SUPPLEMENTI

# *Ovidius Pictus*: Afterlives of the *Metamorphoses* in Europe, from Books to the Arts

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# Expansion and Theatricality: Ovid Frescoes in the Ráday Mansion, Pécel

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*Abstract*

Ovid made a rare appearance in the Hungarian countryside in the mid-18th century. Enlarged illustrations from the *Metamorphoses* formed a mythological cycle in the Ceremonial Hall of the late baroque mansion of the noble Ráday family. The mansion was built in the 1720's in Pécel by Pál Ráday and was renovated later in the century by his son Gedeon. The original decoration consisted of 16 large frescoes and was inspired by two illustrated Ovid editions published in Amsterdam in the 1730's. Each scene is supplemented with Gedeon's verses in Hungarian. The wall paintings form a significant part of a larger decoration program, which aspires to present the encyclopaedic knowledge of the era. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the mythological cycle including its visual sources and textual additions, examine its historical and cultural context, analyse its program and acknowledge the role of the patron in the dissemination of classical knowledge in Hungary. It claims that the Ceremonial Hall provides a scenery for theatrical representations, encloses the idea of theatricality and outlines yet another important chapter in the afterlife of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

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## 1. *Introduction*

Ovid made a rare appearance in the Hungarian countryside in the mid-18th century. Enlarged illustrations from the *Metamorphoses* served the basis for a painted mythological cycle in the Ceremonial Hall of the late baroque mansion of the noble Ráday family in Pécel. The mansion was built in the 1720's in Pécel by Pál Ráday and was renovated later in the century by his son Gedeon. The residence was a place with a cultural mission. This is one of the reasons that the building got a painted decoration, first in the library area and then it was extended to other areas of the mansion, like the Ceremonial Hall and the rooms around it. The original decoration of the hall consisted of 16 large frescoes and was inspired by two illustrated Ovid editions published in Amsterdam in the 1730's. Each scene was supplemented with Gedeon's verses in Hungarian. These wall paintings form a significant part of a larger decoration program, which along with the private library and the picture gallery, aspires to present the encyclopaedic knowledge of the era and give moral lessons.

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the mythological cycle including its visual sources and textual additions, in order to give publicity to this hardly known example inspired directly by classical mythology. The paper will examine the decoration's historical and cultural context, analyse its program and acknowledge the role of the patron and his unique and extensive library in the dissemination of classical knowledge in Hungary. These ambitions were influenced by the patrons' views and were necessary contributions for a mansion to become a humanist centre for writers, philosophers, and artists. Two other features of the program will be addressed: the expanding and rescaling of the former engravings into full-sizes scenes and the characteristics they convey, and the question of display, which can be best described with the theoretical concept of baroque theatricality. The paper claims that the Ceremonial Hall provides a scenery for theatrical representations and encloses the idea of theatricality. In this respect, it outlines yet another important chapter in the afterlife of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

Because of the unfortunate history and the formerly poor condition of the building, the Pécel mansion and its decoration was fairly neglected in the scholarly literature. The primary source of our knowledge is the family archive, which consists of the family correspondence, notes, contracts, ground plans, and many other documents, and gives some information on the commissions and the history of the mansion[1]. The second contemporary source is the poet and humanist Ferenc Kazinczy, who was a close friend and often visited the family, and who wrote enthusiastic descriptions and shared his memories

[1] See more in The Ráday Archive, <https://leveltar.rgy.hu/>, 18.12.2023, and in the scholarly digital edition of the family correspondence <https://deba.unideb.hu/deba/raday/>, 18.12.2023.

some decades later[2]. The modern scholarly literature has mostly focused on the role of the family in organizing literary life and collecting books rather than on commissioning works of art and decorating the mansion. The first modern report on the fresco cycle can be found in Klára Garas's 1955 comprehensive book on 18th century painting in Hungary; she gave a short description of the frescoes, identified a few scenes and one of the sources, but criticized the painter's drawing skills[3]. Endre Zsindely in 1956 published the first throughout study of the history of Pécel mansion based on archive materials and documents and outlined the stages of the building and described the decorations of the mansion and the portrait gallery[4]. Recently, in 2003 Ágnes Berecz and József Lángi authored a book entitled *Aranyidők a péceli Ráday-kastélyban*, in which three studies address the lifestyle of the family, the iconography of the fresco decoration, and one 'possible message' of the murals.

## 2. *The place and the family*

The Rádays were a protestant noble family whose social status raised in the 18th century due to their outstanding education, political career, and civil service. Concerning art commissions, the two most prominent members of the family were Pál Ráday (1677-1733) and his son Gedeon Ráday (1713-1792). They both participated actively in public life, were high-ranking political officials, representatives in the parliament, whilst they were avid collectors of books and writers themselves[5]. The father, as a diplomat, was a close confidant of Francis (Ferenc) II. Rákóczi and was the director of his Transylvanian Chancellery; he also had an important role in organizing religious life and published religious poetry. Pál maintained a close connection with other humanists of the era, established a library collection, and had financially supported students; one of them was Ádám Mányoki, who became Hungary's most significant baroque portrait painter. The Pécel estate was inherited by his wife, Klára Kajali (1690-1741). The couple moved to Pécel after the Treaty of Szatmár (1711), when Rákóczi's war of independence with the Habsburgs ended.

Pál Ráday put a special emphasis on his son, Gedeon's education: he had first attended a protestant high school in Pozsony, then spent a year in Ber-

[2] See sections in Ferenc Kazinczy's two works: *Pályám emlékezete* <https://mek.oszk.hu//07000/07016/html/#84>, 18.12.2023, and *Magyar Pantheon* (Nemzeti Könyvtár vol. 36, Budapest, published without date).

[3] Garas 1955, pp. 126-27, and footnote 154 at pp. 276-77.

[4] Zsindely 1956.

[5] For more on the Ráday family, see Lángi 2003, pp. 72-73, and Berecz 2003a, pp. 9-14.

lin studying history, archaeology, theology, and rhetoric before continuing his studies at a university in Frankfurt. Unfortunately, the death of his father in 1733 forced him to return, take up his duties and manage the estate. Soon, in 1737 Gedeon married Katalin Szentpétery (1720-1779) and established a family in Pécel. Similarly to his father, he held offices, for example, represented his county in the Diet of Hungary in 1764-65 and was a chief guardian at the Danubian Reformed Church District; nonetheless, he found more enjoyment in cultural rather than political enterprises and thus focused more of his energies on a few private and public cultural projects centered around his Pécel mansion. First, he greatly expanded the library inherited from his father, built a numismatic collection and a significant portrait gallery[6]. As a patron, he supported schools, protestant students and young poets, and made himself active through different roles in the forming literary life of Hungary. He earned timeless merits as a great initiator, for example as a founder and editor of the journal *Magyar Museum* and as a poet himself.

Pécel became Pál Ráday's home in the later stages of his life; it was Gedeon's permanent residence for most of his life as well as served as home for a few more generations of the family[7]. From an official point of view, the family reached its peak with Gedeon's son, Gedeon II (1745-1801), who obtained the rank of a baron in 1782 and a count in 1790 and built a protestant baroque church in Pécel. Due to overspending, after this period, the family's situation began to deteriorate financially, debts piled up, and following a devastating fire in 1825, first the library, than the mansion itself was put up to sale and the family's connection to Pécel ended.

Pécel, the place where the Ráday family resided, was rather far from the country's that time capital, Pressburg (Pozsony/Bratislava) and Vienna, the other cultural and political center. It is located in the countryside, about 25 km east of Buda. It was first mentioned as a village in the 14th century, equipped with water mills and a school. Under the Ottoman empire, the population fled and the settlement was even uninhabited for a period. A new development began from around the end of 17th century, and the population quickly raised in the 18th century from 26 taxpayer families in 1715 to 147 in 1760, so in the period when the Rádays made Pécel into a regional center for humanism, literature and art, the village barely had a few hundred inhabitants.

[6] The portrait gallery was a collection of portraits of famous figures from the history, culture, and science of Hungary. There were engravings or paintings of the same size that were destroyed in the 1825 fire or were auctioned off later in Vienna and dispersed. See more in Zsindely 1956, pp. 266-69 and Lángi 2005, p. 87.

[7] Pécel was the center of the estate, most of the family correspondence was addressed to or sent from Pécel, the family received guests and relatives in the mansion. Six surviving receipts prove that the family rented apartment(s) in Pest or Buda, where only catholics were allowed to buy properties until the early 1780's (Berecz 2003a, pp. 15-16).

## 3. *The building*

The mansion in Pécel was established to become the residence of the extended Ráday family for the generations to come[8]. It was built in the 18th century in two phases: the first, smaller building was designed for Pál Ráday between 1722 and 1730; it most probably had two floors, but there is no trace of any decorations. This first construction was later encapsulated by the second. The son, Gedeon, inherited the building in 1747 and decided to renovate and enlarge. During this second phase, which lasted at least two decades starting from 1755, the mansion got a late baroque touch and reached its present layout. While Pál Ráday commissioned a residential mansion, Gedeon's upgrade included the completion of the private suites in the wings, the library halls on the ground floor, the staircase, the Ceremonial Hall and the painted decoration. After the modifications, the ground plan has followed a U-shaped form with two wings enclosing a *cour d'honneur.* This arrangement was inspired by two Hungarian aristocratic palaces, both larger and more influential, the Esterháza Palace in Fertőd for Miklós (Nicolaus) Esterházy planned by Melchior (Menyhért) Hefele and built between 1720-1766, and the Royal Palace in Gödöllő, designed by András Mayerhoffer around the 1730-40's for the Grassalkovich family.

Just as in its two close models' case, the facade of the Pécel mansion is symmetrical, contains a protruding wide middle bay that accentuates the facade and incorporates the central main entrance, which is here a typical baroque low arched wooden gate (fig. 1). The facade is decorated with flat double pilasters which contribute to its vertical rhythm. The pilasters divide the wall surface into large openings; in the middle, the balcony door is flanked by two arched windows on the front, and another window on each side. The wrought iron balcony, supported by spiral consoles, is incorporated into the facade design; it belongs to the Ceremonial Hall, which is just above the gate. The upper part of the bay has an arched gable wall with a large dome behind, the gabled wall is decorated with a vase and intertwining tendrils. There are two smaller risalits at the end of the side wings, each topped with a triangular tympanum the central field of which once might have contained sculptural elements and displayed coats of arms of the family, but none has survived.

The central location of the Ceremonial Hall on the upper floor is an almost mandatory element in the arrangement of baroque private palaces and mansions, just as its dominant, main place in the *piano nobile* (fig. 2). It is above the doorway and can be reached from the hallway through the grand staircase. Its raised ceiling and higher windows are also typical just as the big glassed door opening onto the balcony. The size of the windows allows an abundance

[8] The detailed building history of the mansion was published in Zsindely 1956.

of natural light to flood the great hall's interior. The floor arrangements on the upper floor follows an *enfilade*, a common arrangement for adjoining rooms on an axis, providing a successive row of the doorways and multiplying the view. Here there are only two consecutive rooms in each direction adjacent to the Great Hall in the middle.

Similarly to the patrons, the architects involved were also father and son: the building is attributed to András Mayerhoffer (1690-1771), an architect from Salzburg, who, apart from working for the aforementioned Grassalkovich family, was responsible for many of the finest baroque buildings in Hungary, both sacred and secular, and his elder son János Mayerhoffer (1721-50). Their exact role in the planning process is not clear from the documents and certainly their contribution is not distinguishable.

## 4. *The decoration*

During the second phase of the renovation, when the mansion was modified and enlarged along Gedeon's plans and commissions, from the 1760's onwards, several rooms got a painted decoration and a theme on its own, and many of them is related to Ovid and ancient mythology; unfortunately, not all has survived in their original form.

### 4.1. *Library Hall on the ground floor*

This is a lavishly decorated hall, it is also the first and most colourfully painted part of the mansion where the best quality materials were used, and the only place where gilded architectural elements appear. Family correspondence reveals that as early as 1763, Gedeon made efforts in order to find a painter both in Vienna and Besztercebánya (Banská Bystrica) who is also a master in gilding. A contract survived from the same year identified the painter as Mátyás Schervitz (Mathias Xeravich, c. 1701-1771) who already had previously painted some altarpieces and ephemeral decorations for certain churches in Buda[9]. The most outstanding decoration of this hall is its painted ceiling. The hall is divided into nine different vault sections by four rose marble columns coming from Tardos stone quarry; the capitals are gilded, the vault arches are decorated with golden rococo motifs including cartouches, and there are other painted and stucco elements. The vault sections consist of three bigger circular fields in the middle row and six smaller rectangular fields on the side vaults.

[9] Schervitz was recently studied by Korhecz Papp 2015.

The frescoes of the vaults represent allegorical figures of the sciences surrounded by putti holding books or scrolls; an inscription either on an open page or on the spine of the book identifies the figures. Each composition is encompassed by illusionistic architectural frames. The central vault represents the Triumph of Science: Pallas Athena is sitting in the middle with her owl, the composition is framed with painted railings; the same pattern appears on the railings of the hallway. The other sections are also very colourful, mostly pink and gold, but less decorated. They include the allegorical figures of Saturn and History in the two bigger vaults, and in the smaller ones are the figures of Philosophy, Mathematics (including Astrology and Geometry), Theology, Law, Medicine, Grammar, Poetry, and Rhetoric. The painted decoration and the vault frescoes were executed around 1766 or a little later. For Gedeon, his efforts in various intellectual enterprises reached their peak in the book collection, so this library was the most important location of the mansion and was regarded as a sanctuary of knowledge. In the hall, bookshelves and bookcases were installed and most of the family's book collection was kept there.

### 4.2. *Small Library Room*

This small room is adjacent to the library hall and is raised with a few steps thus has lower ceiling height. The main theme of this room is the power of music and poetry with protagonists Arion and Orpheus. On the ceiling, Arion, the great musician, is riding a dolphin on the stormy sea and playing his kithara, surrounded by nereids. It was intended to show Orpheus in a series of compositions on the wall in smaller fields, on two sides of the window, and above the doors. The compositions include Orpheus singing to Hades and Persephone, Orpheus taking Eurydice out of Hades (partly destroyed), and Orpheus singing; the fourth episode was probably another scene from Orpheus's life. The room is very rich in rococo ornaments: illusionistic architectural frames with volutes, urns, and amoretti, all painted in grisaille, and vases with colourful flowers accompany the narrative frescoes; the scenes have white stucco frames with garlands and cartouches. Although there is no evidence, the vault and the walls were most probably decorated also by Schervitz some time around 1766-68; this attribution is based on the style, colours, and materials of the frescoes.[10] Just as in the library room, bookcases were placed in this room, too.

[10] See Lángi 2005 p. 86.

### 4.3. *Ceremonial Hall on the first floor*

The most prominent feature of the mansion is the Ceremonial Hall on the upper floor, once decorated with 16 large mythological scenes, of which 15 survived on the walls, and a ceiling fresco, supposedly of a gigantic size, that is now lost. The painted decoration of the hall was intended to create a complex visual program, consisting of narrative scenes, allegorical figures, painted architectural structures, and colourful rococo ornaments, all are of scholarly interest not just because of their role and size but their special iconography. The entire design was commissioned by Gedeon Ráday, but no particular detail of the commission is known to us. The main hall can be accessed from the staircase of the hallway (fig. 3); it has a large rectangular form with two diagonally positioned niches at the inner end of the hall. Looking from the entrance, there is a large doorway on both sides (fig. 4); the facade wall with four windows and a balcony door is just opposite the entry (fig. 5). All these doors, windows and niches are framed with colourfully painted rococo arches of equal size, reaching almost the top painted cornice just below the ceiling.

The murals cover the four walls of the hall. Each wall is divided into rectangular fields with fictional architectural elements; above the plinth wainscot, there are two registers that bear the narrative scenes and the allegorical figures, except above the doors where only one scene could fit. Since Early Christian art, the most common arrangement for narrative cycles is the grid form, that is, dividing the walls into rectangular fields; from the Renaissance, they became increasingly sensitive to perspective, and since the Baroque, more illusionistic. Each narrative scene has a golden frame decorated with geometric patterns or flowers and ribbons imitating a real gallery of paintings. The architectural grid system also means that there is no proper linear order of seeing these fields as the arrangement is fundamentally spatial. On the left and right side walls, in the narrow fields beside the doors, placed one above the other, there are two pairs of allegorical female figures, each standing on a pedestal in a painted niche as would be sculptures. *Pictura*, *Sculptura*, *Poesis*, and *Eloquentia* are representing the arts with their well-known attributes: *Poesis* has a lute and a laurel wreath, *Eloquentia* is holding a palm branch and an open book, *Pictura* is depicted with a palette and a brush also has a laurel wreath, and *Sculptura* is holding a paper board and a bust.

The narrative scenes take their subjects from classical mythology; most of these stories are known to be described in their most fully form in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*[11]. Following Ovid's chronology, the first five scenes represent ancient historical events from the early history of Earth: the Golden age (B4), the Silver age (B1), the War of Giants (D3), the Great Flood (B5), and the End

[11] The denotation used here is detailed in the *Appendix*.

of Great Flood (B2). These scenes are supplemented with nine individual stories in eleven scenes each providing a strong moral lesson that will be studied later: Deucalion and Pyrrha (A3), Phaeton (A1, C3, E1) in three scenes (the second of which was once on the ceiling but did not survive), Narcissus (C1), Icarus (A2), Philemon and Baucis (D4), Silenus (B3), Ulysses (C2), Enceladus (D1), and Tantalus (D2). The colour palette of the narrative scenes is restricted, they were all painted in *grisaille*, that is, monochrome grey. In contrast, the playful late baroque and rococo ornaments are kept in delicate pastel colours: the golden frames and ribbons, the vibrant floral decorations, the white cartouches against the pinkish or greenish background are integral part of the embellishment. In terms of painting, two different painting methods were used: the narrative scenes are painted *al fresco*, while the ornamental decorations and flower garlands are painted with *al secco* technique. The stylistic features of the Ceremonial Hall murals compared to that of found in the library led scholars to attribute the painted decoration to Mátyás Schervitz[12]. The decoration of the great hall was painted in the 1760's, perhaps started right after the contract had been concluded with Schervitz in 1763 and finished either in 1766 or around 1770. Today, after a recent restoration the ceremonial hall's condition can be regarded as near to its original state.

### 4.4. *Courtyard Picture Room*

The name of this smaller room, the first to the right to the great hall, is found in a 1792 inventory. The frescoes were revealed in the restorations between 1955 and 1957 but found damaged and partly destroyed; the restoration kept their imperfect condition. The walls were painted *al fresco*, the vault *al secco*. The theme of this room is political power, specifically the glory of the Habsburg dynasty. This is presented first as an allegory and secondly as portraits. On the ceiling, where Nike, the goddess of victory is depicted with open wings carrying symbols of victory, a palm frond in her left hand and a laurel wreath in her right (fig. 6). She is surrounded with putti holding a banderole with reference to roman emperors. The ceiling is framed with rich painted architecture and ornamentation – garlands, ribbons and grotesque heads, among others. The speciality of this composition is that the damaged parts of the Nike figure reveal the underdrawings made in preparation for the fresco. Right below the frames of the ceiling there are two painted battle scenes on each side. The lower part of the walls are decorated with medals of rulers painted like busted sculptures; these include emperors Trajan and Augustus, and members of the House of Habsburgs, like Maria Theresa and Joseph II.

[12] For the attribution, see Lángi 2005 p. 89, and Jernyei Kiss 2017, p. 191.

In between, framed rectangular fields are left empty in the upper part of the wall, originally oil paintings were placed here depicting some more Habsburg monarchs painted by Franz Paul Zallinger, but not one survived. This room probably has the latest murals, made after 1772, the artist is not known, but was producing lower quality artworks compared to the other painters.

### 4.5. *Billiards Room*

The Billiards Room is the next room further from the great hall. Found together with the previous Courtyard picture room in similar circumstances but even more damaged, and was also restored in the 1950's. The theme of this room is beauty and love, represented in both allegorical and narrative scenes. The middle of the ceiling is completely destroyed, only figurative groups around the perimeter are preserved. However, their fresco paint layer has gone and thus the red and black *sinopia*, the initial layer bearing the underdrawings of the fresco, painted with brush, became visible. Here the scenes include the Judgement of Paris with several groups: Paris with his dog, Pallas Athene sitting on her throne, Hera riding a chariot, and Aphrodite with Eros and the Three Graces. On each side of the stove two more, seriously damaged scenes are depicted: the painted sculpture of Pygmalion, and the amorous couple of Hercules and Omphale; putti with arrows appear also as individual framed pictures. The nonfigurative decoration displays late baroque, neo-classical and rococo elements, all fragmented. Apart from the painted architectural elements, garlands, and cartouches that are present in the other rooms, here one can see fluted columns, cornices, and monochrome pseudo-reliefs. The painter was the Prague-born Johann Nepomuk Schöpf, who painted the room in the 1780's.

### 4.6. *Hercules room*

This room, used as a guest room, is located on the first floor in the west wing. The murals once depicted the Labours of Hercules, created in the mid-1780's. The latest restoration conducted investigative probes and confirmed that today only three scenes, painted in yellow and grey monochromes, and some colourful garlands and architectural frames can be recognised. These had been all painted on white walls with *al secco* technique, but unfortunately, later these were painted over many times. The existence of such narrative scenes was confirmed by the description of the poet Ferenc Kazinczy who repeatedly visited the Ráday mansion[13].

[13] Lángi 2005, p. 107.

The mansion had other rooms with painted decoration of which only small fragments have survived, and certain rooms have not been painted at all but had tapestries hung on the walls.

## 5. *The later history of the mansion*

The Ráday mansion, the home of Pál, Gedeon, and their descendants, is an impressive remnant of the family's established success in the long 18th century. However, the 19th century led to a decline and the building later faced a rather unfortunate history. The 1825 fire would bring the mansions' heyday to a halt; the dome was destroyed, the ceiling with the second episode of Phaeton's story collapsed, the picture gallery and parts of the book collection were destroyed. The family's financial situation did not allow a full restoration, thus the wall paintings in the Ceremonial Hall were later simply overpainted. The library along with some paintings were sold for the Danubian District of the Hungarian Reformed Church (DRE, Dunamelléki Református Egyházkerület) in 1861, where they formed part of the library and the archive, now open for research. The estate was auctioned off in 1872, the new owners were the historic Kelecsény family.

In the First World War the Council of Workers, Soldiers, and Peasants of Pécel occupied the building and declared it as People's House. The decline continued after the Second World War, when the mansion stayed empty for many years. Between 1953 and 1955, it was turned into a hospital of the Hungarian State Railways (MÁV), and this transformation involved moving walls and plaster destruction, fortunately, the main hall and the library rooms remained intact. As a hospital, beyond its main function, the building also hosted several cultural events. Full restoration came only in 1979-1980 when the overpaints were removed. The hospital closed in 1997, and in 1998 the property was handled over to The National Heritage Institute; another restoration was undertaken during which the painted fragments of the Hercules room were found. As a heritage site, the mansion was opened for the public in 1998, and was frequently used as a film scenery and a location for special events. Unfortunately, in April 2023, the mansion was closed off permanently; its future function is not yet decided. Visitors can now virtually explore the building[14].

[14] The link for the virtual tour is <https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=hbA8ikWL3k5&fbclid=IwAR3GO-WyuygyXID6IKiwD0FIBIBCHLPAiCqorlLxVioOglKM6T4knXjMuqY>, 18.12.2023.

## 6. *Gedeon Ráday's verses*

In the Ceremonial Hall, each scene of classical mythology is supplemented with an inscription in hexameters, in vernacular Hungarian, written by Gedeon Ráday. The inscriptions form lines of a poem, and Gedeon also referred to them as such, but have no clear order of reading, because the images in the hall are not arranged linearly either. In content, they reflect on or summarise the moral of the story depicted above. The list of inscriptions as individual works of art appeared in Ferenc Kazinczy's newly founded literature journal, *Orpheus*, in 1790, in Kassa (Košice)[15]. It was a demonstrative act: the journal was one of the very first literature periodicals in Hungary (only had eight volumes in the period of 1790-92) with multiple goals in accordance with the purposes of Enlightenment. The most urgent of these goals was reforming the Hungarian language in order to enhance its use not just in everyday life but also in official procedures and scholarly publications and facilitate the writing and publication of literary works in Hungarian. This had special importance because at the time Latin, then German was the official language in the country; it took almost half a century for Hungarian to gradually displace them and became official in 1844. The journal's title, *Orpheus*, was not only a reference to the ancient mythology, but demonstrated the aspirations of the editor, Kazinczy, as it was his nickname in freemasonic lodge.

Gedeon Ráday was later a frequent contributor of the *Orpheus*, but the poem formed by the inscriptions of the great hall in Pécel had come out without his approval in the very first issue under the edition of Kazinczy[16]. Later that year it was published again, in the fourth issue, now with Gedeon's approval, who made some corrections both in grammar and content, and added clarifying descriptions[17]. Their personal correspondence reveals the reason behind: Gedeon complained about the fact that Kazinczy had mentioned Iron age and Midas in the footnote despite these topics not being present in the palace decoration. Thus Gedeon asked for a second publication which would correct the first one. He then gave a bit longer description, identifying all the mythological

[15] Kazinczy is regarded as one of the main figures in developing art historical professional language in Hungarian, see more in Csanádi-Bognár 2008.

[16] The proper title is *Orpheus*, 1790, first volume, n. 1, (Months of Aquarius), IX. Báró Rádaynak Pétzeli Palotája. (festetett 1766ban.), pp. 33-35, published by Kazinczy. Transcription of n. 1. is available at <https://deba.unideb.hu/deba/orpheus/index.php?xf=orpheus_1_1_10_o>, 18.12.2023; facsimile of n. 1. is at <https://dea.lib.unideb.hu/items/193b1719-0a47-44bf-a5e7-002741145392>, 18.12.2023.

[17] The second version is in the first volume, n. 4, (Months of Taurus), pp. 434-440. XVIII. B. [baron] Rádaynak Pétzeli Palotája. Transcription of n. 4. is available at <https://deba.unideb.hu/deba/orpheus/index.php?xf=orpheus_1_4_18_o>, 18.12.2023; facsimile of n. 4. is at <https://dea.lib.unideb.hu/items/e8b68ab4-f40b-4a9e-9136-c79a20905a78>, 18.12.2023.

stories on the walls and giving the exact position of each line in the compositional scheme; this second version went into the press in August that year.

There is a certain flexibility in reading Gedeon's poem; this flexibility may cause slightly nuanced differences in the interpretations. Because of the verses, the iconography of the fresco cycle in the Ceremonial Hall and the identification of the Ovidian stories have never caused a problem for modern scholars; they perhaps also took away the excitement of discovery. There is, though, a fundamental difference between the two readings: Kazinczy's description followed a linear route in which the narrative units were not distincted. It began on the right wall, moved to the entrance wall, and so on, following the ground plan anti-clockwise; on each wall, the order was right-to-left and top-to-bottom. This is a route made by an outside observer, or someone having deep attachment and preference to the linearity of the written text, probably rooted in a literary mind; quick viewers or tourists of our time would also prefer this direction. The author of the verses, Gedeon Ráday, however, gave a different order; he seemed to have a more visual mind and a taste for spatiality. Gedeon's order was considering not just the wall arrangements but the smaller narrative units – we might call them microstories –, in the larger narrative scheme. The first unit was the story of Phaeton and its counter example, Silenus; then he moved on to the facade wall to the giants and the smalls; then came the opposite, entrance wall about the lost golden age; and finally stories about the self and their good or bad decisions. This order of the scenes does indeed give an interpretation when the morals are taken into an account. Before arriving to the morals, however, let us throw light on some other helpful aspects of the great hall's scheme.

## 7. *The visual sources of the Ovidian scenes*

From Kazinczy's first description we know that the source of the narrative scenes of Pécel's fresco cycle was Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, but it was Gedeon's second description which precisely identified the visual sources. It was mentioned before that the scenes in the great hall are monochromes, painted in *grisaille*. This was a honest decision, because the compositions were copied from two 18th-century illustrated books on Ovid: the 1732 French-Latin Amsterdam edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* illustrated by Bernard Picart and Philip van Gunst[18], and the other is Picart's French *Le Temple des Muses* published also in Amsterdam in 1733[19]. The grey tones thus refer to their source:

[18] Ovid 1732.
[19] De Marolles 1733.

the scenes are depicted as if were painted, like enlarged engravings in frames, hanging on the walls. The books were part of Gedeon's own library, he bought them through his agent Sámuel Nagy in Vienna in 1762. The remnants of the family library, including these two volumes, were bought in 1861 by the Danubian Reformed Church and served as a basis for their own library[20]. Since then, along with the family archive that landed there in the early 20th century, they form part of the so called Ráday Collection, integrated into this public church library in Budapest.

Eight scenes were selected from the *Metamorphoses* (Golden Age, Silver Age, Deluge, End of Deluge (fig. 7), Phaeton and Apollo, Phaeton's Sisters, Silenus (fig. 8), and Philemon and Baucis), and seven from the *Le Temple des Muses* (The Giants, Deucalion and Pyrrha, Icarus, Narcissus (fig. 9), Ulysses (fig. 10), Enceladus, and Tantalus)[21]. The source of the ceiling fresco, the second episode of Phaeton's story, is unknown, because it has been destroyed and Gedeon's short remark about the ceiling is not decisive either. There are two assumptions, tough: it might have been the episode in which Phaeton was carried away by the horses of Apollo, no. 18 from the *Metamorphoses*, or it could have been made after fol. 8r. in the *Le Temple des Muses*, in which Phaeton was struck down by Jupiter's thunder. Lángi suggests that it is the latter one[22], but the scene in the *Metamorphoses* would make more sense: it must have been revealed to the viewer upon entering the hall and then going from the entrance to the balcony along the shorter central axis of the rectangular hall, hence the horizontal format; further, Phaeton with Jupiter is not simply a vertical composition, but it is also hierarchical, a relation difficult to express by juxtaposing them in a horizontal layout.

Due to Gedeon's own interests and values, the murals were visually less inventive than verbally, but the scenes are not exact copies of the engravings either. Although most pictures strictly followed the original engravings, there were some minor changes in order to make them fit into the wall scheme. Regarding their publishing history and compositional variations,

[20] The 1732 edition in the Ráday library registered as RGY-RK-00013942, No. 0-2876. <https://opac3.raday.monguz.hu/hu/record/-/record/RADAYGYUJTEMENY66201>, 18.12.2023; the 1733 edition registered as RGY-RK-00003395, No. 0-238. <https://opac3.raday.monguz.hu/record/-/record/RADAYGYUJTEMENY62225>, 18.12.2023.

[21] For the comparison and identification, I will use two digitalized copies available online and follow their numberings. For the 1732 edition it is the one found under University of Virginia's *Ovid Illustrated: The Reception of Ovid's Metamorphoses in Image and Text*, by Daniel Kinney and Elizabeth Styron <https://ovid.lib.virginia.edu/picart.html>, 18.12.2023. For the 1733 edition I will refer to BnF Gallica's digitized copy, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8529018b/>, 18.12.2023. There are other places in the mansion where these two books were used as sources, for example, the figure of Arion in the small library room was modelled after De Marolles 1733, fol. 40v, and most probably the Orpheus and Hercules was also based on Picart's illustrations.

[22] Lángi 2003, p. 92.

both of these books, the 1732 *Metamorphoses* and the 1733 *Le Temple des Muses* have already had a long genesis of editions, however, as this will not be studied here, they will be referred to as 'originals'[23]. The result of the comparative analysis of the engravings and the frescoes shows that two compositions were truncated when their original horizontal compositions were made into vertical: in case of Silenus, by cutting the right group of King Midas, he became the sole protagonist of the scene; the third Phaeton episode was also cut in half and only the right mourning group was kept. There are two more scenes where horizontal compositions were transformed into vertical, by reducing the space between the figures in the Phaeton-Apollo episode, or by elongating the figures and cutting a vertical strip, like in Philemon and Baucis. Another painterly strategy was to keep horizontal compositions horizontal but change the ratio of the sides to make them closer to a square, this was done by cutting the upper zone as in the Deluge, or decreasing the empty space between the figures (Golden Age, End of Deluge). Some scenes remained vertical but got narrower: cutting from both sides as in Narcissus, leaving out the lower zone and elongating figures in Enceladus, making the composition more crowded by compressing it from the two sides as in Ulysses, cutting a strip on the right side in Tantalus, or leaving out figures and getting the groups closer in the Giants.

Small changes are apparent in the foreground or background in almost every episode: including elements of the original frame into the composition as in Icarus, changing or adding details to the background, as in Enceladus and Tantalus, or making it more complex (Deluge); simplifying the foreground or the background, as in the architectural scenery of Phaeton and Apollo or leaving out unimportant background figures as in the Giants. The figures are also adjusted to the new setting, although this rarely concerns the main protagonists: altering body postures in Silenus and Narcissus, slight changes in the body postures of the background figures in Icarus and Ulysses, different hand gestures in Silenus, and different orientation of the gazes in Deluge, in Phaeton's sisters or in Philemon and Baucis. The changing taste in the 18th century can be seen in the new floor pattern and chair design in the Phaeton-Apollo scene. Some modifications were made because the function of the images changed, they were made more public thus less intimate and more conservative, bodies were covered as of Apollo's, and breasts were covered with clothes in Silver Age and in some female figures in Phaeton's sisters.

[23] For the origins and the long history of the two series of engravings used for Marolles's, see Altena 2019.

## 8. *The historical and cultural context*

To understand the simple act of choosing illustrated books of classical mythology as models for the decoration of the Ceremonial Hall in Pécel means understanding how the broader cultural context and especially book culture had a crucial role in the era and on the elaboration of such a program. The 18th century marks a short period of peace in the region's history that gives place a more clearly and loudly articulated quest for national art and culture. Following 150 years of war, during which Hungary was under the Ottoman empire, the country was liberated in the last decades of the 17th century just to found itself under the Habsburg throne. Neither the residence of the queen, nor the political and cultural centre was within the regions of Hungary: Maria Theresa seated in Vienna, while Pozsony was the acting capital hosting the parliament. They left Buda, the former royal residence on the periphery.

In consequence, aristocratic families living in rural Hungary created local cultural centres, like Fertőd, Gödöllő, or Pécel, and kept the classical tradition alive and initiated innovative cultural endeavours. Music and especially literature were more embedded in Hungarian culture and more cherished because written culture and literacy has been regarded as crucial in the survival of the language and thus the nation. Painting was primarily religious and the lack of art schools meant that mostly foreign artists practiced it taking up commissions. This century in Hungary, just as in the neighbouring countries, meant a transitory period from late baroque, which was dominated by the church, to enlightenment and classicism. Further, the emphasis was shifted onto aristocracy and urban citizens. Pécel fitted into this development and can be regarded as one of the flagships of this movement.

Therefore, Pécel can be better understood from verbal tradition and book culture rather than from the practices of visual culture. Libraries and books had for centuries a special importance for Hungary; the model was the Bibliotheca Corvina, the extensive library of lavish books of the Renaissance ruler King Matthias Corvinus, who commissioned manuscripts from Italy and also employed craftsmen in his court in order to create a unique collection covering various topics, especially ancient classics, and books on history and science. The greater part of these books, unfortunately, were destroyed or eroded during the time Hungary was under the Ottoman empire[24].

Enlightenment was the period when aristocracy and urban citizens began to import books on a larger scale, also books and journals were published locally since presses were established[25]; although limited in number, some attempt

[24] More in the website <https://corvina.hu/en/front/>, 18.12.2023.

[25] Although the first press in Buda was established in the 15th century by András Hess, it did not last long; in the 16th and 17th centuries the developing press industry, at the outer areas of the country that were not under Turkish occupation, served the Reformation and printed religious books. The majority of the books in Hungarian were also printed abroad.

aimed at establishing full range libraries. This was not independent from the spread of literacy, reading, and educational reforms of the era; patriotism was also a key factor. The influence came from the West through France, Germany, and Austria, where young aristocrats studied or took a journey. This was the case with Gedeon Ráday, too, who, because of his religion, was more oriented towards Germany than Italy.

## 9. *The Ráday Library*

The second half of 18th century, when Pécel murals were painted, is regarded today as the golden age for books, with increasing number of libraries and growing collections that later in the 19th century formed the foundations for many public libraries, including the National Library in Budapest that grew out of Ferenc Széchényi's library or the Brukenthal Library in Sibiu (Nagyszeben) which is formed upon Samuel von Brukenthal's collection, and that future awaited to the Ráday Library, too[26]. The most important books in these general collections were different editions of the Bible, religious literature, historical works, and books on intellectual movements of the time.

Gedeon Ráday inherited his father Pál's book collection that had originated mostly in the 1720's[27] and continued to build it. He put excessive energies in significantly expanding it, the library in his time contained more than 12000 copies. Father and son both regarded book collecting as public service, an act of patriotism and a necessity for quiet life; they actively engaged with their library by adding comments or publishing commentaries. Gedeon's collecting focused on theology, history and philosophy, but there were books on natural sciences and also rarities, prints and manuscripts, and bilingual editions. Among new additions there were the literature of Enlightenment (Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot) and the latest editions of the *Encyclopedia*. Following Pál's aspirations, Gedeon's other focus was literature, especially contemporary literature, French, German and Hungarian authors among others.

Gedeon had a special taste for classics, almost all the classical auctors were represented in the collection mostly in 17th or 18th-century editions, including Homer, Euripides, Sappho, Horace, Virgil, but also Cicero and Aesop, etc[28]. Ovid was represented with more than one edition and in more copies[29]. Earlier

[26] See more on the development of private libraries in the 18th century in Szarvasi 1939 and Péter 1962. The library was studied in detail by Viktor Segesvary, whose book was also translated into English: Segesvary 2005.

[27] More on Pál's library in Segesvary 2005, pp. 18-29.

[28] Szarvasi 1939, p. 35; Segesvary 2005, pp. 104-12, especially p. 105.

[29] Segesvary 2005, p. 44, ft 80.

on, Pál's library had a section on classics, but Gedeon had several 'classical Greek authors', 'Latin authors' classified into four sections, and also another 'Latin poets' section[30]. Gedeon collected books for decades: the collecting began in the 1730's, was most intensive in the early 1760's when it was developed into a full range general library, but became scarce in 1770's. Gedeon was in extended correspondence with scholars and writers of the era, members of the clergy, and Hungarian students studying abroad, who informed him about the novelties; he also followed book auctions and was in connection with merchants and agents from foreign countries. The bookseller Friedrich Berhard in Vienna, for example, was regularly sending him lists of books on sale, and his inventory included many other book catalogues.

The story of the two books on ancient mythology that were later used as sources for the frescoes of the Ceremonial Hall is known from Gedeon's personal correspondence. His main representative in Vienna was the acquisition agent Sámuel Nagy, the family's former *protégé*, who was connected to bookstores and bought from auctions and book dealers, and also organised the shipments from other cities like Basel, Leipzig or Frankfurt, usually through Vienna. Sámuel Nagy was in charge from the year 1761; he was a learned man and also made recommendations[31]. One such case was when he drew Gedeon's attention to the *Le Temple de Muses* in a letter dated 4 May 1762: «its [the 1732 Ovid *Metamorphoses*] companion *Temple des Muses*, caused what harm? Because this one also is truly beautiful and not more expensive»[32]. These two books thus landed shortly after this exchange of letters and soon Gedeon commissioned the wall paintings.

## 10. *The program*

The frescoes of the Ceremonial Hall are part of a larger decoration program of the Pécel mansion invented and commissioned by Gedeon Ráday in the 1760s, therefore the interpretation also works on two levels: while the painted program of the mansion aspires to represent universal knowledge through classical mythology, each hall in it shows an aspect of this knowledge with its own decoration. The program of the Library Hall is formed around the sciences with the central figure of Athene; the Small Library Room addressed poetry through the story of Orpheus; the Courtyard Picture Room manifests the many different faces of political power from ancient rulers to contemporary

[30] Segesvary 2005, p. 103.

[31] He was the main agent of Ráday in Vienna, they exchanged some 400 letters, mainly in the period of 1761-65. See Somkuti 1968.

[32] Segesvary 2005, pp. 70-71.

ones; the Billiards Room gives an array of beauty and love, including earthly and platonic love; and the Hercules Room most probably demonstrated labours carried out of penance. The careful selection of the Ovidian stories in the Ceremonial Hall, each supplemented with Gedeon's verses, formed a new narrative that gave this program a clearly articulated moral aspect which was reflected the Ráday family's own political and geographical status, ambitions, and limitations.

The iconographic program of the Ceremonial Hall is formed around the story of Phaeton and the consequences of good and bad life choices of an individual in a given state of the world. This was achieved by introducing classical examples from mythology and elevating them to a level of moral lessons. In other words, the Ovidian stories on the walls give a spectrum of answers on the very fundamental problem we all face, that is, how to make right choices and live a meaningful life regardless of the place and the financial or political circumstances. What is interesting about it is that the classical stories of Ovid were relevant even from this point of view. Ráday Gedeon's creative and deliberate choices avoided love and war stories that are regarded to be the fundamental ideas to the *Metamorphoses*, and featured only one transformation. One detailed interpretation of Gedeon's program was given by Ágnes Berecz, and although I mostly agree with her argument, I offer here a different route and conclusion[33].

The stories Gedeon has chosen can be divided into three groups: the first set deals with the universal order as it appears to humans and shows the fight against the elements, the necessary failure and reconciliation with the mighty powers; the second group of stories gives example of the bad choices and wrong deeds including ambition, hubris or rebellion against the divine power, which obviously results in failure and punishment; the third group demonstrates a handful good decisions and the humble acceptance of the state of orders all in harmony with the divine plan.

On the entry wall, four scenes introduce the original state of the world and the first conflict, they are all from Book I of the *Metamorphoses*. There is a phantasy about the effortless life in Golden Age (B4) with the formation of the mankind and the four ages of men from the time when people were living in harmony with nature in blissful idleness. Silver Age (B1) still brings a peaceful life although some effort is needed: hard work is necessary for achievement which is shown by several types of physical work: harvesting, farming, or spinning. Then comes a warning that things might go bad, for example, in a form of a natural disaster, if people are acting against the divine will. The Universal Deluge (B5) is a flood caused by angry gods, but here comes Neptune on his shell-chariot with nymphs and tritons and is calming the storm in the

[33] Berecz 2003b.

End of the Great Flood (B2). There is mercy in the world, and there are ways out from misery.

Bad examples are more emphasized in this program than good ones: the main motif of the hall is the story of Phaeton, presented in two *supraporta* scenes on the side walls and a third, now destroyed, main episode on the ceiling. Phaeton persuaded his father Apollo to ride his chariot (A1), but overestimated his own strength and lost control (E1, destroyed), leaving his sisters mourn by his sarcophagus and lament on his fate (C3). The middle episode on the ceiling, Phaeton's actual fall, must have been larger than the rest of the scenes and was probably more dramatic. Phaeton is an example of a stubborn character who longed for glory but because of his hubris he was doomed to failure. The story of Icarus from Book VIII of the *Metamorphoses* fits into the theme, he is a parallel of Phaeton (A2). Icarus and his father, Daidalos were trying to escape from Crete by making artificial wings fixed with wax, but Icarus flew too high and the Sun melted his wings causing his downfall. Should he listened to the advice, his tragedy could have been avoided. In this sense, the alcoholic Silenus is an opposite to Phaeton and Icarus, a wasted talent without ambitions (B3). Another caution is the lack of self-criticism of Narcissus, who fell in love with his own reflection but his selfishness and egoism later brought fatal consequences (C1).

Another three examples of antagonism were displayed on the facade wall, they represent different conflicts with gods in which hubris and arrogance bring eternal punishment. In the War of Giants (D3), poorly chosen and unrealistic goals and arrogance lead to catastrophe. The giants were piling mountains in attempt to battle the Olympian gods, but this turned out to be a hopeless fight, because even giants are powerless against the divine order. The same message applies to Enceladus (D1), one of the giants, whose attack on gods resulted in being hit by Mount Etna. Tantalus (D2) misused the trust of the gods, with which he earned nothing but a punishment in a form of eternal hunger and thirst proving that presumption and pretentiousness have enduring consequences.

After so many stories of failures, the frescoes of the Hall are able to offer a few good examples. The story of Deucalion and Pyrrha (A3), who survived the great flood caused by the anger of gods, teaches us a strong moral lesson. The couple threw stones that transformed into men and women who repopulated Earth. Their simple and humble act caused a huge impact. The curious and clever Ulysses is another good example: being cautious, he tied himself to the ship's mast and avoided the trouble the alluring voice of the charming Sirens would bring (C2). In many ways, Ulysses is the counterexample of Phaeton and Narcissus, because his self-recognition helped him bypass the trap and escape the sinful temptation. Finally, the story of Philemon and Baucis illustrates a simple and humble life lived according to the divine order (D4). In the scene, Jupiter and Mercury are visiting the old couple and acknowledge their acceptance and hospitality.

The message Gedeon Ráday wanted to convey seems clear: individuals have the willpower to choose between good and bad, but the examples suggest that one should be aware of the universal context and their own limitations when these choices are made. Living a simple, peaceful and meaningful life, accepting the determinations of the universal law, and even more, accepting the compelling circumstances may lead to fulfilment, but rebellion, hubris, and arrogance may cause conflicts. Because of the arrangement being spatial rather than linear, these positive and negative examples are not separated by their position in the hall, differentiation is left to the viewer. Gedeon Ráday was probably reflecting on his own situation and ambitions, that is, living in the peripheral area of the country as a patron of arts and leading an active intellectual life. Seeing both the success of the family in the 18th century due to their political career, education and wise decisions, and the failure of the later generations of the same family caused by financial problems and perhaps bad decisions, this message seems especially powerful. Gedeon Ráday's aim to revive classical tradition and present it in a new fashion was at the end, successful.

## 11. *From books to frescoes*

When the decoration of the Ceremonial Hall was completed and the Ovidian illustrations made their appearance on the walls, not just their size changed, but they created a new context, defined a different access to publicity, and another level of privacy. There was also a change in their function and perception.

Illustrated books are rather small, precious objects that belong to the private sphere and are experienced in a very personal way. At one time, not more than one or maybe two viewers can read and observe simultaneously its tiny pictures. Because of their scale, the engagement with books is a very private matter, viewing requires intimacy and even secrecy. The illustrated book as we know it is a Renaissance invention; it defines a certain mode of commitment, probably a chair and a table, and certain movements: leaning over, touching the paper, turning the pages, focusing eyes. The Ovidian books in question offer a linear arrangement of the stories that are both written and depicted, so that the viewer may read them, watch them, compare them, and contemplate on them. In the social class the Rádays belonged to, literacy was not a question; still, one could have only watched the miniatures without reading the stories. Although «we now know that private, solitary reading was neither the only, nor perhaps the dominant, form of reading during this period, and that readers also regularly read aloud to perfectly literate people in public, social and private spaces [...] manuscript and printed letters, newspapers, sermons, novels and other books were read aloud to family and friends in domestic and

social settings»[34], this engagement was still private and personal. Although reading became more common even in the lower classes by the second half of the 18th century, classics and illustrated books in foreign language, such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which was published in thousands of copies in Western European cities, were rare and luxurious items in Hungary that could only be found in very few households across the country.

In contrast, the Ceremonial Hall was an act of demonstration. It is not just a matter of scale itself: it was made to declare certain culture and certain values. It was designed to impress. When the Ovidian stories were enlarged, they lost their predefined order and their written version; one way, they were more difficult to comprehend because the viewer did not get the details and had to rely exclusively on the visual depiction. At the same time, the moral lessons the additional verses offered already gave an answer, an interpretation. One must have spent some time in the room to understand the content of these mythological tales and memorize the moral of each story. It was not an individual and solitary involvement anymore, but a collective experience. The intimacy of viewing was lost, but the perception of the decoration still needed a physical experience, though a very different one. A well travelled viewer might have had a previous experience with large narrative fresco cycles in chapels or court rooms. The comprehension of such works of art needs a bodily exercise: looking up, turning the body, moving on, walking back and forth, that is, navigation in space; for guests, doing so during a short visit, this might have been challenging.

We know that the Ceremonial Hall was the most public space within a private mansion. This beautifully decorated hall, a masterwork of interior design, was finished around 1770 and was a vital part of the building. Just as other ball rooms in baroque private palaces, most probably it served as a stage for social life and witnessed the usual activities the nobility was engaged with: visits, meetings, diplomatic receptions, dinners, weddings, balls, carnivals and ceremonies, and other forms of entertainment, perhaps concerts and theatrical plays[35]. Dining was probably an everyday activity: according to the accounts, the hall had 24 chairs and a chandelier. Just as Philemon and Baucis, people shared meals around the tables – Gedeon had a remark about it –, used the hall as a ball room and danced with each other, tasted wine, sometimes even got drunken, just as old Silenus who was a warning sign above the entrance door and probably gave a good laugh; they created noise in the otherwise quiet life of the family. During these events, guest not only spent time in this special environment, but they might have examined the frescoes thoroughly, discussed

[34] Bannet 2013, p. 123.

[35] Berecz put special emphasis on the fact that we do not know much about the specific use of this mansion just how generally baroque mansions were used. Berecz 2003a, p. 14.

the scenes loudly and made comments, and even compared them to the books themselves.

## 12. *Baroque theatricality*

Small is precious, but large is theatrical. The idea of theatricality is naturally connected to baroque grand halls and ballrooms; although it is originated from church interiors, is not restricted to them[36]. Pécel owns certain frequently used baroque features and common visual effects that create an impression of a masterwork, capture the visitors' imagination, affect their senses and contribute to the illusion of theatricality. First, these are the visual characteristics of the Ceremonial Hall and second, it is its actual function.

Private palaces, be as of royal or aristocratic, had a special representational hall, mostly situated on the first floor, the *piano nobile*, that was used for social gatherings. These halls, similarly to Pécel, are usually higher than the other rooms, have larger windows, balconies or loggias, and use natural light purposefully. Their location emphasized their role: the Ceremonial Hall occupies a central position on the ground plan that follows a special arrangement called *enfilade*, in which a series of rooms are placed on one axis so that the viewer can see the doors in a distant perspective view. Pécel's grand hall, like other reception halls, is designed to have a complete and immersive interior: from floor to ceiling each and every element, be as a monochrome narrative scene, a statue-like allegorical figure or a lavish ornament, is used to create a beautiful ambience. The hall features a combination of rococo and late baroque elements. The ornaments follow playful rococo forms, like ribboned frames and other floral motifs, but the main arrangement of the interior is late baroque: it keeps symmetry and rectangular forms such as frames, content and decoration are separated, and the structure is not concealed from the viewer. However, the vision is not entirely unified: each of the narrative scenes, like real engravings that would hang on the wall, has its own vantage point of perspective. The clear glasses of the windows enable natural light to illuminate the hall and leave patterns of shadows on the floor. In the evenings, the artificial light of candles might have given an even more dramatic atmosphere.

The humanist metaphor of *theatrum mundi*, that the world is a theatre in which every creature takes part in a universal drama directed by upper forces, in early modern European context is linked to visuality and spatiality. This concerns not just theatre buildings but stage designs, various symbolic spaces or stage structures that could accommodate a play as well as interiors of

[36] The notion of theatricality was studied in detail recently by Jackson Reist 2013.

private mansions where theatre or life takes place. While Renaissance theatricality often chased the antique and stage structures reflected the harmony of universe in a rather abstract way, the baroque perception of theatricality was different: it was dramatic, sensual, and incorporated the audience as essential component. Certainly, Pécel's interiors complies with the latter.

The illusionistic interior of the grandiose Ceremonial Hall presents an immersive microcosm to be part of, and relying on this effect, it most probably served as a stage scenery for the events that happened there. Connecting Pécel to theatres and theatricality seems relevant in the mirror of the fact that theatres played a crucial role for many family members[37]. Family correspondence revealed that five generations of the family were theatre fans, visited theatres in both Pest and Buda, and enthusiastically supported both acting in German and establishing Hungarian theatre. According to Kazinczy's record, Gedeon would not miss a theatre performance whenever he visited the capital, this note referred to the 1770's and 1780's[38]. He regularly visited the so-called Rondella, the first theatre in Pest to have a permanent site[39]. Gedeon established a section in his library for theatre-related scholarly literature that was destroyed in the 1825 fire. Gedeon's son was also a theatre enthusiast and his grandson was a patron who actively helped in establishing theatre that would perform in Hungarian – in these decades the main language of acting was still German. There are some legendary stories about actual theatre performances at Pécel in the time of Gedeon, including performances in German and a Mozart opera, *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, which would have been performed in 1788 by the German theatre from Pest, but the details are uncertain and without proper evidence[40]. These performances might have taken place in Pécel or in the family's apartment in Pest, which they rented between 1756-73, or could have been only a widely shared urban legend. However, the possibility of such performances was given as this luxurious venue was able to accommodate quite large audience, and most probably it was used for such events, just as it has been used up until recent times for both theatre or orchestra performances and music concerts.

[37] The relation of theater and the Ráday family was the subject of Mályuszné's paper from 1956; however, she was focusing on the early 19th century events, that is, the era of Gedeon's son and grandsons.

[38] Berecz 2003a, pp. 65-70.

[39] Berecz 2003a, p. 65.

[40] The information is coming from Domokos Kosáry from 1983, see Berecz 2003a, p. 66, ft. 218. However, this has been doubted by the latest research; Berecz thinks that the private letters exchanged by the female family members of the Rádays can give more information about their lifestyle. See Berecz 2003a.

## 13. *Conclusion*

The interior of the Ráday mansion in Pécel is an unexpected surprise in rural Hungary. The narrative scenes along with the painted architectural elements and the colourful floral decoration in the Ceremonial Hall create a superb late baroque interior with grace and glamour, especially when the design is accentuated by the bright afternoon sunlight. This spectacular illusion gives a feeling of a luxurious masterwork. It would not be fair to say that the mansion got this late baroque and rococo touch at the time when these styles already started to go out of fashion; it is a relatively lower standard work with less originality than one would expect from an artist, and the narrative scenes are enlarged copies made by a rather unknown painter – but it is indeed true. However, this work of art still bears value and importance: first, because it revives the classical tradition and Ovid's mythology, and second, because the illusion it creates is real and, even on this scale, is impressive. The effect of theatricality relies on a few typical baroque elements that work even on small scale and limited budget and creates a stage that highlights the moments of a rather isolated rural life.

Since the 15th century, private palaces often turned to classical mythological tradition to decorate their interiors. The spectrum of examples is huge and ranges from such well-known examples like the Villa Farnesina in Rome to the Würzburg Residence, or to the lesser known places like the Lnáře castle in Bohemia[41], and beyond. By the mid-1760's, when the frescoes in Pécel were executed, the international art scene was amused by the interior decorations of the great Venetian master, Tiepolo, who was bringing back theatricality to figurative painting and he was doing it lightly and playfully. The closest parallel of Pécel, however, can be found in the neighbourhood: the representative hall of the Brukenthal Palace, in Nagyszeben (Sibiu), now the Brukenthal National Museum, was decorated also with enlarged engravings of Picart taken from the *Le Temple des Muses*, and it also has a Hercules room[42].

The painter who worked in Pécel did not reach Tiepolo's level of vivid playfulness, but still there are many illusionistic features that point towards theatricality, though on smaller size and definitely on lower budget; originality concerns here the selection of the scenes, the verses and the immersive interior. However, theatricality had a message to convey: the selection of ancient mythological stories in the narrative scenes created a new moral that was reflecting the status and story of the family both on the level of their personal ambitions and their geographical and geopolitical position.

[41] I want to thank Radka Nokkala Miltová to bringing this example to my attention.
[42] See Avram and Dávid 1996.

*Appendix*

*Scheme of the decorations*

The description gives the details of the fresco cycle following Kazinczy's order from the right wall anti-clockwise as can be seen on the ground plan: right side wall (A), entry from the hallways (B), left side wall (C), the facade wall with the balcony door (D), and the ceiling (E). The cycle consists of 16 scenes, 15 on the walls and one on the ceiling that did not survive. The numbering goes on each wall from right to left and from top to bottom. Each entry gives a descriptive title for the scene, the line of the verse as it appears on the wall, the translation of the inscription into English and its source. For the source two editions were used that are available online as detailed in footnote 21 (*Metamorphoses*, 1732 and *Le Temple*, 1733).

*Right side wall*

Upper right: Allegory of Poesis
Lower right: Allegory of Eloquentia

(A1) Middle: Phaeton before Apollo
Inscription: Többet kérsz Phaeton, mint sem próbátlan erőd bír.
Translation: Phaeton, you ask more than your untrained strength can handle.
Source: *Metamorphoses*, 1732, no. 17.

(A2) Upper left: The fall of Icarus
Inscription: Igy jár, az ki tanáts nélkül jár, tsak maga kényén.
Translation: This is what happens to those who do not take advice but do as they please.
Source: *Le Temple*, 1733, fol. 36v.

(A3) Lower left: Deucalion and Pyrrha repeople the world by throwing stones behind them
Inscription: Ez noha tsak költmény; De jelentő tzéllya valóság.
Translation: Although it is only a poem, its meaning is aimed at reality.
Source: *Le Temple*, 1733, fol. 7v.

*Entry wall*

(B1) Upper right: The Silver Age
Inscription: Nints ingyen semmi: Jár minden már ma dologgal.
Translation: Nothing is free. Getting anything done requires effort.
Source: *Metamorphoses*, 1732, no. 4.

(B2) Lower right: The end of the Deluge
Inscription: Napfény váltya fel a' felyhőket: És öröm a bút.
Translation: Sunlight replaces clouds, just as joy replaces sorrow.
Source: *Metamorphoses*, 1732, no. 9.

(B3) Middle: The drunken Silenus
Inscription: Ha bora van, nem vágy Phaeton szekerére Silenus.
Translation: If Silenus gets wine, he does not aspire to Phaeton's chariot.
Source: *Metamorphoses*, 1732, no. 104.

(B4) Upper left: The Golden Age
Inscription: Már az Arany ártatlan idő, tsak hiribe van fel.
Translation: The innocence of Golden Age is known only by reputation.
Source: *Metamorphoses*, 1732, no. 3.

(B5) Lower left: The Universal Deluge
Inscription Rettenetesség még tsak nézniis, Hát így valóba'.
Translation: How horrible it is to look at it. Indeed.
Source: *Metamorphoses*, 1732, no. 8.

*Left side wall*

(C1) Upper right: Narcissus falling in love with his own reflection
Inscription: A' ki magát szereti, az nem jól nézte magát meg.
Translation: He who loves himself has not taken a good look at himself.
Source: *Le Temple*, 1733, fol. 39v.

(C2) Lower right: Ulysses and the Sirens
Inscription: Dugd bé jól füledet, mert szép hangu szavok ámít.
Translation: Cover your ears, for their beautiful words are deceiving.
Source: *Le Temple*, 1733, fol. 34v.

(C3) Middle: Phaeton's sisters changed into Poplars
Inscription: Itt igazán b'é tölt: Hogy bú járása bolondnak.
Translation: Here it is confirmed that folly brings trouble.
Source: *Metamorphoses*, 1732, no. 19.

Upper left: Allegory of Pictura
Lower right: Allegory of Sculptura

*Facade wall*

(D1) Upper right: Enceladus buried under Mount Etna

Inscription: Meny most az hegy alúl ostromnak: nem lehet úgyé?
Translation: Start a siege now from under the mountain: this can't happen, can it.
Source: *Le Temple*, 1733, fol. 3v.

(D2) Lower right: Tantalus's torments
Inscription: A Fösvényeknek nem övék, még a' mi övékis.
Translation: What misers own is not theirs either.
Source: *Le Temple*, 1733, fol. 56v.

(D3) Upper left: The Giants attempt to scale Heaven
Inscription: Vallani ha kívánsz szégyent; vágy nagyra; s el éred.
Translation: Being too ambitious, you will be ashamed.
Source: *Le Temple*, 1733, fol. 2r.

(D4) Lower left: The Gods entertained by Philemon and Baucis
Inscription: Philemon s Baucis, tud gazdálkodni kevésbül.
Translation: Philemon and Baucis can manage with little.
Source: *Metamorphoses*, 1732, no. 82.

*Ceiling*

(E1) The Fall of Phaeton
The ceiling fresco was damaged in the 1825 fire and was later repaired, but after another damage it was completely demolished. The scene is known only from a vague description.
Inscription: Vesztét köszönje magának. Nem szül jót a' maga hittség.
Translation: You owe the defeat to yourself. Hubris does not bring any good.
Source: not known, probably *Metamorphoses*, 1732, no. 18. or *Le Temple*, 1733, fol. 8r.

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## *Appendix*

Fig. 1. Front view, Ráday Mansion, Pécel (Photograph by György Endre Szőnyi)

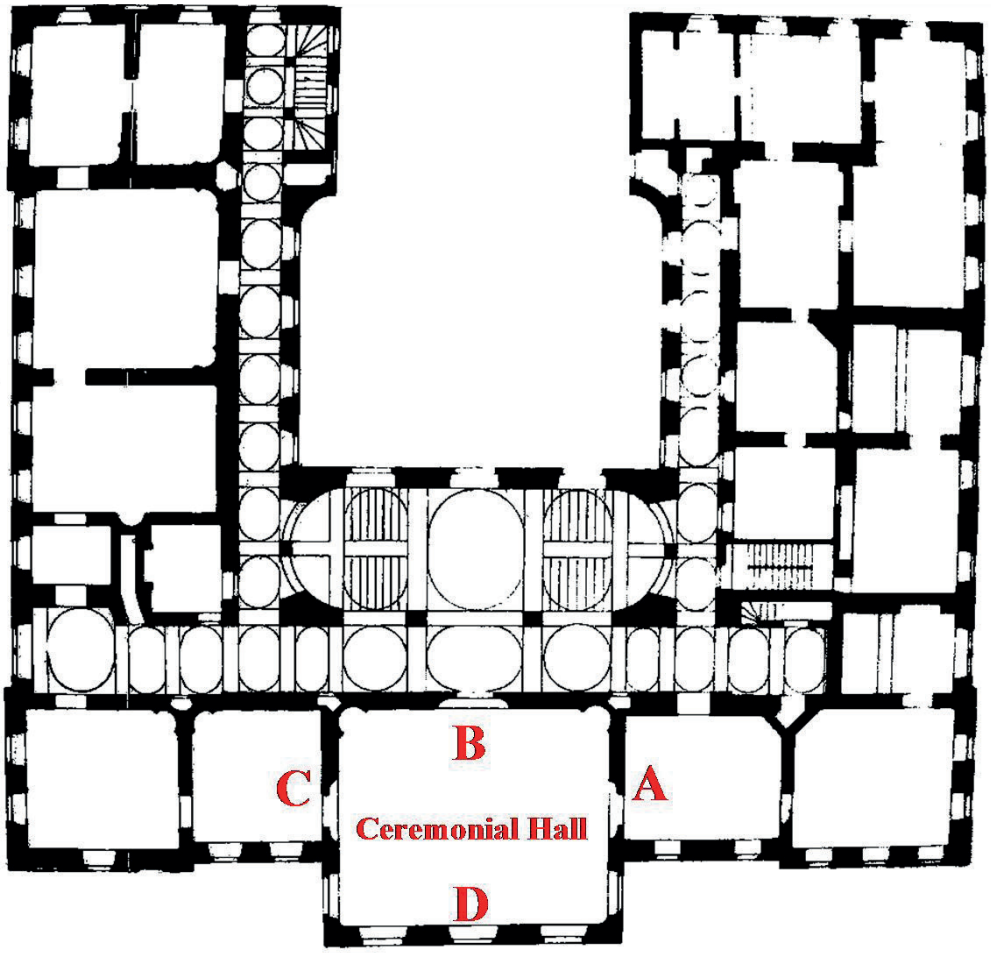


Fig. 2. Ground plan of the first floor, Ráday Mansion, Pécel (Figure 38, Berecz, 2003b)

Fig. 3. The entry wall of the Ceremonial Hall, Ráday Mansion, Pécel (Photograph by the author)


Fig. 4. The right wall of the Ceremonial Hall, Ráday Mansion, Pécel (Photograph by the author)

Fig. 5. The left and the facade wall of the Ceremonial Hall, Ráday Mansion, Pécel (From the official Facebook site of the Ráday Mansion, Pécel)

Fig. 6. The figure of Nike on the ceiling of the Courtyard Picture Room, Ráday Mansion, Pécel (Photograph by the author)


Fig. 7. End of the Deluge with Neptunus, Ceremonial Hall, Ráday Mansion, Pécel (Photograph by the author)


Fig. 8. The drunken Silenus, Ceremonial Hall, Ráday Mansion, Pécel (Photograph by the author)


Fig. 9. Narcissus falling in love with his own reflection, Ceremonial Hall, Ráday Mansion, Pécel (Photograph by the author)


Fig. 10. Ulysses and the Sirens, Ceremonial Hall, Ráday Mansion, Pécel (Photograph by the author)

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