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THE LIFE'S WORK OF GYULA WÄLDER

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION (PHD) THESIS

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Objective

In my thesis, I wanted to study the architecture of Gyula Walder (1884-1944). Gyula Walder was one of the most prolific figures of Hungarian architecture in the interwar period, and his works still define the image of many of our cities, yet his name is less well known, or often negatively perceived for being associated with the neo-baroque architecture, of which he was the most famous representative. My aim, therefore, was to present the architect's vast collection of buildings, most of which still serve their original function and are of excellent quality, and to revise the perception of the neo-baroque architecture of the interwar period.

Description of the research

The research focuses mainly on the period between the two world wars, although the earliest known work by Gyula Walder dates from 1905, while the condominium, which is currently considered the latest work built, was built in 1941. In addition to the literature on the period, in which his name appears only in passing, the research has relied mainly on archival material and the period press and newspapers, which provide the history of many of his works. Among these, *Magyar ptmvszet* and the *pt Ipar – pt Mvszet* were outstanding sources, providing not only excellent descriptions but also published plans, and archive photographs. Fortunately, in many cases, the original plans can also be found in various archives already mentioned. Most of the research was carried out in the Archives of Budapest, as it stands out in terms of the volume of buildings in Budapest. The Heves County Archives also provided very important sources, not only for the buildings in Eger but also for those in Gyngys. Interestingly, the Veszprm County Archives played an indispensable role in the research of the Cistercian building complex of Buda, since the material of the client, the Zirc Cistercian Abbey, is all located there today. The research carried out in the Vas County Archives proved to be very useful not only for the buildings of Szombathely but also for the knowledge about the Walder family. We should also mention the Gyula Walder bequest and the Lrnt Radnai bequest, held at the Hungarian Museum of Architecture and Historic Monuments Documentation Centre, which contain a wealth of indispensable and excellent resources, from the architect's catalog of works to photographs taken on building sites and the recollections of young architects who worked in his office. (Interestingly, the bequests of architects who were also associated with Walder, such as Gyula Rimanczy, Lszl Lauber, Istvn Nyiri, and Ivn Kotsis, do not contain any material mentioning Walder.) The Budapest Collection of the Ervin Szab Library of Budapest, which helped the research with both local histories works and copies of the not yet digitized press, and the Architectural Collection of the Kiscelli Museum, which had some surprises in connection with the tender for the National Pantheon on the Hrmashatr Hill, proved very useful during the research. Thus, the research drew on primary and secondary sources to elaborate on the architectural heritage of Gyula Walder and to dissect the characteristics of the neo-baroque architecture of the interwar period.

Thesis

1. Gyula Walder was a leading figure of the interwar period’s architecture in Hungary

As mentioned above, Gyula Walder's name is mentioned in the literature on the architecture of the period, but no comprehensive work on his life's work was published until the author's monograph in 2020 by Holnap Kiado. Probably because of his most characteristic style, the career of this artist has not been previously covered, although Walder stands out not only for the quality of his buildings but also for the quantity of his work. In addition to well-known and acclaimed works such as the Cistercian St. School and Church of Buda and the Madach Square complex in Pest, many rural towns owe a significant part of their important public buildings to him. In Balassagyarmat, he designed the Paloc Museum, the Finance Directorate (now police headquarters), the parish and the post office, in Gyongyos the fire station and the water tower, in Nagyenyed the synagogue and several residential buildings, and in Eger the Financial Palace, the Korona Hotel and several schools. In general, these buildings are decorative in design, well integrated into the urban landscape thanks to their proportions and style, and still largely serve their original function today thanks to their practical layout and good structures. This is particularly true of the schools designed by Walder, which are still used for education in many municipalities. Overall, therefore, the architect's work is an important part of Hungary's building stock, having shaped the urban landscape and fulfilling an indispensable function.

2. Gyula Walder's architecture is much more diverse than the public thinks

As we have seen, Gyula Walder is known primarily for his large-scale works, such as the aforementioned church in District XI or the Music Palace in Miskolc, and the image of him is also defined by these neo-Baroque works. As a young architect, he experimented, designing many different styles of buildings, most of which, however, already show the architect's characteristics. Some of his works are clearly in the Secession style and are most closely related to those of Karoly Kos. These include the apartment building in Alfoldi Street in District VIII and his works in the Wekerle Housing Estate. His works in Balassagyarmat, for example, are characterised by a mixture of Art Nouveau and Baroque elements, while the Baroque and pre-modernist elements and the influence of Bela Lajta can be seen in the building of the State High School in Kisvarda. Another noteworthy example is the synagogue in Nagyenyed (Aiud, Romania), whose designs show the influence of Otto Wagner. After the large-scale neo-baroque works of the 1920s, the 1930s saw a return to experimentation, with exciting works such as the house No 2 in Napraforgo Street in Pasaret, the aforementioned Madach Square ensemble and the Holitscher House in District VII. These buildings are both influenced by the Bauhaus and German Expressionist architecture, and although they are relatively well known, few people know the identity of the architect.

3. Neo-Baroque architecture of the interwar period is a more complex phenomenon than previously thought, and is not specific to Hungary

Many historians consider this phenomenon as the result of the conservative thinking of the Horthy-era, and simply look upon the Neobaroque as the state-supported style, but the topic is far more complex. It is true that many buildings constructed by the state were erected in this style, but there was also a general nostalgia towards the Austro-Hungarian Empire after the Treaty of Trianon, and the revival of baroque architecture was the most obvious way of expressing it, since the Baroque style was highly associated with the Habsburg family. Hungarian society also had a kind of “Baroque taste” and structure in the Interwar period which helped the Neobaroque style on its way to popularity. Also, Modernism as an alternative did not play a big role in this era because of its socialist nature. The style had leftist origins, but so did the Hungarian Soviet Republic just a few years before, which was not a pleasant memory for many Hungarians. The conservative, traditional Neobaroque was more convenient and understandable, especially because since its popularity at the end of the 19th century it never really disappeared. It was highly popular in the 1910s, therefore it often seemed like an obvious choice. We must note, that interwar historicism is not a uniquely Hungarian phenomenon, it's also seen in many other countries such as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the United States of America, Scandinavia and the British Empire.

4. Despite the use of prefabricated elements, many buildings of artistic value have been built

Neo-Baroque architecture between the two world wars was characterised by the use of prefabricated cement casts and plaster elements, which made construction cheaper and faster, while at the same time creating a striking effect. These elements are often repeated in Gyula Walder's buildings and the same decoration can be found in many places. This might suggest a schematic and featureless building – it is no coincidence that the term 'industrial baroque' is used to describe neo-baroque architecture of the interwar period – but this is not necessarily the case. If we look only at the work of contemporaries, such as Ivan Kotsis or Denes Gyorgyi, we can still find buildings of artistic merit, but Gyula Walder's buildings are particularly notable. Even though the same clay carving of the Virgin Mary with the Child Jesus appears on the Walder Villa and on several schools in Eger, and even though the gates of the Cistercian School of Buda and the church next to it are almost identical, the composition is still artistic and shows excellent drawing skills.

Publications on the topic:

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Paár Eszter Szilvia: Kotsis Iván és a korszerű nyaralóépítés. *Építészfórum*, 2022.03.13.

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Paár Eszter Szilvia: Kotsis Iván és a szecessziós falusi iskolák. *Építészfórum*, 2021.11.12.

Paár Eszter Szilvia: A 20. század sokszínűsége Kotsis Iván építészetében. *Építészfórum*, 2021.10.29.

Paár Eszter Szilvia: Meissen-i és más pagodafigurák a XVIII. századtól napjainkig. *Magyar Művészet*, 2021. 9. évf. 2. szám

Paár Eszter Szilvia: Modernizmustól a vincellérházakig – P. Mueller Éva életművéből válogattunk. *Építészfórum*, 2021.04.07.

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