A view on life in a feudal castle: finds analysis from the castle of Cesargrad (2008 and 2010 excavation campaigns)

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The castle of Cesargrad is just one of many old castles and forts in north-western Croatia. It is located on the west side of the Cesargrad hill, just northwest of the town of Klanjec, from where it overlooks the Sutla River and its gorge Zelenjak. Today it is situated on the state border between the Republic of Croatia and Slovenia, near the castle of Kunšperk on the Slovenian side.

Cesargrad was first mentioned in 1399 when it was in possession of the Counts of Cilli (Celje). After the Counts of Cilli died out in 1456, it passed from hand to hand between Styrian and Slavonian nobles, until it became the property of the Erdödy family at the end of the 15th century. January 29th 1573 was an important date in Cesargrad’s history, as the castle was destroyed then by the peasant armies during the Great Peasant Revolt. The Erdödys restored Cesargrad, but in the early 17th century the town was already referred to as a ruin.

In 2008 and 2010 the Croatian Conservation Institute carried out two archaeological research campaigns at Cesargrad. The 2008 campaign involved the exploration of the interior and surroundings of the square tower “H”, which is located in the north-eastern corner of the castle core. In 2010, excavations were carried out in the large room “K” of the south wing of the hall, i.e. the living quarters. Along with archaeological research, the conservation and restoration of this valuable late medieval monument has been planned due to the fact that a large part of the preserved standing architecture is in poor condition.

In both campaigns a large quantity of kitchen, table and technical ceramics has been found, among which late Gothic stove-tiles stand out due to their shape. Most of kitchen ceramics consists of coarse pottery with only a small amount of fine tableware. Although the major part of Cesargrad remains unexcavated, some observations about the quality of life and social status of the inhabitants can already be made based on the data obtained.

A distinctively small amount of fine glazed pottery and majolica is surprising, since this has been a feudal lord’s residence. The interpretation of the distribution of finds leads to the conclusion that the excavated areas were used as living and working quarters by the castle’s inhabitants whose activities were associated with food and drinks preparation, as well as their storage. Namely, the ground floor of the tower “H” has accommodated one of Cesargrad’s kitchens, while the excavated part of the hall’s south wing “K” is also located on the ground floor. Although only a small part of the room “K” has been explored, the type of
plaster flooring as well as the number and quality of ceramic finds indicate that the room was used for economic purposes and not as a representative area.

Beside the analysis of ceramics and architectural remains, an analysis of the remains of animal bones will be carried out to improve our knowledge of the Cesargrad inhabitants’ eating culture and its quality at the end of the Middle Ages.

In the coming years we plan to continue the research and conservation which will provide new insights into the past of the Cesargrad castle.