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Theses of the doctoral (PhD) dissertation

The Oeuvre of Jenő Kismarty-Lechner (1878-1962)

Bodó Péter

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I. Research history, problem statement

I got to know Jenő Kismarty-Lechner during the research of the Battlemented Renaissance. The style was used most often by Gyula Sándy with who I had dealt a lot earlier. I was interested in which other architects were touched by this unique style, and Jenő Kismarty-Lechner was one of them. In the beginning I only examined what were the similarities and the differences between Sándy and Kismarty-Lechner, but when I started the doctoral school I spread my research area to the whole oeuvre of Jenő Kismarty-Lechner.

My aim was to write a monograph because there is a shortage of the architect-monographs in the field of art history. Many architects worked in Hungary in the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, but we know only very little about most of them, their oeuvre have not been worked up. Jenő Kismarty-Lechner is one of them.

Though some longer or shorter studies have been written on him, but a monograph of his whole oeuvre has not been done. This is a problem not only because he was a multifaceted architect but also because his activity in different fields had effect on one another. For example his activity in the protection of monuments or the teaching at universities influenced the way he designed.

Jenő Kismarty-Lechner designed in different styles during his very long – almost half a century long – career, but the studies written on him so far have not dealt the Neoclassicism. He worked in this style quite early, even in the middle of the 1910s and he used it for about fifteen years. Earlier studies did not really deal with the way he thought about the Turanian theory or his Art Deco plans. Though only one building was realized in art deco style, his several other plans show very well how Jenő Kismarty-Lechner adjusted the style to his own way of thinking.

Moreover these plans show very well how the transition happened from the Battlemented Renaissance to the Art Deco. This monography was necessary to discover these transitions between the different periods of his oeuvre.

However most of his styleshifts happened very suddenly because he was forced to it by the cultural government. Jenő Kismarty-Lechner lived in a very difficult historical period, full of tragedies and they printed their marks on the architecture, too. Most of the earlier studies mentioned the historical situation only superficially, but I tried to show it more thoroughly as the extent of the dissertation made it possible.

II. Applied methodology

I started my research with reading and processing all the books and studies written by Jenő Kismarty-Lechner. He wrote a lot from the beginning of his career and they made a good base for understanding his way of thinking and certainly they contained many useful data, too. His book issued by the Swiss publisher *Meister der Baukunst* in 1930 was particularly important, because it presented not only his plans and buildings but also his architectural ideas.

He wrote more studies (e.g. *Studies on the Battlemented Building in Poland and Upper-Hungary*, 1913) and a doctoral dissertation (*The Renaissance Building in Hungary and around its Borders*, 1915) on the Battlemented Renaissance, he published his thoughts about the Turanian theory (*The Art of the Turanic Peoples*, 1923) and after the Trianon treaty his books and studies dealt with the monuments of Budapest (e.g. *The Old Pest and Buda*, 1922).

However these books and studies provided only a theoretical background to my research, my aim was to present the improvement of the career of Jenő Kismarty-Lechner through the analysis of his plans and building. I examined his works considering his writings but with strong critical attitude. Therefore I tried to research all the available documentation about all his plans and building. Jenő Kismarty-Lechner fortunately arranged his photos of his buildings, statues, and monument-reconstructions into albums that were a good starting point in my research. There is an album containing newspaper articles about his works, furthermore he created separate albums about four of his most important works (*Holy Mary Church in Rezső Square in Budapest, the Main Altar of the Eucharistic World Congress in 1938, the Theatre of Vilma Medgyaszay, and the Coronation Scenes of Charles IV.*) After his death his inheritors donated these albums and a large number of plans to the Budapest History Museum, that keeps them in its premise, in the Kiscelli Museum. It takes care of the legacy very well, for example almost all the plans have been digitized.

As Jenő Kismarty-Lechner taught in the ancestor institution of Budapest University of Technology and Economics, several of his plans have been kept there, too. Besides I have found precious documents in his other workplace, in the Hungarian University of Fine Arts. The documents regarding his activity in the protection of monument are stored in the Hungarian Museum of Architecture and Monument Protection Documentation Center. However I had to research some of his particular buildings in the Budapest City Archives as well as archives, libraries and museums in other towns (Hajdú-Bihar County Archives; Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County Archives; Episcopal Archives in Székesfehérvár; Primate Archives in Esztergom; Zrínyi Ilona Town Library in Sárospatak; East-Slovakian Archives in Košice).

I examined especially the style of the plans and buildings of Jenő Kismarty-Lechner: how the main general styles can be seen on them, how the architect followed them. Besides I also examined how the national architectural style – about what he wrote a lot – appeared on his works.

III. New results, theses

Jenő Kismarty-Lechner admired even at a young age his uncles's, Ödön Lechner's aim to create a Hungarian architectural style. It has been stated in different studies on Jenő Kismarty-Lechner that despite of his admire he did not become his uncles's follower. It has been stated that he wanted to create a Hungarian architectural style that is based on historical architectural styles, as his university teachers inspired him. However after examining the several drawings in the Budapest History Museum Kiscelli Museum I realized that this statement is not exactly correct: he was under his uncle's effect not only at a young age but also after leaving the university. One of his drawings in Ödön Lechner's style was made on a sheet with the sign of his first workplace, the Royal Castle Designing Office.

However his first boss, Alajos Hauszmann really had a big effect on him and distracted Jenő Kismarty-Lechner from his uncle. So he later did not want to create a brand new style, instead he wanted to develop the Battlemented Renaissance to a Hungarian architectural style. His experiment can be seen only on a few buildings because in more cases he was forced to change the style of the plans. This happened for example in the boarding school in Munkács or the Police Station in Nyíregyháza. He mentioned them in his book issued by the publisher *Meister der Baukunst*, so they were known. I found a new similar case during my research: the Ministry of Culture forced him to soften his copf style on the Monument of the University Heroes.

Some earlier studies on Jenő Kismarty-Lechner criticized that he used high roofs on his Battlemented Renaissance buildings however this kind of roof was not typical of the original Renaissance monuments. I found that he used the high roofs because he was convinced that the Renaissance monuments originally had had high roofs and the type of roof that we know – whose sides slope into the middle – is only the result of a later alteration.

Besides these less important new discoveries the monographical process has brought more important results, too. The earlier studies interpreted his Neoclassicist style as a type of Neohistorism that was general after the Trianon treaty. However after examining all his plans, it turned out that Jenő Kismarty-Lechner worked in this style even in the middle of 1910s. He was inspired by his research for Mihály Pollack and the building of the Hungarian National Museum and he became convinced that the Classicism of the Reform Age had a unique Hungarian mood. He used the Hungarian Neoclassicist style in the interwar period because the Battlemented Renaissance was not accepted by the cultural government but he wanted to design in Hungarian mood. So it was not a meaningless returning to a historical style.

I have found in my research that the Empire furniture he designed into his Neoclassicist buildings as well as into reconstructed monuments, proved that Jenő Kismarty-Lechner had a genius sense of styles. His works in applied arts were better than his buildings.

Nevertheless he made some plans in Battlemented Renaissance even in the interwar period, but they were not built. These plans contain very sharp pointed arches, which motif was attributed to the German expressionism by some earlier studies on Jenő Kismarty-Lechner. However I found in my research that this motif

could have derived from the Turanian theory. He joined to the Turanian Association in 1916 and he designed the coronation scenes at the end of that year as a sharp nomadic tent. Though I could have not found written evidence but it is very probable that he later wanted to refer with the sharp pointed arches to ancient Hungarian tents.

From the middle of 1920s German architects started to use very similar pointed arches in many churches and Jenő Kismarty-Lechner might have found them as a confirmation that he had chosen the right motif. He planned very similar pointed arches on his modern churches, so the effect of the German expressionism is obvious on these works.

Unlike with the Neoclassicism or with the sharp pointed arches Jenő Kismarty-Lechner did not go ahead of his time with using the Modern Style. He started to design in Modern Style in the very beginning of the 1930s. He disliked the impersonal international Modernism, so he tried to make it more Hungarian-like with the mentioned sharp pointed arches, and also he completed his plans with Art Deco ornaments. The Art Deco was much closer to him and it can be seen on the plans of the Németsölgy parish church how he changed his Battlemented Renaissance plans step by step, without force to Art Deco. Battlement was the characteristic of both styles (in Art Deco because of its Eastern origin), so the change was obvious for Jenő Kismarty-Lechner.

It turned out from his books and studies that he believed in the wave theory according to what the rational and emotional periods change in the history of art. He considered the Modernism as the era of the rationalism and though he did not feel well in it, he could adapt to it quite well. However it also turned out in my research that the other members of his office influenced him a lot towards the acceptance of the Modernism. The best example for it is a new data about the

Heroe's Mausoleum in Debrecen: its idea did not come from Jenő Kismarty-Lechner but from his colleague, Pál Szontagh, though Jenő signed the plans. He anyway had to invite younger architects to his office because he had big problems with his sight and his arms so he could not draw alone.

Jenő Kismarty-Lechner had to maintain a studio not only because of his bad health state but also because of the large number of commissions. In the interwar period it was due to his political connections that he sometimes used against his ideological opponents.

I could find several unethical actions in my research, but some data denies his antisemitism as he had good connection with Jewish people. For example after the World War I when antisemitism was at a peak, he insisted the Jewish Manó Rákos to produce the pedestal of his statues. Jenő Kismarty-Lechner planned a villa for the Jewish Jenő Lukács who was surrounded by scandals. But he also did unethical actions against Jewish people if he was interested in it, for example he tried to take away a state commission from Géza Maróti.

However he confessed his Hungarianness even in a newspaper article during the Nazi pressure. Actually the whole family insisted on their Hungarianness, this is why they chose the Kismarty forename in 1942.

IV. Publications on the topic

Printed publications:

Péter Bodó: *Tulip among sedge leaves. The empire furniture of the Holy Mary Church in Tisztviselőtelep.* In: Magyar Iparművészet, 2024/1. pp. 48-51.

Péter Bodó: *Cubes behind the lion. The mix of modernism and art deco on the Heroe's Mausoleum.* In: Debreceni Szemle, 2024/2. pp. 181-187.

Péter Bodó: *The Teacher Training School in Sárospatak.* In: Zempléni Múzsá, 2024/3. pp. 41-50.

On-line publications:

Péter Bodó: *The other Lechner – Jenő Kismarty-Lechner died 60 years ago.* Pestbuda.hu, published: 27 February 2022

Péter Bodó: *The newest Bécsi Gate is 85 years old.* Pestbuda.hu, published: 2 September 2021

Péter Bodó: *A little Rome in Budapest – The main altar of the Saint Peter's Cathedral was built in the Heroe's Square in 1938.* Pestbuda.hu, published: 8 September 2021

Péter Bodó: *Modern but Hungarian, too – The Saint Michael church in Albertfalva has become 80 years old.* Pestbuda.hu, published: 29 September 2021.

Péter Bodó: *One of the largest church in Budapest was sacrificed 90 years ago.* Pestbuda.hu, published: 8 October 2021

Péter Bodó: *The 130 metres high Hungarian History Tower would have been built on the Duna riverside in Pest.* Pestbuda.hu, published: 8 January 2022

Péter Bodó: *It would have been like this – A 110 years old plan for the Ethnographical Museum.* Pestbuda.hu, published: 24 May 2022

Péter Bodó: *The reconstruction of the Hungarian National Museum – A hidden floor was added to the building.* Pestbuda.hu, published: 29 July 2022

Péter Bodó: *A forgotten monument on the Szabadság Square – The messages of the Relic Country Flag.* Pestbuda.hu, published: 3 August 2022

Péter Bodó: *Scandalous precedent, wonderful result – The Lukács villa in the Ostrom Street has become 100 years old.* Pestbuda.hu, published: 16 December 2022

Péter Bodó: *The house where a film star lived 100 years ago – The villa of Kálmán Rózsahegyi.* Pestbuda.hu, published: 24 February 2023

Péter Bodó: *The silent relative – Loránd Lechner was born 140 years ago.* Pestbuda.hu, published: 6 July 2023

Péter Bodó: *Monuments on the screen – The story of a presentation series 100 years ago.* Pestbuda.hu, published: 6 September 2023