

THE OLD TOWN OF TALLINN AND ITS FUTURE

In 1154, the Arab geographer Idrisi plotted two new entries into his map of the world — "Astlandia" and "Kalevany". The first designated Estonia — a country located on the southern shores of the Finnish Gulf, while the second, was derived from the name of the Estonian epic hero Kalev, marked a settlement, which has been mentioned in old Russian chronicles since 1223 as Kolyvan, later to be called Tallinn.

A famed chronicler of old Livonia — the missionary Henrik, known as Henricus de Lettis — mentions an old Estonian settlement, Lyndanise, in the province of Raevala (Rävala), where the Danes, after conquering Estonia, founded a town in 1219. Founded? The answer is yes and no. Yes, because from that time on the name Revel (after the old Estonian province Raevala) and the name Tallinn (Danish citadel) became widely used as designations for the town which during the Middle Ages had developed into an important trade centre. And, no, because archaeologists have discovered ruins here of an old permanent Estonian settlement of artisans and tradesmen dating from the 10th to the 11th centuries A.D.

Indeed, the proximity of the naturally well protected bay which hardly ever freezes over during the long winter, made it a very convenient trade harbour on the water route from Scandinavia through the Finnish Gulf, along the large Russian rivers and through the Black Sea all the way to Byzantium. Even if a city, in the true sense of the word, did not exist there in those times, there did exist, according to Idrisi, a "small town resembling a big fortress".

The history of Tallinn, therefore, goes back at least 800 years. The first stages of its existence, however, are still concealed in obscurity, and scientists can only hope that new archaeological findings will throw more light on its past.

Tallinn owes its historical biography to Estonia's geographical location. It has survived many invasions during the years of its existence, as even the briefest chronology will show: 1219 — conquered by the Danes; 1227-1238 under the Teutonic Order; 1238 — under Danish domination; 1346-1561 — again under the

German Order of the Knights; 1561-1710 — under Swedish dominion; 1710 — incorporated into the Russian Empire.

In the Middle Ages, Tallinn was an influential trade centre and, as a member of the Hanseatic League, one of the most important way stations along the historic east-west trade routes. It prospered and and flourished much like other rich towns of the Middle Ages.

However, Tallinn was not only a rich trade town, but an important art centre as well. Such structures as the Teutonic Order Castle in the Upper Town (on Dom or Toompea Hill), the large ensemble of public buildings (churches, monasteries, merchant and artisan guild building and hospitals) and also the architecture of dwelling houses were all part of the development of a remarkable general trend in art — widely known today as the Tallinn school of architecture.

The rich heritage of Middle Age architecture places Tallinn among the top ranking and best preserved historical towns of Northern Europe. The role of town-fortress, with its corresponding special regimen, which Tallinn played after joining the Russian Empire and right up to the second half of the 19th century, enabled it to preserve a labyrinth of old streets and capital stone structures forming a unified city grouping, known today as the Old Town.

The Old Town occupies a very small part of Tallinn (118.4 hectares out of a total, in 1965, of 13,226,27 hectares) which stretches around it in a semi-circle along the shores of the bay. For many centuries it functioned as the civic centre. It was such in the Middle Ages, when it was surrounded by a high wall, and all public buildings, ensembles and settlements outside its limits were subject to demolition in cases of extreme emergency. And thus it was in subsequent centuries when the town expanded into its outskirts.

Therefore, the Old Town was always the arena of seething life and underwent frequent transformations in construction and architecture, which were realised on the basis of the old layout of the city and the architecture of former centuries — that is, on the

basis of the existing architectural complex — even though the economic, socio-political and ideological basis did not remain the same in the succeeding centuries and periods. One exception is the Upper Town (Toompea), where a large part of the buildings was destroyed by fire.

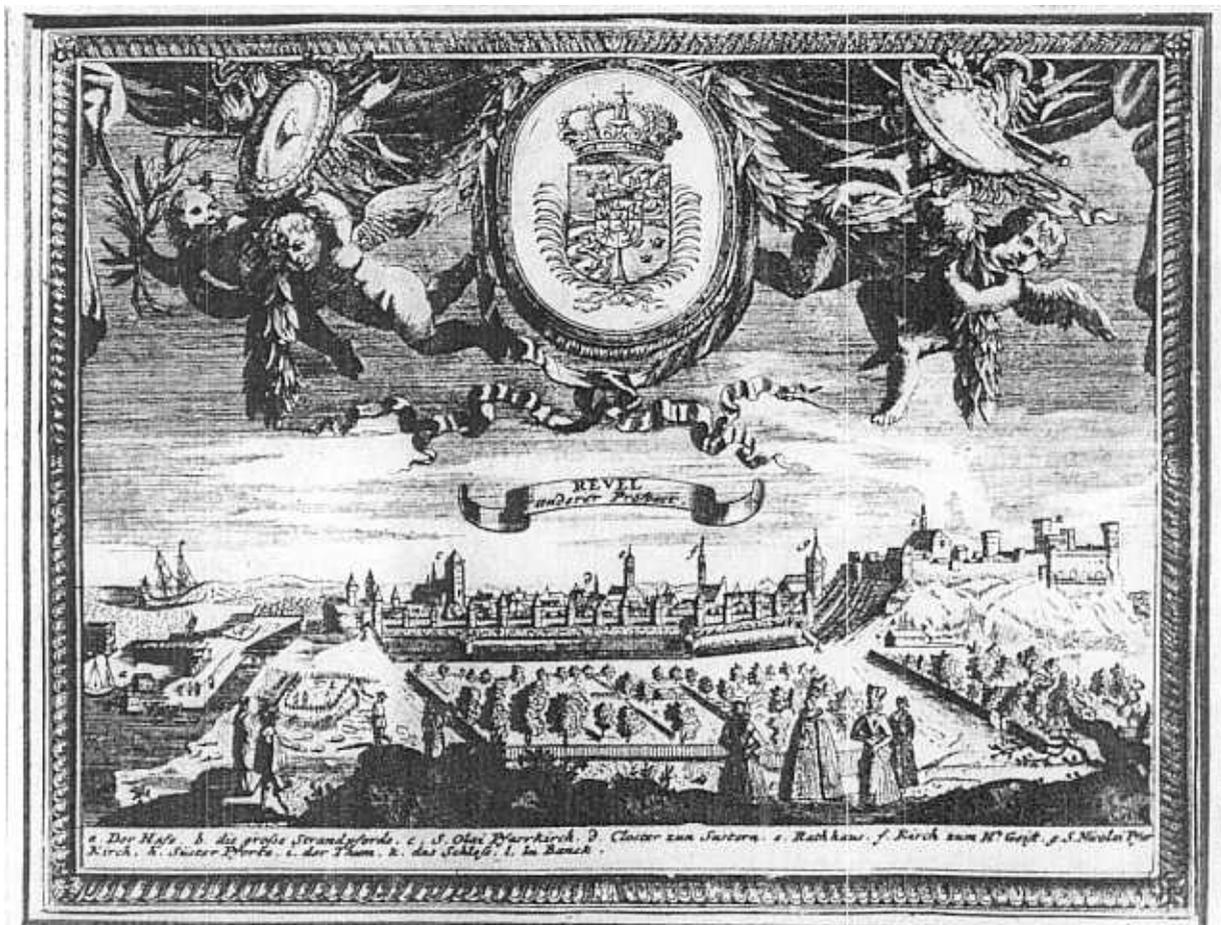
This part of the city was rebuilt as a complex of residential buildings, in Baroque and Classic, for the aristocracy, who had long owned the land at the top of the hill. However, in the Down Town, where the population consisted mainly of merchants and artisans, there were changes in architecture which were based on discoveries of new or latent possibilities hidden in the old architecture. This is why the old centre of

Tallinn give the impression of an ancient town — an impression that was not even destroyed by the two world wars of the 20th century.

Certain of Tallinn's especially striking architectural monuments have earned great fame, such as the elegant Town Hall, erected in the late 14th and early 15th centuries — the period of Revel's highest glory; the Grand Guild building of the same period; several churches built in the 13th century and reconstructed in the 15th, when they were given the outward form of a basilica (the Dom Cathedral, the churches of St. Olaus and St. Nicholas).

Especially interesting is the town wall, originally extending three kilometres, with 45 defence and passage

Fig. 1. — Tallinn (Revel). Engraving by Adam Olearius, 1650.



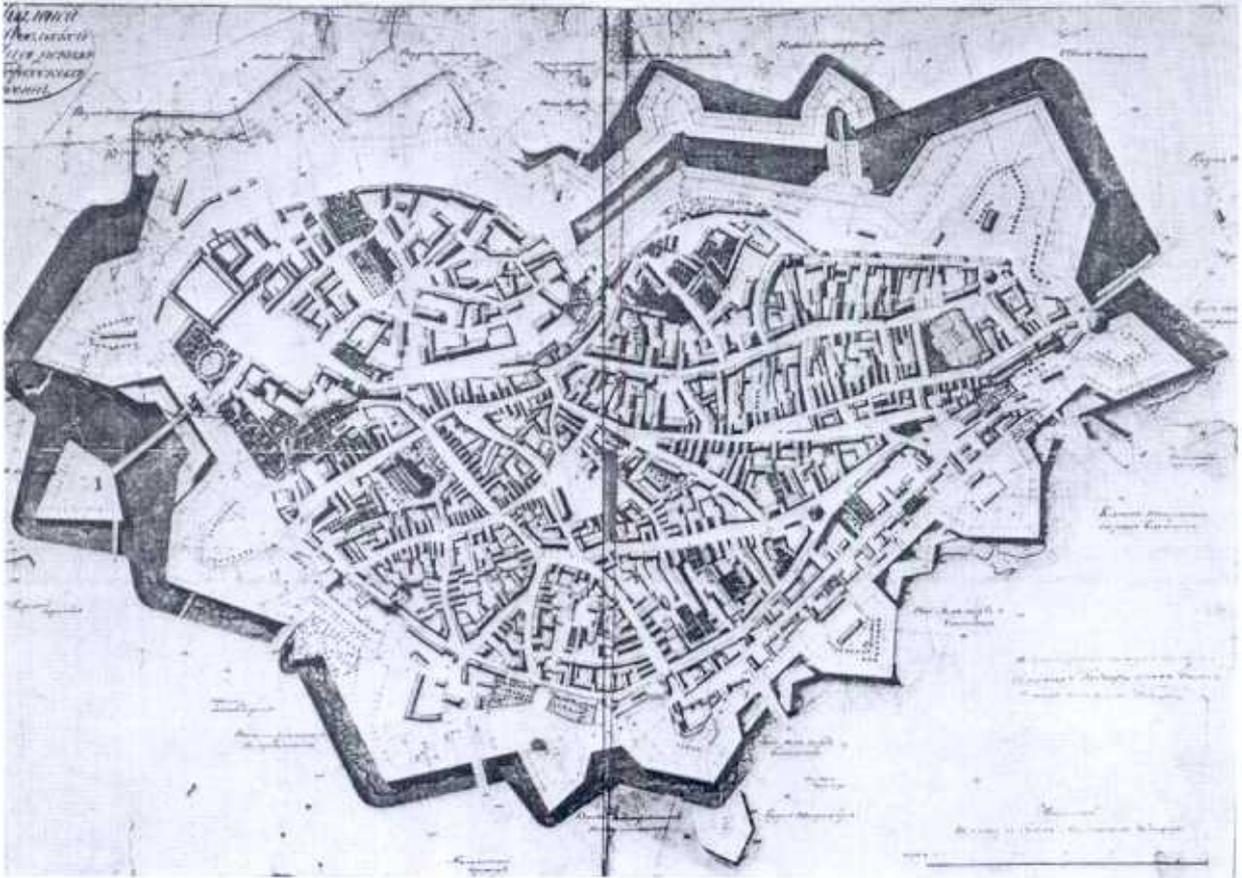


Fig. 2. — Tallinn in 1825.

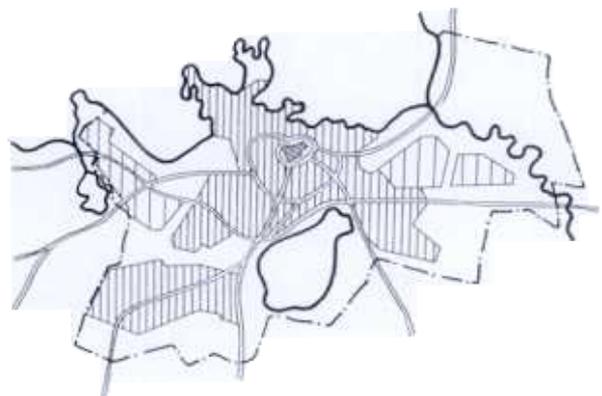


Fig. 3. — Map of Tallinn, 1965. The Old Town: 
 Lower Town:  Area under construction:  City
 limits:

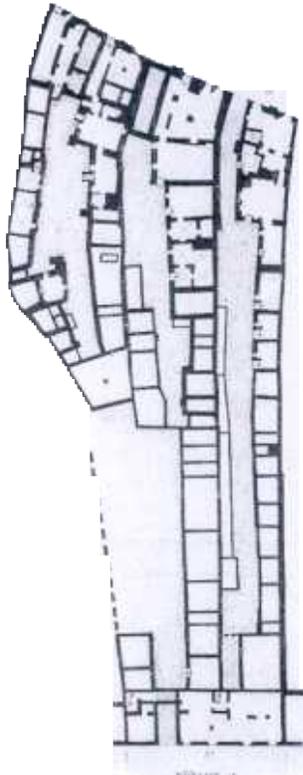


Fig. 4. — Overall plan view of a rich merchant's estate.

Fig. 5. — A craftsman's dwelling.

Fig. 6. — Tallinn. A view from the tower of St. Olaus' Church. In the right background is the Upper Town (Dom or Toompea Hill).



towers. A considerable part has been preserved — 1.85 kilometres of wall with about 30 towers. The wall's high degree of preservation and its prominent role in creating the special atmosphere of the Old Town account for its being considered "one of the wonders of the North". Wandering about the Old Town, we may find ourselves on some little secluded by-street running along the city wall, or in front of the city gates, or suddenly come upon a view of a slender tower with a weather vane on top.

How much valuable information is contained within these walls about the history of the art of war and the building of defences, but, mostly, of course, about the history of Tallinn itself. Earthen fortifications — a number of mighty bastions of the 16th to 18th centuries — became a unique defence belt preventing the fusion of the Old Town with newly settled sectors. It was later turned into a green zone surrounding the Old Town and is today a monument to town planning and architectural arts, a model of ancient fortification construction and a beautiful park, all rolled into one. Every historic town has its own countenance, its own individual features which characterise it as a single whole. Contributing to the formation and subsequent preservation of such a unity in Tallinn is the natural setting (the sea, Toompea Hill, the arrangement of the city on rising terracelike plateaux), as well as

Fig. 7. — Silhouetted rooftops and towers in old Tallinn.



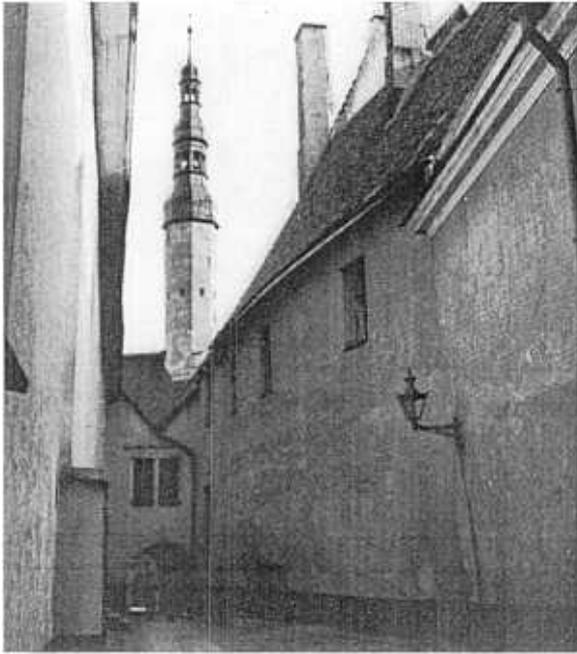


Fig. 8. — Tower of the Church of the Holy Ghost.

local building material (limestone) and its creative application in architecture, which is a synthesis of art and function.

However, various historical circumstances (for example, the fact that Tallinn was a typical Middle Ages town of commerce and a member of the Hanseatic League), as well as social phenomena (in a class sense), had, in turn great influence on shaping the appearance of individual parts of the town, on town blocks, and privately-owned plots of land, and also on certain architectural-building traditions preserved to this day. The streets of the Old Town consist of homes built one next to the other with narrow façades and high triangular pediments. Behind these façades there were rows of privately-owned buildings stretching out along long, narrow plots of land: large residences and small houses, servants' lodgings, rental apartments and ancillary structures. This is what the property of a wealthy town-dwelling merchant of the Middle Ages looked like. The plot usually stretched from one street to another through the whole block. Hence the system of main-and by-streets built up with homes of the most varied architecture.

On the other hand, the craftsman, as a rule, had a small house facing the street, and a small back-yard, since his was not a household containing a great many horses and cows as was the merchant's. Therefore, the main characteristics of the Old Town are the rows of building with alternating architectural and social rhythm.

Walls with their abutting buildings separated neighbouring plots and turned each piece of property into an individual secluded cell within the block. In the residential blocks of the Old Town, the principle "my home is my castle" prevailed — characteristic of the so-called "atrium" system of homes of the Roman aristocrats, revived today in Western Europe.

Constructional and social factors, reflected in the architecture of each individual home reveal the historical essence of the Old Town. Thus the social division of old Tallinn is fully traceable in its architecture. The distinct connection between architecture and the social order, the individual character of each part of town, even the size and composition of individual blocks, were dependent upon the influence of the natural and historical factors peculiar to Tallinn.

Now, when the process of city development and planning, with its problem of inevitable reconstruction and transformation, is of immediate concern to Tallinn, particular attention is being given to the Old Town.

The old sections of most cities today cannot continue to function as city centres. Modern life in all its aspects and manifestations can no longer be contained within the tight limits of an old town. A tense atmosphere arises, full of contradictions, which can only be relieved by means of well thought-out reconstruction, and not by haphazard demolition of some buildings and the building of others in their place.

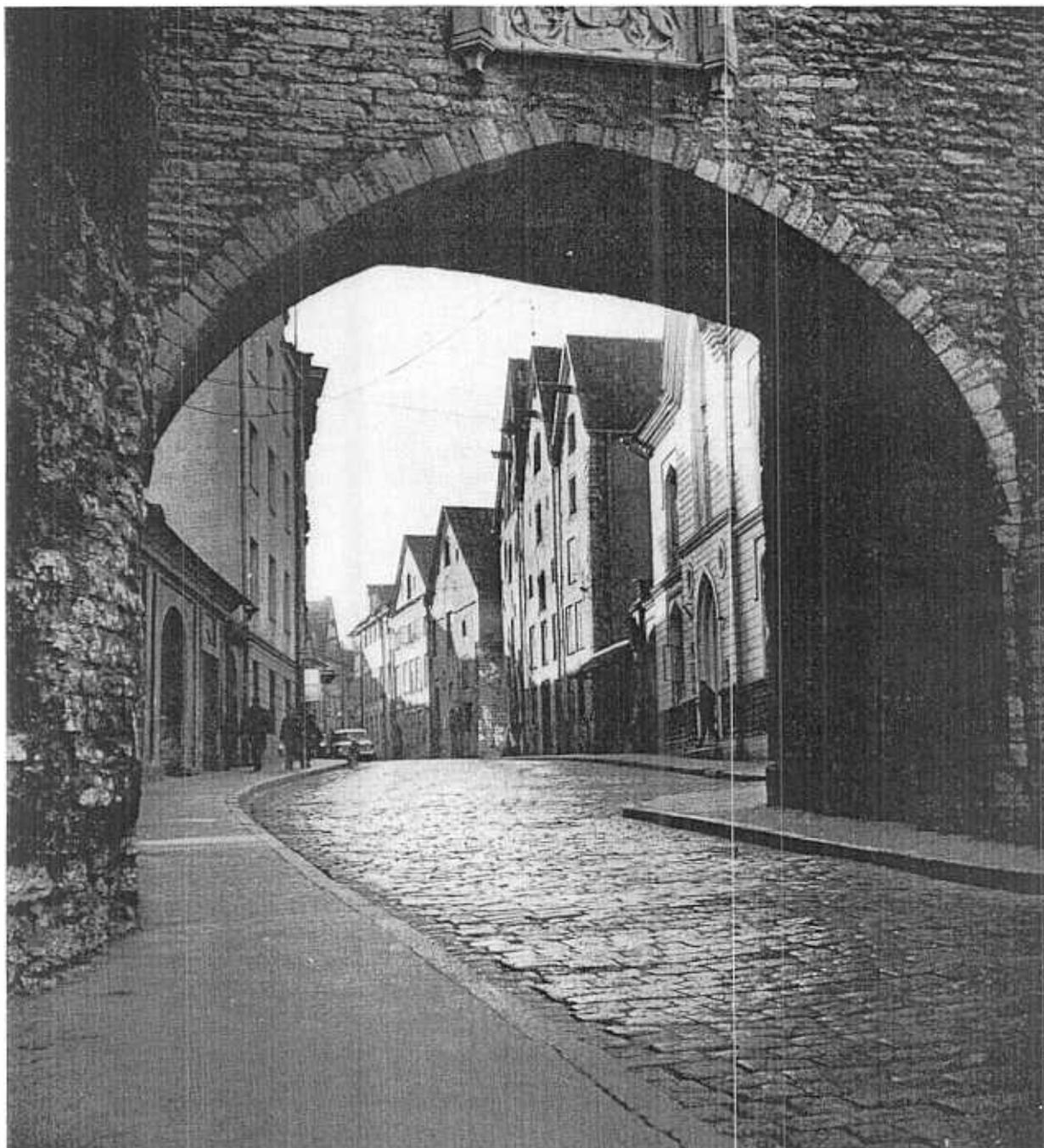
Fig. 9. — One of the streets running alongside the town wall.



Tallinn. Inner courtyard



Fig. 11. — Tallinn. A street viewed through the town gate next to the harbour.



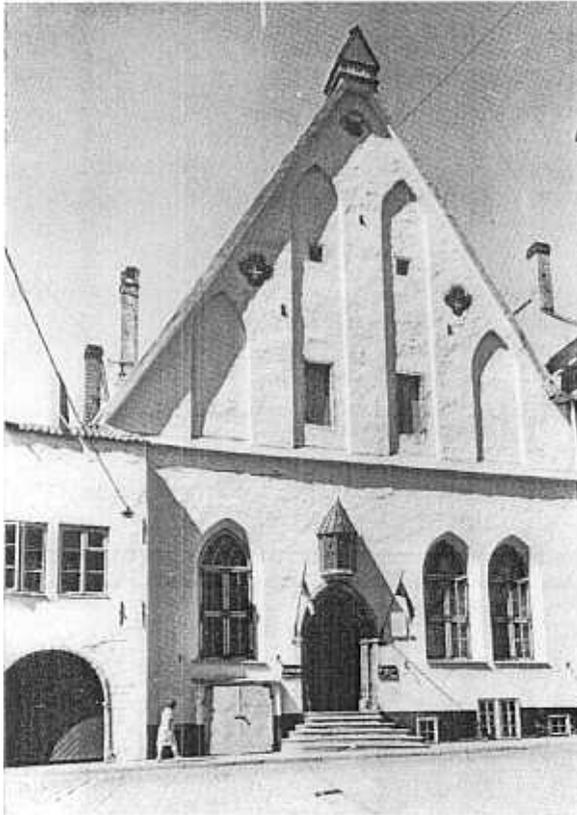


Fig. 12. — Façade of the Grand Guild Building in Tallinn.



Fig. 13. — A Tallinn city street.

This is why, all over the world, careful studies are being made of ancient, historic cities. But what, actually, can be considered to be in the "old" category? Where is this "old" to be found, and is this "oldness" complete or only partial? And is only the "old" valuable? To what extent can what is understood by "old" be differentiated according to centuries and according to styles? Is there something of value in all of this, and, if so, how valuable? What should be preserved, and how is this to be accomplished? About five years ago, we could not have answered

these questions precisely and on a proper scientific level. At that time, only the general appearance of Tallinn's architecture and a few individual units (architectural monuments, especially churches), were well known. However, architectural monuments comprise only a relatively small part of all the buildings of the Old Town, which all together comprise the basis for reconstruction.

There are nearly 1,500 buildings in the Old Town, each of which is an integral part of the whole and demands a concrete and differentiated approach, pos-

Fig. 14. — Towers Square.



Niguliste Church



Town wall Tallinn



Tallinn's town wall

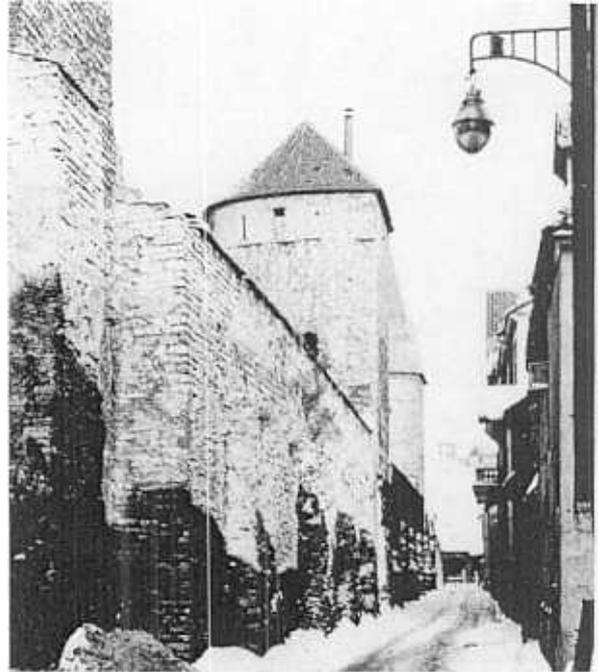


Fig Kadriorg Palace.





Fig. 19. — A portion of Tallinn's town wall after restoration.



Fig. 20. — Tallinn Town Hall (before restoration).

Fig. 21. — Tallinn Town Hall (after restoration).



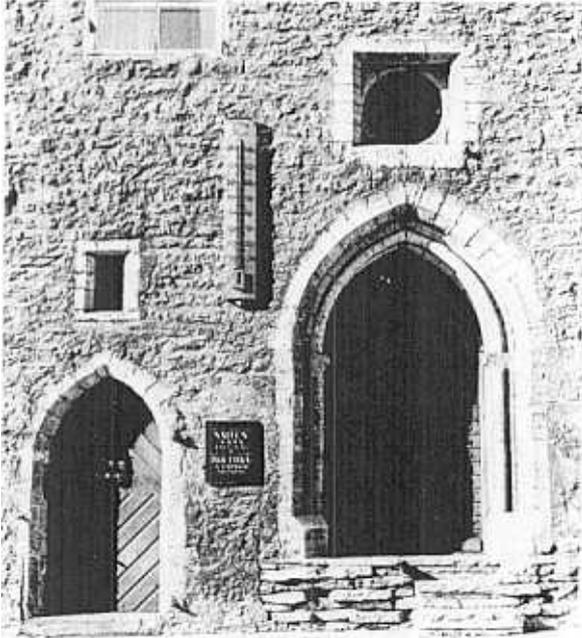
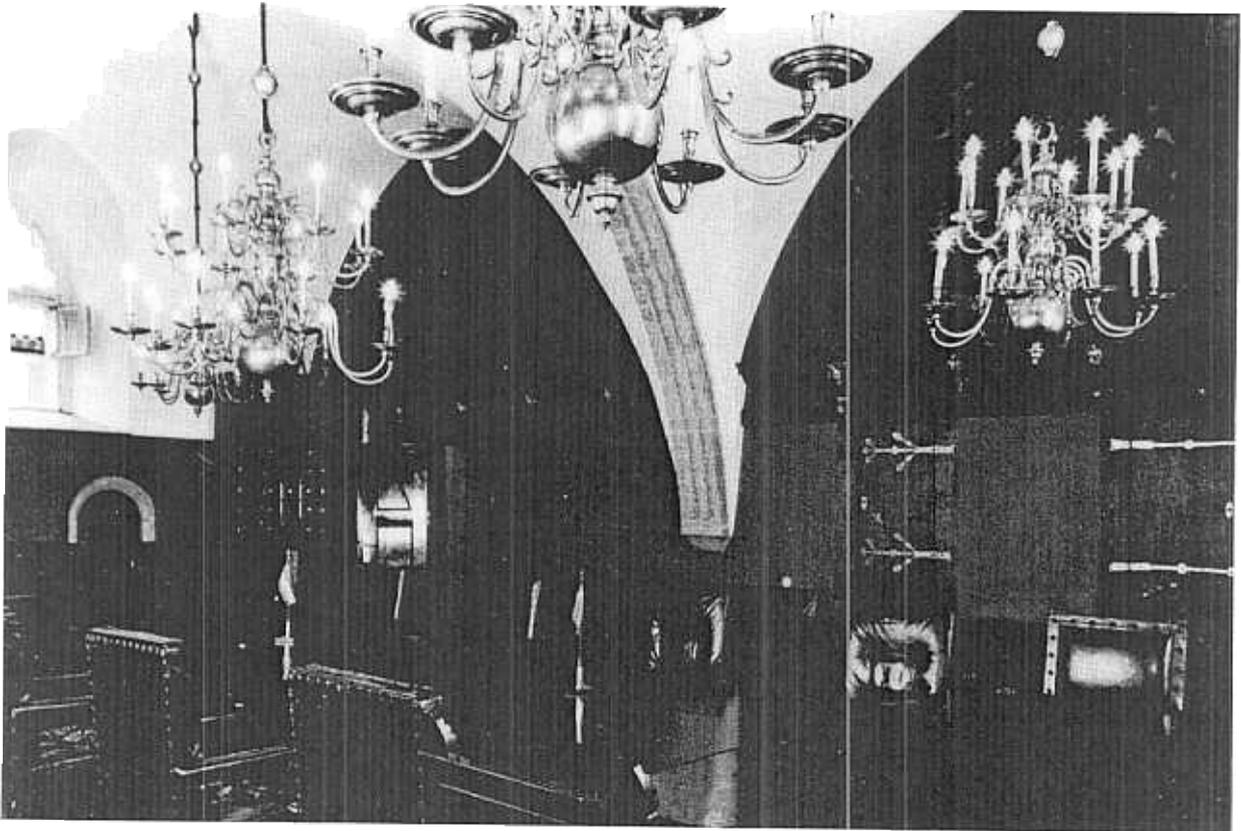


Fig. 22. — Tallinn Town Hall. The doorway, after restoration.

Fig. 23. — Tallinn Town Hall. The main hall.



sible only after a careful inventory of all the buildings. Such an inventory was taken, using a list of 73 questions. In studying the data received, the main goal was to answer four basic questions :

1. How great was the role of any one period (structural-archaeological), particularly of the early periods, in the structural-architectural development of the city — the role of old, historical forms of architecture and building art, including traditions of placement and planning ?
2. What are the general composition and lay-out of the city from the point of view of their antiquity ?
3. What picture does the city present from the point of view of architectural style ?
4. How great is the architectural-historical value of the buildings of the Old Town ?

It was established that the most ancient architecture, that is, since the time of the founding of the city up to the year 1630 (Gothic and Renaissance) is concentrated mainly in the Lower Town. Archaeological and architectural discoveries were made on every single block there. It is interesting to note, in this connection, that the ancient buildings which play such a large role

in the over-all appearance of the Old Town and in imparting the special architectural atmosphere today, are all different in both their exterior and interior architecture. It may be stated definitely that in the frequent, variable rhythm of old Tallinn's architecture, all styles are represented.

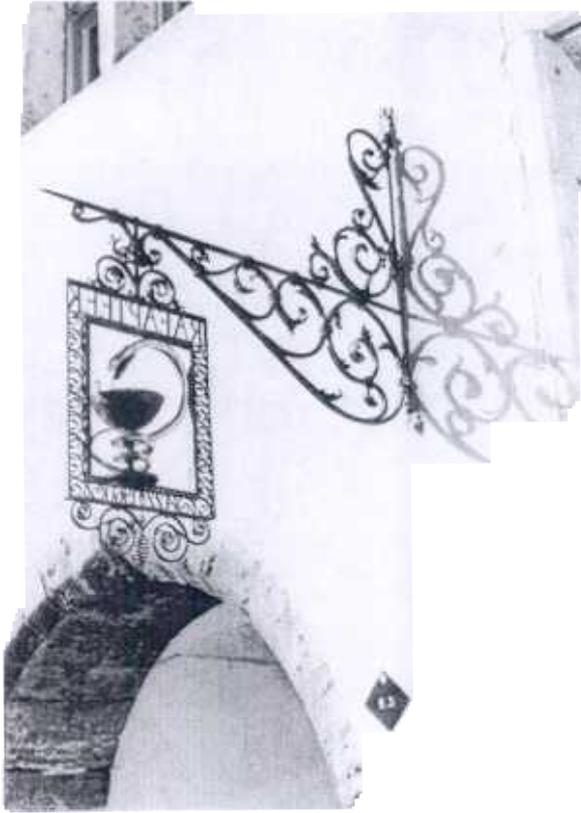
The most widespread among them is Classicism, reflecting in the architecture of the 19th century the period of the intensive development of capitalism. After that comes the Gothic, forming the basic of the architecture of the Old Town, although greatly changed by later reconstructions. Then come early Classicism, a few examples of the Baroque, Renaissance and the pseudo-styles and architectural trends of the 20th-century. Thus, in quantity, the Gothic is not far behind

the leading Classicism, and thanks to the location of the preserved Gothic buildings (corner houses, street perspectives) the Middle Ages clearly dominate in the overall architectural appearance of the Old Town.

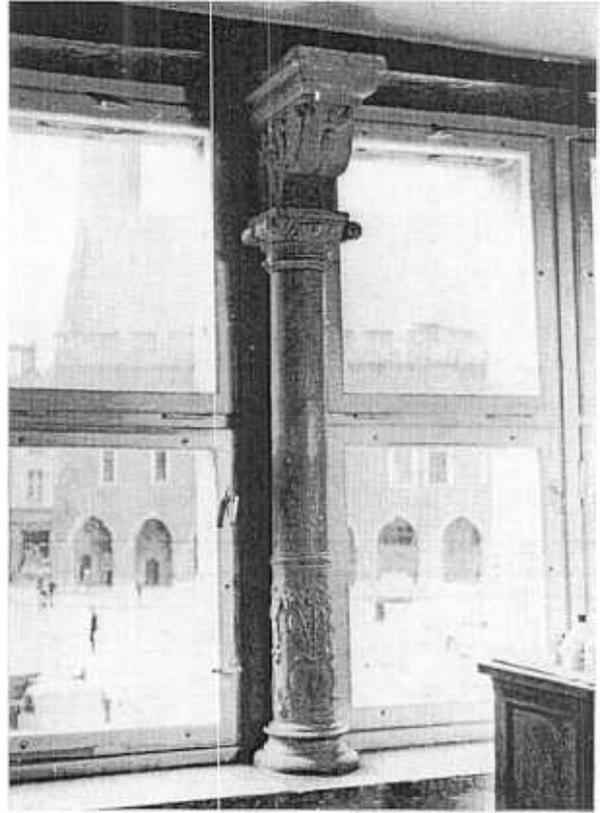
Age and style constitute only one criterion in determining the value of a relic monument. Archaeological data were taken into account which enabled us to determine the original size and plan of a given building and the building methods and architectural elements used, as well as numerous aspects of the city's composition, namely, the unity of a street's over-all appearance and individual architectural ensembles, the harmonious blending of architecture and history, and so forth. Finally, each building was individually studied in the light of Tallinn's history and the history of Estonia

Fig. 24. — Town Hall Square. The oldest pharmaceutical chemist's shop in the territory of the U.S.S.R. (founded in 1422).





pharmacy Hanging sign



Pharmacy Pillar found the wall masonry. Town Hall
Pikk Street

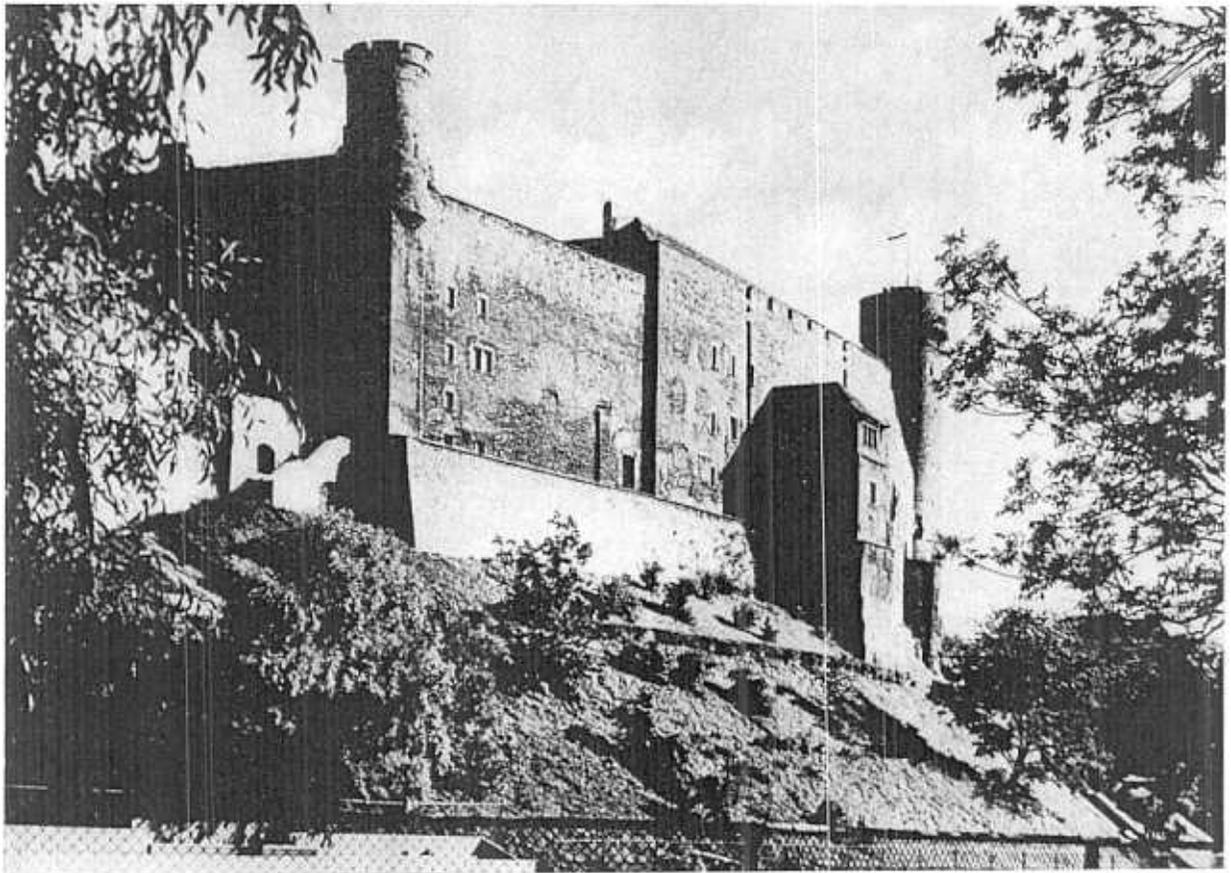


Fig. 28. — Toompea Castle.

and other European countries, with special attention being given to the specifics of local features and the works of local architects. The problems of reconstruction were examined together with the possibilities of making practical use of the historical atmosphere that has been preserved. All of these criteria were applied from two different positions — either from the point of view of the outward appearance of a given part of the city, or from the position of a given historical or architectural ensemble.

Out of 1,510 buildings, 145 were considered especially valuable, 375 were valuable, 365 were of relatively less value, and 625 were of no value at all (mainly small parasite houses located primarily in the green zone). This inventory confirmed the correctness of the approximative listing, "Individual Features of the Old Town of Tallinn", made by the author of this article in 1964.

The basic value of the Old Town, the main reason for Tallinn's uniqueness among other historic cities, and the high degree of preservation are not to be found in



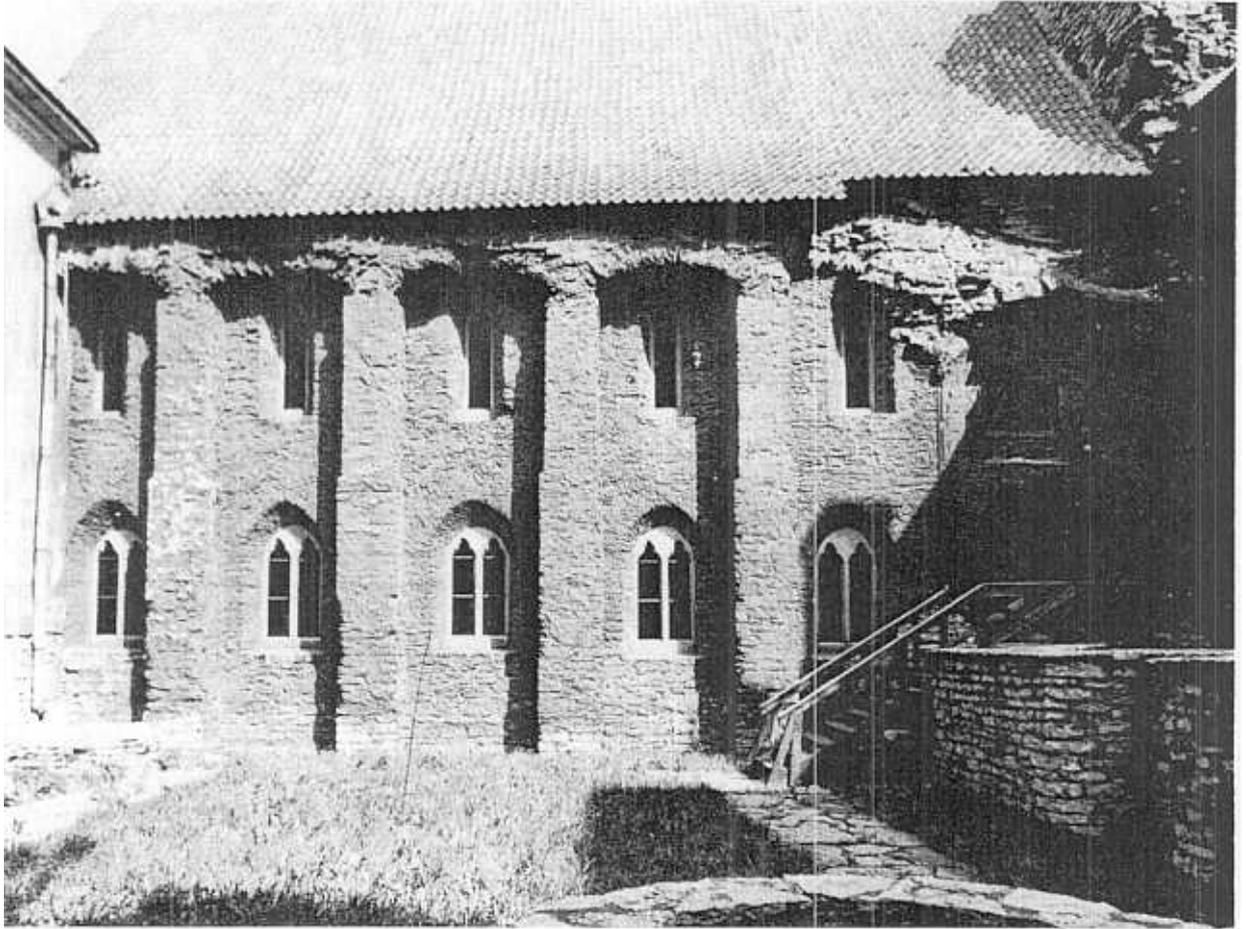
individual architectural relics or a particular architectural style, but in the unity of its city ensemble, in its over-all composition, created under the influence of natural, historical, economic and socio-political factors.

It is because of Tallinn's highly unusual state of preservation as a unified architectural whole that the significance of the Old Town goes far beyond that of a relic of local culture. It should, therefore, be seen as historically formed unity of great value. This unity is maintained because of the dense network of streets, the lay-out of the blocks, the traditional character of placement, the impressive city silhouette and the large quantity of preserved buildings of significant architectural-historical value.

Principles derived from architectural-historical research will be very important in developing concrete proposals for the restoration of the Old Town. Foremost is the determination of the degree of its functional use, as well as the degree of reconstruction of its buildings. Historical research of the functions of the Old Town

Fig. 29. — A view of Tallinn's streets.





has shown that throughout the centuries the city was given new functions in accordance with the already existing architectural resources. As a rule, thoughtful consideration and logic were used in bringing the major buildings of the Middle Ages into correspondence with their new designations, which, in essence, is the reason that the historically valuable architecture has been preserved.

The functional character of Tallinn has radically changed in recent years. So much so that an urgent need has arisen to alter the face of the city, in which the spiritual element, which has grown significantly in comparison with earlier times, must play a substantial role. This includes several possibilities for making practical use of the buildings of the Old Town: for various cultural institutions (museums, concert and exhibition halls), for student facilities (dormitories, clubs), art studios, scientific institutions, tourist bureaus, as well as for public facilities such as small specialty shops, cafés, restaurants and hotels.

on

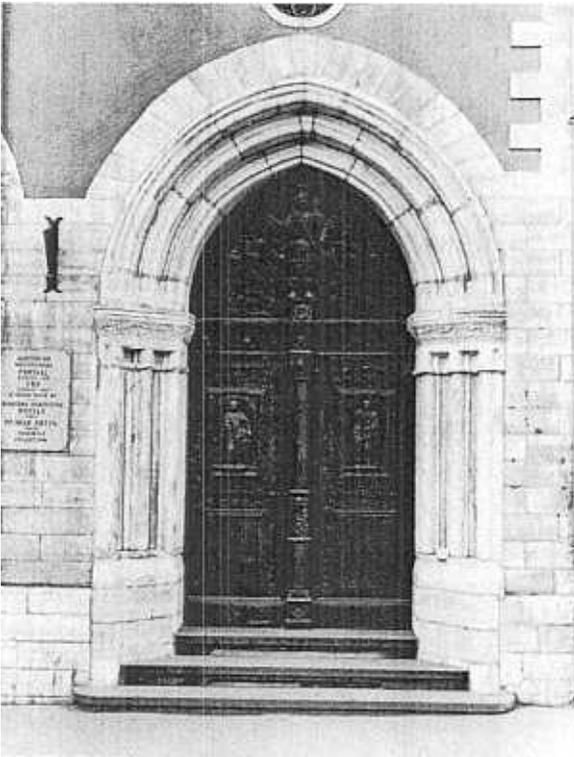
Fig. 30. — The courtyard of the Dominican Monastery in Tallinn.

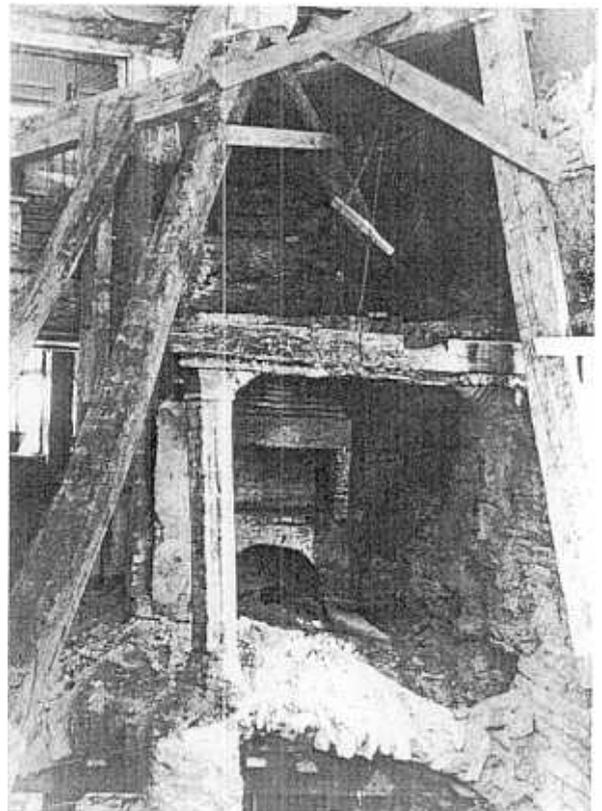
Fig. 31. — The domes of Oleviste Church.

Fig. 32. — The castle in Kiiyu, after restoration.

Fig. 33. — Doorway of a building on Suur-karya street.

Fig. 34. — "Kick in de Kõk" Tower in winter.







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Fig. 35. — A view of the Upper Town.

Fig. 38. — A view of Tallinn's streets.

Fig. 36. — No. 17, Vene Street (before restoration).

Fig. 38. — No. 17, Vene Street. A view of the vestibule (before restoration).

Fig. 39. — No. 17, Vene Street (after restoration).

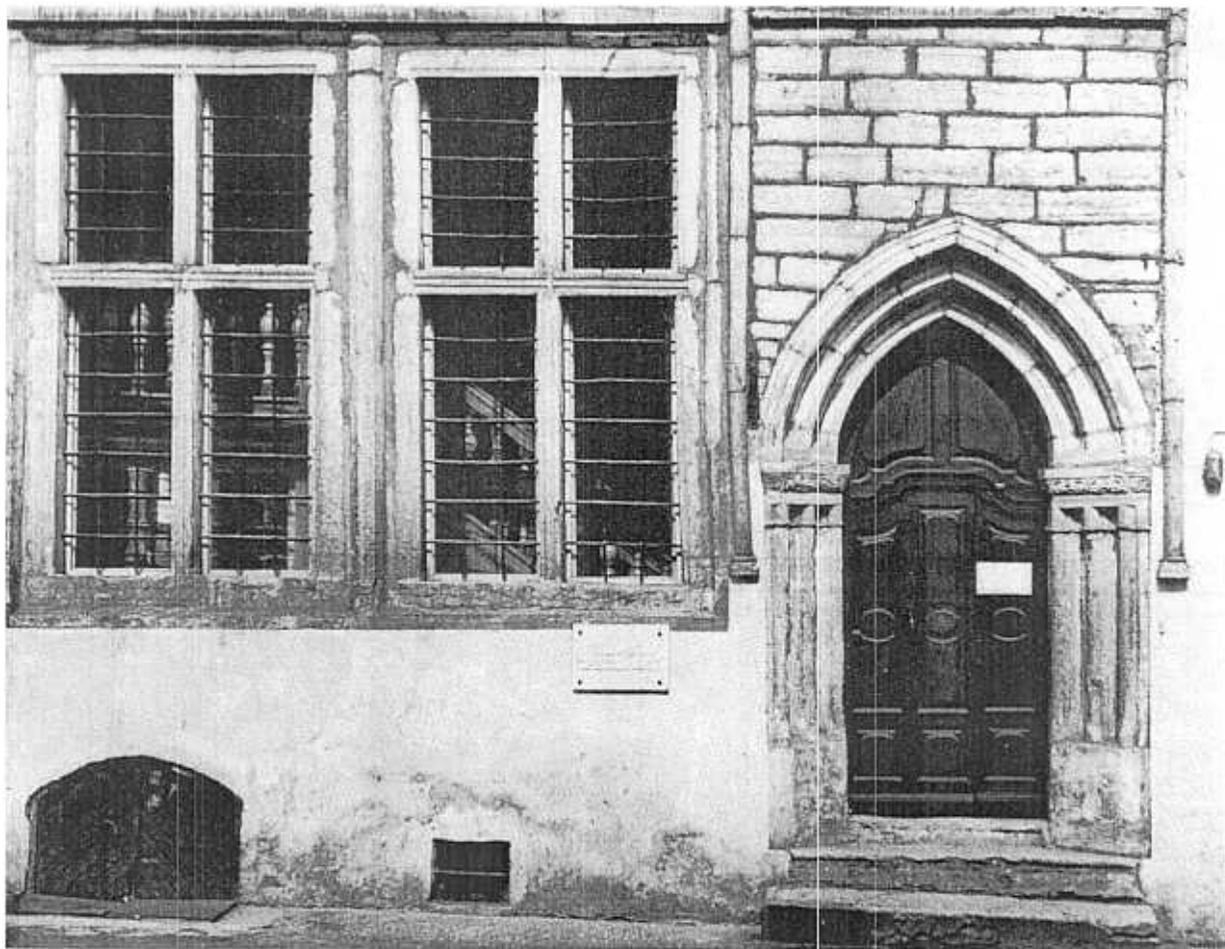


Fig. 40. — No. 17, Vene Street. Front entrance.

Fig. 41. — No. 17, Vene Street. Vestibule.

Here, in historic Upper Town, is the building housing the Republic's central administrative organ (Council of Ministers of the Estonian S.S.R.), as was customary throughout history. The available architectural resources, the great number of the most varied buildings, especially the historically evolved ensembles and the composite-houses (with components built during various periods on every parcel of what was formerly private property — all this guarantees many possibilities for giving the Old Town special functions. Along with various other designations, the Old Town will still remain a residential section of town. It must continue to exist, despite its antiquity — or rather, because of it. The following essential condition becomes the main principle: a building's architecture determines its function, and not the reverse. The extent of reconstruction depends on the degree of the building's historical value and on the architectural silhouette of the Old Town as a whole. There is no common module for reconstructing either historical cities or all the buildings

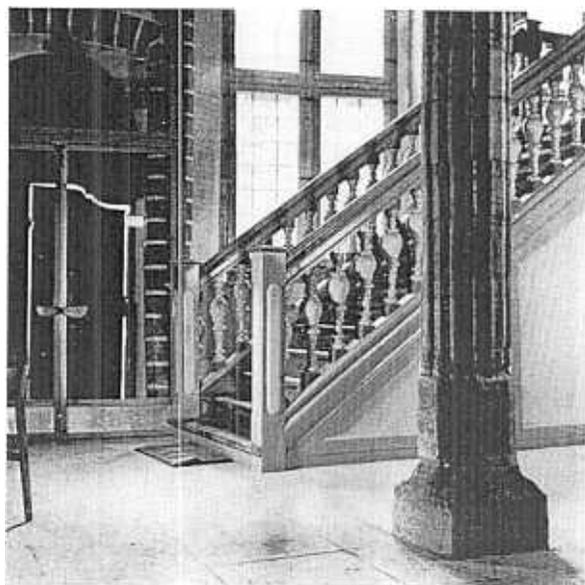




Fig. 42. — Koeru Inn (before restoration)

Fig. 43. Koeru Inn (after restoration)



within such a city. It must be the comparative principle applied to historical value, which should serve as a guide in each individual case.

Tallinn's Old Town must remain a special part within the centre of the capital of Soviet Estonia — the part which displays its architectural heritage, while, at the same time, functioning as a modern city — within, of course, the bounds to be determined. The problems of old Tallinn, the city centre, and greater Tallinn are all being dealt with simultaneously. Despite its complexities, this approach is the most advantageous for examining all contradictory aspects and for pinpointing what functions the Old Town now fulfils

which do not correspond to its future role, and to transfer them beyond its limits.

Each city is a complex entity which inevitably includes its past — a category satisfying its historical, aesthetic and practical needs. These same needs greatly influence the modern process of reconstruction and city improvements in old cities. The first of these holds such cities responsible for the preservation of their cultural legacy, which belongs to all mankind. And Tallinn, the capital of the Estonian S.S.R., is just such a city.

Helmi ÜPRUS
(Tallinn)

Fig. 1. — Tallinn (Revel). Gravure d'Adam Oléarius, 1650.

Fig. 2. — Tallinn en 1825.

Fig. 3. — Carte de Tallinn en 1965. : La vieille ville. : La ville basse. : Zone des constructions nouvelles. — —: Limites de la commune.

Fig. 4. — Vue d'ensemble en plan de la propriété d'un riche marchand.

Fig. 5. — Maison d'un artisan.

Fig. 6. — Tallinn, vu du haut de la tour de l'église de St. Olaüs. Au fond, à droite, la ville haute (Colline de Toompéa avec la Cathédrale).

Fig. 7. — La vieille ville : toits et tours se profilant sur le ciel.

Fig. 8. — Tour de l'église du Saint-Esprit.

Fig. 9. — Rue longeant les murs de la ville.

Fig. 10. — Tallinn, cour intérieure de l'église de St. Nicolas.

Fig. 11. — Une rue de Tallinn vue en regardant par la porte de la ville située près du port.

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Fig. 13. — Une rue de la ville.

Fig. 14. — La Place des Tours.

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Fig. 17. — Les murs de Tallinn en hiver.

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Fig. 20. — L'Hôtel de Ville (avant restauration).

Fig. 21. — L'Hôtel de Ville (après restauration).

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Fig. 27. — Rue Pikk, nos 24-26.

Fig. 28. — Château de Toompéa.

Fig. 29. — Les rues de Tallinn.

Fig. 30. — Cour du Monastère des Dominicains à Tallinn.

Fig. 31. — Les dômes de l'église d'Oléviste.

Fig. 32. — Le château de Kiiyu, restauré.

Fig. 33. — Portail d'un bâtiment de la rue Suur-Karya.

Fig. 34. — La tour appelée « Kiek in de Kök » en hiver.

Fig. 35. — Vue de la ville-haute.

Fig. 36. — Le n° 17 de la rue Vene (avant restauration).

Fig. 37. — Le n° 17 de la rue Vene. Le vestibule (avant restauration).

Fig. 38. — Un aspect des rues de Tallinn.

Fig. 39. — Le n° 17 de la rue Vene, restauré.

Fig. 40. — Le n° 17 de la rue Vene, entrée donnant sur la rue.

Fig. 41. — Le n° 17 de la rue Vene, vestibule.

Fig. 42. — L'Auberge Koeru (avant restauration).

Fig. 43. — L'Auberge Koeru, restaurée.