

Anna Kónya

**THE VIRGIN MARY, THE APOCALYPTIC HORSEMEN,  
AND THE TREE OF JESSE:  
THE WALL PAINTINGS OF THE PARISH CHURCH IN ALȚÂNA  
(ALZEN, ALCINA)**

MA Thesis in Comparative History, with a specialization  
in Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies.

Central European University

Budapest

May 2013

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by

Anna Kónya

(Romania)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,  
Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
of the Master of Arts degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in  
Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies.

Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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Chair, Examination Committee

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External Reader

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Budapest, 15 May 2013

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**SIGNATURE**

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## INTRODUCTION

The wall paintings that are the focus of this thesis were discovered accidentally in the summer of 2007 during the repainting of the Lutheran church in Alțâna (Alzen, Alcina). This case is not at all unique in Transylvania. While in the medieval period most churches are presumed to have been decorated with wall paintings, in most cases they were white-washed in the centuries following the Reformation.<sup>1</sup> Since these hidden wall paintings first attracted attention in the second half of the nineteenth century, there have been continuous new discoveries.

Art historical research on the significant body of wall paintings revealed in the last two decades in most cases has not been carried out yet. While overviews and studies on certain aspects of this new material have been published recently,<sup>2</sup> monograph studies employing a comprehensive approach to examine a monument in depth from many aspects are relatively few.<sup>3</sup> Still, studying this new material and incorporating it in the scholarly discourse is important, as it can add to, or modify the existing general picture about artistic development in the region.

The wall paintings in the parish church of Alțâna present a good opportunity for such a study for several reasons. The recovery and conservation of the wall paintings in the sanctuary has already been completed. The resulting decoration, once extending to the

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<sup>1</sup> Hermann Fabini, *The Church-Fortresses of the Transylvanian Saxons* (Sibiu: Editura Monumenta, 2010), 91-92.

<sup>2</sup> József Lángi and Ferenc Mihály, *Erdélyi falképek és festett faberendezések* [Transylvanian wall paintings and painted furniture] vols. 1–3, (Budapest: Állami Műemlékhelyreállítási és Restaurálási Központ, 2002, 2004 and 2006). Zsombor Jékely and Lóránd Kiss, *Középkori falképek Erdélyben: értékmérés a Teleki László Alapítvány támogatásával* [Medieval wall paintings in Transylvania: Salvage with the support of the Teleki László foundation] (Budapest: Teleki László Alapítvány, 2008). Recent studies on individual monuments include Zsombor Jékely, “A Kolozs megyei Bádok falképei és az erdélyi falfestészet” [The wall paintings from Bádok in Kolozs county and the wall painting in Transylvania], in *Colligite Fragmenta! Örökségvédelem Erdélyben* [Colligite Fragmenta! Heritage Protection in Transylvania], ed. Tímea N. Kis (Budapest: Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kar Művészettörténet Intézeti Képviselő, 2009), 194-208; Tekla Szabó, “A felvinci református templom újonnan feltárt középkori freskója” [The newly uncovered medieval fresco of the Calvinist church in Felvinc], *Dolgozatok az Erdélyi Múzeum Érem- és Régiségtárából*, 2 (2007): 143-156.

<sup>3</sup> Helga Fabritius, *Die Honigberger Kapelle. Kunst und Selbstdarstellung einer siebenbürgischen Gemeinde im 15. Jahrhundert* (Dössel: J. Stekovics, 2006).

surface of the whole sanctuary, forms an extensive and relatively coherent ensemble in spite of the fragmentary survival of some parts. In this way, a coherent iconographic program – including a Mariological cycle, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, the Tree of Jesse and saints – can be studied here.

The thesis is intended to be a case study on the painted decoration of the sanctuary in a medieval parish church. The advantage of focusing on one monument is that it enables a more in-depth examination of all relevant aspects and the adoption of a comprehensive approach. This includes examining the historical and architectural background of the wall paintings as well as addressing the problems of style and iconography.

For a better understanding of the wall paintings, it is necessary to explore the political, social and religious context in which they were created in as much detail as possible. Chapter 1 outlines the historical background, providing an overview of the history of the Transylvanian Saxons and Alțâna in the fourteenth century. It is also important to take into consideration the architectural context by fitting the wall paintings into the architectural history of the building, and exploring the relation of the wall paintings to the environment formed by other works and objects connected to religious practice in the sanctuary. Chapter 2 investigates the building history of the church with an emphasis on the architectural features in the sanctuary. Iconographic analysis helps to identify the individual scenes and figures depicted, establishing connections between them and interpreting them with regard to the function of the sanctuary. Chapter 3 identifies and describes the iconographic themes and places them in the iconographic tradition. Stylistic analysis is applied in Chapter 4 to determine the stylistic analogies of the wall paintings and offer a dating for the ensemble. Chapter 5 examines the meanings and connotations of the different representations and how these are interrelated in the context of their placement in the sanctuary. In the Conclusion the insights drawn from the chapters examining the various aspects are put together to highlight

the peculiarities of this iconographic program and offer a better understanding of it in its historical context.

## CHAPTER 1: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the historical background in which the wall paintings were created. The first part will sketch the political, social, and religious situation of the Transylvanian Saxons in the fourteenth century. The second part will outline the history of Alțâna based on primary sources and secondary literature.

### 1.1. The Transylvanian Saxons

During the Middle Ages, Transylvania was part of the Hungarian Kingdom as an administratively distinct unit. In medieval Transylvania several ethnic groups lived near each other, differentiated from a political, economic, social and religious point of view. Despite their designation in the documents as *Saxones*,<sup>4</sup> the origin of the Saxons has not been clarified completely. This mostly German speaking population originated from parts of the Holy Roman Empire as well as Northern France and Flanders.<sup>5</sup> The Saxon colonisation took place in several stages during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; King Géza II (1141-1162) invited the first groups in order to secure the southeastern borders of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary. While the target of the first wave of colonisation was the area around the later Sibiu (Hermannstadt, Nagyszeben) in the southern part of Transylvania, subsequently Saxons also settled in the southeastern and northern regions of Transylvania.<sup>6</sup>

The rights and privileges that attracted the Saxons to Transylvania were first codified in the *Andreanum* issued by King Andrew II (1205 -1235) in 1224. The conditions referred to the region first colonised by the Saxons, which the king now designated as a single administrative unit, the Province of Sibiu, from Orăștie (Broos, Szászváros) to Drăușeni

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<sup>4</sup> The designations *Theutonici* and *Flandrenses* also appear in the documents, but *Saxones* prevailed., see: Konrad Gündisch, ed., *Siebenbürgen und die Siebenbürger Sachsen* (München: Langen Müller, 1998), 30.

<sup>5</sup> For a review of earlier literature on the origin of the Saxons, and the results of historic, linguistic, and archaeological research, see: Thomas Nägler, *Așezarea sașilor în Transilvania* [The settlement of the Saxons in Transylvania] (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1981), 94-130.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 170, 185, 196.

(Draas, Homoróddaróc), and gave it to the Saxons.<sup>7</sup> The colonists were now only subordinate to the king and exempt from the rule of the voivode of Transylvania, with no nobles entitled to rights or ownership of properties in the region. In exchange for the various administrative, economic, and political rights and privileges, the Saxons paid a fixed annual tax and provided predetermined military support for the king.<sup>8</sup> While this privileged territory, also referred to as Royal Land (*Fundus Regius*), was originally conceived as a single administrative unit led by a *comes*, in the fourteenth century the province was reorganised into eight seats.<sup>9</sup>

The Saxon community not only constituted an administratively and legally distinct entity. The Provostry of Sibiu, including the Province of Sibiu, was also independent from the Transylvanian Bishopric of Alba Iulia (Gyulafehérvár), being subordinate to the Archbishop of Esztergom. The units of ecclesiastical organisation were chapters which included almost all of the Saxon population. Ecclesiastical taxation in the case of the Saxon chapters situated outside the privileged royal land led to permanent tensions between the Transylvanian bishopric and the provostry.<sup>10</sup>

Also, the relation of the Saxons with the king and his representative, the voivode of Transylvania, was ambiguous and often tense at the time. During the fights for the throne following the extinction of the Arpadian dynasty at the beginning of the fourteenth century, the Saxons supported Otto of Bavaria against Charles Robert of Anjou. The Province of Sibiu even sent several dignitaries to the coronation of Otto at Buda and to fight in his army. Still, after Charles Robert managed to win the Hungarian crown and secure the throne, he improved his relations with the Saxons.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Béla Köpeczi, ed., *Erdély története* [The History of Transylvania], vol. 1 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986), 298. In the fourteenth and fifteenth century the rights and privileges were gradually extended to regions colonized later.

<sup>8</sup> Nágler, *Așezarea sașilor*, 264.

<sup>9</sup> Gustav Gündisch, *Aus Geschichte und Kultur der Siebenbürger Sachsen* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1987), 6-7.

<sup>10</sup> Nágler, *Așezarea sașilor*, 272.

<sup>11</sup> Gündisch, *Aus Geschichte und Kultur*, 27-28.

The relation between the Province of Sibiu and the voivode had already been tense during conflicts in the time of Ladislaus Kán (1295–1314). The appointment of his successor, Tamás Szécsényi, as the *comes* of the province and the measures taken by him that restricted the autonomy of the Saxons led to an uprising in 1324. This was put down by the united forces of the voivode and the Hungarian palatin. In response, King Charles Robert terminated the position of *comes* of the province and, for more effective control, divided the province of Sibiu into seats. These were led by royal judges appointed by the king, usually from among the members of the *Gräf* families close to the king.<sup>12</sup>

## 1.2. Alțâna in the Middle Ages

The village of Alțâna lies thirty-one kilometers from Sibiu, on the right bank of the Hârtibaciu (Harbach) river. It is situated on the privileged royal land colonised in the first stage of settlement in the second half of the twelfth century. Administratively it belonged to the seat of Nocrich (Leschkirch, Újegyház).<sup>13</sup>

There are numerous written sources referring to the history of Alțâna from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century. Most of them are connected to the *Gräfs* of Alțâna. While theoretically all the members of the Saxon community had equal rights, the *Gräfs*,<sup>14</sup> present throughout the colonised region, emerged as a distinct, increasingly influential, social group during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>15</sup> Originally probably functioning as the leaders of the Saxon settlers, subsequently the *Gräfs* had acquired administrative and juridical functions in the colonised settlements, coupled with special rights and exemptions that contributed to their economic growth.<sup>16</sup> In most cases they succeeded in making their

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 29, Köpeczi, *Erdély története*, 335.

<sup>13</sup> Hermann Fabini, *Atlas der siebenbürgisch-sächsischen Kirchenburgen und Dorfkirchen*, vols. 1–2 (Hermannstadt – Heidelberg: Monumenta Verlag – Arbeitskreis für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde, 1999, 2002), 17.

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed discussion of the origin and role of the Saxon *Gräfs* in Transylvania, see Thomas Nögler, “Wesenszüge des Sächsischen Gräfentums in Siebenbürgen,” in *Studii și Comunicări, Arheologie – istorie*, 19 (1975): 89–100.

<sup>15</sup> In the Latin sources they appear as *comes* or *iudex* (in Hungarian *geréb*), see, Nögler, *Gräfentum*, 89.

<sup>16</sup> Köpeczi, *Erdély története*, 333.

property and functions hereditary. Still, they are to be differentiated from Hungarian nobles. While more land was assigned to them, they did not legally own properties within the royal land; village communities were not subordinate to them, and they had to pay their share of the common taxes.<sup>17</sup>

The *Gräfs* of Alțâna are first mentioned around 1291. They appear as *comites Gerlah and Stephanus* in a document which confirms their acquisition of a property called *terra Mikuzala*, situated near the territory of the Saxons of Alțâna, in the district of Sibiu.<sup>18</sup>

The next two sources chronologically are related to the role the Saxons played in the contest for the throne mentioned above. In the documents of a lawsuit from 1309 between the chapter of Alba Iulia and some of the Saxon deaneries, one of the points to investigate is whether the Saxons from Sibiu supported Otto of Bavaria against Charles Robert. The chapter accuses several Saxons, among them *Stephanus de Olczna*, of being present in the army of Otto camping around Buda and Pest<sup>19</sup> and even of making a public oath of loyalty to Otto as king of Hungary.<sup>20</sup>

Several documents from the second to the sixth decade of the fourteenth century are related to the discussion of a property in Alba County between the chapter of Alba Iulia and Stephanus of Alțâna. As is known, the Saxon *Gräfs* often strove to acquire properties outside the royal land which they could possess as nobles<sup>21</sup> and which constituted a frequent source of conflicts with the Transylvanian bishopric. In a charter from 1318, Charles Robert awards the estate *Zalathna*, so far occupied by a *comes Nicolaus filius Corradus* and *Stephanus de*

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<sup>17</sup> Nägler, *Gräffentum*, 92.

<sup>18</sup> Franz Zimmermann, Carl Werner, *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen*, (Hermannstadt-Bucharest: Ausschuss des Vereins für siebenbürgische Landeskunde – Editura Academiei Române, 1892–1991), vol. 1, 189-190. Gustav Gündisch interprets the geographic designation *terra Saxonum de Ol[chona]* as referring to the administrative unit of the later seat of Leschkirch, see, Gündisch, *Aus Geschichte und Kultur*, 6.

<sup>19</sup> *Urkundenbuch*, vol. 1., 239-292.

<sup>20</sup> Zsigmond Jakó, ed. *Erdélyi okmánytár* [Transylvanian archives], (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1997-2008), vol. 1, 77.

<sup>21</sup> Köpeczi, *Erdély Története*, 332-333.

*Olchona*, to the chapter of Alba Iulia.<sup>22</sup> A document dating from 1336 shows that the dispute had not yet been settled, as possibly the son of the above-mentioned Stephan (*Stephanus filius Stephanus de Olchna*) is reported as protesting against the allocation of the property to the chapter of Alba Iulia.<sup>23</sup> The ownership of the property seems to have remained doubtful through the next decades. In 1357 it featured among the properties that fell upon the king after *Werus* and *Stephanus*, sons of Stephan of Alțâna, died childless, and were donated to a *miles Nicolaus*.<sup>24</sup> Four years later, King Louis ordered the Province of Sibiu to defend the chapter of Alba Iulia's possession of Zalathna.<sup>25</sup>

Two fourteenth-century sources mention the parish priest of Alțâna. A *dominus Johannes plebanus de Alczina* appears in 1349 and 1351 as member of the juridical seat of the chapter of Sibiu in a case between the parish priest of Șelimbăr (Schellenberg) and Cîsnădie (Heltau),<sup>26</sup> and as a witness testifying to the statutes of the chapter of Sibiu.<sup>27</sup> Also in a case between Șelimbăr and Cîsnădie from 1349, a *comes Syffridus de Alczina* appears as a member of the general assembly in Sibiu.<sup>28</sup>

Other family members appearing in the sources are a *comes Stephanus filius Johannis de Olchuna*, mentioned in 1357,<sup>29</sup> and a *Herrico de Alcyna* who appears in 1370 as one of the envoys to the court of King Louis when the king exempted the Saxons of the Seven Seats from services that contradicted their rights.<sup>30</sup>

Other documents bear witness to the ambitions of the Gräfs of Alțâna to acquire the function of royal judge. The first member of the family known to have occupied this position

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<sup>22</sup> *Urkundenbuch*, vol. 1., 330-331.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 478-479.

<sup>24</sup> *Urkundenbuch*, vol. 2, 116-117.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>26</sup> *Urkundenbuch*, vol. 2, 58-59.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-83.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-61.

<sup>29</sup> *Urkundenbuch*, vol. 2., 116-117.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 358-360.

is Hedricus, son of the above-mentioned Heinrich.<sup>31</sup> In a document issued in January of 1374 King Louis appoints *Hedricus, filius Henrici* and *Salomonus de Magyar* the royal judges of the seat of Nocrich. In March of the same year another charter was needed in which the king orders the seat to recognise only them as royal judges.<sup>32</sup> From this time on the *Gräfs* of Alțâna usually occupied this role.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, rivalry between Alțâna and Nocrich is visible in the sources for the title of the center of the seat. The seat was first named after Alțâna in a charter from 1361 (mentioned above).<sup>34</sup> During the next two and a half centuries the rivalry continued and the dispute was only settled for good in 1620, to the benefit of Nocrich.<sup>35</sup>

In sources dating from the last decades of the fourteenth century, an *Emericus de Alcznow* appears several times. In 1383 he was at the court of Queen Mary to obtain confirmation of the *Andreanum*.<sup>36</sup> Four years later he visited the court of King Sigismund for the same reason.<sup>37</sup>

In the fifteenth century the Saxon *Gräfs* tended to disappear as a separate class, assimilating into the Hungarian nobility.<sup>38</sup> This is what happened also to the *Gräfs* of Alțâna.<sup>39</sup> The last male member of the family, deceased without male descendants, is mentioned in 1440.<sup>40</sup> The Hungarian Gerendi family obtained their lands and rights by marriage and resided in Alțâna for the next century and a half. During this time they often managed to acquire the role of royal judge and had the ambition to transfer the center of the

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<sup>31</sup> Friedrich Schuller, "Beiträge zur äußern Geschichte der Erbgrafen der sieben Stühle. Die Erbgrafen von Thalmesch, Heltau, Kleinpold, Rothberg, Burgberg, Leschkirch und Alzen," *Archiv des Vereins für siebenbürgische Landeskunde* 21, no. 2 (1887): 313-366, 335.

<sup>32</sup> *Urkundenbuch*, vol. 2, 417, 426.

<sup>33</sup> Schuller, *Geschichte der Erbgrafen*, 334.

<sup>34</sup> "sede de Olchwa," *Urkundenbuch*, vol.2, 192.

<sup>35</sup> Schuller, *Geschichte der Erbgrafen*, 345.

<sup>36</sup> *Urkundenbuch*, vol.2, 567-570.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 609-611.

<sup>38</sup> Gündisch, *Aus Geschichte und Kultur*, 21.

<sup>39</sup> For a more detailed account of this later period in the history of the family, see: Schuller, *Geschichte der Erbgrafen*, 334-345.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

seat from Nocrich to Aljâna. The common history of the Gerendis and Aljâna ended around 1593, when the community of the village bought up their rights and domains.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 338-345.

## CHAPTER 2: THE PARISH CHURCH IN ALȚÂNA

This chapter focuses on the architectural context of the wall paintings. After briefly summarizing the results of earlier research on the building, I present the most important architectural features of the church with a special attention to the sanctuary. After this, the main phases of construction will be distinguished based on an analysis of the architectural features and previous literature.

There have been several attempts to reconstruct the building history of the church in Alțâna which have led to contradictory results. In a study focusing on the Romanesque period, Gyula Halaváts identifies the architectural elements from the first, Romanesque building phase without dating them more precisely. He assumes that there was a second, Gothic, phase at the beginning of the sixteenth century which involved the reconstruction of the sanctuary and covering the nave with a new vault.<sup>42</sup> Gustav Treiber puts the beginning of the constructions in the twelfth century and distinguishes two Gothic reconstruction phases: the extension of the sanctuary in the fourteenth century and a transformation of the building into a hall church in a later period.<sup>43</sup> In contrast, Juliana Fabritius-Dancu argues for a first phase in the thirteenth century and a second at the beginning of the sixteenth century.<sup>44</sup> Hermann Fabini outlines a similar development, but suggests an earlier dating for the second reconstruction phase, in the fifteenth century.<sup>45</sup>

### 2.1. Description of the architectural features

The Lutheran Church in Alțâna is in its present form a three-aisled pseudo-basilica (Fig. 1, 2). Although the nave is higher than the aisles, there are no windows on the clerestory wall. The aisles and the nave extend to five bays and are separated from each other by

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<sup>42</sup> Gyula Halaváts, “Az alczinai, holczmányi oltszakadáti és feleki románkori templomok” [The Romanesque churches of Alczina, Holczmány, Oltszakadát and Felek], *Archaeologiai Értésítő*, (1914): 374–380.

<sup>43</sup> Gustav Treiber, *Mittelalterliche Kirchen in Siebenbürgen; Beiträge zur Baugeschichte aufgrund der Raumverhältnisse* (Munich: Hilfskomitee der Siebenbürger Sachsen, 1971), 51.

<sup>44</sup> Juliana Fabritius-Dancu, *Cetăți țărănești săsești din Transilvania* [Saxon peasant fortresses from Transylvania], (Sibiu: Revista Transilvania, 1980), 13.

arcades made up of round arches supported by square-shaped piers with carved bases and capitals. Wooden tribunes run alongside the wall of the nave above the arcades, while above the western bay of the nave a stone tribune was built for the organ, supported by two square-shaped piers.

The nave was covered earlier by a net vault in which the ribs form a star pattern, but today only the grey stripes marking the place of the now-missing ribs can be seen (Fig. 3). In the attic of the church the clerestory walls continue above the present vaulting, with five round-arched windows on each side, one above each lunette. The northern aisle is covered with a groin vault, and the southern one with Bohemian vault.

While the two aisles have a flat eastern end, the elongated chancel has a polygonal end formed by three sides of an octagon, supported by four buttresses from the outside. The transition from the nave to the chancel is marked by a round chancel arch supported by two pilasters with carved capitals.

The sanctuary is now covered by a flat ceiling. It is lit by three ogival windows on the eastern walls (Fig. 4). The narrow windows on the sides have preserved their stone frames with trefoil heads; the one in the middle is twice as wide and has now been replaced by a modern rectangular window. On the southern wall a window is set in a segmental arched opening. To the left of this window and partially below it there is a painted window frame which marks the place of the original window (Fig. 5).<sup>46</sup> Above the entrance to the sacristy there is a narrow round arched window.

On the eastern sides of the chancel arch two column bases with angle spurs can be seen. (Fig. 6) A stone carving featuring a *Vir Dolorum* is built into the southern wall of the

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<sup>45</sup> Fabini, *Atlas*, 19-20.

<sup>46</sup> Lóránd Kiss, Péter Pál, “Proiect pentru conservarea picturilor murale din absida bisericii evanghelice Alțâna” [Project for the Conservation of the Wall Paintings from the Sanctuary of the Lutheran Church in Alțâna], (Târgu Mureș, unpublished ms prepared at the behest of the Ministry of Culture and Cults, Directory of Historic Monuments, Commission of Artistic Components, 2008), 8. I wish to thank the authors of this report for sharing it with me.

sanctuary, which, judging by its form, was probably a keystone, although the beginning of the ribs cannot be seen (Fig. 7). Two further keystones from the church, of similar form and size, are exhibited in the Medieval Lapidarium of the Museum of History in Sibiu. On one of them an *Agnus Dei* is shown, on the other one the face of Christ (Fig. 8-9). On the northern side of the sanctuary there is a square shaped tabernacle carved of stone, while a sitting niche was built into the southern wall (Fig. 10.). A bronze baptismal font dating from 1404 also used to stand in the sanctuary until 1999, when it was stolen.<sup>47</sup> The original altar mensa was later reused as a stepping stone, now placed before the southern entrance to the church.<sup>48</sup>

Attached to the exterior northern wall of the sanctuary and the eastern wall of the northern aisle are the remains of a room with a rectangular plan which probably served as a sacristy (Fig. 11). While the northern wall has almost completely disappeared, in the still standing eastern wall the stone frame of a narrow round-arched window is partly preserved. The sacristy was once covered by a barrel vault, a segment of which survives above the southern wall, together with the two round arches on the eastern and western walls. The round-arched stone portal that once served as an entrance to the sacristy is visible from the inside of the sanctuary, now walled up with brick.

The sacristy which is presently used is attached to the southern side of the sanctuary. This rectangular room is covered by a barrel vault. Above the entrance to the sanctuary a round-arched tympanon with carved profiles can be seen (Fig. 12).

The tower stands on the western side of the church. Its first two storeys have a square plan with a pilaster in each corner, while the third and fourth storeys are hexagonal. A drawing made by Martin Schlichting in the middle of the nineteenth century<sup>49</sup> gives an idea of what the earlier tower might have looked like, bastion-like with a pyramidal spire, having few

<sup>47</sup> Elek Benkő, *Erdély középkori harangjai és bronz keresztelőmedencéi* [Medieval bells and bronze baptismal fonts of Transylvania] (Budapest: Teleki László Alapítvány, 2002), 10.

<sup>48</sup> Kiss, Pál, *Project*, 9.

<sup>49</sup> Fabini, *Atlas*, 20.

and small windows, and a gallery on the top, all features serving the defensive purposes of a fortified church (Fig. 13., 14). The church is surrounded by fortification walls with four towers (Fig. 1).

## 2.2. Chronology and building phases

In the nave two main building phases can be discerned, the clerestory windows in the attic implying that an original basilical structure was later transformed into a pseudo-basilica. Also, there are several features suggesting that the sanctuary is a result of several building phases. The texture of the chancel wall is uneven. While the eastern part of the wall is smoother, in the western part the surface is rougher. Moreover, on the northern wall a fissure runs from the ceiling to the floor, while another fissure can be observed on the southern wall. This suggests that an earlier shorter chancel was later extended, hence the elongated form. The fissures may be the result of the failure to join the walls built in the two different periods.<sup>50</sup>

Various features also hint at how the earlier vaulting system of the sanctuary may have looked. In the uppermost stripe, the wall paintings are arranged in three lunette-shaped frames on each side which probably coincided with the lunettes below the rib vault. Stone remains of the consoles are visible between them.

In order to establish an absolute chronology, features such as the plan of the church, the two column bases east of the chancel arch, windows, key-stones and vaults might be examined. When talking about the beginnings of Saxon building activity in southern Transylvania, research generally points out that churches followed a similar plan starting from around 1200.<sup>51</sup> Most buildings were three-aisled basilicas without transepts, with three to five bays, and a square-shaped choir with a semicircular apse. It seems that the church in

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<sup>50</sup> Kiss, Pál, *Proiect*, 15.

<sup>51</sup> Géza Entz, *Erdély építészete a 11-13. században* [The architecture of Transylvania in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries], (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 1994), 45, Hermann Fabini, *The Church-Fortresses of the Transylvanian Saxons* (Sibiu: Editura Monumenta, 2010), 45.

Alțâna also fits this pattern, although no excavation has been carried out to determine the plan of the original sanctuary.

The first datable example of a column base with angle spurs on the territory of medieval Hungary is found at Dömös dating to the first decade of the twelfth century.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, the two pieces from Alțâna can be compared to the column bases from Almásmonostor<sup>53</sup> and the provostal church in Arad,<sup>54</sup> dated to the twelfth century. In Transylvania, column bases with angle spurs are found at Alba Iulia and Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár, Klausenburg), excavated in a secondary position, both dated to the early thirteenth century.<sup>55</sup>

Ogival windows of a similar design and proportions as in the sanctuary at Alțâna appeared in the first part of the fourteenth century (Luna de Sus, Magyarlóna<sup>56</sup>) as well as around 1400 (Porumbenii Mari, Nagygámbfalva<sup>57</sup>). Rib profiles similar to those on the two keystones can be found in Buda castle, dated around 1400.<sup>58</sup>

Regarding the keystones, the iconographic type of the *Vir Dolorum* where the half figure of Christ is emerging from a cloud was a wide-spread solution in Germany in the fourteenth century.<sup>59</sup> For the type of undulating hair on the representation of the face of Christ analogies can be found in South German, Austrian, and Hungarian art around 1350: in

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<sup>52</sup> Sándor Tóth, “A 11-12. századi Magyarország Benedek-rendi templomainak maradványai.” [Remains of Benedictine churches in eleventh-twelfth century Hungary], *Paradisum Plantavit*, ed. Imre Takács (Pannonhalma: Pannonhalmi Bencés Főapátság, 2001), 229-258.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, fig 44.

<sup>54</sup> Zsuzsa Heitelné Mór, “Katalógus” [Catalogue], *Építészet a középkori Dél-Magyarországon. Tanulmányok* [Architecture in medieval southern Hungary. Studies], ed. Tibor Kollár, Tibor Rostás (Budapest: Teleki László Alapítvány, 2010), 762.

<sup>55</sup> Entz, *11-13. század*, 40-41; Radu Lupescu, “Kolozsvár korai történetének buktatói” [The Pitfalls of the Early History of Kolozsvár], *Erdélyi Múzeum* 3-4 (2005): 72-73.

<sup>56</sup> Géza Entz, *Erdély építészete a 14-16. században* [The Architecture of Transylvania in the fourteenth to sixteenth Centuries], (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 1996), 30.

<sup>57</sup> Entz, *14-16. század*, 151.

<sup>58</sup> Dezső Várnai, “Budavári középkori boltozatok bordáinak formai fejlődése” [The Formal Development of the Ribs of Medieval Vaults in Buda Castle], *Budapest Régiségei* 16 (1955): 364, 366.

<sup>59</sup> Engelbert Kirschbaum and Günter Bandmann, ed, *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*. Vol. 4 (Rome: Herder, 1972), 88.

the Church of Our Lady at Esslingen am Neckar,<sup>60</sup> in the Minorite church in Vienna,<sup>61</sup> and among the statues of the Gilded Chapel of Our Lady in Pécs.<sup>62</sup>

As Balázs Szőke points out, brick rib vaulting became widespread in Transylvania beginning from the 1490s. It was a characteristic feature of fortified churches in southern Transylvania; the type used in Alțâna, based on six-pointed star motifs and deltoid forms being the most common pattern.<sup>63</sup> It has been proposed that the new vaulting of the nave, as well as the building of the fortification around the church, might be related to an Ottoman attack in 1493, in the course of which the church suffered serious damage.<sup>64</sup>

Thus, the following building phases can be discerned. First, a three-aisled Romanesque basilica was built, with the aisles separated by round arches on pillars and a chancel shorter than the present one, possibly with semicircular end. The sacristy was placed on the northern side of the sanctuary, which also had an entrance from the southern side. This phase can be dated to the thirteenth century, probably the first half. The next phase was the Gothic reconstruction of the sanctuary around the middle of the fourteenth century. This phase included the extension of the sanctuary, covered with a rib vault at that time, the construction of the polygonal apse, and the wall painting decoration of the sanctuary walls and the triumphal arch. A third building phase was the Gothic reconstruction of the nave, when it received Late Gothic brick rib vaulting after 1490. Later, post-medieval reconstructions and renovations include the building of the tribune for the organ in the

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<sup>60</sup> “Marienportal,” Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, image no. mi05224a05, <http://www.bildindex.de>. Last accessed May, 2013.

<sup>61</sup> Imre Takács, “Királyi udvar és művészet Magyarországon a késői Anjou-korban” [The royal court and art in the late Anjou-period], in *Sigismundus rex et imperator. Művészet és kultúra Luxemburgi Zsigmond korában, 1387-1437* [Art and Culture in the Age of Sigismund of Luxemburg], ed. Imre Takács (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2006), 77-78, images no. 21-22.

<sup>62</sup> Mária G. Sándor, “Die Plastischen und architektonischen Fragmente der Marienkapelle”, in *Die Bischofsburg zu Pécs. Archäologie und Bauforschung, ICOMOS Hefte XXII*. ed. Mária G. Sándor and Győző Gerő (München und Budapest: Bayerisches Landesamt für Denkmalpflege, Országos Műemlékvédelmi Hivatal, 1999), 66-67, image no. 72.

<sup>63</sup> Balázs Szőke, “Téglabordás boltozatok Dél-Erdélyben” [Brick Rib-Vaults in Southern Transylvania], *Colligite Fragmenta! Örökségvédelem Erdélyben* [Colligite Fragmenta! Heritage Protection in Transylvania], ed. Tímea N. Kis (Budapest: Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kar, Művészettörténet Intézeti Képviselő, 2009), 68-77.

eighteenth century and the reconstruction of the tower, the building of the new sacristy, and probably installing the flat ceiling of the sanctuary in the 1850s.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Halaváts, *Románkori templomok*, 374–375.

<sup>65</sup> Fabini, *Atlas*, 20.

## CHAPTER 3: THE WALL PAINTINGS

The iconographic program covers the whole surface of the sanctuary and the triumphal arch, the figurative elements being set in a framework of geometric and vegetal ornamental motifs. The aim of this chapter is to present this decorative system. After some remarks on the technique and state of preservation of the wall paintings, and an overview of the general arrangement, the identification and description of the individual scenes and figures will follow. The fragmentary survival in some parts – especially in the western part of the southern and northern walls and on the triumphal arch – makes the identification of certain scenes difficult. In these cases, considering the accompanying inscriptions or the sequence of the narrative scenes may help in addition to the iconographic analysis.

### 3.1. The state of preservation and technical observations

The painted decoration of the sanctuary was accidentally discovered in the autumn of 2007 during a repainting of the sanctuary. In the following years, the wall paintings were cleaned and conserved completely.<sup>66</sup>

The wall paintings of the sanctuary all belong to the same layer, originating from one period, with the exception of a painted aedicule on the northern wall (Fig. 51), which is from an earlier period.<sup>67</sup> The decoration was executed shortly after the fourteenth-century reconstruction of the sanctuary (see chapter 2, 16, above). This circumstance resulted in the mixed technique applied. On the already existing western part of the sanctuary the *al secco* technique was employed on the plaster from the Romanesque period, while on the recently added Gothic, eastern part the wall paintings were executed on fresh plaster, with the *al fresco* technique.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Kiss, Pál, *Proiect*, 11.

<sup>67</sup> Also earlier, and possibly contemporary with this image, is the representation of kings on the eastern wall of the southern aisle, see below. Lóránd Kiss, personal communication, 5 September 2012.

<sup>68</sup> Kiss, Pál, *Proiect*, 13.

Corresponding to the different techniques, the wall paintings have survived to a different extent in the two parts. While in the eastern part the decoration survives almost completely, in the western part most of the painted surfaces have been lost. Even the surviving parts are more fragmentary, with less detail preserved.<sup>69</sup>

Later reconstructions that caused further losses to the wall paintings were the enlargement of the Gothic window on the southern wall and the covering of the sanctuary with a flat ceiling, which led to the destruction of the topmost part of the decoration. The painting in the lowest zone (up to 150 cm) has also been lost to a great extent due to greater levels of humidity and accessibility.<sup>70</sup>

While the wall paintings in the sanctuary have been completely cleaned, there are traces of wall paintings on the eastern walls of the aisles that have not been revealed yet. In the nave there is no trace of painted decoration except for the consecration crosses above the piers.<sup>71</sup>

### **3.2. The distribution of the scenes**

The northern and the southern walls are divided in three registers (Fig. 15). Above two tiers with continuous narrative scenes, the decoration in the upper register is organized in lunette-shaped frames which coincide with the lunettes of the earlier Gothic vaulting. The first two tiers contain a continuous cycle, narrating events from the life of Mary in chronological order. The scenes follow from the left to the right, first in the upper tier of the northern and the southern wall, and then continue in the lower tier. In the lunettes above, figures of riders appear, who, based on their traits and attributes can be identified as the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. This system of continuous narrative bands and lunettes is broken by a monumental Tree of Jesse composition on the northern wall which covers all three registers.

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<sup>69</sup> Kiss, Pál, *Proiect*, 15-16.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

On the eastern walls, figures of saints appear in the fields between the three windows, two standing figures placed above each other in both fields. Further fragmentary figurative scenes and decoration appear on the eastern side and the inside of the chancel arch, as well as on the eastern wall of the southern aisle. All the scenes and figures were accompanied by inscriptions below them, most of which, however, are fragmentary or have been completely lost.

### 3.3. Individual scenes

#### *Scenes from the Life of Mary*

The cycle starts in the upper tier on the northern wall. The first scene is set in an architectural frame suggesting an interior space (Fig. 16). The polygonal structure with two turrets is identified as a sacred space by the altar in the left of the room, covered with a cloth, with a chalice, a candlestick and a book placed on it. A tonsured priest is standing in the middle, looking towards an aged man with a red cap who is about to leave the building to the right. As the introductory scene of the cycle narrating the life of Mary,<sup>72</sup> the scene can be identified as the Expulsion of Joachim from the Temple, presenting the episode when Joachim's offerings were refused by the high priest on the grounds of his infertility.

Two different iconographic traditions exist for representing this scene. Joachim is either accompanied by Anne, as on French or Byzantine examples, or he visits the church alone, a version that had spread from Italy after the end of the thirteenth century.<sup>73</sup> Although the right part of the scene is damaged, it seems that the second version was employed here. While due to the fragmentary state of preservation of the scene details such as gestures or the sacrifice of Joachim are not recognizable, the general arrangement of the two main figures

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<sup>71</sup> Kiss, Pál, *Proiect*, 12.

<sup>72</sup> Engelbert Kirschbaum and Günter Bandmann, ed, *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*. Vol. 3 (Rome: Herder, 1974), 219-222, Jacqueline Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Iconographie de l'enfance de la Vierge dans l'Empire byzantin et en Occident*, Vol 1, (Brussels: L' Académie Royale d'Archéologie de Belgique, 1965), 62.

<sup>73</sup> Gertrud Schiller, *Ikonographie der christlichen Kunst* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus G. Mohn, 1980-1991), vol. 4.2, 55-56., Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Iconographie*, 63-65.

and the altar under an architectural structure can be compared to an embroidery from Florence made after 1350,<sup>74</sup> although here – as on most other representations – more people are present (Fig. 17).

Of the next, fragmentary, scene only the heads of two figures have remained (Fig. 18). To the left is Joachim, who is now listening to an angel, identifiable by the haloed head and fragments of the wings, his pointing gesture suggesting speech. This can be taken to mean that the scene represents the Annunciation to Joachim, an event that took place in the desert where Joachim withdrew after the refusal. Further to the right, fragments of a second architectural structure are visible. This was probably a setting for another event of the story, following the moment when Joachim learns that he will have a child, presumably the Meeting at the Golden Gate.

The next scene is also damaged; the left side is completely destroyed (Fig. 19). Still, the Birth of the Virgin can be recognized, a composition similar to the Nativity placed just opposite on the southern wall. The event is set in an interior space enclosed by a semicircular arch decked with a white curtain and patterned drapery. Anne is lying on a bed placed parallel to the plane of the composition. Her left hand is resting on her knees while with her right hand she reaches towards the cradle placed behind her in which the baby Mary lies wrapped in swaddling clothes.

Even though nearly half the scene is destroyed, from the remaining parts it can be inferred that the composition was rather simple, probably without assisting midwives. Although there are parallels for a simpler composition, with an arrangement of the bed parallel to the picture plane and the motif of Mary lying in a cradle instead of being held or

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<sup>74</sup> “Borte,” Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, image no. C 000913, <http://www.bildindex.de>. Last accessed April 2013.

bathed,<sup>75</sup> the scene seems closest to the Nativity on the opposite wall, with a close imitation of the arrangement of the two figures, the cradle, bed, and even the folds of the bed cover.

On the next scene, a massive tower-like building stands on the right side, its crenellated top covered with a red roof. Three steps lead to the open portal where a girl is standing. She is wearing a red gown over a white dress and a crown on her haloed head. Her young age is implied by her much smaller scale compared to the two other, much damaged, figures standing on the left. Identifying this scene as the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple is supported by the fragmentary inscription below reading *p[re]senta [?...]in templum*. The two figures besides Mary are probably Joachim and Anne, who are often present at this event.<sup>76</sup>

As her parents promised to dedicate her to the service of the Lord, they took Mary to the temple at the age of three to grow up and serve there. On Western representations the church is mostly in an elevated position, with three to fifteen steps leading to it, which Mary usually ascends alone.<sup>77</sup> While according to the textual sources of the event, Mary, when let go by her parents, hurried up the stairs without even looking back,<sup>78</sup> there are examples of pictorial representations when Mary turns back towards Joachim and Anne.<sup>79</sup>

The composition is comparable to a wall painting at Waiblingen from around 1390,<sup>80</sup> where Mary, accompanied by Joachim and Anne, enters a somewhat similar tower-like structure into which three steps lead, although more figures appear here (Fig. 20). The crown on Mary's head marks her chosenness and may also refer to her future coronation.<sup>81</sup> The

<sup>75</sup> For example, on an altar from Friesach, Austria, from 1525: "Geburt Mariens," REALonline image no. 000995. Bildserver des IMAREAL. Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit. <http://tethys.imareal.sbg.ac.at/realonline>. Last accessed April 2013.

<sup>76</sup> Schiller, *Ikonographie*, vol. 4.2, 68.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> For example in Schmalkalden, Germany, from 1503, "Mariä Tempelgang," Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, image no. LA 4.872/66. <http://www.bildindex.de>. Last accessed April 2013.

<sup>80</sup> "Der Tempelgang Mariens," Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, image no. ladbw-12174d-9x12. <http://www.bildindex.de>. Last accessed April 2013.

<sup>81</sup> Schiller, *Ikonographie*, vol. 4.2, 69.

motif is present in the art from the middle of the fourteenth century,<sup>82</sup> although not exclusive to it.

The narrative continues on the second tier of the southern wall. In the next scene an old man with grey hair and a beard is kneeling before an altar, his hands together in the act of prayer (Fig. 21). On the altar, draped in a red cloth decorated with a silver star pattern, a leafy branch is placed. From above, a white dove with a halo descends towards the altar. A trefoil arch supported by two consoles frames the scene. On the rear wall of the room there is a lamp, further suggesting an interior. The fragmentary inscription below the scene reads: ...[I]osep [?].

The scene can be identified as an episode related to the Betrothal of the Virgin, The Prayer for the Flowering of the Twigs. As several apocryphal Gospels relate, when Mary reached the age of fourteen all the marriageable men from the house of David were summoned to the church and each of them brought a rod and placed it on the altar. Among the twelve men, it was Joseph, already a widow, thus older than all the others, whose staff blossomed and a dove descended over it as a sign of heavenly favor.<sup>83</sup> The composition seems unmatched in the iconographic tradition in that it is reduced to the figure of Joseph, while usually the priest and the other suitors are also present.

The left side of the following Annunciation scene and partly the figure of Gabriel were destroyed by the later building of a window (Fig. 20). The angel is portrayed half kneeling before Mary. One of his hands is raised in a blessing while the other hand holds a scroll with the text *[a]ve maria gratia plena d[omi]n[u]s tecum*. Standing to the right of the angel Mary also holds a scroll with her answer: *[e]cce ancilla d[omi]ni. fiat michi s[e]c[un]d[u]m v[er]bu[m] tu[um]*, at the same time expressing her assent with a bow of her

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<sup>82</sup> For example, it appears on an embroidery from Iceland representing scenes from the life of the Virgin, middle of the fourteenth century, see: *Ibid.*, 327, image no. 543.

<sup>83</sup> Schiller, *Ikonographie*, vol. 4.2, 78.

head and a gesture towards the angel. The strip of inscription below the scene reads:  
...angel[us] [?] salut[ur] mariam. [et] ipsa concepit...

Parallels for the arrangement, posture, and gesture of the two figures appear in the Annunciation scenes of a *Speculum humanae salvationis* manuscript from around 1330 (Fig. 23).<sup>84</sup> Compared to these representations, the composition in Alțâna is reduced to the essential elements; there are neither architectural details nor a book in Mary's hand, and even the dove of the Holy Spirit descending towards Mary is missing.

In the Nativity, Mary is represented in the foreground, lying on a bed with a bedsheet arranged in decorative folds (Fig. 24). She supports her head with her left hand while reclining on a pillow adorned with a silver star-like pattern. The manger in which the infant Jesus lies is placed behind her, with the ox and the ass leaning above it. Joseph is sitting to the right, leaning on his staff, portrayed without a halo as in all other scenes. The composition of the scene with all its elements and their arrangement was already developed and widespread in the twelfth century.<sup>85</sup> Among the numerous analogies, parallels for Mary's posture (one hand supporting her head, the other leaning on her knee), Joseph's gesture, and the arrangement of the composition parallel to the picture plane appear from the twelfth to the fourteenth century.<sup>86</sup>

To the right a greatly damaged scene follows, the Annunciation to the Shepherds (Fig. 25). In the upper left corner, an angel emerges from a cloud, raising both hands in a pointing gesture while delivering his message. Two figures are recognizable below, standing on the ground. They are wearing pointed red hats and recline on their staffs while following the heavenly speech.

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<sup>84</sup> Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek; cod. s. n. 2612; fol. 5v, 9v, and 49v. REALonline images no. 007163A, 007171 and 007251. <http://tethys.imareal.sbg.ac.at/realonline>. Last accessed April 2013. See also chapter 4 on the stylistic similarities.

<sup>85</sup> Schiller, *Ikonographie*, vol. 1., 83.

<sup>86</sup> For example, "Coupe Karls des Großen, Deckel, Detail: Geburt Christi." Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, image no. 79.728. <http://www.bildindex.de>. Last accessed April 2013, beginning of the thirteenth century, or "Missale,

The scene of the Adoration of the Magi is also largely destroyed (Fig. 26). To the right, Mary appears sitting on a chest-like seat with the child Jesus in her lap and holding a small globe in her left. The infant Jesus leans forward and reaches with his right hand towards the place now destroyed where the magi probably stood. Joseph is standing behind Mary, leaning on his staff. A six-pointed star with a long tail leading the Magi to Jesus appears on the sky, with an angel behind it.

The narrative probably continued in the lower tier on the northern wall; however, this part of the decoration is almost completely destroyed. The only remaining parts are fragments of a figure at the right edge of the tier, who, based on facial features and the typical hat, can be identified as Joseph. The scene probably represented an episode from the infancy of Christ following the Adoration, possibly the Flight into Egypt, which would fit Joseph's position on the right of the scene, heading to the right.

The story continues on the lower tier of the southern wall. The first scene showing the Rest on the Flight into Egypt is cut by a near-vertical fissure (Fig. 27). Mary is sitting on the ground in the center of the scene, holding the child Jesus in her lap. Jesus, now looking slightly older and having a halo with a cross, turns his head towards an angel who emerges from a cloud in the upper right. The lower right part of the scene is destroyed, and only a hand is visible belonging to a figure lying on the ground, probably Joseph, having a rest. The episode of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt was most popular in the later periods, with the first representation of this subject listed by Schiller dating from 1379.<sup>87</sup> Still, it seems that there were also earlier representations, such as the one from the Saint George's church in Neuenbürg, Germany, from the first half of the fourteenth century.<sup>88</sup>

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Geburt Christi." Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, image no. 64.987. <http://www.bildindex.de>. Last accessed April 2013, end of the fourteenth century.

<sup>87</sup> Schiller, *Ikonographie*, vol. 1., 132.

<sup>88</sup> "Ruhe auf der Flucht nach Ägypten," Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, image no. mi07547f13, <http://www.bildindex.de>. Last accessed April 2013.

To the left, there is an arch-like frame suggesting an architectural structure in which three slender columns appear in the background of a patterned textile. On the top of the right column, a statue of an animal-like creature with horns can be distinguished, in the course of falling down and breaking into pieces. This detail evokes an episode related in the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew. When the Holy Family arrived in the city of Sotine and entered the pagan temple, all the idols prostrated themselves at the sight of Jesus and were smashed into pieces.<sup>89</sup>

On the scene of the Twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple, the temple of Jerusalem appears as a simple architectural structure opening with three arches supported by thin columns (Fig. 28). In the center, Jesus is sitting on a high pulpit, turning towards the teachers gathered around him. Below, seven figures are recognizable, although as the lower right part of the scene is destroyed there might have been more. The teachers are individualized by the colours of their clothing, poses, gestures, hair and beard styles, but wear the same kind of Jewish hat. Their figures are much smaller in proportion compared to Jesus or Joseph and Mary standing outside the temple, to the left. Joseph is leaning on his staff, while Mary puts her hands together in a prayer-like gesture.

The scene follows a common compositional pattern, the so-called teaching-type, where Jesus is seated high above the teachers who surround him, in a frontally seen, symmetrical composition.<sup>90</sup> On most representations of the event – as is also the case here – both episodes of the story – Jesus lecturing the teachers and his parents finding him – are presented in one composition. For the arrangement of the main characters there are parallels in fourteenth century book illumination.<sup>91</sup> On a wall painting at Libiš, (Czech Republic) the

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<sup>89</sup> Schiller, *Ikonographie*, vol. 1, 127.

<sup>90</sup> LCI, vol. 4., 584.

<sup>91</sup> “Miniatur mit der Darstellung des 12-jährigen Jesus im Tempel,” Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, <http://www.bildindex.de>, image no. LA 5.438/26., and “Gisle-Codex: Initiale D: Der Zwölfjährige Jesus im Tempel,” Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, <http://www.bildindex.de>, image no. RBA 081 665, Last accessed April 2013.

event takes place in a similar architectural structure.<sup>92</sup> However, compared to other representations, the age and clothing of Jesus seem unusual at Alţâna. While Jesus is mostly dressed as an adult, wearing a long gown, here he only wears a loincloth-like dress and is also younger than on most other representations.

The remaining parts of the tier are almost completely destroyed. Although there is room for several scenes, the exact number is hard to estimate, as scenes in general do not have a standard size. From the scene following the Twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple only a small portion survives in the upper part (Fig. 29). Here a small semicircular cloud with a red frilled edge is depicted, similar to the clouds in other scenes from which an angel emerges (Rest on the Flight into Egypt, Fig. 27). This time it seems that a hand is reaching down from the cloud, to the left of which a fragment of a white object can be seen, defined by three vertical lines.

On the next scene, a face with feminine features and closed eyes can be identified (Fig 30). Judged by the low position of the head, tilted back, it probably belonged to a lying figure. The background is filled by chequered yellow drapery, an arrangement that in other scenes always suggests an interior space (for instance, The Birth of Mary, Fig. 19). A different type of red drapery appears to the left of the figure's face. From what was supposedly the last scene of the cycle, only red and yellow patches remain, which are hard to interpret.

However fragmentary these last scenes are, it can be proposed that they belong to, and probably end, a cycle that narrates important moments from the life of Mary in a chronological order. Viewed in this context, the scene featuring a woman lying down could represent the Death of the Virgin, who is lying on a bed in a room, her body covered with a blanket. No other figures of this usually populous scene can be seen. The preceding scene

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<sup>92</sup> "Zwölfjähriger Jesus im Tempel." REALonline images no. 013317. <http://tethys.imareal.sbg.ac.at/realonline>. Last accessed April 2013.

involving a heavenly apparition with the Hand of God reaching down from a cloud might have represented the Pentecost. If this interpretation stands true, the white strokes to the left, comparable to the tail feathers of the dove descending over Joseph's branch (Fig. 21), here as well may belong to the dove representing the Holy Spirit. Following this logic, the last field probably contained an episode following the Death of Mary, such as the Assumption or Coronation of the Virgin.

#### *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*

The upper parts of the lunette-shaped frames were damaged by the construction of the new flat ceiling, destroying the heads of all the figures. The first lunette on the northern wall features an equestrian riding a galloping white horse equipped with an ornate harness (Fig. 31). He wears a white mantle over a knee-length red garment and a pointed shoe, and stretches a bow held in his left hand. The second lunette on the northern wall was greatly damaged and only the rear part of a red horse can be seen, wearing a kind of harness similar to that of the first horse (Fig. 32). Opposite this composition, on the southern wall, a galloping black horse appears; not much of its rider can be seen, except its attribute, a scale with two pans (Fig. 33). The fragmentary strip of inscription below the image reads: ...[et] *seducit*... In the last lunette, the rider is riding a horse without a saddle or harness (Fig. 34). His bust is turned frontally towards the viewer, and under the cloak his skeletal body is revealed. In his right hand he holds a stick-like object which cannot be identified as the top of it is destroyed. Below him the word *mors* can be deciphered, written from the right to the left.

The attributes, the colours of the horses, and the succession of the horsemen correspond to the description of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse in the Book of Revelation (Rev. 6:1-8). According to this description, the riders embodying various disasters appear as the Lamb opens the first four of the seven seals. The first rider, with a bow, arrives on a white horse and is given a crown symbolizing his victory. The second rider, with a

sword, appears on a red horse, embodying War. The scales of the third rider on a black horse allude to the scarcity of food, evoking Famine. The last rider is Death, who, according to the biblical account, is followed by Hell. However, in pictorial representations, he can have various attributes, a spear, a sword or a demonic creature.<sup>93</sup>

The third lunette on the northern wall is taken up by the Tree of Jesse. The opposite lunette on the southern wall was partly destroyed by the later construction of a window (Fig 35). In the lower left part of the lunette a white lamb-like animal with long curly fur and two horns is standing on the ground. The other parts of the scene are hard to decipher. However, it may have belonged to the apocalyptic series, as in the Book of Revelation (Rev 5:6) the lamb is described as having horns.

#### *The Tree of Jesse*

The Tree of Jesse features as a monumental composition on the northern wall, extending to two tiers and the lunette above (Fig. 36). Below, Jesse is sleeping on the ground. He is portrayed as an old man with white hair and beard, holding a scroll, the inscription on which has not survived (Fig. 37). A large tree is growing out of his body. The leafy branches of the tree coil to form circular medallions, forty altogether, in nine rows, where the ancestors of Christ appear. This genealogy follows the description in the Gospel of Matthew (1: 1-16), which lists forty forefathers from Abraham to Joseph. Each of the figures holds an inscription with the corresponding biblical passage, such as *Abraham autem genuit Isaac, Isaac autem genuit Iacob*, and so on.<sup>94</sup> All the ancestors are haloed, but are individualized by variations in clothing, beard- and hairstyles, as well as by different pointing gestures. David and Salomon are wearing crowns as signs of their rank. It can also be observed that the ancestors closer to

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<sup>93</sup> Schiller, *Ikonographie*, Vol. 5.2, 38.

<sup>94</sup> Although a significant part of the inscriptions are damaged or completely lost, the remaining ones seem to follow the biblical text exactly, in both the names of the ancestors and their succession. In some cases it seems that there was not enough space for the second name, as in the case of the second figure in the fifth row: [E]zechias aute[m] genuit.

the top of the tree are shown as “younger.” While the figures in the lower part are portrayed as grey-haired, elderly men wearing beards, the ones in the upper rows are blond or brown-haired, often without beards. The top of the tree is damaged (Fig. 38). On the uppermost branches a cup-like vessel is placed. In it, a bird-like figure is standing, of which only the lower parts survive: the legs, a large tail and its head, bowed down, reaching towards its own breast.

A parallel for this motif appears in a wall painting from Flensburg, Germany, dated around 1400 (Fig. 39).<sup>95</sup> Here a pelican appears on the top of the Tree of Jesse, surrounded by five of her brood, whom she feeds with her own blood taken from her breast.<sup>96</sup> The half figures in medallions made up of the tendrils of the tree are also similar, each of them holding scrolls, with the two kings – David and Solomon – differentiated from the others. Different is here that only twelve forefathers appear and the composition is completed with an image of the Crucifixion.

While several types of the Tree of Jesse composition developed after the twelfth century, which could include a variety of motifs,<sup>97</sup> it is relatively rare that the Tree of Jesse is limited to the ancestors of Christ listed in the Gospel of Matthew, without prophets or other figures, and that the ancestors appear in such a large number. The Tree of Jesse composition from Mediaș (Mediasch, Medgyes), a Saxon town not far from Alțâna, may have provided an analogy for this arrangement (Fig. 40). Unfortunately, the composition, dated around 1420 based on an inscription,<sup>98</sup> has been damaged by later reconstructions, thus the essential parts – the bottom, top, and the trunk of the tree – are missing. Still, the arrangement of the

<sup>95</sup> “Wurzel Jesse,” Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, image no. mi04650g03. <http://www.bildindex.de>. Last accessed April 2013.

<sup>96</sup> The young were probably also present at Alțâna. Although this part of the composition is fragmented, five wedge-shaped black forms are visible below the breast of the bird, probably the beaks of the brood.

<sup>97</sup> Arthur Watson, *The Early Iconography of the Tree of Jesse* (London: Oxford University Press, H. Milford, 1934), 83-147, Schiller, *Ikönographie*, vol. 1., 26-31.

<sup>98</sup> Vasile Drăguț, “Picturile murale de la Mediaș: o importantă recuperare pentru istoria artei transilvănene” [The mural paintings from Mediaș: an important recovery for the history of Transylvanian art], *Revista muzeelor și monumentelor - Seria Monumente istorice și de artă* 14 (1976): 11–22.

composition is similar, with the ancestors positioned in compact rows between tendrils, their curved scrolls, and the representation of the haloed figures as busts with a great variety of faces, postures, and gestures.

### *The Saints*

Four saints appear in the spaces between the three windows of the eastern wall, frontally depicted standing figures, set below painted arches that are supported by consoles. The inscriptions below the figures are either damaged or have completely disappeared, with the exception of the inscription identifying Saint Valentine. Thus, the figures must be recognized based on their clothing and attributes.

Saint Anthony the Great appears in the second row, to the left, as an old man with white hair and a beard, having a tonsure (Fig. 41). He is holding an open book in his left hand while holding his right in a blessing gesture. His attribute, a T-cross,<sup>99</sup> decorates his scapular, under which he is wearing a skin habit.

Below, a bishop saint is depicted wearing a mitre, a yellow patterned chasuble, and holding a bishop's staff (Fig. 42). His blond hair and beard suggest that he is middle-aged. He is holding his attribute, a golden chalice, in his left hand. This identifies him as Saint Eligius; the chalice refers to his profession as a goldsmith.<sup>100</sup> While in most cases he is represented holding a tool of his craft, he also appears in similar representations with a chalice, as in the missal of the guild of the goldsmiths of Vác from 1423, where he is represented in a bishop's attire with a chalice in his left hand (Fig. 43).<sup>101</sup>

Saint Valentine can be identified on the basis of the inscription *S[an]c[tu]s Valentinus* (Fig. 44). Shown as a priest, he is wearing a red chasuble with a chequered pattern over the

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<sup>99</sup> LCI, vol. 5., 207.

<sup>100</sup> LCI, vol. 6., 124.

<sup>101</sup> Ernő Marosi, ed, *Magyarországi művészet 1300-1470 körül* [The art of Hungary around 1300-1470], vol. 1., (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó 1987), 630, image no. 43.

alb and his head is tonsured. He is holding a closed book in his left hand and is making a blessing gesture with his right.

Below, another bishop saint appears, wearing a mitre and a red chasuble. He has blond hair and a beard (Fig. 45). He is holding up both of his hands. At the fingertips wedge-shaped objects appear stuck under the fingernails, which identifies him as Saint Erasmus, who was thus tortured.<sup>102</sup> The saint is represented with similar gestures, attributes, and bishop's attire at Keszthely, Hungary,<sup>103</sup> and Štítník (Csetnek)<sup>104</sup> and Ochtiná (Martonháza)<sup>105</sup> in Slovakia.

#### *Other scenes*

In the sitting niche on the southern wall, a seated priest is depicted in a frontal position (Fig. 46). He is wearing a red chasuble in a chequered pattern with dots and his head is tonsured. He is putting his hands together and may be holding an object which is no longer recognizable. The lower part of the composition is damaged; only a small portion survives of the bench-like piece of furniture covered with a cloth on which he is sitting. The background is filled with a pattern of a four-petalled floral motif.

The western lunette of the triumphal arch is decorated with a frame similar to the other lunettes, although the scene it contains can no longer be deciphered. On both pilasters supporting the chancel arch there are fragmentary figural representations. On the northern side, a haloed figure is depicted (Fig. 47). In the opposite field, there is also a figure with a halo, holding a scroll, while in the upper left corner Christ appears in a mandorla, wearing a red mantle (Fig. 48). Above the capitals of the pilasters, fragments of three medallions have survived in the lower parts of the arch, the content of which is not recognizable (Fig. 49). The

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<sup>102</sup> LCI, vol. 6., 156.

<sup>103</sup> Béla Zsolt Szakács, "Palatine Lackfi and His Saints. Frescos in the Franciscan Church of Keszthely," *Promoting the Saints. Cults and Their Contexts from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, ed. Ottó Gecser, et al., (Budapest: CEU Press, 2011), 213-214, fig. 4.

<sup>104</sup> Here also his other attribute appears, his intestines wound up on a wheel. "Hl. Erasmus; Hl. Martin." REALonline image no. 012474. <http://tethys.imareal.sbg.ac.at/realonline>. Last accessed May 2013.

medallions may have contained figures of prophets or the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, as there are several examples for both subjects in a similar arrangement on the chancel arches of churches in Transylvania.<sup>106</sup>

On the eastern wall of the southern aisle, the heads of two figures wearing crowns, but not halos, appear under an ornamental frame (Fig. 50). This scene belongs to an earlier layer of painting.<sup>107</sup> Possibly from the same period, in any case earlier than the rest of the pictures, is a representation of an architectural structure on the northern wall, to the right from the old sacristy door (Fig. 51). Although it is much damaged, a triangular roof set on a square form is recognizable. During the restoration works, a niche was discovered behind this image, possibly a tabernacle belonging to a building phase earlier than the fourteenth-century Gothic reconstructions, which was subsequently walled up.<sup>108</sup> The aedicule-like structure could thus be an architectural frame for this sacramental niche as an alternative to a sculpted tabernacle.

Vegetal and geometric motifs were used to separate tiers, frame scenes and fill narrow wall surfaces. For detailed descriptions see Chapter 4.

### 3.4. Conclusion

The iconographic program of the sanctuary in the parish church of Alțâna was conceived as a coherent whole, with almost all the representations originating from one period. The most emphatic element of this program is the Mariological cycle, with fifteen scenes surviving at least partially, other representations including saints, the Tree of Jesse, and the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

<sup>105</sup> “Hl. Erasmus.” REALonline image no. 012499. <http://tethys.imareal.sbg.ac.at/realonline>. Last accessed May 2013.

<sup>106</sup> For the Wise and Foolish Virgins at: Sântana de Mureș (Marosszentanna), Hărman (Honigberg, Szászhermány), Sușeni, Sâncraiu de Mureș (Marosszentkirály), prophets: Sântana de Mureș (Marosszentanna), Bonțida (Boncida), see: Vasile Drăguț, “Iconografia picturilor murale gotice din Transilvania. Considerații generale și repertoriu de teme.” [The iconography of Gothic wall paintings in Transylvania. General considerations and a repertory of themes], in *Pagini de veche artă românească* (Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1972), Vol. 2, 26, 80.

<sup>107</sup> Lóránd Kiss, personal communication, 5 September 2012.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

Study of the compositional patterns shows that the compositions are usually simple, reduced to the essential elements. In most cases only the minimum number of persons required by the story are present and the background of a scene is only specified if the architecture or landscape has an important role in the event. In addition, based on analogies, the representations fit into the iconographic tradition characteristic for the regions north of the Alps, with most parallels occurring in the German and Austrian territories.

## CHAPTER 4: QUESTIONS OF STYLE

In this chapter I will examine the stylistic characteristics of the wall paintings and search for analogies in style. The aim of this analysis is to explore possible connections and the place of the paintings in artistic development, as well as to provide a dating for them, as there is no direct evidence that would suggest a dating.

### 4.1. Stylistic features and analogies

#### *Figures*

Figures are set either frontally or in half profile; they are all turning their heads to the side in a half profile, the only exception being the perfectly frontal and symmetrical position of the priest in the sitting niche. Their standing, sitting, or kneeling postures and the gestures are relatively varied. Variation is most evident in the case of the ancestors of Christ on the Tree of Jesse, where the different pointing, waving and holding gestures, varying postures, and turning of the heads in different directions create a dynamic effect in the repetitive pattern. The hands are drawn with angular lines, and are often clumsy or out of proportion, either too small or too large.<sup>109</sup>

The facial features are drawn with clear, simple lines (Fig. 53). The heads are oval in shape with round chins. The eyelids framing the bluish-grey-coloured eyes are marked with two lines, the upper curved, and the lower straight. Curved lines constitute the eyebrows, one of them directly joining the nose. The eyebrows of the elderly male figures are flatter and the inner sides joining the nose are marked by short oblique lines suggesting wrinkles. The nose is represented in profile, with only one side of it drawn using only a single line. The mouth, where visible, is an unemphasized straight line. The beards and hair of the figures, drawn with curling parallel lines, create a decorative and dynamic effect. All figures are either blond or grey-haired.

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<sup>109</sup> For example, in the case of Saints Eligius, Anthony, and Mary in the Presentation and Annunciation scenes.

The simple, linear facial features and the form of the eyes, eyebrows, and nose are comparable with the figures in the Saint Catherine cycle decorating the southern wall of the nave at Ghelinta (Gelence), generally dated to the 1330s (Fig. 52. and 53).<sup>110</sup> For the wavy hair with a broader curl in line with the eyes and more angular eyebrows, the exterior wall paintings of the All Saints church at Batizovce (Batizfalva), Slovakia, provide a close analogy. As the other features (eyes, nose) there are more elaborated, with a suggestion of spatiality, the fragment from Batizovce, dated to the second half of the fourteenth century, may represent a more advanced stage of development (Fig. 54. and 55).<sup>111</sup>

The halos surrounding the head of the saints are one of the most distinctive features of the wall paintings (Fig. 55). The white disk of the halo is edged by a row of red-brown semicircular arches, a narrow white strip and a black contour. The decoration of the halos with semicircles was common in German, Austrian, and French painting in the first half of the fourteenth century.<sup>112</sup> While the motif is also present on wall paintings in medieval Hungary, the structure of the halo and the form and proportion of the arches are different.<sup>113</sup> The wall paintings in the nave of the church at Mălâncrav from the middle of the fourteenth century provide a relatively close comparison.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Vasile Drăguț dates the cycle to around 1330, see: Vasile Drăguț, *Arta gotică în România* [Gothic art in Romania] (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1979), 192. In a co-authored study Mihály Jánó and Zsombor Jékely provide a broader time frame, between 1300 and 1340, see: Mihály Jánó and Zsombor Jékely, “A templom épülete és falfestményei,” [The building and the wall paintings of the church], in *A gelencei Szent Imre templom* [The Saint Emeric church at Gelence], ed. Mihály Jánó (Sepsiszentgyörgy: T3 Kiadó, 2003), 42. In a paper in the same volume, Zsombor Jékely argues for the possibility of dating the Passion cycle on the northern wall to the very beginning of the fourteenth century, which would also affect the dating of the Saint Catherine cycle, see: Zsombor Jékely, “Krisztus passiója a gelencei templom középkori freskóciklusán.” [The Passion of Christ on the medieval fresco cycle of the church from Gelence”], in *A gelencei Szent Imre templom* [The Saint Emeric church at Gelence], ed. Mihály Jánó (Sepsiszentgyörgy: T3 Kiadó, 2003), 64.

<sup>111</sup> Vlasta Dvořáková, Josef Krása, and Karel Stejskal, *Středověká nástěnná malba na Slovensku* [Medieval Wall Paintings in Slovakia]. (Bratislava: Tatran, 1978), 73-74, fig. 35.

<sup>112</sup> Examples of halos with similar structures and proportions can be found on the wall paintings at Niedermendig (around 1300), Wienhausen, (1335) ([www.bildindex.de](http://www.bildindex.de)), Hosín (1325-1335), (<http://tethys.imareal.sbg.ac.at/realonline>) and Clermont-Ferrand, around 1300, see: Yves Bonnefoy, *Peintures murales de la France gothique* (Paris: P. Hartmann, 1954), Fig. 1.

<sup>113</sup> For example, at Mediaș, the decoration of the northern aisle, around 1400, see: Drăguț, *Arta gotică*, 233-236.

### *Draperies and folds*

The complexity of the folding of draperies varies, as does the way in which they are suggested. In some cases, modeling with lighter and darker shades forms complex fold structures, creating a plastic effect. An example of this is Mary's mantle in the Annunciation scene. The mantle is pinned up at waist, and the folds fall sinuously on one side and in vertical lines on the other side. Several motifs, such as the curved loose folds around the waist, the crease with which the mantle unfolds on the ground, and the fold below the left arm are paralleled on the illustrations of a *Speculum humanae salvationis* manuscript in the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna, dated to the 1330s (Fig. 56, 57 and 58).<sup>115</sup> Similarly, the creases on the lower part of Mary's robe in the Nativity scene are also comparable to the folding of clothing on the lying figures in the same manuscript.<sup>116</sup> Similar modeling with colours was used on the robes of the two apocalyptic horsemen whose figures have been preserved, in the case of Mary in the Adoration scene, and on the first standing figure in the Presentation of Mary.

In other cases the suggestion of folds is more graphic, with various motifs creating a decorative effect. One can find such a graphic, although still complex, treatment of folds on the robe of the angel of the Annunciation or on the alb of Saint Valentine (Fig. 22. and 44). Here the parallel vertical folds drawn with dark brown lines and shaded with a light brown line swerve to the right when reaching the ground. For some figures folds are drawn with simple vertical lines while in other cases there seems to be no intention to suggest folds at all.

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<sup>114</sup> Vasile Drăguț, "Picturile murale din biserica evanghelică din Mălâncrav" [The mural paintings of the Lutheran church in Mălâncrav], *Studii și Cercetări de Istoria Artei* 1 (1967): 86.

<sup>115</sup> Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek; cod. s. n. 2612 ; fol. 5v and 8v. Dated to the 1330s, the manuscript originated in southwest Germany or Austria, see: Andreas Fingernagel and Roland Martin, *Mitteleuropäische Schulen (ca. 1250-1350)*, (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997), 293-302.

<sup>116</sup> For example, *Ibid.*, fol. 5v, image no. 381.

Typical features of the representation of clothing are a mildly sinuous edge on the clothing and a voluted curve. Both motifs create a decorative contrast between the colour of the mantle and the colour of the lining. (Fig. 59).

There is a predilection for patterned draperies. The vestments of the priests and the saints and the draperies forming the backgrounds of the architectural structures are all decorated with similar motifs. In a net of standing rhombs, four or six-pointed stars, four-petalled flowers or dots appear, with the exception of the chasuble of Eligius, which is covered by a net of touching circles and the skin habit of Saint Anthony. The patterned draperies are flat, without folds, creating a decorative effect.

#### *Backgrounds and architectural structures*

On most scenes architectural structures, pieces of furniture or – in one case – elements of landscape mark the setting of the events. A common feature unifying all the narrative scenes is the bluish-grey sky and the undulating ground on which the figures are standing. The Rest on the Flight into Egypt takes place in a landscape setting suggested by three trees (Fig. 27). The trees are represented in a stylized way with tall, thin trunks bent in a double curve, and a smaller lateral shoot growing out below the leafage, where the leaves are suggested by a decorative chequered pattern.

A characteristic feature of the compositions is the use of architectural structures, either as a requisite of narrative scenes or as framework for the standing saint figures. On narrative scenes, elements of architecture appear either when the events take place in an interior space or when the building is an important element of the story, as in the Presentation of Mary in the Temple.

In the case of the house of Joachim and Anne and the Temple at Sotine, the interior spaces within an architectural structure are suggested with a simple semicircular arch (in the latter case this is combined with a five-foiled arch below). The Temple of Jerusalem on the

scenes of the Expulsion of Joachim and the Twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple is a more elaborate polygonal structure shown from the inside as well as the outside. On the first scene the temple is presented as a castle-like building with crenellated stone walls, a red roof, and two turrets; on the second scene the three sides of the building open with three trefoil arcades supported by thin columns. In each of these four cases a suspended patterned drapery decorates the interior. In turn, the temple of Jerusalem in the Presentation of Mary in the Temple is shown from the exterior as a tower-like building with crenellated walls built of stone blocks of uneven size, articulated by two pair of round-arched twin windows beside a high but narrow round arched portal.

The saints stand below crenellated tower-like structures that open with an arch which is supported by consoles with complex profiles, with a pair of round arched windows in each spandrel. While the two arches in the upper row are trefoil and the colour of the structure is grey, below them the structures are yellow, with five-foiled arches. Although it frames a narrative scene, the architectural structure in the Prayer for the flowering of the twigs is similar to this type; the only difference is that the spandrels of the trilobal arch are decorated with five dots arranged in a cross form.

Looking for analogies, the combination of trefoil arches and slender columns as seen on the Twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple is paralleled on the frescoes in the Dominican church at Regensburg, dated around 1330 (Fig. 60. and 61).<sup>117</sup> From approximately the same period figures are shown framed by a trefoil arch supported by consoles with the spandrels

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<sup>117</sup> The capitals of the columns here are more elongated although they are structured similarly. Regensburg, the Dominican church, frescoes on the southern wall, Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, image no. 69.882. <http://www.bildindex.de>. Last accessed April 2013.

opened by windows in a *Biblia Pauperum*.<sup>118</sup> On the wall paintings at Wienhausen the motif of battlements is combined with the windows and trefoil arch.<sup>119</sup>

### *Decorative patterns*

Figural decoration is complemented by vegetal and architectural motifs separating the tiers and framing the lunettes, windows, and the chancel arch. The five lunettes are each framed by a band made up of red and white stripes arranged in an accordion shape suggesting perspective (Fig. 31). This effect is lost in some places and the surface becomes flat. An illusionistically represented blind arcade runs along the inside of the lunette, a motif appearing in similar position on Romanesque portals.<sup>120</sup> A similar blind arcade is used to separate the three tiers from each other; between the first and second tiers it is completed by a band of green and yellow oval-shaped leaves arranged in a zigzag pattern (Fig. 62). The decoration below the lower tier is generally much damaged or completely destroyed. In the eastern parts, a band of rhomboid patterns containing a six-leafed vegetal motif appears above the row of painted curtains (Fig. 63).

Scrolling vegetal motifs are used to fill up narrow wall surfaces. A similar pattern of a meandering scroll with red and green leaves decorates the eastern side of the chancel arch and the space left of the window on the northeastern wall (Fig. 64).<sup>121</sup> The window splays on the eastern wall are filled with a winding vine scroll with leaves and bunches of grapes. In the central window splay the leaves are green and the bunches of grapes are yellow, but the two colours are reversed at the side windows. This latter type of pattern is repeated at Buia

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<sup>118</sup> *Biblia Pauperum*, from Austria, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, cod. 1198 ; fol. 2v, around 1330-1340. REALonline images no. 005441B. <http://tethys.imareal.sbg.ac.at/realonline>. Last accessed April 2013.

<sup>119</sup> Wienhausen, 1335, Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, image no. LAC 7.087/37. <http://www.bildindex.de>. Last accessed April 2013.

<sup>120</sup> For example, at Domonkosfa, see: Tibor Kollár and Tibor Rostás, ed., *Építészet a középkori Dél-Magyarországon. Tanulmányok*. [Architecture in Medieval Southern Hungary. Studies] (Budapest: Teleki László Alapítvány, 2010), 118.

<sup>121</sup> The narrative scenes extend to the similar space on the southeastern wall.

(Bólya) in the Calvinist church, now in ruins (Fig. 65. and 66).<sup>122</sup> Not only is the position of the vine scroll identical in the window splay of the southeastern window, but also the blue background and red framing, although the contour of the leaf is less curled on this fragment.

### *General features*

The compositions generally create a plain effect. The representations are mostly linear; colours are used for modelling only for some of the draperies and the undulating ground. In most cases they fill up flat surfaces. The decorative chequered patterns on clothing, furniture, and architectural elements enhance the plain effect. While a few objects and buildings are shown in perspective,<sup>123</sup> this is a reverse perspective with the lines converging towards the viewer. The suggestion of spatial relationships between the figures and the objects surrounding them is often problematic. In the Nativity scene, rather than lying on the bed, Mary seems to be floating before it (Fig. 24). Similarly problematic is the setting of the two seated figures in the scenes of the Adoration and the Twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple (Fig. 28).

The compositions are generally simple, reduced to the essential elements and deploying few figures. Still, they are relatively crammed with few blank spaces left and the height of the figures in most cases fills all the available space. A limited range of colours is used, with dark red-brown, yellow, and white surfaces dominating against blue backgrounds, complemented by the use of pink, grey, and green.

## **4.2. Conclusion**

Research focusing on the artistic development in the first half of the fourteenth century in medieval Hungary points out the coexistence of several stylistic phenomena in this

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<sup>122</sup> József Lángi and Ferenc Mihály, *Erdélyi falképek és festett faberendezések* [Transylvanian wall paintings and painted furniture], (Budapest: Állami Műemlékhelyreállítási és Restaurálási Központ, 2004), Vol. 2, 14-16.

<sup>123</sup> The temple of Jerusalem in the Presentation of Mary, the seat of Mary in the Adoration of the Magi, and the Jesus' pulpit on the Twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple.

period.<sup>124</sup> Besides linear Gothic, a style widespread north of the Alps, characterised by plain and slender forms and the importance of lines and contours as the main means of expression,<sup>125</sup> the Italian influence was also significant. The Italo-byzantine style was present from the beginning of the fourteenth century and the influence of the Italian trecento became widespread from the second quarter of the century onwards.<sup>126</sup> Although in Transylvania there are several monuments which reveal Italian influences,<sup>127</sup> these features are not evident in the case of the wall paintings from Alțâna, which are more closely related to northern art.

The stylistic orientation of the wall paintings in Alțâna was probably not an isolated phenomenon in the region, as the fragment from Buia suggests. Moreover, the wall paintings seem to represent a stage of artistic development similar to the Saint Catherine cycle in Ghelinița. Still, it seems that in the surviving material there are no examples that would suggest a close stylistic relationship. Therefore, at this point of the research and state of discoveries the issue of workshop activities will not be addressed.

At the same time, broadening the geographical framework, one can find parallels for several motifs and stylistic features in the art of Central Europe around 1330 to 1340. Therefore, the examination of the analogies points to a dating around or shortly after this period, in the second third of the fourteenth century.

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<sup>124</sup> *Magyarországi művészet*, 346, 351. Drăguț, *Arta gotică*, 189-192.

<sup>125</sup> *Magyarországi művészet*, 346.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 346, 351.

## CHAPTER 5: INTERPRETATION OF THE ICONOGRAPHIC PROGRAM

To this date only few contemporary wall paintings from Saxon churches in Transylvania are known, and there are even fewer examples where the iconographic program of a sanctuary decoration can be studied. Thus, there are limitations to contextualising the wall paintings at Alțâna in the art of the period and the region. As more discoveries occur, this will be a task for future research.

For a better understanding of this iconographic program, it is most useful to look more closely at the constituting elements and how they are interrelated with each other and with their placement in the sanctuary. Several layers of meanings can be distinguished in the program. The scenes and figures can be grouped into thematic units of Mariological, apocalyptic, eucharistic representations and figures of saints.

In the center of the program stand the scenes from the life of Mary, which extend to two tiers on both the northern and the southern walls. After 1300, narrative cycles presenting the life of Mary based on the apocryphal writings became increasingly popular across the whole of Europe.<sup>128</sup> In Italy, the Mariological scenes were most often represented in the form of fresco cycles, often in the sanctuaries of churches.<sup>129</sup> However, in the region north of the Alps, wall paintings were only relatively rarely dedicated to this subject, which appeared there more often on stained glass, textiles or in book illumination.<sup>130</sup> In the territory of medieval Hungary, only one Mariological fresco cycle that includes scenes from the childhood of the Virgin has been preserved besides the one from Alțâna.<sup>131</sup> The wall paintings decorating the sanctuary of the Franciscan church in Keszthely follow the Italian

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 349, see also Mária Prokopp, *Italian Trecento Influence on Murals in East Central Europe, Particularly Hungary* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1983).

<sup>128</sup> LCI, vol. 3., 217, Schiller, *Iconographie*, vol. 4.2, 46.

<sup>129</sup> LCI, vol. 3., 221-222, Schiller, *Iconographie*, vol. 4.2, 47.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 46-47. For an extensive list of Mariological cycles north of the Alps see: Lafontaine-Dosogne, *Iconographie*, 35-49.

<sup>131</sup> Drăguț also mentions a cycle at Deva (Déva), in the Calvinist church which was demolished, see: Drăguț, *Iconografia*, 77.

tradition, showing close connections with Sienese painting.<sup>132</sup> However, the Mariological cycle at Alțâna is conceived in the pictorial language of Northern art, both regarding compositional patterns and style.

The Apocalyptic theme is also emphatic through the placement of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse in the lunettes above the two tiers presenting scenes from the life of Mary. This association of subjects might be seen as dissonant, as the Four Horsemen, a reminder and exhortation in the light of the coming Last Judgement, seem to convey another type of message than the glorification of Mary.

Compared to the other parts of the Bible, the Book of Revelation was rarely represented in monumental art.<sup>133</sup> Because of this, a particular interest in the Apocalypse is usually assumed behind the commission of an apocalyptic cycle, for which its very exclusivity may have been a major appeal.<sup>134</sup>

Although it was primarily in book illuminations that Apocalyptic cycles evolved and appeared most frequently, the subject was also present on wall paintings after the tenth century, usually in an abbreviated form.<sup>135</sup> In the fourteenth century it was mostly in Italy that the Apocalypse was represented on fresco cycles.<sup>136</sup> The only example from Central Europe of an extant apocalyptic cycle, probably inspired by Italian sources, is at Karlštejn Castle.<sup>137</sup>

Generally no rule for the placement of the Apocalyptic cycles within a church can be detected; they can appear in the sanctuary as well as in various other locations.<sup>138</sup> In fact, the

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<sup>132</sup> Béla Zsolt Szakács, "The Fresco Cycle of the Holy Virgin in the Franciscan Church of Keszthely," *Ikon* 3 (2010): 261-270.

<sup>133</sup> Not considering such more common, non-narrative images inspired by the Book of Revelation as the Christ in Majesty, see: Meg Gay, "Monumental Apocalypse Cycles of the Fourteenth Century," Ph.D. dissertation (University of York, 1999), 7, 9, 142.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 78, 168.

<sup>135</sup> Schiller, *Ikonographie*, vol. 5.1., 118.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 279-294.

<sup>137</sup> Peter K. Klein, "Introduction: The Apocalypse in Medieval Art," in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Kenneth Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 193.

<sup>138</sup> Schiller, *Ikonographie*, vol. 5.1. 172.

representation of the Apocalypse could take on various connotations depending on the function of the space where it was placed or on other images it was associated with.<sup>139</sup>

There are several examples in the fourteenth century where the Apocalypse appears in the context of the Eucharist. The Book of Revelation contains several references to the heavenly liturgy performed around the altar, which could be set in parallel with the earthly rituals practiced in the church.<sup>140</sup> Accordingly, several representations of the Apocalypse designed for liturgical spaces emphasize the eucharistic theme, for example, the east window at York Minster or the Apocalypse altarpiece from Master Bertram's workshop, both from the beginning of the fifteenth century.<sup>141</sup>

The baptistery of the cathedral in Padua is an example where an apocalyptic fresco cycle decorates the sanctuary (around 1375-1385). There, one finds fifty scenes inspired by the Book of Revelation on the walls of the altar chapel, with the figures of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse in the pendentives and the figure of Christ surrounded by apostles in the dome.<sup>142</sup> Besides the association with the altar, the Apocalypse cycle there can also be understood as the final episode and fulfillment of salvation history, completing the Old and New Testament cycles of the nave.<sup>143</sup>

Other examples show that the Apocalypse could also be present in the context of Marian devotion. In some cases it appears in liturgical spaces dedicated to the Virgin Mary without this connection being otherwise explicit.<sup>144</sup> On the frescoes of the Chapel of the Virgin in Karlštejn the Apocalyptic iconography is closely linked to Virgin Mary based on the reading of the Book of Revelation, which identifies her with the woman clothed with the

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<sup>139</sup> Gay, *Apocalypse Cycles*, 218.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 198-202, 203-204.

<sup>142</sup> Schiller, *Ikongraphie*, vol. 5.1. 291.

<sup>143</sup> Gay, *Apocalypse Cycles*, 203.

<sup>144</sup> Gay, *Apocalypse Cycles*, 213.

sun.<sup>145</sup> The visually most emphatic scene of the cycle is the woman pursued by the dragon, where she is presented according to the iconography of Mary. The cycle ends with a devotional image that combines the traditional representation of the Madonna with child and the attributes of the apocalyptic vision (Fig. 67).<sup>146</sup>

The uses of the apocalyptic imagery presented above can help in understanding how the apocalyptic theme at Alțâna fits into the iconographic program of the sanctuary. However, it should be pointed out that here there is no iconographic reference that would link the Apocalyptic representations either to the Eucharist or to the Virgin Mary, except for their spatial position above the Mariological cycle. Parts of the decoration that are no longer extant could have provided further hints to the interpretation of the Apocalyptic cycle. The representation of the first lunette on the southern wall, probably a related scene, is too fragmentary to allow an interpretation. Besides, if the original Gothic vaulting was decorated with wall paintings, it may have contained further Apocalyptic representations, about which no evidence has survived.

A further group of representations is associated with the Eucharist, in accordance with the function of the sanctuary. Related to this, one can note the consistency in the iconography of the keystones, all of them bearing connotations of the sacrifice of Christ. While the original arrangement and sequence of the three keystones are no longer known, they once formed an integral part of the iconographic program (see also chapter 2, 13, above). On the keystone found in a secondary position on the southern wall, the Man of Sorrows appears, an image invoking the Passion through the wounds of Christ and the repetition of the Passion in the sacrifice of the Mass.<sup>147</sup> One of the two other keystones preserved in the Museum of History in Sibiu represents the face of Christ, and the other the Lamb of God with a flag and a

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Schiller, *Ikonoğrafie*, vol. 5.1. 291.

<sup>147</sup> LCI, vol. 4, 87-88.

cruciform halo, a symbol of Christ as a sacrificed lamb, at the same time also referring to his victory and glory.<sup>148</sup>

In addition, the vine-leaf motif with bunches of grape filling up the splays of the three eastern windows of the sanctuary might also be an allusion to the Eucharist, although at the same time it clearly had a decorative function.

One element of the program seems to function as a link between the various layers of meanings. Just as it overarches the three tiers of decoration, the Tree of Jesse connects the Mariological, eucharistic, and eschatological components of the program.

The connections between the Tree of Jesse and the Virgin Mary were often evidenced in theological writings. The association between the rod figuring in the prophecy of Isaiah<sup>149</sup> and the Virgin was already drawn by Tertullian based on the similarity of the words *virga* and *virgo*, while Christ was seen as the blossom of the tree emerging from this rod.<sup>150</sup> The Mariological aspect of the Tree of Jesse was further developed by Bernard of Clairvaux, who associated it with the supernatural conception and virgin birth.<sup>151</sup>

This connection is also present on pictorial representations. Mary often appears in Tree of Jesse compositions, in some cases being literally presented as the trunk of the Tree.<sup>152</sup> In works deploying typological representations such as the *Speculum humanae salvationis*, the Tree of Jesse is coupled with the Birth of the Virgin in many cases.<sup>153</sup>

The Tree of Jesse is also represented in the context of Mariological cycles. The scenes from the life of the Virgin decorating the sanctuary of the church of Saint Bartholomew in Zell bei Oberstaufen (Germany) are introduced by a Tree of Jesse

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., vol. 3, 7-14.

<sup>149</sup> “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord” (Isaiah 11:1-2).

<sup>150</sup> Watson, *Tree of Jesse*, 3-4.

<sup>151</sup> Schiller, *Ikonographie*, vol. 1, 26.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 27.

composition. The connections to the subsequently represented events are evidenced by the two figures in the Tree: Mary with the child Jesus and a prophet holding a quote from Isaiah, which foretells the virgin birth: *virgo concepiet* (Fig. 68).<sup>154</sup> There are also other instances when a Tree of Jesse is the first scene of a Mariological cycle, in wall painting<sup>155</sup> as well as in other media. In the territory of medieval Hungary, the Tree of Jesse appears on altars presenting scenes from the life of the Virgin, such as the altar from Spišské Podhradie, (Szepesváralja) around 1490 or Sebeş (Mühlbach, Szászsebes) around 1524.<sup>156</sup> Thus, while the monumental Tree of Jesse composition creates a visual break in the continuity of the Mariological cycle, it can also be seen as part of this cycle, based on the multiple connections between the symbolism of the Tree of Jesse and the Virgin.

References to the Tree of Jesse also appear on individual scenes from the life of Mary. When relating the episode of the Choosing of Joseph as the husband of Mary, the *Legenda Aurea* refers to the prophecy of Isaiah, suggesting a parallel between the Tree of Jesse and the blossoming rod of Joseph, as the dove of the Holy Spirit rests on both.<sup>157</sup> In the cycle at Alțâna this subtle connection is emphasized by the placement of the Prayer for the Flowering of the Twigs opposite the Tree of Jesse composition.

The eucharistic connotation of the Tree of Jesse is evidenced through its depiction just above the stone tabernacle on the northern wall of the sanctuary. The Tree of Jesse was an image through which the Incarnation and the Passion could be connected in both religious

<sup>153</sup> For example, in the *Speculum humanae salvationis* manuscript in the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna, dated to the 1330s, “Wurzel Jesse,” REALonline images no. 007165A. <http://tethys.imareal.sbg.ac.at/realonline>. Last accessed May 2013.

<sup>154</sup> “Zell bei Oberstaufen,” Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, image no. 731.915, <http://www.bildindex.de>. Last accessed May 2013.

<sup>155</sup> For example, in the Saint Gallus church at Gestratz, Germany, “Wurzel Jesse,” REALonline images no. 015936. <http://tethys.imareal.sbg.ac.at/realonline>. Last accessed May 2013.

<sup>156</sup> Dénes Radocsay, *A középkori Magyarország táblaképei* [Panel paintings in medieval Hungary] (Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1955), 430-431, 450.

<sup>157</sup> “Each unmarried but marriageable man of the house of David is to bring a branch to the altar. One of these branches will bloom and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove will perch upon its tip, according to the prophecy of Isaiah. The man to whom this branch belongs is, beyond all doubt, the one who is to be the virgin’s spouse.” See: Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, tr. William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), vol 2., 153. Schiller, *Ikonographie*, vol. 4.2., 43.

literature and art. Presenting the earthly ancestry of Christ, it was a visual demonstration of the doctrine of the Incarnation and of the human nature of Christ – essential conditions of the sacrifice of Christ and of the transubstantiation of his body and blood in the Eucharist.<sup>158</sup> An analogy between the Tree of Jesse and the Tree of the Cross was also explicitly drawn in texts and images as well.<sup>159</sup>

Accordingly, the Tree of Jesse is often represented in a eucharistic context. It appears on tabernacles, as in the Saint Martin Church in Hettingen around 1500,<sup>160</sup> on altar predellas (the best-known example being the altarpiece of the Death of the Virgin in the St. Mary's Church in Cracow), while in later periods it was represented on monstrances.<sup>161</sup>

In some cases, the eucharistic connotation of the Tree of Jesse was further emphasized by specific iconography. Based on the analogy between the Tree of Jesse and the Tree of the Cross, the Crucifixion was inserted in the composition in many cases.<sup>162</sup> On the representation from Alžâna, the pelican on the top of the tree makes evident the association with the Eucharist. The bird feeding her brood with her own blood is a symbol of the crucified Christ, a motif often appearing on Crucifixion scenes or on objects related to the Eucharist.<sup>163</sup>

The Tree of Jesse can also appear in the context of eschatological representations, as an antecedent leading to the fulfillment of salvation history. On the Portico de la Gloria at Santiago de Compostela (end of the twelfth century) the Tree of Jesse appears on the lower part of the trumeau supporting the tympanon in which an Apocalyptic vision is presented with Christ in Majesty surrounded by the evangelists, angels, the blessed, and the twenty-four

<sup>158</sup> Michael D. Taylor, "A Historiated Tree of Jesse," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 34/35 (1980/1981): 143-144.

<sup>159</sup> Watson, *Tree of Jesse*, 52-54.

<sup>160</sup> "Sakramentshaus," Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, image no. mi05757g08, <http://www.bildindex.de>. Last accessed May 2013.

<sup>161</sup> Schiller, *Ikonographie*, vol 4.2., 32.

<sup>162</sup> Carol Falvo Heffernan, *The Phoenix at the Fountain: Images of Woman and Eternity in Lactantius's Carmen De Ave Phoenixe and the Old English Phoenix* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1988), 118.

<sup>163</sup> LCI, vol. 4., 390-392.

elders.<sup>164</sup> The east window of Selby Abbey from around 1330 provides another example for a link between the Tree of Jesse and the end of times. Above the monumental Tree of Jesse composition crowned by an image of the Crucifixion, the Last Judgement fills the upper part of the window.<sup>165</sup>

A fourth element of the iconographic program is the representations of saints. Between the windows on the eastern walls of the sanctuary Saint Anthony the Great, Saint Eligius, Saint Valentine, and Saint Erasmus are depicted.

Hermitic orders probably played an important role in the popularisation of the cult of Saint Anthony the Great.<sup>166</sup> Among the three Antonite monasteries documented on the territory of medieval Hungary, one was situated in Transylvania, in Sighișoara (Schäßburg, Segesvár).<sup>167</sup> Representations of the saint survive from this region on a wall painting at Dârjiu, (Székelyderzs) from 1419<sup>168</sup> and on the altarpieces from Cisnădie (Heltau, Nagydisznód) and Băgaciu (Bogeschdorf, Szászbogács).<sup>169</sup>

The spread of the cult of Saint Eligius in medieval Hungary was connected to the mining and monetary reforms of Charles Robert. As a result of these reforms, the significance of goldsmiths, also involved in minting, increased.<sup>170</sup> While the saint was also venerated in mining regions, he was primarily a patron of the goldsmiths, largely Germans by ethnicity.<sup>171</sup> It is also in this context that his cult is traceable in Transylvania. The saint appears on the seal of the goldsmith's guild in Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár, Klausenburg) from the fifteenth century;

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<sup>164</sup> Watson, *Tree of Jesse*, 106-109.

<sup>165</sup> Elisabeth Reddish, "The Fourteenth Century Tree of Jesse in the Nave of York Minster," *York Medieval Yearbook 2* (2003). <http://www.york.ac.uk/teaching/history/pjpg/jesse.pdf>. Last accessed May 2013.

<sup>166</sup> András Mező, *A templomcím a magyar helységnevekben (11-15. század)* [Church titles in Hungarian place names], Budapest: Magyar Egyháztörténeti Enciklopédia Munkaközösség, 1996), 60.

<sup>167</sup> Tamás Grynaeus, "Remete Szent Antal a hazai képzőművészetben" [Saint Anthony the Great in the art of Hungary], *Ars Hungarica* 25 (1997): 181. On the Antonite monasteries in Hungary, see also: Idem, *Szent Antal tüze* [St. Anthony's fire] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2002), 57-72.

<sup>168</sup> *Magyarországi művészet*, vol. 1., 615, Drăguț *Iconografia*, 62.

<sup>169</sup> Radocsay, *Táblakép*, 395-396, 429.

<sup>170</sup> István Petrovics, "Szent Eligius magyarországi és angliai tisztelete a középkorban" [The medieval cult of Saint Eligius in Hungary and in England], in *A VIII. Numizmatika és a Társtudományok Konferencia* [The eighth conference of numismatics and related disciplines] (Szeged: Móra Ferenc Múzeum, Magyar Numizmatikai Társulat, Magyar Éremgyűjtők Egyesülete, 2011), 169.

the same guild also founded an altar dedicated to Saint Eligius in the Saint Michael's church there, mentioned in a document from 1516.<sup>172</sup> From the regions populated by Saxons, seals of the goldsmith's guilds of Mediaș and Sibiu are known from the sixteenth century, both representing the saint.<sup>173</sup> Although goldsmiths are known to have been present in the major Saxon settlements of Transylvania like Brașov, Sebeș, Sibiu, and Sighișoara from as early as the second quarter of the fourteenth century,<sup>174</sup> there is no further evidence to account for the depiction of Saint Eligius at Alțâna.

In German territories the cult of Saint Valentine, the early Christian martyr celebrated on the fourteenth of February, was merged with another bishop saint of the same name, whose relics were preserved in Passau and who was the patron of that diocese. This was the case in Hungary as well, where the cult of Saint Valentine, patron of epileptics, was also present.<sup>175</sup> Among his several representations one survives from a Transylvanian Saxon context on the altarpiece from Băgaciu (1518).<sup>176</sup>

The characteristically German cult of Saint Erasmus, one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers, was present in Hungary throughout the medieval period.<sup>177</sup> In Transylvania one representation of Saint Erasmus survives, in the form of a wall painting, in the Church on the Hill at Sighișoara, dating from around 1483-1488.<sup>178</sup> Another representation of him at Abrud (Abrudbánya, Gross-Schlatten) is no longer extant.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>173</sup> Magdalena Bunta, "Două sigilii ale breslei aurarilor din Cluj și Dej" [Two seals of the goldsmiths' guild from Cluj and Dej], *Apulum* 6 (1967): 355.

<sup>174</sup> Gustav Gündisch, "Sächsisches Leben im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert," in *Geschichte der Deutschen auf dem Gebiete Rumäniens*, ed. Carl Göllner (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1979), 47.

<sup>175</sup> Sándor Bálint, *Ünnepi kalendárium. A Mária-ünnepek és jelesebb napok hazai és közép-európai hagyományvilágából* [Calendar of feast-days. From the Hungarian and Central European traditions of the feasts of Mary and other feasts] (Budapest: Neumann, 2004), "Február 14," online edition: <http://mek.oszk.hu/04600/04656/html/>. Last accessed May 2013.

<sup>176</sup> Radocsay, *Oltárkép*, 429.

<sup>177</sup> Bálint, *Ünnepi kalendárium*, "Június 2."

<sup>178</sup> Drăguț, *Iconografia*, 66.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

Therefore, it can be observed that the cult of each saint represented is traceable among the Transylvanian Saxons. A common distinctive feature of the saints is their important ecclesiastical position; except for Saint Anthony, an essential figure in the history of monasticism, all saints are bishops, although Valentine is not represented as such. In addition, their cult tends to have a German aspect or origin, although not exclusively. At the same time, due to the lack of evidence regarding the circumstances of the commissioning of the wall paintings, the question of the reasons behind the selection of saints remains open.

A further element of the iconographic program that deserves attention is the representation of the sitting niche on the southern wall, where a praying priest is depicted in a frontal, seated position. When sitting niches in churches preserve figural representations, generally these are depictions of saints.<sup>180</sup> In cases where priests are represented as donors in wall paintings, they usually appear in profile, kneeling and turning towards a saintly figure to whom they address their prayer, often visualised in the form of a scroll they are holding. Examples of such depictions include the representation of *Erasmus plebanus* beside a row of apostles at Martijanaci (Mártonhely) around 1400 (Fig. 69),<sup>181</sup> a priest turning towards Mary in a Crucifixion scene in the sacristy of the Saint Francis church at Poniky (Pónik) around 1415,<sup>182</sup> and another priest beside a Crucifixion scene in the funeral chapel at Hărman (Honigberg, Szászhermány) around 1445.<sup>183</sup> A closer parallel to the representation at Alțâna, also from the same region and similar time period, can be found at Cislădie (Heltau, Nagydisznód).<sup>184</sup> In a window splay on the eastern wall of the sanctuary a priest without a halo is depicted in a similar frontal, symmetrical, (although standing) position, his hands put

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<sup>180</sup> For example, at Siklós castle chapel, (around 1430-1450), *Magyarországi művészet*, vol. 1. 704, image no. 36.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1. 483, vol. 2. image no. 721.

<sup>182</sup> Dušan Buran, *Studien zur Wandmalerei um 1400 in der Slowakei: die Pfarrkirche St. Jakob in Leutschau und die Pfarrkirche St. Franziskus Seraphicus in Poniky* (Weimar: VDG, 2002), 168-170, 331, image no. 122. There is also a figure of a praying Franciscan on the northern wall of the sanctuary, *Ibid.*, 165-166, 327, image no. 116.

<sup>183</sup> Helga Fabritius, *Die honigberger Kapelle*, 152-157.

<sup>184</sup> "Evangelikus templom, Nagydisznód," *Monumenta Transsylvaniae*, [www.monumenta.ro](http://www.monumenta.ro). Last accessed April 2013.

together in prayer before his chest (Fig. 70). An inscription above him identifies him as *Petrus plebanus*. He is directing his prayer to the patron saint of the church, *Walpurgis virgo*, represented on the opposite side of the window splay. Although at Alțâna it is no longer clear whom the priest was addressing with his prayer, he might have been turned towards the altar.

## CONCLUSION

This analysis shows that the iconographic program of the sanctuary in Alțâna is complex and elaborate. The selection of representations and their arrangement in the space of the sanctuary, the various references and interconnections, and the exclusiveness of some of the iconographic themes imply careful planning and a learned background. However, there seems to be a contrast between the sophistication of the iconographic program and its realization. The artistic quality of the images and the simple, sparing treatment of the compositions reduced to the essentials bespeak local standards.

Several aspects of this decorative program deserve attention. The program is centred on the Virgin Mary, whose life is presented in a large narrative cycle comprising more than fifteen scenes which fill most of the decorated space. As pointed out above, the life of Mary was a relatively rare subject of fresco cycles in the north of the Alps. A dedication of the church to the Virgin Mary may have provided a motivation to decorate the sanctuary walls with scenes of her life, as in the case of the Franciscan church at Keszthely. Still, there is no further evidence to support this suggestion.

Other representations underscore the theme of the glorification of the Virgin, allude to the eucharistic presence in the sanctuary or are concerned with the eschatology and veneration of saints. Among these, the complex use of the Tree of Jesse is noteworthy, as it bears multiple connections to the Virgin Mary and the eucharistic sacrifice and also links several moments of salvation history through its placement and specific iconography.

Also worthy of attention is the presence of the Apocalypse representations in Alțâna, due to their rarity in monumental art. As a theme mainly accessible to the educated, it was probably chosen precisely for its exclusivity.

Regarding the commissioning of the wall paintings, no written document or inscription survives. Viewed in the context of the architectural history of the church, the

decoration of the sanctuary was part of the rebuilding campaign around the middle of the fourteenth century, which involved enlarging the Romanesque sanctuary and refurbishing it with new vaulting and sculptural decoration. That the execution of the wall paintings immediately followed this reconstruction is suggested both by technical considerations and stylistic analysis of the sculptural and pictorial elements.

The rebuilding of the sanctuary and the commissioning of this complex decorative program extending to all the wall surfaces, which involved considerable cost, reveal an ambitious purpose. In this context the long-term rivalry between Alțâna and the nearby Nochrich for juridical and administrative rights as the center of the seat deserves attention. This rivalry, documented from 1361 onwards (see chapter 1, 9), probably had antecedents which could also have provided an incentive to demonstrate precedence through representative architecture.

The identity of the commissioner and the learned inventor of the program remain unknown. The emphatic representation of the priest figure in the sitting niche on the southern wall suggests that the parish priest – possibly the *Johannes plebanus de Alczina* mentioned in 1349 and 1351 – may have played a role in it.

The wall paintings in Alțâna provide a rare example of coherent and extensive sanctuary decoration in Transylvania from the second third of the fourteenth century. Their examination enriches the fragmentary picture of the artistic development of this region in this period. At the same time, the wall paintings can also be viewed as a source on the culture and standards of education in fourteenth-century Transylvania, demonstrating how the means of expression of provincial art could be coupled with erudite ideas and an elaborate conception.

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## FIGURES

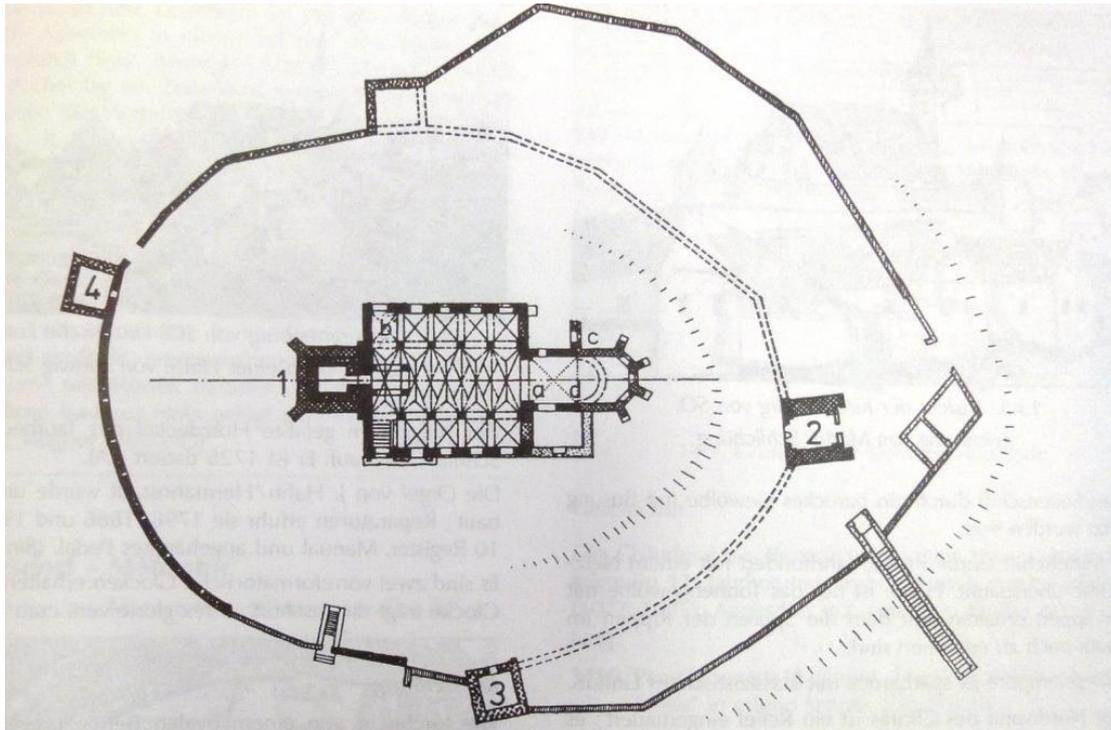


Figure 1. The plan of the church. Hermann Fabini, *Atlas der siebenbürgisch-sächsischen Kirchenburgen und Dorfkirchen*, 2 vols (Hermannstadt – Heidelberg: Monumenta Verlag – Arbeitskreis für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde, 1999, 2002), 20.



Figure 2. View of the interior from the western tribune (photograph by the author).



Figure 3. View towards west showing the vault above the nave (photograph by the author).



author).

Figure 4. The sanctuary (photograph by the



Figure 5. Window on the southern wall of the sanctuary (photograph by the author).



Figure 6. Column base on the eastern side of the chancel arch (photograph by the author).



Figure 7. Keystone built into the southern wall of the sanctuary. – *Vir Dolorum* (photograph by the author).



Figure 8. Keystone exhibited in the Medieval Lapidarium of the Museum of History in Sibiu – *Agnus Dei* (photograph by the author).



Figure 9. Key stone exhibited in the Medieval Lapidarium of the Museum of History in Sibiu – Face of Christ (photograph by the author).



Figure 10. Sitting niche on the southern wall (photograph by the author).



Figure 11. The original sacristy (photograph by the author).



Figure 12. Southern portal of the sanctuary (photograph by the author).



Figure 13. The church from southwest (photograph by the author).



Figure 14. Drawing by Martin Schlichting – Hermann Fabini, *Atlas der siebenbürgisch-sächsischen Kirchenburgen und Dorfkirchen*, 2 vols (Hermannstadt – Heidelberg: Monumenta Verlag – Arbeitskreis für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde, 1999, 2002), 20.

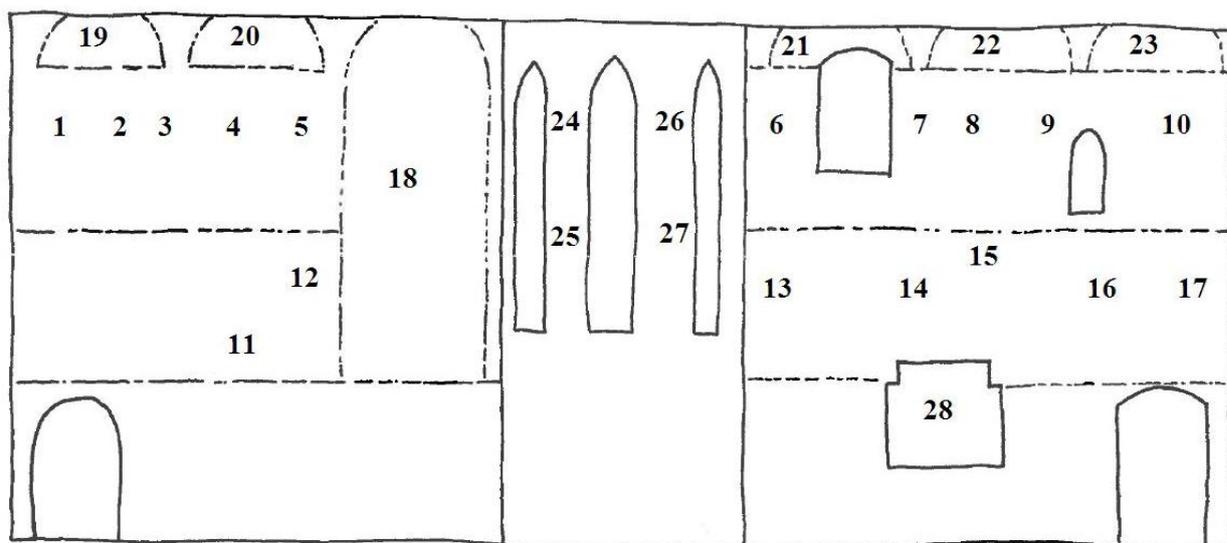


Figure 15. The iconographic scheme (illustration by the author).

1. The Expulsion of Joachim from the Temple
2. Annunciation to Joachim
3. Fragment (Meeting of Joachim and Anne at the Golden Gate?)
4. Birth of Mary
5. Presentation of Mary in the Temple
6. Prayer for the Flowering of the Twigs
7. Annunciation
8. Nativity
9. Annunciation to the Shepherds
10. Adoration of the Magi
11. Fragment – Tabernacle
12. Fragment (Flight into Egypt?)
13. Rest on the Flight into Egypt
14. The Twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple
15. Fragment (Pentecost?)
16. Death of the Virgin (?)
17. Fragment (Coronation of the Virgin?)
18. Tree of Jesse
19. First Apocalyptic Horseman
20. Second Apocalyptic Horseman
21. Fragment
22. Third Apocalyptic Horseman
23. Fourth Apocalyptic Horseman
24. Saint Anthony the Great
25. Saint Eligius
26. Saint Valentine
27. Saint Erasmus
28. Priest



Figure 16. The Expulsion of Joachim from the Temple (photograph by the author).

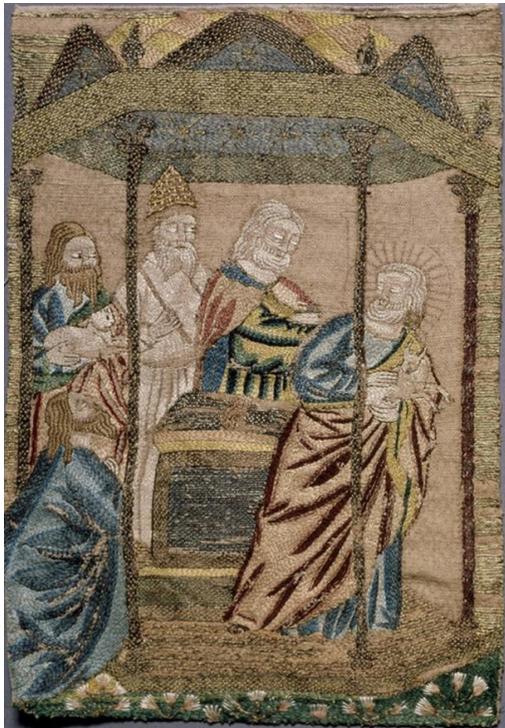


Figure 17. The Expulsion of Joachim from the Temple, embroidery from Florence, after 1350, Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, image no. C 000913, <http://www.bildindex.de>. Last accessed April 2013.



Figure 18. Annunciation to Joachim (photograph by the author).



Figure 19. Birth of the Virgin. Presentation of Mary in the Temple (photograph by the author).



Figure 20. Presentation of Mary in the Temple, Waiblingen, around 1390, Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, image no. ladbw-12174d-9x12, <http://www.bildindex.de>. Last accessed April 2013.



Figure 21. Prayer for the Flowering of the Twigs (photograph by the author).



Figure 22. Annunciation (photograph by the author).



Figure 23. Annunciation to Anne, Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek; cod. s. n. 2612; fol. 5v, around 1330-1340, REALonline image no. 007163, <http://tethys.imareal.sbg.ac.at/realonline>. Last accessed April 2013.



Figure 24. Nativity (photograph by the author).



Figure 25. Annunciation to the Shepherds (photograph by the author).



Figure 26. Adoration of the Magi (photograph by the author).



Figure 27. Rest on the Flight into Egypt (photograph by the author).



Figure 28. The Twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple (photograph by the author).



Figure 29. Fragment (photograph by the author).



Figure 30. Fragment (Death of the Virgin (?), photograph by the author).



Figure 31. The First Apocalyptic Rider (photograph by the author).



Figure 32. The Second Apocalyptic Rider (photograph by the author).



Figure 33. The Third Apocalyptic Rider (photograph by the author).



Figure 34. The Fourth Apocalyptic Rider (photograph by the author).



Figure 35. Fragment (photograph by the author).



Figure 36. Tree of Jesse (photograph by the author).



Figure 37. Tree of Jesse (detail, photograph by the author).

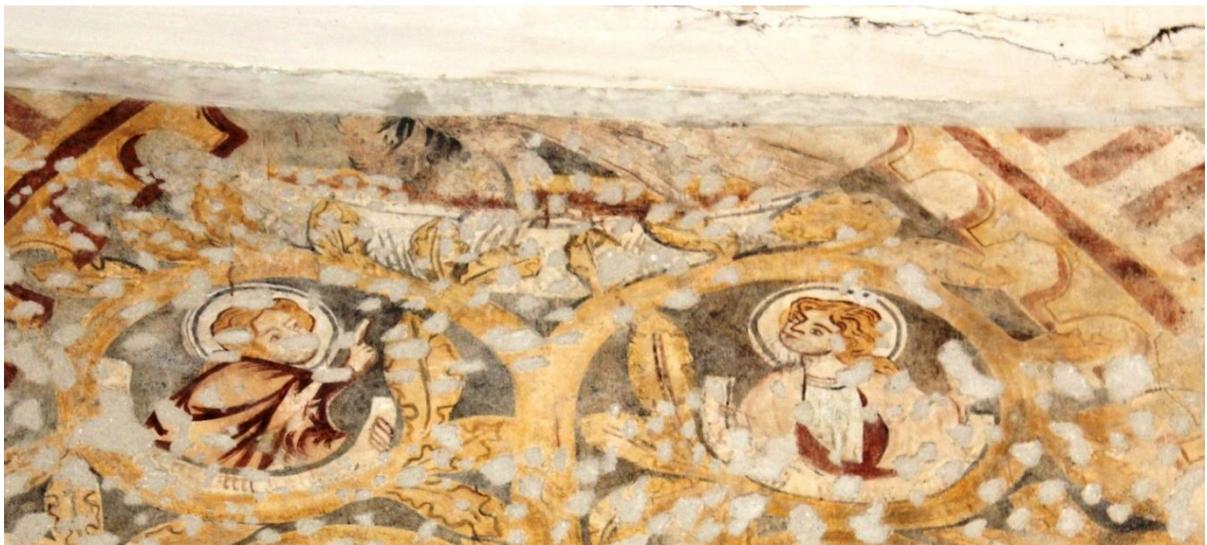


Figure 38. Tree of Jesse (detail, photograph by the author).

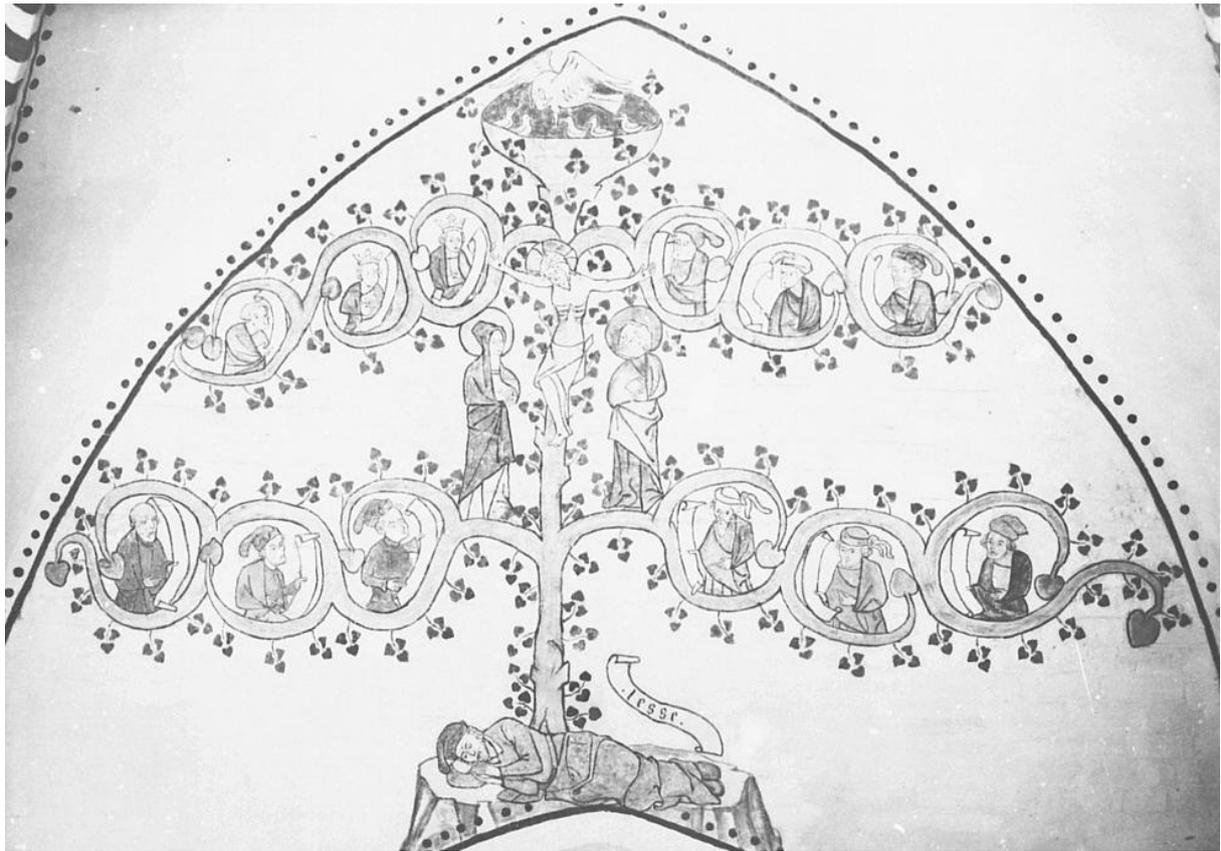


Figure 39. Tree of Jesse. Church of the Holy Spirit, Flensburg, Germany. Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, image no. mi04650g03. <http://www.bildindex.de/#|3>. Last accessed: November 2012.



Figure 40. Tree of Jesse in the Saint Margaret's church in Mediaș, around 1420 (photograph by the author).



Figure 41. Saint Anthony the Great  
(photograph by the author).

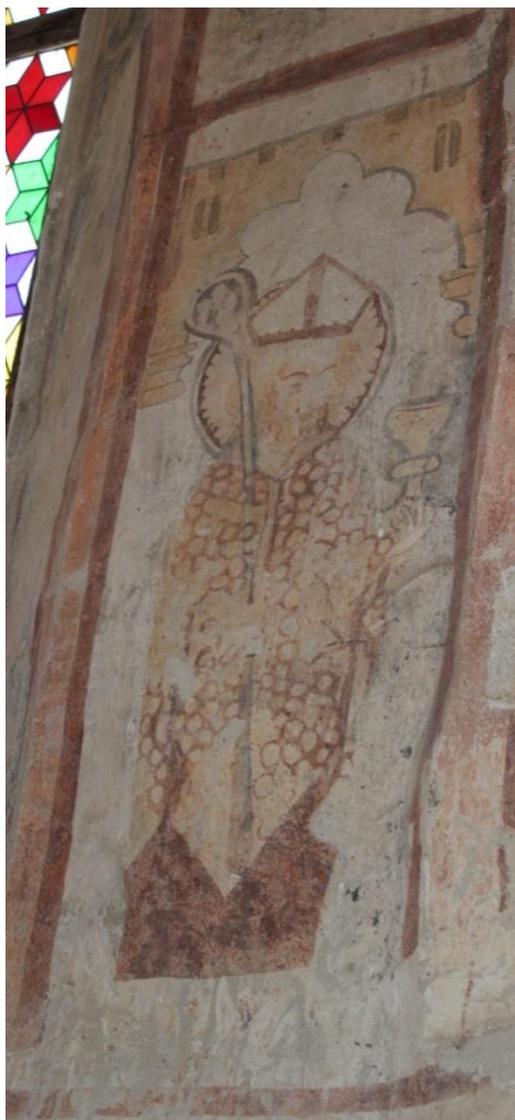


Figure 42. Saint Eligius  
(photograph by the author).



Figure 43. Saint Eligius in the missal of the guild of the goldsmiths of Vác from 1423, Fine Arts in Hungary, <http://www.hung-art.hu/index-en.html>. Last accessed April 2013.



Figure 44. Saint Valentine  
(photograph by the author).



Figure 45. Saint Erasmus  
(photograph by the author).



Figure 46. Priest (photograph by the author).

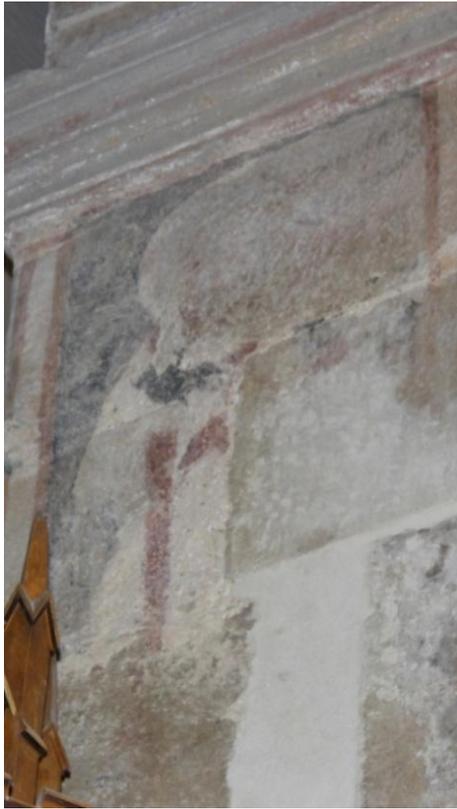


Figure 47. Fragment (photograph by the author).



Figure 48. Fragment  
(photograph by the author).



Figure 49. Medallions on the chancel arch (photograph by the author).



Figure 50. Crowned heads on the eastern wall of the southern aisle (photograph by the author).



Figure 51. Tabernacle (photograph by the author).

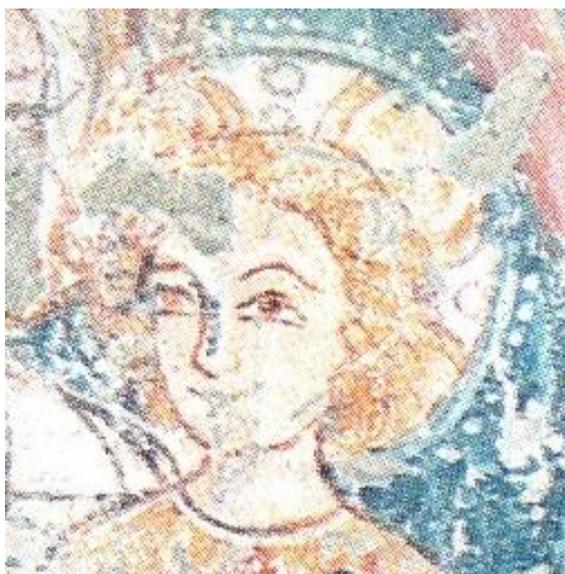


Figure 52. Legend of Saint Catherine (detail). Ghelintă, around 1330. József Lángi, and Ferenc Mihály, *Erdélyi falképek és festett faberendezések* [Transylvanian wall paintings and painted furniture] vol. 1. (Budapest: Állami Műemlékhelyreállítási és Restaurálási Központ, 2002), 40.

Figure 53. Nativity (detail, photograph by the author).



Figure 54. Wall paintings on the exterior. Batizovce, second half of the fourteenth century. Fig. 3. Vlasta Dvořáková, Josef Krása and Karel Stejskal. *Středověká nástěnná malba na Slovensku*. [Medieval Wall Paintings in Slovakia]. (Bratislava: Tatran, 1978), 73-74, fig. 35.

Figure 55. Saint Anthony the Great (detail, photograph by the author).



Figures 56 and 57. *Speculum humanae salvationis*, Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek; cod. s.n. 2612 ; fol. 5v and 8v. 1330's. (<http://tethys.imareal.sbg.ac.at/realonline/>)

Figure 58. Annunciation (detail) (photograph by the author).

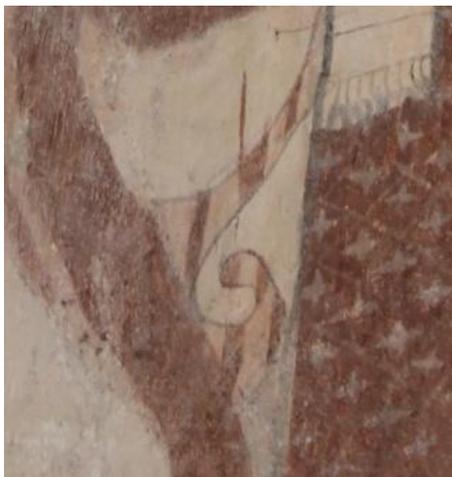


Figure 59. Prayer for the flowering of the twigs (detail, photograph by the author).



Figure 60. Saints under an arcade. Regensburg, Dominican church, around 1330, Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, image no. 69.882. <http://www.bildindex.de>. Last accessed April 2013.

Figure 61. The Twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple (detail, photograph by the author).



Figure 62. Decorative band (photograph by the author).



Figure 63. Decorative band and curtain (photograph by the author).



Figure 64. Vegetal motif on the northeastern wall (photograph by the author).

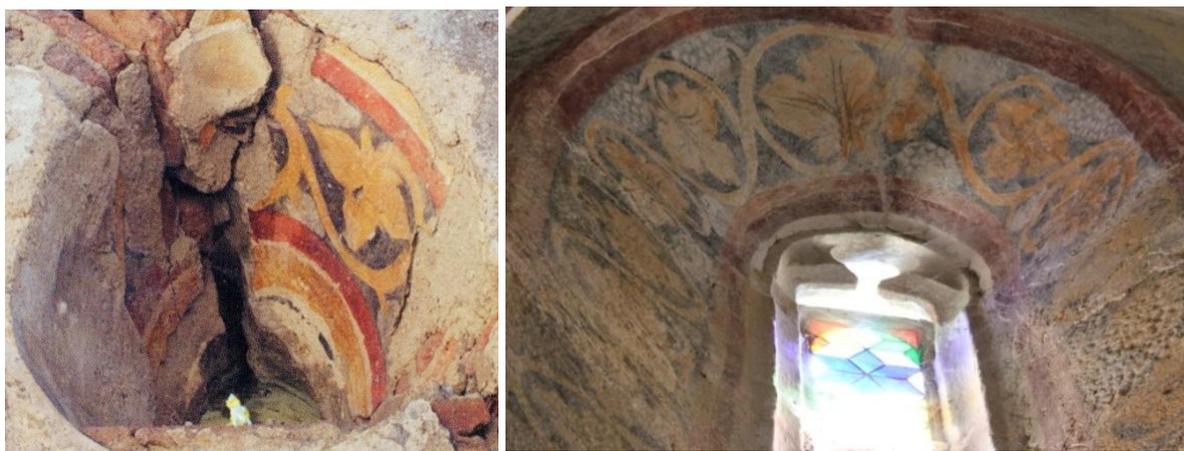


Figure 65. Vine scroll motif, Buia. József Lángi, and Ferenc Mihály, *Erdélyi falképek és festett faberendezések* [Transylvanian wall paintings and painted furniture] Vol. 2. (Budapest: Állami Műemlékhelyreállítási és Restaurálási Központ, 2004), 15.

Figure 66. Vine scroll motif, southeastern window of the sanctuary (photograph by the author).

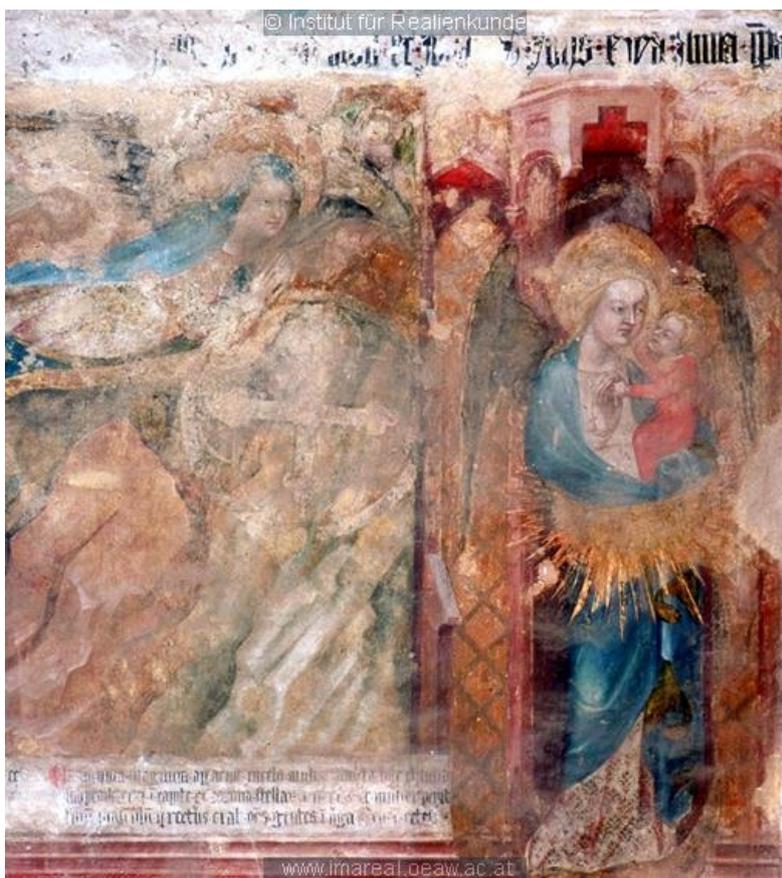


Figure 67. Karlštejn, detail of the Apocalypse cycle in the Chapel of the Virgin, around 1360. REALonline image no. 013280. <http://tethys.imareal.sbg.ac.at/realonline>. Last accessed May 2013.



Figure 68. Mariological cycle introduced by a Tree of Jesse. Church of Saint Bartholomew, Zell bei Oberstaufer, around 1450. Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, image no. 731.915, <http://www.bildindex.de>. Last accessed May 2013.



Figure 69. Martijanci, donor portrait and two apostles, around 1400. REALonline image no. 010986. <http://tethys.imareal.sbg.ac.at/realonline>. Last accessed April 2013.



Figure 70. The portrait of *Petrus plebanus* at Cisnădie, first half of the fourteenth century. “Evangélikus templom, Nagydisznód,” *Monumenta Transsylvaniae*, [www.monumenta.ro](http://www.monumenta.ro). Last accessed April 2013.