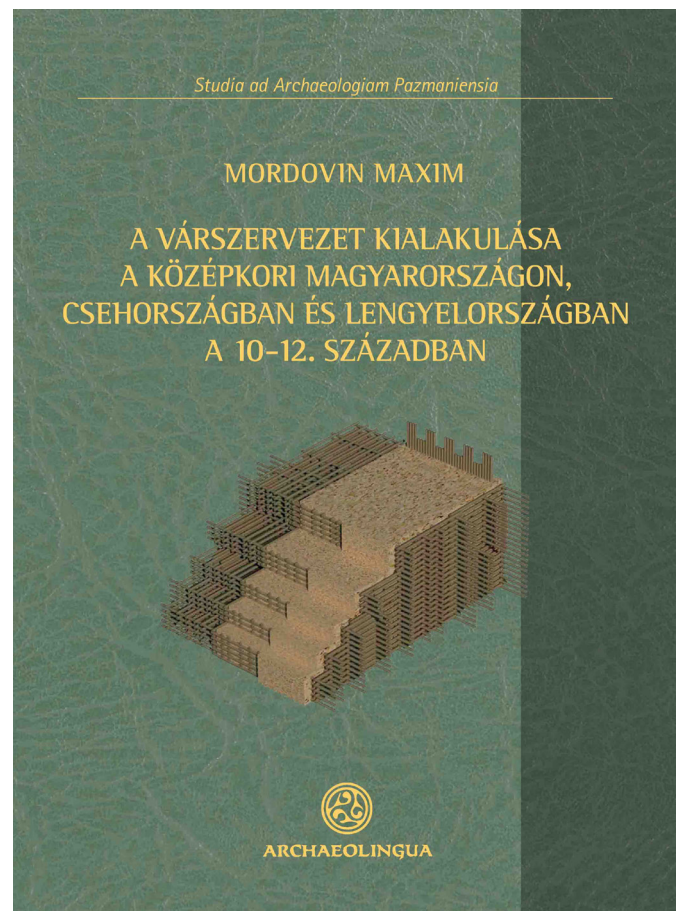


MAXIM MORDOVIN: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CASTLE SYSTEM IN MEDIEVAL HUNGARY, BOHEMIA AND POLAND IN THE 10TH-12TH CENTURIES

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Since the publication of the work of István Bóna (1995/1998), which by his own admission he had intended to be just short document, many archeologists and historians researching the Early Árpád period were awaiting a turning point, a paradigm shift if you like, in the matter of “the early castles of the Árpáds”. Although his work in its time did rouse academic life, significant steps forward on the issue did not take place for a long time. However, in 2010 a young archeologist who had a sufficient overview of the archaeological scope of western and eastern Slav peoples in the Early Middle Ages took on the task within the framework of a doctoral dissertation to reexamine the earliest period of Hungarian castle construction and place it in a central European context. In the years that have passed this respected work has been cited by many and in many places in its manuscript form, but it has now become available in print as well – revised to the extent possible according to the author – within the series of publications from the Pázmány Péter Catholic University’s Department of Archaeology. Just as in his time, Bóna came to new conclusions by examining the entirety of the country of the Árpáds, Mordovin’s research extending to the territories ruled by the Přemyslids and the Piasts has made important findings in terms of the essence of both the construction techniques and chronology of castles as well as the so-called “castle system” that developed from the organization of the castles (the Hungarian castle county system as well as its equivalents in Bohemia and Poland).



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The basis of the volume according to the author’s words is “the archeologically-based comparison of the royal fortified centers of the three east-central European states that were formed around the year 1000 (Bohemia, Poland and Hungary)”. The title should not mislead anyone, the author only deals with the castles and their immediate surroundings, but he considers it to be evidence that these fortified centers were built up during the development of the power of the new dynasties with the same goal, the objective of organizing the territorial exercise of power on the basis of castles, and at the same time for the most part, during the organization of the state in all three countries. This type is referred to as an ispán’s castle and

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the administrative unit organized around it is an ispán's castle district or castle county in Hungarian. In the wake of György Györffy, the author uses the phrase castle system terminus technicus for the common designation of the structure of power for Hungarian counties and the similar forms in Bohemia and Poland.

Mordovin worked with an enormous, well-structured database; he collected 101 centers from the region that had fortifications, can be dated to around the turn of the millennium and have been researched archeologically (additional aspects such as the castle should be found in contemporary sources, have an ecclesiastical structure, have an associated urban area around it, etc. were less strictly adhered to). The territorial distribution of the castles is slightly disproportionate; the volume discusses 28 castles from Bohemia and Moravia, 29 from the 11th century Polish areas and 38 from the Carpathian Basin. This disproportion is in part due to the differing levels of research, but it is also an indisputable fact that from the beginning the castle system was more dense in the Czech territories, while at the same time it was the stated goal of the author that as many features as possible be highlighted from the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary, in some cases relaxing the strict criteria.

The reader can be easily convinced by the size and thorough nature of the database, since half of the nearly 550 page book is made up of illustrated tables, and the bibliography for the text section is also nearly 60 pages. In every case for the illustrated tables, finding the location is aided by historical maps and satellite images, the surroundings of the site are presented through archival and recent photographs as well as maps and site plans, and naturally the most important published excavation documentation and reconstructions can also be found here. In addition to this, one also finds in the DVD supplement the catalogue of castles that have been studied, which in striving for comprehensiveness provides the research history of the individual features and attempts to interpret – in many cases reinterpret – the results of the archaeological excavations. In essence with these two units, the illustrated tables and the catalogue, the readers have a handbook that guides them through the entirety of the central European professional literature on the subject.

However, alongside all of this there are also nearly 200 pages worth of detailed academic elaboration on the subject as well as the extensive English and Russian summaries. Following an introduction to the research methodology and the selection considerations briefly outlined above, the author dedicates an extensive section to the research history of the castles. In this some fifty page write-up filled with numerous outstandingly meticulous details on the history of politics and scholarship, we find the roots of some interpretations that later proved to be dead-ends, and last but not least from this section it is possible to understand the noticeably strong regional differences in the level of research on this problem (which naturally have been politically motivated in most cases).

The detailed introduction to the history of the scholarship is followed by a section on terminology that is brief but full of information. On the one hand this explains the Latin terminology of the contemporary sources and points out the chronological differences between the designations *civitas* and *castrum*, and on the other hand it makes recommendations for the creation of a uniform Hungarian system of nomenclature where the Hungarian terms *ispán – ispánság – ispáni vár* can be indicated in the form of their central European equivalents *castellan – castle district – district castle*. To designate the system of these concepts he recommends the phrase castle system (the extent to which the author himself consistently uses this terminology we leave for the reader to decide).

The next chapters are grouped around the issues of dating that undoubtedly are of greater interest to the majority of readers. The author provides a brief review and evaluation of the various methods for dating (historical, linguistic, archeological and natural science methods, and within this focusing on dendrochronology), placing particular emphasis on dangers inherent in connecting at any cost the historical and archaeological data. It is not surprising that the author considers the most dependable method to be the joint utilization of the reliable data from the various dating methods, although it comes to light that the complementary utilization of data can only be taken advantage of in exceptional cases, particularly in Hungary. This explains the topic of the following long and thorough chapter, the relationship between the castles and the cemeteries. In this case, the joint analysis of data from archaeology, the natural sciences, historical study and ecclesiastical history is possible.

The examination sets off from Bóna's proposition that the castle could not have existed without the inhabitants of the castle, or more precisely their cemetery. The author includes in the evaluation the development process of the ecclesiastical system, and in connection with this the analysis of the changes in burial specifications as well. His major conclusions are as follows: the row cemeteries precede the erection of the castles in the region by no more than a half century, but they remain in use all the way to the second half of the 12th century (or even to the 13th century in Poland); and church cemeteries are present relatively late, mostly starting from the second half of the 11th century, so in the beginning people were not buried around the castles' churches or the churches of the urban areas outside the castles. In connection with this observation, he becomes involved in an exhaustive analysis of the canonical situation of so-called "archdeaconry churches", which however does not help much in resolving the issues related to the dating of castles. His most important conclusion in all this from the perspective of the chronology of castles is that in most cases the populations that significantly preceded the period of state foundation, as well as their cemeteries, cannot be traced in the surroundings of the region's castles, and that row cemeteries were in use for a long time, while church cemeteries appear late, so the construction of the castles cannot be dated by the closure of the cemeteries of the former inhabitants or the opening of the latter type of cemetery. In addition, the age of the ecclesiastical buildings in the castles cannot be precisely determined due to the lack of burials.

One of the central chapters of the book is the analysis of the fortifications of the castles, which takes into account the attempts at classification up to this point (topographical location, function, ground area, the system/size of ramparts, etc.), and then makes a recommendation for the introduction of a new typology. Mordovin creates three main types: 1. simple fortifications (palisades, simple embankment, earthworks supported by timber walls and stone walls); 2. complex single-component fortifications (earth and wood structures that may have fiber, grid or case structures); and 3. complex multi-component fortifications (the joint employment of various fortification types, e.g. fiber and case structures, possibly with an exterior stone wall). According to his view, this unified description provides the opportunity to compare the castles of the region with the only difficulty being represented by the evaluation of castle structures that are minimally or poorly documented. The main points in connection with this are the following: the majority of rampart types cannot be used for dating, only a few sub-types (e.g. grid structures with hooked connections) can be considered specific, the fiber ramparts went out of use in the 12th century, the grid structures can be dated from the turn of the 10th century and the case structures from the middle of the 10th century and both remain in use for centuries. From the Hungarian perspective the author emphasizes the diversity but still isolates two characteristic groups: the castles of the northwestern frontier and a few Transylvanian castles have case structures and the northeastern area has fortifications with grid structures, which can even be indicators of period. Here it is necessary to mention Mordovin's observations on the differences between the fiber and the grid structures and his precise definitions of them.

The author dedicates a separate chapter to proving that the castles were at the same time settlements or were sections of settlements making an integrated whole with the suburban area. This point can be considered evidence in light of the Czech and Polish research, but in Hungary it still needs verification. As with so many times in the earlier chapters (in connection with the chronology of burnt red clay ramparts, archdeaconry churches or ramparts with narrow or wide bases), here he again points out a dead-end direction of research that tried to interpret uninhabited castles so-called places of refuge (*refugium*). On the basis of central and eastern European examples he shows that the castles had well-structured plans, within which the ruler/ispán's palace and the castle church were separated as a kind of internal castle, while the other sections were filled with residences, workshops and storehouses. To prove that this point was also true in terms of Hungary, the author did not only collect the scattered data (e.g. the data on the unity of the palaces and churches starting from Bratislava, going through Visegrád and on to Abaújvár), but also presented the case of one actual castle, "Hungary's best excavated and most widely published ispán's castle" of Bor-sod. The thorough documentation made it possible for Mordovin to reinterpret the excavation results and convincingly verify that the castle and the settlement discovered "below" it were actually from the same

time (the 10th century), and there are numerous characteristics of central European fortified centers in this castle as a settlement, such as for example the presence of a separated internal castle with a church and palace.

The analytical section is closed by a brief, concise summary that covers the conclusions from the individual chapters. Of these, we will only highlight the final conclusions here: the early Hungarian state developed in parallel with the Bohemian and Polish state organisms, and in all three countries similar power arrangements and territorial exercise of power based on castles (here: the castle district system) came about, which comprised an integral unit with the developing ecclesiastical system. Already at this time, the physical appearance of the castles did not show as unified a profile; while the castles of the Bohemian and Polish areas can be considered continuations of local traditions, the castles of the Carpathian Basin show influences coming from several directions, which the two types already presented above, the northeastern grid and northwestern case structures show characteristically. After his earlier cautiousness, the author was perhaps a little too bold in formulating the hypothesis that the castles of the Upper Tisza region may represent the first group of ispán's castles, to which the buildings with a case structure were added in a relatively short time. The phenomenon is explained on the basis of the Bohemian and Polish examples, such that the first castles (already in the 10th century on the basis of the example of the castle of Borsod) were created in the core area of the ruling dynasty, then the new types of fortifications were constructed during the expansion of rule.

The critic is in a difficult situation when evaluating Maxim Mordovin's imposing work; the enormous database undoubtedly provides a secure foundation for further research, the terminology that has been meticulously worked out greatly aids comparative analyses and through his observations, recommendations and the Bohemian and Polish parallels presented the author may provide genuine momentum for castle research, and not only in Hungary. At the same time, a perceptive reader senses a kind of uncertainty and possibly a feeling that something is missing as well. The uncertainty is first and foremost detected in the chronology of the castles. The author emphasizes repeatedly that the individual types of ramparts do not have value for dating, the individual construction techniques remained in use for centuries and an extensive state organism was not necessarily needed for the erection of castles. Compared with this, the final hypothesis about the first and second groups of ispán's castles seems bold, and perhaps through this the author meant to indicate the direction of further research. It is not incidental that this (hypo)thesis is in harmony to a certain extent with one of István Bóna's points; the fortifications with uniform structures are the marks of the development of strong centralized power. However, the author himself had previously refuted this point with the fact that the structures of the fortifications are not even close to uniform. Of the missing information, perhaps the full disregard of linear ramparts may be the most striking to the reader, since it can be hypothesized that these were closely related to the ispán's castles (e.g. the Somogy earthworks with Somogy Castle or the Vasvár earthworks with Vasvár Castle, and in the latter case, since the location of the ispán's castle can only be suspected on the basis of field observations, it is precisely the authentic, well documented cross-sections of the linear ramparts that are known).

Despite all of these uncertainties and deficiencies, which for the most part arise from the shortcomings of Hungarian research that have been emphasized several times in recent decades, it is possible to boldly state that a new essential work on the research into early Hungarian castles has been created, which will be of great use not only to archaeologists studying the Conquest and Early Árpád periods, but also to historians, ecclesiastical historians and even medieval Latin philologists. Maxim Mordovin's massive handbook will hopefully stimulate an even more lively debate than István Bóna's "pamphlet" in its time, and will not only inspire researchers into the individual features to perform more thorough work, but also will facilitate the creation of syntheses based on the newest results from various fields that deal with this outstandingly important question from the period of the establishment of the Hungarian state.