

## LITERATURE

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The year 1955 marked the founding of the International Commission of Urban History (Commission Internationale pour l'Histoire des Villes), the organization that later initiated the edition of historic town atlases in Europe. In 1968, a group of specialists in urban topography and history led by Heinz Strob set up general guidelines for the edition of the series of town atlases. The focus in this period was very much on the Middle Ages but from the 1990s new principles were established and since then modern history has become equally important in the volumes. Over the last four decades more than 450 folios have

MAGYAR VÁROSTÖRTÉNETI ATLASZ 1.  
HUNGARIAN ATLAS OF HISTORIC TOWNS NO. 1

# SOPRON



Összeállította: Jankó Ferenc, Kücsán József és Szende Katalin  
Dávid Ferenc, Goda Károly és Kiss Melinda közreműködésével

By Ferenc Jankó, József Kücsán and Katalin Szende  
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been published in the series of historical town atlases, all of which have, more or less, the same structure and editing principles. The main maps use identical scales. The atlas series is organized on a national basis. Thus, the volumes follow the present-day borders of the countries. Although the current volume is the first to be published within the modern borders of Hungary, there are a few atlases published in Croatia (Varaždin, Bjelovar, Sisak, Koprivnica, Hrvatska Kostajnica), Austria (Rust, Eisenstadt) and Romania (Sebeș, Sighișoara) which represent towns that once belonged to the Hungarian Kingdom. Research on historic town atlases were already proposed in Hungary by Jenő Szűcs in the 1960s but the work itself has only been ongoing in the last six years. Under the supervision of András KUBINYI and after his death led by Katalin SZENDE, a

research group has been working on the edition of the first four volumes of the series with the financial support of a Hungarian Scientific Research Fund grant (OTKA) since 2004. The first four atlases all represent different types of towns in historical Hungary. Sopron (Western Hungary) as one of the eight medieval free royal towns was one of the few highly urbanized centers in medieval Hungary. The study of Buda is also of key importance as from the late 14<sup>th</sup> century it became the royal center and capital of the country. Kecskemét represents a different type in the group of market towns (*oppidum*). Kecskemét itself is a typical example of urban settlements from the Great Hungarian Plain. It had huge borders and a large population from the Ottoman Period onwards. However, the population was not significant before the sixteenth century. The fourth choice fell on another market town: Sátoraljaújhely (north-eastern Hungary), which is in a rather different location and topographic setup at the feet of the hill region in Hungary.

The focus of this review is on the historical topography of the town of Sopron. The present volume – the first one in the Hungarian series in print – consists of two parts: a booklet, which provides a detailed description of the town and a section of loose-leaf maps which includes twenty-three maps and images showing the topographical, structural and social changes in the town. Although the primary focus is on the maps themselves, as the publication under review is an atlas, the descriptive part is also worth some discussion as this is the most recent scholarly summary of one of the most important towns of Hungary from experts in urban geography, ethnography and the local history of Sopron.

Sopron has the richest archive among the medieval towns of Hungary. Many excavations were also carried out in the town, making it possible to provide a detailed analysis of the structure of the town since antique times. The town of Scarbantia (Sopron), established next to one of the most important trading routes (the Amber Road) in the Roman Empire, was a significant settlement. The authors provide topography of the town based on a previous research by János GÖMÖRI, combined with the results of more recent excavations. From the turn of the sixth century, the town was abandoned; still this was an important period in its history because, as Katalin SZENDE convincingly argues, the German name Ödenburg (meaning ‘desolate castle’) the name given the town during the Carolingian Times. After the Hungarian Conquest, the remains of the town were still visible and because of its strategic location a wood-and-earthwork bailiff’s castle had been built along the line of the Roman walls. During the early Arpadian age a new fortification wall was constructed which still followed the path of the Roman walls. This is the reason for its larger territory than parallels from the medieval times.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries the commercial role of the castle area was limited, something that changed from the mid-thirteenth century onwards. New houses were built within the walls of the town, which fundamentally changed the structure of Sopron. Katalin SZENDE provides a thorough analysis of the parceling-up of the new downtown of the city and the restructuring of the suburbs. From the fourteenth century, several urban farms were built in the suburbs. These farms greatly influenced the later development of the town. The author gives an account of the urbanization in the late medieval period and discusses the construction of ecclesiastical institutions (religious and military orders, chapels) and administrative buildings (especially the town hall). The analysis also includes data on the territories outside the built-up area of the town. The chapter about the medieval period of the town also refers to the demographic trends in the town although this subchapter does not fit in the structure of the work logically.

In the early modern period, discussed by ethnographer József KÜCSÁN, the view of the town changed again as a consequence of the major fortification works, which was an obvious response to the growing pressure on the town during the Fifteen Years War.

Not only were the inner walls strengthened but another wall was built which surrounded the suburban territories as well. The historical sources in this period can be supplemented by landscape paintings and other visual evidence that the editors used carefully. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the medieval center of the town and the road network remained the same. Numerous houses were rebuilt but there were no fundamental changes. In the eighteenth century many houses were rebuilt in the Baroque style, which have remained the most important element of the townscape. Major changes took place in the Várkerület Zone in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The previously open zone of the ditch began to be built-up as the protective role of this area decreased. The population grew rapidly in the suburbs during the eighteenth century as the outer walls restricted growth within the old boundaries until the early nineteenth century but did not limit the expansion of the town beyond them.

The last chapter of the historical overview contains information on the modern development and morphological changes of the town. The author of this part, Ferenc JANKÓ, focuses on the growth around and outside the historical center of Sopron. Although before the Austro-Hungarian Compromise (1867) the historical suburban area was very much urbanized, the most fundamental change in the modern times was the growth of the town itself as the surrounding settlements accreted with the town. The author puts an emphasis on the development of the Lóver, which is the historical villa district in the hills south of the town. In the late-nineteenth – early-twentieth century the most important new feature of the town was the growth of industry which resulted in the construction of new residential areas. After the Second World War during the socialist era, and especially in the 1970s and '80s, a wave of housing estate construction started in the town. However, as it is emphasized in the study, the historical center was saved and became one of the most important areas of monument protection in Hungary. As a consequence, the town preserved its medieval milieu. In the last subchapter, Ferenc JANKÓ refers to the changes over the last twenty years. During these years the decline of industry and the growth of commercial and shopping centers marks the most significant change and as the population did not stop growing, the structure of the town still is in a dynamic change.

Apart from the comprehensive description of the development of the town of Sopron, the booklet contains two more sections. In the first one, Károly GODA analyses the number of taxpayers and the amount of tax paid by them in the late medieval and early modern times, the other short treatise contains a discussion of house-ownership of the prominent members of the town in this period. Although both subchapters contribute to the social and economic history of Sopron, they are not embedded in the structure of the historic atlas. Apart from the maps, which are indeed the most important part of the atlas, the last main section of the booklet is also very valuable as the editors of the atlas compiled a database which includes all the topographic objects that appear in the maps (features not only in the town itself but also those related to the surrounding agricultural area) until the late nineteenth century. This topographical gazetteer follows the example set by the Irish Historic Towns Atlas.

Although the booklet in itself is already a noteworthy overview of the town of Sopron, the plates it contains make it even more important. The main principles of the historic atlas are the same for all of Europe. The editors respected these principles and made only slight modifications to help the readers understand the topographic changes of the town. The first plate (A.1) shows the topography of Sopron based on the cadastral survey of 1856. The scale of this map (1:2500) provides a detailed overview of the parcel structure of the town. The atlas also includes a sheet representing Sopron and its environs in the first (1765–1785) and second (1819–1869) military surveys (A.2). A.3 through A.6 is



a series of plates which illustrates the development of the town from the Roman period until recent times. Here the editors deviated from the basic principles of the series which provides a single summary map of growth phases, and represented the stages of development in different periods on different maps instead. This makes it easier to compare the stages of development by time period.

The next major group of plates is an addition to the compulsory requirements set by the International Commission for the History of Towns. Plates B.1 and B.2 represent some aspects of social, ecclesiastic and economic structures of Sopron town in medieval and early modern times. The ones on the estate values and the valuation of houses in early modern Sopron says a lot about social stratification and the real estate of burghers in the town. The plates designed by József KÜCSÁN concerning the early nineteenth century are also worth closer examination. This series of maps is essential for understanding the relationship between professions, wealth and urban space in Sopron. The maps by Ferenc JANKÓ (B.5 and B.6) on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Sopron visualize the morphological changes of the town over the last 200 years. The main focus, apart from the display of territorial expansion, is on the change in how many multi-storied buildings the town had. One of the main lessons to be learned here is that the buildings (especially those in the historic center) remained very similar in height during this period.

The last section in the plates (C.1 through C.11) is an important aid both for scholars and the interested public, as it brings together the most important visual representations of the town from early modern times. Apart from recent artists' reconstructions of the Roman and Arpadian age early lithographs, aquarelles, copper cuts and maps of Sopron from the eighteenth and nineteenth-century are included. One of the earliest representations of the town of Sopron is a copper cut from 1681 by Daniel SUTTINGER. It was a very reasonable decision to show this picture together with the lithography of Zsigmond HÁROSY from 1841 because of the obvious parallels but it is not easy to connect the explanation of these two plates in the booklet with the images themselves.

The first volume of the Hungarian Atlas of Historic Towns is a very ambitious attempt to summarize the urban development and the morphology of an urban settlement in Hungary over the last millennia. The volume succeeded in this ambition in that this compilation will be a useful tool for scholars of urban, social and economic history, urban and historical geography, historical demography and so on. Both the study of the urban development of Sopron and the maps were edited with care and precision. All the pictures and graphs are of high quality. The maps also have a fine design in most cases, except perhaps for the ones on the twentieth-century development of the town. This problem may be attributed to the fact that these maps were adopted without alteration from the country-wide mapping system of the Institute for Geodesy, Cartography and Remote Sensing (FÖMI). The volume includes a CD as well containing all the maps and the text of the booklet. The atlas with all its parts is bilingual (Hungarian–English) which allows international scholars to become acquainted with the results of this work, to compare Sopron with other towns in the region as well as with more distant towns of Europe.

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Zacharias Michel: Bird's eye view of Sopron, 1700