

MONUMENT CONSERVATION AND EXCAVATION OF THE ROSSZTEPLOM CHURCH IN TÖK, 2022

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The Rossztemplom [the name meaning “Ruin Church”] in Tök is one of the few Árpáadian Age ruined churches in Pest County. Having belonged to a former, late-13th-century AD village called Tek, it is now surrounded by ploughlands. Its conservation and archaeological survey was completed in 2000, but since then the condition of the ruins has deteriorated. The church has attracted illegal metal detectorists, and ongoing land cultivation has also put the site in danger. The worsening condition of the ruins was noted several times during field walks, also by experts of the Ferenczy Museum Centre. In 2022, Market Ltd. undertook the conservation of the ruins and tidied up its environs. Their work received considerable media coverage as Market Ltd. used its own resources for a voluntary service to the community. This renovation project also included a short archaeological excavation, conducted by the Ferenczy Museum Centre and realised with the assistance of volunteers. The work focused on the architectural history of the church building, as that was considered essential in the conservation process. This short paper provides a summary of the excavation results.

Keywords: Tök, ruin church, excavation, community archaeology, reconstruction

Historical sources reveal that in the later 12th century, the area of present-day Tök was in the possession of the Aynard family who had moved here from Southern France (CZENE 2015; BALÁZS 2016). The village was first mentioned by the name *Tek* in a charter issued by Ladislaus IV in 1278. The village was still in the ownership of the Aynard family at the end of the 14th century, but in the early 1400s King Sigismund donated it to the Maróthi family. In 1490, it was mentioned by the name *Thewk* as a landed property of John Corvinus. After this point, the ownership of the village changed many times in quick succession.

The so-called Rossztemplom-dűlő, a small non-cultivated area where the ruined church stands today, is located northeast of the present-day village of Tök and west of the Békás Stream. The nave of the church is rectangular, 8 m wide and 14 m long. Having been built from different types of stones and with mixed masonry techniques, its corners were reinforced with carved ashlar. Beam pockets are visible both on the inner and outer sides of the wall. Only the semicircular apse and the northern wall of the nave have been preserved of the original construction, the rest of the building has been completely ruined (DINNYÉS ET AL. 1986, 338–339; TARI 2000, 147). The patron saint of the church remains unknown. Potsherds dated to the 12th–13th centuries have been collected from the nearby ploughlands (DINNYÉS ET AL. 1986, 337); the village that stood here must have been abandoned in late medieval times at a so far unknown date, with the remaining population moving to the location of the present-day settlement.

The excavation preceding the first attempt at monument conservation was undertaken by András Fülöp in 2000 (FÜLÖP 2001). The ground plan of the church, the way it was constructed, and the excavated finds all suggested the building having been erected in the 13th century. Research revealed that it was constructed in a single phase, without ever having been extended or transformed. In all probability, it was used for only a short period and became abandoned by the time of the Ottoman occupation. Several plunder pits had been dug inside the church, but the stratigraphy was still clear. Its construction layer was covered by a yellow clay layer with mortared surface, probably the former floor. The foundation between the two piers of the arch shows that the floor level was higher in the apse than in the nave. The foundation of the main altar was also preserved, and the side altars could be located at the meeting points of the nave and the apse.

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Fig. 1. Aerial photo of the Árpadian Age church before conservation (photo by László Rupnik)



Fig. 2. Volunteers of the Community Archaeology Association during a field walk around the ruined church (photo by László Rupnik)

Twenty years have passed since the first conservation of the ruins, and the building's condition has deteriorated severely. Dániel Giedl, Máté Mészáros and László Rupnik, experts of the Ferenczy Museum Centre, were joined by volunteers of the Community Archaeology Association for a field walk and a metal detector survey of the ploughlands around the ruins in February 2022 (Figs. 1–2).² The main aim of the field walk was to authenticate the site (registered under no. 11890), locate the medieval village, and check the condition of the ruins. The field walk yielded new data about the settlement history of the area. No Árpadian Age finds (either pottery or metal artefacts) were collected in the immediate vicinity of the ruins but late medieval objects were discovered there. It seems that the settlement site has never been intensively used because only a few potsherds, a mace fragment, a piece of a late medieval almond-shaped knife handle, an 8-shaped buckle, and a few additional metal objects were recovered from there. A “Saracen head”-type silver denar issued by Louis I (1342–1382) and a copper denar issued by Matthias I (1458–1490) in Buda were also found near the church. The mace fragment does not belong to the common star-shaped spiked but has protrusions on its surface instead. A mace with similar protuberances, published by László Kovács (KOVÁCS 1971, 178–179) was identified by him as a Type 5 iron mace. The polygon marking the perimeters of the site in the national register has been updated based on the 2022 findings. According to earlier archaeological topographic data (DINNYÉS ET AL. 1986, 337), the Árpadian Age site is located 200–300 m northeast of the church ruins.

The conservation of the ruins and the clearing-up of its vicinity started in 2022 on the initiative and at the expenses of Market Ltd.; the team of the Ferenczy Museum Centre joined the works again with another short archaeological excavation, carried out in collaboration with volunteers of the Community Archaeology Association and the staff of Market Ltd. The first trench was designed to help clarifying whether the building had a western entrance. Even before the topsoil was removed, we found, with a metal detector, a late medieval copper coin covered in white metal. It was in the topmost 3 cm of the soil, obviously in a secondary position.



Fig. 3. The western wall in Trench 1, excavated to the bottom of its foundation (photo by Tibor Ákos Rácz)

² I hereby thank the leaders of the field walk for allowing me to use their research results. I am grateful to Balázs Nagy for identifying the coins and to Dániel Giedl for identifying the mace fragment.

The date was not legible on it anymore, but it was identified as a counterfeit coin imitating the type ÉH 766 (issued in 1564–1608). The yellowish, clayey subsoil was reached at a depth of 50–60 cm. We cleaned the ruined wall with a high pressure water gun and found that it was relatively easy to distinguish between the foundation and the wall itself, as the outer side of the foundation was also mortared. The overground parts of the nave's western end had been completely destroyed, but the underground part of the wall could be traced to a depth of 30–40 cm, under which we have found the 20 cm thick foundation set directly on the subsoil. This means, the floor level in the Árpadian Age on this side of the wall was 30–40 cm deeper than the present-day ground level. This observation corresponds to the stratigraphy of the trench, where the border of the two, clearly different observed layers was found in the same depth. The topmost layer (S-1) consisted of greyish brown humus admixed with rubble and mortar. Under that, we have distinguished a homogenous dense light greyish brown humus fill layer (S-2) with no rubble that yielded only a single human bone; it was identified as the Árpadian Age humus layer. The foundation trench (S-4) could also be traced along the foundation wall, deepening from the fill layer some 20 cm more; in summary, the foundation of the wall was 40 cm deep relative to the medieval ground level. Nothing suggested that an entrance had ever existed on the west side of the church.

The second trench was positioned next to the southern wall in order to clarify if there was an additional construction associated with the entrance there. The top 30–40 cm was identical with S-1 in Trench 1. Underneath, a layer containing the stones from a major collapsed wall section (S-5) was observed; it contained stones without any recognizable arrangement or connection. The layer also comprised a few pottery sherds, some animal bones, and perhaps human bones as well. A new layer started under the rubble, at a depth of 40 cm; it was a greyish brown fill with only a few stones (S-10) and somewhat more medieval ceramic fragments than the one above. Under the wall rubble at the southern entrance we discovered the remains of a foundation that protruded ca. 50 cm from the wall and served as a reinforcement of the entrance (S-14); this feature could be traced from the level of the rubble down to the yellowish subsoil. In the same section, under the foundation, we could also trace a narrow north to south foundation trench. In summary, we discovered the foundation of the south entrance in the second trench but nothing indicating a portico.



Fig. 4. Rubble of a collapsed wall section in Trench 2 (photo by Tibor Ákos Rácz)



Fig. 5. Stratigraphic sequence in Trench 3 (photo by Tibor Ákos Rácz)

Trench 3 was positioned inside the nave, close to the sanctuary. The aim here was to clarify the stratigraphy of the church's interior. The position of the trench was partly defined by the scaffolding around the walls that prevented us from excavating at their feet and the building material piled up beside them, which made other parts of the church interior inaccessible. The trench was positioned in a more-or less clear area in the centre of the nave in a way to make sure that it intersects all potential important burials in the axis of the nave near the sanctuary. We found several distinct layers and a large pit. The topmost 5–10 cm was modern humus (S-6) that deposited after the first monument conservation works in 2000, when slabs had been laid in the topmost layer to create a paved pathway. The soil layer rich in gravel under S-6, observed throughout the whole trench, was a result of ground levelling during the same conservation works. It must have been created to protect the historical layers underneath, and consisted of stones that do not occur in the area naturally. The

first historical stratum was a 20–30 cm thick sandy, grey humus layer with rubble (S-8). A coin from the time of Béla IV (counterfeit of type ÉH 218, issued around 1242–1270) was found at the border between layers S-7 and S-8, while the bottom of layer S-8 featured patches of brick rubble and lime (S-11): this was the construction layer of the church. S-12 under that was a homogenous light brown humus layer that yielded no finds except for a few bone fragments in secondary position, brought there by burrowing animals. In Trench 3, the profiles proved to be the most useful in clarifying the stratigraphy of the church interior: S-8 corresponded to the medieval period of the church, while S-11 was connected with its construction.

To document the perpatranted layers and clarify their position relative to the wall, we dug another small trench, 150×90 cm in size, as the continuation of Trench 3 but separated from it by a profile wall (Fig. 6). To make that, some parts of the scaffolding had to be dismantled first, but the standards that had to be left in place still prevented us from extending it to be two-metre wide. However, the trench ran up to the inner side of the northern church wall. All layers described in Trench 3 could also be observed and documented in the extension, and we even found a few pottery fragments in S-8. Furthermore, we have revealed a direct connection between layer S-11 and the foundation wall, proving that the former was indeed the construction layer.



Fig. 6. The north wall of the church in Trench 4 (photo by Tibor Ákos Rácz)



Fig. 7. The apse of the restored ruin, viewed from the west (photo by Tibor Ákos Rácz)

Our findings suggest that the church had only one construction phase in the Árpáadian Age. It had no western entrance, and the cultural layers were thin and only yielded very few artefacts. The Árpáadian Age village was located at a distance, but a few houses were built in the vicinity of the church building in the late Middle Ages. The church was in use during the Middle Ages, but the youngest finds from the scattered settlement surrounding it can be dated to the reign of Matthias I. The inhabitants moved to another location at an unknown date in the medieval period. A scattered settlement may have remained around the church, but no proper village stood there in later centuries (Fig. 7).

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