

*The life and work of Matthias Greischer **

Very little is known about the life and work of Matthias Greischer. According to the written sources that were accepted as authentic still a few years ago, Greischer was born in Frankfurt. In the 1670s in Vienna working as a drawer and plate-engraver for various Georg Matthäus Vischer's Topographie and died in 1712.¹

However, according to recent research, Matthias Greischer was born in Sankt Martin (today's Šmartno pri Litiji,) in Krain (presently: Slovenia) and was baptized on 20 February 1659. He became an orphan while still a little child, as his father, Georgius Greischer died in 1668. Presumably, he completed his studies in Laibach (today's Ljubljana), in the six grades' grammar school run by the Society of Jesus religious order. There he met Johann Anton Thalnitscher (Janez Anton Dolničar), who later became the vicar general of Laibach.² At the start of his career as an artist (drawer and plate-engraver) Greischer joined Johann Weikhard Valvasor, a scientist, patron of arts and historian living in the castle of Wagensberg (Bogenšperk), at a distance of only a couple of kilometres from Greischer's birthplace. Around 1678, Greischer was one of the first members of Valvasor's artistic circle (Andreas Trost, Justus van Nypoort, Peter Mungerstorff, Paul Ritter-Vitezović etc.), living and working for Valvasor in Wagensperg. It must have been here that he learned plate engraving from Andreas Trost, who had formerly engraved some 150 views for G. M. Vischer's Topographia Ducatus Stiriae in Graz.

We do not know exactly where Greischer stayed in the period between 1680 and 1683. Around 1681 Valvasor's artistic circle dissolved. It must have been then that Greischer moved to Vienna or perhaps for a while to Vischer in Graz and engraved plates for Vischer's Topographia Ducatus Stiriae, a book issued in 1681. Besides, he also engraved the plate for Vischer's map of Hungary. The reason for his lasting stay at Kismarton might have been the time-consuming Esterházy family tree engraving he made upon the order of Esterházy Pál. In Vienna, he engraved the map of Upper-Hungary for Reiner and, then in December 1682 the coat of arms of the Lobens Family.

In the summer of 1683 he was in Vienna during the Turkish siege. He was already married at that time, and his first wife, Helena died at the age of 39 on 22 March 1684 and soon thereafter, on 28 August 1684, their children also died. On 05 July 1684 Greischer married Anna Theresia Lerch, daughter of Martin Lerch a plate-engraver from Vienna. The marriage ceremony took place in the Saint Stephen Cathedral and one of the witnesses for Greischer was Johann Jacob Hoffmann, the former court plate-engraver of Esterházy Pál. Following his marriage, Greischer moved from the Hohenmarkt where he had lived to Esterházy's residence, the so-called Hungarisch Haus at Wallner-strasse. Afterwards he lived in Herrengasse.³ The dowry of his wife (160 Gulden)⁴ must have also helped him in establishing by 1685 a plate-engraving workshop and gravure publishing house, the „Matthias Greischer Kupfferstechern bey der Kay. Burgh" in Vienna, near the Burg. He also used the „... beym Kays. Ballhaus" sign. During the next few years he used both texts for giving the location of his workshops. Occasionally, he also used the terms „Akademischen Kupfferstechern", „Kunsthändler" and „Kunstführer" terms in his mark. At the end of the summer of 1686, his six weeks' old son, Matthias, died.⁵ In 1687, he engraved and published several large size engravings jointly with J. M. Lerch, his father-in-law.⁶

Between 1685 and 1688, he regularly exchanged letters with Thalnitscher who lived in Laibach, as a clergyman. As a rule, Thalnitscher asked Greischer to purchase books for him, and to assist him in his other affairs. Greischer enclosed in his letters several engravings he made of the battles against the Turks and at the end of July 1686 he sent him a sketch of the siege of Buda. In 1688 their correspondence suddenly stopped. There is a supposition that the reason for this can be that Greischer died in Buda in 1689, as the brother of his pen-friend, Johann Georg Thalnitscher, a historian, mentioned in his work published under the title "Biblioteca Labacensis publica". Another

presumption is – and probably this is the truth - that Greischer had received a very significant commission from Esterházy Pál.

Greischer moved from Vienna, and in the period between 1688 and 1690 lived at Kismarton, in the court of Esterházy, as his “geographer and calcographer”, so he could no more handle the affairs of Thalnitscher. The third son of Greischer, Mätl (Matthias) died at Kismarton in January 1688, and a couple of months later, in the autumn, his daughter, Anna, too. The same autumn, his twin daughters and then, in December 1689, another daughter of his were born. In the parish registers Greischer figured as a local plate-engraver or as a „Kupferstechers bey Ihro durchlaucht”. The godparents in both cases were members of the prince’s court.⁷ In 1690 he must have still lived in Kismarton with his family, when he made the coat of arms engraving that was published in the book by Esterházy Pál with the inscription „Celsissimi S.R.I. Principis Pauli Esterhasi Hungariae Palatini Geographo-Calcographus Aulicus fecit Kismartonij 1690”. From this point of time until 1712, the year that has been generally accepted as his year of death, we know nothing about his works as an artist.

That is why the theory of Greischer, the plate-engraver and Greischer, the “Bauinspektor in Buda” being the same person was raised in the 1950s by the researchers dealing with architectural history of the era following the recapture of Buda. These researchers found a Matthias Greischer, employed by the Imperial Chamber Office of Buda in the 1690s for the task of drawing a list of the houses and building plots in Buda and Pest. Later this Greischer became the architectural supervisor of the Chamber Office.⁸ He prepared the Land Register of the Buda Castle in 1695 and, as part of his remuneration, he received in 1696, from the Chamber Office a house in the Buda Castle, which was at some time on the plot of today’s Fortuna House.⁹ He completed surveying of the Viziváros (near-the-Danube district of Buda) under the title „Zaiger Über die Wasserstadt” on 30 December 1695.¹⁰ This land register drawn by him contains the data of 284 plots and the buildings on them, many of which were in ruins. His report makes it evident that he had excellent skills not only in determining the location of plots, but that he also had a very thorough knowledge of the former geographical names in Turkish that figured in the cadastre.¹¹ In 1696 Greischer still participated in the setting up of the new land register of Pest, but when it was finished his name was not listed among the authors.

Let us examine the arguments which can support the supposition that Matthias Greischer the architectural supervisor of the emperor working in Buda and Matthias Greischer, the court plate-engraver of Esterházy were one and the same person.

Greischer made several engravings showing the recapture of Buda. They show a very thorough knowledge of the place. What is more, in 1686-87, it was he who made the engraving works for the plate prepared by Charles Juvigny, military engineer that can be considered as one of the first maps of Buda. His engravings of Buda are accompanied by plenty of explanations, and many buildings are identified by name, which suggests that he must have visited the place. Greischer was also an experienced map engraver, something he could very well exploit in this position. In other words, Greischer had the necessary knowledge and skills to fulfil the tasks stemming from an architectural-administrative job.

In marking his works, and naming himself, Greischer is sometimes very elaborate and supplies a lot of useful information about himself and the places he worked in. As we have already seen, in 1690 Greischer called himself a court geographer, i.e., a person with extensive and thorough knowledge of geography, which is something not very common for plate-engravers. The person named Greischer, who worked in Buda in 1695, made a handwritten note on the Zaiger of Viziváros: „... durch Matthia Greischer Geographie Liebhaberen den 30. Dec: Anno, 1695.” We feel that the references to geographical knowledge in case of „both” Greischers is something very remarkable.

We have already noted that, contrary to what J. G. Thalnitscher claimed, Greischer did not die in Buda in 1689. The piece of news Thalnitscher broke contained, however, another element, namely, that Greischer lived in Buda or was preparing to go there, i.e., that Greischer had something to do with Buda.

Based on what we have set down above, it can be taken almost for sure, that the former plate-engraver Matthias Greischer and the architectural supervisor Greischer are one and the same person. But there is also other evidence. Namely, according to the documents in the local land registers the maiden name of the Buda based Greischer's wife was Anna Theresia Lerchin. This means, that the names of the wife of Greischers of Kismarton and Buda were the same, so it can be taken for granted and proved that the "two" Greischers are the same.

We do not know exactly when Greischer left Kismarton. From 1690, no more mention of him, nor any entries concerning him can be found in the Registers of Kismarton, although from 1690, three or four children were born in the family. They must have been born in Buda, but the birth registers of Buda from that era disappeared. Greischer was living in Buda perhaps from 1691, but for sure from 1693.

Matthias Greischer was buried in Buda on 07 January 1697.¹² According to the land registers his house in the Buda Castle area and the other bought in 1693 in Víziváros, were transferred after his death to his heirs (his wife and four children, namely Georg Fridrich, Anna Katharina, Rozália and Barbara). In 1698, his widow sold the house they formerly had in the Buda Castle to Johann Fridrich Seelich chyrurgus.¹³ In the first half of the 18th century in Vienna there lived and worked a Georg Fridrich Greischer, goldsmith, who might have been Greischer's son.

The Work of Matthias Greischer

Greischer prepared his first works in Wagensberg, in the circle of Valvasor, as an apprentice of Andreas Trost. He made his engraving of the Holy Family offering protection against the plague in 1679 and his 18 engravings were included in the illustrated *Metamorphosis* by Ovidius, published by Valvasor (the book was re-edited several times, the last edition was published in Salzburg, in 1704). Among other works, such as the post office in Laibach, the Holy Virgin Saint Mary, Saint Dominic, etc., he made 49 views for *Topographia Archiducatus Carinthiae modernae* and in 1681, 19 views of his were published in *Topographia Ducatus Stiriae* by G. M. Vischer. In 1682 Greischer engraved two maps: the map of Upper Hungary by Joannis Alexander Reiner and the map of Hungary by Georg Matthäus Vischer with a view of Pozsony/Presburg (today's Bratislava). The date of Greischer's first work for Esterházy Pál is known by the year inscribed on the engraving: Greischer was entrusted in 1682 with the task of preparing a large heart-shaped engraved family tree for Esterházy Pál and Esterházy Orsolya.¹⁴ Several of his works were made in the autumn of 1683, such as, e.g., the engravings of the Turkish flag captured by Jan Sobieski, the painting of Saint Mary found in the camp of the Turkish besiegers, and the cross of Prince Kantakuzino.

In the following year, on 2 August, Esterházy Pál offered to Pope Innocent XI the Turkish flag captured on 22 July of the same year in the battle near to Ercsi and in 1684 commissioned from Greischer an engraving of the flag with the translation of the inscriptions in Turkish language on it. Greischer's engravings of the events of the war liberating Hungary from the Turkish rule were published in Vienna continuously from 1685. His known works from 1685 are engravings of Érsekújvár (only a description has remained, but not the engraving), Szolnok, Szarvas and Gyula with historical explanations and the engraving of the arrest of Thököly. In 1686, first he issued an illustrated leaflet of the re-taking of the fortress of Szentjobb and then three engravings of the recapture of Buda with very detailed explanations. For one of these, the drawing was made by Ch. J. Juvigny, military engineer, while Greischer only engraved the plate. There are also several religious engravings made by him in this period: (Veronica's veil, the altar of Saint Mary in Madrid, pilgrimage in Mariazell). In 1687 he made and published with Johann Martin Lerch, his father-in-law, a couple of large sized engravings of the attack against Osijek, adapting the drawing of Ch. J. Juvigny, and of the Nagyharsány battle using as his source material a drawing by Domenico Fontana, a military engineer. In the autumn of 1687 he made an engraving of the siege of Buzin Slavonia. The leaflet he issued on the capitulation of Munkács is known only by description.¹⁵ The fact suggesting that his contact with Valvasor remained unbroken was the portrait he made of Valvasor in 1688 (which portrait was published in the most famous work of Valvasor, the "Die

Ehre des Herzogthums Crain”) and also the fact that a large number of Greischer works have remained in the Valvasor collection in Zagreb.¹⁶

We do not know how Greischer got into contact with Esterházy or who was the one who recommended him to the prince, but we can make several suppositions in this respect. Pavel Ritter-Vitezović, a Croatian writer, historian and a famous genealogist and family tree establisher of his age, stayed at Valvasor’s castle at the same time as Greischer and also dealt with plate-engraving. In 1681, Pavel Ritter-Vitezović as a representative of the town Zengg (today Senj, on the Adriatic coast) took part in the Sopron Diet, where Esterházy was elected to be the palatine. At the beginning of the 1680s Ritter-Vitezović lived in Vienna. It was then that Greischer engraved Ritter-Vitezović’s coat of arms and called Ritter-Vitezović in his dedication his most valued patron.¹⁷ Although Vitezović was in contact with Esterházy their relation was not too close. Greischer could have been recommended to Esterházy also by Valvasor or Vischer, who were in touch with the palatine and a little later also by Johann Jakob Hoffmann, his court plate-engraver. Hoffmann got in touch with Esterházy following the death of Tobias Sadler in 1679 and in 1683 he married Sadler’s widow.¹⁸

Greischer remained in touch with prince Esterházy Pál until the end of the 1680s and, as we have already mentioned, in 1684 he lived in Vienna, in the prince’s house on Wallnerstrasse.

He made the family tree of the Esterházy family¹⁹ for Esterházy Pál at some time between 1682-84. It was his first work known by year. Then, in 1684 he made the engraving of the Turkish flag captured at Ercsi, and from 1688, he was the court plate-engraver of the prince.²⁰ In 1688, he made a commemorative print of the crowning of Joseph I in Presburg together with Lerch, his father-in-law and dedicated it to Esterházy Pál. The engraving of the Holy Trinity statue erected at Kismarton in 1687 must have been also prepared at that time. As evidenced by the engraving made of the Belgrade camp plan, Greischer continued his publishing activities also in Kismarton.²¹

The 117 engravings of devotional image of the Holy Virgin included in the book by Esterházy Pál issued in 1690 under the title „Az egész világon lévő csudálatos boldogságos Szűz képeinek...” (“Devotional images of the Holy Virgin throughout the World”) were made by Greischer, but only two of them (the Holy Virgin of Marizell and the Triumphant Saint Mary of Vienna) have his signature. The engraving of the Esterházy coat of arms as the frontispiece of the book has also been mentioned already. It is the last known engraving by Greischer whose year of making known.

Esterházy Pál also commissioned Greischer to make a series of views.²² The engravings made by Greischer show a very strong influence of the views in *Topographia Archiducatus Austriae Inferioris* by G. M. Vischer. In the series, there are 81 views of 53 settlements. There are settlements of which two views were made from different directions. There are several uncertainties in connection with them, i.e. we do not know when they were made. They could be as well from the first half of the 1680s but also from the period between 1688 and 1690. The proof that they are Greischer’s artwork is evidenced by the fact that his sign can be seen on the engravings of Pergelen and Harthenstein, and it can also be found on a sketch made for a third view, that of Dörfel. It is not certain that every single piece in the series was drawn or engraved by Greischer. Quite probably, other artists were also involved. We can also assume that the series was not completed, and this is the reason why the engravings were not traded and therefore their copies can be found only in the Esterházy archives, but some of them were later distributed to various museums, some were sold to the state and a few found their way onto the market. These engravings are very rare. Hardly any of them can be found in private collections.

During a period of hardly more than a decade, Greischer made approximately 350 engravings, half of which are the views, one third have religious subject and most of the rest deal with the events from the war against the Turks.

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(*An excerpt from the study „Matthias Greischer and the series of views commissioned by prince Paulus Esterházy” published in Szalai Béla *Magyar várak, városok, falvak metszeteken 1515-1800* Vol. IV. Addenda - Kiegészítések Budapest, 2013.)

¹ Thieme-Becker XIV. 590.

² Enciklopedija Slovenije. Vol. III. (1989), 386. s., Lavrič, Ana Janez Anton Dolničar/Thalnitscher's contacts with the copper-plate engraver Matija Greischer In: *Acta Historiae Artis Slovenica*, 1999/4, 75-86.

³ Data on Greischer's stay in Vienna: *Quellen zur Geschichte der Stadt Wien*. VI. Bd. *Regesten von Alexander Hajdecki Wien*, 1908 (full text on Internet Archiv), Haupt, Herbert *Das Hof- und hofbefreite Handwerk im barocken Wien 1620-1770*. (Forschungen und Beiträge zur Wiener Stadtgeschichte Bd. 46, Wien 2007, Seite 549, Nr. 2634.)

⁴ Greischer's marriage contract In: *Gewöhr Protocoll Budai Vár 1695-1705 Budapest City Archives IV.1009.b/2. vol. folio 19*.

⁵ Talnitscher's letter to Greischer October 8, 1686. Little Matthias died on September 20, 1686. (see notes 2 and 3)

⁶ Biographical information on Greischer's stay in Vienna in the 1680s has been published by Geza Galavics in his study added to the reprint edition of Esterházy Pál „Az egész világon lévő csudálatos boldogságos Szűz képeinek...” (Budapest, 1994)

⁷ Prickler, Harald *Eisenstädter bildende Künstler und Handwerker der Barockzeit* (manuscript)

⁸ Pataki Dénes *A magyar rézmetszés története Budapest, 1951*. 132. s.

⁹ *Gewöhr Protocoll Budai Vár 1695-1705 Budapest City Archives IV.1009.b/2. vol. folio 19*.

¹⁰ Nagy Lajos *A Viziváros XVII. század végi topográfiája* In: *Tanulmányok Budapest múltjából XVII*. 1964.

¹¹ Nagy Lajos *Pest város XVII. század végi topográfiájának forrásai* In: *Tanulmányok Budapest múltjából XIV*. 1961.

¹² *Budavári Nagyboldogasszony Parish /Budapest/ registers, Matricula defunctorum 1693-1717* 13. s.

¹³ *Gewöhr Protocoll Budai Vár 1695-1705 Budapest City Archives IV.1009.b/2. vol. folio 41*.

¹⁴ Esterházy family-tree engraving by Greischer In: *Főúri ősgalériák, családi arcképek Hungarian National Gallery Exhibition catalogue 1988*. Nr. A.8. *Cor Esterhasianum, seu genealogia...* (size 80,2x108,2cm)

¹⁵ Greischer's Hungary-related works: Buda (Rózsa György *Budapest látképei* (bp. 1999.9 Nr. 34, 84/b, 154/f és 170), and In Szalai Béla *Magyar várak, városok, falvak metszeteken I-IV. kötet: Érsekújvár 1685/2, Szolnok 1685/9, Gyula 1685/6, Szarvas 1685/3, Thököly elfogása röplap 1685, Szentjobb 1686/1, Eszék 1687/10, Nagyharsány 1687, Pozsony koronázás 1687/1, Munkács 1688/lapp./3 etc..*

¹⁶ Greischer's works in Valvasor Collection: *Stelè, France Valvasorjev krog in njegovo delo* In: *Glasnik Muzejskega Drustva za Slovenijo IX/1-4*. Ljubljana, 1928.

¹⁷ *Valvasor Collection XVI. 9b*.

¹⁸ See note 3.

¹⁹ See note 11.

²⁰ Greischer's works for Esterházy in study of Galavics, see note 6.

²¹ On the 35,8 x31,2cm sized engraving the signature reads: "Matthias Greischer fec: et excud: 1688: 2. Sept:" (Dresden, Staatsarchiv)

²² Dealing with the series of views: Rózsa György *A Birckenstein-féle metszetes könyv Az OSZK kiadványai XXXVI*. Budapest, 1957. 61. lábjegyzet, Guglia, Otto - Schlag, Gerald *Burgenland in alten Ansichten*, Wien, 1986. Ingo Nebehay –Robert Wagner *Bibliographie altösterreichischer Ansichtenwerke aus fünf Jahrhunderten I-VI*. Graz 1981-91. Klimesch, Gertraud: *Zur „Greischer-Serie”. Eine Topographie für Paul Esterházy (1635–1713)*. *Burgenländische Forschungen* 13, 1994, 213–224. Sonderband. Galavics Géza: *A mecénás Esterházy Pál. Vázlat egy pályaképhez*. In *Művészettörténeti Értesítő* 37. 1988. Harald Prickler *Bollwerk Forchtenstein Ausstellungskatalog Burg Forchtenstein 1993*. 228-230. s. Szalai Béla Tobias Sadler, Matthias Greischer és Justus van der Nypoort magyar vonatkozású metszetei In Szalai Béla *Magyar várak, városok, falvak metszeteken I. kötet A mai Magyarország - Kiegészítések 1. Bp. 2003*.