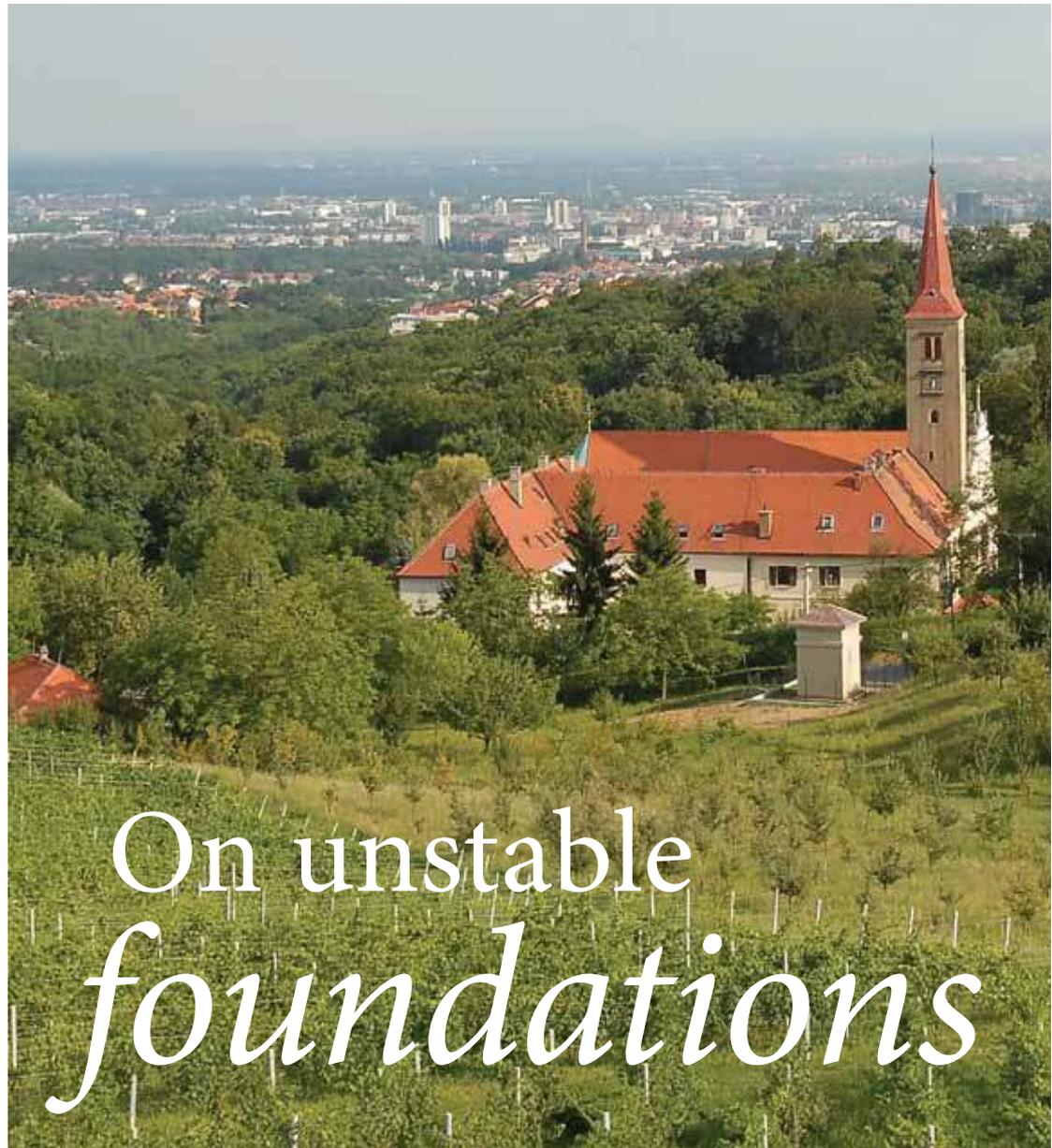


Boris Mašić and **Tajana Pleše** report on the excavation of the Monastery of the Pauline Order in Remete, Croatia

At the end 2007 an archaeological team from Zagreb City Museum, at the initiative of the Municipal Heritage Protection Department, began excavations alongside the southern elevation of the church in Remete, 5km from the centre of the Croatian capital of Zagreb (Fig 1). The excavations discovered foundations of two older churches on the site, together with 282 graves, and would raise a number of questions about this well known foundation, which honours the Virgin Mary.

Remete is located in the valley of Kratki dol, in the southern foothills of Medvednica, and was chosen by the Pauline Order (often referred to as the White Friars) as the site for the third monastery they would build in late medieval Slavonia. It is a landscape well suited to the Paulines' contemplative traits of dedication to prayer, penance, and renunciation. Their work was also marked by the promotion of culture and art, the building of many monasteries and churches, and an educational mission, which resulted in the foundation of the first college in Croatia at Lepoglava in 1503. The name 'Remete' itself derives from the hermits (*eremitae*) who established the monastery at the site.

A Church devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary has stood on the site from the beginning of the 14th century, when written sources refer to



On unstable foundations

the Croatian-Hungarian Angevin king, Charles I (1301, 1309-1342) providing assistance to the Remete Pauline Order in the construction of the church. Textual evidence concerning the Paulines in Remete also states that, at the time of Provincial Benedict (1270-1290), Abbott Isquirinus established a monastery with a wooden church.

According to these sources, financial support from the local nobility allowed

Fig 1. The monastery of the Pauline Order as it currently appears in Remete. The Croatian capital of Zagreb can be seen to the south.

Fig 2. An entire image of the Remete site was obtained through a computer 3D model. Image: Vektra/Geo3D.

Fig 3. Southern foundations of both early churches excavated at Remete. Photo: M. Gregl.

Fig 4. Part of the southern foundation of the chancel of the oldest church. Photo: M. Gregl.

the monastery to develop rapidly, and as early as 1390 it had been elevated to the level of vicariate, to which the monasteries in Streza, Šenkovac, Lepoglava, and Kamenski were subordinate. During the 14th to 16th centuries, the monastery was damaged several times during Ottoman invasions (in 1484, 1557 and 1591). The monastic complex was also given a Baroque makeover at some point between 1667 and 1687, while, at the same time, the Chapel of the Miraculous Mother of God of Remete was built on the southern side of the monastery. Works on the renovation and expansion of the church westwards were undertaken between 1721 and 1747, during which the interior was adorned with frescos by the celebrated Baroque painter Ivan Ranger. When the order was dissolved in 1786, the bishops of Zagreb also made considerable changes to the monastic complex. The current appearance of the church is the result of repair works carried out following the disastrous earthquake of 1880, from plans drawn by Herman Bollé, one of Croatia's most important architects of the second half of the 19th century. The complex, which since 1960 has belonged to the





Fig 5. Diagrams depicting the earliest church (purple) and that built soon after (green). The top diagrams show the position of the foundation walls today, and the two that follow reconstruct the lines of the churches as originally laid out (bottom) and as the landslide began to take effect (centre). Image: Vektra/Geo3D.

Barefoot (*Discalced*) Carmelite Order, acquired its final form in the restoration works completed in the 1990s.

Archaeological research carried out along the southern façade of the church from 2007 to 2009 was to force a reconsideration of the dating of the church that currently stands on the site (Fig 2). Furthermore, the remains of what were clearly older architectural features were found during the excavations, and these proved that the site had previously been occupied by two earlier churches.

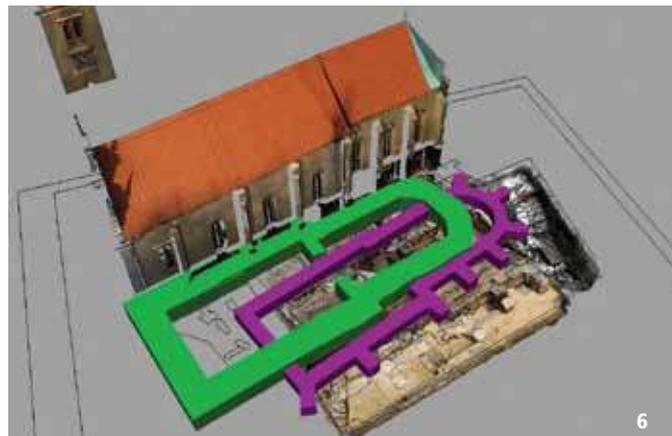
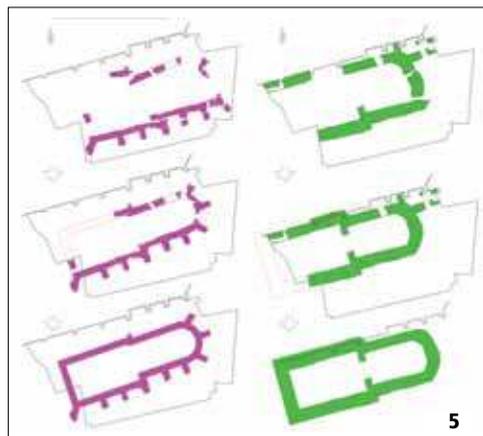
The remains from the foundations

of these earlier churches indicate that both structures had been seriously damaged by strong geotectonic disturbances in the upper layers of the soil. The excavated wall foundations have tensile fractures running through them, as well as large cracks up to 150cm wide. The foundations of both early churches were broken in the south and east (Figs 3, 4), and there was subsidence along the eastern side of the churches. The original location of the foundations had been displaced by an active landslide that had been moving slowly across the site for

many centuries, while extensive building repair work carried out at the site has further confused the archaeological picture. It was only after imaging with a 3D scanner that it became possible to define two distinct construction phases of the late medieval monastic church. Digital technology also made it possible to 'restore' the dislocated parts of the foundations to their (hypothesised) original locations and reconstruct a ground plan of the two building phases (Figs 5, 6).

According to the reconstruction arising from the 3D model, the oldest

Fig 6. Reconstruction of the original position of the foundations of the churches found in Remete (Image: Vektra/Geo3d).



monastic church on the site featured architectural traits common to the Order of St Paul the Hermit: it was constructed with an emphatically longitudinal aspect measuring 30.4 x 10.8m, while the rectangular nave (13.75 x 8.0m) was almost as long as the apse with its semi-circular ending (13.8 x 6.1m). The church was reinforced with solid rectangular buttresses linked to the foundations (Fig 7). In spite of the numerous tensile cracks, the southern foundation of the nave did not undergo any major tectonic shifts, but was partially damaged by later building work, although the rear foundation of the apse did suffer considerable displacement. Along with the damage created by the construction of the second church, it is clear that the destruction of the wall was caused by the shifting of the foundations as a result of the steady movement of the landslide.

The northern wall of the nave and almost the entire western elevation of the church were destroyed in the 17th century during the construction of the Baroque chapel of the Miraculous Mother of God of Remete. Although the construction of the buttresses indicates that the church was vaulted, these were probably built primarily to stabilise the structure on the slope on which it was built.

Croatian churches of the late Middle Ages tended to be built in a short space of time, and it is therefore possible that the foundations and walls of the oldest church began to crack even during the construction phases. The builders of the second church increased the depth and thickness of the foundations and positioned them alongside those of the previous building in an effort to provide additional stability. However, not even these mighty foundations were able to resist the impetus of the shifting ground, and in a relatively short time the new church had cracks running through its foundations.



Fig 7. Part of the demolished apse with buttresses of the oldest church in Remete and the oval structure.
Photo: M. Gregl.

Fig 8. Pilgrimage medal with depiction of the Virgin Mary and St Anthony of Padua, 18th century.
Photo: M. Mustacek.



Thanks to the 3D model, it was possible to produce an ideal reconstruction of the second of the monastic churches found on the site (Fig 6). The model indicated that a similar floor-plan to that used for the building was retained, so the church was also long and narrow (34.4 x 14.35m), with a rectangular nave (14.8 x 8.6m) and an equally long, narrower apse finished off with a polygon (13.75 x 7m). This second medieval church was also damaged by geotectonic disturbances, and, although its northern foundations remained almost entirely in their original location, the southern foundations of the nave and the apse shifted eastwards by almost 1.5m and suffered considerable subsidence.

The third (current) church built on the site achieved structural stability only by shifting its position slightly to the north, which moved the foundations away from the main flow of the landslide. It was built on part of the massive northern foundation of the second church, which may have further strengthened its structure.

The key problem during the

research was the dating of each of the three building phases, which included that of the existing church. The absolute limit for the construction of the first church on the site was obtained by analysis of the skeletal remains buried in the churchyard, and which correspond to the same stratigraphic layers into which the foundations of the earliest church were dug. The oldest graves date to the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries, so the construction of the earliest church could not have started prior to this period.

The construction date of the third church, which still stands on the site, is much harder to determine. It is clear that the polygonal apse is older than the nave, but because of building modifications carried between 1721 and 1747, and repair works undertaken after an earthquake which damaged the building in 1880, it is difficult to determine which parts of the church are the original Gothic construction. Clues to the date of the building of this third and final church are, however, provided in *Catalogus virorum illustrium et Virgini Matri devotorum, qui in ecclesia Remetensis requiescunt*, written by an anonymous author in 1665.



Fig 9. Graves of the 17th and 18th centuries on the foundations of the churches found. Photo: M. Gregl.

The writer listed the worthies who had been buried in the church, mentioning the grave of Lovro Stoch of Susedgrad (1400) as the oldest burial. The text suggests that the unknown author was listing the graves that could still be seen in the church. Accordingly, today's church must have been constructed by, at latest, 1400. All three churches were therefore constructed between c. 1300 and 1400.

Such a relatively short time span for the construction of three large churches is the result of the Pauline Order selecting the unfortunate location on top of an active landslip for the site of its monastic complex. The cracks in the foundations of the first two churches emphasise the speed and strength of the tensile stresses operating on the walls of the buildings.

It has therefore been concluded by the archaeologists that the first church built on the site was never actually used because of the effect of geotectonic disturbances on the structure during the building operations. The second attempt to build the church was certainly more successful and the archaeologists identified repairs to the foundation wall that must have been made while the church was in use. Furthermore, the builders of the second church had also clearly learnt of the geotectonic disturbances that had destroyed the older church, and therefore built very strong foundations in an attempt to provide additional support to the structure (Figs 5, 6). The fact that the first two churches built on the site were discovered at the foundation level, with no record of a demolition layer, also indicates that the building material of the first two churches was reused during construction of the third church.

Archaeological work on the eastern

part of the southern plateau alongside the current church also revealed a buried structure that was oval in shape and preserved only at the level of the foundations (Fig 7). Interpretation of this structure is probably explained by the Zagreb historian Janko Barlé, who noted in his work *Remete*, published in 1914: 'The whole monastery with church and monastery garden was girt with a wall. It is said that the monastery was connected with Zagreb by an underground passage. This is not true, of course, but it is possible that the Paulines did have some underground secret passage to the mountain, in which they were able in time of need to store their valuables.' This is suggested by the steep northern entry into the structure and the southern exit, which was probably on the slope. Although there is still debate about when it was constructed, it probably dates to the years immediately following the first Ottoman attack on the monastic complex in 1484. Chroniclers of the Pauline

Order refer to the Croatian-Hungarian king Matthew Corvin (r. 1458-1490) financing construction of walls and a tower to help protect the monastery.

During the excavations, 282 skeletal remains were also found. These mostly dated from the late 16th to the end of the 18th century (Fig 9), but eight appear to have been dug at the turn of the 13th and 14th century. The deceased were placed on their backs, often in wooden coffins (which can be concluded from the finds of wood remains and iron nails), with their hands placed on their pelvis or chest. While the oldest graves contained no artefacts beyond skeletal remains, later burials contained crosses, rosaries, buttons and belt buckles. The most numerous items found with later burials were medals, either depicting saints, such as St Benedict with the Virgin, or from pilgrimage sites in Mariazell, Passau, Marija Bistrica, Altötting, Dorgen, Wies, Częstochowa, Loreto, Marianka, and Rome (Fig 8).

Among the later medieval finds, a hoard of ten gold coins minted in the 15th century stands out (Fig 10). Four of these were struck during the reign of King Sigismund/Zygmunt, and are dated to the period between 1428 and 1436. A gold coin of King Wladyslaw Jagiello I was struck in Hermannstadt (modern Sibiu) in 1441. The five remaining specimens were minted in the reign of Matthew Corvin and were found in excellent condition, as if they had hardly been in circulation. They are perhaps connected with the construction of the tower and wall around the monastery from 1485, funds for which were provided by Corvin.

All these finds testify to the remarkable persistence of the Pauline Order in building on the site at Remete, despite the tribulations they faced, up until the dissolution of their order in 1786. Zagreb City Museum, the Heritage Conservation Department, and other national and municipal institutions of Croatia and Zagreb are now faced with the challenging task of presenting the archaeological finds in such a way that the heritage of the site will be made accessible to the general public. Throughout the centuries the church in Remete has occupied an important place in the spiritual and religious life of the population of the wider Zagreb area, a role it continues to fulfil through to the present. ■

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Fig 10. A hoard of coins from the 15th century. Photo: M. Gregl.