



ATTILA'S EUROPE?

STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION AND
STRATEGIES OF SUCCESS IN THE EUROPEAN
HUN PERIOD



ATTILA'S EUROPE?

STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION AND STRATEGIES OF SUCCESS IN THE EUROPEAN HUN PERIOD

Extended, annotated proceedings of the international conference
organised by the Hungarian National Museum and
the Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, June 6–8, 2019

Edited by Zsófia Rácz and Gergely Szenthe



Edited by Zsófia Rácz and Gergely Szenthe

English and German texts revised by Attila Király, Ágnes Merényi, László Oláh,
Magdalena Seleanu and Péter Somogyi

© 2021 Hungarian National Museum, Eötvös Loránd University and the authors

All rights reserved.

You are free to copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format as long as you quote the source. You may not adapt it, remix, transform or build upon the material. This licence does not give you permission to use photographic and other images (where permission has been granted to us to use).

Publisher

Benedek Varga, director general of the Hungarian National Museum

Dávid Bartus, dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Eötvös Loránd University

Cover: Gold bowl, Şimleu Silvaniei hoard, photo: Ádám Vágó; Title pages: Chapter 1: Onyx brooch, Şimleu Silvaniei hoard, photo: Ádám Vágó; Chapter 2: Jug, Bátaszék, photo: Judit Kardos; Chapter 3: Artificially deformed skull, Pusztataskony-Ledence, Site 2, photo: Tamás Szeniczey; Chapter 4: Cup, Szeged-Nagyszéksós, photo: Ádám Vágó. 1–2, 4: Hungarian National Museum, Budapest; 3: Hungarian Natural History Museum, Budapest.

The publication of this volume was supported by the Ministry of Innovation and Technology of Hungary from the National Research, Development and Innovation Fund, financed under the ELTE TKP2020-IKA-05 funding scheme.

Cover design and layout concept: Anna Farkas

Layout: Gábor Váczi

Technical editor: Gábor Váczi

Printed and bound by Dürer Nyomda Ltd.

Managing director: István Aggod

ISBN 978-615-5978-39-5

CONTENTS

Benedek Varga
Lectori Salutem 9

László Borhy
Foreword 11

Zsófia Rácz – Gergely Szenthe
Structural transformation and strategies of success
in the European Hun period: Introductory remarks 15

ENCOUNTER OF CIVILIZATIONS

Radu Harhoiu
Die Hunnenzeit im unteren Donaubecken 21

Andreas Rau – Claus von Carnap-Bornheim
Scandinavia and the Eurasian nomads: Comments on evidence
and interpretations 77

Natalia P. Matveeva – Alexandr S. Zelenkov
The impact of nomadic culture on the population of Western Siberia
in the era of the Huns and ancient Turks 95

Judyta Rodzińska-Nowak
The “princely” burial from Jakuszowice (western Lesser Poland) and
its importance for the interpretation of the ethnic situation and political
circumstances between the Odra and Vistula rivers during
the period of Hunnic domination 113

Anton A. Stokov
Two-chamber vaults of the Cimmerian Bosphorus in the Migration period 131

Ágnes B. Tóth
Authentic or fake? Do they belong to the “Caucasian-type” brooches?
Copper alloy brooches in the collection of the University of Debrecen 159

REGIONAL TRAJECTORIES

Tivadar Vida
The Huns and the late antique settlement structure in Pannonia 173

Tina Milavec
Crises and new beginnings: Collapse, adaptation and strategies
of success along the road to Italy 201

Murtazali S. Gadzhiev
The Maskut Kingdom and the Hun Empire: Textual sources
and archaeological data 213

Dmitry S. Korobov
The system of habitation of the North Caucasian Alans in the Hunnic era 223

Ivan Bugarski
Consequences of Hunnic raids and the newly-established border:
An archaeological panorama of the Central Balkans (ca. 450–500) 243

Balázs Wieszner – Emese Gyöngyvér Nagy
A new sacrificial deposit of the Hun period from Debrecen 259

PEOPLE'S LIVES

**Bernadett Ny. Kovacsóczy – Zsófia Rácz – Viktória Mozgai –
Antónia Marcsik – Bernadett Bajnóczy**
Archaeological and natural scientific studies on the Hun-period grave
from Kecskemét-Mindszenti-dűlő 305

**Alpár Dobos – Szilárd Sándor Gál – Imola Kelemen –
Endre Neparáczki**
5th-century burials from Sângeorgiu de Mureş-Kerek-domb
(Mureş County, Romania) 327

Zsófia Masek

Settlement research of the 5th century in the core of the Hunnic Empire:
A chronological and stylistic approach 361

Nataša Miladinović-Radmilović

A contribution to the study of archery on the basis of activity-induced
stress markers on the skeleton 389

Tamás Szeniczey – Antónia Marcsik – Zsófia Rácz – Tamás Hajdu

A survey of the 5th-century population in Hungary based on the published
physical anthropological data 417

ATTILA'S EUROPE**Eszter Istvánovits – Valéria Kulcsár**

The "*argumentum ex silentio*": A possible new approach in the research
of the Hun period 435

Zsolt Mráv – Viktória Mozgai – Annamária Bárány

Fragments of silver-gilt saddle plates and horse bones buried in a Late Roman
ditch at Göd (Pest County, Hungary). Contributions to the funerary sacrifice
deposits and "horse skin" rituals of the Hun period 449

Attila P. Kiss

Which came first, the chicken or the egg? The ethnic interpretations
of the hoards of Şimleu Silvaniei / Szilágysomlyó: A case study
in mixed argumentation 477

Zsuzsanna Hajnal – János Gábor Ódor

A Hun-period gold assemblage from Diósjenő-Magashegy. Preliminary report 501

Vujadin Ivanišević

The circulation of Roman solidi in the 5th century in Moesia Prima and
the Barbaricum 519

Péter Somogyi

Beiträge zu den spätrömisch-frühbyzantinischen Fundmünzen
des 5. Jahrhunderts im Karpatenbecken 537

Gergely Szenthe

Social power, identity and the ritual deposits in "Attila's Europe" 563

LECTORI SALUTEM

Attila and his Huns, the Hunnic campaigns and the location of the Hunnic power centre have figured prominently in archaeological scholarship, as has their cultural reception in European historical and political thought during the past one and a half millennia. The image of the Huns underwent a continuous change from one age and culture to the other, and they were alternately portrayed as “bloodthirsty barbarians” and the “scourge of God” or as “noble savages” in European political debates as well as in literature, art and music. Attila and his Huns have pervaded European thought, moulding our perception of the fall or the slow decline of the Western Roman Empire and our perspectives on the transition between Antiquity and the Middle Ages, on the early medieval dichotomy of Christianity and paganism, on the nature of political empires, on the impact of nomadic peoples on Europe and on the migration of Germanic (or “Germanic”) tribes.

One curious phenomenon is how passionately debates on the interpretation of this period are conducted in international scholarship, a passion that is rarely encountered in academic discussions of any other antique or early medieval period. I can think of no other reason than that the academic discourse on the Hunnic campaigns and the sweeping migrations of the Late Roman period have demonstrably direct impact on our own lives. It would appear that in this particular case, the academic research projects and debates affect issues of our own identity, our very Europeanness, and oft-times even have a bearing on certain aspects of our national and political identity as well as on our world-view, generating debates that resonate well beyond the groves of academe – which, admittedly, fills me with deep satisfaction as a museum director.

While the critical re-assessment of the written sources often leads to paradigm shifts in itself, no matter the perfection with which historical philology is pursued, the corpus of written sources available to researchers is unlikely to increase significantly. The approaches, perspectives and research designs of the social sciences and studies in the history of reception have and still hold a range of exciting potentials, many of which have been explored during the past fifty years.

Archaeology, on the other hand, can draw from a wealth of new sources in the wake of new excavations and the many advances in archaeometric analyses, and can thus

offer not only fresh data, but also novel perspectives and interpretative frameworks. The present volume is a compendium of the papers read at the conference “Attila’s Europe?” held in the Hungarian National Museum in May 2019. It offers an overview of archaeological research conducted during the past decades in the central, eastern and south-eastern regions of Europe as well as of the many new directions in this field of research. The papers range from descriptions of new sites and new excavations to presentations and discussions of new data and new analyses, alongside new perspectives and new interpretations.

The surprisingly meagre number of Hun-period sites, repeatedly emphasised in the studies, and the low population number of Central or Eastern Asian stock as demonstrated by archaeogenetic analyses stand in stark contrast to the undeniable strength of the 4th–5th-century Hunnic power centre – which again goes to show that genetic ancestry cannot be exclusively correlated with ethnic identity and that it did not have an exclusive influence on ethnogenesis, and particularly not on political and military organisations and their efficacy.

The title chosen for the conference and the conference volume is in itself a reflection of the complexity of this issue. The notion of Europe can alternately be seen as a retrojection of the cultural concept of the Carolingian renaissance onto the 5th-century conditions of the continent, or as one of early building blocks of a much later concept, or simply as a nod to the traditions of current archaeological practice in designating regions. Can we actually speak of Attila’s Europe? To what extent did the Hunnic campaigns overturn the slow and gradual population movements affecting the Western Empire, and the demographic and social conditions? What was their impact on the period’s political, social and intellectual transformation, and what are their traces in the material record of the Eastern European region in the broader sense? The studies in this volume have surveyed the current evidence in their quest for meaningful answers to these questions.

The philological tradition appears somewhat more straightforward: in 476, Romulus Augustulus, son of Orestes, a high-ranking official in Attila’s court, was deposed by Odoacer, son of Edika, king of the Scirians. Edika is occasionally identified with Edekon, a member of Attila’s court who, as a military leader, represented Attila in Constantinople. And although the year 476 has been regarded as denoting a symbolic milestone for some time, it is exactly its symbolic nature that best expresses the many strands linking this event to the Hunnic court and the centuries-old tradition that looked upon this date as marking the irreversible decline of the antique world and the first step on the road leading to the birth of Europe.

Budapest, May 23, 2021

Benedek Varga

Director General of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest

FOREWORD

When tearing down the old walls of Chalcedon, a town lying in the territory controlled by the Emperor Valens, a square block of stone inscribed with Greek verse came to light, which forecast the ill-fated future of Pannonia and Moesia:

*“Countless hordes of men spread far and wide
With warlike arms shall cross clear Istrus’ stream
To ravage Scythia’s fields and Mysia’s land.
But mad with when they Pannonia raid,
There battle and life’s end their course shall check.”*

This ominous oracle has been preserved in the work of Ammianus Marcellinus, the 4th-century historian of Rome. Quite obviously, the *lapis quadratus* built into the town wall as a *spolium* did not specify which warlike people would bring death and destruction to the lands in their path; however, in Chapter 2 of his Book XXXI, he contends that the devastation of the Roman Empire and the root cause of the many calamities was the appearance of the Huns (*Hunnorum gens*). His horrifying portrayal of the Huns (Book XXXI, 2, 1–16) outrivals the usual hostile description of Barbarian peoples in antique literature: Ammianus describes them as men “with compact, strong limbs and thick necks ... monstrously ugly and misshapen” and likens them to two-legged, brute beasts and rough-hewn images, adding that they lead a frugal life with no need of fire or fine-flavoured dishes since they feed on wild plants and half-raw meat, and they do not even have roofed houses. Day and night they ride their horses, eating and drinking on horseback, buying and selling and holding their councils on horseback, they are born and raised in the wagons they have made their homes, where they live their lives. Their fickle nature is governed by uncurbed anger, they have neither mores, nor religion, but harbour an unrestrained lust for gold.

It therefore comes as no surprise that the oracle proved true: this unruly, uncontrollable people with its ardent passion for plunder tore through empires, provinces and peoples from the River Ganges flowing through the land of India, across Asia to the western provinces of the Roman Empire.

Whether the explanation for the events that first threatened the Roman Empire's security and ultimately led to its transformation and re-structuring during the few decades from the late 4th to the mid-5th century should indeed be sought in the allegory of the "scourge of God" or, as Ammianus Marcellinus believed, in the wrath of the god Mars (*Martius furor*) remains irresolvable and discussions along these lines are largely futile exercises. What can be reasonably claimed is that this chain of events had an indelible impact on the northern fringes of the Mediterranean world as well as on East Central and South-East Europe, regions that were simultaneously central regions, frontiers and military deployment bases, where Roman culture found itself not only interacting with, but also accommodating Hunnic as well as Alanic, Sarmatian, Germanic and steppean cultures and structures, which soon came to have a decisive impact on the future of the Roman Empire. The Hunnic conquests and the Hunnic rule turned out to be unsustainable in the long term: the Late Roman sources relate how Pannonia was restored to the Roman Empire after fifty years. Nevertheless, the Huns' steppean empire undermined and transformed a crisis-ridden and weakened system, while channelling new cultural impulses from the steppeland in the Caucasus region to the eastern Mediterranean and Central Europe.

The international conference "Attila's Europe? Structural Transformation and Strategies of Success in the European Hun Period" organised by the Institute of Archaeological Sciences of the Eötvös Loránd University and the Hungarian National Museum between June 6 and 9, 2019, explored these issues from two main aspects. The first, "Crisis and revival: Destruction, adaptation and success in the power centres and their broader area during the European Hun period" took a regional and micro-regional approach to how the Hunnic invasion affected socio-economic structures on both sides of the Danube, in the Roman province and in the Barbaricum, whether it brought on crisis, destruction or transformation, and also addressed the issue of how the Huns' presence affected the life, the socio-economic organisation and administration of the local population and various other communities, which could equally well take the form of decline or collapse, or of successful re-organisation and revitalisation. The second, "Centripetal and centrifugal forces in the Hun Empire", examined the arsenal of tools available and deployed for the organisation of the Hun Empire after its conquest of immense territories and how it achieved the political, social and cultural integration of its motley of peoples, each with its own political formation, traditions, language and culture.

The twenty-three studies written by Austrian, German, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Serbian and Slovenian scholars all take a critical, fresh look at the previous broad picture of the Hun period in the light of the dynamic growth of the archaeological record, which complements and adds new hues to the existing corpus of historical sources, alongside an examination of the trajectories that flowed beyond the 4th and 5th centuries, given that the elite identities emerging at this time that had survived Antiquity provided a strong legitimacy for the medieval elites rising to power after the Hun period not only in Hungary, but across the entire European continent. It is my conviction that a far more colourful and more reliable canvas can be painted

of the Huns and their social organisation as well as of the impact they had on the culture of this region than the one bequeathed to posterity by Ammianus Marcellinus, who portrayed them as men with beardless, wrinkled faces furrowed by knives after birth, who wore garments made of linen or the skins of field-mice sewn together that they never once took off until they were reduced to rags by long wear and tear.

Budapest, June 2, 2021

Prof. Dr. László Borhy

Member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences,
Rector of the Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest

STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION AND STRATEGIES OF SUCCESS IN THE EUROPEAN HUN PERIOD: INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Spanning the decades from the late 4th to the mid-5th century, the Hun period is one of the most exciting ages in European history, a harbinger of major changes, the first period when the northern fringes of the Mediterranean, the uncontested centre of western civilisation, suddenly took centre stage in the events on the subcontinent and its broader area.

The Hun period is one of the most dynamically developing fields of Migration period studies: new find assemblages provide an unrivalled opportunity for taking a fresh look at the period's dynamics and for offering new interpretations. Many excellent studies have been recently written about the Hun period and the emergence of early medieval Europe. Not in contrast to, but rather complementing the works written by historians from a top-down perspective of the historical sources, archaeologists are in a position to critically re-appraise and add a wealth of new hues to the broad picture of the Hun period with a bottom-up approach in the light of the dynamically expanding archaeological source material.

Although there has been a proliferation of scholarly literature analysing not only the encounters between nomadic and sedentary cultures, but also the processes leading to the sudden emergence and the eventual collapse of nomadic empires, there are still many gaps to fill in the overall picture of the Migration period and in particular of the Hun Empire as a special case. Especially so, because the Hun period has a bearing on our European cultural milieu, as it contributed to the disintegration of the antique socio-cultural structures and to the emergence of a new era, the early medieval period of the Mediterranean and European world system.

The goal of the Budapest conference, organised by the Archaeological Institute of the Eötvös Loránd University and the Hungarian National Museum, was to direct

scholarly attention to the events and dynamics in East-Central and South-East Europe, the westerly regions of the Hunnic Empire. Probably to the great misfortune of its inhabitants, the Carpathian Basin as well as the adjacent regions played a prominent role during this brief period spanning the late 4th and the earlier 5th century AD. The area was simultaneously a central region, a frontier zone and a military marching route, as well as the melting pot of the richly diverse cultures of Late Roman, Sarmatian, Germanic and steppean origin.

Until recently, scholarly narratives focused on the destruction of local structures, including the disruption of the life of human populations and of the economic and cultural systems in the wake of the Hunnic occupation. Our overall picture of the Hun period in the Middle Danube Basin underwent a major change during the past two decades, not least because of the large-scale excavations that have yielded an immense amount of new archaeological material. As a result, we can now more confidently claim that the break between the Late Roman structures (including the territory of the “Barbaricum”) on the one hand, and the Hun-period imperial order on the other was not as profound as posited earlier. Simultaneously, a spate of new, detailed studies has appeared on the regions neighbouring on the Middle Danube Basin as well as the Eastern European territories. One exciting field of research is the study of how these local cultural systems operated and changed during the era, regardless of whether or not these regions had been integrated in to the “Hunnic Empire”, a nomadic power network based on *gentilis*/clan organisations and their sphere of influence.



The two main sections of the volume's first part are therefore dedicated to the questions of the encounter between steppean and local societies and the regional trajectories emerging after the first contacts. What happened on the local level? What did the Hunnic conquest mean for the Sarmatians of the Hungarian Plain, for the population of the Roman towns and provinces, for local elites, for local administration and for local economies in general? What was their condition at the time? How did the Hunnic

conquest and presence impact the life and culture of local groups? How did local groups re-organise their lives? What disappeared, what remained, and what held out the promise of success – either for particular groups or for specific individuals – in the new world of migrating and shifting peoples?

The cases in which the cultural contact with the “Huns” is weak or virtually undetectable are no less interesting, for they can shed light on the importance of local trajectories as well as on what could be called “the human factor”, the long-term influence of strong scholarly personalities – like the Hungarian István Bóna – who can determine the narratives of a particular field of research for long decades.

Extending its sway over a vast geographic area, the new Hunnic power had to somehow consolidate the motley of peoples of different ancestries, each with its own language and culture, incorporated into the empire in order to stem the rise of centrifugal forces that would threaten its very existence. With the establishment of a nomadic power in the Carpathian Basin, the cultural impulses from the east became dominant. The appearance of a steppean empire led to the dissolution of an already weakened Late Roman organisation, but at the same time, it also channelled the flow of a wide array of cultural impacts between the steppe, the Caucasus, the Mediterranean and Central Europe. Unlike in the territories under Roman rule, there is little evidence for an aggressive conquest in the Carpathian Basin and neither are Hunnic incursions against this region mentioned in the historical sources. Yet, the introduction of the conquerors’ socio-economic structures and the creation of a nomadic imperial culture in the period’s last phase cannot be solely explained by the preponderance of steppean components, given that it simultaneously involved the blending of elements drawn from various sources. The remnants of local Barbarian and Roman populations lived together with the newcomers, namely the Germanic “peoples”, Alans and the probably also heterogeneous groups arriving from the steppe within this new framework in the Carpathian Basin. It would appear that the Roman infrastructure remained in continuous use and that local Roman elites were integrated into the new power system as well.

In second part of the volume, the third and fourth sections explore various aspects of the integration of the immigrant and local elements as well as the patterns in the emergence of the new power and its prominent social groups, the period’s “high society”.

What tools did the Huns have at their disposal to maintain their power structure (empire)? Can we witness any elements of consolidation, and if so, where should they be sought, in which segments of culture? How were culturally and socially diverse elements integrated into a single system? How were group identities constructed, what were their building blocks, to what extent did they blend and how did they change over time?

Archaeological work generally sheds light on the long-term processes of human societies, cultures and economies. The Hun period is one of the few exceptions in

whose case historians, archaeologists and natural scientists are able to work together more closely, as the period is short and there is an abundance of both historical and archaeological sources. We hope that the present volume will provide valuable material not only for archaeologists, but also for historians, and will contribute to constructing new models for the period of "Attila's Europe".

Zsófia Rácz

Institute of Archaeological Sciences, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest

Gergely Szenthe

Department of Archaeology, Hungarian National Museum, Budapest