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Italian Influence on the Hungarian Renaissance

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In researching the Hungarian Renaissance and its relationship to artistic and intellectual developments in Italy, I have observed the developments in visual styles from the court-centered works in the Matthian period (1458-1490) through the sixteenth century with a particular emphasis on the period from 1490-1526 when Hungary was ruled by the Jagiellonian dynasty. A mixture of Hungarian traditions and Italian innovations allowed the Renaissance to flourish in a manner unique to Hungary. This paper gives a brief overview of Renaissance art in Hungary from Matthias's reign until the mid 16th century, using three prominent examples to illustrate different styles and stages of development: the Bakócz chapel in Esztergom, the town hall in Bártfa (Bardejov, Slovakia), and the castle at Sárospatak. I conclude with a short description of my research and time spent in Hungary.

Introduction

I would first like to thank the Fulbright committee for their support, without which this year would have been impossible, and my advisor, Dr. Péter Farbaky, for his advice and support. I would also like to thank my fellow grantees as without their good humor and encouragement, I may never have left the library.

My research has been on the art of the Hungarian Renaissance mainly focusing on the Jagiellonian period, 1490-1526, although similar styles and trends continued throughout the sixteenth century. Today I would like to give a brief overview of the period beginning with the reign of Matthias Corvinus (1458-1490), and then discuss three prominent examples of Renaissance architecture that this grant has allowed me to see in person: the Bakócz chapel in Esztergom, the town hall in Bártfa (Bardejov, Slovakia), and the castle at Sárospatak.

The Matthian Period, 1458-1490

Although there had long been connections between Hungary and Italy, one of the most fruitful collaborations between a Hungarian ruler and Italian thinkers and artists undoubtedly occurred under Matthias Corvinus, who ruled from 1458 to 1490. The king's interest in Italian-style art, literature, and court ceremony noticeably increased with his marriage, in 1476, to Beatrix of Aragon, a Neapolitan princess.

Hungary was the first place for the ideals of the Italian Renaissance, both intellectual and artistic, to appear north of the Alps. Unfortunately, few artistic monuments from this early period survive. Only fragments remain from the castles of Buda and Visegrád. Today Matthias is perhaps best known for his library, which consisted of between 1500 and 2000 volumes,[1] making it one of the largest in Europe. Matthias did not come from a royal family; his father, János Hunyadi, had been a powerful magnate and successful military leader, but he still lacked the heritage of many of the nobility who served him. In order to support his royal position, Matthias adopted many of the vestiges of power used by other rulers without prestigious family trees, including Federico de Montefeltro, the duke of Urbino, and Lorenzo de Medici, the unofficial leader of Florence, with both of whom he was in close contact. Additionally, both these rulers were responsible for sending artists and art objects to the Hungarian king. Contemporary Italian humanist thought emphasized that nobility, and hence legitimacy in office, was not a right of birth, but was gained through education, intellectual achievements, and an understanding of what would be today called 'high culture'. Matthias, who had had a humanist education in his youth, therefore made sure that his interest in literature and learning was well known. He had a *studiolo*, a private office in which the owner would display objects of intellectual and monetary value, and symposiums, structured, intellectual conversations on a specific topic, were held at his court and at other centers of learning around Hungary. In the written account of one symposium, held at the house of János Vitéz between 1468 and 1472, on the topic of theology, the king was presented as the wisest of the debaters.[2] This flattering portrayal was common among the intellectual Italian magnates, and whether or not the symposium ever took place, or if it happened in the way described is unimportant compared with the image of the king it presented. Additionally, to enhance his image as an enlightened ruler, in the manner of many Italian magnates, Matthias presented himself in the guise of various historical and mythological figures. To his political and military enemies, he drew on imagery of Attila the Hun, becoming a sort of Attila Secundus, the scourge of Europe. For the intellectual classes, he presented himself as Alexander the Great, the conquering, learned leader. His role as the defender of Christianity against the Turks was embodied by Hercules metaphors.[3] Works illustrating these metaphors were commissioned from a host of Italian artists, including Mantegna, Filippino Lippi, Verrocchio, Caradosso, Ercole de'Roberti, Pollaiolo, and perhaps even Leonardo da Vinci and Botticelli.[4] Italian artists also came to his court, and when he commissioned work on his palaces at Buda and Visegrád, he hired Italian architects to direct the work, and imported Italian artists to execute sculptures and building plans.

However, although Matthias had an interest in Italy, classicism, and the newest intellectual and artistic developments from south of the Alps, the king maintained an interest in and loyalty to Hungary's own Medieval traditions. Matthias continued to commission buildings in the Gothic manner, for example, St. Elizabeth's in Kassa (Košice, Slovakia) (figure 1),[5] and even the Buda and Visegrád palaces continued to use Gothic structural elements. Matthias's use of a mixture of Gothic and Renaissance forms was not accidental. Some, certainly, can be attributed to Hungarian masons' lack of familiarity with Italian design and building methods, but the use of Gothic styles had a specific purpose as well. The king presented himself as being possessed of Classical virtues and Renaissance culture, as well as the strength and courage of a chivalric Medieval knight.[6]

1 *Uralkodók és Corvinák = Potentates and Corvinas: Az Országos Széchényi Könvytár Jubileumi Kiállítása a Lapításának 200. Évfordulóján = Anniversary Exhibition of the National Széchényi Library,* Budapest, May 16 – August 20, 2002, p. 16.

2 Klára Pajorin, "I simposi degli umanisti" in *Uralkodók és Corvinák= Potentates and Corvinas: Az Országos Széchényi Könvytár Jubileumi Kiállítása a Lapításának 200. Évfordulóján = Anniversary Exhibition of the National Széchényi Library,* Budapest, May 16 – August 20, 2002, p. 117.

3 Alessandro Scafi, "La cittá ideale del Filarete e il Rinascimento ungherese", *Il veltro: rivista della civiltá italiana*, vols 1-2, January-April, 1993, p. 13.

4 Scafi, p. 13.

5 Antal Kampis, *The History of Art in Hungary*, trans. Lili Halápy, London, 1966, p. 114.

6 János Bak, "The Kingship of Matthias Corvinus: A Renaissance State?" in *Matthias Corvinus and the Humanism of Central Europe*, eds.

This duel identity of the king and, indeed, of Hungary continued throughout the early modern period.

Gothic and Renaissance in Hungary and Europe

Before I go on, I would like to give a general characterization of the concepts of Gothic and Renaissance in art history. In general, Gothic structures are identified by a few certain characteristics, namely, pointed arches, an exaggerated verticality, elements grouped in threes, and an interest in negative space. Renaissance architecture developed from an attempt to re-create the building styles of ancient Rome. It is generally characterized by rounded arches, columns decorated with classical orders, elements groups in twos, and an emphasis on symmetry and balance.

Hungarians had particular ways of mixing these two styles together. Certain *all'antica* ornaments, to use the Italian phrase for classicizing elements, were imported into Hungarian Renaissance architecture, and were found all over the country. One particular element, is the window and door frame of the type found in figure 2, in this case from a house in Lőcse (Levoca, Slovakia). This frame is found throughout the Hungarian lands, but with variations based on local building traditions. Medieval door frames, such as that in figure 3, were typically formed with a sloping surface which ends the framing element, about half way down the window. When Hungarian masons adopted the new Renaissance-style cross windows, they often used the Italianate frame, but

Tibor Klanczay and József Jankovics, Budapest, 1994, p. 45.

FIGURE 1

ST. ELIZABETH'S CATHEDRAL, KASSA

included three openings in the window, or had the frame elements end half way down the window rather than at the bottom as was characteristic in Italy and, for example the Bakócz chapel (figure).

Window frames and classical ornamentation, however, are merely decorative elements, and the major structural feature that distinguishes Gothic from Renaissance building is the construction of the opening elements, that is the door and window frames, regardless of how they are ornamented. In the medieval building tradition, elements such as door and window frames were carved from the same stones as the walls (figure 4), while in Italian buildings, walls were constructed and door and window frames were added separately, usually made from a different material than the wall itself (figure 5). On projects without an Italian master, early attempts at building 'Renaissance' structures in Hungary, Italianate styles were applied merely as decorative elements, and, due to the rigidity of Hungarian guild structure, the fundamental Gothic building techniques, that is the carving of the opening elements from the same stones as the walls, remained the same.[7]

The adoption of Italian Renaissance styles was not, as it happened in Florence, a simple matter of the old pushing out the new. At first Italian elements were associated only with the court, as only Matthias had significant access to Italian artists. However, works of a religious nature, in particular church painting and architecture, continued to be executed in the Gothic style, as this was traditional. North of the Alps, religious painting

7 Rózsa Feuer-Tóth, *Renaissance Architecture in Hungary*, trans. Ivan Feherdy, Budapest, 1981, p. 21.

FIGURE 2, WINDOW ON A HOUSE IN LŐCSE

was seen as Gothic, and although there are occasional exceptions, such as the Italian-style frescoes at Esztergom from the early fifteenth century, when people went to church, they expected to see Gothic architecture and painting. Additionally, although by 1500 Italian artists and styles were prevalent in courts and cities around Europe, rulers still used Gothic elements to emphasize certain political points. In the German speaking lands in particular, there was a revival of knightly, medieval values. This found its expression particularly in chivalric poetry and the emphasis on armor, although, since the development of firearms, it was militarily obsolete.[8] Hungary, which had strong ties with the German cities and Austria, as well as a large German-speaking minority, continued to use Gothic art for political and spiritual purposes. In 1486, Matthias Corvinus had himself portrayed in the Gothic manner at Ortenberg castle, today in Bautzen, Germany, where his rule was unpopular.[9] The Gothic decorative elements helped to emphasize a continuity with the past and legitimize his rule.

Bakócz Chapel

In stark contrast to the Ortenberg relief is a monument in Hungary intended to emphasize its patron's suitability for a prominent role in Italian politics. The Bakócz Chapel (figure 6) in Esztergom is probably the best known monument of the Hungarian Renaissance, and one of the few remaining whole structures from the period. It is significant, however, not merely for its survival, but also as one of the great masterworks of the period, characterized both by its overwhelmingly Italian form, and the use of traditional Hungarian building materials.

Cardinal Thomas Bakócz came from obscure origins to great power both in the Church and in more worldly capacities. At various times he was Bishop of Győr, Bishop of Eger, Archbishop of Esztergom, a member of the royal council, and finally Cardinal in 1500. He later became the Latin Patriarch of Constantinople. He was both a thoughtful scholar and humanist, a patron of the arts, and a skilled politician who was motivated by a desire to start a powerful dynasty.[10] His political connections were numerous, and in 1505 he was encouraged by the Emperor Maximilian I to seek the papacy. The same year, news that Michelangelo had begun work on a monumental tomb for Pope Julius II reached the Cardinal. [11] Bakócz was inspired to create a monument to himself that would not only express his judgment as a patron of the arts, but also his political ambitions.

The following year, in 1506, the foundation stone was laid for the chapel. The chapel was not fully completed until 1519 when the white Carrera marble altar, carved by Andrea Ferrucci and

8 Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Court, Cloister, and City: The Art of Central Europe 1450-1800*, Chicago, 1995, pp. 68-69.

9 Bogusław Czechowicz and Mateusz Kapustka, "Hope and Pragmatism: The Rule and Visual Representation of Matthias Corvinus in Silesia and Lusatia" in *Matthias Corvinus, the King: Tradition and Renewal in the Hungarian Court, 1458-1490*, Budapest Historz Museum, Budapest, March 19 – June 30, 2008, p. 81.

10 *The Register of a Convent Controversy (1517-1518): Pope Leo X, Cardinal Bakócz, the Augustinians, and the Observant Franciscans in Contest*, ed. Gabriella Erdélyi, Budapest and Rome, 2006, pp. xix, xxi.

11 Miklós Horler, *The Bakócz Chapel of Esztergom Cathedral*, trans. Lili Halápy, Budapest, 1987, p. 18.

FIGURE 3

DOORWAY IN BESZTERCEBÁNYA

FIGURE 4

DOORWAY FROM THE CASTLE AT TRENCSÉN (TRENČIN, SLOVAKIA)

shipped from Italy, was installed (figure 7).[12] Although Bakócz would narrowly miss the papacy in the election of 1513, the prelate went on building the chapel.

The chapel is remarkable for many reasons. Although there had been a strong interest in Italian art and architecture in Hungary for almost a century when Bakócz began building, Bakócz was the first non-royal patron to embark on such an ambitious Italianate building project, and the first person of any sort to construct a building entirely in the Italian style, not merely use classical elements as decorations in a fundamentally Gothic building. Other non-royal humanist patrons, such as János Vitéz and Jannus Pannonius, had merely collected books, commissioned paintings, and held symposia. Matthias's commissions at Buda and Visegrád, perhaps because they were renovations of older buildings rather than new structures, did not adopt an Italian-style ground plan, although they incorporated Renaissance decorative motifs. The Bakócz chapel was the first centrally-planned chapel built in Hungary. The central plan was a key element of Renaissance architecture in Italy, and was described by Alberti and used throughout the peninsula. Stylistic links can be found with the chapel of the sacristy in Santo Spirito in Florence, which was built between 1483 and 1487 by Andrea di Salvi, but the decorative style is reminiscent of contemporary Rome.[13] Records are scant, but the name of Iohannes Fiorentinus is associated with the workshop at Esztergom, and he may have been responsible for the carving and decorative work in the chapel.[14]

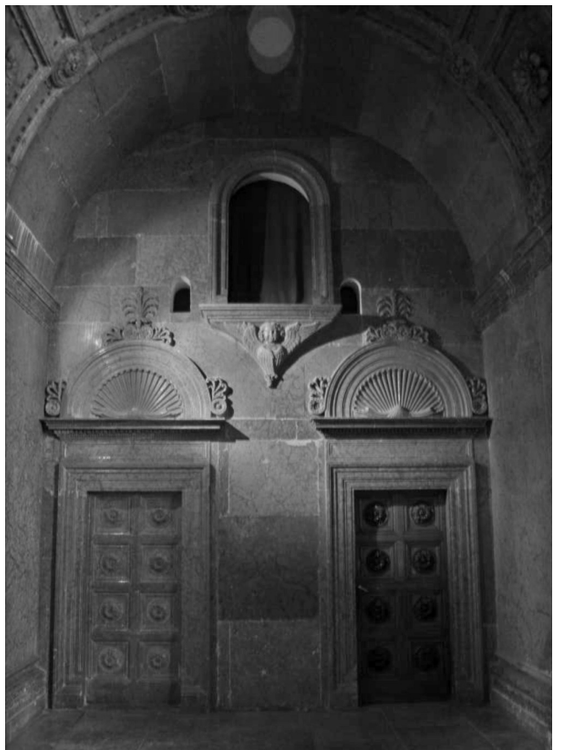
12 Rózsa Feuer-Tóth, p. 23.

13 Horler, p. 24.

14 Horler, pp. 25-26.

FIGURE 5

THE BAKÓCZ CHAPEL, ESZTERGOM, DOOR TO THE SACRISTY



However, despite the similarities to contemporary Italian architecture and decoration, there are two elements of the chapel which are specific to Hungary. The first is the use of local Hungarian red marble to cover the entirety of the chapel. The use of red marble to cover walls had a long tradition in Hungary, but marble covered chapels were not yet common in Italy. In Hungary red marble was used in building elements and projects of particular importance. It was used by King Imre (1196-1204) in his castle in Óbuda, now known only by description, which had a red marble floor and portals, or doorways decorated with red and white marble, and white marble lining the walls. Additionally, red marble covers the *porta speciosa* in Pannonhalma, built around the 1220s, and it may have even covered the walls of the original church at Esztergom. Later, it was used by Frederick III for his funerary monument in Salzburg.[15] Although it had a symbolic content similar to that of porphyry, which was used in Italy wherever it was available, red marble was a specifically Hungarian material, unknown in Italy. The other particularly Hungarian element of the Bakócz chapel is the bronze lettering around the cornice and in the drum of the dome. Although numerous Italian buildings, chapels, churches, and *palazzi* had monumental inscriptions, the insertion of bronze letters was a technology that had been used by the Romans but was subsequently lost in Italy. In Hungary however, the knowledge of the technique survived, and was employed with some frequency throughout the middle ages.[16]

15 Pál Lővei, "'Virtus, es, marmor, scripta': Red Marble and Bronze Letters", *Acta Historiae Artium*, vol. XLII, 2001, pp. 41, 44-46.

16 Lővei, pp. 46-52.

FIGURE 6

THE BAKÓCZ CHAPEL, ESZTERGOM, ALTAR BY ANDREA FERRUCCI

There is one other Hungarian element to the chapel. Although there were certainly Italians involved in the design and building of the chapel, and although the decorative elements, proportions, and execution are all unmistakably Italian in nature, the basic structure of the walls reveals some discrepancies. In some places different elements are carved from different pieces of stone, while in others opening elements are carved from the same piece of stone as the wall itself. For example, in the back of the choir stalls the engaged columns are visibly distinct pieces of marble from that of the wall panels between them (figure 8). On the door to the sacristy, however, the wall and door frame are carved from the same piece of marble (figure 9). It would be too much to read certain things into figure 9. The chapel survived the Turkish wars, even if the attached cathedral did not, and when the cathedral was reconstructed, the chapel was dismantled and rebuilt, piece by piece, in a different location. It is possible that seams in the door frame and surrounding wall were made at that time and were not part of the original construction, but the lack of seam between the edge of the door frame and the wall is clearly visible; they were carved from the same piece of marble. The discrepancy between these two parts of the chapel is symptomatic of construction in Hungary at this time. The chapel was undoubtedly under the supervision of an Italian architect, but the labor would have been a mix of Italian and Hungarian workers, and elements of the Hungarian guild system, which did not distinguish between different parts of the building practice in the same way as Italian guilds, persisted.

FIGURE 7

DOOR FRAME IN THE BAKÓCZ CHAPEL, ESZTERGOM

FIGURE 8

THE BACK OF THE CHOIR STALLS IN THE BAKÓCZ CHAPEL, ESZTERGOM

The Town Hall at Bártfa and the Castle at Sárospatak

The Bakócz chapel is perhaps the most famous example of Italian Renaissance-style architecture produced in Hungary in the sixteenth century, but it is not the only one. After the death of Matthias Corvinus in 1490, many of the court projects were continued by the succeeding Jagiellonian dynasty, but many of the Italian and local artisans who had been working in the Buda workshops had to move on and find other work. In addition to Italians, the court had attracted builders, sculptors, painters, and joiners from around Hungary, and many carried the new styles with them as they returned home or to other centers of artistic production. Two of the most important centers to develop were in Kassa and Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napolca, Romania). The guilds in these cities influenced building styles in northern Hungary and Transylvania. However, although many of the artisans had worked with Italians, or were familiar with the work being produced in Buda and at Esztergom, they did not simply adopt the new styles wholesale. Rather, the tightly organized nature of guild life and the desires of patrons who were not likely to have had great familiarity with Italian building ensured the continuation of Gothic styles in Hungarian art and architecture well into the sixteenth century. Although much of the work of the Kassa and Kolozsvár guilds has been altered or destroyed, there are a few important monuments that survive. One of the most important is the town hall in Bártfa (Bardejov, Slovakia), a town north of Kassa.

FIGURE 9, THE TOWN HALL AT BÁRTFA

The town hall (figure 10) was the first public building to take into account the Renaissance style without the help of any Italian artists or craftsmen, but it shows a significant amount influence from local building traditions. Constructed between 1508 and 1510 by one 'Master Alexius', the contract for the building stipulated that it have Italian windows, but the resulting structure is a mix of Gothic and Renaissance styles.[17] At first glance, the hall is hard to identify as Renaissance, especially to anyone familiar with contemporary Italian buildings, such as the Palazzo della Cancellaria in Rome. However, it contains distinctive features which break from Hungary's Gothic traditions. There are several highly decorated Renaissance-style door frames inside the building (figure 11), a coffered ceiling, cross windows with only two openings and classical frames (figure 12), and a porch in an Italianate style (figure 13). However, the sloping roof with its Gothic embellishments, lack of any sort of classical framework applied to the exterior, and repeated use of traditional Gothic motifs, such as the broken-branch door frames (figure 14) and balustrade, and the triple window in the Renaissance porch indicate a persistence of local building styles.

In contrast to the Bardejov town hall, the castle at Sárospatak, owned by the Perényi family, was remodeled under the direction of an Italian architect, Alessandro Vedani, who came from Lombardy and worked at Sárospatak from 1534 until his death. This architect was responsible for remodeling the *vöröstorony* (red tower) (figure 15) and building a new wing with a three light arcade (now

17 Feuer-Tóth, p. 24.

FIGURE 10

DOOR FRAME AT THE TOWN HALL, BÁRTFA

enclosed) (figure 16), and numerous decorated door and window frames throughout the structure.[18] Fortunately, the castle still stands, largely in its original state. Several of the door frames and other embellishments were moved in a later renovation, but they still survive. Motifs popular in the Matthian and Jagiellonian periods, such as rosettes and dolphins, continued to thrive at Sárospatak, but there was still no attempt to impose a unifying order to the entire façade of the castle as was almost inevitable in Italy at this period. Although construction was supervised by the Italian Vedani, Péter Perényi requested masons from Kassa and Krakow to help build and fortify his castle,[19] indicating the sort of mix of backgrounds to be expected in building projects in Hungary at this time.

18 Feuer-Tóth, p. 27.

19 Feuer-Tóth, p. 27.

The Renaissance in Hungary was not a homogeneous movement characterized by a steady progression from Gothic to Renaissance, nor was it invariably backward looking or unwilling to experiment. Both Hungarian designers and Italian architects in Hungary proved themselves willing to work creatively with new and old elements, to accommodate the strict guild codes and to build in many styles. Different political and social concerns as well as a differing level of access to actual examples of Italian architecture and Italian artists resulted in an uneven and idiosyncratic development of Renaissance style throughout the Hungarian lands. The picture of the Hungarian Renaissance, so often imagined from abroad, as that of a wholesale transplant of Italian ideas and arts to Hungary, is simply untrue. The uniform and authentic Italianate style of

FIGURE 11
WINDOW FRAME FROM THE TOWN HALL, BÁRTFA

FIGURE 12
WINDOW FROM THE CHURCH IN CSÜTÖRTÖKHELY (SPIŠSKÝ ŠTVRTOK, SLOVAKIA)

the Bakócz chapel is the exception rather than the rule. The Bártfa town hall is nearly contemporary, but could hardly be more different in aspect, although both were built from the ground up with clear intentions to imitate the Italian manner. In contrast, the Sárospatak castle is a belated renovation and extension, and in many ways comes closer to the Italian ideal than Bártfa, having more elaborate and finely carved ornamentation executed and arranged, at least in the new wing, in a more organized and Renaissance fashion. Despite its limited embrace of the Italian manner, the town hall in Bártfa must have served the patron's purpose in its expression the wealth and sophistication of the prosperous mining city.

Research in Hungary

The primary difficulty in studying the Hungarian Renaissance is the scarcity of material to work with. From the perspective of a foreigner, in particular, it can seem that there is little more than a few fragments from the Buda castle and the Bakócz chapel in Esztergom. Indeed the destruction of the Turks, the Habsburgs, and other invading forces, as well as well as occasional disputes between Hungarians themselves, has damaged and destroyed invaluable resources for the scholar of art. Research in Hungary, then, as well as extensive travel in areas like Slovakia and Transylvania is necessary to develop a full understanding of the period. I have been lucky enough to visit many of the important sites around Hungary and Slovakia, including not only the

FIGURE 13

PORCH ON THE TOWN HALL, BÁRTFA

above mentioned monuments, but also, among others, Kassa, Lőcse (Levoca), Frics (Fričovce), Eperjes (Prešov), Besztercebánya (Banská Bystrica), Pozsony (Bratislava), Sáros (Šariš), and Késmárk (Kežmarok) in Slovakia, and Siklós, Pécs, Pácin, Eger, Vác, Tata, Nyírbátor, and Pécel in Hungary. These travels have allowed me to learn what is not possible in a library; how wide spread the used of Italian motifs was in Hungary, even in domestic architecture without a public or religious function. I now have a better understanding of the scale and function of these works, and the manner of their execution.

I have also, of course, spent a good deal of my time in Budapest in the library. The other great challenge to the would-be student of the Hungarian Renaissance, is the Hungarian language itself. Indeed, some foreign scholars, who work in the field of Central and Eastern Europe have studied the subject only cursorily, because they do not know the language, or otherwise, they have studied the subject without knowing Hungarian because all of the primary resources for the subject, archives, letters, documents, books, and so forth, were written in Latin in that period. It is only the secondary literature that is in Hungarian, and much of that is available in either German or English. However, there are a few things, journals, some books, older travel literature that may describe a palace or building since destroyed, that are in Hungarian, and that are necessary for the serious student to read.

For this reason, and to ease my transition to life in Hungary, I have been studying Hungarian with some success. Although conversations are still laborious, my Hungarian reading is useful, not only in the library, but on a day to day basis

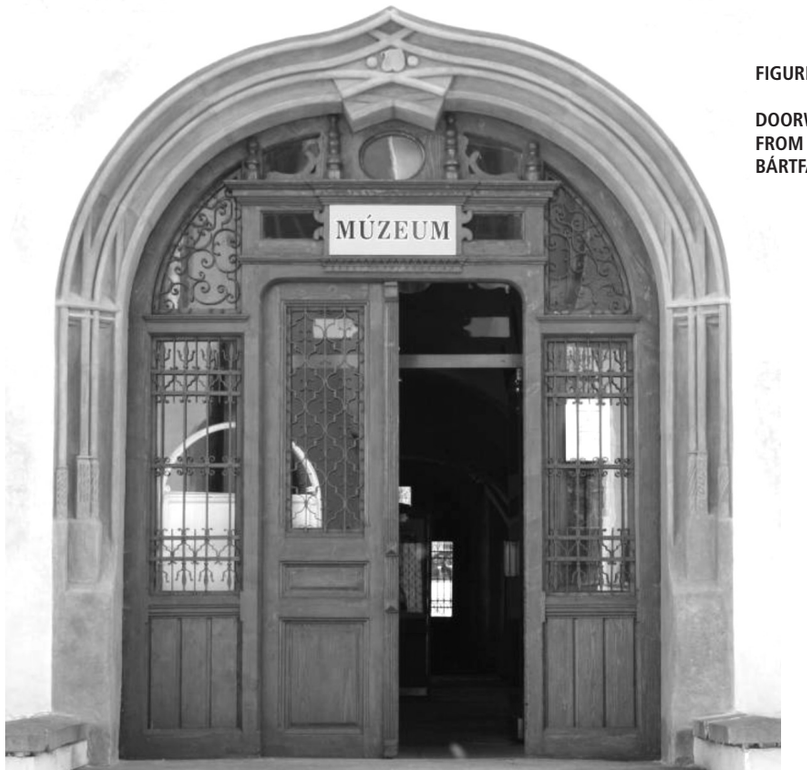


FIGURE 14

DOORWAY FROM THE TOWN HALL, BÁRTFA

as I navigate Budapest and other parts of the country where my research has taken me. Even my rudimentary spoken Hungarian skills have proved useful in the areas formerly included in the Hungarian crown, and I have often found that speaking just a little Hungarian has opened doors, both literal and figurative. On one occasion, and attendant at a church, pleased with my attempts to speak Hungarian, opened the sacristy, which was not normally open to the public, and on another occasion, a guard in a castle allowed me to photograph a chapel, that normally did not permit visitors to used photography.

My experiences in Hungary have been both personally and professionally rewarding and enriching. I will return to the United States better prepared to embark on further research on the Renaissance in Central Europe.

FIGURE 15, THE CASTLE AT SÁROSPATAK, RED TOWER ON THE RIGHT

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All photographs are the author's.

FIGURE 16

ARCADE OF THE CASTLE AT SÁROSPATAK

“But, really, what do you think?:” The Challenges and Opportunities of Teaching Across Cultures as a Fulbright E.T.A.

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The Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) in Budapest faces a two-part job: teaching at a Hungarian university and advising at the Fulbright Center. Each job requires patience in negotiating the cultural differences in style of teaching and learning – a difference that covers far more than just the language barrier alone. In this paper, I discuss both the challenges and rewards of teaching and assisting Hungarian students, and offer my ideas for how to best bridge these differences.