

BOOK REVIEW

The Árkays – A Hungarian Dynasty of Architects and Artists. Written by Aurél BENÁRD, István BIZZER, Tamás CSÁKI, Katalin GERGELY, Edit LANTOS, Ildikó PANDUR and Gábor György PAPP. Edited by Tamás CSÁKI. *Masters of Architecture* [Az Építészet Mesterei]. Published by: Holnap Kiadó, Budapest 2020

reviewed by:

Rozmann Viktor

Institute of Architecture, Ybl Miklos Faculty of Architecture and Civil Engineering,, Óbuda
University, Hungary

rozmann.viktor@ybl.uni-obuda.hu

A secondary publication

The series *Masters of Architecture*, launched by the Hungarian publishing house Holnap Kiadó in 2003, already consists of 24 volumes. The goal of this series is to introduce the most outstanding personalities of 19th and 20th century Hungarian architecture along with their oeuvre. While its primary target audience is those within the industry, these richly illustrated, easy-to-read texts are quite popular with the general public as well. This way the series smuggles architectural knowledge and reflection on our built heritage back into general knowledge. Its success is shown by the fact that already five of these volumes – printed originally in a relatively high number of copies – have been re-issued. The most recent volume was funded not only by the National Cultural fund but also by the Lechner Knowledge Base and the Hungarian Museum of Architecture and Monument Protection Documentation Centre, proving that the series has earned the respect of the professional community. The late editor of the series, János GERLE have been followed in this role by József Sisa.

The most recently published volume is unlike the previous ones: while the authors and editors of those had been focusing on one single architect and his/her work, the “Árkays” – as its subtitle indicates in plural – is dedicated to multiple architects and designers, one way or another related to each other. Its goal is to introduce five people belonging to three generations in a time span of almost one hundred years.

Nonetheless, the encompassed period and styles add up to a heterogeneous image, starting with the pure as well as mixed branches of historicism, following with Vienna and Hungarian art-

nouveau, reaching early and classic and then romantic modernism, and then even socialist realism.

Only three of the introduced personages were actual architects, while the two others created lasting masterpieces in the field of applied arts. While central figures in the volume are Aladár and Bertalan Árkay, they were not the first in the family to become architects. Aladár's uncle Jakab ÁRKAY (1834-1877) was working in Arad as an architect prior to becoming the chief engineer of Transylvanian Railroads, while his younger brother Sándor (1841-1910) was a locksmith – his life and works are presented in the study by Ildikó PANDUR. Sándor ÁRKAY moved first from Arad to Timisoara, then in 1869 to Pest, establishing there his workshop in Csengery Street. In the following three decades, his talented skill, industry and participation in civic life yielded their fruits. Artefacts from his workshop can be seen on numerous buildings in Budapest and various Hungarian towns. Besides private projects, he took part in such large-scale works as building the structure of Nyugati Railway Station or the re-building of the town of Szeged after the disastrous flood of the Tisza river. His works won prizes at a number of Hungarian and international competitions; the 1885 National Fair brought him great success, and subsequently he was the first in Hungary to achieve the title of ‘imperial court locksmith’. In addition, he also received the Knight's Cross of the Order of Franz Joseph. At the same time, he was a member or office-holder of a number of trade bodies and committees.

However, PANDUR's study not only allows us to follow the career of Sándor ÁRKAY, but the description of his works gives us a vivid image of the development of the then newly unified Hungarian capital into a teeming metropolis. Economic consolidation and later the millennial festivities, following the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, actively boosted up giga-investment projects, which provided great possibilities to apply the increasingly popular wrought iron building ornaments. The heyday of Sándor ÁRKAY's career coincides with this period. Three of his four sons became creative artists: Béla took over the forgery, while István became a painter and Aladár an architect.

Budapest attracted high numbers of architects during this golden age. Mór KALLINA, an architect of Moravian origin arrived in the City to supervise the building works of the Rumbach Sebestyén Street synagogue as a co-worker of Otto WAGNER. This initially provided KALLINA and WAGNER new contacts to the Budapest Jewish community and consequently new commissions, too. KALLINA settled in Budapest, opened his own business and in 1874 obtained Hungarian citizenship. Gábor György PAPP guides us from one building to another, giving a knowledgeable analysis both for the facades and layouts of each. And he does even more: besides presenting those buildings, he also guides us through the intricate and fascinating social network of Kallina's clients. We see the sources of their wealth and can follow how KALLINA left the legacy of Theophil HANSEN behind and what fate awaited the buildings designed by him. In the context of their entry for the competition for designing the Hungarian Parliament Building, the so-called “Transylvanian marriage” comes up, including why it was so popular in contemporary Vienna, and how it served KALLINA's and Wagner's cooperation.

KALLINA worked together with his son-in-law Aladár ÁRKAY from the middle of 1890s onwards. (Remarkably, the volume's very first page features the intertwining genealogy tree of the ÁRKAY and KALLINA families.)

KALLINA surely needed the fresh knowledge and agility of his son-in-law, although, as Aurél BENÁRD states in his study as opposed to all that has been published in earlier literature, Aladár never graduated as an architect. Actually, he never even completed the first semester at the Faculty of Architecture at Budapest University of Technology (then called Royal Joseph University), apparently investing a much larger share of his time and energy in painting studies. Probably we are not far from the truth to look for the secret of his multifaceted creator's expression skills in this very condition.

Maybe we could even speak of Aladár ÁRKAY as of a painter and graphic artist, with architecture as the special subject of his art. A master of applied arts, furniture designer, interior architect, decorator, designer... in 1888 he composed a piece of music, a polka, which he got published in Vienna. Looking over his oeuvre, we can state that his creative freedom, permanently renewing character and light-footed style leaps were never paralysed by a regular architects' education, while the triumph of art-nouveau fully releases him from any pressure of academic constraints. He gains plenty of practical architect's knowledge at building sites as a foreman, then starts with his designer career at his father-in-law's architect studio. This cooperation was probably a win-win situation for both.

Besides describing the chosen buildings, BENÁRD's study focuses on the artistic activity itself by exploring its forerunners, probable effects and ideals. He is interested in the background of the creation of a work, while putting the building in question into both national and international contexts, in addition to Finnish and Viennese examples even associating it with Polish and German buildings. And through the buildings we start to see the personality of Aladár ÁRKAY unfold as well.

While reading the book, we have the feeling of working on a jigsaw puzzle, in which the single pieces strengthen each other, when getting in place. For example, there are two “framing” writings supplementing the main text: Tamás CSÁKI's introduction to the KALLINA-ÁRKAY Villa in Gábor György PAPP's chapter, then the text of Aurél BENÁRD about the a Berente power plant in Edit LANTOS' chapter which opens towards a lesser-examined subject, or we can equally mention the Jesus' Heart Parish Church in the Városmajor precinct of Budapest and the Votive Memorial Church in Mohács, as both of them are obviously discussed in the chapters on Aladár (written by A. B.) and on Bertalan (by T. CS.)

This mutually supplementing character is especially strong with the Judges' and Prosecutors' Cottage Ensemble, as BENÁRD writes on it briefly, while Katalin GERGELY devotes to it a whole chapter, but the vantage points of the two are different. While the first author approaches the ensemble from an architect's point of view, the latter gives us a sociographic description and investigates the living conditions of those who commissioned the project. Through her

writing we get an insight into how the living space was used by the wealthy upper middle class. An invaluable flat inventory, compiled in 1944 by the owners prior to their fleeing the country, gives us an exact image of housing culture and way of life characterizing this period and class.

A profound knowledge of ÁRKAY's heritage is a characteristic of all the authors' texts, but perhaps is most obvious in Tamás CSÁKI's chapter on Bertalan ÁRKAY where, based on numerous sketches of the Burchard-Bélaváry house, the author reconstructs that ÁRKAY really followed the planning and construction methodology of Behrens' school. It is known that two separate plans were submitted to the competition for designing the opening square of the Erzsébet Avenue by the father and his son – but it was only the inventory of the Árkay office which revealed that the office was to submit two plans also for the competition on the south side of Szabadság Square.

Bertalan is traditionally described as a member of the so-called “Roman school” made famous by Tibor GEREVICH, however, CSÁKI re-evaluates the “Italian influence”, which has so far been regarded as a solid fact. Árkay was a member of the 1st course, which happened to be simply too early to experience the influence of modern Italian architecture. As CSÁKI demonstrates step by step, Bertalan's primary mass creation models point to German forerunners, while ancient Christian architecture was the crucial experience of his stay in Italy.

All the oeuvres introduced in the book converge into two focal points of architectural realization, one of which is the family's villa in Városmajor Street, built by the plans of Mór KALLINA. Following his death, Aladár enlarged the villa into a studio house, and even later, when Bertalan came back from his foreign study trip, he set up his apartment with Lily SZTEHLO in another new attachment to the building. Multiple members of this artist family lived and worked and worked in the villa. The weekend house of Sándor ÁRKAY and his wife, planned by KALLINA, was erected nearby in Alma Street. The Kallina Villa is still inhabited by an architect descendant, one of great-grandchildren of Aladár.

The other location of the same essential density is the Városmajor Church, being a common creation of the father and his son. With its highly elaborate interior concept and Lily SZTEHLO's windows (along with PÁTZAY's sculptures and ABA-NOVÁK's murals) the church is a pan-art creation, the flagship of renewing Hungarian religious art, a milestone and a stumbling block – and also the very zenith of Bertalan's oeuvre.

In her study, Edit LANTOS focuses mainly on the ecclesiastic architecture branch of Bertalan ÁRKAY's post-war works. Churches are not the first aspect of the rebuilding after 1945 we usually think of, nevertheless, Bertalan was the most heavily employed church designer of the era: 14 churches designed by him were completed between 1945 and 1970 and several further unrealised plans survived, as well. However, we would look in vain for the imposing character and inventions of his previous churches. His talent was confined by meagre finances, by the coercion of using an existing substructure or by the available building materials – and still he

was able to create remarkable works; the Saint Anna Church in Taksony fits into the international tendencies with its oval base.

The era in which Bertalan ÁRKAY lived makes certain topics unavoidable. LANTOS manages to clarify a crass misunderstanding concerning the role of ÁRKAY during WWII. Árkay and his wife hid and saved about 20 persecuted children of Jewish origin.

The tableau presented by the book couldn't be complete, neither of the family nor of the churches, without Lily SZTEHLO and her coloured windows. Her first commission that was realised – the windows now decorating the City Hall of Mohács, she had got from her father-in-law, Aladár ÁRKAY. During the following decades, she created the windows of more than 50 buildings. Her oeuvre seems to be exceptionally prolific if we recall how meticulous and time-consuming the process of producing coloured windows is; completing six out of the eight panes of Jesus' Heart Church in Városmajor took ten years. This fact makes even more painful the loss caused by a nearby bomb hit in 1942, which destroyed all of them. This field of art is as vulnerable, as ethereal is coloured light.

Lily SZTEHLO's art has hardly featured in literature; István BIZZER's study is the first study overviewing her oeuvre. During her scholarship in Rome, she became influenced by contemporary Italian and French decorative movements while studying medieval windows. Her art fit quite well into the new direction of ecclesiastic art promoted by Tibor GEREVICH.

Lily SZTEHLO is not the first in the family to do glass colouring. Aladár's daughter, Tessza, who was a painter and graphic artist, made the windows for the minor church of Városmajor. Her early and tragic death was most probably part of the reason for Aladár to encourage Lily to take up coloured window art.

The artists presented in the book are bound to each other not only by kinship: this family should be seen as a shared workshop, where the oeuvres of family members are inseparably intertwined. As we have seen, the “ÁRKAY book” is a collection of massive topic(s) without any ambition to be monographic – such an ambition would indeed be satisfied by not one single but at least five volumes. At the end of each chapter we see an exhaustive list of the works by the given artist, from which the authors were forced to rigorously select the ones to be introduced because of the obvious constraints of the book. Some topics could be just mentioned, so there is room left for later studies, too. On the other hand, this collection of studies is much more than an introduction of an artist family: apart from being a piece of architecture and applied arts history, it is a depiction of an era as well.

Along with smoothly phrased writings, the readers get an extraordinarily rich collection of pictures; Rudolf KLEIN's professional building photos are of the same high standards than the well-selected and in many cases until now unpublished archive plans and photos.

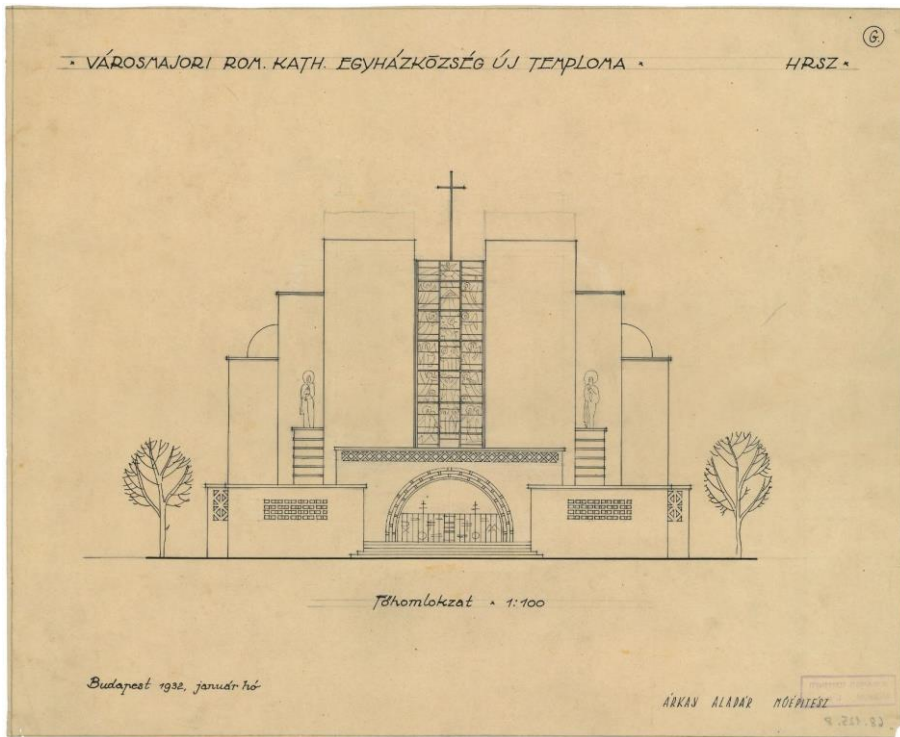


Figure 1. Plan version of the Városmajor parish church's main facade, 1932. Budapest, Budapest History Museum, Kiscelli Museum

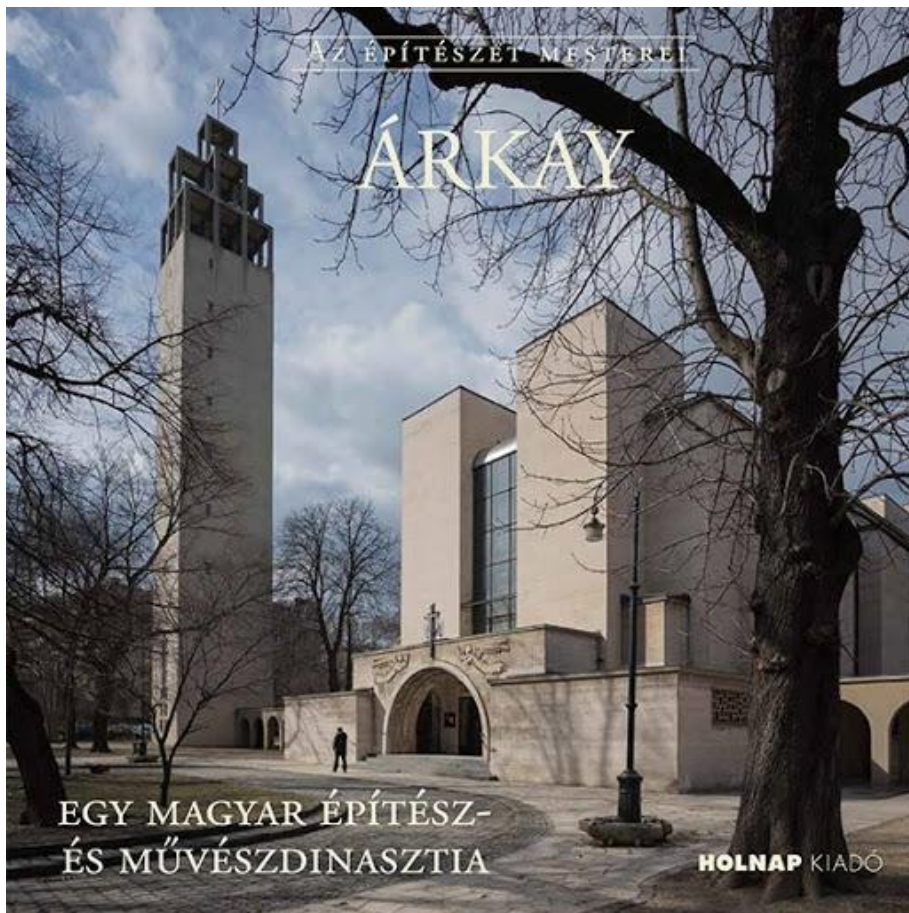


Figure 2. Cover of the book