

THE INFLUENCE OF NAZARENE ART ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUNGARIAN NATIONAL ART AND THE CRAFTS

The academic painter Alajos (Alois) Unger
(Bap Győr 29 Oct 1814 - Győr 28 Dec 1848)

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This paper will deal with the Nazarene Movement and its art in Hungary with special reference to Alajos (Alois) Unger, a recently rediscovered artist of Hungary's Reform Era (WUNDERLICH 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012), his links to Nazarene art, the relevance of (functional) semiotics in the interpretation of Nazarene works and the influence of the Nazarene Movement on the arts and crafts of the 19th century. This includes the design of new playing-card patterns in Hungary.

To begin with, however, it seems wise to provide terminological clarification and further background information to illustrate the relevance of the topic. What exactly was the Nazarene movement and how can Nazarene art be defined? Given the polysemic nature of the term "Nazarene", it seems necessary to disambiguate it first of all. The word Nazarene can not only refer to Nazareth, Jesus or a member of a protestant denomination (AHD 2009, s.v. Nazarene), but also to

(Fine Arts & Visual Arts / Art Terms) a member of an association of German artists called the Nazarenes or Brotherhood of St Luke¹, including Friedrich Overbeck (1789-1869) and Peter von Cornelius (1783-1867), founded (1809) in Vienna to revive German religious art after the examples of the Middle Ages and early Renaissance (CED 1991, 1994, 1998, 2000, 2003, s.v. Nazarene).

The present paper will deal with this artist movement. Nazarene art, although a leading art form of the 19th century, has been by and large an underappreciated art form:

"It is still largely unrecognized, what fundamental importance the Nazarenes have for the art history of the 19th century." (EXH. CAT. MAINZ 2012: back cover).²

¹ *Lukasbund* in German.

² In this paper, all quotes will appear as translations in the text with the original version in the footno-

This holds true not only for Germany and Austria, but also for Hungary, where both Hungarian and foreign Nazarene artists were active.

As we shall see, Nazarene art was controversial from the onset (SUHR 2012: 13), and artifacts created in this manner had largely become seen as mere “kitsch”, reflecting inferior taste, by the beginning of the 20th century (GREWE 2009: 249). Both Keith Andrew’s seminal work from 1964 (ANDREWS 1964) and the exhibition *Die Nazarener* at the Städel Museum in Frankfurt in 1977 (EXH. CAT. FRANKFURT 1977) had already created some renewed interest in the topic. This trend was intensified with exhibitions like the one at the Schirn Kunsthalle in 2005 entitled *Die Nazarener. Religion Macht Kunst* (EXH. CAT. FRANKFURT 2005) and last year’s large exhibition at the Landesmuseum Mainz *Die Nazarener – Vom Tiber an den Rhein: Drei Malerschulen des 19. Jahrhunderts* (EXH. CAT. MAINZ 2012). Altogether, therefore, the question also arises as to what impact the Nazarene movement had on the formation of Hungarian national art, on the crafts of the 19th century as well as on modern art.

In short, Nazarene art is generally defined as a romantic, mainly – though not exclusively – Roman Catholic, conservative, national and intellectually sophisticated form of Christian art (cf ANDREWS 1964, GOSSMANN 2003, GREWE 2009, EXH. CAT. FRANKFURT 2005, EXH. CAT. MAINZ 2012 to name some seminal works on the topic). Famous they became particularly for church frescoes – a technique they revived – and altarpieces. They left traces in Germany and throughout the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and beyond such as Leopold Kupelwieser (1796-1862) with his high altars in Kalocsa and Pécs both featuring the *Patrona Hungariae* (AKL, s.v. Kupelwieser, Leopold).

Examples of patriotic oil works by Nazarene artists and by those close to their circle are Ludwig Schnorr von Carolsfeld’s (1788-1853) *Vereinigung der Österreichischen Truppen mit den Tirolern unter Andreas Hofer am 14. April 1809 bei Sterzing* (*The unification of the Austrian troops with the Tyrolians under Andreas Hofer on 14 April 1809 near Sterzing*) (1830, Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum in Innsbruck) and Philipp Veit’s (1793-1877) *Germania* from 1848 (now in the permanent exhibition of the Germanic National Museum in Nuremberg). In the case of Carolsfeld, this art was not anti-Habsburg but propaganda aiming at a “visualization of the reconciliation of Austria with Tyrol” (TELESKO 2008: 325).³ In how far this also holds true in the case of Alajos Unger’s art shall be discussed further down.

But who exactly were the people behind this art movement? The Nazarenes originally called themselves the “Brotherhood of Saint Luke”, ie they named themselves for the medieval painters’ guild named for Saint Luke, the saint who presumably painted the first Madonna ever (SUHR 2012: 13). Founded in 1809, they were a group of students from the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts, who, in 1810, fled from Vienna to Rome because they were dissatisfied with the training at the Viennese academy of arts (ibid). The term “Nazarenes”, a name later appli-

tes: Noch immer wird verkannt, von welch grundlegender Bedeutung die Nazarener für die Kunstgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts sind.

³ Visualisierung der Versöhnung Österreichs mit Tirol.

ed to them, apparently stemmed from a nickname derived from the Italian word "I Nazareni" alluding to their originally long, Jesus-like hair (ibid.: 14). Among the six founding members were Friedrich Overbeck (1789-1869) and Franz Pforr (1788-1812) (SUHR 2012: 13).⁴

As they understood their "union as an order, a brotherhood with monkish traits"⁵ (ibid.), they lived at the Monastery of Sant'Isidoro for a while and were later joined by other artists like Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld (1794-1872) and Philipp Veit (1793-1877) "and formed, for a decade, an avant-gardist movement with Europe-wide influence" (ibid.: 14).⁶ While some remained in Rome, many were appointed to professorships at the art academies of Munich, Frankfurt and Düsseldorf, where they trained many students (ibid.).

The two most famous later Austrian Nazarenes and professors at the Vienna Academy were Leopold Kupelwieser and Joseph von Führich (1800-1876), who also trained many Hungarian students. Leopold Kupelwieser was Alajos Unger's main teacher at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts (WUNDERLICH 2012: 273 and the literature cited within).⁷ Führich, who was appointed professor of history painting in 1840 (ENGERTH 1994: 7, MAI 2010: 154), may also have been his teacher. Raphael and Dürer were the Nazarenes' main role models as painters, which showed in their painting style and in their choice of subject matter.

The Nazarenes were extremely popular with King Louis I of Bavaria (GREWE 2007), but also with the Habsburg-Lorraine family. This although they also had many critics at the same time; among them Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (SUHR 2012: 13). Apart from their flat, drawing-like painting style, which many disliked (GOSSMANN 2003), contemporary critics objected that "this art is too anemic, too intellectual and simply too religious" (GREWE 2009: 9).

To date, there has not been a comprehensive overview over Nazarene artists and art in Hungary, although many representatives of this school or artists originally trained in this tradition were active there too.⁸ Another painter who also worked much in the tradition of the Lukasbund at the beginning of his career was Alajos Unger's classmate Eduard von Engerth (ENGERTH 1994: 7). Johann Nepomuk Ender, their teacher, also had connections with the Nazarenes and made artistic contributions to Károly Kisfaludy's literary almanac *Aurora* (SZVOBODA DOMÁNSZKY 2011: 137). It had a great impact not only on the literature of Hungarian Romanticism, but also on the development of national art in Hungary (ibid.: 144).

⁴ The other founding members of the Lukasbund were: Johann Konrad Hottinger (1788-1828), Joseph Sutter (1781-1866), Ludwig Vogel (1788-1879), and Josef Wintergerst (1783-1867) (SUHR 2012: 13).

⁵ Sie verstanden ihren Bund als Orden, als Bruderschaft mit mönchischen Zügen (SUHR 2012: 13).

⁶ ...und bildete für ein Jahrzehnt eine avantgardistische Bewegung, die von europäischer Wirkung war.

⁷ Among Kupelwieser's many students were also quite a few Hungarians. Miklos Borsos, Henrik Weber, Alajos Györgyi Giergl and Bertalan Székely, for example, were also trained by him for a while (AKL s.v. Borsos, Miklós, Weber, Henrik, Györgyi, Alajos, Székely, Bertalan). Like Alajos Györgyi Giergl, Alajos Unger must also have started his training at the Viennese Academy (Elementarzeichenklasse) in 1833 under Karl Gsellhofer (AKL, s.v. Györgyi Giergl, Alajos; OBL, s.v. Gsellhofer, Karl), who taught there at the time.

⁸ They seem to have influenced strongly even Károly Markó the Elder, a topic which has not been researched more thoroughly yet (SINKÓ 2002: 22).

Aurora strongly inspired Hungarian history painting and national art and Károly Kisfaludy was a source of inspiration for the romanticists in Hungary generally (DOMÁNSZKY SZVOBODA 2005: 77).⁹ Ludwig Schnorr von Carolsfeld too has a connection with the formation of Hungarian national art since, in 1825, he illustrated the knight's tale *Tihamér* in *Aurora* (ibid.).

Two other fairly well-known representatives of the Nazarene movement who were Hungarian or worked in Hungary in the 19th century were Ferenc Szoldatics (1820-1916) and Franz Josef Dobiaschofsky (1818-1867, alternatively spelled Dobyaschofsky), who later also taught at the Vienna Academy for a while. He was invited to decorate the cathedral of Győr by Bishop János Simor (1813-1891) (AKL s.v. Dobiaschofsky, Franz Josef). Additionally, Nazarene artists in Hungary are mainly known for their religious works and not for history paintings, but this genre was rare in Hungary before the Revolution and Freedom Fights of 1848/49 anyway.

This may be due to the fact that Nazarene art was highly esteemed in church circles¹⁰. As such, it also played a big role in Bishop Simor's collection, which he began when he was Bishop of Győr between 1857 and 1867. It formed the foundation of the collection of the *Keresztény Múzeum* (*Christian Museum*) in Esztergom, which Simor founded after he had become prince primate of Hungary in 1867: "As his later acquisitions for the Keresztény Múzeum demonstrate, Simor was deeply influenced by the art of Kupelwieser, Führich and Dobyaschofsky" (SALLAY 2011: 106).

Overall the reason for the high popularity of Nazarene art in church circles was that "many ecclesiastical collectors were profoundly impressed by Nazarene art, which was generally considered in religious circles as the heir to, and the direct continuation of, the pure Christian spirit of early Italian painting" (ibid.: 105).

Bishop Arnold Ipolyi (1823-1886) was another famous ecclesiastic art collector with a predilection for the Nazarenes (ibid. 111-114). Other than the church, the main patrons of the Nazarenes were aristocrats.

What may also have appealed to the representatives of the Roman Catholic church is that the Christian representations in Nazarene art entailed the rebirth of pictorial meaning, which GREWE (2009: 304) characterizes in the following way: "Openness had to be reconciled with closure, polysemy with circumscribed interpretation. The result was an art at once rigid and open: rigid in its missionary ideology, proclamation of doctrine and absolute orientation towards transcendental Truth; open in its productive engagement with the inexhaustible dynamics of the symbolic mode. The rebirth of pictorial meaning proposed in Nazarene art occurred at this juncture."

However, this pictorial meaning always showed idiosyncratic tendencies specific to the individual artist, stemming from his own quest of the divine: "In the early years of the Lukasbund, the intense engagement of its members with the Scriptures and pre-modern techniques of exegesis was driven by personal con-

⁹ On history painting in Hungary in the early 19th century cf also GALAVICS 1980.

¹⁰ An exception to this seems to have been Ladislav Pyrkner though (YOUNG 2006: 124).

cerns. The search for a sacred language was inseparably tied to the young artists' desire to form identities – as artists, as men, as crusaders of the Christian faith. This emphatically subjective perspective guided the Lukasbrüder's conquest of traditional styles and conventional signs. The result was an iconography that negotiated private and public aspirations. The charm of the early works derives not least from their productive tension between individual expression and missionary outreach, idiosyncrasy and general legibility, secessionist independence and yearning for institutional context" (GREWE 2009: 12f).

The main reason for why this new pictorial language was developed is to be sought in the tumultuous political situation of the early 19th century: "The Nazarene quest for a new language of sacred art spoke to an urgent and overarching sense of crisis in communication produced by the massive cultural and political upheavals of the late eighteenth century. The confrontation between secularization and religious revival was one of its key battlegrounds." (GREWE 2009: 303)¹⁰

The artifacts that followed the principles of the Lukasbund can be categorized as conceptual art, which used a hieroglyphic language to transport its messages, which also entailed a specific relationship between verbal and pictorial meaning: "The conceptual art of the Nazarenes carved out a novel and uncompromising position within traditional approaches to the relationship of word and image, text and picture. While the Nazarenes emulated past styles and revived symbolic systems handed down through centuries, their solution to the problem of representation with its emphasis on self-reflection, reflexivity and citationality molded these traditional elements into a consummately modern language. In contrast to the academic tradition of *ut pictura poesis*, the Nazarene concept of what I will call *ut hieroglyphica pictura* tended toward an erasure of narrative and rhetoric in the classical sense." (GREWE 2009: 3).

Blisniewski (2010) further specifies that "*Ut hieroglyphica pictura* is a central term Grewe coins in allusion to Horace's '*ut pictura poesis*'. The visible world becomes the symbol of the invisible, becomes a holy, engraved sign of the 'principles of God's creation', it becomes the revelation of divine truths in the picture. Thus the art of the Nazarenes is true 'conceptual art' (and in this sense much more modern than some of the critics of the Nazarenes would want to believe [...]).¹¹

Altogether, therefore, the Nazarenes did not paint, but rather write ideas based on their faith (ibid.). Their hieroglyphic language is not easily intelligible even for highly educated people in the 21st century, though, and – according to (GREWE 2009: 304) – this can well be remedied with the help of modern theories of language: "The semiotic implications of the hieroglyph made this concept well suited to adapt modern theories of language to the quest for cultic function and symbolic form. This peculiar fusion poses some stimulating challenges to post-1900 definitions of iconography [...] But in Nazarene art, iconography was also unders-

¹¹ „*Ut hieroglyphica pictura*“ ist ein zentraler Begriff, den Grewe in Anlehnung an das Horaz'sche „*ut pictura poesis*“ prägt. Die sichtbare Welt wird zum Symbol für die unsichtbare, wird zum heiligen, eingravierten Zeichen für die „principles of God's creation“, wird zur Enthüllung göttlicher Wahrheiten im Bild. Die Kunst der Nazarener ist insofern echte „conceptual art“[...] (und in diesem Sinne viel moderner als manch ein Kritiker der Nazarener glauben will[.]

tood (and explicitly so) as a form of figurative expression, a visual equivalent to Christ's parabolic speech. As such it was symbolic, mystical and denoting the unspeakable. Both aspects coexisted united in the notion of the artistic hieroglyph."

This hieroglyphic language shares elements with that deployed by other Romantic artists in general (SCHOLL 2007) and yet differs. As will be shown, however, Nazarene art still allows for multiple interpretations since it is – just as the term Nazarene itself, as already discussed – polysemic by its nature and invites the onlookers to engage in (religious) contemplation. Altogether, a main aim of Nazarene art was conversion (GREWE 2009: 319) and several leading Nazarenes like Overbeck had converted to Catholicism themselves. This also plays a role in the work of Alajos Unger as will be discussed further down.

The role of Functional Semiotics in the description and interpretation of artwork

Since GREWE (2009) already suggested interpreting this art form with the help of theories of language, to gain even further insight into Nazarene art a possibility is to also interpret it with the help of the functional semiotic framework in *Multimodal Discourse Analysis* rooted in NeoFirthian or Hallidayan linguistics (HALLIDAY 1994, ROTIMI 2006, KRESS & VAN DER LEEUWEN 2006, VAN DER LEEUWEN 2011, O'TOOLE 2011).¹²

This semiotic approach seems relevant also because it nicely complements the "three typical traditional ways of discussing art: the kind of art history that concerns itself with the circumstances of a work's original commission; the 'iconographic' approach that tries to trace the origins of a work's subject matter through literary or philosophical sources; and the study of pure composition, usually unrelated to either of the other two approaches" (O'TOOLE 2011: 119).

Therefore O'Toole's aim is to link these "approaches in a more complete and synthesized interpretation of the work under study" (ibid.). In sum, functional semiotics distinguishes between three functions of an artifact (ibid: 1):

1. Representational meaning,
2. Modal meaning,
3. Compositional meaning

Representational meaning corresponds to how the information is conveyed to the viewer, the modal meaning deals with the engagement of the onlooker with the artifact, whereas the compositional meaning results from the composition, proportions and perspective employed in the artifact in question. This also involves the type of colours used in the artwork (VAN DER LEEUWEN 2011). These categories are based on the systemic functional linguistic model of M A K Halliday and his school (HALLIDAY 1994).

This framework will also be applied to Unger's painting "Baptism of Vajk" further down to allow for a better understanding of this work in typical Nazarene style. First, however, Alajos Unger, his training and work will be presented.

¹² This is a consequence of the *pictorial* or *iconic turn* in linguistics of recent decades (MITCHELL 1994, BÖHM 1994).

The Nazarene heirloom in Alajos Unger's work

Alajos (Alois) Unger (1814–1848) is an enigmatic, little known but recently rediscovered Hungarian artist and early history painter, who also followed Nazarene ideals – at least at the beginning of his career and during the years after he left the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts (WUNDERLICH 2009, 2010, 2011). Alajos Unger was the second eldest son of playing-card maker Mátyás Unger the Elder (Sopron 1789–Győr 1862) and brother of playing-card maker Mátyás Unger the Younger (1824–1878, *ibid.*, SALAMON 2012, s.v. Unger Alajos, Unger Mátyás (ifj.)). Alajos Unger, too, was presumably trained as a playing-card maker first and his talent as a draughtsman was discovered while he attended the National Drawing School of his hometown as a journeyman (*ibid.*: 2010: 143, 2011: 118, 2012: 272).

He studied at the Vienna Academy of Arts between 1833 and 1842, where he was trained particularly under Leopold Kupelwieser, but most probably also under Johann Nepomuk Ender (1793–1854), twin brother of Thomas (1793–1875) (*ibid.* 2010: 143, 2011: 119) and – judging from the style of his *Vajk* painting – under Joseph von Führich too, who became professor of history painting at the academy in 1840 (AKL, s.v. Führich, Joseph von). Alajos Unger went on long travels after his studies (*ibid.* 2010: 144, 2011: 120). Typical characteristics of Nazarene art can also be found in Alajos Unger's works, as will be shown. Altogether, the fact that Nazarenes were “obsessed with history” (GREWE 2009: 46) is reflected in Alajos Unger's works.

His family background may also have been beneficial for his art: Alajos' elder brother Károly Unger (1812–1895) was a priest and from 1845 onwards he worked as a scribe and archivist for the bishop of Győr, between 1857 and 1867 this was the already mentioned János Simor. Károly Unger may have been an important informant on religious matters generally and when painting his *Baptism of Vajk* picture in particular, which shall be discussed further down.

There was another painting, now lost, thematically strongly related to the *Vajk* picture: In 1846 Alajos Unger displayed his oilwork “St Ladislav, king of Hungary, perceives King Solomon” at the Art Association of Pest (*Pesti műegylet*). Art historian and critique Imre Henszlmann (1813–1888) reported about all the exhibitions but does not mention Unger's work at all (HENSZLMANN 1990). Nazarene art was popular in church circles and with the aristocracy, but it does not seem to have been the preferred style of the Hungarian art scene otherwise, which may have been for various reasons. Apart from what in all likelihood was a Nazarene painting style in Alajos Unger's oeuvre displayed there, Henszlmann, as a protestant, must not have been particularly enthusiastic about the depiction of saints in this lost painting either. Additionally, Henszlmann was a proponent of realism in art, which contradicted much of Nazarene art including the known existing ones by Unger (SZABÓ 1985: 14–16).

Altogether, Alajos Unger's work shows developments parallel to Dobiaschofsky's: He too painted portraits, (religious) history and genre paintings. About Unger's oil works we know mainly from his brother Károly's will (WUNDERLICH 2009,

2010: 145, 2011: 121 footnote 12). At present we know the whereabouts of six of his oil works: Other than his *Baptism of Vajk* canvas from 1842 these are: A portrait of an unknown lady from 1836 (part of the art collection of the University of Pennsylvania), a family portrait from 1843 (image 1) depicting Alajos with his siblings surrounding their widowed father, a copy of Cesare da Sesto's painting *La vierge au bas-relief* (images 2 & 3) and a Biedermeier picture clock with a view of Venice.

His sixth work is his hitherto best-known (WUNDERLICH 2010: 144f): *The Recapture of Raab/Győr*, to which Johann Krafft's (1780-1856) "Zríny's Outbreak" served as a model (image 4)¹³. It is a religious history painting executed in the Viennese style of the time with what might be considered a Nazarene twist: The seeming anachronism of the painting depicting the 17th century baroque Carmelite Church in Győr, which was yet to be built at the time the Battle of Raab took place in 1598. In Nazarene manner, whose works were also designed for a regional market, it combines history with the subjective and religious, much more so than Krafft's work and thus it mixes periods in an idealistic way (cf also GLEIS 2010: 99f). The time after this famous battle went hand in hand with a policy of recatholization of Hungary as well as popularization of baroque piety (KLIMÓ 2003: 97), a topic which seems to have been addressed by the painting also. This is in line with the above-mentioned Nazarene goal of conversion.

Unger's extended Holy Family (*sacra conversazione*) "La vierge au bas-relief" (unknown date, probably 1840s, private ownership) also has a Nazarene connection. It is a copy – lacking the column with bas-relief in the lower left corner though – of the painting by the *leonardesco* Cesare da Sesto (1477-1523), but during Alajos' lifetime it was still attributed to Leonardo da Vinci himself (WUNDERLICH 2010: 152, endnote 40). It was probably painted after one of engraver François Forster's (1790-1872) prints since it is not an exact copy (*ibid.*). In general, Madonnas with children were a popular motif with the Nazarenes. Franz Pforr's friend and director of the Städel Museum in Frankfurt, Johann David Passavant (1787-1861), presented a precise description of this oil work in *Kunstblatt* (PASSAVANT 1832). The original of the painting, owned by Lady Proby, is now at Elton Hall manor house in England with a smaller copy at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge and prints at the British Gallery in London (WUNDERLICH 2010: 152 footnote 40).

Alajos Unger's known history paintings are thematically related (*ibid.*), with the double cult of the *Patrona Hungaria* entailing that of King Stephen (cf KLIMÓ 2003: 96): "The Baptism of Vajk" is the largest work (130 x 180 cm, image 5)¹⁴ by Alajos Unger executed in accordance with late Nazarene principles (1842, private ownership (ascribed)).¹⁵ It was the Nazarenes who were the first painters in 19th century Central Europe to depict medieval history in art (FASTERT 2000).

¹³ It was displayed in museum exhibitions on several occasions, not only in his hometown, but also, for example, at the Móra Ferenc Múzeum in Szeged in 2004.

¹⁴ Special thanks to the owners of the painting for this piece of information.

¹⁵ The painting is not signed. However, it was presumably donated to the present owners of the painting by a descendant of the Unger family, who claimed it was painted by Unger. Documents in the Unger-Mürwald-Wunderlich Family Archives in Munich would most probably prove the identity of the donor.

Some of the most striking functional semiotic principles employed in this painting at the level of the whole work (O'TOOLE 2011: 24) will be discussed in the following:

A) Representational Meaning:

The painting is divided into several scenes / episodes in polyptich manner, based on the legends describing the life of King Stephen I from the House of Árpád, founder of the kingdom of Hungary¹⁶. Thus it portrays Grand Prince Géza to whom St Stephen deacon and martyr appears in his sleep announcing the birth of a baby, the future king of Hungary, to whom the Pope Sylvester was to send the now lost crown. The central scene below depicts the baptism of Vajk performed by Bishop Adalbert (LMA, s.v. Stephan I. d. HL, ÖHL, s.v. Stephan I. von Ungarn, Bogay 1976)¹⁷. They are surrounded by men clad in Hungarian costumes and church representatives alluding to the process of Christianization accomplished by Stephen.¹⁸ In the lower left corner are a man and woman and it is left open whether they are Stephen's parents Géza and Sarolt¹⁹ or Stephen's wife Gisela and her brother Emperor Henry or Emperor Otto III (ibid.). As mentioned before, it is typical of Nazarene art to allow for multiple readings. In the background we see mounted knights, who, together with the slain man at the centre front, allude to Stephen's struggles to unify the country (eg against his cousin and rival Kop-pány) and also to his son Emeric's (Imre) untimely death (ibid.). The white horse in the upper right corner refers to the legend of the white horse.²⁰

Around the drapery at the centre *Psalm (32) 33: 12 Beata gens cujus est Dominus Deus ejus; populus quem elegit in hæreditatem sibi (Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord: the people whom he hath chosen for his inheritance)* is inscribed in Latin in conservative fashion and not in Hungarian.²¹ Until 1843/44 Latin was still partly the

¹⁶ His biography was passed down in the three legends: *Legenda maior*, *legenda minor* and the *Hartwig legend* (LMA, s.v. Stephan I. d. HL).

¹⁷ The Vajk painting, overall, seems to have been inspired by many sources particularly from the Renaissance and other 19th century art including that of other Nazarene painters. In part, the Vajk painting seems to have taken Piero della Francesca's Fresco cycle in the Basilica San Francesco in Arrezzo, Tuscany in Italy as a model (AKL, s.v. Francesca, Piero della, image 12). This cycle not only contains the Legend of the True Cross, but also depicts the first night scene in Western art, of which particularly the dream scene in Unger's Vajk painting is reminiscent. Piero painted the Baptism of Christ (National Gallery, London, image 13), too. The bodies of the men depicted in this work are also reminiscent of Unger's painting. Altogether, it seems to have been influenced by many different artists and styles, as were many works by other Nazarene artists as well.

¹⁸ The Hungarian dress is not medieval though. Rather, the men and Sarolt / Gisela are dressed in 19th century Díszmagyar dress (TOMPOS 2005, NEMES 2002), which also became known as Hungarian magnate's dress. Cf.: image 6 of Count Széchenyi and Hungarian magnates at the Hungarian Diet of Pozsonyi clad in díszmagyar dress reminiscent of Unger's Vajk painting. He may have used a similar source as a model.

¹⁹ This is the interpretation of the Hungarian owners of the painting, whom I should like to thank for their willingness to show the original painting to me on 20 February 2012.

²⁰ Although, of course, a white horse also symbolises a white knight. Here, however, Unger juxtaposed Hungarian mythology and symbolism.

²¹ The psalm can be found in German in Fessler's account of the life of Saint Stephen (Fessler 1809: 47f).

language of administration and of the learned in Hungary (KLIMÓ 2003: 30f), ie at the time of the creation of this painting and the inscription thus offers anchorage, a link between text and image, which is typical of Nazarene art (GREWE 147f). The text is ambiguous though, too: This psalm was also the motto of the crusaders (SKOVGAARD-PETERSEN 2001: 24f) and nation here is most likely not meant in the liberal sense.²² Altogether, Unger's Vajk painting and its contents seem closest to the concept of the *hungarus* consciousness (FARKAS 1931: 130).

Altogether, the painting also shows some similarity with Pforr's *Entry of King Rudolf of Habsburg into Basel* 1273 (1808-10) as well as Raphael's *School of Athens* (c 1510), the model for Overbeck's *Entrance of Christ into Jerusalem* (1808-1824, destroyed, images 8, 9, 10), another painting bearing similarity with Unger's. The parallel with Pforr's work is noteworthy because of the religious and ideological implications: "When Pforr turned to the thirteenth-century figure of Rudolf von Habsburg in 1808, the Austrian dynasty was widely perceived as the chief defender of German independence against Napoleon. It also had the reputation of being particularly pious, and for centuries, the Habsburgs had carefully nurtured the myth of a specific *pietas austriaca*. This concept, dynastic rather than national, rested on the assumption that God had purposely chosen the House of Austria as the protector of the Catholic Church and Holy Roman Empire and had done so because of the merits of its ancestors. The founder of the Habsburg dynasty, Rudolf of Habsburg, played an important role in this construction. His exceptional Christian piety, firm belief in the power of the holy cross and devotion to the Eucharist were literally legendary. The last aspect, the Habsburg's exceptional Eucharist piety, was a core element of the *pietas austriaca* and, according to the dynasty's mythos, the basis for the House's blessedness. The most effective topic of the Habsburg *pietas eucharistica* was the encounter of Rudolf with a priest carrying a viaticum (the Eucharist administered to the dying), a legend that Pforr recorded in 1809/10." (GREWE 2009: 47f; on the *pietas eucharistica* as well as the connection between the Habsburg rulers and the crucifix / *fiducia in crucem* cf also CORETH 1982: 18-344, image 11).

²² Overall, Unger's painting is not only promoting the Catholic Church, but also addressing the aristocracy: The Holy Right symbolized the integration of the *Natio Hungariorum*, ie the aristocracy of Hungary, into the Habsburg empire (KLIMÓ 2003: 98). Thus the painting seems to aim at the main target group of patronage for his art in Nazarene style. Whether this meant that Alajos Unger wanted to thank the aristocracy and / or church for financial aid in being able to pursue his studies with this – as did Adam Liszt, Ferenc Liszt's father by referring to himself and his son as a Hungarian national (LUBLINER 2006) – or his later travels, still needs to be investigated further. Overall, the political situation in Reform Era Hungary was extremely complex (EVANS 2001: 299) and altogether the term "liberal" has been varying greatly in its connotation and denotation in the Western world then and now. Since Unger's family had full burgher rights (*Bürgerrecht*, *polgárjog*) of their hometown Győr (WUNDERLICH 2012: 274 footnote 13) and since their trade was, to a certain extent, protected by the guild system, a change in the estate and economic system of Hungary endangered some of their privileges and thus their livelihood. As much as general progress must have been desired by the Ungers as well, they must have felt intimidated by it at the same time. Franz Josef Dobiaschowsky, however, was removed from the Vienna Academy because of his revolutionary attitudes, although Kupelwieser and Führich remained loyal, conservative subjects of the imperial family (EXH. CAT. STENDAL et al. 2001: 14, 20 footnote 38). Unger was a member of the National Guard in Győr in 1848, but only for some time, it seems (WUNDERLICH 2010: 144; 2011: 120; 2012: 274).

This scene and the topos of Rudolf was also rather popular with many other Viennese and Nazarene artists of the early nineteenth century generally (GLEIS 74f, 95-97, FASTERT 2000: 43-106).

The Vajk painting bears some striking parallels and thematic analogies particularly to Pforr's paintings, especially because of similarities in the representation within the canvas (WUNDERLICH 2010: 145) and also because crucifixes and the cruet saucer for the eucharist are depicted in the Vajk painting as though they were an allusion.²³ It seems as though in this work Hungary, represented by Vajk, is deemed a natural yet important member within the Habsburg Empire, to which special attention should be paid. It appears to be a specific form of the *pietas hungarica*, which still deserves more attention according to Ducreux (2011).

B) Modal Meaning: Gaze

The single most striking modal feature is what appears to be Alajos Unger himself alias Vajk's tutor and godfather Theodatus gazing at us like Pforr in *Rudolf von Habsburg's Entry into Basel* or Overbeck in his self-portrait in his painting *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem* (1824)²⁴, addressing us directly and making us become witnesses of the baptism, along with the crowd, not entirely unlike representations on Flemish renaissance altarpieces such as the Ghent Altarpiece by van Eyck.²⁵ Again, this style reflects the Nazarene's ultimate goal of conversion.

C) Compositional

Most striking here are the partly rather vivid colours²⁶, the central perspective of the main scene at the centre, which strongly contributes to the impression of being a direct witness of the baptism and the various triangle compositions, for example the drapery around Géza's bed or of Vajk and the two men around him symbolizing Holy Trinity. The almost polyptich-like ruptures in composition are also typical of Nazarene artworks (GREWE 2009: 36f). This resembles the representations of the life of saints on renaissance altarpieces or in frescoes.

After this short, exemplary semiotic analysis, it seems pertinent to comment on the changing cultural historical reception of Saint Stephen. This is to gain better overall understanding of the painting and its meaning.

²³ In Pforr's painting, Rudolf is welcomed by the representatives of the city council of Basel whereas Stephen seems to be surrounded by Hungarian magnates, who used to attend the diet in Pozsony (EXH. CAT. FRANKFURT 1977).

²⁴ In Overbeck's drawing his friend Pforr and four of their friends, Sutter, Vogel, Hottinger and Wintergerst were also portrayed (MERK 1977: 152). In Unger's painting there is a strong similarity between the priest carrying and offering the cruet saucer to Bishop Adalbert (TOR: 138f, 145, 147) and Leopold Kupelwieser in the drawing (image 7). Did Alajos Unger portray his teacher here? Altogether, depicting fellow artists was a rather typical strategy deployed by the Nazarenes.

²⁵ Whether the crowd also has other popular non-religious history paintings such as those by J L David or Johann Peter Krafft as a role model and thus implies 19th century massification still remains to be investigated further.

²⁶ It has recently been found that vivid colours are not entirely untypical of Nazarene art (SUHR 2012: 18).

Although the cult of King Stephen is nowadays one of the most important national cults in all of Hungary (KLIMÓ 2003), this was not so at the time when Unger painted his *Baptism of Vajk*. It had a Habsburg and Roman Catholic past and could thus not serve the liberal nationalist movement of the Reform Era (ibid.: 99). Both Count István Széchenyi and historian Ignac Aurel Fessler wrote very negatively about him; only the liberal historian *Bishop Mihály Horváth* (1809-1878) spoke in slightly more favourably terms when describing the life and work of Stephen (ibid.: 99f). Altogether, Stephen was a highly controversial figure (ibid.).²⁷ However, he had founded the Diocese of Győr, and monasteries such as the nearby Archabbey of Pannonhalma as the “principal monastery” and the “primatial see” of Esztergom (ODS, s.v. Stephen of Hungary; cf also LMA, s.v. Stephan I. d. Hl. and the literature listed therein).²⁸

In 1819, Palatin Joseph reorganized the procession connected with the traditional veneration of the Holy Right (Szent Jobb) in Pest-Buda (KLIMÓ 2003: 100; on the origins and development of the procession: ibid. 94-109). The character of these processions has been described in the following way: “After the end of the Napoleonic Wars, in 1819, Palatin Joseph requested that the representatives of the military and civil authorities take part in the Stephen’s procession in Pest-Buda. The ceremony was limited to the city and certain estates of society until 1848 since Pest-Buda was not the sole capital of Hungary (the Diet and the Prelate resided in Bratislava). The character of the ceremony was emphasized by the presence of the Civil Guard (polgárőrség), which, founded in 1789, had been established since 1808 to maintain the inner order in free royal cities. [...] Furthermore, until 1848, it had not been the Primate who performed the ceremony on St Stephen’s day but always a priest of a rank below him. In 1838 for example Nepmuk János Dercsik, an orientalist and former censor, as a representative of the church, the city authorities (Statthaltereirat) and the university (rector since 1836) led the procession” (ibid. 100).²⁹

²⁷ However, what he did was “[b]y introducing limited feudalism, by retaining control over the people as a whole through reducing the power of nobles, by abolishing tribal divisions and setting up counties with governors appointed by him, he formed the Hungarians into a single kingdom” (ODS, s.v. Stephen of Hungary).

²⁸ What must also have played a role is that among the ethnic German population of Hungary, to which Alajos Unger’s family originally belonged, St Stephen was particularly cherished and venerated (this was presented by Csilla Schell in her talk “Die Bierbarackenkirche von St. Stephan” at the 11th Szeged Conference on the Ethnography of Religion on 11 October 2012). Additionally the cult of Saint Stephen had been a strong part of baroque lay piety in Hungary, also in Győr (SZÉKELY 2000).

²⁹ *Nach dem Ende der napoleonischen Kriege, im Jahr 1819, forderte Palatin Joseph die Vertreter der militärischen und zivilen Behörden dazu auf, sich an der Stephansprozession in Ofen-Buda zu beteiligen. Die Feier beschränkte sich bis 1848 auf einen ständischen und städtischen Rahmen, weil Ofen-Buda noch nicht alleinige Hauptstadt Ungarns war (in Preßburg residierte der Landtag und der Primas). Diesen Charakter der Feier unterstrich die Anwesenheit der Bürgerwacht (polgárőrség), die, 1789 gegründet, seit 1808 zur Aufrechterhaltung der Inneren Ordnung in freien Königsstädten eingerichtet worden war. In ihr diente nur die bürgerliche, in ihrer Mehrheit deutschsprachige Oberschicht, die volles Bürgerrecht besaß; der (deutsche) Bürgereid wurde in Uniform abgenommen. [...] Außerdem war es bis 1848 nicht der ungarische Primas gewesen, der die Zeremonien am Stephanstag durchführte, sondern stets ein Geistlicher von geringerem Rang. Im Jahr 1838 etwa führte Nepmuk János Dercsik, ein Orientalist und früherer Zensor, als Vertreter der Kirche, der Stadtbehörden (Statthaltereirat) und der Universität (Rektor seit 1836) die Prozession an.*

This officially only changed in 1860: "In 1860, the Prince-Primate of Hungary stressed – for the first time – the relevance of the processions of 20 August to honour the hand relic of King Stephen held since the early 19th century for the modern history of the nation" (Klimó 2003: 92). This had led to a clash with Vienna, but ironically it had been the Habsburgs themselves, who had drummed into the Hungarian aristocracy that "Hungary would be the country of Saint Stephen, Mary and a bastion of Christianity" (ibid. 93)³⁰.

The climate had already begun to change in the 1850s (ibid. 100): "Only when the magyar elites felt threatened by other national movements within the kingdom, they tended to emphasize, like Horváth, the occidental choice of Stephen as a great accomplishment of civilization. For in this way they were able to historically 'prove' the backwardness of the small Slavic peoples and their incapacabilities."³¹

This finally also led to the view that being national and conservative were not mutually exclusive (Klimó 2003: 93): "When the empire envisaged in the concordat of 1855 to put the Hungarian bishops on a par with the Cisleithanian, which threatened the privileges of the Primate of Hungary, the hitherto Habsburg-friendly chief shepherd changed sides to the national movement without adopting their liberal tendencies. Something similar occurred with the representatives of the Hungarian aristocracy who now recognized that they were able to be simultaneously conservative and national."³²

Should the Vajk painting be considered an early manifestation of this development? Especially after 1867, the Cult of Saint Stephen became more generally accepted by the government (ibid.)

Altogether, Unger's Vajk is a Roman Catholic, overall rather conservative painting and a typical Nazarene work, too. Yet Alajos Unger as a Hungarian who also served in the National Guard in 1848 for a while must have been caught between conservative traditions and liberal currents of his time, especially since the national and conservative in unison only became an accepted pairing after his death in 1848 (ibid.). This tension seems partly reflected in this painting.

Additionally, the figures in the painting resemble figures on playing-cards. There is a strong link between Nazarene art and popular art and the crafts, which we shall turn to next.³³

³⁰ „[...] Ungarn sei das Land des heiligen Stephan, der Maria, eine Bastion der Christenheit“.

³¹ Erst als sich die magyarischen Eliten von den anderen Nationalbewegungen innerhalb des Königreiches bedroht fühlten, neigten sie dazu wie Horváth die abendländische Wahl Stephans als große zivilisatorische Leistung hervorzuheben. Denn damit konnten sie die Zurückgebliebenheit der kleinen slawischen Völker und deren Unfähigkeit, Staatsvolk zu sein, historisch 'nachweisen'.

³² Als das Kaiserreich im Konkordat von 1855 vorsah, die ungarischen den cisleithanischen Bischöfen gleichzustellen, was die Sonderrechte des Primas von Ungarn bedrohte, schwankte der bis dahin als habsburgfreundlich geltende Oberhirte auf die Seite der Nationalbewegung, ohne jedoch deren liberale Tendenzen zu übernehmen. Ähnliches geschah auch bei anderen Vertretern der ungarischen Aristokratie, die nun erkannten, daß sie zugleich konservativ und national sein konnten.

³³ The owners and restorer of the Vajk painting also believe that the people in the work much resemble figures on playing-cards, independent of the research of the author of the present article.

The link between Nazarene art and the crafts

Intellectual as it was, Nazarene art also had a strong affinity to the crafts and simple devotional pictures, which contributed to the negative attitude towards them, although their original artifacts, different from cheap mass copies, were of the highest quality. This made Nazarene art rather singular: "In contrast to the French academy or modernist art critics, the Nazarenes broke down the barrier between high and low art and approached both areas with a unified concept. Their imagery functioned, without significant distortion or diminished quality, in widely different media. [...] The Nazarenes negotiated this divide, always aware that their output had to function simultaneously as autonomous artwork and heteronymous tool of devotion, prayer and education" (GREWE 2009: 16).

Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld's *Picture Bible* (1860) was a worldwide success and as a widely copied product, it shaped the taste of the masses. He also designed a card game based on biblical scenes (WUNDERLICH 2012: 273). This is an example for the connection between Nazarene art and the crafts. Another one is Alajos Unger's Biedermeier picture clock depicting a veduta of Venice (cf particularly *ibid.* 2012: 272f; an image of the clock is depicted there). This historical genre image is a turn away from strict Nazarenism, although it still promotes a strongly religious and national world view.

Thus it is perhaps even less surprising that Alajos Unger designed his family's playing cards and that this may have been his most important legacy as an artist (WUNDERLICH 2010, 2011, 2012). It is high-quality German cards with figures clad in Hungarian costumes the Ungers became well-known for in the 1840s (for images cf WUNDERLICH 2012: 268).

With the strong link between the Nazarenes, popular art and the crafts it still remains to be investigated further in how far they in particular and other artists trained at the Vienna Academy of Arts generally worked as designers of playing-cards in the 19th century, thus contributing to the formation of new, evolving national patterns of playing-cards, thus reflecting different cultural identities (cf *ibid.*). This would include the question as to whether there was a difference in quantity or quality in the contributions artists trained within the Nazarene framework made not only to popular devotional art but also to the crafts.

Conclusion

The Nazarene Movement, their art and how it helped pave the way for national and modern art in Hungary certainly deserve more attention. It is conceptual art and beyond the naïve surface a complex pictorial language or semiotics is at play referred to as "ut hieroglyphica pictura" by GREWE (2009). As has been demonstrated, this symbolic language – simultaneously conventional Christian and idiosyncratic – can be further investigated with the help of functional semiotics in

the framework of *Multimodal Discourse Analysis* (O'TOOLE 2011). This should also involve the assessment of whether there is "the dominance of one or other of the functions in particular schools and tendencies, in particular periods or even in individual styles of painting" (ibid., 231) to be able to best describe the characteristics of Nazarene art. After our first short analysis, the representational and compositional meanings seem particularly elaborated in Nazarene art.

This in combination with tried and tested art and (cultural) historical methods will allow for a most comprehensive understanding of this art form. This can be applied systematically to further illuminate the works of Alajos Unger, a very early Hungarian history painter in the following of the Nazarenes, as well as other Nazarene works generally.

Further research into how Nazarene art promoted religion and Hungarian national identity and helped popularize national symbols such as the *Patrona Hungariae* or even the cult of Saint Stephen and how liberal their proponents in Hungary actually were seems relevant too. Finally, with the close affinity to the crafts, the influence of Nazarene artists on them and particularly playing card design, ie the formation of new standard patterns of playing-cards such as the Hungarian, also still seem worthwhile of further investigation.

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THE INFLUENCE OF NAZARENE ART ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUNGARIAN NATIONAL ART AND THE CRAFTS

The academic painter Alajos (Alois) Unger
(Bap Győr 29 Oct 1814 - Győr 28 Dec 1848)

The Nazarenes represented a 19th century European school of primarily Roman Catholic romantic art taking German and Italian masters as their models. They had a major impact on the European art of the 19th century, a fact that has only been rediscovered recently (EXH. CAT. MAINZ 2012). Leopold Kupelwieser (1796–1862), professor at the Vienna Academy of Arts, also represented this school. A little known student of his was Alajos (Alois) Unger (Győr 1814-1848), a son of playing-card maker Mátyás Unger the Elder. The Hungarian National Gallery keeps Unger's oil painting *Recapture of Győr* (1840) and his family portrait (1843). Recently discovered works include a copy of Cesare da Sesto's *La vierge au bas-relief* (date unknown), the portrait of an unknown lady (1836), the *Baptism of Vajk* (1842) and a Biedermeier picture clock (1847). A further work was *St Ladislav, perceiving King Salomon*, displayed at the Art Association of Pest in 1846. The present paper will discuss what contribution the Nazarenes and Catholicism made to the creation of national symbols, cults and art, also in Hungary. A special focus will be placed on Unger's *Baptism of Vajk* painting, which will also be analysed within a framework of functional semiotics to describe the pictorial language typical of Nazarene works of art (GREWE 2009). Finally, the relationship between Nazarene art and the crafts will be investigated



Fig. 1 Alajos Unger: The artist and his family. Late Nazarene family portrait. (1843). Oil on canvas mounted on wood. Hungarian National Gallery. 72 x 57 cm, Inv. No. 74.83 T



Fig. 2 Alajos Unger. Copy of La vierge au bas-relief by Cesare da Sesto, oil on canvas c 80 x 90 cm. Unknown date. Private ownership.



Fig. 3 Cesare da Sesto: La vierge au bas-relief. Owner: Lady Prody, Elton Hall, Cambridgeshire, UK (by kind permission of Lady Prody)



Fig. 4 Alajos Unger: The recapture of Győr. 1840. Oil on canvas.
Hungarian National Gallery. 47 x 65 cm, Inv. No. 70.214 T



Fig. 5 Alajos Unger: The Baptism of Vajk. (1842, ascribed). Oil on canvas.
130 x 180 cm. Private ownership



Fig. 6 Count Szechenyi and Magnates at the Diet of Pozsonyi offering one year's income of his estate to establish and endow the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (wikipedia.com, s.v. István Széchenyi). c 1860.
Lithography by Vinzenz Katzler. Source: Wikipedia.com



Fig. 7 Leopold Kupelwieser. Drawing. Austrian National Library. (with kind permission of the Austrian National Library).



Fig. 8 Franz Pforr: The entry of Rudolf von Habsburg into Basel. 1809/10. Städel Museum Frankfurt-on-Main. Oil on canvas. 90 x 119 cm. wikipedia.com



Fig. 9 Raffaello Sanzio: The School of Athens. 1510/11. Fresco. Vatican. wikipedia.com



Fig. 10 Friedrich Overbeck: Christ's entry into Jerusalem. Print (the original painting was destroyed in WW II, formerly at the St Mary's Church, Lübeck).

Source: Carl Friedrich Wehrmann: Die schöne Hansestadt Lübeck in 100 Bildern. p 57. wikipedia.com



Fig. 11 Franz Pforr: Rudolf von Habsburg and the Priest. 1809/10. Städel Museum Frankfurt-on-Main. Oil on canvas. 45.5 x 54.5 cm. wikipedia.com



Fig. 12 Piero della Francesca: The dream of Constantine, probably 1452-56, a fresco from the History of the True Cross cycle in Arezzo, Italy. wikipedia.com

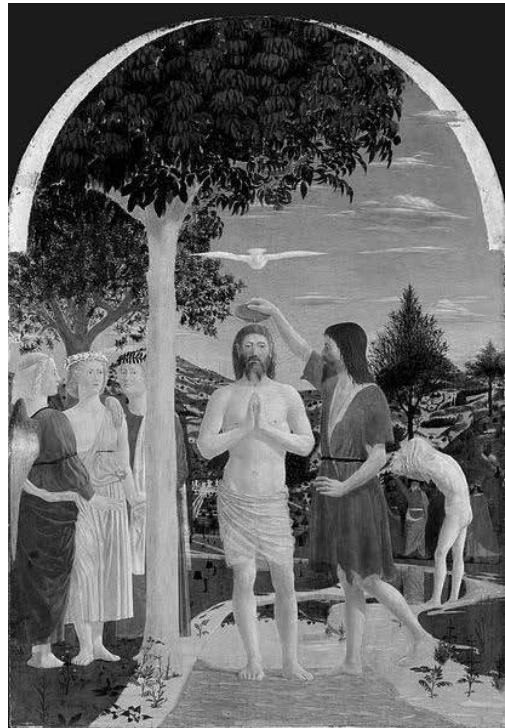


Fig. 13 Piero della Francesca: The Baptism of Christ, tempera on panel, 1448-1450, 167 x 116 cm, London, National Gallery, wikipedia.com