THE DEVELOPMENT AND TOPOGRAPHY OF SOPRON IN THE MIDDLE AGES

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The comparison of information gained from the town plan, the historical sources and the results of archaeological investigations show that Sopron does not belong to the group of towns of Hungary for which, similarly to the western *civitates* (even if with differing characteristics),[1] a possible course of development was stimulated by the existence of separate commercial settlements of artisans and *latini* added to an episcopal see or a regal castle. In the 13th and 14th centuries this latter part of these settlements grew continuously, and often became the actual town centre, moreover, they also became separated from the castle topographically (e. g. Esztergom, Vác, and to a lesser degree, Győr and Pécs). Although the historiography of Sopron often assumed a similar process, the excavations of the past two decades have yielded a different picture.

Here, too, the forerunner was a Roman settlement which at the close of the 1st century rose to the rank of town (Scarbantia), parts of which were given up as a consequence of the increasingly frequent raids; its centre was surrounded by a town wall at the beginning of the 4th century. Some of the still inhabited stone houses were demolished in the 3rd century and were used to build a town wall covered with ashlars 3 m thick. The wall had a regular plan with 39 towers, two of which were gatehouses on the northern and southern side. Following the decline in the 5th century (after the destruction at an unknown date), the town was abandoned for some time. Excavations have not discovered traces indicative of settlement or finds from the late Migration period so far. This stratigraphical level was formed by Roman debris, black humus and peat. (This abandonment may provide an explanation for the German name of the settlement: Ödenburg.[1a])

The state forming Hungarian royal power organised the country into a network of counties, each with its own seat and the fortress of the *comes* (governor of the regal castle). The *castrum Suprun* had thus evolved at the beginning of the 11th century. Similarly to other county seats, it was named after its first *comes*. The archaeological excavations of the past two decades have clarified the location of the fortress of the *comes* and the fortification system. The fortification wall was constructed of massive wooden trunks arranged in a chamber construction, bolstered with earth to a width of 20 m and a height of at least 5 m. Analogies to this fortification type are known from Central Europe from the 10th–11th centuries, the best examples being from the Kiev principality and the town of Kiev itself.[2] The earthen bank was supported by the inner side of the Roman town wall and it not only followed its line, but also used its surviving 2–3 m high remains as an outside cover. On the basis of the recovered pottery, its construction can be dated to the 11th century, which corresponds to the historical process. Little is known of the life of the *comes* inside the castle. Traces indicative of houses built around a framework of wooden posts with wattle and daub walls have only been observed in three spots so far.[3] We know that the fortress of the *comes* had two gates: the northern one over the spot of the former Roman gate, the eastern one on a new spot, since the medieval road leading southeast deviated from the former Roman road. On the testimony of local

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[1] The dualism of *civitas* and *burgus* was first discussed by Rietschel, Rörig, Pirenn, Ganshof and Ennen (1897–1953). The legal status of the Hungarian towns listed here differed from their western contemporaries and their topography also differed. For a comparison and an analysis of divergences, see Fügedi (1969) 101–118, esp. 108. Fügedi termed the towns of the 11th–12th centuries 'towns of the nomadic type' ('Städte asiatischen-nomadischen Typs') owing to their differing traits. L. Gerevich: Die mittelalterlichen Städte im Zentrum Ungarns. *Vor- und Frühformen der europäischen Stadt im Mittelalter* I–II. Göttingen (1974) 258ff, does not accept this term.

[1a] Former research explained the name Ödenburg by suggesting the existence of an earlier hillfort ('Burg') north of the settlement, the existence of which has not yet been proven. K. Mollay; *Scarbantia, Ödenburg, Sopron.* Budapest (1944). After excavating the Roman town wall we realized that this name probably denotes the deserted Roman town.

[2] For the discovery of the earthwork see Tomka (1976) 391–410. For the Roman town see K. Sz. Póczy: Die Anfänge der Urbanization in Scarbantia. *ActaArchHung* 23 (1971) 93–110.

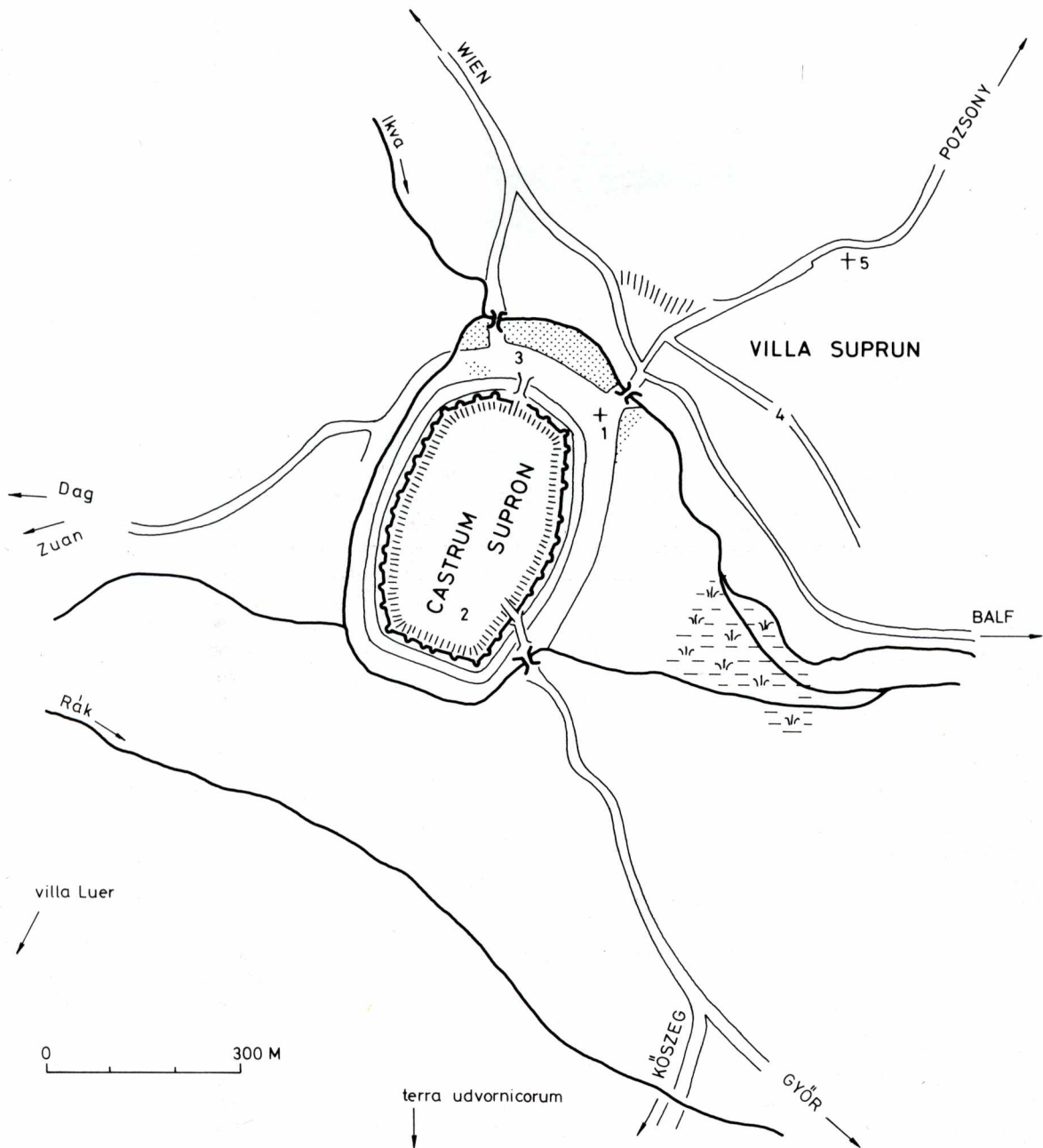[3] Tomka (1976). See also Gömöri (1976) 421–422.

Fig. 1. Sopron. The fortress of the *comes* and its environment in the 11th–12th century. 1. Church of the Holy Virgin, marketplace; 2. Salt market — Salzmarkt; 3. Smiths' street — Schmiedgasse, suburb; 4. Fishermen's street — Fischergasse; 5. St. Michael parish church

topographical data, the house of the *comes* probably stood within the northern gate, and the salt market ('Salzmarkt') was near the other gate in the southeastern part of the fortress.[4]

Immediately in front of the northern side of the fortress there probably lay the small settlement of the smiths bound to the performance of various duties; that of the fishermen was northeast of the fortress, beyond the brook. Both places are indicated by the profession names (preserved as street names), since at the beginning of the 15th century — to which the earliest written

[4] K. Mollay discussed several topographical issues in his history of Sopron, published in *Sopron és környéke műemlékei (Monuments in and around Sopron).* Ed. by D. Dercsényi. Budapest (1956²). This study, however, was written prior to the archaeological investigations, and thus reached differring con-

clusions on several topographical questions such as the location of the fortress of the *comes.*
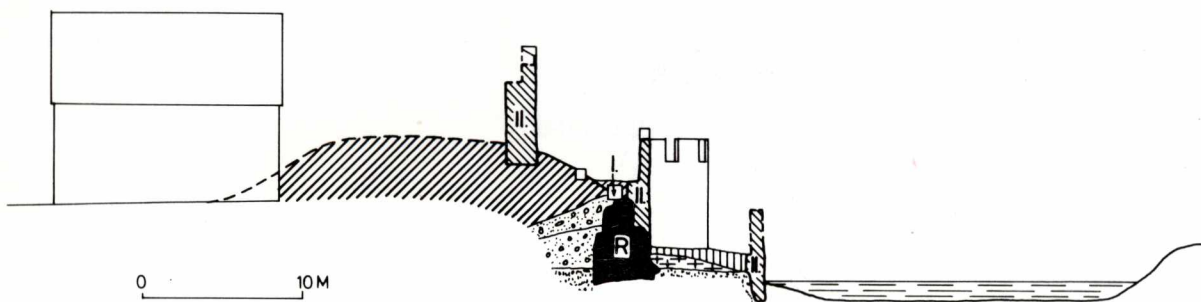
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Fig. 2. The town walls (R: Roman town walls, remains of the earthwork ditch, II: 1330–1340)
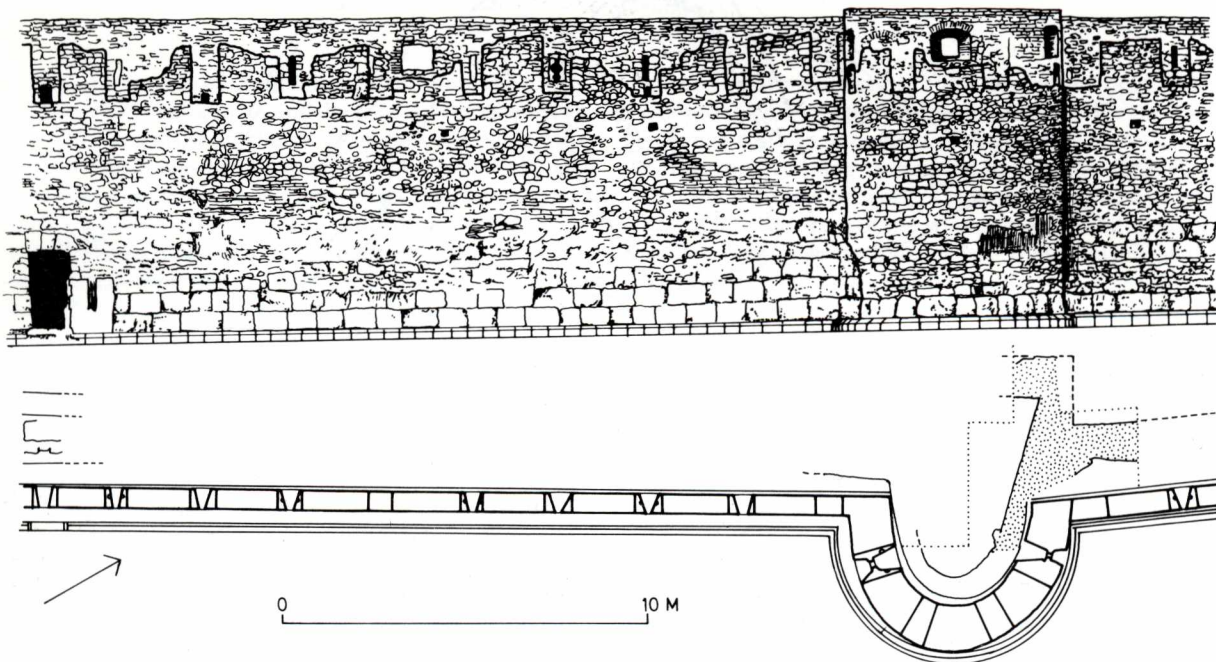

Fig. 3. The façade of the middle town wall, with the pediment of the Roman town wall

records can be assigned — men of these professions no longer lived in these quarters. Further on, to the northeast of the fortress stood the parish church of St. Michael (first mentioned in 1278) of the village settlement (*villa Suprun,* 1156, 1199).[5]

Several smaller villages lay in the close environs of the county seat. Evidence for ironworking and smithies have been reported from two of them.[6]

The town plan would indicate that the marketplace lay beside the northeastern side of the fortress and the church of the Blessed Virgin (mentioned from 1278) that once stood there was the church of the fortress. Its position was also favourable in view of the inhabitants of neighbouring settlements who frequented the market and the merchant stalls. The study of the routes taken by the long-distance roads through Sopron (several of which correspond to the Roman roads) reveals that although they conspicuously lead to the *castrum,* they pass under it. This phenomenon can perhaps be explain-

[5] Earlier investigations gave various reasons for the location of the parish church in the suburb (deliberate separation from the fortress of the *comes,* former and/or orthodox Christian tradition, transference of the church, etc.). See Házi (1939). J. Major: Hozzászólás a "Sopron és környéke műemlékei" c. könyvhöz (Comments on the volume "Monuments in and around Sopron"). *Településtudományi Közlemények* (1953) 94–112 (with a critique of the relevant topographical issues). For comments, see Gy. Nováki: A soproni Várhely ásatásának története (The history of the excavations at Sopron–Várhely). *Soproni Szemle* 9 (1955), and Mollay (1956) 34–42. Mollay thought *villa Supron* to have been the first settlement built on the plain which was later fortified. See Mollay (1956) 42–43. For an explanation for the simultaneous use of *villa* and *castrum,* see B. Surányi: Az Árpád-kori Sopron topog-

ráfiájának kérdéséhez (The topography of Sopron in the Árpádian Age). *Történelmi Szemle* (1961) 220–223.

[6] Gömöri (1976) 412–420. Finds of the 10th century were recovered from the smithies. The population of certain neighbouring villages known only by their name today were obliged for services and provision of the fortress.
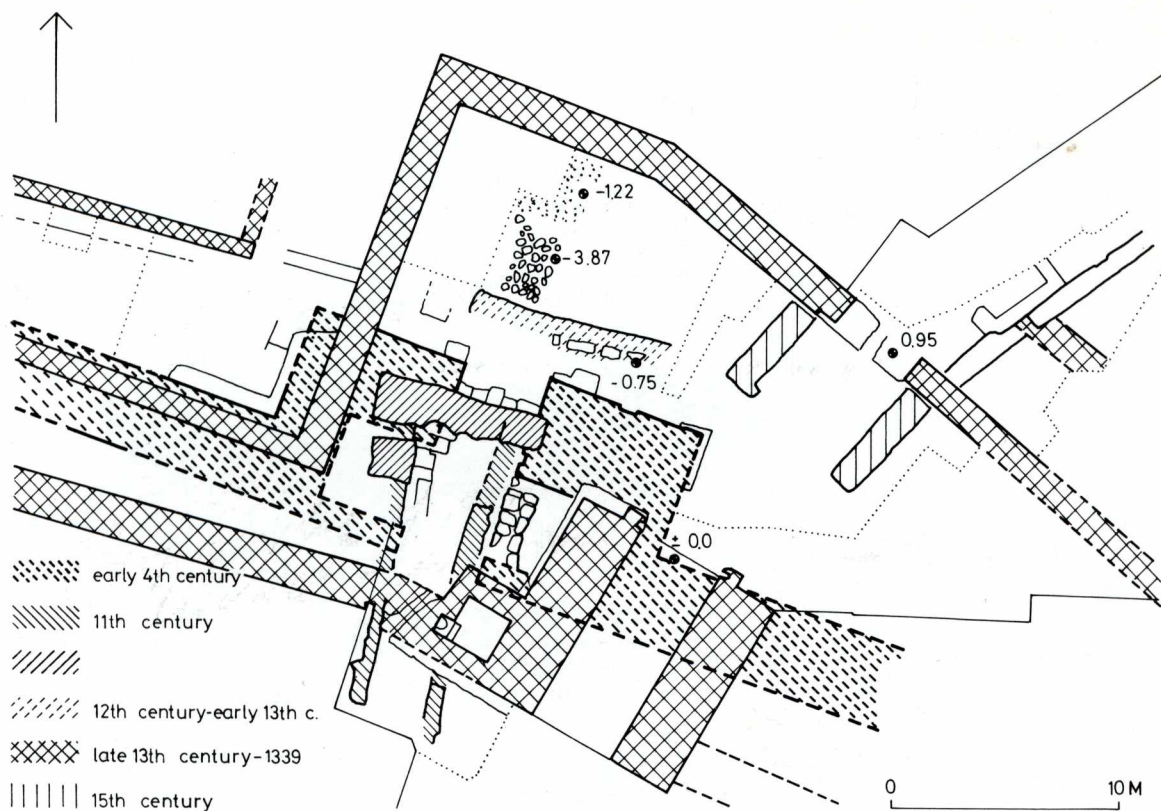
Fig. 4. The building periods of the northern town gate

Legend in figure:
early 4th century
11th century
12th century-early 13th c.
late 13th century-1339
15th century

Depth markers: -1.22, -3.87, 0.95, -0.75, 0.0

0   10 M

ed by the defence system: unlike the Roman towns which were open to roads, medieval fortresses were closed to roads, but they nonetheless controlled the traffic (Fig. 1).[7]

It is thus fairly obvious that the location of the *castrum* of the county seat was primarily influenced by the favourable topographical position, the road network and the Roman town walls which were well suited to defensive purposes.

The archaeological and historical investigations of the past 20 years have revealed that the early topography of Sopron shares numerous similarities with that of other county seats and centres: a fortress and a set of more or less related settlements.[8]

These seats had undergone a significant development by the middle of the 13th century. The ultimate result was the emergence of independent medieval towns (also

in the legal sense of the word). At the same time, topographical development often took diverse paths.[9]

The development of Sopron is not known in detail due to the scarcity of the evidence; nonetheless, major tendencies can be reconstructed from the building activity of the 13th century (1247: the settlement of Johannite knights in the northern suburb; the building of the funerary chapel of St. James near the parish church in the middle of the 13th century). Accordingly, the suburbian settlement appears to have grown considerably.[10]

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[7] I. Holl: Sopron im Mittelalter. *ActaArchHung* 31 (1979) 105–149. Here I gave a detailed analysis of the topography of late medieval towns.

[8] Such as Győr, Pécs, Székesfehérvár. The small settlements sometimes had their own churches or a monastery. For Veszprém, see P. Németh: Az első magyar egyházmegye kialakulásának kérdéséhez (The emergence of the first Hungarian diocese). *Székesfehérvár Évszázadai* 1. Ed. by A. Kralovánszky. Székesfehérvár (1967), 117–123. Smaller settlements were mentioned with the name *szeg* or *vicus* (occasionally Weiler, Gasse, Dorf).

[9] Regarding subsequent development, we must emphasize the increase in trade and the settlement of Walloons, Flemings, Lotharingians and, to a lesser degree, Germans and Italians. The major trade routes are outlined by coin finds: *via* Carinthia and the Rhineland from the turn of the 12th and the 13th centuries; *via* Vienna from the end of the 13th century. See I. Gedai: Székesfehérvár közép- és törökkori pénzleletei (The medieval and Turkish period coin finds from Székesfehérvár). *Székesfehérvár Évszázadai* 2. Ed. by A. Kralovánszky. Székesfehérvár (1972) 191–193; I. Gedai: Fremde Münzen im Karpatenbecken aus den 11–13. Jh. *ActaArchHung* 21 (1969) 105–148. For topographical issues see Fügedi (1969).

[10] There is no data for the composition of the population in the 13th century; one event, however, definitely proves the social significance of artisans: a tanner called István *(Stephanus pelliparius)* and his brothers chose to remain loyal to the Hungarian king, and therefore the treacherous *comes* Peter had them murdered when he surrendered the *castrum* to the
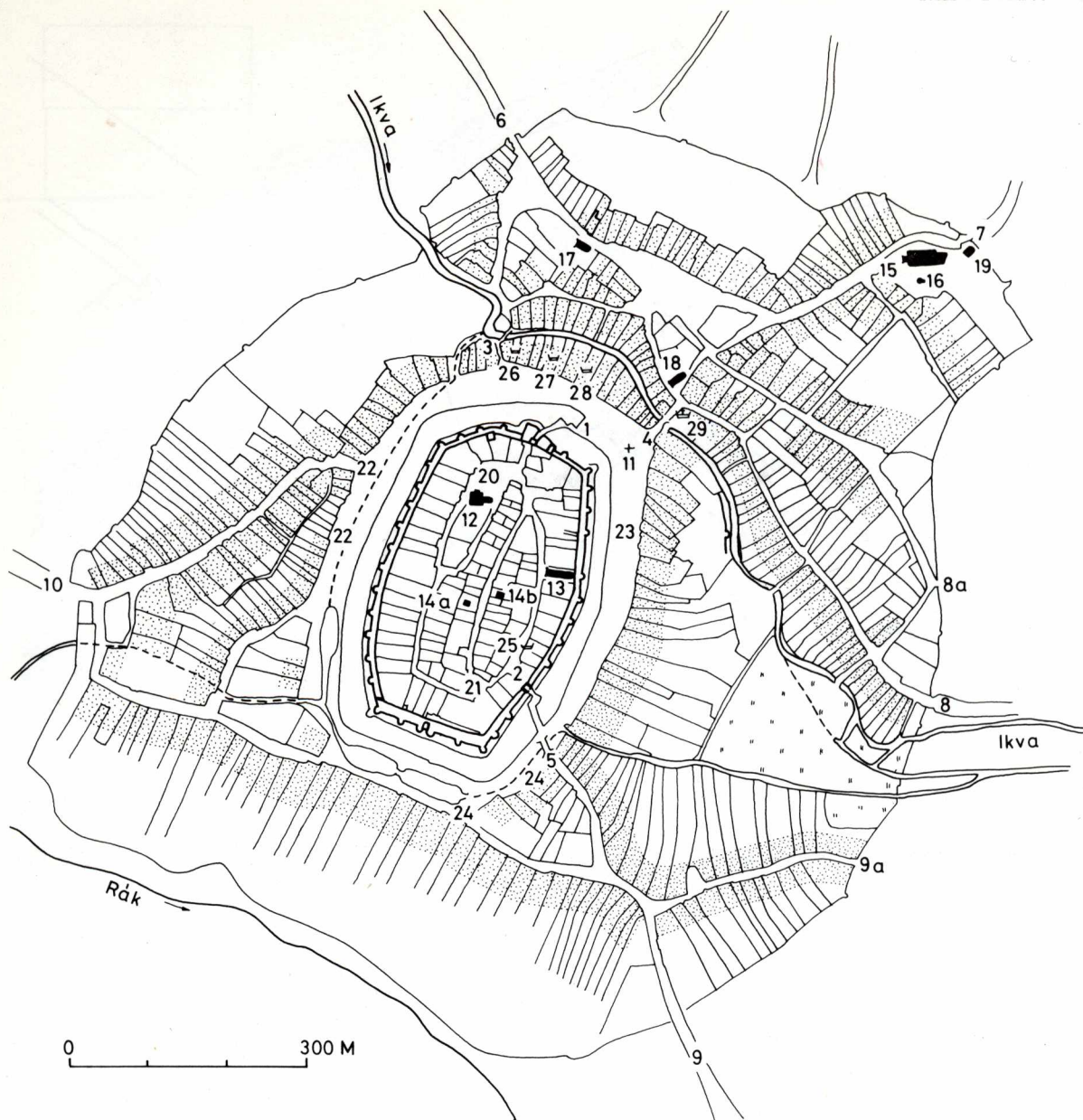
Fig. 5. Sopron in the Late Middle Ages. 11. Church of the Holy Virgin; 12. Franciscan monastery; 13. St. George's church; 14. the synagogues; 15. St. Michael's parish church; 16. St. James' chapel; 17. Johannite church; 18. chapel of the Holy Spirit; 19. chapel of Maria-Magdalena; 20. marketplace; 21. Salzmarkt; 22–24. marketplaces; 25–28. baths; 29. hospital

After the Tartar raids (1241), royal policy changed in several respects. The construction of feudal and regal castles was coupled with the issue of a series of town privileges. A characteristic trait of the settlement policy was to increase the population of independent towns, e.g. by resettling the inhabitants of neighbouring settlements. Beside economic strengthening, the military and

defensive objectives are also apparent: the defense of the former regal fortresses was undertaken by the burghers.[11] The fact that the Austrian prince, Frederick

[11] Direct data concerning resettlement: Zagreb (1242), Buda (1246?), Esztergom (1249), Székesfehérvár (1249), Győr (1271), Sopron (1277). In Esztergom the resettlement of the inhabitants within the walls of the regal and episcopal castle on the hill did not prove to be long-lasting; in Buda, on the other hand, the former inhabitants of Pest settled in the newly established town. The defensive objectives are apparent since the places of resettlement in Zagreb, Buda and Esztergom lie on hills.

Bohemian king in 1273. This event is recorded in the diploma of 1279. I. Lindeck-Pozza: *Urkundenbuch des Burgenlandes.* II. Graz (1965) 134.
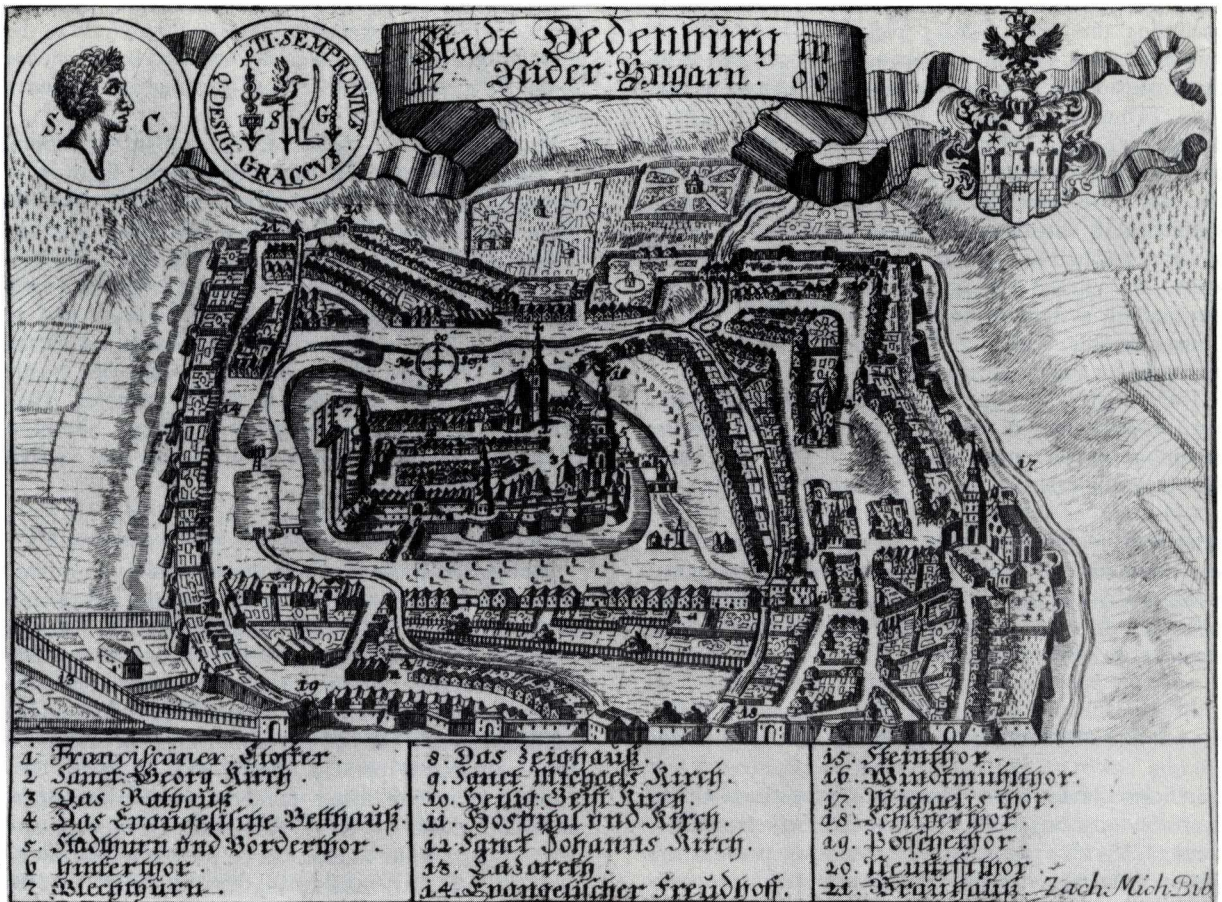
Fig. 6. Sopron in 1700. The sketchy engraving still reflects the medieval topography. (17. St. Michael's parish church)

II, and the Bohemian king, Ottokar, aspired to occupy the western part of the country accelerated the growth of fortresses into towns.[12]

Following the attainment of the rights of township (1277)[13] the serfs of the regal castle and the *hospites* became burghers, hence the reconstruction of the walls and other constructions were now undertaken by them. They were aided by the surrender of regal incomes and various donations.[14] It should be noted that instead of

establishing a burghers' town of new structure and layout, this involved the preservation of the town nucleus; the fortress of the *comes* became the inner town which adhered to the boundaries of the Roman town and its fortifications. By relinquishing the duty incomes between 1330 and 1344 the king increased the support of the building of fortifications: the burghers again planned the triple wall ring following the Roman layout. Excavations have proved that not only the Roman walls, but also 34 of the 39 towers were retained. The surviving part of the Roman wall constituted its outer surface and in lower parts the Roman ashlars were also reused. A pediment following the protrusions of the towers crowned the walls. This wall was the main fortified ring. The northern town gate with a new gatehouse was built beside the previous two gates. (Five successive building periods were observed here during the excavations.[15])

The inner wall ring was erected over the destroyed earthwork ditch of the fortress, behind the middle fortified ring. Between the two walls there extended a 6–7 m wide *zwinger*. The third town wall was a fairly low

[12] Ottokar also occupied Moson, Sopron and Győr; Sopron was captured three times between 1268–76.

[13] Privileges were granted to them already by the middle of the century, but the diploma itself is lost. In 1250 there were negotiations between the Johannite knights and the *burgenses* of the castle, and there is evidence for towers surrendered to the castle serfs (*civibus in saepedicto castro*). Mollay (1956) 48–50.

[14] 1277: ... *consideratisque antiquis operum consumtionibus et fracturis in eodem castro nostro Supron, ad reparationem ... concessimus. CD* 5/2, 397. 1297: ... *murorum eiusdem ciuitatis confraccionem ex nimia antiquitate, et operis vetustatem vidissemus. AUO* V, 171. ...*pro renovatione civitatis. Ibid.* Since nothing was known about the Roman town walls and the location of the fortress of the *comes* until the 1959 campaign, the interpretation of the diploma was also obscure. The term *vetustissimus murus* was also applied to the Roman town walls of Vienna in 1280: H. Ladenbauer-Orel: *Der Berghof*. Vienna (1974).

[15] The survival of the location of the gate, but the alteration of its form was also customary elsewhere. B. Cunliffe: Excavations at Porchester Castle, Hants 1969–1971. Fourth interim report. *The Antiquaries Journal* 52 (1972) 78–80, Porchester.

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outer wall, preceded by a 25–35 m wide shallow moat encircling the town. This triple defensive wall ring surpasses most Central European fortifications, even those considered to have been most developed at that time. (Thus, for instance, Bern was protected by a double ring from 1345; Regensburg's second ring was built in 1383 and Warsaw's even later.) The reason for this may have been that the European towns having a sophisticated fortification system protected a larger territory and had no financial resources to protect it with walls. The closest analogy to and the model of the fortification system in Sopron was the town wall of Constantinople, built by Theodosius in 412, though obviously on a much grander scale.

The burghers of Sopron probably insisted on their town walls because of their high technical level and the enormous human labour invested in it. They have since then been maintained, but not enlarged. Even after the introduction of firearms, only the crenelles and the gates were modernized (first half of the 15th century); and three bastions were later added as gun emplacements (1614–41). Beyond the maintenance of the fortification of the central part, there were no financial resources to protect the suburbs.

LATE MEDIEVAL TOPOGRAPHY

In Sopron the suburbs were a focal issue of settlement from the very beginning. Several successive royal decrees (1283–1328) forbade, but could not prevent the settlers from abandoning their houses built within the town walls, and moving to the suburbs.[16] The spacious suburb undoubtedly attracted numerous craftsmen and agriculturalists (wine growing) from the very start. This is why the parish church (rebuilt in the latter half of the 14th century) remained there. The convent of the Johannite knights endowed with the right of duty taxation, lying on the road to Vienna, also defended this outer settlement. The Chapel of the Holy Spirit (the parson's domestic chapel) was also built here (1421). At the same time, the Franciscan monastery was built in a rather unusual spot, in the marketplace, within the walls (c. 1280). Only one other Christian church (St. George's, built after 1380) and two succeeding synagogues were built within the walls.

Except for two small marketplaces (Main Square — 'Platz' and Salt Market — 'Salzmarkt'), the large marketplaces (Corn Market, Wood Market, Cattle Market — 'Kornmarkt', 'Holzmarkt', 'Viehmarkt') form a concentric circle around the town. The names of the main routes and streets leading to them are without exception mentioned in the abundant records from the beginning of the 15th century and are thus of aid in reconstructing the town plan. The unchanged survival of plot boundaries and streets has been proven at several spots by

architectural investigations and excavations.[17] The small inner town was inhabited by the wealthier strata of the population (merchants, wealthy artisans) in the shelter of the walls; nonetheless, 75% of the inhabitants lived in the suburbs by 1379.

Except for various churches, the town did not abound in public buildings. In the 14th century there were already 4 baths (1 in the inner town, 3 by the brook); but there was no town hall. In 1422 a patrician house was surrendered for this purpose, and still later, another, finally, a third patrician house was also rebuilt as a town hall. The various guild and religious societies had no common halls either, meetings were usually held in the house of the guild master in office.[18] Churches mostly also served communal, representative purposes. They were built entirely from burghers' donations, and most of their altars were supported by guilds and various societies (Fig. 5).[19]

We shall conclude this brief survey of the medieval town with the evidence yielded by the excavations.[20]

Among the goods reaching the town through foreign trade, a biconical glass vessel perhaps manufactured in a southern, possibly an Italian workshop, and an iron lock with inlay decoration, made in Russia, can be dated to the 13th century. At the same time, Austrian pottery wares had also begun to be imported, and their import increased significantly by the end of the 13th century; it was continuously present through the 14th–16th centuries, even if in lesser number. Of luxury goods, stoneware cups from the Rhineland (Siegburg) and glass beakers from Venice can be proved to have been used by rich patricians during the 15th and the 16th centuries.

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[16] 1283: … *quidem ex eis derelicto castro nostro Supruniensi in rure continue resideret … et magna pars ipsius castri per hoc vacua haberetur.* I. Lindeck-Pozza: *Urkundenbuch des Burgenlandes.* II. Graz (1965) 1283.

[17] For medieval patrician houses see F. Dávid: Gótikus lakóházak Sopronban (Gothic houses in Sopron). *Magyar Műemlékvédelem* 5 (1967–1968 /1970/) 95–123.

[18] Only four religious societies acquired guild halls (in 1454, 1510 and 1511), but they were not representative buildings either, being rather like suburbian patrician houses.

[19] A part of the religious societies also conceal guilds: Corpus christi society (*zecha Corporis Christi*, 1433), smiths; guild of the Blessed Virgin, blacksmiths; society of the apostle St. James (*zecha Beati Jacobi, z. carnificum*, 1433), butcher guild. They usually used their funds to buy vineyards. Házi (1939) 287–304.

[20] For the excavation of the town walls and the finds, I. Holl: Sopron középkori városfalai I–IV (The medieval town walls of Sopron). *Arch. Ért.* 94 (1967) 155–183; *ArchÉrt 95 (1968) 188–205; ArchÉrt 98 (1971) 24–44; ArchÉrt 100 (1973) 180–207.* No mention is made in the written sources about the imported goods recovered in the course of the excavations.