

AVARS, BULGARS AND MAGYARS ON THE MIDDLE AND LOWER DANUBE

Editors

Lyudmila Doncheva-Petkova – Csilla Balogh – Attila Türk

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Front Cover

Detail from Bowl No. 21 of the Nagyszentmiklós Treasure by Imre Huszár

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FOREWORD

The readers hold in their hands the most recent and very tangible evidence of the traditionally good relationship between Hungarian and Bulgarian archaeologists since Géza Fehér's time. The deep historical roots of the friendship between these two nations, however, would not have sufficed in itself for a meaningful cooperation: for that we need joint thinking. In fact, collaboration is a must due to the close identity of certain historical structures and archaeological relationships. Namely, the ancestors of both peoples arrived from the east European steppe, from a common cultural milieu, to their present homelands; they both found during their respective conquests Slavic inhabitants; they both converted to Christianity; and the newly emerging material culture of both were strongly shaped by the cultural influence of Byzantium. Nevertheless, no matter how obvious the latter is, many archaeologists still have not yet recognized this factor and have not utilized it in their research approach. Beyond the above-mentioned parallels of history and material culture, in the past few decades such similarities have been found in the early medieval find material of both countries that raise fundamental methodological and cultural historical questions. For a long time, especially thanks to Géza Fehér's fundamental book, Bulgarian belt mounts have been known that were the closest relatives of – if not identical to – certain belt mounts of the Hungarian Conquest Period. It has also been widely accepted that a few ceramic sherds from Preslav had exactly the same kind of palmettes that are otherwise held characteristic for the conquering Hungarians. The case was similar with a few 7th–8th-century belt mounts from Bulgaria that were identical with so-called Avar mount types. These similarities were frequently referred to and illustrated by both Hungarian and Bulgarian scholars in their works, but in most cases they did not reach any far-reaching conclusions beyond establishing the fact. In the light of the above-mentioned new analogies, however, the situation has become very different. They raise the

fundamental question, what these similarities actually mean. Indeed, what do typological or ornamental similarities and identities generally mean? In Bulgaria, "Avar" and "conquering Hungarian" belt types, furthermore the workshops that had produced them, have come to light in such large numbers that to invoke "connections" as explanation today is simply not satisfactory, and no-one thinks now of resettlement of whole populations from one place to the other (as happens in other similar cases in east central European research). At the same time it is also obvious that this phenomenon cannot be explained by the concept of "influence"; were it the Bulgarians, who influenced the Carpathian Basin, or were it the Avars and Hungarians who influenced Bulgaria? Their number and their joint importance in both countries have become so large that a new approach is needed. It has to be recognized that the close similarities and parallels stem from common cultural roots, whether we are talking about certain jewellery types, belt mounts or pottery: simply, the material culture of the Carpathian Basin and the northern Balkans – obviously differently and adapted to local circumstances – took over many things from Byzantium. Similarly, analogous finds from the Crimea and the east European steppe cannot be held *directly* and with certainty the remains of the Onogur Bulgars or the ancient Hungarians, but were in fact the local, idiosyncratic manifestations of Byzantine peripheral culture. This was actually a Steppe Commonwealth, represented by the various cultures of a multitude of peoples for the archaeologist.

While I greet the authors of the present volume, I am also looking forward to the publication of many similar works presenting the syntheses of central and east European archaeologists, that will reveal and analyze both the common and the unique characteristics of this vast and interesting world.

Csanád BÁLINT