

Ana Krevelj

## APOCALYPSE DRAWING AS A POSSIBLE SOURCE FOR A FRESCO DECORATION IN HARTBERG CHAPEL

### Zusammenfassung

Dieser Beitrag präsentiert zwei Kunstwerke: das Pergamentblatt und die Fresken. Das Pergamentblatt befindet sich im Erzabtei St. Peter in Salzburg und ist um 1230 datiert. Die Federzeichnungen illustrierten primär die Apokalypse nach Johannes und auch andere Szenen wie die vier Könige auf Tieren sitzend. Sie sind im Vision des Propheten Daniel beschrieben. Könige auf

Tieren treten ebenfalls im Freskenzyklus in dem romanischer Karner im Hartberg auf (um 1250 datiert). Die Fresken werden am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts schwer restauriert und das ikonographische Programm wurde unerkennbar. Hier wird die Möglichkeit vorgestellt, dass das Pergamentblatt aus Salzburg mit Fresken im Hartberg Karner verbunden ist basierend auf dem Ursprungsdatum, dem Ursprungsort und der Ikonografie beider Kunstwerke.

**Keywords:** Apocalypse, Daniel's vision, 13th century, parchment, fresco cycle

This article presents two different works of art and focuses on a possible relationship between them: a drawing made on parchment and a fresco painting in a Romanesque charnel chapel. Both are located in Austria and are roughly dated to the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The first work of art is a Romanesque drawing (Fig. 1), made on a rather large sheet of parchment (it measures 395 × 585 mm).<sup>1</sup> It was used as a binding of an account book for the years 1439 to 1470 in the treasury of the Archabbey of Saint Peter in Salzburg, Austria, where it is still located

today.<sup>2</sup> To serve its secondary purpose as binding, the sheet was trimmed on all four sides (but not equally) and folded, so parts of the drawing, especially along the top and right margins, are lost. Freehand drawings were made in brown ink with some red or pink highlights and inscriptions in dark brown. They illustrate the visions of John the Evangelist from the Throne in Heaven, described in the Revelation, chapter 4 to the Heavenly Jerusalem shown to him by an angel in Revelation, chapter 21.

The scenes are represented as a complex diagram with three circles in the centre, of which the larger two are divided by diagonals to create a four-spoked double wheel. On each side of these concentric rings, there

1 L. V. GEYMONAT, 'Apocalypse Drawing', in: *Pen and Parchment, Drawing in the Middle Ages*, ed. by M. Holcomb <Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2nd June - 23th August 2009> (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009), cat. 37, 130-133.

2 The parchment has no shelfmark, just an inventory number 975.

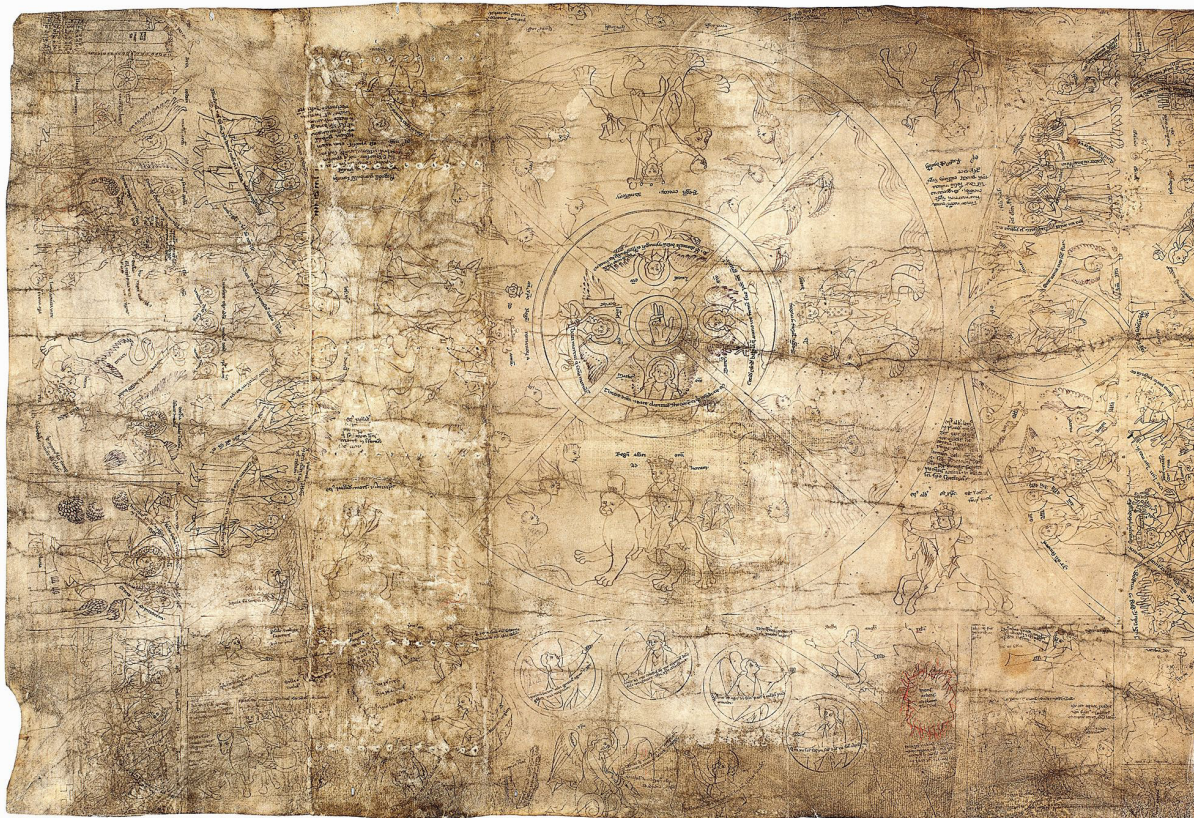


Fig. 1: Apocalypse drawing, Salzburg, Archabbey of Saint Peter, around 1230  
(source: *Pen and Parchment, Drawing in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Melanie Holcomb, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2 June–23 August 2009), New York 2009, cat. 37, 131)

are four semicircles. A few straight lines further subdivide the rest of the space. The available surface of the parchment is full of different figures with accompanying inscriptions and citations from the Bible. The smallest circle serves as the centre and represents the hand of the Lord blessing. All other figures and scenes are arranged concentrically, proceeding from the centre outward without following any other orientation.

In the second circle, there are four angels with scrolls with passages from the Book of Revelation and the names of evangelists inscribed next to each angel. The objects of our interest are depictions in the largest circle representing four crowned men with sceptres and orbs, each riding on a different beast. These are the four beasts described by the prophet Daniel in the Book of Daniel (7:6-9). They are coming out of the sea, surrounded by the winged heads of blowing winds.

The four horsemen outside the outer ring can be identified by inscriptions: they

are Christ with a crossbow on a white horse, the Devil with a sword on a red horse, Hypocrisy with a pair of scales on a black horse, and Death with a hatchet on a pale horse.

The semicircle on the lower edge encloses seven angels in smaller circles, sounding the seven trumpets. In the centre, an angel binds a dragon. On the sides there are smaller scenes representing the beginning of an Apocalypse. The scenes on top are almost entirely lost, but inscriptions are preserved, and they mention angels John sees standing at the corners of the earth holding back the winds. The semicircle on the left represents God the Father crowning Jesus Christ, flanked by saints, prophets, patriarchs and martyrs below the throne and the semicircle on the right shows Christ in Majesty, surrounded by symbols of Evangelists and enclosed with elders on the left and angels on the right side.

The sheet was discovered and first published by an Austrian art historian Otto

Benesch in 1962.<sup>3</sup> He attributed the drawing to the school of Salzburg and dated it around 1230 based on its style. The so-called “Zackenstill” is a transitional style between Romanesque and Gothic. This linear style of the drawing corresponds to the style of Austrian frescoes of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The nearest and stylistically very similar case are the wall paintings in a Romanesque church of St. George in Bischofshofen near Salzburg, also dated to around 1230. At that time, the town Bischofshofen was under the church jurisdiction of Archabbey of Saint Peter.<sup>4</sup>

Interesting is the remark Benesch made about this drawing. He described it as “a document of unique importance in the history of drawing. It is the only known design for a cycle of frescoes of the thirteenth century”.<sup>5</sup> According to Benesch, the great wall painting cycles in the Middle Ages had to be based on previously made preparatory compositions, conceived by educated ecclesiastical patrons and then shown to artists as a guide. For him, this parchment is pointing in this direction, especially because of its diagrammatic layout that bears a resemblance to a design of a small chapel in a quadrangle form. There are some similar cases of this period in Austria, for example a bishop’s chapel in Gurk in Carinthia or the chapel of St. Michael in Göss Abbey in Styria.<sup>6</sup>

Later, Johann Apfelthaler proposed that the drawing may have had other possible

functions besides a possibility of being a draft for a wall-painting cycle.<sup>7</sup> It could be a didactic diagram for the visualization and memorization of the Apocalypse or an illustration for a manuscript containing a commentary on the Book of Revelation. He also pointed out the three questions regarding its origin, the time of creation according to its style and the use of theological sources.<sup>8</sup> For him, it is evident that the drawing was made in the Archabbey of St. Peter itself or at least somewhere in Salzburg area. The individual features of the drawing in linear style correspond to the artistic level in Salzburg until the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the complex programme indicates that certain theological sources must have been used.

Finally, Ludovico Geymonat agreed with Benesch in 2009.<sup>9</sup> He proposed that such drawings may have had a role in devising and carrying out the complex iconographic programmes that can be found on the walls of a number of 13<sup>th</sup>-century chapels. He also suggested that this particular drawing, according to its Salzburg provenance and visual evidence, was made for someone interested in Apocalyptic writings and who may have kept it within a scriptorium at his disposal and accessible to his students and followers. Finally, he concludes his theory with a question of whether this drawing was ever involved in the patronage of a painted cycle inspired by Daniel and the Revelation of John.

The second work of art represented in this article are wall paintings in a Romanesque charnel chapel in Hartberg in Styria (Fig. 2). The chapel, located south of the parish church, is a central building with apsis on the east side. It consists of two divided spaces: the ossuary, located partially underground and a chapel of St. Michael in a higher ground floor. The division is also accentuated on the facade with horizontal frieze.

3 O. BENESCH, ‘cat. 304’, in: *Great Drawings of all Time*, ed. Ira Moskowitz (New York: Shorewood, 1962 – 1979), vol. II, no. 304.

4 BENESCH, note 3, 304.

5 Although a few decades have passed since the first publication of the drawing and the remark Benesch made, it still represents a rare case of a possible prototype for a monumental wall decoration. Robert W. Scheller mentions only two similar cases from the 13<sup>th</sup> century: a *Vercelli rotulus* and the drawings with the so-called *Joinville Credo*. The *Vercelli rotulus* records the ruined frescoes in the local cathedral while the drawings of *Joinville Credo* are regarded as a design for a chapel mural. He also mentions the Apocalypse drawing and agrees with Benesch, mentioning that the drawing is showing the complete decorative programme of a small chapel cupola and its four supporting walls. R. W. SCHELLER, *Exemplum: model-book drawings and the practice of artistic transmission in the Middle Ages (ca. 900-ca. 1470)* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995), 36, note 121.

6 BENESCH, note 3, 304.

7 J. APFELHALER, ‘Apocalypse-Blatt’, in: *Hl. Rupert von Salzburg 696-1996. Katalog der Ausstellung im Dommuseum zu Salzburg und in der Erzabtei St. Peter*, ed. by P. Eder – J. Kronbichler <Dommuseum Salzburg, 16. Mai – 27. Oktober 1996>, Salzburg 1996, 449-451.

8 APFELHALER, note 7, 450.

9 GEYMONAT, note 1, 130-133.



Fig. 2: Chapel of St. Michael, Hartberg, around 1250 (source: Ana Krevelj)

It is not known when exactly the chapel was built, so the dating of its construction varies in the literature from the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century until the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> It is possible that the construction was connected with the parish priest Ulrich von Hartberg, who appears in written sources between 1163 and 1201. Ulrich was of noble background and had an excellent education. At first, he was the chaplain of the archbishop of Salzburg, Eberhard I (1147–1167) and at that time Salzburg also had a desire to establish a diocese in Hartberg. Later he was politically connected with Duke Leopold V. of Babenberg, who may also have contributed to the construction of the charnel chapel. In addition to St. Michael, the patron of the chapel was also St. Ulrich (until the end of

10 E. LANC, *Die mittelalterlichen Wandmalereien in der Steiermark* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2002), 152–157 with complete list of older bibliography about Hartberg chapel of St. Michael.



Fig. 3: Interior of the Chapel towards the north (source: Ana Krevelj)

the 16<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>11</sup>

During the Baroque period, the interior was whitewashed, the apsis window was enlarged, and new openings were made. In 1715, fire destroyed the roof, and the frescoes were exposed to bad weather conditions for an extended period. The bad state of the chapel was noticed just at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and in 1893 an academic painter and restorer Teophil Melicher started with the restoration of poorly preserved and fragmentary frescoes within the whole restoration of the building (Fig. 3).<sup>12</sup>

The remaining frescoes were heavily restored or practically overpainted, and the lost parts were just supplemented by entirely new scenes. The result of this procedure was even at that time considered to be questionable and disturbing, especially by an art historian and conservator Johann Graus (employed by k. k. Central-Commission zur Erforschung und Erhaltung der Baudenkmale in Vienna), because the original iconographic programme was no longer clearly

11 R. WAGNER-RIEGER, 'Gotische Architektur in der Steiermark', in: *Gotik in der Steiermark. Landesausstellung veranstaltet vom Kulturreferat der Steiermärkischen Landesregierung im Stift St. Lambrecht vom 28. Mai bis 8. Oktober 1978*, ed. El. Langer (Graz: Kulturreferat der steiermärkischen Landesregierung, 1978), 45–93; M. SCHWARZ, 'Die Architektur der Spätzeit (1200–1246)', in: *1000 Jahre Babenerger in Österreich. Niederösterreichische Jubiläumsausstellung Stift Lilienfeld 15. Mai – 31. Oktober 1976* (Wien-Köln-Weimar: Böhlau, 1976), 511–522; M. SCHWARZ, *Die Baukunst des 13. Jahrhunderts in Österreich* (Wien-Köln-Weimar Böhlau, 2013), 77–80.

12 J. GRAUS, 'Romanische Malereien zu Hartberg', in: *Kirchenschmuck*, 1897, 3; S. WALTER, 'Die Fresken im Hartberg Karner', in: *Zeitschrift des Historischen Vereines für Steiermark*, 1978, 185–190; LANC, note 10, 153.

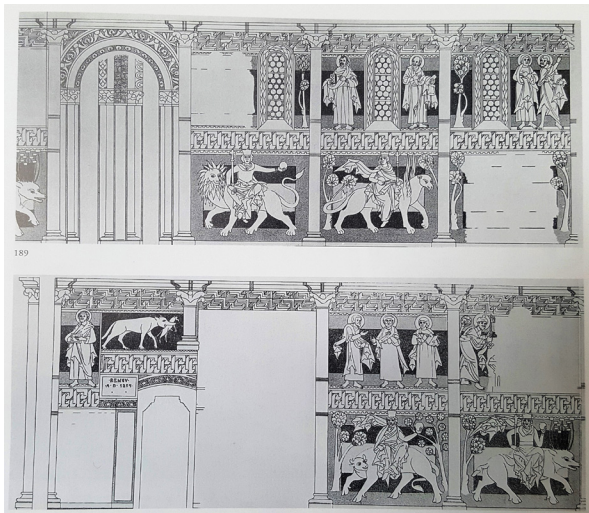


Fig. 4: Scheme of original parts of frescoes before the restoration by J. Graus  
(source: E. Lanc, *Die mittelalterlichen Wandmalereien in der Steiermark*, Wien 2002, Figs. 189–190)

recognizable. Johann Graus spoke after the restoration with Theophil Melicher and made a scheme showing the original parts of frescoes according to Melicher's descriptions. The blank areas were later painted by Theophil Melicher (Fig. 4).<sup>13</sup>

The walls of the chapel are divided into two registers. The lower register represents seven crowned men riding different animals. They hold sceptres and orbs in their hands. Four of them (kings riding a bull, a boar, a lion and a winged panther) are according to Melicher more or less original. In the scene with the king on a horse, only the head of a horse is original, while the kings on the dragon and whale are new.

The upper register represents Christ enthroned with Peter and Paul and other standing figures defined as apostles. Only Peter and some standing figures are original. The scene with the devil dragging souls into the hellmouth is new, while the wolf with the lamb is reportedly original. The whole vault is entirely new. Melicher was inspired here by the fresco paintings in the Romanesque chapel of St. Catherine in Znojmo (Czech Republic), which he also restored previously.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> LANC, note 10, 154.

<sup>14</sup> LANC, note 10, 154.

The painting in the apsis represents the family tree of Christ with the Virgin and Child in the centre, while the sleeping Jesse is missing. Here are also several additional scenes that cannot be explained without some doubt and cannot be iconographically defined with certainty.

In 1897 and 1902, Johann Graus suggested that the iconographic programme was based on a vision of St. Daniel of four kingdoms.<sup>15</sup> However, later there was a controversy in 1977–1979 between Elfriede Grabner,<sup>16</sup> who followed Graus and Sepp Walter,<sup>17</sup> who saw in seven riders “the oldest depiction of seven deadly sins in medieval Christian iconography” and whom many other scholars, such as Mario Schwarz, often quote.<sup>18</sup> Walter interpreted the lion as Pride, the camel (?) as Wrath, the horse as Sloth, the dragon as Envy, the whale (or basilisk) as Greed, the ox as Gluttony and the boar as Lust.

Elga Lanc<sup>19</sup> compared the scheme of Johann Graus with the descriptions of kings in St. Daniel's vision, and although the whole cycle in the chapel still cannot be fully iconographically explained (the head of a horse, for example), she concluded that the original four riders do represent the vision of Daniel. She leaned her interpretation on a study of Edgar Marsch about the written sources on Daniel's vision.<sup>20</sup> Marsch evalu-

<sup>15</sup> GRAUS, note 12, 2-7 and 17-20; J. GRAUS, ‘Romanische Wandmalereien zu Pürgg und Hartberg’, in: *Mitteilungen der k. k. Zentral-Kommission zur Erhaltung und Erforschung der Kunst- und Historischen Denkmale*, N. F. 28, 1902, 83-88.

<sup>16</sup> E. GRABNER, ‘Die vier Reiterbilder im Karner zu Hartberg. Zur ikonographischen Einordnung und Deutung der im 19. Jahrhundert restaurierten romanischen Wandmalereien’, in: *Zeitschrift des Historischen Vereines für Steiermark*, 1977, 221-244; E. GRABNER, ‘Zur Ikonographie Hartberger Karnerfresken’, in: *Zeitschrift des Historischen Vereines für Steiermark*, 1979, 133-141.

<sup>17</sup> S. WALTER, ‘Die Fresken im Hartberger Karner’, in: *Zeitschrift des Historischen Vereines für Steiermark*, 1978, 185-238; S. WALTER, ‘Die Fresken im Hartberger Karner’, in: *Zeitschrift des Historischen Vereines für Steiermark*, 1979, 143-150.

<sup>18</sup> SCHWARZ, note 11, 77-80.

<sup>19</sup> LANC, note 10, 154-157.

<sup>20</sup> E. MARSCH, ‘Die fünf Reiterbilder im Karner zu Hartberg’, in: *Biblische Prophetie und chronographische Dichtung. Stoff- und Wirkungsgeschichte der Vision des Propheten Daniel nach Dan. VII* (Berlin: Schmidt, 1972), 89-96.



Fig. 5: Emperor August on a boar with ten horns and Christ enthroned between St. Peter and St. Paul. (source: Ana Krevelj)

ated the programme of the frescoes as the most crucial cyclic representation of this motif in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. He claims that the representation of the motif of four riders in the upper storey of the chapel expresses the importance of eschatological sense for the symbolic understanding of the Vision. In the chapel, Death and Salvation are ideally connected. The history of salvation is contrasted with the individual experience of death in a visionary-symbolic way. Christ enthroned and surrounded by apostles is represented upon these four rulers on beasts. They symbolize four world-kingdoms that will, according to Daniel's vision, be replaced by the true kingdom of God. The four beasts are positioned on each side of the apsis. Their sequence and appearance only partially follow Daniel's description.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> After Daniel 7.3-12 the prophet saw in his dream a lion with wings of an eagle, a bear with three ribs in its

The sequence is the same as in the chronicle *Historiae Adversus Paganos* of Paulus Orosius, who, according to Daniel, divides the world into four periods of dominion, which will finally be replaced by only one. The first ruler is Ninus from Babylon on a winged lion. The second is the Greek kingdom represented by Alexander the Great on a winged panther. Wings symbolize his rapid rise and a short reign. The panther has only one head instead of four, which in Daniel's vision symbolize Alexander's four successors. Orosius is writing about fourteen of them, so more panther heads were not relevant. The third kingdom is Egypt, represented by an ox (Apis) with Ptolemy and the last is Rome with Emperor Augustus riding on a boar with ten horns (Dan. 7.24). For Orosius, it was significant that Christ was born under the rule of Augustus. According to Marsch that is the reason that Christ enthroned is represented just above the fourth rider and that he symbolises the final dominion, the Kingdom of God (Fig. 5).<sup>22</sup>

Comparing the Apocalypse drawing on parchment from Archabbey of St. Peter in Salzburg and the frescoes in Hartberg chapel, some similarities are visible in the representations of kings on animals (Figs. 6a-6b). They are sitting majestically on their beasts with crowns on their heads and with orbs and sceptres in the shape of a lily in their hands. The drapery is swirling in the air in a typical "Zackenstill" form. The beasts on the drawing have never been seen in real life. They do not resemble any specific species but, because of their symbolic meaning and corresponding inscriptions, there was no need for this. What the beasts in the chapel looked like before the restoration,

mouth between its teeth, a leopard with four wings and four heads and the fourth beast, which was terrifying, frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth and was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns. Between them there was a small horn which had eyes like the eyes of a human being and a mouth that spoke boastfully.

<sup>22</sup> MARSCH, note 20, 94-96; GRAUS (Pürgg und Hartberg, 1902), note 15 and GRABNER, (Die vier Reiterbilder, 1977 and Zur Ikonographie der Hartberger Karnerfresken, 1979), note 16, present also other parallel examples of the same iconographic type based on Orosius' writings.

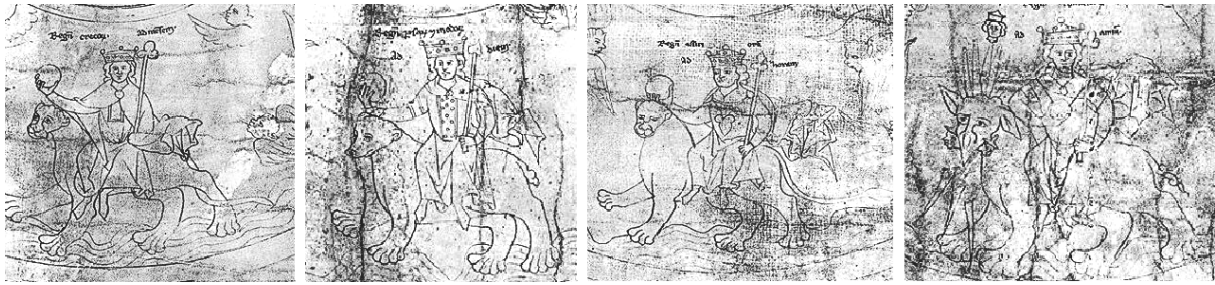


Fig. 6a. Details from Apocalypse drawing representing kings on beasts.  
(source: same as Fig. 1)

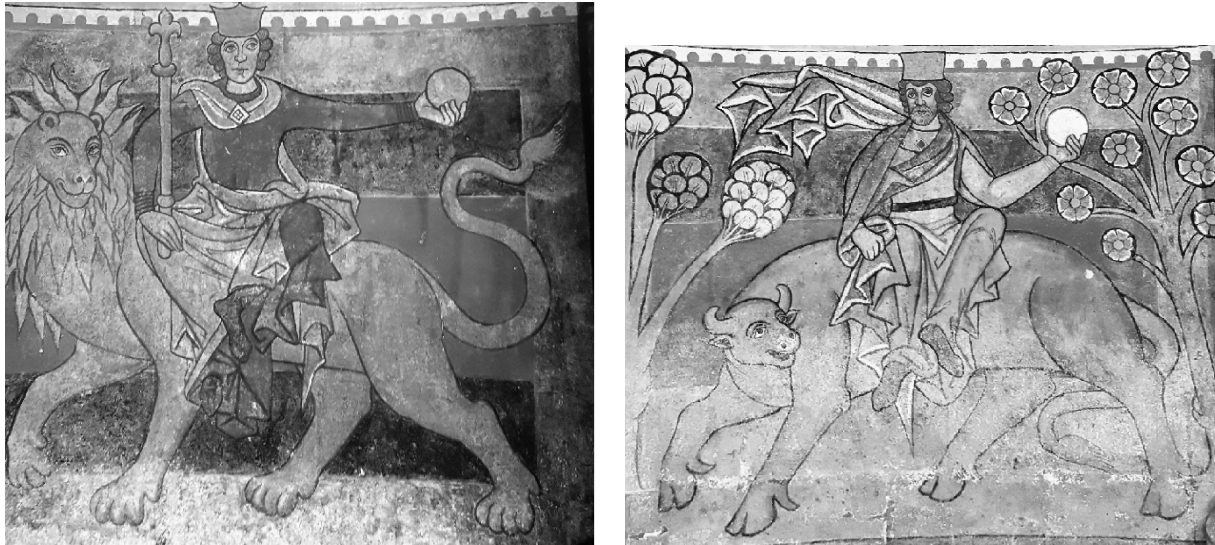


Fig. 6b. Details of two kings on beasts from the Hartberg Chapel  
(source: Ana Krevelj)

we can only guess. I believe the lion did not have such an abundant mane, the panther could even lack wings, while the boar with ten horns looks very similar to the drawing variant. The discrepancies are to be expected. As Robert Scheller pointed out, it is generally difficult to demonstrate the use of illuminated manuscripts as prototypes for monumental wall decorations. The size and unique requirements of the wall surface and subdivision presuppose a different approach to that of the layout of an illuminated manuscript.<sup>23</sup> Fresco technique required fast work, making minute details such as in our drawing hard to copy accurately, so it is also reasonable to conclude that the author of the drawing was not skilled in fresco painting and that alterations were necessary.

Because of complete restoration of the original parts of the remaining frescoes in

the 19<sup>th</sup> century and because of lack of photographic evidence of its original state before the restoration, it is impossible to date and stylistically define them accurately. Based on rough comparison with other related monuments, Elga Lanc dates the frescoes towards the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>24</sup> The Apocalypse drawing is dated to around 1230 and placed in the Salzburg area. It has been mentioned before that Hartberg was also connected with Salzburg Archabbey through Ulrich von Hartberg and Salzburg's desire to establish new diocese in Hartberg at that time. We cannot overlook the fact that in Hartberg there are no scenes from Revelation of John as on parchment, although we should not forget that a large part of the cycle is missing (the whole vault for instance) and that the remaining parts were incorrectly completed or altered. It is also interesting

23 SCHELLER, note 5, 30.

24 LANC, note 10, 157.

that Melicher included new scenes, such as the Mouth of Hell and a Dragon, which correspond to iconography of the Apocalypse.

The diagram of the drawing suggests that it may represent a design for quadrangle chapel while in Hartberg we have a rotunda. However, perhaps this exact distinction implies that in Hartberg we have a kind of an abbreviation of a larger scheme. As Ludovico Geymonat mentioned before,<sup>25</sup> this drawing could be made for someone interested in Apocalyptic writings and who may have kept it within a scriptorium at his disposal and accessible to his students and followers and that it might have influenced directly or indirectly the fresco cycle in Hartberg.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that the drawing and frescoes have some crucial common points (dating and style, connection with Salzburg and partial matching in iconography) and that this accidentally preserved parchment may represent rare evidence of existing pre-prepared schemes for complex fresco cycles in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. However, there are also some discrepancies between the two, so we can only assume that the drawing might directly or indirectly have influenced the Hartberg cycle. This is partially due to a heavy restoration in 19<sup>th</sup> century, which represents at least for the development of the restoration-conservation practice a critical lesson. All of this is partially due to a lack of information, which may lead to some further research on the topic.

**Ana KREVELJ**

Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, The Novo mesto Regional Office, Skalickega 1, 8000 Novo mesto, Slovenia  
ana.krevelj@zvkds.si

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25 GEYMONAT, note 1, 133.