

REVIEW:

**Perica Špehar – Olga Špehar (eds):
Crkveno brdo in the Middle Ages: Exhibition catalogue /
A Templomdomb a középkorban: Kiállítási katalógus.**

GYÖNGYVÉR BÍRÓ¹

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As part of the City Day programme series in Senta (Сента / Zenta), a temporary archaeological exhibition entitled Crkveno brdo in the Middle Ages opened on 31 August 2024. It was a joint venture of the University of Belgrade – Faculty of Philosophy and the City Museum in Senta. The exhibition presents the archaeological research of a medieval settlement, its church, and its churchyard. The Crkveno brdo (Црквено брдо / Templomdomb) site is located in Serbia, about 8 km southwest of Senta, 1.5 km southwest of the village of Gornji breg (Горњи брег / Felsőhegy). The archaeological features and their find material uncovered by the excavations that have taken place in several stages there since 2019 gave the source material of the exhibition.

The focus of this review is the exhibition catalogue. The volume, published by the University of Belgrade – Faculty of Philosophy, with the support of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia in 2024, was edited by Perica Špehar and Olga Špehar and includes contributions by five other authors.² Considering that the exhibition is temporary and was still open (until 31 October) when this review was written, it is a true joy that its catalogue was already available in both print and digital format at the time.

That the volume contains every text, including find descriptions and figure captions, in three languages greatly facilitates its widespread use. The design of the volume meets the expectations set against exhibition catalogues: the book is easy to handle, the different colouring of the headings of the Serbian, Hungarian, and English descriptions makes it easier to navigate within the volume, the typography makes the content accessible, and the colourful illustrations complement the text well.

The content of the volume was arranged into four major parts: the preface and the first two chapters serve as a kind of introduction, the next three chapters discuss the features and finds that came to light during the archaeological excavation, a following chapter gives provides insight into research methodology, and the work concludes with a bibliography.



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The editorial preface describing the circumstances in which the exhibition was born and the cooperation amongst the institutions behind it is followed by a brief overview of the site and its research history and, next, a short chapter summarising the historical background of the broader surroundings of Crkveno brdo. This summary and recent and old historical maps help the reader orientate themselves in time and space. One can learn that the area of Crkveno brdo was inhabited already in the Early Middle Ages and that the early Hungarians had established a burial ground there preceding the construction of the one-time church. The 11th–15th-century village, parts of which were deserted between the 13th and the 15th centuries, had a churchyard and a church. The church, built in the late 11th–early 12th century, suffered damage in the Mongol invasion in 1241–1242; after that, it was reconstructed and remained in use until the 16th century.

The next part is two chapters summarising the results of the archaeological research, focusing first on the settlement and next on the church and the churchyard. Field photos of the unearthed features, survey maps, and images of the artefacts from the features in focus illustrate the excavation report. A glimpse at the survey map of the excavated part of the six-hectare site (Fig. 4 on page 32) makes it clear that currently, we only have data on a part of the settlement, which was inhabited in the 11th–13th centuries, included five houses, nine external ovens, 41 pits, thirteen ditches, and a well. Of these, House 4 is worth mentioning (p. 33, Fig. 6): with a size of 7.25×5 m, it was about twice as big as any other house on the site but fit the line of close analogies (large, sunken Árpád Period buildings) from other sites (NAGY *et al.* 2001). Altogether, sixty graves were excavated in the multi-phase churchyard used until the 16th century; the floor plan of the church was also outlined (p. 49, Fig. 7).³ The authors briefly mention that a part of the graveyard was destroyed by a trench, about 1 m wide and 1.20 m deep, which might have been dug before the Mongol invasion, but the exact position and possible function of the feature remain unclear. A geophysical survey has revealed a circular ditch, ca. 45 m in diameter, around the church, and perhaps also traces of a smaller and shallower ditch within (p. 78, Fig. 12). It seems realistic to assume that these structures can be identified as the remains of some fortification, i.e., part of a defence system against the Mongol campaign around the brick building, akin to the ones observed on sites in the Great Hungarian Plain (ROSTA & PÁNYA, 2022; LASZLOVSZKY, 2022).

The find catalogue comprises 32 items: pottery, metal, glass artefacts, bricks, and fresco fragments. It presents a brief description and data on the findspot, size, and dating of each. A significant proportion of the settlement finds is pottery, including cauldrons, pots, and a special, cylindrical bottle type with varied decoration (p. 35, Cat. 5). The finds recovered from the church are mainly building materials, while the grave finds are typically coffin clasps, clothing accessories, jewellery items, obols, as well as rattles and stone balls in children's graves, and a fragment of a small glass jar. A separate chapter is devoted to the fresco fragments. In light of the results, while the setting and main characteristics of Crkveno brdo connect the site with coeval ones on the neighbouring Southern Great Plain, it also has some particular traits.

The excavation report is followed by a chapter on methodology, which provides an overview of the various instrumental site detection and survey methods applied (including magnetometer survey, GIS mapping, drone photography and photogrammetry, and 3D modelling) and the scientific analyses carried out (anthropological, archaeozoological, archaeobotanical, archaeoparasitological investigations, and radiocarbon dating).

A short selection of the related literature concludes the volume, enabling the interested reader to delve into the topic. Most of these publications describe the results of the interdisciplinary research of the site, while one presents a preliminary report on the results of the 2019 excavation campaign (ŠPEHAR, MARKOVIĆ & JOVIĆ 2021).

The selected, mostly high-quality images complement the diverse topics well, allowing the reader to glimpse the features and finds discovered. It would be nice to have more of these, perhaps a closer view of some features or a larger image here and there, but the published photos still make the work complete, as they cover all aspects of the site and the find material.

³ The dimensions, proportions, and partly the floor plan of the church at Crkveno brdo are similar to the medieval church of Csorvás (Békés County) (SZATMÁRI 2005, 106, 174, 6. kép).

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Although the research is still in progress, the publication of the first results in an accessible, clear, and eye-catching way is very promising. The book perfectly meets the demand set against an exhibition catalogue, giving a sufficient basis for orientation even to those who did not have an opportunity to view the exhibition. This is particularly important in light of the fact that nowadays, despite the demand, it is not common practice to create a lasting, tangible summary of every temporary exhibition.

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