

THE SCULPTURES OF THE PARLIAMENT BUILDING

Cover image: *Statue of Saint Stephen in the dome hall*
Hardcover image: *Statue of chief Árpád in the dome hall*

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INTRODUCTION

Historicism, a dominant architectural style in the second half of the 19th century, turns to earlier periods for inspiration. From the 1860s on, through two and a half decades, the face of the growing capital city was defined by the neo-Renaissance style, influenced by early Italian imagery. The fact that Imre Steindl, the architect with the only neo-Gothic entry submitted for the permanent House of Parliament, was the one commissioned with the design on 22 April 1883 also contributed to the end of the neo-Renaissance hegemony. The entry was a testament to the architect's love for the Gothic style, as well as the enthusiasm of politician Gyula Andrassy – a highly influential member of the jury – for British parliamentarism and the Parliament building on the bank of the Thames. In addition, some say the design evokes the Middle Ages, a glorious period of Hungarian history. From a sculptural point of view, Imre Steindl's design was one of the more modest of the known entries, but the design underwent further evolution, eventually encompassing 246 full-body sculptures both within the House of Parliament and on its facade. Although the artistic quality of the statues have been heavily criticised, the complexity and richness of the imagery they represent constitute a remarkable aspect of the House of Parliament. This volume details the original figurative sculptural ornaments of the House of Parliament, excluding the commemorative plaques and other plastics established in the past century. Sculpture groups representing a common theme are introduced separately, in chronological order according to the first step of their preparation. After describing the stages, we will first discuss the pantheon of sovereigns in the Dome Hall, followed by the sculptures of rulers, kings, and other historical personae on the facade, then the ornamental figures representing crafts and virtues in the interior, and finally the unrealized monument of Francis Joseph and Empress Elisabeth.

1. *Detail of the design for the Dome Hall, by Imre Steindl*







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3. Arcades on the Danube-side facade with the royal statues originally emplaced there, but later replaced due to stone degradation





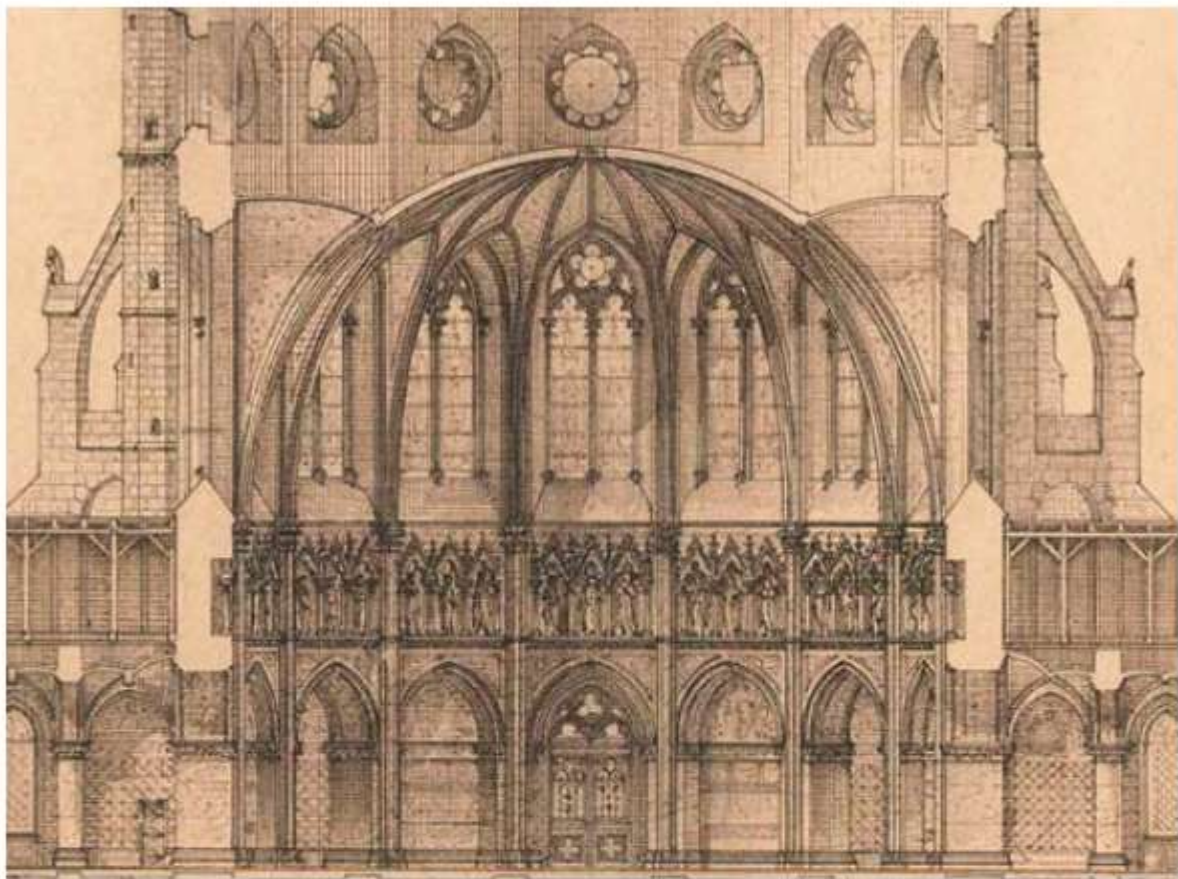
BACKGROUND AND PRELIMINARIES

FROM ENTRY DESIGN TO REALIZATION

When the neo-Gothic design of Technical University professor Imre Steindl was selected in spring 1883, it seemed that despite the evocation of the period in question, Hungarian sculptors would be receiving less work, as the planned sculptural ornamentation was rather modest in comparison with other entries. By contrast, Alajos Hauszmann's design, which was jointly awarded first prize, included a multitude of figures of the most varied sizes and themes: allegorical statuettes, geniuses (guardian angels) driving four-in-hand carriages, and countless other ornaments, in addition to the larger-than-life statue of Hungaria on the bank of the Danube.

4. *Much like Antal Palóczy's design, the entry by Géza Mirkovszky would have also featured a large Hungaria statue along the centre axis of the river-side facade*





Similarly extravagant statue groups can be found in the entries by the renowned Viennese architect Otto Wagner, as well as by Ferdinand Fellner and Hermann Helmer. Antal Palóczy, on the other hand, envisioned a monumental Hungaria statue reaching all the way up to the cornice of the building. In contrast, Steindl's entry did not include any sculptures on the external facades, with the exception of the banner-carrying figures decorating the dome and the top of the towers, and the angels holding the Hungarian coat-of-arms. The interior, however, looked much more lavish. The niches of the gallery in the Dome Hall housed 48 statues, with 34 more planned to be placed on the pillars in the Upper House chamber; on a purely numerical basis, this is close to the final count, but they are as of yet all concentrated in the most significant areas.

5. Statues in the gallery of the Dome Hall, shown on the longitudinal section of the entry

With continued development, more and more statues appeared on the plans, the figures populating not only the interior, but also the exterior of the building.

THE ART OF SCULPTURE AS RELATED TO ARCHITECTURE

The tradition of decorating important public and private buildings with figural sculptures dates back to the antiquity. Individual buildings were decorated with statues representing allegorical or actual persons related to the function or builder of the edifice. The tradition of allegorical representation goes back thousands of years, with figures depicting abstract ideas, activities, and qualities through the tools they carry or hold, or possibly the animals accompanying them. The general term for such items or animals is "attributes". Their meanings, derived from associations, myths and legends, have continued to change throughout the ages. For example, an owl sitting by a figure's feet, or a book held in its hands represented wisdom and knowledge, while a sword and a soldier's uniform was used to denote power and patriotism in this period. Statues depicting a particular person were less typically used for building ornamentation. This genre is related to memorial sculptures, which required serious research and a precise understanding of the subject's face and characteristics, as realistic representation and historical authenticity were important requirements for such sculptural works at the time. A typical location for such statues was the facade of churches, often featuring saints or Jesus Christ. But they could also be found on public buildings, such as the Opera House with the composer statues on the parapet, or in the niches of the monumental facade of the Budapest Keleti Railway Station, with the statues of James Watt and George Stephenson. The building of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences is unique in the sense that it houses both a pantheon of scientists and an allegorical collection of figures. The ornamentation programme of the House of Parliament, however, is even more complex and rich.

6. *The main entrance of Budapest Keleti Railway Station with the statues of Watt and Stephenson, and the allegorical figure of Transportation on the top of the building*

7. *The Opera House, with statues of composers on the parapet*



THE SCULPTURE WORK CONFLICT

The construction of the House of Parliament began amidst ceremonial festivities on the former Tömő Square on 12 October 1885. By the summer of 1887, only the excavation works had been finished. At this time, a group of sculptors from the capital were already expecting to play an important role in the construction of the most important public building in the country. This hope was justified by the fact that the budget allocated a sum of 114,800 forints for figural sculptural works. The artists submitted a request to the Executive Committee supervising the construction of the House of Parliament and chief designer Imre Steindl, asking to be commissioned for the statues. The letter was signed by Gyula Bezerédi, Béla Brestyánszky, Gyula Donáth, Leó Feszler, Adolf Keszler, Antal Lóránfi, Lajos Mátrai, Ede Mayer, József Róna, Károly Senyei, Alajos Stróbl, Gyula Szász, Antal Szécsi and Ferenc Vasadi. However, the request did not receive significant attention at the time, despite the sculptors' assertion that they would need no less than five years to complete a task of this volume. A new attempt was made two years later, in January 1889; nonetheless, the development of a detailed sculptural program was only started over a year after this second letter. Steindl was reluctant to make a decision, claiming that it was not his sole responsibility to determine who or what the statues should depict. The sculptural program for the legislative building of the Kingdom of Hungary, as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was indeed a sensitive issue, and one that was much more political rather than architectural in nature. Steindl also had another, more practical excuse, namely that the storage of the completed artworks would be problematic. Another year passed, and by early 1891, Steindl himself also began to worry about the time requirements for sculptural works. Accordingly, he submitted a request to the committee, in order to enter negotiations with the interested sculptors. By this time, serious progress had been made with the foundation works and the construction of walls. Over the winter of 1890–1891, the whole building was erected up to the first floor level.



8. Lajos Tisza, head of the Executive Committee

THE DEAL

Steindl's recommendation was soon prepared, proposing 96 statues on the facade, and 98 in the building's interior. Statues of Hungarian rulers, kings and generals were proposed for the outside, and "eminences of parliamentary life" for the inside; though Steindl requested that his recom-

9. The signatures of sculptors, including György Zala, Károly Senyei and József Róna, in a letter of protest against a tender procedure



mendations should not be considered as final, in order to avoid straining the budget with unreasonably high extra costs.

Next, negotiations began with the artists about unit prices. The artists requested 750 forints for the smallest 1.5-metre statues, 1,200 forints for the largest 2.5-metre statues, and 1,000 forints each for the two lions guarding the main entrance; the total costs would have reached an astounding 188,300 forints, over 50% higher than the originally budgeted amount. Therefore, Steindl inquired about the prices of some other building statues completed around that time, including the Main Customs House in Pest (Miklós Ybl, 1870–1874), the Vienna Town Hall (Friedrich von Schmidt, 1872–1883) and the Budapest Opera House (Miklós Ybl, 1879–1884). He found that the prices varied greatly depending on the time and location of construction, as well as the quality of the stone. The Executive Committee, though impressed by the list of renowned sculptors, was more concerned with the costs exceeding the budget. Believing the prices to be overly high, they decided to announce a tender procedure not only for the ornamental stone carvings, but also for approximately 30 figural statues. On learning about this, the sculptors, headed by the professionally esteemed György Zala, sent a letter to Lajos Tisza, president of the committee, claiming that “it is our desire and ambition to participate [...] in the ornamentation of the permanent House of Parliament, being that it is a monumental edifice worthy of our millennial constitution [...] it is our patriotic duty to jointly contribute to this prestigious task, and thereby to further the development of Hungarian sculpting” as an explanation for reducing their rates. Thus, the final cost was reduced to 134,923 forints. Following this new offer, Steindl participated in further negotiations in June 1891. The final offer, signed by twenty artists, overran the budget by only 24,260 forints. The price of the 1.5-metre statues was reduced to 520 forints, and the 2.5-metre statues to 900 forints. In addition to the new offer, the artists also had some requests with regards to the contract. In order to fully understand the implications of these requests, however, we should first understand the usual approval and realization procedure for stone sculpting works.

10. *Plaster model of a page statue*



Stone and metal statues went through a number of phases, from the initial concept to the actual realization. The first step was the creation of a one-half or one-third scale (or, depending on the final dimensions of the statue, possibly even smaller) clay or plaster model. This was usually evaluated by the principal or an appointed committee, and based on their recommendations or requests, the sculptor would either modify the work or start creating a full-scale model. Once that was finished, it was once again inspected by the principal or their committee. If the principal found everything to be satisfactory, then the stone carving or repointing procedure for a stone statue could begin, based on the plaster model. For statues made of bronze or other metal, this step involved the preparation of the moulds for casting instead. Sometimes the artists commissioned subcontractors for the sculpting process, especially if expensive metal casting works were involved. The result of the carving or casting process was then inspected by the principal or the committee once more, but at this stage, only limited modifications were possible. This is why the multi-step process described above was so important.

DETAILS OF THE AGREEMENT

As sculpting works are both labour and cost intensive, few were willing or able to pre-finance the complete work. Thus, sculptors would in-



153. Alajos Stróbl

ALAJOS STRÓBL (1856, *Királylehotka (today's Kráľova Lehota, Slovakia)* – 1926, *Budapest*)

Stróbl was Caspar von Zumbusch's student in Vienna. He was one of the most popular memorial sculptors of his era, and a teacher in the College of Fine Arts. His most significant works include the fountain statues of János Arany (1893) and Saint Stephen in Budapest (1906), István Dobó in Eger (1907) and King Matthias (Corvinus) I in the Buda Castle (1904). The builders of the House of Parliament commissioned him to produce sculptures. His artwork in the House of Parliament: the bust of Imre Steindl.

FERENC SZÁRNOVSZKY (1863, *Pest* – 1903, *Budapest*)

Szárnovszky studied in Budapest and Vienna. He is best known as a metal sculptor; his most famous artwork installed in a public place is the statue of János Garay in Szekszárd. The builders of the House of Parliament commissioned him to produce the statues of Stephen IV, Béla III and Ladislaus III. He participated in the tender for the royal couple's statue group.



154. György Zala

GYÖRGY ZALA (1858, *Alsólendva (today's Lendava, Slovenia)* – 1937, *Budapest*)

Zala was a student of Edmund von Hellmer in Vienna, and later of Joseph Knauber in Munich. He was one of the most notable Hungarian sculptors of his era, and a key figure in the public life of sculptors. His major works include the memorial of the Hungarian defence forces in Buda Castle (1889–1893), the statue of Gyula Andrassy in Kossuth Square (1906) and several of the Millennial Memorial statues (1894–1929). Zala chaired the sculpture committee during the construction of the House of Parliament, and he was also commissioned to produce sculptures. He was a member of the jury for the royal couple's statue group tender process.

ZUMBUSCH, CASPAR VON (1830, *Herzebrock, Prussia* – 1915, *Rimsting am Chiemsee*)

German sculptor, university teacher, academic. He was a student of Johann von Halbig. In 1873, he began teaching at the Academy of Vienna, where he taught several notable Hungarian sculptors. His most significant artwork is the Maria Theresa memorial in Vienna (1887). During the construction of the House of Parliament, he was a member of the jury for the royal couple's statue group tender process.

155. Statues of kings during the reconstruction of the facade >



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