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Panel painting in and for Transylvania during the 1480s: the Mediaș Altarpiece.

"Templum Mediensium majus in honorem sanctae Mariae virginis aedificatum seculo XV, perfectum anno 1488, ut chronologicae notae innuunt" wrote Georg Soterius in the eighteenth century in his Transylvanian chronicle about the parish church in Mediaș (Medgyes, Mediaș).¹ At this point (1488) the winged retable very probably already stood in the church, or in any case it had surely been commissioned. (Fig. 1) The enlargement or reconstruction of the earlier parish church during the second half, final decades of the fifteenth century can almost be considered a general phenomenon in large Saxon localities. A similar undertaking took place in these years in Biertan (Berethalom, BIRTHÄLM), in Sighișoara (Segesvár, Schässburg), but also in a series of rich surrounding villages. It is the large works of reconstruction that indicate the flourishing economic situation of Mediaș in the second half of the fifteenth century, but we also know of other data mirroring the on-going active commercial, economic, cultural and ecclesiastical life here at this time (Theil, 1873; Werner, 1874.). Mediaș was not only the center of the administrative region, the *sedes* Mediasch, which brought together a group of eighteen communities, but also an ecclesiastical focal point and the center of the Mediaș chapter. As such it belonged to the diocese of the Alba Iulia (Gyulafehérvár, Weissenburg) Chapter instead of the provostship of Sibiu (Szeben, Hermannstadt). The written sources show that its deacon played a fairly important role among the Saxon deacons.²

It is in these last decades of the century that the reconstruction of the parish church has approached its end and the high altar must have been given into commission. In order to get closer to the circumstances under which it was commissioned and produced a thorough analysis of the retable is necessary to provide a plausible answer also to the question of whether the panels were imported or painted in Transylvania. Although it has become a commonplace that

¹ Georgius Soterius, *Historia Transsilvaniae*, Manuscript no. 1095, referred to by Werner, 1872. The reference to the dedication of the church to the Holy Virgin is clearly a mistake made by the chronicler.

² It was mentioned several times as "*Decanus generalis*" and even in the period when this notion was not yet used, he figured in the very first place in an enumeration of the deacons. See: Salzer, 1883: 22, 27.

the Mediaș altarpiece belongs to the stylistic circle of the Schottenmaster, neither the nature of the dependency between the two altarpieces and thus the two masters is known, nor has the relationship of this altarpiece to the other large Transylvanian altarpiece from the same stylistic circle, the retable of Biertan, been studied. All the authors who have dealt with the topic only took the Mediaș panel representing the Crucifixion into consideration, as creating a connection to the Schottenretable and its circle.³

The decoration of the generally more sumptuous "*Festtagseite*" of the retable has been completely destroyed. (Fig. 2) Based on the traces on the shrine-background – to be seen on an archive-photo (Fig. 3) – there were three carved individual figures standing in the central shrine although there is no information on their identity.⁴ Similarly, the imprints on the predella-shrine suggest that four standing figures, perhaps those of the evangelists or the Church Fathers had decorated this part of the altarpiece. The sculpted decoration that can be seen in the central shrine today was carved and placed here after the restoration of the altarpiece during the seventies in Brașov (Brassó, Kronstadt). There is absolutely no extant information on the themes of the reliefs that once covered the inner sides of the wings. The four evangelist symbols on the wings, originally belonging to the four endings of a Crucifix, (although more or less contemporary with the altarpiece) were obviously placed there at a later time, after the loss or removal of the original carved decoration. (The most general use of arrangement would suggest that the four scenes of the Virgin's Life: the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Birth and the Adoration of the Magi could have stood here.) Thus, only the paintings of the outer side can be considered when examining the relationship of the Mediaș retable with the Viennese one. It has already been pointed out in earlier literature (Priebitsch, 1979.), that seven of the scenes follow the compositions of Israhel van Meckenem's Larger Passion (Bartsch, 10-21; Lehrs 142-153). It is precisely the *Crucifixion* scene referred to above as considered to be the main link towards the workshop of the Schottenmaster that was composed of different elements – missing in the form of an individual representation from Meckenem's Passion cycle. (Fig. 4) The painter did obviously not dare to adhere to Mackenem's innovative method of representing the main

³ Literature dealing with the Mediaș altarpiece so far:

Werner, 1872; Roth, 1907: 193-206; Roth, 1916: 36-56 ; Juraschek, 1930: 45-46; Streitfeld, 1930: 52-53; Otto Folberth, 1973; Fabini, 1979: 6; Priebitsch, 1979: 116-121; Fabini, 1985: 76-79; Nägler, ed., 1991: 78; Richter, 1992: 91-104.

⁴ Taken into consideration that the church was dedicated to Saint Margaret, it can be supposed that one of the figures, perhaps the central or the left-side one was the martyr with the dragon at her feet.

scene of the *Crucifixion* pushed into the background of another episode.⁵ Thus, the representation was compiled from several motifs taken partly from prints of Schongauer and partly from a pattern-collection, as we will see, connected to the Schotten-environment. The most striking detail, unquestionably recalling *Crucifixion* representations from the circle of the Schottenmaster, is the couple comprising Pilate and the centurion. The gestures of these two persons are represented in a very similar way on the *Crucifixion* panel of the Schottenaltar as well as on the central panel of the Tryptich from Sankt Florian, and also on other representations belonging to the same stylistic direction. The figure of the Saviour, his head bent onto his right shoulder, his hands with the fingers convulsively closed and the overall character of the body refer to the same artistic circle, in spite of the fact that the influence of one of Schongauer's *Crucifixions* is also unquestionable in Mediaş. (Bartsch .011 S1, S2, C6, C13) (Fig. 5) (not only in the figure of Christ, in the endings of his loin cloth but also in the figure of the woman in red, lifting her hand to her cheek.) The figures of the Virgin, the kneeling Mary Magdalene and the woman clad in blue on the edge of the image present close relation to another print of Schongauer: they are all adopted from leaf B 17. (Fig. 6) The figure of Johannes seems to be an individual invention of the Mediaş-master, it does not appear either on the Schottenpanel or in Schongauer's work in this form. Although his clothing, the folds of his robe recall the Johannes-figure from the Schottenretable, the Evangelist was clearly not copied. The vedute-motif in the background, usually identified with Vienna, is not present on the *Crucifixion* scene of the Schottenretable, but it occurs on other panels of the Viennese altarpiece and is also quite characteristic for backgrounds of several paintings belonging to the same circle, like the central panel of the Sankt Florian triptych (although naturally in a different form).⁶ All in all, the panel indeed shows the closest connection of all the Mediaş panels to the workshop of the Schottenmaster.

The rest of the cycle is closely inspired by the previously mentioned series by Israhel van Meckenem. The scene of the *Betrayal* very closely follows the corresponding print. (Figs. 7-8.) It is only the face-types and the clothing of certain figures that has been changed. It appears that our master took special joy in

⁵ Meckenem used this method both for the "Washing of the feet" scene, where the Last Supper was shifted to the background and the "Resting Christ" scene where the Crucifixion was represented as a secondary event in the background.

⁶ As already mentioned, the identification of the vedute with Vienna has contributed to the inclusion of the Mediaş altarpiece's master into the category of the Schottenmaster-followers. Although several researchers have identified various Viennese constructions on this representation, it has also been pointed out that the depiction is far from being topographically correct - it only presents presumably Viennese buildings in a random arrangement. See: Opll, 1999

depicting several types of head-dresses.⁷ The scene of the *Flagellation* again displays only small differences relative to the print, these are all details taken from other sources. (Fig. 9-10) The figure of the summoner dressed all in red, lifting his whip with his right hand was unquestionably borrowed from an etching by Schongauer (Bartsch 12). The remainder as well as the general architecture in the scene was taken from Meckenem, and even the background events, depicting happenings preceding the episode in the foreground in the course of the narration, are consistently present on the *Medias* panels. This feature was not even invented by Meckenem, but derived from Netherlandish works known to him. The two persons assisting at the Flagellation on the left side, are a permanent motif, since they recur in several scenes of the retable and can be identified as Pilate and one of the High Priests. That the painter's hand recognizable on this image was still rather unpracticed, perhaps that of an apprentice who needed to hang on the model employed, is suggested by the figure of Pilate, represented frontally, while the position of his feet obviously shows that a pattern from a back-side figure (probably that from the following *Crowning with thorns* scene) was used here. The *Crowning with thorns* reflects the same tendency with the etching followed precisely, with only minor borrowings from other works. (Fig. 11-12) The figure of the man kneeling in front of Christ, mocking him by handing over a simple staff alluding to a sceptre is a mirror image of a detail borrowed from Schongauer's print. (Bartsch 13) The two persons standing in the lower left corner of the image witnessing the event are slightly changed in order to resemble the above-mentioned figures of Pilate and his mate who accompany most of the scenes. The motif on the golden-black brocade mantle of Pilate is reserved for his person on this retable but the pattern itself is met over and over in the environment and among the sources of the Schottenmaster.⁸ The scene of the *Ecce Homo* again displays only the smallest deviations from the original print. (Fig.13-14) However, these differences are quite outstanding. The painter again demonstrated his predilection for depicting several types of special head-dresses. One of the most striking head-dresses on the panel – clearly different from the one used on the graphic source, is the tall white fur cap, a piece of clothing that was very fashionable in the “cloak-room” of the Schotten-circle and I have found no example of it on panels not related to the Viennese master.⁹ The gesture of

⁷ Just as typical in the surroundings of the Schottenmaster, as pointed out several times by Robert Suckale.

⁸ See the pattern in: von Pfeil, 1995. Called in her catalogue “Muster 2”, listed there as present in painted form and as a Pressbrokat on a number of retables from the circle in point: Bamberg – Klarenretable, Michael Wolgemut – Epitaph of Anna Gross, Hans Pleydenwurff – Hofer Retabel, Dreikönigretabel etc.

⁹ Similar head-dresses can be observed on the *Ecce Homo* scene of the Schottenretable as well as on the representation of the Martyrdom of Saint Ursula from Lilienfeld, today held in the Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, in Vienna. (Depicted in Baum, 1971: fig. 126.)

the crossed fingers that can be observed in the crowd, symbolizing the cry of the people: "Crucify him!", is also a motif known from the corresponding panel on the Viennese altar. The woman-figure in the background also leads our thoughts in the direction of this same environment. The woman, probably Pilate's wife, was represented while relating her dream to her husband. She is shown in a costume well known in panel paintings from the stylistic circle of the Schottenworkshop.

The following three panels from the lower panel-row of the retable are obviously of a much higher quality in their drawing, in their depiction of the details, the painting of the faces than the other panels. The scene of the *Bearing the Cross* is a "word-by-word" copy of the Meckenem-print. (Fig 15-16) Slight differences can be found mainly in the lower right-hand corner of the composition. The soldier pulling Christ's hair on the etching and holding the bar of the cross with his right hand was seriously modified on the panel. His gestures reflect the painter's knowledge of other important sources besides the etching series. The soldier pulls with his right hand an end of the rope tied around Christ's waist and is preparing to hit the suffering Christ with it. His left foot steps on the knee of the Saviour instead of the elegant, almost affected step observable on Meckenem's image. Although on the underdrawing, both legs of the soldier had been conceived according to the Meckenem-model, the motif was changed during the painting as can easily be seen not only on infrared-photographs but actually also with naked eye. The gesture of treading on the suffering Christ can be found on several panels and several scenes in Passion-cycles¹⁰ and quite often on works related to the Katzheimer workshop in Bamberg. Katzheimer and his followers are known for having used a number of prints by Meckenem as graphic source for their panels. The motive can also be found on Netherlandish panels¹¹ that are considered to have been influenced by the same conception as the work of Israhel. (Riether, 2006: 221.) The back-figure in the corner has suffered another small modification, and the pair of women represented in Meckenem's image standing behind the cross is also modified on the panel. Next to the nursing woman, Veronica with the *Vera Icon* in her hands completes the

¹⁰ On a *Flagellation* scene of the Master from Hersbruck (around 1490), depicted in Stange, 1934 -1961, Vol 9: Fig. 206, as well as a *Flagellation* of the Katzheimer workshop (Stange, 1934 -1961, Vol. 9: Fig. 216), and a later book illustration of the *Bearing the Cross* of Master IS from 1516. (Depicted in Lüdke ed., 2001, Fig. 222) A scene of the *Bearing the Cross* and of the *Flagellation*, from the Lendenstreich workshop and kept in the Castle of Landsberg are compositionally also quite close to the corresponding Meckenem leaves and we encounter the same gesture of Christ being trod in the *Flagellation*-scene. (Stange, 1934 -1961, Vol. 9: Figs. 280-281)

¹¹ on a *Bearing of the Cross* panel dated to around 1495, of the Master *Virgo inter Virgines*, working in Delft.; preserved in: Barnard Castle, Bowes Museum. Inv. No. 168. Reproduced in: Riether ed, 2006: 221.

Mediaş panel.¹² The rest of the image, the background scenery, the details of the architecture and the group of John, the Virgin and the three Marys are in essence copied from the print.

(**Fig. 17-18**) With the representation of the *Man of Sorrows Resting*, an “*Andachtsbild*”, a typical devotional image was introduced into the narrative of the retable. The composition of the event in the foreground follows the etching by Israhel although the proportions were modified. Thus, the devotional character of the image increases in importance. The architecture was considerably modified, composed of elements again resembling Viennese buildings. The vividly gesticulating couple in discussion on the left edge of the panel, already known from the previous panels as Pilate and the High Priest, are also faces met in the stylistic environment of the Schotten-workshop.¹³

After the already discussed representation of the *Crucifixion*, the scene of the *Resurrection* closes the cycle. At first sight the composition follows the etching again in a servile way. (**Fig. 19-20**) However, a more thorough look at the panel shows that the painter has again made use of the corresponding print by Schongauer as well. (Bartsch 20 [127]) (**Fig. 21**) The figure of Christ, the ductus and the folds of his mantle, the loin cloth as well as the character of the sarcophagus’ lid clearly point to the fact that the Mediaş master knew about Schongauer’s print. The relationship between the foreground and background was again changed with the main motif in the representation occupying a larger surface.

Because they have been in overpainted state for centuries probably, and were revealed only during the restoration in the Braşov workshop of Gisela Richter, the paintings of the predella have been omitted from the analyses of most researchers. It was only Otto Folberth who, in his discussion of the representations, shortly gave as his opinion that they could not have been works of the same master who was responsible for the retable itself. (Folberth, 1973: 92.) After careful observation of the paintings it seems very likely that not only were both figures produced in the same workshop but they were the works of the main master himself. The fact that both donors were overpainted as well as the cleaning procedure affected the quality of their preservation to a certain extent. (Mihály, 2007: 57.) (**Fig. 22 -23**) However, it is still clear that both figures were drawn by a sure, practiced hand. The left-side man,

¹² Veronica is present on Schongauer’s representation of the scene (Bartsch 16 (126)) but in a completely different way. The figure depicted on the Transylvanian panel more closely resembles the position of Veronica on Schongauer’s etching (also copied in a reverse version by Meckenem) Bartsch 66 (149).

¹³ Pilate’s face is indeed very similar to the face of the figure witnessing a scene from the martyrdom of Saint Ursula and her mates, standing on the left edge of the representation, a panel in the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Inv. Nr. 42/242, even if the relation does not seem to be that close as Robert Suckale has suggested. He counted with the identity of the master of the panel from Munich and of the altarpiece from Mediaş. Suckale, 2004: 379.

an ecclesiastical person, is somewhat better preserved. His red *birretum* indicates that he was a learned man, a *magister*, as the open book in his hand emphasizes. The legs of both figures are somewhat short as drawn, most likely because of the form of the predella. The folds of their mantles are also not very easy to evaluate. Those of the priest still retain their original contours but have clearly been overpainted. Those on the mantle of the other donor, however, are so very faded that only the black contours that were redrawn during the restoration can still be seen. Both faces indicate that a highly skilled painter was at work here. These faces can be compared to those on the three panels of the highest quality on the retable. While the two figures are unquestionably individual works by the master and seem to have been uninfluenced by any of the fashionable etchings of the period, the backside of the retable again shows the master's knowledge of contemporary decorative patterns – very much at fashion and largely popularized among others also by the very same Israhel van Meckenem discussed above. (Fig. 24) The dense, whirling, typically late gothic leaf decoration in a vivid green color, complemented with white and light yellow flowers and fruits are wide spread motifs in this period but also well known as decorative patterns in Meckenem's and Schongauer's *oeuvre*.¹⁴

"Icones Israhelis Alemani per universam Europeam desiderantur habenturque a pictoribus in summo precio", wrote Jacob Wimpheling in his 1505 chronicle. (Quoted by Metzger, 2006: 38.) Meckenem is considered in the most recent research to have been the first for whom the production of prints was his main interest. He was able to earn a good living from this activity as well. (Riether, 2006: 21.) The so-called Large Passion cycle, used as source in the case of the Mediaș panels, is dated to the end of the 1470s or around 1480 and seems to have been one of Meckenem's most commercially successful series. (Riether ed., 2006, 211.) Max Lehrs knows for each leaf of the cycle of around forty to fifty surviving copies.¹⁵ The cycle of 12 prints is considered to be largely inspired by the slightly earlier (around 1475) Passion cycle of Schongauer and influenced by several Netherlandish patterns.¹⁶ In spite of the fact that – as far as is known at present – this is the only example of Meckenem's

¹⁴ See: Bartsch 113 (154), Bartsch 114 (165) for Schonaguer or Bartsch 205 (282), Bartsch 206 (282) for Meckenem. The decoration on the back side of altars with this kind of ornament is also characteristic of the late fifteenth century. See for example the retable of Zwickau, the panels of which were produced in the workshop of Michael Wohlgemut, a contemporary of the Schottenmaster, working seemingly in many cases from the same pattern-collection. But a number of other examples may be mentioned. The same leaf-ornament may also be seen on the back side of the retable from Proștea Mare.

¹⁵ Lehrs, 1934, Vol. 9. Fifteen complete series are still held today in several collections. See: Schnack, 1979: 110.

¹⁶ Metzger, 2006: 43 and also: Koreny, 2001: 469-472. – according to Koreny, Meckenem used patterns that were also applied by Baegert, models from the closest circle of the latter as patterns for the complete Passion cycle.

graphics being reproduced on Transylvanian panels, it should not come as a surprise. Taking into consideration the previously mentioned fact that the print series was wide spread throughout Europe¹⁷ and sold, probably bound together into little volumes, a master – like the painter of the Mediaș panels – with clerally foreign education, could easily have purchased them. He clearly knew the complete Passion series of Schonaguer as well and took as much from it as he needed. The general concept behind Meckenem's images suited the desires of the Mediaș painter: the great narrative-spirit placed into a complex space-perception. A clear perspectivic project, with secondary scenes in the background, obviously depicted in a way learned from Netherlandish painters. Additionally, the narration and space-perception was completed by the strong presence of devotional ideas. Thus, what does the relationship termed in almost a commonplace way – *Schottennachfolge*– cover in the case of the Mediaș retable? We are concerned here with a well-thought out adoption of an etching series, a compilation of known models in a rather individual style that borrowed substantially from the form, pattern and style- treasury of the Schottencircle. The Mediaș master is however not dependent from the Viennese predecessor to such extent as the painter of the Birthälm panels is. The latter remained a pupil of the Schotten-workshop, while the Mediaș master has developed his own more individual style, individually utilizing the elements he had learned. Although using patterns of the Schottenworkshop's circle, his style does obviously not directly depend on the Viennese master. Other influences, like possibly the region of Franconia, which is also considered to have played a generation earlier basic role in the education of the Schottenmaster himself, should be considered. In this respect the works of the group of painters working around the already mentioned Bamberg workshop of Wolfgang Katzheimer could be of importance.¹⁸ So much the more, as the environment of Katzheimer is known for not only using prints of Israhel van Meckenem, but being directly influenced by his works. We also have information on the fact, that Meckenem personally visited Bamberg in 1470.¹⁹ The Mediaș master was obviously not working on his own on the Mediaș altarpiece, but was helped by apprentices. As already mentioned, the quality of the three panels with the *Bearing of the Cross*, the *Man of Sorrows resting* and the *Crucifixion* scenes differs so markedly from the rest of the panels that there is little doubt that they were the work of the leading master himself. These same three scenes also contain the most individual details complementing the Meckenem prints, while the remainder of the panels can be identified as workshop-production. The two donor-portraits on the predella were very probably the "autograph" work of the main master also. It is these two portaits that can provide us with further

¹⁷ From Germany, through Italy to Spain. See: Schnack, 1979.

¹⁸ For this idea I have to thank professor Robert Suckale.

¹⁹ See on the topic: Bouillon – Kappler eds. , 1997

information referring to the history of the retable. Since they were revealed in the 1970s by the restorer workshop of Gisela Richter in Braşov, several attempts to identify these two persons have not led to success. The single handhold given the researcher is the preserved coat-of-arms on the left side of the predella (Fig. 25) and the fact that two donors – an ecclesiastic and a secular person were represented.

Among the names mentioned by charters from the second half of the fifteenth century referring to Mediaş, the name of the Thabiassy family, "*Erbgraf*"s from the neighbouring Aţel (*Ecel, Hetzeldorf*), recurs quite often.²⁰ The family is known for having played an important role, not only in the life of the town and the *sedes* of Mediasch, but also in the other Saxon-regions in this period. Georgius Thabiassy was mentioned in the documents since 1454. In the uprising of 1467 against the King Matthias, he seems to have stayed on the side of the ruler. In any case it is striking that only a month after the uprising, on the 22nd of September 1467, he and his two eldest sons – Ladislaus and Tobias – received a series of rewards for the services done for the king, including a number of possessions and the function of *iudex regius* of the *sedes* of Schenk for the period of their lives. (Theil, 1901: 437) In October 1467, the King gave them a stone-built house in Sibiu – again as a reward for their services. In 1470, the town council of Mediaş offered the ruined house of Johannes Bwdner to Georgius Thabiassy for the numerous services performed in the interests of the town, on the condition that he would have it rebuilt.²¹ Georgius, already mentioned in 1466 as *judex regius* of the two *sedes* – Mediasch and Schelk, had five children: Ladislaus, Tobias, Stefan, Anna and David. (Theil, 1901: 439, 440.) Not much is known of Stefan and David, but the two eldest sons were often referred to in the above-mentioned donations of the King and in later documents referring to the family. The only daughter, Anna, was married at the beginning of the sixteenth century to the famous *iudex* of Sibiu, Johannes Lulay. From our point of view it is more important that the eldest son, Ladislaus, was already a clerk (*notarius*) of the royal chancery at King Matthias's court in 1466, (Zimmermann-Werner, 1892-1991, Vol. 6., 267. No. 3504.) after having obtained a degree of Master of Arts at the University of Vienna, where we find him registered in 1460. (Tonk, 1979: 274.) He still possessed this function in 1470, (Tonk, 1979: 274.) and probably also in 1472 when he figured as the king's delegate in a charter inaugurating the seven *sedes* and Sibiu in certain new possessions. (Theil, 1901: 441.) Not much later he seems to have returned to Transsylvania, perhaps on the occasion or shortly before the death of his

²⁰ See: Theil -Werner, 1870 and the collection of charters on microfilm in the possession of the Magyar Országos Levéltár. I. 246. 34738 and 34860

²¹ Theil, 1901: 441; Entz, 1996: 384. Entz also supposes, based on the topographical description given in the source, that the house is identical with the so-called Schuller-house that still stands today on the corner of the market-square, in the neighbourhood of the parish church. See: Entz, 1996: 183.

father, who was supposed to have died around 1477. (Theil, 1901: 433, 441.) A series of other charters mention the name of Ladislaus Thobiassy de Etzel. He had clearly obtained a number of exemptions and privileges for Mediaș, Ațel, Agnita (Szentágota, Agnetheln) and a series of Saxon localities within the family's sphere of influence from the King. (Zimmermann-Werner, 1892-1991, Vol 6., 267. nr. 3504-3506.; Vol. 7, 124. nr. 4164.) In these years he also became parish priest and later became provost in Alba Iulia. (Bónis 1971: 234, 235, 236; Tonk, 1979: 274.) In 1477, Ladislaus was one of the most important persons in Mediaș, when he was mentioned as a delegate of the so called "zwei Stühle" travelling to the court in order to arrange a certain problem of the possession of Fucușdorf (Farkastelke, Furkeschdorf).²² According to the nineteenth century publications of Rudolf Theil he possessed the function of *iudex regius* and was also a citizen of Mediaș at this time.²³

Although indubitable proof is still missing, taking the above listed data into consideration, it is worth to raise the possibility that the donor on the left side of the Mediaș predella might be identified with Ladislaus Thabiassy. The representation of an ecclesiastical person with a magister's *birretum* on his head very well suits the information known about him. Additionally, the coat-of-arms representing a writing hand growing out of a crown, fits perfectly with his position of *notarius* at the royal chancery. The role of the Thabiassy family in the life of Mediaș in the second half of the fifteenth century is unquestioned. The father, Georgius, was *iudex regius* of the two *sedes*, reelected several times during the 1460s. In 1474 he was still greeted first in a charter of the King, apparently as the most important person in Mediaș.²⁴ It is more than probable that he must have played a great role in the construction works of the town in these years and therefore also the rebuilding and vaulting works on the St. Margaret church that occurred in this period.²⁵ The influence of the Thabiassy

²² Theil, 1901: 441. The problem of Fucușdorf went on for years. In 1470, the last inhabitants of Fucușdorf move to Moșna (Muzsna, Meschen), and in 1474 King Matthias decides that the territory of Fucușdorf should be divided between Moșna and Mediaș. Römer, 1912: 11-12. It is probably still this same matter that Ladislaus was delegated to solve by the king in 1477.

²³ Theil, 1873: 74: "...der Königsrichter der „2 Stühle“ Ladislaus Thobiaschi, der Bürtger von Mediasch war, und der Meschener Graf Jakob zu dieser Zeit die tonangebenden Persönlichkeiten waren." However, the charter he is referring to at this point is unfortunately not unambiguous as regards the function of Ladislaus Thabiassy: "*Nos Matthias...Memoriae commendamus tenore praesentium fideles nostri egregius ladislaus, filius Georgy Thabyasy de Eczel ac Jacobus Gereb de Musna et laurentius Aurifaber de Meggyes in ipsorum ac prudentum et circumsectorum iudicis et juratorum ceterorumque civium et inhabitatorum universonum oppidi meggyes et villae nostrae Muszna exhibuerunt nobis et presentaverunt...*" See Theil, 1873: 93.

²⁴ "*Matthias dei gratia rex Hungariae, Bohemiae et cetera fidelibus nostris nobilibus et prudentibus viris Georgio Thabyasy de Etczel ac iuratis senioribus duarum sedium Saxonicalum Saxonibus salutem et gratiam*". Zimmermann-Werner, 1892-1991, Vol 7: 23, nr. 4012.

²⁵ For the architectural history of the church see: Marosi ed., 1987: 693. – considering the present chancel a work of the second half of the fifteenth century. See also: Avram, 2006: 21-

family in Mediaș did not come to an end with the death of Georgius. Ladislaus, as we have seen, remained one of the most important citizens in the town. He probably continued to support and try to finish the works begun in the time of his father. The work on the church-chancel probably came to an end in these years, thus it can be easily imagined that he only had to put the crown on the work sponsored by his father and put the altarpiece into commission. Thus, there is also a possibility that the donor on the right side of the predella could be his father, Georgius Thabiassy, represented there on the order of his son – as a gesture of respect and remembrance to one who played such a great role in the life of the town and the constructions on the church. The old age and the dress of the depicted person support this supposition, although only the coat-of-arms – unfortunately destroyed – would have constituted a proof.

The retable was painted around or shortly after 1480 and – as pointed out above, based on the Meckenem prints. The Thabiassy sons, Ladislaus and Tobias, must still have possessed important power in this period. In 1486-1487, the *iudex* of Sibiu, Thomas Altenberger, protested against their occupying the role of *iudex* in the Schenk *sedes* (one of the seven Saxon *sedes*) without having been elected, based on the privilege given to them by King Matthias in 1467. Little is known on the role played by Ladislaus in Mediaș after the death of the father. However, his wealth and importance still probably permitted him to make the necessary donation for a not particularly large or luxurious but high quality altarpiece. The fact that the commission for this work was given to a painter with obvious links to Vienna and follower of the most famous master of the region in that period: the Schottenmaster, fits nicely also with the information that Ladislaus studied in Vienna in the 1460's; the years when the Schotten-altarpiece was in work. Having spent afterwards years at the royal court, he was not only up-to-date with the cultural and artistic trends and fashions of the period but must also have seen that it was not a rarity at the royal court of Matthias to order art-works from Viennese masters. As for the itinerary of the master himself, even, when he was not trained in the immediate surrounding of the Schottenworkshop, Vienna was probably a place where he spent certain time and where he possibly received the commission for the altarpiece in point. Unfortunately, there is no information referring to the length of the time he spent in Transylvania. He was obviously responsible for the general conception of the retable, but did not complete it on his own. Not only the joiner work and sculptural decoration of the altar-piece (which is completely lost) supposes a

25. According to his information (based mainly on the excavations done in the 1970's) the new, larger chancel was built at the middle of the century (after 1440), at the same time a sacristy was attached, and the southern aisle of the church was finished. He considers the vaulting of the chancel and of the nave dating from the last decades of the century – (thus exactly the period we are speaking about).

collaboration, but also – as already mentioned – the differences between the panels show, that the foreign master was working with – perhaps local – apprentices. The supposition is confirmed also by the panels of the Proștea Mare (Nagyekemező, Grossprobstdorf) retable, (preserved in the Brukenthal Museum, Sibiu), which stands stylistically very close to the Mediaș altarpiece, having been produced very probably in the same workshop.

Resuming: the Mediaș master, having been the first one to be considered in literature a Transylvanian follower of the Schottenmaster, - already in works dated to the 1930's - is in spite of the clearly detectable influences a painter with a very individual style. He is obviously not the same person as the master of the Birthälm altarpiece, who is much more dependent on the used patterns and on the stylistic characteristics of the Schottenworkshop. Thus, two of the largest and most important retables of Transylvania have been produced for two geographically neighbouring localities, being in continuous competition for the primacy in the *sedes* during the fifteenth century, both retables belonging to the same stylistic circle but produced by different – most probably foreign – masters. The image is further nuanced by the wall-paintings of the Schässburg church on the hill – imitations of wooden panels that have been recently discovered for the research of Transylvanian Schottenmaster-followers. (Sarkadi, under publication) The existence of these paintings delimitate the Transylvanian presence of Schottenmaster-followers to the small triangle of Mediaș-Biertan-Sighișoara, an information which can be through further research hopefully brought in connection with the name of Hans Siebenbürger, supposed leading master of the Viennese Schottenworkshop. At the same time it can be of interest that these altarpieces, all belonging to the same stylistic environment, represent almost exclusively the Transylvanian panel painting of the Matthias age.

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