

**ICONS OF THE ICONOSTASIS OF THE FORMER
GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH OF NAGYVÁRAD/ORADEA
(VELIKI VARADIN)**

The first Greek Catholic church of Nagyvárad/Oradea (Veliki Varadin, RO) was built around 1740;¹ the woodwork of its iconostasis may date back to the period after 1751. I extensively discussed the stylistic relations of the structure and carvings at last year's Niš Conference.² This time, I shall make an attempt at presenting a style- and iconography-based analysis of the icons. At the beginning of the 19th century, the iconostasis was transferred to the church of the village Körösrév/Vadu Crișului.

Three of the four local (despotic) icon (*prestone ikone*) in the first register of the iconostasis show the saints seated on a throne. Saint Nicholas is holding an open book on his knees, displaying a Gospel quotation in Greek.³ His attire reflects a bishop's traditional apparel, with the *Panagia* replaced by a pectoral cross. In line with iconographic traditions, the half-figure representations of the Theotokos and Christ appear above Saint Nicholas (*Picture 1.*). Behind the Theotokos, there are the Angels Michael and Gabriel standing; two minor angels are holding a crown over her head, each with a scroll with Greek inscriptions in the other hand (*Picture 2.*). Near the seatback of Christ's throne, six-winged cherubim are painted, with the symbols of the Evangelists appearing above and below them. Christ is wearing a *himation* and a *chiton*, holding an open book in his left hand, featuring a quotation in Romanian (*Picture 3.*). Saint John the Baptist is standing against a landscape background, pointing his right

¹ Terdik Szilveszter, *Dati alla storia della cattedrale greco-cattolica di Oradea (Nagyvárad)*, in *La Scuola Transilvana*, ed. Remus Câmpeanu, Vasile Rus, Varga Attila, Florin Jula, Niregyháza-Oradea, 2013, 111-120. Kémenes Mónika, *Helyi és idegen mesterek a nagyváradi római katolikus püspökség szolgálatában a 18. században. (I.)*, in Emödi András (szerk.), *Tanulmányok Nagyvárad-Újváros megalapításának 300. évfordulója alkalmából (1714-2014)*, *Miscellanea Historica Varadinensia IV*, Nagyvárad, 2014, 15.

² Terdik Szilveszter, *Artists from the Balkans in the Service of Greek Catholic Bishops (18th century)*, in Rakocija, Miša (red.), *Niš and Byzantium, Twelfth Symposium Niš, 3-6 June 2013, The Collection of Scientific Works XII*, Niš 2014, 477- 488.

³ I am the good shepherd, who lays down His life for His sheep. John 10, 11



1. Saint Nicholas. Local icon in the iconostasis of Vadu Crişului 2. Theotokos. Local icon in the iconostasis of Vadu Crişului

1. Св. Никола. Престона икона иконостаса у Vadu Crişului 2. Богородица. Престона икона иконостаса у Vadu Crişului

hand to Christ and holding a scroll with Greek text in his left hand. At his feet, his martyrdom is shown incorporated into a medallion, whereas, on the other side, his head is seen placed in a bowl (*Picture 4*).

The time when the local icons were made may be accurately established on the basis of the dates and inscriptions on them. In the bottom right corner of each of the four icons, there is an inscription commemorating Meletius Kovács, Bishop of Oradea (1748-1775), along with the date 1763.⁴ In the bottom left corners of the icons of Saint Nicholas, Christ and Saint John the Baptist, additional Greek inscriptions may be seen. The initial parts of these inscriptions contain the name of the saint depicted, which is followed by the names of the donors, mostly as Christian names, with family names occurring only occasionally. The list of names for all four icons is concluded by the date 26 of October, 1763. The icon of Saint Nicholas features 15 names arranged into two columns, with three female names among them (*Picture 5*);⁵ the icon of Christ bears the name of only a single couple, Malakia Oros and his wife;⁶ the icon of the

⁴ Διασυνδρομής / μελετιου προτθου / επισκοπου της αγίας ενοσεος Μέγα Βαρα/ διου εκκλησιας ποιων 1763

⁵ Κτιτορη τής εικο/νος του αγιουνικολα/ου και τον λοι πουον εικονο /κιρκοςας / κირνεζορας / κερδιμος / κερλιολας / κεριωανης / κερκοςας / ποφλορα / κερδιμος / κεργεοργις / Θομά - / κερλιας πο ιωανου/ κερνικολας παα ζαμουήλα / κερ Θομας ανδρεου / ιωανα / ποιων οκθομβριου 26

⁶ τής εικο/νος του Χριστου / Κτιτορ - / Μαλακης Ρουση συν/τυσυμβιά και τον γονεον / αυτου και θον τέκνον / οκθομβριου 26



3. Jesus Christ. Local icon in the iconostasis of Vadu Crişului

3. Исус Христос. Престона икона иконостаса у Vadu Crişului



4. Saint John the Baptist. Local icon in the iconostasis of Vadu Crişului

4. Св. Јован Крститељ. Престона икона иконостаса у Vadu Crişului

Baptist has approximately 10 names on it.⁷ The icon of the Theotokos records the names of the donors not in a Greek but in a Romanian inscription written in the Cyrillic script (*Picture 6*).⁸

Further inscriptions are also found on individual pieces of the Feast- and Apostle tiers of the iconostasis, chiefly around the lower sections of the icons, written in black or red. They contain names in Cyrillic, suggesting Romanian origin, in all probability representing additional donors. For instance, the inscription at the bottom of the icon of the Ascension of Christ commemorates Jeremia and Teodor. The icon of the Assembly of the Angels features the names of Ion Petru Hajduk and Ion Radu, as well as the date 1763. The icons of the Apostles also display red inscriptions, presumably containing the names of other donors (*Picture 7*).

Based on their style, the icons indubitably pertain to a painting tradition that is regarded as Moscopolean (i.e. from Voskopojë, Albania) in origin by both Serbian and Hungarian scholarship. The Balkan city with a flourishing cultural life in the 18th century was considered to be one of the centres of Greek speaking culture despite the fact that the majority of its inhabitants were mainly of Aromanian (Macedo-Vlachian) extraction, an ethnic group conventionally re-

⁷ As the photographs I took in the church concerned do not permit accurate reading of the inscriptions, I shall not undertake the task of transcribing them.

⁸ Péter, Simon, Maria and Ana Szilágyi. The latter two may be their wives.



5. Greek inscription on the icon of Saint Nicholas

5. Грчки натпис на икони Св. Николе



6. Romanian inscription on the icon of Theotokos

6. Румунски натпис на икони Богородице

ferred to as ‘Tsintsars’ in the Kingdom of Hungary.⁹ The most well-known representative of this style in Hungary was Teodor Simeonov Gruntović (Theodor Simo Grunde), who emerged in Hungary in the early 1760s and, as of 1765, would work in Ráckeve on several occasions -- for the first time in 1765 --, making the wall paintings and most of the iconostasis of that church. It was him who subsequently painted the walls of the Serbian church of Székesfehérvár. Having settled in Pomáz, he was granted citizenship in 1775 and died prior to the year 1785. Icons associated with his style constitute a clearly distinct group within the relevant heritage found in Hungary.¹⁰ This style is marked by close

⁹ Peyfuss, Max Demeter, *Die Druckerei von Moschopolis (1731-1769). Buchdruck und Heiligenverehrung im Erzbistum Achrida*, Wien 1989. Rousseva, Ralitsa, *Iconographic Characteristics of the Churches in Moschopolis and Vithkuqi (Albania)*, *Македоника/makedonika* 35 (2006), 163-191.

¹⁰ It is hard to estimate the size of the workshop run by Gruntović. Nevertheless, Márta Nagy attributes an entire workshop to him: Nagy Márta, *A magyarországi görög di-*



7. Three Feast icon in the iconostasis of Vadu Crişului

7. Три празничне иконе иконостаса у Vadu Crişului

adherence to the Byzantine idiom, even though the painters concerned could not remain unaffected by the prevalent stylistic influences of the age. One of their distinctive features is that the garments worn by the saints are rendered all the more variegated by means of symmetrical floral patterns. At the same time, western influences are also unequivocally evidenced in certain elements of iconography.

At this juncture, I suggest reviewing some of the iconographic and compositional characteristics of the icons of Oradea, comparing them to the corresponding features of the icons found in the relevant heritage in Hungary, linked to Simeonov's workshop.

Among the local icons, the icon of the Theotokos no doubt deserves special attention. The enthroned Virgin is holding the infant Saviour in her left hand, in a manner well-known from *Hodigitra* icons. Her legs are, however, turned somewhat aside, creating the impression as if her left leg were even

aszpóra egyházművészeti emlékei, I, Debrecen, 1998, 19-30., 76 (Footnote 65 in particular). An extensive discussion of the phases of Teodor Gruntović's activities in Hungary, a publication of his contracts concluded with commissioners in Ráckeve and a critical revision of relevant previous literature are presented by: Тодић, Бранислав, *Радови о српској уметности и уметницима XVIII века. По архивиском и другим подацима*, Нови Сад 2010, 319-342. (with bibliography) Ševo, Ljiljana, *Srpsko zidno slikarstvo 18. vijeka u vizantijskoj tradicij*, Banja Luka 2010, 219-232. Ševo, Ljiljana, *The Church of the St. John the Forerunner's Birth in Székesfehérvár*, Banja Luka 2011, 49-86.



8. C. Žefarović, Theotokos Olympiotossa.
Copper engraving, 1752, detail

8. X. Жефаровић, Богородица Олимпијска.
Бакорез, 1752, детаљ

folded inwards. This slightly *contraposto* pose mitigates the monumentality of the body of the Theotokos verging on rigidity, causing her figure to appear to be ethereally graceful. This solution is by no means the invention of the painter working in Oradea: As early as 1752, Hristofor Žefarović (+1753) had depicted the figure of the Theotokos in a similar position in his drawing, engraved onto copperplate by Thomas Mesmer and published in Vienna, showing the miraculous icon of the Olympiotossa Monastery, surrounded by scenes from Jesus' life (Picture 8).¹¹ A simpler version of that type is known to have been found in Gyöngyös,¹² featuring only the two main figures but with a similarly shaped and elaborated throne. The legs also terminate in volutes, just as in Žefarović's engraving. The icon of Christ found in Oradea also seems to

have a small-size and simplified variant originating in Gyöngyös. However, in the latter, the painter not only omitted the angels but placed a globe in Christ's left hand instead of a book as well. The fourth local icons has a parallel, too, as an icon of Saint John the Baptist in an upright position, originally from Gyöngyös, is kept in the Orthodox Museum of Miskolc. That composition may be demonstrably related to its counterpart in Oradea. In the lower section of the icon, a medallion with the execution scene is displayed, alongside the Prophet's head in a bowl. A lamb also materialises in the Oradea icon, whereas, in the Gyöngyös variant, John is holding a chalice in his hand with a half-figure Emmanuel appearing in it and God the Father depicted in the top right corner.¹³

From an iconographic point of view, the icons in the Feast Tier of Oradea reveal a series of highly elaborate patterns. Whereas Byzantine schemata were observed in the structural principles of composition, the feast icons seem to present some exceptions to the rule. In the Annunciation Icon, for example, the Virgin Mary is kneeling down on her heels in front of a pulpit on the left hand side of the picture; in response to the angelic greeting, she is turning back in a slightly raised posture, holding up her arms and opening her hands; the Angel is descending while kneeling on a cloud, holding a lily in his left hand and

¹¹ The icon of the Elasson Monastery, which was transported here from one of the monasteries of Mount Olympus, is called Olympiothissa. On the engraving: Давидов, Динко, *Српска графика XVIII века*, Београд 1976, 277-278. 73-75. Picture: Papastratos, Dory, *Paper Icons. Greek Orthodox Religious Engravings 1665-1899*, I, Athens. 1990, 170-171.

¹² Nagy, *op. cit.* 88.

¹³ The two icons: Nagy, *op. cit.* 89-90.

9. Annunciation. Icon in the iconostasis of Vadu Crişului

9. Благовести. Икона на иконостасу у Vadu Crişului



pointing his right hand to heaven; at the top of the composition, God the Father does emerge surrounded by clouds, sending the Holy Spirit in a sunbeam to the surprised Virgin (Picture 9.). This compositional arrangement unequivocally reflects western influences and may be traced back to a composition of a similar theme by Hendrick Goltzius.¹⁴ Moreover, the scene is already seen in Žefarović's 1752 engraving in a similar form,¹⁵ even though this somewhat 'twisted' body posture would not become particularly popular in Byzantine-style iconography thereafter.¹⁶

Furthermore, the depiction of the Pentecost is also unusual as figures are divided into multiple planes or 'columns', as opposed to the conventional semicircular shape: In the upper section of the icon, the Theotokos is seated

¹⁴ Hendrick Goltzius (1558 – 1617), Annunciation. Engraving. Metropolitan Museum, New York. Accession Number: 17.3.1649. See: <http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/347404>

¹⁵ Давидов, *op. cit.* Picture 74.

¹⁶ The Annunciation engraving in a book published in Univ in 1741 shows a similar composition (Запаско, Яким-Ісаєвич, Ярослав, *Пам'ятки книжкового мистецтва. Каталог стародруків, виданих на Україні. Книга друга. Частина перша (1701–764)*, Львів 1984, Kat. 1401 & on p. 79). The turning back Theotokos figure also materialises in a woodcut by Petru Papavici seen in the lower picture section of the cover page of a Pentecostarion published in Balázsfalva/Blaj (Tatai-Baltâ, Cornel, *Gravorii în lemn de la Blaj*, Blaj 1995, 225, Picture 29), subsequently emerging on the cover pages of the 1765 Gospel and of the 1771 Triodion respectively as well. Andreescu, Ana, *Cartea românească în veacul al XVIII-lea*, Bucureşti 2004, 84-85. fig. 42-43.



10. Pentecost. Icon in the iconostasis of Vadu Crişului

10. Духови. Икона на иконостасу у Vadu Crişului

painter of the icons from Gyöngyös.¹⁷

The Apostle tier of the iconostasis in Oradea consists of fifteen icons. In the middle, Christ enthroned combined with the Intercession of the Theotokos positioned in a separate icon field and Saint John the Baptist form a Deesis scene (*Picture 11.*). The Apostles are standing against a golden background, each of them holding an open book in his hands, with a Greek text in it. An accurate transcription and interpretation of these texts has not been possible as yet.

The same master or masters painted the Royal Doors, too. The four icons in the upper row, apart from the Annunciation, feature the Prophets Solomon and David, whereas the four pictures at the bottom show depictions of the Church Fathers (Saint Athanasius, Saint George the Theologian, Saint John Chrysostom and Saint Basil the Great). This arrangement was typical of the Balkan Region in the 18th century.¹⁸ The same masters painted the Prophets seen in the *ketabe-*

on a throne, and, in the centre, the two the Princes of the Apostles are sitting facing each other, with a representation of the Cosmos beneath them; the other Apostles are banished to the two edges of the icon so that two of them are evoked only by the upper fridges of their haloes as they could not be fitted into the main field of the picture (*Picture 10.*). A virtually complete Feast tier is also known to have existed in Gyöngyös. When those icons are juxtaposed with their counterparts in Oradea, it may be concluded that, just as for the local icons, the Oradea painter endeavoured to visualise the respective events in considerably more detail and by including more ancillary characters. By the same token, it may also be remarked that, but for a handful of exceptions (*see above*), his point of departure was constituted by the very same compositional late-Byzantine schemata as for the

¹⁷ The following icons are originally from Gyöngyös: Descent into Limbo, The Pentecost, The Baptism, The Raising of Lazarus, Entry into Jerusalem, The Last Supper, Ascension, The Dormition of the Theotokos, Crucifixion and the Assembly of the Apostles. Nagy *op. cit.*, 76-86. Parts published earlier by: Kárpáti László, A gyöngyösi „arnótok” művészeti öröksége, *Mátrai Tanulmányok*, 1993, 89–118.

¹⁸ *Ikonen 13. bis 19. Jahrhundert*, Skrobucha, Heinz (red.), München 1970, kat, 119. and kat. 121. Kellaris, Georgios, *The Iconography of the Sanctuary Doors from Pathmos and*



11. Deesis. Icons in the iconostasis of Vadu Crişului

11. Деисис. Икона на иконостасу у Vadu Crişului

des almond-shaped fields below the local icons, also holding scrolls ornamented with Greek texts in their hands (from left to right: Isaiah, Zachariah, Elijah and Daniel). The gilt background in the small fields is rendered more varied by the sealed patterns in the chalk priming, a technique applied for the local icons and of the Apostles *(Picture 12)*.

It is uncertain whether the workshop of the painters working in Oradea had any direct links to Teodor Gruntović, who would evidently be working in Hungary two years later. In the absence of archival data, this issue cannot be resolved conclusively at the moment. Icons attributed to the ‘Ráckeve Workshop’ do in fact display close relations to the Oradea icons of comparable themes in several instances. However, on the whole, it may be observed that the icons of the iconostasis of Oradea are more meticulous in their elaboration and contain a significant number of iconographic details that do not appear in the icons of Gruntović and his associates. Their refined representations testify to a tendency to attain high artistic standards and a predilection for minute decorative details, attributes missing from Gruntović’s works. Such an artistic predisposition is not evidenced by the iconostasis or the murals of Ráckeve, either. It may also be speculated that it was the fact that the work had been commissioned by the bishop that could spur the masters to create pieces of such a high quality in Oradea.

its Place in the Iconographic Program of the Byzantine Iconostasis, Thesis Department of Art history, McGill University, Montréal, Québec 1991, 37-40.



12. Isaia. Icon in the iconostasis of Vadu Crişului

12. Пророк Исаија. Икона на иконостасу у Vadu Crişului

The icons found in Oradea could, in effect, be shown to bear even closer resemblance to the traditions of a workshop that produced a series of icons surviving in their entirety in the Serbian Orthodox Monastery of Tárnokszentgyörgy/Sveti Djuraj (Sângeorge, RO). According to the testimony of the donation inscriptions on the icons, they arrived in that Monastery in 1748. Based on their style and iconography, the 14 icons, mainly presenting the major feast days, with various groups of saints in a standing position frequently appearing in them in the lower portions, are likely to be the works of a Moscopolean painter, although little is known about his identity.¹⁹ The eclectic elaboration of the Oradea icons is reminiscent of that epoch in the activities of the Moscopolean painters.

The large number of names on the icons concerned could encourage researchers to attempt to compare the data found in this location to the figures from censuses conducted in that period. In 1739, following the acceptance of the union, Meletius Kovács was first appointed as priest of the 'Greeks' of Diószeg (Bihardiószeg / Diosig, RO), who, being tradesmen, could not but endorse the union for economic and political reasons. Thus, it seemed expeditious to compare the donors displayed on the icons against the names listed as Greeks in the census. In the Archives of the Council of the Governor - General, data from several censuses have been preserved. In 1760 members of the Compania of Diószeg were recorded as well, with individuals from Oradea in their ranks, one of whom happened to be named Kosta.²⁰ However, as it was one of the most popular Greek names, it cannot be straightforwardly identified as any one of the 'Kostas' appearing on the icons. Furthermore, it is also fair to assume that the inscriptions do not necessarily refer to the ethnic allegiances of those commissioning the icons but their cultural background instead. On the other hand, an allusion is made to their bishop, who was an Aromanian (Tsintsar), born in Macedonia, just as the artists themselves. The latter were probably more adept at using Greek letters than the Cyrillic script.

¹⁹ Popović, Vukica, *Srpski spomenici u Rumuniji*, Subotica 1996, 237-240, 10-23. Јовановић, Миодраг, *Сликаство Темнишварске Епархије*, Нови Сад 1997, 109-110.

²⁰ National Archiv of Hungary, Budapest, C 42, fasc. 2 No. 8. 15. cs. f 23.

The painting of the iconostasis screen was apparently not fully completed in 1763. As the Romanian inscription in Cyrillic above the Royal Doors indicates, its gilding and painting would resume in 1768, in the time of Bishop Meletius Kovács. In addition to the Bishop, the inscription also commemorates Protopope Moise, who is identical to the future Bishop, Mózes Drágossy (1776-1787), as well as Protopope Simion, brother of the former, and, subsequently, the names of the *ktitors* are enumerated: Siladi Petru, Oros Ilie, Pop Nicolae and Grek Nicolae.²¹ The painter who could be credited with the completion of the painting job in 1768 commenced by Moscopolean painters embraced a stylistic tradition vastly different from the style of his predecessors. He painted the four minor scenes seen in the fields below the local icons (from left to right: Saint Nicholas saves Sailors; The Flight to Egypt; Satan tempts Christ – holding stones towards Him in the desert; The Baptist Preaching before Herod), the half-figure prophets in the almond-shaped field above the local icons and the Doors, the figure of Jesse in the architrave, some further prophets in the remaining fields, as well as the cross at the apex and the two ancillary figures next to it. This painter, whose name has been unknown to date, must have been affected by western painting considerably more strongly than the masters of the icons. His figures and scenes speak to a naturalistic orientation. Presumably, he also relied on western prototype cuts;²² the dominant colour in the background of the pictures is blue, and the use of gold is abandoned. His inscriptions are Cyrillic Romanian texts. In all probability, it must have been him who painted the pictures of the bishop's throne and the pulpit. Currently there are no known icons or iconostases that could be compared to the works of this painter. Therefore, at this stage, the responsibility of identifying the painter cannot be assumed.

Although the names of the painters of the iconostasis of Oradea have not been determined conclusively yet, it is safe to claim that it is certainly the work of an artist or artists of Balkan roots who, at a very high level, adhered to the style characteristic of the workshop of Dionysius of Fournà (c. 1640 - after 1744) on Mount Athos.²³ These standards, however, would not be met by the painting activities of Teodor Simeonov from Moschopol, settling in Hungary a few years later. The painters working in Oradea were staying in Hungary only for a short time. Having completed their assignments, they must have returned to the Turkish Empire as their works are not evidenced elsewhere.

²¹ The inscription is published in Roman script transliteration by: Porumb, Marius, Un valoros ansamblu de pictură și sculptura din secolul al XVIII-lea la Vadu Crișului, *Acta Musei Napocensis*, XXI (1984), 562. The author read the name of Petru Szilágyi as 'Simadi'. However, upon juxtaposition with the original, the correct version would seem to be 'Szilágyi' instead.

²² It is particularly justifiable to assume the presence of such an influence in case of the scenes 'The Flight to Egypt' and 'The Temptation' since, in the latter, the depiction of Satan reflects the hoofed and horned figure well-established in western Bible illustrations by that time.

²³ Kavakas, George, *Dionysios of Fournà (c. 1670- c. 1745) Artistic Creation and Literary Description*, Leiden 2008. Rousseau, *op. cit.* 167.

Силвестер Тердик
О ИКОНАМА ИКОНОСТАСА НЕКАДАШЊЕГ УНИЈАТСКОГ
ХРАМА У ВЕЛИКОМ ВАРАДИНУ

Иконостас некадашњег унијатског храма у Великом Варадину је био пренет у село Vadu Crișului (Kőrösgén на мађарском) почетком XIX века, где је, иако у измењеном облику, поново постављен. Његова дуборезбарена декорација вероватно је нмастала средином XVIII века. Иконе са иконостаса су дело више мајстора. Престоне иконе, представе апостола и великих празника, представљају стил који је у стручној литератури везан за град Мосхопоље. На иконама се налазе натписи на грчком и румунском језику који спомињу епископа, ктиторе, чак и време настанка икона (1763) али не наводе имена иконописаца. У свом реферату покушавам да укажем на иконографске изворе датих представа и дајем анализу њихових стилских веза са другим мосхопољским мајсторима који су радили на подручју Угарске.