

London and Budapest: A Tale of Two Parliaments

The Houses of Parliament in London (1835–1860) and the Parliament in Budapest (1885–1902) are related in many ways. It was due to former Prime Minister Gyula Andrássy's personal commitment that a riverside site and the Neo-Gothic style were selected for the Hungarian edifice. While the New Palace of Westminster represents the late-medieval English variant of the Gothic style, its Hungarian counterpart is an amalgamation of various Gothic features marshalled into a heterogeneous synthesis. Inevitably the issue of a national style emerged, as well as the representation of royalty on the exterior and in the interior of the building. The Parliament in Budapest was meant to be a national monument and project the (illusory) image of a Hungary on equal footing with the world's major countries.

The New Palace of Westminster in London (1835–1860) and the Parliament in Budapest (1885–1902) are two internationally well-known buildings of the Gothic Revival (figs 1–2). Although separated by about half a century in time and half a continent in space, they are closely related not just in terms of architectural style but also in terms of their location along major rivers, the Thames and the Danube, respectively. Thanks to recent research into the history of the Hungarian Parliament and the issue of national style, a second look at the two buildings, their origins, and the true extent of their similarities seems warranted.¹

The New Palace of Westminster was known from the very beginning to the well-informed builders of the Budapest Parliament, but initially they did not consider it as a principal model for its Hungarian counterpart. It was only due to a leading politician's personal commitment and adamant insistence that the English model should serve as an inspiration that events turned in that direction. The construction of the Hungarian Parliament was first proposed in 1880.² Prime Minister Kálmán Tisza convened a national committee for the construction of the so-called permanent Parliament for 20 March 1881.³ He, of course, would head the new body, and it

was to include several leading members of the Hungarian political establishment. Three architects were also invited as experts: Miklós Ybl, the greatest architectural authority in the country, Antal Wéber, and Béla Ney. At the committee's first meeting, the prime minister presented the plans of the British Houses of Parliament and the Austrian Parliament, which had been acquired in advance, most probably to give a general idea of Europe's two great modern structures of their kind rather than to provide specific models. A subcommittee was formed with the duty of compiling a proposal for the programme of a future architectural competition, as well as of preparing a preliminary plan to accompany it. That plan, drawn up by Miklós Ybl, called for a rather regular, rectangular structure accommodating the two debating chambers as its main rooms (fig. 3).⁴ The proposed arrangement resembled Ybl's design submitted for the Lower House of the Austrian Parliament in 1865, and indeed to some extent the Austrian Parliament itself as realized by Theophil Hansen in Vienna in 1871–1873. The building would have stood at right angles to the Danube, separated from it by a small park.

This proposal could well have served as the basis for the Hungarian Parliament, had not one



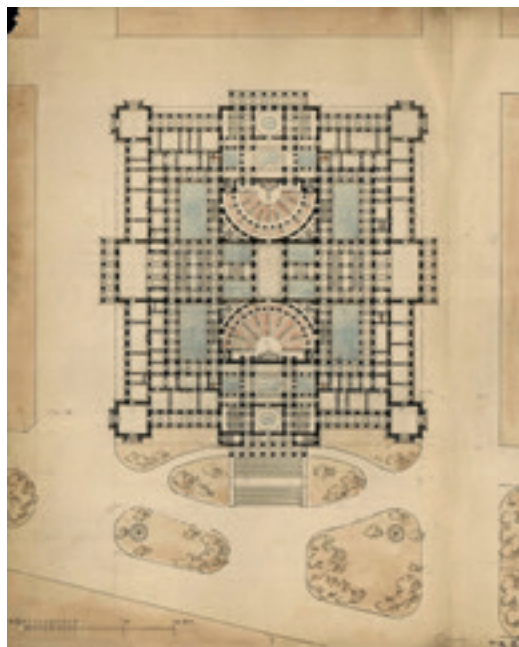
1 Charles Barry and Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, The Houses of Parliament in London, 1835 – 1860, photo from the construction office of the Hungarian Parliament. Budapest, Hungarian Museum of Architecture (Bequest of Ernő Foerk)



2 Imre Steindl, The Hungarian Parliament in Budapest, 1885 – 1902. Budapest, Budapest History Museum, Kiscelli Museum, Photographic Collection, 83.1777

member of the subcommittee, Count Gyula Andrassy, come up unexpectedly with an entirely new idea at their meeting on 8 December 1881, upsetting the well-thought-out scheme: "The permanent Parliament should not be laid out in the form as agreed previously, but in such a way that its principal façade rises directly along the river in a terrace-like arrangement, in which case the lower stone embankment would be vaulted over so that the traffic of carriages could be maintained, and a grove-like square would be created behind the building."⁵ One can hardly doubt that the New Palace of Westminster had given the idea for this novel arrangement, and by proposing it Andrassy wanted a structure analogous to the 'mother of parliaments' located on the Thames.

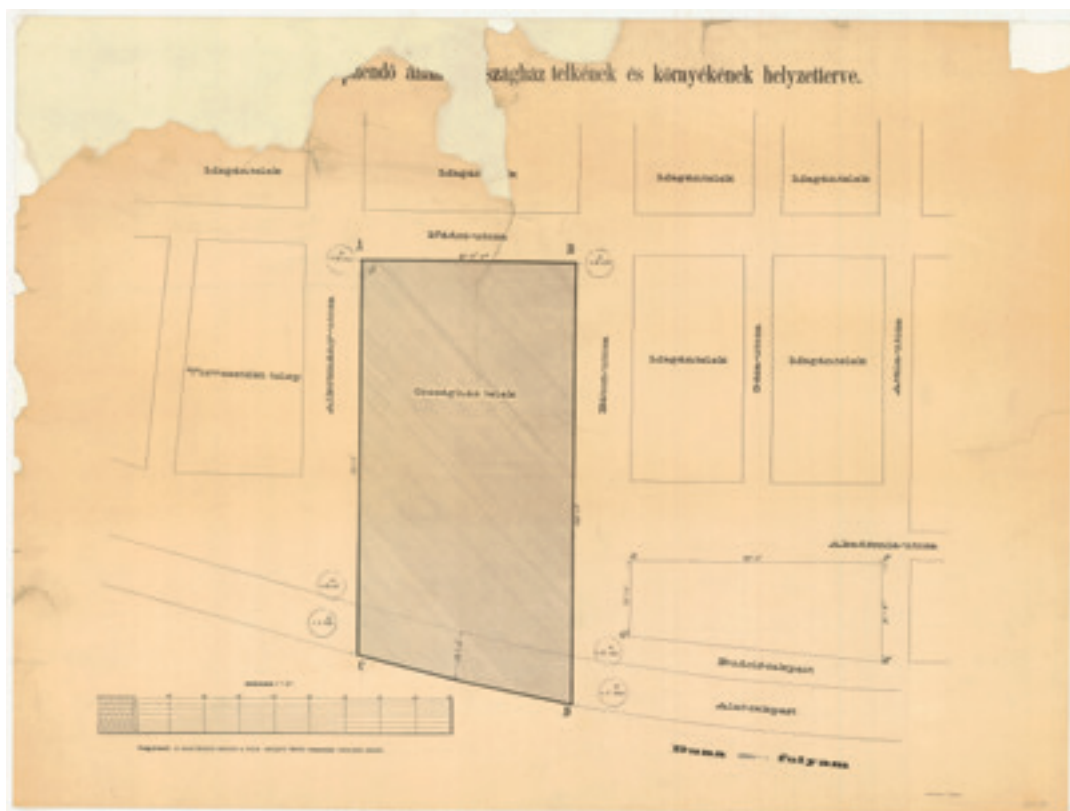
Who was Count Gyula Andrassy, and what motivated his actions?⁶ Scion of an ancient aristocratic family, he had had a fascinating and brilliant political career not lacking in unexpected turns of fortune. In 1848–1849, he took part in the Hungarian war of independence as a member of the diplomatic corps, for which he was executed in effigy by the Austrian authorities. After the defeat of the Hungarians, he lived in exile in Paris for years and repeatedly visited London, and thus had the chance to admire the new building operations in both cities. In 1857, thanks to Franz Joseph's imperial pardon, he returned to Hungary, where, after the conclusion of the momentous Austro-Hungarian compromise in 1867, he became prime minister. Between 1871 and 1879, he filled the highest political position in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, that of foreign minister. In his capacity as Hungarian prime minister, he did his utmost to modernize the country and its capital. For Budapest he chose Paris as a model and was instrumental in transforming the city more or less along the lines of the French metropolis. But for the Parliament, the obvious model was London. Beside the unrivalled prestige of Westminster, the Hungarians' widely held belief that their country had, just



3 Miklós Ybl, Preliminary plan for the competition of the Hungarian Parliament, Office of the Hungarian Parliament, Collection of Plans and Documents, Papers of the Executive Committee 1881–17

like England, an ancient constitution may have strengthened Andrassy's determination: the Golden Bull issued in 1222 by King Andrew II of Hungary granting the right of resistance to the nobility should the monarch overreach his authority was often likened to the English Magna Carta of 1215. When the decision concerning the Parliament was made, Andrassy no longer held any office. However, due to his undiminished prestige and overwhelming authority, he could weigh in on the discussions and impose his will. Thus, at the session of the national committee on 19 March 1882, two alternative sites were designated for the future Parliament, accompanied by their respective plans.⁷ One of them called for the arrangement at right angles to the Danube as proposed originally, the other for a site along the river in accord with Andrassy's wishes (figs 4–5).

On 31 March 1882, an international competition was announced for the Hungarian Parlia-

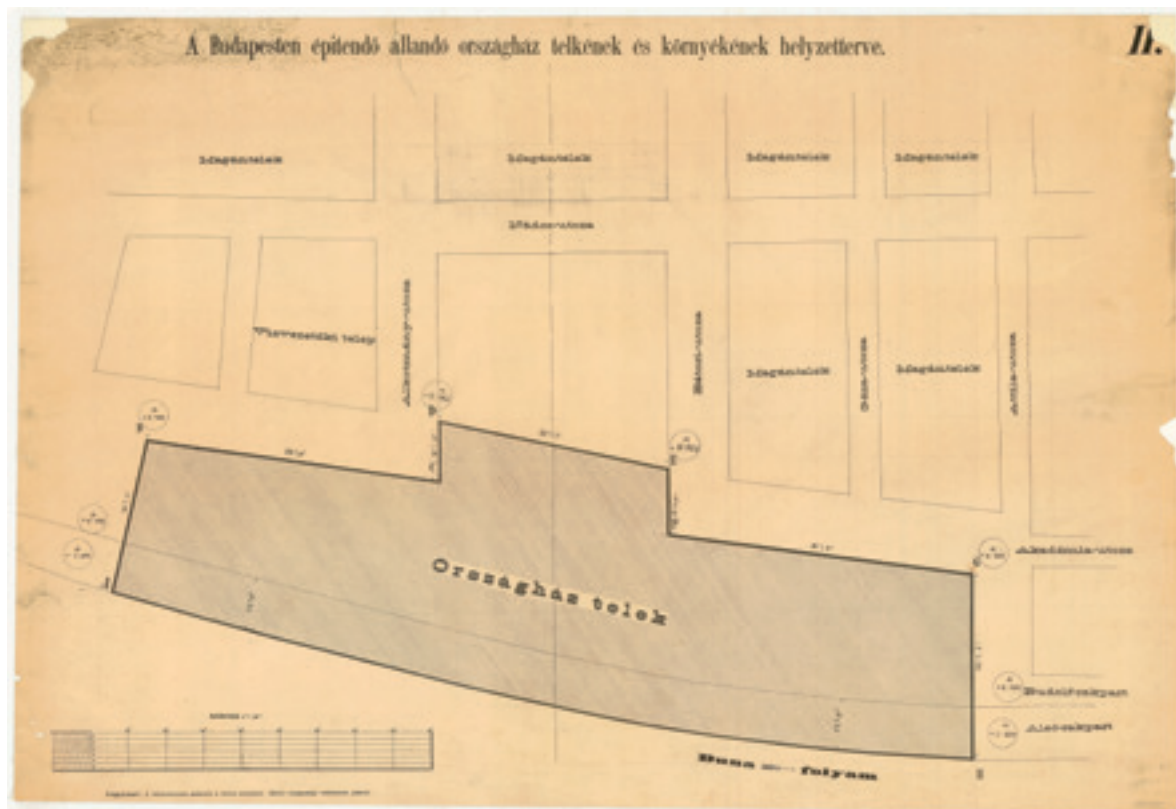


4 Site plan for the competition of the Hungarian Parliament, first alternative. Municipal Archives of Budapest, XV.331.105.4

ment. Its programme stipulated that no skylights could be applied in the building; whether this reflected the builders' reluctance to resort to modern engineering on account of its perceived unreliability, or a desire to create a building fundamentally different from the Parliament in Vienna, where skylights were present in the main halls, remains unclear. Yet the fact that the programme states that any architectural styles could be applied and then conspicuously omits the Neo-Classical style while enumerating the possible choices seems to confirm the suspicion that the builders wanted to distance themselves from their Austrian rivals. Incidentally, the Vienna Parliament owed its Neo-Classical style to its builders' desire to render it supranational

and thereby inclusive to all nationalities of the western half of the monarchy (Cisleithania).⁸ In equally multiethnic Hungary (Transleithania), where, after the conclusion of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise and the establishment of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the idea and practice of Magyar hegemony prevailed, such an attitude would have been anathema.

By the deadline of 1 February 1883, 19 entries had been submitted, a 20th entry arriving a fortnight later. Their evaluation occurred within the framework of another subcommittee set up for the purpose; the politicians wanted to keep matters in their hands rather than leaving the decision to an independent jury, as could have been expected and as was usual in regard



5 Site plan for the competition of the Hungarian Parliament, second alternative. Municipal Archives of Budapest, XV. 331. 105.5

to architectural competitions at the time. On 22 April 1883, the national committee awarded its four top prizes to “Alkotmány I” (Constitution I) by Imre Steindl, “Patres Conscripti” (Conscript Fathers) by Alajos Hauszmann, “Alkotmány II” (Constitution II) by Albert Schickedanz and Vilmos Freund, and “Scti Stephani regis” (King St. Stephen’s) by the Viennese Otto Wagner and his collaborators. Thus the winners included two professors of the Budapest Technical University, Steindl and Hauszmann, leading members of the architectural profession and the ones who realistically could expect to receive the commission. The national committee made its final decision on 27 May 1883 to the effect that the Parliament should be

Neo-Gothic; actually no other considerations had been taken into account, in spite of the subcommittee’s careful evaluation.⁹ Thus they had effectively awarded the commission to Imre Steindl, the only one whose winning design was in the aforementioned style (fig. 6).

The minutes of the meeting of the national committee contain no details of the debate preceding the decision, and only refer to an “intense deliberation”, which can easily be interpreted as heated discussion. They fail to even mention the names of the interested parties. Yet it is clear from several sources that contemporaries knew who the mastermind behind the decision was, namely Count Gyula Andrassy, who wanted the Hungarian Parliament to be analogous, not just

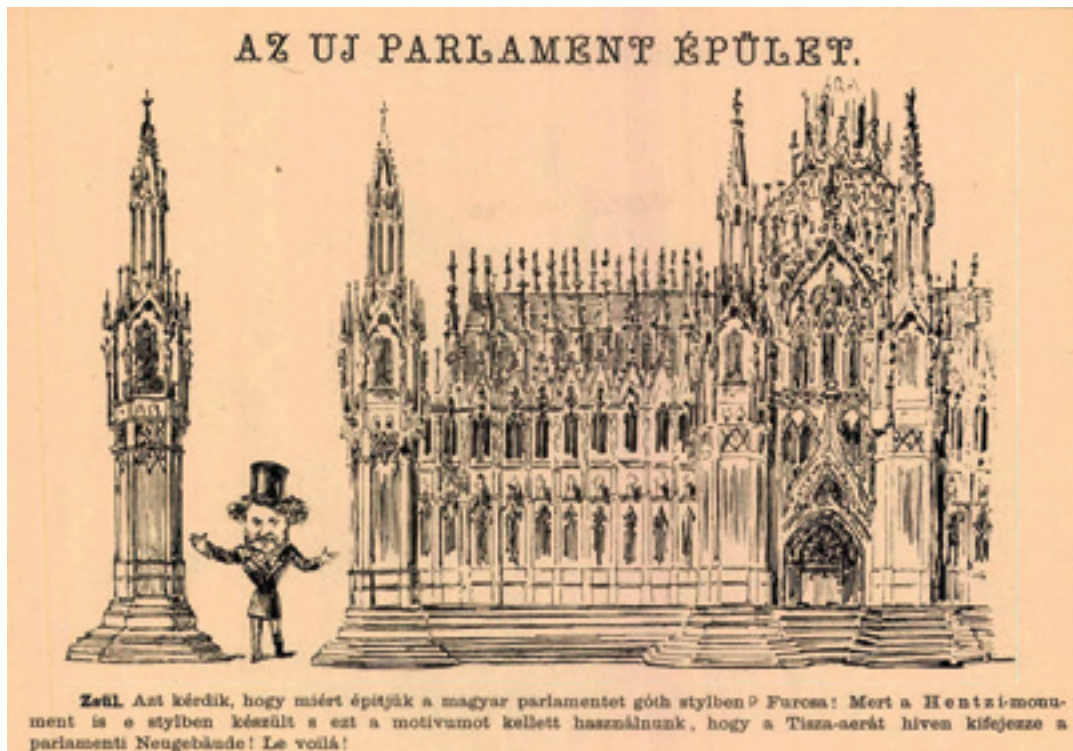


6 Imre Steindl, perspective view from the Danube, competition design for the Hungarian Parliament. Office of the Hungarian Parliament, Collection of Plans and Documents, T_00032

in its topography but also in its style, to London's Houses of Parliament.

A contemporary satirical magazine, *Bolond Istók*, published a cartoon on the subject (fig. 7).¹⁰ This speaks volumes not just about the person responsible for the Neo-Gothic style of the future building but also about what some Hungarian contemporaries thought of the style itself, including its political connotations. The cartoon represents a small figure pointing to a Neo-Gothic structure with his right hand and to a strikingly similar large structure with his left. The figure, as one can read in the caption, was "Zsül", which is the Hungarian phonetic transcription of the French first name "Jules", the Hungarian equivalent of which would be Gyula. Not only is the name in its French form but also the man's slight stature, frizzy hair, and top hat made him easily recognizable as Count Gyula Andrássy. In the caption Zsül exclaims, "You are asking why we build the Hungarian Parliament in the Gothic style? Strange! Because the Hentzi Monument is in this style too and we have to use this motif so that the Parliament Neugebäude duly expresses the Tisza era. Le voilà!" The Neo-Gothic monument that Zsül is

pointing to in the picture had been put up in the Buda Castle after the defeat in the war of independence of 1848–1849 to immortalize the Habsburg imperial general Heinrich Hentzi, who had fallen fighting the Hungarian revolutionary troops. To quote this Habsburg-Austrian symbol as a model for the Hungarian Parliament was quite a nasty insinuation. Calling the would-be building "Parliament Neugebäude" follows on the same line and drove the insult home. The Neugebäude (New Building) was a huge Austrian military complex in the heart of Budapest – quite close, incidentally, to the site of the future Parliament building – and equally symbolized Habsburg oppression. Harping on Hungary's notorious anti-Austrian sentiments neatly coincided with the general perception of the Gothic as a German style, a reason why many Hungarians opposed it. The "Tisza era" in the caption of course referred to Prime Minister Kálmán Tisza. A skilful and pragmatic politician, he had abandoned his pro-independence stance to become the leader of the country within the framework of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, a move that many people could neither forget nor forgive, as the cartoon involving him in the



7 Count Gyula Andrassy pointing to the Hentzi Monument and to a Neo-Gothic parliament building, cartoon. From: *Bolond Istók* 7, 1884, no. 18, 5

‘German-Austrian’-style Parliament project duly indicated.

Alajos Hauszmann, author of one of the pre-miated designs, gave the following account in his memoirs: “I had designed the Parliament in the Renaissance, Steindl in the Gothic style, and the struggle centred upon these two projects. Prime Minister Tisza, Ybl and several other members of the committee were for my design, while Count Gyula Andrassy, Lajos Tisza and other members of the committee fought for Steindl’s design. Eventually the majority of the committee by a margin of one vote decided for Steindl’s, i.e. the Gothic design, and Steindl got the commission.”¹¹ Several decades later, Ernő Foerk, one of Steindl’s assistants, summed up the events leading to the selection of his boss’s design in the following way: “The modern Gothic

works of the Viennese master Friedrich Schmidt, as well as remembrances of London cherished by Count Gyula Andrassy, our former prime minister, resolved the question in such a way that, just as London’s Houses of Parliament were built on the Thames, so was the Hungarian Parliament to be built in the Gothic style on the bank of the Danube. [] Count Gyula Andrassy adamantly insisted on the young Gothic master’s design.”¹² Later Andrassy would reportedly boast that the Hungarian Parliament was “the most beautiful building along the Danube, from its source to the estuary.”¹³

The status of the Gothic in the Hungarian mind was quite equivocal in the nineteenth century, ranging from endorsement to outright rejection. Initially it was vaguely associated with the Hungarian past and seemed to be appropri-

ate, like in so many European countries, to be the foundation of, or even to be, a national style. It was best expressed by the great and eccentric patriot Count István Széchenyi, who, in his book entitled *Pesti por és sár (The Dust and Mud of Pest)*, written in the 1830s but published posthumously in 1866), advocated the idea of an indigenous Hungarian style, “Scythian” and “north Asiatic Gothic” in character.¹⁴ The concept, as naive as it was muddled, clearly indicated what would haunt many Hungarian architects in the following decades, i.e., the desire to connect the notion of national architecture with the Magyars’ obscure eastern origins. Soon a more scholarly approach gained ground and would persist for decades: the idea of the style’s assumed German origin. When in 1846 Imre Henszlmann, one of the founding fathers of Hungarian archaeology and art history, published his groundbreaking book on the Gothic Cathedral in Kassa, the first art-historical monograph in Hungary, he entitled it *Kassa városának ó német stílű templomai (The Churches of the City of Kassa in the Old German Style)*.¹⁵ Being an internationally well-versed scholar who expanded his knowledge during his self-imposed exile in France in the 1850s, he soon became aware of the French origin of the ogival style, yet remained an avowed Gothicismist. Thus, when in 1860 the Hungarian Academy of Sciences invited him back to Hungary to elaborate the programme of the architectural competition for the seat, or as they would call it the “palace”, of this highly important national institution, he did his utmost to realize a Neo-Gothic building. He manipulated the first round of the limited competition, in which he himself took part, in such a way that only Neo-Gothic plans would be available. This gave rise to a big debate, the first of its kind in Hungary, which focused on the question of style.¹⁶ Henszlmann staunchly defended the Gothic, assuring his readers of its French – and not German! – origin. He also pointed out the civic, i.e., non-monastic character of the style as well as its rationality and flexibility, ideas go-

ing back to the teachings of Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc. Although he conceded that the Gothic proper was Hungarian, he proposed it for the palace of the Academy on the grounds that “the golden ages of our national history always embrace the pointed style”, thereby referring in the first place to the Middle Ages, when the Kingdom of Hungary was an important regional power. Other participants in the debate promoted the idea that the Byzantine style should be adopted as the basis of a Hungarian style. Eventually the palace was built to Berlin architect Friedrich August Stüler’s Neo-Renaissance plan, but the big debate anticipated in many ways what would come two decades later, when the construction of the Hungarian Parliament was on the agenda.

After his triumph Steindl had to modify his Parliament design, not least to render the building’s appearance even more Gothic. It was displayed in public in the spring of 1884, and immediately came under fire. As could be expected, one of the major objections concerned its style. Lőrinc Mara, an architect by training, even published a booklet on the subject. Some passages from it – which include references to two great Hungarian poets – give a fair illustration of the substance and tenor of the debate:

“In the area of church building we accept the validity of Gothicism. [...] But only here. In all other areas it will create an alien and unusual impression upon all other non-Germanic peoples, especially upon us. [...]

Just let’s imagine the debating chamber. As the internal furnishings will necessarily be brought into harmony with the character of the whole building: the debating chamber will have a Gothic, grim, mysterious atmosphere. [...]

The Hungarian Parliament in the Gothic style!

It is no less blasphemy than printing János Arany’s poems with Gothic letters or if Sándor Petőfi recited his National Song with a pickelhaube on his head!”¹⁷

Instead of the Gothic, Mara recommended the Renaissance. He regarded the latter as the style of the present time, a view shared by many of his contemporaries. His concession with regard to churches reflected the firmly established belief that Gothic was eminently, if not exclusively, suitable for ecclesiastical architecture. A case in point was Matthias Church in the Buda Castle District, one of the few medieval monuments in the capital and the venue of Franz Joseph's politically important coronation in 1867 as king of Hungary, which was at the time being thoroughly restored and substantially embellished in the Gothic style by Steindl's colleague and soul mate, Frigyes Schulek.¹⁸

Critics contemplating Steindl's plan repeatedly referred to the New Palace of Westminster as a model for, or a parallel of, its Hungarian counterpart.¹⁹ One of them, Alexander (Sándor) Uhl, reproached the architect for not having strung out all the rooms of the library along the river-facing side of the building, once he had taken Westminster as his ideal.²⁰ Alexander (Sándor) Országh pointed out, in Steindl's defence, that modern public structures had been erected all over the world in the Gothic style, for example London's Houses of Parliament and Vienna's City Hall.²¹ The *Deutsche Bauzeitung* also regarded the style of the New Palace of Westminster as a model for the future Hungarian building,²² and the members of the Society of Austrian Engineers and Architects, who had inspected its plaster model, came to the conclusion that its richly ornamented façade was reminiscent of that of the Houses of Parliament.²³

Prime Minister Kálmán Tisza presented the bill on the construction of the Hungarian Parliament on 13 March 1884. On this occasion, he pointed out that "in the political and national respect [the building] should be big, ornate and monumental, so that it has the character of a monument of the present time."²⁴ Concerning its style, he reasoned – possibly halfheartedly, since in the selection process he had opposed Steindl's

plan – "In the capital the row of buildings on the left bank of the Danube consists of ornate and dignified palaces at present – but as they were built nearly without exception relying on the shapes and forms of the modern (Renaissance) style, it has nearly the character of monotony, and [the Parliament] will have the most beneficial effect to relieve it."²⁵

The Transport Committee supported the notion, maintaining that although the Gothic style was not national, it was well suited "to represent the most sublime ideas: the ideas of freedom and state power". They also added that "the Parliament House with its great proportions opposite the Royal Palace and the Danube must correspond with our ancient constitution and the majestic idea of statehood."²⁶

The debate on the future Parliament took three days in the Lower House, of course still in the old building of the Hungarian legislature. It was digressive and fierce. The main sticking point was the projected building's enormous price tag, the astronomical sum of 9,500,000 forints, which many participants thought (rightly, as it turned out) would ultimately be exceeded by far. In fact, for the builders financial considerations were no concern, and they would put no limit on the expenses. Opinions were divided, as could be expected, along party lines. One of the MPs, Ádám Lázár, questioned even the very idea of building an expensive Parliament, given Hungary's limited sovereignty. In the reasoning of the opposition the New Palace of Westminster was cited repeatedly, primarily as an example of a horrendously expensive building. Obviously everybody present was well acquainted with the monumental British edifice. Balázs Orbán, an MP representing Hungarian independence as opposed to the country's position as a partner state within the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, pointed out that the practice of Gothic construction "has ceased, and only rich countries such as England can afford this architectural luxury", which of course he rejected.²⁷ His opinion was shared by

the other speakers who brought up the subject. Orbán even took the trouble to criticize the British building: “The pointed Gothic style is graceful and sublime with cathedrals [] but it is less applicable in the domain of secular architecture. [] I know that some of you may want to refute my view by referring to the palace of the English Houses of Parliament. This palace on the bank of the Thames looks fine, it is undeniably beautiful and magnificent, but only because they proceeded by the rules of ecclesiastical architecture at the expense of practical internal arrangement. There the effect is achieved not so much by the proportions and the details of the building but rather by the magnificence of the towers.”²⁸

At one point in the debate Lajos Tisza, the prime minister’s younger brother and head of the subcommittee responsible for the elaboration of the final plan, got carried away in the heat of the moment and presented a veritable phantasmagoria of a future Parliament building: “Keeping all this in mind and with regard to the stages of the development of our constitution, also with regard to the majestic framework created by nature in which this building will be situated, and finally with regard to the irregular shape of the building site put originally at our disposal, I confess I pictured to myself this future, permanent Parliament House like a block in some medieval style, which, though harmonious, due to the capriciousness of the style, excluded rigid symmetry; its immense tower-bastion jutting out onto the Danube symbolizes the fundamental unsubvertibility of Hungarian statehood and the Hungarian constitution, around which would be grouped building-blocks housing the other necessary rooms, with their different sizes, different ornamentation, projections, flat or pointed roofs, each marking the development of our constitution in different stages in different times. And I am convinced, honourable House, that such a building facing the peaks of the Buda mountains, located on the riverbank between the two monumental bridges, emerging from among

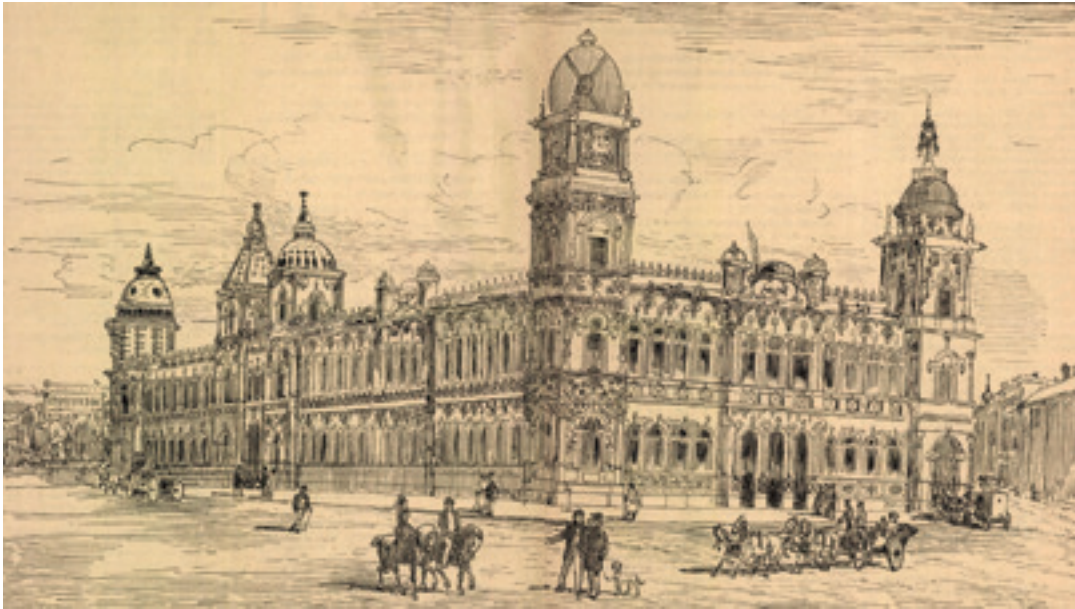
plantations and doubling itself in the mirror of the Danube, would have produced a serious, fascinating, picturesque image, whose pair we could have bravely searched for in any European capital.”²⁹

Not surprisingly the next day a cartoon appeared faithfully illustrating Lajos Tisza’s words (fig. 8).³⁰ The hodge-podge of styles proposed by Lajos Tisza under the heading of ‘national architecture’ seemed absurd at the time. Yet hardly more than ten years later, at the 1896 Millennial Exhibition, a large pavilion went up in the City Park of Budapest, embodying in all earnestness virtually the same idea. It was the Historical Main Group (called popularly Vajdahunyad Castle), a spectacular and beloved structure composed of replicas of Hungary’s major historic buildings.

On the very same day another cartoon was published in another magazine depicting a parliament in a humorous ‘Hungarian’ style, one which would reflect national character traits and oddities (fig. 9). Obviously the topic preoccupied many, both inside and outside the legislature.



8 Lajos Tisza’s phantasmagoria for a Hungarian Parliament, cartoon. From: *Bolond Istók* 7, 1884, no. 19, 6



9 A Hungarian parliament in the national mode, cartoon. From: *Borsszem Jankó* 17, 1884, no. 19, 4 – 5

The accompanying description provided the detailed explanation, using references to a variety of songs, poems, and adages:

“The national committee has accepted Steindl’s Gothic style for the new Parliament.

Gothic style, Romanesque style, Byzantine style, Italian and French Renaissance – these boomed from the big debate. It has occurred to nobody to propose a specifically perfected Hungarian style on this occasion. We rectify this omission. Our motto is: a purely *Hungarian style* of Hungarian atmosphere, with the careful exclusion of everything foreign. We give the main details of our project in the following: In accordance with the legendary Hungarian mood, the Parliament must be *depressed*, possibly low. And since ‘the Hungarian *has fun while weeping*’ – a great number of symbolic eaves are to be applied, as well as some tulip chest motifs of the Vigadó Building. As sculptural decoration, the servants of the Vigadó adorned with ornamental cords are highly recommended. The spatial arrangement of the Parliament, in keeping

with the idea expressed in the Hungarian trousers, is to be as tight as possible. On the façades national minorities in hats will be symbolized, because the song says: ‘All Wallachs [Romanians], all Germans, and all Goths [playful reference to the Tóts, i.e., Slovaks] should raise their hats to the Hungarians!’ There can be no doubt that the House must be more expensive than necessary because ‘the Hungarian learns at his own expense’. Symmetry must be carefully avoided on the building because ‘the Hungarian *has no pair*’. ‘*Be blind*, Hungarian!’ Admonition to the effect that a row of blind windows should face the Danube. ‘*On your feet*, Hungarian!’ [a reference to Sándor Petőfi’s ‘National Song’] Hymn to the nation squeezed into stone, since it cannot go to sea, it should do like the Slovakian and stand on its *feet*. ‘On the turf, Hungarian!’ Since the site at present is not adorned with turf, it should be *provided* in the shortest period of time. As for the details, the main entrance should represent a *water-flask*, its checkered surface the *collar of the peasant coat* [‘szűr’], its top should be ornamented with the dome of a *fur-cap*, and the flag-staff on its peak should be the

helve of an *axe*. Of course the ornamentation will be based on cords, and where possible, on *chains* and *flags*. As columns *maces* offer themselves. As ornaments hanging from the openings of the attics scythes and festoons of corn recommend themselves. In a single word: in every respect the Parliament must be extra, because: *Extra Hungariam* etc. [reference to the adage: *Extra Hungariam non est vita, si est vita, non est ita*].”³¹

As referred to above, it was an established belief in late nineteenth-century Hungary that no major historical style could be considered genuinely ‘Hungarian’, and most people also thought that it was futile even to try to create one. Frigyes Feszl’s attempts to this effect in the mid-century were well known but not appreciated at the time; the above description referred mockingly to Feszl’s main work, the Vigadó Building (1860–1864) in Pest.³² Yet later Feszl’s activities would be considered pioneering. His efforts were followed by Ödön Lechner and others starting from the turn of the century, and many of the innovators in fact relied on what they perceived as Hungarian folk motifs in their drive to invent an indigenous mode.³³ Thus what the description of the cartoon suggested facetiously would turn, in some way, into reality.

After the three-day-long debate on the Parliament and its style, the Lower House adopted the bill by a margin of 148 to 100, 192 MPs not being present. The debate in the Upper House took only one day and passed off more peacefully. The first speaker was Arnold Ipolyi, bishop of Besztercebánya and a noted art historian, who commented that the Parliament House “should be a monument to the existence of the nation in this country for a thousand years.” His speech concentrated on the style question as “we, not having our architectural style [] need to turn to the application of great, epochal art forms. [] The Gothic is the most excellent monumental style.” The arguments he marshalled in favour of the Gothic were similar to those used by Imre Hen-

szlmann in the debate over the Academy’s design in 1861–1862: the Gothic was not only the style of ecclesiastical structures, it was especially suitable for the construction of big spaces because of its skeletal system, and historically “it owes some of its verve to its reaction against feudalism.” He nonetheless had to admit that the freely interpreted design of the Hungarian Parliament “uses the Gothic style in a modified form and in its external decorative motifs rather than in its basic organism of its strictly rigid system.”³⁴ The debate then moved on to other subjects. When the vote came, 134 were in favour, 74 were against. On 22 May, Franz Joseph sanctioned Act XIX of 1884, approving the construction of the building.

What Imre Steindl himself thought of the Gothic style and how he wanted to introduce a national element transpires from the inauguration address he gave in 1899, when he was elected a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences:

“This splendid style of the Middle Ages [...] with its awe-inspiring, perfect beauty, with its soaring, definite forms, is the most beautiful embodiment of the connection of the material world with the spiritual world. [...] With the new Parliament I did not want to create a new style, because no traces of a national character can be found in our architectural forms applied in stone. I could not treat such a monumental building destined to stand for centuries with ephemeral details, but I strove to infuse a national and individual spirit into this splendid style of the Middle Ages in a modest way, carefully, as it is always and unequivocally required by art. For this purpose I have used all the motifs of our two-dimensional decoration that have hitherto existed to embellish the wall surfaces, the vaults, etc. in the spirit of the Gothic style. I have applied the forms of our country’s flora, the plants of our fields, forests and heaths in a more or less stylized way [...]. In my case the national character of the style can be found not so much on the exterior of the building, [but] I have intended to implement it in the interior decoration” (fig. 10).³⁵



10 Decorative painting on the vault on one of the staircases. Photo by György Bencze-Kovács, Office of the Hungarian Parliament, Budapest

Did Imre Steindl know the New Palace of Westminster? Certainly he did, though he may have never seen it in person. He was not much of a traveller anyhow, being a family man, and moreover completely absorbed in his work.³⁶ In the spring of 1871 his employer, the Budapest Technical University, was organizing an official visit to London to see the International Exhibition, at first with the participation of Steindl and his colleague, the jurist and economist Gyula Gerlőczy.³⁷ The scant documentation doesn't reveal all the details but, probably for lack of funds, only Gyula Gerlőczy travelled there. Steindl's biographers fail to mention such a visit, but Gerlőczy's did take note. Yet, in the construction office of the Parliament headed by Steindl, according to an inventory dating from 1896, they kept a number of documents relating to the New Palace of Westminster, e.g., "1. The new palace of Westminster, 2. Report [on the] House of Commons

arrangement (1867–1868), 3. Report from [the] select committee on [the] Houses of Parliament with the minutes of evidence, 4. Proceedings of the select committee on [the] new House of Commons, 5. Report from [the] select committee on [the] Houses of Parliament together with the minutes of evidence taken before them, 6. First report from the select committee on [the] new House of Commons, 7. The Palace of Westminster (Illustrations of the New Palace of Westminster), two volumes."³⁸ The last item, Charles Barry's *Illustrations of the New Palace of Westminster* (London 1849, second series published in 1865), contained several plates representing both the exterior and the interior of the building, as well as its ground plan, which would have informed Steindl sufficiently about the building. Besides, in the Budapest construction office they also kept photographs of the Houses of Parliament. The documents of the office were unfor-



11 Laying the foundations, 1887. From: *Ország-Világ* 23, 1902, no. 41, 817

tunately dispersed after its dissolution on 31 December 1902 (Steindl himself had died on 31 August of that year). Some items were, however, ‘rescued’ by Ernő Foerk,³⁹ among them photos of the exterior and the internal spaces of the New Palace of Westminster.⁴⁰ The young employee stuck his *ex libris* labels on them probably to establish his ownership (using the original, German version of his name, Ernst Förk).

* * *

Act XIX of 1884 stipulated that the construction of the Parliament be completed, if possible, within ten years. Ground was broken on 12 October 1885. Laying the foundations quickly turned into a more costly and time-consuming process than had been anticipated. Building work came to a halt while the wells and the pipelines of the municipal waterworks were moved out of the

way. Construction resumed only on 25 October 1886. Hundreds of workers toiled even at night, thanks to huge floodlights (fig. 11). First they had to build an enormous dike, to keep the Danube waters from flooding the construction pit. By 31 August 1887, they finished excavating. To lay the foundation, they covered the soggy terrain in a solid concrete layer, averaging two metres thick. On 1 October, at last, they started building the walls. All this enabled Imre Steindl, who was in charge of construction under the supervision of the building committee headed by Lajos Tisza, to make further design refinements. Steindl set up his office on the building construction site, where he employed several of his students and former students from the Technical University, as well as like-minded young architects, some of whom had been trained at his alma mater, the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts, and under his master, Friedrich Schmidt (fig. 12).



12 Imre Steindl's office for the construction of the Parliament, 1896. Photo by Károly Divald, Hungarian Museum of Architecture, Budapest (Bequest of Ernő Foerk)



13 Partial completion ceremony, 5 May 1894. Hungarian National Museum, Historical Photo Archive, Budapest, 3857-1958

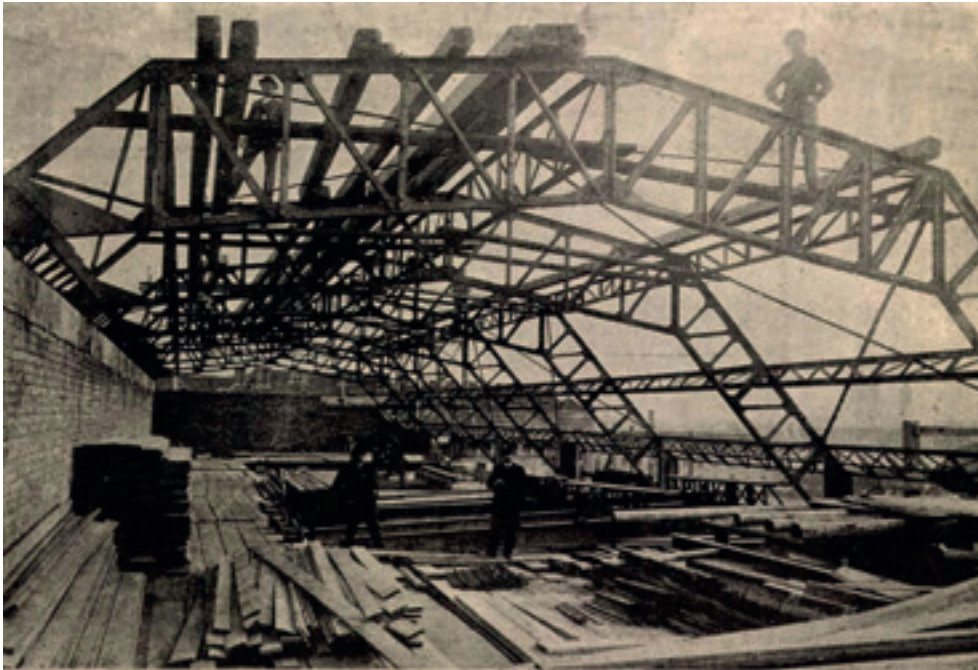


14 Design of the main towers and parts of the façade with the indication of the layers and types of stone. Office of the Hungarian Parliament, Collection of Plans and Documents, Budapest, OH-T_00608

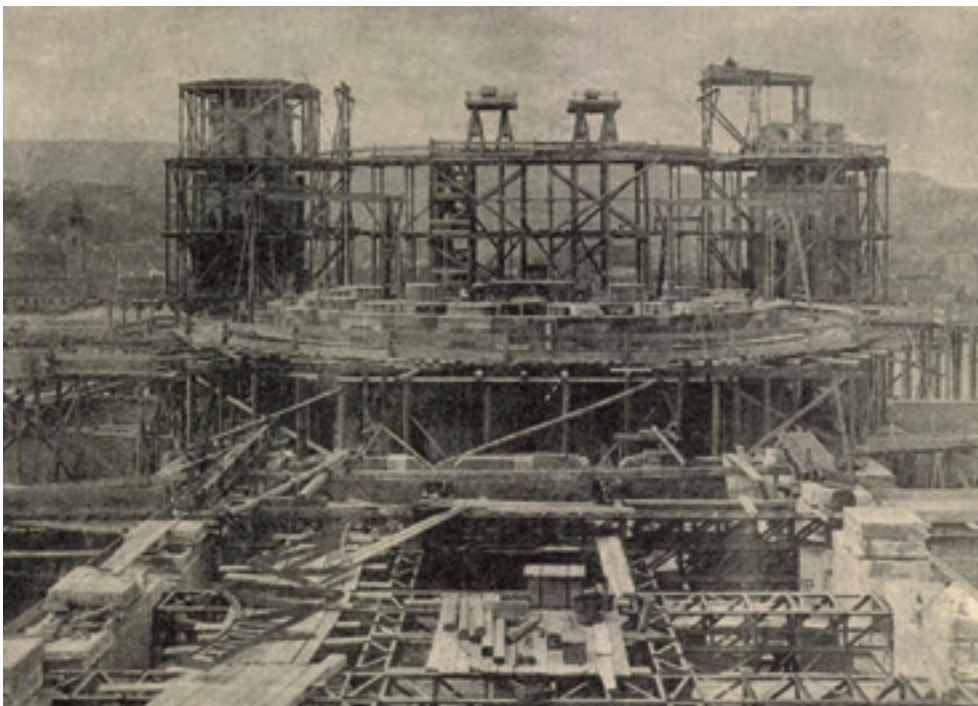
On 5 May 1894, a celebration was held to mark the construction of the walls up to the main cornice, the end of the bricklaying process (fig. 13). An astounding amount of building material had already gone into the project, including 40 million bricks and 30,000 cubic metres of carved stone for their sheathing and the interior vaulting. The two main towers, highly elaborate structures in their own right, would also be built of stone (figs 14–15). Yet for the subsequent construction process they resorted to modern technology: for the ceilings of the main staircase and the two big debating chambers, iron trelliswork; for the vast slate roof and the outer shell of the dome, rolled and riveted trussing were applied (figs 16–17). The inner shell of the dome, though deep underneath, was covered with an ingenious combination of fan and stellar vault composed of



15 One of the main towers. Photo by Károly Birchbauer, Office of the Hungarian Parliament, Collection of Plans and Documents, Budapest, OH-F_BIR_0005



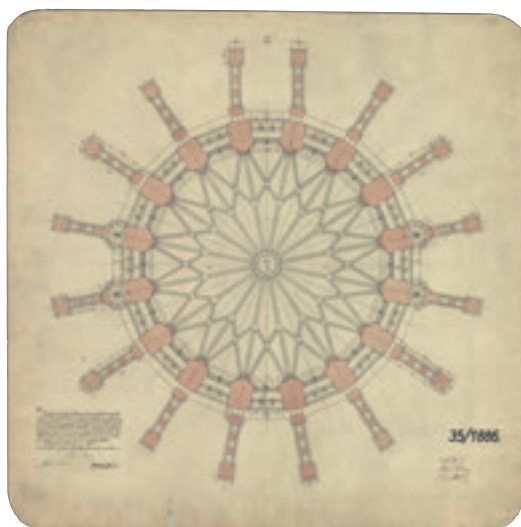
16 Construction of the roof. From: *Ország-Világ* 15, 1894, no. 20, 333



17 Construction of the dome and the towers. From: *Ország-Világ* 15, 1894, no. 20, 329



18 Imre Steindl, Cross-section of the Parliament, 1888. Office of the Hungarian Parliament, Collection of Plans and Documents, Budapest, OH-T_00214



19 Imre Steindl, Plan of the inner shell of dome, 1886. Office of the Hungarian Parliament, Collection of Plans and Documents, Budapest, OH-T_00108

carved stone elements (figs 18–19). In December 1895 the external scaffolding was taken down.

The builders had hoped to complete the Parliament by 1896, the year of the millennium, the thousandth anniversary of the arrival of the Magyar tribes in the area which would later be Hungary. Several spectacular events were to commemorate the great anniversary, the Parliament being the centrepiece of the celebrations. Not only was it the biggest and most sumptuous edifice of the country, which was, also by virtue of its lofty function, destined to play a major ceremonial role, but the iconography of its innumerable statues and (by 1896 only partially completed) wall paintings was equally de-

signed to serve the glorification of the nation. By the intention of its creators the Parliament was meant to be not only home to the Hungarian legislature but, in a period of patriotic fervour, also the ultimate national monument of the country. Eighty-eight statues of Hungary's leaders, kings, and statesmen had been fitted upon the façade, and 16 statues of monarchs and great men had been placed in the rotunda, turning the whole structure into a veritable pantheon (figs 20–21). It needs to be added, though, that all the statues were relatively small, uniform in their (hyper) realistic style, and entirely subordinated to the building also by means of consoles and canopies; in fact they were more or less absorbed into the



20 Partial view of the Danube façade, photo by Károly Divald. From: Béla Pilisi Ney, *A magyar Országgház: Steindl Imre alkotása – Das ungarische Parlamentshaus von Emerich Steindl – Le Palais du Parlement hongrois. Œuvre d'Émeric Steindl*, Budapest [1906], 6



21 The rotunda with the statues of great Hungarians. Budapest, Hungarian Museum of Architecture

gigantic structure anyhow. Steindl wouldn't have tolerated works of art that would outshine his achievement; besides, Neo-Gothic architecture, due to its highly elaborate design, didn't leave much room for independent artistic expression. This means that the Hungarian Parliament became a national monument not so much because of its statuary but because of its spectacular architecture and prominent riverside position. One can also wonder, as some MPs actually did, why they put royalty on and in a building that served as the temple of modern democracy. Obviously those responsible prioritized the idea of a noble national past over that of representative power. And parliamentary democracy had its limits in Hungary, where the ruler of the dual monarchy kept prerogatives in a number of important domains. Incidentally, in the Parliament building of Vienna, whose timeless Neo-Classical style itself vouched for neutrality, they sorted out the problem by including statues of antique gods and personalities.

By 1896 the exterior of the Hungarian Parliament and its main staircase and rotunda had been completed. Accordingly, the highpoint of the millennial celebrations was the ceremonial joint session of the two Houses in the rotunda on 8 June, the 29th anniversary of Franz Joseph's coronation, and the event was to culminate in an enthusiastic expression of loyalty to the king. Even the Holy Hungarian Crown was to be brought in for the special occasion. However, the monarch pointedly decided to stay away from the all-important event, which took place nonetheless. What is more, as a counter-gesture, he laid the foundation stone of a new wing of the Royal Palace in Buda, across the Danube. A few days later he did visit the Parliament, but as a private person, strictly dispensing with all ceremony. In 1897 the German Emperor Wilhelm II came to Hungary and visited the Parliament in Franz Joseph's company; the high-ranking guest, who had a flair for pomp and bombast, was overwhelmed by what he saw and found the

Hungarian edifice superior to the Reichstag.⁴¹ In the years to come, Franz Joseph would maintain the tradition of opening the sessions of parliament in the Royal Palace in the presence of the MPs. It may have been small consolation for the Hungarians that Franz Joseph never visited the Parliament in Vienna after its completion either, where they had hoped he would open the sessions in the central hall.⁴² The situation was similar in Berlin: the Kaiser summoned the Reichstag delegates to the royal palace for the opening of a new Parliament.⁴³ Only the British sovereign went (and goes) to the House of Commons for the same ceremony.

In 1902, when the whole interior of the Hungarian Parliament was complete and the first regular session was to be held, many cherished the hope that Franz Joseph would be present, or even that he would lay the keystone. None of that happened. Only a memorial plaque was placed on one of the pillars of the rotunda stating that construction took place under his rule. The sovereign apparently remained indifferent, if not hostile, to the idea of parliamentary democracy, especially if its home happened to be the shrine of Hungarian national grandeur. Undeterred, the Hungarians decided to pay tribute to him by putting up a statue, in fact a veritable monument, in the building of the Parliament. Initially the main staircase was designated as its location, but eventually, because of its excessive weight, they settled for the rotunda. The sculpture was to represent Franz Joseph in the company of his (by then deceased) wife, Queen Elisabeth, whom the Hungarians genuinely admired and respected. The inclusion of Elisabeth may have been devised to make the monument more palatable to the people. After many years of effort, the large statue carved of white Carrara marble was complete, but eventually it was discarded on the well-founded grounds that it was artistically worthless, "a caricature" (fig. 22). All this took place years after the death of Imre Steindl, who had actually conceived the failed monument.

Had the ponderous sculpture been put up in the Parliament, given Hungary's turbulent history, it would surely have been removed. Even so, it was destroyed after World War II, save, of course, for the graceful figure of Queen Elisabeth. On the opposite side of the spectrum, the white marble statue of Queen Victoria naturally found its way to Prince's Chamber of the British Houses of Parliament, where it has been treasured ever since.⁴⁴

* * *

To what extent are London's Westminster and the Budapest Parliament similar – what are their common features and what separates them? What makes them similar is first of all their respective sizes and riverside locations. The choice of the site of the Hungarian Parliament has been discussed above. As for its size, it would be tempting to assume that the Hungarian builders wanted something that would rival, even surpass, the British model, but apparently that was not the case. There is no reference whatsoever in the contemporary documents to that effect. In fact, just the contrary happened. When Steindl submitted his first plan for the competition, he actually envisaged a building virtually as long as Westminster, 285 metres and 286 metres, respectively. It may or may not have been Steindl's intention to produce a building of the same size as its English antecedent. But then he had to modify his plan in multiple stages, gradually rendering the building higher and more compact. This eventually resulted in a length of 270 metres, which is 16 metres shorter than the Houses of Parliament in London. Also, when evaluating the competition entries, the experts were not enthusiastic about Otto Wagner's project – an evocation of his architectural fantasy named *Artibus* (1880) – proposing an excessively long building of no less than 316 metres (fig. 23). So apparently the builders were not motivated by sheer size.

As for the architecture of the two buildings, the common denominator is, of course, the Neo-



22 The plaster model of the sculpture of the royal couple in the rotunda, photomontage by Károly Divald. From: Béla Pilisi Ney, *A magyar Országház. Steindl Imre alkotása – Das ungarische Parlamentshaus von Emerich Steindl – Le Palais du Parlement hongrois. Œuvre d'Émeric Steindl*, Budapest [1906], 10

Gothic style. Both structures are outstanding monuments of the Gothic Revival. Yet there are also major differences. In the case of the New Palace of Westminster, it is its late-medieval variant, the Perpendicular style, something that made the building 'national' in the eyes of English contemporaries. As shown above, in Hungary few considered the Gothic a national style, although its connotations with the country's medieval 'grandeur' made it desirable for some scholars and politicians.

The kind of Gothic Steindl had devised included a variety of themes and features from within and without the realm of medieval architecture (fig. 24). Its central element, the 96-metre-tall dome, is steep and ribbed, and has a 16-pointed footprint. Ultimately its design goes



23 Otto Wagner and collaborators, Perspective view from the Danube, competition design for the Hungarian Parliament. Office of the Hungarian Parliament, Collection of Plans and Documents, Budapest, OH-T_00017

back to Filippo Brunelleschi's dome of Florence Cathedral (1419–1436), a widely acknowledged archetype for European dome builders. To make it look more Gothic, Steindl attached flying buttresses to its drum, a device of thirteenth-century 'classic' Gothic cathedrals, except for the fact that in the case of Budapest they are purely decorative. The two slender towers flanking the

dome evoke the towers of the great churches of the High Gothic such as that of Freiburg Minster (completed in 1330), a prime and seminal example, as well as the towers of Flemish town halls, first of all that of Brussels (completed in 1455). Their bodies taper in three stages, with a fairy-tale-like profusion of gargoyles, pinnacles, and grotesque sculptures of standard-bearers.



24 The Danube façade¹

The Danube façade is further animated by two tall pavilions, the one to the left accommodating the debating chamber of the Upper House, the other to the right that of the Lower House deep below the roof. All this results in a symmetrical and dynamic massing, a far cry from the authentic, organically evolved medieval structures, but closely related to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Baroque palaces. The blocks are integrated in such a way that the masses step up rhythmically and gradually, reaching a climax at the dome. The roof of the pavilions consists of a steep main block and sharp corner turrets, their lower zones surrounded by richly carved crests (fig. 25). Wrought-iron grills crown each roof ridge, giving a lacy and softening edge to the building's bulk.

The base of the building, too, comes with some surprisingly airy touches. On the Danube elevation, arcades run along the ground floor of the lateral wings, a grand theme that originates from the Doges' Palace in Venice. On the central projection the arcades pierce the first floor, emphasizing the height of the dome above. In the place of the arcades on the end blocks and on the side walls of the central projection are heavy, again non-functional flying buttresses, while the length of the façade is animated by means of buttresses. Given this alteration of arcades and buttresses, the first floor's close-set windows ornamented with crockets and finials, as well as the innumerable turrets and gables, the Danube façade practically seems to vibrate.

Steindl differentiated the two fronts quite clearly by architectural means: the Danube, or the west front, is more relaxed and at the same time more ornate, while the city, or east front, is more compact and austere (fig. 26). Various forms and sizes of the windows further differentiate the system of the façades. On the ground floor, there are round-headed windows arranged in pairs, sitting in segmental frames. The subordinate mezzanine displays simple, square-shaped windows. The first floor is graced with



25 The pavilion crowning the Lower House, photo by Károly Birchbauer. Office of the Hungarian Parliament, Collection of Plans and Documents, Budapest, OH_BIR_0012

tall lancet windows, as befitting the main storey of the building. On the city side, a perpendicular cross-wing joins the long wall. The main entrance is located under a treble arch of columns and piers in the short side of the cross-wing and evokes the portals of medieval cathedrals. Portecochères flank the archway and lead to the two other, so-called ministers' entrances of the cross-wing. Throughout the building, Steindl skilfully differentiated the wings and sections via subtle shifts and ornaments on the top. Thus the upper edge of the façades is crowned either with quatrefoils or dwarf galleries of different sizes. The former were popular motifs of Gothic design, the latter were borrowed from Romanesque architecture.

All in all, Steindl had marshalled a wide range of forms, big and small, culled from various



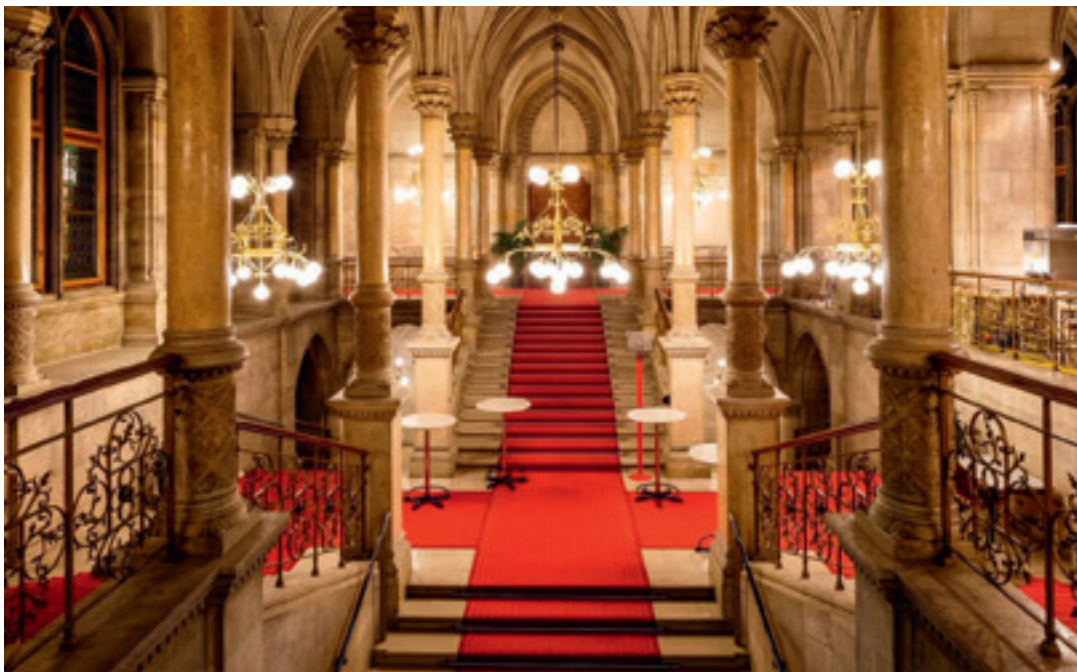
26 The city façade, photo by Károly Birchbauer. Office of the Hungarian Parliament, Collection of Plans and Documents, Budapest, OH-F_BIR_o23

sources, into a new, albeit heterogeneous synthesis. The result is a rather unorthodox kind of historicism, where visual impression far outweighs archaeological consistency and authenticity. At first sight this may seem surprising, bearing in mind that Imre Steindl studied in Friedrich Schmidt's architectural school at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, and his teacher, in turn, had acquired his skills and convictions at the restoration and reconstruction of Cologne Cathedral, a highly influential centre of Gothic orthodoxy.⁴⁵ However, time had passed and attitudes had changed. Cologne Cathedral was completed in 1882 after forty years of labour, while Steindl submitted his entry to the competition for the Hungarian Parliament the next year, in 1883, and construction lasted until 1902. The tenets of

strict historicism had yielded to a more relaxed approach, and Steindl's achievement is an eminent testimony to that. As expressed in his inaugural speech at the Academy, he himself was equivocal of Cologne's role, even if what he was proposing as an antidote was not exactly what he was implementing in practice: "Even if in the case of Cologne Cathedral we can find the universally greatest example of consistency and regularity in Germany, where they strove, so to say, for the spiritualization of the material, yet this consistency and spiritualization don't have the beauty, comeliness and freshness which one can find in the French monuments of the heyday."⁴⁶ In his Parliament Steindl had deviated from earlier practices, especially as laid out in Cologne, not only in terms of architecture *per se*, but also



27 The main staircase, photo by Zsuzsa Pető. Office of the Hungarian Parliament, Collection of Plans and Documents, Budapest



28 The main staircase of Vienna City Hall

by applying iron trelliswork and trussing on a grand scale. This enabled him to compose the building's grandiose masses and picturesque outline as well as its large spaces inside. If one compares the main staircase of the Hungarian Parliament with the two main staircases of the City Hall of Vienna, the former having a huge single span thanks to its light Rabitz (stucco and wire) structure imitating Gothic ribs, the latter being divided into aisles by columns that support their stone vaulting, the difference is obvious (figs 27–28).

What did Friedrich Schmidt, the architect of Vienna City Hall and former teacher of Imre Steindl, think of his pupil's Parliament? So far there is only one piece of information to that effect, and even that is somewhat ambiguous. János Bobula, the well-informed but venomous editor of the architectural magazine *Építészeti Szemle*, gave an account of the visit of the Society of Austrian Engineers and Architects to Budapest. The visit itself took place in 1885 and Bobula published his article a full seven years later, so there is also a time factor to take into consideration. According to Bobula, upon inspecting the plans and the plaster model of the Parliament, Theophil Hansen expressed outrage in public, and Friedrich Schmidt and Heinrich Ferstel also had a negative opinion of the building.⁴⁷ Whatever the case may have been, Steindl's achievement obviously ran against the grain of established historicist convention. Yet in some way just that made the Parliament 'modern' in 1902, at the time of its completion. While some critics objected to its historical forms or just to their perceived abuse, others appreciated the building's idiosyncrasies. One of the latter was Hugó Ignóty (Veigelsberg), a poet, radical, and noted journalist, who managed to capture the very essence of Steindl's work: "[W]hatever is said of it, from the outside, especially from the Danube side, the new Parliament is a beautiful building, and whatever is said of the faults of the details and the daring lack of a single style, in

the fluid unity of the building's body the details submerge, and the independent taste does not care for stylistic purity."⁴⁸ He could not refrain, however, from expressing strong views on the interior of the Parliament, which he – like several critics after him – deemed garish and crass.

Given the Budapest Parliament's individual characteristics, it differs substantially from the New Palace of Westminster, even if both buildings fall into the category of 'Neo-Gothic'. The façade of London's Houses of Parliament is flat; it has vertical accents and a repetitive arrangement, as opposed to the more varied, even sculptural front of its Hungarian counterpart. Another major difference is the symmetry, or the lack of it. In London the façade itself is symmetrical, but the various soaring towers behind it are arranged in a picturesque, nearly haphazard manner. In Budapest the entire building, seen from the Danube, is symmetrical, including the main towers and the pavilions on either side. This pile of masses has a function, it should be noted: the tall pavilions indicate the location of the two debating chambers, and the dome accommodates the rotunda, once the scene of festive events. In fact the very bicameral system of Hungary's Parliament, which ultimately goes back to England's 'mother of parliaments', is clearly visible on the building. In London nothing on Westminster's exterior indicates the presence of the important internal spaces.

Concerning other possible contemporary models for Steindl's design – after all, Westminster and Budapest were decades apart – some British and American authors have proposed various High Victorian Gothic Revival buildings and projects.⁴⁹ No doubt Steindl had access to the relevant British journals at the Budapest Technical University and could have seen images of these buildings and projects, yet his background and earlier work suggest other sources. As he had taken courses with Friedrich Schmidt in Vienna, one must reckon with his charismatic master's influence in the first place. Not just strictly speaking Gothic details but also some



29 Friedrich Schmidt, Vienna City Hall, 1872 – 1883

major ‘classic’ themes of European architecture present in the Hungarian Parliament may have come through Schmidt’s mediation.

First of all, Imre Steindl’s Parliament owes a great deal to Friedrich Schmidt’s Vienna City Hall (1872–1883; fig. 29), which was often likened to the Budapest Parliament and was widely regarded as its antecedent, if not direct model. This majestic edifice on the Ringstrasse represented a major breakthrough of the Gothic Revival in Vienna and Central Europe.³⁰ The Austrian authorities had initially looked askance at the Gothic, which was acceptable in church architecture but, on account of its assumed Pan-German and therefore anti-Habsburg connotations, much less so in secular buildings. References to

30 Friedrich Schmidt, Maria vom Siege parish church in Fünfhaus, Vienna, 1868–1875, photo from the contemporary construction office of the Hungarian Parliament. Budapest, Hungarian Museum of Architecture (Bequest of Ernő Foerk)



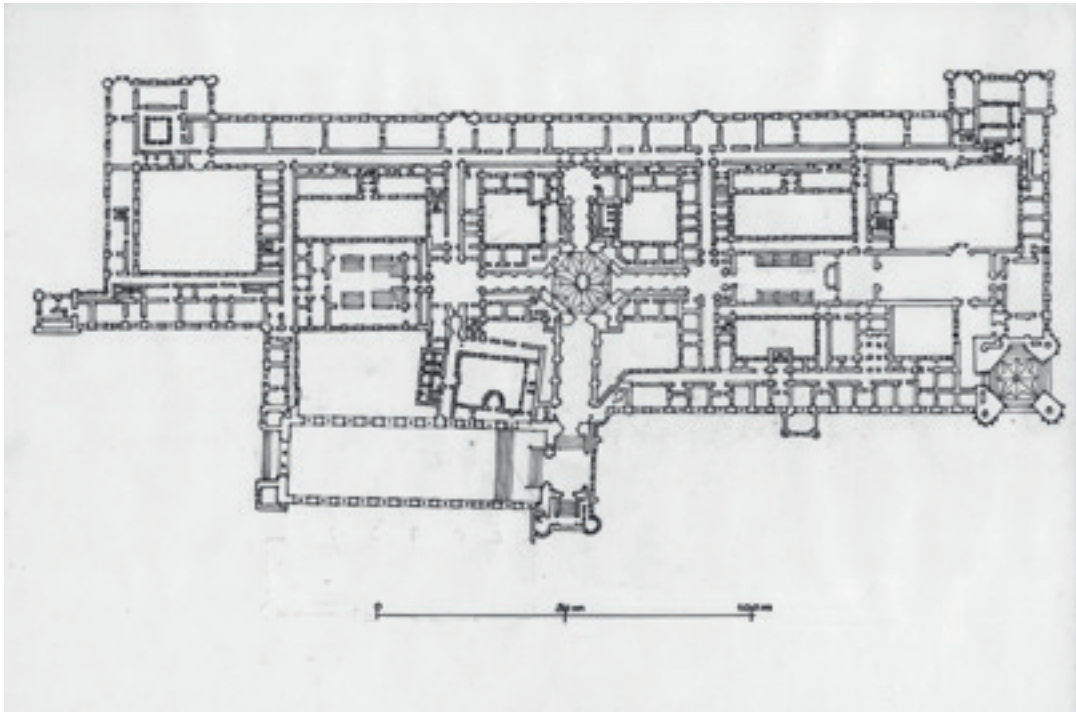


31 Imre Steindl, Competition design for the Berlin Reichstag, 1872. Budapest Technical University, Department of the History of Architecture and Protection of Monuments, Archives, 101097

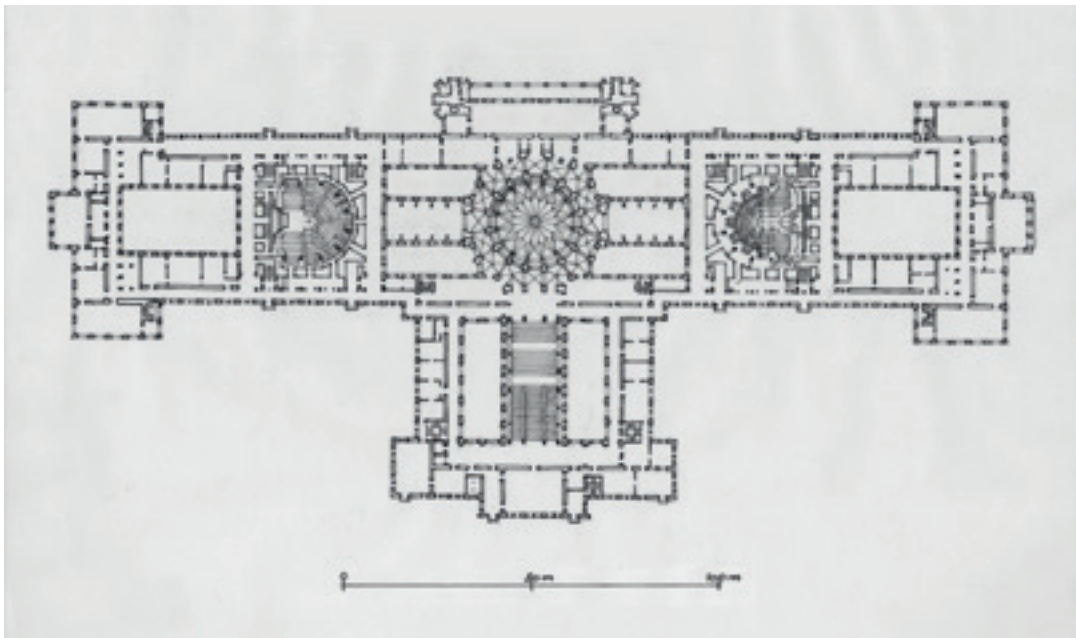
Flemish medieval town halls had eventually convinced the city fathers. The Vienna City Hall is symmetrical; it also has arcades running along the length of its façade, though, as discussed above, Steindl raised the arcades at the central section of his Parliament as a tool of additional emphasis. A big difference is that, as opposed to Schmidt's City Hall, which has a soaring central tower, Steindl put a dome on the middle of the building as its crowning feature, with two towers on both sides. This latter arrangement is analogous to that of Schmidt's Maria vom Siege parish church for the Fünfhaus district of Vienna (1868–1875; fig. 30). (Photographs of both buildings were kept in the construction office of the Hungarian Parliament.) What makes their works look different is that, while Schmidt's Gothic

was technically correct and sinewy, Steindl's was somewhat haphazard and ornate.

The dome itself, a supreme theme in the history of architecture with the primary meaning of glorification, deserves more attention.⁵¹ In Budapest it glorified the nation in the first place. For some contemporaries, the Parliament's dome was nothing less than the "symbol of the Holy crown",⁵² the country's revered relic, the embodiment not just of royalty but of Hungary itself. In Washington, D.C., of course, it served more the glorification of democracy. When Steindl conceived his dome, it was no accident that he chose Brunelleschi's Florence Duomo as his ultimate model, since no medieval Gothic antecedent existed to take into consideration. It was in fact quite unusual in the history of the Gothic Re-



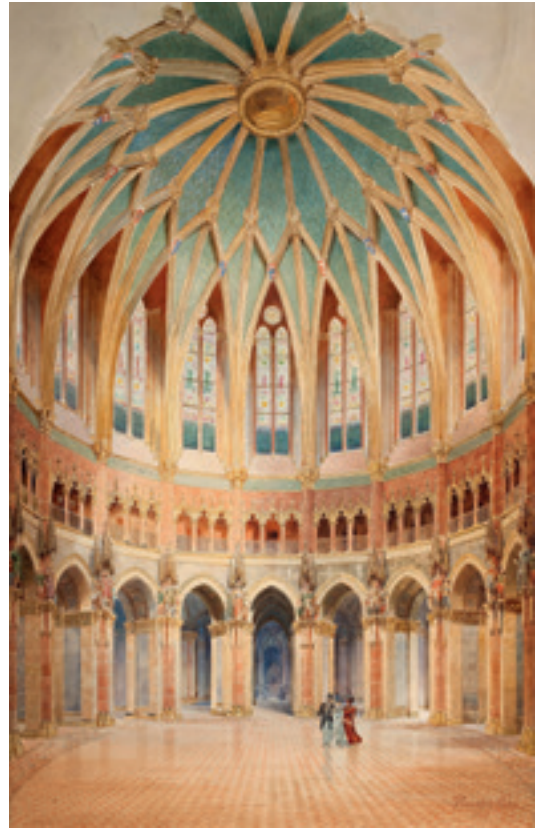
32 Main floor plan of the Houses of Parliament in London, 1835–1860



33 Main floor plan of the Hungarian Parliament in Budapest, 1885–1902



34 Central Hall of the Houses of Parliament in London.
From: *The Illustrated London News* 21, 1852, 376



35 Rotunda of the Hungarian Parliament in Budapest, 1885 – 1902, watercolour by Lajos Rauscher. Office of the Hungarian Parliament, Collection of Plans and Documents, Budapest, T_00005

vival to apply a dome on a secular building. One of them was the Victoria Terminus in Bombay/Mumbai, built by the British architect Frederick William Stevens from 1878 (as pointed out by an eminent English architectural historian in his quest for the Hungarian Parliament's possible models).⁵³ Incidentally, railway stations and parliament houses alike represented new building types, which may have made it easier to make use of a non-Gothic form like the dome.

Steindl himself had previously expressed some interest in domes when, as a student in Vienna in 1865, he prepared an ideal plan for a royal palace, for which he received the institu-

tion's prestigious Fűger Prize. Its central vaulted octagonal space, Gothic of course, anticipated the Parliament's sixteen-sided rotunda, just like its main staircase, ascending majestically on axis with the central space, prefigured the layout of the Parliament. Yet here the central space is still concealed within the mass of the building. In 1872 Steindl submitted an entry for the first competition of the Berlin Reichstag, the parliament building of the German Empire (fig. 31). Here the huge, nearly oversize dome dominated the edifice. This can be regarded as an early essay of his Budapest Parliament, where finally he would manage to tame his dome and bring it in



36 House of Lords in the Houses of Parliament in London, 1835–1860. From: Charles Barry, *Illustrations of the New Palace of Westminster*, London 1849



37 Lower House of the Hungarian Parliament in Budapest, 1885–1902, watercolour by Lajos Rauscher. Office of the Hungarian Parliament, Collection of Plans and Documents, Budapest, T_00002

harmony with the rest of the structure. It has to be noted that the English architect George Gilbert Scott also submitted for the Reichstag an entry with a prominent dome, something that may have strengthened Steindl's commitment. The dome as the main theme of a Gothic parliament building had been proposed as early as 1865 by Friedrich Schmidt, who prepared a design along these lines for the Upper House of Austria's Parliament.⁵⁴ The idea of a Gothic dome commemorating the national idea – which ultimately was the purpose of the Budapest Parliament, too – goes back as far as Karl Friedrich Schinkel and his designs for the *Befreiungsdome* of 1814–1815.⁵⁵

In terms of planning, the influence of the New Palace of Westminster on the Hungarian Parliament is unmistakable (figs 32–33). In the case of both edifices the basic scheme of the layout is cruciform. The difference is that the cross-wing in London is not quite at right angles to the long

wing because it had to take into account and incorporate the crypt of St. Stephen's Chapel and join the adjacent Westminster Hall, the surviving sections of the medieval Palace of Westminster ravaged by fire in 1834. The arrangement of the internal spaces in the two buildings show a remarkable similarity. The cross-wing accommodates the main entrance and the steps leading to the Central Hall (or Central Lobby) in London and to the rotunda in Budapest. The Central Hall was evidently the model for the rotunda, but the latter had gained in size and importance to grow into a veritable pantheon of Hungary's great rulers (figs 34–35). Steindl also skilfully composed vistas connecting the rotunda with the main staircase and the two lobbies on either side, creating a complex and captivating visual impression. The spaces in the long wings of the two buildings follow more or less the same pattern, with the debating chamber of the House of Lords



38 The Hungarian Parliament's debating chamber of the delegations, photo by Károly Birchbauer. Office of the Hungarian Parliament, Collection of Plans and Documents, Budapest, OH-F_BIR_0030

(Upper House) located on the left and the debating chamber of the House of Commons (Lower House) on the right, seen from the river. But while in Budapest their arrangement is strictly symmetrical, in London the two debating chambers differ somewhat in size and shape, and so do the adjacent spaces and courtyards on both sides. An explanation lies in the fact that in London several rooms were dedicated to royalty, while in Budapest no such provision was made. And all this despite Queen Victoria's limited powers as opposed to the more far-reaching prerogatives Franz Joseph possessed.

The dense decoration and furnishings of the New Palace of Westminster bear the mark of Pugin's untiring genius. The interior spaces of the Hungarian Parliament are equally lavish even if the profusion and Gothic consistency of the

details vary from room to room. In this respect the two debating chambers in Budapest represent the climax. The splendid coffered ceiling of the Upper House, complete with pendants and prominent consoles, may well have been inspired by the ceiling of the House of Lords (figs 36–37). Originally Steindl also wanted to evoke the colour scheme of Westminster's debating chambers: the upholstered benches would have been red in the Upper House, green in the Lower House. As eventually the benches did not get upholstered, the two lobbies received distinctive colouring, but now with a difference: the colour scheme of the lobby of the Upper House is blue, apparently in reference to the blue blood of its erstwhile users, and that of the lobby of the Lower House is red, as befitting commoners, simple sons of the people.

As a special feature, the Hungarian Parliament also accommodated a third, albeit smaller debating chamber in the cross wing, that of the so-called delegations (fig. 38). The delegations represented Austria (Cisleithania) and Hungary (Transleithania), the two partners of the monarchy, for joint sessions held alternately in Vienna and Budapest. Their duty was to discuss the so-called joint affairs of the monarchy, i.e., the foreign and the military policies, and the finances needed for the two. The long wall of this hall was graced with the most monumental mural painting of the building, *Franz Joseph's Sword Stroke after the Coronation*, done by Andor Dudits in 1901. This large work reminded the delegates, not least the Austrian members, of the major ceremonial event marking the birth of the dualistic empire. The other wall and ceiling paintings, subordinated to the architecture of the building just like its statues, did not have such a forceful character. They covered a rather wide range of subjects, from allegory to national mythology to Hungarian history to the country's noted castles. By tacit understanding, those responsible refrained from sensitive subjects such as Hungary's resurrections and war of independence



39 The view of the Danube in Budapest with the Parliament on the left and the Royal Palace on the right in the distance, photo by Károly Divald. From: Béla Pilisi Ney, *A magyar Országgház: Steindl Imre alkotása – Das ungarische Parlamentshaus von Emerich Steindl – Le Palais du Parlement hongrois. Œuvre d'Émeric Steindl*, Budapest [1906], 1

against Habsburg rule, which they deemed inappropriate in an atmosphere of Austro-Hungarian accommodation. In a somewhat analogous fashion, in the wall paintings of the Houses of Parliament some thorny issues of British history, such as past conflicts of royalty and parliament, had to be treated tactfully, in the name of reconciliation.⁵⁶

London and Budapest may be quite far apart geographically, but their Neo-Gothic Parliaments bind them together. Even so, their Gothic differs remarkably: the New Palace of Westminster is generally regarded as the first grand and archaeologically precise secular building of the world in the Neo-Gothic style, while the Hungarian Parliament is an amalgamation of various Gothic forms combined with the compositional principles of other ages. This fact clearly reflects

that the former is the product of the first half of the nineteenth century, the latter of the second, and historicism had evolved in the meantime.

In the Central European context the Hungarian Parliament has a special position. Namely, Friedrich Schmidt, the charismatic professor in Vienna, inspired not only in Imre Steindl but in several other students great enthusiasm for the Gothic. Thereby he launched a school of Gothicists, who would play a major role in the region's architecture, both as designers of new buildings and as restorers of medieval monuments.⁵⁷ In his Parliament, Steindl produced the crowning achievement of Schmidt's school, yet one that deviated noticeably from the master's original ideas.

For the Hungarians the Parliament was both the home of the country's legislature and a na-

tional monument. Hungary being a nation with limited sovereignty and a turbulent past, the building's architecture in this form was motivated by compensation and the illusion of power. As far as Budapest's urban context is concerned, the huge edifice lent a new dimension to the city, and its position along the Danube made the river the new 'ceremonial road' of the metropolis (fig. 39). The Parliament would soon be followed by the massive expansion of the Royal Palace on the other side of the river, a building surpassing in length even the home of the legislature. The newly restored and embellished Matthias Church, also on the Buda side, thanks to the demolition of the old buildings next to it and the construction of the Fishermen's Bastion, also offered an enchanting view from the Danube. The enriched panorama was to determine the identity of the Hungarian capital for generations to come.

In the nineteenth century, five monumental houses of parliament were built in London, Berlin, Vienna, Washington, D.C., and Budapest.

This seemingly put Hungary on equal footing with the world's major countries, and ultimately that was the ambition of the Parliament's creators and the self-confident – perhaps overly self-confident – ruling elite of the country. Yet this ambition proved illusive with the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and the dismemberment of Hungary itself after World War I. Fortunately the Hungarian Parliament, the monument of a great dream and a superb piece of architecture, has remained.

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