THOUSANDS AND THOUSANDS OF SIGNS

Caucasian Sources of our Prehistory
Exhibition of Hungarian-type Finds from the Conquest Period from South Russia
In memoriam of Béla Pósta archaeologist

HUNGARIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM

February 17, 2020 – April 26, 2020
Dear Visitor,

Who are the Hungarian people, where did they come from and where did their ancestors live? Academics and people interested in the ancient nation of Magyars have tried to find the answers to these questions for centuries.

Our exhibition primarily relies on archaeology to provide the answers. With authentic finds and documents from South-Russian, predominantly North Caucasian sites that are of key importance from the viewpoint of the latest ethnographic and genetic results.

A short cartoon film revives the plot of the origin myth of Hungarians, The Legend of the Kolozsvár University, Department of Archaeology.

The exhibition also commemorates the Hungarian National Museum (1885–1889), while carrying out excavations for the Hungarian Conquest period Collection.

Béla Pósta's academic activity

Most of the specific national elements of our archaeological relics, even from the earliest times cannot be explained and interpreted without a thorough knowledge of the relics from the Oriental world. (Béla Pósta, 1915)

While carrying out excavations for the Hungarian Museum (1889–1890), Béla Pósta dealt with nearly all archaeological eras from prehistory to the Middle Ages. In a grave of the Hungarian Conquest period near Törtel, Pest County, Pósta found a belt and armament with a deer representation which to this day has been considered as one of the emblematic specimens of the Hungarian material culture of the Carpathian basin in the 9th–10th centuries A.D.

After exhibiting the archaeological finds of his Caucasian and Turan expeditions at the 1896 Millennium Exhibition, Count Jenő Zichy donated them to the Hungarian National Museum. Béla Pósta published the collection of 2091 artefacts and the following year he took part in Count Zichy's third Asian expedition. The broad media coverage of his expedition trip was also the reason of his appointment as head of the newly established Department of Archaeology of the Kolozsvár University. As a university teacher, he considered one of his most important tasks to educate young Hungarian professionals, many of whom decided to choose for carrying out ancient Hungarian research in Eastern lands. He planned to organise an Institute of Oriental Studies to get Hungarian scientists involved in the territory of ancient Mesopotamia, which to this day has been the field of interest for international teams.

Béla Pósta and Count Jenő Zichy during the 3rd expedition (Hungarian National Museum, Central Archive)
"The results of Béla Pósta's research work were summarized in his book published in 1905, which he also emphasized when discussing other expeditions. Béla Pósta visited areas where "Hungarians lived in prehistoric times and where Finno-Ugric peoples contacted Turkic-Tatar people." Based on the obtained results, he deemed research in the Caucasus region as one of the most important tasks.

"Research into the cultural influence coming from the Iranian regions and the Caucasus will be one of the most distinguished rulers of the land of Mesopotamia, the great-grandson of Noah, Nimrod. In the fullest form, it can be found in the chronicle, Gesta Hunnorum et Hungarorum (Deeds of the Huns and Hungarians), written in Latin by Simon of Kéza, around 1285; but the legend was also known among the Hungarians.

Legend of the Miraculous Hind

The Maeotis area is near to the land of the Persians, and Lake Maeotis neighboured Persia; except for one land, it is enclosed by seas. It is well watered and rich in grass, woods, fish, birds and beasts; it is difficult either to approach or to leave. Having thus come to the Maeotian marshes, they stayed there for five years without leaving. But in the sixth year, they suddenly came upon the inhabited Persia; where they found people of high stature and a different language. Formerly inhabited Persia, their stature and the colour of their skin are similar to the Hungarians; only their language is somewhat different, as Saxon differs from Thuringian. Since Honor and Magor were Nimrod's firstborn, they lived separately from their father in their own tents.

It happened also in that skinwhirl that besides the boys there were seized two daughters of Evilath, of whom one was taken to wife by Hunor and the other by Magor. All the Huns descend from these women. And it came about that when they had been dwelling for some time in the Maeotian marshes, they stayed there in a most mighty nation, and the region could not contain them nor nourish them. Therefore having sent out scouts into Scythia to spy out closely and cunningly the Scythian land, they moved thither with their children and their herds to dwell in that country."

(Simon of Keza: Gesta Hungarorum, 1285)

According to 19th-century research, the land was to be found in the southern part of the Caucasus, in the north-western part of today's Armenia.

"Upon the beginning of the confusion of languages, Nimrod the Giant left for the land of Eثل (Evilath), which then was called a province of Persia, where he begat two sons — Húnor and Mágor — by his wife Eneth, from whom are named the Magyars and the Huns. According to tradition, Nimrod the Giant had several wives whom he sired sons and daughters besides Húnor and Mágor. These sons and daughters and their wives and children inhabited Persia; their language and - though it produced certain results - the research work was summarized in his book published in 1905, which he also emphasized when discussing other expeditions. Béla Pósta visited areas where "Hungarians lived in prehistoric times and where Finno-Ugric peoples contacted Turkic-Tatar people." Based on the obtained results, he deemed research in the Caucasus region as one of the most important tasks.

"Research into the cultural influence coming from the Iranian regions and the Caucasus will be one of the most distinguished rulers of the land of Mesopotamia, the great-grandson of Noah, Nimrod. In the fullest form, it can be found in the chronicle, Gesta Hunnorum et Hungarorum (Deeds of the Huns and Hungarians), written in Latin by Simon of Kéza, around 1285; but the legend was also known among the Hungarians.

Legend of the Miraculous Hind

The Maeotis area is near to the land of the Persians, and Lake Maeotis neighboured Persia; except for one land, it is enclosed by seas. It is well watered and rich in grass, woods, fish, birds and beasts; it is difficult either to approach or to leave. Having thus come to the Maeotian marshes, they stayed there for five years without leaving. But in the sixth year, they suddenly came upon the inhabited Persia; where they found people of high stature and a different language. Formerly inhabited Persia, their stature and the colour of their skin are similar to the Hungarians; only their language is somewhat different, as Saxon differs from Thuringian. Since Honor and Magor were Nimrod's firstborn, they lived separately from their father in their own tents.

It happened also in that skinwhirl that besides the boys there were seized two daughters of Evilath, of whom one was taken to wife by Hunor and the other by Magor. All the Huns descend from these women. And it came about that when they had been dwelling for some time in the Maeotian marshes, they stayed there in a most mighty nation, and the region could not contain them nor nourish them. Therefore having sent out scouts into Scythia to spy out closely and cunningly the Scythian land, they moved thither with their children and their herds to dwell in that country."

(Simon of Keza: Gesta Hungarorum, 1285)
Dávid) (The Castle of Magyari) written in 1827. in his epic poem "Magyarvár" also eternalised by Mihály Vörösmarty

It was Ibn Battuta described it as a prospering town. As a Hungarian town, it was populated by the tribes of the Karachay, Kabardian, Avar, and other groups who wanted to find the ancestral home of our ancestors on the coast of the Sea of Azov and the northern foot of the Caucasus. The Hungarian presence in the Caucasus region is also indicated by written sources. “At that time (527), Gorda, the Prince of the Huns near the Bosporus (today's Strait of Kerch), appealed to the said emperor. He came to Constantinople, was baptized and converted. The emperor who became his godfather, presented him with many gifts, dismissed him and told him to return to his homeland to protect the interest of the Huns near the Bosporus. Having returned to his homeland, the Christianised king of the Huns found his brother near the Bosporus and related to him the friendship and generosity of the emperor and his baptism. Leaving there, he took Hun troops to death.” (Malalas, 6th century AD.)

When a war arose between the Turks (Magyars) and the Persians, killed Kanga, the army of the Turks was defeated and split into two parts. One part went eastwards and settled in the region of Persia, and they to this day are called by the name of Persians. The Turks who settled in the region of Persia in the east, they visit them and often bring back word from them.” (Béla IV sent a group of Dominican monks, Muageris (Magyar), Gordas’ brother, put the prince to death.)

“During our trip, I got acquainted with the metal was exchanged for Byzantine heads of the Karachay, Kabardian, Avar, and other groups who wanted to find the ancestral home of our ancestors on the coast of the Sea of Azov and the northern foot of the Caucasus. The Hungarian presence in the Caucasus region is also indicated by written sources. “At that time (527), Gorda, the Prince of the Huns near the Bosporus (today's Strait of Kerch), appealed to the said emperor. He came to Constantinople, was baptized and converted. The emperor who became his godfather, presented him with many gifts, dismissed him and told him to return to his homeland to protect the interest of the Huns near the Bosporus. Having returned to his homeland, the Christianised king of the Huns found his brother near the Bosporus and related to him the friendship and generosity of the emperor and his baptism. Leaving there, he took Hun troops to death.” (Malalas, 6th century AD.)

When a war arose between the Turks (Magyars) and the Persians, killed Kanga, the army of the Turks was defeated and split into two parts. One part went eastwards and settled in the region of Persia, and they to this day are called by the name of Persians. The Turks who settled in the region of Persia in the east, they visit them and often bring back word from them.” (Béla IV sent a group of Dominican monks, Muageris (Magyar), Gordas’ brother, put the prince to death.)
Silver gilt palmetto-decorated braid disc from Andreevskaya Shchel (Anapa Archaeological Museum, first half of the 10th century). Discs for decorating braids are frequent finds in female graves. To date, about 70 similar pieces from the Conquest period (10th century A.D.) have been excavated in the Carpathian basin. In addition to the disc exhibited here, two other pieces of the kind have been registered in the South Urals, in the middle course of the Volga River. The closest parallels from the Carpathian basin to the braid disc from Andreevskaya Shchel are, for instance the palmetto-decorated laminar discs from Anarcs and Csengele (both in Hungary), or Ipolykiskeszi (today Malé Kosihy, in Slovakia).

Silver gilt belt decorations with griffin and dog motifs from the North-West Caucasus (Mardzhani Collection, 9th–10th centuries A.D.). Gryphon motifs alluding to mythological beliefs were already used by the Scythians and Avars. The motif appears on finds from the Conquest period in the Carpathian basin, for instance, on the belt end from Bénapuszta (Hungary) and the buckle from Vöröspéter F (Hungary) and it also occurs on braid discs. The dog motif can also be found on objects from the Conquest period. English analogues of the objects exhibited here were found in a female grave of Kenézlő-Fazekaszug No. 2 burial place (Hungary), where they were used to ornament the rosette-shaped mounts of horse harness.

Silver gilt helmet from the North Caucasus (Mardzhani Collection, 10th–11th centuries A.D.). According to records of the time, helmets, as well as armour, were important elements of the Hungarian battle gear. In accordance with the light cavalry combat mode, helmets were predominantly made from leather. An iron helmet was found in the cemetery of the Conquest period at Domb street, Pécs (Hungary), one of its Hungarian analogues was sold at the Munich auction in 2006. Several graves in Eastern Europe are considered to have belonged to Hungarians as the fallen warriors were buried wearing their iron helmets.

Silver gilt buckle with life-tree motif from Barakaevskaya Stanitsa, North Caucasus (Mardzhani Collection, 9th–10th centuries A.D.). The life-tree motif as a mythological element is a frequent motif of finds from the Conquest period in the Carpathian basin, for instance, it was depicted on the harness mount from Érsekújvár (today Nové Zamky, Slovakia), on the belt mounts from grave No. 61 in Karos, or the buckle from Orsova (today Orșova, Romania). In Hungarian mythology, serpents – in which the spirits of the ancestors reside – are the guardians of the inhabitants of the house. They are also considered as fertility symbols.

Stone-inlaid gold ring from Barakaevskaya Stanitsa, North Caucasus (Mardzhani Collection, 8th–10th centuries A.D.). Four-globule finger-rings with stone or glass insets of different colours are typical finds from male and female graves of the Conquest period in the Carpathian basin. They are seldom found in graves of common people; their use is dated to the first half of the 10th century A.D. Four-globule rings were also excavated from the Karos cemeteries.

A pair of silver bracelets with snake head from Barakaevskaya Stanitsa, North Caucasus (Mardzhani Collection, 8th–10th centuries A.D.). Similar bracelets were found in female graves from the Conquest period in the Carpathian basin. A bracelet made of twisted golden wire was found in a female grave in Žurany (Hungary); there are variants made of silver (e.g., Šeged – Bajszhaba, Hungary) and bronze (e.g., Bakócz – Póvâd, Hungary) in the Hungarian royal necropolis – in which the spirits of the ancestors reside – are the guardians of the inhabitants of the house. They are also considered as fertility symbols.
Silver sabre sheath and silver-gilt palmetto-ornamented suspended mounts (Krasnodar State Historical and Archaeological Museum, 10th century A.D.)

Silver gilt sabres with mounts are frequent finds in graves from the Conquest period (e.g., in Karos, Rakamaz, Geszteréd, Tarcal in Hungary). The sabres were used in close combats; the hilts, sheathes and suspension lugs were usually decorated with golden or silver gilt palmetto-ornamented discs as insignia.

Silver sabre with mounts from Barakayevskaya Stanitsa, North Caucasus (Mardzhani Collection, second half of the 9th century–first half of the 10th century A.D.; reconstructed by M. V. and A. V. Goreliks). Sabre blades from the Conquest period were slightly bended; the lower third was usually double-edged or equipped with a c useless. The letter’s function was to wound the enemy or the horse with the blade pulled backwards if the cut missed the target. The word ‘sabre’ originates from the Hungarian verb ‘szabni’ (to cut), and it entered other languages from Hungarian.

Bronze gilt saddlebow plate from the North Caucasus (Mardzhani Collection, 10th–12th centuries A.D.)

The first plated saddle from the Conquest period was reconstructed by Gyula László on the basis of Hungarian ethnographic analogues. According to research, the front and rear saddlebows could be covered not only with metal but also with bone plates, the surface of which was usually decorated with palmetto motifs.

Silver gilt belt decorations from the North Caucasus (Mardzhani Collection, 9th–10th centuries A.D.)

Belts worn by men during the Conquest period as insignia indicating their rank were usually decorated with heart-, leaf- or circle-shaped rosette mounts. Belt ends were covered with shield-shaped mounts. Round and angular belt decorations were probably used for hanging various objects. Men usually wore leather bags, knives in leather cases, arrow quivers, bow cases and sabres attached to their belts.

Silver gilt sabretache plate from South Russia (Mardzhani Collection, second half of the 9th century – first half of the 10th century A.D.)

The surface is engraved and decorated with palmettos and lions facing each other. Plated sabretaches with locking mechanisms cut in the middle are considered to be the most ancient types; in the Carpathian basin, the sabretache from Bana (Hungary) belongs to this type. Sabretaches were made of leather and worn on the belt; flint and tinder for kindling fire and small belongings, for example razors were stored in them.

Silver gilt saddlebow mounts from the Karachai-Cherkess Republic (Mardzhani Collection, first half of the 10th century A.D.)

In Hungary, saddles with mounts from the Conquest period were for the first time reconstructed by István Dienes on the basis of findings from Szakony (Hungary). Vestiges of mounted saddles were also found in the Karos (Hungary) cemeteries; the reconstruction of the saddlebows was performed by László Révész. Saddles of this type have been used by shepherds of the Great Hungarian Plain until recently.
Excavation sites

The North Caucasian garments and personal items of Hungarian type of the Conquest period presented at this exhibition are from the finds documented during the archaeological excavations carried out by Gabriella Lezsák-Moys on an annual basis since 2016.

The finds that are similar and in many cases identical to the archaeological relics of the Conquest period of the 9th–10th centuries AD, indicate that the northern foothills of the Caucasus formed an organic part of the cultural area where - according to written sources - Hungarians belonged before moving to the Carpathian basin. In addition to the archaeological finds, historical, ethnographic and archaeogenetic samples proved that the area stretching between the southern foothills of the Urals and the northern foothills of the Caucasus constituted a connected and single area in the life of equestrian nomadic peoples. Thus, research in the southern – Caucasian and Azov – lands from the viewpoint of the ancient history of the Magyars will become one of the most important tasks of the relevant disciplines.

The first joint Hungarian-Russian excavation in the Caucasus was conducted at Andreevskaya Shchel in the autumn of 2019. Based on the burial practices (inhumation burials, west-east orientation) and the typical finds of the Subottsi horizon associated with the Magyar presence in Etelköz, including an iron sabre with mounting the excavated graves indicate a presumable connection with Hungarians. Samples of human bones have been submitted for scientific examination to the Archaeogenetics Research Centre of the Institute for Hungarian Studies.

Konstantin Krutogolovenko, Andrei Novichikhin and Erwin Gáll archaeologists during the excavation of a man’s grave with a grave (grave No. 11). (Photo by Gabriella Lezsák-Moys)

Members of the archaeological research trip to Madzhar by the Kuma River: Erwin Gáll, Gabriella Lezsák-Moys, David Somfai Kara, and Ákos Avar with their Nogai-Tatar and Russian hosts.

(Photoby Andrei Novichikhin.)

Excavation of the Andreevskaya Shchel cemetery in autumn 2019. Gabriella Lezsák-Moys, Konstantin Krutogolovenko and Roman Prokofiev archaeologists (Photo by Andrei Novichikhin.)
Results of related disciplines

Folk music
According to the North Caucasian collection of Gergely Agócs, folk musician and Dávid Somfai Kara, ethnologist, 35–40% of the Karachai-Balkar folk melody types and nearly 70% of the Nogai folk melody types can be linked to the morphological order of Hungarian folk music. In several cases, this musical relationship is also strengthened by melody matches.

Genetics
According to Endre Neparáczki and Tibor Török archaeogeneticists, 6.9% of 102 samples of maternal lineage and 10.3% of 29 samples of paternal lineage from cemeteries of the Hungarian elite during the Conquest period point towards the Caucasus–Middle East.

Based on the analyses of 18 samples from the Conquest period by Christine Keyser, geneticist and university professor of the University of Strasbourg, the Y chromosome gene pool of the conquering Hungarian elite buried in cemeteries of a small number of graves consists of Pontic (North Caucasus), Uralic and Altaic components.

Earlier genetic research confirms the heterogeneous character of the elite in the 10th century A.D. Currently, the genetic composition of cemeteries of the common people with a large number of graves is examined by the Archaeogenetics Research Centre of the Institute for Hungarian Studies, under the leadership of Endre Neparáczki and Tibor Török.

Eurasian

East Eurasian
Buryat, Chinese (Inner Mongolia), Kazakh, Tatar, Mongolian, Buryat, Yakut, Even, Evenki, Nenetsian, Manchurian, Fireese, Evenki, Yakutian, Udege, Alas, Udek, Yakugir

West Eurasian
Danish, German, Irish, Swedish, English, Norwegian, Dutch, Swedish, French 12.7%

Caucasus
Armenian, Azeri, Druze, Turkish, Iranian, Iraqi, Palestinian

“Thousands and thousands of signs” Caucasian sources of our prehistory Exhibition of Hungarian-type finds from the Conquest period from south Russia in memoriam of Béla Pósta archaeologist


Set design, Illustration: Antonia Donner

Graphics design, pre-press: Creativ Partners Kft. (Szabolcs Kelemen, Miklós Linczmayer, Dániel Nagy)

Constructor: Event Stuff Kft.

Institutions lending archaeological items and documents: Marienhof Foundation (Moscow, Russia), Russian State Historical and Archaeological Museum (Moscow, Russia), Anapa Archaeological Museum (Anapa, Russia), Museum of Historical Collection, Central Database and Digital Archive of the Hungarian National Museum, King Matthias Museum of the Hungarian National Museum, Manuscripts Archive of the National Széchényi Library, Library of the Hungarian Parliament

Leaders of exhibitions: Anna Gozat, Csaba Hidán, Lajos Kassai, Mária Nagy, József Nádas, Hungarian Historical Archive, Society, Zengő Nyíl Association

Creators of the short cartooned film, The Miraculous Hind: Anita Dorner, Valentin Bajkov, Bence Bukki, János Papp, Zoltán Farkas, Dániel Dorner, Zoltán Moys

Patrons of the exhibition: Ministry of Human Capacities, Institute for Hungarian Studies, Foundation for Central and Eastern European Research and Training

Acknowledgement: to Anna Gozat, Attila Kiss, Levente Lezsák, László Rózsa, György Szente, Gergely Szente, Ferenc Stilling

Project management: Salvia Bartus-Szaloki, Destrama Kft.

Project leaders: Benedek Varga, Director General (Hungarian National Museum), Dr Gábor Haránt-Lugassy Director General (Institute for Hungarian Studies)

PR and communication: Destrama Kft.

The exhibition is open from February 17, 2020 until April 26, 2020.