

DISSEMINATING THE REGIONAL WITHIN THE GLOBAL Representing Regionalist Ideas and the Global Scale of the Modern Movement in the Hungarian Journal *Tér és Forma*

Ágnes Anna Sebestyén

Magyar Építészeti Múzeum és Műemlékvédelmi Dokumentációs Központ / Hungarian Museum of Architecture and Monument Protection Documentation Center, Budapest, Hungary

Abstract

*The pursuit of a national style has engaged Hungarian architects ever since the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and such tendencies prevailed even in the interwar period when the Modern Movement emerged. A magazine editor represented an alternative standpoint rejecting style architecture, formalism and historicism and, using his voice and platform, propagated the Modern Movement in accordance with his regionalist views. This was the architect Virgil Bierbauer (1893–1956), who edited the journal *Tér és Forma* (Space and Form), the leading architectural periodical of interwar Hungary between 1928 and 1942.*

*Bierbauer did not only deny historicism but also the notion of a unifying international style as he insisted on regional solutions based on the local climate and building materials. While he was a firm advocate of the Modern Movement, he provided a broad panorama of contemporary architecture from a global scale focusing on the local relevance of his selection in *Tér és Forma*. He was also deeply interested in vernacular architecture. He eagerly observed rural buildings during his travels within Hungary and abroad and he dedicated articles and complete journal issues to this subject. Bierbauer also insisted on the elevation of this topic into the international discourse in the framework of CIAM-Ost, the Eastern European organization for the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne.*

*In my paper, I focus on the common grounds Bierbauer found between modern and vernacular architecture and how it was presented in the journal *Tér és Forma*. In my case studies, vernacular architecture represents functionalism, simplicity and dedication to life, which Bierbauer – similarly to many of his contemporaries – compared to modern architecture. I trace both Hungarian and international examples to articulate Bierbauer's interpretations. In addition to *Tér és Forma* as a source material, I use Bierbauer's correspondence, travel reports, original manuscripts and photographs held at the Hungarian Museum of Architecture.*

Keywords: Virgil Bierbauer (1893–1956), periodical press, interwar Hungary, modern architecture, the Hungarian peasant house

Introduction

The quest for a national style had been a prevailing concept ever since the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy when – despite Hungary's relative independence dated from the 1867 Compromise – Hungarian architects aspired to define an

architecture sought to be distinctive and national. At the turn of the century, Ödön Lechner (1845–1914) and his followers, as well as a generation-younger Károly Kós (1883–1977) – though in a different spirit – turned to folk art and architecture as a source material to define a national style in Hungarian architecture. After the fall of the Empire in World War I and the 1920 Treaty of Trianon, Hungary lost ca. 70% of its territory and ca. 60% of its population. Owing to this significant deprivation in territory, economy, human and natural resources, Hungarians tended to cherish the greater past of the nation and thus, the aftermath of the war witnessed a severe conservatism in general as well as in architecture, considering especially State- and Church-owned commissions. Some architects such as Gyula Sándy pursued national style in the so-called crenellated Renaissance characteristic of the north-east of historic Hungary, while others, like István Medgyaszay, found the sources in Eastern cultures that were thought to be related to the Hungarians. Historicist styles also prevailed, and the Neo-Baroque became the dominant style of the 1920s. At the same time, a younger generation of architects became responsive to progressive tendencies in art and architecture. Studying in Western Europe, taking study trips, participating in international events and reading foreign publications, a significant number of young architects started to share a disdain for Historicism in favour of the *new architecture*. They generally appreciated technological progress and the new modern lifestyle and they also tried to respond to social problems.

In spite of the numerous connotations labelled *international*, the Modern Movement in architecture was many times fuelled by *regionalist* ambitions. A prominent architect in interwar Hungary represented this path, as he not only rejected Historicism and style architecture per se, but he also objected the term *international style* in accordance with his beliefs in the derivation of architecture from the local climate and building materials. This was the architect Virgil Bierbauer (also known as Virgil Borbíró, 1893–1956),¹ whose position was of foremost importance, since he represented a leading voice as the editor of the journal *Tér és Forma (Space and Form)*, the most influential architectural

¹ Virgil Bierbauer's editorial work can be considered one of his chef-d'oeuvre, while his architectural projects are equally important, especially his long-term project for the extension of Kelenföld Power Plant in Budapest (1925–1934) and Budaörs Airport (1936–1937), which he co-designed with László Králik.

periodical in interwar Hungary.² The journal contributed to the promotion of the Modern Movement to a great extent and fostered especially the implementation of the ideas of the new architecture in Hungary. Bierbauer edited the monthly magazine for fifteen years between 1928 and 1942, and he also wrote a considerable number of essays, polemics, travel reports and publication reviews for the journal. During the first years of *Tér és Forma*, the architect János Komor acted as co-editor, but after his resignation in 1931, it was Bierbauer who shaped the message of the magazine essentially. Bierbauer's core principle permeated the content of the journal during the fifteen years of his editorship and reappeared in many different topics. He was convinced that contemporary architecture had to be originated from the everyday life of the inhabitants, function and the environment. In this paper, Bierbauer's above-mentioned tenets are interpreted in the context of his ideas about modernity and the vernacular on the basis of his travels, professional connections and activities as a cultural mediator in the international architectural scene.

The main sources of this paper consist of the textual and photographic material published in *Tér és Forma* including several essays written by Bierbauer himself. The mechanisms of the editorial processes and the dynamic of Bierbauer's professional network can be scrutinised via his correspondence of ca. 900 letters, which are related to his professional work; the comprehensive but not completely intact correspondence that represents Bierbauer's global network is now held at the Hungarian Museum of Architecture in the context of the Virgil Bierbauer archive.³ Bierbauer's estate also comprises a significant photographic material incorporating the architectural photographs representing Bierbauer's oeuvre as an architect, the photographs taken by Bierbauer during his travels as well as family photographs.

² The history and impact of the journal *Tér és Forma* are the subject of a thorough study written by Pál Ritoók and Ágnes Anna Sebestyén, which will be published in *Docomomo Journal* no. 59 in 2018.

³ The author of this paper completed a comprehensive research into Virgil Bierbauer's correspondence of ca. 900 letters related to his professional work as an architect and editor. The research project was funded by the National Cultural Fund of Hungary (ref. no. 101102/00444).

Early Encounters with Regionalist Ideas

Virgil Bierbauer was born in a family of architects and engineers, his father, István Bierbauer was the chief director of engineering at the Royal Hungarian Post and thus Virgil had an insight into the latest architectural publications from an early age. He studied at the Technical University of Munich between 1911 and 1915 and he also attended the art history lectures of Joseph Popp, Heinrich Wölfflin and Fritz Burger. He obtained his doctorate in 1920 with his dissertation entitled *Bramante und die ersten Plane für Sankt Peter in Rom*. His deep interest in architectural history and theory dated back to these years and prevailed during his entire career. Thus, in addition to his numerous articles about contemporary architecture, he dedicated several essays to architectural history including not only the historical styles but also vernacular architecture. His studies culminated in his comprehensive book *The History of Hungarian Architecture*, which he published in 1937 (Bierbauer, 1937a), as well as in his manuscript entitled *The Comparative Study of the Hungarian House* from the 1940s. (Borbíró, 2003)



Figure 1. Virgil Bierbauer's photograph of the Piazza Vecchia in Bergamo. Virgil Bierbauer archive, Hungarian Museum of Architecture and Monument Protection Documentation Center – HMA

Bierbauer eagerly collected contemporary publications from an early age and later as a magazine editor he was in the fortunate position to receive numerous copies to be reviewed in his journal. In addition to gaining information from publications from all over the world, Bierbauer was an avid traveller, although his travels were only limited to European countries such as Italy, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, France, Sweden, Switzerland, Poland and Czechoslovakia.⁴ Preceding his career as an editor, he took study trips to Italy, which remained his favoured destination during the 1930s. He equally visited historical sites, vernacular architecture and modern buildings as it can be scrutinized in his publications and his photographs. His trips can be traced in his published travel reports in different Hungarian publications as well as in the memoir of his wife, Adrienne Graul (1896–1973) entitled *Bottle Post*.⁵ In 1927, Bierbauer took a trip to the Netherlands and Germany, which had a lasting influence on his thinking about modern architecture and its regionalist connotations. The main reason of his travel was the congress of the Comité Permanent International des Architectes (CPIA) held in the Hague and Amsterdam, and on his way there and back Bierbauer stopped at several German cities including Hamburg and Stuttgart. In addition to the visit at the Weissenhof Housing Estate (1927) and J.J.P. Oud's housing in Oud-Mathenesse, Rotterdam (1922–1923), Willem Marinus Dudok's school buildings in Hilversum and Fritz Höger's Expressionist brick architecture in Hamburg took the longest-lasting influence on Bierbauer's theoretical thinking. Bierbauer was in contact with both Dudok and Höger for several years and also had the chance to meet them personally in 1927 as well as during a trip in 1931.⁶ It was especially the local relevance of both architects'

⁴ The author of this paper has an ongoing research project about Virgil Bierbauer's travels highlighting the impact of travelling on his editorial and architectural work. The research project is funded by the National Cultural Fund of Hungary (ref. no. 101102/00578). For more on Virgil Bierbauer's travels, see Sebestyén, 2017.

⁵ Adrienne Graul was deeply involved in Bierbauer's professional life as his secretary and translator managing Bierbauer's correspondence in different languages. She was also the manager of Bierbauer's bequest after her husband's death and thus several archival materials now held in the Hungarian Museum of Architecture bear Graul's commentaries. Her memoir entitled *Palackposta (Bottle Post)* was written between 1958 and 1972 and aside from its highly biased narrative it contains essential information about Bierbauer's work and personal life. A copy of this unpublished manuscript is now held in the Virgil Bierbauer archive of the Hungarian Museum of Architecture.

⁶ Bierbauer's correspondence contains letters exchanged between Bierbauer and Dudok dated to the period between 1928 and 1937 (D 24 – D 26, Virgil Bierbauer archive, Hungarian Museum of Architecture); regarding Höger, the letters that survived are dated to 1926–1932 (H 39 – H 56, Virgil Bierbauer archive, Hungarian Museum of Architecture).

oeuvre that engaged Bierbauer's attention such as Höger's usage of brick as a local building material, a conviction that he promoted in the pages of *Tér és Forma* in the following years. The chance for networking at the CPIA conference, the several sites he visited and all the ideas he encountered proved to be essential during his editorship of the monthly magazine launched in the following year.

Experiencing regionalist ideas was of course not restricted to the international scene as similar quests can be traced in Hungary at the time. Beside the highly influential Károly Kós who studied the Hungarian rural houses in Transylvania, surveys executed in order to document the Hungarian peasant house decades before Bierbauer touched upon this subject. Notable surveys were authored by Róbert Kertész K. and Gyula Sváb, which were published under the title *The Hungarian Peasant House* by the Union of Hungarian Engineers and Architects in 1908. In the 1910s, Kertész and Sváb, as the managers of the Technical Department of the Cultural Ministry launched a programme to build schools in the rural areas of Hungary. The programme proved to be noteworthy as it was required to use local building materials and correspond with the built environment of the neighbourhood as it was highlighted by Iván Kotsis, one of the architects of this programme. (Kotsis, 2010, pp. 30–32.) Although the programme had not become a reference point for Bierbauer and it certainly differed from the ways Bierbauer appropriated vernacular architecture, it can be considered a notable phenomenon that immediately preceded Bierbauer's work. There was also the architect Iván Kotsis, who remained a constant figure on Bierbauer's horizon as a leading architect who shaped the architecture of the region of Lake Balaton in the interwar period.

Kotsis's regionalist ideas became prevalent in *Tér és Forma* from the beginning of the magazine, even more so as Kotsis turned from Eclecticism towards the new architecture around 1928, the year of the launch of *Tér és Forma*. Kotsis echoed the modernist belief in functionalism and at the same time its regionalist overtones, which materialised in his building activities around Lake Balaton. In 1931, the Union of Hungarian Engineers and Architects held a series of lectures about the economic, health and architectural problems of the Balaton region. The outcomes of the meetings and thirty modern summer houses were published in

the 2nd issue of *Tér és Forma* in 1931, and in 1932, a thematic issue (issue no. 5–6) was dedicated to the lectures given at the symposium including Iván Kotsis's talk. (Kotsis, 1932) Kotsis designed types for summer houses taking into consideration the local climate around Lake Balaton and the everyday activities of vacationers. He proposed simple, standardized and minimal dwellings, which served the basic activities during a summer holiday. His types of housing represented an economic solution for middle-class clients, who could not afford costly solutions. These houses represented a new vernacular perfectly in line with Bierbauer's ideas about the modern architect's role that was, according to Bierbauer, the service of a given task, which should outperform architects' individual ambitions. These two thematic issues of *Tér és Forma* illustrate the essence of Bierbauer's intentions about how regionalist ideas needed to be distributed in order to be implemented in the countryside of interwar Hungary. The proposals for the region of Lake Balaton intended to be exemplary and its importance could be easily emphasised due to the importance of the region in the country's economy and tourism.



Figure 2. The cover of the February 1931 issue of *Tér és Forma* including thirty modern summer houses designed for the region of Lake Balaton. The cover features Károly Weichinger's design.

Bierbauer's early regionalist concerns with Lake Balaton were testified by even an international example, when he made a hint to the vernacular while featuring Villa Flora, the Aaltos' summer house by Lake Alajärvi.⁷ In his short essay, Bierbauer compared this very simple weekend house, which was designed by Aino Marsio-Aalto in 1926, to the local vernacular architecture saying '[The house] is Finnish in the same way as the houses of the Finnish peasants are Finnish.' (Bierbauer, 1929, p. 312.) In continuation, Bierbauer urged to build in the same spirit around Lake Balaton, where by appropriating such architectural ideas it would have been possible to construct adequate and inexpensive summer houses.

Representing Hungarian Vernacular Architecture in Relevance to the Modern Movement

In 1929, Bierbauer dedicated a complete issue (no. 1, *Tér és Forma*) to the vernacular architecture of Hungary and several other essays appeared in the journal especially in the late 1930s–early 1940s. The articles around 1930 were authored by, for instance, Károly Kós and Ede Toroczkai Wigand, both of whom had become the renowned figures of ethnographic studies in architecture by this time. In these essays, Toroczkai Wigand examined the origin and development of the Hungarian peasant house (Toroczkai Wigand, 1929), while Kós focused his attention to the peasant house of Transylvania (Kós, 1929). These studies represent a research-oriented standpoint without direct references to modern architecture. A younger architect of Bierbauer's generation, Jenő Padányi Gulyás (1900–1982) was at the forefront of surveying the vernacular architecture of rural Hungary along with his colleagues such as László Miskolczy and Kálmán Tóth. As an architect and researcher as well as an author and a subject of study, Padányi Gulyás regularly appeared in the pages of *Tér és Forma*. In a review of one of Padányi Gulyás's summer houses, Bierbauer compared the house to the

⁷ Only four letters remained in Bierbauer's correspondence, which document the connection between Bierbauer and Alvar Aalto, dated to the period between 1929 and ca. 1932–1933 (A 1 – A 4, Virgil Bierbauer archive, Hungarian Museum of Architecture). Two of these letters concern the publication of Villa Flora in *Tér és Forma*, see Erling Bjertnaes's, Aalto's assistant's two letters to Virgil Bierbauer, 9 and 12 July 1929, A 1, A 2, Virgil Bierbauer archive, Hungarian Museum of Architecture.

Hungarian peasant house in terms of both function and form. (Bierbauer, 1939a) According to Bierbauer, Padányi Gulyás followed function and conformed to the local climate and thus he reached similar formal solutions as the anonymous maker of a vernacular house, such as the shady patio and the unadorned whitewashed facades. Bierbauer's appraisal was at the same time the acknowledgement of Padányi Gulyás's and his colleagues' work in surveying and thus understanding vernacular architecture. It echoes Bierbauer's editorial of 1937, in which he states that appropriate building activity in the countryside can only be executed if contemporary architects perform a thorough study in order to truly understand the given region's local building materials, structures as well as the peasants' past, thinking and current life. (Bierbauer, 1937b) In this editorial, Bierbauer self-critically expressed his journal's omission in representing the countryside in the same extent as the urbanized areas. At the same time, Bierbauer pointed out that without acceptable building activities in rural regions it was impossible to give more coverage to this topic. Moreover, he urged the execution of comprehensive surveys and studies, which he consciously featured in a greater number from 1937.

Bierbauer, however, did not accept the status quo but tried to add to the shared scholarly knowledge about the Hungarian peasant house. His goal was to deeply understand the vernacular in order to give relevant answers to the current problems of rural areas. He studied the origins and the development of the peasant house, its typology, space, architectural elements and, due to his comparative method, he expanded his scope to the houses of other peoples and regions such as the Germans, the Scandinavians and the Mediterranean. In addition to producing an elaborate written material, Bierbauer took numerous photographs during his work. Although Bierbauer performed his study with the utmost attention and scholarly ambition, his texts now considered notable due to their documentary value with regards to his theoretical thinking. (Fehérvári & Prakfalvi, 2003, p. 10.) His work led towards the above-mentioned manuscript entitled *The Comparative Study of the Hungarian House* with initial passages published in *Tér és Forma* in 1940 (Bierbauer, 1940a; Bierbauer, 1940b). The first version of the manuscript that was considered final by Bierbauer is dated to 1948 and it was followed by a few altered versions, but all of them remained

unpublished during Bierbauer's life. It was the 1948-version that was finally published in 2003 by the Hungarian Museum of Architecture (Borbíró, 2003).



Tornác Bélapátfalván

Foto: Bierbauer

dani, hogy alig van nép, amely ma vagy egykoron a fejlődésnek egy korábbi vagy későbbi fokán ne épített volna fedett, pillérekkel vagy oszlopokkal alátámasztott nyitott előteret — magyarul tornácot — háza, már egyesülj ösháza előtt. A görög megaron-háznak jellemzője az oromlatfi, pillérszteg, esetleg középszopos előcsarnok, s ugyanez jellemzi az északgermán ösházat is, de ma is élőformája a lapilléres „Laube” formájában az észak-kelet-németországi parasztháznak. Viszont a ház ereszdalán, tehát hosszoldalán végigvonaluló tornácot megtaláljuk Kínától Irakig és Iránig, végig egész Közép- és Dél-nyugat-Ázsián, még pedig a történelem előtti időkől napjainkig, megtaláljuk azt a történelmi Magyarország egész területén, de fízta hosszanti formában csak a magyarlelta fájakon. Ugyanis, amikor a szlávok tornácos házat építettek, — szinte kizárólagosan favózas szerkezettel, falákkal, — vagy ahol

a szláv szokások befolyásolták más népek építései, a hosszanti tornác úgyszólván mindig reágyarodik az oromlatra. És én úgy látom, épp ez adja meg a kérdés kulcsát.

Két különböző dolog az oromlatfi tornác, — „Laube” — és az ereszalati tornác. Az egyik az orom alatti bejáratú ház természetes jellegzetessége, a másik a hosszoldali bejáratú háznak tulajdonsága. Itt ágazik kitéfelé az európai háztípus, — amint azt a tanulmány előző részében kifejtettem: a mélysegi és a hosszú ház-típusa és egy közbelső keveréktípus az, amelynél az eresz alatt van ugyan a bejárat, de a tornác kifordul az orom alá.¹

Idáig julva úgy lepszik, hogy most már világosan körülírhatjuk a magyar ház tornácát, illetve egy összehasonlítás révén kiismerhetjük annak építőművészeti jelentőségét.

A magyar ház tornáca tehát a háznak hosszú oldalára, az eresz alá, a ház bejárata elé kerül, mondhatnók a pitvar ajtaja előtt egy jobbra és balra szerleszökő tér alakult ki a ház zárt részei előtt, ilyenformán a háznak az ereszvonallal meghatározta síkján belül épül meg. A tornác és a zárt helyiség tömegét az egyszerű, — egyes esetekben a lakonyvult nyeregletélő — foglalja fízta stereometriai egységekbe. Ez a téralakítás egyszerűségében logikus, épp olyan logikus, mint amikor a meghosszabbított nyeregletélő egyik oromlatfi vége alá kerül az előcsarnok, a Laube.

¹ Teljesség kedvéért megemlítem még azt is, hogy a germán népeknél elég gyakori az emeleten épített eresz-alatti tornác, akár abban a formában, hogy az emeleti szobák keskenyebbak — Skandináviában — s ezek elé, és a ház zárt homlokzati síkjá mögé kerül a hosszanti tornác, akár abban az alakban, hogy az eresz alatti tornác erkélyszerűen kiugrik a ház földszinti falukja elé. Ezek a tornác paraszti eszközökkel és szerkeszetekkel csak ott valósíthatók meg, ahol a ház, vagy legalább annak felső része lából épült.

A ház felé haladó ember itt vagy a tornáca, vagy az előcsarnokra pillant rá.

Etesen különbözik e formáktól a szláv forma, amely egyesíteni igyekszik magában a téralakításban e két erőben ellentétes útját: az orom alatti előcsarnokot, mint az eresz alatti tornácot egyaránt alkalmazza és ezáltal sem az egyik, sem a másik alaknak fízta logikáját nem érvényesítheti.²

Erdemes a kérdést az éleltszokások fényében is megvizsgálni. Az építő magyar nem fordítja a tornácot az utca felé, mert az a tornác életlér, amelyben lepsz, vess, dolgozik, — nem akarja pedig azt, hogy az életlér az útfelől figyeljék. A szláv viszont a tornácot az utca felőli orom oldalon is alkalmazza, talán csak azért, hogy épületének ezt a felét is díszesebbé tegye. Ezáltal azonban az orom alatti és a hosszanti tornác-részeknek értelme kétféle lepsz, s ezért házból hiányzik az az építészeti logika, amely a magyarság tornácos házának, vagy a germán „Laube”-s házának sajátja.

Igy látván most már a különbségeket, Bünker 45 évvel ezelőt elhangzott és a magyar háztudományt erősen befolyásoló, a tornáctól megfosztó felfogásával is szembe-helyezkedhetünk. Elfogadjuk azt, hogy a tornác sajátja a történelmi Magyarország számos, csaknem minden lája házának. A tornác, mint olyan, nem egy faj kizárólagos építészokása, hanem egy faj kultúráé. De viszont a tornác alakításának mikéntjében lényeges különbségek mutatkoznak, ame-

² Azt lehetne mondani, hogy a görög perisztíliumos templom is alkalmazta az orom alatti és az eresz alatti hosszoldali oszloposort. Csak hogy a görög templomnak mind a négy oldalán körülült az oszlopcsnok, és a templomnak egész belső területét, celláját körülövezti, tehát egységes oszlopcsnok haltra lérekszik, a zárt, tömör falat mindegy elélti, s egy-úttal oszlopkra, oszloposokra oldja fel az épületet egészét.

Figure 3. Virgil Bierbauer's study on the Hungarian house with his photograph of a patio in Bélapátfalva. Bierbauer, V. (1940b). Szempontok a magyar házkutatáshoz (Aspects of the Study of the Hungarian House). *Tér és Forma*, 13(12), 225.

In addition to his concentrated work to improve the local state of research and implementation, Bierbauer made efforts to advocate these problems on international platforms. The Hungarian chapter of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) was founded in 1929, one year after the establishment of CIAM itself. Although Bierbauer did not belong to the founding members of the Hungarian CIAM group, he supported their activities by dedicating complete *Tér és Forma* issues to their ideas and recently executed works between 1932 and 1937. Farkas Molnár, József Fischer⁸ and Máté Major were among the leading figures of the group, whose ideas and modernist architecture not only shaped the CIAM issues but also represented a recurring

⁸ After Virgil Bierbauer's resignation from his editorship in 1942, an editorial board took over *Tér és Forma*, which was headed by József Fischer until 1948, when the journal ceased publication.

pattern throughout the magazine. The beginning of Bierbauer's official participation in the group's work is undocumented, but according to Máté Major's recollections it can be dated to ca. 1934. (Major, 1978, p. 570.) In 1937, CIAM-Ost was founded to integrate the separate national groups from Central and Eastern Europe in order to handle problems especially typical to this region. One of these features, which were distinctive from Western European interests, concerned architecture in rural areas, as the population of the countryside was still considerably larger than in the cities of this region. The first meeting of CIAM-Ost was held in Budapest between 29 January and 2 February 1937 with Bierbauer's contribution who reported on the event immediately in *Tér és Forma*. (Bierbauer, 1937c) Bierbauer underlined Sigfried Giedion's participation, with whom he was in contact for many years,⁹ and emphasised one of the points of Giedion's lecture in which he expressed the necessary basis of modern architecture on the local conditions. (Bierbauer, 1937c, p. 57.) Giedion's references to the association between vernacular and modern architecture and especially anonymity as an inherent pattern in both the vernacular and the modern are well-documented subjects in architectural history.¹⁰ Bierbauer was well-aware of these ideas and regularly cited these well-known figures of referential status such as Giedion, Le Corbusier and Giuseppe Pagano in order to broaden the context of the relationship between the modern and the vernacular that he repeatedly pointed out in *Tér és Forma* in Hungarian frameworks.

As a magazine editor, Bierbauer himself became a reference point over the years and he regularly received invitations from the international scene to give lectures, participate in professional events and curate exhibitions. Although the considerable number of these invitations concerned modern architecture, Bierbauer gave a lecture e.g. at the *Entretiens sur l'art populaire* at Royaumont Abbey near Paris in 1939 about his research in the Hungarian house.¹¹ (Bierbauer, 1939b; Bierbauer, 1939c)

⁹ In Bierbauer's correspondence, the letters they exchanged are dated to the period between 1929 and 1954 (G 1 – G 6, Virgil Bierbauer archive, Hungarian Museum of Architecture).

¹⁰ For the recent studies in connection with Giedion and the Greek vernacular, see Matina Kousidi's papers (Kousidi, 2015; Kousidi, 2016).

¹¹ The letters related to the invitation to the meeting at Royaumont Abbey survived in Bierbauer's correspondence, see the letters between Virgil Bierbauer and Bernard Champigneulle, 26 April 1939 – 18 June 1939 (C 18 – C 22, Virgil Bierbauer archive, Hungarian Museum of Architecture).

Representing the Regional within the International

In the 1939 article, which he published about his participation in the conference in Royaumont Abbey, Bierbauer listed the components modern architects usually appreciated in vernacular architecture. He outlined the vernacular's moderation, severe logic, the peasants' focus on essential spatial requirements, the excellent structures with local building materials and the aesthetic that originated in structure and material. (Bierbauer, 1939b) At the same time, Bierbauer expressed his opposition to the usage of folkloristic motifs in urban architecture as follows: '*It is similarly not acceptable to furnish a pseudo peasant house to accommodate townsmen coming to spend a weekend in a riverside pub, where wavy-haired flappers would sit in shorts with cigarettes in their hands while listening to the radio.*' (Bierbauer, 1939b, p. 87.) Instead, he demanded to learn from the vernacular and apply its logic while designing modern buildings. Bierbauer dedicated notable publication material to confirm his tenets about the appropriation of vernacular architecture while expanded his perspective to international examples in *Tér és Forma*.

Although Bierbauer's scope of references to the vernacular was noticeably wide, with mentions of Northern Europe (see the Aalto weekend house referenced above), Switzerland¹² and even the traditional Japanese house, most of his notes are related to the Mediterranean. Considering the content of *Tér és Forma*, Bierbauer's correspondence and travel reports, it was the island of Capri, which made a significant impact on Bierbauer. According to Adrienne Bierbauer's memoir, they visited Capri for the first time during their Italian trip in 1928. (Bierbauer, 1958–1972, pp. 177–184.) In her recollections, she mentioned Bierbauer's initial reluctance to visit Capri as, according to Bierbauer's knowledge then, it was an island full of kitschy weekend houses and tourists. (Bierbauer, 1958–1972, p. 179.) Due to Adrienne's urge, they still took a trip to Capri, where they finally remained for eight days as they could not be parted from this '*magical island*'. On their way back, they visited an exhibition about modern architecture in Rome, where Bierbauer noticed the architect Giuseppe Capponi's designs for whitewashed, flat-roofed and cubic villas for Capri and their

¹² Bierbauer was an advocate of the German-born Carl Weidemyer's work, who became a renowned architect in Ascona, by Lake Maggiore in Switzerland. Bierbauer compared his modernist architecture to the local vernacular, see Sebestyén, 2017, p. 116.

relatedness to the vernacular architecture of the island. (Bierbauer, 1958–1972, p. 184.) Bierbauer contacted Capponi for publication materials in the same year, they met personally in a congress in Rome in 1929 and then they remained close friends until Capponi's premature death in 1936.¹³ The Bierbauers spent a few summer holidays at Capponi's villa in Capri, when Bierbauer had the opportunity to examine and record the vernacular and the modern architecture of the island as an amateur photographer; these images accompanied his report on Capri in *Tér és Forma* in 1932. (Bierbauer, 1932) Bierbauer was also in contact with Edwin Cerio, the Mayor of Capri in the early 1920s, who made a considerable impact on the built environment of the island as he, to protect the island's traditional ambience and landscape, stood for a new architecture that was in harmony with the local vernacular buildings.

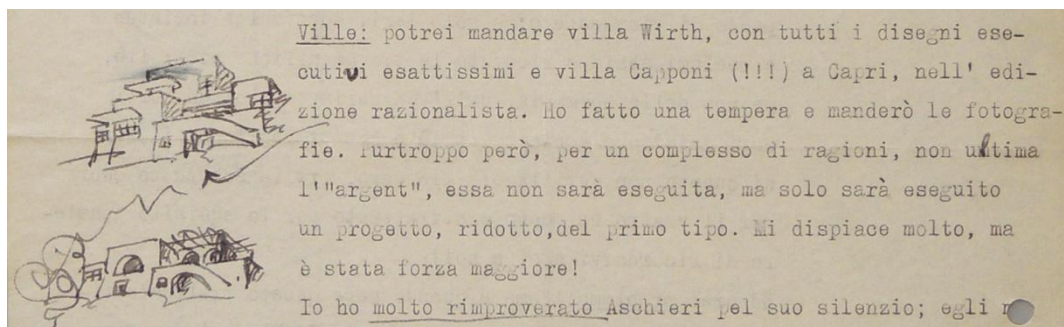


Figure 4. Giuseppe Capponi's sketches of villas on a letter he wrote to Virgil Bierbauer on 29 January 1930 (no. C 10). Virgil Bierbauer archive, Hungarian Museum of Architecture and Monument Protection Documentation Center – HMA

In the same issue of *Tér és Forma* that contained his account on Capri, Bierbauer included two reports on Santorini by Heinrich Lauterbach (Lauterbach, 1932) and Peter Meyer (Meyer, 1932). Lauterbach and Meyer were two of Bierbauer's firm connections; he was acquainted with Meyer from at least 1915 and he met Lauterbach in Wroclaw, at that time Breslau, during the Wohn-und Werkraum exhibition in 1929.¹⁴ Lauterbach's role proved to be important to expand his

¹³ See Bierbauer's and Capponi's correspondence from the period between 1928 and 1936 (C 3 – C 16, Virgil Bierbauer archive, Hungarian Museum of Architecture); also see Sebestyén, 2017, pp. 113–115.

¹⁴ Virgil Bierbauer and Heinrich Lauterbach corresponded between 1929 and 1933 (L 15 – L 34, Virgil Bierbauer archive, Hungarian Museum of Architecture). Bierbauer's correspondence with

network in Germany and Poland, while Bierbauer helped Lauterbach on his way to Greece in 1932. According to Adrienne Bierbauer's commentary to Bierbauer's correspondence with Lauterbach, Lauterbach stayed at the Bierbauers while spending two days in Budapest on the way to Greece and, in addition to giving accommodation and good company to Lauterbach, Bierbauer provided him a letter of recommendation addressed to Emmanuel Kriezis in Athens as well as Peter Meyer's address, whose writings Lauterbach wanted to acquire.¹⁵ These opportunities for networking enriched the publication material of *Tér és Forma* with, in this present case, the travel reports of two prominent architects who highlighted the lessons modern architects learned from the vernacular. Other references to the Mediterranean vernacular in *Tér és Forma* include the appearance of Villa Oro in Posillipo, Naples (1934–1937) by architects Luigi Cosenza and Bernard Rudofsky (Bierbauer, 1938)¹⁶ as well as the reports on the vernacular architecture of Ibiza by Raoul Hausmann (Hausmann, 1937) and the *trulli* of Alberobello by the Hungarian architect László Gerő (Gerő, 1938) with photographic illustration by Hausmann and Gerő, respectively.

Conclusion

The considerable number of Bierbauer's references to the Mediterranean vernacular was not at all coincidental. It can be interpreted in the context of the manifold ties of Hungarian interwar cultural politics to Italy, Bierbauer's Italian orientation concerning modern architecture, the abundance of his Italian professional connections and the numerous trips to Italy in this era. His book review of *L'architettura rustica in Sicilia* by Luigi Epifanio substantially concludes Bierbauer's ideas about the relatedness of modern and vernacular architecture and especially of the Hungarian peasant house and Mediterranean architecture. (Bierbauer, 1940c) As Bierbauer points out in this article, both the Hungarian peasant and the Mediterranean house have the distinctive character of big

Peter Meyer contains letters dated to the period between 1915 and 1946 (M 61 – M 105, Virgil Bierbauer archive, Hungarian Museum of Architecture).

¹⁵ See Adrienne Graul's comments from 1973 on her summary of Virgil Bierbauer's letter written to her on 30 August 1929 (L 14, Virgil Bierbauer archive, Hungarian Museum of Architecture).

¹⁶ About the publication, see Bernard Rudofsky's letter to Virgil Bierbauer written on 15 February 1939 (R 42, Virgil Bierbauer archive, Hungarian Museum of Architecture).

masses, whitewashed facades and the play with the shadow instead of the dominance of carvings and colouring typical to the Germans and the Slavs, respectively. (Bierbauer, 1940c, p. 45) His deep-rooted belief penetrated the pages of *Tér és Forma* for more than a decade culminating in such statements cited above and also manifested in Bierbauer's architecture. As his wife mentioned in her memoir, even the external staircases of Budaörs Airport (designed by Virgil Bierbauer and László Králik, 1936–1937) bear the reminiscence of the vernacular architecture of Capri. (Bierbauer, 1958–1972, p. 294.) The lesson he learned from the vernacular, hereby materialised in an architectural element that improved this building functionally and aesthetically, considered as one of his chef-d'oeuvre.

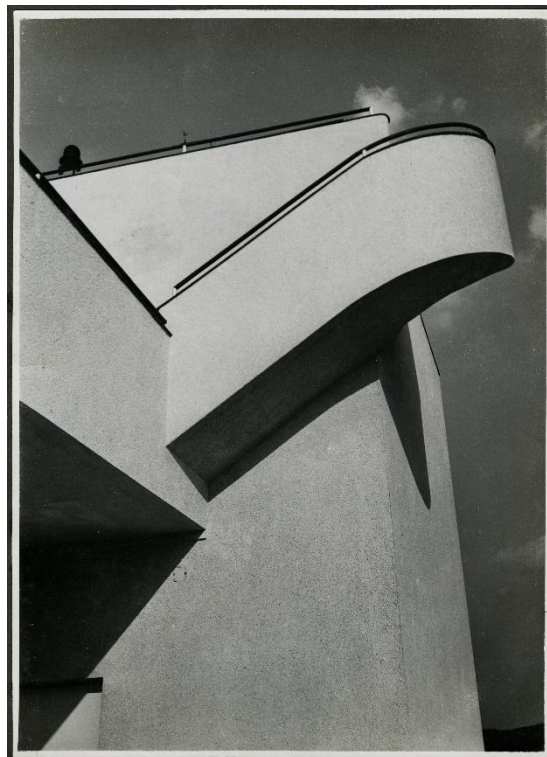


Figure 5. External staircase of Budaörs Airport (designed by Virgil Bierbauer with the co-design of László Králik, 1936–1937), photograph by Mrs. Elemér Marsovszky (née Ada Ackermann). Virgil Bierbauer archive, Hungarian Museum of Architecture and Monument Protection Documentation Center – HMA

Acknowledgements

The research project of the author is funded by the National Cultural Fund of Hungary (ref. no. 101102/00444, 101102/00578).



National Cultural Fund of Hungary

References

- Bierbauer, A. (1958–1972). *Palackposta* (Bottle Post). Unpublished manuscript, Virgil Bierbauer archive, Hungarian Museum of Architecture, Budapest.
- Bierbauer, V. (1929). Egy finn építészcsalád nyaralóháza (The Summer House of a Finnish Family of Architects). *Tér és Forma*, 2(8), 312-313.
- Bierbauer, V. (1932). Caprii házak (Houses in Capri). *Tér és Forma*, 5(10), 336-342.
- Bierbauer, V. (1937a). *A magyar építészet története* (The History of Hungarian Architecture). Budapest: Magyar Szemle Társaság.
- Bierbauer, V. (1937b). Az új évfolyam élére (Editorial for the New Year). *Tér és Forma*, 10(1), 1-2.
- Bierbauer, V. (1937c). Cirpac-konferencia Budapesten (CIRPAC conference in Budapest). *Tér és Forma*, 10(2-3), 48, 55, 57-58.
- Bierbauer, V. (1938). Lakóház Nápolyban a Posilippón (Villa in Posillipo, Naples). *Tér és Forma*, 11(7), 233-236.
- Bierbauer, V. (1939a). Egy magyar építész nyaralóházat épít (A Hungarian Architect Builds a Summer House). *Tér és Forma*, 12(7), 128-130.
- Bierbauer, V. (1939b). A modern építész és a paraszti építés (The Modernist Architect and Rural Architecture). *Tér és Forma*, 12(5), 86-87.
- Bierbauer, V. (1939c). A magyar falusi ház a külföld érdeklődésében (Foreign Interest in the Hungarian Peasant House). *Tér és Forma*, 12(7), 131-132.
- Bierbauer, V. (1940a). Szempontok a magyar ház kutatásához (Aspects of the Study of the Hungarian House). *Tér és Forma*, 13(5), 88-92.
- Bierbauer, V. (1940b). Szempontok a magyar házkutatáshoz (Aspects of the Study of the Hungarian House). *Tér és Forma*, 13(12), 222-226.
- Bierbauer, V. (1940c). Falusi építészet Siciliában (Rural Architecture in Sicily). *Tér és Forma*, 13(3), 43-45.
- Borbíró, V. (2003). *A magyar összehasonlító háztudomány, Lapis Angularis V. Források a Magyar Építészeti Múzeum gyűjteményéből* (The Comparative Study of the Hungarian House, Lapis Angularis V. Sources from the Collection of the Hungarian Museum of Architecture). Budapest: Magyar Építészeti Múzeum.
- Fehérvári, Z., & Prakfalvi, E. (2003). Előszó (Foreword). In V. Borbíró, *A magyar összehasonlító háztudomány, Lapis Angularis V. Források a Magyar Építészeti Múzeum gyűjteményéből* (The Comparative Study of the Hungarian House, Lapis Angularis V.

Sources from the Collection of the Hungarian Museum of Architecture) (pp. 9-14). Budapest: Magyar Építészeti Múzeum.

Gerő, L. (1938). Az alberobellói trullok (Trulli in Alberobello). *Tér és Forma*, 11(8-9), 260-264.

Hausmann, R. (1937). Ibiza-szigeti régi parasztház (An Old Peasant House in Ibiza). *Tér és Forma*, 10(10), 315-318.

Kós, K. (1929). Az erdélyi magyar parasztház (The Hungarian Peasant House in Transylvania). *Tér és Forma*, 2(6), 215-219.

Kotsis, I. (1932). Művészet a balatoni építkezésekben (Art in Architecture around Lake Balaton). *Tér és Forma*, 5(5-6), 168-170.

Kotsis, I. (2010). *Életrajzom* (Biography), E. Prakfalvi (Ed.). Budapest: HAP Galéria – Magyar Építészeti Múzeum.

Kousidi, M. (2015). Through the Lens of Sigfried Giedion: CIAM IV and the Stay in Greece. In J. C. Leal, M. H. Maia, B. F. Torras (Ed.), *Southern Modernisms. Critical Stances through Regional Appropriations, Conference proceedings* (pp. 252-267). Porto: CEAA/ESAP-CESAP, IHA/FCSH-UNL.

Kousidi, M. (2016). Through the Lens of Sigfried Giedion. Exploring Modernism and the Greek Vernacular *in situ*. *RIHA Journal* 0136, 15 July 2016.

Lauterbach, H. (1932). Santorin (Santorini). *Tér és Forma*, 5(10), 329-333.

Lejeune, J.-F., & Sabatino, M. (Eds) (2010). *Modern Architecture and The Mediterranean: Vernacular Dialogues and Contested Identities*. London and New York: Routledge.

Major, M. (1978). *Férfikor Budapesten* (Manhood in Budapest). Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó.

Meyer, P. (1932). Santorin építészete (The Architecture of Santorini). *Tér és Forma*, 5(10), 334-335.

Sabatino, M. (2010). Documenting Rural Architecture, by Giuseppe Pagano. *Journal of Architectural Education*, 63(2), 92-98.

Sebestyén, Á. A. (2017). Architectural Photographs as Agents of Travel and Information: Virgil Bierbauer's Travels to Circulate Visual Information in the Architectural Press in Interwar Hungary. *Revelar*, 2(novembro), 104-122.

Toroczkai Wigand, E. (1929). A magyar parasztház eredete s fejlődése (The Origin and the Development of the Hungarian Peasant House). *Tér és Forma*, 2(1), 4-16.

Author identification

Ágnes Anna Sebestyén. *Is an art historian, having graduated with a Master's degree from Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest in 2013. She was an exchange student at Leiden University in 2011. Since 2015, she has been working at the Hungarian Museum of Architecture; she is also a member of the Hungarian working party of Docomomo International. She has curatorial experiences in 20th century architectural history and she has research expertise in the history of modern architecture and architectural photography. Her current research focuses on the editorial activities of the architect Virgil Bierbauer in interwar Hungary and his role in international architectural transfers.*