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EARLY CHRISTIAN ARCHAEOLOGY IN HUNGARY BETWEEN 2010 AND 2016

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Abstract: In 2010 the Department of Archaeology at the University of Pécs witnessed the establishment of Christian Archaeology, a new M.A. subject that did not exist in Hungary before. Shortly after the launch of Christian Archaeology in Hungary, in 2012 the department started a new research project in collaboration with the Department of Christian Archaeology, University of Vienna, under the title *Frühes Christentum in Ungarn*. This contribution is a presentation of the most important events and research-results in Christian Archaeology in Hungary between 2010 and 2016. Recent publications of the Roman provincial archaeologists, migration period archaeologists and patristic philosophers and theologians are also taken into account.

Keywords: Early Christian archaeology, research projects, scientific collaborations, conferences, exhibition catalogues¹.

In 2010 the Department of Archaeology at the University of Pécs witnessed the establishment of Christian archaeology, a new M.A. subject that did not exist in Hungary before. Shortly after the launch of Christian archaeology in Hungary, in 2012 the department started a new research project in collaboration with the Department of Christian Archaeology, University of Vienna, under the title *Frühes Christentum in Ungarn*. Project leaders Prof. Zsolt Visy (and since 2014 Levente Nagy) and Prof. Renate Johanna Pillinger, as well as other project members received funding from the *Stiftung Aktion Österreich-Ungarn*.¹ The aim of the bilateral international project has been to write a new monograph on Early Christian monuments and artefacts found in the territory of Hungary, dated between the fourth and eighth centuries, with the contribution of various experts and M.A. and Ph.D. students from both Vienna and Pécs. The first project reports in 2012 and 2013 (published in German and English)

¹ This funding enabled both Austrian and Hungarian project members to travel throughout Hungary in order to observe Christian artefacts in Hungarian Museum magazines and exhibitions, and to visit libraries in Vienna in order to consult recently published Early Christian archaeological literature not known and read in Hungary before.

made a brief outline of the current state of research complemented with a research history beginning with the nineteenth century, paying homage to the former generations of researchers conducting investigations into Early Christian monuments and artefacts in Hungary.²

In the first two years of the project we made an EXCEL database of the examined Christian and presumably Christian finds and monuments, including data about their exact archaeological contexts (if there were any). In 2015 this database was converted into a Microsoft Word catalogue with appendices, which forms the basis of a future monograph. The analysis of the items in the catalogue started in 2012-2013, and will be continued in 2016 due to the courtesy and permissions of Hungarian museums. The project aims not only to collect recently published and unpublished material which have not been analysed and evaluated by earlier publications of the field. It also deals with new discussions and interpretations of the earlier published material employing modern evaluation methods and methodological approaches currently discussed in the research of Late Antiquity. The first students of Christian Archaeology in Hungary, Réka Neményi, Dalma Lukács and Nikolett Besenyi have already written their B.A./M.A. theses. They carried out in-depth analyses of fourth-century cross-bow brooches with Christian symbols³, Late Antique disc brooches with figural representations,⁴ and Menas *ampullae* of the Middle Danube Region⁵ with iconographical research offering new interpretations and new evidence about cross-cultural networks in the examined regions.

In the light of our project goals and aspirations, in this paper I will present a brief synthesis of Hungarian research concerning Early Christianity of Hungary between 2010 and 2016. The aim of my paper is not merely a presentation of the publications written by the research fellows and students of the Archaeology Departments in Pécs and Vienna employing special research methods and points of view of Christian archaeology (*christliche Archäologie*,

² Nagy 2013a, 325-330; Nagy 2015a; a more detailed synthesis of research history will be made by Tamás Szabadvány in his M.A. thesis of 2016 (Szabadvány 2016a). I especially thank the author for the possibility of reading the manuscript of his M.A. thesis still in progress. The first results of the project *Frühes Christentum in Ungarn* were presented in a poster exhibition in Pécs, in connection with the international conference titled *Pagans and Christians in the Late Roman Empire: New Evidence, New Approaches*, organised by the Department of Medieval Studies of the Central European University, Budapest and the Department of Archaeology of the Pécs University (Marianne Sággy – Levente Nagy): Nagy 2013a, 327, 334, Plate III. The conference papers will be published soon.

³ Neményi 2012; Neményi 2014.

⁴ Lukács 2016.

⁵ Besenyi 2014.

archaeologia Christiana) used in several departments and research centres in Europe.⁶ It is also meant to draw attention to the immense diversity of publications written by Hungarian archaeologists of the Roman provinces and the Migration Period, patristic philosophers, and theologians dealing with the same era.

In 2010, along with the establishment of the discipline of Christian archaeology in Hungary and the organisation of a poster exhibition and a conference in Istanbul on the Late Roman – Early Christian heritage of Sopianae and the Province of Valeria,⁷ the Hungarian Patristic Society (the most relevant organised research community dealing with various aspects of Early Christianity in Hungary since 2001) witnessed on its annual conference in Kecskemét a strong increase of interest in methodological problems of Early Christian art and iconography: how to interpret (re-interpret) images with the help of biblical and patristic texts.⁸ This interest was extended to a collaboration with the BARDA Research Group for Early Christian Iconography and Epigraphy at King's College, London. The conference organised together with the Center of Patristic Studies of the University of Pécs on 24-25 May 2012 in Pécs focused on iconographical questions related to the murals in the burial chambers of Sopianae.⁹ The papers of the conference titled *Early Christian Art: An International Conference with special regard to the early Christian Cemetery in Sopianae (Pécs-Hungary)* were published in the series *Studia Patristica* in Oxford, in 2014.¹⁰

The systematic re-evaluation of the iconographical programs of Early Christian casket mounts with mythological and Biblical scenes from Hungary began in 2012. Some of the results are still available in the manuscripts of conference papers, being prepared for publication.¹¹ A new synthesis about the Early Christian murals from Hungary are being prepared in connection with the project *Frühes Christentum in Ungarn* by Claudia-Maria Behling and Krisztina Hudák. The results of earlier publications by Krisztina Hudák and Levente Nagy about the paintings of Sopianae published between 2003 and 2016 were

⁶ A recent introductory synthesis of the specific methods, interests and viewpoints of Christian archaeology: Sörries 2013.

⁷ Fazekas – Gábor – Nagy – Visy 2010.

⁸ Bugár 2014b; Heidl 2014 (in English: Heidl 2013); Nagy 2013b (German manuscript for the series *Specimina Nova*, English summary: Nagy 2014, 203-205).

⁹ Shortly reported by Nagy 2013a, 326-327, 331.

¹⁰ Brent 2014; Bugár 2014a; Csigi 2014; Heidl 2014; Hudák 2014; Nagy 2014a, with the promise of a new synthesis of the Early Christian iconography of the Pannonian provinces; Visy 2014.

¹¹ Nagy 2012a; Nagy 2014b (English: Nagy 2016a); Nagy 2013b (German manuscript for the series *Specimina Nova*; English: Nagy 2014a, 203-205.); Nagy 2015b (German manuscript for the series *Antaeus*); Nagy 2015c (Hungarian manuscript for the series *Studia Patrum*).

summarized briefly at the AIPMA international conference in Lausanne, on 16 September 2016.¹²

The excavations of the Late Roman – Early Christian funerary buildings in the northern cemetery of Sopianae between 2000 and 2006, in 2010-2011 and 2015 raised several new questions of interpretation concerning the structure, reconstruction possibilities and religious historical evaluation of funerary buildings. Did all of the two-storey burial chambers in Pécs (sharing obviously the same architectural design) belong to Christians, or only those with symbols and Biblical images expressing clearly Christian identity? Were they commissioned by the local (otherwise unknown) church authorities, or were they ordered by private commissioners? What should the correct definition and terminology of these buildings be: *hypogaea*, crypts, burial chambers, *cellae memoriae*, burial chapels, or *mausolea*? These issues have been discussed in detail in various publications between 2010 and 2016.¹³ The most recent synthesis is the new monograph of Olivér Gábor from 2016, based on the updated version of his Ph.D. dissertation from 2008.¹⁴

Early Christian Church history and hagiography are special *Hilfswissenschaften* of Christian archaeology. A new Church history in the Pannonian provinces between 374 and 456 is offered by Krisztina Hudák in her Ph.D. dissertation from 2013 (defended in 2014).¹⁵ The still missing updated summary of the Church history of Pannonia from the time of the Tetrarchy to 374 is in progress (Krisztina Hudák – Levente Nagy). The relevant contributions by Rajko Bratož and the collections of written sources of Late Roman Pannonia, published continuously by Péter Kovács, are particularly useful.¹⁶ The Research Centre of Church History established at the University of Pécs in 2012 launched its new monograph series titled *Thesaurus Historiae Ecclesiasticae in*

¹² Hudák – Nagy 2016 (English manuscript for the AIPMA conference). An earlier manuscript of Levente Nagy from 2011 about the afterlife concepts concerning the Pécs murals designed for the series *Autonomous Towns in Noricum and Pannonia* could be published finally in the series *Hungarian Polis Studies* in 2016, in the Festschrift for György Németh, professor of ancient history in Budapest: Nagy 2016b.

¹³ Gábor 2010; Gábor 2013; Gábor 2014; Katona Győr 2013, 177-181; Pozsárkó – Tóth I. Zs. 2011; Magyar 2012, 131-134; Tóth I. Zs. 2010; Tóth I. Zs. 2012a; Tóth I. Zs. 2012b; Tóth I. Zs. 2015.

¹⁴ Gábor 2016.

¹⁵ Hudák 2013.

¹⁶ Bratož 2011a; Bratož 2011b; Kovács 2011; Kovács 2014; Kovács 2016. A short collection of recent publications in the field of Church history of Pannonia is summarized by Nagy 2016c, 169-170, which is a book review of the posthumous edition of the famous Pannonian religious history by István Tóth: Tóth I. 2015. Recent historical summary of Arian Gepids: Kiss 2015, 124-129.

Universitate Quinqueecclesiensi with a hagiographical and archaeological interpretation experiment of four Passion stories from Pannonia.¹⁷ Another relevant research topic of the centre for the year 2016 is the complex theoretical and case-study based investigation of Christianisation as a historical process in the Carpathian Basin from the Early Christian period to the Middle Ages. The next conference in collaboration with the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the new Research Centre of Christianisation founded this year by the Department of Archaeology at the University of Pécs will be held with the title *Christianisation: Identity, Mobility, Continuity* on 14 October 2016 in Pécs.

The Bishopric of Pécs has recently become strongly interested in Early Christian research. In 2015 the diocese established a new Christian Heritage Research Centre dealing with Early Christian art and archaeology, too. One of the first events of the new centre was a joint international conference with the collaboration of the Department of Archaeology in Pécs, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the University of Vienna, Institute of Classical Archaeology (organised by Günther Schörner, Réka Neményi and Levente Nagy) with the title *Archaeology of Identity(es) – Archäologie der Identität(en)* on 12-13 November 2015. One of the methodological questions at the conference was an experiment: how to employ the special research methods and theoretical frameworks of post-processual archaeology and archaeology of identity in the research of Early Christianity in Pannonia.¹⁸

In the years in question (2010-2016) archaeologists of the Roman provinces prepared new publications about earlier excavated finds on Roman sites with Christian interpretations¹⁹ (such as a bronze finger-ring with a Chi-Rho emblem from the Late Roman cemetery of Visegrád-Diós,²⁰ two lead seals and a bronze finger-ring from the Iseum of Savaria,²¹ a magical (?) amulet from the Southern cemetery of Intercisa²²), or long-forgotten unpublished artefacts from museum magazines (such as, a bronze mirror fragment with crosses from Intercisa in the magazine of the Hungarian National Museum²³).

Endre Tóth, a renowned expert on Late Antique archaeology of Pannonia from the last third of the 20th century till today, continued his earlier work on the *passio S. Quirini*,²⁴ on the Late Roman – Early Christian inscriptions from

¹⁷ Nagy 2012b.

¹⁸ Nagy 2015d.

¹⁹ For example some evidence from County Baranya: Gábor – Katona-Győr 2012.

²⁰ Grave No. 134: Gróh 2015, 72-73, fig. 3/7.

²¹ Kat. Szombathely 2013, 291, Kat. Nr. 26.2-4.

²² Near graves No. 1624 and 1625: Szabó 2014, 209-221, figs. 1, 2, 4.

²³ Szabadváry 2016b, 293-298, figs. 1a-d; see further Kocsis 2013.

²⁴ Tóth E. 2011a

the Eastern Cemetery of Savaria,²⁵ or on questions of continuity of the so-called Romanized population in the Migration Period.²⁶ He summarized his earlier iconographical analysis of the casket mount fragments from the inner fortress of Ságvár,²⁷ and his typological considerations of the cross-bow brooches of types Keller 5/6 – Pröttel 5/6 – Swift 5i-ii/6i-ii. He evaluated the brooches with Christian symbols from Ságvár, Tömlöc-hill, grave No. 7 and from a Late Roman grave in Tihany-Sajkod.²⁸

Regarding the younger generations of Roman provincial archaeology, I had the possibility to follow the extremely useful M.A. thesis project of Tamás Szabadváry. He re-collected and re-evaluated the Early Christian artefacts from the Hungarian National Museum, reconstructing their original contexts (old excavations, purchase from individuals) from inventory books and museum archives.²⁹

Archaeologists of the Migration Period continued to deal with fifth- and sixth-century Christian finds and monuments from Roman sites – for example, the Late Roman fortress of Aquincum,³⁰ the town of Scarbantia³¹ or the inner fortress of Keszthely-Fenekpuszta, together with their surroundings³² – raising several challenging questions of continuity, mobility, migrations, and interpretations of ethnicity. Concerning the recent (or reiterated) chronological, contextual and religious historical interpretations of Christian artefacts from the fifth to the eighth century from the Carpathian Basin,³³ the contributors tried to make the same attempts to reconstruct or refuse a kind of religious syncretism (!?)³⁴, personal beliefs, ethnic/cultural identity, mobility or special cultural contacts with the Eastern Mediterranean, based on the funerary context of the de-

²⁵ Tóth E. 2011b, 188-200.

²⁶ Tóth E. 2013b

²⁷ Tóth E. 2014

²⁸ Tóth E. 2015, especially 337-340.

²⁹ Szabadváry 2016a

³⁰ Zsidi 2011; Vida 2013; Tóth 2013a, 48.

³¹ Tomka 2015, 600, 612.

³² Heinrich-Tamáška 2011a; Heinrich-Tamáška 2011b (in German: Heinrich-Tamáška 2010); Heinrich-Tamáška 2012; Heinrich-Tamáška 2015, 45-58; Heinrich-Tamáška 2016; Heinrich-Tamáška – Müller – Straub 2012, 49-58; Müller 2010; Müller 2014, 157-173; Vida 2011, 413-418.

³³ See, for example, Bollók 2014; Bollók 2016; Curta 2011, 305-313; Daim-Bühler 2012, 208-217; Heinrich-Tamáška – Straub 2015, 636-638; Perémi 2012, especially 470-471; Prohászka 2012, 49-51; Vida 2016, 87-88.

³⁴ For the methodological questions of the use of this term/concept and other terms/concepts discussed in recent Early Christian studies, see Nagy 2016d (this manuscript in German for the conference titled *Grenzübergänge*, held in Ruma on 6 November 2015, will be published in the same conference volume).

ceased with one or two Christian artefacts (necklaces, pectoral crosses, apotropaic (?) amulets, disc brooches, and agraffes).

These methodological tendencies are also present in the most recent summary of Hungarian research on Early Christianity in the Carpathian Basin: in the new catalogue of the two exhibitions in Szombathely and Pannonhalma on the occasion of the supposed year of birth of St. Martin, bishop of Tours.³⁵ The catalogue of the St. Martin exhibition, comprising some unpublished material (for example, lead seals with Christian symbols and Biblical scenes from the Hungarian National Museum³⁶) and coloured photographs of good quality, is a really successful synthesis of the investigated time-span of the development of Early Christian archaeological research in Hungary between 2010-2016. The next step on this way must be the monograph *Frühes Christentum in Ungarn* to be published by the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

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³⁵ Kat. St. Martin 2016, with the archaeological contributions of Ádám Bollók, Orsolya Heinrich-Tamáska, Attila P. Kiss, Ágota Perémi, and Tivadar Vida. The archaeological evidence on Late Roman Pannonian Christianity is briefly summarized in the contributions of Endre Tóth, Zsolt Visy and Krisztina Hudák with Levente Nagy (the name of co-author Krisztina Hudák is mistakenly missing from the Hungarian edition of the catalogue).

³⁶ Kat. St. Martin 2016, 210-211, Kat. Nr. III.33a-u.

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Abbreviations

ActaArchHung – Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungariae
 BAW – Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften
 CPP – Castellum Pannonicum Pelsonense
 HPS – Hungarian Polis Studies
 MFMÉ Stud. Arch. – Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve, Studia Archaeologica
 MiChA – Mitteilungen zur Christlichen Archäologie
 StPatr – Studia Patristica

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