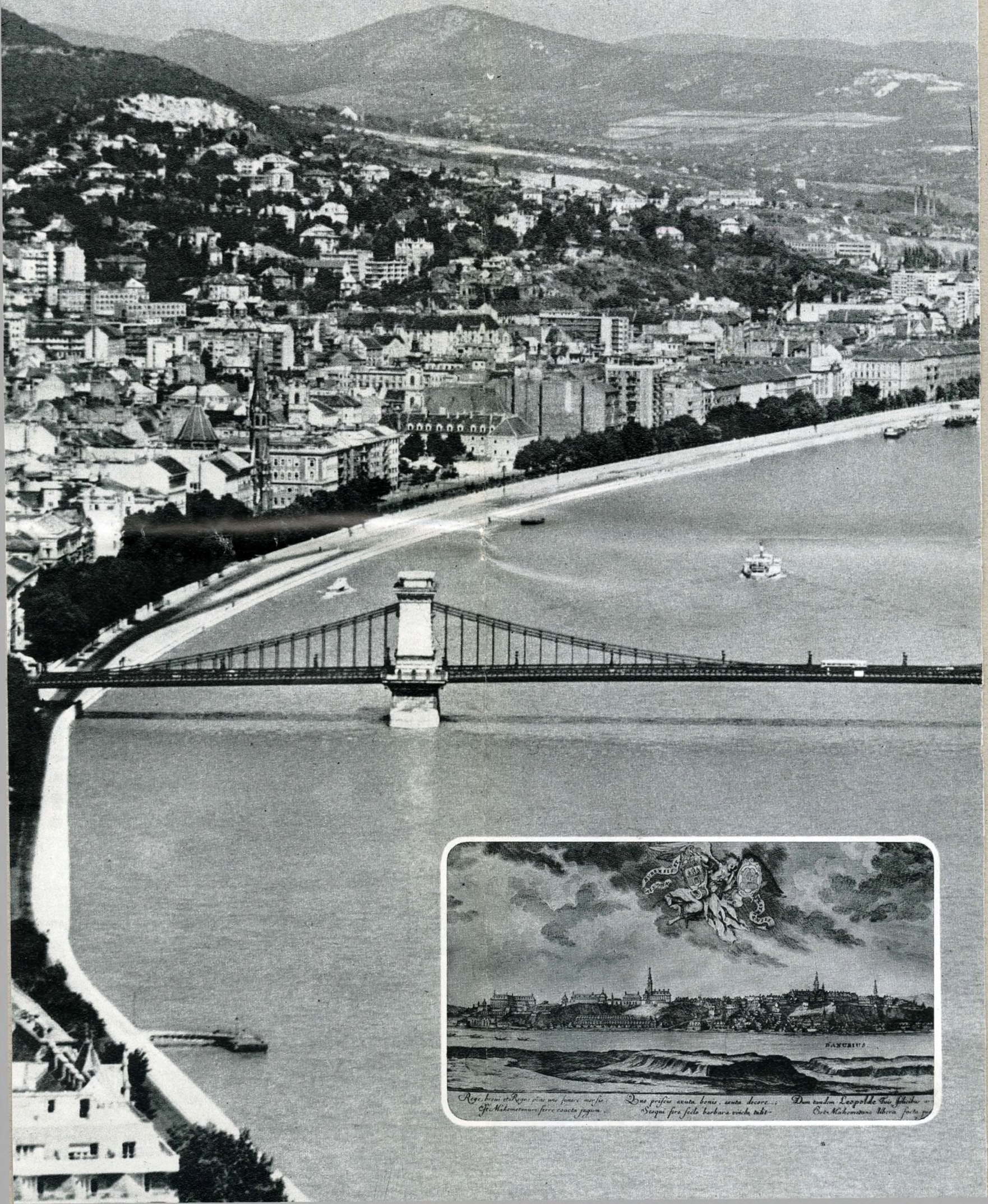


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*Rege, beati et Regni sine uno foveat, nisi sic
Sic Mahometanus, ferre exacta pugna
Duo profus axuta bonis, acuta decore...
Sicque fore fide barbara vicia, takt
Dum tandem Leopoldo suo, flicite
Cui Mahometanus illera, facta, qui*



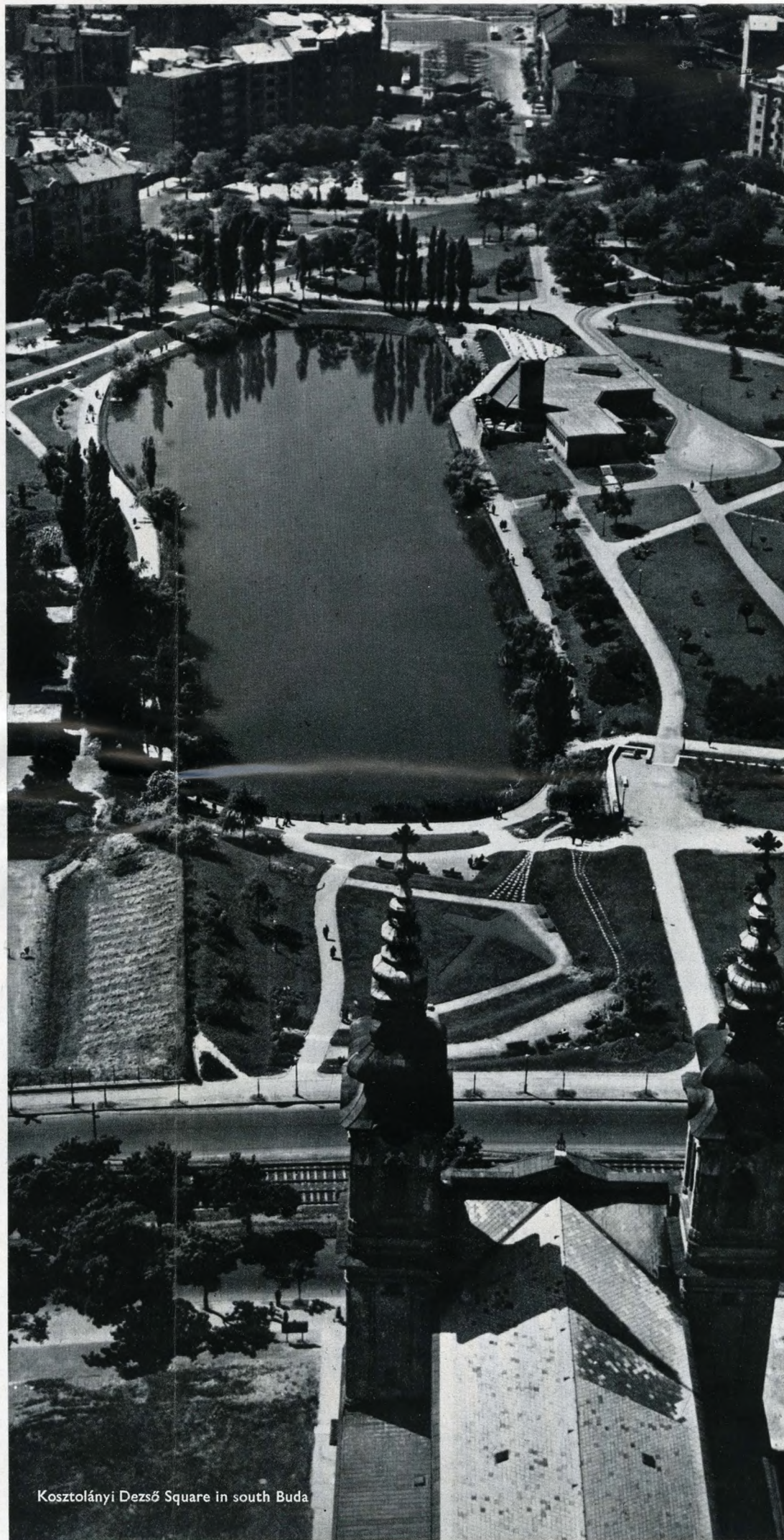
BUDAPEST

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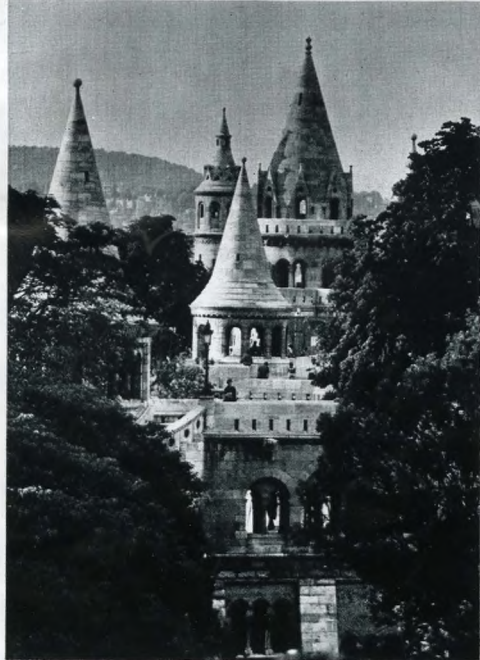
Budapest, a city of two million people, and with its 525 square kilometre area—more than five times that of Paris—the largest capital in continental Europe, lies at the junction of the northern latitude of 47 and the eastern meridian of 19 from Greenwich. The contours of the earth betray obvious cataclysms in geological history: the cliffs of Gellért Hill, 5,000 million years old, marking a fault in the dolomite silts of the Thetis sea, overlook the Danube. Close by there are volcanic deposits, freshwater remnants from swamps, and the drifts of wind and water. With its dozen or so caves and 75 medicinal wells of different types, this is, to say the least, an interesting geological district. If we consider in addition to this the exciting flora (for instance, on Sashegy (Eagle Hill), now a residential district in the city proper, there is within a single hectare a flower and a typical plant surviving from the Ice Age, neither of which are to be seen anywhere else but in Scandinavia), we find ourselves insisting that if this were not a metropolitan area today, a National Park should be set up here.

It is generally said that the Buda side on the right bank of the Danube is hilly, whereas Pest on the left or east bank is flat. As a matter of fact, the plain of Pest on the left side is also skirted by low hills, and so the city actually lies in a basin bisected by the Danube, running in a north-south direction. This stretch of the Danube is 95.65 metres above sea level; and János-hegy (John Hill), the highest point in the city, is 529 metres above sea level. The annual mean temperature is around 11 to 12 degrees centigrade, with a wide—almost 50-degree—fluctuation between winter and summer, the swing away from the mean being greater in the summer. In the summer the thermometer often registers above 30 degrees; but in the winter it rarely shows less than minus 10 degrees centigrade. The annual average of hours of sunshine is unusually high; about two thousand. The average precipitation is from 5 to 6 hundred millimetres a year. If, on top of this, we take into consideration that the top soil in this district is very fertile; that the city is surrounded by forests, in fact, there are about four thousand hectares of virgin forests within the city limits (with an astonishing variety of wild life); that apart from the natural protection offered by caves, there is a lot of clay suitable for brick-making, plenty of good limestone, and nearby surface coal, it becomes easy to understand that man has been happy to settle in this district since primordial times. On the evidence of the famous Vértesszőllős finds dating back 700,000 years, many believe that probably the first pithecanthropi of the European continent settled here. More distinct outlines of the history of the settlement can be gained from the fifty-thousand-year-old sites of the Neanderthal man excavated just south of Budapest, the three- or four-thousand-year-old Bronze-Age settlements in north Budapest, and the dozen or so Celtic remnants on the two banks of the Danube and on its islands.

The most suitable crossing place for east-west traffic developed here on the Danube about ten thousand years ago. As a result, towns and fortifications to protect the ford were built from the very earliest times. We know of the Celtic Ac Inc (Town of Waters), which became, by about the beginning of the calendar, the Aquincum of the Roman Empire; we can still see its impressive ruins at Óbuda, the old northern section of Buda, and we can admire its south-east outposts, Contra-Aquincum, on the other side of the Danube, near the Elizabeth Bridge bridgehead on the Pest side. Attila the Hun had a castle and city here, and so did the Lombards and the Avars, to mention only the major tribes of the Great Migration who settled over a longer period in this area. Finally, after



Kosztolányi Dezső Square in south Buda



The Fisherman's Bastion in the Castle Hill district of Buda

their conquest at the end of the ninth century, the Magyars founded a town here.

It was, therefore, transport which nursed Budapest to life since the town was situated at the junction of the north-south water routes (along the Danube) and the east-west land routes. Ever since then transport facilities have left their mark on the city. In the middle of the last century, when railway construction first started, the Hapsburgs did all they could to ensure that the railway lines of the Monarchy had their main junction in Vienna. Against these political efforts, the stubborn facts of nature and history insisted that Budapest should be the centre of the railway network throughout the Carpathian basin. Even nowadays transport dominates Budapest industry: its oldest major factory still makes electric and Diesel locomotives and bridges; more recently the biggest bus factory on the Continent was built here (it now ranks second in the world, but is expected to expand its production and take the top place in a short time); and if not transport, then communications determine the character of the newest industry, the famous telecommunications works in Budapest.

It was transport which turned Budapest into a major commercial centre. Already in the Middle Ages this was the most important market of east and south-east European animal and corn trade, of Transdanubian wines, and of timber from the Carpathians and south Europe. Andersen, the great Danish teller of fairy-tales, who visited Budapest in the middle of

A statue of King Stephen, founder of Hungary, and a relief of the most popular Hungarian king, Matthias, in the Castle Hill district of Buda



View from the tunnel which passes under the Castle Hill towards the Chain Bridge



The statue of Bishop Gellért and the Elizabeth Bridge

The south wing of the Buda Castle





A new housing estate



the last century, admired and recounted one of the four big annual fairs held here. Even now every year Budapest is the scene of big international fairs which play a significant part in east-west trade.

Commercial investments and the traditional market commodities influenced the development, at the end of the 18th century, of the Budapest textile, wood, milling and food industries, and of engineering which serviced them. The industrial boom of the 19th century attracted manpower to Budapest from the entire Carpathian basin, and within the lifetime of two generations the population of the city increased ten-

fold. The Budapest working class of about half a million people developed in the 20th century, including highly qualified working-class dynasties, tens of thousands of skilled workers on whose knowledge and ability such exacting industries as the electric and electronic rely, and, most recently, the pharmaceutical industry in which Hungary has reached a place close to the top in the last decade.

The combined advantages of the geographical and economic situation practically attracted historical disasters. Let us look at the last thousand years: Budapest was ravaged by the Mongolian invasion in the mid-13th century; the Turks

occupied and held for a hundred and fifty years its fortification, the second biggest in Europe, the only medieval fortress that is still inhabited, the Castle of Buda; Rákóczi's malcontents attacked the Hapsburgs at the castle walls; a bloody battle was fought here by the freedom-fighters of the 1848-49 War of Independence, and finally, in the winter of 1944-45, the remnants of the defeated Nazi army entrenched itself here and made a desperate last defence for fifty days—having blown up all the bridges over the Danube. So the history of Budapest is a story of destruction and repair. From Central Asia to the Atlantic Ocean, from the Middle East and North Africa to Scandinavia, there is not a nation whose soldiers have not fought at some time, in some campaign over the last one thousand years for or against Buda.

Budapest is an ancient city, one of the oldest settlements in Europe, and yet under its present double name it is one of the youngest. This year will be the centenary of the unification of Ancient Roman Óbuda, of Buda—founded in the 13th century—and of Pest, which started its urban development in the 18th century.

It is only natural that with such geographical attributes and over such a vast area the cityscape is highly varied. The present 22 districts constitute an artificial administrative division: there are many more quarters, each with an individual atmosphere and "personality". And this great variety, of course, makes for some striking contrasts: densely populated, noisy blocks of stone, and four thousand hectares of virgin forest where you may see deer, fox or wild boar in the course of a walk; sleepy Baroque small-town-like districts, and modern housing projects smelling of fresh mortar; modest little family houses with tiny gardens, and distinguished looking villas; whitewashed village churches and a neo-Gothic Parliament

Baross Square with the largest Budapest railway station



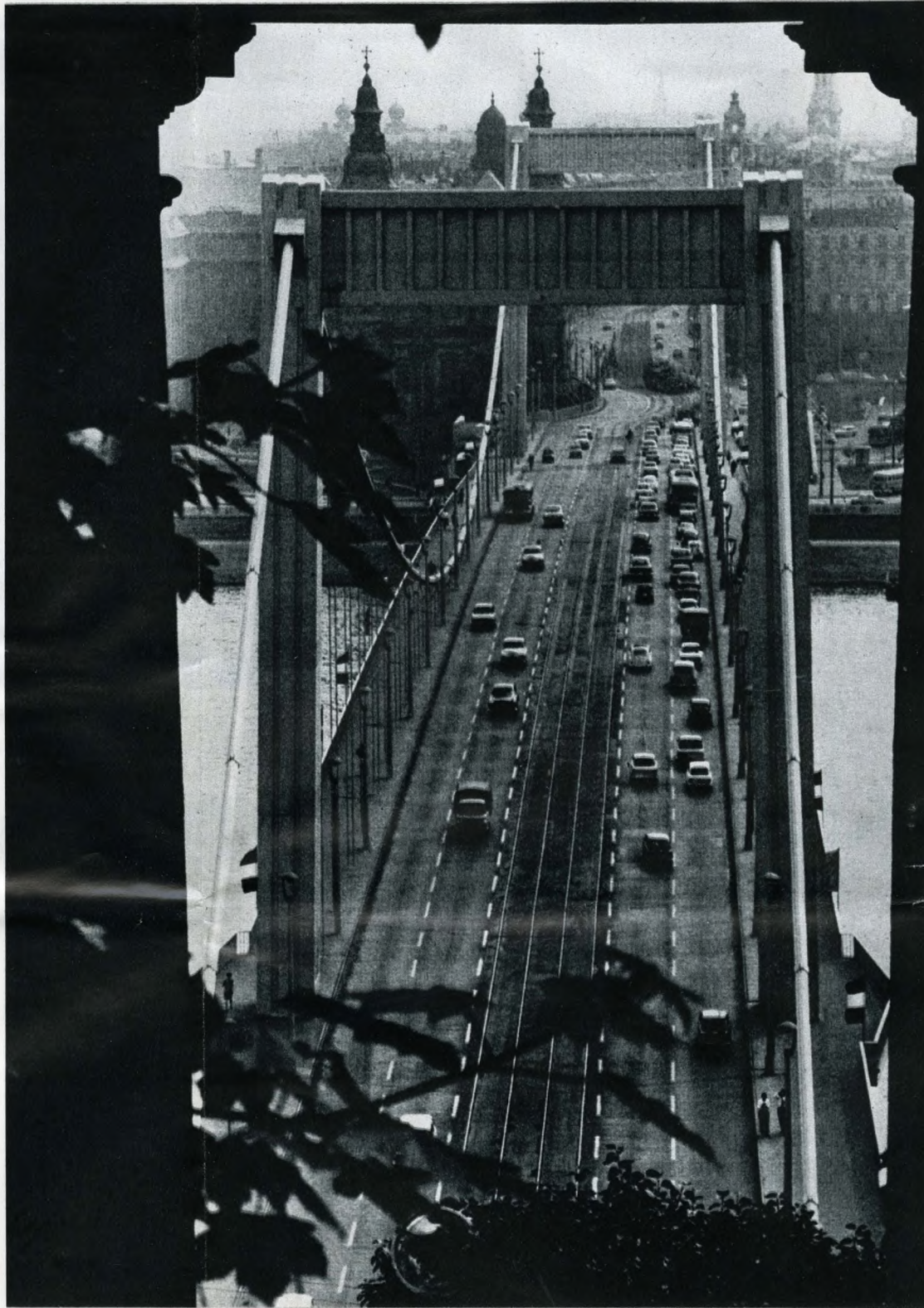


The heart of downtown Pest, Váci Street

building of which any great power might be proud.

How can the general cityscape be best described? Well, one of the things most characteristic of Budapest is that because of all the ravages of history, it has not a single monument which we could call unique. And yet everything that it has to offer—Aquincum and modern Óbuda, the Castle Hill district of Buda (an effective skanzen of the history of architecture), the ten splendid bridges across the Danube and all the natural and cultural treasures—make it in its way unparalleled. There are few places in the world where space can evoke time, and the present call to mind history with such eloquent suggestivity. And the face of the city is rapidly

The most popular spot for students—the steps beside the Danube



The Elizabeth Bridge

Photos: Demeter Balla, Lajos Czeizing Peter Korniss and MTI

changing. For one thing, under the five-year plan now under way, almost 20 thousand flats are being built annually, and about six thousand are demolished. In other words, entirely new quarters are springing up and some of the old districts are undergoing considerable transformation. Not to speak of such large-scale public constructions—bound to alter completely the look and life style of the city—as the new row of hotels planned for the Danube embankment on the Pest side, or the Metro, the construction of which is taking place at six different sites.

Budapest is a lively and vigorously intellectual city. Ninety per cent of the young people completing the eight-grade general school continue their studies. The ten Budapest colleges and universities supply over ten thousand new graduates every year. And what more beautiful campus feature for Budapest students

than the miles of marble steps leading down to the Danube! If a tourist stops on Elizabeth Bridge near examination time in May and looks down at the colourful crowds of sunbathing, courting and chiefly studying couples, he might think that Budapest is a city of young people. But he would be wrong. This is again something in which Budapest is a city of extremes: there are over 400,000 retired people living here. In contrast to the general tendency seen elsewhere, over one third of all the pensioners in Hungary congregate in the capital.

There are two things in which the people of Budapest are absolutely united and naive believers. They are convinced that this is where the world's tastiest dishes are to be had, and they will believe anyone who says that Budapest is the most beautiful city in the world. Let it be according to their belief.

Lajos Mesterházi