

Research Possibilities into the History and Material Culture of Eating, Drinking, and Hospitality during the Period of the Hungarian Conquest

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Research into the Period of the Hungarian Conquest has a long tradition. Studying the material culture of this epoch has achieved significant results as well. This review is far too short to summarize them even briefly.¹ Therefore, an attempt was made to present the types of sources and methods available to help us better understand the topics mentioned in the title of this paper. Consequently, this article serves as an introduction for the following studies: Detailed information on individual methods and areas of research are presented in the respective specialists' reports. Meanwhile, it seemed necessary to tackle questions which are not possible to research on the basis of documented sources since written information is not available from the discussed period, but which belong to the subject outlined in the title.

The topic was therefore elucidated using the logic developed during my research into later medieval periods. This methodological approach is justified by the scarcity and indirect nature of documentary sources dealing with eating and drinking habits as well as hospitality. On the other hand, during the later centuries of the Middle Ages, a rich source material is available from other areas of Europe.² Surveying this information and summarizing its results is also instructive since it may help in the

¹ The most important summary of the recent literature: The Ancient Hungarians 1996. See also: di Cave 1995.

² Adamson 1995; Bitsch – Ehlert – Ertzdorff 1990; Borst 1983, 323-335; Bosman 1976; Desportes 1987; Dyer 1993, 77-133; Hagen 1989, 1995; Henisch 1976; Laurioux 1989; Montanari 1988; Scully 1995. For the medieval Hungarian sources and secondary literature see: Kubinyi 1991, 1992.

identification of both the potentials and limitations as well as pitfalls inherent in such investigations.

This chain of thought can be illustrated with an analogy which is unquestionably relevant to the subject of hospitality. Investigations in gastronomic history may be looked upon as preparing a complex and elaborate meal that consists of a multitude of elements and involves a number of techniques. In an ideal case, one has raw material of the highest quality, that is, detailed sources for this work. We also possess all the culinary equipment that is necessary for preparing this sophisticated meal. Moreover, we also have expert helpers, each experienced in different areas, always at hand when it is their turn to take part in the cooking process. Finally, we also have a chef who oversees the entire operation, and whose directions coordinate raw materials, equipment and specialists in the production of a most delicious meal. It is possible, however, that the situation falls far short of this ideal. We have a meager pool of raw materials, many ingredients required in the recipe are missing. Therefore we must be satisfied with the use of substitutes. Some of the raw materials may even turn out to be barely usable which may force us to abandon our original plan. In addition, some of the experts may actually be less helpful than expected or their contributions are useless, often defective. Under such harried circumstances the chef may consider quitting, saying that he cannot take responsibility for the end product. However, the guests are here and they are certainly hungry so something must be done. Nevertheless, a real chef can prepare something tasty even in such desperate circumstances unless all the raw materials are absolutely rotten, and his helpers are complete imbeciles. Naturally, any prepared meal made this way will be a far cry from what was originally planned, however, at least something can be served to the guests.

Facing an analogous problem, the situation of historians and archaeologists is very similar. They know what raw materials, sources they need, however, these are either not available or are "spoiled". They know the areas in which external help would be indispensable, however, their helpers have either disappeared or are ill-prepared to carry out their tasks as planned. Although historical reconstructions can be carried out even under such difficult circumstances, one should clearly see what ought to be done given an ideal situation and what can actually be done in an optimal case. It is only in this manner that we can appraise how our meal differs from the ideal recipe that the master chef would have realized under the best circumstances.

This comparative review represents an attempt to carry out such a task. However, the standard will not be an ideal, imaginary situation, but the later Middle Ages which is much better understood than the Period of the Hungarian Conquest.

First, our "raw materials", that is the sources, must be inventoried. The traditions of historical research dictate that the written sources should first be accounted for. Such documents may be classified into various groups, but the type best suited for our current study is in the form of coeval cook books in which both the raw materials for foods and drinks, as well as their modes of preparation are properly listed.³ Another excellent source may be an authentic eyewitness account of a feast, which in addition to describing the food and drink in the order in which they were served, may offer additional details on how people behaved, what customs were characteristic of that period.⁴ Similarly, a traveler's diary may be a valuable source in which he/she describes the produce seen in the market, or the food offered during the visits paid to local homes, not to speak of comprehensive sources which provide information on what food certain social strata consumed, including data on the frequencies and customs at meals, sometimes even through longer periods.

Although such texts are at least sporadically available from the Middle Ages, they do not concern the food habits of conquering Hungarians.⁵ Cookbooks are known only from the 13th century onwards, and even those are relevant to the western regions of our continent.⁶ Descriptions of feasts are also numerous such as the famous account of Attila's feast.⁷ No written sources are available, however, concerning the celebratory meals of the chieftains and social elite of conquering Hungarians. Although some travelers' accounts are available even from the pre-conquest habitation areas of the ancient Hungarians, they are of little help in reconstructing foods, drinks and the traditions of hospitality.⁸ Eating regimens and regulations of particular social groups have also survived,

³ For the role of cookbooks : Montanari 1996, 79. The interpretation of these texts is also problematic, particularly the reconstruction of the raw materials and the measures.

⁴ Ethnographic studies are important in this context, but they can only be used for a much later period: Valonen – Lehtonen 1975, Kisbán 1975.

⁵ Traveller's accounts can be used for the later period in Hungary, but even these are not dealing with drinking and eating very often.

⁶ See note 2.

⁷ Bóna 1993, 63–73. See also Péter Tomka's article in this volume.

⁸ Pauler – Szilágyi 1900; for the new sources and for the recent discussions of interpretations: Kovács – Veszprémy 1996.

especially those of monks from the concerned periods. These are, however, largely irrelevant to eating customs habits during the period of the Hungarian Conquest.

It must be stated therefore that practically no such direct documentary evidence is at hand for research on our topic. Sporadic written sources relevant to the problem are either poor in information content or are difficult to interpret. One of these is the undoubtedly authentic account of how marauding Hungarians behaved during an incursion to the monastery of Sankt Gallen.⁹ The only problem with this precious piece of writing is that, as will be detailed by Miklós Takács in this volume, it is not possible to tell how much may be generalized from this description. Should we believe that the behavior of a group of drunk soldiers during a military campaign was characteristic of all strata of Hungarian society during the Conquest Period? Was it only the intoxicated warriors who amused themselves by throwing around the gnawed bones during the meal? Could the lack of proper drinking cups mean that they were not used by Hungarians at the time, or was this characteristic only for the marauding hordes? It is obvious that although this source is authentic, one should not draw generalized conclusions from it.

The same can be said of another western account of how Kursan, one of the Hungarian military leaders was killed during a feast held by the Bavarians. This source is not only fundamentally discredited by the fact that another source describes Kursan's heroic death in the battlefield. From our point of view, it is more of a problem that even this laconic description of the meal is not relevant to Hungarian eating and drinking traditions. Although there is little doubt that high-ranking Hungarians organized similar feasts at the time, it is clear that in this documented case it was the Bavarians who prepared for the celebration of the peace talks which ultimately offered an opportunity for the assassination of Kursan.¹⁰

This modest list of written sources is traditionally further expanded to include another piece of documentary evidence. According to *Anonymus*, during the course of the conquest, the military commanders Ond (Ound), Ketel and Tarcál (Turzul) rode to the top of a hill following their battles in the Bodrog river area (actually, the hill was named after the last of these warriors). At that spot, they held a great celebratory feast (*magnum aldamas*

⁹ Pauler – Szilágyi 1900, 335-342.

¹⁰ Aventius and the *Annales Alemannici*. See Gombos 1937, 341-387, Györfy 1959, 127-160.

fecerunt) in which a horse was sacrificed as well.¹¹ Within the Latin expression it is easy to recognize the Hungarian word, *áldomás*, that has survived unmodified until the present. *Anonymus* himself again used it in another part of his otherwise Latin text. According to him, when Chief Árpád received good news he "held a reception", that is "*facerunt aldumas*".¹² The pagan rite of horse sacrifice as well as the celebration of special occasions in this manner was definitely characteristic of the period of the Hungarian Conquest. Moreover, there is linguistic evidence that the word *áldomás* was part of the ancient Hungarian vocabulary.¹³ It is another question as to which sources were available to the royal notary *Anonymus* who prepared his text some three centuries after the Hungarian Conquest, and to what extent the author's fantasy linked this authentic form of celebration with geographical names and imaginary events. Thus, with these descriptions it is not only the general nature of phenomena which may be called into question. One must also follow the rigorous rules of critical analysis of sources and treat the information available with a measure of prudence.

In summary, it may be said that practically no direct sources are available concerning food and drink in the period of the Hungarian Conquest. The number of indirect written sources is somewhat greater. Such documents include any text with the discussion of raw materials for foodstuffs, that is, lists of plants and animals that may have served in food provisioning. Although some of such descriptions were not directly related to the period of the Hungarian Conquest, they may with great certainty apply to that time as well. For example, land cultivation is mentioned from several regions that were inhabited by Hungarians preceding the period of the Hungarian Conquest.¹⁴ This means that domestic plants definitely played a role in nourishment. In the story of Ajtony, which has survived as a document of power struggles during the 11th century, as well as in the somewhat later legend of St. Gellért, vast herds of free-ranging livestock are mentioned which may be indicative of the considerable role played by meat consumption.¹⁵ Unfortunately, these sources are not only later than the period of the Hungarian Conquest, but their information content is also very tangential. Therefore, they can be used only when complemented with

¹¹ *Gesta Hungarorum* 1991, 62-63. For the word *aldamas* *ibid.* 158.

¹² *Gesta Hungarorum* 1991, 72-73.

¹³ Mészöly 1956, 75-82.

¹⁴ Gyulai 1994, Balassa 1994.

¹⁵ SRH II. 471-506.

other sources. Namely, it is unknown how fields were tilled, what plants were cultivated and what was the stock of free-ranging animals like.

Another important pool of direct documentary evidence comes from normative sources. Most of these are laws or resolutions brought by the synod which regulated society and various aspects of human conduct. More exactly, these are the data that were most frequently recorded and are thus available for modern research. Naturally, rules and regulations that define social norms had existed long before this time, however, those customs were not codified in a written form. This situation is typical for the period of the Hungarian Conquest as well. Everyday life at the time was certainly ruled by strict customs, however, no documentary evidence has survived. Written laws and resolutions by the clergy first appeared at the beginning of the 11th century.¹⁶ Paradoxically, however, their appearance was aimed at significantly changing customs that must have been most characteristic of the preceding period of the Hungarian Conquest. Not only were laws drafted during the reign of the first Christian king St. Stephen, or Ladislaus I and Coloman at the end of the same century chronologically distant from the period under discussion here.¹⁷ They must be considered unusually indirect as well, since they were set out to defining the norms of a new and different social structure. Their role in reconstructing the period of the Hungarian Conquest, therefore, must be considered extremely limited. Nevertheless, some elements of these sources can prove useful from the perspective of this topic, especially those which were aimed at prohibiting customs incompatible with the new social order and Christianity. The existence of such customs, which had to be banned by law due to their importance, can be used in indirectly characterizing earlier periods. From the viewpoint of this volume prohibitions of pagan rituals may to some extent be useful, since some of them must have been sacrifices related to food and drink as well.¹⁸ Yet again, however, the sources themselves reveal only a few details so their evaluation must be carried out in conjunction with the use of other sources as well.

Another traditional means of investigating medieval material culture and everyday life is the study of the pictorial evidence. Murals, paintings and miniatures have preserved many details, and beyond the mere depiction of objects they often immortalized actions and gestures as well. A special characteristic of these sources of information is that they are based on sights

¹⁶ Závodszky 1904.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ For the religious background of these sacrifices: Diószegi 1967.

coeval with their actual creation, even if they are intended to illustrate events that happened sometimes centuries earlier. Most typically, medieval biblical iconography is not relevant to reconstruction of attire or objects used at the time of Christ but to that of the typical environment in which the picture was painted. This makes the systematic use of pictorial sources especially important.

Unfortunately, iconographic data from the period of the Hungarian Conquest are even more scarce than written sources. It is not only eating and drinking that have not survived in at least approximately coeval pictures. More basic efforts in trying to recognize the conquering Hungarians themselves have consistently failed as well. Some pictures used in tentative identifications do not originate from the period of the Hungarian Conquest while others cannot be linked with any certainty to Hungarians.¹⁹ Although such representations may be of significant help, they still remain on the level of analogies and parallels which raises further methodological problems to be discussed later.

Traditionally, the Hungarian language has been considered one of the most important sources in the study of the period of the Hungarian Conquest and even for the preceding historical times.²⁰ Linguistic studies already played a prominent role in the 19th century when "our relatives", the Hungarian ancestral territory and the routes of their westward migration were being mapped. Since language undergoes continuous change, many phenomena affecting a group of people are reflected in the structure of the language as well as in the evolution of its vocabulary. Thus, in the nomenclature of plants cultivated and domestic animals kept by the ancient Hungarians, several linguistic strata have been distinguished and this method is of great help in determining the characteristics of various historical periods. More recently, this research has been neatly complemented by the results obtained by natural sciences (botanics, zoology etc.) which help in identifying the plants and animals once exploited by the ancient Hungarians, and whose names are preserved in the linguistic record.

Following this logic it is plausible that one should get similarly good results by studying food habits within the context of various linguistic strata. Unfortunately, the method appears much less promising from this

¹⁹ Later depictions of the Hungarian conquest are not relevant for these questions, see Kubinyi – Laszlovszky 1991, front page illustration (Die Sieben der Ungarn. Holzschnitt aus J. Thuróczi, *Chronica Hungarorum*. Brunn 1486.) The most important summary of the literature: Györfy 1986, 319-323.

²⁰ Kovács – Veszprémy 1997.

point of view. On the one hand, a typical form of linguistic change is that words lose their original meaning and often change substantially. For example, the Hungarian equivalent of butter, "vaj", belongs to the most ancient stratum of our language. One could therefore conclude that dairying was among the more important activities pursued by conquering Hungarians. Unfortunately, however, comparative linguistic, etymological and linguistic-historical studies have shown that today's usage of this word cannot be considered as evidence of such activities, since it has turned out that "vaj" was used in a significantly broader sense, meaning just about any kind of fatty substance.²¹

Another difficult element in linguistic-historical studies is that it is difficult to link their observations to precise time periods. This is not only the case because the first occurrence of certain words can be detected only following their en masse appearance in written documents. Many of our words are evidently older than their first mention in documents. The other time-dependent source of bias is that words have been constantly introduced into and continuously disappear from the language. The surfacing of a new word by no means proves that the object or concept referred to was previously unknown. Very often, simply a new term enters the language and this phenomenon may have a number of explanations. It is for this reason that expressions related to nutrition and gastronomy must be treated with appropriate caution as well, especially when it is concluded that something first appears in a given period on a purely linguistic basis. Undoubtedly, it is the combined use of archaeological, scientific and linguistic evidence that may yield the newest conclusions in this area of research.

The fourth group of sources at our disposal in food and drink reconstruction is that of the objects which can be linked to food habits, modes of preparation and consumption. In the case under discussion here, such materials consist almost completely of archaeological finds. Therefore, during the discussion of material evidence it is worth reviewing archaeological sources as a whole.

A few years ago the only archaeological finds available for this type of study would have been almost exclusively ceramic vessels, especially those found in burials. However, due to the development of archaeology related to the period of the Hungarian Conquest, increasing numbers of settlement remains have been at least partially excavated.²² It is

²¹ *A magyar nyelv történeti-etimológiai szótára*. (Historical-etymological dictionary of the Hungarian Language). Ed. Benkő, L. Budapest 1967.

²² Révész – Wolf 1996.

predominantly these settlement excavations that yielded botanical and zoological remains whose scientific analysis provides sufficient direct information on the period concerned. This is clearly illustrated when the process of cooking is looked at in detail as would be the case with the reconstruction of any other craft-activity.

During previous studies of various crafts, archaeologists have devised a methodological system which helps in reconstructing the entire process by combining various steps in it. First, the raw materials required by the end product (in our case food or beverage) must be reviewed. This is the area in which we have most of the new, reliable, coeval and directly applicable information at our disposal. The transformation and refinement of excavation techniques has made the retrieval of those plant and animal remains possible which served as raw materials in the preparation of foodstuffs. Similarly to ceramics or metal artifacts, these materials are archaeological finds which often survive only under particular soil conditions. Their recovery and analyses require target-oriented, special excavation techniques. Two papers in this volume discuss the methods, and results of this type of research.

In addition to the raw materials, the remains of by-products also provide information on the preparation processes involved in making food or drink. Such finds are relatively rarely encountered since by-products may also have been consumed, at least by animals. Some types of leftovers have, however, survived such as the residue from Roman period grape marc from the town of Aquincum. The discovery of such remains shows which by-products were not processed any further, in addition to offering direct evidence on the preparation process itself.

Archaeological find assemblages which contain defective products from the manufacturing process should be considered similarly useful. Such useless specimens offer a snapshot of a particular stage in the preparation continuum. A good example of such phenomena is a kiln which collapsed during firing, and the half-made vessels in it were not worth retrieving for the craftspeople of the time. In fortunate cases, such assemblages survived in their original state until the time of the archaeological excavation. However, during the course of food preparation this type of interrupted process is virtually unknown. Although a baking oven may have temporarily preserved food remains after its collapse, it is easy to see that such fortunate finds providing information on both the potential end-product as well as the process of preparation, would be extremely special.

Studying the end product is one of the most important stages in research on medieval craft activities. These objects and products have a number of traits which can be used in the characterization of their manufacturing. Unfortunately, this traditional method of investigation is not applicable in the case of food and drinks since, although the end product would indeed be characteristic of many stages in its production, as an object of consumption it survives only in exceptional cases. Chances emerge only with well preserved, lucky finds or foods prepared for special functions. The first group of such finds will be discussed within the context of macrobotanical remains. The second group is best represented by finds recovered as grave goods from cemeteries of the period of the Hungarian Conquest. Researchers have long noticed that in addition to arms, metal mounts and vessels, animal bones were also entered in the burials of the conquering Hungarians.²³ Horses buried alongside warriors have raised the greatest interest. When the first such graves were discovered during the last century, scholars presumed that warriors had been buried on horseback, as if they reflected some post-Colombian native American rite from the Wild West. Since then, following the excavation of numerous graves with horses, it became clear that a special form of Migration Period horse burials may be observed in the cemeteries of the conquering Hungarians. Instead of the entire horse, only some of its specially selected parts were placed in the grave. These include the skull and, most typically, the bones of the feet. Additional finds (stirrups and saddle), however, may indicate that the thus entered parts represented the entire animal, since horse remains are frequently encountered in a fully harnessed state. In such cases, the head and feet symbolized the complete horse.²⁴ From the viewpoint of our topic, however, anything that was not put into the grave is of even more interest. One seems to be confronted with a form of the aforementioned pagan horse sacrifices. It is likely that the horses not only served their master in the other world, but also played a substantial role in the ritual mortuary feast. Food and beverages placed into the burial as part of the grave furniture may be classified as special gastronomic finds which have never been consumed. Sometimes there is a possibility to observe certain food preparation processes in such remains. Animal bones found in burials, for example, display signs of butchering and burning which show how the animal was dismembered and which parts of its body were offered for the long, post mortem journey of the entered person. Naturally, our possibilities of

²³ Tettamanti 1975.

²⁴ Bálint 1969, 1970, 1974., Vörös 1996.

observation are very limited, since while burnt bones may at least indicate roasting, bones usually provide no information on spices or other forms of meat flavoring. Similarly, while some samples taken from vessels can be used in reconstructing the chemical composition of beverages, they cannot be used in establishing whether dairy remains, for example, originate from milk or kumiss.²⁵ It must also be taken into consideration that foodstuffs entered as burial goods may have been specialties, since they were prepared for a ritual occasion. It is possible, therefore, that they do not reflect the everyday eating habits of conquering Hungarians. Therefore, although the phenomena observed in burials indirectly characterize the diet and celebratory meals, they can be fully elucidated only with the help of historical and ethnographic analogies.

In the reconstruction of food preparation, utensils used during the production process must also be taken into consideration. Thus, the remains of cereal grinding stones and cooking ovens, as well as vessels are indicative of the functional use of various types of equipment.²⁶ Therefore, even if indirectly, they also provide additional data concerning the foodstuffs themselves as well as the ways such meals were served.

Other types of archaeological artifacts may contribute additional indirect information. The remains brought to light during the course of excavations cannot only be interpreted as part of their contexts. They also contain individual information in and of themselves. In relation to nutrition, the physical anthropological examination of skeletons found in inhumation graves is of primary importance. Beyond the age and gender of the deceased, scientific analyses of the bones may reveal structural information or deformations. Most of these traits are closely related to the nutritional history of the person studied.²⁷ It is well known, for example, that insufficient doses of some vitamins and trace elements in the diet can lead to nutritional deficiencies, which often effect the bones as well. Relative frequencies of, for example, defective nutrient absorption caused by chronic high fever in early childhood can also be detected in the skeletal material. Such methods can also be used in detecting anemia and malformations caused by poor diets. To date, studies of most human skeletons from the period of the Hungarian Conquest have shown that diets at that time

²⁵ Duma 1971, 1980.

²⁶ Méri 1970.

²⁷ Józsa 1996.

contained balanced proportions of vegetable and animal nutrients and only few of the deformations observed could be attributed to malnutrition.²⁸

Indirect data are also available for answering even more complex questions. It is well known that sweets, including honey, the number one sweetener during the discussed period, as well as certain forms of food preparation increase the incidence of tooth decay. In general terms it has been observed that, somewhat paradoxically, this condition is more frequent in the better nourished, richer segments of the population. Thus, the frequency of dental caries within a social group may be indicative of the average nutritional status of that group. Such investigations have already been carried out on skeletons from cemeteries of the Hungarian Conquest, where anthropological materials from both high-ranking and common grave assemblages can be compared from this point of view.²⁹ Undoubtedly, the number of such methods will increase thereby contributing additional indirect data within the realm of food research.

Following this review of sources, the methods available for the purposes of gastronomic investigations should also be mentioned. Among others, these methods include the use of parallels, that is, historical analogies. These become particularly important in our research, since only a few reliable and direct examples are available in our own sources, as was discussed previously. In such cases, on the basis of historical studies, one may conclude that two different historical periods or ethnic groups may display a number of similarities. While pastoral nomadic people of the Migration Period were frequently different in terms of their languages and customs, several elements in their war tactics, weaponry and economic life were identical or at least comparable. In connection with the use of analogies, however, it should be pointed out that the applicability of such parallels is limited. The scope of both similarities and differences should be defined as precisely as possible and delineate the boundaries of relevance. Some ethnographic parallels or historical sources distant both in time and space (such as the example of 13th century Mongolia), can be of instrumental importance in reconstructions. However, one must carefully distinguish between using parallels for simply elucidating details that would be otherwise difficult to interpret and the full scale projection of complex phenomena onto the period of the Hungarian Conquest. Thus, for example, both ethnographic analogies and historical parallels are important in identifying and interpreting archaeological finds or excavation phenomena.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Pap 1986a,b.

Quite often, when the function and original usage of a tool or instrument seems obscure, ethnographic observations are of great help in the interpretation.

Meanwhile, using analogies can also direct our attention to another important detail. Ethnographic investigations reveal, for example, why certain objects never occur among the archaeological finds or in the written sources, in spite of the important role they played in the material culture. This problem is clearly illustrated by the example of vessels used in making, storing and serving food and beverages. No written sources discussing the period of the Hungarian Conquest mention these artifacts, while numerous archaeological specimens of ceramic vessels have been brought to light by excavations. On the other hand, investigations carried out among the pastoral or quasi-nomadic peoples of the 19th-20th centuries have undoubtedly shown that the overwhelming majority of vessels were made from wood, leather and other organic materials, rather than ceramics. The objects of the exhibit held in conjunction with our scientific conference clearly illustrated how important wooden cups, drinking bowls as well as the leather Kumiss container were. Such objects never survive long enough to be recovered by archaeological excavations in Hungary. The bone spout from a leather container or the metal mounts from a wooden vessel may sometimes survive,³⁰ however, they are known in significantly lower numbers than they must have been used, even if only grave goods are taken into consideration. Vessels made of leather, wood and other organic materials were certainly more useful for people with mobile lifestyles than ceramics. In addition, quantities of their raw materials must have been readily available at any time.

Analogies thus, both help in the interpretation of apparently obscure phenomena in the archaeological record, and may also shed light on elements of material culture that did not survive to become archaeological finds. Using parallels, however, should be limited by strict rules, which must be observed in the same way as the critical evaluation of historical sources. Ethnographic observations, for example, may direct our attention to the fact that some segments of the material culture are little known to us since trace of it rarely survived. This does not mean, however, that such information gaps in the material culture of the period of the Hungarian Conquest can be automatically filled in by just about any ethnographic example. Familiarity with food, beverages and eating habits observed among the peoples of Central Asia, culturally related to the Conquering

³⁰ The Ancient Hungarians 447-448.

Hungarians, may be of great help. However, they should not be directly integrated within the heritage of conquering Hungarians since, for example, many such peoples in Central Asia live under geographical and climatic conditions completely different from those experienced by the ancient Hungarians. Evidently, the natural environment directly influences the pool of raw materials available for the purposes of human nutrition as well as some food preparation techniques. Prudence is justified even when potentially parallel phenomena are observed in the local ethnographic scene. Just because similarities may be discovered with distant cultures, it cannot be presumed that the appearance of similar objects or customs can be exclusively explained by a population group preserving its tradition for centuries or even millennia.

All these thoughts should only serve as an introduction to the articles of this volume which will elucidate various aspects of this problem using concrete examples and analyses. Nevertheless, in my opinion, research possibilities and methodology developed for the later centuries of the high Middle Ages, a period rich in a variety of sources, provide a good foundation for appraising the perspectives as well as limitations of our research possibilities.

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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

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STAMRA

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

EDITED BY JÓZSEF LASZLOVSKY

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.

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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 9th-10th 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 Főiskola, 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 cooperation 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