

44(2), pp. 45-50, 2013

DOI: [10.3311/PPar.7393](https://doi.org/10.3311/PPar.7393)

<http://www.pp.bme.hu/ar/article/view/7393>

Creative Commons Attribution ©

György Kelényi

RESEARCH ARTICLE

RECEIVED DECEMBER 2013

Abstract

The cathedral of Vác was built by Isidore Ganneval (Canevale) who accompanied his master, Niccolo Servandoni to Vienna in 1760. He did not return to his homeland of France but remained in Vienna until the end of his life (1786). In 1761, he was appointed to design the cathedral at Vác. As there are no original plans, in the research, there is some diversity of opinion about the artist's origin; we do not know whether there were stages in his development. Attention is directed towards the cathedral because it is stylistically close to "French revolutionary architecture". The study deals with the totally novel character of the building and its stylistic parallels (e.g. Contant d'Ivry in France and Plattenstil in Austria). The hypothesis is that representations of the cathedral with high towers in place of the present sturdy version are signs of an earlier, more traditional plan.

Keywords

Ganneval · cathedral of Vác · Cardinal Migazzi · Contant d'Ivry · simplicité

Prince Khevenhüller-Metsch, major domo of Queen Maria Theresa, who was in the entourage of the Queen during her visit at the town of Vác in 1764, noted the following in his Memoires: "The cathedral here was designed by Monsieur Ganneval², a pupil of the famous Mr Servandoni"³. Marcellus Isidore Ganneval, or as he is called in the Hungarian literature, Canevale (1730-1786), after the famous 17th century architects' family, presumably arrived to Vienna in 1760 with his master, during the 20th anniversary celebrations of Maria Theresa's ascending the throne. Giovanni Niccolo Servandoni, who enjoyed considerable fame as the stage designer of the Parisian opera, a painter and an architect, planned the ephemeral decorations of the feasts. He was at the zenith of his career at that time⁴.

Ganneval did not return with his master to Paris, but remained in Vienna until the end of his life (1786), first in the service of the high nobility, then as an architect of the Hofbauamt, later transformed into General Bau-Direktion.

In 1761, he was appointed the task of designing the cathedral at Vác from Christoph Migazzi (1714-1804), Archbishop of Vienna who that year had also been appointed Bishop of Vác.

The name of the architect is mentioned by Migazzi in his notes⁵, but he added that Ganneval had neither time to make the detailed plans nor supervise the execution of them. These tasks were carried out by a Piarist friar, named Oswald [1].

Knowing the planning and execution practice of the period, we may suppose that Ganneval presented plans only for the facade, the ground plan and the two sections necessary to get

1 This study is based on a lecture, which I had delivered on the 23d July, 2004 at Vác on the conference "Aeternae Domui" – a megújuló Vác Migazzi Kristóf bíboros, váci püspök és bécsi érsek, a mecénás és műgyűjtő idején+ (Aeternae domui – the reborn town of Vác under the cardinal of Vienna and bishop of Vác, Christoph Migazzi, a patron of art and collector of artworks).

2 In Vienna, Canevale used his name in the form of "Ganneval", and this is how the documents mention him.

3 [7, pp. 54-57] [11, pp. 15-22] [4, p. 55]

4 The author mentions that Servandoni used his first name sometimes in the Italian form. [13, pp. 329-334]

5 Migazzi's note. [1, p.185.]

György Kelényi

Institute of Art History, Eötvös Loránd University,
Múzeum krt. 6-8., H-1088 Budapest, Hungary
email: kelenyi@chello.hu



Fig. 1. The facade of the Cathedral of Vác (Photo by the author)

the approbation from the bishop. The approved plans had to be enlarged and drawn in a more detailed form for the execution; Oswald may have carried out this task.

Relying on the bishop's notes and contemporary sources, even lacking the original plans, we have no reason to doubt Ganneval's role as a designer of the cathedral. It is hoped that if the plans or other contemporary sources are ever to appear, this role will be confirmed, and we may get a full picture of the building history. It would be valuable to know, whether Ganneval developed the plans from the beginning or whether there were stages in his development, and he gradually arrived at the in depth changes in his design.

The idea of a change in the original plans is perhaps confirmed by a picture of the town from 1770 on a charter of a guild, which shows the towers of the cathedral one storey higher than the present ones and ending in a traditional Baroque spire⁶. It is not known whether the engraving was made according to an earlier, by now lost plan, or the artist just followed his own idea of how the towers – at that time still under construction - ought to have looked like when finished. Perhaps a drawing in the Tragor Ignác Museum at Vác also indicates the existence of an early but later changed plan. The inscription is “fait par...Hermann 1777” and it shows two high towers with small, dome-like

⁶ Jeszenszky's woodcut in the Tragor Ignác Museum of Vác.

spires [3, p. 288] [10, pp. 94]. The draftsman, about whom we know nothing, might have copied the already abandoned older plan. Although he also shows us church-clocks, about which, documents relate only in 1791; they could have been parts of the original plan. If the towers were left unfinished or modified, the clocks would have had to be relocated from the higher to the lower position.

On the other hand, Viktor Lőrincz's assumption might be true too. He believes that the drawing is not connected with an earlier plan, but it is either a later idea for finishing the façade, or a plan for a church to be built somewhere else in the bishopric [11].

Ganneval's work is so very different from the tradition of the Hungarian Baroque cathedrals that in the research there is some diversity of opinion about the origin of the artist's ideas, and where to place the building in European architecture.

Attention was drawn towards the cathedral of Vác in the 1960s and 70s in a higher degree, when Anna Zádor viewed it within the framework of European architecture; she emphasized that the stylistic peculiarities of it came close to “French revolutionary architecture”. As Anna Zádor stressed, the architect had formed his views a few decades earlier and so independently from the revolutionary ideas.⁷ There was no direct connection between him and the chief representatives of French revolutionary classicism.

Recently, some excellent studies have dealt with the cathedral of Vác. First Ulrich Neffzger analysed the building [12]. Primarily, he stressed the Roman connections of the structure. He explained this partly by the general attitude of the age and partly by a portrait of Cardinal Migazzi, which showed small representations of St Peter's and the Vác cathedral, side by side. This meant that according to the cardinal's view, the two buildings were related to each other [12, p. 17]. To add to his arguments, although the planned two towers of St Peter's were not actually built, most of the representations that spread throughout Europe showed the exterior according to the original plan, which showed the dome flanked by two towers. We know of several examples showing that in the 18th century, following the design of St Peter's in Rome did not mean a detailed copy of it as we would assume today; it meant only the use of some characteristic elements of the building. For example, in 1750, the architect of the cathedral of Nagyvárad had to study the Roman example, and even today, when we compare the cathedral with St Peter's, we cannot detect any relationship between them. It seems that the use of the most conspicuous elements or following the general disposition was considered as conforming to the model.

István Bibó, in his study, emphasized Cardinal Migazzi's role in the building activities [1]. Migazzi, as the sources attest, abandoned the plans of his predecessor, Bishop Károly Esterházy, which had already reached the laying of the

⁷ [17]. About Ganneval: [16, 152ff]

foundation stone a year earlier. He now started building operations according to a new plan and again laid the foundation stone; so manifesting the total change in the concept.

The architect of the new cathedral broke with all accepted rules of tradition, which could only happen with the consent of the patron. His personal role in the design is indicated by the fact that even in the bishopric of Vác, the new, daring efforts did not meet with any resonance, and the cathedral remained unparalleled, even in Austria.

Bibó stressed that Migazzi's predilection for the architecture of Rome went hand in hand with his appreciation of the principles of French Classicized architecture, and these two trends may have together influenced the unique solution of the cathedral of Vác.

Recently, Viktor Lőrincz has dealt extensively with Ganneval's work in Vác, directing attention to many previously unnoticed facts. He realised that on Contant d'Ivry's plan for St Madeleine's in Paris, the tower by the choir of the church, is very similar to those at Vác [9, pp. 94]. The tower, topped by a balustrade was engraved in 1765. The similarity is really convincing, but it is doubtful that three years after the laying of the foundation stone at Vác, an engraving of an unexecuted plan influenced Ganneval to change his already accepted plans.

Accepting the views of the scholars mentioned above, there are other aspects of the cathedral that have remained somewhat unnoticed until now.

What can be confirmed is that the research has described, with scientific thoroughness, the intrinsic qualities of the cathedral. It first stresses that its concept is totally different from that of the Baroque. Scholars described as the main characteristics of the cathedral, the large empty surfaces, the reticent decoration, the lack of dynamism, depth and movement; they realized that the architect had laid a curious emphasis on the elementary geometrical forms. Some decades earlier to the revaluation of French revolutionary architecture, these same characteristics were still viewed negatively. The famous art historian, Wilhelm Pinder expressed his view that Classicism was the era of minor-ranking geometry, in which the chief form of the composition was the square, the cube or the sphere, and the chief parts are carried out according to a module, (all these traits are characteristic to the cathedral of Vác).

The two towers are very unusual; they are short, clumsy and – despite the Baroque tradition of onion spires – they have no spires and end in a balustrade. As they are not tall enough, it is rather the huge dome that dominates the exterior. The balustrade on top of them provides a clear, flat outline; their massive, heavy, almost disproportionate blocks are isolated from the facade in a very definite manner. A static calmness and sobriety prevails; the Baroque upward movement here is missing (Fig. 3). In the Hungarian architecture of the 1760s, all these features appeared very unique and in spite of the simplicity of the front, very unusual.



Fig. 2. The north-west tower of the Cathedral of Vác (Photo by the author)



Fig. 3. The Cathedral of Vác from the East (Photo by the author)

One of the most characteristic traits of the work appears on the facade, instead of the traditional, two-storey Baroque church facades - almost obligatory since the building of the Gesù in Rome - a one-storey front appears. The Gesu-type facades have a wide ground-structure, which is topped in the middle by a narrower second storey. In contrast to this, in Vác, giant columns screen off the facade and form a portico of a single Corinthian order, without pediment. This form is related to views expressed in the contemporary French theoretical literature. In 1754, Pierre Patte,

in his *Discours sur l'architecture*, calls the usual arrangement illogical, since the two storeys, comprising of two superimposed orders, contradict the inner structure of the church⁸.

(This is debatable as Gesù-type facades do follow the cross-section of the church; the substructure is as wide as the nave and the chapels, while the higher second storey expresses the enlarged height of the nave). Pierre Patte comments that the second illogical trait of a traditional facade is that it contradicts the antique architecture. The requirement that the number of the orders should be equal to the number of the storeys of the building is not new, Perrault already held similar views. In 1748, the facade of St Sulpice in Paris was criticized because of the two superimposed orders.

No doubt, Ganneval in Paris was aware of the arguments around the dispute. Patte considered the freestanding column as looking more majestic than the pilaster and admired its plastic value, its chiaroscuro effect. In the 18th century, other architects also shared his theoretical considerations and practical ideas.

These comments suggest that the same theoretical debates began again in French architecture that had taken place in Italy in the Quattrocento. The dispute dealt with the question about which form of Ancient architecture could be used by Christian ecclesiastic architecture. Alberti and Palladio preferred the triumphal-arch type of facades and the facade with portico respectively. Unfortunately, neither of the two architects exerted much influence on the architecture of their age in this respect, so their views remained confined to theory.

The 18th century, French theorists had more success, although the portico-front did not become generally accepted until the following century. Beside Soufflot's Ste Genevieve (built from 1757), the other, huge, much respected church of Paris was the St Madeleine's (1806, architect Pierre Vignon), which spread the form of the portico-type facades. In fact, Contant d'Ivry's earlier (1763) unexecuted plan of the church already showed a portico added to the nave.

The facade of the cathedral of Vác is peculiar because the columns of the portico are not placed in even rhythm; the distance is greater in the middle than in the other positions. The rhythmical placement and the greater stress on the centre call to mind Baroque ideas. These typical Baroque features had already abandoned on both Servandoni's St Sulpice and on Soufflot's Ste Genevieve.

Ganneval's solution proves the widely accepted belief that, in the 18th century, Classicizing architecture did not mean a sudden break with the Baroque. In fact classicizing did not mean creating exact copies of the Ancient buildings, but only to evoke the Ancient past with a few elements. This is manifested by the fact that Ganneval is still using the Corinthian order, which was considered in the Baroque period the noblest and most ornate order, although, since the original Greek art

has been rediscovered, it was the Doric order that was used most frequently.

(Migazzi's odd relationship to Classical forms is obvious when we turn to the inner decoration of the cathedral: the frescoes were painted by Maulbertsch, whose High Baroque-Rococo style is far from Ganneval's more advanced style, with a marked tendency to Classicism).

At Vác, a low attic rises above the portico instead of the more common pediment. In this, we recognize the influence of Servandoni's narthex of St Sulpice. There, on the first approved design, we still see a pediment, which later, on the changed design, became even larger. However, during the execution of the plans, problems arose with the large pediment, which led first to pushing the pediment at the backside of the narthex, so negating its role in the picture of the portico. Eventually, the pediment was abandoned altogether.

Ganneval was aware of these problems, and he saw them as a warning. The final solution pointed at the possibility of a clear overall picture of the building and the beauty of the straight outlines. (It is worth reiterating how important it would be to locate Ganneval's plans and see whether he had already used the portico without pediment motive on his first design, or if he gradually formed this solution.

One of the keywords of 18th century French architecture theories was "simplicité" (simplicity). It meant following the rules of nature as nature was simple and without any unnecessary features. This is the age in which Homer's simplicity was considered superior to the more subtle and refined poetry of Vergil, and which admired the simple but still grandiose architecture of the Greeks. As for the ideals of architecture and monumentality, the application of a few but grand masses and motifs was preferred to the fine, detailed, meticulous elements and ornaments. However, simplicity did not mean the sheer limitation or sparsity of the motifs, but the clear arrangement and lucidity of the structures and abandoning of the superfluous.

For the architects, simplicité meant both the use of the Doric order -considered manlike and plain- and the restriction to the necessary. The idea of simplicity is accompanied by the natural and the Ancient. The example of the Ancient artists demonstrates how to follow nature in art and architecture. Their art is based on copying and rationally analysing of nature's rules. Instead of the decayed contemporary art, one has to turn for examples to the natural art of the ancient Greeks. A remark by J.F. Blondel in 1745 could be considered a manifesto of the new ideals: "The beautiful antique means following nature's rules"⁹.

In 18th century theoretical works, the concept of the "magnificentia" (magnificence) often appears as an aesthetic category. It meant the grandiose and the monumental, which are not expressed only by their large scale or ample ornaments, but by their grand idea and character that can achieve the admiration

8 [12, p. 17] cf. [4, p. 382]

9 Le bel antique – c'est à dire. le naturel" [4, p. 55]

of posterity. The basic element of grandiosity in a building is the use of classical orders. To quote D'Aviler: "The Classical order is the principal ornament of a building because its magnificence distinguishes it from the plain common buildings" [4, p. 173].

At Vác, the use of columns, in a different way from that of Pilgram's design, characterises not only the facade but the interior as well. Though there is little difference between Pilgram's and Ganneval's ground-plan and the interior is Baroque in several regards, the engaged columns standing at the edge of the bays, at the crossing-piers, under the tribunes and at both sides of the altar still manage to create an atmosphere of magnificence.

Migazzi's ideas about the new architectural style were formed not only by contemporary theoretical debates, or by the ancient and modern architecture he had seen in Italy, but also by contemporary Austrian architecture. In fact, in the architecture of Vienna, one could already detect from the 1730s more and more Classicizing trends [14, p. 84]. The forms and the details became calm, sometimes even cold and strict. From the middle of the century, instead of the rich, picturesque High-Baroque, the "Plattenstil" prevailed, so the movement of masses, the springing out of forms were entirely dispensed with, and flatness of surfaces, the delicate play of elements and the balance of motives appear. This principle is best demonstrated by the building of the Hofbibliothek in Vienna (today: Austrian National Library, finished in 1722).

The Rococo in Vienna was confined mainly to the interiors, but even there never in extravagant, sprawling, overflowing modes of decoration. This decoration never has melted the forms together as it did in the South German and French architecture. That is why the Austrian architects did not adopt a very critical attitude towards the Baroque and the Rococo, like their French contemporaries, and the new style was only slowly rising and slowly expanding. Austrian architects were guided by less extravagant, less dynamic concepts, and adopted the more sober models of J.A. Gabriel or M.J. Peyre, who had a predilection for large, isolated geometrical masses and unrelieved surfaces. Their works are markedly distinguished by a reticent use of decoration [5] [2].

Austrian architecture served as an example for the one-storey portico topped with straight cornice, which screened off the facade. Migazzi probably knew the Göttweig Abbey, a late work of Johann Lucas von Hildebrandt.¹⁰ Although the plan of Göttweig was made in 1719, the construction still continued in the 30's. It was led by that Pilgram who was active for a while in Vác (1761). The church stands in the middle axis of the Abbey and is dominated by the two towers and the dome. At the entrance, we can see the five axis portico topped by a balustrade, which is flanked by the towers.

¹⁰ [8]; The study appeared one year later than my lecture was delivered. In many details, he came to the same conclusion (e.g. The role of Göttweig, the formal similarity between St Blasien Abbey church and the cathedral of Vác, etc).

Emil Kaufmann, who re-discovered the French revolutionary architects and was keen to have them acknowledged, wrote a survey of the 18th century history of architecture. He pointed out that the English, French and Italian architectural elements of classicism that were different from Baroque, gradually appeared and prepared the way for revolutionary classicism [6]. Ledoux's and Boullée's concept of architecture didn't come from a sudden impetus, but from the developments of the century. The new classicizing currents lead to the same ideal as those by which Ganneval was guided at Vác.

To illustrate how the architectural and theoretical traditions of the age that led to the building of the Vác cathedral also resulted in similar works in other countries, we can refer to the St Blasien Abbey church in Southern Germany¹¹.

The complete rebuilding of the abbey was carried out after the devastating fire in 1768 when the old monastery and the major part of the church burnt down. Pierre Michel d'Ixnard, who was a pupil of Servandoni similarly to Ganneval, was commissioned for the construction. So both architects came from Servandoni's direct circle.

As mentioned previously, Servandoni was not only a stage designer but a designer for ephemeral constructions and an acknowledged painter, who painted fantastic, imaginary architectural ensembles made of correct antique elements. It is not known, but we can presume that he must have had a design that served as an inspiration for both of his students as we can detect considerable similarity between the cathedral of Vác and the some years later St Blasien Abbey church.

For us, only the facade of the St Blasien Church is relevant because the ground plan of the building, according to the patron's request, copies the Pantheon in Rome and has a rotunda shape. D'Ixnard used the St Sulpice in Paris as a model for the special connection between the two towers and the facade. There, the facade and the porch was joined, the front became a single homogenous, square unit. On both sides, the two towers are short and sturdy, and the portico is made up of giant columns, which are also squeezed into the towers.

The giant columns of the porch are flanked by sturdy turrets; it is almost squeezed between the two massive volumes, presenting the same antagonism as in Vác. The porch consists of four columns and two semi columns with the intercolumniation wider in the middle than at the sides. So the motif of the portico, finished by a strong cornice and triglyphs topped by a balustrade, practically screens off the facade — as in Vác.

The towers at St Blasien are squat and massive; they are only one level higher than the facade. Their forms remind one of pylons and not of Baroque towers. On the early plans, we see high towers with spires, but during the execution, the upper level and the spires were entirely dispensed with.

¹¹ About St. Blasien: [6, pp. 131-139] [15, pp. 79-109]

As we saw, the abbey-church and the cathedral show the same basic formal ideals. Such characteristics are the antagonism of the heavy masses and the portico, the isolation of different parts both as a whole and as a motif. In consequence of the separation

of the elements of the front, the exterior of the buildings are not distinguished by a hierarchical order, a sin of the Baroque, but an addition of independent, geometrical forms.

Acknowledgement

The publication of this article has been supported by the NKA project grant No. 3208/00448.



References

- 1 **Bibó I.**, *Études sur Ganneval*. in 'Acta Historiae Artium tom. XLII, fasc.1-4', 169-186 (2001).
- 2 **Braham A.**, *The Architecture of the French Enlightenment*. London (1980).
- 3 **Dercsényi D. ed.**, *Pest megye műemlékei*. II. kötet, Budapest (1958).
- 4 **Erichsen J.**, *Antique und Grec*. Köln (1980).
- 5 **Goebel R.**, *Architektur*. in 'Klassizismus in Wien', Wien, 32-42 (1978).
- 6 **Günther A.**, *Pierre Michel d'Innard – ein Architekt zwischen Rokoko und Klassizismus*. Zeitschrift für hohenzollerische Geschichte, 121, 127-139 (1999).
- 7 **Khevenhüller-Metsch R., Schlitter H.**, *Aus der Zeit Maria Theresias. Tagebuch des Fürsten Johann Joseph Khevenhüller-Metsch 1742-1776*, hrsg., 8 Bde, Wien 1907-1972, Bd. 6 (1764-1767), Wien-Leipzig, 54-57 (1917).
- 8 **Krause W.**, *Revolutionsklassizismus und Barocktradition*. In 'Von Schinkel bis van de Velde (hrsg. Angela Dolgner)' Dossel, 49-58 (2005).
- 9 **Kretschmar F. J.**, *Pierre Contant d'Ivry*. Köln (1978).
- 10 **Lőrincz V.**, *Róma vagy Párizs? Megjegyzések a váci székesegyházhoz. (Rome or Paris? Remarks about the cathedral of Vác)*. in '„És az oszlopok tetején liliumok formáltattak vala”'. Tanulmányok Bibó István 70. születésnapjára. (ed.: Tóth Á.)' Budapest, 93-97 (2011).
- 11 **Lőrincz V.**, *Eszterházy Károly építészeti műveltsége és könyvtára (Károly Eszterházy's knowledge of architecture and his library)*. in '„Én is a lelkek halásza vagyok” Galánthai gróf Eszterházy Károly váci püspökké történt kinevezésének 250. évfordulója emlékére (ed.: Horváth Alice)' Vác, 105-111 (2011).
- 12 **Nefzger U.**, *Die Romidee des Klassizismus und die Kathedrale in Waitzen*. Alte und moderne Kunst, 28(190-191), 15-22 (1983).
- 13 **Patte P.**, *Discourse sur l'architecture*. Paris (1754).
- 14 **Wagner-Rieger R.**, *Vom Klassizismus bis zur Secession*. in 'Geschichte der bildenden Kunst in Wien, Geschichte der Architektur in Wien' Wien (1973).
- 15 **Wörner H. J.**, *Architektur des Frühklassizismus in Süddeutschland*. München-Zürich (1979).
- 16 **Zádor A.**, *Zur Frage der französischen Revolutionsarchitektur in Ungarn*. in '„Actes du XXIIe Congrès International d'Histoire de l'Art, Budapest, 1969", 2. vol' Budapest, 151-156 (1972).
- 17 **Zádor A.**, *Prolegomena zu einer Ikonologie der Architektur um 1800*. Acta Historiae Artium, XXIV, 335-352 (1978).