

# Edith Hoffmann (1888-1945): the first successful female art historian in Hungary

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Figure 1 Edith Hoffmann in her office at the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, 1937  
*Rádióélet*, 9: 5, 29 January 1937, 4.

Edith Hoffmann's name is not unknown to those involved in Hungarian museology or to researchers of medieval and Renaissance miniature painting and panel painting, and her research on 19th century Hungarian art is significant. Nevertheless, her oeuvre has not been scientifically processed, no collection of her numerous publications, which constitute basic research, has been published, and on her premature death she was not even honoured with a Festschrift. In 1948, her former workplace commemorated her with a memorial exhibition, the first to include her bibliography in its catalogue and the first compilation of the works she had collected for the Graphic Art Collection of the Museum of Fine Arts.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, her person has come into focus primarily through her association with the Vienna School of Art History and her relationship with János (Johannes) Wilde.<sup>2</sup> Although the anthology of

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<sup>1</sup>Jolán Balogh, 'Foreword to the catalogue' in *Dr. Hoffmann Edith emlékkiállítás*, Budapest: Szépművészeti Múzeum; 'Élet' Irodalmi és Nyomda Rt. 1948. 3-18.

<sup>2</sup>In particular, four issues of the journal entitled *Enigma* deals with the life and activities of János Wilde. (See: 'Wilde és a bécsi iskola 1-4', *Enigma*, No. 83-86, 2015/16.; Csilla Markója, 'János (Johannes) Wilde and Max Dvořák, or Can we speak of a Budapest school of art history?', *Journal of Art Historiography*, No. 17, December 2017, 1-21.

<https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2017/11/markoja.pdf>

Csilla Markója, 'Everyday life at the Dvořák Seminar, on the basis of contemporary sources: Addenda to the history of the Vienna School of Art History', *Journal of Art Historiography*, No. 25, December 2021, 1-13. <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2021/11/markoja.pdf>

the great authors of Hungarian art history (2007) includes a summary of her person and career, this could only be considered the starting point for a comprehensive volume of her works spanning several periods.<sup>3</sup>

The theme of the current conference gave me the idea that a gender perspective on the development of her career might be a valid one, since we are talking about a woman scholar who managed to carve out a place for herself in the all-male art historical community at a time when this was not at all obvious.

That's why the present paper will in the first part of the text explore the conditions at the time she began her career and the possibilities for her remaining in the field. In the second part of the paper, I will focus on Edith Hoffmann's professional contacts in Vienna, because of the venue of the current conference.<sup>4</sup>

### **Initial difficulties and years of success**

In the years before the First World War, the Faculty of Humanities at Péter Pázmány University in Budapest had a relatively large number of female students, many of whom successfully completed their doctorates. The female students attending the university, who were either middle-class intellectuals or descendants of wealthy industrialist and merchant families, believed in the possibility of female professionalisation. However, these promising beginnings were often not fulfilled, precisely because of traditional social roles, meaning that talented young women gave up their academic careers or were forced to change careers.<sup>5</sup>

Edith Hoffmann's father, Frigyes Hoffmann (1853-1938), a teacher of German linguistics and literary history, was a leading figure at the famous Eötvös College in Budapest, who had all four of his daughters educated.<sup>6</sup> Two of the four, Edith and Mária (1885-1949), almost inseparable friends, pursued academic careers. Edith worked in the Graphic Arts Department of the Museum of Fine Arts, while her sister, Mária, became a respected researcher at the National Széchenyi Library. The beginning of their careers, however, was far from ordinary. They both received their doctorates in 1910, Edith in 14th century Sieneese and Florentine painting, and her sister in German philology. Besides Taine's theory of milieu, Edith based her thesis on two important seminal works on Renaissance art by Bernard Berenson.<sup>7</sup>

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Paul Stirton, 'The Vienna School in Hungary', *Journal of Art Historiography*, No. 8, June 2013, 1-17.

<https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/stirton.pdf>

<sup>3</sup>Tünde Wehli, 'Hoffmann Edith (1888–1945)' in Csilla Markója and István Bardoly, eds, *Emberék, és nem frakkok'. A magyar művészettörténet-írás nagy alakjai. Tudománytörténeti esszégyűjtemény*, Budapest: Enigma 2007, 205-217.

<sup>4</sup>Not to be confused with Edit Hoffman (1907-2016), a Vienna-born art historian who fled to England in 1938 to work as deputy editor of *Burlington Magazine*.

<sup>5</sup>In 1895, Gyula Wlassics (1852-1937), Minister of Religion and Public Education, first allowed women to enter certain university faculties, including the humanities. Andor Ladányi, 'Két évforduló. A nők felsőfokú tanulmányainak száz éve', *Educatio*, 3, 1996, 375-389.

<sup>6</sup>Imre Garai, *A tanári elitképzés műhelye. A Bárá Eötvös József Collegium története (1895-1950)*, Budapest: ELTE, Eötvös József Collegium, 2016, 75.

<sup>7</sup>The title of his dissertation was: *A sienai és firenzei festészet a XV. században*. 1910. The two referenced works by Berenson: *The Central Italian Painters of the Renaissance* (1897), *The Florentin Painters of the Renaissance* (1896); Ferenc Gosztonyi elaborated the topic. Ferenc Gosztonyi, 'A Pasteiner-tanítványok.

We know from Edith's autobiography, that at the time, a job in a museum was almost the only way to stay in the art history profession.<sup>8</sup> But in 1910 there were no women working in museums in Hungary, while Edith's male contemporaries who were also students of Gyula Pasteiner found jobs one after the other.<sup>9</sup> We also learn from her autobiography, that she and her sister were taken on as volunteers at the National Museum immediately after leaving university, essentially in exchange for a large donation.<sup>10</sup> The comment of the Director of the National Museum on their recruitment is telling: 'Fine, I'll put them in the Ethnography Department, let the little girls have fun'.<sup>11</sup> Edith worked on cataloguing the sound recordings of Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály at the department, but she never gave up her ambition to pursue a career as an art historian.<sup>12</sup> She published her first article on the classicist Hungarian sculptor – István Ferenczy – in the journal *Művészet* in 1912,<sup>13</sup> which brought her to the attention of the public, and as a result Simon Meller<sup>14</sup> (an earlier monographer of István Ferenczy), head of the Graphic Art Department of the Museum of Fine Arts, invited her over to work in the Graphic Art Collection, where she remained from 1913 until her death in 1945. For years she was in unpaid status and even had to prove herself over and over just to be able to stay there. She felt that her first serious undertaking abroad was like being thrown in deep water. Since Edith was a highly proficient speaker of German, she was entrusted – due to Meller's impediment - with bidding at a Berlin auction of graphic art in 1917, where she successfully managed to enrich the collection with some important graphic works (by Dürer, Schongauer).<sup>15</sup> She also travelled to Vienna on this occasion, where she was already researching in the manuscript department of the

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Tudománytörténet, 1', *Ars Hungarica*, 38: 1, 2012, 11-71.

<sup>8</sup> *Edith Hoffmann's autobiography (Hoffmann Edith önéletrajza)*. Typescript, cc. 1943. Budapest: Szépművészeti Múzeum könyvtár, inv. no.: 4465/VII. Coll. XXV. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Among Gyula's Pasteiner students who were successful in the museum profession we can mention László Éber (1871-1935), Simon Meller (1875-1949), Zoltán Felvinczi Takács (1880-1964), Tibor Gerevich (1882-1954), Hugó Kenczler (1884-1922) or Kálmán Pogány (1882-1951).

Apart from Hoffmann, Olga Elefánt (1886-1951), one of the many female students, succeeded in finding a position at the Museum of Applied Arts, but she asked in vain for a promotion after a long period of time, which she believed was not granted by the Ministry for anti-feminist reasons. Géza Vörös, 'Klebselsberg Kunó és az Országos Magyar Gyűjtemény Egyetem', *Levéltári Szemle*, 60: 3, 2010, (21-46), 28.

<sup>10</sup> István Görgey (the brother of Artúr Görgey, the legendary General of 1848/49) donated valuable relics to the National Museum in exchange for the admission of the Hoffmann girls. *Edith Hoffmann's autobiography*. 2-3.

<sup>11</sup> *Edith Hoffmann's autobiography*. 2-3.

<sup>12</sup> *Edith Hoffmann's autobiography*. 2-3.

<sup>13</sup> See the list of works by Edith Hoffmann. *Hoffmann Edith bibliográfiája*, edited by Eszter Illés.

[https://bibliografia.szepmuveszeti.hu/2020\\_honlap\\_muveszettorteneszek/Hoffmann\\_Edith.pdf](https://bibliografia.szepmuveszeti.hu/2020_honlap_muveszettorteneszek/Hoffmann_Edith.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Simon Meller (1875-1949) was an art historian. He founded the modern collection of the Graphic Arts Department of the Museum of Fine Arts, with Picasso's prints among others. He was forced to leave the Graphic Arts Collection in 1919 because of his role in the Republic of Councils.

<sup>15</sup> She tells her story in the article Edith Hoffmann, 'Életem legérdekesebb élménye. Először a magam talpán. Elmondja Hoffmann Edit dr., a Szépművészeti Múzeum igazgatója', *Tolnai Világlapja*, 46, 17 June 1942, 24, 26.

Hofbibliothek.<sup>16</sup> Partly as a result of this research, she published a study of Czech miniatures in the collection of Museum of Fine Arts the following year.<sup>17</sup>

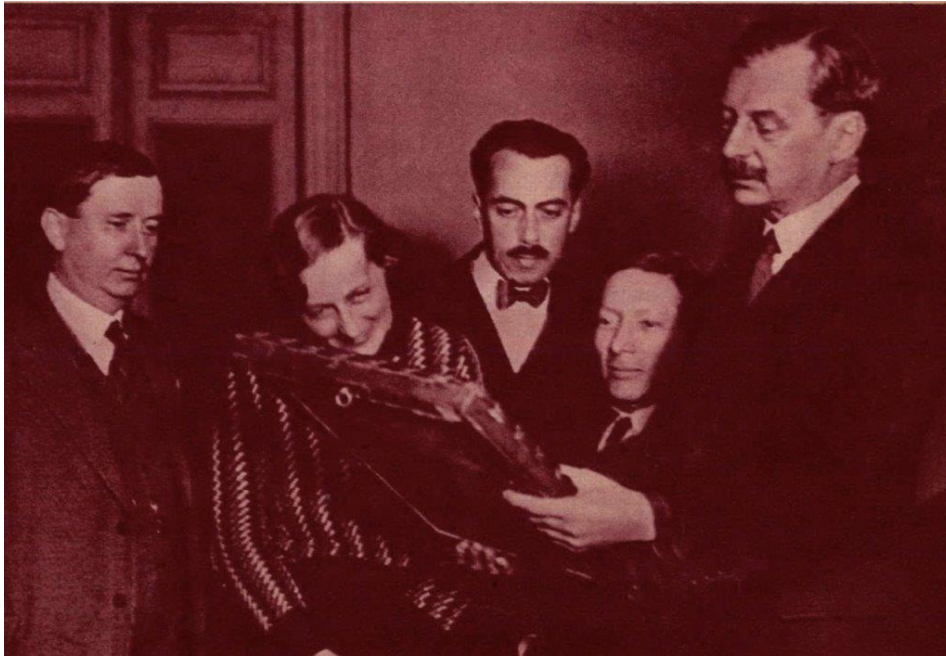


Figure 2 Dr. Edith Hoffmann among her colleagues at the Museum of Fine Arts 1934  
*Pesti Napló, Képes melléklet*, 10, 1 April 1934 (Photo: Károly Escher)

Despite her diligence and dedication, she was promoted at a much slower pace than her male colleagues, but her perseverance finally paid off and as Meller's successor she was appointed head of the Graphic Arts Department in 1921, and later became one of the most important and influential figures in the Museum, becoming Director in 1936, second only to the Director General.<sup>18</sup> Although she was involved, she managed to avoid the retaliations following the Republic of Councils of 1919 and became one of the loyal and trusted colleagues of Elek Petrovics,<sup>19</sup> then Director General of the Museum of Fine Arts. After the removal of Petrovics, she continued her work from 1935, now under Dénes Csánky as Executive Director<sup>20</sup>. She was bestowed the title 'right honourable' on her own accord, i.e., not by right of the wife of a dignitary, in 1936, which was almost unprecedented at the time. This also put her in a higher pay grade. She became an example of the *Neue Frau*, the

<sup>16</sup>János Wilde's letter to Margit Wilde. 19 June 1917. Published in *Enigma*, 83, 2015, 132.

<sup>17</sup>Edith Hoffmann, 'Cseh miniatűrök a Szépművészeti Múzeumban', *Országos Magyar Szépművészeti Múzeum Évkönyvei*, 1, 1918, 49-74.

<sup>18</sup>Until 1918, for 8 years, she served as an unpaid assistant museologist, a position in which she was succeeded by János Wilde on 22 October 1918, while she moved up the ranks. István Bardoly, 'Adalékok Wilde János életéhez és tevékenységéhez (1918-1922)', *Enigma*, 84, 2016, 103-124.

<sup>19</sup>Elek Petrovics (1873-1945) was a lawyer, art writer and Director General of the Museum of Fine Arts from 1914 to 1935.

<sup>20</sup>Dénes Csánky (1885-1972) painter, art writer. Director General of the Museum of Fine Arts from 1935 to 1945. He organised and executed the transport of the Fine Arts Museum's material and confiscated art treasures to Germany to escape Russian looting.



independent woman who could support herself financially, which attracted the attention of the press. Numerous interviews, photographs, etc. bear witness to this fascination, where the theme was always the same: how was it possible for a woman to achieve such success as an academic?<sup>21</sup> The tragic end of her life was caused by a fatal accident. In April 1945, she was hit by a Soviet military truck on her way to work.

Edith Hoffmann was married for a few months, but soon divorced. It was a fleeting affair in her life, more of an alibi marriage to avoid social prejudice than a real relationship. She never married after that, but had a very lively social life, and maintained remarkably close friendships with contemporary artists and progressive literary figures, especially women writers, with whom she also had a close emotional relationship.<sup>22</sup>

Edith Hoffmann epitomised the type of highly educated, passionate, European scholar who aimed for the broadest most thorough study of her field, coupled with methodological consistency. This was facilitated by the fact that the Museum of Fine Arts had by this time grown into a prestigious collection in Europe and had become an integral part of an international network of researchers.

### **Max Dvořák as a master**

In the second part of this paper, I would like to highlight the links of this network to Vienna - given the location of the conference - without claiming to be exhaustive.

Edith Hoffmann attended Max Dvořák's classes.<sup>23</sup> This must have been around 1910, unfortunately no trace of this is preserved in the archives of the University of Vienna.<sup>24</sup> The research of Csilla Markója has revealed that János Wilde, as a Dvořák student between 1915-17, may have played a connection between the Graphic Arts Department of the Museum of Fine Arts and the Dvořák Department.<sup>25</sup> Wilde was a member of the staff at the Graphic Arts Collection already before 1915, and maintained close relations with Simon Meller and Edith Hoffmann.<sup>26</sup> The events of 1919 (the Communist takeover of the Republic of Councils, which lasted for a mere few months) also brought a turning point in the life of the Museum of Fine Arts. Many emigrated, but Hoffmann stayed. Paul Stirton, in his study entitled *The Vienna School in Hungary*, suggested the possibility of a school of art history in Budapest with a Dvořákian intellectual-historical orientation. Among its members there were Antal Frigyes

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<sup>21</sup>See, among others, Iván Boldizsár, Iván, 'Hogy lett méltóságos? Hoffmann Edit, a Szépművészeti Múzeum igazgatója elmondja, hogyan ért el címet, rangot és tudományos eredményt', *Nemzeti Újság*, 9 August 1936, 19-20.

<sup>22</sup>She had a rather strong emotional relationship with the wife of the famous writer Mihály Babits (1883-1941) and Sophie Török (1895-1955). Their rich correspondence provides an excellent insight into the artistic life of the period. Budapest: OSZK Manuscript Archives, the legacy of Mihály Babits.

<sup>23</sup>Béla Kőhalmi, ed, *Az új könyvek könyve. 173 író, művész, tudós vallomása olvasmányairól*, Budapest: Gergely R. Kiadása, 1937, 155-157.

<sup>24</sup>Unfortunately, there is no record of Hoffmann's studies in Vienna in the archives of the Institute of Art History at the University of Vienna. Courtesy of Dr. Friedrich Polleroß.

<sup>25</sup>Markója, 'Everyday life at the Dvořák Seminar, on the basis of contemporary sources: Addenda to the history of the Vienna School of Art History', 1-13.

<sup>26</sup>On their relationship, see the previously mentioned Enigma issues on the works of János Wilde.

(1887–1954), Károly Tolnay (1899-1981), János Wilde (1891-1970) and Edith Hoffmann, the only woman among them.<sup>27</sup>

According to Hoffmann's recollections from the 1930s, she was initially impressed by Dvořák as a lecturer. It was only later, in the post-World War I period, that his research into intellectual history influenced her. Yet, Hoffmann in her publications on art history still applied stylistic analysis. She considered accurate attribution to be one of the most important of her tasks as an art historian, especially since the Graphic Art Collection of the Museum of Fine Arts had a number of prints that had previously been misidentified or not identified at all. Her starting point was the assumption that the drawings in the collection were essentially studies or sketches, and she tried to find the finished work for them. She was aided in her work by her well-developed visual memory and passionate study of Europe's major and less significant art collections.

### **Hoffmann as a key figure in professional relations between Vienna and Budapest**

From 1923, Edith Hoffmann became involved in the process of recovering Hungarian cultural property left in Austria, which finally ended in the Venice Agreement of 1932 after lengthy negotiations and litigation. The committee appointed by the cultural government conducted a thorough search of the museums and archival collections in Vienna. Edith Hoffmann, as someone who had already established good relations with both archivists and art historians and with the Hungarians who had recently emigrated to Vienna, became one of the key players in these processes.<sup>28</sup> Based on her surviving lists we can trace the institutions in which she carried out in-depth research to discover Hungarian pieces of art.<sup>29</sup> She played a major role, even if the overall demands of the Hungarians were not fully met, in the recovery of many of the Hungarian codices, including some of the Corvina codices.<sup>30</sup>

Until recently, part of Edith Hoffmann's legacy – mainly containing her correspondence and research notes – which was acquired in the 1950s, has been lying forgotten in the Museum of Fine Arts.<sup>31</sup> Among her correspondents there are some of the most important representatives of the international academic world with whom Hoffmann was in contact. Some of her Austrian correspondents included Theodor Gottlieb (1860-1929), Otto Benesch (1896-1964), Hermann Julius Hermann (1869-1953), Heinrich Schwarz (1894-1974), and Karl Oettinger (1906-1979).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Stirton, 'The Vienna School in Hungary', 1-17.

<sup>28</sup>Ferenc Dóry, Elek Petrovics and Elemér Varjú, eds, *A bécsi gyűjteményekből Magyarországnak jutott tárgyak kiállítása a Magyar Nemzeti Múzeumban*. Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, 1933.

<sup>29</sup>*Bécsi tárgyalások*. Kézirat. Budapest: Szépművészeti Múzeum Kézirattár, inv. no: 829/63.

<sup>30</sup>Balogh, 'Foreword to the catalogue', 8.

<sup>31</sup>A part of Edith Hoffmann's legacy, her correspondence, and her notes on art, are currently held at the Central European Research Institute for the History of Art (KEMKI), Archive and Documentation Centre, inv. no.: 1958-61/1-833.

<sup>32</sup>Letters from the above (KEMKI) to Edith Hoffmann: From Theodor Gottlieb to Edith Hoffmann, Vienna, no year, inv. no: 1958-61/73; From Otto Benesch to Edith Hoffmann, no place, no year, inv. no.: 1958-61/99; From Hermann Julius Hermann to Edith Hoffmann, Vienna, 17 July 1933, inv. no.: 1958-61/100; From Heinrich Schwarz to Edith Hoffmann, Vienna, no year, inv. no.:1958-61/117; From Karl Oettinger to Edith Hoffmann, Vienna, no year, inv. no.: 1958-61/265.

After 1921, Edith Hoffman was commissioned by the scholar Bishop, Vilmos Fraknói, to process the miniatures of the Corvina codices.<sup>33</sup> She came into closer contact with Theodor Gottlieb, a colleague at the Hofbibliothek in Vienna, in connection with the Corvina research, and their correspondence revealed that they were thinking of a joint publication. Gottlieb had previously published extensively on the covers of the Corvina volumes<sup>34</sup>. His letter to Hoffmann reveals a number of professional, personal, and financial problems in connection to their joint project which did not seem to have been resolved.<sup>35</sup> Finally, the multi-authored volume, which can be considered the first significant Hungarian-language publication on the Corvinae in 1927, was completed without a contribution from Gottlieb.<sup>36</sup>

Research on medieval art accelerated in the inter-war period, and in the new Central European situation emerging after the collapse of the Monarchy, nationalist visions often overrode the strict criteria of scholarship in order to legitimise the successor states. In Hungary, as in other successor states of the Monarchy, one of the means of establishing continuity was to prove the existence of independent national art schools as early as possible.

In Hoffmann's publications, including the one on the Czech miniatures kept in the Museum of Fine Arts,<sup>37</sup> the reference to Dvořák's research was therefore tantamount to a statement of worldview. For example, Tibor Gerevich,<sup>38</sup> one of the most influential and powerful art historians of the period, attacked Edith Hoffmann in 1931 for having 'sacrificed a part of Hungarian miniature painting to Czech colonialism incorrectly and unjustifiably with incomprehensible zeal'.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Vilmos Fraknói (1843-1924), historian, canon of Várad, secretary general of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

<sup>34</sup>Theodor Gottlieb, *Bucheinbande*, Wien: K.K. Hofbibliothek, 1910. Fraknói had already had an earlier acquaintance with Gottlieb, their joint article on the Kálmáncsehi codices was published in Vienna in 1920. See: Vilmos Fraknói and Theodor Gottlieb, *Manuscript enluminé d'un Prélat hongrois a la Bibliotheque Beatty a Londres*. Vienna: [s.n.], 1921.

[http://real-eod.mtak.hu/8729/1/MTA\\_ElnokokFotitkarokMunkai\\_FraknoiVilmos\\_241007.pdf](http://real-eod.mtak.hu/8729/1/MTA_ElnokokFotitkarokMunkai_FraknoiVilmos_241007.pdf)

<sup>35</sup>Letter from Theodor Gottlieb to Edith Hoffmann, Vienna, no year, (KEMKI) inv. no.: 1958-61/73.

<sup>36</sup>Vilmos Fraknói, József Fögel, Pál Gulyás and Edith Hoffmann, *Bibliotheka Corvina. Mátyás király budai könyvtára*, Budapest: Szent István Akadémia, 1927.

<sup>37</sup>Hoffmann, 'Cseh miniatűrök a Szépművészeti Múzeumban', 8. In this Hoffmann refers to Max Dvořák, 'Die Illuminatoren des Johannes von Neumarkt', *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses*, 22, 1901, 35-126, and links the panels to the Czech New Style that developed from the ornamentation of Avignon. The Czech origin of the miniatures is still accepted in research today. Hoffmann, in a summary study published in 1927, confirms her opinion, emphasising the influence of Czech art. See: Edith Hoffmann, 'A Nemzeti Múzeum Széchényi-könyvtárának Magyarországon illuminált kéziratái', *Magyar Könyvszemle*, 34, 1927, 1-43.

<sup>38</sup>Tibor Gerevich (1882–1954) art historian, university professor, government commissioner, Director of the Hungarian Institute in Rome.

<sup>39</sup>Tibor Gerevich, 'Művészettörténet', Hóman Bálint ed, *A magyar történetírás új útjai*, Budapest: Magyar Szemle Társaság, 1931, (87-140), 123. Republished: Ernő Marosi, ed, *A magyar művészettörténet-írás programjai. Válogatás két évszázad írásaiból*, Budapest: MTA Művészettörténeti Kutató Intézet; Corvina, 1999, (206-242). 226.

Ernő Marosi deals with this topic among others: Ernő Marosi, 'Wahlverwandtschaften. Nemzeti művészet-koncepciók és középkori művészet', in Teréz Kerny, Péter Schmidt and Zsuzsanna

There have also been heated debates among scholars about the origin of the panel paintings. Otto Benesch linked the five 15<sup>th</sup> century panels depicting the martyrdom of the apostles in the Museum of Fine Arts to the school of Vienna,<sup>40</sup> while István Genthon suggested an origin from Kassa [present day Košice, i.e., a Hungarian origin].<sup>41</sup> Genthon wrote in 1929 'there is hardly any study of old Austrian art that in passing does not prove the Austrian origin of a well- or lesser-known Hungarian work'.<sup>42</sup> In 1936, the Museum of Fine Arts reorganised a permanent exhibition of these panels and they were placed in the Austrian room. Edith Hoffmann, who upheld an attribution more in line with the views of Benesch and other Austrian scholars, may have played an active role in this interpretation.

The good relationship between Hoffmann and Benesch is clearly evident. In a letter to Hoffmann, Benesch wished to ask her to write a review of his book, which was about to be published.<sup>43</sup> As he wrote: 'I would very much like to see a rigorous critical examination of the book penned by you, especially in front of a forum of Hungarian scholars who like to blur concepts and boundaries'.<sup>44</sup> To my knowledge, this did not take place. Benesch also arranged for materials and reproductions requested from the Museum of Fine Arts through Edith Hoffmann, similarly to other Austrian researchers. It is perhaps less known that Otto Benesch was offered the position of assistant museologist at the Museum of Fine Arts in 1919, a position he did not officially accept.<sup>45</sup> However, as an expert he was involved in the attribution of objects taken into public property, which resulted in a large exhibition at the Budapest Kunsthalle, in which Edith Hoffmann was also took part.<sup>46</sup>

In 1937 Hoffmann published her study on medieval Hungarian panel painting, in which the differences in attribution of certain works were clearly outlined, and which were also part of the identity debate mentioned above.<sup>47</sup> Hoffmann disputed the theory put forth by Tibor Gerevich concerning the Hungarian artistic character as derived from traits of the national spirit. Gerevich classified medieval altarpieces as works by Hungarian masters on the basis of these supposed character traits. On the contrary, Hoffmann demonstrated that the sources of the medieval panels under study were mostly German engravings.

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Szegedy-Maszák, eds, *'Oszlopok tetején liliumok formáltattak vala' – Tanulmányok Bibó István 70. Születésnapjára*, Budapest: Centrart, 2011, 29-35.

<sup>40</sup>Letter from Otto Benesch to Edith Hoffmann, no place, no year, (KEMKI) inv. no.: 1958-61/99.

<sup>41</sup>István Genthon (1903-1969) was an art historian, Director of the Modern Picture Gallery of the Museum of Fine Arts and Director of the Hungarian Institute in Rome between 1940 and 1943. Despite their professional differences, Hoffmann and he had a good relationship.

<sup>42</sup>István Genthon, 'Az apostolvértanúságok mestere. Adalékok a magyar és osztrák festőművészet XV. Századi kapcsolataihoz', *Archeológiai Értesítő*, 43, 1929, (156-181), 158.

<sup>43</sup>Otto Benesch, *Österreichische Handzeichnungen des XV. und XVI. Jahrhunderts*, Freiburg: Urban-Verlag, 1936.

<sup>44</sup>'Eine strenge kritische Auseinandersetzung mit dem Buch aus ihre Feder wäre mir gerade vor dem Forum der gerne die Begriffe und Grenze verwischenden ungarischen Forscher sehr erwünscht'. Letter from Otto Benesch to Edith Hoffmann, no place, no year, (KEMKI) inv. no.: 1958-61/99.

<sup>45</sup>On Otto Benesch's Hungarian connections, see: Markója, 'János (Johannes) Wilde and Max Dvořák, or Can we speak of a Budapest school of art history?', 17-18.

<sup>46</sup>*Köztulajdonba vett műkincsek első kiállítása*. Múcsarnok, Budapest: Közoktatásügyi Népbiztosság, 1919.

<sup>47</sup>Edith Hoffmann, 'Jegyzetek a régi magyar táblaképfestészethez – Beiträge zur alten ungarischen Tafelmalerei', *Archeológiai Értesítő*, 50, 1937, 1-30, 177-190.



Hoffmann also corresponded in the 1930s with Gyula Fleischer (Julius Fleischer),<sup>48</sup> former secretary of the Collegium Hungaricum and the Hungarian Historical Institute in Vienna, and also with the literary historian Dávid Angyal,<sup>49</sup> who was director of the Institute until 1935. As a researcher of the Baroque period, Fleischer was also in contact with Benesch and the Austrian art historical circle. Hoffmann's above mentioned 1937 study were published in both Hungarian and German, so her text reached Austrian specialists directly, and Fleischer and Angyal certainly forwarded it to their Austrian colleagues. Dávid Angyal called Hoffmann's book a patriotic act and wrote the following: 'The two Mr G's [Genthon and Gerevich] however, will not be very happy about this critical review'.<sup>50</sup> And Fleischer hailed his colleague as a liberating St George, who came in 'in the form of a lady' this time.<sup>51</sup> His letter shows that Hoffmann had finally given the art-historical circles in Vienna a satisfactory answer as regards the question of the origins of medieval Hungarian art works.

Edith Hoffmann was also well acquainted with medieval Austrian miniature art, as can be seen from her 1934 study in which she was the first to identify a Bible pauperum and the series of images depicting the Life of Jesus attached to it later, all from the estate of an István Delhaes which was transferred to the Museum of Fine Arts in 1901, as 14th century Austrian works.<sup>52</sup>

Overall, it can be said that Edith Hoffmann had strong professional contacts with Austrian art historians, classical archaeologists, and archivists. Not only did she come into contact with them in the course of her work at the museum and assist their research, but she was also respected as an authority with an exclusive focus on scholarship.

Based on her correspondence, however, these contacts seem to have faded after 1938. The reason for this must necessarily be identified in historical events. On the one hand, her colleagues with whom she had professional contacts or even friendship have mostly emigrated or retired as a result of the historical turn of events. The last letter from Austria, according to the inventory book of the Museum of Fine Arts, dates from the spring of 1939, in which Karl Ginhart (1888-1971),<sup>53</sup> then still working for the Austrian Federal Office for the Protection of Monuments, thanked Edith Hoffmann for one of her last important publications, which attracted international attention, entitled *Pozsony a középkorban (Bratislava in the Middle Ages)*.<sup>54</sup> However, it seems that she no longer kept in touch with the art

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<sup>48</sup>Julius Fleischer (Gyula Fleischer) (1889-1962) was an art historian, university lecturer and head of the Burgenland heritage protection.

<sup>49</sup>Dávid Angyal (1857-1943) was a literary historian and Director of the Hungarian Historical Institute in Vienna until 1935. He returned to Hungary after the Anschluss in 1938.

<sup>50</sup>Letter from Dávid Angyal to Edith Hoffmann, Vienna 27. 02. 1937, (KEMKI) inv. no.: 1958-61/193.

<sup>51</sup>Letter from Gyula Fleischer to Edith Hoffmann, Vienna 02. 1937, (KEMKI) inv. no.: 1958-61/215.

<sup>52</sup>Istvan Delhaes (1845-1901) was a painter and collector. Edith Hoffmann, 'A régi osztrák művészet egy ismeretlen fontos emlékééről – Ein unbekanntes wichtiges Denkmal der altösterreichischen Kunst', in Edith Hoffmann, ed, *Petrovics Elek emlékkönyve*, Budapest: Országos Magyar Szépművészeti Múzeum barátai és tisztségviselői, 1934, 39-51, 170-183.

<sup>53</sup> Letter from Karl Ginhart to Edith Hoffmann, Vienna, 2 March 1939, (KEMKI) inv. no.: 1958-61/231. On the headed paper of the Kunsthistorisches Institute der Zentralstelle für Denkmalkunst.

<sup>54</sup>Edith Hoffmann, *Pozsony a középkorban. Elfelejtett művészek, elpusztult emlékek*. Budapest: Magyarágtudomány, Első kecskeméti Hírlapkiadó, 1938. German version: 'Pressburg im Mittelalter. Vergessene Künstler, verlorene Denkmäler', *Südostdeutsche Forschungen*, Leipzig, 1938, 9: 2, 280-334.

historians who took up their posts after the Anschluss. But Hoffmann's interests had also changed. After 1938 she became more interested in 19th-century Hungarian masters and began researching the art of Pál Szinyei Merse, which resulted in a monograph and oeuvre catalogue published in 1943.<sup>55</sup>

She became involved with contemporary art, primarily as a museum curator, as young artists came to study the graphics collection and she also participated in acquisitions connected to several contemporary artists. She was also a member of modern art associations.<sup>56</sup> She was particularly attentive to female artists being the only female member of the jury for the Women Artists' Exhibition in Paris.<sup>57</sup> She became an artist herself, creating silhouette portraits of some of the most prominent representatives of the art and literary world of the time.<sup>58</sup> (fig. 3) She tried to help many of her fellow countrymen who were persecuted during the Holocaust.

Her premature death came as a shock to her friends. Her life's work thus remains fragmentary. She was one of the first significant female academics to achieve resounding success in her career, whose example later became a model and encouragement to many women.



Figure 3 Hoffmann's Silhouette Portraits  
*Nemzeti Újság*, 18: 182, 9 August 1936, 19.

<sup>55</sup>Edith Hoffmann: *Szinyei Merse Pál (1845-1920)*, Budapest: Országos Magyar Szépművészeti Múzeum kiadványa, Budapest, 1943. Recent literature on this monograph: Anna Kopócsy, 'Maga a Majálisnak elhivatott papnője. Hoffmann Edith Szinyei Merse Pál (1845-1920) című monográfiájáról', in Kitty Árvai-Józsa, Eszter Nagy, József Sisa, Miklós Székely and Erzsébet Tatai eds, *Látkép–2021–Művészettörténeti tanulmányok*, Budapest: Bölcsészettudományi Központ, Művészettörténeti Intézet, 2022, 105-118.

<sup>56</sup>She was elected a member of the KUT (New Society of Artists) and the Szinyei Merse Pál Society.

<sup>57</sup>M.Ö.K., 'Magyar művésznők nemzetközi versenye', *Nemzeti Újság*, 10 January 1932, 23.

<sup>58</sup>Gábor Tolnai: *Árnyból szőtt lelkek. Hoffmann Edith sziluettsjei*. The study on the silhouette portraits was written by: György Rózsa, Budapest: Corvina Kiadó, 1988.

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