

**THE LIGHT OF  
THY COUNTENANCE  
GREEK CATHOLICS  
IN HUNGARY**

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## IV.1.2 The Cult of the Miraculous Icon of Máriapócs in Vienna

*Katalin Földvári*

*'O Mutter mild, dein Gnadenbild, sey unser Zuflucht,  
Schuß und Schild'*<sup>1</sup>

The miraculous icon labelled *Ungarische Madonna* or *Unsere Liebe Frau von Wien* by the Viennese is the Stephansdom's most highly prized image of the Virgin Mary to this day.<sup>2</sup> The icon is a popular destination for visitors, mostly from Hungary, as well as from other parts of Austria and the neighbouring countries.

The miraculous icon of the weeping Virgin Mary played a prominent role in the Marian cult of the Hapsburg Dynasty,<sup>3</sup> acting as a perpetual monument to the victorious battle at Senta (*Zenta*), which Abraham a Sancta Clara (1644–1709) ascribed to the intercession of the Virgin Mary of Pócs (Máriapócs) in his speeches.

Once news of the weeping of the miraculous icon (4 November to 8 December 1696) reached Vienna, at the request of the Empress Eleonore and advised by Capuchin Friar Marco d'Aviano (1631–1699), the Emperor Leopold I ordered that the miraculous icon be transported to Vienna.<sup>4</sup> Following the arrival of the icon, High Mass was celebrated and festivities were held in the city for five months (7 July to 1 December 1697). In Vienna, the picture was received by a hundred thousand believers, and the Bishop of the city, Count Ernst von Trautson, accompanied by his priests, went to greet it in a procession and escorted it to Favorita, the chapel of the Imperial Summer Palace, where it was welcomed by the imperial-royal couple. On 7 July 1697, the icon was

transferred from the chapel to the aulic church of the Augustinians, where the Empress Eleonore adorned it with a rose composed of diamonds and precious stones.<sup>5</sup> Afterwards, the picture was carried in a procession to the Cathedral again and it was placed on the altar next to the treasury; for fourteen days, ordinary people could also pay their tribute.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, as requested by the parishes of Vienna, the icon was presented in all the churches of the city; in each place, it was exposed for public veneration for three days.<sup>7</sup> On 1 December 1697, in a solemn procession, it was returned to the Stephansdom, where it was accommodated on the high altar<sup>8</sup> (Picture 1). To mark the occasion of its placement in the Cathedral, the Empress Eleonore presented the miraculous icon with the so-called *Rosa Mystica* frame and an ornate festive garment.<sup>9</sup>

While the miraculous icon of Pócs toured the imperial city, Prince Eugene of Savoy (1663–1736) defeated the Ottoman Turks at Senta on 11 September 1697. The acclaimed homilist Abraham a Sancta Clara attributed this victory to the miraculous power of the Pócs icon, the intercession of the Virgin Mary of Pócs: In his homilies, he explained that the picture saved Christendom from its foes, with its mantle protecting first and foremost Austria and its constituent countries. Thus, the miraculous icon of Pócs was seen as the palladium of the Hapsburg Dynasty. In 1701, the Emperor issued a bull to promote faith in the miraculous power of the Virgin Mary of Pócs and to encourage subjects to pray to

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<sup>1</sup> Source of the motto: Zennegg, 1739, 149.

<sup>2</sup> Gruber, 2013, 40–41.

<sup>3</sup> For more detail, see: Földvári, 2015, 93–117.

<sup>4</sup> For more detail, see: Terdik, 1999, 156–157. The Monarch turned to György Fenesy, Bishop of Eger, who would authorise Canon Count Imre Csáky to execute the ordinance of Leopold I. On 1 March 1697, accompanied by the gun salute of 150 soldiers, the miraculous icon was removed from the iconostasis, and first it was taken to Nagykálló, from there to Košice (*Kassa*) via Tokaj and then to Vienna via Pest, Buda and Győr. See: Magyar, 1996, 85–97.

<sup>5</sup> According to Annemarie Fenzl and Johann Weißensteiner, the rose symbol may be traced to depictions of the Little Jesus of the type in which the Child holds a red flower in His hand. See: Fenzl – Weißensteiner – Guber, 1997, 235.

<sup>6</sup> Magyar, 1996, 93–94.

<sup>7</sup> The journey of the miraculous icon is described in detail in: *Heylsamer Gnaden-Brunn...*, 1703, 28–46. Thus, a total of 33 processions were held with the icon, and, in the churches, 126 sermons were delivered, 103 High Masses with musical accompaniment were celebrated, 68 vespers and 91 litanies were sung, and 136 rosaries were prayed in public before it. *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>8</sup> Here, before the icon, Low Mass was said several times a day – in winter, between 5 and 12 am and, in summer, from as early as 4 am – and High Mass was celebrated from 11 am. In the afternoons, the Litany of Loreto was prayed daily from 5 pm, and the rosary was recited three times a day – at 9 and 11:30 am and after the Litany of Loreto. On Sundays and feast days, the rosary was accompanied by the sound of the trumpet and the drum. Each rosary was concluded with additional prayers, read by an ecclesiastical individual appointed for this purpose. To ensure continual recitation of the rosary this way, Jakob Daniel von Tepsern, Mayor of Vienna for eight years, started a 2000-Gulden fund. For more detail, see: Földvári, 2017a, 407–423.

<sup>9</sup> As Rudolf Bachleitner points out, this novel way of installing the picture whereby the silver frame and the large aureole formed a unit with the altar table and the tabernacle of the high altar would become exemplary for a number of Viennese churches subsequently. The *Rosa Mystica* frame adorned the icon to 1776, when it was replaced by precious stones made by court jeweller Franz Mack. For a description of the frame and the festive garment, see: Bachleitner, 1961, 355; Fenzl – Weißensteiner – Guber, 1997, 235–238; Fenzl, 2014, 3.

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her for victory over the Turks.<sup>10</sup> Thus, in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century, the icon of Pócs came to be a protector not only of the city of Vienna but of the whole of the Hapsburg Empire as well (Picture 2).

In the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a variegated cult evolved around the original icon of Pócs placed in the Stephansdom of Vienna, with its outlines well pronounced in contemporary works.<sup>11</sup> The development of the cult surrounding the miraculous icon was to a large extent defined by the printed material *Abgetrocknete Thränen*<sup>12</sup> published in 1698, on the one hand, significantly contributing to the icon soon becoming the number one cultic image of Vienna held in highest esteem and, on the other hand, amplifying the moments that could make the ties between the miraculous icon and the populace of Austria and Vienna more intimate.<sup>13</sup> To the end of the volume, a 54-page work was appended, containing three sermons by Abraham a Sancta Clara under a single a title.<sup>14</sup> These homilies relate to the miraculous icon of Pócs in a variety of ways; the most important one among them is the sermon entitled *Aller Freud und Fried*, which would play an influential part in delineating the scope of the cult in Vienna.<sup>15</sup>

Two feast days observed to this day are associated with the icon. To celebrate the arrival of the miraculous icon in Vienna, every year, on the Sunday after 2 July, a festival attended by the Emperor would be held. The memorial day of the weeping (4 November) would be commemorated as a three-day solemnity, with two High Masses each day.<sup>16</sup> In 1747, the 50<sup>th</sup>,<sup>17</sup> while, in 1797, the

<sup>10</sup> Zeinar, 2003, 257.

<sup>11</sup> Földvári, 2017a, 407–423.

<sup>12</sup> *Abgetrocknete Thränen...*, Nürnberg–Frankfurt, 1698.

<sup>13</sup> Three main elements underlay the cult of the miraculous icon: 1. Cessation of weeping: The icon did not weep in Vienna. 2. The miraculous icon found a home in the imperial city: In the frontispiece of the volume, the icon is featured in the Maria Stiegen Church, with the inscription *in propria venit* above it, suggesting that the picture had come home and returned to its own property. 3. The icon would provide protection against the Ottoman-Turkish threat. For more detail, see: Knapp, 1996, 61–79.

<sup>14</sup> *Aller Freud und Fried* (composed on 22 September 1697), *Brunst zu Wienn von Wasser* (heard on 8 August 1697) and *Baare Bezahlung* (delivered by Abraham a Sancta Clara on 22 September 1697, during the pilgrimage in Wiener Neustadt to commemorate Vienna's deliverance from the Turks in 1683).

<sup>15</sup> The cult elements manifest in the texts of the homilies allude to the special patronage of Mary conveyed through a specific devotional icon: 1. The miraculous power of the icon is emphasised: The simple *Tafel* (i.e. board) has become *Gnadenbild* (i.e. a devotional picture). 2. The local and national characteristics of the image of Pócs, as well as its integration into the local political context are highlighted (public veneration by the Imperial Family and its function as a palladium ensuring the peace of the empire). 3. At the same time, the relationship between the picture and Hungary is given a negative assessment: Hungary failed to take proper care of the miraculous icon; Hungary is a bad neighbour to Austria. The summary of the volume is thus meant to argue for the expropriation of the picture and to make its Austrian cult more direct. 4. Elements of special patronage include the Turkish theme as the icon provides protection against the Ottoman threat. 5. The question of the purport of the weeping is raised several times: Why did the Virgin Mary of Pócs weep? The homilies account for this miraculous event in various ways: a) the weeping was the picture's cry for help, for it was in danger in Hungary, necessitating its transfer to Vienna; b) through the miracle, Mary evinced her compassion for Hungary; c) the Virgin Mary shed tears of joy over the victory at Senta.

<sup>16</sup> The first one was celebrated from 9 am, the second one from 11 am; when members of the imperial court were present, the bishops and other senior clergymen invited to the 11 o'clock Mass would conduct the vespers, deliver sermons and pray the litany. See: Zennegg, 1739, 26–29.

<sup>17</sup> The fifteen speeches delivered before the miraculous icon during the festival from 1 to 9 July 1747 were compiled in: *Funftzig-Jähriges Jubel-Fest...*, Wien, 1747.

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100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the transfer of the picture to Vienna was remembered amid baroque festivities.<sup>18</sup>

From the time of the arrival of the miraculous icon in Vienna, the Cathedral had two orchestras with two conductors for nearly a hundred years; one orchestra would exclusively be dedicated to the service of the icon of Pócs.<sup>19</sup> To enable the continuity of services at the altar, apart from the city of Vienna, numerous private individuals started funds.<sup>20</sup> Musical accompaniment was made more colourful by the development of a unique repertoire of songs in honour of the icon of Pócs during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The chapter *Marianische Lob- und Bitt-Gesänger, oder Reim-Gebett* of the volume edited by Christoph Zennegg and published in Vienna in 1739 contained twenty songs addressing the weeping icon of Pócs to be sung during processions or pilgrimages and as part of the vespers.<sup>21</sup>

The presentation of gifts begun by the Empress Eleonore would be continued by a number of dignitaries ever since the icon was installed in the Stephansdom.<sup>22</sup> As signs of homage, countless votive gifts were placed on the miraculous icon,<sup>23</sup> as well as on the surrounding walls.<sup>24</sup> Even in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, among the votive objects – alongside jewellery – various figures cast from wax showing babies in swaddling clothes, female and male individuals, teeth, legs, hands, eyes, breasts

<sup>18</sup> To honour this anniversary, the following volume was published: *Gebet und Gesang...*, Wien, 1796.

<sup>19</sup> The musical accompaniment of services dedicated to the miraculous icon of Pócs was discontinued in consequence of the prohibitive measures of Maria Theresa and Joseph II. The liturgical ordinance issued in 1783 would no longer allow Mass to be celebrated with songs or organ accompaniment in any of Vienna's churches, just as it forbade Mass on feast days and Sundays to be accompanied by an orchestra and required that foundation Masses be also stopped. For more detail on the music performed near the miraculous icon, see: Hochradner – Vörösmarty, 2000, 133–176.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Ogesser remarks that, at the request of the City Council, a large silver chandelier worth 7251 Guldens was made in 1747, followed by six silver candlesticks valued at 7251 Guldens (Ogesser, 1779, 302). Furthermore, the Council ordered that solemn High Mass be celebrated at the miraculous icon every day, a practice which would continue until the ordinance of Joseph II. To make the musical accompaniment of services in conjunction with the icon of Pócs more dignified, some chose the miraculous icon as their heirs: In 1707, in his will, court merchant Michael Kurz provided that the services at the miraculous icon of Máriapócs mandated for Sundays and feast days be conducted with a musical accompaniment more splendid than previously, starting a fund of 17 700 guilders for this purpose. A similar will was made by a Viennese citizen by the name of Franz Zwegen, as well as court scribe Andreas Huttauer in 1716 and Adam Perchtold, parish priest of Gnadendorff. See: Donin, 1884, 14; Magyar, 1996, 95; Ogesser, 1779, 302.

<sup>21</sup> Zennegg, 1739, 133–172. In addition to the mostly multiple-verse songs, the reader could find the corresponding tune in each case as the compiler of the volume either made the notes available or made a reference to a well-known church song patterned on the same melody. With the texts, occasional allusions to common Marian songs were included. These were invariably earlier compositions newly adapted (probably by Christoph Zennegg). As the texts published by Zennegg were explicitly meant to be performed at the Máriapócs Altar, their use was confined to the veneration of the miraculous icon of Pócs. See: Hochradner – Vörösmarty, 2010, 165–175.

<sup>22</sup> Apart from works presenting the history of the icon, the subject is also prominently covered in the book *Erneuert- und vermehrter Gnaden-Brunn...* Cf. Bachleitner, 1961, 355; Cser-Palkovits, 1984, 60; Ogesser, 1779, 301; Zennegg, 1739, 29–30.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Zykan reports that, in 1961, the original icon of Pócs was X-rayed, revealing a number of minute holes in the wooden board of the picture, which could indicate that smaller gifts must have been attached by means of nails (Zykan, 1971, 5). On 19 March 1903, the jewellery fitted on the miraculous icon, along with the golden crowns worth 20 thousand Kronen, was stolen by unidentified perpetrators (Gruber, 2011, 129).

<sup>24</sup> For more detail, see: Földvári, 2014, 295–302.

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and horses were on display.<sup>25</sup> Besides votive figures, donating plaques of gratitude was also popular.<sup>26</sup>

In case of extraordinary threats, the Virgin Mary would always be invoked 'officially' through the miraculous icon of Pócs; at times of epidemics and wars, processions and multiple-day prayer services were held, with ecclesiastics, the laity and societies appearing according to a set schedule for prayer and singing.<sup>27</sup>

However, once the Ottoman menace was over, the 18<sup>th</sup> century saw several changes in the veneration of the miraculous icon of Pócs (the first among the so-called Turkish Madonnas), with prayers addressed to it more in the hope of deliverance from the plague this time, as was the case with other icons invoked previously under the threat of a Turkish invasion.<sup>28</sup> Gustav Gugitz *Sagen und Legenden der Stadt Wien* In his book entitled *Sagen und Legenden der Stadt Wien*, Gustav Gugitz observes that, in addition, the miraculous icon of Pócs also served as a safeguard against fire: '... the miraculous icon also gave Vienna protection against fire. In the steeple of the Stephansdom, a red flag decorated with the image of the

Virgin Mary of Pócs would be raised in the direction of the spot where the fire was detected.'<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, concerning the miraculous power of the image, the belief that those praying to it would be healed from diverse diseases increasingly came to the fore.<sup>30</sup> In his work offering a description of the Stephansdom published in 1906, Emil Hofmann notes that this Madonna was revered by the people as 'the rescuer of those suffering from grave illnesses'.<sup>31</sup> In 1735, Thomas Ertl already mentions only two themes of the cult of the miraculous icon of Pócs: 1. The Turkish theme was combined with the cult of Loreto: the Litany of Loreto would be recited at public prayer services. 2. The other principal feature was constituted by the miracles credited to the devotional icon (e.g. child birth, deliverance from imminent danger, recovery of ailing limbs, rescue from shipwreck and deliverance from the plague).<sup>32</sup>

The popularity of the icon is illustrated by the fact that, during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, numerous copies of it were made, which were venerated not only in the city of Vienna but in various places in Austria,<sup>33</sup> Germany<sup>34</sup> and

<sup>25</sup> Gugitz, 1955, 42.

<sup>26</sup> For example, in 1722, Friedrich Tilmez speaks of 'innumerable votive items and plaques of gratitude' (Tilmez, 1722, 275).

<sup>27</sup> The Emperor Charles VI also acted thus in 1713, when the plague broke out in Vienna again; following a procession, he prayed to the icon of Máriapócs. See: Zennegg, 1739, 28–29.

<sup>28</sup> The collection of songs compiled by Christoph Zennegg also contains examples in which the Weeping Virgin Mary was expressly entreated for protection against the plague: Zennegg, 1739, 140–142 (*Um Abwendung der Pest*), 149–151 (*Bitt-Gesang*), 151–152 (*Bitt-Gesang*).

<sup>29</sup> Gugitz, 1952, 90–91.

<sup>30</sup> This is substantiated by the instances recorded in two extant books of miracles: *Heylsamer Gnaden-Brunn...*, 1703, 57–279; Zennegg, 1739, 36–172. On answered prayers said before the icon, see: Földvári, 2017b, 122–132.

<sup>31</sup> Hofmann, 1906, 153.

<sup>32</sup> Ertl, 1735, 11–19.

<sup>33</sup> The reproduction of the miraculous icon found in the church of Altenfelden, Austria, was discovered by Maria Magdalena Gahleitner, a peasant woman, in 1793, while she collected hay. In the next five years, the picture was kept in a rural cottage until a woman called Teresia Bichler was instructed in her dream to return it to the place where it had been found. Her son, Mathias, fixed the icon on a tree next to a healing spring. The image concerned is a copperplate depicting the miraculous weeping in Máriapócs. The Abbey of Heiligenkreuz also boasts a replica of the devotional icon. Placed at the entrance to the treasury, it dates from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The reproductions found in Petronell-Carnuntum and Rapottenstein are linked to the castles of the Abensperg-Traun family. The genesis of the Petronell picture may be dated to the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, whereas the copper replica of Rapottenstein is mentioned in a 1736 inventory. The latter image was later lost. The copy hanging above the sacristy door of the church of St Elisabeth in the village of Ginzersdorf dates from around 1800. The *Hodigitria* is modelled on the icon in Vienna. On the so-called plague-altar of the south chapel of the parish church of Rastefeld dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, there are two Máriapócs images styled on the picture of Altenfelden. The church of Stranzendorf was built in 1733; the stucco altar in front of its east wall exhibits a Marian icon. The depiction is a highly faithful copy of the miraculous icon of Máriapócs. The legend of the pilgrimage site Weichselbaum relates the story of a Cistercian monk, who, in 1749, fixed a Marian image on a tree, which was carried by woodcutters to the town of Weichselbaum. However, the picture would return to the location of its discovery, and, as soon as these miraculous events were divulged, a series of pilgrimages would ensue, culminating in the construction of the current small church between 1792 and 1793. The devotional icon replica of the church of Telfs in Tirol is closely connected to the history of the local monastery: Provincial P. Eustach had vowed that, in case the Emperor Leopold I approved the foundation of the monastery, he would take a copy of the Marian icon to Telfs. The icon he had pledged was made in 1700, and it was brought into contact with the original so as to transfer the miraculous power of the devotional icon. Furthermore, Hans Aurenhammer makes a brief mention of the replicas seen in the parish church of Aggsbach-Markt (image made circa 1700), as well as in the churches of Benrdorf and Klausen-Leopoldsdorf (Hans Aurenhammer, 1956, 86–87; Ivancsó – Betz – Imfeld, 1997, 77–82).

<sup>34</sup> The parish church of Kindsbach dedicated to the Feast of the Visitation holds a replica of the miraculous icon, which found its way to the town thanks to an officer called D. P. H. Biot in 1704. Accounts of answered prayers before the icon launched a series of pilgrimages in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The icon replica of the parish church of St Paul in Passau was painted in 1700 by Franz Werner von Tamm (1658–1724), painter of the Viennese Imperial Court, who portrayed the Virgin Mary surrounded by a rose wreath, as a reference to the title *Rosa Mystica*. The devotional icon replica of the Benedictine Monastery of Vornbach made in 1700, which is currently kept in the conference room of the Abbey, is also Von

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Switzerland<sup>35</sup> as well. These reproductions were not merely instruments of piety and remembrance but, akin to the original miraculous icon, they also ensured the presence and operation of the Saint, whereby the replicas themselves would become wonder-working devotional images that, thanks to the associated legends, gave rise to a pilgrimage- and votive-cult and a wide range of prayers and devotions.<sup>36</sup>

From 18<sup>th</sup>-century Vienna, four replicas of the original miraculous icon of Pócs are known; of these, the legend pertaining to the icon in the church of St John of Nepomuk in Leopoldstadt (2<sup>nd</sup> District) is highlighted by several authors.<sup>37</sup> The picture was especially venerated during the plague that broke out in 1723, and, years later when the disease recrudesced in the city of Vienna, people would visit not only the original miraculous icon but this replica as well: 'When Vienna was gripped by the plague in 1730, and a few houses needed to be closed down as a result, the sick climbed out through the windows and succeeded in making their way to the image of the

Merciful Mother, stayed there to pray all night and, in the morning, freed from their predicament, went home in perfect health'<sup>38</sup> (Picture 3).

According to Hans Aurenhammer, in the parish church of the Fourteen Holy Helpers in Lichtental-Vienna (9<sup>th</sup> District), a replica of the miraculous icon was placed on the high altar on 22 October 1820.<sup>39</sup> The picture shows the Viennese icon with lavishly decorated baroque crowns, pearls, necklaces and golden ornaments. The lower one-third of the reproduction is adorned by silver votive hearts symbolising granted requests made to the Theotokos.<sup>40</sup>

The icon replica of St Nicholas' church in the 3<sup>rd</sup> District of the city has unfortunately been lost over time. Aurenhammer comments that veneration of the miraculous icon in case of fire was recorded by a devotional picture held in a private collection, in which the anonymous artist depicted Saint Florian and Saint Nicholas blessing the icon, with a procession passing outside St Nicholas' church underneath. The inscription of the picture read: 'Protect the whole country from fires and all dangers at all times!'<sup>41</sup>

Lastly, the Viennese church of the Conventual Franciscans also held a replica of the miraculous icon, presumably donated by the Viennese mystic, Christina Rigler, in 1706, though – unfortunately – this one has not survived, either.<sup>42</sup>

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3. Replica of the miraculous icon of Máriapócs in the Viennese church of St John of Nepomuk

Tamm's work. See: Ivancsó – Betz – Imfeld, 1997, 82–84.

<sup>35</sup> The small pilgrimage church of Vals also boasts an icon replica, donated by Johan Berni van Leis, chaplain of Vals, in 1707. He studied theology in Vienna at the time of the arrival of the miraculous icon there, and so he acquired the copy. The replicas in the chapels of Verdasio and Siebeneich also capture the miraculous weeping of the original icon with bloody tears. In the latter icon, below the image of the Virgin Mary of Máriapócs, beggars and the infirm with various disabilities are featured, corresponding to votive pictures. See: Ivancsó – Betz – Imfeld, 1997, 84–86.

<sup>36</sup> Rettenbeck, 1963, 87–89.

<sup>37</sup> Gugitz, 1952, 97; Köhler, 1846, 66–68.

<sup>38</sup> According to Köhler, this may be corroborated by historical data as it is known that, in this part of the city, not a single person died of the plague at that time: Köhler, 1846, 67.

<sup>39</sup> Aurenhammer, 1956, 86.

<sup>40</sup> Ivancsó – Betz – Imfeld, 1997, 39.

<sup>41</sup> Aurenhammer, 1956, 86–87.

<sup>42</sup> Aurenhammer, 1956, 86; Gugitz, 1955, 32.