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*The ruins and reconstruction of the medieval Cistercian Abbey of Zirc***

Historical context

The Abbey of Zirc, founded by King Béla III, in 1182, flourished until the mid 14th or early 15th century and played a significant role among the Cistercian Abbeys in Hungary. It received several delegations from the Pope and the General Chapter of the Cistercian Order also entrusted to the Cistercian Abbot the management of various official businesses. It is important to note that in the statute-books, the Abbeys of Zirc or Bakony never once appears as having any disciplinary problems.

However, at the beginning of the 15th century the Abbey of Zirc, similarly to most of the Cistercian Abbeys in Hungary, must have been in a run-down state. *The monasteries of Hungary... have been corrupted spiritually in many respects and some of them are occupied by force by outsiders who are not members of the Order*¹, wrote the General Chapter in 1411. At that time, there certainly was a convent in Zirc², but the charter issued 30 years later reports on impoverishment³. The impoverished abbey must have been directed by a commendatory abbot⁴ in 1462, but if it was not so at that time, by 1511

the abbey would certainly be run by a commendatory abbot, Miklós Maglódy⁵, and it would remain so until its reestablishment. From 1538 Zirc belonged to the Podmaniczky – another source⁶ gives details of its decline at that period – and if there was a monk at Zirc at that time abandon Zirc at latest after the capture of Buda by the Turks in 1541. The village itself was deserted shortly thereafter. By 1549 only four places are recorded as inhabited by serfs.

We do not have any sources concerning the construction of the abbey and neither of the medieval building operations. The archives of Zirc Abbey completely perished in the 16th century, therefore it is only from the above mentioned data that we can make the inference that the buildings of the abbey had started to decay from the 16th century and onwards. After the foundation, certain repairs, perhaps even transformations were made. We can draw this conclusion from a piece of a Gothic bevelled window frame from the 14–15th century⁷.

* The Cistercian Abbeys in Hungary.

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¹ Josephus Canivez, *Statuta Capitulum Generalium Ordinis Cisterciensis (1116–1786) IV*, Louvain, 1936. 1411: 31, p. 142–143.

² The charter issued on 17th May 1418 mentions “Andrew Cistercian abbot and his convent”, therefore we may assume that there is a monastic community and it seems that the abbot is also a member of the order. Magyar Országos Levéltár DI 43398.

³ According to a document dated 17th September 1450 at Pécs, if Abbot Peter should not pay back the borrowed 10 forints, the auxiliary bishop would enforce his claim by legal proceedings. J. Koller, *Historia Episcopatus Quinqueecclesiarum*. IV. Pozsony, 1796, p. 336–337.

⁴ Peter Nagyváthy Cistercian abbot must have already been a commendatory abbot who appeals to Pope Pius II in 1462 as the

abbot of Zirc his commission to be abbot of Bakonybél, resigning from his rights about Zirc. In 1464 he will get himself commissioned again to be the abbot of Zirc of the monastery that has “no more than 20 forints income per annum” (H. Konstantin O. Cist., *Zirc története*. Veszprém, 1930, p. 281. Oklevéltár, 130–032=HK 130–132).

⁵ On the 10th October 1513 Jákob, abbot of Cîteaux approves that Miklós Maglódy, commendatory abbot having been commissioned by János Szapolyai in 1511, who wants to become a monk following the general decree of the Parliament issued in 1486 and 1498, would join the Order by the abbot of Heiligenkreuz and so become abbot of Zirc. The abbot of Cîteaux stipulates that he has to “put the monastery right” – Budapest, Eötvös Lóránd Tudományegyetem Könyvtára, Kézirattár, Collectio Hevenesiana Tom. LXXIX p. 389.

⁶ Lukinich Imre, *A podmanini Podmaniczky – család oklevéltára*, IV. Budapest, 1942, p. 39–40.

⁷ Veszprémi Múzeum Veszprémvölgyi Kötár, lsz: 255 (73.8.3) Zirc, 1972.

Sources on the construction of the Abbey of Zirc

The first authentic records about the medieval abbey and church come from eyewitnesses in the 17–18th century. The first source mentioning the Abbey of Zirc is the *Celestial Crown* by Pál Eszterházy, published in 1696 that source mentions the devotional pictures of the Holy Virgin⁸. He writes as follows about the Abbey of Zirc:

CLIV. The Picture of Our Miraculous Lady of Zirc in Hungary.

There is a monastery in Zirc, in the Bakony Range, in the County of Veszprém, Hungary that had been built for the Cistercian monks four hundred years ago. Though it was a place where the Holy Virgin had been particularly venerated, it was razed to the ground by the pagan enemy in 1530. Now it is just barren with some walls of that sacred place here or there still standing. The source does not tell us anything about the details concerning the abbey and it also contains some inaccuracies with regard to the date of foundation and its destruction.

The second source comes from the refounders of Heinrichau. In 1699, before taking over the abbey of Zirc and its estates, the abbot of Heinrichau, Kalert Heinrich commissioned the monk Abraham Wabrzig with the inspection of Zirc and its properties and the survey of its economic potentials. He writes his report to his abbot in Wien on 17th October 1699 in which he describes the church as well as the abbey in detail, comparing it to the church of the Cistercian abbey of Heinrichau and to the neighbouring one of Rauden (Rudy). We quote the most important excerpts from that letter⁹.

The monastery of Zirc is mostly in ruins. Its church is built of carved stone. The arches, windows and columns are also made of chiselled, still undamaged stones. It is cruciform as the church of Heinrichau with the exception that [...] the sanctuary is exactly the same width but not as long as in Heinrichau, and there are no side-aisles next to the sanctuary that would enable one to perambulate, however, continuing from both sides of the sanctuary there are two fairly wide chapels with a wall between them. Up to now, all four are still vaulted. Similarly to the church of Rauden, in other parts of the church at Zirc, continuing from the choir there are side-aisles and high arches, just as in Heinrichau. In its front, next to the high altar there are no side-corridors and as in Rauden next to the sanctuary there is one chapel. [In Zirc,

there are two neighbouring chapels separated by a wall.]¹⁰...

The walls built on its middle columns still stand and the lateral ones up to the roof of the above mentioned church although there is no roof one could easily top it as the wall is as high as it was when covered with a roof. The walls are intact without any cracking of the carved stones, from the high altar to the third bay of the back part of the church as, for example in our church to the stairs of the pulpit¹¹. All the windows have the same shape as the new windows of the church of Heinrichau that are built from the pulpit¹². There is an enormous, beautiful window made of yet intact stones behind the high altar¹³. The vestry is nice, wide and long, its walls are still standing. The lateral walls of the dormitory and the separation walls of the lower floor... are all still intact, however the upper floor, namely the dormitory is half ruined from the middle of the cell's window. The other part of the dormitory has intact windows... but all the vaulting has fallen down, including all the corridors that had been arched. All the walls and the façade of the refectory are still intact but its vaulting has already fallen down. The length of the vestry, the dormitory and the refectory built southward, as in Heinrichau¹⁴, is the same as in Heinrichau from the church to the refectory inclusive¹⁵.

The following written memento dates from about 1729 subsequent to the move from Pápa to Zirc, to their temporary residence – called Bagolyvár – of the three Cistercian priests who were involved first-hand in the reestablishment in 1726. They soon started to compile the handwritten book listing in detail the estates and abandoned lands of the Abbey of Zirc, named after the Blessed Virgin, in order that *the newly arriving monks might be informed*, as they say in the foreword. The quotation

¹⁰ The author (Abraham Wabrzig) himself repeats what had been written about the chapel. The plan designed by Tibor Hümpfner that we have sketched above proved to be correct with regard to the side-chapels albeit he could not find the foundation walls of the chapel.

¹¹ In the church of Heinrichau, the pulpit is in the nave on the third left pier counting westward from the transept. The altar-piece of Olaszfalu that we will detail below also depicts intact to this third pier the medieval church of Zirc. See the plan of Heinrichau, Figure 1.

¹² The above mentioned window-frames dating from the 14–15th century could have been in the church. See Note 7.

¹³ We assume that “the enormous, beautiful window” refers to the six metre high rose window, reviewed below, found in fragmentary state in 2005.

¹⁴ It appears to us from the source that the refectory in Zirc was also situated in the southern end of the eastern wing. See the plan of Heinrichau, Figure 1.

¹⁵ In Heinrichau the distance from the vestry to the summer refectory is 43.2 m (namely the eastern corridor of the cloister) while in Zirc the length of the vestry, the dormitory and the refectory is 43.9 (according to the text it is the whole eastern wing.) – E. Łużyniecka, *Architektura klasztorów cysterskich*, Wrocław, 2002, p. 462. made by the plan of Heinrichau and by the plan of Zirc of Tibor Hümpfner.

⁸ Eszterházy Pál, *Mennyei korona az az Az egész Világon lévő Csudálatos Boldogasszony Szűz Képeinek röviden föl tett Eredeti...*, Nagyszombat, 1696. p. 127 (no. CLIV).

⁹ The letter of Abraham Wabrzig to his abbot on the 17th October 1699. Heinrich Gröger: ‘Der Beginn der Union von Heinrichau und Zirc (1701–1752)’ *Analecta Cisterciensia*. 38 (1982) p. 68. (The original can be found at Breslau/Wrocław Diocesan Archive V-B-6c.)

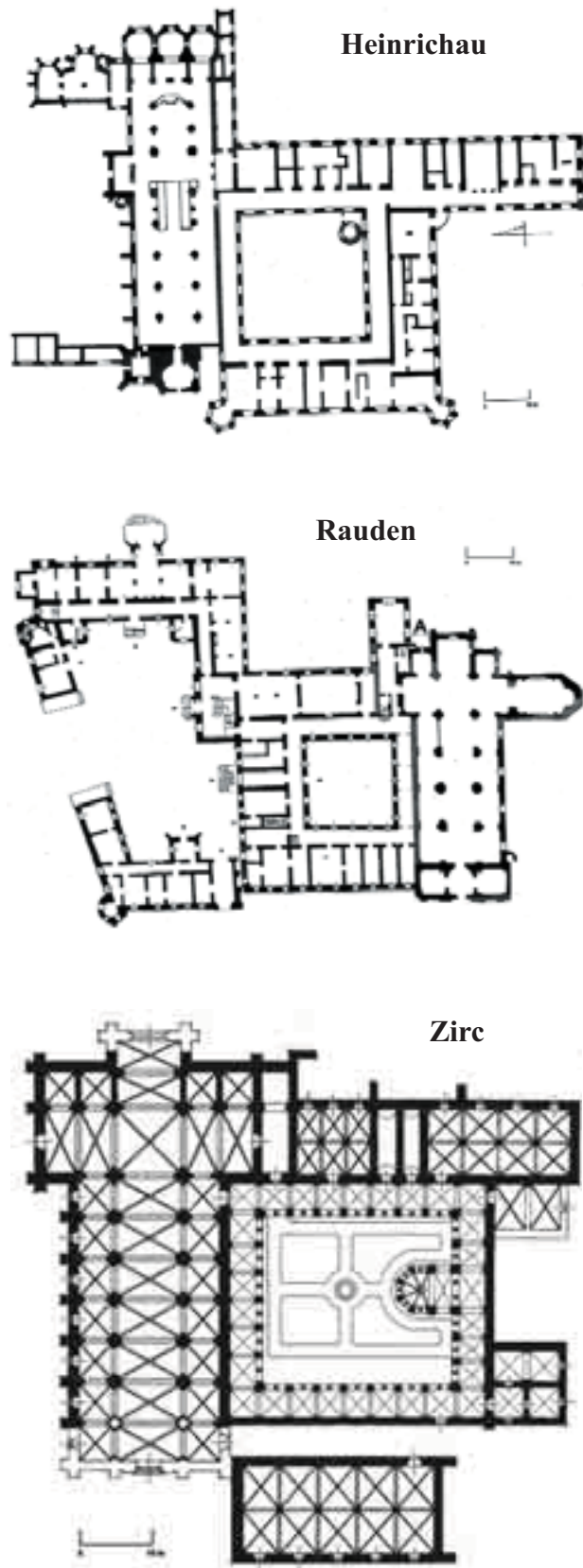


Fig. 1. The plans of the three abbeys with identical measurements, included in the report¹⁶ of 1699

¹⁶ The layouts of Heinrichau and Rauden are taken from the book of E. Łużyniecka, *Architektura klasztorów cysterskich*, Wrocław, 2002.

below comes from the description of the estates and the comments relating to them¹⁷:

[Zircz – p. 65] *There remained standing, nevertheless, the tall ruins of the once magnificent Basilica, which are awesome even today, together with the ruins of one wing of the abandoned monastery. The foundation documents of the Abbey of Zirc have been lost, together with all the other documents. They diligently (instituted a search) at the archives of the Chamber of Pozsony, but found nothing. ... [Annotations – p. 66:] N. 1o At one time there were two churches at Zirc: one more festive, that of the monastery, the other [p. 67:] rustic, by the side of which, as far as one can see from the ruins, the rectory building stood. We know nothing today of the patron saints of these churches. Márton T. Szentiványi, the Jesuit historian says that at one time there was a miraculous picture at Zirc, but one cannot tell where it originated from. In the church of the monastery two chapels have been cleaned and a shingled roof put over them, at the place where mass used to be celebrated under the open sky; before Zirc became a village, our priests used to spend the night there and, in place of the brothers' singing of the psalms in the choir loft, they heard the howl of the wolves close by.*

In the larger church and the monastery here and there a number of holes can be found where the swineherd and other wretched sons of the mammon sought treasure, and they threw stones into the sanctuary behind the ruined altar through the larger round window, and they sometimes got frightened and stopped their activities when the moks in their habits appeared like (some) spirits.

This quotation places before us the same picture as that written 30 years earlier by Abraham Wabrzig: some parts of the church are still standing, including the eastern wing of the monastery, furthermore it specifies the presence of the rose window on the sanctuary wall.

The fourth source can be found in the work of Mátyás Bél concerning Veszprém County. Shortly before 1735, Mátyás Bél surveyed Zirc himself, not only the ruins of the medieval abbey but also the village of Zirc and the new abbey which was under construction¹⁸. He speaks briefly about the construction of the medieval abbey: *The building of the church was cruciform; all was built of ashlars made of rock beautifully interspersed with chiselled windows, gates and columns. It is a huge, magnificent building from all sides. [...] The whole was surrounded by a three-mile long wall...*

The fifth source comes from the first monks of the reestablished abbey from 1738. It is preserved in the *Historia domus* of the abbey¹⁹: *From time to time you can hear some rumours widespread in all Pannonia about the ancient ruins (that) are partly from the*

¹⁷ *Specifica enumeratio possessionum et desertorum praediorum abbatiae B.M.V. de Zirc appertinentium Zirc. 65–67. c. 1729*, New Library of the Abbey of Zirc.

¹⁸ M. Bél, *Veszprém Vármegye Leírása*. [In:] *Publications of the Veszprém Megyei Levéltár*. 6. Ed.: L. Madarász. Veszprém, 1989. p. 53–55.

¹⁹ *Historia domus*, p. 43. (1738), New Library of the Abbey of Zirc.



Fig. 2. Detail from the bottom left part of the high altar-piece of the Roman Catholic church of Olaszfaalu

monastery, mainly from the church in Zirc. (And they show) as I could see myself that it was not just a what-ever artifact but it was really worthy of a king. But something that long-ago people once liked is not appreciated by present-day people. Though in the past it was a royal artefact, due to cruel storms, to the length of time that has past and to the corrosive effect of the air, and mostly to the enemy that has set it on fire, the monastery and the church have been ruined to such an extent that they were not like a royal ornament but like a beggar's rags.

At the moment of my writing, the new monastery has already been built out of the old one and the same intention was kept in mind (this time as well), namely that the new church should be made out of the old ruins. As we can see from the previous description, the foundation-stone has been laid and the remaining ruins have been demolished one after the other. The last and most beautiful part of the façade was blasted on December 19th this year.

On this façade the window looked to be intact and very artistic but the weather has worn it very much²⁰. Its parts could not have been used for any other buildings.

The sixth written source on the medieval Abbey of Zirc can be found in the second edition of *Topographia magni regni Hungariae* (1750) by Father Bonbardius SJ and Father Trsztványanski SJ. It tells us less than the description by Mátyás Bél²¹.

²⁰ The text may leave us in doubt as to whether the eastern or western façade of the church was demolished last. But we see in the previous source that the western part of the church was in a bad state, or did not stand at all, and the “beautiful window” in both sources is similarly standing. Therefore we must regard the façade holding the “very artistic window” in the description dated 1738, also based on the contents of the previous source, as being “that behind the main altar”.

²¹ P. Michael Bonbardius SJ, and P. Joannes Bapt. Trsztványanski: *Topographia magni regni Hungariae*, 2. ed. Vienna, 1750. p. 140–141.

Chronologically the last record which does not have full source value is the high altar-piece of the Roman Catholic Church of Olaszfaalu²². In the lower left corner the presumed ruins of Zirc Abbey can be seen together with two Cistercian monks. The ruins on the high altar-piece show us a Latin cross church with basilican layout and the eastern wing of the Abbey in ruins. It completely agrees with the above mentioned account of Abraham Wabrzig concerning its building and the designed items²³. Yet, the artist used his artistic freedom: he did not make a precise plan but a painting, therefore the piers and some other items are schematic. The name of the painter and the date of the painting are unknown. According to Mária Aggházy the painter may have been Bernhard Krause and the painting date from ca. 1770²⁴. We know that Krause has painted several pieces for Heinrichau²⁵. and we can find some more paintings by him in other churches founded by the Abbey of Zirc. However, Krause himself could not have seen the ruins. At his birth, in 1743 they were no longer standing. Presumably he might have made that portion of the painting based on some other painting or drawing, if it was painted by Krause at all²⁶.

²² The parish established and still looked after by the Cistercians in the neighbourhood of Zirc.

²³ It shows the first three bays of the sanctuary, the transept and the nave to be intact. The great rose window however dimly can be discovered on the sanctuary wall. We have to note that in the picture to the left (and to the right as well?) from the sanctuary wall the dark marks of a reparation done possibly in the course of the 19th century can be discovered.

²⁴ Mária Aggházy: *A Zirci Apátság templomépitkezései a XVIII. században*. Veszprém, 1937, p. 86.

²⁵ In Heinrichau, the bills paid for Krause have been found.

²⁶ It raises a question whether the “original painter” whoever he was could have seen the ruins or he painted only on the basis of narration. This latter might give an explanation for schematization.

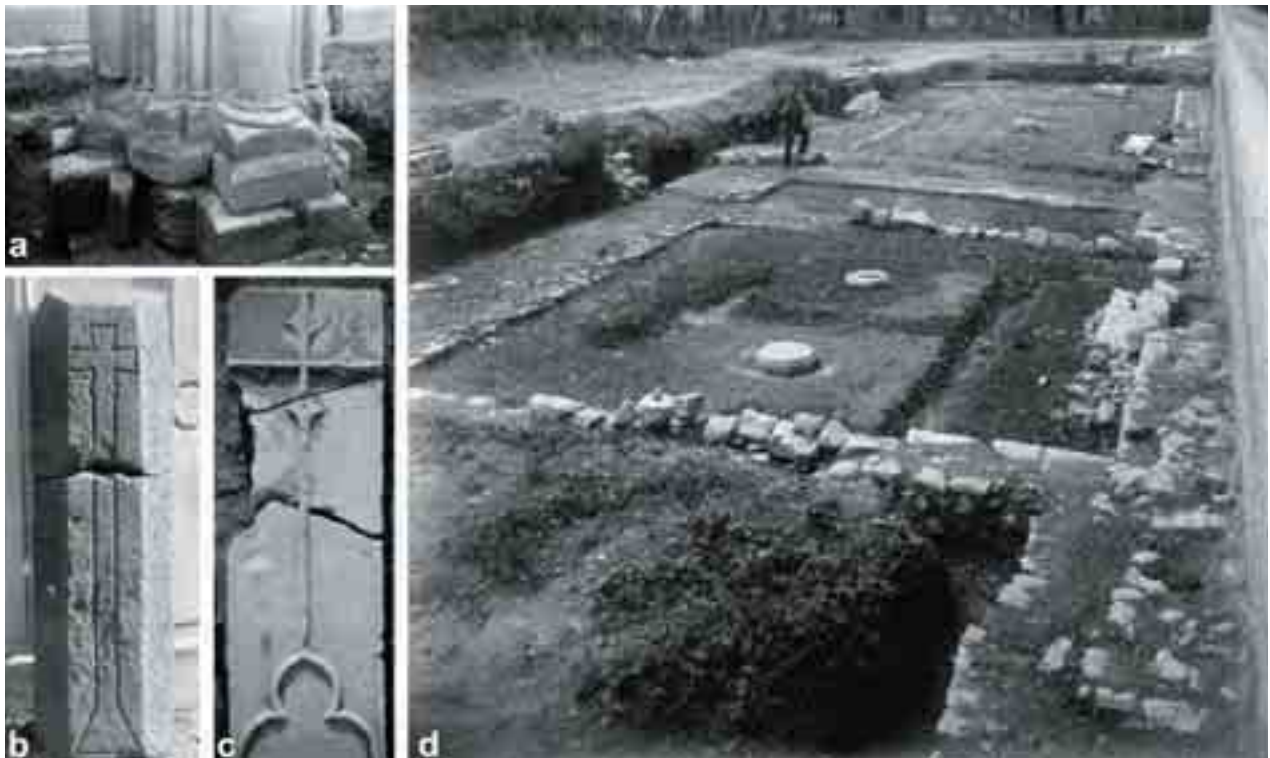
Excavation lead by Tibor Hümpfner, Cistercian, in 1912–1913²⁷

Fig. 3. The excavation of 1912–1913. a) the pier by the main road 82, before restoration; b) gravestone found at the entrance of the chapter house; c) gravestone found at porta monachorum; d) the excavation of the eastern wing

By the 20th century the build-up and the layout of the ancient monastery had sunk into oblivion. At the beginning of his abbotship, Remig Békefi had given his permission for Father Tibor Hümpfner to start an excavation in order to establish the layout of the medieval church and abbey. He initiated the excavation in February 1912 with six workers. He supposed that the only pier left for reminiscence in the 18th century stood at its original place. Thus, first he looked for the wall of the southern side-aisle, then following this he arrived at the transept. On the continuation of the transept, the chapter house was found, and soon a chiselled column base was discovered. Thus, their assumption was verified: the pier stood at its original place. Those people who at the beginning were doubtful about the excavation, gladly started to go to see it too. From the eastern wing of the cloister a door opened to the church. In front of this, a fine recumbent gravestone without inscription was found. Deep underneath there was an intact skeleton too. In front of the entrance of the chapter house, also in the cloister, another fine gravestone was found: one with a convex finely chiselled Gothic cross without inscription. During the excavation several smaller or bigger chiselled stone fragment were found. The chapter house and the community room²⁸ have been completely excavated. The

width of the chapter house helped to establish the width of the transept and the nave, therefore the layout of the medieval church could be established. Instead of the foundation wall of the sanctuary, on the rocky grounds mortar patches were found²⁹. The foundations of the pier at the junction of the nave and the transept, furthermore the ones of a pair of piers situated to the south from this, were found. The foundation wall of the western façade was not found, so the church is imagined to be seven-vaulted, relying on the place of the western wing and on analogy³⁰.

In the wing of the lay brothers, by April the cellar was also excavated, more precisely its corners deep underneath and the foundation of its piers³¹. Only the western and eastern foundation walls of the southern wing were found.

that in the southern wing “the refectory had not been built”: *l.c.* p. 131. Hümpfner did not know about the 1699 report.

²⁹ Though the exact place of the sanctuary wall is unknown, we may suppose that Tibor Hümpfner drew correctly on his layout the place of the sanctuary wall following the available signs and the principle of proportions. Today a modern excavation could shed light on this, as the mortar marks on the rocky substratum could give an explanation for this. More information can be drawn from the above mentioned source from 1699 saying that “the sanctuary is as wide but not as long as the one in Heinrichau” – thus it must have been made of less than three bays, making comparison with Heinrichau.

³⁰ It is interesting to note that in 1930, Konstantin Horváth O. Cist. in his book about the history of Zirc (p. 4) describes the medieval church to be six-quarreled.

³¹ Though the refectory of the lay brothers was not found in the southern continuation of the cellar (*ibidem*, p. 136), it features on the layout drawn by Hümpfner.

²⁷ Tibor Hümpfner O. Cist.: *A zirci apátság templom ásatása (1912–13)*. [In:] *A Veszprém Megyei Múzeumok Közleménye II*. Veszprém, 1964, p. 119–140.

²⁸ According to the above mentioned source from 1699, this room served as a refectory, in agreement with Tibor Hümpfner’s supposition

There was no trace of the refectory³². Relying on the general principles of Cistercian architecture, the corners of the cloister were also found. They did not have to look for the well as it had been known for a long time that the well on the site is of medieval origin. Around it, the hexagonal foundation walls of the well house were found³³.

³² Nevertheless, it features on the layout drawn by Hümpfner.

³³ *Ibidem*, p.137. – It is a pity that on the excavation plan the foundation walls of the well are not marked.

Thus, on the basis of the excavation in 1912, in the spring of 1913, Remig Békefi, Abbot of Zirc commissioned Dr Oszkár Fritz, private teacher at the Polytechnic, to prepare the technical drawing³⁴ of the excavated foundation walls and the chiselled stone fragments. Applying them to the Cistercian construction customs, Tibor Hümpfner drew the probable layout of the medieval abbey.

³⁴ These plans – or perhaps only those parts of them that can be found in the quoted works of Tibor Hümpfner – can be found in the Archaeological Data Store of the Veszprémi Laczkó Dezső Múzeum.

The history of the excavated ruins since 1912

Further excavation and conservation did not take place, because the First World War and the ensuing difficult conditions in the country put a stop to any further researches. Then Abbot Remig Békefi, the initiator of the history writing of the Order in this country, died in

1924. The excavated sections were all buried, excepting the eastern wing.

In 1944 the young entrants to the Order cleaned down the ruins that were left uncovered. In 1950 when the monastery was disbanded, the excavation area was

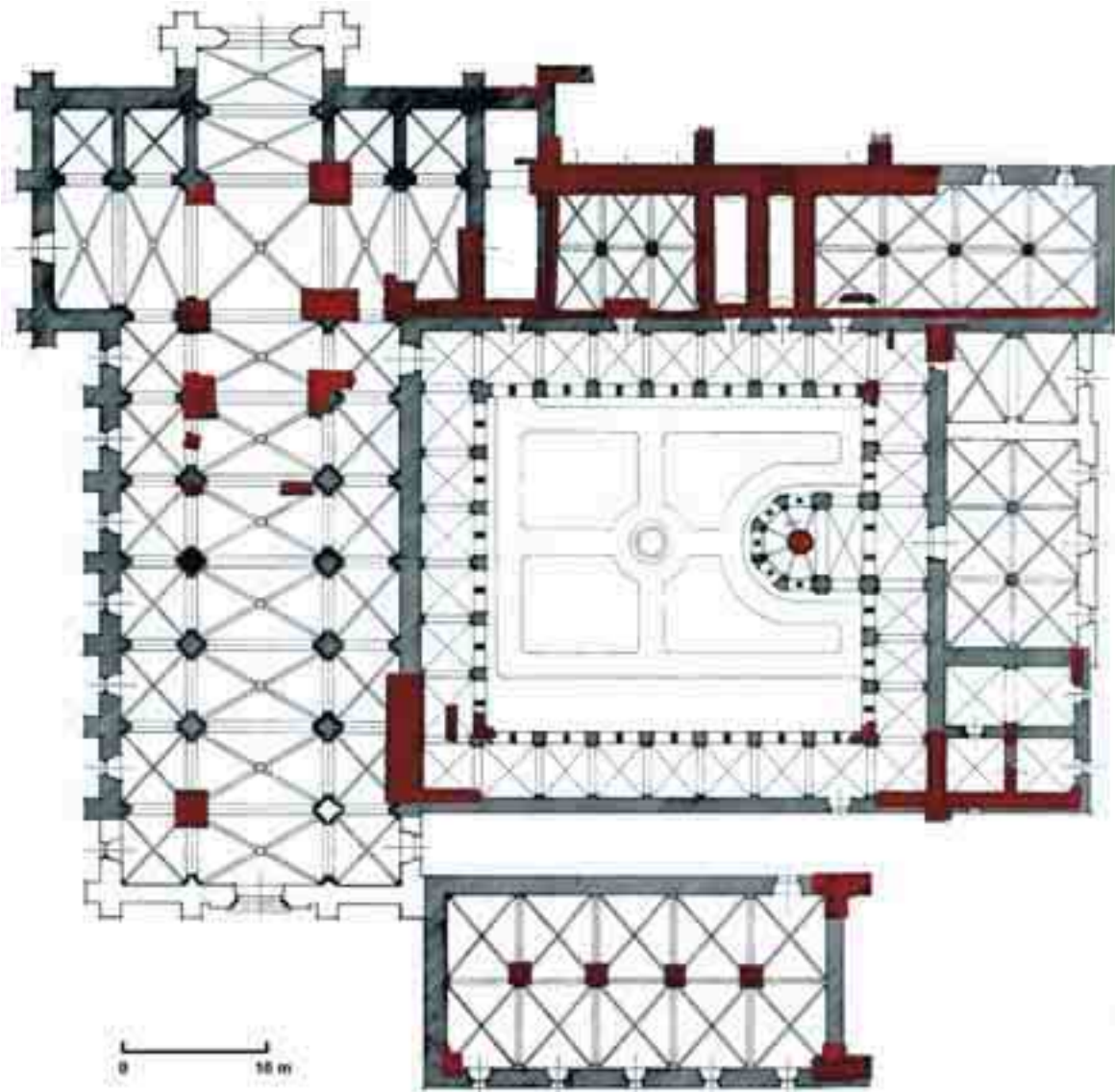


Fig. 4. An adapted version of the plans drawn by Tibor Hümpfner. The excavated portions are coloured dark. The white areas, without specific finds, are presumed

abandoned, neither the Natural Science Museum of Bakony, nor the arboratum were interested in it. This is what Sándor Tóth³⁵ complains about in 1963. In 1958 for the Bakony Weeks, the 100th anniversary of the death of Antal Reguly, on the initiative of Antal Békefi, the outstanding song and music teacher and researcher of traditional music, D. Csaba Veress, and Ferenc Illés, local supervisor of adult education, organised the tidying up of the ruins: they arranged a “stone exhibition” and provided explanatory boards for it.

After 1963 – probably on the basis of the report of Sándor Tóth – part of the stones from the ruins – those easier to move – were taken to the stone storage of Tihany³⁶. The two gravestones, a chiselled corbel, a half pier base and capital, can be found there today. The upper part of the 17th century gravestone could have been lost at that time. The smaller stone carvings were taken to the stone collection of the Laczkó Dezső Museum of Veszprém.

³⁵ Veszprémi Laczkó Dezső Múzeum, Archaeological Data Store No. 8809.

³⁶ S. Palágyi – Sándor Tóth, *A római és középkori kőtár katalógusa*, Veszprém, 1976. no. 44–48.

After 1958 the excavation area became abandoned for twenty years. During the school year of 1978–79 the secondary school teacher, Steven Szűcs and his pupils tidied up the area cutting out shrubs, trees, replacing loose stones. Besides the maintenance of the ruins, they undertook serious research work and made a maquette of the medieval monastery in two possible formats³⁷. In 1982, being the 800th anniversary of the Abbey of Zirc, they carried out further cleaning work. There were plans for displaying the ruins in a proper, worthy manner, but these could not be achieved because of lack of funds.

Following some 20 years of neglect, in 2003 the young Cistercian monks carried out the maintenance work of the excavation area, the last time. They cut out overgrown trees, sprawling shrubs, and removed the rubbish. But the excavation area – even though it is cleaned up – is exposed to the vicissitudes of the weather without the necessary protection and conservation work having been done over a period of nearly 100 years.

³⁷ The results of the research work are presented in: I. Szűcs, *Zirc középkori udvarháza és ciszterci monostora*, Veszprém, 1944, and of further works in 1978/79 written in: I. Szűcs, *Tisztelet a hajdankori mestereknek. Munkaleírás egy helytörténeti kutatásról*, Rajztanítás. 1980 (22) 1. szám 1–5.

Excavations around the medieval Abbey after 1950

The place of the medieval Abbey church is almost precisely divided lengthwise to west/east by a stone wall. Within the wall is the yard of the Abbey, beyond the wall is Köztársaság Street along which the main road No. 82

runs between Veszprém and Győr. During the spring and summer of 1952 while laying pipes for the water supply on the southern side of the main road No. 82, some 15 metres west of the currently standing pier, the trench dig-

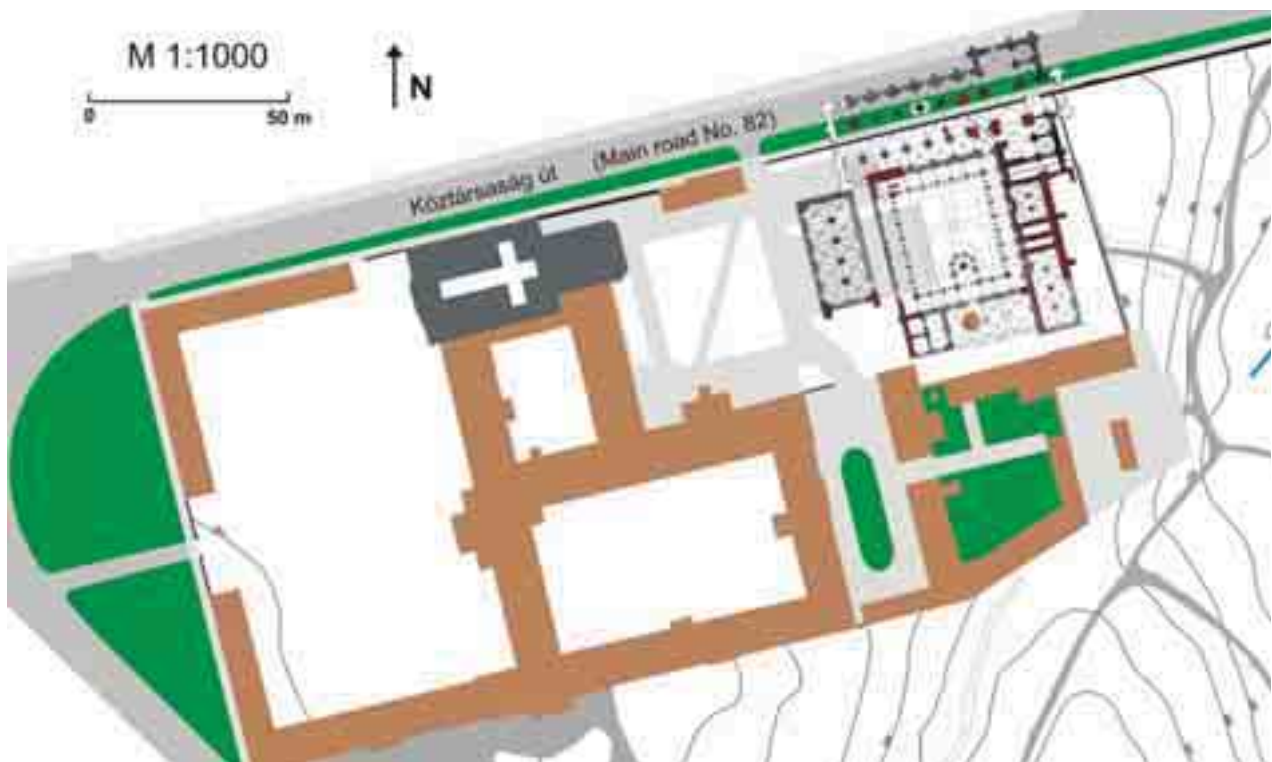


Fig. 5. The environment of the medieval and the current Abbey

gers³⁸ broke through a foundation wall about 2 m thick and 1 m high – according to the account of the archaeologist Miklós Héjj – “the marks of the church’s western outer foundation wall”. If we accept that in 1952 they discovered the bases of the western outer wall – that Hümpfner could not find in 1912 – then we must imagine the church having only six bays, but then the street of lay brothers would lead into the open and not into the church. This is unusual but not impossible. Miklós Héjj in 1952 may not have known of Hümpfner’s discoveries of 1912, the results of which were published in 1964. It is possible that they discovered the foundations of the last north-western pier, if only a 2×2 metres section of it was seen, or, in the event of a continuous foundation wall, a section of the underground strip between the foundation of the piers. The question cannot be solved at present – perhaps Miklós Héjj himself had made a hasty judgement – so on the revised plans of Hümpfner I have marked it as possible – just as Hümpfner himself had done – on the western façade beyond the seventh bay.

During the above mentioned excavations on a 15–20 metre section the foundations of the northern wall of the church were also found. At the northern side-isle under the ground floor they found graves with skeletons and a red marble column capital about 20 cm high, but this was broken to pieces the following night by unknown persons, and so the workers buried it in the ditch later.

The laying of the watersupply pipes was continued in 1954 at the place of the northern side-isle of the medieval church, and onward in a line east of the currently standing

³⁸ Veszprémi Laczkó Dezső Múzeum, Régészeti Adattár, no. 8806. Archaeological report of Miklós Héjj.

pier. Here they discovered new graves and the exceedingly massive wall³⁹ that Tibor Hümpfner knew. The walls continued under the road even at a depth of 2 m.

The following finds of 1972 did not come from the immediate vicinity of the Abbey grounds, but during the dismantling of the forrester’s house⁴⁰. These stones that originate from the old monastery can also be found in the stone storage depot of the Valley of Veszprém.

The last time that excavations around the medieval church took place was 1996 when gas supply pipes were laid⁴¹. The northern side of the main road No. 82, and on its south side immediately east of the pier, a 45 metre length of the grassy strip between the main road and the pavement were opened up. On the south side of the road, about 7 and 12 metres east of the pier, those foundation walls were discovered which had been seen in 1912 and 1954. On the north side they thought that they had found the continuation of the wall that is 12 metres from the pier. On the south side of the main road, beside the wall of the arboratum, they dug up the entire length of the pavement and human bones were found at 37, 40 and 45 metre distances. According to this the graveyard of the monks was east of the sanctuary of the church. At a distance of 14.5 metres from the pier a 100×60×30 cm large white carved limestone block was found. This was taken to Felsőörs, to the stone repository of the Dezső Laczkó Museum of Veszprém.

³⁹ Veszprémi Laczkó Dezső Múzeum, Régészeti Adattár, no. 8807. Archaeological report by Dr Ákos Kiss.

⁴⁰ Veszprémi Laczkó Dezső Múzeum, Régészeti Adattár, no. 15810 (8805). Archaeological report Sylvia Palágy.

⁴¹ Veszprémi Laczkó Dezső Múzeum, Régészeti Adattár, no. 18861–18897 and 18861–18899. Arch. Report of Pál Rainer.

The most recent finds

At the beginning of the 1990s during a walk-around, two smaller fragments were found at a house in Zirc. These were taken to the Archaeological Institute of the Eötvös Loránd University of Science. As promised, these should find their way into the stone repository of Zirc when it is established. During the last year these were returned to Zirc and placed into the stone storage room of the monastery.

In 1995 on the first floor of the Abbey building, which was built prior to 1735, during alterations, chiselled stones from the medieval monastery were found.

In 1996 we opened a door into the cloister at the south-west corner of the present Abbey church. Several carved stone pieces were found during the breaking up of the wall. In the Baroque wall carved stones were embedded in mortar between two brick walls. At the opened up base of the church wall to about a 70 cm height we found chiselled stones and ashlar that were turned inward. Most important among the finds are: a fragment of the pier abacus of the medieval church, stringcourse and arches.

In the summer of 2004 in the area of the arboratum, about 35 metres east-south/east of the eastern wing of the medieval monastery, during the laying of sewerage pipes a fragment of the outer crocket stringcourse was found. Based on the place and form of the discovery, it is probable that it was a part of the south façade of the eastern wing of the monastery. This construction piece weighed several hundred kilograms. Furthermore, the building layer from the 12–13th century and debris from the work of chiselling was also found.

Early in September 2005 town residents reported to the Abbey as well as to the Cultural Heritage Protection Office that some 40–50 pieces of chiselled stone were found during demolition of a building⁴² that stood at the inner corner of the bend of the main road No. 82 heading

⁴² This building is presumed to be the mill about which Konstantin Horváth writes at the place marked below (“in 1728 below the ruins of the old monastery”) and the hand-written map of Zirc of 1766 also marks it. – Horváth Konstantin O. Cist., op. cit., 169–172. – The map can be found in the Veszprém Megyei Levéltár VeML T no. 112.



Fig. 6. The fragments of the rose window found in September 2005: a) the hub of the rose window b) the outer frame of the window

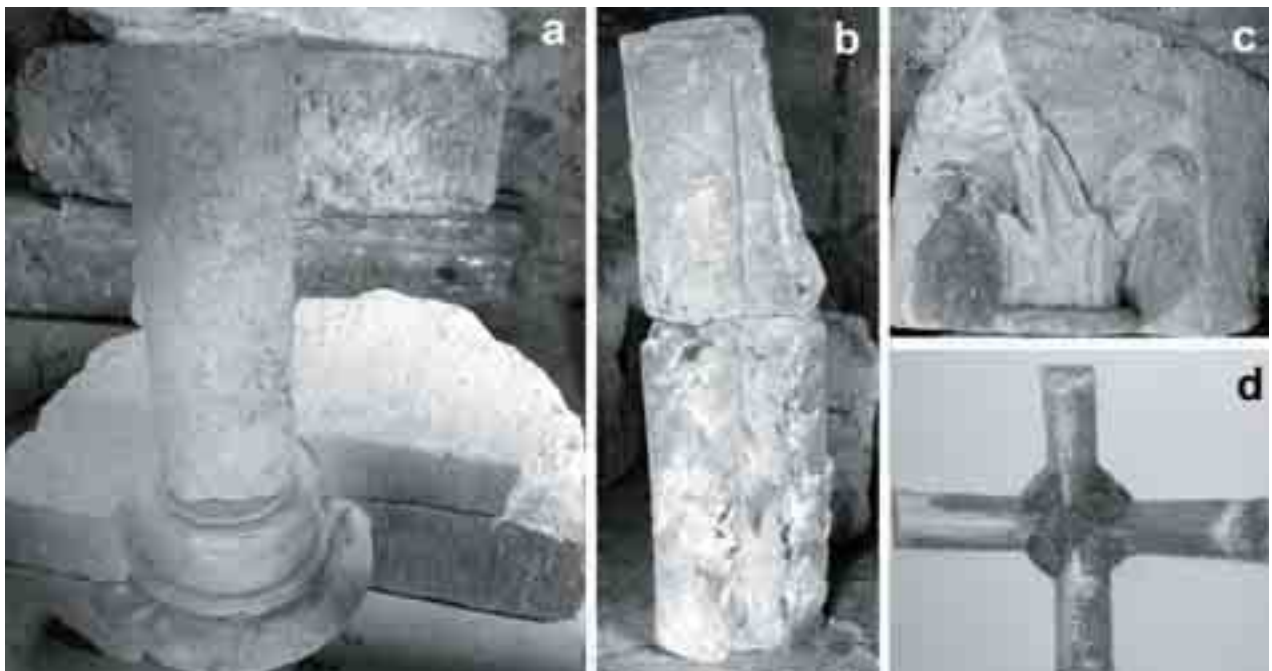


Fig. 7. The stone fragments found in September 2005: a) column ring, b) rib vault, c) column capital, d) vault boss built into the wall of the cloister of the 18th Baroque Abbey

to Győr, and which once belonged to the Abbey, built by it around 1728 and 1766 and which was reconstructed several times. The investor had not informed the authorities⁴³! The salvaging of the finds was and is being carried out by the Archaeological Control, Veszprém, of the Cultural Heritage

Protection Office⁴⁴. The chiselled stones found originate from the medieval abbey church, and were placed into the walls of the Baroque building during the beginning and the middle of the 18th century. The cataloguing of the find and their architectural interpretation are expected later, only the

⁴³ The renovators of the abbey church noticed the chiselled stones, they brought these to the attention of the abbey and they in turn informed the KÖH. Had the renovators not done this, perhaps these precious stones might have become buried forever.

⁴⁴ Excavations are also taking place now not far from the building, around it and inside the building geophysical survey is being done, because on the basis of the information gained from Konstantin Horváth there is doubt that the building was erected on the spot “where hundreds of years earlier (that is in the Middle Ages) a mill” stood.

most important pieces have been assessed to date. The most significant fragments found are the outer frame and hub (boss) of a wheel window about 6 metres in diameter, to which the spokes had joined. I assume this is the rose window mentioned in 1699 by Abraham Wabrzig in his report; of which about 1729 the returned monks write; and about which the Abbey's *Historia domus* speaks⁴⁵.

⁴⁵ The writer of the diary in 1738 on the demolition of the

Some further important fragments: two crocket capitals, several fragments of rib vault, corner column ring, fragment of the outer crocket stringcourse.

rose window of the eastern façade commented: "parts of it could not be used for any building whatever". That is why it was rebuilt many times, in the Baroque era, for the last time in 1766. (The round cut stones are difficult to use in building. Those pieces found had been truncated and bricks supplemented to be able to fit them into the wall.)

The reconstruction of the medieval Abbey church of Zirc

The computerized reconstruction of the medieval abbey, primarily the church, was raised in 2003, following the tidying up of the excavation area. Its implementation started in 2004 with the assistance of Csaba Benkő a graphic architect and visual artist. It was based on the reconstruction plans of Tibor Hümpfner, with small adjustments that were made necessary by the finds discovered later. These same technical drawings of Hümpfner were used to start the shaping of the interior of the church. Thereafter the interior was developed by the help of analogues, among which Orval played an important part, because of the preserved pier at Zirc, the closeness of the time of building, and the great similarity due to their affiliation. We also noted the above mentioned main altar picture of Olaszfalu to help us imagine, with the use of analogues, the bays of the transept and the sanctuary. Aided by these details the church could be reconstructed, apart from the east and west façade.

The exceedingly significant finds that surfaced in September 2005 were a great help in the reconstruction. This happened when two important pieces of the rose window were found, so it was possible to construct the window, although the missing parts could be replaced only by analogues. Those fragments found at Zirc originate in the eastern outer wall of the sanctuary, according

to the sources quoted. It is true that outer walls with such a large rose window were not a common practice in Cistercian building, at the same time we can find examples at the Italian San Galgano and Arabona Cistercian abbey churches⁴⁶ built in almost an identical period. Similar wheel windows, albeit in the western façade, can be found not far from Arabona, also in Italy, at Fossanova and Valvisciolo abbey churches, built at the turn of the 12–13th centuries. A wheel window, almost identical to that at Arabona, can be found in northern Italy at Vercell, in the Sant Andrea Benedictine abbey church⁴⁷, in the outer wall of the sanctuary as well as in the western façade.

However, it is not necessary to travel to Italy for an analogue, as one can be found 40 kms from Zirc at a Benedictine abbey church with a straight outer wall

⁴⁶ San Galgano of Casamari was founded in 1201. Its church was consecrated in around 1218. The rose window mentioned does not have its inner segments any more. Arabona was founded in 1209 from Tre Fontane. In the rose window the spokes structure can be seen today.

⁴⁷ Cardinal Guala Bicchieri built it between 1219 and 1227. In the abbey and equally in the church French Burgundy influence shows. In some parts Cistercian influence can also be found.

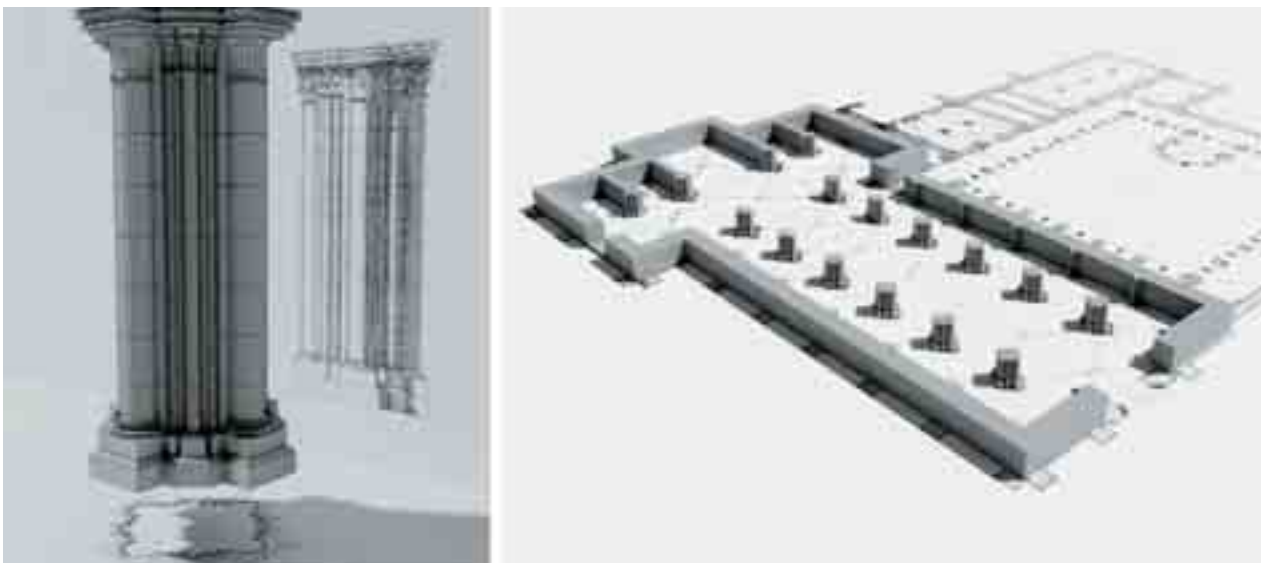


Fig. 8. The computerized reconstruction of the medieval Abbey church

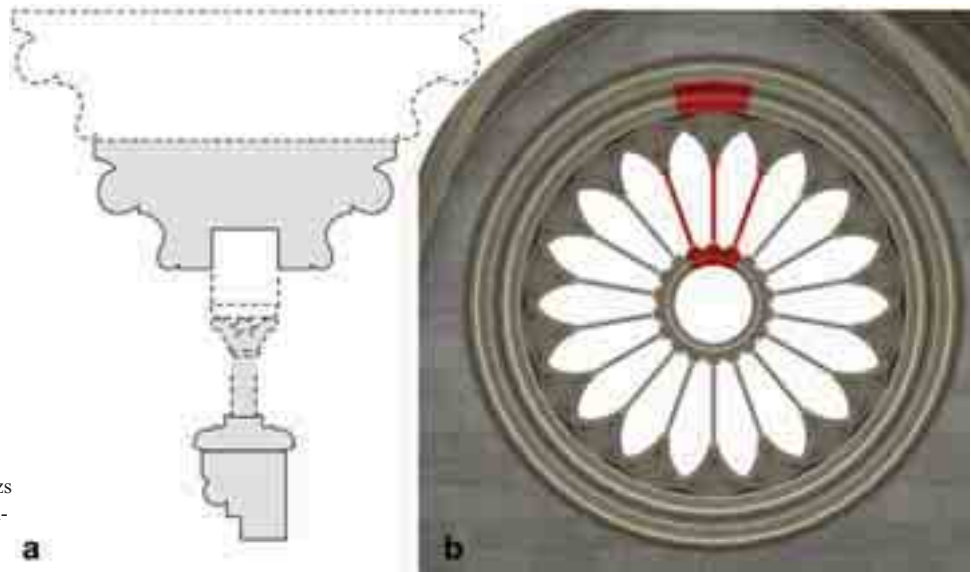


Fig. 9. Reconstruction of the wheel window: a) profile of the wheel window (the work of Balázs Bodó), b) the computerized reconstruction of the wheel window (the work of Csaba Benkő)



Fig. 10. Rose windows similar in proportions and execution to that in the outer wall of the sanctuary at Zirc: a) Arabona, b) Pannonhalma (photo: Arabona – Leonardo Mazzaschi, 2004; Pannonhalma – Gábor Hegyi [in:] *Katolikus templomok Magyarországon*, Budapest, 1991. Szerk. Erzsébet Déri. 76)

and a large rose window with three simple windows under it – maybe due to Cistercian influence. The analogue is Pannonhalma. The large circular window of the sanctuary is about 4 metres in diameter, and this, in relation to the width of the sanctuary, is almost identical⁴⁸ with the rose window of Zirc, looking at its proportions. It is true that at Pannonhalma in this circular window the spokes are no longer there, but in 1995 during the renovation of the façade, in the outer rim of the circular window a groove was discovered⁴⁹

required for the insertion of tracery. Thus it is not unimaginable to find such a large rose window on the façade of the sanctuary at Zirc.

In the reconstruction of the church there are further details that can be imagined only conditionally, on the basis of analogues, for example the western façade is merely guesswork because no relic whatever has remained of it. We will start the reconstruction of the abbey buildings according to plans next year. When our work with the stone fragments is completed, we hope that will give us further points of reference to help in the reconstruction. At the same time there are several questions in which the entire excavation could reveal the direction. Up to date information is available at <http://www.ocist.hu/zircz/>.

⁴⁸ At Pannonhalma the circular window measures about 60% of the width of the sanctuary, at Zirc 65–70% (taking into account the currently missing sections).

⁴⁹ M. Sacer. I. Edit. I. Takács. Pannonhalma, 1996, p. 234–235, 126. note.



Fig. 11. Reconstruction of the medieval Abbey church; the nave



Fig. 12. Reconstruction of the outside of the medieval Abbey church; N-E view

Acknowledgement

I wish to express my gratitude and thanks before anything else to Fr Levente Hervay who led me to the love of our medieval monastery and who assisted in the present work several times. I would like to thank Balázs Bodó and Gergely Buzás, archaeologists, for their honest and quick assistance. They appraised the more significant stone fragments that were found in September 2005 and

made the technical drawings to be inserted in the computerized reconstruction. They continue to provide useful information even today. Last but not least I thank Csaba Benkő, graphic architect, for the reconstruction of the medieval abbey church, which task demanded a great deal of work, challenges, and study of the history of art.

Appendix

Letter of Abbot Abraham Wabrzig dated 17th October 1699. Heinrich Grüger: *Der Beginn der Union von Heinrichau und Zirc (1701–1752)* Analecta Cisterciensia. 38 (1982) p. 68. (Original: Breslau/Wrocław Egyházmegyei Levéltár V-B-6c)

Zircium monasterium magna ex parte dirutum. Ecclesia est extructa ex meris lapidibus scissis; arcus, fenestrae, columnae item formatae ex lapidibus politis adhuc illaesis. Formam habet crucis ad modum ecclesiae Henrichoviensis, unico excepto, quod navicula seu pars presbyterii sit quidem tam lata, non autem tam longa sicut Henrichovii, nec penes presbyterium sint laterales ambitus, ut circumiri possit, sed ex utraque parte presbyterii duo sunt contigua sat ampla sacella, muro interposito, pro nunc omnia quatuor adhuc fornicata. Ad modum denique ecclesiae Raudensis est Zircensis, nimirum posterior ecclesia post Chorum, ut Henrichovii habet tales laterales ambitus et tam altos arcus; anterior autem pars penes majus altare nullos laterales ambitus habet, et sicut Raudae penes presbyterium ex qualibet est unum, sic Zircii sint duo contigua sacella, interposito muro, v. g. ubi Henrichovii sacristia actualis aut repositorium est unum et alterum ubi est ambitus sacellum versus S. Josephi et eodem modo sunt in altera parte. – Extant praenominatae ecclesiae muri medii ecclesiae supra columnas exstructi et laterales usque sursum ad tectum, et quamvis tectum nullum sit, posset sine magna difficultate superponi tectum, cum murus nulla indigeat elevatione, cum adhuc ejusdem altitudinis sit, cuius fuit, tum ut tecta Ecclesia. Integri sunt enim muri, sine omni concussionem lapidum politorum; ex parte altaris majoris usque ad tertium arcum inclusive posterioris ecclesiae, v. g. usque nostrae Ecclesiae ad arcum scamni D. Cancellarii inclusive, fenestrae omnes sunt in forma fenestrarum novarum Ecclesiae Henrichoviensis, quae in Ecclesia inferius e regione D. Cancellarii extructae sunt, et post majus altare est ingens et pulchra fenestra integrorum lapidum extructorum. Sacristia est pulchra, lata et longa, cujus muri adhuc integri extant. Dormitorii laterales et intermedii muri in tractu inferiori, ubi est nostrum capitulum, omnes sunt adhuc integri; superior tamen pars, hoc est dormitorium, media ex parte, cum medietate fenestrarum cellarum est diruta; et in medietate altera dormitorii adhuc sunt fenestrae lapide polito cinctae et modestissime formatae integrae, collapsis tamen omnibus fornicibus, etiam omnium ambituum, quod fornicatae fuerint. Refectorii muri omnes ac frontispicia etiam adhuc integri sunt, collapsis tamen fornicibus. Longitudo sacristiae, dormitorii et refectorii, quae ad meridiem versus, ut Henrichovii, sunt extructa, tanta est, ut Henrichovii ab Ecclesia usque ad Refectorium inclusive.

Specifica enumeratio possessionum et desertorum praediorum abbatiae B.M.V. de Zirc appertinentum Zirc. 65-67. c. 1729, Zirci Apátság Újkönyvtára.

[Zircz – p. 65.] *Remanserunt nihilominus permagnicae olim Basilicae rudera altissima usque hodie admiranda cum uno tractu (aq?) in ruderibus desolati monasterii. Litterae fundationales abbatiae de Zircz una fere cum omnibus documentis antiquis sunt depeditae, quae quidem si fonte extarent in Archivo Comerae Regiae Posoniensis diligenter sollicitatae sunt, sed non sunt repertae. ... [Annotationes – p. 66.] N. 1^o Fuerunt olim in Zircz duae ecclesiae: una quidem solemnior monasteriensis, altera vero [p. 67.] oppidana, penes quam prouti extruderibus colligere licet, in uno contiguo erat domus parochialis. De patronis divis harum ecclesiarum hic et nunc nihil constat. Refert dilaudatus historicus R. P. Martin Szentiavny, Soc. Jesu antiquibus in Zircz existisse miraculosam imaginem, quo devenerit norunt superi. Duo secella in ecclesia monasteriensi sunt purgata, et scandolis tecta, ubi sub caelo missae celebrari solent; antequam Zircii pagus fuisset, ibi noctarunt patres nostri, atque loco cantus fratrum in choro psallentium audiverunt in vicinitate, lupos intonantes et ejulantes. Reperiuntur in ecclesia majori et monasterio hinc inde multae cavaturae, ubi subulci ac alii mammonae nequam filii thesauros quaesiverunt, qui jactibus lapidarum per majorem fenestram rotundam in praesbyterio post dirutum altare atque etiam compartitione spirituum ac religiosorum cucullatorum frequenter intimidati, et a laboribus abacti sunt.*

Historia domus. p. 43. (1738), Zirci Apátság Újkönyvtára.

Anno 1738. *Eodem anno audieris subinde famam et per totam Pannoniam divulgatum rumorem de ruderibus antiquis tam monasterii, quamque et vel maxime de ecclesia Zircii existentibus, vere uti et ego vidi, non opus fuisse simplex, sed vere regium, ast, quod placuit antiquis, recentibus non assidet; quamquam opus regium omnino fuerat, tamen ob iniurias tempestatum, longitudinem temporis et invasiones aëris, et vel maxime ob furorem incendii hostilis ita desolatum est monasterium et templum, ut non regio, sed mendicabulo hinc inde lacero aequiparatum fuerat. Cum igitur iam hoc tempore, quo haec insero, novum monasterium ex antiquo extructum sit, etiam eadem mens consuluit, ut ex antiquis ruderibus ecclesiae, ecclesia formaretur nova, uti videbis ex praeteritis scriptis, lapidem fundamentalem positum esse, adeoque una pars post alteram exstantium defacto ruderum diruta est; ultima vero et quidem maxime miranda frontispicii anno supraposito 19 Decembris per artificium pyrabolarum pulverum dejecta est, in quo frontispicio fenestra apparebat integra et artificiosissima, quae tamen per aëris injuriam multum infestata, partes ejus pro nullo aedificio applicari potuerunt.*

Translated by Anna Varga