

**Works of art and masters of the Benedictine Abbey at Tihany in the 18<sup>th</sup> century**  
**Theses of a doctoral dissertation**

by  
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## I. Theme, method and methodology

This dissertation is focusing on the period of the Baroque revival in the 18th century in the history of the one thousand year-old Benedictine Abbey at Tihany. The observations, in the field of History of Art, tracking the renewal of the monastery complex, which began at the end of the 1980s and got a new stimulus by the return of the order in 1994, have resulted in this dissertation. The summary of the research on the site, accomplished with Csaba László, archaeologist, has been involved in the dissertation. The excavations between 1996 and 2005 were primarily intending to reveal the fortification systems and the Baroque building periods. The restoration the altarpieces and other wooden furnishing of the church, carried out previously and parallel with the investigation of the building, has also provided us with numerous new particulars as for the Baroque objects and their masters. The excavations on the site have been completed by researches in the Benedictine Archives. Among the documents the accounts of Abbot Samuel Vajda and records relating to the constructions in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century could be judged as completely new sources. The history of the constructions of the Abbey in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the question of the masters working there have become more precise due to these documents. The masters' name from the Benedictine Archives encouraged my research in the archives belonging to the ecclesiastical and the county of Veszprém and in the registers of births of MOL (National Archives of Hungary) on the one hand and have furnished me with new aspects in the interpretation of the previous sources collected in the town-archives of Pápa during the last decades on the other hand. The so called 'liquidation document' by the Habsburg Emperor Joseph II (1787), from the collection of MOL, describing the condition of the monastery in the 18th century also became the subject of my research. To describe the activity of the masters (specified by the sources of the archives), accomplished in different places in the 18th century I used the method of art-geography and tried to identify the works and activity of the workshops connected with the masters working in Tihany. The investigations on the site, the assessment of the restorers' work from the history of art point of view, the sources of the archives and the benefits of the art-geography method, identifying the circle of masters, have provided us with a new and more precise picture of the constructions and masters, creating this Baroque complex and its works of art in the Benedictine Abbey of Tihany in the 18th century, compared to the previous descriptions of the history of the order in Tihany published in 1908 and 1911 and to the art-historical treatises of the 1960s.

## II. Structure and results of researches

1. In the introduction describing the first 700 years of the monastery. I summarised the results of the special literature since neither new sources nor new results in research work, relating to the history of the monastery in the middle ages and Ottoman occupation have been discovered. However, I made an attempt at analysing the patron Saint of the Abbey, Saint Anianus's, trying to demonstrate how the Saint got from France to Hungary and why the honour of the Saint, remained uniquely isolated in out country. Andrew I (1046-1060) King of Hungary must have got to an authentic relic determining the patron Saint of the monastery to be buried there by his family and diplomatic connections.
2. The constructions in the 18th century permanent for nearly a half a century and the chronology of building the church and the monastery wings have become clear. According to the hypothesis, based on the sources of archives, the constructions launched at the beginning of the century (in 1719) were to create a smaller church with a different ground-plan and a monastery possessing a wing in the eastern side. This building was burnt down in 1736. Following his appointment in 1740 Ágoston Lécs Abbot (1740-1760) had the building redesigned, the church increased in the west and closed by a pair of towers and a monastery involved a regular three wings. Among the designers Martin Wittwer called sometimes Brother Athanaz is also mentioned who actually could not have been the designer of the present church since he died in 1732. The architect's name of the 1740s is not known but he is certainly associated with the Austrian architectural trends defined as the Danubian Baroque School by Pál Voit. The title of the 'Magro Architecto' expressing an official duty refers to an architect of the court. According to the sources of archives he presumably died in 1751.
3. The evaluation of the archival particulars has made the organization of the building in the Abbey obvious and shown that its practice did not differ from that of the systems applied on large domains. However, they did not employ a leader either the abbot himself or a member of the order instructed the work. The Abbey did not contract with the masters arriving mainly from Veszprém for a particular work but paid them as day-workers. The constructions were instructed by József a foreman who must have been identical to József Tiethart, a mason from Veszprém introduced by P. Lukics and J. Pfeiffer's (1933) research.
4. The the altarpieces and other wooden furnishing of the church was created in the days of two abbots, Ágoston Lécs (1740–1760) and Sámuel Vajda (1760–1787). The iconographic project of the furniture was determined by the completely different personality of the two abbots. Lécs strove for formality and he tried to demonstrate the latest tendencies of art in the

abbey. However, the furniture installed by his inspirations represents an unsophisticated iconographic program. The patron saints of the church (Saint Anianus and the Holy Virgin) and the saints of the order with the saint Hungarian kings are illustrated on the main altar, while the most popular saints of the order on the two small side-altars (Saint Benedict and Saint Scolastica) and the Four Fathers of the Latin Church on the pulpit. To intensify the religious belief of his flock Sámuel Vajda had two subsequent side-altars (The Mariazell Madonna Altar and the Altar of the Sacred Heart) erected. His intention was to domesticate an already existing and living cult in Tihany on the one hand and to establish another one being about to develop on the other hand. The iconography of the sacristy realised in two steps (first the three prayer-stools with six pictures then the vault-paintings) demonstrates Vajda's extensive literary work. The pictures of the prayer-stool refer to Jesus's sufferings while the vault-paintings illustrate the Eucharist and the importance of the monastic life devoted to God and representing the only value and instruction against the ideas of enlightenment spreading rapidly.

5. To analyse the altars it became necessary to examine the altar development tendencies of this period. There were 30 altar-sketches at least drawn and published in engraving by S. Kleiner, A. Beduzzi and his engraver J. S. Negges in the 1720-1730s. These sketches relate to the illustrations of the 'stereoscopic retabulum' altars erected at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and connected with the latest tendencies of art consequently becoming also a model for the home customers. In the Transdanubia the first representative of this type of altars was built in the Jesuit church (Benedictine nowadays) of Győr and it became an example to be followed in the Paulite church of Pápa then in Tihany.

6. The question of the masters producing the furnishing in Tihany raised the necessity of studying the work of joiner's shops. The comparative analysis of the monastic workshops resulted in the conclusion that these joiner' shops operated as receptive places employing one or two (maximum) monastic joiners who instructed the workshop and provided background for creating the furniture and for involving secular outworker-masters (painters, sculptors) in the work. According to the practice of this period a Benedictine monastic joinery was established in Tihany in the middle of the 1740s – known as a unique in its kind so far – when a journeyman called David worked in it. Sebestyén Stolhoff joined him who was identified as a joiner by the accounts consequently he can not have created statues – contrary to the results of previous research – since outworker-masters were always assigned to this job. Stolhoff neither entered the order nor became a lay monk but was employed as a 'familiar' which legal relationship was also confirmed by the latest Austrian research. Stolhoff had a contract with

the monastery and was provided with a negligible income (convention) but he was not paid for the performed work. He lived and worked in a 'familia' belonging to the monastery and was provided with accommodation and food, similarly to the employees of the monastery having the same legal status such as the gardener or barber for instance.

7. Only the joiner's work of the furniture was created in the joinery (led by Stolhoff) of the monastery in Tihany. The job of the sculptor and painter was accomplished by masters from the neighbouring towns (Székesfehérvár, Veszprém, Pápa). Erecting an altar required the joint work of three masters (sculptor, joiner and painter) in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Hungary according to the practice rooted in the guild system. It was generally the sculptor who conceived the altar – possibly designing it on paper -, the joiner's work closely connected with him, while the master painting the altar-building and the altar-picture frequently worked separate from them. (These two painters were not always the same since the employers tried to find highly-qualified masters to paint the pictures of the altar especially that of the main altar.) The work was realised in the following process: the retabulum was created first by the joiner, the ornaments and statues were placed on it then, and the rough altar-building got marbled, painted and gilded finally by the painter sometimes completing the work only after years.

8. The altars of the church in Tihany were created by two circles of sculptors. The sculptural complex of the main altar is unique among the other pieces of furnishing. Failing documents and using the methods of Geography of Art the works of Ferenc József Schmidt, a sculptor in Veszprém can be connected with the main altar. His name was already known previously due to the research in archives between the two World Wars and the subsequent publications. The present dissertation has revealed further works certainly related to his name (the main and side-altars of the Roman Catholic Church in Hajmáskér, the main altar of the Roman Catholic Church in Csabrendek and Karád) and has proved that the parts of the compositions of the Holy Trinity ascribed previously to him on the basis of documents do not belong to him. Schmidt frequently co-operated with another sculptor from the neighbourhood who contributed to Schmidt's activity in Tihany. The statues on the cornice of the main gate of the church in Tihany must have been created by János Mihály Walch from Várpalota, the sculptor of the statue of Holy Trinity in Veszprém.

9. The another group of sculptors came from Pápa and József Huber belonging to them was identified in Tihany. The research has proved that the group defined as the workshop of the Paulite order in Pápa by the special literature, also established a workshop with one or two monks in order to create the furniture of their church (e.g. Felix Tatirek) but primarily they

collaborated with and employed casual painters and sculptors living in the town. The activity of two or three generations by the (secular) workshop in Pápa can be distinguished in Tihany. The sculptural works of the pulpit and the Altars of Saint Benedict and Saint Scolastica differ from the organ and the Marizell Madonna Altar while the Altar of the Sacred Heart, the Service Table and Abbatial Trone represent the third unity. This workshop of Pápa worked in the Cistercian Church at Zirc and the Benedictine Church at Bakonybél. The main altar in the Roman Catholic Church in Márkó and Gyömöre (originally in the parish-church of Pápa) and the statues (ascribed to Benedictine school previously) in the collection in Pannonhalma are also associated with them. Four statues in the Roman Catholic Diocesan Collection in Veszprém, getting there from Pápa, served as a key to identify the school. The direct stylistic parallels of these four saints are represented on the pulpit in Tihany and on the Marizell Madonna Altar.

10. The painters collaborating with the sculptors and accomplishing the task of painting the surface and of painting the pictures of the two side-altars arrived from Székesfehérvár and Pápa. According to documents József Codelli, specified already as former Jesuit joiner, became also identified as the painter of the illustrations of King David and Saint Cecilia on either side of the organ case. After the death of Codelli master Ambrogio from Székesfehérvár – probably identical to Ambrogio Dornetti - inherited these tasks in Tihany. However, it is impossible to attribute the wall-paintings of the sacristy to him for lack of the knowledge of his further authentic works.

Mihály János Stern the other painter is described as three persons in the special literature (Mihály Stern, János Stern and Mihály János Stern). According to his authentic signatures and inscriptions the painter living in Pápa and working closely with the sculptural workshop of Pápa, then moved to Győr in 1760–1761. The pictures of the two side-altars and the surface painting of the main altar in Tihany and the surface painting of the pulpit in Sümeg were identified as his signed works. The close relationship between his paintings and the similar colour scheme and space structure of the altar pictures of the Paulite church in Pápa demonstrates that the master must have belonged to the art-circle of the Paulite church.

11. Finally the legend of Stollhoff saying that he created the furniture of the abbey in Tihany during 25 years by himself has to be given up. He was a joiner and lived about 25 years in the abbey but no sculptural activity of any sort can be attached to his name. The presumption that the altars were established following his inventions can not be either eliminated or confirmed. The retabulum in Tihany very similarly to the workshop in Pápa gradually decayed after their golden age in 1750. They could not regenerate and did not get new stimulus. In the end a

presumption can be ventured that Stolhoff arrived in Tihany and stayed there from Vienna, his place of birth in the time of establishing the main altar through the circle of masters erecting the main altar of the Paulite church in Pápa.

### III. Further aims of research

While examining the question of masters creating the liturgical furnishing of the church in Tihany the art-geographical connections of the northern part of the Transdanubia especially of Veszprém County were described. The masters living in Pápa and Veszprém provided the churches and abbeys – among them the abbey in Tihany – with furniture in the diocese of Veszprém in the 1750–1760s. To complete the activity of the masters identified by this dissertation is the further aim of the subsequent topographic research since the knowledge of the works listed here and associated with particular masters can provide us with the possibility of finding a more complex and accurate picture of their activity.

It seems necessary to expand the research in the home archives with the archival sources of the surrounding countries since the provincial masters of smaller importance could also originate from abroad. The name of the master builders, sculptors and painters belonging to the guild system and arriving in Hungary from mainly Austria (Tyrol) and Moravia is unfamiliar by the special literature over the borders of Hungary and to reveal their roots can not be the task of the foreign research but of the home research as a consequence of the provincial nature of the material. While analysing the sources of Tihany I did not have the possibility of doing research in the archives of Vienna and Austria and I lacked the sources relating to both Stolhoff and the Austrian connections of the sculptors of Pápa. Stolhoff's origin may have been defined precisely by written documents and it could have provided us with basis to specify the origin of the workshop in Pápa.

Basic research into the altar-architecture obtaining gradually increasing importance in specifying the components of the Baroque sculpture and further extension of it is needed in the countries influencing our country significantly from art-geographical point of view. The special literature evaluates the retablo only as a medium of sculptural production and hardly considers it as a work of art or a creating process even if the craftsmanship and the connection to the latest tendencies can be detected the most evidently in their construction and structural establishment.

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