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THE TRANSFORMATION OF MONUMENT PROTECTION IN THE LAST  
THIRD OF THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY  
(1872-1904)

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION (PHD) THESES

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## **OBJECTIVE**

In my thesis, I examined the initial period of the history of the protection of Hungarian monuments, the three decades following its institutionalisation. These three decades were one of the most eventful, complex and significant periods of monument protection. Like art history, it was a newly emerging discipline, ambitious and struggling for autonomy, and the creation of the Provisional Commission for Monuments in 1872 was an important milestone in its history. The scientific study of architectural form and the resulting flowering of historicism; the idea of stylistic purity; the economic prosperity that followed the Compromise; the millennium's aspirations for representation and the search for a new discipline - among many other factors - together shaped the theoretical and practical direction of monument conservation in the period.

A widely accepted narrative in the historiography of conservation is that the turn of the 19th and 20th

centuries brought a paradigm shift in conservation, with purist aspirations being replaced by what are still considered modern principles, and that this process brought about a clear, definitive and radical change. In my thesis I examine whether this change has indeed taken place in this way.

The focus of my research is on smaller-scale, less well-funded restorations, because I believe that these, alongside large and emblematic restorations, are an excellent reflection of the historicist principles of the time. In my thesis, I discuss the restoration histories of fifteen such 'smaller' monuments, which are: Csaroda, Reformed Church; Harina, Evangelical Church; Keszthely, parish church; Kusaly, Reformed Church; Máriafalva, Church of the Assumption of Mary; Miskolc, Reformed Church of Avasi; Nagybánya, Church of St. Stephen; Ócsa, Reformed Church; Palágykomoróc, Reformed Church; Bratislava, "Clarissa" tower of the Catholic High School (church); Bratislava, tower of the Franciscan Church; Bratislava, St.

Martin's Cathedral; Sasieba, Lutheran Church; Százd, St. Nicholas Church; Zólyom, castle.

## **DESCRIPTION AND METHODS OF THE RESEARCH**

I set the starting date of the period under study in my thesis to 1872, the year of the foundation of the Provisional Commission for Monuments, and the end of the period in 1904, the year of the end of Béla Czobor's term as rapporteur of the Commission and the end of his life.

My sources, in addition to any available literature, were the documents and plans of the Provisional Commission for Monuments and Sites (MIB) and the National Commission for Monuments and Sites (MOB). In addition to the survey and restoration plans, the submissions, reports, proposals, descriptions and budgets of the committee members provided a wealth of details on how the subject was thought about in the period under study. The focus of my research is on the building intentions

expressed in the documents mentioned above, sometimes irrespective of whether they were actually implemented. The other source material for my research was the opinions and reports published in periodicals and the regrettably few theoretical writings.

I have devoted a separate chapter to the financial resources for restoration, as this aspect has also proved to be a very important factor.

I placed the restorations under study in context with an overview of the development of the theory of monument conservation in Europe and in the country.

The changes in the field of heritage conservation are not only reflected in restoration and written opinions, but also in the transformation of the institutional context, and this aspect is therefore also examined in a separate chapter.

Finally, I briefly reviewed the relationship between heritage conservation and identity politics in the 19th century.

## THESES

**Thesis №1** The general view in some literature that the period of historicising purism ended at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries and was replaced by the later charter-oriented principles of heritage conservation, which we now see as progressive, needs to be revised and nuanced.

In the last third of the 19th century, purism, which was the dominant style of monument restoration, (also) flourishing in our country. Three main factors, among many others, contributed to this:

- The millennial aspirations of representation, also manifested in the beautification of our built heritage; in this context
- the unprecedented financial resources devoted to building restoration; and
- the highest level of knowledge of form and structure in architectural styles.

The Gothic style was a 'second mother tongue' for the architects who designed the restoration projects; they designed in a historic style with a sound knowledge of it. They acquired their knowledge through a long process of study, often at universities abroad and through fine arts studies, and then put their knowledge to good use as practising architects over decades. It would be unrealistic to expect and imagine that these professionals would force themselves to change radically. A generational change was needed to translate and consolidate the new principles into practice.

While the professionals who designed heritage restoration projects were unwilling and unable to give up this knowledge, the direction of the necessary change in conservation principles may not have been initially clear to their contemporaries. According to the committee minutes, the committee members seem to have been more concerned with fine-tuning purism, maintaining a balanced approach while avoiding excesses, than with the possibility of a radical break with purism. When, at the

turn of the century, the critique of purism - influenced by Western Europe - began to emerge in Hungary, the methods of restoration that would offer a real alternative had to wait decades for their crystallisation. Until then, the tried and tested tools were available.

After 1896, large-scale and spectacular restorations (reconstructions) were replaced by smaller-scale, simpler restorations, but the demand for purism remains evident. It would be a mistake to plot the change in conservation principles as a definite vector from purism as a starting point to charters.



**Thesis №2** In many cases, the fate and outcome of restoration has depended on the financial resources available.

In the context of the previous thesis, it should be noted that, apart from the need for a stylistically pure restoration or extension and the intention to protect the monument, the most significant factor determining the restoration in question was in many cases (with few exceptions, typically always) the existence or lack of financial resources available for the work. In the history of both the 'large' and 'small' restorations that I have examined in this thesis, the question of where the necessary funds could be found and how much was available has recurred again and again.

As we have seen, the money needed for the construction could come from a variety of sources. The financial possibilities affected not only the pace of the restoration, but in many cases the programme and the plans themselves. In several cases, it is clear that the scarcity of

financial resources meant that a simpler solution had to be considered, or that in the case of several plan options, the decision was determined by their cost of implementation.

On the basis of the written sources available, the most significant of which in this case are the Commission's files, it is safe to say that historicist purism would have left its mark on an even wider range of monumental material; if the domestic heritage sector had had more financial resources at its disposal, the majority of our medieval building stock would be different today.

**Thesis №3** Scientific and demanding research on buildings was already known and established practice in the last third of the 19th century.

As is clear from the sources, building restorations were in most cases preceded by research. The architect commissioned to draw up plans for the restoration carried out a thorough preliminary study before embarking on the planning stage. This means complex and thorough building research. It can be seen that all of the methods of building research that we now call modern building research were known and practised in the period under study.

First and foremost, a detailed and interpretative architectural survey of the building was carried out: plans, sections and façade views were drawn up. Already in the course of the survey, a depth of knowledge was acquired which can be described as observational building research.

On several occasions, we learned from reports to the committee that the architects had collected historical sources and information on the building in question.

Known was the demolition wall survey, whereby the wall fabric was excavated to examine certain parts of the building. In some cases, phenomena revealed during construction (which could be seen as an extension of wall research) modified the plans and shaped the way the restoration was carried out.

Wall painting-research was also known, and even the paint layers were examined in the laboratory.

We have seen that the research almost always included structural testing, tests for stability, i.e. structural condition assessment.

Finally, before and during construction, efforts were made to record the process.

**Thesis №4** During the period under study in my thesis, the engineering approach and point of view were strengthened in the Provisional and then the National Commission for Monuments.

In fact, it could be said that it became more professional, which means a strengthening of the engineering, architectural character as opposed to the non-architectural character within the Commission. This change is most noticeable in the increase in the collection of drawings and in the growing demand for engineering surveys of buildings. As we have seen, the building surveys presented by the external members with a fine-art claim increasingly failed to meet the expectations of the architectural committee members who judged them. This was the context in which photography appeared in the service of the objective recording of buildings.

This change was accompanied by a change of personnel and was a prerequisite for a generational change. With the deaths of the founding generation; Arnold Ipolyi,

Ferenc Pulszky and Flóris Rómer, but especially with the death of Henszlmann in 1888, the architect members of the Commission felt that the time had come to reinforce the engineering and architectural approach to heritage conservation in contrast to that of the art historians and archaeologists.

## **PUBLICATIONS ON THE SUBJECT**

1. The Turn-of-the-Century Monument Protection Practice in Light of Ernő Foerk's Work. In: Ybl Journal of Built Environment (2019) Vol. 7/2. Budapest, pp. 74-82.
2. Collection growth in the first three decades of the National Commission for Monuments. XVI Scientific Conference on Civil Engineering (2021). Óbuda University, Ybl Miklós Faculty of Civil Engineering. pp. 31-55.
3. The restoration of the Evangelical Church of Harina by Otto Sztehlo. XVII. Scientific Conference on Civil Engineering (2022). Óbuda University, Ybl Miklós Faculty of Civil Engineering. Under publication.

4. Zuh Deodath – Viktor Rozmann: The difficulties of national stylistic aspirations - monument protection in the service of identity politics at the end of the 19th century in Hungary. 1st Ybl Conference on the Built Environment (2023). Hungarian Architecture. Under publication.

#### **OTHER PUBLICATIONS**

1. An apartment building in Bálvány Street. Additions to the history of 22 Október 6. utca. In. Etudes. Studies in honour of Katalin Granasztóiné Győrffy. Edited by István Bardoly. Cultural Heritage Protection Office, Budapest, 2004. pp. 277-286.
2. Levente Csomortány – Judit Gömöry – Viktor Rozmann: History of the building at 3 Bécsi kapu Square, Győr. In. Stone on stone. For the 73rd birthday of Ferenc Dávid. I. Vince Publishing House, Budapest, 2013. pp. 293-307.



3. List of monuments in Hungary: Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok county. Ed. by Istvan Bardoly – Andrea Haris. Cultural Heritage Protection Office, Budapest, 2005. I compiled the list.
  
4. Review: Aurél Benárd - István Bizzer - Tamás Csáki - Katalin Gergely - Edit Lantos - Ildikó Pandur - György Gábor Papp: Árkay. A Hungarian architect and artist dynasty. Ed. by Tamás Csáki. Masters of Architecture. Holnap Publishing House, Budapest 2020. 311 pages. Art History Bulletin (2020) 69. 2. pp. 351-359.
  
5. Second release review: Aurél Benárd – István Bizzer – Tamás Csáki – Katalin Gergely – Edit Lantos – Ildikó Pandur – Gábor György Papp: The Árkays - A Hungarian Dynasty of Architects and Artists. Edited by Tamás Csáki. Masters of Architecture Published by: Holnap Kiadó, Budapest 2020, 311

pages. Ybl Journal of Built Environment. Under Publication.

6. Dr. Gergely Domonkos Nagy - Viktor Rozmann: Data on the history of the construction of the Teleki-Tisza Castle in Nagykovácsi. In. Building stones of the homeland. Studies on 19th century architecture in honour of József Sisa. Edited by Péter Farbaky - Lilla Deklava Farbakiné. Research Centre for the Humanities, Institute of Art History, Budapest, 2022. pp. 331-341.