

Metaphors of Universal Architecture and the Architecture of Vanities in Miklós Bethlen's Works*

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Abstract:

This paper highlights the tantalising intellectual tension between the sceptic view of the late Transylvanian Count Miklós Bethlen (1642–1716) in his *Memoires* on architecture as “vanitatum vanitas” and his earlier progressive building project in Bethlen-szentmiklós/Sânmiiclăus. Whereas the later Bethlen's self-fashioning is driven by the worldview of *Ecclesiastes/Kohelet*, commonly accepted in Bethlen's age as written by King Solomon, his country house built between 1668 and 1683 shows the fundamental influence of his teacher Nicolaus Goldmann's (1611–1665) theory of universal architecture in the footsteps of the Jesuit Juan Bautista Villalpando's (1552–1608) reconstruction of the Temple of Solomon. This case study offers a unique opportunity to compare cognitive metaphors in sources ranging from Bethlen's autobiography to such architectural embodiments of cognitive metaphors as Bethlen's country house in Transylvania.

Keywords: metaphors; history of architecture; autobiography; Temple of Solomon; design culture

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Miklós Bethlen was a distinguished member of one of the leading early-modern landed aristocratic families in Transylvania, primarily a politician – Chancellor of the Principality – but also a creative architect and prolific author. As Virgil Birbauer (Borbíró; Bierbauer; 1893–1956) once wrote, his autobiography is a “pearl” of early-modern Hungarian prison literature and his palace in Bethlenszentmiklós is the best and most beautiful example of late renaissance country house architecture in Transylvania.¹ I shall demonstrate the tantalising interplay between Bethlen’s use of metaphors in his autobiography and architecture, claiming that notwithstanding the strong tension between them, any understanding of the text and of the building is deeply interdependent.

Theoretical frameworks

After the heyday of the linguistic turn, postmodern strong textualism and the crisis of the humanities and theory in general, new and alternative cultural and scholarly attitudes began to emerge as part of the phenomenon of the “theory after theory” (Barry) such as the theory of atmosphere or mood (*Stimmung*) and the production of presence, somaesthetics, affect theory and design culture studies, all of which are connected to bodily, spatial and design (culture) turns.² These trends sought to criticise attitudes that regarded cultures exclusively as texts, linguistic practices, discursive epistemes and paradigms, semioses or language games with their particular dictionaries and grammars on the one hand, or – as in the case of visual culture studies – solely as sets and patterns of visual or iconographic phenomena on the other. After a while, however, these new alternatives, successfully overcoming linguistic imperialism and iconological reduction, gradually began

1 Bierbauer, V., Nicholas Bethlen. Un grand seigneur architecte. *Nouvelle Revue de Hongrie*, 28, 1935, No. 53, pp. 314–322, here p. 315: “Son autobiographie est une des plus saisissantes, une perle, malheureusement peu connue, de la littérature hongroise – tandis que le château de Bethlen-Szentmiklós, dont il fut lui-même l’architecte, est le plus beau château de la Transylvanie en style renaissance” [His autobiography is one of the most striking examples, a pearl, unfortunately little known, of Hungarian literature – while Bethlen-Szentmiklós Palace, of which he himself was the architect, is the most beautiful palace in Transylvania in the Renaissance style]. (Translation mine.)

2 Barry, P., *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*: Fourth Edition. Manchester, Manchester University Press 2017; Böhme, G., *Atmosphäre: Essays zur neuen Ästhetik*. Berlin, Suhrkamp Verlag 1995; Gumbrecht, H. U., *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey*. Redwood City, CA, Stanford University Press 2004; idem, *Stimmungen lesen*. München, Carl Hanser 2011; Shusterman, R., *Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal*. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 57, 1999, No. 3, pp. 299–313; Julier, G., *From Visual Culture to Design Culture. Design Issues*, 22, 2006, No. 1, pp. 64–76; Highmore, B., *Cultural Feelings: Mood, Mediation and Cultural Politics*. London, Routledge 2017.

to tend to the other extreme, excessively emphasising sensorial experiences and bodily cognition at the expense of intelligible, discursive and logical understanding in striking accordance with the total aestheticization project of the current (cognitive) trends of aesthetic, artistic and design capitalisms.³

One of the most tantalising papers from this point of view is Böhme's piece on architectural metaphors that, to his mind, are non-existent, since metaphors are solely linguistic phenomena, so that in the case of architecture one must instead think in terms of atmospheres.⁴ It is quite telling, though, that he appreciates the possibility of architectural metaphors in the paradigm of postmodernism in design, when architecture is virtually understood as built marketing. This could, however, unintentionally support Renato De Fusco's semiotic thesis, according to which this is a typically historical question, since there are some ages when architecture is understood and practiced in more "representative" (cf. *rappresentazione*) and others in more "structural" (cf. *conformazione*) terms.⁵ In "representative" periods, the idea of architecture as rhetoric or language prevails; in more structure-focused periods, engineering-oriented, structuralist and phenomenological approaches are more common. Equally convincing is John Onian's research on architectural cognition that claims legitimacy for architectural metaphors from several points of view which complement Lakoff's, Johnson's and Kövecses' pivotal theories in the field according to which our cognition and language use are primordially spatial.⁶

Instead of supporting one of the extremes or thinking these assumptions inimical, it is more edifying to adopt notions of the poetics of space originating in Gaston Bachelard's theory, following which one can think of an ever-fruitful interaction between space articulation and perception in physical

3 With references to T. W. Adorno, Mike Featherstone, Ernesto Francalanci, Remo Bodei, Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy among others, see Szentpéteri, M., Total Aestheticization and Design Capitalism. In: Csontó, L. – Horányi, A. – Süli-Zakar, S. (eds.), *Tervezett alkotás = Designed Art Work: Debreceni Nemzetközi Művésztelep = International Artist in Residence of Debrecen*. Debrecen, Modem 2017, pp. 30–35; idem, Changing the Rhythm of Design Capitalism and the Total Aestheticization of the World. *Hungarian Studies Yearbook*, 1, 2019, No. 1, pp. 82–98; idem, A művészet visszatérése [The Return of Art]. *Helikon: Irodalom- és Kultúratudományi Szemle*, 66, 2020, No. 3, pp. 5–19. For a less critical but detailed overview see Böhme, G., *Ästhetischer Kapitalismus*. Berlin, Suhrkamp Verlag 2016.

4 Böhme, G., Metaphors in Architecture – a Metaphor? In: Gerber, A. – Patterson, B. (eds.), *Metaphors in Architecture and Urbanism: An Introduction*. Bielefeld, Transcript Verlag 2013, pp. 47–58.

5 De Fusco, R., *Una semiotica per il design*. Milano, Franco Angeli 2005, p. 13.

6 Lakoff, G. – Johnson, M., *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago–London, University of Chicago Press 1980; Kövecses, Z., *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*. Oxford, Oxford University Press 2002; Onians, J., Architecture, Metaphor and the Mind. *Architectural History*, 35, 1992, pp. 192–207.

terms, and in discursive terms the poetic, mythical or narrative creation of more homogenised places from the ocean of heterogeneous spaces.⁷ When we approach design culture as a dynamic network of phenomena that is constituted from the synergy of all the senses, we naturally think of it as being born out of an ever-creative interplay of physical spaces experienced by the body and discursive spaces open to the human mind at the same time. This is especially true of reading in terms of 4E Cognition theory,⁸ according to which our mind is embodied in its states, movements and gestures while delving into typographical space, embedded in social and material contexts virtually rebuilt by the text, extended into our designed environment, again, evoked by the text, and to a certain extent enacted in the intellectual and fictitious scenes of the book also clearly experienced by the body.⁹

The textual palace as a cognitive metaphor for futility

Questions arising from the construction of Bethlen's Palace in Bethlenszentmiklós and questions regarding Miklós Bethlen's architectural education have sporadically appeared in the history of Hungarian architecture ever since the pioneering works of the architect and architectural theorist Virgil (Borbíró) Birbauer, but despite Margit B. Nagy and András Kovács' pivotal works, we can hardly claim that the subject has been exhausted.¹⁰ In the meantime, Koen Ottenheyen and Letícia Cosnean have recently opened up a completely new perspective in the investigation of such questions and thus, for example, the Bethlen researchers were able to direct attention to Bethlen's Leiden master, Nicolaus Goldmann, and his architectural thoughts, recently discussed in detail by Jeroen Godeau.¹¹

7 This line of inquiry has been extensively explored in: Szentpéteri, M. – Tillmann, J. (eds.), *Térpoéтика* [The Poetics of Space]. *Helikon: Irodalom- és Kultúratudományi Szemle*, 56, 2010, No. 1–2 (thematic issue).

8 4E stands for Embodied–Embedded–Extended–Enacted. For an overview see Newen, A. – Gallagher, S. – Bruin, L. de, 4E Cognition: Historical Roots, Key Concepts, and Central Issues. In: *iidem* (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of 4E Cognition*. Oxford, Oxford Library of Psychology 2018. For online digital edition see *ibid.*, Oxford, Oxford Academic 2018. Available online at [www: https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198735410.013.1](https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198735410.013.1) [cit. 19. 6. 2025].

9 Kukkonen, K., *4E Cognition and Eighteenth-Century Fiction: How the Novel Found its Feet*. Oxford, Oxford University Press 2019.

10 Bierbauer, V., *A magyar építészet története* [A History of Hungarian Architecture]. Máriabesnyő, Gödöllő 2004 (1st edition 1937), pp. 97–100.

11 Cosnean, L., The Architectural Patronage of Miklós Bethlen in Late Seventeenth-Century Transylvania. *Caiete ARA*, 5, 2014, No. 1, pp. 135–150; Ottenheyen, K., Proportional Design Systems in Seventeenth-Century Holland. *Architectural Histories*, 2, 2014, No. 1, pp. 1–14; Goudeau, J., *Nicolaus Goldmann (1611–1665) en de wiskundige architectuurwetenschap*. Groningen, Philip Elchers 2005; *idem*, The Matrix Regained: Reflections on the Use of the Grid in the Architectural Theories,

Before I say more about this, let me first refer to the fact that in his memoirs, the elderly Miklós Bethlen, while in prison, retrospectively classifies all human activity as futile, including earthly, actual architecture, as a result of which in his autobiography the Bethlenszentmiklós Palace and its construction history functions as a kind of cognitive metaphor that can be regarded as a model of all kinds of vanity in the text.¹² Bethlen's attitude is not unique for its time. John Onians drew architectural historians' attention to the medieval crisis of actual, tangible architecture, which affected reception all the way to the early modern era and guaranteed the basically negative role of architecture in the strict system of Christian morality.¹³ Accordingly, this was perhaps the most important reason for the strengthening of symbolic architecture in the era, which proved to be decisive later on, such as in Miklós Bethlen's time. In this Christian view, factual architecture is actually a temptation from God, a kind of hubris, like the construction of the Tower of Ba-

of Nicolaus Goldmann and Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand. *Architectural Histories*, 3, 2015, No. 1, pp. 1–17. See also Goudeau, J., Ezekiel for Solomon: The Temple of Jerusalem in Seventeenth-Century Leiden and the Case of Cocceius. In: *idem – Verhoeven, M. – Weijers, W. (eds.), The Imagined and Real Jerusalem in Art and Architecture*. Leiden, Brill 2014, pp. 88–113.

12 On Bethlen's self-fashioning in general see Tóth, Z., *A koronatanú: Bethlen Miklós. Az Élete leírása magától és a XVII. századi puritanizmus* [Miklós Bethlen's Autobiography and 17th-century Puritanism]. Debrecen, Csokonai 2007, pp. 38–41. On the architectural use of cognitive metaphors see Szentpéteri, M., *A kereszteny pánszófia temploma*. *Jan Amos Comenius és a szabadkőműves templomszimbolika kora újkori forrásvidékei* [The Temple of Pansophy: Jan Amos Comenius and the Early Modern Sources of Masonic Temple Symbolism]. *Helikon*, 62, 2016, No. 4, pp. 528–545. Bethlen's image of mummies is similarly exciting and perceptive, although it does not play such an important role in the autobiography's self-fashioning strategies as the question of futile architecture. “The sweet scent of ointment is profitable to the living, who can inhale it and smell it. To the dead, however, it is as useful as a horseshoe to a dead horse. What use to the bodies of the Egyptian kings was that anointing in which they indulged above every nation, if, as doctors tell us today, if they are not mistaken [“lying” in the original], they are corroded and rotted later in the mummified state [“people eat them as mummies and shit them out” in the less euphemistic original version]? Has anointing ever preserved a single body from corruption? Never ever. If the anointing is renewed, the body will dry out and keep for a long time, but so hideously black that one is repelled by it. Such things are to be seen among the curiosities in Leyden. But what does it profit the body itself, or the soul that lived in it, that it should not be corrupted? Thus we have seen amply above what profit repute is to the dead.” Bethlen, M., *Élete leírása magától*. In: Windisch, É. V. (ed.), *Kemény János és Bethlen Miklós művei*. Budapest, Szépirodalmi 1980, pp. 399–981, here p. 423. For online digital edition see *idem, Élete leírása magától*. In: Windisch, É. V. (ed.), *Bethlen Miklós művei*. Budapest, Neumann 2000. Available online at [www: https://mek.oszk.hu/06100/06152/html/index.htm](https://mek.oszk.hu/06100/06152/html/index.htm) [cit. 19. 6. 2025]. For English translation see Bethlen, M., *The Autobiography of Miklós Bethlen*. Transl. B. Adams. London–New York–Bahrain, Kegan Paul 2004, pp. 52–53. (Here and in the following quotations from the English translation of Bethlen's autobiography, the modifications in square brackets are mine.)

13 Onians, J., *Bearers of Meaning: The Classical Orders in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance*. Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press 1988, pp. 112–129 (chapter “The crisis of architecture: Medieval and Renaissance”).

bel. These worldly, human structures, just like the cities of Babylon, Sodom, or even Jerusalem, and earthly possessions in general (*Matthew 6,19*), are doomed to destruction – even Solomon's temple only stood for a short time. At the same time, construction in the metaphorical sense is decisive as early as the New Testament. Peter is the rock, for example, on whom the church is built (*Matthew 16,18*); and Paul calls the apostles James, Peter and John “pillars” (*Galatians 2,9*). It is therefore not surprising, according to Onians, that Christian basilicas and churches were symbols of the Heavenly Jerusalem, and their builders all compared themselves to Solomon, the only person to receive divine approval for his construction work on earth. This legitimacy trick was also applied by Justinian, the builder of the Hagia Sophia, as well as by Charlemagne in Aachen and Abbot Suger in Saint Denis.¹⁴

It is rarely discussed whether the parallels to Solomon were drawn when designing civic buildings although, to a certain extent, the example of the Escorial is obvious from this perspective.¹⁵ Notwithstanding that Bethlen, *expressis verbis*, does not see himself as the constructor Solomon, in his autobiographical self-fashioning an important role is played by the Solomon of vanities, i.e. the Preacher, whose words in Bethlen's time were still believed to be those of Solomon, “the son of David, the king of Jerusalem” (*Ecclesiastes 1,1*). In my opinion, the *topos* of the crisis mentioned by Onians also appears in Bethlen's autobiography in the form of Solomon's vanity, when the discussion of honour and reputation turns to the construction of Bethlen-szentmiklós Palace. According to Bethlen,

[h]onour is [...] of two kinds; in the same way that man consists of two parts, body and soul; so there is bodily, worldly honour, which accompanies the body or earthly life and vanishes together with the same; and there is spiritual, lasting honour, and like the soul this too is immortal and not only aids one in this life but also accompanies one to the next world, inseparably, unchangingly.¹⁶

The latter is “truly honour”, the former only its “image”, “mask” and “shadow”, although the former is “pursued” for the most part, and the latter, regrettably, is “very weakly claimed”.¹⁷ In the sequel, Bethlen illustrates the question of worldly fame and honour with a perceptive architectural image

14 Szentpéteri, M., *A kereszteny pánszófia temploma*, pp. 531–532.

15 Taylor, R., *Arquitectura y magia. Consideraciones sobre la idea de El Escorial*. Madrid, Siruela 1992.

16 Bethlen, M., *Élete leírása magától*, p. 406; idem, *The Autobiography*, p. 30.

17 Idem, *Élete leírása magától*, p. 411; idem, *The Autobiography*, p. 35.

relevant to our topic, “[b]ut how weak, and certainly more fragile than ice, is the opinion of man, the fundamentum on which the world builds its Babel-tower of honour, as the thing itself and everyday examples reveal.”¹⁸

The topos of “the tower of Babel of honour (becsületi Bából tornya)” is beautifully enriched when Miklós Bethlen brushes the futility of the *arti del disegno*, that is, in Bethlen’s words, the “great crafts of the hands (kézi nagy mesterségek)”, like architecture, painting and sculpture. Regarding the craft of the architect (*architectus*), for example, he believes that “those men of power too grasp at this shadow that seek eternal memory in buildings, the first of whom was the murderer Cain in *Genesis* 4,17 and the first tyrant Nimrod or Ninus in *Genesis* 10,8–11, the kings that made the pyramids of Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander, Seleucus, Antiochus, Constantine the Great and others.” He then continues:

Where are the terribly great buildings known as the seven wonders of the world, where are they themselves that built them or caused them to be built? If any city named after them still bears their name today it is rather in the histories than in reality, for the nations that inhabit them now call them by different names; but even if they had remained, what would they have profited their builders? in the mouths of men their names signify, for the most part, foolish and haughty tyrants. What is harder still, God, through David in *Psalm* 49,12–15, likens them to cattle, and consigns them to the grave and to hell. Is that good repute, honour, eternal remembrance?¹⁹

Bethlen later, now openly referring to Solomon and his temple, adds more colour to the picture outlined so far:

Solomon says in *Ecclesiastes* 1,4: One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh, and so on and so on; *consequenter* time consumes not only men but also all their works, even those in which they have sought repute, name and eternity, monarchias, great imperiums, cities too and terribly great buildings, columns of marble, gold, bronze and silver set up in the hope of perpetuity, images, monumentums, whole generations, their languages, repute and names; it consumes too the human emotions, love, fear, anger, pleasure, sorrow, glory, kind-

18 Idem, Élete leírása magától, p. 413; idem, *The Autobiography*, p. 37.

19 Idem, Élete leírása magától, p. 421. “Great manual skills” is certainly not the best rendering of “kézi nagy mesterségek”. Idem, *The Autobiography*, pp. 48–49.

ness, shame, repute good and ill, panegyricuses, epitaphiums, books, languages, sciences, in brief, all transitory things. Where are the pyramids of Egypt, the temples of Solomon and Diana, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Four Monarchias, the tomb of Mausolus?²⁰

Bethlen does not deal with painters (“képírók” in Hungarian, i. e. “image writers”) and sculptors (“képfaragók” in Hungarian, i. e. “image carvers”) any more positively:

Apelles and Parrasius were painters and Phidias and Praxiteles sculptors so famous that even the idol gods that they made received greater honour; but where in the world today is a single one of their works? Their work is lost, they themselves are no more, their names and memorials too. Indeed, what could be greater folly than to wish to set ice in a ring instead of a diamond and wear it? No greater sense, surely, only not so soon perceptible, have those that seek eternity in transient, perishable things.²¹

Although Bethlen calls all worldly pursuits, including architecture and construction, with Solomon “the vanity of vanities” in the chapter “On my Inclinations or Propensities”, it is still exciting to have a look at how things actually happened, or at least what it was for the younger Bethlen to remember all this could mean. Let me quote the well-known lines about Bethlen’s great willingness to build:

My inclination towards building was great, and was increased because at university I studied architecture both civil and military; and because I saw many fine houses in Christian lands, and as eldest son I inherited farms everywhere, so that, even if I had not taken pleasure in architecture and had not had a grasp of it, I would have been obliged to build. But this did me harm, and in many ways I was led astray in it, was boastful over it, tried beyond my strength and impoverished myself with it; I had great trouble, much anxiety and regret, and could not obtain expert master craftsmen in Transylvania, because they were very few.²²

This detail is followed by the well-known story of the construction of Bethlen-szentmiklós Palace, which certainly inspired generations to come. Writing

20 Idem, Élete leírása magától, pp. 457–458; idem, *The Autobiography*, p. 102.

21 Idem, Élete leírása magától, p. 422; idem, *The Autobiography*, pp. 50–51.

22 Idem, Élete leírása magától, p. 502; idem, *The Autobiography*, pp. 164–165.

instructions for posterity, Bethlen concludes the section of his autobiography discussing the construction of his palace with this famous Solomonic verdict, which also raises the eternal backwardness of Hungarian and Transylvanian culture:

I have judged it necessary to write this as evidence for my posterity, and I advise them: if there is not actually great need of something, do not build for mere pleasure or out of vanity; because although I set my own building in order so that my property should not be harmed, it was at great damage to my farming and my purse. As I see it, fine buildings are not for Transylvania: they lead either to damage to a man's vision, or to loss for his children, or both. *Vanitas vanitatum.*²³

The above *topos* of the Preacher's vanity puts the history of the palace's construction in a beautiful framework. As we read above, Bethlen asks, where are the pyramids of Egypt, the temples of Solomon and Diana, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the four Monarchies, the tomb of Mausoleus? These worldly vanities, just like Bethlenszentmiklós Palace, which in its current state is indeed unfortunately at the mercy of the public, are only doomed to destruction...

The Temple of Solomon in Transylvania

Notwithstanding all the above elderly talk about futility, is it conceivable that the Temple of Solomon, prefiguring the Heavenly Jerusalem, might still be hidden in Betlenszentmiklós Palace? Is it possible that in Miklós Bethlen's self-fashioning, not only the old preacher, or the disgraced, idolatrous — in Bethlen's words, promiscuous and arrogant — Solomon, but also the young builder Solomon in Bethlen's younger years played a role? Is it possible that the text inscribed into the building and the text of the recollection show an exciting tension? In order to obtain a meaningful answer to this question, we have to take a look at Miklós Bethlen's architectural studies. In Utrecht, he studied:

[f]ortification or military architecture with a very old and drunken man called Wasner, a famous mathematician, who came to my lodgings and taught us as a group of five young gentlemen. He knew no Latin, only Belgian, and his hands shook so with age and drunkenness that

²³ Idem, *Élete leírása magától*, p. 504; idem, *The Autobiography*, p. 166.

he could not draw a line, never mind write a word, until he had drunk a goodly glass of brandy in the morning or two glasses of rough wine after lunch; when he had drunk it his hand was steady. Therefore even when we were making arrangements he struck a bargain: he taught for an hour every morning and at noon. I made great progress in this subject, and therefore translated from German into Latin the *Architectura* of Adam Freytag; it is among my writings if it has not been destroyed.²⁴

This shows that Bethlen was already very interested in the topic in Utrecht, so much so that it even encouraged him to work as a translator. At the same time, to us his studies in Leiden are much more important: “[A]lso I studied civil architecture and perspective in German with an old German named Nicolaus Goldmannus (he was not a professor).”²⁵ Goldmann, who was born in Breslau in 1611 and died in Leiden in 1665, was a mathematician and architectural writer educated in Leipzig and Leiden, whose most important work is the *Vollständige Anweisung zu der Civil-Bau-Kunst*, published posthumously in 1696 by Leonhard Christoph Sturm, which is as important in the German-speaking lands as Alberti’s in Italy, Philibert de l’Orme’s in France or Inigo Jones’ in England.²⁶ The book, and especially Sturm’s revised editions, also had a fundamental impact on Hungarian architectural theory. From our perspective, it is particularly important that Goldmann also plays a distinguished role in the history of “architectural Solomonism” (Stefania Tuzi).²⁷

24 Idem, Élete leírása magától, p. 574; idem, *The Autobiography*, p. 249. Adam Freytag (1608–1650) was a military engineer and physician of Prussian origin. There is no extant copy of Bethlen’s translation of his *Architectura militaris nova et aucta, oder Neue vermehrte Fortification* (Leiden 1631). See Bethlen, M., *Válogatott bibliográfia* (Selected Bethlen-bibliography). Ed. Z. Tóth. Budapest, Reciti 2016. Available online at [www: http://reciti.hu/wp-content/uploads/bethlen-bib_vn.pdf](http://reciti.hu/wp-content/uploads/bethlen-bib_vn.pdf) [cit. 19. 5. 2025].

25 Bethlen, M., Élete leírása magától, p. 579; idem, *The Autobiography*, p. 255. István Bibó does not mention that Bethlen studied under the supervision of Goldmann, see Bibó, I., *A magyar építészeti szakirodalom kezdetei* (Építészeti szakkönyvek Magyarországon a XVIII. században) [The beginnings of Hungarian architectural literature /Architectural textbooks in Hungary in the 18th century/]. In: Zádor, A. – Szabolcsi, H. (eds.), *Művészet és felvilágosodás. Művészettörténeti tanulmányok* [Art and Enlightenment]. Budapest, Akadémiai 1978, pp. 27–122, here p. 85.

26 See Bibó, I., *A magyar építészeti szakirodalom kezdetei*, pp. 85–86. Jeroen Goudeau calls him “a northern Scamozzi”, see Goudeau, J., *A Northern Scamozzi: Nicolaus Goldmann and the Universal Theory of Architecture. Annali di architettura*, 18–19, 2006–2007, pp. 235–246. See also Hanno-Walter, K., *Geschichte der Architekturtheorie*. München, C. H. Beck 1995, pp. 198–199. For a detailed discussion in the original – together with Ezechiel’s visionary description of the Temple from the Lutherbibel in Sturm’s introduction – with tables and Sturm’s beautiful Villalpadian images see Goldmann, N., *Vollständige Anweisung zu der Civil-Bau-Kunst*. Ed. L. C. Sturm. Braunschweig, Heinrich Kessler 1699, pp. 30–46.

27 Portoghesi Tuzi, S., *Le Colonne e il Tempio di Salomone. La storia, la legenda, la fortuna*. Roma, Gangemi 2002, p. 126.

As we have seen so far, the palace of the autobiography is not only an architectural or construction matter. Since its real meaning, and thus what makes it always present in the reader's mental or neural filmmaking, is inseparable from the spatial poetic process by means of which the already blasphemous *topos of vanitas* in Bethlen's Palace in backward Transylvania certainly turns into a cognitive metaphor of hopeless and futile spiritual, moral and material construction or development as well as all kinds of progression. Bethlen brilliantly combines here the spiritual dimensions with the tangible.

This can be further elaborated by the fact that the Solomon of vanity (*vanitatum vanitas*) stands here with Solomon the builder. As Letiția Cosnean emphasises following Koen Ottenheyen, the nine-panel, orthogonal ground plan of Bethlenszentmiklós Palace clearly shows the influence of Goldmann's architectural theory on his former student.²⁸ Further, following Jeroen Goudeau, Cosnean draws attention to a fact, well known by "ideal architecture" researchers, that Goldmann's universal architectural system sought to demonstrate the harmony of Vitruvius and biblical architecture, namely the lingering project of the highly influential Jesuit Juan Bautista Villalpando who, among other things, followed the considerations of the Renaissance *philosophia perennis* during his procedure and tried to show that the pagan Vitruvius participated in the eternal truth long before the first coming of Christ.²⁹

It is about the method of Villalpando, who in this context, as an exegete as well as an architect – a member of the Escorial Circle – probably made the most influential attempt ever to reconstruct Solomon's temple. In the history of early modern Hungarian ideas and culture, the depictions of Solomon's Temple and Jerusalem made for Piscator the Elder's Bible project, and later reused in Johann Heinrich Alsted's encyclopaedias, are the best-known examples of the far-reaching reception of Villalpando's model. In the 18th century, these same visual materials were also employed, albeit in a less spectacular fashion, in the reconstruction attempts of the Jesuit antiquarian János Molnár.³⁰

28 Cosnean, L., The Architectural Patronage of Miklós Bethlen in Late Seventeenth-Century Transylvania. *Caiete ARA*, 5, 2014, No. 1, pp. 135–150.

29 From the vast literature see especially *Dios arquitecto: J. B. Villalpando y el templo de Salomón*. Ed. J. A. Ramírez. Madrid, Siruela 1991.

30 Szentpéteri, M., A bőlcsestő temploma. *Metszetek Johann Heinrich Alsted enciklopédiaiában* [The Temple of Wisdom: Engravings in J. H. Alsted's Encyclopaedias]. In: Kapitány, Á. – Kapitány, G. (eds.), *Építészet és jelentés – építészeti jelentés* [Architecture and Meaning – Architectural Meaning]. Budapest, Moholy-Nagy Művészeti Egyetem 2007, pp. 52–105; Szentpéteri, M., The Temple of Encyclopaedia – A Symbol of Universal Wisdom in Johann Heinrich Alsted's Works. In: Kérchy, A. – Kiss, A. – Szönyi, G. E. (eds.), *The Iconology of Law and Order (Legal and Cosmic)*.

It has remained a mystery whether the coffered or orthogonal ground plan of Bethlenszentmiklós Palace, born in the spirit of Goldmann, could present us with a hidden, symbolic reconstruction of Solomon's temple, since the Leiden architectural theorist considered the orthogonal structure in the spirit of Villalpando's temple reconstruction to be an architectural metaphor for universal architecture and universal, encyclopaedic knowledge of all kinds. As Cosnean succinctly summarises, following Goudeau, "the use of a square layout divided into nine equal-sized sections can be traced back to Solomon's Temple, which Goldmann treated as the spiritual foundation of architecture, an archetypal model of architectural and scientific thought inspired by God."³¹ We do not know for sure how much Bethlen was aware of this fundamental, Villalpandist context of Goldmann's oeuvre, but I consider it almost impossible that he could have been to any extent unfamiliar with these semantic considerations of his former master when he began to design his palace, and that he would have followed Goldmann in the construction purely on a formal basis. This is almost impossible in the case of an eminent Transylvanian aristocrat who studied under the supervision of János Apáczai Csere, the author of the first encyclopaedia in Hungarian, who himself was the excellent student of András Porcsalmi in Cluj/Kolozsvár and Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld in Alba Julia/Gyulafehérvár, and as such was an ardent reader of Alsted, the highly influential master of all.³²

Preliminary conclusions

According to present knowledge, the palace of the autobiography and its extra-textual version is, on the one hand, a paraphrase of Solomon's temple, but on the other hand, also a cognitive metaphor for futility. This seems like an incredibly exciting tension, the tension between the perception of the young and the old Solomon. Although the Jerusalem Temples were also destroyed – both the Solomonic and the Zerubabbelian/Herodian – their virtual or actual reconstruction in the early modern period was part of the *Verbesserungsprojekte*, the various – great, general, universal and further – reformations, instaurations, and restitutions, and later, in general, it became

Szeged, JATE Press 2012, pp. 185–197; Szentpéteri, M., *Molnár János és Salamon temploma: Templomrekonstrukció körülűvesellenes kontextusban?* [János Molnár and the Temple of Solomon: Reconstruction in an Anti-Masonic Context?]. Unpublished manuscript notes for a lecture, Institute for Literary Studies, Hungarian Academy of Sciences [8. 3. 2016].

31 Cosnean, L., *The Architectural Patronage*, p. 143.

32 For details see Szentpéteri, M., *Egyetemes tudomány Erdélyben. Johann Heinrich Alsted és a herborni hagyomány* [Universal Learning in Transylvania. J. H. Alsted and the Herborn Tradition]. Budapest, Universitas 2008.

a cognitive metaphor for all kind of progressive efforts to create an earthly paradise in the perception of many authors, such as Villalpando, Alsted, Comenius, Coccejus and later, for example, in freemasonry, as well as Bethlen's master from Leiden, Nicolaus Goldmann, who viewed the architectural role of the archetype of the Solomonic temple in this way in his universal architectural program. In this respect, it is rather surprising that while Goudeau clearly refers to the influence of Alsted and the Herborn post-Ramist authors on Goldmann's universal learning endeavours, he paradoxically believes that Alsted – in contrast with Goldman, who followed him – failed to bring the formal character of his universal learning project into harmony with its architectural content. Although *expressis verbis* neither Bethlen's building nor writing were produced according to metaphorical terms of Vitruvian ideas – namely, *ichnographia*, *orthographia* and *sciographia* – and that of Ezechiel's visions as Comenius' temple of *pansophia*, the tantalising role of the Villalpandian imagery in Alsted's 1620 and 1630 encyclopaedias definitely navigates its initiated reader in this direction and displays metaphorically the entire encyclopaedia as the reconstructed Millenarian temple of wisdom.³³

It is possible, then, that the young Bethlen was therefore inspired by this Villalpandian tradition via Goldmann when designing Betlenszentmiklós Palace. The elderly Bethlen, however, seems to have regarded such enthusiastic perceptions as futile. Be that as it may, for those who enter the ruined palace today, the designed environment, especially in its depressing present state, will be a cognitive metaphor for Solomonic self-fashioning, and the spatial atmosphere experienced by the body will be inextricably intertwined with the logic of the autobiography and floor plan discussed herein, with their intellectual and spiritual connotations. From now on, learned and understanding observers shall perceive what they experience in this tension-filled dialogue, and their aesthetic contemplation will encourage them to discursively articulate their sensual experiences in the spirit of this dialogue, that is, to capture them in a conceptual sense. For design culture is constituted in the synergy of all our senses and the amalgamation of our aesthetic and logical knowledge, stemming both from our bodily experiences of the physical space and our mental poetics open to myths, stories and narratives that can be rendered upon the designed environment.

³³ Goudeau, J., A Northern Scamozzi, pp. 246–248. See also Szentpéteri, M., A bölcsesség temploma; idem, The Temple of Encyclopaedia; idem, Egyetemes tudomány Erdélyben.

Appendix



Figure 1. Miklós Bethlen's palace on an early 20th-century postcard – still in good condition.

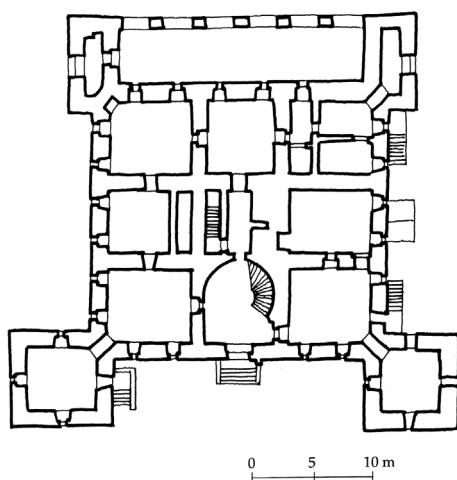


Figure 2. The schematic ground plan of the Betlenszentmiklós Palace.

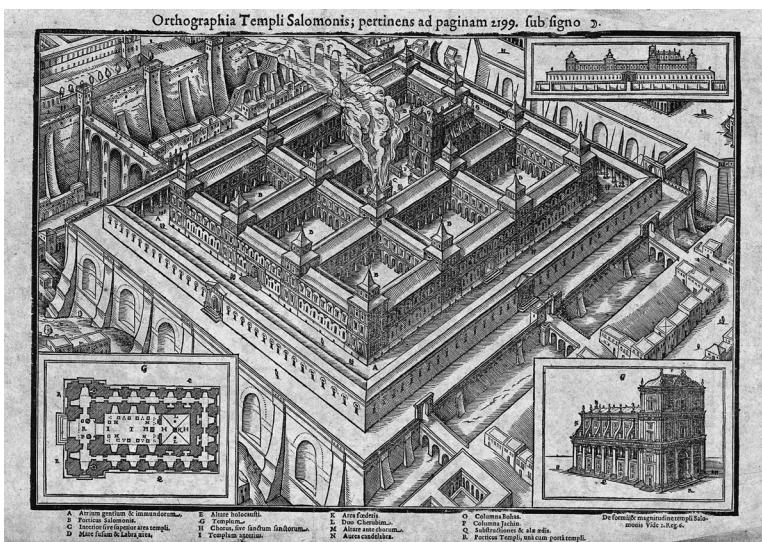


Figure 3. The Villapandian image of the Temple of Salomon in Johann Heinrich Alsted's *Encyclopaediae septem tomis distincta*. Herborn, Corvinus 1630.