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BOOKS AND LIBRARY HALLS IN 18th CENTURY HUNGARY

18th century libraries have been an interesting subject of research for a long time, as this was a period of the proliferation and spreading use of books and of the rapid and significant development of libraries. What has appeared on the subject, however, is mainly to the credit of literary and library historians. The history of special libraries, especially those of the natural sciences, have also been written. It is one of the great omissions of art history in Hungary that such material has not yet been analysed from this aspect.

The only work in the field is about literature on architecture, but examined more from the point of view of the books than from their presence in libraries¹. It is quite understandable that works on architecture have come into the limelight as they account for the largest group within the material in question and we have a goodly number of data concerning their practical use. The 18th century has been called the period of architecture in Hungary, as construction proceeded on a large scale. Those who commissioned the building of important edifices, above all aristocrats who owned large estates, had close contacts with architects and also acquired the relevant literature. Their libraries sometimes included works of surprising depth and thoroughness. In the department called *Architectura civilis et militaris* of the famous library, the so-called "Téka" of Sámuel Teleki, there were such books as the *Neue Methode, unauflösliche Malter und Kitte zu Machen* by Lorient, a German translation of the original French work which appeared in 1775 in Vienna, obviously not for the personal use of the count himself². It is also highly improbable that Count Ferenc Széchenyi immersed himself in the illustrated work entitled *Descriptio brevis construendae fornacis* that appeared in 1797³.

While the majority of works on construction and architecture also served practical purposes, the same cannot be said of the

books on art history and archeology. The libraries, especially those in secular hands, had very rich collections reflecting the widely differing tastes and interests of their owners. A lively interest was taken above all in the art of the ancient world as well as in the other fields of ancient culture. The libraries often included descriptions of scientific research and archeological excavations carried on in the 17th and 18th c.; studies by Athanasius Kirchner and other authors, illustrated works dealing with the arts in ancient Greece and Rome, and even in Egypt and China. One way come across publications on cameos, statues, picture galleries, and collections of stamps. (It is interesting to note that the *Entwurf einer Historischen Architektur* by Fischer von Erlach does not seem to have been in favour with Hungarian collectors.)

Descriptions of famous Italian, German, French, etc. buildings and collections can also be found in 18th c. Hungarian libraries. Guide-books constitute a separate group. A rich selection of books describing journeys in foreign countries form an interesting part of the libraries of people who never visited the countries in question. Those who acquired works dealing with the techniques of painting and even the art of mosaic were probably contemplating the commission of some work of art. The biographies of foreign artists are also to be found.

The taste of the period was formed by contemporary works on aesthetics and the history of the arts, by Winckelmann, Herder, Mengs, etc. The libraries were usually supplemented by a collection of engravings. The two extremes in collectors' tastes are represented by the works of Lucas Cranach and Ferdinando Galli Bibiena⁴. Art-history as science is a child of the 18th c. but we find the section *Historia Artium* in the Teleki Téka about 1780. Even this thumbnail-sketch is enough to show that the analysis of libraries from the point of view of the art historian should be done and soon. But there is another task of no less importance, and this is the examination of the library itself as a work of art. Here we shall try to indicate, almost without preliminary studies, some of the problems. We begin our discussion with the monastic libraries, because they form the largest group.

After the ancient precedents, libraries first became organic parts of the monasteries. According to St. Benedict's rules, the monks were to read for at least two hours a day and could borrow books to be taken to their cells from the bibliotheca, a bookcase. In the beginning this was located in the cloisters near the monks' entrance to the church. From those remaining in Hungary, the "armarium" of the Cistercian abbey in Szentgotthárd, dating from the 12th c., is in rather good condition⁵. With a steady increase in the number of books, the bookcase developed into a room.

By the Baroque period the library had become one of the most beautifully formed halls of the monastery. It will perhaps be enough to mention the ones in Melk and Admont in Austria, or Fürstenzell and Metten in Bavaria⁶. The size and ornamentations of these libraries strikingly show that they were made with the greatest artistic care almost immediately after the church and the ceremonial hall, not only because they were so frequently used but because they had a communal function. The furnishing

and decoration of a library was an especially rewarding task for the artist; a broad field for the application of the principles of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, so much in preference during the Baroque period.

The first wall-system library, as we know it today, where the shelves are by the walls leaving a large unoccupied space in the middle, was designed by Juan de Herrera in the Escorial around 1567. This was followed by the library of the Vatican in 1587/88 by Domenico Fontana. Small portable wooden steps enabled the readers and librarians to reach the books on the higher shelves. The walls of the Bibliotheca Ambrosiana were covered in shelves up to where the vault began, a wooden gallery being erected in the middle, as early as between 1603 and 1609. With this the modern library interior was born to live on until today⁷.

The interior of libraries belonged to the sphere of several artists. First came the architect who had to shape a well-balanced space with the proper proportions of height and width. The ceiling was then embellished with stucco work or painting, or both, subject to the conditions of the place, age, and the means of the founder. The bookshelves were mostly made by lay brothers in the monasteries sometimes wandering from work to work. In the few library interiors that have survived we can discover several masterpieces of applied art. The pediment of the bookshelves, the columns separating the sections, the parapets of the galleries - all offered excellent opportunities for applying rich ornamentation. The construction of the small staircases leading to the gallery required special talents.

The furniture of the various libraries is fairly different. The small portable wooden steps, regularly mentioned in the inventories, figure in many sample books. Their construction was not easy, as they had to be portable on the one hand and high enough on the other to reach the high shelves, with a wide platform on top, and a guardrail for safety, permitting unhurried thumbing through of a heavy book before taking it down.

The most complete picture of library furniture in the Hungarian monasteries is given by the inventories made in the 1780s, at the time of the dissolution of most of the religious orders. Although it differs, of course, from order to order and from monastery to monastery, it is interesting to note that many of them still include lecterns, a piece of furniture originating from the Middle Ages. The other extreme is represented by the Kalocsa library, where French-style desks served the readers' comfort with shelves on three sides for the books currently studied. Most of the movable furniture has changed hands through the centuries; the shelves, fastened to the walls, had a better chance of survival in their original place.

Quite often it was in the library that the various maps and globes were kept. In the library of the Prešov (Eperjes) Minorites there was a board showing various scripts (*Una Tabella varia gentium Litteras exhibens*)⁸. Some of the collections included pictures, and in one monastic library there were even seventy marbles (*lapides marmorei*), most probably statues or reliefs⁹. Several library halls were decorated with pictures and statues.

It can be said of 18th c. Hungarian libraries that, although

none of them was so outstanding and magnificent as the Austrian or German ones mentioned, they did not in general lag behind the average, typified by the monastic libraries in Göttweig or Kremsmünster. They were not rich in furniture; most of them only contained two or three tables or high desks; on the other hand we find eight or ten books in the monks' cells¹⁰.

As an example let us take the library of the Paulite monastery in Budapest which has survived comparatively intact and now belongs to the Academy of Theology (fig. 59, 60, 61). A door, richly ornamented with rococo carvings, leads from the cloister to the split-level library hall, which was developed and embellished from 1741 to 1771 but has never been finished. The walls are covered in oaken shelves, the railings of the gallery are ornamented with rococo, carvings, just like those of the spiral staircase leading there from one of the corners. The built-in woodwork was prepared by Felix Tatirek, a Paulite lay brother in the 1740s, whereas the furniture, of slightly more ponderous style, is the work of another monk, Antal Rucsman. On the lower part of the cloister vault there are thirty blank medallions which were to be filled in with the portraits of outstanding Hungarian scientists and authors, this, however, never having been accomplished. The mural on the ceiling was only finished in 1802¹¹.

Almost at the same time, between 1740 and 1746 the library of the Szentgotthárd Cistercites was erected on the basis of plans made by Franz Anton Pilgram. The library has no gallery and is located on the upper floor of the monastery. It is smaller than that of the Paulites but no less richly ornamented. The bookshelves are the work of brother Kaspar Schrezenmayer. The shelves, of oak and pine, are embellished with inlaid motifs and at the top with a gilded pediment. The ceiling was painted by Matthias Gusner, a Cistercian lay brother. His illusionistic mural opens the hall towards the sky, representing the four cardinal virtues. The windows command a fine view of the garden and the beauty of the place is further enhanced by the rows of books bound with the artistic care of the "frater bibliopegus" Christian Weidinger¹². When the Szentgotthárd monastery has been restored, both the earliest, 12th c. *armarium* and one of the most beautiful Baroque libraries will be on view. The bishops' libraries, usually founded when an outstanding personality wore the mitre, are somewhere between the ecclesiastic and secular libraries. There was one in every episcopal seat but very few of them survive in their original state. Here we will only mention some interesting and important examples. At the beginning of the 18th c. László Ádám Erdődy, Bishop of Nitra (Nyitra), revived a tradition of the Middle Ages and set up a (perhaps stall-system) library in two rooms on the third floor above the porch of the Cathedral¹³.

The most remarkable libraries belonged to György Klímó, Károly Eszterházy, and Ignác Batthyány, Bishops of Pécs, Eger, and Alba Julia (Gyulafehérvár). Klímó was the first bishop who, in 1774, following the example of the university library one year later, opened his library to the public. His collection now belongs to the Library of the Pécs University and the Bishop's Palace has been thoroughly rebuilt. Károly Eszterházy's books were transferred to the Eger Academy, to the library halls of which

we shall still revert.

What lends special interest to the Batthyaneum is the fact that a monastery of the dissolved Trinitarian Order was rebuilt to house it. On the ground floor of the four-storeyed building there was a printing shop, the second comprised the apartments of the librarian and the astronomer, the third floor was occupied by the library itself, and the fourth by the observatory. The building, very probably the first one in Hungary whose main function was to house a library, was accomplished in 1792. Bishop Batthyány made it fully open to the public, which entailed the revival of a tradition of the Middle Ages: in the room of manuscripts and incunabula the volumes were still chained. Later the library was augmented by the collection of Kristóf Migazzi, Bishop of Vác¹⁴.

Márton Padányi Biró, Bishop of Veszprém, set up a private library in the palace he had erected in Sümeg (fig. 66), his favourite abode. The books had the nicest room of the palace. The mural on the ceiling includes among the symbols of the various sciences a representation of the bishop himself, in not too convincing ecclesiastic humility. The beautiful inlaid furniture of the library has been treasured by the Museum of Arts and Crafts since the end of the 19th c.¹⁵.

Ferenc Herzan, Bishop of Szombathely, on the other hand, though he could call one of the most remarkable libraries of the country his own, was content to keep it in two small rooms on the third floor of his palace. Besides unadorned softwood shelves the furniture consisted only of a few long tables. Neither Padányi's nor Herzan's libraries were meant for public use¹⁶. This group of libraries forms a natural transition to those collected by aristocrats. From the latter almost nothing remains in its original place and arrangement. To have a library was an almost obligatory display of aristocratic status. In the Eszterházy residence at Fertőd, for example, there was a library of twenty-two thousand volumes, bound in different colours according to the language in which there were written¹⁷. Antal Grassalkovich was not known for his special love for books but in each of his castles there was a library. It is perhaps the aristocratic libraries which give the most different, in reconstruction of their interior. What does seem sure is that the masters of local guilds played an important part. In this field, however, the collection of books and the erection of libraries had become a little less closely connected. For example, Samuel Teleki, who held important government offices, took along most of his books to the places where he was stationed and had a library wing added to his palace only after retiring between 1799 and 1802. This is how it happened that his collection of books is characteristic of the 18th century, whereas the library hall with its white Empire furniture is already a forerunner of Hungarian neoclassicism¹⁸. Ferenc Széchenyi who had catalogue and who had the volumes written in foreign languages removed from his Cenk castle to Sopron, left all his Hungarian books for the first national library founded by him¹⁹.

Another famous bibliophile was Gedeon Ráday. From his library erected in Pécel (fig. 63) the books were transferred to the Calvinist collection together with the shelves, but as we also know what the rooms looked like, it can at least be partly

reconstructed. The pleasant and cosy Baroque manor house was built by a Pest master builder, János Mayerhoffer, between 1756 and 77. The main library hall, which was divided by four marble pillars into three naves, occupied the ground floor. Its ceiling of nine surbased spherical vaults was covered in murals savouring of Illusionism. The centre was occupied by Pallas Athene, goddess of science, surrounded by figures representing grammar, poetry, rhetorics, jurisprudence, history, the medical science, mathematics, and philosophy. Around the allegorical figures little putti busied themselves carrying books which were available in the library. By the big library hall there was the so-called small library, whose murals told the history of Orpheus, while on the ceiling the figure of Arion could be seen. This room was devoted to poetry. The murals were painted by the Buda painter Mátyás Schervitz (fig. 64) in 1763 on the basis of engravings by Picart. Books were kept in altogether six rooms of the castle, including the count's study. Bound with white vellum or gilded brown leather, they stood on white shelves very moderately ornamented with gilded carvings. The artistic quality of the furniture and the murals are definitely not up to the standard set by the works of the lay brothers in the monasteries. The masters of the Pest-Buda guilds worked for a principal who knew more of literature and science than of the fine arts. Nevertheless, the spectator cannot help being enchanted by the rural charm of the place²⁰.

A totally different universe opens up in front of us when we enter the Helikon Library in Keszthely (fig. 65) only baronial library surviving intact and in situ, though recalling the end of the 18th c. From 1745 on the Festetics family continuously augmented and embellished the residence until it turned into a veritable palatial home. In the course of the 1745 construction Kristóf Festetics already had a library room erected but, as we know from an inventory taken in the middle of the century, it only comprised two built-in bookcases. His successors first of all augmented the picture-gallery and the collection of engravings. It was György Festetics, the most outstanding member of the family who, settling in Keszthely at the age of 36, founded a new library. This time it was a highly educated man, educated in the Vienna Theresianum and in close contact with the highest circles, who set about creating a library as a patron of literature and the sciences in Hungary. He added a new wing to the castle for the purpose between 1792 and 1800. The furniture, too, was prepared by 1800 but, though it bears some features of early neo-classicism, it is actually a summary of the Baroque idea of a library interior. The hall is divided by a gallery supported on voluted consoles, its graceful railing ornamented with acanthus leaves. Access is ensured on each of the shorter sides of the oblong hall by spiral stairs, hidden in a wall cupboard. The original stuccoed ceiling was altered and low glass cases were added to the furniture of the library in the middle of the last century. All the wall-furniture was made by a Keszthely carpenter, János Kerbl. The monumental hall is the last great manifestation of the Baroque spirit in Hungary²¹. While we know something of the aristocratic libraries that have not survived from contemporary sources, practically no trace is left of libraries owned by burghers. It is indeed a pity, as it

can be gathered from catalogues, that some of the scientists had as many as two thousand volumes. Today it does not seem a collection requiring too much space, but it could not have been easy to find room for the bulky books of science, large folios, and hand-written codices. The library was generally in the study where wall-cupboards and wall-shelves alike could have been found²².

However, the most efficient meeting places of book and reader were the libraries of colleges, universities, and other institutions of education. It is difficult to reconstruct how the library of the University of Trnava (Nagyszombat) would have looked. We know at least that its bookcases, ornamented with beautiful carvings, had an inspiring effect even on Wolfgang Kempelen, King's Counsel, a man of encyclopaedic learning²³. The library was opened to the public after the dissolution of the Order of Jesuits in 1773 but did not remain in its original place for long. In 1777 the university was moved to the royal palace in Buda, where it was given the whole of the king's apartment on the second floor, comprising five rooms with a view of the River Danube. Although the librarians complained of lack of space, the fact that the most decorative rooms of the palace held thirty-seven bookcases, six long and fifteen square tables, and eight long benches shows that this was a library on an impressive scale. The furniture was supplemented by two old globes, five library steps, seven inkpots, and four tin candelabra²⁴.

This was, however, not to be the final place of the library either. By the order of Joseph II it was moved in 1784 to the Franciscan monastery in Pest. We can only show here the plans made by Franz Anton Hillebrant, as the building itself was taken down in the 19th century. We do not know how it was furnished, but the split-level reading hall with its gallery, the smaller reading rooms for the lecturers, and the stack-rooms show that here a monumental conception was put into practice. The library of the university soon became the scientific centre of Pest. At the same time the various faculties, occupying several buildings, had their own special libraries²⁵.

Although it was not given university status, Károly Eszterházy, Bishop of Eger, had had a university in mind when he ordered the erection of the Academy in Eger. The library (fig. 62) was assigned one of the four inner projections of the monumental building surrounding its courtyard, stressing thereby its intellectual significance. He also saw to it that the books should have a place worthy of this significance as one of the most beautiful Baroque library halls, surviving comparatively intact, bears evidence. The building, whose construction began in 1765, was furnished after 1771. The system of shelves for the huge split level hall and gallery was prepared by an Eger carpenter, Thomas Lotter, probably on the basis of designs made by the architect, Jakub Fellner. Above the bookcases in a string of medallions the portraits of ecclesiastic and secular scientists, made in relief by Vencel Halblechner, look down on the visitor. The ceiling of the hall is covered by a monumental picture of the Council of Trent, the work of János Lukács Kracker, painter, and József Zach, *pictor quadraturae*.

The appearance of this bold representation looks forward in

taste, including Neo-gothic elements as early as 1782, and may perhaps be considered a symbol of science, imparted to the young through the libraries, leading mankind towards the future²⁶.

The famous Protestant libraries in Sárospatak and Debrecen, or the library of the Pannonhalma Benedictines belong to the next, the neo-classic period of the arts, which was also another era in science and education.

In sum, we have conclude that the historian of art can, thanks to the study of both the contents and appearance of libraries, gain much - perhaps not less than those who frequented them two hundred years ago.

Notes

1. I. Bibó, *A magyar építészeti szakirodalom kezdetei*, In: *Művészet és felvilágosodás*, ed A. Zádor, H. Szabolcsi. Budapest 1978, p. 27-122.

2. *Bibliothecae Samuelis S.R.I. Com. Teleki de Szék. Pars Secunda*. Viennae 1800. Classis XI. *Architectura civilis et militaris*.

3. *Catalogi Bibliothecae Hungaricae Széchényiano Regnicolaris. Index alter, libros bibliothecae hungaricae Francisci Com. Széchényi, Duobus Tomis comprehensis in scientiarum ordines. Pesthini 1800. The cited book is; F. Rausch, Descriptio brevis construendae fornacis, quae pro arbitrio temperandum cum Lignorum compendio admittit*. Budap. 1797.

4. It was not the aim of the present paper to give a detailed list of the books on history of art. We have studied several library catalogues. The most remarkable are, besides the above mentioned: *Catalogus librorum Cav. Andr. Belli a die XIX. mensis Januarii in collegio rubro auctionis lege dividendorum*. Lipsiae 1784. - *Clarissimi Danielis Cornides bibliotheca hungarica...* Pestini 1792. - *Catalogus praestantissimorum librorum, necnon rarissimorum manuscriptorum bibliothecae Kollarianae*. Viennae 1783, etc.

5. I. Valter, *Szentgotthárd története a mohácsi vészig*. In: *Szentgotthárd*, p. 40. Fragments of another armarium have been discovered in Bélapátfalva, a Cistercian monastery.

6. M. Baur-Heinhold, *Schöne alte Bibliotheken*. München 1972. - J. Goldner, *Bayerische Klosterbibliotheken*. Freilassing 1983.

7. N. Pevsner, *A History of Building Types*. Cap. 7. Libraries. London 1976, p. 91-110.

8. Hungarian State Archives. C. 103. Capsa 25. Eperjes, Minoriten. No. 10. *Inventarium Naturalium rerum, Mobilium, pecorum et pecudum, totius item Suppellectilia Domesticae in abolitio*. Die 6^{ma} 8^{bris} 1787.

9. Hungarian State Archives. C. 103. Capsa 19. No. 83. *Inventarium von dem aufgehobenen Franziskaner Kloster zu Sta Catharina*. Anno 1792.

10. Our remarks are based on 105 inventories of dissolved orders. They are usually very accurate in describing every single object found in the communal places and in the cells. A special list is also made of the books, for the use of the University Library. Their librarians had the right to choose from these books to complete the main collection. Duplicates were usually sold by auction or otherwise put up for sale.

11. S. Kuthy, *A pesti egyetemi templom*. Budapest 1960.

12. M. Zlinszky-Sternegg, *Die Geschichte der Zisterzienserorder von Szentgotthárd*. In: *Szentgotthárd*, p. 289 ff.

13. M. Szarvasi, *Magánkönyvtárak a XVIII. században*. Budapest 1939, p. 40-41.

14. About the episcopal libraries see: M. Szarvasi, o.c., p. 21-50. - Cs. Csapody, A. Tóth, M. Vértesy, *Magyar könyvtártörténet*. Budapest 1987, p. 133-138.

15. P. Voit, *Régi magyar otthonok*. Budapest 1943, pp. 196, 201.

- L. Végvári, *A süimegi Maulbertsch freskók*. Budapest 1958, p. 16.
16. J. Koltay, *A A szombathelyi Herzan könyvtár művészeti könyvei*, Savaria, 1971-72, (5-6), p. 523-538.
17. A. Vályi, *Magyar Országának leírása .I.* Budae 1796, pp. 618, 623.
18. A. Deé Nagy, *Teleki Sámuel és a Teleki Téka*. Bukarest 1976. Teleki added a new wing to the Wesselényi palace in Tîrgu Mureş (Marosvásárhely) for the library, which was open to the public from since 1803.
19. Szarvasi, o.c., p. 65. - Csapody, Tóth, Vértesy, o.c., p. 170 ff.
20. M. Vas, *Ráday Gedeon élete és munkássága*. Budapest 1932. E. Zsindely, *A péceli Ráday kastély*. Budapest 1959.
21. P. Péczely, *A keszthelyi Festetics kastély és belső berendezése*. Budapest 1958 and 1964.
22. B. Holl, *Pest-Buda polgárainak könyvkulturája a XVII-XVIII. században*, TBM, XV, 1933, p. 289 ff. - Csapody, Tóth, Vértesy, o.c., p. 149-158.
23. A. Tóth, *Az Egyetemi Könyvtár története a szerzetesrendek feloszlataása korában, 1770-1793*. EKE, III, 1966, p. 102-107. - Csapody, Tóth, Vértesy, o.c., p. 125, 158 ff.
24. Tóth, o.c., p. 107-119. The plan of the royal castle can be found in Vienna, Graphische Sammlung Albertina. Architekturzeichnungen. Inv. Nr. 7179, 7180. The inventory cited: *Adversaria conceptum scriptorum Bibliothecae Regiae Universitatis Budensis concernentium*. Budapest, University Library. Fol. lat. 53. 61-62.
25. Vienna, Graphische Sammlung Albertina. Architekturzeichnungen. Inv. Nr. 7813-7817. See.: Tóth, o.c., p. 122-123.
26. I. Genthon, *The Lyceum of Eger*. Budapest 1955. - *Heves megye műemlékei*, ed. P. Voit, II. Budapest 1972, p. 444-477.

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