

HOW PEST-BUDA BECAME BUDAPEST

Architecture in the Hungarian capital about 1873

by

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Budapest in its present form came into existence after the unification of three boroughs. Buda and Óbuda are on the right or west bank of the Danube, amidst the hills, Pest is on the fringe of the Great Hungarian Plain on the left or eastern bank. The trade route linking Augsburg and Vienna with Constantinople had always crossed the Danube there. The Hungarians chose to settle there at the end of the 9th century A.D. The growth of towns was slow, and it was interrupted first by the Tartar raid of 1241-42 and then by the Turkish occupation which lasted from 1541 till 1686.

The growth of the three townships, recently liberated from Turkish rule, was slow. The progress of the Castle Hill settlement, earlier the most populous area of Buda, slackened considerably in the eighteenth century when Pest grew vigorously. In the nineteenth century the unification of the three towns became timely and was finally put into effect in 1873.

Óbuda, which had been the demesne of Hungarian queens, was in part built over the ruins of Aquincum, a town and military camp in Roman Pannonia. Growth was restricted by the manorial rights of the queen and convents and its predominantly agricultural and rural character remained virtually untouched even in the Baroque age.

Buda offered a different picture. The royal palace built on Castle Hill and the walled city of the burghers reached a peak of development in the thirteenth-fourteenth century. The Royal Court was frequently in residence there. Sigismund of Luxembourg, King of Hungary and Holy Roman Emperor enlarged the gothic palace in Buda, turning it into an imposing edifice, employing architects from Ulm and elsewhere. It was further extended by Matthias Corvinus, the humanist king who ruled in the second half of the fifteenth century. This extension showed an early taking over of the noblest forms of Italian Renaissance architecture, which accorded

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with the taste of King Matthias's Italian wife, Beatrix of Aragon and her entourage. The carved stones excavated in the course of the past twenty years betrayed considerable affinity with those produced by the workshop of the brothers Benedetto and Giuliano da Maiano, both employed by the court at Urbino, and with similar products by Spanish masters of majolica. The Corvina codexes of King Matthias's library were the masterpieces of the best illuminators of the age.

The ingeniously constructed pontoon bridge over the Danube which probably went back to the time of King Sigismund could not stand up to the drifting ice in the river. One may therefore say that Buda and Pest were only really and permanently linked by the first Danube bridge which was also in service in winter.

The idea of building this bridge was István Széchenyi's, whose father Ferenc had played a prominent part in raising the cultural level of his country. He had founded the Hungarian National Museum. István was much impressed by his own travels in England and what he had seen there: bridges, well-cared for highways, municipal amenities, city lights and pavements, all the outward signs of the country which led the world in industrial development. He was interested in other British achievements too, like river shipping, industry in general, horsemanship, horse races, etc. All these Széchenyi wanted to bring to his own country. He always found time and energy to mention, explain and propagate them at home.

The first permanent bridge over the Danube, the Chain Bridge built in 1842-49 and designed by the Count's Scots engineer friend William Tierney Clark was mainly due to his efforts and organizing skill.

The Chain Bridge was an indispensable factor in unifying the boroughs of Pest, Buda and Óbuda which was enacted in 1872 and implemented in 1873. Another Scots engineer's, Adam Clark's ingenuity also played an important role. He was in charge of the Chain Bridge construction and later became the builder of the Tunnel.

The Tunnel (1857) connected areas beyond Castle Hill, mostly the Krisztinaváros district with the life of the new metropolis.

The neighbourhood of the Chain Bridge became the centre of new buildings. At the Pest bridgehead the new headquarters of the Academy of Sciences were built by A. Stüler in 1862, and at Buda that of the Savings Bank by Miklós Ybl in 1866. There, as elsewhere in the country, Romanticism was the ruling style at the time, going back to and making use of medieval motives. In the sixties Eclecticism became dominant. The Main Custom House, a number of residential houses around the National Museum and the present Népköztársaság útja were amongst the most

notable constructions of Eclecticism in the sixties and seventies. These buildings had a certain dignity reminiscent of the neo-Renaissance work of Sir Charles Barry in London and of Semper's Dresden.

In the nineteenth century Buda gradually lost its former leading position. The terrain and medieval walls hindered development. At the same time Pest's population soon grew fourfold, amounting to 200,000 out of the total of 276,000 in the year of unification.

The town centre of the Middle Ages, the city of Pest, had been enlarged earlier, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, by the Classicist district of Lipótváros. A new town development scheme was needed since the classicist reconstruction plan by János Hild proved to be inadequate for the rapidly growing capital. More far-reaching projects were necessary for coping with future needs. But first of all an organization had to be set up which could deal with the often ungenerous conduct of affairs by the city corporation, and its overriding preference for saving at the expense of financing developments.

It was interesting to notice how once again a British example suggested this metropolitan organization. Gyula Andrásy, Széchenyi's friend and follower, as Prime Minister of the new responsible government of Hungary after the *Ausgleich*, the compromise between Parliament and the Hapsburg dynasty in 1867, fully realized the problems of the capital which were not purely those of Budapest but of the whole country. At that time all the resources of Buda and Pest were not enough to tackle them. Andrásy recognized the urgent need to create a body with sufficient financial means and executive power. He set up such a body on the model of the Metropolitan Board of Works directing the twenty-eight metropolitan boroughs of London. This British board was designed to deal with town planning, highway construction, river control, drainage, gas supply, fire service, new stores, etc. It became the highest authority concerning construction generally. Andrásy had ample opportunity to observe the functioning of the Metropolitan Board of Works of London from the very start. Using its example the 10th Hungarian Act of Parliament of 1870 was enacted containing the charter of the Metropolitan Board of Public Works, and assigning its duties and activities.

This Metropolitan Board of Public Works ordered a new survey of the capital and a reconstruction plan for 1873, envisaging a second, outer circle (Grand Boulevard) parallel to the smaller, inner one (Small Boulevard) as well as what is Népköztársaság Avenue today, a new and wide avenue destined to take over much of the traffic of the overcrowded Király utca, leading out to the Városerdő area.