Cruci de consacrare medievale din Transilvania și din vestul României

Abstract:

The paper deals with the consecration crosses (Crux signata, Konsekrationskreuz, Weihekreuz, Apostelkreuz, croix de consécration etc.) identified in churches with medieval origin from Transylvania and the western neighbouring territories of this province. These can be easily pointed out as part of a general European phenomenon with consistent medieval history, pertaining to the Latin Church. Most often, these crosses were made through painting, carving or incising on the nave and choir walls. These elements generally came in groups of twelve, the same number as the Apostles. Crosses appeared and propagated as part of the complex consecration ritual of a building as cultic space, according to prescriptions codified by the pontificals. It has become obvious that these symbols were addressed differently through time and space. Some were kept to perpetually remind one of the initial moment of the birth and the designation of the church as a holy place, others were rivalled by and coated with ample narrative painting; clearly, a different category faced destruction together with the respective churches and were replaced by new crosses standing for the reconciliation of the building and, implicitly, for the massive interventions on these constructions. Subsequently, their presence was rejected by the Reformation, later on being neglected during restoration work (in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries), just to be retrieved randomly or by research and careful restoration work. In some cases (areas or countries) these images were already subject to scientific research, in others they have just been uncovered (if coated with paint or plaster), preserved and recorded as patrimony elements. Overall, the scholarly literature is poor, the highlight being represented by the vast unfolding of mural images, with manifest artistic and documentary qualities. During the last two or three decades the retrieval of consecration crosses was done at an increased rate due to the high number of mural research and restoration projects. Consequently, the necessity of recording, along with the need for some guidelines for their beginning, function and changes in the cultic space emerged; there is also a high demand for analogies for future finds and advanced research. Overall, the present study shows the potential of the recorded crosses for the retrieval of a series of aspects related to the history of the medieval cult space and to that of the region's religious art. These images are not merely a proof of the consecration moments of the 70 churches, but also reveal the reconsecration of eight of them, determined by factors that are worth further research. In one particular case, that of Chimindia, two crosses still bear inscriptions with the reconsecration year, 1482. On the other hand, due to their function period (requiring scientific demonstration) and especially because of some physical traces associated with them (proof of periodical lighting in their vicinity), the crosses are the only documents of the collective memory of the consecration moment of a construction and of the annual celebration of the church consecration. The present research brings forth the fact that most of the consecration crosses have been painted as pairs, most likely 12, adapted to the nave and choir interiors. There are no clues for their positioning at the exterior of the church, such as in England, for instance. The most common types in the research area, as all over Europe, were the painted crosses with equal arms, straight or slightly curved at the ends, enclosed in one or more circles, after being incised with a compass in the plaster base. In Alba Iulia there are two chapels where the crosses have been first carved in rock. Many were only painted in red on a white background, and for others three to four colours were alternately used. The study emphasises the fact that the basic shapes of some, repeated across centuries (14th-16th), are making it impossible to date only based on this criterion. For example, some crosses from the thirteenth century (Cisnădioara, Copșa Mică, Cricău) are no different from the ones dated during the sixteenth century and found in the chapels from Alba Iulia. Therefore, when it comes down to establishing the consecration moments of some spaces, one cannot resort only to a stylistic and formal typology, but must take into account the context of these visual documents. The majority of the discussed images were templated, most of the drawing being traced out with a compass. Though, there are also parts done in a freehand manner, displaying great plastic expression through lining, decorative elements (combining geometric

and vegetal motifs) and very well alternated chromatics. Out of the entire lot, the examples from Bărăbanţ (Alba county) are particularly distinct, because they have the greatest surfaces and show hints that they have survived for a long time without any over painting in a church consecrated to the Holy Cross. One can add the images from Sântămărie Orlea – related from a stylistic point of view, as well as those from Șmig, Oradea (with two fragments archaeologically uncovered in the fortification), Drăușeni, Petreni, Șintereag (the last two hosting the cross type known as Jakobskreuz) or Netuș; each of them being representative for the mural religious art that developed in the region. All the crosses uncovered until this moment belong to the nonfigurative type. Although, in Western Europe examples in which the Apostles have been depicted next to these crosses have been documented, in the investigated area no associated anthropomorphic elements were found yet. One only knows of the epigraphs rendered on the consecration crosses (Chimindia, Șmig). The paper is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue of the consecration crosses, ordered by settlement name and cult places. Because of the high number of monuments known to still preserve these elements – 70 – the catalogue was synthesised and limited to the most important rubrics: number of crosses and their position in the church, a brief description with production details, maximum dimensions, shapes, ornaments and colours, along with the underlining of the possible presence of traces left by cultic lights used when celebrating the consecration and the connection with other mural layers (painted ones or mortar/stone base, if known); nonetheless, dating and bibliography, along with the names of those who have contributed, together with the author, to the field work documenting will be included.

Keywords: *medieval religious images, art and liturgy, (re)consecration of medieval churches.*