

Old maps of Pest-Buda

on show
at Museum
of History

The most valuable pieces of the Budapest Museum of History's (II. Szent György tér 2 in Buda Castle) map collection make up the material of an exhibition opening Friday Feb. 27. The maps, dating from the period between the 17th and the 19th centuries, give an authentic picture of the development of Pest and Buda. Some of the maps were drawn by outstanding Hungarian surveyors, Mihály Ruttkay, Antal Balla and Adám Horváth. The makers of the others are unknown.

Eva Gál, the organizer of the exhibition, said that the earliest maps were hand-drawn, and as

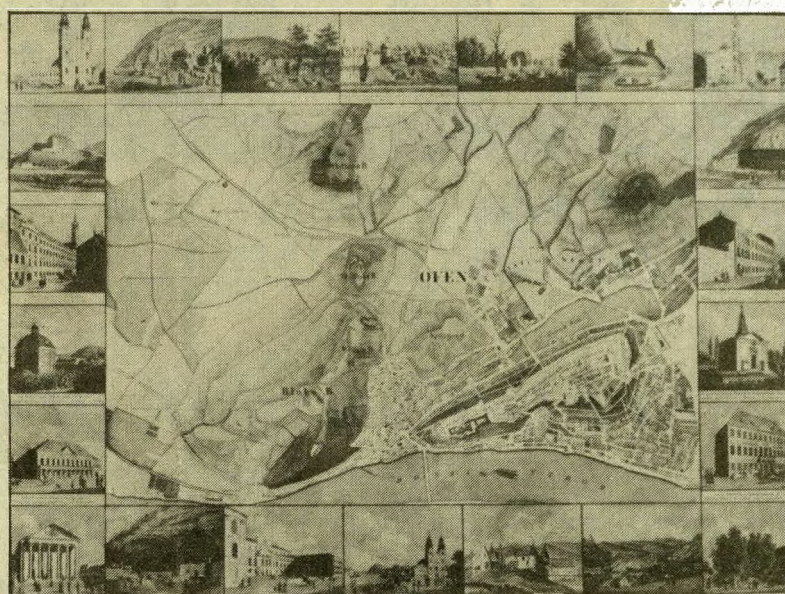


PHOTO A. LEVAI

A map of Buda from 1837, with sights of the capital in the frame



PHOTO A. LEVAI

Mihály Ruttkay's map with the plots delimitation scene

such, count as unique pieces. They all had a concrete practical purpose. They contain historical data and facts that could not be found elsewhere.

Some of the earliest known Hungarian maps date back to 1686, the year when the 150-year Turkish rule ended in Hungary. The maps from this period mostly deal with the siege of Buda Castle. Drawn at the scene, the maps are authentic historically. The emplacement of the troops, cannons, trenches, and the walls of the castle are all drawn in minute detail.

The maps dating back to 1750 are even more ornate. Small baroque scenes can be found in the corners where the title frame is. Such are the five maps depicting the vicinity of Buda. It is interesting to note the names on the map. Beside the Latin names, one can see Hungarian names. Specialists have shown that these names originate from the Middle Ages and certainly not from after the Turkish rule, for then the settlers of this region were Germans who spoke no Hungarian.

An interesting scene can be seen on one of these maps. An old man is being sworn in by an official during the inspection of landmarks. In the 18th century, landowners often quarrelled about the placing of border marks, so they had maps drawn to prove their claims. The position of the border marks was determined by tradition, so the authorities had to find people who knew from hearsay where these marks had been, and were ready to swear before officials. After this the border mark was verified.

All these maps were drawn in ink made from an extract of the oak apple and were painted in water colours. The hills and mountains were not yet marked by level lines, they were only indicated by shading while, the rest of the map signs were the same as today, with the exception of villages that were indicated by the ground plan of houses, with the church drawn out in full.

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tion of villages that were indicated by the ground plan of houses, with the church drawn out in full. The oldest existing map of Pest was made around 1720. The streets and sites cannot be easily distinguished, for the map was damaged during the 1838 great flood of Pest. The ink had been nearly completely soaked away, nevertheless the city walls are clearly perceptible. These walls ran along today's Tanács körút, Deák Ferenc utca and Múzeum körút. As houses were built along both sides of the wall, it lost its importance and was pulled down (except an existing small portion left intact). This map has great historical value for it shows a state of the town that is only known from this map.

On the map from around 1775, we can roughly judge the size of Buda and Pest. Building in Pest began in the 1730-ies. The nearer and farther parts of the outskirts began developing. These today are known as Ferencváros, Terézváros and Józsefváros. But the larger area of today's Pest

was covered by quicksand. Buda lay on a narrow strip along the Danube, and there were no signs of further development. The borders were Gellért Hill, Sas Hill, Orbán Hill, Martonovics Hill, Rózsa Hill and Mátyás Hill. The upper regions were co-

vered with woods, fields and vineyards, giving Buda's famous red wine, which provided most of its income. An interesting feature of the maps is that the gallows of the town were also marked.

The establishment of the first Land Surveying Institute (Institutum Geometricum) meant a landmark in the development of modern techniques of map drawing. Owing to this, maps took on a new face. Level lines appeared together with Hungarian writing in 1843. In the 18th century, the map inscriptions were German as that was the language of administration.

Finally, there is a series of three maps which are from 1837. They give an all-round picture of Pest and Buda.

The maps on display show a totally different town from the one we know. But it is with their help that we can see what has remained unchanged. These changes took place within a span of 150 years, and there was no other town in Europe that changed so fast from a little town into a large city.

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DAILY NEWS

1981 FEB 2 71