

**L. DONCHEVA-PETKOVA – CS. BALOGH – A. TÜRK (eds)**  
**Avars, Bulgars and Magyars on the Middle and Lower Danube**  
**Proceedings of the Bulgarian-Hungarian Meeting, Sofia, May 27-28, 2009.**

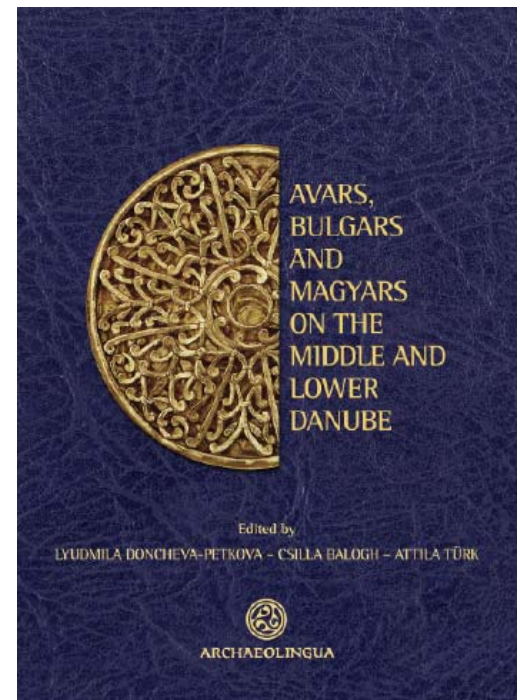
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*Bulgarian-Hungarian collaboration in archaeology can look back on a long past, which is due for the most part to the work of Géza Fehér, who lived in Bulgaria from 1922. At the center of this archaeological cooperation has been the connection between the material cultures of the Avars, the Bulgars and the conquering Hungarians in the Early Middle Ages. Fortunately, this archaeological collaboration continued even after the death of Géza Fehér in 1955, as evidenced by the book we are holding now. The active Hungarian-Bulgarian archaeological relationships in the present day are shown by the conference held in May of 2009 that serves as the basis for this book, as well as the participation of Hungarian archaeologists (Miklós Takács, Szabina Merva, József Szentpéteri and Péter Langó) in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress on Bulgarian Studies held in Sofia in 2013. Hopefully in the near future the catalogue of the Stara Bălgaria museal collection in Varna, which contains a great number of metal objects from the Early Middle Ages, will also be published within the context of this collaboration.*

The mutual interest in the archaeology and history of the 7<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries is not by chance. The Avars and the conquering Hungarians of the Carpathian Basin live in the historic memory as ethnic groups with eastern origins, just like the Danube Bulgars. Their culture was formed in the nomadic world of the Eastern European steppe, and all three populations ended up as neighbors of the Byzantine Empire and under its influence. Bulgaria, due to its geographic location, for a long time remained as a part of the Byzantine “community of nations”, while as a result of the decisions of Grand Prince Géza and King Stephen of Hungary the Carpathian Basin became a member of the community of Western Christianity.

The book is not entirely without precedent; the main part of the volume is made up of the presentations from a conference held in May of 2009, in which both Bulgarian and Hungarian archaeologists and historians took part. A portion of the essays, the work of the Hungarian researchers involved, has already been published in a Hungarian language volume by Napkút Publishing in 2009 (*Avarok, bolgárok, magyarok – Konferenciakötet* [Avars, Bulgars and Hungarians – Conference Publication]), but the six essays that were a part of this are now part of a new, English language book. In this way, the present volume can be considered an up-to-date scholarly version of the earlier Hungarian publication, expanded with the inclusion of the Bulgarian participants.

Following the foreword of Csanád Bálint and the introduction of Lyudmila Doncheva-Petkova, 16 essays deal with 7<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> century Bulgar-Hungarian connections. The subjects enumerated present a wide array: some are purely archaeological works (presentation and analysis of materials), some are archaeological



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summaries including historical evidence and some are art historical analyses and interpretations, while there are also papers that are historical and linguistic in nature.

The essay setting the theme of the book was written by Lyudmila Doncheva-Petkova on the 6<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> century ethnic changes in Bulgaria, relying on both archaeological and historical data. Her article includes a description of the destruction of the Byzantine system of forts at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century and the settlement of the Slavs, as well as the ancient Bulgar bi-ritual cemeteries and early Bulgar centers alongside the Slav settlements.

Csilla Balogh in her essay summarized the typology and chronology of the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century Carpathian Basin fittings with mask decorations. The author classified these objects on the basis of technology and form, in which she also differentiated between examples that were cast, cut from sheets or pressed. She also pointed out the Eastern European and Byzantine connections of these objects, and in contrast to previous authors dealing with this subject she suggests a chronology based not on their method of production, but on accompanying finds.

The Late Avar period is represented in the book through the work of two Hungarian authors, Miklós Makoldi and Gergely Szente (Gábor Fancsalszky's presentation from 2009 is unfortunately left out). Miklós Makoldi deals with one of the most wide-spread motifs from the Late Avar period, the depiction of griffins. In contrast to Falko Daim's theory emphasizing the Byzantine connections of the motif, he highlights precedents from the steppe (Central Asian Scythian). He explores the conceptual background of these images, although he was not successful in convincingly bridging the great geographical and temporal distance between the two cultures.

Gergely Szente wrote an essay detailing evidence from comparisons, stylistic critical analysis and casting techniques concerning cast belt fittings from the Vrap-Velino horizon known from Bulgarian, Albanian and Late Avar milieus. According to his findings, these belt fittings are alien to the Carpathian Basin and represent a southern influence. Through the classification of the technical and ornamental characteristics of this stylistic range and the examination of the casting techniques he also significantly contributed to clearing up the origins of the fittings.

Maria Hristova compared vessels from proto-Bulgar graves with the ceramics of the Carpathian Basin's Late Avar period. The author examined the shapes of the vessels and their decoration, but unfortunately their production techniques were not included in her research.

9<sup>th</sup> century Bulgar find materials are represented by the early medieval grave goods from Plovdiv, the ancient Philippopolis, which were presented by Ivo Topalilov and Kamen Stanev. The authors interpreted the burials as being pagan rites due to the food amongst the grave goods, and thus dated them to the period between 836 and 864 on historical grounds. After all, Philippopolis (Plovdiv) was in Byzantine hands until Malamir's military campaign of 836, and Bulgars only settled in the city after it was conquered. Therefore, according to the opinion of the authors, pagan proto-Bulgars could not have been buried in the city before this time, and 864 was the year of their conversion to Christianity.

Nikolai Markov provided a new interpretation for the decoration of ewers 2 and 7 from the Treasure of Nagyszentmiklós. This is based on Persian mythology and Zoroastrianism and utilizes the sacred book of the Zoroastrian religion, the Avesta, as well as Ferdowsi's 11<sup>th</sup> century epic poem reworking Persian mythology, the Shahnameh. However, he did not clear up how elements of a religious mythology that is only known of from Iran and Central Asia during this period could have gotten onto the Treasure of Nagyszentmiklós.

One of the important historical issues from the 9<sup>th</sup> century is the location of the settlement area of the Obotrites, also known as the Praedenecenti. Through the use of historical and linguistic data Pavel Georgiev places this in the area between the Danube and Tisza rivers. His reasoning cannot be considered conclusive, but the historical source materials that were gathered and analyzed and the author's attempt at analyzing the etymology of ethnic names is worthy of attention. Also dealing with etymological issues is the essay of Tsvetelin Stepanov, who on the basis of the examination of Bulgar, Avar and Khazar names hypothesizes an Iranian stratum through the names of the proto-Bulgars.

The volume's essays on the history of weaponry are unfortunately quite succinct. Valeri Yotov presents two more recent parallels from Iran as contrasts to the Byzantine sword from Kunágota, while Stela Doncheva and Boyan Totev present a 10<sup>th</sup> century saber and its accessories from Pliska.

Of particular worth are the book's essays on the period of the Hungarian conquest, which cover the issues of burial rites, metal finds (including jewelry) and ceramic vessels placed in graves. Attila Türk throws light on the fact that the practice of a few burial rites known from the Eastern European steppes can be seen in the conquering Hungarians as well. He deals with burials in or below kurgans, as well as graves with cavities or benches and equestrian burials. Péter Langó examines the connections between the conquering Hungarian and 10<sup>th</sup> century Bulgar find materials in connection with several types of metal finds (primarily belt fittings and buckles), and the research history of these objects. Ciprián Horváth presents new data on the manner of wearing earrings with beaded pendant on the basis of excavation observations that question the determination of this type of object as an earring.

The book's longest essay is the publication of an updated version of Szabina Merva's Master's thesis on ceramic vessels placed in Hungarian Conquest period graves in northeastern Hungary. The author presents 95 vessels from 84 sites. She touches upon the research history of the topic, the chronology of the grave finds, the customs of giving grave goods, the production techniques of the objects, the forms of the vessels and their decoration. Of particular importance are the author's observations and remarks on technology, about how vessels thrown on a fast wheel could have made it to the Carpathian Basin. She was able to show examples of both import wares and objects made on site with borrowed technology.

Miklós Takács's essay deals with the power vacuum and the pagan rebellions following the death of King Stephen. The author made an attempt to identify the archaeological traces of the historical events on the basis of an examination of the animal bone materials and burial rites from the settlements of the period. Both attempts ended with negative results and the methodology needs to be reflected upon as well. The consumption of horse meat in Árpád period settlements continued for a long time even after its legal ban, while the placement of the hands in the majority of Early Árpád period cemeteries does not prove that the deceased were either Christian or pagan.

The varied topics of the book clearly shows that the Bulgarian-Hungarian archaeological links are not limited to a narrow period or group of objects, and therefore there are a great many further opportunities for collaboration. The volume is in an A4 format, is nicely printed, is in English and has notes. The large number of colorful tables with photographs as well as the high quality of the editing and layout should be pointed out, which is thanks to the work of the Archaeolingua Press. The book is the first volume of the newly founded archaeological series from Pázmány Péter Catholic University, the *Studia ad Archaeologiam Pazmaniense*. Its international editorial board includes recognized representatives of the archaeological profession from Germany, England, Russia, Ukraine and Syria.