

## EIGHTEENTH CENTURY CEMETERY IN THE CENTRE OF VISEGRÁD

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*For a long time in Hungary the dominant opinion was that due to the abundance of written and pictorial sources on hand for research on the centuries following the Middle Ages there was no need to employ archaeological methods in this work. Therefore, while there has been a significant tradition of surveying and measuring 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> century architectural monuments, the study of the period's material culture through archaeological methods began much later. The archaeology of this period, generally referred to as the Early Modern (Post Medieval) period, which also includes the Ottoman occupation, can be considered the newest comprehensive approach in the study of archaeology. Traditionally, and according to Hungarian legal regulations, the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (1711) is the upper limit for archaeological research, while the period following this is the realm of historical scholarship and ethnography. Despite this, in recent years numerous cases have arisen in relation to 18<sup>th</sup> century historical issues, such as the study of folk religion and funerary customs, where archaeological sources and the research conclusions based upon them cannot be ignored.*

During the summer of 2005, 18<sup>th</sup> century burials were recovered in the historic centre of Visegrád (Fig. 1). They came to light during the excavation of the remains of a medieval building. The occurrence of graves here was unsurprising, as archaeological investigations and rescue excavations in the area have been carried out since the 1950s, and 18<sup>th</sup> century features have also been consistently revealed. The site is located at Rév Street underneath the densely inhabited central area of contemporary Visegrád.<sup>2</sup> Today this property is occupied by an Elementary School and the building is the oldest structure still in use in the city that has been almost continuously occupied. It was a house in the Middle Ages that was then turned into a church during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The first inhabitants resettling Visegrád after the Ottoman Turkish occupation buried their dead here until the last third of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Subsequently, the church became a school and burials ceased around the building. During the current research, archaeological field observations were supplemented by documentary data and topographic information that were of great help in establishing the chronology of the graveyard, that is, the period of its use. All these factors contributed important new knowledge concerning the material culture and daily life of Visegrád following the Ottoman Turkish occupation – beginning at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century – as the village inhabited by German and Hungarian settlers developed into a market town.

### MEDIEVAL ANTECEDENTS

Nine archaeological projects were carried out in the area between 1955 and 2005, including rescue and preventive excavations as well as medieval wall research. These investigations revealed that approximately 2/3 of the current school building is of medieval origin, and in some parts the original house has even survived to almost its full height. The building probably incorporates the remains of a two-storey house and its basement, which can be dated to either the Anjou or the Sigismund period. A well was found in the immediate proximity of the building with an external diameter of 170 cm and a coarse stone lining. On the

<sup>1</sup> This text was translated by László Bartosiewicz (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest) whose help is acknowledged here.

<sup>2</sup> At No. 2 Rév Street, presently the Áprily Lajos Elementary School building



Fig. 1: The ground plan of the site (Katalin Boruzs)

basis of the pottery found within it, the period of use for this well ended between the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

During the course of the excavations in 2005, a portion of another medieval building was recovered near the entrance of the school's courtyard (Fig. 2). On the basis of its chronologically diagnostic features, it seems that this was the basement level of a 14<sup>th</sup> century house that was buried at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> or at the latest during the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. A possible reason for this may have been that the building was exposed to frequent flooding, as heavily silted layers could be identified in the stratigraphy.

This portion of a cellar found in the school's courtyard, along with the wall remains discovered underneath the southern room of the school and additional wall fragments located under the street in front of the building found between 1964 and 1982, were part of what was probably a single storey house with two rooms. If it did have an additional storey, it would have had a wood frame structure. It is unlikely that this was attached to the building hidden within the structure of the current schoolhouse. They instead seem to have been neighbouring houses, separated by a narrow alley.

Observations made so far, as well as the results of rescue excavations, suggest that the school and its broader surroundings were relatively densely built up during the 14<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> centuries. During the course of excavations several 14<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> century features of the medieval town could be observed. Some of these were spotted north of the school, while others came to light in front of the school's courtyard, all along Rév Street. Although the exact system of these archaeological phenomena is still to be clarified, it may be safely stated that the area under discussion here formed part of the densely inhabited core area of the 14<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> century medieval town.<sup>3</sup>



Fig. 2: Excavation of the remains of a medieval building in the schoolyard (photo by Orsolya Mészáros)

## THE 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY CHURCH

Beginning in 1544, with a single interruption of only ten years, Visegrád fell under Ottoman Turkish occupation for some 140 years. During this time the former medieval town became depopulated. Muslims as well as Southern Slavic Christians that constituted the occupying force inhabited the settlement that formed around the Salamon Tower in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the Upper Castle above the town. These settlements were destroyed during the 1664–1665 re-conquest of Visegrád.<sup>4</sup> Although the town was registered again as an inhabited settlement by the period between 1692 and 1696,<sup>5</sup> final settlement was only achieved by the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when it became the property of the Starhemberg family. Villages in the Visegrád region (*Dominium Visegradense*) became a part of the estates

<sup>3</sup> Mészáros, Orsolya: *Visegrád késő középkori város története és helyrajza* (The History and Plan of the Late Mediaeval City of Visegrád) (Visegrád, Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum Mátyás Király Múzeuma, 2009), 209–210.

<sup>4</sup> *Visegrád a török korban 1526–1685* (Visegrád in the Ottoman Turkish Period 1526–1685). Altum Castrum 7. A visegrádi Mátyás Király Múzeum Füzetei. ed.: Kováts, István (Visegrád, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Magyar, Eszter: *Visegrád története 1684–1756* (History of Visegrád 1684–1756) (Budapest, 1998), 12–13.

of Ernst Rüdiger von Starhemberg (the commander who defended Vienna during the siege of 1683) in 1700.<sup>6</sup>

Aside from a few individuals, we do not know precisely where the several waves of Germanic and Hungarian settlers arriving in the area beginning at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century came from, or what route they took. We can also only imagine how Visegrád may have looked at the time of their arrival, and what the conditions may have been like. The outward appearance of the settlement at that time was dominated by the double fortifications, the remains of the former royal palace and the other major stone buildings. Documentary sources reveal that the first post-Ottoman Period settlers lived in houses reconstructed from these ruins. Major edifices – such as the surviving remains of former churches and monasteries – were far too large for these people to reconstruct. The new church of the village (probably already consecrated to John the Baptist at this time) was therefore built on the ruins of a medieval house. However, even this work was only finished in 1712 by the Starhemberg family. They also donated the interior decorations of the church, which was elevated to the rank of parish church. According to the visitors' registry (*canonica visitatio*) and surviving iconographic evidence, it is known that this small, simple, single nave church had a gallery, a baptistery and several altars. It was also remodelled several times even during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is this church that was depicted in Sámuel Mikoviny's panoramic view of 1737, made for Mátyás Bél's description of the country (Fig. 3). The conditions in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century are shown on a ground plan prepared by Leonard Schade, an architect from Esztergom, who performed a joint survey of the church and the parish in 1773. These historical sources were able to be confirmed at several points by research carried out on the walls of the building. Excavations brought to light several 18<sup>th</sup> century features, including altar niches, windows and vestry doors. Following the construction of the Late Baroque parish church (1773–1782) that still stands in Visegrád today, this building was converted into a schoolhouse. Even the 1787 plan for its remodelling prepared by the carpenter Ferenc Xavér Hacker has survived.<sup>7</sup>

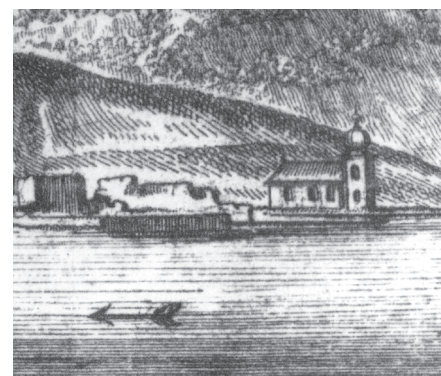


Fig. 3: Depiction of the church of Visegrád in *Notitia Hungaria Novae* (1737) by Mátyás Bél

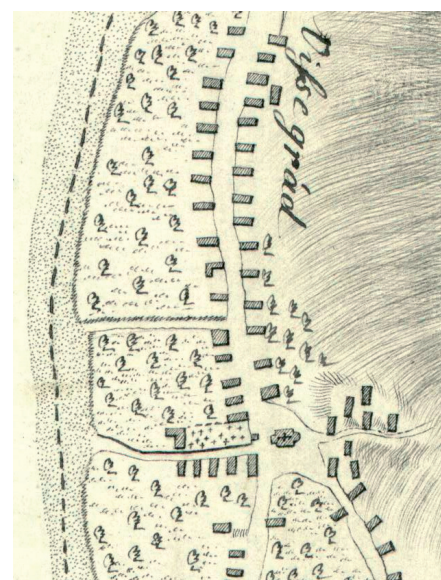


Fig. 4: Depiction of the second parish church and the cemetery of Visegrád in the map by Banhöltzel (1777)

## THE 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY CEMETERY

Most of the schoolyard was created over the cemetery that once belonged to the church. Historical data and contemporaneous maps concerning the first cemetery of the Baroque village and then market town help in determining the extent of this graveyard. It was also possible to establish its stratigraphy and modes of use with great likelihood during planned excavations and rescue work in the schoolyard between 1955 and 2005.

Among the contemporaneous sources, a city map by Banhöltzel dated to 1777 contains the most detail. It shows that the graves were located to the east and south of the school building almost all the way to the church that is still standing today (Fig. 4). Excavation data support this scenario as well: 18<sup>th</sup> century graves

<sup>6</sup> Iván, László: *A visegrádi vár története a kezdetektől 1685-ig* (The History of the Visegrád Castle from its Beginnings to 1685) (Visegrád, 2004), 211.

<sup>7</sup> Buzás, Gergely – Gróf, Péter – Gróh, Dániel – Kováts, István: Középkori településmaradványok, 18. századi plébániatemplom és temetőrészlet a visegrádi Rév utcából (Mediaeval Settlement Remains, 18<sup>th</sup> Century Parish Church and Section of a Cemetery from Rév Street in Visegrád). *Folia Archeologica* LII (2005/2006), 251–287.



Fig. 5: The graves of the 18<sup>th</sup> century cemetery in the schoolyard (photo by István Kováts)



Fig. 6. a–b.: The graves of the 18<sup>th</sup> century cemetery in the schoolyard (photos by István Kováts)

were found primarily under the road and sidewalk running in front of the south side of the building as well as within the courtyard to the east of the building. In all these areas they were dug into medieval features, disturbing the medieval stratigraphy between the depths of 0.9 and 2 m. Unfortunately, the majority of graves have become inaccessible due to Rév Street being intensively built up.

Research in 2005 covered the part of this cemetery near the entrance of the school. A total of 33 graves were excavated (Fig. 5). This work was difficult since the graves had been disturbed by extensive modern construction projects and drainage works in the area. The uppermost layers contained an admixture of stone rubble, brick fragment and plastering fill as well as quantities of human remains, coffin nails and related iron fittings throughout the entire area. This level yielded only a few *in situ* burials (Fig. 6a). Intact or only partially disturbed graves were discovered above the wall remains of the medieval building found in the school's courtyard and toward the north in a red, burnt layer datable by the presence of 14<sup>th</sup> century pottery shards (Fig. 6b).

The graves were uniformly oriented west-east or east-west. In two cases a south-north orientation was also observed. All burials were performed in coffins (Fig. 7). This was usually shown by the presence of nails and iron fittings. In some cases, however, even the wooden remains of coffins could be identified (Fig. 8). Individuals were always buried in an extended supine position. Their hands were placed together either on the chest or in the pelvic region, although the original position of the lower arms could not always be identified due to disturbances. The osteoarchaeological study of the cemetery was greatly hindered by the poor preservation of the remains. A considerable degree of infant mortality and high relative frequencies of traumatic injuries and other palaeopathological phenomena could be observed. These indicate that at the time the inhabitants of Visegrád had a hard life.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Mónika Merczi (Hungarian National Museum's Balassa Bálint Museum, Esztergom) kindly related this information to me in person.



Fig. 7: Burial with coffin (photo by István Kováts)



Fig. 8: Burial with coffin (photo by István Kováts)

Similar to contemporaneous cemeteries, the material finds in the graves were relatively scarce, although a few objects were found in almost each burial. Some of these were not found in situ due to stratigraphic disturbances, but were found scattered in the fill. It is remarkable that there were no remains of jewellery (rings, bracelets, headdresses or belts). The only exceptions were a few beads and a string of blue glass beads found in two graves. The main group of grave finds consists of accessories, mostly related to clothing. Simple, usually undecorated, lentil-shaped buttons with attachment loops are the best represented (Fig. 9). Some small clasps were also found. Sacral grave goods were found in considerably greater numbers, including devotional medals, loose rosary beads, and crucifixes that were either worn around the neck or attached to rosaries. These types of objects tend to be characteristic in general of the material finds recovered from contemporaneous cemeteries, and so they provide good proof for the chronology of the Visegrád cemetery.

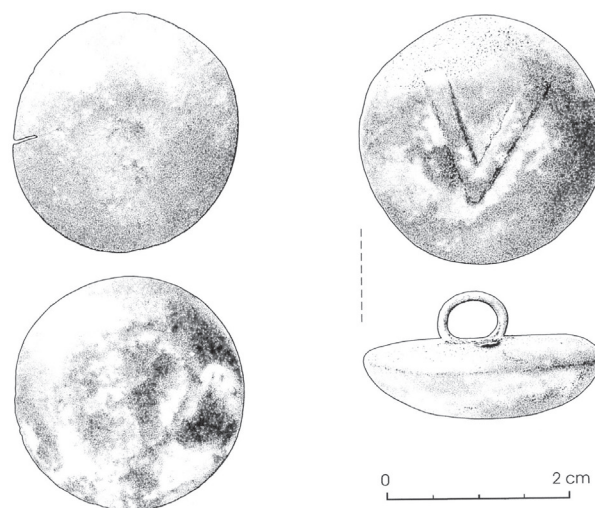


Fig. 9: Lentil-shaped buttons (drawing by László Hornyák)

Devotional medals are a type of religious medallion that mediates salvation to their owners through the clerical blessing inscribed on it. Although these objects have been known of in Hungary since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, their overall distribution became common only by the 18<sup>th</sup> century in relation to the Catholic restoration. The medals were worn not only on necklaces but also attached to clothing, hats and rosaries and they were sometimes souvenirs related to pilgrimages, thus representing the adoration of certain saints related to various locations. In addition, these medals were also considered to have magical powers and played apotropaic roles in warding off evil spirits and diseases such as the plague. Therefore the religious symbolism of the medallions was combined with an amulet function that may be considered superstitious. This is clearly exemplified by a medal of St. Benedict recovered from one of the graves which combines these two functions by showing the saint along with an inscription for an exorcism (Fig. 10).

Nine medals of this type were found in the Visegrád cemetery. Some of these were unfortunately stray finds. The pointed top of one medallion was perforated. On this, one side shows the devotional statue of



Fig. 10: St. Benedict medallion  
(drawing by László Hornyák)



Fig. 12 a-b.: Medallion with a text referring to a religious society, the Confraternity of St. Michael the Archangel  
(photo by László Hornyák)



Fig. 13 a-b.: Medallion with a depiction of a statue from Mariazell and the representation of the trinity from Sonntagsberg (photo by László Hornyák)



0 2 cm

Fig. 11: Medallions and the Pietà-image on paper  
(drawing by László Hornyák)



Fig. 14 a-b.: Medallion with a depiction of Christ and a circumscription containing a prayer  
(photo by László Hornyák)



Fig. 15: Bronze crucifix with wooden inlay  
(photo by László Hornyák)



Fig. 16: Crucifix  
(photo by László Hornyák)



Fig. 17: Crucifix  
(photo by László Hornyák)

Mariazell, while the other is decorated with a picture of St. John of Nepomuk with a radiating halo (Fig. 11). The Charles Bridge in Prague, the site of his martyrdom, is shown in the background. Both this and the St. Benedict medallion may have been strung on rosaries. This can be ascertained from their locations within their graves; both of them were recovered in the area of the lower arm of their respective skeletons. Other medallions are inscribed with texts referring to places of pilgrimage and devotional images such as the aforementioned Mariazell statue and a representation of the trinity from Sonntagsberg (Fig. 13). One of the examples contains a prayer (*Salvator Mundi Salva Nos*) in a circumscription, along with a depiction of Christ. Moreover writing referring to a religious society (the Confraternity of St. Michael the Archangel) was also found (Figs 12, 14). There was also a particularly interesting stray find, a small image on paper set in a square-shaped bronze frame and glass plates. The composition depicts a Pietà scene symbolising the death of Christ and the sorrow of the Virgin Mary (Fig. 11). This imagery is one of the most universally depicted motifs in the late Middle Ages, and several finds attest to the cult of this symbol in the Baroque Period.

Another group of sacral grave goods is represented by crucifixes. These are not rarities either, as similar pieces of comparable workmanship have come from excavations at several cemeteries of this time period. Three examples were found at the Visegrád site. The largest was an 8 cm tall simple bronze corpus with wooden inlay that has survived in relatively good condition. The wood was used to fill in the bronze frame relatively evenly in a cross-shape, and it was fastened by a small iron rivet (Fig. 15). Although this was a stray find, it may be safely presumed that the cross was originally worn around the neck, since there was a bronze suspension loop on the top of the cross. The other two bronze crucifixes may have been attached to rosaries instead (Figs 16–17). One of these was also a stray find, while the other was found *in situ* in a grave, under the hand of the skeleton around the area of the wrists.

The remains of a rosary could be observed in one of the graves. Scattered around the right forearm of the skeleton, 47 small glass beads were noted in this burial, in addition to 20 larger wooden beads that had been



turned on a lathe. The exact location of these finds could no longer be identified, but it seems that the rosary was wrapped around the hands of the deceased. This was a widespread practice in 18<sup>th</sup> century burials.

In addition to sacral grave goods, some graves showed signs of pagan rituals. On the basis of archaeological and ethnographic parallels, an iron horse shoe found on the pelvis of one corpse may be considered an apotropaic device, and so can a closed pair of scissors found in another burial.<sup>9</sup> Iron objects placed in the graves were attributed with magical powers, although according to some opinions these artefacts may be interpreted as work tools.

The cemetery's period of use can be estimated on the basis of coins recovered among the grave goods. *In situ* coins were found in four of the burials, although they were in an extremely poor state of preservation. The earliest specimens are *denarii* minted by Leopold I (1657–1705) in 1698 and 1700. The most recent coin found is a one Kreuzer piece issued by Maria Theresa (1740–1780) in 1762. On the basis of these finds it may be concluded that people were using the burial ground from the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century up until the last third of the century.

Archaeological data can be supplemented using documentary sources and historical maps. The map made by Mihály Karpe, land-surveyor of the Royal Treasury, shows Visegrád in 1767, designating the building that later became the school as a church. The cemetery is shown to the east of the church and designated as '*R Cemeterium*' in the aforementioned 1773 survey map by Schade. In 1777, Banhöltzel also marked the present-day late Baroque church that was built between 1773 and 1782 on his map, to the east of the old church. According to this map it seems certain that the inhabitants of the town were still being buried in the cemetery around the first church. We have no reliable data concerning the abandonment of this cemetery. Documentary sources reveal that the cemetery outside Visegrád that is still in use today was opened in 1790. By the 1820s it was definitely in use: the oldest known tombstone was dedicated to Anna Horváth, the wife of György Szeles, managing officer of the Visegrád Crown Estates. This Classicist monument was taken from here to the lapidarium of the King Matthias Museum in Visegrád.

By comparing the historical documents and archaeological sources it is likely that the cemetery was in use between the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the last third of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It may have been abandoned for a number of reasons. It may have been related to an edict by Maria Theresa in 1777 that was supplemented by Joseph II in 1784, in which the digging of graves and the building of crypts was banned within settlements. Consequently, by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century people were no longer buried inside churches or in churchyards in Visegrád; burial grounds were designated on the periphery of the settlement.

Meanwhile it is possible that the closing of the first parish church after the Ottoman period in Visegrád, as well as its cemetery, is related to the erection of the new parish church that began around 1773 and the subsequent transformation of the former church on Rév Street into a school.

<sup>9</sup> Pusztai, Tamás: Ollós temetkezés Zsámbékon a 17–18. század fordulójáról (Burial with Scissors in Zsámbék from the Turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century). In: *A kőkortól a középkorig. Tanulmányok Trogmayer Ottó 60. születésnapjára* (From the Stone Age to the Middle Ages. Essays for Ottó Trogmayer's 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday). ed.: Lőrinczy, Gábor (Szeged, 1994), 531–541.

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