

Architecture around 1900 in Central Europe

#1 Revivalism

Karolina Dzimira-Zarzycka

Jakub Zarzycki

translated by Agata Walny



UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
WIRTH INSTITUTE FOR AUSTRIAN
AND CENTRAL EUROPEAN STUDIES

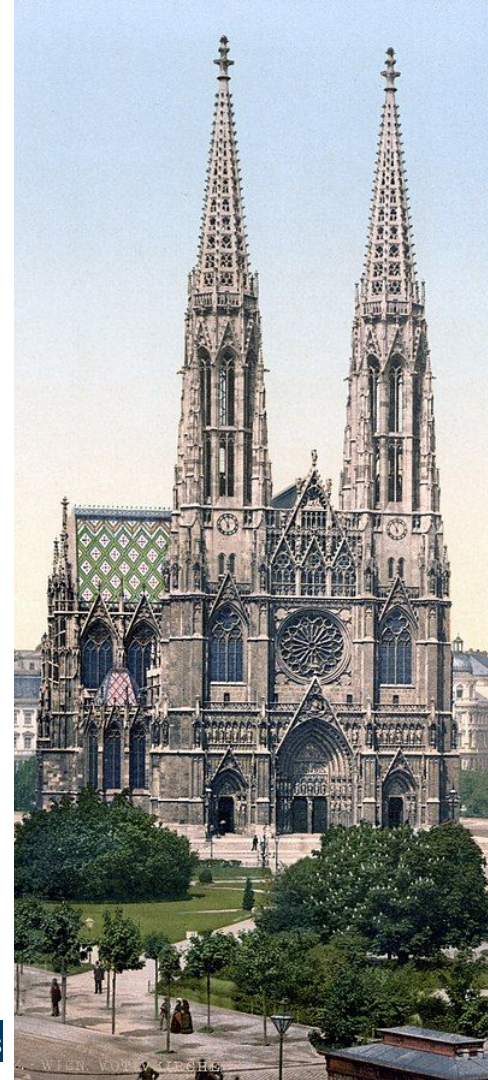


Architecture around 1900 in Central Europe

In this series on popular culture, we will once again revisit one of the most inspiring moments in the history of European culture. The turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was a **special period for art in Central Europe** due to various artistic trends and an increased cultural exchange between countries politically associated with Austria-Hungary.

The architecture style of this time largely dominates the face of contemporary European cities. Many important and characteristic buildings (such as train stations, museums, universities, and parliaments) were designed by then architects, while main boulevards and plazas were designed by city planners.

Similarly to our previous series, we will present a panorama of **the Belle Époque** through examples from Central European countries.



Votivkirche in Vienna, circa 1890-1900, Library of Congress

History and revivalism

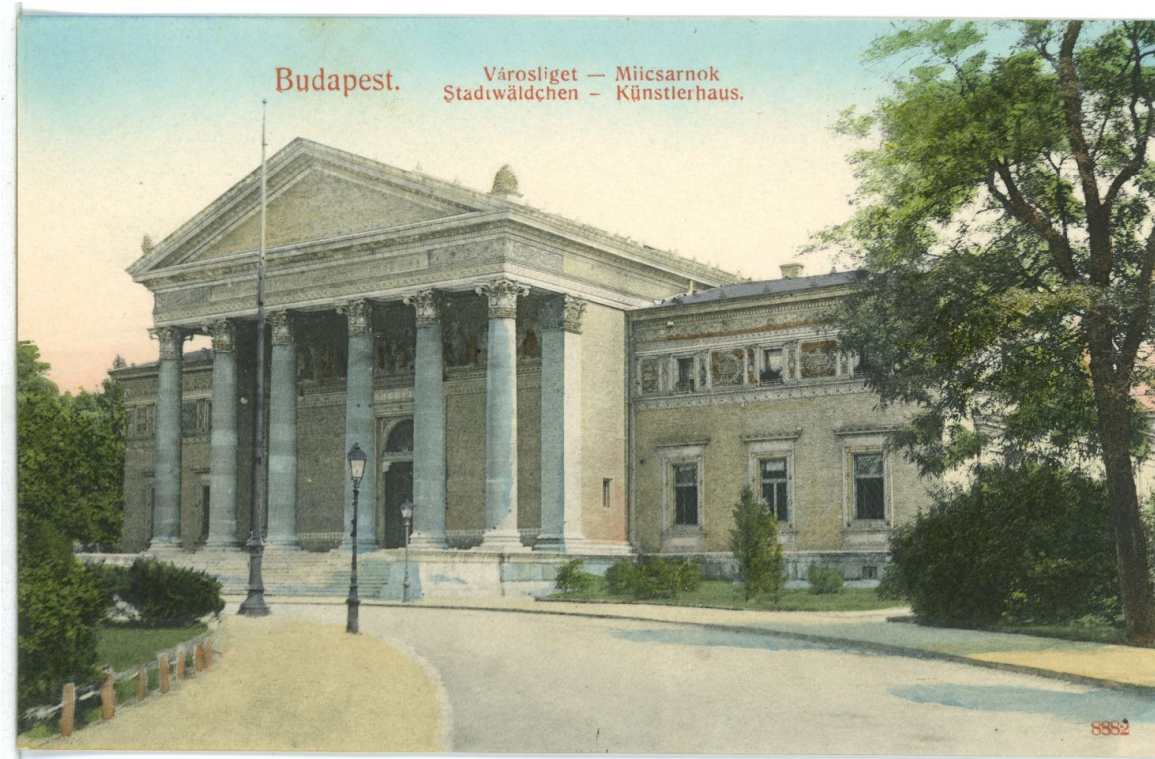
History was considered the “goddess” of the 19th century. The cult of the past was refined, and events of former epochs (i.e. the Middle Ages or ancient history) were considered key to explaining the history of a specific country.

It was the past that played a key role in shaping the architecture of the “long nineteenth century”.

Franz von Matsch (AT), *Allegory of Architecture*, 1889, MAK – Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna



The name for this phenomenon is “revivalism”, which is the period around between 1830 and 1918. Its main characteristic was the recognition of history as the most important inspiration for architecture, and thus the use of forms and solutions known from the past. Although there were, of course, references to history in earlier epochs, it was revivalism that expressed them most fully.



Hall of Art (Palace of Art) in Budapest, 1907,
Deutsche Fotothek

Style

An important concept for revivalism was style – or a set of formal features (motives or principles) – with which it was possible to easily refer to a specific moment in time and the values associated with it. Style was also considered a visual summary of an era.

A given historical style was to express the purpose of the building in question. The so-called a “costume style”, or set of appropriate decorative elements, masked the structure of the building.



Votivkirche in Vienna, photo by Wilhelm J. Burger,
1880, Austrian National Library

It is worth emphasizing, however, that the perception of the past was strongly filtered by the state of knowledge, aesthetics and imagination of people living in the nineteenth century. Sometimes even attempts were made to “repair” old buildings – so that they fit the image of a given era to be stylistically uniform. In Krakow, St. Mary's Church was “cleaned up” in order to give it a more matching, neo-Gothic interior (originally it was Gothic, but with a Baroque interior).

The interior of St Mary's Church in Cracow. Work on the polychrome designed by Jan Matejko, 1889, National Museum in Cracow



The Typical City

Revivalism was massive, widespread and dominant. Examples of it can be found virtually all over the world, regardless of geographic conditions or local building customs. In individual regions and countries, it did however take different forms in relation to local history or the anticipated outcome.

It should be emphasized that revivalism largely dominated and shaped the buildings of European cities that we see today.



Ringstrasse (Vienna Ring Road), photo by A. Wimmer, circa 1893-1903, MAK – Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna

Architecture and colonialism?

In non-European cities, this style unity can be rather seen as an expression of colonialism. Historical styles confirmed the dominant history and culture of the colonizers in the urban tissue.



Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Warsaw,
1906, National Library in Warsaw

This can be seen in Poland, where between 1894-1912 the Russians built the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Warsaw in the Byzantine style – a mode completely foreign to Polish culture. This church, built on one of the most important squares in Warsaw, was also one of the tallest buildings in the city. For the Russians it was a manifestation of their religious and cultural domination. It is not surprising then that the church was demolished after Poland regained independence in 1918.



Demolishing of Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Warsaw, 1926, National Digital Archives, Warsaw

A Wonderful Past

Revivalism had two main causes. The first was recognizing the old epochs as a perfect and unsurpassed role model. It was believed that that architecture of the past was simply better. The second was the search for evidence of the existence of one's own nation, its achievements, and successes.

Postcard from Zagreb with neo-gothic Cathedral of the Assumption of Mary, circa 1900, Museum of Arts and Crafts, Zagreb



Inspirations

Architects sometimes included “architectural quotes” from monuments in their designs, attempting to faithfully reference existing buildings, and sometimes a general perception of a given period.



St. Anthony of Padua Church in Vienna (mostly inspired by Basilica of Saint Anthony of Padua in Italy), Wien Museum

Wien II. Erzherzog Karlsplatz.

Kaiser Jubiläumskirche z. h. Franz v. Assisi.



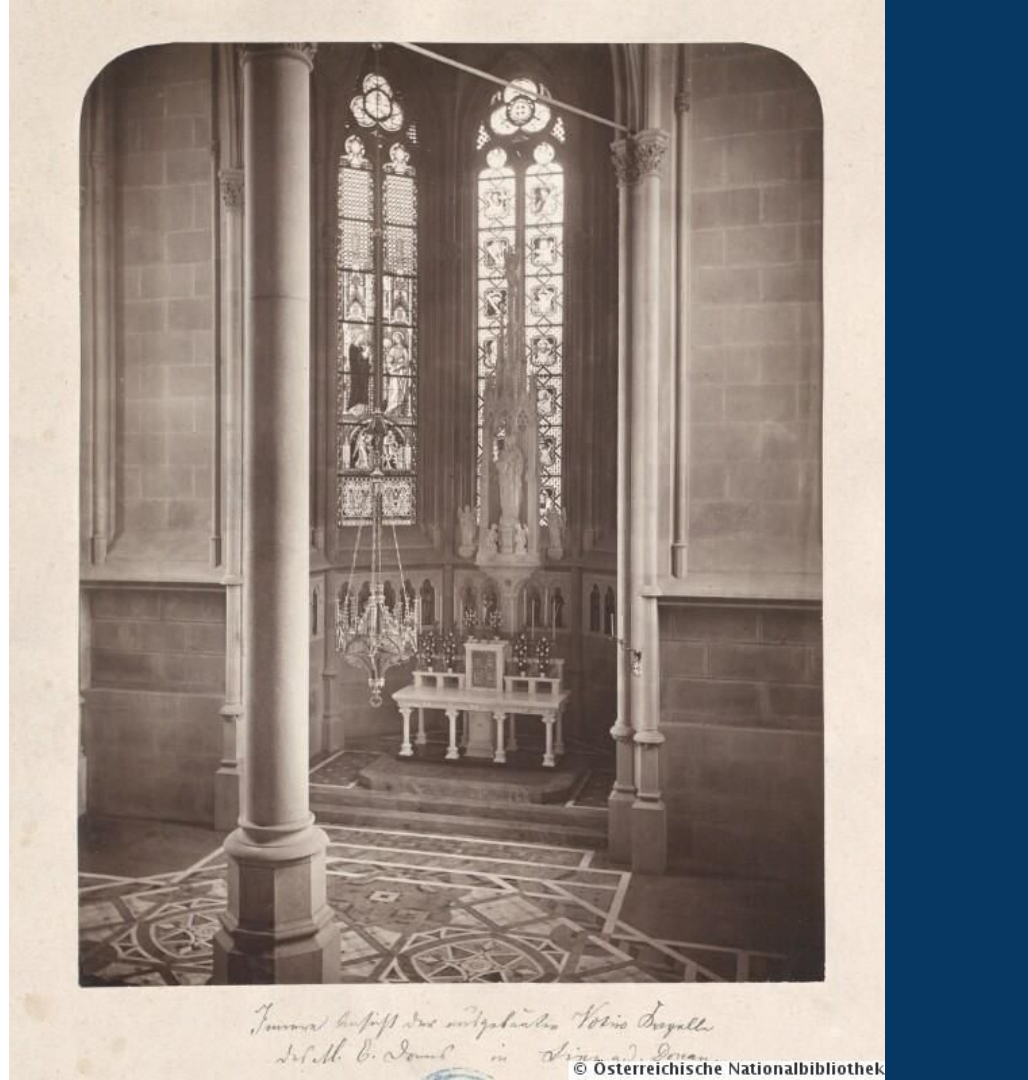
Neo-Gothic St. Francis of Assisi Church in Vienna, circa 1913–1914, Wien Museum

with tower inspired by...



Gothic Great St. Martin Church in Cologne, Germany, photo by Anselm Schmitz, 1877, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Historical references did not end with the façade but continued within the building. This could be seen in the interior decorations of churches and public buildings, where the furnishings and decor imitated those of a given era – i.e., neo-Gothic altars in neo-Gothic churches.



Votive chapel in New Cathedral in Linz,
Austria, 1870, Austrian National Library

*Immer heißt die seligste Maria
L. v. D. in Linz a. D.*

However, in the 19th century a problem also emerged with buildings not seen in historical times. For instance, which style should a railways station or museum have?



Main railway station in Zagreb, circa 1925,
Museum of Arts and Crafts, Zagreb

Art Pavilion in Zagreb, 1910,
National Museum in Prague



The Neoclassical Style

The first style that emerged was Neoclassicism. Its genesis dates to the 18th century. In ancient forms, it is what Johann Joachim Winckelmann – a German art historian and archaeologist – called “noble simplicity and quiet grandeur”.

Elements, such as architectural orders, columns, arches and domes, were taken from ancient Greek and Roman architecture. The horizontal, wide facades were characteristic, thanks to which it was possible to cover the entire frontage of squares and streets.



Zagreb, Palaća Baruna Vranicania.

*Prinacima i kraljevima
i visokim plemićima
i bogatim trgovcima
i drugim osobama*

Modern Gallery in Zagreb, circa 1902,
Museum of Arts and Crafts, Zagreb

The Neoclassical style turned out to be particularly suitable for public buildings, such as the parliament in the Ring of Vienna. The monumentalism of these forms and their indisputable historicity indicated the power of a given institution and its “past” origin.

The reference to antiquity could be used by both republican governments referring to the ideals of Athenian democracy or republican Rome, and monarchies emphasizing the legitimacy of their rule modelled on the imperial ones.



Austrian Parliament Building in Vienna, photo by Stengel & Markert (Dresden), circa 1900, National Library in Warsaw

Austrian Parliament Building
in Vienna, circa 1890-1900,
Library of Congress



644-1-11 EN PARLAMENT

It was also particularly a good fit for museums or palaces, especially those storing collections of ancient art, meant to emphasize antiquity and nobility. The persistence of these inspirations is demonstrated by the similar in style Hungarian National Museum (1837-1847) and the Museum of Fine Arts (1900-1906) in Budapest, which were built more than half a century apart.

Palais Rasumofsky in Vienna, photo by Bruno Reiffenstein (AT), circa 1897-1905, MAK – Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna





Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, 1906,
Budapest City Archives

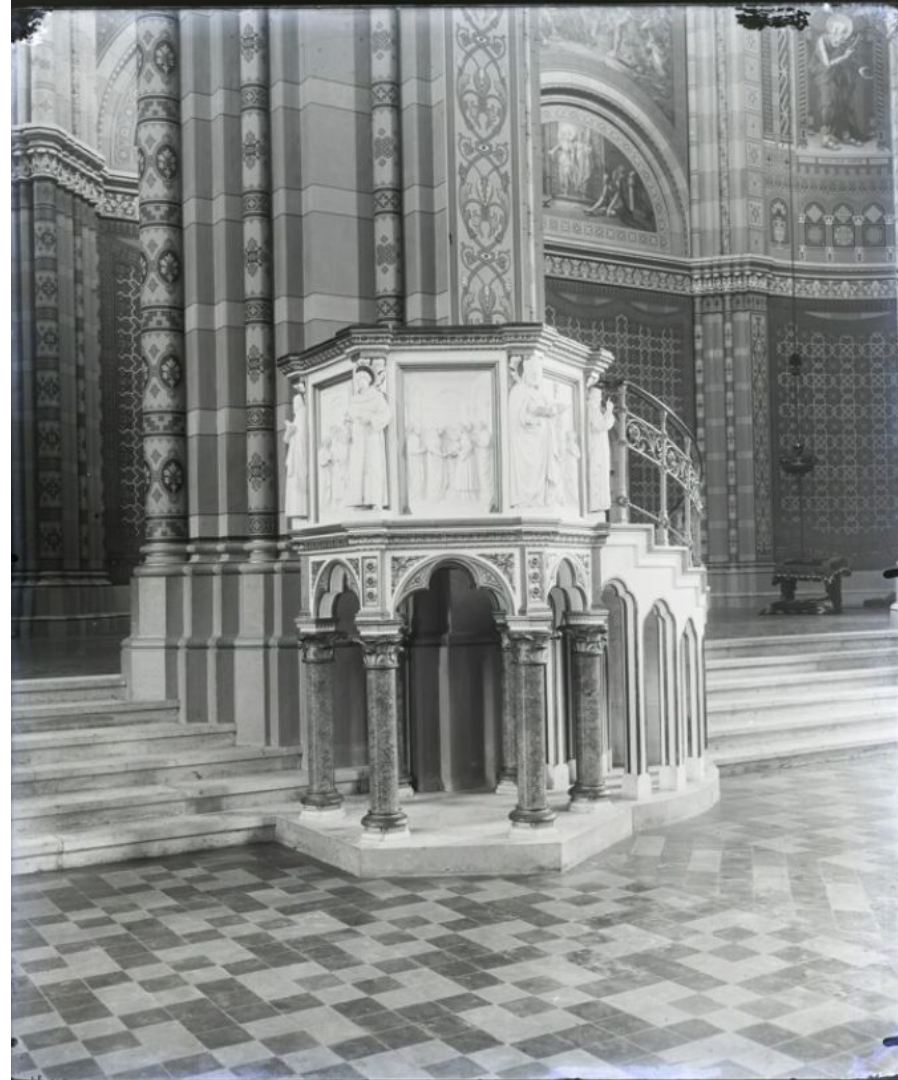


Hungarian National Museum in Budapest, circa 1900,
Budapest City Archives

The Neo-Romanesque Style

In neo-Romanesque architecture, emphasis was placed on the massiveness and heaviness of forms. This style presented a given nation's deep embeddedness in the Christian Middle Ages, but also "its own" history, not necessarily resulting from its relations with the ancient Greeks and Romans.

Cathedral basilica of St. Peter in Đakovo
(pulpit), Croatia, circa 1900, Strossmayer
Gallery of Old Masters, Zagreb



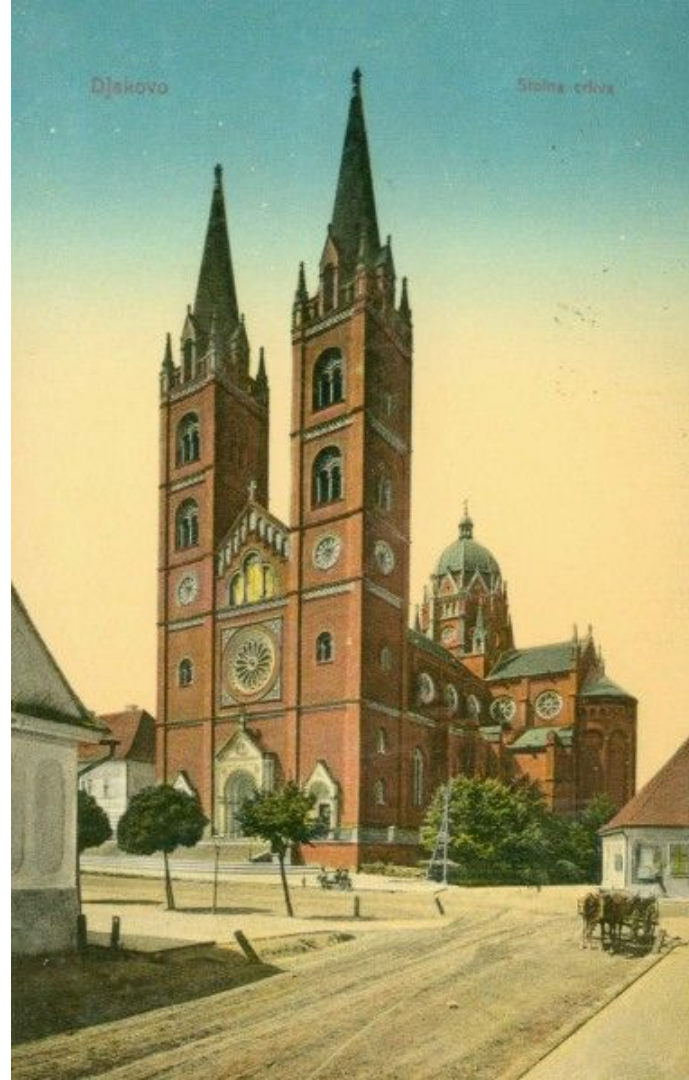
The main sources of inspiration were Romanesque churches and archaeological remains of old manors and city fortifications, as seen in the Fisherman's Bastion in Budapest built in 1895-1902.

Fisherman's Bastion in Budapest,
circa 1910, Hungarian Museum
of Trade and Tourism



The neo-Romanesque style was most often used for churches – as it emphasized the “age-old” ties of a given nation with Christianity. This can be seen, for example, in the case of the Cathedral basilica of St. Peter in Đakovo (Croatia, 1866-1882).

Cathedral basilica of St. Peter in
Đakovo, Croatia, circa 1912, Museum
of Arts and Crafts, Zagreb





Cathedral basilica of St. Peter in Đakovo (main portal), Croatia, circa 1900, Strossmayer Gallery of Old Masters, Zagreb



Maribor

Cerkev Marijinega oznanenja



The Neo-Gothic Style

As the nineteenth century was considered the epoch most expressing Christian ideals (when religion was the most important element shaping European civilization), the gothic cathedral was its greatest synthesis.

The Gothic style was perceived not only as the most Christian, but also the most medieval and artistically impressive.

It emphasizes soaring verticalism – or the pursuit of what is perfect, never ending in mortality, and the main architectural motifs are pointed arches and towers. Therefore, the neo-Gothic style was eagerly used in the construction of churches.

Votivkirche in Vienna, circa 1890-1900,
Library of Congress



Votivkirche in Vienna,
photo by Josef Löwy, circa
1880-1894, MAK –
Museum of Applied Arts,
Vienna



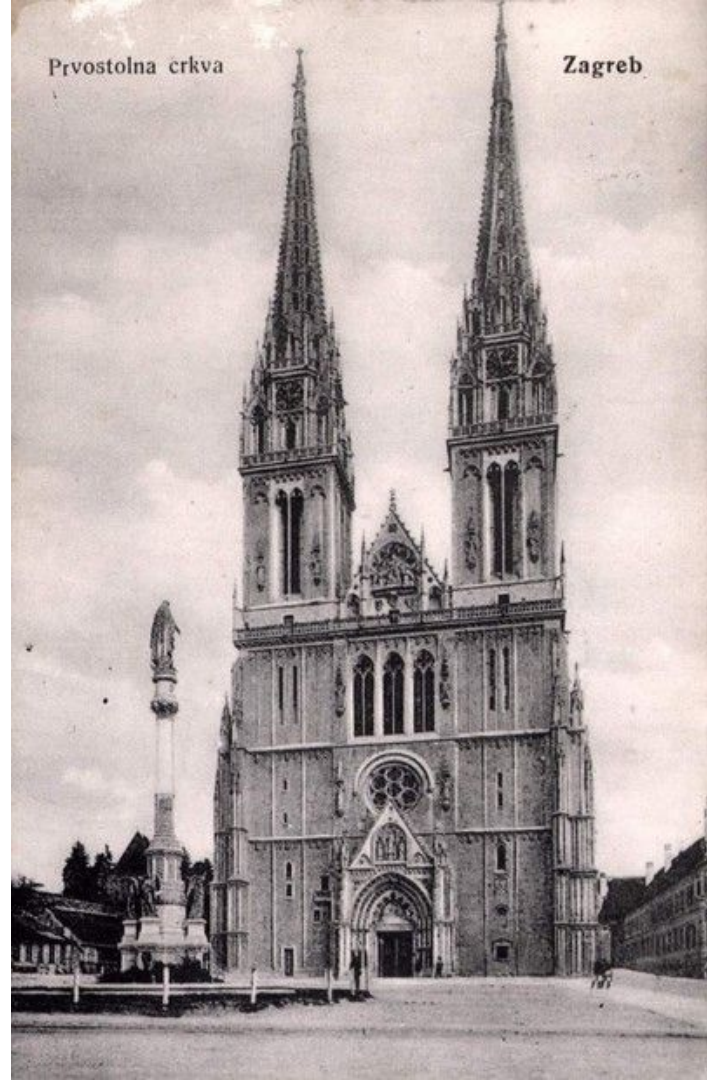
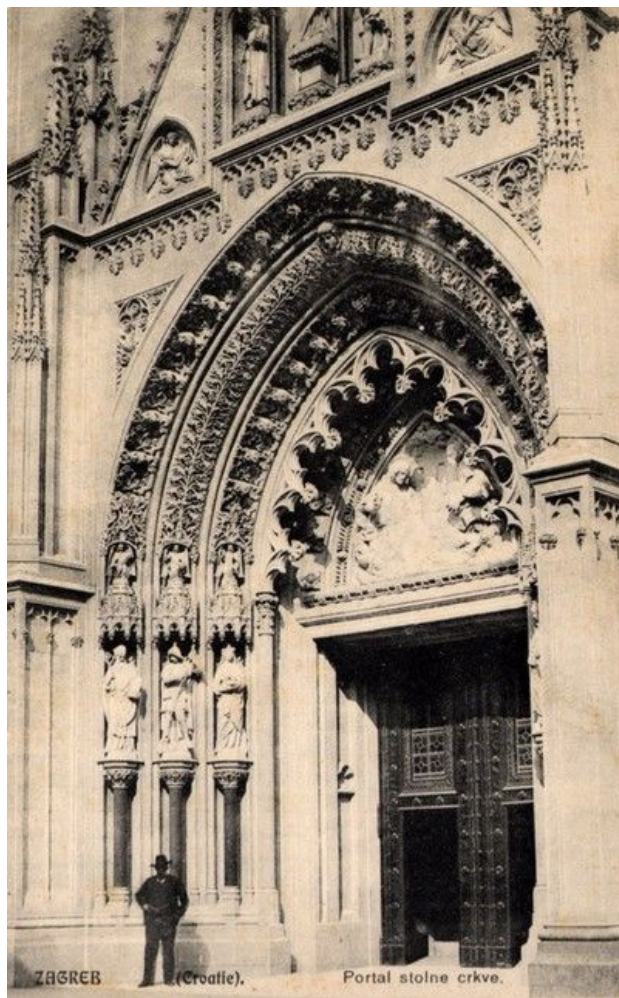
Votivkirche.

© MAK - Museum für angewandte Kunst

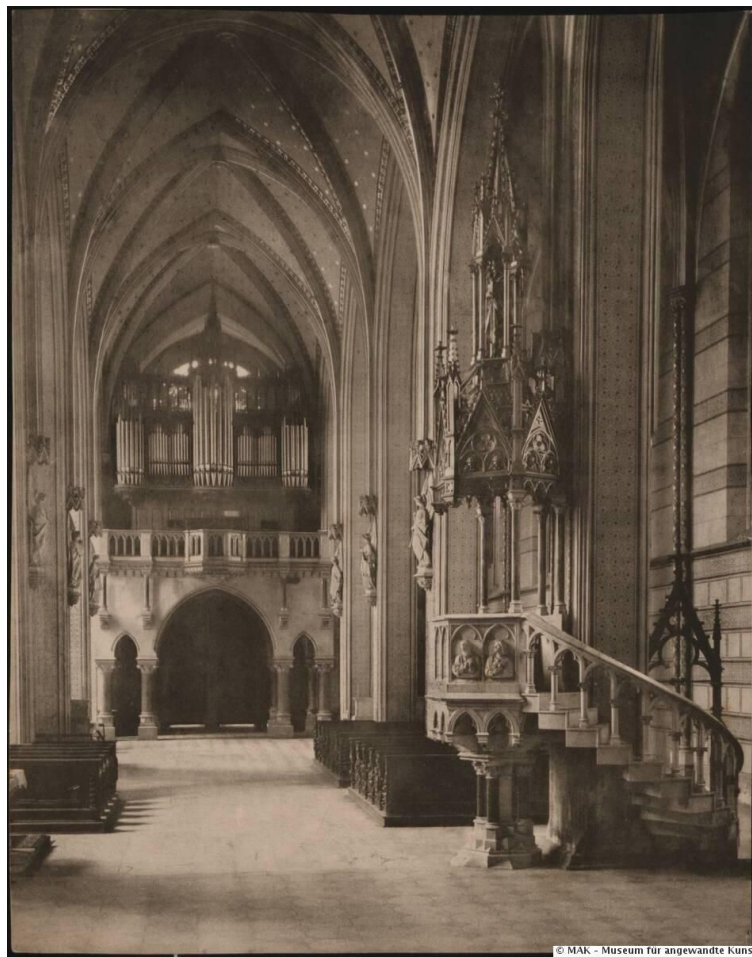
Franz Alt, *Main altar in Votivkirche
in Vienna*, 1879, Albertina, Vienna



Cathedral in Zagreb (main portal), circa 1900, Museum of Arts and Crafts, Zagreb



Interior of Saint
Wenceslas Cathedral in
Olomouc, Czech
Republic, circa 1910,
MAK – Museum of
Applied Arts, Vienna



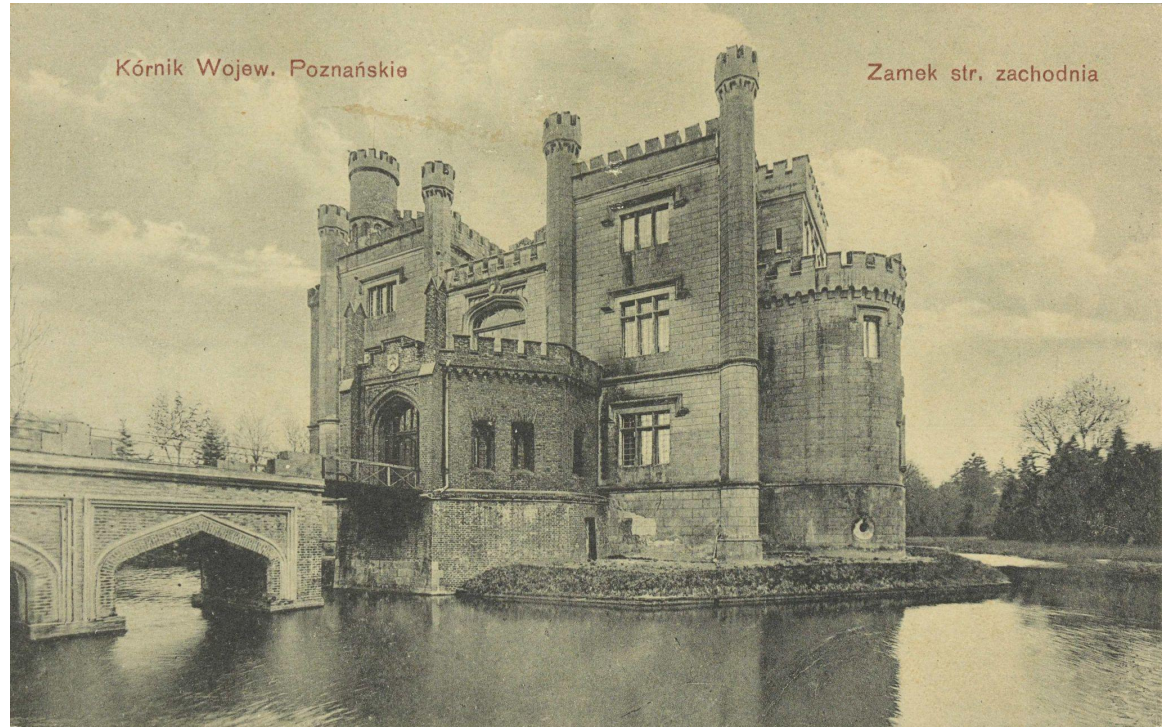
© MAK – Museum für angewandte Kunst

Rudolf Bernt (AT), *Saint Wenceslas Cathedral in
Olomouc*, 1897, Austrian National Library



© Österreichische Nationalbibliothek

The significance of Gothicism did not end with Christian spirituality. This style can also be found in palace buildings – here reference to the Middle Ages was used to indicate the ancestry of the owner's family, and sometimes it resulted in the gothic trend that prevailed in Europe in the 19th century.



Kórnik Castle, Poland, photo by Leonard Durczykiewicz (PL), before 1918, National Library in Warsaw

The Gothic Revival also appeared when an emphasis of the importance of the Middle Ages in the history of a given nation was needed. For this reason, the neo-Gothic style was chosen as the “costume style” for the parliament building in Budapest. The main point was to stress that Hungarian statehood is deeply embedded in the past and not the present.

Hungarian Parliament Building,
beginning of 20th century,
Hungarian Franciscan Library
and Archive



Hungarian Parliament
Building, 1915, Thúry
György Museum



Vienna City Hall, 1910,
Austrian National Library



The Collegium Novum (1883-1887) – or the Jagiellonian University in Cracow – was also designed in this style. The architects wanted to mark the medieval roots of the university, and thus of Polish science.

The neo-Gothic style was in its own way a response to neoclassicism and thus became popular in parallel.

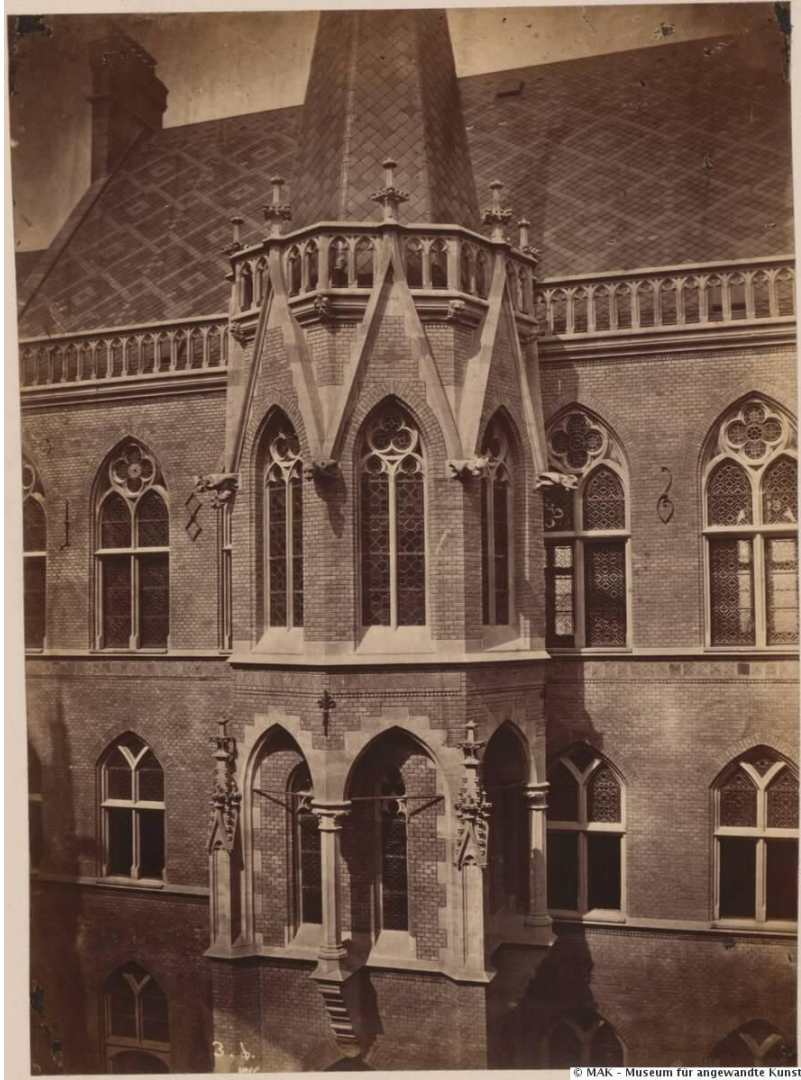


Collegium Novum in Cracow, circa 1890, National Library in Warsaw



© MAK - Museum für angewandte Kunst

Akademiesches Gymnasium in
Vienna, photos by Andreas Groll
(AT), circa 1866-1872, MAK -
Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna



© MAK - Museum für angewandte Kunst

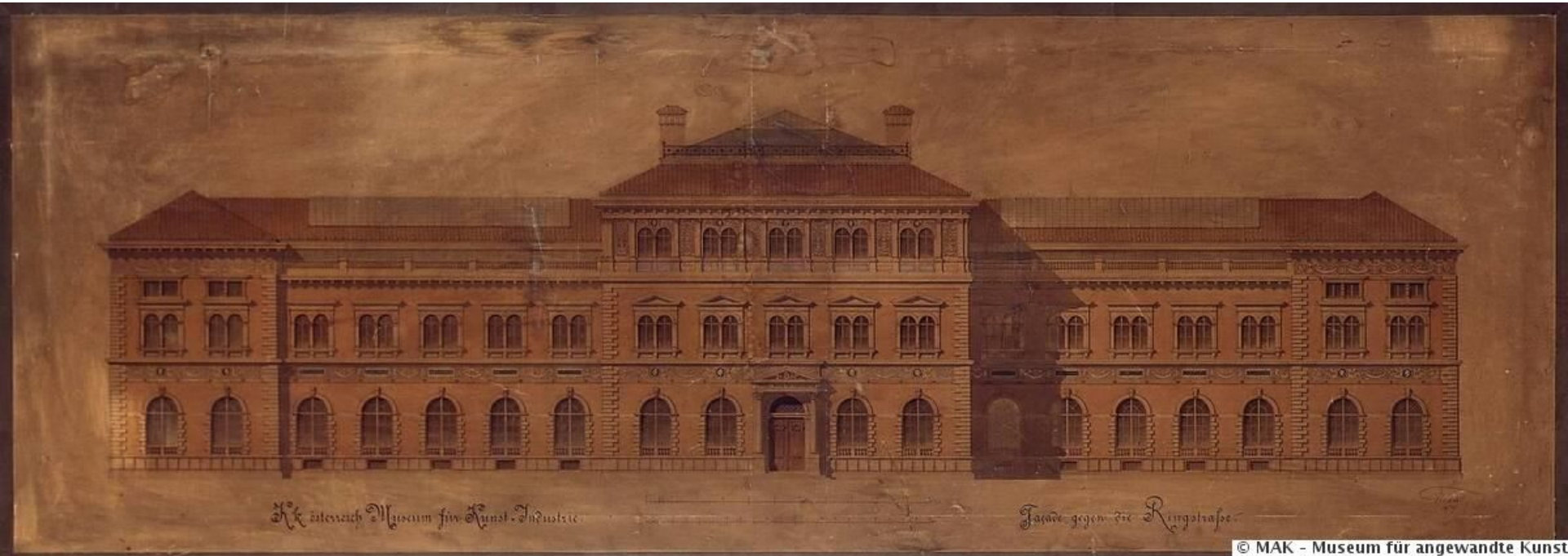
The Neo-Renaissance Style

The neo-Renaissance style resulted from the fascination with Renaissance in Italy. It was admired as the heyday of art, science, humanism and the skilful use of ancient patterns.

The Museum of Applied Arts in the Ring of Vienna was designed in the style of an Italian Renaissance palace. The façade was decorated with a frieze in sgraffito and medallions with portraits of old artists. The inner courtyard was surrounded by decorative arcades. The architecture was in reference to the era of the unattainable Italian artists, such as Rafael or Leonardo da Vinci.



Museum of Applied Arts in Vienna, photo by Josef Löwy (AT), after 1871, Albertina, Vienna



© MAK - Museum für angewandte Kunst

Heinrich von Ferstel (AT), Project of Museum of Applied Arts in Vienna, 1867, MAK – Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna



Palais Epstein, vom Oberbaurath T. Ritter v. © Österreichische Nationalbibliothek

Palais Epstein in Vienna, 1871, Austrian National Library



© MAK - Museum für angewandte Kunst

Kursalon Hübner in Vienna, photo by Andreas Groll (AT), circa 1864-1865, MAK – Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna

Franz Alt (AT), *Opera house in Wien*, 1873,
Austrian National
Library





Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, MAK –
Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna



Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, circa
1890-1900, Library of Congress

The neo-Renaissance was favoured in the Czech Republic as this era was considered the peak of Czech culture. Among the leading examples are National Museum in Prague Liberec Town Hall and projects by Antonín Wiehl, such as Prague City Savings Bank (designed with Osvald Polívka).



Alois Ježek (CZ), *Prague City Savings Bank*,
Czech Savings Bank Gallery

National Museum in Prague,
circa 1890-1900,
Library of Congress



1978. P. Z. - PRAG. MUSEUM.

PRAHA. MUSEUM.



Rudolfinum (music hall) in Prague,
before 1905, Austrian National Library



Liberec Town Hall, Czech Republic,
photo by Karl Möhsl (AT), 1900,
Austrian National Library



National Theatre in Prague, circa 1890-1900, Library of Congress



Theatre in Plzeň, Czech Republic, 1909, Austrian National Library

Renaissance inspirations did not end with Italy. The reconstruction of the Castle in Gołuchów by Izabela Działyńska is a good example. As a Polish aristocrat raised in Paris, she drew inspiration from the architecture of the French Renaissance from the castles of the Loire Valley. The interior was filled with old furniture and tapestries, as well as works of art and crafts collected by Działyńska.

Portrait of Izabela Działyńska from the Czartoryski family standing at a door to the court of the Gołuchów Castle, photo by Ignacy Krieger (PL), circa 1885, National Museum in Warsaw





Gołuchów Castle, photo by Henryk Poddębski (PL), after 1932, National Library in Warsaw



King's Bedroom in Gołuchów Castle, photo by Antoni Pawlikowski (PL), 1905, National Museum in Poznań

The Neo-Baroque Style

The neo-Baroque style also drew on Italian models and later replaced the inspirations of the Renaissance.

References to baroque architecture were considered particularly appropriate when building theatres and operas, because it was believed to be the peak era for these arts. The richly decorated facades merged perfectly with the purpose of these buildings.



Volksoper in Vienna, 1898, Theatermuseum in Vienna



Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, circa 1917, Museum of Arts and Crafts, Zagreb



Burgtheater in Vienna, circa 1890-1905, Library of Congress

An example is the Volkstheater in Vienna – designed by the esteemed architects of Hermann Helmer and Ferdinand Fellner and opened in 1889. In the case of the Juliusz Słowacki Theater in Cracow (1891-1893), the architects often incorporated neo-Baroque elements into eclectic projects.



Juliusz Słowacki Theatre in Cracow, 1895, National Library in Warsaw



The Eclectic Style

The free use of inspiration from historical architecture soon led to the combination of various elements and styles in one project. Sometimes it was dictated by symbolism (a deliberate reference to several epochs), sometimes just a decorative stylistic mixture.

In this case, we refer to the Eclectic style – largely based on Neoclassicism, neo-Renaissance and neo-Baroque. The blurring of the differences between them shows what revivalism was all about – after all, it was not about specific references, but about the overall impression.

Church of the Holiest Saviour in Warsaw,
circa 1925, National Library in Warsaw



The Eclectic style was preferred when building tenement houses. It gave the impression of elegant “city palaces” from past eras, and their ornate facades were intended to convince the public that the building itself was luxurious, which, of course, was not always true.



Street in Budapest, circa 1885, Hungarian
Museum of Trade and Tourism

Kärntner Ring (section of
Vienna Ring Road), circa
1890-1900, Library of
Congress



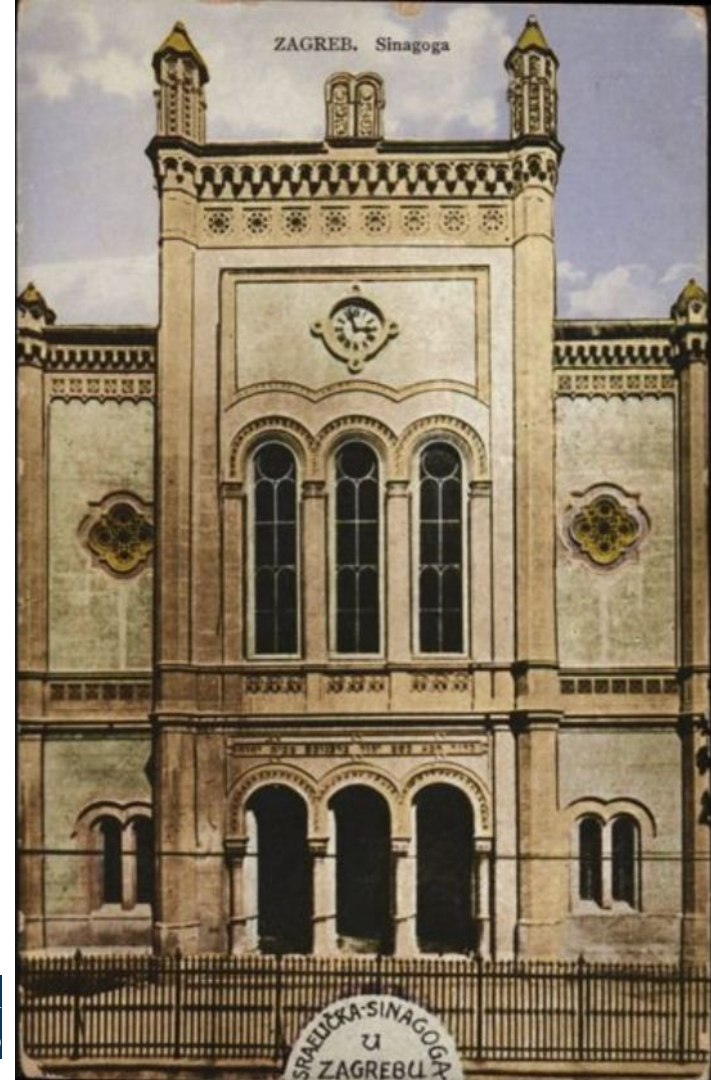
Graben, street in Vienna,
circa 1890-1900, Library
of Congress



Moorish Style or “Oriental” references

Architecture from outside the European cultural circle was also a major inspiration, especially the Moorish style.

“Oriental” elements often appeared in synagogue designs, alluding to the roots of the Jewish people and the former Palestine. Such synagogues were built in Budapest, Zagreb or Cracow.



Synagogue in Zagreb, circa 1915, National and University Library in Zagreb

The Jerusalem Synagogue built in Prague in 1906, also known as the Jubilee Synagogue – was built in honour of the anniversary of the rule of Franz Joseph I of Austria.

The Eclectic style of the synagogue in Szeged, Hungary (with elements of Moorish style) was to symbolize the diversity of the Jewish nation and its dexterity in assimilation.



Synagogue in Szeged, Hungary, 1907,
Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives

Jerusalem Synagogue (Jubilee Synagogue) in
Prague, circa 1905, Museum at Eldridge
Street, New York





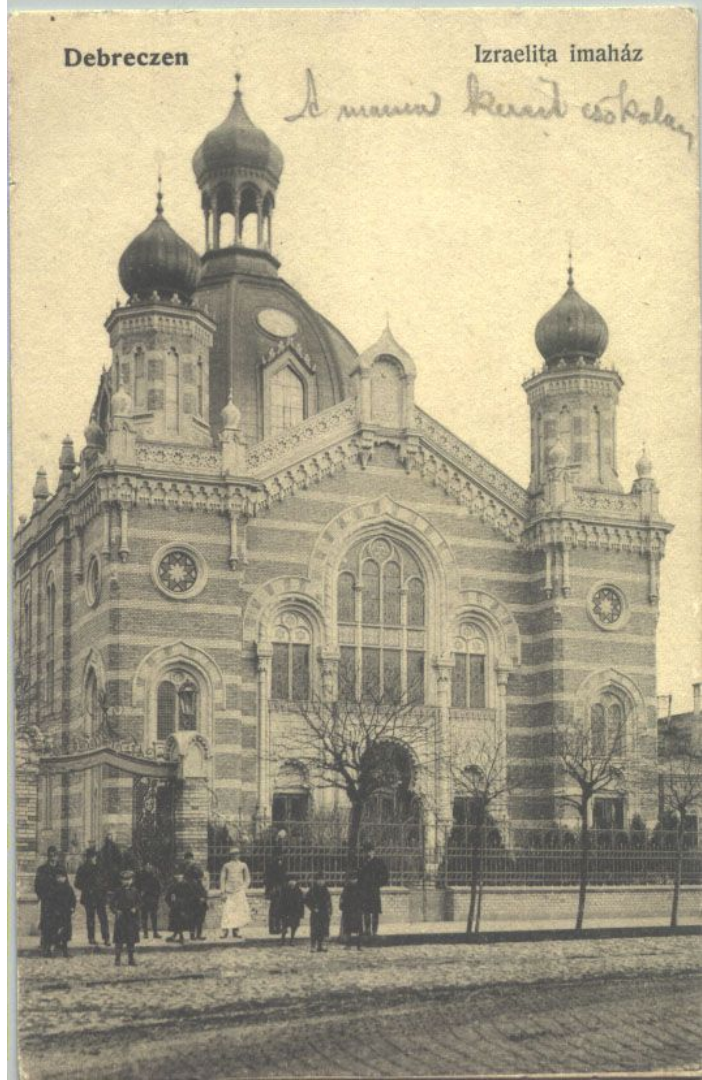
Interior of Dohány Street Synagogue in Budapest, photo by Bánó Ernő (HU), 1934, Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives



Dohány Street Synagogue in Budapest, Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives



Tempel Synagogue in Cracow, 1936,
National Digital Archives, Warsaw

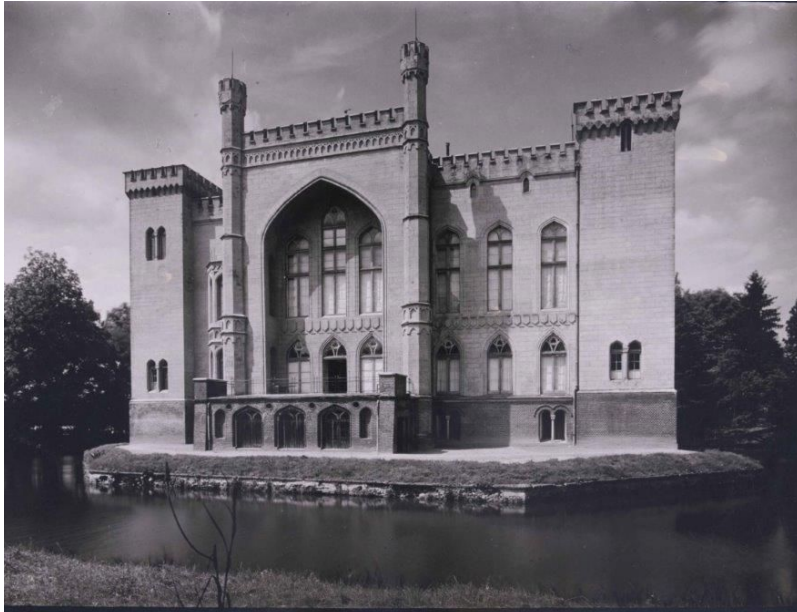


Synagogue in Debrecen, before 1910,
Hungarian Jewish Museum and Archives

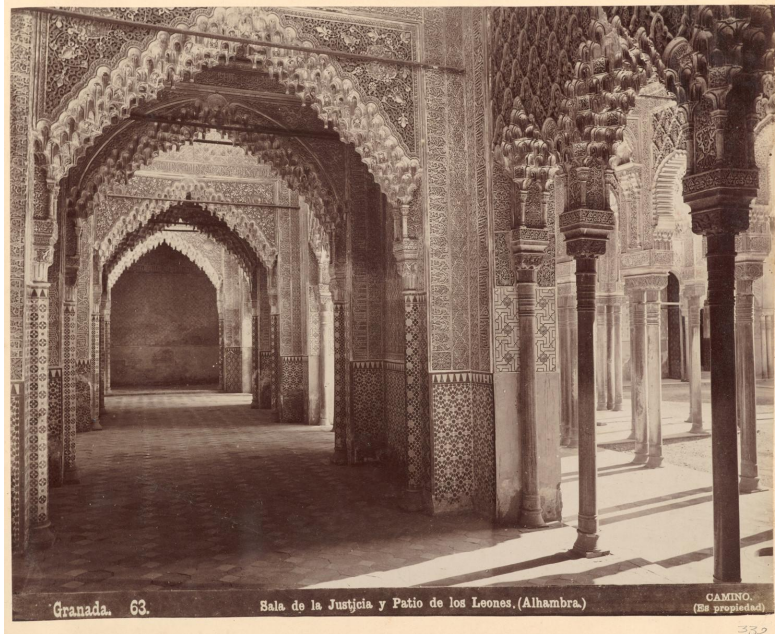
Another example of drawing on non-European architecture were mansions. Various inspirations were used by the Polish aristocrat Tytus Działyński, who in the first half of the 19th century decided to rebuild his castle in Kórnik. There you can find references not only to the English Gothic Revival, but also to the Indian Taj Mahal.

Thomas Daniell (GB), *Taj Mahal* from series *Oriental Scenery. Twenty Four Views in Hindoostan*, 1796, Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences

Kórnik Castle (southern side), photo by Roman Stefan Ulatowski (PL), 1929, Kórnik Library



It was not uncommon to have interiors combining various styles within one building. In Kórnik, some rooms had neo-Gothic elements, but the columns and arabesque ornaments in the Moorish Hall mimicked the decorations of the Alhambra, an Arab palace in Granada, Spain.



Mauritanian Hall in Kórnik Castle, photo by atelier "Camera", 1908, Kórnik Library

Hall of Justice, Alhambra, photo by Camino, 1887-1888, Museum of Photography in Cracow

The Search for a „National Style”

With time, architects began to look for the so-called “National style”, that is, a local variety of Neostyle, based on the history and tradition of one’s own country. The question was, for example, when creating in the neo-Gothic style, whether to refer to great European works (i.e. from France), or rather to native monuments.

In Hungary, Ödön Lechner created what was later referred to as the Hungarian style. In its buildings we can find “oriental” and baroque motifs. He was also happy to use eye-catching, colourful ceramic tiles from the famous Zsolnay factory.

Postcard with Drechsler Palace in Budapest, designed by Ödön Lechner (HU), circa 1902, Hungarian Museum of Trade and Tourism





Museum of Applied Arts in Budapest (main
façade), designed by Ödön Lechner (HU),
1893, Museum of Applied Arts



Bertalan Pór (HU), *Portrait of Ödön Lechner*, 1903,
Hungarian National Museum

Polish artists gave special importance to folk art, seeing a remedy for the crisis of values and pessimism at the end of the 19th century in rural culture. They also saw authentically Polish features in folklore. Inspired by the traditional architecture of Podhale (a region lying at the foot of the Tatra Mountains), Stanisław Witkiewicz created the Zakopane style, which was mainly villas and guesthouses designed of wood.



Leon Wyczółkowski (PL), *Portrait of Stanisław Witkiewicz with Wojciech Roj*
[carpenter from Podhale], 1901, National Museum in Cracow



Villa „Koliba” in Zakopane, designed by Stanisław Witkiewicz (PL), before 1901, National Museum in Warsaw



Villa „Under Jedla” in Zakopane, designed by Stanisław Witkiewicz (PL), owned by the Pawlikowski family, circa 1898-1905, National Museum in Cracow

Afterlife

The fascination with Neostyle ended with the First World War. Removing the “stylish costume” was one of the main assumptions of modernism, where architects wanted to free themselves from too much style and display pure architecture.

At the same time, revivalism significantly influenced the development of architecture. The influences of the neoclassical style turned out to be the most durable and were alluded to in monumental buildings of the 1920s and 1930s. Its continuation was in the socialist realism in Central Europe in the 1940s and 1950s.



Palace of Culture and Science, photo by Zbyszko Siemaszko (PL), 1955, National Digital Archives, Warsaw

On the other hand, the search for national elements returned in later architectural styles, albeit in a different interpretation.

It was revivalism that strengthened the fascination with the old epochs and the belief that the past is sometimes more interesting and important than the present.

Theodor Zasche, *Ringstraßenkorso*, 1900,
Austrian National Library



RINGSTRASSENKORSO.

About the Authors

Jakub Zarzycki, PhD

An art historian and literary scholar.

He received his joint PhD from the University of Wrocław, Poland and Sapienza University of Rome.

Assistant Professor at the Institute of Art History University of Wrocław.

Vice-President & Research Officer for the Wirth Alumni Network.

From September 2015 to August 2016, PhD Research Fellow at the Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies.



Karolina Dzimira-Zarzycka

Art historian and Polish philologist.

Author of popular culture texts on art and women's history. In collaboration with online magazines: Historia:poszukaj (National Institute for Museums and Public Collections) and Culture.pl (Adam Mickiewicz Institute).

Recipient of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage scholarship (2020).

Research Associate at Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies (2015/2016).