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CHINESE ELEMENTS IN PROVINCIAL OTTOMAN GOLDSMITHING

A number of so-called Balkan silver bowls may be found in the goldsmithing collections of the Hungarian National Museum. This collection has become well known in the Hungarian and international literature as a result of research work carried out by Géza Fehér (FEHÉR 1963; FEHÉR 1963a; FEHÉR 1965). In Fehér's work, the material from Hungary was primarily associated with analogous finds from Bulgaria, thus questions of dating were also chiefly answered on the basis of such analogous finds. It was on the basis of these latter that he dated the specimens under discussion here to the second half of the 16th century, to the reigns of Selim II (1566–1574) and Murad III (1574–1595). He also pointed out relationships between these objects and Seljuk as well as Ottoman works of art (FEHÉR 1963, 100–102; 1965, 190–195). In connection with the find material from Hungary, previously unexplored contacts in Serbia and Bosnia should be considered equally important. Some of the objects found there display striking similarities to the material kept in Hungarian collections (RADOJKOVIĆ 1966; KARAMEHMEDOVIĆ 1980; LONDON 1981; Already FEHÉR directed attention to some of these parallels; cf. FEHÉR 1963, 96).

Objects in this collection may be grouped according to several criteria. Choosing those identified during previous research seemed most sensible: this approach means that an attempt was made to link each of these finds to archaeological sites. This method, however, used in and of itself, does not provide sufficient information either on dating, or affiliation to workshops of production. Consequently, Géza Fehér also classified this material predominantly on the basis of a critical evaluation of their style. One naturally agrees with his method, since analyses of decorative motifs identified on cups as well as certain technical aspects may help in answering questions surrounding origins and workshop affiliation. In the case of the so-called Balkan silver bowls, four fundamental systems of decoration may be distinguished.

1. Liturgical objects decorated with the portraits of saints.¹
2. Dishes decorated with mythical animals, often with inscriptions that either formed part of the original design or were incised secondarily. In both cases, however, they indicate liturgical use.²
3. Specimens with geometric designs.³
4. So-called "arabesque bowls".

In the following, objects in this circle of artifacts will be discussed, with the addendum that the term "arabesque bowl" should be revised.⁴

Three bowls form a separate unit within this collection. Two of them came to the Hungarian National Museum during the first half of the 19th century, from the private collections of Miklós Jankovich. The third specimen was purchased from a private person named Zsigmond Ormos in 1891, along with other artifacts of goldsmithing, most of which originated from Transylvania.

The description of the objects:

1. *Gilded silver drinking bowl* (Fig. 1) (diameter=11.9 cm, height=3 cm, Inv. No.: App. Jank. 178)

The inner wall and base of this bowl are both covered by a system of decorations chiseled-in against the finely embossed background. Lotus flowers and five-petaled rosettes are connected with leafy tendrils in this design. From the base upwards, the wall of the bowl is covered by an incised net ornament, separated by a ring of arched patterns. The rim has two silver proofmarks on it. A secondary ancient Slavic inscription was roughly incised on the undecorated outer surface, directly under the rim. Its translation reads as follows: This beaker was repaired by....(FEHÉR 1965, 172).

According to a note in the Jankovich inventory book, this object was brought to Vienna from Ragusa (Dubrovnik), along with the item inventoried as App. Jank. 179, where it was bought at auction by Miklós Jankovich.⁵

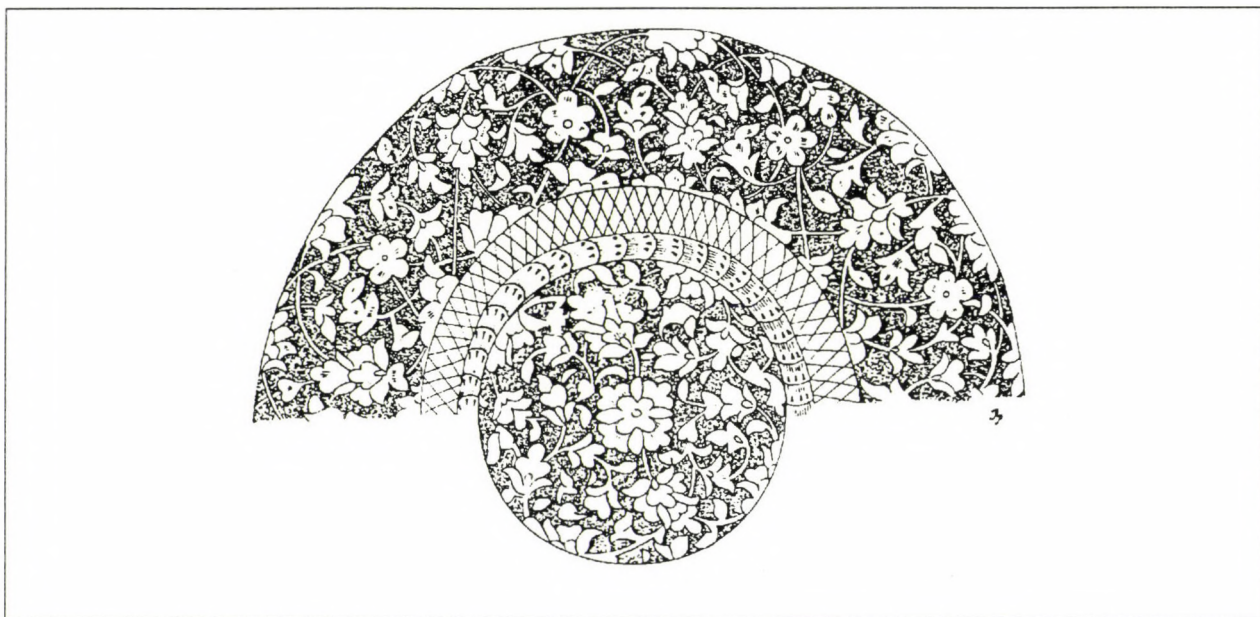


Fig. 1 Decoration of the bowl Inv. No. App. Jank. 178 (after Géza Fehér)

2. *Silver drinking bowl* (Fig. 2) (diameter=12.3 cm, height=2.9 cm, Inv. No.: App. Jank. 179)

The wall of this bowl is covered by a system of decorations chiseled against the finely embossed background. Leafy tendrils in this design connect lotus flowers and five-petaled rosettes. The base of this bowl is framed by a corolla design that encloses pointed leaves forming a continuous network reminiscent of an arabesque design. A false Latin inscription on the beaker's rim reads as follows: "Sum Fr. Geor. Wttiseny. 1537." (that is, I belong to Frater George. This refers to archbishop Frater George Martinuzzi (1482–1571), whose original family name was Utienesović.

3. *Silver drinking bowl* (Fig. 3) (diameter=13.5 cm, height=2.9 cm, Inv. No.: 1891.56.7)

The inner wall and base of this thin-walled, finely executed bowl are both covered by a network of decorations chiseled against the delicately embossed background. Lotus flowers and lotus buds are connected with leafy tendrils in this design. Pointed leaves with serrated edges occur among the motifs on the base of this bowl. In contrast with the two aforementioned specimens, no roughly outlined, five-petaled rosettes were included in the decorative patterns of this bowl. The base and the wall of the bowl are separated by a non-ornamented ring.

In addition to these three bowl, a simplified version of the same set of motifs was adopted secondarily in the decoration of numerous specimens. In technical

terms, however, these objects are markedly different from the aforementioned specimens owing to their thicker material and rougher execution. These motifs bear only a distant, but never-the-less clearly recognizable resemblance, to their original prototype.

4. *Silver drinking bowl* (Fig. 4) (diameter=13.9 cm, height=3.2 cm, Inv. No.: 1874.267)

The base of this bowl was decorated with still recognizable lotus motifs and serrated leaves against the relief of the embossed background. The wall is decorated with alternating, smooth semi-cartouches, arranged in a rotary pattern. A less finely worked variety of the vault ornamentation, also emerging from the embossed background, covers the bowl's wall as well. The base and the wall of the bowl are separated by a beaded and a smooth ring respectively. According to an inventory book entry, this object was found at "Kubin", a site whose location cannot be identified.

5. *Silver drinking bowl* (diameter=14 cm, height=3 cm, Inv. No.: 1947.11)

The execution and system of decoration of this bowl are almost identical to that of the aforementioned specimen. The decoration of its base, however, differs in the sense that it was made roughly, similarly to the wall. A small, turnable, cast silver deer statuette was fitted into the middle of the wall. According to the inventory book, this beaker was found "in the environs of Koložsvár" (Cluj-Napoka), however, a more precise definition of the site is missing.

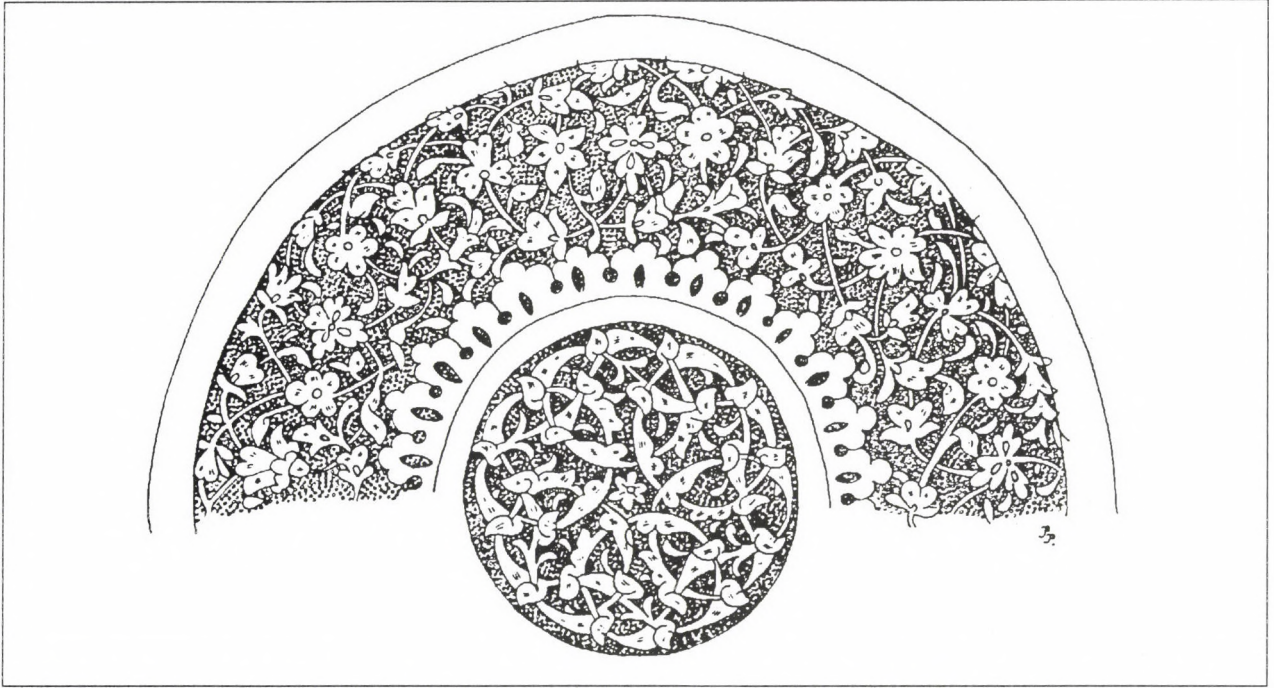


Fig. 2 Decoration of the bowl Inv. No. App. Jank. 179 (after Géza Fehér)

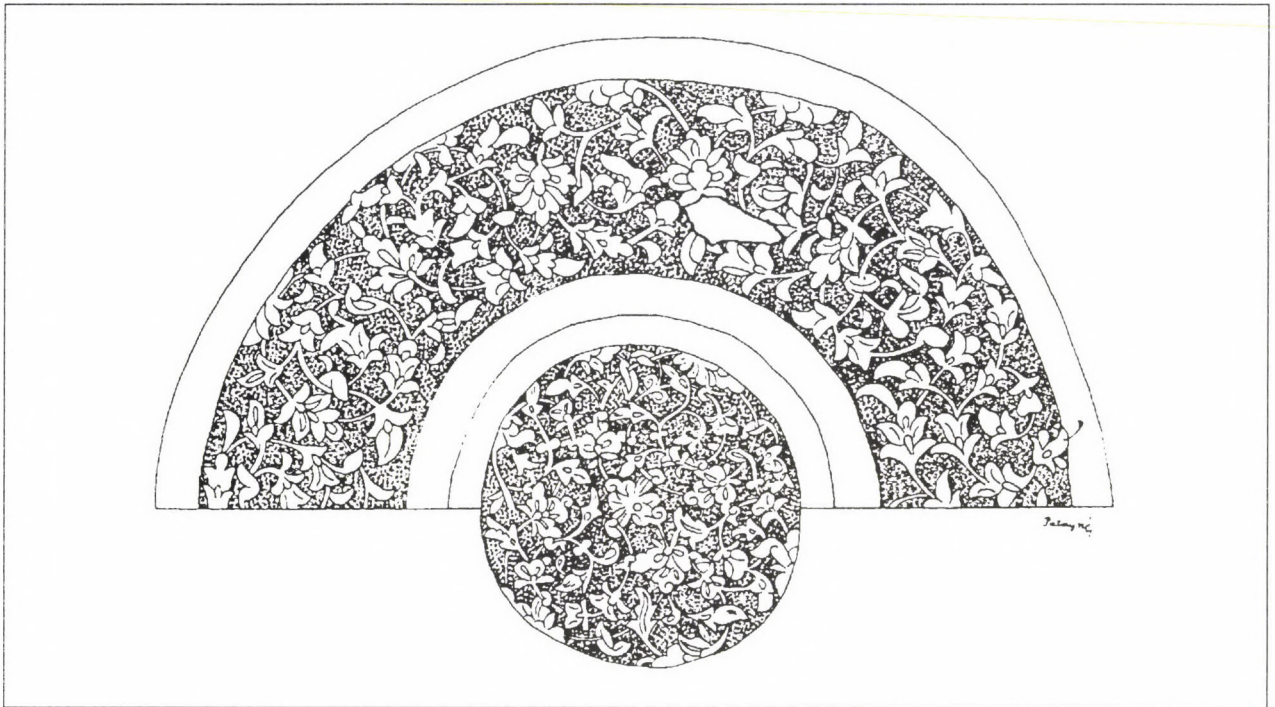


Fig. 3 Decoration of the bowl Inv. No. 1891.56.7 (after Géza Fehér)

6. *Silver drinking bowl* (diameter=15.6 cm, height=4.9 cm, Inv. No.: 1871.257)

The execution and system of decoration of this bowl are largely identical to that of the aforementioned

specimen. However, only a fragment of the turnable deer statuette have survived. According to the inventory book, this find was recovered in a mill's ditch near the Karás river (Karasica? Northern Serbia).



Fig. 4 Decoration of the "Kubin" bowl Inv. No. 1874.267

A more precise definition of the site, however, is not available.

7. *Silver drinking bowl* (diameter=14.7 cm, height=4.3 cm, Inv. No.: 1949.301)

In comparison with the previously listed specimens, the highly stylized lotus ornaments, decorating the wall of this artifact in a rotary pattern, differ from the original prototype. Floral elements, framed by rotary semi-cartouche patterns, alternate with the smooth silver surfaces in the same shape. The base of this bowl is delineated by a string of beads pattern. It is decorated with star-shaped, geometric designs.

Similarly to beaker No. 5, this object was also found "in the environs of Kolozsvár" (Cluj-Napoka).

8. *Silver drinking bowl* (diameter=15.5 cm, height=2.9 cm, Inv. No.: 17.1887.1)

A double row of stylized leaves set within the frame of a string of bead design, runs around the wall of this bowl against an embossed background. A row of corollas made up of pentagonal patterns was placed around the bowl's base along the inner string of beads. There is an incised floral pattern on the base of this bowl that is vaguely reminiscent of the aforementioned lotus motif. The find spot of this artifact is

Keresztúri puszta (Jaša Tomić) in Torontál county (Módos district).

9. *Silver drinking bowl* (Fig. 5) (diameter=15.4 cm, height=4.6 cm, Inv. No.: 17.1887.2)

Plain and decorated semi-cartouches alternate on the side of this bowl in a rotary pattern. The base, as well as the decorated semi-cartouches emerging from the embossed background, are covered by stylized lo-

into four sections. Its find spot is identical with that of the aforementioned specimen.

12. *Silver drinking bowl* (diameter=10.8 cm, height=3.1 cm, Inv. No.: 17.1887.6)

The wall decoration of this bowl is essentially identical with those listed under 9 and 11. The lotus flowers, however, are completely rough and schematic. The base of the bowl contains a highly simplified geo-

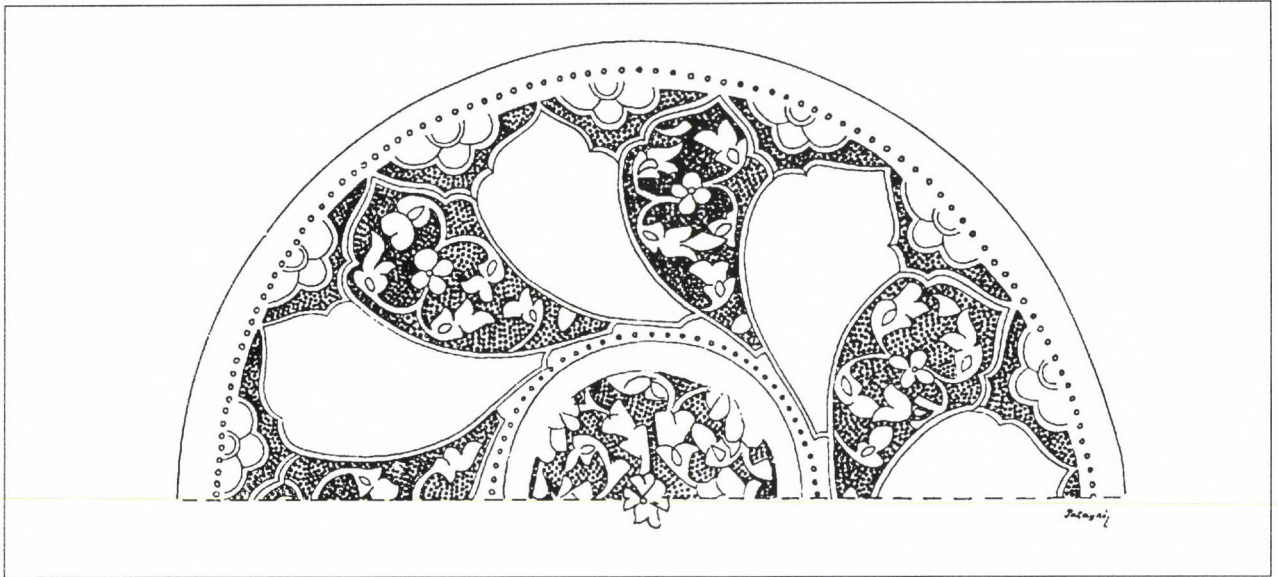


Fig. 5 Bowl from the Keresztúri puszta find. Inv. No. 17.1887.2 (after Géza Fehér)

tus flowers. This specimen may be considered an additional, further simplified variant of the bowl listed under No. 4 in this study. Its find spot is identical with that of silver bowl No. 8.

10. *Silver drinking bowl* (diameter=15.7 cm, height=4.7 cm, Inv. No.: 17.1887.3)

The wall of this bowl is decorated with oblong surfaces containing fish-scale-shaped pairs of half circles, and pointed stylized leaves emerging from the embossed background. There is a roughly worked copper sheet riveted to the base of this bowl. The copper sheet is surrounded by a band decorated with stylized lotus flowers, raised from the embossed background. The find spot of this beaker is identical with that of the aforementioned specimen.

11. *Silver drinking bowl* (Fig. 6) (diameter=15.3 cm, height=4.4 cm, Inv. No.: 17.1887.5)

The decoration of this artifact is almost entirely identical with that of bowl No. 9. The petals of lotus flowers are not divided in this case, and under the rim a half-circle can be seen instead of the field divided

metric pattern set within a circle. The find spot of this bowl is identical with that of the aforementioned specimens.

It is precisely these previously analyzed set of motifs that can also be recognized on the earliest Iznik ceramics as well (Fig.7–8). The new graphic style occurs on faience dishes made between 1480 and 1520. First, it was painted in white against a cobalt blue background and covered with a colorless glaze. Subsequently, blue patterns were painted onto a white background. The graphic design includes intertwining arabesque motifs as well as highly stylized floral patterns. These and the depiction of peony and lotus flowers adopted from Chinese art, indicate an intimate familiarity with Chinese art, especially with 15th century blue and white porcelain ware. Chinese porcelain itself, however, may only have provided an indirect template, since according to the sources at our disposal, it was imported to Turkey in quantities only after the 1550s (ATASOY–RABY 1989, 121).

The same style was also employed on the tile panels used to cover buildings. This is especially clearly illustrated by two such tile panels from the Yeni Valide



Fig. 6 Bowl from the Keresztúri puszta find. Inv. No. 17.1887.5 (after Géza Fehér)



Fig. 7 Faience bowl from Iznik, dated to ca. 1480



Fig. 8 Faience jug from Iznik, dated to ca. 1480

mosque built in 1522–1523 in Manisa. On these, the designers showed simultaneously the “tiny cloud” and lotus flower motifs, as well as the traditional arabesque, considered to be of Islamic origin (CARSWELL 1982, 81).

A pattern book has survived from the last year of the reign of Mehmed II (1451–1481). The characteristic decorative motifs of that period were collected in it (Fig. 9). The clearly detectable, broad diffusion of this “first court-style” already indicates a tendency that later became much more pronounced. According to this trend, the wealth of patterns in prototypes developed by artists in the sultan’s nakkashane (the Serai’s studio) were applied in almost all branches of art across the Empire. The leading artist in this workshop, who created the aforementioned album, was already living in Istanbul in 1466. According to Evlia Chelebi, his name was Baba Nakkash, and he was of Uzbek extraction (NECIPOĞLU 1990, 137–138). The

characteristics of the first court-style had already been defined in his own lifetime. Jafer Chelebi, the poet had already mentioned the term “*rumi*”, that is, arabesque and “*hitayi*” (or *hatayi*) i. e. Chinese floral motifs in his poem written in 1493–1494 (NECIPOĞLU 1990, 138). This description was aimed at the so-called “international Timurid” style, that had a rich inventory of Chinese elements. As a result of the close Chinese connections developed by Timurid rulers, this style became widespread in the main centers of the Islamic World from the 1420s onwards. It became particularly popular in Persia which was ruled by the Timurids.⁶ Artists brought to Samarkand by force during the reign of Timur Lenk (or Tamerlane, ca. 1370–1405) and subsequently released by Ulugh Beg in 1411, played an important role in distributing this style (GOLOMBEK 1993, 250). It may, however, have been brought to Ottoman court art through a different channel, from the Herat studio of Timurid Baysunkur.



Fig. 9 Drawing from the "Baba Nakkash" Album, ca. 1470 (after Julien Raby)

First, it appeared in Tebriz, then after 1473, masters commissioned at the court of Mehmed II probably furthered this style that spread widely in coeval Islamic art. The Ottoman variant of this style must have become crystallized as a result of work by Baba Nakkash.

The style under discussion here, found simultaneously in goldsmithing and ceramic manufacturing, both point to a common prototype. This originated from the first court style based on Timurid stylistic traditions and the ca. 1480 album prepared by Baba Nakkash respectively. In addition to the shared inventory of motifs, this hypothesis is also supported by the fact that the detailed, elaborate elements are alien to both goldsmithing and ceramic art and are a lot more typical of manuscripts and graphic albums.

Previous research in Hungary has ignored the rather interesting fact that two of the bowls analyzed in this study certainly came from Ragusa. During the 15th century, Ragusa retained its significance as a center of goldsmithing with close ties to the sultan's court in Istanbul. According to a 1442 agreement, merchants from Ragusa could trade freely throughout the territory of the Ottoman Empire (FISKOVIĆ 1949, 175; CARTER 1972, 200–201). From that time onwards, probably as a result of invigorated trade links, pieces of Turkish goldsmithing continuously figure in the wills of well to do Ragusa inhabitants (KARAMEHMEDOVIĆ 1980, 15). It may be even more important that there are data concerning a certain Pavlo, a goldsmith from Ragusa, who had actually worked in the court of Mehmed II and then returned



Fig. 10 Silver jug with the *tuğra* (signature) of Süleyman I.

home (FISKOVIĆ 1949, 175). A reverse migration of objects can also be demonstrated. According to a document, dated to the year of the aforementioned agreement, another Ragusa goldsmith named Javko, was commissioned to prepare pieces of art for the Sublime Porte. Objects brought to the sultan's porte are mentioned several times in a variety of sources. In 1458, for example, forty silver objects were made for Mehmed II. Twenty-two others were prepared for the spectacular circumcision ceremony of the sons of Murad III. The importance of Ragusa workshops is supported by the fact that they filled special orders for sultans Mehmed II and Bayezid II (1481–1512) (FISKOVIĆ 1949, 188; ALLAN-RABY 1982, 25–26). According to a 1494 reference of outstanding importance, a Ragusa master called Maroje Ratković crafted an ornamented sword for Bayezid II (FISKOVIĆ 1949, 212).

It is possible that the makers of Ragusa bowls discussed at the beginning of this study, followed original Ottoman prototypes that were available thanks to the close connections the Ragusa workshops had with Ottoman masters. The finely elaborated, detailed style of decoration on these bowls, as well as the presence of lotus motifs adopted from Chinese art offers unambiguous evidence of this possibility. The combination of arabesque and Chinese floral motifs (i. e. "rumi" and "hitayi" elements) on the bowl with the false Martinuzzi inscription (Inv. No. App. Jank. 179, Fig. 2) all point to the first Ottoman courtly style. On the basis of this observation, and as opposed to previous stylistic dating, the new date for these three bowls sug-

gested here is the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries. This opinion is reconfirmed by the presence of an arabesque decorated silver bowl with the *tuğra* (signature) of Bayezid II, held in a private collection (ALLAN-RABY 1982, 44). In addition, this analysis of style is also supported by an archaeological find. Alongside a bowl of the type under discussion here, 125 Aqche, issued during the reign of Bayezid II, also came to light during the course of excavations in Novo Brdo (KARAMEHMEDOVIĆ 1980, 38).

On the basis of these arguments, silver bowls of Balkan origin, considered secondary copies of this style, should be assigned to a somewhat later date, although no later than the reign of Süleyman I (1520–1566). Craftspeople making these specimens probably had no chance to see the pattern sheets of the albums prepared in the sultan's serai. However, they may have known the finely made Ragusa bowls that imitated this style directly. Certain technical differences between these secondary products may be detected as well. The base decoration of the "Kubin" specimen (Item 4 in the list presented here), for example, is related to three silver and gilded silver jugs that are Timurid in shape, but are decorated with chiseled relief motifs characteristic of the first Otto-

man court-style. Two of these latter are marked by the *tuğra* of Süleyman I (ALLAN-RABY 1982, 24, 43, 218; ATIL 1987, 122) (Fig. 10). The technical execution and ornamentation of pieces in the Keresztúr puszta hoard are even further removed from the original prototype. In spite of this, however, the lotus floral motif of Chinese origins may be recognized on these objects. In terms of dating, previous research can probably be accepted: these objects must have been buried during the 1552 military campaign (FEHÉR 1963, 100). It is perhaps more than a coincidence that all bowls of the discussed type in the collection described here originate either from northern Serbia or the northern part of Transylvania.

It seems that a group of artifacts may be delineated which may be distinguished from other, similar products, made in the Balkans. Meanwhile, their inventory of motifs as well as time of manufacturing is closely associated with the first Ottoman court-style. The mediating link must be the Ragusa workshops which, from the mid-15th century onwards, had close connections with the Sultan's serai in Istanbul. Due to this situation, such workshops may have mediated Chinese influences, which continuously affected Islamic art from its beginnings, and which later spread into the Balkans.

Notes

- 1 MNM KKO 1911.57.1; MNM KKO App. Jank. 182. although this latter specimen belongs to this group, its 16th century origins are highly questionable.
- 2 MNM KKO 1929.36; MNM KKO 1913.13; MNM KKO 1920.16.
- 3 Bowls with exclusively geometric decoration are rare. These include items MNM KKO 55.447.C and MNM KKO 1891.56.8. respectively, as well as the bowl in Makó find: MNM KKO 1910.22.3. Two silver bowls belong to this find, in addition to 104 coins. The latest of these was a 1593 silver Denarius issued by Rudolf (1576–1608). In general, it may be said that the aforementioned four styles rarely occur in a pure form. In most cases, they represent a combination of these forms.
- 4 In contrast to the standpoint represented by previous researches, I would refrain from calling the find material under discussion here "arabesque bowls"; cf. FEHÉR 1963, 96; FEHÉR 1965, 169. Research in the history of Islamic art tends to place the first occurrence of arabesque to the 9th century in the city of Samarra. The antique grape leaf is considered its prototype; cf. FEHÉRVÁRI

- 1987, 59. According to the classical definition by Alois Riegl, the arabesque is "... a particular and exclusively Islamic form of denaturalized vegetal ornament consisting of shoots of split or bifurcated leaves on inorganic tendrils..."; cf. Encyclopaedia of Islam. The classic arabesque is form of decoration imitating a meandering plant clasper, made of bifurcated, pointed leaves and half palmettes. It never contains, however, floral elements. Its perfected form can be best observed in 11th century Seljuk and Fatimida artwork respectively. The rest of this study will focus exclusively on artifacts in this group, with site affiliation. It must be added however, that even among the bowls of uncertain provenance, some specimens can be classified within this group on a stylistic basis; cf. MNM KKO 55.445.C; 55.448.C; 1891.56.6; 1889.4.1; 1908.52.1; 1916.2.
- 5 Hungarian National Museum, Jankovich Inventory Book, Apparatus p. 17.
- 6 These two basic motifs of Ottoman Art, "*rumi*" and "*hatayi*" elements and their appearance on early Iznik ware have been discussed in detail by LANE 1957, 46–47.

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