



## **The Effect of Visual Representations on Conceptions, Dreams and Visions Related to Saints**

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**Abstract.** The Church encouraged the commemoration of saints, the celebration of their feasts mostly through priests' preachings. In these preachings, a role was often given to legends about saints, which also inspired folk beliefs. In this way, the beginning or finishing of some work, or different beliefs, routines were connected to one or another saint's days. Saints operate as mediators of grace at the same time, since people pray to saints so that their requests will be granted. Besides the preachings and teachings of the Church, different visual representations also have an impact on the notions, conceptions related to saints. In my essay I deal with the following questions: What kind of image do the different visual representations present about the given saint? How does this saint appear in dreams and visions? Is there any difference between an "average" settlement and a place of worship regarding the conceptions of a particular saint?

**Keywords:** sacred images, devotional pictures, the Blessed Virgin Mary, conceptions, visions, dreams

### **1. Introduction**

In a special sense of the word, those persons are called saints who are chosen by God, and who, accepting His grace, realised the gift of sanctity on a heroic level. The Church commemorates them individually because they are the role models of Christian life, who should be venerated and can be called to help. The veneration is not due to them directly but to the divine grace that acts in them, so venerating saints

is a form of worshipping God. In order to avoid misunderstandings the Church had to emphasise that religious worship has more forms: adoration (*latria*) is due to God only, the highest level of worship is due to the Blessed Virgin, then comes Saint Joseph, then everybody else (the apostles, martyrs, ascetics, confessors, holy bishops and founders of holy orders) (Müller 1993).

In folk religiosity saints are worshipped as mediators of God's protecting power and bliss, and as patrons of human cases, since "through becoming one with Christ more intimately, the blessed stabilise the entirety of the Church in sacredness even better ... They ceaselessly intercede for us at the Father [...]. They do not cease to care about those whom they left here on Earth ... Now they are serving God's plan with their intercession ..." [ellipses in the original] (Hetény 2001a, 42-43).

There are many forms of veneration towards them, such as kneeling, prostration, bowing, praying, kiss, songs, pilgrimage, incensation, candle-lighting and the veneration of images and relics of saints. At the same time, representations can have an effect on the conceptions and often on the dreams, visions related to saints.

In my study I am going to outline how, through which channels can this process go on and how the notion of a particular saint is influenced by the researched settlement being a place of worship. I began my research in the well-known holy place Máriapócs (Hungary) in 2008. The town made a reputation because of the repeated weepings (4 November, 1696; 1-2, 5 August, 1715; 3-19 December, 1905) of the devotional picture that can be found in the basilica. The icon was painted in 1676 by László Csigri, magistrate of Máriapócs, and he donated it to the church out of gratitude for being set free from Turkish captivity. After the first weeping of the icon, Kaiser Leopold had it taken to Vienna, after this, it was the copy that weeped again. Máriapócs has been visited by hundreds of thousands of pilgrims since the first weeping, and up to now the settlement has broadened its area of influence and has become the largest and most important Greek Catholic place of pilgrimage. Because of this, the rate of Greek Catholics is the highest in the settlement, there is only a few percentage of Roman Catholics.

Later, I continued my research in a nearby village, Pircse. Pircse also lies in the Nyírség region, about 14 km from Máriapócs. The rate of Greek Catholics is also high in this settlement that has about 1,900 inhabitants, so here I also had the opportunity to examine how they imagine the saints they pray to, then I searched for the answer how these notions are affected by the different visual representations. The reason for involving the second settlement was to find out

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whether Máriapócs, a place of worship and the notions of its inhabitants make any difference to those of another village that is not a holy place.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. The role of pictures in Christianity

The history of pictures is the history of thinking because people put the surrounding world into pictures over and over again, hereby unintentionally expressing how they think about it. The history of the veneration of sacred images in Christianity is the history of Christian thinking. Christianity used the opportunity offered by visual representations in many ways: as the support of philosophy, theology, education, praying and devotions. The history of Christian thinking can be followed on the basis of Christian art (Nacsinák 2005).

In the history of Christianity the veneration of images has so far been of utmost importance. The knowledge represented by the picture, through its visual nature has been able to be understood more easily. From the Middle Ages to the last century the significance of pictures was much greater than today. According to the teachings of the Church, the images are closely related to the Salvation History and their task is to raise the believers' hearts to God, and to strengthen their faith at the same time. This idea is supported by Patriarch Germanos (8<sup>th</sup> century), for example, who gave reasons for the veneration of sacred images with the following pedagogical arguments: pictures are suitable for arousing attraction towards the represented saint, so they encourage us to follow their morals. Visual representation helps to understand what the preaching abstractly expresses, it encourages believers more directly during the viewing of the image to follow what they heard. At the same time, visual representation suits human nature, since the picture confirms what faith assumes. This is what distinguishes the veneration of sacred images from idolatry (Vanyó 2007).

Saint John of Damascus's (8<sup>th</sup> century) opinion about the veneration of images was defined by the worship of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints. He made a distinction between the veneration of images and idolatry. According to his theory, the homage expressed toward the picture goes back to the represented saint (proto-image) (Vanyó 2007).

The pictures are filled by God's grace, which is called to them by those whom they represent. Although pictures mediate grace, they are not equivalent to sacraments: in case of sacred images the essential presence of the Holy Spirit is out of the question. However, the sacred image also mediates revelation in a certain sense: the spectator gets through the representation and in 'immaterial contemplation' gets to the proto-image. Thus the icon gives a starting point, it

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<sup>1</sup> The study was supported by project Nr. K078207 of OTKA. Special thanks to Gabriella Kiss for the translation.

inspires thoughts and becomes the target of spiritual observation. So the fact of the Incarnation fully legitimises the representation of Christ in a human form, since the Son appeared in the world as a real man: the Incarnation spiritualised the material and made it suitable for its own representation.

A dauntless preacher of icon-veneration was Abbot Theodore Studites (759-826) who said that viewing icons is everybody's moral obligation (Vanyó 2007).

The ends of Christian use of pictures stabilised at the end of the Middle Ages: on the one hand, theological illustrations with a strictly organising purpose, on the other hand, pictures of private worship. The theological illustrations are pictures made with didactical purpose that try to put abstract thoughts or thought systems into clear, visual form. These illustrations rendered help to learning philosophy and theology or served as a starting point for further contemplations. As opposed to this, the images of private devotion had the task of encouraging private devoutness. During the viewing of the picture, the thought has to adapt to the view: the picture inspires the personality, transforms the viewer. Thus these pictures speak to the emotions in the first place, they serve for immersing in the spiritual content, and on a higher level, for mystic recognition. The flowering of the pictures of private devotion fell to 14-15<sup>th</sup> century: it was at this period that a great many smaller, portable boards and emotionally upsetting illustrations of prayer books appeared. Their common quality is that their purpose is always recalling a certain mood or emotional state, and through inspiring the heart, the encouragement of a prayer-state. The representations of pictures of private devotion deepen and emphasise emotional contents: for example, tender love and care in case of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in case of the Passion, they fix and detail the narrative components, thus encouraging the viewers to derive from their own emotions and reviving the passion of Christ and identifying with it (Nacsinák 2005).

So the use of pictures is also important because they speak to all of our abilities and they encourage us to act. The more you let the picture capture you, the more you are formed by the content of the images. With representations it is not the content that is the most important – the mystery that the picture tries to make you understand – and not only the artistic perfection. An important means of religious socialisation is the teachings of the Church represented through images. Its mostly accepted means in everyday life were the small pictures representing the saints, Jesus and Mary (Korpics 2006).

According to Karl Rahner, the image is the representation of the reality in connection with man, which is characteristic of human thinking. This is based on the idea that in human cognition perception is the sensation through seeing and because of this, “concepts” can only be understandable with the help of “notions”. Here, the sight of the viewer is defined and also transformed by the visually represented content and the individual ability to see (imagination). The veneration of images is a “relative cult” because it bears relation to the represented person

(only s/he is entitled to the “absolute cult”), so the image has no cult value of its own. Only God can be granted real prayer, the picture gets veneration only. The degree and importance of the homage can increase in consequence of the Church tradition, or because of the history of the picture itself (pictures, icons at places of pilgrimage) (Rahner – Vorgrimler 1980).

There are three types of sacred images pertaining to places of pilgrimage:

The first group is that the devotional pictures (Picture 1): the cult of the particular place has developed in relation to them. There is no connection between the artistic quality of devotional pictures and the degree of worship. Veneration does not belong to a person who likes arts, but on the one hand, it is homage to the saint represented in the picture, on the other hand, it is respect paid to the contents symbolically related to the history and miracles of the holy place.

The second picture type belongs to the other aspect of the cult surrounding places of worship, this type is the votive picture (Picture 2). Votive pictures are the pictures of thankfulness and gratitude. The pilgrims express their gratitude to the holy person – in most cases, the Blessed Virgin Mary – in an objectified way. The golden age of votive pictures is the 18<sup>th</sup> century when it was a habit mainly among the nobility, although in later centuries it also became widespread among lower layers of society.

The third category is the sacred images sold as “souvenirs” at holy places (Picture 3). According to Zoltán Szilárdfy’s definition, sacred images are usually flat religious representations, independent of size, material, technique and function. In a narrower sense, in this category belong the works of graphical nature that have devotional purposes. In the course of history there was a differentiation between sacred images meant for the public and made for private use, but they only became mass products, cheap goods sold at fairs and parish feasts with the appearance of multiplying graphical operations. (Szilárdfy 1995)

The sacred images themselves represent saints, biblical scenes, and their cult has been demonstrable up to now: they are the vehicles, mediators of religious ideas, preventive and healing power is attributed to them. The pictures made with the purpose of becoming presents have been sold at places of pilgrimage since the Middle Ages, they have also become souvenirs, their holy nature was ensured by touching them to the devotional picture. In these places it was necessary so that the pilgrims could take them to be reminded of the shrine. The advertising role of the picture was also important because the small picture had the purpose to make the holy place more popular in distant places as well. Sacred images still play an important role in the life of places of pilgrimage. (Korpics 2006)

In my research I examine the influence of devotional pictures and sacred images. In the two settlements – Máriapócs and Piricse - there is not wide-ranging saint-worship, the central saint is Mary, and some people also mentioned Jesus.

### **3. The veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the conceptions about Her and Jesus in connection with sacred images**

The worship of the Blessed Virgin has a central significance in folk religiosity. According to János Hetény, people search for the ways of an encounter and a kind of coexistence with the Virgin. It is a typical idea that this encounter can happen at any time, because she often visits the inhabitants of villages. Folk devotion places the Mother of God in its own country environment, so She can be approached and understood through human sympathy. However, the encounter with Her is never finite, but each Marian feast offers another new opportunity of living together with Her. (Hetény 2001b)

In folk religiosity there is a very complex image of the Blessed Virgin Mary: she is the heavenly mother, the patron of pilgrims, she forgives sinners, protects from evil and troubles, she can heal, perform miracles, help, etc. So on the one hand, She is a miracle-worker with extraordinary powers, a being with divine attributes, on the other hand, she is a woman with qualities like that of an average human being.

My experiences so far have proved that the sacred images form only a part of the variety of the factors influencing the image of the Virgin (e.g. teachings of the Bible, miracles, revelations). Generally – though not sharply separable – it can be said that the influencing factors change according to the appearance, looks (beauty, brown hair, white clothes) and inner qualities (good, loving, caring, anxious) of the Saint. The Virgin's inner qualities are based on the Bible: she is a special woman because of her immaculacy, who had been and remained a virgin before and after the birth of Jesus. Her role being The Mother of God in the Salvation History presents us the image of a “warm-hearted, affectionate” holy mother, a saint woman. However, Her miracles and revelations, messages to different mediums emphasise that She is also a helper, a mediator of grace, who intervenes for people, who pleads their cause, the forgiving of their sins with Jesus. In this way, She is the saint you can always turn to, She listens to all the requests. All this is reinforced, confirmed by personal experiences in many cases: “I was called to go Medjugorje, I told them I couldn't, I didn't have money. I told the Virgin, ‘I know you are calling me, because I can feel it, but you also know what kind of limits I have. If you solve it, I leave it to you.’ In a week my financial problem was solved.” (Interview with P. Jánosné Vilma 2011). “My husband died in the August of 1985, I was ill, with two children under age [...] with the help of the Virgin I was able to get through this very hard period” (Interview with Z. Sándorné Mária 2011).

The visual representations mostly take part in determining the Virgin's look, but inner qualities can also be reflected in them. According to the pictures through which people imagine Her, the Mother of God is described as “very beautiful”, “the most beautiful”, an “enchanted” beauty. Jacques Maquet, in his work entitled

*The Aesthetic Experience* expounds that the words “beautiful” and “magnificent” summarise the positive visual response to the object, so they are more related to the state of mind than to the description of the topic. So when somebody calls a representation “beautiful”, they think that while watching, they are fascinated, captivated by the visual experience. The materialistic justification of the aesthetic meaning is based upon the forms. The whole composition of the work is an important formal characteristic feature. As the contemplative viewing of pictures is holistic, the symbolic meaning of different colours and forms is apprehensible to the senses instinctively; thinking and analysis come later. The symbol and the symbolised are parts of the same process: when the viewer gains experience about a symbol, s/he knows about what it symbolises at the same time (Maquet 2003).

The Blessed Virgin Mary is always represented as a woman in a long dress, with a shawl on Her head, Her face and figure is drawn with fine, arched lines, which suggest femininity, softness, fineness. In the believers’ imagination Her dress is white or light blue, Her face is light pink, and Her hair is brown, just like in many sacred images (Picture 4). These light colours all symbolise peace, harmony, tranquillity, and white is the colour of chastity, purity. The Mother of God is always described as a young woman by the inhabitants of both settlements. They mentioned another quality: that She is a calm, smiling woman.

The posture and movements of the represented person also carry a symbolic meaning, which also influence the overall effect of the picture (Picture 5-7). The Saint is either represented with the child Jesus or praying with clasped hands, at other times with outstretched arms or with arms stretched forward. All these suggest different things for the viewer and in this case the already mentioned inner attributes also return: the representation with the little Jesus means motherly love, caring, concern, protection; the praying posture of the hands suggests the mediating role, the representation with outstretched arms also means the intercession, helpfulness, support for people.

A special phenomenon is when the believer imagines the Virgin as seen in the icon of the holy place. Despite my previous hypothesis (that this is true for most of the people of Máriapócs), I met such people not only in Pócs, but in Piricse, too, but this is true for only part of Pócs people. These notions are not dominated by aesthetic principles (like the ones mentioned before), but by simplicity: Mother Mary is a simple woman with the Child in her lap, with a necklace of pearls in her neck, a flower in her hands. So in this case people place Her in their own environment, as opposed to the previous case, when She is imagined as a beautiful woman, so She is an unattainable, unworldly creature. The conception generated by the icon is sometimes in connection with the “changing” of the icon (Pictures 1 and 8): “I imagined Mary as I saw Her in my childhood in the old icon of Máriapócs, in a cloak, with a sad face. I imagine Her as a dark bride. Now like the icon of Pócs:

simple, smiling, light, with a necklace of pearls, with a flower” (Interview with G. László 2011).

However, because of the effects of visual representation, the believers do not always manage to form a unified image of the Blessed Virgin. The different representations of Her – devotional pictures, icons, sacred images – can raise confusion on the one hand, as the Virgin Mother is represented differently in each type (Pictures 9-12). One of the women of Máriapócs says the following about it: “I have the picture of Lourdes and the picture of Medjugorje and Pócs on my mind, I’m arranging them in my head, that all these are the same one person, but I can’t imagine Mary” (Interview with S. Attiláné 2011).

On the other hand, according to another woman: “I have been to many churches, the Virgin is different in all of the churches, I have seen Her being ugly, but I can only imagine Her being beautiful. I can’t compare Her to any of the pictures, it isn’t true that She looks like the way She is painted, because the Mother of God can’t be compared to earthly things” (Interview with Cs. Miklósné 2011).

Like with the Virgin Mary, the notions related to Jesus also show the variety of visual representations, at the same time you have to rely more on your imagination (Pictures 13-15). I would like to quote one of the Pócs women’s opinions:

Jesus is different, Him I must almost imagine, like how tall He is ... I have to imagine how Jesus looks like, He is quite tall, He has brown hair and a beard... His face always reflects agony, it is not sad, rather grave. I’ve seen pictures of Him, paintings and pictures, but they can’t represent Him because there is this thing, His eyes, for me always these eyes, at the moment of resurrection I look into those eyes, it’s as if he’d pierce through my whole being. For me these eyes are like this. However, His hands are rougher, so it’s not gentle like the Virgin’s hands, very soft and silky. [...] But for me, His face is not sad, it is grave. It is always like as if He wanted to tell or make me feel something important, but He doesn’t say it. [...] Because when He speaks, says things, then His face is kind of brighter [ellipses in the original]. (Interview with P. Jánosné 2011)

It should also be noted that apart from devotional pictures and sacred images, other forms of visual representations should be taken into consideration that also influence the notions related to saints. It can be seen in the notions about Jesus: in several cases believers said that they imagine how He looks like not only according to sacred images, but also according to the influence of TV and films.

There is another outstanding example, when Jesus appeared to a woman like the way she had seen Him on a noticeboard in the church: “and then the door of the tabernacle opened, Jesus came, He came out of the tabernacle, He looked like the



picture on the door saying ‘Welcome’, well, Our Lord Jesus was represented with this half-long hair and smiling face and He looked like as He was coming out of the tabernacle and He held a key in His hands, a key with a key-case” (Interview with P. Jánosné 2011).

The fusion of the saint and the image can be perceived in both settlements. People do not talk about the sacred images as the representations of saints but when they see the face of the represented saint changing, they say: “If I trespass, Jesus doesn’t look at me that way, I can see on Him that He knows I trespassed” (Interview with S. Attiláné 2011). “We were singing and then it smiled (the statue of the Virgin), then there was a case when we went there and another group came and the Virgin Mother is so sad, so sad” (Interview with P. Jánosné 2011). In folk belief the rational civilian classification of the non-living material is not valid for the sacred objects representing saints, but they almost have a personal existence. So the representations are completely identified with the given saint. In this way, the representations can give the direct experience of the heavenly world and divine presence to the believers.

#### **4. The Blessed Virgin Mary in visions**

The sign of the intimate relationship with the Blessed Virgin is that her living manifestation is often perceived in the form of dreams or sometimes visions.

For believers a transcendental world exists as real, which is populated by supernatural beings, similar to the earthly world. For those who accept the heavenly sphere it is natural that supernatural beings can appear to them and communicate with them (Pozsony 1991).

According to Éva Pócs, a vision is a subjective experience about the personal encounter with the supernatural: supernatural communication. It depends on the function and cultural context of the vision what kind of spiritual beings the visioner communicates with, so a Christian person supposedly encounters the Blessed Virgin Mary or Jesus. The main function of religious visions is getting revelations, and the mediation of messages to the living. There are more practical roles among them: messages to the community, village or family; teachings, warnings; commands to build a church or to found a shrine. Visions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century can contain a warning concerning personal life or instructions related to religious devotion. In the birth of visions, isolation, loneliness, fast, meditation and/or contemplation can play a role. Those women who are more deeply religious, who are inclined to contemplation, who have a connection with the other-world through prayers or meditation have more visions (Pócs 1998).

However, according to Tamás Grynaeus it is not right to use the term “vision” in connection with these experiences, since dream, light sleep, wakefulness and rapture are states with different integration of consciousness, where the

classification of “normal” and “abnormal” is different. Among the members of communities with different behavioural and moral standards, it can be a source of (sometimes tragic) misunderstandings (Grynaeus 1991).

In most cases the visions are experienced at home, in dreams; they are iconic-visual or object-visual and they are related to verbality and to a person at the same time.<sup>2</sup> The visions experienced in dreams occur more frequently and they have rich symbolism. Some interesting examples:

We were at the mass, and it is on my mind, I remember the details, too and the father, and there were many young people, and he said he needed help with the communion, to hold the tray, so that he could administer the sacrament, but there was nobody, then when he came to my pew I told him that I would [help] and took hold of it. First, two hosts fell to the ground, then there was another young man, he took them up, but I don't know what became of him, he just took it up, so they shouldn't be stamped on. Then three more fell and I lay low next to them so that nobody could step on them, but I held them, then they disappeared around me, everybody disappeared, but I was there with the host and then the Virgin took my hands. We were floating, went in the air, we went on and we landed at the edge of a kind of cornfield, but the host was there on the ground, but in my hands, too, but the Virgin was holding my hand and the cornleaves were rattling, then came a snow-white lamb, and a huge snow-white dog was chasing the lamb. Then I knew that the dog is very shifty and then the Virgin told me that “you have Jesus with you, is there anything to be scared of?” (Interview with P. Jánosné 2011)

There is another case that I remember with the Virgin, it was that I longed for a pilgrimage, especially to Krakow, but I couldn't go, I didn't have money, and the pilgrims went and it hurt me, you know, that I couldn't go, you know, and then I almost started to cry, you must be able to surrender and I tried to console myself. And then I dreamt that the Virgin said “Don't worry, come!” Then we went and She took me to the picture of Jesus that is in Krakow “My Jesus, I trust you!”, She took me there, and it was such a joyful feeling after that, that although I wasn't able to go, only in my dream, but I saw that picture anyway, and I was able to pray in front of it, and I said: “Do you find out everything? Do you do everything?” (Interview with P. Jánosné 2011)

Another similar, Mary-related experience is when the Mother of God showed her “own empire” to a woman, on the first anniversary of her 11-year-old son's death, and she led her into a beautiful quince-garden. “One of my children died, he

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<sup>2</sup> For the classification, cf. Limbacher 1998.

was 11 years old, he drowned in the water, and of course I cried and then, on the first anniversary of his death: ‘Don’t cry, because it is very bad for me, but come and I’ll show you my empire’. And She took my hands and She took me to a very beautiful quince garden, the like of which isn’t anywhere on Earth, and angels and farther the Virgin and I feel very good here. This is what she showed me and then I stopped crying” (Interview with P. Jánosné 2011).

In these dreams Mary often appears similar to the representations in pictures, but at the same time she is completely different. ”She has beautiful brown hair and long, but usually just the veil, it couldn’t be seen very well, but I saw her hair. [...] She cannot be compared to a picture and especially not to a statue” (Interview with P. Jánosné 2011).

So according to those who went through similar experiences She cannot be compared to any of the pictures, and “especially not” to a statue. However, it occurred that She was compared to a photo of a statue. Since in dreams the Virgin appears as a very beautiful woman, she is rather perceived as a supernatural being, and the statues cannot reflect this in the same way as the pictures.

In the visions the Virgin usually appears as a heavenly mother: “She radiates motherly love. It can be expressed this way, so that I guard, protect, I am concerned for, I feel a kind of solicitous love. As if She approved that it is right, like when we tell our children ‘It’s OK, my son, it’s good, well done’. She is kind of guarding, protecting, approving, so like this... it can’t be explained, I can’t explain it.” (Interview with P. Jánosné 2011)

There is a phenomenon similar to the notions related to sacred images: when the Mother of God appears in the believer’s dream as the image of the wonder-working icon of the holy place:

I imagine her very beautiful, because I saw her in my dream, too. Now, that I was about to be operated on, I saw the Virgin in the hospital. I told my beads every morning. I was lying in my hospital room next to the window where the moon and the morning-star accompanied each other. I fell back to sleep and I saw the Blessed Virgin Mary in the form in which She is reconstructed in Pócs. I saw her legs, too, in full form. When I returned home, I told the others to mind my words that I would fall seriously ill. (Interview with I. Jánosné 2008)

In the other group of visions the pictures come to life while praying: during the Way of the Cross, wounds and blood appear in the Jesus-picture, during the prayer blood flows from the edge of the Virgin’s mouth in the picture.

With Jesus it was very hard... there is the Jesus face from the veil. It was after a holy confession, I was given the Way of the Cross by Father Illés, and I

didn't live here but on the other side, but this picture was the way as it is now. I'm kneeling here, you know, and I'm contemplating through the Stations of the Cross. In connection with this I have a booklet entitled 'The Way of the Cross With the Virgin'. She is next to me and we are crying and hugging each other and when I do this, it's fantastic. She is by me. When there was the Way of the Cross and after the first two stations I'm so involved that I'm almost there and the picture ... scars began to appear on it and the scars started to come to life, and the whole face came to life and it shed blood. Oh, it was such a terror that I cried, 'Don't show, don't show it to me, it nearly kills me, I don't want to see it'. (Interview with P. Jánosné 2011)

In my opinion this can be explained by the fact that during the viewing the representation itself enhances the impression raised by it. During the sensation viewers lose the sense of place, time and body, they identify with what they see in the picture. This is another example for how a picture influences the way believers see the saints, which, in this case, really happens.

The Virgin's appearance as a mother in visions gives a sense of safety and protection to the visioner, which can also raise the illusion of reality in them. The woman who had more dreams and visions with the Virgin sees Her as a real person, she talks to Her and the Virgin protects and helps her. "My relation with the Blessed Virgin Mary becomes so intimate as if she was alive, she looks at me, like when we talk. I don't have a conception, for me it's like reality, it is reality. I don't imagine Her, for me it's like as if She was really there, and for me it's reality, not fiction." (Interview with P. Jánosné 2011)

## **5. Summary**

As seen above, sacred representations define the conceptions of saints significantly, although these objects are only a part of the factors that have an impact on these notions. This study examined the effect of sacred images and devotional pictures made for private devotion in two settlements: a place of worship, Máriapócs and a nearby village, Piricse.

The composition of the representation is very significant in the case of both picture-types, since the viewers perceive the picture as a whole, while the different shapes and colours affect them instinctively. All these have a great influence on how the believers think about the appearance and inner qualities of a particular saint – in this case, the Blessed Virgin Mary.

As a conclusion, it can be said that the Virgin means the heavenly mother, love, family and protection, safety for the believers of both settlements. It is

reflected not only in the conceptions about Her and the names given to Her – Virgin Mother, Mum –, but also in dreams and visions about Her.

In connection with the researched settlements it can be stated that a town being a place of worship does not have significant influence on how its inhabitants imagine the Virgin Mary. So the inhabitants of Máriapócs do not imagine Her according to the devotional picture of Pócs: they are more influenced by the different sacred images and pictures of other holy places.

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### **Interview subjects**

- Cs. Miklósné, Máriapócs, 2011.  
G. László, Máriapócs, 2011.  
I. Jánosné, Máriapócs, 2008.  
P. Jánosné Vilma, Máriapócs, 2011.  
S. Attiláné, Máriapócs, 2011.  
Z. Sándorné Mária, Máriapócs, 2011.

## Self-made photos (2008-2010)



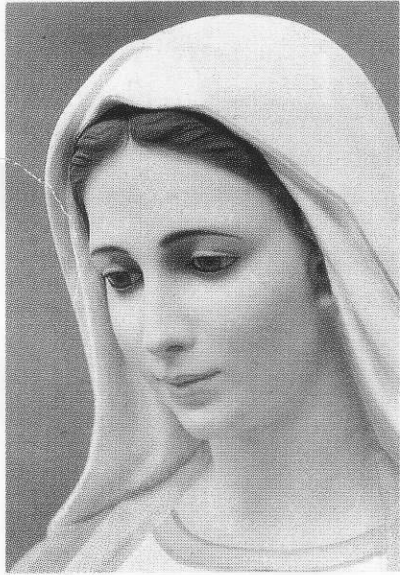
Picture 1. The devotional picture of Máriapócs



Picture 2. Votive picture



Picture 3. Sacred images



**Én, Anyátok vagyok.**

Picture 4. The Virgin as the believers imagine Her



Picture 5. The praying Virgin



Picture 6. The Virgin with the child Jesus



Picture 7. The Virgin with outstretched arms





Picture 8. The "old" devotional picture of Máriapócs



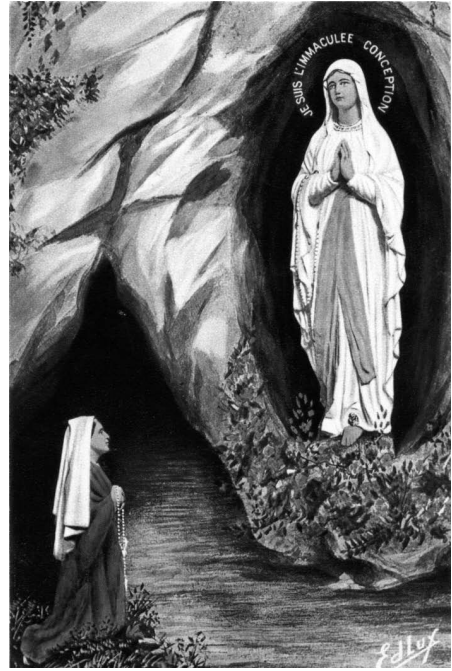
Picture 9.



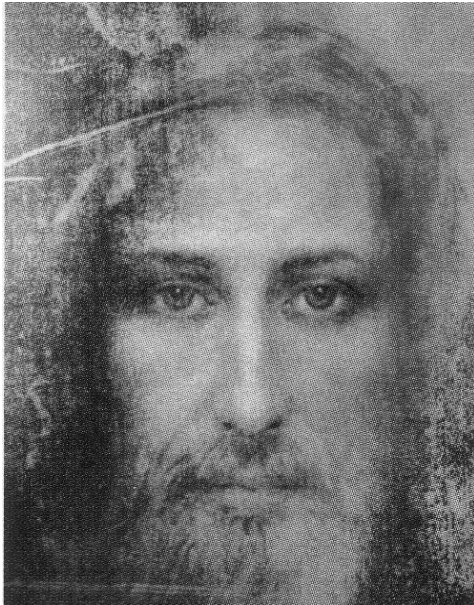
Picture 10.



Picture 11.



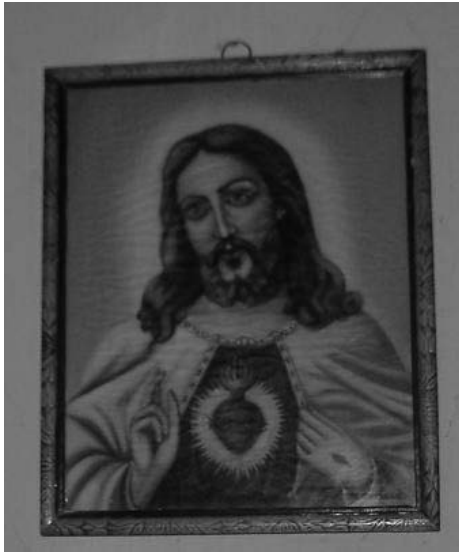
Picture 12.



Picture 13.



Picture 14.



Picture 15.