

“Such a Style Is in Itself a Call for Originality”*

Imre Henszlmann’s Views on the Reinterpretation of Gothic Forms in Nineteenth-Century Architecture

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Abstract. This essay explores the views of Imre Henszlmann (1813–1888), an art historian, archaeologist, and art critic who was the first professor at the Department of Art History at the University of Budapest, on the contemporary applicability of medieval architecture, with a particular focus on Gothic architecture and construction methods. First, I will outline the circumstances and motivations behind the adoption of medieval styles in Hungarian architecture in the mid-nineteenth century. By placing Henszlmann’s work in this context in addition to analysing his architecture-historical and archaeological studies, I will demonstrate that, throughout his career, he frequently expressed his views on contemporary buildings and the role of contemporary architecture. His writings from the 1840s and 1860s show that his study of Gothic building methods and architectural proportions gave him a clear understanding of the subject. He believed that, of all the historical architectural styles, only Gothic possessed characteristics that could be successfully applied to nineteenth-century building types while simultaneously satisfying the architectural demands of the era. In his view, historical forms in the architecture of his own era did not serve an illustrative role but were tools of a complex artistic method. Henszlmann’s conception of architecture, which viewed buildings as functional creations where forms served to realise their function to the fullest extent possible, was probably understood only by a few of his contemporaries. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the illustrative intent became dominant in the contemporary application of medieval architecture.

Keywords: Imre Henszlmann, Arnold Ipolyi, nineteenth-century architecture in Hungary, Gothic architecture, architectural proportions, Gothic building methods

History, architecture, and national consciousness in the mid-nineteenth century: The Central-European context

This paper focuses on the writings and ideas of Imre Henszlmann (1813–1888), one of the outstanding figures in Hungarian art history, archaeologist, and researcher

* Original caption: “Ily styl már eredetiségével is eredetiségre szólít fel.” Henszlmann, “Minő stylben,” 375.

of medieval architecture, as well as on the applicability of medieval forms to nineteenth-century buildings. Of Henszlmann's extensive oeuvre as a theorist, scholar, and critic, I will deal with a few particularly relevant works that clearly demonstrate why the renowned art historian considered Gothic architectural forms suitable for modern (and national) architecture. However, before addressing them, it seems essential to briefly review the evolution of the use of historical forms, including medieval styles, in nineteenth-century Hungarian architecture. Applying historical forms is inextricably linked to the desire to express the national identity through architecture, and ultimately to the history of national-style architecture.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, national consciousness in Central Europe was often associated with a desire for national independence. In architecture, as in the visual arts, the question of the national character was represented by historical, mythical, folkloric, or symbolic figures. The fact that, from the 1830s onwards, architecture and architectural shaping appeared in the discourse about the creation of the national character in Hungary necessitated the introduction of a new concept, the national architectural style. The term, like several other elements of architectural thinking, originated from the German architectural terminology. The reason for this choice was that Hungarian conceptions of national architecture were largely determined by German ideas on late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century national art and style.¹

The use of the "national style" meant that certain artistic and intellectual goods and works were seen as determinant in expressing a particular political community's identity. The design of the built environment and the buildings that constitute urban spaces were crucial in the search for and creation of identity; in particular, the kind of appearance and style of buildings that could best express what was considered the national character. Calls for proposals, programme texts, and written elaborations on the national style architecture were produced. These writings reflect a fundamental element of nineteenth-century architectural thought, Historicism, which saw the present as part of a single historical process. According to the historicist view, the architecture of the present is part of the universal history of architecture, and contemporary architecture is therefore a product of the national past. This approach had a direct impact on architectural styles and, within them, on the national style. The historical perspective defined the two closely related architectural movements of the nineteenth century, Romanticism and Historicism.²

1 Büchsenschuß, *Goethe und die Architekturtheorie*; Borger-Keweloh, *Die mittelalterlichen Dome*; Gärtner, "Patriotismus und Gotikrezeption."

2 Brix and Steinhauser, *Historismus*; Wagner-Rieger, *Wiens Architektur*; Komárik, "Gótizáló romantika;" Komárik, "Romkultusz."

To understand the novelty of this approach, we should remember that using historical forms did not mean simply copying them. Instead, architects reinterpreted medieval forms by applying them to contemporary buildings, creating a new context for them and a new quality. In the second half of the nineteenth century, this adaptive, reinterpreted approach, which was generally characteristic of historicist architecture, was complemented by an additional element, namely the confidence of the positivist perspective. The architects who had the mastery of design in historical forms considered that, thanks to their knowledge and experience, they were able to solve any architectural problem better than their predecessors. From around the 1860s, the adaptive approach and the confidence of positivism were joined by a third trait: striving for historical accuracy and precision. The latter was also partly inspired by respect for the past, especially the Middle Ages. Following (and sometimes even reviving) the working methods of medieval master builders and aiming for authenticity, new historical forms were created and placed in a contemporary context.³

Imre Henszlmann and the idea of associating medieval forms with national history

Following this shift in approach, which was connected to the idea of history as a process, medieval elements and construction methods were deliberately incorporated into contemporary designs, particularly when the aim was to convey the national identity. This approach was typical also in the architectural theory of mid-nineteenth-century Hungary,⁴ creating a need for the accurate knowledge of monuments and for their surveys. The gradual professionalisation and institutionalisation of monument protection and art history provided the theoretical and professional framework for this growing body of architectural history, which contemporary architects seeking to express a national style were drawing on. In other words, from the second half of the nineteenth century, from the analysis of Hungarian monuments, professionally investigated and buttressed theoretical constructions envisaged a national style that could be created within the framework of universal historical styles.

For a brief review of the history of the national style in Hungary, we should start from the 1840s. This was a time when buildings with historical references were constructed in Hungary in the spirit of Romantic Historicism. A key question regarding the impact of this new interpretation of the past is to what extent historical forms,

3 *Der Kölner Dom*; Borger-Keweloh, *Die mittelalterlichen Dome*, 149–63.

4 Henszlmann, *Kassa városának*.

which in the early decades of Historicism were usually a “recycling” of medieval architectural styles, became part of the common visual knowledge. In other words, to what extent could the architecture of early Historicism and the following decades shape the contemporary public’s aesthetic and historical thinking?

From the early 1840s, the association of medieval architectural styles with the national history certainly played a significant role in their acceptance by patrons and the public, in contrast to the period of Neo-Classicism. By the mid-nineteenth century, Imre Henszlmann—an art historian, archaeologist, and member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences—was a leading figure in the systematic study and historical interpretation of architectural monuments. He was also a pioneer in viewing them as part of the construction of the national identity.⁵ Henszlmann was born in Košice (Kassa) on 13 October 1813 into a German-speaking middle-class family. He studied at the Lutheran College in Prešov (Eperjes), where he formed a lifelong friendship with Ferenc Pulszky, who would become one of the founders of Hungarian archaeology. Henszlmann’s parents wanted him to become a physician, so he studied medicine in Pest and Vienna, receiving his doctorate in Padua. However, he never practised medicine. From an early age, he knew two of the most talented art collectors of his time: Gábor Fejérváry of Prešov, Pulszky’s uncle and a renowned universal art collector; and Joseph Daniel Böhm, the artistic director of the Imperial Mint and head of the Engraving Academy in Vienna, an eminent art connoisseur and collector in the city. These experiences encouraged him to continue to study history and art deeper. His growing expertise led him to publish articles on art criticism and the importance of art education, and later to write theatre reviews.

Medieval patterns of the Hungarian national architectural style and the process of professionalisation

The desire to create a national style is clearly evident from various writings, essays, articles and programme texts. The intention to create a national architecture seems to have been articulated somewhat earlier among those outside the architectural profession than within it. Early writings on the subject from the 1830s onwards were mostly general and recorded the absence of a Hungarian national architectural style. The first question, therefore, was how to create a national style. It is to be noted that at the time, there was no question of the need for national architecture. In this context, the Hungarian people’s historical past and building traditions were examined. Interestingly, some writers identified the Hungarians’ distinctiveness at the conquest of Hungary rather than the subsequent centuries of the Kingdom

5 Marosi, “Henszlmann.”

of Hungary. Consequently, rather than selecting building forms characteristic of the nation from the remnants of the Middle Ages, as they did from the mid-nineteenth-century, they sought to take the form of the Hungarian conquerors' home, namely the tent, as their starting point. This idea enjoyed a resurgence at the turn of the century, when early ethnographers would again cite the tent as inspiration for the Hungarian architectural style.⁶ In other words, in texts addressing the national style in the first half of the nineteenth century, we encounter the same concept of Hungarian history and the exemplary role of the conquering Hungarians' clothing and material culture. This grand vision of creating a national architectural style should be seen in the context of more general contemporary texts advocating the creation of national art.

It seems that in the mid-nineteenth century a shift took place that affected the forms of the imagined national style, to which a new relationship with national monuments undoubtedly made a contribution. Let us examine this shift and change in the relationship with monuments. When people wrote about the need to create a national style, they drew inspiration from one of Europe's historical architectural styles. The historical perspective of the era determined that the architectural representation of the national character was also conceived using elements of historical styles. In Central Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century, a hierarchy of historical architectural styles emerged, of which medieval styles were the most highly regarded European architectural periods. Romanesque and Gothic monuments were seen as testaments to the nation's greatness. In mid-nineteenth-century Hungary, for example, medieval architecture was not generally considered a model for a national style; rather, local monuments that represented a 'national' version of Romanesque or Gothic architecture were idealised. This preference was even more manifest when the monuments (such as castles and churches) could be linked to the nation's history. In line with the start of ethnographic activity in the Austrian Empire in the early nineteenth century, a few decades later Hungary also started the description of landscapes and monuments. This reflected the approach of the so-called imperial patriotism, which to the east of the Leitha River involved describing and publicising the notable landscapes and monuments in the empire. From the 1830s onwards, publications containing engravings and descriptions were produced in Hungary, depicting notable sites in Hungarian history. These illustrations introduced to the public famous historical sites, such as Visegrád, Hunedoara (Vajdahunyad), Buda, and Székesfehérvár, making them part of the national consciousness.⁷

In addition to the aforementioned activities promoting and shaping national consciousness, a voluntary organisation played an important role in the development of

6 Gerle, "Boglyakupola."

7 Szentesi, "Birodalmi patriotizmus."

the canon of historical monuments, calling for an inventory and survey of domestic monuments. In 1845, Imre Henszlmann published an essay entitled “A Call to Preserve the Remnants of Art.”⁸ At the 1846 travelling meeting of the Hungarian Physicians’ and Naturalists’ Society in Košice (Kassa) and Prešov (Eperjes), he gave a lecture on St Elizabeth’s Church in Košice. The travelling meeting and the proposals adopted there played a key role in the institutionalisation of monument protection in Hungary. At the meeting, the Society wrote to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, requesting that the Academy should monitor the condition of the deteriorating historic monuments until the Parliament took action to protect them. Additionally, they deemed it crucial to stipulate that the renovation of historic buildings should be preceded by a scholarly survey and publication. From that point on, the issue of protecting historic buildings received nationwide attention. Also in 1846, Henszlmann published the first art history monograph in Hungarian, *The Old-German-Style Churches of the City of Kassa*.⁹

The following year, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences issued a text calling for the cataloguing and processing of historical monuments. Archaeologists, historians, self-taught local historians, and other volunteers participated in the ensuing project. This was the heyday of “archaeological fieldwork”. This went on for decades and eventually required professionalisation in order to provide an organised framework for collecting and processing data. In 1872, the Provisional Committee for Hungarian Historical Monuments was set up under the auspices of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The model and prototype for the committee was the Central Commission for the Research and Conservation of Historical Monuments (*k.k. Central-Commission zur Erforschung und Erhaltung der Baudenkmale*), founded in Vienna in 1850. These formal frameworks enabled art historians, historians, architects, and local patriots to create a canon of architectural monuments of Hungarian history: Central-Commission served as a reference for those seeking a national architectural style.

Imre Henszlmann and his concept of proportions: A key to understanding medieval architecture?

For Henszlmann, the theory of architectural proportions was fundamental to his understanding of medieval architecture. The theoretical reconstructions he produced from the 1840s onwards, as well as the restorations he carried out in subsequent decades served to demonstrate this theory.¹⁰ In these years, he started his

8 Henszlmann, “Figyelmeztetés.”

9 Henszlmann, *Kassa városának*.

10 Fehér and Halmos, “A középkori építészet,” 238–40; *Henszlmann levelezése I*, 109–17, 207–14, 220–29, 294–300, 329–32, 504–7, 520–28, 536–39, 572–75; *Henszlmann levelezése II*, 103–5.

regular work on medieval monuments in Hungary, including the ruined church of Zsámbék and the abbey church of Pannonhalma. In the process, he understood the systematic use of certain proportions, while the medieval law of proportions was gradually taking shape in his mind. As he wrote himself:

“I did not rest until I had a clear understanding of this medieval law of proportions. I first became suspicious in 1845, and by 1847 I clearly comprehended the law, but I had not yet been able to prove its general application.”¹¹

Henszlmann, as he recalls in his memoirs, began studying the proportional systems of historic buildings in the mid-1840s. The starting point for his research was surveying the churches in Košice, and analysing their dimensions. In Košice, it was the reconstructed form of the towers and, in particular, the sacristy that dated to the second half of the fifteenth century (and were associated with Viennese architecture) that developed into one of the basic tenets of his theory of proportions. Having studied monuments in Hungary, he concluded that historical buildings were using a consistent system of proportions. Over the following years, he supported this hypothesis by collecting data on the proportions of medieval churches in Germany and England. He also studied the data in Matthäus Roritzer’s treatise on the construction of fiales ([*D[as] puechle[n] d[er] fiale[n] gerechtikait*], 1486), written and illustrated by the cathedral master builder in Regensburg.¹² He also extended his investigations to the analysis of the scale of Greek churches. One of the fundamental principles of his theory was that common construction principles should be sought in architectural periods of ancient cultures and subsequent European cultures not considered part of antiquity, such as Gothic architecture. His second tenet was that there is a close connection and parallel between architectural and musical harmony. In short, it was this fundamental theorem—the theory of triangular projections in Gothic church floor plans—that became ingrained in contemporary architectural theory, with Henszlmann’s work frequently cited as a reference.¹³

11 In original: “[N]em nyugodtam, míg ezen középkori aránytörvényre világosan rá nem ismer-tem. A sejtés bennem már 1845-ben támadt, 1847-ben a törvényt világosan megismertem ugyan, de *általános* alkalmazását még nem bírtam bebizonyítani.” Henszlmann’s autobiography and career path drafted when he applied for the position of director of the Hungarian National Museum in 1865. Košice, Vychodoslovenské Múzeum. The source was published by: Timár, “Adalékok,” 136.

12 *Das Büchlein von der Fialen Gerechtigkeit. Nach einem alten Drucke aus dem Jahre 1486 in die heutige Mundart übertragen und durch Anmerkungen erläutert* was published in Trier in 1845 with a preface by August Reichensperger.

13 Szentesi, “Arányelmélet;” Fehér and Halmos, “A középkori építészet,” 238–40. For additional information on this topic, see the relevant section of Deodáth Zuh’s study of this issue: Zuh, “Consensus and Lack of Consensus,” 53–54.

Henszlmann began the detailed elaboration of his theory of proportions in the early 1850s and presented his findings in a lecture at a meeting of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in December 1852. According to Anna Zádor, British architects in London sought the “secret” of Gothic architecture to enhance the beauty of their newly built Neo-Gothic edifices, raising them to the level of medieval Gothic buildings.¹⁴ However, the RIBA special committee cautiously endorsed Henszlmann’s proposal to continue his studies. As a result, during the 1850s, he continued to work on his theory in France. In 1860, with the support of the French state, he published the first volume of his major research concerning the foundations of his theory and the characteristics of Egyptian and Doric architecture (Figure 1). This volume was entitled *Théorie des proportions appliquées dans l’architecture depuis la XIIe dynastie des rois égyptiens jusqu’au XVIe siècle* (Theory

of Proportions Applied in Architecture from the Twelfth Dynasty of Egyptian Kings to the Sixteenth Century). Dividing the material into Byzantine, Romanesque, so-called “transitional”, and Gothic styles, by 1863, it had been supplemented with large etched plates illustrating the proportions of medieval architecture.¹⁵ As Anna Zádor notes, Henszlmann’s belief in the need to find the “secret” of medieval constructions, to learn the “theoretical” foundations of their beauty, and to use this knowledge for creating structures of equal value and beauty is a typical consequence of the rationalism that survived the Enlightenment era.¹⁶ It was during these years that Henszlmann turned his ideas about the national characteristics of the Gothic style into a coherent system. He first presented these ideas in his above-mentioned work on the Gothic churches of Košice in 1846. It was undoubtedly influenced by the significant architectural project of the time, the completion of Cologne Cathedral by the Cologne Cathedral Lodge (Dombauhütte), which was founded in the 1820s.

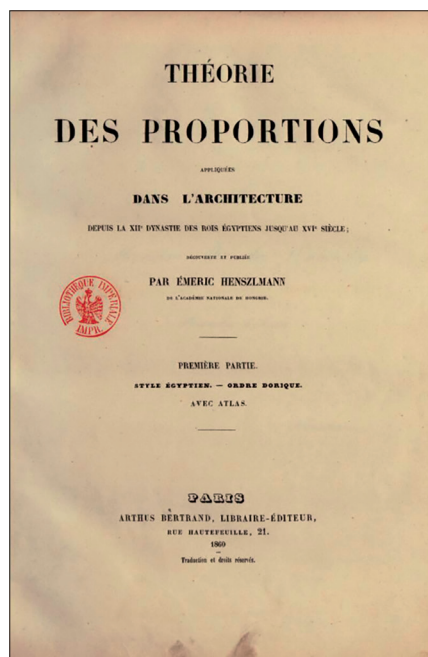


Figure 1 Henszlmann, Imre: *Théorie des proportions appliquées dans l’architecture depuis la XIIe dynastie des rois égyptiens jusqu’au XVIe siècle*. Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1860. Cover.

14 Zádor, “Henszlmann Imre építészetelmélete,” 210.

15 Henszlmann, *Méthodes des Proportions*.

16 Zádor, “Henszlmann Imre építészetelmélete,” 214.

According to Henszlmann’s theory, if something cannot be deduced from archival sources revealing the history of the church in Košice, it can certainly be inferred from its design. It was in this spirit that he reconstructed the “original” forms of the church the way he imagined them.

The study of medieval monuments in Hungary led to the identification of stylistic forms and architectural solutions within medieval (essentially Romanesque) architecture that could be classified as local (Hungarian) variations of the style. Based on his theoretical reconstructions of the Royal Basilica in Székesfehérvár and the second Cathedral in Kalocsa from the late twelfth century, Henszlmann developed the concept of the cathedral with four corner towers as a distinctively national interpretation of the Romanesque style. In 1864, in a volume summarising the history of the excavation of the Székesfehérvár basilica, he wrote the following about its ruins, which are known only in fragments: “St Stephen’s Basilica created a Hungarian national school of architecture.”¹⁷

Henszlmann made several references to the extent to which contemporary architecture could draw inspiration from medieval, particularly Gothic, architecture. As early as 1841, he wrote that “the technique of old German architecture painfully disappeared in almost its entirety, and only recently have efforts been made in Munich to revive it.”¹⁸

Henszlmann’s contemporary architectural designs: Concepts for the nineteenth-century implementation of the Gothic style

On two occasions during his stay in France, Henszlmann demonstrated how the Gothic style could be applied to contemporary architecture.¹⁹ In 1854, he participated in the architectural competition for the cathedral of Notre-Dame de la Treille in Lille, working alongside the French architects Henri-Eugène Leblanc and Auguste Reimbeau (Figure 2). Their design, which won them a gold medal (that meant, otherwise, the fourth place), followed the tradition of early French Gothic architecture. Their three-nave church, with a chapel-like, stretched, polygonal sanctuary enlarged to five naves after the transept, exemplifies the ideal of a contemporary Gothic church. The accompanying printed description provided Henszlmann with the opportunity to express his views on pointed-arch architecture, based on contemporary French

17 Original caption: “Szt. István basilikája magyar nemzeti építészeti iskolát képezett.” Henszlmann, *A székesfehérvári ásatások*, 131.

18 Original caption: “[A] régi német építéset technikája, fájdalom, majd csaknem végképen elenyészik, és csak a’ legújabb korban Münchenben történtek törekvések annak megújítására.” Henszlmann, *Párhuzam*, 105.

19 Sisa, “Henszlmann.”

and German ideas on Gothic architecture. Thus, in relation to the thickness of pillars and buttresses, he represents Viollet-le-Duc's view that the structural strength of Gothic buildings is ensured by the balance of their elements rather than the thickness of their masses. With regard to Gothic vault structures, he uses the example of the fishnet analogy known from Georg Moller's work *Denkmäler der deutschen Baukunst*.²⁰ He also refers to a study by Idesbald Le Maistre d'Anstaing, a member of the jury, according to which architecture leads the way in the development of styles, with other disciplines merely following in its footsteps.

Two years later, still from France, but this time independently, he submitted a design for a competition for a memorial church in Constantinople dedicated to the memory of the English victims of the Crimean War.²¹ The call for entry specified the Gothic design and discouraged the use of Byzantine style, as it would have referred to Muslim religious buildings in Constantinople. Taking into account local architectural traditions, applicants were asked to avoid depicting human or animal figures in their designs. They wanted a simple, dignified building with a capacity of at least seven hundred people, at a cost not exceeding twenty thousand pounds.²² The fact that Henszlmann participated in the competition without a degree in architecture and without fellow architects shows that while he did a great deal to

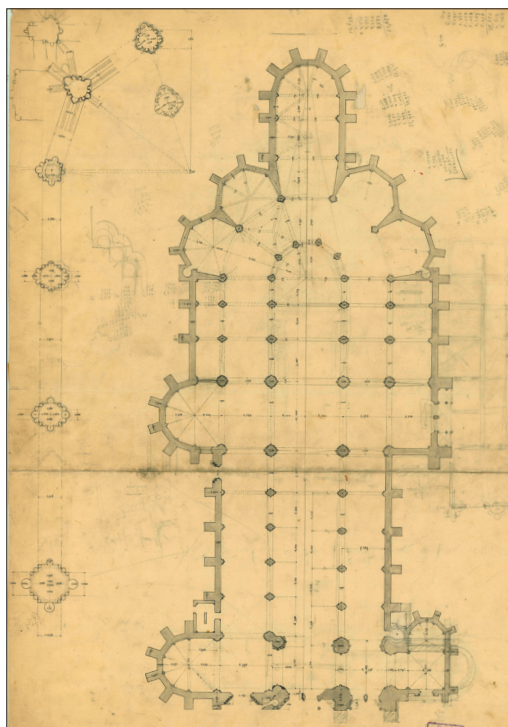


Figure 2 Henszlmann, Imre: Preliminary study for the proposal submitted to the design competition for the Notre-Dame de la Treille church in Lille, 1860. Floor plan.

Source: MÉM MDK Archive of Plans. K 9430.

20 Original caption: "Man vergleiche z. B. die Festigkeit oder Tragkraft von einer Anzahl parallel gespannter Fäden mit der Tragkraft derselben Anzahl von Fäden, wenn sie in ein Netz mit festen Kneten und kleinen Maschen geknüpft sind. Dieses netzförmige Abschliessen der langen Linien durch Knoten in kurzen Zwischenräumen ist nun, wie mir scheint, das charakteristische und vorzüglich nachahmungswerthe Princip der Constructionsweise des Mittelalters." Moller, *Denkmäler der deutschen Baukunst*, 11.

21 Kovács, "Henszlmann;" *Henszlmann levelezése I.* 437–39, 461–64.

22 *Organ für Christliche Kunst* 6 (1856): 165–66.

professionalize art history, archaeology, and monument preservation, to a certain extent, he still operated with the art appreciation approach of the previous generation. His design, which in many respects resembles St Michael's Chapel in Košice as well as Tewkesbury Abbey, received negative feedback (Figure 3). As the critics put it:

"Henszlmann offers a specimen of bathotic architecture, a groined, cruciform, aisleless church, lighted by sprawling lancets, without one redeeming feature of detail or arrangement. [...] If M Henszlmann saw at Lille what English architects could do, how could he have ventured to send in this caricature?"²³



Figure 3 Henszlmann, Imre: Proposal for the design competition for a memorial church in Constantinople dedicated to the memory of the English victims of the Crimean War, 1862. Perspective view. (Detail.)

Source: MÉM MDK, Archive of Plans, K 15713.

The building of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences: The limits of the Gothic style in nineteenth-century bourgeois architecture

A few years later, Henszlmann had another opportunity to discuss Gothic features and the suitability of this style for contemporary architectural projects. The opportunity arose in 1860, when the President of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences

23 "Competition for the Memorial Church," 112.

invited him to design the construction programme for a palace to be built for the institution in Pest. However, his involvement in the events surrounding the palace did not end there, as he took part in partnership with architects Károly Gerster and Lajos Frey in the invitation-only design competition.²⁴ The design competition of the Academy's headquarters as an independent national institution marks the time when architectural issues, not least stylistic ones, first came to the forefront of wider public interest.²⁵ As the art historian and Bishop of Banská Bystrica (Besztercebánya) and later Oradea (Nagyvárad), Arnold Ipolyi (1823–1886) put it:

“We also consider it noteworthy that the design of our Academy's palace brought the question of architectural taste to the forefront, awakening hitherto dormant and uninformed attention to the subject and even arousing interest in it.”²⁶

The Academy's building committee invited Imre Henszlmann, Heinrich Ferstel from Vienna, and Miklós Ybl to submit designs for the palace. Antal Szkalnitzky, a young Hungarian architect submitted a plan independently of the call, whilst Frigyes Feszl also prepared a plan but apparently did not submit it. The plan of Henszlmann and his associates followed the early French Gothic style and included an explanatory note detailing their decision to use the Gothic style. He presented this argument at the Academy meeting on 28 January 1861, after which the text was introduced to the wider public. His paper may be seen as a kind of programme for the creation of a national architectural style.

This analysis of his design description provides insight into Henszlmann's architectural theory and his views on contemporary national architecture. The academic art historian carefully constructed his argument²⁷ by examining whether, from a climatic and/or functional point of view, the forms and structures of the main styles of the European architectural tradition (Classical Greek and Roman, Byzantine, Romanesque, and Gothic) could authentically represent the architectural unity of the Academy's palace in Pest.

“[T]he connection between the palace as a public building and the apartment building as a private building also requires the use of the exterior and interior architecture that was originally used by the Greeks, albeit in

24 Kemény, “Henszlmann Imre szerepe.”

25 Kemény, “Stílusválság;” Kemény, *A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia palotája*.

26 Original quote: “[K]iemelendőnek tartjuk még is azon nevezetes körülményt, hogy maga Akadémiánk palotájának már ezen tervezése hozta épen előtérbe nálunk az építészeti ízlések kérdését, a tárgy iránt eddig szunnyadozó és tájékozatlan figyelmet fölkeltve, sőt mondhatnók, iránta érdekeltséget gerjesztve.” Ipolyi, “A magy. Akadémia.”

27 Henszlmann, “A magyar Academia.”

its medieval modification, because it developed in response to our own climate.”²⁸

This approach suggests that the building should be stylistically uniform and in harmony with the chosen style. The text on the search for a style befitting and adequately expressing the nation was based on the widely held view that there was no such thing as a Hungarian architectural style. This was because the Hungarians settling in the country did not have their own architectural style, and monuments built in later centuries were based on foreign models.

“With regard to style, two opinions have been expressed so far: one in favour of an antique style, and the other in favour of a national style. The second opinion calls for a distinctive style that bears witness to our living conditions and views for posterity in the monumentality of the building; in other words, a national Hungarian style. However, there are no national Hungarian architectural elements because, after settling in our country, the Hungarian nation was nomadic and built its houses, churches, and palaces based on foreign models. This borrowing has continued to this day, so there can be no question of an improvised Hungarian style. Therefore, we are forced to choose from existing styles, the way our ancestors always did.”²⁹

His arguments in favour of the Gothic style are as follows:

“The development of the transept, which had already progressed in Romanesque architecture, only reached its peak with the pointed arch, or the French style. This style offers the most perfect lighting system and the greatest freedom in terms of arrangement, grouping, and shape.”³⁰

28 Original caption: “A palotának mint középületnek a bérházzal, mint magánépülettel összeköttetése szintén ezen, már a görögök által használt kül- és belépítézetet igényli, még pedig középkori módosításában, mert az tekintettel saját éghajlatunkra fejlődött.” Henszlmann, “A magyar Academia.” *Pesti Napló*, 31 January 1861, 2.

29 Original caption: “A styl tekintetében eddig leginkább két vélemény nyilatkozott, az egyik antikizáló, a másik nemzeti módot akarván alkalmaztatni. [...] Az érintett második vélemény sajátságos stylt kíván, mely az épület monumental voltában tanúságot hagyjon az utókorra életviszonyainkról és nézeteinkről; vagyis más szavakkal, mely nemzeti magyar styl legyen. [...] Azonban nemzeti magyar építészeti elemek nem léteznek, nem létezhetnek, mert a magyar nemzet mint nomád nép telepedvén le hazánkban, házát, templomát és még később palotáját is idegen minták után építé. Ezen kölcsönzést mai napig folytattuk; és így rögtönzött magyar stylről szó sem lehet. Kénytelenek vagyunk tehát a meglevő stylek közül választani, mint ezt mindeddig ősünk tették.” Henszlmann, “A magyar Academia.” *Pesti Napló*, 31 January 1861, 1.

30 Original caption: “A keresztbolt kimívelése már a román építészetben előhaladván, tetőpontját csak a csúcsíves, vagyis a francia stylben érte el. E stylben mindazt fölhaláljuk a mire szükségünk

Henszlmann was keen to dispel any nationalist dislike of the Gothic style. The main reason for the aversion was that some members of the public and architects perceived the Gothic style as being of German origin and, therefore, associated with Germanism. As such, it was considered unsuitable for expressing the Hungarian national autonomy, especially in the construction of national institutions. Henszlmann, who was familiar with the 1835 work of the German historian Franz Mertens in which he proved the French origins of Gothic architecture,³¹ listed at length the facts that proved its French origin in his 1861 paper.

He also linked the choice of style to the national history, arguing for the adoption of Gothic architecture. The idea that Gothic architecture should be the model for a national style was supported by examples from a glorious past. Both historical works and literary texts from the period suggest that the artistic representations of national identity stem from a glorious national past.

“We should also remember that the heyday of our national history coincided with the popularity of the pointed arch style. After the Mongols’ destruction, Béla IV and his family introduced French architecture to our country, which was reviving at the time. In the fourteenth century, Charles I built Visegrád Castle in the pointed-arch style, which was also used by Louis I and, finally, by Mátyás in his Buda castle.”³²

Henszlmann speaks here of the Gothic style as being appropriate for contemporary art and architecture, citing the Gothic style of Hungarian dress and jewellery as examples. He also discusses the general popularity of Gothic forms in mid-nineteenth-century Hungarian urban architecture. The latter comment is one of the earliest contemporary evaluations of Romantic-period architecture.

“There was a time when, as today, we desired houses built in the pointed arch style, a taste which had prevailed fifteen years earlier. Admittedly, since that time, we have seen numerous changes to this style, but if we are put off by these changes, why are we not put off by changes to other styles of building? For here the ‘memento mori’ are still more numerous.”³³

van, föltaláljuk a legtökéletesebb világítási rendszert, s a legnagyobb szabadságot, valamint az elrendezésben, úgy a csoportozatban és az alakzatban.” Henszlmann, “A magyar Academia.” *Pesti Napló*, 31 January 1861, 2.

31 Mertens, “Historische Uebersicht,” Passini, “Le Gothique.”

32 Original caption: “Nem kell továbbá elfelejtenünk, hogy nemzeti történetünk fénykorai karöltve járnak a csúcsíves styllal. A mongolok pusztítása után újra fölébredő hazánkban IV. Béla és családja a francia építészetet honosítja nálunk; a XIV. században Róbert Károly Visegrád várát csúcsíves styllben építé, e styllt használta Lajos, és végre Mátyás budai várában.” Henszlmann, “A magyar Academia.” *Pesti Napló*, 1 February 1861, 2.

33 Original caption: “Volt idő, mikor, mint ma e minták után készített díszítményt, csúcsíves styllbe

He argued that the contemporary application of the Gothic style could be based on a survey of memories, their publication in albums, and their dissemination to the public. In his opinion, serious dignity, accessibility, and clarity are best achieved through the use of the Gothic style. These characteristics depart spectacularly from the Romantic and, to some extent, still prevalent ideas of the Gothic as a medieval style (mysterious and wild). It also differs from the vision of the Gothic as a decorative style for its own sake (lace architecture). On the other hand, it incorporates an architectural aesthetic derived from the German architect Gottfried Semper, which concerns the 'honesty' of buildings (*Bekleidungstheorie*).³⁴

For Henszlmann, the accessibility of the building represented the accessibility of science. In terms of light, he argued that Gothic buildings could create much brighter spaces than Romanesque ones, contrary to the prevailing view. He believed that the flexibility, clarity, and honesty of the Gothic style made it suitable not only for expressing the nation's independence, but also for meeting the new challenges of contemporary architecture. There was also something else that made him see Gothic architecture as compatible with the ethos of his time. This was the degree of freedom (both physical and metaphorical) that he saw in Gothic architecture: "The development of French architecture is most closely related to the movement and quest for freedom of the cities founded and developed in France in the twelfth century." In the words of Árpád Tímár:

"For Henszlmann, the Gothic was not religious piety or the romantic medieval cult of the knight, but the expression of urban, merchants', craftsmen's, and civic culture; of 'free thinking'; of the democratic spirit; of rationality; and of the independent national existence. In this way, he honoured the past while dedicating it to his own time, feeling that this style aligned with his aspirations as a thinker and politician."³⁵

The Gothic designs for the Academy Palace by Heinrich Ferstel, and the Henszlmann–Gerster–Frey partnership won the approval of contemporary public opinion. In his analytical essay that he wrote when the plans for the Academy Palace in 1861 were first presented, Arnold Ipolyi, for example, discussed the exemplary nature of the Gothic style from an urban landscape perspective. He emphasised that it is not the new, memorable building that should adapt to the conventional apartment buildings in its surroundings, but rather that this palace may serve as a model for a modern artistic style in Pest (Figure 4).

épített házakat kívántunk, ez ízlés 15 év előtt uralkodott. Azóta, igaz, nem keveset kontárkodtak nálunk e stílusban; de ha ezen kontárkodás visszaijeszt bennünket, miért nem ijedünk meg más építő módorokban tett kontárkodástól? Hisz itten a „memento morik” még sokkal számosabbak.” Henszlmann, "A magyar Academia." *Pesti Napló*, 1 February 1861, 2.

34 Quitzs, *Semper*.

35 Tímár, "A gótikus stílus," 112.

“The work of art should not adapt to the mediocrity of its surroundings. Rather, one of its most important tasks is to elevate those surroundings, which are mired in everyday forms, by spreading good taste. This is also the obvious task of a Hungarian academic palace. Rather than adapting to Pest’s current apartment buildings, which are tasteless, it should serve as an example and model for the development of Pest’s future architectural taste. Instead of the bare-walled, barracks-style yet imposing Danube promenade in Pest, let us imagine a row of Gothic palaces with varied wall formations, gables and balconies, reflected in the Danube’s waves; they would present us with a thousand charming scenes. The Academy Palace, a monumental masterpiece representing the perfection of our century, bears witness to the extraordinary artistic understanding and taste of its era. Even in a future age, when its surroundings are dominated by barracks-like guesthouses embellished with classical Renaissance flourishes, Lloyd’s coffee houses, stock exchange buildings, and apartment buildings which change their purpose, owners, and appearance every hundred or even fifty years and have long since disappeared from today’s streetscape, the Academy Palace will stand as a testament to its time.”³⁶

Henszlmann’s critique: National or unique? The Vigadó (Redoute) in Pest

For Henszlmann, applying medieval styles to contemporary architecture is inseparable from his views on historic preservation, architectural restoration and reconstruction. As we have seen, when Henszlmann recommends the use of medieval forms and construction methods in contemporary architecture, he envisages ideal buildings created by combining the most refined elements of the style that can also meet modern needs.

36 Original caption: “[N]em hogy a műremeknek kellene környezete törpeségeihez alkalmazkodni; de épen kitűnő föladatai egyike, hogy ízlést terjesztőleg magához emelje a köznapi formákban elsatnyuló környezetét. És ez nyilván föladata egy magyar akadémiai palotának is. Nem hogy Pestnek mai, minden ízlést nélkülöző bérházaihoz alkalmazkodjék, de hogy Pest jövődő építészeti ízlésének kifejtésére hangadólag s mintaszerűen hasson. Képzeljük csak magunknak a csupasz falú, kaszárnya ízlésű s még így is imposánt pesti Dunasor helyett, egy ily sorát a góth. palotáknak, változatos tagozásu falcsoportozataikkal, homlokcsucsaiakkal és erkélyeikkel a Duna árjaiban tükröződni s ezer egyéni bájvarázsu jelenet áll előttünk. Az Akadémia palotájának, mint századunk ma tökélyének színvonalán álló monumentális remeknek, tanúskodni kell korának nem köznapi, de legemelkedettebb műértelméről s ízléséről azon jövő korban is, midőn környezetének kaszárnyaszerű s legfeljebb homlokzataikon át classicismusi renaissance czifrákkal fölciczomázott vendégfogadói, Loyd-féle kávéház s tőzsde épületei és bérházai, minek rendszeren 100 sőt 50 év alatt, változtatva céljukat s uraikat, megváltoztatják alakjokat is – régen elenyésztek mai külső kinézésekben mellőle.” Ipolyi, “A magy. Akadémia.”



Figure 4 Henszlmann, Imre: Proposal for the design competition for the Palace of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1862. Perspective view. (Detail.)

Source: FSZEK Budapest Collection. Inv. No. AN058279.

In other words, he did not merely advocate the application of appropriate medieval styles, such as Gothic architecture. Rather, he envisaged buildings constructed in the Gothic style that were carefully designed and employed a kind of ‘perfect’, modernised Gothic. At the same time, we should understand that for him this did not mean merely copying ready-made medieval elements. As he warned, “We should guard against the lifeless imitation of existing buildings.” This concept is comparable to his principles of historic preservation, where his goal was to create works that were harmonious in style, structure and effect. In these projects, too, a holistic approach—so-called ‘stylistic appropriateness’—served as his guiding principle, often taking precedence over authenticity or historical accuracy. Examples are seen in his views on the restoration of St Elizabeth’s Cathedral in Košice and the Church of the Assumption in Buda.³⁷

Although Henszlmann’s opinion of the architecture of his own era was influenced by his preference for the Gothic style, he considered harmony, practicality and quality of primary importance in his architectural writing. These considerations are evident in his critique of the Vigadó (Redoute) building in Pest, designed by Frigyes Feszl between 1859 and 1865³⁸ (Figure 5).

Henszlmann praised the building’s spatial layout and the arrangement of its rooms. He also commented on the stone cladding of the building’s façade: “The Vigadó in Pest is the first modern building to use stone cladding.” He welcomed

37 Kerny, “Henszlmann Imre az intézményes”; Marosi, “Henszlmann Imre és a Kassai.”

38 Henszlmann, “A pestvárosi Vigadó.”

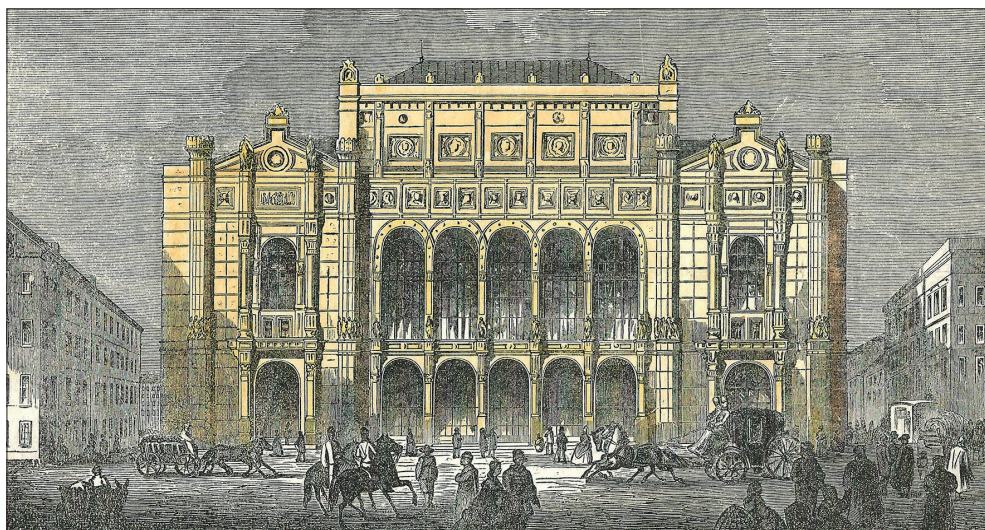


Figure 5 Feszli, Frigyes: The Vigadó (Redoute) in Pest, 1859–1865

Source: MKVM. Inv. No. VF 6832.

this all the more because stone quarried in Kőbánya and Sósút had been used since ancient times, and the latter had also been used in St Stephen's Basilica in Székesfehérvár. However, he also pointed out that the construction quality was uneven, attributing it to pressure from the incompetent building supervision committee, the slow decision-making, and a lack of funds resulting from cost-cutting. He also disapproved the use of painted cast iron columns inside the building. In his view, not only did the designer violate architectural integrity by making the iron columns resemble stone, but he also adjusted the capitals to match the stone, making them disproportionate. Nevertheless, he praised the decorative elements of the façade, which divided and enlivened the main façade. He thought that inconsistent quality was due to the circumstances of construction mentioned above.

“The agenda was to cut back on original artistic decoration; valuable materials were replaced everywhere with substitutes and surrogates. [...] We already feel the lack of artistic perfection everywhere. They set about the task with great effort, but their energy faltered halfway through. This is a recurring mistake in our pursuit of Eastern luxury, where we never consider the end result or the finishing touches, and always leave the completion of our projects to the ‘God of the Hungarians.’”³⁹

39 Original caption: “Napirenden volt a sajátlagos művészeti díszítés megszorítása, s az értékes anyag helyébe mindenütt a pótlék, a szurrogátum lépett. [...] Már most mindenütt hiányát érezzük a művészi befejezettségnek. Nagy erőfeszítéssel nekifogtak a dolognak, de félúton lelankadt az erő. Keleti fényűzési vágyunk minduntalan visszatérő hibája ez, melynél fogva

Henszlmann believed that the most important internal space fell victim to the repeated interruptions of the design process and the professional shortcomings of the judges. In his view, the height of the main hall was excessive and disproportionate.

“The tallest cathedrals [...] have the same height up to the keystone of their vaults, as is the case with Cologne Cathedral, for example. This enormous height makes an oppressive effect on observers, who feel as if they were standing in a deep well in the nave. What, then, can we say about a dance hall whose height exceeds its width and has a horizontal ceiling high above? Workers encountered this issue in the construction process, referring to the building as a ‘cathedral’ due to its tremendous height, particularly that of the hall.”⁴⁰

Based on his own studies of proportions, Henszlmann emphasised the need for harmonious design and proportions in architecture.

“A sensible rate would have been 47 feet in height, i.e., four fifths of the internal width. For the sake of extravagance, this could have been increased to five sixths of the internal width, or a maximum height of fifty feet.”⁴¹

At the same time, he acknowledged the historical influences on the architecture of his own era in the design of the Vigadó, stating that “it is impossible today to find a façade whose layout and shape does not resemble an existing one”.⁴² His observation that the interior columns, especially their capitals, resemble the early Romanesque style (the columns of the imperial palace in Gelnhausen) is consistent with this historical perspective. However, Henszlmann did not mention the source of these solutions, which in Feszl’s case can be linked to early Romanesque German and Byzantine architecture. Yet, Henszlmann was certainly familiar with Munich, the location of Feszl’s studies, and its architecture of the 1840s (here we primarily mean the works

soha a dolog végével, a zárkő beillesztésével nem gondolunk, s vállalataink befejezését mindig csak a »magyarok istenére« bizzuk.” Henszlmann, “A pestvárosi Vigadó,” 242.

40 Original caption: “[A] legeslegnagyobb csúcsíves székesegyházak [...] ugyanoly magassággal bírnak boltozatuk zárókövét véve, ezen eset pl. a kölni dómnál fordul elő [...]. [A] tetemes magasságarány nyomasztó hatást gyakorol a szemlélőre, ki magát a középhajóban mintegy mély kútba helyeztetve véli; mit szólunk tehát általában oly táncteremről, melynek magassága túlhaladja belsélességét s fent a magasban fekirányú födénye van? Ezen bajt érezték már az építés folyama alatt a munkások is, mivel azok az építményt, különösen a terem szörnyű magassága miatt, »Kathedrale«-nak, székesegyháznak nevezték.” Henszlmann, “A pestvárosi Vigadó,” 245.

41 Original caption: “Józan arányisme a 47 lábnyi magassággal, azaz a belsélesség 4/5-ével beérhetett, s pazarlás kedvéért a belsélesség 5/6-ára, legfeljebb 50 lábnyi magasságra emelkedhetett volna.” Henszlmann, “A pestvárosi Vigadó,” 245.

42 Original caption: “[L]ehetetlen ma már oly homlokzatot találni föl, melynek berendezése és alakja, egy már meglévő régiebbhez ne hasonlítana.” Henszlmann, “A pestvárosi Vigadó,” 248.

of Friedrich von Gärtner and Friedrich Bürklein). Overall, Henszlmann praised the originality of the design and decoration of the Vigadó building: “It is something that you do not see every day, and it is this that reveals its master’s distinct personality.”

Conclusion: Medieval models for nineteenth-century buildings. Romanesque versus Gothic – Ipolyi versus Henszlmann

Some of Henszlmann’s contemporaries also believed that modern national architecture and the reinterpretation of medieval styles were entirely compatible. Arnold Ipolyi, who studied many medieval buildings in Hungary (including the Romanesque church in Bíňa (Bény), agreed with his colleague that medieval monuments expressed the Hungarian spirit and that creating a Hungarian national style based on them was possible. However, unlike Henszlmann, he was not enthusiastic about Gothic architecture, preferring the Romanesque style instead. He believed that Romanesque monuments required a higher level of artistic training than the large number of Gothic urban works. Ipolyi’s argument follows the well-known pattern of artistic development (development–flourishing–decline), but it is striking that he did not consider late Romanesque to be a descending branch, but rather a transition towards the Gothic characterised by continuous development. In contrast to the Gothic, which, in his view, arrived in Hungary in a state of decline:

“Romanesque taste did not undergo a distinct decline, but rather a gradual evolution. When it arrived late in our country, it transitioned into the new style it had paved the way for and was accompanied by its evolution. By contrast, the late arrival of the Gothic style coincided its decline.”⁴³

Prior to the aforementioned 1861 lecture, he had voiced his preference for the Romanesque style, its national character, and its applicability in contemporary architecture. In 1859, for example, he wrote that professionals preferred the Romanesque style to the Gothic, stating: “Despite the Gothic trend that has become fashionable today, experts are increasingly beginning to favour the Romanesque form, both in theory and in practice.”⁴⁴

Differences between Ipolyi’s and Henszlmann’s perspectives regarding the applicability of medieval art to contemporary architecture—that is, how medieval architecture may inspire or enrich contemporary architecture—are clearly reflected

43 Original caption: “[A] román ízlés épen azért, mivel nem volt sajátlagi hanyatlása, hanem fokozatos fejlődése, mellyel átment az új, általa előkészített ízlésbe, midőn későn ért hazánkba, egyszersmind fejlődésével jött át hozzánk; míg ellenben a gót késő érkezésével egyszersmind hanyatlását is magával hozta.” Ipolyi, “A középkori emlékszerű építészet,” 102.

44 Ipolyi, “Magyar műemlékek,” 8.

in their respective views on art history. This concerns a difference of opinion regarding the purpose of art history and the transmission of art-historical knowledge. Henszlmann draws contemporary architects' attention to the various elements that constitute medieval (primarily Gothic and urban) architecture's complex attitude (flexible composition, proportionality, sincerity, clarity, and stylistic purity). Among his considerations, the historical connotations of the Gothic monuments in Hungary are merely secondary. In contrast, Ipolyi viewed the evaluation of the Romanesque style and its Hungarian monuments as intertwined with the country's history. For him, the monuments served as historical illustrations that that could be experienced on a personal level.⁴⁵ In his interpretation, they may serve as precise models for nineteenth-century architecture in Hungary in this capacity.

The debate that unfolded around the Academy Palace between 1861 and 1862 led to Henszlmann experiencing two failures. The fact that the Academy's leadership favoured the Renaissance over the Gothic style, resulting in the building being constructed in the former style, was only one aspect of this failure. The other aspect, which was perhaps more tragic for him, was the realisation that he was unable to convey his extensive knowledge of Gothic architecture and design, even to his contemporaries who supported him. For those arguing in favour of Henszlmann's design, the main consideration—besides supporting Hungarian architecture—was that the palace, built with support of national donations, should reflect a national character in its style and form. Thus, in fact, it was Ipolyi's approach that best expressed their artistic vision. In light of the above, it may be concluded that this discourse did not lay the foundations for an architectural approach that was both historically grounded and focused on functionality. Henszlmann's approach views historical architecture as an activity and a creative endeavour, arguing for the applicability of a complex architectural method across different eras. By contrast, around 1861, the view that historical monuments are illustrations of national history—a kind of archive set in stone—gained acceptance among a receptive segment of Hungarian society. According to this narrative, the national character of a nationally significant building can be conveyed by referring to these historical illustrations.

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45 Marosi, "Henszlmann, avagy," 30; Kapusi, "Ő tehát: szépész," 174–75.

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