

# CLASSICISM AND ROMANTICISM FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF CURRENT ARCHITECTURE HISTORY<sup>1</sup>

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Traditional art history, the chronological list of European stylistic classifications is generally closed with the arts of the 18th century, the arts of the Baroque and Rococo eras. In some cases they tagged on the Classicism of the first half of the 19th century, convinced that this still retained art history has seminal stylistic characteristics. Thus, the arts produced in the era termed Classicism, in this system of art- and architectural-historical classification took on equal importance with those of the Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque monuments, while the art produced in the period following Classicism of the first half of the 19th century was deemed purely imitative. The so-called 'Neo' stylistic developments of the second half of the XIXth century, Neo-Gothic, Neo-Renaissance, Neo-Baroque were in this value system mere eclectic copies of the outward forms only, and entirely lacked any true creative energy. This assessment is the result of an art historical point of view which considers the course of stylistic development solely on the grounds of sterile, formal norms, judging only the changes in the outward signs, and valuing only their originality.

Recent art historical scholarship focuses on the roots of stylistic periods, in the light of broader connections; for architectural history in particular, critical scholarship takes into account the economic and social aspects, and the level of technological development of an era, in addition to the purely formal aspects of style. In view of these new attitudes and considerations, the seemingly quite heterogeneous eclectic historicism of the arts of the 19th century can now be more comprehensively treated, both from the material, as well as the intellectual aspects. The development of capi-

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talism spawned the arts of the modern era: it had its roots in the mid-18th century, from which it took off full force and grew unchecked basically all through the 19th century.

The complex developments of the 19th century served as the underlying forces of the arts of the modern era; these intellectual-artistic forces are now universally recognized, which art historians have named, for want of a better term, — ROMANTICISM. By Romantic architecture, they meant that style of building which came to the fore after the classicizing period of the first half of the 19th century; this architectural historical period revived the formal vocabulary of medieval architecture, and used this vocabulary to express its creative thoughts, which came about mainly in the latter third of the 19th century, when it became the leading mode of architectural creative expression. However, in terms of contemporary architectural thought — and principally due to the great diversity of this idiom — we are not referring here to the traditional stylistic categorizations. Therefore we do not regard Romanticism as a style, but rather as a new kind of artistic approach, as a unique creative direction and attitude which adopted different European, as well as other, exotic stylistic and formal traits in its creative processes. Using this approach, we can then recognize a kind of similar expressive tendency in monuments of the Classicizing late Baroque period, in the revival of Greek and Roman forms and motifs of early 19th century Classicism, or in the 'Romantic' enthusiasm for the medieval, for the Gothic and the Romanesque, and even in variations of Neo-styles that came about in the second half of the 19th century as a result of the fashion for historicism.

It is possible to narrow down even further this loosely termed concept of Romanticism, and to divide the Romantic movement of the modern era into two different phases. The first, greater portion is the real Romanticism that occurred between 1750 and 1850, which is called ACTIVE Romanticism, and which includes progressive intellectual romanticism. This can be further broken down into the Romantic Classicism or Classicizing late Baroque of 1750–1800; the Classicizing Romanticism of 1800–1830; and the Gothicizing Romantic period of 1830–1850; taking in consideration, of course, the necessary overlaps between periods. With these notions of Romanticism as our basis, we can say that the period continues right down to our present day, proceeding as it does from creative processes that have a common intellectual and spiritual basis.

The second phase of Romanticism, which permeates the second half of the 19th century, is the so-called PASSIVE Romanticism, that can also be referred to as the period of Historicism–Eclecticism. Compared to the innovative, fresh, creative expressions of the first Romantic period, the works produced during this epoch seem ponderous, mechanical, and aca-

demic, with an archaeological exactness that makes them seem to be routinely turned out, and boring. These neo-style monuments have a disturbingly aggressive monumentality about them, and by this time are even outdated, retardant in their creative formal aspects.

It is important to note that the notion of the continuity of Romanticism till the end of the 19th century must be taken with reservations. That is, while active Romanticism, having adapted formal characteristics from the historic periods, and having transformed them, achieved a new set of relationships that resulted in a definite, and unmistakable set of expressive modes that could not be identified with any other forms, passive Romanticism of the second half of the 19th century, on the other hand, with its imitative neo-styles, largely remained stuck in the slavish copying of historical forms and their combinations.

If we are to place the works of Hungarian Classicizing Romanticism in this classification of Romanticism we must examine them more on how they differ from the average European works of the time. It is surprising that our Classicizing Romantic architecture grows organically and smoothly, without any breaks, out of late Baroque Classicism. We can call this Classicizing Romantic architectural style quite simply Classicism, since, throughout a full half century, it retained all the forms of exclusively classical character in every aspect of architectural activity. For this reason, our architecture of this period can be related to the Mediterranean, the Italian and French cultural ambit rather than to the Northern European, German and English. In England, Greek revival, Gothic revival, and Classical revival seem to overlap each other, appearing simultaneously with the first stage, the so-called active stage of Romanticism. This is true of Germany as well, where, in the works of SCHINKEL, the Gothic and the Classical were equally emphasized, simultaneously with Langhans or KLENZE's strivings to achieve Greek-like expressive forms. In Hungary some four decades of pure Classicism were followed by a short but homogeneous period of medieval Romanticism, which just as quickly and also relatively homogeneously turned into a Neo-Renaissance version in the 1860s.

The root of this clear, pure, unified Classicism in Hungarian architecture can be found in our adherence to and connections with, the Mediterranean cultural world over centuries — in either an open, or at times in more implied ways. This trait was also expressed in the Latinized character of Hungarian society. Latin dominated Hungarian political life, and the legal concepts of Hungary's political gentry were completely rooted in Roman law, even in the first half of the 19th century. Thus, when the Baroque finally waned in Europe and rationalism came to the forefront, bringing with it the spirit of Greco-Roman culture, the fashion for the antique quickly and easily gained ground in Hungarian cultural circles. For

them the vogue of the antique did not appear to be a novelty, and was adapted immediately and without reservations.

The result of this age-old cleavage to Latinity was an enormously rich, Classicist architecture that developed without any particular theoretical preparations. This architecture was relatively independent from other artistic influences, and can be said to be significant, in a larger European context. Our architects did not peruse the works of such outstanding theoreticians as LODOLI, LAUGIER, WINCKELMANN or OESER, nor publications that spread the knowledge of Classical forms, such as PIRANESI's albums, VITRUVIUS and VIGNOLA's reprinted works, nor DURAND's model books, and neither the showy survey books of the English and French architects who had travelled to Italy, nor the architectural publications of the Society of Dilettanti, which had such a great impact on the spread of Classical culture throughout Europe. No doubt, these works were not entirely unknown among our higher architectural circles, but they could hardly even have known works by Hungarian writers, since there were hardly one or two produced at this time.

J. N. SCHAUFF published his theoretical writing on the Classical orders in Pozsony (Bratislava today) in 1790. It is a sign of the writer's Hungarian identity, that, in addition to the five Classical orders, also included a 'Hungarian Order', which is based in the Doric and has in its ornamental motifs, the double-cross, the Holy Crown, and a csákó. He published another work in 1806, entitled 'The basic concepts of beautiful architecture.'

Another notable work is by Ferenc KRESZNERICS of the KAZINCZY circle. This is a handbook in Latin published in 1804, entitled 'Architecturae civilis et hidrotechnichae.' There were several books of a specifically technical nature, among which the most familiar is the four-volume work by Pál BERECSZÁSZI of Debrecen. With this we can close the list of Hungarian books that promoted classical architecture, since Imre HENSZELMANN's 'Parallel' of 1841 still stresses the element of nationalism, but he finally concludes that the zenith of esthetic perfection is to be found in the German Gothic. Thus, he became the apostle in Hungary of the Gothicizing trend, which was already developing in the 1840s.

This is all the more remarkable since only a few of our most important architects were able to spend any time in Italy, in the matrix of the Classical in architecture, to study, to polish and perfect their craft. This is the reason our architecture is free of the archeological preoccupations that make some works of English and German Classicizing architecture so lifeless, and akin to stiff stage sets.

The faithful reproduction of examples of Antique art and architecture was especially popular in official political circles. Quotations from ancient

Roman monuments were initially adopted by the ruling classes for their own glorification. The development of Hungarian Classicism comes not from the point of centralized political power, but from the Hungarian aristocracy and landed nobility on their large estates that supplied the Habsburg armies with grain, meat, and horses during the time to the Napoleonic wars; as well as the landed gentry, which had also grown wealthy, and the rapidly growing prosperous merchant middle class. Pest carried the lead in this development, and it was at this time that its foundations as the capital were established. An entirely new area of the city was laid out during these decades, which was based in the medieval city center, and stretched northward along the Danube: this is the Lipótváros, or Leopold city area. This new area was built according to strict urbanistic principles, with a network of regulated, squared streets, with carefully designed two-story apartment buildings with harmonized facades, interspersed here and there with a public building.

A certain harmony of form characterizes this style. This harmony comes from the identical cornice heights, the windows spaced evenly according to an 8-foot measure; the brickwork, which, though modest, is worked in carefully banded systems, horizontally and vertically, as well as the good proportions of the uniformly stuccoed facades, all of which gave a particular local character to the street. A certain well-to-do, middle-class air radiated from these simple apartment buildings, and from the public architecture as well, which differed only in being detached, free-standing buildings of somewhat larger size. These public buildings appeared more monumental because of their central risalits emphasized by a tympanum. Their massive closed forms, and stereometric blocks seem to echo WINCKELMANN's descriptions of the 'brightness and might' of Greek art.

Another, quite striking characteristic of Hungarian Classicism is apparent in these simple buildings: this is the strong tendency to define space. A major problem for our great Classicizing architects was the design and integration of spaces. This is evident not only in the great halls which spread through the two floors of the Nemzeti Múzeum, and in the Vigadó in Pest, destroyed in 1849, but also in residential buildings. This can be seen in the drawings and plans of house interiors by POLLACK, HILD, HOFRICHTER. The carefully designed arched doorways, the use of which in Hungary can be traced back to late medieval times, the adjoining vaulted staircase, and the festively decorated succession of rooms on the first floor all testify to the modest, but self-possessed middle class's pretensions and ambitions, and not least, their esthetic tastes. This taste is apparent even in the seemingly humble facade designs of buildings by the lesser architects and master builders. The predisposition to a certain delicacy in dividing and proportioning is evident even in the simplest rural architectural form:

not only in the manor houses of the Alföld or Great Plain, but in the simplest, most ordinary rural houses as well, for example as in Alsódabas, with their beautifully rhythmical, well proportioned colonnaded porch (*tornác*), or in Nagykunság, where the paired column motif in the porch becomes an eye-catching device, invented by the local builders who entirely lacked any formal architectural training.

Although SZÉCHENYI already in the thirties criticized the monotony of the streets of Pest, where he would have liked to see some balconies — in his words, ‘paste-ons’ — and facades enlivened by some convex and concave undulation and risalits, all in all, this was not to detract from the meritorious efforts of the architects who planted our cities full of simple rows of buildings by the hundreds, which perfectly suited the needs and demands of those who built them. The popularity of Hungarian Classicism with the residents is an important fact that is rarely encountered in contemporary architecture elsewhere. A survey of the function and size of the architecture of the period — from Mihály POLLACK’s Nemzeti Múzeum, the lower nobility’s manor house in Debrecen to the peasant houses of Kunmadaras, of Tiszaderzs, or of Szatmármegye — shows clearly the impetus to create form, that persisted uniformly for 40 years, with only slight variations in the ornamental elements to differentiate them. The use of the classicizing style in Hungarian architecture was not limited only to the aristocracy, the wealthy classes and the realm of public life, but was very much the domain of smaller cities, towns, and hamlets.

Finally, a word about the present state of our Classicizing architecture: about that carelessness, our neglect, which, in spite of the efforts of the National Monuments Conservancy and the local preservation groups, has caused these monuments, irreplaceable relics of our cultural heritage, to fall into ruins before our very eyes. Here I refer not only to the Lloyd Palota on Roosevelt Square, thoughtlessly torn down following the War, likewise the Hotel Europa, and the Manor House at Alcsút, but also to those ugly renovations to which so many of our Classicizing buildings have fallen victim. With their ungainly reconstructions, these urban and rural buildings have most often been adapted for purposes entirely unsuited to their original function and structure.

And these are major monuments which unfortunately are not known to Western art historians. Little mention is found in the architectural historical literature written in foreign languages on Hungarian monuments at all, and even less of the works of the Classicizing period. The only building that may be illustrated is usually the Nemzeti Múzeum. In the course of this short lecture I have tried to bring out the particular Hungarian characteristics which distinguish our buildings of the Classicizing period from any others in Europe of the time. I have not even mentioned those build-

ing types which secure particular importance of our Classicism in universal European development, and are quite unique in structure and design, for instance the double-steepled, cupola-type churches which are the final serious products of European architectural design in an era when religious culture was superseded by bourgeois rationalism which brought with it a worldly, materialistic, Greco-Roman cultural attitude. Among our unique new building types, found nowhere else in Europe, are the County Seats, with their colonaded facades set right onto the ground like mushrooms, and literally seeming to grow out of the ground. These County Seats are the proud documents of local government. Their plans are unique in design as well, composed of a fancy doorway and stairway, but with little else than a large room on the first floor, flanked by the living quarters of the county officials.

The Hungarians' strong attachment to the soil, the 'mother-land' is quite apparent in the castles and manor houses of the Classicizing period. The majority of these are modest in size, with ceremonial rooms situated on the ground floor, which are marked usually by the central risalit, with columns planted right into the ground, and supporting a tympanum above; the unarticulated corners of these buildings seem to disappear right into the trees and shrubbery of the surrounding landscape.

After having said all this, I dare claim that Hungarian Classicism is an exceptional phenomenon: I state this in spite of my definition of the 150 years of Romanticism which I stated should not be considered as an independent style as other stylistic categories were regarded by art historians. Hungarian Classicism was an exceptional movement at the dawning of the newest era, which gathered creative forces, and saw the many-faceted manifestations of art which here unified a variety of esthetic forces and directions. This classical view of art which developed in Hungary in the first half of the 19th century, and which reigned supreme here, penetrating all layers of society and all cultural levels, could so perfectly adapt to all aspects and demands of the economic situation of the owner, integrating aesthetic and functional demands, directly, and therefore manifest itself so energetically and emphatically that this artistic claim appeared with the universality of a style already. The fact that in Hungary, Classicism became a style to itself proves and asserts its unique place in mainstream European art history. Within the scope of a comparative work of architecture history a detailed examination of Hungarian Classicizing architecture, and a publication of this research, would be a most valuable contribution to the annals of Hungarian architectural history, and to the spread of its knowledge abroad.