

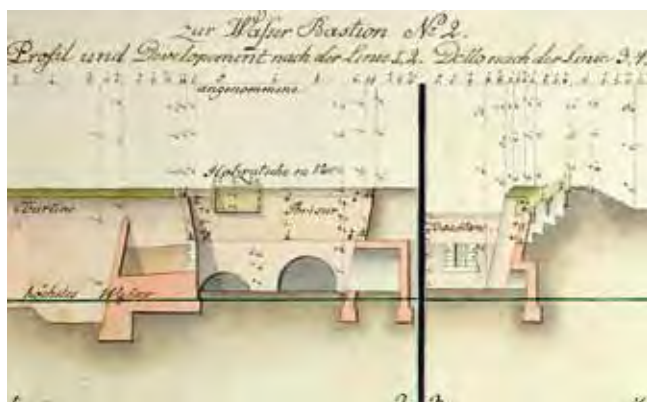
HUNGARY

Győr, Danube Gate

Today, Győr (Raab, Javorinum, Giavarino) is the spiritual and economic centre of Northern Transdanubia. The historic settlement is situated at the border of several typical geographical regions and is an important intersection point of rivers, highways and railway lines. The settlement owes its existence to the geography of the area. Without doubt, one of the most important gifts of nature is the gate-like character of this region. A safe river



Győr, Danube Gate occupation in 1594



Győr, fortification plan, c. 1561

crossing connected the western Viennese, Czech and Moravian Basins with the Carpathian Basin. For thousands of years, people, migrant tribes and armies passed through this area.

Győr played an important role at historic moments of Europe. Its strategic stance in times of war and its economy and trade in times of peace ensured its outstanding position in both the local and wider region. The Roman fortress Arrabona – an important part of the ancient Roman “Limes” – was almost symmetrical, square shaped. The Hungarians first appeared in the area in the

10th century.¹ In early medieval times, as the Hungarian city was established around the Chapter Hill, it became the residence of the Bishopric.

From the first quarter of the 16th century, Győr became the border fortress of Europe, a defensive bastion of Vienna preventing the Ottoman advance towards the west for one and a half centuries. On 10 May 1529, Sultan Suleiman I sent a declaration of war to Ferdinand I, the Hungarian king, an event which determined the next one and a half centuries in the history of Győr. The Turkish troops overcame the fortress of Győr on 19 September 1529 with the intention to capture Vienna. The conquerors set fire to the city. That was when the Turks named Győr “The Burnt Castle – Janik-kala”.

Around 1536, the reinforcement of the dirt and wood plank-wall of the castle began. By October 1552, the fortified north entrance – Danube Gate – which later played a significant role in the city’s history, was completed. For the fortification of the city, Italian engineers and royal military architects worked out plans in accordance with the military techniques of the period. In 1554, a royal decision was made about the fortification of the entire downtown of Győr and the construction was led by the Italian master builders Francesco Benigno and Bernardo Gabrielli.² In 1561, Pietro Ferrabosco³ arrived in Győr, and in 1564 he sketched plans illustrating the changes he recommended. His plan included modifications recommended by Benigno and Gabrielli in 1561. He supplemented the west wall of the Castle bastion with the Sforza half bastion, and between the southern Kaiser bastion and the eastern Middle bastion he installed the New Bastion.

The final image of the fortress of Győr from an aerial perspective is illustrated in a 1566 copper engraving by Domenico Zeno.⁴ The representation clearly shows the up-to-date, new Italian “winged bastions” at the junction of Rába, Rábca and Danube, the Danube Gate. The monumental architectural and engineering work was financed partly by the Austrian Imperial Court, by the taxpayers of Styria, Upper Austria and by the Pope. A great series of detailed architectural plans remained in the Military Archive in Vienna and in the Archive of the Provincial Government of Upper Austria.

On 29 September 1594 the Turkish Army captured Győr after a long, bloody siege. It was a tragic moment for Christian Europe. There is a whole series of staggering representations of the 1594 siege of Győr; Balthasar Caimax’s stenographic picture of Turkish troops storming the Christian army sent to liberate the fortress illustrates a crucial moment of the siege.

Győr was recaptured on 28 March 1598 by the Common European Army led by General Adolf Schwarzenberg and Nicolaus Pálffy in one night. It was one of the most important historical events of the 16th century. Overall in Styria, Carinthia, Upper Austria and Bavaria hundreds of statues – so-called Raaber Kreuze (Győr crosses) – were put up to immortalize the important success of the Christian world.

After recapturing the city, construction works of the missing outer entrenchment began. Around that time a delegation of engineers from Győr visited Palmanova Fortress, a military settlement built in the shape of a nine-pointed star. Upon meeting the designer of the fortress, Vincenzo Scamozzi⁵ suggested increasing the height of the walls of the bastions in Győr. According to the old drawings, the works of the fortress progressed between 1661 and 1664.

The peaceful times of the 18th century were only disturbed by the Napoleonic wars – Napoleon’s troops later caused the destruction of the fortress of Győr. Only the three town gates, the castle bastion and the Sforza half-bastion were spared at that time, but the three Renaissance town gates were destroyed between 1858 and 1894. The row of small Baroque houses built on top of the walls of the fortress was demolished in 1938 to create a new market square for the city.

In 1978, upon maintaining flood preservation works builders discovered the lower part of the Danube bastion. The bastion walls were restored accurately.⁶ While building flood preservation walls we observed that the whole casemate system of the Renaissance fortress had remained intact under the ground level of the square. It was our greatest desire to discover this interesting historical document of Győr at a later time.

In 2011, the municipality of Győr decided to build an underground garage for 400 cars under the empty square. The National Office of Cultural Heritage compelled the municipality of Győr to undertake an archaeological excavation of the whole area. The result of the excavation surpassed all our hopes. The whole casemate system was discovered in excellent condition. The overall view of the wall system was the same as in Lucca (Italy), where the complete fortress has been preserved to this day.

On 31 October 2013 the entire 140-year-old Hungarian monument preservation office system was abolished by the Hungarian Parliament. The new authority for building permissions, the “bureau of the government”, approved the plans to build the three storey underground garage in April 2013. It is easy to understand that the construction works mean a great danger for the bastions. According to plans only a small surface of the back of the brick walls would be displayed on the first level of the garage. ICOMOS Hungary together with local civil organisations – Hun-



Győr, Danube Gate excavation, 2012



Győr, Danube Gate excavation, 2012

garia Nostra, Arrabona Local Patriot Organisation⁷ and other associations – have protested heavily in the past years to prevent the local municipality’s plans to build the garage complex. Hungarian architects have advised to reconstruct the whole casemate system to demonstrate the original, authentic construction from the Turkish era.

It seems that nothing can be done: the construction of the garage will start in 2013–2014.

Prof. emer. Gábor Winkler
Honorary Member of ICOMOS

¹ Győr supposedly got its Hungarian name from the family name “Geur”.

² Agoston, Gábor: “Habsburgs and Ottomans: Defence, Military Change and Shifts in Power”, in: *The Turkish Bulletin Association*, vol. 22, no. 1, spring 1990, pp. 124–141.

³ Ferabosco [Ferrabosco], Pietro, born in Laino near Como, 1512(?), died in Como(?), 1599(?), Italian painter, architect and military engineer.

⁴ Winkler, Gábor: *Győr 1539–1939*. Győr 1998; Winkler, Gábor: *Győr 1939–1999*. Győr 1999.

⁵ Vincenzo Scamozzi (2. September 1548–7. August 1616) was a Venetian architect and a writer on architecture, active mainly in Vicenza and in the Republic of Venice area in the second half of the 16th century.

⁶ Architect: Gábor Winkler, structural engineer: András Persa.

⁷ Expert opinion: Arch. Gyula Szabó and Arch. Ferenc Szigeti.