

**“HE WHO WANTS TO PLAY THE BAGPIPE, DOWN TO HELL HE HAS TO GO”<sup>1</sup> THE FIGURE OF THE BAGPIPER IN ICONS OF *THE LAST JUDGEMENT***

The above quote is the first line of a Hungarian folk song and as such, it sums up precisely the topic of my study, which is the depiction of the figure of the bagpiper in compositions of *The Last Judgement*.<sup>2</sup> Such icons with the figure of the piper are known for us from the eastern regions of the Carpathian Mountains, from the south of Poland, Eastern Slovakia and Western Ukraine, starting with the last decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

It is quite difficult to identify the figure of the piper in these representations, since it usually appears in the lower units of the compositions, which are often severely damaged – in the majority of cases even destroyed – by water or some other element. For this reason it is to be presumed that the figure of the piper originally appeared in much more icons than it is to be found in today.

But who is actually the bagpiper and what kind of instrument is the bagpipe? The figures of the pipers in icons of *The Last Judgement* are nothing but the visual manifestations of the answers to these questions.

In medieval times the bagpipe was a wide-spread musical instrument, well-known for various social groups. It was used in royal and aristocratic courts, just as well as among burghers, as is suggested by its frequent representations in fine arts<sup>3</sup> (**fig. 1**) (*Court Jester with Bagpipe*, an example from 15<sup>th</sup>-century Western Christian Art). However, from the 17<sup>th</sup> century on the bagpipe was gradually ousted from the entertainment of the upper classes and became an element of peasant music.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, even within the peasantry it was linked to

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<sup>1</sup> The first line of a folk song of the Palóc, a subgroup of Hungarians in Northern Hungary with a distinctive dialect.

<sup>2</sup> I was inspired to do research on this topic by a study of Zoltán G. Szabó, “A dudásbrázolások elemzési lehetőségei,” *Néprajzi Értesítő* Vol. LXXXV, ed. Zoltán Fejős (Budapest, Néprajzi Múzeum, 2003), 157-173.

<sup>3</sup> Galavics Géza, “Művészettörténet, zenetörténet, tánc történet,” *Ethnographia* 98.2-4 (1987), 160-206; G. Szabó, op. cit., 159 refers to János Manga, *Magyar népdalok, népi hangszerek* (Budapest, Corvina, 1969).

<sup>4</sup> Tari Lujza, “Zene és hiedelem,” *Démonikus és szakrális világok határán*, eds. Katalin Benedek and Eszter Csonka-Takács (Budapest, MTA Néprajzi Kutatóintézet, 1999), 252.



Fig. 1 Court Jester with Bagpipe. Miniature, 15<sup>th</sup> century. [János Manga, *Magyar népdalok, népi hangszerek* (Budapest, Corvina, 1969).]

Сл. 1 Дворска луда са гајдама, минијатура, 15. век [Janos Manga, *Magyar népdalok, népi hangszerek* (Budapest, Corvina, 1969).]

one particular group: mostly shepherds played it.<sup>5</sup> This social group had actually used the bagpipe ever since the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries all over Europe.<sup>6</sup> For instance, such a shepherd with a bagpipe can be seen in the bottom row of a composition in an East Slovakian icon from 1661, as he is marching to hell playing his instrument (fig. 2). Nevertheless, the Christian Church had raised its voice against the bagpipe as early as the Middle Ages,<sup>7</sup> even though ever since antiquity European peoples had thought that music was of divine origin and associated both musicians and their instruments with transcendental powers.<sup>8</sup>

That said, wind instruments “had a bad reputation” as early as the antiquity, which is explained by Greek mythology. According to a myth, it was Pallas Athena who made the first wind instrument – a pipe – and entertained the company of gods by playing it as they were feasting. However, she spotted her distorted, blown-out cheeks as mirrored in water – ample reason for the others to laugh. In her rage she threw away her pipe, which was found by a faun, who became an excellent player.<sup>9</sup> The goat-like faun with his horns and clawed fingers – the god of shepherds<sup>10</sup> – is a prototype of Christian representations of the devil.<sup>11</sup>

It is such a faun-like creature who is dragging a bagpiper into the stream of fire in hell in a late-17<sup>th</sup>-century icon from Nova Sedlica in north-eastern Slovakia (fig. 3). Indeed, most bagpipes have a chanter stock shaped like a goat’s head (fig. 4). Also, Hungarian poet János Arany is quite explicit in his poem *Sabbath-breakers* about the nature of the person playing a bagpipe: “...a piper’s coming. He’s ancient – hairy, haggard, squint-eyed, ugly. His bagpipe is to burst ready. ’Round his ears, two horns tiny, look like his own, not of goatlings...”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Manga, *op. cit.*, 45.

<sup>6</sup> G. Szabó Zoltán, *A duda/The Bagpipe* (Budapest, Néprajzi Múzeum/Museum of Ethnography, 2004), 30.

<sup>7</sup> Tari, *op. cit.*, 252.

<sup>8</sup> G. Szabó, “A dudásábrázolások,” 166.

<sup>9</sup> G. Szabó, *ibid.*, 166-7.

<sup>10</sup> József Pál and Edit Újvári, ed., *Szimbólumtár* (Budapest, Balassi Kiadó, 2005), 385.

<sup>11</sup> Mihály Hoppál, Marcell Jankovics, András Nagy and György Szemadám, *Jelkép-tár* (Budapest, Helikon Kiadó, 2000), 170.

<sup>12</sup> Qtd. in Tari, *op. cit.*, 253.

The poem implies that the bagpiper is some kind of devil-like creature. In folk beliefs the piper, even if he is not a devil, definitely has some otherworldly abilities – he can cast spells, bewitch animals, what is more, he keeps company with sorceresses. Thus, we can also see him in a 1669 engraving by Johannes Praetorius depicting a *Witches' Sabbath* (fig. 5). It is within the piper's power to order a whirlwind to carry him and his music can resurrect the dead.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, his bagpipe is an instrument that can make music without a player – when his owner throws it into a corner or hangs it on a nail<sup>14</sup> – according to the testimony of folklore collections.

The folk song quoted in the title of this presentation sums up very tersely the essence of being a piper: “*He who wants to play the bagpipe, down to hell he has to go...*”, in other words, a piper gains his knowledge through connection with the underworld. Indeed, not only his knowledge, but also his instrument, since – as the song puts it – “*He who wants to play the bagpipe, down to hell he has to go, there they live, the wormy big hounds, great for good pipes, they will do.*” The bag of the instrument was most often really made of dog- or goatskin.<sup>15</sup>

So we can conclude that in folk beliefs and literary works based on them the bagpiper is connected to hell in many ways. It is also clear from the above that he does not simply have to go to hell for his knowledge and instrument – what is more, he himself belongs there. In icons from the east-



Fig. 2 Last Judgment. Icon, 1661, from Bogliarke (formerly Boglarka, Sáros County, Hungary, today in Slovakia). [Vladislav Grešlik, *Ikony 17. storočia na východnom Slovensku*, (Prešov, n. p., 2002), plate XVII.]

Сл. 2 Страшни суд, икона 1661, из Богларке (некада Богларка, округ Сарош, Мађарска, данас у Словачкој). [Vladislav Grešlik, *Ikony 17. storočia na východnom Slovensku*, (Prešov, n. p., 2002), табла XVII.]

<sup>13</sup> Actual stories of this kind are qtd. in Manga, op. cit., 48.

<sup>14</sup> Manga János, *Nógrádi dudások, A Néprajzi Múzeum Füzetei* Vol. XII, ed. Ákos Szendrey (Budapest, Néprajzi Múzeum, 1950), 25.

<sup>15</sup> G. Szabó, *A duda/The Bagpipe* 17.

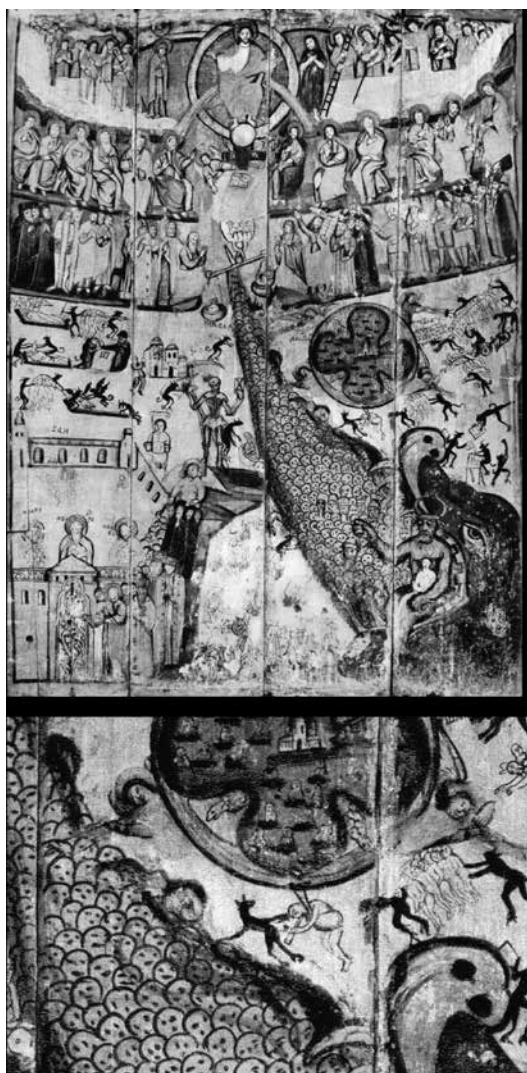


Fig. 3 Last Judgment. Icon, 17th century, Nova Sedlica (formerly Újszék, Zemplén County, Hungary, today in Slovakia) [Alexander Fricky, *Ikony z východného Slovenska* (Košice, Východoslovenské vydavateľ'stvo, 1971), fig. 67.]

Сл. 3 Страшни суд, икона 17.век, Нова Седлица (некада Ујзек, округ Ујзек, округ Земплен, Мађарска, данас у Словачкој) [Alexander Fricky, *Ikony z východného Slovenska* (Košice, Východoslovenské vydavateľ'stvo, 1971),сл. 67.]



Fig. 4 Bagpipes with a chanter stock shaped like a goat's head. 1936-1951. [G. Szabó Zoltán, *A duda/The Bagpipe* (Budapest, Néprajzi Múzeum/Museum of Ethnography, 2004), 109-10.]

Сл. 4 Гајде са гајдарком у облику козје главе 1936-1951. [G. Szabó Zoltán, *A duda/The Bagpipe* (Будимпешта, Етнографски музеј, 2004), 109-10.]

ern regions of the Carpathian Mountains the piper usually appears close to hell: for example, in the bottom row of the above-mentioned icon from Bogliarke, he is marching straight to the underworld from the verge of hell (fig. 2). Similarly, in a 17<sup>th</sup>-century Ukrainian icon he is heading the line of the damned and leading them, blowing his bagpipe, to the gates of hell – depicted on a larger scale, Beelzebub, the lord of the underworld is waiting for them there with his scythe in hand (fig. 6). In an 1893 Transylvanian Romanian glass icon it is a piper who is leading the line of musicians marching to hell, following the Biblical sea monster, the Leviathan<sup>16</sup> (fig. 7).

The figure of the bagpiper is most frequently to be seen, however, among the damned, right in hell. He features in a pub scene in hell, some components of which had been depicted as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In a Ukrainian icon from Msancja there is an innkeeper, a woman among the damned, who is kneeling in front of a cask and tapping wine. There is a winged devil hanging on to her back and strangling her. The innkeeper as the personification of a sin – one who encourages drunkenness – is rightfully placed in hell and the attribute of the devil is “her due” (fig. 8). In a 16<sup>th</sup>-century panel from Lukov-Venecia, Eastern Slovakia, the innkeeper also appears among the damned: this time she is sitting on a stool with a cask in front of her and a wine-cup on it, which she is filling up from a flask. Again, a winged devil is riding on her back and strangling her (fig. 9). The innkeeper with a devil on her back was also depicted in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, for example in the above-mentioned icon from Bogliarke (fig. 2).

The innkeeper among the damned, with her cask and devil, seems to be a *topos*, which is not specific to representations from the eastern regions of the Carpathians.

This composition type can also be detected in Hieronymus Bosch's triptych, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, from around 1500, in the right wing, which depicts hell (fig. 10).



Fig. 5 Johannes Praetorius, Witches' Sabbath. Engraving, 1669.

Сл. 5 Јохан Преторијус, Црни сабат, бакрорез, 1669.

<sup>16</sup> *King James Bible*, Job 40.15-41.26



Fig. 6 Last Judgment (excerpt).  
Icon, 17<sup>th</sup> century, Svidnik, Múzeum  
Ukrajinskej Kultúry. [Štefan Tkáč, *Ikony  
zo 16.–19. storočia na severovýchodnom  
Slovensku* (Bratislava, Tatran, 1980),  
152, fig. 72.]

Сл. 6 Део Страшног суда, икона из  
17. века, Свидник, Музеј украјинске  
културе [Štefan Tkáč, *Ikony zo 16.–19.  
storočia na severovýchodnom Slovensku*  
(Bratislava, Tatran, 1980), 152, сл. 72.]

The focal figure of the otherwise complex scene is a monstrous creature with an egg-shell-like body. The shell is broken, so the inside of the body is visible. This egg-shell represents the “pub in hell known from North German folk beliefs,” where the damned can spend a bit of time.<sup>17</sup> In this fantastic tavern there are three guests sitting around a table with wine-cups in front of them. On the left from the table there is a cask with an inn-keeper kneeling in front of it and tapping wine – just like the landlady of the icon from Msancja (fig. 8).

This *topos* was accompanied by the figure of the bagpiper in icons as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century. For example, the musician can be seen in a severely damaged 1575 icon from the Lviv Region, from Кам’янка-Бузькая (fig. 11). In this depiction the landlady’s table is placed among the damned. On the left from the table there are two casks lying on top of each other. On the right, we can see the landlady standing with a decanter in hand, and with a devil embracing her from behind. The piper is sitting next to the table, with flasks lined up in front of him, playing his instrument. He is central to the composition. Thus the piper appears here as the representative of not only one, but two sins, since he is playing his devilish instrument, on the one hand, and is a drunkard, addicted to drink, on the other. He is rightfully placed among the damned, indeed.

A similar composition can be found in an icon from the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, from West Ukrainian Volosyanka (fig. 12). In this panel, the landlady also appears next to the table as she is serving her guests in hell. The bagpiper is standing behind the woman. As observed by Zoltán G. Szabó,<sup>18</sup> this piper has hooved feet. This pictorial representation is symbolic of the notion that pipers are devilish not only in their profession, but also in their person. The landlady is depicted yet again in front of the table, as she is tapping wine from a cask. On the other end of the barrel there is a kneeling man who is a representation of the sin of drunkenness, indeed, who is its slave, as clearly indicated by the fact that his hands are tied behind his back. The ensemble of motifs in

<sup>17</sup> Wilhelm Fraenger, *Hieronymus Bosch*, trans. Gábor Csaba Dávid, Béla Kerégyártó and András Székely (Budapest, Corvina Kiadó, 1982), 41.

<sup>18</sup> G. Szabó, “A dudásábrázolások,” 169.



Fig. 7 Matei Țimforea, Last Judgment. Glass icon, 1893. [Juliana and Dumitru Dancu, *Die bäuerliche Hinterglasmalerei in Rumänien* (Bukarest, Meridiane Verlag, 1979), fig. 74.]



Fig. 8 Last Judgment. Icon, 15<sup>th</sup> century, Мшанця (Lviv Region, Ukraine). [Ю. П. Нельговський, відпов. ред., *Історія українського мистецтва. Мистецтво XIV–першої половини XVII століття*, Том 2 (Київ, Жовтень, 1967), 230, fig. 156.]



Fig. 10 Hieronymus Bosch, The Garden of Earthly Delights (excerpt). C. 1500. [Wilhelm Fraenger, *Hieronymus Bosch*, trans. Gábor Csaba Dávid, Béla Kerékgyártó and András Székely (Budapest, Corvina Kiadó, 1982).]

Сл. 10 Хијеронимус Бош, Башта земаљског задовољства, сегмент. 1500. [Wilhelm Fraenger, *Hieronymus Bosch*, прев. Gábor Csaba Dávid, Béla Kerékgyártó - András Székely (Budapest, Corvina Kiadó, 1982).]



Fig. 9 Last Judgment. Icon, 16<sup>th</sup> century, Lukov Venecia (Slovakia). [Jana Božová and František Gutek, *Drevené kostoliky v okolí Bardejova* (Bardejov, Sajancy, 1997), 133.]

Сл. 9 Страшни суд, икона из 16. века Луковска Венеција (Словачка). [Jana Božová -František Gutek, *Drevené kostoliky v okolí Bardejova* (Bardejov, Sajancy, 1997), 133.]

this composition sums up, as it were, the motifs of the above representations of the bagpiper.

At the same time, this scene is also the culmination of the process outlined by the bagpiper's representations in the panels introduced here: in the icon from Nova Sedlica (**fig. 3**) the piper is being dragged into the stream of fire in hell by a devil, in the representation from Svidnik (**fig. 6**) he is the one, in turn, who is leading the damned into hell, while in the panel from Volosyanka (**fig. 12**) he appears as a devilish creature right in hell.

It is worth paying attention to the type of the bagpipes represented in icons from the eastern region of the Carpathians.





Fig. 11 Last Judgment. Icon, 1575, Кам'янка-Бузькая (Lviv Region, Ukraine). [Ю. П. Нельговський, відпов. ред., *Історія українського мистецтва. Мистецтво XIV–першої половини XVII століття*, Том 2 (Київ, Жовтень, 1967), 269, fig. 186.]

Сл. 11 Страшни суд, икона из 1575, Кам'янка - Бузкаја (љвовски регион, Україна). [Ю. П. Нельговський, відпов. ред., *Історія українського мистецтва. Мистецтво XIV–першої половини XVII століття*, Том 2 (Київ, Жовтень, 1967), 269, сл. 186.]



Fig. 12 Last Judgment. Icon, second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Волосжанка (formerly Hajasd, Ung County, Hungary, today in the Ukraine). [Zoltán Fejős, Mónika Lackner and Gábor Wilhelm, eds., *Időképek, Milleniumi kiállítás a Néprajzi Múzeumban 2000. december 31 – 2001. december 31.* (Budapest, Néprajzi Múzeum, 2001), 142.]

Сл. 12 Страшни суд, икона из друге половине 17. века, Волосжанка, (некада Хајасд, округ Унг, Мађарска; данас у Украјини). [Zoltán Fejős, Mónika Lackner - Gábor Wilhelm, eds., *Időképek, Milleniumi kiállítás a Néprajzi Múzeumban 2000. december 31 – 2001. december 31.* (Budapest, Néprajzi Múzeum, 2001), 142.]

Zoltán G. Szabó has been so kind as to identify these musical instruments as so-called European bagpipes (**fig. 12**), which have one drone and one chanter bored in a conical shape. In the Central European region bagpipes of this type are wide-spread mostly in Eastern Slovakia and the south of Poland. In other words, exactly in the regions where the icons depicting the bagpiper were made. From this we can conclude that the icon painters inserted into these compositions, which are representative of a set iconographic type, a musical instrument used in the peasant society of their environment; what is more, a typical wind instrument of the given region.

Nevertheless, the bagpipe in the icon from Svidnik (**fig. 6**) belongs to a different type. This instrument has two drones and one chanter bored in a conical shape and as such points towards another region. The bag of this instrument is tied together – like the neck of a paper bag – at the bottom. Bagpipes of this type are widely used not only in Eastern European, but also in Balkan, mainly in Macedonian regions. To the best of my knowledge, however, in material from the Balkans there are no representations of piper figures.

In conclusion, the bagpiper playing his instrument emerged in icons made in the eastern regions of the Carpathians in the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The types of bagpipes depicted are characteristic of the given region, so they confirm the locations where icons representing the bagpiper are to be found.

The representation of the bagpiper is a pictorial manifestation of the piper's role in folk beliefs, which hold that he is a devilish figure, just like his instrument is a devilish reed. It is for this reason that icon painting depicts the piper in compositions of *The Last Judgement*, near hell or within it, among the damned.

The figure of the bagpiper usually belongs to the *topos* of the innkeeper or landlady, which is also to be found in Western European art.

This scene of compositions of *The Last Judgement* exemplifies how folk thinking and characters of folk society make themselves seen even in icon painting, which is regulated by strict canons.

Марта Нађ

“ОНАЈ КОЈИ ЖЕЛИ ДА СВИРА ГАЈДЕ, НЕКА ИДЕ У ПАКАО” ПРЕДСТАВА  
СВИРАЧА ГАЈДИ НА ИКОНАМА СТРАШНОГ СУДА

Цитат у наслову представља први стих мађарске традиционалне песме и стога сумира спроведена испитивања свирача гајди на иконама Страшног суда.

Свирач гајди се појављује на иконама источног региона Карпата у периоду од шеснаестог до осамнаестог столећа. Постоје различите представе свирача гајди, а углавном је у вези са народним веровањима да је у питању симбол зла. Стога се управо представа свирача гајди неретко налази на иконама Страшног суда, у сегменту који припада грешницима.

Представа свирача гајди је уобичајена и у уметности Западне Европе. И у Западној Европи то је одраз локалних веровања о свирачу гајди као еманацији зла.