

THE
PARLIAMENT HOUSE
OF HUNGARY

*With this book
the Magyar Könyvklub commemorates
the centenary of the construction of the
Parliament House*

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MAGYAR KÖNYVKLUB

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THE PARLIAMENT HOUSE

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The Parliament House in Budapest is the home of Hungarian legislation and the headquarters of the country's highest dignitaries. The vast building, lavishly ornamented with sculptures and paintings, has in fact come to symbolize Hungarian statehood. Its construction took place in one phase about a century ago, but the history of the institution that meets there goes back many centuries. And the country made several previous attempts to build a Parliament House, and once constructed a new provisional home for the Representatives, before this landmark was finished.

The Antecedents

In Hungary, the system of estates arose quite early by European standards, i.e. in the last third of the 13th century. As early as 1277, the high clergy and nobility had assembled at the Rákos stream's plains near Pest. From the mid-15th century Parliament convened on a regular basis, and an Act in 1608 codified bicameral sessions. The venue always changed as the country's fortunes and political conditions shifted; the Estates gathered at different towns, in ecclesiastical or secular buildings. In the 17th century, when the ancient royal seat of Buda was under Turkish rule, the Parliament, or Diet, chose as its permanent venue the town of Pozsony (today's Bratislava in Slovakia), in

THE ROYAL TREASURY'S PALACE IN POZSONY, WHERE PARLIAMENT CONVENED.
THE VIENNESE ARCHITECT G. B. MARTINELLI DESIGNED IN 1753. (19TH-CENTURY VIEW)

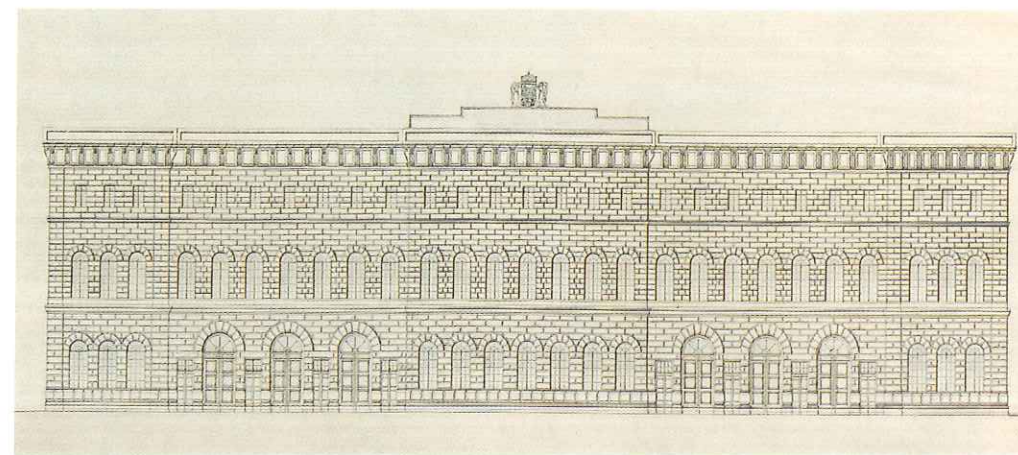


the secure northeastern part of the country. Members of the high clergy and nobility convened there at the Royal Treasury's palace.

Oddly enough, the first leader to construct a meeting place for Hungary's Parliament in Buda was an absolutist but enlightened monarch, Joseph II from the House of Habsburg, who never convoked the Estates. He commissioned a new wing for a converted, secularized Clarissan convent in Buda's Castle District. Erected in 1784–85, the addition was designed by Franz Anton Hillebrandt, a leading member of the Court Architectural Office. Behind its fairly simple facade, it accommodated the chambers of the two Houses on its first floor; the quarters of the Lower House, a monumental late Baroque space complete with gallery, was an especially noteworthy design. Parliament convened there only three times: in 1790, 1792, and 1807. (Today the Hungarian Academy of Sciences uses the former Lower House chamber as a ceremonial hall, and only the street's name – Országház utca, or Parliament House Street – reflects the building's original function.)

In the early 19th century, Parliament resettled in Pozsony. But in this so-called Age of Reform, politicians and the public alike often discussed the concept of building an appropriately dignified home for Parliament in Pest. The structure, in their minds, would embody the national independence, or at least the national grandeur, that Hungary had craved for centuries. The first formal proposal for such a building was made at the Parliament of 1830, but deeds did not follow words. The question was mooted again at the 1839-40 Parliament. Then, probably at the request of the pro-Magyar Palatine Joseph, the respected architect Mihály Pollack, who had designed the monumental National Museum in Pest, drew up plans for a Parliament House on an unspecified site. In this scheme the aging master deviated from his usual Neo-Classical style and followed new trends: he covered the facade with rustication reminiscent of Florentine palaces and set pointed arches into the building's small chapel. Pollack apparently completed his design too late for the Palatine to submit it before Parliament dissolved.

The 1843–44 Parliament only briefly considered Pollack's plan before summarily rejecting it, supposedly because its attached estimate was too general. In truth, though, many MPs probably thought that an insufficiently lofty method had been used to choose the design, and that an international architectural competition was in order. A committee was set up to foster construction of a Parliament building, with Grand Cupbearer Count János Keglevich as its chairman. A well-educated aristocrat who had studied at the Theresianum in Vienna, he was well versed and deeply interested in architecture but had no formal training in the craft. Keglevich brought on an advisor named Alois Pichl, who had worked in many parts of the Habsburg monarchy and also served as the architect of Keglevich's own Neo-Classical estate at Kistapolcsány (now Slovakia). The committee designated a site at Új piac (New Market) in Pest's Lipótváros district, although Count István Széchenyi was already farsightedly suggesting that Parliament take up residence beside the Danube. In the summer of 1844, the group announced an international competition for a Parliament House, with a deadline of November 30. Though the Lower House had prepared a bill calling for Parliament House schemes with "ornamentation of national character," this term was not included in the final competition programme. To our knowledge this marked the country's first architectural competition. The commit-

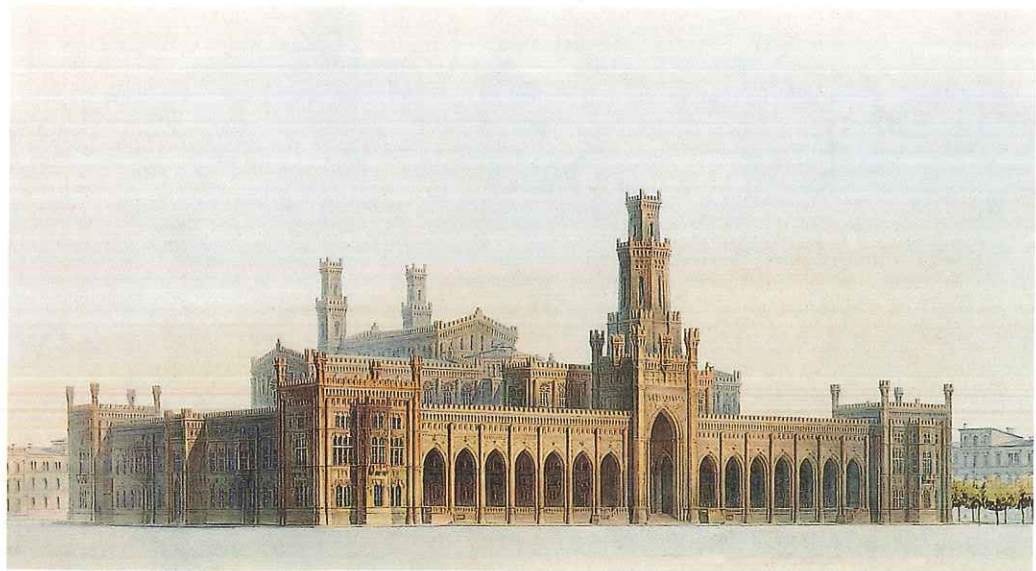


MIHÁLY POLLACK'S 1840 DESIGN FOR A PARLIAMENT HOUSE
IN A STYLE REMINISCENT OF FLORENTINE PALACES. IT WAS REJECTED SUPPOSEDLY
BECAUSE ITS ESTIMATE WAS TOO GENERAL

tee opened it up to international entrants partly to emulate foreign models, and partly to publicize Hungary's increasing sense of national consciousness, and hence its need for suitable a legislative headquarters.

Parliament concluded on 1 August 1844, earlier than expected, so the Lower House extended the unrealistic deadline of the competition by a year, and asked the committee to submit proposals at Parliament's subsequent session. Yet in reality no money had been allocated for construction anyway: before the close of the 1843-44 session, the Upper House had rejected a bill financing the project. Even if it had received funding, it would never have proceeded given the chaos that soon engulfed Hungary. In vain did numerous designs arrive; the revolutionary-era Parliament of 1847-48 understandably never dealt with them, and after the country's bloody defeat the project of course fizzled completely. No judges ever examined the submissions, and entrants who so desired were eventually given back their documents. Probably this abortive design competition helped inspire Mihály Vörösmarty's poem *Országháza* (Parliament House), which opens with the embittered line, "*The nation has no house ...*"

Of 42 recorded entries, none has surfaced to date, but half the competitors have been identified and some details of their submissions are known. It is certain, for example, that Pichl prepared plans for a monumental, severely Classical structure. Surviving documents also show that Keglevich corresponded with the celebrated Leo von Klenze, architect to the King of Bavaria, who had first rejected the idea of participating and then came to inspect the Pest site; in the end, though, he probably never submitted an entry. Another prominent architect from Munich, Eduard Metzger, who taught at that city's Polytechnikum, definitely participated, as did many other architects from the German states and from Habsburg provinces. Among well-known Hungarian architects, József Hild did not submit a design, nor most likely did Pollack, and entries from several younger, less important architects and engineers could not compensate for these two masters' absence. A particularly unusual Hungarian entrant was Károly Markó Sr., the renowned painter, who at that time was based in Florence. He had original-

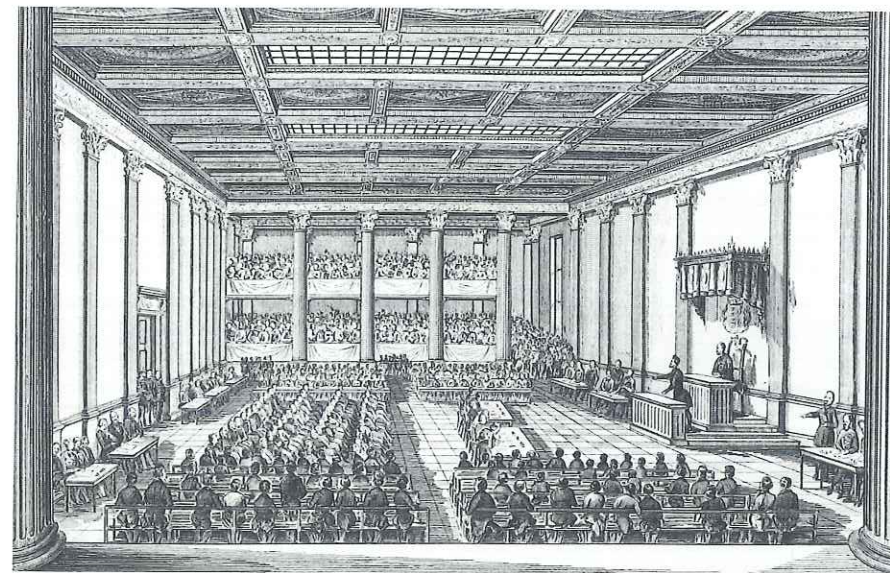


WILHELM STIER OF BERLIN DESIGNED A GOTHIC FANTASY OF A PARLIAMENT HOUSE FOR THE NEW MARKET SITE IN PEST (C. 1845)

ly trained and briefly practised as an engineer, and he submitted a Parliament House design perhaps out of pre-revolutionary patriotism.

A number of the entrants seem to have never shipped their entries to the ill-fated committee, for a variety of reasons. Two young architects from Vienna, Eduard van der Nüll and August von Sicardsburg (later the architects of the city's Opera House, who would meet early and tragic deaths), prepared a plan in the Rundbogenstil, only so that they could publish it in the professional journal *Allgemeine Bauzeitung* by way of protesting the terms of the competition. They objected to the fact that no judges had been assigned to examine the designs and thought that the Parliament House would never be built. The Hungarian Frigyes Feszli designed a Romantic, somewhat orientalized building, and it is not clear why he failed to submit it. (Later a legend arose that he had somehow won first prize.) Wilhelm Stier of Berlin drew up plans for a fantastical Gothic structure, in his typical mode (which prefigured the equally exciting Gothic structure that Hungary eventually built), but never completed the design.

The April Acts of 1848 provided for the basis of the modern parliamentary system by adopting the principles of popular legislation and responsible government. Yet after the defeat in the war of independence, though in theory the Acts were in power, absolutist Habsburg rule was imposed for more than a decade. In 1860, the so-called October Diploma at last stipulated the partial restoration of a constitutional system. When Parliament reconvened on 2 April 1861, the House of Representatives began meeting at the National Museum's state hall, while the Upper House took over the so-called Lloyd Palace, or Merchants' Hall. (The great Neo-Classical building once stood on today's Roosevelt tér.) The city's general assembly meanwhile started planning for some kind of provisional Parliament building, a concept that Parliament itself quickly embraced. On 27 June 1861, a parliamentary committee presented 13 hastily prepared proposals. Two of the suggestions involved converting the (now-destroyed) National Riding Hall behind the



PARLIAMENT MEETING IN THE NATIONAL MUSEUM'S STATE HALL. IN 1865, CONSTRUCTION OF A BUILDING FOR THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES BECAME A PRESSING ISSUE

National Museum into the Representatives' debating chamber, while others called for upgrading the National Museum's state hall or adding an annex to the Museum. The committee favoured the most ambitious idea of the lot: Pest architect Ferenc Wieser's second, improved variant, which called for a single building to accommodate both Houses on a site in the Botanical Garden (today the university compound on Múzeum körút). His design no doubt captivated the committee partly because of its graceful Neo-Renaissance architecture, a novelty at that time in Hungary. The Lower House, however, did not rule right away on any of the proposals, and when Franz Joseph rejected the Representatives' refusal to accept the October Diploma and the February Patent, Parliament dissolved on 22 August, leaving the building's prospects as cloudy as ever.

In the summer of 1865, the Empire's crisis forced the Habsburg ruler to take steps towards compromising with the Hungarians. He called for his subjects' Parliament to convene in December, which meant that a legislative headquarters had to be created in a hurry. Government officials assigned the National Museum's state hall to the Upper House, and commissioned a new building for the Representatives near the Museum, on Sándor (today Bródy Sándor) utca. A committee was set up, and on 9 August 1865, it invited Miklós Ybl, Antal Szkalnitzky, and József Diescher to produce plans on a very tight deadline; Béla Pribék of the National Architectural Office joined in this competition as well. The committee settled on Ybl's Neo-Renaissance design, and work began on 11 September, with contractor József Diescher pledging to complete it in 90 days. Some 800 people laboured at a feverish pace and technically finished the structure on 10 December 1865, in time for the start of parliamentary sessions – although the interior remained unfurnished and damp, and the Representatives ended up gathering again at the National Museum after all. The fully furnished building was declared open on 11 April 1866.



THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES' QUARTERS ON SÁNDOR UTCA SERVED THE HUNGARIAN LEGISLATURE FOR MORE THAN THREE DECADES

Its facade is modest, in keeping with its neighbours'. Three round-arched gates surmounted by lion's heads served as the Representatives' entrance, and the public entered through two side gates. The large, oblong debating chamber took up nearly the whole interior. The Speaker's rostrum originally stood opposite the entrance of the room in a round-topped niche and, as in London's Houses of Parliament, the benches of the MPs were located lengthwise on both sides. On the first floor above them, arcades sheltered a visitors' gallery. The impressive room turned out to have bad acoustics, so in 1867 it underwent a thorough remodelling. The rostrum was moved to the long, west wall, facing semicircular benches for the MPs. The east side gallery was walled up, and the ceiling was lowered to the level of the column capitals of the arcades. This less monumental, but definitely more practical, chamber served the Hungarian legislature and burgeoning parliamentary life for more than three decades. (Today the building houses the Italian Cultural Institute.)

Designs for the Permanent Parliament House

The quarters of the House of Representatives were intended to be provisional, as was the installation of the Upper House at the National Museum. Almost as soon as the Houses settled into their temporary meeting places, Hungary regained partial sovereignty in the wake of the 1867 Austro-Hungarian Compromise, and the government had to create a great number of state buildings around the country. The Parliament House project was put on hold, and when the question of its construction was mooted again, the structure turned into more than a matter of bricks and stone: soon it became



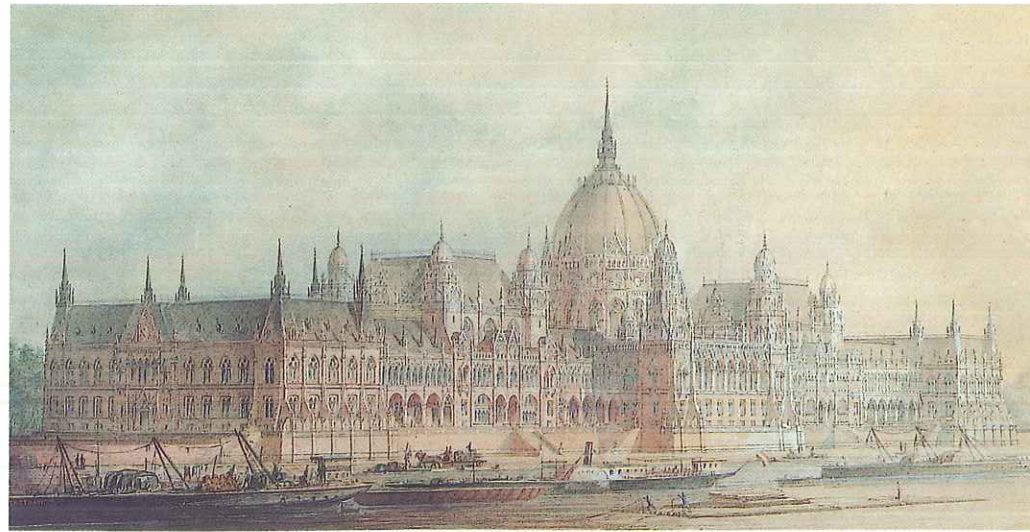
COMPETITION DESIGN BY THE VIENNESE ARCHITECT OTTO WAGNER FOR THE PARLIAMENT HOUSE (1883). IT IMPRACTICALLY SET THE DEBATING CHAMBERS AT THE FAR OPPOSITE ENDS OF THE BUILDING

the architectural climax of the 1896 millennial celebrations marking the Magyars' conquest of the Carpathian Basin, i.e. today's Hungary.

Act XLVIII of 1880 provided for its construction. The text specified that it would be erected at Tömő tér (today Kossuth Lajos tér) in the capital's fifth district, that an open competition would be held to select the design, and that the prime minister would implement the Act. In early 1881, a National Committee headed by Prime Minister Kálmán Tisza was established to manage the competition. Its members included representatives of several organizations as well as Miklós Ybl and his fellow architect Antal Weber.

Tisza immediately acquired plans for London and Vienna's parliament buildings, the first large, modern complexes of their kind in Europe. A subcommittee was assigned to develop the competition programme, based on the general principle that "*the design of the permanent Parliament House as far as the layout and the function are concerned is not to be restricted by financial considerations.*" The detailed competition announcement appeared in early April 1882. It offered two site alternatives: one running perpendicular to the Danube, and the other parallel. In either case the structure was supposed to hug the river, with its principal facade facing the waterfront. Entrants could design in any architectural style they pleased, except for Classical Greek – the style of the Parliament House in Vienna, Budapest's great rival. Construction costs, excluding decoration, were not to exceed 4.5 million forints. Entrants would vie for four top prizes of 5,000 forints each – this arrangement would ensure the judges considerable leeway in making the final decision – and the judges were also entitled to purchase other designs they liked for 1,500 forints each. The submission deadline was 1 February 1883. Though the competition was theoretically international, the Hungarian architectural community succeeded in lobbying for only Hungarian journals and newspapers to publish the announcement. So the event became an insular race among Hungarians and – to a lesser extent – the Viennese.

No more than 19 entries arrived by the deadline. Contemporaries attributed this relative paucity to the overly complex programme, and to the fact that the resources of foreign architects had just been depleted by the competition for Berlin's Reichstag, held in 1882. On 22 April 1883, the National Committee awarded its four top prizes to "Alkotmány I" (Constitution I) by

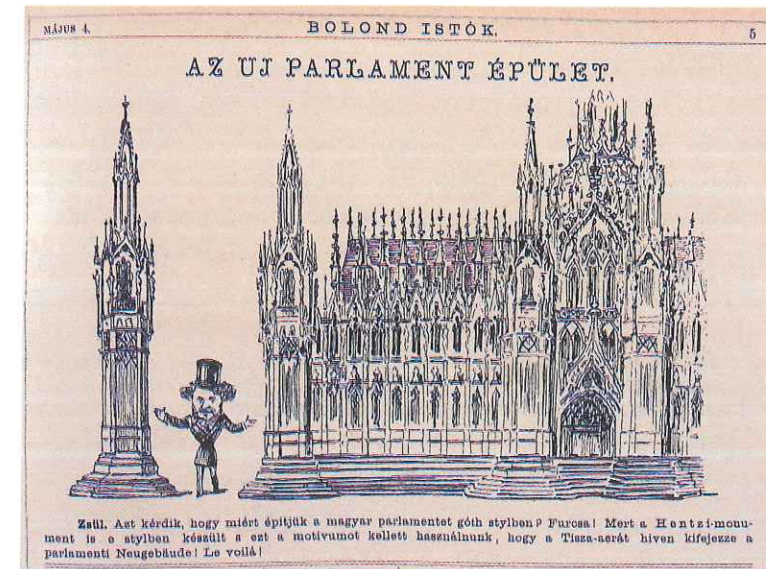


THE COMPETITION-WINNING GOTHIC DESIGN (1883)

BY IMRE STEINDL, PROFESSOR AT THE BUDAPEST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

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 in partnership with the Mór Kallina and Dezső Bernd. The judges purchased Viennese Emil Förster’s design with the motto “Magyarország nem volt, hanem lesz” (Hungary has not been, but will be) and also “Moriatur pro rege nostro” (We die for our king) by the Viennese partnership of Fellner and Helmer, which was equivalent to awarding them lower-level prizes. Thus the winners included two professors from the Budapest Technical University, Steindl and Hauszmann, and a teacher from the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts, Wagner. Of the total of first- and second-tier prizes, architects from Budapest and Vienna had, quite diplomatically, won an equal share—although more Hungarians had taken the top awards. The committee also commended Károly Gerster’s design, which bore the motto “Egyesült erővel” (With united force).

The designs represented a variety of arrangements: either the two debating chambers or the hall of joint sessions, or all three, were enhanced with projections. Of the winning designs, only Steindl’s was Neo-Gothic; the other competitors preferred Neo-Renaissance or Neo-Baroque, with Gerster alone opting for Neo-Byzantine. In basic format, though, the lauded schemes were fairly similar. Only Hauszmann’s ran perpendicular to the Danube; marring his compact and logical proposal was an almost vestigial hall of joint sessions. Steindl devised a plan that, with its slightly broken long axis, followed the Danube’s gentle curve, and he crowned the central hall with a dome. Both Schickedanz and Freund and Wagner likewise envisioned central domed halls. Of these two entries, Schickedanz and Freund’s seems more disciplined and focused, while Wagner’s, which otherwise impressed the jurors, impractically set the debating chambers at the far ends of the building. Fellner and Helmer’s design failed to rank among the first-tier winners because of its imperfect layout, its inorganically attached dome, and its jagged overall composition. Förster’s design, with five pedestrian entrances



COUNT GYULA ANDRÁSSY SUPPORTING CONSTRUCTION OF A NEO-GOTHIC PARLIAMENT HOUSE (CONTEMPORARY CARTOON).

IN 1883, PARLIAMENT DECIDED TO REALIZE A NEO-GOTHIC DESIGN

on the lower embankment, betrayed his lack of knowledge of local conditions: that area is often flooded by the Danube.

The National Committee decided on 27 May 1883, that the Parliament House should be Neo-Gothic, effectively awarding the commission to Steindl (subject of course to future design modifications). No contemporary documents have turned up to explain how they reached this decision. We know from a later account, though, that “*the London memories of our former Prime Minister Count Gyula Andrassy decided the matter in the way that like the London Houses of Parliament on the Thames, the permanent Parliament House of Hungary should also be Gothic.*” Andrassy, a prominent member of the National Committee, had spent years in exile after the revolution in London and Paris, and the later account notes that he “*insisted adamantly on the acceptance of the young Gothic master’s design.*”

Imre Steindl (1839–1902) was not exactly a youth when he received this job of a lifetime; he was 44 years old, and already an expert Gothicist. Medieval architecture had fascinated him since his student days at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts, where he took courses with the charismatic medievalist Friedrich Schmidt. As a student Steindl had prophetically sketched plans for an ideal royal palace, its round central throne room attached to a broad stair hall. When he returned from Vienna to Hungary his homeland was enjoying unprecedented independence and prosperity, but architectural patrons were not yet interested in Gothic – they considered the style feudal, clerical and Germanic. In 1870 he started to build a Neo-Gothic New Town Hall in Pest, but after he had finished the foundation the general assembly ordered him to rework the structure along Neo-Renaissance lines. In 1872 he entered the Berlin Reichstag’s first competition with a scheme featuring wings and courtyards subordinated to a 16-pointed central dome; he won a commendation for this design, which so vividly foreshadowed his Budapest Parliament House. (The entry was also a kind of flam-

boyant cousin to Schmidt's own 1864-65 proposal for the Upper House of the Viennese Parliament.)

During the 1870s and early 1880s, Steindl designed a number of large Neo-Renaissance buildings in Budapest, such as the Veterinary School and the Technical University, although his interest in the Middle Ages never flagged. In 1870 he was appointed professor of medieval architecture at the Technical University. He delved into the then-new field of architectural restoration, which at that time amounted to radical reconstruction. He worked on the Castle of Vajdahunyad in Transylvania (today Rumania), and then on historical Hungary's most prized churches at Kassa, Bártfa, and Igló (today Slovakia). As his younger colleague Ernő Foerk observed in an article 25 years after the master's death, "*Steindl's individuality and feeling of form strengthened increasingly in the course of the restoration projects, so in 1882 the greatest task of recent Hungarian architecture, the competition for the Parliament House, found him fully armed.*"

To realize Steindl's Parliament plans, the legislators created a new subcommittee under the chairmanship of Count Lajos Tisza, the prime minister's younger brother and confidant. Lajos Tisza had already distinguished himself by serving from 1879 as royal commissioner for the rebuilding of flood-stricken Szeged. Among the members of the new subcommittee was Miklós Ybl, the country's leading authority on architectural matters.

The Design Debates

On 24 February 1884, the subcommittee members gave the National Committee a design they considered definitive. They had made some major modifications to the original entry, in – sometimes probably testy – collaboration with Steindl. They had shifted the proposed site 72 metres to the north, so the structure would centre on Alkotmány utca and overlook a larger plaza than originally foreseen. They had reduced the length of the building from 285 to 265 metres, and Steindl had inserted a mezzanine between the ground and first floors. In general, he had improved the proportions of the building by raising and compacting its somewhat rambling and flat original forms. He had replaced cupolas on the two large towers of the central projection with pointed spires, and similarly had adapted the corner turrets of the chambers into pointed spires. He pulled back the projections along the Danube to the edge of the upper embankment, freeing up pedestrian circulation routes, while still allowing the long axis to bend slightly with the river. And although he originally envisioned a grand total of 32 small courtyards within the building's mass, by the time the National Committee saw the plans, that number had dropped by half.

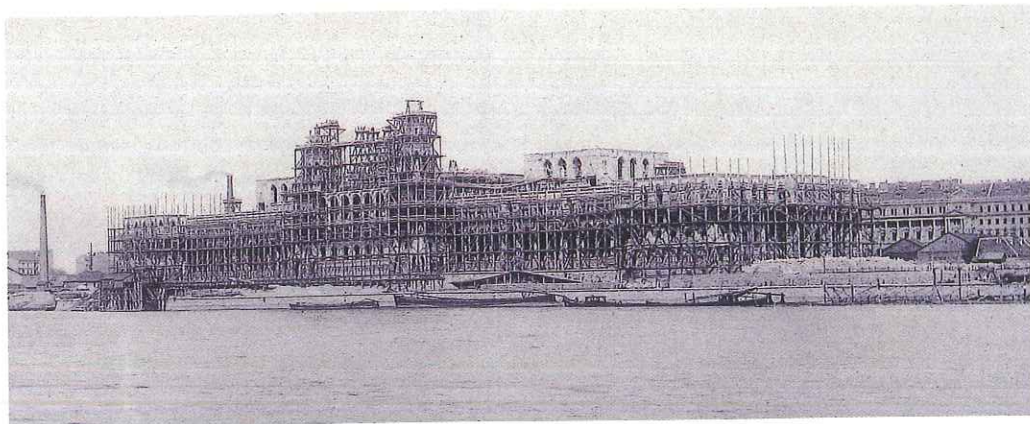
The National Committee accepted the modified scheme. The public was invited to examine it: a plaster model, a longitudinal section and a plan were put on display at the Technical University. As is usual in such cases, critics immediately weighed in. They evaluated the modified proportions, complained about the principal rooms high up on the first floor and some badly lit "dead spaces," and they unfavourably compared Steindl's work with Vienna's civic monuments. The question of style stirred up protests, too (as had been the case two and a half decades earlier, when anti-Gothic sentiment

had caused the rejection of Gothic designs for the headquarters of the Hungarian Academy). Lőrinc Mara Jr. wrote a booklet claiming that "*the Gothic style is entirely alien to Hungarians.*" It is German in character and a product of Catholic mysticism, he warned, as well as a "dead" style that would stymie future development in the arts. Building a Neo-Gothic Parliament House, he concluded, would amount to "*no lesser blasphemy than printing János Arany's poems with Gothic letters or if Sándor Petőfi recited his National Song with a pickelhaube [pointed military helmet] on his head.*"

The German-language professional press contributed its own diatribes to the fray. For example the *Deutsche Bauzeitung* published a substantial illustrated article, taking a strongly critical stance – as was typical of German publications dealing with Hungary. In this case some jealousy was perhaps involved as well, since Berlin was then building a monumental structure comparable to Budapest's, the Reichstag.

Parliament, meanwhile, was about to start formal debates on the controversial proposal. On 13 March 1884, Kálmán Tisza submitted a bill "*on the approval of the design for the permanent Parliament House and the realization of the construction.*" The bill stated that work would begin that year and possibly last ten years. As for the design, the bill explained, "*In the capital, the row of buildings on the left bank of the Danube, though consisting of ornate and dignified palaces, has in its present form the character of monotony, since they were built without exception in the modern (Renaissance) style. A grand building in the romantic style will relieve this and will provide the most beneficial effect ... from the point of view of the plan and the harmony of architecture, it will be the most suitable for the satisfaction of the existing needs.*" The Transportation Committee attached the following important comments: "*The Gothic style is not national, but if we have no national style, it can be chosen to express the most magnificent idea of freedom and state power ... 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.*"

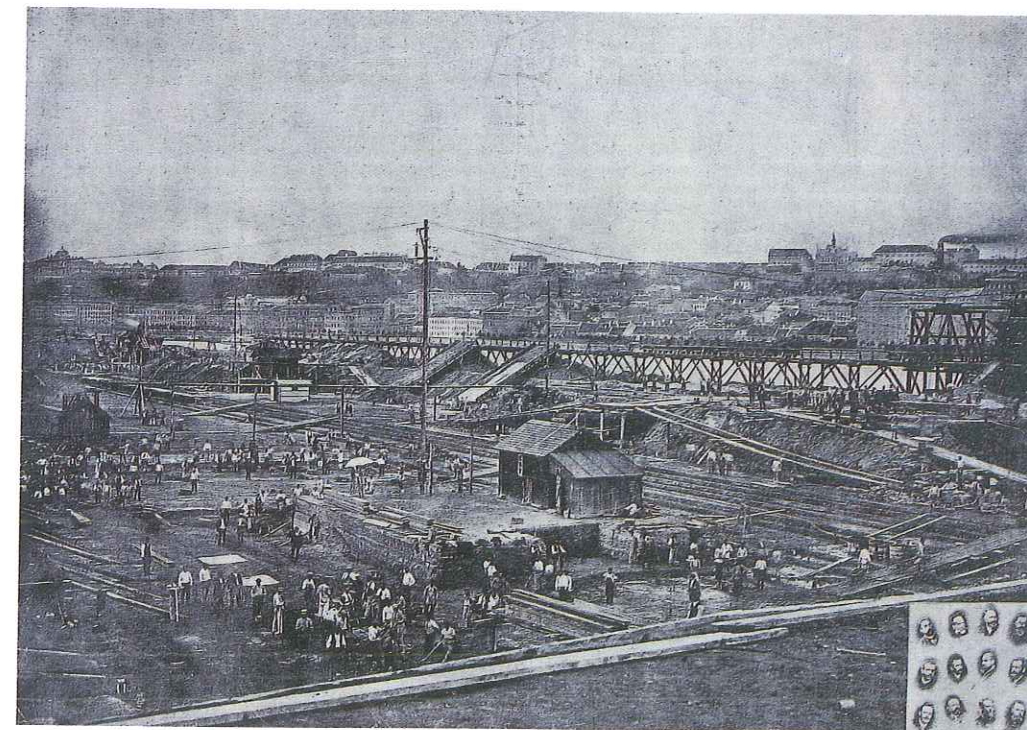
The House of Representatives debated the bill on 1, 2 and 3 May. The discussion proved sharp and digressive, and the viewpoints of the deputies were divided largely along party lines. Balázs Orbán, whose platform called for full political independence, spoke first and gave a variety of reasons why the Parliament House should not be built according to the submitted designs. The bill should be rejected, he concluded, and a cheaper proposal developed. Soon afterwards Count Albert Apponyi, a member of the Moderate Opposition, put forward a resolution that "*the government be instructed ... to present a new proposal on the construction of the permanent Parliament House in accordance with the financial situation of the country.*" The huge cost of the building seemed to pose the major stumbling block, and some deputies suspected that even the predicted budget would not suffice in the end. Several speakers, from both the Government and Opposition sides, couched their financial reasoning in the language of social demagoguery. The Government took every opportunity to mention the future role of the building in the millennial celebrations, its embodiment of the Hungarian state and constitution, etc. Kálmán Tisza, countering accusations of megalomania, called attention to the fact that "*first we built railways; first we built a port,*



THE PARLIAMENT HOUSE UNDER CONSTRUCTION.
TO KEEP THE TERRAIN FROM SINKING, CREWS CREATED
A SOLID CONCRETE BASE LAYER AVERAGING TWO METRES THICK
(AND 4.69 METRES THICK UNDER THE DOME)

our only seaport, we regulated waters for millions and we did many other things; we erected schools, university buildings in the capital, we brought into being bridges connecting the two cities, postal buildings." MPs also addressed the style question, although it was not their main concern. Orbán insisted that Gothic *"has been abandoned, and mostly rich countries such as England can afford this architectural luxury now."* The prevailing view was that Neo-Gothic carvings were especially expensive to produce and maintain; Géza Halász presciently declared, *"the experience of the whole world shows that such buildings are continually surrounded with scaffolding for repairs."* But Lajos Tisza was well prepared for such arguments: with a flourish he presented a letter from Theophil Hansen, architect of Vienna's Neo-Classical Parliament House, stating that its execution had cost 23 forints per cubic metre versus 20 forints 49 krajcárs for Vienna's Gothic Town Hall (by Steindl's mentor Schmidt). The latter, incidentally, had been the basis for the construction estimates of the Hungarian Parliament House. At the end of the third day of the debate, the House of Representatives endorsed construction of the Parliament House by a narrow margin of 48 votes.

The Upper House debated the issue for one day, 15 May. Arnold Ipolyi, bishop of Besztercebánya and a noted art historian, spoke first and concentrated on the Gothic question: *"We, not having our own architectural style, ... need to turn to the application of great epochal art forms ... Gothic is the most excellent monumental style."* He conceded, though, that the Parliament House design *"uses the Gothic style in a modified form and in its external decorative motifs rather than in the basic organism of its strictly rigid system."* The debaters then took on the exorbitant budget. At one point Baron Miklós Vay astutely remarked, *"if we don't build [the Parliament House] today, it will be delayed indefinitely, perhaps forever."* At the end of the session, Kálmán Tisza admonished his audience, *"We composed the bill calling for the construction of the Parliament House back in 1880. Four years have passed since, which indicates that to commission, evaluate, and modify a design is not an easy thing."* When the vote came, 134 were in favour and 74 opposed. On 22 May 1884, the monarch sanctioned Act XIX of 1884,



IN 1885, WORK CREWS BEGAN EXCAVATING TÖMŐ TÉR'S SOGGY TERRAIN
AND LAYING A CONCRETE FOUNDATION. THIS PERIOD PHOTO ALSO SHOWS
THE BUILDERS OF THE PARLIAMENT HOUSE

approving the permanent Parliament House project and stipulating its implementation.

Then the bodies for implementing construction were set up: the Building Council under the prime minister's chairmanship for major decisions and general control, and a smaller Executive Committee for day-to-day construction management. Chairing the latter committee was Lajos Tisza (and after his death in 1898, State Secretary József Tarkovich took over the post). The Executive Committee also included representatives of the organizations that had been part of the earlier subcommittee. On 5 March 1885, Steindl signed his construction contract. The document stated that he was expected to prepare detailed working drawings, recommend appropriate materials, and supervise contractors' work and billing. His fee would equal 4.7 % of the estimated building cost, i.e. about 450,000 forints. Steindl appointed Ottó Tandor as his depute. His office employed several of his former students, as well as Ernő Foerk, who had trained under Schmidt, and Ede Thoroczky-Wigand, who would later become a prominent architect in his own right, a pioneer of Hungarian Art Nouveau. The government appointed ministerial counselor Béla Ney to oversee implementation of the contract.

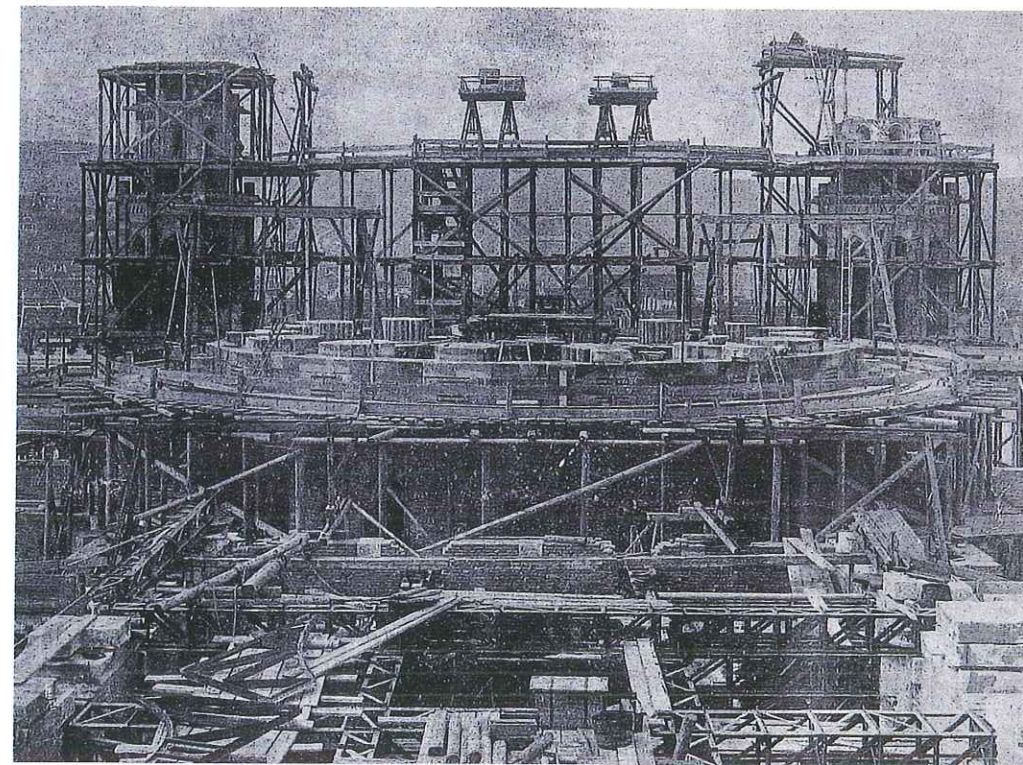
Construction Work Begins

Ground was broken on 12 October 1885. Laying the foundation quickly turned into a more costly and time-consuming process than had been anticipated. Construction came to a halt while the wells and pipelines of the municipal waterworks were moved out of the way. Painful as the delay may have been, it gave Steindl a chance to make further design refinements. He removed the break in the long axis of the building; carving irregular curves into innumerable piers, ribs, and other stone elements would have proved prohibitively expensive, and in any case even a small break in the axis, the Executive Committee stated, “*would reduce considerably the splendid effect of the perspective of the rooms and halls that open from each other.*” He completed the re-modified scheme in 1886, and construction resumed on 25 October of that year. Hundreds of workers toiled even at night, thanks to huge floodlights. They built 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 first covered the soggy terrain in a solid concrete layer, averaging two metres thick. On 1 October at last, they started building the walls.

In 1888, further delays due to the construction of the foundation and related works enabled Steindl to alter the design again: he finalized the system of courtyards and secondary rooms, refined the layout of the main staircase, and merged the small rooms on the Danube front into a single, long restaurant. That spring, a 1:20-scale, 5-by-14-metre plaster model of the building was put on display in a wooden cabin at the site. Many large models have been created in the course of architectural history, but undoubtedly this ranks among the biggest. Besides finalizing the details, it informed visitors about the design and also helped sustain public enthusiasm as the construction of the shell alone dragged on for eight more years.

By 1892, Parliament realized that the building would not be ready in time for the millennial celebrations of the Hungarian conquest of the Carpathian Basin. The Executive Committee instructed Steindl to finish at least the exterior, rotunda, main staircase and Hall of Delegations. On 5 May 1894, a celebration was held to mark the construction of the walls up to the main cornice, i.e. the end of the bricklaying process. An astounding amount of material had already gone into the project, including 40 million bricks for the walls and 30,000 cubic metres of carved stone for their sheathing. The vast slate roof rested on rolled and riveted iron trussing made by the Budapest-based Schlick factory. The heating and ventilation system was another feat of engineering, one of Europe’s most advanced at the time. Heat came from a remote site: steam boilers operated in a separate building (today No. 1-5 Balassi Bálint utca) 150 metres away from the Parliament House. Steam travelled to the legislative chambers via an insulated underground pipe. In the summer, the Parliament House was cooled by air blown across ice blocks in the basement. Grills and shuttered openings in the floors and ceilings provided ventilation year-round.

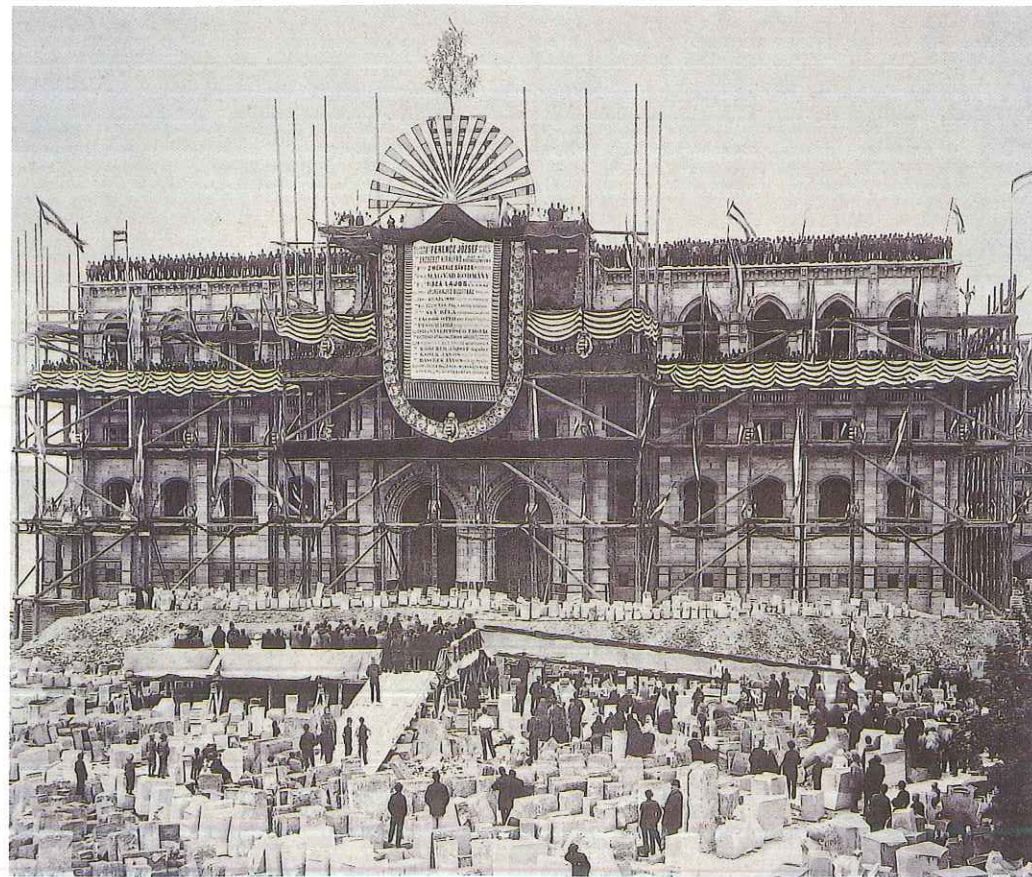
On 16 May 1895, the dome received its keystone, and in December 1895, the external scaffolding was taken down. On 8 June 1896, the 29th anniversary of Franz Joseph’s coronation as king of Hungary, the two Houses of Parliament held a solemn ceremonial session in the rotunda. The Holy



THE DOME UNDER CONSTRUCTION.
THE BUDAPEST-BASED SCHLICK FACTORY PRODUCED ITS IRON SKELETON
AND ALL THE IRON TRUSSES OF THE ROOF

Crown and other coronation regalia were brought in, escorted by a banderium, i.e. a traditional band of soldiers. Parliament did not move into its new House for good, however, until 8 October 1902 (a few weeks after Steindl’s death, on 31 August—and a year after he had finished another cherished career goal, the erection of a large Neo-Gothic church, specifically the parish church for Budapest’s Erzsébetváros district). Not until the end of 1904 did workers complete the interior. Officially the final cost was 37,183,943 crowns, double the estimate (18.5 million crowns in the newly-changed national currency) that Parliament had so vociferously debated back in 1884, and about four times the total stipulated at the original competition.

Upon completion, the structure’s design caused controversy again. In some quarters there was no shortage of praise: “*With this sensational work master Steindl has erected an eternal monument, and brought far-reaching fame and glory to his country and to the creative Hungarian genius,*” announced Károly Csányi, Imre Steindl’s faithful pupil, in a professional journal. The journal *Ország-Világ* raved, putting into words the feelings of many: “*Magnificent, Gothic, soaring stone giant, from which all grace for the country’s benefit is destined to rise ... no other nation has a more splendid and magnificent edifice ... Who is not elated by the majestic sight offered by the banks of the vast Danube? Which city of the world can boast of anything near it?*” The inauguration inspired Antal Váradi to write a poem, which responded even in its title – *Országháza* (Parliament House) – to Vörösmarty’s lines of a half-century before:



PARTIAL COMPLETION CEREMONY, 5 MAY 1894. THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE WALLS REQUIRED 40 MILLION BRICKS AND 30,000 CUBIC METRES OF CARVED STONE

*The nation has a house,
Standing proud,
Soaring towards the sky
Her sons' great work ...*

Yet not all reactions were so enthused. Eighteen years had passed since the design had won the parliamentarians' votes, and by 1902 many people considered it hopelessly obsolete. Great shifts in taste were underway at the turn of the century, and in any case yesterday's art always seem a bit ridiculous to the next generation. Hugó Ignóty (Veigelsberg), a poet, critic, and radical of middle-class origin, expressed strong views on the interior of the Parliament House, but defended its exterior: "*... whatever is said of it, from the outside, especially from the Danube side, the new Parliament House is a beautiful building, and whatever is said about 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 ...*" MPs, for their part, generally disliked it; compared to their small, worn, but familiar quarters, it seemed huge and overly ornate. Kálmán Mikszáth, the great chronicler of Hungarian parliamentary life, recorded his first impression in a sketch called *Bevonulás az új házba* (Marching into the new House): "*What a wonder, the Parliament is really there: exactly the same people we left in the Sándor utca building in June are here now. But what flourish!*

What light, how much gilding on the walls! The eye does not know which way to look. ... The debating chamber is the event of the day. Everybody speaks about it: beautiful, not beautiful. Pro and con. The majority does not find it beautiful, just lavish. Its pomp is overdone, cold, even disagreeable. Dazzling, it is true, but at the same time gaudy. (Oh, compared to this, how friendly was the old nest!)"

Hungarians could take pride, however, in the fact that their legislature's new home was one of the world's largest buildings when it opened. Today it seems out of proportion with the population, geographical area, and international import of the country, but one should bear in mind that when it was finished the nation was – and had been for a thousand years – three times its current size. (Just 16 years after the completion of the structure, World War I's peace treaty of 1920 carved away two-thirds of Hungary's territory.)

The Exterior of the Parliament House

On the symmetrical Danube facade, the House of Representatives pavilion stands to the right and the Upper House chamber to the left. A large central projection and two tall towers jut out and complement the soaring dome. At either end, projections and high roofs mark the locations of the offices of the Representatives and the Upper House. These blocks are lower than the pavilions over the House chambers, which in their turn are not as tall as the dome; that is, the masses of this dramatic, animated building step up rhythmically and gradually, reaching a climax at the 96-metre-tall dome.

The ribbed, steep dome has a 16-pointed footprint and rests on a drum surrounded by flying buttresses. The towers flanking it are considerable Neo-Gothic structures in their own right: their bodies taper in three stages, with a fairy-tale-like profusion of gargoyles, pinnacles, and copper-bossed sculptures of standard bearers. The roof of each debating chamber consists of a steep main block and sharp corner turrets, their lower zones surrounded by richly carved crests. 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, and on the central projection 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, non-functional flying buttresses. Given this alternation of arcades and buttresses, as well as the first floor's close-set windows ornamented with crockets and finials, the Danube facade practically seems to vibrate. Steindl has differentiated the two fronts quite clearly by architectural means: the Danube, i.e. the west front is, as we have seen, more relaxed and at the same time more ornate, while the city, i.e. the east front is more compact and austere. The various forms and sizes of the windows of the respective floors further differentiate the system of the facades. In fact throughout the building, Steindl skilfully differentiated wings and sections via subtle shifts in ornament. Thus the upper edge of the facades is crowned either with rosettes or dwarf galleries of different sizes.

On the city side, a perpendicular cross-wing, 123 meters deep, 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 it has an elaborate wrought-iron gate made by Gyula Jungfer's workshop. Porte-cocheres flank the archway and lead to the two other entrances of the cross-wing (in all, 17 gates allow access to the building). On the short sides of the main wing, too, there are porte-cocheres with splayed arches, which lend plasticity to this section of the building. Above them gabled projections emerge.

In the gable over the main entrance, two carved angels carry heavenward a relief of historical Hungary's coat-of-arms. More coats-of-arms, representing Hungarian towns and counties, appear beneath the main cornice of the whole building. The heraldic system both provided additional plasticity, and handsomely complemented an iconographical programme of 90 external statues.

Steindl originally hoped to install a total of 450 statues on the exterior and interior, according to an 1888 account-based very probably on information from him. Eventually he had to content himself with 90 statues outside and 162 inside. He subordinated them to the overall architecture, and on the outside they virtually blend in. None approach the cornice or otherwise project dramatically, unlike the row of allegorical statues atop the Palace of Justice across the square. And, in keeping with Neo-Gothic practice, none of Steindl's figures are allegorical; all represent specific Hungarian heroes and their retainers.

Proposals for this sort of national pantheon had arisen often in 19th-century Hungary. One was built: the Millennial Monument in Budapest's City Park. But in terms of sheer number of statues, the Parliament House is by far the largest gallery devoted to the nation's worthy. The sculptures on the north facade refer to the Hungarian conquest: Árpád (sculpted by Antal Szécsi) stands on the central pier, with other chieftains in line above him. On the south side, a statue of St. Stephen by Miklós Köllő evokes the founding of the Hungarian kingdom. Above the main entrance, figures of Louis the Great (by Ede Mayer) and Matthias Corvinus (by Béla Brestyánszky) proclaim the grandeur of medieval Hungary. (The portraits of these kings also appear at the apex of Pest's Vigadó, or Assembly Rooms, of 1859-64, again attesting to their traditionally prominent role in the Hungarians' historical viewpoint.) On the Danube facade, statues of other Hungarian kings run in chronological order from north to south. After Joseph II, the gallery turns the corner to the south facade, continues over the head of Köllő's St. Stephen figure, and concludes there with statues of Ferdinand V and Palatine Joseph. At the top of this facade stretches a procession of outstanding palatines (regents), statesmen, generals, and Transylvanian princes. All the figures stand on consoles and under ornate canopies, and they were made of the same stone as the carved elements of the facade, one of the principal reasons they blend in (also, they are located 10, 15, or 25.7 meters above the street, and hence obviously were not meant as more than decoration). There is nothing "Gothic" in their style; they are products of the dry realism typical of late 19th-century sculpture. Steindl stipulated that they resemble each other not only in style but also in pose and historical accuracy: all face front, and wear clothes and weapons based on 19th-century concepts of historical dress. It is not surprising, therefore, that although 23 sculptors worked on

the statues, including some of the country's best artists, the figures seem to have been carved by the same hand.

The largest sculptures stand separately by the entrance: seated lions, latter-day descendants of the lion figures that guard Romanesque churches, which were modeled by Béla Markup. (One was destroyed in World War II, and József Somogyi resculpted it in 1949.)

The skin of the building is now undergoing some massive changes: blocks of hard limestone quarried in the Piszke region are replacing the original Sós-kút limestone, which came in semi-hard and soft densities and enabled the building crews to carve quickly. The Sós-kút blocks started eroding soon after the structure was finished, and replacement work began as early as 1924. In 1944-45, during the siege of Budapest, the building was hit several times by bullets and bombs, and the dome itself fell in. After the war, this damage was repaired, and in the 1970s a decades-long programme of wholesale stone replacement began.

In 1950 a red star, symbol of one-party dictatorship, was hoisted to the top of the dome. It was brought down in 1990, and in 1991 the finial was restored to its original form.

Today the majestic Parliament House not only symbolizes Hungarian statehood but also defines the cityscape of the Hungarian capital. At the same time, the home of Hungarian legislation forms an ideological and architectural counterpart of the (today simplified) Neo-Baroque mass of the formal Royal Palace, looming atop Buda's Castle Hill to the south, on the opposite bank of the Danube. Viewed from the Pest side, though, the Parliament House is far less effective visually; at the time of its construction, the city could not manage to acquire a sufficiently grand site and did not move streets in order to enhance vistas of the Parliament House. So the square around the Parliament House, Kossuth Lajos tér, is irregularly shaped, and no avenue runs perpendicular to the building. Fortunately, a large new square was laid out a few blocks to the south at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, after the destruction of a huge army complex called New Building, or Neugebäude in German. From this square, thanks to a diagonal street called Vécsey utca, the Parliament House dome does present a magnificent sight.

During the construction of the Parliament House, two public buildings went up on the east side of the square, both quite large: the Ministry of Agriculture and the Palace of Justice (now the Museum of Ethnography). In 19 years, therefore, a stylistically heterogeneous but impressive ensemble of public structures came into being. After World War I, monuments were erected at the base of the Parliament House to two great freedom fighters, Ferenc Rákóczi II and Lajos Kossuth. Recently a monument was put up there to commemorate the 1956 revolution. The square also has a place in public memory because many of 20th-century Hungary's political dramas took place there, such as the massacre of innocent civilians during a demonstration in 1956, or the declaration of the Republic of Hungary in 1989 marking the end of Communist dictatorship.

The massing of the building is symmetrical yet dynamic, as we have discussed, a paradox which has roots in 17th- and 18th-century Baroque architecture; the relation between the central dome and lateral pavilions evokes precedents such as Vaux-le-Vicomte in France. Yet the details of the Parliament House are entirely Gothic. One could claim-without exaggeration-

that historicist architecture, a fusing of structural principles, themes, and features of different eras, reached a climax in the Hungarian Parliament House. Many of its elements derive from French Gothic models, although some large forms evoke Italy's version of the style: the dome, for instance, was rare in the Middle Ages, but did occur in Italian towns such as Padua and Florence. The most spectacular medieval counterpart for the arcades of the Danube facade can be found in the Doges' Palace of Venice, and the basis for the treble arches of the main entrance sunk in solid wall could well have been the cathedrals at Siena and Orvieto. Steindl had observed many of these features in Schmidt's works, too. Arcades animate the ground floor of Schmidt's Town Hall in Vienna (1872–83), and his Maria vom Siege church in Vienna-Fünfhaus (1868–75) features a Gothic dome and a pair of towers. But in Budapest's Parliament House, the picturesque pile of pavilions, towers and dome enhanced by the vibrating effect of innumerable piers, pinnacles and carvings, forms an overwhelming and unique composition surpassing anything built before in this style. Steindl managed to realize a Gothic fantasy, a veritable Gothic "national monument."

London's Neo-Gothic Houses of Parliament (Ch. Barry and A.W.N. Pugin, 1835–65), with their riverfront location, were another obvious model for Steindl's design: he could not resist the opportunity for a similar arrangement along the Danube. The very bicameral system of Hungary's Parliament goes back ultimately to England's "mother of parliaments." But while nothing on the exterior of London's Houses of Parliament indicates the presence of important internal spaces, in Budapest their location is unmistakable. At Vienna's Neo-Classical Parliament House (Th. Hansen, 1873–83), porticos do suggest the outlines of the central hall and two debating chambers, but no towers or domes give them vertical emphasis. Berlin's Reichstag (P. Wallot, 1882–98) has a large dome on a square base, but bicameralism plays no role there. The U.S. Capitol in Washington (enlarged by Th. U. Walter, 1856–63) clearly indicates the Senate and House of Representatives' symmetrical chambers and features a huge dome, albeit within a classical skin. One other nation has a great Neo-Gothic headquarters, aside from England and Hungary: Canada's Parliament Buildings in Ottawa (Fuller and Jones, 1859–67), which even culminate in a circular, domed space. But it accommodates simply the library, rather than the country's most important ceremonial chambers. In planning, massing, and style, then, the Hungarian Parliament House follows the traditions of European and North American parliament-house construction, and reinvents them in most ingenious ways.

The Interior of the Parliament House

The layout of the Parliament House is symmetrical and efficiently organized. The wings enclose ten courtyards of various sizes, and an apparently endless system of corridors connects the many sections. The basement accommodates technical equipment and workshops. On the ground floor are offices and a committee room; library stacks and offices surround the dome area on the ground floor, and a technical storeroom is set under the dome. In the low mezzanine are more offices and library rooms. At the centre of the ground floor of the Danube side rises the large, two-storey reading room of the

Parliament Library. With its open gallery and carved-wood ceiling it ranks among the most impressive spaces of the building. Members of the public wishing to view it, or to gain access to the library's 500,000 volumes, can enter via the arcades of the Danube facade. The riverfront location of the room recalls the Thames-side library at London's Houses of Parliament; in London, however, all the library rooms are strung along the Thames bank, while in Budapest these spaces are dispersed.

The first floor of the Parliament House accommodates the legislative debating chambers and other important rooms and offices. They are brilliantly decorated; in fact, all of the building's important artworks are concentrated here. This lush ornament is due to the multiple functions of the rooms: they do not exclusively serve the legislature but rather are partially open to the public, and hence must meet a need for national self-representation. (Before the Parliament House was completed, Hungary's National Museum played a similar role.)

The major rooms of the Parliament House are arranged in a cruciform plan, like those at London's Houses of Parliament, with a dome at the crossing of the two axes. The short axis houses the former Hall of Delegations, the former ministers' studies, the main staircase, and the former restaurant. The Representatives occupy the southern portion of the long axis, and the former Upper House once took up the northern portion.

At the centre of the cross-wing stands the main staircase, 32 metres long, 15.5 metres across, and 20.9 metres high. It owes its grandeur to the relatively high-up location of the main rooms of the Parliament House; no other major parliament buildings have arranged their principal spaces so far off the ground, and hence none have a need for such a majestic staircase. In the lobby, the stairs measure five metres wide and are flanked by solid walls. At the central landing they expand to three times their base width; thus the overwhelming size and decoration of the hall unfolds gradually as one ascends the steps. From the central landing, the broad main stairs proceed towards the rotunda, and two narrower flights on either side turn back towards the former Hall of Delegations. The complex stair system and spacious surrounding hall have little to do with the spirit of Gothic; they recall instead Baroque palaces – and the sovereign creativity of 19th-century Historicism. Overhead, ribbed vaults and three large oblongs between ribs span the ceiling. Iron supports and lightweight infill materials (rabitz) made such an unusual ceiling structure possible.

Although the exterior of the building is almost wholly monochrome, the stair hall (and the rest of the interior) are intensely colourful. The walls flanking the staircase are covered with dark brown marble, and the top section of the hall is clad in light brown marble. Both marbles had been quarried in Gyüd. The balustrade plinths and top rails are yellow marble, also from Gyüd, and the balusters were carved out of dark brown marble from Vaskoh. In general the builders of the Parliament House used Hungarian materials, thereby stimulating several branches of industry. Whole new quarries at Gyüd and Vaskoh were opened to fill the construction project's orders. Of course if a type of stone required proved unavailable in Hungary, imports were brought in. For instance the vault piers consist of yellow marble from Girolamo, the eight monolithic columns between them are reddish-brown Swedish granite, and the steps are grey Karst marble.

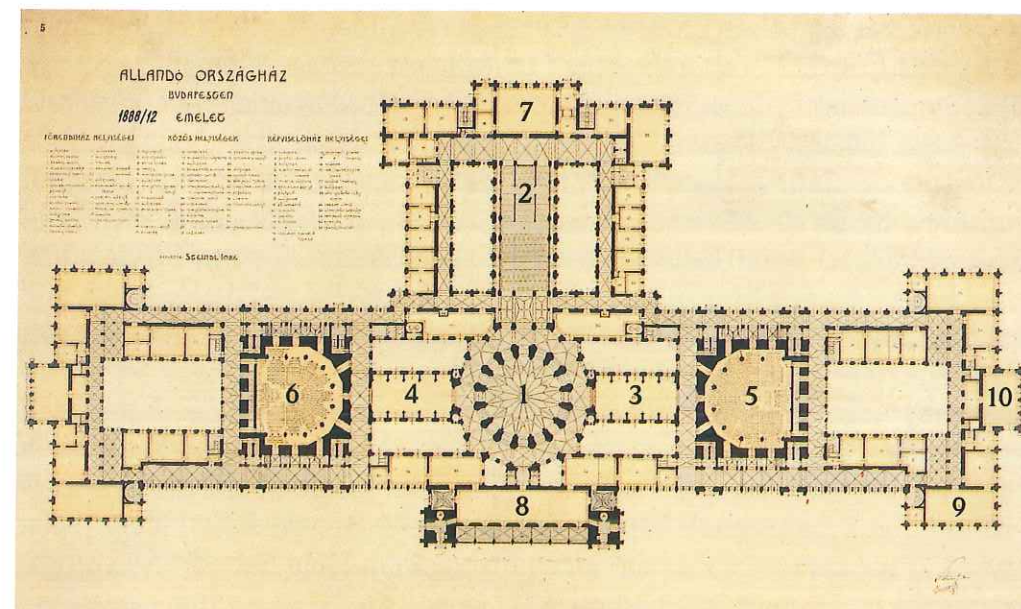
The consoles interrupting the staircase balustrade were originally intended for sculptures "to commemorate great men of great times," but eventually gilt bronze candelabra in an inventive, modernized Gothic design were placed here. Zinc statues of four pages (by György Kiss) are attached to the central piers of the hall, and in the hands of these rather schematic figures are the Hungarian coronation regalia. On the central landing, in a small wall niche, is Alajos Stróbl's expressive bust of Imre Steindl.

Renaissance-style decorative paintings cover the vaults, and among the standard grotesque motifs of the paintings are designs based on Hungary's flora. We know from one of Steindl's lectures that he hoped such artworks would lend a national character to the building:

"I planned the whole building in the Gothic style. This splendid style of the Middle Ages evokes in the most beautiful way the connection between the material and spiritual worlds, with its perfect beauty raising enthusiasm and with its definite form soaring towards heights ... In the new Parliament Building I did not want to create a new style, because traces of our national character in our stone architecture do not exist anywhere. I could not treat such a monumental edifice destined to stand for centuries with ephemeral details, but I did strive to introduce a national and individual spirit into this splendid medieval style carefully and modestly, as it is always required by art whatever the circumstances. For this purpose I have used all the existing motifs of our surface ornamentation on the walls and the vaults in the spirit of Gothic, I have applied the plants, the forms of our country's flora, of our fields, forests and plains, using these forms in a more or less stylized manner."

Other vaults in the building bear similar designs, all by decorative painter Róbert Scolcz, Hungary's foremost master of the craft. In the upper section of the hall are stained-glass windows by that profession's undisputed master, Miksa Róth. More windows by Róth, in designs ranging from quite rich to simple, grace many rooms and corridors in the Parliament House.

Károly Lotz was commissioned to paint the ceiling of the stair hall; he was one of the country's greatest artists at the time, and had already embellished Budapest's Opera House among many architectural landmarks. No other painters of his stature participated in the project; instead, any sections that Lotz did not paint were assigned to a younger generation of artists nurtured in, or simply imitating, his manner. The stair hall ceiling encompasses three sections, in which Lotz was asked to represent two important concepts from the iconographical programme of the building: *The Apotheosis of Hungary* and *The Apotheosis of Legislation*. Between the two he painted the coronation regalia and the coats-of-arms of Hungary and her dominions. Lotz tackled these varied tasks with his typical easy lyricism, using the distemper technique. For both main images he developed illusionistic groups seen from a daring, low angle. In the rotunda side painting, *The Apotheosis of Hungary*, the figures of a peasant, a nobleman, and a bishop at the left represent the classes of the country. Near them stands Count István Széchenyi, "the greatest Hungarian." To the right, the poet Sándor Petőfi, portrayed from the back, gestures enthusiastically to revolutionaries who gather under the nation's flag. Except for Széchenyi, all the characters turn towards Hungaria's majestic figure, above which float allegories of Peace, Wealth, Truth and Glory. At the bottom of *The Apotheosis of Legislation*, the figure



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

1. ROTUNDA 2. MAIN STAIRCASE 3. REPRESENTATIVES' PARLOUR
4. PARLOUR OF THE FORMER UPPER HOUSE 5. PARLIAMENT'S DEBATING CHAMBER
6. THE FORMER UPPER HOUSE'S DEBATING CHAMBER 7. HALL OF DELEGATIONS
8. HUNTING HALL 9. MUNKÁCSY ROOM 10. NÁNDORFEHÉRVÁR HALL

of Chronos reminds viewers of the passage of time. Behind Chronos, encased in a trompe-l'oeil pedestal, a relief represents the so-called Blood Pact of the ancient Hungarian chieftains. Surrounding a towering column of law at the centre of the picture are allegorical figures of History, Firmness, Patriotism, Kingdom, Peace, Anarchy defeated and Wisdom.

Three arches link the stair hall to the rotunda. Though the original competition programme called only for a room here that would accommodate 200 people, as realized the rotunda constitutes the architectural and ideological climax of the building. It measures 20.8 metres in diameter and 27.2 metres tall. Its ceiling rests on 16 massive piers, separating tall, pointed arches. Bundles of columns attached to the piers soar and fan out above box openings to form net and stellar vaulting. Tall, coupled windows pierce the drum and partly the dome itself, adding some lightness to the solemn room. A corridor with groined and stellar vaults rings the rotunda. Bright stone cladding and paint animate the rotunda walls, as do shimmering stained-glass windows. Polished plates of Siklós, Gyüd, and Piszke marble cover the floor in an elaborate checkerboard pattern.

The rotunda houses statues of great Hungarian rulers and statesmen; in fact the room amounts to a full-blown national pantheon. Originally even more statues were to have been placed in niches here, but for the 1896 millennial parliamentary session boxes for the guests had to be constructed, which thus replaced niches destined to accommodate sculptures. Now 16 coloured-zinc statues of kings, Transylvanian princes, and a governor, each flanked by two pages, encircle the rotunda at the height of the lancet arches. Their costumes and weapons, intended to be historically authentic, and their forward-facing poses echo the outfits and stances of the facade sculp-

tures. The statues run in chronological order from left to right, beginning at the far side from the stair hall: Árpád by Antal Szécsi, St. Stephen by Miklós Köllő, St. Ladislav by József Róna, Coloman Beauclerc by Ede Mayer, Andrew II by Lajos Mátray, Béla IV by Antal Lóránffy, Louis the Great by Béla Brestyánszky, János Hunyadi by Gyula Bezerédy, Matthias Hunyadi (Corvinus) by Gyula Bezerédy, István Báthori by Béla Brestyánszky, István Bocskai by József Róna, Gábor Bethlen by Lajos Mátray, György Rákóczi I by József Róna, Charles III by Miklós Köllő, Maria Theresa by Miklós Köllő, and Leopold II by Ede Mayer. Originally, as the topical climax of the programme, a white-marble sculpture of Franz Joseph and his wife Queen Elizabeth (carved by Antal Szécsi) stood under the central arch facing the entrance of the rotunda. This pair was removed after World War I. The rotunda has been the scene of numerous important ceremonies both festive and solemn since it opened, and between 1 January 2000 and 20 August 2001, it has been serving as the ceremonial home for the Hungarian Holy Crown and coronation regalia.

The rotunda affords a magnificent view not only of the stair hall but also towards two spacious parlours separated from the rotunda by wood-and-glass walls. These wide, barrel-vaulted rooms, with transverse vaults and niches, are basically identical in shape and ornamental character. Their forms evoke Baroque spatial concepts, as do their ceiling paintings, which seemingly reveal patches of open sky. Upholstered settees and, at the centres of the rooms, round, upholstered stools adjoin ornate candelabra. Of the total of 160 interior statues of the Parliament House, about one third are concentrated in these parlours. The coloured-faience naturalistic figures, sporting medieval costumes, were made by the Zsolnay factory in Pécs. Minister of culture Gyula Wlassics had disapproved of them and admonished the interested parties at the time: "*Zsolnay's pyrogranite material is by all means a precious medium of artistic decoration, but the essence of sculpture resides in artistic modelling and not in the material.*" Steindl was nonetheless able to impose his will, but the faience figures have kept drawing criticism since their installation, as they seem more like gaudy decoration than autonomous works of art.

In the parlour of the Upper House, statues surrounding the columns represent suitably "elevated" disciplines and crafts: Law, Theology, Humanities, Medicine, and time-honoured pastoral pursuits such as agriculture, hunting and animal husbandry. On the three fields of the ceiling, Zsigmond Vajda painted several distemper scenes. In spite of the artist's drawing talent, they seem overcrowded and fragmented. They evoke legends surrounding Hungarian kings: St. Ladislav throwing medicinal herbs among the people, Bishop Astrik giving the crown to St. Stephen, King Matthias performing acts of justice, Louis the Great ordering construction of the church at Kassa. Several figures in this last image bear the features of real persons, such as Vajda, Steindl, and members of the construction management team. Under the vault, emblematic figures of great Hungarian kings face each other. At the middle of the room, the huge, lavishly painted porcelain vase designed by the painter Pál Gerzson was a gift from the Herend porcelain factory on the occasion of the millennial year 2000.

In the parlour of the Representatives, faience statues fittingly represent more worldly, modern sciences and professions: architecture, engineering,

chemistry, minting, the railway system, the post office, stock exchanges, etc. The figure of the architect was again modelled after Steindl. On the ceiling, Vajda painted the best-known scenes from Hun and Hungarian legend cycles, referring to the fact that this room served the people's elected representatives. Hunor and Magor are shown chasing a deer, while a shepherd boy hands Attila the magic sword, Gyöngyvér mourns Buda's death and curses Attila, and Emese dreams of the mythic turul bird flying off Attila's shield and alighting on her. Currently the press corps uses the parlour more often than do MPs.

Just past the parlours in the long axis of the building are the actual parliamentary venues: the debating chambers. Both are 25.6 metres long, 23.45 metres wide, and 17 metres high. Likewise in architecture and decoration they are virtually identical. Only minor details are more elaborate in the former Upper House chamber, such as the parapet and the division and framing ground-floor arches. In both rooms, two corners curve as they follow the horseshoe outline of the benches. (The tradition of such arced benches in Europe goes back to the French National Assembly [1828-32].) Two rows of galleries line all four sides of the chambers. Filling each bay on the first floor are three arches, and on the second level huge traceries stretch across these bays; the filigree lends transparency to the room and lets in light through the large windows behind it. Open timber console structures reminiscent of late English Gothic architecture adjoin the tracery, while the coffering of the ceilings evokes Renaissance architecture. The ceilings and benches were made in Endre Thék's and Alajos Michl's workshop from Slavonian oak, a noble wood species. The irregular surfaces and relatively moderate size of the rooms were meant to improve acoustics, a particularly sensitive issue before the advent of electric amplification.

In the former Upper House chamber, behind the Speaker's rostrum, are painted the coats-of-arms of Hungary's former ruling dynasties: the Árpáds, the Angevins, the Hunyadis, the Jagiellonians, János Szapolyai, and the House of Habsburg-Lorraine. At their centre is the largest coat-of-arms of all, that of Hungary and her dominions. On either side of the coats-of-arms, two long, theatrically conceived but skilfully composed pictures by Mátyás Jantyik illustrate the nobility's prominent role in Hungarian history. The painting at left is entitled *The Announcement of the Golden Bull*, commemorating Andrew II's issuing in 1222 Hungary's "Magna Carta", the decree containing the clause of resistance. The picture on the right shows the famous *Vitam et sanguinem* scene of 1741, when Hungarian noblemen committed their "lives and blood" in support of Maria Theresa and her beleaguered empire. Above the Speaker's rostrum, on the second floor, allegorical statues of Science, Strength, Truth, Criticism, Faith and Charity gaze forward.

The chamber of the Representatives was laid out to contain 453 seats, including ten for the ministers and four for the notaries. The number of seats corresponded to the number of deputies in historical Hungary's Parliament. Though the 1920 peace treaty deprived the country of more than half its population, the number of MPs decreased only slightly; today they number 386. Facing their benches stands the Speaker's and referee's rostrum, and in front of that is the stenographers' unit, approachable by steps from below. The coats-of-arms behind the rostrum match those in the Upper House

chamber. On both sides of the coats-of-arms display, two long distemper paintings by Zsigmond Vajda evoke important events in Hungarian constitutional history: *The Parliament of 1848* and *The Coronation of Franz Joseph*. At the upper gallery level, allegorical figures of Glory, Concord, Wisdom, Eloquence, Peace and War remind legislators of the required virtues of their posts and the impact of their decisions.

At the east end of the cross-wing stands the so-called Corridor of Delegations. Wider and more lavishly decorated than the other corridors of the building, it features stained-glass windows with unusual motifs such as grotesques, grisaille medallions, and human figures. On either side of the lavishly framed and carved door of the Hall of Delegations are the ministers' former studies. The murals along the corridor refer to ministerial purviews: *Warfare, Religion and Culture, Jurisdiction, Agriculture, Industry and Commerce*. The muralist, Andor Dudits, quite ingeniously composed scenes illustrating these subjects, rather than straightforward allegorical figures.

The large door at the centre of the Corridor of Delegations gives access to the so-called Hall of Delegations. At the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, deputies from the Austrian and Hungarian parliaments used this hall for discussions of the empire's so-called common affairs, i.e. foreign relations and military and fiscal policies. Above the entrance on the long side of the room, Dudits painted *Franz Joseph's Sword Stroke after the Coronation*. This large albeit somewhat anaemic work reminded the MPs of a major ceremonial event marking the birth of the dualistic empire. The corner room to the right of the Hall served as the ministers' council room. Its decoration includes wooden panelling as well as two charming oil paintings by Károly Lotz on the ceiling, allegories of *Wisdom* and *Firmness*.

On the Danube flank of the rotunda runs a long wood-panelled room originally known as the restaurant, and now called the Hunting Hall. Its coffered wooden ceiling rests on late-Gothic-style trusses. The walls feature a fascinating array of artwork. The two short walls are covered by paintings by Aladár Körösfői-Kriesch; his vigorous Art Nouveau images provide a refreshing splash of modernity in the historicist ambience of the Parliament House. Painted in distemper, they are officially entitled *Fishing on Lake Balaton in the 15th Century* and *Bison Hunt: Etele saves Buda*. But according to a more general interpretation they represent the two ancient occupations of Hungary. On the long wall facing the windows, Béla Spányi painted murals of the castles of Vajdahunyad, Árva, Visegrád, Trencsén, and Klissa in Croatia. These images were badly damaged in World War II, and restored only in the early 1980s. On the ceiling, Viktor Tardos-Krenner's illusionistic allegorical paintings of *Harvest, Abundance* and *Vintage* speak of the culinary function of the room.

Beside the restaurant is the so-called Tapestry Room, with a large woven hanging manufactured in 1928. Gyula Rudnay designed its painterly image of the first "national assembly" at Pusztaasz, an event recorded and lauded in legends.

Several more artworks are noteworthy in the south wing, in rooms now used by the President of the Republic and formerly by the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The long wall of the President's reception room bears perhaps the most monumental painting of the building, *The Conquest of the Land* by Mihály Munkácsy. The Hungarian populace had pressured

the Executive Committee into commissioning Munkácsy, the Hungarian "painter prince" who was then residing in Paris, to prepare a picture for the chamber of the Representatives. The artists had already adorned Vienna's Art Museum with a magnificent ceiling painting, but no Hungarian public structure could boast a comparable, large painting by the country's famous son. Munkácsy drew up preliminary sketches in 1890, and eventually elaborated a long, well-composed tableau in relatively pale hues. It shows Prince Árpád receiving the Slav emissaries, who are bearing water, earth and grass as signs of submission. Árpád is seated with majestic tranquility on a white horse and surrounded by his chieftains, and at his left a crowd of Hungarians is cheering. Such a domineering oil painting apparently unnerved Steindl: he objected to the placement of this outstanding work by another eminent artist in so visible a position as the chamber of the Representatives. On the pretext of preserving the architectural unity of the room, he succeeded in banishing Munkácsy's work from the Parliament House altogether. The piece ended up first at the National Museum's state hall (which was still the meeting place of the Upper House when the Munkácsy painting was completed, since the Parliament House had not yet opened), and then at the Museum of Fine Arts. Only in 1929 did it reach its present location.

A quarter of a century after the Parliament House was finished, murals were painted in the great hall of the President's office. Vaguely reminiscent of stage sets, the scenes originally glorified three great governors in Hungarian history: János Hunyadi, who is portrayed standing gloriously outside Nándorfehérvár (Belgrade) Castle, which he had defended successfully against the Turks in 1456 – hence the room's present name, Nándorfehérvár Hall; Lajos (Louis) Kossuth, the leader of Hungary's 1848-49 war of independence, who is shown addressing enthusiastically a group of cheering people; and Miklós Horthy, the country's governor between the two World Wars. Géza Udvardy painted the Hunyadi and Kossuth portraits, and Vince Hende depicted Horthy from life. On the room's long wall pierced by windows, a mural by Antal Diósy represents Mihály Szilágyi with his troops, promoting the election of Matthias as king. The Horthy painting was removed after World War II, and in the early 1950s it was replaced by Szilárd Iván's Socialist-realistic *Alliance of Workers and Peasants*. This image, in turn, was taken out in 1977, and today the spot is occupied by László Patay's mural of Ferenc Rákóczi II, leader of Hungary's freedom fight in the early 18th century, meeting his future general Tamás Esze. Between the World Wars, György Kóródy decorated the President's study in the Transylvanian Renaissance manner.

The long corridors in the Parliament House, surmounted by groin vaults, resemble medieval Gothic cloisters. Steindl fought off monotony in these potentially dreary spaces by applying a variety of pastel-coloured scagliola to the walls and pilasters. The scagliola has proven extremely durable. Further enlivening the halls are touches of gilding on the pilaster capitals, the cornices, and the arches. (In total, the interior of the building received no less than 40 kilogrammes of 22-23-carat gold.) Zsolnay faience statues line the corridors, each representing a different profession – and the figure of the potter in the Danube-side corridor of the Upper House bearing the features of company owner Miklós Zsolnay. The overall naiveté of the sculptures brings to mind German Romanticism, but as "the people's simple sons" they also

provide a kind of counterbalance to the rotunda's formal gallery of royalty and statesmen. Even the brass cigar rests fixed to the walls of these halls benefited from exquisite design forethought: they include numbered slots, so that the deputies, upon leaving the debating chamber, could easily locate their hopefully still glowing stogies.

In some of the secondary staircases of the building, the decoration remains rich, even florid. Gilt vaultings add dazzle to the pairs of House staircases at each end of the building. Allegorical paintings by Zsigmond Vajda appear on the ceilings above all four of these stairways: Truth and Historiography over the Representatives' stairs, Patriotism and Canonical Law in the former Upper House section. At the end of the cross-wing, two so-called ministerial staircases lead to the first floor. They rest on cast-iron columns, which have gilt-iron ornamentation and wrought-iron railings.

After the cluttered world of the interiors, heavily laden with murals and statues, bright with colours and gilding, the simpler courtyards offer a welcome respite. Covering their walls are pale, compressed bricks. But Steindl did not exactly restrain all ornament in these spaces; at the window capitals and especially the faience decoration of the cornices, he reinforced the national character of the building by adding decorations modelled after native flora, such as maize, sunflower, tobacco, oak leaves, and tulip. Crowning the cornices are Venetian-Gothic-style pointed crests, which in some courtyards are complemented by rows of fantastic masks.

After World War II, a unicameral system replaced Hungary's bicameral Parliament, and so the function of some rooms had to change. The former Upper House chamber now hosts assorted meetings; since 1945 it has been called the congress hall, and its adjoining parlour has become known as the congress parlour. The south end of the building houses the President of the Republic's suite, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, or today the Speaker of Parliament, has taken up offices in the cross-wing. At the north end of the building, the Prime Minister for many years maintained offices that had been intended for the Speaker of the Upper House. Two years ago, the Prime Minister moved back to his original cross-wing rooms, and the Parliament House's few remaining pieces of original furniture, now carefully restored, have been installed in this area. His former rooms at the north end of the building have meanwhile become meeting spaces.

The Parliament House in Budapest has served Hungarian legislation and the Hungarian state for a century. Over these hundred years – thanks to good fortune and to expert maintenance – its exterior and interior have remained basically intact. The following generations will face the challenge of continuing to preserve this peerless building.