

RELIGIOUS HISTORICAL EVALUATION OF ONION FIBULAE DECORATED WITH EARLY CHRISTIAN SYMBOLS¹

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The onion fibulae that can be classified into the late Keller/Pröttel types 5-6³ were typical items of male apparel in the Late Roman period. The main characteristic of the examples that for the most part were made from gilded bronze plates was that the bow and foot of the fibula were commonly decorated with floral or geometric motifs of gold or silver inlays or using the niello technique. Symbols belonging to the range of forms of Early Christian art appear at times amongst these decorative motifs. We know of a total of 22 examples of this from the territory of the Roman Empire,⁴ half of which come from the territory of Pannonia (Table 1). In connection with this group of objects, the question may arise whether it may be concluded that the former users were Christians on the basis of the Christian symbols depicted. To receive an answer to this question it is necessary to examine the symbols depicted, the close surroundings of the find materials and the function of the object type more closely.

SYMBOLS

In addition to the representation of complex iconographic images, Christian art often employed simple symbols that had clear and important meaning for the followers of Christ. Appearing in the first quarter of the 4th century, the ligature made up of the Christogram, the first letters of Christ's name in Greek (Chi

¹ The present essay is a brief summary of the investigations performed within the context of the “*Frühes Christentum in Ungarn*” project. This research program is aimed at performing a comprehensive evaluation of the cultural history of Early Christian objects from the territory of Hungary, the compilation of a catalogue of these objects and their assessment in a narrow and a broad context. For a preliminary summary of the project results, see: Nagy, Levente: Die Lage der Erforschung des frühen Christentums in Ungarn im Spiegel eines neuen Projekts. In: *Neue Forschungen zum frühen Christentum in den Balkanländern* (Wien, 2015), 19 - 36 and Taf. 1 - 10.

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³ Keller, Erwin: *Die spätrömischen Grabfunde in Südbayern*. Münchner Beiträge zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Band 14. (München, 1971), 26-55.; Pröttel, Philipp Marc: Zur Chronologie der Zwiebelknopffibeln. *Jahrbuch des Römisch-germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz* 35/1 (1988), 347-371.; for a typological classification of plate onion fibulae, see: Swift, Ellen: *Regionality in Dress Accessories in the Late Roman West* (Montagnac, 2000); Tóth, Endre: Typologie der nicht gegossenen Zwiebelknopffibeln. In: *Romania Gothica II. The frontier World Romans, Barbarians and the Military Culture*. ed. Vida, Tivadar (Budapest, 2015), 329-361.

⁴ Examples found from outside the borders of Pannonia: *Bonn-Jakobstraße*: Ristow, Sebastian: *Fühes Christentum im Rheinland. Die Zeugnisse der archäologischen und historischen Quellen an Rhein, Maas und Mosel*. (Köln, 2007), Kat. 72., Taf. 45 c., 46 a-b.; Basel/Aeschenvorstadt, Late Roman cemetery, grave 379: Laur-Belart, Rudolf: Ein frühchristliches Grab aus Basel. In: *Ur-Schweitz XXIII/4* (1959), 57-71. Abb. 40-42.; *Gamzigrad/Romuliana*: Živić, Maja: Catalogue of small finds from excavations outside the fortified palace of Romuliana, 2005-2007. In: *STARINAR LVII* (2007), 285. Cat. 50e; Marteville, Late Roman cemetery, grave 16: Loizell, Michel – Coquelle, Jacques: Le cimetière gallo-romain du Bas-Empire de Merteville. In: *Cahiers archéologiques de Picardie* Vol. 4. (1977), 181.; *Prahovo/Aquae: Donati, Angela – Gentili, Giovanni: Costantino il Grande. La civiltà antica al bivio tra Occidente e Oriente*. (Milano, 2005), 246. Kat. 72.; Niš/Naissus, fort: Popović, Ivana: Gilt fibula with Christogram from Imperial Palace in Sirmium. In: *STARINAR LVII* (2007), 107. Fig. 3.; London (?): Dalton, O.M.: *Early Catalogue of early christian antiquities and objects from the christian east, in the department of British and mediaeval antiquities and Ethnography of the British Museum*. (London, 1901), 40. Kat. 256.; 3 further examples from unknown sites: *Kaufmann-Heinimann, Annemarie: Fundliste der Zwiebelknopffibeln mit Köpfen oder Büsten* (Keller/Pröttel Typ 5; Swift Typ 5i). In: *Das spätrömische Silberschatz von Kaiseraugst* (Hrsgb. Martin A. Guggisberg) *Forschungen in Augst, Band 34*. (Augst, 2003), Kat. F42. Abb. 307.; Kat. F43. Abb. 308. és Kat. F44. Abb. 309.; Ténés: Eger, Christoph: *Spätantikes Kleidungszubehör aus Nordafrika I. Trägerkreis, Mobilität und Ethnos im Spiegel der Funde der spätesten römischen Kaiserzeit und der vandalischen Zeit*. Münchner Beiträge zur provinzialrömischen Archäologie Band 5. (Wiesbaden, 2012), 101-104.

Rho) enjoyed the greatest popularity. The symbol refers to the risen Jesus Christ, who in Early Christian art was represented only through divine attributes or symbols indicating him. The appearance of the Christogram can be placed in the first quarter of the 4th century, at the beginning of the rule of Constantine the Great. It first appears in archaeological find materials in 315 A.D., in the impressions on a series of medallions used as a tool of imperial propaganda,⁵ with the image decorating Constantine's helmet. Its use spread widely starting from the 320s, finally becoming a permanent symbol of Christianity and of the state and empire at the same time.⁶ The latter also meant that it was fundamentally linked to the person of the ruler, and from this it naturally follows that it served to express loyalty and devotion to the Christian emperor. It appears 3 times in the Pannonian finds that have been examined, the fibulae from Intercisa, Neviodunum and Mursa.⁷

The Christogram appears within a wreath 5 times in the materials examined (Fig. 1). From the second half of the 4th century the emblem can be interpreted as a symbol of the passion of Christ, who as a reward for his suffering received from the Father this floral tribute of honor and respect.⁸ However, the interpretation of the Christogram encircled in a wreath

Site	Loop			Catch plate, pin rest			
	Christogram	Staurogram	Portrait	Christogram	Staurogram	Alpha and omega	Portrait
Bátaszék-Kövesdpuszta				1			
Ságvár, grave No. 7.					1		
Ságvár, grave No. 20.				2			
Tihany-Sajkód				1			
Dunaújváros-Öreghegy				1			
Neviodunum			4	1			4
Mursa/Eszék	2		1				
Sirmium					1	1	
Somlóvásárhely	1		3	1	1		2
Arrabona (?)				1		1	
Unknown			2	1			1

Table 1. Presence and quantity of symbols on onion fibulae from Pannonia



Fig. 1. Onion fibula decorated with Christ's initials, Ságvár; late Roman cemetery, grave No. 20. Photo credits: Judit Kardos@Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum

⁵ Ehling, Kay: Das Christogramm als magisches Siegeszeichen – Zum konstantinischen Silbermedaillon des Jahres 315. In: *Konstantin der Grosse zwischen Sol und Christus*, ed. Kay Ehling, Gregor Weber (Darmstadt, 2011), 28. Abb. 2a-2b.

⁶ Cf. Heid, S.: Kreuz. In: *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*. Bd. 21. (Lfg. 162/169) 1099-1126.

⁷ Intercisa: Buza, Andrea – Keszi, Tamás: *Aranytárgyak az Intercisa Múzeum gyűjteményéből (Gold Objects from the Collections of the Intercisa Museum)*. (Dunaújváros, 2009), 20. Kat.88.; Neviodunum: Malte-Johansen, Ida: Rings, fibulae and buckles with imperial portraits and inscriptions. In: *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 7 (1994), Abb. 7.; Mursa: Migotti, Branka: *Evidence for Christianity in Roman Southern Pannonia (Northern Croatia)*. BAR International Series 684. (Oxford, 1997), 56. Va. 1

⁸ Hudák, Krisztina – Nagy, Levente: *Megfestett Mennyország (Painted Heaven)*. (Pécs, 2009), 42. anm. 109.

is not unequivocal, since the wreath as a symbol of victory was popular long before the expansion of Christianity,⁹ so during and after the reign of Constantine this combined with the Christogram may also have alluded to the victorious emperor.

During the research, the idea arose¹⁰ that perhaps this dual meaning in particular could be related to the appearance one of the formal variants of the monogram of Christ, the Staurogram combining the cross (tau) and rho. Of the fibulae examined, onion fibulae decorated with the Staurogram came to light from Somlóvásárhely, Sirmium and grave number 7 from Ságvár (Fig. 2).¹¹



Fig. 2. Onion fibula decorated with a staurogram, Ságvár, late Roman cemetery, grave No. 7. Photo credits: Judit Kardos@Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum

It cannot be considered out of the question that Christians deemed it necessary to use a symbol that was free of all imperial symbolism and related exclusively to the followers of Jesus Christ. This can be contradicted by the fact that the Staurogram also turns up in manuscript texts that can be dated to as early as the 2nd century A.D. In the manuscripts the combination of the Greek letters *tau* and *rho* is a common abbreviation for the corresponding forms of the Greek noun *stauros* (“cross”) and the verb *stauroo* (“to crucify”), and in addition in the form that the ligature of *tau* and *rho* was used to stand for the noun of *stauros* or the verb *staurothanai*.¹²

Similar to the Christogram, the Staurogram also symbolizes Jesus Christ, but we make an important distinction between these two symbols, since the latter can be dated to a later point in time. It appears at the earliest on the reverse of the solidus of Valens and Valentinian minted in Antioch between 364 and 367 A.D., and then becomes more and more popular in the last quarter of the century.¹³ The Pannonian finds also support its contrasting, later appearance than the Christogram; the railing post from Székesfehérvár that can be dated to the end of the 4th century-first half of the 5th century was decorated with the Staurogram, as was the belt buckle from Dombóvár that can be dated to this same period.¹⁴

On the fibulae that were examined, in three cases the Greek *alpha* and *omega* was depicted, in two cases combined with the Staurogram and in one case combined with the Christogram. The letters *alpha* and

⁹ For a summary of the appearance of the wreath in a pagan context, see: Engemann, Josef: Kranz. In: *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*. Bd.21. Lfg. (162-169), 2006, 1006-1034.

¹⁰ Cf. Tóth, Endre: A székesfehérvári ókeresztény korláttöredék (The Early Christian Railing Fragment from Székesfehérvár). In: *Archeológiai Értesítő (Archaeological Bulletin)* 133 (2008), 49-66.

¹¹ Somlóvásárhely: Tóth, Endre: A későantik ifjúarckép- medaillonok értelmezéséhez (Interpretation of the Late Antique Medallions with Portraits of Youths). In: *Komárom-Esztergom Megyei Múzeumok Közleményei (Reports from the Museums of Komárom-Esztergom County)* 1997, 151. Abb. 15.; Sirmium: Popović, Ivana: Gilt fibula with Christogram from Imperial Palace in Sirmium. In: *STARINAR* LVII (2007), 101-102.

¹² We consider the Bodmer Papyrus II containing certain portions of the Gospel of John and the Bodmer Papyrus XIV encompassing a few chapters of the Gospel of Luke, which can be dated to the period of about 175-225 A.D., to be some of the earliest surviving manuscripts of the gospels. Cf. Hurtado, Larry: The Staurogram in the Early Christian Manuscripts: The earliest visual reference to the crucified Jesus? In: *New Testament manuscripts: Their text and their world. Text and Editions for New Testament Study, no.2.* (ed.) Thomas J. Kraus-Tobias Niklas, (Leiden/Boston, 2006), 207-226.

¹³ Biscont, Fabrizio – Fiocchi Nicolai, Vincenzo – Mazzoleni, Danilo: *Roms christliche Katakomben. Geschichte-Bilderwelt-Inschriften.* (Regensburg, 1998), 129-132. Abb. 144.

¹⁴ Cf. Szent Márton és Pannonia. Kereszténység a római világ határán (Saint Martin and Pannonia. Christianity on the Borders of the Roman World). ed. Tóth, E.– Vida, T. (Pannonhalma-Szombathely, 2016), 231. IV.6. and 265. V.68. and Tóth, Endre: A székesfehérvári ókeresztény korláttöredék (The Early Christian Railing Fragment from Székesfehérvár). In: *Archeológiai Értesítő (Archaeological Bulletin)* 133 (2008), 49-66.

omega as the symbols of the beginning and the end¹⁵ also refer to Jesus Christ. However, the height of the use of the combination of the apocalyptic letters in Early Christian art was during the battle and subsequent victory against the Arians, and may have indicated the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son.¹⁶ On coins, it was first depicted together with the Christogram on those minted by Magnentius in 353.¹⁷

Although it is not amongst the Christian symbols, we must touch upon the fact that a portrait of a youth is also depicted alongside the Christogram on the fibula from Somlóvásárhely. The presence of this type of depiction, which is common in the forms of Late Antique art,¹⁸ is not rare on onion fibulae either, appearing regularly on examples belonging to the Keller/Pröttel type 5. Their numbers are between one and ten, their faces and hairstyles both show variability and they can be shown full-face or three-quarter profile with their heads slightly turned. Over the decades numerous varying ideas have been offered in the research as to the interpretation of the figures.¹⁹ Due to the lack of the different attributes, we do not find their identification as martyrs or emperors from certain ruling dynasties as acceptable. It is important to note that in the case of these types of heads/faces, we cannot talk about portrayals, but instead only representations that do not reflect the physiognomic characteristics of the head/face of the individual depicted,²⁰ and due to this we can discard the identification of the figures as individual portraits. It seems the most acceptable that the figures in question are idealized concepts, presumably meant to express allegories of youth and happiness, while at the same time we cannot discount the possibility that they simply functioned as elements of decoration.

CIRCUMSTANCES OF DISCOVERY

We do not have data on the circumstances of discovery in every case for the type 5 fibulae examined. The example from Győr was catalogued in 1953 as from an unknown site. According to the suggestion of Eszter Szőnyi, the original site of the object may have been the Late Roman cemetery that had been excavated earlier.²¹ The fragment of the piece from Sirmium was found in the area of the imperial palace in 2005 amongst the debris of the excavation from the previous year, so its original



Fig. 3. Pottery finds from the grave at Tihany-Sajkód
Photo credits: Judit Kardos @Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum

¹⁵ Cf. Rev 1,8; Rev 1,11; Rev, 21,6; Rev 22,13

¹⁶ Lohmeyer, Ernst: Alpha und Omega. In: *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*. Bd. 1. (Lfg. 1/8) 1-3.

¹⁷ Kellner, Wendelin: *Libertas und Christogramm. Motivgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur Münzprägung des Kaisers Magnentius (350-353)*. (Karlsruhe, 1968), 57.

¹⁸ Övcsatokon: Malte-Johansen, Ida: Rings, fibulae and buckles with imperial portraits and inscriptions. In: *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 7 (1994), 236-239.; Ládikavereten: Die spätrömischen Metallscrinia und frühchristlichen Reliquiare. I. Teil: Katalog. Wiener Byzantinische Studien Band 9. (Wien, 1971), 138-139.; Kincsleletek különböző tárgytípusain: Kaufmann-Heinimann, Annamarie: Deccenaliensplatte des Constans. In: *Das spätrömische Silberschatz von Kaiseraugst (Hrsgb. Martin A. Guggisberg) Forschungen in Augst, Band 34. (Augst, 2003)*, 117-161., különbösen 127-129.

¹⁹ For a summary, see: Migotti, Branka: *Lukovičaste fibule s portretima na području rimskog carstva / The crossbow brooches with portraits in the Roman Empire*. (Zagreb, 2008)

²⁰ On the basis of the examination of the iconography of numerous Late Roman and Early Christian mural paintings, for these, see: Nagy, Levente: Túlvilági elképzelések és értelmezési problémák a pécsi késő római-ókeresztény temetőben (Concepts of the Afterlife and Problems of Interpretation in the Late Roman-Early Christian Cemetery of Pécs). *Műemlékvédelem (Historic Preservation)* vol. 57, no. 1 (2013), 5-6.; Nagy, Levente: Kádár Zoltán és a pannoniai provinciák ókeresztény ábrázolásainak ikonográfiája (Zoltán Kádár and the Iconography of Early Christian Depictions in the Pannonian Provinces). In: *Műemlékvédelem (Historic Preservation)* vol. LVIII, no. 1. (2014), 1-4.

²¹ Szőnyi, Eszter: Altchristliche Funde im Xantus János Museum, Győr. In: *Zalai Múzeum* 11. (2002), 44.

context cannot be reconstructed²² (Fig. 3). The fibula from Mursa was uncovered during construction work in 1934 in the northwestern section of the city.²³ The items from Neviodunum²⁴ and from Somlóvásárhely²⁵ were discovered as scattered finds, so their precise sites are unknown.

The site of the Tihany-Sajkod example has not been well investigated, but on the basis of the settlement features and Late Roman row burials that have been discovered over the decades Endre Tóth has concluded the existence of a villa or a *vicus* settlement along with an associated cemetery. Along with the fibula, a grey clay jar with one handle, a dark grey plate and a Sirmium copper coin of the emperor Julian came to light from the grave²⁶ (Fig. 4).

The example from Báticaszék-Kövesd puszta (Fig. 5) was discovered in a male grave with a southeast-northwest orientation, at the right shoulder of the deceased in accordance with its use. A ring was also originally amongst the finds from the grave. All that could be discovered about this object from the descriptions was that it was a simple wire ring made from bronze that followed the generally widespread form.²⁷

Of the type 5 onion fibulae that have been discovered from outside the Pannonian provinces, the items from Marteville, Romuliana, Bonn and Basel were also discovered as grave goods. The example from Bonn, which shows a close connection in form to the examples from Tihany and Báticaszék as well as the Sirmium fragment, came to light from the sarcophagus of a male who was buried together with weapons. In addition to the fibula, an iron knife with a scabbard decorated with a damascene inlay motif, a spatha, an angled and an oval Late Roman belt buckle, an amphora-shaped strap end with kidney shaped perforations,



Fig. 4. Onion fibula decorated with Christ's initials in a wreath, Báticaszék-Kövesdpuszta, late Roman cemetery, grave No. 108. Photo credits: Prof. Renate Pillinger @Wosinsky Mór Megyei Múzeum

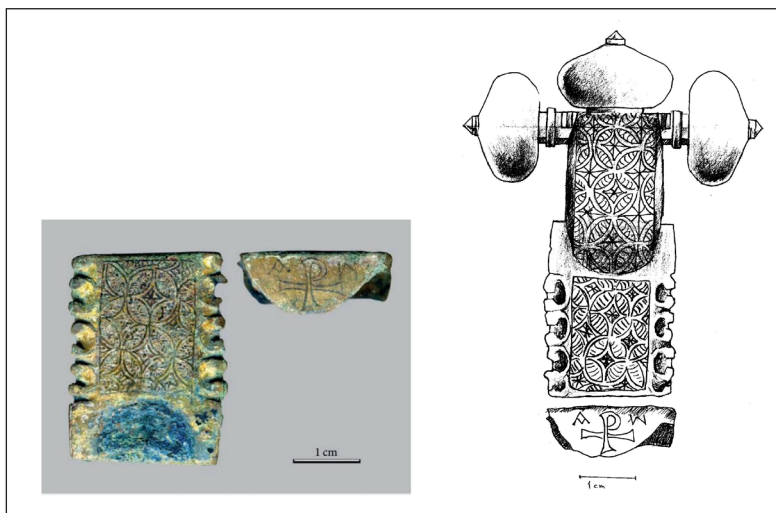


Fig. 5. Fragment of the fibula from Sirmium (source of the image: Popovic 2007, 102, Fig. 1.) and its suggested reconstruction

²² Popović, Ivana: Gilt fibula with Christogram from Imperial Palace in Sirmium. In: *STARINAR* LVII (2007), 101-102.

²³ Migotti, Branka: *Evidence for Christianity in Roman Southern Pannonia (Northern Croatia)*. BAR International Series 684. (Oxford, 1997), 55.

²⁴ Petru, Sonja–Petru, Peter: *Neviodunum (Drnovo pri Krskem)*. (Ljubljana, 1978), 96.

²⁵ Tóth, Endre: A későantik ifjúarckép- medaillonok értelmezéséhez (Interpretation of the Late Antique Medallions with Portraits of Youths). In: *Komárom-Esztergom Megyei Múzeumok Közleményei (Reports from the Museums of Komárom-Esztergom County)* 1997, 369.

²⁶ Tóth, Endre: Későrómai sír Tihanyból. A lemezből készült hagymafejes fibulák tipológiájához (Late Roman Grave from Tihany. The Typology of Onion Fibulae Made from Metal Sheets). In: *Folia Archaeologica* XLIII. (1994), 137-162. TÓTH 1994, 131.

²⁷ Péterfi, Zsuzsanna: A Báticaszék-Kövesd pusztai későrómai temető (The Late Roman Cemetery at Báticaszék-Kövesd Puszta). In: *Wosinsky Mór Múzeum Évkönyvei (Yearbooks of the Wosinsky Mór Museum)* XVIII. (1993), 96.

a glass pitcher and a glass plate with a polished decoration were placed in the grave. The figures of four youths dressed in tunics and holding sheaves of grain or bouquets of flowers are depicted on the plate. There is an eight-pointed star on the bottom of the plate. A loop was etched later onto one of the lines of the star, due to which it can be interpreted as a Christogram.²⁸

A gilt fibula made from a metal plate was discovered below the right thigh of a male skeleton in grave 7 of the Late Roman cemetery at Ságvár, which is unique amongst the Pannonian finds under examination because it can be classified as Keller!/Pröttel type 6. In addition to the fibula in this constructed grave covered with bricks, there were two glass vessels in the leg area, a silver belt buckle, a strap end also made from silver and an iron object of unknown use²⁹ in the area of the pelvis. Of the two glass vessels, which are in a highly

fragmented condition, one hypothetically may have been a jug with a round middle decorated with applied thread (Barkóczy type 120). This type appears in the finds from Pannonian cemeteries in the second half of the 4th century A.D., and is present all the way to the first quarter of the 5th century.³⁰

In summary, in the case of the Pannonian fibulae with well-documented find conditions and their analogies from elsewhere in the empire, it can be observed that they appear as traditional grave goods³¹ typical of the Late Roman period. The relatively large number of onion fibulae from a closed context at the Late Roman cemetery in Ságvár³² also provided the opportunity to compare the circumstances of discovery for examples with Christian symbols and those without. The results of this comparison also reinforce the statements above, we observed no differences in ritual, nor in the custom of furnishing grave goods (cf.: Table 2).

No. of the grave	Orientation	Silver belt buckle		Silver strap end		Other grave goods	Closing coin
		Oval	Rectangle	Amphora form	Heart form		
7	NW-SE	na.	na.	na.	na.	Fragments of glass bowls: 1. type Barkóczy 120. 2. Bowl with cut decoration	-
20	NW-SE	x		x		-	-
97	W-E		x			Iron awl	-
114	W-E					-	-
198	NW-SE	x				Glass fragments	-
212	W-E	x				Iron knife	Iulianus (355/61)
249	NW-SE		x		x	1. Iron knife 2. Remains of a leather pouch	II. Constantius (350/55)
253	W-E		x			Glass fragments	Valens (375/78)
257	NW-SE	x		x		Glass cup: type Barkóczy 47.	-
310	W-E					Glass fragments	-

Table 2. Grave goods from graves containing types 5-6. onion fibulae of the cemetery of Ságvár

²⁸ Cf.: Ristow, Sebastian: *Fühes Christentum im Rheinland. Die Zeugnisse der archäologischen und historischen Quellen an Rhein, Maas und Mosel.* (Köln, 2007), Kat. 72., Taf. 45 c., 46 a-b.

²⁹ We have no information on the fate of the belt buckle, the strap end or the iron object of unknown use, and no description or illustration of them has survived. Cf.: Schmidt, Wolfgang: *Spätantike Gräberfelder in den Nordprovinzen des römischen Reiches und das Aufkommen christlichen Bestattungsbrauchtums. Tricciana (Ságvár) in der Provinz Valeria.* In: *Saalburg Jahrbuch* 50 (2000), 396. ann. 1019.

³⁰ Barkóczy, László: *Pannonische Glasfunde in Ungarn.* (Budapest, 1988), Kat. 302-305.

³¹ For the question of the Christianity of the deceased buried with Christian objects and traditional grave goods, see: Hudák, Krisztina – Nagy, Levente: *Megfestett Mennyország (Painted Heaven).* (Pécs, 2009), 32-33.; 36.; 68-72.

³² Sz. Burger, Alice: *The Late Roman cemetery at Ságvár.* In: *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* XVIII. 99-234.

EVALUATION

A significant portion of the known onion fibulae decorated with Christian symbols found in the territory of the Roman Empire have come from the province of Pannonia. Of the type 5 examples with a well-documented find context, the grave from Tihany can provide the greatest amount of information in regards to dating. The coin dates the burial to as early as the 360s, while the plate and the jar may suggest the final third of the 4th century.³³ The amphora-shaped strap ends and the belt buckles with oval clasps that came to light from the Ságvár graves are generally widespread find types from the second half/final third of the 4th century A.D.³⁴ On the basis of the Pannonian grave goods examined, the dating of type 5 cannot be narrowed down further than the second half of the 4th century, while the period of use of the scabbard of the iron knife decorated using the damascene inlay technique discovered as a grave good at Bonn could extend this to the first quarter of the 5th century.³⁵ The example from grave 7 at Ságvár that can be classified as Keller/Pröttel type 6 is also dated to the second half of the 4th century by the glass vessels placed as grave goods. In this case the dating can be made more precise by the fibula decorated with the Staurogram to no earlier than the final third of the 4th century.

We can see that in the period of use of the individual types, the symbols examined above already had Christian meaning, even if not exclusively so. However, as was mentioned above, in addition to the symbols and the circumstances of discovery, the function of the object type also has an important role during evaluation. In the beginning, onion fibulae were a component of military attire, and every soldier wore them no matter what function they served within the army.³⁶ However, this status changed in the late period, and their use was also adopted by imperial officials working in administration, so they spread in an even wider sphere.³⁷ At the same time, on the basis of the statistical examination of the various versions of onion fibulae it seems that type 5 was represented to a much lesser degree than the earlier types.³⁸ This, combined with the fact that iconographic depictions that can be dated to the second half of the 4th century often show high ranking individuals with onion fibulae, together show that these gilt examples served to indicate rank.³⁹

While the Christogram symbolized Jesus Christ himself, the possibility cannot be discounted that the symbols depicted on the fibulae also served as a way to express loyalty to the Christian emperor. Even the

³³ Tóth, Endre: Későrómai sír Tihanyból. A lemezből készült hagymafejes fibulák tipológiájához (Late Roman Grave from Tihany. The Typology of Onion Fibulae Made from Metal Sheets). In: *Folia Archaeologica* XLIII (1994), 131.

³⁴ Bullinger, Hermann: *Spätantike Gürtelbeschläge: Typen, Herstellung, Trageweise und Datierung*. Dissertationes Archaeologicae Gandenses 12. (Brugge, 1969, 30-32.; Sommer, M: *Die Gürtel und Gürtelbeschläge des 4. und 5. Jahrhunderts im römischen Reich*. In: Bonner Hefte zur Vorgeschichte 22. (Bonn, 1984), 133-140.

³⁵ Böhme, Horst Wolfgang: *Germanische Grabfunde des 4. bis 5. Jahrhunderts zwischen unterer Elbe und Loire*. Studien zur Chronologie und Bevölkerungsgeschichte, Volume 2. (München, 1974), 128-130.

³⁶ Theune-Grosskopf, Barbara: Zwiebelknopffibeln und ihre Träger. In: *Die Schraube zwischen Macht und Pracht. Das Gewinde in der Antike*, ed. Deppert-Lippitz, Barbara–Schürmann, Astrid–Theune-Grosskopf, Barbara (Stuttgart, 1995), 84-87. The assertion that onion fibulae were elements of military attire goes back a long ways, and for a review of the research history, see: Gschwind, Markus: *Abusina. Das römische Auxiliarkastell Eining an der Donau vom 1. bis 5. Jh. n. Chr.* Münchner Beiträge zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte 53. (München, 2004) 190-201.

³⁷ Here it is sufficient to refer to the large numbers of types 3 and 4 appearing.

³⁸ For a map of the distribution of type 5, see: Swift, Ellen: *Regionality in Dress Accessories in the Late Roman West*. (Montagnac, 2000), Fig.16.; for type 6: Buora, Maurizio: Zwiebelknopffibeln des Typs Keller 6: Zur Verbreitung und status quaestionis. In: *Brooches and other elements of dress as sources for reconstructing interregional movement and group boundaries from the Punic Wars to the decline of the Western Roman. Proceedings of the International Conference from 27th–29th April 2011 in Innsbruck*, ed. Grabherr, G. – Kainrath, B. – Schierl, Th. (Innsbruck, 2013), 427-446. and Eger, Christoph: *Spätantikes Kleidungszubehör aus Nordafrika I. Trägerkreis, Mobilität und Ethnos im Spiegel der Funde der spätesten römischen Kaiserzeit und der vandalischen Zeit*. Münchner Beiträge zur provinziäl-römischen Archäologie Band 5. (Wiesbaden, 2012), 97-106.

³⁹ For a catalogue of the depictions, see: Theune-Grosskopf, Barbara: Zwiebelknopffibeln und ihre Träger. In: *Die Schraube zwischen Macht und Pracht. Das Gewinde in der Antike*, ed. Deppert-Lippitz, Barbara–Schürmann, Astrid–Theune-Grosskopf, Barbara (Stuttgart, 1995), 142-161.

symbol of the cross was not sufficient to clearly express Christian identity, considering that it also turned up in pagan settings.⁴⁰

Summarizing the above, while we can state that in the period in question the symbols appearing on the fibulae could genuinely be considered Christian emblems, and thus the fibulae can be classified as Christian artifacts, at the same time this does not mean that those wearing them were Christians themselves. We can talk about the suggestive character of the Christian symbols in relation to the individual piety of the individual or those burying them in particular in the case of closed constructed graves or crypts made exclusively for the deceased.⁴¹ Thus, on the one hand caution is justified in stating whether an individual who wore a fibula decorated with Christian symbols was certainly of the Christian faith, and on the other hand, the extraordinarily widespread incidence of Christianity in the 4th-5th centuries also urges caution in connection with the narrower interpretation.

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⁴⁰ Cf.: the examples of onion fibulae decorated with Latin and Greek crosses that can be classified as type 7. Cf.: Deppert-Lippitz, Barbara: A Late Antique Crossbow Fibula in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In: *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 35. (2000), 39-71.

⁴¹ An example of this is the grave decorated with a Christogram at crypt number 20 from Pécs. See: Visy, Zsolt: Sopianae későrómai temetői (Late Roman Cemeteries of Sopianae). In: *Szent Márton és Pannonia. Kereszténység a római világ határán (Saint Martin and Pannonia, Christianity on the Frontiers of the Roman World)*, ed. Tóth, E.–Vida, T. (Pannonhalma-Szombathely, 2016), 68- 76., fig. 5-6.

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