Political Emblems in the Decoration of Transylvanian Noble Residences in the 17-18th Centuries

Abstract:

According to documentary sources, emblematic representations started to appear in the decoration of certain residencies of the Transylvanian elite during the last decades of the 16th century, the first known cases being related to the surroundings of the princely court (e.g. the palaces in Alba Iulia and Oradea, as well as the castle in Făgăraş). The decorations of the princely palaces and castles came to influence, in the following period, the appearance of the interiors of the noble residencies of the Principality, as well. Our study presents two mural painting ensembles from the 17th and 18th centuries, where political emblems were used for the decoration of the representative spaces, adapted from three significant works of European political emblem literature. In the case of the paintings from the Bethlen Castle in Criş (Mureș County), which probably date back to around 1660-70, the model was the collection of the well-known Protestant humanist Julius Wilhelm Zincgref, Emblematum ethico-politicorum centuria, published in 1619 in Frankfurt am Main. The mural paintings in the Gurghiu Country House (Mureș County), discovered during recent researches, reflect the prevalence of the use of political emblems in the Baroque era; in this case, the Roman Catholic owner used two important collections of the Central European Jesuit milieu: Meteorologia Philosophico-Politica by Franz Reinzer, which appeared in 1697 in Ausburg, and Idea Sapientis Theo-Politici by Antonio Vanossi, published for the first time in 1725 in Vienna. The identification of the graphic models for the representations in Criş and Gurghiu highlights the importance of using graphic models in the Transylvanian late Renaissance and Baroque art, as the two ensembles are prominent examples for the presence of applied emblematics in this region as well.

Keywords: *Transylvania, Renaissance, baroque, wall-painting, Criș, Gurghiu, Julius Wilhelm Zincgref, Franz Reinzer, Antal Vanossi.*