

**“BABEŞ-BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY
“CULTURE, CIVILIZATION, HISTORY” DOCTORAL SCHOOL**

**THE RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF NAGYVÁRAD IN THE 18TH CENTURY**

ABSTRACT OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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The Residential Buildings of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Nagyvárad in the 18th Century

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The Baroque group of buildings of the Roman Catholic cathedral, the bishop's palace and the houses of canons is well known to art historians. However, the wider range of activities of the bishop's building workshop employing a large number of foreign artists and craftsmen for over two decades (1752-1776) and that of the other masters working for the bishop's court, and their influence on the other orders in the region has not been researched.

We know little about the antecedents of the works picking up at the middle of the century, that is, the building work implemented in the first half of the 18th century and the artistic products belonging to them, due to the small number of surviving documents; on the other hand, because of the inferiority of their quality to the widely known main works, the attention of researchers was not drawn to them.

The process by which on the former occupied territories the reorganised Roman Catholic dioceses accomplished the architectural programs based on the principles of Counter-Reformation seem quite similar if we evaluate this activity controlled on the central level of empire. However, the excellent late Baroque works were preceded by works reflecting local conditions about which, with a few exceptions, we know little.

Such was the situation of the Nagyvárad diocese restored in 1692 where we only had partial knowledge about the bishop's buildings of the first half of the 18th century. The gradual strengthening and expansion of the Roman Catholic Church, supported with consistent political decisions is illustrated the most by the growth in scale of the residential buildings. The more and more adventurous ideas and plans could rely on a more secure financial situation, which was the result of a number of well-thought-out economic decisions made at the beginning of the century.

The widespread episcopal property provided great profit through its natural resources already in the first years after the restitution, however, the bigger scale constructions only began

after the Rákóczy revolution and Bishop Count Imre Csáky's (1702-1732) arrival at Várad (1712).

A key issue of the process of reconstruction, in addition to economic measures, was the building of the new cathedral and developing the properties of the religious institutions in the centre of the diocese and in the country. The first bishops of the diocese hoped for the restoration of the diocese centre, to make it appear worthy of its traditions in its architectural framework, in different locations, mostly on the ruins of the prestigious medieval St. Ladislaus cathedral in the castle. However, this clashed with the intentions of the War Council, and even the decade that passed between the two attempts did not bring the hoped-for approval.

Of Bishop Ágoston Benkovich's (1696-1702) abode we only know that its plot was on the main square of the Olaszi district of the city on the right bank of the Körös river, in the former St. Egidius street where he built a small temporary church with a wooden tower to serve as the cathedral of the early years.

Bishop Imre Csáky (1702–1732) eventually chose a particular solution to the problem when he built his probably U-shaped mansion enclosing a rectangular courtyard south of the city on Szalka puszta, at the end of the 1720's. Its designer is unknown and we do not have information on the construction either. He moved into the completed section shortly before his death in 1732 and could still see the slowly rising walls of the cathedral behind the palace. We have no detailed resources on the building of the mansion—the bishop's future summer residence—erected in the centre of the estate in Belényes.

We know even less of the residences of his very briefly reigning successors. János Okolicsányi (1734-1736), although at first went on with the construction on Szalka hill, with a new architectural concept, summoned Italian architect Fortunato de Prati from Buda to Várad to determine the location of a new cathedral, seminary and episcopal residence and to design the buildings. He started the building of a small manor near Várad in Biharpüspöki, which was further developed and used as a temporary residence by his successors.

Bishop Count Miklós Csáky is the first whose palace we know more about, built in the heart of the "Újváros" (New Town), which pertained to the chapter. He settled into his residence created from the buying of several adjacent plots and houses opposite the St. Ladislaus church built from the early 1720's, and functioning as the cathedral. The one-storey building built with

two inner courtyards was created presumably based on chamber architect Fortunato de Prati's plans or suggestions, between 1737 and 1744, in several phases.

Bishops Pál Forgách (1747-1758) and Ádám Patachich (1759-1776) also mainly used this residence—sometimes the buildings in Biharpüspöki and Belényes—as their main residences. Its appearance and layout at the time can be reconstructed in detail based on the 18th century drawings of the group of buildings.

While Bishop Forgách focused the construction potential of the diocese on building the new cathedral, Patachich focused on the construction of a much larger scale palace, and commissioned Franz Anton Hillebrandt to design it. In addition he expanded his residence in the Újváros, and he rebuilt his manor in Belényes based on the plans of Johann Michael Neumann, the architect contracted for the new constructions.

The splendid Baroque group of buildings including the cathedral, the bishop's palace and the prebendal houses was finished in the third quarter of the century. This concludes the last, symbolically most important part of the reconstruction process, which by the middle of the century could be considered practically complete.

The primary written sources on these constructions, the accountability statements, give detailed insight into the activities of craftsmen working on the sites. The slow rebuilding of the destroyed settlement could mean secure employment to only a few masters at first. In Nagyvárad the conditions under which a substantial number of foreign craftsmen could have settled were not created later either. The major construction projects of the 18th century were almost all linked to the Catholic Church, the other denominations only got similar opportunities in the last third of the century, and the bourgeoisie and the nobility of the town and its surroundings did not constitute a permanent clientele like those of Kolozsvár or Marosvásárhely.

Since the unfolding of the local construction crafts was provided mainly by the construction sites of the Catholic Church, it is natural that in the census of the first half of the 18th century we find the same craftsmen as in the accountability documents of the church constructions.

About the first third of the century we only have sparse data, however, from 1737-1738, beginning with the construction of the bishop's palace in the "Újváros" (the New Town), the

activity of the local and foreign craftsmen can be tracked down quite precisely. Of the three stonemasons and one sculptor who arrived at the end of the 30's, two craftsmen remained in Várad, while a stonemason and a second generation painter moved on a few years later to Kolozsvár, which provided better opportunities. From the craftsmen who settled in this earlier period, the partial reconstruction of the work of Georg Erlach stonemason, Joseph Wagner sculptor, and later Franz Eberhardt was possible.

We know a few specifics of Erlacher's work, while those of Wagner that are present in the sources were destroyed, or have not emerged yet. The oeuvre of his successor in his workshop, the hitherto lesser-known Franz Eberhardt gets outlined from Várad to the heart of Transylvania. Erlach and Wagner worked at the episcopal construction sites at the beginning of their activities in Várad, while Franz Schuszter and Johann Steierer worked with a team of wealthy Újváros (New Town) craftsmen.

In the early fifties Bishop Pál Forgách contracted for his more daring construction plans, chamber architect Franz Anton Hillebrandt and builder Giovanni Battista Ricca and his Italian team of stonemasons. The workshop lead by head stonemason Domenico Luchini took over, besides the work on the cathedral, other construction projects of the episcopate, and their contribution can be detected in the service of the rural Catholic nobility and in the church buildings funded independently from the bishop. The establishment of some of the members of the stonemasons' team (which was organised based on family relations) in Várad is well attested, just like the way the carpenters from Pest lead by Blasius Ruttensteiner, invited to work on the cathedral, or the stonemasons who came to build the new palace under Bishop Patachich, lead by Joseph Ganhier, became citizens of Várad. Unlike the stonemasons and carpenters coming from abroad, the other works on the buildings were made by glaziers, blacksmiths, locksmiths and potters of the local bourgeoisie.

In the light of the sources, the activity of already known foreign masters could be fully described, thus the new bishop's palace in the Újváros turned out to be chamber architect Fortunato da Prati's design, while the former Bányka (Little Lamb) Inn can be assumed to be architect András Mayerhoffer's from Pest. We found out that Giovanni Battista Ricca designed the building next to the new construction site for the Italian stonemasons that still stands, and we believe him to be the designer of the chapel of the Order of the Hospitallers in Nagyvárad, and the Roman Catholic parish churches in Micske and Belényes. We could identify architect Johann

Michel Neumann's first known designs. We managed to track down more works made in Nagyvárad of the Bavarian painter commissioned to create the monumental frescoes of the new group of buildings: thus the oil paintings made for the Nagyvárad Hospitallers and one of the altar pieces of the Ursuline chapel.

All these results are summarised in my work in two chapters. On the one hand, I endeavoured to present in detail the thus far unknown memories of the residential constructions preceding the late Baroque bishop's palace: the demolished old episcopal palace in the Újváros (New Town), the largely rebuilt mansions in Belényes and Biharpüspöki used as a summer residence, and the Greek Catholic dean's, and later bishop's residence in Várad built by the Roman Catholic episcopate. Another objective was to make a list-like enumeration of the local and foreign craftsmen and artists working on the different construction sites of the diocese.

My work was greatly defined and facilitated by the fact that the research of the Nagyvárad Baroque has extended antecedents to rely on. József Biró defended his doctoral dissertation on this topic based on a detailed analysis of archival sources in 1932. In his work entitled *Baroque and Neoclassical Art of Nagyvárad* he carried out the analysis and evaluation of seven Baroque and some Classicist groups of buildings and their interiors based on art historical interpretation of the sources as well as in the context of contemporary Hungarian and European art phenomena. Biró, without considerable antecedents, using archival sources, did a fundamental study that to this day is essential to researchers studying this topic. Largely following this, later work recorded the main characteristics which determined the constructions encompassing artistic activity with coinciding results: major periods, customers' needs, the presence of foreign artists and craftsmen. These researchers focused their fields of study obviously on discussing the artistic monuments of outstanding value. The resulting picture shows an incoherent chain of episodic activities of foreign artists and craftsmen, as Biró put it: the art history of Nagyvárad is more a history of artists and objects... The results of my research do not fundamentally change this situation, but they reveal the less dramatic processes and actors of the art historical phenomena, thus showing a more coherent picture of the artistic phenomena accompanying the 18th century rebuilding of the Roman Catholic diocese of Nagyvárad.