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## Urban Places, Criminal Spaces: Police and Crime in Fin de Siècle Budapest

This essay examines the processes by which police oversight came to emerge in Budapest at the turn of the century and expanded to cover ever larger sections of the city. It also considers aspects of public safety from the perspective of the relationship between the capital and the urban communities on its periphery. The patterns of the expansion of police authorities in the urban space suggest that, rather than exercise control over social groups (workers, the poor) perceived as potentially dangerous by representatives of power, the police were called upon to protect private property, and in particular to exercise authority in parts of the city in which members of the elite and middle class lived. In contrast, in the outlying parts of the city one has the impression at first glance that the police increased its presence first and foremost in areas in which members of the working class lived. Closer scrutiny, however, reveals that the expansion of the authority of the municipal police to the outlying parts of the city served not to further the “compelled acculturation” of workers, but rather as a means of removing “undesirable” elements (criminals, vagrants, and beggars who traveled between the inner districts and the outskirts) from the capital.

Historical scholarship is devoting increasing attention to the notion of space and spatiality. The utilization of space as an analytic category has become so widespread in Western social history that, in addition to “linguistic” and “cultural” turns, some have begun to talk about a “spatial turn” as well.<sup>1</sup> Urban-history research ascribes particular importance to the notion of space. Few social historians from Central and Eastern Europe have dealt with the issues of the police and the everyday presence of crime in urban space. Thomas Lindenberger examined strikes and various uprisings in pre-First World War Berlin as well as the “everyday clashes” (*alltäglicher Kleinkrieg*) that took place between Berliners and police patrolling the streets of the city during this period.<sup>2</sup>

The present analysis will focus primarily on incidents of the latter type. However, one must not overlook the interaction between workers and state

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1 For a more detailed account see Gábor Gyáni, *Budapest – túl jön és rosszon: A nagyvárosi múlt mint tapasztalat* [Budapest—Beyond Good and Bad: Metropolitan Past as an Experience] (Budapest: Corvina, 2008), 9–21.

2 Thomas Lindenberger, *Straßenpolitik: zur Sozialgeschichte der öffentlichen Ordnung in Berlin 1900 bis 1914* [Street Policy: the Social History of Public Order in Berlin from 1900 to 1914] (Bonn: Dietz Nachfolger, 1995).

authority present on the streets: the assertion of some historians that the increasing supervision over public spaces in the modern city took place primarily in working-class districts serves as one of the points of departure for this study.<sup>3</sup> Therefore our primary goal is to find out how Budapest police gained control over the city's public and semi-public spaces around the beginning of the twentieth century.

In the first half of this study, we will analyze the manner in which police established and subsequently extended their authority to an increasing proportion of the public spaces in Budapest. The decades between the 1890s and the outbreak of the First World War are especially interesting from this standpoint, since it was precisely during these years that Budapest underwent its most dynamic period of development. This development entailed not only benefits, but presented the city administration and police with new problems as well.

One of the most significant consequences of the urban development that occurred in Budapest in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was the emergence of an expansive suburban zone around the city. In the second half of this study, we will examine the public-safety aspects of relations between Budapest and communities located on the perimeter of the city. The present analysis thus highlights not only the significance of discourse surrounding crime within the police and public milieu during this period, but deals with general urban-historical phenomena connected to relations between Budapest and its suburbs through an examination of the local press as well.

### *1. Attempt to Localize Police Presence in Urban Space*

The distinction between public and private spaces represents one of the unique features of the modern city. The process of separating these two types of space was not, naturally, free of conflict, since certain urban spaces qualified as public also functioned as private spaces for certain social groups. However, city administrative officials and police, who had begun to exercise increasing surveillance over urban spaces, became less and less tolerant of manifestations of private life in such spaces.<sup>4</sup> Authorities attempted to restrict usage of city streets exclusively to traffic, enacting various municipal and police regulations

3 Gábor Gyáni, *Az utca és a szalon: Társadalmi térhasználat Budapesten, 1870–1940* [The Street and the Salon: Social Spatial Usage in Budapest, 1870–1940] (Budapest: Új Mandátum, 1999), 41–3.

4 *Ibid.*, 34.

aimed at preventing other types of activity in public spaces.<sup>5</sup> Many previously tolerated modes of behavior became unacceptable as a result of the 1879 law on petty offenses. Robert D. Storch characterized the process of tightening the degree of supervision over the growing urban masses as follows:

Despite some dramatic confrontations, the police carried out their mission as ‘domestic missionary’ in the largest cities not by pursuing a policy of over suppression at every opportunity, but rather through the pressure of a constant surveillance of all the key institutions of working-class neighborhood and recreational life. [...] It was precisely the pressure of an unceasing surveillance and not the intense but sporadic episodes of active intervention and suppression which ultimately produced the main impact on working-class neighborhood.<sup>6</sup>

The current study examines the process of extending police surveillance over public spaces in Budapest at the beginning of the twentieth century. The primary source of information for this analysis is the *Budapesti útmutató* [Budapest Guide] published annually beginning in 1902. This publication, which later bore the revealing subtitle *Az utca rendje* [Order in the Street], listed the precise location of all the police guard posts in Budapest. Present study used this data in an attempt to localize these posts in the city’s public spaces.<sup>7</sup> The annual report of Budapest State Police published in 1904 is particularly interesting from this perspective, because it contains the planned location of new guard rooms and posts in the city. Although a chronic lack of money and personnel prevented the Budapest police from ever establishing these new guard rooms and posts, the 1904 plan does provide a clear indication of the locations in Budapest where police officials felt the need to extend the force’s surveillance.

## The Main Characteristics of Police Surveillance

The periodical *Rendőri Lapok* [Police News] described street policing in Budapest in the 1890s as follows in an 1894 article entitled “*A fővárosi államrendőrség*” [The Budapest State Police]:

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5 Lindenberger, *Straßenpolitik*, 65–6.

6 Robert D. Storch, “The Policeman as Domestic Missionary: Urban Discipline and Popular Culture in Northern England, 1850–1880,” *Journal of Social History* 4 (1976): 487.

7 This analysis uses the 1908 version of a Budapest map based on data collected in 1870–74 to identify the location of streets, house numbers and buildings listed in the *Budapesti útmutató*.

Street service in Budapest is a combined system. It is based neither on fixed guard posts (as in London) or guard patrols (such as the night service in Paris), but is mixed. During the day there are only guard posts, while at night guard patrols also perform service. We do not have separate night watch, as in Berlin (the *Nachtwächterkorps*), but only a shop guard, though this does not belong to the cadre of the police and as a private institution does not in the least satisfy the requirements expected of modern night shop guards.<sup>8</sup>

The system described above remained unchanged over subsequent years. Police manuals and guide books published beginning in the 1900s illustrate the unique aspects of the Budapest police's surveillance service. Perhaps the most important of these publications was the 1906 *Rendőrközegek tankönyve* [Police Officer's Handbook], which offered detailed information regarding the Budapest police's surveillance service. The text book reveals that four police officers were assigned to posts located outside buildings and two police officers were assigned to posts located inside buildings.<sup>9</sup> The book states that police officers were prohibited from engaging in the following activities while on duty: leaving their post without permission, smoking or sleeping at their posts, entering a location requiring police surveillance without reason, partaking in "unwarranted conversation" and



Figure 1. Police officer catching a criminal.

Source: Kornél Tábori, *Pesti élet* [Life in Pest] (Budapest: Révai és Salamon, 1910)

8 *Rendőri Lapok* [Police News], October 14, 1894, 5.

9 Imre Laky, *Rendőrközegek tankönyve* [Police Officials' Text Book] (Budapest: Pátria, 1906), 291.

receiving gifts or “free provisions.” Police patrols maintained public safety on the more sparsely populated fringes of Budapest. One of these patrols consisted of two police officers, either mounted or, more commonly, on foot.

The surveillance service proved to be especially difficult at night, when “invasive patrolling” was used instead of static surveillance so that police officers would “not leave a portion of their watch without continual supervision for lengthy periods of time.”<sup>10</sup> A 1913 report from the Budapest police chief reveals that shop owners in the city center complained on several occasions that the night service was ineffective and that nighttime burglaries had increased, thus suggesting that the system described above did not always work as intended.<sup>11</sup>

### Police Surveillance and the Social Map of the City

In addition to the *Budapesti útmutató*, reports from the Budapest chief of police also provide an important source of information needed for an examination of the expansion of police surveillance over public spaces in the city. The content and amount of detail in these reports differ greatly depending on the district of the city in question, though they do specify the relationship between the specific social-spatial features of each district and the measures the police needed to take in order to maintain public safety in the district.

The first district of Budapest provided the city police with the greatest amount of work. Migration from the outskirts of the city represented the primary source of problems in the district, which counted 84,727 inhabitants in 1913. According to the Budapest police chief’s report regarding the latter year, such migration entailed the arrival to the district of “the lower social classes and the dubious livelihoods and elements presenting a danger to public order and safety.” The police’s surveillance service did not have sufficient capacity to keep watch over the enormous amount of territory on the periphery of the district. (This outlying territory constituted just over 90 percent of the total area of the first district, which at the time included sectors of mostly vacant land now located in the 11th and 12th districts.) The section of the report dealing with first district stated that “burglaries were very frequent, particularly of uninhabited villas and summer homes during the wintertime.” The report added that poultry theft was frequent in this sector of Budapest, noting that vacated villas located in

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10 Ibid., 291–300.

11 *A Budapest Fő- és Székvárosi Állami Rendőrség 1913. évi működése* [The 1913 Operations of the Budapest State Police] (Budapest: 1914), 69.

the popular residential and hiking district on the Buda side of the city “provide dangerous livelihoods with such good hiding places that even the repeated and partially successful raids are hardly able to permanently cleanse the district.”<sup>12</sup>

Data in the *Budapesti útmutató* casts the text of the report in a different light, indicating that the greatest concentration of police in Budapest was located in the Buda Castle district, particularly in the vicinity of the Royal Palace and on roads leading to the castle. The data suggests that the Budapest police’s surveillance network was much less extensive in the adjacent Krisztinaváros and Tabán neighborhoods. The increase in police sentinels in the year 1913 took place not in the frequently cited districts of Budapest, but in southern Buda.

The Budapest police chief’s report portrayed the city’s second and third districts as more calm than the first from a law-enforcement perspective, attributing this to the stable social composition of the population living here. According to the report, there was no serious crime in these districts, only petty theft and minor burglaries.<sup>13</sup> Police surveillance in the second and third districts focused on Margaret Bridge and its main access roads in 1913, while the planned extension of surveillance to the *Rózsadomb* [Rose Hill] villa district planned in 1904 also took place in the former year.

The historic Óbuda, or third district stretching up the Danube River to the northern perimeter of Budapest presented the city’s police with a much greater challenge in terms of surveillance than did the more densely populated second district. The Budapest police concentrated its attention in the third district on its Fő [Main] Square and the Margaret Hospital. The police likely decided to place the hospital under heightened surveillance due to the proximity of the Óbuda brick factories, which were notorious criminal hangouts in the early 1900s.

The 1913 report offered a much more detailed social and criminal depiction of the districts on the Pest side of Budapest. The report stated that the fourth district bordering on the Kiskörút [Small Boulevard] presented Budapest police with the least number of problems in this part of the city because “the population consists primarily of elements to be counted as part of the intelligentsia.” The Budapest police chief’s report attributed the social homogeneity of the fourth district to its high rental fees and lack of small apartments. The report noted, however, that crime had increased in this district as well as a result of the general economic and consequent moral crisis in Hungary: “The struggle for survival

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12 Ibid., 60–1.

13 Ibid., 67.

drives new victims into the arms of crime every single day, increasingly even those who previously knew of destitution and crime only from the pages of the press.”<sup>14</sup> It was perhaps not therefore coincidental that the number of thefts, burglaries and shop robberies increased in the fourth district, the main commercial district in Budapest.

Police in the old inner-city fourth district, the smallest in Budapest in both area and population, did not have to contend with the challenge of extending surveillance activities to sparsely inhabited outskirts. Perhaps as a result of the fourth district’s central location and prominent commercial and touristic profile, the Budapest police established its most comprehensive observation network in the city in this district composed of an intricate web of winding streets and small, irregular spaces.

The police concentrated its presence to a similar degree in Budapest’s financial center located in the section of Lipótváros [Leopold Town] extending to the Nagykörút [Grand Boulevard]. In 1904, the Budapest police focused primarily on the Hungarian Parliament Building, the Supreme Court building and Szabadság [Liberty] Square, while in 1913 police placed the area of Dorottya and Nádor streets under heightened surveillance. The strengthened police presence in the latter sector of Lipótváros stemmed from the fact that the 1910 increase in personnel had taken place primarily in and around financial institutions. The Budapest police chief’s 1904 report reveals that the force intended to extend its reach to the primarily industrial districts lying beyond the Grand Boulevard, though had only partially implemented this plan by 1913.

The Budapest police’s deployment of sentinels described above clearly corresponds to its notion of the spatial arrangement of the district’s population. The police chief’s 1913 report declared that “from the perspective of social distribution, there is perhaps no other district in the city that displays as much diversity, no other district is arranged in such a unique way as Lipótváros.” The report divided the inner part of the district extending to the Nagykörút into two parts: one section between Alkotmány [Constitution] Street and Ferenc Deák Street encompassing “wholesalers, financial institutions, industrial enterprises, banking commission agents and the plutocracy in general, which consider it the most expedient to situate themselves around and near the stock exchange—the throbbing living space of the commercial and financial world”; and the section lying beyond Alkotmány Street in which predominately public buildings were located. According to the report, merchants, civil servants and private white-collar

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14 Ibid., 69.

workers “who had been driven out of the inner parts of Lipótváros” inhabited the section of the district lying beyond the Nagykörút that had not long before been the site of steam mills and lumber yards.<sup>15</sup> The report stated that the periphery of the district consisted of factories and housing for their workers.

The Budapest police identified a similar sectoral division in the city’s sixth district, known as Terézváros [Theresa Town]. The police divided this district into an inner sector bordered by Károly and Váci Boulevards (today known as Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Avenue) and the Felső Erdősor [Upper Forest Line]. The police chief’s 1913 report noted that this sector of Terézváros was the location of residential neighborhoods housing the “upper middle class mixed with the more distinguished middle class” and also served as a “center of brisk trade.”<sup>16</sup> This sector was the most densely populated and built-up part of the sixth district. The report identified the sector extending from Felső Erdősor Street to Aréna Avenue (today known as György Dózsa Avenue) as a villa district in which magnates, artists and “the more prominent middle class” lived. According to the report, Terézváros also included a third sector situated on the outskirts of the district, where workers and less prosperous social-classes had engaged in a pattern of “island-like settlement.”

Aréna Avenue therefore represents the most important dividing line on the police map of the district, one marking the gulf between “prosperity and poverty, satisfaction and dissatisfaction.” As a result of the sharp social and spatial separation that existed within the population of Terézváros, the Budapest police chief recommended that the district be divided into two parts in terms of police activity, because “this is the only way to guarantee adequate surveillance, permanent oversight and effective operations.” The police chief noted that such a division was also necessary due to the fact that “workers movements exercising an influence on the entire country stem from the population living on the outskirts of the district.”<sup>17</sup>

Data from the *Budapesti útmutató* suggests, however, that the periphery of the sixth district consisting primarily of industrial buildings and small colonies of workers was not under police surveillance of any kind at the beginning of the 1900s and that such surveillance within the district had extended only to the railway junction located on Mexikói [Mexican] Avenue by the year 1913. Though the number of police sentinels increased in Terézváros during this period, they

15 Ibid., 79–80.

16 Ibid., 83–4.

17 Ibid., 83–6.



were not concentrated in the “critical” areas cited in the report, but in the vicinity of the heavily travelled central locations of Andrásy Avenue, the Városliget [City Park] and Aréna Avenue.

The proposed division of the sixth district was based on concepts that require some further nuance. Maps of Terézváros from the early 1900s clearly demonstrate that a significant amount of the territory lying beyond Aréna Avenue was either uninhabited or only sparsely inhabited and that the danger the police attributed to workers’ movements was present only in the “working-class district” of Angyalföld located in the northern part of the district. The Budapest police chief’s 1912 report supports these conclusions, asserting that Angyalföld was a “meeting place for hooligan elements” and that “if disturbance rears its head at any location, the people of the street receive their most devoted and destructive reinforcements from Angyalföld.”<sup>18</sup>

The report on the seventh district known as Erzsébetváros [Elisabeth Town] called for this district to be divided into distinct law-enforcement sectors as well. The report stated that the seventh district consisted of four main territorial components based on the district’s social structure: the “intensive commercial hub” lying between Károly [Charles] Boulevard and Erzsébet Boulevard, home to the “more refined middle class”; the newly built-up area lying between Erzsébet Boulevard and Aréna Avenue, whose residents were “divided in equal proportion between the working- and middle-class”; the area lying beyond Aréna Avenue, which did not represent such a sharp dividing line as it did in Terézváros; and, finally, the Zugló neighborhood “to be taken completely as a peripheral territory.”<sup>19</sup>

It is interesting to note that the police report on the district did not even mention the most notorious section of Erzsébetváros—the neighborhood of the district known as “Csikágó” [Chicago] as a result of its checkerboard street pattern, rapid population growth and increasing crime rate.<sup>20</sup> In spite of Csikágó’s infamy, police concentrated their forces along the four previously mentioned avenues in the seventh district, deploying only two guards to the interior of this perilous neighborhood.

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18 *A Budapest Fő- és Székvárosi Állami Rendőrség 1912. évi működése* [The 1912 Operations of the Budapest State Police] (Budapest: 1913), 73.

19 *A Rendőrség 1913. évi működése* [The 1913 Operations of the Budapest State Police], 91–2.

20 Kornél Tábori and Vladimír Székely offer a decidedly plastic description of “Csikágó” in their 1908 work *Nyomorultak, gazemberek* [Wretched, Villains].

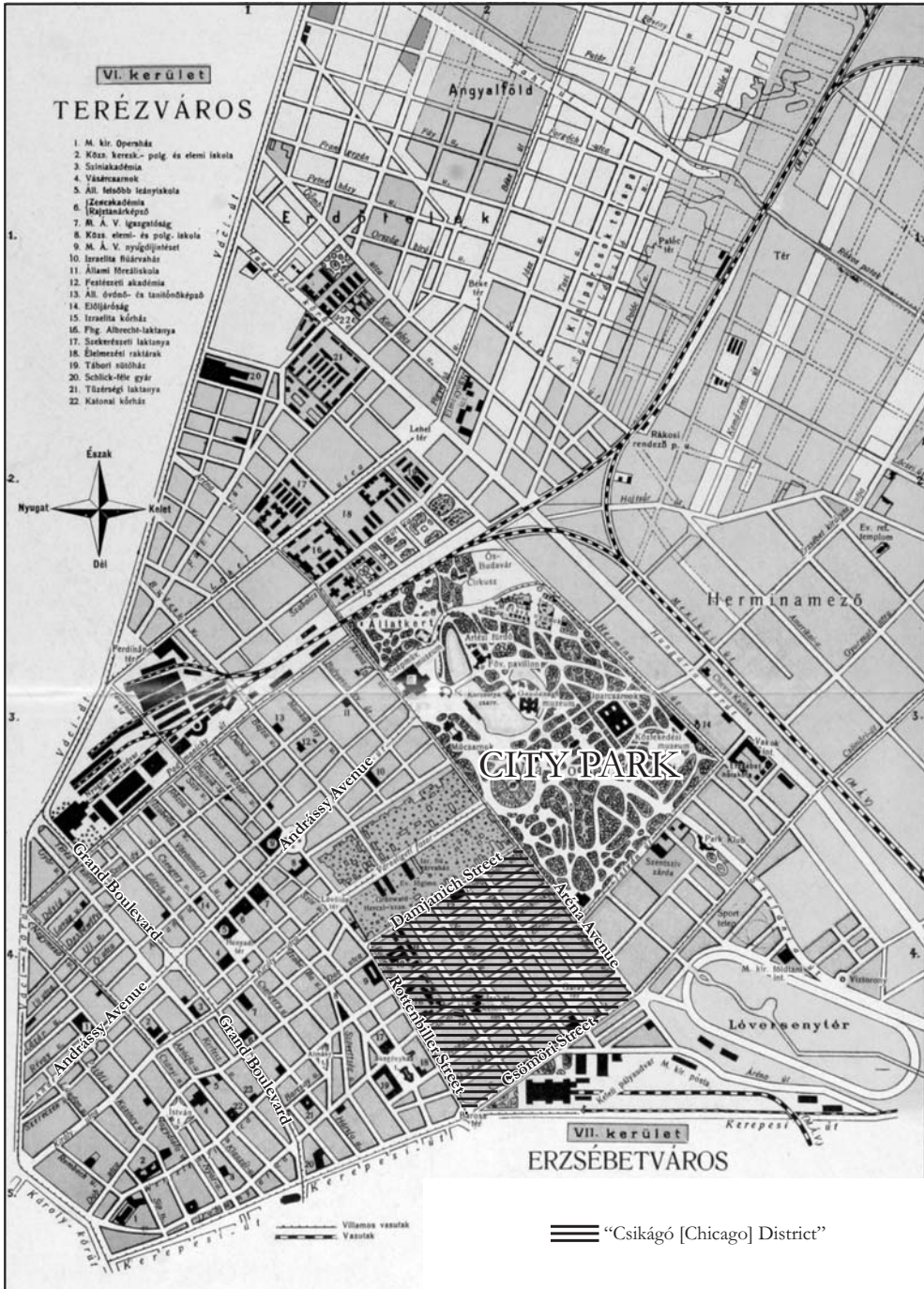


Figure 2. Inner Budapest and the neighborhood of the district known as “Csikágó” [Chicago]. Source: Map of Terézváros and Erzsébetváros (6th and 7th districts) in Gyula Kozma’s School Atlas, 1906. Museum Kiscell, Collection of City Maps.

The Budapest police chief's 1913 report asserted that public-safety conditions in the seventh district were satisfactory: "Although the extent of crime has expanded, it has exceeded the ordinary range of fluctuation mainly in its volume. Theft and burglaries have undergone a particular increase."<sup>21</sup> The report nevertheless recommended that police surveillance be extended only to the outskirts of Erzsébetváros.

The sixth district of Terézváros, the seventh district of Erzsébetváros and the eighth district of Józsefváros [Joseph Town] contained the highest populations of all the districts in Budapest in the early 1900s. The 1913 report did not provide a detailed analysis of the spatial distribution of the population inhabiting Józsefváros, because this district's relatively uniform degree of development and lack of peripheral territory made its division into sections impossible. In its analysis of public safety in Józsefváros, the report declared that members of "inferior classes" had taken up residence in "dives and overcrowded apartments" in the district, thus making the police's work much more difficult.<sup>22</sup>

The spatial distribution of police sentinels underwent no significant change in Józsefváros between the years 1904 and 1913. By the end of this period, eighth-district police had begun to focus their activity on Kerepesi, Köztemető, Orczy and Üllői Avenues forming the perimeter of the district, maintaining supervision over the latter roadway in cooperation with police from the neighboring ninth district.

Ferencváros [Francis Town] represents another Budapest district possessing an extremely diverse spatial distribution. The population of the inner portion of the district extending to the Grand Boulevard was primarily middle class, while that of the outer portion of the district was primarily working class. According to the Budapest police chief's 1913 report, the large periphery of this district was a "veritable industrial town whose workers live predominantly in nearby communities: Kispest, Erzsébetfalva, Soroksár and Csepel."<sup>23</sup> The most critical location in Ferencváros from a public-safety standpoint was the "protective forest" on the border of the district located between the Gubacsi dűlő neighborhood and Erzsébetfalva [Elisabeth Village], which the report indicated was ravaged by gangs of thieves. This area, known locally as "Little Bakony" in reference to the Bakony Hills of west-central Hungary, was especially significant for residents of Erzsébetfalva, many of whom crossed it on their way to work at the local weapons factory. For the Budapest police, this territory represented

21 *A Rendőrség 1913. évi működése* [The 1913 Operations of the Budapest State Police], 92.

22 *Ibid.*, 94.

23 *Ibid.*, 100–2.

a “no man’s land” into which Pest County gendarmes could not venture because it lay within the boundaries of the city. A journalist writing in the *Erzsébetfalvai Közlöny* [Elisabeth Village Gazette] declared that people rarely entered this sector of Ferencváros, noting that “it sometimes occurs that as [the “state police”] enjoy themselves in the dense succession of taverns, one can hear cries for help emanating from those being assaulted in the bushes.”<sup>24</sup>

The 1913 report contained a very positive assessment of the expansive, yet sparsely populated tenth district of Kőbánya [Stone Quarry]:

The tenth district has projected large-scale future development over the past year. [There were] massive projects to build the horse-racing course and the nat’l. breeding-animal marketplace, while hundreds of workers from the new factories being built on Maglódi and Gyömrői Avenues increased the size of the population and at the same time reduced the expanse of vacant plots of land.<sup>25</sup>

The rise in population and built-up territory in Kőbánya presented the police with a greater number of law-enforcement tasks in this district. The report identifies those locations in the tenth district where the police were unable to adequately perform their surveillance duties: Gyömrői and Ceglédi avenues, the district’s railway freight-yards, the horse-racing course, the animal marketplace and the neighborhood of Rákosfalva. The report concluded that these locations “should be disconnected from the activity on the district’s outskirts” located around the Rákoskeresztúr Cemetery and the agricultural land in the Felsőrákos area.<sup>26</sup>

An article that the Police Chief of Kőbánya, Miklós Rédey published in the local newspaper *Kőbányai Hírek* [Kőbánya News] in 1912 reveals more information regarding public-safety conditions in the district. The police chief stated in his article that “nine-tenths” of Kőbánya’s population consisted of industrious working people, adding that the district “virtually lacks the inferior element that customarily endangers public safety.” According to Rédey’s article, much of the police’s work in Kőbánya stemmed from pub brawls and accidents at the large number of industrial workshops and freight yards in the district. The police chief asserted that major instances of robbery in this district occurred only in the Népliget [People’s Park], noting that “fellows who wander in from the city,” not locals, committed these crimes. The article portrays Kőbánya as an idyllic suburb

24 *Erzsébetfalvai Közlöny*, June 26, 1898.

25 *A Rendőrség 1913. évi működése*, 102–3.

26 *Ibid.*, 102–3.

lying distant from the clamor of the big city, though recognizes that the rapid development taking place in the district would soon put an end to this condition.<sup>27</sup>

## Police Surveillance in Operation

The Budapest police's surveillance service served several purposes: the duty of sentinels posted on the street was to ensure that citizens complied with laws, statutes and city regulations regarding behavior in public spaces. The steady expansion of police surveillance-activities is reflected in the rise in the number of criminal procedures launched in connection to transgressions that had previously been tolerated.

One such offense involved 53-year-old “retail medicinal-herb seller” Mrs. Antal Bodrás, who according to a February 11, 1893 hearing on charges of endangering public health, had been selling henbane, which served as a popular basic ingredient for poisons, elixirs and potions, on Rákóczi Square in the eighth district of Budapest. Mrs. Bodrás confessed to her misdemeanor, though asserted that “*she had been doing this undisturbed for decades* [italics mine] and this is why she had never [had any trouble] with the authorities.” The judge hearing the case found Mrs. Bodrás guilty of the charge, ordering her to pay a five-forint fine or spend 15 days in jail.<sup>28</sup>

Forty-four-year-old “tinsmith Gypsy” Antal Sztojka from the village of Szalkszentmárton in central Hungary was similarly baffled at his 1896 arrest for allegedly “pulling out and displaying his private parts” in front of the Szent István [Saint Stephen] Hospital in Budapest. Mr. Sztojka admitted to the charge, though claimed that he had merely sought to “satisfy his urinary needs” at a secluded location and had not intended to commit an offense against public morals. In the end, the court acquitted Mr. Sztojka, finding that he had not committed an act of indecency.<sup>29</sup>

Police data reveals an increase in disciplinary action taken in Budapest public spaces in the early 1900s. Statistics from this period make it possible to analyze

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27 Miklós Rédey “Kőbánya közbiztonsága 1911-ben” [Public Safety in Kőbánya in 1911], *Kőbányai Hírlap*, August 14, 1912, 1–2.

28 Budapest Főváros Levéltára (=BFL) [Budapest City Archives], VII.13.b. A Budapesti Királyi Járásbíróság iratai, Büntetőperrek iratai [Budapest Royal District Court Documents, Criminal Trials], 9745/92. An interesting aspect of the procedure against Mrs. Bodrás was that the district doctor questioned during the hearing declared that he found nothing wrong with the retail sale of medicinal herbs.

29 BFL, VII.13.b. A Budapesti Királyi Járásbíróság iratai, Büntetőperrek iratai [Budapest Royal District Court Documents, Criminal Trials], 42445/896.

changes in the effectiveness of surveillance over time and thus determine if the spatial redistribution of police forces exercised an influence over the frequency of behavior violating established norms in public spaces.

Police data regarding petty offenses of various types are the most useful for this purpose, since it may be assumed that in the majority of cases police officers posted on the streets served as the party reporting or responding to the transgression.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, statistics regarding such offenses were the only to be assorted according to city district, therefore making it possible to more or less determine the spatial distribution of violations of the law that resulted primarily in the imposition of fines.<sup>31</sup>

The following table displays the number of police reports of petty crime in the ten districts of Budapest in the years 1904, 1908 and 1912.

|      | I     | II    | III   | IV    | V     | VI     | VII    | VIII   | IX    | X     |
|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|
| 1904 | 2,325 | 3,695 | 2,592 | 5,453 | 4,615 | 10,788 | 18,332 | 17,152 | 7,717 | 2,075 |
| 1908 | 2,164 | 4,979 | 2,679 | 7,357 | 5,379 | 19,765 | 27,395 | 15,183 | 7,842 | 2,541 |
| 1912 | 3,335 | 3,341 | 1,765 | 2,954 | 4,556 | 18,182 | 13,122 | 6,662  | 8,174 | 4,763 |

The table above shows that the greatest number of police reports of minor offenses occurred in the busiest and most highly populated sixth, seventh and eighth districts of Budapest. However, whereas the number of reports of minor offenses rose significantly in all districts of Budapest with the exception of the first district between 1904 and 1908, the number of such offenses dropped significantly in all districts of the city with the exception of the peripheral districts and, again, the first district between 1908 and 1912. The greatest decline in the number of petty offenses reported to the police during the latter four-year period took place in the seventh and eighth districts, where this number fell by over fifty percent. These two districts were among those in which the Budapest police conducted its greatest increase in the number of sentinels between 1908 and 1912.

Whereas it is customary to attribute declines in serious crime to an increase in the effectiveness of the operations of law-enforcement organizations, decreases in minor crime reflect a rise in the deterrent capacity of the police. The decline in petty crime in Budapest over the four-year beginning in 1908 suggests that

30 It must be mentioned that petty offenses included many acts that are not relevant to the theme of this study, such as not reporting the birth of a child within the prescribed time limit. However, since we were not able to find a better indicator than statistics regarding minor transgressions, it was necessary to utilize such data.

31 Data regarding complaints of petty offenses stem from the Budapest police chief's reports from the years 1904, 1908 and 1912.

the police's effort to take gradual control over the public spaces in the city was successful. The fact that the population of Budapest, which rose from 733,000 to 880,000 between 1900 and 1910, increased at a faster pace during the first decade of the twentieth century than did the number of minor criminal offenses committed in the city over that period can be attributed, at least partially, to the effect of “coercive acculturation” on the part of police stationed in the streets.

The disciplinary and didactic impact of police officers performing surveillance duties could be felt only in those public spaces of the city in which police authority was truly present. There remained certain locations in Budapest that city authorities and elite classes considered to be dens of crime and ideas posing a threat to the social order due to a lack of such police authority. Most of these spaces lay beyond the inner sections of Budapest in which the city's middle-class luxury apartments and villa districts were located.

The permanent presence of the Budapest police in public spaces reflects the spatial structure of the city's social composition, establishing a sharp division between the bourgeois and working-class spatial environments.<sup>32</sup> This segregation between what the Budapest authorities and elite classes considered to be the benign and malignant elements of society manifested itself in the zonal spatial-division of the city that characterized police discourse during this period. Various works of urban history and sociology have, however, shown that the spatial segregation of the social classes in Budapest was not nearly as strong as it was in major cities located in Western Europe and North America.<sup>33</sup> The cognitive image that the Budapest police had formed of the city in the early twentieth century, nevertheless, included a fairly distinct spatial separation of the various social classes

## 2. *Crime and the Suburbs*

### The Role of the Suburban Zone in the Development of Budapest

The appearance of large suburban zones was one of the natural byproducts stemming from the development of modern cities, including Budapest in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The belt of suburbs surrounding Budapest began to form sometime around the middle of the 1800s. Suburban

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32 Gyáni, *Az utca és a szalon* [The Street and the Salon], 353.

33 See Gábor Csanádi and János Ladányi, *Budapest térbeni-társadalmi szerkezetének változásai* [Changes in the Spatial and Social Structure of Budapest] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1992).

communities grew at a particularly high rate along the periphery of the Pest (eastern) half of Budapest in the quarter century between 1870 and 1895. Most of the inhabitants of the new suburbs were initially migrants from other parts of Hungary, though by 1900 migrants from Budapest constituted an increasing proportion of the population of these suburbs. The rising number of outward migration from Budapest was primarily the result of the extension of public transportation to the suburban zones.<sup>34</sup>

This process resulted in a significant transformation in the social composition of the population living in the suburban zone. According to geographer Pál Beluszky, “whereas in the final decade of the nineteenth century the population of the suburbs was composed primarily of artisans producing for the Budapest market, producers for city food markets, employees, small-scale entrepreneurs, Hungarian State Railways workers living along railway lines and less well-to-do pensioners, the industrial workers became the dominant social group living in the suburbs following the turn of the century.”<sup>35</sup> Data showing that the total population of the communities located on the perimeter of Budapest had, at 1.2 million, exceeded that of the city itself by the year 1900 demonstrates the rapid pace of growth that was taking place in these suburbs.<sup>36</sup>

The notion of annexing the suburbs to Budapest was a permanent topic of debate during the period in question. The idea of establishing Greater Budapest galvanized public opinion in both Hungary’s capital city and its surrounding suburbs. The burgeoning local press in the latter communities published a steady stream of articles expounding the potential advantages and disadvantages of annexation to Budapest.<sup>37</sup> The stated objective of the newspaper *Budapest Környéke. Társadalmi és Közgazdasági Hetilap* [The Environs of Budapest. Social and Economic Weekly] was to combat those points of view which asserted that land speculation was destroying the zone on the periphery of Budapest, that the

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34 For information regarding the development of the Budapest suburban zone see Pál Beluszky, “Az elővárosok útja Nagy-Budapesthez” [The Path of the Suburbs to Greater Budapest], *Tanulmányok Budapest Múltjából* [Studies on Budapest’s Past] 30 (2002): 121–52.

35 Ibid., 129.

36 Gábor Preisich, *Budapest városépítésének története: Buda visszavételétől a II. világháború végéig* [The History of Urban Construction in Budapest from the Recapture of Budapest until the End of the Second World War] (Budapest: Terc, 2004), 123.

37 See Borbála Mészáros, “A helyi sajtó szerepe a főváros környékén: Kispest-Szentlőrinc 1895–1918” [The Role of the Local Press in the Vicinity of Budapest: Kispest-Szentlőrinc 1895–1918], *Tanulmányok Budapest Múltjából* 32 (2005): 137–57.



suburbs were losing their “healthy” rustic atmosphere and that the “capital city Moloch” was swallowing these communities.<sup>38</sup>

Disputes in the press regarding the expansion of the authority and jurisdiction of the Budapest state police reveal the significant degree to which public-safety considerations influenced relations between Budapest and its suburbs. The territorial jurisdiction of the Budapest police doubled in size during the period under consideration in this paper as compared to that defined by Police Law XXI of 1881. The town of Újpest [New Pest], the largest suburb of Budapest at this time, represented the first stage in the process of extending the jurisdiction of the city police.

### The First Expansion of the “Observing Gaze”: Újpest and Rákospalota

The town of Újpest established an autonomous law-enforcement organ in 1871, when the municipality decided to employ eight armed bailiffs.<sup>39</sup> However, this local force of law and order proved ineffective, failing to control a riot that took place in 1874 following the mysterious suicide of a local butcher after his arrest for resisting tax authorities, thus forcing municipal officials to summon the military to control the disturbance.<sup>40</sup>

Following the suppression of this riot, the district magistrate in Vác ordered that the town located to the north of Budapest establish an independent police force. The district magistracy shortly thereafter approved the municipal statute regarding the foundation of a local law-enforcement organization.<sup>41</sup> The notion of incorporating Újpest into the jurisdiction of the Budapest police emerged just as the municipality began to organize its own police force.<sup>42</sup> The latter idea resurfaced during preparation of the aforementioned Police Law XXI of 1881, though was rejected due to the increased operational costs it would have entailed for the Budapest police.<sup>43</sup>

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38 *Budapest Környéke. Társadalmi és Közgazdasági Hetilap* [The Environs of Budapest. Social and Economic Weekly], March 31, 1907.

39 Gyula Ugró, *Újpest 1831–1930* [Újpest 1831–1930] (Budapest: Magyar Városok Monográfiája Kiadóhivatala, 1932), 350–51.

40 *Ibid.*, 46–52.

41 *Ibid.*, 351.

42 See János Sallai, “Újpest rendvédelmének története,” [The Law Enforcement History of Újpest], *Újpesti Helytörténeti Értesítő* [Újpest Local History Bulletin] 4 (2002), 13.

43 *Ibid.*

However, the possible expansion of the jurisdiction of the Budapest police to include the community of Újpest remained on the agenda even after officials declined to make this measure part of Police Law XXI. Evidence suggests that the newly created police force in Újpest was unable to ensure public safety in the community. Minutes from an 1886 meeting of the municipal council, for example, show that officials from Újpest engaged lamplighters to help the local police perform their duties, primarily those stemming from an increase in the number of beggars in the town.<sup>44</sup> Press reports claimed, however, that the increased duties of the police in Újpest arose mainly from the settlement in the town of people with “previous convictions” who had been expelled from Budapest, though continued to commute to the city in order to conduct their “business.”

Minutes from the Újpest municipal council indicate that the reorganization of the police in the 1880s was closely connected to the issue of acquiring regular council rights. Minutes from the council show that the town of Újpest established a separate committee to deal with these two issues late in the year 1886.

On September 25, 1886, the head of the state police’s detective department, Ödön Splényi, sent a memorandum to Police Chief János Török describing the public-safety problems in Újpest.<sup>45</sup> According to Splényi’s memorandum:

The exceedingly dangerous circumstance has emerged in which those forced to leave the territory of Budapest as a result of their notorious police records and those who still live in the city, though are under permanent police observation as a result of their threatening nature, chose to establish their permanent residences on the territory directly adjacent to Budapest in the town of Új-Pest located in the jurisdiction of Pest Pilis Kis Kun County.

Splényi attributed the settlement of “those with criminal records” in Újpest to the good transportation links between the suburban community and Budapest

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44 BFL, V.672.a. Újpest nagyközség iratai, Képviselőtestületi gyűlések jegyzőkönyve [Documents from the Major Commune of Újpest, Minutes of the Representative Body Assemblies], vol. 5.

45 BFL, VI.1.b A M. Kir. Államrendőrség Budapesti Főkapitányságának általános iratai, Vegyes iratok [General and Miscellaneous Documents from the Budapest Police Department of the Hungarian Royal State Police], 9668/1886. Police detectives presumably began to focus more attention on Újpest following the 1884 arrest of a gang of counterfeiters in the town. See János Baksa, *Rendőrségi almanach* [Police Almanac] (Budapest: Stephaneum, 1923), 36.

and the “scandalous and disturbingly lenient” attitude of the Újpest municipal council toward these dangerous elements.<sup>46</sup>

Splényi stated in the memorandum to the Budapest police chief that he believed there were two methods of resolving the problem outlined above: either place Újpest under the authority of the Budapest police or have the deputy lord lieutenant (*alispán*) of Pest County instruct the Minister of the Interior to “banish those expelled from the territory of Budapest as a result of their menacing schemes from the communities lying in the direct vicinity of the city.”<sup>47</sup> At the end of his memorandum, Splényi voices criticism of Újpest town marshal Géza Csapó, asserting that “his unreliability and permissive behavior toward many with prior convictions has become the subject of popular discourse.”<sup>48</sup> Splényi’s difficulties with the town marshal did not end here. An investigation of the November 1886 burglary of the Festetich Chapel in Újpest, which Splényi and his detectives launched without consulting local officials, revealed that Csapó had helped to hide the items stolen from the building.<sup>49</sup>

In December 1886, the Minister of the Interior ordered Budapest Police Chief Török to submit a report regarding the possible incorporation of Újpest into his force’s jurisdiction, requesting that the report stipulate “the number of police personnel that would be required and the amount of expense that implementation of such a measure would entail.”<sup>50</sup> Török’s January 17, 1887 report, which he based on data regarding Újpest obtained from Hungary’s Central Statistics Office, proposed that the Ministry of the Interior use the Budapest tenth-district police force as an organizational model for that to be established in Újpest even though the population of the latter community exceeded that of the territorially larger tenth district.<sup>51</sup>

In the summer of 1887, the Újpest municipal council considered a proposal to request Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun County officials for permission to have the community placed under the authority of the Budapest police, though it is not clear whether Police Chief Török’s January report to the Minister of the Interior

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46 BFL, VI.1.b A M. Kir. Államrendőrség Budapesti Főkapitányságának általános iratai, Vegyes iratok [General and Miscellaneous Documents from the Budapest Police Department of the Hungarian Royal State Police], 9668/1886.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 BFL, V.672.a. Újpest nagyközség iratai, Képviselőtestületi gyűlések jegyzőkönyve [Documents from the Major Commune of Újpest, Minutes of the Representative Body Assemblies], vol. 5.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

had inspired the council to examine this possibility. However, on July 30, 1887, the Újpest council rejected this proposal on the grounds that the extension of the Budapest police's authority to the county would infringe upon the "autonomous rights" contained in the community's municipal statute and would, moreover, cost too much. The council then voted unanimously to approve a proposal to have a platoon of gendarmes stationed in Újpest.<sup>52</sup>

The Budapest police had thus completed preparations for the possible broadening of its jurisdiction in 1887, although such expansion did not take place for another two years. Evidence indicates, however, that the Budapest police had already become quite active in the communities of Újpest and Rákospalota before the adoption of Law XLVI of 1889 officially extended the force's authority to include these two suburbs. An article published in the December 12, 1888 issue of the newspaper *Pesti Hírlap* [Pest News], for example, indicated that the Budapest police "had become tired of the abundant chorus of reproach voiced in the newspapers after every single break-in . . . and decided to eradicate all burglars from the face of the earth—that is just from Újpest."<sup>53</sup> According to this article, the Budapest police had conducted a raid in Újpest that had resulted in the arrest of ten suspected criminals, including their "governess," Mrs. Sándor Száraz Julcsa Dombai, who was responsible for training the "talented" young thieves and pickpockets. The author of the *Pesti Hírlap* article concluded that "Újpest has thus become clean—one-hundred pieces of gold for one burglar!"<sup>54</sup>

Law XLVI of 1889 therefore institutionalized an established practice. The initial expansion of the Budapest State Police's jurisdiction involved two communities located in Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun County that had previously fallen under the authority of the gendarmerie.

Minutes for meetings of the Újpest municipal council suggest that the relationship between the Budapest State Police and town officials and residents was tense at the outset. For example, on December 27, 1889, the Újpest magistrate recommended that the municipal council invite police leaders to a banquet in order to "demonstrate the cordiality of relations with them" and refute the notion that officials from the community had opposed the decision to place the town under the jurisdiction of the state police.<sup>55</sup> In 1890, one member of the

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52 Ibid.

53 "Az újpesti betörő szövetkezet" [The Újpest Burglary Cooperative], *Pesti Hírlap*, December 12, 1888, 4–5.

54 Ibid.

55 BFL, V.672.a. Újpest nagyközség iratai, Képviselőtestületi gyűlések jegyzőkönyve [Documents from the Major Commune of Újpest, Minutes of the Representative Body Assemblies], vol. 5.

Újpest council complained that the police's treatment of the local population was too severe, while in 1891 member of the body declared that "there is no connection between the police and the community, and the captain does not belong to the council, thus there are no relations of any kind."<sup>56</sup>

The Budapest police began operating in Újpest and Rákospalota, whose total population was 30,000, in 1890, with 28 officers, four of them mounted.<sup>57</sup> Reports from the police chief and articles in the press both describe an unambiguous improvement in public safety in Újpest and Rákospalota following the incorporation of these communities into the jurisdiction of the Budapest police.

An article published in the newspaper *Budapest Környéke* in 1907 argued that the positive results the Budapest police had achieved in Újpest served as evidence that the jurisdiction of the city police should be expanded further to include more suburban communities. The author of the article claimed that the arrival of the Budapest police to Újpest had forced "approximately 260 notorious [sic] families" to leave the community, noting that "the song had long told of the Újpest sixpence, though today the Budapest papers are writing that the main lair of the counterfeiting gang has again become Erzsébetfalva and Kispeszt."<sup>58</sup>

In 1896, authorities from Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun County submitted an official request to have the authority of the Budapest police extended to the suburban communities of Cinkota, Mátyásföld, Csömör, Pestszentmihály, Soroksár, Kispeszt, Szentlőrinc, Budaörs, Budafok and Albertfalva, indicating that officials from the county were satisfied with the work the police had done in Újpest and Rákospalota.<sup>59</sup> However, the Minister of the Interior rejected this request on the customary grounds that it would cost too much. The jurisdiction of the Budapest police was, nevertheless, expanded one more time during the period under consideration in this paper. It is worthwhile to examine this episode in detail, because the local interpretation of the relationship between the extension of the Budapest police's authority and public safety provides a clear illustration of the unique relationship between the city and its suburbs.

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56 Ibid.

57 *A Budapest Fő- és Székvárosi Állami Rendőrség 1896. évi működése* [The 1896 Operations of the Budapest State Police] (Budapest: 1897), 58.

58 "Államrendőrséget a főváros környékének" [State Police for the Budapest Area], *Budapest Környéke*, April 7, 1907.

59 *A Rendőrség 1896. évi működése* [The 1896 Operations of the Budapest State Police], 4–5.

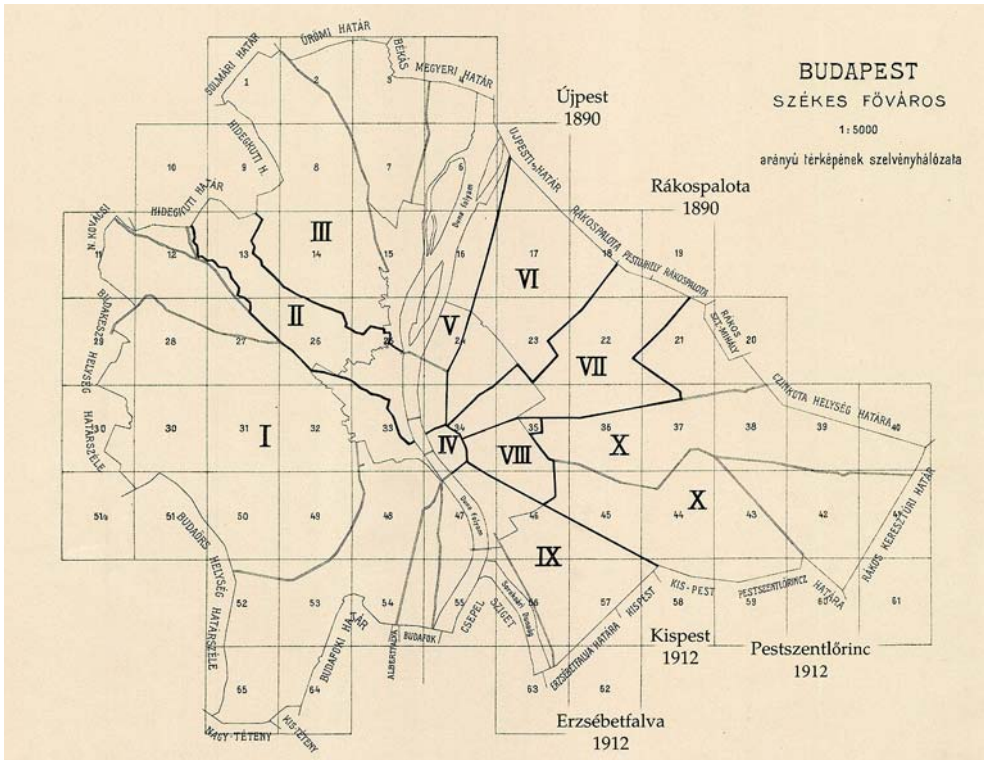


Figure 3. The expansion of Budapest State Police in the suburban zone, 1890–1912.

Overview of the districts and boundaries of Budapest on a 1908 survey map.

Source: Museum Kiscell, Collection of City Maps

### The Second Phase of Expansion: Erzsébetfalva, Kispest, and Pestszentlőrinc

The establishment in 1912 of a Budapest State Police station in Kispest to direct the force’s operations in that suburb as well as the neighboring communities of Erzsébetfalva and Pestszentlőrinc represents the second phase in the expansion of the jurisdiction of the city police. The justification for this measure contained in a footnote to Law LX of 1912 stipulating the extension of the authority of the Budapest police to Kispest, Erzsébetfalva and Pestszentlőrinc clearly displays the attitude of the state toward the expansion of the jurisdiction of the city police to its suburbs:

The law-enforcement administration of the rapidly developing towns bordering on the capital city requires completely different regulations and management than that of other communities in order to ensure that the personal and material security of their populations is sufficiently protected.

The justification for Law LX of 1912 furthermore warranted the extension of the Budapest police's authority to Kispest, Erzsébetfalva and Pestszentlőrinc on the grounds that public-safety conditions in these three towns were similar to those in Budapest and that improvement of law-enforcement operations in them would serve to reduce crime in the city as well.<sup>60</sup>

The debate that took place surrounding the expansion of the Budapest police's jurisdiction can be followed in issues covered in the local press in the village of Erzsébetfalva, which gained the Hungarian administrative rank of *nagyközség* [Major Commune] in 1897. Beginning in the middle of the 1890s, there was always at least one newspaper published in Erzsébetfalva that featured crime as one of its permanent themes. Articles published in these newspapers clearly depict the odd, dual relationship that existed between Budapest and Erzsébetfalva: while the latter community strove to develop its own identity, it also kept its sights on the possibility of one day becoming part of Budapest. This dual endeavor is reflected in the title of a local newspaper that began publication in 1897: *Budapest-Erzsébetfalva*.

Although newspapers published in Erzsébetfalva presented the prospect of incorporation into Budapest as a much-desired objective, this did not prevent them from voicing criticism of conditions in the city as well. These newspapers frequently published articles regarding sensational crimes committed in Budapest and the city's moral decadence. Although Erzsébetfalva newspapers took an increasingly unfavorable view of the actions of Budapest "detectives" in the town, they nevertheless supported the extension of the Budapest police's authority to the community.

The author of the lead article in the February 28, 1897 issue of the newspaper *Erzsébetfalva*, entitled *Helyi viszonyaink* [Our Local Conditions], expressed hope that the arrival of the Budapest police to the community would exercise the same impact on local public-safety conditions as it had in Újpest: "In brief, we can confidently say that Erzsébetfalva is at present where Újpest was eight to ten years ago, i.e., it is home to the rascals who give the capital city's police the most work." Although the author did not go so far as to request that the Budapest police establish a station in Erzsébetfalva, he did propose that they conduct regular raids aimed at capturing criminals living in the area.

Local newspapers focused increasingly on both the problem of criminals from Erzsébetfalva active in Budapest as well as local crime. Hungary's gendarmerie

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60 Ibid.

established a post in Erzsébetfalva in 1895, while the community later had its own police magistrate. It appears, however, that neither the gendarmerie nor the police magistrate were able to handle the increasing law-enforcement tasks in the community. Articles criticizing local law-enforcement organizations for the increasing number of crimes and beggars and tramps loitering on the streets became more and more frequent beginning in the 1900s. The author of an article appearing in an 1898 issue of the newspaper *Erzsébetfalvai Közlöny* [Erzsébetfalva Gazette] speculated, for example, that “Personal and material security is protected better perhaps even in the deserts of Nubia than here in the vicinity of the country’s capital city in the town of Erzsébetfalva.”<sup>61</sup> According to the lead article of the January 11, 1903 issue of the newspaper *Erzsébetfalva* lamenting the “moral decline” taking place in the community, poor public-safety conditions and political conflict among local public-officials would lead to a decline in the value of property in Erzsébetfalva and make annexation of the town to the city of Budapest impossible.<sup>62</sup>

A letter to the editor from “a taxpayer” published in the January 30, 1898 issue of the *Erzsébetfalvai Közlöny* suggests that brisk competition had emerged between towns and villages located on the periphery of Budapest to be incorporated into the jurisdiction of the city police following the aforementioned 1896 submission of an official request to have the authority of the Budapest police extended certain communities in Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun County. The editorial, which appeared under the title *Néhány szó állami rendőrségünkéről* [A Few Words on Our State Police], complained that the municipal council in Erzsébetfalva had not campaigned with sufficient vigor to have the town placed under the jurisdiction of the Budapest police, thus it was likely to receive only a guard post, while Soroksár would get an independent police station.<sup>63</sup>

The local press also reveals that the Erzsébetfalvi Otthon [Erzsébetfalva Home] “community-defense” association had launched the civil initiative to have the town placed under the authority of the Budapest police almost immediately after its elevation to the status of Major Commune in 1897.<sup>64</sup> Bringing the

61 “Közbiztonságunk” [Our Public Safety], *Erzsébetfalvai Közlöny*, August 14, 1898.

62 *Erzsébetfalva*, January 11, 1903.

63 According to the author of the letter, Soroksár’s advantage over Erzsébetfalva stemmed from the fact that “Soroksár goes in delegation, asks, begs, offers budgetary contributions and even goes so far as to propose a location, because it knows the difference between a police guard-post and a police headquarters.” *Erzsébetfalvai Közlöny*, January 30, 1898.

64 Cf. Emil Bogyrka, *Pesterzsébet története* [The History of Pesterzsébet] (Budapest: Pesterzsébet Önkormányzata, 2000), 94.



Budapest police to Erzsébetfalva therefore appears to have been connected to the town's aspiration for independence and the establishment of administrative and judicial organizations in the community.<sup>65</sup>

The Erzsébetfalva municipal council fully supported the above initiative, deciding in August 1900 to ask the Minister of the Interior to have Budapest police placed in the community and to appropriate 8,000 krone for this purpose in spite of the “oppressive financial situation.”<sup>66</sup>

It was therefore not coincidental that enticing the Budapest State Police to begin operations in Erzsébetfalva carried such importance. It was for this reason that residents of the community took such great interest in reports published in the Budapest press regarding the Minister of the Interior Kálmán Széll's plans. However, the August 9, 1900 issue of the newspaper *Erzsébetfalvai hírlap* [Erzsébetfalva News] reported with regret that contrary to rumors appearing in certain Budapest newspapers, the Minister of the Interior had “postponed satisfying the request until a better time, citing poor financial circumstances.”<sup>67</sup>

It is clearly evident that this issue galvanized public opinion and that the press did everything under its power to ensure that it would remain in the news. Minutes from meetings of the Erzsébetfalva municipal council show that town leaders made a serious attempt to convince the Budapest police to start law-enforcement operations in the community. In 1901, the council announced, for example, that the town did not want to raise its own police force, because “only the extension of the authority of the state police to the territory of the community can improve our public-safety conditions as a result of our immediate proximity to the main capital city.”<sup>68</sup> The council therefore submitted a new request to expand the jurisdiction of the Budapest police—again without success. Local officials nevertheless continued to advocate expanding the authority of the Budapest police to include the town in spite of these failures. In 1905, for instance, the local council refused to support a proposal to post five more gendarmes in Erzsébetfalva, “but instead urges having the Hungarian royal

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65 Erzsébetfalva fell under the jurisdiction of the district magistrate's office in the village of Ráckeve and the district court located in the village of Ócsa. *Kispest-Szent-Lőrinczi Lapok*, April 20, 1898.

66 BFL, V.371.a. Erzsébetfalva nagyközség iratai, Képviselőtestületi jegyzőkönyvek [Documents from the Major Commune of Erzsébetfalva, Minutes from the Municipal Council], vol. carton 1.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.



Figure 4. Police officer and women waiting for expulsion from Budapest at the courtyard of the police barrack in Mosonyi Street, 1908. Source: Museum Kiscell, Photo Collection

state police brought in, for which the assembly has already voted to contribute 8,000 krone annually for operating expenses [sic].”<sup>69</sup>

Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun County confronted the issue of extending the authority of the Budapest police again in 1909. On July 27 of this year, the county’s lord lieutenant submitted a proposal to the interior minister requesting that the Budapest police perform service in the communities of Kispest, Pestszentlőrinc, Pestújhely, Lónyay-telep, Erzsébetfalva, Kossuthfalva, Csepel, Budafok, Albertfalva and Budakeszi. The proposal stipulated that the county would contribute 20,000 krone annually to cost of police operations in these ten communities.<sup>70</sup>

The interior minister approved this request, presumably as a result of the offer of greater financial support than stipulated in earlier petitions. The Budapest State Police opened its station in Erzsébetfalva on October 1, 1912. According to an article published in the *Erzsébetfalvai Közlöny* two days before

69 The cost of bringing five more gendarmes to Erzsébetfalva would have been only 2,000 krone annually, which reflects the preference of local officials for the Budapest police. Ibid.

70 “Az államrendőrség kiterjesztése Erzsébetfalvára” [The Expansion of the State Police to Erzsébetfalva], *Erzsébetfalvai Közlöny*, July 9, 1911.

the opening of the station, new local Police Chief László Vaday “does not want to introduce the institution of the state police with iron rigor, but wants to first familiarize and understand.” The article quoted the captain as saying “This, of course, applies only to the well-intentioned and benevolent population, because those with prior convictions would do well if they were to move their homes as far away as possible.”<sup>71</sup>

### *Summary*

At first glance, an examination of the spatial expansion of the Budapest police in the late 1800s and early 1900s would appear to suggest that this expansion took place primarily in working-class districts on the perimeter of the city. However, Budapest State Police sources did not cite strengthening supervision over workers living in these areas as the main reason for the extension of the force’s authority. Only the justification contained in the footnote to Law LX of 1912 broadening the jurisdiction of the Budapest police to Erzsébetfalva, Pestszentlőrinc and Kispest indicated that extending the force’s surveillance activities to the working-class Wekerle-telep neighborhood of the latter town played a role in this expansion process. Data published in the *Budapesti útmutató* clearly shows that the police presence in Erzsébetfalva, Pestszentlőrinc, Kispest and Újpest was insufficient at the time of their incorporation into the jurisdiction of the Budapest State Police to conduct permanent surveillance activities in these rapidly growing communities. It therefore seems highly probable that law-enforcement operations in the four suburban towns mentioned above were not aimed primarily at serving as an instrument of “coercive acculturation” of their working-class populations. The introduction of the obligation for residents to register with the police, not the expansion of permanent supervision over public spaces, represented the main motive for extending the authority of the Budapest State Police to communities lying on the periphery of the city. This registration obligation theoretically made it possible for the Budapest police to clear undesirable elements—“commuting” criminals, tramps and beggars—from these sectors of the city’s suburban zone.

At the same time, the surveillance system represented a serious impediment to the police’s “coercive acculturation.” As police manuals published at the time indicated, sentinels performing service on the street were not permitted to leave

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71 “Az államrendőrség” [The State Police], *Erzsébetfalvai Közlöny*, September 29, 1912.

their designated posts. The Budapest police were therefore unable to suitably play the type of civilizatory role that police in many other large cities filled at this time. In his analysis of the “event diary” of a Boston police patrolman, Alexander von Hoffman concluded that a police officer who was permanently on the move represented an important figure in the daily life of an urban district or neighborhood.<sup>72</sup> The activity of such an officer was important primarily from the standpoint of enforcing compliance with middle-class norms, not protection of property.<sup>73</sup> Police patrolmen in the United States were able to establish a social microcosm based on informal relations with the residents of his district. This took place in an environment that was simultaneously friendly and hostile and, at the same time, assisted police in the performance of their everyday activities. Police built and sustained important contacts with local shop owners, barkeepers and apartment caretakers. This degree of sociability could not emerge between police and the masses on the streets until these informal contacts proved to be mutually beneficial.<sup>74</sup>

The potential for establishing such informal relations between police sentinels and local residents was much smaller in Budapest than it was in the United States or Great Britain. In terms of its functions and mission, the Budapest State Police followed the stricter German model, exercising a greater degree of social control than did the more liberal law-enforcement organizations in the English-speaking world.

The manner in which a police officer conducts surveillance over an urban space is not irrelevant. The acquisition of surveillance technics is a particularly interesting issue in light of the composition of Budapest police’s guard-personnel. Although no attempt has yet been made to systematically examine the social history of the Budapest police and written sources published during the period in question deal primarily with the force’s officer corps, available

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72 This “*move-on system*” also characterized the operations of the English police. See Robert D. Storch, “The Policeman as Domestic Missionary: Urban Discipline and Popular Culture in Northern England, 1850–1880,” *Journal of Social History* 9, no. 2 (1976): 482.

73 Alexander von Hoffmann, “An Officer of the Neighborhood: a Boston Patrolman on the Beat in 1895,” *Journal of Social History* 26 (1992): 317. According to Christopher Thale, New York police officers objected to the introduction of a stationary sentinel posts, such as that used in Budapest: “When an experimental patrol system was tried in 1911, forcing many officers to remain riveted to a single spot in an intersection, patrolmen objected that talkative citizens had become impossible to escape.” Christopher Thale, “The Informal World of Police Patrol: New York City in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Journal of Urban History* 33, no. 2 (2007): 195.

74 Cf. Thale, “The Informal World of Police Patrol,” 203.

data makes it possible to draw a few conclusions relevant to the theme of this study. Although statistics regarding police personnel are extremely sketchy, it can be discerned from this data that during the era under consideration the prior, civilian occupation of a significant number of police sentinels (mounted and foot police plus those satisfying their probationary period) fell under the “farmer” category. The proportion of police who had previously worked as farmers rose steadily in the late 1800s and early 1900s, rising from 52 percent of all police guard-personnel in 1884 to 79.1 percent in 1912.<sup>75</sup> The fact that people who had previously worked in agriculture were more likely than those from any other occupational field to select the relative financial security of police service likely stemmed mainly from the low prestige and difficult conditions connected to the law-enforcement profession. The sustained effort of the Ministry of the Interior to raise the “intellectual level” of police personnel and to improve the material conditions surrounding police service through multiple increases in wages and other benefits exercised no considerable impact on this situation.<sup>76</sup>

As a result of the predominantly rural composition of the police’s personnel, many officers performing service on the street possessed similar spatial experiences as the immense number of migrants who formed the majority of the urban population. The cognitive map that oriented most of the police posted on the city streets was comparable to that of many of its inhabitants: the new environment of the modern city presented them with a totally unfamiliar spatial experience. In addition to the permanent fluctuation in police personnel, the insufficient familiarity of many police of rural origin with Budapest and its environs served to reinforce the “static” relationship that existed between the police and the residents of the city.

Summing up, it can be ascertained that the spatial expansion of police surveillance evolved differently in Budapest than it did in Western Europe and North America as a result of the relatively late professionalization of the Budapest police beginning in the 1880s and the city’s unique urban development. As Eric H. Monkkonen’s book on urban law-enforcement in the United States between 1860 and 1920 shows, the focus of city police in the United States shifted in the 1890s from maintaining supervision over “dangerous classes”

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75 At 70 percent, immigrants constituted a similar proportion of the police personnel in the city of London. Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society* (Oxford: Penguin Books, 1971), 131.

76 János Baksa, *Rendőrségi almanach* [Police Almanac], 53–4.

to “crime control.”<sup>77</sup> However, the spatial presence of the Police in Budapest, whose development into a major city took place relatively late, primarily fulfilled a civilizatory function from the very outset rather than conducting oversight of “dangerous classes.” The models for the expansion of police surveillance presented here likewise show that the everyday work of the Budapest police concentrated mainly on the protection of property and supervision over districts of Budapest inhabited by the elite and middle classes rather than on surveillance of social groups deemed to be potentially dangerous, such as workers and the poor.<sup>78</sup>

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VII.13.b. A Budapesti Királyi Járásbíróság iratai, büntetőperpek iratai [Budapest Royal District Court Documents, Criminal Trials], 42445/896.

77 Eric H. Monkkenen, *Police in Urban America, 1860–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 147.

78 This study has not addressed another major disparity that Monkkenen’s book reveals regarding the social role of police in Budapest and those in the United States. Whereas the social activity of the police in the United States—such as searching for lost children and providing the homeless with temporary shelter—decreased in the late 1800s and early 1900s as a result of the institutionalization of urban social policy, that of police in Hungary increased during this period. Budapest police utilized mainly repressive measures, such as expulsion, until the beginning of the twentieth century, whereas they received a much greater social role, such as in the area of child-protection, pursuant to the supplementary criminal law approved in 1908. Monkkenen, *Police in Urban America*, 86–128.

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