

Институт археологии им. А.Х. Халикова
Академии наук Республики Татарстан
Казанский (Приволжский) федеральный университет
Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Institute of Archaeology
Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Research Centre for the Humanities,
Early Hungarian History Research Group

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Адрес редакции:

420012, г. Казань, ул. Некрасова, 28, пом. 1203

Телефон: (843) 210–19–76

E–mail: archeostepps@gmail.com

https://www.evrazstep.ru

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Editorial Office Address:

Nekrasov St., 28, office 1203, Kazan, 420012, Republic of Tatarstan, Russian Federation
Telephone: (843)210-19-76
E-mail: archeostepps@gmail.com
https://www.evrazstep.ru

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УДК 902/904

EASTERN RELIGIOUS MOTIFS ON THE BELT MOUNTS OF SUBOTSI GROUP, KUSHNARENKOVO CULTURE AND LOMOVATOVO CULTURE^{1,2}

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The spread of Buddhism from the Indian subcontinent in the northern direction towards Bactria began in the 4th century B.C. In the 1st century A.D. its spread in the steppe area was continued by the Kushans settling in Bactria. Trade between Europe, Middle and Far East at the Central Asian stations of the Great Silk Road was regulated by the Sogdians. They were also the mediators in the relations between individual cultures and religions. A significant role in the spread of Buddhism was played by the Sogdians speaking the East-Iranian language related to the Kushan language. The spread of Buddhism in the steppe area has also been confirmed by Chinese travelers. During his trip to India in the 8th century, a Buddhist monk Wu-k'ung visited the territories of the Western Turkic Khaganate which was under the rule of the Turgesh, where he discovered the attributes of Buddhist religious life. These facts have been widely accepted by historiographers. Another accepted fact is that the toretics of the ancient Hungarians was influenced by the Sogdians. In addition to the technical methods of metal processing, masters of the Sogdian origin, or Hungarian masters having acquired the metal processing techniques from Sogdian artisans, could have been familiar with the myths and legends associated with Buddhism, which were spread across the steppe area. Therefore, Sogdian artisans probably depicted the motifs of Buddhist iconography, equally known to themselves and their customers, on the items they crafted. Patterns on belt plates discovered in Subbottsy village, burial ground 2, indicate their relation to ancient Hungarian findings from Magna Hungaria and the Carpathian Basin. However, images of a man sitting down in the lotus position (padmasana) or dancing winged girls/angels have not yet been discovered in the territory of Hungary. Findings of the Subbottsy type include belt set with a dancing girl/angels from Katerinovka. The position of the right hand of a man sitting down in the lotus position, or a stick with a T-shaped tip in his right hand have not been discovered in the Buddhist iconography. Therefore, it cannot be established which Buddha or Bodhisattva is represented by the sitting man from Subbottsy village. However, the dancing girl/angels can be identified as the Apsarasas of the Buddhist iconography on the basis of their characteristic features. Buddhist motifs have also been traced in the territory of the Kushnarenkovo culture. They include a belt tip with the image of a man with four arms the grave No. 3 of barrow No. 3 at Ishimbayevo burial ground, which can be identified as Avalokitesvara (in the Chenrezik Lamaism).

Keywords: religious motifs, belt mounts, Subotsi Group, Kushnarenkovo Culture, Lomovatovo Culture, Sasanian-Sogdian metallurgy, Buddhist symbols, Manichaeism, 9-10th century, Early Hungarians.

1. Introduction

It is a well-known fact for researchers of Hungarian prehistory that Hungarian metallurgy was strongly influenced by Sasanian-Sogdian metallurgy in the 9–10th century. However, Sogdian merchants coming from Central Asia did not only trade in their silver objects such as jars, cups, dishes, they did not only spread the artistic style of these pots among the peoples speaking Turkic and Iranian languages in the steppe region and peoples speaking Finno-Ugric languages in the forest region, but they also had a cultural mission. While they had a leading role in managing trade along the Silk Road, they

also spread Buddhism and Manichaeism among the people they traded with. Researchers of Hungarian prehistory have not studied Sogdian cultural influence on ancient Hungarians, as no historical or archeological traces of this influence have been known. Here I propose that some archeological finds suggest that the teachings and symbolism of Manichaeism as well as Buddhist symbols used in Manichaeism were known for 9–10th century Hungarians.

2. Belt mounts with images of humans from Subotsi Grave 2

The primary source of information for Hungarian archeologists about the

¹ The title of the article has been changed from “Buddhist motifs” to “Eastern religious motifs” owing to new insights gained during a deeper analysis.

² Nóra Wenzky translated this article from Hungarian into English, and the quotations from Russian into English. The original Russian quotations are given in footnotes.

graves excavated in Subotsi, Soviet Union (now Ukraine) was an article published in Hungarian by N.M. Bokij and S.A. Pletneva in 1989³. The finds are explicitly related to finds of the Hungarian conquerors. However, it was problematic to relate these finds to the Hungarians both for the dating of the excavation site and for the interpretation of the belt mounts found in Grave 2. Bokij and Pletneva dated the jug of Tmutarakan type found in Grave 2 to the second half of the 10th century, i.e. after the Hungarian conquest in the Carpathian Basin. Concerning the belt mounts, they wrote: «the long-bearded old man on the buckle plate and the young man in various strange positions on the belt mounts are figures from some eastern legends or tales» (Bokij – Pletneva, 1988: 113; 1989: 96)⁴.

Aleksey Komar systematized finds from Subotsi and similar finds from the territory of Ukraine and Moldova (Komar, 2011). Following his terminology, this well-defined find complex is referred to as *Subotsi-type finds*, *Subotsi Circle* or *Subotsi Horizon*.

Four scenes are depicted on the belt mounts found in Subotsi Grave 2. The images on the hexagonal mounts from the same grave depict a person turning to the right, with both legs bent (Fig. 1). This is not a static figure, the artist depicted the person while moving or hovering⁵. The person's position resembles a dancer who is in the air after jumping upwards. While the arms are bent in front of the body, the hands are touching. On both sides of the head the same veil-like object is depicted as in the case of the old man on the buckle plate. There is a scarf-like garment tied around the person's neck. The scarf is sticking out on both sides just the same way as the «veil» around the head. Next to the figure's waist, another veil or a wing can be seen. According to Bokij and Pletneva, who published these finds, the person is holding this object in his hand. The wide trouser legs of the dancer are held by a belt.

Besides the hexagonal belt mounts, three further belt mount types from the same grave depict humans. People with their knees open

³ The article was originally published in Russian: (Бокий, Н.М. – Плетнева, С. А. (1988)

⁴ «...длиннобородый старик на пряжке и молодой человек в различных причудливых позах на бляшках – персонажи какой-то восточной легенды или сказки» (Bokij-Pletneva, 1988: 113., 1989: 96).

⁵ According to the description of Bokij és Pletneva «стоит «на левом колене», i.e. «is standing» on his left knee» (Bokij-Pletneva, 1988: 106; 1989: 90). We do not agree with this interpretation.

and feet closed are depicted on oval pendant belt fittings with a ring (Fig. 2). Supposedly, the artist wished to show a dancing movement, just like in the case of hexagonal belt mounts⁶. The objects surrounding the people and their hand position is similar to the images on the above described finds. There is a veil-like object protruding from the head on both sides, the hair (and the veil?) is held by a diadem, the arms are bent, the hands are making a fist, and on both sides of the waist there is a wing-like object. It is clearly visible on the better quality pendant belt fitting that the hands are holding a lotus. Therefore, we can suppose that the figures on the hexagonal belt mounts are also holding lotus flowers or lotus buds⁷. On the pendant belt fittings, the figures are unambiguously wearing a neck band, while in the case of hexagonal belt mounts, the figures are rather wearing scarves with the ends jutting out on both sides.

The last type of belt mounts depicting humans from this find is the half-disc formed plate with a hole (Fig. 3). The figure is hovering in a lying position above the hole in the object. The artist used the same clothes and attributes as in the previously described belt mounts. However, in this case it is clearly visible that the person is holding some kind of veil in his/her hands. This fact and the known parallels (Komar, 2016) render it probable that the figures on the hexagonal plates and on the pendants hold a veil in their hands besides the lotus.

The most finely wrought depiction of a person is found on the buckle plate in the belt set of Subotsi Grave 2. The figure of an old man sitting in lotus position can be seen on the buckle plate (Fig. 4). The man has long hair, a long moustache and a beard reaching his knees as he is sitting. There are trapezoidal shapes (maybe a special hairstyle or veil) on both sides of the head. The man is wearing drop earrings with spherical pendants, and his hair is kept together by a diadem. He is holding a stick with a T-shaped end in his left hand. He is giving blessings with his right hand: his arm is reaching up, three of his fingers are bent, his index finger and middle finger are pointing upwards.

⁶ According to the description of Bokij and Pletneva «Человек изображен сидящим», i.e. «the person is depicted sitting» (Бокий, Н.М. – Плетнева, С. А. 1988: 107; Bokij – Pletneva, 1988: 107; 1989: 91). We do not agree with this interpretation.

⁷ Lotus buds are depicted on the cup from Korobchino as well (Subotsi Horizon; Prihodnuk, O.M. – Churilova L.N., 2002).

Belt mounts similar to the above described ones are also known from Katerinovka (Fig. 5), another archeological site of the Subotsi Horizon (Komar, 2011: рис. 8). The belt mounts similar to the hexagonal belt mounts from Subotsi have rounded edges, and the pendants with a ring and the pendants with a hole are quite worn. Despite the wear, it is visible that the figures' movement is the same as on the belt mounts from Subotsi. However, no plate with an old man sitting in lotus position was found at the Katerinovka site.

3. Motifs on belt mounts

Bokij and Pletneva regard the figures depicted on the hexagonal mounts, the oval mounts with a ring and the mounts with a hole as males⁸ (Bokij – Pletneva 1988: 107, 1989: 91), while Komar calls them dancers or angels, and does not determine their sex (Komar 2016: 550–553).

Based on parallels in other arts like sculpture and painting, it can be stated that the belt mounts from Subotsi depict dancing angels, female angels. The goldsmith artists depicted them in positions well-known from Buddhist iconography. These dancing angels resemble *apsaras*, i.e. the celestial female spirits of clouds and rain, which originate in Indian art and are depicted on various Buddhist works of art as well. Both leg positions depicted on the Subotsi and Katerinovka finds is well-known from the images of *apsaras*. The figure on the hexagonal mounts turns both bent legs in the same direction. The same leg position is seen on a relief from Borobudur, Indonesia (Fig. 6).

The figures on the oval mounts with a ring open their knees and touch their feet together. The same position can be observed on a relief depicting dancers from Angkor Wat, Cambodia (Musée Guimet, Paris), as shown on Figure 7.

The figure depicted above the hole of the half-disc formed belt mounts is floating in a lying position. A parallel to this is found on a relief belonging to Serindian art. These angles floating in a lying position are generally depicted on a Buddha's or a Bodhisattva's two sides. The angel's leg position on the relief in Figure 8 is similar to that of the dancers on the oval belt mounts with a ring from Subotsi.

⁸ «Очевидно, несмотря на безбородые и безусые лица, на всех 17 описанных бляхах изображены мужчины» «It is clear that although the figures have no beard or moustache, all the 17 mounts depict males» (Бокий, Н. М. – Плетнева, С. А. 1988:107, Bokij – Pletneva, 1988: 107, 1989: 91).

The parallel works of art are of high significance because their cultural background and interpretation leading to the world of Buddhism are known. The Buddhist cultural background does not only help the interpretation of belt mounts from Subotsi, Ukraine, but also the interpretation of similar images found on other belt mounts, silver bowls and jars. However, in the course of interpretation of mythological scenes it is not sufficient to look for parallels among Buddhist motifs, as possible parallels range from Hellenism to Christianity. Interpretation is further complicated by the fact that a given scene may be interpreted on the grounds of more than one religion or belief system.

Buddhism started to spread eastwards from the Bactria region. The Buddha's teachings reached China as early as the 1st century AD. From there, with state help, the doctrines spread back to the west to serve as the ideological foundation for the Chinese expansion. At the same time, the Yuezhi people entered Bactria and continued to spread Buddhism eastward. The main role in this process was played by Sogdian merchants, who spoke an East Iranian language related to the language of the Yuezhi. The elite Sogdian merchants played a decisive role in the formation of steppe empires. The official language of the First Turkic Khaganate was Sogdian, Sogdian texts were written in Sogdian script. It has long been recognized by scientists that the Buddhist basic vocabulary of Turkic languages is partly of Sogdian origin (Sims-Williams, 1983).

Chinese travellers also reported the spreading of Buddhism in the steppes. On his way to India, Wu-k'ung Buddhist monk crossed western Turkic territories dominated by the Turgesh at the time: Semirechye (or Zhetysu) and the valleys of Rivers Chu and Ili. The Turgesh khagan Ocirlıq/Wuzhile (699–706) was also a Buddhist, supposedly on Sogdian influence, as he had Sogdian inscriptions minted on his coins. The first Buddhist finds in the Chu Valley were discovered by archeologists more than a hundred years ago. Ever since several Buddhist finds have been unearthed, including some buildings as well (Torgoev et al., 2012). The above facts just give a glimpse into the enormous number of publications by our learned predecessors and colleagues written on the presence of Buddhism in the steppe region (cf. Litvinsky, 1968; Puri, 1987; Foltz, 1999; Elverskog, 2010 and the literature cited by them).

The golden age of Buddhism in the steppe region was terminated when the Second Turkic Khaganate created its own script, the Turkic

runic script (Old Turkic Script) in order to protect the country from Chinese ideological and political expansion. They also wanted to return to the old faith of their ancestors, i.e. Tengrism. The Uyghur Khaganate, however, supported still another religion, namely Manichaeism.

When interpreting the image of the old man sitting in lotus position on the buckle plate, Károly Mesterházy (1994) thought that this old man is the principal god himself. He traced this representation back to Sogdia and post-Sasanian Iran, and mentioned the Painted Vase from Merv as a parallel. One of the scenes painted on this vase depicts a Zoroastrian monk in the same position as the old man on the belt from Subotsi. Mesterházy regarded the band worn on the Subotsi god's forehead as part of a diadem. He noticed that the stick in the old man's hand is a crosier with a T-shaped head, which alludes to Christ's cross and is the most ancient form of crosiers of high-ranking Christian priests (Mesterházy, 1994: 198, 200).

Contrarily, G. G. Korol linked the motifs of the Subotsi belt plates with the Nart Sagas (Король, 2005: 157–158, cited by Комар, 2016. С. 548). In Chapter *Хазарский сюжет...* of his book, V. Ya. Petruhin, however, relates the male figure on the belt plate with the Eurasian cosmogonic myth. He identified the old man as the long-haired one out of the males fighting forever in the myth (Петрухин, 2014. С: 348). Aleksey Komar compared the same man to a Taoist teacher in his 2016 study *Поясные наборы IX–X вв. с «мифологическими сюжетами»*, and added: „It seems, the jeweler faced the task of presenting not so much a ruler as an elder sage, and to achieve this goal he had to combine the image with elements of Buddhist or Taoist iconography” (Комар, 2016. С. 551)⁹. Unfortunately, Komar did not elaborate on what he had identified as elements of Buddhist and Taoist iconography. Presumably, he regarded the old man's body position (lotus position) as a motif from Buddhist iconography. The wings or veil-like phenomena depicted around the old man's head remind us of a basic text of Taoism, namely the Zhuangzi, especially its Chapter 2. According to a story in this chapter, Zhuang Zou turns into a butterfly in his dream. The dream and the metamorphosis into a butterfly can be interpreted as a metaphor for death (Kósa, 2008).

⁹ «По-видимому, перед ювелиром стояла задача представить не столько правителя, сколько старейшину-мудреца, и для достижения цели ему пришлось совместить образ с элементами буддийской или даосистской иконографии» (Комар, 2016. С. 551).

The man's sitting position is called «lotus position», but this is only one out of several possible explanations. It is a general resting position in steppe nomadic cultures to sit with legs drawn close to the body on the the ground or on a soft object. In Hungarian, this position is called *törökülés* «Turkish sitting position», which is not a coincidence. Attila Türk (2011: figures 265 and 266) and Aleksey Komar (2016: 547/рис. 2, 549/рис. 3, 552/рис. 4) show parallels from the Sasanian–Sogdian metallurgy to the sitting figure of the buckle plate from Subotsi Grave 2. Literature discusses objects depicting Sasanian rulers, sometimes surrounded by dancers and musicians. The rulers are wearing sacred symbols as diadems, which can be explained on the grounds of Mazdaism.

However, certain figures sitting in the lotus position cannot be identified with Sasanian rulers owing to their special hand position and objects in their hands. The attributes of the old man on the Subotsi buckle plate can be traced back to Buddhist and Christian motifs. Based on the presence of these motifs, the sitting position of the depicted person (a god, a prophet?) must be interpreted as lotus position.

The wings, ribbons or veils around the old man's head indicate that he is a special person. However, the hand position of the right hand giving blessings is unknown in Buddhist iconography, while the sacredness of the gesture is widely acknowledged in Christian cultures. The T-ended crosier in the old man's left hand is also known from Christianity. A similar crosier is in an old man's hand on a fragmentary belt mount found in Verkhniy Saltov, Soviet Union (now Ukraine) in 1985, from the Saltovo Cultural-Historical Community region. Furthermore, another belt mount from the same Verkhniy Saltov grave depicts another person sitting in lotus position (Aksenov, 2001; cf. Komar, 2016: 547). It is self-evident that some mutual cultural influence can be the cause of the high similarity of the finds from Subotsi and Verkhniy Saltov.

In my opinion, the mixing of Buddhist and Christian motifs in the depiction of the old man reflects the syncretism of Manichaeism, which has also been discussed widely. See for example Klima (1962), Widengren (1965), Hosroev (2007), Simon (2011), Smagina (2011) and the literature suggested there. A bibliography was completed by Mikkelsen (1997). However, the researchers of Hungarian prehistory have not studied the field of Manichaeism in detail.

Mani, the founder of Manichaeism, preached that before his coming three prophets

had walked the Earth: Shakyamuni, i.e. the historical Buddha, Zoroaster and Jesus. Mani declared himself to be the fourth prophet of the Earth. While the Christian church fought against the spread of Manichaeism desperately, no conflicts arose with Buddhism. The dualistic cosmology of Manichaeism could be reconciled with the beliefs of people who feared the forces of nature, believed in benevolent and malevolent spirits and respected shamans.

The eastward spreading Manichaeism started at the end of the 7th century, when a Manichaean bishop travelled to China in 694. Mani and his disciples tried to convert rulers first, and then the nobles, especially wealthy ladies of birth. They also aimed at converting the youth. Mani and his followers supported trade and financial transactions, thus Manichaean missionary work was primarily done by travelling salesman, especially Sogdian merchants. A number of authors discussed that Sogdian trade and missionary work had been intertwined (e.g. Maenchen-Helfen (1951), Foltz (1999), both cited by Simon 2011: 411–413.). Boris Marshak, who excavated Penjikent (Panjakent), wrote about the complexity of Sogdian cosmology and the myths and symbols combined into it (for an overview of his research see Marshak (2002)). In their joint study, Marshak and Belenickij cite examples to prove that religious syncretism is visible on Penjikent frescoes (Беленицкий А.М., Маршак Б. И, 1976. С. 79–89). Motifs can be traced back as far as India, and signal the presence of Shiva cult in Sogdia. Previously, we have discussed the role of Buddhism and Manichaeism in connection with Sogdians, we must add Shaivism to the list. However, we must not forget about Lukonin's opinion, according to which 'Shiva on Kushano-Sasanian coins was interpreted as Ahura Mazda'¹⁰ (Лукинин, 1967: 20, cited by Беленицкий – Маршак, 1976:79).

Syncretism is reflected in Manichaean art as well. Buddhist and Manichaean motifs mixed in the Eastern Asian version of Manichaean art on the territory of the Uyghur Empire. Prophets were depicted in a lotus position, wearing a long robe and with a glory over their head (Gulácsi, 2009: 128–129). Jesus was depicted in the same manner, with a cross in his hands (Gulácsi, 2009: Fig. 1a, 1c; Gulácsi, 2015). On a relief, an angel sitting in lotus position is holding a cross in his hands (Gulácsi, 2009: Fig. 4f, based on Parry, 2005).

The deliberate syncretism of Manichaeism, the way it built on other religions offers a very good explanation for the mixed symbolism of buckle plate from Subotsi Grave 2. The old man's lotus position can be derived from Buddhist iconography. There are probably wings around his head, as wings are well-known attributes of non-earthly beings in several religions. The position of the blessing right hand, with the two fingers and the T-ended crosier are known from Christian iconography. This syncretic mixture of symbols points to Manichaeism.

However, up to now we have not seen any image from Manichaean art that would be similar to the image on the belt plate from Subotsi Grave 2. Therefore, we must be cautious when guessing the identity of the person depicted here. It is quite extraordinary and unique that the old man sitting in the lotus position has long hair and a long beard. Mani was depicted with a long beard on a seal, but this is not characteristic of Manichaean art (Gulácsi, 2013).

I suppose that the old man sitting in a lotus position on the buckle plate of Subotsi Grave 2 depicts Mani himself out of the four prophets recognized by Manichaeism, owing to his attributes signalling his connection to the upper world, i.e. the T-headed crosier, and the hand in the Christian blessing position. The Christian motifs of the image might mean that Mani had been a Christian before founding Manichaeism, he was a member of the Elcesaites sect. As we have discussed it above, Buddhism and Manichaeism was spread among the peoples of the steppe by traders of Sogdian origin. In the 9–10th century, Hungarians learnt the stylistic marks and collection of motifs from Sogdian metallurgy from the same Sogdian tradesmen. Therefore it is valid to suppose that Sogdian culture did not only influence Hungarians' decorative art, but also their cosmology.

4. Belt mounts depicting humans from Ishimbay, Novonikolaevka and Redikor

Finds from the Subotsi horizon have great many connections to the finds excavated in the cemetery of Bolshie Tigani, Russia and to the whole of Karayakupovo–Kushnarenkovo culture. This fact was already noted by the archeologists first publishing about the Subotsi excavation site (Бокий – Плетнева, 1988, Bokij – Pletneva, 1988, 1989). Additionally, publications dealing with the finds from the Subotsi horizon regularly mention and analyze this relationship (Комар, 2011; Türk, 2011). The supposition that the people who created the artifacts from

¹⁰ «Шива на кушано-сасанидских монетах понимался как Ахура Mazda» (Lukonin, 1967: 20).

the Subotsi horizon had lived in the area of the Karayakupovo–Kushnarenkovo area earlier is getting more and more certain.

In the 1960s, N. A. Mazhitov (1981) excavated three new kurgans in the Ishimbay excavation site, which had been explored ever since the end of the 19th century. Grave 3 in Kurgan 3 was supposedly a symbolic one, as human bones were missing from it. According to a photo published of a roughly wrought belt mount (Fig. 9), the mount depicts a man, with male features and a moustache. He is dressed in a long robe which is fastened with a belt¹².

In my opinion, the artist wanted to depict a human figure with four arms on the belt mount. The human figure has two extra arms growing upwards from his shoulders, in a similar manner to other images of multi-armed gods. The arms are bent and the figure is probably a male.

The human figure on the strap end from Ishimbay is not so finely wrought as the old man on the buckle plate from Subotsi. However, this image helps us interpret the human figures on the strap end from Novonikolaevka (Ханенко Б., Ханенко В., 1902. С. 23, 42, Табл. XIX/679.), and the buckle and strap end from Redikor (Путешествие Ибн Фадлана 2016: 363; for a detailed description of the finds see ОАК 1909–1910: 228, 230.) as well.

The finds from the Novonikolaevka Kurgan got into the Hanenko Collection in 1902. It is clear that this collection of finds belongs to the Subotsi Horizon. As the photo taken from the strap end depicting a human figure proves (Fig. 10), the same person is depicted here as on the Ishimbay strap end. This strap end is heavily worn. The human figure is roughly wrought. He is wearing trousers and maybe a long robe. His feet are pointing in the same direction. The artist depicted several arms or veils (or wings?) around his head. It seems as if he was holding two of his bent hands in front of himself, and he was raising his two other hands. There is a veil or a kerchief around his waist.

Redikor is situated along the River Visera, in the Upper Kama region. The ancient homeland of Komi-Permyaks is outstandingly rich in

mementoes of the commercial relations of the 9-10th century. The area delimited by the Rivers Kama, Visera and Kolva is called the «silver triangle». Several stray finds and cemeteries are known from Redikor, and archeological excavations were pursued in Gorodishche, Redikor as well. Strap ends belonging to the Lomovatovo Culture were found in Redikor in 1909, which are parallel to the strap ends from Ishimbay and Novonikolaevka. The objects are made of gilded silver, and the figure's head is quite grotesque. It is difficult to see it on the buckle plate, but it is easier to identify a special hairstyle, a ribbon or wings around the head of the figure on the strap end. Concerning the Ishimbay strap end, it seems ribbons are going into two directions from the top of the head. There is a very high number of arms and legs on the Redikor belt mounts, which is difficult to interpret. It is possible that veils or wings surround the figure's body around the waist, in a similar manner to the figure on the finds from Subotsi. But they might also be interpreted as the bent and folded arms of the figure. It seems there are fingers of a human in the middle of the mounts. There are two additional uplifted arms depicted above the “veils” or bent arms. Moreover, there are two extra pairs of legs pointing downwards on the strap ends.

Based on the similarities of images on the belt mounts from Ishimbay, Novonikolaevka and Redikor, I suppose the figures depict the same person on all of these finds.

5. Motifs of the belt mounts

The Southern Uralic Mountains, i.e. the wide region around Karayakupovo–Kushnarenkovo culture, was an important trade center from the 8-9th centuries. Here the Volga Bulgarian Khanate received and forwarded goods arriving from different regions. Sogdian merchants were probably also present in the area. They paid for the furs coming from the Finno-Ugric regions by so called “Eastern silver”, i.e. the products of Sasanian-Sogdian metallurgists, such as jugs, bowls and cups. These were carried primarily by Volga Bulgarians to both sides of the Uralian Mountains, to Siberia and to regions along the Upper Kama inhabited by Komi-Permyak and Ob-Ugric peoples. However, based on Muslim geographical sources we can suppose that merchants arriving from the south reached territories occupied by Finno-Ugric peoples, i.e. to Aru, Visu and the «Land of Darkness» (Klima, 2016: 182–208.). Based on findings from archeological sites of the Lomovatovo culture we can suppose that merchants from the south took a

¹² Other finds from the same grave include a sabre and a disc-shaped mount, which is divided into four fields and depicts four three-petalled flowers (Мажитов, 1981: 90). Exactly the same type of flowers can be found on the belt mounts from Bolshie Tigani and Novonikolaevka, Subotsi Horizon (Halikova, 1976: 59, 60, 66; Комар, 2011: 58). Besides other parallels, these also support the hypothesis that the kurgans in Ishimbay belong to the remains of ancient Hungarians.

rest for a shorter or longer period of time in these places.

The human figures depicted with multiple limbs on the belt mounts found in Ishimbay, Redikor and Novonikolaevka can be interpreted based on Buddhist-Manichaeist iconography. It must be added here that Belenickij and Marshak found an image of a four-armed goddess in Penjikent. This four-armed goddess from Penjikent is sitting on an imaginary animal, and ribbons are attached to her headband (Беленицкий А.М., Маршак Б. И., 1976: 77)¹³. A four-armed goddess can be seen on a silver cup from an unknown location, holding the symbols of the Moon and the Sun in her hands (Smirnov, 1909: item 43, picture XVIII: «ранее 1875 г. С Нижегородской Ярмарки», i.e. «before 1875, from the Nizhny Novgorod Fair»). This motif can be traced back to India, which was spread in Middle Asia and Eastern Turkestan by Sogdians (Беленицкий А.М., Маршак Б. И., 1976. С. 77–80). However, owing to the syncretism of Sogdian population described above it is rather difficult to identify the symbolism of a given artifact. The four-armed goddess can not only be identified with Shiva, but also with Anahita (Djakonova – Smirnova, 1967). It is also possible that the client and the artist of goldsmith's product, fresco or relief interpreted the same symbol in a different way.

Male figures with four or five arms are also known from Buddhist iconography. Buddhists have a very high respect for Bodhisattvas, i.e. people who have already been enlightened but have not reached the state of being in Nirvana forever. They have reached enlightenment for our sake and they are waiting in the Tusita Heaven for us to reach enlightenment as well. Avalokiteśvara was one of these Bodhisattvas. He is the Lord looking down on us (like Tengri, the Turkic god of the sky...), he is compassionate with us and loves together with us. Avalokiteśvara has been known by various names (e.g. his name in Tibetan Buddhism is Chenrezik). The mantra “Om maṇi padme hūṃ” is directed to him. He is depicted in several forms, sometimes with a high number of arms, but the “Om maṇi padme hūṃ” mantra must be said to Chenrezik with four arms.

Based on the above details, the person depicted on the strap end from Ishimbay may originate from the cult of Avalokiteśvara/

¹³ “Изображено сидящим на спине фантастического животного”, “Заметны остатки от нимба и от лент головного убора” (Беленицкий А.М., Маршак Б. И., 1976: 77). Ribbons similar to these ones are depicted at the head of human figures on belt mounts from Subotsi as well.

Chenrezik. Naturally, we do not know whether the people of Ishimbay knew of the Buddhist or the syncretistic Manichaeist background. We do not know it either whether some new meaning was attached to the four-armed male god figure owing to the mixing of religions.

6. Contacts between the early Hungarian state and Central Asians

The contacts between Hungarians and Sogdian culture and Sogdian people continued after the Hungarian conquest. Based on historical sources, during the reign of kings from the Árpád Dynasty elite merchants called ‘káliz’ (Khwarezmian)¹⁴, possibly of Sogdian origin, took part in Hungary's economic and financial life, what is more, they had leading roles. Hungarian kings hired mercenaries from Central Asia (Zimonyi, 2009: 22). Khwarezmians, however, were already Muslims, as following the Arabian conquest the inhabitants of Sogdia converted to the Islam. This process was terminated by the turn of the 9th and the 10th centuries¹⁵.

7. Conclusion

This article proposes that certain aspects of Buddhist and Manichaeist teachings were known by Hungarians before the Hungarian conquest. This proposition is based on an analysis of certain archeological finds, namely belt mounts depicting human figures. These objects show the characteristic stylistic features of Sogdian metallurgy. I suppose that both the style and the motifs used prove that Sogdians had a cultural impact on Hungarians. During their migration to the Carpathian Basin, Hungarians were continuously in touch with Central Asian merchants and thus also with the cultural values they transmitted. As a result of these contacts, certain elements of Buddhist and Manichaeist iconography appeared in the motifs applied by Hungarian metallurgists.

It is widely known that Sogdian merchants coming from Central Asia played a crucial role in the organization of trade along the Silk Road. Moreover, they facilitated the formation of states along this route, and played an important role in organizing the economy of the newly emerging states. In his book on the sources of Manichaeism, Robert Simon claimed that scientific monographs both on the role of the

¹⁴ The Hungarian word ‘káliz’ originates from the name Horezm (Harmatta, 1994), just like the English word Khwarezm, which is the name of an oasis region in Central Asia.

¹⁵ As proved by Ibn Fadlan's travel reports from 921–922, by that time Islam had spread among Volga Bulgarians (Togan, 1939).

Silk Road and that of Sogdian merchants in the spreading of Manichaeism, and on the coexistence of Buddhism and Manichaeism are missing. The historical, economic and religious role of Sogdians in the life of peoples they traded with still needs to be studied (Simon, 2011: 411, note 192; 420, note 231). I wish to contribute to this research with this study on the emergence of Buddhist and Manichaeist motifs on Hungarian belt mounts.

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About the Author:

László Klima. Candidate of Historical Sciences, Assistant Professor, Eötvös Loránd University, Department of Finno-Ugric Studies, Pázmány Péter promenade 1/C, 23–27, Budapest, 1075, Hungary; klima.laszlo@btk.elte.hu

ВОСТОЧНЫЕ РЕЛИГИОЗНЫЕ МОТИВЫ НА ПОЯСНЫХ НАКЛАДКАХ СУББОТЦЕВСКОЙ ГРУППЫ КУШНАРЕНКОВСКОЙ И ЛОМАТОВСКОЙ КУЛЬТУР

Клима Ласло

Начиная с 4-го столетия до н.э. буддизм стал распространяться с индийского субконтинента на север, в сторону Бактрии. В 1-ом столетии н.э. в зоне степи кушаны, вселявшиеся в Бактрию, продолжали распространять его. Торговлей между Европой, Ближним и Дальним Востоком на станциях Средней Азии Великого шёлкового пути управляли согды. Кроме этого они были и посредниками связи между культурами и религиями. В распространении буддизма значительную роль играли согды, говорящие на восточно-иранском языке, родственном с кушанским языком. О распространении буддизма в зоне степей свидетельствуют и китайские путешественники. В 8-ом столетии, во время своего путешествия в Индию, буддийский монах, Укун (Wu-k'ung) бывал и на территории Западно-тюркского каганата, бывшего под властью тюркешей, где он обнаружил признаки живой буддийской религиозной жизни. Данные факты известны для историографии. Также известный факт, что в тюркешах древних венгров наблюдается влияние согдов. Кроме технических приёмов обработки металла, мастера согдийского происхождения, или венгерские мастера, принявшие приёмы обработки металла у мастеров-согдов, могли знать и распространённые в зоне степей мифы и предания, связанные буддизмом. Поэтому, на предметах, изготовленных для заказчиков, мастера-согды, наверное, изображали мотивы буддийской иконографии, одинаково известные для них самих и для заказчиков. Узоры на поясных накладках, найденных в д. Субботцы в мог. 2, указывают на связь с древневенгерскими находками из Магна Хунгарии и из Карпатского бассейна. Но изображение мужчины, сидящий в позе лотоса (padmasana) и танцующих девушек/ангелов с крыльями до сих пор не известны с территории Венгрии. Среди находок типа Субботцев поясной набор с танцующей девушкой/ангелом известна из Катериновки. Позиция правой руки мужчины, сидящего в позе лотоса, и палка в левой руке с Т-образным концом до сих пор не известны в буддийской иконографии. Поэтому не можем установить, которого будду или Бодхисаттву изображает сидящая мужчина из д. Субботцы. Но танцующих девушек/ангелов по своему характерному признаку можно отождествлять с апсарами буддийской иконографии. Буддийские мотивы появляются и на территории кушнаренковской культуры. К ним относится наконечник ремня с изображением человека с четырьмя руками из могилы № 3 кургана № 3 Ишимбаевского могильника, который можно отождествлять с Авалокитешварой (в ламаизме Ченрези).

Ключевые слова: религиозные мотивы, поясные накладки, субботцевская группа, кушнаренковская культура, ломатовская культура, сасанидско-согдийская металлургия, буддистские символы, Манихейство, 9-10 вв., ранние венгры.

Информация об авторе:

Клима Ласло, кандидат исторических наук, доцент, заведующий Кафедрой финно-угроведения Будапештского университета имени Лоранда Этвеша (г. Будапешт, Венгрия); klima.laszlo@btk.elte.hu



Fig. 1. Hexagonal belt mount from Subotsi Grave 2.
Source: Komar 2011: рис. 6/12.



Fig. 2. Oval pendant belt fittings with a ring from Subotsi Grave 2. Source: Komar 2011: рис. 6/11.



Fig. 3. Half-disc formed belt mount with a hole from Subotsi Grave 2. Source: Komar 2011: рис. 6/13.



Fig. 4. Buckle plate from Subotsi Grave 2. Source: photo by Attila Türk.



Fig. 5. Belt ornaments from Katerinovka, Subotsi Horizon. Source: Komar 2011: рис. 8/5-10.



Fig. 6. Belt mount from Subotsi, Ukraine (left), relief from Borobudur, Indonesia (right). Sources: Bokij, N. M., Pletneva, S. A. 1988: 104, 1989: 92; Komar 2011: рис. 6/12; https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Apsara_Borobudur.jpg – Wikimedia Commons, CC-BY-SA 3.0.



Fig. 7. Belt mount from Subotsi, Ukraine (sides), relief from Angkor Wat, Cambodia (middle). Sources: Bokij, N. M., Pletneva, S. A. 1988: 104, 1989: 92; Komar 2011: рис. 6/11; Musée Guimet, Paris, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fronton_Guimet_240907_3.jpg – Wikimedia Commons, CC-BY-SA 3.0.



Fig. 8. Belt mount from Subotsi, Ukraine (left), Serindian relief from Musée Guimet, Paris (right). Sources: Bokij, N. M., Pletneva, S. A. 1988: 104, 1989: 92., Komar 2011: рис. 6/13, <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a0/SerindianGroup.jpg> – Wikimedia Commons, CC-BY-SA 3.0.



Fig. 9. Strap end from Ishimbay – Grave 3, Kurgan 3. Source: Mazhitov 1981: 90., рис. 47/1.



Fig. 10. Strap end from Novonikolaevka. Source: Hanenko, B., Hanenko, V. 1902: Табл. XIX/679.



Fig. 11. Strap ends from Redikor. Source: Ibn Fadlan's Journey, 2016: 363.