

## “PAULINES” IN THE HUNGARIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM

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On 12 September, the historical exhibition entitled “Paulines”, organized jointly by the Hungarian Pauline Order and the National Museum, closed its doors after three months (Fig. 1). The exhibition was originally planned to be on display in 2020, commemorating the 750th anniversary of the death of the Order’s founder, Blessed Eusebius of Esztergom. The aim of the jubilee year and the exhibition was to draw the attention of the public to the Pauline Order that is the sole medieval order founded in Hungary that is still functioning as a male monastic order with papal approval. Behind this complicated description there is a great history, a lot to tell, and each word of the Order’s complex definition evokes centuries of history.



Fig. 1. The entrance of the exhibition

Together with my co-curator, Dr. Anita Bojtos, we focused on the history of the Order in a clear, accessible way and aimed to draw attention to the charisma and impact of the Order that underwent profound transformations in the last centuries. The range of the collected artefacts and documents varied in terms of genre, quality and chronology, and so it was decided to formulate the concept of the exhibition around those important topics that were already addressed during our previous research. The artefacts were arranged in a chronological order within these themes, at least where such an arrangement was possible and relevant. This gave a series of thematic units that formed the backbone of the exhibition, in which archaeological finds were given a prominent role (Fig. 2).

But before we dive into the history of the Paulines through the artefacts, we should also take a look at the installations that are all integral parts of the concept. It was important for both the curators and the Order

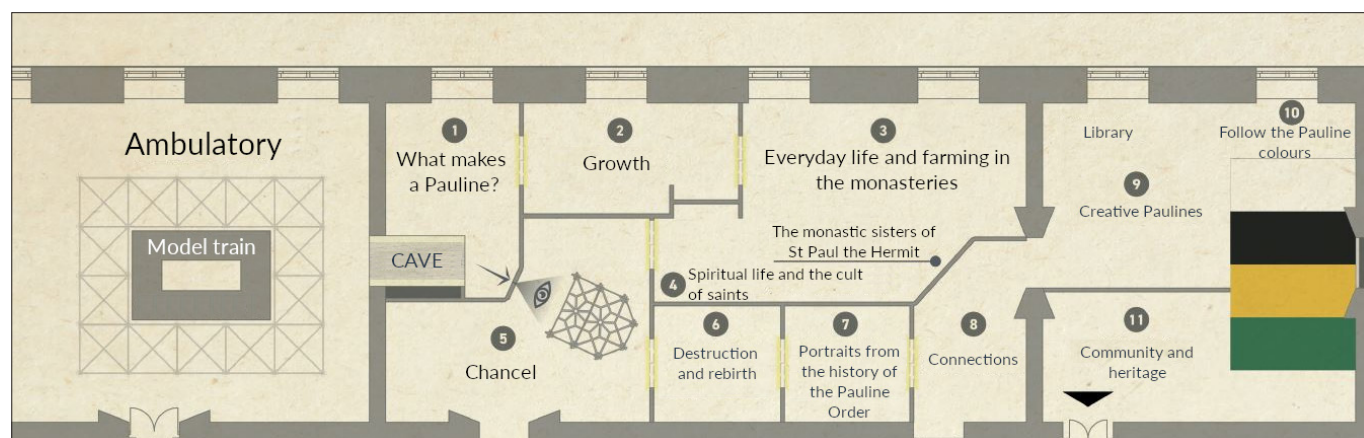


Fig. 2. The ground plan of the exhibition. Design by DE Creative Ltd., Laura Dobos and Zsolt Egri

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of St. Paul to focus on the present life of the monks; in these days the Order is active in sixteen countries on four continents, having exceeded the Central European horizon that has been the core zone of the Order, since many a decade. The Pauline Order’s present impact has been shaped over long centuries and is nourished by the deep-rooted hermit traditions and the monks’ cast of mind in seeking God.

Reflecting on this duality and in some degree historicity is no small feat; therefore we began as simple as possible: our aim was to find those points of Pauline history, that are the most fundamental and characteristic to present-day viewers. In the first room, the main message, was structured around a central installation, a railway model running on a circular track (Fig. 3). The train pulled by a “Nohab” locomotive has six imaginative stations: five are present-day monasteries within the Hungarian ecclesiastical province, the sixth is at the main monastery of Częstochowa in Poland. And why a model train? Each year, the Hungarian Pauline order accompanies hundreds of pilgrims on the Black Madonna pilgrimage train, which departs from Budapest Keleti station to Częstochowa, thus this installation represents a real event. Modern Pauline monasteries outside the province of Hungary were represented in the simplest possible manner, using traditional means: via a series of posters placed on the empty, snow-white walls of the exhibition space. The monastic mind-set representing the present, the consistency and the historicity at the same time, proved a focal point for us too.

The ambulatory of a cloister has always been the spatial centre in a monk’s lifelong quest for God, pathfinding and contemplation. This specific space was also a cornerstone of Pauline monastic history, which is why a wooden archway, a reminiscent of a quadratic cloister, was raised around the model railway. However, classic monastic lifestyle was preceded by ranks of Pauline hermitages located in the natural landscape, commonly symbolized by the caves. This phenomenon inspired us to create a cave installation, a gateway representing the symbolic *origo* of the exhibition, from which thematic units of Pauline history were began (Fig. 4). A set of small lens were built in a partition wall opposite the cave, serving as a loophole granting visitors “a glimpse” into how far the Pauline Order has progressed: “from cave to cloister”, from a hermit’s way of life to organised monastic communities – from the cave representing a gateway to an installation of a chancel with the Black Madonna icon at its centre.

Past the cave and the loophole, the first thematic unit recalled the most significant characteristics of the Pauline Order. It was created in respect of the Order’s development but highlighted a selection

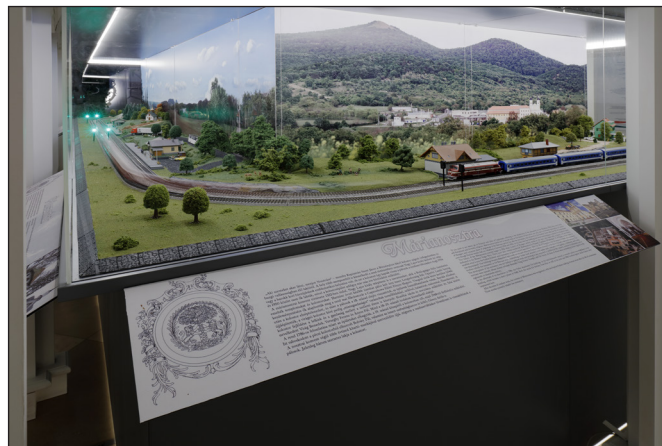


Fig. 3. The model train



Fig. 4. The model cave



Fig. 5. Keystone with a representation of St. Paul the Hermit, from Széna Square, Budapest. The artefact is now kept in the Budapest History Museum

of consistent elements. Beside general features of monastic orders, such as the *regula*, constitutions or the history of the order, our focus was on St. Paul the First Hermit and the features of the Pauline coat of arms which represent his story and legacy.

Only a single archaeological find is included in this section, which draws the attention to a number of key connections, spanning centuries of history. This unique trove is a vault keystone, found in Buda at Széna Square, which depicts the hermit saint with the raven and palm tree. It is quite a unique artefact for several reasons. On one hand, extremely few medieval depictions of Paul of Thebes related to the Paulines survived. On the other hand, St. Paul is shown already glorified, with a halo around his head, wearing perhaps the cloak of St. Athanasius in which he was eventually buried (Fig. 5).<sup>2</sup>

But how is Paul, the First Hermit, who lived in the Egyptian desert in the 3rd–4th centuries, related to the founding of the Pauline Order in 1250? What can a single archaeological find tell us on what makes the Pauline Order uniquely Pauline?

According to the tradition and the medieval history of the order, the first eremitic communities (that later became Pauline) were founded in the Mecsek Hills (Transdanubian region, South Hungary) at the beginning of the 13th century (GYÖNGYÖSI 1983). Given this millennium-long distance, it is obvious that Paul of Thebes can be regarded as a spiritual founder, a heavenly protector and an ideal for the hermits. The actual foundation of the order (also according to the Pauline history) is dated to 1250, when the founder, Blessed Eusebius (Hungarian: Özséb), canon of Esztergom, established the monastery of the Holy Cross in the Pilis Hills, in the hereditary forest of Hungarian kings, with royal support (the monastery's ruins, located in Keszölc-Klastrompuszta, have been partially excavated). A series of further monasteries were founded during the 13th century, when at one point Cardinal Gentile di Montefiore, the papal legate, in one of his charters referred to these communities as hermits of St. Paul the First Hermit, and also granted several privileges to them (1308). The actions of the papal legate brought the Paulines a huge step closer to the order's papal recognition and approval.

It is unanimous that the founding process of the Pauline Order took a century and this long time and transformation defined its character to this day. However, as the medieval keystone suggests, the expressed veneration of their namesake saint was equally important for the Paulines throughout the Middle Ages. So much so, that by the end of the 14th century, Saint Paul the First Hermit was entitled as the protector of the Hungarian Kingdom, alongside the Virgin Mary, Queen and Patroness of the Hungarians. It is worth noting this attention that St. Paul received throughout the Middle Ages because afterwards his veneration has somewhat faded.

Following the overview on the basic features of the Order, we focused on the spread and growth of the Pauline Order primarily in the Carpathian Basin. In this section, archaeological results were presented through mapping medieval Pauline monasteries, most of which were identified through archaeological and historical methods.

In the next section, a few aspects (especially the remains of farming and liturgical life) of the Pauline everyday life were displayed. The monastery and its immediate surroundings have always been the main living space of monastic life. The monastery in Salföld (Transdanubian region, Balatonfelvidék) is one of

<sup>2</sup> For Paul, the First Hermit and the Pauline coat of arms, see: <https://www.palosrend.hu/bemutakozas/a-rendrol/326-elso-remete-szent-pal>.

the few Pauline monasteries where the function or purpose of most rooms is known or at least hypothesized, which is why this monastery was chosen as the basis for an interactive model (Fig. 6). The model was based on the digital reconstruction of Balázs Szőke, but we idealized some features. Two aspects are worth highlighting as general issues. First, the roof of the monastic buildings is uncertain: we may assume the presence of a shingle roof, especially in minor Pauline monasteries, but recent archaeological excavations revealed large quantities of beaver tail tiles. Perhaps the main edifices and halls (including the church, chapel, sacristy), located in the eastern part of the monastery were covered with ceramic tiles – on the model not only these, but all buildings have them. The second issue concerns the location of the belfry: it is unclear whether it was attached directly to the complex, as in case of the Salföld monastery, or it stood on separate bell-stands, e.g. in one corner of the courtyard, as the excavation of another cloister (Toronyalja, North Hungary, Börzsöny hills) suggests?



Fig. 6. Miniature model of the Salföld monastery.  
Made by DE Creative Ltd.

A relative abundance of written sources survived on the economic management of the Pauline monasteries (F. ROMHÁNYI 2010). This evidence revealed that the environs of monasteries located in woodlands, degrading slowly, are worthy research topics themselves. Considering buildings as elements of a broader landscape reveals traces of historic and contemporary Pauline monastic land use (LASZLOVSZKY 2004). Remains of this past landscape (BELÉNYESY 2004; PETŐ 2018) were also captured on the Salföld model, such as fishing, viticulture and wine production, alongside woodland acorn farming.

The maps from the 18th century also play an important role in the study of medieval landscape management – some of the exhibited maps were commissioned or directly made by the Paulines themselves. These maps show not only the former boundaries of estates and major buildings, but also different types of land (e.g. vineyards, ploughs, pastures) and other prominent features (e.g. fish ponds, dams, wells, coal-burning sites), and since most of them depend on relatively enduring natural conditions, it is reasonable to assume that they have medieval origins.

We have also been able to present a number of valuable finds regarding this subject. The excavations at Klastrompuszta (KOVALOVSKIKI 1992) yielded a number of extraordinary finds, including fragments of stained glass windows. At the moment, no further published painted glass windows are known from excavations conducted on 11th–15th century ecclesiastic buildings in Hungary (Fig. 7). The find from Klastrompuszta depicts perhaps part of a halo and further floral motifs. The excavation of the Pauline monastery at Nagyvázsony (ÉRI 1960) also yielded a number of



Fig. 7. Fragments of a painted glass window from the Holy Cross monastery of Kesztlőc–Klastrompuszta. The artefact is now kept in the Hungarian National Museum

unique, mostly small finds: from everyday utensils (e.g. hooks) to liturgical relics (e.g. bronze *corpus* fragments) and peculiar artefacts (e.g. chest ornaments made of antlers), a wide range of finds has been presented at the exhibition. A group of archaeological finds displayed on the exhibition offered insight into the life of another Pauline region. The relatively small monastery of Toronyalja is located in Börzsöny, near Márianosztra in Northern Hungary. The monastery was founded in the 14th century. It had a 20-meter-deep well, from which exclusive finds have been unearthed (MIKLÓS 1997), including



Fig. 8. Wood and metal artefacts from the Toronyalja monastery

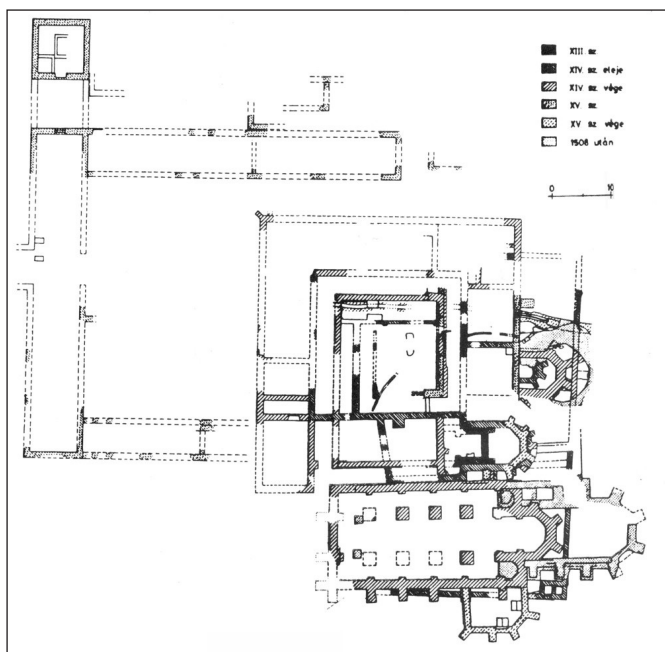


Fig. 9. Ground plan of the Budaszentlőrinc monastery (BENCZE & SZÉKÉR 1993, 38)



Fig. 10. Model of a chancel, with the icon of the Black Madonna of Pécs (1934) in the centre

quodidian objects such as buckets, a large grinding bench with its stone, shoemaker's lasts, and metal objects, such as a late medieval tin cup, a pan and anchors for retrieving the bucket (Fig. 8).

Two “red marble” (specific reddish limestone) fragments represent a less mundane aspect of Pauline everyday life. The material was highly appreciated in the Middle Ages and the Pauline monks used it to furnish a housing for their valued relic. The body relic of St. Paul the First Hermit was brought to Buda Castle from Venice in 1381. A series of miraculous healings were documented at his tomb (Bálint Hadnagy recorded these in his volume published in 1511), and it soon became a popular pilgrimage destination (Fig. 9). Frater Dionysios (Hungarian: Dénes) a master stonemason created the sarcophagus in the last decades of the 15th century, where the finds were deposited at last in 1492, when the expansion of the monastery was concluded.

A chancel installation was placed at the centre of the exhibition (Fig. 10), which housed further medieval stone reliefs in correlation to their original setting, alongside some modern relics. One carving is a fragment from a polygonal internal balcony dated to the second half of the 15th century recovered from Budaszentlőrinc, bearing the symbol of the Order of the Jar and the Griffin (Spanish: *Orden de la Jarra*, German: *Kannenorden*) of Aragon. This order was founded in 1403 by Ferdinand of Antequera, who later on became King of Aragon, and as such, he elevated this order among the ranks of royal *ordera* (LÖVEI 2006, 260). In 15th century Hungarian heraldry, amongst foreign orders, the Order of the Jar is represented by most signia (LÖVEI 2014, 16).

Several interruptions were documented in Pauline history, and oftentimes they had a hard fate in Hungary that demanded persistence and endurance; for this reason, we dedicated a separate section to Pauline fortitude.

Just after the Battle of Mohács (1526), the Ottoman armies wreaked havoc in the Kingdom of Hungary, ravaging among other, the monastery at Budaszentlőrinc, the medieval centre of the Pauline Order. In other times, it was not direct destruction itself, but demolitions ordered by military engineers in the wake of fortification waves that vanquished the monasteries. This was the case with the monastery at Pogányszentpéter (Southern Hungary),



Fig. 11. Pocket sundial from the Pogányszentpéter monastery. The artefact is now kept in the Thúry György Museum in Nagykanizsa



Fig. 13. Axe and knife carved onto a stone from the Bükkszentlélek monastery. The artefact is now kept in the Herman Ottó Museum in Miskolc



Fig. 12. Artefacts testifying to the secular connections of the Pauline Order

where a tiny pocket sundial was found (MÜLLER 1972), left perhaps by someone involved in the demolition at the mid-sixteenth century. This particular object was most probably produced in Nuremberg at the end of the fifteenth century (Fig. 11).

A separate section was dedicated to Pauline connections, their relations with the secular and ecclesiastic worlds with special emphasis on their links with royal courts. Archaeological finds were displayed amidst magnificent works of art. A splendid 17th century coral reliquary was accompanied by a gilded pyxis, dated to the second half of the 15th century, found at the Pauline monastery of Almárvölgy near Eger in Northern Hungary (FODOR 1991). Similarly, a bronze ring from a secular burial of the Pauline monastery at Gombaszög (today Gombasek, Eastern Slovakia) was placed next to the artefacts donated by the Transylvanian prince and Polish king, Stephen Báthory to the Paulines at Częstochowa (Fig. 12). A stone relief (of considerable size and weight) from the Pauline monastery of Bükkszentlélek (North-eastern Hungary, near Miskolc) depicting a bard and a knife, was placed in the same thematic section (Fig. 13). The iconological evaluation of the carving is extremely interesting; perhaps it commemorated the donations of the butchers' guild of Csaba (today this settlement is part of the nearest city, Miskolc) to the monastery.

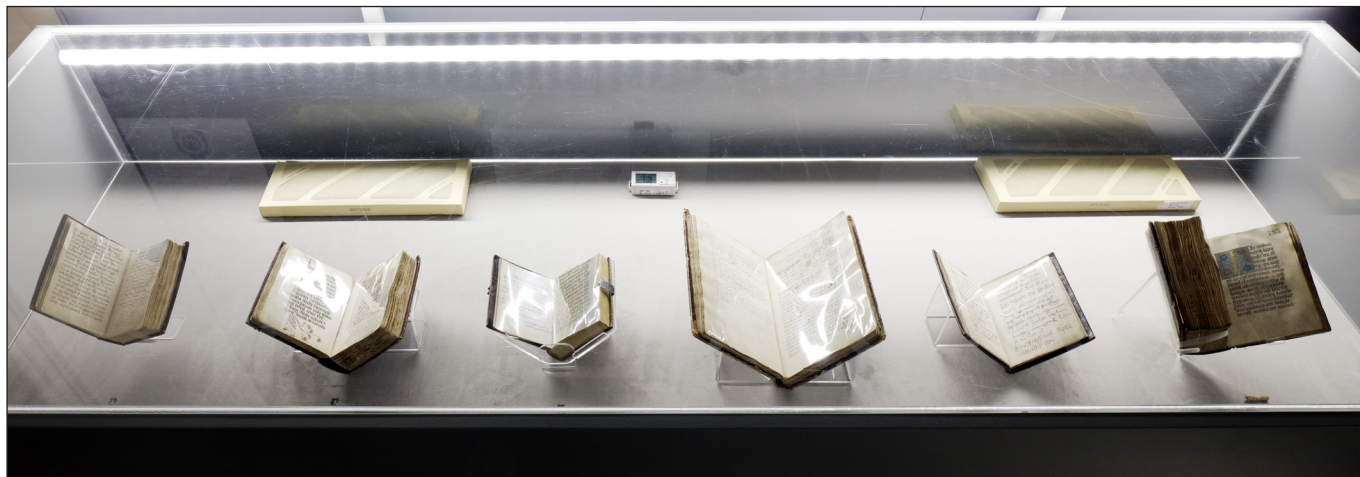


Fig. 14. The Order's activities in preparing codices are also reflected in the exhibition

There was another connection between archaeology and artefacts kept in collections. There are several late medieval codices containing records in Hungarian that were related to the codex workshop of the Pauline monastery at Nagyvázsony (Transdanubia, Balatonfelvidék). One of the most famous such codex is the so-called Festetics Codex used by Benigna Magyar, wife to Pál Kinizsi, the notable general. An ivory handle fragment from a small painters' spoon recovered from the excavations at Nagyvázsony was placed alongside it. The spoon might have been used for painting this very codex (Fig. 14).

Ambient sounds were used to facilitate visitor immersion. In the first room, nature was evoked through birdsong, in the second room, whistles and background noises of a railway station accompanied the model train. Different Gregorian chants from albums published by the Hungarian Pauline Order were played throughout the exhibition. The “Paulines” is scheduled to be on display next in Transylvania, and afterwards it may return to Hungarian museums. In any case, those who missed the exhibition may recall [via a virtual exhibition](#) the unpretentious yet inspiring legacy of White Fathers, their famous and unsung human destinies that address and shape us.

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