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László Kovács: The Treasure Finds in the Carpathian Basin of the Early Árpád Age (1000–1141). *Leletek és veretek I.*

Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont, Történettudományi Intézet. Martin Opitz Kiadó. Budapest 2022. 207 pp. 13 maps, 16 charts.

Anna NEVÁLOVITS* 

The *Leletek és Veretek* series' first book, László Kovács's *A Kárpát-medence kora Árpád-kori kincsleletei* (The Treasure Finds in the Carpathian Basin of the Early Árpád Age /1000–1141/) was published in 2022, by Martin Opitz Kiadó. The book deals with the coin hoards dating between 1000 and 1141 found in the Carpathian Basin, in the Hungarian Kingdom and offer a complete collection and evaluation of them. In the surrounding countries, similar aspirations are at a more advanced stage than in Hungary. Many repertoires were published even in the century before, which sometimes also cover parts of the former Hungarian Kingdom. In Slovakia for example, the Árpád-Age finds have already been processed by Jan Hunka, and a three-part book series called *Nalezky Minci na Slovensku* published from the 1960s. The Transylvanian material was also processed more than once since the mid-20th century (Iliescu 1958; Hlinka et al. 1964, Hlinka et al. 1968, Hlinka et al. 1978; Velter 2002; Hunka 2013).

From the area of the former Yugoslavia Ivan Mirnik published the corpus of coin hoards in 1981 (Mirnik 1981). In Hungary, a similar corpus that strove to become a completed summary and would process our various database completely has not yet appeared. At the same time, Ernő Saltzer's work from 1996 is notable, as he processed and published 156 coin hoards from the Árpád Age (Saltzer 1996). Besides, there are studies about shorter periods, such as the time of the Mongol invasion of Hungary, or the foreign coin finds of the 11–13th centuries (Gedai 1969; Tóth 2007; Ujszászi 2010). The Research Centre for Humanities program's „Lendület” Medieval Hungarian Economic History Research Team, under the leadership of Boglárka Weisz, has taken up the task of, publishing an up-to-date corpus, which confines to modern standards.

In order to properly evaluate Kovács's work, and to be able to place it in the literature, we should have a look at the history of Hungarian numismatic research, and review the work done so far. Research in Hungarian monetary history started with the work of István Schönvisner, who first wrote on the subject in 1801, followed by the publication of the Hungarian National Museum's Széchényi's coin collection in 1807 (Schönvisner 1801; Schönvisner 1807). These are part of the fundamental readings in the field of Hungarian numismatics, together with the two-part catalogue of the late Árpád Age and late Middle Ages produced coins by Jakab Rupp in the 1940's (Rupp 1841; Rupp 1846). At the turn of the century, a new corpus extensively used both in Hungary and abroad was written. László Réthy's *Corpus Nummorum Hungariae* remains a seminal work in Hungarian numismatics and archaeology until today, its only disadvantage being its confinement to typological aspects only (Réthy 1899; Réthy 1907).

Bálint Hóman is the next notable scholar in the field with his work written in 1916. It bears the title *Magyar Pénztörténet* (Hungarian Monetary History), in which Hóman tried to summarize (as thoroughly as possible) both Hungarian and other coins in use in the area in the context of early Hungarian economic history (Hóman 1916). Lajos Huszár's work is also important, his *Münzkatalog* was published in 1979. The work took the Hungarian National Museum's numismatic core collection as its base (Huszár 1979). Huszár re-evaluated Réthy's typological order more than once in his own corpus, however he only relied on types which were in public collections or were already known from published literature. However, the work of Réthy and Huszár together offered the opportunity to establish basic database of Hungarian coin types. Kovács also relied on these two works to place the coins found in

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hoards in order, using H (Huszár) and CNH (Réthy) markings, respectively. Relatively new is a work entitled *A magyar pénz története* (The History of the Hungarian Money), which was written by Lajos Pallos, Melinda Torbágyi and Csaba Tóth (Pallos et al. 2012). From 2018, a multi-volume database is being published which includes the whole coinage of the Árpád Age with the most modern typology, written by a research group led by Csaba Tóth (Tóth et al. 2018; Tóth, Kiss 2018; Tóth et al. 2020).

László Kovács has been working on the coinage of the Hungarian conquest and early Árpád Age for decades. From the 1980s, he has published several works researching its history. Among these, stands out his study from 1989, which is a collection of the foreign (West-European, Byzantine and Muslim) coins from the 10th century that appeared in the Carpathian Basin (Kovács 1989). Another study of his written joint with Aleksey Vladimirovich Fomin about the hoard of Máramaros (found in the 19th century) containing dirhams from the 10th century is also an important piece (Kovács, Fomin 1987). Both of these are internationally consulted and referenced. The revaluation of Kovács's data has started during the last couple of years (e.g. Prohászka 2012; Coupland, Gianazza 2015). Kovács's work continued with the 11th-century finds. He had a significant scientific debate with – the other great numismatic expert of our time, István Gedai, about the start of the Árpád-Age coinage. The debate proved fruitful in solving the question. He has started the research of Hungarian Kingdom's coin history of Árpád Age in the beginning of his career (Kovács 1975). Parallel with his archaeological studies, he published also in this subject area. His summary of substantial value appeared in the series *Varia Archaeologica Hungarica* in 1997 (Kovács 1997). His recent work contributes to this previous monograph by offering a database.

There is an antecedent for the study of the hoards too – parallel to Kovács's 1997-monograph, Ernő Saltzer also published a study covering the entirety of the Árpád Age (Saltzer 1996). The numismatist collected 156 coin (and treasure) hoards thus his work can be viewed as the other forerunner to produce a complete summary. Saltzer's findings were reviewed by Kovács later on (Kovács 2006).

His present work from 2022 can be separated into three parts. In the first, we can read about the topic's research history, the methodology and the origins of the hoards, and their various types, groupings and identifications. The author made an outstanding ef-

fort to make professional numismatic language appealing even for an untrained readership. The book starts with the introduction of the hoards, describing nature and their archaeological typology. The author here identifies the reasons why he chooses the date 1000 and 1141 for the limits of his examination and why the study contains only the treasures found within the borders of the former Hungarian Kingdom. The starting date is justified by a hoard, which contains H1 and H2 denars, the first Hungarian coins minted by King St. Stephen (1000–1038). The H2 was minted in 1000/1001, around the founding of the kingdom. The second denar that can be attributed to King St. Stephen is the H1, which is datable around 1015/1020. The date of 1141 was chosen based on an archaeological observation. According to Kovács, people stopped burying their dead in village cemeteries during the end of the 11th century, beginning of the 12th century and started to bury their relatives in Christian cemeteries around the churches instead. This process was also “promoted” by the kings during this era with laws, for example King Coloman the Learned (1095–1116) in his I. book of law stated that the Christians could be buried only in the cemeteries of the churches. The process was slow, it took several decades to leave the village cemeteries completely. However, Béla the II's (1131–1141) and his descendants' denars do not occur in the village cemeteries, so the change was finished by their time. This observation became clear in several excavated cemeteries. (Kovács 2013; Kovács 2019). The date of 1141 was chosen based on this observation, and can be related to the anonym denars, which started to appear around this time, but the author did not want to include those in his study.

In terms of their composition, there are more than one type of hoards existing – this book is about the coin treasures, the concept of this is explained in the next few chapters. In this category, usually those findings occur which contain more than two coins and are found together. Next to the coins there can be other objects, for example, jewellery or other minted findings, these are called mixed treasures. A hoard is put to a place that is familiar/symbolic for the person who hides it and is usually buried at different depths in the soil. Hiding a treasure can be explained by several reasons, most common being that the hiders life was in danger, thus they hid their valuables in the hope of recovering them later. But treasures are not always hidden because of a dangerous situation. It is also possible that the owners sim-

ply did not want to keep their wealth in their homes, but in a safe place. In addition, we are not always able to establish a connection between every treasure and the events of conflicts either. The thought may also arise, that treasures could be hidden due to religious beliefs, however such practices are extremely rare in the region (if any) and are more common in North-European contexts. Since Hungary was a Christian kingdom, this is perhaps the least conceivable option coming into mind.

It is frequent in Hungary (and perhaps also in other countries) that treasures surface by accident during larger construction work and therefore often fall apart, thus cannot be observed *in situ*. Based on this, we can talk about closed (found and documented *in situ*) or incomplete treasures. Closed treasures are unfortunately rare, there are only a handful of cases, when we can surely say that a finding reached the museum in complete closed form. Most of the time there are no archaeologists around when they emerge. Usually the ceramic vessel, which contained the treasure, suffers damage during the process or if it makes it to the museum, it is often lost. Therefore, we possess little information about them in general, and unfortunately there are only rare occasions when the modes of shutting the container can be identified. The treasure was not always in ceramic vessels for example, the hoard from Nagyharsány for instance is widely known to have been kept in a small copper box, while other hoards were kept in little bags made of leather or linen (Parádi 1963, 205).

The middle part of the book contains maps and charts after every chapter. We can see the location of the hoards on a map of the Hungarian Kingdom sorted by origin and ruler and at the end of the book there is also a map that contains all the treasures. Most of the listed treasures contain denars made in Hungary, but there are also foreign coins included most notably nine completely Byzantine coin hoards.

The charts are informative, but unfortunately because of the small size of the book, they are difficult to read, especially since they spread out to more than one page. It would have been a better solution if at the end of the book we get a foldable addition which the reader can take out, just like in the 1989 publication. The spreadsheets are basically a shorter version of the catalogue from the final part of the book. There are separate sheets for every ruler, containing the hoards that can be attributed to them based on the dating of the hoards. The find circumstances

(when, where and how), and the condition of the hoards are also documented here.

Foreign coins are discussed in separate chapters. The author introduces the historical background to the inflow of these coins, and despite the shortage of pertaining written evidence, summarizes the possible scenarios on a historical context (e.g. in the case of the economic relationship between the kingdom and the Byzantine Empire) Hoards containing Byzantine gold coins occur almost in the entire Carpathian Basin – as the inflow of Byzantine coins did not cease after the 970's when the Hungarian raids towards the Empire finally stopped. It is a fair surmise that these coins did not arrive in the form of taxes and spoils of war only, but are the results of economic, probably commercial relationship. Based on this, Kovács argues that the Hungarian people possessed substantial amounts of Byzantine money in the Árpád Age. There are separate chapters about the 21 Czech, 14 German, one Roman and one “Eastern” (unidentified) coin, which are found less often in hoards, and Kovács introduces them in only short chapters.

Kovács discussed the contemporary value of each hoard in the last two chapters. In this part, he communicates important data, which helps to contextualize the worth of these hoards at the time of their burying. One of them is a comparison between the value of the Hungarian denar and the Byzantine gold coin. Bálint Hóman was the first who measured the average weight of the denars, and contrasted them to the Byzantine specimen in the light of written laws and Bavarian coin research results. The value ratio he determined was 1:30, which later changed to 1:40, during the time when Béla the I. was king. Kovács arrived to a slightly different result, when he repeated the research. Kovács's results appear in the latest Hungarian catalogue (Tóth et al. 2018). In the law books of Hungarian kings, there are concrete data for the punishment of minor and major crimes for which the fines ranged between 1 and 110 *pensa* (30 and later 40 *pensa* being equitable with one denar). These, together with written sources covering contemporary taxation issues provide a rough estimate for the value of hidden treasures at the time of burial. However, considering the fact that most of the hoards are incomplete, reliable data can hardly be reached in most cases.

All in all, the book covers 12132 coins, which is only a small fraction of the total amount emitted in the country. Therefore, the chronological ordering of the hoards is of little value in contrast to the political, economic– or other kinds of – relations on which

they can shed lights on in a period of short written sources. Such an example was that of Byzantine gold coins mentioned above. Since written sources are equally silent on the flow of Czech and German coins, hoards can reveal a similarly important – hitherto unproven – network. This is amply testified by the early 11th-century Nagyarsány treasure containing many German and Czech coins. At the same time, it should be taken into consideration that not every foreign denar should signal an economic or commercial relationship. Also, besides the foreign coins, it is necessary to address those Hungarian coins which were not minted by the kings, but the princes. The spread of these indicates the internal circulation of princely currencies even in those parts of the kingdom which fell outside their powerbase and belonged directly to the king.

The final part of the book includes the catalogue. This contains the hoards collected by Kovács, more than 61 in number. These are not in chronological order or grouped by kings, but appear in alphabetical order, making searching in the book easier. Since there are more than one hoards, which contain the coin(s) of more than one king, as well as there are incomplete ones, it would have indeed made it futile to set up an order based on the last coin of each hoard. Treasures coming from an unknown site, are listed at the end of the book.

The catalogue is accompanied by entries including all important relating information and as well connected publications. The author describes the composition of the finds in detail and does not forget to tell us where the treasure is available today. The author's conscientiousness is exemplary, he made use of his personal and academic contacts and processed material from archival and public collec-

tions and tried to review the topic completely. In most cases he was able to trace back the ways and correct geographical places of the discovery of the hoards, and also their subsequent faith, such as their disappearance or ending up in private hands. This is an important contribution as it often happened that the find's spots were inadequately documented causing several misunderstandings in later publications. Therefore, the correction of the geographical names is also a very important part of this book.

The first news reports are usually from local periodicals or private letters, but sometimes there are works that are rarely referred to and published in a small number – these are now can re-join the scientific discourse. It is revealing, about earlier documentation, that the 19th century museums often only took rarer coins and the rest enter the commercial market or private hands, or alternatively were trading objects in the exchanges with other museums. This was a common practice at the time, both in Hungary and abroad. A huge number of findings disappeared like this, making the research even harder. More information than what this book records unlikely to surface any time soon, therefore Kovács's work can be already used as a manual, making it an indispensable piece for numismatists, archaeologists and historians of the period.

We have finally received a thorough and detailed volume, based on decades of research, from a distinguished expert. This book is mostly intended for professional audience, but it might be appealing for members of the public, who are interested in the topic. The author in this book promises a similar study of the grave goods, which would make László Kovács's work complete in the research of the early Árpád Age.

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