

Theses of doctoral (PhD) thesis

Small sacral monuments in the border region of Hajdúság and Nyírség

Buczko József

Supervisor: Dr. Elek Bartha, university professor



UNIVERSITY OF DEBRECEN

Doctoral School of History – Ethnography

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The aim of the thesis, the scope of the topic

The aim of my thesis was to investigate, describe and document small sacral monuments in the border area of Hajdúság and Nyírség. With this in mind, I present the sacral monuments of five settlements (Újfehértó, Téglás, Kálmánháza, Hajdúdorog and Hajdúnánás). They are placed next to each other according to two "ordering principles": on the one hand, because, at least in terms of Roman Catholicism, they are all members of the parish of Újfehértó, and on the other hand, they are neighbours.

In pre-Reformation times, these parishes had a unified denominational image. However, from the beginning of the 17th century onwards, their religious denominational composition gradually became more nuanced and diverse. First, Greek-Catholic (Serbian) ethnic groups settled (in Hajdúdorog after 1605 and in Újfehértó in 1630), but also Greek-Catholic Romanians from Transylvania and Ruthenians from Transcarpathia (Hajdúdorog, Újfehértó). This process was not interrupted in the later years either, since from the middle of the 19th century, a large number of mainly Roman Catholic families settled in the territory of the Eger archdiocese, also as part of internal migration, mostly on the outskirts of the settlements. (Újfehértó, Hajdúdorog, Hajdúnánás.) At the time of the settlement organisation, from the beginning of the 20th century, Greek and Roman Catholics and Reformed Christians from neighbouring and more distant settlements also settled in Kálmánháza alongside the Evangelicals. This process of settlement also took place in Téglás as a result of the washing machine factory established on the outskirts of the settlement, the Hajdúsági Iparművek, as many of those who had come from further afield to work here settled permanently, thus further nuancing the denominational proportions alongside the majority of Reformed.

All in all, the overall religious mix became mixed, with two settlements, Hajdúdorog and Hajdúnánás, remaining predominantly Greek Catholic and Reformed respectively.

The religious traditions of Catholic communities have fundamentally determined their use of sacred space. Crucifixes and other sacred monuments in their immediate and wider surroundings became an integral part of these communities. They are projections of their faith and their souls in space, along roadsides, in borders, in churchyards or even in cemeteries. For this reason, they have also played a decisive role in their religious values and religious practices. They performed various ritual acts in their midst (crossing the cross, lifting hats, prayers, supplications, etc.), while also sacralising the streets, squares, landscapes and all the places where they were placed. This is particularly true of crucifixes, which, unlike most other small sacred monuments, 'left' the churchyard.

It is perhaps a little difficult to imagine today, but not so long ago, wooden crucifixes and wooden crosses adorned the cemeteries and churchyards of a settlement. But sometimes also, quite literally, the border roads.

Of course, most of these have been eroded by time. Only those that have stood the test of time and oblivion have survived.

This is also true of the gravestones in the cemeteries. In our Catholic and Reformed cemeteries, wooden headstones have disappeared. Their place has been taken by more timeless works of stone and artificial stone.

In our countryside, at the junction of Hajdúság and Nyírség, where, for example, there is no stone suitable for carving gravestones, at the end of the 19th century, gravestones appeared in the cemeteries of Hajdúdorog, which testify not only to the material situation of their makers, but also to their taste. Most of these tombstones, crowned with crosses, are still standing today and, together with the cemetery crucifixes, have an environmental role. They also define the overall appearance of the cemetery.

This is why I have chosen to present them alongside our sacral monuments, drawing attention to their preservation.

I have gone back to the end of the 19th century, when they were erected, for those that still exist, and to the second half of the 18th century for those that no longer do. This is the only period up to which we can realistically trace the existence of a sacred monument, on the basis of archival sources and military maps. My investigation will end in the present.

During my research, I placed special emphasis on the overview of the history of research, which helped to place the topic of the dissertation within the framework of ethnography.

Small sacral monuments in the landscape are not only landscape-shaping forces, but also serve as landmarks today. I therefore considered it essential to provide some of them with GPS-coordinates for those who might wish to visit them. In view of the fact that there are nearly a hundred sacred monuments to be presented, I have added a summary table containing the main characteristics of each sacred monument for ease of reference. This summary table is given under the heading "Annex".

Outline of methods used

In the course of my work I used ethnographic methods to research the topic of this dissertation. My aim was to create a complete ethnographic documentation. For this reason, I

aimed at exploring folklore traditions and collecting knowledge preserved through oral tradition. In order to give voice to living memories, I preferred to use the method of questioning. The records of parishes and parishes were a useful aid. With limited success, I also consulted the period newspapers. In addition to these, I examined the various military and cadastral maps, as they also provide useful and indispensable information about our sacral monuments, especially crosses and crucifixes. Moreover, their material. Whenever I had the opportunity, I also made use of the method of comparison and, in general, of photographic documentation by juxtaposing past and present photographs. The advantage of this is that it makes it possible to see the change itself, which may be a decay or a renewal, or even a stylistic modification (for example, the practice of repainting the plate corpus).

Listing the results of the thesis

Small sacral monuments and cemetery crosses are apparently separate subjects, but they are linked by the sacral context in which they were created. Although cemetery gravestones are not sacral monuments, some of them have a special professional, industrial and aesthetic value, and are therefore formative and defining elements of cemeteries, alongside crucifixes. Their preservation and recording is important not only for the aesthetic values of the local community but also for the wider region.

In presenting these two themes, the emphasis has been on exploring their historical past, alongside the survey of sacred monuments. I have also paid attention to sacral monuments of earlier times, which have been erased by time but are preserved in archival sources and many of them are still recorded in living memory. The former is exemplified by the wooden crucifixes, which were the predecessors of today's stone crucifixes, and the latter by the memorial of the sculpted trees. There were some in the south-eastern outskirts of Hajdúdorog, where a picture of Mary placed on a tree with a body served as a place of prayer for the people living on the farm until the mid-1970s.

I have included in my field of vision all the small man-made structures in the open air which, whatever their form, have been erected for religious purposes and consecrated by the Church. I emphasised that they are just as much a part of the image of a settlement as secular architecture. What they have in common is that they are signs in their own right. Because they have a cultic function, they are messages and signals from a community to the outside world. They are therefore part of local traditions, local values and built heritage. For this reason, they also have a unique landscape value, as man-made artistic monuments that shape and form an

integral part of a natural or man-made environment. Because they have a value in the landscape, they should be protected.

I have placed particular emphasis on the need to distinguish between the corpus depiction practices of Greek and Roman Catholics. As a result, I have come to the conclusion that in our region the Greek Catholics placed only plate, or 'tin Christ', on the crosses, whereas the Roman Catholics always used a body-colouring technique, and until recently these corpuses were also painted in body-colour. This is particularly true of crosses made of stone, since the sources suggest that not all wooden crosses erected in the past were covered with painted tin bodies.

The bodies of Roman Catholic crucifixes are mostly made of prefabricated artificial stone or cast iron. A common feature is that the feet of Christ are fixed with a nail, so that a total of three nails are fixed to the cross. In contrast, on the plate bodies of Greek Catholic crucifixes, the feet of Christ are nailed side by side, so that four nails are visible on the body. The tradition of this can be traced back to the Greek-Catholic ways of depiction. Local or itinerant masters may also have used paintings in churches as a direct model, depicting Jesus crucified in this way. In our countryside, the crucifixes on the top of the iconostasions or other paintings in the church halls, such as those in Hajdúdorog or Újfehérto, could have served as models. And even the painted crucifixes.

At first glance, one can see that the body of Christ is a realistic representation. It is therefore quite certain that such crucifixes could also have served as a model for the painting of the naïve concept of the crucifixion, since they were seen by the community of believers at a church event, not only on the front but also on the back. The latter differs from the front, which depicts the living Christ, in that the image of the dead Christ is already on the cross.

At first glance, the body of Christ is a realistic representation. It is therefore quite certain that such crucifixes could also have served as a model for the painting of the naïve concept of the crucifixion, since they were seen by the community of believers at a particular ecclesiastical event, not only on the front but also on the back. The latter differs from the front, which depicts the living Christ, in that the image of the dead Christ is already on the cross.

In the literature, there are mixed names for the cross and the crucifix, and I have therefore tried to contribute to the clarification of the terms, with the help of archival sources. I have tried to clarify this by asking the question "Cross or crucifix?" and by formulating the answer.

In this respect, I have arrived at the following summary result: in the early period of domestic research, and even more recently, these sacral monuments were mostly referred to as

crosses, regardless of whether or not they had a corpus. But it was also common to use the terms cross and crucifix interchangeably. Some authors, and indeed most scholars, have used the two terms and types synonymously, and still do, and therefore mix them in their writings as they see fit.¹ The colloquial nomenclature certainly stimulated the use of this name, since the crucifix and the cross are essentially the same in popular religion.

Here we must make a very important addition regarding the distinction between the cross and the crucifix. We mentioned that even in the literature these two concepts are confused. In the church documents of Hajdúdorog, we have found some very interesting and instructive information in this respect. A document from 1861 refers to a cross with a crucifix (corpus) as a crucifix cross.² A decade later, in the minutes of the Canonica visitatio of 20 September 1871, we read of an even more precise distinction (this document was drawn up on the occasion of the visit of Bishop István Pankovics of Munkács, the bishop of the Canonica visitatio, or inspection tour).³ In this document, when the crucifixes of the church in the cemeteries and on the outskirts of the town and on the roads were listed, a clear distinction was made between the cross and the crucifix, which was common in the vernacular of the time. Indeed, it is stated here that the Church has stone crosses in cemeteries in good repair, with crucifixes painted on them. For example, in the chapter on cemeteries it says: *"The Church has two burial places. On the east side there is a stone cross, still in good repair, with an antiquated painted crucifix. On the west side, in the cemetery along the Nánási road, there is a stone cross, bought for use at an unknown date, still in good condition."* The latter therefore had no crucifix, i.e. no corpus, at that time. But it is also worth noting the number of crosses in the then new cemetery (on the western edge of the town), which is recorded as having a *"stone cross with crucifix in good condition"*.⁴

It is clear from the above that until the second third of the 19th century a distinction was still made between the word cross and crucifix, the latter being understood to mean only the corpus of the crucified. In this case, the word crucified is synonymous with crucifixion as the final act, i.e. the crucifixion which the Romans committed when they nailed Christ to the cross. Crucifixion - crucified means: in a broader sense, any representation of Christ crucified. In a narrower sense, the cross with the corpus.)⁵

¹ Limbacher, G., 2009. 145-192.

² GKPL IV-2-a. 15. d. 93/1861.

³ See: B. Papp, J., 1996. 35.

⁴ GKPL. I-1.f. 11. lap

⁵ Magyar Katolikus Lexikon, 1997. III.

Nevertheless, the church - at least in our region - used the designation cross from the end of the 19th century onwards, for example, for stone crucifixes, which replaced wooden crosses (or wooden crucifixes). A document from 1890, for example, refers to the new stone crucifixes⁶ consecrated in Hajdúdorog as new crosses, and a document from 1909 refers to the new stone crucifixes erected in the same year as stone crosses.⁷

In this respect, the picture is simplified in later sources, since the new crucifixes, already made of stone, are clearly labelled as crosses, stone crosses, although they also have a corpus. By this time, it seems to have become natural to use them. Thus the categorical distinction between crucifix and cross is dissolved.⁸ A good example of this is the fact that the designation is sometimes used interchangeably within a single text in the Greek Catholic Review.⁹

As far as all sacral monuments are concerned, a dichotomy can still be observed. Gábor Barna mentions that *'we Hungarians also - on the basis of the German examples Kleindenkmale, Kleinbauten - use the terms "kisemlék", "kisépitési" alternately. The Hungarian colloquial language speaks of roadside or roadside crosses, often written as one, and Sándor Bálint used the same. But these "crosses" are usually crucifixes, since they also carry the body of Christ, i.e. the cross has a corpus. And then the name is crucifix.'*¹⁰

On the basis of the literature, it seems - according to the terminological interpretation of Gábor Barna and Gábor Limbacher - that the term crucifix is becoming common for crosses with a corpus. For this reason, a clear distinction is made in this study between the material manifestations of these two concepts.¹¹

Today, in parallel with the use of the term in the literature, the picture seems to be becoming more nuanced in the vernacular, since even in everyday usage a distinction is made between sacred monuments with a corpus, i.e. crucifixes, and crosses without a corpus.

As can be seen from the previous lines, the churches considered the crosses and crucifixes placed in public areas, churchyards and cemeteries as their own property, even though they were erected by the faithful. From the moment of their consecration, however, they became church property, while their maintenance was the responsibility of the erectors, or the donors or members of the parishes, who were the beneficiaries of the foundations.

⁶ GKPL IV.-2-a.12.

⁷ GKPL IV-3-7.d. 1.cs. 1909. For details on this, see later under cemetery crucifixes.

⁸ GKPL IV-2-a 27. d. 39. 1890.,IV-3-7.d. 1.cs.1909.

⁹ See for instance: GKSz 1929. Vol. 5. 2.

¹⁰ Barna, G.. 2021. 13.

¹¹ Further: Liszka J. 2020. 439.

In the *Canonica visitatio* of Hajdúdorog, already referred to several times, crosses outside the cemetery were also counted. At that time there were five of these along the roadsides and in the churchyard. The striking thing about the list of these is that in none of the cases was there any mention of them having a crucifix, i.e. a corpus. Nor did they mention that they were made of stone. It was merely noted that all were in good condition and that each had a foundation.

Since they did not say what they were made of, it is reasonable to assume that they were all made of wood. It is therefore understandable why, from the last years of the 19th century, when they became obsolete, they were all replaced by new ones, namely stone crosses with a slab body, in today's parlance crucifixes.

The question immediately arises: what kind of wood could have been used for the old crosses? Well, mostly oak, and in the 19th century acacia, which was also introduced here, proved to be durable and long-lived because of its hardness.

These wooden crosses, sometimes with a corpus, were replaced by stone crosses in our settlements at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. This process continued uninterrupted between the two world wars. The process gained new momentum in public areas, churchyards and cemeteries after the change of regime in 1989/1990.

I thought it important to emphasize how the religious soul sought to surround itself with various religious objects. Wooden table and wall crucifixes, painted plaster or porcelain statues of saints. These were mostly bought during the church fairs of Máriapócs, each one as much as his wallet would allow. These sacred objects were placed on the dresser in their homes as a domestic altar or hung on the wall above it. I have come to the conclusion that the wooden crucifixes are of particular importance for this dissertation, as several of them can still be found in our settlements.

The formal features of the table crucifixes examined suggest that they could have served as a model for stone crucifixes in public places, cemeteries and churchyards, as their structural design is extremely similar. The crossbars of these crosses also stand on, and grow out of, a beautifully articulated base. We can respect the models and predecessors of these open-air stone crucifixes, so it is certainly not far from the truth to claim that they are nothing other than the forerunners of stone crucifixes. In this respect, we can include this statement among the results of research.

During my work I also paid special attention to the restoration of the Greek Catholic „Tin Christs” (Pléhkrisztusok), i.e. the plate corpus, and to the monitoring of the phenomenon. The plate corpus used to be a realistic representation, with all its naivety. In other words, they

carried the style of the 'folk painter'. One was more plastic, more corporeal, the other more planar. No two of them were alike, because the 'master' himself (usually a local woman of skill) could hardly produce two alike. By the time of the change of regime, these 'images of Christ' had mostly been eroded by time. As the stone elements of the crucifixes were restored, it was only natural that they should be repainted. I observed an important change and reinterpretation in Újfehértó and Hajdúdorog, namely that the works created by the painters (icon painters) no longer conform to the old traditions. The new plate corpus is made according to the rules of icon painting. The result is a strange phenomenon whereby an iconic representation of Jesus is placed on the original Latin cross, creating a dissonance in the visual manifestation of such sacred objects.

In order to document the changes in their condition, I have also made use of photographs taken earlier, where possible, to form a picture not only of deterioration but also of transformation, for example in terms of sacrality. I have been able in some cases to illustrate with photographs the 'rewriting', repainting or replacement of old-style plate corpus with new ones, using representations made according to the rules of icon painting. In this respect, these findings also add to the range of professional results.

As we have seen above, the terms cross and crucifix appear side by side in the literature. This is now a common phenomenon in the vernacular, and I have seen it confirmed in the course of my research.

That is why I have tried to record how they were called in our region, in the area under study, and how they are still commonly referred to. As far as the professional result is concerned, I have come to the conclusion that the most frequent use of the word is crucifix, with the possible addition of the designation of place. The crucifix on the crossroad (Keresztúti fészület, Kálmánháza), the crucifix on Dorogi street (Dorogi úti fészület, Újfehértó) or the crucifix on the churchyard (Templomkerti fészület) in every settlement. It is also common that the name of the family that erected the crucifix was "pasted" on the crucifix, which also served to identify the place more precisely (Márton crucifix in Kálmánháza, Mosolygó crucifix in Újfehértó, etc.). In Hajdúnánás, for example, the name of the crucifix on the border was most commonly used, but the name of the Jesus standing next to the church was also mentioned.

The name 'cross' is therefore not applied to sacral signs with a corpus, which may be a consequence of the fact that crosses without a corpus were no longer produced in the period under study. Neither in the streets of the villages, nor on the borders, nor in cemeteries or churchyards.

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List of publications related to the dissertation

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1. **Buczkó, J.:** Szent Gyuri: A hajdúdorogi Szabados György életének elbeszélése. Keresztrel koronázott sírkövek Hajdúdorogon. Szerző, Hajdúdorog, 120 p., 2024. (Hajdúdorogi Füzetek, ISSN 2498-5767 ; 26.) ISBN: 9786150201238
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20. **Buczko, J.:** A "Nánási lakodalmás".

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