

Baroque images of the saints, their visions and emotions as reflected by popular discourses around 1970

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This article attempts to identify and describe some of the concepts that have been used in popular discourse in relation to Baroque art, architecture and visual culture on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The concepts to be studied are associated with visual cults of particular saints, and especially with the emotional loading of such images. Can we find any significant differences between the various ways in which these images were conceptualised and medialised to a wider public in the eastern and western parts of a divided Europe? The search for an answer to this question will be divided into two phases. The first part of the article is devoted to one of the most important examples of popular art history of our time – the famous BBC television documentary series, *Civilisation: A Personal View*, by Kenneth Clark, and the accompanying book of the same name.¹ This article attempts to reconstruct the conceptual framework used by the author in his presentation of the Baroque cult of saints in the visual arts. This reconstruction will provide a kind of benchmark against which less illustrious examples of such a popularisation effort can be measured. The latter task will be carried out in the second part of the paper, in a short case study of how the Baroque cult of St Elizabeth of Thuringia was understood and popularised on either side of the Iron Curtain. The examples to be studied are from the cities of Vienna and Bratislava, both cities having spent a long time as the capitals of their respective halves of the Danube monarchy.²

The famous BBC series, *Civilisation*, in which Kenneth Clark presented his personal views on complex questions on historical development and on the mutual interaction of art, politics, religion and science, reached an enormous television audience and was subsequently published in book form in which medium it experienced even further success.³ In spite of its outwardly simple form, created as it was for the education of a very broad public, the work offers much more than a

¹ Kenneth Clark, *Civilisation: A personal view*, London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1969.

² Bratislava (under its historical names – Posonium in Latin, Prešporok in Slovak, Pressburg in German, and Pozsony in Hungarian) was the capital of the historical Kingdom of Hungary in the period after 1536. What was to be the last coronation of a Hungarian king in the city took place in 1830. See Mikuláš Teich, Dušan Kováč and Martin D. Brown, eds, *Slovakia in history*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 8.

³ The series, which was first aired 23 February 1969 to 18 May 1969 on BBC2, won many awards and was sold to over sixty countries. It served as an international model for later programs. The richly illustrated and lightly adapted book became a bestseller both in Britain and in the United States. In 2011 the series was remastered on DVD and Blue-Ray by BBC Warner with the addition of a number of extra features (*Civilisation: The Complete Series*).

package of elementary knowledge – it is a brief but extremely concise interpretation of the phenomena presented to the audience. Clark's masterly narrative skilfully mixed elementary information with unostentatious and emotional expressions of his own personal reactions, as well as with occasional deep insights and provocative ideas. The art and culture of the Catholic Baroque period seems to be one of the favourite subjects of the author, who went as far as devoting a whole chapter to its discussion, even though he knew very well how provocative such an emphasis on that particular topic might be in his country. Clark did not attempt to gloss over the fact that the period would be unthinkable without influence of authoritarian clerical politics, which were perceived with mistrust not just in the prevailingly liberal societies of Great Britain and the United States around 1970, but were rejected even more fiercely on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Clark's provocation consists in putting his emphasis in his narrative on the positive side of the activities of the Catholic Church:

[T]he civilisation of these years depended on certain assumptions that are out of favour in England and America today. The first of these, of course, was belief in authority, the absolute authority of the Catholic Church. This belief extended to sections of society which we now assume to be naturally rebellious. It comes as something of a shock to find that, with a single exception, the great artists of the time were all sincere, conforming Catholics.
(175)

This paper will not address either the complex problems associated with Church history, or the almost insoluble methodological problems associated with attempting to gauge the sincerity of artists in any period. Where it will dare to enter, however, is another area with the potential to generate a comparable explosion of subjectively biased judgements – i.e. the relationship between art and human emotions. The number of recent publications grappling with this topic indicates the wide variety of possible methodological approaches to choose from.⁴ Nevertheless, in the case of the text we are dealing with, Clark was not attempting to trigger scholarly discussion. His priority was to address as broad as possible a community of viewers of the documentary. With this aim in mind, he did not hesitate to give expression to his own biases. As a person in possession of a solid classical education, he was surely well aware of the fact that an orator needs to be biased if he is to aspire to reach the hearts and minds of his audience. It therefore comes as no

⁴ Pablo P. L. Tinio and Jeffrey K. Smith, eds, *The Cambridge Handbook of the Psychology of Aesthetics and the Arts*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014; Damien Freeman, *Art's emotions: Ethics, expression and aesthetic experience*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012; Eric R. Kandel, *The age of insight: The quest to understand the unconscious in art, mind, and brain: From Vienna 1900 to the present*, New York: Random House, 2012; Penelope Gouk and Helen Hills, *Representing emotions. New connections in the histories of art, music, and medicine*, Aldershot, Burlington: Ashgate, 2005; Ciarán Benson, *The Cultural Psychology of Self: Place, Morality, and Art in Human Worlds*, London and New York: Routledge, 2001.

surprise that he stressed the Baroque's appeal to human emotions as one of its essential features, a feature that made it much more popular than some of the more intellectually challenging and therefore more elitist masterworks of the preceding period. 'Baroque art was a popular art. The art of the Renaissance had appealed through intellectual means – geometry, perspective, knowledge of antiquity – to a small group of humanists. The Baroque appealed through the emotions to the widest possible audience.' (182)

But what does it mean to communicate through the emotions? On the one hand, the popularity of Baroque art was to some extent a consequence of the media that it used to communicate with its public. Clark made a comparison between the means of communication used by the great artists of the period and the formal language of modern film. This analogy might seem daring, but it continues to inspire historians of art and culture even in the twenty-first century.⁵ Clark – in remarks quite typical of his methodological approach – saw behind this phenomenon the inspirational work of one particular genius who influenced the artistic culture of the entire period. That genius was Caravaggio, who 'experimented with the kind of lighting fashionable in the highbrow films of the 1920s, and gained thereby a new dramatic impact'. (182) The inspirational creator opened up new direction for his followers: '[l]ater Baroque artists delighted in emotive close-ups with open lips and glistening tears. The huge scale, the restless movement, the shifting lights and dissolves – all these devices were to be rediscovered in the movies.' (182)

The analogy between Baroque painting and any modern medium might seem a little over-ambitious or superficial, ignoring the many important differences between the two modes of expression. Nevertheless, a closer reading reveals that the comparison provides within it a hint of such substantial differences. The similar formal devices were associated in each case with substantially different content – it would be pretty safe to claim that mystical visions were not included in the privileged topics of European visual culture around 1970. Therefore, mediation of emotions through the image of a human body had acquired a number of new characteristics. Clark, also the author of a famous book on representation of human body published in 1956, never ceased to be attentive to the role of the bodily experience in art.⁶ His sensitivity to the artistic treatment of the human body led him to think about ideas inherent to the way the body is depicted. Firstly, he recognised that the great artists of the period were not afraid of the human body. Artists such as Bernini or Rubens had absorbed the pagan heritage of the Renaissance and, simultaneously, transformed it into an artistic language that could be used effectively in pro-clerical propaganda. They helped the Church to achieve and celebrate a 'union of dogma and sensuality' (181). This artistic synthesis was closely

⁵ See e.g. the essays in the volume, Timothy Murray, *Digital Baroque: New Media Art and Cinematic Folds*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

⁶ Kenneth Clark, *The Nude. A Study in Ideal Form*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1956; John-Paul Stonard, 'Kenneth Clark: The nude. A study of ideal art, 1956', in Richard Shone and John-Paul Stonard, eds., *The books that shaped art history: From Gombrich and Greenberg to Alpers and Krauss*, London and New York: Thames & Hudson, 2013, 102–115.

associated with the immense impact that their work was to have. According to Clark, this new formal language was 'the chief source of an international style that spread all over Europe, as Gothic had done, and as the Renaissance style never did' (181).

According to this explanatory model, the popularity of the Baroque artistic style was inspired by the sensitivity of its creators to human needs. Clark did not hesitate to use anthropological terms, that is to say concepts that express a specific understanding of basic characteristics of any human being ('body', 'flesh', 'soul', 'spirit', 'human impulses', 'imagination' etc.) in his explanation of the achievements of Baroque art: '[T]he conflict between flesh and spirit is gloriously resolved.' (181) In choosing this formulation, he was offering much more than just an elementary statement about body/soul dialectics. The soul for him was not an entity simply to be described in theological terms, but a living psychological reality, observable in various expressions of the human body. Such an understanding will come as no surprise to a scholar who has devoted much thought to Leonardo da Vinci, among the artists who first studied this phenomenon in detail. According to Clark, this art in the service of the Church 'gave imaginative expression to deep-seated human impulses' (181). And that imaginative expression was a civilising force, which – according to Clark – helped Church leaders to teach the broad masses of believers a means of gaining some degree of control over the wild forces of human nature: '[T]he great achievements of the Catholic Church lay in harmonising, humanising, civilising the deepest impulses of ordinary, ignorant people.' (175) In his efforts to describe these deep human impulses, Clark developed a new and original anthropology, that appealed more to his own empathy and intuition than it did to any strictly cold rational theoretical speculation or fully formed empirical evidence. What he offered was a theoretical reconstruction of that anthropology, as the ideological framework of the Baroque art was now no longer a quasi-natural part of experience of his audience. Surprisingly for someone who was a basically conservative thinker, he praised the feminine side of human nature more than strength of will, even going so far as to associate the female principle with artistic creativity. His sentences sound surprisingly lively even in when compared against the searing pace of language in our own time: '[T]he aggressive, nomadic societies – [...] – Israel, Islam, the Protestant North, conceived their gods as male. It's a curious fact that the all-male religions have produced no religious imagery – in most cases have positively forbidden it. The great religious art of the world is deeply involved with the female principle.' (177) This anthropological perspective served Clark as an argument in favour of the Baroque cult of Marian images. Clark expressed extreme empathy to the emotions of people hurt by Protestant iconoclasm: '[I]magine the feelings of a simple-hearted man or woman – a Spanish peasant, an Italian artisan – on hearing that the northern heretics were insulting the Virgin, desecrating her sanctuaries, pulling down or decapitating her images. He must have felt something deeper than shock and indignation: he must have felt that some part of his whole emotional life is threatened. [...] He simply knew that the heretics wanted to deprive him of that sweet, compassionate, approachable being who would intercede for him, as his mother might have interceded with a hard master.' (177) Instead of

presenting his audience with complicated theological speculations, Clark appealed to the basic strata of the human psychological constitution formed in early childhood. An imaginative response to artistic images may include substantial emotional elements of that basic human relationship that is the one between a child and its mother. Such ideas might seem to be based on a fairly simple empathetic psychological vision, but in fact they were the result of much thought on the topic of modern psychoanalysis.⁷ The influence of this thought is revealed in his discussion appealing to another deep human impulse – the need for confession. Clark had developed an emotionally engaged theory in which the concept of the ‘sympathetic imagination, of entering into the emotions of others’ (191) plays a very important role. His narrative offers plenty of space to allow warm human response to develop. The conceptual framework used within the narrative may ultimately be open to criticism insofar as this space also provides room for irrationality. The irrationality of the emotions was approached from a number of viewpoints in the popular accounts of the time. John Berger, in his *Ways of Seeing*, broadcast in Britain in January 1972, made an attempt to lead his viewers to experience real, personal, lively experiences of images, based on their observation of his own spontaneous reactions and those of his contemporaries (he interviewed children). In an effort to find an approach to the ‘real experience’ of his viewers, he protested against the ‘false mystifications’ surrounding art: ‘the art of the past is being mystified because a privileged minority is striving to invent a history which can retrospectively justify the role of the ruling classes’.⁸ In order to avoid such mystification, the ‘emotion provoked by the image’ should not be isolated ‘from the plane of lived experience’.⁹ Berger may have offered some important insight on the experience of art. One example is the following: ‘The experience of art, which at first was the experience of ritual, was set apart from the rest of life - precisely in order to be able to exercise power over it.’¹⁰ Nevertheless, a direct and spontaneous association of art with the emotions of later historical periods can easily lead down the road to ignorance of the varying historical forms of experience, a topic which is not directly and spontaneously accessible to majority of modern interpreters. Berger was trying to persuade his viewers to be sceptical, but he himself did not hesitate to deliver ahistorical statements, including a long emotional passage on the ‘social presence of a woman’, whose self is constantly ‘split into two’. ‘A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself.’¹¹ A remark in which he points out the difference between ‘an expression of her own feelings’ or feelings as ‘a sign of her submission to the owner’s feelings or demands.

⁷ Compare the paragraph on psychoanalysis in Clark, *Civilisation*, 177

⁸ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin, 1972, 11. Comp. John Wyver, Television. In: Chris Stephens, *Kenneth Clark: Looking for Civilisation*, London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 2014, 123–131.

⁹ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 13.

¹⁰ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 32.

¹¹ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 45–47.

(The owner of both woman and painting.)', might also be seen as an important indicator of his attitude.¹²

Personally, I think that Clark manifested a greater sensitivity to the otherness some historical forms of experience. He used emotionally sensitive conceptual framework too when explaining phenomena alien to modern Protestant culture, or even to the culture of consumer society: the authority of the Pope or the veneration of relics associated with the cults of saints, for example. The emotions played a very important role in Clark's understanding of intentions behind the visual cults of saints in the Baroque period: 'the saints should be made more insistently real to the imagination, and in particular their sufferings and their ecstasies should be vividly recorded.' (177) Moments of ecstatic visionary experience, or rather the absence of such moments, will play an important role in our short case study. The embodied experience remains of key importance for the artistic rendering of an ecstasy: '[I]t's always been difficult, even for the saints, to represent spiritual love without having recourse to the symbols of physical love.' (238) Describing Bernini's St Theresa in Cornaro Chapel of the Church Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome, he spoke of religious ecstasy as 'the rarest and most precious of all emotional states' (191). And feelings in depictions of religious ecstasy do indeed express a kind of submission, but it is a gender-neutral kind of submission, one accessible to both women and men. It has more of a connection with power or, more precisely, with the concept of surrender to a power defined as immaterial. And the social consequence of such an experience can lead in a variety of different directions. One of those directions may be the above-mentioned justification of the role of the ruling classes, but – as I will show later in the case of Saint Elisabeth – another direction could be the path to selfless service to the needy in defiance of any social hierarchies. Clark did not hesitate to deliver his extremely positive view of the phenomenon of ecstatic experience, in spite his awareness of the danger that it may lead one to escape from reality altogether into a world of illusion. He used the slightly ironic term 'aerial ballets' in his description of paintings on the ceilings of some Baroque churches.¹³

Such escapes from reality could take various forms. Rococo churches, according to Clark, offered their visitors 'a foretaste of paradise' (238). This emotional experience was described using synaesthetic associations with the music of Haydn's as written for the Eszterhazy family. And this family can serve us as a bridge into the second part of this article, which is devoted to the churches of the Order of the Sisters of Saint Elisabeth built in the cities of Vienna and Bratislava. Both buildings were founded and supported by a great patron of art of the family – Emeric Eszterhazy (1664–1745), Archbishop of Esztergom.¹⁴ They are quite similar in

¹² Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 52.

¹³ The term 'ballet' was explained in Clark, *Civilisation*, 188 as 'ecstatic repudiation of the forces of gravity'.

¹⁴ Jakob Michael Perschy and Harald Prickler, *Die Fürsten Esterházy: Magnaten, Diplomaten & Mäzene. Ausstellung der Republik Österreich, des Landes Burgenland und der Freistadt Eisenstadt, Schloss Esterházy, 28 April–31 October 1995*, (exhib. cat.), Tutzing: Eisenstadt Amt der Burgenländischen Landesregierung, Landesarchiv und -bibliothek, 1995; András Forgó, 'Esterházy Imre és az aulikus politika a 18. század első évtizedeiben', in I. Maczák, ed.,

style, as they were architecturally planned (exclusively in the case of Bratislava, and only partially in the case of Vienna) by Franz Anton Pilgram.¹⁵ However, neither the identity of the patron family or the artistic qualities of the architect provide the main reason behind the choice of these buildings and their decor as suitable examples of interpretation in popular literature that can be usefully compared with the work of Clark. A far more important factor in my choice was the visual representation of an ecstatic experience of their patron saint – Elizabeth of Hungary (or, depending on your local preference – of Thuringia) – which plays a crucial role in their decorative programs.¹⁶ The saint experienced an intense feeling of spiritual love for her Heavenly Bridegroom in many respects very similar to that of St Theresa. An examination of the commentaries on how her experience was visually expressed in the two churches has the potential to provide us with an example of how this important aspect of European visual culture was interpreted on the both sides of the iron curtain.

Unfortunately, the formats through which these churches were dealt with in the popular literature are not entirely comparable with the masterly narrative of Kenneth Clark. Specialist dictionaries and guidebooks were the main genres through which the art of both buildings were popularised in the period around 1970. The conceptual frameworks and narrative directions created in order to interpret the churches were much poorer than those used in the famous documentary. And if one makes a comparison between the literature written on the two churches, it would appear that the Viennese example of the pair fared substantially better. Descriptions of that church were built upon an older tradition, as represented by such works as *Heiliges Wien. Ein Führer durch Wiens Kirchen und Kapellen* by Alfred Missong.¹⁷ The author, who wrote the work for a gathering of Catholics from German-speaking countries (Katholikentag) in Vienna in 1933 (which was destined to be the last before the long break due to the Nazi regime), was not in fact an art historian, but a former diplomat in Bonn, Rome and Bern.¹⁸ He

“Fényes palotákban, ékes kőfalokban”. *Tanulmányok az Esterházy családról*, Budapest: WZ Könyvek, 2009, 65–86; András Koltai, ‘Császárhű, bőkezű, remete. Esterházy Imre hercegprímás’, *Limes tudományos-történelmi szemle*, 3, 2005, 18–19; Katarína Chmelinová and Radoslav Ragač, ‘Päťdesiate výročie kňazstva Imricha Esterházyho. Niekoľko poznámok k takmer zabudnutej barokovej slávnosti v Bratislave’, in Jiří Kroupa, Michaela Šeferisová Loudová and Lubomír Konečný, eds, *Orbis artium: K jubileu Lubomíra Slavička*, Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2009, 521–537. The cloister and church in Bratislava was the topic of Gizela Weyde’s (1894–1984) first publication – Gizella Weyde, *A pozsonyi szent Erzsébetről nevezett szüzek temploma és kolostora*, Pozsony [Bratislava]: Károly Angermeyer, 1919.

¹⁵ Pál Voit, *Franz Anton Pilgram (1699–1761)*, Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982.

¹⁶ For a differentiated approach to the multiple strategies of representation of the Saint in the houses of the Order see: Cordula Bischoff, *Strategien barocker Bildpropaganda: Aneignung und Verfremdung der Heiligen Elisabeth von Thüringen*, Marburg: Jonas, 1990, 44–50.

¹⁷ Alfred Missong, *Heiliges Wien. Ein Führer durch Wiens Kirchen und Kapellen*, Wien: Gsur, 1933. A second edition of the book was published by the Wiener Dom-Verlag shortly after the 1939–1945 war (in 1948) and in 1970 an improved third edition by the same publishing house.

¹⁸ Missong, *Heiliges Wien*, 11.

wanted to illuminate the place of Viennese churches in the history of [Europe's] cultural and spiritual life, in an approach that maintained a lively interest in mystical meanings. He gave a large space in his work for the images and relics of saints as he firmly believed in their importance to the religious life of Catholic communities: '[T]here is no Catholic spirituality without the cults of saints and the relics.'¹⁹ And Missong understood Catholic spirituality very much from within. He did not appear to see any need for explanations when describing the image on the high altar because he was writing for an audience from which he could expect a good knowledge of Catholic tradition, including an understanding of the basic motifs of the narratives on the church's patron saint as something quasi-natural. Any theoretical constructions employed to elucidate this context would be seen as either superfluous or useless speculation by his readers. For this reason, his text tends to focus on history and iconography. He gave a great deal of space in his account to the church's relic – the holy head of the saint preserved in the church. Even if Missong failed to mention the fact that there were other alleged heads of the saint preserved in other places, he did put some emphasis on the question of authenticity of the relic. He emphasised the argument there was no need to doubt the claim of the Viennese relic to be the truly the head of the saint as it had been examined and found to be genuine by an anthropological commission of University of Vienna in 1931. The fact that Missong felt no need to explain to his readers why a relic of the saint should be perceived as a precious object was in striking contrast to Clark, who offered an explanation of the problematic in his discussion of the case of Saint Fides in Conques, explicitly noting that rationalising 'in modern terms and comparing the pilgrim looking at a large fragment of the True Cross in Constantinople with the tourist cricking his neck in the Sistine Chapel' puts one in danger of making 'quite unhistorical' judgements (41). Neither did Missong pay any attention to complex psychological problem of how the real body of the saint was represented in the altarpiece image, in which St Elizabeth, dressed in the habit of the order, is being accepted into heaven, kneeling on a cloud and pointing with her right hand to her heart and her left to a crown.²⁰ He presented the depiction to his readers as something entirely natural, even if the gestures of the saint included otherworldly references that would be unknown to modern secular reader.

A book of very similar content – a description of Viennese churches as witnesses to belief – was published in 1989 by Wolfgang J. Bandion, Professor of Religion at the Academy of Education in Vienna.²¹ The new methodological move expressed in the work consisted in stepping beyond any Christian bias – the author manifested an interest in the sacred places of all great monotheistic religions, which considered to all share the basic moments of the same revelation.²² His lively interest in emotions is expressed in a play on the Latin word *credere*, to believe, explained as

¹⁹ Missong, *Heiliges Wien*, 9: 'Ohne Heiligen- und Reliquienverehrung gibt es eben keine katholische Frömmigkeit.'

²⁰ Missong, *Heiliges Wien*, 118.

²¹ Wolfgang J. Bandion, *Steinerne Zeugen des Glaubens. Die Heiligen Stätten der Stadt Wien*, Wien: Herold, 1989.

²² Bandion, *Steinerne Zeugen des Glaubens*, 19.

cor dare, to give heart.²³ For him, churches are less museums than they are living places of living belief, places that express a rich intellectual and emotional life, places of prayer and pilgrimage into the depth of the human soul.²⁴ His description of the convent church of the Sisters of Saint Elizabeth offers us more information on historical events, such as the arrival of the first nuns of her order in Vienna in 1709, and the architecture of the church (planned in 1710 by Franz Jängl and reconstructed in 1743 by his cousin Franz Anton Pilgram).²⁵ The author provides basic information on Saint Elizabeth, the story of her relic and an explanation of the symbolic meanings of the three crowns of the saint, which provided the Order's coat of arms.²⁶ Nevertheless, his short description of the image of the mystical vision did not go much deeper than the one by Missong – indeed it seems to have been taken directly from Missong's, without any substantial rephrasing.

Another local aspect of the Viennese tradition is the strong local living interest in one's own home place and its surroundings, a tendency represented in the form of a specific genre of books typical of the German speaking countries – the *Heimatbuch* or 'homeland book' – in which one finds an expression of passionate interest in local communities and local history. Karl Ziak published in 1975 a book dedicated to the Landstraße, the long Viennese street on which the church of Saint Elizabeth stands. It includes an account of the history of the convent church and an explanation of its practical functions, richly detailed with dates and fascinating detail.²⁷ However, the author showed no particular interest in either the church's artworks or its relics in his account. Local history also features strongly in dictionaries produced in Vienna. Prominent local historian and ethnographer Felix Czeike co-edited the great *Lexikon of Vienna* in 1974, in which he offers only basic information on the building.²⁸ This neglect of important parts of Baroque art and history is comparable with the situation in Bratislava, which was strongly marked by the influence of the ideological criteria employed by the communist dictatorship.

Was it then even permitted to speak in positive terms of the Catholic saints in the popular literature of socialist Czechoslovakia? The official doctrine of the regime was Marxist-Leninist atheism, also referred to as 'scientific atheism' in the official sources of the time, such as the *Atheist Dictionary*, published in 1981 by Pravda, the publishing house of the Communist Party of Slovakia. The book had started life as a translation of a similar dictionary (*Kratkij naučno ateističeskij slovar*), published 1969 in Moscow, but was localised to the conditions of Czechoslovakia by

²³ Bandion, *Steinerne Zeugen des Glaubens*, 19.

²⁴ Bandion, *Steinerne Zeugen des Glaubens*, 19.

²⁵ Bandion, *Steinerne Zeugen des Glaubens*, 126.

²⁶ Bandion, *Steinerne Zeugen des Glaubens*, 127.

²⁷ Karl Ziak, *Das neue Landstraßer Heimatbuch. Geschichte eines Wiener Bezirks*, Vienna: Europaverlag, 1975, 58.

²⁸ Ernestine Krug and Felix Czeike, eds, *Das große Gröner Wien Lexikon*, Wien: Molden, 1974, 458. The title of the book refers to the works of Richard Gröner (1853–1931). Comp. also Felix Czeike, *Wien wie es war*, Vienna: Molden, 1965, Felix Czeike, *III. Landstraße (Wiener Bezirkskulturführer 3)*, Vienna: Jugend & Volk, 1984, 25, and Felix Czeike, *Wien. Kunst und Kultur-Lexikon. Stadtführer und Handbuch*, Munich: Süddeutscher Verlag, 1976, 96.

a group of scholars working at the Institute of Scientific Atheism within the Slovak Academy of Sciences. According to this source, the cult of the saints was 'a powerful religious tool [used] to stultify and deceive believers, frequently a tool of reactionary Vatican politics'.²⁹

The extremely anti-religious standpoint of communist ideology was not shared by the majority of the population.³⁰ There were, however, some oases of relative freedom from censorship allowed to publish materials that were not a part of communist propaganda – on condition, of course, that they did not attack the regime. One such place was the *Vlastivedný časopis* (Journal of Local History), which offered a space for the description of the fresco decoration of the church, painted by Paul Troger, without ignoring the Celebration of the Saint ascent into Heaven: '[The author] ... captured a moment, in which the young women, carried upon clouds, is received into glory'.³¹ The choice of the topic was briefly explained on the basis of the immanent artistic motivation: 'Troger employed the popular Baroque subject of Apotheosis'. It was as if one could say that it was not religion, but the inner logic of the artistic culture of the time that decided what was to be depicted. The question of emotional meaning was simply not addressed.

In other cases, ideological pressure and its consequences on popular literature dealing with the convent church of the Sisters of Saint Elizabeth in Bratislava are hardly even perceivable, for the simple reason that they need to be heard from the silence, to be proven *ex absentia*. The saint, along with all her works of charity and above all her mystical experience, disappeared almost completely from the published texts. Their authors obviously lacked the ideological creativity and skills of dialectical argumentation possessed by the leading official art historian of the period, Jaromír Neumann. Neumann had managed – even during the worst of the Stalinist period – to identify that the positive 'realistic' elements of art were created 'in touch with interests of the people' (this rather vague use of terminology is typical for the ideology of the period) directly in the context of his fierce criticism of Jesuit propaganda. He sympathetically recognized the usefulness of an 'elastic ideology', a capacity to use the arguments of opponents as weapons in a victorious fight against them.³² Neumann had not been afraid to closely look at 'inimical' images and find elements in them that could be deemed acceptable in the discourse of the period, including among other things the mission to help the poor and ill, a topic of particular relevance in the case of the church presently being discussed. Unfortunately, neither Neumann nor anyone else like him commented on the

²⁹ *Ateistický slovník*, Bratislava: Nakladateľstvo Pravda, 1984, 531.

³⁰ In this respect, Slovakia has been different from prevailingly atheist Bohemia – see e.g. Nešpor, Zdeněk: *Příliš slábi ve víře: česká neligiozita v evropském kontextu*, Prague: Kalich 2010.

³¹ Eva Toranová, 'Barokové nástenné maliarstvo v Bratislave', *Vlastivedný časopis*, 16, 1967, 58–63, here 62: '[Troger] ... zachytil moment, keď na oblakoch unášaná mladá žena prijím gloriólu'.

³² Jaromír Neumann, *Malířství XVII. století v Čechách*. Praha: Orbis, 1951, 59: 'Jesuité (...) si z ideologických projevů, jim v podstatě nepřátelských, učinili nejúčinnější zbraně, jimiž zdolávali své odpůrce'.

paintings. As a consequence, they were not made accessible to a broader audience. Visitors to the church had to content themselves with short city guides – and even these had been mutilated as a result of ideological pressure. The 1931 guide provides a brief biographical reference to the saint herself. When the new 1964 edition was issued, however, the saint had almost completely disappeared from the narrative. The name ‘Elizabeth’ was mentioned only as a reference to label the statue on the façade. Even the church itself is not identified by the name of its saintly patron, but only through the name of the monastic order founded for her. The official *ABC guide to the cultural monuments of Czechoslovakia*, published in Prague in 1985, correctly names the patron of the church, but neglects to convey any information on her role in the iconography of the building’s decoration.³³ The situation changed slightly during the late 1980s – a 1987 book on the artistic monuments of the city offered basic information on the architecture of the church, also mentioning Pilgram’s work on the order’s convent house in Vienna.³⁴ The vision experienced by the saint only receives mention as the subject of the main altar painting in the course of a description of the church’s decoration. The account also includes dates for the earlier activities of the Order of the Sisters of Saint Elizabeth (*Sorores Hospitalariae S. Elisabethae*, shortened in popular language to *Elisabethinae*, or *alžbetinky* in Slovak) in the town since 1420.³⁵ This chronology appears pretty strange, as the order was actually only founded in the early seventeenth century (1622 or 1626, depending on which event one interprets as the act of foundation) and first invited to Bratislava in 1738 by Emericus Eszterházy.³⁶ The date of 1420 given to the convent’s foundation in Bratislava may have been taken from the entry for ‘alžbetinky’ of the above-mentioned *Atheist Dictionary*, where it appears side by side with a number of other strange assertions (including that the order was founded in 1229 by Saint Elisabeth in Magdeburg) without making any reference to historic sources.³⁷ During a period where a study of religious topics was oppressed, the *Atheist Dictionary* may have become a source of information even for people whose texts did not manifest any sign of anti-religious bias.

³³ Jan Muk and Eva Šamánková, eds, *ABC kulturních památek Československa*, Prague: Panorama 1985, 57.

³⁴ Štefan Holčík and Ivan Rusina, *Umenie Bratislavy. Obrazový sprievodca pamiatkami mesta*, Bratislava: Tatran, 1987, 17. The interest of the authors in subject matter of Baroque art was exceptional in popular literature of the time, especially when compared against the fact that the popular history of the town in the eighteenth century almost completely ignored the order, its activities and its church, mentioning only the sculptures of Ludovít Gode on the façade of the church: Anton Špiesz, *Bratislava v 18. storočí*, Bratislava: Tatran, 1987, 164. Fortunately, the scholarly literature dealing with the period did not share that systemic disregard – see Anna Petrová-Pleskotová, *Maliarstvo 18. storočia na Slovensku*, Bratislava: Veda, 1983, 29.

³⁵ Holčík and Rusina, *Umenie Bratislavy*, 357.

³⁶ Peter Kőszeghy, ed., *Magyar művelődéstörténeti lexikon: Középkor és kora újkor*, Budapest: Balassi Kiadó 2004, II, 399; Walter Kasper and Michael Buchberger, *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, Freiburg im Breisgau and Basel: Herder 2006, III, 603.

³⁷ *Ateistický slovník*, 18.

No popular account of the church from the period around 1970 allowed space for contemplation of the emotional aspects of the ecstatic experience of the saint as expressed by Paul Troger's image on the high altar (1741), which depicted the saint's vision as she knelt before a crucified Christ bending down to her from the cross, or by the fresco on the main dome of the church (finished in 1742), where the saint is seen kneeling before Christ in heaven.³⁸ The visionary experience has a special psychological importance for her, providing spiritual consolation at demanding times in her work caring for the sick. In this regard it remained relevant to the practical activities of the sisters working in the hospital. While this traditional context remained in place undisturbed, as an obvious and quasi-natural non-issue in Vienna, in Bratislava the case was completely different. No historian of the time was allowed to criticize the expulsion of the sisters from the church, cloister and adjacent hospital, which was what happened in 1950. The theme of religious love as a motivating force in the saint's service to the poor and ill remained a forgotten element in the secularised hospital until the 1990s, when the buildings returned to the church and its original name was restored on 1 January 1996.³⁹

Clark's narrative opened up a new perspective through which to popularise knowledge on the structures of imagination that formed the basic structure underlying the cult of the saints and of their artistic image in Baroque culture. Even in more secular popular texts and TV programmes from around 1970 the emotions carried by the images studied were an important topic of reflection. In some other cases, as manifested above, that topic escaped the attention of popular literature during the Cold War period – on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Nevertheless, the reasons for this neglect were different on each side of that divide. In Vienna, the ancient religious culture remained a dominant conceptual framework within which to think about the city's church and its decoration. In this context, the historians felt no need to broach any question on the cultural differences between the Baroque culture and the present-day period. In Bratislava, criticism of traditional religious culture was presented as if it was a topic that had already been dealt with, so that there should be no need for art historians to reflect on 'ancient reactionary superstitions'. The fierce ideological conflict between traditionalists and the communists simply did not leave space for any gradual translation of local, traditional ideas and their artistic presentations into narratives and medial forms in which they could address the needs of a radically different type of society.

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³⁸ See the images and description in Barbara Balážová, Jozef Medvecký and Dušan Slivka, *Medzi zemou a nebom. Majstri barokovej fresky na Slovensku*, Bratislava: Societas historiae artium v spolupráci s Ústavom dejín umenia SAV, 2009, 69.

³⁹ 'O nemocnici', Onkologický ústav sv. Alžbety, accessed 11 November 2015 <http://www.ousa.sk/sk/o-nas>.

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Baroque images of the saints, their visions and emotions
as reflected by popular discourses around 1970

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