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# Medieval houses, plots and city planning surrounding St. Sigismund's Church in Buda

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The city of Buda was founded by Béla IV around the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Building on the plots took place according to a well defined method, which can be deduced mainly from the ruins of cellars since the remains of these were left to us.

In earlier times cellars were usually excavated in the interior of the plots and had either a wooden structure or were made of stone. However, later they were situated directly at the street front and residential buildings were built above them. Between 1988 and 2003 several excavations were conducted in the southern, narrow part of the city – today's St György Square – where various forms of building on the plots could be observed in the northern area. Six different plots could be identified.

The area situated south of these became a part of the king's residence at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Meanwhile – parallel to this – St. Sigismund's Church as a kind of new royal Chapel was built on the site described above. During this process the buildings of the northern area were demolished to the ground level. Thus at least their foundations and underground structures have remained for us to observe in “original condition”.

It can be concluded that on the uniformly sized plots there existed a variety of forms of building up to the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

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Following the destruction of the Mongol invasion, King Béla IV began a new kind of regional politics. To defend the inhabitants and wealth of the country, he promoted settlements built on high ground surrounded by stone walls. On the right bank of the Danube, south of Buda, the royal centre formed on the site of Roman Aquincum, and on the left bank of the river on the vast plateau opposite Pest, the merchant city, which was granted a charter as early as the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, he built a settlement called New Buda (Novus Buda), later called Buda, while the former Buda got the name Old Buda (Vetus Buda; Györfy 1973, 295–308).

A city wall punctuated by towers surrounded the triangular plateau. At appropriate places gates opened. The boundaries of the 18–20 metre wide plots which reached out to the city wall conformed to the line of the wall. The areas between the plots along the walls were divided by streets along the length of the hill; the areas between them were parcelled out. In the wider northern part four streets were formed, in the narrower, southern part there were only two. The significant area left in the middle part of the hill became the market place of the city.

The Hungarians moving in from Old Buda, the Germans from Pest and the Jews coming from Austria formed the most significant ethnic groups in the new city (Károly Magyar 1991, 153–166, 174–176).

The building of plots took place in a characteristic fashion in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The remains of buildings left are mainly cellars that show evidence of wine production in the area. Only in the 13<sup>th</sup> century were cellars built in the middle of the plots, along their boundaries. The cellars were built in wood, but you can also find some in stone. At the same time a new type appeared behind the street facade, perpendicular to it, underneath residential buildings. All of these cellars have stone walls. Individual cellars dug in the back of the plots were also common. The cellars were at first fitted with timber ceilings, vaulting became widespread in the 14–15<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**1)** Houses: Gerevich 1955; Gerevich 1973, 389–394; Holl 1989, 60–62; the connection between the owner's profession and the house type: Holl 1989, 60–69; cellars: Zádor 2000.

The residential buildings were mainly built on the front above the cellar. Later, parallel to the first house, on the other side of the plot, another building was erected and the gap between them was used as a gateway. More floors were built inside the buildings; the gateway became a corridor-like entrance. On its two sides a row of sediles (a kind of niche for sitting) was formed, which had a representative role, as well as a role in the retailing of wine. As a result of the division of plots several varieties of the above mentioned forms of building occurred. Research suggests that the application of certain types of houses might have been connected to the occupation of the person who built up the plot. By this we mean mainly the buildings which were built on 3/4 plots, without sediles, fitted with shops or workshops on ground level as well as the shop-buildings which replaced the former shanties in the market place. Unfortunately there are not enough written sources to prove this assumption. **1)**

Often, independent buildings were built in the middle or back parts of the plot, usually with a cellar in the early period. Their function is not always clear. Sometimes they served as storehouses, sometimes they were residential buildings. It needs to be noted that up until a later period there were wooden residential buildings among the stone palaces of the city.

Let me introduce the different forms of buildings on plots in the 13–15<sup>th</sup> centuries through examples taken from a part of the city which possesses specific topographic features. I would also like to introduce the archeologically observable effects of changes in function through the Middle Ages in one area.

From the founding of the city onwards there were two gates in the southern part, St. John's Gate in the east and the Jewish Gate in the west. There are two southbound streets parallel to the city wall which gave their names to the two gates. Between the two streets there is a significant square formed in the modern period. In the north of this area there is the partly ruined building of the former Ministry of Defence. Between 1988 and 2003 we conducted several excavations in different parts of the Ministry building and the area south of it. In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the area was significantly deepened, so that the medieval ground level was destroyed and only the cellars of the former buildings could be excavated (Feld – Kárpáti 2000; Kárpáti – Zádor 2004). The excavation revealed the royal chapel of the Virgin Mary or the collegiate church of St. Sigismund founded by King Sigismund in 1410, which was erected on the highest spot in the foreground

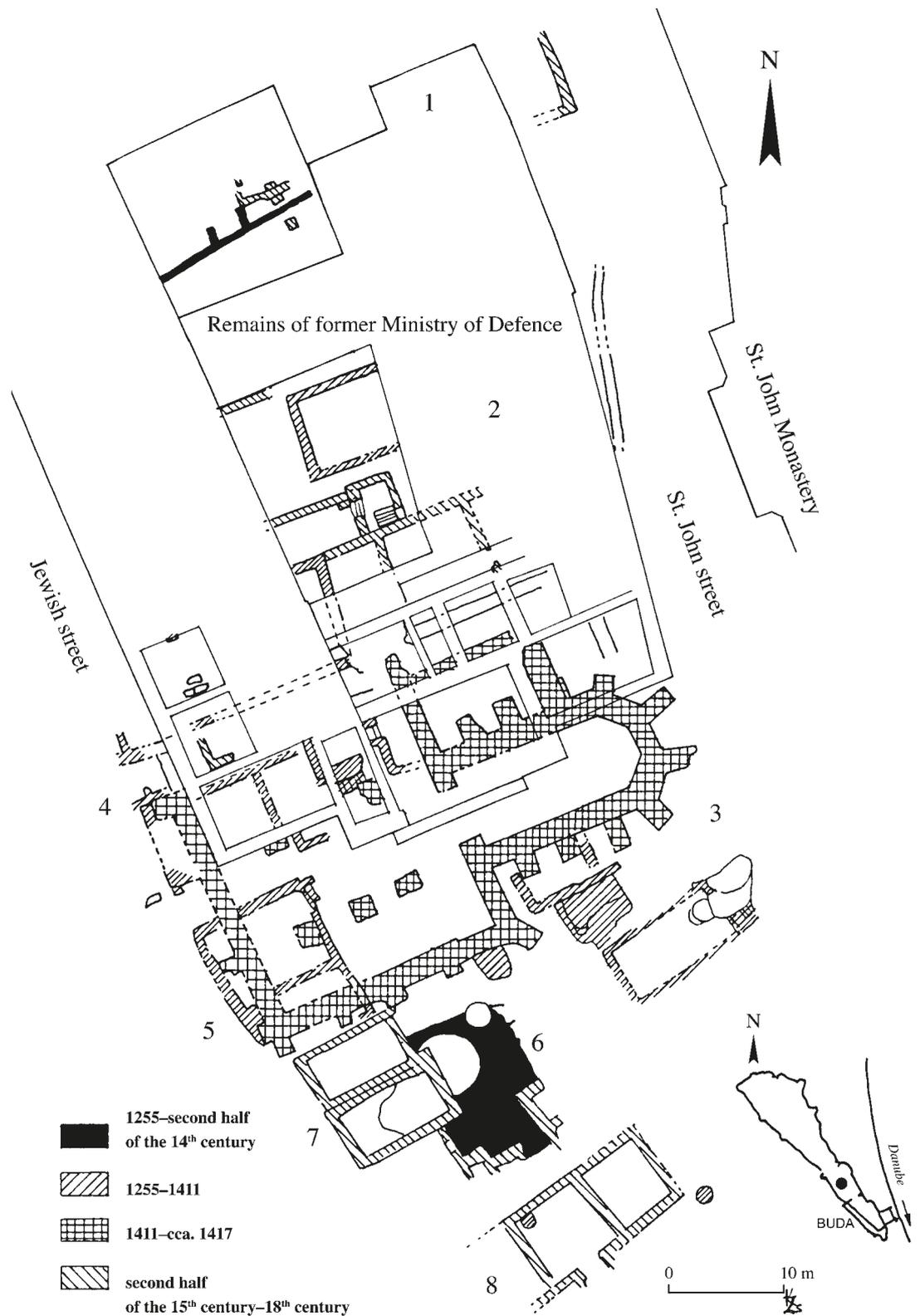


Fig. 1  
Buda, St. György Square, ground plan of the excavations (1989–1996).

of the royal palace in the medieval city. Previously, in the area of the church there had been plots with town houses that the king ordered to be pulled down. The stone material of the buildings was used for the construction and the cellars were used as foundation trenches and filled in only after the foundation of the main walls of the church (Kárpáti 2003, 240). (Fig. 1)

In the research it was possible to identify the following plots and buildings erected on them: One plot could not be defined because of significant modern disturbance.

**Plot 1:**

We were able to excavate the St. John's Street facade of the building erected on the plot, and the remains of a cistern built to the back of the house. The building of the church had no effect on this plot. At the moment we think that the royal steward of Buda Castle was the owner of this house at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, who had it built in place of a wooden residential building. Unfortunately we were unable to find any archaeological traces of this wooden building, because the cellars of the ministry destroyed most of the archaeological remains.

**Plot 2:**

South of the above mentioned, it was probably formed from several plots. On the basis of topographic data, we can place here the house of the tertiary Franciscan sisters, in a former illustrious lady's house, which stood opposite the St. John's Monastery of the Franciscan monks, founded in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. One of the earliest buildings is from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It stood at the back of the plot, without a cellar. It was pulled down in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. (Fig. 2) The two cellars, built with a common wall, that were excavated at the southern facade of the Ministry might have belonged here as well. For the building of the cellars an older building facing the Jewish Street was used. The cellars were divided into several sections, a feature observable with other cellars too. The northern cellar was accessible from the east, from the courtyard, the southern one opened from the street. The latter was abandoned when the church was built. In its place a passage was opened between the two streets. This method is completely different from the usual formation of burgher houses. The reason for this lies in the building of the house of the Beguines.



Fig. 2  
Plot 2., Foundations of the house  
without a cellar.

**Plot 3:**

The northern part of this plot only had a cellar in its rear. Its southern wall runs to the east; next to it a timber cellar was excavated. (Fig. 3) The front part of the residential building that stood here was without a cellar. The building and the cellars at the back of the plot were pulled down and filled in when the church was built. The same happened to the cross-buildings erected in the southern part. There was a deep cellar reaching out under the street, dug from the cellar under the building. One could enter the upper cellar from the same direction. This building was nearly completely pulled down; the walls of the cellar were almost totally removed when the church was built. On the basis of the cellars built at the boundaries of the plots, we estimate the width of the plot as 18 metres. The neighbouring plot could not be defined because of significant modern disturbance.

Fig. 3  
Remains of the cellars of the house  
at the rear of Plot 3.

**Plot 4:**

Under the northern nave of St. Sigismund's Church, under the cross-building facing Jewish Street, lay a cellar divided into two parts. The western part of the cellar was accessible from the street, the eastern part from the courtyard. The cellar-like building at the back of the plot also opened from the street, but the floor was at a higher level, than that of ordinary cellars. This cellar might have been inserted under the house later. Secondly used carved stones were used in its construction. We assume that the plot continues north of the building. The wall corner mentioned in connection with the second plot probably belonged to this plot too.



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**Středověké domy, parcely a urbanismus v okolí kostela sv. Zikmunda v Budě**

Buda byla vybudována ve 13. století za vlády Bély IV. v souvislosti s jeho novou regionální politikou zaměřenou na ochranu země prostřednictvím výšinných sídel obklopených kamennými hradbami.

Parcely měly stejnou velikost a přizpůsobovaly se městskému opevnění. Zástavba jednotlivých parcel probíhala podle jasně stanoveného plánu, který můžeme identifikovat hlavně díky dochovaným pozůstatkům sklepů.

Zpočátku bývaly sklepy obvykle hloubeny do země uvnitř parcel a neobsahovaly žádné dřevěné ani kamenné struktury. Později však byly situovány za uliční fasádou a obytné stavby stály nad nimi. V letech 1988 až 2003 bylo v jižní úzké části města – dnes náměstí St. György – provedeno několik archeologických výzkumů, díky nimž byly objeveny různé druhy zástavby v rámci parcel.

Náměstí se na počátku 15. století stalo součástí královské rezidence, zdejší budovy byly zbourány a jejich původní uspořádání se tak dochovalo až dodnes. Byl zde také postaven kostel sv. Zikmunda a královská kapele.

Na uvedené lokalitě se podařilo identifikovat šest různých parcel:

1. První parcela, severně od kostela, byla využívána až do 19. století.
2. Mezi kostelem a první parcelou vznikla další sloučením několika menších parcel. Stál zde dům řeholních sester III. řádu sv. Františka.
3. Třetí parcela měla jako jediná sklep v zadní části. Ten byl zasypán v souvislosti s výstavbou kostela.
4. Čtvrtá parcela se nacházela částečně pod lodí kostela sv. Zikmunda. Byl zde identifikován dvoudílný sklep v přední části a za ním uvnitř parcely další struktura připomínající sklep.
5. Pátá parcela ležela jižně od čtvrté a stála zde budova se sklepem situovaná paralelně s ulicí.
6. Na šesté parcele se nacházel kamenný sklep, který byl odstraněn ve druhé polovině 14. století. Poté byl postaven ještě jednou v 16. století.

Na závěr ještě můžeme dodat, že na parcelách stejné velikosti se až do první poloviny 15. století vyskytovala celá škála různých druhů staveb.

**Popisy obrázků**

Obr. 1  
Buda, náměstí sv. Jiří (St. György), půdorysný plán archeologických výzkumů (1989–1996).

Obr. 2  
Parcela 2. Základy nepodsklepeného domu.

Obr. 3  
Zbytky sklepů domu v zadní části parcely č. 3.

Obr. 4  
Parcela 5. Vchod do sklepa.

Obr. 5  
Urbanistický plán okolí kostela sv. Zikmunda ze dvacátých let 15. stol. (teoretická rekonstrukce).

