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THE TOPOGRAPHICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SZÉKESFEHÉRVÁR IN THE ÁRPÁD AGE

The geographical location of the area largely determined the development and expansion of the medieval *civitas*. Székesfehérvár [in short: Fehérvár] is situated on island-like elevations at the junction of depressions formed by two perpendicular faults in the southern opening of the Mór valley towards Mezőföld. The largest dryland accommodated the mediaeval town centre (*Castrum*), to the north of that was the “Budai” suburbs (*Exterior/Suburbium*), to the west the Island (*Insula*), and to the south the “Ingóvány” [Swamp]. *Nova Villa*/New Village could have been located near the “Buda” suburbs, in the western part of the settlement called *Novaj/Kisfalud* (image 1).¹

Important trade routes passed through the town, and already the founding charter of the Tihany Abbey (1055) mentioned the “military road” going through it.²

1 Opinions on the location of *Nova Villa* are divided. Attila Zsoldos, examining the land ownership of *Novaj* on the basis of perambulations from 1298, found that “Újfalú” [New Village] could be located in the western part. *Novaj* may have been situated in the area bordered by Battyán, Pákozd, Méd and Börgönd which was shared among three owners (the king, the queen and a noble relative of unknown origins) (Zsoldos et al. 2016, pp. 231–233).

2 Fügedi 1967, pp. 27–28; Hoffmann 2010, pp. 130–132



Picture 1: Székesfehérvár in the Árpád era. Prepared with the help of historical and archaeological data by Zsuzsanna Branczeiz

The development of the medieval town

The earliest written mention of the name of the town (*Alba Civitas*) comes from 1009 from the boundary-description certificate of the diocese of Veszprém, which indicated that it was a comes centre [seat of the county head] from the reign of (Saint) Stephen I, gradually acquiring the character of a royal seat.³

At the time of the occupation of Transdanubia (920-950), the seat of the prince was located in the Upper Tisza region.⁴ The cemeteries around the town (Demkóhegy, Maroshegy, Rádiótelep) were spread out on the hillsides on the southern edge of Sárret, well aligned with the tracks of the road leading to the Úrhida ferry crossing, already used in the Middle Ages. The community buried here played an important role in owning the crossing that controlled the traffic going through.⁵

Some researchers (György Györffy, Alán Kralovánszky) date the beginnings of the town to the time of Prince Géza.⁶ It could have become an important centre under the reign of Stephen I indicated by the establishment of the Provostry of the Virgin Mary (around 1018).⁷

The Castrum

The spatial structure of the medieval town centre was defined by the roads coming from the north (from Buda, Győr and Esztergom) and from the west (from Veszprém, Keszthely and Pécs) which, according to the surviving engravings and town plans, merged outside the town, and led through the Budai gate in the north and the Palotai gate in the west into a widening space, the marketplace (*Theatrum Civitatis*).⁸

3 CD I. p. 289; Zsoldos et al. 2016, pp. 211–214

4 Bakay 1967–68, p. 75; Bóna 2000, p. 42

5 Petkes 2019

6 ÁMF II. p. 325.; Kralovánszky 1984, pp. 196–197

7 Györffy 1983, p. 317

8 Fügedi 1967, pp. 32–33

The town wall of the early Árpád age (first half of the 11th century) approximately encircled the area of the medieval *Castrum*.⁹

As concluded from the historical and archaeological data currently available, the earliest unit of settlement was established southwest of the Provostry of the Virgin Mary, which was the highest point of the town (today: the area between the Megyeház utca, Városház tér and Kossuth utca). The excavations and salvage excavations carried out here brought to surface pottery findings from the Árpád era, which support the fact of an early settlement here.¹⁰

Alán Kralovánszky came to the conclusion of the existence of a princely seat¹¹ from a four-lobed church he dated to the 10th century, which is probably identifiable with St. Peter's Parish Church, while Gyula Siklósi deduced the same from the curtain walls unearthed during his excavations. In the area, he outlined a fortress with 80×85×60×60-metre-long side walls and a gate tower in the north-west corner.¹² The assumption arising most often regarding the origin of the town's name is that it was named after the white stone walls of its early fortification.¹³

Between 2014 and 2018, the Árpád-age fortification walls, built in several periods and unearthed in the Hősök tere [Heroes' square], made it clear that a separate centre of rulership was built in this area inside the 11th-century walls demarcating an area later called the *Castrum*, but due to the lack of a greater number of findings with dating potential, their priority compared to the *Castrum* walls cannot be confirmed. This way, it is also impossible to define whether this was the area accommodating the comes castle or the area of the later *Castrum*, as Attila Zsoldos assumes.¹⁴ The wall remains, built with

9 Horváth et al. 2018, pp. 170–180; Szücsi et al. 2020, p. 63. For more on this, see the Szöllőssy and Szücsi study in this volume.

10 Lásd Siklósi 1992, Figure 3

11 Kralovánszky 1990, p. 79. The building with a four-lobed outline encompassing a central square of 10x10 metres is identified by most researchers as St. Peter's Parish Church: Zsoldos et al. 2016, pp. 214–215. The archaeological excavations did not reveal any layers of dating value, so the age of the building cannot be clearly determined.

12 Siklósi 1999, pp. 10–17, Figure 69. For a criticism of the concept, see Zsoldos et al. 2016, pp. 211–222

13 Györffy 1983, p. 318; Zsoldos et al. 2016, p. 211

14 Zsoldos et al. 2016, pp. 211–214

different mortar and of different structures, suggest the continuous expansion of the fortress and the creation of a smaller but better defended core (image 2).¹⁵



Photo 2: South-eastern pillar foundation of the hall-like building and excavated part of the fortification wall (sunken due to a cesspool) erected after the demolition of the building. Photo: Szabina Reich (SZIKM)

Sections of ditches were uncovered at several points in the area. Alán Kralovánszky excavated a short section near Heroes' square, under 1 Arany János utca.¹⁶ According to Gyula Siklósi, the part found in Kossuth street connected to the fortress wall,¹⁷ while this could not be verified for the parts unearthed at the southwest tower of the cathedral and inside the church.¹⁸

15 For more details see *Reich Szabina ásatása* [Szabina Reich's excavation] Szent István Király Museum (SZIKM), Repository, 9042/2018 (hereinafter: Reich 2018.)

16 From the section of the ditch stretching west to east, he presumed the existence of a 10th-century oval rampart. Kralovánszky 1990, p. 79

17 Gyula Siklósi's research, Szent István Király Museum (SZIKM), Repository, 6310/92

18 Reich 2018

The excavations found that landscaping had been carried out to enlarge the area suitable to build on.¹⁹

The existence and location of the royal palace divides researchers.²⁰ In 2018, the parts of the remains of a large, hall-like building (its east and west end walls and three pillar bases) were unearthed in the area between the town hall and the Episcopal Cathedral (image 3).²¹



Photo 3: Remains of the walls of the hall-like building excavated in Heroes' Square, Székesfehérvár. Orthophoto by GeoMontan Ltd

Based on parallels (Wawel in Krakow), the possibility of identifying this as a palace with a representative role also emerges.²²

19 Siklósi 1988, pp. 12–14; Reich 2018

20 For a recent discussion of this, see: Zsoldos et al. 2016, pp. 217–218

21 The width of the excavated building part is 12.77 m, the distance between the foundations of the supports is 3 m. For a detailed description, see Reich 2018.

22 Pianowski 2000, p. 481. Figure 325.

Another unit of settlement of the early medieval *civitas* was the Provostry of the Virgin Mary and its estate (Rózsa utca–Fő utca–Városház tér–Kossuth utca–Táncsics utca), where the chapter's serfs lived.²³ Alán Kralovánszky associated the early walls excavated southwest of the Royal Basilica with this ecclesiastical institution, which he considered a separate enclosure.²⁴

These two units were located along the market in the former *Theatrum Civitatis* (today: Városház tér). As regards localisation, we only have data from the late Middle Ages, but it is reasonable to assume that it was inherited from the Árpád period within the small *Castrum*.²⁵

The spiritual needs of the people living in the territory of the chapter were provided for by the Parish Church of the Holy Cross (12th century), which, according to late medieval sources, stood in the graveyard of the provostry.²⁶ Alán Kralovánszky identified the church remains excavated on the properties at 3-5 Rózsa utca with the above-mentioned church, but it cannot be definitely proven due to the lack of topographical evidence. The floor plan and the hair ring found in its graveyard confirms that the building dates back to the Árpád era.

The earliest documentary evidence related to the St. Imre Parish Church dates back to 1229.²⁷ In 1470 it is specifically mentioned on the edge of the marketplace (“in acie fori”).²⁸ The De Prati map of 1720 shows a church on the property of the Franciscans (today: Városház tér), which raises the possibility that the order was given land where a church building already existed in the Middle Ages.²⁹

The Mongol invasion was an important milestone in the evolution of the topography of the town. Following the passing of the Mongols, Béla IV moved the citizens living in the suburbs into the castle.³⁰ The only remnant of this latter

23 Kralovánszky 1967, pp. 40–42; Fényi 1977, pp. 127–140; Zsoldos et al. 2016, pp. 212–213

24 Kralovánszky 1967–68, p. 256

25 Fügedi 1967, p. 44

26 *Codex Albensis* 1963, p. 24, fol. 58v; 1439: MREV II, p. 605; p. 1454: *Codex Albensis* 1963, p. 1343

27 ÁMF II, p. 379

28 Zsoldos et al. 2016, p. 175

29 Nagy 1972, p. 209

30 Zsoldos et al. 2016, p. 161

event was the burnt remains of a beam-framed pit-house built around 1250, excavated on the square in front of the present-day St. Anne's Chapel.³¹

According to Gyula Siklósi, this was when a complex of buildings he called the late royal castle and palace was constructed in the north-eastern corner of the town centre. Based on his observation, 17th and 18th century depictions show a slightly irregular square fortification with a courtyard lined with palatial wings.³² Research connects the 2.1-3 m wide walls excavated at the Országzászló tér, and in Bástya utca and Fő utca to this building complex.³³ The surviving remains, however, do not allow for a full reconstruction and there are no known findings of dating potential from along the walls either.

The walled and moated town centre became a densely populated settlement by the late 13th century. The network of streets was fully formed by this time, which, based on evidence provided by 17th–18th century engravings and town plans, had only been slightly altered since then. The medieval outline of streets can be identified in the present-day Jókai (*Vicus Sancti Bartholomei/Vicus Canonialis*); Juhász Gyula; Oskola (*Vicus Canonialis*); Megyeház; Arany János (*Vicus Sancti Petri*); Táncsics; Ady (*Buda utca*); Bástya, Lakatos, Fő (*Vicus Magnus*) and Kossuth (*Vicus Teutonicalis*) streets, and in the Templom köz (*Parva Platea*).³⁴

Within the town centre, sources mention several administrative buildings (1233: salt depot, 1234: prison, 1487: town hall) as well, which cannot be located based on the available data.³⁵

The bishop of Veszprém had his own palace (1279) in the town, but its exact location is unknown.³⁶

31 Two floor levels were identified inside the building with two layers of fill between them. Probably only a short period passed between them because a penny of Ottokar II (1251–1276, CNA B 159, L51) was found in the bottom layer: Reich 2018.

32 Siklósi 1999, pp. 31–36

33 Dormuth 1935, pp. 89–91; Siklósi 1999, pp. 31–36; Szöllősy 2018, p. 239

34 Fügedi 1967, note 97. During the Ottoman rule, upon the building of the new Budai gate the northern end of the *Vicus Magnus* shifted to the west, as reflected by the current outline of Fő utca: Nagy 1972, p. 207.

35 CD III/2. p. 352; PRT Vol. I, p. 727; Csánki 1894–1913, III. p. 309. The town hall may already have stood, despite the late medieval source.

36 Károly 1898, p. 688

Civitas Exterior

The Budai suburbs could be considered the earliest part of the town established outside the castle, which is confirmed by the foundation of the Provostry of St. Nicholas (first half of the 12th century) and the settlement of the Latins (second half of the 11th century).³⁷ To the north of the medieval town centre, the roads from Győr and Buda converged in these suburbs, as mentioned above.³⁸

Owing to the transit traffic and the “Italian” population that initially lived here, begging orders settled in this part of the town (1221: Dominicans, 1280: Franciscans), but traces of their buildings have not yet been found.³⁹

Insula (Island)

The dryland west of the town centre was the site of several settlement units in the Middle Ages, the earliest of which could have been the Hospitaller Convent in the western part.⁴⁰ The building of the monastery was initiated by Martyrius, Archbishop of Esztergom (1150–1158), and after his death the work continued under the support of Euphrosyne Mstislavna.⁴¹

Szentkirályföldsé in the south-west belonged to Fehérvár in terms of the settlement structure, but in legal terms it was under the Hospitaller Convent.⁴² The date of the construction of the monastery implies that settlement in the town began in the first half of the 12th century. It was named after the parish church dedicated to St. Stephen (1192).⁴³

37 Its boundaries: Palotai út–Mészöly Géza utca–Rozgonyi utca–Forgó utca–Mikszáth utca–Széna tér–Rákóczi utca: Hatházi 1996, 25; Zsoldos et al. 2016, p. 223

38 17th century depictions of the roads: Siklósi 1999, Fig. 4, 5.

39 Reich 2013, pp. 46–47

40 Fügedi 1967, p. 35

41 Fügedi 1967, p. 35. Gyula Siklósi carried out excavations in its territory: Siklósi 1982, pp. 6–11. For more detail on his findings, see: Reich 2015, pp. 111–128

42 Fügedi 1967, p. 32

43 ÁMF Vol. II, p. 382

Nova Civitas may have been established in the northern part of the western dryland at the end of the 13th century, as the monastery of the Augustinian hermits here was already mentioned in 1303.⁴⁴

The *Insula* was protected by a marshland from the west, so it could not have had any serious fortification in the early period.

Ingovány

The land of the collegiate chapter of the Virgin Mary called *Ingovány* [Swamp] could have been established south of the town centre from the end of the Árpád era.⁴⁵

Nova Villa

The formation of this district of the town may be indicated by the fact that Queen Elisabeth, King László IV's mother, donated "Újfalu" in *Novaj*, her own part of the estate, to the citizens of Fehérvár in around 1274.⁴⁶ She probably also had a manor house in this area, as her son stayed here during his coronation.⁴⁷

Research links the Church of Saint Martin to *Nova Villa* on the basis of the 1096 crusade.⁴⁸

44 Károly 1898, p. 174

45 Zsoldos et al. 2016, p. 243

46 Zsoldos et al. 2016, p. 231

47 1273: CDCr Vol. V, p. 51

48 György Györffy places the church north of Fehérvár between the roads to Győr and Esztergom: ÁMF Vol. II, p. 377. Attila Zsoldos also puts it here because Gottschalk could have reached Fehérvár and several important roads pass through the suburb (Zsoldos et al. 2016, p. 55). Two late sources tell us that the four sword swings associated with the coronation ceremony took place at this building: Velius 1762, pp. 187–188; Callimachus 1600, p. 307.

Summary

According to the historical and archaeological data available, in the early Árpád age Fehérvár consisted of an early centre of rulership/castle (today: II. János Pál pápa tér and its environs) with the surrounding area (*suburbium*), and the provostry with its estate also formed part of the settlement. It is not yet clear whether the fortification on the II. János Pál pápa tér or the walled area of the later *Castrum* were developed first. From the 12th century onwards, *Alba Civitas* showed an image of an increasingly urbanised settlement owing to the arrival of foreign merchants, pilgrims and the settling Latins. The increased population and economic prosperity led to the development of suburbs around *Castrum*, but the topography of the settlements, which were under constant attack, is mostly preserved only in scattered late-medieval sources.



Column capital, The Provostry and Church of the Virgin Mary,
St. Stephen King Museum, Székesfehérvár

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