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REGISTRATION OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE OF BUDAPEST

The Archaeological Archives

In this article I would like to talk about the development of the tasks performed by the Archaeological Archives and about the change in our work from the very beginning till nowadays. First of all, for a better understanding I would like to introduce the history of the Budapest History Museum in a few words.

In 1887, the predecessor in title of the Budapest History Museum, the Museum of the Capital was established (although it took a few years to begin its real activity) with the first and most important aim to collect and to care for the finds of the almost 100 year Obuda excavations. The second most important aim of the foundation was to collect the relics from all the historical periods of the Capital. Later, the same aims were followed during the organization of the collections and the departments. The director, Balint Kuzsinszky used the structure of the History Museum of Vienna as a model for the first organization structure of the institute.¹ Kuzsinszky realized that the dispersion of the relics of Aquincum - these were located in the Hungarian National Museum - made their study difficult and therefore he urged the earliest possible incorporation of the finds. In 1889 the first volume of the Antiquities of Budapest (Budapest Regisegei in Hungarian) was published in order to promote publications on the results of excavations.² This series is still the primary forum of publications related to excavations held all around the Capital. From 1896 he urged to collect both the pieces from different archaeological periods and the Roman finds found in Obuda in one place.³

From the last quarter of the 19th century, the Budapest History Museum and its predecessors carried out research into the archaeological heritage of Budapest, with the help of the city authority in power. Among archaeological researches started during the 19th century and in the early 20th century, before World War II, in many sites a great number of excavations were carried out on the basis of the previous results like for example: Aquincum, Taban - Debaghane, Buda - the medieval Szentpetermartir suburb.

In the 1940s excavations were continued in several parts of the city, particularly at well-known and often visited sites. In this period, an excavation of the prehistoric settlement at the Danube bank in Bekasmegyér was started with the leadership of the director, Lajos Nagy. This excavation was intensively continued after World War II and is going on recently.⁴ In 1885 the Budapest City Council ordered that all the constructions and earthworks done with permission in the 3rd district of Budapest (Obuda) should have been reported to the Archaeological Special Committee. In 1897 Kuzsinszky asked the council of the city to extend this decree to the whole area of the capital and to the dredging of the Danube, and according to him the so-called „antiques" found in the above mentioned areas should have been located in the Museum of the Capital.⁵ The request was not reasonless, in the Archaeological Archives and of course in the inventories of the archaeological departments we can find data about finds that were found

¹ VEGH 2003, 7.

² VEGH 2003, 20.

³ VEGH 2003, 22.

⁴ VEGH 2003, 58.

⁵ VEGH 2003, 23.

during the dredging of the Danube.⁶ Due to researches and the topographical data, authorities in 1944 ordered to take the Obuda ruins into consideration when making regulation plans. Moreover it was suggested that a land register should have been kept on the excavated ruins in order to take care of them when making regulation plans and considering constructions on building sites.⁷ This type of registration was a really modern idea, but in the shadow of World War II it could not be realized, only later. As a consequence of this process, in the mid-1950s authorities provided archaeological protection on recognized and important archaeological sites and started their registration, for example the Roman fort of Campona in the South part of Buda. Beyond this, an organizational unit established in 1958 (at first it was called Rescue and Data Collection Group, later named as Central Archives) began to collect data about the recognized archaeological sites known from scientific publications and to gather together archaeological documentations, as well as to register them. This unit existed until 1960, then the find saving work got back to the archaeological departments.⁸ The data collection operated as Central Archives from 1963 until 1976. In this year the Archaeological Archives was established and took over the collection, these documentations are the basis of our Collection of Documentation. Until now this collection has been developing in the quickest pace - the earliest documentations are only short reports about rescue excavations and not so detailed than the modern ones, but contain a lot of information and after decades these are the basis of making preventive excavations on large surfaces.

The other collection which was established quite early, is the Collection of Inheritance, its first part was donated to the Museum by the widow of Balint Kuzsinszky after his death in 1938.⁹ Sandor Garady, who was a pioneer in the exploration of the Middle Ages and the Turkish period in Budapest, died in the 1945 siege of Budapest and his scientific legacy in manuscripts was also donated to the Museum, because the family is still giving all the recently rediscovered manuscripts,

⁶ For example a so-called dismembered arm, which is actually a piece of a wired armor.

⁷ VEGH 2003, 59.

⁸ VEGH 2003, 108.

⁹ VEGH 2003, 50.

letters to the Archives.¹⁰ Soon after his death, in 1946 the then director of the Museum, Lajos Nagy died too, his legacy was located in the Department of Archaeology, then in 1977 the newly established Archaeological Archives received it.¹¹ After the systematization of the legacy collection, we are often provided with new data and information, primarily in case of significant persons of the Museum's early history. While processing the legacy we may identify new or uncertain sites.

Considering the registration of the capital's archaeological heritage, the third very important collection is the Collection of Institution documentation, particularly the ones belonging to historical periods taking place before and during World War II. In this collection we preserve those annual and midyear institutional reports which provide us with information about excavations done in a given time period and their brief results, and these are often the only records. Naturally these are not scientific documentations of excavations, but they can complete and limit the localization of a few archaeological sites - related to the inventories of the Archaeological departments.

Basically these 3 collections, the data of the inventories in our archaeological departments and in the Hungarian National Museum (the departments of Archaeology and Archaeological Archives), and the data of Budapest from the collections of the National Office of Cultural Heritage are the basis of our archaeological-topographical database that was started to develop from the late 1970s. This data system was methodized on cards according to the available information about finds that could be related to either of the following: topography, historical period, the name of the archaeologist leading the excavation, type of the find. The elaboration of the system - before the PC's appearance - is attached to Katalin Vegh.

Later there were data collected about the excavations and finds of Budapest from regular publications of the Budapest History Museum and national archaeological periodicals. Nowadays the whole database contains more than 45,000 cards.

The next most important step in the history of the Archives was the computerizing of the cards in the 1990s. Nowadays

¹⁰ VEGH 2003, 67., According to the inventory of the Archaeological Archives the last documents were given by the family in 2004.

¹¹ VEGH 2003, 76.

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only one copy of the original cards exists for safety reasons, other copies were eliminated after a strict control.

The data collection of decades, the administration connected to earthworks and constructions that took place in the area of Budapest for many decades, help us to successfully combine the available informations and in this way we try to protect the archaeological heritage of Budapest.

Every year we face the more than 100 year history and archaeological work of the Museum, for example there are permanent excavations done in the Civil Town of the Aquincum area nowadays - where Balint Kuzsinszky started the excavations in the 19th century. A similarly important site is the Danube bank of Bekasmegyér, where researches were started with the leadership of Lajos Nagy, these works were directed by

Rozsa Schreiber from the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s. Today, based on their works and the current law, before starting any earthworks related to preventive excavations more and more information come to light - mostly about the occupation of the area in the prehistoric period. Sandor Garady, who was searching archaeological remains of the Middle Ages and the Turkish period in the area of the capital, put down a lot of records about his works and nowadays our colleagues can still utilize them.

Bibliography

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