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CURRENT ISSUES OF IRONWORK IN HUNGARY
BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS
IN THE LIGHT OF THE WORK OF BANDI SCHIMA A. APPLIED ARTIST,
GOLDEN WREATHED MASTER

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The legacy of the craftsman Bandi Schima A.¹, a golden wreathed master came into the possession of the former Xántus János Museum in Győr, today the Rómer Flóris Museum of Art and History three years after his death, in 1962. In 2013, as an art historian of the institution, I became acquainted with the voluminous artistic legacy that was only partially inventoried. In addition to the objects of fine and applied arts, my research interest was aroused by the written and printed set of documents containing the relics of the half-past, which lay in a completely disordered, scattered form. Most of the legacy has been added to the local history collection of the museum without specification, which has an undefined collecting sphere independent of quality and artistic value. In addition to the documentary material, the entire fine and applied arts part also shared this fate. Pieces from the artist's library were separated from the legacy and placed in the museum library, and his valuable photographic legacy was placed in the institution's photo collection. In my experience the classification of a significant part of the material into the local history collection, had a negative effect on the whole further fate history and judgment of the legacy, as it was classified as a local curiosity instead irrespective of its uniqueness and true artistic value. Even the museologist colleagues in charge of the collection considered the legacy to be a barely appreciable, problematic collection unit beyond its local aspects, and also the collective memory did not go much further in its evaluation. His person is undoubtedly divisive. The acquaintances of the artist, his former students, and the owners of his works, almost without exception, spoke and speak in a voice of rapture about the fanatical, lonely master living for his own work. Others, especially those familiar with his political views, saw and see an extreme, eccentric figure in him.

The material of Bandi Schima A.'s extremely rich artistic heritage ranges from the early study drawings, plans, sketches and works from Arad, Bratislava and Berlin at the beginning of his career to about 200 pieces of blacksmithing and applied arts objects. The oeuvre includes ecclesiastical and secular, decorative, memorial and utility objects. This core material is complemented organically by a collection that reveals superior technical knowledge, executed in about 530, mostly independent graphics and an almost invaluable collection of written and printed documents by an artist with a strong historical consciousness. This latter, huge part of material includes extensive personal and official correspondence relating to orders and works, a collection of contemporary newspaper articles, posters, and brochures, and several volumes

¹The artist was born under the name AndrásSchima. He used the name BandiSchima from 1919, when he settled in Győr. In the name BandiSchima A. used in the dissertation, the two name variants were merged.

of a collection of motifs used in the works, as well as pieces of his scattered library. In addition, hundreds of unique, drawn postcards decades before the so-called Mail Art are an integral part of the oeuvre, so as the more than 5,000 photographs and glass negatives documenting the artist's life and work. In addition to his own works, the artist also collected recordings of the works of his famous contemporaries, which were also included in his legacy.

At the end of his life, Bandi Schima A. made a serious effort to systematize his legacy and to collect his earlier (but could still be found – szerintem ez nem kell) works. In order to place them in the museum in Győr, he negotiated and was in constant working contact with the then director of the museum, András Uzsoki.

In contrast to the semi-official promises he had received in his lifetime, his legacy has never been presented in the context of the permanent local history exhibition. From October 1968, in the first local history exhibition of the Xántus János Museum, a corner furnished as a small workshop evoked the artist's memory with a pair of tools and some randomly selected wrought iron and bronze works that revealed nothing about the true value of the artist's heritage. However, the detail evoking Bandi Schima A. has been completely omitted from the concept of the museum's next permanent local history exhibition, reorganized in March 1971. The last permanent exhibition of the Xántus János Museum, which was on display unchanged until 2015, was (held) opened in 1989. In this exhibition, the organizers of the exhibition - to the extent of a showcase - remembered the person and work of the golden wreathed master, who had been shown as a man from Győr, with a few photographs and a few small objects in the part of the exhibition commemorating the local handicraft industry. The artistic legacy has been practically resting in the museum warehouses since 1962. Inventory books show that in 1966, the more valuable part of the legacy, the larger artefacts, and the more spectacular designs were registered in one batch. Excluded from this inventory were, among other things, sketches, simpler designs, the entire printed and written legacy, including hand-drawn postcards of special value. Uninventoried, disorderly and mostly forgotten, they lay in the depths of the museum warehouses, and their existence was known almost exclusively to the responsible museologist for decades. On a civil initiative, a temporary exhibition accompanied by a leaflet catalogue opened in May 2000 from a small fragment of the vast graphic material preserved in the legacy in the modest temporary exhibition space of the Rómer House belonging to the museum.

In 2009, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Xántus János Museum, a small but this time a high-quality selection of the artist's most important works was on display in the local history temporary exhibition of “The City and its Inhabitants”.

In connection with the restoration of the trade sign of the well-known Golden Ship Pharmacy in the city centre, the local press wrote several times about Schima A. Bandi in 1979, 1988, and then in 1990. From time to time, local historians from Győr dealt with the artist to the extent of a brief study, with the most attention-grabbing purpose and typically in the sound of bias, without any serious repercussions. The most factual, most objective writings came to light from the pen of the late local historian György Veszprémi in the early 1990s, who processed the material of the Győr County Archives professionally, thematically and systematically². Károly Perekházy, a prominent researcher of Hungarian ironwork, always praised the master of Győr in his pioneering articles on blacksmithing. In his basic work entitled *Wrought Iron Art in Hungary* and in his study entitled *The Work of Our Golden Wreathed Masters of Locksmiths*, some important works of Bandi Schima A. were mentioned. In all probability, the unprocessed nature of the diverse subject and the more difficult access to the artist's oeuvre can be attributed to the fact that although the work of the artist was monitored by the specialist thoroughly, he did not deal with it in more depth.

In 2002, the artist's nursed-son, dr. János Rádai created the first illustrated pictorial catalogue of Bandi Schima A., which presented a beautiful and significant selection of the artist's most important known works.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the extraordinary richness of the legacy, the (art historical) profession is still indebted with a comprehensive, all-encompassing elaboration, such as the creation of an item catalogue of the basic artefacts, by the inclusion of the entire written and material legacy, and by the contextualization of the oeuvre in the history of industrial history and applied arts.

In 2017, the museologists of several disciplines, art historians, historians and local historians of the Rómer Flóris Museum of Art and History, undertook to enumerate and systematize the artistic heritage left untidy, damaged as a result of unprofessional storage, scattered and mixed up, thus creating the basic conditions for professional processing.

The first major achievement was the artist's collection exhibition, completed between September 2017 and January 2018, accompanied by a representative catalogue, organized by

²György Veszprémi: *Schima A. Bandi iparművész, Magyarország aranykorszak mestere*. Győri Városszépítő Füzetek IV., 1990, 52–64.

the museum, which was the first in a series of exhibitions professionally presenting the entire oeuvre by genre.³

Thanks to the highly successful exhibition held in the Hungarian Ispita building in Győr and the professional processing of the oeuvre that has continued since then, the life and work of the applied artist Schima A. Bandi has been included into the Győr-Moson-Sopron County Treasury, and the ciborium and monstrance preserved in the Roman Catholic parish of Csorna into the Treasury of the city. The wall of his former home in the Zombor Street in Győr has been decorated with a memorial plaque since November 2019 at the initiative of the museum. The artist's works have since been regularly featured in historical exhibitions organized by the institution and have been effectively incorporated into the consciousness of audiences interested in local art.

The sixty years that have passed since the artist's death have undoubtedly proven that the subject is worthy of the ongoing professional and scientific elaboration. The lasting artistic values of the legacy are clearly outlined, which, in addition to its important historical, local, sociological, social historical and ideological aspects, also gives the artist a prestigious place in the history of Hungarian (industry) crafts and applied arts.

The primary goal of my doctoral dissertation was to conduct an all-encompassing, experience-based fact-finding basic research on the life and artistic work of the applied artist Bandi Schima A., golden wreathed master. Following the Bacon inductive research pattern commonly used in such cases, my goal was to establish well-founded, new information. That is why I have placed great emphasis on illustrations, credible presentation and factual presentation of the available source documents and data in all the topics I am interested in. For the sake of objectivity and professional credibility, following the methods of document and content analysis, I first conducted thorough source research. This was followed by a comparison through analytical and synthesizing research and finally by parallel domestic and foreign contemporaries in order to formulate final conclusions. In the course of my research work, I considered the multi-aspect interpretation and source-critical treatment of the available huge documentary material to be of key importance, keeping in mind the appreciations and analyzes that appeared about the artist.

I started my research by processing the documents in the Local History Collection of the Rómer Flóris Museum of Art and History in Győr and in the Archives of Győr-Moson-Sopron

³EmesePápai (ed.): *Schima A. Bandi iparművész, aranykoszorús mester (1882-1959)*, Rómer Flóris Művészeti és Történelmi Múzeum, Győr, 2018..

County, the Archives of the Military History Museum, the Győr Evangelical Parish, the Diocesan Library and Treasury of Győr. In parallel with the archival research, I researched community, church and civilian artefacts in various locations, documenting them, in order to compile a database of artefacts as complete as possible, which I intend to use as part of an oeuvre catalogue in the near future.

As an expert on the subject, I work with countless civil and private individuals and collectors on an ongoing basis. Since it is an extremely well-documented, representative career - both by himself and the contemporary press -, wherever I could I followed the system of processing the most important assignments and works in chronological order. In many cases, however, the simple, linear follow-up of events is overridden by the specific internal logic of the oeuvre, which is organized around a specific or recurring theme or subject that has occupied the artist for a long time. In some chapters of the dissertation, I dealt in depth with key topics and events that significantly influenced the artist's life and artistic career. Among these, the artist's youthful masterpiece, the *Carpathian Guard*, deserves a special place, with which he earned the title of golden wreathed master in 1932, and whose preparation, transformation and fate he was intensely engaged in until his death.

Among the liturgical objects commissioned by the Church I mainly analyzed the collections of objects related to the newly built parishes in the chapter *Church Orders* of my dissertation, while in the *Church Art Between the Two World Wars* section I discuss well-documented works that are extremely characteristic and thus are suitable for drawing general consequences for the whole oeuvre.

In addition to focusing on the chosen artist and oeuvre, I considered it absolutely necessary to have a multi-aspect study with placing the topic in a broader context. Schima A. Bandi's life and diversified, multidisciplinary work can be effectively imagined only in the broad context of history, local history, sociology, political history and social history from the point of view of art history. My researches and conclusions are clearly and first of all relevant from the point of view of my profession: the art history. Kutatásaim és következtetésem nyilvánvalóan elsősorban saját szakmám, művészettörténetem szempontjából relevánsak. On the other hand, the story is densely interwoven with the parallel narratives. The historical and economic cataclysms of the period between the two World Wars, as well as the radical changes in the society that experienced and suffered from it, are inseparable from the subject and preclude a narrow-minded examination of the subject. In any case, the pages of my dissertation refer to aspects outside my profession only (in terms) as far as they were necessary for understanding the multifaceted topic. The complexity of the topic and its

valuable relevance from several points of view still provide ample opportunity for the subsequent studies of other approaches and also for micro-historical researches.

**Bandi Schima A. (November 23, 1882 - April 5, 1959) the
career of applied artist and golden wreathed master**

„[...] The last third of the 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th century (after the Baroque) were the half-century when Hungarian artistic blacksmithing was known and valued in Europe, when our blacksmiths were among the best in Europe.”⁴- stated Károly Perekházy about the period from the second half of the 19th century to the Second World War.

Bandi Schima A. , (who became a man from Győr, - ???) was a prominent representative of the last generation of blacksmiths who grew from an artisan into an artist at the turn of the 19th century. The artist was born under the name of András Schima on November 23, 1882 in Orosháza, as the third child of machine locksmith Károly Schima and Katalin Baumann. The artist completed his elementary school at the Roman Catholic Folk School in Szépfalva, Arad County in the autumn of 1895. After completing six elementary and two years civilian studies, in 1897, the young man with excellent drawing skills became a student at the Arad State Vocational School of Wood and Metal Industry. A year later, at the age of 16, he lost his beloved mother. After the tragedy that befell the family, his father, (citing) due to financial reasons, wanted to stop the vocational training of his son and wanted to employ him as an assistant in his own machine workshop. The young man's school principal, Aladár Nesnera, on the other hand, helped him with a scholarship, so in 1901 he was able to finish his four-year industrial school.

After graduating from vocational school, András Schima worked in the Arad machine factory for three years as a locksmith. Then he embarked on a study trip to Berlin, where he perfected his skills for two years in the most famous blacksmith workshops in the German capital and in blacksmith courses for craftsmen with the scholarship of Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Arad. After his return, in September 1906 he began his twenty-year career as an industrial teacher and as an assistant manager at the Royal Hungarian State Vocational School of Metal Industry in Bratislava. In the early 1910s Bandi Schima A.'s early masterpieces were made in the workshop of this well-equipped institution.

⁴Károly Perekházy: Műkovácsképzés a Bach.korszaktól a II. világháborúig. *Művészettörténeti Értesítő*, 1978/1, 58.

The artist was transferred to Győr in November 1919, after the Czech invasion of Bratislava. Until his retirement in 1927, he was a lecturer at the Royal Hungarian State Vocational School of Wood and Metal Industry in Győr. In his new residence, in 1922, he became a member of the Győr Fine and Applied Arts Society, where he held several important functions until 1937. Between 1925 and 1937, he served as the Society's secretary of applied arts. In addition to teaching and working, he devoted his time and energy to organizing and managing the exhibitions of the art society. During this period, his works were featured in all the exhibitions of the Society.

After a 20-year teaching career, the artist applied for his retirement in 1927. From the early 1930s, Bandi Schima A. worked as a self-employed person in his own workshop in Zombor Street. After his early studies in Berlin (1904–1906), the master went on a study trip abroad twice. First in 1928 as a scholarship holder for the daily newspaper “Est”, when he went from Vienna to Paris through Nuremberg, and secondly in 1936, when he went from Venice to Rome and to Sicily with the help of a scholarship from the Italian Federazione Nazionale Degli Artigiani. During his travels, in addition to his conscientious study of museums, galleries, and monuments, he visited numerous contemporary workshops to gain experience, which he described in detail in his travel diaries. These experiences left their mark on the artist's later works, and also provided an opportunity to me to look out and contextualize his oeuvre in Western European context during my dissertation.

Thanks to a wave of modern church building upsurge between the two World Wars, about 80% of Schima A. Bandi's works were made to answer orders by the church, and many of them are still in use to this day. A wide range of liturgical objects, representative memorabilia, prizes, wandering prizes, sports prizes (are) represents the most beautiful pieces that can be most appreciated in terms of applied art in the artistic oeuvre. In addition to large works, Bandi Schima A., like her colleagues, created large quantities of unique memorabilia, ornaments, gifts, and utility items for more discerning civilian customers. The artist's own trademark is the naturalistically shaped rose motif, which was especially popular in the era and is endlessly varied in its decorative, memorabilia and utility objects.

In 1951, at his own request, the business license of the increasingly ill Bandi Schima A. was revoked. From then on, he (made fulfilling) fulfilled only smaller assignments. In 1956, he lost his beloved wife, who was his permanent partner also in the realisation of large-scale orders. From then until his death in 1959, he turned his attention to compiling and writing the

volumes of *Mikrokozmoszom*⁵, which contain the most important events of his life, including his artistic creed, and was richly illustrated with drawings and pictures. Beside this he was busy with putting together and arranging his artistic legacy. At the end of his life, as part of an interview during a workshop visit, he was covered by the local newspapers as an undeservedly forgotten, marginalized artist. In 1958, the staff of the Hungarian Television shot for three days in his workshop, in which resulted a 10-minute film newscast.

In early 1959, the artist's health finally deteriorated. After a brief illness, he died on April 5 at the University Clinic in Budapest. He rests in a cenotaph in the public cemetery in Győr.

The name of Bandi Schima A. - thanks to Károly Lyka - appears in the *Thieme-Becker Art Lexicon*⁶, thanks to Nándor Salamon in the *Kisalföld Art Lexicon*⁷, while he was left out of the *Hungarian Art Lexicon* edited by Anna Zádor and István Genthon⁸. The artist was still alive in 1956, when several of his works were declared protected. Since then, the protection has been extended to several other works, including the trade sign of the *Golden Ship* and *Thrush's Nest* in Győr.

Bearing in mind the contemporary careers in the capital and the countryside, presented in parallel in the dissertation, it can be stated that the example of Bandi Schima A. is not unique in terms of Hungarian blacksmithing or applied arts between the two World Wars. Like many of his contemporaries, he formed himself into an applied artist with a continuous self-education and unbroken diligence, starting from a workshop environment. He deserves the attention and recognition of posterity not primarily because of his systematic studies, but because of his talent and perseverance and his extremely diverse and incredibly rich oeuvre, that is the result of his personal qualities alone. His creative style, like that of his contemporaries, is rooted in the eclectic approach of the 19th century and in the traditions of the Hungarian blacksmith craft of European standard. As a creator, he did not chase new forms of expression and did not follow current trends in taste. In his artistic career, both in design and execution, he was guided by traditional values, conscientious thoroughness and professional perfection, which, in turn, was not always accompanied by impeccable taste. My research proves that this kind of traditional, value-centric approach is followed by the majority of Hungarian and European blacksmiths and craftsmen working in this period, forcibly adapting to the eclectic needs of the “neo-baroque” society between the two World

⁵In the second half of the 1950s, Bandi Schima A. organized the events of his life and the history of his artistic career into volumes, which title was *Mikrokozmoszom* III-VIII.

⁶Thieme-Becker, 1936, volume XXX., 72.

⁷Nándor Salamon: *Kisalföldi Művészeti Lexikon*, 2012, 312.

⁸Anna Zádor–István Genthon: *Művészeti Lexikon I-IV.*, Akadémia Kiadó, Bp., 1968.

Wars. Instead of innovative, experimental, modern endeavours, they preferred traditional forms and techniques in their work. Instead of novelty and form-breaking invention, professionalism and perfect workmanship were practiced to a master level.

Bandi Schima A., like his contemporary “applied artists” struggling for a living, did not have much opportunity to prove his openness to modernity, declared his views primarily in his artistic writings. That is why his few completed and well-known works are significant, which he realized not at the request of the customers, but at their own discretion, on the basis of independent plans of his own. The best known of these is the crucifix made of iron, can be found in the Győr-Nádorváros Lutheran Church. He made it for the Milan Triennial of Ecclesiastical Art in 1940, which deservedly won the recognition of the profession and experts as I detailed in my dissertation.

In the period between the two World Wars, with the turn to industrial production, a large number of domestic and foreign applied artists, including the blacksmiths having an independent workshop, proper workshop environment and a sound customer base could provide for a relatively stable livelihood. Mass-produced metal products, consumer goods - which in most cases had to do with industry and not art - temporarily guaranteed the survival of businesses. Bandi Schima A., on the other hand, did not have that workshop infrastructure and capacity to make this opportunity available. To be able to stay in the competition and get an order, in countless cases he worked almost at material costs and overhead, with minimal profit. Frequent inflation of the period did not favour his financial situation either. Sometimes, even at large orders, such as the church works in Komárom, the altarpieces of the Pannonhalma Abbey or the main gate of the Győr Basilica, he had long and awkward correspondence with the customers to pay the production costs, which consumed a lot of time and energy of him. Instead of a good business sense and an ability to assert himself, his driving force was his love of work and vocation accompanied by a naive idealism, which made his lonely struggle difficult throughout his life and also condemned his works intended to be masterpieces. Considering the careers of those golden wreathed blacksmith masters which are the most parallel to Bandi Schima A., it can be stated that, whether they were practicing their job in the capital or in the countryside, their integration into the profession of applied artist wasn't an easy task. Károly Perekó made many serious efforts in the 1970s and 1990s to search for and recognize the careers of the masters living in the capital. His thoroughly documented, authentic articles, studies and monographs processed the oeuvre of the largely forgotten locksmiths working in Budapest between the two World Wars, bringing them back from the gloom of obscurity. However, his rich work is strongly based on

Budapest. If his research is directed at country masters, such as Bandi Schima A., he mentioned them in several places and in many respects, but only to the extent of one or two acknowledgment. In any case, the artist's talent, as well as his works that have become classic in recent decades, such as: the gates of the Győr Basilica, trade signs in Győr, his works in the Komárom and Kapuvár churches, his liturgical objects in the churches of Győr and its surrounding, assigned him an important place in the Hungarian and European history of forging between the two World Wars.

He was not a style-creating master, and apart from his godson, Jr. Nándor Hável, who, although talented, presumably eventually left the profession, he did not raise disciples in his workshop in the classical sense of the word. His artistic style is well recognizable, individual, and the uniformly high standard of his works fits well with the Hungarian and European average of the period.

In addition to works of applied art, the artist's autobiographical *Mikrokozmoszom* volumes are of special value, as they are important documents bearing witness of the age beyond personal aspects, and can be valuable sources for further research in social history, sociology, political history, micro-history and other research fields.

The final conclusion is that Bandi Schima A.'s excellent technical skills - a high level of knowledge and sometimes brilliant application of difficult and complex master-strokes - as well as the virtues of his superior invention, especially in the development of decorative ornamentation - make him one of the best in the genre. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that the oeuvre, which is still almost unknown and exists outside the field of view of art history and applied art history, be given its rightful place in the professional public opinion and in the domestic and European literature of blacksmithing.