

ERNŐ FOERK'S SACRED BUILDINGS

Gergely Domonkos Nagy¹

¹Institute of Architecture, Ybl Miklós Faculty of Architecture and Civil Engineering, Szent István University, Budapest, Hungary
Nagy.Gergely@ybl.szie.hu

Abstract: *The article reviews Ernő Foerk's career through the perspective of his sacred buildings. Ernő Foerk's oeuvre accounts for a significant proportion of these works. Most of his accomplished churches were made in a Historicist style with a Latin-cross-shaped plan and facade tower. His designs which remained on paper, however, show a more diverse picture from both spatial and stylistic aspect. A number of plans were marked together with Gyula Petrovác, however, we should presume Foerk had a more significant role in the artistic formation. In addition to the general historicist language, his works also had unique stylistic features, which were mainly related to the design of towers' proportions, windows, pediments and spires, and to the use of bricks in facade design.*

Keywords: *Ernő Foerk, sacred architecture, Historicism, Secession, central space formation*

INTRODUCTION

Ernő Foerk had a diverse artistic personality, and besides architecture, his work encompasses the fields of applied arts, the monument preservation and even architectural education; after all sacred architecture has undoubtedly a dominant role in his oeuvre. At least twenty-five churches were built according to his plans, and together with the unrealized, the number of sacred works exceeds fifty. When there are so many buildings available, it is possible to ask more comprehensive questions on the basis of an examination of a building group, and thus to evaluate the creative artist. Present article examines Foerk's work through his sacred architectural works: Can his artistic periods be defined, and are they also periods of different styles? Are there any special features of spatial formation or characteristic elements on his churches?

1. PERIODS OF HIS LIFE

Ernő Foerk's architectural work covers about four decades. As a result of a closer examination, certain periods can be separated within this. These stages are not the result of some sort of his internal decisions, but of the natural turnings of his lifetime, and of the segment of history he obtained, as it is the case for most people. Five main periods of his creative carrier can be distinguished.

The first one is during his scholar years. After graduating from the sculpture department of the Budapest School of Applied Arts, he wanted to move towards architecture, and in 1888 he began to work at the architectural office of József Pucher. One year later he won a royal scholarship to Vienna as a student of Friedrich von Schmidt. In 1892 he returned to Budapest and got a job in Imre Steindl's office. [1] In these early years, no individually designed and realized

buildings were found. Plans as studies, such as a neo-Romanesque church with campanile [2] and a neo-Gothic church designed on the bank of the Béga, from 1891 [3] show, that some of the basic features of his art, which was later incorporated into buildings, were already present in the early years.

The next period was the time for design contests and the first major successes. In 1898 and 1899, with Ferenc Schömer, he won the first prize in both the competitions published for planning the Lipótváros synagogue. The synagogue eventually was not built, but since then, Foerk participated numerous architectural design contests and succeeded several times in the following years. (e.g. Breznóbánya and Nagykőrös church towers, Trieste synagogue). Also, in 1898 he received a job at the Hungarian Royal Public Higher Architectural Industrial School, where he worked until his death. [4]

In 1905, together with Gyula Petrovác, he was entrusted with the expansion of the church of Jánoshalma, which was completed in 1906. This was a new turning point in his career. From then until the First World War he had very active years, which resulted numerous buildings. [1] Foerk and Petrovacz were charged one after the other with the construction of smaller or larger parish churches in the diocese of Kalocsa. That was also the time when the Archbishop's Cathedral was renovated and expanded according to his plan, and in 1913 he began his main work, the Cathedral of Szeged. In addition to further design competitions, he had still time for architectural public life and the launch of summer surveys (from 1912). [5] The time between 1906 and 1914 can be regarded as the zenith of Foerk's life. This is certainly not only the result of the extraordinary working ability of the 40-year-old architect, but also influenced by the prospering era of Hungary before First World War, giving the profession numerous architectural orders.

This very active period was halted by the First World War. As a beginning, the orders started to stagnate, then in the years following the World War, particularly narrow circumstances came, and Foerk had to spend his reserves to maintain his family. In addition to war, the 'Trianon trauma' and existential difficulties, private tragedies have also aggravated his situation. Foerk lost his son in the war, who had intended to be an architect. The most arresting heritage of this era are some of his designs remained on paper, that testify exciting space and style experiments.

After the war, construction industry began to recover from 1923. From there began Foerk's last period which lasted until his death. [6] The number of his work was less than before the war, but the projects were much more significant. At the end of this period was the completion of the Szeged Cathedral (1930), and compared to the village churches the scale and demand of these works were quite different. This period contains for example the plans for the church of Angyalföld-Tripolis or the Salesians' church in Szombathely, or the renovation of the Romanesque church of Ócsa.

2. STYLISTIC CHARACTERISTICS

It would be tempting to combine stylistic features with the creative periods outlined above. Some stylistic tendencies can be observed on the works that has been built. Although Foerk is defined as an architect of Historicism, which is not far from the truth, there was clearly an art nouveau line in his art before the war, as well as a rise of Modernist phenomena at the dawn of his life. However, if we look at all of his plans and sketches, it can be said that there were features and formal elements that followed Foerk's entire career. The final version of the plans were mostly influenced by the taste of the customers and the current spirit of the era.

In architecture for Foerk, style was a central issue. This is evidenced by his journal records criticizing his contemporaries, for example, through the aspect of the authentic use of style. [6]

Still it often happened, that during the planning of a church, he used different style variations without significant change in the spatial form. Although this seems to contradict the central role of style choice, it is very characteristic way of thinking in Historicism. A good example of the above is the Basilica of Saint Quirinus in Szombathely, where he made various plans in neo-Romanesque [7], neo-Baroque style [8], as well as one leading to Modernism with brick façade [9], and finally an Early Christian-style church.



Figure 1. Various plans to the Basilica of Saint Quirinus in Szombathely [8, 9, 7]

This, after all, should not be a surprise: Foerster as an architect educated in Historicism was in cozy relation with almost every European style. We can find Romanesque, Gothic and Baroque pieces between the churches as well as Renaissance, Byzantine, Art Nouveau and Modernist elements.



Figure 2. Secessionist design of an altar in Tompa [10]

Due to the dominance of historicizing works, perhaps his Secessionist designs are least known, although many of them were made around 1910. Between them, there are Lechner-like, absolutely Secessionist pieces of art (church of Tompa or the Kossuth-mausoleum plan [4]). Other concepts show the impact of the vernacular branch of Hungarian Art Nouveau, which can be labeled with Károly Kós's name (eg. the plans of the chapel of Izbég [1] and the church of Zenta [4]), and the effect of Viennese Secession can also be noticed. In the latter case, parallels can be found especially with the architecture of Joseph Maria Olbrich. The staggered arches of the facade of the church named with a „brick” sign in 1902 [1] (surviving on the windows of some historicistic towers, for example in Vállaj or Fajsz), the pediments bounded by complex concave lines (eg. on the tower of Bácsföldvár church or on a plan made in 1912 without a placemark [11]), or one of the design variants of the church of St. Imre in Budapest (1910) [12], especially the gate, the pediments, or chessboard-like decorations all exemplify this connection.

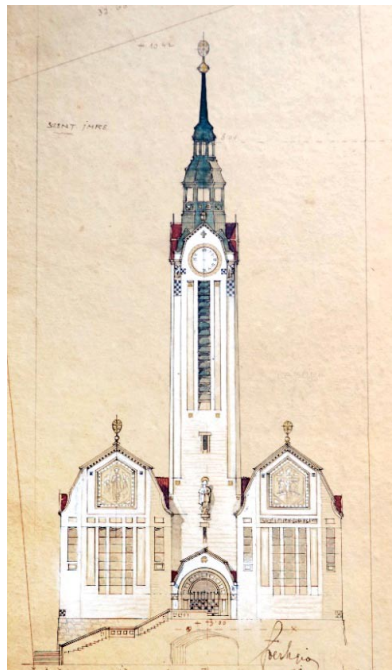


Figure 3. Plan of the Szent Imre church's facade [12]

At the end of his life, he planned three more notable churches that were realized. Among many of their common features, it should be highlighted, that although at first they seem to have a Historicistic style, they have many elements of Modernism in their details. Perhaps that is why the main historical archetype of their space formation are the Early-Christian basilicas of Rome. This is not only due to their ideologically easily verifiable reminiscences, but because their coffered reinforced concrete slabs were thus “sold” as citation of churches covered with wooden ceiling. Representative churches of the second millennium were covered by vaults, which would have been controversial either with reinforced concrete or with a traditional structure, so the Early Christian forms were a way out of this problem. They presented a way to reference authentically a historical prelude, and to apply a modern structure the same time. In addition, the character of Modernism appeared not only in the use of reinforced concrete flat ceilings in these works, but also in details such as unornamented, rectangular openings or puritan, geometric, flat decoration.

In spite of the various stylistic experiments listed so far, we can find some featuring characteristics of Foerk that run through almost the entire oeuvre and come up regularly. The most well-known of these is the use of bricks that have been mentioned frequently in connection with the common works with Gyula Sándy. Undoubtedly it is characteristic of Foerk, although does not appear on all of his works. Usually, brick was used to form lesenes with arch frieze together with plaster surfaces, but also appears as a material for the entire facade. It was an excellent tool in his hands for the reduced use of historic styling.

Special features of his brick architecture are tall pyramidal spires, which are horizontally divided by white stone bands. These kind of spires can be found on the churches of Szeged, Budapest-Angyalföld and Budapest-Törökőr, but the form already appears on the sketches before the war. [13] However, his village churches – obviously because of their costs – did not use such a steeple. The most typical form of these latter is the needle spire with triangular pediments and four pinnacles on the corners (eg. churches of Tiszakálmánfalva, Tavankút, Óbecse, Baja-Kiscsávoly).

Elements often used in his art were also the rose-window similar to the style of the Quattrocento in northern Italy, or the simpler round and oval windows, the gable detailed with dwarf-galleries, the pediments bounded by complex concave curved lines, and the triple sectioned tower windows.

His neo-Romanesque church designs can be cited as an example of a lifelong accompanying thought. From his student years beginning in 1891, a plan already exists [2], where the facade of the church has three axis, with three semicircular openings at the bottom, three twin windows above it, then a rose window, and finally a triangular gable with dwarf gallery. Sideward it is complemented by a campanile with tall conical spire and four small pinnacles, below them stands a triple, semicircular twin window and a round clock. The essentially same elements of this composition, with minor changes, appear in later plans, such as on one of the church of Temesvár (Timisoara) variants in 1912 [14], the plans of the Szeged Cathedral [4] and the church of Rezső Square in 1914, or on one of the first designs of the façade of the church in Újpest-Tripolis in 1928. [15]

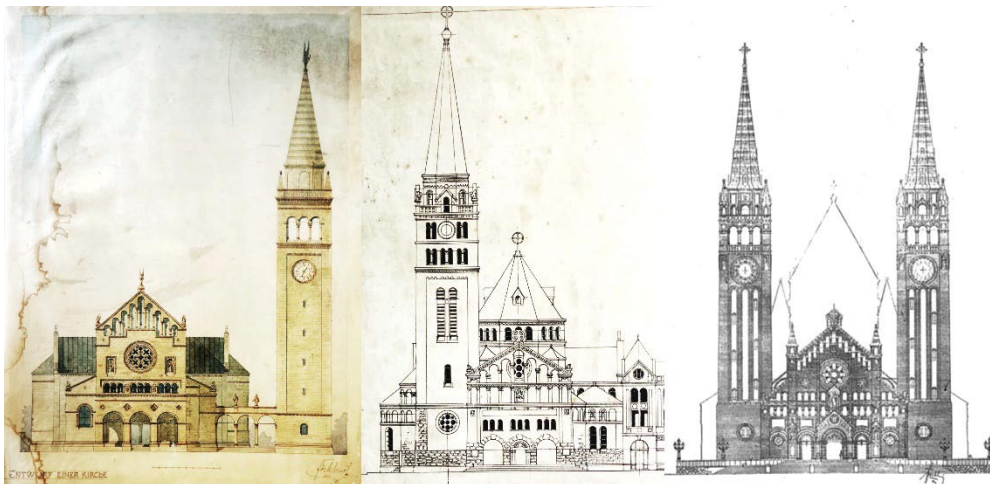


Figure 4. Neo-Romanesque church designs: study (1891) [2], Temesvár (1912) [14] and Szeged (1914) [4]

Perhaps the most exciting feature of Foerk's individual style is shown, when he deviated from the traditional proportions. It was this, which could give an individual taste to his buildings,

even though he was conservative even in its own era with his Historicistic style. Unusual proportions were typically characterized by a greater emphasis on the tower(s), or dome. He readily modified both height and latitude.

The above is already evident in his early works: the Pantheon's plan of 1890 [4] or the plan of the 1898 Synagogue both have a huge dome, several neo-Gothic church designs have a grandiose tower in the central axis of the main façade (eg. [16], [17]), and they all have unusually small lateral spaces. One of the most characteristic changes in the case of his main masterpiece, the cathedral Szeged, compared to Frigyes Schulek's plan [18], was also the fact that he made the proportion of the towers and the nave more contrasting. Unusual proportions appeared not only in the volume, but also in other details, for example openings. In the example of the towers of Óbecse, Bajmok, Tompa and many other village churches, the proportions of the semi-circular bell window was elongated compared to the commonly used form since the Baroque style.



Figure 5. Neo-Gothic church façade (1903) [16]

3. THE DESIGNER PARTNER

Foerk did not make most of his building plans alone. This was the case with his sacral buildings also, where in several times Gyula Petrovác was his partner. Gyula Petrovác was nine years younger than Foerk, but they began to teach at the Hungarian Royal Public Higher Architectural Industrial School almost the same time. [19] From 1905, a number of village churches built in the area of the Kalocsa diocese were their common projects, but they made plans together in other areas too.

The question is, how the work was divided between them, and how much the plans can be considered as Foerk's artistic results. The exact answer could surely only be given by Foerk or Petrovacz, but they are no longer able to do so.

Thus, we can create assumptions from plans, Foerk's diary records and analysis of realized joint and independent works.

Basically Foerk seems to have played a greater role in artistic shaping and facade design than Petrovác. Usually Petrovác's signature is on the floor plans, while Foerk's on the facades. Of course, a building plan must be coordinated in every detail, but it shows that the parts that require greater artistic sophistication and better drawing skills usually went to Foerk.

From the biographical data Petrovác is depicted to be an ambitious man, who was able to get the job done and organized. From 1907 he was a technical advisor and the artistic instructor of the Kaloosa diocese [19], and he gained many projects by this position, which he shared with Foerk for more efficient work. Foerk was a much more modest, reserved man who was far from careerist, although he wrote about it bitterly in his diary when he saw meritless people pressing themselves. [6] On the one hand Foerk had to maintain his family and therefore he could sometimes have been forced to get to work, then again he really liked designing churches. Because of these reasons, their co-operation, though it was not conflict-free, stood up until Foerk's death.

In 1910, Ernő Foerk made a plan for an altar to Zirc [20], which was practically copied with modest modifications by Petrovác in 1924 [21]. Petrovác signed himself as designer of this altar plan of the Dunapataj Convent. The few changes rather decreased the freshness of the forming than they improved. Gyula Petrovác's signature is also on all of the pages of the design of the church in Budapest-Törökőr. At the same time, besides the facades, Ernő Foerk's long-known monogram can be found [22], so the drawing was certainly made by Foerk, but Petrovác „sold it”. These examples show that sometimes behind the name of Petrovác were actually Foerk's thoughts. We don't know of any reverse cases.

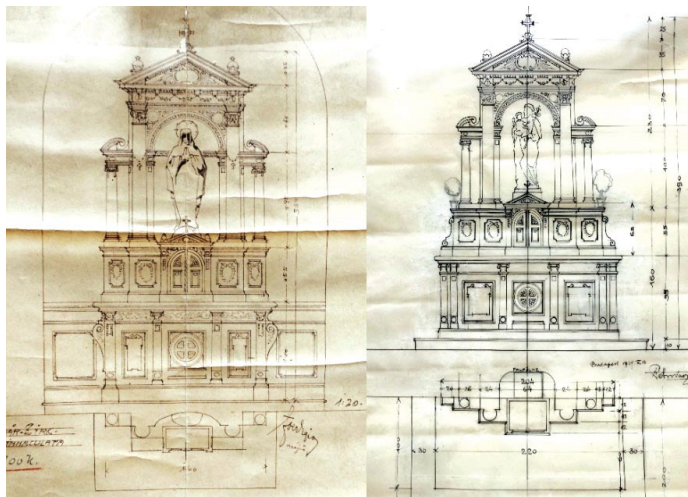


Figure 6. Foerk's altar design to Zirc [20] and Petrovác's one to Dunapataj [21]

4. FORMING OF SPACE

In terms of Foerk's realized churches, the type of latin-cross shaped layout with a tower on the western side is clearly dominant. The crossing sometimes received special accent with a ridge turret (eg. churches of Jánoshalma, Bajmok, Tompa, Vállaj and Tavankút), or a dome in the case of the Szeged Cathedral. Somewhere, the transept is almost aligned with the straight contour of the nave (eg. Vállaj, Fajsz). In the case of some more modest churches, there was no transept, and a simple longitudinal shape with a tower and sanctuary was built (eg. Tiszakálmánfalva, Szuhakálló, Oromhegyes).

These space shapes in the Roman Catholic Church have a long tradition. We can say that these churches were built on the basis of the old, well-known “recipe”, in which we can more likely look for the needs and conservatism of the customers rather than the decision of Foerk and Petrovác.

We are mistaken if we assume, on the basis of the relative uniformity of the built works, that Foerk was an unimaginable architect. If we analyze his plans and sketches about unrealized churches and chapels, we find a much more colorful picture: besides longitudinal churches, Foerk had designed several central spaces too. Sometimes these plans have ingenious style elements also.

According to the traditions of architectural history, mainly his memorial sacred building-plans were centrally arranged. These could be simple, archetypal forms, where architectural inventions lied more in the mass formation and detailing of the superstructure. The bold, Secessionist draft of the Kossuth-Mausoleum (1901) [4], the monument of the Heroes (1922) [23], which is a squaring space vaulted by a dome with pendentives, a pyramid-like, monolithic block, or several Greek cross-plan variants designed for the cemetery chapel in Pusztaborsód in 1924 [24] are such examples.

However, he also produced more complex central-plan designs. The plans of the first synagogue in Lipótváros and Trieste can be mentioned here, [4] but one of the most interesting works is the World War Votive Church planned in 1915. [25] It has a round, central layout extended in the main directions with larger semicircular apse-enclosed side-spaces, and with trefoiled chapels in diagonal directions. It can be characterized by a very clear structure. In the floor plan, two concentric circles provide the frame of the structure, reinforced by eight transverse walls. On the outside of the mass, the buttressing ribs are clearly visible. The outside surface of the dome has coffered proportioning, the tambur is surrounded by concave curved pillars. However, despite the use of reinforced concrete material and forms in the turn of the century style, the building - as usually in Foerk’s works - shows historical reminiscences. Ultimately this votive church is a paraphrase of the Venetian Santa Maria della Salute in reinforced concrete.

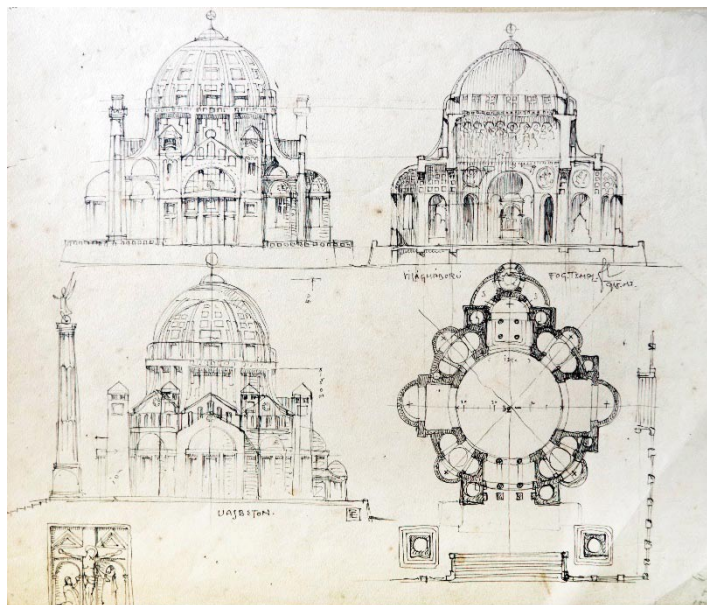


Figure 7. World War Votive Church (1915) [25]

The plans of the church of Temesvár-Józsefváros (Timisoara) are interesting, because their variants were designed in different styles and with different space forms. There is a Latin-cross formed between them, with a crossing dome similar to the Szeged Cathedral, [14] also a cross-in-square plan with seven domes [26] and a plan of Renaissance central layout [27] and Baroque style [28]. The latter is a central, octagonal space with a round dome, expanded in eight directions.



Figure 8. Sketch of the church of Temesvár-Józsefváros in Baroque style [28]

The unrealized plans, of course, include not only central, but also Latin-cross shaped churches, similar to the built ones (eg. Kalocsa-Eperföld parish church [29]). In some cases the emphasis of the crossing is much bolder compared to the realized churches. For example, the plan made for Rezső Square (Budapest) in 1914 shows an octagonal crossing tower, similar to that of Szeged, and a huge neo-Baroque dome designed for the renovation of the parish church in Óbuda. [30]

CONCLUSION

In the diverse oeuvre of Ernő Foerk, the planning of sacred buildings played an important role. He often worked together with Gyula Petrovác, and it is difficult to distinguish exactly the extent of their participation in their joint work. It can be assumed that in most cases we can attribute a significant role to Foerk in the artistic formation. The style of his works is dominated by Historicism and a kind of conservatism, but that does not mean that he has not had different attempts, either in the direction of Secession or in the use of certain Modernist structures. In spite of the traditional style choices, his architecture has its own distinctive features, such as unusual proportions, spires with four turrets, and the use of brick on facades. On the erected works, the Latin-cross layout with facade tower is dominant. In addition, he also planned a number of central space sacral buildings, but these were not realized. Foerk had many plans on paper. We receive a misleading picture of the artist's personality if we only want to judge through the built buildings, because many plans of Foerk remained on paper. The unrealized designs and their variants sometimes carry the most inventive artistic ideas, and are thus indispensable to create of a complex image of Foerk, for which research still has a lot to contribute to.

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