



Béla Miklós Szőke

# THE CAROLINGIAN AGE IN THE CARPATHIAN BASIN

HUNGARIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM





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PERMANENT EXHIBITION OF THE HUNGARIAN  
NATIONAL MUSEUM

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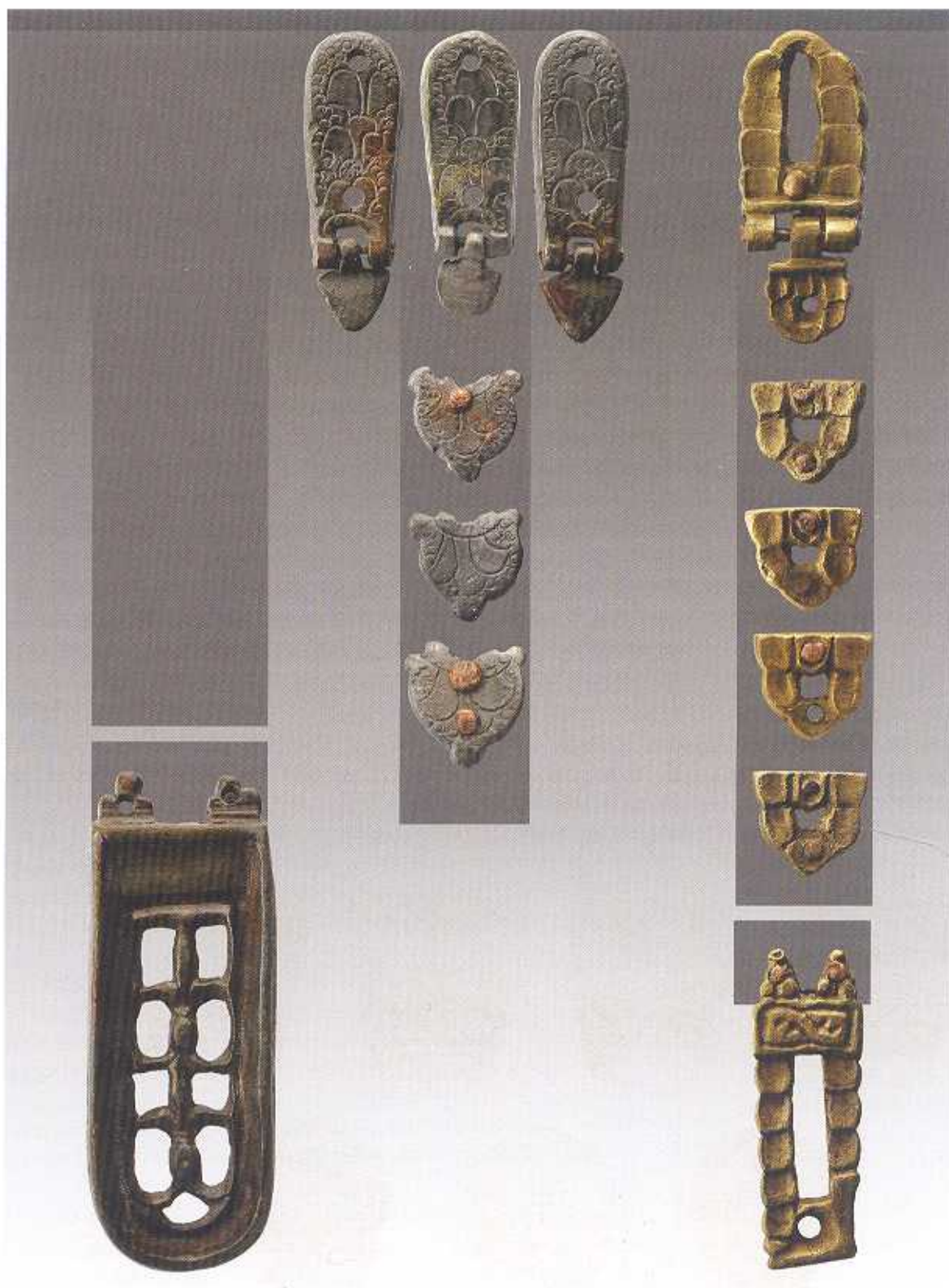


Fig. 15 Detail of a mounted belt

▪ Vári-Papkeri B. (Somogy c.) grave 259, RRM 91.4.1-11; Bronze, tinned bronze, large strap end L: 6,1 cm, W: 2,1 cm; small strap end L: 4,1 cm, W: 1,4 cm; belt mounts 3,1×1,2 cm and 3,3×1 cm; hole framing mounts and small belt mounts 1,8×1,7-1,2×1,1 cm



Fig. 16 Belt set

■ *Vörs-Papkei B grave 437, RRM 96.55.1-5; Gilded bronze; mounts with pendants L. 3,5 cm; astragalos strap holder L. 10,8 cm; hole framing mounts 2,4 × 1,7 cm; strap end L. 3,3 cm; small belt mounts 1,35 × 1,2 cm*

hook-and-eye catches, and single or multiple S-ended spiral pendants, as well as jewellery featuring chain pendants with bottom rings made from wire that had been twisted or wire bent so as to form loops. On necklaces, on the other hand, bead types of western origin increasing appear increasingly, alongside beads shaped like melon seeds. In male burials, weapons of mainly western origin are relatively common as grave goods (winged spears; single-edged swords; langsaes;

bearded axes; socketed and barbed arrowheads), and spurs, too, appear. The appearance of these artefacts in growing numbers indicates that life, the economic environment, and cultural connections were gradually changing. By the end of the late phase of the so-called Avar age, burials with modest grave goods, or with no grave goods at all, are more and more common, and multi-element belts and rich selections of jewellery disappear once and for all.

## VÖRS-PAPKERT

Containing approximately 700 early medieval burials, the cemetery came to light between 1983 and 1996, during excavations preceding reconstruction work to do with the Little Balaton. According to the testimony of the find-assemblages, burials were conducted continuously on the site from the late Avar period until the beginning of the Arpadian age. Burials from the late Avar period and from the end of that period made up the largest group on the site.

In a separate block on the eastern edge of the cemetery, at an average of 5 m from each other, 40 horse burials arranged in 6–7 rows came to light, in which the deceased man or woman usually lay in a west–east direction in the northern half of a large burial pit; next to him or her lay a harnessed horse placed in a contrasting direction. Of these burials, only two had escaped robbers; the other burials were probably robbed in the early Arpadian age, at the very latest during the reign of King Béla III of Hungary (1172–1196), when the inhabitants of an entire village had already settled on the site. Judging from the finds discovered in the burials, it is certain that well-to-do families belonging to the middle stratum of Avar society were interred here. Their archaeological legacy is characterised by generously gilded belt mountings – some with engraved, punched, and openwork fishscale patterning (**Fig. 16**) and some with lion depictions stylistically similar to those found in the Nagyszentmiklós hoard (**Fig. 17**) –, gold earrings with glass beads and pendants resembling bunch of grapes, and box-like breast clasps with animal figures; (**Fig. 18**) other characteristic features are bridle mountings (**Fig. 19**) and bridle rosettes decorated with copper-gilt and silver-gilt sheet and wire inlay. Also, number of vessels – a simple small pot, a so-called yellow mug, and a flask – were often placed beside the deceased with food and drink for the journey to the next world. (**Fig. 20**)

In the western half of the cemetery, the burials con-

tained more modest grave goods, with pots filled with food and drink and yellow flasks whose surfaces had been polished. The men were buried with a weapon (lance, axe), a belt featuring mountings that were pewtered (imitating silvering), and, in one case, footwear with spurs. The characteristic elements of their attire were an iron knife and a razor. On the women, simple earrings; necklaces consisting of pieces of mosaic eye (millefiori) and segmented beads; rings made from strips of metal with punched decoration; and glass buttons with bronze and iron loops were found. Some of these finds are from the period when Priwina and Chezil established the centre for the county of Lower Pannonia in nearby Mosaburg (on the territory of today's Zalavár). Some of the persons buried in the cemetery at Vörs may have come from one of the communities of serving people belonging to the power centre of Mosaburg.

One may conclude from the marked social differences characteristic of the whole time the cemetery was in use that the families interred in the conspicuously rich horse burials did not sink to the level of the serving people even at the end of the Avar age. However, additional investigation is required to ascertain the nature of the dependency that connected members of the late Avar period warrior middle stratum buried on an island of the Little Balaton to the county of Mosaburg. Nevertheless, some of those buried there in the 9th century had remained in place even after the Hungarian Conquest, using the cemetery site together with Hungarians who settled there as part of the Conquest process right up until the turn of the 11th century (i.e. until the consolidation of the Hungarian state). The community's village came to light on a mound surrounded by marshland. This mound was approximately 800 m from the cemetery in a northwest direction, on the find-site Vörs-Papkert A.

*László Költő – József Szentpéteri*





Fig. 17 Belt mounts

- Vörs-Papkert B graves 347, 378, RRM 93.250.2, 96.26.6-7; Bronze, round mounts D. 3-3,1 cm; spherical mounts L. 4,1-2,9 cm

Changes of a different kind are perceptible in northwest Transdanubia, in the vicinity of Sopron, in the Burgenland adjacent to it, and on the territory of Lower Austria all the way to the find-sites of Mühling-Hart, neighbouring Purgstall an der Erlauf, and Wimm, located on the far side of the Danube. These may be dated somewhat later, to the years between the turn of the 9th century and the period around the middle of that century. The fully-excavated 225-burial cemetery at Purgstall is especially interesting. In this there occurred in the early phase sets of cast bronze belt decorations and women's jewellery. Later on, there were Sopronkőhida-type finds – among them the same types of women's jewellery (of the wire variety) characteristic of this area, and ways of wearing them, that appeared at this time and were characteristic only of this area, along with weapons. In the late phase, artefacts characteristic of the burials containing serving people that occur in the environs of Mosaburg/Zalavár came to light. The horizontal stratigraphy of this cemetery graphi-



Fig. 18 Women's jewellery from the cemetery of Vörs-Papkert B

- Earrings (graves 106, 454), RRM 92.59.1, 96.46.1; Gilded bronze, shell; L. 2,8 and 4,4 cm
- Pearl necklace (grave 290), RRM 92.149.1; glass
- Finger ring with shield like bezel (grave 301), RRM 93.219.4; Bronze; D. 2,3 cm



Fig. 19 Belt mounts and harness ornaments

■ Vörs-Papkerl B grave 371, RRM 96.19.1–16; Bronze, gilded bronze, tinned bronze, buckle L. 4,3 cm, belt mounts L. 2,8 cm W. 1 cm; hole framing mount 2,1×1,8 cm; small belt mounts 1,1×1,1 cm; mounts with head of horse 2,1×1,5 cm; strap end 2,3×2,1 cm and 2,8×1,9 cm



Fig. 20 Vessels

■ *Vári-Papkeri B grave 348; RRM 96.1.1-3; Clay; H. 14,5 cm; 12,2 cm; 9,7 cm*

Fig. 21 Pots

■ *Sopronkőhida (Győr-Ménfőcsanak-Sopron c.) Grave 13; 64, 132, SM 62.24.7; 62.24.129; 62.24.289; Clay; H. 20 cm; 15,5 cm; 18 cm*



cally attests to the acculturation process which characterised the period lasting from the end of the Avar age and the beginning of the Carolingian one to the time of the full setting up of the Carolingian Empire across the entire eastern border zone. The groups accompanying in a broad arc the Eastern Alps mountain range stretching along the Danube from the Enns before then turning south are loosely linked together by a pagan burial custom, namely the offering of food and drink for the journey to the next world. On the other hand, in the area of the Tulln and Vienna basins, in addition to this a characteristic *pars pro toto* version of an animal sacrifice, the so-called severed cattle skull burial, was still common (Sopronkőhida-type cemeteries). These pagan customs are completely lacking in the Carantanian Slav territory immediately to the south, while in the region to the north of the Danube (Moravians, Bohemians) only at around this time is the change made from cremation burials to inhumation burials.