

**THE LIGHT OF  
THY COUNTENANCE  
GREEK CATHOLICS  
IN HUNGARY**

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Cover images: wall-painting of the Pantocrator (by Zsolt Maklár) in the Nyíregyháza Seminary Chapel and a fragment of the icon *Christ the Great High Priest* from the iconostasis of Velyki Kom'yaty (*Magyarkomját*)

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## III.2.2 The Altar of Abaújszolnok

### *Szilveszter Terdik*

The settlement Szolnok (Abaújszolnok) is located in the southern part of historic Abaúj County, in the District of Szikszó. In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, the village was colonised by Rusyns, who would soon build a wooden church there. In 1741, during the tenure of Gergely Zuhrovics (Zsugrovics) as parish priest, the building was in a sorry state,<sup>1</sup> yet, six years later, it was found to be in good repair.<sup>2</sup> From 1751 and 1752, the protocols of even two visitations survive, revealing local conditions. According to the first of these, the wooden church was in a moderately poor condition, it was blessed by Dean Dudinszky, and its *antimins* was from the time of Bishop Bizánczy (1716–1733), the latter circumstance also serving as an indication of the approximate time of the blessing of the church; in connection with the pictures of the church, it is noted that all of the sovereign-tier icons were new and had not been blessed. The other protocol contains only the parishes of the Deanery of Cserehát at the time; the church is described as new and built from wood; it was supplied with the necessary equipment; the name of the parish priest was János Zsuhrovics (Zsugrovics)<sup>3</sup> – presumably son of the previous priest.

The wooden church concerned was described and even surveyed by Viktor Myskovszky (1838–1909), an art teacher from Košice (*Kassa*), during his excursion to Abaúj County. In the report of his study trip, without the drawings, Myskovszky published only a hand-drawn representation of the Cyrillic text engraved in the beam above the west entrance of the wooden church, suggesting that the church was built in 1758, in the time of the priest 'Zsuhrovics János'.<sup>4</sup> He was pleased to remark that he had been able to prepare the drawings in time because he had learnt from the local parish priest that the wooden church would be demolished and a new one would be built in its place as soon as

the opportunity arose.<sup>5</sup> The two drawings were partially published in 1999 by László Kárpáti, who also conducted a detailed architectural analysis of the former building, specifying its type as a Lemko wooden church typical of Southern Poland and Upper Hungary.<sup>6</sup> In the present paper, the survey drawings are reproduced in their entirety: The first page features the base plan and the front view of the south side of the wooden church (Picture 1),<sup>7</sup> while, on the next page, the longitudinal section and the survey of the west gate of the building are presented (Picture 2).<sup>8</sup> By comparing the date above the former west entrance (1758) to the data in the 1752 protocol speaking of a new wooden church, it may be established that the former date refers to the final completion of the building.

In 1893, Myskovszky was also invited to participate in the planning of the national exhibition to mark the Millennium of the Hungarian Conquest of the Carpathian Basin (896). At that time, he returned to his surveys from Abaújszolnok; he envisaged the Greek Catholic wooden church to be put on display at the exhibition as modelled on the church there.<sup>9</sup> Again, he produced two drafts, one featuring the longitudinal- and cross-section of the church and the other showing the south front and the base plan. In comparison with the drawings from 1876, it was a novelty that, this time, he also displayed the cross section of the nave as well on the first page, with the drawing of a full iconostasis seen in it. Although it might be speculated that this iconostasis could also document the furnishings of the church of Abaújszolnok, the fact that the sanctuary includes the drawing of a baldachined altar, which cannot have stood in that location, ought to prompt caution. In making the 1893 plans, Myskovszky probably drew on his memories about other wooden churches; for

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<sup>1</sup> Véghseő – Terdik – Simon, 2014, 106.

<sup>2</sup> Véghseő – Terdik, 2015, 147.

<sup>3</sup> Véghseő – Terdik – Simon – Majchrics – Földvári – Lágler, 2015, 281–282, 497–498.

<sup>4</sup> 'Sozdan' est' hram" sei pri ierei Ioanne Žugroviče 1758' – 'This church was created in the time of the priest János Zsugrovics, 1758', transcription and translation by Xénia Golub.

<sup>5</sup> Myskovszky, Viktor. Az 1875-ik év nyarán tett régészeti utazásom eredménye, *Archaeologiai Közlemények*, 10(1876), 3, 71–72.

<sup>6</sup> Kárpáti, 1999, 678, Pictures 1 and 2

<sup>7</sup> Paper India ink, colour India ink, 563 mm × 398 mm (22.16" × 15.67"), Hungarian Museum of Architecture and Monument Protection Documentation Centre, Archives of Plans, Inv. No. K 910.

<sup>8</sup> Paper India ink, colour India ink, 563 mm × 400 mm (22.16" × 15.74"), Hungarian Museum of Architecture and Monument Protection Documentation Centre, Archives of Plans, Inv. No. K 911.

<sup>9</sup> The two drawings: Museum of Ethnography, Budapest, R 2634–2635, published in: Tasnádi, Zsuzsanna. *Ácsolt fatornyok – védelmező templomok. Válogatás a Néprajzi Múzeum grafikáiból, fényképeiből* (A Néprajzi Múzeum Kamarakiállítás, 19), Budapest, 2013, 5–6. The plans were not implemented; in the exhibition area, only the replica of the Calvinist church of Izvoru Crișului (*Körösfő*) was built.

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instance, he mentioned a baldachin in the description of wooden churches from Sáros County.<sup>10</sup>

In Abaújszolnok, the new church built from a solid material in an eclectic style was completed by 1895.<sup>11</sup> The building had retained not only its old title feast (the Beheading of Saint John the Baptist, 29 August) but also some of its furnishing items: an 18<sup>th</sup>-century processional icon (see: Cat. III.29), the *antependium* of the baroque altar (see: Cat. III.27), as well as its

reredos, placed on one of the *prestols* (console tables in front of the sovereign-tier icons) of the former iconostasis, on the south side of the nave, under the window closest to the sanctuary.<sup>12</sup> While the former two specimens were conserved in the past few years, the reredos of the altar has been restored very recently (Picture 3). From the former iconostasis of the wooden church, two sovereign-tier icons, the *Teaching Christ* and the *Theotokos*, were also evidenced, but they were stolen in 1995.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> In the description of the wooden church of Ondavka (*Ondavafő*), he mentions a 'canopy' (*mennyezet*) standing on four pillars as an arrangement reminiscent of altars of the 'Byzantine ciborium-type' (*bizanti ciborium-féle*). Myskovszky, Viktor. Adalék régi fatemplomaink ösmeretéhez, *Archaeologiai Értesítő*, 14(1894), 246.

<sup>11</sup> *Schematismus Venerabilis Cleri Graeci Ritus Catholicorum Dioecesis Eperjesiensis pro Anno Domini 1898*, Eperjes, 1898, 127.

<sup>12</sup> Its baldachined high altar was made in 1896 according to the inscription on its back: 'ISTEN DICSŐSÉGÉRE / adományozta! / Kriván Ferencz; egyházi gond. / nokok: Kriván Ferencz, / 200. forintot adományoztak. / Olajütő Fedor János; Bubno Já. / nos, Galvács Mihály; Számadó / István 60 forintot adományoztak / Bukszár György nyéstei zse: / lér 50. forintot adományozot. / KOVALICZKY PÉTER készítete / UNGVÁR 1896 ban.' (To the Glory of God donated by Ferenc Kriván. Church curator Ferenc Kriván donated 200 forints, church curators János Olajütő Fedor, János Bubnó, Mihály Galvács and István Számadó donated 60 forints, and György Bukszár, a villein from Nyésta, donated 50 forints. Made by Péter Kovaliczky in Uzhhorod in 1896.) The iconostasis and the table of oblation were made in the Budapest company Rétyay és Benedek Műipari Intézet in 1903, *Egyházi Műipar*, 5(1904), 2. szám, 7.

<sup>13</sup> Puskás, László. *Házad ékessége: Görögkatolikus templomok, ikonok, ikonosztázok Magyarországon*, Nyíregyháza, 1991, 93–94; Kárpáti, 1999, 685–686, Pictures 7 and 8; Puskás, 2008, 185–186, 248, Pictures 138 and 139. On the theft, with actual data on the pictures: *Cent Objects Disparus / One Hundred Missing Objects: Looting in Europe – Pillage en Europe*, Barcelona, 2001, 69.

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The significance of the structure regarded as large in Greek Catholic terms but only barely on a par with an average side altar in scale by Roman Catholic standards (height: 242 cm [95.27"], width: 253 cm [99.60"]) is not defined by its size. In Hungary, very few 18<sup>th</sup>-century Greek Catholic altars have been preserved (e.g. Nyírdersz and Sárospatak), with the one in Abaújszolnok retaining its original form the most.<sup>14</sup>

The church inventory compiled in 1877 reveals the size and shape of the table holding the structure, and it is also clearly indicated that its pediment at the time was more complex and higher than the present one, even decorated by two paintings: *the Baptism of Jesus (Epiphany)* and a depiction of the Father at the top. The total height of the structure was 2 m 84 cm (9.31 ft). By subtracting its current height (242 cm [95.27"]) from

<sup>14</sup> Works on the altar to date: Puskás, 1996, 14, 31, kat. 64. The altar is described in more detail in: Kárpáti, 1999, 687–693, Picture 5; Puskás, 2008, 185–186, Picture 151.

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this value, a pediment height of approx. 50 cm (19.68") may be estimated.<sup>15</sup> Most probably, the carved fragments subsequently attached to the upper section of the altarpiece were part of the ornamental segments of the latter. The altar is bevelled; its main picture fitted into a frame closed with a prominent arched cornice between two columns with fretwork carving shows the Crucifixion. In the composition painted on a wooden board – possibly based on western engraved prototypes – apart from His mother and the beloved disciple, the Saviour is accompanied by Maria Magdalena falling to the ground at the bottom of the cross and embracing it. It may only be deduced from the carved gilded background evocative of the Rococo and the Church Slavonic inscriptions flanking the depicted saints that the picture was made at the request of the Greek Catholic community (Picture 4). The footing of the altar structure is segmented by surfaces framed by templets, with carved rosettes in their centres, while the central axis is occupied by the sacrament house, with a *prophoro* piece, the Lamb, cut in a square shape surrounded by rays, shining over a chalice on its gilded and lustred door. The Patriarchal cross adorning the sacrament house is from a later period; the gilded carving fitted on its top in all probability belonged to the lost original pediment. The main picture was complemented by two richly carved wings, with two upright figures in irregular picture areas: King David on the left and the Prophet Nathan on the right; the former holds a harp, while the latter has an open scroll in his hand with a biblical quotation (и гдѣ ѿиатъ согрѣшеніе твоѣ – ‘The Lord also has put away your sin...’ – 2 Sam. 12:13b). The inscription aids the interpretation of the picture: Guided by God, the Prophet goes before the monarch and reprimands him for seducing Uriah’s wife; he makes the king realise the severity of his transgression through a parable, prompting him to do true penance; according to tradition, it is then that King David composes the most well-known penitential prayer, the 50<sup>th</sup> Psalm. During an informal conversation a few years ago, László Kárpáti proposed that the lateral pictures were made after the cover illustration of a Psalter printed in the Kiev Monastery of the Caves. This composition was displayed already on the front cover of the 1728 edition and would also emerge in



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subsequent versions with a slight modification: the text on Nathan’s scroll is absent from the engraving of the 1755 variant.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, it may seem that, in Abaújszolnok, in painting the image of Nathan, the first variant of the engraving was used as a starting point, implying that a copy of the Psalter could be available to the painter. This assumption appears to be reinforced by the protocol of the 1752 visitation of the parish, where it is emphasised that, in addition to the necessary liturgical books, the community also possessed a Psalter with explanations (‘Psalterium explicatum’).<sup>17</sup> Based on the Nathan image appearing on the altar, it would seem likely that they actually owned the 1728 Kiev edition. Seldom is it the case that reference to the on-site existence of the engraved prototype of a baroque painting is available. Furthermore, it may also be inferred that, in the selection of the prototype, as well as in the

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Kárpáti, 1999, 689. This pediment must have perished as early as circa 1900 as the style of the considerably smaller supplement made with leaf-ornaments is suggestive of an early-20<sup>th</sup>-century date.

<sup>16</sup> Запаско – Ісаєвич, 1984, kat. 1097. Subsequent editions: *ibid.*, kat. 1917, 1919, 2144. Cf. the description of the Nyírgyulaj Psalter in the present volume, Cat. III.26.

<sup>17</sup> Véghseő – Terdik – Simon – Majchrics – Földvári – Lágler, 2015, 497. It is no longer listed in the 1877 inventory. Kárpáti, 1999, 691–692.

(5)



specification of the iconographic programme of the altar, the local parish priest, Zsuhrovics, played a major role. The Crucifixion theme of the altarpiece was a straightforward choice since Christ's sacrifice of the cross is the archetype of the sacrificial act of the Divine Liturgy as well. The appearance of David and Nathan, however, is not known from elsewhere: Most certainly, the parish priest intended to clarify it to penitents that the death of Christ not only broke the curse of ancestral sin symbolised by the motif in the main picture – Adam's skull at the bottom of the cross – but, in the Sacraments of Confession and the Eucharist, it would also wash away the personal sins of true penitents, whose paragon could be David. The former pedimental picture showing the Baptism of Jesus was an allusion to the patron saint of the church, John the Baptist, as well. Perhaps it is no coincidence that it was precisely this scene that was absent from the *antependium* on the front plate of the altar. The programme of the altar structure was harmonised with that of the frontal.

Data on the painter, carver or the exact time of the production of the altar have not been discovered to date. The style of the two lost sovereign-tier icons and of the paintings of the altar is indicative of a single pair of hands, while the *antependium* is reflective of finer skills; the

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processional icon suggests a master with considerably weaker training though. If the data in the protocol of the 1751 visitation recording that the sovereign-tier icons were new were applicable to the paintings nowadays familiar only from photographs,<sup>18</sup> it is appropriate to assume that the altar was made in the same period, i.e. in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. For some time, László Kárpáti would attribute the two sovereign-tier icons to József Szécsényi,<sup>19</sup> a proposal which would require further investigation given the only known signed work by the painter from 1791 (see: Cat. III.38). With reference to their style, however, the paintings of the Holy Unmercenaries Cosmas and Damian painted in cartouches on the front plates of two *prestols*, surviving in the Greek Catholic church of Mogyoróska, could be associated with the painter of the altar of Abaújszolnok (Pictures 5 and 6). Just as the pictures of the Abaújszolnok altar, these works are also characterised by dynamic forms, slightly exaggerated extremity proportions and vivid colour use. In 1751, the wooden church of Mogyoróska was described as built one year earlier to replace the old dilapidated one; it had a splendid steeple and was fitted with all manner of new pictures.<sup>20</sup> Based on this information, the making of the two tables may be dated to the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, similarly to the altar of Abaújszolnok.

<sup>18</sup> At the time of the 1877 visitation, it was not known when the iconostasis had been made. Apart from some dimension data, it is also indicated that it consisted of three rows; there were six pictures on the Royal Doors, with the *Last Supper* above them, and the door bevels bore the pictures of the authors of the liturgy. Kárpáti, 1999, 691. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that it dated from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, on the south wall of the nave, pictures of the 'old iconostasis' are also mentioned (Kárpáti, 1999, 692), which might have been even earlier pieces from the former wooden church.

<sup>19</sup> Kárpáti, 1999, 685–686, Pictures 7 and 8. Herein, he did not elaborate on the attribution but marked it in the inscriptions of the pictures conditionally.

<sup>20</sup> Véghseő – Terdik – Simon – Majchrics – Földvári – Lágler, 2015, 295. At the time of the 1786 census, the church was known to have been built in 1741. Concerning its shape, it is noted that it was surrounded by a porch all around, a circumstance also considered in estimating its capacity: Its interior and the porch combined could hold three-hundred people. See: Véghseő – Terdik – Majchrics – Földvári – Varga – Lágler, 2017, 157. Cf. Demjanovich Emil: Mogyoróska, *Görög Katholikus Hírlap*, 3(1905), 5.

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Its reredos, very similar to the altar of Abaújszolnok, was added to the collection of the Museum of Ethnography, Budapest, from the Greek Catholic church of Chorváty (*Tornahorváti*). By juxtaposing the currently disassembled, extremely fragmentary structure with the Abaújszolnok specimen, it may be established that they are essentially of the same construction: The shafts with fretwork carving, the position of the picture, its bevelled frame, as well as the entire footing, but – first and foremost – the sacrament house, show correspondences possibly hinting at a single master. The wing pictures of the two reredoses are, nevertheless, different in shape and size, and the ornaments are also differently structured. On the altar of Chorváty, however, even the original pediment has survived. Incorporating innovations mainly in the ornaments only, its carver transmitted the base forms developed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which would maintain a palpable presence in the art of Greek Catholics in the Carpathian Region even as late as the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; presumably, these forms were kept alive by the communities' strong sense of respect for tradition for such a long time.

Upon seeing the close connection between the carved sections of the two altars, it would seem logical to conduct a comparison of the altarpieces as well: The Chorváty altarpiece (see: Cat. III.28), which may have been produced somewhat later than the one in Abaújszolnok, displays refined painting arrangements, which speak of a more mature and better-trained painter. It may be determined that the masters of the two altars must have been skilful painters from a nearby city (Eger or Košice), more familiar with western iconography, who, by carefully reproducing the sleek gilded background and the inscriptions in Greek and Cyrillic, also endeavoured to comply with the requirement of adhering to tradition, most probably expressed by the clients.

The style of the painter whose Hodigitria-type picture of the Virgin Mary painted on an wooden board, with a sleek gilded and silver-plated background, is kept in the Roman Catholic church of Krasznokvajda is close to that of the masters working in the two Greek Catholic churches – particularly of the one in Chorváty.<sup>21</sup> From the inscription on the reverse of the wooden board, it may be ascertained that it was commissioned by

Deputy-Lieutenant József Szentimrey (1721–1776), local landowner and advowee of the church, in Eger in 1764. Unfortunately, from the painter's name, only the Christian name *Jakab* may be deciphered; the surname has been damaged by the split running across the board, making unambiguous transcription impossible.<sup>22</sup> In this context, it is also well-worth considering this painting because, based on its inscription, it must be the work of a Roman Catholic master, who nonetheless created a composition that could pass even for a sovereign-tier icon of a contemporary iconostasis. Obviously, he must have produced a replica of an ancient miraculous icon in line with the client's intention. Of the miraculous icons in the Kingdom of Hungary, the Krasznokvajda painting shows affinity with the 17<sup>th</sup>-century icon of Cluj (*Kolozsvár*), originating in an Orthodox environment, with numerous engravings made of it during the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>23</sup> Not only did these mass-produced drawings retain the Byzantine character of the icon, but they also demonstrated a predilection for presenting floral ornaments in minute detail in the background, as is the case with the specimen from Krasznokvajda. At any rate, it cannot be ruled out that the painter from Eger could employ a different prototype though.

However, the Krasznokvajda example also highlights the fact that, essentially, it could not be only the consequence of the local community's initiative that high-quality works of art surpassing contemporary rural standards – a case in point would be the *antependium* – were made for the church of Abaújszolnok. In all probability, advowee Pál Tiszta, gaining land grants for Selyeb, Monaj and Abaújszolnok from Maria Theresa in 1750, also played a role in selecting and recommending masters.<sup>24</sup>

#### List of pictures

1. The base plan and south façade of the church of Abaújszolnok, 1876, by Viktor Myskovszky
2. The longitudinal section and the west gate of the church of Abaújszolnok, 1876, by Viktor Myskovszky
3. The altar of Abaújszolnok
4. Crucifixion. The altar of Abaújszolnok
5. Saint Cosmas. Greek Catholic church, Mogyoróska
6. Saint Damian. Greek Catholic church, Mogyoróska

<sup>21</sup> I wish to thank painter and conservator Klára Nemessányi for her permission to use her photographs of the painting.

<sup>22</sup> 'Curavit pro Ecclesia Vajdensi / Spect. D. Josephus Szent-Imrey / Ordin. Judlium Anno 1764. Agriae / Jacobus K[ra]c[k]k[er](?)'. To date, no data pointing to a painter with a similar surname working in Eger have been discovered by reviewing municipality records or the 1764/1765 register of taxpayers. It may be the case that he was not an Eger citizen.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Szilárdfy – Tüskés – Knapp, 1987, 106–107, Cat. 136–145. Dumitran, Ana – Hegedűs, Enikő – Rus, Vasile. *Fecioarele înlăcrimate ale Transilvaniei: Preliminarii la o istorie ilustrată a toleranței religioase*, Alba Iulia, 2011, 66–82.

<sup>24</sup> On the land grants: Borovszky, 1904, 549; Véghseő – Terdik – Simon – Majchrics – Földvári – Lágler, 2015, 497.