

THE MEDIEVAL ROYAL PALACE AT VISEGRÁD

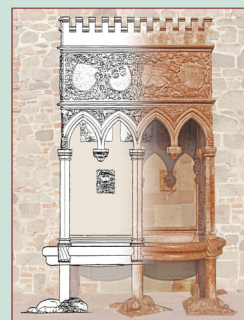
Gergely Buzás – József Laszlovszky (eds)

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The town of Visegrád, which lies to the north of Budapest in the picturesque Danube Bend region with its surrounding hills, is an emblematic location for Hungarian archaeology and historic preservation. Excavations have been going on here continuously for half a century and the job of restoring historic monuments never ends. During the period of the establishment of the kingdom of Hungary in the 11th century, the former late Roman fort and its surroundings were developed into the seat of the comes who controlled the county. Learning the lesson from the Mongol invasion of 1241–42, King Béla IV (1235–1270) erected a new castle in the middle of the 13th century, with a citadel atop a hill overlooking the Danube and fortifications that included a monumental keep (the “Salamon Tower”) running down to the riverbank, controlling the trade route. King Charles I (1308–1342), who came from the House of Anjou in Naples, made the small town protected by this strong castle his capital in 1323. The development of the palace complex began, and around this sprang up urban residences to house the nobles and governmental officials, along with lavishly decorated church buildings. King Louis I (1342–1382), the son of Charles I, developed the previous residence into an imposing royal palace, with the work on its expansion and adornment continuing into the beginning of the reign of his successor, Sigismund of Luxembourg (1387–1437). While the functions of the capital returned to Buda, which was in a far more favorable central geographical location, the palace continued to be used. King Matthias I (1458–1490) remodeled this in the late Gothic and Renaissance styles as his summer residence. King Vladislaus II (1490–1516) renovated the Franciscan friary next to the palace that had been established and constructed by his predecessors. The Turkish conquest brought an end to the urban life of the royal center after 1541, and in the 18th century, besides the ruins of the castle complex, only written sources suggested its former brilliance in the Middle Ages.

Everything that can be known today about the appearance of medieval Visegrád and its material culture has come to light from under the layers of debris as a result of archaeological and historic preservation research. One of the founders of Hungarian archaeology, art history and historic preservation, Imre Henszlmann (1813–1888) first excavated at the castle. Following an analysis of the written records and several attempts on site, the architect János Schulek (1872–1948) found the royal palace in the 1930s. The series of efforts to reconstruct the palace fountain during the work following the Second World War were brought to perfection by Ernő Szakál (1913–2002) with his scientifically-based restoration of its stones. The excavations on the site soon will have lasted without interruption for three-quarters of a century, with the third generation of archaeologists from the Visegrád office of the Hungarian National Museum working with undiminished enthusiasm.

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The first century of extensive research work is hardly reflected in the area of scholarly publications. The first truly significant summary is found in the historic monument inventory published in 1958, thanks to the archaeologist Miklós Héjj (1922–1996), who directed the museum for four decades, and the art historian Dezső Dercsényi (1910–1987), who edited the publication and was at that time directing the reorganization of Hungarian historic preservation.¹ The art historian Jolán Balogh (1900–1988) in her comprehensive works primarily publicized the remains of the Matthias era Renaissance stone sculptures. These were highlighted in the large exhibition on the Renaissance in Hungary, set up to a significant extent according to her conception, which was shown in the Austrian town of Schallaburg.² The breakthrough in publishing activity has come in the last quarter century due to the fruitful collaboration of the museum director, the archaeologist Mátyás Szőke, and the archaeologist/art historian Gergely Buzás, who arrived at the museum as a young researcher at the end of the 1980s. An array of other young scholars has joined in the work, helping both to make the archaeological excavations more intensive and to process the wide range of finds. New impetus was provided by the joint work with the historic preservation agency, and in the realm of excavations and publications the department of archaeology at Eötvös Loránd University has also played a significant role. The first monographic volume on the royal palace was published in 1990 within the context of the Lapidarium Hungaricum program aimed at the cataloguing of Hungary's stone architectural fragments.³ The progress of the research on the site of the palace was accompanied by a string of publications, the majority of which within the framework of the Visegrád Archaeological Monographs series. The most recent volume of essays that was published in 2010 presented the remains, history and rehabilitation program of the royal palace in more detail than ever before.⁴ In time, the first detailed historical, archaeological and architectural history summaries about the castle complex also appeared.⁵ In 2009 a gap was filled with a monograph elaborating the history of the late medieval city, whose author also completed a topographical reconstruction made possible by the archaeological results.⁶ The Lapidarium Hungaricum was a series of publications from the historic preservation agency, but the majority of the publications – and at the same time a significant proportion of the publications on the subject of the Middle Ages from Hungary's provincial museums – were written by the local museum, the Mátyás Király Museum of the Hungarian National Museum. A portion of the publications also contain summaries of varying lengths in either German or English. Nearly twenty years ago, as part of a series by the Institute of Archaeology of the University of Budapest, an English language publication was created, with quite abundant illustrations despite its relatively short text.⁷ A recent English language publication from a conference organized in Florence about a presentation related to Visegrád on the Renaissance in Hungary must also certainly be

¹ Dercsényi, Dezső – Héjj, Miklós: *Visegrád*. In: *Pest megye műemlékei* (Historic Monuments of Pest County), ed. Dercsényi Dezső. Magyarország Műemléki Topográfiája 5 (Historic Monument Inventory of Hungary 5). (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1958), Vol. 2, 396–480.

² Balogh, Jolán: *Die Anfänge der Renaissance in Ungarn. Matthias Corvinus und die Kunst*. Forschungen und Berichte des Kunsthistorischen Instituts der Universität Graz 4. (Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1975); *Matthias Corvinus und die Renaissance in Ungarn 1458–1541* (exhibition catalogue, Schallaburg 1982) (Wien: Amt der Niederösterreichischen Landesregierung, 1982).

³ Buzás, Gergely: *Visegrád, Királyi Palota 1. A kápolna és az északkeleti palota* (Visegrád, Royal Palace 1. The Chapel and the Northeastern Palace). Lapidarium Hungaricum. Magyarország építészeti töredékeinek gyűjteménye 2. Pest megye I (Collection of Hungary's Architectural Fragments 2. Pest County I). (Budapest: Országos Műemléki Felügyelőség, 1990).

⁴ Buzás, Gergely, Orosz, Krisztina: *A visegrádi királyi palota* (The Royal Palace of Visegrád) (Visegrád: Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum Mátyás Király Múzeuma, 2010).

⁵ Iván, László: *A visegrádi vár története a kezdetektől 1685-ig* (History of the Visegrád Castle from the Beginnings to 1685) (Visegrád: Visegrádi Mátyás Király Múzeum, 2004); Bozóki, Lajos: *Visegrád, Alsó- és Felsővár* (The Lower and Upper Castles of Visegrád). Lapidarium Hungaricum. Magyarország építészeti töredékeinek gyűjteménye 8. Pest megye II (Collection of Hungary's Architectural Fragments 8. Pest County II). (Budapest: Országos Műemléki Felügyelőség, 2012).

⁶ Mészáros, Orsolya: *A késő középkori Visegrád város története és helyrajza* (The History and Topography of the Late Medieval City of Visegrád) (Visegrád: Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum Mátyás Király Múzeum, 2009).

⁷ Laszlovszky, József, ed.: *Medieval Visegrád. Royal Castle, Palace, Town and Franciscan Friary*. Dissertationes Pannonicae III.4. (Budapest: Institute of Archaeology, Eötvös Loránd University, 1995).

mentioned.⁸ However the mainly Hungarian language publications are not sufficient to provide international recognition to the historical role of Visegrád in the late Middle Ages. Its significance went beyond Hungary to all of central Europe, particularly in light of its prominent place within the chronology of the Italian Renaissance's spread through Europe, as well as the architectural remains found during the research and the abundance of material finds.

Due to this the results have not been able to be fully integrated into international scholarship. (Of course, this problem is characteristic of the entirety of Hungarian archaeology.) About two decades ago professionals who would like to change this situation created the Archaeolingua Foundation, and through it are providing the opportunity to publish archaeological monographs and collections of essays in foreign languages. Looking beyond the Carpathian Basin and Central Europe, dedicated to topics encompassing every period from prehistory to the Middle Ages, it has published about fifty volumes, for the most part in English and German. According to the publisher and the organizers of the work at Visegrád the time has now come for the full results up to now to be released in the English language. The English version of the previously mentioned work published in 2010 on the royal palace has been issued in an emended, expanded form reworked for foreign readers in 2013 as volume 27 of the publisher's main series, which is at the same time issue 1 of the subseries studying medieval Visegrád.

Besides the painstaking preparatory work, the reason why the editors launched the series on this subject can be explained by the spectacular character of the remains, the prominent place the palace occupies in the history and architectural history of Hungary and the significance of the archaeological finds and ornaments uncovered. The volume contains nine essays with a catalogue of the most characteristic archaeological finds at the end. The length of the essays written by a total of five authors varies, there are comprehensive studies that are essentially the length of a book in themselves, as well as shorter discussions of smaller sub-topics. The author of the first, introductory essay, József Laszlovszky, begins with a passage from a poem describing Visegrád by one of Hungary's most outstanding poets, János Arany (1817–1882). Arany, who for many years was the secretary-general of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, integrated stories from the historical sources and the most up-to-date results of early historical scholarship with a special flair into his poems on historic subjects. His inclusion here hits the bull's eye, since the topic of the essay is the link between historical research and historical memory, as well as a historiographic outline of the research at Visegrád. The entire train of thought is based upon the viewpoint of research on residences that has become one of the most popular fields of archaeological/historical research in recent decades throughout Europe. The final sub-section touches upon methodological issues such as the documentation of on-site investigations and the restoration or reconstruction of remains.

The backbone of the volume is provided by two essays, both by Gergely Buzás, which make up nearly half its length and in many aspects are connected. The first discusses the construction history of the palace in detail, including the chronology of the excavations and the various concepts for its display as a historic monument/museum. The second essay serves as a reconstruction of the former use of the palace and the functional roles of its particular wings, areas and chambers. The results of the research are compelling, and the phases of the complex's construction history are successfully placed in a logical order that also corresponds to the historic sources. The two sections are embellished with 334 illustrations, making a slightly mixed impression on the reader. The large number of photographs and ground plans of the excavation that serve as the most precise documentation, pictures and measured drawings of the original stone sculptures, as well as contemporary depictions and present-day ground plans or photographs of European analogies are combined with documents from actual and virtual reconstructions related to the Visegrád palace. The illustrations provide an account on the long process of restoration. Former scenes that were for the most part based on the original remains and carefully composed architecturally have been replaced today with volumes

⁸ Buzás, Gergely: *The Royal Palace in Visegrád and the Beginnings of Renaissance Architecture in Hungary*. In: *Italy & Hungary. Humanism and Art in the Early Renaissance. Acts of an International Conference, Florence, Villa I Tatti, June 6–8, 2007*, eds Farbaky, Péter – Waldman, Louis A. Villa I Tatti. The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance 27 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 368–407.

and wall surfaces that can be considered products of the present-day construction industry, avoiding the aesthetic of ruins to an increasing extent. Of the reconstructed furnishings in the rooms only the tile stoves are verified through original remains, all other furniture and fixtures are reproductions made on the basis of originals from various locations or roughly contemporary depictions. The architectural restoration plans, phases and results are provided in the volume by the designing architect Zoltán Deák.

A chapel of significant size also stood on the grounds of the royal palace, but the rulers did not find this sufficient. Sigismund erected a Franciscan friary directly adjacent to the residence, and this was also supported by his successors. The friary's remains still have not yet been exhibited, but the results of the excavation have been discussed in greater detail than the study that appears in the present volume.⁹ However, now the author József Laszlovszky places the creation of the institution within its wider context: he presents the background, processes and sites of Sigismund's foundation of other ecclesiastical institutions in the Visegrád area. The gathering of the historical data related to some of these, in particular together with the topographical identification of their sites, and the most recent scientific results will appear through the promise of newer, broader publications.

The tile stove reconstructions pieced together on the basis of the great number of stove tile fragments are much more convincing than the reconstructions of the architecture and the interiors in the palace. These stoves appear in several forms in the volume: in the form of drawings in Edit Kocsis's study; as building blocks of the original restored pieces that can be taken apart and put together in the depictions of the exhibition installations; and in pictures of the stoves built up from replicas of the reconstructed tiles. All of these can be found in the exhibits of the palace as well. The work aimed at processing these stoves with ornaments, coats of arms and figural depictions from at least a century and a half has been going on not only at Visegrád for fifty years, but started even earlier with the similar finds at the Buda Castle palace. The results benefit one another, and the records from one site sometimes augment the finds from the other. Edit Kocsis also compiles the information known about the palace's ceramics for both everyday use and decoration (vessels – including Syrian albarello jars – floor tiles and stamped bricks, glazed roof tiles and roof ornaments), its glassware (Venetian glasses and goblets) and its everyday metal implements. István Kováts presents the varied and relatively abundant objects made from bone.

In view of the richly illustrated, highly informational, varied volume on the palace, it is a pleasure to report that the writing, editing and translation work for the next volume of the series is underway for the most part, which will present the town of Visegrád.

⁹ Buzás, Gergely – Laszlovszky, József – Papp, Szilárd – Székér, György – Szőke, Mátyás: The Franciscan friary at Visegrád. History, archaeological remains, the results of the 1990–1993 campaigns. In: *Medieval Visegrád. Royal Castle, Palace, Town and Franciscan Friary*, ed. Laszlovszky, József. *Dissertationes Pannonicae III.4.* (Budapest: Institute of Archaeology, Eötvös Loránd University, 1995), 26–33.