

## THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE 18TH CENTURY IN VISEGRÁD

ISTVÁN KOVÁTS<sup>1</sup>

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*The 18th century is a little-known and under-researched period of historic Visegrád. From the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries, the townscape, topography and ethnic composition of the village, which later became a market town, established in the area of the destroyed medieval royal seat and residence underwent dramatic changes. At the same time, in the same way as in earlier centuries, the newly developing economy and people's everyday life were strongly impacted by the natural environment. The image of Visegrád and construction work in the Baroque period were fundamentally defined by the proximity of the Danube and the woodlands in the vicinity, as well as the extensive field of ruins in the area. New buildings were erected on the still extant medieval ruins, incorporating considerable sections of the former network of roads, land layout and public utilities, which in several respects constitute a direct antecedent to present-day Visegrád. This is how the settlement structure characteristic up to the second half of the 20th century, and in some cases even up to our days, evolved with one main street, long, narrow plots of land and at some points with a clustered settlement structure. We have increasing amounts of information about this period from written (historic-topographic) sources, as well as thanks to the excavations that go beyond the traditional landmark divide of the year 1711.*

**Keywords:** Visegrád, Danube Bend, Modern era, archaeology, topography, continuity

Over the past twenty years, some outstanding relics of the Baroque settlement have been uncovered in the town, almost exclusively in the context of excavations of other periods. Some of the sites had already been known earlier but, apart from a few exceptions, their unearthing and documentation had not been done yet – mostly because of the legal regulation of temporal boundaries. Since the early 2000s, the newly launched large-scale investments and accompanying preventive excavations and the recovery of finds in the territory of the medieval town have often yielded 18th century remains as well. This fortunate situation has offered a unique opportunity for the systematic archaeological research into Visegrád in the Baroque period.

### POPULATION EXCHANGE AND CONTINUITY OF RUINS IN THE 16TH-18TH CENTURIES

In the two hundred years between the 16th and 18th centuries, Visegrád saw multiple population exchanges. Following the power struggles in the early 16th century after the Ottoman occupation, former inhabitants were leaving in increasing numbers. After the decisive Ottoman Conquest in 1544, life came to a complete standstill in the territory of the medieval town. Although in 1546 the first Turkish surveyor still listed 24 families, their actual existence is questionable. From 1562, in turn, no taxpaying Christian citizens were recorded any more (HEGYI 2001, 281). The depopulation of churches and monasteries also seems to have happened in the 1540s (BUZÁS et al. 1994, 283; BUZÁS & MÉSZÁROS 2008, 76). The marauding soldiers of the Turkish garrison and the Muslim and South-Slav Christian population, who had migrated with the Turks, lived in the rural settlement concentrated near the Citadel and the Solomon Tower. This is verifiable not only by written sources (HEGYI 2001, 281–282; IVÁN 2004, 85–120; 141–158) and the apparently authentic 16th-17th century prints and images of sieges (TOLNAI 2006, 198–205), but also by archaeological excavations (KOVÁTS 2010, 48–71). Only in the 1684-85 war was the Ottoman-age settlement completely destroyed. Due to the ongoing sieges, the continuously used Visegrád Castle and its outbuildings were gradually falling into disrepair to the extent that the imperial forces no longer saw them as suitable for any

<sup>1</sup> Hungarian National Museum, King Matthias Museum. E-mail: [kovatsistvan@visegradmuzeum.hu](mailto:kovatsistvan@visegradmuzeum.hu)

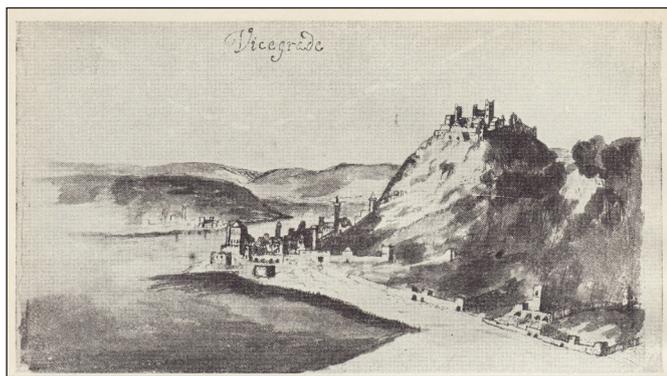


Fig. 1. Edward Brown's ink drawing of the ruins of Visegrád (1673)



Fig. 2. Sámuel Mikoviny's panorama of Visegrád (1737)

purpose, therefore they did not set up a guard there. For this reason, from 1686, i.e., from the liberation of Buda the latest, even military presence came to a virtual end in this territory (IVÁN 2004, 102–103).

The resettlement of the completely abandoned and ruined town of Visegrád must have started a few years after the reconquest. The document that first mentions settlers is dated to 1688.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, we have sporadic sources from 1690–1696 that make mention of a new population. Presumably, they do not refer to any permanent settlement yet, as there is no data of the settlers' nationality, numbers, religion or livelihood. The 1696 national census is the first to record Visegrád as a clearly living settlement (MAGYAR 1998, 11–13). The new population settled definitively as early as the beginning of the 18th century, at the time when the Stahremberg family owned the territory. The settlements of the Visegrád dominium (*Dominium Visegradense*), namely Maros *oppidum* and Kisorozsfalu, went into the ownership of Count Ernst Rüdiger von Stahremberg (who had been in charge of Vienna's defence in the 1683 siege) in 1700 (IVÁN 2004, 211). Similarly to some other places abandoned in Pest County, in Visegrád as well, we can reckon primarily with German Catholic, and in smaller numbers with Hungarian and, occasionally, with "Rác" (South-Slavic) settlers arriving in several waves up to the 1780s (MAGYAR 1998, 76–87; KOVÁTS 2020, 18–24).

It is not negligible for archaeological research that in the first half of the 18th century Visegrád's townscape and topography were dominated by the remains of the former medieval town. Between the 16th and 19th centuries, the abandoned royal castle and the major stone buildings in the town gradually fell into ruin, although they were still visible for a long time to come (IVÁN 2004, 86–87). Moreover, the first settlers would live in houses restored with building material obtained from the ruins (MAGYAR 1998, 17). For example, the 1673 ink drawing by the English traveller Edward Brown still features one-storey walls without a roof, at the site of the royal palace and the Franciscan monastery (DERCSÉNYI 1951, 36; BUZÁS et al. 1994, 282) (Fig. 1). Over sixty years later, besides Sámuel Mikoviny's "sad ruins of Visegrád", Mátyás Bél also includes in his 1737 country description the newly erected Baroque parish church and chapel (DERCSÉNYI & HÉJ 1958, 406–408; BENEDEFY 1976, 302) (Fig. 2). The late 18th-century copperplate engraving included in Robert Townson's *Travels in Hungary*, however, no longer shows any ruins – apart from the monumental remains of the castle system (DERCSÉNYI & HÉJ 1958, 408; KOVÁTS 2020, 27). On the other hand, several significant

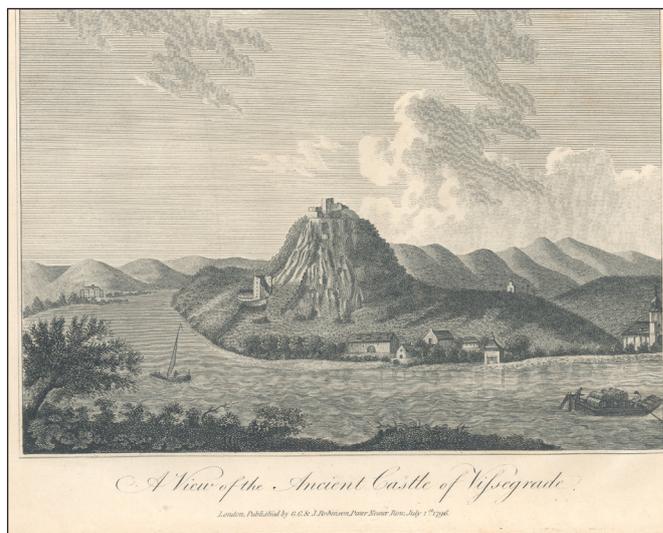


Fig. 3. Panorama of Visegrád from Robert Townson's book "Travels in Hungary" (1797)

<sup>2</sup> The Buda chamber inspector's letter about Visegrád settlers' tax exemption dated 6 October 1688 (MNM OL. marked: E278 Fol.446.)

buildings in 18th-century Visegrád, some of which are still used today, and their locations can be identified. Among them, we can spot the manor house inn, the building complex of the manorial centre in the area of the castle, Saint Mary's chapel by the Danube, the parish church completed by 1782, as well as the Calvary Chapel on the southern ridge of Castle Hill (Fig. 3). Thus, the sources enable us to trace how the medieval ruins of buildings were rebuilt or built into another edifice, covered up, pulled down, and partly or fully recycled within the space of about a hundred years. As a result, the settlement structure and environment had been completely changed. The same is verified by contemporary maps and ordnance surveys, which should be regarded as primary sources of information also due to their representations of natural and man-made landmarks, their inscriptions and their keys to signs (HRENKÓ 1985, 47–49).

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN 18TH CENTURY VISEGRÁD

Over the past two decades, due to the circumstances described above, in addition to obtaining a better understanding of the more intensively researched Roman and medieval sites, it has been possible to formulate a considerably more accurate image of the settlement in the Baroque period as well. This holds true both for the densely populated late medieval and the 18th-century settlement core, as well as for the sparsely populated outskirts that were however more significant for the economy.

In the course of the planned excavation of the long-known late Roman fortress and Árpád-age county castle on Sibrik Hill north of the settlement, it has been possible to document 18th-century dry-stone retaining walls of terraced cleared land, vineyards and orchards (SOPRONI 1954, 49; BORUZS 2021, 154–155) (Fig. 4). The agricultural use of the land that had been left undeveloped from the second half of the 13th century, between the 18th and 20th centuries gained fundamental importance for the inhabitants of land-poor Visegrád. Even in an 1821 road map the area is called *Prata Sibrik* or Sibrik Field (ASBOTH 1821).



Fig. 4. Dry-stone retaining wall on Sibrik Hill  
(photo: Katalin Boruzs)



Fig. 5. Baroque mill at Lepence  
(photo: Civertan Bt.)

At Lepence, located at the southern edge of the town, major excavations were carried out in 2008 in the area of the former swimming pool, where in addition to a bronze-age cemetery and a section of a second or third-century settlement, the remains of an isolated early modern stone building have also been found. Based on the topographic data of the territory (see EKF or First Military Survey), certain structural-architectural features and the archaeological material, this approximately northeast-southwest directed 28-metre-long and eight-metre-wide, three-part building with a rectangular floor plan has been identified as a watermill from the Baroque age (Fig. 5). Placed into clay and occasionally reinforced with mortar, the walls of a width of 60–70 cm were erected of mixed materials (gravel stone, cobblestone, cobble gravel, brick and mud brick) at the beginning of the 18th century, and later in the century they were repeatedly reconstructed and extended. The living room, the kitchen and the workshop joined to the tool shed were separated by mud brick partitions. The kitchen had a square base of cobblestone for the oven or stove whose erect walls

were patted with clay. At the end of the building, there was a mill-race roughly walled up with large stones joined together with the pillar that supported the axle of the mill wheel; at its bottom it had the pebbled and gravelled layers of the watercourse of the stream that once ran here. The building was on a cliff of a rather steep hillside. Taking advantage of the sloping terrain and the natural streams in the vicinity, the water was conducted to the mill wheel with the help of wooden structures and canals. In addition to the direct examination of the object, this hypothesis is confirmed by contemporary drawings of the ground plan and the façade.<sup>3</sup> (KOVÁTS 2020, 42). Therefore, it is undeniable that what we have found is a watermill with an overshot wheel.



Fig. 6. Remains of an 18th-century edifice built on a medieval tower (photo: István Kováts)

According to the find material, the mill's activity must have been discontinued in the first third of the 19th century, after which it served as a home up to the last third of the century, when it was abandoned for good (GRÓF 2009, 315; KOVÁTS 2018a, 194–195; KOVÁTS 2020, 38–44).

Also in the course of the long ongoing investigations of the medieval town and the royal residence, we have regularly come across destroyed relics, mostly underground by now, of the Baroque age. It needs to be added that the 18th-century village was almost entirely built on the former medieval ruins. At that time, some of the 14th and 15th-century stone buildings were occupied again, although usually given a function very different from the original, thus they were very considerably transformed inside as well as outside. Other remains were pulled down or, in some cases, deliberately destroyed. This may have been due to two main reasons. On the one hand, partly because of their size, some still extant buildings such as medieval churches could no longer be restored and, thus, were of no use to the settlers. On the other hand, the stone from the demolition of old structures was used for new constructions or was sold as building material (BUZÁS & LÖVEI 2001, 33–34). As late as the middle of the 19th century, destroying old ruins and using them as quarries was still standard practice, which according to written sources, the authorities tried to stop (IVÁN 2004, 115).

The destructions and reconstructions in the excavations of the Baroque period are processes that can be accurately documented and dated. These investigations have shown us, among other things, that a major section of the medieval north-western wing of the royal palace was demolished as late as 1740-1750. The vaulting and pulvini of the ground floor spaces were often blasted, with the walls torn down to the ground. Replacing the old edifices and making considerable use of their components, the development of the manorial building complex was launched in the early 1760s. In the same location, some of the ground floor was dug out and restored to be used as spaces for storing grain or as cellars, stables and carriage houses. The manorial steward's home was on the upper floor. Also for fencing round the manor, partly the walls of the former palace were used (BUZÁS & LÖVEI 2001, 33–34). In the 1730s, the neighbouring plot with the abandoned ruins of the Franciscan monastery and church was also built in. Next to this plot, in the early Baroque period, practically on the late medieval walking level, a number of stone houses were erected placed into a clay bedding. One of them, a large building on a T-shaped layout, can be identified as the estate manager's house. One of its vaulted rooms was built from the ruins of the monastery's tower (Fig. 6). In the Baroque period of the second half of the 18th century, in the same way as most of the medieval walls, it was demolished and replaced by a two-wing single-storey house with eleven rooms, a stable and a coach house on the remains of the former church. In the late 19th century, the manorial building complex was turned into a hunting lodge; today all we have left of it is its neo-baroque gate made in the period (BUZÁS & SZŐKE 2025, 75–76).

<sup>3</sup> Esztergom master builder Leonard Schade's survey from the 1770s (Hungarian National Archives, inv.no. T\_1\_No\_150.)



Fig. 7. Baroque-age dug water well built from medieval square stone (photo: István Kováts)

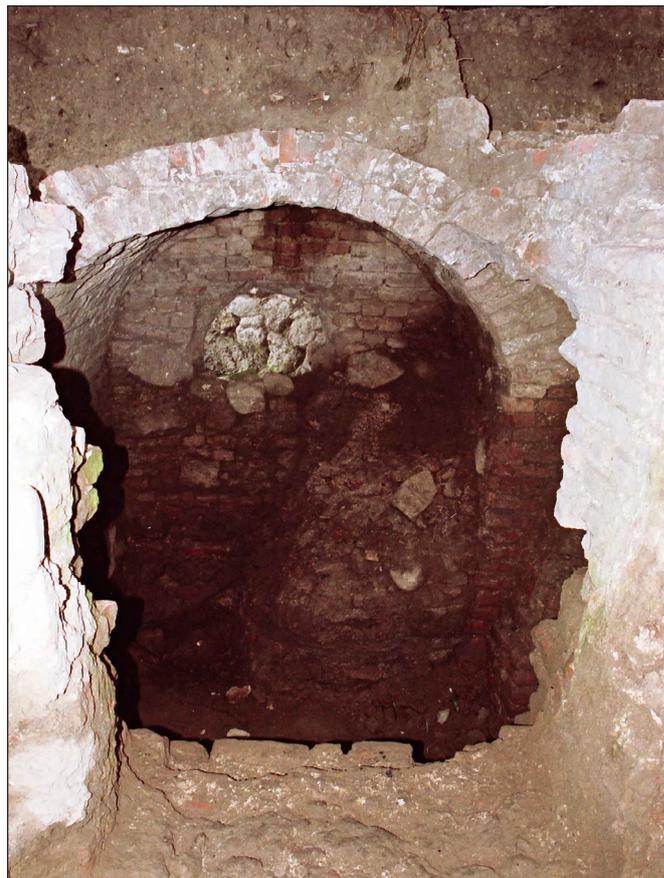


Fig. 8. 18th-century cellar as a secondary transformation of a medieval cesspit (photo: Gergely Molnár)



Fig. 9. 18th and 19th-century structures in the Visegrád school building (dimensioned orthophoto mosaic by Norbert Sandó)

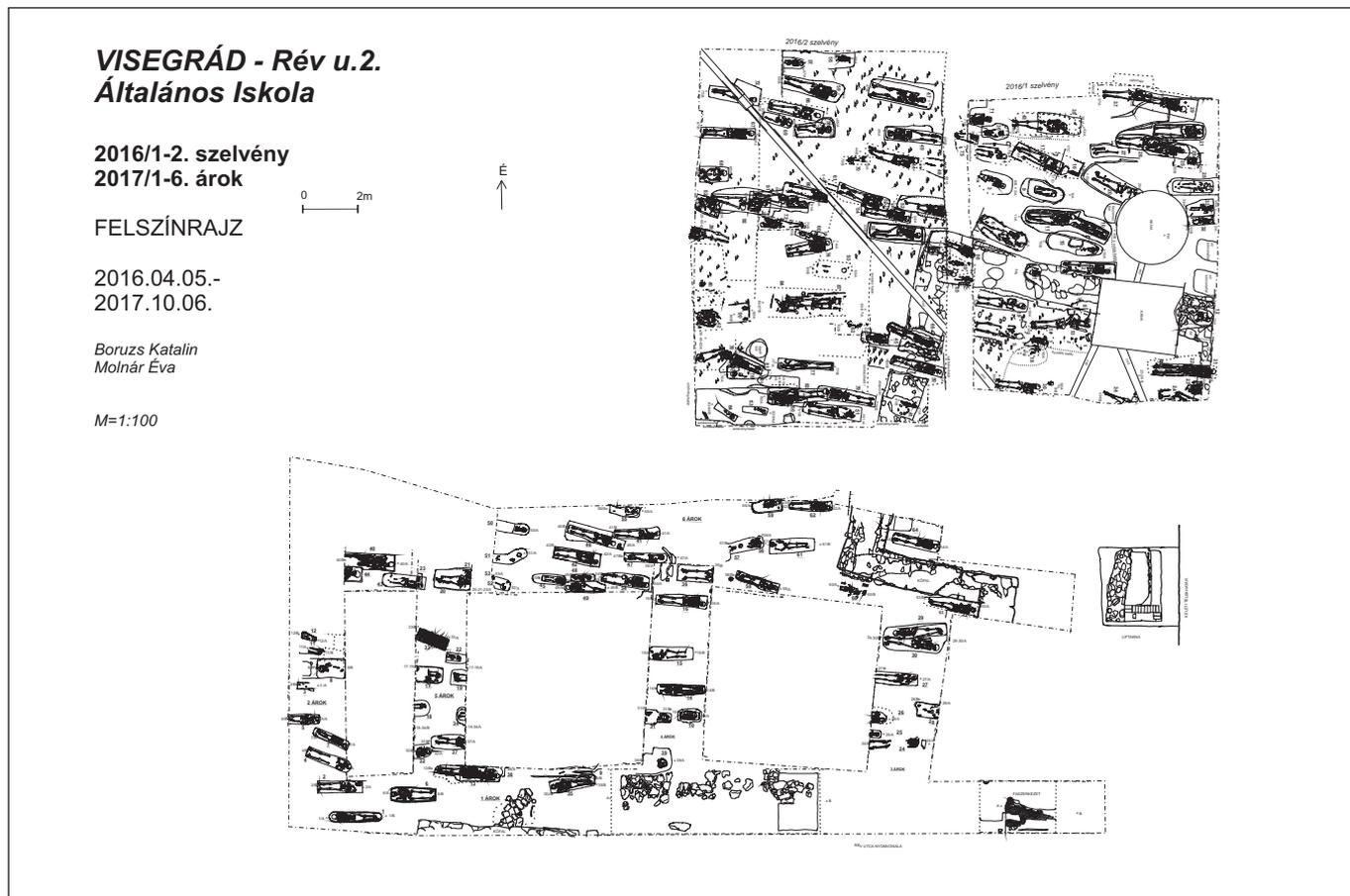


Fig. 10. Surface drawing of the 18th-century Visegrád cemetery (made by Katalin Boruzs–István Kováts–Éva Molnár)

In several sites of the late medieval town, we have also regularly found signs of intensive activity in the 18th century. When excavating a section of the settlement destroyed in the 16th century (metalworks and timbered houses), we also found a dug water well and remains of a mid-18th-century house with mixed wall material (Fig. 7). Both of them recycled squared stone taken from the ruined 14th or 15th-century church in the immediate vicinity (BUZÁS 2007, 46). From the 18th to the 20th century, the cesspit pool of a larger 14th or 15th-century house was used as a cellar; when building its entrance in the early 18th century, one wall of the pool was broken through (Fig. 8). At the same time, most of the medieval ruins on the plot were taken down to the ground level and must have been replaced by a court and, for some time, by outhouses (KOVÁTS & GRÓF 2008, 306–307).



Fig. 11. A section of the 18th-century Visegrád cemetery (Photo: István Kováts)

The primary school and its immediate surroundings in the centre of Visegrád have been a popular archaeological site since the 1950s (BUZÁS et al. 2006, 251–252; KOVÁTS 2023, 125–129). This listed two-storey complex hides sections of a 14th or 15th-century cellared house. Already ruined and abandoned under the Ottoman occupation, the house was turned into a one-nave church by the settlers, and following repeated reconstructions in 1787, when the second parish church had been completed, into the school that is still used today. In and around the building, we have identified late medieval settlement and destruction levels, ruins

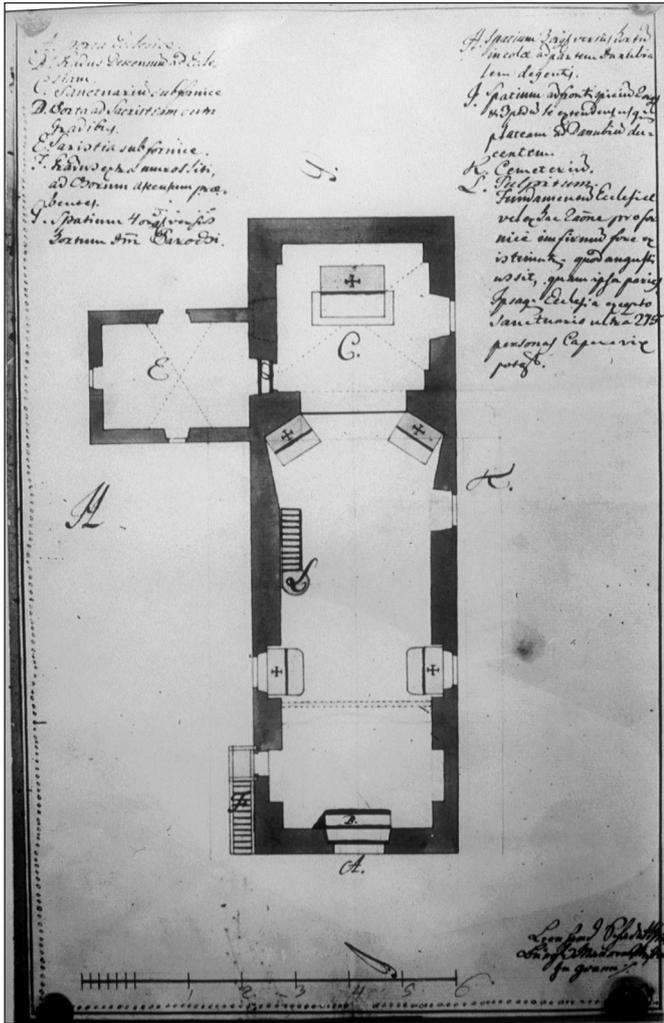


Fig. 12. Leonard Schade's survey of the Visegrád church (1773)

of edifices, a 14th or 15th-century water well, the sanctuary and sacristy of an 18th-century church, and the partition walls, heating appliances and cellar of the school dateable from the end of the 18th century (Fig. 9), as well as the graves of the Baroque cemetery that strongly interfered with the medieval levels and wall fragments (BUZÁS et al. 2006, 252–287; KOVÁTS 2008, 256–263; KOVÁTS 2013; KOVÁTS 2023, 129–145) (Figs. 10–11). Examinations of the walls and archaeological observations have verified, supplemented and refined at several points the data for the church available in historical sources (records of church visits, building surveys, maps, etc.) (Fig. 12). It could be established, among other things, that the ruins of the medieval house had been taken into use from as early as around 1698, and that up to the 1780s it had been repeatedly rebuilt and extended as a church. Architectural fragments from this period have been found in extremely good condition, such as the brick-covered floor, the foundation block of the main altar, the side-altars dated to the 1730s and the 1750s according to the brick marks, the former triumphal arch and the considerable remains of the sacristy (KOVÁTS 2018b, 80–85; KOVÁTS 2020, 52–58) (Figs. 13–14).

East of the church, immediately joined to it, the cemetery was formed already from the end of the 17th century. Its exact location, extent and boundaries are also given precisely in a number of contemporary sources. The 200 graves and the exceptionally rich find material offer us detailed information on the religious, economic and material culture of the period. In line with Christian funeral customs, placed into coffins, the deceased were always in a stretched supine position with their hands crossed on their chest or abdomen. The coffins are often pre-



Fig. 13. The 18th-century main altar of the Visegrád church (photo: István Kováts)



Fig. 14. An 18th-century side-altar of the Visegrád church (photo: István Kováts)



Fig. 15. Wooden coffin “in situ”  
(Grave 17, photo: István Kováts)



Fig. 16. Wooden coffin “in situ”  
(Grave 33, photo: István Kováts)

served in a remarkably good condition (KOVÁTS 2020, 61) (Figs. 15–16). Clothing accessories (fasteners, buttons, clasps), jewellery (glass beads, earrings, rings), coins (*duariuses* and *kreuzers* minted during the reign of Leopold I and Maria Theresa) and iron objects serving as curse breakers or protection against evil (horseshoe, scissors) have been unearthed (BUZÁS et al. 2006, 279–280). The largest group of burial goods is formed by various sacral objects (grace coins, crosses, rosaries, icons in copper or wooden frames, and so-called “breverl” or reliquaries known from German-speaking regions) (KOVÁTS 2018b, 84–85; KOVÁTS 2020, 62–66) (Figs. 17–18). The copper or bronze devotional objects of various shapes were frequently attached to a bone or wooden rosary wrapped around the hand of the deceased; sometimes they were around the neck or placed next to the head. Among the images they represent, we find Christ, the Virgin Mary, the allegory of the Holy Trinity, various saints (Saint Benedict, Ignatius of Loyola, Saint John of Nepomuk, Saint Venantius etc.), shrines, churches, votive statuettes (Mariazell, Sonntagberg, Altötting etc.), signs and mottos of religious confraternities, formulas of supplication, prayer, exorcism texts and symbols related to the lives of saints. It is confirmed by the well-dateable material available nationally (REICH 2018, 198–232; ÓDOR & VINDUS 2019, 175–228; VINDUS 2020, 203–212; ZOMBORKA 2021, 173–185), as well as by archaeological parallels and historical sources that the cemetery was used from the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries to the last third of the 18th. Its closure is probably related to turning the church into a school in 1787 and the parallel construction of the new parish church in 1773–1782 (DERCSÉNYI & HÉJJ 1958, 413–416), as well as to the new regulations that gave detailed instructions for burials and banned the use of old burial sites and crypts in inner areas (SIMON 2015, 121–123). Based on a Classicist tomb from 1820, the oldest known monument in the cemetery, it seems certain that the cemetery, at the time located outside the boundaries



Fig. 17. 18th-century clothes accessories and burial objects  
(photo: István Kováts)

of the settlement and still used today, was certainly there already at the beginning of the 19th century (SOPRONI et al. 1991, 12–13).

In summary, we may conclude that, thanks to the investigations introduced above, today we have much more detailed information than before on the settlement system, infrastructure, economic and religious life, material culture and citizens' everyday life in Visegrád. This fact indicates in itself that even when we are in fortunate source conditions, research results obtained from archaeological data cannot be ignored. It also shows that the artificial boundary drawn as the year 1711 in the relative law on cultural heritage protection (Act LXIV of 2001 on the Protection of Cultural Heritage) is untenable (LÁSZLOVSZKY 2023; FONT 2025).

I am grateful to archivist Dr. Árpád Zsigmondy for giving me a copy of the Buda chamber inspector's letter and his translation of the text. I am also grateful to retired museum director Mátyás Szőke for the photocopy of the survey by Esztergom master builder Leonard Schade.

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Fig. 18. An icon with a glass plate placed in a coffin "in situ"  
(photo: István Kováts)

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