

THE KITCHEN OF THE NOBLE ROZGONYI FAMILY.

The kitchen in the Castle of Csókakő in the 15th century, as reflected by pottery finds

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The Castle of Csókakő is one of the Hungarian forts with Árpáadian Age roots. It was owned by several prominent noble families and even the king himself for a pretty long period. In the course of the two decades of field research, the relics of the building complex have been almost entirely excavated. In 2022, a new project created an opportunity to start processing the recovered vast find material. This paper presents a minor part of the pottery found in the one-time inner courtyard of the lower castle, dating to the 15th century when the building complex was the property of the Rozgonyi family.

Keywords: Castle of Csókakő, Late Middle Ages, pottery, material culture, 15th century, petrography

THE MEDIEVAL HISTORY OF THE CASTLE OF CSÓKAKŐ

Located at the southern fringes of the Vértes Mountains, the Castle of Csókakő today is the only still-standing medieval fort in the territory of County Fejér (Fig. 1). It was first mentioned in 1299, one of the last years of the Árpáadian Age. However, it had probably been built much earlier, at the end of the 1250s and in the early 1260s, as a fort for the Csák family, who exchanged it with some nearby castles for other estates with King Charles I in 1326. The castle remained a royal estate in the following century, only to be handed over to the Rozgonyi family after that: it was granted to Stephen (István) Rozgonyi, Sr., first for life in 1430, and then forever in 1439. Probably after the death of his wife, the new owner moved its residence into the castle. The building



Fig. 1. The Castle of Csókakő viewed from the south
(photo by Gyöngyi Kovács)

complex was transferred to the Csicsva branch of the family in 1461 and remained their property until 1492 when the branch remained without a male heir. In 1493, the castle was owned by John Corvinus for a short time. Later, it was given to László Egervári, the husband of Klára Rozgonyi, as a pawn, while in 1496, when Klára remarried, the Kanizsai family got it under similar conditions. Eventually, the Kanizsais only became the actual owners of the castle in 1522, but the family had also run out of male heirs by 1532. By then, the building complex had lost its residential and military functions, gaining its significance only from the economic power of the related lands. The fort fell under Ottoman rule in 1543 or 1544 and practically remained there until 1687. The building complex started to decay in the early 18th century (HATHÁZI 2010, 33–97).

EXCAVATIONS IN THE CASTLE

The systematic excavation and reconstruction of the castle took place between 1996 and 2017, mainly under the leadership of Gábor Hatházi and Gyöngyi Kovács (HATHÁZI & KOVÁCS 2019, 29–47). In 2022, a grant provided funds for a new project led by Gyöngyi Kovács aimed at processing the recovered vast archaeological record. The focus of this project has been to evaluate the well-datable closed find assemblages discovered in the building complex, of which the findings collected from the infill layers of the inner courtyard of the lower castle were among the first.

THE MEDIEVAL INFILL LAYERS OF THE LOWER CASTLE'S INNER COURTYARD

The findings under study were found on the so-called upper terrace in the eastern part of the lower castle in 2016. A path (Fig. 2/D1) connected the gatehouse (Fig. 2/c) with a small, closed courtyard of about 6 x 7 m (Fig. 2/D6). The eastern wall of the courtyard, with a vaulted doorway (Fig. 2/D7), was built in the second



Fig. 2. Survey map of the Castle of Csókakő. The building phases are marked by colours; besides, the inner courtyard (D6) is highlighted in light blue (drawing by Balázs Holl, surveys by Balázs Holl, Krisztián Pokrovenszki, and Tamás Belegrai.

After HATHÁZI & KOVÁCS 2019)

third of the 15th century, and the northern and southern walls were also erected in the same century. Field observations suggest that the vaulted doorway was walled up in the last third of the century, and the floor level of the courtyard has also been raised significantly, by about 1–1.5 m, at the same time (Figs. 3–4). The source material discussed here is the abundant pottery record recovered from this infill, dated mainly to the reign of King Matthias I (Hunyadi). A lower layer of the infill also yielded a coin, a *denar* issued by Matthias I (1458–1490; HATHÁZI & KOVÁCS 2019, 29–33; KOVÁCS 2016).



Fig. 3. The infill layers of the inner courtyard and the walled-up doorway (after KOVÁCS 2016)

POTTERY FROM THE TIME OF THE ROZGONYI FAMILY

The 15th-century infill layers contained more than 2,000 pottery and metal finds, of which the evaluation of the pottery finds was started first. Of this part of the pottery record of the site, the current paper only presents the vessels used in the kitchen and for serving food, and does not provide an evaluation of the rest, including some minor stove tile fragments from the Sigismund era (HATHÁZI & KOVÁCS 2019, 34) and cup-shaped unglazed stove tiles.

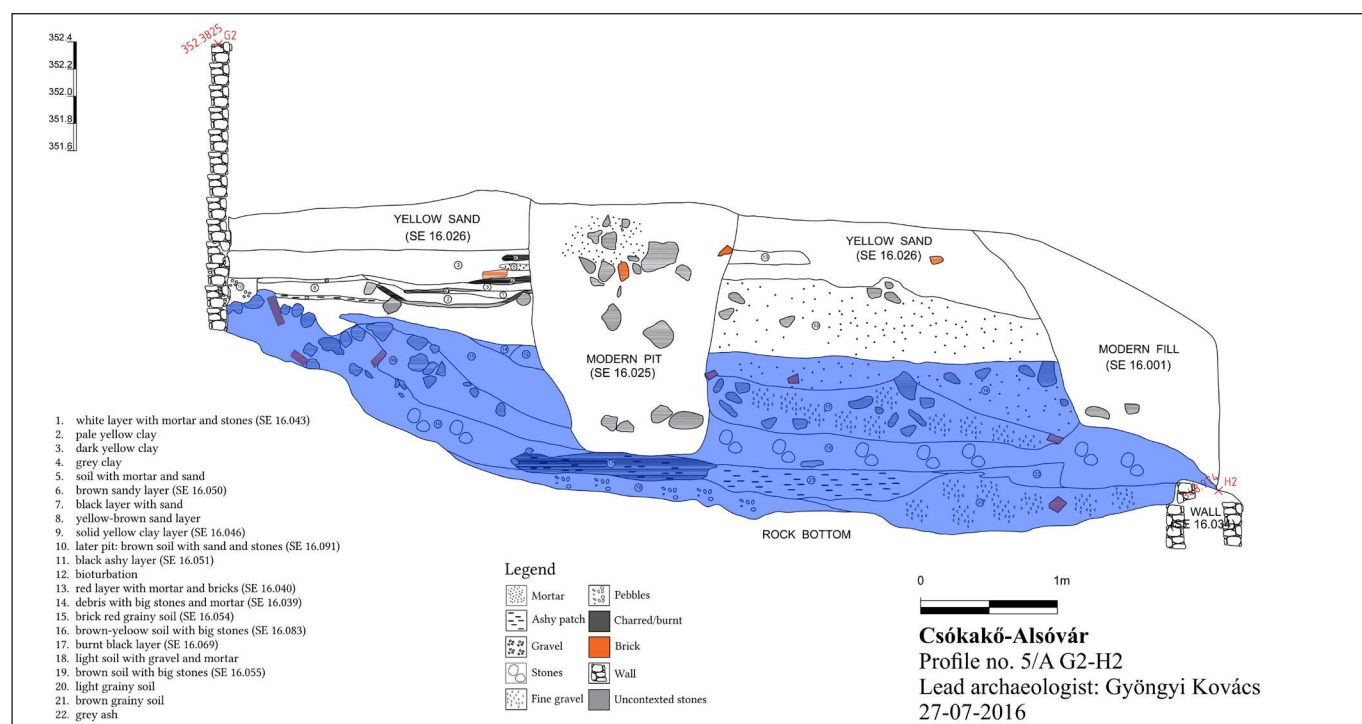


Fig. 4. Profile G2-H2 with the infill layers of the inner courtyard. The 15th-century strata are highlighted in blue (drawing by Tamás Belegrai and the author)

COOKWARE

Akin to other sites, cookware, especially cooking pots, make the greatest part of the pottery record: the fragments add up to about 250 vessels. As their find context suggests, the find material is highly fragmentary: no rim and base fragments could be matched. Thus, we failed to produce even a single complete vessel profile. Therefore, typological classification was carried out following the method of Imre Holl (1963), which focuses primarily on the material of the fragments and relies less on the size and proportion of the vessels. The regular shapes, evenly thick walls, and the cut marks on the bases indicate that most vessels had been wheel-turned, which suggests market production (PETÉNYI 1996, 23).

More than 55% of the vessels belong to yellow pottery (Fig. 5). These vessels were made of clay tempered with grainy sand, often with black grains. The sizes range on a wide scale: the rim diameters vary between 12 and 32 cm, with most vessels in the 16–21 cm range. Calculating volumes from the fragments

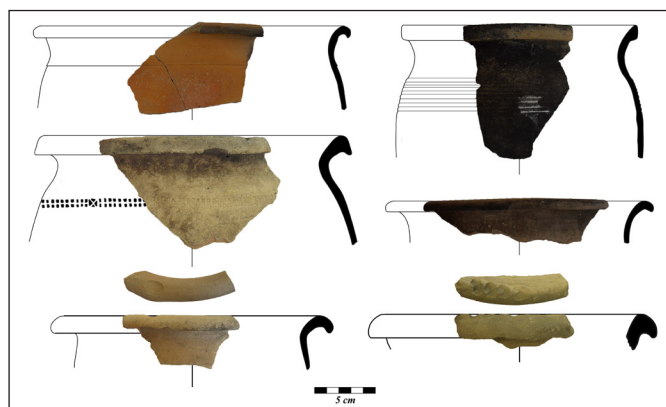


Fig. 5. Yellow pot fragments from the infill of the inner courtyard (compiled by the author; finds from the collection of the Szent István Király Museum, Székesfehérvár)

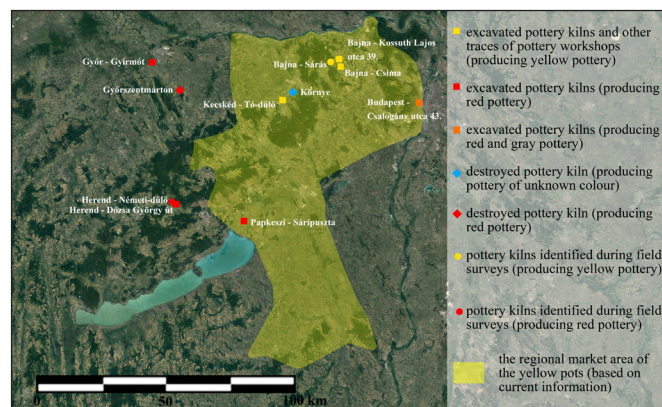


Fig. 6. Late medieval pottery workshops in Northern Transdanubia and the distribution of yellow pottery (compiled by the author)

was impossible, but a range of 1–25 litres could be estimated, with most vessels having a 3–7 litre capacity. The rim designs show little variation: most vessels have some kind of everted rim, rounded on the upper side and with an edge on the lower one. Only a few pieces come with completely different rims. Decoration usually appears on the shoulders of the vessels: most frequently, incised lines, in some cases, one or two circular ribs, while a few pieces have patterns created with a stamp cylinder. The closest analogies of these pots are known from Székesfehérvár (Siklósi 1993, 76, Figs. 6–7); Gy. Siklósi dated them to the second half of the 15th century. Besides, the record contains two rim fragments with simple impressed ring motifs for rim stamps, which, based on the analogies from Buda and Visegrád, could be earlier, dating to the end of the 14th or early 15th century (Holl 1963, Fig. 75; Bárdi 2014, 56–58). Imre Holl separated a group of yellow vessels in the pottery record of the royal palace of Buda; the material of these vessels is more rough and grainy compared to the white variants. The shapes in this group usually imitate the so-called Austrian pottery, a reductively fired, grey ware. According to Holl, the yellow vessels first appeared on the site during the 14th century and remained in use throughout the 15th century (Holl 1963, 345–346, 351). Yellow ware was also identified in the pottery record of several other forts (e.g., Ozora and Felsőnyék; Feld & Gerelyes 1985, 166–169; Miklós 1988, 210, 233). I believe the finds from Csókakő also belong to this group. The proportion of similar yellow ware in the pottery record of late medieval sites in Northeast Transdanubia is conspicuously high, and yellow vessels appear in numbers as early as in 12–13th-century assemblages, indicating perhaps that such vessels were produced in this area. Surveys carried out at the turn of the 20th century revealed natural deposits of a clay variant that fires to yellow heat-resistant ceramic at the feet of the Vértes and Gerecse Mountains (Kalecsinszky 1905; Matyasovszky & Petrik 1885). Moreover, several (unpublished) late medieval pottery kilns are known from the area of the same mountain ranges (Fig. 6). Petrographic analysis was performed on four yellow pottery fragments from Csókakő, of which only one matched the 19th-century clay samples from the area unequivocally (Kreiter, Viktorik & Máté 2022). In conclusion, the hypothesis of local pottery production needs further persuasive evidence.

About 13% of pot fragments belong to red vessels with a material similar to the yellow pottery's; also, the size range and design of the vessels are identical. These fragments have only been classified into a separate category because of their colour, possibly due to a different firing method rather than a material different from the yellow ware. The result of the petrographic analysis performed on a single fragment from this group confirms our hypothesis (Kreiter, Viktorik & Máté 2022).

The third type group of pots, comprising 32% of the vessels, is clearly different from the first two. These red vessels were made of clay tempered with fine gravel (Fig. 7). The rim designs also differ. The rim diameter of the vessels varies between 13 and 28 cm, with most vessels in the 17–21 cm and 24–26 cm ranges. These pots were made of less high-quality clay, rich in iron oxide, that fires red. This type of clay has numerous natural deposits throughout the country (Kresz 1960, 303); the vessels were probably made in the wider area of the castle.

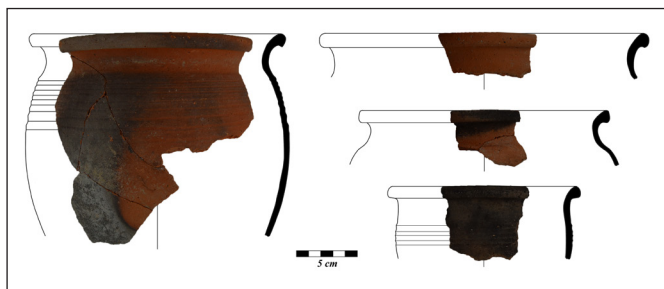


Fig. 7. Red pot fragments from the infill of the inner courtyard (compiled by the author; finds from the collection of the Szent István Király Museum, Székesfehérvár)

Only a few lid fragments (3%) were found among the potsherds (Fig. 8). As for their material, the proportions are similar to pots': most pieces are yellow, with only a single red fragment among them. Bell-shaped and conical variants also occur. The rim diameters vary between 14 and 20 cm, indicating that mainly smaller pots were covered with lids.

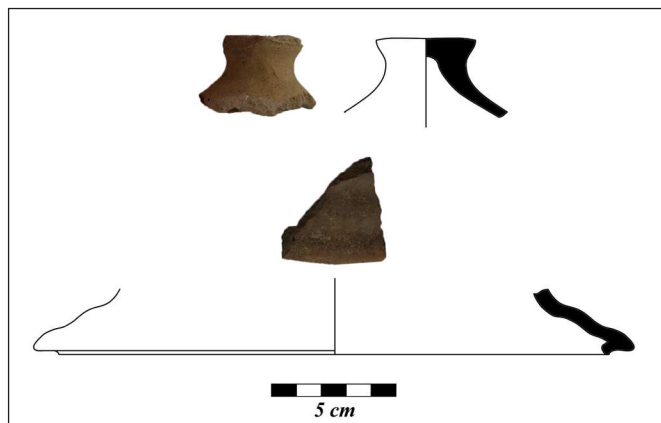


Fig. 8. Lid fragments from the infill of the inner courtyard (compiled by the author; finds from the collection of the Szent István Király Museum, Székesfehérvár)

TABLEWARE

In contrast to pots, the proportion of tableware fragments in the pottery record is relatively low (15%). The types include liquid containers, cups, and plates, all wheel-turned. The low turnout rate of pottery types related to servicing food may be partially because, until medieval times, tableware was made mainly from wood (or glass, tin and even precious metals for the affluent and the elite). The role of pottery only started to increase in the 15th century (HOLL 1992, 26). Besides, the lifetime of cookware was probably way shorter as frequent exposure to open heat accelerated their wearing out; thus, more pieces were used per unit of time.

Pitchers and jugs only add up to 4% of the analysed pottery finds (Fig. 9). Most fragments are yellow, but they are made of much higher quality clay, tempered with fine sand, than the cookware. Every pitcher and jug was fitted with a flat-profile band handle. The vessels have ribbed rims, coeval (15th-century) analogies to which are known from Buda and Eastern Transdanubia (e.g., HOLL 1963, 351, 36. kép; SZATMÁRI 1974, 9. kép; FELD & GERELYES 1985, 169, 6. kép/1). Some side fragments feature broad-brush red-painted grid patterns; identical pieces have been recovered from Székesfehérvár (SIKLÓSI 1983, Abb. 4). The petrographic analysis performed on a single red-painted potsherd revealed that its material differs from the pots', showing similarity with a 19th-century clay sample from Csákvár (KREITER, VIKTORIK & MÁTÉ 2022). This result probably indicates that this vessel type was produced somewhere near the castle and the Vértes Mountains. Besides, a smaller part of liquid containers – the ones made of clay tempered with fine gravel and fired to red – may also be classified into this category. The handle fragments associated with these vessels were all round-profile band handles; one had a hole along its centre, similar to liquid containers in other coeval sites (pl. HOLL & PARÁDI 1982, Abb. 60/1).

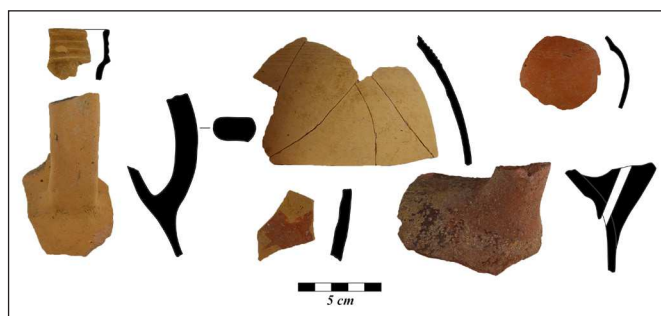


Fig. 9. Pitcher and jug fragments from the infill of the inner courtyard (compiled by the author; finds from the collection of the Szent István Király Museum, Székesfehérvár)

While their proportion in the pottery record of the site is relatively low (7%), cups represent the most varied type group amongst the discussed ones (Fig. 10). Most pieces were made of clay tempered with fine gravel, fired to red pottery, and have a surface that is slightly smoother than the cookware. The rim diameter

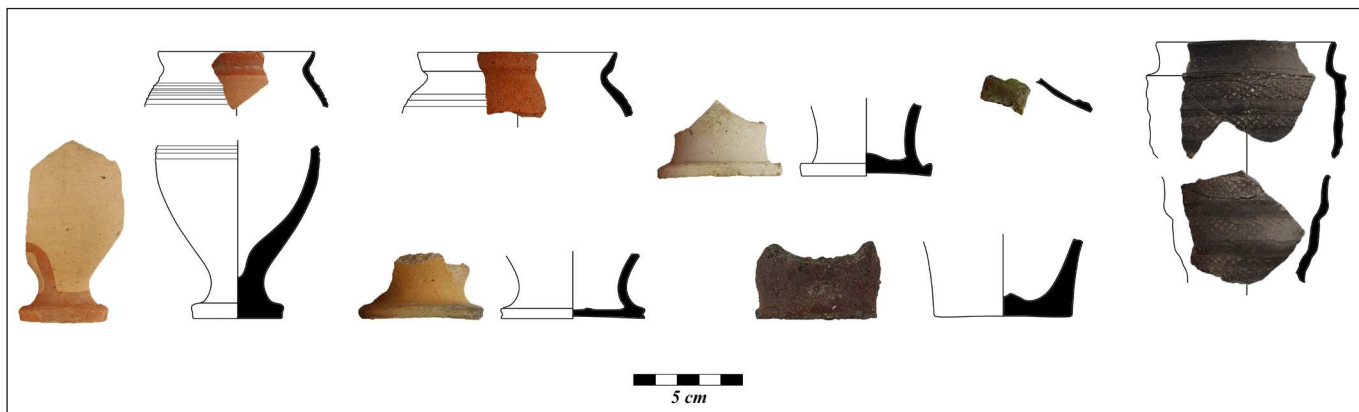
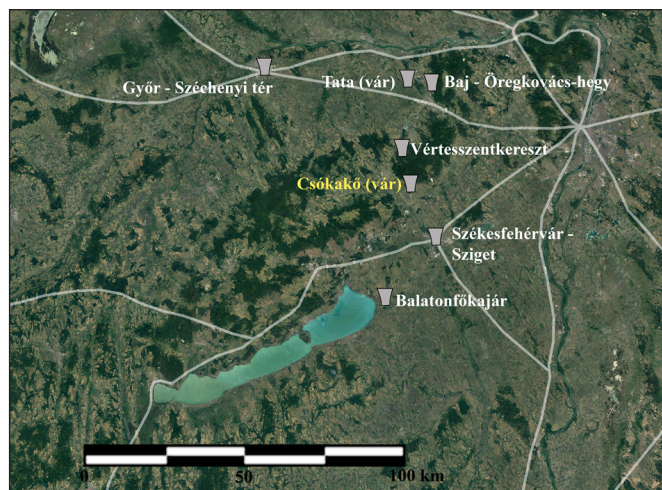


Fig. 10. Cup fragments from the infill of the inner courtyard
(compiled by the author; finds from the collection of the Szent István Király Museum, Székesfehérvár)

of large cups varies between 8 and 12 cm. The same range for another variant, yellow cups, is only 7–11 cm. Two yellow cup fragments have been decorated with red paint. Besides, the analysed find material contains a fine white cup base fragment. Its analogies are known from nearby sites (e.g., Vértesszentkereszt, Bajna-Csima; LÁSZLÓ & SCHMIDTMAYER 2008, 41. kép; PETÉNYI 1996, 88. kép), but the type was also popular in Buda and spread to more remote areas (e.g., the Castle of Ozora). The piece recovered from Ozora was identified as the product of a Buda pottery workshop (FELD & GERELYES 1985, 173, 8. kép/3). Another green-glazed white side fragment of a cup with applied decoration also points to long-distance connections: cups with similar decoration were produced in Buda at the time (HOLL 1963, 355, 50. kép). Moreover, the pottery record of the site contains fragments of foreign cup types. The appearance of a cup from Loštice, Moravia, amongst the finds of the castle does not come as a surprise as the type was popular at the time, gradually gaining ground throughout the country in the 15th century (HOLL 1990, 227–234, 266). The fragment of another cup, a grey piece made of unusually high-quality clay and featuring stamped grid pattern on the side, has its analogies in multiple sites in Northeast Transdanubia (Fig. 11), Austria, and Moravia; the type was probably the product of a workshop in the territory of one of the two foreign countries (KOVÁCS 2021, 772).

The last major typological group of tableware comprises a few bowls (Fig. 12). The rim diameter of the red and the two yellow bowl fragments varies between 28 and 30 cm. The fragments are undecorated save for the upper edge of the rim, which is accentuated with impressed notches and dots (red ware) or ribs and jags (yellow ware). The specimens found at Csókakő seem to be local imitations of stamp-decorated types known from Buda and other sites (KOVÁCS 2021, 267–271).



11. Distribution of stamp-decorated grey cups and pitchers in Northern Transdanubia (compiled by the author)

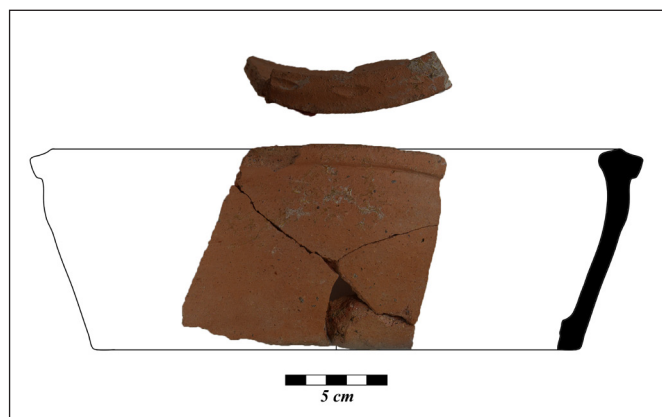


Fig 12. Bowl fragment from the infill of the inner courtyard
(compiled by the author; found from the collection of the Szent István Király Museum, Székesfehérvár)

THE 'KITCHEN' OF THE ROZGONYI FAMILY

The kitchen or kitchens of the 15th-century castle have remained to be located yet. Akin to other coeval castles (OROSZ 2010, 561; FELD & OROSZ 2007, 69–71), the 13–14th-century arrangement of the building complex certainly included a kitchen in the high castle near the cistern. While its exact place maybe changed during later renovations, the 15th-century high castle probably still included a room with the same function. Irrespective of that, the design of the lower castle erected in the 15th century perhaps also comprised a kitchen.

While the kitchens still have to be located, the presented pottery finds provide a suitable base for reconstructing the cookware. Based on their material and shape, the vessels came from various pottery workshops. The vast majority of cookware was probably a local product manufactured near the castle or even on the estate surrounding it. While functionality was an almost exclusive factor determining the design of cookware, tableware also played a role in social representation – especially cups, which included imported ones besides more-or-less locally made pieces. These exclusive pieces are the ones in the analysed find material that best recaptures the plenty of the table of the former noble residence.

The processing and evaluation of the recovered finds will continue in the upcoming years. We hope the results will significantly improve our knowledge of life in the castle in medieval and early modern times.

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