

**BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY, CLUJ-NAPOCA
FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY**

Ph.D. Candidate
CIPRIAN FIREA

**THE ART OF MEDIEVAL TRANSYLVANIAN
ALTARPIECES (1450-1550)**

**Ph. D. Thesis
Abstract**

Scientific Supervisor
MARIUS PORUMB
Member of the Romanian Academy

2010

Summary

First Volume

INTRODUCTION	p. 3
The European altarpiece. Methodological approaches	p. 6
What is an altarpiece?.....	p. 6
The altar and the altarpiece.....	p. 7
The altarpiece and the liturgy. The genesis of the class.....	p. 13
The liturgical and the artistic patronage.....	p. 20
The medieval Transylvanian altarpieces. Generalities	p. 24
Boundaries and limits.....	p. 24
The repertory. Quantitative evaluations.....	p. 26
The provenance of preserved altarpieces.....	p. 27
The dating.....	p. 28
The “dimensions” of the art. The character of the sources.....	p. 28
Case studies: the Dominican convents of Sighișoara and Cluj	
The losses.....	p. 33
The historiography concerning the Transylvanian altarpieces	p. 35
The medieval Transylvanian altarpieces: structure, terminology, typologies	p. 62
The iconography	p. 67
Medieval art and liturgy: St Mary church in Sibiu	p. 75
The altarpieces and their patrons	p. 82
The art and the production of altarpieces in medieval Transylvania	p. 89
The craftsmen.....	p. 89
The craft and the guild.....	p. 92
The social status of the artists.....	p. 94
The workshop.....	p. 96
The graphic models.....	p. 98
A history of the panel painting in Transylvania. Stylistic guidelines.....	p. 110
Final considerations	p. 121
BIBLIOGRAPHY	p. 125
ANNEXES	
Transylvanian artists. Painters and Carvers	p. 140
The statutes of the artistic guilds	p. 188
Chronology of the altarpieces	p. 197
Graphic sources	p. 200

Second Volume

CONVENTIONS.....	p. 5
I. Altarpieces attested in medieval written sources.....	p. 9
II. Preserved altarpieces.....	p. 21
The <i>St Mary</i> altarpiece from Armășeni (➤ Armășeni).....	p. 22
The altarpiece of <i>St Mary between St Catherine and St Magdalene</i> in Băgaciu (➤ Băgaciu).....	p. 31
The <i>St Ursula</i> altarpiece from Beia (➤ Beia).....	p. 40
The <i>St Mary</i> altarpiece in Biertan (➤ Biertan 1).....	p. 47
Fragments of an altarpiece in Biertan (➤ Biertan 2).....	p. 66
The <i>St Mary</i> altarpiece from Boian (➤ Boian).....	p. 70
The altarpiece of <i>St. Nicholas</i> from Bruiu (➤ Bruiu).....	p. 77
The altarpiece of <i>The Coronation of the Virgin</i> from Călățele (➤ Călățele 1).....	p. 84
Wing of an altarpiece from Călățele (➤ Călățele 2).....	p. 88
The altarpiece of <i>St Mary</i> in Cetățuia (➤ Cetățuia).....	p. 90
The <i>Vir dolorum</i> predella in Cincu (➤ Cincu).....	p. 94
The altarpiece of <i>St Mary between Sts. Peter and Paul</i> from Cioboteni (➤ Cioboteni 1).....	p. 97
The altarpiece of <i>St. Mary</i> from Cioboteni (➤ Cioboteni 2).....	p. 106
Fragments of <i>St John the Baptist's</i> altarpiece from Cîsnădie (➤ Cîsnădie).....	p. 111
Wings of an altarpiece from Cluj (➤ Cluj).....	p. 118
The crowning with <i>The Resurrection</i> from Cozmeni (➤ Cozmeni).....	p. 123
The altarpiece of <i>St Nicholas</i> from Cund (➤ Cund).....	p. 125
The altarpiece of the <i>Eucharist</i> from Dupuș (➤ Dupuș 1).....	p. 131
The <i>Lamentation</i> predella from Dupuș (➤ Dupuș 2).....	p. 142
The altarpiece of <i>St Mary</i> from Feldioara (➤ Feldioara).....	p. 146
The altarpiece of <i>St Martin</i> from Fișer (➤ Fișer).....	p. 152
Fragment of a wing from Florești (➤ Florești).....	p. 162
The altarpiece of <i>The Saints Apostles</i> in Hălchiu (➤ Hălchiu).....	p. 166
Wing of a diptych with <i>Mater dolorosa</i> from Hunedoara (➤ Hunedoara).....	p. 176
The altarpiece of <i>St Mary and other Saints</i> from Jidvei (➤ Jidvei).....	p. 180
The altarpiece of <i>St Mary</i> from Jimbor (➤ Jimbor).....	p. 190
The altarpiece of <i>The Holy Ghost</i> from Leliceni (➤ Leliceni).....	p. 199
Fragment of a wing with <i>The Birth of the Virgin</i> from Lipova (➤ Lipova).....	p. 207
The altarpiece of <i>St Mary</i> in Mălâncrav (➤ Mălâncrav).....	p. 210
The wing with <i>Visions</i> from Mănăstirea (➤ Mănăstirea).....	p. 219
The <i>Passion</i> altarpiece in Mediaș (➤ Mediaș 1).....	p. 224
The <i>Last Supper</i> predella in Mediaș (➤ Mediaș 2).....	p. 234

The altarpiece of <i>St. Thomas</i> from Moşna (➤ Moşna).....	p. 239
The central panel with <i>Hermit Saints</i> from Movile (➤ Movile).....	p. 245
The altarpiece of <i>The Holy Cross</i> in Prejmer (➤ Prejmer).....	p. 249
The altarpiece from Richiş (➤ Richiş 1).....	p. 254
Fragment of the frame belonging to a central panel from Richis (➤ Richiş 2).....	p. 264
The altarpiece of <i>Sts John the Baptist and the Evangelist</i> from Rodeş (➤ Rodeş).....	p. 266
The central panel with <i>The Coronation of the Virgin</i> from Sândominic (➤ Sândominic 1).....	p. 275
Wing of an altarpiece with <i>The Annunciation</i> from Sândominic (➤ Sândominic 2).....	p. 280
The altarpiece of <i>St Mary</i> from Sântimbru (➤ Sântimbru).....	p. 282
The <i>St Mary</i> altarpiece in Sebeş (➤ Sebeş).....	p. 287
The <i>Passion</i> altarpiece in Sibiu (➤ Sibiu 1).....	p. 299
The <i>Vir dolorum</i> central panel from Sibiu (➤ Sibiu 2).....	p. 311
The central panel with <i>Christ between Apostles</i> in Sibiu (➤ Sibiu 3).....	p. 316
Wing of an altarpiece with <i>Saints</i> from Sibiu (➤ Sibiu 4).....	p. 319
Wings with <i>Passion</i> scenes from Sibiu (➤ Sibiu 5).....	p. 322
Panels with <i>Virgines Capiales</i> from Sibiu (➤ Sibiu 6).....	p. 327
Panel of an altarpiece with <i>The Martyrdom of St Barbara</i> from Sibiu (➤ Sibiu 7).....	p. 330
Predella with <i>The Resurrected Christ appearing to His Mother</i> from Sibiu (➤ Sibiu 8).....	p. 333
Predella with <i>The Dead of the Virgin</i> from Sibiu (➤ Sibiu 9).....	p. 336
The altarpiece of <i>Sts Martin, Gilles and other Saints</i> from Sighişoara (➤ Sighişoara).....	p. 338
Predella with <i>The Passions of Christ</i> from Şaeş (➤ Şaeş 1).....	p. 350
The altarpiece of <i>The Holy Kindred</i> from Şaeş (➤ Şaeş 2).....	p. 356
The <i>St Mary</i> altarpiece from Şmig (➤ Şmig).....	p. 364
The <i>Incarnation and Passion</i> altarpiece from Şoroştin (➤ Şoroştin).....	p. 370
Fragment of wing with <i>Saints</i> from Târgu-Mureş (➤ Târgu Mureş).....	p. 376
The <i>St Mary</i> altarpiece from Târnavă (➤ Târnavă).....	p. 379
The triptych of <i>St Anne</i> from Vlaha (➤ Vlaha).....	p. 387
III. Altarpieces attested in modern sources and latter lost.....	p. 392
Panel with <i>The Annunciation</i> from Prejmer < Prejmer >.....	p. 393
The altarpiece with <i>Holy Women</i> from Sântimbru < Sântimbru >.....	p. 395

Key words: medieval art and liturgy, altarpiece, polyptych, altar, church furnishing, panel painting, artistic patronage, artists of the Gothic and Renaissance, engraving, woodcut.

The 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, 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 the 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 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 Ph.D. thesis represents an attempt to approach medieval and Renaissance images not only from the point of view of the evolution of artistic forms, but by considering them in their original context. The *context* means here the liturgy, the architectural setting, the public, the social milieu which intended and financed images and, of course, the artists themselves. 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 space of Catholic churches and chapels, visually highlighting the “presence” of the divine in liturgical spaces centered around altars.

The corpus of survived medieval Transylvanian retables is yet to be published in its entirety. The **Second volume** of the present thesis provides the most complete catalogue with its 59 altarpieces and fragments treated as monographs. Each piece is considered from the point of view of its origin (the exact original emplacement), iconography, patronage, attribution and artistic connections. The volume contains also a number of altarpieces (30) attested by medieval written sources and other documented by modern information but meantime disappeared. With its 91 entries, the volume represents the most comprehensive repertory of medieval and Renaissance Transylvanian altarpieces.

The **First volume** intends to offer a synthesis of the subject. In the first instance it makes a necessary overview of the main methodological approaches attempted in Western literature, highlighting the most important contributions to the knowledge of the altarpiece as a “class” of artistic and liturgical objects. The altarpiece as a category has lately become a “fashionable” topic of study. The assertion alludes to the important scholarly research into both the altarpiece as a class *sui generis* and regional or limited material. Although the view that the altarpiece is a “valid category” is in many ways problematic, it nonetheless gave rise to a fair number of new perspectives on medieval art.

A second section of the thesis focuses on the generalities concerning Transylvanian altarpieces. It considers the material of the Repertory, dating back from ca. 1450-1550, and interrogates on how the sources, both visual and written, reflect the original “dimensions” of this kind of art. The analysis of some case studies led to the conclusion that the most part of the original repertory is now lost.

An important chapter of the thesis is dedicated to the historiography dealing with Transylvanian medieval altarpieces. The literature, consisting both of syntheses and monographic studies, 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, or to emphasize devotional trends, and even fewer focus on their liturgical implications and functions. The analysis of the literature leads to the conclusion that a new approach became necessary.

The next chapters in the thesis represent in depth analyses of the typologies of Transylvanian altarpieces (including their structure and specific terminology), the overview of the iconography, the attempt to reintegrate the preserved examples in the original liturgical matrix of churches, the investigation of the patronage and finally the reconstruction of the artistic milieu.

The annexes of the volume include the most extensive catalogue of artists, painters and carvers, active in Transylvania between ca. 1430-1560. Another important section is dedicated to the identification of visual models (mainly engravings and woodcuts) which local artists used in the production of images.