

THE MEDIEVAL ROYAL TOWN AT VISEGRÁD

Royal Centre, Urban Settlement, Churches

Edited by

GERGELY BUZÁS, JÓZSEF LASZLOVSZKY

and ORSOLYA MÉSZÁROS



BUDAPEST 2014

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Preface

Visegrád is the most enigmatic town in medieval Hungary. Already its early history, from the tenth century to the Mongol invasion (1241/42) raises a number of difficult questions about the administrative and military function of this settlement. It is even more challenging, however, to explain Visegrád's unexpected rise and steep decline between the middle of the thirteenth century and the Ottoman occupation three hundred years later, and the rapid changes in the roles that the town played for the whole kingdom and for the Danube bend. These overall processes: why Visegrád became a royal seat, how it functioned as such, and what happened to the town after the moving of the king and his court, can only be described and explained if the basic facts about the town are at our disposal. These include location, topography, population, public and private buildings, as well as the functioning of the local administration. Without these data one remains in the realm of suppositions and guesses.

The meticulous work of data collection on all these diverse aspects was undertaken by Orsolya Mészáros, a young scholar educated both as an archaeologist and a historian, currently faculty member of the Department of Medieval and Postmedieval Archaeology at the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. She defended her work as a doctoral dissertation at the University of Debrecen in 2009. This year was also the millennium of the first written mentioning of Visegrád in a document from 1009, a fortunate coincidence that gave an opportunity to publish the results in a Hungarian-language monograph in the same year. Soon after Dr. Mészáros was awarded the András Kubinyi Prize for her work, an award established in honour of Professor András Kubinyi (1929–2007), one of the most prominent urban historians and medievalists and the founding professor of university-level education in medieval archaeology in Hungary. This acknowledgment was all the more appropriate, since the author made substantial use at the outset, besides the advice of her dissertation supervisor, Professor László Solymosi, of the methodological guidance of András Kubinyi himself. The main trademark of the 'Kubinyi-school' is precisely what the work presented here has achieved: the integrated analysis of written documents, excavation results, and visual/cartographic evidence.

This volume consists of two main units: an analytical part which describes and explains the process of administrative topographical development, and the presentation of the various sorts of evidence – practically every single piece of topographical information concerning late medieval Visegrád and its immediate vicinity – that serve as the basis of the assessment. This latter part not only corroborates the author's own statements, but will be a necessary point of departure for any future research as well. It includes English summaries and full-text Latin editions of all those documents that contain relevant information on Visegrád's topography and ecclesiastic institutions, 61 documents altogether, issued between 1338 and 1517. This collection made it possible to prepare a detailed topographical gazetteer, which follows the spatial sequence of house clusters on their respective building plots and other features in the order reconstructed by the author. The same written source material, combined with the data from the epigraphic sources (inscriptions of the medieval tombstones from Visegrád) offered the basis for the list of burghers of Visegrád. The detailed, complex analysis of the medieval town, thus, is based on the interpretation of charter evidence and the analysis of the archaeological investigations mainly carried out in the last decades in the area of the modern settlement of Visegrád and in connection to the excavations of the royal palace and castle.

The main results of the historical and archaeological studies related to the urban structure and development of Visegrád presented in this volume are also contextualized in the framework of medieval towns in the Kingdom of Hungary. Katalin Szende and József Laszlovszky offer a general overview of the research questions and methods of the relevant research fields, their European-wide historiographic survey focusing mainly on the problem of town and residence in the Middle Ages. Various factors of urban development in medieval Hungary, combined with the issues related to the interaction of town and residence in other areas, can shed light on the particular and enigmatic character of settlement development at Visegrád. With the previous volume¹ of the same series on the medieval royal palace, this monograph offers the most complex picture on the interaction of royal residence and urban settlement in medieval Visegrád.

Katalin SZENDE

¹ BUZÁS – LASZLOVSZKY 2013.