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Késő középkori szárnyasoltárok
Erdélyben (Rezümé)** 300

**Ateliere locale – Relații externe.
Altare poliptice medievale din
Transilvania (Rezumat)** 305

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FOREWORD

The author never feels a work is really ready when it is done. The topic of medieval winged altarpieces in Transylvania represents such a wide and far-reaching research territory, and raises so many interesting and still unresolved problems, that this contribution can only mean the beginning of a long journey. My survey, finished in 2008, constitutes the main body of this book, but it has been partly reshaped and a full catalogue of the surviving altarpieces, panel paintings, and wood sculptures has been added.

I was able to answer a number of questions, tentatively resolve a few more, but in many cases, I succeeded in simply raising the issues. The studies presented here provide a selected overview of the larger topic. A brief characterization of the early period (the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries) of Transylvanian winged altarpieces is aimed at providing an understanding of the very beginnings of altar production in or for Transylvania. The few surviving examples and the written data on retables of this period represent important preliminaries to the art of the following decades, and also consequently to the two main chapters of this thesis.

The first considerable and coherent period of Transylvanian winged altarpieces was the 1470s, and in particular the 1480s, decades marked by a strong foreign influence. Because their style characterizes the period almost exclusively, a group of paintings from the time of King Matthias were selected to illustrate this era. Finally, the heyday of Transylvanian winged altar production is presented through one special workshop from sixteenth-century Hermannstadt (Sibiu, Nagyszeben): that of master Vincencius. We are thereby presented with a feasible and characteristic example of the lives and work of craftsmen in this period in terms of their workshop activity and the stylistic influences they absorbed. However, this is only a small sample of the total production of the age. In the future, to enhance our understanding, two other important groups in particular would require greater study: the other workshops of Hermannstadt and, unavoidably, the rich material of the preserved altarpieces linked to Schässburg.

The catalogue at the end of this book contains never-before compiled data and objective descriptions of the condition of the preserved pieces. The assembly of works is as

complete as possible, containing all surviving painted and sculpted works that can with some degree of likeliness be attributed to the region's altarpiece-producing workshops. Thus, even fragments that could not be proved to belong to a particular altarpiece, but were nevertheless known to date to the period in question, were included in order to offer a more complete understanding of the work done by these workshops. Works by joiners, however, were excluded, although obviously these craftsmen played an outstanding role in altarpiece production, too. Unfortunately, though, their activities fall outside the scope of this project. At certain points, though, references are made to other church furnishing.

The Transylvanian origin of certain pieces included in the catalogue cannot be verified, but, until evidence arises to the contrary, they have been included in the compilation, listed as works of uncertain origin.¹ As extensive as the catalogue may be, it is probably, or rather hopefully, not complete. The work of restorers and researchers during the last few years have hinted at how many unknown artworks may be lying in wait in little village churches or in the depths of museum deposits. The analysis of archival photo material might also supply additional information. The catalogue, therefore, includes a record of those altarpieces and fragments that disappeared long ago, whose existence is known only through old photographs and descriptions.

In the study of winged altarpieces, the question of function and use is still much discussed. Probably further case studies are needed in order to bring us closer to an answer. However, the choice of iconography in the various panels obviously conforms to liturgical needs, and the programs of the inner and outer sides of the wings were designed to produce the greatest effect on the public at the various times of year. Thus, I have chosen to use the two most well-known expressions of »feast-day side« (or *Festtagseite*) and »work-day side« (or *Werktagseite*), although I am aware that these expressions considerably simplify and generalize the rules governing the opening and closing of the wings.

A complicated task that proved impossible to resolve satisfactorily involved the correct and consistent use of Transylvanian place names. These locations today have official Romanian names. However, it would be historically incor-

rect to use the current official name when speaking of the period discussed in this book. I have therefore chosen to use the »historical« place names, the Hungarian or German variant where appropriate, based on the nationality of the majority of inhabitants or the dominant culture of the given locality in the Middle Ages. As a result, I speak of Hermannstadt (rather than Sibiu), but of Gyulafehérvár (rather than Alba Iulia). When the place name first occurs in the text, I provide the other two versions of the name in parenthesis. However, in the catalogue, which documents the present place of preservation of these pieces, it was necessary to use the official names of the localities and the institutions. In each entry, though, I do include the other two name variants. Additionally, the index at the end of the book helps clarify these questions.

I am grateful to the Medieval Studies Department of the Central European University, where I defended my PhD thesis on this topic, for providing funding and also generous professional and technical assistance. Further aid to my research came in the form of scholarships offered by the Geisteswissenschaftliches Zentrum Geschichte und Kultur Ostmitteleuropas Leipzig, the Bosch Stiftung, the Siebenbürgen Institut in Gundelsheim, the Gerda Henkel Stiftung² and the Országos Kutatási Alapprogram (OTKA).³

I am especially thankful to Dr. Imre Takács, who encouraged this line of research, showing me the hidden possibilities of the topic, and guiding me through the early stages with his astute comments and methodological suggestion. For numerous useful discussions and advice I am also indebted to Drs. Robert Suckale, András Kovács, Ernő Marosi, Evelin Wetter, Stefan Roller, Gernot Nussbächer and Maria Crăciun.

Another tremendous source of support was Thomas Șindilariu of the Archives and Library of the Black Church in Brașov and Christian Rother of the Siebenbürgen Institut in Gundelsheim, who were always ready to offer swift bibliographical help. Márta Guttmann from Sibiu also provided me with immediate technical support on innumerable occasions. For their understanding, patience, and permission given to publish various pieces, I am grateful to my colleagues from the Muzeul Național Brukenthal, Muzeul de Artă Cluj and the Muzeul de Istorie a Transilvaniei Cluj, the Muzeul Secuiesc al Ciucului (Csíki Székely Múzeum) in Miercurea Ciuc, and the Bishopric and the Archives of the Library of the Lutheran Church of Sibiu, and especially to Dr. Wolfgang G. Theilemann. The conservator and restorer Ferenc Mihály also played a special role in the preparation of this work, sharing with me his rich documentation material and

infrared reflectographies. I have learned so much from him throughout these years.

For their special help and encouragement given in the last, most frightening, months of writing, and for advice on considerable parts of this work, I am grateful to Drs. János Végh, Györgyi Poszler and János Kalmár. Dr. Gerhard Jaritz and the Institut für Realienkunde Krems likewise provided indispensable help with a number of the illustrations in this publication. Also playing a critical role in providing images were Attila Mudrák and Gellért Áment, who spent long weeks taking and preparing the photographs published here. I also thank my colleagues from the Library of Fine Arts Museum in Budapest, especially Andor Nagyajtai and Kálmán Sipos, for their continual technical and bibliographical help. A most observant and careful linguistic reader and editor of this book was Lara M. Strong, whose collaboration was reassuring and constant, a real joy.

Last but not least in the long list of people and institutes that have offered me scholarly assistance is the Geisteswissenschaftliches Zentrum Geschichte und Kultur Ostmitteleuropas Leipzig. I am grateful to them for including my work in their series, and especially to Dr. Markus Hörsch for his numerous contributions to this project.

Above all, however, I owe thanks to my family, especially my parents, who have not only treated my long-lasting work with understanding, but have always given me the necessary encouragement from the very beginning, when I chose to pursue a career in the poorly financed field of art history. Without their active contribution during the last months of writing this book, it would have been absolutely impossible to finish my work. My husband, Márton Sarkadi, also deserves my deepest appreciation for struggling alongside me through my everyday difficulties and always being a sympathetic and professional audience. His continual interest in my topic, his special knowledge as an architect, and his passion for photography have contributed considerably to this book. Finally I owe a great deal to both my small daughters, Borka and Lilla, whose understandable impatience required me to maintain a balance between my personal and professional life, and whose love left me reinvigorated day after day.

With the completion of this book, I am thus relieved of a heavy, but dear, burden – at least until I continue my research on the still unresolved matters of this topic and try to remedy some already recognized deficiencies in my research. For the time being, however, I hope my work will be of use to other students of this topic and to anyone with an interest in the rich and fascinating history of Transylvanian altarpieces.

1 THE HISTORY OF INTEREST IN TRANSYLVANIAN ALTARPIECES

1.1 Previous Scholarship

A glaring gap in research on Transylvanian winged altarpieces was recognized long ago in art historical literature. Not only is a scholarly corpus lacking that would facilitate an overview of the surviving objects, but so too is a continuous publication of detailed studies which could aid in formulating more general conclusions. A series of thorough studies and overviews published in the last decades⁴ reflects an increasing interest in Hungarian (and not only Hungarian) literature on altarpieces in upper- and western Hungary (Transdanubia). Nevertheless, researchers of Transylvanian panel painting or wood sculpture still rely on Victor Roth's general opus written in 1916.⁵ This classic work is concerned with the development of both Saxon and Székely altarpieces from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries. When the book was first published in Strasburg (at the beginning of the twentieth century), a slice of Transylvanian art became accessible to the Western European public. Roth offered a summary of the information published up to that time, mainly by Saxon historians, clerics, and several interested amateurs.⁶ He also compiled all earlier descriptions of altarpieces, short studies surveying church antiquities, and most of the data on craftsmen and altarpieces found not only in written sources and charters, but also in account books published in collected volumes at the end of the nineteenth century. Early references to the topic in Hungarian art historical literature did not escape his attention either.⁷ Roth's series of articles on Transylvanian altarpieces, some published in Hungarian, but most in German before World War I, reveal only one aspect of Roth's wide interests in the art and culture of Transylvania. His basic overview of 1916 is, more or less, a result of these studies.⁸

Roth's fundamental view that Transylvania cannot and should not be understood as an autonomous artistic region⁹ was much debated in the literature, since he suggested that Transylvanian art was simply a blend of Eastern and Western artistic trends, their influence evolving along the cultural and commercial routes that crossed the medieval

Hungarian Kingdom. Local art objects were not, he thought, the work of local masters, but of itinerant artists coming to the region from distant countries. Martin and George of »Clussenberch« alone were considered »real« Transylvanian artists by Roth. His approach to the works is mainly chronological, but he organizes them into stylistic groups. Although most of the connections he outlines can be debated, his statements (on the »large group of altarpieces« grouped around the St. Martin's retable from Schässburg (Sighișoara, Segesvár), the »Birnhalm group of altarpieces« or the »retables of Master Vincentius«) have for many long decades left their mark on the general understanding of Transylvanian altarpieces and workshop organizations.

In his volume of 1932, István Genthon used much of the data published by Roth, although he came to conclusions that in many respects contradict those of the Saxon specialist: »The artifacts of the Transylvanian school form a closed group at the beginning of the sixteenth century and their style is unmistakable. The backbone is represented by local painters, local schools.«¹⁰ Later he said, »If no artist from the more central towns reached Upper Hungary or Transylvania, it is even less probable that foreign itinerant craftsmen could have made their living here.«¹¹ The exact location of the workshops where Transylvanian altarpieces were produced, their eventual import as well as origins, and the identity of the masters who painted them are all questions that have yet to be answered in the literature. The presence of various Western influences in Transylvania is incontrovertible, as is the interpretation of local character as simple provincialism in earlier research. The solution obviously lies in a combination of the two factors.

Victor Roth again published his opinion on the topic, with the collegial contribution of well-known specialists like Theodor Müller and Alexander von Reitzenstein.¹² Their survey of German art in Transylvania, an early publication of the Deutscher Kunstverlag Berlin, aimed to popularize the art of the region outside the borders of medieval Hungary, concentrating, according to the tendencies of the period, on the primacy of German culture. Edit Hoffmann also provided short comments on certain Transylvanian altarpieces in her

much-quoted article on old Hungarian panel painting and its graphic patterns.¹³ However, she merely touched on the altars from Székelyszombor (Jimbor, Sommerburg), Radeln (Roadeş, Radeln) and Csíkmenaság (Armăşeni). She also identified certain prints of Dürer and Beham that were relied on in composing these paintings. Much of her information was based on the publications of Victor Roth.

According to Jenő Rados, not only the number but also the quality of Transylvanian retables trailed behind those found in Upper Hungary. In his survey of Hungarian altarpieces,¹⁴ he recognized certain important stylistic relationships, including the connection between the altarpieces of Csíkmenaság and Székelyszombor. In other cases, however, he followed the mistaken interpretations of other researchers, including the late, sixteenth-century dating of the retable from Csíksomlyó (Şumuleu).¹⁵

In Antal Kampis' analysis published in 1940, Transylvania figures as »the most eastern frontier of Gothic and of all Western culture.»¹⁶ The introduction of the book, which discusses the general characteristics of the region's art works, emphasizes the »peculiarities« and the »reserved provincialism« of the local art, and the »lower quality of these objects compared to those surviving in Upper Hungary.«¹⁷ The sources for his concrete data on Transylvania were Roth's publications. In contrast to Genthon, he suggested that »there were several examples of Transylvanian altarpieces that were probably imports while only in the rarest cases can the presence of foreign masters or imported altarpieces be demonstrated in Upper Hungary.«¹⁸

Following Transylvania's annexation to Romania after World War I, personal investigation of Transylvanian artworks by Hungarian art historians became much more complicated. Jolán Balogh very correctly recognized a phenomenon in this period that has remained more or less true today: »The teachings of Balázs Orbán have been forgotten, so that researchers from Budapest only know as much about Transylvanian art as they can find in the books of Viktor Roth.«¹⁹ Balogh not only used earlier literature in her work, but also tried to rectify the above-mentioned deficiency with personal journeys and by collecting material in situ in Transylvania. Famous for identifying the concept of a »Transylvanian flowery renaissance« (»erdélyi virágos reneszánsz«), Balogh above all traces the presence of Italian and German Renaissance elements in her analyses of the retables. Her overview is completely dedicated to the Transylvanian Renaissance, and thus she naturally excludes any discussion of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century objects and the stylistic and workshop relationships between these earlier works of art. In answer to the question of whether the masters were local or foreign craftsmen, Balogh suggested

that some work was carried out by Italian masters, for example the wall-paintings in the northern apse of the cathedral of Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia, Weißenburg/Karlsburg). She noted, however, that there was a clear influence of imported Italian artworks on local artists, reflected in a type of retable called by Genthon the »Transylvanian type,« which is characterized by a central image on a low predella and a lunette-form superstructure. Along with her careful analysis, Balogh published an important collection of data that finally demonstrated clearly the existence and functioning of local workshops and masters in Transylvania.

The most recent literature on the topic can be found in the corpus of Dénes Radocsay, published in 1955, on panel paintings in medieval Hungary. Unfortunately, Radocsay was limited by his inability to personally examine most of the pieces and consequently bases much of his work mainly on earlier literature, photos, and objects held in Budapest collections. The mostly »second-hand« data he published was adopted from Roth, Kampis, or Jolán Balogh, and in many cases was incomplete or misunderstood. Naturally, a considerable number of surviving pieces escaped his attention and also many panels and sculptures (such as two altar wings in the collections of the Brukenthal Museum)²⁰ mentioned in earlier works pass without even a short description or image in Radocsay's volume. As a result, these pieces long remained unknown, unnoticed, and unidentified in later research.

Modern researchers are often astonished that certain well-known connections, considered today almost commonplace, were still unknown to Radocsay. For example, in the 1950s, very little was known about the altarpiece of Birtálm. As Radocsay could not study the work in person, he was obliged to base his interpretations on Roth's ideas.²¹ Thus, he stated that the Birtálm (Biertan, Berethalom) altarpiece had been produced in the supposedly large Schässburg workshop, the work of the same master who created the sixteenth-century retable from Schaas (Şaeş, Segesd). He still had absolutely no idea about the connections of the central part of the Birtálm altarpiece to Viennese artistic traditions, and made no mention of the influence of the master of the Schotten altarpiece at all, a much-discussed topic since Harald Krasser's 1971 publication.²² Not having seen even reproductions or photos of the Birtálm altarpiece, he was unable to differentiate between the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century parts of the retable.

Despite his limitations, Radocsay managed to outline many stylistic connections that for the most part were proved correct decades later when restoration and cleaning work were carried out on the panels. Unfortunately, however, he did

not live to see the confirmation of many of his well-reasoned remarks. For example, he would never know that late Gothic compositions influenced by the Danube school were indeed hidden, as he had suggested, under the eighteenth-century repainting of *Jeremias pictor* on the panels of the Hermannstadt altarpiece. By cleaning the central image, predella, and wings of this altarpiece in the 1980s, Gisela Richter and her assistants brought to light one of the highest quality Transylvanian panel paintings of the late Gothic period.

Dénes Radocsay's other fundamental work, dedicated to the wooden sculptures of medieval Hungary, was preceded by a 1958 book by Mária Aggházy on a similar topic. In Aggházy's overview, the entire production of altars in Transylvania was represented only by the retable of Csíkmenaság.²³ Because of the similar unfortunate fate suffered by art objects from these two regions, Radocsay thought sculpture from medieval Transylvania and Western Hungary (the so-called *Dunántúl*) should be discussed in one and the same chapter. Nevertheless, he discussed a fairly large number of Transylvanian wooden sculptures, including pieces that have been almost forgotten today. His analysis focuses on two large groups of works: that of the Saxons and of the Székelys, which he considered to be geographically very distinct. Radocsay still thought that the sculptural heritage of the Saxon towns could be very clearly differentiated from that of the Székely region, although he was aware that there were considerable stylistic overlaps between the two schools.

Romanian research on the topic for a long time was characterized only by the works of Virgil Vătășianu. His short articles were followed in 1959 by a large review opus dedicated, according to the spirit of the age, to the art of the feudalist period in the three Romanian countries (meaning Transylvania, Walachia, and Moldavia).²⁴ In the pages of his book, Vătășianu discussed the surviving objects according to two categories: panel paintings and sculptures. His interpretations were also based mainly on the information adopted from Victor Roth, but were partly revised based on his personal experience. The number of studies, research accounts and restoration reports on altarpieces, panel-paintings, and wood-sculptures increased in both Romanian and Saxon periodicals during the 1970s and 1980s.

Although he first examined Transylvanian art in the 1930s,²⁵ Krasser did not publish his influential observations on the relationship between the BIRTHÄLM altarpiece and the former high altar of the Viennese monastery of the Scotts in various Transylvanian and Austrian periodicals until the 1970s.²⁶ Otto Folberth's monograph on the Mediasch (Mediaș, Medgyes) altarpiece was published in the same pe-

riod. Here too, the author sees the same Viennese influence of the Schotten master in this retable. However, due to the book's long historical and geographical introduction and an analysis which becomes lost in generalities, this volume appears more a popularizing work for the Western public than a specialist study.²⁷ Still, Folberth's monograph called attention to one of the most interesting questions related to Transylvanian altarpieces: the presence of concrete western influences, with the most characteristic and feasible example of this the impact of the Viennese Schotten master on Transylvanian panel painting. The widespread influence of this leading Viennese master in Central Europe has become generally accepted in the last years. The idea that the Mediasch and the BIRTHÄLM altarpieces are outstanding works of followers of the Schotten master in Transylvania is almost a commonplace in art historical literature since the publication of Krasser's and Folberth's works. Nevertheless, publications in the last few decades have mainly repeated earlier formulated statements, while fundamental questions remain open. The identity of these masters remains a mystery as does the nature of their connection to the Viennese school and to each other. Similarly, little is known about the commissioners of the altarpieces.

At the same time as the above-mentioned Saxon publications appeared, the interest of Romanian researchers in Transylvanian altarpieces also increased with contributions by Viorica Guy Marica and Andrei Kertesz-Badruș containing detailed descriptions and a series of important observations.²⁸ After 1971, Vasile Drăguț, chief of the Romanian Monuments' Office in that period, initiated a restoration workshop in Kronstadt (Brașov, Brassó) financed by the Saxon Lutheran Church. This led to a surge in interest in Transylvanian altarpieces and thus also in the number of local publications.²⁹ The activity of the workshop, run by the conservator Gisela Richter, was summarized in a volume published by Christoph Machat in 1992. Unfortunately, it contains rather sparse information on restoration methods, although important descriptions and analysis of the retables by Otmar Richter³⁰ are offered. The book, which presents data collected on twenty-two altarpieces restored in the Kronstadt workshop, is the most important survey on the topic in recent decades and continues to be a fundamental aid to art historians, despite the fact that it was written for the general public.

The last few years have seen a welcome interest in art historical literature in questions related to Transylvanian altarpieces. The strong nationalistic character of earlier literature has been criticized in the writings of Evelin Wetter.³¹ The

main interest of this art historian has been in the goldsmith works of Transylvania, but many of her articles also touch upon certain aspects of panel painting or wood sculpture.³² Even more than Evelin Wetter, Maria Crăciun has shown interest in Transylvanian panel paintings with respect to the Reformation. Her published studies have made important contributions to our understanding of the role of retables in Transylvanian ecclesiastic history. From a theological point of view, she has also made interesting comments on the iconography of the surviving pieces.³³ The young researcher Ciprian Firea has examined Transylvanian altarpieces from an art historical perspective, dedicating his BA thesis to the altarpiece from Mühlbach³⁴ and his MA thesis to representations of donors in Transylvanian panel paintings.³⁵ His PhD³⁶ dissertation contains a catalogue of Transylvanian panel paintings with a full list of masters and altarpieces mentioned in written sources. In addition, he has also published case studies on individual altarpieces.³⁷

Over the last few decades, revisions have begun of old, often repeated interpretations of Transylvanian panel painting and wood sculpture. The above-mentioned interest of not only local but also foreign art historians and their published works based on personal experience have contributed considerably to the emergence of new evaluations in the field. However, many more case studies will be necessary in order to understand the broader connections and finally include Transylvanian art within the cultural framework of artistic trends in both the medieval Hungarian Kingdom and Central Europe in general.

1.2 Restorations. The Workshop of Gisela Richter in Kronstadt

Conservation and restoration work done on Transylvanian altarpieces, panel paintings, and wood sculptures mirror the interest and appreciation shown for these pieces early on. The first signs of such care, even if combined with factors of necessity, appear in the transformations and repairs of retables in the eighteenth century. It is well known that the altarpiece of Seiden (Jidvei, Zsidve) was sold to the community of Taterloch (Tatârlăua, Tatârlăka) in the eighteenth century. Similarly, the altarpiece from Meschen (Moşna, Muzsna) was transferred to Großschen (Cincu, Nagysink) in the same period. Both works received a Baroque frame at this time, making them appear larger and more fashionable.³⁸ In Taterloch, master Michael Hartmann even decorated the

empty shrine with a new panel and foliage, while the panels were covered with new paintings glued over the old ones. The eighteenth-century inscription on the Tobsdorf (Dupuş, Táblás) altarpiece informs us of its transfer to Tobsdorf and restoration in 1720.³⁹ The lost relief from the central shrine of the altarpiece from Schweischer (Fişer, Sövényesség) was replaced in the eighteenth century with a canvas depicting the Crucifixion. The panels of the altarpiece from Braller (Bruiu, Brulya) were completely overpainted during the eighteenth century, as were those from Schorsten (Şoroştin, Sorostély). The panels of the feast-day side and the predella of the large altar from Hermannstadt were overpainted in 1701.⁴⁰ Numerous other examples exist of damaged and incomplete medieval altarpieces restored according to the notions of the period, and they bear witness to the large wave of restoration campaigns that took place in the eighteenth century.

Another period of intensive restoration occurred at the turn of the twentieth century, with some foreign »restorers« invited to work on these pieces. In the last years of the nineteenth century a team comprising two local craftsmen and led by Eduard Gerisch from the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna restored the altarpiece in Bogeschdorf (Băgaci, Szászbogács).⁴¹ In 1903, when the retable from Magyarfenés (Vlaha) was transferred from its original home to the Museum of the Bishopric in Gyulafehérvár,⁴² the panels were restored and cleaned in Vienna.⁴³ The Museum of Fine Arts in Klausenburg (Cluj-Napoca, Kolozsvár) bought the former altarpiece of the parish church in Székelyudvarhely (Odorheiu Secuiesc) in 1909.⁴⁴ On this occasion József Beer was invited from the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest to restore the retable.⁴⁵ Photos made before work began show that Beer touched up large surfaces of the predella and the panels. It was in this period that medieval paintings seemed to have regained their value in the eyes of the communities. A good example is the 1914 renewed restoration of the altarpiece from Taterloch, at which time Hans Hermann removed the above-mentioned Baroque overpaintings on the panels.⁴⁶

The altarpiece fragments and retables added to Hungarian and Romanian museum collections during the first half of the twentieth century generally underwent several restorations during the 1950s and 1960s. These dates are usually recorded in the inventory books of the institutions in question. Unfortunately, however, only in the most unusual cases was the restoration work documented with photographs and detailed descriptions. Nevertheless, how the word restoration was understood and the methods and principles by which it was carried out – all continuously changing – can clearly be

traced in the treatment of Transylvanian altarpieces throughout the centuries.

The first systematic, centralized restoration campaign and thus also the most important one in the history of these objects took place in the workshop of Gisela Richter in Kronstadt. Her restoration workshop, which was supported by the Saxon Lutheran Church, was founded in 1971, as mentioned above, on the initiative of Vasile Drăguț, who suggested the organization of such a workshop to Bishop D. Albert Klein. The work continued over approximately two decades in Kronstadt, in a private house in the immediate neighborhood of the so-called Black Church (fig. 1.1). The communist era, in particular the circumstances of the 1970s and 1980s, were not conducive to the enlightened functioning and sustaining of such a workshop. The necessary materials, chemicals, and instruments for the work were mainly provided by the *Gustav-Adolf-Werk Kassel*, the *Diakonisches Werk in Stuttgart* and the *Hilfskomitee der Siebenbürger Sachsen und Banater Schwaben*. After a training course in Germany,⁴⁷ Gisela Richter maintained a continuous correspondence with colleagues from Germany, as material preserved in the church archives in Kronstadt shows. Problematic questions and decisions were always discussed with several (foreign) specialists. However, the local circumstances, the frequent lack of appropriate materials, and also the restoration principles of the period led to results that are often criticized nowadays.

Twenty-two almost completely preserved altarpieces and a number of fragments including panels, sculptures, and other furnishings, such as doors or wooden epitaphs, were restored over these two decades by Gisela Richter and her assistants. The pieces which came to her workshop were understandably those preserved in and around Saxon Lutheran churches. The only exceptions were the panels from the Székely locality of Csíkszentimre (Sîntimbru).⁴⁸ Fortunately, the restoration work was continuously documented through photographs. Although not all the art pieces were equally well photographed and a part of the documentation was supposedly lost over the last decades,⁴⁹ the images contain valuable and only very-very sporadically published information on the altarpieces and the work done on them.

A large number of panels were cleaned of their later, usually Baroque or nineteenth-century overpaintings. Once again, the phases of the cleaning procedure were quite well documented. Thus, it is possible to detect when questionable steps, such as the removal of very early overpaints, took place.⁵⁰ The photos present details of the altarpieces that in many cases cannot be observed with the naked eye, or which were later covered up during the restoration work. Impres-



Fig. 1.1 Gisela Richter at work (Photo: Sibiu [Hermannstadt], ZEKR, Gisela-Richter-Archiv)

sions of the original, now missing, sculptures in the shrines and remnants of the shrine vaulting and articulation – information important in a theoretical reconstruction of the altarpiece's original appearance – can easily be discerned. These records also enable researchers to trace perfectly which details of a panel had been painted in or painted over during restoration work through a detailed comparison of the paintings before and after treatment. Thus, the documentation has a special importance when conducting a stylistic analysis. Many vestiges of the over-zealous steps taken by Protestant Reformers at the time can also be observed in these photographs, such as scratched-out eyes and faces and broken noses, all of which were documented before restoration. The great majority of photographs are in black and white; thus certain good-quality, detailed images act almost as infrared shots, with the under-drawings clearly visible under the worn layers of paint.

In spite of the often controversial methods used during these restoration campaigns and the less-than-desirable circumstances in which the objects were transported, the work carried out by the restorers of the Kronstadt workshop (which seems to have functioned for a period even after the emigration of the Richter couple to Germany) is of great importance in the history of Transylvanian winged altars. Because the treatment of the objects generally conforms to the level of interest of the priest or the community and the occasional financing offered by various institutions, but mainly by the Saxon Lutheran Church, the idea of founding a central

workshop for the restoration of these works is worth serious consideration. Formulation of a general policy of restoration that would rank the pieces according to their needs is urgent considering the present state of the objects. The activities of specialists like Ferenc Mihály, who is responsible for the conservation and restoration of a considerable number of

altarpieces over the last few years; the contributions of young conservators from the Hermannstadt University; and the occasional assistance of foreign (mainly German and Hungarian) specialists could help assure the continuous and systematic monitoring of the condition of these works.