

## THE FIRST RESULTS OF THE EXCAVATION IN THE SURROUNDINGS OF ST. GEORGE'S CHAPEL IN VESZPRÉM IN 2022

DÓRA HEGYI<sup>1</sup> – MÁRK KÉKESI<sup>2</sup> – VIRÁG KRISTÓF<sup>3</sup> – GERGELY SZOBOSZLAY<sup>4</sup>

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*In September 2021, in relation to the preparation of an archaeological impact study of the area, a team of the National Archaeological Institute of the Hungarian National Museum started a trial excavation on properties of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Veszprém in the Castle Hill of Veszprém. The research was carried out in the “European Capital of Culture 2023” programme. In February 2022, parallel with the probing, preventive fieldwork started, the first step of which was a full-scale excavation of the medieval St. George’s Chapel and its surroundings, including the neighbouring basement of the Great Seminary in the north.<sup>5</sup> In the present study, we summarise the first results that have expanded our knowledge of this outstanding historical site.*

**Keywords:** Veszprém Castle, St. George’s Chapel, St. Michael’s Cathedral, medieval cemetery

### INTRODUCTION

The focus point of our research was St. George’s Chapel at the northern end of Castle Hill in the historical centre of Veszprém. The ecclesial site and its surroundings played a significant role in the town’s history during the Middle Ages. “St. George’s Chapel” refers to two buildings that existed at different times. The early round chapel was probably already standing in the 10th century until a later structure with an octagonal floor plan replaced it in the 13th century.

Previously, Katalin H. Gyürky carried out a full-scale excavation between the St. Michael Cathedral and the Great Seminary in 1957. This year, H. Gyürky took over the amateur excavation started not long before by József Hungler. Her systematic investigations were focused on the two-phase St. George’s Chapel and its surroundings. The area was excavated with fifteen intersecting ditches arranged in a regular grid-like network (*Fig. 1*).<sup>6</sup> Later on, in the 1970s and 1980s, Sándor Tóth and Alán Kralovánszky carried out further excavations, partially examining the area between the chapel and the cathedral (TÓTH 1974, KRALOVÁNSZKY 1990). Since these investigations, no other archaeological research has taken place in the area. After the 1957 session, a protective building was erected above the ruins unearthed at the time, sheltering them for decades and enabling them to be presented to visitors. The cover was designed by Ferenc Erdei (architectural design) and Tibor Slavik (static design). Parallel with the protective building’s construction, Tibor Koppány conserved the medieval ruins (ERDEI & KOPPÁNY 1966, 89–90).

In our excavation between the beginning of February and mid-March 2022, we divided the area of the chapel and its surroundings into five separate sections: the current remains of the chapel under the protective building; the areas east, west, and south of the protective building, respectively; and the western section of the Great Seminary’s southern basement wing (*Fig. 2*).<sup>7</sup> We have reached the natural rock surface at an

<sup>1</sup> National Archaeological Institute of the Hungarian National Museum, e-mail: [hegyi.dora@mnm.hu](mailto:hegyi.dora@mnm.hu)

<sup>2</sup> National Archaeological Institute of the Hungarian National Museum, e-mail: [kekesi.mark@mnm.hu](mailto:kekesi.mark@mnm.hu)

<sup>3</sup> National Archaeological Institute of the Hungarian National Museum, e-mail: [kristof.virag@mnm.hu](mailto:kristof.virag@mnm.hu)

<sup>4</sup> National Archaeological Institute of the Hungarian National Museum, e-mail: [szoboszlay.gergely@mnm.hu](mailto:szoboszlay.gergely@mnm.hu)

<sup>5</sup> The excavations were carried out in the framework of the project: “Renovation and Development of the Monument Complex in the Veszprém Castle Area” on behalf of the *Castellum* Asset Management Board. We started the excavation in 2021, still as employees of the Castle Headquarters Integrated Regional Development Centre Nonprofit Private Limited Company. From January 1, 2022, in accordance with and pursuant to § 17 of the 776/2021. (XII. 23.) Government Decree, the archaeological department of the Castle Headquarters PLC became merged with the Hungarian National Museum under the name National Archaeological Institute, and our team continued the work in this formation.

<sup>6</sup> For additional results of Katalin H. Gyürky’s research, see H. GYÜRKY 1963, 341–408.

<sup>7</sup> We are grateful to András Fülöp, who followed our excavations in Veszprém as a consultant. He continuously helped our work with his invaluable thoughts and advice.



Fig. 1. Survey map of Katalin H. Gyürky's 1957 excavation, detail (clean copied by Kristóf Virág)

average depth of 3 m below the current street level. The excavated dolomite surface was almost entirely covered by a humus layer containing Neolithic, Copper-, and Bronze-age finds. Under the prehistoric layer, we have uncovered a burial and two rows of postholes stretching north-south. Each feature was cut into the rock surface and covered by the humus layer. Based on the discovered prehistoric features and finds, it can be stated that – although the chapel's area played a significant role in the Middle Ages in the first place – the traces of earlier settlements dating back to the Neolithic are not negligible either.



Fig. 2. Survey map of the 2022 excavation in the basement of the Great Seminary at the northern end of the Castle Hill and the vicinity of St. George's Chapel

### THE PERIOD OF THE EARLY ROUND CHAPEL

The most important architectural remain from early medieval Veszprém is the first phase of St. George's Chapel, dating back presumably to the 10th century. According to the *Vita Sancti Emerici ducis*, the canonised legend of Saint Emerich from around 1110, St. George's Chapel was where Prince Emerich (Imre in Hungarian), son and heir of King Stephen I (1000/1001–1038), pledged his chastity vow.<sup>8</sup> Following the removal of the modern layers, the curved contour of the early round chapel (rotunda) became visible right west of the later chapel's walls. Based on our observations, the arched line of the rotunda does not match the floor plan hypothesised by Katalin H. Gyürky. The wall of the early chapel in the western part of the excavation area was not discovered in 1957, so her floor plan reconstruction was based solely on a small wall section discovered south of the apse visible today. While, according to her reconstruction, the north-western wall of the 13th-century octagonal chapel ran inside the early round chapel, our observations made it clear that the contours of the younger chapel and the rotunda matched almost perfectly. The dismantled southern part of the early round chapel's horseshoe-shaped apse was visible under that of the later chapel as their orientation was different. The foundation walls of the early round chapel were built on top of the prehistoric humus layer. The mortar between the wall's stones was white, visibly differing from the yellowish bonding agent containing a larger proportion of organic components used in 13th-century structures.

We have also uncovered a thick mortary layer southwest of the chapel, above the rocky ground, which was most probably placed down to level the terrain and serve as the base level for the rotunda. We have unearthed a burial there, east of the apse; based on their matching east-western orientation, it may also be linked to the early round chapel (Fig. 3).

Yet another structure could be linked to the earliest building phase. At the western intersection of the early rotunda and the southern wall of the Great Seminary, we discovered detail of a walking surface paved with large stone slabs (Fig. 4). The slabs displayed similar erosion marks suggesting that the layer may have been a walking surface, where the gaps between the tightly fitted stone slabs were filled with the same bright mortar that was used by wall structures in the earliest phase. Conclusively, this surface was built probably in the same phase as the first period of the chapel, all the more as the stone slabs were aligned with the rotunda's wall. This walking surface was cut through during



Fig. 3. Walls, walking surfaces, and their relations in the chapels' immediate surroundings as observed in the 2022 excavation

<sup>8</sup> „Megtörtént, hogy mikor egyik éjjel titokban, csupán egyetlen szolgát magához véve imádkozni ment abba az igen ősi és ódon templomba, amit Veszprém városában Krisztus drága vértanújának, Györgynek a tiszteletére építettek, hogy ott imádságba merülve magában azt fontolgassa, milyen még kedvesebb dolgot ajánlhat fel Istennek”. [“It happened that one night, taking only one servant with him, he secretly went to pray in that very ancient and time-worn church which was built in the town of Veszprém in honour of George the dear martyr of Christ, so that, immersed in prayer, he considered within himself what kinder thing he could offer to God”] PRAZNOVSZKY 1994, 119.



Fig. 4. Walking surface made of stone slabs, connected to the early chapel



Fig. 5. Core of a dismantled wall at the entrance of the octagonal chapel

the reconstruction of the chapel in the 13th century and destroyed by the northwest pillar of the chapel's second building phase, the foundation of which comprised several reused paving slabs. The three medieval burials discovered in the area under the protective cover also cut through this early pavement. The graves' orientations matched the cathedral's, pointing slightly north-east.

A partially dismantled wet stone wall ran into the threshold stone of the 13th-century chapel gate. The wall was laid on the mortar layer over the rock surface mentioned above, linked to the construction of the early chapel. It was not possible to determine a specific face of this wall, although, in a later building phase, it was framed with Baroque-style bricks running, on the south, up the shafts of the carved 13th-century pillars around the threshold stone. The brick framing was defined as a modern structure in 1957, interpreted as the southern kneewall of a staircase leading to the chapel. It seems that of the original wall, only the wall core survived the Baroque-period reconstruction works. As the threshold stone of the chapel overlapped the crown of the wall, the latter is probably earlier than the 13th-century chapel.<sup>9</sup> It is important to emphasize that the east-west orientation of the wall and its position in the western axis of the chapel match the corner segment discovered by Alán Kralovánszky under Vár Street (KRALOVÁNSZKY 1990, 64) and identified as a possible corner of an early palace. The supposed connection of the two structures is hypothetical, based solely on their matching orientations. In her excavation, H. Gyürky opened a narrow probe trench at the inner side of the threshold stone and identified the continuation of the partially dismantled wall described above. Based on her field documentation, the relationship between the wall section and the brick floor of the early chapel, however, are uncertain; to clarify that, further excavations shall be carried out in the chapel (H. GYÜRKY 1957, 17–18; Fig. 5).

The three burials found next to the northern wall of the cathedral can be connected to the early round chapel and the period preceding the 11th-century Romanesque cathedral. Compared to St. Michael's Cathedral, their orientation was more southwest/northeast. Furthermore, all of them were disturbed by later graves, the orientation of which matched the cathedral's. It is important to note that, as the burials did not contain any grave goods, a relative chronology could have only been established based on their orientations and relative positions. We must also mention yet another burial that was cut into the natural rock surface next to the exterior wall of the cathedral's northern side aisle. That grave became heavily disturbed during the construction of a Romanesque-style wall sequence connected to the western tower (Fig. 6).<sup>10</sup> These

<sup>9</sup> Katalin H. Gyürky dated the inscribed threshold stone, visible today in its original place, to the 15th century. According to her, that stone replaced a previous threshold during the renovations conducted by Archbishop Vetési. Since the entrance's position has not changed since the chapel's rebuilding in the 13th century, it can be assumed that the original threshold stone also covered the wall core (H. GYÜRKY 1963, 382).

<sup>10</sup> During an archaeological observation session in 1974, Alán Kralovánszky identified this burial and made similar observations (KRALOVÁNSZKY 1976).



Fig. 6. Burial discovered under the foundation of the cathedral's northern wall, next to the north-western tower



Fig. 7. Face of the medieval northern transept's outer wall and its north-eastern corner with ashlar

burials firm up a previous assumption by Sándor Tóth regarding the presence of a sacral building with a cemetery around in the area preceding the first Romanesque-style church building.<sup>11</sup>

East of the chapel's protective roof, we have discovered the outer side of a stone wall running east-west at 10 cm below the current surface. The discovered wall section turned south in front of the eastern profile. Its corner was strengthened by large ashlar (Fig. 7). This L-shaped stone wall was the north-eastern corner of the Romanesque cathedral's northern transept that was shortened during later renovations. Previous piping works cut through this wall section in three places. However, despite the damage, one could still clearly determine that its eastern end runs under the north-eastern corner of the church's current transept. The unearthed wet wall section also preserved traces of the cathedral's Gothic-style reconstruction around 1400, when the north-eastern corner was rebuilt and the walking level raised. Its lower part was set in white, chalky mortar, while the upper, clearly different part in more yellowish mortar. The younger, elevated, mortary walking surface was preserved in a small area along the inner side (Fig. 8).



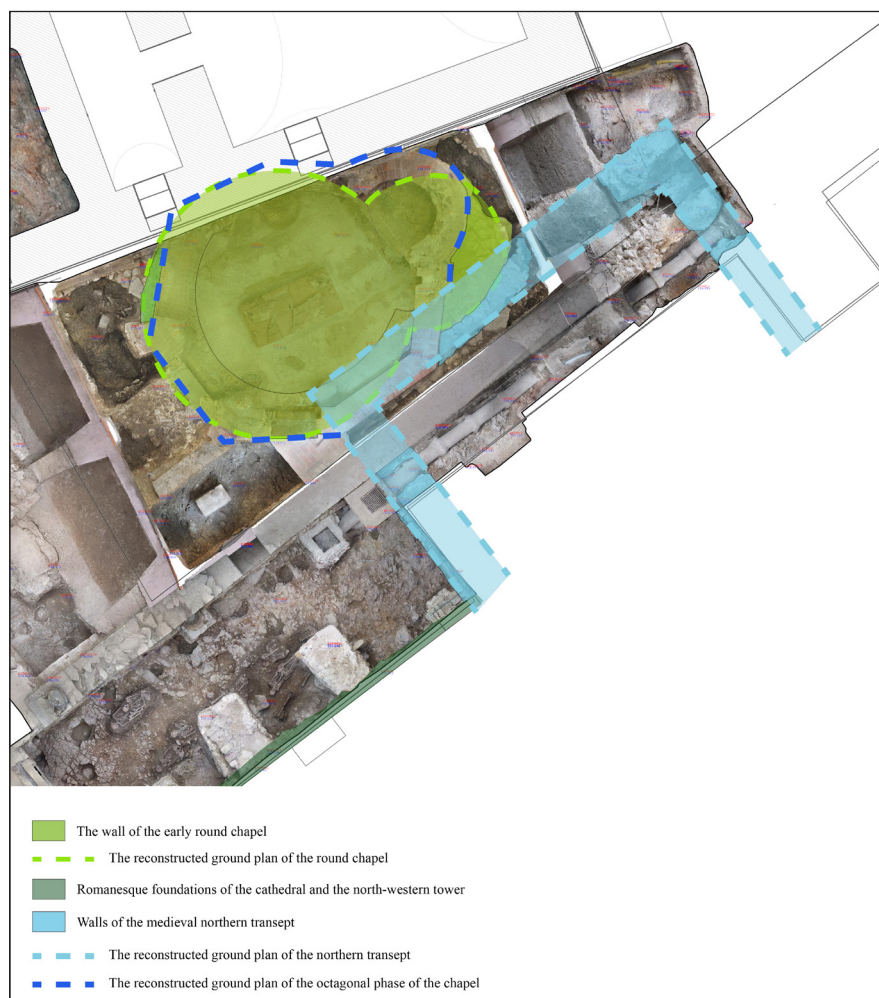
Fig. 8. Detail of the medieval northern transept's eastern wall cut through by modern utility trenches and detail of the mortary Gothic-period walking surface connecting to the wall's inner side

<sup>11</sup> For detailed historical, archaeological, and architectural data on this early sacral building, see FÜLÖP 2021, 279–281; SIMON 2012, 437.

The western part of the medieval transept's almost completely dismantled walls were used as a foundation for the north-western corner of the current transept. The medieval transept's remains, including the almost entire eastern wall, were destroyed by a modern drainage system's shaft and piping cutting through them; we could only observe remains of the eastern wall next to the two sides of the pipeline's ditch. There was no trace of the medieval reconstruction on the western side matching those identified on the eastern one: the medieval wall section there consisted exclusively of similar white stones laid in chalky mortar.

### THE OCTAGONAL CHAPEL'S PERIOD

During the rebuilding of the chapel in the 13th century, the walls of the early round chapel were dismantled, and a new building with a polygonal floor plan was attached to the then-existing northern gable wall of the cathedral's medieval transept. The connection assumed previously between the two buildings became proven by the transept's northern wall that matched the remains of a high wall segment where the structure's southern walls should have been. That (southern) wall section was found in 1957 by Katalin H. Gyürky, who interpreted it as a modern structure. We have clarified, however, that the remains in question represent the northern gable wall of the medieval transept and, at the same time, the southern wall of the octagonal chapel (attached to the transept of the Romanesque cathedral). According to written sources, the capitular meeting was held in St. George's Chapel in 1352; that may account for the close architectural connection between the building and the cathedral (*Fig. 9*;



*Fig. 9. Reconstruction of the medieval northern transept's position and its relations with the older and younger chapels*

FÜLÖP & KOPPÁNY 2021, 46). From the 14th century on, written sources also mention another chapel dedicated to the Holy Spirit. This building can be identified as the structure attached to the northern wall of the cathedral. It must be noted, though, that, according to our observations, the area in question was probably continuously built-up from the 11th century.

During the late Middle Ages, the area continued to play a decisive role: a charter by the Veszprém Chapter in 1473 mentions that Bishop Albert Vetési chose the chapel for his personal burial place, got it painted, embellished, and a marble altar erected there (GUTHEIL ET AL. 1960, 137, 360). The western entrance was also provided with an ornamental portal then. We have found a fragmentary, carved, and inscribed red marble piece that was perhaps part of a banderol above the coat of arms of Albert Vetési in the archivolt of the gate. The cemetery around the cathedral and the octagonal chapel continued to function during this



Fig. 10. Detail of the medieval cemetery next to the north wall of the cathedral, between the two unearthed Baroque-period buttresses



Fig. 11. Detail of the medieval cemetery in the south-western part of the Great Seminary's basement

reconstruction phase, as displayed by 19 unearthed graves with the same orientation as the cathedral's. We do not know the precise extent of the cemetery, but no burials were found in the southwestern corner of the Great Seminary, suggesting, perhaps, that its western border was in that area. It is important to highlight, however, that we have only found the deepest graves of the cemetery in the basement of the Great Seminary, and it is possible that less deep ones were destroyed by modern construction works (Figs. 10–11). In the cellar, we have found a pit carved into the dolomite surface of Castle Hill. Based on the characteristics of its infill, the pit was dated to the first half of the 16th century. Later, when the Great Seminary's basement was constructed, the hill's base rock was carved in several places, and the works also disturbed the pit's upper part. The pit's infill contained several finds, including intact and fragmented stove tiles, broken pots, a Renaissance-style stone carving, several floor tiles, animal bones, and archaeobotanical remains.

### THE CHAPEL AND ITS SURROUNDINGS FROM THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD TO THE PRESENT

During the excavation, a cellar unfolded west of the chapel. Based on its remains comprising parts of the northern and southern walls with impostes, it was a stone structure with a barrel-vaulted roof, built probably in the 16th or at the beginning of the 17th century. The room's southern wall also served as a northern wall to the Chapel of the Holy Spirit; H. Gyürky already identified its western wall in 1957. The cellar's original walking surface with a clayey, rammed earthen floor unfolded 250–260 cm below the current surface. During its cleaning, we found 17th-century sherds and a silver denarius of Ferdinand II from 1625. Based on these finds, the room was still in use at the beginning of the 17th century but may have been built earlier (Fig. 12).

We have also uncovered a mortary surface in the layer where the cellar's semi-dismantled vault, made from large flat stone slabs, was discovered. This thick layer was laid on top of a loose infill layer admixed with debris in the partially filled-up cellar sometime during the 18th century. It was identified as part of a stairway that led to the threshold stone of the medi-



Fig. 12. Northern wall of the barrel-vaulted room with the persisting piers of the arches (imposts) after the cleaning of the cellar's clayey rammed earthen floor



Fig. 13. Barrel vaulted room west of the chapel and the triangular building attached to its northern wall



Fig. 14. The structure built next to the barrel-vaulted room; it is triangular today

triangular today. The bright white walls laid in white mortar along its southern and eastern sides were bound and, thus, coeval, while the western wall, laid in yellowish mortar, started relatively higher and seemed younger than the other two. The base of this younger wall sat on a layer serving as the foundation for the triangular structure's mortar and stoney walking surface. Initially, the triangular building could have been part of a larger rectangular one, and only gained its recent form due to later transformations (Fig. 14). Its northern corner matched the southern side of the Great Seminary (fortunately, the construction of the Seminary in the 1770s did not disturb this older structure). The persisting foundation walls of two Baroque-style buttresses at the cathedral's northern wall also referred to this period.

Later, the cathedral's large-scale transformation between 1907 and 1910 caused further damage to the relics of earlier periods. Following the discovery and systematic excavation of the St. George's Chapel relics in 1957, a protective roof based on a design by Ferenc Erdei was built above the chapels in the early 1960s. However, the works related to the laying of the protective building's foundations and the pipe lining carried out as part of landscaping in the project along the northern wall of the cathedral and in the area of the Chapel of the Holy Spirit caused extensive damage to the walls of the medieval northern transept and the graves of the churchyard cemetery.

## SUMMARY

The excavation, exceeding our expectations, provided abundant new information about the early round chapel, the 13th-century octagonal chapel, the Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals, the medieval cemetery around them, and the structural topography of the surrounding area.

The multi-period St. George's Chapel was in the focus of our excavation (Fig. 3). By summarising stratigraphic observations (including those related to wall remains), we could establish a relative chronology of

eval chapel's western entrance, the kneewalls of which have already been found in 1957. The mortar, brick-dusted, and rammed walking surface discovered west of the chapel, containing 18th-century finds, could also be linked with that layer (Fig. 13). The Baroque-style baptismal font, the pedestal of which was discovered by H. Gyürky in the chapel's centre above Vetési's tomb, was also established in this phase (H. GYÜRKY 1957, 128.V.II).

The building next to the northern wall of the barrel-vaulted room was lined with stone walls; it is



the chapel. According to this, the first period of the round chapel, with foundation walls laid in white mortar, was built directly on the surface of a prehistoric humus layer. We found a walking surface paved with stone slabs that aligned with the walls of the early chapel, and, consequently, they were built in the same phase. The recovered find material did not allow for a precise dating of the round chapel's construction, but that certainly predated the establishment of the 11th-century cathedral, the transept of which was built over the outer edge of the former round chapel's southern wall.

The early walls were dismantled during the reconstruction of the chapel in the 13th century, and a new, octagonal building was attached to the northern gable wall of the cathedral's transept. As a result of Gothic-period reconstructions, the chapel's floor plan became different, but, unlike H. Gyürky had suspected before, its size remained almost entirely identical to that of the earliest round chapel. Only the two apses' orientations are somewhat different (*Fig. 9*). The transformations carried out in the second half of the 15th century did not change the chapel's floor plan but only affected the ornamentation of the building. The orientation of most excavated graves matched that of this building phase of the cathedral and the chapel's 13th-century phase; we have only found a single east-oriented grave in the axis of the early chapel and three more, the orientation of which did not match any of the unearthed buildings'.

The area west of the chapel was built-up first in the 16th century. The barrel-vaulted cellar discovered there was certainly still in use at the beginning of the 17th century. Later, in the 18th century, the cellar was already somewhat filled-up, and a staircase led through it to the then still-used chapel. An additional quadrangular building was attached to the northern side of the barrel-vaulted cellar; that was later transformed into a triangular one, a structure still visible today. This transformation certainly took place before the 1770s, preceding the building of the Great Seminary.

The large-scale investment necessitating the presented excavation is ongoing, requiring further fieldwork. Future excavation sessions, completed by the processing and evaluation of the recovered find material and anthropological remains, will most certainly provide us with even more information about the area's past. In our hopes, by incorporating new data, we will be able to extend and refine the results presented above.

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