

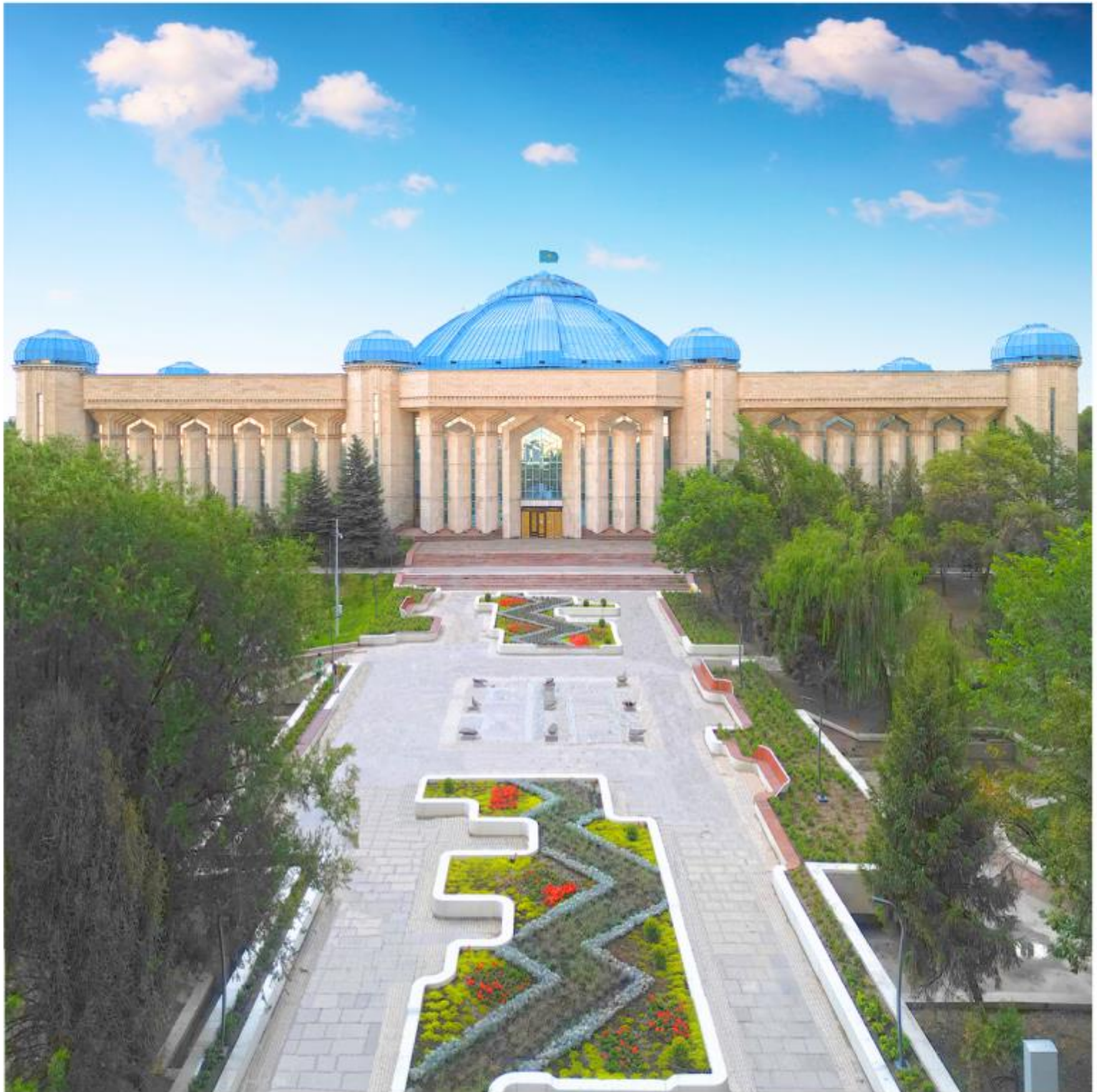
ISSN: 2958-5376  
ISSN-L: 2958-5376

# MUSEUM.KZ



ҒЫЛЫМИ-ПРАКТИКАЛЫҚ ЖУРНАЛ · НАУЧНО-ПРАКТИЧЕСКИЙ ЖУРНАЛ · SCIENTIFIC AND PRACTICAL JOURNAL

4(8)2024



UDC 07.00.03.

## THE CHALICE AND PATEN OF TOMAJMONOSTORA: SECRETS OF A MEDIEVAL ABBEY IN HUNGARY

*Gábor Virágos*  
Budapest (Hungary)

**Abstract.** In summer 2024, archaeologists discovered a pristine silver chalice and paten in a disturbed grave near the sanctuary of a medieval Benedictine abbey church in Tomajmonostora, Hungary. The finds, dated to the 1230s based on archaeological context and stylistic features, represent an exceptional example of medieval Hungarian ecclesiastical art and liturgical practice. The 97% pure silver chalice combines early Romanesque and Gothic styles, while the 6cm diameter paten bears a rare Hand of God motif. The location is significant due to its connection with both early Pecheneg clans and later Cuman settlements, suggesting the set's possible role in Christian missionary work. The site's history traces back to the 11th century, with an early rotunda later replaced by a three-nave abbey church. This discovery provides unprecedented insights into medieval Hungarian goldsmithing, religious practices, and the complex relationships between local nobility, church authorities, and nomadic peoples in the region.

**Materials and methods of research.** This study is about the latest sensational silver ecclesiastical finds from a medieval abbey church in Hungary. It starts with giving a brief description about the fundamental geographical and historical environment followed by the first summary of the excavation context.

These are all needed to understand the dating and the significance of the objects. The unique items have no contemporary parallels, but the typology of such objects is known from publications and the closest parallel are also referred to in the text. The study used general scientific methods - observation, landscape analysis.

**Key words:** medieval Benedictine abbey, pristine silver chalice, paten, abbey church, ecclesiastical figure, Cuman settlements, early Pecheneg clans, Hungarian church history

**For citation:** Gábor Virágos. The chalice and paten of Tomajmonostora: secrets of a medieval abbey in Hungary // MUSEUM.KZ. 2024. №4 (8), pp. 21-28. DOI 10.59103/muzkz.2024.08.03

## ТОМАЙМОНОШТОРДЫҢ ТОСТАҒАНЫ МЕН ПАТЕНІ: ВЕНГРИЯНЫҢ ОРТАҒАСЫРЛЫҚ АББАТТЫҚТЫҒЫНЫҢ ҚҰПИЯСЫ

*Габор Вирагош*  
Будапешт (Венгрия)

**Андатпа.** 2024 жылдың жазында археологтар Томаймоностордағы (Венгрия) ортағасырлық Бенедиктин аббаттық шіркеуінің жанындағы қабірден таза күміс тостаған (чаша) мен дискіні тапты. Табылған заттар археологиялық контекстке және стилистикалық ерекшеліктерге негізінде 1230 жылдарға жатқазылды, олар ортағасырлық венгр шіркеуінің өнері мен литургиялық тәжірибесінің ерекше үлгісі болып табылады.

Қабірден табылған 97 % таза күмістен жасалған тостаған ерте романдық және готикалық стильдерді біріктіреді және сирек мотив диаметрі 6 см дискіде бейнеленген «Hand of God» (Құдайдың қолы). Бұл жер ерте печенег тайпаларыменде, кейінгі көшпелі халықтардың қоныстарымен де байланысты болғандықтан маңызды және христиандық миссионерлік қызметі кешенінің ықтималды рөлін болжайды. Аталмыш жердің тарихы XI-ші ғасырдан басталады: ертедегі дөңгелек ғимараттар кейінірек үш қабырғалы аббаттық шіркеумен ауыстырылды. Бұл жаңалық ортағасырлық венгр зергерлігі туралы бұрын-

сонды болмаған түсінік береді, діни әдет-ғұрыптар және жергілікті ақсүйектер, шіркеу басқармасы мен аймақтағы көшпелі халықтар арасындағы күрделі қарым-қатынастар жайынды.

**Зерттеу материалдары мен әдістері.** Зерттеу Венгриядағы ортағасырлық монастырлық шіркеуден алынған соңғы сенсациялық күміс шіркеу олжаларына бағытталған. Ол іргелі географиялық және тарихи ортаның қысқаша сипаттамасынан басталады, сонымен қатар, қазба контекстінің алғашқы қысқаша мазмұны беріледі. Мұның бәрі объектілердің мерзімі мен маңыздылығын түсіну үшін қажет.

Бірегей объектілердің қазіргі заманғы параллельдері жоқ, бірақ осындай объектілердің типологиясы біраз басылымдардан белгілі және мақалада мәтіндері жақын параллельдер де айтылған. Зерттеуде бақылау, ландшафты талдау сияқты жалпы ғылыми әдістер қолданылды.

**Тірек сөздер:** ортағасырлық Бенедикт аббаттығы, таза күміс тостаған, патен, монастырь шіркеуі, шіркеу басшысы, көшпелі халықтардың қоныстары, ерте печенег рулары, венгр шіркеуінің тарихы.

**Сілтеме жасау үшін:** Габор Вилагош. Томаймоноштордың тостағаны мен патені: Венгрияның ортағасырлық аббаттықтығының құпиясы // MUSEUM.KZ. 2024. №4 (8), 21-28 бб. DOI 10.59103/muzkz.2024.08.03

## **ЧАША И ПАТЕН ТОМАЙМОНОСТОРЫ: ТАЙНЫ СРЕДНЕВЕКОВОГО АББАТСТВА В ВЕНГРИИ**

*Габор Вилагош*  
Будапешт (Венгрия)

**Аннотация.** Летом 2024 года археологи обнаружили первозданную серебряную чашу и диск в могиле недалеко от святылища средневековой церкви бенедиктинского аббатства в Томаймоношторе, Венгрия. Находки, датированные 1230-ми годами на основе археологического контекста и стилистических особенностей, представляют собой исключительный образец средневекового венгерского церковного искусства и литургической практики. Так, чаша из чистого серебра 97% сочетает в себе ранний романский и готический стили, а на диске диаметром 6 см изображен редкий мотив «Hand of God» (Длань Господня). Это место имеет важное значение из-за его связи, как с ранними кланами печенегов, так и с более поздними половецкими поселениями, что позволяет предположить возможную роль комплекса в христианской миссионерской работе.

История этого места восходит к XI веку: раннюю ротонду позже заменили трехнефной церковью аббатства. Это открытие дает беспрецедентное представление о средневековом венгерском ювелирном деле, религиозных практиках и сложных отношениях между местной знатью, церковными властями и кочевыми народами в регионе.

**Материалы и методы исследования.** Исследование посвящено последним сенсационным серебряным церковным находкам из средневековой монастырской церкви в Венгрии. Он начинается с краткого описания фундаментальной географической и исторической среды, за которым следует первое резюме контекста раскопок. Все это необходимо для понимания датировки и значения объектов.

Уникальные предметы не имеют современных параллелей, но типология таких предметов известна из публикаций и наиболее близкие параллели также упоминаются в тексте. В исследовании использованы общенаучные методы – наблюдение, ландшафтный анализ.

**Ключевые слова:** средневековое бенедиктинское аббатство, первозданная серебряная чаша, патен, монастырская церковь, церковный деятель, половецкие поселения, ранние печенежские кланы, история венгерской церкви.

**Для цитирования:** Габор Вирагош. Чаша и патен Томаймоношторы: тайны средневекового аббатства в Венгрии // MUSEUM.KZ. 2024. №4 (8), с. 21-28. DOI 10.59103/muzkz.2024.08.03

### **Introduction: An Unexpected Discovery**

In the summer of 2024, experts stumbled upon a find near Tomajmonostora that has since captivated both the academic community and history enthusiasts alike. Amidst the ruins of a medieval Benedictine abbey, a pristine silver chalice and paten were unearthed from the grave of a former ecclesiastical leader. But why is this discovery so extraordinary, and what does it reveal about our past?

### **The Site: Where Layers of History Converge**

Tomajmonostora is a little village close to the Tisza River, more precisely, to the so-called Tisza-lake, which is an artificially created lake, being the result of the construction of the Kisköre hydropower plant. Its location within the central area of the Great Hungarian Plain is however significant, since the steppe-like geographical conditions were decisive for its population history (Fig. 1).

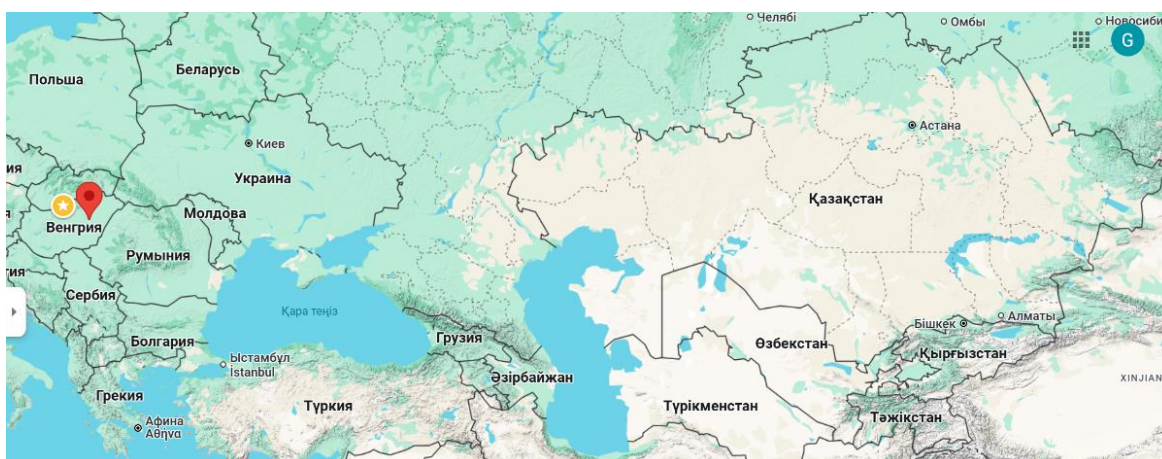


Figure 1. Location map of Tomajmonostora in Hungary showing its relation to the Steppe region. (Google Maps - Gabor Viragos)

Today, the name Tomajmonostora may not sound too familiar to the general public even in Hungary, yet it was once a significant settlement. Archaeological research indicates that the area has been inhabited since the 11<sup>th</sup> century the latest, evidenced by the remains of an early rotunda church and burials. While written sources first mention the settlement's monastery-derived name (monostor = monastery; Tomaj = the name of the owner of the place) in 1322, the recently uncovered artifacts suggest it was an important ecclesiastical centre long before that.<sup>1</sup>

Excavations also revealed that the early rotunda was later replaced by an impressive three-nave abbey church. The surrounding cemetery and fragments of richly decorated frescoes all testify to Tomajmonostora once being home to a thriving community (Fig.2).

<sup>1</sup> Pálóczi Horváth, forthcoming

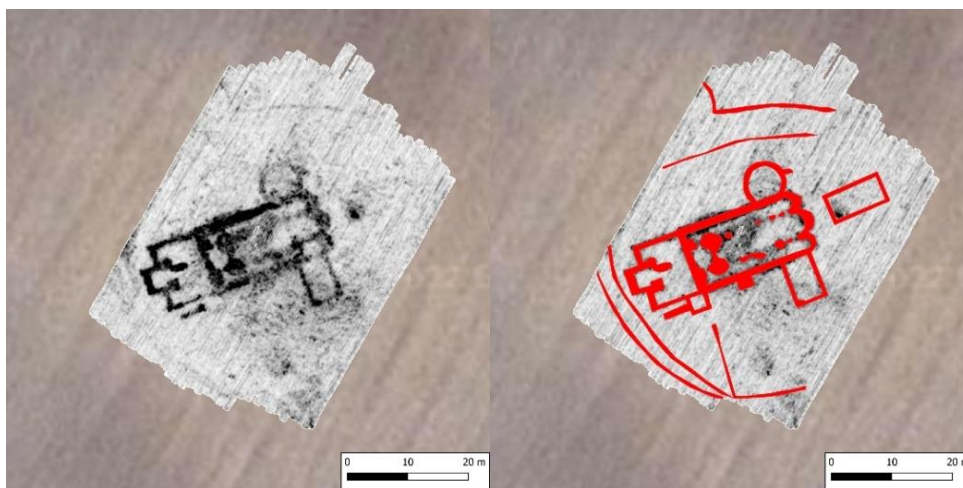


Figure 2. The geophysical survey result of the site and its interpretation. (Hungarian National Museum - Stibrányi Maté at al.)

### The Treasure: An Abbot's Final Journey

Undoubtedly, the most exhilarating moment of the excavation came when a silver chalice and paten emerged from a heavily disturbed grave. The burial's location – near the sanctuary – and the objects found within clearly indicated that archaeologists had discovered the final resting place of a high-ranking ecclesiastical figure, likely an abbot (Fig. 3-4).

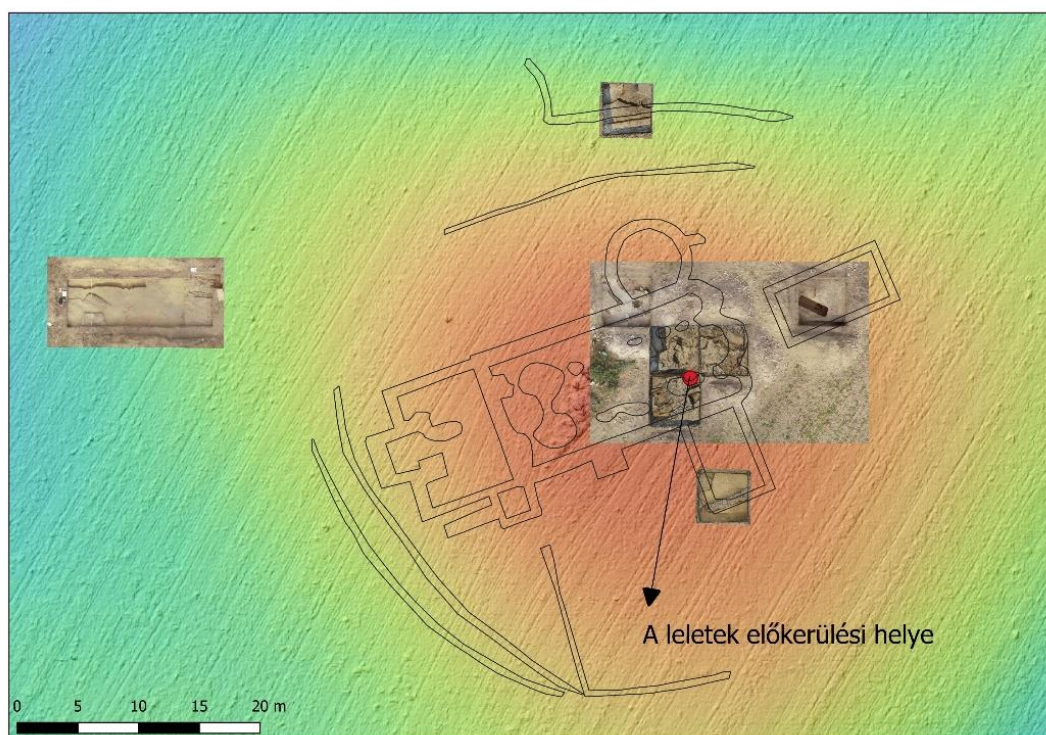


Figure 3. Site map/church floor plan based on a geophysical survey, with adding the photos of the excavation sections; the place where the treasure was found is marked. (Hungarian National Museum - Piros-Pozdora Máté, Bakos Gábor, Stibrányi Maté at al.)



Figure 4. On-site excavation photo of the finds with bones of the finger bones of the ever hands holding the set. (Photo by Gábor Virágos)

### The Chalice: A Confluence of Styles

The chalice is a true art historical curiosity. Its metallurgical analysis was done parallel to its restoration. Crafted from nearly 97% pure silver, it is exceptional in its own right. Nonetheless, its form invites us also on a veritable journey through time, bearing hallmarks of both early Romanesque and later Gothic styles. The conical, ribbed base and spherical node (knop) are characteristic of early chalices (down to the 8<sup>th</sup> century), while the upward-tapering, similarly ribbed cup heralds the newer style (available on visual sources even from the 15<sup>th</sup> century) (Fig. 5).



Figure 5. Photo of the chalice and patena after restoration. (Hungarian National Museum - György László)

### The Paten: A Divine Message

If the chalice is extraordinary, the paten is equally remarkable. This seemingly simple silver plate, merely 6 cm in diameter and fitting snugly into the cup, actually holds rare artistic significance. Its surface shows a punched depiction: the Hand of God (*dextera Dei*) extending from

stylized clouds, bestowing a blessing over a cross. While extremely rare on such early medieval Hungarian artifacts, this motif is profoundly meaningful. Its closest parallel is the paten found in the archbishop's tomb in Kalocsa, which recent studies date back to the time of King St. Stephen (997-1038), associating it with Archbishop Astrik, who supposedly brought the crown from the Pope (Fig. 6).<sup>1</sup>



Figure 6. Reconstruction of the original burial construction of the set as it was used like that during masses. (Hungarian National Museum – photo by Jaksity Iván)

### **The specificity of the location**

The Tomajmonostora assemblage is thus not merely a pair of objects or finds, but a symbol that forges a direct link to the earliest period of Hungarian Christianity. At the same time, the location of their provenance also recalls options for being connected with former Steppe people.

On the one hand, the name Tomaj is of Turkic origin, literally meaning 'taciturn' or 'sullen'. According to the tradition preserved by the chronicler Anonymus, the Tomaj clan descends from Tonuzaba, a Pecheneg leader who entered the country during the reign of the magyar (Hungarian) Prince Taksony and received a settlement area near the Abád-rév (along the Tisza River), from Taksony himself. Thus, Tomajmonostora was the central settlement of this Pecheneg-origin Tomaj clan during the Árpád-dynasty Era.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, this was the first settlement along the surrounding area of the Cumans, who moved into the Medieval Hungarian Kingdom in the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century, after ending the Mongol Invasion of the country. This nomadic pagan Steppe nation had turbulent connection with the Hungarians for centuries, but moving in resulted their very fast adaptation. While the lifestyle remained for a while, their cemeteries show almost no differences at all to the previous local ones in a generation. This also included conversion to Christianity, and the Benedictine monastery on the border territory was certainly one of the major starting points for such a conversion movement. But the story doesn't end there. Cuman settlements were known to exist near the site, and by the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, Cuman inhabitants were mentioned in Tomajmonostora. The set may have been related to a mission aimed at converting the local Cumans. This could explain the objects' small size and portability.

<sup>1</sup> Buzás, 2014

<sup>2</sup> Pálóczi Horváth, forthcoming

### **The Mystery: Dating and Historical Context**

Precisely dating these finds poses a real challenge for researchers. Based on stylistic features<sup>1</sup> and available parallels as well as on the written sources, the period between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries seems likely, with the archaeological context suggesting the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century as the most probable dating. This era is particularly fascinating in Hungarian history: the final decades before the Mongol invasion or the period of reconstruction following the great devastation. But how archaeology helps in dating? The finds could only survive the centuries with divine luck. The grave that accommodates them was mostly destroyed by later engravements, eliminating the upper parts of the body. Only one and a half leg and the finger bones survived, since the patena and the chalice were put in between the legs in the hands of the deceased. However, and this is the most decisive from a dating point of view, the rest, that is, the lower body ends were destroyed by the medieval church building works. The foundation ditch of the southern inner pillar row of the three-nave basilica church runs just a cm along the bones and the finds. Based on this, the builders of the church were not aware of the fact that a prestigious grave was located on the site when the construction works started. Since this church is supposed to be built still under the Árpád dynasty (i.e. before 1300), there was only one reason why the previous local population could disappear, the Mongol Invasion (1241-42). This was also the time of the first moving in of the Cuman tribes into the country. Therefore, the objects can be perhaps best dated to the 1230s.

#### **Why is this Discovery So Important?**

1. **Rarity:** Never before has such an intact, medieval holy mass/holy service set been uncovered from a modern, professional excavation in Hungary. Most similar objects are known from museums and other collections, often with uncertain provenance and without an archaeological context.

2. **Historical Information Source:** These finds help us understand the medieval history of a previously little-known region. They shed light on the area's significance, the relationship between local nobility and the church, and may even provide data on Cuman settlement and Christian missionary work.

3. **Art Historical Value:** The unique stylistic features of these objects offer new insights into medieval Hungarian goldsmithing and ecclesiastical art.

4. **Religious Historical Significance:** The holy mass/holy service set provides a glimpse into medieval liturgical practices and symbolism.

5. **Technological Information:** Material analyses of the objects furnish valuable data on contemporary metallurgy and the origin of raw materials.

#### **Conclusion: A Treasure Posing a Thousand Questions**

The Tomajmonostora find is not merely two beautiful objects, but a veritable time capsule that raises countless questions and opens numerous research avenues. How did this exceptionally high-quality set end up here? Who was the abbot in whose grave it was placed? What role did Tomajmonostora play in the ecclesiastical and secular life of this region in medieval Hungary?

As research can hopefully continue, each tiny detail could be another piece added to the grand historical mosaic. The Tomajmonostora grave find is not just a fragment of the past, but a bridge connecting the present to the mysterious world of the Middle Ages, reminding us that history doesn't just live in books, but lies hidden beneath our feet, waiting to be discovered.

### **REFERENCES**

*Buzás, Gergely.* A kalocsai érseksír azonosítása (Identification of the Kalocsa burial vault of the archbishop) // *Archaeologia - Altum Castrum Online*, Visegrád, Mátyás Király Múzeum, 2014

---

<sup>1</sup> Elbern, 1963



*Pálóczi Horváth, András.* CUMANIA MAIOR – A nagykunság történetének településrendje a X-XVII. században (The settlement history of the Great Cumania area in Hungary between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century) (forthcoming)

*Elbern, Victor H.* Der eucharistischen Kelch im Frühen Mittelalter, in: Zeitschrift für Deutschen Vereinschaft für Kunstwissenschaften (The Eucharistic Chalice in the Early Middle Ages // Journal of the German Association for Art Sciences), Berlin, Band XVII/Heft1-2, 1963

**Автор туралы мәліметтер:** Габор Вирагош – т.ғ.д., археолог. Будапешт, Венгрия.  
E-mail: gabor.viragos1@gmail.com

**Сведения об авторе:** Габор Вирагош – д.и.н., археолог. Будапешт, Венгрия. E-mail: gabor.viragos1@gmail.com

**Information about the author:** Dr. Gábor Virágos – archaeologist. Budapest, Hungary.  
E-mail: gabor.viragos1@gmail.com

*Редакцияға түсті / Поступила в редакцию / Entered the editorial office: 06.11.2024.*

*Рецензенттер мақұлдаған / Одобрено рецензентами / Approved by reviewers: 22.11.2024.*

*Жариялауға қабылданды / Принята к публикации / Accepted for publication: 29.11.2024.*