

A Sinner in the City: the Later Medieval Cult of Mary Magdalene in Central Europe

5:30 pm on May 30, 2017
CEU—Gellner Room
Budapest, Nádor u. 9



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The cult of Mary Magdalene has enjoyed a steadily growing popularity in late-medieval Central Europe as in its western and southern regions. Churches dedicated to the saint occupied strategic locations in Buda, Krakow and Vienna and were often linked with important urban rituals and prestigious confraternities. This multi-layered ‘urban’ quality of the Magdalene’s cult is investigated through a close-up analysis of a mysterious 15th-century relief, originally a tympanum, which shows the saint as the witness to the Resurrection of Christ. Research has shown that the tympanum (now in the Wien Museum) once formed a part of an ambitious Gothic facade of the Mary Magdalene chapel in the cathedral square. The rebuilding of the chapel as the seat of the powerful Notaries guild and of the Corpus Christi confraternity was one of several civic initiatives in and around Vi-

enna, which involved the cathedral lodge. It will be argued that the intriguing Magdalene relief cannot be explained by conventional iconographic tools alone. Its meaning can only be extrapolated by focusing on its location and the role of the Stephansplatz as a site of communal rituals of salvation in the form of relic displays, Passion plays and Corpus Christ processions, set amidst one of Vienna’s largest and oldest cemeteries. By drawing comparisons across the region, this lecture will demonstrate the development of a sophisticated insight into Mary Magdalene’s dual role as an equal member of the Apostolic elite and also as a reformed sinner and as role model of the life (and death) transforming belief through sight.

The lecture will be followed by a book launch: *From Hus to Luther -Visual Culture in the Bohemian Reformation (1380-1620)* edited by Katerina Hornicková and M. Šroněk, presented by Béla Zsolt Szakács .

Zoë Opačić specialises in the medieval art, architecture and urbanism in Central Europe. She is a senior lecturer at Birkbeck College, University of London, a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and the Editor of the *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*. She is a long-standing collaborator of the CEU (as well as its staunch supporter), and is currently its visiting lecturer.