

## SAINT MARTIN AND PANNONIA Treasures from Saint Martin's Land of Birth

DORKA TAMÁS

*A twin archaeological exhibition unique of its kind is has been opened within the framework of Saint Martin's Memorial Year in Pannonhalma and Szombathely. The collection—boasting an array of famous archaeological finds and numerous gold objects, among them an item of the Nagyszentmiklós Treasure—presents a period of nearly five centuries of Pannonia, Saint Martin's land of birth, providing also an insight into the way Christianity spread in this region. It is for the first time that the public have the opportunity to see these museum pieces of internationally acknowledged cultural and artistic value in a comprehensive display. The exhibition awaits visitors until this year's autumn in the Iseum Savariense museum in Szombathely and the Museum of Pannonhalma Abbey.*



Fig. 1: Fortuna statue, 1<sup>st</sup> century AD (photo: Attila Mudrák, © Wosinsky Mór County Museum, Szekszárd)



Fig. 2: Dolichenus triangle, 193–235 AD (photo: Gellért Áment, © Hungarian National Museum)

Saint Martin, a famous saint, was born 1700 years ago in Hungary. A Roman soldier who became Bishop of Tours, he is celebrated this year by the **Pannonhalma Archabbey** and the **City of Szombathely**. As an outstanding event of the memorial year, the twin exhibition offers a unique collection of international importance, gathered from the territory of erstwhile Pannonia, a Roman province at Saint Martin's time.



Fig. 3: Blue jug from Mosdós, 4<sup>th</sup> century AD  
(photo: Gellért Áment, © Katona József Museum, Kecskemét)

The presentation of the rich material, divided into two parts and arranged by historical periods, is the result of collaboration between two museums. In the **Iseum Savariense** museum in Szombathely visitor can trace the history of Pannonia and Savaria back to the Roman period when Saint Martin lived, whereas in the **Museum of Pannonhalma Abbey** it is the age of Saint Martin, the Christian monk and bishop, as well as the subsequent centuries that are aimed to arouse visitors' interest.

Several objects and finds are seen for the first time to the public, only known so far by a narrow circle of professionals, whereas some others have been unknown even for them. Research into the exhibits, often even their first publication, are due to this exhibition.

The earliest item on display is a 43 cm high bronze **Fortuna statue** dating from the latter half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, still in a remarkably good condition. Made in Italy, it originally stood in the sanctuary of a land-owning family's villa. The statue has two parts fitted together, since the figure and the throne were cast



Fig 4: Nose guard plate with Christogram, 4<sup>th</sup> century AD  
(photo: Gellért Áment, © Hungarian National Museum)



Fig. 5: Piece of a Hun sacrificial set  
(photo: Attila Mudrák, © Rómer Flóris Museum, Győr)



Fig. 6: Jug with hunting scenes, c.500 AD  
(photo: Attila Mudrák, © Ferenczy Museum, Szentendre)

separately. The goddess wears a short-sleeved *stola* slipping down from her right shoulder and sandals made of thin straps. The front side of the headdress is covered with silver sheet, and the eyes are also inlaid with silver. In the right hand she holds a sacrificial plate, whereas in her left hand is a cornucopia densely ornamented with foliate design.

Typical to the **Jupiter Dolichenus** cult is the triangle-shaped **bronze plaque** produced in the period 193–235 AD, with embossed decoration on both sides. This sort of object was placed in every sanctuary of the god. A figure of Victoria, Goddess of Victory decorates the tip of the plaque. According to the inscription, the triangle was commissioned by the centurion of the maniple stationed in the military camp at Dunaszekcső.

A highlight of the Saint Martin & Pannonia exhibition is the so-called **blue jug** from the grave goods of **Mosdós**, a truly peculiar item in both domestic and international comparison, found together with a glass beaker and a glazed bowl. Apart from this piece, no other cobalt-blue glass jug of this size is known from the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.

Another rarity is the cornet-shaped purple glass beaker of the late imperial period type with some remains of gold foil decoration that has almost completely worn away. Under the brim is a Greek inscription: “Drink and you shall live with yours in the name of the Creator of the World.” Based on the

way the gold foil, now lost, used to be attached to the glass, the one-time decoration—three circular fields with a horseman riding towards the right in each—can be identified. Between the circular fields dancing figures were depicted.

The earliest Christian artefacts in the exhibition date from the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. An outstanding example is the gilt silver **nose guard plate** with a Christogram indicating that its high-ranked owner must have been a Christian. Together with the helmet shell it was found in one of the side-towers of the Alsóhetény fortress, where it had been hidden between the building stones in the latter half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, squashed to handful size. Christograms also appear on the ornate **brooches** decorated with onion knobs, recovered from a late Roman grave in Tihany. Brooches or fibulae were used to fasten military capes at the shoulder.

A real rarity is a **Hun sacrificial set**, a find unearthed in Pannonhalma, a fact conferring particular significance on it. The complete set of gilt bow also comes from Pannonhalma. Funeral offerings containing symbolic emblems of power used to be buried at the memorial place on occasion of the funeral feast.

A splendid late Roman find from Hungary is the **jug with hunting scenes**, a worthy though much less known counterpart in quality of Seuso Treasure pieces. The belly of the jug has depictions of bear-hunting scenes: a tiger hunter on horseback, the fight of a bear and a boar, and a hunter attacked by a leopard. The jug of Budakalász, due to its relationship with court art, is thought to have been made in one of the prestigious workshops of the Byzantine Empire, in Constantinople or Antioch, at the end of 5<sup>th</sup> or early 6<sup>th</sup> century. The successful hunter served as a model of prowess for the viewer, and the hunt as a good luck symbol became a widespread ornamental motif of temples, secular buildings, and objects (tableware, jewellery, buckles) in the late antique world.

*Tamás, Dorka • Saint Martin and Pannonia*

**Cup No. 9** of the largest hoard of early medieval Central and Eastern Europe, the **Nagyszentmiklós Treasure**, unearthed in 1799, makes part of the display too. The item, presumably dating from the 7<sup>th</sup> century, is undoubtedly of Christian origin, as suggested by the clearly functional depiction of four-pointed crosses in the centre of medallions on the bottom of the cup. However, the crucial point is that – although the inscription of the cup, despite several attempts, could not be conclusively deciphered – experts of middle-Byzantine epigraphy agree almost without exception in the reading of the word *hydatos* (‘water’), which indicates that the cup had been used at baptism.

It is for the first time that, through the exhibits, visitors get a comprehensive picture of how Christianity spread in the Roman province Pannonia. The double identity of Saint Martin, a Roman soldier who embraced Christianity, is the exact reflection of his age.

**Venues:**

**Iseum Savariense**

6–8 II. Rákóczi Ferenc Street, Szombathely, 9700 Hungary

Until 30 September 2016

**Museum of Pannonhalma Abbey 6**

1–3 Mátyás király Street, Pannonhalma, 9090 Hungary

Until 30 November 2016

For further information and advance booking at a reduced price, please visit

[www.szentmarton-pannonia.hu](http://www.szentmarton-pannonia.hu).