Architecture around 1900 in Central Europe

#2 Metamorphosis of cities

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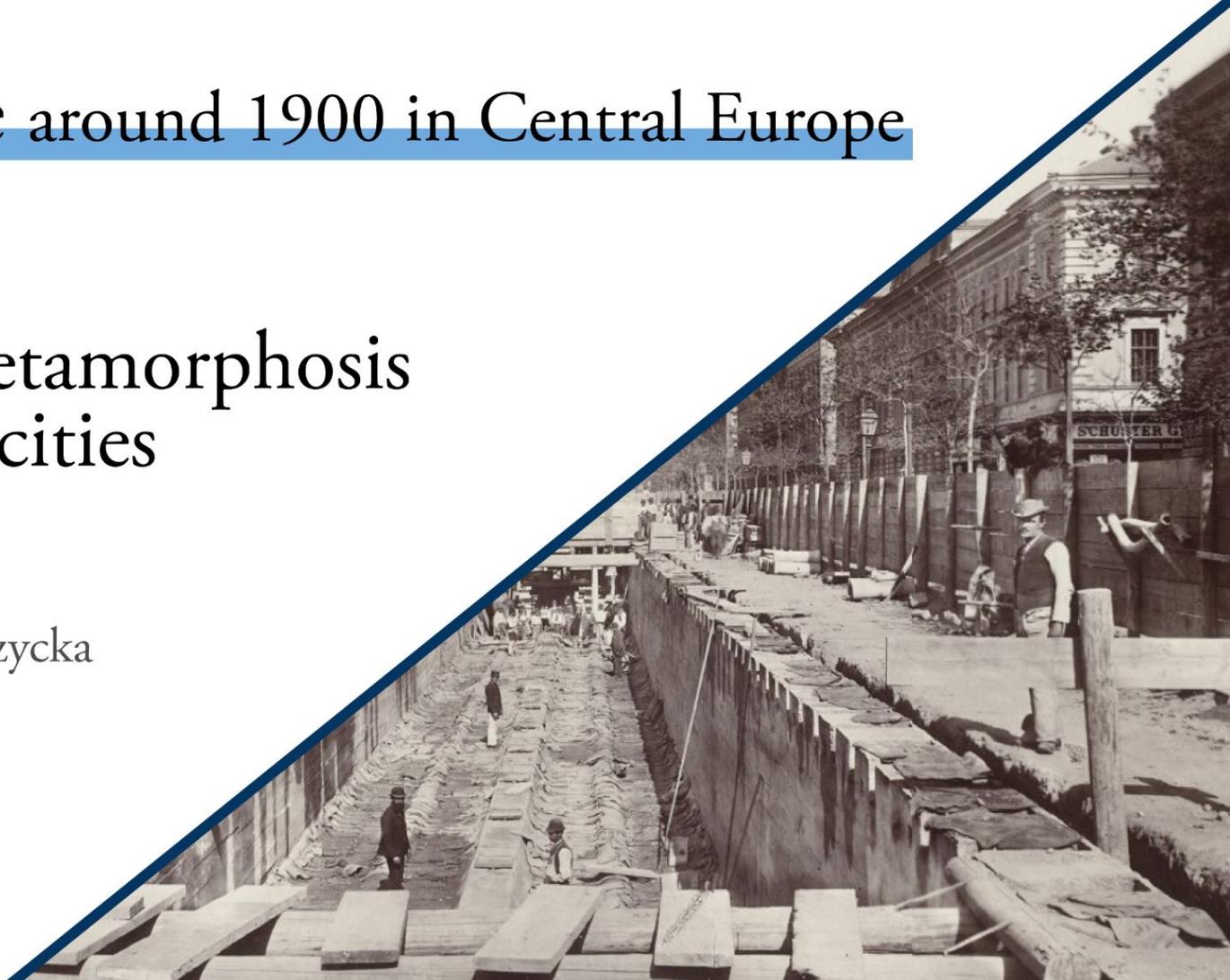
Architecture around 1900 in Central Europe

In this series on popular culture, we will once again revisit one of the most inspiring moments in the history of European culture. The turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was **a special period for art in Central Europe** due to various artistic trends and an increased cultural exchange between countries politically associated with Austria-Hungary.

The architecture style of this time largely dominates the face of contemporary European cities. Many important and characteristic buildings (such as train stations, museums, universities, and parliaments) were designed by then architects, while main boulevards and plazas were designed by city planners.

Similarly to our previous series, we will present a panorama of **the Belle Époque** through examples from Central European countries.

Andrássy Avenue, circa 1890, Hungarian National Museum in Budapest

Development of cities

Never had urbanization been as extreme as in the 19th century - especially throughout the second half. The number of city dwellers grew rapidly. In Vienna for example, in 1850 there was a population of half a million, in 1880 over a million, and in 1910 – two million.

In 1850, Warsaw had only 160,000 inhabitants, while in 1900 it quadrupled to 700,000. Prague had a similar case, while Budapest developed even faster – the population exceeded one million in 1910.

Wenceslas Square in Prague, 1908, National Museum in Prague

Maximilian Lenz (AT), *Sirk-Ecke (Vienna Ring Road)*, 1900, Wien Museum

Capital cities garnered the greatest importance at this time. It was there that the main town halls, universities and factories were located – which in turn stimulated an even greater influx of people, and thus further development.

The ability for quick and easy transportation was ensured by the development of the railroad. New transport hubs and rail links also helped stimulate the expansion of cities.

Anna Bilińska (PL), *Unter den Linden street in Berlin*, 1890, National Museum in Warsaw

# Transformation and reconstruction

With population growth, successive civilizational achievements, and the development of capitalism and industrialization, the face of the city changed. Traditionally, the largest buildings were cathedrals and palaces, while the modern city displayed equally large town halls, museums and railway stations.

The development of the city was closely related to the expansion of infrastructure. This included not only buildings, but also other fragments of urban space, such as wide boulevards, cobbled streets, lighting, underground sewage and water supply systems.

Antonín Chittussi (CZ), *Paris seen from Montmartre*, 1887, National Gallery Prague

Four main bridges were built in Budapest in the 19th century: Széchenyi Chain Bridge, Margaret Bridge, Liberty Bridge (originally named Franz Joseph Bridge) and the Elisabeth Bridge.

Many infrastructural elements developed artistic forms: decorative metal railings, metro stations covered with ceramic tiles and decorative lanterns to name a few. New urban investments significantly influenced the development of industrial design.
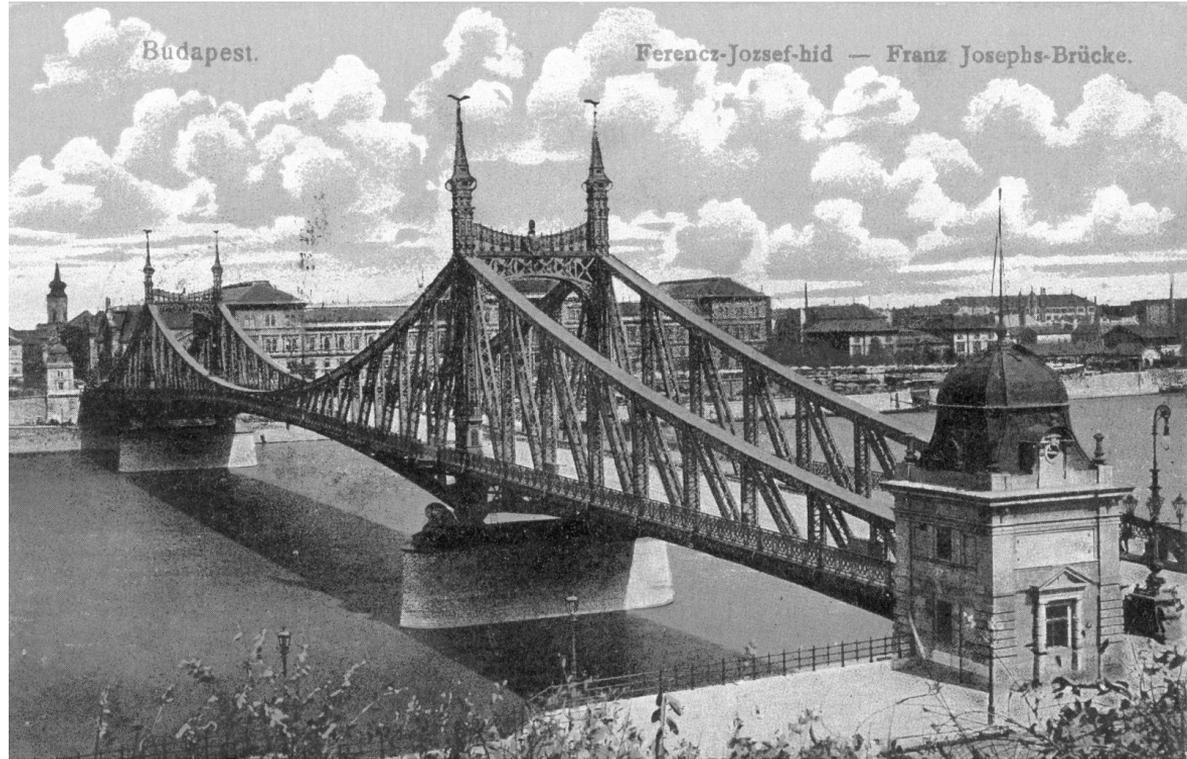
Liberty Bridge in Budapest, 1915, Museum of Károly Esterházy, Pápa, Hungary

Széchenyi Chain Bridge in Budapest, early 20th century, Hungarian Museum of Trade and Tourism

From the horse-drawn carriage to the metro

In the mid-19th century, apart from carriages, omnibuses and horse-drawn trams began to appear in cities. However, they were relatively slow vehicles, and moreover troublesome to maintain. The clatter of hooves on the pavement generated noise, and the costs were increased by feed, caring for the horses, and removing waste from the streets.

Karl Friedrich Gsur (AT), *Maximilian Platz and Votive Church*, 1906, Wien Museum

Horse-drawn omnibus in Vienna, 1910,
Austrian National Library

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Horse-drawn omnibus with conductress in
Vienna, postcard 1916, Wien Museum

The solution turned out to be electric trams, which were introduced at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. In 1896, the first metro line in continental Europe was opened in Budapest.

Burgring in Vienna (section of Vienna Ring Road), 1913, Wien Museum

Budapest Metro under construction, Andrássy Avenue, photo by György Klösz (HU), 1894, Austrian National Library

Electrified underground railway in Budapest, 1896, Deutsche Fotothek

Electric trams in Vienna, 1902, Wien Museum

Another challenge that emerged was how to connect the different topologies of the city. For this purpose, special funicular railways were created in Budapest, Zagreb and Prague.
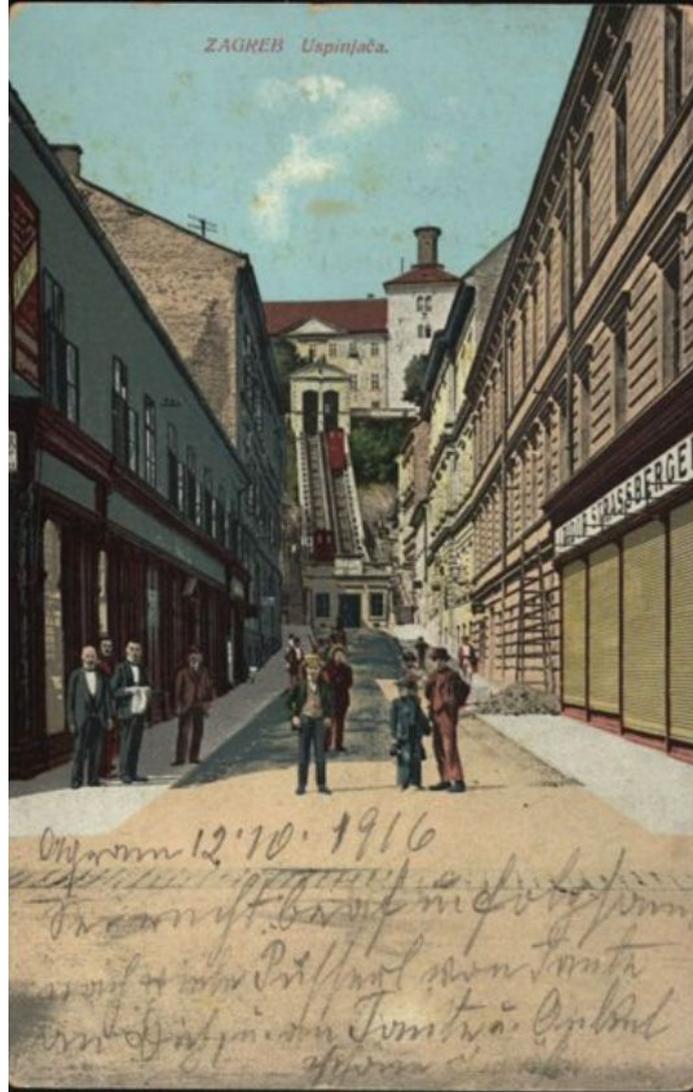
Postcard with Zagreb Funicular, 1916, National and University Library in Zagreb

The development of railways forced the reconstruction of the city centres, and even the redesign of entire areas to allow for their construction. In some cities, so-called dead-end railway stations were built, like in the east and west of Vienna or Budapest.

Postcard of the Eastern Railway Station (Keleti) in Budapest, 1911, Gömöri Museum in Putnok, Hungary

Western Railway Station (Nyugati) in Budapest, early 20th century, Hungarian Franciscan Library and Archive

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Eastern Railway Station (Ostbahnhof) in Vienna, 1874, Austrian National Library

City as a myth

At this time the myth was born of the modern city as the catalyst for the development of culture and civilization.

Entire districts gained separate characteristics and began to be seen through the prism of their function or dominant group of residents. For example, the working-class district was different from the bourgeoisie's fashionable district, or the villa suburbs.

Postcard with Andrássy Avenue in Budapest, 1908, Hungarian National Digital Archive

At first gas-lit lanterns were a symbol of modernity, later followed by electricity. Artists used this new illuminated city and turned it into a separate painting theme – Paris, for instance, became the "city of lights".


Ludwik de Laveaux (PL), *Place de l'Opéra in Paris*, circa 1893, National Museum in Warsaw

Rapid urbanization and industrialization, and hence moving from the countryside to the city, meant a radical lifestyle change for many people.

People were exposed to various problems (exploitation, prostitution, disease) on a previously unknown scale.

Károly Ferenczy (HU), *In front of the posters*, 1891, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest

With time the "anti-myth" of the city emerged as a dangerous, sinister space where one could be exploited. Scenes related to this also appeared in painting from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Karel Myslbek (CZ), *Accident on the building site*, 1909, National Gallery Prague

Jakub Schikaneder (CZ), *Murder in the house*, 1890, National Gallery Prague

Great remodelling

Throughout the 19th century, the reconstruction of European capitals made them models for other cities. Although today we see only the end results, it often took decades, and cities were almost always under construction.

Paris (modernized under the leadership of Georges-Eugène Haussmann) and London were considered the most important. Over time, Vienna also became a perfect example, especially for the cities of Central Europe.

Avenue des Champs-Élysées in Paris, circa 1890-1900, Library of Congress

First and foremost, efforts were made to introduce more space and light into the city. Wide streets were cut through, squares were marked out, and boulevards were created to ease transportation. This also facilitated the movement of the military in the event of riots.

One of the goals of modernization was to rid the streets of the irregular and tangled medieval networks, and to design the city in such a way to continue its development.

Kärntner Ring (section of Vienna Ring Road), circa 1890-1900, Library of Congress

Old city walls

In the past, cities were usually surrounded by walls and fortifications. Although they protected the city in case of a siege, they deemed to be a serious barrier to its expansion.

The removal of old fortifications therefore became a natural impulse for development. In this way, additional space was made for buildings. The lack of walls also made it possible to annex suburban villages or empty land around the city centre.

Władysław Malecki (PL), *View of the Wawel Castle*, 1873, National Museum in Warsaw

Rural areas near Wawel Castle in Cracow, soon annexed by the city

In Cracow, between 1822-1830, the former city walls were replaced with Planty, a park surrounding the Old Town.

Planty Park (green area around the city center)

Map of Cracow, circa 1910, National Library in Warsaw
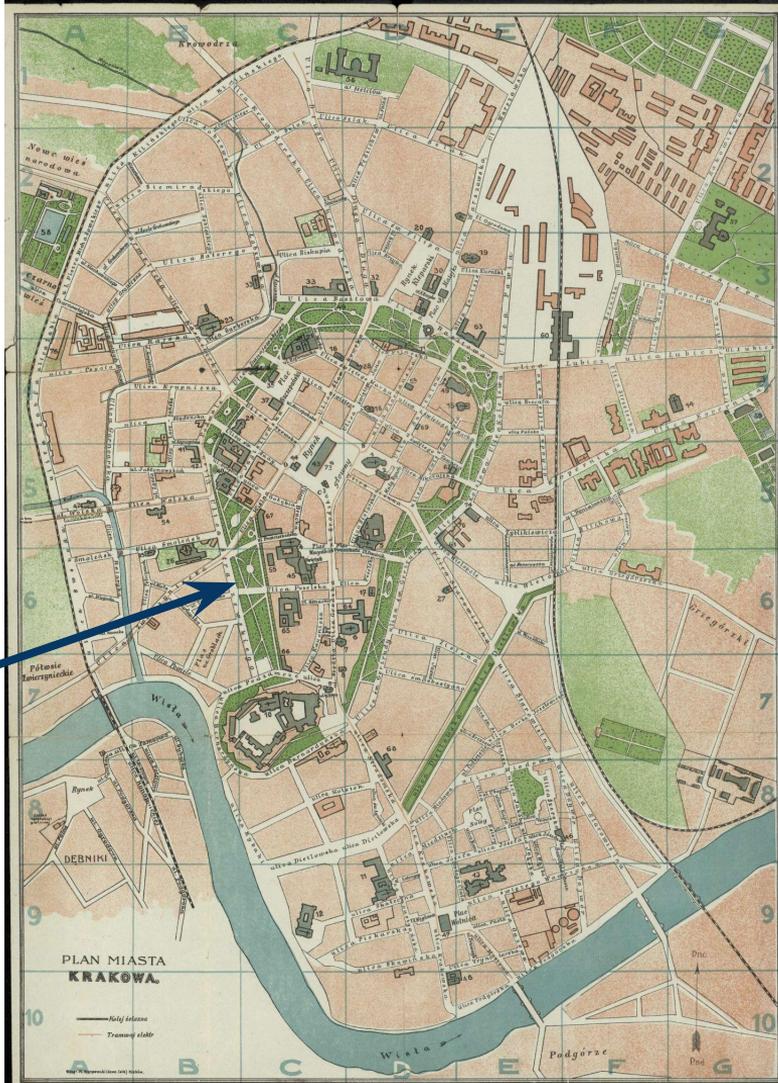
Witold Wojtkiewicz (PL), *Planty Park in Cracow*,
1905, National Museum in Warsaw

Jan Stanisławski (PL), *Fragment of the Planty Park*,
circa 1905, National Museum in Cracow
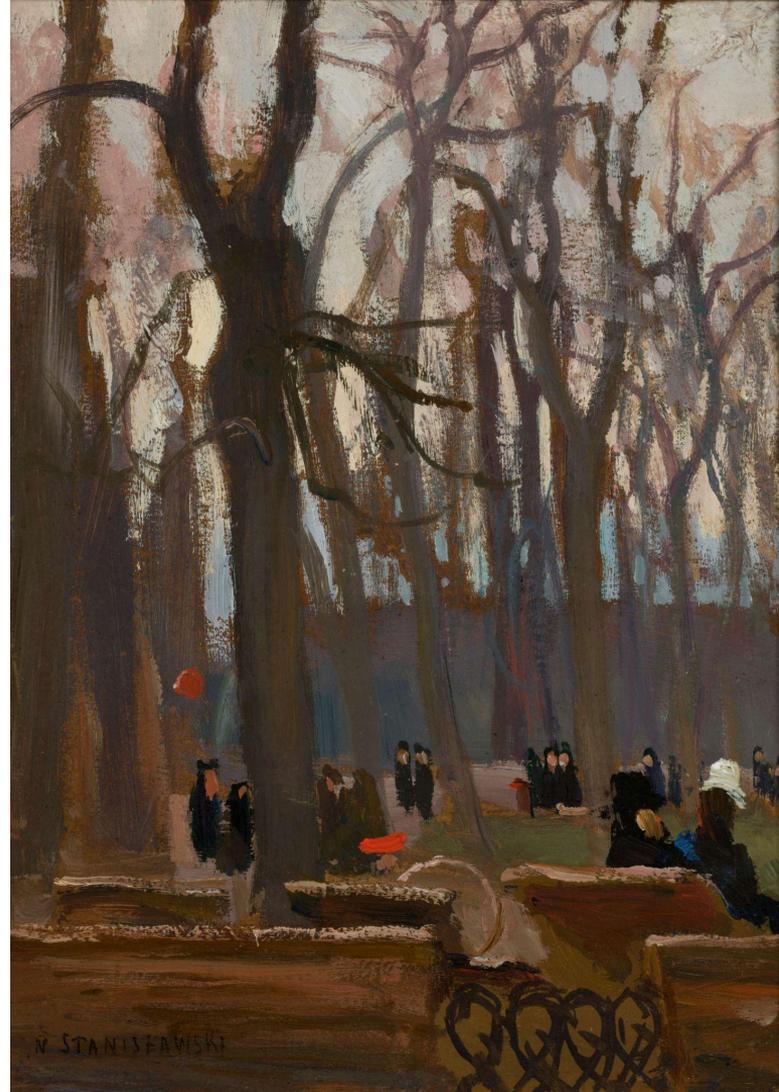
Vienna Ring

One model example of the reconstruction of former fortified areas turned out to be the Vienna Ring.

This was largely the result of the Spring of Nations (1848) in Vienna, when protesters erected barricades in the narrow streets and the ring of fortifications proved completely unnecessary. The city walls were removed, wide boulevards were laid out, and the neighbouring districts were integrated with modes of transportation.

Ladislav Eugen Petrovits (AT/CZ), *Opening of the Vienna Ring Road on May 1, 1865*, 1865, Wien Museum

Vienna Ring Road
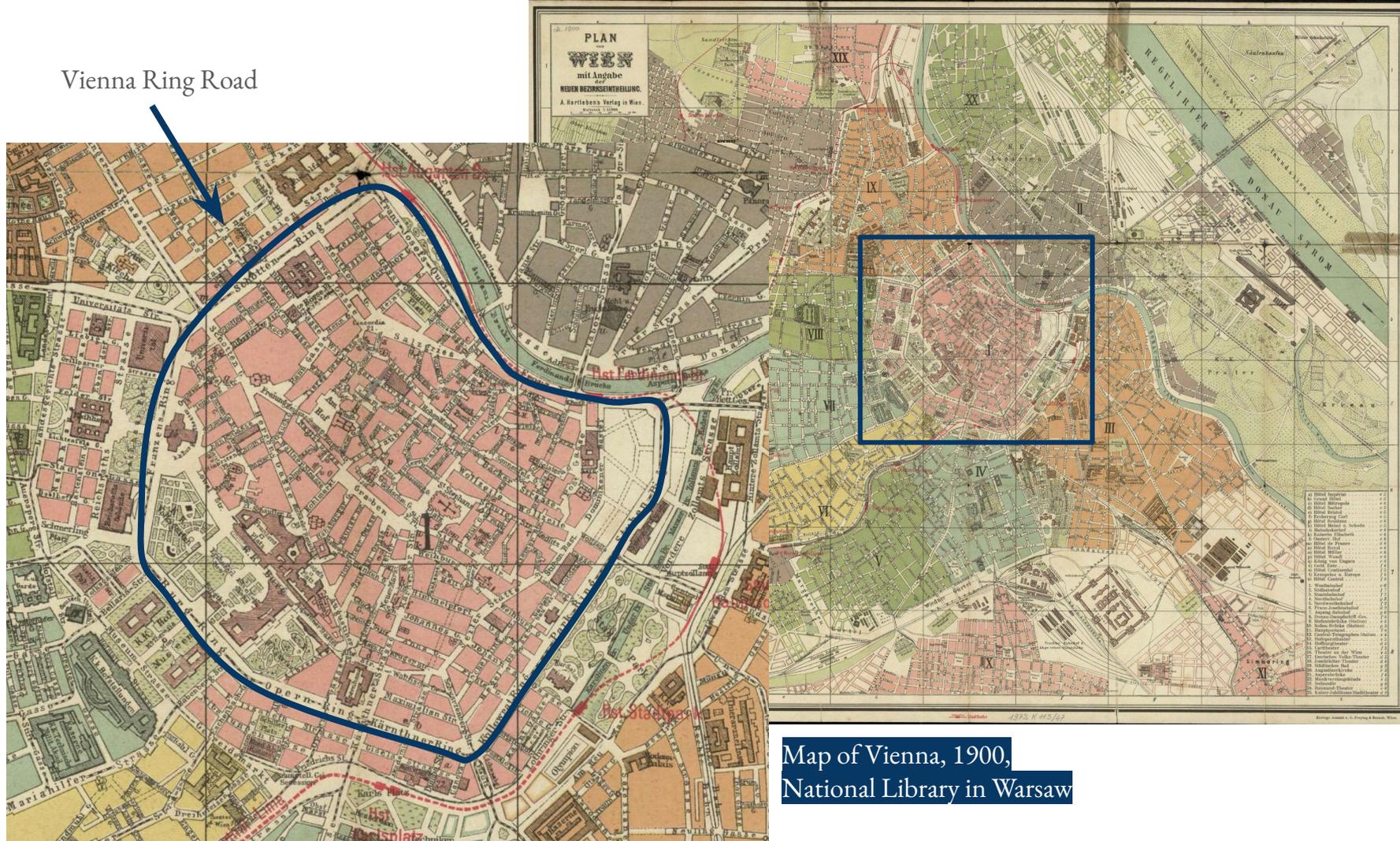
Map of Vienna, 1900,
National Library in Warsaw

Map of Vienna, 1844,
Kujawsko-Pomorska Digital Library

Map of Vienna, 1866,
Austrian National Library
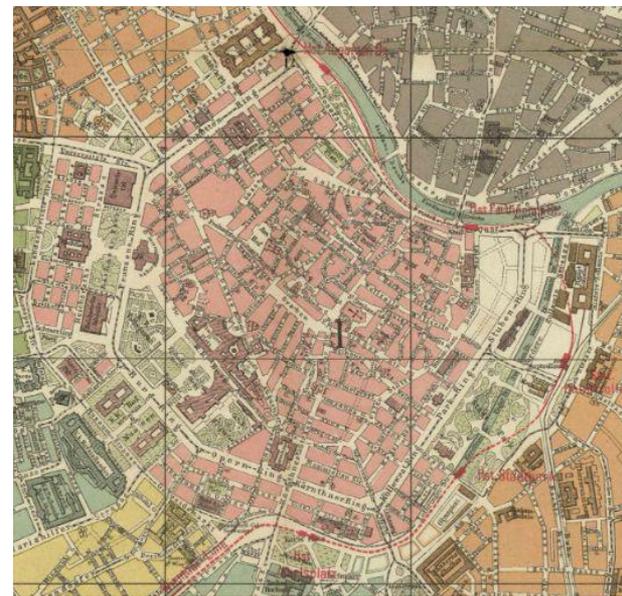
Map of Vienna, 1900,
National Library in Warsaw

View from the tower of the Vienna City Hall towards Natural History Museum, photo by Michael Frankenstein & Comp., 1883, Wien Museum

Edifices were built on the representative boulevard, without which the great capital could not function: parliament, ministry of war, city hall, university, academy of fine arts, art museum, Natural History Museum, city theatre, opera house and residential buildings.

The buildings by the Ring presented the most important functions of a modern city:
political-administrative,
university-scientific,
cultural-formative and residential.

Volkstheater in Vienna, 1898, Theatermuseum in Vienna

Der neue Parlamentspalast in Wien. Originalzeichnung von L. E. Petrowitsch.

Ladislav Eugen Petrovits (AT/CZ), Austrian Parliament Building in Vienna, 1884, Petőfi Literary Museum in Budapest

Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, circa 1890-1900, Library of Congress

Burgtheater in Vienna, circa 1890-1905, Library of Congress

OPER — OPERNRING.

The Ring became a showcase for the imperial ambitions of Emperor Franz Joseph I of Austria and made Vienna one of the most admired cities in Europe.

RINGSTRASSENKORSO.

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Theodor Zasche (AT), *Ringstraßenkorso*, 1900, Austrian National Library

New city: Budapest

In 1867, the Austrian Empire was transformed into the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Five years later, the Hungarian Parliament merged the three Danube cities of Pest (the capital), Buda (the traditional royal seat), and Óbuda into a single center: Budapest.

The urban development of the new city became a spectacular example of the great reconstruction. The new state system and the unification of the cities required a number of important investments: from bridges and train stations to public buildings.

Elizabeth Boulevard in Budapest, early 20th century, Hungarian Museum of Trade and Tourism

Construction soon began on a neo-Gothic parliament building on the Danube, modelled in part on the London parliament. Andrássy Avenue was laid out in the city centre, along which the neo-Renaissance Hungarian State Opera House was erected. The construction of St. Stephen's Basilica continued for many years, only to be completed in 1905.

Hungarian State Opera House, circa 1910, Hungarian National Museum in Budapest

St. Stephen's Basilica in Budapest, 1900,
Budapest City Archives

Andrássy Avenue in Budapest, circa 1890,
Hungarian National Museum in Budapest

Further investments were connected to the celebration of the millennium of the Hungarian state, which was in 1896. In addition to the organization of the Universal Exhibition, a subway line was opened, and the representative Grand Boulevard was built. Heroes' Square was also built at this time, housing the Hall of Art (Palace of Art).
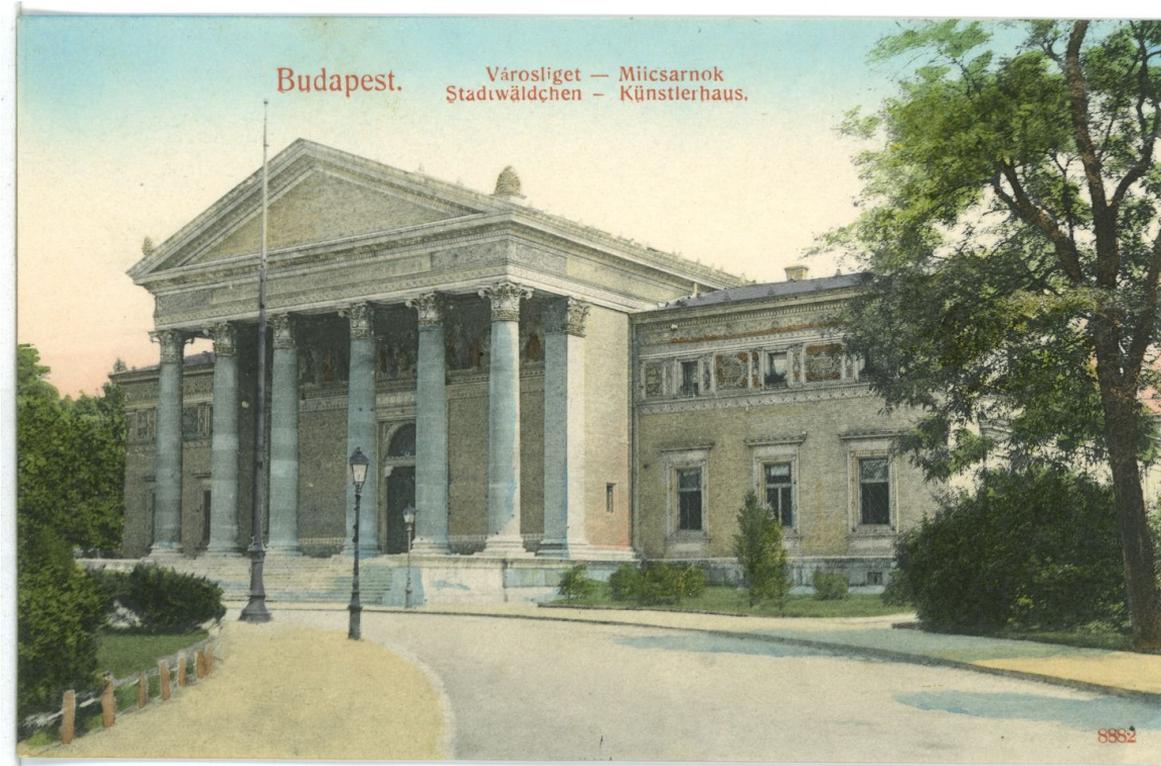

Hall of Art (Palace of Art) in Budapest, 1907, Deutsche Fotothek
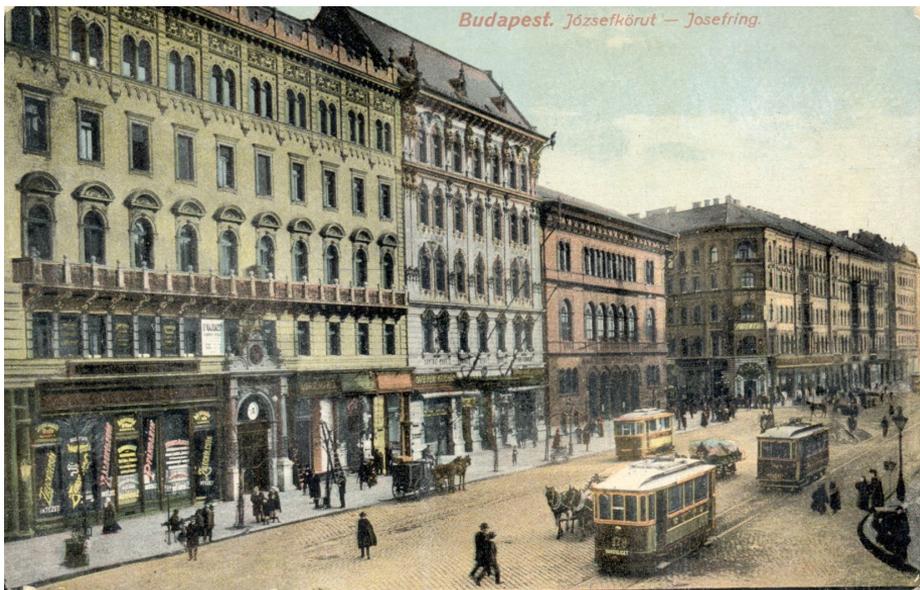
József Boulevard in Budapest (section of Grand Boulevard), 1910, Hungarian Museum of Trade and Tourism

Hungarian Parliament Building, early 20th century, Hungarian Franciscan Library and Archive
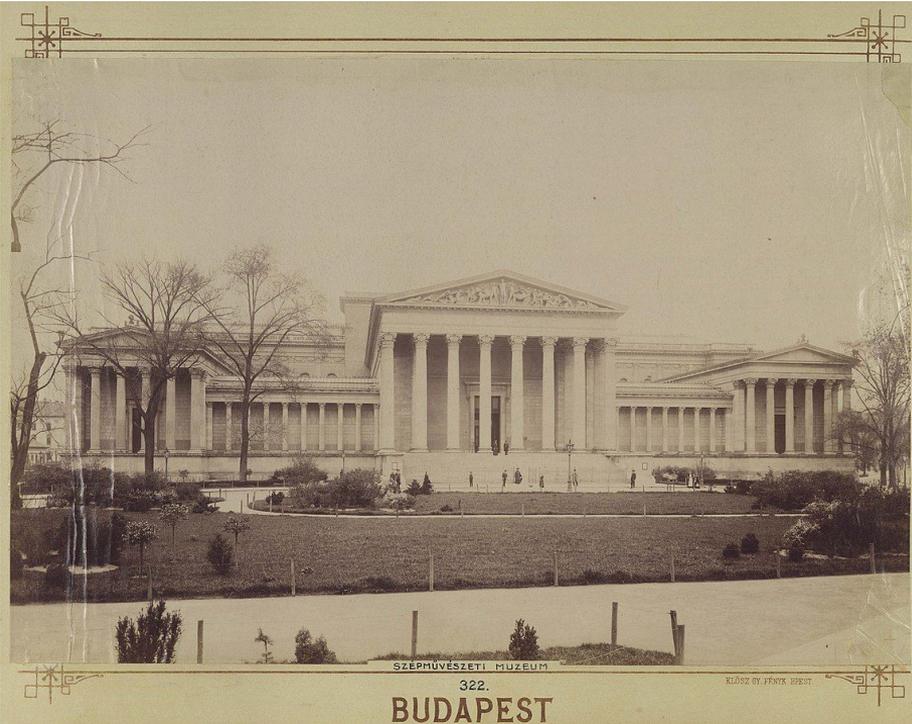
Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, 1906,
Budapest City Archives

Ferenc Boulevard in Budapest (section of Grand Boulevard),
early 20th century, Hungarian Franciscan Library and Archive

To demolish or to protect?

In addition to fortifications, there was other architecture – although important in earlier eras – that became an obstacle to further development of the city. Examples of this were some churches and monastic buildings.

Demolishing of church of the Holy Spirit in Cracow, photo by Ignacy Krieger (PL), before 1892, National Digital Archives, Warsaw

At the end of the 19th century, in Cracow, despite the protests of Jan Matejko (at that time the most famous Polish painter) the decision to demolish the hospital and monastery complex in the name of the Holy Spirit was made.

Matejko considered it a historical building, worth preserving and protecting. However, in the opinion of the city council, the buildings were in poor condition and took up needed space in order to build a city theatre, which Cracow lacked at the time.

Juliusz Słowacki Theatre in Cracow, 1895, National Library in Warsaw

Poverty and hygiene

It was decided to demolish entire quarters that were considered "unhygienic" – often cheap, wooden housing, occupied by the poor. They were in danger of fires (which could spread to other districts), on the brink of collapse, and overcrowded, lightless, damp apartments became a breeding ground for diseases. Such districts included, for example, the Powiśle in Warsaw.

Aleksander Gierymski (PL), *Sand workers [on Powiśle]*, 1887, National Museum in Warsaw

Squares and parks were created as part of the city's concern for fresh air, while the empty, green space between building quarters inhibited the spread of fires.

Johann Nepomuk Geller (AT), *On the meadow*, 1901, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna

Disasters vs. expansion

The causes of urban reconstruction were not only due to political decisions, but also because of natural disasters. Significant urban changes incurred in Cracow after a fire (1850), in Szeged (Hungary) after a great flood (1879), and in Zagreb after an earthquake (1880).

In a way, the opportunity presented by destruction was used to create modern buildings from scratch. First of all, wide boulevards and tenement houses were rebuilt, giving them a historical costume and modern construction more resistant to fire.

Adam Gorczyński (PL), *Dominican Church after the Fire of 1850*, 1850, National Museum in Cracow

Szeged during the great flood of 1879, photo by György Klösz (HU), Austrian National Library

Szeged during the great flood of 1879, photo by Illés Plohn (HU), Albertina, Vienna
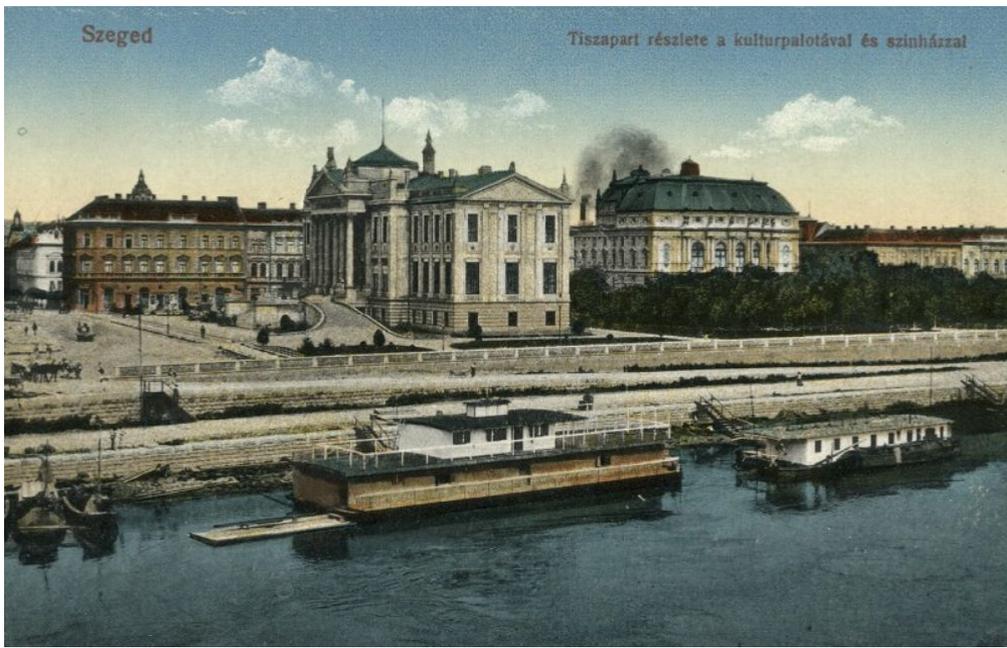
Postcard from Szeged with Palace of Culture (today Móra Ferenc Museum), 1916, Austrian National Library

Theater in Szeged, 1883, Austrian National Library

Zagreb Cathedral after earthquake, photo by Ivan Standl (HR), 1880 , The Digital Collections of the Zagreb City Libraries

Damaged Zagreb Cathedral after earthquake, photo by Ivan Standl (HR), 1880, Museum of Arts and Crafts, Zagreb

Reconstructed neo-Gothic Zagreb Cathedral, 1910, National Museum in Prague

Ban Jelačić Square in Zagreb damaged by the earthquake of 1880, from the album *A memento of the Zagreb earthquake from 9th November 1880* by Herman Fickert, Zagreb City Museum

Ban Jelačić Square, on the left reconstructed neo-Gothic Zagreb Cathedral, 1910, National Museum in Prague

City of military and officials

Representative office buildings and parliaments were a response to the change in the management of the modern state. Due to the increasing role the state played in the lives of citizens (from education to universal military service, and thus bureaucracy), appropriate buildings had to be built.

Jindřich Tomec (AT/CZ), *Building of Postal Savings Bank in Vienna*, circa 1900, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna

Following the Spring of Nations, authorities were afraid of riots within cities. Buildings were created for armies to suppress them – barracks, military academies, manoeuvring and training areas. Such a role was played, for example, by Cracow's Błonia.

Juliusz Kossak (PL), *Cracow cavalry honour escort accompanying the Emperor on his ride through the Błonia Meadows*, from the series *Inspection trip of Emperor Franz Joseph I around Galicia in September 1880*, 1881, National Museum in Cracow

Industry and workers

With the Second Industrial Revolution, cities became centres of industry, trade, and communication. Workers' districts developed rapidly, such as the Ferencváros in Budapest, and were inhabited by villagers who moved to cities and became workers. Factories and the palaces of factory owners were also built.

Elevator in Ferencváros, Budapest, circa 1900, Budapest City Archives

A good example is Lodz, a city that became the centre of the textile industry in Poland and rapidly developed around emerging factories. In 1830 it had 4 thousand inhabitants, while in 1914 – already half a million.


View of Łódź, Poland with Juliusz Heinzel's Company buildings, early 20th century, Central Museum of Textiles, Łódź

Culture and leisure

In the 19th century, public museums and galleries began to emerge, which needed to be housed in representative buildings. Among the most popular bourgeois entertainments was the theatre and opera, whose monumental edifices had to accommodate large audiences.

Still another impetus for urban redevelopment were general exhibitions. Not only were special exhibition areas created, but striking pavilions were designed to serve the public permanently after the event for example as exhibition halls.

Burgtheater in Vienna, postcard by Robert Leopold Richter (AT), 1913, Wien Museum
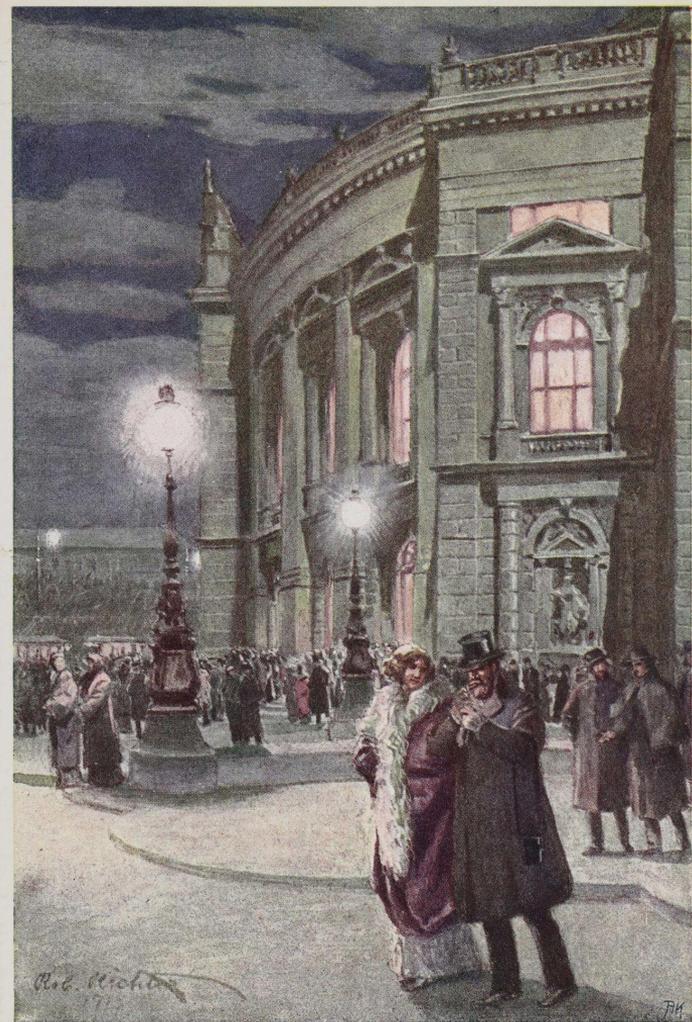
Theatre in Lviv, 1915, National
Library in Warsaw
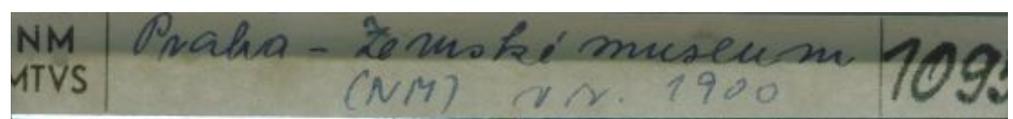
National Museum in Prague, 1900,
National Museum in Prague

Comedy Theatre of Budapest, 1896,
Hungarian Museum of Trade and Tourism

National Theatre in Prague, circa
1905, National Museum in Prague
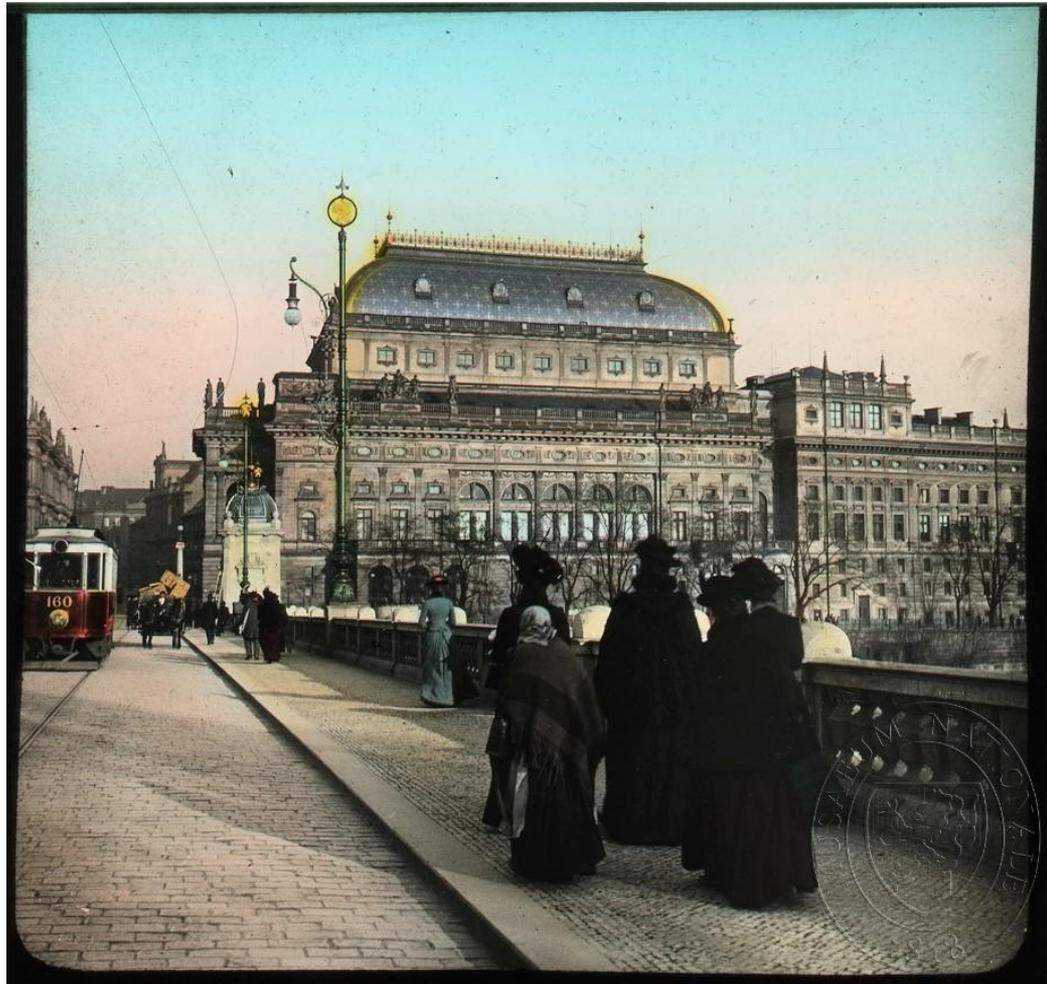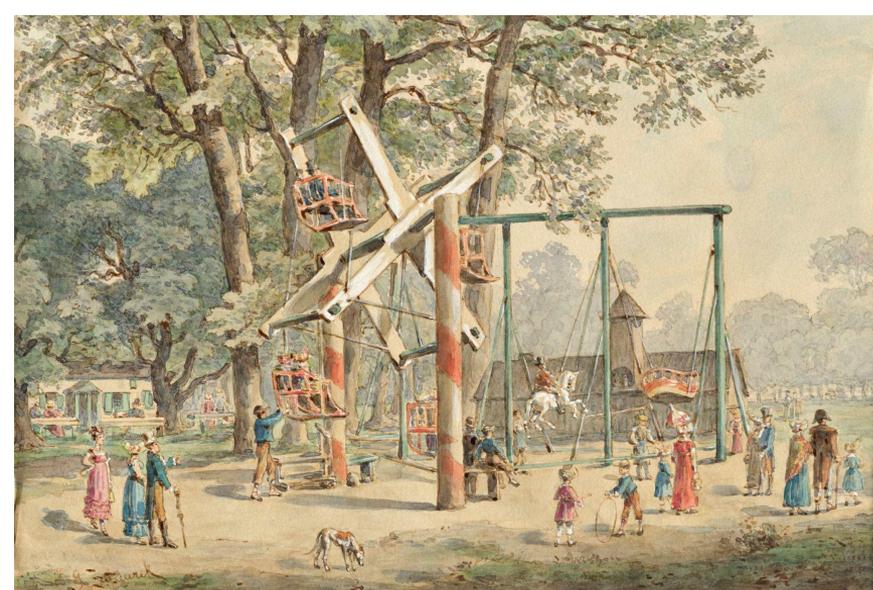
Gustav Zafaurek (AT), *Swings in Wurstelprater* [amusement park in the Wiener Prater], 1900, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna

On the right Prater Park in Vienna, circa 1890-1905, Library of Congress

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