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Continuity and Change in the
Church Architecture of the Transdanubian Reformed Church District

Doctoral (PhD) dissertation
summary

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1. Background of the research, problem statement

The Reformation, a major change that culminated in the middle of the 16th century, left a decisive mark on the life of Christian Europe. The medieval order and everyday life were completely transformed. At the same time, in the Kingdom of Hungary, constant warfare with the Turks became part of everyday life. The ongoing warfare presented the church with new challenges in terms of spiritual life. In addition to the physical threat, a new way of thinking emerged within the church, and this change took on an increasingly strong form.

The history of research on Protestant and Reformed churches in Hungary forms an interesting framework. There are no in-depth, comprehensive works covering multiple fields of study. Zoltán Lőrincz recently summarized the history of research on this topic. Certain academic fields, as well as outstanding scholars, have produced summaries of these buildings, but everyone has evaluated Reformed church architecture from the perspective of their own profession and interests.

Comprehensive historical studies have been produced mainly by pastors of the Reformed Church. Notable among these are large-scale summaries such as 'Magyar református templomok I-II' (Hungarian Reformed Churches I-II), edited by István Kováts J. and published in 1942, which has a significant impact today as well. In these two volumes, architects, pastors, and historians expressed their thoughts on Reformed church architecture. The comprehensive histories of the churches are written by region (divided into church districts).

The early period of research, which covers the last third of the 19th century, is closely linked to the processing of congregational history. Among the leading figures in this field were Etele Thury (1861–1917), a theology professor, and Endre Tóth (1899–1970), a church historian, who, when writing the history of individual congregations, devoted more or less attention to the art and history of churches. In the second half of the 20th century, the writing of these congregational history studies took a back seat, but local history and village research became widespread, so that in their details, churches and, within them, temples became manifestations of cultural history.

Architects first turned their attention to the actual, descriptive study of Reformed churches at the end of the 19th century, when new challenges had to be met in the construction of new churches. Thus, the first studies were written by Frigyes Schulek and then Samu Pecz. As a subject, it is nothing more than an examination of the survival of medieval Catholic churches in a Protestant period. In addition, research into the beginnings of Protestant church architecture represents an examination of one of the most clearly discernible manifestations of Catholic-Reformed denominational continuity. This is where the dividing line between medieval and early modern archaeology and Reformation archaeology can be drawn.

This means nothing more than that, in the case of newly discovered findings, we examine the possibility that there are traces of the effects of the change of denomination in either the burials or the building, and that the above-mentioned factors may help in interpreting the findings. The bricking up of gateways, as seen, for example, at the Reformed

church in Monoszló or the Catholic church in Magyarszecsőd, shows that people in the modern era – often regardless of their denomination – were not particularly interested in medieval murals, gateways, or carvings. They preferred to give churches a new exterior and use new modern elements rather than preserve the legacy of the Middle Ages. As for frescoes and other depictions, we see that the Reformation fundamentally moved away from their use.

In Hungarian research, it is worth mentioning Juan Cabello, who, together with Zoltán Simon, Zsuzsa Lukács, and István Feld, researched several Reformed churches in northern Hungary. We could also mention the research of András Pálóczi-Horváth, Csaba László, András K. Németh, etc., although in almost every county and city museum we would find someone who has had examine a church owned by the Reformed Church. In most cases, archaeological excavations focused on the origins and early history of the churches. However, as archaeological evidence from the early modern period is less accessible, less emphasis was placed on these documents, or rather on publications. In several cases, it can be observed that the excavating archaeologists recognized the significance of this change of denomination, but they never went further than that. An example of this is Gábor Ilon's comment on the graves excavated in Kéttornyúlak, when he clearly identified the deceased young girls as Reformed.

In my dissertation, I raised the following questions:

1. What are the tangible results of the Reformation's impact on church architecture?

2. When can we identify the type of church that spread from the end of the 18th century, in the spirit of free construction, which differed greatly from medieval church architectural traditions?
3. What tools are available to us for the archaeological study of the Reformation?
4. Finally, how different is the ideology formulated on the basis of different religious backgrounds, and are there any significant differences and manifestations of this in church architecture?

2. The methodology followed

My research approaches Reformation church architecture from an archaeological perspective, which involves a complex examination of the available historical material (i.e., the building itself and written sources about it). Based on this, the cornerstones of my research are:

1. written sources – church visitation records and archival sources describing these early churches, and
2. archaeological research – which approaches the archaeology of sacred spaces from the perspective of Reformed churches

Taking the above two points into account, they mark out a direction that will help us gain a more realistic picture of early Reformed churches and how medieval Catholic churches fared in the early modern period. This also contributes to the study of the spread of the

Reformation, as we can see its effects on a theoretical level, settlement by settlement.

Information that can be gained from the analysis of buildings

I examine the common assertion that Protestants whitewashed and plastered over the murals of the medieval churches they took over, threw out their altars, and centralized the space, and I attempt to clarify this with additional data. In many places, this is almost the only thing that is usually mentioned as the effect of the Reformation on changes in church architecture, but specific areas have not yet been examined from this perspective. My intention was to find the earliest buildings constructed by the Reformed Church, so that by comparing data from architectural, archaeological, and written sources, it would be possible to reconstruct the early Hungarian Reformed church in theory. To this end, I also sought to learn about developments in Western Europe, where we will see that there are many similar elements and that the interactions between them seem clear.

A review of the results of archaeological excavations dating from the 16th and 17th centuries reveals what information can be gleaned about the use of churches during the Reformation from archaeological data alone. Such findings include structural changes and solutions in the interior of churches, such as the removal of galleries or sacristies and sanctuaries. In addition, we can also see results in the field of burial research, based on Western models, where

it is possible to attempt to separate burials by denomination in the early modern period.

I would like to refer to a few more specific examples of archaeological methodology. The case of Kéttornyúlak, where Gábor Ilon's excavation in 1985 brought to light the walls of the sacristy on the north side of the church. On the south side, he also uncovered a partially indeterminable annex building, for which he could not provide a clear explanation. In his opinion, what he considered to be unstable could even be interpreted as a "*Reformation-era ship extension*," and the possible church extension excavated on the south side would otherwise comply with Reformed liturgy and regulations. The so-called Lord's table, placed in the central space thus created, would have been clearly visible from this new part of the building.

Another case where we used non-destructive archaeological methods to uncover a medieval church in Szentgál, which was also used as a Reformed church in the 16th-18th centuries, under the Reformed church that stands today. Here we found the church's straight-ended sanctuary, which contradicts the sources, as well as the southern and northern parts of the building (chapel and sacristy?). It is also possible that the sources refer to this chapel as a building with a semicircular sanctuary. In this case, it is possible that the Reformed Church did not use the main sanctuary building in the 18th century, but only a chapel. The medieval and modern periods are only partially connected, as the current Baroque building forms a right angle with the medieval one, and the current eastern longitudinal wall of the church was built on top of the foundation of the triumphal arch.

The usability of datas from written sources

Among the written sources, we find church visitation records and synod decisions. These resolutions contain details that are also interesting in the context of 16th-century church history, as we learn that Márton Sánta of Kálmáncsehi had to leave Debrecen in 1555 because he had the altars and other items left behind by Lutherans removed from the church, and that Balázs Radán, a pastor in Debrecen and then in Beregszász, was even killed for this reason. The information we learn about the Synod of Óvár can clearly be linked to the question of the formation of the church organization and its chronology. In 1551, the Protestants elected Mihály Hevesi, pastor of Szatmár, as their bishop, followed by Demeter Thordai, court priest of the Báthori family, who *"had already removed the images and altar from the church in Óvár."*

In light of all this, the ruling of the Synod of Vásárhely in 1559 is particularly interesting: *"We decree that all fabulous images must be removed from churches, while historical ones must be retained."*

The Debrecen-Egervölgy Confession (1562) mentions the nature of the vessels used for the Lord's Supper. *"The scripture mentions drinking vessels or cups. Therefore, we accept all vessels, whether they be made of glass, wood, gold, silver, or pottery, or whether they be made of copper or any other metal, provided that abuse,*

extravagance, superstition, and scandal are removed. We reject papist chalices and plates because of superstitious abuse."

Finally, the creed presents the provisions relating to churches in a very open but clearly defined manner. Compared to what is stated here, a few years later the attitude towards churches was different. The decrees of the 1567 Synod of Debrecen: *"LVII. Places of worship must be chosen that are clean, where there are no outhouses or pigsties, and where the foul air of the dead does not spread. For we must avoid scandalizing the weak. Papists bury their dead under the church. Where should the dead be buried? Outside the community, following the example of Christ, the patriarchs, etc. LVIII. We cannot hold worship services in the same church where papist idolatry is practiced. LIX. LIX. We must keep our assemblies separate from the papists, because the holy common church of Christ and the ecclesia of the wicked can never be united. Psalm 26:5.*

In Western Europe, the following quote comes from the 1526 regulations of the Hessian church: *"We encourage all believers to participate regularly and diligently in public prayer and reading, and likewise in the Lord's Supper. These acts will no longer be performed in the choir, but in the middle of the church."*

A very similar process took place at the same time, in 1526, in Zurich, where the former sanctuary of the Grossmünster was demolished and a pulpit was placed in its center.

3. New results

The mature structures of medieval church architecture in Hungary and late Gothic church architecture reached their peak in the architecture of monasteries. The secular architecture of the period, as well as the architecture of castles, practically fell victim to the Turkish presence. This cannot be said unequivocally about ecclesiastical architecture. It is considered an almost universal belief that the destruction of our medieval churches can be attributed to the Turkish presence. In general, from the point of view of the church organization, military events may indeed have played a major role in the destruction of our most prominent churches and cathedrals, as they were located in centers and cities that were targets of the Turks. Thus, most of our church buildings were destroyed in the 16th century. Veszprém and the entire Balaton Uplands after the siege of 1552, but even here it is clear that the local lords decided to destroy them out of fear of the Turks. The local population then used these medieval ruins as a quarry. Elsewhere, we can see that with the improvement of demographic indicators in the 18th century and the rapid growth of the population, the size of the churches could not meet the space requirements of the population, so they decided to demolish the old ones and build new churches. In a few fortunate cases, we see that these were documented, either in pictorial or textual form.

It is almost inconceivable how common it is that even the collective memory cannot recall the patronage of certain churches, even those still in use, while these names remain spontaneously preserved in field

names. It seems as if the Reformation gave rise to a public mindset that actually condemns and tries to forget its Catholic past. This is also evident in the church visitation records, which clearly show that the Catholic visitor knows and understands which elements can be traced back to Catholic origins, while the Reformed visitors repeatedly declare that the church in question – which is clearly medieval – has always been Reformed since time immemorial.

However, based on historical data, the tradition of patronage of churches and the process of consecration have remained, and we are indeed talking about consecrated spaces as opposed to simple prayer houses – although the Reformed Church does not acknowledge this. In general, Reformed churches operate under the name of the "Holy Trinity," and as such, they can obviously be considered the house of the Lord, since they are consecrated in his name. In my opinion, this can be traced back to medieval consecration traditions. However, similar to French, the Hungarian language also distinguishes between the names of these churches and sacred spaces in the traditional sense. The name oratory can even be traced back to Jewish traditions, where community spaces are not called temples, as there was only one in Jerusalem, and the rest could only be "houses of prayer."

These buildings can be considered central-plan churches, which, in accordance with the new liturgy, place the pulpit in the center. The space surrounding it also represents the symbolic space of the community, and it is no coincidence that in Transylvania this part of the church is called the 'Piac' (marketplace) of the church.

The altar of medieval churches was both the place where holy relics were kept and the place where sacrifices were offered. In Reformed churches, this is represented in a modified form by the Lord's table. Perhaps referring back to its medieval origins (the enclosure of the sanctuary), the railings of the bimah in synagogues may also be a direct parallel to the railings around the Lord's table, which in a biblical sense also refers to the holy of holies.

The clear placement of the pews in churches is designed to ensure that the preacher can be seen and heard. For this reason, there are almost always pews facing in three directions in rectangular spaces, with the Lord's table and the pulpit standing in the space between them, the church square.

The number of galleries or choirs in the church corresponds to the size of the congregation. The medieval precursor to this is the gallery, which is usually located on the west side. In rectangular churches, the "first phase" of the galleries is a gallery built on one of the short sides, usually made of wood, which can be extended with a pair opposite it, or it can be transformed into an L-shape, which means the wall opposite the pulpit. The largest built-in structure is the U-shaped gallery, which is the same as the rows of pews on the ground floor. In larger urban congregations, it can even have several levels, as can be seen in some places in France and Hungary.

We can also make summary about church towers. Most of the towers that survived from the Middle Ages were probably in ruins in the 16th and 17th centuries, which may explain why towers are mentioned in visitations, yet bells are used in bell towers. It was only at the end of

the 18th century, and more generally at the beginning of the 19th century, that they were raised in the classicist style.

The color scheme of churches could not vary greatly, as only the colors available could be used, primarily simple lime, so the exterior and interior walls of churches were white. Colors were used inside the churches, which, based on examples surviving from the 18th century and, to a lesser extent, the 17th century, were generally red, yellow, green, and blue.

We must mention the location of churches, as from the 11th century onwards, sacred buildings were practically the center of each settlement, serving as a fixed point, and with their eastern sanctuary, they probably also functioned as a point of orientation. After the disappearance of medieval buildings, secular buildings rarely replaced them. Instead, they were left empty or new sacred buildings were constructed. In many cases, we do not even know about the medieval buildings themselves, only the scattered bones that have been found reveal their existence, so we are unable to provide more detailed information about the churches of the early Reformation period in these places. However, from the point of view of evaluating the site, it is important that its ecclesiastical function

We know from the Middle Ages that cemeteries were linked to the jurisdiction of parish churches. In Western Europe, we still find them in cemeteries today. The synods of the 16th century clearly stipulated that new cemeteries should be opened outside the settlement wherever possible.

Although Protestant burials cannot be clearly distinguished from an archaeological point of view, the liturgy and burial regulations paint a very different picture. These are perhaps more ritual changes, the tangible elements of which cannot be found in the graves. Supplementing the written sources, we can observe burials in the cemeteries around the church dating from the 16th to 18th centuries, which are essentially lacking even in grave goods and are definitely devoid of Catholic characteristics (rosaries, crosses, crucifixes). These can be considered Protestant burials to some extent.

Medieval churches were also converted to suit their own liturgy by the Reformed Church from the 1550s onwards. From the 1560s onwards, we can speak of an officially established Reformed Church in terms of church organization, so in my opinion, the first so-called transverse churches may have appeared during this period, about which we know nothing, just as we know nothing about many unknown Reformers. We know from records that this type of church existed in a church district at the end of the 16th century.

Based on the historical material presented in my dissertation, the simple architectural design of the rectangular church type that appeared at the end of the 16th century can be considered the precursor to the Reformed churches built from the mid-18th century onwards, which still exist today.

Within the framework of Reformation archaeology, we can also examine the churches built in the 16th and 17th centuries, which were later destroyed or rebuilt, reflecting the influence of the new approach. We can see examples of this in the eastern part of the

Carpathian Basin, which continues the Gothic tradition, but there are also church buildings in the western part of the country that reflect French and German influences.

The Reformation placed great emphasis on schooling. The transformation of medieval parish schools, or possibly the construction of new buildings, and their examination, in the absence of excavations, can currently be described as a distant goal, with a few exceptions. It would be interesting to see the first period of the colleges in Sárospatak, Pápa, Debrecen, etc. Similarly, we would see special results in the archaeology of printing presses, which clearly helped the work of the reformers.

Parishes and parsonages, based on their Western European counterparts, would basically represent the housing culture of the period.

The periodization of Reformed churches is basically as follows:

1. The conversion of medieval churches to Protestantism, which has no upper limit, as in some cases these buildings are still in use today.
2. Destroyed and ruined churches generally began to be rebuilt or renovated from the mid-to-late 16th century.
3. At the very end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century, rectangular-shaped, sanctuary-less transverse churches appeared, based on Western models.

4. In the 17th century, the emergence of the system of articular places, local conflicts over the preservation and maintenance of churches.
5. The period of church occupations in the 18th century
6. After 1781, the beginning of a period of free church construction

4. My publications on the subject

PÁTKAI 2016 Pátkai Á. S.: Adatok a Mihályházi Református Egyházközség XVII–XVIII. századi történetéhez (Details for the history of the Reformed Church in Mihályháza from the documents of the Parish in 17–18th century) in: *Acta Papensia XVI.* 2016/3–4. 2017. 323–335.

PÁTKAI 2017 Pátkai Á.S.: Református templomépítés a Dunántúlon 1781 előtt. *Acta Papensia XVII.* 2017/3-4. 2017. 181–196.

PÁTKAI 2018a Pátkai Á.S.: Kontinuitás és változások vizsgálatai a Pápai Református Egyházmegye templomaiban (Researches of the continuity and changes in the churches of the Calvinist Diocese of Pápa) in.: Ringer I. (szerk.) A *Fiatal Középkoros Régész* VIII. Konferenciájának Tanulmánykötete. Sátoraljaújhely 2018. 139–147.

PÁTKAI 2018b Pátkai Á.S.: A reformáció hatása a Dunántúli templomépítészetre, a Veszprémi Református Egyházmegye középkori eredetű templomai in. Karlinszky B. – Varga T. (szerk) *Folyamatosság és változás. Egyházszervezet és hitélet a veszprémi*

püspökség területén a 16-17. században. A veszprémi egyházmegye múltjából 32. Veszprém 2018. 235–254.

PÁTKAI 2019 Pátkai Á. S.: Felekezeti templomépítészet a Veszprémi Egyházmegye területén a 17. században. in.: Karlinszky B. – Varga T. (szerk.) *Erőgyűjtés és újrakezdés. A veszprémi egyházmegye története a 17. században.* A veszprémi egyházmegye múltjából 32. Veszprém 2019. 119–127.

PÁTKAI 2022 Pátkai Á.S.: Egy elveszett középkori templom Veszprémben. *Veszprémi Szemle* 67. (2022) 50–61.