

A BURGUNDIAN PILGRIM AMPULLA FROM KATYMÁR

BERNÁT RÁCZ¹ – ISTVÁN PÁNYA²

Hungarian Archaeology Vol. 12 (2023) Issue 2, pp. 29–36. <https://doi.org/10.36338/ha.2023.2.4>

In Hungary, community archaeology and the inclusion of metal detectorists in research projects have produced overwhelmingly positive results. In addition to the rapid increase in the number of known archaeological sites, many new finds found their way into museums over the last decade. The subject of the present study is one of these, a pilgrim ampulla found during a field survey connected to the medieval settlement research project of Bács-Kiskun County. The provenience of this small lead-tin alloy vessel can be reconstructed quite well due to the abundance of related Western European studies in the last two decades. The ampulla and its broader context provide a unique insight for the study of pilgrims embarking on their journeys from the Kingdom of Hungary.

Keywords: Pilgrim ampulla, pilgrimage, community archaeology, Chartreuse de Champmol, settlement research

THE SITE

Near the village of Katymár, in the area called Roglatica in the valley of the Kígyós Creek, stands a hill known by the locals as Török domb/Turski grad/Gradina (Fig. 1; LÁNG 1966, 320, 328); the Hungarian and

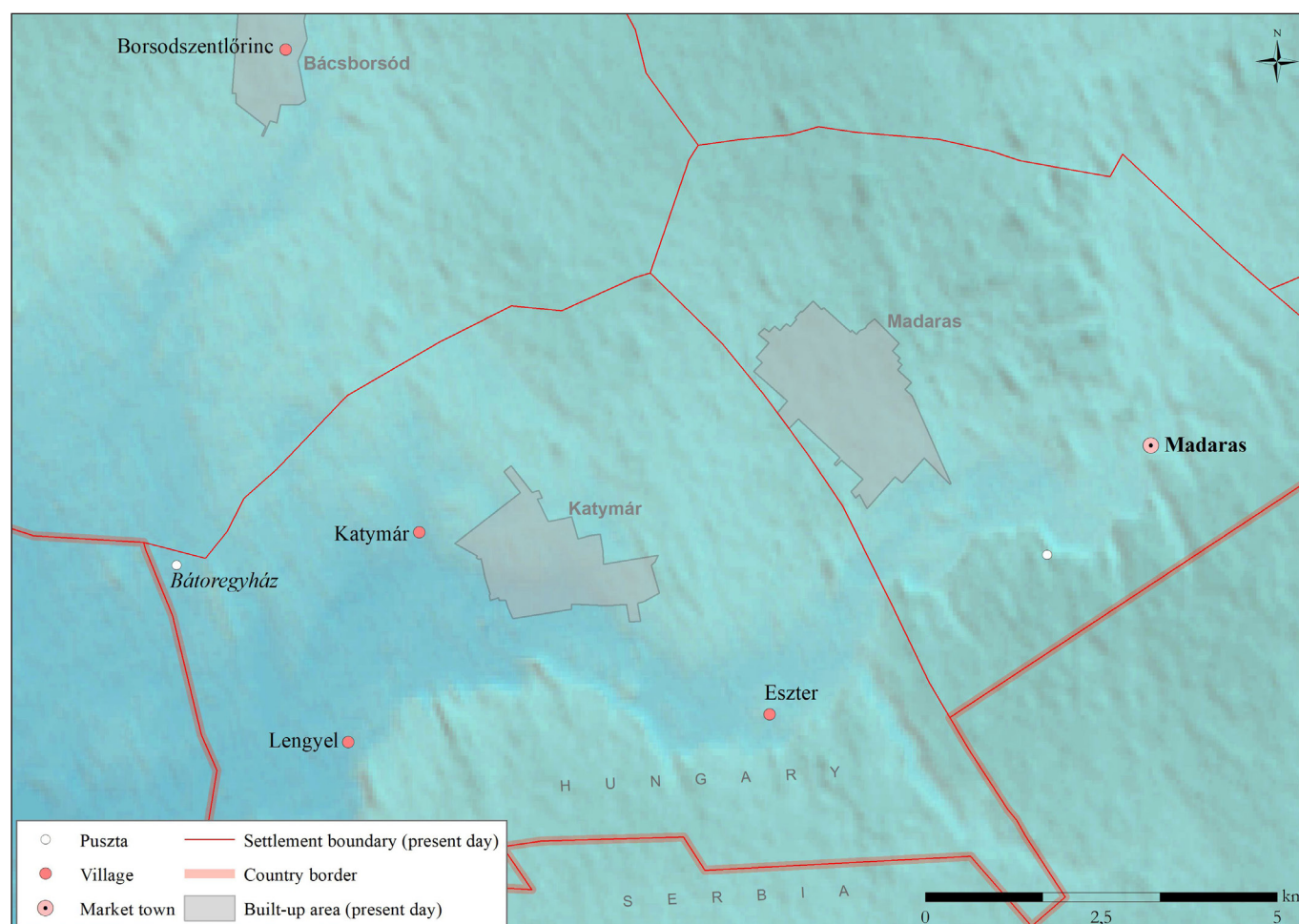


Fig. 1. The medieval topography of the environs of Katymár (map by István Pánya)

¹ Central European University, Department of Medieval Studies, email: raczbernat@gmail.com

² Katona József Museum of Kecskemét, email: panyaistvan@gmail.com

South Slavic names mean Turkish Hill or Turkish Castle. It was a site of a medieval village. In 2022, the Katona József Museum of Kecskemét conducted a field survey in the area. The geophysical survey revealed the location of the settlement's church and its extents. Additional material was collected from the settlement using metal detectors. The discovery of the ampulla was a result of this survey. The field research was also supplemented by an investigation of archival sources. The combined results indicated that the settlement must have been the village Eszter, which was known as the property of the Geszti family before the Ottoman expansion (1388: KAPOCS & KŐHEGYI 1983, 86; 1481: DL³ 81855; 1521: DL 37163).

PILGRIM AMPULLAE

The cult of Christian pilgrim ampullae began in Late Antiquity. The ampullae from sacred sites were primarily used for storing oil, water, or earth collected at these special sites. They were made to serve as sacred souvenirs and symbols of the journeys undertaken. In this early period, the desire for such objects was becoming apparent with the continuous increase of pilgrims. The urge to take something from the sacred sites can be illustrated by the story of the pilgrim who bit off a piece of the Holy Cross while kissing it (HAHN 1990, 85; WILKINSON 2006, 136–137; VINDUS 2021, 26). The ampullae were also types of amulets protecting the pilgrims on their journeys, and their contents were thought to have healing qualities. These early ampullae were so important for pilgrims that some even wanted to be buried with them (HAHN 1990, 92; VIKAN 1982, 26).

THE AMPULLA FROM KATYMÁR

The lead-tin alloy ampulla discovered at Katymár is 5 cm in height and 3 cm in width (*Fig. 2*). One side is decorated with a coat of arms with three lilies and a crown above the shield. On the other side of the object, the upper right and the lower left sections of the quartered shield are also decorated with lilies, while the upper left and the lower right quarters contain stripes. The area above this shield is covered with a net-like design, which commonly appears on different types of objects connected to pilgrimages. It turns into a diamond grid above the coat of arms, the base motifs of which are decorated with small dots in their centre; on the top of this field there may have been another stylised crown, but this part is damaged and difficult to decipher. Late medieval ampullae from France often bear lilies as their main motif. Typically, both sides of the ampullae are covered with heraldic motifs, but in some cases, a visual reference to the cult related to the site appears. In the nineteenth century, such heraldic ampullae were interpreted as objects that were distributed at coronations or other royal events (BRUNA 1996, 257). However, we do not have any source that would confirm this hypothesis. Another early theory suggested that the coat of arms attested the legal validation of the sacred site which was – according to this interpretation – connected to the court (BRUNA 1996, 257). Brian Spencer, a renowned author of several studies related to the material evidence of pilgrimages, suggested that ampullae with different types of heraldry could have been distributed by nobles or royal figures among the members of their “courts” (SPENCER 1971, 62; BRUNA 1996 257). In addition, Spencer also suggested that some of these coats of arms may have ended up on the ampullae as purely decorative elements without any concrete meaning.



*Fig. 2. Ampulla from Eszter (Katymár), 5 x 3 cm
(photo by Béla Kiss)*

³ Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Diplomatikai Levéltára, Budapest (The National Archives of Hungary, Archives of Diplomas and Charters).

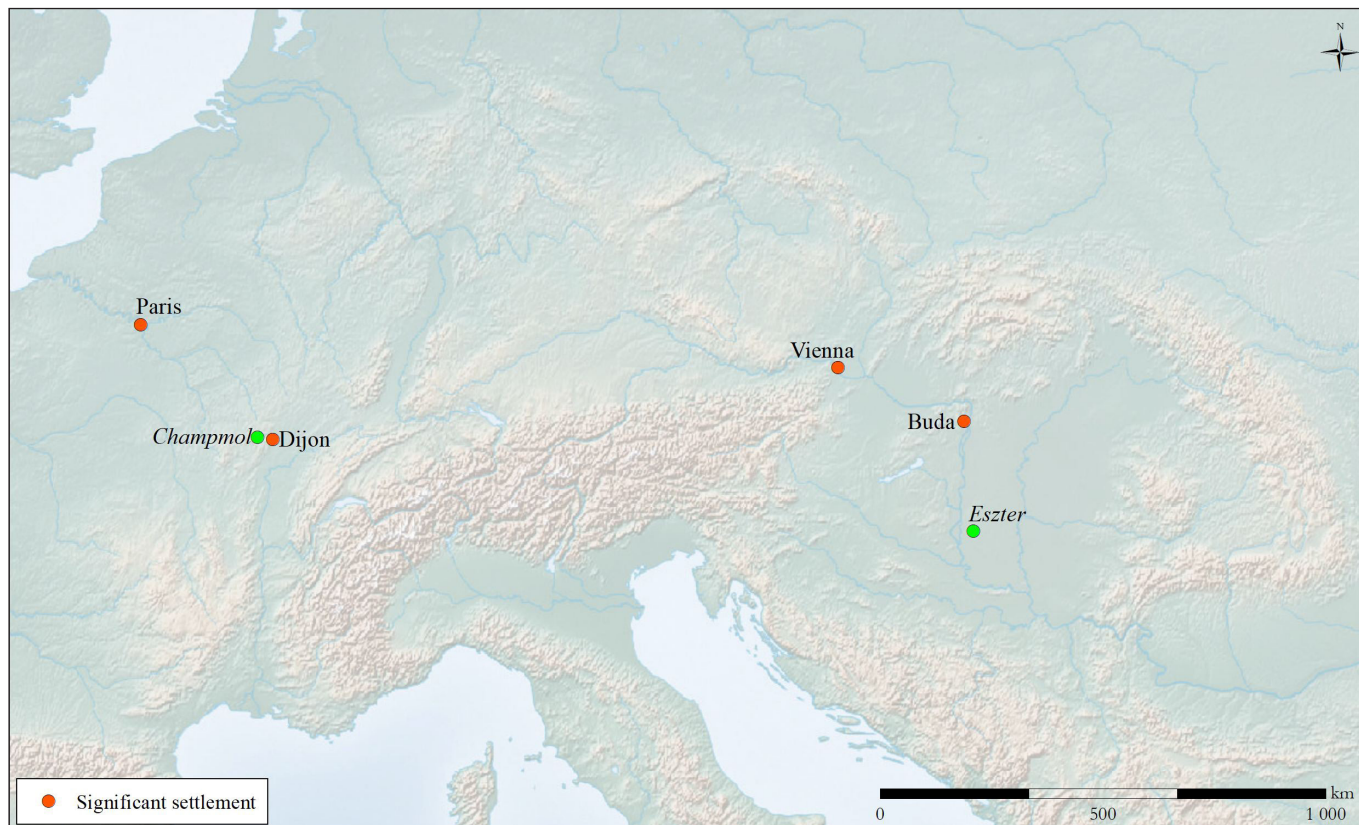


Fig. 3. The location of Champmol and Eszter (map by István Pányá)

As it is visible from these examples, the ampullae with coats of arms were for long considered elusive object types the provenience of which cannot be determined. Nevertheless, Jos Koldeweij in a study on a group of ampullae offered an alternative and very specific solution (KOLDEWEIJ 2007). He argued that the coats of arms on the ampullae were there for a purpose; he illustrated his point through the analysis of a group of ampullae with the Burgundian coat of arms that he identified as originating from the Burgundian court, specifically from the Moses Fountain of the Carthusian Monastery of Champmol – Chartreuse de Champmol (Fig. 3; KOLDEWEIJ 2007, 64–65). When the ampulla from Katymár (the medieval Eszter) is compared with this group, it becomes evident that it bears a similar Burgundian coat of arms (Figs. 4–7).⁴



Fig. 4. Pilgrim ampulla found in Vlissingen, 4 x 3.7 cm
(Collection Van Beuningen Family, 3672;
Kunera database 06729)



Fig. 5. Pilgrim ampulla found in Westenschouwen, 4.2 x 3 cm
(Collection Van Beuningen Family, 3272;
Kunera database 06730)

⁴ The Kunera numbers appearing in the captions indicate their reference number in the collection: <https://database.kunera.nl/en>



Fig. 6. Pilgrim ampulla found in Delft, 3.7 x 3.1 cm
(Collection Van Beuningen Family, 4122;
Kunera database 16902)



Fig. 7. Pilgrim ampulla found in Heeswijk-Dinther, 4.1 x 3.1 cm (R. A. K. Swelheim's private collection, BAM 2401; Kunera database 14493)

BURGUNDIAN ORIGIN

By the early fifteenth century, Champmol became a regional cult centre with a political dimension. The monastery was an important site in the Burgundian court since that is where Philip II the Bold (1342–1404) was buried (NASH 2010, 371). Nevertheless, it became a true Latin Christian pilgrimage site when Eugene IV (r. 1431–1447) gifted the Bleeding Host to Philip III the Good (1396–1467) in 1433. Isabella of Portugal (1397–1471), the wife of Philip the Good, donated a gilt silver monstrance for the Bleeding Host in 1454, which shows the continuous importance of the cult. As Koldeweij suggested, it was not only this relic that attracted pilgrims but also the presence of the ducal tombs and the sacred water of the Fountain of Moses (*Figs. 8–10*; KOLDEWEIJ 2007, 64–65). The popularity of the fountain and its water seems to be demonstrated by the fact that probably there were pilgrim badges that could be acquired in the monastery, but the number of badges discovered are significantly inferior to the number of ampullae (KOLDEWEIJ 2007, 65–66). On the other hand, the ampullae originating from Champmol have been discovered throughout all the Burgundian and allied territories in France, the Netherlands, and Flanders (KOLDEWEIJ 2007, 65–66).

Koldeweij pointed out that there is an intriguing visual connection between the water of the fountain and the design of the ampullae. Until the nineteenth century, several coats of arms were visible with a design from the time of Philip the Bold which would have provided an ideal decoration for these ampullae, especially given the fact that these depictions were reflected by the water of the fountain (KOLDEWEIJ 2007, 72).

Susie Nash, in her studies on the fountain, rejected the theories regarding the fountain's role



Fig. 8. Claus Sluter, *Fountain of Moses*, 1395–1404 (detail showing Isaiah, Moses, and David; Chartreuse de Champmol, Dijon, Franciaország, photo by Henri Waerenburgh)



Fig. 9. Claus Sluter, *Fountain of Moses*, 1395–1404 (detail showing Jeremiah, Zachariah, and Daniel; Chartreuse de Champmol, Dijon, Franciaország)

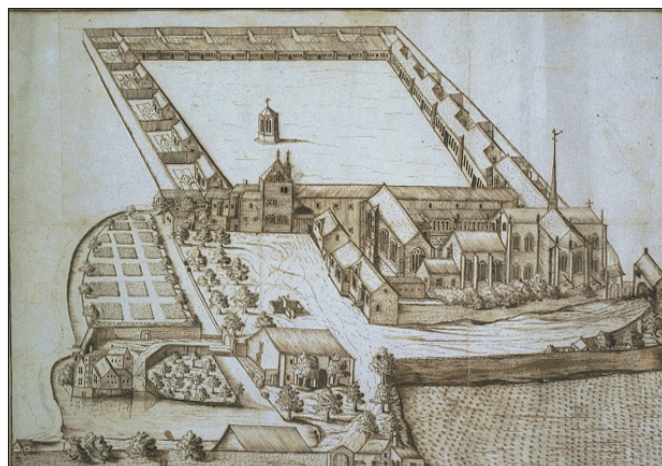


Fig. 10. Aimé Piron's view of Chartreuse de Champmol from 1686 (Bibliothèque municipale de Dijon)

enter the church (NASH 2008, 726). It could even be possible that the ampullae were distributed in the church and not at the fountain.

Koldewej's theory is also supported by Laura D. Gelfand's research, who explored Champmol and its infrastructure related to pilgrims (GELFAND 2005). Gelfand suggested in multiple works that the areas designated to visitors, the pilgrim badges, and the creation of an infrastructure typical at pilgrimage sites, including the many bars and locks, all suggest that Champmol was a site for pilgrims (GELFAND 2011, 90–95). In addition, there were thirty-four vacant seats in the church which the monks did not occupy, and at the entrance there was room for tethering twenty-one horses (GELFAND 2011, 95).

THE KINGDOM OF HUNGARY AND DUCHY BURGUNDY

In the fifteenth century during the reign of Matthias (1458–1490) and Charles the Bold (1467–1477), Hungary and Burgundy were in close contact. In the 1470s, the two courts were often interacting due to their hostile attitude towards the Holy Roman Empire (BÁRÁNY 2014, 46–58). Charles wanted to establish himself as a ruler of a new Lotharingia between France and the Empire (BÁRÁNY 2014, 47–49). The ampulla discovered in Hungary conforms to the observation of KOLDEWEIJ (2007, 65) about how all the Burgundian ampullae were found in allied territory and none in the lands of the Holy Roman Empire or England. In addition, Spencer's theory about the diplomatic significance of these objects could also be considered (SPENCER 1971, 62). It is possible that these ampullae were not simply religious objects but also political

as an important site for pilgrims (NASH 2008, 726–727). She argued that previous studies emphasising the indulgence granted to those who visited the fountain and the monastery misunderstood the sources. According to Nash, the indulgence granted was too short and thus it was probably destined for the monks only and not to any visitor. The argument of Nash is convincing; however, Koldewej's theory is supported by the likely pertinence of the design of the ampullae which he assigns exclusively to Champmol. Furthermore, the presence of the tombs of the dukes of Burgundy (LINDQUIST 2008) also makes the ampullae related to the monastery. Even if the monastery and its fountain were not open to visitors, it is known that outsiders were allowed to

manifestations, for which their iconography was ideal. The ampulla of Katymár possibly came from a well-off house whose owner could have participated in a pilgrimage that stopped in Champmol or could have been in contact with a member of the delegation that was keeping contact with the Burgundian court. It is also possible that he participated in a diplomatic event between the two courts which did not only occur in the Burgundian territories since delegations also came to the court of Matthias (BÁRÁNY 2014, 65).

This is especially relevant since we know only a few pilgrim-related objects from Bács-Kiskun County, and most of these are from pilgrimages to Rome or other places in Italy. Champmol was a relatively new centre for pilgrimage and therefore the chance of a pilgrim from Hungary going there in the 15th century is low. Thus, it may be more likely that there was some type of political connection to help the ampulla to reach its owner at Eszter. Nevertheless, even if written sources do not describe the site with Hungarian connections, a journey of someone from the Hungarian Kingdom is not impossible. Yet, the general tendency does not support this and makes the political connection more plausible. A diplomatic interaction on the other hand does not exclude pilgrimage since it is also possible that the ampulla was acquired along with the pilgrim experience during one of these political interactions.

CONCLUSION

The ampulla from the medieval village of Eszter is not only important for its implications regarding the regional context, but it also contributes to the scholarly debate unfolding around Burgundian ampullae. The identification of Eszter was based on the study of medieval and early modern sources and on the data of the field survey carried out within the context of community archaeology. The finding of the ampulla is also the result of a metal detector survey carried out with archaeology enthusiasts. Nevertheless, the collaboration between amateurs and professional archaeologists is quite young in Hungary. The two sides began to work together only slightly more than a decade ago. Since the beginning of the 2010s, similarly to the situation at the Katona József Museum of Kecskemét, there are tens of thousands of objects that found their way into museums, but objects related to pilgrimages still remain rare.⁵ The ampulla of Katymár is a symbolic find of this process due to its vicinity to the Serbian border. While in Hungary most museums established a network of metal detectorists, in Serbia this type of field research remains strictly limited and the amateur enthusiasts are perceived rather negatively.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We express our gratitude to Gábor Kovács for finding the ampulla. We are also grateful to Jos Koldeweij for confirming our hypothesis about the ampulla's origin (22 September 2022). For the images we thank H. W. J. Piron, R. J. M. van Genabeek, R. A. K. Swelheim, our colleagues behind the Kunera database, the Collection Van Beuningen Family, and the Heritage Department of 's-Hertogenbosch. Lastly, we would also like to thank András K. Németh and Zoltán Rózsa for sharing information about the finds discovered during their community archaeology projects.

RECOMMENDED LITERATURE

Gelfand, L. D. (2005). 'Y Me Tarde': The Valois, Pilgrimage, and the Chartreuse de Champmol. In Blick, S. & Tekippe, R. (eds.), *Art and architecture of late medieval pilgrimage in Northern Europe and the British Isles*. Studies in medieval and Reformation traditions 104. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 567–586. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047430070_024

⁵ Besides the ampulla presented by Melinda Vindus (2021) there are only about 6–8 pilgrim badges found in Tolna County (András K. Németh personal communication, 15 December 2022). In the well-researched district of Orosháza (Békés County) among the tens of thousands of finds there is not a single ampulla, nor a pilgrim badge (Rózsa Zoltán personal communication 11 September 2022).

Csukovits, E. (2003). *Középkori magyar zarándokok*. Budapest: História • MTA Történettudományi Intézete.

Koldeweij, J. (2007). A Pilgrim's Badge and Ampullae Possibly from the Chartreuse of Champmol. In Blick, S. (ed.), *Beyond Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges. Essays in Honour of Brian Spencer*. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 64–74.

Vindus, M. (2021). Középkori zarándokampulla Cikó-Eszterpusztáról. *Wosinsky Mór Múzeum Évkönyve* 43, 23–35. <https://doi.org/10.55022/WMME.2021.2>

REFERENCES

Bárány, A. (2014). *Magyarország nyugati külpolitikája (1458–1526) Angol-magyar kapcsolatok Mátyás és a Jagellók korában* (Az MTA doktora cím elnyeréséért benyújtott értekezés). Debrecen.

Bruna, D. (1996). *Enseignes de pèlerinage et enseignes profanes*. Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux.

Gelfand, L. D. (2005). 'Y Me Tarde': The Valois, Pilgrimage, and the Chartreuse de Champmol. In Blick, S. & Tekippe, R. (eds.), *Art and architecture of late medieval pilgrimage in Northern Europe and the British Isles*. Studies in medieval and Reformation traditions 104. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 567–586. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047430070_024

Gelfand, L. D. (2011). Illusionism and Interactivity: Medieval Installation Art, Architecture and Devotional Response. In Gow, A. C. (ed.), *Push me, pull you: Imaginative, emotional, physical, and spatial interaction in late medieval and Renaissance art*. Leiden: Brill, 87–116. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004215139_025

Hahn, C. (1990). Loca sancta souvenirs: Sealing the Pilgrim's Experience. In Ousterhout, R. G. (ed.), *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 85–96.

Kapocs, N. & Köhegyi, M. (1983). *Katymár és környékének középkori oklevelei a Zichy okmánytárban*. Baja: Türr István Múzeum.

Koldeweij, J. (2007). A Pilgrim's Badge and Ampullae Possibly from the Chartreuse of Champmol. In Blick, S. (ed.), *Beyond Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges. Essays in Honour of Brian Spencer*. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 64–74.

Láng, J. (1966). Katymár község földrajzi nevei. *Az Egyetemi Könyvtár Évkönyvei* 3, 307–334.

Lindquist, S. C. M. (2008). *Agency, visibility and society at the Chartreuse de Champmol*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate.

Nash, S. (2008). Claus Sluter's 'Well of Moses' for the Chartreuse de Champmol reconsidered: Part III. *The Burlington Magazine* 150 (1268), 724–741.

Nash, S. (2010). "The Lord's Crucifix of costly workmanship": Colour, Collaboration and the Making of Meaning on the Well of Moses. In Vinzenz, B., Primavesi, O. & Hollejn (eds.), *Circumlitio: The Polychromy of Antique and Medieval Sculpture*. Frankfurt am Main: Hirmer Publishers, 357–381.

Bernát Rác – István Pánya • *A Burgundian Pilgrim Ampulla from Katymár*

Spencer, B. (1971). A Scallop-Shell Ampulla from Caistor and Comparable Pilgrim Souvenirs. *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology* 6, 56–66.

Vikan, G. (1982). *Byzantine Pilgrimage Art*. Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks.

Vindus, M. (2021). Középkori zarándokampulla Cikó-Eszterpusztáról. *Wosinsky Mór Múzeum Évkönyve* 43, 23–35. <https://doi.org/10.55022/WMME.2021.2>

Wilkinson, J. (2006). *Egeria's travels*. Oxford: Aris & Phillips.