

FROM THE CENTRAL REGION TOWARDS THE PERIPHERIES. A CHRONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF A PRESTIGE GOOD – THE MOUNT ORNAMENTED SABRETACHE

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Abstract: The spatial and chronological spread of sabretaches decorated with mounts, one of the emblematic prestige goods of the Hungarian Conquest period, represents a relatively underexplored area of 10th-century funerary archaeology. The present study examines the dating of this category of objects through five aspects. It concludes that although the spread of this specific item – considered a symbol of societal prestige – begins with the Hungarian Conquest, and its use is traceable as early as the 9th century, the quantitative peak of its usage was reached significantly later, during the mid-to-late 10th century. Other than the early/earlier examples from Karos and Szeged, a significant number of such items can be dated to much later periods. This clearly suggests that a parallel use of sabretaches decorated with mounts and those decorated with plates occurred, moreover, the specimen from Choma dates later than all known plate-decorated sabretaches.

The sabretaches from the Upper Tisza region, Cluj-Napoca, and Przemyśl share structural similarities, in contrast to the examples from the Szeged and Budapest's surroundings, and these structural similarities hold a chronological significance as well. It can be asserted, based on the earliest identifiable examples from the Upper Tisza region, that the spread of sabretaches decorated with mounts, similarly to those decorated with plates, appears to follow a multi-phase chronological process, the latest occurrences being those from Cluj-Napoca, Choma, and Przemyśl – in southern Poland. This fact likely has geopolitical and geoeconomic explanations, as both regions are known for their significant salt resources.

Cuvinte-cheie: bunuri de prestigiu, gentuțe decorate cu aplice, regiune centrală, periferie, analiză cronologică, secolul X

Rezumat: Distribuția spațială și cronologică a gentuțelor decorate cu aplice, una dintre piesele de prestigiu emblematice ale perioadei cuceririi ungare (secolul X), reprezintă un domeniu destul de puțin cercetat de către arheologia funerară a secolului al X-lea. Studiul de față analizează datarea acestei categorii de obiecte, urmărind cinci aspecte. Concluzia este că, deși răspândirea acestui obiect – considerat un simbol al prestigiului social – începe din secolul al IX-lea, respectiv începutul secolului al X-lea, apogeul utilizării sale a fost atins mult mai târziu, la mijlocul sau sfârșitul secolului al X-lea. În afară de exemplele timpurii de la Karos și Szeged, semnificativ de multe astfel de obiecte pot fi datate în perioade mult mai târzii.

Acest lucru sugerează în mod clar utilizarea în paralel a gentuțelor decorate cu aplice și a celor decorate cu plăcuțe; în plus, gentuța decorată cu aplice de la Choma (Ucraina) se datează mai târziu decât cele decorate cu plăcuțe.

Gentuțele decorate cu aplici din regiunea Tisei Superioare, Cluj-Napoca și Przemyśl prezintă asemănări structurale, reprezentând deosebiri față de exemplarele din zona Szeged și din împrejurimile Budapestei. Totodată, aceste asemănări structurale au și o semnificație cronologică. Se poate afirma, pe baza celor mai timpurii exemple identificabile din regiunea Tisei Superioare, că răspândirea gentuțelor decorate cu aplice, similar celor decorate cu plăcuțe, pare să urmeze un proces cronologic în mai multe faze, cele mai recente apariții fiind cele din Cluj-Napoca, Choma și Przemyśl – în sudul Poloniei. Acest fapt are probabil explicații geopolitice și geoeconomice, deoarece ambele regiuni (sudul Poloniei și zona Clujului) sunt cunoscute pentru resursele lor semnificative de sare.

1. INTRODUCTION: SPACE AND ITS STRUCTURES

Structures are the “creators” and shapers of history, and at the same time, human group identities originate from and are created by them, determining the (relative) territoriality of these groups¹. In pre-modern times, power was not organized from base to top, but from

top to bottom, that is, legitimacy did not come from the people, but from divine-sacred sources², and was organized around the *leader* (the khagan, the king etc.). We could also say that the leader or the elite had people, and not that the people had a leader, and thus, the principle of Rousseau's “*popular sovereignty*”³ that can be traced

¹ The concept of territoriality of political structures has changed its meaning several times throughout history. The modern concept of political territoriality can be defined as an active strategy for governing a geographical area (which may also become political): Vollaard 2009, p. 687–706, and it shows significant differences from the ancient concept of political territoriality (Ando, Richardson 2017).

² “In the barbarian kingdoms God was understood to be the ultimate source of royal authority. This notion, which was widely prevalent in the sixth century, became focused into the formula that such a ruler was ‘king by the grace of God’ (rex dei gratia) – that he ruled by God's favour. This formulation became fundamental to medieval conceptions of kingship and was the distant ancestor of early modern divine right monarchy” (Canning 2003, p. 17).

³ Greenfield 1996, p. 3–40.