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**THE SMILING CENTAUR, THE SIREN, AND THE NAKED MAN:
CARVINGS FROM THE ROMANESQUE CATHEDRAL OF PÉCS**
EL CENTAURO SONRIENTE, LA SIRENA Y EL HOMBRE DESNUDO.
ESCULTURAS DE LA CATEDRA ROMÁNICA DE PÉCS

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ABSTRACT

The Romanesque cathedral of Pécs in Southern Hungary with its more than one thousand stone carvings holds the richest and most excellent collection of monumental sculptural decoration in Central Europe. Among the rich material a strange pair of capital, representing a naked man between a centaur and a snake, and a corbel, depicting a siren, deserves special attention. There were many speculations regarding the meaning of these carvings, such as symbolizing saint Andrew-Zorard or Adam and Eve. Based on international comparative material, the composition at Pécs may be interpreted referring to more general experiences: the vulnerable status of the human soul living in the world of temptation.

KEYWORDS: Romanesque sculpture, centaur, siren, nudity, Pécs.

RESUMEN

La catedral románica de Pécs, en el sur de Hungría, con sus más de mil labras de piedra, posee el conjunto más rico y excelente de decoración escultórica monumental de Europa Central. Entre el prolífico material, merecen una atención especial una pareja de extraños capiteles: uno representa a un hombre desnudo entre un centauro y una serpiente; el otro muestra una sirena. Se han manifestado numerosas interpretaciones a propósito del significado de estas esculturas, desde la figura de san Andrés-Zorard a Adán y Eva. A la luz de los repertorios internacionales, las composiciones de Pécs pueden interpretarse en un sentido más genérico y, al tiempo, especulativo: la alusión al estado vulnerable del alma humana que vive en el mundo de la tentación.

PALABRAS CLAVE: románico, escultura, centauro, sirena, desnudez, Pécs.

Those who wish to see more than one thousand Romanesque stone-carvings in one single museum should visit the Cathedral Lapidary of Pécs in Hungary. This relatively recently opened museum aims at collecting and presenting the vast artistic heritage of one of the most splendid Romanesque cathedrals in Central Europe.¹ In fact, this enormous collection is the result of the late 19th-century restoration of Friedrich von Schmidt which produced a very spectacular Neo-Romanesque cathedral.² However, in order to achieve his aims (building a more beautiful church than the original medieval ever looked like, as a contemporaneous art historian formulated³), he practically destroyed the entire old building and found in the walls a large number of Romanesque stone carvings.⁴ The church before this restoration was quite different; but even in this shape, it was the result of a previous restoration of the early 19th-century. The earliest engravings document the building in its 18th-century state, with some Baroque additions but overwhelmingly medieval in its walls.⁵

This, originally Romanesque cathedral was probably not the first one of the diocese. The bishopric of Pécs was founded in 1009 by saint Stephen, the first king of Hungary; even the foundation charter has been preserved.⁶ The first cathedral, which we do not know directly, burnt down in 1064.⁷ The present-day building represents a church type very typical for Hungary: a three-aisled basilica with three semi-circular apses at the east and no transept. This type is known in Hungary since the last quarter of the 11th century.⁸ The best preserved architectural element of the church is the enormously large hall crypt which fills the entire eastern half of the church. Some details preserved during the restoration, such as the cubic capitals and the attic base, would support a dating to around 1100.⁹

¹ K. HAVASI, "A pécsi középkori székesegyház és a Dómkötár gyűjteményének rövid története" [Short history of the medieval cathedral of Pécs and its Lapidary], in: Zs. Virág (ed.), *A pécsi püspökség évezredes öröksége*, Pécs, 2015, pp. 174-183.

² E. CSEMEGINÉ TOMPOS, "A pécsi székesegyház Schmidt-féle újjáépítése" [The rebuilding of the cathedral of Pécs by Schmidt], *Az Építőipari és Közlekedési Műszaki Egyetem Tudományos Közleményei* X (1964), pp. 33-97; E. MAROSI, "Die Domsulpturen von Pécs. Kunsthistorische Einordnung und Inszenierung als ein Paradigma ungarischen Selbstverständnisses", in R. Born, A. Janatková and A. S. Labuda (eds.), *Die Kunsthistoriographien in Ostmitteleuropa und der nationale Diskurs*, (Humboldt-Schriften zur Kunst- und Bildgeschichte 1), Berlin, 2004, pp. 233-252.

³ I. HENSZLMANN, "A pécsi székesegyház restaurációja" [The restoration of the cathedral of Pécs], *Archaeologiai Értesítő*, XVI (1882), p. 14.

⁴ B. Zs. SZAKÁCS, "Másolás és újraalkotás: a pécsi altemplomi lejáratok domborművei" [Copy and recreation: the reliefs of the crypt entrances in Pécs], *Ars Hungarica*, XXXIII (2005), pp. 241-256.

⁵ L. BOROS, *A pécsi székesegyház a 18. században* [The cathedral of Pécs in the 18th century], Budapest, 1985.

⁶ Gy. GYÖRFFY (ed.), *Diplomata Hungariae Antiquissima. I. Ab anno 1000 usque ad annum 1131*, Budapest, 1992, pp. 54-59.

⁷ I. SZENTPÉTERY (ed.), *Scriptores Rerum Hungaricarum tempore ducum regumque stirpis Arpadianae gestarum*, vol. 1, Budapest, 1937, p. 363.

⁸ B. Zs. SZAKÁCS, "Állandó alaprajzok - változó vélemények? Megjegyzések a 'bencés templomtípus' magyarországi pályafutásához" [Constant ground plans – changing ideas? Notes on the Hungarian carrier of the "Benedictine type" of Romanesque churches], in Sz. Bodnár et al. (eds.), *Maradandóság és változás*, Budapest, 2004, pp. 25-37; cf. B. Zs. SZAKÁCS, "Henszlmann and the 'Hungarian Provincialism' of Romanesque Architecture", in L. Varga et al. (eds.), *Bonum ut Pulchrum. Essays in Art History in Honour of Ernő Marosi on His Seventieth Birthday*, Budapest, 2010, pp. 511-518.

⁹ G. BUZÁS, "Az egyházmegye építészeti emlékei" [Architectural monuments of the Diocese], in T. Fedeles, G. Sarbak, J. Sümegi (eds.), *A pécsi egyházmegye története I. A középkor évszázadai. (1009-1543)*, Pécs, 2009, pp. 624-625.

While the architectural decoration of the Romanesque church and its crypt was generally modest, there is one point of the building where the sculptural ornamentation proved to be unexpectedly rich. This is the zone of the chancel arch, the borderline between the elevated sanctuary above the crypt and the nave serving the liturgical needs of the people. At this point, we find three important sculptural ensembles. In the middle, the Holy Cross altar was situated, today replaced by an even more sumptuous Neo-Romanesque baldachin. In the two aisles the staircases leading to the crypt were abundantly decorated with narrative relief cycles. Furthermore, of course, the piers of the chancel arch were also decorated with capitals.¹⁰

The Holy Cross altar, today preserved in its original form in the Cathedral Lapidary, was a curious construction with a low sculpted baldachin; its ribbed vault counts to the earliest examples of its type in Central Europe. The baldachin was painted and gilded and its all surfaces were covered by carved decoration; however, this decoration is majorly ornamental in character, with very few exceptions (such as the lions at the eastern wall).¹¹ On the contrary, the entrances to the crypt were lavishly decorated with narrative episodes. They were discovered in a relatively bad shape during the restoration, therefore the original reliefs were transferred to the Cathedral Museum, where they are still kept, and in the re-decorated interior of the Neo-Romanesque church faithful but extended copies were placed.¹² Narrative cycles of the south entrance include episodes from the Old Testament (e.g. the story of Samson) and the childhood of Jesus (e.g. the annunciation to the shepherds or the magi receiving by night the advice from an angel not to return to Herod). In the north entrance, different scenes from the Genesis were depicted together with references to the Apocalypse. These relief cycles are regarded as the highlight of Hungarian Romanesque sculpture, usually dated to the last third of the 12th century.¹³

As mentioned above, all these liturgical and artistic accents fall to the middle of the Romanesque basilica, at the zone of the chancel arch. Obviously, the decoration of the related compound piers received also special attention. Today none of the original capitals preserved its original position, being transferred to the Cathedral Lapidary. However, on the basis of contemporaneous sources, the related carvings can be localized.¹⁴ Some of them were decorated with vegetal ornamentation in a relatively simple style; some others are decorated in a more complicated manner following a Corinthian pattern – although in execution they are still quite

¹⁰ M. TÓTH, “La Cathédrale de Pécs au XII^e siècle”, *Acta Historiae Artium*, XXIV (1978), pp. 43-59. M. TÓTH, “A pécsi székesegyház kőszobrászati díszítése a románkorban” [Stone carving decoration of the cathedral of Pécs in the Romanesque period], in Á. Mikó and I. Takács (eds.), *Pannonia regia. Művészet a Dunántúlon 1000-1541*, Budapest, 1994, pp. 123-147.

¹¹ M. TÓTH, “Die Umbauung des Heiligkreuz-Altars in der Kathedrale zu Pécs”, in F. Möbius and E. Schubert (eds.), *Skulptur des Mittelalters*, Weimar, 1987, pp. 81-108.

¹² B. Zs. SZAKÁCS, “A pécsi attemplomi lejáratok domborművei: művészettörténeti probléma és muzeológiai feladat” [The reliefs of the crypt entrances in Pécs: art historical problem and museological task], in Gy. Heidl, E. Raffay and A. Tüskés (eds.), *Echo simul una et quina. Tanulmányok a pécsi székesegyházról*, Pécs, 2016, pp. 189-202.

¹³ E. MAROSI, “A pécsi székesegyház és a magyarországi romanika művészete” [The cathedral of Pécs and Romanesque art in Hungary], in Heidl Heidl, Raffay and Tüskés (eds.), *Echo simul una*, pp. 121-150.

¹⁴ O. SZŐNYI, *A pécsi püspöki múzeum kőtára* [The lapidary of the Episcopal Museum of Pécs], Pécs, 1906; Gy. Gosztonyi, *A pécsi Szent Péter székesegyház eredete* [The origins of the St Peter cathedral of Pécs], Pécs, 1939.

modest. Finally, in the south aisle, we find two figural carvings: a capital with a centaur and other motives and opposed to it, a corbel with a siren. These are the subjects of my paper.

Let us first have a detailed view of the two stone-carvings. The capital, originally decorating an engaged semi-column, is decorated from three sides. On the front side, a standing man is represented in the middle; he is naked, at least under his belt his genitalia are uncovered (Fig. 1). He lifts his hands, holding in the right hand an orb or a ball or something like this; and a stick or some sort of weapon, maybe a knife in his right hand. He is frontally represented, with an archaic, somber face. On both corners of the capital eagles are standing, without any visible relationship with the rest of the figures. On the left side of the capital a centaur is represented; it is standing with his back towards the eagle but turning back with his human upper body (Fig. 2). It has a charming smile while in his hand a huge axe is lifted towards the figure on the front side. On the right side of the capital, originally facing toward the east, a snake is represented in a strange rearing position (Fig. 3). Its body is knotted; its mouth is open sticking out its tongue. Behind the snake, in the background, some leaves are represented in the same style as the others with vegetal ornaments.

In front of the capital, in the south side of the chancel arch of the south aisle a corbel was positioned originally (Fig. 4). On the front side a two-tailed siren is represented, lifting up her tails and holding them with his hands. Her tails are partially covered with fish-scale. From her human upper body her small round breasts are well visible. It is not quite clear if she is naked, although that would be logical; nevertheless, at the neck there is some sort of edge of something which may well be an upper garment (we will see a local example for it later). She has a long hair. She is seemingly not alone. A third hand, obviously of another being, takes her left tale. Unfortunately, the corbel is fragmented, and the figure is either destroyed or remained unfinished; the motif of the corner, maybe a tree, is unidentifiable. Sadly, the other corner is even more fragmented. Thus, the original composition cannot be fully detected; however, we have still enough information to challenge an interpretation of the two carvings.



Fig. 1. Pécs, capital with centaur, front side with naked man. Pécs, Dómmúzeum (photo: author)



Fig. 2. Pécs, capital with centaur, left side.
Pécs, Dómmúzeum (photo: author)



Fig. 3. Pécs, capital with centaur, right side
Pécs, Dómmúzeum (photo: author)

So far previous research has formulated three different types of interpretation. One of them is quite specific. The starting point is the naked figure that is represented with a belt. In 1963 Erzsébet Tombos published an article in which she made an attempt to identify the mysterious figure.¹⁵ She identified the naked man with a hermit and emphasized the curiosity of a belt over open genitalia. Her suggestion is saint Andrew-Zorard, one of the earliest saints of Hungary. According to his legend, Zorard came from Poland in the early 11th century and lived in Upper Hungary in the Benedictine monastery of Zobor (today in Slovakia), founded by saint Stephen, the first king of Hungary.¹⁶ He received Andrew as his monastic name. At the end of his life, he lived in a hermitage in Vágsziclás (today Skalka in Slovakia) where he died. His body was buried in the cathedral of Nyitra (today Nitra, Slovakia) where he was canonized in 1083. He, together with his disciple, Benedict, belongs to the very first saints of the Christian Hungarian kingdom. His legend was written by a certain Maurus, originally a Benedictine monk, whose sanctity was revealed by the kisses of the holy Prince Emeric.¹⁷ Maurus knew himself Benedict and heard a lot about the saintly life of Andrew-Zorard, even the penitential belt of the saint was owned by him. Maurus later became the bishop of Pécs and administered the diocese from 1036 to around 1075.¹⁸ He had close connections to the

¹⁵ E. Cs. TOMPOS, "A pécsi székesegyház kőtárának kentauros fejezete és szirénes gyámköve. Adalék a XI. századi magyar épületplasztika ikonográfiájához" [The centaur capital and siren corbel of the lapidary of the cathedral of Pécs: addition to the iconography of 11th-century Hungarian architectural sculpture], *Művészettörténeti Értesítő*, XII (1963), pp. 113-121.

¹⁶ SZENTPÉTERY (ed.), *Scriptores*, vol. 2, 1938, pp. 357-361.

¹⁷ SZENTPÉTERY (ed.), *Scriptores*, vol. 1, p. 452.

¹⁸ FEDELES, SARBAK, SÜMEGI (eds.), *A pécsi egyházmegye*, pp. 59-62.



Fig. 4. Pécs, corbel with siren. Pécs, Dómmúzeum (photo: author)

royal court; in 1064 he donated the cilicium to Prince Géza, the future king of Hungary (1074-77). Thus the hypothesis seems to be logical for the first sight: the naked man is the hermit saint Andrew-Zorard, and his penitential belt is represented because it was kept for a while in the cathedral of Pécs. According to Tompos, the carving was commissioned by Bishop Maurus himself in the 11th century; since then we would date the carvings rather to the 12th century, however, the problem is more than merely chronological. First of all, there is no sign that the naked figure would be a saint. Even if we accept that the siren can be a symbol of temptation which is appropriate to evoke in the context of hermitage, there are further strange elements. The stone in the hand of the hermit is identified with the nut which Andrew-Zorard ate, one peace each day, during Lenten time. However, the lifted hands seem to be bizarre in this context. And what about the centaur and the snake? In fact, centaurs sometime appear in the company of hermits. In the legend of saint Paul the Hermit, written by saint Jerome, we read that when Anthony Abbot intended to visit Paul, he met a centaur in the desert who showed him the right way. Of course, saint Andrew-Zorard never met a centaur, or at least his legend does not mention it. Moreover, the snake does not have a specific role, either. Thus, although the naked man in a general sense can be understood as a representation of ascetic life, attacked by the vices symbolized by the snake, the centaur and the siren, the specific identification with a local saint is totally unfounded.

If we are interested in the meaning of a naked man and the snake, the story of Adam and Eve can be evoked. This is exactly what the early research did. As early as in 1895, Péter Gerecze, the first author describing the Romanesque findings of the cathedral restoration, proposed this kind of identification.¹⁹ According to his opinion, the naked man is Adam and what

¹⁹ P. GERECZE, "A pécsi székesegyház egykori oltársátra és többi szobrászati munkája" [The former altar baldachin and other sculptural works of the cathedral of Pécs], *Archaeológiai Közlemények*, XX (1897), pp. 72-130.

is in his hand is an apple. The belt should represent the fig leaf. The snake is a good argument in favour of this theory, but where is Eve? She may be identified with the siren since they are often regarded as symbols of the temptation. Others tried to see the centaur as the substitution of Eve.²⁰ However, the centaur cannot be explained from Biblical context, therefore the meaning must be more general.

I am convinced that if we want to understand the real significance of these representations, we shouldn't pick up arbitrarily single elements, such as the naked figure with a belt or the snake as symbol of the original sin, but we should analyse the different motives in their relationship in a complex system.

Let us start with the siren and the centaur. Both of them had been discussed by enormous literature; let me underline only the more recent studies of Jacqueline Leclercq-Marx, who has been working on the sirens for a lifetime; but of course, she also discusses the centaurs.²¹ In fact, they have been often associated with each other since the time of the Hellenism. Being similar in nature, half-human and half-animal, they are represented in a special position in *The Earthly Paradise*, a Carolingian ivory carving, just below Adam and Eve, together with satyrs and above all the animals.²² They are described together by the Physiologus, with a reference to Isaiah, the Prophet (13:21 and 34:14). "Physiologus treated the nature of each one, saying of the sirens that they are deadly animals living in the sea which cry out with odd voices. ... Likewise, the ass-centaurs from their breasts up bear the figure of a man and that of an ass from there down. 'Thus the man of deceitful heart is confused in all his ways' [Jas. 1: 8]."²³ In short, summarizes the Physiologus: "Such beasts, sirens or ass-centaurs, represent the figures of devils."²⁴

Since siren and centaur are discussed together by the Physiologus, it is not surprising that they appear side by side. They are represented in peace with each other in some Greek manuscripts, such as a Byzantine example from the 11th century, formerly in Smyrna (Izmir), now lost, or in a South Italian copy, produced for a local Greek community, now kept in Milan.²⁵ As the Physiologus describes the sirens as a half-bird, their depiction in the Greek manuscripts follows this type. Otherwise, in western culture the sirens are more often represented as half-fish, and in this way they are related to the mermaid. The Western type siren is represented together with a handsome centaur in a 12th-century English bestiary, which contains, besides

²⁰ M. ZÁDOR, "A pécsi székesegyház ún. Ádám és Éva oszlopfőjéről" [On the so-called Adam and Eve capital of the cathedral of Pécs], *Archaeologiai Értesítő*, XC (1963), pp. 195-204.

²¹ J. LECLERCQ-MARX, *La sirène dans la pensée et dans l'art de l'Antiquité et du moyen âge. Du mythe païen au symbole chrétien*. Bruxelles, 1997; see its online edition: <http://www.koregos.org/fr/jacqueline-leclercq-marx-la-sirene-dans-la-pensee-et-dans-l-art-de-l-antiquite-et-du-moyen-age/4389/> (last visited 19/09/2017). References will be given to the online edition. For the centaurs, see especially J. LECLERCQ-MARX, "Le centaure dans l'art préroman et roman. Sources d'inspiration et modes de transmission", *Cahiers de Saint-Michel de Cuxa*, 37, (2006), pp. 33-42.

²² J. LECLERCQ-MARX, "Du monstre androcéphale au monstre humanisé : à propos des sirènes et des centaures, et de leur famille, dans le haut Moyen Age et à l'époque romane", *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*, LXV no. 177, (2002), pp. 55-67.

²³ *Physiologus. A Medieval Book of Nature*, translated by M. J. Curley, Chicago and London, 1979, pp. 23-24.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

²⁵ LECLERCQ-MARX, *La sirène*, ill. 95-96.

the Latin text of the Physiologus, the Historia Vandalorum of Victor Vitensis and miscellaneous other texts. In addition to the Physiologus text, most chapters have an excerpt from the “Etymologiae” of Isidore of Seville.²⁶

There is a frequently followed composition in Romanesque sculpture according to which the siren is in the center and she is accompanied by two centaurs that stand on the corners of the capital. A nice example can be seen in the Sant Pere de Gallicants of Girona with a single-tailed siren. A double-tailed specimen is represented in the St Peter’s church at Bessuejous in the South of France in the tower-chapel in the early 13th century. Note that the centaurs put their hands on the tail of the siren – a motif difficult to explain in Pécs. As Jacqueline Leclercq-Marx underlined, the siren, a metaphor of temptation in the 11-12th century, is a logical pair of the centaur, who was regarded as the symbol of violence, and especially the sexual violence.²⁷

However, maybe because of their violence, or because of other reasons, centaurs do not always live in peace with sirens. Leclercq-Marx referred to the influence of astrology and the positive figure of Chiron, “the wisest and justest of all the centaurs” (Iliad, 11/831).²⁸ That can be the reason why the centaurs are so frequently represented in a conflict with sirens. In a 12th-century frieze originating from the basilica of Saint-Sernin in Toulouse, a bearded centaur with an arrow menace the bird-like siren. Another pair is constituted by a double capital in the cloister of Saint Paul-de-Mausole in Provence. Here the centaur is shooting back towards the fish-tailed siren. While these compositions form a set (and maybe the single elements do not constitute a closed system, do not necessarily refer to each other), in some certain cases the mythical beings are fighting in one and the same carving. This is the case e.g. in the capital of Saint-Alban-sur-Limagne in Southern France, or, to name a closer example, a half-column from the cathedral of Lérida/Lleida.²⁹ In the latter the struggle is immediate; the arrow of the centaur is directly taken by the siren, who, in this case is a half-bird being with a beard – thus representing a male siren (although according to the Physiologus, the centaur is male and the siren is female; how they can reproduce themselves, is mysterious).

Similar subjects appear in other media, too. One of the most complex battle scenes ever represented can be found in the church dedicated to Saint James in Termeno (or Tramin in German) in South Tirol (now Italy).³⁰ The city is not only famous of its wine (the Traminer) but of its chapel erected on a hill above the settlement nearby to a ruined castle. Here one of the most famous Romanesque frescos can be found in the region. The lower part of the apsis is decorated with a wide range of mythical animals, among others centaurs and sirens, in a terrible fight.

Shooting centaurs with sirens also appear in manuscript illumination. Although they are relatively rare in Latin bestiaries, they can be found in the margins of many other codices,

²⁶ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Laud Misc. 247, f. 147r, see <http://bestiary.ca/manuscripts/manu1043.htm> (last visited 19/11/2017).

²⁷ LECLERCQ-MARX, *La sirène*, chapter IV.3.3. and figs. 62 and 64.

²⁸ Ibidem, figs. 65 and 68.

²⁹ Ibidem, ills. 98-99.

³⁰ Ibidem, ills. 103 and 171; G. SUITNER, *Le Venezie* (Italia romanica 12), Milano, 1992, p. 426, fig. 121.

such as e.g. in the Manerius-Bible, a French manuscript from the late 12th century, where centaurs and sirens are represented in pairs symmetrically.³¹ They are seemingly in a larger company of other mythological creatures, however, for the ensemble of Pécs we should find other analogies.

So far we have strongly missed the serpent, the primary symbol of evil and temptation. The snake is often accompanying the siren in one or another way. A charming example is known from the lintel of the Pieve di Corsignano in Pienza, where the snake is talking directly to the ear of the siren that is playing the music.³²

The centaur also can be represented as a pair of the snake. Let me present an interesting example from Hungary. The Late Romanesque tympanum originates from Újudvar, a small village in Western Hungary where a house of the Order of St John was founded in the early 13th century (Fig. 5).³³ In the tympanum the Holy Cross is represented in the middle, while the figure of a centaur is situated on the left side and a pair of serpents on the right. Snakes and centaur seem to be on the same level, bearing comparable meanings. The snake, the explicit diabolic symbol is connected here with the centaur. The Cross symbolizes Christ who overcomes the evil forces. Snake and centaur thus are related allies subjugated by the triumphant Cross.³⁴



Fig. 5. Újudvar, tympanum, Budapest, Hungarian National Gallery (photo: author)

³¹ Paris, Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, MS. 0010, f. 127v. LECLERCQ-MARX, *La sirène*, ill. 68.

³² *Ibidem*, ill. 172.

³³ B. Zs. SZAKÁCS, "A lovagrendek művészete a középkori Magyarországon" [The art of the chivalric orders in medieval Hungary], in J. Laszlovszky, J. Majorossy and J. Zsengellér (eds.), *Magyarország és a kereszties háborúk*, Mária-besnyő-Gödöllő, 2006, pp. 239-249.

³⁴ S. TÓTH, *Román kori kőfaragványok a Magyar Nemzeti Galéria Régi Magyar Gyűjteményében* [Romanesque stone carvings in the Old Hungarian Collection of the Hungarian National Gallery], Budapest, 2010, p. 147.

Let us call back the siren which was neglected for a while. Besides the snake and the centaur, she is also a member of the same company. A telling example is the façade of the church of San Michele in Lucca.³⁵ Here the siren and the centaur are represented side by side in the lintel. Between them the snake, or rather the dragon, is killed by saint Michael, the title saint of the church. The evil and heavenly forces have come together for a final battle. But we still miss the protagonist: the human figure, the naked man.

Naked men sometimes appear in the company of sirens and centaurs. A beautiful example is a double capital from the former cloister of the church of Notre-Dame de la Daurade in Toulouse, which is now kept in the Musée des Augustins.³⁶ On one side of the capital we can identify a siren in the middle, turning to a centaur on the right, who is turning back. A naked man is represented on the left, holding a lance, probably hunting the mythical animals. If their relationship is correctly deciphered, the siren and the centaur are in conflict with the man, who plays here the persecutor's role.

The situation in the carvings of Pécs seems to be somewhat different. The central figure is unquestionably the naked man. He is attacked from two sides: by a centaur with a huge axe from the left and the snake from the right. He is in fight, with all possible tools: maybe a stone in his left hand, and probably a knife or similar weapon in his right. His genitalia are uncovered and he is the subject of the temptation of the siren represented just in front of him. Opposed to the capital of Toulouse, here the naked man is attacked and is in defence.

The carvings of Pécs can be successfully compared to the Romanesque pulpit of Gropina in Tuscany: here a naked man with giant genitalia is represented between two snakes whispering to his ears while a siren is placed just below him (Fig. 6).³⁷ I think this is a very close analogy, with one important difference. In Pécs, instead of one of the snakes a smiling centaur takes place. And maybe there is another detail: the man of Pécs is fighting against the evil forces with all means. The man of Gropina seems to be more vulnerable.

All in all, it seems to be quite clear that instead of the specific identifications, such as saint Andrew-Zorard or Adam and Eve, the composition at Pécs may refer to more general experiences: the vulnerable status of the human soul living in the world of temptation.

The misunderstandings of the previous scholarship may be due to the lack of available international comparative material. On the other hand, I am convinced that the Hungarian material can be also useful for the general research of such problems. Jacqueline Leclercq-Marx, based on her immense collection, stated that of all the Romanesque siren representations 40% can be found in France, 30% in Spain and some 10% in Italy. On the contrary, in Central Europe, such as Poland or Hungary, there is almost nothing, maximum one or two examples.³⁸ Successfully, the situation is quite different. There are rather early representatives of the siren motif in Hungarian Romanesque churches, e.g. two carvings from around 1100 from the Ben-

³⁵ LECLERCO-MARX, *La sirène*, ill. 174.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, ill. 84.

³⁷ G. TIGLER, *Toscana romanica*, Milano, 2006, pp. 173-182.

³⁸ LECLERCO-MARX, *La sirène*, chapter IV.5.



Fig. 6. Gropina, San Pietro, pulpit (photo: author)



Fig. 7. Feldebrő, former Benedictine monastery, relief with siren (photo: author)

edictine monasteries of Feldebrő³⁹ (Fig. 7) and Dombó (today Rakovac in Serbia).⁴⁰ Another one, the fragment of a wall-painting originates from the same cathedral of Pécs where our capitals were also in use.⁴¹ In other cases the Hungarian sirens are also in context: in Esztergom,

³⁹ E. MAROSI, M. TÓTH (eds.), *Árpád-kori kőfaragványok* [Stone carvings of the Árpád-Age, 1000-1301], Budapest and Székesfehérvár, 1978, p. 121.

⁴⁰ S. NAGY, *Dombó, középkori monostor és erőd* [Dombó, medieval monastery and fortress], Újvidék, 1987, p. 43, fig. 90/d.

⁴¹ MIKÓ, TAKÁCS (eds.), *Pannonia regia*, pp. 219-220.

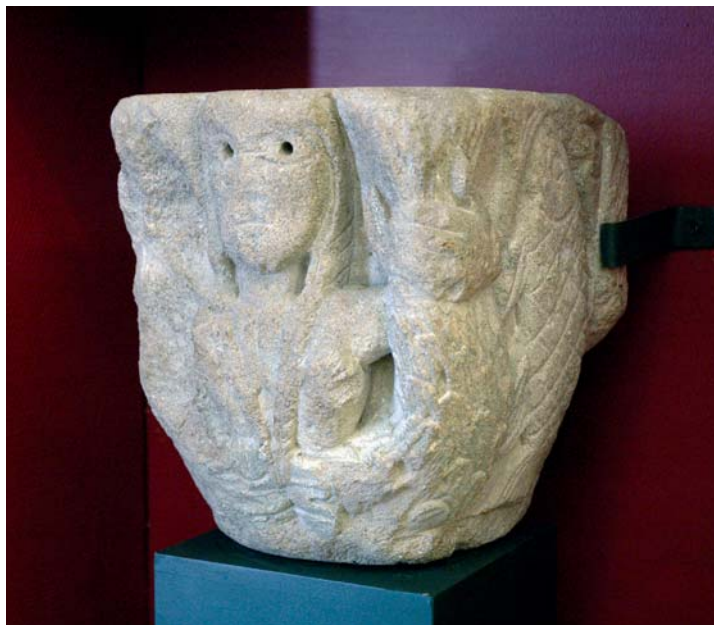


Fig. 8. Borosjenő
(Dienesmonostor?), Budapest,
Hungarian National Museum
(photo: author)

former capital of the kingdom, a siren accompanies a pair of lions;⁴² and in a carving from an eastern Hungarian monastery, a siren was represented together with a fish (Fig. 8).⁴³ The Central European material certainly needs further exploration.⁴⁴

The capital and corbel of Pécs in this respect merit a prominent place. Although each single elements or each pair can be compared to other examples, the highly complex system of the siren, the centaur, the snake and a naked man seems to be unique in the cathedral of Pécs. Some of the elements of this complex system, as we have seen, originate from Antique mythology transmitted by the Physiologus and other channels. However, the system itself based on these elements is truly Christian. Mythological elements originally profane in character found their way into the space of Romanesque churches, just in order to play an appropriate role in the sacred universe.

⁴² E. MAROSI, *Die Anfänge der Gotik in Ungarn. Esztergom in der Kunst des 12.-13. Jahrhunderts*, Budapest, 1984, p. 195, fig. 61.

⁴³ Capital from Borosjenő (today Ineu in Romania), probably originally from Dienesmonostor. Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest, inv. 55.1597. TÓTH, *Román kori kőfaragványok*, no. 13., p. 128.

⁴⁴ See also A. M. GRUIA, "Sirena bicaudata pe cahle medievale. Iconografie si posibile functii" [Two-tailed sirens on medieval stove tiles: iconography and possible functions], *Arheologia medievala*, 6 (2007), pp. 205-242.