

Ödön Lechner in Context

Studies of the international conference on the occasion
of the 100th anniversary of Ödön Lechner's death

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of the 100th anniversary of Ödön Lechner's death

Edited by Zsombor Jékely
with the assistance of Zsuzsa Margittai and
Klára Szegzárdy-Csengery

Museum of Applied Arts
Budapest, 2015

The conference was jointly organized by the Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest and the Institute of Art History,
Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Organising committee of the conference:

Tamás Csáki, András Hadik, Zsombor Jékely, Katalin Keserü, Magda Lichner, József Sisa

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Preface

The Museum of Applied Arts in Budapest is housed in a magnificent building, the masterwork of architect Ödön Lechner (1845–1914). This great building defines and identifies the institution, and is sometimes better known than the collection it houses. In fact, the building is often described as the first and key object in the collection of the museum. It is thus no wonder that one of the missions of the Museum of Applied Arts is to make the architect of its palace better known both at home and abroad. To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the death of Ödön Lechner, the museum thus embarked on the organization of an international conference and a major exhibition dedicated to the master.

The exhibition and the accompanying publication – written and edited by József Sisa – set out to survey the career and works of Ödön Lechner, displaying plans and photos of his most important buildings. Special attention was given to five major works, nominated for UNESCO World Heritage Site status: the Kecskemét City Hall, the parish church of Budapest-Kőbánya, the Museum of Applied Arts, the Institute of Geology, and the Postal Savings Bank. The aim of the conference on the other hand was broader: to place Lechner’s architectural principles and planning activity on the contemporary European scale, with the opportunity for comparisons on a wide horizon, while also giving an opportunity for presenting the results of most recent research. The conference explored the context in which Ödön Lechner

had worked and created his masterpieces: Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century, a period of great scientific and architectural change and development. Hungary in particular, after the 1867 compromise with the Austrian empire of the Habsburgs, enjoyed unprecedented growth during these decades. Ödön Lechner, one of the greatest and most original architects of this period, certainly deserves a prominent place among the international talents from the late nineteenth century.

The conference was jointly organized by the Museum of Applied Arts and by the Art History Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and by an organizing committee set up to coordinate the programme and the various sections. Altogether, four sessions were organized, focusing on the role and architecture of European museums of decorative arts, on issues of orientalism in late-nineteenth-century architecture, on questions of architecture and technology, as well as on significant figures of European architecture, the contemporaries of Lechner. The detailed description and programme of each section can be read below. We are very grateful for all participants who came to Budapest to deliver their papers and to those especially who had submitted an edited version for publication. The present volume is the result of their combined effort, which represents a significant step towards understanding the phenomenon of Ödön Lechner in the context of the late nineteenth century.

PHOTOS OF THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE CONFERENCE
AND THE EXHIBITION
LECHNER, A CREATIVE GENIUS











Overview of the conference and introductions to the sections

Lechner – International conference on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Ödön Lechner's death

Conference date and venue:

19–21 November 2014, Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest

Organisers:

Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest

Institute of Art History, Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Organising Committee:

Tamás Csáki, art historian, Budapest City Archives

András Hadik, art historian, Budapest

Zsombor Jékely, Director of Collections, Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest

Katalin Keserü, professor emeritus, Dept. of Art History, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest

Magda Lichner, art historian, Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest

József Sisa, Director, Institute of Art History, Research Centre for the Humanities,
Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Overview

In 2014 we commemorated the 100th anniversary of the death of Ödön Lechner (1845–1914), one of the greatest Hungarian architects and one of the most original geniuses of the European architectural scene at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This special occasion was marked with a three-day-long international conference (19–21 November 2014).

The centennial of Ödön Lechner's death (1845–1914) gave the primary occasion for an international conference devoted to the architect's oeuvre. Furthermore, in the history of the Museum of Applied Arts a highly significant event also makes it relevant to present the latest researches. The building of this museum designed by Ödön Lechner and Gyula Pártos architects' studio is nominated to be a World Heritage Site and because of its condition, the complex reconstruction and expansion cannot be further delayed. The reconstruction is also combined with the modernisation of the institute. The examination of the historical monument, the restorers' and art historians' reports on the architect's plans as well as the studies for preparing the needed documentations have come up with several new and often surprising results. These inspired to rethink Lechner's manifested principles and his architecture.

The museum's Archive preserves the documentation of the construction between 1892 and 1898, the original plans, the reports of the architectural committee's sittings, the construction diary, work reports, bills and not least the files and correspondence of the governmental patronage. Besides the manuscripts and plans, the uniquely rich source material consists of archive photos and negatives with the help of which the examination was comprehensible and the future reconstruction can be authentic. Lechner's work previously was said to be eclectic because he used typical elements for different periods in art history, but the proper classification is rather syncretic – combining living parallel forms and equalised principle theories. Emphasizing the usage of sculpted decoration and sheet ornamentation many consider him an early representative of Hungarian Art Nouveau. Recently the characteristics of national Romanticism have been emphasized: he intended to develop a characteristically Hungarian architectural style.

The modernisation of the institution is of course based on researches on the phenomena of musealisation which has been a central theme in art historical studies in the last decades and has become a paradigm. The building of the Museum of Applied Arts as emblematic manifestation of Ödön Lechner's conceptions is an outstanding work even from this point of view. During the preparation works for the reconstruction viewpoints that were previously considered to be less important have been re-evaluated. In Lechner's designer practise the engineering architecture, the latest iron structures of his age, the usage of brick and concrete played a significant role. With the usage of the new materials and structures he typified the building but also made it unique. In this style characteristic to him, Lechner harmonically combined the influences that affected him, the experiences gained in Berlin, Rome, Paris and London and the patriot wishes: the dominant oriental tradition which feature is highly emphasized in the nineteenth-century-image about the origin of the Hungarians. His qualifications, the recognition of the contemporary European and Hungarian phenomena, his openness to the latest architectural trends as well as the artistic and theoretical publicity of his age made it possible – according to his intention – to develop a new style and create a 'school' from his followers and disciples. In framing the sections of the conference these viewpoints have been considered.

The aim and the role of the conference is to place Lechner's architectural principles and designing activity on the contemporary European scale, with the opportunity for comparisons on a wide horizon, while also giving an opportunity for presenting the results of most recent research. The organising committee has set up four sections for discussing these topics in detail.

Introductions to the sections of the conference

Section 1.

Applied arts – Museums of applied arts

Chair: József Sisa

This section tackled several related issues. One is the birth of the concept of applied arts, the appreciation of material culture, the changing perception of the aesthetic value of everyday objects surrounding us, with special

respect to the division of handicraft and industry. Further attention was paid to the role of shows, world's fairs and various publications (books, journals). To that comes the appearance of permanent exhibitions, later museums devoted exclusively to the applied arts, their foundation and institutional background, national significance, and their relationship to other, traditional museums focusing on history and the arts. In this section we examined the above aspects in a general context, and also with special respect to specific, major European museums of applied arts. In the case of the latter, the process of their institutionalisation, their collecting policies as well as their construction and functioning was discussed. The Museum of Applied Arts of Budapest, Lechner's chef-d'oeuvre, can be better understood against this broader background.

Section 2.

Orientalism and ornament

Chair: Katalin Keserü

The nineteenth-century orientalism – a sensational interest for the culture of the Near-, Middle- and Far-East – grew out from several roots and, we can say, had several branches. One root was the English architects' attention for the Mogul (Mughal) monuments on the Indian colonies. Another was the spectacle of the archaeological and cultural possessions brought to Europe, principally to English, German, French and Russian, museums as a by-product of the attempt for dominating the Middle-Eastern, Islam-Arabic region and the Iranian plateau. Furthermore, the synagogues on the Pyrenean-peninsula recalling the Moorish architecture could serve as another example. The goods and the knowledge about Eastern objects presented at the universal expositions in the second half of the century served as a model for the general interest and taste and presumably these exhibitions were reasons for the high popularity. The scientists and amateur researchers of Central Europe also turned towards the East, although for different reasons. The national mythical history like Romantic legends about the origin of a nation emerged for instance in resurrecting the 'Sarmatism' in Poland while in other countries of Central, Eastern, or Southern Europe joining the Pan-Slavic idea and the Byzantine traditions. With simplifying the hypothetical studies of

ethnic origin in Hungary, the Iranian and Turanian (general name for the nomadic tribes migrating east from the neighbouring Iranian mountains) relationship received special attention in the popular historical narrative. In these countries, representing the 'national character' received special meaning and was mainly manifested in the ornamentation. The science which turned towards the object culture after language research and the archaeological debate about the Great Migration Period were connected to the discourse of 'Orient or Rome' theme. This section examines and illustrates these phenomena with ornamental examples.

Section 3.

Architecture, architecture as art, engineering architecture

Chair: András Hadik

The list of these notions, on the one hand, reflects a chronological order, but it also refers to different approaches. The questions of practical craft, creative art and theoretical planning closely relate to the changes of nineteenth-century education and also to the publicity of the opinions about art. After acquiring the basic principles in the Hungarian capital, Lechner received architectural style doctrine, planning and engineering studies in Berlin. Later during his travels in Italy and the years spent in Paris he broadened his knowledge. In the Romantic conception architecture acquired the "aura" of the Fine Arts; therefore the architects were entitled to artistic consciousness. This section deals with the connections between the qualifications and the status of the architects, and, on the other hand, with the relations and genres of how the demanded architectural tasks of the nineteenth century were executed: industrial buildings, bridges, railway stations, market halls, world fair halls and with the creators of functional and emblematic buildings.

Section 4.

Ödön Lechner – ‘Father figure’ of the modern Hungarian architecture. Followers, criticism and reception of Lechner in the first half of the twentieth century

Chair: Tamás Csáki

Ödön Lechner was the first personality in Hungarian architectural history who had a ‘school’ and ‘followers’ – and there were not many even later. In the first decades of the twentieth century even without university chair, official position and institutional position he became a point of reference for a significant group in the generation following him. Among the closest circle of Lechner were outstanding representatives of the Hungarian Art Nouveau architecture like Marcell Komor, József Vágó, Béla Lajta or Béla Málnai.

Lechner’s works and personality divided Hungarian architectural society, the most important debates in architectural press formulated around him in the first years of the twentieth century. He received strong criticism not only from the conservative and academic architects of the University of Technology, but for instance, the neo-vernacular movement around 1908 (the ‘Youngsters’), which differentiated itself from the architectural Art Nouveau, defined itself against Lechner

and his followers. From the 1910s, all criticism against architectural Art Nouveau articulated either from the conservative or the modern stream principally took aim at his followers’ architecture. Their ornamental modernism became the scapegoat to which all the ‘aberrations’ of the early years of the twentieth century were stuck to.

In this section of the Lechner conference, we asked speakers to present architects who played a central role in their countries’ architectural culture in the early years of the twentieth century. As well as examining Lechner’s personality and role we would like to present different ‘father-figures’ in twentieth-century architecture through the example of Otto Wagner, Henrik Petrus Berlage and Jan Kotěra. We wanted to know what role these architects played in their architectural community and what their relation with the Academy, the official authorities, educational institutions and the government was like. Was a school set up around them, how did that work, did they succeed in establishing their own alternative institutions and organs and what was their relationship with the architects of the generation following them like? Who were their commissioners and how did this influence their status in the profession?

János Vadona's Collection of Japanese and Chinese Objects in the Museum of Industry in Kolozsvár*

In order to understand what was meant by the term “museum of industry” as the 1870s passed into the 1880s, shortly after the foundation of the Budapest Museum of Art and Industry in 1872 (which later became the Museum of Applied Arts), was made a state institution, we need to have an appreciation of the ideas on the subject held by the main players in the state development of industry. A memorandum about the museum of industry issued in 1880 by Károly Keleti and Soma Mudrony was the first to deal with the nurturing of taste and the development of industry and trade in an interconnected way, and to set them on solid museal foundations. In their essay, the museum of industry was not just a candidate for another type of institution; they applied this phrase to an entire complex of institutions promoting industrial development and modernisation: they presented a concept resting on three pillars, which described a conglomeration made up of a museum of applied arts, a museum of industry and an “Eastern” museum. The tasks of the first, the museum of applied arts, were to give instruction in aesthetics, to improve tastes in art, to decide on the right selections of colours and materials, and to present stylish products. The second pillar, the museum of industry, which was often supplemented with the epithet of “technological”, would exhibit the tools, devices and machinery of any branch of industry, and the related material knowledge. A total of three museums of industry came into being in the country within a short period of time. The task of the third type of museum, the so-called “Eastern” museum, was to display industrial goods produced in the new countries of the Balkan region, and thereby to raise awareness of any weak spots in the region’s industry, and potential opportunities for Hungarian exports.¹ The Eastern Museum (later renamed the Museum of Commerce) would support increased exports of Hungarian handicrafts, cottage industry goods and applied art products to markets in Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria and the Eu-

ropean part of Turkey. Alongside the collection of items from the Far East held by the Museum of Industry in Kolozsvár (today Cluj-Napoca, Romania), obtaining markets in the East was part of the profile of the Székely Museum of Industry based in Marosvásárhely (today Târgu Mureş, Romania).

The Museum of Industry in Kolozsvár, known at the time as the Transylvanian Museum and School of Technological Industry, began to take shape in 1882, with the primary objective of teaching modern theory and practice to artisans working in the fields of construction, woodwork and metalwork.² Initially, the profile of the school of industry in Kolozsvár developed in parallel with the collections of the museum, which, as we shall see, served needs that went far beyond its basic function as a “repository” for the school of industry. The change that took place around the year 1900 was also significant when it came to shaping public taste. When the basic collection of the museum was established – at the same time as the devices, objects, equipment and samples related to industrial activity became part of the collection – an important ensemble of Chinese and Japanese objects also entered the museum, which coincided with the spread of Hungarian-language travel literature (descriptions, memoirs and accounts of journeys) about the Far East. János Vadona embarked on his trip in 1884, one year after the first journey undertaken by his contemporary, Ferenc Hopp, the noted Hungarian collector of oriental art.

Vadona's Tour of Collecting in the Context of the Collection of Oriental Art in Hungary

Scholarly interest in oriental objects, especially those from China and Japan, was evident in Hungary from the end of the 1860s. The exploration of the Far East



1. Japanese lacquer wood plate, National Museum of Transylvanian History, Cluj-Napoca, h: 1.5 cm, d: 13.5 cm, inv. no: M3657

manifested itself mainly in travelogues and in collections of applied art objects, while the motivation differed fundamentally from that of the expeditions mounted to the East in search of the ancient origins of the Hungarian people, the journeys to the Caucasus region and the Middle East undertaken by Ármin Vámbéry, Jenő Zichy and their associates. Besides the ensemble of Japanese porcelain kept by Count Ferenc Zichy in his mansion in Vedrőd (today Voderady, Slovakia), one of the earliest examples of this kind of collection was the one assembled around 1868–1869 by János Xántus, Hungary's pioneer in ethnographic museology. The contemporary nature evident in the purchases of objects that János Xántus made in the years 1869–1870 resulted from the descriptive sociography that was spreading at the time, in parallel with discoveries of historical sources. For János Vadona, who built up his collection a decade and a half later, his motivation for purchasing objects – as we shall see – would turn out to be similar, as his intentions were primarily to modernise industry and the economy.

The changes taking place in industry, particularly in cottage industries, woodwork and metalwork, and the applied arts, did not remain free from the influence that Japanese calligraphy and Chinese painting were exerting on the visual arts in Europe, bringing about innova-

tions in attitude and technique. The European public had received its first exposure to the high quality of craftsmanship and the technical solutions and decorations of oriental utensils, especially those from Japan, at the World's Fairs, where presentations of wares from India, Japan and China were initially arranged by European diplomats and traders. The conscious attention paid to oriental handicrafts and the modernisation of technology and decorative motifs reached its peak in the theory and practice of Gottfried Semper. The renewal expounded by Semper and his followers centred on a reinvention of European manufacturing output, which was regarded as nothing special at the time, by using new types of decoration and fresh shapes and materials. At the 1862 London International Exhibition the historic treasures that had been seized from the pal-



2. Clay teapot, National Museum of Transylvanian History, Cluj-Napoca, h: 11 cm, w: 15.5 cm, d: 8.8 cm, inv. no: M2930

ace in Peking by French and British soldiers went on display, attracting enormous attention, alongside Japan's first own international showing of objects from their homeland.

The series of oriental travel journals written in Hungarian in the nineteenth century began with the account of Manó Andrassy's journey to Ceylon, Java, China and Bengal in 1849. His recollections of the 1851 Great Exhibition in London were released four years later. Published slightly earlier, in 1842, was the *Liber Antiquitatis* for the collection of Fejérváry and Pulszky, which featured reproductions of sixteen oriental ob-

jects, although independent written sources indicate that this collection, the only one of its kind in Europe, was far more substantial than this.³

In Hungary at the end of the eighteenth century, oriental objects were present in every major collection of works of applied art, including the collections of Miklós Jankovich, Count Mihály Viczay Junior, and Gábor Fejérváry. Fejérváry's collection, featuring items from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries consisting mostly of bronze and stone objects and crystal and wooden statues of the highest order, even went on show in London in 1853. Reports not only praised the works for their technical perfection, but also for the collecting concept that had brought them together.⁴ The collection was largely auctioned off in Paris in 1868, and the remainder probably consisted of the oriental – Persian and East Indian – objects, which were briefly exhibited to the public by Fejérváry's nephew, Ferenc Pulszky, on two occasions: in 1873 at the Vienna World's Fair, in the section on Hungarian art collectors, and in 1880 at the exhibition of oriental applied art objects, which featured the collection's significant body of Chinese wares.⁵

There are several connections between travel writing and the acquisition of oriental objects. The approach of travel descriptions was to compare and contrast European art history, divided up into stages of development according to different categories of style, against – as a constructed (historical) approach – the material goods that reflected the timelessness of the Asian way of living. The style concepts used by Burckhardt, Semper and Riegl to describe the “unbroken” thousand-year trajectory of development in European art were not up to the task of analysing oriental art, and the profundities of Asian cultures would only be explored as a by-product of the nationalist policies that emerged in the interwar years. The timelessness of Asian nations and peoples did not, however, mean that they were without history; they were regarded rather as cultures that had preserved much of the essence of the earlier, less well-known and largely undocumented periods in the history of humanity. Alongside the arts, philosophy and sociography, an important role in bestowing a place in human civilisation upon the cultures of the East was played by language. The chief modern researchers into orientalism included Horace Hayman Wilson and Sir



3. Six braided sheet trays, National Museum of Transylvanian History, Cluj-Napoca, dimensions variable, inv. no: M3856–3861

William Jones, whose works formed part of the library belonging to Ferenc Pulszky. In London in 1853, Pulszky delivered a lecture at the Archaeological Institute, and the following excerpt clearly illustrates this experiment to embed the Orient in history: “All the East of Asia is ruled by Chinese culture and civilization, which, as we can guess from the monosyllabic character of the language, retains more of the primaeval period of mankind than any tongue of the white man. In China too we find as in India and Egypt, institutions, which outline the changes of centuries, and an art which is indigenous, scarcely influenced by foreign intercourse. The principle of stability is dominant here, of society in spite of frequent revolutions, conquests, and overthrows of dynasties.”⁷ The culture that spoke the ancient language from the dawn of mankind, “more primaeval” than “any tongue of the white man”, was worthy of serving as a model for the regeneration of Western art.

Throughout the nineteenth century, for both scholars and the general public, the art historical past of the Far East, in particular India, Japan and China, was characterised by a continuation of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century fashion for chinoiserie. For a long time, the pinnacle of this consisted of the eighteenth-century Chinese porcelain, bronzes, lacquerware and fine carvings that were well-known across Europe, but there were also examples of Chinese pavilions, such as those in the English-style gardens of the country houses in Csákvár and Hotkóc (today Hodkovce, Slovakia).⁷ At the end of the seventeenth century, European collections concentrated increasingly on chinoiserie, the fashion for Chinese objects, as opposed to Japanese items. The knowledge of the physical and spiritual geography of the continent-sized country, the popularity of travel journals, and the idealisation of the teachings of Confucianism in the writings of certain Enlightenment philosophers – notably Leibniz and Voltaire – also fomented the spread of Chinese material culture in Europe.⁸ The emphasis on its exotic nature and its constructed timelessness dominated the common European perception of the East until the mid-1860s. The way in which this developed and persisted can be largely attributed to the same phenomenon that caused the paradigm shift: the World’s Fairs in Europe. At the exhibitions in London in 1851 and Paris in 1855, the Chinese exhibitions were put together by Europeans in the spirit of colonisation: alongside “Chinese” landscapes and por-

traits painted by European artists, European consumers were treated to an array of ceramics, lacquered furniture, screens and lanterns.

By the start of the 1870s, a newly signed trade agreement with the Empire of Heaven launched new perspectives for the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, which had no colonies of its own. As a sign of prospering relations, the Monarchy was permitted to send two navy customs officials to China. The Hungarian official, Ödön Faragó, remained in his post for several decades, and his accounts of his journeys within the enormous country were published regularly in the Hungarian press, while the lecture he delivered in Budapest in 1882 also appeared in print.⁹ Improvements in infrastructure, the expansion of sea and rail routes and a significant decrease in prices made it possible for an increasing spectrum of noble and bourgeois scholars, art connoisseurs and adventurers to discover the East. Ágost and József Zichy travelled around the world between 1875 and 1879, and one of the important outcomes of their stay in Japan was the first Hungarian book on Japanese art, which Ágost Zichy published in 1879. The final destination of their trip in 1875–1877 was Siam, China and Japan, and they reported their experiences in a book titled *Travel Memories from China 1876–1877* (Úti emlékek Chinából 1876–1877).¹⁰

Apart from Ödön Faragó, who helped arrange customs clearance for the objects acquired by János Vadoňa, Hungarian scholars, in particular those researching ancient history, directed their interest towards China. The Chinese expedition led by Béla Széchenyi in 1877–1878, whose aim was to locate the Asian ancestors of the Magyars, and the three oriental journeys undertaken by Jenő Zichy in search of the Eastern origins of the Hungarian people, all resulted in a wealth of material objects being brought back to Hungary. Béla Széchenyi’s collection, which is now lost without trace, was exhibited in Nagycenk, while the items collected by Jenő Zichy – from the Caucasus region in 1895, from Turkmenistan in 1896, and, enjoying the greatest level of scientific preparation, from Asia and Siberia in 1897–1898 – were analysed and recorded by the archaeologist Béla Pósta and the ethnographer János Jankó. The pre-Common Era items brought back from the third journey – Chinese bronze mirrors, coins and ceremonial objects – are of questionable provenance. Yet there was also a historical aspect to the oriental objects in the col-

lection of Ödön (Edmund) Zichy (1811–1894), as we can see from the catalogue for the exhibition held in 1876 in support of flood victims.¹¹ In order to substantiate their own ancient origins and their noble ancestry, the Hungarian aristocracy in the nineteenth century frequently relied upon the evidence of Eastern origins. For the descendants of Edmund Zichy, the family genealogy became a national one. The core of the 1876 exhibition, which as yet had just four Japanese and two Chinese relics, was made up of historical pieces owned by the Hungarian aristocracy. The actions that the art-loving father had taken two decades earlier, exhibiting oriental applied art objects together with items pertaining to European history and art history, were in line with common European practice in those days. The contemporary items collected by Jenő Zichy during his expeditions, over 3000 pieces in all, were put on display in the replica of the church in Magyarvalkó (today Văleni, Romania) in the Ethnographic Village at the Millennium Exhibition of 1896; the items were presented as archaeological objects within the context of material relics from Hungarian history, as a genealogical, nation-building gesture, serving political objectives.¹² Besides the debates on the origins of Hungarians, another movement among Hungary's collectors of Eastern art saw oriental artistic output, particularly that of Japan, as a resource for artistic and industrial modernisation. This focus, however, grew ever more distant from the perception of the East held by contemporary Europe.

A Collection of Far-Eastern Objects Serving to Help Modernise Hungary

The collection assembled by János Xántus during his journey to the Far East, consisting of over 2500 objects, was first exhibited in the Department of Natural Sciences at the National Museum. The choice of venue and the way oriental art was received were probably influenced by the defining national (imperial) conceptions, by scholarship, and by the available infrastructure. In the second half of the nineteenth century, there were noticeable differences in the way individual countries judged items from the Orient. In the European reception of Eastern art and in the science-based separation of applied arts from visual arts, the strategy of collection



4. Wicker basket, National Museum of Transylvanian History, Cluj-Napoca, h: 13 cm, d: 36.2 cm max., inv. no: M3868

and interpretation pursued by the South Kensington Museum, based on the industrial, applied art and ethnographic objects acquired at the World's Fair in London in 1851, reflected the colonising ideas of the British Empire. Objects made in the Orient which fitted the European definition of fine art – paintings and sculptures – were placed in the applied art rooms of the museum, while pottery, classified according to the classical European criteria as applied art, was sent to the departments of ethnology and ethnography.¹³ Scholarship and museology in the Germanophone world, similar in many ways, distinguished between *Völkerkunde*, the description of (advanced) cultures in terms of technology and stylistic development, and *Volkskunde*, the material culture of “natural peoples”, banished beyond the confines of historical development, which was placed in the collections of the natural sciences.

We can learn much about Hungary's priorities regarding industrial development, and about the realisation that national development was contingent upon improvements in industry and the arts, from the words of Countess Emma Teleki, widow of Auguste de Gérando and an enthusiastic Hungarian reporter from the World's Fairs: “Japan made a truly splendid appearance at the World's Fair, like a nation which is striving for progress, and which, while preserving its original char-

acter in its tastes, is never averse to reasonable improvement".¹⁴ In parallel with this, modernisation also took place in collecting for the purposes of museums and education, which sought to compile series of samples, in the same way as Vadona. In addition to the warehouses that supported trade, an array of private galleries offered Japanese woodcuts for sale, while studies, portfolios and art albums were all designed to bring oriental aesthetics and values closer to the affluent Western consumer.¹⁵

A further example of how the influence of the Far East on European decorative, industrial and applied arts was perceived in Hungary in the 1870s comes from the pen of Count Ágost Zichy, who in 1879 expressed the idea that would also later imbue the collecting attitude of János Vadona, which was the intimate link between social aspects and industrial development: "the poor [Japanese] man", wrote Zichy, "eats his rice and drinks his tea from a decorated bowl, while on his fan can be seen artistic paintwork or at least a few master strokes".¹⁶ This sociologically sensitive presentation of far-eastern decorative art was not by chance, for it resonated with the cottage industry movement that was gaining an increasing hold on the public imagination in Hungary at the time. This is connected to another member of the Zichy family, Count Jenő Zichy, who put forward the idea of a museum of ethnography and cottage industry

as part of the national exhibition of 1885.¹⁷ Another key player in promoting cottage industries in Hungary was János Xántus, who, via the objects he collected during his journey to the Far East in 1869–1870, had already once established a link between collecting Eastern art and developing cottage industry on the one hand, and improving the practice of museum collecting on the other. Xántus made his next purchases at the World's Fair in Vienna in 1873; János Vadona was familiar with the Japanese and Chinese items obtained here, often using them as references in his own collecting activities.¹⁸

The first important specialist exhibition at the Museum of Industry in Kolozsvár after its opening in 1884 was a ten-day show held in June 1889. On display were the items that János Vadona had collected over a number of years travelling in China and Japan, which, according to the contemporary press, consisted "mainly of modern industrial objects". From a scholarly point of view, the exhibition presented applied-art and artisan (cottage industry) goods mostly from Japan, with a smaller section from China, which later became part of the collection of the Museum of Industry.¹⁹ At present, the only image we have of the Vadona collection comes from the inventory of the objects carried out in 1942. A total of sixty-three Japanese and Chinese objects that can be identified with the collection of János Vadona have survived to this day. They include those made in cottage industries: baskets, wooden spoons and boxes, spindles, wooden plates and vases, woven objects of different sizes, (flower baskets in different shapes and colours); handicrafts: porcelain bowls and plates, papier-mâché dishes; and applied-art objects: soapstone figurines, carved ivory vases, lacquerware boxes, painted wooden panels, and painted silk ribbons.

There is very little biographical information available about the collector himself, and most of what we know is related to his trip around the world, which lasted over three and a half years. János Vadona was a citizen from Kolozsvár, presumably unmarried and childless, as we can infer from the will he made in 1885. The will itself is now lost, but press reports from the time indicate that just before his round-the-world journey, which began at the end of September 1885, he wrote a will stating that, in the event that he should die on his journey, his wealth would be bequeathed to the then-recently formed Transylvanian Carpathian Society. His self-funded journey, lasting three years and seven and a



5. Multi-coloured wicker basket with stand, National Museum of Transylvanian History, Cluj-Napoca, h: 13 cm, d: 15.1 cm, inv. no: M3864

half months, came to an end in mid-April 1889. Just two months later, on 23 June, his – for now temporary – exhibition opened in the Museum of Industry in Kolozsvár, in the premises of the parish building on the main square.²⁰ Newspaper reports project an image of rooms cram-packed with exhibits, referred to by some authors as applied-art and ethnographic items, coming from, among other places, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, China, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Indonesia, Cochinchina (Vietnam), Japan, Java, India and Cambodia. In addition to the “flowers” made from the feathers of South-American birds, which caused the greatest sensation, “the Japanese pictures scattered across the walls also generate much interest”.²¹

The section of Vadona’s collection that we have most knowledge of today – the mainly Japanese and partly Chinese ensemble – is the very section that he as-

sembled for the collection of samples at the Museum of Industry in Kolozsvár. The temporary exhibition, for which there are, as yet, no known photographic records, not only presented the future sample collection, but also many Japanese paintings, as well as hundreds of photographs showing scenes of Chinese and Japanese life and folk art. The reporter for the Kolozsvár journal *Ellenzék* gave a more detailed account of the event than the rest of his fellow critics, and his writings constitute the only set of source materials we have for understanding the nature of the exhibits: “This group of objects, numbering in its thousands, is a rare museum. Each item instructs, very many astonish and amaze the viewer not only with their originality, but also by virtue of their shape and material, and the care, taste and skill employed in making them.”²² Elsewhere he wrote, “Other goods and household items, from brooms to intricately worked rings, by different civilised or semi-civi-

lised peoples of the world; household camphor-wood utensils, clay and porcelain pots, fabrics, canvases, headwear, luxury goods, and items of indulgence are represented in such great variety and quantity that it is not only interesting and pleasing to behold them, yet artists, artisans and laymen alike may learn from them some taste and form.”²³

As we can see from these reports, the Japanese and Chinese applied-art and handicraft objects stood out among the exhibits for both their quality and their quantity. The reason for this can be found in the terms of the commission: unlike the objects that János Vadona acquired elsewhere on his journey, in Japan and China he bought items specifically for the Museum of Industry in Kolozsvár. The ensemble of goods, ordered directly after the Museum of Industry was founded in 1884, constituted part of the museum’s basic collection. The aim of the



6. Reed-shaped pipe, National Museum of Transylvanian History, Cluj-Napoca, l: 18.3 cm, inv. no: M3667

purchase was to display, among the tools of industry, some low-price, high-quality, marketable products that could be adapted to suit Hungary’s means and traditions of manufacturing. The oft-quoted low cost and high quality of Japanese goods served as an example to be followed when making improvements to industry in Hungary at the time. We have no first-hand information about how much the items cost to purchase, and an estimation of their value is only found from 1942, after rule in Transylvania changed hands for the second time, when an inventory was carried out at the Transylvanian Museum of History; the estimates written next to the items formerly in the Museum of Industry are nevertheless informative. By way of comparison, objects that by the 1940s were considered of historic interest were given the following values: a Vilmos Fischer three-pronged candlestick was valued at 30 pengős, while a Herend pierced porcelain fruit bowl was 50 pengős; by contrast, a Japa-

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7. Japanese pierced, carved, decorative cylinder, National Museum of Transylvanian History, Cluj-Napoca, l: 22 cm, d: 3.8 cm, inv. no: M3807

nese wooden spoon was registered with a value of 1 pengő, a Japanese reed instrument 2, a Japanese flower basket 8, and a round, flat, woven basket 5 pengős. Among the most valuable Japanese objects in the inventory of 1942 were two “masterpieces”, described as a “Japanese pierced, carved, decorative cylinder” and a “carved ivory oxcart in a (Japanese) case”, accorded values of 70 and 100 pengős respectively.

During his long journey, Vadona made a thorough tour of Japan, while in China he visited only Hong Kong and Macao, from where he dispatched his far-eastern goods home to Kolozsvár. One of the longest sections of his almost nine-hundred-page report, making up roughly a seventh of its total, consisted of the 106 pages describing Japan (pp. 528–634) and 26 pages on China (pp. 634–660), as reflected in the objects in the



8. Carved ivory oxcart in a (Japanese) case, National Museum of Transylvanian History, Cluj-Napoca, 14.8×13.5×7 cm, inv. no: M4729

collection. The path Vadona took can be clearly reconstructed from his descriptions, and it shows a remarkable similarity to the one followed by János Xántus in 1869–70. Attempts to match Vadona’s route with the surviving objects in the Transylvanian National Museum have not yet proven fruitful, except in the case of one location, a small village called Arrima, about which Vadona wrote: “It was part of an old plan of mine: if one day I made it to Japan, I would seek out the village of bamboo basket-weavers, Arrima. [...] The basket-

who knows no better will seize them with both hands. The bazaars here are always full of such works; at any moment they are poised to flood foreign shops.” He mentions tortoiseshell decorations, various household items, Satsuma ware and Banko ware – items which “were not yet present at the World Exposition in Vienna [in 1873].”²⁵ His concept-based selection of items for the collection of samples is reflected in the notes he made concerning the acquisitions of items that filled in gaps. “Having purchased a hundred types and a thou-



9. Metal teapot, National Museum of Transylvanian History, Cluj-Napoca, h: 19.8 cm, w: 13.4 cm, d: 6.5 cm max., inv. no: M3377. On the bottom of the object the four inventory numbers reflect the history of the collection. In red (5909) the probably original number used by János Vadona. In black (M.A. 552) the inventory number of the Museum of Industry from the end of the 1880s. In black over yellow (VI.2444) the new Hungarian inventory number from the 1940s and finally in black on white the actual inventory number (M3377)

weavers of Arrima are famous for good reason; their works are truly beautiful. Their once low prices have risen since the introduction of the yen.”²⁴ Evidence of his local knowledge and of reading up in advance is apparent from other passages of his memoirs, and the purchases he made were based on a high degree of expertise and on the familiarity with objects from the Far East that he had built up visiting the World’s Fairs across Europe: “This city [Nagasaki] and its environs produce the majority of light-industrial goods destined for European and other markets, they are true market goods. Yet he

sand kinds of objects in Tokyo, which I began to collect in Miyanoshita, Kyoto, Osaka, Kobe, Arrima and Nagasaki, I am returning to Yokohama, where I aim to substitute the missing items. I cannot afford any expensive cabinets; but I have sought to send smaller objects, which demonstrate the same taste and artistry, as samples.”²⁶ Vadona’s collecting activities, which paid equal attention to industrial development, practicality and aesthetics, were exceptional in Hungary, and stood out from the general practice of Hungarian collectors by having the express objective of fostering modernisation.



10. Three-pronged candlestick made for Ottoman Delivery by Vilmos Kolozsvári Fischer, National Museum of Transylvanian History, Cluj-Napoca, h: 41 cm, d: 16 cm, inv. no: M2958

Around the year 1900, at the same time as the school of industry changed its profile and Jenő Radisics was carrying out his reforms in Budapest, the collections of the Museum of Industry began to include contemporary Hungarian and European applied art, and from then on the collecting policy of the Museum of Industry was remarkably similar to that of the Museum of Applied Arts in Budapest. Japanese objects appear once more in the inventory of the Museum of Industry in Kolozsvár between 1911 and 1915: in 1911, a Japanese porcelain vase, an unglazed porcelain cat, a Japanese plate and an antique Japanese pot were bought from the dealership of Henrik Tivadar Rex in Budapest; in 1913, the same dealer supplied a Japanese paper stencil, painted silk, a Japanese hand-painted picture, and ancient Japanese needlework, and in 1915 an item of Japanese basketry. The period between János Vadona's return home in

1889 and the collecting activity in and after 1911 cannot be reconstructed due to a lack of information. The fact that these later acquisitions were made from an art dealer in Budapest indicates a change from Vadona's original strategy.

As so many of the records and materials from the Museum of Industry in Kolozsvár have been lost or destroyed, it seems unlikely that we can ever reconstruct the location, method of presentation, systemisation or chronology of the oriental sample pieces brought to the museum. We may, however, make a reasonable deduc-



11. Kerosene lamp made for Ottoman Delivery by Vilmos Kolozsvári Fischer, National Museum of Transylvanian History, Cluj-Napoca, h: 48.2 cm, d: 14 cm, inv. no: M3618

tion from the collection of János Xántus, who collected East Asian items in accordance with the same instructive attitude. Xántus expressed his objectives as follows: “to obtain, at a moderate cost and to the highest degree possible, from all the industries of the East Asian peoples, not so much expensive and magnificent pieces as cheaper ones, but to acquire many kinds of examples of everything, in many cases just samples.”²⁷ As a result of this collecting activity, samples of wares, and products from cottage industries and applied-art handicrafts, were brought in front of the Hungarian public.²⁸ Combining modernisation with social aspects was also important to Vadona, as he wrote regarding the exhibition of industry in Tokyo: “Even the very poorest can afford to splash out on something fancy, to treat himself to a little luxury to take home from the holy city. They are mostly items from the woodworking industry, every single one a practical object, and this purpose is rarely forgotten by the Japanese manufacturing industry.”²⁹ In the face of Japanese art, regarded as dynamic and open, interest in China waned towards the end of the nineteenth century, and the majority of European travellers, János Vadona among them, would go no further than Hong Kong, which was considered the gateway to China. About the Chinese objects he wrote: “The Chinese excel at silk-weaving, carving, painting and the silk industry, which are carried out by men. They work significant quantities of ivory and tortoiseshell, as well as large amounts of ebony, sandalwood and camphor; for carved art and for beauty accoutrements. Their works of porcelain, cloisonné and lacquer also occupy an outstanding position.”

The role of the Japanese and Chinese objects donated to the Museum of Industry in Kolozsvár as samples to be used in education was gradually supplanted by the logic of market production: “Hungary ought to face the East in its dealings with industry. Our industrial wares will always find a market in that direction,

and be less exposed to competitors than elsewhere. Our industry is already conquering the East. When transportation improves, and proper care is devoted to raising awareness in the provinces of the East, they will favour our industrial goods, and our exports are promised a fine future in this direction.”³⁰ Samples from the Far East which were important for their role in modernisation, economics, industrial development and technology required one approach, but a different kind was needed when it came to exporting to Eastern markets. Manufacturing for the Eastern markets referred, in a more pragmatic and economically rational way, to the markets in Hungary’s immediate neighbours; we may recall the plan drawn up by Keleti and Mudrony, mentioned at the start of this essay. The lines written by Vadona that were quoted above also pertained to an awareness of the Balkan taste; the inclusion in the collection of sample items intended for the Turkish, Romanian, Serbian and Bulgarian markets – “the peoples and nations living beyond our south-eastern borders”, as they were described at the time – was related to a new, commercial layer found within the concept of the East, which was not so far removed from the unrealised blueprint for the Eastern Museum / Museum of Commerce. In Marosvásárhely, the role of the collection of samples of the museum of commerce was taken over by the Museum of Industry there, just as in Kolozsvár, applied-art objects eventually came to predominate. In the original concept put forward by Keleti and Mudrony, the Museum of Industry was described as a complex, future-oriented museum that was attuned to industry and to the idea of development. Alongside ceramics by Vilmos Fischer, who maintained a depot in Kolozsvár and who even supplied the court of the sultan in Istanbul, some museums of industry even featured goods from the cottage industries of the Balkan nations.³¹

NOTES

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¹ Károly Keleti – Soma Mudrony, ‘Emlékirat az iparmúzeum ügyében’ [‘Memorandum on the matter of the museum of industry’], in *Jelentések és javaslatok Budapesten létesítendő Műszaki Iparmúzeum*

tárgyában. [Reports and recommendations concerning the Museum of Technological Industry to be established in Budapest.] 1881, 8–9.

² See the study by Jenő Murádin in the present volume (ed.).

³ Bincsik 2009, 53.

⁴ Fajcsák 2008, 26–27.

⁵ Fajcsák 2008, 27–28.

⁶ Bincsik 2009, 59–60. The transcript of Pulszky’s presentation is printed in an annex: 174–175.

- ⁷ Fajcsák 2008, 18–19, 25. This kind of interest can be found in aristocratic collections in Hungary at the time, such as the three rooms in Eszterháza, decorated with lacquered wood, that are mentioned in a description of the mansion from 1832. Fajcsák 2008, 16.
- ⁸ Bincsik 2009, 25.
- ⁹ Fajcsák 2008, 42.
- ¹⁰ Ágost Zichy, *Tanulmány a japáni művészetről. Építészet, szobrászat, festészet.* [An essay on Japanese art. Architecture, sculpture and painting.] Budapest, 1879. Ágost Zichy, Észleletek és elmélkedések Japán felett. [Observations and reflections on Japan.] *Földrajzi Közlemények*, 1879 (7.), 89–109. Gróf Széchenyi Béla Keletázsiai útjának tudományos eredménye 1877–1880 [The scientific results of Count Béla Széchenyi's journey to East Asia 1877–1880], I–III, Budapest, 1890–1897. See also: Gusztáv Kreitner, *Gróf Széchenyi Béla keleti utazása India, Japán, China, Tibet és Birma országokban.* [The oriental travels of Count Béla Széchenyi in the lands of India, Japan, China, Tibet and Burma.], Budapest, 1882 and Lajos Lóczy, *A geológiai megfigyelések leírása és eredményei gróf Széchenyi Béla keletázsiai útjából.* [Description and results of the geological observations from Count Béla Széchenyi's journey to East Asia.], Budapest, 1890. Géza Bernáth, *Keletázsiai utazás.* [Journey to East Asia.], Pest, 1873. Arnold Vértesi, *A fölkelő nap országa.* [The land of the rising sun.], Budapest, 1878. Gyula Lázár, *Khina és Japán: Társadalmi és művelődési rajz.* [China and Japan: A social and cultural picture.], Budapest, 1880.
- ¹¹ *Műipari és történeti kiállítás* [Exhibition of industry and history], 1876.
- ¹² Katalin Sinkó, 'A valóság története, avagy a történelem valósága. A milleneumi ünnep historizmusá'. ['The history of reality, or the reality of history. The historicism of the Millennium celebrations.'] in: *Lélek és forma. Magyar művészet 1896–1914.* [Spirit and form. Hungarian art 1896–1914.], Budapest, 1986, 14; Katalin Sinkó, *A magyar műgyűjtés 1850 után – a magángyűjteményi kiállítások tükrében. Válogatás magyar magángyűjtőktől.* [Art collecting in Hungary after 1850 – as seen through exhibitions of private collections. A selection of Hungarian private collectors.], Budapest, 1981, 15.
- ¹³ Partha Mitter and Craig Clunas, 'The Empire of Things: The Engagement with the Orient', in *A Grand Design: The Art of the Victoria and Albert Museum*, London, 1997.
- ¹⁴ De Gerandóné Teleki Emma, *Fővárosi lapok*, 1878, issue 251, 1216.
- ¹⁵ It was in connection with this that the phrase *Japonism* was first used, by Philippe Burty in 1872, who devoted a series of articles to the phenomenon in the periodical *La Renaissance littéraire et artistique*. Bincsik 2009, 38.
- ¹⁶ Katalin Gellér, 'Japanizmus a magyar festészetben és grafikában' ['Japanism in Hungarian painting and graphic art'], *Ars Hungarica* 17, 1989 (2), 179.
- ¹⁷ Bellák 1986, 22.
- ¹⁸ Mária Kresz, 'A magyar népművészet felfedezése' ['The discovery of Hungarian folk art'], *Etnographia*, year 79, 1968 (1), 1–36.
- ¹⁹ *Értéktő a Kolozsvári Erdélyrészi Technológiai Iparmúzeum, az Államilag Segélyezett Építő-, Fa-, és Vas-Ipari Tannúhelyek s a Központi Felsőbb Szakipar-Rajziskola Működéséről az 1887/8–1889/90. Tanévekben.* [Bulletin on the operations of the Kolozsvár Transylvanian Museum of Technological Industry, the state-supported study workshops for the construction, timber and iron industries and the central superior vocational school of drawing in the academic years 1887/8–1889/90.], 1890, 25.
- ²⁰ Ritkaságok a föld minden pontjáról. [Curiosities from every corner of the world.], *Ellenzék*, 24 June 1889, year 10, 588.
- ²¹ Vadona János Kiállítása. [The exhibition of János Vadona.] *Erdélyi Híradó*, 25 June 1889, 4.
- ²² Ritkaságok a föld minden pontjáról. [Curiosities from every corner of the world.], *Ellenzék*, 24 June 1889, year 10, 588.
- ²³ Ritkaságok a föld minden pontjáról. [Curiosities from every corner of the world.], *Ellenzék*, 24 June 1889, year 10, 588.
- ²⁴ Vadona 1893, 598.
- ²⁵ Vadona 1893, 603.
- ²⁶ Vadona 1893, 628.
- ²⁷ Xántus 1871, 2. Fajcsák 2008, 50.
- ²⁸ Fajcsák 2008, 41
- ²⁹ Vadona 1893, 553.
- ³⁰ Ki a földet körül utazta. [The man who travelled round the world.], *Ellenzék*, 25 June 1889, year 10, 592.
- ³¹ Johanna Bónis, *A Székelyföldi Iparmúzeum* [The Transylvanian Museum of Industry], 2003, 81–82.

Bibliography and General Abbreviations

General Abbreviations

- BFL = Budapest Fővárosi Levéltár (Budapest City Archives)
MNL–OL = Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár – Országos Levéltár
(Hungarian National Archives, Budapest)
MNW = Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie (National Museum,
Warsaw)
MOB = Műemlékek Országos Bizottsága (National Committee
of Historic Monuments, 1881–1949)
OMF = Országos Műemléki Felügyelőség (National Monument
Protection Agency, Hungary, 1957–1992)
ZÖIV = Zeitschrift des Österreichischen Ingenieur- und
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