

## EMESE NAGY: AZ ESZTEGOMI KIRÁLYI PALOTA Az 1934–1969 között végzett régészeti ásatások eredményei (The History of the Royal Palace of Esztergom).

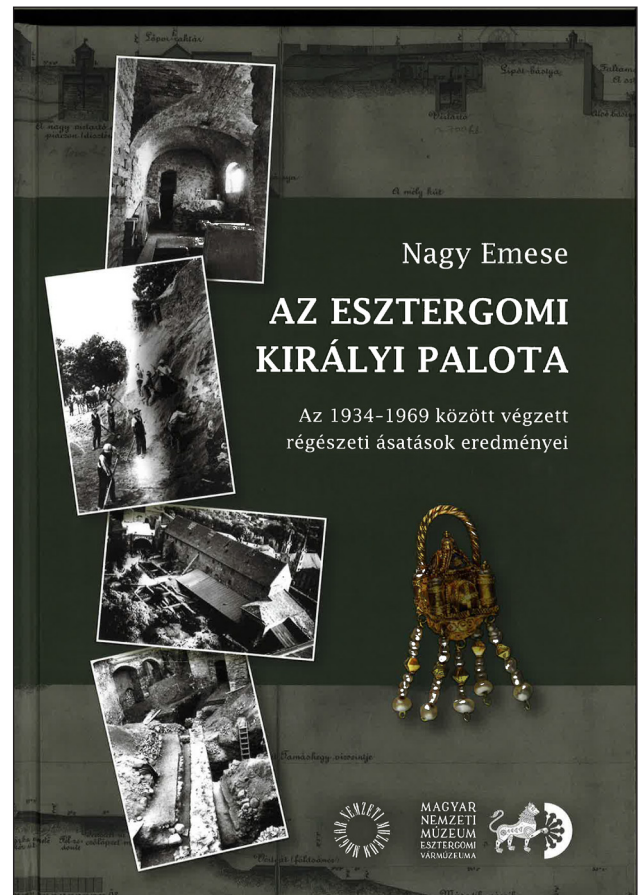
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*Scholars studying the archaeological heritage of Esztergom and the public interested in the history and archaeology of medieval royal centers can finally celebrate the publication of a long-awaited opus which fills a gap in medieval scholarship. Earlier attempts to put out this volume in the time of the National Monument Inspectorate (Országos Műemléki Felügyelőség) were abandoned—this institution ceased to exist more than two decades ago. The author, Dr. Emese Nagy, could not live to see the publication of her enormous scholarly endeavor; sadly, she passed away in 2008.*

Luckily, however, in the past eight years the Esztergom Castle Museum took on the task of digitizing the manuscript and enhancing the images supplementing the text, and the work thus became available, although not yet in a book form. So far, results of the Esztergom excavations after the 1930s had been known mainly from short preliminary reports. The 1964–1969 excavations were documented and analyzed in Emese Nagy's PhD thesis, in which she also summarized the excavations undertaken between 1934 and 1938 in order to provide a context for her own work. The thesis was turned into a book, and so additional written and visual sources, as well as results of later excavations (conducted, among others, by István Horváth) were added in the discussion. In the preface the author names 1987 as the year when the manuscript was closed.

The cover features excavation drawings and images of medieval artifacts, while on the front flyleaf the site map of the excavation area, the unearthed rooms, as well as the numbered excavation trenches and explored areas are depicted. References are frequently made to these locations and keeping the front flyleaf open while reading helps one orient himself spatially. In a similarly practical manner, the publisher placed the legend for the excavation's comprehensive section drawings on the back flyleaf.

As shown already by its complex cover, this book is certainly not an easy bedtime reading but a very detailed scholarly documentation and analysis. However, certain descriptive and explanatory parts in the volume offer an intriguing academic adventure for the reader (such as the chapter on the results and significance of the excavations).



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*Konstantin Vukov • Emese Nagy: Az Esztergomi Királyi Palota. Az 1934-1969 között végzett régészeti ásatások eredményei.*

A preface by Gergely Tolnai, director of the Esztergom Castle Museum, summarizes the historical and historiographical importance of the volume, also giving a sketch of Emese Nagy's professional career. After this follows the original preface of the book, written by the author, in which she discusses the aim of the excavations, as well as the goal and methods of her analysis. At the end of the volume the publisher decided to include the reviews written by the two external readers of the original thesis, Géza Entz and György Györffy, as well as Emese Nagy's answer to their criticism. The fact that these scholars, the most important medievalist and art historian of the period, were asked to review the thesis, shows that the scope and significance of the work was acknowledged already when it was submitted.

The lion's share of the volume consists of Emese Nagy's analysis of the most important archaeological discoveries in the 1930s, and her detailed discussion of the excavation documents from the 1960s. A bibliography and a list of abbreviation follows, as well as a summary in English, and, as a special feature of the book, the above-mentioned reviews of the PhD thesis and the author's answer to them. A series of plates with images, altogether 112 pages, supplements the volume. Pictures showing the present-day condition of the sites discussed in the book were also added to this image collection by the editors.

The original structure of the thesis was somewhat altered in order to make it more "user friendly" and easier to follow; this is a great merit of the publisher. Originally, all images were placed at the end of the thesis, but now the excavation drawings are inserted into the text, making it easier to comprehend the argumentation and use the book. This volume is much more than a simple documentation of the excavated archaeological sites. I cite here a few examples to illustrate the scope of this scholarly endeavor, and to show how it addresses important, universal questions.

Nagy provides a credo of her excavation methodology in Chapter 2.2, under the title "Analytical methods." She writes, "There are two possible ways to present the excavation results: to follow a chronological or a geographical order. A chronological structure leaves little room for the discussion of archaeological connections, while in the case of a presentation by geographical regions it is more difficult to follow the history and architectural history of the sites. Finally, as opposed to my first analysis that had a more pronounced archaeological perspective, I decided to follow the chronology. However, I present it by dividing the area into four larger regions and presenting their archaeological remains in a chronological order (in three periods: the early Árpád period, the Árpád period, and the 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century). Hopefully, this structure helps me elucidate historical connections, but at the same time, archaeological evidence is also properly presented."

I highlight here a few parts of the volume to show the meticulous and objective way the author discusses the results of her research and her conclusions. The landscape of the Castle Hill (Várhegy) and its medieval topography was in the focus of studies already in the 1930s (a drawing by Dezső Várnai is also included in the book). A separate chapter (III.D) is dedicated to the early Árpád-period topography of the Esztergom Castle Hill, and the reconstruction of the original terrain. Nagy's predecessors obviously made significant contributions. It is breathtaking to see the precision with which the old maps, especially the engravings by Krey and his 1756 survey, depict the topographic details. Emese Nagy compared these to present-day (that is, those in her time) vertical measurements, in order to check the old documentation. This also helped her formulate a series of significant conclusions, as well as place the castle's location on the Castle Hill in a wider context of European castle architecture. Furthermore, the study of the old terrain made her able to conclude that the royal residence must have stood on the highest elevation in the landscape. She writes, "observations on the above-mentioned transformations of the terrain led me to make a series of conclusions. When he first made Esztergom his seat, the residence of Grand Prince Géza occupied only this highest projection on the hill. This was his first residence, and the chapel dedicated to St Stephen Protomartyr, which, judging from its name, probably had a role in the early Christianization process, must have stood here as well." The southern part of the hill only started to be built up and incorporated into the royal palace under the rule of St Stephen, when the complex was enlarged.

Another pivotal aspect of the work is the research on the so-called barracks. Her most important conclusion is that there are medieval wall segments everywhere throughout the building. For this study she

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meticulously documented the complex system of walls facing the yard, as well as the flights of stairs. She also investigated the space of the zwinger on the side facing the Danube and concluded that this part of the building was constructed when the complex was enlarged in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Research of the wall tops was not feasible at that time, given the limitations inherent in the period's archaeological methodology. This was done later by István Horváth, and as a result, the architecture of the large palace wing could be reconstructed. During this work, the theories Nagy proposed on the periodization of the complex were confirmed and supplemented with further observations.

As a last example I cite here the scholarly polemics about identifying the Basilica with the church dedicated to St Vitus. In this case, present-day excavations were instrumental in clarifying the connection (Chapter III.E). As Nagy writes, "This is the only case when the name of St Vitus appears in sources about Esztergom, and so locating this church posed a challenge to scholars." The key sentence in the primary source says, "*in Basilica beati Wythi martiris de promontorio Castri Strigoniensis, que est Capella Strigoniensis ecclesie.*" Here, the only certain element was the name of St Vitus. Nagy presents all existing views on the identification of the church and the patron saint. The main point here is not the identification itself, but Nagy's exemplary attitude with which she revises her own views and the possibilities for further research: "Vacillating between the arguments and counter-arguments concerning the St Vitus Basilica, earlier I supported the theory that it is identical with the underground round chapel, although for a short time I wavered in this view. However, the results collected in the present study suggest that the St Vitus Basilica is, in fact, the castle's chapel. It is important to note, however, that a definite answer may be given only if new pieces of data will surface; there is, however, not much hope in that." Luckily, her last remark proved wrong. Unfortunately, she did not live to see the hope turn into certainty: the remains of the chapel were finally unearthed.

To sum up my review, an exemplary piece of work, filling a gap in medieval archaeology, is now available for researchers as well as for the wider public. The careful editorial work, including finding the right place for illustrations in the text, compiling the plates, and checking the references, makes the volume even more valuable and easy to use; thanks to the Hungarian National Museum and its Esztergom Castle Museum for this undertaking. Director Gábor Rezi Kató ensured that the book was published within the framework of the Árpád Dynasty Program so that financial resources became available. István Horváth contributed as a consultant, while proofreader Krisztina Bertók painstakingly checked the publication—her task was probably much more complex than that of a usual proofreader. The visual material was edited by Zoltán Vigh in a scrupulous manner. Their contributions, along with those of many other colleagues, made it possible for this groundbreaking work to be published in a quality that is in accordance with the significance of the discussed monuments and worthy of Emese Nagy's professional standards.