

Marble works and marble floors in medieval Hungary in the late 12th Century. Fragments of a choir screen and opus sectile from Eger medieval cathedral and its artistic connections

Abstract:

In medieval Hungary, towards the end of the twelfth century, many cathedrals from the eleventh century were in the progress of being rebuilt or approaching completion. Remarkably, the completion and superior renewal of two such architectural works—at Esztergom and Eger—with excellent marble works and the large-scale use of an elegant and exclusive marble material, are connected to the simultaneous identification of the local marble quarries. In Esztergom the interior of the Cathedral was certainly “encased” with marble as well. The walls and the pillars of the nave, which probably connected the choir, were also covered with marble. In addition, the preserved details of the variety of incrustation patterns and opus sectile floors have been associated with the preferred sites and routes of the cathedral’s liturgy. In the art historical research, the famous red marble works of the Esztergom Cathedral and the completion of the cathedral’s renewal are dated to the common ruling years (1185–1196) of King Béla III and Archbishop Job, illustrated together on the tympanum of the Porta Speciosa. The relics of the renewal of the Eger Cathedral at the end of the twelfth century—the turn of the year 1200—are represented by some early gothic pillar, rib, and capital fragments as well as by a large number of fragments of architectural details, carved in outstanding quality from white marble and red andesite. From these series of blind niches of various sizes and entablatures unfolds the articulated barrier architecture (probably the choir screen). To all this, a varied sampled opus sectile floor was associated. The ornamental small architecture partially accompanied by inscriptions and incrustations could be related to the elevated level of the main sanctuary and choir of the cathedral, as well as the vaulted burial chamber at the west end of the nave, which certainly represents the burial memory of King Emeric (1196–1204). A possible antecedent and iconographic model of the decorated marble choir and decorative floor at Eger could be the Deanery Church of Alba Regia founded by King Stephen, which got its decoration with the founder’s burial (1038) and his canonization (1083). The close connection between the chamber and the barrier architecture in Eger also raises the question of the king’s role as a builder. However, next to the king, the most important role was that of Bishop Katapán (1198–1217), who was an important person at the court of King Béla and his son. He started his career as provost of Alba Regia, in the 1190s he advanced to the chancellor’s office, and from there to the bishop’s chair. The bishop could have played a part in Emeric’s decision to interrupt the royal burial series in Alba Regia by choosing to be buried in Eger Cathedral.

Keywords: -