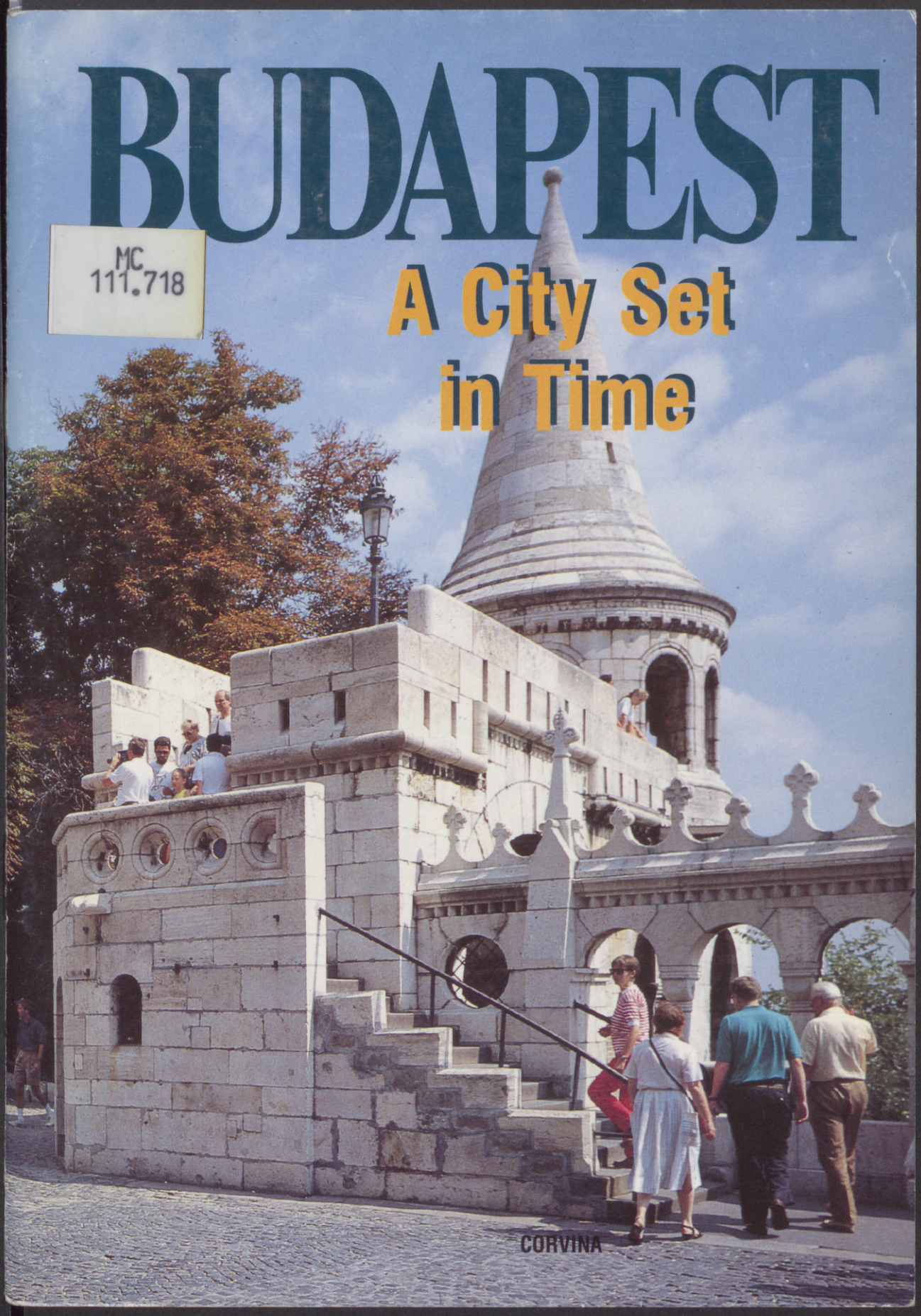
BUDAPEST

A City Set in Time



CORVINA

Where shall we begin our journey? On one of Budapest's famous bridges, perhaps? Or down by the river, before cutting across the city on one of the main avenues, pausing only to take the odd glance down a side-street from time to time? Or shall we proceed in chronological order, beginning with Aquincum, the Roman ruins to the north of the city? The history of many a European city begins with such a place. Or shall we set out from one of the railway stations, or from one of the airport terminals, where most visitors from abroad

1. A view of the city from the top of Gellért Hill– Buda (to the left) and Pest (to the right)

2. On Margaret Island

3. Váci utca– the main street of old Pest

usually get their first glimpse of the city, a city of which they may know nothing except that it is the capital of Hungary?

No. Let's start in the very heart of the city, on the top of Gellért Hill, a rugged rock which plunges sharply into the Danube and where once, or so legend would have it, witches gathered on broomsticks. It was from here, too, that in the 11th century St. Gerard (Gellért), a bishop from Venice, was cast into the river by the pagan Magyars who did not appreciate his attempts at converting them to the Christian faith.

Pausing by one of the handrails which skirt the hilltop and the steep paths around the hill, we can see immediately behind us the Citadel. However, it is not the ancient fortress that it may seem from far below, but rather a construction from the period just after the Revolution and War of Independence of 1848. It was built by the victorious Austrians in order that they could keep an eye on the rebellious town below. Today it houses a hotel and restaurant. Adjacent to the Citadel is the Liberation monument from 1947, a huge figure of a woman holding a palm-branch skywards. From here we have perhaps the most spectacular view of the city.

Way below us the mighty Danube flows from its source in far away northern mountains through the gorges and passes of the Balkans and beyond to the Black Sea, and gently curves through the city. To our left, almost out of view but still well within the city limits, is the green expanse of Margaret Island (Margitsziget) with its parks, swimming pools, and hotels. The island is named after a medieval princess who was confined to the now ruined convent, and who later became a saint.

4. Liberty Bridge with Hotel Gellért behind it

5. Statue of St. Gerard (Gellért)

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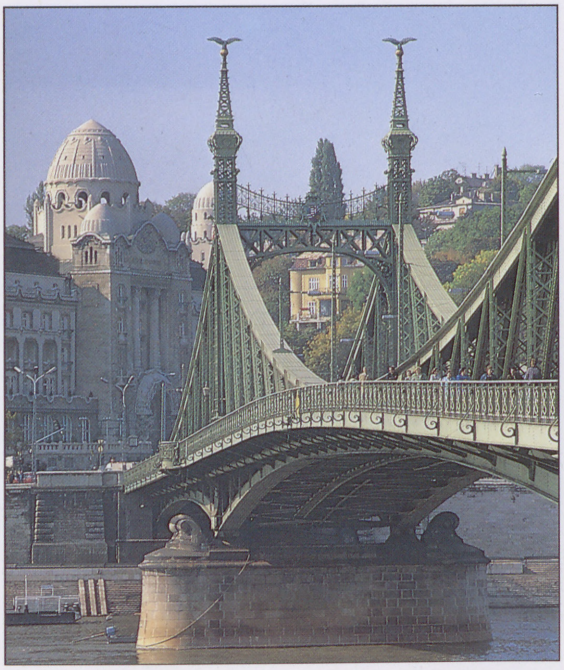

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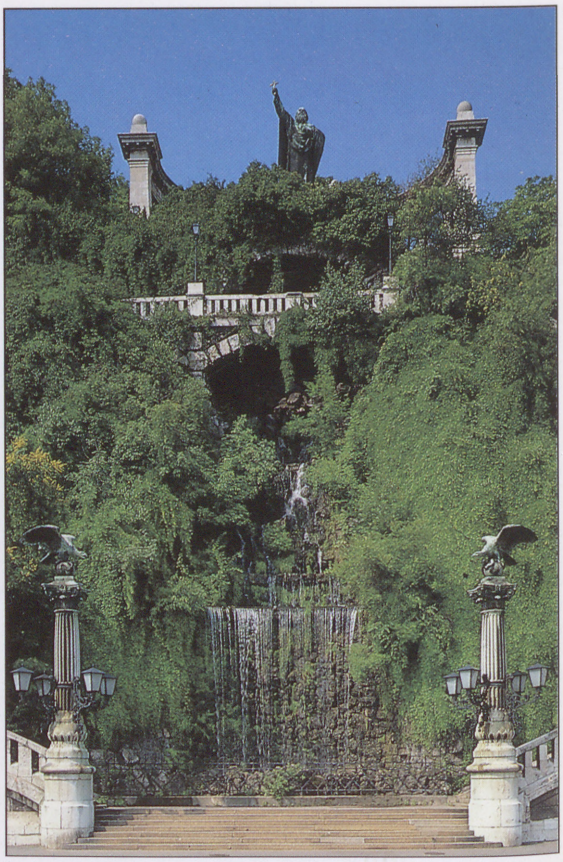

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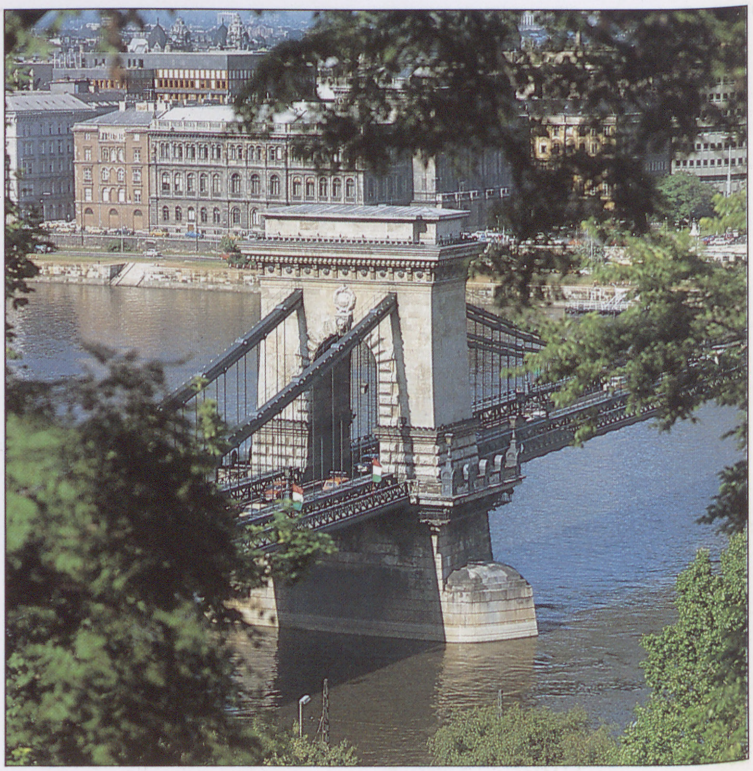
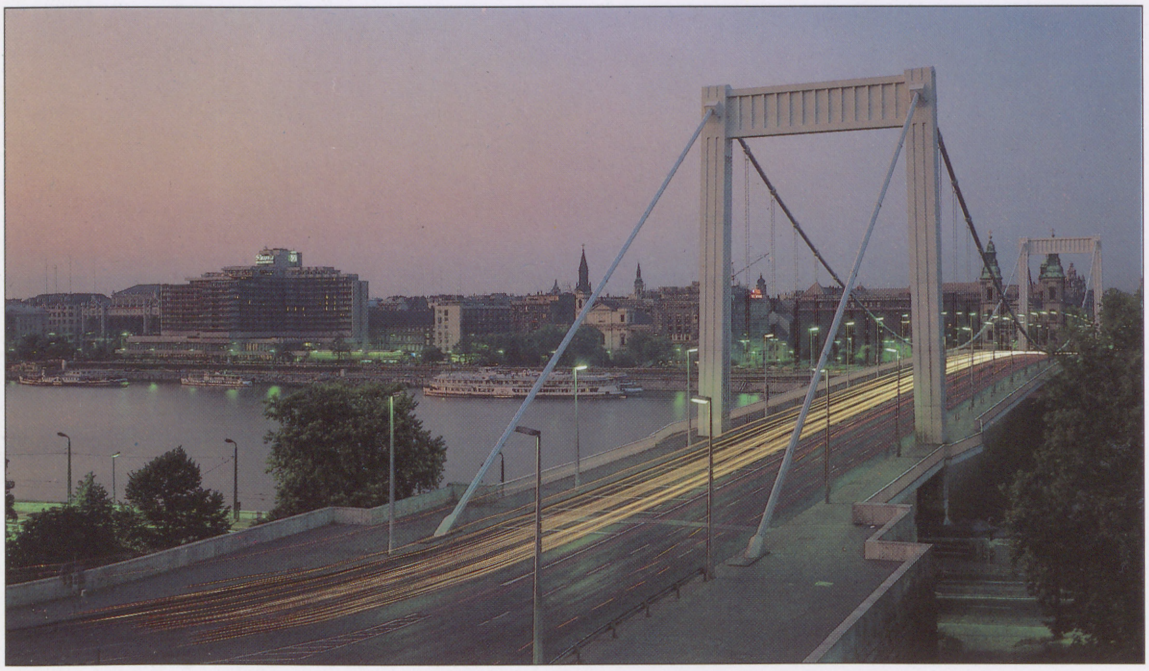


Opposite us, in the fog and haze, stretches the flat expanse of Pest county and the city of the same name which grew during the last century into today's metropolis. Beyond is the Great Hungarian Plain, the famous *puszta* (which means "wasteland" or "barren land"), stretching away until finally it meets the mountains of Transylvania.

To our left and to the north, nestling amongst the now residential but once wooded hills, lies Buda. This old town on the right bank of the river abounds in history, but it is Castle Hill and the former Royal Palace which dominates the landscape. Looking across the river again, we have the Belváros, the inner city of Pest, and between these two old towns, the bridges. In the centre is Lánchíd or Chain Bridge, the first and to this day the most beautiful bridge in the city. Below us, at the very foot of the hill, is Elizabeth Bridge, named after an elegant Habsburg Empress who was one of the most beautiful women of her day. This was the last bridge to be re-built after the devastation of the Second World War. The river is at its narrowest here and thus, as with many towns and cities, it was at this point that the first ferry crossing ran, sparking off the growth of the town.

To the far right a wide floodplain stretches away before our eyes. The Danube widens again, branches out and leaves several islands in its wake. To the south are factory chimneys and the rings of the uniform, matchbox dwellings of modern housing estates. There is also the island of Csepel which is the longest on



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6. The Chain Bridge– the first stone bridge on the Danube

7. Elizabeth Bridge– at the foot of Gellért Hill, where the river is at its narrowest

8. A barge heading north– from the plain towards the mountain, from the Balkans to the heart of Central Europe

the Danube (50 km). It also has the largest industrial complex in the country at its northern end.

If we crane our necks a little, beneath us, a touch to the right, at the foot of Szabadság Bridge, several oriental cupolas will come into view. These are examples of how the architects of the *Art Nouveau* period imagined the style of the original Magyar settlers, who came from the east. The majestic Hotel Gellért, of which they are part, was built according to this supposed style. To this day, it remains the most characteristic and charming hotel in the city. A famous medicinal spa, which itself is of architectural significance, is attached to the hotel and fed by one of the dozen thermal springs which were found gushing from Gellért Hill in ancient times. Bathers here have included crusaders bound for the Holy Land.

On the riverbank directly below us is another cupola. Although it is less imposing and more modest than those on the hotel, it is, at least, original. It crowns a Turkish bath, still in use, from the Ottoman reign of 150 years. The Turks resided in Buda from 1526 to 1686, during which time only a slim crescent of land in northern and western Hungary remained in Christian hands. This was the age of Luther, Charles V, and Francis I of France. Although it was cut off from the rest of Hungary by the advancing Turks, and indeed became an independent state between the two great empires of the Habsburgs and the Sultan, the principality of Transylvania also remained Christian.

From our lookout on the top of Gellért Hill the lay-out of the Pest side of the city can be clearly seen: concentric semi-circular boulevards which begin and end at the bridges, and intersecting avenues which radiate outwards cutting across the circular plan like the spokes of a wheel before continuing on to meet the main roads out of the city. This neat city lay-out, however, only applies to the Pest side of the river. In Buda the imposing blocks of Gellért and Castle Hills stood firmly in the way of 19th-century town planners, who laid down the framework for the growth of Budapest into the city we see today. In the 1880s and 90s there was rapid development, but because of their efforts Pest was able to absorb this growth, and indeed, that of the 20th century, too. Pest is now the

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cultural, industrial, business and political hub of the country. Until very recently Buda, with its leafy residential atmosphere, was a complete contrast to Pest. Consequently, the inhabitants of the Pest side of the river have always regarded living in Buda as, well, shall we say, snobbish!

In fact, much of Buda retains the atmosphere of an old Baroque town. In the Middle Ages it was a busy capital, its towers and palaces rivalling those of Vienna and Prague, but neglected under the 150 years of Turkish rule and destroyed during the siege of 1686, much of the original town had to be rebuilt. Upon the ruins of Gothic mansions and villas, Buda became a sleepy and somewhat provincial town. Middle-class German families settled within its walls whilst the Hungarian royalty resided in Vienna, and the Parliament, which had fled from the Turks, set up its seat in Pozsony (today's Bratislava), where it remained until 1848. And when finally in the 19th century a new political and national awakening developed, the Parliament returned, but this time to Pest, the new Hungarian capital.

Looking across the Danube at the multitude of buildings in Pest, a semi-circular road is clearly discernible running from Szabadság Bridge round to the Chain Bridge. Though this "inner circle" has different names along its route, it is generally referred to as the Kiskörút. It roughly follows the line of the old city walls. If we were to enter some of the courtyards of the larger houses on the stretch called Múzeum körút, we would find the remains of 5 to 6 metre high walls of rubble and plain stone which, judging by their appearance, were built more to keep out robbers rather than marauding armies!

By the beginning of the last century Pest had already begun to spill over its own walls and go beyond the city gates. These gates, which stood at the head of the main roads out to Vác, Hatvan and Kecskemét, have since been pulled down. The original National Theatre was built in 1837 but again, outside the city walls. It was erected with money raised from amongst people nationwide, which illustrates the extent of national feeling at that time and gives us a foretaste of the great events that were to occur.

The increasingly important commercial centre of Pest was shaping up for its new role. The key moment arrived in 1848 when, only a few hundred yards away from the site of the old theatre, in the gardens of the new National Museum, the flame of revolution that had swept through Europe flared up. A young poet by the name of Sándor Petőfi now regarded as the greatest poet of Hungarian Romanticism, recited one of his verses before a mass gathering of citizens. Petőfi, who died in battle at the tender age of 26 and who is the embodiment of the ideal of a "national poet", made such an impact on the angry crowd that they stormed a printing house and issued their demands without regard for the censorship laws of the day. Then they released a journalist imprisoned for his political views and finally succeeded in implementing a provisional revolutionary government, taking over, in effect, control of the city. This "bloodless revolution"–known as the "revolution of umbrellas" due to the fact that bad weather forced the crowd to huddle beneath their umbrellas–signalled the beginning of the War of Independence against the Viennese government. All

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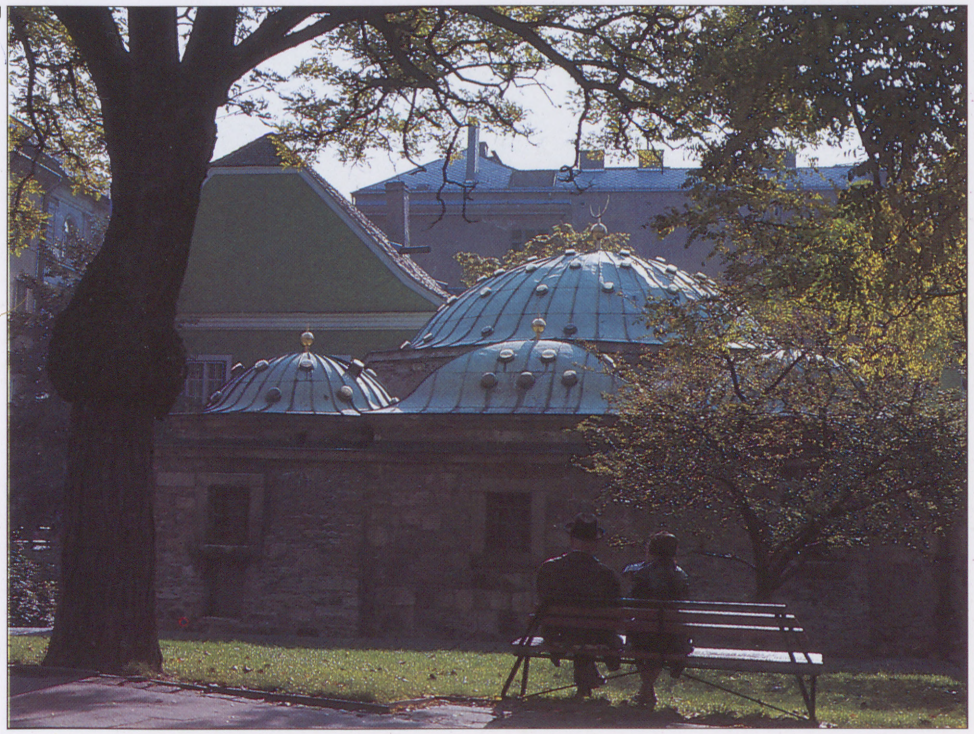

9. Aquincum–ruins of the *forum*

10. Two and a half thousand years look down on us

11. Domes of the Turkish baths in Buda's main street, the Fő utca

this eventually led to the creation of the modern Hungarian civil state. Since then Pest has been the heart of the city as a whole and, indeed, when Hungarians refer to the capital, they often simply say Pest rather than Budapest.

To return to the Kiskörút: it encircles old Pest which lies directly opposite the former Royal Palace in Buda. The remains of a Roman *castrum*–Contra Aquincum–were unearthed in old Pest at the foot of Elizabeth Bridge. This site probably served to guard a river-crossing on the so-called *limes* system of defences which the Romans placed along the Danube. The river was the north-east frontier of the Roman Empire and beyond here, on the Great Plain, only nomadic tribes lived. These nomads grazed flocks and wandered freely, only occasionally making raids into the border territory of the Empire. Some Roman legionaries lived in this region with wives who were mainly local Celts, as has been shown by inscriptions on tombstones and sarcophagi discovered in the necropolis at Aquincum, a Roman settlement where today's district of Óbuda stands.

Another relic from Roman times, more spectacular than Aquincum, is the amphitheatre in Nagyszombat Street. It lies several miles away from the ancient city, to the south of Buda and of Árpád Bridge, and thus gives us an idea of the original size of what was the most important city in the province of Pannonia Inferior. The amphitheatre has remained in relatively good condition due to the fact that it was in almost continuous use. Its strong walls were used as a fortress by those peoples who settled in the area after the Romans. These Hungarian tribes knew little of their predecessors and when they settled here in the 9th century, they believed they had found settlements left to them by Attila the Hun, who they considered to be their ancestor. Mistakenly, they thought that the ruins were of one of his palaces and nothing seemed more natural than to turn this place of heritage into a palace for their own leaders. In fact, Attila had occupied the nearby region between the Danube and Tisza rivers.

12-13. Remains of the Roman fortifications of Pest The oldest church in Pest, the Inner City church

14. The bazaar called "Parisian Arcade"

15. The Pest embankment of Elizabeth Bridge

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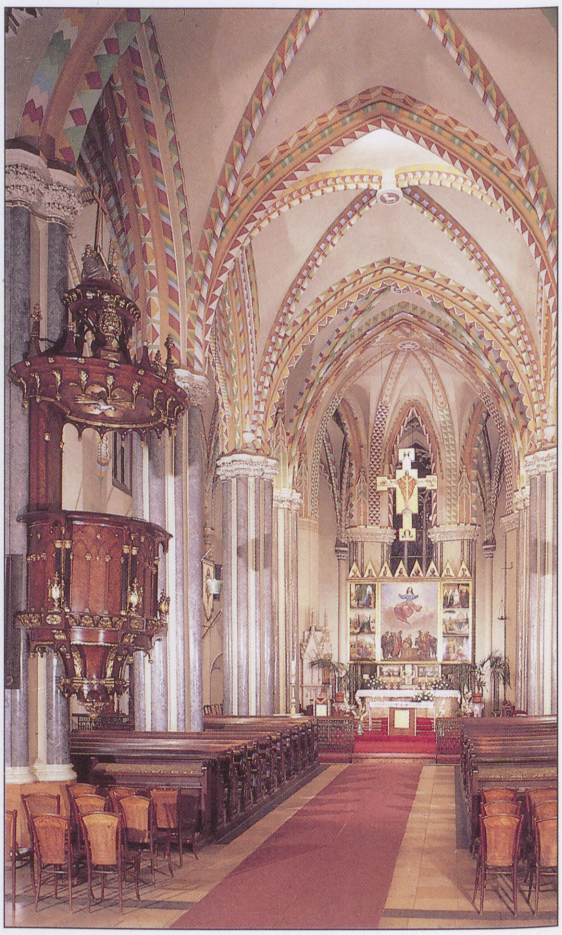

But let's return to the Pest side of the river once more, to the ruins of the Roman outpost. The oldest church in Pest still stands by this spot: the Inner City Parish Church. Originally built in Romanesque style, it was later rebuilt in Gothic style. It stands in part on the foundations of the Roman *castrum*. There were another three or four Roman military posts within the boundaries of today's Pest, and due to the remains of road systems along the river, we can with some accuracy locate their positions.

This is not surprising, considering the fact that the region had been a frontier for centuries. It was the eastern edge of the Carolingian Empire bordering on the Byzantine, and after some centuries of relative calm, in the 16th century it again became the dividing line between two world powers as the Kingdom of Hungary.

During centuries of bloody battles between Islamic and Christian armies the frontier moved constantly to and fro, and in defence of this line the Hungarian population was halved. When considering the history of Hungary, this strategic position should always be kept in mind, firstly, because it may explain many national peculiarities, and secondly, because Hungarians have learned through painful experience to acknowledge their rather awkward position in Europe and to accept it.

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The fact that the city of Budapest was begotten here at the foot of Elizabeth Bridge, on the ruins of one of the last military outposts of an ancient civilization, can assume a symbolic significance. With little effort we could expound many a grand theory on this. Another factor of some significance to Hungarian history is that apart from parts of the already mentioned city walls and the Inner City Church, nothing from the original medieval town remains. Even from the reconstructions of the Baroque period only one building still stands, and that, too, curiously enough, is at the corner of that same little square by the Danube. This building, now the "100 Éves" (100 Year Old) restaurant, was

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formerly a modest burgher house built in 1775.

Strolling through today's inner-city Pest, one can easily cover the area from bridge to bridge in a few hours, where buildings from the last century will be found. Some will be elegant but modest Neo-Classical houses from the first part of the century when the whole town reflected such an image. The National Museum is one such building. Most, however, were built during the last third of the century, and a great number of these recall the Italian Renaissance. Yet there are also buildings which exhibit traces of several other styles: French medieval, ancient Egyptian, and just

16. The best café in Central Europe, the famous "Gerbeaud", on Vörösmarty tér, in the Inner City of Pest

17. Vörösmarty tér– in the place of the former haymarket of Pest

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18-20. Váci utca– the "street of fashion" for two hundred years. If you stop on a corner, within an hour you'll meet a handful of friends

about anything between the two! One can find several varying styles on one building–these were usually constructed for banks, ministries or offices, or as well-to-do tenement blocks, typical of the "Hungarian Victorians", the *Franz-josefians,* if you like. This was the golden age of the middle classes. Today, at the end of the 20th century, life in Pest still goes on mainly within the walls erected in that period.

Váci Street, which runs parallel to the Danube, is lined in the main by such buildings. It is one of the most famous streets in the city and has had the most expensive fashion shops for over a century. At the end of Váci Street, beyond the

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point where the now demolished Váci Gate stood, is Vörösmarty Square, formerly the Haymarket. The most renowned coffee-house in Budapest, the Gerbeaud, is here.

Of course, a walk in the city should really begin on the riverbank. Between Elizabeth Bridge and the Chain Bridge, the embankment is lined with three luxury hotels. The war left this whole area in ruins, but before that it was the place where high society came to stroll, chat and sit in elegant cafés and restaurants. It is worth mentioning that when the embankment hadn't even been built and barges loaded and unloaded on the sandy bank, other hotels had stood here. From those days only a boat-station remains which is now the starting point for river cruises.

By the boat-station is a small square wedged between the hotels. Here, with its back to Vörösmarty Square, stands the Vigadó Concert Hall, a romantic building from the last century whose Eclectic style recalls a fabulous, imaginary Middle Ages. Its fame, however, is due to the artists who perform here.

Fine weather sees the embankment crowded with people, which is not surprising as the benches and terraces here face the most beautiful part of Buda on the opposite bank: to the left, the striking rock of Gellért Hill, and to the right, the smaller Castle Hill, with the huge Royal Palace and its cupola.

If we look northwards along the Pest bank of the Danube we find, between the Chain Bridge and Margaret Bridge, another cupola, that of the Parliament building. This Neo-Gothic palace was built at the turn of the century as a symbol of the millennium of Hungary, which was then being celebrated. When it was first built it was surrounded by warehouses and factories; the public buildings, banks and offices are of more recent origin.

Budapest is a miracle of 19th-century town-planning. The architects were not given the job of reshaping an already existing town to the requirements of a new age, like Housmann with Paris, but rather, to plan the city of their dreams over dusty roads, rural suburbs, riverside meadows, and cabbage-fields. The Parliament building, Margaret Bridge, and the nearby Vígszínház for example, were built with only a vague hope of them being surrounded by houses some day in the future. But then, in the 1880's, the city's development exploded to such a degree that in the course of just a quarter of a century, its present aspect emerged. Perhaps this is why Budapest projects an image of such unity.

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21. The renewed hotel row by the Danube in Pest

22. The Vigadó (Redoute)– the former ballroom of Pest's inhabitants is a concert hall today

23. The Basilica– on the altar stands the statue of St. Stephen, first king of Hungary; in one of the side chapels is the "Holy Right", St. Stephen's right hand

24. Cupola of the Catholic Cathedral of Pest, which took fifty years to build

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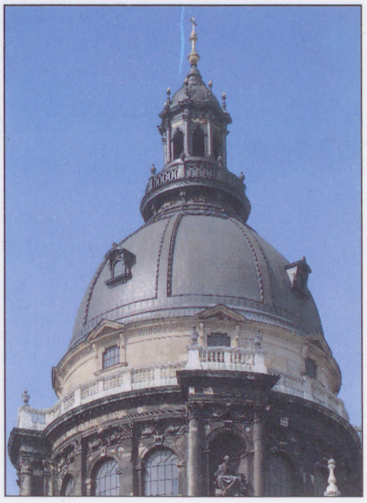

And yet another cupola rises above the houses of Pest. The Basilica, a rather gloomy, Neo-Renaissance style cathedral, took fifty years to complete and was consecrated at the turn of the century. Rather unusually, a statue of a king stands on its altar: Saint Stephen, the first king of Hungary, crowned on Christmas Day in the year 1000 with a crown sent by the Pope. This merciless monarch, traditionally portrayed as an old man with a beard, converted the pagan Magyars to Christianity

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25. The building of Parliament. To the left, the former "White House", or Party Headquarters

26. The main staircase of Parliament

27. Statue of Ferenc Rákóczi II, prince of Transylvania, and the romantic hero of the Hungarian freedom fights of the 18th century

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by use of every means avaible to him, including force. He is usually pictured holding the patriarchal cross of the apostles, which became part of Hungary's coat of arms. The Holy Crown, with which he is represented on paintings and in statues is, however, associated with his person only by tradition. We know for certain that this royal diadem, of unclear origin and assembled from various parts, could not have been worn by Stephen, although it is without doubt very old and was used during the reign of

the kings of the Árpád dynasty. At the end of the Second World War the crown became a "prisoner of war" in the USA, to be returned from Fort Knox only in 1976. It is now exhibited in the National Museum along with other coronation regalia.

This royal emblem, one of the earliest in Europe, has always seen hectic times. The main reason for this is that only those monarchs who had been crowned with this particular crown were recognized as true monarchs. In this way it took on a sacred and mystical significance, the embodiment of the nation and of Hungarian statehood.

The most highly revered relic of the Hungarian Catholic Church, the Holy Right–the clenched right hand of King Stephen preserved through the centuries–has a no less spectacular history. It is kept in one of the side chapels of the Basilica and brought out for the procession held on St. Stephen's Day, the 20th of August, when the king used to hold public days of jurisdiction. It is now one of the national holidays in Hungary. Believers and state officials alike attend this event, as the first king of Hungary is honoured as both a Christian saint and the founder of the state, thus tying his people forever to Europe. In addition, this dual act meant that Hungary turned its back on the then mighty

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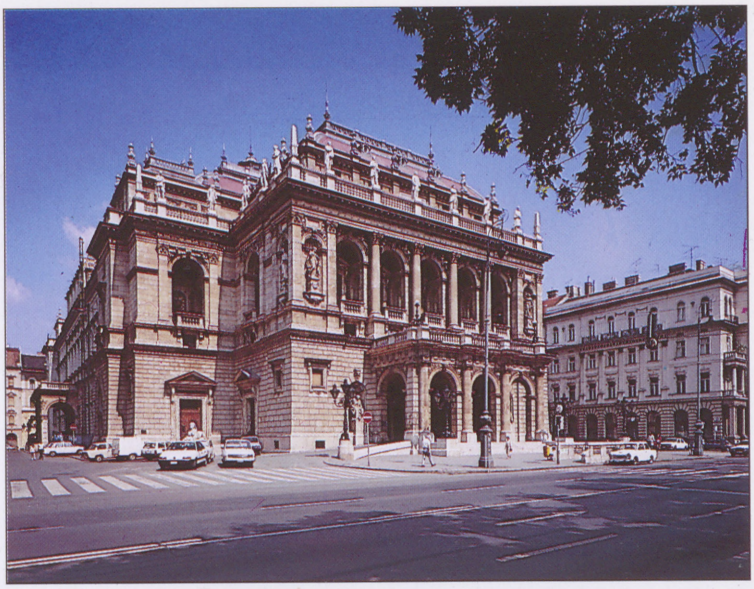

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28-30. The one hundred year old Neo-Renaissance Opera on Andrássy út

Orthodox Byzantine Empire and its influence.

Just to the right of the Basilica, our eyes meet the straight line of the most beautiful avenue in Budapest. Andrássy út, until recently called Népköztársaság út (People's Republic Avenue), cuts through Pest from the Small Boulevard to the greenery of City Park (Városliget), where, at the turn of the century, the city ended. In the park stands the Chateau of Vajdahunyad, the only building still standing from the national fair organized to celebrate the Hungarian millennium. It is a somewhat curious and spectacular architectural capriccio which illustrates the history of architecture by cleverly placing side by side scaled-down elements from a dozen famous buildings from different ages. Today most of it houses the Museum of Agriculture.

Andrássy Avenue is lined with attractive Neo-Renaissance houses, once the homes of the aristocracy and well-to-do classes, which have preserved the taste

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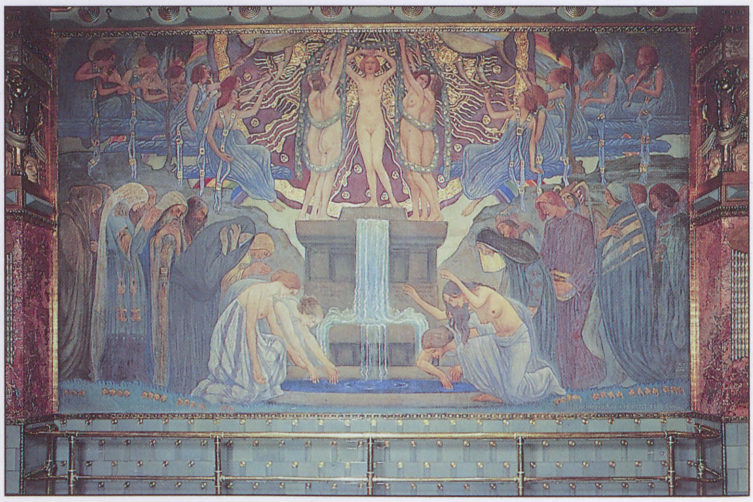

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31-32. Andrássy út, the city's most elegant avenue

33. The foyer of the Academy of Music

34-35. The group of statues made for the one-thousandth anniversary of the Magyar conquest– in the middle, the romantic statues of the seven Magyar chieftains, and behind them, in a half circle, leaders and sovereigns– Hungary's history in bronze as our forefathers saw it a hundred years ago

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and wealth of the early years of this century.

The impressive Opera House also stands on this avenue. In a square near the junction with Teréz körút, one finds the Academy of Music–founded by Ferenc Liszt–with its Art Nouveau concert hall, perhaps the most beautiful in Europe. After this same junction (of which there will be mention later), the face of the street, and indeed the whole neighbourhood, changes. Rows of romantic villas line the avenue and adjacent streets; once the homes of the wealthiest families, today their splendid wood-panelled halls serve as embassies and consulates.

This most beautiful of Budapest streets ends in a theatrically designed square: on both sides there is a building with a tympanum and a colonnade, obviously erected to be museums. The one on the right is the Palace of Exhibitions (the Műcsarnok), the largest exhibition hall in the city for major temporary shows; the one on the left is the Museum of Fine Arts. This museum has one of the finest collections of paintings ranging from the Italian early Renaissance to

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French *fin de siècle* of any museum in Europe. (Works by Hungarian artists are displayed in the National Gallery up in the Royal Palace on Castle Hill.)

In the centre of the square a huge obelisk rises (which on a clear day is discernible from the top of Gellért Hill) with an archangel holding aloft the patriarchal cross of the apostles. It is the embodiment of Hungarian history, as the other hand holds the Holy Crown. At the foot of the pillar seven proud and fiery horsemen stand in oriental garb. They are the "seven leaders" (partly figures whose true identity is lost in the mists of legend and partly real historical figures), the chieftains of the seven Magyar tribes which settled here in 895 A.D. They rode into the region which is today's Hungary, with their flocks and families, from their previous settlement on the norhern shore of the Black Sea. Their conquest of the sparsely inhabited Carpathian Basin was the final act in the great invasions which drew the ethnic map of Central Europe. Their arrival here was preceded by long north-easterly migrations through the centuries from the steppes of Asia. The proud helmeted figure in front of the horsemen is, of course, their leader Árpád, head of this alliance of tribes, and from whom the first dynasty in the Christian Kingdom of Hungary–the House of Árpád–and indeed, Saint Stephen himself, are descended.

There is a semi-circular colonnade behind the statues of the tribe chieftains, between whose columns the greatest fig-

ures of Hungarian history can be seen. Firstly, Stephen, founder of the country, several other kings, generals and finally a statesman, Lajos (Louis) Kossuth, who died whilst in exile. He was the leading figure in the already mentioned anti-Habsburg War of Independence of 1848–49. Kossuth is for most Hungarians synonymous with the idea of the patriot and not in the least associated with defeat, although the Austrians crushed the Hungarians in 1849, and the joint Austro-Hungarian state, which lasted until 1918, was created only 20 years later due to a compromise that is still much argued about! The new state was created during the reign of Franz Joseph Habsburg, who was Emperor of Austria, Bohemia, Polish Galicia and other territories, King of Hungary, Transylvania, and Croatia.

Thus this square is a kind of open-air historical pantheon, faithful to the spirit of the millennial celebrations and to the figures remembered here—hence its name, Heroes' Square. The history of the main monument itself is also somewhat symbolic, as originally the row of statues was complemented by the most outstanding Habsburg monarchs. However, after the establishment of the Republic in 1948, the leading figures in Hungary's many struggles for independence through the centuries replaced them.

Heroes' Square is the largest square in Budapest, capable of holding half a mil-

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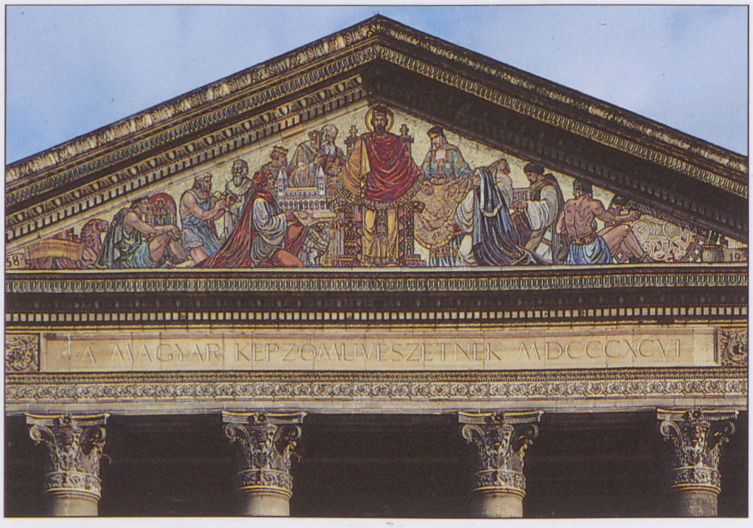

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36-37. On the square of the Millennial Monument– the Műcsarnok exhibition hall and the Museum of Fine Arts

38-39. The architectural *capriccio* of the Castle of Vajdahunyad behind Heroes' Square– an outdoor museum showing what the famous buildings of Hungary's past looked like

lion people between the two museums. So it is hardly surprising that at key moments in the 20th century, many public meetings and demonstrations have taken place here. The most recent occasion was in the summer of 1989, when the remains of Imre Nagy, the Prime Minister executed after the 1956 revolution, were laid on the steps of the Műcsarnok before being reburied with some of his companions.

Next to Heroes' Square is an area of concrete used mainly as a car-park, which, however, is also of historical interest. This wasteland was created by the cutting down of some of the park's trees and was the venue for the huge officially organized marches and processions of the 50s. A gigantic statue of Stalin used to stand here before it was demolished by demonstrators on the 23rd of October, 1956.

And now, let's return to the top of Gellért Hill and look across the river to the wide, straight street which leads from Elizabeth Bridge. This spoke of the city's circular layout also follows an old highway. The first stretch of this street bears the name of the already mentioned Lajos Kossuth, while the second bears that of Ferenc Rákóczi, an 18th-century Transylvanian prince and leader of another struggle for independence. His statue, too, stands in Heroes' Square. This wide street, which starts from where one of the city gates once stood, is another main shopping street, but prices here are suited to the less well-off citizens of Pest. Since the time when Keleti (Eastern) Station was built at its far end, shops that cater to the demands of ordinary people from the countryside have clustered here. Perhaps we should also mention the busiest department store in the capital, the constantly packed Corvin, which also stands in this street.

Another shopping street is the Nagykörút (the Great Boulevard) which

changes its character and name as it proceeds from one stretch to another. Today it is the middle circle (although not a full circle) of three: the Small Boulevard, which runs along the edge of the Inner City, and the rather characterless outer circle, which goes through the suburbs and functions as a ring road. At one end (the southern) stands Petőfi Bridge, and at the northern end Margaret Bridge, although this road continues to a degree in Buda, beyond both bridges.

The buildings along this boulevard maintain a certain homogeneous style. Their façades preserve the great, turn of the century era of Pest–if we overlook the shopwindows, advertisements and crumbling stuccowork, that is! Italian Renaissance mansions and Gothic noble residences stand side by side. Behind the stuccowork of these lie flats of two or three rooms, the homes of middle-class families. Many of these buildings formerly had cafés or restaurants on the ground floor. Pest was a city of cafés in bygone days. Petőfi and his contemporaries, in fact, organized the 1848 revolution around the tables of such cafés. The only remaining café from this period is the Hungária, formerly known as New York Café, which has a beautifully ornamented interior. It was the haunt of famous writers whose portraits now line the walls. Its galleries still see young writers and editors busily producing literary magazines. The ornamentation is almost beyond description, with fine stone carvings, spires and bronze devils bearing blazing gas torches on the façade above the heads of the passers-by. The Hungária stands near what is perhaps the most famous street corner in Pest, the junction of Rákóczi út and the Great Boulevard. The number 4 and 6 trams, which trundle along the whole length of the boulevard and about which many popular songs have been written, stop here. This is the rather bleak Blaha Lujza Square, formerly the site of a theatre but now a shabby meeting place. One part of it is known as the "EMKE-corner", which took its name from a famous café with gypsy musicians that once stood here. Although the building is still called the EMKE, it is now a kind of self-service restaurant and no longer the place it once was. In the same way,

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40. The New York Café– the popular meeting place of writers and the *literati* at the turn of the century, where a literary magazine is being edited once again at the marble tables of the gallery above the "pool"

41-43. Façades in Pest

44. The building of the National Museum, a storehouse of the mementoes of the nation's past and itself the scene of several memorable historical events

many old cafés in Pest have become "espressos" packed with tiny tables –the props of a new way of life.

It is in these houses that the typical citizen of Pest now lives–and, of course, in those narrow side-streets caught in the net formed by the circular and intersecting boulevards and streets. Those may be less ornamented, but they were built in the same, somewhat pretentious and theatrical manner, with an open corridor running around each of the four or five floors of the square building which encloses an inner courtyard. Of course, many people now live in modern blocks of flats on the outskirts of the city.

There are, and there always have been, "better" and more fashionable parts of town. If given the choice, those who can afford it will undoubtedly make their homes on the slopes of the Buda

Hills facing Pest. Of course, the city also has its share of poorer quarters, too: for example, the semi-rural houses in the working-class quarters of old Pest, where the factories take over from the elegant houses of the Inner City. Újpest is just one such district, not often visited by tourists, where old houses still stand wedged between the new blocks. In the "real Pest" of the inner districts, the different layers of society were once not so sharply segregated: the better off lived on the lower floors of the large houses, in flats with balconies facing the street, and those with more modest means occupied the smaller flats facing the courtyard.

Compared to the bleakness of the new blocks of flats, this small world of Pest appears to be an idyllic one despite its shabbiness and poverty. Its workshops opening onto the street, its small restaurants, corner shops, small cinemas, colourful and bustling markets and squares where kids play soccer and pensioners play chess and cards make it the Trastevere of Budapest.

But who are the people that inhabit this city? Budapest today boasts of two million inhabitants, disproportionately large for this small country of only ten million. Everything is concentrated in the capital, which is the centre of industry, administration, commerce and transport. The reason for this is that the peace treaties following the First World War annexed almost all of the large Hungarian towns, which lay in a vast circle around the capital, leaving them, and in most cases their Hungarian population, in neighbouring countries. Hungary was formerly a country of many nationalities and indeed this can still be felt in Budapest. It was a cosmopolitan city with good numbers of all the national groups of the former empire. If we simply open the Budapest telephone directory we'll see it is full of Serbian, Slovakian, German, Romanian and who knows what other names. Behind each is a whole saga with grandfathers and great-grandfathers who came to the capital to seek their fortune. The city was a melting-pot, a magnet attracting the gifted and the enterprising. Even today it remains a fact that many citizens of Budapest were not born here. The end of the last century saw the arrival of Italian bricklayers and Slovakian carpenters to build the city which as it grew offered good job prospects; poor Jewish merchants came from Poland to sell their wares and after the First, and even Second World War, Hungarians who were not bound to stay came from the annexed territories. In the 1950s peasants who lost their land in the collectivization programmes came to the capital to find work in industry. Today's inhabitants are the children and grandchildren of these people, with families spread right across the Carpathian Basin.

But let us return once again to our vantage point on Gellért Hill. From here all of this is invisible; only the houses built by these people, from the walls of which we are trying to read the city's history, are in view–walls which in place still bear the marks of machine-gun fire.

Turning our attention to the right bank of the river, we can see a long, straight street running along the foot of Castle Hill parallel to the Danube. This is Fő utca (Main Street) which has the so called Watertown (Víziváros) lying on either side. Lying beneath the formerly affluent royal town on the hilltop, it was once the core of the slum area, constantly threatened by floods. The Tabán quarter at its southern end used to be inhabited by Serbs, who settled here during the Turkish occupation, and once had quite a bad reputation. Today just a green hillside, a few houses and one pub (from the hundreds that once stood here) remain near the Baroque church in this valley between Castle Hill and Gellért Hill at the foot of Elizabeth Bridge. At the far end of the Tabán quarter, near Margaret Bridge, one can find medicinal spa baths over a hundred years old: the Szent Lukács (St. Luke) and the Császár (Emperor), where the city's first hospital was built in 1330

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by the Knights of the Order of the Holy Ghost. Here, at the foot of the bridge, between Castle Hill and the wealthy, residential area of Rózsadomb, the inner circle of Buda begins. This stretch is called Mártírok útja (Martyrs' Road) and is a continuation of the road from Pest. Its wide arch encircles both Castle Hill and Gellért Hill to reach the river again by the Hotel Gellért. Opposite this point, in Pest, on the far side of Szabadság Bridge, is the southern end of the Kiskörút and the elegant Neo-Renaissance building of the old Custome House–today the University of Economics–and a building which recalls a medieval castle, which is in fact the biggest and certainly the most attractive markethall in Pest.

Mártírok útja, which passes the lowest outer walls of the old fort of Buda near Széna Square, was once a highway. At the turn of the century it was famous for its 136 pubs standing side by side on the short stretch from the bridge to the old market place now called Moszkva Square. Today, Moszkva Square in an unavoidable junction of bus and tram stops and an underground Metro station. Further on is the Déli (Southern) Station from where the road continues almost as a main highway towards Lake Balaton and Vienna.

The park which now stands between the station and the foot of Castle Hill was once a rather swampy pond which, after drying up, became a dusty exercise and parade ground for the troops stationed in the area. Earlier it was a place of public executions and, indeed, it takes its name Vérmező (Blood-meadow) from this gory past. At the end nearest Moszkva Square there is a simple stone sarcophagus to commemorate the Hungarian Jacobins who were beheaded as conspirators following the ideals of the French Revolution–a year after Robespierre's death in 1795. The basin of the pond was filled in after the Second World War, using the rubble from the demolished buildings of the Castle District. Trees were planted and today there is a pleasant park here where children play as peacefully as if they had always done so.

Looking to the immediate left from Gellért Hill the view is dominated by the dome of the Royal Palace. What we see today is the result of the renovation of the burnt out palace which suffered a siege of several weeks during the last war. The civic town, on the northern part of the hill near the palace, was also

45-47. Fő utca, the main street of Buda, running at the foot of Castle Hill– the endless street of former inns and drinking places

48. Castle Hill can be approached by romantic steps like these, which lead from the side streets

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49. The last palace of the Hungarian kings, whose Baroque walls rise above the ruins of three ancient royal seats

50. The "Lion Yard", entrance to the royal residence

51. The ornate gate of the former royal gardens– behind it, the statue of Prince Eugene of Savoy, who drove the Turk from the land

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nearly destroyed at that time. For weeks the whole district was littered with smouldering ruins and corpses, just as in 1686 when the Christian forces regained Buda from the Turks and the residence of the medieval Hungarian kings was raised to the ground. The ruins, however, were preserved beneath the Baroque buildings that were subsequently constructed in the area, and ironically, it

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was the devastation of the last war that made possible their excavation. Just below ground level, the remains of King Matthias' Renaissance palace, built in the Italian style, was unearthed. (The king died just two years before the discovery of America.) Below these ruins were those of the Gothic castle of Sigismund of Luxembourg, King of Hungary and Holy Roman Emperor a hundred years earlier, and some medieval fortifications. Several French-style ornamental statues which had been removed from the Gothic castle during the reconstruction of the Renaissance period were also found among the foundations of a house where they had been used as filling material in the 15th century! All this is now on display in the cellars of the palace. The large rondella and the tower rising above it were also revealed during the excavations after the war. The lower entrances to the museums of the Castle can be reached from here, on the side of the hill, facing the Tabán. The walls are, however, reconstructions of the originals.

The first fortress to be built in the then latest western style was erected by Béla IV, King of the House of Árpád, in 1242 after the devastation of the country and the slaughtering of his people by the Mongols, who ruled almost the whole of Asia to the Pacific coast. After this invasion they disappeared as unexpectedly as they had come, retreating to the steppes of south Russia. Only then did Buda become a royal residence. The only building which remains from the first constructions of this period is the

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52. Reconstruction of a former gate bastion at the southern end of Castle Hill

53. The statuary of the Gothic royal palace was unearthed just a couple of years ago. Today, they are on display in the so-called Knights' Hall

54. Remains of the 16th century Turkish fort

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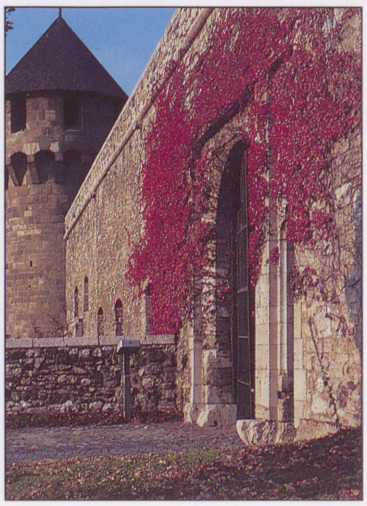

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Nicholas Tower. It is now part of the Hilton Hotel along with remains of a monastery and Gothic church which were incorporated into the design of the hotel to the left of the main entrance.

After the siege of 1686, which finally liberated Hungary from the Turks, Habsburg monarchs sat on the throne. As their main residence was in Vienna, they built only a modest, though spacious, Baroque palace on the ruins of Buda. For a long time it housed various schools, the University of Buda, and offices dealing with Hungarian affairs.

Buda was restored to its former dignified self upon the creation of the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy in 1867. This new relationship was brought into being by the Hungarian contemporaries of Queen Victoria, and the new constitution obliged the king to keep up a residence in Budapest too. It had become apparent that Hungary, which had rebelled on many occasions–the last time being 1848–was after all an indispensible part of the Empire. She had been suppressed but never broken and was now accepted for what she was. The new monarchy called for a worthy residence, and thus work was immediately begun on a major extention for the palace. This was when the huge complex we see today was built. The halls which were gutted in 1945 house the National Gallery, the Budapest Museum of History, and in the wing facing the Buda Hills, the National Library.

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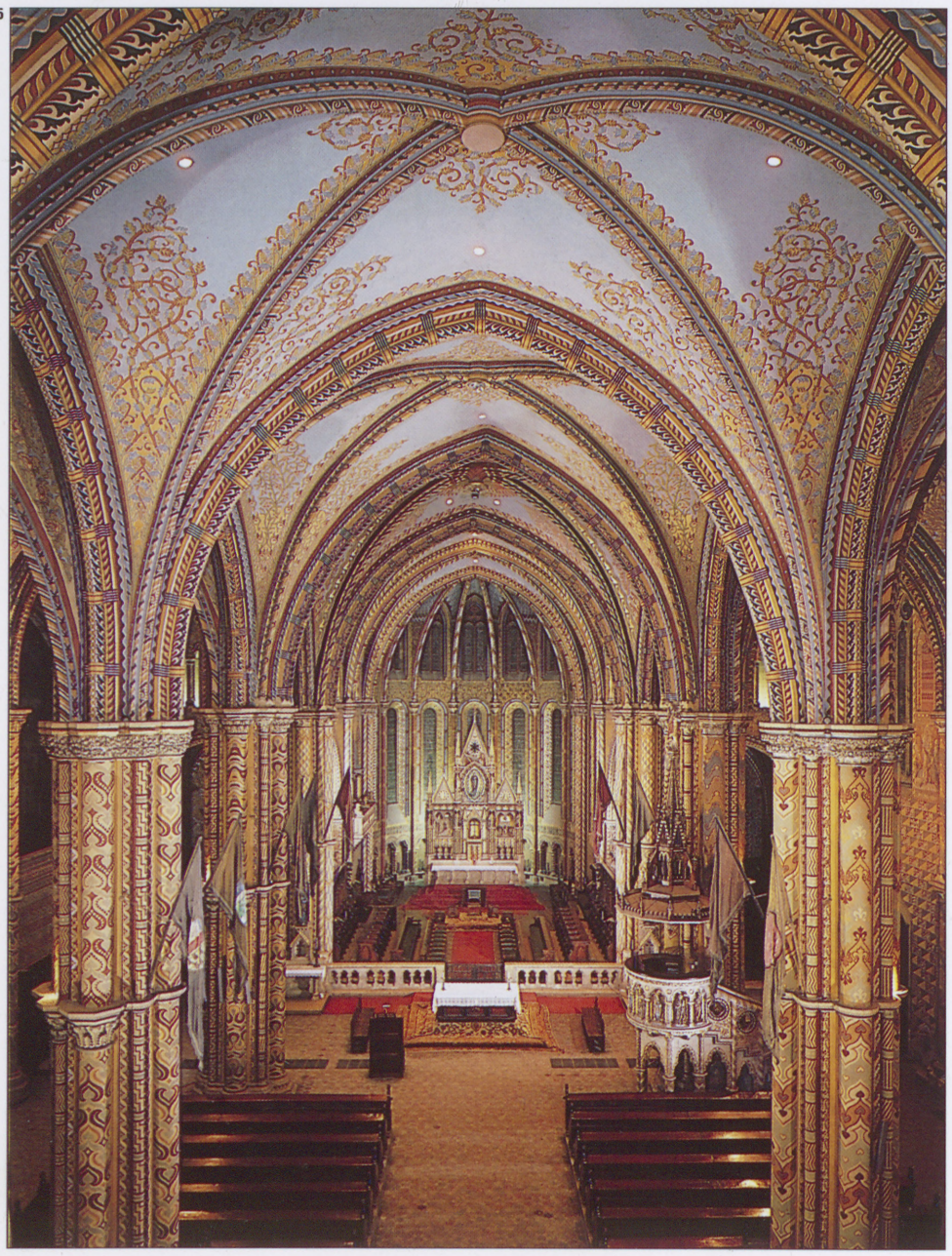

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55-57. The Church of Our Lady– Buda's main church, popularly known as Matthias Church

58. Statue of King Matthias, the great Renaissance sovereign, on the wall of the medieval tower that is today part of the Hilton Hotel

Franz Joseph I, the first king of the dual monarchy and famous for his longevity, was, of course, crowned in Buda in accordance with the agreement reached under the compromise. The coronation was held in the Church of Our Lady, known by the general public as the Matthias Church, which stands in the centre of the civic town on Castle Hill. Its richly carved stone tower was originally built by King Matthias and restored at the end of the 19th century to its former Gothic glory. The edifice attracts the eye like a magnet and is found on the earliest engravings of Buda. Under the Turks the church became a mosque with its tower serving as a minaret. At the turn of the century, the original Gothic walls were

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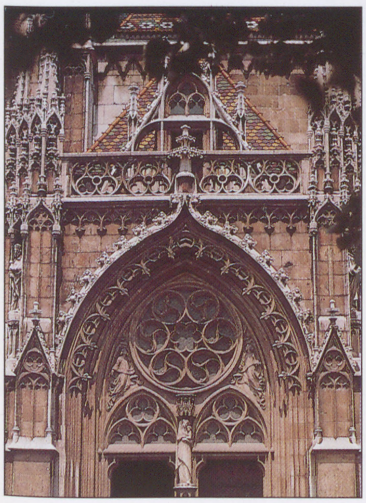

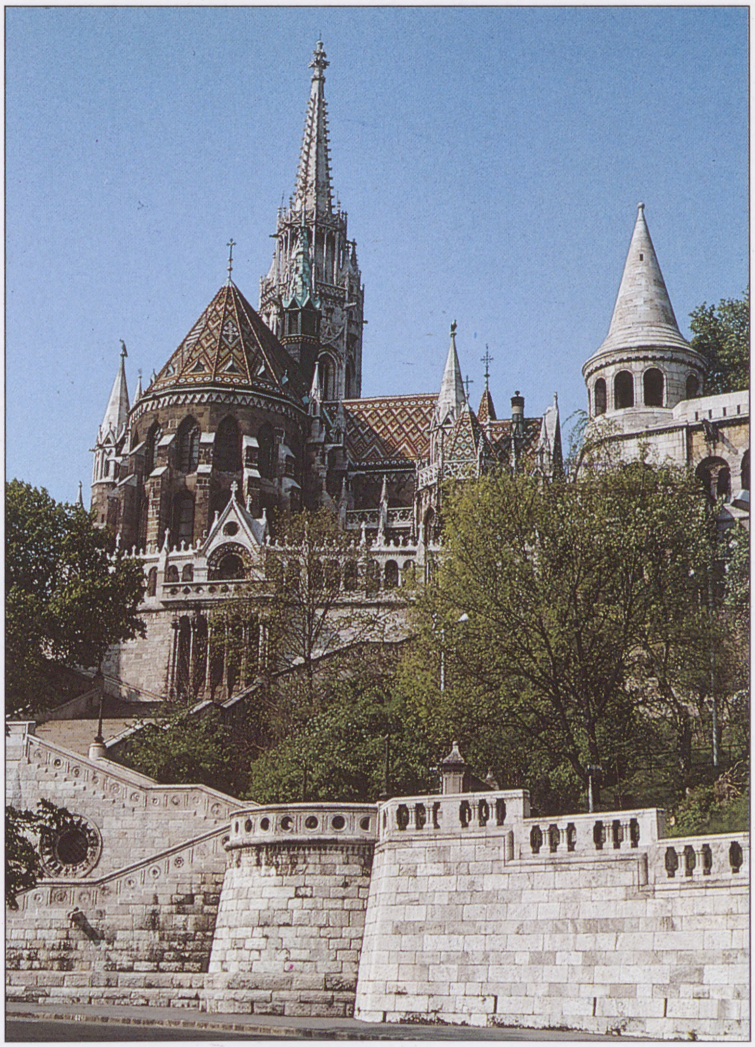

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uncovered from beneath the Baroque ornamentation of the Jesuits. The Matthias Church is considered to be the main church of Buda. When during excavations on the site of the long demolished basilica the bones of the medieval king Béla III and his queen Anne of Châtillon, for instance, were found in Székesfehérvár, where kings of old were crowned, it was decided that the most worthy place for them to rest would be in one of the side chapels of the Matthias Church.

At the turn of the century, the country was developing at great speed and fashion desired the scenery of the past: thus behind the sanctuary of the Matthias Church (which once itself served as a bastion) a splendid Neo-Romanesque architectural capriccio was erected. This replaced the rather characterless for-

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tifications which legend holds used to be manned during sieges by the fishermen's guild. In summer one can hardly move here for the hoards of tourists who throng beneath the mounted statue of King Stephen and amongst the stalls selling all kinds of useless but exotic knick-knacks. This spot should be visited at night, when from beneath the arches of the Fishermen's Bastion, which reminds one of the cloisters of a monastery, a most memorable view of the city reveals itself.

The Castle District itself should be explored house by house, since each, with the graceful Baroque residences that stand out amongst them, have their own stories to tell, some of which are revealed by the traces of the various reconstructions of their walls. Who would

believe, for example, that the large, plain building at number 9 Táncsics Mihály Street, near the Hilton, was once a prison, where even Lajos Kossuth was held prisoner? To kill time whilst there, he translated "Macbeth" into Hungarian. It is perhaps even more incredible that archeologists found the remains of the first Romanesque castle in Buda, erected by Béla IV, in the courtyard of this building. Almost directly opposite stands a modest little Baroque-style, middle-class house. Its ground floor, however, embraces the broken arches of a Gothic synagogue.

The history of Buda is the history of never ending reconstructions–an authentic European history in a nutshell.

The Castle District has an underground history, too, a secret story interwoven with unverifiable legends which has only in part been disclosed. The limestone hill is similar to a ripe Emmenthaler cheese, with caves formed by thermal waters. In the course of its history the inhabitants of the hill joined the caves together until today they form a 10 kilometre long, three-storey system of cellars and tunnels. In these tunnels, some of which are still intact, the citizens of Buda did not merely keep their wine-barrels and winter-fuel, but in times of danger (also during the long siege in the Second World War) they actually lived here. The lower levels have wells which even today supply water. Two floors beneath the Ruszwurm, a lovely Biedermeier café, a skeleton in chains was found when explorers lit up the corridors where no man had stepped

for over 200 years. A short stretch of this tunnel system is accessible to visitors through the cellars of number 9 Úri utca. One can see, amongst other things, the halls with concrete floors which were used as a field-hospital during the war, and where today dripstone formations have begun.

Castle Hill is enclosed by a wide circle of hills, which get higher and higher the further one goes. The first to be populated was the innermost one, Rózsadomb, rising opposite the Buda end of Margaret Bridge. The memory of its long gone vineyards and wine-presses is preserved only by a few pleasant but rather expensive restaurants found in rural-looking houses among the villas. Buda is expanding, crawling up the still green slopes of the furthest hills which are visible from the top of Gellért Hill. The city is devouring the 18th-century Swabian villages of the Buda Hill valleys, settlements which existed independently before the war, but which were annexed to the city in 1950 along with numerous others in the vicinity.

Budapest, which was born in 1873 from the union of three neighbouring towns, Pest, Buda, and Óbuda in the north, is beginning to disintegrate once more. The districts which developed from the centres of the small towns and villages of the region are only connected to the city centre by public transport. The area which is more or less visible from our vantage point on Gellért Hill, the rejuvenated city of the turn of the century, heir of Romans and of medieval monarchs and citizens alike–this is the real city.

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62-63. The burghers' quarters of Buda, encircled by the castle walls

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59-61. The romantic backdrop of Fishermen's Bastion, which offers perhaps the most breathtaking view of the city. In the middle of its semicircular base stands the statue of St. Stephen, and in the background of the stone monsters, the glass wall of the Hilton

Budapest is already an elderly lady, slowly getting on in years as she heads towards Europe. Her houses recall a more and more romantic past, and have incredible stories to tell. Looking back from the vantage point of passing time, the stone carvings of the ancient Matthias Church and those of the more recent Fishermen's Bastion merge into one. More and more ghost-figures tred the narrow inner-city streets and the wide boulevards; the stories narrated by the shabby houses become more and more exciting. If we manage to ignore the cars parked on the pavement which block our way, and allow ourselves to be carried away by the atmosphere radiating from the stones, the city will tell us a most fascinating tale.

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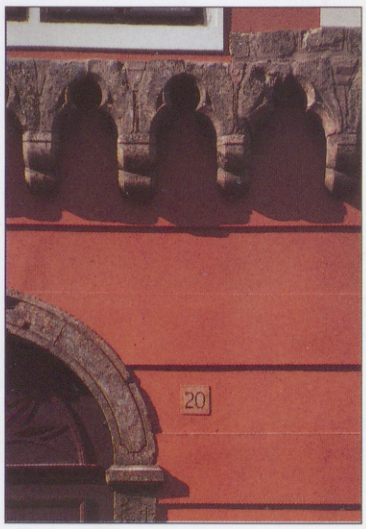

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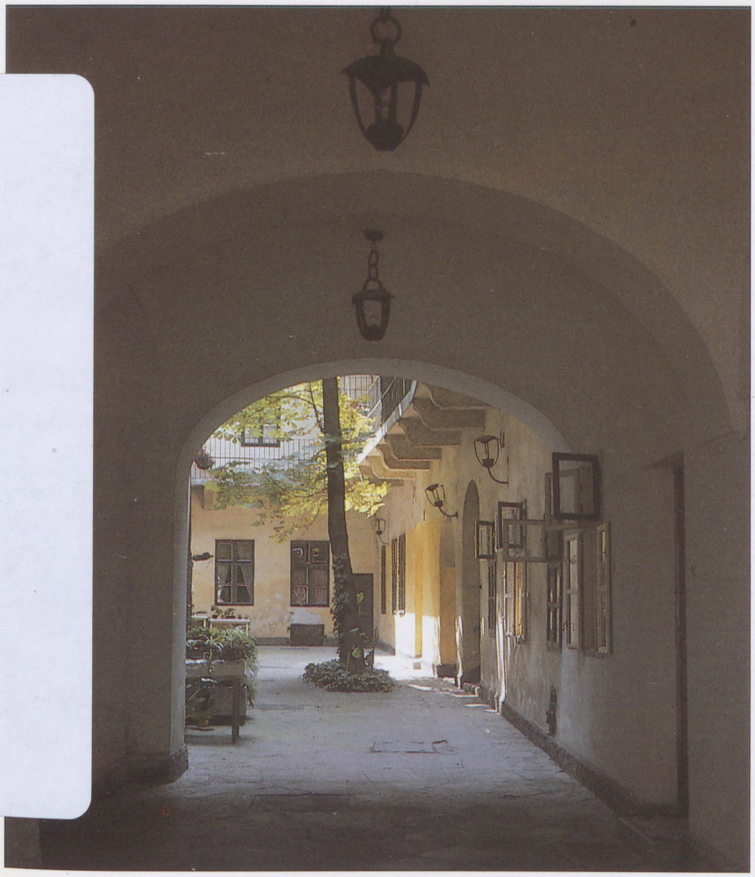

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64-70. The Castle District. From under the Imperial yellow plaster of the walls of the Baroque houses and mansions of the narrow streets peep out Gothic window frames, doors, and stone arches. They stand as silent witnesses of the many terrible sieges that the small town suffered time and time again in the Middle Ages and thereafter

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The raven was the heraldic animal of Matthias Corvinus, King of Hungary, and the emblem of his famous Renaissance library, the Bibliotheca Corviniana

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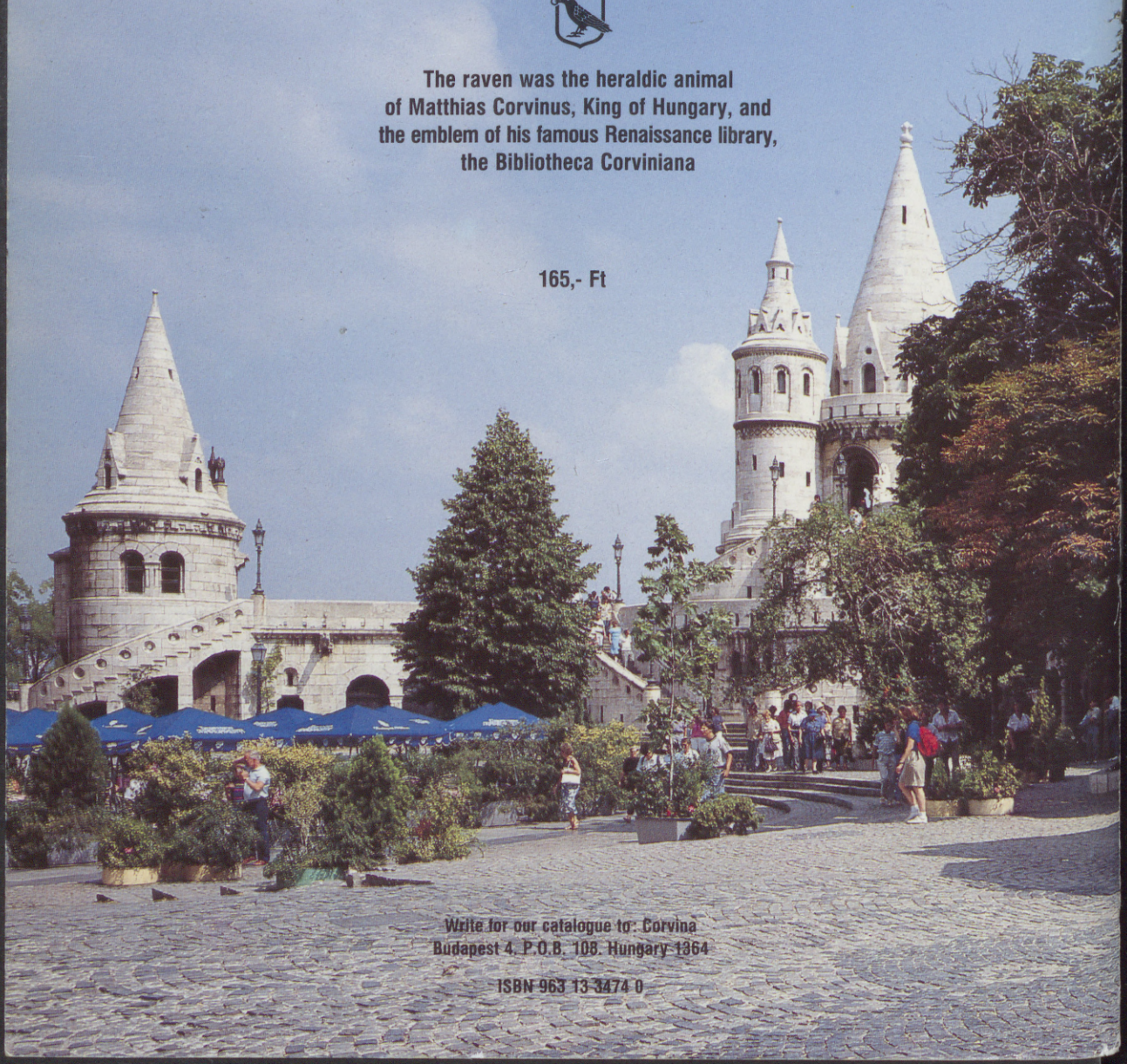

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