



BUILDING PLANS/HERITAGE

Renovation of Saint George Chapel in Veszprém and its surroundings

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The next plan presentation of the developments of the Veszprém Castle Quarter on our website is the Saint George Chapel, which is the oldest building on the castle hill. According to the medieval legend of Saint Emeric, the prince took a vow of chastity here. During the current development, after the archaeological excavations, in addition to the presentation of the building remains of significant historical value, the spatial connection between the chapel and St. Michael's Cathedral will also be renewed.

The spatial location and history of the chapel

The Saint George Chapel and its surroundings are located in the precinct of Veszprém Castle. At the end of Castle Street, between the buildings of St Michael's Cathedral and the Major Seminary, lie the ruins of a chapel that spans two periods. This round-shaped church is a building from the late 10th or early 11th century in which, according to the legend of Saint Emeric written in the first half of the 12th century, the prince made a vow of chastity. The chapel was partially demolished in

the 13th century, remodelled, and replaced with an octagonal chapel expanded with an apse.

The building was destroyed during the Ottoman period, and then during the Baroque era, part of the building of the Major Seminary was built on top of the still unexplored ruins at that time. The remnants of the building were discovered in 1957, and restoration of the building elements alongside the construction of a protective roof took place in 1967. Its historical and artistic significance is underlined by its early dating, representing the initial phase of the establishment of Christianity and Christian culture in the Carpathian Basin, specifically in Transdanubia.



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The renewal of the Saint George Chapel and its surroundings in Veszprém, Designed by M Architectural Office (M Építész Iroda)

Archaeological excavations, historical monuments ¹

The construction of the early round church can be dated between 972 and 996. It is certain, according to the legend of Saint Emeric written in the first half of the 12th century, that the prince took his vow of chastity in the Saint George Chapel, which means it was already standing around 1020.

However, the historical data relating to the chapel are relatively late. Following a piece of data from 1352, Jenő Gutheil cites several further mentions from the late Middle Ages (1358, 1417, 1448), primarily to demonstrate that a chapel under the patronage of Saint George must be presumed on the northern side of the cathedral. In the Baroque era, including Bishop Márton Padányi Biró himself, they believed that the chapel associated with the legend of Saint Emeric could be identified with the crypt.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, the town was repeatedly occupied by the Turks, burned down again in the mid-16th century, and in the meanwhile, a Protestant military garrison settled in the castle, leading to significant depreciation of the religious institutions and buildings. The chapel is barely or not at all documented in surveys and depictions from the 16th and 17th centuries. The survey conducted by Nicolò Angeli in 1566 symbolically depicts some sort of polygonal building to the north of the cathedral. Researcher Katalin H. Gyürky associated the chapel's ruin with the siege of 1593.



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Floor plan. The renewal of the Saint George Chapel and its surroundings in Veszprém, Designed by M Architectural Office (M Építész Iroda)

The chapel erected above the Saint George Chapel, referred to as the "canonry chapel," had its walls purportedly identified by the 1957 archaeological dig, although erroneously in several cases. In the late 19th century, with the "canonical", or Saint Joseph's Chapel, the area's sacred function was temporarily reinstated. In 1880, a "granary-shaped" room was built on the northern side of the cathedral so that the elder members of the chapter wouldn't have to recite the rosary in the cold sanctuary of the cathedral. Despite this, Ivan Ádám described the new chapel as an ugly, dark, and draughty building, which was demolished in 1907 during the cathedral's renovation.

Currently, the ruins wedged between the Cathedral and the building of the Major Seminary are covered by a reinforced concrete protective roof. The protective building is a typical 1960s-style curved concrete structure, the demolition of which was previously reported by Építészforum (Architecture Forum).

The architectural concept of the renovation

The key issue in the design is the potential to transform and redefine the space into a sacred area once more. According to the last authentic state, the chapel was a sacred space, a fact confirmed by the block of stone from the baptismal font recorded

in the latest excavation. The current spatial definition is dual due to the non-reconstructible building mass; however, the original function of the building can be authentically restored. Naturally, a fundamental task is the landscaping around the ruins, handling technical expectations and ensuring a multifaceted approach. A crucial heritage consideration is preserving the ruins, ensuring their protection and presenting them under fitting conditions, incorporating additional elements found since the last reconstruction. It is clear that the complexity of the current situation extends far beyond merely finding a contemporary architectural solution to a spatial problem.



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During the process of pathfinding, a clear requirement – expressed by researchers, planners, and builders – emerged: comprehensive excavation of the chapel and its immediate surroundings, previously neglected, is indispensable for decision-making and a clear assessment of the situation. This excavation confirmed previous research descriptions and explanations, but also revealed a wealth of new information. The essential findings are as follows:

- the remains of a once IX-X century circular church building, and remnants of an octagonal chapel from the XIII century, are unique to our heritage (nationally, only two similar buildings remain)
- historical reconstruction – due to Baroque overbuilding – is not possible
- presenting the ruins submerged below ground level is not feasible.
- authentic reconstruction of the ruins and building elements in this form – under a protective roof – is not feasible
- a direct connection with the cathedral has been proven, and its restoration reinforces the re-sacralisation of the space
- The reinforced concrete pillars and foundations supporting the protective roof occupy a much larger area and have an unfavourable design for water drainage, resulting in irreversible damage to several historical wall sections.
- the connections between the eastern and western gardens, as well as with the street, need to be restored
- light and transparent construction is necessary.



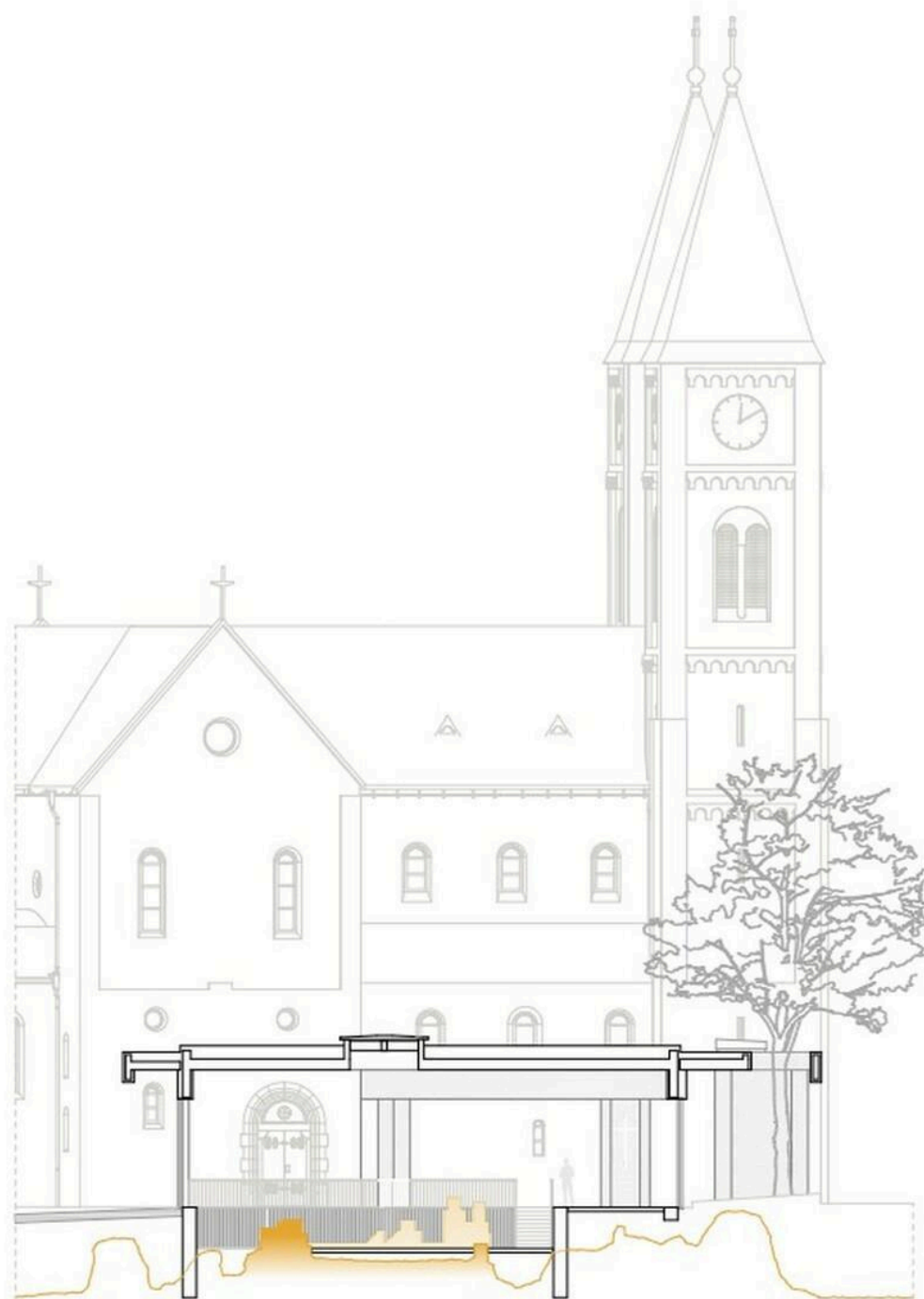
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The existing reinforced concrete shell has been dismantled, and a transparent, definitive, yet layered mass is being prepared for the tense situation between the cathedral and the Major Seminary. The surrounding ground is being arranged to the same level as Castle Street (Vár utca). Access to the exhibition space protecting the

ruins of the new Saint George Chapel is primarily possible barrier-free from Castle Street (Vár utca) and the eastern garden, and secondarily through the northern exit of the cross-house from Saint Michael's Cathedral. From both directions, an intermediate, covered-open space acts as a filter, while arrival at the cathedral itself also represents a liturgical preparation route.

The intention behind the structural redesign is clear and easy to comprehend: to ensure the surrounding buildings remain undamaged and that the new structure is viable on its own. The foundations for this are characterful, ancient-shaped, prism-like pillars of varying sizes, which stand independently, set apart from neighbouring buildings and exposed historical walls. Their placement is delicately composed in harmony with the spatial proportions and structural functionality. The delimitation of the interior space is facilitated by large glass surfaces, while a rhythmic arrangement of delicate steel pillars, supported by reinforced concrete foundations along the contour of the excavated ruins, adds to the sense of lightness. The diverse spatial composition is completed by a flat plate structure, pierced by a circular skylight constructed above the chapel's centre. Continuing the historical tradition, a baptismal font will be placed in the centre of the chapel.



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Section. The renewal of the Saint George Chapel and its surroundings in Veszprém, Designed by M Architectural Office (M Építész Iroda)

The planned main usage area, which surrounds the historical ruins, is situated at the same level as the street entrance, providing accessibility and integration. Parallel to the Castle Street, there is a larger exhibition space, and next to the cathedral, a smaller, secluded expansion (in the area of the Holy Spirit Chapel) accommodates visitors. An entrance of equal importance is provided from the eastern garden, while

the crafted gate of the transept allows passage into the cathedral. From the cleaned space, the view of the ruins is ensured from all directions.

From the outside, the building presents itself with a lightweight appearance, supported by pylons and topped with suspended canopies covered by horizontal slabs. Its fully glazed facade gives it a transparent quality from both directions. From the direction of the street and arriving from the garden, it radiates intimacy, and the solid-looking walls serve the layered unfolding of the transitional space.



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The internal balance is achieved through the restrained use of materials and the subtle homogeneity of surfaces. The employed colours are neutral and are composed to fit together seamlessly. The treatment of the facades of the surrounding buildings is notable, unified by a fine concrete lamella running from ceiling to floor, hinting at the architecture behind it on the side of the Great Seminary, while from the direction of the cathedral, we see the remaining historical stone wall as a witness surface. Every architectural act aims to highlight the historical chapel and its renewed purpose.

The chapel will also be suitable for hosting smaller events – such as baptisms, anointings, and other pastoral events. This entails a capacity of 20-25 people per event. In support of this function, we are placing several interior design elements and objects designed along a consistent principle also found in the cathedral, such as a crucifix, baptismal font, candle holders, seating furniture, and installations. In terms of materials, we use noble, durable materials such as brass, onyx, fine concrete, and cast stone.

Viktor Szentkuti
Lead designer

¹ *Abstract from the Architectural Historical Scientific Documentation - Prepared by: Archaeologists András Fülöp and András Koppány - Budapest, July 30, 2021.*

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