

# Emblems of Faith: Holy Companions on the Road to Observance

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Article: history; Received: 15.05.2023; Revised: 17.05.2023

Accepted: 10.06.2023; Available online: 30.06.2023.

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**Abstract:** The present study focuses on the specific devotional models that were promoted by the Observant Dominican friars in the late Middle Ages. By closely investigating textual and visual sources, previous research has noted that the reformed friars were eager to disseminate, particularly within the communities of the Observant Dominican women, the cult for the Passion of Christ and cults of saints that were easily transformed into models that pious women would adopt and emulate. Since the Observance was an European phenomenon and strong contacts existed between local friars and influential centres of reform, the prerequisites of the Dominican *forma vitae* became the standard according to which the communities of Observant Dominican women were organized and functioned. An integral part of this process of standardisation concerned the holy companions of the pious women affiliated to the Order of the Friars Preachers, who were usually recruited from the same cohort of saints represented by the Virgin Martyrs.

**Keywords:** Observant movement; the Order of the Friars Preachers; Dominican nuns; Passion devotion; cult of the saints

**Rezumat:** Studiul de față investighează modelele devoționale care au fost promovate cu predilecție de către Dominicani Observanți în perioada evului mediu târziu. Analiza detaliată a surselor textuale și vizuale produse în ambianță observantă a evidențiat faptul că devoțiunea cristocentrică și cultele unor sfinți care puteau fi ușor transformate în modele imitabile au fost susținute și diseminate de către frații dominicani, îndeosebi în comunitățile călugărițelor dominicane observante. Mișcarea

observantă, un fenomen european, a facilitat răspândirea unor formule specifice care caracterizau modul de viață în cadrul ordinului, de multe ori intermediarii acestei diseminări fiind frați din regiune care au studiat în centre ale reformei observante (universități sau conventuri). Procesul de uniformizare și standardizare care a organizat mănăstirile călugărițelor dominicane a inclus și adoptarea unor culte specifice, integrate modelului de sanctitate virginală și martirală.

**Cuvinte cheie:** mișcare observantă; Ordinul Fraților Predicatori; călugărițe dominicane; devoțiune christocentrică; cultul sfinților

In 1390, Johannes Sartorius, vicar of the Congregation of Friars Pilgrims for the province of Ruthenia-Wallachia, undertook a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The direct contact with the places where the sufferings of the Holy Victim were both commemorated and deeply venerated only increased Johannes's profound devotion to the Sacrifice of Christ. On his return to the friary he headed, that of Siret, in the Principality of Moldavia (**Map 1**), Johannes Sartorius generously divided a veil he had acquired during the pilgrimage into three parts: one was sent to the Dominicans in Lvov, another to those in Kamyenyets, while the third remained with the friars in Siret. The white linen cloth was transformed into a corporal, the altar cloth on which the bread and wine were placed during the Eucharistic celebration. A year later, in 1391, blood appeared on the corporal of the friars of St John the Baptist.<sup>1</sup> The miraculous event was investigated by Nicholas Goldberg, then inquisitor in Moldavia, and many witnesses testified to the supernatural power of the drops of blood on the altar cloth. In the months that followed, people coming from different dioceses were miraculously healed. At the request of the city council of Siret, the notary Conrad recorded the miracle stories, which revealed with great accuracy the growth of the cult of the Holy Blood with the Friars Preachers in Siret.

Two decades later, in 1417, an Austrian master, Peter Lantregen, executed a monumental work-of-art representing Christ crucified in the

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<sup>1</sup> To this day, Renate Möhlenkamp's study "Ex Czeretensi Civitate": Randnotizen zu einem in Vergessenheit geratenen Dokument", *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie "A.D. Xenopol" XIX* (1982): 105-130 is the most comprehensive analysis of the context within which the veil relic has been used by the Friars Preachers in their missionary activities in late fourteenth century Moldavia. Her study includes the editing of the miracles recorded in relation to this blood-relic in Siret and the identification of a good number of individuals who were the beneficiaries of these miracles. More recently, Claudia Florentina Dobre has focused the discussion on the strategies used by the Mendicant Orders among the Orthodox population and Catholic communities in Moldavia, an integral part of which has also been the recourse Friars Preachers made to the miraculous blood in their work of conversion, see *Mendicants in Moldavia: Mission in an Orthodox Land (Thirteenth to Fifteenth Century)* (AUREL Verlag: 2008), particularly 53-54.

company of the Virgin Mary and St. John the Evangelist. According to early modern accounts, this Crucifix was placed outside the fortifications of the town of Sibiu *ante portam Elizabethanam*.<sup>2</sup> Although there is no documentary evidence that this work was commissioned by the Dominicans of the Holy Cross friary in Sibiu, its location was most likely in the vicinity of the site where the first church of the Friars Preachers was built in the course of the thirteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, it has recently been convincingly argued that the way in which Master Lantregen depicted the torrent of blood flowing from Christ's side wound, not to mention the lifeless body of the Saviour with his eyes closed and his head bowed (**Fig. 1**), faithfully illustrated the Friars Preachers' affectionate devotion to Christ's sufferings, which the Holy Blood faithfully embodied.<sup>4</sup> According to local tradition, the people of Sibiu showed great devotion to the Holy Cross when, on the feasts of the Invention of the Cross and the Exaltation of the Cross, they piously visited the city's two crucifixes.<sup>5</sup> It is very likely that one of these crucifixes was the work of Lantregen, the *magna crux*, with the figure of Christ at a height of six metres and his outstretched arms reaching more than three metres, an impressive representation of Christ which, with its strong emphasis on the sacrificial blood, captured the viewers' attention (**Fig. 2**).

Conflicts between the mendicant friars and the parish church were quite frequent in Transylvanian towns during the 15<sup>th</sup> century, as the mono-parochial profile and the very active apostolate of the friars put them at odds with each other on issues related to the administration of the sacrament of confession and burial.<sup>6</sup> In Sibiu, it was precisely the opposition of the parish priest that prevented the friars from moving their church inside the city walls in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, after it had been severely damaged in several Ottoman attacks.<sup>7</sup> Such local conflicts reveal the success of the

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<sup>2</sup> Georg Soterius, *Cibinium. Eine Beschreibung Hermannstadts vom Beginn des 18. Jahrhunderts*. Translated and edited by Lore Wirth-Poelchau (Köln Wiemar Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2006), 38.

<sup>3</sup> Irina Băldescu, *Transilvania medievală. Topografie și norme juridice ale cetăților Sibiu, Bistrița, Brașov și Cluj* [Medieval Transylvania. Topography and juridical norms of the towns of Sibiu, Bistrița, Brașov and Cluj] (București: Editura Simetria, 2012), 153; Mihaela Sanda Salontai, *Mănăstiri dominicane din Transilvania* [Dominican monasteries in Transylvania] (Cluj-Napoca, Mega: 2022), 215.

<sup>4</sup> Ferenc Veress, "The Dominicans and the Holy Blood: from Late Medieval Devotion to Baroque Piety. Cases in Austria, Hungary and Romania", *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Kunst und Denkmalpflege*, LXX Heft 3-4 (2021): 134-149, especially 138 and footnote 22.

<sup>5</sup> Soterius, *Cibinium*, p. 38.

<sup>6</sup> Marie Madeleine de Cevins, *L'Église dans les villes hongroises à la fin du Moyen Age (vers 1320-vers 1490)* (Budapest - Paris - Szeged: Publications de l'Institut Hongrois de Paris - Université de Szeged, 2003), 57-61.

<sup>7</sup> Salontai, *Mănăstiri dominicane*, 202-203; Mária Lupescu Makó, "Domonkos rendi obszerváns törekvések Magyarországon" [Observant trends in the functioning of the Dominican Order in Hungary] in Veronka Dáné - Teréz Oborni - Gábor Sipos (eds), "...éltünk mi sokáig 'két hazában'...". *Tanulmányok a 90 éves Kiss András tiszteletére* [We lived for a long time in "two countries".

friars with the urban population, while the strong support they gave to the cult of the Holy Blood could be better understood if further contextualized.

Officially confirmed at the Council of Vienne in 1311, devotion for Corpus Christi rapidly spread Europe-wide, as revealed by an ever-growing number of fraternities, altars and chapels that were dedicated to it, developments which transformed Eucharistic devotion into the hallmark of late medieval piety.<sup>8</sup> Transylvania was an integral part of this picture, as revealed by the importance that the veneration of the Body and Blood of Christ came to acquire both in urban parishes and in village churches.<sup>9</sup> A highly relevant example in this regard is the chapel in Mălâncrav dedicated to the Blood of Christ, a chapel which benefited from the patronage of Nicholas Apafi, the nobleman who secured an indulgence for its functioning in 1424, which eventually turned it into a noteworthy pilgrimage place in the region.<sup>10</sup> The Dominicans involvement in promoting the cult for the Holy Blood was thus not only in tune with the more general spread of this cult, but it was also an efficient strategy that would enhance their apostolate. At the Council of Konstanz in 1415, it was decided that the communion in both species was reserved to the clergy alone, the reception of the chalice being forbidden to the laity, a decision that was supposedly meant to increase the clerical control of the cult for the Eucharist.<sup>11</sup> To be sure, ordinary believers were denied partaking in the Blood of Christ during the liturgical celebration; however, to them, the Friars Preachers offered other means by which devotion to *Sanguinis Christi* could be expressed. In Sibiu, these took the form of large drops of blood abundantly flowing from the wounds of Christ, the visible expression of Christ's sufferings on the cross that people adored when processing to the Crucifix of the town.

Miraculous bleeding hosts, object of popular devotion, were kept in other churches of the Dominican province in Hungary. In Pécs, one of

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Studies dedicated to the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kiss András] (Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó/Debrecen University Press, 2012), 264-266; Beatrix F. Romhányi, "A koldulóbarátok szerepe a XV-XVI századi vallási megújulásban" [The role of the friars in the religious revival during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries], in Beatrix F. Romhányi and Gábor Kendeffy (eds.), *Szentírás, hagyomány, reformáció*, [Scripture, tradition, reformation] (Budapest: Gondolat, 2009), 144-155.

<sup>8</sup> Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi. The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 210-214.

<sup>9</sup> Maria Crăciun, "Attitudes to Religious Art and the Confessional Identity of the Saxon Community. Passion Cycles in the Context of Lenten Observance and Easter Celebrations in Late Medieval and Early Modern Transylvania", *New Europe College GE-NEC Program*, (2004-2007): 13-70.

<sup>10</sup> Anca Gogâltan, Dóra Sallay, "The Church of Mălâncrav and the Holy Blood Chapel of Nicholas Apa", in Adrian Andrei Rusu, Péter Levente (eds.) *Arhitectura religioasă medievală din Transilvania* [Religious architecture in medieval Transylvania], vol. II (Satu Mare: Editura Muzeului Sătmărean, 2002), 195-9.

<sup>11</sup> Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 72-77.

the largest convents in the kingdom, in 1491, the Master General of the Order of the Friars Preachers asked the local friars to allow women to visit the miraculous host kept in the sacristy of the church. A few years later, Alexander VI (1492-1503) referred to the miracles that took place in the Church of the Holy Cross of the friars in Vasvár, in western Hungary, where another bleeding host was kept. (**Map 1**).<sup>12</sup> There is high certainty in considering that both friaries have adopted the Observance by the end of the fifteenth century, when these miracles related to the Holy Blood were recorded, something which draws our attention to the modalities within which this cult became an integral part of the devotional models this reform movement propagated.<sup>13</sup>

In 1390, Raymond of Capua, Master General of the Order of the Friars Preachers, strongly advocated for an urgently needed reform of religious life, and that its aims could be achieved by strict observance of the Rule of St Augustine and the Constitutions of the Order, requiring that there should be at least one friary in each province which would adhere closely to these exigencies. As we know from recent research into the adoption of the Observance by religious orders, such a return to the pristine ideal of monastic life was a process that was neither straightforward, nor easy to achieve.<sup>14</sup> Following serious crises such as the Great Schism or the Black Death, the society had greatly changed since the first century of the Dominican Order's existence, when its legislative body was established, and the reform movement had to adapt to the needs and expectations of a very different late medieval society.

The accommodation of the Observant reform was thus translated into new saintly models that were constructed and propagated. The preservation of strict enclosure was strongly emphasized, whereas interest in regulating and controlling the religious behaviour of the faithful became of key importance.<sup>15</sup> From an institutional point of view, the long fifteenth

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<sup>12</sup> Veress, *The Dominicans and the Holy Blood*, 135-136.

<sup>13</sup> András Harsányi, *A Démonkosrend Magyarországon a reformáció előtt* [The Dominican Order in Hungary before the Reformation] (Debrecen: Nagy Károly grafikai műintézetének nyomása, 1938), 69-71.

<sup>14</sup> Among recent contributions on the investigation of the Observant movement as a multifaceted phenomenon oriented towards reforming not only the religious orders, but the entire society, there are those of James D. Mixson – Bert Roest (eds.), *A Companion to Observant Reform in the Late Middle Ages and Beyond* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2015), 5-10; Sylvie Duval, Haude Morvan, and Ludovic Viallet, "Introduction." *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome* 130/2 (2018) <https://doi.org/10.4000/mefrm.4182> (last accessed 10 September 2023) and Michele Lodone, 'Riforme e osservanze tra XIV e XVI secolo', *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome*, 130/2 (2018): 267-273.

<sup>15</sup> Anne Huijbers, *Zealots for Souls. Dominican Narratives of Self-Understanding during Observant Reforms, c. 1388-1517* (De Gruyter: 2018), 179-185.

century also witnessed a change in the way the Observance was adopted. Between 1390 and 1460, the reform was carried out by energetic friars who were vigorously supported in their undertakings by the highest officials of the Dominicans, a piecemeal strategy that led to the reformation of several friaries and women's convents, but without having a strong impact on the Order as a whole. The turning point came with the pontificate of Pius II (1458-1464) and the canonisation in 1461 of Catherine of Siena, the paradigmatic model of the Observance in the eyes of the Preachers. The autonomy gained by the Observant Congregations (such as that of Lombardy in 1459 or that of Holland in 1462) proved to be effective, and it finally allowed the Observant reform to prevail within the Order.<sup>16</sup>

During the pontificate of Pius II, fierce disputes arose between the Observant Franciscans and the Dominican ones. James of the Marches reiterated the idea (which was otherwise condemned as heretical in the fourteenth century) that the effused Blood of Christ was unworthy of veneration, since it no longer belonged to the sacred body of Christ, something which was promptly condemned by the Observant Dominicans in Lombardy and recourse to papal mediation was made. In the end, the pope and the cardinals decided that the Holy Blood, even if effused, remains part of Christ's sacred body, hence, it should be venerated.<sup>17</sup>

This dispute brings to the fore a key dimension along which the Observance had influenced late medieval devotion. At the heart of this reform movement, there was a renewed emphasis on the regulation of religious life by norms to be obeyed by clergy and laity alike, a development intertwined with a centring of piety, in the words of Berndt Hamm. In his view, the more general tendency, visible in government and law, but also in humanism and the visual arts, was towards greater standardisation, discipline and control, which largely characterized the formation of early modern states. Such a tendency was paralleled in the world of devotion through the enforcement of norms and the reduction and simplification of complex belief systems. The most valued of such normative centring was identified in the Christ of the Passion, the powerful image of divine mercy that prompted repentance.<sup>18</sup> Placed within this interpretative framework, the Observant Dominicans' support for the cult of the Holy Blood not only exalted the redemptive value of Christ's sacrifice, but also transformed it into the focal point of the religious experience. However, this normative

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<sup>16</sup> Sylvie Duval, "Les Dominicaines ou les paradoxes de l'Observance. Une approche historiographique", *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome*, 130/2 (2018), <http://journals.openedition.org/mefrm/4515> (accessed 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023)

<sup>17</sup> Veress, *The Dominicans and the Holy Blood*, 134.

<sup>18</sup> Berndt Hamm, *The Reformation of Faith in the Context of Late Medieval Theology and Piety* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2004), 12-22.

centring of piety gained enormous importance within the devotional world of religious women affiliated with the Observant Dominicans.

Chapter XVI of the *Constitutiones sororum*, authored by Humbert of Romans and approved by the General Chapter in 1259, made obedience the cornerstone on which the life of women religious was to be built. Obedience was pledged to when the nuns took their profession to God, the Virgin Mary and St. Dominic, to the prioress and the Master general of the Order, to the Rule of St. Augustine and the Constitutions of the Order.<sup>19</sup> A uniform and standardised way of life was thus imposed on the *Moniales Ordinis Sancti Augustini sub cura et instituta Fratrum Predicatorum viventes*, not only with regard to obedience to the Rule, the Constitutions and the officials of the Order, but also with regard to the inner life of their communities. Monastic life was a communal life, and living in the community required that the nuns also obey and observe the liturgical tasks that they had to fulfil according to the Constitutions and the decisions of the general chapters, as well as the duties that kept the convents functioning, such as those arising from the offices of prioress or sub-prioress, or the more mundane activities of the simple members of the convent.<sup>20</sup>

With the advance of the Observance in the course of the fifteenth century, enclosure became even more important and had a significant impact on the life of women religious. From 1298, the bull *Periculoso* imposed both passive (no one could enter a nunnery except confessors, doctors and, in rare cases, the patron of the house) and active (the nuns could not leave their nunneries) enclosure on all professed nuns.<sup>21</sup> The reformed friars placed great emphasis on the enclosure of women affiliated to the Order of the Friars Preachers, given that the assumption was that only by adopting a cloistered way of life could women fulfil their spiritual role. The Brides of Christ were instructed both in the guidelines drawn up for them by influential Observant friars such as Johannes Nider and Johannes

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<sup>19</sup> *Modus faciendi professionem: talis est. ego N. facio professionem et promitto obedienciam deo. et beate marie et beato dominico. et tibi N. priorissa. vice N. magistri ordinis fratrum predicatorum.... secundum regulam beati augustini et institutiones sororum. Quarum cura predicto ordinii est comissa: quod ero obediens tibi. aliisque priorissis meis. usque ad mortem,* quoted from Nicola Vohringer, *Chanting Nuns, Chiming Bells: Sound in Late Medieval Mystical Literature and Devotional Culture* (PhD Thesis Department of Germanic Languages & Literatures, University of Toronto, 2017), 132, footnote 283.

<sup>20</sup> Claire Taylor Jones, *Ruling the Spirit. Women, Liturgy and Dominican Reform in Late Medieval Germany* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 64.

<sup>21</sup> Carola Jäggi and Uwe Lobbedey, "Church and Cloister: The Architecture of Female Monasticism in the Middle Ages" in Jeffrey F. Hamburger, Susan Marti (eds.), *Crown and Veil. Female Monasticism from the Fifth to the Fifteenth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 109-132.

Meyer, and in the decisions taken by the General Chapters in 1468 and then again in 1508, on the strict observance of enclosure.<sup>22</sup>

Communal and enclosed life, fundamentals of Dominican *forma vitae*, decisively shaped the daily and yearly liturgical and cult practices the Observant Dominican women were engaged in. The nuns were to participate in the choir for the celebration of the Divine Office at each canonical hours every day, to say the Little Office of the Virgin Mary, to attend the Mass, to sing and speak designated sequences of psalms and hymns, to pray, to read or to listen to a text from the Bible or a legend of a saint that were read aloud to them.<sup>23</sup> The prerequisites of women's liturgical performance can be found in the Rule of St. Augustine, according to which *when you pray to God in psalms and hymns, consider in your heart what you offer with your voice*,<sup>24</sup> an instruction which was given week after week when the Rule was read aloud to female religious. Claire Taylor Jones has further argued that Johannes Nider, the influential promoter of the Observance, placed great emphasis in his works on the correct, informed and considered performance of the Divine Office by the nuns. Pious and attentive singing in the choir, together with correct participation in the liturgical ritual (one had to know by heart the various movements to be made, such as inclinations, standing, kneeling or prostrating), was a constant exercise of obedience within a liturgical framework, and at the same time fostered a collective sense of identity with female religious communities.<sup>25</sup>

The key figures in the implementation of the Observance in the Dominican Province of Hungary were Jacob Richer and Leonardus Huntpichler, who began this work in the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Richer was sent to Transylvania in 1444 by Eugene IV (1431-1447), who appointed him vicar of the Dominican houses in the region. At the time of this nomination, Richer was a friar in the convent of Basel, a convent that is considered to have played an enormous role – if not the most important role – in the advancement of the Observance in the mid-fifteenth century. According to the papal charter, Jacob Richer came together with several like-minded friars, having the clear mission of introducing the Observance

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<sup>22</sup> Heike Uffmann, "Inside and Outside the Convent Walls. The Norm and Practice of Enclosure in Reformed Nunneries of Late Medieval Germany", *The Medieval History Journal* 4 (2001): 91-104. Franz Andreas Frühwirth – Benedictus Maria Reichert (eds.), *Acta capitulorum generalium Ordinis Praedicatorum* (Romae: In domo generalitia, 1900), vol. 3, 308 and Andreas Frühwirth – Benedictus Maria Reichert (eds.), *Acta capitulorum generalium Ordinis Praedicatorum* (Romae: In domo generalitia, 1900), vol. IV, 85.

<sup>23</sup> Gisela Muschiol, "Liturgy and Rite in Female Monasteries of the Middle Ages", in Jeffrey F. Hamburger, Susan Marti (eds.), *Crown and Veil. Female Monasticism from the Fifth to the Fifteenth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 192.

<sup>24</sup> Taylor Jones, *Ruling the Spirit*, 14-15.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-72.



in the friaries belonging to a region where religious life was considered to be in severe decay and thus in urgent need of reform. Richer and his companions spent three years in Transylvania, between 1444 and 1447.<sup>26</sup> In the early sixteenth-century, the prior provincial of the Dominicans reports that the first house to be reformed was that of Cluj, and it seems that it became an influential center of the reform movement.<sup>27</sup> We lack more precise details on how Observance was implemented in the friary of Cluj, but we do have a much clearer picture of what the Observance meant to the Dominican nuns of Cluj.

Belonging to the second generation of reformers, Johannes Nider was magister and lector at the Vienna University, then became prior in Basel in 1429, the one who reformed the nunnery of St. Catherine in Nuremberg.<sup>28</sup> In each house that he reformed, or encouraged to be reformed, Nider never failed to instruct the nuns in active and informed participation in the liturgy, given that the necessary step in reforming a convent was the provision of the correct liturgical books needed by the nuns in order to fulfil their duties in the choir. Johannes Meyer, a great admirer of Nider's reform efforts, further promoted the Observance. Like Nider, Meyer was also a friar in Basel between 1442 and 1454, and later, as confessor to Dominican nuns in Schönensteinbach and Bern, he exerted an enormous influence on the life of the women religious belonging to the Friars Preachers. For Meyer, the Divine Office was the perfect medium in which and through which the liturgical ritual shaped the community of nuns, since it involved the whole convent in prayer in a way that was both uniform and regulated.<sup>29</sup>

In 1450, prioress Gertrude, together with nun Elizabeth of St. Egidius nunnery in Cluj, having been given the consent of the prior of the friary of the town, sold three liturgical books (a gradual, an antiphonary and a Missal) that were of no use to their community.<sup>30</sup> Seen within the broader context of the reformation of Dominican nunneries, the decisions made by the nuns of Cluj, having received the consent of the local prior, as it was required by the Order's regulations, can be regarded as an act of reform. Unlike their counterparts from Germany, Spain or Portugal, who, in many cases, adopted the Observance through the involvement of nuns who had

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<sup>26</sup> Lupescu Makó, *Domonkos rendi obszerváns törekvések Magyarországon*, 262-264.

<sup>27</sup> János Eszterházy, "A kolozsvári Boldog-Asszonyról címzett domonkosok, jelenleg ferencziek egyházának történeti és építészeti leírása" [Historical and architectural evidence concerning the Franciscan (former Dominican) friary of the Virgin Mary in Cluj], *Magyar Sion* 4 (1866): 567.

<sup>28</sup> Huijbers, *Zealots for Souls*, 192-197.

<sup>29</sup> Taylor Jones, *Ruling the Spirit*, 11.

<sup>30</sup> Zsigmond Jakó (ed.), *A kolozsmonostori konvent jegyzőkönyvei (1289-1556)* [The protocols of the Benedictine convent from Cluj-Mănăştur 1289-1556], (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1990), vol. 1, 402, doc. no. 828.

come from an already reformed nunnery,<sup>31</sup> the adoption of the Observance by the nuns of St. Egidius seems to have been the work of the friars, themselves reformed as a result of Jacob Richer's mission, the friar who came from Basel.

Surviving sources do not indicate the existence of any Dominican community of women in Transylvania until the mid-fifteenth century, when the reformation of the friaries started. The initiative of reforming the liturgy by the nuns in Cluj is the first recorded information not only regarding the female religious in this particular town, but in the whole of Transylvania. Undoubtedly, there is a strong connection between Observance and the emergence of Dominican nunneries in the most important towns of the region such as Cluj, Sibiu, Bistrița, Brașov and Sighișoara. This connection is on the one hand suggested by chronology. There is evidence of the presence of communities of Observant Dominican women in Cluj (1450) at the time when the friary of the town has adopted the Observance, in Brașov in 1474 where the friary had been reformed in 1454, in Bistrița where the reformation of the Holy Cross friary and the formation of an Observant Dominican nunnery can be dated to the 1470s, in Sibiu where the friars became Observant in 1447, whereas the nuns of Mary Magdalene are mentioned in 1497, and in Sighișoara where the friars adopted the Observance by 1455, and the first indices about the Dominican nuns are dated to 1510.<sup>32</sup>

The firm promoters of the Observance in Transylvania proved to be the local friars such as Thomas *Siculus*, who studied at the University of Vienna (a prominent center of the reform movement) in 1453, and then became prior in Brașov (1464), Lawrence *de Valle Rosarum*, who pursued his studies in the Dominican *studium generale* in Naples in 1475, and then became the prior in Bistrița one year later, or Johannes Episcopi, a student in Cologne in 1460s, then prior in Cluj, vicar in Transylvania and took over the office of prior provincial between 1474-1477 and then again in 1495.<sup>33</sup> The leading positions they acquired in governing the friaries or even the province, helped enforce the Observance in the region. Highly relevant was also the work they provided to the formation of the communities of Observant Dominican women.

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<sup>31</sup> Claire Taylor Jones, "Negotiating Liturgical Obligations in Late Medieval Dominican Convents", *Church History* 91 (2022): 24-26.

<sup>32</sup> Salontai, *Mănăstiri dominicane*, 88-183, 202-259.

<sup>33</sup> Sándor Tonk, *Erdélyiek egyetemjárása a középkorban* [Transylvanian students in the Middle Ages] (Bukarest: Kriterion Könyvkiadó, 1979), 258, 278; Béla Iványi, "Geschichte des Dominikanerordens in Siebenbürgen und der Moldau", *Siebenbürgische Vierteljahrschrift* 62 (1939): 252.

In 1474, in Braşov, the prior was licensed by the Order's officials to affiliate ten women *cum scapulari* to the Order of the Friars Preachers. Two years later, Lawrence *de Valle Rosarum* was granted permission from the Master General to allow the sisters to wear the scapular and also to receive three more women in the community of female religious in Bistriţa.<sup>34</sup> The scapular was the indisputable symbol of the nuns' professed status, a marker of identity which, as shown by these Transylvanian examples, was defined within the frame of the Observant movement. Of outstanding importance concerning the advance of the Observance with the involvement of noteworthy friars in the functioning of the houses of religious women was also the work of Paul of Vác, *magister in artibus et theologie*, trained at the universities in Vienna and Heidelberg. Friar Paul translated into Hungarian the Rule of St. Augustine and the Dominican Constitutions, a translation that unambiguously proves the friars' strategy in making available to the nuns the foundational texts according to which their communities were organized and their vocation should be pursued.<sup>35</sup>

Whereas this translation is part of the more general efforts made by the Observant Dominican friars in regulating the life of the female religious communities they supervised, another noteworthy feature should be observed. Since 1468, by decision of the general chapter, the women affiliated with the Order of the Friars Preachers were to strictly obey to the authority of the prior provincial whose decisions, not least concerning the observance of enclosure by female communities, must rigorously be followed.<sup>36</sup> In the Dominican Province of Hungary, reform-minded friars, such as Lawrence of *Valle Rosarum* or Paul of Vác, were supporters of the formation or reformation of nunneries at the time when the prior provincial was Johannes Episcopi (1474-1477). The 1470s was thus the time when the institutional framework designed for the spiritual cure of Dominican women was consolidated with local initiatives aimed at strengthening their integration into the reformed family of the Order of the Friars Preachers.

As I have argued elsewhere, the friars and nuns were not alone in their commitment to Observant ideals, saints proved to be of invaluable help in this regard. The emblems of faith that embody the essence of the *forma vitae* that the Dominican friars and nuns were called to adopt and

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<sup>34</sup> Salontai, *Mănăstiri dominicane*, 98.

<sup>35</sup> Lea Haader, "Domonkosokhoz köthető középkori kódexek" [Medieval codices related to the Dominicans], in Gábor Barna (ed.), *A Szent Domonkos rend és a kunok* [The Order of St. Dominic and the Cumans], (MTA-SZTE Vallási Kultúrkutató Csoport, 2016), 134-135 the translation has survived, albeit in fragmentary form in the so-called Birk-codex, being used by the Dominican nuns of the Virgin Mary convent on the Margaret Island/ *Insula Leporum* of the Danube.

<sup>36</sup> *Acta Capitulorum*, vol. III, 308-309.

follow can be identified in the patron saints who became their protectors, mediators and intercessors. If we were to compare the saints who became the patrons of the Transylvanian convents, most of which were founded in the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, with the saints who assumed this patronage in the Observant Dominican communities of the region, we could easily see a change. The Virgin Mary and the Holy Cross were the saintly patronages under which the friars worked in the region, an integral part of the great esteem in which these devotions were held by the Friars Preachers. At the same time, these dedications also reveal the very firm attachment of the friars to cults that were not only popular Europe-wide, but also highly revered at a local level.<sup>37</sup>

Such a coherent plan of adapting their mission to the devotional profile of the communities where the friars undertook their apostolate was slightly modified in the course of the fifteenth-century. The change was the result of the spread of the Observant movement, a process in which saints who conformed to the exigencies of the reform were called to protect the nuns. Sts. Anthony and Egidius became paradigmatic models of the life of asceticism, renunciation and confession for the friars and nuns in Cluj, Mary Magdalene the great repentant saint was employed as patroness for the nuns of Sibiu, while in Braşov, John the Evangelist, the beloved disciple of Christ was the exemplar of faith for the Dominican women.

A further comparison will add more weight to this idea. The Dominican nunneries that functioned in the Province of Hungary were in their greatest majority founded in the course of the thirteenth century and the following one, and were dedicated to the Virgin Mary, St. Catherine and St. Stanislaus. Of those founded in the course of the fifteenth century outside Transylvania, the dedication of only one is documented, that of the Holy Spirit for the nuns living in Pécs (1461).<sup>38</sup> Not only did five communities of Observant Dominican women emerge in Transylvania in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, but placing their patron saints in the wider context of the holy patronage promoted by the Observant Dominicans highlights the successful attempt to link their celestial protectors with the demands of the reform movement. This was undoubtedly the result of Observant friars educated in centres of reform (such as the University of Vienna) or in reformed friaries such as those of Bologna, Cologne or Heidelberg,<sup>39</sup> who employed suitable holy figures to achieve this goal.

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<sup>37</sup> Carmen Florea, *The Late Medieval Cult of the Saints: Universal Developments within Local Contexts* (London-New York: Routledge, 2022), 159-166.

<sup>38</sup> Beatrix F. Romhányi, *Kolostorok és társaskáptalanok a középkori Magyarországon* [Monasteries and collegiate churches in medieval Hungary] (Budapest: Pytheas, 2000), 69.

<sup>39</sup> Harsányi, *A Domonkosrend Magyarországon*, 71-73.

The fact that this can indeed be regarded as a piety that was centred on exemplary models to be followed by nuns is further revealed when approaching the patrons of friaries and nunneries as saintly pairs. When we look at the map of the medieval town of Sibiu (**Map2**), the Dominican friary and the nunnery were placed in proximity, next to each other in the Upper part of the town, close to the fortifications. Previous research has already drawn the attention and dealt at length with the difficulties the friars of the Holy Cross had to overcome when attempting to relocate their house inside the city walls.<sup>40</sup> A series of charters dated to 1444, 1445 and 1447, coinciding with Richer's mission in Transylvania, reveal the support the friars received from both the papacy and the city council.<sup>41</sup> Mentioned in 1447 as Observant friars, the Dominicans of Sibiu would only be able to settle within the city walls three decades later. The agreement concluded between the Order's officials and the magistrate faithfully revealed the ways in which the city authorities had devised to control the apostolate of the friars. The most important means was the provision that the majority of them, including their prior, had to be of German origin, thus strengthening their apostolate among the city's population.<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, from 1474 onwards, the friars became involved in the construction of their convent, a project that was also civic in nature. Detailed studies of the Observance have shown that, in most cases, the support of the municipal authorities and the territorial lords proved to be key to succeeding.<sup>43</sup> This was also the case in Sibiu, not only because the municipal government cherished the reformed way of life the friars embarked upon and the prestige it derived from it, held in great esteem by the laity, but also because it offered effective means of controlling religious life. This is of increased significance for a town such as Sibiu was in the Middle Ages, where the collaboration of the city council with the local parish had a long history and strongly impacted on the religious life of the town.<sup>44</sup> It was now, with the help of the Observance, that the councillors of the city

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<sup>40</sup> Salontai, *Mănăstiri dominicane*, 202-203.

<sup>41</sup> Karl Fabritius (ed.), *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte des Kisder Kapitels vor der Reformation und der auf dem Gebiete desselben ehemals befindlichen Orden* (Hermannstadt: 1875), 54, doc. no. LXXXV and 55, doc. no. LXXXVI; Franz Zimmermann and Gustav Gündisch (eds.), *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen* (București: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1975), vol. 5, 138, doc. no. 2495; Augustin Theiner (ed.), *Vetera monumenta historica Hungariam sacram illustrantia* Roma: Typ. Vaticanis, 1860), vol. II, 238, doc. no. CCCXCVIII.

<sup>42</sup> Gustav Gündisch, Herta Gündisch, Konrad Gündisch and Gernot Nussbächer (eds.), *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen* (București: Editura Academiei Române), vol. VII, 28-30, doc. no. 4022.

<sup>43</sup> Gabriella Zarrì, 'Osservanze mendicanti tra Quattro e Cinquecento. Una riflessione storiografica e alcuni esempi milanesi', *Memorie domenicane*, XLVII (2016): 24-30.

<sup>44</sup> De Cevins, *L'Église dans les villes hongroises*, 101-135.

of Sibiu were able to extend their involvement in ecclesiastical matters further and in a more subtle way.

The Observant friars understood how reform could be of social benefit, contributing to the social disciplining, the project in which city governments invested considerable energy at the end of the Middle Ages. They were thus ingenious enough to integrate into their apostolate those devotional traits that would largely be mirroring the Dominican *forma vitae*. The saintly emblems of an Observant Dominican identity in Sibiu were the Holy Cross and Mary Magdalene. By choosing, as patron for the nuns, the sinner who underwent profound repentance and became a saint, the Observants in Sibiu not only remained faithful to their Order's allegiance to this intimate of Christ,<sup>45</sup> but they also thus provided the nuns, who lived a cloistered life, a constant example and guide to transcend the sinful nature of their being. It was also a visible symbolic connection since it was at the foot of the Holy Cross that Mary Magdalene lamented and mourned the sacrifice of Christ, symbols that were held together in Sibiu by placing the friars' church next to that of the nuns.

Research on Transylvanian Dominican establishments has already pointed out that, similar to the situation observed in other European regions, in the greatest majority of the cases, the nuns' churches were located in the vicinity of the churches the friars used. This was the case not only in Sibiu, but also in Bistrița, Brașov, and Sighișoara, evidence of urban topography that further illustrates the friars' spiritual cure, and most likely also control, of the nuns.<sup>46</sup> Significantly enough, the churches used by the nuns and their cloisters were built next to the city walls for pragmatic reasons, both to protect the nuns and because of the space available inside the walls at the end of the Middle Ages. The need to enclose the nuns also played a decisive role in the municipal authorities' choice for the sites. Great care was taken by the councillors to ensure that the complex of buildings used by the nuns was separated as much as possible and was difficult to access,

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<sup>45</sup> By decision of the general chapters, the feast of Mary Magdalene was included in the Dominican calendar in 1297, while in 1505 an octave was added to the celebration, *Acta Capitulum*, vol. III, 283 and *Acta Capitulum*, vol. IV, 198. The support provided by the mendicant friars to the development of the cult of Mary Magdalene has been discussed at length by Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen. Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 44-227. I have also attempted to provide a detailed approach to the means by which Mary Magdalene was transformed into a patron and protector of women religious in "Identity and Patronage in the Religious Experience of Observant Dominican Women", *Bruckenthal. Acta Musei*, XVIII.2 (2023) (forthcoming).

<sup>46</sup> Salontai, *Mănăstiri dominicane*, 160; *Cura monialium* was provided to the nuns by friars belonging to the convents of the towns where the nunneries functioned, for example Gaspar *de Rupe*, friar in Sibiu is mentioned as *confessor monialium* to the nuns of Mary Magdalene, Harsányi, *A Domonkos rend Magyarországon*, 110-111.

thus enforcing their enclosure.<sup>47</sup> Urban fortifications were not only the most appropriate means of confining women religious within the city, they also effectively detached them from the outside world. Our Transylvanian examples further complicate this discussion in a most interesting way.

The nunnery of St. Egidius was *in promontorio vinearum fundato*, the exception to the rule of proximity to the convent already mentioned, the nuns of Cluj lived outside the city fortifications, completely separated from the tumult of urban life. The norm of enclosure that the Rule of St. Augustine, the Dominican Constitutions, papal bulls and several decisions of the general chapters imposed on the formation and functioning of the convents of Observant Dominican women was also visibly expressed within the city walls. In Braşov, the nunnery of St. John was formed at the periphery of the town, and the name of the street where it was located *Nova Platea* (1486) or *platea Sancti Johannis* (1540) indicates that it was a recently urbanized area.<sup>48</sup> The situation was similar in Sibiu, where the nuns *ad sanctam Maria Magdalenam* had their church located on the street which was named *Nonnengasse*, belonging to an urban nucleus which started developing from the end of the fourteenth-century onwards.<sup>49</sup> A detailed investigation of the topography of the area where the Holy Cross friary and the nuns' convent were placed in Sibiu has shown that the streets at the intersection of which the friars' church and cloister were built were scarcely inhabited. The architectural evidence also revealed that the existing buildings on the *Nonnengasse* had all been constructed in the course of the eighteenth century.<sup>50</sup> An isolated and deserted area within the town's walls was thus the place where the city council allowed the Observant Dominican women to form their community, thus reinforcing the norm of leading a cloistered way of life.

The interior of the Dominican churches was a divided space that enforced the active and passive enclosure of the nuns through choir screens, galleries, tribunes or movable wooden panels. There was also a visual enclosure, in that the nuns were not to be seen, but were also prevented from seeing, visual access to the Eucharist celebrated by the clergy was only possible through large openings in the fixed or mobile structures that

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<sup>47</sup> Ana Marinković, Zehra Laznibat, "Monastic Enclosure as Urban Feature: Mapping Conventual Complexes vs. Public Space in Early Modern Dubrovnik", in Ana Plosnić Škarić (ed.), *Mapping Urban Changes/Mapiranje urbanih promjena* (Zagreb: Institute of Art History, 2018), 196-219.

<sup>48</sup> Salontai, *Mănăstiri dominicane*, 126-129.

<sup>49</sup> Radu Lupescu, "The Medieval Fortifications of Sibiu", in Olaf Wagener (ed.), *"umbringt mit starcken turnen, murn", Ortsbefestigungen im Mittelalter* (2010): 358.

<sup>50</sup> Alexandru Avram and Christoph Machat (eds.), *Denkmaltopographie Siebenbürgen. Stadt Hermannstadt. Die Altstadt/ Topografia monumentelor din Transilvania. Municipiul Sibiu. Centrul istoric* (Köln: Rheinland, 1999), 208-256.

separated the nuns from the most sacred place in the church, the high altar.<sup>51</sup> Not much is known about the interior of the churches used by the Transylvanian Observant Dominican women. Those of Cluj and Sighișoara completely perished, that of Bistrița has also been largely destroyed. Similarly to the situation encountered in other European regions, the church of St. John the Evangelist in Brașov and that of Mary Magdalene in Sibiu underwent considerable changes over the course of the eighteenth century. Such significant losses and transformations, not to mention the lack of archaeological investigations conducted on these edifices, makes it difficult to have a precise idea of the interior layout where Observant Dominican women once lived, prayed and sang.<sup>52</sup>

In 2016, restoration and conservation work were carried out in the church used by the nuns of Mary Magdalene from Sibiu in medieval times. Thus, several (albeit rather incomplete) wall paintings that decorated the chancel of the church were brought to light.<sup>53</sup> There was a strong emphasis placed on the Christocentric devotion that these representations illustrate. The first scene from the left in the lower register of the chancel's southern wall depicted the Crucifixion, with the Virgin Mary in prayer turned to her Son, John the Evangelist – the only animated figure in the scene – gesturing towards Christ. In addition, it also depicts a kneeling donor for whom most likely the patron saint of the church was interceding. The execution of the scene is simple – it used sombre colours and it is set in a sombre landscape, which is an invitation to meditation and contemplation of Christ's sacrifice.<sup>54</sup> The representation of Christ interceding before God, which is almost twice as high, is placed on the right and extends into both the upper and lower registers. It visually expresses the redemptive power of Christ's sacrifice and, according to several convincing arguments, it

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<sup>51</sup> Jeffrey F. Hamburger, Petra Marx and Susan Marti, "The Time of the Orders 1200-1500" in Jeffrey F. Hamburger, Susan Marti (eds.), *Crown and Veil. Female Monasticism from the Fifth to the Fifteenth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 72-73.

<sup>52</sup> Salontai, *Mănăstiri dominicane*, 160, 244, 101, 127-128 and 216-217.

<sup>53</sup> Dana Jenei, "Murals Discovered in the Choir of the Present Franciscan Church in Sibiu", *Ars Transilvaniae*, XVII-XVIII, Cluj-Napoca (2017-2018): 31-48 and Anna Kónya, *Eucharistic Imagery in the Late Gothic Wall Paintings of Transylvania (c. 1440-1530)*, (PhD dissertation, Budapest: Department of Medieval Studies, Central European University 2020) 44-47, 127-130, 396-402 offer detailed discussion on the production, stylistic traits, identification of the saints and devotional beliefs related to these wall paintings.

<sup>54</sup> Kónya, *Eucharistic Imagery*, 45 and Fig. 1.61; Denis Zaru, "Les Observances dominicaine et franciscaines: ferments de nouveauté artistique ou gardienne de la tradition? Éléments de réponse et perspectives de recherche", *MEFR* 130 2 (2018): 14-19 has drawn the attention to the privileged place detained by the representations of the Passion of Christ in the churches of Observant Dominican women, paintings which primary role was that of instilling meditation during the liturgical practices these pious women were engaged in.



symbolically links the meanings contained in these compositions.<sup>55</sup> The image of interceding Christ, a rarely represented (or rarely preserved) depiction in Transylvanian paintings (**Fig. 3**) where God the Father blesses His Son, angels are carrying the instruments of the Passion, while Jesus is mediating for the humankind apparently showing his wounds, reveals, with great accuracy, the Christocentric devotion these mural paintings prompted.<sup>56</sup>

The dead Christ on the cross and the resurrected Christ were images that explicitly and unambiguously offered the viewer the essentials of the history of salvation. In his *Buch der Reformacio*, Johannes Meyer gives us a vivid example of how Observant Dominican women engaged in and were stimulated to get engaged into Christ-centred piety. In 1397, Conrad of Prussia presided over the ceremony of the enclosure of the nuns in Schönensteinbach, during which he offered each nun an image of Christ illustrating different moments of His Passion. However, a miracle took place: through the intervention of God, all the images came to represent only one scene: the Crucifixion of Jesus, accompanied by the Virgin Mary and St John. The identical gift received by the nuns corresponded in every detail to the Observant ideals of uniformity, equality and devotion to the Passion, as has been suggested.<sup>57</sup>

For the Observant Dominican women, the contemplation of the Passion, the identification with it and the devotion to it became an even more compelling integral part of their daily liturgical and cultic activities through the mediation of the cult of the Eucharist.<sup>58</sup> As a re-enactment and remembrance of Christ's sacrifice, devotion to the Eucharist not only became increasingly important in women's spirituality in the late Middle Ages, but was also adopted and expressed in particular ways by the Observant Dominican women. For the cloistered nuns, whose church was divided so as to separate them from the laity and the clergy who celebrated Mass at the high altar, architectural solutions were devised, such as openings in the choir screens through which the consecrated host was passed to them.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, since their Constitutions required that the Sacrament of Communion be administered to them fifteen times a year, images with

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<sup>55</sup> Kónya, *Eucharistic Imagery*, 46.

<sup>56</sup> Jenei, *Murals Discovered in the Choir*, 38.

<sup>57</sup> June L. Mecham, *Sacred Communities, Shared Devotions. Gender, Material Culture and Monasticism in Late Medieval Germany*, edited by Alison I. Beach, Constance H. Berman, and Lisa M. Bitel, with an Introduction by Lisa M. Bitel (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 168-170.

<sup>58</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, *The Mystical Presence of Christ. The Exceptional and the Ordinary in Late Medieval Religion* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2022), 145-179.

<sup>59</sup> Uffmann, *Inside and Outside the Convent Wall*, 93.

Eucharistic overtones fulfilled the desire of those who yearned for direct and more frequent identification with the Holy Sacrifice.<sup>60</sup>

The location of the nuns' choirs in their churches has received increased attention in recent research. It has been emphasised that the choir, where the nuns were obliged by their constitutions to perform their liturgical duties every day of the week, at every canonical hour, was, according to the norms of enclosure, a distinct, separate place where their devotion was shaped by singing, praying and contemplating the images that adorned this sacred space.<sup>61</sup> The nuns' choirs were located at the west end of the church, in an elevated gallery, or a tribune, sometimes in the eastern part of the church, in which case the nuns' separation from the main altar where the Mass was celebrated was made possible by portable, wooden-made panels.<sup>62</sup> In the convent of the Virgin Mary on the Margaret Island of the Danube, for example, the nuns' choir was on the west end of the church, on the ground floor, as information from thirteenth-century discloses. It was, however, in the early fifteenth century that an elevated gallery was built, with access provided by stairs placed on the southern wall of the church.<sup>63</sup>

In 1510, the Master General of the Order of the Friars Preachers limited the number of nuns of Mary Magdalene in Sibiu to twenty-four.<sup>64</sup> The decision is of high relevance from several points of view. As enclosed communities, the nunnery could only accommodate a number of residents limited to the amount of sustenance they could provide, depending on the economic means they had at their disposal through donations, testaments or civic subsidies. To *monialibus nigris*, the city council of Sibiu allocated 6 Fl. in 1497, and, in 1507, the town officials also provided the support necessary for their functioning. Bequests were also made to them in the last wills issued in 1502 by the parish priest from Rupea, in 1512 and 1523 respectively, by two highly prosperous, influential ladies belonging to the urban elite.<sup>65</sup> It is more than coincidental that this support surfaces from existing documentation in the early sixteenth-century. This was the time, as it has already been observed, when the nuns' church underwent architectural changes, the pointed-arched

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<sup>60</sup> Ann Roberts, *Dominican Women and Renaissance Art. The Convent of San Domenico of Pisa*, (London-New York: Routledge, 2016), 21.

<sup>61</sup> Hamburger, Marx, Marti, *The Time of the Orders*, 43-46.

<sup>62</sup> Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture. The Archaeology of Religious Women* (London-New York: Routledge, 1994), 95-99.

<sup>63</sup> Rózsa Feuerné Tóth, "A Margitszigeti domonkos kolostor" [The Dominican convent on the Margaret Island], *Budapest Régiségei* XXII (1971): 254-256.

<sup>64</sup> Salontai, *Mănăstiri dominicane*, 216.

<sup>65</sup> *Rechnungen aus dem Archiv der Stadt Hermannstadt und der Sächsischen Nation (1380-1516)*, (Hermannstadt: in Commission bei Franz Michaelis, 1880), 241, 473 and Salontai, *Mănăstiri dominicane*, 215-216.

windows of the nave, but also of the chancel having been walled-up prior to the execution of the mural paintings that were dated to around 1520.<sup>66</sup> The norm of enclosure thus formed the community of the Observant Dominican women in Sibiu, visibly separated from the outside world, but at the same time integrated into it through the system of mutual benefices, donations and testamentary clauses articulated.<sup>67</sup>

The existing research has also shown that the nuns' church was a small one, with a single nave and a chancel that measured 11.60 metres long. In medieval times, the nave was shorter and it was significantly enlarged in the course of the eighteenth-century.<sup>68</sup> Further archaeological research paired with the use of ground-penetrating radar would most likely provide a more accurate picture of the interior design of the church and would also reveal the precise location of the nuns' choir. Until then, the visual environment of the nuns of Mary Magdalene could fill in these gaps. During the restoration work that resurfaced the mural paintings on the south wall of the choir, another image was revealed: a large Gothic monstrance painted on the north wall.<sup>69</sup> Although only the upper part could be restored during the 2016 campaign, the visibility of the host in the centre suggests the active participation of the Observant Dominican nuns in the Eucharistic cult. It is possible that the choir stalls of the nuns were placed in the chancel where they performed their liturgical duties. This way, they were always, day and night, close to the symbol that continually re-enacted the sacrifice of Christ. The nuns of Mary Magdalene could not approach the high altar during Mass, as required by the norms of their Order, and may have had only a concealed view of the consecration and elevation of the host during the liturgical celebration. However, they had constant access and visual contact with the Host placed in the painted monstrance.

Detailed art-historical research has also emphasised that, given the proximity of these frescoes to the main altar, they set the scene for the celebration of the Eucharist, as is also suggested by the representation of the martyrdom of the Ten Thousand and that of St. Ursula and her Eleven Thousand Virgins.<sup>70</sup> The cult of the Ten Thousand has gained particular currency with the Order of the Friars Preachers who actively promoted it

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<sup>66</sup> Kónya, *Eucharistic Imagery*, 396.

<sup>67</sup> Gabriela Signori, "Wanderers Between Worlds: Visitors, Letters, Wills, and Gifts as Means of Communication in Exchanges Between Cloister and the World", in Jeffrey F. Hamburger, Susan Marti (eds.), *Crown and Veil. Female Monasticism from the Fifth to the Fifteenth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 270-271.

<sup>68</sup> As it has been revealed during the archaeological research undertaken in 2008, see Salontai, *Mănăstiri dominicane*, 217.

<sup>69</sup> Jenei, *Murals Discovered in the Choir*, 32 and Fig. 2, 41; Kónya, *Eucharistic Imagery*, 47.

<sup>70</sup> Kónya, *Eucharistic Imagery*, 128.

throughout Europe from the early fifteenth century when a feast with nine lessons was added to the Dominican liturgy.<sup>71</sup> The martyrs were often represented in the churches of the Observant Dominicans, as they offered them a vivid example of perseverance, of steadfastness in the faith that eventually brought heavenly rewards. The literal imitation of the sufferings of Christ, as faithfully represented by the depiction of the soldiers crucified in their loincloths like Jesus (Fig. 4), the blood flowing abundantly from the wounds of the martyrs is a visible and tangible identification with the Passion of Christ.<sup>72</sup> Such a representation of the Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand was not only visually rendered. It echoed the Dominican liturgy, which emphasized that the suffering of these martyrs was equivalent to Christ's Passion.<sup>73</sup>

On the southern wall of the chancel of the nuns' church in Sibiu, the Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand is juxtaposed with that of St. Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins. By the end of the Middle Ages, visual emphasis on mass martyrdoms prompted devotion for the Passion, being frequently represented in concert, such hagiographical compositions of the violence and suffering that Acathius and Ursula together with their companions underwent, also began to be present in the decoration of Observant Dominican churches.<sup>74</sup> Sacrifice and faith were illustrated by the slaughtered virgin falling from the ship, her neck pierced by an arrow, while in the lower part of the painting in Sibiu, a virgin with a halo, possibly St. Ursula, is depicted in devout praying (Fig. 5).

Devotion to Ursula and her martyred companions developed strongly in the Kingdom of Hungary. Their relics were kept in several churches in the kingdom, while the feast of these virgin martyrs on 21 October enjoyed early, widespread and special veneration in local liturgical celebrations. The Transylvanian evidence complements this picture, as Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins are frequently encountered in surviving visual representations, as well as in church patronage.<sup>75</sup> This cohort of holy figures acquired increased significance for Observant Dominican women who could easily identify themselves with the examples of profound piety these virgins stood for. The legend of St. Ursula and her Eleven Thousand companions to be found in the Codex of Érsekújvár strongly emphasizes the importance of the

<sup>71</sup> Roberts, *Dominican Women*, 218 and footnote 79.

<sup>72</sup> Anna Kónya, "Eucharistic References in the Representations of Saints: a Case Study of Late Gothic Wall Paintings in Transylvania", *Acta Historiae Artium* 58 (2017): 85-92.

<sup>73</sup> Roberts, *Dominican Women*, p. 228-229.

<sup>74</sup> Jenei, *Murals Discovered in the Choir*, 33-36.

<sup>75</sup> Anna Tüskés, "The Cult of St. Ursula in Hungary: Legend, Altars and Reliquaries" in Jane Cartwright (ed.), *The Cult of St. Ursula and the 11,000 Virgins* (University of Wales Press: 2016), 187-205.

tortures these martyrs suffered. Despite the violence of their passion, Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins remained faithful to Christ and preserved their virginity, merits that eventually earned them heavenly glory.<sup>76</sup>

Codex of Érsekújvár was composed in vernacular between 1529 and 1531 in the scriptorium of the convent of the Virgin Mary on Margaret Island, where the nuns adopted the Observance in the late fifteenth century.<sup>77</sup> Compiled of rather miscellaneous texts, i.e., legends, sermons, *exempla*, meditations, passion and prayers, the codex was meant to serve the devotional and liturgical needs of Observant Dominican women, a special group of pious women on the Danube island who were under constant threat from the Ottomans after 1526. Márta Sövényházi was the nun who worked extensively on this codex, both copying most of it and decorating the initials, also in addition to carefully selecting the writings to be included, as the nuns were ready to leave behind their convent and the codex was their portable library.<sup>78</sup> Thus, the legends included in the Codex of Érsekújvár were the result of a careful selection made by the nuns, who chose the texts that were useful for private and collective devotion, including the legend of Saint Ursula and her companions.

These Brides of Christ, embodiment of virtues and sacrifice, became role models for enclosed nuns. When the legend of St. Ursula and her companions was read out loud to them, celebrating their feast days with a *totum duplex* as the Dominican liturgy required, Observant Dominican women were able to find many similarities with their own way of life. For the enclosed nuns, the images served a didactic purpose by offering simple instructions on how to live cloistered and which virtues were to be cultivated within their communities.<sup>79</sup> St. Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins, as they were seen by the nuns in Sibiu, conformed with and embodied the Dominican *forma vitae*. This assumption is further confirmed by the almost simultaneous integration of these holy figures into the devotional world of

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<sup>76</sup> György Volf (ed.), *Érsekújvári codex* (Budapest: 1888), 378.

<sup>77</sup> Sándor Lázs, *Apácaműveltség Magyarországon a XV-XVI. század fordulóján. Az anyanyelvű irodalmi kezdetei* [Nuns' literacy in Hungary at the turn of the fifteenth to sixteenth century. The beginnings of the vernacular literature] (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2016), 40-59.

<sup>78</sup> Edit Madas, *Az Érsekújvári kódex mint a menekülő apácák hordozható könyvtára és két új forrásazonosítás (Műhelytanulmány)* [Codex of Érsekújvár as a portable library of fleeing nuns and two newly identified sources. A workshop essay] in László Boka and Judit P. Vásárhelyi, *Szöveg – emlék – kép* [Text - Tradition - Image] (Budapest: Bibliotheca scientiae & artis, 2011), 92-93.

<sup>79</sup> Sainly models offered to the nuns were - in the view of Johannes Meyer - meant to be imitated, instead of admired, while in order to help the nuns emulate these models, images that faithfully reflected the lives of the saints became catechetical tools for the religious education of Observant Dominican women, Huijbers, *Zealots for Souls*, 240 and Paula Cardoso, "Shaping an Observant Identity: Narrative and Image in the Services of Reform in the Portuguese Dominican Nunneries", *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez* 52-2 (2022): 3-5.

pious women. Ursula and the virgin martyrs in her company were set as imitable saintly models: around 1520, by visual means, to Observant Dominican women in Sibiu, and, less than a decade later, by textual means, to the Observant Dominican women of the Virgin Mary on the Margaret Island of the Danube.

Last, but surely not least, there was also a strong local relevance that the Virgins of Cologne acquired with the nuns of Mary Magdalene in Sibiu. The fact that they were portrayed as young, elegantly dressed women alluded to more than just the royal and aristocratic status enjoyed by Ursula and her Eleven Thousand companions. Their depiction may also refer to the status of the Observant Dominican women in the city. Although their church and convent were located in an uninhabited area, the street where they were built was very close to the so-called *Grosser Ring*, the main market place of Sibiu, the place where influential and wealthy citizens lived.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, Mary Magdalene, the nuns' patron saint, the Ten Thousand Martyrs, St. Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins benefited from a strong parish-based cult, as they were celebrated daily in the most important church of the town, that of the Virgin Mary.<sup>81</sup> Not to mention that the chancel of the church of Mary Magdalene was also transformed into a place of memorialization, as the painting of the kneeling donor in the scene of the Crucifixion suggests.<sup>82</sup> Girls coming from well-to-do families in town could become novices of Mary Magdalene by taking the vow of profession, most likely in the chancel, while gazing upon and being protected by the familiar figures of St. Ursula and her companions. As nuns, these pious women were offered emblems of faith to instruct them, to inspire and to model their behaviour. When the nuns of Mary Magdalene in Sibiu sang the Divine Office devoutly and attentively, when, through psalms and hymns, they celebrated the feast days of the saints they visually encountered on the chancel's walls, companions from Heaven joined their enclosed community.

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<sup>80</sup> Băldescu, *Transilvania medievală*, 153.

<sup>81</sup> According to an agreement concluded in 1432 between the parish priest of Sibiu and the city council in the parish church *missae legende omni die* would be dedicated to Mary Magdalene, the Ten Thousand Martyrs, and St. Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins, Franz Zimmermann and Gustav Gündisch (eds.), *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen*, (Hermannstadt: Krafft & Drotleff, 1937), vol. IV, 461-462, doc. no. 2147.

<sup>82</sup> Hedwig Röckelein, "Founders, Donors, and Saints: Patrons of Nuns' Convents" in Jeffrey F. Hamburger, Susan Marti (eds.), *Crown and Veil. Female Monasticism from the Fifth to the Fifteenth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 207-225.

## List of Illustrations

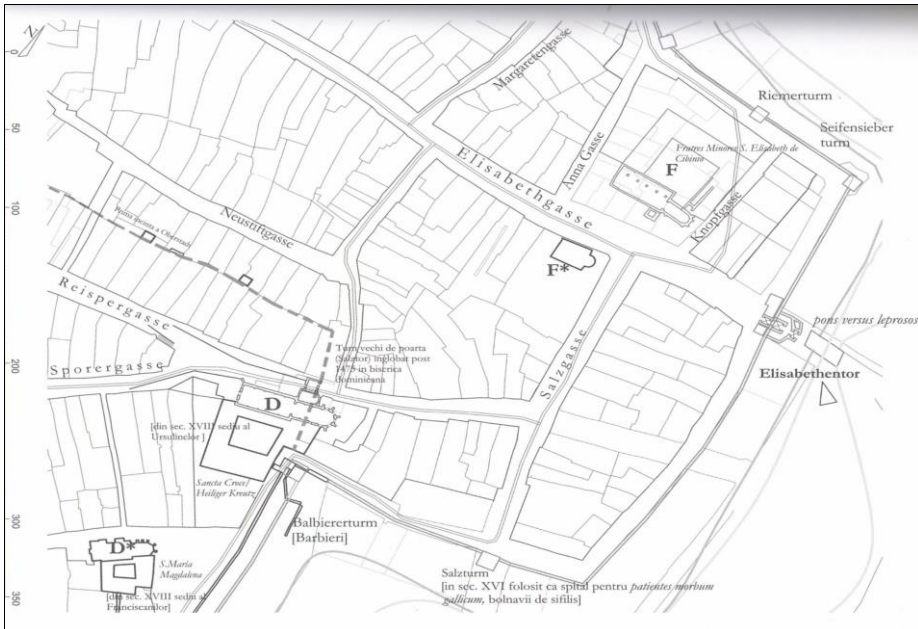
### Map 1 The Dominican Province of Hungary

(Source: András Harsányi, *A Domonkosrend Magyarországon a reformáció előtt* (Debrecen: Nagy Károly grafikai műintézetének nyomása, 1938), 83)



### Map 2 The Mendicant convents of Sibiu

(Source: Irina Băldescu, *Transilvania medievală. Topografie și norme juridice ale cetăților Sibiu, Bistrița, Brașov și Cluj* (București: Editura Simetria, 2012, 151)



**Fig. 1** The *Crucifixion* of Sibiu - Detail with Christ's side wound  
(Source: Ferenc Veress, "The Dominicans and the Holy Blood: from Late Medieval Devotion to Baroque Piety. Cases in Austria, Hungary and Romania", *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Kunst und Denkmalpflege*, LXX Heft 3-4 (2021): 137)





**Fig. 2** *The Crucifixion of Sibiu*

(Source: Ferenc Veress, "The Dominicans and the Holy Blood: from Late Medieval Devotion to Baroque Piety. Cases in Austria, Hungary and Romania", *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Kunst und Denkmalpflege*, LXX Heft 3-4 (2021): 137)



**Fig. 3** Christ as intercessor - Wall painting in the (former) Dominican church of Mary Magdalene in Sibiu  
(Photo credit: Raluca Georgiana Cobuz)



**Fig. 4** The Martyrdom of the Ten Thousands - Wall painting in the (former) Dominican church of Mary Magdalene in Sibiu  
(Photo credit: Raluca Georgiana Cobuz)



**Fig. 5** The Martyrdom of St. Ursula and the Eleven Thousand Virgins - Wall painting in the (former) Dominican church of Mary Magdalene in Sibiu  
(Photo credit: Raluca Georgiana Cobuz)

