

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH WITHIN THE FRAME OF HUNGARIAN-SLOVAKIAN COLLABORATION

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*Research in neighbouring countries has always been important for Hungarian archaeology since archaeological cultures and the borders of former empires or countries do not usually correspond to those of modern states. The record of many archaeological periods, including the medieval Kingdom of Hungary, can only be researched effectively if archaeologists from neighbouring countries cooperate or even conduct joint research. Such collaborations have a long tradition, and the last two decades have seen an increase in the number of joint projects. Hungarian Archaeology reflected on this trend last year by launching a series presenting multi-national projects by country, reporting first on research in Romania, with a special emphasis on joint Hungarian research in Transylvania. Next, we plan to report on projects in Slovakia. This paper is an introduction, briefly outlining the research history of the focus area and some of the ongoing excavations.*

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In the second half of the 20th century, close professional links were established between archaeologists and professional institution networks in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Professional collaborations on archaeological sites of different historical periods played a prominent role among these, with a few prehistoric sites of international importance, sites of the former Roman Empire in Hungary and the *limes* in Slovakia, and the mapping of Avar Period archaeological record also in the limelight. In close cooperation with Hungarian experts, Anton Točík (1918–1994), one of the leading figures in Slovak archaeology, played a major role in the publication of the Hungarian Conquest Period material of south-western Slovakia; his contribution to the research of the Bronze Age and the Migration Period is also significant. A similarly close relationship was established between the different generations of researchers into medieval castles, who contributed to mapping the castle network of the period through systematic research of Slovak castles and excavations related to monument conservation. Regarding institutional links, the most important research centre was the Institute of Archaeology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Nitra, with the first director being Anton Točík. As a later director, Alexander Ruttkay also promoted joint programmes—for example, in the field of castle research—in cooperation with the *Castrum Bene* conference series, a Hungarian and, later, international professional forum for castle research. Joint research and professional cooperation thus go back decades.

The political changes in the region, the fall of the Communist regime, the break-up of Czechoslovakia, and the emergence of the independent Slovak Republic have also created a new situation for joint archaeological programmes. Gradually, more institutional cooperation completed the long-established links between researchers. As the two countries joined the European Union, the number of cross-border programmes for which funding could be obtained from various EU sources increased. In addition to cooperation between microregions, local tourism development projects, often linked to archaeological sites and monuments, have also played an increasing role. These have not necessarily been focused on archaeological problems, but the phenomena uncovered within their frames contributed significantly to exploring sites previously little known by research.

From 2010 on, previously established professional contacts, combined with new forms of support, have led to several joint programmes involving new excavations and years-long collaborations. Among these,

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the Institute of Archaeological Sciences of the Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) has played an important role, launching several planned excavations for students on medieval sites in Slovakia in cooperation with institutions and researchers from the Slovakian side. Maxim Mordovin's work has been pivotal in the realisation of these projects. As part of his academic research, he has forged close links with Czech, Polish, Romanian, Slovak and Ukrainian researchers and got involved in projects on early castles in countries neighbouring Hungary. As he had organised joint excavation programmes with Hungarian researchers and students in several other countries before, Mordovin had the experience to lead the Hungarian team in such cooperation. The excavations in the castles at Zólyom-Pusztavár (Zvolen, Slovakia) and Csábrág (Čabrad', Slovakia) continued this line; these projects, along with fieldwork at several other sites (some also in Slovakia), provided an opportunity for students of the Medieval Archaeology programme to gain field experience.

The castle of Zólyom is an outstanding example of late medieval castle architecture; it is also a monument of major importance for the architectural heritage of the whole Central European region. The site has a less-known part on a nearby hilltop: the hard-to-access ruins of Pusztavár (Pustý Castle, i.e. 'ruined fort'), a medieval fortress. Medieval sources have often been referring to the fortresses ambiguously, and excavations in the area have been particularly important for the pre-Angevine Period. Researchers and students from ELTE became involved in a research programme carried out on the site since 1992. This decades-long project has shed new light on the history of the site, consisting of a Lower and an Upper Castle, and a wall connecting them. The excavations have uncovered very significant building remains, and it has also become clear that the fortifications associated with the Árpád Period royal estate still existed in the late Middle Ages, and also that important building phases can be associated with the latter.

The research project with the castle of Csábrág in focus is a noteworthy example of the excavations carried out with the participation of ELTE under the supervision of Maxim Mordovin (*Fig. 1*). A continuation of previous research, it was launched in 2013 to clarify the building history of the castle and its connections with the medieval castle network of the Carpathian Basin (BELJAK *et al.* 2016). This large castle has sev-



*Fig. 1. Aerial image of the Castle of Csábrág (by Civertan)*

eral important buildings still standing today; as it was also important in the Early Modern Period, the new excavations were expected to significantly contribute to research on the said era (MORDOVIN 2015). The work also brought something of a surprise: in addition to discovering important building remains, it has yielded particularly important results for the research on stove tiles—especially for the younger periods, as reported in a previous issue of Hungarian Archaeology (RAKONCZAY 2020). In addition, the Late Middle and Early Modern pottery, metal, and glass finds are also important for improving our knowledge of the region's craft history.

Recently, another important Hungarian educational centre (besides ELTE) has launched programmes within diverse institutional frameworks in Slovakia. Archaeologists from Pázmány Péter Catholic University (PPKE), another major player in archaeology education in Hungary, have been involved in many international projects, including the Holy Land and areas of outstanding importance for Hungarian prehistory. PPKE has also worked in other regions in the past year, including two excavations in the territory of Slovakia. Both projects are related to the development of a monument and its historic environment: the castle of Nagykövesd (Velky Kamenec) and the Premonstratensian monastery of Ság (Šahy, Ipolyság), important elements of the medieval built heritage. The new research, related to new local development projects in these sites is expected to yield new archaeological results.

The excavation of the Premonstratensian monastery in Ság started in 2021 with the participation of experts from Slovakia and Hungary and the [professional support](#) of the Tekov Museum in Leviciach, Slovakia. The goal of the 2023 campaign, conducted by archaeologists and students from PPKE, was to conclude previous work on the site. Three southern rooms of a Baroque granary, erected in place of the medieval monastery from the stones of the former, were excavated last year, and six trenches were opened east of the granary, covering the eastern wing of the former monastery. There, a row of late medieval rooms and the associated brick floor were clearly discernible; besides, some stumps of the Árpád Period building complex were discovered, allowing for a general reconstruction of the ground plan of the building in the earliest phase.

The medieval castle of Nagykövesd has significant remains however, little is known about its archaeological record as the area has never been excavated before. As the ruins of the castle, mentioned in written sources dating back to the 13th century, have needed restoration and conservation, the developer has intended to do precisely that. The castle (in the Bodrog Region) has become the focus of a tourism development project; conservation has been the primary objective as they have been in danger of collapse. As such work pre-necessitates archaeological excavation, fieldwork, led by Ákos Tibor Rácz, was planned in several campaigns, starting with 2023. Alongside university students, volunteers from the Community Archaeological Association have also been involved in the work carried out under the professional supervision of the Slovakian Office for the Protection of Historical Monuments (Pamiatkový úrad Slovenskej Republiky). A 5 × 5 m trench grid has been marked out in the upper castle; six trenches have been opened and excavated so far. The work concerned the building complex in the western half of the castle, where several building phases have been documented. The excavation brought to light the monumental tower and its floor of the earliest building phase, dated with a coin. The results provide an important starting point for the planned reconstructions.

The programmes briefly described here have played, and continue to play, an important role in the cooperation of Hungarian and Slovakian archaeologists and the related institutions; in future issues, we plan to report in detail on the results of research on these sites and others, together with the related literature.

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