

Anthropology

SMALL RELIGIOUS IMAGES AS INSTRUMENTS OF SOCIAL
INTERACTION
AN ANALYSIS OF HOLY CARDS BASED ON A CĂPLENI
COLLECTION¹

Mária SZIKSZAI

Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania

e-mail: maria@szikszaimaria.ro

Abstract

This study analyzes a collection of 245 small holy cards preserved in a private collection in Căpleni (Romania). The primary aim is to explore the origins, functions, and connections of these holy cards with local religious societies. By focusing on the personal inscriptions and messages on these images, the research seeks to uncover how they were used and how they contributed to shaping interpersonal relationships. The methodology involves categorizing the items based on their usage occasions and the nature of their inscriptions, prioritizing qualitative aspects. The study employs theoretical frameworks such as the concepts of social objects and object biographies, to interpret the functions and social significance of the images. The findings reveal that these small religious images served not only devotional purposes but also acted as social catalysts that facilitated the maintenance and reinforcement of relationships within the community. The gifting and exchange of holy cards were embedded in social interactions, often accompanied by personal messages that documented and strengthened social bonds. These practices contributed to the reproduction of social capital by continuously reaffirming mutual recognition and obligations among community members. In conclusion, the study highlights the multifaceted roles of small devotional images as instruments of both personal piety and social connectivity. The analysis underscores the importance of considering the social life of objects to fully appreciate their cultural and anthropological significance within a given community.

Keywords: holy cards; interpersonal relationships; object biographies; religious images; social objects.

The objective of my study is to present and analyze a collection of small, paper-printed religious images preserved in a private collection in Satu Mare County.² In the course of this study, I aim to explore the origins, function, and connection of the collection's pieces to local religious societies, and to demonstrate how these materials contribute to a deeper understanding of the history of ethnographic objects and reveal aspects of religious life in Căpleni in the 20th century. The collectors and users of the materials under study were members of the Hungarian-speaking communities of Swabian origin in the 20th century. Furthermore, I will discuss how these small religious images participated in shaping interpersonal relationships. For this, I have

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² I discovered the collection of small devotional images alongside a larger collection of documents during fieldwork in Căpleni (Satu Mare County, Romania) in 2013. Initially, it was unclear that these holy cards, stored separately, were distinct from the larger archive of 2,400 records. For the detailed analysis of this document collection, see Szikszai 2023.

primarily focused on the personal notes appearing on these prints, through which I aim to determine the function of these images of private devotion during the time of their use.

1. The Origin of the Material Examined

The material discussed in this study consists of 245 small, paper-printed religious images.³ I discovered these items in Căpleni in 2013, among the paper-based records stored in the attic of the parish, deemed old by the local community. Based on the inscriptions on the pages, it is assumed that most elements of the collection were assembled by Jenő Gajdos, known by his Franciscan name, P. Vince (1926–1986)⁴ (hereafter referred to as Vince Gajdos). However, certain pieces extend beyond Vince Gajdos's lifetime. Given that the collection includes items that originated well before his birth, it can be surmised that he added the devotional images and commemorative sheets he received alongside materials collected by others.

The gifting of such devotional image collections is also documented in the scholarly literature. Zoltán Szilárdfy began his own collection following a similar event and then published this collection (Szilárdfy, 1997, p. 7), and a similar collection practice is reported by another duo of authors, Diana George and Mariolina Rizzi Salvatori (George & Salvatori, 2008, pp. 257, 259). Some museums and university libraries hold extensive collections of small devotional images.⁵

2. The Development of Small Religious Images in Private Devotion in the Region

In this region, the origin of religious images used in private devotion dates back to the 13th century, when they were painted on paper or parchment in monasteries (Csukovits, 2018, p. 20). These images were primarily distributed by pilgrimage sites, serving not only a sacred function but also promoting the pilgrimage locations. Believers attached them to various places, such as walls, furniture, or clothing, for protection (Csukovits, 2018, pp. 20-21). Ethnographic research indicates that religious images only became visible in Hungarian peasant homes from the 18th century onwards (Csilléry, 1991, p. 30). The genre of small, paper-printed devotional images in Hungarian scholarship was most prominently showcased by Zoltán Szilárdfy, who published a detailed catalogue of these in two volumes, accompanied by a brief historical overview (Szilárdfy, 1995; Szilárdfy, 1997). In these volumes, the author systematically organized and published the small devotional images in his possession, reinforcing his interpretation of these images exclusively as minor graphic art pieces. In the introduction to his published catalogue, Szilárdfy explains that his collection was originally based on items owned by family members, which he received as gifts, to which he added items he collected himself (Szilárdfy, 1997, p. 7). We will see that a similar process occurred in the

³ In this study, the term holy cards refers to small cards featuring religious images, not consecrated ones. I apply the definition of holy cards as “small printed cards containing pious sentiments or depicting popular religious figures. Widely distributed after the advent of printing, the cards are used as mementos of religious events, to foster a particular devotion, or as a means of remembrance, e.g., for a deceased person.” (Richard P. McBrien, general editor, *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, cited in George & Salvatori, 2008, p. 251).

⁴ Jenő Gajdos, P. Vince, was ordained in 1956. He was a monastic priest. He first served as an assistant priest in Dej (Cluj County, Romania), then in Gârbou (Sălaj County, Romania), and from 1958 onward, he was a parish priest in Iojib (Satu Mare County, Romania). In 1968, he began his service in Căpleni, where he remained until his death in 1986 (Ilyés, 2006, p. 319). In the study, the abbreviation “P.” preceding male names stands for “Pater,” which is the title and form of address for an ordained priest in clerical monastic communities. Similarly, the “M.” before the names of nuns stands for “Mater,” which is the title and form of address for the superior general and choir sisters in female monastic orders.

⁵ For example, the University of Dayton has a collection of over 18,000 small devotional images (source: [University of Dayton Archives] (<https://archivescatalog.udayton.edu/repositories/2/resources/92>, accessed 19.10.2024), while the Hungarian Ethnographic Museum in Budapest holds an 11,000-piece collection from a private collector (Szacsavay, 2000, p. 411).

collection discussed in this study: the owner added pieces he received or collected to those from an earlier collection.

An intriguing perspective comes from the research of Éva Knapp and Gábor Tüskés, who interpret image usage from the standpoint of emblematics.⁶ In this perspective, they discuss emblematic biographies of saints, illustrations in miracle books, graphic illustrations in society publications, illustrations appearing in 18th-century religious chapbooks, and finally, single-sheet peasant woodcuts from the 18th and 19th centuries (Knapp & Tüskés 2004). The approach adopted by the authors in the aforementioned research is primarily iconographic, cultural-historical, and emblematic rather than ethnographic or anthropological. They do not address the usage and function of the images, the practices formed around them, or the values transmitted by these practices. My study employs the anthropological view and examines the cultural values transmitted by these practices: it focuses on the inscriptions and messages visible on small religious images, drawing conclusions from these about when, by whom, and how these images were used, as well as what role these images held in daily life.

3. Holy Cards in Folk Religious Practice

Diana George and Mariolina Rizzi Salvatori's study (2008) highlights that holy images are not merely religious objects but physical manifestations of everyday religious practice, playing a vital role in preserving personal and communal memory related to faith. George and Salvatori's research revealed that in the communities they observed, these sacred cards were not just religious objects; they played a variety of roles in everyday life. They were often given as school rewards for winning spelling competitions, completing religious tasks or even minor acts of service. The authors add that they were also found to serve as a communication tool, with teachers, students, parents and friends writing personal messages on the blank backs. In addition, people kept them in books, purses or pinned to their clothes, used them as personal reminders of faith and as a source of comfort, and often reached for them in times of need (George & Salvatori, 2008, pp. 256-257). They point out that these items, although occasionally regulated by the Catholic Church hierarchy, remained popular among believers because they provided tools to make religious practice tangible (George & Salvatori, 2008, pp. 252-253). The authors also emphasize in their research that religious images uniquely bridge the gap between official theological discourse and folk religious experiences. As part of visual literacy, these images support the daily practice of religious faith, which is often focused not on theological depth but rather on the physical expression of faith (George & Salvatori, 2008, pp. 254-255). The authors also noted that the study of small devotional images presupposes the researcher's access to private collections.

Hungarian ethnographic research emphasizes that visual representations have played and continue to play an important role in Catholic communities in deepening individual and communal religious life, educating the faithful, and supporting their spiritual development (S. Laczkovits, 1991, p. 44). Believers acquired these religious images inexpensively at

⁶ "Az emblematika mint szintetizáló művészet a képzőművészet és az irodalom rendszerébe ágyazott, a kép és a szöveg által együttesen meghatározott, tömeges mértékben előállított, terjesztett és használt kifejezési forma. (...) Az emblematika az európai művészeti hagyomány ikonográfiai közhelyeinek gyűjteménye, amelyben az antik, középkori és reneszánsz szimbólumrendszerekből származó elemeket a hagyomány tekintélye hitelesíti. Az emlémképek egy széles körben ismert ikonográfiai nyelv részét alkotják. Túlnyomó többségük jelentése kulturálisan meghatározott, és egy kialakult befogadási konvenciórendszerre épít." (Knapp & Tüskés, 2004, p. 16). [Emblematics, as a synthesizing art, is embedded within the systems of visual arts and literature, forming an expressive mode jointly determined by image and text, produced, disseminated, and utilized on a mass scale. (...) Emblematics constitutes a collection of iconographic commonplaces within the European artistic tradition, where elements derived from antique, medieval, and Renaissance symbolic systems are authenticated by the authority of tradition. Emblematic images are part of a widely recognized iconographic language. The vast majority of their meanings are culturally determined and rely on an established system of reception conventions. – our translation.]

pilgrimages and fairs, and they were also distributed by itinerant vendors (S. Laczkovits, 1991, p. 44).⁷

A significant role in the dissemination of small holy images was played by Catholic societies. Popular graphics, often described in scholarly literature as images for private devotion, were connected to their activities, with some depictions likely circulated through their networks. This is why it is worthwhile to document which religious societies operated in a given region. Some research suggests that between 1563 and 1780, approximately 1,300 religious societies may have been active in historical Hungary (Knapp & Tüskés, 2004, p. 155). Among these societies, those with a higher level of organization also distributed printed publications. According to the estimates of Éva Knapp and Gábor Tüskés, this was characteristic of about ten percent of all societies (Knapp & Tüskés, 2004, p. 155).

In Căpleni, a vibrant catholic society life existed at the beginning of the 20th century. In a previous study, I uncovered traces of the presence and operation of religious societies in the village (Szikszai, 2013, pp. 145-156). This reconstruction was made possible partly through interviews with informants and partly from data in the parish archives. I identified the following societies and associations, noting the years corresponding to the data available:

1. Perpetual Rosary Society, 1894–1992
2. Third Order of St. Francis, continuously from the second half of the 20th century to the 21st century
3. St. Anthony of Padua Prayer Union, 1902
4. Society of the Living Stations of the Cross, 1909
5. Society of the Holy Scapular, 1912
6. Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, 1914
7. Society of Mary (Brotherhood), around 1927
8. Army of the Holy Cross, 1927, 1928
9. Association of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, 1932
10. Catholic Young Men's Society, 1932
11. Catholic Agricultural Youth Society (KALOT), 1941
12. Altar Society, 1948
13. Society of St. Joseph, 2013 (Szikszai, 2013, p. 153).

The spread of small religious images and the establishment of their use are largely linked to these religious associations and the religious practices that were organized around them.

4. Presentation of Data

As mentioned, the material forming the basis of this study was likely collected by Vince Gajdos, but it includes images from periods before his lifetime, as well as images gifted by others to others during his lifetime. The collection consists of sheets of various sizes and functions, with the common characteristic that, with a few exceptions, they are all paper-based. The exceptions include, for instance, a sheet with a textile cutout glued onto it and another case where dried and flattened plants were affixed to paper sheets.

In examining the collection, I attempted to categorize the items based on the occasions and ways they were used. Below, I describe these items according to these categories,

⁷ It is known that in many cases, individuals of peasant origin not only sold the images at fairs but also produced them themselves. For example, according to a study by Károly Kós, in the first half of the 20th century, in certain Transylvanian settlements peasant-origin individuals played a significant role in icon painting (Nicula), or they were actively engaged in woodcut production (Hășdate). These religious-themed works were not only used within their own communities but were also sold, becoming part of the local economy. Kós emphasizes that these activities were not merely crafts but played an important role in the visual culture of folk religiosity. (Kós, 1994, pp. 13–15).

prioritizing qualitative aspects. In some categories, multiple images belong together; in these cases, the description addresses them collectively. Some categories include fewer images, but those with handwritten inscriptions providing valuable information are treated with particular attention. In every case, I placed the emphasis on images carrying personal messages, because from these one can outline the use of the images and the social relationships that accompanied them. The handwritten texts on the pictures are in Hungarian. Below I publish both the original and the English translation of each quoted text.

4.1 Mass Commemoratives

These holy cards mark pivotal moments in the life of a priest, such as the first Mass following ordination and the 25th, 50th, and 60th anniversaries of this first Mass, commemorated as silver, golden, and diamond jubilees, respectively, with devotional image-bearing commemorative sheets.

The first occasion when a young priest prepared and distributed such sheets to the congregation and acquaintances was his first Mass after ordination. After celebrating his first Mass, the young priest distributed these commemorative sheets to the faithful and fellow priests attending the event. This collection contains 35 commemorative sheets prepared for first Mass occasions.

One interesting aspect of the collection is that it includes two shared commemorative holy cards. In 1957, a joint commemorative holy card was prepared by 18 graduates ordained as priests in April 1957. The card listed the names of all 18 graduates alongside their birthplaces. These 18 priests came from three dioceses, as indicated on the sheet: 12 were from the Diocese of Transylvania, four from the Diocese of Satu Mare, and two from the Diocese of Timișoara. There are two copies of this card in the collection; one bears a handwritten note: “Szeretettel P. Vincének” [With love to P. Vince] though the gift giver remains unknown. Among the names listed is that of a graduate from Căpleni: József Ludescher. József Ludescher (1929–1989) was born in Căpleni and was ordained on April 28, 1957 (Ilyés, 2006, p. 353).

In the same year, in November 1957, five Franciscans were also ordained as priests; they, too, had a shared card displaying the names of the five newly ordained priests. It appears, however, that some also made individual cards in addition to the shared commemorative card, as a name appearing on the common list (eg., Sándor Bakos) is also found on a separate commemorative card. The aforementioned József Ludescher also had a personal commemorative card, which is included in the collection.

Some chose not to have a commemorative card printed; instead, they wrote the customary information for a first Mass by hand on the back of a photograph reproducing an illustration of a saint. This included their chosen motto, the location and date of ordination, the location and date of the first Mass, and, of course, their own name.

The distribution of first Mass cards by year is as follows: 1905: 1; 1929: 2; 1934: 1; 1936: 2; 1937: 1; 1938: 1; 1941: 1; 1943: 1; 1948: 1; 1956: 4; 1957: 13; 1958: 1; 1960: 1; 1961: 1; 1965: 2; 1966: 1; 1967: 1. As we can see, the number of cards increased in the mid-1950s, partly because Vince Gajdos was ordained in 1956, giving him connections with students from those years.

Among the jubilee commemorative cards in the collection, 15 were created for silver jubilees, seven for golden jubilees, and one for a diamond jubilee.

It is worth pausing to examine the collection’s oldest card, dating back to 1905. This commemorative card marks the first Mass of the Franciscan priest P. Béla Stefanovics, held in Trnava (Slovakia). The card is notable for its four gray patches in the corners of the text side, evidence of it having been affixed somewhere at some point with the image facing outward. Presumably, someone was drawn to the illustration on the front, an admittedly beautiful

depiction of Christ, and decided to paste it somewhere. Later, the card was included in the collection with these patches still visible. There is no other card in the collection of such age. This card likely survived precisely because someone admired the illustration adorning one side and, disregarding its original function, attached or glued it somewhere. Thus, the card underwent a change of function: for a period, it ceased to serve as a reminder of P. Béla Stefanovics's first Mass, with the illustration side instead taking on primary significance, functioning solely as an image.

The collection also includes a commemorative card without a name inscribed. In the place where the name would typically appear, it simply reads "IN MEMORIAM", with the years "1930-1955" beneath it. At the top of the card, a Latin motto is inscribed. The image on the reverse side shows an altar with a chalice, along with a Latin motto and an inscription indicating that the card was created for a 25-year jubilee. Someone manually added "P. Benedek Fidél ofm" to the text side. Thus, the card commemorates the 25th anniversary of the ordination of the Franciscan priest P. Fidél Benedek, who modestly refrained from printing his name, likely opting instead to handwrite it on each card, as was done on this one. This group also includes two other commemorative cards prepared in memory of Franciscan vows: one from 1957 for P. Benedek Stelli and another from 1947 for Regináld Antal.

We have seen that some pieces in the collection originate from the first half of the 20th century. It is conceivable that the early 20th-century collection of Franciscans serving in the Căpleni monastery was later expanded by Father Vince Gajdos, the Franciscan pastor. I assume that upon taking charge of the parish, he discovered previously collected holy cards among the documents and began adding his own to this collection. Eventually, these documents were considered "old" and relegated to the attic, from where they subsequently got to the researcher.

4.2. Commemoration of the Deceased

Small memorial cards were also created in remembrance of the deceased, featuring a saint's image on one side and textual information about the deceased on the other. In the collection, there are memorial cards for nine clergymen, two young individuals (one a theologian and the other a monk), and one layperson.

The memorial card for the layperson is particularly interesting: it requests prayers for Mrs. Gyuláné Czapik, widow, who was born in Szeged in 1855 and passed away in Budapest in 1938. Below the information, a prayer in Hungarian is inscribed, with a photograph of the elderly woman above it. The other side displays an image of the Sacred Heart of Christ with a Latin motto below. A brown stain on the textual side suggests that this card, like others, may have been affixed somewhere, indicating a preference for displaying the image side. This may explain how the memorial card of a layperson, born in 1855 and living far from Căpleni, ended up preserved in this collection in Căpleni.

Another photographic memorial card requests prayers for P. Leonard Maria Bello, a Franciscan who passed away in Rome in 1944.⁸ The card was printed at the Bunavetura Press⁹, with P. Fidél Benedek, a Franciscan friar, listed as the publisher responsible. The collection also includes a photographic memorial card for Ottokár Prohászka, a bishop from Hungary who passed away in 1927; a card for P. Fülöp Einholz, a Franciscan priest who died in Călugăreni (Mureș County) in 1934 (Figure 1); Fr. Rókus Miks (1856-1937), who passed away in Dej (Cluj County); a photographic memorial card for Archbishop Lajos Szmrecsányi (1851-

⁸ Fr. Bello Maria Leonardo was born on August 16, 1882, in Motta di Livenza, Italy. From 1933 to 1944, he held the position of Minister General of the Franciscan Order. For a brief biography, see Cecchin, 2023, p. 76.

⁹ St. Bonaventure's Book Printing House operated in Cluj-Napoca between 1906 and 1948, and was the printing house of the Franciscan Order of Transylvania. (Diós & Viczián, 2007) <https://lexikon.katolikus.hu/S/Szent%20Bonaventura%20Könyvnyomda.html> (15. 11. 2024)

1943); a card for Fr. Elek Szilveszter Papp (1879-1956), who died in Estelnic (Covasna County); and a photographic memorial card for P. Valérián Rendes (1873-1940).



Figure 1. Memorial card of P. Fülöp Einholz, front and back of the image

There are also memorial cards for two young individuals in the collection: two copies of the card for Brother Antal Bálint Miklóssy, a Franciscan who died “in the service of the homeland” at the age of 25 (though no birth or death years are mentioned), and the card for Béla Ambrus Vitek, a third-year theologian who passed away in Radna (Arad County) in 1934.

Although it is not in the genre of holy image memorial cards, it is worth mentioning a memorial funeral among the cards in the collection. An A4-sized sheet folded into quarters, with the details printed on one side. A broad black border around the edges indicates that it is a funeral notice. The text announces the passing of landowner Ferenc Gurzó in Lăzarea (Harghita County) in 1944 at the age of 61. Among the mourners listed is P. Anaklét Gurzó, a Franciscan friar, suggesting a family connection, which may explain how the card ended up with the Franciscans in Căpleni. P. Anaklét Gurzó was a well-known Franciscan figure in Transilvania, likely a relative of the deceased.

4.3. Holy Images with Personal Messages

This category includes 36 small holy images in the collection, along with two documents that, although not holy images, contain personal messages and were grouped with the holy images by the collectors. Therefore, I regard them as documents classified by their users within this larger category. Below, I present a selection from this category, chosen to highlight how these images were used in different situations based on the notes and texts on them.

4.3.1

One side of a commemorative card is a color print depicting Christ, with a stylized heart encircled by a crown of thorns visible in the center of His chest. Christ slightly raises His hands, with a reading stand in front of Him bearing an open book. Beside it there lies a cushion with a ring into which a large and a smaller lily are inserted. The stand is fully covered by a veil. The following text is inscribed at the side: “Da mihi animas caetera tolle tibi.” [Give me souls, take the rest for Yourself.]¹⁰

¹⁰ The motto “Da mihi animas caetera tolle tibi” belonged to Saint John Bosco (1815–1888), founder of the Salesian Society.

On the reverse side, a small printer's mark appears, with no location or date. A handwritten text reads as follows:

"Lelkicsokor
Szentmise..... 30
Szentáldozás.....30
Szentségimádás.....30
Rózsafüzér.....30
Lelkiáldozás.....150
Önmehtagadás.....150
Röpima..... 3000
Hálás szeretettel lelkiatyánknak.
M. Melánia, Margit és Vali."
[Spiritual Bouquet
Masses.....30
Holy Communion.....30
Eucharistic Adoration.....30
Rosaries.....30
Spiritual Communions.....150
Acts of Self-Denial.....150
Short Prayers.....3000
With grateful love to our spiritual father,
M. Melánia, Margit, and Vali]

This handwritten note lacks a date. Signed by three individuals, the attentive observer will immediately notice that each item is accompanied by a number divisible by three. The devotions listed on the card were formulated as a gift, and the signatories intended to participate equally in fulfilling them. In this case, the commemorative card functioned as a gift offering made by three people. (Figure 2)



Figure 2. Holy card, the front and back of the card

4.3.2

A small, black-and-white reproduced image depicting the face of Virgin Mary. The handwritten text on the reverse reads:

“Fleisz Éva
víz kereszti
Hittan Emlék 1961”
[Éva Fleisz
Epiphany
Catechism Memory 1961.]

This indicates that the card was likely given to Éva Fleisz on the occasion of Epiphany, perhaps as a gift from her catechism teacher, and it served as a memory of this 1961 Epiphany. It is not clear how this small image ended up in the collection.

4.3.3

The next commemorative card shows a black-and-white reproduced photograph of the Virgin Mary on one side. Mary is depicted within an oval frame, surrounded by allegorical elements such as a wreath of lilies, hearts, and stars. The inscription reads: “Regina sine labe originali concepta ora pro nobis” (Translation: “Queen conceived without original sin, pray for us”).

The handwritten text on the reverse reads:

“Édes Annikám!
Köszönjük, hogy szeretettel átengedted a kis hajlékot nekünk lelki megújulásunk céljára.
A Jó Isten áldjon védelmezzon az élet minden körülményei között ezt kívánjuk lelki
testvéreid.
1950. IX. 13.
M. Eterna
M. Petronella n.
M. Nikoletta n.
M. Kanradilla n.
M. Apollónia n.”

[Dear Annika!
Thank you for lovingly allowing us the small shelter for our spiritual renewal. May the
Good Lord bless and protect you in all circumstances of life, from your spiritual siblings,
1950. IX. 13.
M. Eterna¹¹
M. Petronella n¹²
M. Nikoletta n.
M. Kanradilla n.¹³
M. Apollonia n.]

This holy card was a gift from the signatories to the addressee, who provided them lodging for a retreat. The signatories and the addressee, who refer to each other as spiritual siblings, were likely members of the same order. The date reveals more: by 1950, religious orders were officially banned in Romania, having been outlawed the previous year. However,

¹¹ Eterna Papp served as a housekeeper in the Sancta Maria Institute in Sfântu Gheorghe from 1940–1942 before relocating to Cluj. (https://epa.oszk.hu/03300/03308/00004/pdf/EPA03308_acta_siculica_2010_481_496.pdf), accessed 12.10.2024).

¹² Mária Gáspár, aka Sister Petronella (1930–2012) recounted her life story in the journal *Keresztény Szó* 16, no. 9 (September 2005) (<https://epa.oszk.hu/00900/00939/00066/text.htm#7>), accessed 12.10.2024).

¹³ Berta Gergely, aka Sister Konradilla was born in 1920 and passed away in 2014 at the age of 94, in her 75th year of religious life. She worked as a nurse from 1944–1975, mainly in Târgu Mureş. (<https://ersekseg.ro/hu/content/elhunyt-gergely-berta-m-konradilla-ferencrendi-nover>), accessed 12.10.2024).

these nuns continued their activities discreetly.¹⁴ This small card not only attests to this fact but also to the organization of and participation in retreats even after the ban. I found information on three of the five signatories.

In this instance, the commemorative card serves as a token of gratitude: a few nuns received lodging from someone and, as a gesture of thanks, gifted her this holy card with a personal message. (Figure 3)



Figure 3. Holy card, the front and back of the card

4.3.4

A stylized heart encircled by a crown of thorns radiates light beams, each ending with another crown of thorns. Below it, a chalice is flanked by two white doves, one poised to drink. Beneath the chalice there are flowers and a bunch of grapes; to the left there stands a stalk of wheat, and on the right, a parchment on the table bears a Latin inscription.

The parchment reads: “Gustite et videte que suavis est dominus,”¹⁵ translated as [Taste and see that the Lord is sweet.]

The following text, handwritten in blue ink, appears on the reverse side:

“Édes jó Istenem, ne engedj meghalnom, mielőtt a szegénység, tisztaság, engedelmisség és a szegények szolgálata fogadalmát le nem tettem. Édes Szüzanyám! nyerd ki nekem égi Jegyesemmel való eljegyzésem napjára a keresztségi ártatlanság sz. kegyelmét. Sz. Vince jó atyám esd ki számomra az alázatosság az egyszerűség és igazi szeretet szellemét.”

¹⁴ My research shows that during the period of the ban on religious orders in Romania between 1949 and 1989, Catholic nuns in this region expected to continue to be considered nuns by their narrow community and their families, and behaved accordingly: they kept their name as nuns until their death, signed their letters with that name, and expected others to address them as such in correspondence. They participated in spiritual exercises and generally lived according to this value system, for example by not marrying, attending church regularly, etc. Catholic priest Mihály Tyukodi had two nun sisters with whom he corresponded for several decades, addressing them in his letters by the names they had taken upon entering their religious order. Mihály’s youngest sister, who had applied to join a convent in the 1940s but ultimately did not take her vows and later got married, was still celebrating her nun’s name day even in the 1990s (Szikszai, 2020, p. 30). A significant shift occurred in 1995 when one of Mihály Tyukodi’s oldest sisters passed away. From that point on, in letters to others, he referred to her by her civil name. His sister had used her nun name for 60 years and her civil given name for only 23 years. Yet, deep in Mihály’s heart, she remained by her childhood name, and her death also signified that she was no longer a member of the order, allowing him to return to the name they had used in their childhood (Szikszai, 2020, p. 44).

¹⁵ The phrase “Gustate et videte quoniam suavis est Dominus” is a slightly modified title from a work by Domenico Mazzocchi (1592-1665), originally “Gustate et videte quoniam suavis est Dominus” (Mazzocchi, Domenico, 1664).

[My dear God, do not let me die before I have taken the vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, and service to the poor. Sweet Virgin Mother! On the day of my betrothal to my heavenly Spouse, grant me the holy grace of baptismal innocence. Good Father St. Vincent, obtain for me the spirit of humility, simplicity, and true love.]

Below, in different handwritings, the following text is added:

“Ezüstmisém
emlékére
Tarzicia nővértől”

[In memory of my silver jubilee
from Sister Tarzicia.]

The initial text, written in calligraphic, neat script, contrasts significantly with the informal style of the second inscription. The two texts were clearly written by different individuals, as indicated by both the handwriting and the content: the person who wrote the upper text likely did not write the lower. The latter mentions a silver jubilee, but this case diverges from the usual situation where a priest gifts a holy card to attendees for his own jubilee. Here, the text reads not only “in memory of my silver jubilee” but also adds “from Sister Tarzicia.” Due to the mention of the silver jubilee, we must assume a priest as the second person involved, who celebrated his silver jubilee. Therefore, our main characters are a priest and Sister Tarzicia. The text at the top was written by the nun, who likely donated the commemorative card as a gift to the priest. The text at the bottom was added by the priest: since the giver did not sign her own name after the text, the priest, who received the image as a gift, probably noted under the prayer who had given him the commemorative card and on what occasion. This is why there are two different handwritings on the image.

Following this line of thought, St. Vincent is mentioned in the upper text. It is known that one of the Căpleni parish priests was P. Vince Gajdos (1926-1986), so he may have been the priest for whom the card was gifted for his silver jubilee. If so, the timing of the gift can also be established. Vince Gajdos was ordained in 1956, making his silver jubilee in 1981. This card was likely gifted by Sister Tarzicia to him in 1981. In this case, the commemorative card functioned as a gift: a nun gifted a holy card with a handwritten prayer to a priest celebrating his 25th ordination anniversary.

4.3.5

A depiction of Christ with shoulder-length hair ending in curls. He gazes upward, displaying a stylized heart at the center of his chest with his hands. Above the heart there is a cross surrounded by a crown of thorns. Behind Christ there is a climbing rose, with a single lily in front of him.

On the back, a handwritten message reads:

“Főtisztelendő P. Szentey (?) Gellért úrnak a sok-sok jószágért.
1943. jun. 25-én. Friedrich Róza.”

[To the Reverend Father Gellért Szentey (?) for his many kindnesses.
June 25, 1943. Róza Friedrich.]

Róza Friedrich gifted this commemorative card to a priest in gratitude for his kindness in 1943. Although the individuals could not be identified, it is evident that commemorative cards featuring holy images were also used to recognize positive moral qualities.

4.3.6

A black-and-white image depicts two figures, visible from the waist up. The taller figure, likely Christ, holds a chalice and a host, looking downward at a kneeling figure with clasped hands and eyes fixed on the host. Below, on a white background, black uppercase text reads, “Ego sum panis vitae,” meaning [I am the bread of life.] In smaller print, publishing details are noted: “Kunstanstalten Joseph Muller, G. m. b. H., Dresden.”

On the back, a handwritten message reads:

“Jutkának születés napjára nagy-nagy szeretettel K. Jutka Isten éltesse! 1940. nov. 22.” [To Jutka on her birthday with much love, Jutka K. May God bless you! November 22, 1940.]

The holy card was likely given as a birthday gift by a close acquaintance, perhaps a friend, in 1940, meaning that in this case, the small holy card served as a birthday present.

4.3.7

A black-and-white image shows the child Jesus, holding a globe with a small cross in one hand and raising the other in blessing, with a decorative aura around His head.

The reverse side bears a handwritten message:

“Drága Juditkának születésnapjára minden jót kívánunk. Sok-sok szeretettel
Nicolette
Kundi
Orsi
1940. XII. 22.”

[To my dear Juditka, best wishes for your birthday. With much love,
Nicolette, Kundi, Orsi
December 22, 1940.]

It is likely that both this and the previous card were intended for the same person’s birthday, though there may be an error in the month noted, as it seems improbable that her birthday was celebrated exactly one month apart. The previous card records November 22, while this one lists December 22. The latter is more likely incorrect due to the use of Roman numerals, where such mistakes are more common. In this case, the small picture was a birthday present from three women. (Figure 4)



Figure 4. Holy card, the front and back of the card

4.3.8

A black-and-white image of Mary with the child Jesus, framed by climbing roses. On the back, a handwritten prayer reads:

“Legyen Uram Irántad való szeretetem az, hogy visszavonhatatlanul és tökéletesen a Te szent akaratodat teljesítem. Szeretettel,
M. Jolánda n. 1940. V. 18.”

[May my love for You, O Lord, be such that I fulfill Your holy will irrevocably and completely. With love,
Sister M. Jolanda, May 18, 1940.]

The message is largely a prayer, with the final lines indicating that Sister Jolanda gifted this small image to someone in 1940 as a sign of affection. In this case, the holy card is a gift lovingly presented by the signee.

4.3.9

A black-and-white image likely depicts Saint Cecilia at a piano, with a kneeling, praying angel beside her. Five additional angel figures watch from above. The back reads:

“Sz. Cecillia őrizze meg lelked harmóniáját egész életeden át. Szeretettel Magduska,
Szárhegy, 1935. VII. 2.”

[May St. Cecilia preserve the harmony of your soul throughout your life. With love,
Magduska, Szárhegy, July 2, 1935.]

The Franciscan monastery in Lázarea (Szárhegy or Gyergyószárhegy in Hungarian, Harghita County) has existed since 1642. This holy card, gifted by a woman named Magduska in 1935, was likely intended for a Franciscan who later brought it to Câpleni, where there was also a Franciscan monastery.

4.3.10

A holy card depicting an unnamed, kneeling, praying female saint. On the reverse side, the following dedication appears:

“3 szentmise
3 szentáldozás
5 rózsafüzér
10 röpima
3 jócselekedett
Kedves névnapjára a jó Isten áldását, kegyelmét!
S. Erzsike néni
Dés, 1961, VII. 19.”

[3 Holy Masses
3 Communions
5 Rosaries
10 short prayers
3 good deeds
God’s blessings and grace on your nameday!
Aunt S. Erzsike, Dés, July 19, 1961.]

The list of devotions suggests that the card’s giver would perform these prayers and acts as a gift for the recipient’s nameday. Although the recipient’s name is not given, it can be

inferred from the date. Between 1737 and 1969, the feast day of Saint Vincent de Paul was on July 19, which, in the 1961 calendar, was the day of Saint Vincent. P. Vince Gajdos was indeed serving in Dej (Dés in Hungarian, Cluj County) at that time, so we can reasonably assume that this card and the devotional practices listed on it were gifted to him for his name day. Another example of how small holy cards could also function as name day gifts.

4.3.11

A black-and-white illustration of a standing female saint, with a handwritten dedication on the back:

“Juditkámnek az utolsó fête de classe emlékére sok-sok szeretettel Marianne. 1942. III. 25.” [To my Juditka, in memory of the last *fête de classe*, with much love, Marianne, March 25, 1942.]

The dedication suggests that classmates gave each other this card to commemorate their last class celebration, likely marking their final year together. This example shows that commemorative cards could serve as mementos not only for religious occasions but also for secular events or social gatherings, marking moments shared between two individuals. (Figure 5)



Figure 5. Holy card, the front and back of the card

4.3.12

Finally, a handmade commemorative item is worth mentioning, similar in function to the preceding examples. Composed of 15 identical-size cardboard sheets, possibly cut from a drawing book, these pages are punched on the left side and tied together with string to be flipped like a book. A green pencil frame was drawn around each page, approximately 2mm from the edge. The first page reads, “Csíksomlyói emlék” [Souvenir from Csíksomlyó]. (Figure 6)

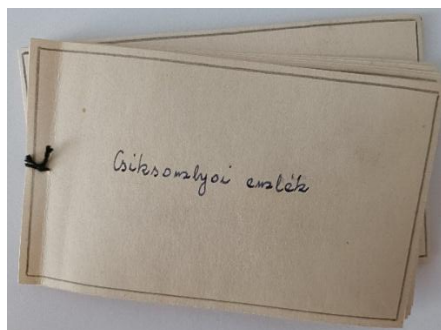


Figure 6. Commemorative card.

Inside, the dedication “Szeretettel Magdus” [With love, Magdus] appears. Each subsequent page bears a handwritten title in the upper left corner: “I. Állomás”, “II. Állomás” “XIV. Állomás” [I. Station, II. Station, ... XIV. Station), with each page centered around a different pressed plant. The arrangement recalls the Stations of the Cross, likely visited during the Pentecost pilgrimage¹⁶ to Șumuleu Ciuc (Csíksomlyó in Hungarian, Harghita County), and brings this memory to life with its herbarium-like arrangement. The booklet was placed in a blue, folded paper envelope and remained intact. (Figure 7)

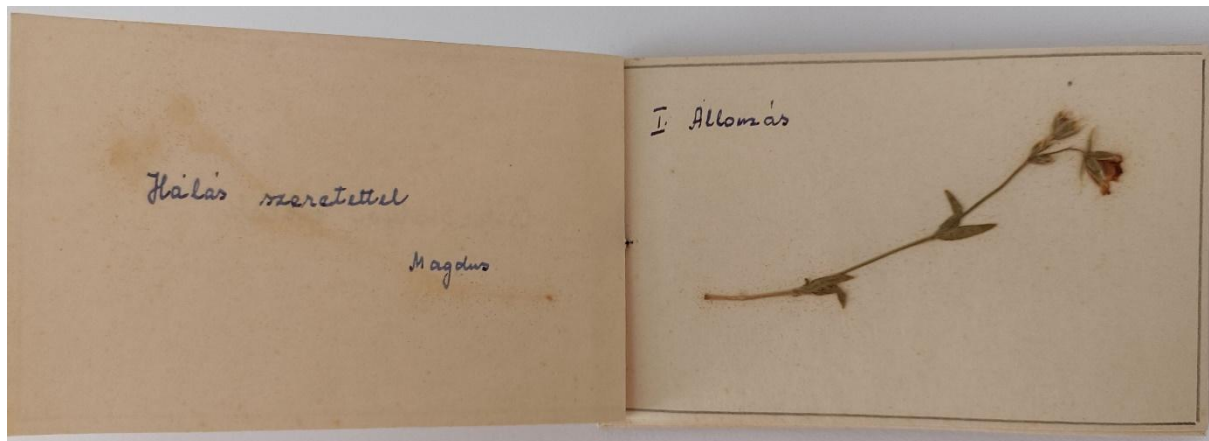


Figure 7. Commemorative card.

We cannot determine from this piece on what occasion and to whom the compilation was gifted by a woman named Magdus, but in section 4.3.9, we observed that a person of the same name¹⁷ gifted a holy card on Saint Vincent’s Day. There, we inferred that the recipient might have been P. Vince Gajdos, who was serving in Dej at the time and later moved to Căpleni. Perhaps this compilation is also from the same person; the shared name at least suggests this, as does the fact that her gift arrived in Căpleni along with the previous one.

4.4. The Rosary Society Mysteries

The Rosary Society’s small devotional cards represent a distinct category in this collection, featuring monthly illustrations with accompanying messages known as “mysteries.”¹⁸ These cards are regularly exchanged among society members, who would recite the prayers depicted on the images. Based on their style and numbering, the collection includes two incomplete series and a third complete series.

5. Other Paper-Based Items in the Collection

The items highlighted so far stand out due to their inscriptions and the narratives they reveal. However, the collection includes many additional small devotional images and similar pictures lacking personal messages or notes. Among these, there are numerous German-language images alongside Hungarian ones. There are a total of 46 images featuring a picture on one side and a prayer on the other, of which 18 are identical. These 18 identical images

¹⁶ Șumuleu Ciuc (Harghita County, Romania) is a Catholic pilgrimage site in Romania. For an ethnographic description of the procession, see Mohay 2009, Vass 2010.

¹⁷ Magduska and Magdus are diminutive forms of the name Magda.

¹⁸ The first record of the establishment of the Perpetual Rosary Society in Căpleni dates back to 1894, when the community petitioned for recognition by the Dominican Order. This society was eventually replaced by another, the Living Rosary Society, which incorporated the practice of exchanging devotional cards and became active in Căpleni only in the second half of the 20th century (Szikszai, 2013, pp. 146-147).

depict Pope Pius XII. Below the Pope's image, his brief biographical details are provided: his birth year and the dates of his ordination as a priest, and later as a bishop, cardinal, and pope. On the reverse side of the image, there is a prayer in German. Since the date of his death is not printed on the card, it can be assumed that this image was produced and distributed during his lifetime. Due to its size and structure resembling holy cards, these images were also preserved among the holy cards by the collection owners. I believe that anthropological research must also consider where informants draw genre boundaries, and in this case, it becomes apparent that these boundaries do not align precisely with the formal limits of the small holy card genre itself.

Thus, we encounter the category of genre-bordering items within this collection. While the collection primarily includes small devotional images, it also holds pieces that lie at the boundary of the genre. Their religious content and similar dimensions led collectors to place them among the devotional images, though they do not entirely fit the genre of small devotional cards.

An example is a printed sheet with an image of Christ holding a book, a halo above His head on one side, and German text on the reverse, partially formatted as a fillable form, completed in ink. The printed text instructs the reader that, in the event of an accident, illness, or hospitalization, the cardholder would like a priest to be summoned immediately. The handwritten details record the name and address of a woman in Germany. The data does not reveal how this card entered the collection.

Additionally, the collection includes a handwritten poem in Hungarian entitled "Óh, ha én is Páter leszek..." [Oh, if only I could become a Father...] on an old notebook page. The two-stanza poem describes a young boy's aspiration to become a monk from a young age, wearing a brown robe as he has seen. The author, Márka Lajos, signed it as follows: "Írta: Márka Lajos VII. osztályos. Sok szeretettel P. Gajdos Vincének Lajcsi. Szatmárnémeti, 1957. I. 21." [Written by Lajos Márka, 7th grade. With much love, Lajcsi, to P. Vince Gajdos. Satu Mare, January 21, 1957]. The page, folded into quarters, is the same size as the average holy card.

Another small note preserved among the holy images is a notebook page bearing a letter dated October 1, 1966, in Debrecen, addressed to Vince, presumably P. Vince Gajdos. The letter's writer mentions settling into a new place, enjoying schoolwork with two children's choirs (one with 80 members, another with 150), and expresses a lingering fondness for Cluj. The letter ends with a request for remembrance, promising the same in return. The note card is the same size as the average holy cards.

In both cases above – the poem handwritten by a young boy and the letter – the items were either of similar size to typical holy cards or folded to that size. They were personal mementos, and this personal significance, along with their size, is what aligns them with the previously highlighted category of images bearing messages and well-wishes. This similarity explains their inclusion in this collection.

6. Analysis: Social Objects, Object Histories, Social Capital

6.1. Ethnographic literature has long been concerned with the interpretation of objects. In a 2013 study, Zoltán Fejős, anthropologist and museologist, presented three approaches that, while blending together, distinctly aim to explore this issue (Fejős, 2013, pp. 32–65). One approach views objects as representations of an era (Fejős, 2013, p. 33). This approach attempts to represent an era through objects. The basis of this interpretation is that the objects, groups of objects, collections of objects carry the characteristics of the era in which they were created and used. From the perspective of our analysis, it can be argued that these small devotional images indeed bear the traits of the late 19th century and, primarily, the 20th century: they were

produced on paper and reflect the hallmarks of paper-based culture. They were designed in a printing house, with the appropriate images and texts selected, printed, and then disseminated through ecclesiastical networks until they reached specific recipients. However, these small devotional images also reflect the fact that after 1948, the Romanian authorities made every effort to suppress the activities of churches. As a result, on some occasions, the faithful resorted to improvised solutions, such as handwriting the text on a photograph of a saint's image, when they could not afford to use printing services.

The second approach considers objects as expressions of social categories (Fejős, 2013, p. 40). In the case of the present material, it is evident that men appear predominantly as givers, as most of the small devotional cards were distributed on the occasion of significant milestones in the priestly vocation, such as the first mass and its anniversaries. Female names appear on memorial cards associated with death, birthdays, name days, significant personal events, or instances of expressing gratitude. The data in the collection indicate that in all such cases, the cards were exclusively given by women, to both men and women alike. Thus, male givers are only present when priests distribute cards to commemorate a first mass or its anniversaries, while female givers are associated with personal celebrations or other notable occasions. As for the recipients, no clear gender roles can be discerned; both men and women appear as recipients of these cards.

The social status of the givers is known in only a few cases, as indicated by inscriptions on the small devotional images. During this period, these small devotional images were used at every level of the Catholic ecclesiastical hierarchy, from the lowest to the highest ranks.

The third approach mentioned by Zoltán Fejős views objects as manifestations of personality (Fejős, 2013, p. 48). Within this framework, the concept of relicization is often referenced, where the value of certain objects derives from their association with specific individuals. In the case of small devotional images, this type of interpretation is relatively rare. Zoltán Szilárdfy mentions that he became an enthusiastic collector himself, proudly noting that his collection initially came from family members (Szilárdfy, 1995). However, in practice, this phenomenon is uncommon. For the small devotional images analyzed in this study, there is no evidence of such behavior, nor have data emerged from the village where the images originate to suggest this interpretation, beyond the fact that inscribed names likely reminded the owner of the giver. However, there is no indication that any of these images were preserved specifically because they were received from someone of personal significance. On the contrary, it seems that the illustration on one side of the image played a more significant role in its preservation and transmission than its origin. This is supported by at least two pieces in the collection, which appear to have been affixed somewhere for the purpose of appreciating the illustration.

Yet, the effort of the creators of these images to design and distribute pieces that aligned with their own taste and conveyed their intended message can also be interpreted as a manifestation of personality. This intent is relatively clear within the collection. Although the collection is not extensive, it is reasonable to assume that the creators carefully selected both the images and texts displayed on the commemorative cards.

6.2. Another concept that I found useful in this research was the concept of the social object. The concept is used across numerous scientific disciplines (Passinsky, 2021; Epstein, 2014; Asl et al., 2013; and others), however, I cannot address this breadth within the current framework, I can only indicate that here I apply the ethnographic interpretation of the concept of the social object. Following Nina Simon, I regard social objects as drivers of experiences embedded in social networks, and in this approach, both objects and experiences become inherently social (Simon, 2010). These objects were not merely household artifacts but came into the possession of individuals through social interactions, valued not only for artistic or

historical qualities but also as stimulants of interaction. According to Nina Simon (2010), social objects allow people to focus their attention on a third thing rather than on each other, which facilitates interpersonal relationships.

The material analyzed in the present study includes objects through which people communicated within the framework of social interactions, assuring one another of their attention and goodwill. Consequently, these objects were not merely items in themselves, nor were they simply mementos; rather, they represented past social interactions and served as tangible evidence of social relationships. These devotional images were not only collected and stored but were also distributed and gifted on specific social occasions and at the end of religious rites. The cards conveyed religious messages through their printed illustrations and, at times, through mottos, prayers, or supplications. Beyond this, however, the messages carried an additional, personal layer. Crucially, in the vast majority of cases, the giver personally approached the recipient to hand over the image. The act of giving was not about the image itself but about establishing a personal connection, often marked by words of greeting, smiles, or other gestures. When distributed after masses, the large number of participants limited personal exchanges, yet such signs of acknowledgment, like nods or brief interactions, remained. On other occasions, however, the act of giving could serve as a pretext for a brief, polite conversation, and in this sense, the images indeed functioned as catalysts for social interactions.

6.3. However, in the course of the research, I found that the social role of small sacred images sometimes goes beyond the notion of a social object, as their role is not limited to provoking social interaction, but extends further: these objects have changed hands and functions several times, they have a history, they have value, and in their constant gifting and exchange, a social exchange value is formed. The interesting aspect of Igor Kopytoff's approach (1986) is that, in describing what he calls the history of things, he also goes into detail about the exchange value of things.

Ethnography has long noted the relevance of the story of museum objects. The foundation of this approach lies in the idea that the object itself is not the only significant factor in museum curation – its history is equally important. Ideally, understanding an object's history should accompany its acquisition, documenting any related narratives.¹⁹

With regard to the holy cards studied here, it is no longer possible to ask former owners about the histories of these objects. Instead, I relied on the personal messages and notes that appear on the cards. As Kopytoff suggests, we can pose questions about objects akin to those asked about people's life stories, such as key moments in the object's life, its changes in status over time, and any significant "eras" that distinguished it from similar objects (Kopytoff, 1986, pp. 66-67). Kopytoff's approach, rooted in commodification, explores how certain cultural prohibitions prevent some items from becoming commodities, as public sale of certain items is culturally or communally restricted (Kopytoff, 1986, p. 75). An object's history can articulate its value within a specific exchange context. Viewed through this lens, these small devotional cards have outlived their first, second, and sometimes even third owners by decades. Their stories likely began with their initial gifting, passing from the first owner to the second, and so on, as they eventually became part of this collection.

The examination of small devotional images benefits from this perspective. Some images followed a simpler trajectory in private devotion: they reached an owner and were used as part of personal worship, often displayed prominently at home (on shelves, in cabinets, framed with other images) or used as bookmarks in books and prayer books, with other items

¹⁹ This approach is primarily associated with museum artifacts but can extend to any collection encountered by cultural researchers.

stored in collection boxes or drawers.²⁰ Other images participated in a broader social cycle: a person acquired an image and later, in a social situation deemed appropriate, felt compelled to make a gesture toward another person. This context could be a first Mass, a jubilee Mass (such as a silver or golden jubilee), a memorial for the deceased, or a secular occasion like a name day, birthday, or even a school celebration. The individual in such a situation reinforced their social role through the act of gifting, incorporating the devotional image as part of this gesture. To personalize and emphasize the social act, they sometimes added a handwritten message to the card.

In the case of the present research, the biography of the objects can only be obtained indirectly: only in a few cases is it indicated on the plates where they were printed, and only in the case of those pieces with personal inscriptions is there any chance of deciphering part of their history. This is why the pages on which messages are written are important. Also worthy of attention are those on which the donor himself did not write a personal message, but the person who received the picture as a gift wrote on it who gave it to him.²¹ As a gesture, this note not only indicates that the person who received the gift wants to remember the person who gave it to him, but also that he wants to be remembered as a participant in the exchange chain.²²

6.4. Another valuable interpretive framework for this material is Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social capital (Bourdieu, 1997, pp. 156-178). Here, the constant maintenance of social relationships is crucial for the reproduction of social capital, which requires ongoing exchanges to reinforce mutual recognition (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 162). Within this framework, social capital represents long-term obligations created and reproduced through reciprocal gifts, favors, and visits. In this collection, commemorative cards received by both priests and laypeople indicate that the exchange paths of these devotional images were bidirectional between clergy and laity. The giving of these cards, therefore, can also be understood as an effort to sustain and reinforce social relationships continuously.

An example from section 4.3.1 illustrates this dynamic. Here, the gift was not only the card as a material object but also the list of devotions handwritten on it, symbolizing the giver's commitment to perform those prayers for the spiritual benefit of the recipient. Miklós Mojzer (1997, pp. 11-13), in his study on the late medieval institution of the altar, describes the Catholic Church's historical efforts to quantify spiritual benefits, measured in terms of temporal remission of sins, which reduced the suffering of souls in purgatory. According to Mojzer, the indulgence system functions as a 'massive communal and individual (and within that, forgiveness) spiritual deposit'²³ (Mojzer, 1997, p. 13). This understanding sheds light on the devotional offerings inscribed on the holy card: the givers offered instruments of indulgence, likely to a priest, as part of the cycle of reciprocal favors and gifts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, these small, paper-printed religious images or holy cards served not only religious functions but also as instruments of social connection, aiding in the maintenance and

²⁰ I observed these usage practices in Căpleni during fieldwork, not specifically for this collection but in private collections held by villagers.

²¹ According to Marcel Mauss, "each gift is part of a system of reciprocity in which the honour of giver and recipient are engaged" (Mauss, 2002, p. 16).

²² Participation in the exchange chain in this community was also important in other areas. Even in recent times, what locals call "kaláka", the institution of mutual aid during major works, was still valued and considered important. In Căpleni, the "kaláka" was still in operation in the 1990s, and I have personally collected data showing that during this period, families organized wedding parties on their own, with friends and relatives in the village volunteering hours of work on the days of preparation. The organizing family knew exactly how many hours of work they could count on from each family in the village. Now, in 2024, there is only a tangible trace of this within the extended families in the form of family members even from neighboring villages coming over to help each other with larger jobs.

²³ Original text: "(...) közösségi és egyéni, roppant méretű lelki (és ezen belül bűnbocsánati) bankbetét." (Mojzer, 1997, p. 13)

reinforcement of relationships. The gifting and exchange of these images often prompted direct interactions, allowing the images to become tools for the reproduction of social capital.

Secondly, individual items within the collection passed through multiple owners and functions over time, becoming gifts with social exchange value. These object biographies reflect shifts in their roles within social circulation, providing insights into the context of these interactions.

Lastly, the devotional images carried not only religious content but were enriched with personal messages, documenting and strengthening the relationships between their owners. These notes preserved not only memories but also direct gestures of religious and social significance.

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