

The Medieval Castle of Buda

The "Mace" Tower thrusts its bulky top skywards—a memento of the Middle Ages—at the southern tip of the conglomerate of diverse pieces of architecture that is known as "The Castle" of Buda.

From this point, several flights of stairs lead to Ferdinand Gate (1836), and here, too, is the entrance passage by which one descends to the underground portion of the huge complex of buildings, where the remains of the medieval royal palace and castle lay hidden for some five hundred years. These remains, opened up—and where necessary reconstructed—through more than two decades of painstaking restoration work, have now been opened for the public.

The oldest portion to re-emerge from under later constructions in the one-time residence of King Sigismund (1387-1437)—who also was Holy Roman emperor. Various sections—rooms adorned by brick-columns and brick-friezes—of Sigismund's palace have been carefully stripped of later plaster-and-brick layers and reconstructed. The limestone statuary here are survivals from an earlier Gothic palace: they are the work of a "Master Janos", who worked in the palace from 1352 to 1374. Sigismund also employed French and German architects and masons.

Renaissance masterpiece

King Matthias' fine late 15th century palace was widely admired in Renaissance Europe. Enthusiastic accounts of the palace's architectural beauty were recorded by Hungarian historians, such as Gaspár Heltai and Bishop Olah, as well as by humanist scholars from other countries—Bonfini, Lubenau and others.

There are pilaster heads, red marble crenellations, chimney-pieces—adorned by the arms of the king and his queen, Beatrix of Aragon. Only a section—a beautiful one—remains of Giovanni Dalmata's red marble coffered ceiling.

The majolica floor (1480) of the rooms of the king's residence shines in bright hues of blue. The Gothic crypt (1365) is surmounted by the Church of the Assumption, rebuilt for Matthias. This church was famed at the time for its 40-member orchestra.

The huge-vaulted baroque "King's Cellar"—opened from the side of the eastern yard—contains some re-



The garden of the medieval palace

markable details—red marble ordres of arches and jambs and one unfinished Renaissance corbel. Alongside there is a set of tools that have been dug up.

Italians and Dalmatians

Matthias' architects came from Italy or Dalmatia; they included: Benedetto da Maiano, who worked here in 1476-78; Chimenti Camicia (1478-90), James of Trau (1476-84) and Giovanni Dalmata (1487-90).

Several huge medieval columns are built into the interior wall of the Gunpowder Magazine, a tower used for storing gun-powder. These are only partially revealed.

Outside the tower a little garden recalls the period: and fig-tree shrubs, and tubs hold fragrant rosemaries stone beds contains lilies and slender bay-trees. By stark contrast, an abstract figure gleams above a little pond, looking like a tennis ball that's plopped into the water.

(bozoky)