



LECHNER
A CREATIVE
GENIUS

JÓZSEF SISA

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GENIUS

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Műskemél th. város sákháza.



*Levelezés 1878 szept. hó
rehabilitáció
pályázat
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Műskemél városi tanács
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Portrait of Ödön Lechner

Crayon drawing by Oszkár Glatz,
around 1900

LECHNER

A CREATIVE GENIUS

Ödön Lechner (1845–1914), one of the greatest exponents of Hungarian architecture, and certainly its most original, deserves a prominent position in the international canon of extraordinary talents from the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹ He is regarded by many as the creator of the Hungarian national style, the master of the Secession, one of the fathers of modern architecture, and even the Hungarian Gaudí. There is truth in all these statements, but the reality is far more complex. Lechner's work progressed gradually and organically from historicism towards more progressive forms of expression, interweaving different trends and movements from European architecture, and accumulating, step by step, into an exceptional and incessantly innovative life's work. The beginnings of this process lay in the Hellenistic neo-Renaissance, with new vistas opened up by the French Renaissance, followed by his incorporation of such nineteenth- and early twentieth-

century breakthroughs in European architecture as the use of bare brickwork and architectural ceramics, polychromy, Orientalism, ornamentation, the discovery of folk traditions, the search for a national mythology, and the application of the new technologies of iron, steel and reinforced concrete. For many people, Lechner's oeuvre represented, at a Hungarian level, a reflection of national ambitions, the artistic and intellectual emancipation of the country, and modernisation.

Hungary underwent unprecedented political and cultural upheaval in the nineteenth century. At the end of the seventeenth century, following violent and destructive wars against the Ottomans, the entire country had come under Habsburg rule. The eighteenth century marked a period of peaceful reconstruction within the Empire. By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, there was a powerful upsurge in national awakening and in demands for modernisation, which culminated in the Revolution of 1848–49, the fight for liberation from the Habsburgs. The freedom fight was quelled by the Austrians with Russian assistance, and followed by retribution and neo-absolutist governance. Hungarians responded to this oppression with passive resistance. This, along with subsequent political events – the military defeat of Austria, and the formation of a unified Germany – forced the ruler, Franz Joseph, to make a deal. The Compromise was signed in 1867, establishing the dualistic Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Under the new state structure, Hungary – which made up around half of the Monarchy – enjoyed autonomy over its internal affairs, and equal rights with Austria. Decades of rapid development ensued, and Hungary began to close the economic and cultural gap with the western half of the Monarchy, and with Western Europe in general. In 1873, three towns were united to form Budapest, which soon grew into a truly European metropolis. In 1896, the nation revelled in its Millennium celebrations, marking a thousand years since Hungary was established.

Although the Compromise was successful, the legacy of 1848 lived on in Hungarian political and intellectual life: many regarded the quelling of the Revolution as an insult, and refused to accept sharing statehood with Austria. Hungarian society was split for decades between the “48-ers” and the “67-ers”. The ever-present enmity towards the Habsburgs and Vienna only increased, as did Hungarian national sentiment, and this led to the crisis of the Monarchy after 1900. The situation was exacerbated by emancipation movements among the ethnic minorities in Hungary, and by social unrest. An atmosphere of tension, mired by conflicting political and intellectual tendencies, was widespread across Europe at the

time, but this did not prevent a vibrant cultural life, and may in a sense have nurtured it.

In the nineteenth century, Hungarian culture was concerned with closing the gap with the rest of Europe, and the momentum for this was accelerated after 1867 by the emerging Hungarian state structure, and the new or reinvigorated cultural and educational institutions. Unlike the eighteenth century, when Hungary had been culturally subsumed by the Habsburg Empire, and art, including architecture, had followed the example of Vienna or other western centres of the empire, the nineteenth century saw multiple attempts at the creation of an independent Hungarian style. Due to historical traditions and Hungary's firm place in central Europe, however, this was difficult to implement, especially in architecture, which remained dominated in virtually every country by the great, universal European styles up until the turn of the century. Circumstances fostering substantial change only came about in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the generation of great pioneers emerged in the nations of Europe, including Ödön Lechner in Hungary.

According to tradition, the Lechner family, which boasted its own coat of arms, originated from Bavaria. The direct ancestors of the architect had belonged to the intellectual circles of Pest. His grandfather, János Nepomuki Lechner the Elder, had been a leading officer for the “Beautification Committee”, the supreme architectural authority in the city. János's son, János Nepomuki Lechner the Younger, was a lawyer in the city's civil service. He quit after the Revolution, when the oppressive Habsburg regime took over, and then lived primarily from the brickworks he had inherited. His was a symbolic gesture: the family was proudly patriotic, and this manifested itself in other ways as well. The young Ödön was brought up in this atmosphere, and he was politically and intellectually a “48-er” after the Compromise, and would remain so till his dying day. This was probably a powerful influence on the development of his art, and a motivation behind his search for a “Hungarian language of form” – even if his work was more complex than this – and the urge to create a Hungarian style would form the framework of his constantly regenerating art. The family brickworks also played an important, though different role in shaping Ödön Lechner's interests, as he wrote in his memoirs towards the end of his life: “In this factory I learnt to handle clay at a very young age, and I grew to love different ceramic techniques. Because the factory not only produced ordinary bricks, but also fine ceramics [...] my love for ceramics is still very much alive in me.”² Childhood drawings by the future architect, some of which still survive, reveal his talent at art, which was



**Ödön Lechner
in his youth**
Photograph,
around 1866

also evident at school. Several of his siblings also exhibited artistic tendencies in a range of fields.

The young Lechner graduated from the “modern school” (*Reáltanoda*) in Pest, and then enrolled at the polytechnic in Buda, which he attended for just a year, architecture training being still in its infancy; as sometimes happened, the teacher at the polytechnic, Antal Szkalnitzky (1836–1878), persuaded Ödön Lechner and two other students, Alajos Hauszmann (1847–1926) and Gyula Pártos (Punczmann) (1844/45–1916), to continue their studies after 1866 at the Bauakademie in Berlin.³ Szkalnitzky was familiar with the Berlin architectural academy, founded on the traditions of Karl Friedrich Schinkel, for he had been the first Hungarian to study architecture there. Lechner and his associates were taught by Johann Strack, Franz Adler, Richard Lucae and, last but not least, Carl Bötticher, the noted theoretician, who was their teacher of ornamentation and architectural drawing. Bötticher's work *Die Tektonik der Hellenen* (1844–1852) had a great impact on his contemporaries, Lechner included. Part of Bötticher's theory was the distinction between the *Kernform* (the core form – the architectural structure) and the *Kunstform* (the art form – decoration), which presaged the even more influential *Bekleidungstheorie* (theory of dressing) of Gottfried Semper.⁴ During the two years Lechner spent in the Prussian capital he would also have witnessed the local fashion for building with bare brickwork and terracotta, which would also play an important part in his later career.⁵ Lechner and his companions lived pleasurably, and the three Hungarian students with the German names were re-

ferred to as the “*drei wilde Magyaren*”. In the summer of 1867, the affluent budding architect travelled to Copenhagen before spending a few days in Paris. On his return trip he took in Trier, Speyer, Worms, Bamberg and Regensburg. Lechner married young, taking as his bride Irma Primayer, the daughter of a wealthy lawyer.⁶ The young couple travelled to Italy for a year. The extended honeymoon was also a study trip; for Hungarian architects at the time, knowledge of the monuments of Italy was an essential part of their training.

When he returned to Hungary, Lechner soon received his first commissions, as the post-Compromise boom created opportunities for young architects as well. He formed a company with his classmate from Berlin, Gyula Pártos, and the first known designs signed by both of them – in the form “Lechner Punczmann”, using Gyula Pártos’s original name – date from 1871. One of his first jobs was to design the care home for elderly soldiers in Pest (1871), whose meticulously worked-out facade plan specifies red brick for the first floor. His style was imprinted with the Italian neo-Renaissance, blended with Hellenistic elements, which he had learnt in Berlin, and which he also used in his plans for the Primayer House (1871–72). Around this time in Hungary, the “Berlin Renaissance” was in the ascendant, a natural – and soon indistinguishable – part of the general interest in the Renaissance across central Europe.⁷ The apartment building Lechner designed for Pál Mándl (1871–75) was covered with sgraffito decoration; this ornamental paintwork, early by Hungarian standards, shows the architect’s innovative spirit and the close attention he paid to the appearance of the facade. Compared with his earlier works, his apartment block for the city of Kecskemét (1871–74) was more conventional, with the facade graced by a gallery of statues of famous men from the city and the nation. The above works, created within a few years of each other, show great variety, without overstepping the traditional bounds of neo-Renaissance historicism.

In summer 1874, the architect suffered tragedy when his young wife unexpectedly died. No longer with a reason to stay in Budapest, the next year he left his two young children in the care of his father-in-law, and went to France, where he would stay for three years. This not only cut his family ties, but also interrupted his Hungarian career. Clearly, the death of his wife was the initial impulse, but his irrepressible desire for all things new must also have been a factor. In Paris he found work with Clément Parent (1823–1884), a prominent member of a great family of architects. Under him, he took part in the construction or restoration of around thirty châteaux, including one mentioned in his memoirs as the château of “Monsieur Carail-

lon [Carayon] de la Tour”. This acquaintance with French architecture exerted an extraordinary influence on Ödön Lechner; the “wonderful mixture” of the Gothic and the Renaissance fascinated him, and its rich idiom and its boldness served as an example to follow. As he admitted, “This French culture was even more attractive because I saw, in amazement, how it was able to create different artistic movements and completely new styles from one king to the next, within barely a generation”.⁸ Local architects were also turning with interest towards the architecture of their homeland from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, regarded as the national style,⁹ which would not have escaped the notice of the young Hungarian. Even years later, in his old age, Lechner enthused about the continuously regenerating, inventive French architecture. The wealth of experiences he gained here impacted directly on his later creations, in terms of style and materials. (His notes and drawings from France have sadly not survived.) No less significantly, throughout his life he set an example of how one should always explore new avenues. When in Paris, Lechner obviously observed, alongside traditional architecture, the achievements of iron constructions and engineering work, including the pioneering creations of Henri Labrouste and Victor Baltard – another source of inspiration for his future work.¹⁰ It would also appear that he first took notice of Indian architecture while he was in Paris; Sándor Fellner, who studied in Paris, described their joint visit to the Musée du Trocadéro, built for the Exposition Universelle of 1878, where Lechner was fascinated by the plaster casts of Indian architectural elements.¹¹

Enriched with a wealth of experiences, Ödön Lechner returned home at the end of 1878, and immersed himself in work once more. He renewed his partnership with his old classmate from Berlin, Gyula Pártos (who had by now assumed a Hungarianised name). The two men complemented each other well: Pártos was more prudent, and managed the office, while Lechner, more artistic, defined the concept and drew the details and decorations. Lechner needed a reliable partner to keep the business under control, for by nature he would have been incapable of this alone. To all intents and purposes, this partnership, which lasted for decades, followed the architectural ideas of Ödön Lechner, even if publications from the time, and the designs themselves, mostly presented their names in the order of Pártos–Lechner. Posterity tends to reverse the order, or – not entirely unjustly – to refer to these works as Lechner’s alone. Whenever Pártos worked independently, as he did on the Kiskunfélegyháza parish church (1873–76), regarded as one of his greatest works, he never stepped outside convention. They remained in partnership until around 1896.

The French influence can be felt directly in the Milkó house in Szeged (1882–83), which incorporated a broad spectrum of different architectural forms and ornamentations. Another distillation of French forms, and also the overture to Lechner’s grandest compositions, is the apartment block of the Hungarian National Railways Pension Institute (1883–84), built on Budapest’s prestigious Andrassy Avenue, opposite the Opera House. The mass of Lechner’s building and the arrangement of its windows and arches echoed those of the building across the street, but Lechner acted wisely: “My ambition burned, but I had to be careful that my building did not intrude upon Ybl’s masterpiece, for the lady in waiting must never outshine her queen, and the queen must always remain the queen”.¹² One of the building’s unique features is the steeply angled roof, composed of several parts, which follows the typical patterns of older French architecture. For now, Lechner kept within the limits of historicism, but in his later masterpieces – Kecskemét City Hall, the Museum of Applied Arts, and the Postal Savings Bank – the steep roof would be recast in the starring role, the bearer of both artistic design and ideological meaning. The ground-floor arcade with a deeper space behind is also present in several of his works, reaching its climax in the atrium of the Museum of Applied Arts. Typical of Lechner’s work is the way in which certain motifs and architectural forms are recycled in his works, with greater refinement and fresh associations. The architect was fond of grouping windows into pairs, and on the top floor, into threes. The basic plane of the facade of the Pension Institute building is covered in brick, while the divisions and the frames of the windows and arches are of stone. This is his version of the popular French combination of “brick and stone” (*brique et pierre*), which was back in fashion in the nineteenth century. The mix of materials adds texture and colour to the walls, making the facade more picturesque. Certain motifs on the building are reminiscent of specific French precedents,¹³ although Lechner’s unique, free modelling of the details leads them in a more plastic-organic direction. French architects visiting the National Exhibition in Budapest in 1885 are alleged to have been completely taken aback by this magisterial reworking of the architecture of the French Renaissance.

In the 1880s, Lechner erected two major public buildings, both in a neo-Baroque style. The neo-Baroque had just started to appear in Hungary, and Lechner demonstrated his originality in this style too. It was one of the stipulations for Szeged City Hall, so that the new building would carry a reminder of its predecessor. Lechner and Pártos won the commission

through a competition. The finished building (1882–83) employs a unique and inspired solution: the tower is located at the rear of the main wing and has a broadened gallery at the top, so it looms over the rest of the building. For the first time in a Lechner building, the massive mansard roof was covered in patterned, glazed tiles, anticipating – albeit in a relatively conventional form – the solution he would employ in his mature masterpieces. With the opulent stucco of the grand hall and the wavy balustrade of the gallery, Lechner could give flight to luscious forms and rich details. His second neo-Baroque creation was Nagybecskerek County Hall (1885–87; today Zrenjanin City Hall, Serbia). Here, the imaginative architect not only gave the building a complex, fundamentally mansard roofline, but also inserted an improbably large Palladian motif into the central avant-corps, resulting in an extravagant combination. Moreover, the building featured strongly sculpted shaping, which Lechner never ceased to favour and develop, whether in the bulk of the building, its ornamentation or its internal spaces. Here, it is present in the semi-circular balcony on the first floor of the avant-corps, and the cylindrical, turret-like oriel windows at the front corners. The latter feature would have been observed while the architect was in France, and he incorporated it in a good number of his buildings.

His unimplemented designs from the 1880s also contain some innovations. His plan for the Kecskemét public baths and steam baths (1884) features eastern motifs: slim, scalloped arches on the main mass, topped with a solid, minaret-like chimney, and airy corner domes on either side. It was quite common for European public baths to borrow from Islamic architecture, and Lechner did this with aplomb. Lechner and Pártos also won the competition in 1888 to design Pécs City Hall, after which new, refined plans were drafted, although they were never carried out in the end. Lechner partly made use of slightly adapted ideas from before, and partly introduced new components, such as the stylised windows on the first floor, reminiscent of Gothic tracery – which foreshadowed the great window on the central avant-corps of the Museum of Applied Arts – and the use of coloured majolica to decorate the facade. His design for the National Theatre in Pécs (1889) was a further reworking of the Baroque style, with unique features including the light iron-construction frame of the building, the Moorish-Hindu elements of the atrium and the auditorium, and the funnel-like lantern rising above the auditorium.

The Szegzárd Hotel and Restaurant in Szekszárd (1889–93) and the Biedermann Mansion in Mozsóg (1892–96) both include round oriel windows and parapet walls taken from French architecture. However, historicism now only has a to-



Château de Meillant
Stair-tower

ken presence, while the decorative peaks on the Szekszárd building foretell Lechner's later biomorphic ornaments.

Lechner, who was interpreting historical elements ever more liberally, reached and even surpassed his limit with the Thonet House in Budapest (1888–89). The first design for the building, using an iron structure but maintaining conventional neo-Renaissance architecture, was drawn up by Henrik Koch. After his untimely death, Lechner was engaged to complete the commission.¹⁴ Lechner kept the iron frame but drew a new facade, creating a novel synthesis of French Gothic and Renaissance elements with some materials that had seldom been used before. The two-level glass portal was decorated with metal sheets that imitated stone cladding, while the upper part of the facade was completely covered in Zsolnay ceramic tiles, creating a never-ending floral pattern. Lechner would have seen a similar stylised pattern, which filled the entire surface, on the stair-tower of Château de Meillant in France (Tour de Lion, built before 1510), which served almost as a direct precedent. (The dome of the stair-tower later acted as one of the inspirations for the dome of the Museum of Applied Arts.) Despite its historical forbear, this solution exceeded the spirit and practice of historicism, and unconsciously pointed the way towards the Secession. The same can be said for the parapet wall that substituted the entablature, which contained Gothic details.

In addition to Lechner's French experiences, another substantial source of inspiration came from the two journeys he made to England. On his first trip, in 1879, the country houses and cottages caught his eye for their "rural simplicity" and their

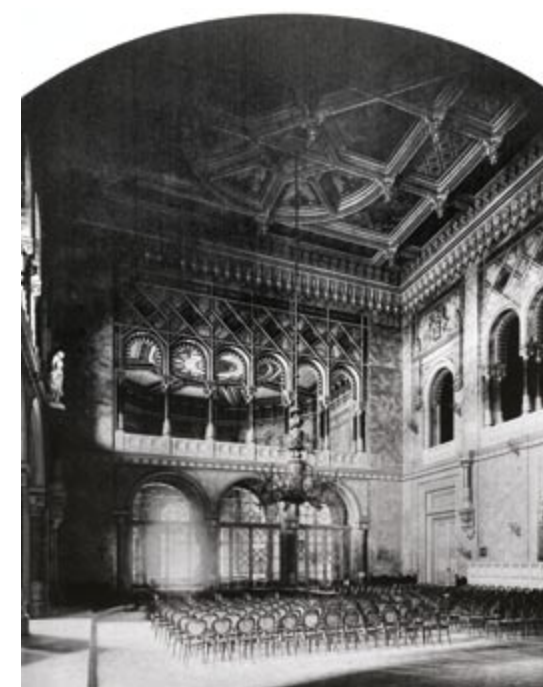
"primal earthy smell".¹⁵ The English house, as a practical construction, independent from all the major styles, was a source of wonder in the nineteenth century to visiting continentals, laypersons and professionals alike, and the independent-minded Lechner was no exception. He was not directly influenced by English architecture, but rather by the convention-free attitude towards building, although a few works from the Arts and Crafts movement probably reinforced him in his views. His second, much longer sojourn in England in 1889 left a deeper mark. He now came into closer contact with Indian and Persian art, in the ceramics collection at the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum). Lechner greatly admired Asian art, and he extended his familiarity with it by "studying photographs and publications". His standpoint and artistic methods are aptly illustrated by his words on this subject: "In view of the fact that I was not as interested in absolute forms as in phylogenetic analogies, this lack could not have been of such great importance to me."¹⁶ He noticed something else: "My interest was particularly captivated by the colonial buildings of the English. I noticed that the English, when they build something in their Indian colonies, make an effort to adapt to the aboriginal taste, and to build, as it were, in the Indian style."¹⁷ As he never travelled to India, Lechner could only have known these buildings from pictures and publications. It is also possible that he came across Indian-style buildings in England, where they had been built since the early nineteenth century. This practice was part of the greatest trend of modern European architecture to revive exotic styles.¹⁸

The study of eastern art was not merely a route along which Lechner could find new styles and explore an exciting, picturesque world, although this in itself would not have been a negligible factor. For him, eastern culture provided the key to understanding the roots of Hungarian (folk) art, and thereby to a possible renewal of Hungarian architecture and the creation of a national style. As he expressed it in his memoirs, "A study of Hungarian folk art led me to the art of Asian peoples, because the undeniable relationship between the two arts was obvious from the first moment. This eastern relationship, which is clearest in the arts of Persia and India, was all the more interesting, because with these peoples – whose art had already been elevated to a certain monumentality – I believed I would find some guide towards how folk motifs could be transposed into monumental architecture."¹⁹

These thoughts are closely connected with the issue of Hungarian origins. Pagan Magyar tribes arrived in the Carpathian Basin from the East in the ninth century, to the area later known as Hungary. Where exactly they came from, and what exactly

their ethnic background was, were the subject of considerable speculation and debate in the nineteenth century. These intractable questions gave rise to countless romantic and fanciful ideas, including theories about Hungarian-Indian and Hungarian-Persian ancestry, evidence for which was claimed in Hungarian folk art, as the preserver of ancient Magyar culture. The influential propagator of this view was the art teacher and ethnographer József Huszka (1854–1934), who used his own collection as the basis for publishing profusely illustrated books and articles on Hungarian folk art, in which he expounded on his conjectures.²⁰ In his main work from 1885, he writes, "This peculiarity of the Hungarian style of decoration, *that its main decorative element is made up of flowers*, points to affinities with Persia and India, and leads to the conviction that our present style of decoration is a direct continuation of the ornamentation of pagan tombs, although the line of the stems, very rarely covered, is from the Renaissance. The Persian and Indian decorative style works not because of the pleasantly curving lines and rows of volutes, as is the case with the Renaissance, but because of the balanced distribution of flowers and leaves, regardless of the splendour of colour or the equally present, pleasantly curving lines of the stems. The shared characteristic with the east, the excellent proliferation of flowers, is a folk characteristic, an ancient trait of the Magyars [...]"²¹ Although the opinions of Huszka, who was ultimately an amateur, were fiercely criticised among scientific circles, his influence reached far and wide. Lechner not only subscribed to the idea of Hungarian links with the east, and implemented it in his architecture – in particular in the Museum of Applied Arts –, he also took the floral motifs he stumbled upon in works published by Huszka, and in foreign works that also inspired Huszka, and used them as precedents for his buildings.²² The amount of scientific credit given to the theory that Hungary shared origins with India and Persia was of no actual relevance when it came to Lechner's artistic achievements.

There was nothing new in Hungary about the search for a national style or the related proposition of precedents from the East. It had been in vogue in the 1850s and 1860s, a time when nations elsewhere in Europe were also occupied with the idea of creating a new style, and the "battle of the styles" was fought. This question came to the fore in 1860–62, during the architectural competition to design the palace for the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, when it developed into a national polemic.²³ Many voiced the opinion that the "Arabian-Byzantine" style was the best expression of the eastern origin of the Hungarians, "paired" with western civilisation. Eventually, the Academy was constructed in a neo-Renaissance style (Friedrich August Stüler, 1862–65), which not only ended the style debate, but



Vigadó, Pest,
Great auditorium
Frigyes Feszli, 1860–64

also set the direction for Hungarian architecture in the ensuing decades. At the same time as the Academy was being erected, the Vigadó Concert Hall (1860–64) was built in Pest from a design by Frigyes Feszli, which was of a completely different kind of architecture.²⁴ Its main facade was in the Romantic *Rundbogenstil* (round-arch style), whose identifying features included elements quoting from Venetian, Byzantine and Arabic architecture, while in the great auditorium, the row of elongated, scalloped openings, resting on slender cast-iron columns, recalled Moorish architecture. A further unique element is the decoration on the side facade, consisting of *vitézkötés* (elaborate braid [literally: "knot of valour"]) motifs, borrowed from Hungarian military dress uniform. Although Feszli had no direct

Vigadó, Pest
Frigyes Feszli, 1860–64



followers, owing to the Romantic style quickly becoming passé, and his architecture as a whole fits in more with the contemporary European context, this achievement of his – with a biased and often exaggerated emphasis on its Hungarian nature – was admired by many at the turn of the century, including Ödön Lechner. The final third of the nineteenth century, however, was a period of historicism and the revival of styles from the past. The great nations of Europe claimed to have found their own national style or style variant in these historic trends, be it the French or German version of the Gothic or the Renaissance. The general view in Hungary was that, owing to the trials of history, the nation had never had an opportunity to develop its own historical style in grand architecture. The opinion of a whole generation was summed up by Imre Steindl (1839–1902), one of the most respected Hungarian architects of the age, and professor at the Royal Joseph Technical University, when he stated, in his inaugural speech at the Academy, “there is no trace anywhere of a national character for architectural forms applied in stone.”²⁵ This position was something Lechner was determined to change, when he made his own attempts to renew Hungarian architecture in the 1890s. An important stage in this was when he moved beyond forms made from stone, and found motifs he could use in other materials, such as textiles. It may have been somewhat a simplification when he stated, “As a remote ideal, the creation of a Hungarian national style always floated before me.”²⁶ His architecture is, after all, much more complex than this. Yet in the final decade of the nineteenth century, when he was synthesising his accumulated experience and the knowledge he had distilled from Hungarian, European and universal art, this was the main focus, or at least intention, of his work. Thanks to fortunate external circumstances, this is when he created his masterworks, enabling him to write his name in the history books, not only of Hungarian, but also of universal architecture.

The creations in question cannot be seen as homogeneous, as Lechner progressively evolved and refined his ideas and concepts. The first in the series was Kecskemét City Hall (1893–95). The facade is a unique fusion of historical styles, floral ornamentation makes a modest appearance, and the rooms together create an organic composition of internal space. A logical progression of this would manifest itself in the Museum of Applied Arts (Budapest, 1893–96), with its sublimation of historical styles, its copious use of floral motifs, and the powerful touch of Indian and Persian styles in the open atrium and the inner areas. The organic contiguity of the rooms is masterful, and this is achieved by using iron-frame construction technology. Inside the building, the steel structure is left proudly

bare in the central exhibition hall. For the church in Budapest-Kőbánya (1894–97), Lechner was forced to take somebody else’s designs into consideration, yet with his organic reworking of the details, including the innovative use of coloured architectural ceramics – which, similarly to the Museum of Applied Arts, were a constitutional element of the building – Lechner reached newer heights. The Geological Institute (Budapest, 1898–99) is the embodiment of purity and serenity, whose internal spaces flow into one another, in a new synthesis, with natural momentum. The Postal Savings Bank (Budapest, 1899–1902) moves further in the direction of the simplification of mass, and can be regarded as an early precursor to modern architecture. Yet its ceramic-tiled roof displayed unprecedented grandeur and variety, setting a new standard with motifs that made reference to Hungarian mythology.

As can be seen from the brief, preliminary summary given above, architectural ceramics played a major role in Lechner’s main works. Ceramic was a relatively new material in Hungarian architecture, but even in the rest of Europe, and in America, it was only enjoying a comeback in the nineteenth century.²⁷ It was used in relation with other interconnecting phenomena of the architecture of the modern age, such as polychromy and ornament. The polychromy debate of the first few decades of the nineteenth century legitimised coloured buildings. Ornamentation as a conveyor of value and meaning in itself became apparent with the publication of Owen Jones’s book *Grammar of Ornament* (1856). It is no coincidence that this work was published in the period after the Great Exhibition of London (1851), when material culture and civilisation beyond Europe became the centre of attention. The German architect and theoretician Gottfried Semper, who had taken part in the debate on polychromy and in the Exhibition at the Crystal Palace, would soon publish his influential theory of dressing (*Bekleidungstheorie*), emphasising the autonomous significance and worth of external coverings that do not depend on the structure of the building.²⁸ These developments also contributed to the increasing role appropriated by architectural ceramic, which was an excellent colour medium, and which, by virtue of its plasticity, was outstandingly suitable for creating free ornamental forms. German and English architects had taken a keen interest in traditional brick buildings and terracotta decorations from northern Italy, especially Lombardy. Ödön Lechner had already come across the consequences of this interest as a student in Berlin, but he would have noticed the expanding use of brick and terracotta all the more in London. During his visit in 1889, not only the collection of the South Kensington Museum, but also the building itself (constructed in stages from 1856) would have offered him

inspiration,²⁹ as would other prominent constructions in the South Kensington cultural district, in particular the Royal Albert Hall (Francis Fowke – Henry Scott, 1867–71), and even more so the shining example of polychrome brick and ceramic architecture, the Natural History Museum (Alfred Waterhouse, 1873–81). In England, the following years and decades would see even more colourful majolica decoration. Yet Lechner would not only have seen coloured ceramics in the oriental collection of the South Kensington Museum, he would also have been familiar with illustrations of the buildings of Persia, adorned with patterned, multi-coloured tiles, including the “Shah Mosque” in Isfahan (seventeenth century), the most magnificent masterpiece of its kind.³⁰

Ödön Lechner arrived on the Hungarian scene at virtually the same time as architectural ceramics. An early example of their use was the terracotta-decorated building of the Dohány Street Synagogue (Pest, Ludwig Förster, 1854–59),³¹ although this did not catch on for a while, owing to the unique function of the building, and the fact that the architect was from abroad. When the terracotta statues, brought from Berlin, were installed on the palace of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1864, Imre Henszlmann, the noted archaeologist and art historian, felt compelled to explain to the public what exactly this material was, even though his own opinion of it was none too high.³² To varying degrees, ceramic elements found their way onto the exterior and/or interior of buildings in Budapest in the 1870s and 1880s. After some modest beginnings, the Castle Bazaar building (Miklós Ybl, 1875–82) was the first to be decorated with coloured ceramics, manufactured by the Zsolnay factory of Pécs, the largest and best of its kind in Hungary. Among contemporary Hungarian architects, Imre Steindl made frequent use of Zsolnay ceramics, mostly in the form of statues and altars. Apart from Steindl, Ödön Lechner used Zsolnay ceramics so intensively and in such great quantities on his buildings that his main creations are essentially products of a symbiosis of the art of architecture and the art of ceramics.

The Zsolnay factory was established in Pécs, southern Hungary, in 1853, initially to manufacture stoneware, by the merchant Miklós Zsolnay. The plant was taken over in 1865 by his son Vilmos Zsolnay (1828–1900), who built it into a prosperous business.³³ Their goods were successfully displayed at the World Fair in Vienna in 1873, and the factory soon became the largest ceramics works in Hungary. They developed continuously, and created ever newer, more durable and attractive products. A material launched in 1895 under the name of “pyrogranite” – made in glazed (majolica) and unglazed varieties – played an important role in architectural ceramics. The



“Shah Mosque”, Isfahan
From Pascal Coste’s
Monuments de la Perse
(Paris, 1867)

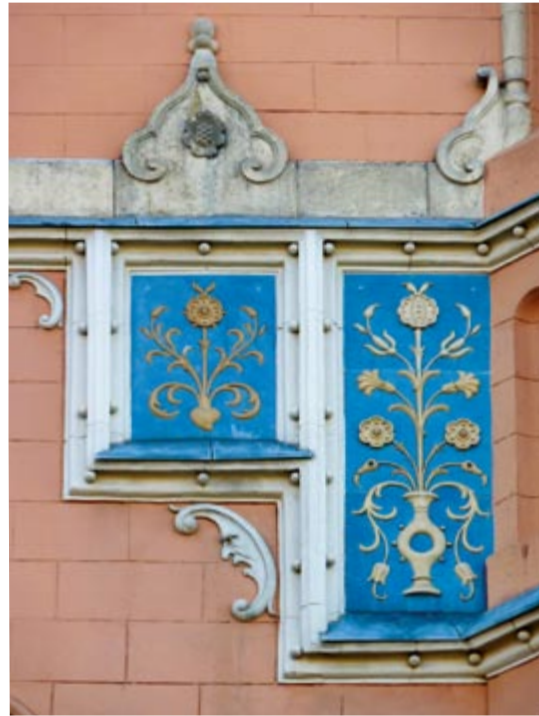
new material was used at once by Ödön Lechner on the Museum of Applied Arts, as well as on some later buildings.³⁴ Lechner, incidentally, was good friends with the Zsolnay family.³⁵ In the second half of the 1870s, Ödön Lechner and Vilmos Zsolnay travelled together to Paris, and Lechner’s pivotal study trip to England in 1889 was also made in his company.

As ceramic could be shaped and coloured with ease, it became a means of artistic expression for Lechner, and he found an excellent partner in Zsolnay, who nursed similar ambitions, and was blessed with outstanding technical skill and business sense. Lechner wrote the following about the use and the theoretical and practical background of ceramic:

“I knew from the first moment that the inception of any artistic movement was only possible with a monumental material.

The different techniques and tricks of plaster cladding that were fashionable even then, and which have meanwhile become even more so, may be forgivable as surrogates on certain cheaper buildings, but as the starting point for new forms they will just not do. A different consideration, which decided in favour of majolica, was of general interest, and I believe it is the result of findings that are equally valid for every modern metropolis and for every construction of this day and age.

The smoky, dusty air of modern cities accumulates in the pores of the facades of buildings, making them filthy and rendering the entire city gloomy, whereas a non-porous material keeps buildings hygienic and in their original, pleasant colours. Colour itself decided in favour of ceramic, as did the thinness and low volume of the tiles, which is a significant factor when the high price of city property and the efficiency of modern structures are taken into consideration. Besides these general criteria, some particularly Hungarian circumstances also justified the use of majolica. None of the stones quarried in our country, at least at present, is suitable for use as a structure in building, and a large part of the country, the most Hungarian part, is an enormous plain, where people only know stone from hearsay, and where it is expensive to deliver stone; however, the



Kecskemét City Hall
Floral patterned majolica
panel on the facade

trade of the crocker and potter is an ancient tradition, so requisite building materials may be produced at will anywhere.³⁶

Colour, durability, washability and economy were all criteria associated with ceramics in architectural thinking across Europe at the time, even if these principles did not always turn out to be correct. What Lechner added was the national, the Hungarian aspect. His assertion that there is no suitable stone in Hungary may only be accepted with reservations, because around Budapest, for example, there has never been a shortage of quarries. The Great Plain region, however, was indeed lacking in stone, and it is not by chance that this region was where the architecture of the Secession, shaped by Lechner and his followers, came to its true fruition, in national colours.

The ceramic components for the buildings Lechner designed tended to be planned by the architect himself. He made – and signed – drawings for individual profiles, often at actual size.³⁷ Based on these artistic sketches, precise technical drawings were prepared in the Zsolnay factory, although on occasion a skilled modeller might form the component directly. (Scale drawings of commissioned ceramic elements were made at the factory and kept in special dossiers [*fazonkönyvek*].) Lechner considered the ceramic parts to be of such importance that he spared neither time nor effort in perfecting them – often at the expense of the deadline. This was the only way that these utterly unique, hand-crafted forms could be created by this man, who understood and loved the material he was working with.

Lechner's chief works, listed above, can only be properly appreciated through more detailed examination. The first, both in time and in the creative process, was Kecskemét City

Hall. A call for designs was announced in 1890, stipulating a tiled roof, “simplicity of form”, and as little stone masonry as possible on the facade – ideal, therefore, for Lechner.³⁸ Five entries were submitted, of which three won prizes, with the first prize going to Gyula Pártos and Ödön Lechner for their work, with the motto “Neither height nor depth deters us”. Construction began in 1893, and the new building was in use from the summer of 1895. The general assembly hall was completed at the end of 1897.

With regard to the style, the architects expressed ideas declaring political and artistic independence: “Concerning the selected style, when formulating the building’s architecture, the designers, as far as possible, have avoided conventional models, eschewing in particular the schematism of the Italian Renaissance or the so-called Maria-Theresa style, [...] because they do not wish to employ, for the artistic concept of the first modern public building in a great Hungarian city, any of the styles which emphatically pronounce our dependence on Vienna, but rather follow the trail of the more ancient and glorious past, which is preserved – in the form of town halls – as precious monuments in the upper regions of our homeland.”³⁹ These words, expressing Lechner’s credo, found favour in the patriotic atmosphere of Kecskemét. This city on the Great Plain proudly upheld the memory of 1848, and a statue to the leader of the Revolution, Lajos Kossuth, was erected there in 1906. The artistic ornamentation on the city hall was also the product of nationalist feeling, fed by the patriotism that abounded around the time of the Millennium celebrations.

The mass of the building is dominated by a central avant-corps that protrudes imposingly, as a kind of substitute for the tower that was *de rigueur* for city halls. The outline of the avant-corps undulates and is crowned by the giant gable familiar from German Renaissance architecture, while the rest of the facade is topped by a parapet resembling the crenellations of old mansions and bell-towers of the Hungarian Uplands (modern Slovakia). The central, polygonal balcony is an open-air paraphrasing of the entrance porch beneath the ground-floor arcade of Lechner’s Pension Institute in Budapest. Also like the Pension Institute, Kecskemét City Hall has arcades on the ground floor. Most of the wall surfaces are covered with bare bricks (although they are plastered in places today), and the patterned tiles on the steep roof give a restrained polychrome effect. Embellishing the array of colour and, in line with Lechner’s original intent, reinforcing the Hungarian nature of the building, are the floral compositions of majolica panels placed centrally beneath the parapet. The patterns are stylised developments of Transylvanian embroidery published

by József Huszka,⁴⁰ if not taken directly from Indian and Persian motifs in contemporary publications, which were a source of inspiration for both men.⁴¹ The statue on Kecskemét City Hall, together with the other figures, is also subservient to the idea of the nation. Following the tradition of German city halls, the pinnacle of Kecskemét City Hall is surmounted by a *Rathausmann* (city hall man), although far from being a mere decoration, the statue here is of Árpád, a cult figure in the Hungarian mindset of the time. (Árpád was the leader of the Magyar tribes that settled in present-day Hungary in the ninth century.) The lower part of the facade features relief profiles of the first Hungarian king, Saint Stephen, and the ruler at the time of construction, Franz Joseph. In the courtyard, these are supplemented by an entire cycle of additional portraits.

The little gables of the central balcony were fitted with Lechner’s own unique architectural ornamentation. The three-dimensional shapes, essentially devoid of all historic or folk art precedent, are hard to define or describe using conventional terminology. They had appeared in embryonic form on some of his earlier, historicist buildings. These biomorphic formations, the product of his own imagination, have been aptly described by the people of Kecskemét and its environs as “caterpillars” or “cockscobs”, while the elements accompanying the pictures in the grand hall have been called “snakes’ eggs”.⁴² These and similar shapes would be used by Lechner more abundantly and in more developed forms on the buildings that followed, transforming them into a powerful means of artistic expression.

The regular, rectangular ground plan of Kecskemét City Hall contains a practically arranged system of wings and courtyards. In line with the convention for city halls, the main body contains the atrium, the twin staircase and the first-floor hall, but creating a complicated convolution of space and an occasionally biomorphic “cave” system. Thanks to a slit ceiling, the horizontal and diagonal visual axes are supplemented by a vertical one, similarly to – though not as grandly as – what he would later execute in the Museum of Applied Arts.

In the general assembly hall on the first floor of the avant-corps, historicism is even more stylised than in the rest of the building. Its unique ceiling is like a shell. Another novel artistic feature of the hall is the grandiloquent and complex cycle of historical paintings, done in the spirit of the Millennium. The walls bore two murals by Bertalan Székely – *Blood Oath* and *The Coronation of Franz Joseph* – and other notable figures from Hungarian history, including the “rebel” Lajos Kossuth. Matching the standard of the hall’s architecture and its works of art are the furniture, also designed by Lechner, the decorative paintwork, citing Huszka’s floral motifs, the



Persian floral pattern
From Pascal Coste’s
Monuments de la Perse
(Paris, 1867)

stained-glass windows and the chandelier. It is therefore no surprise to find the following record in the minutes of the general assembly of the city of Kecskemét, from 28 December 1897: “In view of the fact that Ödön Lechner has exerted his influence on the design of every detail of the furnishings of the hall, he constantly supervised the execution of the work. It is due to this, his expertise, his artistic skill and, last but not least, the dedication he exhibited in performing this task, that he has earned unanimous recognition for the beauty of the entire work, the way in which the style matches the building, the harmony of the furnishings as a whole, and their Hungarian motifs.”⁴³

The competition to design the Museum and School of Applied Arts in Budapest was announced at the end of 1890 with a deadline of 15 March 1891.⁴⁴ The first of the three prizes was awarded to Gyula Pártos and Ödön Lechner for their work, with the telling motto “To the East, Hungarian”, which beat the conventional, historicist plans of their rivals. The generous jury praised the arrangement of the ground plan and the faultless structure, adding that its architecture “reveals a more unconventional and free-thinking concept, which sets out from motifs of English Gothic, early Renaissance and, most of all, the Moorish style”, but noting that “only the observer’s own taste and judgment will decide.”⁴⁵ The plans had to be modified due to financial limitations, however, and among other things, the planned museum of folk art and the third and fourth storeys were discarded. Construction began in 1893. The decision to go ahead with the expensive ceramic cladding, specified in the original design, was not taken until 1895, when Gyula Wlassics,



**Victoria Railway
Terminus,
Bombay (Mumbai)**
William Stevens,
1878–87

Minister of Culture, declared, “The pyrogranite made in the Zsolnay factory is a product of our homeland’s artistic industry that is so unique, and so advanced compared with abroad, that on the building of the Museum and School of Applied Arts, the material in itself will bear witness to the level of development we have achieved in this field; whereas, in the opposite case, plastering the palace of applied arts would allow conclusions to be drawn that it were rudimentary and inferior.”⁴⁶ Work progressed slowly, however, so at the end of the year, Wlassics appointed a ministerial commissioner to oversee the construction. The contract to supply the ceramics was only signed with the Zsolnay factory on 8 January 1896, but the designs were submitted with some delay by the meticulous Lechner. The ceremony to lay the crowning stone of the building was held on 25 October 1896, in the presence of the king, as the last major event of the Millennium celebrations. The museum was opened to visitors on 20 November 1897.

Lechner and Pártos designed a building whose wings extend along the extreme edges of the irregular plot (one of the rear sections was never built), while the great central exhibition hall in the middle is connected perpendicularly to the main wing (on Üllői Street). As one corner of the block has an acute angle, the dome-covered central mass of the main facade is situated asymmetrically, and the sharply angled corner, topped with a smaller cupola that echoes the shape of the main dome, acts harmoniously as a counterweight and a “hinge”.

As a result of Ödön Lechner’s efforts to create a “Hungarian language of form”, a unique synthesis of historical, eastern and folk art was produced in the architecture and decoration of the building. In this work, the architect combined all his experience and his rich imagination, and the ideal medium for putting his fantastic shapes and bright colours into practice was Zsolnay ceramic.

The interior and external architectures of the building differ quite significantly, as though Lechner were offering

alternatives for the national style. The main wing is broken up by an unusual, octagonal central mass. The enormous, decoratively simplified tracery window in the upper part of the central section shows affinities with the Gothic. As with Keckskemét City Hall, the entablature is replaced with a crenellated parapet, with arched inserts. The central dome and the smaller cupola on the corner hinge have an unusual shape: above the lower third it narrows concavely, then reaches up vertically before finally rounding off. The side is broken up by ribbing, and each rib is made more emphatic and spectacular by the diverse ridge tiles. The large dome is crowned with a ceramic lantern composed of eastern and organic shapes. There is a possible French precedent for this unusual dome shape in the cupola over the stair-tower of the Château de Meillant, already mentioned with regard to the Thonet House. The French cupola is much smaller than Lechner’s, but its shape is distinctly similar. The museum’s dome also has eastern precedents for its shape and proportions in the “Shah Mosque” in Isfahan or even the Taj Mahal. As we have already pointed out, Lechner knew and admired English colonial architecture from pictures. One of the best known exemplars was the Victoria Railway Terminus in Bombay (now Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, Mumbai, India; Frederick William Stevens, 1878–87).⁴⁷ The Museum of Applied Arts is similar in the shape and ribbing of its dome, as well as in its blend of Indian and Gothic elements. However, Lechner’s dome is monumental in scale, and its irregular octagonal base makes it one of a kind. The arrangement of the wings of the Terminus is different from that of the museum, but is much closer to Lechner’s draft for the Goods and Stock Exchange, made in 1899, incorporating many of the shapes and stylistic components of the Museum of Applied Arts. The lantern on the museum’s dome is also



**Ödön Lechner and Sándor Baumgarten’s competition design
for the Goods and Stock Exchange of Budapest, 1899**



**Museum of Applied Arts,
Budapest**
Floral patterned ceramic
ornamentation on the facade

aligned together. Several types of ceramic were used, from stone-imitation materials to finer, glazed ceramics. The ceramic panels laid out from tiles are concentrated in the flat surfaces of the central section and in the arches of the parapet. The patterns are Hungarian floral motifs, inspired by Huszka and adapted by Lechner. Lechner’s forms bear some resemblance to the floral-style variant of Art Nouveau, which was emerging in Western Europe at the time, though there was of course no direct connection between the two.

The cavernous, open atrium is a synthesis of Indian and Persian forms. Perusing the literature, Lechner would soon have come across the standard work on Indian architecture, published in multiple editions, James Fergusson’s *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (1876).⁴⁸ The book’s illustrations featured some ancient constructions, such as the Buddhist temples of the Ajunta Caves, with the one designated number sixteen being especially magnificent.⁴⁹ This may have been one of the precedents for the open atrium of

similar to features of ancient Indian and Anglo-Indian architecture.

The museum’s iron-framed dome is essentially empty: it was built to impress, and only a long way below is one of the grand halls located. The hipped roofs either side of the dome are extremely steep and therefore exceptionally high; here too, Lechner has employed the decorative type of roof frequent in French architecture, enabling him to place the visual emphasis above. This allows the polychrome of the building – which anyway is far from grey – to shine through in its full glory, in this case the patterned combination of yellow and green roof tiles. (This is how they appear on the architect’s original plans, and they must have been implemented in several stages.) The biomorphic-organic shapes of the roof ridges, the dome ribbing, the pinnacles and other crowning elements deserve special attention. The museum building, clad in ceramics and exuding the feel of being hand-crafted, became the most effective advert for the applied arts. By comparison, the matt statues standing around the foot of the dome – embodying textiles, ceramics, decorative sculpture and goldsmithery – play second fiddle, whereas on a historicist building they would be the main harbingers of its function. On Lechner’s imposing edifice, the fine arts were given only a minor role.

Above the base, the entire facade is covered in ceramic. It is not just cladding, but also a construction material. Some of the apparently larger sheets actually consist of several pieces, manufactured using a complicated process and then



Floral patterns
From József Huszka’s
Magyar díszítő stíl
[*Hungarian Decorative
Style*] (Budapest, 1885)

**Buddhist cave temple,
Ajunta**

From James Fergusson's
*History of Indian and
Eastern Architecture*
(London, 1876)



Pearl Room, Isfahan, ceiling

From E. Collinot – A. de Beaumont's
*Ornements de la Perse: Recueil de dessins
pour l'art et l'industrie* (Paris, 1883)



the Museum of Applied Arts. The columns of Indian temples tend to be sturdier than their European counterparts. Their shafts are decorated with vertical grooves, lined with bead-like nodes; the decoratively carved, polygonal capitals are linked with curved corbels to the beam. Lechner reinterpreted these elements and added stylised, carved, Hungarian floral motifs to the body of the columns. The flat, ceramic-tiled ceiling of the open atrium harks back to a Persian forebear: the refined system of sinuous, arcing lobes is a distinct, yet recognisable reworking of the ceramic ceiling in the Pearl

Room in Isfahan. Lechner would have found this in a French album, Collinot and Beaumont's *Ornements de la Perse* (1883).⁵⁰ The lobes are inlaid with floral patterns. The steps of the atrium are lined with bright yellow ceramic balustrades, whose fantastically twisting forms resemble the handles of certain Indian teapots and samovars. Lechner, blithely traversing the boundaries between different genres, materials and techniques, probably saw such objects in a publication of the Austrian Museum of Commerce (1895), or even in the museum itself.⁵¹

**Museum of Applied
Arts, Budapest**
Columns in
the open atrium



Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest, ceiling of the open atrium

Upon entering the building, one is met with an unprecedentedly rich composition of space. From the inner atrium, through arcades of foiled arches, multiple visual axes open up towards the main exhibition hall and on both sides in the



Indian samovar

From A. von Scala's *Sammlung von Abbildungen türkischer, arabischer, persischer, centralasiatischer und indischer Metallobjekte* (Vienna, 1895)



**Museum of Applied
Arts, Budapest**

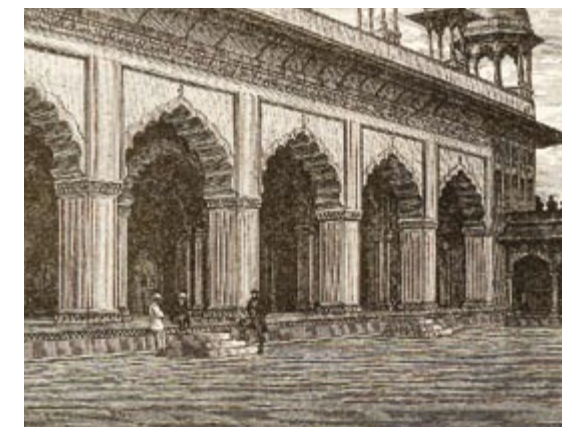
Stair balustrade in the
open atrium

direction of the staircases. There are also arcades of foiled arches on both levels of the exhibition hall. Lechner would have seen similar arches in Fergusson's book, in the chapters on "Indo-Aryan" and "Indo-Saracenic" – known today as Mogul or Mughal – architecture, in particular in illustrations of the central pavilion of the Deeg Palace (18th century) and one of the buildings of the Red Fort in Agra (17th century),⁵² although Lechner took these arches and multiplied them to create the dominant motif of a completely novel spatial composition. The building's vertical perspective is no less exciting, made up of curved and foiled openings that break through the ceiling at every level in the inner atrium, with a stained-glass oculus right at the top. The openings have balustrades all around, whose balusters are topped by finials that are a combination of vase, bird and heart shapes – further evidence of the architect's inexhaustible imagination. The most emphatic bird motif probably derives from Huszka, some of whose strongly stylised floral designs have contours that form the breast and beak of a bird.⁵³ These were developed by Lechner into zoomorphic figures, and converted into three dimensions. This spatially-minded architect had not only mastered architectural forms and spaces, but could also give shape to ornamentation. Combinations of the bird's breast-and-beak motif frequently occur in his later buildings as well.

The unconventional composition of the main rooms of the Museum of Applied Arts, their grandiosity, lightness and penetration, was made possible by the system of iron frames, which, in the front of the building, Lechner concealed. On the other hand, the steel construction supporting the glass roof in the covered exhibition hall was kept bare. Analogies could be found in pavilions built for world fairs, but rarely in a traditional museum building. Patterns were cut into the imposing steel girders holding up the glass roof, which matched the architecture of the arcades and resulted in a graceful overall appearance.

The larger rooms of the building were painted with Hungarian floral ornamentation (now mostly destroyed), which, although inimitably unique, as one would expect of Lechner, blended in with the eastern architecture and clearly reflected the architect's ideas about national art. The courtyard facades are broken up by rows and frames of brick, with plastered walls in between. This economical solution was later commonly used by Lechner and his followers.

The Museum of Applied Arts impacted like an explosion on the Hungarian cultural scene. The building was important not only because it was virtually the first museum in Hungary to be dedicated exclusively to the arts, but also because it was among the edifices erected to coincide with the Millennium celebrations, reflecting the greatness of Hungary and its glorious past. Alongside the historicist public buildings, which copied the major European styles and therefore proclaimed that the nation belonged with the developed West, Lechner's museum struck a completely different chord. Any possible relation to the East was officially rejected, which was clearly



**Red Fort, Agra,
courtyard of Muti Masjid**

From James Fergusson's
*History of Indian and
Eastern Architecture*
(London, 1876)

Museum of Applied Arts,
Budapest
Pillar on the first floor



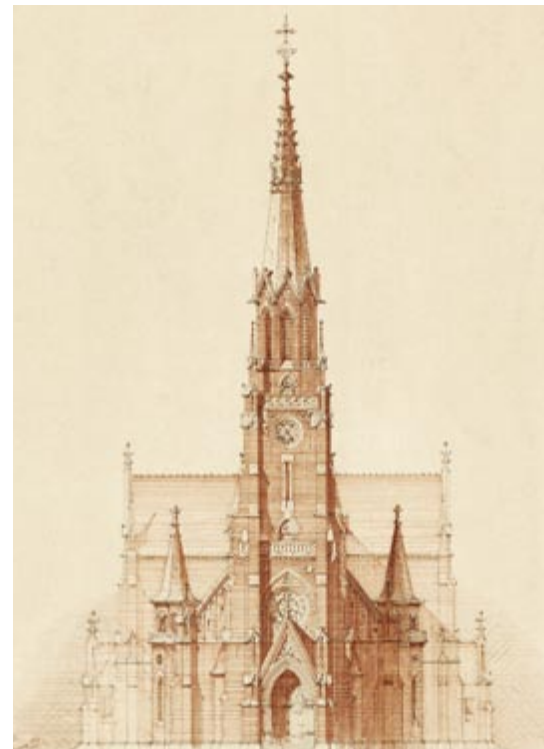
Stylised floral motifs
From József Huszka's
Magyar díszítő stíl
[Hungarian Decorative
Style] (Budapest, 1885)

demonstrated when the Main Historical Group for the Millennium Exhibition was designed, and Ignác Alpár, one of the bidders, was ordered to compose a building from “faithful imitations of monuments in our homeland” as opposed to the eastern and Byzantine “special Hungarian style”.⁵⁴ On top of the ideological considerations, the unusual forms and colours also had a strange effect. Legends abounded that when the ruler, Franz Joseph, arrived to lay the ceremonial crowning stone, he expressed his lack of comprehension. Some contemporaries allegedly called it the palace of the gypsy emperor, while others dismissed it as the work of a potter. The good will that had thus far greeted Lechner’s work was now replaced in certain circles by bafflement, and then by enmity. Although he continued to receive major commissions for a few more years, it was here that his fall from grace began. Even people who understood and respected Lechner’s output began to air their reservations. Kamil Fittler, the director of the School of Applied Arts, wrote about the building, “[The] artist strove to incorporate some hitherto completely neglected Hungarian structural and decorative features into architectural forms that are reminiscent of the region where ample use is made of coloured majolica – by which I mean Persia and India – and, by fusing the two, to compose a peculiarly Hungarian-flavoured architecture that rests on aesthetically correct foundations. This is an enormous and thankless undertaking. [...] Yes, he experiments, but he also creates; yes, he acts precipitously, but he also produces; yes, he makes mistakes, but he also expands our knowledge and our experience.”⁵⁵ Ödön Gerő, a journalist and publicist who had graduated as an engineer and who enthused over all things new, also wrote in praise of Ödön Lechner, with some barely concealed criticism: “What is this palace supposed to be? Neither Gothic, nor Renaissance, nor Baroque, nor anything else. It is slightly French Renaissance, perhaps, but too Indian to be French, and too Hungarian to be Indian. An œuvre need not be like anything. Not even if the builder himself announces it as such. The palace of applied arts is not even Hungarian, no matter what Ödön Lechner claims. It is just a break with the obligatory and accustomed styles. It is merely the expression of a strong artistic individuality, and an independent artistic creation, nothing else. This, however, is sufficient. It may not be very pretty, or it may be very much so – it is unusual, but it is the work of a true artist, and proof of a strong will, harmoniously combined with knowledge.”⁵⁶ Interestingly, Lechner himself – who developed and altered his unique style with every new building, or, as he put it, “every work of mine is an experiment”⁵⁷ – ended up, towards the end of his life, sharing the opinion that his

ingenious creation was strange: “Today, when I look at the gate of the [Museum of] Applied Arts, it sometimes irritates me. It is a little too ‘Indian’ for my taste.”⁵⁸

The difficulties surrounding the construction of the Museum of Applied Arts, not to mention the financial loss it made,⁵⁹ may have been the reason why Ödön Lechner and Gyula Pártos, his business partner for many decades, now went their separate ways. Besides practical considerations, the criticism raised against the museum would hardly have found favour with the more conventionally minded Pártos. After the split, he continued his practice alone, but with less emphasis on daring forms. In 1902, he won the tender to build the central post office in Pozsony (today Bratislava, Slovakia) in a conventional neo-Baroque style, beating, among others, his former collaborator. Lechner never opened his own office, as he lacked that sort of discipline. Instead, he joined forces with one or other of the younger generation of architects who respected his work, and they often signed the plans together.

The parish church in the Budapest suburb of Kőbánya was built at the same time as the Museum of Applied Arts.⁶⁰ Once again, due to external circumstances, Lechner was only able partly to implement his ideas. The church had originally been designed by Elek Barcza, an employee at the Budapest Office of Engineering, who produced a totally conventional neo-Gothic basilica-like church with a tower attached to the facade. However, the office did not wish to make the detailed plans, so the commission was passed to Ödön Lechner on 15 April 1891. Quite understandably, Lechner resisted going ahead with the original plan, and so, ignoring initial objections, he formulated his own concept, which he submitted for approval at the start



Elek Barcza’s design for
the parish church
of Budapest-Kőbánya
Front elevation, 1890

of 1892. This was for a building with a centralised ground plan, consisting of a mass of domes and half-domes, attached to which, by curved corridors, was a baptistery chapel on one side and a tall bell tower on the other. The main building hinted at Byzantine provenance, and Lechner even referred to the eastern origins of Christianity when submitting his design. This bold structure probably – Lechner did not go into detail – would have been erected using iron supports and a reinforced concrete shell, which, although a tried-and-tested technique in Western Europe, had never been used in Hungary before.

The city, which had commissioned the building, were utterly taken aback by Lechner’s plans: not only had the architect not fulfilled their wishes, but his proposal also went against all the accepted norms of the day. Furthermore, despite the favourable opinion of the Committee of Arts, the novel technical solution was met with suspicion. In response to their requests, by 24 March 1893 Lechner had come up with a new design. He now stuck with the nave and tower facade of Barcza’s original design, but he gave the Gothic architecture a twist of his own, designing an open bell tower with a curved steeple, with a smaller, similarly shaped tower and steeple on each side of the main facade, and a decorative arched doorway with a perforated panel in the middle. This still failed to meet the requirements of the committee, who now impatiently instructed Lechner to make further changes. On 14 September 1893, the new plans were ready, which were finally accepted, perhaps because the decision-makers were growing weary of all the toing and froing.

The final plan was, in fact, not remarkably different from the one before, although Lechner had been able to refine his ideas further. Only the open bell tower was discarded, while

the steeples on the main tower and side towers remained. Lechner improved the design greatly by changing the base of the tower from square to hexagonal and increasing its thickness, which transformed the whole building – including the steeple, which had by now become a dominant feature – into something monumental. This arrangement enabled Lechner to place a grand gateway at the base of the tower, with a semi-open atrium behind it, similar to the one at the Museum of Applied Arts. After the slightly playful and imbalanced nature of the previous design, and in spite of all the compromises, the end result was a well-proportioned and emblematic building that dominated the skyline and defined the architecture of the neighbouring section of the city, in which the symbolic, reduced neo-Gothic character served to enhance, rather than suppress, Lechner’s imagination. The curving steeples of the three towers echo the rounded forms so frequently favoured by Lechner. His inspiration may have been the steep, curved Indian temples, although there are also some European precedents, especially for the main tower: the curved steeple on the hexagonal tower of the church of Maria am Gestade in Vienna (1394–1414); and the tower and octagonal steeple of Frankfurt Cathedral (15th century, completed by Franz Joseph Denzinger, 1869–79), with its curved sides and soaring lantern.⁶¹

Construction work began in April 1894, but was suspended by the contractor a few months later on 11 October, because the architect had not completed the detailed construction plan. At this time, Lechner was indeed busy concentrating on the Museum of Applied Arts. Guided by national sentiment, the decision was taken in this year that the church would be dedicated to Saint Ladislaus, one of the most outstanding kings in Hungarian history. Work resumed in the summer of 1895, the last bricks were laid on 27 June 1896, and the church cross was consecrated on 11 August 1897. The building was handed over for use in 1899.

Apart from the afore-mentioned formation of the mass, the truly unique feature of the building is its use of shapes and materials. Within a framework set by a historical style, the neo-Gothic, it was here that Lechner really succeeded in stamping his mark. This harmony, the symbiosis between the traditional and the new, lends the church in Kőbánya a special character. Instead of the stone trimmings, tracery, rose windows and pinnacles of (neo-) Gothic churches, the architect placed freely formed ceramic elements on the building. Some of these recall the Middle Ages when viewed from afar, others can be traced back to folk decorations, while the majority are biomorphic or amorphous. Lechner used similar patterns in the Museum of Applied Arts; only here he also added them to

the exterior, in quite large quantities and with great variety. As essentially pagan forms – even on the arms of the crosses on the towers (!) – their presence on a Roman Catholic church is somewhat surprising, although they harmonise well with the overall image of the building and its different architectural divisions. The diversity of the architectural ceramics made by the Zsolnay factory can be seen not only in the shapes, but also in the refined system of colours, patterns and different surfaces. The free-standing components were made of matt ceramic. The bare brick cladding of the buttresses, divisions, and window and door frames is complemented with the grey, glazed bricks covering the intervening surfaces. Lechner also ensured that the glazed bricks had gridlines on their surfaces, so that anyone looking at them would not be blinded by the reflection of the sun's rays. The most spectacular part of the building is its roof, with its shell and its ceramic components. The glazed tiles on the roof form a dense, dark pattern. The pattern on the main tower and the side towers, however, is larger in scale, gentler and lighter, distinguishing and highlighting these parts of the building. The glazed ceramic ridge elements on the roofs, like those on the Museum of Applied Arts, are yellow, while the crosses and their arms glimmer in gold.

The inside of the church, in accordance with the clients' wishes, had to be laid out as a basilica, but Lechner was given free rein when it came to the architectural details. He designed them as biomorphic and amorphous elements, similar to the equivalent details on the exterior of the church and in the Museum of Applied Arts. In the upper reaches of some of the bundles of columns, he repeats the grooves and nodes from the museum atrium. In the spacious interior of the church, however, they do not overtly intrude: Lechner clearly sensed that a more intense language of form in these religious surroundings would look out of place.

The church furnishings were not made by Ödön Lechner, who had announced that the designs – due to the research involved – would take six months to prepare, with the work itself requiring a further eighteen months. The council withdrew the commission, and on 9 February 1898 they passed the work on to an architect named Ottó Tándor. This provoked outrage among architects and artists, who held Lechner in high esteem. A hundred of them submitted a petition to the city council, calling for the decision to be revoked.⁶² Among those who took part was Ignác Alpár, a very active architect, who had quite different views about architecture, and who would later become Lechner's rival and adversary. Joining him were numerous leading personalities from the world of art in Hungary: painters (such as Gyula Benczúr, István Csók, Károly Kernstok, Károly Lotz, Bertalan Székely and János Vaszary), architects (Kálmán Gerster, Dezső Jakab and Marcell Komor), the sculptor György Zala and the ethnologist József Huszka. In their opinion, Lechner's style was so precious that passing the work to anyone else would result in a terrible loss. The council, however, remained unswayed, and the altars, the lectern, and the rest of the objects were made according to the plans of others.

Ödön Gerő also published his thoughts on the Kőbánya church, emphasising Lechner's sovereign approach: "This is a work of the great, free art that rejoices in Hungarian naïve art. The style orthodoxy may despair, for this building is a revolution against style conformity, a chilling war cry against the legitimists of style. Yet followers of the Hungarian absolute style need not wave the national flag either. For this church is not a building that obeys the compulsory Hungarian style of architecture. It is simply the work of a notable Hungarian artist. It is simply of the Secession, which has sent imagination to pick flowers from Hungarian fields."⁶³

Lechner's next momentous work was the Geological Institute in Budapest. The competition to design the building was announced by Ignác Darányi, Minister of Agriculture, on 2 August 1896, with a deadline of 1 November.⁶⁴ No style was stipulated, but the facade had to be laid out simply, and the "public nature" of the building had to be reflected in its dimensions and proportions. The jury awarded first prize to Ödön Lechner for his work, which bore the motto "We progress by competing". The institute itself put Kálmán Gerster forward to design the building, but they were overruled by the minister, who gave the commission to Lechner. The completed building was handed over for use in 1899.

Lechner made substantial changes to his original design. The competition entry had been quite restrained, with the central section featuring only an avant-corps that was one bay in width, although it had a complex parapet. The building that was actually realised was far more impressive: it is divided by a sturdy avant-corps, embraced on either side by tower-like constructions surmounted with steep hipped roofs, and crowned with an enormous pyramidal roof. It is hard to decide whether Lechner submitted a simpler design for the competition in order to avoid aggravating tempers that had already been frayed because of the Museum of Applied Arts and then produced his more elaborate design once his contract was secured, or whether he – as he often did – simply allowed the concept to mature and evolve naturally.

The facade of the Geological Institute features relatively little architectural ceramic, compared with the Museum of

Applied Arts and the Kőbánya church. Its main dividing elements are the pilaster strips that accentuate the corners, the window and door frames, and the curving decorative bands, which are all made of brick, while the walls in between are plastered yellow. This means that the solution Lechner employed for the less important courtyard facades of the Museum of Applied Arts was now given the main role on the exterior of the Geological Institute. Solitary ceramic elements were placed on the plastered facades, and seem to hover between the rows of bricks. These have their origins in Huszka's floral ornamentation, although by making slight alterations, the heads of the flowers actually form shells, fossils or minerals, and thus refer to the function of the building. The ceramic elements are blue, matching the different shades of blue of the roof tiles. The globe, supported by atlases, on the peak of the enormous central roof announces the institute far and wide. The ridges of the roofs are made of sections with biomorphic outgrowths, while the chimneys are also in the shape of some creature, perhaps an outstretched caterpillar. The pillars of the fence are similarly organic in form.

The central section contains the staircase, which is the largest and most complex part of the building. The sweeping sequence of space begins with an enormous, eight-metre-wide atrium, and carries on up to the second floor. This vast span is facilitated by the use of riveted iron joists, which are given a vibrant, organic contour by some wavy stucco covering. The stairs curve upwards, twisting around to create a cave-like feel. Chandeliers are suspended from rosettes formed in the ceiling like stalactites. The ceiling of the staircase and the corridors is adorned with painted floral patterns and stucco ornamentation, similar to the fine, etched decoration on the windows. The engaged columns along the walls are broken up by nodes placed in fluting, a variation of the columns in the open atrium of the Museum of Applied Arts. Further column variants can be found in the council chamber on the second floor, where – as an additional reference to the function of the building – the heads of mineworkers look down at visitors from the corners of the arches.

With his next large-scale project, the Budapest headquarters of the Postal Savings Bank, Lechner transcended the path he had set himself.⁶⁵ Minister for Trade Sándor Hegedűs announced the competition to design the building in the autumn of 1899. The jury awarded first and third prizes to Gyula Berczik, the post office's architect, with second prize going to Ödön Lechner, whose design was also signed by Sándor Baumgarten (1864–1928), his associate at the time. Berczik's winning entry bore a remarkable resemblance to the

Geological Institute, Budapest

Ceramic ornament on the facade



Museum of Applied Arts, which led to outrage among professional circles. In January 1900, the two architects were invited to take part in a limited competition, which was now won by Lechner. The commission was awarded to him in April, and the building was handed over for use in November 1901.

Here too, the concept matured in several stages. On the interim plan he submitted, the building had a central avant-corps which, although it projected only slightly, was large and impressive. In form and scale, it recalled the avant-corps dominating Kecskemét City Hall, but reduced in depth due to the local conditions. The roof had towers only on each edge. The finished building is not radically different, but the changes reveal a significant shift in his attitude. Most importantly, the central avant-corps was flattened, now only symbolised by four giant pilasters and the enormous gable. The pilasters here are the same as those at the corners of the building, leaving only a token gesture of emphasis on the centre, yet the building is imbued with dynamism. The narrowness of the street was probably the reason behind the need to flatten the facade, but Lechner obviously recognised the opportunities brought about by this necessity, and was conscious in his creation of the flat facade. The more self-contained mass of the building was turned into a tool for innovation, reflecting a move away from traditional (historicist) architecture and hinting at future modernist preferences. This development is remarkable in view of the fact that just a few years before, Lechner had constructed the Museum of Applied Arts and the Geological Institute with very pronounced central masses. Like these two earlier buildings, the facade was not sealed with an entablature, but with a parapet, giving the building a vertiginous effect when viewed from below. However, whereas the earlier parapets had contained historical reminiscences, Lechner's innovation here was to add a simple, continuous wavy line.

Floral motifs

From József Huszka's *Magyar díszítő stíl* [*Hungarian Decorative Style*] (Budapest, 1885)

Château de Jumillac

From Victor Petit's
*Châteaux de France des XV^e
et XVI^e siècles* (Paris, c. 1860)

Another difference from the original design is that the two lateral roof towers are not so grotesquely large or prominent in the final version, yet there is a major addition spanning the centre of the roof, in the form of a boldly curving, more or less pyramidal tower with squashed sides. Lechner borrowed this unusual form from late medieval French architecture. The tower is tiled, and actually forms part of the roof, and rises out from it. The spectacular addition of an emphatic mass in the middle of the roof was one of Lechner's favourite solutions, and with this new, fantastic – and more filigree and airy – form, he did not let himself down. By simplifying the facade and increasing the importance of the roof, the visual focus of the building shifted skywards.

The Postal Savings Bank was supposed to be an inexpensive building. Its facade is therefore simple and economical in construction, with pilasters, bands and window frames made of brick, plastered in between. Lechner had come up with this system for his previous buildings, and now he had the chance to refine it. Through conscious composition, on the lower section of the facade, separated by an undulating dividing cornice, bricks play a greater role, lending the building a more massive appearance, while the wall above the cornice appears lighter. On the central gable, though, the rows of bricks break up into foils, linking organically to similarly shaped elements on the parapet. Concealed behind the huge expanse of facade wall is a network of iron columns and joists.

The ornamentation that Lechner was so fond of is concentrated in the upper part of the building, with two different sets of shapes and techniques. The topmost band of the facade, the gable and the parapet are decorated with different floral motifs. The precedents may be found, yet again, in József Huszka, who had meanwhile added another attractive album to his collection of publications.⁶⁶ The floral compositions sprouting from vases, the flower heads crowned with petals that resemble rabbits' ears, and all the other, similar elements are not precise copies, of course, but Lechner's own variations. They are made of mosaics sunk into the plane of the facade. The colour scheme on the roof is the same green and yellow as on the Museum of Applied Arts. The majolica ornamentation here is perhaps Lechner's most imaginative and most enigmatic composition. Part of the ensemble, consisting of three-dimensional components that are exclusively yellow (golden), may lend itself to iconographic interpretation, such as the beehives at the top of the pilasters, with the bees climbing towards them, which – as with other bank buildings – exhort the viewer to thrift and diligence. The snakes writhing at the edges of the foils and the wings decorating their spines are the attributes of Hermes (Mercury), god of



merchants and thieves. The bull's heads at the summit of the roof tower can be recognised as the main motif on the bowls (drinking vessels) of the treasure of Nagyszentmiklós (now Sânnicolau Mare, Romania). This gold treasure, from the age of the Migration of Peoples, was discovered at the end of the eighteenth century (now kept at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna), and the rumour spread that it had once belonged to Attila the Hun.⁶⁷ According to one myth about the origin of Hungarians, the Magyars and the Huns were relatives, so Lechner – as he had with the Persian and Indian links – once more panders to national sentiment, and a fictive variant of it at that. The other figures are heads of cockerels and dragons, monstrous faces, amorphous shapes, or other powerful designs, such as the contorted knots of snakes at the peaks of the two side towers.

The means were not available to lay out the interior of the Postal Savings Bank in as grand a manner as Lechner had done in the preceding buildings. The ground floor of the courtyard surrounded by the four wings of the building contained the public lobby (sadly this has since been converted), with a roof made of glass bricks, an innovation compared with the double-layered iron-framed hall of the Museum of Applied Arts. The airy, transparent space of the two symmetrically placed staircases owes its visual effect to the slender iron columns, whose bodies contain the grooves and nodes first used in the Museum of Applied Arts. The architectural ornamentation comprises elements from Lechner's customary repertoire, such as the dove-decorated column capital, although the snake motif that adorns the roof parapet is also repeated on the edges of the lintels. The

Postal Savings Bank, Budapest

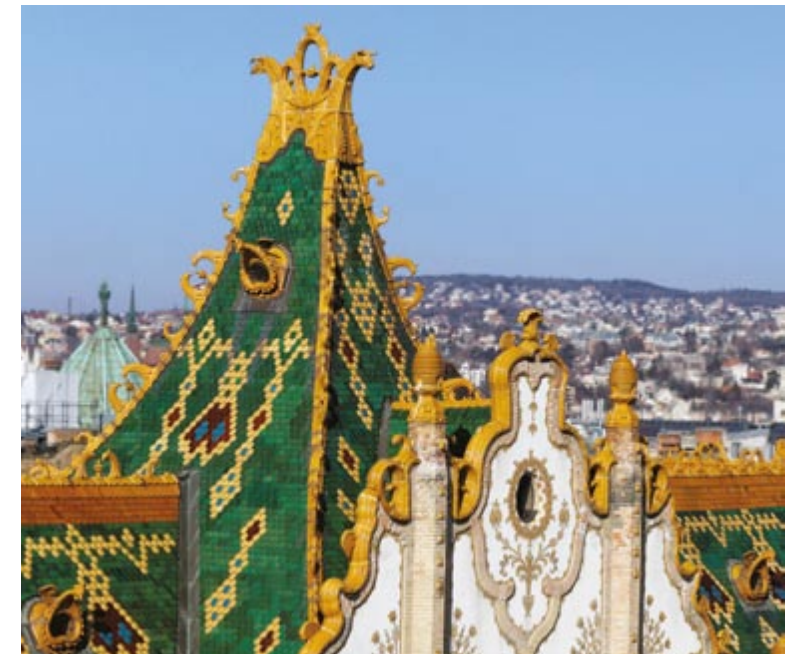
Roof tower with bull's heads

level of detail that pervades the interior, from the finely etched glass, the iron grates and the murals, to the furniture in the public lobby, bears all the attentive and creative hallmarks of the architect.

Contemporary reaction was vibrant, and those who took a modern view responded to the building with zeal. It goes without saying that Ödön Gerő was among them: "This building marks the stage in the development of Lechner's architecture at which modernity and Hungarianness are fused together, and having arrived at this point, where Hungarian modernity has completely evolved its own individuality, it may walk proudly among the leading exponents of Europe's new architectural endeavours. Ödön Lechner has neither substituted the neglect of centuries, nor constructed a Hungarian style from retrospective imagination, but has obliterated the memory of our backwardness by inducting into European modernity Hungary's very own modernity."⁶⁸ The Postal Savings Bank is unique in that, while the flatness of its facade heralds a new direction, the richness of form on the roof surpasses everything that went before. Lechner's contemporaries frequently admired the roofs of his buildings, and they even asked why all this effort and attention to detail was spent where nobody would see it? Legend has it that the master replied, with a playful smile, that at least the birds could see it.

Lechner not only designed the buildings and their details, but often also their fittings. The architectural ceramics, the metalwork, the etched glass, the wrought iron grids and the coverings of the floors, walls and ceilings would all bear the mark, or at least the spirit, of his hand. For some of his main works – Kecskenét City Hall and the Postal Savings Bank – he even designed some of the furniture. This all posed difficulties for the artisans who worked from the traditional repertoire of historicism, often copying from pattern books. "[...] Lechner's designs challenged even the most disciplined craftsman. Everything had to be learnt anew, and to produce forms that had never been seen before required a lot of effort, double time and double cost, and when it was ready – still no good! It was under such tribulations that all of Lechner buildings were made from then on", wrote Károly Lyka.⁶⁹ This attitude in design presaged, nay, even instigated the practice of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

The major constructions were still ongoing when a storm began to brew over Lechner's head. The kingpins of the architecture profession spoke, and though they mentioned no names, it was clear whom they meant. In his inaugural speech at the Academy in 1899, Imre Steindl gave his opinion of Lechner and his movement: "The younger generation of our architects wishes, in recent times, to turn Indian and Arab forms into a



Hungarian direction. They are, however, struggling with teething troubles, and complete success may only be achieved, perhaps, after some lengthy and painstaking research."⁷⁰ A similar statement was made by Alajos Hauszmann, the architect of the neo-Baroque Curia building (Supreme Court, now the Museum of Ethnography) and of the Royal Palace in Buda Castle, in his acceptance speech as rector of the Technical University in 1903: "[...] one man – though he be a genius – is not capable, nor are all artists together capable, in the brief span of their lives, of creating an artistic form, a new style, that will enter the blood of our people, that will have lasting value, and that will express the artistic sentiment of our nation. All that has been produced hitherto under the banner of the Hungarian style has been a more or less successful experiment and essay, for our homeland has no architectural past, and in the absence of such, even the highly talented master who leads the movement has fluctuated in his choice of the artistic form he wished to use as his starting point, turning to this or that style for his own adaptation. What



Treasure of Nagyszentmiklós
Drinking bowl. From
Archaeologiai Értesítő
(Budapest, 1884)

he has created, we can accept as an admirable study, which gives voice to the personality, rich imagination and talent of the master: but to qualify it as an agreed Hungarian style is not possible.⁷¹ The sad fact is that, in terms of how old they were, these eminent architects were both Lechner's contemporaries, even if they were a generation behind him in their mindset. Moreover, Alajos Hauszmann had once been considered a friend of Lechner's, and they had been in the same year at college in both Buda and Berlin. His example shows how Lechner's career would have transpired had he also remained within the confines of convention. When the Minister of Culture, Gyula Wlassics, gave his parliamentary speech in 1902, criticising Lechner and even imposing sanctions against him, there were lasting repercussions: "I summoned the leader of the architecture department, informing him that I do not like the secessionist style, and as it is not uncommon to meet the secessionist style under the name of the Hungarian style, this secessionist style is not in accordance with my taste [...] In architecture, style consists of two parts. One is the architectonic style, and this is primary; the other is decoration. So if someone uses a Hungarian cockerel as decoration, this does not make the style the Hungarian style. I am given the impression by many constructions, however, that whoever wishes to work in the Hungarian style works, in a certain regard, in the secessionist style; to ensure, therefore, that such a secessionist-directed style be impossible under the portfolio entrusted to my leadership, I will be making efforts to prevent it [...]"⁷²

Wlassics's identification of the destructive Secession – which, incidentally, offended many a Hungarian eye because of its Viennese connotations – with the style pursued by Lechner boded badly for the architect's future. The extent to which the two concepts and styles differed from or resembled each other was the subject of fierce debate among contemporary critics. One view was summed up by Ödön Gerő in 1899: "The Secession is not a style, but freedom [...] its apostle is Ödön Lechner."⁷³ Károly Lyka, a leading writer on art, also used it as a synonym for the new and the modern, and he placed Lechner's Hungarian style in this context.⁷⁴ Lechner himself was more nuanced and reticent in his pronouncements, preferring to speak of two parallel phenomena: "The modern movement that has begun across Europe, the 'secession', which had given often extreme freedom to form, was greatly instrumental in my liberation. The Geological Institute and the Postal Savings Bank are witnesses to the labours of this time."⁷⁵ The connection between Ödön Lechner and the Secession, and the terminology pertaining to the architecture of that period, constitute a point of contention in Hungarian art history to this day.⁷⁶

In the face of official architecture, an alternative movement

began to emerge, and the name of Ödön Lechner was pinned to its banner. In Lechner, the younger generation saw the pioneering master, the ideal to aspire to. The movement was joined by the Association of Hungarian Architects, founded in 1902 in opposition to the long-established Society of Hungarian Engineers and Architects.⁷⁷ The Association's name is literally the "Association of Hungarian Architecture-Artists", which immediately indicated that they regarded architecture as more of an art than a technical science, and added a new dimension to the previously existing conception. Among the 24 founding signatories, most of them notable young colleagues, was Lechner himself, who presided over the inaugural session on 10 June. In 1903, the suggestion was put forward to set up a state-funded academy, or master school – similar to the one led by Otto Wagner (1841–1918) in Vienna – with Ödön Lechner at the helm. To this end, a group of architects, painters, sculptors and writers handed in a memorandum to Lajos Berzeviczy, the Minister of Education.⁷⁸ The campaign became a national affair, and the issue was covered by numerous journals and professional papers. Even Lechner added his voice: "The technical university always teaches a single, rigid science, while the academy encourages the free artistic spirit. We should do the same here, and then the words of Alajos Hauszmann would be more understandable, and more forgivable."⁷⁹ In the end, nothing ensued from this initiative.

In the light of the above, it may come as no surprise that the efforts Lechner made to design public buildings after the turn of the century – and the entries he submitted – all came to nothing. This was not always due to the furor surrounding the man, but sometimes simply because of unfortunate circumstances. Nevertheless, the "old boy network" and corruption that were taking off in Hungarian architectural circles remained foreign territory to Lechner. However it happened, the fact remained that Lechner began to be swept aside from the mainstream of his profession, at least in official architecture. His series of consecutive commissions for prestigious public buildings came to an abrupt end in 1900.

His run of unsuccessful bids began in 1899 with the design for the Goods and Stock Exchange in Budapest, which was similar to the Museum of Applied Arts, and which he submitted jointly with Sándor Baumgarten. The competition for the main Budapest branch of the Austrian–Hungarian Bank was held in 1901; Lechner submitted two designs (both now lost), and Otto Wagner also made a bid. Both of the above competitions were won by Ignác Alpár, and the buildings were made according to his plans. Their late historicist, bombastic style was a world apart from what Lechner represented, and reflected an increasing preference for conservative tastes. In the meantime, in 1900, Lechner

and Baumgarten submitted a joint (failed) bid to design the Budapest Telephone Directorate (the plans are now lost). In 1902, Lechner – in association with Béla Lajta (Béla Leitersdorfer; 1873–1920) – applied to build the Post Office Headquarters in Pozsony (now Bratislava, Slovakia); the design recalled the Postal Savings Bank in Budapest, with the addition of Baroque proportions, but as it failed to take the characteristics of the plot into consideration, it was excluded. In 1905, at the end of a competition to design the Ministry of Culture, and following an exceptionally intricate process, the minister intended to award the project to Lechner and his co-architect, Albert Kőrössi (1869–1955), but the political crisis and the resultant change of government meant that the project was cancelled. Their plans successfully handled the enormous mass of the building stipulated in the guidelines, but apart from the dynamic design of the roof, there are only some passing reminders of Lechner's luxuriance of form. During this period, Lechner's narrowing scope led him to take on more private commissions. He had already constructed buildings for himself and his family before the turn of the century, and afterwards there were several others. In 1895 he built an apartment block for himself in Budapest (Berzenczey Street), followed in 1897 by a summer home in Pécel for his sister, Ilka. After this came a home for his elder brother, Gyula (today's Bartók Béla Street, Budapest; 1898–1900), and a villa for his younger brother, Károly (Kolozsvár, now Cluj-Napoca, Romania; 1902). These buildings were of simple and economical design, but with proportionate articulation and mass. Their plastered facades were decorated with brick bands, weaving in places into playful swirls. On his own house – which he built to let – the facade bears some sparsely placed majolica elements. Most are flower heads or a flower-and-dove pairing, but over the entrance is the Lechner family coat of arms. This was also included, as a kind of signature, on the inner facades of the Museum of Applied Arts and the Geological Institute. Károly Lechner's villa is unique in that even its flowerbed was designed by his architect brother, featuring stylised floral motifs. Similar to these buildings, but more richly designed, is the Deutsch House in Szeged (1900). The building itself was the work of a local architect, Mihály Erdélyi, but Ödön Lechner designed the facade and the two staircases. The plans that were submitted were also signed by Baumgarten. The richness and variety of the light-blue ceramic elements embedded in the long, plastered facade bring this building of Lechner's closer to European floral-style Art Nouveau; the same is true for the pattern of the gridwork on the two gates. The delicate, twisting grids on the two oriel windows and the central balcony are reminiscent of French and Belgian Art Nouveau. The riveted steel frame supporting the oriel windows shares affinities with the Eu-

ropean tendency to show engineering components unabashedly. The cock's head decoration on the wrought iron staircase balustrade grid is a three-dimensional reworking of the flat, stylised motif used on the light staircase metalwork in Gyula Lechner's house.

Lechner drew up the plans for the Budapest villa of the sculptor György Zala in 1898, but the somewhat modified final plans were made by two younger architects, Zoltán Bálint (1871–1938) and Lajos Jámor (1869–1955). The building was completed in 1901. The mass of the villa clearly distinguished between the residential part and the enormous studio (now demolished), which had an internal height of over ten metres. The varied, tall-roofed body of the building concealed a series of logically arranged rooms. Above the entrance can be seen a ceramic relief by Zala. The similar Sipeki-Balás Villa was built by Lechner in 1905. At that time he was working in the studio of Marcell Komor (1868–1944) and Dezső Jakab (1864–1932), who both signed the plans along with their master, and who may also have contributed at the conceptual stage. The asymmetric, airy mass of the building, its iron-framed conservatory with its quarter-spherical form, and its narrow, sky-piercing pinnacle all mark a shift of direction, as does the defining feature of the wall surface, the playfully curving sunken recesses. Inside there is a two-floor hall, which was in fashion at the time, containing a leisurely staircase. The balusters, as well as the tile-like covering of the ground-floor fireplace, were made from spectacular iridescent ceramic. This building is teeming with astute architectural touches and imaginative details.

In 1906, Lechner was finally awarded new public projects, not in the capital, but in the venerable western city of Pozsony (today Bratislava). Here, Lechner built the Roman Catholic Central Grammar School (1906–08) and Saint Elizabeth's Church (1907–13). Modest financial resources, as well as changing tastes, may have played a role in him covering the school only with plaster, although he did break the monotony with sunken recesses. The church, built nearby, is a relatively small building. Lechner's first design had an oval ground plan with a thin reinforced concrete dome, a distant and rather tame echo of his first draft for the church in Kőbánya. Here too, however, he had to accept the traditional hipped roof, although the finished building is not devoid of Lechner's refinement. The cylindrical tower simultaneously refers to the city's Baroque past and to the rounded, organic forms that the architect was drawn to. The church exterior – in the wake of the Sipeki-Balás Villa – is embellished with shallow recesses, in vertical bands and larger expanses with irregular contours. Even without any substantial ornamentation, with his harmonious use of shades of blue, recalling the Geological Institute,



Portrait of Ödön Lechner

Pastel by József Rippl-Rónai, 1913

Lechner succeeded in imbuing the building with a distinctive character; it also generated its popular name: the Blue Church. The architecture and the decoration now permitted a work of fine art to be added to the exterior: above the entrance, a mosaic image of Saint Elizabeth was laid, designed by János Vaszary. After his earlier, formidable masterworks, this church would be the master's swansong.

In the difficult years after 1900, Lechner felt a need to express his views in words as well. He was, of course, encouraged to do so by the young, supportive architects who surrounded him. He gave presentations and wrote articles. His most detailed condensation of his thoughts and his practice was contained in a study he published in 1906, titled "There was no Hungarian language of form, but there will be".⁸⁰ The title paraphrases a prophecy of the future of the Hungarian nation by the iconic nineteenth-century politician, István Széchenyi. Lechner's writing is significant because Hungarian architects rarely expressed themselves in this way. His text is more manifesto than scholarly treatise. Other great architects of the modern age issued similar pronouncements, including Otto Wagner, Adolf Loos, Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier. His main thesis was, quite logically, the creation of an independent Hungarian – effectively original – method of architecture. Lechner was still struggling against historicism. "Only the armchair scholars and armchair artists of the eighteenth, and even more so the nineteenth century, began to work with 'styles', that is to say, with what was not their own, and not of their time [...]."⁸¹ The major nations can, on this basis, create something of their own that is typical of them, but "we search these times in vain for Hungarian Gothic, Hungarian Renaissance and Hungarian Baroque".⁸² We have to reach for another source in order to create something original. This is the "Hungarian folk style", "popular planar ornamentation", where the Hungarian national style has been "touchingly preserved". "We have to set rules, and immerse ourselves in its unique spirit, so that one day, as men of culture, we may include the spirit of these forms into today's greatest, most advanced and even monumental archi-

tectural tasks."⁸³ The Finns managed such a feat – avers Lechner – and the entire world acknowledges them. Further opportunities lie in the latest materials and techniques. "Yet if ever, then now the time is ripe for us to make serious efforts to search for the Hungarian language of form: the dizzying rate and amazing achievements of technological development, and the advancement of cement and iron constructions to the fore have naturally caused a commotion in architecture. The possibilities afforded by new structures lead to new forms, so we have the opportunity, in this new evolution, to put our national identity to the service of creating a new language of form [...]."⁸⁴ He refers admiringly to the work of the Viennese modernists, Otto Wagner, Joseph Maria Olbrich and Josef Hoffmann. Lechner's most original idea is the linguistic approach to architecture, in reference to the earlier modernisation and fight for acceptance of the once oppressed Hungarian language. He links this to the issue of Hungary's minorities, who, even if they fail to learn the Hungarian language, may be won over with the help of the Hungarian architectural idiom. He also expounds that, since "the art of architecture has always been the mother and originator of all the arts",⁸⁵ then the fine arts may only be Hungarianised and modernised through architecture. The way to implement this, meanwhile, would be to establish an academy.

Ödön Lechner was also fond of holding forth on his opinions at his regular haunt in his old age, the Japanese Coffee House. At the turn of the century, Budapest was a city of cafés, which functioned not only as places of entertainment, but as the main venues of social life. In the Japanese Coffee House, on elegant Andrássy Avenue, artists could make themselves at home among Bohemian company, and they met up there every afternoon.⁸⁶ The regulars were painters, designers, sculptors and art writers who espoused the new form of expression; most other serious architects rarely frequented such places. "Lechner, with his French-style coiffed white beard and pink face, always with his soft cap perched atop his head, was one of the leaders of the whole company. One of the tribal chiefs of this colourful and diversely composed empire."⁸⁷ The other leading figure was Pál Szinyei Merse, the pioneering master of Hungarian impressionism. Another occasional visitor to the Japanese Coffee House was Tivadar Csontváry Kosztka, the eccentric and introverted painter, whose greatness as an artist compares with Lechner's. Unusually for Csontváry, he was on familiar terms with Lechner, and they used the friendly form when addressing each other. The coffee-house friends of the architect called him "Papszi" ("Pops"), just as his children did. The lively and jocular discussions around the table touched on all areas of life, including the problems of art. If talk turned to politics, Papszi could get rather heated, as he argued in

favour of national independence, often criticising the Prime Minister, István Tisza, whom he despised. He liked to see out through the coffee house window, and if it steamed over, he would wipe it, all the better to see the young ladies as they passed by. One thing he truly liked was the fairer sex. As a consequence of Lechner's close bond with the artists, several of them made portraits or caricatures of him, including Oszkár Glatz, Bertalan Pór, József Rippl-Rónai, and Miklós Ligeti.⁸⁸ No other architect colleague of his ever earned such friendly favour.

At his table in the coffee house, Lechner would scribble sketches and concepts on almost anything that came to hand, sometimes even on the marble top itself. This instantaneous, intuitive method came naturally to him, and was intrinsic to his creative process. Béla Málnai (1878–1941), who was once a draughtsman working under Lechner, and later a young associate, gave us his insight into the master's way of working:

"The Master was at his most amazing when creating at his architect's desk. Whoever saw him at work would be astonished. An enormous series of the finest ideas would appear before us at dizzying speed, we would be unable to follow his train of thought, as he set everything to paper. In these moments, the Master is alone with his art, and he concentrates only on what he is creating. The outside world stops around him, and his imagination is unremitting and prolific.

A mass of sketch paper lies before him, which he fills with buildings and all kinds of details. He attends to every minutest part of the artistic masterpieces he is making. He may be working on the first stage of the composition, but already he sees the details, the splendid harmony of the materials, and he reveals it all on paper, just as he envisaged it. This huge conglomeration of sketches assists him in completing the work, and in these sketches, his thoughts are reflected in all their magnificence.

And so this superhuman endeavour carries on, until the completely finished work stands before us. One who so quickly commits his fantasies to paper never ceases to improve them, and he spares no effort to ensure that every atom of it is organically connected with the whole. As he says of himself, 'A good architect differs from a bad one only in that the one has patience, while the other does not', which is not the only criterion, but it illustrates and verifies the pedantry that pervades his estimable art."⁸⁹

Lechner, an impulsive, undisciplined architect who frequented the coffee house and the cabaret, was in need of an office and helpers. He was provided for by the young architects who idolised him, with whom he had worked since the turn of the century. Even though Lechner never led his own academy, his young colleagues formed an informal school of followers around him.⁹⁰ There were differences in how deeply they became involved in the



creative process – probably less at the beginning and more actively towards the later years of Lechner's life – as well as in the extent to which they incorporated the Lechneresque idiom into their own work. Sándor Baumgarten followed his master's style most faithfully, and as he was awarded (together with Zsigmond Herczeg) the commission from the Ministry of Religious and Public Education to construct a national network of educational establishments, he became the greatest propagator of the art of Ödön Lechner. There is a certain amount of irony in this, considering how vehemently Lechner had been attacked by Wlassics, the Minister of Culture. Marcell Komor and Dezső Jakab,⁹¹ as well as Zoltán Bálint and Lajos Jámor, followed their master's path to newer peaks, erecting buildings of European rank in several cities in Hungary. Béla Lajta also closely observed Lechner's way of designing in his own first works, and he went on to become a representative of pre-modern architecture of international stature.⁹² József Vágó (1877–1947), who collaborated with Lechner in the master's later years, also veered towards modernism, pursuing work abroad after the First World War.⁹³ Lechner's influence was so great that his hallmarks – plastered facades decorated with bands of brick, crenellated parapets, coloured ceramics, and floral patterns – were even imitated by those who had never worked alongside him. There was even a periodical, titled *A Ház* [*The House*], whose mission was, among others, to popularise Lechner's works and architectural style. It was published between 1908 and 1911, edited by Béla Málnai, who was not one of Lechner's followers, just a great admirer. It featured regular articles about Lechner, as well as numerous sketches and drawings, which might otherwise have been lost to oblivion. Lechner's "Draft Autobiography" was also published here, at the editor's behest.⁹⁴

Ödön Lechner exerted this extraordinary impact on Hungarian architecture despite never having a combative nature. Though his work pulsed with revolutionary fervour, his character was the epitome of elegance. It could well be that, besides his outstanding qualities as an artist, it was also his human traits, his Bohemian joviality and his tender charm, that drew so many to his side.⁹⁵

The artists' corner at the Japanese Coffee House, Budapest. Ödön Lechner is on the far left

Drawing by Tibor Pólya, 1912

As time passed, the art created in Lechner's halcyon days, and the ideals it embodied, slowly lost their relevance. During the radical changes that took place in the first few decades of the twentieth century, architectural forms full of colour and flights of fancy gave way to a more disciplined and rational concept. The master's enthusiastic discourse on the Hungarian language of form was heard in silence by the young colleagues of his who happened to be passing that way. The Pre-Modernists – who Lechner got on well with, both as professionals and as men – continued to respect him as their forerunner. Others, however, disparaged him and his followers: Lechner's knowledge of folk art was second-hand, and he had sequestered it arbitrarily to create a national style, using it essentially as ornamentation. A group of young architects – who, as it happens, called themselves the Young Ones (Fiatalok) – took as their starting point the materials and structures of folk architecture, based on direct experience, and they considered the work of Lechner and his urban-minded followers to be superficial and pretentious. In 1910 Károly Kós (1883–1977), leader of this group, which would soon form one of the main movements in Hungarian architecture, wrote the following critical lines: "We have an artist of genius, Ödön Lechner, who in one fell swoop, created his buildings with boldness, instigating a revolution in the entire Hungarian world. [...] From Indian elements, Baroque lines and Hungarian ornamentation he created for himself a unique style. Thus were born the palace of the Society of Applied Arts, the Geological Institute and the Postal Savings Bank, which, they said, were in a Hungarian style. All of them are wonderful creations by a soul of artistic genius. Yet at the same time they are huge mistakes as well. But whereas he was merely mistaken, showing, by his example, his teachings and his encouragement, that a Hungarian artist does indeed need to find the way to make his art national, his students and followers, by contrast, were guilty of following their master without internal conviction, and only copying appearances."⁹⁶ Clearly, there was more than one way of searching for the Hungarian style, and for many, the concepts of "folk" and "national" were, in the strictest sense, distinct from each other.

Reading the signs of the times, Lechner did without ornamentation for a few of his projects. These include the mental hospital in Kecskemét (1908) and the blueprint for the extended complex of buildings of the teacher-training institute in Sárospatak (1909), which he worked on together with Artúr Sebestyén (1868–1946). The old flame was rekindled whenever he could allow his imagination to run wild. A long-running affair was the proposed monument to Queen Elizabeth on the side of Castle Hill in Buda, for which bids had been invited on several occasions. Lechner's sketches, known from publications, show a building

reaching for the sky, sometimes historicist, sometimes more liberated in articulation. A more specific concept was devised for the Kecskemét water tower and Rákóczi monument, which he dealt with in 1910. He made two versions. Reaching a height of over fifty metres, this reinforced concrete structure would have featured a curving, conical water tower, clad in glazed ceramic, hovering like a fantastic vision above an equestrian statue of Ferenc Rákóczi, freedom fighter of the eighteenth century. The earthquake of 1911, and subsequent events, meant that the project was never executed.

In the last few works he built, he was moving towards modernism. Such a change is in line with the master's profile, who remained open to innovation even as he grew older, although we must also bear in mind the more active part played by his younger associates, or at least their influence. One of Lechner's late works is the Vermes House in Budapest (1910–11), which combines residential and commercial units. The residential part of the building is covered with agglomerated stone panels – after ceramic, the architect had stumbled upon a new cladding material – with small, diagonal agglomerate inserts where the panels intersect. The effect recalls Otto Wagner's riveted stone-sheet cladding, without being a direct imitation. Very much in Lechner's style, however, is the cavernous entrance carved out of the ground floor facade, a modest reminder of his earlier, grander works. The ceramic decoration on the coffered, barrel-vaulted doorway is also an echo of Lechner's old use of material and form. In 1914, the year Lechner died, he had begun work on two schools in Budapest: the elementary school on Vajda Péter Street, and the Kőbánya grammar school. His partner in both school projects was the young József Vágó, who probably actually took the main role, but who always insisted that his master and elderly protégé was the author of these works. Ödön Lechner's signature is on the plans for the elementary school, but only his stamp is present on the other. On the facade of Kőbánya grammar school, next to the ornaments that follow Lechner's motifs, is the master's initials. The curved front of the building is accentuated by monumental engaged columns, and while the theme of the vast majority of the ornamentation derives from Lechner, it is given a new expression. The verticalism of the bare brick facade of the elementary school, the design of the parapet and the complex roof formations at the corners are similarly modern transcriptions of Lechner's mature works.

Lechner's final work, in 1914, was his plan for the Franz Joseph memorial church, intended for Budapest's Rezső Square. The programme of the competition stipulated a neo-Romanesque style, which Lechner complied with, designing a French Romanesque dome with a pair of towers resembling the Campanile di



The funeral procession of Ödön Lechner

San Marco in Venice. This plan recalls Lechner's initial concept for the Kőbánya parish church, but without the exaggerated fantasy. The style of the perspective view indicates that József Vágó lent a hand. This design won Lechner first prize. We can only speculate as to how he would have reconciled his own personal attention to detail with the forms of historicism. However, nothing came of it, because the patron of the committee overseeing the project, Archduchess Isabella, did not like the idea of the dome, and so the design was shelved. This incident may have accelerated Lechner's kidney condition, and on 10 June 1914, the master passed away.

The funeral of Ödön Lechner was a grand event, the last in a series of similar funerals that had taken place in the preceding few decades.⁹⁷ His body was laid on a catafalque in the Hall of Arts (Műcsarnok), and leading artists and politicians came to pay their respects. After the eulogies, the Funeral March from Richard Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* was played. As the procession passed along the main thoroughfares of the capital, workers on construction sites, where flags hung at half mast, downed their tools for a few minutes in silence. Lechner was laid to rest in a commemorative grave in the Kerepesi Cemetery, where national heroes are buried. The number of obituaries that were printed, and the things they said about him, proved that his contemporaries deeply mourned his death.

Ödön Lechner's role in the history of Hungarian – and indeed international – architecture cannot be overestimated. At the end of the nineteenth century, when Hungarian architecture was trying to catch up with Western Europe, mostly by imitating it, Lechner was the personality who broke the mould and created something original. This was his personal, yet universally significant oeuvre, which transported the architecture of his homeland from the nineteenth century to the twentieth. Lechner's work should be seen in a broader European landscape, whose representatives are characterised by originality and invention, a thwarting of conventions, a revolutionary attitude towards the mass and, even more so, the ornament of buildings, the application of new materials and techniques, and the search for new ideals and aesthetics on the theoretical plane. These phenomena do not combine to define a style, but rather to identify a movement. What this movement should be called in Hungary is still

a matter of debate, even today. The term "Secession" is traditionally used to describe the movement in general, but due to its obvious links with Vienna, there is some resistance towards this name, in the sense that many of the movement's exponents – with Lechner himself at their head – set out with a mission to create a form of architecture that was distinctly Hungarian, and so different from, and even opposed to, the Viennese style. This led to the introduction of the neutral, but slightly clumsy term, "turn-of-the-century". Seen from an international perspective, the Hungarian architect's work is also part of the "national romantic" category. A compromise solution is the expression: "Hungarian architectural Secession".

In the tumultuous period between 1890 and 1910, there were a number of architects around the world whose individuality was as conspicuous as Lechner's. Even among his contemporaries there were some, like József Vágó, who compared Lechner with the Viennese architect Otto Wagner.⁹⁸ The Hungarian master knew and appreciated Wagner's work, and it was probably under the aegis of Vágó that the two architects met in person in 1911. The parallel between Wagner and Lechner is one that has been drawn many times since.⁹⁹ Lechner also greatly respected the Finns, and was obviously familiar with the works of Eliel Saarinen (1873–1950), who was inspired by local traditions. Saarinen also visited Hungary in 1911, and it is alleged that he and Wagner together admired the Postal Savings Bank in Budapest.¹⁰⁰ Lechner also bears comparison with the Catalan architect, Antoni Gaudí (1852–1926).¹⁰¹ Though they never met, and never even knew each other's work, the two masters have much in common: their evolution from historicism, their organic handling of space and form, and their fondness for ceramics. Whereas Gaudí is more forceful, Lechner is more subtle. Others who may be lined up alongside Lechner – by virtue of certain aspects of their work, their daring innovation, and their relevance both locally and universally – are the Belgian Victor Horta (1861–1847),¹⁰² the Scot Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868–1928), and the American Louis Sullivan (1856–1924). Another common factor between Lechner and most of those listed above is that they were active not in any of the long-established art centres of Europe, but elsewhere, initiating their own reforms of universal architecture and culture.¹⁰³

NOTES

- Long overdue in Hungarian art history is a comprehensive, in-depth monograph of Ödön Lechner’s oeuvre. The most important works on him published so far are: Vámos 1927; Kismarty-Lechner 1961; Bakonyi – Kubinszky 1981; Gerle 2003. – A few exhibitions have been held, with accompanying publications: Ödön Lechner 1985, with the lead study by Hadik 1985; Ödön Lechner 1988; Ödön Lechner 1999. – The main Hungarian reference books that deal with Ödön Lechner in contemporary architecture are: Németh 1981, 324–337. (Zsuzsa Mendöl); Beke – Gábor – Prakfalvi – Sisa – Szabó 2002, 205–210. (Eszter Gábor); Sisa 2013, 471–474, 628–633, 636–641. (József Sisa) – International works that include a discussion of Ödön Lechner are: Howard 1996, 108–111; Moravánszky 1997, 223–239; Wiebenson – Sisa 1998, 225–229. (János Gerle); Alofsin 2006, 130–150.
- Lechner 1911, 343.
- Sisa 1996.
- Mallgrave 1996, 219–222.
- Börsch-Supan 1977.
- The name of his wife and her family appears in the literature as “Primayer”. However, the family tomb bears the name “Primajer”.
- Sisa 2008.
- Lechner 1911, 344.
- Lemerle – Pauwels – Thomine-Berrada 2010.
- Bélier – Bergdoll – Le Coeur 2012.
- Vámos 1927, 20.
- Lechner is quoted by Kismarty-Lechner 1985, 29.
- For the historical precedents for some buildings by Lechner, and their details, see: Falkenau 1993.
- Csáky 2008.
- Lechner 1911, 345.
- Lechner 1911, 346.
- Lechner 1911, 345.
- Koppelkamm 1987.
- Lechner 1911, 345.
- József Huszka 2006. For the contemporary view of ornamentation and related issues, see: Sinkó 2004.
- Huszka 1885, 12.
- The close connection between Lechner and Huszka was first observed by Károly Lyka. Lyka 1914, 304.
- Hajnóczy 1985.
- Komárik 1993, 71–84.
- Steindl 1899, 119.
- Lechner 1911, 343.
- Stratton 1993.
- Laudel 1991; Mallgrave 1996.
- Art and Design for All. The Victoria and Albert Museum [exhibition: Art and Design for All] 2012.
- The most important, illustrated album on the subject is Coste 1867. – The album, as well as the works on Persian and Indian art mentioned in this study, feature in the printed catalogue for the Museum and School of Applied Arts of 1900 (Czakó 1900). It is likely that they already existed there in previous years, and were made available to Lechner for him to study. An exception is the work of James Fergusson (Fergusson 1876), which is held by the Ferenc Hopp Museum of East Asian Arts. During Lechner’s lifetime, this was still a private collection.
- Komárik 1991. The study uses sources to demonstrate that the bricks and terracotta elements for the building were supplied by the company of Alois Drasche (11), which makes it hard to explain Ödön Lechner’s comment that they had been made at his father’s factory in Kóbánya (Lechner 1911, 343).
- Henszlmann 1864, 289.
- Mendöl 1993; Mattyasovszky Zsolnay – Vécsey – Vízzy 2005.
- Lőrinczi 1999, 120–161; Csenkey – Steinert 2002; Vízzy 2009, 52–65.
- Teréz Zsolnay – M. Zsolnay – Sikota 1974, 154–156, 159–160, 181–182.
- Lechner 1911, 346.
- Mendöl 1985.
- Sümegei 1996; Sümegei 2003.
- Pártos – Lechner 1892, 167.
- Huszka 1885.
- Birdwood 1880; Collinot – Beaumont 1883.
- Kismarty-Lechner 1961, 47.
- Hungarian National Archives, Bács-Kiskun County Archives, IV. 1903.a. Documents of the Municipal Committee of the City of Kecskemét. Minutes of the general assembly (1872–1950). 28 December 1897, record no. 406, p. 811.
- Nemes 1991; Ács 1996.
- Az Országos Magyar Iparművészeti Múzeum és Iskola tervpályázata. [The competition to design the National Hungarian Museum and School of Applied Arts] Építő Ipar [magazine: The Building Industry], XV. 1891, issue 27, 246, 247.
- Quoted by: Ács 1996, 39.
- Steindl 1899, 119.
- Fergusson 1876.
- Fergusson 1876, 154.
- Collinot – Beaumont 1883, fig. 54.
- Scala 1895.
- Fergusson 1876, 483, 600.
- Huszka 1885, tables XIV, XIX, XXIII.
- Sisa 2013, 601–602.
- Fittler 1897, 302. – For the debate surrounding the Museum of Applied Arts and Lechner, see: http://kiskunfelegyvaroshaza.blogspot.hu/search/label/Lechner%20%C3%96d%C3%B6n
- Gerő 1899.
- Lechner 1911, 355.
- Lechner 1911, 346.
- Lyka 1914, 305.
- Nemes 1980.
- Marosi 2004, 358–361.
- Nemes 1980, 139, 144.
- Gerő 1899.
- Nemes 1993; Hála – Maros 2000.
- Moravánszky 1998; Gerle 2004.
- Huszka 1898. Also published in German: Huszka 1900.
- Contemporary publication: Hampel 1884, the bowls are illustrated on pages 30–31.
- Gerő 1902, 49–50.
- Lyka 1914, 305.
- Steindl 1899, 119.
- Hauszmann 1903, 14.
- Országgyűlési napló 1902, 93. országos ülés 1902. április 17-én, csütörtökön, 398. [Gazette of the National Assembly 1902, 93rd parliamentary session, Thursday 17 April, 1902, 398].
- Gerő 1899.
- Lyka 1902.
- Lechner 1911, 355.
- Gerle – Kovács – Makovecz 1990.
- Baku – Csernus 2012.
- Gerő 1904.
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- Lechner 1906.
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- I would like to express my gratitude to the following colleagues of mine for the assistance they gave me in writing this study: István Bardoly, Attila Brunner, Klára Csáki, Tamás Csáki, Magda Lichner, Zsuzsa Margittai, Ágnes Prékopa, Pál Ritoók.

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LECHNER’S DRAWINGS, PLANS AND BUILDINGS

