

EAGLES, CROWNS AND BELLS. CONSTRUCTING DYNASTIC LOYALTY IN THE ICONOGRAPHIC PROGRAMS OF THE ROMANIAN CHURCHES FROM TRANSYLVANIA (1765-1867)*

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Resumo: Durante os anos de 1691 e 1867, a Transilvânia esteve incorporada no Império Habsburgo. No final do século XVII, uma nova confissão emergiu — a Greco-Católica —, como resultado da união de uma parte do clérigo romeno com a Igreja Católica Romana. Neste contexto histórico, o presente artigo procura explorar os meios pelos quais a lealdade dinástica perante a Coroa dos Habsburgo foi construída na área mencionada, durante os séculos XVIII e XIX. A análise irá concentrar-se nos programas iconográficos dos edifícios greco-ortodoxos e greco-católicos do norte da Transilvânia, elaborados entre 1765 e 1867. A decoração dos murais das igrejas selecionadas foi elaborada entre 1765 e 1867. A abordagem científica irá questionar a forma como as *Pietas Austriaca* foram moldadas pelas comunidades romenas. O artigo também irá abordar os meios usados pelos artistas para enfatizar a imagem do poder imperial, bem como o cruzamento dos elementos religiosos e políticos nesses programas iconográficos que incorporaram a tradição bizantina e a estética barroca.

Palavras-chave: Transilvânia, iconografia romena, igrejas de madeira, séculos XVIII-XIX, identidade confessional.

Abstract: Between 1691 and 1867, Transylvania was incorporated to the Habsburg Empire. At the end of the 17th century, a new confession emerged — Greek-Catholic —, as a result of the union of a part of Romanian clergy with the Roman Catholic Church. In this historical context, the present paper aims to explore the means through which the dynastic loyalty towards the Habsburg Crown is constructed in the mentioned area during the 18th-19th centuries. This analysis will concentrate on the iconographic programs from the Greek-Catholic and Greek-Orthodox edifices of Northern Transylvania, elaborated between 1765 and 1867. The scientific approach will inquire the ways through which *Pietas Austriaca* was shaped among the Romanian communities. The paper will also inspect the instruments used by artists to emphasize the image of the imperial power, as well as the intersection of the religious elements and the political ones in these iconographic programs that embodied byzantine tradition and baroque aesthetics.

Keywords: Transylvania; Romanian iconography; wooden churches; 18th-19th centuries, confessional identity.

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1. TRANSYLVANIA DURING THE 17TH-19TH CENTURIES: HISTORICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Following the onset of the Reformation in Europe, Transylvania knew 150 years of administrative autonomy (1541-1691), after several centuries as part of the Kingdom of Hungary and before being integrated into the Habsburg Empire. As a territory where several geographic and cultural areas overlapped¹, this principality boasted great linguistic, religious and ethnic diversity during the 17th-19th centuries.

At a time when the Reformation was consolidating its position in this part of Europe, the *Edict of Turda* (1568) proclaimed religious tolerance and the right to choose one's religion², but at the same time it favored certain denominations — a phenomenon comprehensively covered by the extensive research conducted into this matter³. After 1691, Transylvania came under Habsburg jurisdiction. The aforementioned ethnic and religious diversity of the principality, however, was not fully addressed by its legislation. Despite the heterogeneity of the cultural environment, only certain ethnic groups were acknowledged — the so-called *nations* (*natio*), respectively the Magyar nobility, the German-Saxon bourgeoisie and the Szeklers (Székely) upper class⁴. Also, from the 16th century onwards, four Churches received juridical recognition: the Roman-Catholic, Evangelical-Lutheran, Calvinist-Reformed and Socinian-Unitarian Churches, respectively⁵.

The present study addresses the period 1765-1867, spanning the interval between the designation of Transylvania as Great Principality of the Imperial Crown (1765) and the crisis that ultimately resulted in the establishment of the dual Austro-Hungarian monarchy (1867)⁶. In Central Europe, this era saw a number of transformative changes in the religious sphere, and these changes also impacted the ecclesiastical patrimony of cultural groups.

Although it had been present in the region since the 11th-12th centuries⁷, Orthodoxy was not included among the above-mentioned acknowledged religions, and the Romanians (or *Vlachs* as they were known at the time), who constituted the majority of the population around 1700⁸, maintained their political status as a tolerated people (*tolerati*)⁹.

¹ KEUL, 2009: 15.

² *The Edict of Turda* of 1568 reiterated an article of a previous edict (1557), proclaiming the aforementioned principle. Vide KEUL, 2009: 96.

³ KEUL, 2009: 5; SHORE, 2007: 3-4.

⁴ HITCHINS, 1979: 216. Other cultural groups such as Armenians or Muslims did not have political rights. Vide EVANS, 1979: 424; SHORE, 2007: 3-5.

⁵ BERNATH, 1994: 36; HITCHINS, 1979: 216; SHORE, 2007: 4.

⁶ During the period under discussion, Austria was governed by Maria Theresia (1745-1780), Joseph II (co-ruler with his mother (1765-1780) and sole ruler of the Holy Roman Empire (1780-1790), Leopold II (1790-1792), Francis I (1792-1806, as Francis II, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and 1804-1835, as Francis I, emperor of Austria), Ferdinand I (1835-1848) and Franz Josef I (1848-1916).

⁷ PASCU, 1982 *apud* SHORE, 2007: 28, note 5; KEUL, 2009: 19.

⁸ BERNATH, 1994: 161; EVANS, 1979: 423.

⁹ BERNATH, 1994: 92.

The Treaty of Karlowitz, concluded in 1699, marked the end of the conflict between the Ottoman Empire and the Holy League, an event which placed the central part of Europe within the Austrian sphere of political influence. The Habsburg Counter-Reformation, which had begun since mid-16th century, achieved towards the end of the century the first union of the Greek-Orthodox Christians with Rome and the emergence of the Ruthenian Uniate Church, following the Council of Brest of 1596¹⁰. With the political changes occurring post-1690, Transylvania was also included in the monarchy's agenda aimed at countering the effects of the Reformation in the region. During its autonomy (1541-1691), the rulers of this principality had struggled unsuccessfully to persuade Romanians to embrace Calvinism¹¹; however, in late 17th century, efforts were made by the new government to direct Romanians towards union with Rome. This project was announced in 1697, promising to grant certain political and social rights to them, while removing the Orthodox clergy members who accepted the union from under the authority of the Calvinist superintendent of Transylvania¹². In 1700 the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church (the Romanian Church United with Rome) was created, with its clergy accepting the four doctrinal points promulgated by the Council of Florence. Although it had been promised that the new Church would receive the same rights as the Roman-Catholic Church, this not happened at that moment¹³. The Romanians' recognition by the Constitution as an ethnic group, alongside the Saxons, Hungarians and Szeklers, was also delayed¹⁴.

Under the circumstances, with political and social imbalance perpetuated and the emergence of a new denomination, the Romanian population in 18th-century Transylvania knew a troubled time, marked by actions opposing the union, countless conflicts occurring between the «united» and the «non-united», and people shifting allegiance between Churches¹⁵.

My commentary addresses the respective historical context, as it was reflected in the iconographic program of several Romanian churches in northern Transylvania.

¹⁰ DELUGA, 1994: 275; MIRON, 2004: 33.

¹¹ BERNATH, 1994: 93; EVANS, 1979: 423.

¹² BERNATH, 1994: 164; SHORE, 2007: 55.

¹³ MIRON, 2004: 51.

¹⁴ SHORE, 2007: 56.

¹⁵ On the discourse on identity and religious belonging of northern-Transylvania clergy, *vide* MIRON, 2007 and MIRON, 2015.

2. ROMANIAN CHURCHES IN TRANSYLVANIA DURING THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

«The extra-constitutional existence of Romanians»¹⁶, forced to send their representatives across the Carpathians to Wallachia, in order to be ordained in the Orthodox dioceses there, also embedded the situation of their places of worship. Because the use of durable materials was prohibited for the construction of churches, most of those belonging to Romanian communities (Orthodox and, after 1700, Greek-Catholic also) were built of wood. As this material was more perishable than stone and brick¹⁷, many of the worship places built before the 17th century have disappeared, while the liturgical space had to be continuously renewed and readjusted¹⁸.

Characteristically, the architectural structure of Romanian wooden churches built during the 18th-19th centuries had horizontal oak or fir tree beams, on top of an under-structure¹⁹, with a simple plan consisting divided into three parts: narthex, nave and the altar apse. A porch was sometimes added, along the western or southern side of the building. The architectural style in northern features tall roofs, with a belfry surmounting the narthex²⁰. Relief carvings decorate the wooden walls, both on the inside and the outside²¹. Beside the icons displayed in the iconostasis and in other parts of the sacred space, there are paintings adorning the church walls. Usually, the painting is applied on plastered surfaces, while the openings between the beams are covered in hemp cloth, so that the mural decoration is not discontinued²². Icons were mandatory not only for the Orthodox places of worship, but also the Greek-Catholic ones built after 1700. This rule, stipulated by article 24 of the second *Diploma Leopoldinum*, granted the new denomination the right to retain the old worship practices and also limited the influence of Calvinism in the region²³.

Regrettably, because of the perishability of materials, the mural painting still extant in the wooden churches of Transylvania dates, in most cases, from the second half of the 18th century and the next century. This decoration, of Byzantine tradition, also integrated Baroque thematic and stylistic elements, inspired by ecclesiastical art of either

¹⁶ Phrase coined by BERNATH, 1994: 73.

¹⁷ Few masonry churches are attested to have existed until late 18th century. Some edifices were built on lands owned by the Romanian princes of Moldavia or Wallachia, such as those of voivode Steven the Great (Ștefan cel Mare) at Feleac (cca 1488) and Vad (a church he commissioned together with his son, Petru Rareș). *Vide* PORUMB, 1982: 86, 91. Other masonry churches mentioned in documents are those of Bădăcin and Meseșenii de Sus. *Vide* CRISTACHE-PANAIT, SCHELETTI, 1971: 31.

¹⁸ TARNAVSCHI, 1982: 134.

¹⁹ TOȘA, 1982: 231-232.

²⁰ TARNAVSCHI, 1982: 134.

²¹ TARNAVSCHI, 1982: 136.

²² TOȘA, 1982: 236.

²³ MIRON, 2004: 48.

Wallachia or Ruthenia²⁴. When communities could afford it, the mural painting covered the entire surface of the church walls. The inscriptions accompanying it reveal the interruptions in the decoration works, as well as the time gaps between the completion of the construction and the date of its painting.

Pictorial works for a church's murals begin with the decoration of the apse. Usually, the iconography of this space includes figures of bishops and martyr archdeacons (Stephen and Lawrence), sometimes ascetics (Symeon the Stylite, Daniel the Stylite, Venerable Paraskevi), the Sacrifice of Abraham (Fig. 1).

The paradigm of martyrs, which proceeds from the apse, is continued and amplified in the nave, with military saints, depicted on both the southern and northern walls and the evangelists. The succession of figures on the vault reveals sometimes Jacob's ladder, the Assumption to Heaven of Prophet Elijah, and the four evangelists. The nave walls also display the Christological Cycle, which in Transylvania especially highlights Christ's Passions (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1. *The Sacrifice of Abraham*, Church of Racăș, mural painting from 1783

²⁴ The iconographic programs of Wallachia were one of the main sources of inspiration for the artists working in Transylvania. Some of them travelled across the Carpathians in order to learn the art of painting, while others were self-taught by using the sets of models drawn by other artists or the etchings circulating in that part of Europe. Other influences came from Central Europe to Transylvania, especially via Ruthenia. For the relationship between Greek-Orthodox and Greek-Catholic art in the mentioned region, *vide* DELUGA, 1994: 267-284.



Fig. 2. Scenes from the Passion Cycle, Church of Sălcuța, mural painting from 1788

In the narthex, the painting incorporates mostly eschatological topics such as the Parable of the Ten Virgins, the Myrrh-Bearing Women, the Last Judgment (in either succinct or extended versions), episodes of the Apocalypse, or saints with similar significance (Mary of Egypt and Zosimas, Barbara, Marina, Christopher).

The Baroque-style abundant ornamentation, adopted by the iconographic programs in Transylvania in the second part of the 18th century either from the south (through the contributions of Brancovan art in Wallachia), or from the north (by borrowing from the Ruthenian etchings and icons in circulation) also played an important role in the composition of mural paintings within this cultural area. This fusion of Byzantine tradition with Western elements followed the same path taken by churches decorated in the regions of Carpatho-Ruthenia during this period²⁵.

3. PIETAS AUSTRIACA IN A NUMBER OF REPRESENTATIONS OF ROMANIAN GREEK-CATHOLIC ICONOGRAPHY

The union with Rome of a part of the Orthodox Romanians and the emergence of a new denomination did not bring about major changes in the iconographic program of Greek-Catholic communities' places of worship. The liturgical rite had been maintained, as per the request of the bishops who accepted the union, which also implied that the services were performed within a space densely populated with pictorial representations

²⁵ For more information regarding the characteristics of the wooden churches in Ruthenia, *vide* HEWRYK, 1982: 4.

of Byzantine tradition. The interdenominational conflicts occurring during the 18th-19th centuries also included disputes over the edifices erected before 1700. This rivalry often entailed losing and reclaiming certain community churches, and many of the worship places had an ambiguous denominational history. Although research into the matter has revealed the unitary character of the iconographic programs, be they Orthodox or Greek-Catholic, there are certain differences in the respective churches' decoration which deserve greater attention than they have been receiving so far.

To address this issue, let us remember that the new denomination emerged as a result of a part of the Orthodox clergy in Habsburg-governed Transylvania, accepting union with the Roman-Catholic Church, in an attempt to gain political and social rights and benefits for the Romanians.

The present investigation into the iconographic programs of the churches in northern Transylvanian counties, reveals the presence of elements intended to indicate denominational loyalty and, implicitly, loyalty to the House of Austria. My commentary on these iconographic elements is based on the study of Anna Coreth whose outstanding work²⁶, first published in 1959, addressed the Habsburgs' special type of piety and the strategies underpinning it. The aspects examined by this author — devotion to the Eucharist and to the Virgin Mary, confidence in the Cross of Christ, veneration of particular saints²⁷ — are investigated by the Austrian researcher in the historical context of the Counter-Reformation (1545-1563), taking into account the role claimed by the Habsburg dynasty as protectors of the Roman-Catholic confession²⁸. These four dimensions, cultivated by means of processions, ceremonies and visual representations by several generations of the Habsburg family, are also reflected by the iconography of certain Transylvanian churches which belong to the Greek-Catholic communities at the time of their decoration²⁹.

Regarding the Eucharist, the importance attached to it is evinced by the multiplication of visual representations within the same place of worship, as is the case of Cubleşu³⁰, Aghireşu³¹, Tămaşa village churches. Although the author's signature is no longer legible in any of them, in earlier studies, based on stylistic similarities with other occurrences, I have ascribed the mural decoration to Ursu Broină, an artist whose activity in the area, towards the end of the 18th century, is attested to by local people's memory

²⁶ CORETH, 2001.

²⁷ CORETH, 2001. *Vide also* DUCREUX, 2011: 277-278.

²⁸ The Habsburg family was not the only one in Central Europe claiming such mission. In Bavaria, the dukes of Wittelsbach undertook, even before the onset of the Counter-Reformation, actions aimed at reviving Catholicism within the territories under their rule. *Vide* MULLETT, 2010: 27-28.

²⁹ According to the inscriptions present in the narthex or nave.

³⁰ For instance, in the altar apse of Cubleşu church, the theme *Christ in the chalice* is associated with the figure of Archdeacon Stephen carrying an oversized eucharistic chalice, and the *Vision of Peter of Alexandria*.

³¹ At Aghireşu church, the scene of Mary of Egypt receiving Communion from Zosimas is located in the altar apse, an atypical choice, departing from the Romanian iconography of the 18th-19th centuries, which usually places this scene in the narthex (Bica, Dealu Negru, etc.).

and documents³². Broină was not only a skilled painter of churches and icons, but also a Greek-Catholic priest with extensive theological knowledge, as demonstrates the complexity of his iconographic programs. He also associated the theme of the Eucharist to that of the Cross — an unprecedented perspective, never before found with Romanian edifices in northern Transylvania — in a representation depicted in the church of Tămaşa (the edifice is nowadays located in the village of Ticu-Colonie) (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. *Confidence in the Cross of Christ*, Church of Tămaşa, mural painting, c. 1787



Fig. 4. *Confidence in the Cross of Christ*, Church of Fildu de Sus, mural painting from 1856

Confidence in the Cross of Christ (*Fiducia in Crucem Christi*), an post-Tridentine iconographic theme showing Jesus carrying the cross on His right shoulder, can also be found with other Greek-Catholic churches (Năsal, Nădaşu, Fildu de Sus — Fig. 4, Ciuleni).

The third element of this particular strand of piety — devotion to the Virgin Mary — is present in some of the Greek-Catholic places of worship, which display either the miraculous image of Mariazell³³ (found at Aghireşu), or the iconographic type of

³² MARIN BARUTCIEFF, 2011: 25-38; 2013: 361-378.

³³ Mariazell became under Leopold I (1658-1705) the most important pilgrimage destination in the territories under Habsburg governance, where the religious significance also gained political connotations during this period. Vide CORETH, 2001: 57; DUCREUX, 2011: 295. Maria Theresa proclaimed this image as *Patrona Austriae*. Vide STEINER, 2004: 265.

the Immaculate Virgin³⁴ (Fildu de Sus, Năsal) — purposely chosen in the 17th century by the Habsburgs in order to place Austria under the protection of the Holy Virgin³⁵.

The fourth dimension of Catholic piety lies in the veneration of certain hagiographic figures, as encouraged by the Counter-Reformation. One of these saints is Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus, a religious order whose missionaries reached Transylvania as early as 1579³⁶. The figure of the Jesuits' patron, included in the mural painting of Fildu de Sus (Fig. 5), is also one of the post-Tridentine representations intended as a visual reminder of Romanians' alliance with Rome³⁷.



Fig. 5. Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Church of Fildu de Sus, mural painting from 1856

³⁴ This iconographic type shows Mary stepping on the snake's head (Fildu de Sus, Năsal) and is placed in the proximity of Apocalypse scenes (Năsal). Unfortunately, recent alterations of the mural painting at Năsal have rendered the images unclear. Next to the Virgin, an inscription in Cyrillic script reads «The woman clothed with the sun», quoting a verse in the Book of the Revelation (12: 1). An etching and an icon on glass of this type, authored by Johann Esaias Nilson (Augsburg, 1721-1788), are reproduced in STEINER, 2004: 136, figs. 53a, 53.

³⁵ CORETH, 2001: 53. The Mariazell type, as well as other sacred representations produced during the Counter-Reformation also circulated via icons on glass and etchings, widely adopted around mid-18th century by the popular art of Central Europe. *Vide* STEINER, 2004: 9. An etching and an icon on glass of this type also in STEINER, 2004: 230, figs. 100a, 100.

³⁶ CRĂCIUN, 2002: 75.

³⁷ The southern wall of the nave, mural painting dating from 1856. Ignatius of Loyola is shown hitting a snake with a stick — an allusion to an episode in the saint's biography.

The presence in this Transylvanian church of two other iconographic themes belonging to the Catholic visual discourse after 1563 — *Saint Anne teaching the Holy Virgin Mary how to read*³⁸ and *Christ offering the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven to Saint Peter*³⁹ — supports the same interpretation.

In this cultural, social and political context, the inscriptions painted inside the church clarify the denominational identity of Romanian communities in Transylvania. Usually, they indicate the period when the painting was executed, the person who commissioned it, the name of the local bishop and of the priest serving at the time, as well as the name of the ruling emperor. Some of the Greek-Catholic religious edifices in the north of this province and the adjoining regions (Țara Lăpușului and Țara Chioarului, pertaining to the Ruthenian Greek-Catholic Diocese of Muncaci) include further visual identifiers. At Borșa, Năsal (Fig. 6), Bulgari and Cupșeni, as well as Valea Chioarului⁴⁰, the iconographic programs display heraldic emblems of the House of Austria, such as the double-headed eagle (*Aquila biceps*) holding a sceptre and a sword in his claws — a representation which the House of Habsburgs took over from the heraldry of the Holy Roman Empire.



Fig. 6. Coat of arms of the House of Austria, Church of Năsal, mural painting from 1804

³⁸ Gary Waller examined how the medieval theme was taken over by Spanish post-Tridentine art. The Virgin following the book's lines with her finger, under Anne's supervision, indicates she is gaining awareness of her mission as mother of God, and is preparing for the Annunciation (by way of revelation and the *Immaculate conception*). Vide WALLER, 2015: 124.

³⁹ The space allotted to this theme in the church of Fildu de Sus underscores the importance attached to the Holy Apostle Peter by Roman-Catholic theology. Vide LINDBERG, 2021: 309.

⁴⁰ Construction works began in 1852 and were completed in 1881, when the church belonged to the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Gherla, established in 1853.

In the painting of Borșa church (dating from late 18th century) the bird's head is surmounted by a generic royal crown; the object's aspect was altered in the later occurrences (Năsal, Cupșeni — Fig. 7, Valea Chioarului — all from the 19th-century).

This iconographic evolution reflected the political changes following 1800, when Francis I proclaimed the Austrian Empire (1804) and adopted as symbol of the new title the crown created for Rudolf II (1602). Visibly displayed either in the narthex, within the votive inscription (Năsal) or as part of significant compositions (the *Genesis* — Cupșeni)⁴¹, or in transitional spaces (above the entrance from the narthex into the nave, at Bulgari; among the carvings adorning the iconostasis, at Valea Chioarului), the imperial coat of arms illustrated the loyalty of this segment of the Romanian population to the Habsburg dynasty and also expressed its hope for assistance in gaining political and social rights.

Finally, the last case to be addressed is that of painter Ursu Broină, mentioned above as author of the iconographic programs of three churches (at Cubleșu, Aghireșu, Tâmașa), all located near Cluj, the most important urban centre in northern Transylvania during the early modern period. The complexity of the dogmatic and political discourse produced by the painter-priest⁴², reflected in the subtlety of compositional associations in his mural painting, evinces his sound theological education, which he employed to create a visual pledge of religious and political allegiance to the House of Habsburg. An incident in which the priest had been involved, in mid-1780s (the demolition of a monastery he had built) prompted him to petition emperor Joseph II. His letter of 1786, whereby Broină asked the emperor to do justice to him, never reached its addressee. However, the social and political aspirations of this priest were expressed in the (unusual) iconographic program of Tâmașa (1787-1790)⁴³, in which he included two portraits of the emperor⁴⁴. Assimilating the sacred dimension and attributes of the *Christological Cycle* compositions they are juxtaposed to (Fig. 8), these portraits denote their author's faithfulness to the House of Habsburg-Lothringen and especially to this «new Saint Joseph», who ruled between 1780 and 1790⁴⁵.

⁴¹ Introducing the coat of arms in the painting of Cupșeni, created in 1848, should be interpreted in the context of the Revolution of 1848, when a number of Romanian intellectuals, among them philosopher Simion Bărnuțiu, lobbied for the federal organization of the Romanians in Transylvania, Banat and Bukovina as a single province, to be integrated into the Austrian Empire. *Vide* BRUBAKER, 2006: 191.

⁴² Ursu Broină was a priest of the Greek-Catholic community of Stoboru, as shows his letter — now in the National Archives of Cluj, Collection Ilie Dăianu, inventory number 1087.

⁴³ The church built in late 18th century at Tâmașa, a village in Cluj county, was transferred in 1935 to a newly-established village, Ticu-Colonie.

⁴⁴ The inscriptions accompanying them are no longer extant. The portraits were identified in 2011 by the author of the present paper, by comparison with the political propaganda portraits of Joseph II disseminated throughout the Habsburg-ruled territories, including Transylvania.

⁴⁵ Joseph II was a mythical figure to the Romanians in Transylvania, a province which the monarch visited twice (1773, 1786). On the emperor's first visit to Transylvania, *vide* BOZAC, PAVEL, 2006.



Fig. 7. Coat of arms of the House of Austria, Church of Cupșeni, mural painting from 1848



Fig. 8. Scenes from the Passion Cycle
with the portrait of Joseph II,
Church of Tâmașa

This pledge of allegiance to the emperor *who tolls the church bells* — an apotropaic act with multiple connotations (warning, but also deliverance or long-awaited celebration), took place shortly after the decrees emancipating the Romanians of Transylvania, signed by Joseph II at the end of the 18th century⁴⁶.

CONCLUSIONS

Two main conclusions can be derived by investigating the political and religious changes which occurred in Transylvania in late 17th century and over the following one.

Firstly, we note that the iconographic programs of Byzantine tradition were, by and large, maintained unaltered in the Romanian churches (decorated between 1765 and 1867) belonging to either the Orthodox or the Greek-Catholic Romanian communities in northern Transylvania. This iconographic consistency evinced by the places of worship of both Greek-Orthodox and Greek Catholic denominations emanates from the principle of continuity and tradition. This principle was upheld also in late 17th century and early 18th century by the members of the Greek-Catholic clergy, throughout the process of union with Rome⁴⁷. It underscores the convergence of the two denominations' visual discourses and also, in the words of Paul Shore, «the existence of a connexion across national boundaries to a wider cultural heritage spread throughout Eastern Europe»⁴⁸.

The second remark concerns another principle underpinning the emergence of the Greek-Catholic denomination: fidelity to the Habsburg monarchy. Expressed in a set of symbolic elements denoting the influence of Central-European Baroque in the decoration of Uniate edifices, this dynastic loyalty is discernible at the end of the 18th and notably during the 19th century.

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⁴⁶ The decrees concerning Transylvania were issued in 1783 and 1785. Vide DUMITRAN, 2007: 75.

⁴⁷ MIRON, 2015: 87.

⁴⁸ SHORE, 2007: 29.

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