

EAST CENTRAL EUROPE:
BETWEEN THE BALTIC AND THE ADRIATIC

OSTMITTELEUROPA: ZWISCHEN OSTSEE UND ADRIA

VOLUME / BAND 2

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The III. Bálint Alajos International Conference (Móra Ferenc Museum, Szeged, Hungary, 01–03 December 2025)

The Third Bálint Alajos International Conference was held at the Móra Ferenc Museum in Szeged between 1 and 3 December 2025. The aim of the conference is to provide a forum for scholars working with museum collections to present their latest research findings. The organisers seek to enhance the international profile of the event and to strengthen professional networks, particularly with colleagues from Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Poland; accordingly, the working languages of the conference were Hungarian and English.

The programme clearly demonstrated the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of work in public collections in recent years, extending beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries. Nearly fifty speakers presented their research across twelve thematic sections, including history, ethnography, anthropology, art history, museum pedagogy, sociology, literary studies, numismatics, archaeology, andragogy, conservation, and aesthetics. This diversity reflects the recommendations of the International Council of Museums and its *Dictionary of Museology*, which emphasises the importance of interdisciplinary cooperation. Within the historical disciplines, medieval studies were particularly well represented, alongside the continued prominence of Migration Period archaeology.

Among the individual contributions, Csaba Farkas delivered a lecture on the Cumans of the queen, while Szilvia Sass discussed the characteristics of the so-called *pomesztye* system. Richárd Szántó examined the question of Avar survival in the Carpathian Basin on the basis of narrative sources. The present author contributed a paper on the local history of silk production, tracing its development from medieval antecedents to the distinctive features of nineteenth-century Szeged. Gergő Tóth explored key figures in sixteenth-century Anglo-Russian diplomacy.

A number of presentations addressed ongoing archaeological work connected to the construction of the BYD car factory. Lectures by Sztankovánszki and Pópitly highlighted significant findings from Avar-period graves uncovered at the site, including the interpretation of cutlery among the grave goods. Bede presented the results of excavations in Makó, complemented by a second lecture by Sztankovánszki. Tamás Szebenyi adopted a broader perspective in outlining new approaches to the study of Sarmatian–Roman relations.

Moving further back in time, Orsolya Gyurka introduced the audience to Bronze Age Szeged, while Simon and Király presented anthropological research on trepanation practices in the Carpathian Basin. The historical panels also covered later periods in considerable breadth. Zsolt Felletár discussed the early phases of national industrial development, focusing on so-called proto-factories. Other contributions included the multi-generational history of a lime business (Ferenc Bernátsky), the evolution of traditional female social roles (Dorina Dobos), the colonial army of King Leopold II of Belgium (Adrián Joshua Janssens), and the Congregation of Mary in Szeged (Csaba Zoltán Vágfalvi). Kitti Radnai and Hajnalka Forgách presented topics from library history, while Zsolt Giczi examined a lesser-known chapter in the history of Freemasonry. Tamara Szalkai analysed Hungarian press coverage of the First World War pilot Manfred von Richthofen. István Tóth discussed a distinctive category of artefact through his presentation on historic bowling tables in Szeged. Two further papers focused on the nearby town of Makó: Géza Forgó examined local healthcare between 1944 and 1950, while Ádám Zeitler analysed urban development plans.

Twentieth-century history also featured prominently. Ferenc Gábor Kiss spoke about the victims of the Second World War in Madocsa, László Gál addressed the early development of the Ópusztaszer National Heritage Park, and Gábor Vincze discussed gendarmes who changed allegiance. István Tóth Jr. examined the fate of Slovak historical figures imprisoned in Szeged State Prison. Márk Rácz analysed documents produced by the Marxism–Leninism sections of former student competitions.

Several contributions addressed questions of identity and cultural heritage. Luca Veronika Kovács explored the community identity of the Croatian minority, while Anna Indira Hajnács examined attempts to revive ancient steppe musical traditions. Lukáš Perný and Ladislav Skrak presented on the Slovak reception of Victor Vasarely and the potential for related exhi-

bitions. Anita Hegedűs highlighted research into the museum-going habits of university students.

A substantial number of papers focused on material culture and museum practice. Tiszai and Glässerné discussed restoration techniques for modern icon paintings, while Anikó Veronika Vukov analysed the history of soap-making and its representation in museum collections. Zoltán Vona examined the burial customs of a particular social group known as the “vákáncsosok”. Other contributions addressed significant objects associated with life-cycle rituals, such as wedding shawls from Csorna. Kata Hári introduced twentieth-century abstract art, while Erika Nikoletta Nagy and Bálint Veretics discussed contemporary art experience and gender-neutral fashion, respectively.

Questions concerning the future of museums and their social responsibility also attracted considerable attention. Liliána Benyó-Vattay examined educational opportunities within public collections, while Anikó Kovács-Krassói presented her experiences at an open-air museum in Sweden. A further presentation explored the history of hirudotherapy in Hungary.

Cultural-historical perspectives were also well represented. Róbert Újszászi discussed the medal art of Ferenc Csúcs, while Gergely Takács explored research opportunities in documenting Szeged’s musical subcultures. László Mód examined the history and material legacy of the phylloxera epidemic on its 150th anniversary. András Imre-Horváth presented approaches to the museum curation of contemporary manuscripts. Additional topics included the election of cantors (Orsolya Gyöngyössi), the legacy of Ferenc Móra (Tamás Bíró Balogh), the medical career of Géza Csáth (Katalin Szabó), and Hungarian representations of the Dutch East Indies in the twentieth century (Dávid Király).

The opening and closing remarks of the conference emphasised the importance of historical sources and the responsibility of museum professionals. While modern technological developments, including artificial intelligence, provide valuable tools, they may also create an illusion of certainty. It is therefore the responsibility of museum specialists to provide reliable, source-based knowledge capable of guiding audiences in an age of rapidly expanding digital access.

Overall, the conference, named after the former director of the Szeged museum, Bálint Alajos, once again proved to be a successful and well-attended forum for research in the field of public collections.

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Aims and Scope

The East Central Europe: Between the Baltic and the Adriatic (ECE) is a peer-reviewed academic journal published by the Institute of History at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Debrecen. As its title suggests, the journal focuses on the history of Central Europe, covering the region between the Baltic and Adriatic Seas. This region was for centuries a crossroads and meeting point where diverse ethnic groups, religions, traditions, and political entities interacted in unique ways. In addition to studies directly examining the history of the region, the editors welcome methodologically and/or theoretically relevant contributions for the analysis of historical processes.

The journal seeks to create an interdisciplinary platform to facilitate dialogue and disseminate new research on the region, whose findings are often limited in international scholarship due to language barriers and the influence of national narratives. To support this goal, ECE is an open-access journal, published at least once annually, available in both print and online formats.

Zielsetzung

Ostmitteleuropa: Zwischen Ostsee und Adria (ECE) ist eine begutachtete wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift, die vom Historischen Institut der Philosophischen Fakultät der Universität Debrecen herausgegeben wird. Wie der Titel schon andeutet, konzentriert sich die Zeitschrift auf die Geschichte Mitteleuropas, insbesondere auf das Gebiet zwischen Ostsee und Adria. Diese Region war über Jahrhunderte ein Schnittpunkt und Begegnungsraum, in dem unterschiedliche ethnische Gruppen, Religionen, Traditionen und politische Einheiten auf einzigartige Weise interagierten. Neben Studien, die Geschichte der Region direkt untersuchen, erwarten die Herausgeber methodisch und/oder theoretisch relevante Beiträge zur Analyse historischer Prozesse.

Die Zeitschrift möchte eine interdisziplinäre Plattform schaffen, um den Dialog zu fördern und neue Forschungsergebnisse über die Region zu verbreiten, deren Ergebnisse aufgrund von Sprachbarrieren und der Prägung durch nationale Narrative international nur begrenzt bekannt sind. Zur Unterstützung dieses Ziels ist ECE eine Open-Access-Zeitschrift, die mindestens einmal jährlich erscheint und sowohl in gedruckter als auch in digitaler Form verfügbar ist.

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