

## MARKS ON CHINESE PORCELAIN UNEARTHED IN BUDA AND THE CASTLE OF EGER

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*Chinese porcelain is an under-researched field of Ottoman archaeology in Hungary, even though it is a popular type of material culture not only here, but in the international Ottoman research as well. Deciphering and interpreting the marks that appear on these objects is an important step for Hungarian Ottoman archaeology. Although there are only a few such pieces among the several thousand sherds deriving from the major Ottoman period (16-17th c.) excavations, their archaeological and historical aspects are intriguing enough to deserve our attention.*

There are only a few marked pieces among the large amount of Chinese porcelain that were unearthed in Ottoman-period (16-17th c.) layers in Hungary, and even fewer can be deciphered due to their fragmentary nature. Excavations in Ottoman Buda and its suburbs (today's Castle District and Víziváros in Budapest) and in the Castle of Eger yielded almost a thousand Chinese porcelain sherds, among which there were altogether thirty-nine pieces with marks, and only fifteen of them were legible. Both assemblages can be dated to the same periods, namely the reign of the Chinese emperors Wanli (1573-1619) and Kangxi (1662-1722). In Buda there are more pieces from the Wanli period, while in Eger sherds from the Kangxi period occur in a higher number, which reflects the history of the two places: Buda was occupied by the Ottomans from 1541 to 1686, while Eger was only conquered in 1596, and reconquered in 1687. In order to better understand the context of the marks, it is important to briefly summarize the Ottoman-period history and layout of the two places.

### BUDA AND EGER DURING THE OTTOMAN PERIOD

The Ottoman expansion was already a threat for the Hungarian Kingdom during the reign of King Matthias (1458-1490), but it became reality after the Battle of Mohács in 1526, when the Ottoman troops overthrew the Hungarian army of Louis II, who also died during the battle. After Mohács, Sultan Süleyman marched into Buda in 1526 and 1529, but did not occupy it yet, his reason simply being that John Szapolyai, who ruled over the Hungarian kingdom between 1526 and 1540 with the help of Süleyman, was loyal to him. Consequently, Süleyman only needed to occupy Buda after Szapolyai's death when Ferdinand I, Holy Roman Emperor, elected as the king of Hungary by part of the Hungarian aristocracy in 1526, began to overtake lands previously ruled by Szapolyai.<sup>1</sup> The sultan's troops took over Buda on 29 August 1541, on the fifteenth anniversary of the battle of Mohács. After the occupation, the town became the centre of the Buda *vilayet*, the northernmost administrative division of the Ottoman Empire, therefore its primary function was military, and everything was subordinated to this role.<sup>2</sup> Gradually the social topography of the Castle Hill was transformed. The medieval royal palace and its surroundings were inhabited by the soldiers of the garrison, the pasha first moved into one of the aristocrats' mansion on the Danube bank, and then in 1598 moved up to the building that became the Carmelites' convent in the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> The janissary agha resided at the northern end of the Castle Hill, in the vicinity of today's Bécsi kapu Square. One of the archaeologically best researched parts of historical Buda is the present day Szent György tér [St George Square], which, based on the excavations, mainly functioned as a residential area before the

<sup>1</sup> Gábor Ágoston and Balázs Sudár, *Gül Baba és a magyarországi bektasi dervisek* [Gül Baba and the Bektāsi dervishes in Hungary] (Budapest: Terebess Kiadó, 2002), 5–6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

Ottoman occupation.<sup>4</sup> Aristocrats and burghers also owned dwelling houses here, in the neighbourhood of a Franciscan monastery and the St Sigismund provostry, which operated until the end of the Middle Ages (i.e. 1541). The area became especially important in the last few decades of the Middle Ages, when the governor and the chancellor of the country both received a dwelling house next to the royal palace.<sup>5</sup> This clearly shows the accentuated character of the square, most probably due to its vicinity to the medieval royal palace. During the Ottoman period, this area held a similarly important position with the royal palace functioning as the garrison camp and the pasha's palace constructed in its north-eastern corner in 1598. Regarding the topographical distribution of the porcelain sherds, most of them (more than 500) were unearthed in the territory of the medieval royal palace, another nearly one hundred sherds derive from the area of the present day Szent György tér, from the vicinity of the pasha palace, further supporting its topographical importance.

The castle of Eger was strategically and administratively important for the Ottomans during their occupation between 1596 and 1687. Apart from the administrative sources, one important written source is the travelogue of Evliya Çelebi, who visited Eger between 1664 and 1666.<sup>6</sup> According to Evliya, the castle had a large population because it was a nice place to live in. He mentions two parts of the castle: the German castle (outer part) and the Hungarian castle (inner part), which corresponds to the results of the archaeological survey. The Ottomans only modified one section of the walls but rebuilt several buildings within them. One of the most important changes was that the Gothic palace was turned into the pasha's palace; and at least two *camis* (mosques) and the garrison's camps are also mentioned in the sources.<sup>7</sup> According to the written sources, the pasha's *cami* was standing in the vicinity of the pasha palace, with a *minaret* built of brick. The medieval cathedral was used as a storage building for weaponry.<sup>8</sup> These buildings belonged to the inner castle, while the janissary barracks were situated in the outer castle, where no women and children were allowed. The sources also mention houses for the janissars and a *cami* with a minaret.<sup>9</sup> During the Ottoman period, the town was surrounded by a stone wall, and according to Evliya Çelebi, it was a vivid and rich town, which had a very close relationship to the castle.<sup>10</sup> Despite of its richness, much less Chinese porcelain were unearthed in the town than in the castle. One reason might be that Eger's administrative center was in the inner castle, in the pasha's palace and its surroundings, therefore most of these vessels were used in this area. This is also supported by the topographical distribution of the sherds: while the higher quality pieces derive from the vicinity of the pasha's palace, the cheaper, lower quality sherds were unearthed in the areas which are attributed to the janissary and the soldiers. Even though the pieces cannot be connected to certain buildings within the towns, the distribution of the sherds show a pattern in Buda and in Eger that is suitable for interpretation.

## THE ORIGINS OF CHINESE WRITING

The Chinese writing system was already fully developed by the time of the Shang dynasty (1600-1028 BC), the most important monuments of which are the bronze vessels of the Shang period (i.e. "bronze

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed summary of the results of the research until 2003 see Károly Magyar, "A budavári Szent György tér és környékének kiépülése: Történeti vázlat 1526-tól napjainkig" [Development of the St George Square and its vicinity in the Buda Castle: Historical outline from 1526 to the present], *Tanulmányok Budapest múltjából: Budapest várostörténeti monográfiái* 31 [Studies of the past of Budapest: Urban History Monographs of Budapest 31] (2003), 43-127.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>6</sup> Evliya Çelebi, *Evliya Cselebi török világotató Magyarországi utazásai 1664-1666* [The travelogue of Evliya Çelebi traveling in Hungary between 1664 and 1666], trans. and ed. Imre Karácson (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1908), 110-20.

<sup>7</sup> Mihály Détsy, "Az egri vár története VII. 1596-1687 [History of the Castle of Eger VII. 1596-1687]," *Az Egri Vár Híradója* 7 [Newsletter of the Castle of Eger 7], János Gyöző Szabó ed. (Eger: Az Egri Vár Baráti Köre, 1968), 10.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Çelebi, *Evliya Cselebi török világotató Magyarországi utazásai*, 118.

script<sup>11</sup>) and the so-called oracle bones.<sup>12</sup> Based on the above, researchers believe that the development of the writing system started at the early periods of the Shang dynasty. The structure of the language was very similar to that of the present day: it was already morphemic, each character represented a single morpheme. Furthermore, the earliest written sources also show that Chinese script has a pictographic origin.<sup>13</sup> With the development and spreading of the writing system, the characters became simpler, gradually lost their pictographic meaning, and more abstract concepts also appeared among them. This was followed by the development of the language and the appearance of the elements referring to meaning and pronunciation within the characters.<sup>14</sup> The more complex society became, the more Chinese characters were simplified, until they were unified during the first imperial consolidation by Qin Shi Huangdi in 221 BC. Qin Shi Huangdi ordered the use of the Qin script throughout the empire, which later became the ancestor of all forms of Chinese writing.<sup>15</sup> There were two main forms of the Qing script: the more complex standard form, which later developed into the *zhuanshu* 篆书, seal script; and the simpler *lishu* 隶书, clerical script.<sup>16</sup> By the time of the Han dynasty (221 BC – AD 206) *lishu* became the official writing form, which was used generally, including inscriptions. This Han-style writing form was developed by the AD 1st century, and spread all over the empire.<sup>17</sup>

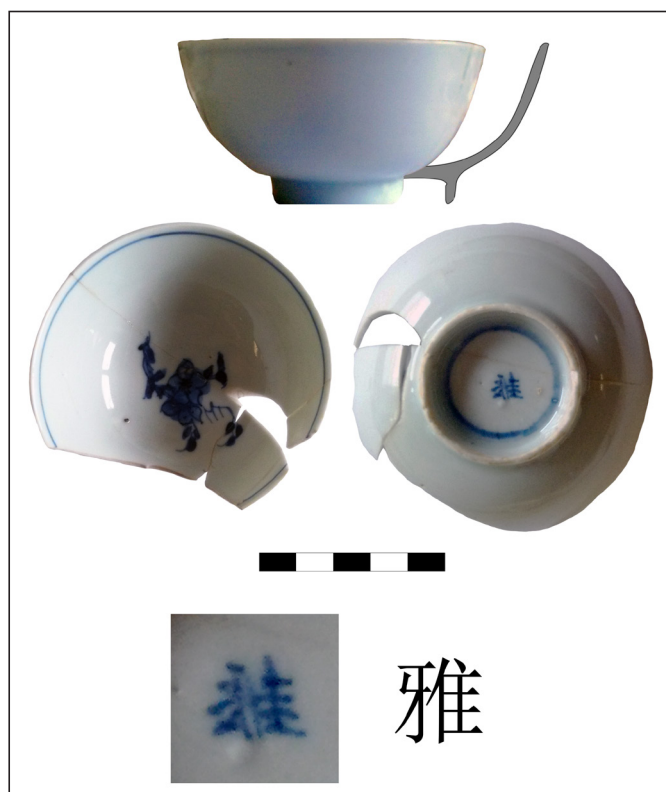


Fig. 1. Blue and porcelain cup with *ya* mark, Wanli to Shunzhi period (1573-1661). Origin: Buda, Szent György utca 4-10. [St George Street 4-10.]

### MARKS ON CHINESE PORCELAIN FROM BUDA AND EGER<sup>18</sup>

#### *Single character marks*

This type of marks is represented by two sherds in the assemblages. One of them (*Figure 1*) was unearthed during the excavations at Szent György utca [St George Street] 4-10., and it bears the character *ya* 雅, meaning “elegant, refined”. This mark was used during the reigns of emperors Wanli and Shunzhi (1573-1661),<sup>19</sup> but based on stylistic evaluation, this cup was probably made at the end of the 16th century. The two sherds depicted on *Figure 2* are inscribed with the character *fu* 福, meaning “good fortune, happiness, blessings”, mainly used

<sup>11</sup> Norman, Jerry: *Chinese*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.), 58. About the bronze vessels: Shaughnessy, Edward L.: *Sources of Western Zhou History: Inscribed Bronze Vessels*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> Oracle bones were made of turtle shell or cattle shoulder. Yes or no questions were carved on them, then they were heated up by hot copper wires, and the answer was decided based on the pattern of the ruptures caused by the wire. For more details see: Keightley, David N.: *Sources of Shang History. The Oracle-Bone Inscriptions of Bronze Age China*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1978).

<sup>13</sup> Normann, *Chinese*, 58.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>18</sup> The assemblages described in this article derive from the excavations of the Buda Royal Palace between 1958 and 1961, of the civilian town of Buda until 2014, as well as of the Eger Castle between 1957 and 1999.

<sup>19</sup> Davison, Gerald: *Marks on Chinese Ceramics*. Second edition (Somerset: Gerald Davison Ltd., 2013). no. 194. The dating of the sherds is given by the reigning periods of Chinese emperors, according to the practice of the international literature.

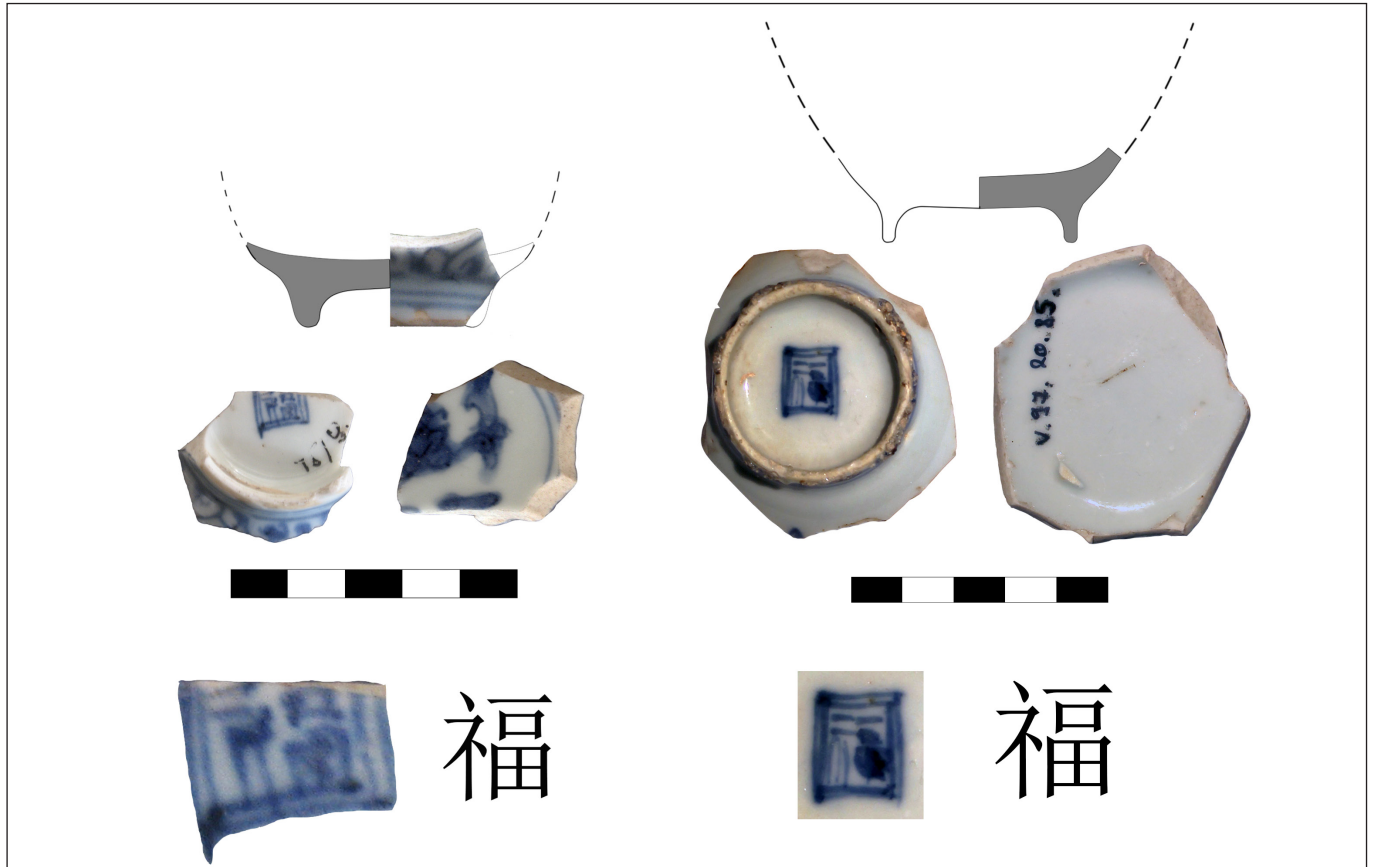


Fig. 2. left: Blue and white porcelain cup decorated with lotus, fu mark, Kangxi period (1662-1722), end of 16th century.  
 Origin: Buda, royal palace  
 right: Blue and white porcelain cup, fu mark, 17th century.  
 Origin: Eger - castle



Fig. 3. Celadon cup with qing or chun character, 17th century. Origin: Eger - castle

during the Yuan and Ming dynasties (1279-1644),<sup>20</sup> therefore it cannot be used for more precise dating. This sherd belongs to the “lotus” type, which can be dated to the 17th-century decades of the Wanli period (1662-1722).<sup>21</sup> A unique celadon vessel of the Castle of Eger is depicted on *Figure 3*. Celadon is a predecessor of porcelain, but it is a type of stoneware made of a greyer biscuit, covered in a celadon green (turquoise) glaze, which was produced until the end of the Ming period.<sup>22</sup> The same character, which might be read as *qing* 青 (turquoise) or as *chun* 春 (spring, vigor, life) is written several times on the wall of the cup. In case it is *qing*, the cup can be dated to the Wanli period (1573-1619); if it is *chun*, then it was probably made in the 17th century.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., no.160.

<sup>21</sup> Komori, Tünde: *Comparative Study of the Chinese Porcelain Finds of Ottoman Buda and the Castle of Eger*: MA thesis (Budapest: Central European University, 2017). 45.

<sup>22</sup> For more details see: Krahl, Regina: *Chinese Porcelain in the Topkapi Saray Museum, Istanbul. A Complete Catalogue I. Yuan and Ming Dynasty Celadon Wares*. (London: Sotheby’s Publications, 1986).

<sup>23</sup> Davison, *Marks*, no. 137.



Fig. 4. Blue and white porcelain bowl decorated with peach and lingzhi, wanfu youtong mark, end of 16th century – 17th century. Origin: Buda, Pasha Palace



Fig. 5. Blue and white porcelain cup with anhua decoration and wanfu youtong mark, Wanli period (1573-1619), end of 16th century. Origin: Buda, Corvin tér [Corvin Square]

### Good wishes

One of the outstanding sherds of the Buda assemblage was unearthed on the territory of the Pasha Palace (Figure 4), bearing the inscription *wan fu you tong* 萬福攸同, written in *zhuanshu* i.e. seal script, meaning “may infinite good fortune surround you”, which was used from the Jiajing (1522-1566) to the Kangxi (1662-1722) period, for about two hundred years.<sup>24</sup> As the construction of the Pasha Palace was started in 1598,<sup>25</sup> the sherd can probably be dated to the 17th century. The same inscription appears on a vessel unearthed at Corvin tér [Corvin Square] in Buda (Figure 5), which is decorated with *anhua* 暗畫 i.e. secret decoration, characteristic of the first two centuries of the Ming period (1368-1644).<sup>26</sup> This type of decoration only appears on this one piece in Buda, and on one sherd in the Eger assemblage.

### Dates

One of the sherds with dates was unearthed in Buda (Figure 6), with the mark “丁未年製 *dingwei nianzhi*”, meaning “made in the year of *dingwei*”. *Dingwei* is a name of a year in the sixty-year cycle of the Chinese Lunar calendar. China started using the Lunar calendar already in the Shang period (1600-1028 BC), which consists of cycles of sixty years, corresponding to a century in the western sense.<sup>27</sup> The cycles consist of ten Heavenly Stems (*shi tian gan* 十天干) and twelve Earthly Branches (*shi'er zhi* 十二支), creating unique year names of the sixty-year cycle, formed by pairing up the Heavenly Stems with the Earthly Branches (Figure 7). This way the name of a year can only appear once in a cycle, thus in order to identify a specific year, one needs to know in which cycle the year is referred to. Unfortunately, just like in the case of the fragment in question, the cycle is usually not specified on the porcelain vessels, leaving us in uncertainty

<sup>24</sup> Davison, *Marks*, no. 1895.

<sup>25</sup> Recently: Papp Adrienn: Rövid összefoglaló a budai pasák palotájáról. *Budapest Régiségei* 46. (2013), 167-185.

<sup>26</sup> Pierson, Stacey: *Earth, fire and water: Chinese Ceramic Technology. A handbook for non-specialists*. (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1996.) 38. The *anhua* decoration is carved into the biscuit, below the glaze, which can only be seen when the vessel is turned to light, hence the name “secret decoration”.

<sup>27</sup> Davison, *Marks*, 33.



Fig. 6. Blue and white porcelain cup with lotus and lingzhi decoration, dingwei date mark (1607), Wanli (1573-1619). Origin: Buda, royal palace

The Ten Heavenly Stems					
1	甲	ja	6	己	ji
2	乙	yi	7	庚	geng
3	丙	bing	8	辛	xin
4	丁	ding	9	壬	ren
5	戊	wu	10	癸	gui

The Twelve Earthly Branches					
1	子	zi	7	午	wu
2	丑	chou	8	未	wei
3	寅	yin	9	申	shen
4	卯	mao	10	酉	you
5	辰	chen	11	戌	xu
6	巳	si	12	亥	hai

Fig. 7. The ten heavenly stems and earthly branches of the Chinese calendar. Davison, Marks, 34.

about the exact year of production. In case of this piece the year is 丁未 *dingwei*, but the cycle is not mentioned, therefore based on the history of the medieval Royal Palace of Buda and the archaeological context, three years can be considered: 1487, 1547 and 1607. Based on stylistic evaluation, the sherd can be dated to the Wanli period, therefore the year of production is possibly 1607. (Figure 8)

Reign marks

There are two vessel fragments bearing a reign mark from the civilian town of Buda, there are none from the Royal Palace of Buda, while there are eight in the Eger assemblage. There are two types of reign marks, one with six (Figure 9) and one with four (Figure 10) characters. The six character version specifies the dynasty and the name of the emperor, as well as the term “made in the period of”, appearing in several different wordings: *nian zhi* 年製, *yu zhi* 御製, *nian zao* 年造, all with the same meaning<sup>28</sup> but *nian zhi* 年製 is the most frequent among the sherds unearthed in Hungary. The four-character type of reign marks does not specify the dynasty, but fortunately no emperor name was used twice in Chinese history, therefore the missing information is not crucial for identifying the emperor referred to on the vessels. Reign marks were used from the beginning of the

CYCLICAL DATING TABLE											
CYCLICAL SIGNS	CYCLE COMMENCING					CYCLICAL SIGNS	CYCLE COMMENCING				
	CE	CE	CE	CE	CE		CE	CE	CE	CE	CE
	4	64	124	184	244		4	64	124	184	244
甲子	304	364	424	484	544	甲午	304	364	424	484	544
乙丑	604	664	724	784	844	乙未	604	664	724	784	844
丙寅	904	964	1024	1084	1144	丙申	904	964	1024	1084	1144
丁卯	1204	1264	1324	1384	1444	丁酉	1204	1264	1324	1384	1444
戊辰	1504	1564	1624	1684	1744	戊戌	1504	1564	1624	1684	1744
己巳	1804	1864	1924	1984	-	己亥	1804	1864	1924	1984	-
庚午	04	64	124	184	244	庚子	34	94	154	214	274
辛未	05	65	125	185	245	辛丑	35	95	155	215	275
壬申	06	66	126	186	246	壬寅	36	96	156	216	276
癸酉	07	67	127	187	247	癸卯	37	97	157	217	277
甲戌	08	68	128	188	248	甲辰	38	98	158	218	278
乙亥	09	69	129	189	249	乙巳	39	99	159	219	279
丙子	10	70	130	190	250	丙午	40	100	160	220	280
丁丑	11	71	131	191	251	丁未	41	101	161	221	281
戊寅	12	72	132	192	252	戊申	42	102	162	222	282
己卯	13	73	133	193	253	己酉	43	103	163	223	283
庚辰	14	74	134	194	254	庚戌	44	104	164	224	284
辛巳	15	75	135	195	255	辛亥	45	105	165	225	285
壬午	16	76	136	196	256	壬子	46	106	166	226	286
癸未	17	77	137	197	257	癸丑	47	107	167	227	287
甲申	18	78	138	198	258	甲寅	48	108	168	228	288
乙酉	19	79	139	199	259	乙卯	49	109	169	229	289
丙戌	20	80	140	200	260	丙辰	50	110	170	230	290
丁亥	21	81	141	201	261	丁巳	51	111	171	231	291
戊子	22	82	142	202	262	戊午	52	112	172	232	292
己丑	23	83	143	203	263	己未	53	113	173	233	293
庚寅	24	84	144	204	264	庚申	54	114	174	234	294
辛卯	25	85	145	205	265	辛酉	55	115	175	235	295
壬辰	26	86	146	206	266	壬戌	56	116	176	236	296
癸巳	27	87	147	207	267	癸亥	57	117	177	237	297
甲午	28	88	148	208	268	甲子	58	118	178	238	298
乙未	29	89	149	209	269	乙丑	59	119	179	239	299
丙申	30	90	150	210	270	丙寅	60	120	180	240	300
丁酉	31	91	151	211	271	丁卯	61	121	181	241	301
戊戌	32	92	152	212	272	戊辰	62	122	182	242	302
己亥	33	93	153	213	273	己巳	63	123	183	243	303

Fig. 8. Names of the cyclical years. Davison, Marks, 35.

<sup>28</sup> Examples: *ibid*.



Fig. 9. Blue and white porcelain cup with lotus and lingzhi decoration, Kangxi mark, Kangxi period (1662-1722), second half of 17th century.  
Origin: Eger – Dobó utca [Dobó Street]



Fig.10. Blue and white porcelain cup with lotus and lingzhi decoration, Chenghua mark, Kangxi period (1662-1722), second half of 17th century.  
Origin: Eger – castle

Ming dynasty (1368-1644) to the end of the Qing period, until 1911.<sup>29</sup> These marks should precisely date porcelain vessels, as long as they bear the name of the contemporary reigning emperor, a scenario not very common in the 16th and 17th centuries, the reason being a decree issued by emperor Kangxi (1662-1722) in 1667, prohibiting the use of his name on porcelains. Kangxi simply wanted to avoid having his name on broken and discarded vessels, but at the same time he also laid the foundation of the practice of using the names of earlier emperors on porcelains.<sup>30</sup> The decree was not always followed by the craftsmen, but when it was, alternative solutions included leaving the vessel free from inscriptions, using good wishes, or the names of Ming emperors, such as Xuande (1426-1435), Chenghua (1465-1487), and Jiajing (1522-1566).

#### Four-character marks

There are two vessel fragments bearing a four-character mark, both of them were unearthed in Eger. The cup depicted on *Figure 11* might be considered as a date mark, although it is not very precise. The inscription reads *Da Qing nian zhi* 大青年製, meaning „made in the time of the Great Qing Dynasty”, which refers to the period between 1644 and 1911. The sherd derives from a layer mixed with modern debris, but based on its stylistic features, it can be dated to the second half of the 17th century. The sherd on *Figure 12* is interesting for two reasons, one being that it is the only one with this inscription in both Buda and Eger, and the other is its meaning. The mark reads *fu gui jia qi* 富贵佳器, which means “beautiful vessel for the rich and honourable”,<sup>31</sup> which is interesting, because this vessel can hardly be considered the most refined in

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., no. 1727. Another meaning in the inscription is “fine vessel for wealth and honour” (Ayers, John and Krahl, Regina, *Chinese Ceramics in the Topkapi Saray Museum: A Complete Catalogue*, pt. 2, *Ming Dynasty Porcelains*, London: Sotheby’s Publications, 1986. fig. 968). In case we consider this meaning, the inscription belongs to the group of good wishes.

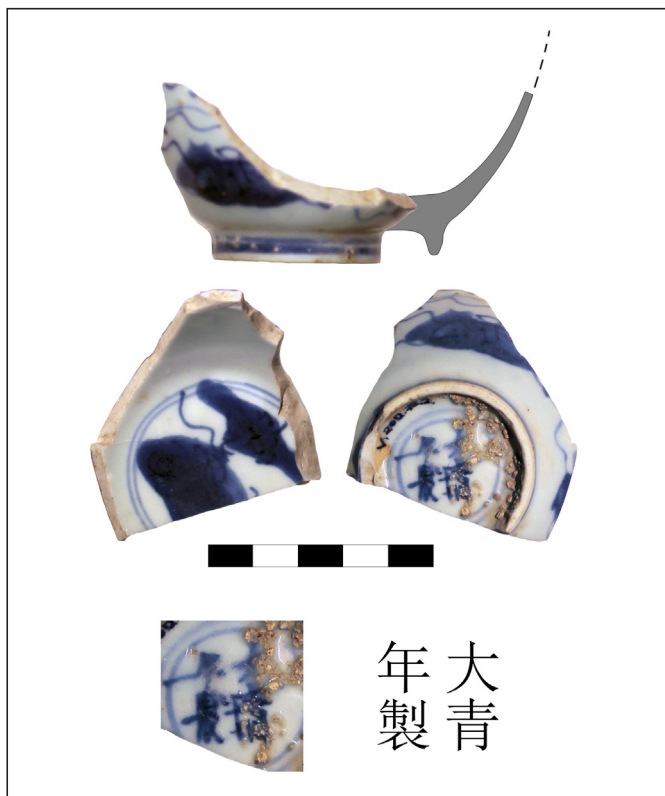


Fig. 11. Blue and white porcelain cup with abstract lotus and lingzhi decoration, Qing dynasty mark, 17th century. Origin: Eger – castle

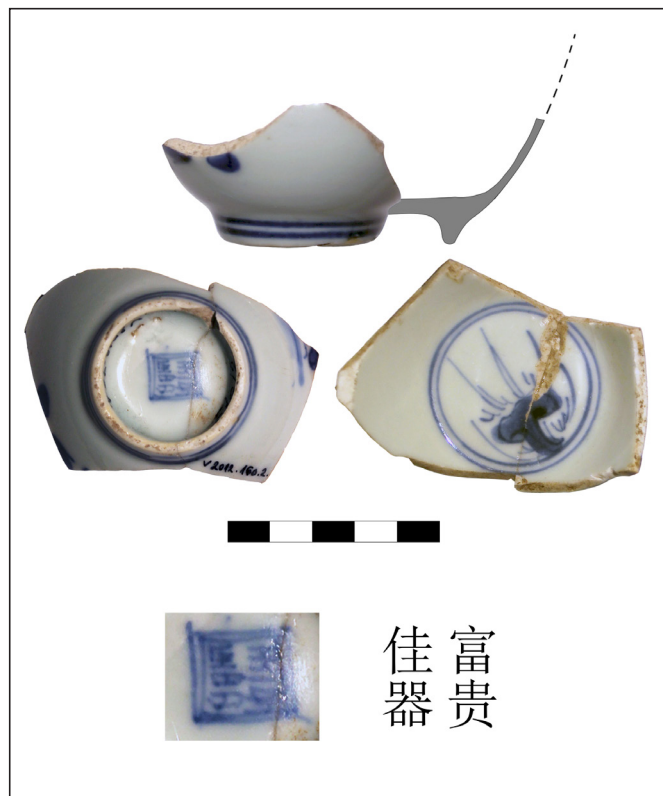


Fig. 12. Blue and white porcelain cup with mushroom decoration, fu qui jia qi mark, 17th century. Origin: Eger – castle

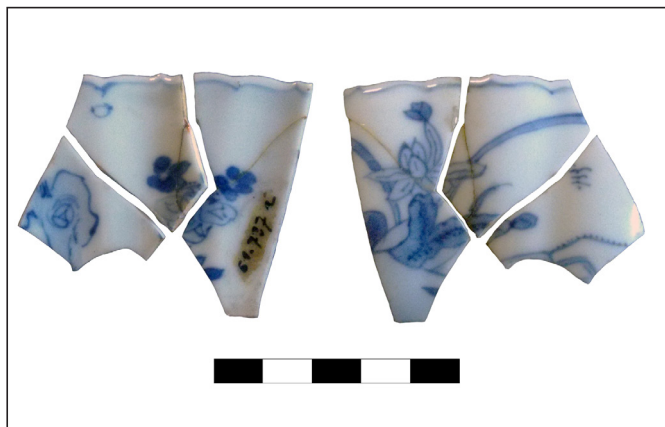


Fig. 13. Blue and white porcelain cup, Wanli period (1573-1619), early 17th century. Origin: Buda – royal palace

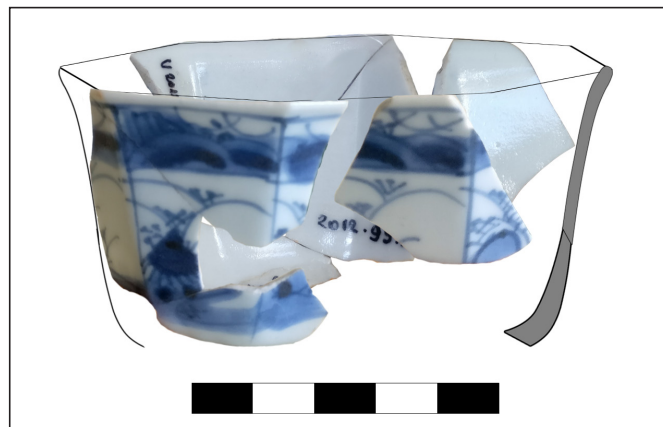


Fig. 14. Octagonal blue and white porcelain cup, Wanli period (1573-1619), early 17th century. Origin: Eger – castle

the two assemblages, especially compared to the high quality, thin-walled types (Figure 13), or the special octagonal cup (Figure 14), which, based on analogies, usually bear no inscriptions or marks.

### CONCLUSION

A small portion of the Chinese porcelain assemblages unearthed in Buda and in Eger bear marks, and only a few of them are legible. The marks help the identification and dating of the pieces in different ways, but none of them offer a precise solution. A careful dating is especially important in the case of reign marks, as usually they do not refer to the contemporary emperors. Porcelain sherds can be dated based on archaeological context, stylistic evaluation and analogies, marks alone are not suitable for identification.

Marks may indicate higher quality, but the assemblages of Buda and Eger hardly support this notion



as there are more refined types with no marks. Furthermore, there are also types with marks which appear to be of lower quality, such as the one depicted on Figure 2: it has a thick wall, the glaze is imperfect, the inside shows the imprint of the sagger, and there is sand stuck in the footring. Naturally, there is a difference among the inscriptions regarding quality, but the pieces unearthed in Hungary do not belong to the imperial products in general. It is intriguing however, that in Buda and in Eger as well, the most pieces bearing marks were unearthed in the vicinity of the pasha's residence, which might indicate the significance of vessels with marks or inscriptions. Chinese porcelain in general, as well as the marked pieces, require more research in order to better understand their function within the Ottoman context in Hungary, and the study of their topographical distribution is a promising direction for further examination.

#### RECOMMENDED READINGS

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