

Power and Culture in the Carpathian Basin of the Early Middle Ages

1) Historical background, main questions of the project:

The half a millennia passing between the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West, the abandonment of Pannonia Province, and the arrival and settling of the Ancient Hungarians was especially eventful and various in the history of the Carpathian Basin. After the sweeping expansion of the Hunnic Empire and later its similarly rapid disappearance, the one and a half century long domination of different and often rotating Germanic tribes (eastern and western Goths, Suebi, Rugians, Heruli, Gepids and Langobards) determined people's lives in the Carpathian Basin. In 567-568 AD an eastern nomadic tribe, the Avars occupied the Carpathian Basin with accompanying eastern European Turkish and Slavic peoples, and remained important political factors until as late as the first third of the 9th century AD. After the Avar Khaganate's disintegration, new 'state' formations emerged on its formal territories: the Carolingian Pannonia Province in the West (in Transdanubia), and independent tribal states (Old Moravian and Old Croatian Principalities) in the Northwest and the Southwest. The conquering of the Ancient Hungarians united the Carpathian Basin again, and strengthened their power there by establishing the Christian Hungarian Kingdom.

These events certainly occurred with the active participation of the broader environment, Western and Eastern Europe, as well as historical high-culture states of the Mediterranean region. During the rotation of peoples covered by din of battles, and later during the more peaceful settling down, numerous forms and ways of connections developed, which were determined by social status, as well as cultural or regional traditions and characteristics. The often changing margins and balance of forces created uniquely rich and various possibilities to study the encounter of power and culture, as well as their mutual effects on each-other.

By applying traditional methods and means of archaeology, early medieval cultural heritage has long been studied in different ways. Classical, antiquarian approaches, and later evaluations targeting chronological, typological, chorological, stratigraphic issues, social relations and conditions, and finally researches applying archeometrical methods led to significant partial results. When drawing conclusions, however, they rarely exceeded the interpretative frameworks created by and for the narrow circles of archaeologists. No complex analysis summarizing these results and correlating them with historical processes has been carried out yet. Even historians were not always well-prepared enough to understand the methods and results of archaeological analyses deeply enough; therefore they often misunderstood or misinterpreted them, and ignored archaeological data instead of integrating them into their own interpretative frameworks.

Participants of this project are therefore willing to change this practice by aiming to research a complex system of connections; in what ways and forms the encounters of power and culture appeared, and how they varied in time. Can culture influence power, or does power create culture? Is it possible to reify this continuously changing system of relations, and contextually analyse by archaeological methods?

According to Max Weber,¹ power appears when there is a chance within a social relation that one has his/her way even in spite of opposition, irrespective of what this chance is based on. Power therefore

¹ Max Weber: *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie*. Tübingen 1972. Erster Halbband

means social superiority, the ability to vindicate one's will. It is a more or less one-sided (perceived or real) ability or possibility present in the relation of two persons or within a group, which can cause significant changes in people's private life or destiny as a result of another person's or other group members' actions. This power manifests itself especially when in spite of the fact that one does not intend to accept, take notice or adopt another person's will, or possibly even turns against and opposes it, one still cannot prevent the vindication of this will having negative effects on him/her. Hence, in a sense, power is related to the phenomena named influence or effect in everyday life. Power reveals itself in relations and connections: no social actor has power in itself, without naming in relation to whom or over whom it is exercised. Power almost always acts reciprocally; nevertheless, reciprocity does not mean an equal measure in most cases. In order to have power over others, thus to dominate other people's wills, one has to gain control over their needs and desires. However, such power can be rarely acquired without having to conquer some kind of resistance or an opposing power. Power is a process, which is part of a continuous social interaction; as Russell states: „Power is the basic energy source of society, without which humanity as a group of social beings cannot organize itself”. Power accompanies human society through history, attaching either to a specific person (chief or another ruler), or an organization. In differentiated societies power is separated functionally and structurally (e.g. between the elite and the commoners within a given system), and the exercise of power becomes various and complex in terms of institutions and individuals as well.²

Power is mainly influence, the ability to influence, and the fact of possession, thus the possibility to vindicate one's will (potentially) by conquering others' resistance; while authority is the manifestation and the exercise of this power (in other words ruling or conducting), which is carried out through a specific institutional system. Based on what generates a “minimum of obedience”, traditional, charismatic and legal or rational authorities can be distinguished. In the first case authority is based on firm belief and conviction in the sanctity and inviolability of tradition, in the second case authority rests on belief in a leader's outstanding abilities, while in the third case the actions of the instructing person or institution are based on rational rules. In reality, these elements are combined within a given system with different emphases.

As a complex of knowledge, customs and traditions of a group of people, culture involves ideas, arts, morality, rights, customs, and every human ability and habit which people learn as members of a society. Cultural activity is a form of social actions; therefore it cannot be separated from other activities of any society. Social practices of power, domination and possession form relations, under the complex of which culture is generally meant today. Cultures are neither entities per se nor ever completed; they are characterized by internal ambiguity, historical variability, and hybridism. No culture is logically consistent or remains constant over centuries; they are rather heterogeneous, composed of elements originating from different regions and times.

Historical cultures can be basically studied through tangible heritage, hence archaeological culture – as a “constantly recurring assemblage of artefacts assumed to be representative of a particular set of behavioural activities carried out at a particular time and place” (Renfrew-Bahn) – forces the above described concept of culture within very narrow bounds.³ However, such shortage of the source material does not automatically mean that there is nothing to go by in respect of power relations. Ian Hodder demonstrates by ethnographic examples that regularities appearing within the material record

² Bertrand Russell: *Power. A New Social Analysis*, London. 1938.

³ Colin Renfrew – Paul Bahn: *Archaeology – Theories, Methods and Practice*. London, 2005.

can occasionally reflect a relatively exact image of power relations, the distribution of resources, and the competition for possessing them within certain communities or between neighbouring communities. Based on the commercial links of neighbouring communities and the type and scale of interactions between their material cultures, consequences can be drawn regarding the competitive or assimilative attitude of certain “cultures”, as well as the nature of power structures generated by the competition for available resources⁴ (see influences of imperial “gifts” on barbarian representations of power, their style-creating power elite circles, and indirectly by commoners etc.). The chronological and spatial distribution of royal as well as the so-called “princely burials” allows to form a notion about the stability of power structures, and the personal or dynastical legitimacy of the ruler.⁵ Moreover, as a wide range of architectural monuments, artistic remains and written sources are also available for investigating early medieval cultural heritage, numerous possibilities are further offered to learn about the ways of encounters and the relation system of culture and power.

2) Hypotheses, key questions, objectives of the project:

Although the attention of Hungarian early medieval research has only seemed to turn to the theoretically-based definition of the relation system between late antique and early medieval barbarian groups and neighbouring empires in the last few decades, Western European and North American specialists had published numerous in-depth analyses regarding China, and the Roman and Byzantine Empires. These works clearly demonstrate that empires blending peoples with diverse ethnic, language and cultural traditions developed and applied several strategies at the same time in order to keep their “barbarian” neighbours away from imperial areas, to “pacificate” these groups, and to integrate them within the frameworks of their own imperial federal systems. The building of border fortifications (the “Great Wall” of China, the Limes Sasanicus in Central Asia, and the system of Roman *limes* forts in the West), the organizing of a defence-in-depth, the adaptation of the armament and warfare of neighbouring peoples, the enrolment of the sons of these peoples to the imperial army, and the operation of continuously changing federal systems constituted the military and diplomatic sides of this strategy. In addition to these, peaceful means must have played similarly significant roles: the establishment and maintenance of commercial relations, or the spread of religions predominant in the empires.

There are numerous constellations of events in the history of the early medieval Carpathian Basin, when the encounter of power and culture, as well as the ways, directions and intensity of interactions can be detected and analysed especially well.

The end of the Roman Age, the appearance of Huns, and the Gepidic – Langobard period in the Carpathian Basin

Cultural transformation of the former Roman Pannonia Province, analysed in a complex way: 1) effects of the influence of newly arrived “barbarians” achieved by pure military power on the culture of the Mediterranean world; ways and character of the integration of cultural goods and innovations brought from the East, 2) impacts of late antique cultural tradition, technological innovations, lifestyle

⁴Ian Hodder, *The Distribution of Material Culture Items in the Baringo District, Western Kenya*, *Man* 12, 1977, 239–269 ; Ian Hodder, *Economic and Social Stress and Material Culture Patterning*, *American Antiquity* 44, 1979, 446–454.

⁵ Georg Kossak, *Prunkgräber*, in *Studien zur Vor- und frühgeschichtlichen Archäologie. Festschrift für J. Werner zum 65. Geburtstag. Münchener Beiträge zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Ergänzungsband 1* (München 1974) 3–33.

etc. on “barbarian” territories, and the forms of appearance of the encounter of the two tradition systems, 3) the direction and nature of acculturation in areas of former provinces and barbarian tribes.⁶

An objective of the project is the complex analysis of the last one and a half century of the Roman period Pannonia Province. Preceding the surrender and abandonment of the Roman Dacia Province in the seventies of the 3rd century AD, the border and authority of the Roman Empire on the Lower Danube section shifted south of the river; also meaning the beginning of a new chapter in the everyday life of Pannonia. The conscious political migration of several groups of people and the movement of barbaric tribes from eastern direction are known.⁷ These barbarian peoples moving in did not intend to transform antique power structure but to occupy it and share in the advantages of the civilization of the Roman world. Contact with the material culture of these groups reshaped the globalized, provincial culture of the middle Roman period, since acculturation is accompanied by the barbarization of Roman areas. This process taking place in line with the decline of the Empire finally resulted in radical changes, and fundamentally altered the cultural and power structures within the Empire as well as in the Roman period barbarian world by the age of the Huns.

Regarding archaeological aspects: although pottery industry of the 4th century AD had a strong Roman period basis, a number of new formal elements, decorative techniques and technologies appeared, the roots of which can be sought in the pottery manufacture of archaeological cultures of Eastern European origin (pottery with burnishing),⁸ and their popularity had been presumably evoked by the pottery manufacture of the army (glazed ware).⁹ By analysing the 4th century legacy of Pannonia, our goal is to learn more about the migrations of the period and the interactions between local Romanized population and groups of foreign origin, and to position them in place and time. On the one hand, we plan to focus on this group of questions through the material culture of the inner forts specialized to the provision of a large number of late Roman armies stationed at the province (by the examples of Keszthely-Fenekpuszta,¹⁰ Alsóhetény and Ságvár). On the other hand, we will study the Roman and “barbarian” features of the pottery of late Roman cemeteries, as well as relations between pottery and burial practices (Friderika Horváth).

Processes of the change of cultural and power structures regarding the population of the Carpathian Basin are little known yet within the Empire or the area of the Roman time barbarian world, in spite of

⁶ S. Mitchell – G. Greatrex: *Ethnicity and Culture in Late Antiquity*. London 2000; T. Derks – N. Roymans: *Ethnic constructs in Antiquity. The Role of Power and Tradition*. Amsterdam 2009.

⁷ K. Godłowski: *Die Chronologie der jüngeren und späten Kaiserzeit in der Gebieten südlich der Sudeten und Karpaten*. In: *Probleme der relativen und absoluten Chronologie ab Latenezeit bis zum Frühmittelalter*. Krakow 1992, 23–54; B. Dumanov: *Mobility as a factor in the migration south of the Lower Danube. The case of the Goths*. in:

<http://arcsotia.org/sites/default/files/Communication%20Conference%20program%20Fall%202012.pdf>; C. H. Opreanu: *Az erdélyi Marosszetanna kultúra vége: Szentgyörgy-kultúra vagy posztcsernyahov horizont?* in: *Molnár István Múzeum Kiadványai 3. Erdély és kapcsolatai a korai népvándorlás korában*. Székelykeresztúr 2010, 191–204.

⁸ F. L. Vagalinski: *Burnished Pottery from the First Century to the Beginning of the Seventh Century AD from the Region South of the Lower Danube (Bulgaria)*. Sofia, 2002; C. H. Opreanu: *Burnished Pottery from the Settlement at Suceag (County of Cluj, Romania). Evolution, Chronology and Cultural Interferences*. in: <http://jam.nyirbone.hu/muzeum/nka/Opreanu.pdf>

⁹ Ch. Magrini - F. Sbarra: *Late Roman Glazed Pottery in Carlino and in Central-East Europe. Production, Function and Distribution*. BAR Int. Ser. 2068. Oxford 2010.

¹⁰ F. Horváth: *Das spätantike Keramikspektrum von Keszthely-Fenekpuszta. Ein Einblick*. In: O. Heinrich-Tamaska (Hrsg.), *Keszthely-Fenekpuszta im Kontext spätantiker Kontinuitätsforschung zwischen Noricum und Moesia. Castellum Pannonicum Pelsonense 2* (Budapest, Leipzig, Keszthely, Rahden/Westf. 2011) 597-652.

the fact that during this period, Hungarian regions had key role in the history of Europe.¹¹ Mostly only the research of rich Hun-period “hoards” (grave assemblages, sacrificial deposits, coin hoards) is in an advanced stage, while the social structure of people with lower status than the “elite” (*optimates*), thus the social structure of the Hunnic Empire remained mainly unknown. Hungarian researchers have not reevaluated the role of the history of the Hunnic Empire since the 1950s.¹²

In the course of centuries, Sarmatian ethnic groups settling in the Roman period Great Hungarian Plain and speaking Iranian language created an independent archaeological culture, which can be sharply distinguished from that of the neighbouring barbarian German world, was closely tied to the antique world, and was strongly dependent on the Roman Empire at certain times.¹³ During the late Roman period the settling in of new Eastern European peoples (speaking Germanic or Iranian languages) can be also detected, and they gave a typical barbarian character to the find material of the Sarmatian culture in the Great Hungarian Plain, but cannot be clearly separated from it.¹⁴ It is questionable to what extent the culture of the peoples newly arriving at the end of the Roman Age and in the Hun period influenced or transformed the life, cultural identity and archaeological heritage of the peoples of mixed elements inhabiting present-day Eastern Hungary. How sharp of a border can be drawn between certain social groups, and did the new elite have an intermediary role in the spread of new cultural impacts? Reversing this question: was the late Roman population able to influence the developing culture of the elite of the Hunnic Empire – who imitated and combined antique and eastern nomadic power structures –, which finally proved to be ephemeral? How can provincial Roman influences be distinguished from those of Romanized barbarian cultures, and from antique effects appearing through the intermediary role of the Eastern European elite? In fact, did processes of acculturation fail, or on the contrary: instead of a gradual transformation, a drastic fracture can be only presumed during the time of Germanic kingdoms rising at the end of the Hunnic Age, with the beginning of the final decline of antique structures (power structure, infrastructure, trade, crafts)?

These questions are investigated from several aspects. In order to gain a comprehensive picture, the analysis of the material of both cemeteries and settlements is necessary, as well as the research of power centres by means of settlement geography (social, economic and infrastructural relations).

With regard to the relation of power and culture, not only the analysis of burial groups with a few, usually wealthy graves, but that of the so-called commoners' cemeteries with a great number of graves dating to the end of the Roman period and the Hun period is very significant (e.g. find material from cemeteries in the vicinity of Csongrád). On the strength of certain artefact types – pottery, elements of clothing, jewellery – the role of material culture as identity marker can be approached: as an example, the research of the fine ware of the period (“Murga jugs”), their origin and relation to antique toreutics and pottery products may highlight complex relations with the Hunnic elite.

¹¹ Bóna István: *Das Hunnenreich*. Budapest, Stuttgart 1991 / *A hunok és nagykirályaik*. Budapest, 1993.

¹² László, Gy.: The Significance of the Hun Golden Bow. *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* I.(1951) 91-104.; Harmatta, J.: The Golden Bow of the Huns. *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* I.(1951) 107-149.; Fettich, Nándor: A szeged-nagyszéksósi hun fejedelmi sírlelet (La Trouvaille de Tombe Princière Hunnique À Szeged-Nagyszéksós). *Archaeologia Hungarica* 32. Budapest 1953.

¹³ H. Vaday Andrea: *Die sarmatischen Denkmäler des Komitats Szolnok*. Ein Beitrag zur Archäologie und Geschichte des sarmatischen Barbaricums. *Antaeus* 17-18. Budapest, 1989.

¹⁴ Párducz Mihály: *Archäologische Beiträge zur Geschichte der Hunnenzeit in Ungarn*. *ActaArch* 11, 1959, 309-398.; Párducz Mihály: *Die ethnischen Probleme der Hunnenzeit in Ungarn*. *StudArch* 1. Budapest, 1963.

The find material of the settlements of the Middle Tisza region and the South Great Hungarian Plain allows the investigation of late antique, provincial cultural effects, commercial relations, and their upper chronological limits; as well as the quality of the cultural impacts between Pannonia and the regions east of the Tisza River in the century after the Hun period. Results can be further specified by the research of the mostly neglected periphery of the Gepidic culture in northern, western and southern cultural borders, which reveal relations with the Kingdom of the Langobards and the Eastern Roman Empire – thus a process, which is relatively well documented in written sources, but barely researched by archaeological methods.¹⁵

The research of cemeteries and especially settlements help the evaluation of late Sarmatian – Hun-period centres of power. We also aim to study the characteristics of Middle Tisza Region and South Great Hungarian centres of power from the perspective of the connection systems of the late Sarmatian, Hun-period and Germanic world. We plan to perform topographic studies in the vicinity of early migration period power centres in the Middle Tisza region (e.g. in the vicinity of numerous significant late Sarmatian and Hun-period cemeteries interpreted as Germanic in the Jászság region, or in the area of Törtel, where the only Hun-period sacrificial cauldron was discovered), and in the Southern Great Hungarian Plain (e.g. in Szikáncs, the site of the greatest Hun-period gold hoard in Europe); in order to clearly distinguish regional differences between power centres of the Middle Tisza region and the South Great Hungarian Plain. This project would enable to research the possibility of Gepidic and Avar period continuity of power centres, which is mainly possible in the case of the South Great Hungarian Plain due to the nearness of the antique world, especially of *Sirmium*.

In line with ascertaining relations between regional power centres, another objective of the project is to define more general principles, such as the complete spectrum of the impacts of the Mediterranean antique imperial culture on regions of Eastern Hungary in the early migration period. Its aspects are: Mediterranean antique influences on the material culture of the Eastern Hungarian elite, effects of provincial antique culture of Pannonia and the Balkans and possibilities to distinguish them; chronological limits and the change of the intensity of antique cultural effects in centuries of the Early Middle Ages.

Besides direct influences, the question of indirect cultural effects, and the continuity of antique and “barbarian” (Hun-period, Germanic) cultural traditions in the Germanic and Avar periods are not fully exploited yet: influences of the western Germanic and antique worlds during the time of Germanic kingdoms, and differences of the antique effects between the Germanic find material of Transdanubia and the regions east of the Tisza River (Zsófia Masek).

Relation system of the Mediterranean world (Rome, Byzantium) and its northern periphery

With Christianity, the Byzantine Empire could depend on the ideology of a universalistic, monotheist religion perfectly serving the diplomatic purposes of the Empire since the 4th century AD. The religious conversion for political reasons is a well-known phenomenon in a great number all over Eurasia (cf. the Arianism of Germanic tribes, the Judaism of the Khazars, and the spread of Islam in the Eastern European and Central and Inner Asian steppe region). However, it seems that Byzantium mainly relied on this strategy successfully by its eastern and southern borders, which can be obviously explained by the geopolitical realities of late antiquity, hence the overwhelming economic and

¹⁵ Lakatos, Pál: Quellenbuch zur Geschichte der Gepiden. Acta Antiqua et Archaeologica Opuscula Byzantina 17/2. Szeged 1973.

political significance of Anatolian and Middle Eastern (also incorporating Egyptian) regions of the Empire. This clarifies why the loss of most of these areas in the first half of the 7th century AD raised the value of the role of northern neighbours in the Early Middle Ages, which manifested itself in attempts at converting the Balkan Slavs first, and then peoples of the Carpathian Basin.

One of the main objectives of the planned project is the analysis of the relations between Byzantium and its northern neighbours (Avars, Ancient Hungarians), more precisely their traces visible on late antique and early medieval material culture.¹⁶ Diplomatic relations and commercial links constitute one segment of the research; while interpretation of phenomena supposedly and/or actually related to Christianity constitute another one. Although attention has long been paid to the research of diplomatic gift exchange between the elites, as well as to the intensity of real trade, it was always conceived from the perspectives of Avars and Ancient Hungarians. An analysis approaching from the aspect of the Empire may lead to a deeper understanding: in the course of this analysis, one has to place and evaluate the rate and value of gifts arriving to the nomads of the Carpathian Basin and of the commercial traffic maintained with them within the frameworks of Byzantine strategies. On one hand, the main focus of the research is relations between power centres of the Empire and the Khaganate; as understanding their dynamics may help to understand why the early and middle Avar period elite developed a representational culture (all across Eastern Europe) following and imitating Byzantine patterns, even though they were considered major military enemies of the Empire. By another inquiry, the spread of this “Byzantinizing” culture of representation from the circle of the Avar period elite to lower layers of society also has to be studied. Answers to this latter inquiry are, however, not only offered by early and middle Avar period find material, but also by 8th century belt accessories depicting scenes of Christian and ancient “polytheist” mythological origin, which must at least partly carry or imitate types of pictures arriving to the Carpathian Basin through gift exchange among the elites.¹⁷

On the other hand, another significant direction is the research of artefact and building types referring or related to Christianity. This indicates searching for the answer of two fundamental questions: in what ways and through what kind of mechanisms did the spread of various types of pectoral crosses take place among the Avars and the Hungarians? The reasonableness of this question is proven by the fact that while the majority of pectoral crosses dating to the Avar period originates from burial assemblages which can be labelled as “pagan” with good reason, by the majority of burials yielding 10th-11th-century crosses there are no obvious signs referring to the religious affiliation/belief system of the deceased or the community performing the burial. Therefore, in order to acquire a more accurate understanding on the significance of cross finds, it may be expedient to also analyse the burial practices of the Eastern Mediterranean, from where these artefacts mainly arrived to the Carpathian Basin. Beside the evaluative overview of Christian symbols placed in the grave of certain individuals, possibilities of dividing cemeteries used by Christian communities should also be considered. The reason is that today it is obviously known of “Christian cemeteries” that Christians started to create topographically separated burial places in different times throughout the Mediterranean, as well as that binding prescriptions expecting the strict separation of Christian and “pagan” deceased are relatively late and became widespread mainly in Latin Christianity. Based on written sources, however, we can primarily obtain information about norms considered desirable and facts of divergent cases, while

¹⁶ Bollók Ádám, ‘A bizánci állam régészeti kutatásáról’ [On the archaeology of the Byzantine state], *Antik Tanulmányok* 55 (2011) 23-48.

¹⁷ Bollók Ádám, Bellerophon and Crucifixion? A brief note on late antique circular box brooches from Pannonia. In: Orsolya Heinrich-Tamáska - Péter Straub (eds), *Menschen, Siedlung und Landschaft im Wechsel der Jahrtausende am Balaton/People, Settlement and Landscape on Lake Balaton over the Millennia*. *Castellum Pannonicum Pelsonense* 4 (Budapest - Leipzig - Keszthely - Rahden/Westfalen 2014) 259-279.

archaeological material also provides information about how wide-spread certain practices actually were. Therefore it is especially important to carefully investigate the development of “churchyards” – a phenomenon considered primary indicator of burial places exclusively used by Christians –, as well as the general transformation of the relations between churches and cemeteries in late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (Ádám Bollók).

In 670, when the Byzantine-Avarian wars were over, the mentioning of Avars in written sources also ceased. A possible reason for that is the appearance of the Danube Bulgarian Empire between the Byzantine Empire and the Avar Khaganate, as a result of which Avars did no more mean an immediate threat to Byzantium. Another possible reason may be that by that time, the Avar Empire had lost its political influence in this region. After that, the Avars are mentioned first at the end of the 8th century AD, hence one can primarily rely on archaeological material for reconstructing the intermediate period, thus the late Avar period.

One of the numerous unanswered questions of the late Avar period is: as a result of what kind of influences did the culture of the so-called “griffon and tendril motif” appear around the turn of the 7th-8th century AD, which is significantly different from the cultural appearance of the previous period? Archaeological research suggests several theories in respect of this. According to certain approaches, a group identifiable with a Bulgarian group appeared in the Carpathian Basin at the end of the 7th century AD, which transforms the previous cultural image of the region. According to another concept, local Middle Avar period material culture transforms into the art of the people labelled by the “griffon and tendril motif”. Accordingly, Gyula László’s “double conquest” theory indicates that Middle Avar period inhabitants constituted the elite of the late Avar population applying “griffon and tendril motifs”.

Therefore it is a task of key importance to understand processes and find groups leading to the development of the “griffon and tendril motif” culture appearing in the beginning of the 8th century AD, to learn to what extent this new appearance was rooted in the heritage of the ancestors, thus of the Middle Avar period, and to what extent it was influenced by the political or cultural forms of appearances of neighbouring countries. The analysis would involve pictorial representations appearing on archaeological material, elements of costumes, jewellery and pottery. Studying the structure of settlements and cemeteries, as well as burial practices could also provide significant data regarding changes in the image of the onetime society (Emese Szabó).

The end of the Avar period – the Carolingian period

At the end of the 8th century and the beginning of the 9th century AD, after near a quarter of a millennium, the Avar Khaganate – holding peoples of the Carpathian Basin together as a community with unified culture – fell apart due to external attacks and inner power struggles. Partly the easternmost territory of the Carolingian Empire: Pannonia Province containing Transdanubia and the Drava-Sava Interfluve, and partly Old Moravian and Old Croatian principalities feudally dependent on the Empire replaced the Khaganate, while the region east of the Danube were still inhabited by and remained under the control of the Avars. The cultural transformation of the entire eastern periphery of the Carolingian Empire – the change and acculturation of costumes, tastes and values of the population – is a slow process taking place over several decades in different ways, and with different impacts. This did not only differ from previous processes in its rate, but also in its character, since the purpose and the essence of expansion was the establishment of spiritual and economic dependence by means of spreading Christianity, and through feudal system – similarly to the expansion of the Roman Empire, the role model of the Frankish reigning house propagating *renovation imperii* as their motto. The

dominantly Avar cultural appearance of the population only changed significantly by around the middle of the century.

At the end of the first third of the 9th century AD, Pannonia fell into further pieces, into smaller counties. Among them the one established in Lower Pannonia around 840 AD is known the best. Its seat was Mosaburg, built on present-day Zalavár-Vársziget, which emerged to an urban level by the end of the century, and also became the Pannonian residence of the Salzburgian archbishops and Arnulf, the Eastern Frankish king. Between 840 and 870 Priwina and Chezil built more than 30 churches, among which three could be identified by archaeological methods in Zalavár-Vársziget (churches dedicated to St. John the Baptist, St. Mary, and the pilgrim church of Martyr Adrian) and further two in its immediate vicinity (Zalavár-Récéskút and Zalasabar-Borjúállás).

For analysing relations between power and culture, Mosaburg/Zalavár – as the seat of Transdanubian secular and church administration in the Carolingian period, and where archaeological research has been performed for more than 60 years – is particularly suitable. Analyses can be carried out within excellent conditions at several levels: a) through the relations of the central regions of the Carolingian Empire, Italy, Byzantium, and the seat of the count palatine (pfalz) located at the periphery, b) through the relations of neighbouring gentilis principalities and the centre of the Carolingian province, c) by examining relations between the seat of the count palatine and the servicing people's villages falling in its catchment area.¹⁸

The types of ground plans and furniture of the churches of Mosaburg – such as carved stone ornaments, coloured and painted glass windows, a bell – draw up with those of churches built in the heartland of the Eastern Frank Empire both in construction and quality. The “imposing” pilgrim church built by Archbishop Liupram of Salzburg around 855, in which “the martyr Adrianus was laid to rest”, is the largest church archaeologically known in the eastern periphery of the Carolingian Empire. This type of churches with an aisle crypt spread in newly converted regions at around the same time as similar Saxon, Frieze and Thuringian churches. Following Byzantine examples, so-called “rood screens” made of flagstones may have been constructed between the central nave and the side aisles, between the pillars at breast height, for blocking the nave from pilgrims who were only allowed in the aisles. Members of the noble retinue – living in harrow-structure, storied wood-houses and palaces – spoke multiple languages (Germanic, Avarian, Slavic, Greek, Latin) and applied various alphabets (Latin, Runic, Glagolitic). Their costumes were also diverse; beside the ones generally worn in the Carolingian Empire, late Avar period cultural traditions of the eastern periphery were also decisively present. The tableware used by the elite was made of finely levigated clay by using hand-turned wheel, and was usually polished carefully and burnt golden brown, which indicates the revival of antique traditions, and an increased interest turning towards the Mediterranean area. Discovering the power relations and the cultural connection system of the elite of Mosaburg is one of the main objectives and tasks of the planned project (Béla Miklós Szőke).

Another important objective is the research of Mosaburg centre and its catchment area; analysing and comparing the settlement structure of different-ranked settlements such as early medieval towns (*civitas*), noble manor houses (*curtes*: Zalavár-Récéskút and Zalavár-Kövecses), and servicing people's villages. Beside the research of settlement structure (the character, location and density of settlement features), the comparison is grounded on the unearthed find material, the systematization of Carolingian age pottery within broader chronological and topographical frameworks, the division of

¹⁸ Szőke Béla Miklós: Mosaburg/Zalavár und Pannonien in der Karolingerzeit. *Antaeus* 31–32 (2010) 9–52; Szőke, Béla Miklós: Pannónia a Karoling korban. Budapest, 2011 (MTA Doktori tézisek)

find horizons of the period between the 8th and 11th centuries A.D, as well as the qualitative comparison of pottery, thus of settlement and grave good pottery (the pottery of the Vörs-Papkert B cemetery and settlement beside Zalavár-Vársziget). By means of the technological and morphological classification and typologization, and the chronological systematization of pottery, the direction of cultural influences reaching the Carolingian Mosaburg, as well as pottery types indicating relations with the centre can be demonstrated. Through the analysis of settlements of the centre and the periphery, we may learn how the differences between centres and servicing people's villages and their find material become manifested, what type of correlation can be demonstrated between certain settlement forms and their material culture. Beyond the investigation of the structure and space usage of settlements, and the urbanization of Early Medieval centres, the mapping of settlement networks is another task of the planned research focusing on the region. As a result, determining the role of certain settlements may help understanding the economic, craft industrial and commercial relations and conditions of the micro region, as well as reconstructing an active pre-feudal settlement concentration and economic model (Katalin Gergely).

3) Applied methods

During our research we primarily aim to reveal new coherences, to perform a kind of integrating work, and to conclude results obtained by different archaeological methods by interpreting them in relation to the complex connection between power and culture, in a way that also makes them available to related fields of research. We expect the proposition of new questions and coherences from this seemingly not new method demanding continuous and intensive work in a workshop, which can become indispensable bases for any further research.

4) Potential results

The research group plans to organize a conference presenting the program and the first results of the research in 2016, and another conference summarizing results of the research in 2018. At the end of the project, we will report on the completed work in a volume of studies. Any results achieved on certain fields will be published in further separate volumes (see individual plans). Three among the individual plans also constitute significant parts of PhD dissertations being in process during the project.

5) Research infrastructure

We plan to employ three young researchers (Zsófia Masek, Emese Szabó, Katalin Gergely) during the entire time of the project, and to provide a laptop computer to every participants of the project in order to enable them continuous and uninterrupted work in multiple locations, libraries, museums etc.