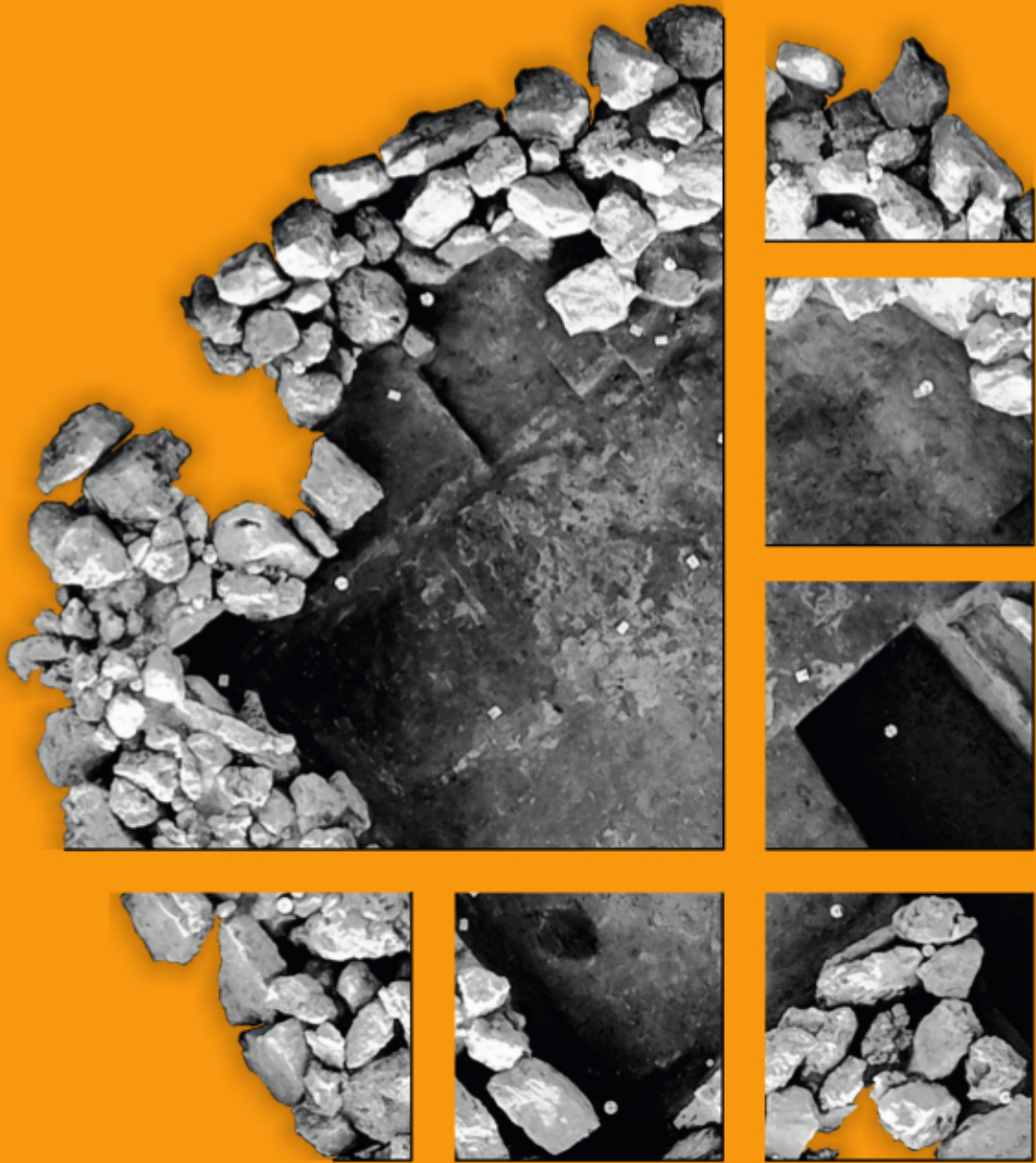


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ex Instituto Archaeologico Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae



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Excavations inside the 16th-century gate tower at the Castle Čabrad' in 2016

MAXIM MORDOVIN

Institute of Archaeological Sciences

Eötvös Loránd University

mordovin.maxim@btk.elte.hu

Abstract

The archaeological cooperation at Čabrad' castle (Fig. 1) between AÚ SAV, Rondel Civil Organisation and the Eötvös Loránd University, led by Ján Beljak, Albert Loydl and Maxim Mordovin, which was initiated in 2013 has continued in 2016, between 8th and 19th of August. The main goals of the research were the same as in the previous years: to investigate the third gate and to prepare for a major reconstruction its southern façade.

The foundations of the southern façade were partially uncovered during the first three seasons¹ enabling a preliminary virtual reconstruction of the gate and the drawbridge led to it. According to the first results the whole structure was erected in the second half of the 16th century, was only slightly modified in the early 17th century and more significantly refurbished before the mid-18th century.² All these observations have created a firm basis for the real rebuilding of the collapsed façade, which process has become extremely urgent in the last several years due to the growing instability of the upper arch of the former renaissance portal and endangered overall state of the whole structure. The reconstruction works have started in October 2016 and are planned to be continued from May 2017. This intervention is needed to stabilise the insecure sections of the largest surviving tower of the castle (Fig. 2–3).

The reconstruction of the renaissance gate is prepared upon the architectural fragments found within the destruction layers in the dry ditch in front of the southern façade of the tower.

The southern façade and the renaissance portal originally were built in the same phase with the vaulted basement accessible only from the inner, great court, where the last was surrounded by the walls of the upper castle. After the fire in 1812 and gradual collapse of the upper vaults, the colliding walls broke through the vaulting of the basement, just besides its joining with the portal. This all means that the reconstruction works must affect not only the façade itself, but also the adjacent parts of the basement. At the same time the infiltrated debris inside the basement might have included fragments of the renaissance portal needed for refinement of the plans. All in all, in 2016 the choice of the territory for excavation was determined by the logistic needs according to the all abovementioned factors and expectations.

1 Participants in 2016 were: Anna Anderko, Nóra Ujhelyi, Andrei Farcaş, Máté Mészáros, Borbála Schliszka, Tünde Komori, Fruzsina Alexandra Németh, Árpád Konnát, Andrea Kocsis, Maja Oszolik, Ákos Szabados, Rita Rakoncay, Mónika Gácsi; Alena Bobáková, Kitty Soltészová, Boglárka Dobosi. For the earlier results see: MORDOVIN 2013, 156–158; 2014, 485–486; 2015, 271–273.

2 BELJAK – MALINIÁK – MORDOVIN – ŠIMKOVIC 2016, 110–112.

The most important logistical expectation for the building works was to ease the access of the construction site (southern portal) via levelling the debris layers within the tower and removing the stone rubble from the collapsed upper vaulting. Especially it was important in the southern part of the tower. The levelling works have been carried out in the trenches 1/2016 and 2/2016 – continuing the earlier trenches 6/2014 and 3/2015. In the northern part of the tower the excavation works focused most of all to the terrazzo floor discovered yet in the previous year (trenches 4–5/2015), which has survived *in situ* above the collapsed vaults, slipped down with them a storey lower (Fig. 4).

The trench 4/2016 targeted the “dungeon” of the tower (basement) removing the huge pile of rubble and washed-in fillings beside its southern wall, unearthing thus the foundations of the renaissance portal (Fig. 5).

The two different sites of the excavations within the same structure surprisingly have produced diverse results. The investigated debris of the “ground floor” in the southern part of the tower consisted of two significant layers, which were often mixing with each other depending of the process of decaying. The first layer contained the stone and mortar debris of the vaults of the upper storeys of the building, while the second layer was the former filling of these vaults. Since the course of decay and destruction took longer time, the gradual collapse of the vaults section by section caused permanent intermixing with the washing out earth. At some places larger collapsed sections of the vaults were kept *in situ* for the documentation.

The first and the second floors of the gate tower originally were divided into at least three-three larger rooms by two west-east walls. The northern dividing wall is partially preserved and there are visible traces of the southern. Since no foundations for them have been found so far after removing rubble in some places up to 1.5 m thick, it seems that the layouts of the ground and first floor were not identical, or – more likely – were modified in a later phase. All the surviving traces and existing parts now can be seen on the upper storey of the gate tower. The lower end of the northern wall is arched, apparently to match the line of the vaulting. According to the observations, it seems that the dividing walls originally were put on the floor of the first storey when it yet had a flat ceiling and only later, during the incorporating of the vaulting, the lower part was removed. In a later phase these walls were supported by the vaults of the ground floor. This fact explains the appearance of the southern dividing wall being collapsed but still in vertical position. This clearly shows that the wall situated on the vaults had no substructure, and slipped down as the vaults had collapsed.

Noteworthy is that the mortar floor (terrazzo) found in the northern part of the tower, extends only to the line of the northern dividing wall (Fig. 6). No similar floor fragments southward of this line have been found during the last seasons. It seems that the central room of the first floor was paved with large square stone slabs, most probably collected and removed by the local population yet in the 19th century, similarly to that on the ground floor. Some sparse fragments of the slabs found in the debris support this.

The earth filling of the vaults seems to be originated from the slopes of the castle hill. This is the source for the chronologically quite broad spectre of finds: from prehistoric sherds, via 13th–15th-century unglazed pottery, up to early 17th-century glazed ceramics. The last group dates the construction of the vaulting, precisely indicating thus a later phase of the tower.

The observations made on the dividing walls with the dating of the filling together enable to reconstruct the character of the modifications introduced on the tower ca. 1600 (vaulting instead of the flat ceiling, new terrazzo and stone floor).

In 2015 in the north-western corner of the tower, on the terrazzo floor of the upper storey remains of a brick structure were found (*Fig. 6*). In 2016 these remains were finally cleaned including the adjacent floor, uncovering thus a relatively high number of perforated, large, thin bricks undoubtedly originated from a stove. Consequently it seems that the brick structure might have been foundation of a tile stove. Unfortunately it was almost completely pulled down and the tiles were taken away after the destruction of the castle and therefore there is no possibility to connect any particular stove tiles to the stove. It can only be deduced from the fashion of the mid- or late 18th century that – when the stove might have been renewed last time – flat, green, baroque tiles were used in this case.

The excavations in 2016 uncovered several relatively well preserved graffiti on the plastered inner walls of the tower, especially around the central northern windows. Most of these inscriptions were written by pencil in the late 19th and 20th centuries (*Fig. 7*). However, their importance lies in the facts and details provided by them concerning the process of destruction of the tower. Thus we can confirm that the vaults still existed in the after-war period (1950's). From the archaeological point of view it helps to interpret the appearance of the post-1812 finds in the fillings of the vaults.

The fillings of the vaults contained most of all different ceramic finds, including glazed and unglazed pots, jugs, lids etc. This pottery represent three main periods of the human activity on the castle hill. The earliest finds can be connected with the prehistoric settlement, preliminary identified as Baden culture. The second period characterised by medium quality, mostly brown pots and lids with plain or slightly articulated rims. The decoration almost exclusively consisted of incised lines. The bottoms of the pots often had cross-like signs. Some unglazed stove tiles with predominantly geometric decoration can also be incorporated into this group. Their dating does not exceed the 15th century. This group of ceramics can be dated from the late 13th century up to the late 15th and represents the first centuries of the castle. The pottery from the third period is the most differentiated including not only cooking pots but also tableware, luxury ceramics and fragments of glazed stove tiles. The range of its dating moves from the early 16th up to early 17th century. Concerning the proportions the most numerous group is the second, making up to 70% of the overall amount. The early modern ceramics make only 25% while the rest is prehistoric. The provenance of the ceramic material in case of the medieval finds is predominantly local. In case of the early modern (16th–17th centuries) a significant number of white ware from Novohrad-Gemer region could have been identified. Most of such fragments belonged to jugs and jars.

Apart from the ceramic finds a number of coins and metal objects were collected from the fillings of the vaults. Coin finds confirm the dating of the layer to ca. 1600. Altogether fifteen silver coins were found inside the tower. Most of them were produced throughout the 16th century but some 15th-century issues were also found. The latest issue is Ferdinand II's coin with no readable exact date.

Among other metal finds iron knives, horseshoes, window and door fittings, building reinforcements, etc. Notable is a yet unidentifiable cloth seal datable to the mid-16th century with depiction of a three-towered coat of arms. There are several known but yet unpublished similar examples from Hungary.

In the trench 4/2016, inside the basement among the three recognisable layers, the uppermost has been almost completely removed yet in 2014. This one consisted of the rubble and stone debris from the collapsed vaults and renaissance portal. In the remaining part of this layer larger stone slabs of the gate structure have been found (carved stones), and fragments of a red marble commemorative plaque most probably from the late 16th or 17th century. The lower two layers have turned out to be intensively mixed yet during the process of their deposition. The lesser one of them is the washed-in filling of the vaults, the predominant other is the earth from outside the tower, most probably from the ditch in front of the portal. As a result the prehistoric, medieval and early modern finds were intermixed with late 17th and 18th-century items. Most of the finds again were ceramic fragments, including a large number of richly decorated early baroque stove tiles. These later finds show very close connection, even more, they are almost identical with the finds collected in the dry ditch in the 2013–2014-seasons.³ At the present stage of the research the similar composition of the layers on the two sides of the southern wall of the gate tower may be interpreted as result of the secondary deposition after the collapse of the portal and the destruction of the vaults of the basement.

The overall results of the 2016 excavations were not as spectacular as in the previous years and the amount of the finds was much smaller than last year. However, many smaller details enable to clarify the building history of the tower and to reconstruct the process of its decay. Concerning the material culture of the site this season produced a significant group of finds from a previously hardly documented, late medieval phase of the castle. In the next year the research will still focus on the interior of the tower.

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3 BELJAK – MALINIÁK – MORDOVIN – ŠIMKOVIC 2016, 117–125.



Fig. 1. Čabrad' Castle from south (30. 12. 2016).



Fig. 2. View of the gate tower from south (30. 12. 2016).



Fig. 3. View of the gate tower from north (10. 08. 2016).



Fig. 4. Layouts of the basement and the ground floor (after M. Šimkovic).



Fig. 5. Site of the trench 4/2016 with the foundations of the portal.

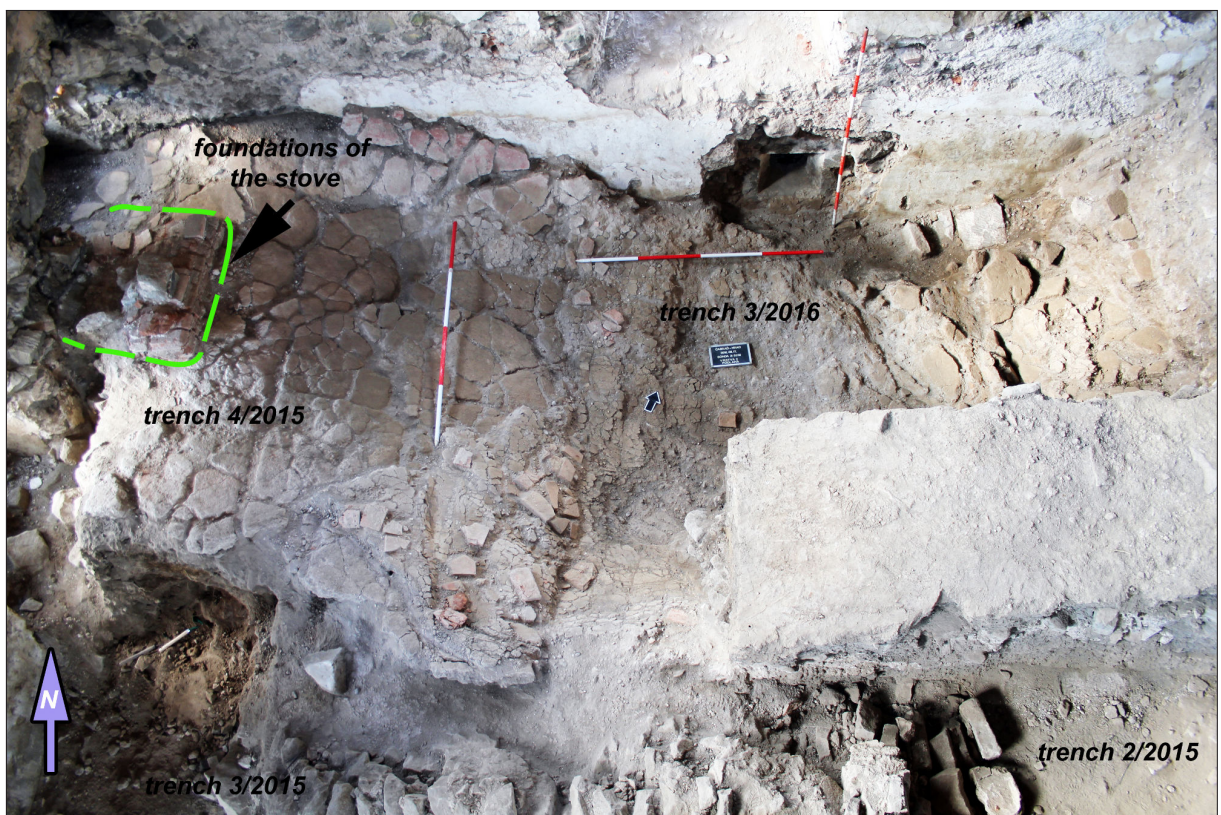


Fig. 6. Excavated terrazzo floor in the northern part of the tower.



Fig. 7. 19th and 20th-century graffiti on the northern wall of the tower.



Fig. 8. Participants inside the gate tower.