

Ödön Lechner in Context

Studies of the international conference on the occasion
of the 100th anniversary of Ödön Lechner's death

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of the 100th anniversary of Ödön Lechner's death

Edited by Zsombor Jékely
with the assistance of Zsuzsa Margittai and
Klára Szegzárdy-Csengery

Museum of Applied Arts
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The conference was jointly organized by the Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest and the Institute of Art History,
Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences

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Preface

The Museum of Applied Arts in Budapest is housed in a magnificent building, the masterwork of architect Ödön Lechner (1845–1914). This great building defines and identifies the institution, and is sometimes better known than the collection it houses. In fact, the building is often described as the first and key object in the collection of the museum. It is thus no wonder that one of the missions of the Museum of Applied Arts is to make the architect of its palace better known both at home and abroad. To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the death of Ödön Lechner, the museum thus embarked on the organization of an international conference and a major exhibition dedicated to the master.

The exhibition and the accompanying publication – written and edited by József Sisa – set out to survey the career and works of Ödön Lechner, displaying plans and photos of his most important buildings. Special attention was given to five major works, nominated for UNESCO World Heritage Site status: the Kecskemét City Hall, the parish church of Budapest-Kőbánya, the Museum of Applied Arts, the Institute of Geology, and the Postal Savings Bank. The aim of the conference on the other hand was broader: to place Lechner’s architectural principles and planning activity on the contemporary European scale, with the opportunity for comparisons on a wide horizon, while also giving an opportunity for presenting the results of most recent research. The conference explored the context in which Ödön Lechner

had worked and created his masterpieces: Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century, a period of great scientific and architectural change and development. Hungary in particular, after the 1867 compromise with the Austrian empire of the Habsburgs, enjoyed unprecedented growth during these decades. Ödön Lechner, one of the greatest and most original architects of this period, certainly deserves a prominent place among the international talents from the late nineteenth century.

The conference was jointly organized by the Museum of Applied Arts and by the Art History Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and by an organizing committee set up to coordinate the programme and the various sections. Altogether, four sessions were organized, focusing on the role and architecture of European museums of decorative arts, on issues of orientalism in late-nineteenth-century architecture, on questions of architecture and technology, as well as on significant figures of European architecture, the contemporaries of Lechner. The detailed description and programme of each section can be read below. We are very grateful for all participants who came to Budapest to deliver their papers and to those especially who had submitted an edited version for publication. The present volume is the result of their combined effort, which represents a significant step towards understanding the phenomenon of Ödön Lechner in the context of the late nineteenth century.