

CULTURAL CONTACTS OF A TURKISH FORT ON THE DRAVA RIVER

– The testimony of the glazed pottery

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The Turkish fort at Barcs, south-west of Szigetvár, occupied a key position in the Turkish defence line along the Drava River. Erected in 1567, the fort was torched twice: first in 1595, during the Fifteen Years' War, and later in 1664, during Miklós Zrínyi's winter campaign, when it was evacuated. After its construction, the Drava flotilla previously stationed at Eszék was transferred to the fort, whose significance was enhanced by the presence of the fleet until the late 16th century. According to the military pay lists, the garrison was manned by 200 soldiers on the average. Most of the troops came from the Balkans and were in part Muslims.¹ The archaeological finds brought to light during the excavations have a definitely Balkanic flavour. At the same time, the glazed ceramics among the pottery finds and a handful of other artefacts indicate that some of the fort's occupants had contacts with various regions during the 16th century.

The fort was first investigated between 1989 and 1994, and a larger part of the fort's area was excavated in 2002–2003.² The archaeological finds, such as stove remains, baking lids and hand-thrown pottery show strong affinities with Balkanic pottery, which is hardly surprising, given the ethnic background of the troops stationed in the fort. The trade routes leading through the broader area too played an important role in the fort's life.³ The proximity of the trade routes explains why the rather uniform find material also contains artefacts that shed light on the personal contacts of the fort's occupants, as well as the fort's trade contacts. These artefacts reflect links with neighbouring settlements, as well as with pottery manufacturing centres in more distant regions, such as the Ottoman Empire, Austria, Germany and Italy. The finds in question include a handful of glazed pottery fragments, described below.⁴

1. Body fragment of a sgraffito ornamented glazed bowl (Fig. 1a)

Fragment of a deep red, thick-walled bowl decorated on the exterior and interior (inv. no. BR 94.2.158). The bowl can be fitted into the small series of similar glazed vessels of the Turkish period decorated with green and brown painted vegetal or geometric designs incised into the white engobe and covered with a transparent glaze. Footed bowls of this type with a pattern covering both the exterior and interior are extremely rare

¹ Klára Hegyi: *A török hódoltság várai és várkatonasága*, I–III (Budapest: História – MTA történettudományi Intézete, 2007), II: 1327–1329, III: 1590–1594.

² For a comprehensive overview of the history of the fort and its archaeological investigation, see Gyöngyi Kovács – Márton Rózsás: *A barcsi török palánkvár (The Turkish Hoarding Castle of Barcs)*. *Somogyi Múzeumok Közleményei* 12 (1996), 163–182; Gyöngyi Kovács – Márton Rózsás: *A barcsi török vár és környéke. Újabb kutatások (1999–2009) (The Ottoman-Turkish Castle at Barcs and its surroundings. New Research [1999–2009])*. In: *A középkor és a kora újkor régészete Magyarországon / Archaeology of the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period in Hungary I–II*, eds Elek Benkő – Gyöngyi Kovács (Budapest: MTA Régészeti Intézet, 2010), II: 621–642.

³ The road from the Danube (Báta) leading through Pécs and Szigetvár joined the trade route between Eszék and Kanizsa running along the northern shore of the Drava River at Babócsa. Géza Pálffy: *Magyarország két világbirodalom határán (1526–1711)*. In: *Magyarország története*, ed. Ignác Romsics (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2007), 357, map showing the trade of Hungary in the later 16th century.

⁴ The finds are housed in the collection of the Dráva Museum in Barcs (currently called the Drava Public Exhibition Hall).

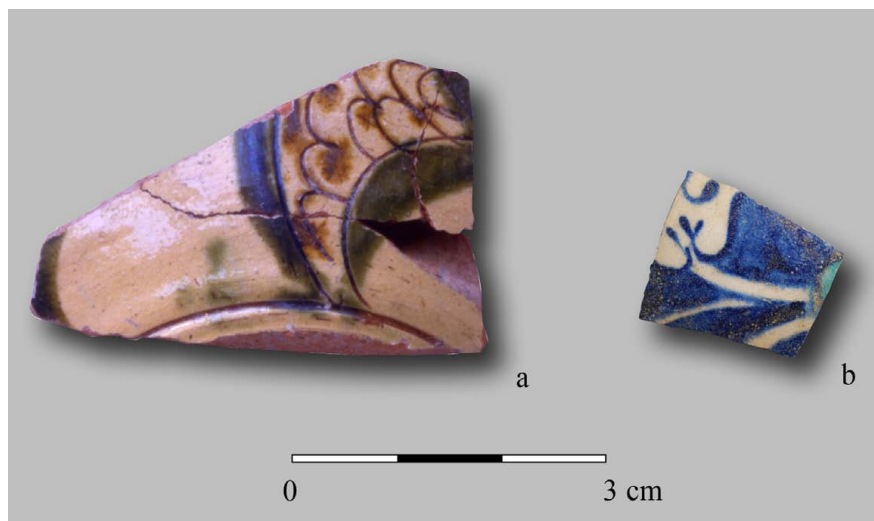


Fig. 1. Barcs fort. a. Sgraffito decorated fragment of a footed bowl (Belgrade?, early 17th century), b. fragment of a faience vessel (Iznik, later 16th century)

in the period's ceramic wares from Hungary,⁵ and were probably made in the Balkans, perhaps in Serbia.⁶ Their use in Hungary can be dated to the later 16th and earlier 17th century.⁷ The stratigraphy of the Barcs fort confirms this dating because the fragment came to light from a pit dug at the onset or the early decades of the 17th century, which cut through the pits of the palisade erected in the 16th century.

The other three vessel fragments described here came to light from 16th century contexts in roughly the same area during the investigation conducted in 2003. Their use can be dated to between 1567 and 1595, a date that is confirmed by the ceramic style. These fragments are unique and rare finds in the fort's material, and other remarkable finds such as a belt plaque made from walrus tusk⁸ were found together with them. It is possible that these finds indicate the location of an important building, perhaps the residence of one of the fort's commanders.

2. Body fragment of an Anatolian tin-glazed faience vessel (Fig. 1b)

Fragment of a white vessel with blue and white design probably made in Iznik (id. no. 644). The decorative style suggests that the fragment can be dated to around 1550–60 and represents the so-called Damascus Style of Iznik faience.⁹ The fragment came to light in the fort's court, from a layer overlying the 16th century occupation level.

3. Fragments of a jug and plate with marble effect decoration (Fig. 2)

Fragments of thin-walled, red coloured vessels decorated with designs in green and red on a white base (id. no. 189). The plate fragment was recovered from a 16th century occupation level, the jug fragments were found in the overlying late 16th century destruction layer. Both vessels were products of an Upper Austrian workshop and had probably arrived to Barcs through Styria. Vessels of this type with a decoration creating a marble effect manufactured in southern Germany (Straubing) and Austria are generally dated to the 16th

⁵ Gyöngyi Kovács: A barcsi török palánkvár kerámialeletei (The Ceramic Finds from the Turkish Palisade Fort at Barcs). *Communicationes Archaeologicae Hungariae* (1998), 168, Fig. 12. 2, with a discussion of comparable finds from Szolnok and Kaposvár.

⁶ The sgraffito decorated vessels from Belgrade seem to confirm this origin. Vesna Bikić: *Gradska keramika Beograda (16–17. vek)*. (Beograd: Arheoloski Institut, 2003), passim, esp. 145, Fig. 31a, b.

⁷ See, for example, Ibolya Gerelyes: Adatok a sgraffito-díszes török kerámia keltezéséhez. *Keletkutatás* (1986 ősz), 81.

⁸ Erika Gál – Gyöngyi Kovács: A Walrus-tusk Belt Plaque from a Sixteenth–Seventeenth Century Ottoman-Turkish Castle along the Drava River (Barcs, Hungary). *Antiquity – Report Gallery* (on-line) (2011, July) <http://antiquity.ac.uk/bulletin.html>

⁹ Gyöngyi Kovács: Iznik Pottery in Hungarian Archaeological Research. In: *Turkish Flowers. Studies on Ottoman Art in Hungary*, ed. Ibolya Gerelyes. (Budapest: Hungarian National Museum, 2005), 72, Ill. 4.

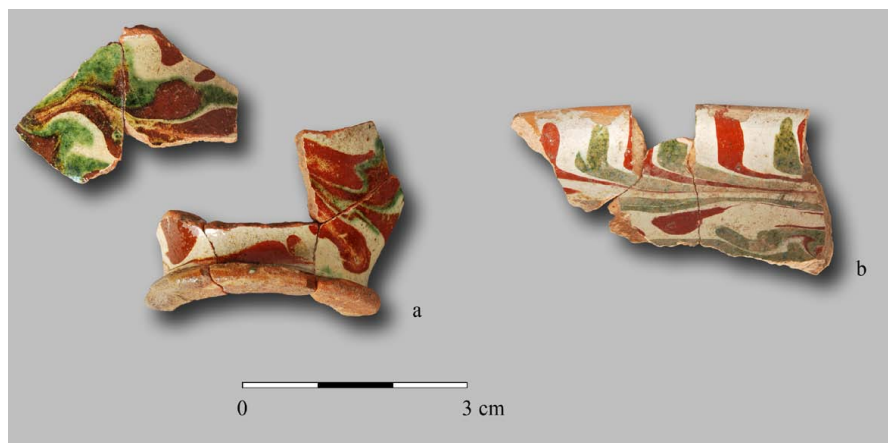


Fig. 2. Barcs fort. Fragments of a jug and plate with “marble” decoration (Upper Austria, later 16th century)

and 17th centuries. The wares produced in the later 16th century are relevant for the pieces found at Barcs.¹⁰ Similar vessel fragments have been found in 16th–17th century contexts at other sites in Hungary too.¹¹

4. Fragments of green glazed vessels with stamped decoration (Fig. 3)

Fragment of a greyish-red thick-walled cup covered with green glaze on the exterior and brownish-yellow glaze on the interior (id. nos 618, 645, inv. no. BR.2011.F60.203). The cup fragments lay scattered across the area investigated in 2003 and all were recovered from 16th century features or levels. The cup can best be likened to the medieval stamped wares of the Rhine region,¹² and it was produced either in a German workshop or in an Upper Austrian one manufacturing fine wares made under German influence.

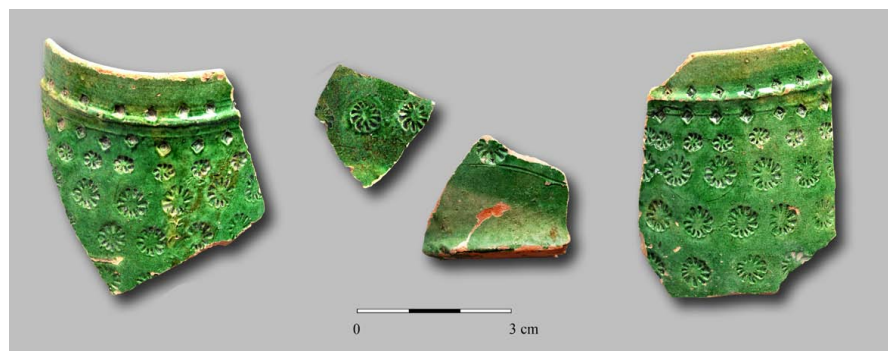


Fig. 3. Fragments of a green glazed cup with stamped decoration (Germany or Upper Austria, later 16th century)

The pottery fragments described in the above, as well as certain metal artefacts clearly indicate that various commodities arrived both from the distant east and from farther-lying regions of Western Europe. However, the small number of these finds suggests that the pieces from Barcs were personal relics or gifts received individually rather than part of the commodities arriving to the fort through trade. It seems

¹⁰ E.g., Salzburg, Schinagl-Wirtshaus: K. Wilfried Kovacsovics: Aus dem Wirtshaus zum Schinagl – Funde aus dem Toskanatrakt der Salzburger Residenz. *Jahresschrift* 35/36–1989/90 (Salzburg 1991), No. 311, 314–317; Linz-Urfahr, Hagenstrasse 17: Alice Kaltenberger: *Keramik des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit in Oberösterreich*. I–II. (Linz: Oberösterreichischen Landesmuseum und der Universität Innsbruck, 2009), Tafel 142–143; Linz-Urfahr, Hagenstrasse 17.

¹¹ E.g. at Buda Castle: Imre Holl: *Fundkomplexe des 15.–17. Jahrhunderts aus dem Burgpalast von Buda*. *Varia Archaeologica Hungarica* XVII. (Budapest: Archäologische Institut der Ungarischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2005), 92, Abb. 52.5. Other sites include the Turkish palisade fort at Újpalánk near Szekszárd: Attila Gaál: Kerámialeletek a Szekszárd-palánki török palánkvár (Jeni Palanka) területéről és feltárásból. *A Wosinsky Mór Múzeum Évkönyve* 32 (2010), 421, Pl. 12. 3–4.

¹² Cp. Imre Holl: Külföldi kerámia Magyarországon (XIII–XVI. század). *Budapest Régiségei* 16 (1955), Figs 10–12, Dreihausen cups.

unlikely that these pieces had been owned by the simple soldiers garrisoning the fort. The vessels were most probably part of the possessions of one of the fort's commanders who could obtain wares of this type either through personal contacts or simply through an interest in finer ceramics. The vessels can thus be seen as relics reflecting cultural contacts on the periphery of the Turkish-occupied areas. All the fragments come from fine wares that were probably only used on special occasions. The finds from the fort indicate that the small number of finds reflecting contact with Western Europe declined even further during the 17th century, probably owing to the diminishing importance of trade routes passing through the region and to the shift in the borders of the Turkish occupied area of Hungary.¹³

¹³ The above study was funded by OTKA (K 72231).