

ABSTRACT OF THE DOCTORAL THESISSES

written by

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on

'ZALAVÁR – VÁRSZIGET IN THE ÁRPÁDIAN AGE.'

RESULTS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS.

I. The Matter of the Thesis and Its Antecedents in the Literature

The Hungarian village Zalavár, lying next to the Lake Balaton, firstly appeared in the focus of the historiography in the first decades of the 19th century. At this time there was a long debate among the great historians of the age about the possible location of the seat of duke *Priwina*, who had been one of the chief figures of *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum*, a chronicle written in Salzburg around 870/71 AC. The matter of question was whether the seat mentioned in the chronicle as *Mosapurc* or *civitas Priwinae* could/should be identified with one of those two settlements bearing the name Moosburg in Bavaria and in Karinthia, or it should rather be searched for in Hungary, in the vicinity of a transdanubian village, Zalavár. According to the *Conversio* the body of St. Hadrian the martyr had been buried in one of the churches of Carolingian Mosapurc. This fact has slightly shifted the opinions towards Zalavár, as the veneration of St. Hadrian could be detected there in the later, i.e. Árpáodian Age (11-13th century) historical tradition, at least in terms of the naming of institutions and buildings. The dispute has finally been settled by archaeological excavations carried out at the site *Vársziget* ('Castle Isle'), situated next to Zalavár. However by 1949, when the first systematic excavations started at Zalavár-Vársziget most remnants of Árpáodian Age buildings once standing on the site had already been destroyed by stone- and sand-mining activity. It is partly due to this fact and to the above mentioned dispute that the 9th century settlement and the 'Slave connections' were put into the focus of the archaeological excavations carried out at the site between 1952-55 by Géza Fehér sr. and 1956–1980s by Ágnes Cs. Sós. In the 1980s she revised her original conception and put 9th century Mosaburg into a much wider, European context. However, because of the old 'main stream' of the research and because of the general conditions mentioned above, the remains of the Árpáodian Age or late mediaeval/early modern settlements and cemeteries of this site remained 'handicapped' all along the excavations.

Summing up those remains at Zalavár – Vársziget that have been traditionally dated to the Árpáodian Age within the literature of the site, five elements are to be mentioned:

1./ 'Outer Castle' or 'Castle Exterior'. The area of Vársziget of about 15 ha-s was surrounded by earthen ramparts; since 1953 these ramparts have been named as

the ramparts of the outer castle. The construction of the ramparts is thought to be connected with the formation process of the '*comitatus*' (county) centre (in Hungarian: 'ispánság') and so dated to the 11th century.

2./ 'Inner Castle'. At the southern part of the Vársgiget a trapezoid shaped area of about 0,5 ha was surrounded with a stone wall set upon pile foundation. This wall has been defined as the wall of the 'Inner castle'. In the preliminary reports of the 1950s-60s, however, it also appeared as the 'wall of the monastery' or 'fortified monastery' as well. The construction time of it was defined "to a slightly later period" than that of the 'Outer Castle'.

3./ Scattered parts of cemeteries in the southern area of the Vársgiget: some groups of burials found within the east wall and without the north wall of the 'Inner Castle'. Among these the latter ones seemed to be less definable meanwhile the burials within the wall were thought to have belonged to the cemetery of the monastery. Within the graves S ended rings were found. Since their use was thought to have been limited to the 11th century the graves were dated also to the same period.

4./ The 'chapel' and a part of the cemetery belonging to it. This is the church ('chapel') built to the north-east from the monastery with the cemetery opened around it. Both were dated to the 11th century by the S rings found in the burials.

5./ After 1965 it was only the middle of the 1980s when the otherwise rather modest number of high mediaeval remnants found at Vársgiget mounted up with only one single structure, a stone building (tower), that however, later (1994) has been interpreted as a part of the 9th century 'Acropolis'.

When dating these elements to the 'long century' of Hungarian state-foundation archaeologists have based on some documentary and historical evidences: such as the consecration of the monastery church (1019), the founding charter of the monastery falsified to the same year, and the county seat functioning there from the 11th century onwards. All the ring jewels found in the graves and even the stratigraphy seemed to have supported this dating. The theory seemed to be also confirmed by the art historians who – based on some stone fragments - have supposed to Zalavár an 11th century stone carving workshop. Furthermore they have also pointed out some 11th century parallels to the church of the monastery, that is – been totally destroyed - only known from a 16th century ground plan. Nevertheless, behind these conceptions there have been mainly historical considerations.

However the basis of this dating was partly shaken in the last decades. After the systematic revision of the archaeological finds the S rings may not be defined merely to the 11th century. Based on the newer excavations of Ágnes Cs. Sós some of the carved stones dated earlier to the 11th century had to be 're-dated' to the 9th century. Some others – due to the research of Sándor Tóth - have been connected to that series of fragments dating from the last decades of the 11th century, which can be characterised by the sarcophagus of St. Stephen at Székesfehérvár. The importance

of the 16th century ground plan as a chief dating element has also been queried, meanwhile among the possible stylistic connections Salzburg has come to the first line.

On the other hand the 'Outer Castle' has become the matter of dispute as well. In one of his works, published in 1998 István Bóna stated that "a fortress with earthen-wooden ramparts of such a huge size and such a shape could not have existed in the early Árpáadian Age; drawings trying to reconstruct its ramparts may not be else than constructions of pure fantasy" and therefore he reckoned the castle of the 'county seat' at Zalavár among the 'castles that have not been found/identified yet'. At the same time he also denied the possible backdating of the ramparts to the Carolingian Age. Nevertheless, other questions concerning the early county centre have neither been answered. According to György Györffy, the formation of the county seat at Zalavár may have taken place only at the end of the 11th century. Most recently Attila Zsoldos has put the birth of Zala County to the middle of the century, i.e. to the reign of King András/Andrew I, consequently the centre of the county could have been marked out around the same time.

The formation of the castle of the county seat might be dated by its church as the church – at least theoretically – must have been an 'obligatory' part of each county centres. From the end of the 11th century onwards the priests of these early churches were called as 'archidiaconi', ie. deans in the law-books. The dean of Zala County was firstly mentioned only around 1230, however, neither the location nor the title of his church is known nowadays.

II. Methods used by the Research of the Matter

The brief overview above gave opportunity to get insight into only one of the three, main periods of Zalavár – Vársziget, i.e. into the Árpáadian Age. When dealing with this rather complex and problematic period I based my work mainly on the results of the archaeological works, yet I did not ignore but employed the results of historical and art-historical researches.

About ten years ago when I started taking under revision the different architectural remains of the site Vársziget dated earlier to the Árpáadian Age, I had to reckon the earthen ramparts ('Outer Castle') into the group of the Carolingian remnants. Very similar rampart-structures to that which could be reconstructed here after the archaeological documentations (among those the drawings of István Méri) have been found in the fortresses of Moravia and Bohemia and dated to the last decades of the 9th century. The supposed dating made after these analogies has been proven recently by dendrochronology.

According to the 'traditional' categorisation used by Ágnes Cs. Sós in her book of 1963, in which she summarised the results of Géza Fehér sr., some defences, cemeteries and a church might belong to the Vársziget site of the Árpáadian Age. Breaking with this kind of classification I have distinguished the remains and phenomena excavated at the site to areas that once could have had ecclesiastic or lay character.

To interpret the different phenomena, I firstly had to identify the exact location of the most important Árpáadian Age architectural ensemble of the site Vársziget, the monastery. To do this I had one single visual source: a military survey of 1569 which preserved the late mediaeval form of the complex in groundplan. According to one of the earlier thoughts, all those buildings depicted on this survey – save for the church – may have stood without the walls of Árpáadian Age 'inner castle'. Meanwhile due to the other opinion the late mediaeval ensemble of the survey must have stood within the area of the 'inner castle'. During the new course of the excavations, started in 1994 we have discovered some longer sections of the late mediaeval defence-lines. These could be identified with the moats and palisades surveyed on the 16th century plan, thus the late mediaeval form of the monastery could be clearly located to the south part of the Vársziget, i.e. within the area of the Árpáadian Age 'inner castle'.

Due to this reconstruction the Árpáadian Age 'inner castle' equalled with the curtain walls of monastery and the late medieval courtyards of it, depicted on the 16th century survey partly stood on these early walls. Thus it could be also concluded that all the Árpáadian Age graves excavated on the south part of Vársziget in the 1950s must have belonged to the church of the monastery.

Most of the Árpáadian Age archaeological relics found at Zalavár – Vársziget have been connected to cemeteries. When I was analysing these cemeteries, I tried to exploit every possible data that had been observed during the excavation of the burials. During the detailed appraisal the analogies from the sites of the closer and wider area were more appreciated than those from distant ones. Nevertheless, as concerning here Christian cemeteries regulated by some general ordinations I could obviously not neglect the phenomena and courses parallel to them on European horizon. I tried to use the same methods to analyse the lay buildings, the area surrounded by palisade and the rectangular, tower-like building. In the case of the area encircled by palisade the task was slightly more difficult as its excavations has not finished yet and the original function of this can rather be guessed than clearly proven by presenting definite evidences.

III. The Structure and Main Results of the Thesis

The short description of the natural environment is followed by brief summary on the archaeological excavations carried out on the site.

The dissertation presenting the heritage of the Árpáadian Age in the first main part discusses the ecclesiastical remains, firstly taken the results of the excavations of the monastery. May be it has been carried out in an unusual way: because of the fragmentary nature of the architectural remnants I start my work with the description of the best datable cemetery, which however provides many small data to the environment of the early Árpáadian Age. The next chapter deals with the other ecclesiastic building, the so called 'chapel' and with its cemetery.

The second main part is dedicated to the profane buildings of the Vársziget. In the first chapter of it the Árpáadian Age palisade has been discussed, meanwhile the second deals with a tower-like building. I close the dissertation with a longer summarising part.

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The benedictine monastery. The analysis of cemetery part situated to north from the monastery is a kind of new experimental method. In the traditional publications on cemetery excavations the detailed description of the burial rites, the ways of dress wearing and the display of the finds (in terms of typology as well as of dating) are expected. On the other hand it is a rather hard duty to give analysis on the order of burials or to reconstruct the onetime state of the given area, as most cemeteries have only been partly excavated. Even though in this case the matter of the analysis was a cemetery of only partly excavated kind, still I happened to describe the order of the burials, to give a topographical reconstruction of the area that once surrounded the cemetery including the changes of the surface. Finally – as a speciality of the place – I could define its relation to the Carolingian heritage.

The excavated part of the cemetery has been fairly well dated from the second part of the 11th to the beginning of the 12th century. This part of the cemetery lay upon a number of destroyed elements of the Carolingian settlement however none of these seemed to have had basic influence on the burials. On the other hand it has become proven that the sunk line of the 9th century moat – the long western section of which had already been filled in at the Carolingian Age – was clearly visible even in the 11th century. The eastern line of the moat had been left open before the Hungarian conquest and its natural sedimentation took a longer time. This hollow line might have quite often been under water and thus it was a less frequented area of the cemetery: as long as the burials cumulate along its rims there has been a stripe of quadrangular shape left empty. Burials in the highest position have been found at the area situated to the south of the 9th century St. Hadrian's church. This means that the 9th century church was erected upon a natural mound. Nevertheless there is no evidence of restoring or reusing the 9th century building.

According to the soil filled into the graves the surface of the area must have been covered with a layer of building rubble containing fragments of bricks and stones. This could mainly come from the destruction of the Hadrian's church and from the levelling of the pulled down material. Nevertheless, there are two groups of the graves in the soil of which such kind of rubble has not been found at all, or at least in very small quantities. One of these lies just next to the onetime church. People resting here might have been buried before the larger scale works to pull down the old church. The other group was situated around the middle of the 9th century moat in a stripe of 5 ms width. We may suppose that this was the place where the stone material pulled down from the St. Hadrian's was carried across to the new construction site, and because of this reason they left it free from the rubbles.

Based on the compassing of the graves as well as on the areas free from burials I could identify the line of those pathways that once were passing through the cemetery and also the changes of these lines that happened at the end of the 11th century.

The order of the burials as it was regulated through the decades could also be detected fairly well. The cemetery expanded in an east – west direction. Within the main boundaries – that might have been marked out rather early - some smaller areas were set out for the smaller communities (families) adapted themselves to the given circumstances, i.e. to the pathways. Some of these smaller areas of family graves are distinguished by the help of a burial custom, according to which the arms of the corps were bent on the body.

At the beginning of the formation process of the Hungarian church organisation the cemetery around the monastery of Zalavár must have been opened for all who wanted to get final rest there. At this time it was probably not yet defined to give any major donations for the use of the graveyard. However, as it can be judged from the finds, those who were wealthier were buried closer to the church, while the graves of the others were situated farther. In most of the graves excavated close to the apse of the church in 1951, men and women of 'maturus' and 'senium' age were buried. Among them there was a woman wearing jewels made of electron-gold and a collar with golden decoration. The area farthest from the church was used by a poorer community around the middle of the 11th century. Among their 'S' ended ring-jewels the silver ones are rare. Their graves are situated according 'traditional' disposition, close to each other.

In the last decades of the 11th century new areas within the cemetery were opened for some rich, newcomer families. Their graves with silver jewels were dug according the direction of the newly built curtain wall of the monastery. The wall, however, separated this area from the church, therefore at the beginning of the 12th century the site lying north of the wall was abandoned. Thus some parts of the areas opened earlier for burials might stay free or at least less frequently occupied.

The building age of the curtain wall of the monastery can be dated by the graves. None of the publications dealing with the excavation of those monasteries dated back before the Mongol invasion mention a wall of such a size and of such a ground-plan. On the other hand the curtain wall of the early royal castle at Székesfehérvár may show some similarities to the one at Zalavár. However, as the remains at both sites are so few and fragmented it is very hard to go into further comparison of them.

The tower once standing on the north-east corner of the wall of the monastery had very similar foundation structure to the one that was used under the tower-like building situated on the northern part of Vársziget. Since the latter can be dated to around the middle of the 12th century this could suggest an approximate dating of the former one as well.

It is also very problematical to give proper dating of those – mainly pile founded - remains which have been unearthed within the curtain wall. However, judging from some old and new observations we may come to the conclusion, that such kind of foundation was not employed during the construction of the late mediaeval walls, thus pile foundations may refer to Árpáadian Age structures. We cannot give more precise dating at the moment. As the latest carved stone fragments of arthistorical value at Zalavár can be dated to the 1230s, it seems, that the later works here could have been limited mainly to the defences.

The Árpáadian Age monastery of Zalavár dedicated to Hadrian/Adorján stood at the south part of Vársziget. The founder of the new church chose this site with the remains of the St. Mary's church that once had belonged to the curia of Priwina instead of rebuilding the 9th century St. Hadrian's church. It seems that around beginning of the 11th century there could have been some parts of Carolingian residence still standing where the newly arrived monks could find shelter. These and other remains of the Carolingian heritage, such as the defences of Vársziget may have offered the physical basis to the pious intentions of the re-founding and to later construction works.

The local continuity of St. Hadrian's cult cannot be proven by archaeological evidences. According to Dezső Dercsényi the re-founding might have been based on the written tradition. His opinion has been supported by the compilations made around the 970s at Salzburg and Passau. These compilations – in the texts of which the *Conversio* was reused - obviously aimed to gain influence over the Hungarian church to be newly founded. This is the way how Mosaburg and its churches came to revival in the ecclesiastical tradition and then through it - somewhere around the end of the 11th or the beginning of the 11th century - in the Hungarian court. Of course it does not exclude the existence of some kind of the local tradition that might have confirmed the intentions of the founder. However, as it was mentioned, no evidence of surviving cult can be pointed out as yet.

The 'chapel'. The remained ground-plan of the other Árpáadian Age church (mentioned as 'chapel' in the archaeological documentations) does not have any special characteristics that could help the dating. It consists of a semicircular apse and a simple nave of oblong shape. The entrance might have opened on the south side, this is however indicated merely by the pathway the line of which has been marked out by a space left free among the graves.

The cemetery around this church formed a matter of a new methodological attempt. Lacking the datable coin finds I had to use here stratigraphical means to identify the relative and absolute chronology of the cemetery and the grave finds. After identifying the relative chronology of the graves it has become clear, that different parts of the cemetery were used in different periods, and that the changing of these areas 'went together' with the changing of the burial customs. I have signed these periods as *horizons* and classified the graves into five horizons. To horizon '0' have been put all those burials, which could not be assigned to the Árpáadian Age churchyard with certainty. Graves of horizons 1-4 were obviously opened within the cemetery of the church. Even if the changing of the burial areas did not necessarily mean change in the wearing, when we compare the finds from horizon 2 and 3 we can see a slight renewal in the stock of jewels. I could date these finds with the help of coin-dated parallels from other Árpáadian Age cemeteries.

Due to the common analysis of the horizons and finds I think the graves of horizon 0 had been dug before the church was built. This place could have been marked out by the new lords of the land in the first half of the 11th century for the burials of those destitute slaves or servants who had been brought here to carry out the preparatory works to the resettling of Vársziget. The site of the church was outlined only later, but then with respect to the earlier cemetery. The church was probably built around the last third of the 11th century and functioned until the first half of the 13th century. In some of the parcels marked out in the vicinity of the church burying had been broken earlier; at the same time we cannot find here a rather typical grave find of the average cemeteries of the villages: the signet-ring. At the moment we can give one probable explanation to these two phenomena: the well-to-do families of the community had chosen other burial places for themselves at the end of the 12th or the beginning of the 13th century. This could be in close connection with the process started approximately the same time and became even stronger along the 13th century due to which the number of the new churches increased rapidly. The final abandonment of the church and its graveyard can be connected to the dissolution of the royal county organisation that took place in the second part of the 13th century. Concluding from the great number of special, 'military type' of wounds found on the skeletons of this cemetery the members of this community – having probably the status of '*castrenses*' – might have served as bailiffs whose main task was to collect the goods and the malefactors as well among the walls of castle of the 'ispánság', i.e. in Zalavár and keep them under guard there.

As a result of the detailed cemetery analysis, beside the relics of a rather well-to-do, but of a not much highly ranked layer of the Árpáadian Age society we could line up some simple wearing elements of a much lower layer. Among them we can found most often the 'S' ended hair rings made of twisted wires.

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Beside the well known cemeteries and churches we could identify two profane buildings that had not been mentioned in the earlier publications made on the topography of the Árpáadian Age Vársziget. One can be related to the beginning, the other to the end of this period.

The manor (curtis). Between the monastery and the church of the 'castrenses' we have found an area surrounded by palisade. This is one of the earliest however very shortly terminated remains of the site. Its gate opened to the south, i.e. towards the monastery. Its exact function can be defined only after the excavations become completed here. The trench made for the palisade cut through the remains of the 9th century St. Hadrian's church. Even though the palisade was pulled down at the end of the 11th century as the latest the profane character of the site within did not changed at all as it has been proven by some later ovens. At present stage of the works we cannot answer the question, whether it had been a provisional site made as a first step towards the re-settlement of the area, or it had been already part of the 'ispánság', or it had perhaps belonged to the monastery?

According to the opinion of György Györffy, the very first centre of Zala County had been in Kolonvár, i.e. Kolon Castle and the centre in Zalavár was created much later, during the reign of Ladislas I. This new county seat, however, might have had preceded by an earlier royal Curtis. Since no remnants of Kolonvár have been found despite the very intensive archaeological activity performed all around the closer and wider area, some archaeologists like Ágnes Cs. Sós, Béla Miklós Szőke, László Vándor put the location of even the early county seat to Zalavár – Vársziget. Due to this we could identify the palisade protected are with the early centre.

Nevertheless, some other, indirect data may support the theory that the area could have belonged to the monastery. Due to my observations the stone wall of the monastery succeeded the palisade in chronological sense but we may not preclude if it happened in functional sense, too.

The tower. The other lay structure, the 'tower-like' building of the Vársziget stood to the east of the church and cemetery of the 'castrenses'. These types of buildings are known from some early centres of the Árpáadian Age, nevertheless it became widespread only from the end of the 12th century. As we have seen, the tower built to the north-east corner of monastery wall was based on the same type of foundation like the one under the 'tower-like' building. It could not be earlier than the 12th century

and not even later than 1222, as at that time bishop Robert dated his deed “ *in Castro Zala*”. We know a number of buildings of similar type from the closer and wider region dated to the end of the 12th or the first half of the 13th century. If the construction of it had been in connection with the destruction of the early palisade then it could rather have been dated to the first part of the 12th century. I can imagine its function as the dwelling of the castellan which could house the local administration as well.

The fate of the settlement at Zalavár – Vársziget was sealed after the Mongol invasion, in the second part of the 13th century. According to the new reform policy of King Béla IV, privileges were granted to a number of settlements. These caused quarrels with the ecclesiastical institutions like it happened in the case of Esztergom and Székesfehérvár. At Zalavár if the civil area before gate of the monastery had been filled up with a great number of settlers it would have caused the same troubles like in the aforementioned cases. Therefore parallel with the wasting of the institution and the seat of the royal county, those settlements of the region could get privileges and thus could develop, that were situated along the main roads. Even though Zalavár lay a bit far from these roads, it did not lose its total importance in the late Middle Age since the monastery gained the functions of the public notary.