



SZOMBATHELY

THE TOWN OF

St Martin



Savaria Szombathely's ancient predecessor, Savaria, was founded by Emperor Claudius in 50 A.D. Its first settlers must have been the soldiers of the 15th Apollinaris Legion, their families, and a few merchants and tradesmen. Situated close the ancient commercial Amber Route, and at the foot of the Alps, Savaria served initially as a military base, but soon grew into an expanding town, and eventually became the centre of the new Roman Province, Pannonia, an important venue for the worship of the emperor. The town soon acquired further importance: at the end of the 3rd century, it was the seat of Pannonia Prima. It served as the residence of the procurator, and was a frequent destination for successive emperors, whose visits were documented by historians and in the decrees issued in Savaria. The urban development accelerated; remains of impressive stone buildings and houses of residence often surface during archaeological excavations in the central area of the present day town centre.

St Martin, born in Roman Savaria (the present day Szombathely) as the son of a Roman officer, played a major role in disseminating Christianity. He was born in 316 or 317 A.D. and following a family tradition he decided to join the Roman Army. As a soldier of the army, he achieved distinction not only with his charismatic personality but also with his kindness, and his sympathy to the sick and the needy. During a very cold winter, Martin met a poor naked man at the door of the city of Amiens and cut up his mantle to share it with him. That night Jesus Christ appeared in his dream and told him that the shivering beggar Martin had helped was Our Lord himself. Following this vision, Martin got himself baptized as a Christian at the age of 18, and when his term of duty was up, he left the army against his father's wish and decided to become a priest. He returned to Savaria a number of times, then visited Slovenia, Bohemia and France.

In France he went to Poitiers where he founded the Monastery of Ligugé, then he was elected bishop by the Christian community of Tours. To escape his appointment as bishop, he tried to hide in a stall but geese betrayed him with their gabbling, hence the goose, the animal symbol of St Martin. As a bishop, he lived a very simple and ascetic life but he was renowned for his love for people, his great kindness, and his exceptional qualities as an orator. When he died in Candes, his body was carried on board of a barge to Tours. Legend has it that on that cold November day all the fruit trees started to blossom all along the river where the barge travelled. His followers had a church built over his grave in Tours.

The town's other Old Christian saint was St Quirinus, Bishop of Sisacia, whose sufferings have been remembered by the growing number of Christians in Savaria; their number becoming significant as early as in the 4th century. According to the available historical records he was taken to court, sentenced to death in the local theatre building, and on 4 June 303 thrown into the Stream Perint with a millstone around his neck.

The majority of the Roman residents left the town during the 5th century, but some must have stayed, which may explain why the name of the town has been maintained until today. Historical records mention



an earthquake leading to the complete destruction of Savaria, but the latest research into this has not produced any definite evidence. In the 8th century, the antique town was once again assigned an important role; owing to Frankish king Charles the Great. On his return from the war with the Avars, he changed his course just to pass through Sabaria, as the town was then called, with the most likely intention of making a pilgrimage to St Martin's birthplace (Martin was not only the patron saint of the Carolingian Dynasty but also that of the entire Frankish Empire).

The 10th century saw the arrival to the area of Avars, Franks, and later conquering Magyar tribes. In the neatly structured county system, organised by King Stephen, the place did not have too much significance, as the seat of Vas County was Vasvár. Town privileges were granted by the Győr Episcopacy in the early 14th century; the development was largely due to its frequent fairs, as the Hungarian name (Szombathely = Saturday Place) suggests, probably held in the vicinity of Martin's well.

Sabaria successfully retained its privileges during the Middle Ages and, on account of its residents' flair for trading and craftsmanship, she could gain further momentum: by the turn of the 16th century, the town had grown to be one of the most significant centres. The mediaeval tow centre stretched on the area of the former Roman town, with the castle playing a key role in its history that was not only of military importance but also served as a centre for the Győr Episcopacy. During Turkish times, in the late 16th century, Vasvár was

exposed to frequent attacks, and Szombathely was chosen as the new seat of the county. Although the Ottoman assaults did not affect the town, its masters did change a good number of times following the different wars of independence. The town archives burned down in a fire in 1605, and thus our knowledge regarding Szombathely's mediaeval history is only rudimentary. Major development instituted in the second half of the 18th century, when Szombathely was selected as the see of the new episcopacy established by Empress Maria Theresa as part of her church reform policy. This was the period when, under the guidance of the first bishop János Szily, one of Hungary's most beautiful baroque building complexes was erected including the Bishop's Palace, the Cathedral, and the other church buildings nearby. The town's development gained new momentum with the construction of the railways and the municipality's large-scale construction and in the 19th century the place was referred to as the "Queen of the West". Besides the town's bustling trade, its industrial activity also gathered strength and, despite the negative impacts of the Paris Treaties after World War I, and the devastation of World War II, by the end of the 20th century, Szombathely had succeeded in becoming the region's cultural, educational and commercial centre, with a continuing reliance on Christian traditions initiated by St Martin.



St Martin's Journeys St Martin was one of the most popular saints in the Middle Ages; he was the first saint not to have been canonised for martyrdom. He was the patron saint of beggars, soldiers, horse and goose-keepers, winemakers, and coopers making barrels. Those suffering from children's diseases, erysipelas or purulent wounds were praying to him for help. Martin is likely to have achieved cult status already among the conquering Magyars, but he was also greatly respected by prominent figures such as Charlemagne of the Frankish Empire or Hungary's King Stephen the First who chose him to become the patron saint of Hungary in the 11th century, making his figure a connecting link between Latin Pannonia and Christian Hungary. St Martin's memory is kept alive by a large number of written and material remains. A document dated 1360 mentions St Martin's Well and a written record issued by Bishop of Győr János Gosztonyi confirming Szombathely in her privileges mentions the citizens' deep respect for St Martin. A charter issued in 1635 by King Ferdinand II of Hungary is another evidence for the admiration expressed towards the helper of the poor in which the monarch exempted the citizens from taxation provided they paid 40 Forints annually to the church, the vicar and the poor of the town as a token of their respect for St Martin. Traces of a St Martin cult in Szombathely are easier to detect after the establishment of the first episcopacy. The first Bishop of Szombathely, János Szily took conscious steps when rebuilding the town's antique past and reviving the cult of the two Old Christian saints, St Martin and St Quirinus. He chose St Martin as the patron saint of the episcopacy, and at the new building complex, erected as the episcopal see, he applied artistic devices to disseminate knowledge about the history of ancient Savaria on the one hand, and the two saints, acting as connecting links between the pagan ancient

times and the Christian mediaeval times, on the other hand. The town council taking office at the end of the second millennium also realised the potentials of the St Martin cult: it continued to cherish its traditions and developed international relations with other European towns that played an equally significant role in Martin's life. St Martin's Day has been celebrated in Szombathely since 1995; besides the plethora of religious, cultural and gastronomic programmes, the town council confers its major honours on the selected ones at a ceremonial event in the middle of November. In 2005, THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE formally certified the cultural route running between Tours, France and Szombathely, Hungary, as a 'Major Cultural Route of the Council of Europe'. At the initiative of Szombathely Municipality and the local Tourinform Office seven new routes of pilgrimage were built out between 2003 and 2007, with Szombathely as a place of departure or destination. Each station on the different routes is indicated with a uniform sign and, those keen on walking will be awaited by a new, 100-km-long St Martin walking path running between Szombathely and Domonkosfa and marked all the way with route signs. The number of partner communities that have joined the routes is now around 100 and has been continuously growing, involving places not only from Hungary but also from Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. The criterion for accession to the route was to be a (memorial) place dedicated to, or named after St Martin, or a consecrated church, a valuable St Martin depiction, relic or any other natural phenomenon (e.g. hill, stream, cave, etc.) that can be found on the area of the place and can be linked the Bishop of Tours. Those walking some part of the St Martin Route will be entitled for an honorary certificate (a Wanderer's Book) bearing their name and the proof of their participation issued by the town of Szombathely.



St Martin's Well The well, standing in front of St Martin church was first mentioned in a document dated 1360, probably the time of its discovery. This well, one meter in diameter, built from stones brought from Csatár, still stands on the spot. It was mentioned by Matthias Bel, one of Hungary's greatest scientist-writers in the early 18th century.

Legend has it that Martin, on his return to Savaria, baptised his mother with the water of the well standing in front of St Martin's church. The well, mentioned by several travellers and used by the citizens as a public source of water, has been reconstructed a number of times. It was depicted on quite a few pictures and engravings; from these we know that it once had an embellished brim and a water-lifting device decorated on top with a picture of St Martin. The well operated up until 1938 when it was covered with concrete slabs and a statue, the work of István Rumi Rajki, was installed over it in 1938 entitled "St Martin Baptises his Mother".



"SANCTVS MARTINVS
MATREM GENTILITATIS
ABSOLVIT ERRORE"
SVLP SEVERVS



St Martin church St Martin was born in the eastern part of Szombathely that one time was a separate village, today called Szentmárton. This is where the church, consecrated in honour of St Martin, was built and which, as legend has it, was erected above Martin's birthplace. Over the entrance to the northern chapel of the church the inscription still reads: HIC NATUS EST SANCTUS MARTINUS, "here was born St Martin". Beneath the church, there is thought to have been a Roman cultic construction, transferred from the former native house, to pay tribute to Martin, which was later replaced by a small church or cemetery chapel. However, the archaeological exploration of the church and the chapel between 1989 and 1992 did not reveal a single remnant of any Roman edifice. Yet one thing is certain: the area served as the town's eastern burial ground in the 1st century A.D., and was permanently used as a cemetery throughout Roman times. In other words, St Martin's birth house could not have been on this site. It is more likely that what was thought to be St Martin's birthplace was in fact the tomb of St Quirinus, who died in Savaria as a martyr. The church standing above the tomb may have been erected to commemorate the saint, laying the basis for a time-honoured tradition.

At the site of today's baroque church, or at least its nave, there once stood a church, dating from as early as the 9th century, which was later reconstructed several times with more up-to-date techniques. It was dismantled late in the 11th century, and soon afterwards a small single-aisled church with a semicircular apse was built there from Roman bricks. In the 1250s, the church passed into the ownership of the Bishop of Győr, who had the building reconstructed in late Romanesque style. The Gothic restoration took place at the end of the 14th century, and a century later, the building was serving as the only

parish church in the town. At Eastertime in 1638, it was taken over by the Dominicans, and a large-scale reconstruction was soon launched. Renovation work was apparently still in progress when the building collapsed, presumably due to the weak masonry structure. Thanks to a donation by Elizabeth Batthyány, the church was rebuilt in baroque style between 1668 and 1674; and the latest renovations, in 1930 and 1931, changed little of its structure.

From the aspect of St Martin's cult one of the side chapels reveals interesting objects. At its eastern wall, there is a baroque St Martin altar, and in the altar of the chapel, we can see a statue of St Martin of Tours with a goose at his feet. A carved tabernacle at the bottom of the statue contains a trunk-shaped reliquary containing a fragment of St Martin's finger bone. This relic itself was mentioned by Matthias



Bel, one of Hungary's greatest scientist-writers in the early 18th century, but the trunk-shaped reliquary is more likely to have been prepared in the 19th century. A large oil painting depicting St Martin and the beggar prepared in the 17th century is still on view in the St Martin Chapel, a very tense picture portraying Martin in a hussar-like uniform and the beggar in a very naturalistic way. The beggar is described as an ailing invalid leaning against his heavy crutches, making Martin's deed even more pronounced and charitable. Szombathely's St Martin church has played a key role in the local Christian community's life for several centuries. It has been a major place of pilgrimage since the 12th century requesting the saint bishop's assistance. For this reason, the bishop's sitting stone statue was erected in mediaeval times onto the altar, in which his relics were

most probably kept. The 18th century saw an even greater number of pilgrims arriving in Szombathely, hence the growing number of devotional pictures describing the church, its devotional statues of the Virgin Mary and St Martin. Such an engraving was prepared by Bernhard Hermann of Graz around 1750, with the picture of Virgin Mary in the centre and the St Martin church, the cloister and the well in the background. Another engraving depicted St Martin in a celestial light, again with the picture of the church and the cloister in the background. The altarpiece of the main altar was also decorated with a picture of St Martin, allegedly depicting the Amiens episode where he cut up his coat to share it with a beggar, a scene that also survived on a 17th-century seal of the Dominican convent. There is a painting kept in St Martin church made in the mid-1800s, and depicting Martin with the beggar and some contemporary noblemen. The picture was probably a bequest of a charitable benefactor of the church, conceivably one of the noble families of the Erdődys, the Batthyánys or the Esterházy, renowned for the keenness to support the Dominican Order. Legend has it that the painter portrayed Martin with subtly feminine lineaments in order to pay tribute to Count Elizabeth Batthyány, builder of the modern church. Among the 18th-century baroque furniture of St Martin church we can still find the altar of the St Martin chapel with the standing statue of St Martin. A highly valuable ciborium was prepared by Viennese goldsmith Adam Tanzl at the request of the Dominican congregation of the church on which the figure of St Martin appears with Virgin Mary and Dominican saints. St Martin church also boasts a number of individual and community relics related to the respect of the saint including a procession flag from the 18th-19th century, the flag of the Rosary Association from 1871, and the flag of the Credo Association from 1927.



St Martin Visitors' Centre There are quite a large number of tourists, pilgrims or historians visiting Szombathely with the purpose of looking for interesting historical sights or relics related to the well-known Bishop of Tours, one of Szombathely's most famous natives. They will also be awaited by the St Martin Visitors' Centre, open to the public from April 2007 in the Vicarage next to St Martin Church, and one of the major stations on the Cultural Route of the Council of Europe. The exhibition, displaying the graphics of local artist Ferenc Masszi as well as copies of relics and documents, focuses on the relationship between Martin of Tours and his native town; it introduces the lesser known and more seldom depicted events taken from the saint's life and related to Savaria. The exhibition also features written documents and archaeological finds, unearthed in the area of former Savaria, and other curiosities that have been so far unavailable to the public.

A photo exhibition, arranged to show depictions of St Martin from all over Vas County, is open to visitors in a separate room of the visitors' centre. On the area of Vas County, there are presently eleven

churches consecrated in honour of St Martin. At all of these places, the patron saint has been depicted on the main altarpiece. The St Martin church of Körmend and Sárovar have unfortunately been destroyed over the times; we know of their existence from historical documents only. There once was a community called Pusztaszentmárton, a fact we also learnt only from manuscripts. The figure of St Martin has been portrayed in twelve other churches in Vas County; in forms of statues, paintings or stained-glass windows.

The third collection of St Martin Visitors' Centre, entitled "St Martin in Folk Traditions" introduces Hungarian folk customs related to Martin's Day. 11 November was not only the day when new wine was tasted; people also practised various other customs related to weather-forecasting. Győző Somogyi's series of 8 pictures depicts these particular traditions.

When the idea of a visitors' centre was thought up, the planners did not forget about younger generations either. At the various interactive venues, visitors with skilled hands can prepare their own souvenir to take home: they can cast lead, coin money, make wax seals and craft St Martin lanterns. These activities allow the visitors to learn all there is to know about the cult of St Martin in a playful manner. In the courtyard of the vicarage, there is a large mosaic familiarising the observer not only with the major milestones of Martin's life but also the European network of pilgrimage.



St Martin Cemetery St Martin Cemetery of Szombathely, built adjacent to St Martin church has a particularly unique history: it was used as a burial ground without interruption from the 1st century A.D., and is known as one of Europe's oldest graveyards. Victims of the various epidemics sweeping this region have been laid to rest here: those of the plague in 1710-1711, the great fires in 1716, 1749 and 1817; the cholera in 1850, the typhoid in 1908, and the casualties of World War I; the bodies of the latter were moved to the Hero's Cemetery only in 1920. During the several centuries, a great number of respectable and prominent citizens were buried here: politicians, officials, businessman, tradesmen and simple people who all made their modest contribution to Szombathely's development and prosperity. One part of the cemetery had been given to the town as a donation by the Cziczser family; a historical fact reflected in the name of this spot, "cicekert" (Cice Garden), still referred to in this form by locals. The graveyard has been expanded quite a number of times since the 18th century by new plots of land purchased from the Dominican Order. The structure of the cemetery neatly reflects this historical development and can be divided into separate parts: Ancient Cemetery, Old Cemetery, Middle Cemetery and New Cemetery. During World War II, St Martin Cemetery was heavily bombed leaving quite a few graves damaged or completely destroyed. The oldest tombstones date back to the 1800s. Around the Stations of the Cross, standing in the centre of the cemetery, a few extremely valuable carvings were added in the 1930s. A bit further away from the paths, we can see simpler tombs; there is a separate plot for children's tombs. One of the most precious tombstones of the cemetery is the one carved for the memory of Nikits Franciscus; it is the work of Ignac Raffensperger, one of the masters making the Holy Trinity Column on Szombathely's Main

Square. A council decree, issued in 1962, put an end to the practice of burial in the cemetery that, by then, had reached the size of 7 Ha. In 1987, a local committee was set up with the aim of establishing a Memorial Park on the area of the graveyard; the plan, however, was bound to fail as, during the 1970s and 1980s, people were taking the remains of their relatives to the new cemetery located on Jáki Road. The Association for the St Martin Cemetery has been recently set up, and this organisation has been doing its utmost to preserve the tombs and to prevent the graveyard from neglect and decay.



The Cathedral In 1913, the then Bishop of Tours relinquished some of St Martin relics to Szombathely including a piece of Martin's skull, brought to the town with all due solemnity and placed in a herm, made by local artist István Tóth, on the St Martin altar of Szombathely Cathedral. Another relic, prebend Sándor Tauber's grail prepared by the Beumers Co. of Düsseldorf, also dates back to the beginning of the 20th century. The grail, with an enamel painting of St Martin on its base, was bequeathed by prebend Tauber to the chapter-house in 1935.

Another composition entitled "The Miraculous St Martin" can be seen in the altarpiece of the transept in Szombathely Cathedral, and was completed by Franz Anton Maulbertsch in 1791. The sketch of the painting was on display at an exhibition arranged in 1997 to pay tribute to St Martin; today it is in the Bishop's Palace. Maulbertsch's altarpiece depicts the eternal Bishop of Tours "in light of his miracles". St Martin, standing in the centre in front of a vaulted shrine, is holding a crook in his left hand, and is raising his right for a blessing. The beggar of Amiens is in the foreground of the picture while the background features the dumb girl of Chartres and St Paul of Nola. Maulbertsch painted another picture of St Martin in one of the side chapels, in this picture he heals the sick and resurrects the dead.





The Bishop's Palace The frescos in the ceremonial hall of Szombathely's Bishop's Palace are also the work of Franz Anton Maulbertsch, completed in the autumn of 1783. Above the main entrance to the hall, we can see the spread of Christianity on four different continents, while the fifth depicts the establishment of Szombathely's episcopacy, an event marking the beginning of a new golden age for Savaria. The picture features the cathedral's original plan, and shows a rain of flowers gushing out of a cornucopia: the symbol of revival of the town's ancient glory effected by the new episcopacy. In front of the female figure symbolising Szombathely, the fresco depicts two local saints, Martin and Quirinus. St Martin is standing in an ornate bishop's frock coat, with a beggar kneeling at his feet, and a goose beside him. In the Bishop's Palace, Maulbertsch obviously wanted to paint St Martin in his quality as a bishop. The building also houses gifts offered by communities respecting and cherishing St Martin traditions.

A silver chalice depicting Martin and the beggar is on display at the Diocesan Museum, made by local goldsmith, Márton Szaniszló, in the 18th century.





The Seminary In the former Seminary, built at the order of Bishop Szily, more than one episodes of St Martin's life are depicted. The earliest one, painted by Stephan Dorffmeister, dates back to 1791: it once stood on the altar of the chapel but now it is on display at the Bishop's Palace. In the chapel of the Seminary there are three frescos painted by Ferenc Storno in 1884. On the ceiling of the chapel, the panel picture shows Martin in a bishop's cloak. The inscription above the panel picture reads: "SANCTUS MARTINUS ORA PRO NOBIS" (Pray for us St Martin). On the two sides of the tabernacle, the painter depicted the famous episode of the Amiens legend, and St Martin's dream. The colourful stained-glass window, the work of Erzsébet Szabó, also features the Bishop of Tours. In 1941, a new chapel was built on the second floor of the Seminary; the composition on the walls of this new chapel was painted by Béla Kontuly and recounts the life of St Martin in three chapters. In the central picture, the well-known episode, the Division of the Cloak is depicted. The Diocesan Library, housed in the same building, also has a large number of St Martin-relics. Local artists founded the St Martin Gild in the 1930s, the bronze plaque of which was prepared by János Alföldy in 1936. This plaque was given as an award to the prize-winners of the first Transdanubian Exhibition of Fine Arts. Today there are still quite a few civil and religious organisations working under the name of St Martin including Martineum Adult Education Academy, the Martinus Cultural and Religious Association, the Association for the St Martin Cemetery and the St Martin Choir, all doing their utmost to preserve the local traditions of St Martin's cult.





The St Martin Week On his memorial day, 11 November, and during the period dedicated to his celebration, churches pay tribute to his activities, and folk traditions are revived. Martin's day is the first day of winter, when new wine is tasted, "Martin geese" are killed, and the chest-bones of poultry are used to forecast the weather. The cult of St Martin in Szombathely is ever stronger, and celebratory events include different programmes such as religious meetings, processions with lanterns, dance evenings, concerts, lectures and exhibitions. Szombathely's restaurants await their guests with gastronomic specialities with abundant goose-dishes being listed on the menu.

All over Europe people light devotional candles in the workshops around the 11 November because of the early nightfall; this is where the idea of the lantern-lit procession originates from, a custom revived in Szombathely in 2000. After a festive ceremony held in the Cathedral, the procession makes its way to St Martin church, traditionally led by soldiers of the Savaria Legion dressed in Roman military uniforms. Besides the wreathing of St Martin's statue and the holy mass, the town council confers its major honours on the selected ones at a ceremonial event on Martin's day.

The Great St Martin Day Fair has been organised during the first weekend of November for over 10 years, organised in Szombathely's Village Museum. The fair is attended by vendors from all over Hungary and even Transylvania, all selling high quality, most typically handmade products.

On the great stage of the village museum people can see ethnographic and folklore programmes including comedies and various musical performances typical of fairs; and, in each year, a community bearing St Martin's name is invited to the festivities. The fair is made even



more atmospheric by the stalls selling pies, roast chestnut and goose-dishes as well as different drinks including top quality wines.



St Martin Routes



Szombathely

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The Municipality of Szombathely – Tourinform Office

H-9700 Szombathely, Kossuth Lajos u. 1–3.

Tel: +36 94/ 514-451, fax: +36 94/ 514-450

E-mail: szombathely@tourinform.hu

www.szombathely.hu

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