From European Capital to Ottoman Outpost: The Decline of Buda in the Sixteenth Century

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It is generally thought that August 29, 1541, the date of the occupation of Buda by the Ottoman Turks, signalled a complete break in the development of the Hungarian capital. “The flowering urban life of one of Europe’s most beautiful and... largest metropolises was brought to an end by the start of the Turks’ 150 year occupation.”¹ In actual fact, however, if there was one “event” that constituted a decisive break in the life of the city, it was the siege of 1686. Indeed the victorious Habsburg forces found only one Magyar family in Buda upon its recapture.² What this paper will attempt to demonstrate while describing the changes in Buda during the course of the 16th century, is that on the one hand major changes to the city reflecting Ottoman influence began after 1526, and on the other that it was during the Fifteen Years’ War waged by the Habsburg Empire in an attempt to recapture central Hungary — fifty years into the Turkish occupation — that the old Buda finally “disappeared.” Ottoman rule changed the city’s administrative, political, demographic, religious and economic life, as well as its appearance. This essay will try to describe these changes as well as argue the point that the European character of Buda survived to a great extent until the turn of the 17th century.

Before beginning, it should be noted that what is now Budapest, during the 15th–17th centuries, consisted of three royal free towns: Buda, the new capital; Óbuda, the old capital; and Pest, a lively commercial town on the left bank of the Danube. There were also several suburbs of Buda at least one of which, the Viziváros (Water-Town), was walled. In the interest of brevity, this study will concentrate on Buda and its immediate environs and will make only occasional references to the other locales.
I. Historical Background

The Turkic Ottomans conquered their first major city, Bursa, in 1326, exactly 200 years before their victory over the Hungarians at Mohács.\(^3\) After their first European conquest (Tzympe, in 1352),\(^4\) they began to pose a potential threat to the Medieval Hungarian kingdom. The threat finally materialized with the massive defeat of the Hungarians at Mohács in Southern Hungary on August 29, 1526. The death of the young King Louis II while retreating from the battlefield left the country without a leader. The Hungarian nobles subsequently elected two kings, John of Zápolya, crowned on November 10, 1526, and Ferdinand of Habsburg, crowned on November 3, 1527, but elected earlier that year. This resulted in a disastrous civil war that ended not only with John's death in 1540 but also with the disintegration of centralized power in Hungary and the occupation of one-third of the country by the Ottomans after 1541.\(^5\)

Buda itself fell to the Ottomans under curious circumstances. Since King John was vassal to Sultan Suleyman II (i.e., he paid an annual tribute), he ultimately depended on the Sultan's support for the maintenance of his power. After John's death in 1540, Buda, occupied by his widow Queen Izabella, saw the last of several sieges of the civil war. Ottoman aid to defend Buda against Ferdinand's troops was received in 1541, and the Habsburgs were soundly defeated. It was thereafter that the Ottomans' imperialist ambitions became evident. On the pretext of “viewing the town,” some of the Sultan's troops entered and promptly occupied it, taking Izabella's troops completely by surprise.\(^6\) This bloodless coup, staged on the anniversary of the defeat at Mohács, was the start of the 145-year Ottoman occupation of Buda. The peaceful nature of the takeover, the essentially friendly relationship between Queen Izabella and the Sultan and the general tolerance shown by the Ottomans to subject peoples were the prime reasons that the subsequent changes to Buda were of a gradual, rather than a sudden nature.

II. Administrative Changes

The bizarre turn of events on August 29, 1541, brought with it considerable changes to the administrative and legal life of the capital. The transfer of power was peaceful (the most peaceful conquest the city had experienced since 1526), except that the conquerors on this occasion had a different religion and culture and represented a foreign power intent on incorporating the kingdom into its empire.
Buda had been a bilingual (German-Magyar) royal free town since 1244 with a twelve-member council and a magistrate (mayor). The German-speaking burghers dominated the council membership until 1439, after which six councillors were to be Magyar and six German. The mayor, who previously had to be German-speaking, was to be German one year and Magyar the next. Latin and German had been the languages of letters, but with the increasing urbanization and cultural development of the Magyars, their language came to the fore by the early 16th century.\(^7\)

The breakdown of the old administrative system began with the evacuation of the population in advance of the invading armies in 1526. Though life soon returned to a semi-normal state, the chaotic alternation of kings at Buda weakened the council's fibre and culminated in the disaster of 1529: Buda, which was then in Ferdinand's hands, was besieged by King John's troops, aided, at John's request, by an Ottoman army. After Ferdinand's defeat, the German-speaking patricians who had supported Ferdinand (an Austrian) were promised safe passage from the town. The Ottoman troops slaughtered them outside the city walls, however, as their fellow Magyar citizens watched helplessly from inside Buda. Some scholars call this event the greatest single break in the continuity of Buda's civic life, since these patricians, their families and forebears had established the city and had dominated its administration for the previous 300 years. The council list of 1530–31 demonstrates 50 per cent continuity with the previous year, mainly because the Magyar patrician families were left intact.\(^8\)

In 1541, a month and a half after Buda had been occupied by the Ottomans, the Sultan issued the following proclamation:

> Everyone in the vilayet of Buda must stay in their places. No one will ever cause them or their children harm. All their property, their houses in the towns and villages, their shops and other buildings and their vineyards and gardens: they may dispose of them as they wish, give them away or transfer property rights in any other way and in the event of their death the property rights pass on to their heirs.\(^9\)

The basic continuity of property and economic life thus ensured, the Ottomans began to set up their new administration. This engendered drastic changes because the Ottoman concept of town, şehir, was different from the European one. “Free towns,” that is ones which were self-governing, were unknown in the empire; all power was vested in the Sultan and was exercised through his
governors known as Bejlerbejs. Furthermore, towns were not viewed as unified communities of citizens, but as collections of separate communities divided along religious rather than ethnic lines, usually occupying separate quarters or mahalles. In Buda they recognized four such groups initially: the Gavurs (Western Christians, in this case mostly Magyars), “Copts” (Eastern Christians, mostly Gypsies), Jews and Moslems. All these groups were organized into distinct bodies and administered separately. By 1557 Dalmatian-Italian traders, mainly from Ragusa (Dubrovnik) had their own community as well.

The town council, which had been dominated by the Gavurs and had previously ruled the town, now became a body that represented Gavur affairs only. The mayor even received a regular income from the new administration as well as certain tax exemptions. This payment symbolized the “mayor’s” dependence on and subservience to the Ottoman administration. Furthermore, the position of mayor was denigrated to “mayor of the Gavurs,” on an equal footing with the Jewish Kethída, the Dalmatian-Italian Prefect and the Copt Kenéz (“Gypsy Vojvod”). There was, to all outward appearances, continuity in council life. Initially Mayor Miklós Turkovics and his council members and clerks retained their positions. Many soon left, however, and Werbóczy, the former captain of the regiment at Buda was named “head mayor” of all Hungarians. During his brief term he attempted to represent his people in this capacity and take their problems and complaints to Üzün Suleyman Pasha, the Bejlerbej, calling upon Hungarian law for support. It seems that the Pasha soon tired of this, however, for he apparently had Werbóczy poisoned on one of his visits.

Regular council elections and the use of the old seal of the free royal town for documents continued for the duration of the occupation. These councils soon became aware of their actual role, however (note Werbóczy’s case), and referred to themselves as the “Mayor and Councillors of the Christian and Hungarian Eclesiae of Buda.” This body issued edicts only when it was permitted to do so by higher powers and was often used as a mouthpiece toward Europe by the Ottoman government. Indeed the council and mayor soon lost all real power and acted solely as a liaison between the authorities and the Magyars. No records remain of the Jewish Kethüdas or the Copts’ Kenézes during the entire period of occupation, and it is very likely that these community leaders did not keep written records or issue documents. Also, since the Copts soon converted to Islam, they lost their community status. While it is obvious that the maintenance of council elections and the continu-
ance of the keeping of records had little more than symbolic value during the term of occupation, it is difficult for us now to imagine the importance that even such tokenism had for the Magyars, who had ended up as the smallest community in Buda by the 17th century.

Magyar community leaders dealt with the lowest level of the Ottoman administration. The Emīns and Basis, each of whom had his own office, administered such things as market weights and prices, the collecting of ferry duties and the infidel head-tax. The Sehīr emīn was in charge of religious affairs for all the communities and directed the general administration of the town in conjunction with the Sehīr Kethūdazhi (town manager). These were titular positions only, however, and involved no real political power. Higher offices were for the vilayet (a military-administrative division of the empire) of Buda which, for most of the remainder of the 16th century, included all of Ottoman-occupied Hungary as well as northern Bosnia. The Defterdar was an important high official in charge of financial matters such as tax assessment and collection, as well as the handling of income from the Sultan's property. The Sultan owned all property in the empire except for private homes, gardens and vineyards. Thus there were no landlords in the European sense of the word.

The position of Kadi (judge) was a curious combination of the legal and the administrative. De jure, Hungarian law remained in effect for the Magyars and, as had always been done, the mayor was responsible for dispensing justice. In actual fact, however, Hungarian law was recognized and allowed to be exercised only in so far as it did not contradict Ottoman law. Any litigation the mayor Kethūda, Kenēz or the Prefect could not handle were brought before the Kadi. Everyone was allowed to appear before the Kadi, though an infidel's evidence was not admissible and a non-Moslem defendant had to have Moslem witnesses to support his case. This, in addition to the infidel head-tax already mentioned, was demonstrative of the way in which all non-Moslems were treated as inferiors. (Even this, however, was in sharp contrast to the fact that Christian rulers in general did not tolerate the existence of Moslem communities at all under their rule.) If the Kadi could not handle a case, he would refer it to the Muftī, an expert in Koranic law, or Seriat, which was supreme in the officially Islamic Ottoman Empire, though its everyday civil application was carried out through the Kanun or civil law.

Appeal was possible to the highest official of the vilayet government (centred in Buda), i.e., to the Bejlerbej. The vilayet of Buda was
not only the westernmost, it was also among the last ever established, and so its Bejlerbejs enjoyed great prestige in the empire. The Bejlerbejs were very powerful: they were military and administrative leaders with the power to overrule any lower legal decision. They were also the final court of appeal, apart from the Sultan himself. Because of this power, they posed a potential threat to the Sultan’s authority and so were replaced, often killed, to prevent them from gaining too much support or popularity in their vilayets. Thus during 145 years of Ottoman occupation, 75 people served 99 terms of office as the Bejlerbejs of Buda. Of these twenty ended their lives by strangulation in office at Buda or at other appointments. Good Bejlerbejs were sometimes sent back to Buda for several terms of office — but they never got too attached to their constituency; the average term of office was one-and-a-half years.

The Bejlerbejs of 16th century Buda were very conscious of their power and even had royal pretensions. Examples of this include Sokullu Mustafa Pasha’s adoption of the royal “we” — not in use in the East — and the holding of elaborate court divans in the apartments of the Royal Palace where the Bejlerbejs were forbidden to live. (Such use of the Royal Palace ceased after the Fifteen Years’ War.) Sokullu Mustafa Pasha, of Bosnian origin, served the longest term of office (1566–1578). This era has often been called the “Golden Age” of Ottoman rule at Buda because he founded so many institutions, and arranged for them to be properly housed.

In summary, administrative changes in Buda started immediately after the occupation, though the Ottomans allowed at least the appearance of continuity for the existing communities. With the drastic decline in the number of descendants of the original inhabitants by the 17th century, however, only traces of the former administrative system were left.

III. Population and Ethno-Religious Changes

Changes in population and in the ethno-religious composition of Buda began when the first refugees from the Szerémség (the region around Belgrade) arrived after their homeland was conquered in the early 1520s. Further change came when the Queen, on hearing of the approach of the Ottoman forces on August 30, 1526, fled with her court to Pozsony (also known as Pressburg, now Bratislava). This move led to mass-panic and most of the population (about 8,000 in the town proper) followed suit. According to the Ottoman historian Ibrahim Pecsevi, the majority of those who remained were taken back to the empire with the Ottoman armies; the Jews were
settled at Saloniki, and the Christians in the Jedikule quarter of Istanbul. In actual fact, however, some residents, including Franciscan monks, were killed, and according to István Nemészürtty, the Jews were sold into slavery because they had supported the Hungarians.

Though the Ottoman armies looted and then burned Buda, they spared the Royal Palace. When the armies returned to the empire soon after, the refugees returned and reoccupied their homes, which were of stone and thus repairable. Some of those who had not fled town, including the Jews, had been lost, but their place was taken by refugees from the south.

Before the siege of 1529, some of Buda’s German-speaking population left in the face of the approaching armies. Most of those who did not, were massacred — as has been mentioned above. Thus, one of the two major ethnic components of Buda was almost annihilated twelve years before the actual occupation began. It was after this event that Buda began to take on the ethnic composition of a Balkan city. An Ottoman garrison, including the first group of Moslems to live in Buda, was stationed in the town from that time on. (As we shall see, not all members of the Ottoman forces were Moslems.) Balkan traders began to make their appearance at the markets of Buda after 1530. Few people suspected at that time that soon these exotic-looking people would come to form the majority of the population. In 1539 and 1540 Jews of indeterminate origin settled in the old Jewish quarter. It may be that some of these families were among those who had been deported in 1526.

The year 1541 brought with it further shifts in population. The Queen and her modest court moved to Transylvania a few days after the Ottomans occupied Buda, causing many of the court nobles to move as well, though a few (Werbőczy, for example) elected to stay and help the remaining population. Since few expected the occupation to last for very long, some of the burghers also remained, and of those who left, most went to Royal Hungary or even to less conspicuous towns in Ottoman-occupied Hungary. As the tales of horror associated with the Ottomans proved to be unfounded, some of those who left soon returned. The Dalmatian traders, the Balkan-Slavs who had come after 1530, and the Greek Orthodox Gypsies all elected to stay.

Some of the Jews who had been deported in 1526 returned after 1541, and by 1547 (including those who had come in 1539–40) there were 75 Jewish families in Buda.

The most immediate demographic effect of the occupation was the contingent of soldiers and officials who settled in Buda, initially without their families. According to estimates, three thousand
soldiers and some officials, most of whom were probably of Balkan-Slavic origin (and many of whom were Greek Catholics) remained in Buda after the conquering forces left. It is an interesting fact that ethnic Turks were actually in the minority among the occupying forces at Buda from the start. It is for this reason that it is a misnomer to use the term “Turks,” as many historians do, to describe these occupying forces.\textsuperscript{20}

The tax assessments taken by the Defterdar in 1546, 1559, 1562 and 1580 provide valuable clues to the ethnic composition of Buda's population during the first period of the occupation.\textsuperscript{21} If one estimates about five members per household, then the non-Moslem population of Buda in 1546 was around 2,000.\textsuperscript{22} Their ethnic make-up was as follows: 60 per cent Magyar, 20 per cent Jewish and 20 per cent Gypsy. As the years progressed, the percentage of Magyars tended to decrease, that of the Jews tended to remain constant, while that of the Gypsies increased. The Gypsies converted to Islam by 1580 and were subsequently not treated as a separate group, while most of the Jews moved to Székesfehérvár after 1598 to avoid the constant warring. Their numbers began to increase again only after 1627.\textsuperscript{23} The Dalmatians also left during the Fifteen Years' War. It has been estimated that by 1580 there were 1,200 to 1,300 non-Ottoman people in Buda and 2,500–2,600 Ottoman soldiers, officials and traders (with their families) both Moslem and Greek Catholic. Of these people, 75 per cent were southern Slavs, the rest Turkish, Albanian and Greek. As an Italian traveller noted in 1567, “almost every ‘Turk’ here spoke Croatian.”\textsuperscript{24}

The high mortality rate between 1546 and 1559 (e.g., 209 of 366 Magyar men enumerated were dead by 1559) was probably due to an outbreak of plague in the early fifties. That the Magyars found life under Ottoman rule tolerable is illustrated by the fact that only seven families left during 1546–59. Two were noted as having “escaped,” although what was meant by “escape” is not specified. Because of the high death-rate, and because the gavurs were not permitted to settle in Buda, however, the Magyar population declined by 59 per cent. Thus the number of Magyar families decreased from 269 in 1546 to around 190 by the 1560s. Their numbers were even more drastically reduced during the Fifteen Years' War starting in the early 1590s, especially during the sieges of 1598, 1602 and 1603. By the 17th century there were very few Magyars left in Buda.

The city's ethnic groups were geographically segregated during the 16th century. At first the Hungarians lived in its larger, northern end (north of the old Szent György tér — St. George’s Square). The
Dalmatians and Jews lived there as well, each on their traditional streets. Soldiers and traders occupied the southern end of the town, that nearest the palace, as well as the palace area itself, where barracks were set up. By the end of the century, as the numbers of *Magyars*, Dalmatians and Jews decreased, the houses north of St. George's Square (by that time known as Orta Mosque Square) were for the most part owned by the Balkan newcomers.

By the 17th century Buda had been transformed from a town with two major and two minor ethnic groups into a Balkan-type town made up of a dozen nationalities, speaking several languages and belonging to different religions. The majority of the population was Balkan-Slav, and theirs were the most commonly spoken languages. The dominant social group was the Moslem-Turk and Balkan-Ottoman military-official class. The official language was Turkish, although documents were also issued in Hungarian as the need arose.

It is noteworthy that the Reformation spread throughout Hungary during the Ottoman occupation. It created internal dissent in a community that could ill afford such divisions. Indeed it has been suggested that the Ottomans were a mediating force in these disputes, forcing all the Christians of Buda to share the Church of Mary Magdalene, for example. The Ottomans even allowed the Church to retain some of its property in order to sustain itself. In 1547, for example, it still owned a mill on the Danube and had two schools associated with it, one Catholic and one Protestant. There was even an organist among the *Magyars* in 1547. A report of 1555 stated that the Catholics used the choir of the church, and the Protestants the nave, suggesting that already then the Protestants outnumbered the Catholics. In a later report in 1587, Reinhold Lubenau noted a wooden partition dividing the nave into two sections. By that time the *Magyars* were said to have been Protestant and the Catholic community made up of Dalmatians. It seems that not only had the *Magyars* become Protestant, but they had further converted from their original Lutheranism to Calvinism (the Hungarian Reformed Church) and even Anabaptism.

The continuity of Roman Catholic life in Buda seems to have been broken by the wholesale departure of the Dalmatians after the sieges of 1598 and 1602 during the Fifteen Years' War, and it did not resume until 1635 when Bosnian Catholics settled there. As a sign of the Ottoman administration's displeasure at this attempt to recapture the city, they closed down the Church of Mary Magdalene in 1595, and it was later converted into the Fetih (Victory) Mosque. In contrast to the fate of Catholicism, Protestant *Magyar* life
continued in Buda. Despite their vastly reduced numbers, the
Protestants maintained their school, and in the 17th century they
even acquired an old church, although they sometimes had to rely
on ministers coming up from Óbuda to conduct their services.²⁹

Jewish sources indicate that Buda became a seat of Talmudic
learning during the 16th century, making it “a great city of the wise
and learned, one of the strongest communities of the diaspora.”
There were three synagogues, one for the German-speaking Jews
(Ashkenazim), another for the Spanish Sephardic Jews from Salon-
ika and still another for the Syrian-rite Jews.³⁰ As has been
mentioned, the Jews of Buda moved to Székesfehérvár during the
Fifteen Years’ War to escape the fighting.

Thus we can see how fragmented the various religious communi-
ties were. The dominant Moslem class consisted of Turks, Bosnians,
Bulgarians, Greeks, Serbs, Gypsies and Albanians. The Orthodox
Christians were made up of Balkan Slavs and Greeks, and the
Roman Catholics of Dalmatians, later some Bosnians and a few
Croatians. The Protestant Magyars were divided into Lutheran,
Calvinist and Anabaptist groups. The Jewish community consisted
of German and Polish Ashkenazim, as well as the more recently
arrived Sephardic and Syrian Jews. Nevertheless, the continuity of
all the communities of medieval Buda, with the exception of the
Germans, was maintained until the Fifteen Years’ War. This war not
only caused the central Christian church of Buda to be closed down,
but it also resulted in the departure of the established Dalmatian and
Jewish communities and in the further drastic reduction in the
number of Magyars. By the 17th century, only a minuscule Magyar
community remained as a remnant of the original population.

IV. Physical Changes

The physical aspect of Buda changed the least during the second
half of the 16th century. This is not particularly surprising since
throughout their history the Ottomans captured towns intact
whenever possible, and then used them for their own purposes,
making changes only as the need arose. They were not city-builders
and, consequently, did not have the skill or tradition to expand
Buda. Nevertheless, the Ottomans viewed towns in general, and
Buda in particular, in a way totally different from that of the original
population. They regarded Buda first and foremost as a military
stronghold, a garrison town on the northwestern marches of their
empire. This was in stark contrast to what Buda had been previous-
ly, the Gothic-Renaissance capital of a Christian kingdom.
Nevertheless, upon taking a town the Ottomans claimed that they would raise it to a level of “higher flowering,” based on the twin pillars of Islam and the military. The first structural change that took place was the conversion of the “den of infidels” — the Church of the Virgin Mary (formerly the German parish church) — into a “house of God,” a mosque. The mosque was originally named after Sultan Süleyman, the Sultan during whose reign the town was conquered, but it later became known as the Büjük (Great) Mosque because it was the largest religious structure, and it finally became known as the Eski (Old) Mosque because it had been the first to be established.

In preparing the church for the thanksgiving service after the conquest of 1541, all unnecessary objects such as pews, statuary and pictures were removed. Since any pictorial representations of sacred themes were considered blasphemous by the Moslems, the paintings, frescoes and mosaics that decorated the interior of the church were plastered over. Decorative quotations from the Koran were then painted on the plaster along with some geometric or floral patterns. The building was then outfitted with the necessary equipment such as the Mihrab (a nook where the Koran is kept) and the Minbar (a stand from which the Koran is read out loud). The floor was covered with carpets, their patterns oriented towards Mecca. Later, minor structural alterations were made: the bricking up of the bottom three-quarters of the windows to reduce incoming light and the construction of wooden balconies around the steeple to enable the Muezzin to call the faithful to prayer from “the four corners of the Earth.”

Two other churches were soon converted to mosques in Buda, the Royal Chapel in the Palace — which became the Seraj (Palace) Mosque — and St. George’s Church — which became the Orta (Central) Mosque. (Minarets were often added to converted churches.) Historian Győző Gerő has pointed out that the conversion of the churches, the extant centres of town life, into the new focal points, the mosques, did much to preserve the traditional urban structure of Buda. The maintenance of the old market places also had this effect. Other, less centrally located churches were used for non-religious purposes, and the Church of Mary Magdalene was retained for use by the Christians until 1594.

A more obvious change in the townscape than the conversion of churches into mosques was the alterations made to the streets. Hundreds of small wooden, thatch and mud booths that served as little shops, workshops and stables now crowded the streets. Narrow lanes replaced the formerly wide avenues to serve as pedestrian
walkways. The streetscape was thus significantly altered without any major structural changes taking place.

In addition to their new appearance, the newcomers did not look upon these streets as the original inhabitants did. The Ottomans, in the Eastern mode, did not orient themselves according to streets, but rather according to mahalles. Arabic in origin, mahalle referred to a quarter centering on something, usually a mosque, and usually named after it. It was the focal point of the mahalle, rather than its boundary, that was definite. However, the area inhabited by a particular religious or ethnic group (such as the Jews, for example) could also be considered a mahalle, even if it did not have one focal point in particular. In Buda the city assessment of 1547 referred to two quarters, the Jewish and the Coptic, as mahalles; the rest were regular street names with the word mahalle attached. As Ottoman life developed in Buda, these European street names disappeared and Eastern-style mahalle names appeared. By the time of the 1563 assessment, the old street names had been dropped, though there is evidence that some streets actually did acquire Turkish names in common usage. It seems that in the end, just as Gothic churches were converted as well as new buildings constructed to serve as mosques, the Ottomans adopted both systems of orientation and used whichever was more convenient.

It has often been said that the Ottomans built nothing at Buda. Yet it is only fair to point out that Buda was already extensively developed, and that they did not tear anything down, but rather converted existing structures to their own use. In the Viziváros and in Pest, for example, where fewer existing structures met their needs, the Ottomans built extensively. The only new mosque in Buda proper was the one built in the former Royal Gardens in the Jeni Mahalle (New Quarter). Of the several mosques built in the Viziváros (or Varos as the Ottomans referred to it) and the Tabán (Turkish: Debaghane), the best examples are Tojgun Pasha’s mosque, apparently designed by the great Greek-Ottoman architect Kosua Sinan in 1553–56, and Osman Bej’s mosque, which survived well into the 18th century.

On the Buda side of the Danube the hotspring baths (ilidje) formed an impressive group of buildings, giving the town here an Eastern character. Buda had been famous since medieval times for its hot springs and its baths. The Ottomans, for whom baths were extremely important, began building new ones soon after 1541. By 1686 nine baths were counted on the Buda side alone. Interestingly enough, though most of the Western travellers during the occupation (Werner, Gerlach, Wratislaw, Lubenau, Brown, etc.) found
them to be the most impressive new aspect of Ottoman Buda, the baths were almost invariably omitted from the engravings of the town. This was possibly because the baths, which were low-domed structures, did not have enough of a vertical component to interest the late medieval town-view artists, who were still obsessed with verticality. The best of the baths were, as were the mosques, in the late 16th century Ottoman-Turkish “classical” style, in the mode of the Sinan school but Bosnian-provincial in character. At least three of these were founded by Sokullu Mustafa Pasha in the 1570s: the Yeshil Direkli Ildjesi (Bath of the Green Column) in the Debaghane (the modern Rudas Baths), the Király Bath in the Varos and the Császár Bath (1570) outside the walls, north of the Varos. Another one, the Debaghane Ildjesi (modern Rác Bath) also survives in the Tabán. There were at least two hamams (Turkish steam baths) in Buda, one in the Bejlerbej’s Palace (built somewhere near St. John’s Church) and one in the Hamam Jolu (Bath Street). These, as well as the Bejlerbej’s Palace, were built around the turn of the century, when the Fifteen Years’ War forced the Bejlerbej to take up residence in the castle.

Other types of buildings were constructed as well. Next to the Büjüük Mosque was the bezistan (covered market) of Buda, where hardware was sold. Another aid to commerce was the han (caravan-serai), several of which were built on the Buda side of the Danube, one near the Yeshil Direkli Ildjesi in the Debaghane. Several schools (madrasas), minor mosques (mechets) and soup kitchens (imarets) were constructed as well — as the need arose and as the bequests of private individuals made possible. Six tekkes or dergahs (Dervish monasteries) were also built near Buda, the most famous one being Gül Baba’s, whose türbe (small mausoleum) still survives. The Ottomans also constructed fortifications: walls, earth berms, towers and rondellas, a few of which survive to this day.

We can see then that the Ottomans did build extensively during their stay. The worsening economic situation, however, and the fact that needs were by then largely met, put an end to such activity by the 17th century.

In contrast to the construction and maintenance of public structures, which was a very important aspect of Ottoman community life, little attention was paid to the private sphere. Thus, houses were usually left structurally untouched. The rooms were subdivided with partitions of wattle and daub, and windows blocked with bricks, mud or straw. When the houses fell into disrepair, improvements were attempted through replacing brick-vaulted ceilings with flat tile roofs and stone balconies with wooden ones. As
houses deteriorated completely, they were replaced with Turkish-Balkan style brick, wood and tile houses. This was true only in the suburbs, however, where the stringent construction standards of Buda proper (including limestone construction) had not applied before the occupation.\textsuperscript{45}

This did not impress Western visitors to Buda during the occupation. Indeed, almost all of them noted the general decay of the town. As early as 1555 the German traveller Hans Deernschwamm noted that:

One house after the next is falling into ruin and [the Turks] build nothing, only just enough for a Turk to live in .... The houses have become pig-sties because they have blocked the old large windows and doors to such an extent that they are unrecognizable. They do not use the cellars, which are filled with trash and dirt. Booths have been built in front of them on the streets .... The Defterdar lives in the old Fugger house, but a wooden stable extending to the old town hall has defaced it.\textsuperscript{46}

Later, in 1573, during the builder Sokullu Mustafa's term of office, Habsburg ambassador Stephen Gerlach gave the following account:

one must be sorry that this beautiful town has become a pig-stye and dog-house, because only the outer walls of the once fine buildings survive; the interiors are ugly and plain: the beautiful balconies and windows are destroyed, filled with mud. It must have been a glorious city. Here (as elsewhere) the Turk builds nothing and repairs nothing.\textsuperscript{47}

This general impression of decay was noted by many other visitors as well.\textsuperscript{48}

Of course these were Western Europeans looking at what had been a European town, maintained by European standards. There were several reasons for the low level of maintenance at Buda. First, Balkan-Turkish standards of housing were generally lower than in Europe; and consequently expectations were low. Indeed Busbecq claimed that the Moslems found it somewhat immoral to build or maintain fancy houses — the dwelling places of our short transient lives maintained as if men wanted to live forever. It was the public buildings such as baths and mosques that money was spent on.\textsuperscript{49} Moreover, much of the Ottoman population at Buda was military in nature. Often soldiers lived without their families in these houses, or even if their families were with them, they would never stay for very
long; and so it was not in their interest to keep the houses well maintained. Also, one did not want to display too much private wealth even if one had it, because of the high taxes. This was true especially for the gavurs: “Never was the hiding of money more in vogue than then,” writes the historian Ferenc Salamon. Furthermore, even if one wanted to implement repairs, it was difficult to get permission to do so. While there is no record of a mimar-aga (building inspector) in Buda, as there was in other Ottoman cities, numerous records remain describing the difficulty and the bribery necessary to gain permission, especially for gavurs, to repair their homes and churches. Gavurs were also subject to height restrictions, i.e., they could not have houses taller than those of Moslems, which were already low by European standards. If repairs to churches were allowed, these were not to constitute improvements over the original state, and so repairs necessarily involved a decline in standards of construction, e.g., from a tile roof to a thatched one.

Buda had sustained much damage, even before 1541, during the sieges of 1526 and the civil war, but repairs had always been carried out according to the old standards. As limestone buildings tended to be replaced with wooden and wattle and daub structures, however, the danger of fire increased. Thus, major fires broke out in 1566, 1577 and 1583. There were also gunpowder explosions in 1578 and during the Fifteen Years’ War in 1603 and 1606. The gunpowder explosion of 1578 was the most serious disaster Buda had ever seen. It destroyed many houses, severely damaged the Royal Palace, blew cannons into the Danube and killed two thousand people. These fires and explosions probably did more than anything else to change the face of Buda.

As a quasi-public structure with little or no public use during the Ottoman era, the Royal Palace fell into ruin. As mentioned, the Bejlerbejs were forbidden to live there. Presumably the Sultans wanted to prevent any pretensions to royalty and power from arising among the Bejlerbejs. The Ottomans, ever since Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent had ambled around the palace in 1526, had always referred to the palace with great appreciation. In the 1660s the historian Evlia Chelebi “went down on his knees” to thank Allah for allowing him to see the legendary “Kizil Elma” (Golden Apple — as the Ottomans referred to the palace). It is not surprising that the Ottomans should be so proud that one of the major Medieval-Renaissance royal palaces in Europe was in their possession. What is surprising is that given this admiration, they should allow it to deteriorate to such an extent. This probably would not have happened had people other than transient soldiers been
allowed to live in its various wings. It had no enemy — as the churches had — but it had no benefactor either, and slowly, through fires, explosions and general neglect, it fell into ruin, a ruin completed by a gunpowder explosion during the siege of 1686.

V. Economic Changes

The decline of Buda's economic might began with the loss of property associated with the 1526 evacuation and burning of the city, and with the loss of the economically dominant German segment of the population in 1529. These German burghers had had strong financial and trade connections with southern Germany and these ties were largely severed. Indeed, as an indication of its decreased confidence, the Fugger Bank closed its Buda office some time during the early 1530s — dealing a serious blow to the town's economic life. The nearly simultaneous appearance of Balkan traders from the south demonstrated the shift in economic orientation being caused by the Ottoman threat, still several years before the actual takeover in 1541. The occupation did bring with it significant changes to Buda's economic life, but, given the Ottomans' laissez-faire policy with respect to the market-place and to industry, the remaining Hungarians were free to carry on with their established trades and commercial activities.

Tax records show that between 1558 and 1590 (along with their numbers as a whole), the total number of non-Moslem tradesmen at Buda declined from 124 to 42. Meanwhile the number of trades pursued by the non-Moslem population declined from 28 to 16 during the same period. Significant, however, is the fact that the proportions of the various industrial sectors as percentages of the total changed little among the non-Moslem population between 1558 and 1590 (the food and clothing sectors remaining the most important), except for a marked increase in the metal-working industry — perhaps a reflection of a response to the increased local market for metalware among the Ottoman peoples of Buda.

This overall continuity in sector proportions of non-Moslem industry is indicative of a continuity in the industrial life of the remaining Hungarians at Buda up to the start of the Fifteen Years' War in 1591. Indeed it has been pointed out that the elimination of the German-speaking segment of the population in 1529 meant increased economic opportunities for the Magyar burghers; and the influx of Ottoman soldiers and administrative personnel after 1541 meant — after the initial insecurity was overcome — increased local
markets for some of their goods. In 1547, for example, 23 flour mills were in operation at Buda (milling being largely in Magyar hands at that time). A generation later, however, 44 were in operation.\(^5\)

The continuity of the commercial activities of the remaining Hungarians was aided, as mentioned, by the Ottomans' *laissez-faire* attitude to the market-place — there was no discrimination against non-Moslems in the commercial field, as there was in personal taxation and in the judicial system. The Hungarians' traditional coinage (the *forint* i.e. the Hungarian Florin) and system of weights and measures were respected, although Ottoman coinage (the *gurus* and *akche*) and measures tended to gain in importance as the level of Hungarian commercial activity declined over time.

While Hungarians at Buda were free to trade, the Ottoman occupation brought with it new circumstances for commerce — changed tariffs and tariff borders, vastly altered transportation conditions, and new markets. Buda was an important trading centre up to the time of the Fifteen Years' War, as shown by tariff records of the period.\(^5\) As expected, the percentage of Moslem traders eventually increased. By the 1580s, for example, 60 per cent of the traders were Moslems, while 30 per cent were Christians and 10 per cent were Jews. Christians and Jews actually handled 60 per cent of the *value* of goods, however, emphasizing their continuing importance. Several *Magyar* traders of Buda were known to have had large-scale trading operations because of their links with traditional commercial partners in the West.\(^6\)

Indeed, the *Magyars* handled most of the trade with the West. Western goods such as textiles, knives and helmets — which were traded for cattle and other agricultural products — were available in Buda as long as these trade connections were maintained. A cache of money, belonging, in all likelihood, to a *Magyar* trader at Buda and hidden during the early 1570s, included coins from all over Germany, Austria and the Low Countries, as well as from Venice.\(^6\)

That this Western trade was significant at Buda during this period is demonstrated by the fact that in 1571, fully one-third of the textiles imported to Buda were of Western origin.\(^6\) Western trade dried up after the 1580s, however, probably due to Ottoman administrative measures — possibly linked to the increased tension that was soon to result in war.\(^6\) Commercial interaction with the West almost disappeared with the onset of war in the 1590s.\(^6\) This no doubt ruined the remaining Christian traders who had depended on this trade for their livelihood. The subsequent unavailability of Western goods on the markets of Buda made life for the
Fig. 1.
M. Mevian (Merian) Buda (and, in the background, Pest) as seen from the West, ca. 1683. Etching and engraving. 19.4 × 32.7 cm.
Fig. 2. J.N. Hallart, after N. Wening. Siege of Buda in 1684 as seen from the north. At the upper left, Pest. Óbuda, at lower centre. Tabán (Debaghnane) at upper centre. Viziváros (Varos) at centre. Engraving and etching. 28.4 × 40.3 cm.
remaining descendants of the pre-1541 population even more uncomfortable, and was one more factor that led to their mass-departure during the war.65

VI. Conclusions

In drawing conclusions from this study it is important to keep in mind that in Ottoman-occupied Hungary, Buda represented one of three types of towns, that of the Ottoman garrison town and administrative centre. This type of settlement is to be distinguished from the suburbs of these towns (such as Óbuda, for example) and the unfortified mezővárosok (agricultural towns), which remained Magyar-populated, unoccupied by Ottoman forces and largely self-administering during the Ottoman period. These retained their Magyar character far more than did fortified towns such as Buda, Székesfehérvár and Gyula, for example. Even nearby Pest saw a far greater survival of Magyar life within its walls during the 17th century than did Buda.

While the occupation of Buda by the Ottomans in 1541 caused great changes in the life of the city, it is hoped that this study has demonstrated that: 1) the shift from European capital to Ottoman outpost began as early as 1526, and 2) there was considerable continuity in the life of the capital after 1541, and the final extinction, so to speak, of the European life of the city came with the Fifteen Years’ War — sixty years into the occupation.66 Indeed, it has been pointed out elsewhere that it was the Fifteen Years’ War, rather than the Ottoman conquest itself, which constituted the greatest catastrophe for the people and the economy of the Hungarian Kingdom during the Ottoman period.67 The important thing to remember here is that it was warfare, rather than the occupation itself, which caused the greatest damage to Hungary at the time.68

In the case of Buda, the city passed into Ottoman hands without a struggle, so there was no physical destruction associated with the act of occupation itself. By order of the Sultan, there was continued ownership of private property, a large degree of personal security under the circumstances — initially, the option to leave was also provided — and a high level of continuity in industrial and commercial life. There was, in addition, some degree of administrative and judicial tradition carried on in the form of a modicum of self-government for the remaining original inhabitants and the retention of the symbols of their former government. Though taxed for their Christianity, the remaining population was free to exercise
and change its religion, and was under no particular pressure to become Moslem.

The deteriorated political climate associated with the Fifteen Years’ War, however, saw the closing down of Christian churches at Buda and the restriction of their traditional commercial ties with the West. The physical destruction caused by the sieges of the war, the fires and explosions associated with it, and the concomitant loss of population through death and emigration, meanwhile, caused the near-extinction of Magyar life within the walls of the former capital. Thus, while the period after 1541 had seen a steady decline in specifically Hungarian life in the capital, it was the Fifteen Years’ War that constituted its death blow. Had the united Habsburg forces succeeded in recapturing Buda at that time, one could have assumed the continued presence of Hungarian life in the city. As it happened, such continuity — unlike even in nearby Pest and Óbuda — cannot be assumed.

Notes

2. Ibid., p.9 and Sándor Takáts, Rajzok a török világból [Sketches from the Turkish World] (Budapest, 1915), p. 114. It should be noted that medieval Hungary was a multi-ethnic kingdom consisting of large numbers of Germans, Slavs, Wallachians (Romanians) and smaller numbers of Jews, Dalmatians, Italians, Frenchmen and others, as well as the dominant Magyars, the ethnic group then still in the majority. Therefore the term “Magyar” will be used to denote that ethnic group, whereas “Hungarian” will be used to denote that which is of or from the Kingdom of Hungary. The term “Ottoman” denotes the conquering group commonly known as “Turks.” The latter term refers to another dominant ethnic group, that of the Ottoman Empire. Modern-day Turkish historians also prefer the use of the term “Ottoman” in such cases, since many, indeed most of the conquering people in Hungary were Balkan Slav, Albanian or Greek in origin.
4. Ibid., p.13.
5. Of the many historical treatments of this period, see, István Nemeskúrt, Önfia vágzta sebét [His Son Inflicted the Wound] (Budapest, 1975), pp.205–500; and, by the same author, Ez történt Mohács után [This Happened after Mohács] (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1968).
6. Lajos Fekete and Lajos Nagy, “Budapest története a török korban” [The History of Budapest in the Turkish Age], in Budapest története a későbbi középkorban és a török híadoság idején [The History of Budapest during the Late Medieval Period and during the Turkish Occupation], eds. László Gerevitch and Domokos Kosáry (Budapest története [The History of Budapest], Vol. II [Budapest, 1973]), pp.229–30.
8. Ibid., p.218.
9. Ibid., p.397.
10. The more commonly used term “Pasha” refers to the military rank of the individual Bejlerbejs, most of whom were “Pashas.”
11. On Buda’s Ottoman administration, the source was Fekete and Nagy, pp.397–407.
13. Ibid., p.108. Káldy-Nagy gives this figure as the approximate population in 1494–95.
15. Nemeskúry, p.245.
17. Ibid., pp.213–15. In all probability they too came from the Balkans.
18. Ibid., p.385.
19. Ibid., p.386. Twenty-five of these seventy-five families were listed as being of “recent Balkan origin.” It is likely that some of them were returnees.
20. See ibid., pp.386–87, and Káldy-Nagy, p.112 for the number of Ottoman soldiers in 1543. The ethnic Turks remained a minority for the entire occupation period.
22. Káldy-Nagy, p.115–16; 390 heads of households were counted in 1546, plus 19 singles.
27. Ibid., p.16.
29. The material for the preceding section was from ibid., p.411 and Gárdonyi, pp.14–15 unless otherwise indicated.
30. Fekete and Nagy, p.413.
31. Ibid., p.360.
32. Győző Gerő, Az oszmán-török építészet Magyarországon [Ottoman-Turkish Architecture in Hungary] (Budapest, 1980), pp.31–32; Lajos Fekete, “Mohamedán vallási és szellemi élet a törökkori Budán” [Moslem Religious and Intellectual Life at Buda during the Turkish Period], in Tanulmányok Budapest múltjából [Studies from Budapest's Past], IX (1941), p. 120.
33. Fekete and Nagy, p.353.
37. Ibid., p.361.
38. Gerő, p.33.
44. Fekete and Nagy, p.360.
47. Ibid., p.107.
48. Busbecq, 1554; Schweiger, 1576; Wratislaw, 1591; Bocatius, 1605; Leszlie, 1666.
49. Ferenc Salamon, *Magyarország a török hódolság korában* [Hungary during the Age of the Turkish Occupation] (Budapest, 1926), p.186.
51. *Ibid.*, pp.189–91. 52. There were more fires in 1625, 1627, 1635, 1658, 1660 and 1669.
53. Fekete and Nagy, pp.363–64.
57. Fekete and Nagy, pp.367–68. The material for the remainder of this passage is also from this source.
60. Kaldy-Nagy, pp.120–22.
63. *Ibid*.
66. Fekete and Nagy, p.387.
67. Takáts, p.111.
68. This point is emphasized throughout Gárdonyi, “Buda és Pest...,” especially pp.13, 23 and 18.