

ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PLAN OF THE IGRİŞ/EGRES CISTERCIAN ABBEY CHURCH

Balázs Major*, Daniela Tănase**

Keywords: archaeological research, Middle Ages, Cistercian monastery church, theoretic reconstruction

Abstract: The monastery of Igrış/Egres (Timiș County, Romania) was one of the most important Cistercian monastic sites of the 13th century in the Hungarian Kingdom. After identifying the now entirely buried remains, excavations conducted between 2016 and 2021 found a multi-layered archaeological site, with an earlier village church and at least two main construction periods of the church of the Cistercian monastery. Despite being a royal foundation and having its first monks come from one of the four most important Cistercian mother monasteries, the plan of the first monastery church of Igrış bears little resemblance to the typical Cistercian plan. It had a typical basilical plan, its eastern end terminating in three semicircular apses. The second construction phase of the church made a stressed transition towards the more conventional Cistercian forms. The semicircular apse of the main sanctuary was transformed into a rectangular one and had a transept inserted. Besides giving a basic description of the most important medieval architectural remains found, the following article attempts to make some preliminary assessments with regard to the general historical and architectural context.

Rezumat: În secolul al XIII-lea, mănăstirea Igrış/Egres (județul Timiș, România) a fost unul dintre cele mai importante așezăminte monahale cisterciene din Regatul Ungariei.

După identificarea prin prospecțiuni geofizice a vestigiilor construite, astăzi îngropate în întregime, săpăturile arheologice efectuate între 2016 și 2021 au relevat un sit arheologic cu mai multe niveluri de locuire și de construcție: o biserică parohială edificată în cursul secolului al XI-lea și cel puțin două faze constructive ale bisericii mănăstirii cisterciene.

În ciuda faptului că a fost o ctitorie regală și primii călugări au venit de la una dintre cele mai importante patru mănăstiri "mame" cisterciene, cea de la Pontigny (Franța), planul primei biserici a mănăstirii de la Igrış nu seamănă prea mult cu planul tipic cistercian. Aceasta avea un plan bazilical tipic, a cărui parte răsăriteană se închidea în trei abside semicirculare. Cea de-a doua fază de construcție a bisericii a presupus o tranziție accentuată către formele arhitectonice cisterciene mai convenționale. Astfel, absida semicirculară a sanctuarului principal a fost transformată într-una de formă dreptunghiulară și avea inserat un transept.

Pe lângă o descriere succintă a celor mai importante vestigii arhitecturale medievale descoperite, articolul de față încearcă să prezinte câteva aprecieri preliminare cu privire la contextul istoric și arhitectural general.

The famous Cistercian abbey on the banks of the Mureș River is well known in scientific literature, its history dealt with by generations of researchers. Egres Monastery (present-day Igrış, Timiș County), dedicated to the Virgin Mary, was founded in 1179 by King Béla III (1172-1196) as *filia* of the Abbey of Pontigny (France);¹ its buildings are said to have been completed in 1187.² In the following decades, thanks to the gifts and privileges offered by the kings of the Árpadian dynasty, the abbey became one of the most important monasteries of the medieval Hungarian Kingdom.³ It was the burial place for its most famous royal benefactor, King Andrew II (1205-1235), and before that, in 1233, for his wife, Yolanda of Courtenay. The fortified monastery was besieged and taken by the Mongol army, which brought utter devastation to the site as can be deduced from the contemporary *Carmen Miserabile* of Rogerius canon of Oradea/Nagyvárad.⁴ We have only a handful of mentions of the monastery after its golden age in the 13th century⁵ and we know that the site was turned into a fortification sometime after the battle of Mohács in 1526. The fortress, considered

* Institute of Archaeology, "Pázmány Péter" Catholic University, Budapest; e-mail: balazs.major.hu@gmail.com

** The National Museum of Banat, Timișoara; e-mail: danielaetanase@yahoo.com

¹ Bácsatyai 2015, pp. 263-267.

² Rupp 1870, p. 69.

³ Juhász 1927, p. 73; Romhányi 1994, p. 201.

⁴ Nagy 2003, pp. 148-149.

⁵ Bácsatyai 2015, pp. 286-288.