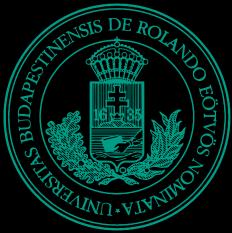


DISSERTATIONES ARCHAEOLOGICAE

ex Instituto Archaeologico Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae



Ser. 3. No. 9. | 2021

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Budapest 2021

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Layout and cover design: Gábor Váczi

Budapest 2021

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Trial excavations in mediaeval churches of Kishartyán, Kisterenyé, Mátranovák and Szuhá in Nógrád County 2021

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Received 4 January 2022 | Accepted 7 January 2022 | Published 2 March 2022

Abstract: In 2021 the Department of the Migration Period and Medieval Archaeology of Eötvös Loránd University participated in excavations at nine mediaeval (or seemingly mediaeval) churches in Nógrád county in collaboration with the Dornayay Béla Museum, Salgótarján commissioned by the Diocese of Vác. This short report presents four excavations of the churches of Kishartyán, Kisterenyé, Mátranovák and Szuhá where the research was led by the author.

Keywords: mediaeval churches, baroque churches, (post-)mediaeval graves, Nógrád county

Kishartyán

The village of Kishartyán is located in Nógrád county, west of Salgótarján. The first written mention of the village is uncertain because Kishartyán and the nearby Sóshartyán were uniformly referred to as *Harkyan* in the Middle Ages.¹ The church (*Fig. 1*) is mentioned – indirectly – in the papal tithe list from 1332 where the priest of Hartyán was named.² The church was mentioned next in the written sources only in the 18th century, in 1712, when the vault of the sanctuary was demolished, the nave was enlarged to the west and got a flat ceiling.³ However, the village was recorded as completely destroyed as early as 1548,⁴ so it can be assumed that in the 16–17th century the church was not used, and was already beginning to be destroyed. In the first half of the 18th century, the village was relocated, and only five households were recorded in the 1715–1720 tax censuses.⁵ The church was renovated sometime in the first half of the 18th century when it gained its present form. The church was renovated in 1936 and 1975 based on the years presented above its western entrance.

The primary purpose of the trial excavation⁶ was to determine the age and periodization of the church. We opened seven trenches during the excavation. The trenches 1 and 2 were designated

1 GYÖRFFY 1998, 248–249.

2 GYÖRFFY 1998, 223.

3 GENTHON 1954, 249.

4 BOROVSKY 1911, 68.

5 BOROVSKY 1911, 68.

6 The participants were Balázs Bodó, Krisztián Tóth and Tamás Szolnoki (archaeologists), László Bíró, Linda Jászberényi and Antal Molnár (archaeological technicians) from the Dornayay Béla Museum, Anna Szolnoki Anderko (PhD student), Vilmos Görög, Anna Lenge and Lili Sólyom, students from the university, Péter Bercsényi, Tamás Bercsényi and Kázmér Pásztor, metal detectorists. The geodetic works were carried out by Péter Balázs, Ákos Lelkes, Gábor Süle, Péter Vizi, colleagues of the Archaeojedi Company.



Fig. 1. The church of Kishartyán (photo: R. Rakonczay).

next to the southern Gothic entrance of the church (*Fig. 2*). Trenches 3 and 4 were opened next to the southern and northern sides of the sanctuary, and trench 5 was designated at the outer junction of the sanctuary and the sacristy wall. Trench 6 was drawn on the northern side of the church in the line between the nave and the west foyer, while trench 7 was opened north of the building, on the edge of the church hill, in order to find the curtain-wall of the church (*Fig. 3*).

South of the church are the remains of the mediaeval and the early modern cemetery. Although no complete grave was found, the yellowish-brown, slightly clayey layer found here at a depth of approx. 50 cm, contained a large amount of scattered human bones and attire elements were also found in a secondary position, such as pieces of a corolla decorated with beads (*Fig. 4*), a hairpin, and a fragment of a French clasp (*Fig. 5*).

The north side of the church was much more disturbed, but sporadic human bones were found here as well, implying the continuation of the mediaeval cemetery. Several modern phenomena – mostly pits – destroyed the early modern and mediaeval stratigraphy. Ceramics from the Árpádian Age and



Fig. 2. The Gothic entrance on the southern façade (photo: R. Rakonczay).



Fig. 3. The plan of the church and the excavation (graphic: Archaeojedi Company).

a Denarius of Maximilan I⁷ (Fig. 4) were also found in the disturbed strata. In Trench 7, the remains of two walls were revealed. One wall is 60 cm wide, oriented east-west. Presumably, this can be identified as the curtain-wall of the church. The other, thicker and more massive wall joined it from the south, but its full width in the trench could not be measured. The function of the building is still uncertain, perhaps it could have been some kind of gate structure. The walls were probably completely demolished sometime in the 18th century, and only the foundations remained (Fig. 6).

The most spectacular results of the excavation include observations related to the construction history of the church. The foundations of the buttresses were found in trenches 3–5, which were connected to the sanctuary. In the trenches next to the sanctuary, it could be observed that the foundation wall of the church did not protrude from the level of the ascensional walls, and the buttresses were contemporary to them and not a later addition. This suggests that the polygonal sanctuary was completed at the same time as the vault and the buttresses. However, the original, mediaeval buttresses, which were wider, were lat-



Fig. 4. Pieces of a corolla decorated with beads (photo: R. Rakonczay).



Fig. 5. Hairpin, French clasp and a Denarius of Maximilan I from the excavation (photo: R. Rakonczay).

7 Thanks to Máté Varga for the identification!

er strongly demolished, and only served an aesthetic function (Fig. 7). This may have happened when the vault of the sanctuary was demolished around 1712 and fitted with a flat ceiling. In trench 5 it was also observed that in the first period the pillar was demolished, and a little later, when the sacristy was built next to the northern side of the church, the previously demolished pillar was included into the newly erected wall.

Both on the northern and southern sides of the church a large number of carved stone elements can be found, which are secondarily used elements of the mediaeval church (Fig. 8). The foundation of the walls is different on the two sides. On the southern part, where the church also has a Gothic entrance, the face of the foundation does not stand out of the line of the ascending parts. This is identical to the foundation of the mediaeval sanctuary. No mediaeval carved stones of secondary use were found amongst the stones of the foundation in this part. On the north side, however, the foundation does stand out at approx. 20 cm, is at least 2 m deep, and contains fragments of the mediaeval vault. The foundation of the western foyer of the church is also prominent, but at the same time, it was much shallower, with a depth of only 1 m. The foyer may have been completed after the Baroque reconstructions when the western wall from the Baroque era was demolished and the church was extended to the west.

According to the observed objects, there may have been a settlement in the area during the Árpádian period. The earliest part of the church is the sanctuary, which can be dated to the 15th century based on the



Fig. 6. Discovered walls in the trench 7. Presumably, the curtain-wall and a gate-structure (photo: ArchaeoJedi Company).



Fig. 7. Strongly demolished buttress in the trench 3 (photo: R. Rakonczay).

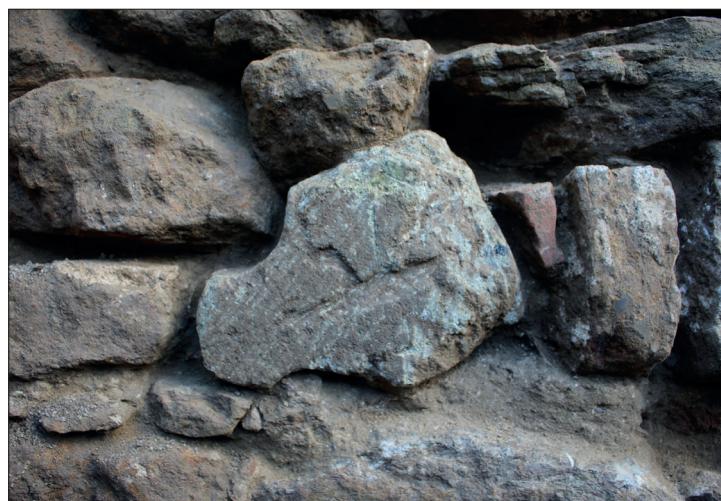


Fig. 8. A mediaeval vault rib in secondary position (photo: R. Rakonczay).

mediaeval vaulted ribs found in the wall of the church. The western part of the southern wall of the nave with the Gothic entrance may also be mediaeval, but the ascending walls are probably Baroque complements based on the secondarily used mediaeval carved stones. However, the northern wall of the nave may be entirely from the Baroque era, considering that the foundation of the wall is different here, with mediaeval carved stones in secondary position. It is possible that in parallel with the construction of the nave, the mediaeval vault could have been demolished and the pillars of the sanctuary restored. In a later period, the northern sacristy was attached to the building, and the church was expanded to the west.



Fig. 9. The church of Kisterenye from south-east (photo: R. Rakonczay).

Kisterenye

Today, Kisterenye is a part of the town Bátonyterenye in Nógrád county. The settlement is located south of Salgótarján. The first written mention of the village dates back to 1280 where it appeared as *Thirynna*.⁸ We have further data from 1381, when *Terennie*'s tithe was donated by Archbishop Demeter of Esztergom, along with several other localities, to the Chapel of the Body of Christ in Esztergom.⁹ This suggests that Kisterenye was the property of the archdiocese of Esztergom in the 13–14th century. In 1413 the Derencsényi family received estates here from King Sigismund.¹⁰ This diploma is also special because in the area of today's Kisterenye village *Eghazas Therennye et Wasaros Therenye* [Church-Terenye and Market-Terenye] is mentioned.¹¹ This can also be considered as the first written source of the church in Kisterenye, since the prefix "church" of the name definitely refers to a church place. Although it is not included in the papal tithe list completed in 1332, it can be assumed that a church was already standing here in the early 14th century.¹² In the 15th century the Derencsényi family appears several times in the written sources. Around 1450, Péter, János and Miklós Derencsényi became involved in a dispute over the tenure with Anna Berzeviczei,

8 BÁRTFAI SZABÓ 1938, 19; GYÖRFFY 1998, 307.

9 FEJÉR 1842, 437.

10 DL 9489.

11 BOROVSKY 1911, 70.

12 SOÓS 1985, 558.

whose grandmother was also a daughter of Derencsényi.¹³ Later, in the 16th century, we see the continuous ownership of the Derencsényi family.¹⁴ In 1546 the settlement came under Turkish rule. In 1556 Ferdinand I confiscated the estates from the Derencsényi family and donated them to Péter Eördögh and Ferenc Sukán. In the 17th century, the Rákóczi, Balassa and Fáy families also appeared among the owners of the village. Around the recapture, in the 1680s, the village was depopulated, mentioned as deserted, and only in the 1690s did its inhabitants return. In the 18th century, not the old owners appear in the written sources anymore, but the Gyürky, Ternyey, Bornemissza and Luzzinszky families.¹⁵ The castle of the Gyürky family was built in the village in 1790 and can still be seen below the church in Kisterenye.¹⁶

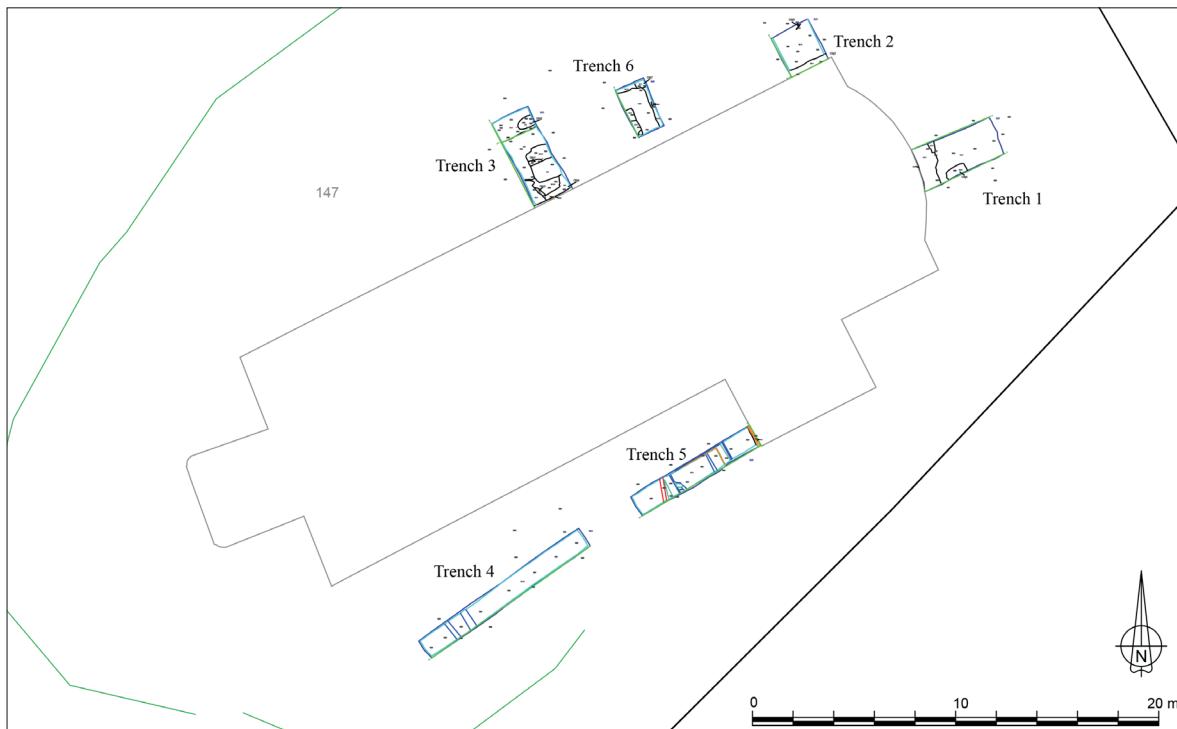


Fig. 10. The plan of the church of Kisterenye and the excavation (graphic: Archaeojesi Company).

The church (Fig. 9) has a single-nave, segmented arched apse to the east and with a tower on the west side. The purpose of the trial excavation¹⁷ at the Baroque church at first glance, was to clarify the antecedents and chronology of the church. During the excavation six trenches were opened (Fig. 10). Trenches 1 and 2 are located perpendicular to the sanctuary of the church, with the first facing east, and the second north. The sanctuary and the nave are the same width, but a partition can be observed on the facade, where we opened the third trench. Trenches 4 and 5 were drawn on the southern side of the church, parallel to the wall, and the longitudinal axis of the church. Trench 6 was drawn only later, between trenches 2 and 3, in order to find a continuation of the walls found in trench 3.

13 DL 14377.

14 SZOMSZÉD 1997, 12.

15 SZOMSZÉD 1997, 12–13.

16 GENTHON 1954, 255.

17 The participants were Balázs Bodó, Krisztián Tóth and Tamás Szolnoki archaeologists, László Bíró archaeological technician from Dornay Béla Museum, Mirtill Árvai, Dorka Galambos, Anna Lenge and Lili Sólyom, students from the university, Lajos Hajdú and Kázmér Pásztor, metal detectorists. The geodetic works were carried out by Attila Szilasi, Péter Vizi, Péter Balázs and Ákos Lelkes, colleagues of the Archaeojesi Company.



Fig. 11. The orthophoto of the excavated building (photo: K. Tóth).

During the excavation, it became clear that the terrace on which the church is located today has undergone significant landscaping over the centuries. In the trenches on the south side of the church (trenches 4–5) we came across multiple layers of modern filling.

On the northern side, however, the graves have already emerged at a depth of 15–20 cm and were nearly dug into the subsoil. The yellow, clayey, completely sterile subsoil was found at a depth of 30 cm. Trenches 3 and 6 reveal the remains of a hitherto unknown building. The thick, 90 cm wide walls were made of angular stones. The rectangular building runs under the present northern wall of the church but was heavily demolished, presumably during the construction works of the baroque walls. The fourth, south wall of the rectangular “room” is separated from the U-shaped wall and is much shallower. The excavated building here thus had at least two construction periods and can be interpreted as the northern sacristy of the church, which has been mentioned in written sources since 1674 (Figs 11–12).¹⁸

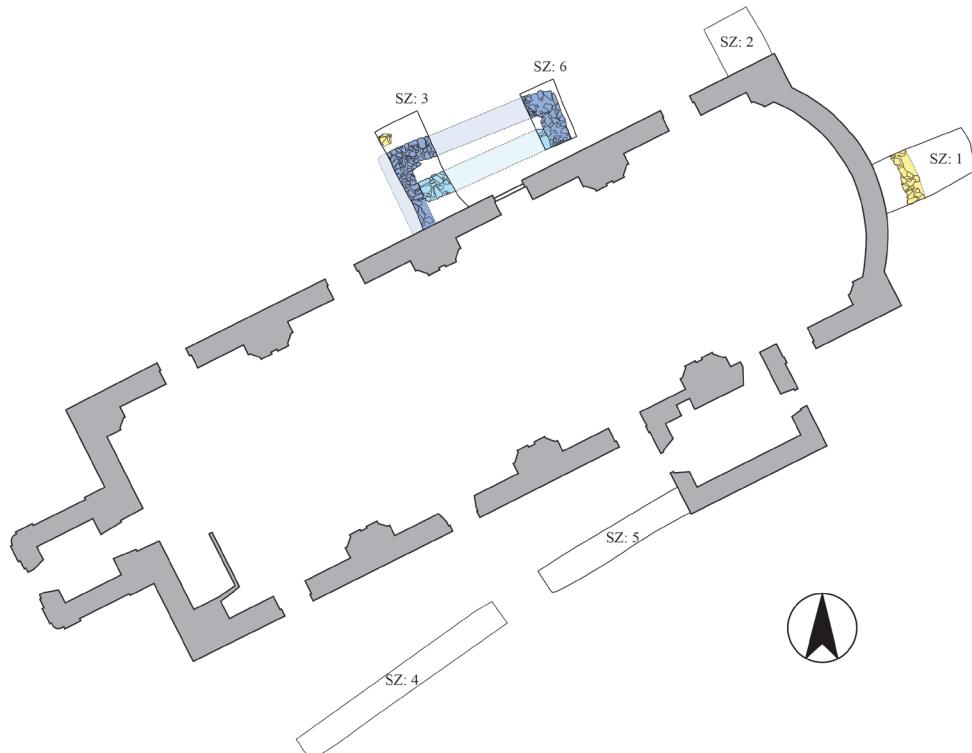


Fig. 12. The ground plan of the church wit the newly discovered building (graphic: R. Rakonczay).

In trenches 3 and 6, a yellowish, mortar-grained, subsoil-like layer was found above the subsoil, which also contained a large amount of scattered human bone as well as *in situ* graves. Two graves were found in trench 3. Along the wall of the sacristy, two features were found: a heavily disturbed child's burial and an adult skeleton. There was also a strap ring on the middle finger of the grown deceased's right hand (Fig. 13). His skull has already been destroyed by previous landscaping.

In trenches 1 and 2, the degree of landscaping was already lower. In trench 2, the yellow subsoil was found at a depth of 50 cm, above which a yellowish-brown, slightly clayey grave fill was observed. The continuation of this layer was found in trench 1, along the wall of today's sanctuary, in which four heavily disturbed burials were excavated (Fig. 14) other by a 60 cm wide wall oriented north-south. A 14th-century denarius of Queen Mary¹⁹ (Fig. 13) was found around the wall. On the eastern side of the wall, 17–18th century features were excavated: mostly pits, storage pits and post-holes. In one of these objects, the remnants of an *in situ* pole was also observed. On the top of one of the pits lies a full pot from the 18th century (Fig. 15). Although we did not dive to the level of the graves on the eastern side of the trench, it was clear that the features were dug directly into the soil of the former cemetery. Based on this observation, the north-south stretching wall can be interpreted as a curtain wall, which – for some unknown reason – narrowed down the area of the former cemetery. On the east side of the wall, the traces of a settlement dating back to the 17–18th century, could be observed.

Mátranovák

Mátranovák is located in Nógrád county, southeast of Salgótarján. The church (Fig. 16), which is dedicated to St. John of Nepomuk, is located in the northern part of the village's core, on the eastern side of the Bárna stream. The church building, which can still be seen today, dates back to the Baroque era, and was built in the 1800s according to the inscript visible on the southern main entrance. The first written mention of the village is known from 1384.²⁰ There is no written source known about the mediaeval church in the village. According to a census of 1674, the church was shared by the inhabitants of Mátranovák and the neighbouring Homokterenye, and presumably lay on the border of the two villages. The church built in honour of St. John was first mentioned



Fig. 13. Denarius of the Queen Mary (photo: R. Rakonczay).



Fig. 14. Strongly demolished graves east of the sanctuary (photo: R. Rakonczay).

19 Thanks to Máté Varga for the identification!

20 CSÁNKI 1890, 104.



Fig. 15. A pottery from the 18th century on the top of a pit of the settlement (photo: R. Rakonczay).

in 1710, which may have stood on the site of today's church.²¹ In 1797 an independent parish was established in the settlement, and in 1800 the present-day church in honour of St. John of Nepomuk was built.²² It is possible that the church, built in 1710, was already built out of stone, because on the 1st military map, a solid stone church is associated with the village.²³

The primary purpose of archaeological research²⁴ was to examine the antecedents of the Baroque church, especially with regard to the question whether a Mediaeval church building could have stood on the site of today's building. During the excavation, we opened four trenches in the churchyard (Fig. 17). In trenches 1–2, and 4 early modern as well as prehistoric cultural layers and objects were discovered, which were disturbed by modern construction sites, while in trench 3 no archaeological feature was seen.



Fig. 16. The church of Mátranovák from south-east (photo: R. Rakonczay).

21 Soós 1985, 559.

22 GENTHON 1954, 267.

23 EPERJESSY 1977, 30.

24 The participants were Balázs Bodó, Tamás Szolnoki archaeologists, László Bíró, Linda Jászberényi, Antal Molnár archaeological technicians from the Dornay Béla Museum, Anna Lenge, student from the university, and Kázmér Pásztor metal detectorist. The geodetic works were carried out by Péter Vizi and Ákos Lelkes, colleagues of the Archaeojedi Company.

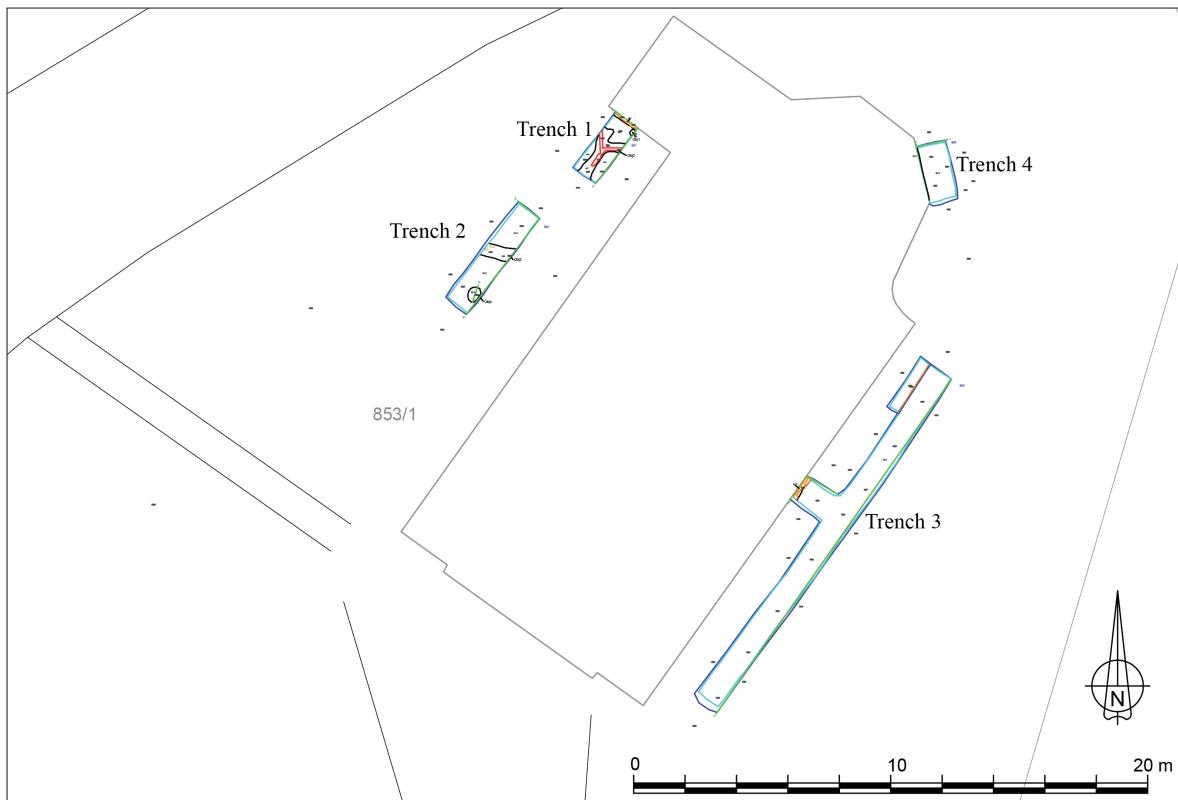


Fig. 17. The plan of the church and the excavation (graphic: Archaeojedi Company).

In trenches 1–2 at a depth of 20–40 cm, a dark brown, sometimes black, slightly clayey layer was found, from which white pottery fragments dating back to the 16–17th century derived. In trench 2, at a depth of 50 cm, a clayey, black layer comprising reddish clay clumps was observed, which contained prehistoric pottery. In the middle of the trench, a grave (Fig. 18) was seen, which was dug into the two clay layers. A relatively large number of late mediaeval and early modern pottery fragments were unearthed in the burial. The rite and the findings clearly refer to a Christian burial. Presumably there may have been a former church nearby, the remains of which were not discovered during the excavation. This was the only grave in the opened trenches, so most probably only the edge of the former cemetery was found. On the second military survey map, a larger stone building is marked on the site of today's church, the orientation and dimensions of which are the same as today's buildings. To the north of this building a cemetery or graveyard was depicted (Fig. 19). It is conceivable, therefore, that the former church, or at least the cemetery, was located a little further north, and one of its outermost burials was excavated.

No archaeological phenomenon was found east and north from the church. In these trenches, the stratigraphic sequence revealed information about the site. In trenches 3 and 4, a thin



Fig. 18. The only grave at the site of Mátranovák (photo: R. Rakonczay).

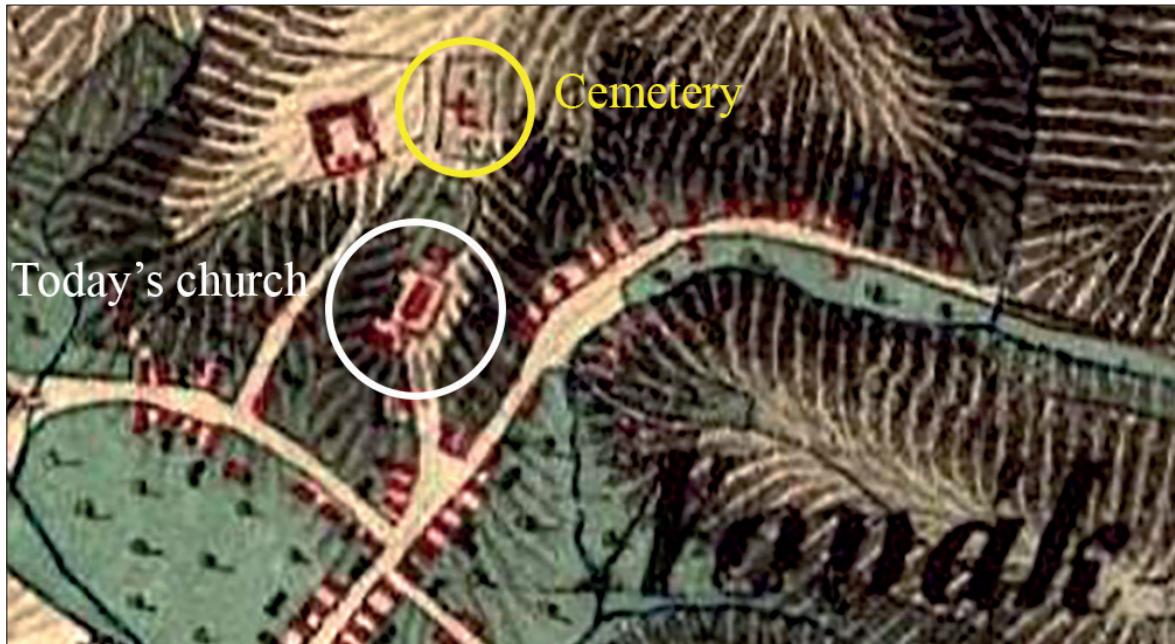


Fig. 19. On the second military map depicted cemetery or graveyard north from the today's church

layer of mortar was observed under the humus, which may be related to the construction of the church in 1800. In trench 3, a yellow, very hard, clayey layer was found at a depth of 30 cm, in which there was no indication of human activity. This layer is presumably identical to the subsoil.

Based on the results of the excavation, we can state that the former church is not to be found in the narrower environment of today's parish. No remains of stone walls or scattered human bones suggesting the existence of an earlier building were found at the site. There was also a prehistoric and an early modern settlement in the area, the strata of which were successfully excavated. The eastern side of the church hill was highly disturbed during the construction of the church, so no archaeological sequence could be observed here, only the building layers belonging to the structuring in 1800 were found above the subsoil. The only early modern burial at the site presumably belonged to the cemetery marked on the second military map, stretching northward, and can be identified as one of its southernmost graves.

Szuha

The village of Szuha is located in the south-eastern part of Nógrád county. Its Roman Catholic church (Fig. 20) dedicated to Nativity of Mary is in the centre of the village, west of the Galya stream. The church has a single nave with a polygonal sanctuary. The sacristy joins it on its north-east-eastern side. The church is not oriented to the east, but its sanctuary faces the south-southeast direction. To the external side of the polygonal sanctuary robust, irregularly distributed support pillars are joined (Fig. 21). The main entrance on the northwestern side is from the Gothic period, just as the door frame that separates the sacristy and the sanctuary.

The test excavation²⁵ was justified by the mediaeval nature of the church. Its size, as well as its two Gothic door frames (Fig. 22), also suggested mediaeval origins. It was listed as a mediaeval church

25 The participants were Balázs Bodó and Krisztián Tóth archaeologists, László Bíró archaeological technician from the Dornayay Béla Museum, Dorka Galambos, Anna Lenge, students from the university and Lajos Hajdú, metal detectorist. The geodetic works were carried out by Attila Szilasi and Péter Vizi, colleagues of the Archaeojedi Company.



Fig. 20. The church of Szuha (photo: R. Rakonczay).

in the paper *The monuments of Nógrád county* in 1954.²⁶ However, the written sources show a more complex picture. The first written record of the settlement of Szuha dates back to 1441, when it was mentioned as *Zoha*. Already in 1463 it appears in the form of *Zwha*.²⁷ But there is no mediaeval written source about the church. It was not mentioned until 1696 (or 1688)²⁸ when it was abandoned.²⁹ Samu Borovszky already mentioned that the village was depopulated in the Turkish era, then after its recapture it settled in its present place, and only in the 18th century was the present church built.³⁰ The local historical tradition dates the building to 1768.³¹ This is supported by a *Canonica Visitatio* from Dorogháza dated to 1811, according to which the church was renovated in 1768 from solid material at the expense of the faithful (*Est e solidis materialibus anno 1768 sumptibus fidelium renovata*).³² According to an unreferenced data, Imre Soós writes that the wooden church of the village



Fig. 21. The polygonal sanctuary robust, irregularly distributed support pillars (photo: A. Szilasi).

26 GENTHON 1954, 412.

27 CSÁNKI 1890, 72.

28 GENTHON 1954, 412.

29 SOÓS 1985, 211.

30 BOROVSZKY 1910, 76.

31 BALECZKYNÉ FEHÉR 2000, 60.

32 AA 3465.

was in a very bad condition in 1733.³³ However, on the border of the village are the ruins of the church of Pusztaszuhá, which was identified to be the church of the mediaeval settlement in the middle of the 20th century.³⁴

The primary purpose of the excavation was to date the present church and to identify the churches based on the written sources. During excavation, two long trenches were opened: trench 1 at the sanctuary of the church, in a southwest-northeast direction, and trench 2 on the longitudinal axis of the church, on the south side of the building, in a northwest-southeast direction (Fig. 23).

In both of the trenches, we reached the yellow subsoil in a depth of 30–50 cm, above which only humus and a thin culture layer were found. In these layers pottery fragments from the 17–18th century and a Fillér from 1927 were found. South of the sanctuary of the church, a large lime-pit was found, which can be dated to the second half of the 20th century, based on the floor tiles and pottery in it. No sporadic human bone, plaster fragments or other re-



Fig. 22. Gothic doorframe between the sanctuary and the sacristy (photo: R. Rakonczay).



Fig. 23. The plan of the church and the excavation (graphic: Archaeojedi Company).

33 Soós 1985, 211.

34 GENTHON 1954, 413.

mains of human activity were found in the upper layers, nor was there any indication of a mediaeval or post-medieval cemetery. During the excavation, it became clear that the first settlement in this area was established in the 17–18th centuries. This picture is well compatible with written sources. The mediaeval village was depopulated at the end of the 17th century and in the first half of the 18th century it was resettled somewhat further away from its original location. Thus, instead of the old, mediaeval church of the village – which is probably identifiable with the abandoned church – a wooden church was used in the early 18th century, which was then rebuilt from stone around 1768.

Summary

During the trial excavations, we had the opportunity to conduct research on a relatively small area and only on the outside of the churches. Nevertheless, the work done can be said to be successful. The dating of the churches, the outlining of their construction history and the clarification of their mediaeval origins can add to both local history and regional research. These small-scale researches are also important from a methodological point of view, because next to the processing of the written sources, the archaeological excavations provide adequate data to the dating of the churches in each settlement. The research in Nógrád county serves as a good example, as in each case it was possible to specify the date of the churches and to determine their mediaeval origins. In the case of mediaeval churches details of the cemetery around the buildings were found, and the history of the construction of the churches could be clarified. In several cases, the remains of the walls of the mediaeval church were also found under today's buildings. For some churches, however, there is no indication that the village's mediaeval church is to be found in the area. These small-scale trial excavations not only contributed to the discovery of the local communities' own past, but also provided a basis and starting point for extremely important regional and topographic research, which will help us to map the mediaeval topography of Nógrád County more accurately.

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