Buda, the late medieval capital of the Hungarian kingdom, was not the ecclesiastical center of the country, and no archbishopric or bishopric had its seat there. Nevertheless, the shaping of its ecclesiastical topography began a considerable time before its foundation, and the institutions present on its territory prior to the city’s establishment influenced the history and the topography of Buda in the long term. When discussing the monastic topography of Buda one cannot avoid taking into consideration the institutions of Óbuda, Felhévíz, the Margaret Island (Hares’ Island in the Middle Ages) and Pest as well as of some other sites surrounding the city, since these settlements – although legally separate – formed an economic unit long before the birth of modern Budapest.

Before the Foundation of Buda

The political center of the medieval Hungarian kingdom, called medium regni by contemporaries – to which later the territory of the capital and the royal residence belonged – was marked from the first half of the eleventh century by ecclesiastical foundations (see Fig. 8.1). The earliest foundations bordered the royal forest of the Pilis, the southernmost edges of which reached as far as Buda. I will not deal with the whole medium regni area in this study, but only with the part which belonged to the territory of the future capital. One of these foundations – the first in this region, in fact – was St Peter’s collegiate chapter of Buda (later Óbuda), founded by King Peter in the 1040s.¹ The chapter was

¹ On the history of the town see László Bártfai Szabó, Óbuda egyházi intézményei a középkorban [The ecclesiastical institutions of Óbuda in the Middle Ages] (Budapest: [n. p.], 1935), as well as the relevant parts of Bp. tört., i–ii. The German volume Budapest im Mittelalter gives an overview of the whole territory of today’s Budapest (especially important for the present topic are the articles of Júlia Altmann, Zoltán Bencze, Katalin Írásné Melis, Enikő Spekner and András Végh). For the most important information on ecclesiastical institutions (with further literature) see Beatrix F. Romhányi, Kolostorok és társaskáptalanok a középkori Magyarországon [Monasteries and collegiate chapters in medieval Hungary] (Budapest: Pytheas, 2000; revised and enlarged CD-ROM version: Budapest: Arcanum, 2008). A fundamental work on the medieval topography of Buda has been published by András Végh, Buda.
always styled “of Buda”, although it did not in fact move into the new city on the Castle Hill. Its estates extended over parts of the later capital. St Peter’s chapter was the most important ecclesiastical institution on the territory of Buda before the foundation of the new city on the Castle Hill.

Despite the fact that the territory was part of the medium regni – but possibly because of the presence of the chapter – monastic foundations can be attested to only relatively late. South of the later capital, banus Apa of the Becsegely kindred founded his family monastery in the middle of the twelfth century, transforming the earlier parish church of the village of Kána into an abbey. Characteristically for medieval Hungary, the foundation can be dated only by the fact that the founder is mentioned in charters between 1150 and 1158. The abbey itself is first mentioned only in 1236 as having common estates with the nearby Benedictine abbey of Telki, thus implying that Kána abbey was also Benedictine. The two abbeys leased their fields in Pest minor (i.e. the part of Pest on the right bank of the Danube) to the burghers of Pest in 1240.\(^2\)

In 1258 the patroness of the abbey, Petronella, mentioned the abbey in her testament.\(^3\) The estates of the monastery are mentioned in 1325,\(^4\) but the abbey itself disappears for more than a century, although its continued existence has been proven by archaeological investigations.\(^5\) Finally, Paul, the priest of Buda and governor of the abbey, is mentioned in 1495.\(^6\)

Shortly before the official foundation of the new capital, the presence of the royal court intensified in the area. Many of the charters of King Béla IV were issued in Óbuda, even before 1241. Further expressions of royal interest were the foundation of new ecclesiastical institutions like the Premonstratensian provostry on the Margaret Island and the donation of a large landed property to the newly founded Cistercian abbey at Petrovaradin (now in Serbia).

The small Premonstratensian provostry on Margaret Island was founded before 1225 by King Andrew II and existed until the end of the fifteenth century,

\(^{2}\) BTOE, i, pp. 37–38 (no 23): “pro supradiectis ducentis iugeribus terrarum, in quibus plantaverunt vel plantabunt vineas, a festo sancti Michaelis proxime venturo in tertia revolutione eiusmodem...solvent decem marcas bonorum frisaticorum ad pondus, vel si frisatici defecerint, solvent in argento decime combustionis ad pondus...”. See also László Bártfai Szabó, Pest megye történetének okleveles emlékei 1002–1599-ig [Charters on the history of Pest County, 1002–1599] (Budapest: Ablaka, 1938), no 24.

\(^{3}\) Bártfai Szabó, Pest megye, no 39.

\(^{4}\) Bártfai Szabó, Pest megye, no 203.

\(^{5}\) Katalin H. Gyürky, A Buda melletti kánai apátság feltárása [Archaeological research on Kána abbey near Buda] (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1996).

\(^{6}\) MNL OL DL 32 522 (15 June 1495).