

Michal Milan Harminc – museum builder¹

When we look at personalities of Slovak origin who were engaged in architectural and project work before 1918, the list is visibly more modest in comparison with those of the surrounding nations. If we do not remember Ján Nepomuk Bobula (1844–1903) and Blažej Bulla (1852–1919), we will certainly think of the names Dušan Jurkovič (1868–1947) and Michal Milan Harminc (1869–1964). It is these two builders who are considered to be the founding personalities of Slovak architecture. The contribution of Michal Milan Harminc's work received attention during his lifetime, the first buildings he designed being declared national cultural monuments in 1963, a year before his death.

Several academic events have been held since the 1990s to evaluate his work. The first was an exhibition in the SNG from 1991, for which a catalogue was also published, “Milan Michal Harminc 1869–1964: Selection from the author's graphic documentation of the architectural work.”² In the first decade of this century, the personality of Harminc and his contribution to the development of architecture were also the subject of two diploma theses at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Charles University in Bratislava: the work of Lenka Štalmachová, “Michal Milan Harminc 1869–1964” (supervisor Leon Sokolovský), whose analysis of the associated collection from 2004 shows his personal collection stored in the Archives of the Slovak National Gallery; and that of Viera Dlháňová, who in her diploma thesis, “Michal Milan Harminc and his sacral architecture”, from 2007 (supervisor Dana Bořutová), in turn focuses on the field of art history, her work also including a special catalogue of Harminc's churches and adaptations.

Of course, the 150th anniversary of the birth and the 55th anniversary of the death of the architect could not be overlooked, especially by architects and museologists. The result was an exhibition in one of the most highly regarded of befitting spaces – in the seat of the Slovak National Museum in Bratislava from November 21, 2019 to January 17, 2021.³ The author of the bilingual Slovak-English publication *Michal Milan Harminc: The builder of museums / Museum builder*⁴ is Elena Machajdíkovič, head of the SNM Archive, who has been dedicated to the personality of Harminc for a long time. The publication comprehensively evaluates his life destinies and architectural work. It is divided into nine chapters, which describe in more detail the individual stages of personal and professional life.

The chapter “Personal and family life” details basic biographical data, information about his family background and places where he worked. Subsequently, the section “Getting started in construction in Lower Hungary and Budapest (1886–1896)” describes the acquisition of his first professional experience and work in the construction companies of other well-known Budapest offices, as well as involvement in the then Slovak community and contacts with later

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² Klára Kubíčková – Mária Štibrányiová: Milan Michal Harminc 1869–1964: Selection from the author's graphic documentation of the architectural work. Bratislava: Gallery of Applied Art Architecture and Design of the Slovak National Gallery, 1991, 42 pp.

³ For more information on the exhibition, see: DÍTE, Tibor: Museum Builder Michal Milan Harminc. In: *Múzeum*, 66, 2020, No. 1, pp. 57–58

⁴ MACHAJDÍKOVÁ, Elena. *Michal Milan Harminc: The builder of museums / Museum builder*. Bratislava: Slovenské národné múzeum, 2020, 299 pp. ISBN978-80-8060-480-6

prominent figures of the Czechoslovak administration and politics in the then main city. Of the construction offices, let us mention at least his, albeit brief, work in the office of the builder of Slovak origin J. N. Bobula.

Harminc's more than half a century of professional activity, dating from the end of the nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century, was a period when aesthetic and theoretical views on the perception of architecture and urbanism changed significantly, and when changes also occurred in the use of building materials. All of this also influenced the work of Harminc, which is illustrated by the chapters "Buildings in the style of historicism (1897–1915), "Buildings in the spirit of monumentality (1916–1929) and "Buildings influenced by functionalism (1929–1951). Gradually, we can follow the almost 20-year period when the architect draws on his personal contacts in Budapest and the Lower Land and focuses on the construction of private villas, tenement houses and churches – Evangelical, Catholic and Orthodox – thanks to contacts in the Lowland environment. Subsequently, even before the establishment of Czechoslovakia, he moved to the territory of today's Slovakia, first to Liptovský Mikuláš in 1916, and then in 1922 to Bratislava as the capital of Slovakia, where he worked until his death. New architectural trends manifested themselves in his use of modernist currents, but at the same time he still used ancient and classicist elements. Gradually, however, in the interwar period he moved to new architectural forms in the spirit of functionalism, but, according to the author, Harminc never identified with the use of flat roofs, as "the building must have a proper roof, nice and especially practical" (p. 107); he thus distinguished himself from other architects, and "created a special expression in his buildings".⁵ Each of these chapters also brings the characteristics of the most significant examples from the given creative period.

The special chapters consist of three museum buildings designed by Harminc, each of which represents a different type of architecture, based on different architectural principles: the Museum in Turčiansky Sv. Martin (1905–1908), the Agricultural Museum in Bratislava (1924–1929) and the Slovak National Museum in Turčiansky Sv. Martin (1929–1932). All three of Harminc's museum buildings are currently declared National Cultural Monuments (NCPs). However, the information on the declaration of the second Harminc Museum Building in Martin as an NKP is contradictory: on p. 128 is an indication that it was listed in 1980 under no. 572, but on p. 137 that this occurred in 1963. Each of the chapters provides information not only on the design and construction of buildings, but also on their further use, adaptation and modification. The largest scope is given to the Bratislava museum building, the research on which the author has paid special attention to in the previous period, publishing the results of the research in a special study. However, some information about these buildings sounds a bit confusing. The first museum building in Martin is referred to in the professional literature as being Neo-Renaissance (or "Renaissance school"; 54), but elsewhere as a building that has a "classicist or neo-renaissance basis" (p. 53). It is described as a "three-storey building" (p. 116), although the catalogue guide to the *Sprievodca sbierkami múzeja* from 1938 on p. 1 states: "The new building is a two-storey building with an elevated ground floor".

The most extensive part of the monograph is the chapter "Other architecture work, which is completely natural, as Harminc is the author of about 300 buildings, the list of which is published here according to individual categories. 18 Harminc buildings arranged according to individual typologies are presented here in more detail. Among the villas and residential houses, the original summer villa of Emil Stodol in Liptovský Mikuláš, Kohút's villa in Martin, Fábry's

⁵ MACHAJDÍKOVÁ, Elena. *Michal Milan Harminc...*, p.107.

villa and the House of the Slovak League in Bratislava, where Harminc lived and had his studio, are presented here. Of the public buildings, there are the sanatorium of Dr Szontága and the Palace Spa House in Nový Smokovec, the Lúčky Spa, the Hospital in Skalica and the Sanatorium in Nová Polianka. The Carlton Hotel in Bratislava and the Tatra Banka buildings in Martin and Bratislava are missing, while the Roman Catholic churches in Černová and Urmince and the Evangelical Churches in Bratislava and Žilina are among the works of sacral architecture. When we look at the list of completed constructions and designs, here we move throughout the territory of the former Hungary, today in the territory of five states: Serbia, mainly in Vojvodina (Aradáč, Báč. Petrovec, Kovačica, Nový Sad, Subotica, Vršac), Croatia (Ilok), Hungary (Balassagyarmat, Budapest, Jászszentandrás, Lórév, Szolnok, Szentendre, Szeged), Romania (Nădlac, Sibiu) and, of course, Slovakia. From the smaller sepulchral architecture, there is more information about the mausoleums in Pomáza near Budapest and in Sládkovičovo.

The final part of the publication consists of an extensive catalogue: of the almost 300-page publication it fills 70 pages, about a quarter of the book (pp. 221–295). It contains objects from the family archive, such as photographs; archival documents related to construction activities, such as architectural sketches, projects and correspondence of the construction company with institutions; and photographs of models of individual architectural works that visitors to the exhibition could see taken by students of the Faculty of Architecture, STU in Bratislava. The catalogue also contains space for your own notes.

The publication has very high-quality graphic design. The published images mainly come from the SNM Archive, resp. SNM-Museums in Martin, the Slovak National Gallery, the Museum of the City of Bratislava and from a private collection. It is a pity that the archival material stored in the SNG was not used to a greater extent (p. 18). The representative image part consists of photographs from the family archive, which in 2018 was obtained by the SNM from the Harminc family.

The catalogue is also complemented by photographs from the opening and installation of the exhibition. It is a pity that the text of the publication does not contain references to sources and professional literature, the notes consisting only of explanations of personalities or institutions mentioned in the text.

Based on the published literature and our own archival research, the presented publication comprehensively presents the latest knowledge about the personality of M. M. Harminc and his work in a broader Central European context. As the author concludes (p. 214), the work of Harminc forms a part of the European cultural heritage. With its scope in terms of the number of buildings and designs and the diversity of building typologies in architectural diversity and time, it documents the development of world modernisation trends in architecture from the end of the nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century and its modifications not only in Slovakia but in the wider Central European area.

Dr Ľuboš Kačírek, PhD,
Department of Ethnology and Museology,
Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava