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POLITICAL ICONOGRAPHY IN
HUNGARIAN ART BETWEEN THE
TWO WORLD WARS: A CASE STUDY ON
KÁROLY LÁSZLÓ HÁY'S FRESCO PLAN
HISTORY (1942)*

Keywords: political
iconography, propaganda,
Group of Socialist Artists,
cult of Miklós Horthy, illegal
communist movement,
anti-German orientation

<https://www.doi.org/10.17234/9789533792170.03>

Abstract

The paper focuses on the interpretation of a fresco plan titled History, painted by the Hungarian artist Károly László Háy. Háy created this artwork in 1942, on the occasion of a competition and exhibition called Freedom and the People, organized by the Group of Socialist Artists. Háy's fresco plan, like other artworks shown at the exhibition, was strongly influenced by the political currents of the late 1930s and World War II. The central figure of the History fresco plan evokes an equestrian portrait, a traditional representation of power in political iconography, but not in the traditional sense. According to my hypothesis, the equestrian figure in Háy's painting has a negative connotation, and its interpretation can be connected to the cult of Miklós Horthy (Regent of Hungary between 1920 and 1944).

INTRODUCTION

During the interwar period and during World War II, many Hungarian artworks related to historical topics were made with the intent to agitate and to propagate divergent political viewpoints. Such representations were often ideologically charged while reflecting on the era's political events. Many contradictory worldviews defined this period and resulted in different historical approaches. While these viewpoints differ about the common past, they represent the same events or historical figures with different connotations. Frequently, these representations resulted in the rethinking of traditional depictions.¹ Károly László Háy's fresco plan *History* should be examined within this context.

In 1942, the fresco plan *History* (**fig. 1**) was submitted to the exhibition *Freedom and the People*, organized by the so called Szocialista Képzőművészek Csoportja (the Group of Socialist Artists) in Budapest. The layout of the fresco plan can be compared to a triptych's structure. Two sides of the fresco plan,

* Special thanks to Rebeka Mrázik for her help with the translation of this paper.

¹ For more on this topic, see Anna Kopócsy, "A jelen történelmi értelmezése fa- és linóleummetszet-sorozatokban a két világháború között" [Historical Interpretation of the Present in Woodcut and Linocut Series in the Interwar Period], in *A modern magyar fa és linóleummetszés (1890–1950)*, ed. Enikő Róka (Miskolc: Miskolci Galéria, 2005), 137–158.



Fig 1. Károly László Háý, *History*, 1942, tempera on paper, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest. Photograph by Sára Bárdi.

which would be the “wings”, show a dissatisfied woman and man wanting to break out of their circumstances, the style of these figures imitating wood carvings. On the middle panel there is a prancing horse with a caricature-like equestrian. The horse’s and the equestrian’s faces appear almost the same. Together, the equestrian and the horse evoke the iconography of the representation of power familiar throughout art history, the iconography of the ruler or general sitting on horseback. However, this motif does not come to life in the classical sense. In the background, a shadoof and farmhouses recall the idealized, symbolic depiction of the Great Hungarian Plain.

According to my hypothesis, Károly László Háý’s fresco plan reflects the political events of the era. The political content of the fresco plan is determined by the activities of Háý and the Group of Socialist Artists as well as the circumstances of its creation. I seek to briefly present my interpretation of the fresco plan, using political iconography as a methodical framework. My analysis focuses on the middle equestrian figure, the additional layers of meaning, and the iconography of representing power in the context of the so-called Horthy era, the period of Miklós Horthy’s rule in Hungary between 1920 and 1944. A significant element of the cult of Miklós Horthy was his depiction on a white horse, which dated back to the very beginning of his rule. On November 16, 1919, Horthy’s triumphal entry into Budapest (as the commander of the National Army), established the foundation for his visual representation. According to the contemporary narrative, Horthy marched into the capital astride a white horse, arriving to “govern” the country with a strong hand and to bring “faith, reassurance, peace, and national consciousness”² in the wake of the losses and traumas of the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic (1919).

2 Tibor Dömötörfi, “A Horthy-kultusz elemei” [Elements of the Horthy Cult], *História*, no. 5-6 (1990): 56–59.

POLITICAL ICONOGRAPHY AS A FRAMEWORK FOR INTERPRETATION

Although there are previous examples of a political approach to the Hungarian fine arts during the Horthy era in art historical literature, often the authors' partiality cannot be ignored. Most of these studies and monographs were written between 1949 and 1989 – therefore their viewpoints were strongly determined by the expectations of the leftist state ideology and cultural policy. In my opinion, the wide-range methodology of political iconography may provide a new reading of the topic.

Political iconography is a sociological and social scientific approach to the field of *Bildwissenschaft* (image science). It proposes that images are not just passive representations, but also active participants in political life that are influenced by various political and social events and phenomena, and vice versa. Its subject consists of political contents appearing in visual form and the functions of images in a political context.³ Martin Warnke defined the purpose of political iconography in the objective examination of political image-strategies and their inclusion in the field of art history.⁴

The use of art for political purposes and the representation of power is not new – it can be traced back to antiquity. In the 20th century, this became especially significant with the appearance of visual propaganda in the modern sense. The recognition of the effectiveness of visual propaganda and its weaponization can be considered one of the great lessons of World War I. This experience was utilized and further developed in the interwar period and during World War II, an era marked by the confrontations of different ideas and ideologies.

In the Horthy era, Hungary's official cultural policy and its government were determined by a Christian nationalist ideology, while at the same time the political-ideological opposition was active, especially the illegal communist movement.⁵ The parallel presence of the worldviews of the official and opposition parties can also be observed in the artworks of the era. An illustrative example of this is the fact that the Group of Socialist Artists, which included László Károly Háy as a member, was initially defined as an alternative to the neoclassical tendencies strongly supported by the state from the 1930s forward.

3 Urte Krass, "Politische Ikonographie" [Political Iconography], in *Metzler Lexikon Kunstwissenschaft. Ideen, Methoden, Begriffe*, ed. Ulrich Pfisterer (Berlin: J.B. Metzler, 2011), 345–347.

4 Martin Warnke, "Vorwort" [Preface], in *Handbuch der politischen Ikonographie, I*, eds. Martin Warnke, Uwe Fleckner and Hendrik Ziegler (München: C.H. Beck, 2011), 7–15.

5 For more about Christian nationalism, see Csaba Fazekas, "Collaborating with Horthy: Political Catholicism and Christian Political Organizations in Hungary," in *Political Catholicism in Europe 1918–45*, eds. Wolfram Kaiser and Helmut Wohnout (London: Routledge, 2004), 160–178.

KÁROLY LÁSZLÓ HÁY AND THE GROUP OF SOCIALIST ARTISTS

Háy, after graduating from the Hungarian University of Fine Arts, became acquainted with the illegal Party of Communists in Hungary (abbr. KMP) and from 1931 he worked as a draftsman for the illegal press. In 1935, on the instructions of the KMP he joined the Group of Socialist Artists.⁶ It was an artist group affiliated with the KMP, and its members carried out movement and artistic work under the direction of the Party. Their organized operation can be traced back to the period between 1934 and 1944, through various legal organizations, mainly with the help of the Social Democratic Party of Hungary.⁷ Their aim was to reach as wide an audience as possible, for example they organized lectures and exhibitions for workers in easily accessible locations. Within the group, a unified stylistic image did not develop, but rather their approach to art and popular front-spirited art policy that should be highlighted. The active operation of the group can be divided into two periods, the first spanning from 1934 to 1937, culminating in the exhibition of the *New Realists* in 1936. They wanted to establish “Neorealism” (in the present case, the concept of “Neorealism” can be understood as Socialist Realism and the striving for it) as the opposite of Neoclassicism, that was strongly supported by the Hungarian cultural policy at the time. The second period can be dated between 1940 and 1944, and it is characterized by the fact that the tense war situation and the politics of the era intensified the activities of the organization. It was then that the exhibition of the *Freedom and the People*, the most influential exhibition in the literature, was held in 1942, shortly after Hungary entered in the Second World War with forces in the spring of 1941.

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE FRESCO PLAN HISTORY AND THE FREEDOM AND THE PEOPLE EXHIBITION

The exhibition *Freedom and the People* opened on March 29, 1942, in the headquarters of the ironworkers at 5 Magdolna Street in Budapest. The exhibition consisted of three sections: prints and drawings, sculptures, and fresco plans, which were displayed in separate halls. The sections of prints and drawings and sculptures were subtitled *Art for Freedom*, while the fresco plans were submitted under the subtitle *Freedom and the People*.⁸

6 György Theisler, “Háy Károly László” [Károly László Háy], in *Magyar Művészet 1919–1945, I*, ed. Sándor Kontha (Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 1985), 557–558.

7 György Theisler, “Szocialista Képzőművészek Csoportja” [Group of Socialist Artists], in *Magyar Művészet 1919–1945, I*, ed. Sándor Kontha (Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, 1985), 541–548.

8 Works by Imre Ámos, Béla Bán, Aurél Bernáth, and Károly László Háy submitted by application were included in the exhibition. Anna Oelmacher, “Szabadság és Nép” [Freedom and People], *Művészet*, no. 4 (1962): 37. Republished: Nóra Aradi, “‘Szabadság és a Nép’, A Szocialista Képzőművészek Csoportjának dokumentumai” [Documents of the Group of Socialist Artist] (Budapest: Corvina Kiadó, 1981), 321–322.

The Group of Socialist Artists received a commission by the central leadership of the illegal Party of Communists in Hungary to organize the exhibition as part of the so-called 15th of March 1942 action.⁹ The action was part of the larger anti-fascist, anti-war movement, the creation and ideological foundation of which had begun much earlier. Beginning in the mid-1930s, the Party considered its task to show the people that the goal of the Hungarian government's policy, military revision of the Treaty of Trianon, would lead to war and threaten the nation's independence. The Treaty of Trianon had formally ended World War I between most of the Allies and the Kingdom of Hungary. It was prepared at the Paris Peace Conference and was signed in the Grand Trianon Palace in Versailles on 4 June, 1920. On the basis of the treaty, the historic borders of Hungary were redrawn, and the country was reduced to a third of its prior territory. The territories of the Kingdom of Hungary affected by annexation on the basis of the Treaty of Trianon belong to the current states of Austria, Croatia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine. This event was experienced as a tragedy and fundamentally shook the national consciousness, and its processing and revision became a central issue in the Horthy era. The first stage of the desired revision was the First Vienna Award (1938), evaluated by government propaganda as a peaceful act. However, the KMP tried to make clear to everyone the danger of war arising as a result of the decision.¹⁰ According to the Party, Miklós Horthy and the Hungarian ruling class could be held responsible, alongside Hitler.¹¹ As a result, in the spring of 1941, at the exact moment when the Hungarian forces entered World War II against the Soviet Union and its allies, an anti-Hitler independence movement emerged in Hungary.

The *Freedom and People* exhibition was fundamentally a response to these political events.¹² The most important task of its contributors was to implement the principles of the popular front policy, that is to address an even wider audience and to propagate their views on freedom and independence. The importance of the fresco as a medium cannot be ignored, as it has been an essential and effective means of addressing the masses since the beginning of the history of art. A detail of the opening speech of the exhibition echoes this: "The artist should create and send news to humanity, especially to the most humiliated, about a more beautiful, better, more pure, more humane world. Make everyone understand the world. In doing so, the artist best serves human freedom."¹³

9 György Vértes, "Művészek a szabadságért" [Artists for Freedom], in Aradi, "Szabadság és a Nép," 316–320.

10 László Kővágó, "A KMP a revízióról és a nemzetiségi kérdésekről 1936–1942" [The KMP about Revision and Nationality Issues], *Párttörténeti közlemények. Az MSZMP Központi Bizottsága Párttörténeti Intézetének folyóirata*, no. 2 (1982): 49.

11 *Ibid.*, 54.

12 Aradi, *Szabadság és a Nép*, 266–267.

13 Vértes, "Művészek a szabadságért," 318. If it is not stated otherwise, the translations of the quotations are made by Rebeka Mrázik. The opening speech was given by Árpád Szakasits, who was then the editor-in-chief of *Népszava* (People's Voice), and later a decisive politician between 1945 and 1950.

However, the artists of the exhibition did not have much time to achieve the sentiments outlined in this quotation. Three days after the opening, on April 3, 1942, the Minister of the Interior closed the exhibition “due to its tendency and proactive nature.” Many members of the Group of Socialist Artists were arrested and carried off. Anti-Bolshevism in the upper political circles, as well as criticism and pressure from the conservative and far-right press, justified the censorship of *Freedom and the People*. Meanwhile the Hungarian army suffered heavy losses on the Eastern Front at this time, and as a result, anti-Bolshevik propaganda intensified. The most striking example was the *Anti-Bolshevik* propaganda exhibition (it can be classified as *Schandausstellung*) in Vigado in December, 1941. The contemporary press interpreted *Freedom and the People* as opposed to the *Anti-Bolshevik* exhibition.

HISTORICAL THEMES AND THEIR MOTIVES IN THE ART OF LÁSZLÓ KÁROLY HÁY

We see that when at the end of the 15th century in Florence Savonarola proclaimed his reactionary mass movement against the new ideals of the emerging bourgeoisie, he considered one of his most important tasks to be to burn the images and statues he professed to be so dangerous preachers of the new mentality. Such an example is known even from recent times, when in 1942 the Horthy-fascists banned the exhibition of the Groups of Socialist Artist, because they recognized the perilous ideas that art, the fine arts, might carry for their reactionary, fascist system.¹⁴

After the war, in 1947, Háy reflected on this event near the end of the Horthy era with the quoted lines. Identifying with the Marxist viewpoint on art, he saw art as “a branch of the ideological structure of society” and therefore as a factor in the growing social tensions of his own age.¹⁵ In Háy’s view, the arts also serve as the scene of various ideological struggles, and at the same time he attributed a decisive social function to them.¹⁶ Háy’s approach, more precisely the interpretation of exhibitions and art as a battlefield, and the central idea of the social function of art largely determined his artistic activity, including the fresco plan *History*, as well as the linocut series *Between Two Pagans and One Homeland*, which can be understood as an antecedent to the fresco plan.

In 1941 Háy started this linocut series about the struggles of Miklós Zrínyi (1620–1664, Croatian and Hungarian military leader, statesman, poet) and the troubles surrounding the Hungarian national independence aspirations, but was interrupted by the preparations for the exhibition *Freedom and the People*. A total of seven of the planned 20 linocuts were executed, and the scenes of the

14 Károly László Háy, *Képzőművészet és társadalmi haladás. Szemináriumi füzeteket kultúrvezetők számára* [Fine Art and Social Progress. Seminar Booklets for Cultural Leaders] (Budapest: Szikra, 1947), 5.

15 Károly László Háy, “Az 1935–36-os kiállítási szezon” [The Exhibition Season of 1935–1936], *Szocializmus*, no. 5 (1936): 256. Republished: Aradi, *Szabadság és a Nép.*, 48–52.

16 Háy, “Az 1935–36-os kiállítási szezon,” 257.

completed sheets historically proceed until 1686, concluding with depictions of the Siege of Buda and the occupation of Transylvania.

The antecedents of Háy's fresco plan *History* also date back to 1938. On the one hand, the plan related to historical and political events noted before, and on the other hand to a visit he made to Prague, during which he met József Révai, a communist politician and theorist living in exile. During their conversation, Háy received the following guidelines from Révai in connection with the historical events of 1938 (First Vienna Award, *Anschluss*): "Now is the time to focus our cultural work on reviving the centuries-old anti-German traditions of Hungarian culture and history."¹⁷ The "centuries-old" fight for national independence from the Habsburgs included, for example, Zrínyi, who campaigned against the Habsburgs as well as the Ottomans, Rákóczi's War of Independence (1703–1711), and the Hungarian Revolution of 1848.

Following Révai's advice, Háy began research, planning to revive anti-German traditions (mainly in relation to the Habsburg Empire) by depicting events related to Miklós Zrínyi and Ferenc II Rákóczi (1676–1735, Hungarian nobleman, leader of Rákóczi's War of Independence). To achieve this, he studied the literature and the fine arts of Zrínyi and Rákóczi's time for many years. Intending to display the events capturing the political climate, he relied on Baroque engravings. Háy entitled this series as: *Between two Pagans for one Homeland, that is, how Turkish occupation was replaced by German oppression (Habsburgs)*.¹⁸

As the initiators of the series, Háy marked the linocuts *The Oppressor* (fig. 2) and *The Liberator* (fig. 3), which depict the Turkish occupation of Hungary (1526–1699) and Leopold, I, the new conqueror, and his marching army. In



Fig 2. Háy Károly László, *Between Two Pagans for One Homeland; The Oppressor*, 1941, linocut on paper, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.

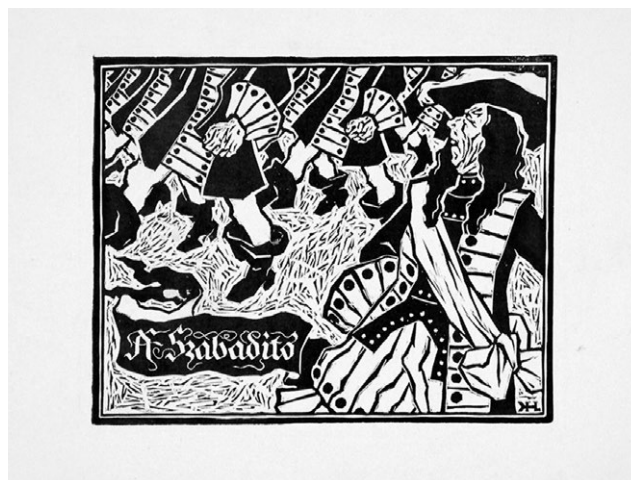


Fig 3. Háy Károly László, *Between Two Pagans for One Homeland; The Liberator*, 1941, linocut on paper, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.

17 Károly László Háy, "Egy félbemaradt metszetsorozatról" [About an Unfinished Engraving Series], *Művelt Nép*, April 17, 1955, 4. Reprinted: Aradi, *Szabadság és a Nép*, 303–305.

18 *Ibid.*, 4–5.

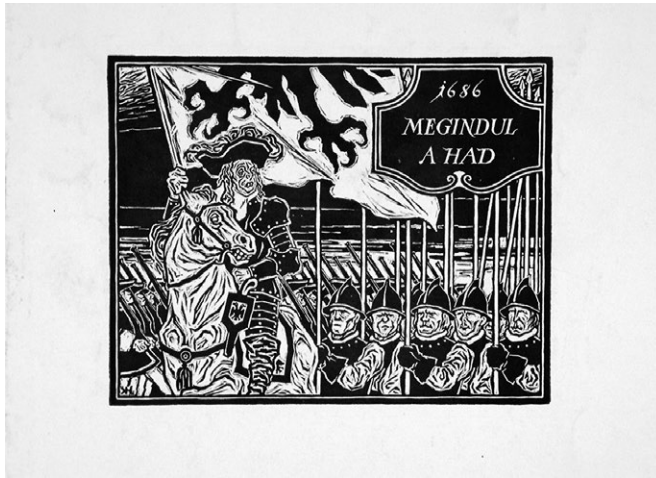


Fig 4. Háý Károly László, *Between Two Pagans for One Homeland: Occupation of Transylvania*, 1941, linocut on paper, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest.

a recollection, Háý specifically mentioned that “while creating the sprawling Turkish figure smoking a pipe, he used features of a familiar district administrator and, while walking on the street, he constantly inspected people and collected the typical types of German officers and the men of SS.”¹⁹ Furthermore, the piece called *Occupation of Transylvania* (**fig. 4**), which includes the sign *1686 The War Begins*, was inspired by a photograph published in a French newspaper about the Nazi invasion of Prague.²⁰ As Háý wrote, “these past events are, in fact, the most burning problems of our time.”²¹

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ANALYSIS OF THE FRESCO PLAN HISTORY

On the engraving *The Oppressor*, there is a sprawling Turkish figure smoking a pipe, while in the background are a shadoof and traditional farmhouses, symbolizing the long-standing Turkish occupation of Hungary. This composition is almost identical to the background of the middle “panel” of the fresco plan *History*. Given the circumstances, in my opinion, the ensemble of the equestrian figure and the background should be interpreted in a similar way, as symbols of dependence on Hitler’s Germany and the pressure placed on Hungary. The revisionist successes, which were only possible owing to the Germans and the Anti-Comintern Pact, created serious expectations for Hungary and established a dependent relationship towards the German Empire. In my interpretation, the dissatisfied, wailing peasant figures on the “wings” represent the oppression of the dissatisfied working class, both in relation to the sum of history and the given period.

In the fresco plan, the shape of the horse and its equestrian rider is stylistically extremely similar to the depiction of Leopold I on horseback that appears on one of the pieces of the linocut series. However, in contrast to the motionless figure of the linocut, the fresco design evokes a frequent

¹⁹ Ibid., 4.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.



Fig 5. János Pásztor, *The Equestrian Statue of Francis II Rákóczi*, 1937, bronze, Kossuth Square, Budapest. Photograph by Sára Bárdi.

iconographic depiction of the prancing horse. The prancing or rearing horse was a highly popular image in baroque art. These representations aimed to symbolize the depicted person's status, conveying the message that the depicted is glorious and capable of exercising power. There are many known portraits of Miklós Zrínyi atop a prancing horse, and Házy clearly considered him a positive historical figure. However, in my opinion, the middle equestrian figure in the fresco plan has a negative connotation in the context of the images, making him appear as an oppressor. I believe the reasons for the negative role of the equestrian figure are to be found in the statist visual propaganda of the Horthy era.

In May, 1937 Miklós Horthy unveiled the equestrian statue of Ferenc II Rákóczi in Kossuth Square in front of the Hungarian Parliament (**fig. 5**). János Pásztor was commissioned by the Hungarian government in 1935 to make the monument, and the costumers were expecting a Baroque equestrian statue in the style of the 17th century, which the sculptor achieved, among other elements, by applying the iconography of the prancing horse.²²

The cult of Rákóczi and the related tradition of independence was not only used by the Party of Communists in Hungary. The dominant political system of the Horthy era used the national past from the beginning as a means of legitimizing power, thus strengthening national self-awareness, and influencing public opinion. It was common to compare Miklós Horthy to the great figures of Hungarian history, thus strengthening his authority. After the First Vienna Award, for example, he was affiliated with Ferenc II Rákóczi, marking Horthy's "nation-saving" efforts as a struggle for independence.²³ An article from 1936 by József Révai is essential for my topic at this point, in which he "called on the members of the communist party to learn to feel the 'great deeds and events of the Hungarian past' as 'their own past' and to use these 'traditions' as weapons in their political struggles."²⁴ Révai's viewpoint is based on developments at the 7th Congress of the Communist International in 1935, in particular the proclamation of a new approach to national pasts. Interestingly, the way in which communists related to the past was deeply "inspired by" nationalist attitudes and expropriations of the nation's past.²⁵

22 Ervin Ybl, "Pásztor János újabb szobrai" [Newer Statues from János Pásztor], *Magyar Művészet*, no. 14 (1938): 136–137.

23 Dávid Turbucz, *A Horthy-kultusz 1919–1944* [The Horthy Cult 1919–1944] (Budapest: Research Center for the Humanities, 2016), 54–55.

24 Dávid Kovács, "Hagyomány mint fegyver. Révai József történelemszemlélete" [Tradition as a Weapon. József Révai's View of History], in *Nemzetfelfogás és történelemszemlélet a 20. századi Magyarországon*, ed. Dávid Kovács (Budapest: Károli Gáspár Egyetem, L'Harmattan, 2017), 125.

25 *Ibid.*, 126–128.

From the point of view of the communist interpretation, we can also talk about expropriation in the case of the Rákóczi cult. In 1935, in connection with the 200th anniversary of the death of Ferenc II Rákóczi we can read about this on the pages of *Czechoslovak People's Voice*.²⁶ “And now Ferenc II Rákóczi, who died in exile and emigration, is being expropriated by the direct descendants of the *labanc* (expression for pro-Austrian soldiers during the 18th century Hungarian wars of independence) of 200 years ago, who still suppress all the movements of the Hungarian people in Hungary as much as the Austrian reaction and the hated Viennese *camarilla* (court).”²⁷ These lines also relate strongly to anti-German traditions mentioned above.

TWO EQUESTRIAN IMAGES OF MIKLÓS HORTHY AND HIS ANTI-BOLSHEVIST ROLE

There are two known equestrian images of Miklós Horthy on a prancing white horse, one on a stamp from 1940 (**fig. 6**), and the other a fresco from 1941 (**fig. 7**). Both works were made shortly before Háy's *History* fresco plan and can be evaluated as visual representations contradicting the opinion of the Party of Communists in Hungary, as well as the socialist way of thinking of the era in general. Both visual representations deal with the following topics: regaining the territories of Upper Hungary (historically the northern part of the Kingdom of Hungary, mostly present-day Slovakia), that is the successful revisions to Trianon achieved with the help of the Germans, and the memory of the Szeged Counter-Revolution (1919), in which Horthy played a key role. From the beginning of Miklós Horthy's career, he openly fought against Bolshevism, which may support my interpretation that the oppressive figure in the fresco plan is drawn from the Regent's cult.

In 1939 Hungary celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Szeged Counter-Revolution, and 1940 was the 20th anniversary of Horthy's Regency. On the occasion of the latter, a series of three stamps were issued on March 1, 1940, commemorating the liberation of Upper Hungary, the installation of Admiral Horthy as regent, and the Szeged Counter-Revolution. Miklós Horthy appears on the six *fillér* (the smallest Hungarian coin at that time) stamp, with the Votive Church of Szeged and the coat of arms of Hungary in the background along with the inscription “Commander”.

Szeged was the venue for the 1939 anniversary series, and on behalf of the city its mayor greeted the head of state “liberating” Hungary from Bolshevism. Miklós Horthy's character was determined by the struggle against the Communists and the Bolsheviks, and the beginnings of his cult



Fig 6. Ferenc Márton and Sándor Légrády, Stamp Series for the Regent's 20th Anniversary; denomination of 6 *fillér*, 1940, stamp, Stamp Museum, Budapest.

26 Between 1926 and 1938, the *Czechoslovak People's Voice* was the political weekly of the Hungarian section of the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Workers Party. Mail delivery of the paper to Hungary was banned in the Horthy era.

27 József Tóth, “II. Rákóczi Ferenc halálának 200. évfordulójára” [For the 200th Anniversary of the Death of Ferenc Rákóczi, II], *Csehszlovákiai Népszava*, April 7, 1935, 12.



Fig 7. Pál Molnár C., *In Order to Depict the Regent of Hungary, Who Regained Upper Hungary and Enriched Our Country*, 1941, mural, destroyed, Dob Street Post Office, Budapest, from *Tér és forma*, no. 4 (1941), 57.

can be linked to the overthrow of the Hungarian Soviet Republic (1919). The Anti-Bolshevik content of Horthy's image was further strengthened in the 1940s and the cult of the regent became part of the war propaganda. Participation in the war was proclaimed as a national interest, a "crusade" against the Soviet Union. The formation and production of the image of the enemy and the justification for war were closely connected. Miklós Horthy also personally contributed to the strengthening of the Anti-Bolshevik image, greeting soldiers returning from the Eastern Front on November 17, 1941, quoted as the first article in the Anti-Bolshevik exhibition catalogue.²⁸

The exhibition catalogue highlights that Horthy started the fight against Bolshevism in Europe, which the catalogue calls the "crusade" against the Soviet Union in several places. While Hitler and the German Empire were the leader of this "crusade", Hungary also actively took part in it.²⁹

The other visual representation of Miklós Horthy on a prancing white horse was the ceiling painting of the ceremonial hall of the Post Office in Dob Street, created by Pál C. Molnár in 1941, called *In Order to*

Depict the Regent of Hungary, Who Regained Upper Hungary and Enriched Our Country (the fate of the mural after 1945 is unknown – although it is not visible today, but no sources are known about its removal). The First Vienna Award made it possible for Hungary to achieve revisions to the Treaty of Trianon "in a peaceful way," and thanks to the mass communication of the era, these successes were attributed to Miklós Horthy. On November 6, 1938, and November 11, 1938, the Regent marched on a white horse to Komárom (Komárno) and then to Kassa (Košice). According to some sources, Horthy appeared as a saviour for the Hungarian people in Upper Hungary.³⁰

CONCLUSION

In my interpretation, the depiction of a prancing white horse and its rider on Károly László Háy's fresco plan *History* is imbued with political ideas, as a figure of the oppressor of the people. Knowing Háy's attitudes and ideology, the motif can be considered a symbol of the universal ruling class, which is based on the interpretation of the traditional iconography of the prancing

28 Turbucz, *A Horthy-kultusz*, 248–261.

29 *Az Antibolszevista kiállítás tájékoztatója* [Prospectus about the Anti-Bolshevist Exhibition], ed. Zoltán Bosnyák (Budapest: Stádium Rt. 1941), 1–9.

30 Turbucz, *A Horthy-kultusz*, 199–207.

rider. This element of power and representation of the ruler is put in quotation marks in the fresco plan by the two peasant figures who want to break away, and points to the different motivations for its depiction. Furthermore, the caricatured representation of the figure highlights the possibility of a negative connotation. In addition to the layer of meaning spanning multiple historical eras, the equestrian figure also carries current political references to the period. According to my interpretation, it references Miklós Horthy and the ideas he embodied, from the point of view of the KMP's ideology, the socialist conception of history.