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ART AND ITS CONTEXT.
LATE MEDIEVAL TRANSYLVANIAN
ALTARPIECES IN THEIR ORIGINAL SETTING

Visual practice played a crucial role in the religious life and experience of the Christian men and women living in late medieval and Renaissance Europe. This fact is proven not only by the visually-centered concepts that pervaded the essentially religious culture of the epoch[1], but also the dramatic and performance-like character of the divine service (public worship) and the nature of personal devotion, which operated on the basis of concrete images and mental visions (private worship). Added to this there is also the impressive heritage of material imagery, again mainly religious, produced in different media using different techniques and which survives until this day.

In modern times, images became the "appanage" of art historians. Certain exquisite masterpieces in particular, which stood out for their bright colors, masterly design, high sensitivity towards object surfaces, power to create illusion, lavish appearance, and skillful craftsmanship, are responsible for the bulk of the modern studies in the field of the history of art. That said, for a long time now, these images have not only be considered beautiful art objects to be placed somewhere on the chart of stylistic evolution, they have also acquired a more sophisticated status thanks to the evolution of the discipline. Different kind of inquiries, different approaches and methodological orientations, helped bring out various layers of meaning and interpretation, providing us with a more subtle, if not more appropriate, understanding of the artistic phenomena.

The present study represents an attempt to approach medieval and Renaissance images not from the point of view of the evolution of artistic forms, but by considering them in their original context. The images that will looked at belong to the "class" of the *altarpiece*, one of the

most spectacular and elaborate forms of Western art, which was used to decorate the inner spaces of Catholic churches and chapels, visually highlighting the "presence" of the divine in liturgical spaces centered around altars. The *context* here will be reduced to mean precisely the inner space of the churches as laid out in the late Middle Ages. It was in this space that interaction between these images and the public occurred, and I believe this setting (architectural and liturgical) played a critical role in the final appearance of these works of art as well as defining their function. Altarpieces needed to fit in to the pre-existing layout of the church, were meant to add to the meaning of the altars for which they were intended, and served to mark the liturgical foci of the building. Thus an analysis and interpretation of their repository, the sacred rooms, may yield some very useful indications as to the purposes and functions of altarpieces.

In terms of a methodological affiliation, this approach is related to the *integrative* or "holistic" tendency promoted in recent decades by certain art historians[2] of the medieval period. As a reaction to the increasing specialization into different branches of research, which caused the (supposedly) unitary reality of the past to be cut into different pieces, the various contributions within this specific framework attempted to reintegrate the scattered fragments into more coherent bodies. Although "there is no way back to the *real* Gothic cathedral, to the *real* twelfth-century audience, to any kind of medieval wholeness, if ever such a thing existed",[3] it is equally true that the fragments (i.e. the pillars, stained-glass windows, vaults, shrines, altarpieces, liturgical performances, Gregorian songs etc.) are less significant on their own than as part of integrative systems. To reconstruct, to restore such complex arrangements as Gothic churches as they were at the time they originally functioned is a very difficult task requiring a substantial amount of historical sources. Unfortunately, there are few sources in the case of Transylvanian Gothic churches and the altarpieces they contain. Nonetheless, a careful analysis of the existing sources, both written and visual, may contribute to a better understanding of the role of the altarpieces within the church, the way they functioned and were integrated into a matrix of liturgical objects and actions that defined the sacred space. While local examples may be poorly documented and interpreted, comparative evidence provides sufficient reason to attempt this reconstruction.

Altarpieces played an extensive role in the development of a "culture of the visual" and the impressive flourishing of Western Christian imagery

in the late Middle Ages by providing images with both a physical medium and a form of legitimacy[4] based on their immediate association with altars. Over the course of time, altarpieces lost much of their original audience and function, often becoming obsolete and, as a consequence, being removed, replaced, or simply destroyed. But despite some losses, the fact they still managed to survive in impressive numbers bears witness to their former success. They were originally widespread in Europe, spanning the entire Catholic world, from Italy to Scandinavia and England to Hungary, and had a multitude of local features. Their disconcerting diversity was based on a wide spectrum of conjectures, ranging from the material used (metal, stone, wood), the techniques employed (*au repoussé*, enamel, carving, painting, gilding etc.), and regional or local forms (Italian single or multi-paneled *pala*, Spanish *retablo*, Netherlandish inverted T-shaped *triptychs*, German *Schnitzretabel* etc.) to specific iconographies and the special functions they were meant to fulfill. Similarly, any attempt to classify altarpieces will be based on very varied criteria. Besides their inherent religious imagery, what places these diverse objects in the same category is their originally intended relationship with an altar.

However, this essential trait of altarpieces has been disregarded for a long time: the modern public is initially more attracted by the representations born by altarpieces, their formal beauty and celebrated authorship. Indeed, some of the great masters – such as Cimabue, Duccio, Giotto, Van Eyck, Van der Weyden, Pacher, Fra Angelico, Botticelli, Raphael, Memling, Dürer, Stoss and Tiziano, to mention but a few – also produced magnificent altarpieces besides other works. By comparison with other classes of images, altarpiece imagery served to document the masters' *maniera*, their personal touch, the specific modalities of representation, the technique, the evolutions of the style. Later investigations exceeded the limits of the "great masters", encompassing the entire artistic heritage. They also dug deep, beneath the impact of the conservation-restoration disciplines, to the intimate knowledge of techniques and materials on which the visible images are based. *Style* represented, and still does, one of the most prevailing and long-lasting foci. Due to microscopic insights into stylistic method, and thanks to museums, we are now familiar with the details of the images, with their external appearance, with *how they look*.

Another other kind of inquiry concentrates on *what is depicted*, that is, the content and meaning of the representations. These range

from simple iconographic approaches, which classify images on the basis of their subject matter, to in depth iconological analysis, which attempts to "translate" every detailed feature of the representation and re-construct intended messages. These investigations put great value on the original cultural background (ideological, textual etc.) from which the images emerged and to whom they were addressed. Focusing on social background emphasizes how diverse social strata or individuals (*patrons*) contributed to the occurrence of special characteristics of images and even the execution of particular objects. The role of the patrons in artistic production was re-examined, and in some cases they acquire a preeminent position compared with the artists. Other studies focus on the *functions* of the images, i.e. how they served the cult and personal devotion, how they contributed to the spreading of diverse devotional trends, how they interacted with the public, how the public responded to their stimuli etc. The research directions briefly mentioned here address late medieval imagery in a broad sense before looking at medieval altarpieces. Each direction emphasizes specific features – such as the author, the style, the material, the commissioner, the iconography, the apparent and the disguised messages, the religious and devotional uses, the public and private nature, the iconic or narrative aspect of the representation etc. – and confirms or argues against different approaches, the end result being a refining of our understanding.

How do the studies that focus on altarpieces contribute to this debate on images?

The altarpiece as a *category* has only lately become "fashionable" as a topic of study.[5] This assertion alludes to the important scholarly research into both the altarpiece as a class *sui generis* – constituting the main focus of what is to follow – and regional and limited material. Although, as will be shown, the view that the altarpiece is a "valid category"[6] is in many ways problematic, it nonetheless gave rise to a fair number of new perspectives on medieval art[7].

One of the most important and simultaneously disputed features of altarpieces is to do with their *liturgical* nature. This relates not only to the general and obvious connection with the representation of the divine, but also to the set of *functions* they served in order to become a specific religious desiderata (or at least a religious "decoration"). One prominent opinion[8] holds that the emergence of the altarpiece is a direct consequence of the mutations in liturgical customs sanctioned and imposed as

universal practice by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. This takes into account several interrelated elements. The newly decreed doctrine of the Transubstantiation stated that the body and the blood of Christ were physically present, at the moment of the consecration, in the bread and wine of the Eucharist[9]. It thus became necessary to show the consecrated Eucharist to the congregation, by raising it in order that it could be *seen*, leading to a change in the priest's position (from the rear to the front of the altar and with back turned to the public) while performing Mass. This new position freed the rear of the altar, which could then be used as a place for permanent decoration, an appropriate backdrop against which the gaze of the congregation could project the elevated Host and Chalice. This convenient backdrop for the exalted sacraments was thus represented by the altarpiece. According to this theory, therefore, the presence of the altarpiece as a permanent decoration of the altar table was the result of a new liturgical tradition.

This very precise liturgically based and chronologically restrictive hypothesis for the origin of altarpieces was not accepted by all authors.[10] The liturgical context, some said, must be considered in a more circumstantial manner, by which they were alluding to the diversity of local regulations and customs concerning the performance of the Mass. There was no – either before or after 1215 – one single tradition concerning the *position* of the priest (in front or at the back of the altar) during the celebration of mass. Moreover, the Forth Lateran Council made no stipulations in this respect. Clear evidence of the liturgical position was to be obtained mainly by analyzing the original arrangement of the sacred space. Besides local liturgical ordinances and consuetude, the studies mentioned underscored the role played by diverse altar furnishings in the genesis of the altarpiece: antependia, shrines with relics, statues of the Virgin and Child (*The throne of the Wisdom*), painted panels as *memoria* of saints etc. They also emphasized the importance of side altars, often attached to the walls and thus with their rear available for altar decorations. Altarpieces emerged from different cultural areas (Italy, as well as England, Spain, and Germany), and it was a long time before they became a broadly accepted feature (between the 9th and 13th centuries). Hence the emergence of the altarpiece was a complex process with broad spatial and temporal contingences and was the result of an adaptation of specific church furnishing and transformations favored by liturgical change.

Some studies aim to show that the liturgy played a pivotal role not only in the development of the form of the altarpiece itself, but also in the overall iconography it contains.[11] The liturgy gradually began to incorporate an increased emphasis on the visual, and the altarpiece came to reflect this evolution. As a rule, every altarpiece was meant to mirror the activity taking place below it. The cult of the Eucharist became dominant in the church in the later Middle Ages, and religious imagery and altarpieces mirrored this trend. Not only the obvious iconographic themes (the *Virgin and the Child*, *Christ on the Cross*, *Vir Dolorum*, the *Last Supper*, etc.) can be interpreted in a Eucharistic way, but much of the disguised meaning of other representations also refers to liturgical and sacramental acts. As to Netherlandish altarpieces, it was argued that they "evoke the ceremonies performed at the altar with unparalleled originality, subtlety, and fervor".[12]

Other opinions neglect the liturgical nature of the altarpieces and reject their implication with the cult.[13] There are several arguments that support this view. One concerns the fact that the altarpieces never became *mandatory* for the celebration of the Mass, unlike other items (the altar itself, the altar cloths, the Bible, the *vasa sacra* etc.) that were specially requested by all canonical regulations. Indeed, many altars remained and functioned without altarpieces throughout their entire existence. Church regulations, both from earlier and later periods, set out very precise requirements concerning the use of liturgical implements, but none concerning altarpieces. It has also been argued that the iconography of altarpieces describing the saints and their lives have little in common with the sacred actions of the liturgy or the Eucharist: "retables are not liturgical objects but *only refer* to the central issue of the liturgy, to reenact ritually the history of the salvation in the eucharistic sacrifice".[14]

These scholarly tendencies, even where they recognize the liturgical nature of altarpieces, have the main advantage of bringing the issue of function to the fore while also confirming the need to view retables not only as simply as works of art. They also returned the altarpieces from museums and reinstated them on the *altars* from which they originated. The research carried out on altars[15] is equally useful in terms of gaining a more accurate understanding of the altarpieces, both in terms of their function and appearance. Every church had at least one altar, and there was a tendency, beginning with the Carolingian period, to increase the number of altars, reaching as many several dozen in the larger churches

of the late Middle Ages. This expansion provided the conditions for the unprecedented flourishing of religious imagery on altarpieces. Each altar had to be properly consecrated, to receive a *titulus* or dedication, and to contain sacred relics. The main altar of the church usually had the same dedication as the church itself, and secondary altars were dedicated to the chapels they were placed in (if there were any chapels at all). The relationship between the relics and the altar was not necessarily important in terms of the dedication itself, meaning the relics contained by an altar did not have to be from the titular saint. There were, for example, very few Marian relics despite a multitude of Marian dedications. Later, when the number of altars surpassed the number of available relics, it became customary to use the consecrated host in the place of relics. But both the patron saint of the altar and the relics it contained still played a decisive role in terms of the iconography of the altarpiece. While local legislation, as of 1229, required that the dedication of the altars be clearly displayed with inscriptions in suitable places,[16] the Trier Council had already, in 1310, set out the requirement that the dedication be indicated either by inscription or by *paintings* or *sculptures* near the altar.[17] The consequence of this canonical regulation was that the altarpiece was required to refer, through its iconography and representations, to the dedication of the altar beneath it. Thus, one of the main *functions* of the retable was to "label"[18] in visual terms the invisible dedication of the altar. This labeling was in most cases obvious, meaning that the patron of the altar was represented in one manner or another (in privileged or subordinate position) on the altarpiece. Often, when the patron of a high altar was a specific certain saint, it was represented through association with the Virgin, the Virgin and Child, or a Christological subject related to the Incarnation or sacrifice of Christ[19].

This interconnection between altar and altarpiece also had other important consequences. One of these concerns a certain magnitude of proportions. Certainly, because the construction of the altarpiece came after the foundation of the altar (sometimes centuries later), the size of the altar determined at least the width of the altarpiece, which hardly could be less than one meter, and often more. This physical size distinguished altarpieces from other classes of images, which, though otherwise very similar, were minute in size and could be taken away or handled by private persons. The dimensions and fixed placement of the altarpiece above the altar, with its base about one meter from the ground, conferred

it with the quality of a *public* object. Despite the existence of many private chapels (connected with churches, chantries, or even private mansions), altarpieces addressed a multifold public (made up of the officiant and the audience, no matter how restricted). Direct contact between the praying person in front of the altar and the imagery of the altarpiece was in many ways restricted (as will be shown), and this could be an argument supporting the fact that altarpieces were more important in terms of overall representation and their general effect than minute observation; they were more important as brightly-colored and gilded ensembles than pictures or sculptures.[20] Because of this *distance*, we can assume that images, understood from an iconological approach,[21] were hardly a matter for the public during the medieval period. Their detailed content and hidden messages were more likely to have been an issue for the artist, and possibly also the patron,[22] as well as a challenge to a modern public and scholars inclined to scrutinize images both in museums and reproductions. The altarpiece as a category, therefore, was not well suited to responding to the requirements of an intimate and personal kind of *devotion*[23] by its own contemporary public.

Nevertheless, altarpiece imagery was by no means deprived of devotional references. Subjects of great emotional and empathetic effect (such as the *Passion* of Christ[24] and the saints), iconic representations with magnetic traits, and, in contrast, narrative scenes of a tormenting nature were all part of the standard iconography of altarpieces. This is one of the "weak" features of the *category* of the altarpiece: it doesn't seem to have a particular iconography. The minute devotional objects, such as personal diptychs and triptychs, as well as big panel paintings that never stood on an altar (e.g. *The Apotheosis of Thomas Aquinas* in church of Santa Caterina in Pisa) share a very similar iconography with altarpieces. By way of contrast, a species of retable such as the *Pala d'oro* in the San Marco in Venice has very little in common with an altarpiece like the Prado *Descent of the Cross* by Rogier van der Weyden. The aforementioned considerations encourage a more cautious approach when considering the altarpiece as a "valid category".[25]

For a more accurate understanding of the altar-altarpiece and altarpiece-public relationships, it is helpful to look in more detail at *where* these interactions took place. This question leads us to the very delicate problem of the restitution of the original liturgical spaces embodied by Gothic churches. Historians of the liturgy and historians of architecture

have devoted a great deal of effort to restoring the original appearance and functions of inner sacred spaces in order to explain better both their content and form. Increasingly, studies centered on ecclesiastical art and other "minor" liturgical furniture are also contributing to this endeavor.[26] It is already well-known that our image of medieval Gothic churches as wide-open, generously lit spaces where our view can easily sweep from the gate to the sanctuary, is in many ways the result of later changes, rather than being an accurate reflection of medieval reality. The new conception of architectural and liturgical space – introduced by the Renaissance and the Reformation, the outcomes of the Tridentine Council, the theories of restoration applied by the school of Viollet le Duc, and all the interventions and "cleansings" performed over time under these new ideological commandments – incisively changed the original Gothic setting. The inner space was originally much more fragmented, separated by material or symbolic barriers, and more hierarchically divided than we believe today. From the gates to the *sancta sanctorum*, there were many thresholds, some very rarely or never crossed by the public. One of these physical barriers, which existed in many medieval churches and was regarded as a kind of oddity in modern times and therefore often removed, was the *choir screen*. Contrary to a common idea about Gothic built space – namely, its supposed unity – choir screens were for long time ignored by researchers. It only later came to the fore how widespread they were. There are English *rood screens*, French *jubés*, Italian *tramezzi* or *ponti*,[27] German *Lettner*,[28] and they all existed in cathedrals, monastery churches, friars' convent churches, in big parish of towns and sometimes even in small village churches. This pervasive architectural component, which physically separated the choir from the nave through what was often a highly elaborate use of masonry (with moldings and traceries and pillars supporting an elevated platform) fulfilled specific functions in the medieval period. Besides the fact that the rostrum was used for reading the Evangels and the Epistles to the audience and sometimes for preaching, one of its main functions was to divide the church of the clergy from the church of the laymen. This separation also implied a "safekeeping" of the climacteric ritual of the church, namely the Mass. Once the elevation of the host had became commonplace and the cult of the Eucharistic more fully developed, the liturgy became an increasingly "clerically-restricted" domain, with a spatially defined space: the choir. Laypeople attending Mass listened to the service more than they actually saw any of the ritual

acts. The elevation of the Host, a highly dramatized moment enhanced by different means (bell ringing, lighting of candles), was also marked by the opening of the doors of the choir screen. In this way the congregation was able to participate in the sacrament: by gazing for an instance at the elevated host projected against the glittering backdrop of the altarpiece.

This scenario is clearly very general, but it may still serve to describe the authentic contact between the public and such works of art as the altarpieces. As already indicated, the choir screen was in fact an unexceptional presence in medieval churches. Although some are of the opinion that choir screens were not very restrictive in terms of public participation in the Mass and, moreover, that the imagery connected with them mostly represented a reflection of the Eucharistic ritual performed at the main altars,[29] they were nonetheless restrictive in terms of the visual contact between the public and the main *altarpiece*. The closed area imposed by the choir screen was trespassed only on a few specific moments during the liturgical year[30] when the laypeople were aloud to approach the main altar and take communion.

Besides the main altar, there were also secondary altars, in high numbers (e.g. Ulm Minster had 60 altars), many of which featured altarpieces. Altars could be housed by separate chapels or constructions attached to walls, they could be displayed in ambulatories or simply use the space of the naves. Each of these altars was the result of a foundation with salvific and devotional ends made in the context of the growing importance of suffrages and the solidarity between the living and the dead. They were established by private individuals or families, guilds or corporations, or the diverse confraternities or other kind of associations which gravitated towards one church or another (parish, cathedral, conventual church etc.). These foundations were always the result of a negotiation between the clergy or the leader of the church and the suitor, the latter providing resources for the chaplaincy (the payment for the priest or chaplain, liturgical utensils, altar clothing) and the former integrating the new altar into the preexisting liturgical framework and ensuring the proper service. The foundation of altars had a crucial impact both on the building evolution of the churches and their inner layout.[31] Large building campaigns or reconstructions of older churches were initiated with the purpose of receiving new foundations for altars. At time, the highly popular cults that developed around some altars (containing famous relics) ensured the spectacular enrichment of the churches and triggered new building stages. The body

of medieval churches thus became an ever increasing number of liturgical foci, each with its own altar and adjoining furniture (altar clothing, curtains, screens, etc.), and some adorned with altarpieces.

The retables marked these liturgical nuclei through their large, shrine-like appearance and strongly gilded and colored imagery. Those placed above secondary altars were more susceptible to contact with a wider public, though this was not always the case. Many altarpieces on the altars of private chapels were sometimes locked behind doors or lattices, others were hidden behind hanging material, and, as was the case with winged altarpieces, many were closed. These altarpieces were usually highlighted at the same moment their corresponding altars were officiated liturgical ceremonies.

The inner space of the medieval church, which as filled with ecclesiastical furniture, was the stage for the continuous performance represented by the liturgical offices and rituals. The Mass or the Eucharist, usually sung at the high altar, was only one of these offices, though certainly the most elaborate and best attended. However, there were a multitude of secondary daily ceremonies and rites and celebrations at specific moments during the liturgical year. The altars spread around the church were the "stations" of an abridged form of stational liturgy,[32] and the moment of staging in front of them depended on their dedication and patron saint, the relics they contained, and the requirements of the patrons. The liturgy was accompanied by an abundance of performance elements, such as ritual gestures, singing, organ music, candle lights, bell ringing, incensing, displaying objects, and even the revealing and handling of images.[33] Imagery thus played its own role in enhancing liturgical performances and ensuring the attendance of the public.[34] During celebrations, the dominating shape and presence of the altarpiece act as a backdrop to the ceremonies and emphasized the ritual actions. The winged altarpieces were opened, thereby presenting their festive side to the public, and were usually more spectacular and more likely to impress the audience. Considered in relation to the ecclesiastic ceremonies, altarpieces revealed an important *liturgical function.*[35] This was even more obvious in the case of the northern examples, where their winged structure allowed for their intentional manipulation and changing of appearance and used iconography in order to strengthen their impact. As the inner space of the church contained multiple layers of the sacred, and the abbreviated journey within it constituted an anagogical experience,

in the same way contact with the numinous content of the altarpiece was realized in stages, from distant to close, from closed to opened, from mere perceptible to visible.

The reality of the ecclesiastic setting of the late Middle Ages was much more complex than this sketchy reconstruction suggests. Each church interior was unique: the range of altars was specific and, therefore, within the common liturgical framework, it also hosted its own personalized ceremonies. Equally, the altarpieces adorning liturgical nuclei were the idiosyncratic result of different intentions and actions. Even if the original audience had vanished, the performance was considerably changed and the setting radically "updated", a substantial part of the artistic images created in this period still exist today and provide us with a valuable source for modern interpretations and restitution.[36] Before analyzing the Transylvanian evidence, however, it might be helpful to look at one well documented and comprehensively researched case, which can then be used as model for an comparative approach. Its relevance becomes even greater given that it is from Nuremberg, a town with strong connections to Transylvanian German settlements.

In spite of the early adoption of the Lutheran Reformation, the large parish church of St. Laurence in Nuremberg still contains a significant amount of medieval and Renaissance religious imagery.[37] After the adoption of Lutheranism the altars were dismantled, and the statues, altarpieces, and other furniture were partially removed from their original positions in order to clear the space for the unique focus: the main altar or the pulpit. The exquisite *Angelic Salutation*, a sculpted group by Veit Stoss, was covered by a sackcloth bag so as not offend the new piety. "Catholic" objects were stored in the aisles of the church or in the ambulatory of the great *Hallenchor*, some being later transferred to museums. The late medieval history of the church is marked by the transformation (between 1439-1477) of the ancient choir into a new and spacious three-naved hall with ambulatory and radiating chapels. It was possible to reconstruct the arrangement of the altars in this architectural setting with great precision[38] thanks to a very detailed set of records. These records also indicated the dedication, the relics, and the endowment for each of the church's 17 or 18 altars.[39] The highly detailed *Mesnerpflichtbuch* (the Verger's Duty Book) from 1493 described the liturgical offices performed at each altar throughout the liturgical year. Thanks to such unique documentary evidence, the specific liturgical model which characterized this church

in the late Middle Ages and the function of each of its altars was able to be reconstructed. Furthermore, detailed research[40] was able to connect 9 of the *Altaraufsätze* (i.e. *altarpieces*) inside the church in secondary positions or in museums with their original altars. Thus it was possible to place the *Imhoff* (around 1418-1422), *12 Apostles and Deocarus* (around 1437), *St. Wolfgang* (around 1460), *St. Bartholomew* (around 1480), *St. Katherine altarpiece* (around 1485), *St. Rochus altarpiece* (around 1493), *St. Nicholas altarpiece* (around 1505), *St. Anne altarpiece* (1510) and *Holy Kinship* altarpieces (1514) with great precision within the church.

What was the relationship between the imagery of the altarpiece and the altar and liturgical offices performed below them? We can answer this question by looking at the example of the *Bartholomew altarpiece.* This altar was founded in 1446 by the *magister* Jobst (Jodokus) Krell as a personal foundation and chaplaincy (he was its first chaplain!). It was placed on the main axis of the church, behind the main altar and connected to the apsis of the new choir, then still under construction. In 1472, when the choir and its altars were again consecrated, the altar received the following dedication: *Bartholomew*, *Jodokus*, *Lucy*, *Ottilia*, *Barbara*, *Helen*. It contained the following relics: one piece of the Cross, one piece of the rock of Golgotha, one piece of Christ's tomb, one piece of Mary's tomb, and remains of St. Bartholomew, St. Andrews, St. Matthew, St. Laurence, St. Stephan, St. Vincent, St. Jodokus, St. Augustine, St. Barbara, St. Lucy, St. Ottilia, St. Helen, and St. Anastasia. The main feasts celebrated at this special altar were: St. Bartholomew's Day (24th August), St. Barbara's Day (4th December), St. Lucy, St. Ottilia and St. Jodokus' Day (13th December). In 1480, three years before his death, Jobst Krell commissioned an altarpiece for his foundation to be realized by an unknown Nuremberger master. The result was a *Flügelretabel*, with a central panel, two movable and two fixed wings, and a triptych predella. The central panel features the *Virgin Mary with Child*, flanked by *St. Bartholomew* and *St. Barbara* and Jobst Krell himself kneeling near St. Bartholomew. On the opened wings we find *St. Jodokus* and *St. Helen*. When closed, the wings show images of Jodokus, Bartholomew, Barbara and Helen. On the opened predella we find the *12 Apostles* with *Christ* and *Mary* and, when the triptych is closed, *St. Laurence, St. Steven, St. Vincent, St. Sebastian, St. Agnes, St. Dorothy, St. Lucy*, and *St. Ottilia.* This is a very convincing example of the strong relationship between iconography and the hidden content of the altar, namely its dedication and the relics it contains. The central image of the altarpiece is *Mary and Child,*

though not necessarily due to an association of "minor" saints to superior ones, but because of the relics contained (pieces of Mary's and Christ's tombs). Bartholomew, the main titular of the altar, is on the right side of Mary, in the most honorable place from a medieval perspective (*the right* vs. *the left*) and, significantly, he is the only one looking towards the public. Barbara, on the Mary's left, is another titular of the altar and, moreover, her attributes (the chalice and the host) indicate the profession of Jobst Krell: *altarista*. The two saints on the festive side of the wings, Jodokus and Helen, are also titulars of the altar. One is the patron saint of the founder (Jodokus/Jobst), and the other, for her attribute, is holding the first precious relic mentioned in the list (*the Holy Cross*). Lucy and Ottilia, the last titular saints, appear on the closed wings of the predella. The other saints depicted on the altarpiece correspond to the relics incorporated in the altar: Laurence (at the same time also the patron of the church), Vincent, Andrews, and Matthews. There is no relic recorded of other depicted saints: Sebastian, Augustine or Anastasia. The altar's three festive days, the consequence of which being the opening and revealing of the altarpiece, were precisely the moments when the three most important saints (Bartholomew, as patron of the altar; Jodokus, as patron saint of the founder; and Barbara, as patron of his profession) were celebrated. The *Werktagsseite* (the closed position of the altarpiece) contains the same three as well as Helen. By way of proof of the devotion expressed by Jobst Krell to the same four saints we have his painted epitaph from 1483, fashioned in the workshop of the renowned painter and sculptor Michael Wolgemut.[41] The kneeling defunct is represented in the same saintly company, Mary and Child, and surrounded by Barbara and Helen, and Bartholomew and Jodokus.

This example as presented describes only one of the possible cases for reconstruction in Nuremberg, and the following questions could justifiably be asked: Why, for example, was a feast of the *Holy Cross* not celebrated at this particular altar when both the relics and iconography hint at this? The answer is to be found by means of an *integrative* analysis of the entire liturgical setting of the church. At the St. Laurence church there was a different altar of the Cross (a very common dedication of altars in German medieval churches), where the corresponding feast was properly celebrated. Thus, even though Jobst Krell was a promoter of the cult (through individual choices concerning the acquisition of relics and the visual representations), his altar could not duplicate a liturgical act that was performed in another part of the church on the important feast

of the Holy Cross; he could only enhance it, in a different locus of the liturgical matrix, with the visual presence of his altarpiece.

In a thorough study of records of liturgical ceremonies, the history of the building and the preserved works of art, Paul Crossley attempted the reconstruction of the *integrated program* of the St. Laurence church.[42] He analyzed the positions of the altars, the significant axes they formed, the feasts celebrated at each altar, and their relation to the relics and imagery, the intentional dialog between setting, liturgy and works of art. The main conclusion of his research is that, "without denying the individualistic and disunifying impulses of much later medieval imagery...., at least in some well-documented cases, images and objects, particularly around and within altars, were conceived as *integrated statements*, and were appreciated as part of a spatial sequence – they formed, so to speak, the stations of a symbolic but abbreviated journey undertaken within the church".[43] The altar of *St. Bartholomew*, in its remote position near the apsis, represented one such liturgical station, at least for three times a year. However, it extended its presence beyond this restricted temporal interval. The main feast of the church, St. Laurence's Day, was also celebrated by the opening of the St. Bartholomew altarpiece. When the day of Apostle Bartholomew was celebrated at the altar of *Twelve Apostles and St. Deocarus* (for which the altarpiece was opened 14 times a year), it was connected with the altar from the apse. On that day, the two altarpieces were opened and the silver reliquary containing a bone of the saint, kept in the altar of St. Bartholomew, was solemnly exposed on the more accessible altar of the Twelve Apostles.[44] The large stained-glass window behind St. Bartholomew's altar, a gift from the emperor Friedrich III, represented not only his "predecessor", Constantine the Great, but also the *Invention of the True Cross* by the empress Helen, whose relics and images were contained in the altar and altarpiece below.[45]

In conclusion, we can assume that the correspondence in the generously documented case of the St. Laurence church are manifold. Such intentional systems, more or less well developed, were inherent to most medieval churches. Altarpieces were integrated into these systems, serving also to emphasize them. As has been shown, reconstructing the context can provide new perspectives on the *functions* (and *functioning*) of the altarpieces, and, similarly, an analysis of altarpieces helps reconstruct the importance of their context.

To what extent does the evidence from Transylvania support similar approaches and how can the Transylvanian altarpieces be analyzed within this methodological framework?

As part of the Hungarian kingdom of the late Middle Ages, the province of Transylvania was on the edge of Catholic Europe. It belonged to the Western ecclesiastical network and had its own bishopric, deaneries, parishes, chantries, monastic orders, monasteries and friaries. The religious dimension in Transylvanian towns and villages was experienced through the important European devotional movements (with regionally-specific elements and a certain conservatism). The churches, of various sizes and built in Romanesque or Gothic style by lodges often related with the Central European area, shared a similar liturgical organization and artistic endowment.

The corpus of surviving medieval Transylvanian retables is yet to be published in its entirety. We can say however that it consists of 56 pieces,[46] dating from around 1450-1550, which have been entirely or partially preserved in churches and museums. Most have since been removed from their original placement.[47] They originate from the former Catholic churches of the German, Szekler and Hungarian inhabitants of Transylvania,[48] who later broadly adopted the Reformation (the Germans embraced Lutheranism, the Hungarians Calvinism and Unitarianism, and the Szekler partly retained Catholicism). This confessional change severely affected the survival rate of altarpieces, which were often associated with iconoclasm.[49] There is almost nothing left among the Hungarian Reformed churches, and therefore the majority come from the German Lutheran and Szekler Catholic communities. Since usually just one retable, if preserved, came from the unique church of a rural settlement, most altarpieces are known by the name of that locality. In an urban context, the situation was not much better. Important towns, such as Brașov, Cluj, and Bistrița, provided stages for the overall destruction of altarpieces. Alba Iulia, the seat of the Transylvanian bishopric, later became the capital of the Reformed Principality of Transylvania and, therefore, its cathedral lost all its Catholic traces. Sibiu, similarly the most important town of the province, features in its museum a dozen pieces, most of which are highly fragmented and with uncertain origins, and only item that is undisputedly related to the parish church. Other less important towns and boroughs, such as Sigișoara, Sebeș, Mediaș, and Biertan, each retained one or two (as in the case of Mediaș) pieces. All the remaining pieces come from

rural areas. It is very difficult to evaluate the proportions and spread of this art prior to the Reformation. Documentary sources are very sparse and largely unpublished for the (presumably) most productive period of between 1500 and 1530-40. Outside the corpus of surviving works, there are a further three altarpieces known in the modern period, but which have disappeared in the meantime, and twelve[50] that were mentioned in contemporary medieval documents. Some estimates (around 700) proposed by different scholars have no documentary basis and are concocted using the confused equation of *altar* and *altarpiece*.[51] There is no evidence, either material or written, of altarpieces older than around 1450, which suggests that this form of liturgical and artistic work did not emerge out of a local evolution, but rather was adopted, already matured, together with its specific liturgical framework and function.

The Transylvanian altarpieces are formally related to German *Flügelretabel*, and most contain a central shrine or panel flanked by two mobile and two fixed wings, each made up of two superposed panels, a predella and a crowning. Hence, they show four panels besides the central part when opened (*Festtagsseite*), and eight when closed (*Werktagsseite*). Other forms, including the more elaborate (such as that in Biertan with its 28 painted panels arranged around the shrine) and less extended (such as the triptyhch in Boian) feature far less. One special type is the *pala*-type retable (such as those in Moşna, Nemşa, and Şaeş), which has no wings and thus has fixed iconography, a form with its origins in the Italian Renaissance and adopted by the German milieu at the beginning of the 16th century. The dominant form was thus constituted by the winged altarpieces, which were opened at various times throughout the liturgical year and therefore used more during liturgical performances. The iconography of the Transylvanian altarpieces is largely standardized, featuring themes such as the *Incarnation*, the *Redemption* and the intercession of the saints. The *Werktagsseite* is often composed of 8 panels depicting the *Passion* of Christ (18 cases) or representations of saints (12 cases). The most relevant feature in terms of the relationship between altarpiece and altar, and therefore also liturgical implication, is the combined iconography of the central part (shrine or panel) and the festive part of the wings (*Festtagsseite*). As far as the central parts are concerned, a similar number of central panels and sculpted shrines (15 and 16 respectively) have been preserved, albeit the latter are often missing their original sculpted figures[52] (10 cases) and we have should therefore ignore the iconographic core of these pieces.

The remaining examples indicate a large Marian preference (11 cases), followed, by some distance, by the iconography of saints, *Corpus Christi* and the *Holy Cross*. Sometimes the dedication of the altar is suggested by the association between Mary and certain saints or by the representations on the festive wings. Besides the very common presence of 4 scenes relating to the *Incarnation*, there are also several examples of saintly *vitae* (7) and saints in "iconic" representations, probably related to the feasts celebrated at their given altars.

The literature on Transylvanian altarpieces, consisting both of syntheses[53] and monographic studies,[54] mainly deals with matters of form and style, artistic connections with Western art, problems of dating, workshops and masters. It also includes iconographic descriptions and interpretations of content. Very few studies use the altarpieces as historical sources *per se*, to reconstruct the social involvement in liturgical art[55] or to emphasize devotional trends,[56] and even fewer focus on their liturgical implications and functions. Similarly, research into the architecture of medieval ecclesiastical buildings primarily with their formal appearance and style, and then deals with the issues of *liturgy* and *function*. It is also true that most church interiors were radically reorganized in later periods and that records of the original arrangements are very sparse.

The following represents an attempt to integrate this poorly documented art into a restored liturgical framework and the original architectural setting. I shall refer to three cases. The first consists mainly of a documentary reconstruction, and focuses on the late medieval endowment of the Dominican church in Sighișoara. It is of relevance thanks to a set of preserved records which indicate with sufficient accuracy the liturgical organization of a mendicant church in a secondary, though still important town of the province. This example proves very interesting to the Transylvanian case because very little is known about the inner structure of medieval churches after the radical transformations operated by the Reformation and subsequent periods. The second case advances a new interpretation of the role played by the altarpiece in the parish church in Sibiu, while third looks at the connections between the altarpiece in Biertan and its architectural environment.

In the Dominican church dedicated to *Virgin Mary* in Sighișoara[57] a document unique in medieval Transylvania was discovered by chance in 1859.[58] It was redacted in 1529 by the prior of the convent and the *predicator generalis*. The wave of insecurity triggered by the spread of

Lutheran ideas led them to record in writing all the important benefices the convent received, in order that they not be forgotten (*Qvoniam mater ingratitudinis est oblivio*),[59] and to hide the manuscript in the wall of the church. The list refers to gifts made between around 1465 and 1529 by various benefactors towards whom the friars had specific obligations (prayers and offices). This enumeration therefore encompasses, besides other, different endowments, all the new foundations within the church and provides us with a basis for the reconstruction of the liturgical arrangements. It is also worth mentioning that at around the 1450s the convent adopted strict observance,[60] and that with the time span documented (around 1492-1500) the church was reconstructed. The first mentioned donation, from around 1465, was from Nicholas of Ocna Sibiului, vice-voivod of Transylvania, who left 350 Florins in his last will. Various interventions by his heirs stopped the friars from obtaining this sum until the 1490s, when the church was in the middle of reconstruction works. With the money finally obtained, the Dominicans built the *choir screen* (*Lectorium*) and engaged painters (*pictores soluti sunt*) for the altarpieces of the *Holy Cross* and *St. Mary Magdalene* (*tabularum puta Crucis et Marie Magdalene*). This first passage of the document tells us of the existence of a choir screen, standard equipment in Dominican churches,[61] and two altars (dedicated to Holy Cross and St. Mary Magdalene), each adorned with an altarpiece. It is worth mentioning that it was almost a rule in the German area to place an altar of the Cross in front of the choir screen. This particular altar was used as the altar for the laypeople. In 1498, Nicholas Bethlen (at the time a former voivod of Transylvania) donated various altar cloths and other liturgical utensils (chalice, cross etc.) to the same altar of the Cross. In his quality as a "perpetual patron" (*perpetuus patronus*) of the church, he ordered several offices to be performed weekly, one of them being a special Friday Mass for the Holy Cross chanted by five ministers accompanied by the organ. One of the most preeminent benefactors of the convent was the bishop Gabriel Polnar, a native of Sighișoara and member of the Dominican order. He financed the reconstruction and vaulting (*fecit boltare*) of the church (1492-1500), the stained glass windows, and an organ and founded the *All Saints altar* (*altare Omnium Sanctorum*). He also wanted to be buried near the *main altar* (*altare majus*) of the church, which was dedicated to the *Virgin Mary*. The church itself had the same *titulus*. In around 1505, the widow of George Hennyg, a former member of the town council, together

with her sons, Christian and Valentine, founded the *altar of the 14 Holy Helpers* (*altare Quatordecim Auxiliatorum*), which was embellished with an *altarpiece* and an antependium (*cum tabula et antependio*). Again in 1505, a priest specifically asked in his will to be buried near the *altar of St. Dominic*, an altar that was very probably founded before the 1460s and is therefore not mentioned in our record. In 1520, a certain Dorothea, the widow of Martin Cruez (Kreuz ?) of Brașov, paid for the construction of a vaulted (*fecit testitudinem sive boltam*) *chapel* near the gate of the church (*ante fores ecclesie*) and dedicated to *Mary*, *Dominic*, *Francis*, *Hubert*, and *Ulrich*. She also commissioned an *altarpiece* (*tabula*) costing 24 Florins as well as several other implements.

The information listed is highly relevant to the present subject. From it we have discovered, for example, that besides the *main altar*, which is dedicated to the *Virgin Mary* and hidden behind the choir screen, and the *altar of St. Dominic*, who was the patron of the Order, the church was also endowed with five other altars: those of the *Holy Cross, St. Mary Magdalene*, *All Saints*, *14 Helpers*, and *Mary, Dominic, Francis, Hubert, Ulrich*. Thus at least seven altars (perhaps others were also founded during the earlier history of the convent for which no evidence survives) marked the liturgical matrix of a medium-sized conventual church in Transylvania. Among these, four were clearly endowed with altarpieces, and we can assume that the main altar and the altar of Saint Dominic (whose *imago* had to be present in a Dominican church) were equally equipped with this additional feature. Despite imperfect and lacking in detail, the image we have of this peculiar church is still suggestive in terms of the feasts celebrated at specific altars throughout the liturgical year. The altarpieces were meant to emphasize these special moments.

How can the only altarpiece still existing from this church[62] be integrated into this scheme? Usually known as the altarpiece of *St. Martin*, this rather small piece is a partially preserved *Flügelretabel*, with a central panel and two movable wings (the fixed wings, the predella and the crowning are missing). The central panel depicts a group of five saints, among which *St. Martin*, *St. Dominic* ? (I would suggest *St. Egidius* instead),[63] and *St. Erasmus* can be identified. Two saintly bishops are seen in the background. On the festive side of the wings there are four scenes from the life of St. Martin. On the back of the wings there are four saints (each on a different panel), among which *St. King Steven* can be identified. The other three are saints from the mendicant orders, one

bishop and two friars: as far as their identity is concerned, the bishop is likely to be *St. Albertus Magnus* (a Dominican bishop who was highly venerated though not yet sanctified at the time, which speaks against this assumption), the first friar, with bread, could be *St. Tomas Aquinas*, and the last again *St. Dominic.* The altarpiece is dated on stylistic grounds to around 1520 and is attributed to the workshop of Johannes Stoss, one of Veit Stoss's sons, a painter in Sighișoara until around 1530, when he died. The iconography of the retable could hardly be related to any of the altars mentioned in the records. Still, its insistence on Dominican saints (at least three of these belong to the order) suggests the altarpiece really originates from the convent of preacher friars. Secondly, it would difficult to explain why the document would omit to mention a foundation or a donation of an altarpiece dating from around 1520, nine years before the document itself was redacted. A possible connection, admittedly a weak one, can be established with the chapel founded by Dorothea Cruez in the year 1520. It is possible that the document refers to a general dedication of the chapel that was not identical with that of the altar. The clear focus on St. Martin could be explained by the fact that Dorothea herself was the widow of a certain Martin from Brașov and surviving wives were usually responsible for the suffrages addressed with the aim of releasing deceased husbands' souls from Purgatory. Saint Dominic, who is mentioned in the document, is also present in the iconography, and the two unidentified saintly bishops might well correspond to Hubert and Ulrich. Another hint is provided by the low price of the altarpiece (24 Florins), which suggests the execution of a small piece, such as that analyzed (e.g. the chalice paid for by the same lady cost 26). This scenario remains largely hypothetical, but we should not underrate this very rare way of reconstructing a model of the liturgical structure inside a Transylvanian church. It is also worth remembering that an only medium sized church such as this still had at least seven altars and four (or even five) altarpieces. This case study can be regarded as a basis in evaluating altarpiece art in medieval Transylvania.

The parish church in Sibiu, similarly dedicated to the *Virgin Mary*, represents one of the most important Gothic monuments[64] in the province. It's current appearance is the result of a long history of building, which began around the 1350s and was completed around 1520. The structure consists of a polygonal three-bayed choir, a transept, a three-naved body, a massive tower and a spacious and again three-naved "narthex" in front of the tower also known as *ferula*. The powerful and rich town contributed

to the development of its main church both in terms of the building itself and its endowment with furnishing and altars. Its prestige was enhanced by the fact that Sibiu was the seat of a particular ecclesiastical institution with quasi-Episcopal powers, which extended its control over the German colonists (*hospites*) of Transylvania and which was independent of the bishopric of Alba Iulia. The term *ferula* probably indicates the fact that this room was used to exhibited the episcopal *insignia* (*ferula* = crosier). The medieval layout of the inner space of the church was radically changed after the adoption of the Lutheran confession, in which all the altars, excepting the main one, were dismantled. Other renovation works (1853-1855, 1910-1911) completed the cleansing of the medieval internal layout of the church, leaving behind an uninterrupted space oriented towards the apsidal altar and the neighboring pulpit (both Neo-Gothic furnishings). All funeral stones were removed (some being installed on the ferula walls) and the remains of the choir screens were dismantled.

According to "tradition", there were 24 functioning altars in the church before the Reformation. This traditional account was "confirmed" by a scholar in the 19th century,[65] and since then has been accepted with question. This information was even translated to a presumed number of medieval altarpieces.[66] An important monument such as this was certainly able to shelter an large number of altars, but the available sources do not document the precise number mentioned. The mistake comes from counting often multiple dedications, in fact associated with one *single* altar, as different altars. For example, there is a document from 1448[67] in which an indulgence is granted to all those who help with the construction and endowment of a new chapel (*nova capella*) dedicated to the *Virgin Mary*, *St. Laurence*, *St. Wolfgang, St. Anthony*, *St. Francis*, *St. Florian*, *St. King Steven*, *St. King Ladislas*, *St. Duke Emeric*, *St. Catherine*, *St. Barbara*, *St. Dorothy*, *St. Cecil*, *St. Elizabeth*, and *St. Clare*. All of these dedications, which in fact represented only one titulus, were erroneously considered separately or were grouped into "families" (for example, *St. King Steven*, *St. King Ladislas*, and *St. Duke Emeric*, which counted for the unique altar of the *Three Saintly Kings*). This chapel would in fact have had just one altar (as in the case of Sighișoara). The extensive dedication of the chapel suggests a large construction project (the success of which would be ensured by a large devotional target) which was identified in the historiography precisely with the building of the *ferula*. I believe it was in fact related to a never-completed plan to transform the choir of

the church into a *Hallenchor*, as in Sebeş and Braşov (and Nuremberg). Indeed, the foundations of this extended choir were recently discovered by archaeologists.

Which altars of the St. Mary church have been documented? Besides the main altar, separated from the nave by a choir screen from an early period,[68] the following dedications are documented: *Corpus Christi*,[69] *All Saints*, *Three Saintly Kings*, *St. Nicholas*, *Holy Cross*, *St. Catherine*,[70] *St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist*,[71] *St. Mary de Raconato*,[72] and the *Transfiguration*.[73] The 10 documented altars are certainly only part of the total number. It is also difficult to place them with any precision inside the church. The position of the Corpus Christi altar bore some relation to position of the choir screen and was maybe on the rostrum (*supra lectorium*).[74] The Holy Cross altar was almost certainly situated in front of the *Lettner*, at the crossing between the transept and the nave. A lost inscription[75] indicates the position of the altar of the Transfiguration in the extension of the northern arm of the transept. A double canopy attached to the second northern pillar, traditionally considered to be a covering for the old pulpit,[76] was in fact intended for a couple of statues (possibly the two St. Johns) probably positioned on an altar. A last recognizable altar position is found in the small chapel above the porch of the southern entrance. This represents the main data concerning the inner organization of the church. It is very sparse, and the picture it paints is highly unspecific. But it is equally true that they reconstruct a part of the lost liturgical content of the building and the way it originally functioned.

How did altarpieces contribute to the completion of this liturgical system? Besides the retable still extant in the church, the Brukenthal museum in Sibiu contains a dozen fragmented altarpieces, some of them probably related with the parish church. A central panel representing Christ as *Vir dolorum* flanked by two angels, a very expressive work from 1520s, clearly (by its iconography) indicates a *Corpus Christi* dedication. It may therefore be connected with the altar founded by the Corporis Christi confraternity, the altar attached to the choir screen.[77] This assumption still remains highly hypothetical. Another fragment that could be related with the church is the large predella, representing the *Death of the Virgin Mary*, bearing the armorial symbol of the town and the date 1524. The coat of arms indicates a communal foundation, most probably instituted in the parish church. The other fragments are too discordant to be connected with one of the known altar dedications in the church. However, as has

been mentioned, a large and impressive altarpiece[78] is still found within this sacred space. Normally considered the main retable of the church, the now dismembered altarpiece is a *Flügelretabel* with a central panel, a pair of fixed wings and a pair of movable wings, and a predella. The crowning is lost. The iconography on the *Werktagsseite* features 8 scenes from the *Passion* of Christ, which were extensively influenced by Dürer's engravings of 1512. The central panel represents *Christ on the cross with the saints*, a scene that was clearly modified in the year 1545. It was in this year that the town adopted the Reformation and the image was adapted to meet the new ideological requirements: the saints were erased from the panel and replaced by two Biblical quotations which still flank the crucified Christ. This central panel represents one of the most accurate modifications of Catholic imagery performed in Transylvanian art in order to become legitimate from a Lutheran point of view. The panels of the *Festtagsseite* were repainted at the beginning of the 18th century to depict the *Annunciation*, the *Birth of Christ*, the *Resurrection*, and the *Pentecost*. We cannot know if they were faithful to the old iconography (though it is likely they did) or if this was changed by the repainting. The predella represents the *Mourning of Christ*. The restoration of this section revealed an inscription indicating the year (1512) and two coats of arms which partially identify the patrons of the altar and the commissioners of the altarpiece. The first identified coat of arms belonged to one of the most powerful and richest citizens of Sibiu in the period 1500-1520: Johannes Lulay, a preeminent member of the magistrate, a royal judge and royal count of the Germans inhabitants of Transylvania. He was involved in gold mining companies and on the king's account administrated the mint in Sibiu. Lulay also possessed the largest urban residence of the town. It was this important personality who (together with another, still unidentified, donor) commissioned one of the most impressive altarpieces found in Transylvania.

How can this outstanding object be integrated into the liturgical setting of the St. Mary parish in Sibiu? As already mentioned, the literature traditionally considers it to be the altarpiece used at the main altar of the church. However, there are several reasons for suggesting a different position. The first of these refers to its formal appearance. The main altarpieces in important churches in the German artistic area were usually *Flügelretabel* and endowed with a shrine, not a central panel. This is especially the case of Central European altarpieces after 1450,

when *Schnitzretabel* generalized.[79] A carved altarpiece, more expensive and lavishly gilded, was more likely to provoke a reaction and emotional response, and it was for this reason that they took preference in the display at the main feasts: they contained the most sacred images of the entire church. Many examples from neighboring regions could also be invoked as arguments, e.g. the *St. Mary altarpiece* in Krakow, the *St. James altarpiece in* Levoča, the *St. Elisabeth altarpiece* in Košice, the *St. George altarpiece* in Spišská Sobota, the *St. Barbara altarpiece* in Banská Bystrica, etc.[80] – The three Transylvanian cases, where main altarpieces survived in their original positions, in an urban (or quasi-urban) environment, namely Sebeş, Mediaş, and Biertan, are all *Schnitzretabel* . It is therefore more likely that a main altarpiece in such an important church as that of Sibiu would be endowed with a shrine.

A second objection to the "traditional" position comes from an *iconographic* contradiction. It is known that the main altar and the entire church were dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Even if Mary appeared in the imagery of the surviving altarpiece, her role is minor by comparison with the very clear focus on the crucified Christ. It would thus be more appropriate to connect this altarpiece with an altar whose dedication focuses on the body of Christ, the Eucharist or the Holy Cross. The last dedication appears to be the most credible. It has been documented in the church since 1432 and I see it as highly probably that its corresponding altar stood in front of the choir screen, at the crossing of the transept with the main nave. In practice, the altar of the Cross was used as the altar for the laypeople. Enclosed behind the doors of the choir screen, the main altar, which was most probably equipped with a statue of the Virgin, was the altar for the large community of clerics (at one time it numbered at least 19 persons).[81] The predella, representing the *Death of the Virgin*, dated 1524, and today in Brukenthal Museum, is a large example of its kind, has its iconography clearly centered on Mary, and might have been part of the altarpiece of the high altar. The coat of arms of the town indicates a public commission, which ties in with the communal character of the church (as is also the case in Sebeş, where the blazon of the town is exhibited on the main altarpiece of the parish).

The retable of the *Passion* of Christ, with its focus on the *Holy Cross*, probably constituted the background for ceremonies directed specifically at the laypeople. Its entire iconography refers to the central sacrament of the Eucharist and paralleled the liturgical actions that took place behind

the choir screen. It also paralleled the large eucharistic image painted in 1445 on the northern wall of the choir, an image not visible to the public because of the choir enclosure. In no small way, this impressive altarpiece satisfied the pride of one of the best known citizens of the town, Johannes Lulay, whose own heraldry was displayed in front of the entire congregation. The conclusion discussion of this case gives rise to is that only recreation of the liturgical setting of the church can provide a sound basis for understanding the functions and purposes of the surviving imagery.

The final example I wish to give here is the *altarpiece in Biertan*,[82] which, with its 28 painted panels arranged around the shrine, is one of the most complex and impressive works to be found in Transylvania. It embellishes the late Gothic choir of the church dedicated again to *St. Mary* in a parish competing for preeminence with neighboring Mediaș and Moșna. In its present form, this altarpiece is the result of two stages of development, followed by various damage due to the Reformation, and then the general restoration carried out in the early 1980s. The *Flügelretabel* is composed of a shrine, a pair of intermediary fixed panels, two movable wings and two fixed wings, a large polyptych predella, and a triptych crowning. The corpus of the altarpiece was realized during the earlier phase (dating from 1483) and the predella and crowning were added during a later phase (1515). I shall describe them in succession. When open, the central part (*Festtagsseite*) contains a large, Marian centered composition. Even if the original sculptures of the shrine have been lost (probably a consequence of the Reformation) and replaced with a Crucifixion group, it is clear that the golden halo applied to the rear of the shrine was intended as a backdrop to a sculpture of the Mother of Christ. The 12 panels mainly depict scenes from the life of the Virgin (beginning with the Immaculate Conception, *The meeting at the Golden Gate*) and the infancy of Christ, which contains a great visual emphasis on Mary. The cycle unusually normally with the *Baptism of Christ*.[83] This part of the altarpiece, the mentioned exception notwithstanding, makes a transparent statement to the Marian dedication of the altar and the entire church. The *Werktagsseite* represents a large range of saints, grouped together on the two large fixed panels and the reverse side of the movable wings. The outer panels contain full length images of the *Four Fathers of the Church* (*St. Augustine* and *St. Ambrose* on the right, and *St. Gregory* and *St. Jerome* on the left), which, with their stature, dominate the entire composition.

The smaller, inner, panels represent four groups of saints: *St. Rochus*, *St. Michael*, *St. Sebastian*, and *St. Joseph*; *The Virgin in Sole*, *St. Anne Selbdritt*, and *The Three Maries*; *St. Margaret*, *St. Dorothy*, *St. Catherine*, and *St. Barbara*; and *The Virgin ear clothed* (Ährenkleid), *St. Elisabeth*, *St. Helen*, and *St. Agnes*. This side of the altarpiece contains various different messages. On the one hand, it underscores the Marian meaning through separate iconic representations (*Maria in Sole*, *Ährenkleidmadonna*, *Anna Selbdritt*) all pointing towards the virginal and immaculate conception (*St. Joseph with the rod* stands for similar understanding). On the other hand, it concentrates on a broad devotional target, bringing together an entire procession of saints, protectors against diseases and calamities, and intercessors in the afterlife. The *Werktagsseite* represents an abridged version of the whole celestial hierarchy and the entire liturgical year. In a sense, it parallels the body of the church. Where a large church, such as that in Sibiu, had multiple liturgical foci, plural dedications, and dispersed imagery, a smaller building like the parish church in Biertan attempted to concentrate larger salvific actions in fewer points, with the main altar being the most privileged.

The section of the altarpiece described above was realized around 1483. This dating is based on an inscription and is confirmed by stylistic analysis. Harald Krasser[84] was the first to indicate the formal connections with the altarpiece of the so-called *Schottnemeister* near Vienna (around 1469-1475). Other features of the retable in Biertan point to the same conclusion. The presence of large fixed panels, similar to those in Mălâncrav (around 1460/70) and Proștea Mare (around 1490), indicates an early date of construction. However, after around 30 years the altarpiece underwent modification, resulting in the following additions: the polyptych predella at its base and the triptych crowning superposed with fine gothic tracery.

How did these changes contribute to the enhancement of the overall meaning of the altarpiece? Over 7 panels, the polyptych predella contains the largest Transylvanian representation of the *Holy Kinship*, i.e. the family of the *Virgin*, and places special emphasis on her mother, *St. Anne*. It subscribes to the same idea of immaculate conception. The crowning has three panels that feature some rather rare iconography. The two outer parts depict two visions (*The Vision of the Emperor Augustus* and *The Vision of the Prophet Ezekiel*) which are both related to the virginity of Mary. The central panel of the triptych introduces a different message

and is thus the most intriguing. The image shows Christ crucified on a cross emerging from a vine stock (allusion to the Eucharist) surrounded by apostles. *St. John the Baptist* is hoeing and *Virgin Mary* watering the vine stock. *St. John Evangelist* is the closest to Christ and is holding a chalice in his hands with the intention of gathering Christ's blood. This representation redirects the meaning of the overall iconography away from a Marian and intercessional one and towards a Eucharistic message. These changes occurred in 1515, as indicated by the inscription of the crowning. The tracery, almost identical with that in Băgaciu (dated 1518) confirm this dating. Some believe the predella was a later addition (from around 1524), according to a document recording the bringing of a *St. Anne* altarpiece (which was equated with the polyptych predella) inside the church. I believe the changing of the altarpiece was in fact the result of a single and coherent plan carried out by the intrepid priest Johannes of Biertan which encompassed the entire church.

In the early decades of the 16th century, the old church in Biertan underwent various important reconstruction works aimed at enlargement and consolidation. The result was the present-day building, an impressive three-naved hall church with a late Gothic netting vault superposed by a defense gallery. The coat of arms visible on the western porch, namely that of the king Ladislas II (1490-1516) and the Transylvanian voivod John Zapolya (as of 1510), indicate completion of these reconstruction works at some time between 1510 and 1516. Other armorials, place on the door to the sacristy and the predella of the altarpiece itself, composed from a chalice and the initials IO, point to the real person behind this ambitious and comprehensive project: the priest Johannes. The iconography on the added part of the altarpiece and especially that of the crowning becomes clearer when connected to this priest. On the one hand, the clear emphasis on the Eucharistic component, a priestly attribute, seems to indicate the priest's involvement with the iconography. On the other, the preeminent place occupied by the two *St. Johns*, the Baptist hoeing at the vine stock's root and the Evangelist gathering the blood with the chalice, also refer to the name and profession of the priest John. There are no other published records concerning the original late medieval layout of the church nor its liturgical arrangement. Besides the main altar, there could also be other liturgical foci and, indeed, the retable of Saint Anne mentioned above hints in this direction. The case of Biertan is less relevant when viewed from the perspective of a liturgical matrix because there are too few supports in

this sense. However, it does become representative when examined from the perspective of the overall change. The radical reconstruction of the setting (architectural in this case) provided occasion for a transformation of its main visual focus in order to better integrate it with the new internal organizational scheme. This transformation affected both the form and content of the altarpiece.

The present study is based on the much debated premise that liturgy played a crucial role in the appearance and functions of medieval works of art and especially altarpieces. This latter category, intended to adorn the liturgical foci of sacred rooms, interplayed frequently with liturgical performances and offices and visually complemented their symbolic significance. The altars and the altarpieces, although the result of individual intentions and actions, were mostly conceived to complete *integrated systems.* In time, these coherent systems, characteristic of every medieval church, underwent radical change and development, and this also affected the meaning and purpose of altarpieces. They lost their original audience and functions and became antiquated objects. A reconstruction of the original setting (both liturgical and architectural) of altarpieces can provide strong grounds for their reinterpretation. There is little documentation of the Transylvanian examples, and for this reason they were usually conceived as merely "paintings" or "sculptures". This study represents an attempt to reintegrate a few cases into their original settings. This, in my opinion, contributes significantly to a more accurate understanding of this impressive late medieval art form.
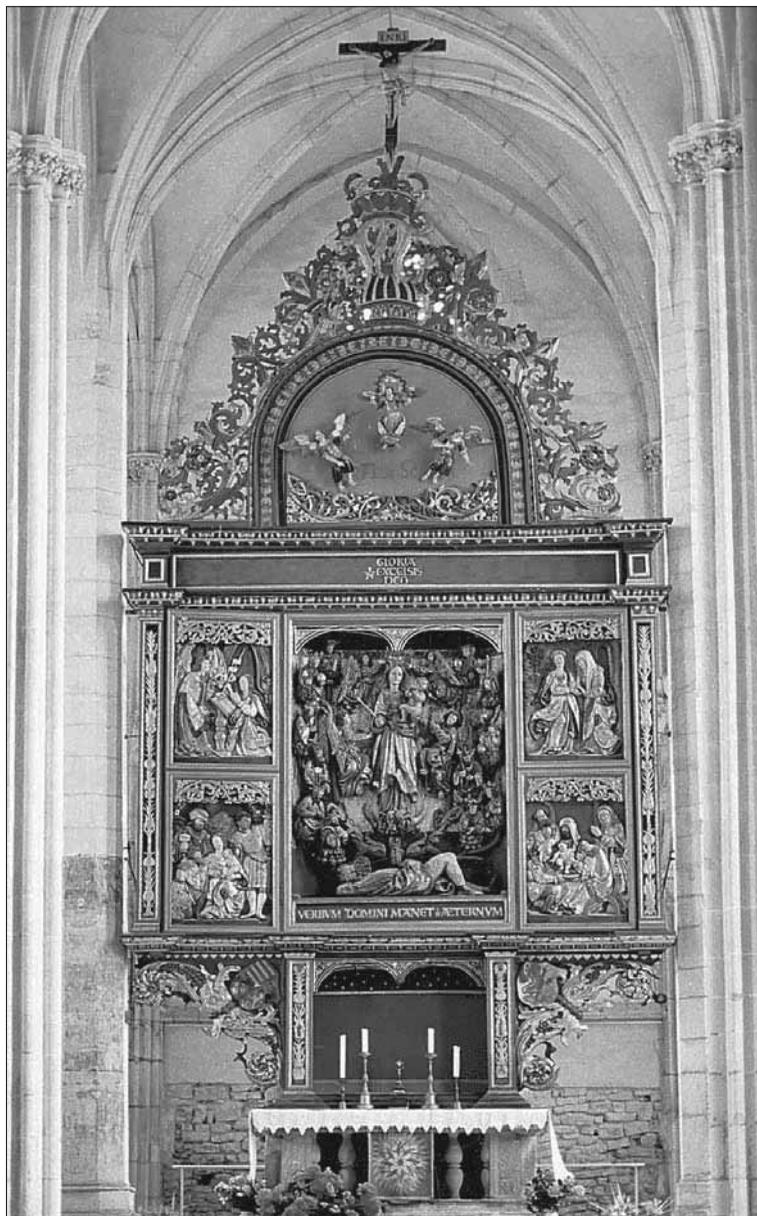
The altarpiece from Sebeș/Mühlbach (preserved *in situ*)

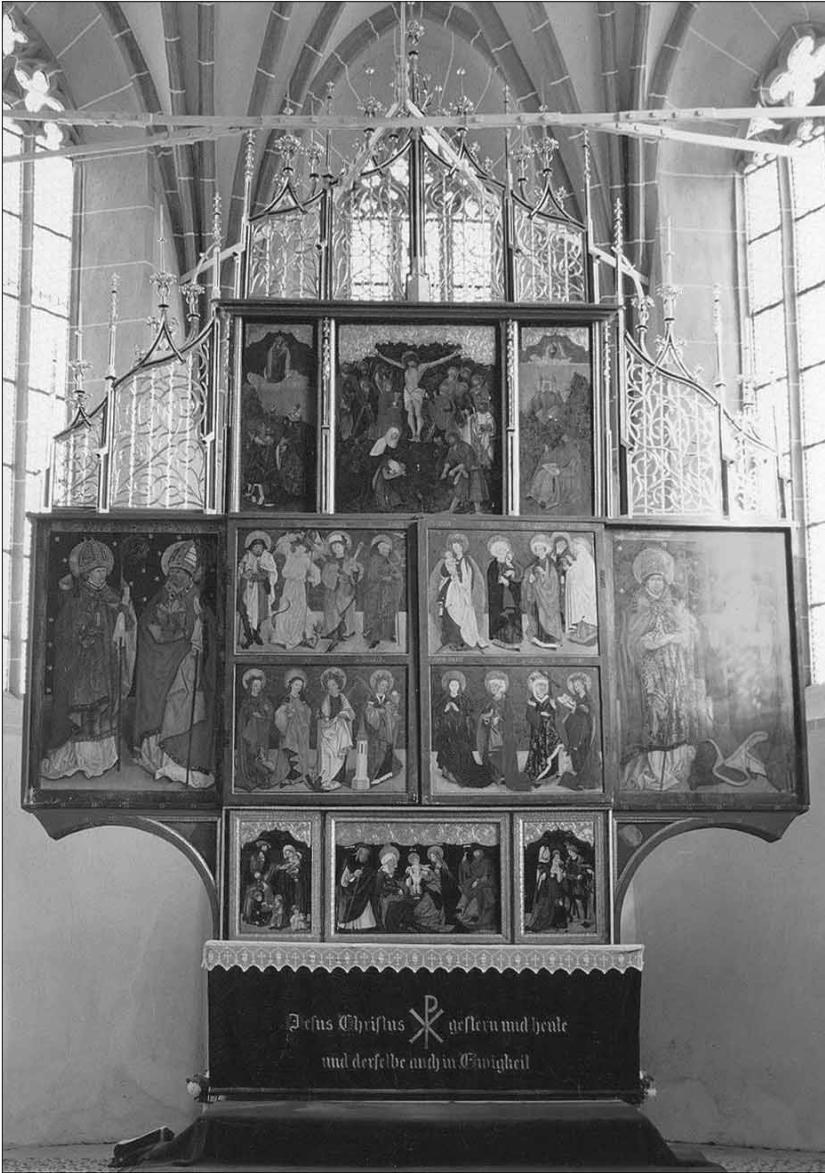The altarpiece from Mălâncrav/Malmkrog (preserved *in situ*)

The altarpiece from the Dominican church of Sigișoara/Schässburg
(open)

The altarpiece from the Dominican church of Sigișoara/Schässburg
(closed)

The altarpiece from Biertan/Birthälm in it's original setting

The altarpiece from Biertan/Birthälm (*Werktagsseite*)

NOTES

[1] Take, for example, the fundamental concept of *Salvation*. Beginning with the 13th-14th centuries this was closely related with the *visio beatifica*, the immediate and unmediated vision of God. It should be born in mind that the general assertions here mainly (but no exclusively) address western Christendom.

[2] See, for example, Virginia Chieffo Raguin, Kathryn Brush, Peter Draper (eds.), *Artistic Integration in Gothic Buildings*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Buffalo, London, 1995.

[3] Willibald Sauerländer, *Integration: A Closed or Open Proposal?*, in V.C. Raguin, K. Brush, P. Draper (eds.), *Artistic Integration*, p. 9.

[4] Christian imagery has always been liable to fall victim to equivoque: "Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor any manner of likeness, of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth", Exodus, 20:3.

[5] Julian Gardner, *Altars, Altarpieces, and Art History: Legislation and Usage*, p. 5-19, in Eve Borsook, Fiorella Superbi Gioffredi (eds.), *Italian Altarpieces, 1250-1550. Function and Design*, Oxford, 1994.

[6] Paul Hills, *The Renaissance Altarpiece: A Valid Category?*, in Peter Humfrey, Martin Kemp (eds.), *The Altarpiece in the Renaissance*, Cambridge, 1990.

[7] A very useful overview is given by Beth Williamson, *Altarpieces, Liturgy and Devotion*, in *Speculum*, 79, 2004, p. 341-406.

[8] Henk van Os, *Sienese Altarpieces, 1215-1460. Form, Content, Function*, Medievalia Groningana, 4, 9, Groningen, 1984, 1990.

[9] Canon 1: "Jesus Christ is both priest and sacrifice, whose body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the species of bread and wine".

[10] See, for example, Miklós Boskovits, *Appunti per una storia della tavola d'altare: le origini*, in *Arte Cristiana*, LXXX, 1992, p. 422-438; Andrew Martindale, *Altarpieces in Italy during the 13th Century*, p. 37-45 and Paul Binski, *The 13th Century English Altarpiece*, p. 47-57, both in *Acta ad Archaeologiam et Artium Historiam Pertinentia*, Institutum Romanum Norvegiae, vol. XI, Rome, 1995.

[11] Barbara G. Lane, *The Altar and the Altarpiece. Sacramental Themes in Early Netherlandish Painting*, Icon Editions, New York, 1984.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 1.

[13] See, for example, Kees van der Ploug, *How Liturgical is a Medieval Altarpiece?*, in *Sudies in the History of Art*, 61, 2002, p. 102-121.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 115

[15] The classic work on altars is Joseph Braun, *Der Christliche Altar in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, vol. 1, 2, Munich, 1912, 1924. Relevant for the subject here is J. Gardner, *Altars....*

16 *Ibid*, p. 10.
17 Lynn F. Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces 1380-1550. Medieval Tastes and Mass Marketing*, Cambridge, 1998, p. 14.
18 Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, New Haven, 1980.
19 Beth Williamson, *op. cit.*, p. 363.
20 André Chastel, *La Pala ou le retable italien des origines à 1500*, Ed. Liana Levi, Paris, 1993 (2nd ed.)
21 Accused sometimes of "over-interpretation". See Charles Hope, *Altarpieces and the Requirements of Patrons*, p. 535-571, in Timothy Verdon & John Henderson (eds.), *Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento*, Syracuse, 1990.
22 The role played by the patron in the detailed iconography of the altarpieces is sometimes emphasized (Shirley Neilsen Blum, *Early Netherlandish Triptychs. A Study in Patronage*, University of California Press, 1969), sometimes neglected (Creighton E. Gilbert, *What Did the Renaissance Patron Buy?*, in Renaissance Quarterly, vol.51, no. 2, 1998, p. 392-450).
23 For devotional art, see Henk van Os & alii, *The Art of Devotion in the Late Middle Ages in Europe, 1300-1500*, Princeton University Press, 1994.
24 See James Marrow, *Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance: A Study of the Transformation of Sacred Metaphor into Descriptive Narrative*, Brussels, 1979.
25 This is one of the main arguments of Beth Williamson, *Altarpieces, Liturgy...*
26 Illustrative of this direction are: Franz Kohlschein, Peter Wünsche (eds.), *Heiliger Raum. Architektur, Kunst und Liturgie in mittelalterlichen Kathedralen und Stiftskirchen*, Münster, 1998; Nicolas Bock & *alii* (ed.), *Kunst und Liturgie im Mittelalter. Akten des internationalen Kongresses der Bibliotheca Herziana*, München, 2000; Nicolas Bock, Peter Kurmann, *Art, cérémonial et liturgie au Moyen Âge: actes du colloque de 3e Cycle Romand de Lettre*s, Roma, 2001; Anna Moraht-Fromm (ed.), *Kunst und Liturgie. Choranlagen des Spätmittelalters – ihre Architektur, Ausstattung und Nutzung*, Ostfildern, 2003.
27 On Italian choir screens a groundbreaking contribution was made by Marcia B. Hall, *The Ponte in S. Maria Novella: the Problem of the Rood Screen in Italy*, in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 37, 1974, 157-173; Eadem, *The Tramezzo in Santa Croce, Florence, Reconstructed*, in *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 56, 1974, 325-341.
28 A comprehensive synthesis of the subject is given by Monika Schmelzer, *Der mittelalterliche Lettner im deutschsprachigen Raum. Typologie und Funktion*, Petersberg, 2004.
29 Jacqueline E. Jung, *Beyond the Barrier: The Unifying Role of the Choir Screen in Gothic Churches*, in *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 82, 2000, p. 622-657.

30   See, L. F. Jacobs, *Early Netherlandish Carved Altarpieces..*, p. 8.

31   On this subject, see Roger E. Reynolds, *Liturgy and the Monument*, in V.C. Raguin, K. Brush, P. Draper (eds.), *Artistic Integration...*, p. 57-68.

32   Stational liturgy was a form of processional liturgy in the Early Middle Ages in which the bishop went from one church of the town to another in order to accomplish a full circuit during the liturgical year.

33   See Johannes Tripps, *Der Kinchenraum als Handlungsort für Bildwerke. "Handelnde" Altarfiguren und Hyperwandelbare Schnitzretabel*, in Nicolas Bock & alii, *Kunst und Liturgie...*, p. 235-247.

34   Annegret Laabs, *Das Retabel als "Schaufenster" zum Göttlichen Heil. Ein Beitrag zur Stellung des Fügelretabels im sakralen Zeremoniell des Kirchenjahres*, in *Magdeburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft*, 24, 1997, p. 71-86.

35   "Liturgical" is understood here not as restricted to canonical or general ordinances, which do not apply to the category of the altarpiece, but as a large class of ecclesiastic rituals and acts also implying the use of church furniture.

36   See, for example, Michał Woźniak, *Die spätmittelalterlichen Retabel der Johanniskirche in Thorn in ihrem liturgischen Raum*, in Hartmut Krohm, Uwe Albrecht, Matthias Weniger (eds.), *Malerei und Skulptur des späten Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit in Norddeutschland. Künstlerischer Austausch im Kulturraum zwischen Nordsee und Baltikum*, 2004, p. 181-192.

37   For an explanation of this circumscribed case of survival in a general framework often marked by iconoclasm, see Carl C. Christensen, *Iconoclasm and the Preservation of Ecclesiastical Art in Reformation Nuernberg* in *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 61, 2, 1970, p. 205-221.

38   Walter Haas, *Die mittelalterliche Altarordnung in der Nürenberger Lorenzkirche*, in Herbert Bauer, Gerhard Hirschmann, Georg Stolz (eds.), *500 Jahre Hallenchor St. Lorenz zu Nürnberg, 1477-1977*, Nürnberg, 1977, p. 63-108.

39   The number of altars was low if we consider the size of the church and the importance of the town. The situation might be explained by the absence of guilds and confraternities, which were not allowed to exist in Nuremberg.

40   W. Haas, *Die mittelalterliche Altarordnung....*; Peter Strieder, *Tafelmalerei in Nürnberg 1350-1550*, Königstein im Taunus, 1993.

41   Peter Strieder, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

42   Paul Crossley, *The Man from Inner Space: Architecture and Meditation in the Choir of St Laurence in Nuremberg*, in Gale R. Owen-Crocker, Timothy Graham (eds.), *Medieval Art: Recent Perspectives. A Memorial Tribute to C.R. Dodwell*, Manchester University Press, 1998, p. 165-182.

43   *Ibid.*, p. 166.

44   W. Haas, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

45   P. Crossley, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

46   This number represents my account. It should noted that this number also includes altarpieces with one single painted panel.

47   Those still in their original places include the altarpieces from *Băgaciu*, *Biertan*, *Hălchiu*, *Mălâncrav*, *Mediaș*, *Prejmer* and *Sebeș*.

48   The Romanians mostly followed Eastern Orthodoxy, which did not use altarpieces as liturgical items.

49   Maria Crăciun, *Iconoclasm and Theology in Reformation Transilvania: The Iconography of the Polyptych of the Church at Biertan*, in *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 95, 2004, p. 61-97.

50   This number refers to precise specification in the documents of the term *tabula*, i.e. altarpiece. My research is still provisional due to the unpublished sources mentioned.

51   The peak of this confusion is shown by Andrei Kertesz, *Altarele și sculptura* [*The Altars and the Sculpture*], in *800 de ani. Biserică a germanilor din Transilvania* [*800 Years. The German Church in Transylvania*], Thaur bei Innsbruck, 1991, p. 69 *sq.*

52   This is due to the more offensive nature of the sculpted "idols" from a Reformation perspective (though not only).

53   Victor Roth, *Siebenbürgische Altäre*, Strassburg, 1916; Balogh Jolán, *Az erdélyi renaissance*, vol. I, Cluj, 1943, p. 115-143; Radocsay Dénes, *A középkori Magyarország táblaképei*, Budapest, 1955, p. 178-190; Virgil Vătășianu, *Istoria artei feudale în țările române*, București, 1959, p. 745-753, 777-800; Radocsay Dénes, *A középkori Magyarország faszobrai*, Budapest, 1966; Andrei Kertesz, *op. cit.*; Gisela Richter, Otmar Richter, *Siebenbürgische Flügelaltäre*, Thaur bei Insbruck, 1992; Andrei Kertesz, *Pictura germanilor din sudul Transilvaniei până la 1800* [*The German Painting from Southern Transylvania until 1800*], Ph.D. Thesis (manuscript), Cluj-Napoca, 1998, p. 41-124.

54   Viorica Guy Marica, *Altarul de la Jimbor* [*The Altarpiece from Jimbor*], in *Studii și cercetări de istoria artei* [*Studies and Researches of Art History*], 18, 2, 1971, p. 203-222; Otto Folberth, *Gotik in Siebenbürgen. Der Meister des Mediascher Altars un seine Zeit*, Wien-München, 1973; Harald Krasser, *Zur siebenbürgischen Nachfolge des Schottenmeisters. Die Birthälmer Altartafeln*, in *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Kunst und Denkmalpflege*, XXVII, 1973, p. 109-121; Anamaria Haldner, *Aspecte locale ale altarului din Boian* [*Local Aspects of the Altarpiece from Boian*], in Studii și comunicări, Arheologie-Istorie, Muzeul Brukenthal, 18, 1974; Andrei Kertesz-Badrus, *Der Altar von Grossprobstdorf, ein Werk europäischer Spätgotik*, in *Forschungen zur Volks- und Landeskunde*, 2, 1980; Tereza Sinigalia, *Le retable de Biertan – nouvelles recherches*, in *Revue Roumaine de l'histoire de l'art*, XI, 1984, p.57-81 etc.

[55] Anca Gogâltan, *Patronage and Artistic Production in Transylvania. The Apafis and the Church in Mălâncrav, 14th-15th Centuries*, Ph.D. Thesis (manuscript), CEU Budapest, p. 150-155. Ciprian Firea, *Artă și patronaj artistic în Transilvania medievală – polipticul din Sibiu* [*Art and Patronage in Medieval Transylvania*], in *Ars Transsilvaniae*, XII-XIII, 2002-2003, p. 123-138.

[56] Maria Crăciun, *Eucharistic Devotion in the Iconography of Transylvanian Polyptych Altarpieces*, in José Pedro Paiva (ed.), *Religious Ceremonials and Images: Power and Social Meaning (1400-1700)*, Coimbra, 2002, p. 191-230.

[57] Mihaela Sanda Salontai, *Mănăstiri dominicane din Transilvania* [*Dominican Convents in Transylvania*], Cluj-Napoca, 2002, p. 228-259.

[58] Karl Fabritius, *Zwei Funde in der ehemaligen Dominikanerkirche zu Schäßburg*, in *Archiv des Vereins für siebenbürgische Landeskunde*, V, 1861, p. 1-40.

[59] *Ibid*, p. 4

[60] This means strict observation of the original rule.

[61] Required already by the general Dominican Chapter in Trier, 1249. See Richard A. Sundt, *"Mediocres domos et humiles habeant fratres nostri:" Dominican Legislation on Architecture and Architectural Decoration in the 13th Century*, in *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 46, 4, 1987, p. 406.

[62] V. Roth, *op. cit.*, p. 90-92; D. Radocsay, *Tábláképei...*, p. 421-422; V. Vătășianu, *op. cit.*, p. 795-796; G. Richter, O. Richter, *op. cit.*, p. 165-169; A. Kertesz, *Pictura...*, p. 104-106.

[63] Scholars believed that the beast next to the saint was a hound, namely the symbol of the Dominicans (*domini canes* = God's dogs); however, closer examination might indicate it to be a deer, a symbol of St. Egidius.

[64] The best monograph is Ludwig Reissenberger, *Die evangelishe Pfarrkirche A.B. in Hermannstadt*, Hermanstadt, 1884.

[65] Karl Henrich, *Altäre in der Hermannstädter Pfarrkirche vor der Reformation*, in *Korrespondenzblatt des Vereins für siebenburgische Landeskunde*, 23, 1910, p. 63-64.

[66] A. Kertesz, *800 de ani...*, p. 69.

[67] *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen*, V, no. 2634.

[68] Attested in 1372 and constructed by the Confraternity Corpus Christi. See Gustav Seivert, *Die Brüderschaft des heiligen Leichnams in Hermannstadt*, in *Archiv des Vereins für siebenbürgische Landeskunde*, 10, 1872, p. 314-360.

[69] Founded by the same Confraternity in 1372.

[70] All recorded in a contract between the town council and the priest regarding the principal and festive offices (*Urkundenbuch...*, IV, no. 2147.

71   Attested in 1469.

72   Or of Loreto. Attested in 1485.

73   Attested by a lost inscription.

74   It is significant that another *Corpus Christi* altar, this time in the parish church at Brașov, had a similar placement *super lectorio*. See *Urkundenbuch*, V, no. 2761.

75   Ioan Albu, *Inschriften der Stadt Hermannstadt aus dem Mittelalter und der frühen Neuzeit*, Sibiu, 2002, p. 44.

76   In my opinion the canopy and the so-called pulpit were not originally related.

77   I suggest that the still existing *Pietà*, an exquisite sculpted work from around 1400, is related to the same altar. See Ciprian Firea, *Pietà cibiniensis*, in *Artă românească, artă europeană. Centenar Virgil Vătășianu* [*Romanian Art, European Art. The Virgil Vătășianu Centennial*], Oradea, 2002, p. 69-78.

78   L. Reissenberger, *op. cit.*, p. 45-46; V. Roth, *op. cit.*, p. 154-158; D. Radocsay, *Táblaképei...*, p. 405-406; V. Vătășianu, *op. cit.*, p. 800; Hermann Fabini, *Gotik in Hermannstadt*, Böhlau Verlag, Köln Wien, 1989, p. 210-211; G. Richter, O. Richter, *op. cit.*, p. 224-229; A. Kertesz, *Pictura germanilor...*, p.115-117; I. Albu, *op. cit.*, p. 35-37; Ciprian Firea, *Artă și patronaj...*, p. 123-138.

79   Rainer Kahsnitz, *Die großen Schnitzaltäre. Spätgotik in Süddeutschland, Österreich, Südtirol*, Hirmer Verlag, München, 2005.

80   See, Dušan Buran (ed.), *Gotika. Dejiny slovenského vytvarného umenia* [*The Gothic. The History of Slovak Fine Arts*], Bratislava, 2003.

81   L. Reissenberger, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

82   V. Roth, *op. cit.*, p. 99-106; D. Radocsay, *Táblaképei...*, p. 277-279; V. Vătășianu, *op. cit.*, p. 789-790; Harald Krasser, *Zur siebenbürgischen Nachfolge des Schottenmeisters. Die Birthälmer Altartafeln*, in *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Kunst und Denkmalpflege*, XXVII, 1973, p. 109-121; Tereza Sinigalia, *Le retable de Biertan – nouvelles recherches*, in *Revue Roumaine de l'histoire de l'art*, XI, 1984, p.57-81; G. Richter, O. Richter, *op. cit.*, p. 58-82; A. Kertesz, *op. cit.*, p. 76-80; Maria Crăciun, *Iconoclasm and Theology in Reformation Transylvania: The Iconography of the Polyptych of the Church at Biertan*, in *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 95, 2004, p. 61-97.

83   This fact led Maria Crăciun to posit a Lutheran intervention on this specific panel (see M. Crăciun, *Iconoclasm and Theology...*). I do not agree with the proposed scenario, appealing as it may be, because of the very clear stylistic connection between the panels of the corpus. A painting made 60-70 years later would look very different. This difference is clear in paintings from 1483 and paintings from 1515.

84   H. Krasser, *op. cit.*