THESES OF A DOCTORAL (PH.D.) DISSERTATION

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The architectural work of Ármin Hegedűs (1869–1945) and Henrik Bőhm (1867–1936)

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Introduction

The Subject of the Research and its Scientific Background

At first glance, the careers of architects Ármin Hegedűs and Henrik Bőhm do not differ greatly from those of architects active around the turn of the century and thereafter. Like other designers graduating from the University of Technology at that time, they acquired excellent technical skills, had a thorough grounding in drawing and materials, and were well-versed in historical styles; at the same time, after their university years—as it was customary—they refined their knowledge during study trips. They founded their joint architectural firm in 1896, presumably as a result of their acquaintance from the University of Technology. They worked separately as well; Ármin Hegedűs was employed by the city of Budapest, where—primarily during his early years as an architect—he was involved in the construction and supervision of schools in the capital, as well as the design of cemeteries. We know less about Henrik Bőhm's independent work; in the 1910s—when Ármin Hegedűs was working on the design of the Sáros (later Szent Gellért) Baths, a project he had won jointly with Izidor Sterk and Artúr Sebestyén—he distinguished himself primarily in the field of apartment buildings. The architectural duo's extremely prolific body of work, spanning more than four decades, comprises approximately 150 plans and drawings; their names are associated not only with building designs but also with interiors and even a design for an ex libris.

No comprehensive work summarizing the work of Henrik Bőhm and Ármin Hegedűs has been composed to date. While they were still alive, they were mentioned in a few encyclopedia entries, and a few short articles were published on the occasion of their deaths and anniversaries. János Gerle's book, co-authored with Imre Makovecz and Attila Kovács and published in 1990, provided a starting point for this research, with the first step being my thesis, which I defended in 2010 in the Art History program at Pázmány Péter Catholic University. At the time, the thesis focused exclusively on the work of Ármin Hegedűs; I later supplemented it with information regarding Henrik Bőhm. I also incorporated new sources into my essay published in 2015 in the anthology Architects in the Age of Ybl and Lechner, published by TERC Publishing.

Presentation of the Materials and Sources Examined

In my exploration of the architectural duo's body of work, my primary source was the "Hegedűs Inheritance" from the 1960s, held by the Kiscelli Museum of the Budapest History

Museum, which enriched my research with, among other things, a list of buildings and a list of presentations. I also treated as an equally important source the data sheet on Henrik Bőhm—completed in 1908, cataloged in 1920, and responding to questions from the Museum of Fine Arts—which mentions some biographical details and several of his works. This document was requested for the multi-volume encyclopedia of artists edited by Gyula Szentiványi and János Szendrei, which was to be compiled primarily by painters, sculptors, and graphic artists. Equally valuable was the folder held at the BFL documenting Ármin Hegedűs's engineering work in the capital, as were the student records found in the archives of the Budapest University of Technology and Economics (BME). János Gerle's notes and list of buildings prepared for his aforementioned book Hungarian Architecture at the Turn of the Century also formed an important foundation for this research, as did the 1907 entry on Ármin Hegedűs found in the Lymbus of the Scientific Archives of the Department of Historic Preservation Documentation (MÉM MDK). Like Bőhm's data sheet, this was prepared for the publication Encyclopedia of Hungarian Visual Artists, but a copy is also preserved in the Scientific Archives of the Historic Preservation Documentation Department at the MÉM MDK. In addition to these, the research drew upon numerous professional journals, daily and weekly newspapers, press publications, and the works of specialist authors.

It is important that I was able to collect the documents, stories, and photographs that form the basis of this research from the architects' descendants. I first made contact with Ármin Hegedűs's family back in 2008; his great-granddaughter, who still lives in Hungary, and then his granddaughter's wife, who lives in Canada, enriched my research with numerous valuable sources and pieces of information. I came into contact—almost as a miracle—with Henrik Bőhm's great-grandchild, who lives in England; he supplemented the architect's less-documented life with some very important information and stories. I was able to fill in the gaps in Henrik Bőhm's biographical data using records from the parish registry of the Parish of Our Lady of the Assumption in Downtown Budapest.

In addition to those provided by descendants, the archival photographs come from the Photo Archive of the Kiscelli Museum (part of the Budapest History Museum), the collection of the Hungarian Museum of Architecture and Documentation Center for the Preservation of Historic Monuments, the Budapest Collection of the Ervin Szabó Library of Budapest, the image archives of the Budapest Metropolitan Archives, the Hungarian National Museum archive, the Hungarian Museum of Trade and Catering Industry archive, the Museum of Photography, the Fortepan collection, the Szerencs postcard collection, as well as the Arcanum,

Hungaricana, and Manda online databases. The Budapest Time Machine website was an indispensable resource for locating the buildings and collecting data.

Research Objectives and Methodology

The fundamental principle of my thesis was that by examining the work of Henrik Bőhm and Ármin Hegedűs, we would be able to compare their careers with the work of architects active at the turn of the century and between the two world wars. As a result of this research, several inaccuracies were clarified, and we were able to quantify and evaluate the pieces in their bodies of work, which allowed us to gain a better understanding of their styles and oeuvres.

My research was based on archival plans and documents: in Hungary, I worked not only in institutions in the capital but in municipal and county institutions as well. In addition to archival research, I set out to locate family documents, consult online databases, and analyse available visual materials. Of course, I also conducted on-site visits to the buildings and prepared photographic documentation. The thesis includes a synthesis of the relevant scholarly literature also.

With regard to their work abroad, I paid particular attention to Slovakia's historic preservation institutions and archives. In February 2024, thanks to a Ceepus scholarship, I had the opportunity to visit the architectural duo's projects in Slovakia and expand my knowledge of their work in numerous public collections. The Office of Monument Preservation and County Archives in Žilina, Nitra, Trenčín, Trnava, and Bratislava; the photo collection of the Slovak National Library in Turčiansky Svätý Martin; the Balneological Museum in Pöstyén; and the University Library in Bratislava constituted the primary scope of my research. In addition to buildings currently located in Slovakia, I enriched my visual material by taking my own photographs and conducting on-site visits in Croatia. I obtained information via email from foreign archives—which I was unable to visit in person.

In structuring my thesis, I have sought not only to provide thorough biographies—covering family life, education, social activities, memories, and personal relationships—but also to present the operations of their architectural firms in light of the available information. In this chapter, in addition to general information, I discuss the few professionals known to us who worked for them; we gain a broad understanding of their network of contacts and clients, the style and location of their works, as well as the types of buildings in which they created. This latter principle served as my guiding thread through the four chronological chapters, around which I have organized the presentation of their works. The organization of the

sections—which showcase their early historicist, turn-of-the-century Art Nouveau, Neo-Baroque, Art Deco, and Modernist endeavors—by building type allows us to trace the changes in character brought about by function. It would have been possible to follow a simple chronological logic, which would have made the parallels and sequence of the buildings more readily apparent; however, in my opinion, the thematic approach opens up a new perspective for evaluating their body of work.

I have endeavored to present each building—precisely for the sake of comparability—in a nearly identical format: where available, I have supplemented the information on the building's history with a list of the craftsmen and master builders involved. This was followed by a brief description of the exterior and interior facades, the floor plan, and the building's functions; where information or archival images were available, these were supplemented with descriptions of the interior spaces and furnishings, as well as iconographic interpretations. I sought to present the architectural styles used; in some cases—where warranted—I highlighted the buildings' significance to the cityscape and discussed their forerunners and parallels. In a few instances, I also discussed the current condition of the buildings, their more famous users and residents, and interesting details from their histories.

I have endeavored to provide a brief summary of the history of each building type at the time of its first appearance, with the aim of situating the works of the architectural duo Hegedűs and Bőhm within the historical context of their development. The basis for this typology was provided by Nikolaus Pevsner's *A History of Building Types* and the book *Building Types in Post-Compromise Hungary*, edited by László Császár.

The chronological chapters are preceded by a brief historical introduction, which seeks to establish the architectural and social-historical context by highlighting a parallel time period, a well-known figure, an idea, or an event. The introduction to the thesis provides a framework for the English-Hungarian summaries following the building descriptions and the list of architectural works, where the year of construction, the exact current address, information about the architects, and details regarding the current condition of each work are also provided.

The appendix nearly doubles the length of the thesis; in addition to presenting family trees, it uses maps to describe the completed works, publishes a selection of Ármin Hegedűs's theoretical writings, and illustrates the thesis with more than 250 images. The appendix also includes a list of works that are in some way connected to the architectural duo, although further research is needed to fully explore them.

Theses

The Scientific Findings of the Dissertation

1. **Correcting little-known details in the Hegedűs-Bőhm body of work and correcting previous inaccuracies provides a clearer picture of the architectural duo's work; thus, in addition to understanding the scale of their body of work, it allows for a more nuanced view of previous stereotypical remarks regarding the operation of their firm, e.g., Bőhm was responsible for office work and floor plans, while Hegedűs handled the facades and details.**

A characteristic of historical writing is the fact that a great deal of incorrect information persists in the public consciousness regarding the lives of this architectural duo. For example, in addition to Ármin Hegedűs's date of death, the "Hungarianization" of his name at the turn of the century was also such "incorrect" information. Sources have repeatedly reported false information regarding the relationship between one of their most significant clients, Lajos Winter, and Ármin Hegedűs, claiming that they studied together at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts. In connection with their works, we encountered numerous instances of misidentified buildings; examples include the synagogue in Újpest, the swimming pool at the Széchenyi Baths, and the arcaded tombs at the Kerepesi Cemetery. It was precisely the process of clarifying these incorrect details that led us to question many earlier claims, thereby shedding light on the causes of several inaccuracies. For example, we were able to determine what connection Ármin Hegedűs had to the aforementioned Újpest Synagogue, the arcaded tombs at Kerepesi Cemetery, or the swimming pool at the Széchenyi Baths.

As a result of this clarifying work, numerous new buildings were also included in the list of projects. By listing and prioritizing primary and secondary sources, the dissertation, in most cases, draws attention to individual renovations and unrealized projects. Thus, the dissertation introduces us to a total of more than 150 plans linked to one or the other member of the architectural duo. This number alone—while, of course, taking quality into account as well—is telling, and places the architectural duo among the most prolific architects of their era.

In addition to the works themselves, significant new information has come to light, such as Henrik Bőhm's conversion to Catholicism, his outstanding grades at the University of Technology in drawing-related courses, and we have also been able to refine our understanding of his employment in Germany. Based on a comprehensive

evaluation of these findings, we can conclude that the previous assumption—that Bőhm primarily designed floor plans and directed the firm's work, while Hegedűs was responsible for facades and details—is only partially true. Nothing proves more clearly that they possessed similar qualities in drawing and design than the fact that the mature Art Nouveau buildings with brick bands—with the exception of the school on Dob Street, which can be attributed solely to Hegedűs—are more closely associated with Henrik Bőhm. At the same time, it seems beyond doubt that Hegedűs, with his bohemian, more outspoken personality, was responsible for the firm's public image; he was prolific in publishing professional articles, and his membership in professional associations, as well as his speeches and public statements, also support this. Just as is the fact that in most cases he was the one who appeared at ribbon-cutting and opening ceremonies, invigorating them with speeches and spectacular stunts (e.g., he lay down in one of the tubs at the presentation of the St. Gellért Baths, demonstrating its comfort).

In the 1920s—as documented—younger architects worked for them, including one of Ármin Hegedűs's sons. At that time, there were often more than five concurrent construction projects—or, to use today's terminology, "projects"—underway in a single year. Although they collaborated on projects with the involvement of a third architect, it was Hegedűs who, from time to time—stepping outside the confines of the firm—partnered with other architects; in such cases, Bőhm typically worked alone. Only a small fraction (approximately 7%) of their work was realized through competitions; however, they were by no means unsuccessful in this genre either: out of more than 25 competition entries, only 6 ended "without an award," a trend that was particularly characteristic of the second half of their career, when they were less in step with prevailing trends.

2. **Their works, built in the early 1900s, reflected not only Austrian Art Nouveau but also numerous architectural styles of the turn of the century.**

Although their works following the turn of the century primarily followed the Austrian and German traditions—the most striking examples of which include, for instance, Wagnerian circular three-bar motifs or, later, visible riveting— However, alongside these, the search for a Hungarian style manifested itself in numerous forms: both in the reinterpretation of Lechner's brick bands and pedimented gables, and through the use of complex petal-shaped windows or the application of folk motifs as appliqué patterns. In the 1910s, yet another new trend emerged: the search for new

designs that could be connected to earlier ones drew inspiration from the Finnish national style, manifesting primarily in the form of parabolic arches, trapezoidal window lintels, and roof designs. The architectural duo is also associated with Jugendstil, primarily through their numerous apartment buildings from the early 1910s, as well as through the more robust stonework and angular lines evident in the St. Gellért Baths and Hotel complex. Their connection to German cultural circles is evident not only in the parallels found in their buildings but also in the surviving biographical data. Examples include Bőhm's German-language library and Hegedűs's German-language lecture; at the same time, this connection is evident in Hegedűs's writings, where he primarily cites German and Austrian examples, though in addition to Vienna, Munich, Berlin, and Dresden, certain buildings in Brussels, London, Milan, Genova, and Trieste are also mentioned.

A unique example in their body of work is the Daruvár Baths building with its Oriental-Moorish motifs, where we saw patterns from the Lechner Museum of Applied Arts come to life alongside the thermal bath imagery that is otherwise characteristic of bath culture. Although the use of enclosed blocks and the basic forms of the buildings tie them more closely to Viennese taste, the masks, female heads, and motifs of smoke or whip cracks, characteristic of French Art Nouveau, also appeared here and there in their oeuvre in more modest variations.

We can primarily associate them with English architecture through Hegedűs's own villa and a few other private residences, but we can also find points of connection—for example, with the architecture of Charles Rennie Mackintosh—in the complex coffered window designs used in numerous buildings, primarily commercial buildings, apartment buildings, and spa hotels. The influence of American steel-and-glass architecture is indirectly evident not only in the Török Bank Building but also in numerous department stores and apartment buildings; one need only think of the buildings on Váci Street or Gerlóczy Street.

Although no distinctive stylistic language unique to them emerged around the turn of the century that would clearly identify their buildings, they were not out of the ordinary in this regard.

3. **According to the previously widespread view, they were architects of the historicist and Art Nouveau styles. However, in my opinion, it is not only these buildings that are significant. The Art Deco and modern styles carry greater weight in their body**

of work—not only in terms of numbers but also in terms of quality—than we previously thought.

The architectural firm is characterized by its participation in the exhibition at the 12th International Congress of Architects in 1930, where it was represented in three distinct groups: those favoring modernist tendencies, those adhering to historical styles, and those following Lechner's teachings. The first decade of the architectural duo's career, preceding the turn of the century, was indeed marked by historicism, comprising buildings designed primarily in the spirit of the Renaissance, and the beginning of their career was characterized mainly by the design of school buildings and cemetery facilities. The Art Nouveau period—two decades encompassing the movements and styles of architectural renewal—lasted from 1902 until the final year of World War I, 1918. While the first decade was dominated by Viennese Art Nouveau and Ödön Lechner's brick-banded, Hungarian-style, Oriental, or even Renaissance style with pilasters, the second decade was characterised by a more robust, heavier style—reflecting the influence of Finnish national romanticism and German Jugendstil—particularly in the early years of the 1910s.

In the 1920s, a series of buildings designed by the firm in the Neo-Baroque, Neo-Classical, and Art Deco styles appear in front of us. During this period, Hegedűs and Bőhm demonstrated not uniformity but rather a diversity of styles; the playful lightness with which they brought variations on historical forms to life is particularly evident in their bathhouse designs. It is no coincidence, then, that their contemporaries mentioned them primarily in connection with these styles. Art Deco and Modernism found their place in their buildings mainly through interiors and interior design; thus, the lighting fixtures and furnishings of the Zsolna Savings Bank or the Thermia Hotel in Pöstyén, or the doorknobs of the model housing complex on Napraforgó Street come to mind. At the same time, elements associated with Art Deco can also be identified in the buildings in the form of zigzag lines and appliqué patterns.

At the same time, in the 1930s, modernist tendencies took on various forms in their work, manifesting primarily in the use of brick facades, more cubic forms, and the abandonment of historicist embellishments. In their house designed for the model housing development on Napraforgó Street, the idea of establishing a close connection between the garden and the residence took shape in the covered and open terraces on the upper floor, as well as in the ground-floor terrace. In international comparison, Expressionist architecture is most often cited as a parallel to their work; examples

include the Aggok House in Pécs and the Törekvés Savings Bank Apartment Building on Mihály Horváth Square. Their Hungarian counterparts during this period were primarily works created by Gyula Wälder and Béla Rerrich. Although the historicist character of the entire body of work is undeniable, in terms of numbers, the building designs and works created in the Lechner-Hungarian, Art Nouveau, Finnish National Romantic, and Jugendstil styles far outnumber the historicist works—even when including the historicist trends of the 1920s.

Parallel lines of development can be traced in their life's work alongside those of several of their contemporaries. This is no different in their works from the 1930s onward, when, quite astonishingly, they were able to create in accordance with new architectural trends, although they did not entirely abandon their inclination for ornamentation; it was precisely this that gave their works—which sought to conform to modern trends—a distinctive identity.

4. **Their sources of inspiration and clients were primarily determined by their network of contacts.**

In the year following the completion of his university studies, Henrik Bőhm was employed by German architect Albert Speer and also worked for Arthur Meinig, while Ármin Hegedűs improved his skills at Alfréd Wellisch's office. Both also took part in various study trips, primarily in Western and Northern Europe. Their early works—influenced primarily by their first mentors—are characterized by a historicist style; toward the end of the century, they began to diverge from this, and their work began to feature experimental, more freely applied decorative and architectural elements that pointed toward Art Nouveau.

Before establishing his architectural firm with Henrik Bőhm, Hegedűs had already taken on work at the capital's engineering office, which allowed him to gain further theoretical and practical knowledge at international conferences and to build his professional network. During these years, he designed most of his school buildings, which were primarily created in a traditional historicist style. At the turn of the century, he was entrusted with a new task: the design and layout of memorial cemeteries. The trips he took during this period provided a further source of inspiration, and at the same time, Henrik Bőhm presented his first designs for tombs.

Hegedűs joined a Masonic lodge in 1900, which presumably also provided him with additional work. Perhaps even more significant is the fact that both of them likely

received numerous commissions through their religious (Jewish) communities. They also owed several architectural commissions to their personal connections, friendships, and relatives; first and foremost, it is worth mentioning Mihály Hoffer, the brother-in-law of Ármin Hegedűs, a council member from Újpest, who may have been involved in the construction of both private and public buildings in that district. Several commissions in Upper Hungary—not only in Pöstyén but presumably also in Trencsénteplic—can be linked to Lajos Winter's high school friendship. Few written documents are available regarding their sources of inspiration; therefore, we can only speculate here that the buildings and works of friends and schoolmates such as Gyula Kosztolányi Kann, Artúr Sebestyén (with whom Hegedűs submitted several joint proposals), Albert Kálmán Kőrössy, and others may have influenced their work.

5. **Respect for tradition and a commitment to innovation were constantly and simultaneously present in their work. They were not particularly innovative in terms of architectural forms, but the emphasis on "function" also occupied a prominent place in Hegedűs's theoretical work.**

Although "innovators" may not be the first word that comes to mind when thinking of this architectural duo, it is worth noting that they could be described as having an experimental spirit in one or two areas. For example, as part of his Freemasonry activities, Ármin Hegedűs worked to establish daycare centers to support the working class; we also know that, following the London model, he "brought home" the idea of rooftop playgrounds for schools built on narrow, downtown lots. He also applied the German model for the design of principals' residences in schools.

At the school on Dob Street, he designed alcoves to be constructed from Falconnier glass bricks—a feature previously more typical of department stores, shopping centers, or bank buildings—which certainly conveyed a sense of exclusivity. Prior to the implementation of Bárczy's school construction program, he incorporated numerous Hungarian and natural motifs into his school design—not only in the mosaic frieze on the exterior façade depicting children at play, but also in the decoration of the classrooms, furniture, and stairwells.

The mosaic on the facade of the Török Bank Building on Szervita Square could almost be considered megalomaniacal, but the architectural duo drew attention to the building not only with this large-scale work of art, but also with its once-illuminated advertising globe and decorative use of iron and glass. The iron-and-glass storefront

itself is neither unprecedented nor ground-breaking, but it can certainly be considered one of the first curtain-wall solutions in our country.

The "pile-supported" reinforced concrete foundation of the Irma Baths and Thermia Hotel in Pöstyén, built directly over the thermal spring, was also considered a bold solution. At the same site, with the Pro Patria Spa Hospital—built during World War I—the architectural duo created something new both in its floor plan and in its unique structural framework. In the 1930s, they designed the first steel-framed apartment building in the form of the Törekvés Savings Bank Palace, and they also demonstrated their experimental spirit and trend-setting approach in the Újpest Epidemic Hospital complex by orienting the pulmonary ward pavilion toward the sun and incorporating a sloped "sun-tracking" roof design.

Although their house, designed for the model housing development on Napraforgó Street, is not among the most modern, they are the only ones credited with hiring an applied artist and interior designer. Overall, therefore, it can be said that they embodied both a spirit of innovation and respect for tradition, as reflected in Ármin Hegedűs's writings and theoretical work as well (in which concepts such as coziness, comfort, and Hungarian identity frequently appear).

List of related publications:

- *The Life and Work of Architect Ármin Hegedűs*. Thesis, Department of Art History, PPKE-BTK. Piliscsaba, 2009.
- Ármin Hegedűs and Henrik Bőhm. In: *Architects in the Age of Ybl and Lechner*. (ed. József Rozsnyai), Terc Publishing, Budapest, 2015, 292–317.
- A magnificent journey through a building type. Review [Review of the book by Attila Brunner (2023): Town Halls in Hungary. Budapest: Holnap Kiadó]. In: *Belvedere Meridionale* 2023. Vol. XXXV, No. 4.
- A monograph on Gyula Wälder, the star architect of the Neo-Baroque period. (Review of the book by Eszter Szilvia Paár: Gyula Wälder. Holnap Publishing, Budapest, 2020.) In: *Aetas* 2021, Vol. 36, No. 1, pp. 194–197.

Additional publications:

- József Németh's 1944 photo series of the National Assembly. Color photography for documentary purposes in the legislative building (a joint study with Kristóf Kelecsényi). *Aetas* 2021, Vol. 36, No. 3, pp. 126–129.
- The Stained-Glass Windows. In: *The Construction and Art of the Parliament Building*. (ed. József Sisa), Parliament Building Publishing House, Budapest, 2020, 374–390.
- *The History of the Speaker's Gallery in the Chamber of Deputies. A Gallery of Portraits of the Speakers of the Hungarian National Assembly's Chamber of Deputies.* (ed. Mátyás Gödölle), Országház Publishing House, Budapest, 2020, pp. 8–55.
- The Glasswork of the Palace of Justice – Forgó and Associates. In: *The Palace of Justice*. (eds.: Kristóf Kelecsényi and Richárd Zima), Imre Steindl Program, Budapest, 2027 (expected publication date)
- *Glass art in the House of Parliament*. Országház Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 2020
- The National Assembly's Office's Youth Programs Simulating the Legislative Process (a joint study with Réka Andrási). In: *Parlamenti Szemle* 2020, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 155–170.