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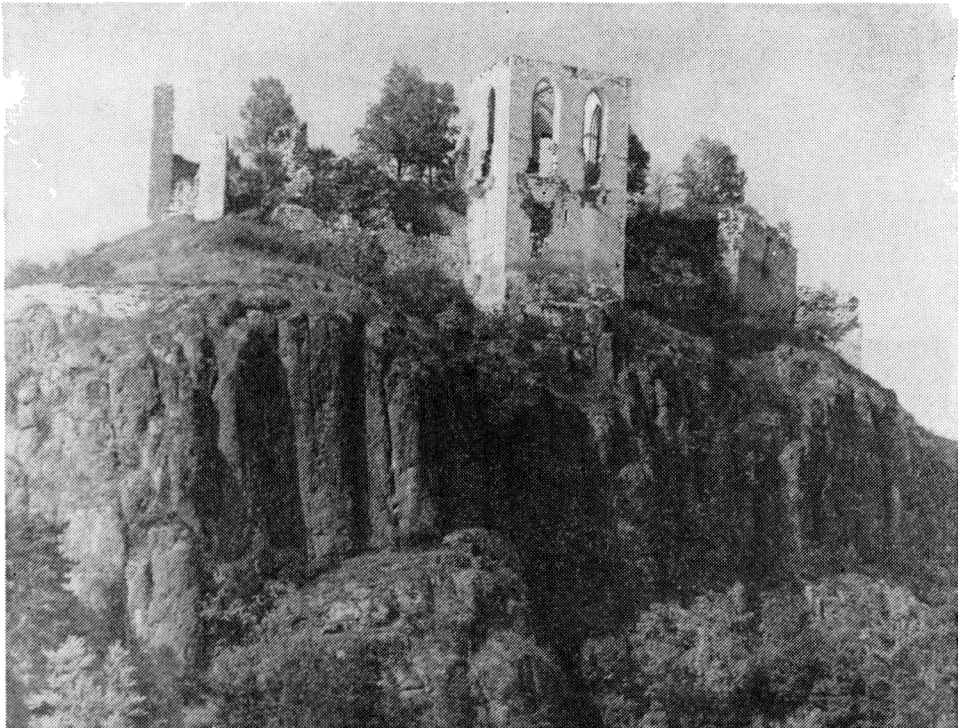
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The fortress of Füzér

ZOLTÁN SIMON

The ruins of the fortress of Füzér are sited in the north-western part of Hungary, at the border of a large basin surrounded by the Zemplén mountains, on the top of a steep rock mass nearly 500 metre above sea level. These remains distinguish themselves not only by their beautiful situation, they belong moreover to the most remarkable relics of the country with a view to history, arts and archeology as well.

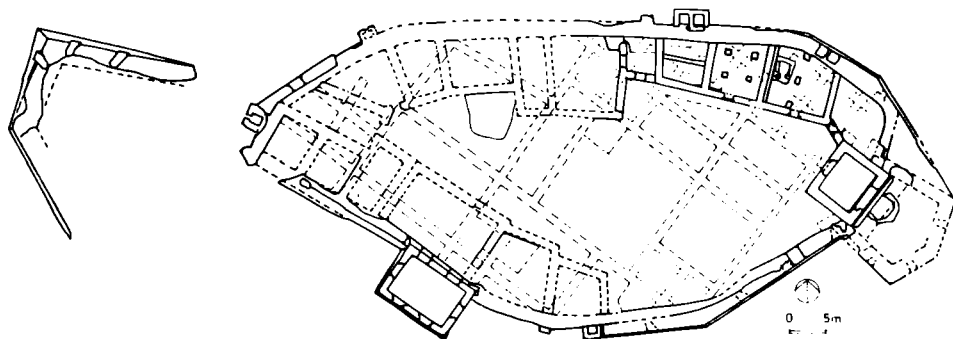
Formerly most of Hungary's feudal private fortresses were believed to have been built after the Tatar invasion of the years 1241—1242, owing to its negative experiences. Today, however, we already know, that the problem is far more complex. The private fortresses were built mostly in consequence of social and economical necessities acting already since the early 13th century, while the experiences of the Tatar invasion merely strengthened their impact on fortification works.¹ One of the main preconditions of the construction of private fortresses was the steadily increasing proportion of feudal private



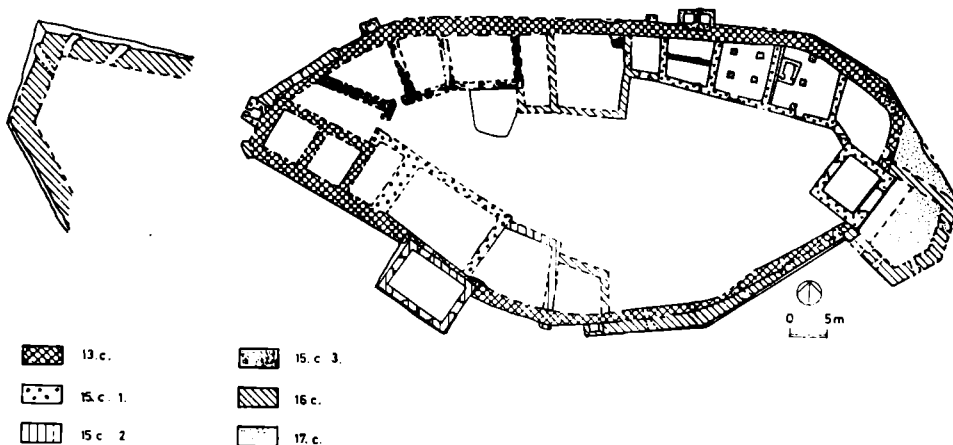
1. The fortress from South.

estates as compared with royal (ecclesiastical) and clannish domains. The disintegration of clanship and the strengthening of feudal private property at the expense of crown lands can be demonstrated in Hungarian history precisely since the beginning of the 13th century. Without being involved in the pertinent economical and social details — this being not the task of the present paper —, we should like to point out, that the preconditions required for the construction of private fortresses were existing in Hungary already before 1241—42. Although most of the documents mentioning such fortifications are dated from the years following the Tatar invasion, it may be supposed that more fortresses were built before 1241—42 than is actually believed.

Füzér is one of the few forts, where this can be clearly documented.² Although the first document actually mentioning the fortress is dated from 1264, another charter dated from 1270 refers also to earlier events. Here it can be read, that the fort of Füzér was purchased by King Andrew II from a certain Andronicus of the "Komplot" clan. In reality, the seller was most probably a member of the mighty clan Aba ruling in this region in the Arpadian age, while the deal was concluded before 1235 (when King Andrew II died). We thus have every reason to believe that the builder and first owner of the fortress of Füzér may be found among the members of the Aba clan.



2. Ground-plan of the excavations.

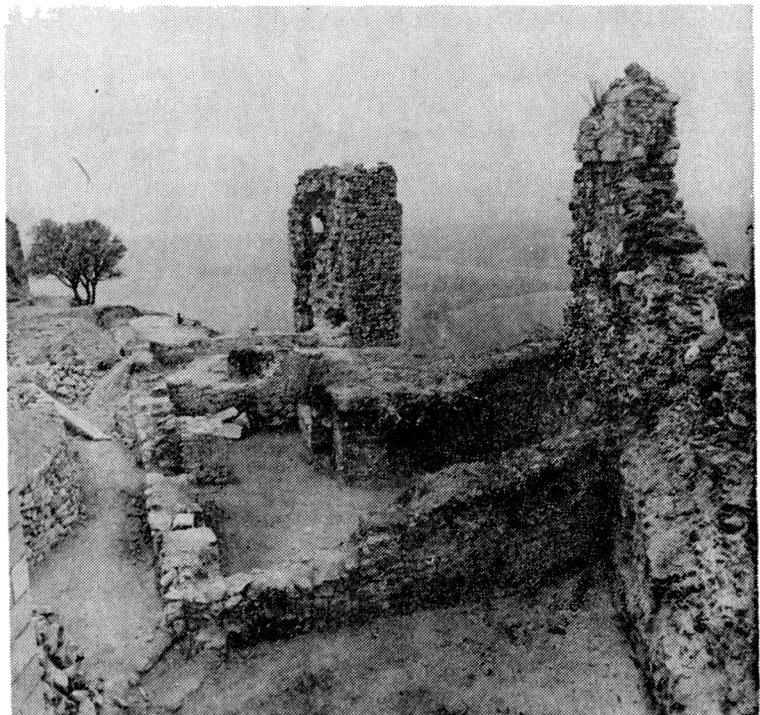


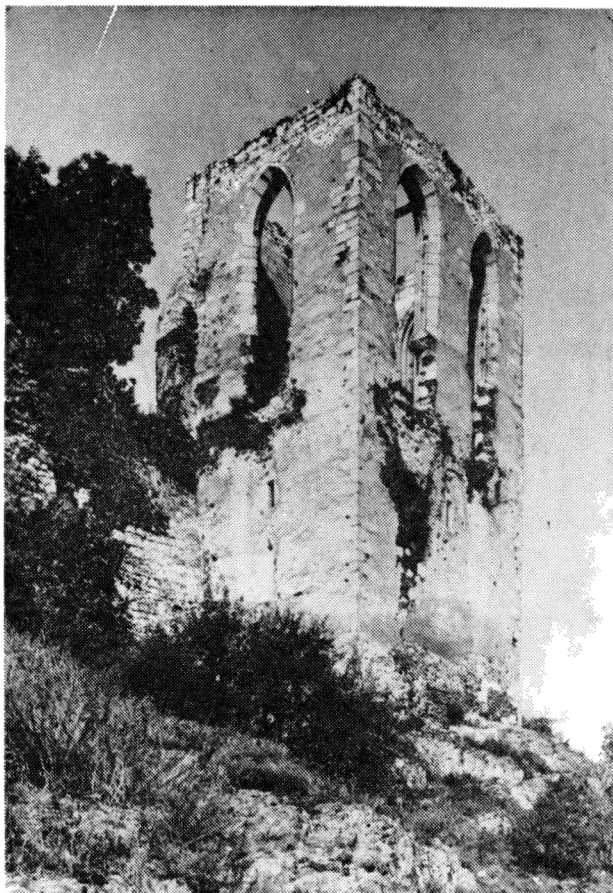
3. Ground-plan with periods of buildings.

4. The gate tower.



5. The
North eastern
side-wing under



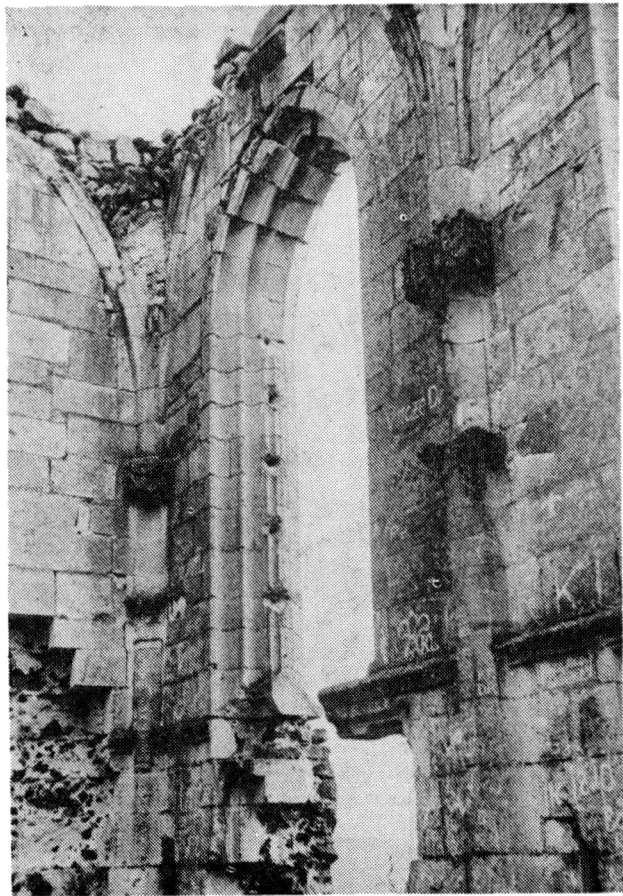


6. The chapel from South-west

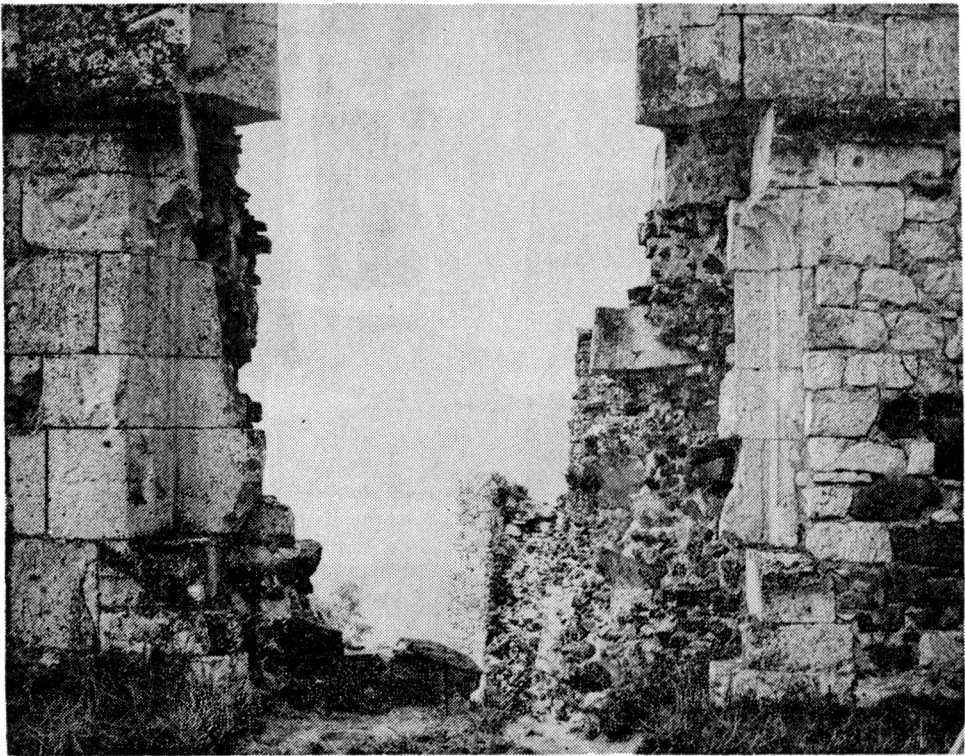
Belonging now to the crown lands, the fortress got into the focus of internal conflicts within the House of Árpád. King Béla IV has given it about 1262—1263 to his daughter Anna, but in 1264, in the course of an armed feud between the King and his son, Prince Stephen, took it by force from his sister, who remained faithful to her father. The King tried in vain to recapture the fortress: a loyal subject of the prince, Michael of the Rosd clan, defended it successfully. When the prince succeeded his father on the throne under the name of Stephen V, he bestowed in return the fortress and the vast domain of Füzér to Michael and his brother Demetrius.

However, after 1285 the fate of the two brothers and their descendants is wrapped in mystery. With the downfall of royal authority, the rising oligarch, Amadeus of the Aba clan, gets hold of the region. Seizing in one way or another every fortification of the environs, Amadeus certainly did not forget Füzér either, and although we have no informations at all in this respect, we may suppose with good reason, that he actually did take possession of the fortress, since in the sources of the first half of the 14th century all the fortifications, including Füzér, confiscated after 1312 from the sons of Amadeus, are mentioned as royal property. The fortress remained in royal hands until the extinction of the Angevins. Its fate altered in 1389, when Sigismund of Luxemburg donated it to the Perényi family.

7. The South-eastern corner of the chapel.



Though belonging to the lesser nobility, some members of this family occupied just in those times high dignities and most important constructions in Füzér are attached to its name. The extension in the 15th century served mainly representative aims, the still extant details are of an outstanding artistic level. This is all the more remarkable since — as far as we know — the hardly accessible fortress did never figure as a residence of the Perényis. Instead, they resided in the lowlands or in castles of easier access such as Terebes/Trebišov, later Siklós and finally Sárospatak. There are certain references indicating that Füzér, as the most inaccessible fort of the family, served mainly as treasurehouse. It may be cited as a good instance, that for the nuptials of Peter Perényi in 1522 in the fortress of Siklós the precious table sets (crowned cups, large amphoras, toilet set from Ragusa etc.) were transported over a distance of more than 500 km from Füzér to Siklós (South-west Hungary).³ This is equally indicated by a famous event when after the defeat at Mohács (1526) John Szapolyai was crowned king, Peter Perényi, than keeper of the crown, did not return the Holy Crown to the castle of Visegrád where it was usually kept, but stowed it away to the remote fortress of Füzér, where he kept it hiding, perhaps preparing himself for his own coronation.



6. Remains of a niche on the western side of the chapel.

After the simultaneous election of two kings (Ferdinand of Hapsburg, John Szapolyai) Peter Perényi frequently changed his allegiance and therefore his properties were anything but secure. He fortified his strongholds, including Füzér which, though practically invincible in case of a traditional siege, was nevertheless vulnerable by firearms. This second major development, started about the middle of the 16th century and lasting until its end, was already basically of defensive character.

The decline of the fortress began with the extinction of the Perényi family (1567). Although the new proprietors, the Báthoris, were also most powerful landlords, Füzér was not equally important for them any more. Its function as treasure-house was about to cease and its economical importance also decreased with the extension of farming husbandry. The centre of the domain was transferred to a farmstead built in the village below the fortress and to the manorhouse made of wood. Since, apart from some minor raids, the Turkish troops did not menace the region, the military importance of the fortress was also not considerable.

When the branch of the Báthoris possessing Füzér died out in 1603, the new proprietors, whose estates were mostly sited far away from Füzér, at the western range of Transdanubia, did not care much about their goods here. From the middle of the 17th century on, they mortgaged in succession the former appurtenances of the fortress and finally the stronghold itself. The latter was pawned in 1628 by Ferenc Bónis. Since both Ferenc Nádasdi and

Bónis got entangled in the antiHapsburg conspiracy schemed by the palatine Wesselényi, their properties were confiscated in 1670 and they themselves put to death in 1671. From the period of the Nádasdi-Bónis ownership there are left five inventories, the first from 1620, the last from 1670.⁴ The detailed investories, comprising also the farm buildings and the wooden manorhouse below the fortress, present us the image of a badly neglected edifice on the brink of ruin. In those times the fortress was used practically only as a dungeon and a granary, with a merely symbolic garrison. With help of the inventories most of the contemporary premises and their functions could be identified.



9. Double niches for sculptures with canopies and consols.

After the confiscation Füzér was managed by the Treasury which, if possible, cared still less about the condition and the custody of the fort. So it could occur that it was pillaged by villagers of the surroundings in 1673. The preservation of the stronghold had no sense for the Treasury, nor was it of any strategic importance for the Court. It was much rather to be feared that it might become a basis of an antiHapsburg movement. Thus, in 1676 the fortress was made unusable by the Imperial soldiery and henceforth the remains fell rapidly into decay. Archeological excavations were started in 1977 under the leadership of István Feld and Juan Cabello, but could be continued only in 1992.⁵ As a consequence the research work is on numerous points still in its initial stage and its results are often uncertain. Nevertheless, we have already enough informations to outline the architectural history of the fortress and to give a foretaste of the finds from different ages.⁶

In the 13th century the form of the fortress was the most simple. The more or less flat, though cleft surface on the rocky peak (cca 40×70 m) was surrounded by a stone wall (1,5 m thick, 5–6 m high), the groundplan being determined by the natural features of the terrain. The building material for the walls was obtained from the rocks of the mountain. The narrow entrance to be used only by pedestrians opened at the eastern part of the wall, at the top of the stairs carved into the rock. The living-house of the first period stood in the south-western part of the enclosed area. Since only its bipartite cellar level remained up to now, the actual number of floors is unknown. According to the inventories of the 17th century there was no tower-like building here, so it is doubtful, whether we may at all reckon with a tower in the previous centuries. The cistern is also from the first period. We may also reckon with wooden houses, though their traces could not be yet identified by now.

Due to the thick mass of fallen masonry that still covers the ruins, the exploration could reach but rarely the layers of the 13th century. Most of the earliest finds consists of current ceramics made of reddish brown or brownish grey clay on the hand-wheel and decorated with wavy or spirel lines. The motifs agree with the ceramics classified as belonging to the Arpadian age, but the characteristic material refers to a local sphere that is not yet sufficiently known.⁷

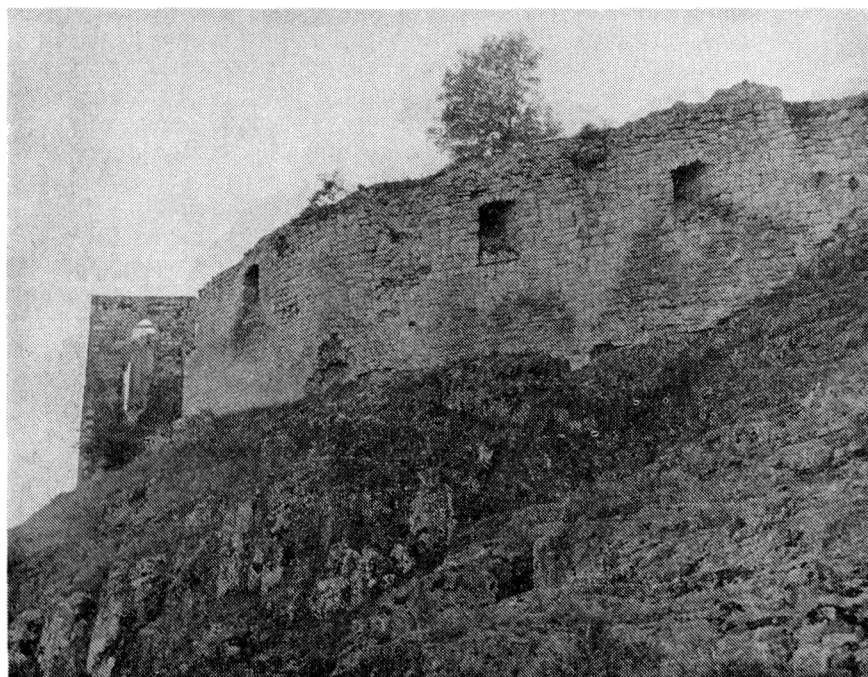
As shown by research results obtained so far, the form of the fortress remained unchanged until the end of the Arpadian age. It is rather difficult to differentiate and partly to attach to the 14th century a group of ceramics dissimilar to earlier finds, that consists of finer, though still somewhat rough pottery fragments made of the same material as the aforementioned. A typical decorative motif is the parallel ribbing around the shoulders. The vessels belonging to this group have already a handle.

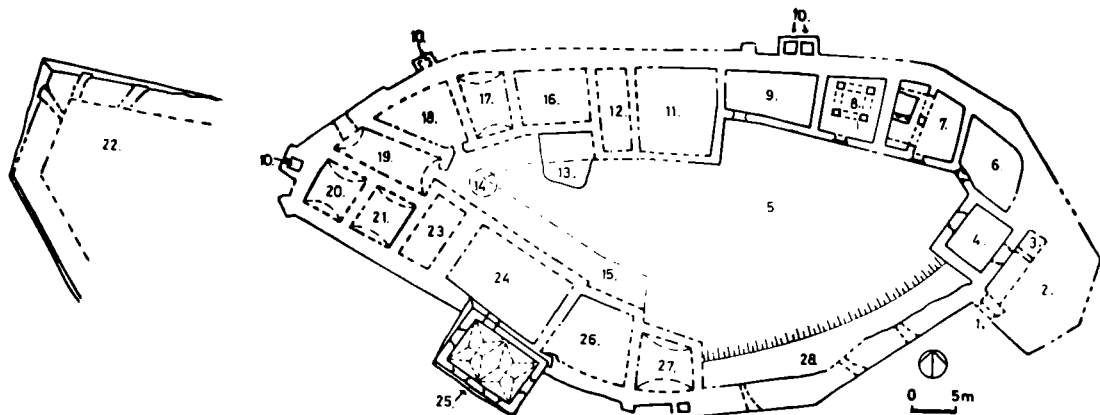
The ownership of the Perényis marks a decisive turning-point in the life of the fortress. The 15th century passed most probably with uninterrupted building activities. The gatetower to the south of the early gate is perhaps still a result of the first building period, with a square ground-plan, protruding from the wall. Unfortunately the original details were almost completely destroyed by an unfounded reconstruction in the first half of the 20th century. The doorways are unknown, the tower itself is at least two floors high. The floors were separated by a timbered ceiling. Traces of fire-place can be found in the corner of the ground-floor and the first story. When the tower was built, the former gate has been walled up. The north-eastern side-wing was equally built in the 15th century. Its remains, bearing the marks of minor



10. The gate bastion with the gate (16. century).

11. Tuff-wall with loop-holes in front of the gun-emplacment (16. century).





12. The ground-plan of the fortress in the 17. century. 1 — gate, 2 — gate-bastion, 3 — prison, 4 — gate tower, 5 — courtyard, 6 — steward's room, 7 — bakehouse, 8 — kitchen, 9 — secretary's room, 10 — lavatories, 11 — flower garden, 12 — porch, 13 — cistern, — 14 — well, 15 — wooden corridor, 16 — „large lower palace“, — 17 — „jew's room“, 18 — „rabbits' room“, 19 — „upper dining palace“, 20 — vaulted room, 21 — middle vaulted room, 22 — western bastion, 23 — small room (treasury), 24 — big palace, 25 — chapel, 26 — dining palace, 27 — „Rimay house“, 28 — emplacement for guns.

and later reconstructions, have already been fully explored in 1977. The wing, including in its original form four premises, had initially economic functions, just like in the 17th century.

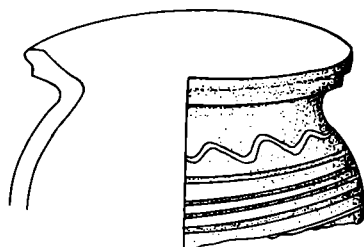
At the time being we have only a scarce knowledge about the building stages of the palatial wing, since the exploration of this site is still limited to research of ditches. It seems, that the south-eastern wing was the first to be built, followed by the north-western wing over several stages. Carved remains are still scarcely known.

The most spectacular and up to now readily explorable element was constructed towards the middle of the 15th century: the castle chapel, attached to the southern palatial wing, but leaning already against the outside of the fort wall. It rests on a foundation with cradle vault. Its floor attached to the upper walking level of the palatial wing was assigned for sacral functions. When the chapel was being built (on a rectangular ground-plan with E-W axes), an equally representative edifice (perhaps an earlier chapel nearby) was demolished, its remains can still be found in the substructure (vault ribs, archstone, etc.). Four vast lancet windows are on the upper floor. In line with the windows there is a niche with an architrave and crenellated openings (except the eastern side, where the altar was standing). The starry vault was resting on slim consoles standing in the corners and in the axis of the longitudinal sides. Under the arch-springs we may see finely worked canopies imitating a valut, decorated with fiales. The canopies are sited above the niches, where consoles supported the sculptures disappeared by now. The inside wall surface consisted of broadstones carved of tuff. A datum from 1680 concerning a picture in the chapel might lead us to the hypothesis, that the chapel was possibly consecrated to the Holy Virgin.⁸

It may be asked, however, what was the purpose of the luxurious building activities of the Perényis, when they did not use Füzér as their residence. At the time being, an exact answer to this question is still ahead. Nevertheless, it can be observed, that this was actually the general trend in Hungarian fortifications of the 15th century. In several mountain forts, worthy at best of being conserved, a tendency similar to that observed in Füzér can not be

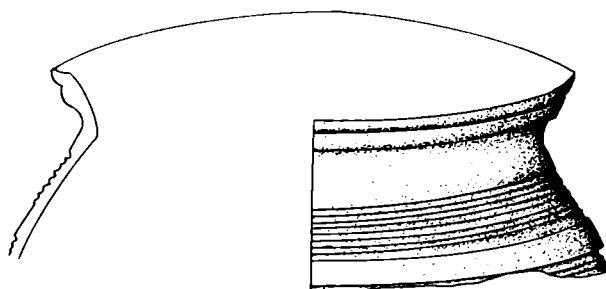
mistaken. Was it a sign of snobbish self-satisfaction of a newly created nobility? Or were these forts supposed to serve as ultimate refuge ranking with the power of their owner?⁹

Some problems of contemporary ceramics have already been treated above. There is, however, another minor group of pottery that can be dated with certainty from the 15th century. It consists of rosate and white fragments with geometrical motifs, decorated with red painting.



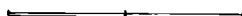
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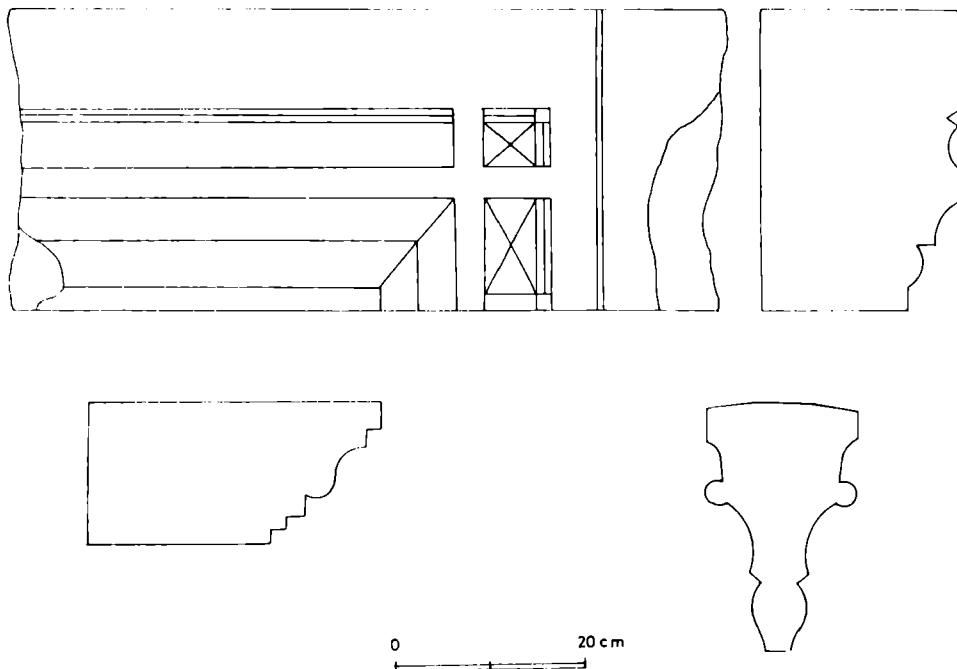
13. Medieval ceramics.

The building activity lasting presumably till the end of 15th century was followed in the 16th century by further large-scale constructions, where the defensive character was already predominating. As already mentioned, the fortress of Füzér was practically strom-proof against traditional methods, but the gate-tower was vulnerable target for heavy artillery from a neighbouring peak. The fortification of this crucial point thus became necessary. Fortification works were undertaken in other castles of Péter Perényi in the years 1534—1548 and included probably the first stage of fortifications in Füzér: the construction of the gateway bastion. In front of the south-eastern side of the gatetower a pentagonal Italian bastion was built. The entrance with drawbridge was opened at the sheltered western side. Lop-holes contributed

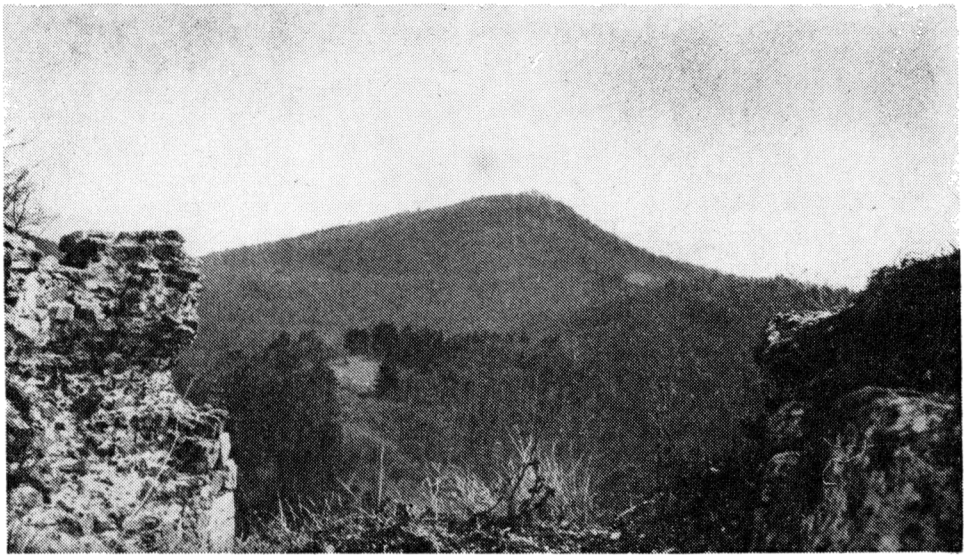
to the efficient defense of the bastion. This was the beginning of a long-lasting series of fortification works. Perhaps in the lifetime of Péter or rather of his son Gábor the up-to-date defences were built one after to other, partly with the co-operation of an Italian master, Alessandro Vedani. The south-eastern wall of the fort was overlayed with a thick tuff-wall provided with loop-holes and a gun-emplacement behind it. This was the time when the western, lower bastion was built and the palatial wings were reconstructed. From this period are dated some Renaissance sculptures discovered during the exploration. The aforesaid reconstructions include the eastern premises of the southern wing. The north-western wing was perhaps attached at the same time to the farming-wing by means of a narrow building which in turn joined the westwards prolonged north-eastern wing by means of an enclosed flower garden.

The finds of the 16th century include already fine, glazed white and red ceramics as well as glazed and unglazed tiles with figural ornaments representing often scenes and rulers of the Old Testament. The connections of these tiles point to the North and North-East, towards Terebes/Trebišov and Sáros/Velky Saris.¹⁰

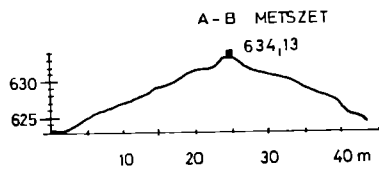
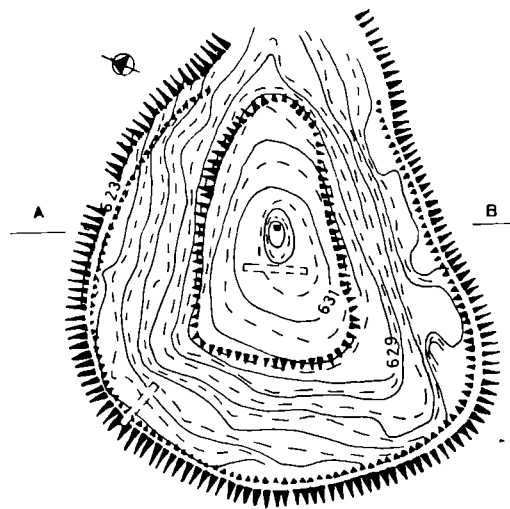
At the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century there are already very few changes to be noted. Our scope of knowledge is limited to the north-eastern wing and the surroundings of the gate. Perhaps this was the time when the internal space of the gate bastion was compactly walled off and buildings of unknown form, but specified in the aforementioned inventories were built on the upper floor. The constructions also include the filling of the empty space between the northern side of the gate-tower and the fort wall, when the battlement of the latter was also raised. The pillars of the bakehouse and of the kitchen were also built then, as well as the stove of the



14. Gothic and renaissance fragments from the fortress.



15. The view of the "Watch-hill" from the fortress.



16. The ground-plan of the fortifications of the "Watch-hill".

bakehouse, partly out of Renaissance stones. According to the inventories only a few premises of the fortress were inhabitable state in the 17th century. The bars were already missing from the chapel windows, and in the chapel itself chalk or corn was kept by turns. It should be mentioned, that on the side of the palatial wing towards the court a wooden corridor was running around. In the premises, made of red and white marble, respectively, as well as several glazed and unglazed green tile stoves were mentioned in the inventories. Some of these stoves made of tiles mostly decorated with floral ornamentation could be identified in the course of our investigations.¹¹

Another medieval object should also be mentioned, that was in close contact with the fortress. To the east of the castle hill, hardly one air kilometer afar, we may find another fort on the summit of a steep mountain of 634m high. The triangular plateau is surrounded by a simple rampart and a trench, with no traces of any walls or buildings to be detected. The rampart was built out of the stones thrown out of the trench. In addition to two neolithic vessel fragments, the finds included just a few medieval pottery, which consists of two strikingly different parts: a roughly manufactured group, apparently of the 13th century, and a finer one, to be defined as belonging to the 15th century. After all we know about the history of Füzér, it is clear that the territory where this fortification is standing, belonged from the very beginnings to the domain of Füzér and thus no other proprietor can ever be taken into consideration than that of Füzér. The peak is almost inaccessible and the descent is also the most difficult, so it cannot have functioned as a siege-fortress either. However, there is an excellent outlook from the peak even on areas that cannot be sighted from the fortress of Füzér. So the object is possibly nothing else than fortified observation post, used causally in turbulent times by the defenders of the fortress in order to keep an eye on more distant surroundings. The casual use would explain the missing traces of solid buildings as well as the different ages of the find. Another detail confirming this theory: up to now the peak is surnamed by the villagers "Órhegy", i.e. Watch-hill.¹²

Annotations

- 1 A detailed treatment of the problem can be found in the volume *Castrum Bene* 1989. *Várak a 13. században. A magyar várépítés fénykora* (Fort in the 13th century. The golden age of fortifications in Hungary), Gyöngyös, 1990. (Ed.: László Horváth), with special regard to the introductory paper by István Feld: *A 13. századi várak az eddigi kutatásokban* (Forts of the 13th century in research works until now). Op. cit. 8—21.
- 2 The sources of historical data concerning the fortress are specified in a publication describing the explorations of 1977: István Feld—Juan Cabello: *A füzéri vár* (The fortress of Füzér), Miskolc, 1980. In the following, a press-mark of the source of the historical data will therefore be given only, if they are not included in the above-cited work.
- 3 Hungarian National Archives, Collection from before Mohács, Dl. 84148.
- 4 The full text of the inventories from 1620, 1644, 1665 and 1668 can be found in: István Feld—Juan Cabello: *A füzéri vár*. Miskolc, 1980. 106—144. Archival press-mark of the inventory from 1670 unpublished so far: Hungarian National Archives, *Urbaria et conscriptiones*. Fasc. 161.nr.1.
- 5 The present paper relies in several items on the results of their work. The author wishes hereby to thank them for their assistance and support.
- 6 The research work in the years 1992—1993 was of a smaller scale than that of 1977. Its results represented a progress mainly in a more accurate knowledge on the ground-plan as well as in periodization. At the same time, the premises mentioned in the inventories could be more exactly localized. As far as the finds were concerned, the observations made in 1977 could be confirmed.

- 7 The pottery has been already published earlier: Juan Cabello—István Feld: Jelentés a füzéri vár 1977. évi kutatásáról [Report on the researches in the fortress of Füzér in 1977]. *Archeológiai Értesítő* 107. Budapest, 1980. 214—225., and partly in: István Feld—Juan Cabello: A füzéri vár, Miskolc, 1980.
- 8 Hungarian National Archives, *Urbaria et conscriptiones*. Fasc. 161.nr.1.
- 9 István Feld: A 15. századi castrum, mint kutatási probléma [The castrum of the 15th century, as a problem of research]. In: *Castrum Bene* 2/1990. Ed.: Juan Cabello, Budapest, 1992. 13—29.
- 10 Medieval stove tiles in Slovakia. Exhibition in the Archeological Museum of Bratislava, Michal Slivka—Adrian Vallašek: *Hrady a hrádky na východním Slovensku*. Košice, 1991. 69, 223—227.
- 11 Elaboration of the stove tiles found within the research work of 1977: Anna Gyuricza: *Reneszánsz kályhacsempék Északkelet-Magyarországon* [Renaissance stove tiles in North-Eastern Hungary]. Miskolc, 1992.
- 12 Detailed description of the object: Zoltán Simon: *Ismeretlen erődítés a füzéri Órhegyen* [An unknown fort on the Watch-hill of Füzér]. In: *Műemlékvédelmi Szemle*, 1992/2, 25—31.

