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## ON THE BORDER OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ETHNOGRAPHY: FIRE STRIKERS IN HUNGARY

*Balázs Tóth*

Hungarian National Museum, Institute of Hungarian Archaeology (Hungarian)

**Abstract:** The aim of my study is to present the types of fire-strikers that were once used in the Hungary and Carpathian Basins, their general forms and dating problems. Most of the types were in continuous use from the Middle Ages to the beginning of the 20th century, but Hungarian archaeology and ethnography know little about each other's results in this case, moreover, archaeological literature is not uniformised in terminology either. It is worth taking the names of object types and their parts from common ethnographic practice and applying them to the material recovered from excavations. The typology follows a fairly simple and logical structure, but the chronology is complicated by the lack of material communication. In connection with Biedermeier animal-shaped chirpers, earlier research has suggested medieval or even Roman dating, but this is clearly refuted by the research. In addition to their functionality, these objects are sometimes very ornate, even with scratched the year of production. In addition to everyday life in Hungary, fire-strikers also play a significant role in folk tradition, as an accessory to wedding ceremonies, folk medicine (analogical magic) or religiosity of certain groups. Although we know the European parallels relatively well, the results of the Asian research did not have a great impact on the examination of this topic in Hungary, so our further goal is to get acquainted with the material here.

**Materials and methods of research.** The research materials were chairs from the archaeological and ethnographic collections of museums in Hungary.

The research methodology is based on scientific approaches and principles; the following were applied: logical, systematic, comprehensive, comparative historical and archaeological-ethnographic approaches using interdisciplinary research.

The work is based on an integrated approach to the object of study. During the study, a typological and chronological analysis of artifacts was carried out. Using the comparative typological method, an analysis of archaeological and ethnographic types of armchairs was carried out, and common and distinctive features were identified. For a systematic description of the artifacts, a formal typological method of studying the iconography of forms and images, supplemented by stylistic analysis, was used. To identify historical, archaeological and ethnographic connections, the historical-comparative method was used. Chronological attribution of artifacts was carried out using relative and absolute dating.

**Key words:** fire-strikers, archaeology, ethnography, Hungary, Carpathian Basin.

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## АРХЕОЛОГИЯ МЕН ЭТНОГРАФИЯНЫҢ ШЕКАРАСЫНДА: ВЕНГРИЯДАҒЫ КРЕСАЛО

*Балаж Том*

Венгрия ұлттық музейі, Венгрия археология институты (Венгрия)

**Аңдатпа:** зерттеудің мақсаты – бір кездері Венгрия мен Карпат бассейнінде қолданылған кресало түрлерін, олардың жалпы пішіндерін және уақыттарын анықтау мәселелерін қарастыру. Кресалоньң көптеген түрлері орта ғасырлардан ХХ ғасырдың басына дейін тұрақты қолданыста болды, бірақ венгр археологиясы мен этнографиясы бұл жағдайда бір-бірінің нәтижелері туралы аз біледі, сонымен қатар археологиялық әдебиеттер де терминологияда біріктірілмеген.

Зат түрлерінің және олардың бөліктерінің атауларын жалпы қабылданған этнографиялық тәжірибеден алып, қазба кезінде алынған материалға қолдану керек. Типология өте қарапайым және логикалық құрылымға ие, бірақ хронология материалдық байланыстың жоқтығымен қиындатады. Бидермейер стиліндегі кресалоға келетін болсақ, бұрынғы зерттеулер ортағасырлық немесе тіпті римдік дәуірді болжаған, бірақ бұл зерттеулермен жоққа шығарылды. Функционалдылығынан басқа, бұл заттар кейде өте айқындалған, тіпті шығарылған жылы жазылған сызығы бар. Венгриядағы күнделікті өмірден басқа, кресалолар халықтың дәстүрінде де үйлену тойларына, халықтық медицинаға (соған ұқсас сиқыр) немесе белгілі бір топтардың діндарлығына арналған аксессуар ретінде маңызды рөл атқарады. Еуропалық параллельдерді салыстырмалы түрде жақсы білетінімізге қарамастан, азиялық зерттеудің нәтижелері Венгриядағы тақырыпты зерттеуге көп әсер еткен жоқ, сондықтан біздің келесі мақсатымыз – Қазақстандағы баламалы материалдармен танысу.

**Материал мен зерттеу әдістері.** Зерттеу материалдары Венгрия музейлерінің археологиялық және этнографиялық коллекцияларынан алынған кресало болды. Зерттеу әдістемесі келесі ғылыми тәсілдер мен принциптерге негізделген: қисынды, жүйелі, кешенді, салыстырмалы-тарихи және пәнаралық зерттеулерді пайдалана отырып археологиялық-этнографиялық тәсіл. Жұмыс зерттеу объектісіне кешенді көзқарасқа сүйенеді. Зерттеу барысында артефактілерге типологиялық және хронологиялық талдау жүргізілді. Салыстырмалы-типологиялық әдіс көмегімен креслоның археологиялық және этнографиялық түрлеріне талдау жүргізіліп, ортақ және ерекше белгілер анықталды. Артефактілерді жүйелі сипаттау үшін стилистикалық талдаумен толықтырылған пішіндер мен бейнелердің иконографиясын зерттеудің формальды-типологиялық әдісі қолданылады. Тарихи-археологиялық және этнографиялық байланыстарды анықтау үшін тарихи-салыстырмалы әдіс қолданылды. Артефактілерді хронологиялық атрибуциясы салыстырмалы және абсолютті даталау арқылы жүзеге асырылды.

**Тірек сөздер:** кресало, археология, этнография, Венгрия, Карпат ойпаты.

**Сілтеме жасау үшін:** *Балаж Том.* Археология мен этнографияның шекарасында: Венгриядағы кресало//MUSEUM.KZ. 2023. No4 (4). 16-23 бб. DOI 10.59103/muzkz.2023.04.02

## НА ГРАНИЦЕ АРХЕОЛОГИИ И ЭТНОГРАФИИ: КРЕСАЛО В ВЕНГРИИ

*Балаж Том*

Венгерский национальный музей, Институт венгерской археологии (Венгрия)

**Аннотация:** Целью исследования стало представление типов кресал, которые когда-то использовались в Венгрии и Карпатском бассейне, а также показ их форм и проблем датировки. Большинство типов кресал постоянно использовались со средневековья до начала XX века, но венгерская археология и этнография в этом случае мало знают о результатах друг друга, более того, археологическая литература также не унифицирована в терминологии. Названия типов предметов и их частей стоит взять из общепринятой этнографической практики и применить к материалу, полученному при раскопках. Типология имеет довольно простую и логичную структуру, но хронология осложняется отсутствием материальной связи. Что касается кресала в стиле бидермейер, более ранние исследования предполагали средневековую или даже римскую датировку, но это явно опровергается исследованиями. В дополнение к своей функциональности, эти предметы иногда очень богато украшены, даже с нацарапанным годом выпуска. Помимо повседневной жизни в Венгрии, кресало также играют значительную роль в народной традиции, как аксессуар свадебных церемоний, народной медицины (аналогичная магия) или религиозности определенных групп. Хотя мы относительно хорошо знаем европейские

параллели, результаты азиатского исследования не оказали большого влияния на изучение этой темы в Венгрии, поэтому наша дальнейшая цель – ознакомиться с аналогичными материалами из Казахстана.

**Материалы и методы исследования.** Материалами исследования послужили кресала из археологических и этнографических коллекций музеев Венгрии.

Методика исследования базируется на научных подходах и принципах, были применены: логический, системный, комплексный, сравнительно-исторический и археолого-этнографический подход с использованием междисциплинарных исследований.

Работа опирается на комплексный подход к объекту изучения. В ходе исследования проведены типологический и хронологический анализ артефактов. С помощью сравнительно-типологического метода проведен анализ археологических и этнографических видов кресала, выявлены общие и отличительные черты. Для систематического описания же артефактов применен формально-типологический метод исследования иконографии форм и изображений, дополненный стилистическим анализом. Для выявления историко-археологических и этнографических связей использовался историко-сравнительный метод. Хронологическая атрибуция артефактов осуществлялась с помощью относительной и абсолютной датировки.

**Ключевые слова:** кресало, археология, этнография, Венгрия, Карпатский бассейн.

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### **Introduction, history of research**

In recent years, thanks to volunteer metal detectorists cooperating with Hungarian institutions, an increasing amount of fire strikers have entered the archaeological collections of museums. Since the archaeological summary analysis of this type of object has not yet been carried out, there was a need to develop an accurate typology and chronology – this is essential because the archaeological literature does not appear to be uniform even in the names of the different types.

However, ethnographic research has done serious work in this field since the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, moreover, a significant part of the types remained in use until the beginning of the 20th century. Therefore, close cooperation between the two disciplines is indispensable. The Hungarian environment defines the research frontier of ethnography and archaeology in 1711. Although this date does not represent a sharp dividing line in material culture, researchers often do not know each other's results.

From the Migration Period (especially the 8th and 9th century A.D.) and Hungarian conquest (10th century A.D.), we know a large number of fire strikers from closed finds, especially graves. This is rare, though not unprecedented, in the Middle Ages and early modern periods (11-17th century A.D.), and these objects are common in the stratified materials of Central European castles, monasteries and settlements, although relatively small amounts of complete material have been published so far compared to the number of excavations. Fire strikers were rarely included in the details and research reports, as they do not belong to the spectacular finds of great interest. International research has identified two major catalogues: a British exhibition catalogue edited by Miller Christy [Christy, 1926], and a volume by Italian authors Vittorio Cacciandra and Alessandro Cesati [Cacciandra – Cesati, 1996].

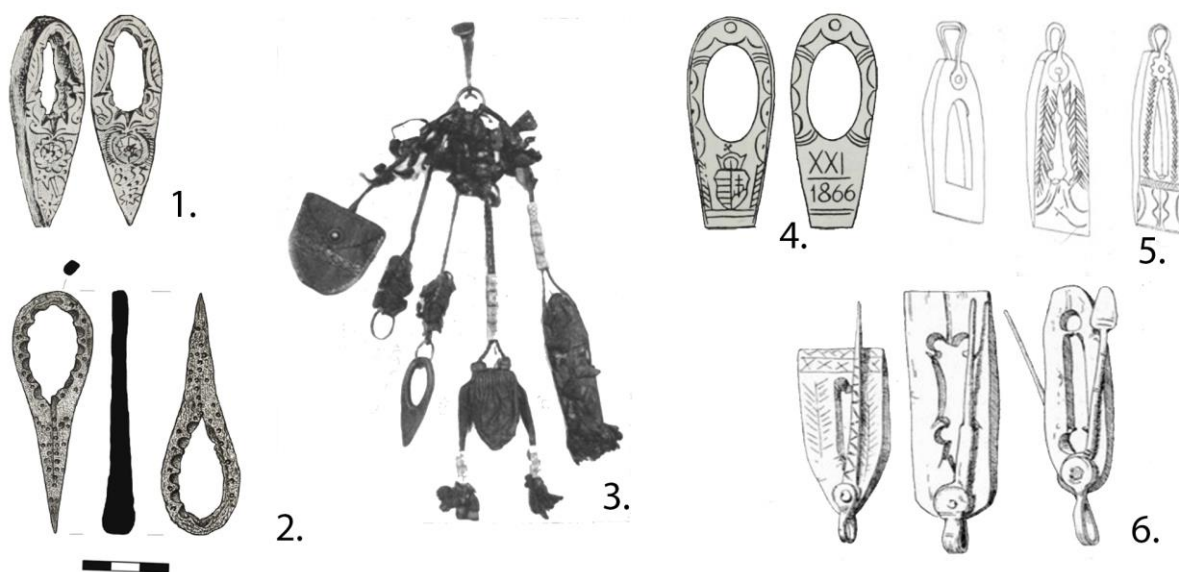
In Hungarian ethnography, interest in the type of subject started already at the end of the 19th century, and until the 1950s a large number of books and studies dealt with them [e.g. Herman, 1898: 62-71; Timkó, 1906; Kiss, 1910; Orosz, 1911; Viski, 1932; Lükő, 1938; H. Fekete, 1958], however, in recent decades the type of subject has moved out of the focus of ethnographic research. In many cases, fire strikers got into ethnographic collections from shepherds. They wore it on their clothes, hung on belts, accompanied by objects that differed from region to region. These included, for example, knives and tobacco bags [Herman, 1898; Timkó, 1906]. The detailed research history, together with a large bibliography, was summarized in detail in a study published

recently [Tóth, 2021]. In one of the rooms of the new permanent exhibition of the Hungarian Museum of Ethnography, nearly 400 fire-steels are exhibited, hopefully the processing of this collection will take place soon.

**Typical forms of fire chirps in Hungary.** In connection with the classification of types, the classification based on the collection of ethnographer Lajos Kiss wrote about the collection from Hódmezővásárhely (Southeast Hungary) can be used best. Depending on how many striking surfaces, or "soles", the device has a distinction between single- and two-soled steels [Kiss, 1910: 64]. Within this, subgroups should be established on the basis of formal features, based on whether the object is regular or irregular, i.e. whether they are symmetrical in the direction of one or more lines.

1. Two-soled types

Fig. 1, 1-3. The so-called "donkey-stinging" type



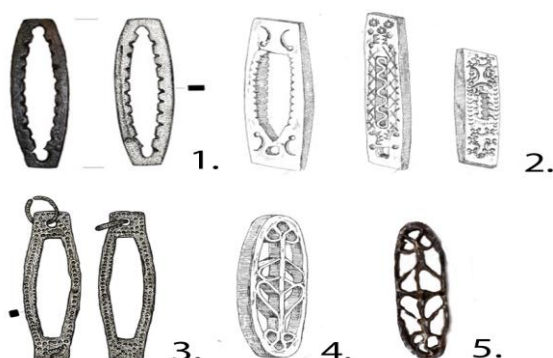
In Lajos Kiss's system, the so-called "donkey-stinging" fire strikers belong to the group of pointed, regular, two-soled devices. Within this they have well-defined characteristics. Their characteristic feature is curved pliers and an opening in the shape that more or less follows the shape of the object. The thickness of the material is generally the same throughout the length of the object, but there are also specimens that thicken slightly towards the tip [Kiss, 1910; Timkó, 1906]. This type appears many times in materials from archaeological excavations, it can be dated from the second half of the 15th century at the latest [Budaj – Pírek 2017, 186, 190; Méri 1954, 147; Kovács 2002, 132; Miklós 1991, 104]. In ethnographic material from the 18th century to the beginning of the 20th century (during the years of the First World War, older herds and herders often still used fire steels instead of igniting matches) can be traced unchanged, in many cases decorated [Herman, 1898: 62-71; Timkó, 1906: 14-22]. It can therefore be said that this type has been in continuous use for four centuries, so its exact formal date is practically impossible – this is only possible if it is found from an object or layer that can be dated well at the excavation. In connection with the origin of the name, there is an interesting document from 1762 in the Kiskunhalas City Council (South Hungary), according to which a shepherd's burdock was accused by his owners of entering the settlement on a donkey for bread, and the animal pressed it against a hedge in such a way that his clothes seceded, so he wounded the animal with his fire steel [Bellon, 2001: 154].

Non-pointed two-soled, so-called "ducknose" type (Fig. 1, 4-6.)

According to Lajos Kiss's classification, these chirps "can be blunt at one end, blunt at both ends, or round. They are convex in the middle, valleyed on one or both sides, with holes at the end

*or in the middle*" [Kiss, 1910: 66]. It is clear from the pictures he provided of the type that specimens without openings may also belong to this group. In ethnographic collections we can find several ornate, very beautifully executed objects, in several cases engraved depictions of coats of arms, and on one occasion with the year 1866. In the course of collecting in the last century, some pieces were placed in museums that were combined with tools used for smoking pipes [Timkó, 1906: 23-24; Kiss, 1910: 65-66; Lükő, 1938: 111]. No such object has ever been found in archaeological excavations, it was demonstrably used in the 19th and 20th centuries. However, it is possible that this type was used before the beginning of the 18th century.

Rectangular chirps (Fig. 2, 1-3.)



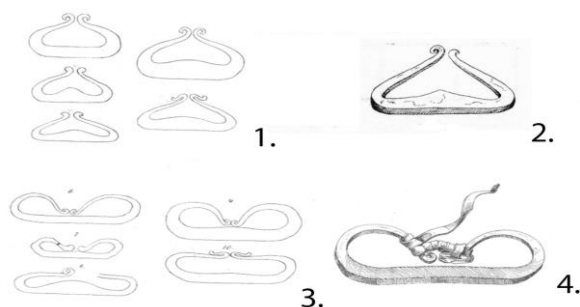
The soles of fire strikers of this type are straight or slightly curved. In all cases, the two bases perpendicular to the soles are straight, parallel to each other. They are symmetrical in both longitudinal and transverse axis, with the exception of cases where one of the bases has been pierced to accommodate the hanging ring. The aperture runs along the entire length of the object and is symmetrical along both axes. This form was widely used in the Middle Ages: it can be dated from the turning of 10th and 11th centuries and was used continuously, even during the years of World War I [Demo, 2009: 106; Richter, 1982; Holl, 2000: 30; Miklós, 1991: 104; Timkó, 1906: 30; Kiss, 1910: 66], making it one of the longest used fire steel forms. Pieces from ethnographic collections are decorated in many cases.

Oval fire chirps (Fig. 2, 4-5.)

These chirps have an oval shape, their inner part is openwork and decorated with ribbon-like iron inserts. In any case, this insert is run with copper. Similar but unloaded chirps were also used in Finland [Timkó, 1906: 30-31]. In Hungarian collections there are only pieces of ethnographic age, but it is not excluded that they were used earlier: they have been known from Austria and Italy since the 16th century [Cacciandra – Cesati, 1996: 114].

2. Single-soled types

Lute-shaped type (Fig. 3, 1-2.)



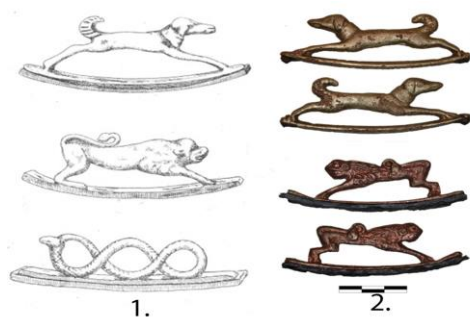
The lute-shaped form is a very common one: it is known in large numbers during the Migration Period (especially from the 8-9th centuries), in many cases from graves from the

Hungarian Conquest Period (about these the *Volumes of the series of grave finds from the Hungarian Conquest Period and early Árpáadian age*). From a layer or closed collection of finds dating from the period of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age, I know of one published piece, about the Peter's Monastery of the Árpáadian age (11-13th centuries) [Rosta, 2014: 220]. In the 19th and 20th centuries, it appears again from ethnographic collections, practically unchanged [Timkó, 1906: 19]. We do not have a dated specimen from the Árpád period to the 19th century, so for the time being we can only assume continuous use – if this is confirmed, we can probably talk about the type of fire steel that has been used continuously for the longest time.

Type with pliers folded towards the base (Fig. 3, 3-4.)

In these cases, the two gripping stems bend back strongly towards the outside of the base, in many cases asymmetrically. The type has certainly existed since the 12th century and can be traced with well-dated finds to the first decades of the 20th century all over Central Europe [Lovag, 2014: 145; Chvojka – Menšík, 2009: 141; Tóth, 2021]. This form is also known from pictorial representations from the Middle Ages and the early modern period, although we have few such sources on the type of object.

Animal-shaped fire steels (Fig. 4, 1-2.)



These objects are among the most spectacular: the animal figures are made of copper alloy by casting, their front and hind limbs are connected by a convex sole. On the outer sides of the legs, the sole was pierced in one place at a time, and an iron plate bent according to the arch was inserted here. Ethnographic research at the beginning of the last century correctly recognized that these were made abroad, largely on the basis of one sample per species. Daniel Modl pointed out in a recent study that these animal-shaped chirps are masterpieces of applied art made during the Biedermeier period, which were widespread in the Habsburg countries in the first decades of the 19th century. The most common forms are dogs and lions, but horse, deer, goat, snake, bird and rabbit forms also occur. He found that these were erroneously dated to Roman times for a long time [Modl, 2018] – we can add that there are also (as yet unpublished) opinions in Hungary that these are medieval objects. The increasingly regular metal-detecting researches in Hungary brings such objects to the surface from time to time, so it is becoming increasingly clear that they were not particularly rare in the era.

#### **Folk customs related to fire strikers in the Hungarian folk tradition**

In the 19th and 20th centuries, several folk customs were collected in connection with our topic. Among the South Slavic population living near Mohács (South Hungary), it was a tradition to put a fire steel in the bride's shoes during the wedding to avoid spoilage [Sarosác, 1968: 116]. In Hont county (North Hungary), on the morning of St. Ivan's Day, children walked around the village and set fire to the houses with steel, thereby saving the house from fire and sowing from drought [Solymossy, 1933: 107]. In the vicinity of Makó (South Hungary) St. Anthony's fire, what is the ancient name of St. John's wort, was cured by grating it with steel and flint; In Apátfalva (South Hungary), in case of the same disease, three people named Anthony had to strike fire on the skin with steel and flint and prayed to [Grynaeus, 2008: 171; Szigeti, 1986: 204]. This is a special form of analogous magic that survived until the 20th century.

## Summary

As you can see, most of the types of fire strikers found in Hungary were in use for a very long time (from the Middle Ages to the beginning of the 20th century), and sometimes the beginnings of production are uncertain. Therefore, it is very important to accurately record the conditions and collection data, since the fire steels cannot be dated on the basis of formal features alone. It is also important to continuously publish excavation materials, thereby increasing the amount of data. In addition, the results of archaeological and ethnographic research complement each other, making the picture more complete.

Beside the mapping European material, we also consider it important to get to know Asian collections, as we expect many points of contact to emerge from here, both in terms of object types and folklore. Few Asian fire strikers have been introduced in Hungarian-language literature at the beginning of the last century, and all of them are objects of Chinese origin or made under Chinese influence, so there is still significant work ahead of us.

Original locations of images not from own publications:

Fig. 1, 1.: Lükő, 1938: 112.

Fig. 1, 3.: Timkó, 1906: 12.

Fig. 1, 4.: Lükő, 1938: 111.

Fig. 1, 5.: Timkó, 1906: 27.

Fig. 2, 2.: Timkó, 1906: 30.

Fig. 2, 4.: Timkó, 1906: 30.

Fig. 3, 1: Timkó, 1906: 19.

Fig. 3, 2.: Timkó, 1909: 29.

Fig. 3, 3: Timkó, 1906: 19.

Fig. 3, 4.: Timkó, 1906: 15.

Fig. 4, 1.: Timkó, 1906: 29.

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**Автор туралы мәлімет:** Balazs Toth – археолог, Венгрия Ұлттық музейі, Венгрия археология институты (1113 Будапешт, Дарочзы у. 3, Будапешт, Венгрия). E-mail: toth.balazs.regesz@gmail.com

**Сведения об авторе:** Балаж Тот – археолог, Венгерский национальный музей, Институт венгерской археологии (1113 Будапешт, Дароци у. 3, Будапешт, Венгрия). E-mail: toth.balazs.regesz@gmail.com

**Information about the author:** Balázs Tóth – archaeologist, Hungarian National Museum, Institute of Hungarian Archaeology (1113 Budapest, Daróczi u. 3, Budapest, Hungary). E-mail: toth.balazs.regesz@gmail.com