

Agnes Kusler

Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest

Problematics of the Research of Applied Emblematics in Hungary. The Case of the Destroyed Emblems and Hieroglyphs of the Sopron Town Hall.

In my PhD dissertation I aim to find, examine and analyse in iconological case studies all examples of the so-called ‘applied emblematics’ in Hungary during the 16th to 18th Centuries – i.e. works of fine and decorative arts with a *conchetto* or program based on emblem books. My goal is to edit a corpus of emblematic fresco-cycles, as well as to analyse the sources and development of emblematics in Hungary in the context of European emblematics. During my research I apply the interdisciplinary approach of Emblem Studies, which emerged during the past two decades in international research. As a result of the Hungary’s unfortunate historical situation during the early modern era – most importantly the Turkish wars – only a few emblematic works of art survived in Hungary. Most of the known – and fragmentally researched – emblematic fresco-cycles are from the age of Hungary’s Catholic re-colonization in the 18th Century (including e.g. the refectory of the Benedictine Archabbey of Pannonhalma, the Benedictine abbot-house, the Jesuit friary and pharmacy in Győr) which fundamentally diverge in character from the *par excellence* early baroque secular and ecclesiastical applied emblematics. During the course of my research, on the other hand, I have found important sources on 17th Century emblematic works that were destroyed during the wars or fell victim to the purist principles of the Enlightenment after the end of the late baroque period, or – with Herder’s term – the ‘*emblematische Zeitalter*’.

The case of the most important early 17th Century Hungarian hieroglyphic and emblematic œuvre – known through printed emblem books and atypical written sources – could as well shed light on the polemics of the critical reception of emblematic depictions. The decoration of the town hall and gates of Sopron, Western Hungary – composed by the humanist consul Christoph Lackner in favour of Habsburg-loyal propaganda – evoked revulsion by the patriotic local nobility but, on the other hand, its moral and political substances were preserved in the collective *memoria* of the following generations even after its unfortunate destruction during a fire in 1676. The decoration could be reconstructed through contemporary sources and the polemics around its content could be confronted with the actual *conchetto* through critical analysis. The ‘ekphrastic’ and interpretative description of

the town hall's and the gates' decoration was preserved in an evangelic sermon from 1670 and six laudatory orations held by humanists on the centenary of Lackner's election as consul in 1714 – along with Lackner's own works. The reconstructed program is analogous to the most important emblematic town hall decoration of the Empire, the Augsburg *Goldener Saal* – elaborated by Matthäus Rader – and the Nürnberg town hall – known from the emblem book of Peter Iselberg.

Besides his political deeds Lackner wrote several emblematic and hieroglyphic works inspired by Valeriano's *Hieroglyphica* and the emblem books Rollenhagen and Camerarius – and as a trained goldsmith also illustrated them personally – including Mirrors for princes (*Emblematischer Tugend-Spiegel*, 1618, *Galea Martis*, 1625), a dictionary of hieroglyphs (*Florilegus Aegyptiacus in agro Sempronensi*, 1617), and the emblematic description of the Hungarian Holy Crown (*Coronae Hungariae emblematica descriptio*, 1615), dedicated to the Habsburg rulers. Among these his didactic-apologetic work, *Maiestatis Hungariae aquila* (1617) is most closely connected with his applied emblematics: in this work Lackner authorizes the presence of the two-headed Habsburg eagle on the town gates against the will of the citizens, by tracing its origins back to the ancient Egyptian symbols. A detailed examination of Lackner's hieroglyphic practices and their controversial contemporary and subsequent reception is an important case study on the 'performativity' and 'mediality' of the uses of hieroglyphs in early modern times.