

ON THE MEDIAEVAL HUNGARIAN TOWNSCAPE

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Summary

Mediaeval South- and West-European townscape had skylines featured by family donjons dominating houses of rich patricians and nobles. A number of data from documents show such donjons to have also been built in Hungary after the Mongol invasion, second half of the 13th century. One or more towers might have existed in Sopron, Körmend, Pozsony, Visegrád, Sáropatak, etc. Recent excavations in Sopron found two two-storey donjons with traces of several reconstructions. Actually, not only written matter of ancient documents are available to research but — verifying their authenticity — buildings themselves lend an opportunity to the architectural reconnaissance of Hungarian towns under way to development.

At his 1297 visit in Sopron, King Endre III had a sorrow sight. Inhabitants suffered from serious social and economical troubles, town walls and fortifications were lying in ruins. So the king ordered half of the Fertő customs to be spent on reconstructing the walls and the town [1]. Still the subsequent decades brought ever new heavy disturbances, further delaying the construction of new walls. But in 1340, citizens report of the completion of the triple wall ring around the town, still digging of the moats being left over from the fortification works.

No doubt, construction of the fortifications was incumbent on the town as municipality. Endre III insists on donating half of the Fertő customs to the citizens for common use. Also in Pozsony, expenses from town fortifications charged the municipality, to be contributed to by citizens of any standing [2]. The more surprising is the trial between Lőrinc, son of Fülöp of Dág, and András Cenki, in 1339, a year before the report on the completion of fortifications, concerning possession of a tower, its lot and other accessories [3]. What kind of a tower is that? It is hard to realize that at a time where fortifications built by the townspeople were hardly completed, a pertaining tower would be in private possession to be sued for by two persons likely not to be permanent Sopron residents. Identities of litigant parties are known. Jenő Házi demonstrated Lőrinc son of Fülöp Dági to be a descendant of castellan Peter ousted by the king already in 1256 from Sopron because of unlawfulness, and beheaded for traitorship in 1279. András Cenki was a descendant of Zonuk, resident of

Babot, Sopron county, being donated, together with his sons and other citizens of Babot, the tower and houses of castellan Peter ousted in 1256 [4]. Accordingly, the tower sued for existed long before the beginning of constructing the fortifications. It becomes understandable why a tower might be possessed by private persons while fortifications possessed by the municipality were built, why it was litigated over, since it is likely to have had nothing to do with the fortifications under construction. But it is not the only tower in Sopron to be hard to interpret.

In 1250, Sopron burghers made an agreement with the order of Hospitalers settled there some years ago and having required a mansion and several pertaining premises in the Sopron castle. At last, with the intermediary of treasurer Csák, "sheriff" of Sopron, they agreed that burghers would hand over the wanted tower with the pertaining mansion and premises to the Hospitalers, under the same conditions and with the same incomes as the other towers were transferred to citizens in the Sopron castle [5]. One of them might buy the tower of castellan Peter. These burghers — citizens — possessing a tower might be like the mentioned Babot citizens or castellan Peter: leading layer of castle serfs eventually living in the countryside and staying in the castle only when on duty. Since, however, by that time urbanization already went ahead in Sopron, this layer was in a special situation. Anyhow, throughout the country, this layer strives to melt with the gentry. This period is also crucial for Sopron: possibility to get free from the disintegrating castellany and to urbanize, on one hand, and relation of this development to the fortune of castle serfs. This is why the quoted document insists on the mere intermediating role of the castellan in the agreement made by the Sopron burghers by own will [6]. These possessors of a tower did not depend directly on the sheriff any more: also Zonuk, citizen of Babot, received the tower under the condition to serve the king (condition likely to affect other towers, too).

In conformity with the document, all Sopron towers were the properties of private persons, under certain conditions, with their belongings of mansion, houses and an income. This income could not be else than half of the Fertő customs. In 1277, László IV confirmed in the patent of the town that half of the Fertő customs — already granted by Béla IV and István V to the same purpose — are due to the citizens for repairing and maintaining the towers. While this income helped to keep the towers sound for nearly hundred years (1339), town fortifications get crumbling and ruined. This fact might induce Endre III to alter the disposition over the customs revenue, to take it away from private persons and to give it to the municipality for communal uses.

But the 1277 patent, in addition to safeguarding maintenance of existing towers, grants any citizen the right to erect a new tower within the Sopron fortifications. Thus, compared to the 1250 condition, to the 14th century, the number of towers in the castle might have increased.

The above fact allows the conclusion that the mediaeval Sopron had several towers, independent of, and within, fortifications started to be built by the end of the 13th century, in the actual downtown, with the pertaining mansions, houses, certain incomes and charges. These towers were owned by the leading layer of Sopron castle serfs, demonstrated by Házi in his quoted study to be nuclei of the later patricians.

The above are not peculiar to Sopron. In 1245, Béla IV donated a village, Nyék, to the sons of Moch, Pozsony castle serfs, for having built a tower in the Pozsony fortifications at own costs. In recompense to this donation, owners of this village are obliged forever to repair and to guard the tower at own costs [7]. Here beneficiaries are explicitly called castle serfs; no doubt, this document dated ten years before the donation of the tower to the Babot citizens refers to the same social layer as that of citizens ("burgenses") affected by the Sopron towers.

In 1252, János, abbot of Pilis, had had constructed two towers joined by houses and yards at own costs at the foot of the Pozsony castle in a region named Vödricz [8]. In 1314, Jakab, former citizen of Pozsony, had had constructed within the fortifications — in conformity with an agreement concluded with the town — two towers [9]. Hence, also these towers of Pozsony were sited either within or outside the fortifications but not integer with them.

A fact of Visegrád, from a much later date, contains much of information. In 1415, András Baran sold his stone masonry tower in the town with the adjacent house, cellar, kitchen, to the Esztergom provost and his relations, in the presence of the Visegrád municipality. One may wonder if this is identical with the tower and yard sited in the Hungarian district of Visegrád near the St. László church [10].

The fact that these towers did not absolutely belong to a system of fortifications appears from the plenty of detached towers in the countryside. Without claim to completeness, some examples will be quoted to better understand the role, destination of these towers. In 1250, the tower of Miklós Ostfi in Fertőszéplak, Győr-Sopron county, near Sopron, had been divided to five parts by his heirs [11]. In 1351, the palatine and Pál Potli seized estates of János, son of András Dorogi, including "a mansion with a stone tower, a stone palace and other timber buildings in good state of preservation, and two mansions so-called hostat" [12]. "A certain tower" in Pordány, Sopron county, had been referred to in 1412 [13]. Forefathers of the Balassa family have erected such a donjon suiting defense in the 13th century in Balassagyarmat, and 14th-century documents refer to an already ruined tower to the south of Iliny, Nógrád county [14], with the owner unknown. Among these towers, Simontornya excels by its dimensions; the right to construct it was granted to sub-senechal Simon, son of Salamon, the clan of

Dörögce, in the second half of the 13th century. A donjon on a small hill adjacent to the ancestral estates of Igar stood detached still in 1324 [15].

Such was the tower built in 1255, on the order of King Béla IV, by comes Dés son of Kacsó de genere Herman, in the village (later oppidum) Körmend in Vas county (so-called Dés tower). After its completion, Béla IV donated an uninhabited part of the nearby royal estates named Zalak to provide for its upkeep.

Mention is made in 1262 of a half-built tower in the north part of the Sárospatak castle, donated by younger king István to Mihály Kállay [17].

More data are available on a tower in Kövesd near the Balaton. In 1320, comes Sámson, noble serf of the Tihany abbot objects, on behalf of the abbot, to the construction of a tower and stone buildings by Arnold, son of Foluyné, and Wolpod, his relation, on the estates of the Abbey. This part of the estates had long been granted by the abbot as a fief (in feudum) to the two who, however, omitted to pay the due charges. In spite of this, the tower was built up, while from the other buildings only the cellars, namely in 1325, sons of Arnold and Wolpod — noble serfs of the Veszprém bishop — returned the lots in question, with tower and cellars, to the abbot.

The affair however, was not yet finished with that, namely in 1394, two grandsons of Arnold — Tamás son of Tihan de Kövesd and Miklós, son of Demeter de Szőlős — took hold of five vineyards, 67 acres of ploughland and a tower with four yards, of the abbey. In 1397, the palatine reallocated them to the abbot of Tihany [16]. Thus, the tower seems to have already been erected by 1325. Its necessity appears from a document dated 1318, enumerating outrageous deeds of master Tamás, son of Leurenté who with his men terrorized all the region out of his Esseg castle. Master Tamás let the cemetery and chapel of Szőlős break open, plundered the churches of Alsóörs. Szárberény, Hidegkút, ransacked estates, thrashed, robbed and carried off people some of them were just praying in the church, among them Tyhon son of Arnold, builder of the tower, at the gate of the Veszprém castle, while he ransacked Kövesd and Szőlős estates of the other son Demeter and of László, son of Volpoth. Rather than to continue this enumeration, it suffices to prove how urgent it was to oppose such robber knight castles by building defensive towers for the provincial gentry to retire more in safety of life and goods, than even in churches [18].

After the Mongol invasion, such towers had been built throughout the country. "He that could not afford to erect a fort — as written by Elemér Varju — asked, and was granted by the king to build himself a tower in royal castles or towns, the defense of which in a siege was incumbent on the builder family" [19].

Accordingly, these donjons are likely to be the same as the towers mentioned in the quoted Sopron documents.

As a matter of fact, rather than high dignitaries, urban tower builders were the only leading layer of the local society. Documents prove that towers had houses, mansions, and other buildings: kitchen, cellar, etc. as accessories. This relation is seen from the documents to have been an areal rather than a pure legal connection. Thus, also houses and buildings belonging to the towers in Sopron were directly adjacent to them.

Fitting these data to the overall European picture, perfectly clears the tower problem. The European relations in the matter of urban towers had been treated in "Streittürme" by Alfred Sitte in 1908 [20]. The subsequent outlining of data by Sitte is expected to definitely enrich, set clear our pre-existing ideas on part of our mediaeval townscapes, skylines. To begin with the close neighbourhood of Sopron: in Vienna, existence of such towers can be demonstrated since 1221. Two towers "am Gestaden" had been mentioned in 1335. Two or three houses with towers are referred to about 1355, sited near churches St. Peter and St. Ruprecht, hence in the earliest Vienna town core. A drawing of Vienna from the 16th century shows her to accommodate a plenty of houses outstanding with towers ("eine Menge mit Türmen ausgezeichneten Häusern" — as written by A. Sitte). Also Regensburg had several such houses with a tower, still twenty two as late as in 1830, but in the time of the Thirty Years' War, there existed forty of them. Just opposite the ancient Roman stone bridge there was the "Goliathhaus", in Wahlenstraß the "goldener Turm", in the Watmarkt the "Hochapfel (Baumburger) Turm", at the Kornmarkt the "Römerturm", etc. The same was true for Augsburg, Köln, Aachen, Metz, Trier, Brunswick. Hans Sachs applies a poetic imagery to praise the beauty of these towered houses: "herrlich hohe Häuser mit Türmen, den Bergschlössern gleich". — "Like castles inserted in the streetscape are these old patrician houses with their towers amidst the town" — enounces A. Sitte. He states — supported by examples — these towered houses to primarily occur where Roman fortification remainders and ruines served as models, typically in Upper Italy, where Padova, Bologna, Firenze, S. Gimignano are the best known examples. By the time of Dante (1265—1321) 150 patrician houses within the walls of Firenze had towers, with the same function as that of provincial donjons. Only the richest, most distinguished families were allowed to build towers near their houses. Later, tower heights were boasted of, so that a bylaw forbade towers to be built higher than the town hall. Towers of San Gimignano were built in the 10th to 13th centuries, of them twenty five were still standing in the 16th century [21].

Sopron towers are felt to perfectly fit this picture drawn by Sitte. Also here, towers had been built adjacent to houses, and protected not so much the town as a whole but the leading, distinguished families; sited within the fortified area, their soaring masses made the skyline animated, even if less high than their Italian counterparts.

Little is known of the further destiny of Sopron towers. Towers deprived of the Fertő customs income are likely to have undergone slow decay. Namely in 1353, leaders of Sopron citizens: the judge, the mayor and a citizen named István requested King Lajos I again for half of the Fertő customs for the repair and maintenance of the towers [22]. This request is again thought-provoking. The new fortifications were completed hardly ten years ago. Thus, the mentioned towers could not be bastion towers, else it would be ununderstandable why just towers decayed during this short time, while the supporting walls remained sound. Decay of the walls could not be referred to since Lajos could still remember of the report of the completion of the walls ten years ago. Citizens were certainly aware of the fact that the Fertő customs were intended to fund construction of the walls, digging the moats, let alone from the relevant document in their archives, just as from that other document in reference of which the customs income had been asked for again to repair the towers. Obviously, patricians looked after some income to repair old towers in their possession. The unfounded request seems to be in vain, thereby the old towers faced decay, the more so since they perfectly lost their importance in defense, what is more, they became hindrances of up-to-date defense with the advent of firearms. They do not appear any more in the first, more or less authentic Sopron townscapes made in the second half of the 16th century.

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This study first issued in 1955 in Hungarian [24] has regained actuality from the detection of two donjons sited in Sopron downtown due to detailed monumental explorations started in the '60s. András Gergelyffy dated to the late 13th century the construction of the donjon in the courtyard of the so-called House of the General (7, Main Square) in the line of the town wall built half a century later. The same date may be assigned to the floor plane of the building in the donjon lot, at its Main-Square wing. He stated the building part joining the east side of the donjon perished all but the western end wall, while construction of the part joining the donjon from the south may be dated to the 15th century. Hence, valuable results of history of architecture concerning both the donjon and the pertaining "mansion" are due to this exploration.

The other donjon was found by Ferenc Dávid mid-downtown. The detached building of square floor plan at the back of the lot 14, Szent György Street, might be of the same age as the former one, namely exploration revealed windows and doors on the storey from two different Gothic periods. Formerly the storey was divided to two parts with timber ceilings. On the south façade of the south part three, and on the west façade one, windows with stone casings and sediles had been built in the second period of the 14th century. Reconstruction of the storey points to the loss of protective role of the tower

after completion of the town walls. Exploration of this tower did not involve that of the pertaining "mansion".

Originally, the courtyard of the tower might have been bigger than now, confined on the other side by the New Street parallel to St. George Street, but later the so-called "private synagogue" (11, New Street) had been built on the New Street half of the lot — directly adjacent to the tower [23].

Thus, explorations in Sopron have been fortunate enough to have documented data supported by existing buildings, even concretizing topographic sites not exactly indicated in written documents. There is a likelihood that further monumental explorations would still add to such buildings and to the relevant information.

These exploration results deny the view that, since after the 16th century, known Sopron townscapes do not exhibit defensive towers, they would have been destroyed. Their disappearance is more likely due to the fact that by the time of preparing the first townscape etchings, downtown houses had several storeys, at the same time upper storeys of the towers had been demolished, depriving them from dominance over the townscape.

References

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2. Király, J.: Mediaeval Urban Law in Pozsony.* p. 34.
3. Hungarian Collection of Documents. II. p. 70.
4. Házi, J.: History of Sopron, Royal Free Borough. II. Vol. 4. XVI. 1. The suit was brought by András before the judge and jury of Sopron. The Sopron court did, however, not wage to take a position, so decision was delayed by any means. Therefore András asked the king to urge the proceedings who ordered the judge and the jury to him for judgment. Typically, some of the twelve jurors were related as: Góri Peterman, Peter Góri, his brother Miklós Góri and his son Nicholas. Thus, one third of the jury was from one family, hinting to sharp controversies in the town. (Hungarian Collection of Documents. III. p. 141). Village names in family names: Cenk, Gór, Dág (at present Ágfalva) show the Sopron leading layer to have been strongly bound to the countryside by their estates.
5. Fejér: Codex diplomaticus. IV. 2. Vol. 2. p. 62.
6. "Ex communi consensu et consilio" op. cit.
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12. Op. cit., Vol. I. p. 223.
13. Op. cit. Vol. II. p. 2.
14. Makkai, L.: History of Nógrád County before 1848. (Monuments of Nógrád County.)* p. 44.
15. Varju, E.: Hungarian Castles.*
16. Facts about the Kövesd tower have been presented in Erdélyi, L.: History of the Order in Pannonhalma.* Vol. X. pp. 256—259, 602—606.
17. National Archives (Hazai Okmánytár) Vol. VII. Körmend. p. 117. Tower of the Sárospatak Castle see in: Dercsényi—Gerő: The Rákóczi Castle in Sárospatak.* Budapest, 1963. p. 10.

* In Hungarian.

18. Kumorovitz, L. B.: *Regesta of Veszprém*.* Budapest, 1953. p. 47.
19. Varju, E., *op. cit.* p. 126. Already in 1819 correct interpretation of noun "turris" occurring in documents had been given in the polemic essay by Horvát, I.: Comments on the Treatise "In Defense of the Legal Duty of Castle Maintenance in Hungary"*. In: *Tudományos Gyűjtemény*, Vol. IV, p. 80.
20. *Berichte und Mitteilungen des Altertumsvereins zu Wien*. Band XLI.
21. As to the architecture of the towers, data in "Handbuch der Architektur" are referred to. Detailed description is given of these thick-walled, nearly windowless defensive constructions, with entrances at storey height to be accessed by ladder. There is no essential difference between urban towers, donjons of fortresses and rural donjons, only that urban towers are somewhat higher, and — due to lot conditions — of lesser ground area. (*Handbuch der Architektur*. Darmstadt, 1889. Part II. Vol. 4, in particular pp. 152, 167—168, 178).
22. Nagy, I.: *History of Sopron County*. Vol. I. p. 240.
23. *Településtudományi Közlemények*, No. 7. pp. 54—57.
24. *Magyar Műemlékvédelem*. (Hungarian Monuments Preservation.) 1973—74. Publications of the National Monuments Inspectorate, VIII. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1977. pp. 380, 382.
25. Sedlmayer, J.: *Reconstruction of the Old Synagogue in Sopron*.* *Magyar Műemlékvédelem*. (Annals of the National Monuments Inspectorate) ÉTK, Budapest, 1984, pp. 315—339.

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