How Did Conquering Hungarians Prepare and Serve their Food?

Miklós Takács

The body of data available concerning the response to the question posed in the title seems hopelessly inadequate at first sight. Thus, for example, written sources concerning conquering Hungarians hardly ever make reference to cooking vessels or table sets. To be precise, the eating habits of 10th century Hungarians are discussed only by a single medieval author, Friar Ekkehard in his work entitled "St. Gallen Histories".[1] According to the description of Heribald, who was captured when Hungarians took over the monastery, their chieftains "sat right on the green grass without chairs to have their meals (...) they ate the shoulder blades and other parts of the livestock sacrificed half raw, using no knives, gnawing off the meat, thereafter merrily tossing the bones at each other". In all probability, their cheerful mood was further enhanced by the fact that "the wine, in a full pail [*cubba*], which was placed in the middle was equally available to anyone, and they could drink as much as they liked." This quote will not be mentioned again, and not only because Ekkehard never described how the meat was prepared (i.e. it remains unknown whether the meat was grilled or cooked). More importantly, even at that time, the eating habits of a marauding army were only to a limited extent typical of an entire ethnic group. It is worth mentioning, however, that the *cubba,* according to several medieval Latin dictionaries, means a tub, a caldron or anything similarly large. It is unlikely, on the other hand, that conquering Hungarians would have carried such a bulky wooden vessel with them on their military tours to the rest of Europe. It seems more likely that the vessel under discussion here was a type characteristically used in viticulture all over western Europe. In addition, the Hungarian origins of the vessel are further

[1] Pertz: *MGSS.* II. 104-111.

brought into question by the fact that Hungarians must have invaded what is today Switzerland, in highly mobile units in 926 AD. Rapid operations could be guaranteed only by limiting the number of carts and wagons that possibly carried both supplies and booty.

The next block of evidence, that of archaeological assemblages, also offers only limited data concerning the eating habits of the conquering Hungarians.[2] I am convinced, however, that this apparently parallel paucity of information in the written record and artifactual material is superficial. On the one hand, several tens of thousands of ceramic vessels and sherds from the Period of the Hungarian Conquest and early Period of the Árpád Dynasty have been found since the second third of the 19th century when systematic archaeological research began in Hungary. Moreover, the ways in which these ceramics may have been used, can be fairly well reconstructed using historical or comparative ethnography. The chief uncertainty in the case of this class of artifact lay in the determination of dating and ethnic attributions, although these latter two aspects have also been successfully studied since the early 1960s. (These two important questions, dating and ethnic identification, however, are beyond the scope of this paper. Even if only ceramics were discussed, either of the two problems would require several such studies[3]).

During the centuries of the Period of the Hungarian Conquest, vessels found their way into the ground in three different ways. The first and most common of these is the ordinary act of discarding sherds into the pits of abandoned houses, fireplaces and storage pits, as was the case with any other kitchen refuse at the time. On the other hand, less wealthy folks also kept their precious objects in ceramic vessels (these may have included jewelry or even silver Dirhem coins, minted in Islamic countries). When dangerous situations arose, these vessels were buried, however, some of them could never be retrieved by their hapless owners. The third form of burial is in contrast with this former situation. Here, the interment of vessels unambiguously formed part of the burial rite. They contained food placed

[2] The most recent summary of artifactual material from the Period of the Hungarian Conquest : *"Őseinket felhozád"... A honfoglaló magyarság* ("Thou have guided our ancestors"... The Conquering Hungarians). Exhibition catalogue edited by Fodor, I. Budapest, 1996.

[3] In a recent publication I have analysed the chronology of individual vessel forms in detail: Takács, M.: Formschatz und exaktere Chronologie der Tongefässe des 10.-14. Jahrhunderts der Kleinen Tiefebene. *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 48 (1996) 135-195.

into the grave that, according to the beliefs of relatives left behind, may have been needed by the deceased in the Other World or during the long journey there.

It is worth considering a few details of these three forms of deposition. Since little can be said about hoards in the pot, this form will be discussed first. Theoretically, such finds should offer an excellent opportunity for dating. This possibility, unfortunately, often remains theoretical, since such randomly discovered small ceramic vessels are routinely crushed, as soon as the finder begins to suspect that they may contain some sort of treasure. Thus, for example, both the Nagyharsány Dirhem find as well as the Zsennye hoard came to light during the course of tillage work. The discoverers, however, were not even able to hand over the tiniest sherd to the museum. The broken pot was discarded as soon as the precious metal had been retrieved. [4]

Moreover, specialists in Hungary have started realizing only in recent decades that conquering Hungarians had actually already established relatively permanent settlements at the time of the Period of the Hungarian Conquest, and that these sites are worth investigating using archaeological methods.[5] Previously, it was rather generally believed that, due to their

[4] Mesterházy, K.: Zsennye. In: *"Őseinket felhozád"* ... op. cit., 378; Kovács, L.: *Münzen aus der ungarischen Landnahmezeit.* Fontes Archaeologici Hungariae, Budapest, 1989, 45-46.

[5] The most significant excavations of 10th-11th settlements within the whole of the territory occupied by Hungarians in those days in recent decades included: Gömöri, J.: Kora császárkori és Árpád-kori település, X. századi vasolvasztó műhely Sopronban (Tenth century Iron smelting workshop in Sopron from the Early Imperial Period and Period of the Árpád Dynasty). *Arrabona* 15 (1973) 69-119; Szabó, J. Gy.: Árpád-kori falu és temetője Sarud határában II. A település. (Árpád Period village and its cemetery in the outskirts of Sarud. II. The settlement). *Egri Múzeum Évkönyve* 13 (1975) 19-62; Mesterházy, K.: Településásatások Veresegyház - Ivacson (Settlement excavations at Veresegyház – Ivacs). *Communicationes Archaeologicae Hungariae* 1983, 133-162; Horedt, K.: *Moreşti 2. Grabungen in einer mittelalterlichen Siedlung in Siebenbürgen.* Bonn 1984; Certain tendentious statements of this work have been criticised by Bóna, I.: Árpádenzeitliche Dörfer, Kirche und Friedhof am Marosfluss. *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 37 (1985) 223-236; Vékony G.: Késö népvándorláskori és Árpád-kori települések Tatabánya – Dózsakertben (Late Migration Period and Árpád Period settlements from Tatabánya – Dózsakert). In: *Komárom megye története.* I. kötet (The history of Komárom county, Vol. I.). Edited by Gombkötö, G., Komárom [1988], 283-316; Wolf, M.: Elözetes jelentés a borsodi földvár ásatásairól (1987-1990). (Preliminary report on the excavations at the bill-fort of Borsod [1987-1990]) *Jósa András Múzeum Évkönyve* 30-32 (1987-1989), Nyíregyháza 1992, 427-428; Jankovich, B. D.: Szondázó ásatás Szarvas - Rózsáson (Test excavations at Szarvas -

equestrian nomadic way of life, 10th century Hungarians could not have inhabited such settlements.[6] The changing of this view was significantly influenced by ceramic finds. Vessel types, previously unknown in the Carpathian Basin, were discovered during the course of excavations at 10th century settlements. These included the so-called vessels with ribbed necks[7] and ceramic kettles[8] that imitated the shapes of their metal counterparts. Their interpretation as Hungarian products is supported by the presence of

---

Rózsás). In: *A kőkortól a középkorig. Tanulmányok Trogmayer Ottó 60. születésnapjára.* (From the Stone Age to the Middle Ages. Studies in honor of the 60th birthday of Ottó Trogmayer) Edited by G. Lőrinczy, Szeged 1994. Takács, M.: Honfoglalás- és korai Árpád-kori telepásatások az M1 autópálya nyugat-magyarországi szakaszán (Excavations at settlements from the Period of the Hungarian Conquest and the early Period of the Árpád Dynasty in the section of the M1 Motorway in western Hungary). In: *A magyar honfoglalás korának régészeti emlékei* (Archaeological monuments of the Period of the Hungarian Conquest). Edited by M. Wolf - L. Révész, Miskolc, 1996, 197-207.

[6] For the criticism of this opinion see: Takács, M.: A 10. századi magyar-szláv viszonyról és a honfoglaló magyarok életmódjáról. (Néhány megjegyzés Kristó Gyula: A magyar állam megszületése. Szeged 1995. c. könyvéről). (On Hungarian-Slavic relations in the 10th century and the lifeways of conquering Hungarians. [Comments of the book "The birth of the Hungarian State" by Gyula Kristó, Szeged, 1995]). *Századok* 131 (1997)/1, 168-215.

[7] The first vessels with ribbed necks was published in: Mesterházy, K.: Honfoglalás kori kerámiánk keleti kapcsolatai (The eastern connections of ceramics from the Period of the Hungarian Conquest). *Folia Archaeologica* 26 (1975) 99-115. In relation to this problem see also: Fodor, I.: Honfoglalás kori bordázott nyakú edényeink származásáról (The origins of vessels with ribbed necks from the Period of the Hungarian Conquest). *Folia Archaeologica* 36 (1985) 165-170; Kopersky, A. – Parczewsky, M.: Das altungarische Reitergrab von Przemysl (Südpolen). *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 30 (1978) 223-224.

[8] The cultural and ethnic backgrounds of pottery kettles were first analysed by Szőke, B.: Cserépbográcsaink kérdéséhez (The question of Hungarian pottery kettles). *Archaeologiai Értesitő* 82 (1955) 86-90; additional arguments for associations with Hungarian ethnicity were listed in: Fodor, I.: Cserépüstjeink származása (The origins of Hungarian pottery kettles). *Archaeologiai Értesitö* 102 (1975) 250-264; a longer version of this work was published in German under the title: Der Ursprung der in Ungarn gefundenen Tonkessel. *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 29 (1977) 323-349. The systematic treatment of pottery kettles was attempted in the dissertation by Takács, M.: *Die árpádenzeitlichen Tonkessel im Karpatenbecken.* VAH [1]. Budapest, 1986; while in a later work an effort was made to make the chronology of this vessel type more precise: Idem: A kisalföldi, Árpád-kori cserépbográcsok pontosabb időrendje (Egy kísérlet a leletanyag rendszerezésére). (A more precise chronology for pottery kettles from the Period of the Árpád Dynasty [An attempt for the systematisation of find materials]). *Herman Ottó Múzeum Évkönyve* 30-31/2 (1993) 447-479.

their stylistic counterparts in areas, where Hungarians lived prior to the conquest of the Carpathian Basin.[9] The importance of ceramic vessels brought to light at excavations is further increased by the fact that it was these finds that made it clear that the households of the common people used the same variety of mundane vessels during the 10th-11th century as during the 12th-13th century. Before this recognition, the generally held view was that only tiny vessels were manufactured during the earlier period, since it was usually that size range which was represented in the grave furniture.[10] Comparisons between ceramics recovered from settlements and cemeteries also made it clear that no special pottery was produced for mortuary purposes. Namely, vessels placed within burials were manufactured in the same manner as those used in everyday life. It seems likely, therefore, that at that time even wealthy people ate from pottery whose production would be considered rather simple, actually primitive, by modern standards. For example, ceramic vessels as part of the grave furniture in the unusually rich cemetery of Karos were made using the same techniques as their counterparts used by common people at the time. The coiled technique of manufacturing hand-thrown vessels, however, should not be regarded as a reflection of nomadic lifeways. Potters in the neighboring Germanic and western Slavic territories used this same technique during the 10th-11th century. In connection with the food placed into the grave, the frequent occurrence of large animal bones should also be mentioned in addition to those of the deceased. These specimens seem to have been placed upon the

[9] See, for example: Postiké, G. I.: Glinjani'e kotli na territorii Moldavii v rannesrednevekovi'j period, *Slovenská Archaeológia* 1985/3, 231-238.

[10] Significant numbers of vessels from grave goods were published by Tőrők, Gy.: *Die Bewohner von Halimba im 10. und 11. Jahrhundert.* ArchHun 39. Budapest 1962; Kürti, B.: Honfoglalás kori magyar temető Szeged – Algyőn (Előzetes beszámoló). (Hungarian cemetery from the Period of the Hungarian Conquest at Szeged – Algyő [A preliminary report]) *Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve* 1978-79/1. 337; and Révész, L.: Előzetes jelentés a karosi honfoglaláskori temető ásatásáról (1986-87). (Preliminary report on the excavations at the Karos cemetery from the Period of the Hungarian Conquest [1986-87]) *Archaeologiai Értesitö* 116 (1989) 36-37; Rejholcová, M.: *Pohrebisko v Cakajovciah* (9. - 12. storocie). Katalóg. Nitra 1995. The vessels of these graves were systematized by Kvassay, J.: *Kerámia a X-XI. századi sirokban* (Ceramics from 10th-11th century graves). Doctoral Thesis in Arts and Humanities, manuscript, Budapest, 1982. The ritual background to the use of vessels as grave goods was analysed in Kiss, A.: Über die mit Keramik verbundenen Bestattungsarten im Karpatenbecken des 10-11. Jahrhunderts, *Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve* 1969/2, 175-182; Tettamanti, S.: Temetkezési szokások a X-XI. században a Kárpát-medencében (Burial customs in the Carpathian Basin during the 10th-11th century). *Studia Comitetensia* 3 (1975) 104-108.

floor of the grave. In such cases, however, one may justifiably hypothesize that this type of meat dish was placed in the grave on some type of a plate or bowl made from organic materials such as wood. A few small, carved bone pipes are also known, especially from the burials of men. These, in all probability, can be interpreted as the only surviving undecayed part of leather flasks. Beyond these bone spouts, a number of other indications exist that food as grave goods (and the vessel containing it) varied by the gender and age of the deceased. Thus, the osseous remains from meat dishes tend to come to light from men's burials. Pottery vessels indicative of mushier meals, on the other hand, are often found in the graves of children and, to a lesser extent, those of women.

This somewhat lengthy review of the archaeological material should end with a few general remarks. The dominant proportion of pottery in particular results from a factor that has already been mentioned. Under the climatic conditions of the Carpathian Basin, vessels made from organic materials have been preserved only under very special circumstances, e. g. in the water-logged bottom of old wells. Unfortunately, however, no such wooden or leather vessel has come to light yet from wells dated to the Period of the Hungarian Conquest. The absence of such finds may also be explained by the fact that this type of settlement feature at 10th century sites is rare. Wells from the Period of the Hungarian Conquest are only known from Zalavár – Városziget in western Hungary, and the Slovakian sites of Kisvárad (Nitriansky Hradok) and Nyitraegerszeg (Jelšovce). [11]

The absence of metal vessels from 10th century graves looks even more peculiar, especially when Hungarians are compared to other peoples of the Migration Period such as the Avars. To date, precious metal vessels are known only from a few, exceptionally rich, "chieftains" burials. Such finds include a cup that came to light in Zemplén (Zemplín, Slovakia), and a small bowl from Kétpó that was made from the sawn-off bottom quarter of a coeval jug.[12] The rare use of metal vessels as grave goods may not be related to any scarcity of such vessels. It may have more to do with the image

[11] Sós, Á. Cs.: *Die Ausgrabungen Géza Fehérs in Zalavár.* AH 41, Budapest, 1963, 148. old; 39. t. 3-4; Habovštiak, A.: *Stredoveká dedina na Slovensku.* Bratislava 1985, p. 110. old.; Figure b on p. 111. Kudláček, J.: Záchranny výskum v Jelšovciach (okr. Nitra) r. 1952 *Slovenská Archaeológia* 6 (1958) 55-56. old; 8. t. 1-3. As opposed to the 9th century dating reported by the excavator, this well was dated to the 10th-11th century by A. Habovštiak: ibid., 280.

[12] Budinský-Krička, V. – Fettich, N.: *Das altungarische Fürstengrab von Zemplín,* Bratislava 1973, 81-90; *"Őseinket felhozád"* ... op. cit. 236-237.

conquering Hungarians cultivated of the "Other World". In contrast to coeval peoples, Hungarians almost always placed no more than a single vessel within the grave. This difference is especially dramatic when contrasted to the mortuary practices of Germans of the early Migration Period. These latter peoples sometimes placed gear for an entire kitchen in the grave, including caldrons, frying pans, mortars, strainers and spoons. [13] The "puritanical" look of the Hungarian mortuary practice may hypothetically be explained by the possibility that the soul of the deceased needed earthly food only until it reached the "Other World". Later either no food was necessary, or this demand had to be satisfied by sacrifices in the forest that surrounded the resting place of the ancestors. (Such offerings were strictly banned by one of the laws introduced by King László the Saint at the end of the 11th century).

Having reviewed the archaeological material, another small detour is worth taking here. It should be explained why the 23 golden vessels of the unusually rich Nagyszentmiklós hoard were not mentioned within the context of metal vessels. My reasoning is simple: I agree with scholars, who date this unique treasure to the 9th century Avar Period.[14]

Let us now examine what types of vessels were contained in a 10th-11th century kitchen ensemble? On the basis of archaeological excavations, the "average household" in that period possessed the following types of pottery: pots, kettles, mugs, bowls, cups and bottles.[15]

It is also of particular interest that these same types of vessels are equally likely to occur in the households of common people and among nobility. Thus, it may be stated with great certainty that the food of the privileged was cooked in the same type of pottery as that of the common people. The individual status of a household can be much better characterized by the number and perhaps also by the capacity of its vessels. In spite of this, there must have been a major difference between the tables set for poor and wealthy people respectively, more exactly in the tableware in which food was served. This statement can be maintained in spite of the aforementioned fact that only a minimal number of metal vessels have been

[13] See, for example: *Die Alamannen* [exhibition catalogue]. Edited by Fuchs, K., Stuttgart 1997, p. 87, Figure 69; p. 91, Figure 73; etc.

[14] See, for example: Daim, F. – Stadler, P.: Der Goldschatz von Sinnicolaul Mare (Nagyszentmiklós). In: *Reitervölker aus dem Osten. Hunnen + Awaren.* [exhibition catalogue] Bad Vöslau 1996, 439-445.

[15] For the detailed presentation of individual forms see: Takács, M.: Formschatz und exaktere Chronologie ...op. cit. 135-195.

found at cemeteries and settlements of the 10th century. Pottery tableware, however, occurred in many simple forms, as will be detailed below.

Similarly to later phases of the Middle Ages, pots were already the most common form of ceramics following the Hungarian Conquest of the Carpathian Basin. The frequent occurrence of this form may be explained by the important role played by pots in the households of that time. The medium-size pot was one of the most important cooking vessels used during the 10th-11th century. Larger specimens functioned as storage vessels, while smaller pots, also called mugs, were mostly used for serving food. It should be mentioned, however, that in some concrete cases classification by function may sometimes yield uncertain results. Thus, for example, small, pot-shaped vessels of about 10 cm in height may be considered to have functioned as mugs that were used in serving some sort of a kasha-like meal. In spite of this, however, similarly to larger pots, the outer surface of such vessels is also often covered by soot. That is, mugs were also frequently used for cooking or at least warming food. The same kind of uncertainty must be reckoned with in the case of larger than average size pots, whose outer surface can also be covered by sooty spots. This phenomenon may, perhaps, be explained by the fact that such vessels served in cooking for larger groups of people, while "average" families used them for storage.

The bodies of pots used during the Period of the Hungarian Conquest bulged moderately or even strongly. Their strongly everted rim sat on a more-or-less arched neck which connected to the pot's shoulder with no particular edge to the profile line. Small pots from the 10th-11th century, also called mugs or cups, occurred in two forms. They either displayed the proportions and shape of larger pots or looked like vertically compressed versions of those pots. In this latter case, their height was half or one third that of the medium size pots, while their diameter was the same. The opposite of the distorted proportions of mugs appeared in the case of larger than usual pots. In the case of these vessels, capacity was increased by "building" the pot's wall higher thereby creating a taller form. These various techniques followed by potters are always worth keeping in mind since certain schools of archaeology (especially in the former Soviet Union) characterized vessel type by the ratios calculated from their dimensions, hoping that the proportions thus arrived at would be idiosyncratic from a cultural or manufacturing point of view. Due to the aforementioned variability in individual techniques, however, such numerical results appear somewhat dubious.

The mouths of these pots were described here only briefly since their shapes correspond to that of the most generally distributed form, characteristic of almost all medieval archaeological cultures even on an overall, Eurasian level. In the case of the pottery used by conquering Hungarians, however, a particular type of rim deserves attention. Following the Period of the Hungarian Conquest, a special type of medium-size or small pot became common. It had a cylindrical neck either divided by horizontal ribs or not. Another important typologically characteristic feature of these vessels is that two small handles may also occur on the shoulder. Variations between these possibilities can be defined as sub-types. That is, both pots with or without ribbed necks may or may not have handles.

Instead of formal typology, however, function should be discussed in this study. It has been rather widely accepted by Hungarian archaeologists (although documentary evidence is poor) that the vessels' vertical necks were closed by some membrane that could be easily stretched over the pot's mouth. Should additional evidence be available, it would suggest that this type of pot was used as a storage vessel. That hypothesis might be best tested by archaeobotanical studies. Unfortunately, such investigations are limited, because most vessels with tall necks originate from old excavations where the soil inside such pots was not yet being sampled for laboratory studies.

Due to the relative rarity of the aforementioned pots and mugs with cylindrical necks, another characteristic vessel type of pottery kettle formed on a hand wheel, also deserves distinguished attention. This most frequently occurring vessel type in the Carpathian Basin is eastern in origin. It occurred not only during the times that followed the Period of the Hungarian Conquest, but survived until the second third of the 14th century. Even without an in-depth typological description, a few details must be singled out here. The term "pottery kettle" encorporates at least three, or even four, morphologically unrelated vessel types. One of these is bucket-like, another looks like a pot, while the third has a hemispherical lower portion most reminiscent of metal kettles.[16] In addition, a bowl-like form may also be classified within this group. The existence of such vessels may be hypothesized on the basis of a hand-thrown, inner-handle fragment brought to light at the site of Tatabánya-Dózsakert during the course of

[16] Takács, M: Die arpadenzeitlichen Tonkessel ...op. cit. 92-103.

excavations directed by Gábor Vékony.[17] On the other hand, among the types of pottery kettle described above, the one with a hemispherical lower portion, reminiscent of metal kettles, came to light most frequently. It was manufactured both in deeper and shallower varieties. The parallel occurrence and use of these two forms during the early Period of the Árpád Dynasty refute the ideas concerning the chronologically diagnostic nature of "flattening" or "heightening" observed in the shape of metal kettle-like pottery vessels. The compressed or tall shapes of pottery kettles are in no way related to the development of this type, since this duality in form reflects two different cooking techniques. It is not an accident that flat metal kettles in Kide (Cidia, Transylvania/Romania) were called "flame users" in Hungarian even during the 1940's, while deep kettles were known as "ember users".[18] On the basis of this analogy it may be assumed that deeper kettles were used in lengthy cooking on embers, while flat kettles served in cooking procedures when great and sudden heat was needed.

This statement leads us back from typology to function. In spite of their stylistic variability, the aforementioned types of kettles are functionally linked by their similar modes of use: cooking over open fire. This manner of cooking explains their popularity as well, since it fit in well with the semi-nomadic lifeways pursued by Hungarians. This vessel type was not used inside the ovens found in semi-subterranean dwellings but could be used over open fire that required only a light structure in the surroundings of the habitation. Sometimes it happened, however, that pottery kettles were not hung over the fire for the purposes of cooking. Namely, there are specimens, whose handles were not or were only partially formed. Moreover, iron tripods have also been found at some sites. Aside from such tripods, it is also known that people in the steppe built caldron-like clay support structures for the same purpose. Unfortunately, such features have yet to be found at the settlements of conquering Hungarians.

Analyzing the possible forms of use one may also speculate whether, similarly to more recent pastoral peoples, some of the conquering Hungarians might have used this vessel for frying. Sometimes the inside of such vessels is covered by a layer of soot that is heavier than the soot on the kettle's outer surface. In addition, on the basis of sheep-milking techniques

[17] Vékony, G.: *Honfoglaló magyar szállás. X. századi magyar falu az Által-ér mellett* (Hungarian habitation from the Period of the Hungarian Conquest. A tenth century Hungarian village by the Által Creek). [exhibition catalogue]. Tatabánya 1996, 12.

[18] Kovács, L. K.: Pásztortűzhelyek Erdélyben 1900 körül (Herders' fireplaces in Transylvania around 1900). NKNT 2-3 (1969) 28.

observed in the Mezőség region of Transylvania, Gyula László also raised the possibility that kettles with a hemispherical lower portion (reminiscent of metal kettles) may have been used as milking vessels.[19] His idea, however, cannot be supported since this form of sheep exploitation is unambiguously characteristic of transhumance pastoralism practiced by Romanian communities and thus cannot predate the 13-14th century.[20] In addition, the overwhelming majority of pottery kettles indeed displays evidence of cooking in the form of soot that was deposited on the vessels' surface.

Finally, at the end of this brief description of pottery kettles, it must be mentioned that only the ceramic versions of this vessel type are available for study from archaeological excavations. There is not a single 10th century metal kettle in the archaeological heritage of the Carpathian Basin. This absence however is, in all probability, only appparent. One may reasonably hypothesize that once bronze or iron kettles had been damaged and rendered useless, their precious raw materials were re-smelted.

The list of cooking vessels should be closed by the so-called baking bells. These large conical, robust pottery vessels served in baking some sort of a flat bread that may have been the 10th century ancestor of "ash baked muffins" known from Hungarian folk tales. It must be mentioned, however, that at least for the time being, this type of vessel remains unknown from archaeological assemblages from 9th century Moldavia, Bessarabia and Ukraine. On the other hand, this form is one of the most characteristically occurring types at 8th-9th centuries settlements in the Carpathian Basin.[21] It may thus be reasonably assumed that Hungarians became familiar with the use of baking bells only after they had crossed through the passes of the Carpathian mountains. It seems, however, that the use of baking bells was never fully adopted by Hungarians. Following the end of the 11th century, baking bells simply disappeared from the households of common people and did not reappear until the 16th-17th century.

In addition to baking bells, locally produced bowls with inverted rims and pottery bottles (i.e. made by Avar and/or Slavic potters in the

[19] László, Gy.: *Árpád népe* (The people of Árpád). Helikon [Budapest, 1988.] p. 140, Fig. 148.

[20] Makkai, L.: A rendi társadalom kialakulása (1162-1526). (The formation of social orders [1162 - 1526]). In: *Erdély rövid története* (Short history of Transylvania). Edited by Köpeczi, B., Budapest, 1989, 162-171.

[21] Bálint, Cs.: *Die spätawarenzeitliche Siedlung von Eperjes* (Kom. Csongrád). VAH 4, Budapest, 1991, 58-61.

Carpathian Basin) remained in use during the century that followed the Hungarian Conquest. These forms frequently occurred in 8th-9th century artifactual assemblages from the Carpathian Basin and their later varieties differ only in negligible details.[22] It should be pointed out, however, that it would be an oversimplification if all bowls would automatically be regarded as "surviving forms". The find material from the hill-fort of Borsod, however, contains types of bowls that never occurred before.[23]

Instead of further elaborating on these typologies, however, we should again concentrate on use. In the spirit of the title of this paper it is worth stating that both bowls and bottles were unambiguously part of the tableware, that is, they were used in serving foods and beverages. Bowls must have contained mushy meals while evidently drinks were offered in bottles.

In addition to locally made pottery, imported ware also occurs in the times that followed the Period of the Hungarian Conquest. Such specimens may have come from three different directions. Links with the East European steppe are illustrated by the jug with smoothed design that came to light from Grave 66 at the site of Karos[24], as well as the vessel discovered in Grave 27 in the Algyő cemetery.[25] On the other hand, the occurrence of Austrian graphite pottery in western Hungary at the turn of the 10th-11th centuries is a sign of a new orientation.[26] Nevertheless, in accordance with evidence provided by historical sources, Austrian import ceramics very rarely occur before the 12th century even in the country's westernmost regions. The third, Byzantine source of import has been clearly illustrated for half a century based on a two-handled jug, in fact amphora, found in the Sóshartyán burial.[27] Studying this specimen, however, scholars agreed that

---

[22] Sós, Á. Cs.: Die Ausgrabungen ... op. cit. Plate 57/8; Plate 65/8; Plate 92/1, 2, 8.

[23] Wolf, M.: Előzetes jelentés a borsodi földvár ásatásairól (1987 - 1990). [Vorläufiger Bericht über die Ausgrabung der Erdburg von Borsod (1987 - 1990).] *Jósa András Múzeum Évkönyve* 30-32 (1987 - 1989) 24/2 ábra.

[24] Révész, L.: *Honfoglaló vezérek népe Karoson* (The people of conquering chieftains at Karos). [exhibition catalogue] Budapest, 1990, 4. (with no pagination); idem.: A magyar honfoglalás kora (The Period of the Hungarian Conquest). In: *Mit ránkhagytak a századok* ... (What the centuries left us ...). Guide to the permanent archaeological exhibitions of the Herman Ottó Múzeum. Edited by L. Révész, Miskolc 1994. 59.

[25] Kürti, B.: Honfoglalás kori magyar temető ... op. cit. 337.

[26] Tomka, P.: Győri ispáni vár (The bailiff's castle in Győr). In.: *"Őseinket felhozád"*... op. cit., p. 424, Fig. 1.

[27] Fodor, I.: Sóshartyán. In.: *"Őseinket felhozád"*... op. cit., p. 405, figure without reference number.

the real object of commercial import was probably not the amphora itself, but the wine or oil that it must have contained. On the other hand, since the 1936 discovery of the Sóshartyán find only a single similar amphora has been found, this at the site of Balatonmagyaród,[28] thus these amphorae cannot be looked upon as evidence of intensive trading. It is possible, however, that the validity of this argument will soon be brought into question. The number of sherds associated with Byzantine imports has been rapidly increased by several recent excavations in the Great Hungarian Plain. Dénes B. Jankovich draws interesting conclusions concerning the character of the 10th-11th century Byzantine trade on the basis of a neck fragment from a green glazed bottle (?) found at the site of Szarvas – Rózsás. According to his slightly sharp but realistic description, the green glazed bottle fragment from Szarvas – Rózsás is a "peripherally occurring mass produced vessel type".[29] Since this particular sherd cannot be linked with polychrome glazed jugs and bowls with engraved designs widespread in the central Byzantine region, it should be regarded a local copy made in the empire's periphery. Thus, it did not find its way to the Carpathian Basin from the center of the Byzantine Empire but possibly from the northern regions of the Balkan Peninsula.

Following this final statement concerning archaeological finds, the question posed in the title of this paper should again be repeated. This is important, since some may consider even the question itself an absurdity. Poor familiarity with the material culture of conquering Hungarians is exacerbated by a topos that has survived since classical times. According to this view, nomadic Hungarians did not cook or bake, since they ate raw meat that was made tender by having been placed under their saddles. In my opinion, the evidence listed above makes it clear that this observation by Ammianus Marcellinus for Huns could in no way have concerned Hungarians. On the basis of ceramics brought to light from their graves and cemeteries it is clear that Hungarians ate cooked food and may have placed meat under the saddle at most to cure saddle sores on the horse's back. [30]

---

[28] Vándor, L.: Landnahme- und Árpádenzeit. In: *Sieben Jahrtausende am Balaton. Von der Ur- und Frühgeschichte bis zum Ende der Türkenkriege.* [kiállítási katalógus]. Edited by R. I. Müller, Mannheim 1989, Taf. 23.

[29] Jankovich B. D.: Szondázó ásatás ... op. cit. 410.

[30] This method of curing horses is described in detail by László, Gy.: *A honfoglaló magyar nép élete* (The life of the Conquering Hungarian people). Budapest, 1944, 330-332.

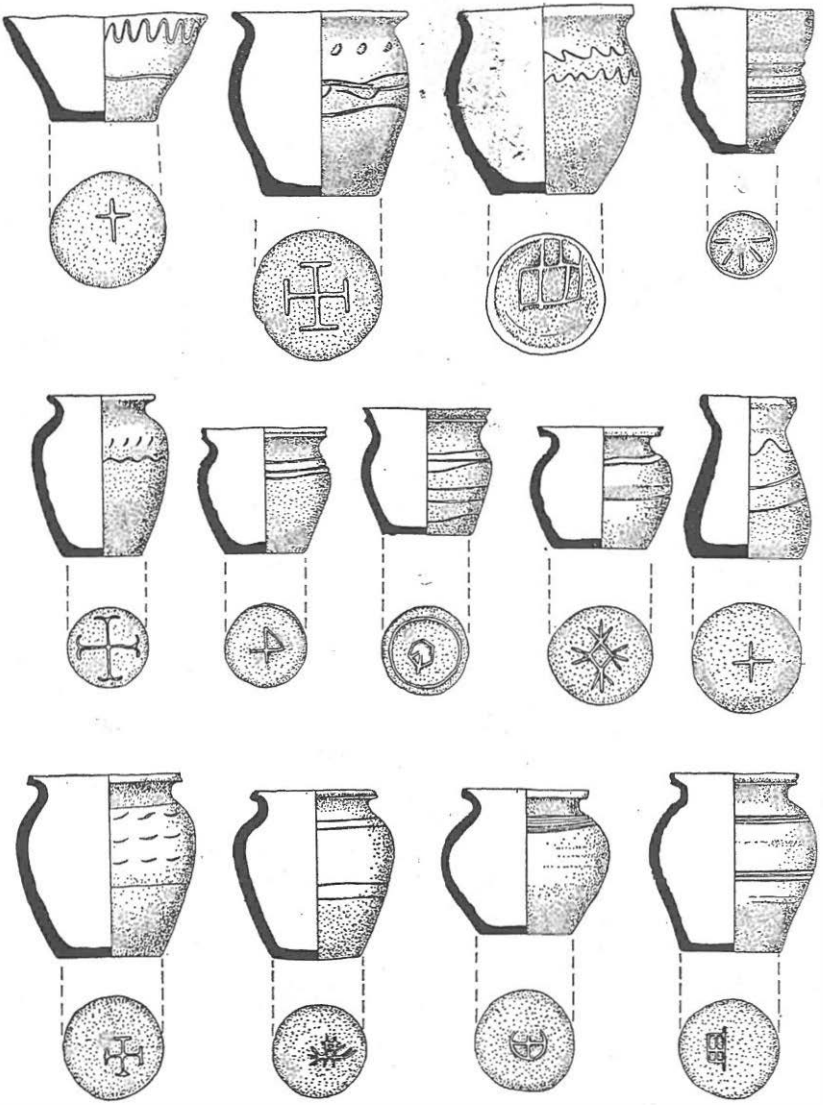
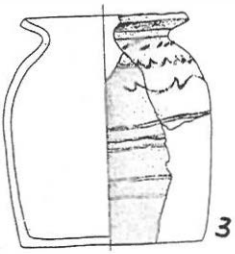
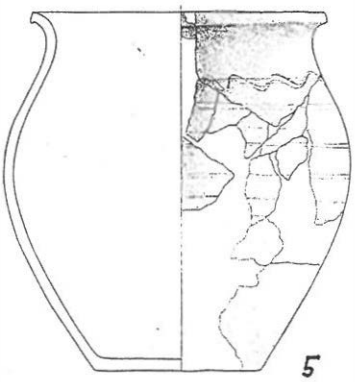
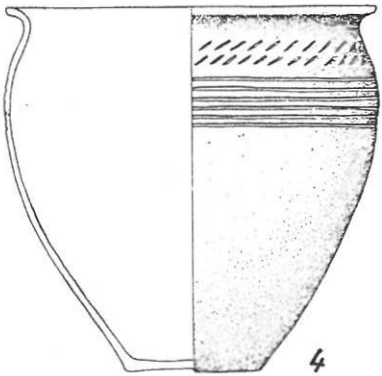
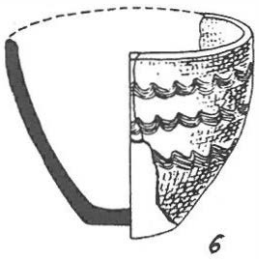


Fig. 1: Arpadian Age pots and mugs from Esztergom



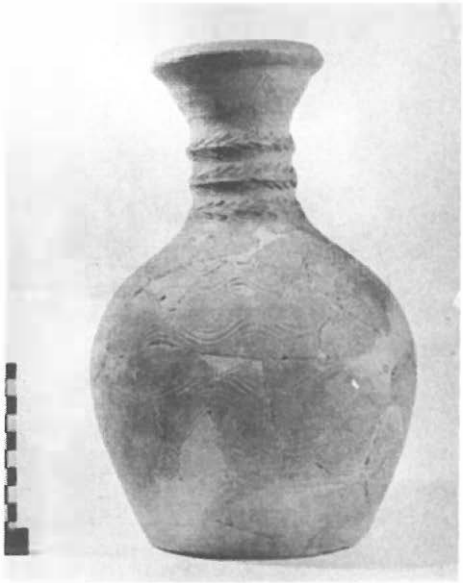






Figs. 2-6: Pots and mugs from Bény/Biňa(2,6),
Ménfőcsanak – Szeles dülö (3-4), Bény/Biňa – Cénapart (5)

7



8

9

10

Figs. 7-10: Decorated pottery: Sóshartyán (7), Zirc (8), Szob (9), (10)

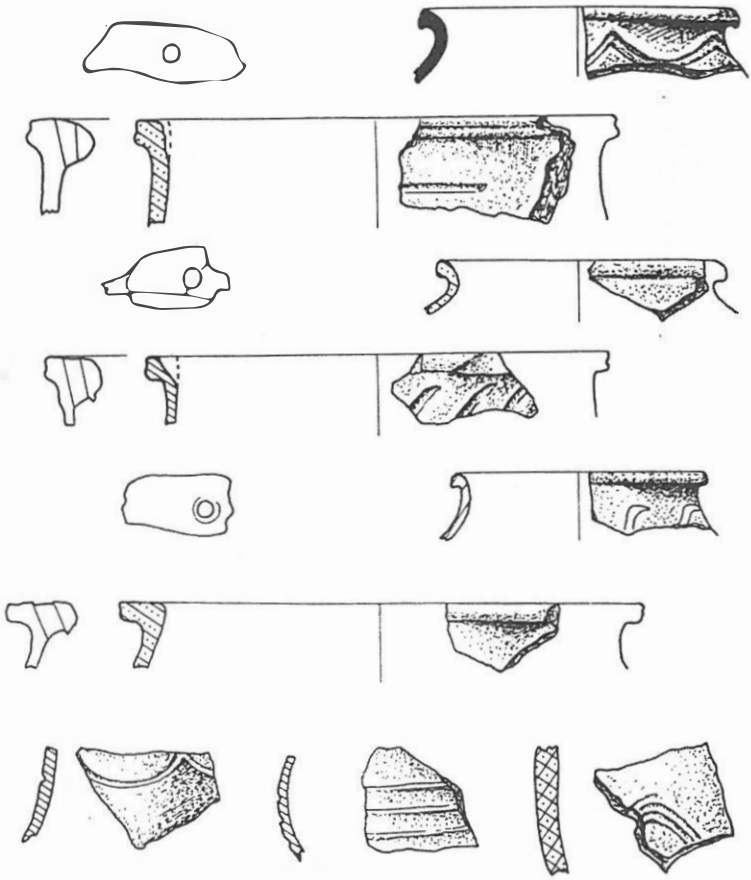


Fig. 11: Potsherds from settlement excavations

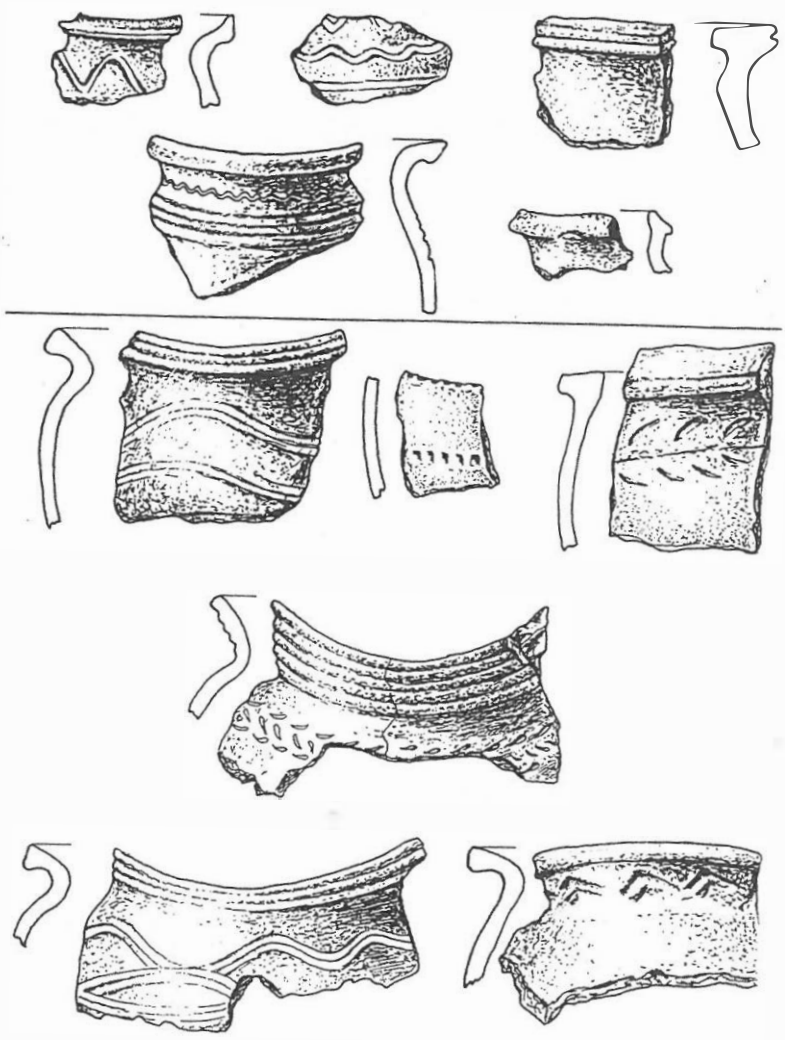


Fig. 12: Potsherds from settlement excavations, Bény/Biňa and Ugal

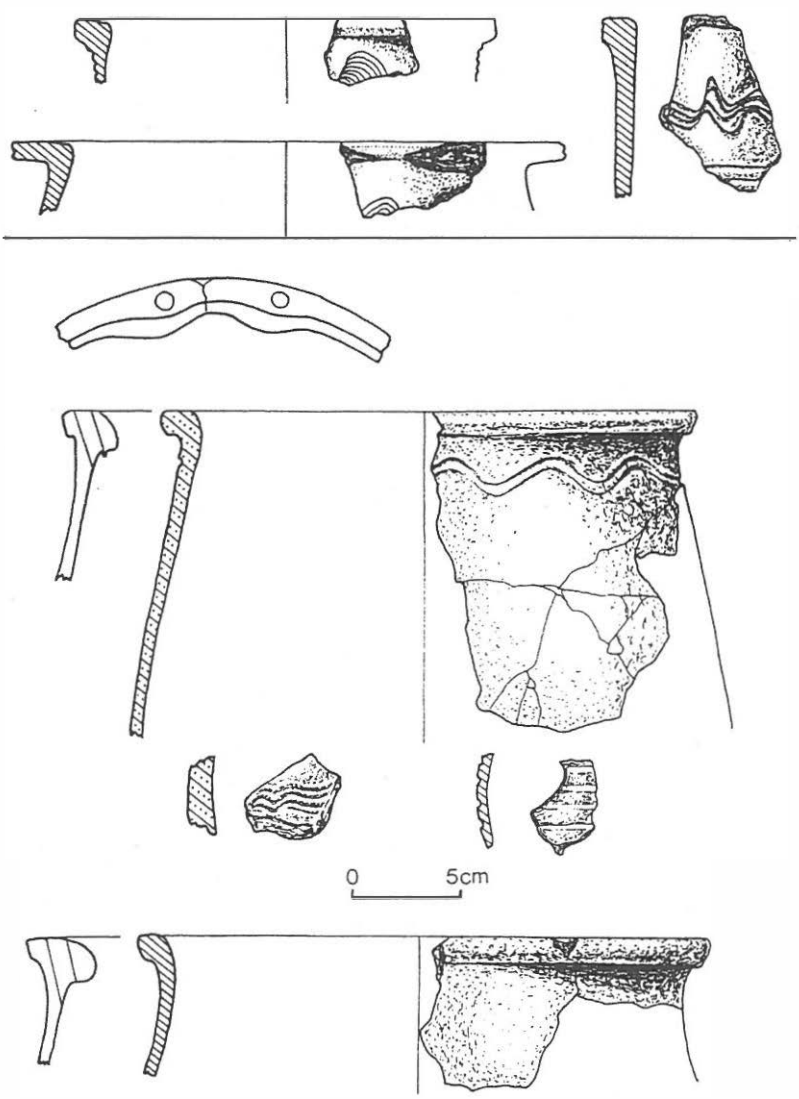


Fig. 13: Fragments of pottery kettles from settlement excavations

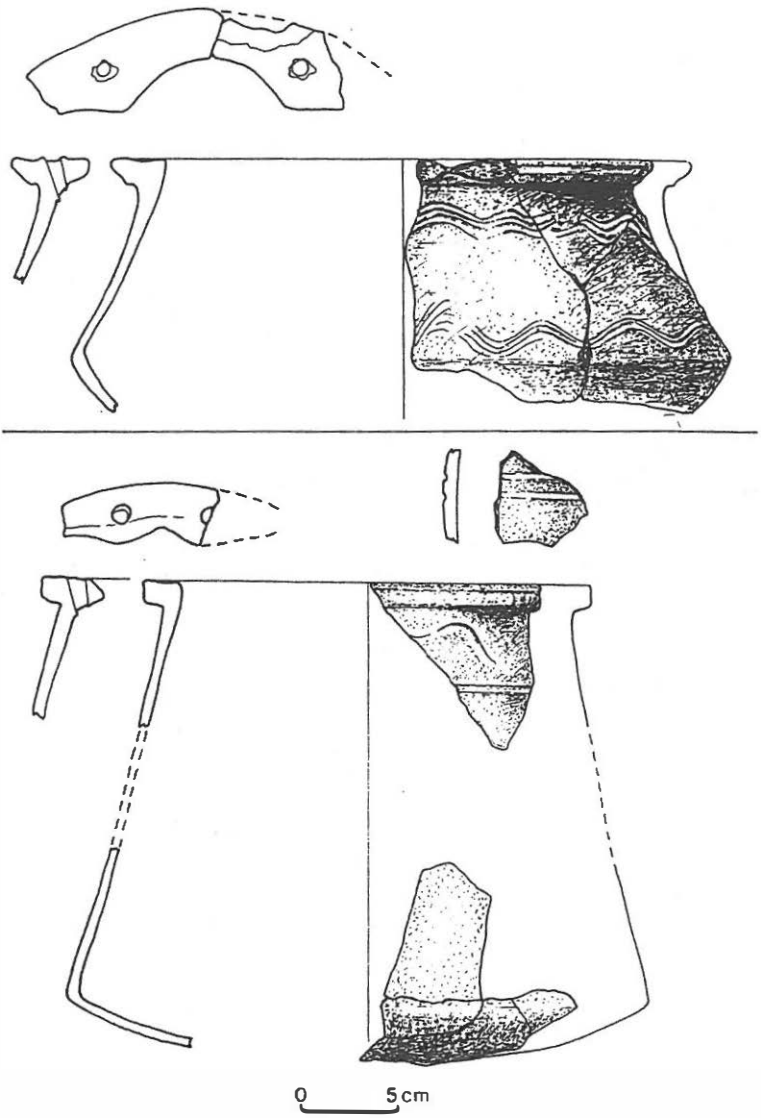


Fig. 14: Conquest Period and Early Arpadian Age pottery kettles from Csorna and Ménfőcsanak

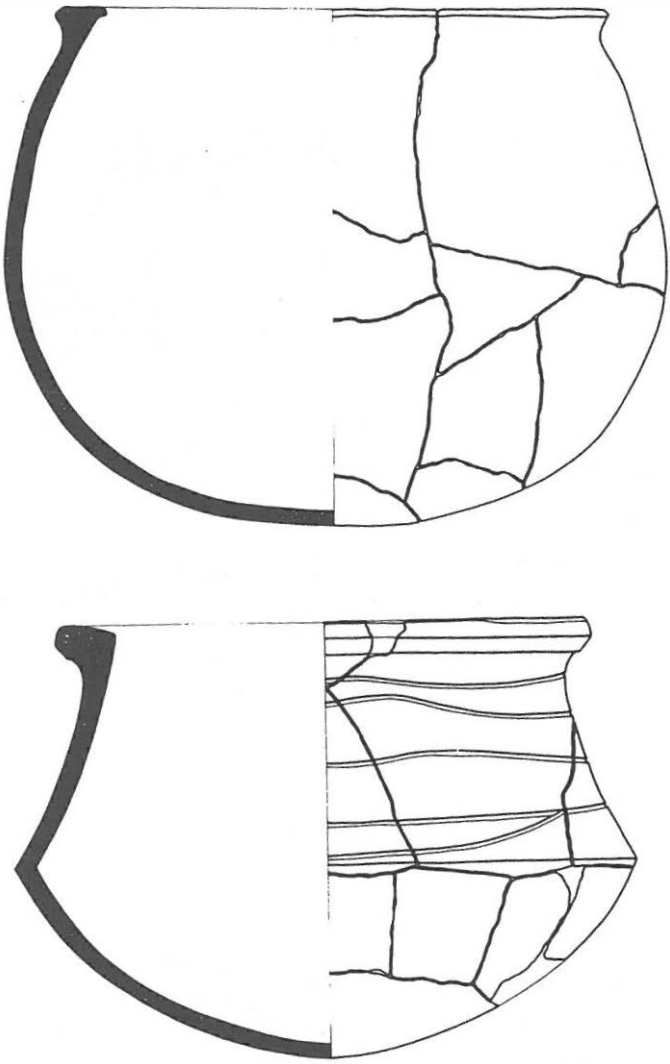


Fig. 15: Early Arpadian Age pottery kettles from Óbecse/Bečej, Szabadka/Subotica, Makó and Hunya

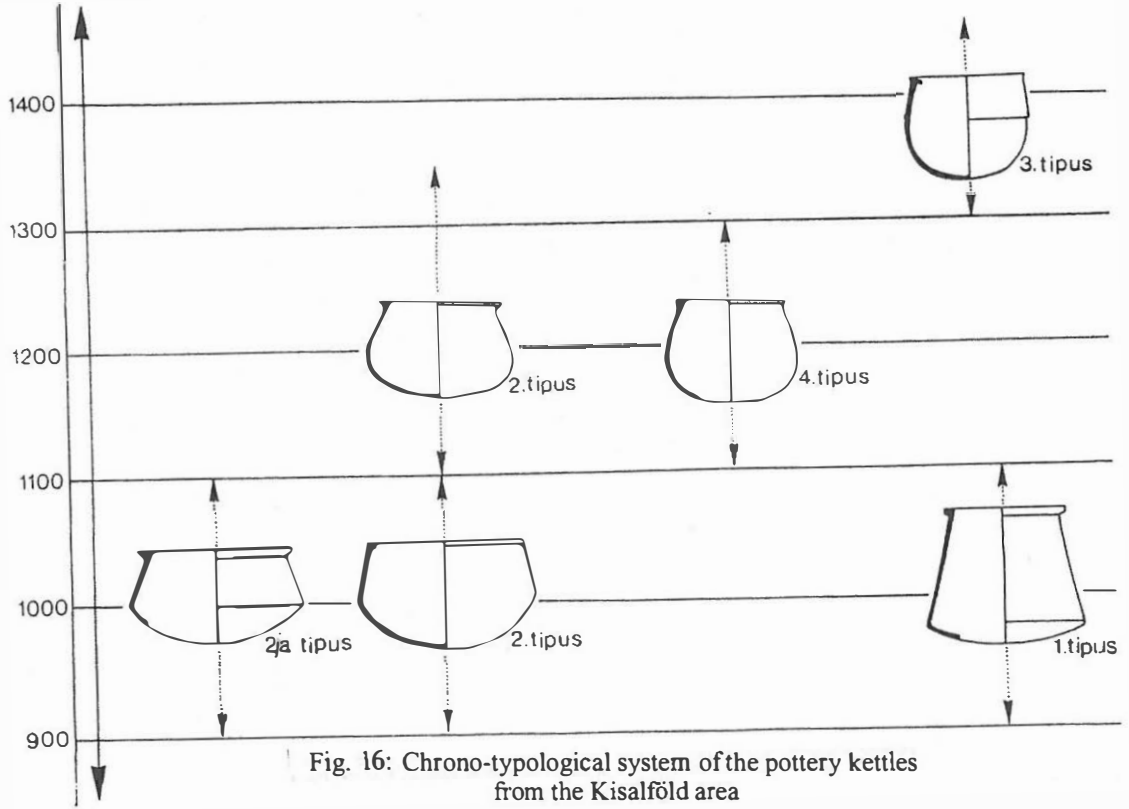


Fig. 16: Chrono-typological system of the pottery kettles from the Kisalföld area

Tender Meat under the Saddle

Customs of Eating, Drinking and Hospitality among Conquering Hungarians and Nomadic Peoples

MEDIUM AEVUM QUOTIDIANUM

HERAUSGEGEBEN VON GERHARD JARITZ

SONDERBAND VII

=

STAMRA

(Studia archaeologica
mediae recentisque aevorum
Universitatis Scientiarum
de Rolando Eötvös nominatae)

EDITED BY JÓZSEF LASZLOVSZKY

VOLUME II

Tender Meat under the Saddle

Customs of Eating, Drinking and Hospitality among Conquering Hungarians and Nomadic Peoples

In Memory of
Gyula László
(1910 – 1998)

Edited by József Laszlovszky

Krems 1998

The articles have been part of a conference organized by the College of Commerce, Catering and Tourism, the Society of Old-Hungarian Culture, and the Department of Medieval and Postmedieval Archaeology, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest (October 10-11, 1996).

Translated from Hungarian
by Alice M. Choyke and László Bartosiewicz

Cover illustration: The seven chiefs of the Hungarians (detail),
J. Thuróczi, *Chronica Hungarorum*, Brünn 1486.

– ISBN 3-90 1094 10 5

Herausgeber: Medium Aevum Quotidianum. Gesellschaft zur Erforschung der materiellen Kultur des Mittelalters, Körnermarkt 13, A – 3500 Krems, Österreich. – Druck: KOPITU Ges. m. b. H., Wiedner Hauptstraße 8 – 10, A –1050 Wien.

Table of Contents

Preface

1996 was the year of millecentennial celebrations of the Hungarian conquest. Many scholarly conferences and popular programmes were organised for this occasion. The theme of this volume was the topic of a programme organised by the College of Commerce, Catering and Tourism, The Society for Old-Hungarian Culture and by the Department of Medieval and Postmedieval Archaeology, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. The first part of the programme was the conference on the archaeological, historical and natural scientific researches on the customs of food consumption of the Hungarian conquest period. These papers are representing a new approach as well an upswing in the study of every day life and material culture. Thus, the study of archaeological food remains and the research on the culture of conquest period Hungarians were relevant contributions for the organisers to the 1996 millecentenary celebrations in Hungary. The conference was not only limited to the 9^{th}-10^{th} century conquering Hungarians, but also was concerned with the pastoral nomads from the Migration period and the Middle Ages.[1]

The scholarly programme of the conference was followed by an exhibition on the archaeological food remains and finds, on the objects of nomadic peoples from early modern period and on modern art objects inspired by these ancient cultures.

The most exotic part of the programme was the dinner organised by the college. This was an attempt to help this institution to create standards for historical tourism and experimental programmes. The special feature of this dinner was the cooperation between scholars of historical studies and specialists of catering and tourism. Particular attention was paid to the authenticity of ingredients (known from historical sources and

[1] The first version of some of the papers presented at this conference was published in Hungarian. *"Nyereg alatt puhítjuk". Vendéglátási és étkezési szokások a honfoglaló magyaroknál és a rokon kultúrájú lovasnépeknél.* Szerk. Laszlovszky, J. Ómagyar Kultúra 10 (1997) különszám. = Tudományos Közlemények II. Kereskedelmi, Vendéglátóipari és Idegenforgalmi Föiskola, Budapest 1997.

archaeological evidence), while the modes of preparation and serving were obviously suited to modern equipment, conditions and contemporary tastes. We regarded this experiment as an important step in the cooparation between scholars and specialists of historical tourism, since dilettant reconstructions of conquest period every day life were also present in the programmes of 1996.

The title of this volume refers to that strange ancient, but often present day, understanding of the customs of „barbars" or nomadic peoples which has also influenced scholarly studies for a long time. Ammianus Marcellinus from the 4th century wrote: „the Huns ... eat meat from all sorts of animals, which they place on their horse's back under their thighs thereby making it tender and warm." A part of this observation is interesting for the ancient history of food consumption or animal husbandry, either reflecting the practice that horsemen took some sort of dried meat with them on long rides, or recording another practice to cure the horses' back with pieces of raw meat. The other part of this sentence is just an example for the topoi of „civilised people" as they misinterpreted some customs of the „barbars".

We dedicate this volume to the memory of Gyula László, professor of archaeology, who was the most important figure in Hungarian archaeology to introduce a new approach: to see the people and their life in the archaeological finds and objects. His pioneer work *The Life of the Conquering Hungarian People* is regarded by the authors of this volume as a standard for those who want to reconstruct the past.

József Laszlovszky