THE RESEARCH ON ROMANESQUE ARCHITECTURE IN HUNGARY:
A CRITICAL OVERVIEW OF THE LAST TWENTY YEARS
The research on Romanesque architecture in Hungary: A critical overview of the last twenty years

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Two decades ago, in 1983 Melinda Tóth published an overview on the research on Hungarian architecture and sculpture of the 11th-12th centuries in the first volume of Arte medievale. After twenty years, it seems to be necessary to inform the international scholarly public about the new results of archaeological excavations and art historical research. It is even more adequate in the case of the last decade as it was a period of commemoration of important events, such as the 1100-year celebration of the arrival of the Hungarians into the Carpathian Basin, the Millennium of the foundation of the first Hungarian Benedictine monastery at Pannonhalma, and first of all, the year 2000, which was not only the feast of Christianity in the world but the 1000-year anniversary of the Christianisation and state-formation of Hungarians. Partially in connection with these events, the restoration of medieval monuments received new impetus, and, at the same time, the history and methodology of Hungarian monument protection became subject of recent studies.

The last two decades produced some important general overviews and summaries of the subject. Contemporaneously with M. Tóth’s article, in 1983 Ernő Marosi published the chapter on medieval Hungarian art in the one-volume History of art in Hungary, intended to summarise the new results of a large-scale eight-volume history of art in Hungary, which was prepared at that time in the Research Institute for Art History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Replacing similar summaries of the previous generation, this overview, although at some points necessarily outdated by now, is still the most homogeneous, so-to-say canonical presentation of the subject. Dividing the period into generations, this refined depiction intended to represent the different parallel tendencies of style, instead of supposing the dominance of one overruling centre. In the new edition of the same volume in 2001, Marosi revised the Gothic part of his overview but the previous chapters (Hungarian art between the Conquest and the Tartar invasion in 1241) were newly written by Tünde Wehli.

Unfortunately, the large-scale compendium on early medieval and Romanesque art itself had never been published. Although a considerable part of the manuscript has been written in the 1980s and a reformulated new version was under preparation in 1996-1997, the general condition and tendencies of Hungarian art historiography changed so much that its publication became impossible. Instead of it, a thin picture book has been published in 1997 with the condensed text of Ernő Marosi and Tünde Wehli, which reflected the newest results but in a very limited space.

While all these summaries are available only in Hungarian, an up-to-date history of Hungarian architecture was published in English in 1998. The history of Romanesque and Gothic periods were summarised by Pál Lövei, following the basic lines of previous research. A few years later, in 2001, Gergely Buzás, a representative of the youngest generation, wrote the medieval part of a six-volume history of Hungarian architecture. Although the publisher preferred the (not always good quality) images instead of text and architectural drawings, the author took the opportunity to formulate his new ideas in one or two sentences and in reconstructional drawings. Hopefully, he will be able to prove his theories in a more scholarly form soon.

As many of the key monuments of Romanesque architecture have been destroyed in Hungary, the importance of stone carvings is immeasurable. The state of their preservation and their research is rarely satisfactory. Therefore the office of Hungarian monument protection started a large project in order to document the architectural fragments of the country. The first volume of the series called Lapidarium Hungaricum presents a general overview of the situation (1988), further volumes are dedicated to single monuments as well as to regions. The usage of special types of stone has been studied recently by Pál Lövei, who is also preparing a corpus of medieval Hungarian tomb sculpture. Other important general aspects of architecture, such as the liturgical usage of buildings, the typology of churches, or the question of supporting systems have been analysed by noteworthy papers.

Beside these researches dealing with the entire country, a special emphasis has been put on the regional aspects. From this respect, the exhibition entitled Pannonia Regia of the Hungarian National Gallery was of cardinal importance in 1994-1995, dedicated to Transdanubia, the western part of Hungary. The westernmost part of this region as well as its southern county (Baranya) belong to the better known territories. However, the most studied region is the middle of the country: the royal centres were presented in a nice publication (also in English), the medieval heritage of the capital was exhibited in Braunschweig in 1991, and the (mostly village) churches of the surrounding region of Pest county is well documented in an archaeological monograph. While the interest in the Romanesque architecture of former Upper Hungary (today Slovakia) is relatively limited, the research on the southern parts of the Great Hungarian Plain became very intensive. The tradition of the research on Transylvanian art was continued by Géza Entz, while the newest results are reflected in a series of essay collections published by the Museum of Satu Mare (Szatmárnémeti). Special regions of this territory (the lands of the Székelys and the Saxons) are included in topographical works of local people.

Beside the topographical research, a new tendency of the last decade is a deep interest in the artistic production of monastic orders. From the point of view of Romanesque art, the most outstanding was an exhibition on the Benedictine monasteries in medieval Hungary, organised by Imre Takács in 2001 at Pannonhalma. The excavations of Cistercian monasteries were continued by Ilona Valter, which resulted new overviews. The art of the chivalric orders is frequently discussed in a legendary way. On the other hand, the roles of the Mendicant orders and the Paulines in 13th century Hungarian architecture are known better and better.

As this short introduction shows, the development of research of Romanesque architecture in Hungary is apparent in many fields (especially the regional and monastic research is noteworthy). However, beside other forms of research, the main source of new information are the archaeological excavations, unfortunately, as in other parts of the world, the publications follow relatively slowly the field work.
Pre-Romanesque, Romanesque and Early Gothic architecture is usually discussed together in Hungarian historiography, called the Age of the Árpád dynasty (11th-13th century), which is followed by this article, too. This period starts with the age of Christianisation and state-formation under King St. Stephen (997-1038). His rule has been in the focus point in the last years, especially because of the related anniversaries (the 950-anniversary of his death in 1988, the millennium of his coronation in 2000). Because of new dating of important pieces, the artistic heritage associated with his age is less and less in number, therefore, beside the critical enumerations, the methodological questions and the sources of our knowledge became more and more reflected. One of the most important discoveries of the last decades was the earliest period of the Benedictine Abbey church of Pannonhalma. Following the hypothesis of Melinda Tóth, the archaeologist Csaba László excavated the western crypt and sanctuary of the church. Imre Takács assumed that rounded towers and a western transept was also added to this part [1].
Other monasteries founded by the king are less known. A two-storey chapel of the former Benedictine Abbey of Pécsvárad is preserved in a relatively good shape, however, its dating and reconstruction is highly debated. The former Abbey church is only partially excavated, and the results are not published. The female monastery, probably inhabited by Orthodox nuns, at Veszprémvölgy has recently been excavated. The newly discovered one-nave church preceding the 14th century one is differently dated between the 11th and 13th century. Another foundation of St. Stephen, the monastery of Zalavár will never be accessible because of the mine opened at the spot. However, the Carolingian predecessors of this monastery, called Mosaburg, are better known. A large basilica with a sanctuary resembling an ambulatory, decorated with stained glass, and stone carving and floor tiles with interlace decoration, was excavated by Ágnes Cs. Sós, and published after her death by her colleagues continuing her work. The dating of the stone carvings related to Zalavár are otherwise quite debated. These carvings, previously regarded as early 11th century pieces, have been re-dated to the 1070-1080s by Sándor Tóth, on the basis of their resemblance to carvings from Zselicszentjakab, founded in 1061. However, this hypothesis is not generally accepted.\(^{39}\)

These questions have serious consequences for the dating of the stylistically related sarcophagus, found in Székesfehérvár and associated with St. Stephen [3]. While previous research connected it to the death of the king (1038), Sándor Tóth argued for 1083, the canonisation of Stephen.\(^{40}\) Ernő Marosi, accepting this new dating, reconstructed it as a part of a memorial funerary monument of the saint.\(^{41}\) This is partially based on the excavation of Alán Kralovánszky, who discovered a tomb in the middle of the royal basilica of Székesfehérvár, rightly identified with the burial place of the founder, St. Stephen.\(^{42}\) The cult place of the other highly venerated saint, the son of Stephen, St. Emeric, was identified recently between the south piers of the basilica.\(^{43}\)

Unfortunately, the early death of Kralovánszky made it impossible to publish the results of his long excavations in the royal basilica. Piroska Biczó, who continues the archaeological research, has published a preliminary report recently.\(^{44}\)

Other aspects of the early history of the royal centre Székesfehérvár were described in the studies of Alán Kralovánszky and Gyula Siklós. Among the most interesting new findings, a small church with a three-lobed sanctuary (so-called Holy Cross chapel in the Rózsa street), and a four-lobed chapel should be mentioned. This later was first connected to the 10th-11th century St. Peter’s, while more recently it was identified with the 12th century St. Emeric’s.\(^{45}\)

The research of the last decades has proved that the stone carvings decorated with palmette leaves in a typically Hungarian style cannot be dated before the middle of the 11th century. The stylistic origin of them is not clear yet. A group of them, the capitals with acanthus spinosa, are related to Dalmatian and north-eastern Italian carvings.\(^{50}\) In the meantime, the number of related carvings is growing with discoveries at Veszprém,\(^{51}\) Zselicszentjakab,\(^{52}\) Visegrád,\(^{53}\) Feldebrő,\(^{54}\) and Nagyecsed-Sárvármonostor.\(^{55}\) Not only components of this style seem to be Italian in origin but the centralising building types of the period are also closer to Italian examples than to Byzantine buildings (e.g. Feldebrő and Szekszárd).\(^{56}\) The most splendid sculptural material is known from medieval Dombó (Novy Rakovac in Serbia), after the excavations of Sándor Nagy and Nebojsa Stanojev [4-5].\(^{57}\) The chronology of south Hungarian monuments was discussed by Sándor Tóth, interpreting lost fragments from Titel,\(^{58}\) and a tomb slab from Aracs.\(^{59}\) The pieces from this region combine interestingly the ornamental style of the middle of the country with the figural decoration at the turn of the 11th-12th centuries.

The late pieces of this style (Sárvármonostor and Dombó) are from churches with «Benedictine or Lombard ground plan»"
monuments of this style (Garamszentbenedek [Hronsky Benzadik, Slovakia], Somogyvár, and with different arrangement as a western apse and crypt from the late 11th century [6].

Building with four supports, which is interpreted by art historians on the spot of the former cathedral of Vác revealed a rounded hardly known better than two decades ago. Recent excavations logically better investigated. As the result of these researches, although dating is controversial in some cases, the material of the 12th century is rapidly growing. The Abbey churches, despite their small measurements, show a great formal variability and abundance. However, monastic reforms do not seem to be really influential in Hungarian architecture. The only exception from this respect is the Cistercian order, still, their first Abbey church recently excavated at Bátaszék (medieval Cikádor, founded in 1142) by Ilona Valter only partially shows the usual Cistercian ground plan [9].

A more important role was played by the Cistercians in the next period, in the last decades of the 12th century. King Béla III (1172-1196) founded four monasteries for them. The most important of these, the Abbey of Pilis (Szentkereszt) is fully excavated and the materials are gradually published [10]. Other Cistercian centres, such as Szentgotthárd and Pásztó are also better known. Recent scholarship attributes a leading role to this order in the introduction of the Early Gothic style into Hungary, which happened remarkably soon in the Central European region. It is not clear yet what is the relationship between these foundations and the royal buildings of Esztergom, which were similarly evaluated by traditional research. However, the destroyed western portal of the cathedral of Esztergom (1185-1196) still seems to follow one of the most remarkable iconographic programs of the Hungarian Middle Ages.

The spread of the Gothic style is connected to the royal court in the early 13th century. The role of the royal castle of Obuda is only partially known yet. The rebuilding of the cathedral of Eger in order to give place to the tomb of King Emeric (1196-1204) resulted a fine set of stone carvings. The brother of Queen Gertrudis, Berthold of Merania, the archbishop of Kalocsa (1207-1218), was a rival of the archbishop of Esztergom. He started the building of the only cathedral of medieval Hungary which followed the Classical Gothic type.

Imre Takács assumed close relationship between the rebuilding of the Abbey church of Pannonhalma (consecrated in 1224) and the cathedral of Reims under the rule of the king of this period, Andrew II (1205-1233), which seems to be more and more important. During the first decades of the 13th century, Gothic tendencies appeared all over the country, partially connected to the monastic reforms and rebuilding of Benedictine abbeys (e.g. Somogyvár, Pécsvárad), which is also proved by interesting carvings from Kolozsmonostor (Cluj-Mănșturi, Romania) [11]. Nevertheless, the most important and best preserved monument of Transylvania from the period is the cathedral of Gyulafehérvár. Its sculptural decoration, according to the analysis of Sándor Toth, is a meeting point of the different Romanesque and Early Gothic tendencies of the late 12th and early 13th centuries. The present-day restoration of the cathedral, carried out in a Romanian-Hungarian cooperation, will result hopefully a new evaluation of its architectural history [12].
6. Vác, cathedral, plan of western crypt (after Sarolta Tettamanti).

7. Óbuda, St. Peter, reconstructed ground plan (after Altmann, Bertalan, Kárpáti, A budai (óbudai) társaskáptalan Péter temploma).

8. Boldva, Abbey church, interior with the newly found eastern galleries (photo author).
Parallely with these Gothic tendencies, the first half of the 13th century gave birth to a splendid flourishing of Late Romanesque architecture. Some of the related problems, as that of the western towers and galleries, are still under discussion.95 On the other hand, the monographic research of single monuments was even more productive. The archaeological excavations of Vértesszentkereszt96 and Bélapátfalva97 were published in details. The restoration of the church of Ócsa was briefly published.98 The ruins of the church of Aracs (Aracá, Serbia) was re-evaluated.99 However, the most important interdisciplinary research centre was working on the Abbey church of Ják in the last years. Art historians, archaeologists and scientists carried out a common research on one of the best known Hungarian Late Romanesque abbey churches. Studies,100 preliminary reports,101 and a monographic catalogue102 were published during the long process of its restoration, excavation, and the replacing of its external sculptures with copies [13].

Other significant monuments of Late Romanesque architecture were also subjects of deep research. Among the monasteries founded by aristocratic families (so-called kindred monasteries), new studies have been written on Sopronhorpács,103 and Zsámbék; this latter played and important role in early Hungarian monument protection (István Moller, 1889), although this restoration was intentionally not a pre-modern one as it was regarded so far.104 While the literature related to the significant Premonstratensian monasteries of Türel105 and Árpás (Mórichida) [14]106 is still very limited, new excavations has been started on other monasteries in Western Hungary.107 The so-called Gisela chapel, a two-storey private chapel at Veszprém was archaeologically investigated and restored, and its position in the development of Late Romanesque architecture in Hungary and in East-Central Europe has been circumscribed.108

The last phase of the Árpád Age, the second half of the 13th century, can be characterised with the predominance of High

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10. Budapest, Hungarian National Gallery, the tomb of Queen Gertrudis, from Cistercian abbey of Pilis (reconstruction of Imre Takács).

11. Kolozsmonostor (Cluj-Mănăștur), Historical Museum of Cluj-Napoca, carving found in the rotunda (after Paradisum plantavit, p. 444).
Gothic architecture. Its local centres are connected to the royal court, which is a common feature in East-Central Europe. New architectural structures, the polygonal sanctuary, and new vaulting types became widespread at that time. The buildings of the Mendicants and the Paulines followed these novelties, which is reflected in recent studies. Another flourishing field of the architectural activity of the period was the building of castles. Among these, the most important was the Upper Castle and the dungeon, the so-called Salomon Tower at Visegrád, build by King Béla IV and his wife as a protection against a possible second Tartar invasion. Private towers were significant elements of town architecture as well, as it was proved in the case of Sopron and elsewhere. In Western Hungary and the mining towns of Upper Hungary, inhabited by German population, a new building type, the Karner became widespread. Jewish communities were also important components of town culture. The first known synagogue in medieval Hungary, the nicely restored Old Synagogue in Sopron, can be dated to the end of the Arpad Age (15). A great number of village churches, sometimes with special arrangements (e.g. Lengyelőti (16)), were researched and restored in the last decades, however, a synthesis of their architecture is needed. In spite of all these works, the last phase of the 13th century is still underrepresented in art historical research. It is regarded as a devastated border land between Late Romanesque architecture and the Late Classical Gothic style of the Anjou Age of the 14th century.

To summarise the results of this overview, the intensity of the research of Romanesque architecture seems to be very high in the last two decades. It produced a lot of new archaeological investigations, exhibitions, re-evaluations, not only of single monuments but of entire regions, periods, and monastic orders as well. However, the emphasis is presently more on the specific problems, single details, and conceptual questions, instead of large scale overviews. This is partially due to the general tendencies of our age, nevertheless, it also demon-
14. Árpás, the restored western façade of the monastery church (photo author).

15. Sopron, Old Synagogue, the reconstructed interior (photo author).

16. Lengyeltöti, eastern façade after restoration (photo author).
strates that the paradigmatic change in our general view of the period is still awaited. As it was formulated by Ernő Marosi, dealing with a specific problem of the period: «the research of Hungarian Benedictine architecture can be characterised with the state of paradigmatic change: our general view is practically identical with the one we have inherited; its details are clarified by more and more precise studies. Nevertheless, it is even harder to construct a new image from these results than to reconstruct a however complicated history of a building.» Somebody, who will overview the research of the next decades, may be able to report this paradigmatic change most probably.

On the fate and failure of the project see: E. MAROSI, Az Árpád-kori művészeti és a Művészettörténeti Kuatóntézet (The art of the Árpád Age and the Research Institute for Art History), «Ars Hungarica», XXVIII (2000), pp. 5-18. The manuscripts of the chapters are kept by the institute.

E. MAROSI, T. WEHLY, Az Árpád-kori művészeti emlékek (Artistic monuments of the Árpád Age), Budapest 1997.

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NOTES

1 M. TÖTH, Architecture et sculpture en Hongrie aux XIe-XIIe siècles. Etat de recherches, «Arte medievale», 1 (1983), pp. 81-99. As a predecessor of this article, see G. Enz, L'architecture et la sculpture hongroises à l'époque romane dans leurs rapports avec l'Europe, « Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale», IX (1960), 1-11, pp. 209-219. The present overview is even more needed as a similar Polish review is available for seven years: Z. Świechowski, L'architecture préromane et romane en Pologne après les explorations archéologiques récentes, «Artibus et Historiae», XIX (1998), pp. 177-199; a more recent catalogue of the monuments has been published in Polish: In.: Architektura romaniska w Polsce (Romanesque architecture in Poland), Warszaw 2000, with English summary. The Hungarian art historical research traditionally covers all the territories which belonged to the kingdom in the 11th-13th century. As significant parts of it belong to neighbouring countries (Slovakia, Romania, Austria, Ukraine, Serbia as well as Croatia and Slovenia), the research of the Romanesque monuments of these territories is not limited to Hungarian scholarship. As the possibilities of an overview of the Slovak, Romanian and other literature is limited in Budapest, publications published in the neighbouring countries are quoted only exceptionally.


7 The first volume: Magyar művészet a hazedéktól 1800-ig (Hungarian art from the beginnings to 1800), ed. by G. Galavics, E. Marosi, Á. Miko, T. Wehly, Budapest 2001, with the chapter of T. Wehly: Művészet a homologiasától 1241-ig (Art between the Hungarian Conquest and 1241), pp. 9-90. The second half of the 13th century is presented by Marosi (pp. 91-98).


It is reconstructed as a one nave church and dated before the foundation of the monastery by Sándor Tóth (Paradisum plantavit, pp. 231, 638); it is also reconstructed as a three-aisle church and connected to Tihany; ca. 1053 (Ibid., pp. 328-334); described as a two-storey chapel with an opening in the middle form ca. 1100 by Gergely Buzás (Magyar építészett., p. 79).


44 S. Tóth, A széfeshevívar városkodás és kóre (The sarcoformius of Széfshevívar and its circle), in Pannonia Regia, pp. 82-86.
47 Z. Szabó, A szentt. avattott Imre herceg kultuszélyének kérdése a széfeshevívariai prépostási templomanában (The question of the place of Prince St. Imre in the provostal church of Our Lady in Széfeshevívar), »Müemlékvédelmi Szemle«, VI (1996), 2, pp. 5-52 (with English and German summaries).
48 P. Biczó, Archaologische Beobachtungen zur Baugeschichte der Stiftskirche Unserer Liebe Frau zu Széfeshevívar, »Acta Historiae Artium«, XLII (2001), pp. 283-295. The four volumes of the monography series on the basilica is in preparation. Until archaeological evidence are not accessible, one should turn to the critics of the written sources, see E. Marosi, »Quam qui vidit, testimonium veritatis verborum nostrorum perhibet». Megjegyzések Szent István széfeshevívari prépostási templomanáknak képzelés elbeszélés forrásainkban (Notes on the image of the provostal church of St. Stephen at Széfeshevívar in our narrative sources), in Magyaroknak elről, ed. by F. Piti, Szeged 2000, pp. 349-363.

Although a detailed publication of the excavation is still missing, shorter reports have been published, e.g. M. BERES ET AL., Zer monostora és kora (The monastery of Zer and its age), Ópusztaszer 1996; O. TROGMAYER, «Fecurant-Studien zu zwei roman-korai monstornának építéstörténetéről» (Thoughts on the building history of the monastery of Zer), in A középkori Del-Alföld és Szer, pp. 81-106; E. MAROSI, Szermonostor gotikus herengénjének szobrai (The sculptures of the Gothic cloister of Szermonostor), ivi, pp. 107-122.


Additionally to the previous publications, see also: A. GERENVIK, A pilisi ciszterci apátság (The Cistercian Abbey of Pilis), Szentesd 1984; I. HOLL, Funde aus dem Zisterzienserkloster von Pilis, Budapest 2000; the stone carvings will be published by Imre TAKÁCS; see also in a wider context: E. MAROSI, A pilisi monostor szerepe a XIII. századi magyarországi művészetben (The role of the monastery of Pilis in 13th century Hungarian art), «Studia Comitatisen», XVII (1985), pp. 541-549 (with German summary); I. HOLL, Funde aus dem Zisterzienserkloster von Pilis, Budapest 2000; the stone carvings will be published by Imre TAKACS; see also in a wider context: E. MAROSI, A pilisi monostor szerepe a XIII. századi magyarországi művészetben (The role of the monastery of Pilis in 13th century Hungarian art), «Studia Comitatisen», XVII (1985), pp. 551-562 (with German summary).


Another type of presentation of the cathedral: S. TÓTH, Esztergom Szent Adalbert-székesegyháza és az Arpád-kori építészeti (St. Adalbert’s cathedral at Esztergom and the architecture of the Arpád Age), in: Ezer év Szent Adalbert olalma alatt («Strigium Antiquum», 4), ed. by A. HEGEDÚS, I. BÁRDSZ, Esztergom 2000, pp. 121-154. One of the most

9. K. HAVAS, *1200 korú belvárosi források tartalma és alakja a városban* (History and newest knowledge about the city of Buda), Budapest 1999.


15. E. RAFFAY, *Az aracsi templom* (The church of Aracs), in *A középkori Dél-Alföld és Szerbia* (Romanesque architecture in south Hungary and Serbia), Budapest 2000, pp. 7-60 (with German summary).

Sono degni di nota gli studi su alcuni temi particolari, come l’architettura monastica (specialmente quella dei Benedettini, dei Cistercensi e degli ordini Mendicanti) e l’architettura regionale (Ungheria occidentale, la parte meridionale della grande pianura ungherese, Transilvania).

Rimane ancora poco noto il periodo iniziale dell’architettura ungherese, con il processo di cristianizzazione e di costituzione dello Stato, all’inizio del XII secolo. Alcuni dei monumenti chiave sono stati datati diversamente rispetto al passato (per esempio le sculture in pietra di Székesfehérvár e Zala-vár, mentre altri sono stati indagati in modo approfondito grazie a recenti scavi (Pannonhalma, Pécs-vár, Veszprém-völgy, Székesfehérvár).

I decenni successivi sono caratterizzati da inusuali tipologie di chiese e da scultura lapidea decorata con palmette di stile specificamente ungherese. Il numero di queste sculture continua a crescere (Veszprém, Visegrad, Dombó, Sár-vár-monostor); nel frattempo, anche i monumenti correlati (per esempio la cripta ovest della cattedrale di Vác) sono stati meglio indagati.