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A CAPITAL IN THE PERIPHERY.
THE DEVELOPMENTAL SPECIFICITY OF BUDAPEST
(AS A BIG EAST CENTRAL EUROPEAN CITY)

Abstract

A short essay can only flag the problem of creation of the image of Budapest as a capital city, and a symbol or epitome, of the Hungarian *Kulturnation*. I will focus on four matters: first, a few examples will be used to briefly exemplify the ideological programme of Historicist architecture. Second, the reception of this programme in the period's journalistic writing will be shown (in brief, again), with particular emphasis on the craving for paralleling the West. Third, I will show how the *Art Nouveau*, rebelling against Historicism, essentially took over its historical mission. And, fourth, I will show the ways in which certain authors discerned already then the pretentiousness, or superficiality, of success. To end with, I will make a reference to the *Sonderweg* issues.

Key words: Budapest, urbanization, representation, bourgeois culture, modernization.

I

The development of Budapest in the latter half of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth century offers an excellent example of peripheral modernisation, the course of which represents a number of elements specific of the Central European region. Let us figure out a city in the first half of the nineteenth century, looking like a somewhat smaller version of Warsaw, and whose architecture predominantly consists of one or, at most, two-storied Classicist houses built in the century's first decades – comparable to those still preserved, here or there, in Warsaw's Nowy Świat Street vicinity. The historically most significant area of this provincial town – the Buda hill, with its Royal Castle – is, naturally, separated from the more modern Pest by an escarpment and by the riverside areas of Víziváros (meaning, 'Watertown') and Tabán. In Buda, atop the high bank, a deserted royal castle (which came alive only at the rare visits of monarchs) stood next to

small mediaeval burghers' houses with their facades redeveloped in a baroque manner, whose dwellers – mostly German-speaking – lived a life separate from the rest of the double city. The functions of the country's capital were exercised by Pozsony (Bratislava), also using the German name Pressburg. It was at the Pozsony castle that diets of the Hungarian Kingdom assembled; kings of Hungary were crowned at the local cathedral, while the castle guarded the emblem of the Hungarian statehood and the very unique token of the nation's highest splendour – Saint Stephen's Crown. The bi-city's major central institution was the university in Buda, removed there from Trnava (Nagyszombat; German: Tyrnau); however in the first half of the nineteenth century, the university was distinguished neither by its scientific quality, nor by its importance for the town's cultural life.

Going on with the image, let us imagine this tranquil provincial town turning into a capital of a modern European state, resulting from some changes taking place in the international political arena, with no need for us to go into the details now. Or rather, a capital city of a poor and provincial country whose elite desired so much to show themselves off before the world as those running a normal and modern Western European state. This is what happened, in reality, in Hungary in the year 1867. The Kingdom of Hungary, reinstated after a dozen years' interval (since 1849) and enjoying complete internal independence, was in desire to have, for the sake of prestige, a European-style capital as soon as practicable. Not only would such a capital city be able to rival with Vienna: it would show itself off to visitors from other Western countries, too. Relevant administrative institutions were formed; three towns: Buda, Pest and Óbuda (Ancient Buda), an old small market town, were unified into one urban entity. Tax facilitations were launched for private investors. Above all, however, the redevelopment and extension of the city was connected with the functioning of public institutions, including state, municipal, and ecclesial institutions.

On the whole, the redevelopment of Budapest, a project that turned three provincial towns into one capital city, can be seen as an element of 'nationalisation' of Hungary – a part of the ambitious plan to rebuild the multilingual and multicultural land into a modern, monolingual and mono-cultural nation-state, centralised in the French way. This interpretation does make some sense: there are so many references to the Hungarian national tradition in the whole

of the city that one can reconstruct, to an extent, the programme of nationalisation of the society through monuments, buildings, patriotic references in the styles, decorations, ornaments, or inscriptions. While not neglecting this thread, I should like to focus on another element which I find more important, and more interesting, though not quite well recognised by the researchers as it seems to be less outstanding at first glance. Budapest is a monument of the ambitions of a provincial elite: an ambition to attain respectability, international recognition, and admission of Hungary to an informal club of 'up-to-the-standard' states.

The deficit of prestige[1] was for the Hungarian elite not only of international but also of internal relevance. International prestige constitutes, namely, an extremely important ratio of validity of the ruling group also with regard to internal relations. And, no less relevantly: the elite of a peripheral country cannot be certain about its own irreproachability or 'high value' when exposed to the West – and, to be reassured in its ability to exercise power, needs being (re)confirmed that Hungary, when ruled by them, is a normal, affluent, trustworthy and respectable European state. This was the kind of message that eradiated from the new capital town – stronger, perhaps, than the idea of 'Hungarianness' of Hungary.

References to nineteenth-century European capital cities are visible at first glance in the city's overall structure, in the concrete urban-planning solutions, and in specific architectural designs. Two rounds of boulevards are a clearly decipherable quotation from Baron Haussman's redevelopment of Paris; Andrássy Avenue (Andrássy út), a boulevard set 'radially' through the city, from the city centre to the suburbs, is a classical element of many nineteenth-century capitals. On a somewhat lesser scale, the Heroes' Square (Hősök tere), featuring the Millennium Monument, is an apparent quotation from Rome's St. Peter's Square, with its double-sided colonnade. The most evident such reference is the neo-Gothic Parliament edifice designed by Imre Steindl: with its riverside location, it brings to mind the Houses of Parliament in London, a work of Sir Gilbert Scott.

All these quotations from European capitals have a common trait to them: they have been embedded in a new town-planning space,

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[1] For an interesting contemplation of the topic, see Andrew C. Janos, *The Politics of Backwardness in Hungary 1825–1945* (Princeton, 1982), esp. 45–6, 92.

parts of which did not yet exist when they were developed but were only subsequently designed and constructed around these structures or landmarks. The London Parliament is situated at the former Westminster Palace location and the new edifice has integrated elements of the old Gothic structure without affecting the city's topography. The Budapest Parliament was built, for a change, at a site the city would come closer to later; a period weekly published a photograph featuring an almost completed Parliament building with merely some countryside-style cottages around it. Representative edifices came out as harbingers of what they meant to represent: the city of Budapest.

<div align="center">II</div>

The art of the Historicist period, particularly the architecture, is fascinating for a variety of reasons (even beyond the artistry facet). Perhaps on a larger scale than the art of the preceding periods, this art was deeply studied and thought-out. The designers were university and fine arts academy professors, whose titles are always mentioned with esteem in the period's texts, giving their works the sort of authority appropriate with scientific work. The architects themselves often published texts being, as it were, manuals or explanations to the works they conceived or delivered. As learned people, primarily with a history-of-art background, they created erudite structures, considered and deliberate in their allegories and quotations from the architecture of earlier periods. They moreover lived in (and contributed to) a time that offered them the potential to opt for a style – not for the first time in European arts history but probably on an unprecedented scale. The entire architectural past appeared for them as a palette to choose colours from; the history of art from Antiquity to Classicism was, so to say, put at their disposal. The question, 'In which style should we build?' (*In welchem Style sollen wir bauen?*), was posed in 1828 by German architect Heinrich Hübsch, used as a title in his polemic brochure known at the time, and called for a reply throughout the nineteenth century: not only from architect but also from those structuring the public debate.

The aesthetic and worldview aspects were tightly intertwined. One major problem when it came to tackling problems with choosing the style became, in the nineteenth century, the 'nationality of style' criterion, and the discussions concerning the best architectural style

turned in many countries, Hungary among them, into a dispute over 'the national style'. It has to be borne in mind that a 'national' character of the construction style was aimed not only at arousing national awareness: the prestigious function being of no lesser importance. Every respectable nation has its own national art; this being, simply, one of the many entries to the cultural world. In the course of the second half of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth, several phases of these discussions appeared in Hungary. In the spirit of late Romanticism, Frigyes Feszl furnished the Vigadó ('Place for Merriment' or, simply, club) edifice situated at the Pest wharf, not far from Gisele Square (Gizella tér; renamed as Vörösmarty tér today), with numerous motifs deemed Oriental at the time, the outstanding element to it being the rhythm of the crescent, somewhat 'Moresque', windows in the central façade. Referring to the eastern background of Magyars, these motifs were meant to make the building 'national'.

But the debate did not end at that point. In the course of the nineteenth century, architects increasingly tended to apply the oriental style characteristic of the décor of the Vigadó club in designing synagogues. In the age of Historicism, which coincided with the outset of the precipitate development of Budapest, the debate on 'national' style became a discussion about the choice to be made among the historical styles: Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Classicist, or Baroque? No, Baroque was dismissed at once, for the most obvious reason: it was, after all, the official Habsburg style. While baroque elements were fit for a royal castle epitomising a compromise with the dynasty, it would be a misconception to use them in building a national image of Hungarianness. Romanism appeared less frequently in the nineteenth century than the other historical styles: it only became popular at the turn of the twentieth. Classicism would also be eliminated, because of the connotations with the Habsburg rule in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century – the system the Hungarian revolution of 1848 turned against. This would, of course, not have precluded baroque or classicist motifs and elements from being successfully featured in Budapest architecture, since the field of associations is sufficiently extensive for any of the great European cultural styles to extract all sorts of content from it – without making them dominant. Finally, the dispute revolved around the Gothic and the Renaissance and, within each of these styles, between their varieties.

It seems that the Gothic eventually took precedence. Although Renaissance prevailed among tenement houses, gothic style was used for the two among the city's major public edifices: St. Matthias Church and the Parliament. Similarly to the London Parliament complex, the style symbolised the mighty tradition of estate-based parliamentarianism. The ideological message was: like England, Hungary is free from the need to artificially implant parliamentarianism in the aftermath of the prevalence of a democratic tradition, happening to occur in the nineteenth century, since the country has its own established constitutional tradition. Imre Steindl faced the necessity, instead, to solve a constructional problem: how to imbed a dome in the overall gothic structure. The contemporaries aptly remarked that the building's adornments were gothic while its structure was renaissance: with its horizontal façade and a dome within the central symmetry axis, the building resembled a Renaissance palace rather than a Gothic cathedral. However, such arrangement was justifiable: aside from the fact that the sacred structure pattern would not have been suitable with a secular purpose, the Budapest Parliament, owing precisely to its architectural layout, gained an additional ideological purport as it became a material symbol of the Hungarian Constitution. Two identical wings of the building contained the House of Representatives and the House of Magnates: a visual symbol of equivalence of the democratic and the aristocratic element in the Hungarian political system, while the dome situated between them, and towering above them, is a symbol of unity of legislation and homogeneity of the country.[2] The great hall underneath the dome was designed to offer space for both Houses to assemble in joint sessions. In line with the traditional meaning of the symbol, the dome could be perceived also as an epitome of monarchic power; in this view, the edifice would symbolise a concord between the King and the political nation, this being the very foundation of the constitutional compromise concluded with Austria in 1867.[3] It would also express an ideal balance between the democratic, the aristocratic and the monarchic element: in Aristotelian terms, an image of the best conceivable political system. Yet, the

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[2] The dome expressed 'Die Einheit der Gesetzgebung'; Rudolf [Rezső] Vigand, *Wegweiser Budapests. Führer durch die Kgl. Ung. Haupt- und Residenzstadt* (Budapest, 1910), 270.

[3] Thus does Miklós Moyzer interpret the meaning of the Parliament's dome; *Torony, kupola, kolonnád* (Budapest, 1971), 45.

significance of monarchical institutions in Hungary's system is high-lighted, rather, by certain other buildings.

Let us stick to Gothic influences still for a while. The role of monarchy has been stronger emphasised through the great rebuilding of Our Lady's Church at the Old-Town hill in Buda, popularly known as Matthias Church (*Mátyás-templom*). The redevelopment into a neo-Gothic temple did not preserve much of the former building. The designer, Frigyes Schulek, was a student of Viennese architect Friedrich von Schmidt, who fathered the 're-Gothicisation' of Vienna's St. Stephen's Cathedral. The Buda church has preserved in its structure certain elements from the time of King Matthias Corvinus, but they were deeply hidden. The façade was rebuilt in the spirit of a modest provincial baroque and embedded in the edifices of the Jesuit convent and college stretching along its both sides. The church had, however, a mediaeval tradition, and was chosen as the venue of the ceremony of crowning Franz Joseph as king in 1867. It thence became the coronation church of Hungarian kings, and thus an appropriate architectural rank had to be conferred on it. Schulek did a lot to give the building momentous importance: he elevated the edifice, hoisted up the southern tower within a new gothic façade, so that it resembled the belfry of Vienna's St. Stephen's; and, first and foremost, he radically rearranged the space around the church. The former Jesuit college buildings were removed, emptying the area around the church, especially on the southern side. In this way, the solid of the new temple was disclosed. Around the square emerged the Fisherman's Bastion (*Halászbástya*) complex, whose style intentionally drew from the architecture of St. Stephen's time (if such a thing ever existed); the coronation church was thus interrelated with the context of the outset of the Hungarian monarchy.

In parallel to the renovation of Matthias Church, the second most important building at Buda's Castle Hill, the Royal Castle, was renovated. In order to grasp the meaning of the Castle, we have to briefly summarise the role of monarchy in Hungary's political system of the time. This role was quite essential both on the real and symbolic level, and it simultaneously tangled in contradiction. On the one hand, the distinctiveness of Hungarian monarchic institutions was one of the primary attributes of the state's sovereignty. As with all European nations boasting their 'own' monarchic past, the great Hungarian monarchs of yore, such as St. Stephen, Louis the Great or Matthias

Corvinus, were the all-important national heroes. On the other hand, however, in the Hungarian case, the modern monarchy involved the Habsburg dynasty, of which many a Hungarian – particularly those whose background was Protestant, and especially after the revolution was suppressed in 1849 – were downright critical. Hence, the need aroused to produce a public image of the institution of monarchy that would emphasise its national character and its continuity in the history of Hungary since the time of Saint Stephen and, on the other hand, to present an image of monarchy acceptable for the Habsburg dynasty. Viewed from this standpoint, the 1867 Compromise was, possibly (this by no means being a complete view), a 'nationalisation' of the dynasty; if this is the right thing to say, through assimilating the Habsburgs into the Hungarian national idea. The dualism generated because of the 1867 settlement was not, at least in the Hungarian perspective, an Austrian-Hungarian dualism; rather than that, it was one between the Hungarian political nation and its king. The king of Hungary entered into a compromise with the nation; the fact that the king was, incidentally, the Emperor of Austria, Archduke of Upper and Lower Austria, the king of Bohemia, etc., etc., was of no relevance from the Hungarian standpoint.

The situation called for a self-restriction on both sides: the Hungarians as well as their monarch. The latter had to accept the fact that he was a king in Hungary, rather than the Austrian emperor, and had to strictly play the part of the national monarch of Hungarians. The political elite had to adapt to the fact that the most varied political currents, in expressing their programmes and aspirations, had to use the language of dynastic loyalty. In terms of its ideological programme, the Royal Castle in Buda is clearly an example of how the dynastic loyalty language served the glorification of Hungarian (yea, *Hungarian*) monarchical institutions and, more broadly, Hungarian political system. The Hungarian national character of monarchy institutions is epitomised by Saint Stephen's Crown – the gem typifying the Hungarian statehood, kept at the Royal Castle.

> When sojourning at the Castle of Buda, His Royal Majesty Franz Joseph is not dwelling at home. For the Castle is not owned by the monarch: the Holy Hungarian Crown is the proprietor[4],

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[4] 'A Budai várpalota', *Vasárnapi Ujság*, liv. 2 (13th January 1907), 21–2.

an illustrated weekly, *Vasárnapi Ujság*, made the readers clear about it in 1907. Here we come across the characteristic trait of the Hungarian legal-and-constitutional idea, consisting in identifying a physical object: the mediaeval crown safeguarded with reverence, with a juristic notion – the 'Crown' as the monarchical institution. When one refers, for instance, to 'prerogatives of the Crown', meant are the prerogatives not of an abstract institution but of a physical object. All this is reflected in the iconography and ideological programmes underlying the buildings.

Having digressed into a legal domain, let us resume the Castle story. Matthias Corvinus's magnificent Renaissance building was completely destroyed during the Turkish reign. In the time of Maria Theresa and Joseph II, a new baroque castle was built, as a venue of infrequent visits paid by the monarch (let us bear in mind that Pozsony functioned as the capital at the time, and it was there that Hungary's 'central' royal castle was located). When, however, the transformation of Budapest into a modern capital started, the castle turned out to be much too small as a venue of the ceremonies and celebrations which were meant to take place in it.[5] Hence, a reconstruction appeared indispensable. In order to ensure adequate number of ample representative halls and chambers, it was decided that a wing should be annexed. Before then, the castle was quadrilateral. North of the eastern façade of the quadrangle a twin section was to be added; moreover, between the old and the new wing, a puissant central section was placed, featuring the pompous stairs and a dome. Thus, an enormous symmetrical façade was developed, breached with a monumental dome that has dominated the city's landscape, becoming one of its major visual landmarks. Resulting from a thorough redevelopment of the old castle, the façade has covered, virtually, a new inner structure. Along with increased dimensions of the castle, the architectural style posed the other major issue – less important, perhaps, from the constructional viewpoint but certainly more relevant in ideological terms. As a matter of fact, the only option to follow was a neo-Baroque solution with some references to the heroic struggles against the Turks in the seventeenth century. The liberation from the Turkish dominance was one of the moments

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[5] Alajos Hauszmann, *A Magyar királyi vár. Die ungarische Königsburg. Le Château Royal de Hongrie* (Budapest [1912]).

in the history of the Habsburg house which, at least to some degree (as the opinions varied at this point), could count on a positive response from educated Hungarians. The neo-Baroque monument of Prince Eugene of Savoy in front of the castle's main entrance resembles the monuments of Habsburg commanders deployed at the Heroes' Square (*Heldenplatz*) in Vienna. Apart from the anti-Turkish fighting tradition, there was one more important incentive for taking over this particular architectural style: in the last decades of the century, it became a sort of quasi-official style for public edifices (and was propagated as such by Albert Ilg, a noted Viennese art historian[6]).

Thus, the neo-Baroque style was found the most suited for a Hungarian kings' castle. Moreover, it was necessary to show the Habsburgs as the legitimate continuators of the Hungarian tradition. The halls devoted to the previous Hungarian dynasties of Árpád and Hunyadi, designed in the historical styles corresponding with these two Houses, served the purpose. The most splendid of the historical rooms, modelled in a baroque manner, 'following the Fischer von Erlach's model', featured the dynasty of Habsburg. The castle could be visited by public when the monarch was not in. On the ideological level, then, the Castle's interior was regarded as open to the people of Hungary[7]; in any case, their appearance was popularised through numerous descriptions and illustrations. Hence, it could be deemed public space – at least symbolically, if not literally.

III

I am primarily interested, just to remind, in one aspect of the ideological agenda of Budapest in Franz Joseph's time – namely, the affirmation of the emerging bourgeois culture. There appears in front of our eyes a large City, which within a generation turns its peripheral status into a metropolis, and whose population encompasses the most diverse groups that had remained almost not interlinked before; it is

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[6] See Péter Farbaky, 'A budai királyi palota a historizmus korában (Ybl Miklós és Hauszmann Alajos átépítési terveinek fejlődése *és* kapcsolata)', in *Tanulmányok Budapest Multjából*, xxix: *A Budavári Királyi Palota Evszázadai* (Budapest, 2001), 241–66.

[7] The deluxe publication *A király könyve*, Budapest [no publ. date], the endpaper between pages 10 and 11 features a characteristic illustration showing 'provincial residents' on a visit to the Royal Castle.

quite plain that such a city forms a foreign body in the Hungarian agrarian society whose culture has been predominantly nobiliary. All this, in a much natural way, aroused the necessity for the nation to be reassured about a successful outcome of the transition. Budapest emanated with a bourgeois stability – so powerfully that a sensitive observer would be eager to presume that the stability he saw mostly a matter of postulate, and not quite part of the reality. To spot this aspect of the quest for stability, it suffices to observe that it needs no in-depth psychological analysis to become apparent, since the available sources speak of it quite openly. Looking into contemporaneous commentaries, the press, pieces of journalism and tourist guides, and other utterances too, we become struck with one reappearing motif: the development of Budapest was for Hungarians a ticket to civilisation. May the aliens finally see and understand, it was reasoned, that Hungarians are a cultural nation! It is fascinating how the *Art Nouveau*, or rather, the *Secession*, formed, to an extent, part of the same image, though it rebelled against it.

Thus, it could be read that the Royal Castle was virtually the largest monarchic residence in the Continent, next to the Versailles; that the nation could rejoice to see the St. Stephen's Basilica project completed, as the temple "testifies, in the first place, to our cultural aspirations"[8]. As a deputy proudly found it, the new Parliament edifice

> is the finest structure that along the entire course of the Danube appears reflected in its waves, as a sign made to the East and to the West that the country which has erected it mentally claims its right to exist.[9]

What is more, the Parliament is "one of the world's largest and most imposing buildings"[10]. It is an enjoyable opportunity that "the Government has also taken care" to publish a very nicely edited (by "Béla Neÿ, architect and ministerial counsellor") book, in Hungarian, German and French (and at a considerable cost of 150 crowns),

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[8] S.A., 'A Szent István-Bazilika', *Vasárnapi Ujság*, lii, 47 (10th November, 1905), 750–1.

[9] This fragment has been quoted (regrettably, without mentioning the MP's name) in Ernst R. Leonhardt and Joseph Melan, *Oeffentliche Neubauten in Budapest. Aus Anlass der Studienreise im Jänner 1885 des Österreichischen Ingenieur- und Architekten-Vereines beschrieben* (Budapest, 1885), 6.

[10] 'Mi ujság? Az uj országház épitése', *Vasárnapi Ujság*, xliv, 30 (25th July, 1897), 493.

explaining the architecture and the *décor* of the Parliament edifice. The work was to "show to the foreigners the progress of Hungarian art that has been achieved within a short time".[11]

Fascination with the beauty of historical styles went hand in hand with admiration of the modernity of the technologies applied. Electric lifts, radiators, ventilators artfully hidden under the historical coat aroused enthusiasm in authors of guides and press articles. And it was not only (though, to a considerable degree, also) about a pride that state-of-the-art technologies can be met *in this country* as well. Their use justified, in some way, the validity of historical styles: once a style of this sort can be merged with the most modern technical equipment, it clearly means that the style is *not* anachronous but forms a fully-fledged part of the modern world.

And it is with relish that these authors emphasise the role of their domestic industry in preparing construction materials. The works of architecture are truly Hungarian owing to their artistic decoration and *décor* that corresponds with the spirit of the nation – through the nationality of the designer and the artists creating the details, and through the contribution of the home industry in the construction and finishing works. As the Rev. Lénárd Lollok wrote in his guide to the just-completed St. Stephen's Basilica:

> It is with joyous beating of the heart that we are watching this magnificent structure, which in its entirety, as well as in its tiniest details, preaches to the world of to-day and to the posterior centuries the glory of *Hungarian art and industry* [italicised as in the original].[12]

Another guide to the temple introduces the reader to the specific artefacts remarking that, for instance, the candelabra were made by the 'Hungarian Metal and Lightning Products Factory, a joint-stock company'.[13]

The number of such quotations is unlimited, there is no point multiplying them. The phrase 'cultural nation' (German: *Kulturnation*) draws one's attention: in the nineteenth-century language it was quite

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[11] 'Képek az Országházból', *Vasárnapi Ujság*, lii, 27 (2nd July 1905), 425–6.

[12] Lénárd Loolok, *A Szent István királyról nevezett budapesti templom belsejének rövid ismertetése* (Budapest, 1905), 27. Similar concepts are found e.g. in Orbán I. Thold, *A budapesti Szent-István templom (vázlatos ismertetés)* (Budapest, 1905), 33.

[13] *Ibidem*, 37.

a common phrase denoting, virtually, everything the Poles or the Hungarians (and, in essence, the Germans too) endeavoured to aspire for – and what was regarded by the English or the French as a normal and obvious description of their nation's condition. One may conceive that there is a never-written-down but subconsciously prevalent list of features potentially characteristic of a *Kulturnation*. On building their Budapest, the Hungarians were continually checking this register, ticking the points already completed: 'Splendid Architecture': tick; 'Modern Technology': tick; all the 'Major Historical Styles': tick; and so on. Here or there, we come across an item from the list clearly mentioned in the sources: for example, per-capita consumption of soap ranks among the major indicators of a nation's cultural development; therefore, the number of public baths for which Budapest was famous was an index figure for high standard of the Hungarians' culture.[14]

The Hungarian establishment derived its worldview from the tradition of nineteenth-century liberalism. Immediately before the First World War, this tradition was growing increasingly 'diluted', taking over, to an increasing degree, elements of new anti-liberal political ideologies: the very name of the ruling party – Nemzeti Munkapárt, meaning National Labour Party, testified to gradual quitting of the liberal phraseology. But there has been a personal and outlook-related continuity – in spite of elements of cultural pessimism, increasingly coming to the fore in Hungarian and European culture. One element of this continuity has been the constant presence of the traditionally liberal view of the role of culture as a gauge of the nation's position in the European ranking of strength and prestige. On the eve of the First World War, the civilisation standard had in the view of the authorities the same legitimising function, expressed with use of similar phrasing, as thirty or forty years earlier, even though such legitimisation was to be endorsed by the aesthetics of *Secession* – succeeding Historicism of a generation earlier. Such use of *Secession* or its elements disarmed, to an extent, the artistic movement's radical anti-systemic potential.

But, not completely so. On the one hand, we can spot, somewhat astonished, that the new style followed up the issues tackled by the former: in the opinion of *Art Nouveau* adherents, the Historicists had not solved the problem of national style, since this task could only be delivered on the basis of *Secession*.

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[14] Vigand, *Wegweiser Budapests*, 88.

A generation earlier, Béla Neÿ, an architect (not too well-known as such) and quite an important figure amongst the Hungarian technical intelligentsia in the period concerned, criticised in 1871 – then as a public officer and a major activist with the Union of Hungarian Builders and Engineers – the very idea of national style. In the spirit of triumphant liberal optimism, he was convinced that the style of the time when technology interconnects people of various nations to an unprecedented degree, and whose central idea is humanity, could only be international.[15] He clearly missed the point as to the conceptualities, since his epoch witnessed an unheard-of popularity of the national style idea all across Europe. As to the practicalities, though, Neÿ's diagnosis is striking with its commonsensical soundness: our contemporary observer of nineteenth-century architecture cannot help amazing, in this and some other cases, at how much 'international' were the buildings presented as works of a national style: following, in fact, a pan-European Historicist convention, they differed in details, at most, from other similar buildings in other countries.

The same charge against Historicists experiments with developing a national style was posed by proponents of *Secession*. Károly Lyka, a noted art theorist and historian, editor of *Müveszét* [Art] monthly, being the main organ of the trend's protagonists, proposed a programme to develop a Hungarian national style based on *Secession*.[16] A few years later, Ödön Lechner, an outstanding representative of Hungarian *Art Nouveau* architecture, published in the same monthly a manifesto article entitled *Magyar formanyelv nem volt, hanem lesz* [There has been no formal Hungarian language, but there shall be one]. Actually, the title was a programme in itself, being a travesty of the known slogan of István Széchenyi – a figure that in Hungarian public life of the time had evolved into a major national hero. Széchenyi is namely credited with having said, 'There's been no Hungary, but there shall be one'[17], thereby laying, as it were, the foundations

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[15] Béla Neÿ, 'Magyar *épitészeti* styl. Az egylet 1871 évi jan. 21-én tartott egyetemes szakülésén olvasta', *A Magyar Mérnök- és Epitész-Egylet Közlönye*, v, 3 (1871), 97–113.

[16] Károly Lyka, 'Szecessziós stílus – magyar stílus', *Müveszét*, i, 3 (1902), 164–81.

[17] Széchenyi never expressed himself like this. His manifesto book *Hitel* [The Credit] is concluded by the formula: "People often think: Hungary – that's past and gone; but I should prefer to think: Hungary *shall be* there!" Its modified version is usually quoted (as above). See http://www.kislexikon.hu/magyarorszag_nem_volt_hanem_lesz.html [30.12.2014].

for the development direction of a modern Hungarian nationality. Lechner started with a premise that was completely reverse to that formulated by Historicists. For him, the question 'In which style should we build?' made no sense as the style is entrenched in culture, and merely cannot be arbitrarily selected. We cannot build in a Gothic or Baroque style, since the time we live in is not a Gothic or a Baroque era. A style can be, at most, brought to perfection based on the really existing elements. Pursuant to these principles, Lechner shaped his own, highly specific, style, which in Budapest was applied with the buildings of the Royal Hungarian Postal Savings Bank (*Magyar Királyi Postatakarékpénztár*), Museum of Applied Arts (*Iparművészeti Múzeum*) or Royal Hungarian Geological Institute (*Magyar Királyi Földtani Intézet*). Other creative artists of the period (just to name Károly Kós, with his nostalgic variations on themes of Transylvanian rural architecture) successfully elaborated a different aesthetic convention, but the general assumptions made by Lechner, claiming the necessity to observe a style ingrained in the popular culture, became – since the century's turn – a generally accepted wisdom among the followers of the new style.

Thus, the *Secession* aesthetics was harnessed in Hungary in the service of the statehood idea, to a larger or lesser extent. In the afore-quoted article, Lechner lamented that the alleged historical or national styles have, essentially, nothing quite national to them (and thus, he agreed with the one-generation-earlier sceptical attitude of Béla Neÿ). The point was, the buildings in Fiume (today, Rijeka in Croatia) were to tell everyone: "Here is where Hungary begins!" *Art Nouveau* signalled its readiness to perform a task Historicism had proved unequal to.

On the other hand, however, *Art Nouveau* fulfilled the task in a different fashion. Its national style, or rather, numerous attempts at realising a national style, with use of a variety of means, made by most various artists proving capable of achieving some very valuable artistic effects, rejected the traditional language of expression. They could not do it otherwise, since they resorted to more or less processed, and more or less imaginary folk art motifs. This being the case, *Art Nouveau* could successfully aspire for expressing a national spirit, more successfully even than a Historicist art, whilst it found it harder to express the bourgeois self-confidence, sense of inveteracy in the history, and belief in a liberal progress. An ideological

breakdown of Positivistic rationalism is visible in the sphere of visual arts of the time no less than in the contemporaneous literature or journalism. The altered style in the fine arts resulted not only from an autonomous evolution of aesthetic forms – from another transition from a rational and serene 'renaissance' into a dramatic and irrational 'baroque': it also expressed a transformation of sentiments and attitudes. Hungary's political and social tensions in the early twentieth century were growing increasingly dramatic; deeper and thicker scratches appeared underneath the façade of national or state unity. The magic of Budapest did not magnetise everybody.

The opposition factions, both on the Right and on the Left, criticised for most different reasons the status quo generated by the Compromise of 1867 – the system visually reflected in Budapest's architecture. The opponents of the Government did not believe in history told by the walls of this city; they could only see a hopelessly failed attempt at building a façade that shielded, with a guise of bourgeois stability, a backward society and a state affected by a severe crisis. One leftist radical, associated with *Huszadik Század* monthly (ideologically stretched between a left-wing version of liberalism and a reformist socialism), wrote:

> We have a Royal Palace that has cost us huge sums; we do not need it at all, for the king never stops at Budapest any longer than a few weeks at a time. We have a magnificent Parliament which, owing to the enormous size and splendour of its interior, makes one, whoever is unaware of the circumstances, believe that this palace is situated at the centre of a nation whose population is rich, numerous, and educated; one that has a mighty army and fleet at its disposal, along with immeasurable colonies. A nation that ranks amongst the first when it comes to world politics, and universal human culture.[18]

An essentially similar diagnosis was proposed after the fall of the country's duality – from the other extreme of Hungary's political spectrum. Gyula Szekfű, the most eminent Hungarian historian of the former half of the twentieth century and one of the main exponents of Hungarian conservatism, wrote of a 'neo-Baroque' Hungarian

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[18] Zoltán Szász, *Les causes du marasme de la littérature hongroise contemporaine*, in *La Hongrie contemporaine et le suffrage universel*, Budapest 1909, 158–66; quote on p. 162.

culture of Horthy's time using words that the reader could as well refer to the period before 1914. What he actually meant was not a neo-Baroque stylistic form but, mostly, an association with showiness, ostentation, or window-dressing concealing weakness and lack of prospects.[19]

I should think that these critics were quite right, but not completely right, in their impressions. Budapest was 'showy' as a matter of fact, constituted, in a sense, a theatrical decoration that was meant to conceal the provincial everyday reality. The capital was to a large extent a product of the state, an element in the development of a bureaucratic system which needed huge amounts of offices – and which, thanks to the employees of these offices, had appropriate power to enforce transfer from the private into public sphere of adequate funds that later on were used in the reconstruction of the city, among other purposes.

Yet, forms without content tend to overgrow with content. Budapest was real – in the sense that it constituted, as a whole, a record of a vision, and of a type of sensing of the world. A most real vision or perception, let us add; one that was shared, to varying degree, by many people: intellectuals as well as, probably, other dwellers of the city. Still, broader research would be required to determine the legibility of the allegorical message. Hence, the city's architectural and visual design of Budapest is a fascinating source for historians of ideas (not just for art historians). Any theoretical considerations such as to what extent architecture can be treated as a language should be dismissed for the purpose of these considerations; the essential message is that visual sources tell us a lot about what written sources are tacit about: the most general forms of the epoch's cultural air, or spirit.

IV

Well, then – but what about any 'peculiar path' to all that? After all, development of a 'capital in the peripheries' is not a uniquely Hungarian phenomenon. A new capital in a new place symbolises continuity and rupture at the same time: while referring to the old tradition of a nation, state, or another entity, it proclaims a new stage of its

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[19] Gyula Szekfű, *A három nemzedék és ami utána következik* (Budapest, 1989 [a reprint of 3rd edition: Budapest, 1934]), 402–15 (part 5, chap. 2: 'A neobarokk-társadalom').

development. Such trends are traceable across history; there are parallelisms that can be found for the period discussed: Australia; the redevelopment of Washington; or (to an extent), the reconstruction of Berlin.[20] After all, is the category of 'periphery' so relevant? Did not the English, the French, or any other nation one might consider an exemplary 'centre', design their capital cities in a similar way, making them exponents of comparable aspirations and ambition? Is it not so that every generation reprograms the ideological and (quite the same aspect) urban-planning facet of their capital city? Then, whether such capital is part of a periphery or not is of no relevance at all. There is virtually no as 'central' a capital, and more archetypal one (in terms of the idea of metropolitan status), as Rome. Like European monarchies modelled themselves on the Roman Empire, the antique or the mediaeval one, the architectural and town-planning shape of individual buildings and structures, or regions, approached the Roman 'benchmark'. One rather easily finds such structures in Budapest as well: the semicircular colonnade of the Millennium Monument was an obvious quotation from the Bernini colonnade at St. Peter's Square; the neo-Renaissance St. Stephen's Basilica no less clearly refers to Rome's St. Peter's. Still, one may strongly argue that the urban reshaping projects undertaken by the new Italian state after 1870: the carving of the glamorous Via Nazionale, construction of Historicist edifices such as the Palace of Justice on the bank of the Tiber, and the monuments, with the *Altare della Patria* and the Victor Emmanuel II Monument at Piazza Venezia as a highlight among them[21] – all that so much resembles the actions taken in Budapest. Rome was redeveloped into a modern metropolis not almost from scratch: indeed, a city that had been there for two and a half thousand years was adapted into the new functions. In London and Paris, the imperial capitals, a new type of nineteenth-century metropolitan status called for a modern aesthetics. Throughout the Victorian period, London successfully resisted any monumental urban-planning projects, and the nation made a sort of ideology out of this resistance.

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[20] See Wolfgang Sonne, *Representing the State: Capital City Planning in the Early Twentieth Century* (Munich and Berlin, 2003).
[21] See Marcello Venturolli, *La patria di marmo. Tutta la storia del Vittoriano, il monumento più discusso dell'età umbertina, tra arte, spettacoli, invenzioni, scandali e duelli* (Rome, 1995).

As a result, the disorderliness of London testifies to English freedom whereas Parisian boulevards attest to the omnipotence of the French state. However, with the new ideas blowing up in the early years of the twentieth century, when the power of individualistic liberalism began shrinking in England too, London was bestowed with a town-planning complex: the monumental avenue linking the Buckingham Palace and Trafalgar Square.

Similarly, any usefulness of the city centre–peripheries distinction may be called into question – which for my present purpose I have otherwise assumed as obvious and calling for no justification. The distinction is obviously 'ideal-typical', and is useful in setting phenomena according to an order, rather than in finding 'real' regions in the historical reality, ones that would fully respond to an ideal type of 'centre' or 'peripheries'. It is an obvious thing that no such regions exist, for in every really existing locality it is easy to find elements of both – which does not deny the reasonableness of the division.

The story on Budapest of the Franz Joseph era is of dual importance for the issues this volume deals with. On the one hand, in spite of the above-formulated reservations, it provides an ideal example of an 'impartial' specificity of the peripheral development. The example of Budapest namely confirms, almost in a textbook manner, the general idea about the course of social processes in the European periphery. They commenced with delay and therefore took a 'condensed' course, going faster and with a higher intensity than in the 'centre' countries. An American reporter was delighted in 1896 with the modern infrastructure of Pest, which he described as the "most modern city in Europe".[22] in his perception, Budapest excelled over New York with its city transport system (as opposed to the Hungarian capital, N.Y.C. had no 'subway' then yet). In parallel, top-down initiative was a particularly powerful aspect – which in Budapest is visible in a great number of richly ornamented public office and administration buildings in the downtown quarters. Finally, social and economic change, or transition, result in a country such as Hungary in an 'insular' modernisation transforming the 'Hinterland' to a much lesser degree than in the West. Contrasts stronger than in the 'centre countries' come out as a result, often ending up in political tensions and crises, but quite often proving extremely productive culturally.

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[22] Richard H. Davis, *A Year from a Reporter's Note-Book* (New York, 1898), 71–2.

On the other hand, though, the case under discussion is of relevance on the level not only of social processes really occurring but also of public debate on developmental specificities. The people who designed Budapest, its buildings and structures, and who described them, thus 'programming' the addressees' minds so that they could, somehow, understand the message behind the city, were aware of Hungary's civilizational backwardness and declared struggle against it – also in the discursive sphere. They created a tale on Hungary's history in which backwardness has been overcome, which fact is epitomised by the magnificent capital town. The Occidentalism and modernity of Budapest is a story of a *Sonderweg* that has come to an end. Those who have created this story overlooked, however, that it perfectly fits the backwardness paradigm, and proves to be similar to the analogous stories presented in the nineteenth and twentieth century by the elites of other peripheral countries. As is the case with those other stories, also this one breaks down at the moment the ostensibility of the modernisation is brought to light. This is how the Budapest case has become part of the history of the *Sonderweg* debate as well as of the history of *Sonderweg* as a real social phenomenon.

trans. Tristan Korecki

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