

Book Reviews

A középkori Magyarország rotundái [The Rotundas of Medieval Hungary]. By Vera Gervers-Molnár. Művészettörténeti Füzetek [Publications of History of Art], No. 4. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1972. Pp. 95.

Among the publications of art history, sponsored by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Professor Gervers-Molnár's study about the round churches of medieval Hungary is the fruit of ten years of research on a heretofore little explored territory of early Romanesque architecture. While the work deals primarily with the round churches of Hungary, it also offers, in twenty-five pages, a brief but comprehensive account on the origins and development of this particular architectural type and its most important examples in East Central Europe, notably in Dalmatia, Moravia, Bohemia and Poland.

The *rotundas* or centrally planned round churches represent a specific group of the early Romanesque churches in Central and Eastern Europe. The origin of this group, according to the author, can be traced back to one single prototype: Charlemagne's palace chapel at Aachen, consecrated by Pope Leo III in 805, which formed part of the imperial palace-complex. While the palace bore reminiscences of the first Christian emperor, Constantine the Great, and his Sacred Palace in Constantinople, the imperial chapel and later burial place of Charlemagne soon became a symbol of the new empire of the West, and presumably it was modelled after the *Chrysothriclinos* or Golden throne-chamber of the imperial palace of Byzantium. Both, the palace and chapel, served ideologically to stress the equality of Charlemagne's imperial authority with that of the emperors of Byzantium. From a technical point of view, however, the direct prototype of the Aachen chapel was the Church of San Vitale in Ravenna, erected in the sixth century during the reign of Justinian I, and itself probably following Byzantine models. Thus, in the view of Professor Gervers-Molnár, the Carolingian palace and chapel of Aachen are spiritually and from a technical point of view linked to the Byzantine tradition. While her theory emphasizes the influence of the Aachen chapel (and indirectly Byzantium) in the devel-

opment of the Central and East European rotundas, less attention is given in this context to the early Christian circular churches in Rome, like the Church of Santa Costanza, or the Church of San Stefano Rotondo, or one of the best preserved monuments of the Antiquity, the great circular hall of the Pantheon, later consecrated as a Christian church under the name Santa Maria dei Martiri. Here the question inevitably arises, how much if any influence can be attributed to these late antique and early Christian models in the development of the round churches of Central Europe, since the architects of Charlemagne must have been familiar with them.

In addition to the Aachen chapel, the earliest, best preserved and most significant round church in East Central Europe is in Zadar (Zara), Dalmatia, the Church of San Donato, built early in the ninth century and thus contemporary with the Aachen chapel, or only a few years younger. In the construction of the San Donato church "the influence of West and East met each other," asserts the author. Yet its role in the development of later round churches in the East Central European area still remains inconclusive.

The larger part of the book deals with the round churches of Hungary, discussing in great detail the origin, architectural and functional characteristics of altogether 64 rotundas, all of them following the Central European pattern. There are also described a few monuments whose origin is uncertain, and their architectural characteristics defy the classification.

Most of the round churches in Hungary were built in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. After the disaster of the Mongol invasion of 1242, during the general reconstruction of the country, the new Gothic style eliminated this form of the Romanesque from church architecture.

The earliest round churches in Hungary followed closely the pattern of the palace chapel of Aachen, and served, like their prototype, as royal chapels, attached to the royal residences. Another smaller group of round churches in Hungary were built near seigneurial castles, as court chapels for the use of feudal lords. From the end of the eleventh century on, the round churches became more frequent in Hungary and they served in great number as ordinary parish churches in the villages. The author examines in great detail the different characteristics of these churches, classifying them with respect to the form or number of their apses, the form of the choir, the presence or absence of a tower, etc. We are offered the systematic description of over 40 such parish churches, some of them existing in ruins only, from the territory of the old historical Hungary, and all of them reflecting the influence of a general

Central European pattern of round churches, modelled after the chapel of Aachen. Direct Byzantine influence is demonstrable in one round church only, or rather from its description dating back to the early nineteenth century, since the church itself was demolished in 1805. There are also a few round churches which belong to a group possibly affiliated with models of the Near East, perhaps Palestine or the Caucasus, where round churches existed already in the seventh century. One such church in Hungary, at Karcsa, in the eleventh century belonged to the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, and it is the assumption that it was they who brought this particular type of centrally planned church to Hungary.

This book, the product of remarkable research, offers a wealth of well organized data and information about its subject. It is completed by a "Summary" in English, and its usefulness is enhanced by numerous sketches and photographs of the most important round churches of the area in discussion.

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The Corvinian Library. History and Stock. By Csaba Csapodi. Trans. by Imre Gombos. *Studia Humanitatis*, I. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1973. Pp. 516.

This volume is truly a labor of love. Dr. Csaba Csapodi has devoted almost a lifetime to the history of the Bibliotheca Corviniana, the famous library of the Renaissance king of Hungary, Matthias Corvinus (1458–1490). His patient and exhaustive research, assisted by his scholarly wife Klára Gárdonyi Csapodi, have enriched Hungarian Medieval and Renaissance studies for decades. The large number of articles describing their thorough search for lost volumes of the Corvinian Library attest to their success. A few years ago they also published, with the assistance of UNESCO, a superbly illustrated volume (*Bibliotheca Corviniana. The Library of King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary*, Budapest, Corvina Press, 1969), which summarized the state of their research at that time.

Dr. Csapodi's latest work is a definitive study on this subject and will be, in all probability, the last word on the library of King Matthias for several generations. It is a reference book of inestimable value. The work is divided into two parts. In the first section the author discusses the history of the library, its size, development and destruction, as well as the previous estimates of its stock. The second part consists of the