

ABBOT UROS AND HIS WORK [UROS APÁT ÉS MŰVE]

Temporary exhibition in the Benedictine Abbey of Pannonhalma,
27 April–11 November 2024

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The impressive exhibition about the life of Abbot Uros of Pannonhalma (abbot from 1207 to 1242) opened on 27 April and, as is customary for the temporary exhibitions of the Benedictine Abbey of Pannonhalma, closed on 11 November, the feast day of St. Martin of Tours, the abbey's patron saint. This review aims to present the studies in the exhibition catalogue and briefly assess the exhibition itself.

Keywords: Pannonhalma, exhibition, Benedictine Abbey, 13th century, Mongol Invasion

The exhibition and the catalogue follow the same concept and order (*Fig. 1*). The objects are arranged in four rooms, successfully combining the historical and the art historical viewpoints of the curators, Kornél Szovák and Imre Takács, who created an excellent and comprehensive presentation of the life of Abbot Uros and the era he lived in. The exhibition is easy for any visitor to access, and the displayed artefacts help understand the historical events of the period (and *vice versa*).

The first room focuses on the early activities of Abbot Uros at Tihany, presenting documents and artefacts from both Tihany and Pannonhalma from before his arrival and his early years there. There are documents of his activities at Tihany and his early presence at Pannonhalma. The second room presents evidence of the professionalism and leadership abilities of the abbot, as well as some details of his journeys. A separate room is dedicated to the abbot's exceptional and dramatic actions during the Mongol invasion; the exhibited items include letters related to the Mongol invasion and works of art from village churches and the Basilica of Pétermonostora (*Fig. 2*). Architectural relics from the time of Abbot Uros are presented in the last room (*Fig. 3*). An exquisite solution, high-quality footage helps the visitor to get familiar with stone carvings at hardly accessible points of the abbey. The charters by King Andrew II and Pope Gregory IX, which mention the churches of Pannonhalma and Deáki, are also displayed in this room.

The exhibition catalogue—bearing the title of the exhibition and a subtitle, ‘*Egy tevékeny élet Szent Márton szolgálatában*’ [A Productive Life in the Service of Saint Martin]—allows the reader to learn about

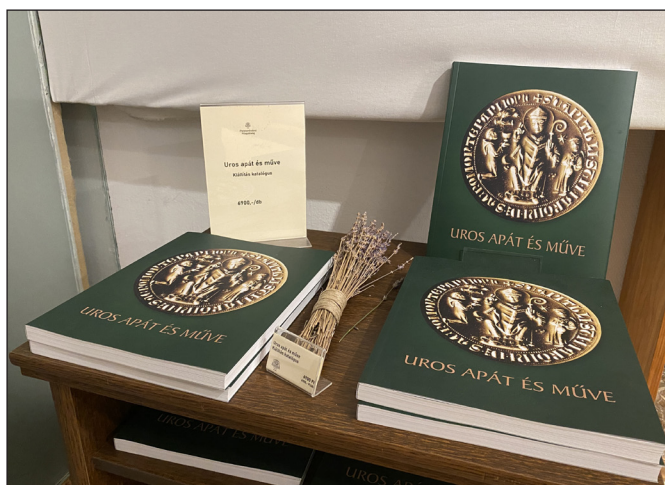


Fig. 1. Catalogue of the exhibition, edited by Kornél Szovák and Imre Takács

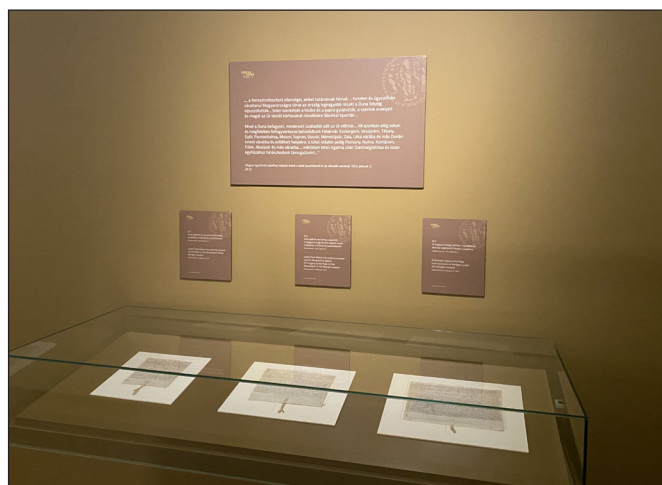


Fig. 2. Letters from February 1242, connected with Abbot Uros and the Mongol invasion

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Fig. 3. Basin fragment from the church

the renovations were carried out not only to restore the building complex that had been damaged by fire but likely also as a result of Abbot Uros' visit to Montecassino in 1211 and the impression this monument may have had on him. Interestingly, the abbot seems to have recognised the historical importance of the buildings that he may have thought were built at the time of Stephen I, the first Christian king of Hungary (1000–1038) and preserved them due to their heritage value. The chapter about the life and memory of Abbot Uros concludes with a discussion of the artefacts related to his early years in Tihany in focus (Fig. 4) (SZOVÁK & TAKÁCS 2024, 21–23).

The second chapter, by Kornél Szovák, the curator of the exhibition's historical part, focuses on Abbot Uros as a community leader during the reform of the Benedictine order in the early 13th century (SZOVÁK & TAKÁCS 2024, 25–41). This renewal was partly a result of the rise of other orders (e.g., Cistercian and Premonstratensian), which encouraged a more personal approach to faith.

Uros' approach to reforms and tasks emerges from the persisting documents issued by him; these also demonstrate his capacity to envision and enact change over an impressive 35-year-long period. Next, Szovák presents a great overview of the many changes in the 12th and 13th centuries and how the related changes interwoven society, especially the connections between the secular and ecclesiastical spheres, at many levels. Besides presenting an account of the historical and ecclesiastical changes, Szovák also introduces the reader to the changes in culture and ideology, positions Uros's insistence on recording the cultural changes of the 13th century, and, even more importantly, examines the legal significance of the related documents. The presented examples of legislation and legal activity illustrate the abbot's aims to strengthen and improve the positions of himself and his community in both the region and in Latin Christendom.

The following catalogue presents the charters and artefacts related to the pre-Uros period of Pannonhalma, particularly the 12th century, and several documents related to the legal activity of Uros issued by him and others, including Pope Gregory

the memory of Abbot Uros through various objects and written sources (SZOVÁK & TAKÁCS 2024). The exhibited items equally include archaeological finds and stone carvings.

The introduction written by Imre Takács, curator of the exhibition's art historical part, presents seals, a form of self-representation, connected specifically to the life and legacy of Abbot Uros (SZOVÁK & TAKÁCS 2024, 9–16), which illustrate excellently the abbot's concern with the memory of himself and his community. Abbot Uros seems to have been very much aware of the forgetfulness of humankind and wanted to eternalise his deeds and the history of the abbey. In that order, after the large-scale constructions in the abbey were completed in 1226, he ordered having all his deeds in Pannonhalma to be recorded; this type of document is quite rare in the Latin West. Importantly, as Takács also suggests,



Fig. 4. 11th-century capital from the Abbey of Tihany at the entrance of the exhibition



Fig. 5. The seal matrix of the abbey from the time of Abbot Uros

IX and King Andrew II (SZOVÁK & TAKÁCS 2024, 43–59). The abbey’s seal matrix from the time of Abbot Uros is also discussed here (Fig. 5).

The next study, by László Solymosi, focuses on the different journeys of the abbot. These journeys always had multiple goals and served his devotion as pilgrimages (SZOVÁK & TAKÁCS 2024, 62–68). When visiting Rome, Abbot Uros not only managed the politics of his abbey but also functioned as an ambassador of Andrew II. He met three popes and visited Montecassino three times.

Naturally, the long journeys prevented him from fully controlling the abbey. For example, in 1218, when he returned from the Holy Land, where he got with the crusade campaign led by Andrew II, Uros found out that some swineherds of the institution liberated themselves from the service to the abbey while he was away.

The next chapter is a longer work by Dániel Bácsatyai about various nobles who acted as representa-

tives of the state (SZOVÁK & TAKÁCS 2024, 69–85), helping position the role of Abbot Uros in the era. When describing the background, the author uses the term ‘West’ to refer to a rather unclear ‘Western Europe’ to distinguish between that and Hungary—a somewhat odd choice for a book about one of the greatest Western monastic leaders of the period (85), as is the term ‘Central-Eastern Europe’ in another study (SZOVÁK & TAKÁCS 2024, 97), which also seems problematic and marginalising (in contrast to ‘East-Central Europe’). These are just terms, but they are in complete contrast with the narrative of the studies in the volume and the message of the exhibition.

The two studies are followed, appropriately, by a well-arranged, transparent compilation of written sources, namely the *Liber ruber* of Pannonhalma, a copied compilation of documents ensuring the privileges of Pannonhalma, issued between 1000 and 1241 (SZOVÁK & TAKÁCS 2024, 87–93). The documents include an intriguing charter by Abbot Adenulfus of Montecassino, describing how the community there solemnly remembers the community of Pannonhalma during their prayers on the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul. It is worth noting here that Abbot T. Cirill Hortobágyi wrote the foreword of the catalogue on the same feast day (SZOVÁK & TAKÁCS 2024, 7–8).

Remarkably, the editors also dedicated a chapter of the catalogue and a part of the exhibition to the Mongol invasion. Tibor Szócs introduces the wider and closer context of this historical event in an excellent manner (SZOVÁK & TAKÁCS 2024, 95–105). While the sources collected mostly emphasise the role of Abbot Uros, they clearly also reveal that the Mongol invasion fundamentally determined and altered the culture of the period. Many monasteries have never been reconstructed after the invasion, and many of their estates, including the ones of Pannonhalma, suffered extensive damage. Part of the cultural damage is not represented accurately in the study: most of the institutional network was completely destroyed in the Great Hungarian Plain, often without any possibility of reconstruction (ROSTA 2014, 208). While the circumstances of the decline of cultural institutions in the Great Hungarian Plain are debated, the Mongol invasion certainly devastated this large region. After overviewing the general historical and cultural context and the unfolding of the events, the chapter presents the supplication letters written by Abbot Uros, diplomatic evidence of the defence against the Mongols and Abbot Uros’ involvement. The exhibited finds from the destroyed monasteries and village churches in the Great Hungarian Plain, including fragments of a reliquary from the Meuse Region, found in Pétermonostora near Bugac, are also presented here (SZOVÁK & TAKÁCS 2024, 107–119) (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Limoges crosses from churches destroyed during the Mongol Invasion



Fig. 7. Fragments of the *Porta Speciosa* of Pannonhalma from before 1224

In the following chapter, Domonkos Horváth's study on the built heritage of the abbey focuses on the remains of the 13th-century cloister (SZOVÁK & TAKÁCS 2024, 122–133). This building complex demonstrates best Abbot Uros' aim for functionality. He likely had to redesign the monastic space to create an impressive and, most importantly, efficient space before commencing the reconstructions of the church building—inspired probably by his experience gained in Montecassino and the heritage of the famous Abbot Desiderius. This chapter not only presents an excellent architectural and stylistic survey but also includes interesting theological aspects related to the use and meaning of such cloisters.

Next, Imre Takács presents the church of the abbey, naturally with a focus on the building phase related to Abbot Uros (SZOVÁK & TAKÁCS 2024, 134–161). The excellent photographs and drawings make the difficult topic easy to access, even for non-specialist readers. Of the three main workshops related to the cloister and the abbey church, the one that also crafted the *Porta Speciosa* of the cloister was related to masters who worked on the Cathedral of Reims (Fig. 7).

The last study, the volume by Béla Zsolt Szakács, leaves the abbey and focuses on one of its estates, the church of Deáki (today Diakovce, Slovakia), the subject of the first high medieval Hungarian architectural monograph ever published by Arnold Ipolyi in 1860. Apart from the architectural significance of the building (which was partially disturbed by an extension on its western side), the church is also notable because the Pray codex, the compilation containing the *Halotti beszéd* [Funeral Sermon], the oldest Hungarian literary work, was used there for some time. The study presents the architectural and historical context of the building with an interesting, additional emphasis on its modern history (SZOVÁK & TAKÁCS 2024, 162–171). The catalogue belonging to the three art historical studies includes an excellent selection of documents and fragments related to the cloister and the church (SZOVÁK & TAKÁCS 2024, 173–185).

The exhibition catalogue concludes with a selection of texts from documents about Abbot Uros (SZOVÁK & TAKÁCS 2024, 187–225). The studies in the chapters, many of which were written by an expert of the respective field, delve into fascinating topics. The excellent new photos illustrating the volume praise the work of Domonkos Horváth.

As for liturgical metal objects, it must be mentioned that according to new results that emerged between the completion of the catalogue and its publication, the remains (IV. 8) identified as a Limoges processional cross come actually from a patriarchal altar cross (Fig. 6) and the rock crystal mentioned in the catalogue did not belong to that but to another, larger, Hungarian cross. As for the 'Hansa' bowl, a vessel with engraved decoration (IV. 10), it is not certain that it was produced in the Kingdom of Hungary (LOVAG 1972, 219).

Informative and concise image captions and descriptions in English and Hungarian guide the visitor throughout the exhibition. It would have been ideal to give at least a short summary in English of the studies

in the volume, or at least include a study that encompasses the cultural significance of the topic given that the exhibition is rather close to both Vienna and Bratislava, because these catalogues eventually find their way to small museums across the former territory of the Kingdom of Hungary, non-Hungarian scholars in these institutions find any English information very useful (not to mention other scholars and interested readers), and finally because the quality of the exhibition, the beautiful catalogue, and the importance of the topic deserve it.

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