

DIVIDED CLOAK SAINT MARTIN AND PANNONIA

Two Exhibitions at Szombathely and Pannonhalma

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To celebrate the 2016 Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy and the Year of Saint Martin of Tours, two stunning archaeological shows are on display from June 3 to September 30 and November 30 respectively at the two localities most closely connected with the memory of the saint in Hungary: Savaria/Szombathely, his birthplace, and the Abbey of Saint Martin on the Holy Mount of Pannonia, his cultplace. As if to imitate the gesture of which the saint is best known and to demonstrate the newfangled cooperation of the two places for Martin's legacy, the exhibitions divide between themselves classical and late antique material culture found in the territory of present-day Hungary. Martin, the Roman soldier became first a hermit then the Catholic bishop of Tours, and the two exhibitions focus on the two contexts of his life: Romanitas and Christianitas. The Iseum Savariense Museum presents Roman Pannonia and the transition from paganism to Christianity in the Danubian provinces in the third and fourth centuries, while the Pannonhalma Abbatial Manor Exhibition Centre concentrates on the Church in fourth-century Pannonia and Illyricum and the conversion to Christianity of the Germanic, Iranian, and Turkish steppe peoples settled in the Carpathian Basin during the Great Migrations from the fourth to the eighth century. A survey of the late antique heritage of the region has been long overdue in Hungary – now made particularly urgent by the partial acquisition of the Seuso Treasure ([Hungarian Archaeology Summer 2014](#)) – and the Year of Saint Martin of Tours offers an excellent opportunity both to take stock of the new findings and to look at well-known pieces with a fresh eye. Moving away from the hitherto dominant discourse in Hungarian scholarship (whether Saint Martin was born in Szombathely or Györszentmárton/Pannonhalma), it (hopefully) opens up new perspectives in Martinian studies in Hungary.

Both exhibitions structure the material culture around quotes from Sulpicius Severus' *Vita Martini*, the unique textual information about the wonderworker bishop of Tours; the text, however, is only a pretext, as it cannot be brought in any connection to any known archaeological finds either in Pannonia or in Gaul. Unfortunately, the title of the exhibition reminds more of a provincial pop band than to the pontiff. Why is Martin's identifier systematically left out from the events and publications of the Year of Saint Martin of Tours? There are several saints of that name (Martin of Braga, also from Pannonia; Martin of Porres, and many others): the omission makes it difficult to identify the Martin in question and to find the catalogue. The international jubilee year, celebrated all over the world, more often than not in the presence of the Archbishop of Tours, could have been exploited to show the international contacts of Pannonian and Hungarian Christianity and to link Savaria to Tours. This is one opportunity missed by the exhibition. The majority of the objects on display come from the holdings of Hungarian museums, but several important works were lent by other European collections (Zagreb, Sremska Mitrovica, Munich, Mainz, Vienna). The beautifully produced catalogue, edited by Endre Tóth, Tivadar Vida, and Imre Takács, has excellent photographs of the often very tiny objects and offers a good (but not always up-to-date) scholarly summary of late antique *Pannonia*, Illyricum, Noricum, and Dacia, but it is marred by editorial mistakes (starting with the name of Martin and the spelling of Pannonia in the title, the omission of an author and the inclusion of some seriously flawed papers).

Igitur Martinus Sabaria Pannoniarum oppido oriundus fuit, says Sulpicius Severus: Martin was born in Savaria. The date of Martin's birth, however, is a matter of controversy, with both 316 and 336 having rationales. Martin's father was a senior officer (*tribunus*) in the [Imperial Horse Guard](#), and a pagan. The first part of the Iseum Savariense exhibition stages the world of Martin in Pannonia with a reconstruction of the

imperial palace in Savaria and objects of everyday life from all over the province (architectural remains, emperor heads, coins, jewels, fibulae, belts, cooking pots, and a tantalizing number of glass jars, among them the breathtaking cobalt blue vase from Mosdós in Somogy County). The second part presents pagan religious life in Pannonia: statues of Fortuna, Lares, Iupiter Dolichenus, altars of Mithras, votive figurines, silver and gold votive rings dedicated to the god Silvanus, three golden rings attesting fidelity to emperor Constantine, belt mounts and protective bullae worn in the neck, ceramic wafer moulds, casket mounts decorated with images of gods and the emperor demonstrate the vigour of polytheist cults. The final section of the exhibition shows the coming of Christianity. A rich array of Jewish and Christian inscriptions, rings, fibulae, and lamps decorated with crosses and/or the Chi-Rho symbol, liturgical vessels, glass beakers, gold-glass, funeral inscriptions are on display. The Ságvár casket mount (Hungarian National Museum, Budapest) representing the Resurrection of Lazarus and the Intercisa/Dunaújváros casket mount (Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, Mainz) with scenes representing Daniel in the lions' den, Moses hitting the rock, the Marriage of Cana, and the Apostles Peter and Paul demonstrate the creation of a new iconography also through recycling great themes of classical art. The marble altar with the story of Jonah (Arheološki Muzej, Zagreb), the brick with an incised graffiti representing Arius (Wosinsky Mór Museum, Szekszárd), and the golden helmet from Alsóhetény decorated with the monogram of Christ are sensational pieces (Fig. 1). Maquettes of the burial chambers in the late antique cemetery of Sopianae/Pécs close the Savaria part of the exhibition.

At Pannonhalma, a brief introduction evokes the foundation of Saint Martin's Abbey in 996 with the earliest charters extant in Hungary. The expansion of the cult of Saint Martin is illustrated by a thrilling toponymical map (unfortunately not reproduced in the catalogue) more than a thousand (?) localities in the Carpathian Basin dedicated to the saint. Baroque drawings and liturgical objects recall the revamping of the cult of Saint Martin after the liberation of the Kingdom of Hungary from the Ottoman yoke.

The section on fourth-century church building and liturgy are poignant reminders of the blood-soaked beginnings of Christianity and the triumph of the Church after the Constantinian turn. Pannonia was exceptionally rich in Christian martyrs, but only an inscription mentioning the basilica of Bishop Saint Irenaeus of Sirmium is displayed – Quirinus, Synerus, and Pollio, Anastasia and the Four Crowned Saints (Quattor Coronati) go unmentioned, despite important recent work on them. Patens, lamps, bells, and a small capital from the early Christian basilica in Aquincum (Budapest Historical Museum, Budapest) help us imaginatively reconstruct the interior of the first church buildings. The inscription set up by the *sanctimonialis* Laurentia in commemoration of the exorcist Ursacius (for some reason identified as Bishop Ursacius in the catalogue) is the most intriguing piece of the exhibition. It attests the powerful agency of ascetic women in the Church – and if, indeed, the inscription refers to Bishop Ursacius of Sirmium, it demonstrates the popularity of Arianism in the region. In the light of cutting-edge research that stresses the support and pressure of wealthy laypersons in the Church, the absence of the Seuso Treasure at the exhibition is another



Fig. 1: Nose protecting plate with Christogram

Source: <http://szentmarton-pannonia.hu/?artwork=orrvedo-lemesz-krisztus-monogrammal>



Fig. 2: Disc brooch with braided and animal ornamentation

Source: <http://szentmarton-pannonia.hu/?artwork=szalagfonattal-es-allatornamentikaval-diszitett-korongfibula>

missed opportunity. Albeit the object is not exhibited, the catalogue reproduces the Hunting Plate, on which Seuso's name is preceded by the Christogram. It was precisely the great landowners of the like of Seuso – Petronius Probus, Paulinus of Nola, Sulpicius Severus – who promoted the rise of new ascetic bishops: Martin, Ambrose of Milan, and Priscillian of Ávila, established their cult, and wrote their lives. It was their social ambition, political interests, and financial muscle that assured the rise of a new type of ecclesiastical leader: the monk-bishop. In contrast with the *mediocritas* of the provincial clergy, the monk-bishop boasted élite contacts (it has been suggested that Martin's best friend in the army was no other than the later emperor Valentinian I). Laurentia and Seuso are thus more than names: they are the social drive behind the new form of power: asceticism.

The fifth section of the exhibition musters the survival of Christianity during the barbarian invasions. The archaeology of the Great Migrations is particularly rich in Hungary, as every migrant, conqueror, and traveler from East to West crossed the Carpathian Basin. An array of small, everyday objects and personal items, each decorated with staurograms, show the ways of how middle- or lower-class people demonstrated their respect of, or adherence to, the Christian God: round fibulae, pins, crosses worn on necklaces, pilgrims' ampullae, brooches, jewelry, belt mounts, coffin crosses (*Fig. 2*). The last part of the exhibition deals with the conversion of the barbarian élite to Christianity, a theme particularly apposite in connection with Saint Martin, whose missionary forays in pagan territories are in the focus of Sulpicius' *Vita*. Symbolic objects of power – a ceremonial sword and a unique golden arch – from a Hunnic funeral banquet in Pannonhalma (Rómer Flóris Museum, Győr), gold and bone amulets, the Avar belt mount from Kölked-Feketekapu (Hungarian National Museum, Budapest), bronze fittings with leopard rider attacking a senmurw, the dragonlike winged lion, represent pagan beliefs and polytheist mythologies. Classic hunting scenes, as on the recently found exquisite silver-copper jar from Budakalász (Ferenczy Museum, Szentendre), however, cannot be linked exclusively to polytheism, they were enjoyed by pagan and Christian owners alike. Similarly, the crosses decorating the jewels of the barbarian élite are not necessarily confes-

sional: they might simply be ornamental or used as protective amulets (Fig. 3). The seventh-century Avar funerary jewelry of Ozora-Tótipusztá, the golden bracelet of Kölked-Feketekapu with the STEFANOS inscription, and the box-shaped golden brooches of Dunapataj decorated with human busts holding a cross (all from the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest) beautifully attest the popularity of Christian symbols among the barbarian leaders. Three golden cups from the famous Nagyszentmiklós Treasure (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), the largest and most exquisite Avar-Byzantine gold find from Central Europe bear the sign of the cross. Cups number 9 and 10 are inscribed with an unknown alphabet: the only word identified by scholars, *hydatos* (water), may refer to the baptismal use of the cups. Mug number 19 is decorated with antique sea griffons as a reference the Isle of the Blessed. These objects, parts of a Christian liturgical set, must have been offered as a gift to one of the Avar princes.

The two exhibitions take the visitor to an exciting travel from Roman to Hunnic, Avar, and Carolingian Pannonia. Having defeated the Avars, Charlemagne privileged Savaria, a city ruined after a sixth-century earthquake, for her glory of being the birthplace of Saint Martin, the patron saint of the Carolingian dynasty and of the Roman Empire. Beautifully reconstructing the archaeological context of the expansion of Christianity in Central Europe, the two shows do justice to the work of Saint Martin, a Pannonian soldier elected bishop of Tours.



Fig. 3: German noblewoman's jewellery

Source: <http://szentmarton-pannonia.hu/?artwork=elokelo-german-no-ekszeri>