

10TH CENTURY CARPATHIAN BASIN FUNERARY EYE COVERING FINDS IN THE LIGHT OF EASTERN EUROPEAN ANALOGIES AND THEIR CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

TEKLA BALOGH BODOR¹

*This essay introduces and analyzes the metal finds interpreted as funerary eye coverings discovered in 10th century Carpathian Basin graves. It classifies and systematizes the objects on the basis of their formal characteristics and examines the context and the graves in which they were discovered as well as what characterizes their geographical distribution and their chronology. The funerary eye coverings in the find materials of the 10th-11th century Carpathian Basin have close analogies in Eastern Europe, primarily in the medieval find materials of the Volga-Ural region. This essay approaches the objects and the belief concepts related to them through the classification of the finds as well as through the aid of similar ethnological and cultural anthropological examples, using this as a basis to raise new considerations for further research.*²

RESEARCH HISTORY

In 1871, at Piliny-Leshegy, the first Conquest period grave was found where the excavating archaeologist, Baron Jenő Nyáry, proposed the use of a funerary eye covering in connection with the burial – although later even he interpreted the remains differently.³ In 1958, István Dienes excavated the cemetery known by the name Tiszaeszlár-Bashalom-Fenyvespart II, where in grave number 10 he discovered square sheets of silver over the eye sockets and mouth of the corpse as well as the remains of some kind of leather shroud. He found a parallel to the traces of this rite in the medieval archaeological remains of the area inhabited by peoples speaking Finno-Ugric languages.⁴ István Fodor also showed parallels to this burial custom in the group of archaeological cultures known from the western foothills of the Urals and reported on further graves with funerary eye coverings.⁵

At the end of the 20th century, the rethinking of the origins of the funerary eye coverings was proposed. Mihály Benkő was the first who questioned the idea that the appearance of masks and eye coverings in the remains from the Conquest period people was of Uralian origin, and ascribed the phenomenon – however without archaeological analysis – to influence from peoples speaking Turkic languages. He sought the antecedents to the custom in the Central Asian region. According to his opinion the custom of funerary eye coverings spread amongst the peoples of western Siberia and the Ural region through the influence of Turkic speaking peoples and this is where the Hungarians became familiar with the practice and brought it with them to the Carpathian Basin.⁶ János Makkay also considered the use of funerary eye coverings amongst

¹ Pázmány Péter Catholic University Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Institute of Archaeology MA/MSc 2nd year (baloghbodor@gmail.com)

² This essay summarizes the research for my thesis written in 2015 entitled “10th Century Carpathian Basin Funerary Mask Finds from the Perspective of Prehistory and Cultural Anthropology” as well as my 2017 National Scientific Students’ Associations Conference paper.

³ Nyáry, Jenő: Pilini Leshegyen talált csontvázról (On the Skeleton Discovered at Pilini Leshegy). *Archaeologiai Értesítő* (*Archaeological Bulletin*) 7 (1873) 156.

⁴ Dienes, István: Honfoglalóink halottas szokásainak egyik ugor kori eleméről (On a Ugrian Period Element in the Funerary Customs of Our Conquering Ancestors). *Archaeologiai Értesítő* (*Archaeological Bulletin*) 90 (1963) 108.

⁵ Fodor, István: Honfoglalás kori régészetünk néhány őstörténeti vonatkozásáról (On Some Prehistoric Connections of Our Conquest Period Archaeology). *Folia Archaeologica* 24 (1972) 159–176.

⁶ Benkő, Mihály: Halotti maszk és sírobolus (Funerary Masks and Grave Obols). *Antik Tanulmányok* (*Antique Studies*) 34 (1987–1988) 169–200.

the Conquest period people to be a custom of Turkic origin.⁷ The exhibition entitled *Ancient Death Masks* organized by the Hungarian National Museum in 2013 contributed to the research of the topic, bringing forward a great deal of evidence and new finds for the Uralian origins of the custom.⁸

THE FORMAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MASKS

During the collection of materials fundamentally based upon a survey of the volumes of the series reporting archaeological finds entitled *Magyarország honfoglalás kori és kora Árpád-kori sírleletei* (*Grave Goods of Hungary from the Conquest Period and Early Árpád Period*), I tracked down 64 Conquest period graves from 32 sites in the Carpathian Basin where remains of funerary eye coverings were discovered. I divided the metal finds determined to be eye coverings, those sewn onto the shroud covering the skull or just placed over the eye sockets and mouth, into four categories based on their formal characteristics.

The sole representative of the first group is the funerary eye covering discovered in the grave designated as Rakamaz-Strázsadomb A (*fig. 1*).⁹ This type of funerary eye covering is presently unique in the area, but there are numerous parallels known from the Ural region, primarily amongst the so-called half-masks typical of the 8th–9th centuries. This type is customarily compared to Carnival masks in general in ethnography, and the sheet that lies on the eyes has a figure-eight form with oval holes at the eyes. The sheet placed over the oral cavity is oval and also has an oval hole in the middle. Belonging to the second category are the simple, often square or rectangular funerary eye coverings cut from sheets of precious metal that are often paper thin (*fig. 1*).¹⁰ According to the evidence from the finds, objects were also used as funerary eye coverings that originally were not made for this purpose. This third category includes fittings that were employed secondarily in this manner during

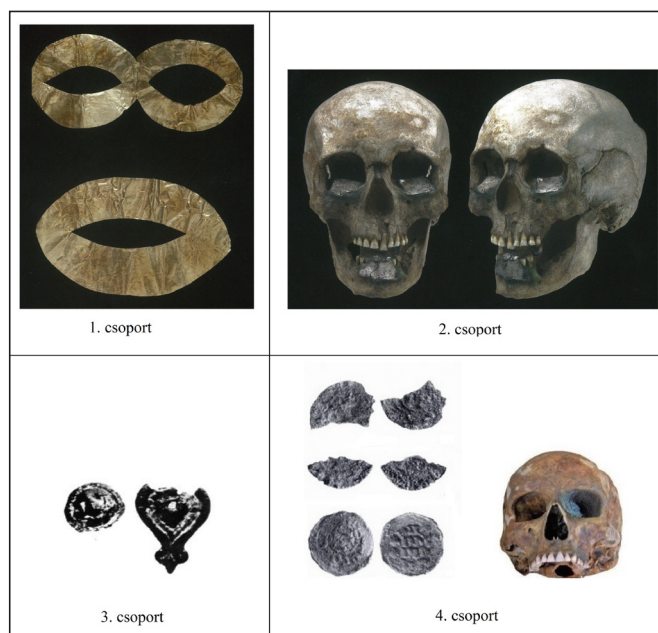


Fig. 1: The four formal groups of metal finds identified as funerary eye coverings, sewn onto the shroud covering the skull or just placed over the eye sockets and mouth (Group 1: grave A from Rakamaz-Strázsadomb [Ősi halotti maszkok. Kiállítási katalógus (Ancient Funerary Masks. Exhibition Catalogue) (Budapest: Hungarian National Museum 2013), fig. 44.]; Group 2: grave 10, cemetery II at Tiszaeszlar Bashalom-Fenyvespart [Ősi halotti maszkok. Kiállítási katalógus (Ancient Funerary Masks. Exhibition Catalogue) (Budapest: Hungarian National Museum 2013), fig. 42.]; Group 3: grave 8 from Szabadkigyós-Pálliget plot [Bálint Csanád: X. századi temető a szabadkigyósi-pálligeti táblában (Tenth Century Cemetery in the Plot of Szabadkigyós-Pálliget). A Békés Megyei Múzeumok közleménye (Békéscsaba) 1 (1971), 6. plot 1–2.]; Group 4: grave 100 from Kiskundorozsma-mould Hosszúhát [Bende Livia–Lőrinczy Gábor–Türk Attila: Honfoglalás kori temetkezés Kiskundorozsma-Hosszúhát-halomról (Eine Landnahmezeitliche Bestattung von Kiskundorozsma Hosszúhát-Hügel). Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve – Studia Archaeologica 8 (2002), Fig.10. 2, 15, 16].

⁷ Makkay, János: *Szarvasok, lovak, szemfedők, üstök és tálak. Indoiráni (indoárja) sajátosságok a finnugor és a magyar régiségben, és keltezésük kérdései* (Stags, Horses, Eye Coverings, Cauldrons and Platters. Indo-Iranian [Indo-Aryan] Characteristics in Finno-Ugric and Hungarian Relics and the Questions of Their Origins) (Budapest: published by the author, 2007).

⁸ Fodor, István: *Ősi halotti maszkok. Kiállítási katalógus* (Ancient Death Masks. Exhibition Catalogue) (Budapest: Hungarian National Museum 2013) 17–30.

⁹ Fodor, István: *Ősi halotti maszkok. Kiállítási katalógus* (Ancient Death Masks. Exhibition Catalogue) (Budapest: Hungarian National Museum 2013), fig. 44.

¹⁰ Fodor, István: *Ősi halotti maszkok. Kiállítási katalógus* (Ancient Death Masks. Exhibition Catalogue) (Budapest: Hungarian National Museum 2013), fig. 42.

the burial (fig. 1).¹¹ Included in the fourth category are those funerary eye coverings that contain coins amongst their elements (fig. 1).¹² There are three cases that can be classified in this group. In two cases, at the Szeged Csongrádi út site, sheets of precious metal were placed over the eyes of the interred bodies, while there were coins in their oral cavities.¹³ In one case, in grave 100 at Kiskundorozsma-Hosszúhát-halom, coins were found in both the eye sockets and oral cavity of the interred body. According to the opinion of the excavators it was clear that the coins found here must be interpreted as objects sewn into a funerary eye covering.¹⁴

However, it is not clear in the first two cases whether the coins discovered in the oral cavity were actually part of a funerary eye covering or were funerary obols used alongside the metal sheets found in the eye sockets. While it does not seem to make a great difference whether the coins were placed in the grave as part of an eye covering or as a funerary obol, the thought process behind the two practices differ significantly. The custom of providing a funerary obol can be traced back to antiquity. The coin placed under the tongue of the deceased served as payment for Charon, the ferryman of the underworld who transported the dead across the river Styx, after which they could continue their path to the afterlife.¹⁵ The placement of funerary obols within the grave could be quite diverse; they were most commonly found in the mouth, but could also be on the skull or in its vicinity, on the chest, under the skeleton, on the back, in the pelvis, on the stomach, at the feet, in the groin or on the shoulder. It was also common that the coin intended to be a funerary obol could be found in the right or left hand of the deceased.¹⁶ With the adoption of Christianity, the elements belonging to pagan burial rites disappeared from graves due to their strict prohibition; only the custom of providing a funerary obol remained and even spread in a wider range.¹⁷ It is conceivable that the placement of coins in the eye sockets were then possibly the Christian variants for the provision of a funerary eye covering¹⁸ – for the purpose of providing funerary obols – although in connection with the provision of obols, László Kovács argued most recently for its eastern, Crimean origin.¹⁹

¹¹ Bálint, Csanád: X. századi temető a szabadkígyósi-pálligeti táblában (10th Century Cemetery on the Szabadkígyos-Páalliget Plateau). *A Békés Megyei Múzeumok Közleményei (Publications of the Békés County Museums)* 1 (1971) table 6, 1–2.

¹² Bende, Livia – Lőrinczy, Gábor – Türk, Attila: Honfoglalás kori temetkezés Kiskundorozsma-Hosszúhát-halomról (Conquest Period Burial from Kiskundorozsma-Hosszúhát-halom). *Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve (Annual of the Móra Ferenc Museum) – Studia Archaeologica* 8 (2002) fig. 10. 2, 15, 16.

¹³ Graves 1 and 36; Kürti, Béla: Honfoglaló magyar sírok Szeged-Csongrádi úton (Conquest Period Hungarian Graves at Szeged-Csongrádi út). In: *Honfoglaló magyarság – Árpád-kori magyarság (Conquest Period Hungarians – Árpád Period Hungarians)*. eds.: Pálfi, György – Farkas, L. Gyula – Molnár, Erika (Szeged, József Attila University, Department of Anthropology 1996) 59–60.

¹⁴ Grave 100; Bende, Livia–Lőrinczy, Gábor–Türk, Attila: Honfoglalás kori temetkezés Kiskundorozsma-Hosszúhát-halomról (Eine Landnahmezeitliche Bestattung von Kiskundorozsma-Hosszúhát-Hügel) (Conquest Period Burial from Kiskundorozsma-Hosszúhát-halom). *Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve (Annual of the Móra Ferenc Museum) – Studia Archaeologica* 8 (2002) 366–367.

¹⁵ Šeparović, Tomislav: Coin Finds of Emperor Constantine V Copronymus in southern Croatia. In: *Byzantine Coins in Central Europe between the 5th and 10th century*. Ed.: Wołoszyn, Marcin (Krakow, Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences Institute of Archaeology University of Rzeszów 2009) 555.

¹⁶ Tettamanti, Sarolta: Temetkezési szokások a 10–11. századi Kárpát-medencében (Begräbnissitten im 10–11. Jahrhundert im Karpatenbecken) (Burial Customs of the 10th-11th Centuries in the Carpathian Basin). *Studia Comitatus* 1975, 103–104.

¹⁷ Kovács, László: Fegyverek és pénzek (Arms and Coins). In: *Honfoglalás és régészet (Conquest and Archaeology)*. Eds.: Kovács, László – Györfy, György (Budapest, Balassi Kiadó 1994) 194.

¹⁸ Mesterházy, Károly: A magyar honfoglalás kor régészetének ötven éve (Fifty Years of the Archaeology of the Hungarian Conquest Period). *Századok (Centuries)* 127 (1993) 303.

¹⁹ Kovács, László: Érmék nem dísz vagy ékszer szerepben a honfoglaló magyar sírokban (Münzen in keiner Zierat- oder Schmuckrolle in den landnahmezeitlichen Gräbern) (Coins Not in the Role of Decoration or Jewellery in Conquest Period Hungarian Graves). In: *Változatok a történelemre. Tanulmányok Székely György tiszteletére (Variante über die Geschichte. Studien zu Ehren von György Székely) (Versions of History. Essays in Honor of György Székely)*. Eds./Hrsg.: Erdei, Gyöngyi–Nagy, Balázs. *Monumenta Historica Budapestinensia* 14 (2004) 46.

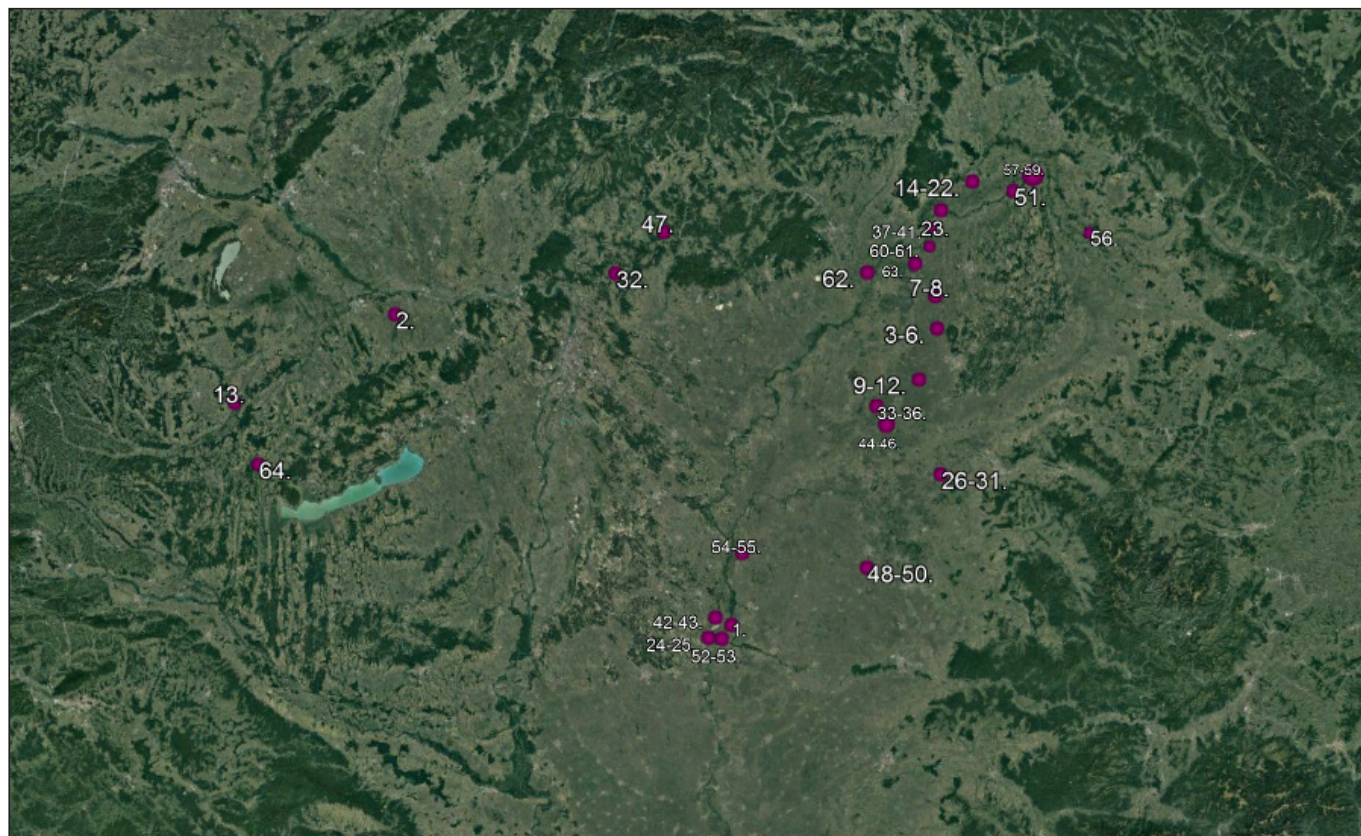


Fig. 2: Distribution of graves containing funerary eye coverings in the Carpathian Basin

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL INCIDENCE OF FUNERARY EYE COVERINGS IN THE CARPATHIAN BASIN

A great proportion, 77 percent, of the remains that can be interpreted as funerary eye coverings have been discovered in male graves, and only 18 percent can be linked to female burials (in the case of the remaining 5 percent the sex of the deceased could not be determined). Unfortunately, the number of graves where the age of the deceased could not be determined or no analysis of this type was performed is quite high. Despite this, it seems that eye coverings were used in the graves of both children and adults in the case of both sexes. On the basis of the geographical distribution of the known finds the custom was typical in the eastern and northeastern as well as the southern sections of present-day Hungary, and only appears sporadically in the western section (*fig. 2*).²⁰ On the basis of projecting the four classifications introduced above on the map, no characteristic regions of usage stand out, the elements of the groups appear intermingled and it can be considered a generally widespread 10th century practice.

Unfortunately, at the time being sufficient information is not available to be able to place the graves with funerary eye coverings more precisely within the 10th century. A total of three graves contained accompanying finds that made a more precise dating possible; the coins discovered in grave 100 at Kiskundorozsma-

²⁰ 1. Algyő-well district number 258; 2. Bana-Ördögásta-hegy; 3–6. Hajdúböszörmény-Bodaszőlő, Búdöskút, Hajdúböszörmény-Vid, Erdős-tanya; 7–8. Hajdúdorog-Gyulás, Hajdúdorog-Temetőhegy; 9–12. Hajdúszoboszló-Árkoshalom; 13. Ikervár-Virág utca; 14–22. Karos-Eperjesszőg; 23. Kenézlő-Fazekaszug; 24–25. Kiskundorozsma-Hosszúhát halom, Kiskundorozsma-Subasa; 26–31. Magyarhomorog-Kónyadomb; 32. Nógrádkövesd; 33–36. Püspökladány-Eperjesvölgy; 37–41. Rakamaz-Strázsadomb, Rakamaz-Túróczi-part (Gyepiföld); 42–43. Sándorfalva-Eperjes; 44–46. Sárrétudvari-Hízóföld; 47. Sóshartyán-Hosszútető; 48–50. Szabadkígyós-Pálliget Plateau, Szabadkígyós-Tangazdaság sand pit; 51. Szabolcsveresmart-Szelérd-domb; 52–53. Szeged-Csongrádi út; 54–55. Szentés-Borbásföld; 56. Tarpa; 57–59. Tiszabездéd-Harangláb dűlő; 60–61. Tiszaeszlár-Bashalom-Fenyvespart; 62. Tiszaszederkény-Vegyí kombinát; 63. Tiszavasvári-Aranykerti Plateau; 64. Zalaszentgrót.

Hosszúhát-halom dated it to the third quarter of the 10th century, and the coins discovered in the two graves at the Szeged-Csongrádi út site placed them after the 950s.²¹

FUNERARY EYE COVERINGS AND MASKS IN THE EARLY MEDIEVAL REMAINS IN EASTERN EUROPE AND THE URAL REGION

The use of funerary masks and eye coverings shows a wide-ranging distribution in both space and time throughout Eurasia from the Paleolithic period through Antiquity up to the Early Modern period.²² The funerary eye coverings that have been isolated in the find materials of the 10th-11th century Carpathian Basin show a great deal of connection with similar pieces observed in the find materials of Eastern Europe, in particular that of the early medieval Ural region, as well as the traces of presumably similar burial customs. The characteristic rite amongst the Ugrian peoples who once lived in the western foothills of the Urals – which also appears in the Conquest period find materials – is considered one of the most important indicators of Ugrian ethnicity by the vast majority of experts in eastern archaeological research, and a significant amount of new professional literature has been written in connection with fortunate finds in recent years.²³ In the first half of the 9th century the Hungarians brought numerous cultural elements from the western foothills of the Urals first to the grassy steppe region of Eastern Europe and then to the Carpathian Basin. Besides the funerary eye coverings, it is possible to mention objects showing post-Sasanian influence, partial equestrian burials observed in certain graves, etc.

In the Ural-Kama region the separate eye and mouth sheets can be dated to the earliest period, the 6th-7th century (fig. 3).²⁴ Although there are examples where the two eyes were covered by two separate pieces, the form where the eye sheet was comprised of one piece was more widespread. The latest funerary eye and mouth sheets can be dated to the 9th century. These were also comprised of two parts, but the metal sheets covering the eyes and the mouth were now larger in size and essentially touch, and are referred to as half masks in the research (fig. 4).²⁵



Fig. 3: Separate eye and mouth sheets dated to the 8-10th centuries from the site of Gorbunyata (Fodor, István: *Ósi halotti maszkok. Kiállítási katalógus (Ancient Funerary Masks. Exhibition Catalogue)* (Budapest: Hungarian National Museum 2013. fig. 33.)

²¹ Grave 100; Bende, Lívia–Lőrinczy, Gábor–Türk, Attila: Honfoglalás kori temetkezés Kiskundorozsma-Hosszúhát-halomról (Eine Landnahmezeitliche Bestattung von Kiskundorozsma-Hosszúhát-Hügel) (Conquest Period Burial from Kiskundorozsma-Hosszúhát-halom). *Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve (Annual of the Móra Ferenc Museum) – Studia Archaeologica* 8 (2002) 366–367. Graves 1 and 36; Kürti, Béla: Honfoglaló magyar sírok Szeged-Csongrádi úton (Conquest Period Hungarian Graves at Szeged-Csongrádi út). In: *Honfoglaló magyarság – Árpád-kori magyarság (Conquest Period Hungarians – Árpád Period Hungarians)*. eds.: Pálfi, György – Farkas, L. Gyula – Molnár, Erika (Szeged, József Attila University, Department of Anthropology 1996) 60.

²² Veres Péter: A honfoglaló magyarok temetkezési szokásainak problematikája. In memoriam Dienes István (1929–1995) (The Problems of the Burial Practices of the Conquering Hungarians. In Memoriam István Dienes [1929-1995]). In: *Ősök, táltosok, szentek: tanulmányok a honfoglaláskor és Árpád-kor folklórából (Ancestors, Shamans and Saints: Essays on the Folklore of the Conquest Period and Árpád Period)*. Ed.: Pócs, Éva (Budapest, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Research Institute for Ethnography, 1996) 53–66.

²³ Белавин, Андрей Михайлович – Иванов, Владимир Александрович – Крыласова, Наталья Борисовна: *Угры Предуралья в древности и средние века* (Уфа, ВГПУ 2009) 109.

²⁴ Fodor, István: *Ósi halotti maszkok. Kiállítási katalógus (Ancient Death Masks. Exhibition Catalogue)* (Budapest: Hungarian National Museum 2013) fig. 33.

²⁵ Fodor, István: *Ósi halotti maszkok. Kiállítási katalógus (Ancient Death Masks. Exhibition Catalogue)* (Budapest: Hungarian National Museum 2013) fig. 34.



Fig. 4: Separate eye and mouth sheets, dated to the 9th century from site Bayanovo (Fodor, István: *Ősi halotti maszkok. Kiállítási katalógus* (Ancient Funerary Masks. Exhibition Catalogue) (Budapest: Hungarian National Museum 2013. fig. 34.)



Fig. 5: Funerary mask covering the entire face from the site of Bayanovo (Fodor, István: *Ősi halotti maszkok. Kiállítási katalógus* (Ancient Funerary Masks. Exhibition Catalogue) (Budapest: Hungarian National Museum 2013. fig. 35.)

Funerary masks that cover the entire face appear at the beginning of the 10th century (fig. 5).²⁶ These are generally oval in shape, but less commonly are square or trapezoidal. In the case of a few particularly carefully made pieces eyebrows, beards and tattoos were also indicated on the masks.²⁷

In addition to the western foothills of the Urals, funerary eye coverings and masks are also present in the early medieval archaeological find materials of the Eastern European steppe region (e.g. Korobchino and Manvelovka).²⁸ In recent years in this area a find horizon has taken form along the middle section of the Dnieper River, where about one hundred burials from some dozen sites show Uralian and Conquest period characteristics. Their comprehensive designation is the Subotsi find horizon, which Hungarian and international research has identified with the settlement area of the ancestors of the Hungarians known as the Etelköz in written sources. The finds discovered here do show a strong connection with the find materials of the 10th century Carpathian Basin as well as with that of the 8th-10th century Volga-Southern Ural area.²⁹ Included amongst these characteristics are also funerary eye coverings and masks.

²⁶ Fodor, István: *Ősi halotti maszkok. Kiállítási katalógus* (Ancient Death Masks. Exhibition Catalogue) (Budapest: Hungarian National Museum 2013) fig. 35.

²⁷ Белавин, Андрей Михайлович – Иванов, Владимир Александрович – Крыласова, Наталья Борисовна: *Угры Предуралья в древности и средние века*. (Уфа, Издательско-полиграфический комплекс БГПУ, 2009) 105–106.

²⁸ Korobchino and Manvelovka; Türk, Attila: A honfoglalás kori régészeti hagyatékkal kapcsolatot mutató keleti lelőhelyek (Eastern Archaeological Sites Showing Connections to the Archaeological Find Materials of the Conquest Period). In: *A honfoglalók viselete* (The Attire of the Conquerors). Eds.: Sudár, Balázs – Petkes, Zsolt (Budapest, Helikon Kiadó 2014) 54–57; 60.

²⁹ Türk, Attila: A honfoglalás kori régészeti hagyatékkal kapcsolatot mutató keleti lelőhelyek (Eastern Archaeological Sites Showing Connections to the Archaeological Find Materials of the Conquest Period). In: *A honfoglalók viselete* (The Attire of the Conquerors). Eds.: Sudár, Balázs – Petkes, Zsolt (Budapest, Helikon 2014) 31–32; 53.

THE QUESTION OF FUNERARY EYE COVERINGS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

To decode the function and meaning of the funerary eye coverings, knowledge of the ancient belief system of the Conquest period Hungarians would be necessary, however we do not have any concrete information on this. According to earlier theories, the spiritual beliefs of the Conquest period Hungarians, similar to the Finno-Ugric or other Eurasian peoples, were based on the duality of the soul, differing between the body soul and the free soul.³⁰ It is certain that the function of the funerary eye covering can be connected to the soul of the deceased, but it is a fundamental question whether it served to protect the dead or just the opposite, shielding the living from the malign gaze and spirit of the deceased.

In his article, István Dienes, taking the publication of Valeriy Nikolayevich Chernetsov as a basis, interpreted the sheets placed on the eyes as obstructing the vision of the dead, thus ensuring that the deceased would not carry off any of the living with them to the afterlife. In parallel with this, the sheets would have also protected the spirit of the deceased, which malign spirits could have attacked on its path leading to the afterlife.³¹

During his travels in Central Asia, Mihály Benkő spent several years amongst the Mongolian Kazakhs examining various customs. Due to this, he also gained an insight into their funeral ceremonies, during which they provided eye covering for the dead. The face of the deceased was covered in a white silk shroud and gold, silver, or in the case of poorer people, bronze coins or sheets were sewn into the shroud at the location of the eyes and mouth (*fig. 6*).³² According to the narrative of the locals, this was necessary for the dead to be able to see in the afterlife, so both the funerary mask and the funerary eye coverings symbolized



Fig. 6: Funerary face shroud with eye and mouth sheets (Benkő 1998, 129)

³⁰ Dienes, István: A honfoglaló magyarok és ősi hiedelmeik (The Conquering Hungarians and Their Ancient Beliefs). In: *Uráli népek. Nyelvrokonaik kultúrája és hagyományai (Uralic Peoples. The Culture and Traditions of Our Linguistic Relatives)*. Ed.: Hajdú, Péter (Budapest, Corvina Kiadó 1975) 83.

³¹ Dienes, István: Honfoglalóink halottas szokásainak egyik ugor kori eleméről (On a Ugric Period Element in the Funerary Customs of Our Conquering Ancestors) *Archaeologiai Értesítő (Archaeological Bulletin)* 90 (1963) 112.

³² Benkő, Mihály: *Nomád világ Belső-Ázsiában (Nomadic life in Central Asia)* (Budapest, Timp 1998) 129.

the face of the deceased. They made a distinction between the precious metals in terms of their meaning; gold radiated the light of the Sun, while silver radiated the light of the Moon.³³ Through this example, Mihály Benkő reconstructed the conceptual background of the metal sheets, fittings and coins sewn into the funerary eye covering.

In the 19th century Russian researchers examined the burial customs of the Ostyaks, who at that time still used funerary eye coverings. They also covered the face of the interred, in general with deerskin, into which copper buttons were sewn at the eyes, mouth, nose and ears. They explained the custom by stating that in this way the deceased does not see, does not hear, does not sense smells and cannot speak or breathe, or in other words loses all connection with the world of the living and proceeds on to the afterlife.³⁴

The research also explained the presence of masks and eye coverings in the early medieval graves of Eastern Europe and the Ural region through the fear the living had of those interred. They may have feared on one hand the malign gaze of the dead, and on the other hand their breathing, which most certainly also expressed the presence of the soul. However, alongside the fear, honoring the dead and the protection of the deceased may also have played a role in connection with the practice.³⁵

However, it is not possible to link the fear of the spirit coming back and haunting with those funerary eye coverings and masks where separate openings were cut in the metal sheets for the eyes and the mouth, since these instead opened up the path for the soul. Due precisely to this, I am of the opinion that the custom of providing funerary eye coverings and masks – in particular in these cases – cannot be explained by the fear of the spirit returning to haunt. While in certain cases the eyes and mouth of the deceased were genuinely covered, in other cases they instead emphasized and cleared the path for the gaze and the breath (spirit) with these openings. Quite a few other methods to prevent haunting by malign spirits are known from Conquest period burials, for example when the deceased was laid on its stomach or in a contracted position, or was interred tied up. These graves typically did not contain other goods. In contrast to this, the graves containing funerary eye coverings often have abundant finds.

EVALUATION

During the research briefly introduced in this essay I collected and systematized the graves found to this point from the 10th century in the Carpathian Basin determined to have included funerary eye coverings. I was able to differentiate four different classifications, which on the basis of the presently available data and examination results can be found throughout the 10th century and do not show a specific distribution geographically either. The analysis of burial practices related to graves containing funerary eye coverings has not yet shown any unifying feature or extraordinary element that would link these graves in any other way. The meaning of the custom is by all means related to the fate of the soul following death, but the manner of this relationship is debated in the research. However, an important result of the systemization and analysis of the Carpathian Basin examples is the observation that while certain pieces on the basis of their design may have blocked the path for the gaze and the spirit, others were open and instead emphasized this path. It is worthwhile in the future to examine modern examples in cultural anthropology from this perspective as well. Important tasks of the continued research are the examination of traces of patina occurring on the skulls, with particular attention to eye sockets or oral cavities, as well as the expansion of the Hungarian and eastern database on these burials.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would hereby like to express my thanks to Dr. Attila Türk and Dr. Péter Langó for the assistance they provided during my work.

³³ Benkő, Mihály: *Nomád világ Belső-Ázsiában (Nomadic life in Central Asia)* (Budapest, Timp 1998) 126–127.

³⁴ Белавин, Андрей Михайлович – Иванов, Владимир Александрович – Крыласова, Наталья Борисовна: *Угры Предуралья в древности и средние века* (Уфа, Издательско-полиграфический комплекс БГПУ, 2009) 108.

³⁵ Белавин, Андрей Михайлович – Иванов, Владимир Александрович – Крыласова, Наталья Борисовна: *Угры Предуралья в древности и средние века* (Уфа, Издательско-полиграфический комплекс БГПУ 2009) 108.

RECOMMENDED LITERATURE

FODOR, ISTVÁN

Ancient Death Masks and the Prehistory of Hungarians. Lessons of a Museum Exhibition. *Hungarian Studies* 28 (2014) 119–138.

BENDE, LÍVIA – LŐRINCZY, GÁBOR – TÜRK, ATTILA

Honfoglalás kori temetkezés Kiskundorozsma-Hosszúhát-halomról (Eine landnahmezeitliche Bestattung von Kiskundorozsma-Hosszúhát-Hügel) (Conquest Period Burial from Kiskundorozsma-Hosszúhát-halom). *Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve – Studia Archaeologica* 8 (2002) 351–402.

БЕЗМАТЕРНЫХ, И. В.

Классификация, хронология и этническая атрибуция средневековых погребальных лицевых покрытий Пермского Предуралья. In: *Stydia historica jenium*. Ред. кол.: Белавин, А. М. – Лычагина, Е. Л. Пермь 8 (2012:1) 17–20.

БЕЛАВИН, А. М. – ДАНИЧ, А. В. – ИВАНОВ, В. А.

Древние мадьяры в Предуралье. В: Фодор, И.: *Венгры: древняя история и родины: науч.-попул.* Ред.: Н. Б. Крыласова. Пермь, «ЗЁРБА», 2015, 102–131.

ГЕРМАН, Е. Ф.

Погребальные лицевые покрытия Прикамья. В: *Научное наследие А. П. Смирнова и современные проблемы археологии Волго-Камья*. Ред.: Белоцерковская, И., Труды ГИМ, Москва, Государственный исторический музей. 2000, 122 141–147.

ГЕРМАН, Е. Ф.

Металлические погребальные лицевые покрытия Волго-Камья эпохи средневековья. В: *Международное (XVI Уральское) археологическое совещание: Материалы международной научной конференции 6–10 окт. 2003 г.* Отв. ред.: Мельничук, А. Ф., Пермь, Пермский государственный университет, 2003, 146–147.