

The rather uninspiring title of this online catalogue is awkwardly worded and unusually long given our present-day world of fast-moving news cycles and endless advertising. The inclusion of the Christian Museum as the owner of the collection is unnecessary as the catalogue can only be accessed through the museum's website. Clearly the clumsy wording results from a desire for scholarly precision, yet the title is not without historical and art historical mistakes. It would be more accurate to use the term Hungarian Kingdom instead of Hungary. Furthermore, it is unclear what is meant by 'from' with respect to the regions listed. Are these areas where the artworks were made, or, in most cases, where the works were *most likely* or *presumably* made? Or rather, are these where the works were meant to be displayed, where they were used, or where they were commissioned? The specific origin of the group of works included in the catalogue should be more precisely indicated; in addition, the type and intended audience of the catalogue should be made clear. Of course, this is all more information than can be provided in a title, even if a long subtitle is added. Therefore, a more apt and concise title, but by necessity a less scholarly one, would have been preferable, directing visitors to the site's new, important content. The above questions could then be clarified in a somewhat longer introduction offering a more detailed explanation of the certain categories, guiding principles and features of the catalogue. Such an introduction would help orient both lay people and experts in the field before they delve into the catalogue.

However, in the small space allotted to the catalogue's introduction, the opportunity to do this was limited. The author makes it clear that her objective was an overview of the basic information for each artwork and, in fact, describes her work as a *Summary Catalogue*. The introduction informs the visitor of the most novel aspect of the catalogue: a presentation of every object comprising one of the museum's most important collections. The author justly states that a database constructed in this way provides a starting point for all further research, whether the focus is the Christian Museum, the individual works or the given period. Free access and the online format, which allows for steady expansion of the catalogue as well as corrections, contribute considerably to this aim, although certain inconsistencies inevitably arise:

the mode of discussion, the quantity of information and the depth of analysis may vary for each artwork depending on the current state of research.

Another, and perhaps the most important, scholarly innovation of this catalogue relates to the issue of where the works originated. The Christian Museum's



Fig. 1. Painter trained in Vienna: *St. Catherine of Alexandria and St. Dorothy*, left stationary wing of a winged altarpiece, c. 1430; inv. no. 54.11.



Fig. 2. Painter trained in Vienna: *Christ and the Twelve Apostles*, predella of a winged altarpiece, c. 1430; inv. no. 54.13.

new catalogue, for the first time, places those artworks known tentatively to have come from the Hungarian Kingdom or one of the Austrian or German territories into a contiguous and more broadly interpreted artistic-geographical unit – one that incorporates a multitude of stylistic, formal, thematic and functional connections. The number of new results achieved through this novel approach and mode of discussion is apparent in the details and superb analyses presented in the catalogue.

The introduction, somewhat cursory in this respect, should have elaborated more on what is meant by the *origins of the works*. The place where the works were made? The catalogue contains several objects for which either an exact or more general location can be confidently identified. An example is a reliquary bust dated to the 1350s (inv. no. 56.830), whose style and origin (supported by the sources) clearly link it to Cologne. After all, this bust of a knight was purchased by Archbishop János Simor in 1884 from the Schnütgen collection in Cologne, and a similar object made in the same workshop can still be seen today in the Schnütgen Museum.

A counterexample is provided by the panels depicting three scenes of martyrdom (inv. nos. 55.50.1-3) by the so-called master of Nagytótlak. These works, which had once adorned the feast-day side of the movable wing of a winged altarpiece, were purchased by Archbishop Simor prior to 1878 at an auction in the Viennese Kunsthalle. They may have come from either Austrian or Hungarian territories, but their history cannot be traced further back than their sale in Vienna. Their style or, to be more precise, certain of their stylistic characteristics link them to altarpiece wings that came conclusively from Nagytótlak (today Selo, Slovenia). The unknown artist who created these wings, now housed in the Hungarian National Gallery in Budapest (Old Hungarian Collection, inv. nos. 180, 182.), was thus dubbed the Master of Nagytótlak. However, the common stylistic origins of both the Esztergom and the Budapest panels, regardless of the nature and strength of the supposed connection

between them (if such a connection can even be concluded at all), can clearly be found in Upper Austria. In-depth stylistic analyses and the inclusion of further comparable materials in the investigation could perhaps bring us closer to identifying the place in which the panels were made, perhaps in one of the Austrian territories or connected to the Kingdom of Hungary. However, it is highly questionable, in fact doubtful, whether this location can ever be established exactly and conclusively.

Stylistic analysis and perhaps research on the history of collections could aid in determining the place in which two, double-sided panels (inv. nos. 55.20-21) were made. Tradition has held that these works were made in Aranyosmarót (today Zlaté Moravce, Slovakia), they are the work of the so-called first Master of Aranyosmarót. Relying primarily on earlier literature, the author has suggested only broad stylistic connections linking the panels to the environs of Vienna or maybe Poland. However, she considered it highly unlikely that the panels belonged to the original furnishings of the medieval church of Aranyosmarót. They are more likely to have come from the Migazzi castle and were purchased by Kristóf Migazzi on the art market. Their provenance, their usage in Aranyosmarót in more recent times, thus does not in any way contribute to identifying their place of creation and usage in the medieval period. Presumably the situation is the same for works by the so-called Master BE of Csegöld (inv. nos. 55.61-55.67). Here, perhaps mapping the origins of the Vécsei family's artworks might help resolve the question. In this case, a more specific stylistic connection to the art of the Upper Hungarian mining towns might serve as a kind of reference point.

Among the artworks from the region in question – where objects are linked by a complicated tangle of stylistic and historical connections – there is an absence of continuity. Furthermore, source materials providing historical data to substantiate and support art historical analyses of these works is scant. Thus, we can already predict that, in the case of average or poor-quality works, any future stylistic analysis promised

by the author, however thorough, would not bring us significantly closer to establishing where the works were made. Similarly of little help, in many cases, is diagnosing the presumed differences in quality and dates of origins between works from artistic centres, areas under their influence, or the peripheries. In fact, even with works that can be more precisely identified, efforts at linking them to places based on sound scholarship, taking into account all the relevant questions, are not likely to yield more results.

Even if the place where a work was made has been narrowed to one region or another, the question might remain whether it was commissioned there or elsewhere. The opposite is also true: we may know where the work was originally used but be unable to definitively determine in which, possibly faraway, place or region the master or workshop operated. Indeed, we need to consider that many churches may have been decorated with 'imported' works or that masters came for a short period to work on perhaps just one element of the furnishing. Furthermore, all these places may differ from where the works were discovered and acquired in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For many works, it is nearly impossible to conclusively categorize them as belonging to the art of a certain geographic territory if we interpret these regions as closed, independent units. The most effective and, from a scholarly perspective, justifiable mode of presenting the works would be to view them as local variations within a larger region. This approach, a broader construal of the art-geographical regions, would not, however, detract from the artistic value of the various territories, including the medieval Hungarian Kingdom, nor question their integrity as defined by their own unique characteristics. In fact, quite the contrary: it is those individual features, embedded in the intricate relationship between culture and art, that create an historically more credible, tangible image.

For these reasons, I consider Emese Sarkadi Nagy's online catalogue ground-breaking, an example to be emulated in both the Hungarian and international practice of museum cataloguing. Her approach should be used for every group of artworks (but only those) that are closely linked by historical and art historical factors but for which many of the constituent works have uncertain origins – and I mean the term in all the complexity addressed above – because of a lack of historical sources. If we give further thought to these questions with respect to museum practice, we find that a collective treatment of the works can also be an organizing principle for an exhibition of works

from Hungarian, German, Austrian and even Czech and Polish regions. This is valid, however, only for those periods and locations for which real, complex relationships are proven. Furthermore, it should only be carried out in a way that the artistic integrity, the unique character of the individual regions predominates: every visual tool in the exhibition should aim to show this or aid in its recognition. Questions of the historical, cultural and art historical relationships; the workshops and masters; the peregrinations of the artists; stylistic origins; analogies; simultaneities; prototypes; adaptations and copies should all contribute – either by adding to or demonstrating regional connections – to the enhancement of professional credibility and the broadening of the public's perspective.

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The preparation of a catalogue of artworks is the greatest achievement, the professional apex of art history work with respect to museums and collections. Sooner or later, the author must contend with every practical museological or theoretical research question and task that arises. The answers and solutions to these require a far broader foundation than does the writing of a monograph focussing on a scholarly question or a specific period. The works in a collection catalogue are all unique and call for a different approach and, on occasion, even a specially tailored research method. The author of such a catalogue must possess a comprehensive knowledge of history and art history, as the objects in question come from a variety of regions and periods.

The Christian Museum's current catalogue spans 400 years. The earliest object is a wooden statue from Cologne portraying a woman carrying holy oil (inv. no. 56.826), dated to between 1160 and 1180. Originally belonging to a Holy Sepulchre composition, this depiction of perhaps Mary Magdalene, almost column-like in form, exudes a solemnity that refers to the works' transcendent meaning. The latest object in the catalogue was painted by a follower or copier of Cranach presumably after 1530. It shows Mary with her bosom uncovered, nursing her child under a crooked, abundantly fruitful apple tree. Approaching her with a donkey and oxen is St. Joseph, shown in travelling clothes, with his hat removed and a look of devotion on his face (inv. no. 56.453). This idyllic genre painting presents a somewhat incoherent assemblage of iconographic elements drawn from a variety of scenes; only the figures' haloes, indicated by thin,



Fig. 3. Painter trained in Vienna: *Crucifixion and the Martyrdom of St. Lawrence*, workday side of a right movable wing of a winged altarpiece, c. 1430; inv. no. 56.494.

gold lines, elevate it from its everyday surroundings. By juxtaposing these two chronological endpoints of the catalogue – these two entirely different works in terms of content, function, genre/type and formal characteristics – we gain a sense of the range covered by the 102 catalogue entries and nearly 150 artworks examined and organized by the author.

The key to Sarkadi Nagy's success in this undertaking is primarily her broad historical and art historical knowledge. She is well versed in the social and economic history of the region in question and was thus successful in her attempt to determine those groups that played significant roles in art patronage and which included, in a given region and period, the donors of certain artworks. For example, in the epitaph depicting a scene from the death of Mary (inv. no. 56.509), a re-examination of the inscription led the author to identify Stefan Geinperger, who was widowed in May 1498, as the donor. Knowledgeable in the liberal arts, Geinperger also served as mayor of Wiener Neustadt on several occasions, according to written sources. In the depiction of Margaret trampling a dragon (inv. no. 55.81), which adorned the feast-day side of the movable wing of a winged altarpiece, Sarkadi Nagy managed to identify the monk kneeling beside Margaret thanks to her knowledge of fashion and ecclesiastical history. The features of St George's armour in the depiction of the dragon-killing saint on the reverse, workday side, link the images to the region of Bavaria. The correct reading of the name appearing in miniscule on the recto and the recognition that the white monastic garb, in this case, refers to the Premonstratensian order, led ultimately to Sarkadi Nagy's identification of the donor as Erasmus Pöchinger, the abbot of the Premonstratensian abbey of Sankt Salvator in Griesbach between 1480 and 1484. This determination allowed for a more exact dating of the panel and made it clear that it was made in the region of Bavaria, as stylistic characteristics suggested anyway. The analysis is a superb example of a novel approach in art history that relies on complex historical research. Although at present the analysis appears in the catalogue in a summary form, it raises expectations of a serious scholarly publication that explores the details.

Emese Sarkadi Nagy's proficiency in historical research is valuable not only in the situations discussed above – in which the artworks, the persons depicted, and the contemporary sources have a direct relationship to the donor or to the place where the work was made or used. She also successfully uses more contemporary documents related to the history of the collection and, more broadly, to the history of collecting. Moreover, the information she acquires from these is not limited to only the more recent fate of the artworks. It is well known that many of the works in the now catalogued collection of the Christian Museum belonged, with varying degrees of certainty, to the estate of Arnold Ipolyi, canon of Eger,



Fig. 4. Workshop in Kassa (today Košice, Slovakia):
Kneeling angel, wooden statue, c. 1490; inv. no. 56.844.

later bishop of Besztercebánya (today Banská Bystrica, Slovakia) and then Nagyvárad (today Oradea, Romania). Sarkadi Nagy has now managed to definitively trace numerous important works to the Ipolyi collection through her consistent use of newly published sources containing more precise information than had previously been known, such as the inventory of the Ipolyi collection made in September 1916, after the death of the bishop but before the works were transported to Budapest. In some cases, her knowledge and expert use of the sources have led even further, providing new perspectives on whether works originally belonged together, on the reconstruction of original

assemblages. Two stationary wings with female saints depicted on the front and ornamental painting on the back (inv. nos. 54.11-54.12) (Fig. 1) were among the works purchased by Bishop Ipolyi from Karl Lemann of Vienna, who acquired them from the copper engraver Blasius Höfel of Wiener Neustadt. The martyred virgins, Catherine and Dorothy in one of the paintings and Barbara and Margaret in the other, are enthroned on stone benches that appear as foreign bodies amidst trees, tiny flowers and green vegetation, in a hilly, rocky landscape unfolding in front of a red, starry backdrop. The figures of the saints, which fill almost the entire height of the available image field, are turned slightly to one side, towards what would have been the centre of the former winged altarpiece. The focus of their depiction is the presentation of their attributes, the tools of their martyrdom. With her left arm wrapped around the sword, Catherine points to the wheel; Barbara soothingly places her right hand on the tower next to her; Margaret raises the chained dragon in front of her with her right hand, while pointing to the large cross with her left. For a long time, researchers believed these stationary wings portraying the four female saints formed one unit along with the predella showing half-length figures of Christ and the twelve apostles (inv. no. 54.13) (Fig. 2). These works were all assembled together in the collection of Blasius Höfel. Like the paintings of the female saints, the predella also has a red background with stars. Elements of the landscape are omitted by necessity; the apostles, however, line up one next to the other, almost as if presenting themselves – with the exception of the saint on the far right, who is largely concealed, presumably due to a compositional error. Like those of the virgins, their hand gestures are expressive. They emphatically lift or hold to the front their rather large, conspicuous attributes. All twelve can be identified exactly; not one lacks an attribute. In the newly published estate inventory of the Ipolyi collection, this predella and the 'back, stationary wings' depicting female saints, painted on both the 'front' and 'back' (and assigned inventory numbers 68 and 91) belonged together. Emese Sarkadi Nagy considered this remark in the inventory an important argument confirming that the works were indeed part of the same winged altarpiece (inv. nos. 56.493-56.494) (Fig. 3). Corroborating this hypothesis was the inclusion of movable wings in the reconstruction created in the Höfel collection. These wings flanked a statue group depicting the coronation of Mary and included a painting in the gable showing the extended family of the Virgin. Also supporting



Fig. 5. Workshop of the so-called Master of Szmrecsány: Altarpiece dedicated to the Virgin Mary, from Felka (today Veľká, Slovakia), c. 1480; inv. no. 56.844.

the hypothesis are the nearly identical dimensions and dates of creation as well as stylistic features that indicate a close connection between the works.

However, before definitively stating the works originally belonged together, we should also consider the differences observable primarily in the workday-side images with respect to the intention of the depictions. The starry, red background, essentially a stereotypical element, and the landscape are obvious common features. Also similar is the large size of the figures, which seem to stretch the borders of the images. On the other hand, the epic approach used in certain paintings contrasts sharply with the mode of presentation in the others. The most striking dissimilarity can be seen in the two scenes of martyrdom, the stoning of St. Stephen and the burning of St. Lawrence on the grill. The suffering of the male saints is not evoked through their attrib-

utes but rather through a portrayal of the event itself, and the painter does not spare us any details. In the lower corner, we see a hatted figure blowing the flames as a henchman tears Lawrence's body with a poker. The right hand of the henchman is raised in a gesture of grief or perhaps to wipe away tears; behind him a figure wearing a white turban looks on in curiosity.

Another consideration, before deciding these works belonged together, is how the series of images on the feast-day side, if reconstructed in this manner, would have been painted. It is surely not a coincidence that the scenes of the Crucifixion and Christ on the Mount of Olives complemented the martyrdom scenes of the two deacons. Their inclusion is perhaps related to the identity of the patron, perhaps to the original place of usage. But how would these works have fit with the depictions of the martyred virgins

shown in a setting typical of Madonna images? How did the epic presentation of the deacons fit with the symbolic nature of the figures displayed on the predella, with their attributes as reminders rather than portrayals of their suffering? These questions can never be answered with absolute certainty. And indeed the problem can be viewed in the reverse: is it possible that altarpiece wings and a predella from the same collection could be very similar in terms of style and period and were almost certainly made in the same place, yet they might not belong together? Even if their dimensions are essentially identical and suggest they do fit together? Perhaps the answer can only be provided by accepting and presuming the operation of a large Viennese painting workshop active in the first decades of the fifteenth century, as was proposed by Jörg Oberhaidacher in recent decades (OBERHAIDACHER, Jörg: *Die Wiener Tafelmalerei der Gotik um 1400: Werkgruppen, Maler, Stile*, Wien–Köln–Weimar 2012). The thematic and conceptual difference in an original winged altarpiece, a work composed of numerous elements, might be explained by the diversity of a large workshop, by the similar, but not identical, style and approach of the masters it employed.

In addition to all these considerations, I also recommend further thought be given to the dating of this winged altarpiece. If we date one of the masterpieces in the Hungarian National Gallery's Old Hungarian Collection (inv. no. 52.656), the *Maria gravida* panel of Némethújvár (today Güssing, Austria), from the Batthyány collection, to 1409, as argued by Jörg Oberhaidacher, then we need to treat this precisely dated work as a point of departure, a reference point with respect to both style and the mode of expression, which relies on presentation of the saints through their attributes. The future analysis of the Esztergom paintings should, therefore, be undertaken in light of this, regardless of whether all the panels actually belonged together.

Just as Sarkadi Nagy's historical knowledge and proficiency with types of sources from different periods aided her in, among other things, identifying patrons and hypothesizing about the original assemblages of artworks, so too has her broad knowledge of art history and her familiarity with the material similarly allowed her to make new attributions, discover stylistic connections and identify companion works or new elements belonging to a group. Underpinning all this, however, is her research method, applied with rigorous consistency. Armed with a thorough knowledge of the earlier literature, Emese Sarkadi Nagy

approached the individual works with the desire to discover. She developed a personal acquaintance with each work, attempting to note every minor detail. She contrasted old opinions and observations with her own. She gladly received assistance from others – art historians, photographers and above all restorers – in her exacting and patient examination of the works. The resulting, precise descriptions of each work's condition were not merely for their own sake, but have at times played a role, for example, in the analysis of objects and, in many cases, the reconstruction of their modern-period history. At this point in her work, the author needed to, and will need to in the future, reckon with the indispensability of scientific examinations in the preparation of even summary catalogues. Soon enough, the results of such scientific examinations will be the only solid foundation for art historical reflection. Meanwhile the potential for scientific investigation is expanding: by determining the material used in a work, we can learn what type of wood or pigment was characteristic of an artist, workshop or even a region. The numerous imaging techniques can provide insight into the creative process and workshop practices as well as help substantiate attributions; furthermore, these tests are an increasingly necessary prerequisite to planned restoration procedures. All of this, however, can only produce new perspectives and positive results if the art historian and restorer use these tests to answer questions that have been appropriately and accurately posed and are based on prior knowledge and especially preliminary inspection. If this is kept in mind when deciding what tests are relevant for a given art work, then results can be achieved.

Major works of art should be approached with the appropriate respect. Unquestionably, such an artwork is a Madonna statue (inv. no. 56.839) that must have belonged to a large altarpiece dedicated to Mary and, as historical evidence confirms, stood in the Church of St. Martin in Pozsony (today Bratislava, Slovakia). The work, dated to the period of 1480–90, was made by a master who may have been from Pozsony and certainly worked there. His style reveals a southern German influence. Also impacting the artist's overall modelling of the Madonna were the statues of the Gothic main altarpiece made for the church during those same years. A microscopic examination of the wood, an almost essential element of any analysis, did not produce unusual results: the statue was carved from large-leaf linden, the most frequently used tree in this region of Europe. However, the crack nearly framing the Madonna's face and continuing onto her



Figs. 6–7. Southern German workshop: Impression of a relief depicting standing saints; on the reverse: *Christ on the Mount of Olives*, fragment from the movable wing of a winged altarpiece, 1480–90; inv. nos. 55.448–55.449.

neck proved perplexing and inexplicable after close examination. It appeared that not every detail of the statue in its present state was original; the crack on her face and head pointed to significant later additions that would affect the stylistic classification of the statue. Framed in this manner, the question could be answered unequivocally with a CT examination. The chief result of the tomographic imaging done in Esztergom's Kolos Vaszary Hospital was to prove that the statue was carved from one linden log with a large diameter. There were no later replacements or additions. Instead, the artists veered away from the common sculptural practice of the time: the hands and even the body of the Child were not made from separate pieces of wood. The examination thus gave an answer to a concrete, specific question. In addition, however, it contributed to the art historical evaluation of the work in unexpected ways. Obviously, it is interesting in the history of sculpting techniques that the life-sized Madonna statue was carved from just one piece of wood. This solution suggests great knowledge of the craft, considerable practice and experience, and these technical features underscore the outstanding artistic quality of the work. Further thought, however, suggests this information can also contribute to determining the master or workshop if tests are done on stylistically similar artworks and these yield similar results. This is the unquestionable art historical benefit of scientific examinations. Tomographic images,

however, also show certain blemishes inherent in the wood, irregularities in the growth of the linden, which may cause much earlier deterioration of the statue, requiring more repair work and intervention in the past. A precise knowledge of these blemishes, damage and repairs is crucial in planning a newer restoration of the work. In the case of the Madonna statue, the scientific examination was therefore useful in terms of its restoration and conservation, too.

Obviously, however, not every art historical treatment of an object requires such a complex examination involving highly technical apparatus. Classical methods, observations based on practice and experience, and a broad knowledge of the material alone can lead to superb results. The Christian Museum's fragmented angel statue (inv. no. 56.844) (Fig. 4) with its damaged surface is a typical example of an artwork that can easily be omitted from any overview but must be included in a comprehensive collection catalogue. Experts in the field, however, would neither expect nor hope to find a detailed analysis. Because of its newly discovered origins, though, this statue of insignificant appearance is ensured a distinguished place in the collection. After all, its former companions were discovered in 1895 in the attic of the Church of St. Elizabeth in Kassa (today Košice, Slovakia). The four angels covered in feathers with curly hair were part of a composition showing the ascension of Mary Magdalene and originally belonged to a winged altarpiece pre-

sumably from Kassa. Today the other angel statues are still in Košice in the East Slovak (Východoslovenské) Museum (inv. nos. S 191; S 192; S 193).

For all the reasons discussed above, I am convinced that Emese Sarkadi Nagy has superbly met the demands of writing a collection catalogue. She is at the start of the most prolific research and writing period for an art historian. Numerous research trips abroad and international and Hungarian scholarships have helped to further expand her knowledge of history and art history; scholarly publications covering a variety of subjects bear witness to her professional calibre and effectiveness. Her book *Local Workshops – Foreign Connections. Late Medieval Altarpieces from Transylvania*, published in 2012 (Jan Thorbecke Verlag, Ostfildern, 2012. Studia Jagellonica Lipsiensia, 9) particularly stands out. Its chief scholarly value is unquestionably its catalogue, in which the author is consistent in her evaluation of every monument in every category related to Transylvania, reviewing each according to the same criteria. Aside from or, perhaps, beyond all the catalogue's other merits is its role as a model that can be used for the future preparation of a professional, that is scholarly, catalogue of the selected collection in the Christian Museum. The new online Summary Catalogue is in every respect a significant step in that direction.

The catalogue attempts a comprehensive treatment of this particular collection in the Christian Museum and represents a return to the principles of István Genthon's topography after several decades in which a different approach to this sort of art historical work was employed. The volume *Esztergom műemlékei* (Monuments of Esztergom), published by the National Committee of Historic Monuments as the first volume in the series on the topography of Hungary's historic monuments (*Magyarország műemléki topográfiája*, ed. GEREVICH, Tibor. Vol. I: *Esztergom 1. rész: Múzeumok, kincstár, könyvtár*. [Esztergom. Part 1. Museums, treasures, libraries] compiled by GENTHON, István, Budapest 1948). '... Esztergom's enormous repository of treasures is presented in this detailed registry, which makes this publication a starting point for all art history research on these issues,' wrote Gyula Ortutay (page V) in the foreword. Despite the fundamental differences, I believe that Emese Nagy Sarkadi's catalogue – naturally with respect to the selected collection – presents several parallels to István Genthon's volume. First of all, we should mention the system of technical requirements and the methodology discussed above: '... monument protection is in just as

much need of intellectual tools, scholarly documentation and constant, vigorous critical control as it is of material, mechanical and technical tools. We have already begun the work, whose success depends on correct methodology, carefully selected authors and coordinated steps.' Tibor Gerevich's requirements, expressed seventy years earlier in the introduction to the volume, were the key to the success of the Christian Museum's collection catalogue today, too – naturally, with adaptations to the current situation. And fortunately, these conditions were clearly present in Esztergom this time, too. The Genthon volume was meant as a topographical work: '...the publication of Hungary's topography of monuments was an old plan, and necessity, of the National Committee of Historic Monuments. It was one of our first plans when the Committee's deliberative body was transformed into a special office.' (p. 1) In meeting the requirements of the topography program, Genthon's book evolved into a comprehensive presentation of every object, and thus became, in many respects, a database or handbook that is still relevant today. Our present collection catalogue, which follows similar principles, was supported by the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund, although it was fundamentally a project commissioned by the museum. This objective of a comprehensive treatment of the material is buttressed, in this case, by an explicit historical approach that provides the foundation for the art historical analysis. The author replaces the approach of the Christian Museum's catalogues from past decades, which focussed on the quality of the works, with an expressly historical one. 'We omitted many older works (too) that were not worth the attention of either the public or scholars, and thus they may be sifted out over time,' wrote Miklós Mojzer in the 1964 catalogue of the Christian Museum's painting collection (BOSKOVITS, Miklós – MOJZER, Miklós – MUCSI, András: *Az esztergomi Keresztény Múzeum Képtára* [The picture gallery of the Christian Museum of Esztergom], Budapest 1964. 26). In Emese Sarkadi Nagy's online catalogue, however, not a single artwork was at risk of being sifted out over time. In other words, she did not adhere to the principles employed in either the 1964 catalogue containing a large selection of works or in later published surveys focussing on a narrower circle, of which I will only mention the most prominent and rigorous one, published in 1993: *Keresztény Múzeum, Esztergom* [Christian Museum, Esztergom], ed. CSÉFALVAY, Pál, Budapest 1993). The historical approach taken by Sarkadi Nagy assigns every work importance, recognizing its

significance in our apprehension of the artistic life of the period in question. In this respect, lower quality works may in fact be more important: after all they demonstrate what was average. From an art historical perspective, they become foundations upon which we can fully appreciate master works; from a historical perspective, they present a tangible picture of the social milieu in which these works were commissioned and used; overall, they provide a more realistic view of the period in which they were made. In the end, readers of the catalogue – the laymen and experts who browse through it – are led through an aesthetic experience, achieving a sense of historicity, an understanding of the history of past eras through art.

Examples of this are the works of the so-called Master of Szmrecsány and his workshop, which include the altarpiece of Felka (today Veľká, Slovakia) (inv. no. 55.47) (Fig. 5) in the Christian Museum and another work that could be considered its companion, now housed in the Hungarian National Gallery (Old Hungarian Collection, inv. no. 53.561.1.14), but which originally came from the neighbouring settlement of Nagyszalók in Szepes County (today Veľký Slavkov, Slovakia). Two other works that could also be seen as companions, both products of the same workshop circle, are the Mary altar from the episcopal palace of Szepeshely (today Spišská Kapitula, Slovakia; Old Hungarian Collection, inv. no. 55.913; 55.919), but of unknown origins, and the former altarpiece of Malompatak (today Mlynica, Slovakia), of which two double-sided panel paintings and two painted side shrine panels have survived (inv. nos. 55.48.1, 55.48.2, 55.48.3 and 55.49). The former is housed in the Hungarian National Gallery and the latter in the Christian Museum. As a perfect example of the historical approach discussed above, Kornél Divald, a prominent art historian of the early twentieth century, dubbed these altars dedicated to the Blessed Virgin – which are linked to the same workshop, are nearly identical in artistic quality, similar in size, and present scenes and statues of almost the same subject-matter – the ‘small town and village Mary altarpieces’ in reference to the type of community and social group that commissioned these works.

Given that ‘the artistic material recorded in this volume [Genthon’s above-mentioned topography] is among the most significant of [Hungary]’s artistic monuments, since, in the whole country, Esztergom’s museum [...] trails only those collections in the capital city in the richness of its artistic treasures’ (p. V), the catalogue-like treatment of the art works in 2018 can

have no other objective than to enhance the comprehensive historical and art historical view of the given regions, improving its accuracy with new findings.

The historical approach taken in the catalogue is successfully complemented by the strictly functionalist approach employed in the presentation of the objects. With every object, the author strives to reconstruct, as much as possible, the original unit to which the fragment or detail belonged, establishing its location, role and function. This endeavour is manifest in the consistent titles given, in the ‘headings’: *reliquary bust of a saint*; *figure of Mary in an Annunciation or Visitation group*; *predella with scenes from the life of Christ*; as well as *panels*, *relief works*, *details*, *shrine side panels* or *carved images from the movable wings of a winged altarpiece*; and *stationary wings* or their *details*, just to name a few of the most frequent. This approach explains the presentation of paintings and statues in paintings and statues in an inseparable unit. The selection of images also highlights this research objective: almost every entry includes not only a description and photograph of the work but also another photograph of the back, regardless of whether it was decorated, whether the decoration is original or modified, or whether the back was intended to be seen by those who viewed or used the work. Winged altarpieces – late medieval masterpieces representing a synthesis of art forms – as well as their details and fragments cannot be successfully examined without applying this principle. The artistic unit, the original function of the altarpieces, the role they played, and the intentions of the patrons responsible for their creation can only be revealed by conducting research in this manner, and only with this information can we construct an authoritative picture of these works of art.

Furthermore, if we think about it, it is not certain in all cases that the well-known side, to which many are accustomed, was originally the main view. A vivid example is the entry ‘Impression of a relief depicting standing saints; on the reverse: Christ on the Mount of Olives’ (inv. nos. 55.448, 55.449) (Fig. 6–7). The surviving painting was originally the reverse, intended for weekday viewing, a depiction meant to help people in their everyday religious contemplation. Presumably it was part of a Passion cycle. If we used a traditional museum or gallery approach of assessing Hungarian or Central European medieval painted and carved works in terms of our modern concept of an art object, we would conclude it was merely a rather mediocre depiction of Christ on the Mount of Olives incorrectly assembled thanks to later restoration procedures. The



Fig. 8. Master M.S.? (Marten Swarcz?):
Beheading of a female saint (St. Catherine), brush drawing
made with black iron gall ink on the reverse of a panel
depicting the Resurrection, from the former main altarpiece
in Selmečbánya (today Banská Štiavnica, Slovakia)
dedicated to St. Catherine; 1506; inv. no. 55.104.

work scarcely would have survived the sieve of time. The former feast-day side provides all the information we have about the winged altarpiece, the original unit that included the painting. In its present condition, this side, which today displays only the impression of the reliefs showing the standing figures, would not be considered an independent artwork in the traditional sense. This impression tells us the image fields of the movable wings were decorated with relief figures, the backgrounds were gilt, contained brocade patterns and were adorned with carved tracery above the individual compositions.

If we continue with this line of thought with absolute consistency, we realize that the superb paintings by the Master M.S. from the former main altarpiece in Selmečbánya (today Banská Štiavnica, Slovakia) should have their front and backs listed in the 'reverse' order in the catalogue. By describing the works as

'four panel paintings from the former main altarpiece of the Church of St. Catherine in Selmečbánya' (inv. nos. 55.101–55.104), Sarkadi Nagy avoids relegating the paintings of Christ Carrying the Cross and the Crucifixion, among the most treasured works in the Christian Museum, to merely the reverses of the feast-day sides, which show impressions of the former relief depictions – a solution that would have upset many with its unconventionality. However, the former feast-day sides are known in this case to reveal much about this lavish main altarpiece, including about its original condition and history. Of these, I will highlight only one detail, which is on the reverse of the Resurrection depiction bearing the date and the artist's initials: it is a rather large, 43 × 26 cm, black brush drawing in the upper right. The drawing was made with iron gall ink, the material used by the painter to sketch the paintings themselves, and was applied directly to the wood without any primer. Given its execution and technical features, it is clearly a preliminary drawing, the kind of quick sketch made by masters to record an idea for themselves or their workshop colleagues. With a few quick brushstrokes, they experimented with an idea that would come into play only later in the process or which they knew would not be visible in the finished work. These sketches, which at times can be viewed as independent drawings, bear the most personal marks of the artist. They can also be used for comparison in questions of attribution. The drawing on the back of the Selmečbánya panel painting shows two figures and portrays the beheading of a female saint, presumably St. Catherine. According to our present knowledge, a painting dealing with this subject did not appear on the former main altarpiece. Was the sketch made, perhaps, for one of the relief works on the feast-day side? The surviving impressions on the two Esztergom panels suggest, however, that the reliefs showed figures standing side by side rather than scenes. For the time being, the question of where and in what form the master planned to execute the sketch on the reverse of the panel depicting the Resurrection, or whether he even planned to use it in the works in progress, remains unanswerable. Yet, it is worth considering that a compositional sketch showing the execution of St. Catherine was not made by chance on the recto of a painting intended for an altarpiece dedicated to her. Perhaps it is also significant that it appeared on the back of the panel containing the signature and date (Fig. 8).

A great benefit of Sarkadi-Nagy's summary catalogue is that the author – taking advantage of the pos-

sibilities offered by the online catalogue format – provides a glimpse into the research process. For example, she openly admits to uncertainty in questions of attribution. She also indicates and discusses, rather than trying to conceal, what the research in its present phase has not yet managed to achieve; in fact, she even notes when it appears that an attribution can never be exactly and verifiably established. In many cases, she retains the attributions, the well-known names of masters, that appear in the old literature. For example, the heading for the Calvary altarpiece, dated to the 1470s, from Garamszentbenedek (today Hornský Beňadik, Slovakia; inv. nos. 55.24–55.32) attributes the work per tradition to the workshop of the Master of the St. Nicholas Altarpiece of Jánosrét, in other words to the so-called Master of Jánosrét, presumably because she could not propose a closer, more exact attribution. After all, scholarly publications have noted that the masterwork for whom the artist is named was not made in Jánosrét (today Lučký, Slovakia) nor was it made for Jánosrét. The master and his workshop may have operated in Körmöcbánya (today Kremnica, Slovakia), a town that prospered from gold mining. The medieval altar of St. Nicholas appeared in the church of Jánosrét dedicated to Nicholas only in the eighteenth century (today in the Old Hungarian Collection of the Hungarian National Gallery inv. no. 55.903.1–20). Thus the master's name can only be maintained out of respect for tradition and in the absence of any better proposals. The relatively early period of mining town altarpiece art named for the 'master of Jánosrét', and presumably the product of a real enterprise, by all means requires further study. The author recommends a re-examination of the earlier view of the master and his work by connecting questions about the organization of medieval workshops to the works in this group. A thorough, integrated analysis of the paintings, statues and structures of the altar of St. Nicholas, the Passion altar and the altar dedicated to the Virgin Mary and St. Catherine, the former side altars of Jánosrét (today both in the Old Hungarian Collection of the Hungarian National Gallery, inv. nos. 55.904.1–11 and 55.905.1–9), the altar of St. Martin from Cserény (today: Čerín, Slovakia) (Old Collection, Hungarian National Gallery, inv. no. 3279) and the Calvary altar from Garamszentbenedek might make possible an approximate reconstruction of the workshop's organization.

Regularly returning readers and browsers of the catalogue, now available in Hungarian and soon English, can certainly monitor the progress of research

and the increase in material related to, for example, the 'master of Jánosrét', just as they can track numerous other problems that, at present, are merely proposed, implied or currently unresolved. Moreover, the hopefully consistent, multi-faceted expansion of the catalogue, uniting numerous aspects, will also illuminate the process by which this 'checklist' develops into a full-fledged collection catalogue. The opportunity to follow this progression, participate and share is reason enough for readers to frequently revisit the Christian Museum's homepage.

The artist and title can be used to search the catalogue for works from Hungary and the German and Austrian territories; furthermore, the works can be listed in order according to their date of creation and inventory number. The latter is presumably not particularly relevant for either a lay or professional audience. Nevertheless, it will not hurt if users, while browsing the new catalogue, gain a sense of Esztergom, a city on the Danube whose history, culture and wealth of collections and monuments has captivated so many, in its own, special world. It was once a 'Roman stronghold, where the philosopher and emperor Marcus Aurelius wrote his *Meditations*', and at one time also a capital city and the birthplace of St. Stephen. Its archbishop performed the coronation of kings and to this day is the head of the Hungarian Catholic Church. Its castle reached the 'pinnacle of lavishness in the time of Cardinal Tamás Bakócz, who yearned for the legacy of Pope Julius II', and this same castle, that of the Humanist poet 'Janus Pannonius's uncle [...] later [...] had to be stormed by Bálint Balassa [in the battle] against the Turks.' The consecration of the new basilica 'was accompanied by Liszt's Esztergom mass in 1856 instead of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*, which had been recommended for the occasion in 1823' (BOSKOVITS–MOJZER–MUCSI *op. cit.*, 5–6). It is a special world, and one of its most brilliant treasures – at least from an art historical perspective – is the collection established by Archbishop János Simor. Since 1882, this collection, first named the Christian Museum by Simor, has been housed in the archiepiscopal palace along the Danube. In this captivating, special world, even the sequence of inventory numbers might have meaning and significance. To quote Miklós Mojzer: 'It is not surprising that the series [of inventory numbers] begins with the panel of St. Catherine of Alexandria by the earliest great personality, the first master of Bát. This beautiful virgin, who played an important role in the emergence of Renaissance art, as portrayed by Masolino in Rome's Basilica of San Clemente, was also

the patron saint of scholars, who used shrewd arguments to defeat her opponents, lived her life with “ratio” and wisdom, and, according to legend, converted to Christianity in front of the painted image

shown to her by the hermit. Few medieval artists have professed more beautifully about art than the first master of Bát in the “ars poetica” of his work.’ (BOSKOVITS–MOJZER–MUCSI *op.cit.*, 15).

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