

**THE PAULINE CHURCH OF SASVÁR
AND THE CULT OF THE MIRACULOUS STATUE IN THE 18TH CENTURY**

Abstract of the (PhD) dissertation

Sasvár (Šaštín, Slovakia) was one of the most important pilgrimage shrines of Hungary and the entire Habsburg monarchy in the 18th century, the intensity of its cult can be compared to that of Mariazell and Marianka in the neighbourhood of Bratislava. The archbishop of Esztergom, Imre Esterházy, as well as Queen Maria Theresia and Emperor Franz von Lothringen strongly supported the pilgrimage church of the Virgin of Sorrows, maintained by the Pauline order. The archbishop and the royal couple frequently visited the pilgrimage shrine, and gave significant donations, whereas first rank artists of the Vienna court carried out the interior decoration of the church in the 1750s and 1770s. In the 18th and 19th centuries thousands of Moravian, Slovak, Austrian and Hungarian pilgrims made pilgrimage to Šaštín, situated in the centre of the Habsburg monarchy, 60 km from Bratislava and 70 km from Vienna, and by that the pilgrimage shrine gained imperial significance.

The thesis discusses the complex history of the pilgrimage shrine during the 18th century, including its historical and art historical aspects and also the different phenomena related to the cult of the miraculous statue in Hungary in the baroque age.

The first chapter of the dissertation analyses the iconographic type of the Pietà statue, dated to the 16th century by tradition, then the beginning of the cult from 1732 and the early history of the pilgrimage shrine, including the circumstances of the settlement of the Pauline monks in Sasvár.

The next chapter discusses the career of the architect of the church, the Trnava born Pauline monk, Máté Vépi (1710–1747) and provides an architectural analysis of the building, with special emphasis on the similarities to the Roman Jesuit church Gesù and other monuments of the Italian Jesuit architecture of the early baroque period. The architectural analysis illuminates the Jesuit orientation of the architect, who studied theology by the Jesuits in Rome in 1732–36. The circumstances of his training as an architect in Rome are unknown, but the formal elements of the ground plan, facade and interior elevation of the Sasvár church display close links to the Jesuit architectural traditions.

The following chapters deal with the interior decoration of the church: the frescos, side altars, high altar and imperial oratory in the sanctuary.

The ceiling of the sanctuary, the nave and the six side-chapels are decorated with frescos, dated to 1757 by the signature of the Vienna court painter, Jean-Joseph Chamant. The iconographic program of the fresco cycle represents the principal ideas of the catholic dogma of salvation: the glory of God father is represented on the mural over the sanctuary, then the Triumph of the Holy Cross and Veron-

ica's Veil follow in the nave. The third section of the vaulting is decorated by an illusionistic dome, followed by the allegory of the Church (Eucharist) and Angels playing music over the organ choir. On the base of the non-historic, allegorical character of the murals and the lack of Pauline references we suppose, that the concept of the iconographic program was invented probably not by the Pauline monks, but rather by the artist responsible for the figural compositions, Josef Ignaz Mildorfer.

Jean-Joseph Chamant must have been only the main entrepreneur of the commission, who had worked with several assistants. On stylistic base the figural compositions can be attributed to Josef Ignaz Mildorfer, student of Paul Troger and professor at the Vienna Art Academy in the 1750's. The earlier hypotheses concerning the contribution of Johann Lucas Kracker as a second figural painter in the frescos of the nave does not seem plausible, while some of the murals of the side-chapels can be attributed to him.

Kracker was commissioned by the Pauline monks to paint two altar paintings. These paintings, signed and dated by Kracker to 1757, hang in the two central side chapels, dedicated to Saint Paul the Hermit, and Saint John of Nepomuk. The altar painting of the third chapel to the left, dedicated to Saint Joseph, was made by Mildorfer in 1764, and represents the Holy Family. The authors of the two further baroque altar paintings, representing the Education of the Virgin (1772) and Archangel Raphael with Tobias (c. 1770) are unknown.

The high altar was commissioned by Queen Maria Theresa in 1762, and designed by the court architect Niccolaus Paccassi. The ceremonial *trnaslantio* of the miraculous statue took place on 15. August 1762, when the Pietà was placed on the new high altar. Nevertheless, the Queen disliked the high altar, therefore in 1770 she commissioned the Vienna court architect, Franz Anton Hillebrandt to reshape the altar. Hillebrandt set the miraculous statue in a typical baroque *thetrum sacrum* scenario, emphasised by a large, green stucco curtain.

The second part of the dissertation discusses the different socio-cultural layers of the cult. In chronological order the first most important sponsor of the pilgrimage shrine was Imre Esterházy, archbishop of Esztergom, earlier Pauline monk, who donated 7.500 fl to support the construction of the church in 1737–44. After the archbishop's death in 1745 the royal couple became the main supporters of the pilgrimage shrine, that they visited frequently from 1740 to 1765. These visits and their donations were not merely pious acts, but also served their political representation. The dynastic tradition of pilgrimage by the Habsburgs and the role of pilgrimage shrines in the representation of power is examined in a separate chapter of the dissertation.

The last chapters outline the broader context of the cult, and analyse the role of the Pauline order and middle-class aristocracy in supporting and diffusing the cult of the pilgrimage shrine of Šaštín in the 18th century. Some of the most This survey includes different genres such as devotional prints (*Andachtsbild*), devotional copies of the statue, books of miracles of the Virgin of Šaštín, or popular prints containing prayers and religious songs dedicated to the Virgin of Šaštín.