

## PERKÁTA, AN UNUSUAL MEDIEVAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

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*Before the road construction between 2009 and 2011 preventive archaeological excavations were pursued on the northern border of present-day Perkáta.<sup>1</sup> The archaeological site situated in Transdanubia, in the area of the former Cuman Hantos Seat (administrative unit) has been known since the mid-1990s,<sup>2</sup> but the fact that a medieval church and the adjoining cemetery could also be identified here is a new result provided by the heritage impact assessment of 2007–2008.<sup>3</sup> Finds from several periods were unearthed. The excavation of the site located on the track line unearthed a section of a settlement and cemetery from the Late Bronze Age (cemetery No. 1), a part of a Celtic settlement from the Late Iron Age, a medieval village and its cemeteries (cemeteries No. 2–5), and two cemeteries (cemeteries No. 6–7) from the Early Modern Age.*

*The medieval settlement, its church and cemeteries were situated on two hills and the two sides of the Pistolai stream, stretching over about 78 hectares. The excavation was conducted on those parts of the village and its cemeteries that were probably the most exciting from the aspect of archaeological research. The area to be excavated expanded on 6 hectares, it was several kilometers long with an average width of 60 meters, and it led through the center of the settlement, touching upon, or rather encompassing every important part of the village. The most significant novelties were provided by medieval burials. In the medieval cemeteries No. 2–5, about 5000 bodies were laid in graves dug over one another in several layers or placed in ossuaries.<sup>4</sup> With this number of graves the site represents one of the largest Medieval - Late Medieval cemetery complex under archaeological excavation and scientific processing.*

The excavation provided opportunity to get information about the life of a medieval village developed in the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The settling of Transdanubian Cumans brought an important change in the life of the village, which ended with the Ottoman rule. Now a far more precise picture can be delineated about the life and history between the Árpád Period and the Ottoman times of the twin settlement called Kétperkáta<sup>5</sup> in the sources, together with the previously known other settlement named Perkáta<sup>6</sup> that was located in Perkáta Köhalmi-dűlő.



*Fig. 1: Aerial photo of the excavation (2010; photo: Gábor Rákóczi)*

<sup>1</sup> The preliminary excavation was conducted by the Hungarian National Museum – Center for National Heritage. Leader of excavation: Loránd Olivér Kovács. Consultant: Dr. Gábor Hatházi. Participants (among others): Zsófia Ács, Áron Dávid, Ákos Gelencsér.

<sup>2</sup> *Perkáta története* (History of Perkáta), ed. Erdős, Ferenc – Hatházi, Gábor (Perkáta: Polgármesteri Hivatal, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Written for NIF Zrt. by László Reményi in 2007, to which new data were added by Máté Stibrányi in 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Ossuary, *ossarium* (Latin) is the name of places where the bones of the dead were collected from their resting places disturbed by later burials or construction works.

<sup>5</sup> Hatházi, Gábor: *A kunok régészeti emlékei a Kelet-Dunántúlon* (Archaeological Remains of the Cumans in Eastern Transdanubia). *Opuscula Hungarica V.* (Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> *Perkáta története* (History of Perkáta), ed. Erdős, Ferenc – Hatházi, Gábor (Perkáta: Polgármesteri Hivatal, 1996), 100–103; Hatházi, Gábor: *A kunok régészeti emlékei a Kelet-Dunántúlon* (Archaeological Remains of the Cumans in Eastern Transdanubia). *Opuscula Hungarica V.* (Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, 2004), 171, 226–228.

## THE ÁRPÁD PERIOD CEMETERIES

In the earliest cemetery comprising straight north-south rows common people were buried. On the basis of some grave goods consisting of clothing accessories, the latest time of its foundation can be put to the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> or the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century (cemetery No. 2). Apart from these items, the grave goods, the elements of clothing show the modest picture that was generally characteristic in this period: most of them are S-terminalled lockrings. This cemetery was still in use in the beginning of the last third of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Part of it might have been consecrated at this time, and an Árpád Period churchyard cemetery was established (cemetery No. 3) in its south-eastern part. As far as the find material is concerned, it shows a similarly poor picture, and the grave goods in most cases are likewise S-terminalled lockrings. Unfortunately we could not identify any traces of fencing here, so the boundaries of the cemetery can only be suspected, but with the help of the superposed burials we will probably be able to draw some more precise conclusions following the processing of the field data. The time of the first burials is still uncertain, but most of the coins found here derive from the second third of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The end of its use can be connected to the settling of the Cumans after the Mongol Invasion, the last graves were probably dug in the last third of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The two cemeteries – according to the present state of processing – could as well be in use at the same time, though they have parts where their graves are superposed. According to our current knowledge this was an unusual phenomenon in its own time. Upon conceptual or canonical considerations the two ways of burials in the two distinct cemeteries, should not be present at the same site. Although there are some other archaeological sites where we can suspect a similar situation, due to the small size of the excavated area or some other factor, those cemeteries cannot, or can only partially be examined.<sup>7</sup> This site is the first one which represents an undoubtedly identifiable case, where this problem of archaeological research and interpretation running for several decades can be judged after the scientific evaluation.

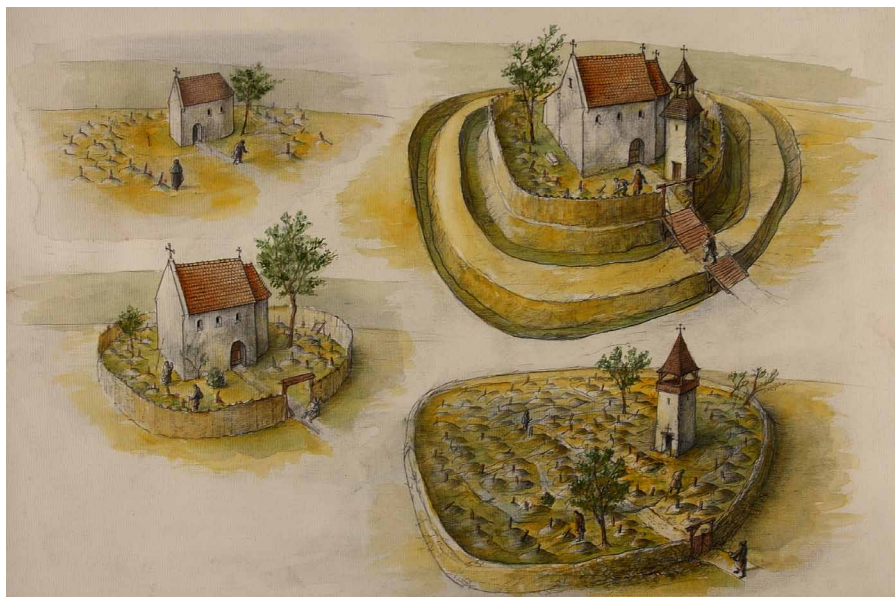


Fig. 2: Lower part of a two-piece fitting (population of a cemetery arranged in rows) (photo: Lajos Sándor)



Fig. 3: S-terminalled lockrings and an Árpád Period earring/hair ring with bead pendant from the Árpád Period cemeteries, before restoration (photo: Lajos Sándor)

<sup>7</sup> For the topic, see Szőke, Béla: A bjelobrdoi kultúráról (On the Bjelobrdoi Culture). *Archaeologiai Értesítő* 86 (1959), 38; Dienes, István: A honfoglaló magyarok (The Conquering Hungarians). In: *Orosháza története és néprajza* (History and Ethnography of Orosháza), ed. Nagy, Gyula (Orosháza: Orosháza Város Tanácsa, 1965), 159–160; Kulcsár, Mihály: Az Árpád-kori templom körüli temetők kialakulásának kérdéséhez. (Előzetes beszámoló az 1993–1994. évi baracsi feltárásokról) (On the Question of the Development of Árpád Period Churchyard Cemeteries [Report on the Excavations at Baracs between 1993 and 1994]). *Somogyi Múzeumok Közleményei* 11 (1995), 227–239; Ritoók, Ágnes: A magyarországi falusi templom körüli temetők feltárásának újabb eredményei (New Results of the Excavations at Hungarian Village Churchyard Cemeteries). *Folia Archaeologica* 46 (1997), 167–168; Ritoók, Ágnes: A templom körüli temetők régészeti kutatása (Archeological Research of Churchyard Cemeteries). In: *A középkor és a kora újkor régészete Magyarországon* (Archaeology of Medieval and Early Modern Hungary), ed. Benkő, Elek – Kovács, Gyöngyi (Budapest: MTA Régészeti Intézete, 2010), 478–480; Langó, Péter: A kora Árpád-kori temetők kutatása (Research of Early Árpád Period Cemeteries). In: *A középkor és a kora újkor régészete Magyarországon* (Archaeology of Medieval and Early Modern Hungary), ed. Benkő, Elek – Kovács, Gyöngyi (Budapest: MTA Régészeti Intézete, 2010), 456–457.



*Fig. 4: Artistic aquarelle-reconstructions of the church, the enclosing ditch and the development of the fortification by Frigyes Kőnig, made during the excavation*



*Fig. 5: Selection from the finds of the site assembled for the exhibition entitled Rescued Heritage - Treasures from the Heartland of Europe (photo: József Bicskei)*



*Fig. 6: Fittings from the row cemetery, before restoration (photo: Lajos Sándor)*



*Fig. 7: Gold plated silver mount from the Cuman village cemetery (photo: Lajos Sándor)*



*Fig. 8: Silver earring with bead pendant on it from the Cuman cemetery, before restoration (photo: Lajos Sándor)*



Fig. 9: Decapitated fowls from the Cuman village cemetery (photo: Gergely Szabó)



Fig. 10: Beaded sabretache from the Cuman village cemetery (photo: Gergely Szabó)

## THE CUMAN CEMETERY

This situation special in itself is further tinged by the fact that the settling Cumans constructed another cemetery (cemetery No. 4) in the area of the church graveyard of the Árpád Period population. This means that this new cemetery is superposed on the two previous graveyards. Its territory is much easier to establish, since it was repeatedly enclosed with ditches – which did not coexist – and finally with a fence. One of these ditches served as a fortification as well. Its depth of 3 meters and width of 4 meters, the traces of a wooden bridge structure and the fallen mass of burnt daubing unearthed from the ditch make it clear that the church used to be enclosed with a board-fence daubed with mud erected within the ditch. It should be noted here that the first enclosure with a ditch or ditches was probably elevated by the inhabitants of the original settlement preceding the Cumans. This will be possible though to determine unambiguously after the precessing of the field data.

At present it is not absolutely clear whether the cemetery of the Cuman village is, in fact, the narrowing of the Árpád Period church graveyard, or a real new graveyard was made here. However, we can certainly state that the area was ceaselessly populated, as proven by the coins unearthed here, which give evidence of a continuous circulation of money. The Mongolian invasion probably avoided the village, as no indirect or direct evidence has been found which could have been connected with the actions linked with the war around the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century. The settling of the Cumans at Perkátá Nyüli-dűlő cannot be justified by the events of the Mongolian invasion. It is far more probable that some other, local occurrence offered opportunity, or, more correctly, gave place for the settling of the Cumans. The results of anthropological analyses and the detailed processing of the field observations are expected to contribute to the satisfactory clarification of the question and to the determination of the date of the Cumans' arrival.

The Cuman cemetery in the center of which there stood a church remodeled several times presented elements of clothing in large numbers: headdresses, fittings, belts, beaded sabretaches. Vessels, indicating food meant to be consumed in the otherworld were also put in some of the graves, moreover, in one case, in front of the western facade of the church, two decapitated fowls were placed. The evaluation of this act in the context of the Christian customs raises questions regarding the depths the Christian faith of the local Cumans.

The Cuman traditions were indicated by the way the attires were worn, since relatively few types of objects were found that could be specifically linked to Cumans, such as the earring with a bead pendant or the beaded sabretache. They wore mass-products present on the contemporary market, but in a characteristic way that indicated a fashion different from that of other ethnic groups in the Carpathian Basin. As an example, their typical gold plated silver fittings served as decorations of their headdresses and costumes. These elements of attire showing distinct traditions disappeared by the 15<sup>th</sup> century the latest, and it seems that by that time the population of the Cuman village totally assimilated into the surrounding people. The cemetery was in use in the first third of the 16<sup>th</sup> century too. The latest phase of the cemetery, or more precisely its posterior use<sup>8</sup> was indicated by the graves of infants and babies, in which the deceased was placed in a vessel, and the head was, in contrast with tradition, oriented to east (cemetery No. 5).

This summary only offers a narrow insight into the work in the first phase of scientific processing, which has already yielded exciting and important results.

#### RECOMMENDED READING

BENKŐ, ELEK – KOVÁCS, GYÖNGYI (eds)

*A középkor és a kora újkor régészete Magyarországon* (Archaeology of Medieval and Early Modern Hungary). Budapest: MTA Régészeti Intézete, 2010.

ERDŐS, FERENC – HATHÁZI, GÁBOR (eds)

*Perkáta története* (History of Perkáta). Perkáta: Polgármesteri Hivatal, 1996.

HATHÁZI, GÁBOR

*A kunok régészeti emlékei a Kelet-Dunántúlon* (Archaeological Remains of the Cumans in Eastern Transdanubia). Opuscula Hungarica V. Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, 2004.

HATHÁZI, GÁBOR

*Sírok, kincsek, rejtélyek. Híres középkori leletek Kiskunhalas környékén* (Graves, Treasures, Mysteries. Famous Medieval Finds around Kiskunhalas). Kiskunhalas: Thorma János Múzeum, Halasi Múzeum Alapítvány, 2005.

PÁLÓCZI HORVÁTH, ANDRÁS

*A kunok feudalizálódása és a régészet* (The feudalization of the Cumans and Archaeology). In: *Középkori régészetünk újabb eredményei és időszerű feladatai* (New Results and Tasks of the Archaeology of the Hungarian Middle Ages), ed. Fodor, István – Selmeczi, László, 93–104. Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, 1985.

PÁLÓCZI HORVÁTH, ANDRÁS

*Hagyományok, kapcsolatok és hatások a kunok régészeti kultúrájában* (Traditions, Connections and Impacts in the Archeological Culture of the Cumans). Karcag: Önkormányzat, 1993.

VÁSÁRY, ISTVÁN

*Cumans and Tatars, Oriental Military in the Pre-Ottoman Balkans, 1185–1365*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Those burials which are created after the regular use of the cemetery are considered posterior use. These are often graves of unbaptized children – infants, who were not allowed to be buried in consecrated ground, so, if it was possible, they found a place for them regarded as consecrated at least in earlier times.