

BOOK REVIEW: THE CAROLINGIAN PERIOD IN PANNONIA. MOSABURG - ZALAVÁR 1 BY BÉLA MIKLÓS SZŐKE

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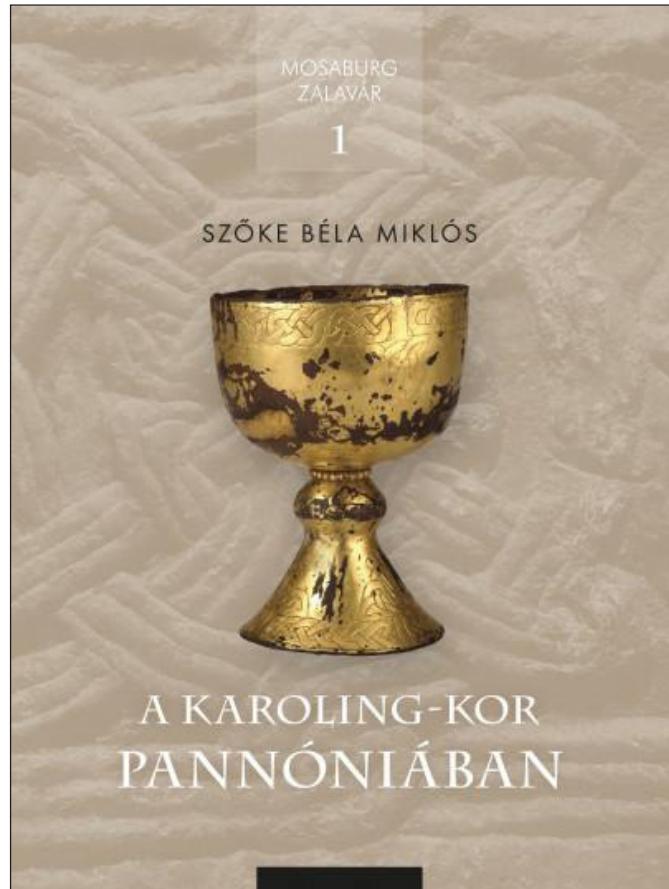
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The author of the book presented here has directed the archaeological excavations at Zalavár-Vársziget for more than a quarter of a century, since 1994. The results have shed a whole new light on this Carolingian period county seat and the Transdanubian region in the 9th century, as well as on the evaluation of the written sources related to it.

This thick volume is in fact based upon the dissertation entitled *Pannonia in the Carolingian Period* submitted for the title of Doctor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and defended in 2013. More than 70% of its text is the same as the dissertation, but the book also touches upon the lessons from the archaeological features that have been discovered since then as well as the most recent professional literature. The work – in part based upon the results of excavations – reassesses the written sources related to Carolingian Pannonia and presents how the understanding of the historical significance, periodization, settlement structure, sacred and private structures, fortifications and society of Mosaburg has changed compared to the previous profile based on the excavations performed over the last 25 years. As is stated in the introduction (p. 13), "...the time has come for the historical profile that was checkered with formulaic, simplified and superficial explanations that did not have solid logical foundations to be replaced by a historical evaluation built upon original sources, covering a wide horizon and encompassing the entire period."

Through a presentation of the antecedents, the book begins with the history of the increasing tensions in Avar-Frankish relations, King Charlemagne's campaign of 791, the internal struggles in the Khaganate, the 795–796 military campaigns of Eric of Friuli and then Pepin of Italy, the beginnings of Christian conversion, the resistance of the Avars, the presumed attack by the Bulgarian khan Krum in 803 or 805, the christening of the khagan and the settlement of the fleeing Kapkan (*capcanus*) and his people with the Franks. The scanty sources make it possible to interpret the events in various ways. The author correctly assesses and judges the previous theories, in particular István Bóna's views that supplemented the missing information with rich fantasies. There are also times when even the author himself is not able to take a clear position.

The next chapter deals with the development of Frankish administration, the uprising of Duke Liudewit, the occupation of the area between the Drava and Sava rivers by the Bulgarians, the borders of Pannonia



*A Karoling-kor Pannóniában. Mosaburg – Zalavár 1
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by Béla Miklós Szőke.

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Inferior and Superior as well as the change in the border in 828, and the acquisition of the first counties. After this, the histories of Pribina and Kocel, the organization of the county of Mosaburg, the connections developed with the church of Salzburg, the stay in Mosaburg of Cyril and Methodius, and the issues of the Byzantine mission are discussed.

A separate chapter deals with the relations between King Arnulf and the Hungarians. The author concludes that the Hungarians controlled the Great Hungarian Plain to the east of the Danube already in 862, and it was only due to the impact of the Pecheneg attack that the Hungarians remaining east of the Carpathians came across to settle in the Carpathian Basin in 895. The Hungarians occupied the area west of the Danube following the death of Arnulf (899). The Bavarian army marching against them suffered a serious defeat in 907 at the Battle of Pressburg, and thus the Enns River became the western border of the Principality of Hungary for nearly a half century. Bratislava has been accepted as the location of the battle ever since the historian Aventinus. Through further support for the 1989 theory of Imre Boba, the author comes to the conclusion that since Arnulf entrusted the Duke of Brezlav with the defense of Mosaburg and Pannonia in 896, Brezlavburg became the new name of Mosaburg, and the fateful battle of 907 instead may have taken place in the area of the present-day town of Zalavár.

The second half of the book presents the results of the excavations of Mosaburg (Zalavár–Vársziget). It can clearly be stated based on the excavated fortifications that the *munimen / castrum* referred to in the *Conversio* indicated the court of Pribina, which stretched to the southern third of the island and a wide ditch and rampart running east-west separated it from the other parts of the island. It was in this area that Pribina's private church was erected, dedicated in honor of the Virgin Mary. In the second half of the 850s, a pilgrimage church named after the martyr Adrian was built to the north of the moat, while a baptismal chapel of Saint John the Baptist that was constructed of wood had previously operated to the west of this ditch. The *civitas* mentioned in the *Conversio* indicated an episcopal *pfalz*, which was surrounded by a palisade with a walkway behind the battlements. The archbishop of Salzburg wanted to make Mosaburg the seat of a bishop. He abandoned his intention following the Byzantine mission and then the death of Kocel. Following this, the legal status of Mosaburg changed. The presumed two-story palace of King Arnulf, which was excavated between 2011 and 2015, was erected in part above the filled-in moat. The charters issued here confirm that Arnulf stayed several times at Mosaburg, which had become a royal *pfalz*. A charter of 890 names Mosaburg a *regia civitas*, or royal seat, thereby raising it to this status.

The author presents the churches of Vársziget Island and their identification in detail. The ground plan of the Virgin Mary Church is only known through the survey of G. Turco in 1569, because its stones were reused in the 19th century. More than a century after its foundation, it became the church of the St. Adrian Benedictine monastery established in 1019 through a transfer of patronage. The author excavated the wooden chapel of Saint John the Baptist and its well. The columns of the associated rectory were discovered below the western extension of the three-aisled St. Adrian pilgrimage church. The St. Adrian basilica was amongst the most advanced, best-equipped churches of the time. Both its stained glass windows and its bell were made on site. From the ambulatory around the chancel, it was possible to see the grave of the martyr Adrian, and three chapels and crypts for the graves of nobles opened from the semicircular walkway. The book also briefly presents the two palaces with column supports excavated to the southwest of the basilica, which the archbishop of Salzburg built for himself. We know of two churches in the vicinity of Vársziget, the basilica constructed of stone excavated on Récéskút Island and a single-nave church built from wood belonging to the manor house surrounded by a palisade wall on Borjúállás Island. The author has identified these as the *foris civitatem* mentioned in the *Conversio*, that is, the churches consecrated by the archbishop Liupram in 850 built for the priests Sandrat and Ermperht outside of Vársziget. I considered the Borjúállás church to be the church of Wittimar. The author did not accept this because no polished ceramics, which were present in every waste pit on Vársziget, came from the settlement features that preceded the construction of the manor house. However, this settlement was inhabited by servants, who theoretically would only have been able to afford decorative ceramics in the last third of the century (a total of four jars with polished surfaces were found amongst the several hundred ceramic objects at the Alsóbáránpuszta cemetery, which is of a

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similar age, and these were found in a single row of graves, alongside corpses that hypothetically belonged to one family).

The final section of the book presents the society of Pannonia in the 9th century, based in part on burial customs and in part on items of apparel. In addition to the changes in Late Avar period burial customs, he discusses burials around churches and the apparel of the common people and the elite. The author's excavations at Vársziget clearly show that so-called Veligrad or Byzantine oriental-style jewelry known from the territory of the Moravian Principality are not an indicator of ethnicity, but they constitute a part of the jewelry found throughout the territory of the former Avar Khaganate and its area of influence.

The book must be supplemented with a few statements. For example, the observation made in connection with the beginnings of Christian conversion, stating that at the end of the 8th century there was no "barbarian Christian" population living in Fenékpuszta (p. 85) is correct, but the burial customs of the later Keszthely culture retained their Christian character until the beginning of the 9th century. Even in the 8th century, the pagan Avars and the Christians buried their dead separated from one another in the Keszthely cemetery, and chest crosses are known from the latest sections of the Lesencetomaj cemetery. According to the author, the Mosaburg center and its connected area became depopulated following the Hungarian conquest, "the burials around the church were discontinued, and only at the St. Adrian church can it be proven that (...) new cemetery sections were opened at the cemetery's eastern and western edges and further from the cemetery" (p. 426). However, the cemetery around the church in Borjúállás was in use continuously until about the end of the first third of the 10th century and about a half of the graves were found outside the demolished palisade wall.

Béla Miklós Szőke's book on the Zalavár research is an especially important milestone. The continuation of the excavations obviously may bring new results. For example, on page 437 one can read that weapons and spurs have not been found in the same grave in the territory of the county of Mosaburg. While on page 447, "Weapons were not placed alongside a single deceased male in a grave around the Mosaburg church." However, this observation lost its validity in the wake of the 2019 excavations.

The history of Carolingian Pannonia and Mosaburg is not a Hungarian research topic, but one of Central Europe. Béla Miklós Szőke's research is essential, but it is well known that the results discussed in scholarly publications in Hungarian are only integrated to a limited extent into the research ongoing in neighboring countries. This is why it is particularly important that this book will also be available in German in the near future due to the work of the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum in Mainz.