

“THE STOVE OF THE ARCHBISHOP”

Figural stove tiles from the Castle of Csábrág (Čabrad’)

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It is only in recent years that the Castle of Csábrág (Čabrad’ in present-day Slovakia) has come to be known in Slovak and Hungarian scholarly research. Archaeological excavations carried out since 2013 have brought to light a large number of finds: ceramic vessels, glass finds, carved stones, and various artefacts made of metal. Yet the greatest surprise was perhaps the 2015 discovery of figural stove tiles in the second gate tower. The vaults inside the tower must have been made around 1600 and may have only collapsed in the second half of the twentieth century. Their layer contained a large amount of nearly intact mixed-glaze stove tiles depicting various saints and other figural scenes. These pieces evoked a previously identified late medieval circle of workshops found in Northern Hungary, but significant differences can also be observed between the original pieces of the workshop and the items from Csábrág.

INTRODUCTION

In the frames of collaboration between the Slovak Academy of Sciences and the Eötvös Loránd University, archaeological excavations were carried out in the Csábrág Castle (Fig. 1) under the supervision of Ján Beljak and Maxim Mordovin from 2013 to 2018 (BELJAK et al., 2016). Investigations were conducted at four sites within the castle, of which the second gate tower deserves special attention in terms of the researched area and the uncovered material, alike. Between 2015 and 2016, a large amount of mixed-glaze stove tiles were discovered there, which bore high-standard figural decorations and, occasionally, vegetal motifs. These tiles clearly point towards the workshop at Besztercebánya (Banská Bystrica in Slovakia) (KVIETOK & MÁCELOVÁ, 2013); however, differences can also be observed between the two find assemblages. Accordingly, the aim of the present study is to locate the finds from Csábrág respective to the already well-known group of stove tiles. Were these pieces also made by the workshop at Besztercebánya or another workshop working in a similar style?



Fig. 1. The Csábrág Castle from the south-west (photograph by Magyar Várarchívum Alapítvány)

THE BESZTERCEBÁNYA CIRCLE OF WORKSHOPS

As early as the end of the nineteenth century, during drain laying works in 1894, a large number of stove tiles showing saints and prophets as well as the figures of secular scenes came to light in the Bothár House at Besztercebánya (Fig. 2), the significance of which was already recognized at that time. Additionally, further finds were discovered in Besztercebánya in 1907 (MEZEI, 2013, 272). The assemblage also contained spoilt and semi-finished items, as well as the fragment of a stove tile mould, which were interpreted by Imre Holl and Pál Voit as the products of the same workshop (VOIT & HOLL, 1963, 49). In the course of the twentieth century, more and more remains of stove tiles with similar motifs and shapes were uncovered at other sites, as

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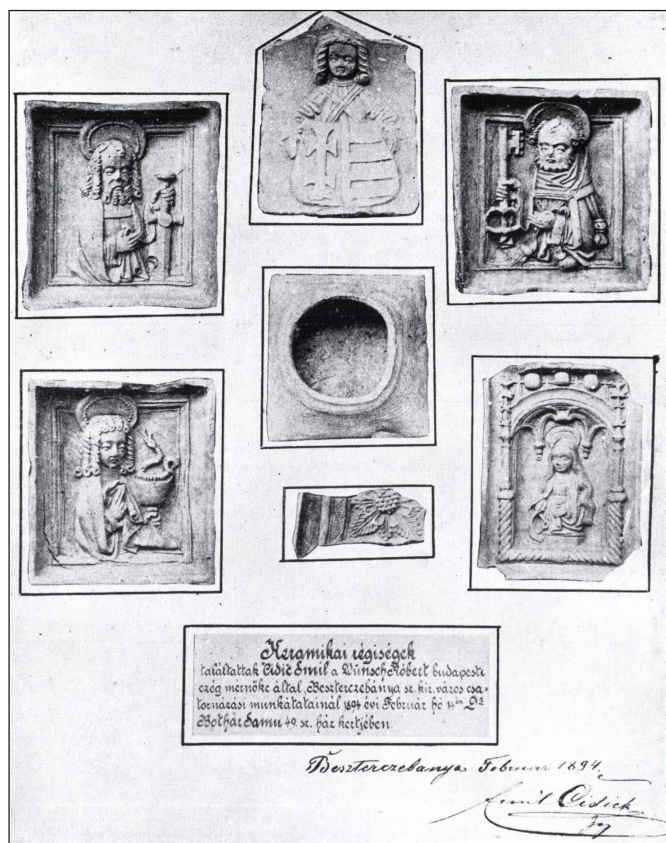


Fig. 2. Stove tiles from Besztercebánya
(PARÁDI, 1984, 177, Fig. 1)

pieces (Fig. 3). While researchers at the beginning reckoned with the migration of stove tile or mould makers (HOLL, 2004, 333), today there is a more prevailing view that these types of images spread over a large area through altarpieces or copperplate engravings, more or less concurrently (FRANZ, 1969, 57–60). Accordingly, the origin of these stoves was dated to the last decades of the fifteenth century. In 1500, however, there was a fire at Besztercebánya, which was believed by Slovak researchers to put an end to the workshops at Besztercebánya (KVIETOK & MÁCELOVÁ, 2013, 7). Recently discovered finds, on the other hand, refute this assumption.

This is why we need to emphasize the potentials and importance of archaeological investigation. During an excavation, the finds found in layers from different periods already provide a preliminary dating. Although in the case of stove tiles, this does not give the time of production but that of destruction, it is still possible to infer with great certainty to the time the stoves were built if the finds were yielded by layers dated with coins.

The processing of local finds is an increasingly urgent task of archaeology, as many fragments with

well (KÁDÁR, 1952; KALMÁR, 1959; BODNÁR, 1988). These sites covered nearly the entire northern part of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary. Former studies interpreted the newly found pieces as the products of the Besztercebánya workshop (PARÁDI, 1984, 182). However, the opinion that there may as well have been several workshops with similar products has recently become generally accepted (BODNÁR, 1988, 20; FELD, BALOGH-LÁSZLÓ & TÓTH, 2013, 260; ANDERKO, 2018, 53). Nevertheless, no attempts have been made to locate these supposed additional workshops, or rather, to delimit their areas of operation.

It also needs to be determined when the objects were made. Archaeological evidence is incomplete. The very first finds – including the assemblage identified as a workshop – do not come from archaeological excavations, so their dating and interpretation are also difficult (BALOGH-LÁSZLÓ et al., 2018, 303–304). It was clear right at the beginning that the figures on stove tiles and the represented themes may be connected to late medieval winged altar-



Fig. 3. A winged altarpiece with Saint Peter and Saint John,
Pónik (Poniky in Slovakia), 1483
(photograph by R. Rakonczay)

similar designs lie unpublished in various local museums. The real question is, however, whether these could have been made in one workshop, or should we reckon with several workshops working in a similar style? That is the reason why the term “Besztercebánya circle of workshops” started to be used in research, which suggests that the stove tiles of this large area could not have been produced by a single Besztercebánya workshop at that time, although no attempts have been made to locate further workshops or to separate their areas so far. The existence of several workshops is also suggested by the fact that stove tiles with similar themes and shapes have appeared in Czech and Polish areas, as well.

According to our current knowledge, there seems to have existed a widely spread fashion of representations – which may as well have been due to the prototypes of copperplate engravings – rather than a single workshop that supplied the whole of Upper Hungary with its products. But where and how can we find the other workshops? During our evaluation we should consider only those analogues that were made with the same mould, and if we map them, we may perhaps outline the districts where the other workshops operated.

THE CSÁBRÁG TYPES

So far, we have identified 118 types among the stove tiles discovered in the Csábrág Castle, nine of which belong to the so-called “Besztercebánya circle”. These can be classified in this group either due to their stylistic or their technical features. The Csábrág stove tiles were made of red-fired clay, tempered with pebbles. Traces of the cloth with which the clay was pressed into the moulds can be observed on almost all tiles. Based on their rear sides, the tiles can be divided into two groups: the rectangular tiles with figural representation have a half-cylinder back (Fig. 4a); whereas the square pieces, decorated with plant motifs, have pulled-up, wheel-turned side panels (Fig. 4b). In terms of glazing, the stove tiles also form two groups: there are specimens covered with simple green lead glaze and fragments with mixed glaze (with green and yellow lead glaze, as well as white, purple, and blue tin glaze).

The figural stove tiles can be divided into five types. **Type 1** comprises tiles that formed a decorative cornice around the crest of the stove. The upper part of the tiles is framed with a beaded pattern, which leans slightly forward, rendering thus the whole tile visible from below. On the stove tile, a curly-haired herald wearing a simple, pleated robe holds the coat of arms of Hungary (Fig. 5). This type of coat of arms goes back to the fourteenth or fifteenth century, but only became widely used in the sixteenth century (BERTÉNYI, 2003, 4). This is the only figural representation that has also been discovered at Besztercebánya, but the coat of arms is depicted reversed there, and the design of the tile is less detailed than on the item from Csábrág (KVIÉ-

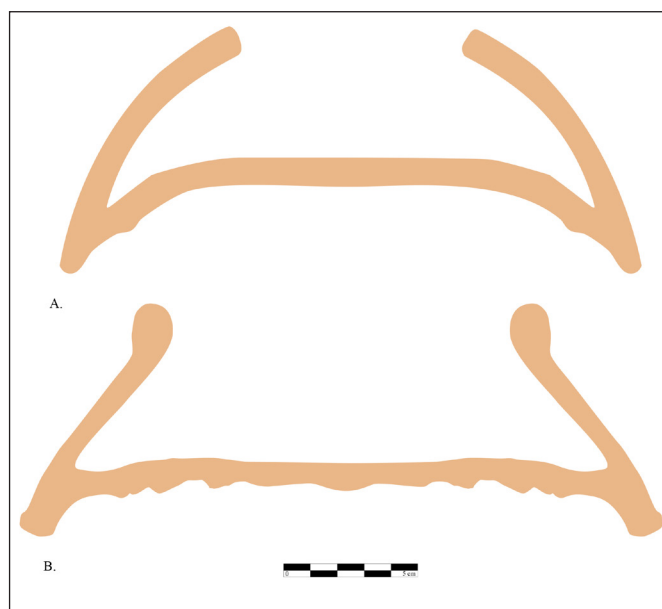


Fig. 4. The profiles of stove tiles

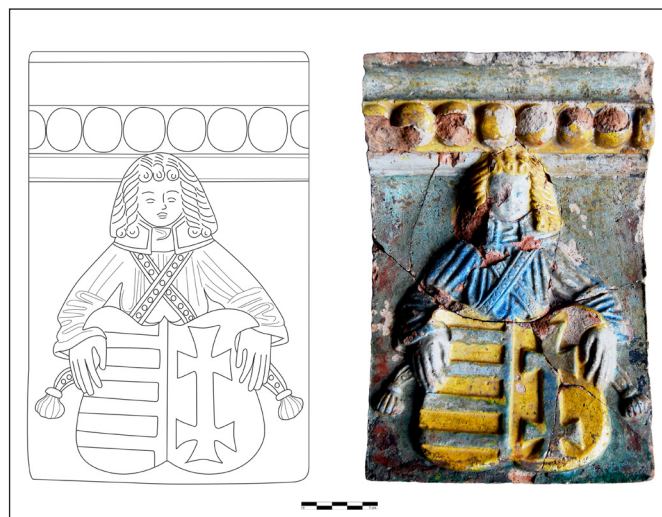


Fig. 5. Type – A herald holding a coat of arms

TOK & MÁCELOVÁ, 2013, 68). Matrix-identical items are known from Selmechánya (Banská Štiavnica in Slovakia; Šebestová, 2005, 58) and from Ipolyság (Šahy in Slovakia; RAKONCZAY, 2018, 218). **Type 2** shows the Virgin Mary holding Infant Jesus in her right arm and her pleated dress in her left. The background is filled with a nimbus, and there is a crescent beneath her feet as described in the Book of Revelation (*Fig. 6*). This depiction often appears on late medieval winged altarpieces, but it is relatively rare on stove tiles. Concerning the archaeological sites associated with the circle, it is also known from the town of Rožnov pod Radhostěm in the Czech Republic (PAVLÍK & VITANOVSKÝ, 2004,



Fig. 6. Type 2 – Virgin Mary



Fig. 7. Type 3 – Mary Magdalene

Vol. 135). The only matrix-identical stove tile is known from Selmechánya (Šebestová, 2005, 44). In addition to Virgin Mary, the figure of Mary Magdalene also appears on stove tiles (**Type 3**). This is the only type of tile from Csábrág that is framed with an inscription: it shows the letters MARIA on the left and MA[GDAL]A on the right (*Fig. 7*). The figure of Mary Magdalene appears infrequently on stove tiles. Matrix-identical items are known from Selmechánya and Ipolyság (ŠEBESTOVÁ, 2005, 39). **Type 4** shows the figure of Saint Dorothy. This type is represented by a single fragment. However, with the help of its analogue known from the Castle of Szitnya (Sitno in Slovakia; GRUIA, 2013, 469, Kat. 358), it was possible to reconstruct the stove tile (*Fig. 8*). It is the only tile that does not represent

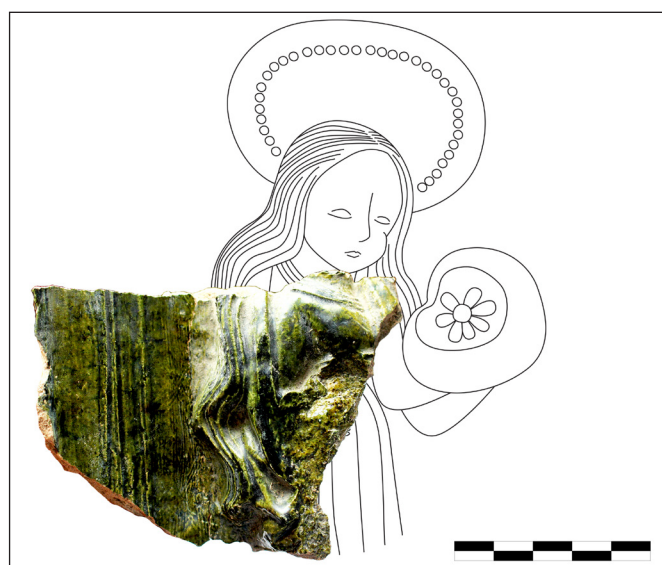


Fig. 8. Type 4 – Saint Dorothy



Fig. 9. Type 5 – Aristotle and Phyllis

the saint frontally, but turning sideways, and it is not a full-body image – like in the cases of Virgin Mary or Mary Magdalene – but merely a bust. Stove tiles depicting Saint Dorothy also appear in Úrvölgy (Špania Dolina in Slovakia) and Besztercebánya (KVIETOK & MÁCELOVÁ, 2013, 48–49). However, in these latter cases the saint is depicted standing in a Gothic niche that is missing on the item from Csábrág.

The only secular stove tile that complements the tiles with saints illustrates the moral story of Aristotle and Phyllis (**Type 5**). This thirteenth-century story presumably originates in the Near East and may have emerged in Europe at the time of the Crusades (C. BROOK & S. BURGESS, 2011, 11–12). According to the story, Aristotle, the tutor of Alexander the Great, scolded the statesman for spending his time with his beloved Phyllis instead of dealing with state affairs. On hearing this, Phyllis decided to teach the philosopher a lesson and seduce him. The man had to prove his love by allowing the woman to ride on his back while hitting his rear end (SARTON, 1930, 8–9). The stove tile depicts the latter scene (Fig. 9). This moral story appeared in almost every field of arts in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Aristotle and Phyllis are regular figures on stoves. They can be seen on the two tiles of a stove from South Tyrol dated 1555 (KAMMEL, 2011, 49. Abb. 19). In San Gimignano, they appear on the



Fig. 10. Aristotle and Phyllis on the wall of the San Gimignano Town Hall (photograph by R. Rakonczay)



Fig. 11. Aristotle and Phyllis on the Malterer Tapestry in Freiburg, fourteenth century (Haardt, 2017)

wall of the Town Hall (Fig. 10; MENNUCCI, 2011, 66–67), while in Freiburg, they can be seen on a fourteenth-century tapestry (Fig. 11; HAARDT, 2017, 18). A similar scene is visible on a fifteenth-century stove tile in Buda (HOLL, 1983, 219), but it does not show the characteristics of the Besztercebánya circle. A matrix-identical stove tile is known from Selmecebánya (LABUDA, 2005, 176).

In addition to figural stove tiles, there were square-shaped stove tiles decorated with vegetal motifs. Two axially symmetrical tiles can be found in the assemblage. **Type 6** shows a six-petal flower with leaves pointing towards the corners of the tile (Fig. 12). **Type 7**, on the other hand, bears a richly decorated pomegranate motif (Fig. 13). It is characteristic of both types of stove tiles that similar pieces were discovered in Besztercebánya; however, those are smaller and less ornate than the Csábrág items (KVIETOK & MÁCELOVÁ, 2013, 83; PARÁDI, 1984, 177, Abb. 1). Matrix-identical stove tiles are known from Selmecebánya, Ipolyság, and the Castle of Bozók (Bzovík in Slovakia; LABUDA, 2005, 181, Abb. 11; ŠEBESTOVÁ, 2005, 112). Type 7 also has a corner tile version consisting of one half and one intact tile, which met at a right angle (Fig. 14). Two types of cornice tiles can be added to the list above. **Type 8** is also square-shaped, and it

shows a pattern imitating roof tiles at the top and a blackberry vine at the bottom (Fig. 15). This type of cornice tile also appears elsewhere. In Szécsény, for example, it bore the inscription PANNO MARIA instead of a roof pattern (BODNÁR, 1988, Tab. VII. Fig. 11). Additionally, similar pieces have been found in the Czech Republic, in Český Brod and Prague (PAVLÍK & VITANOVSKY, 2004, Kat. 1327; 1329). A matrix-iden-

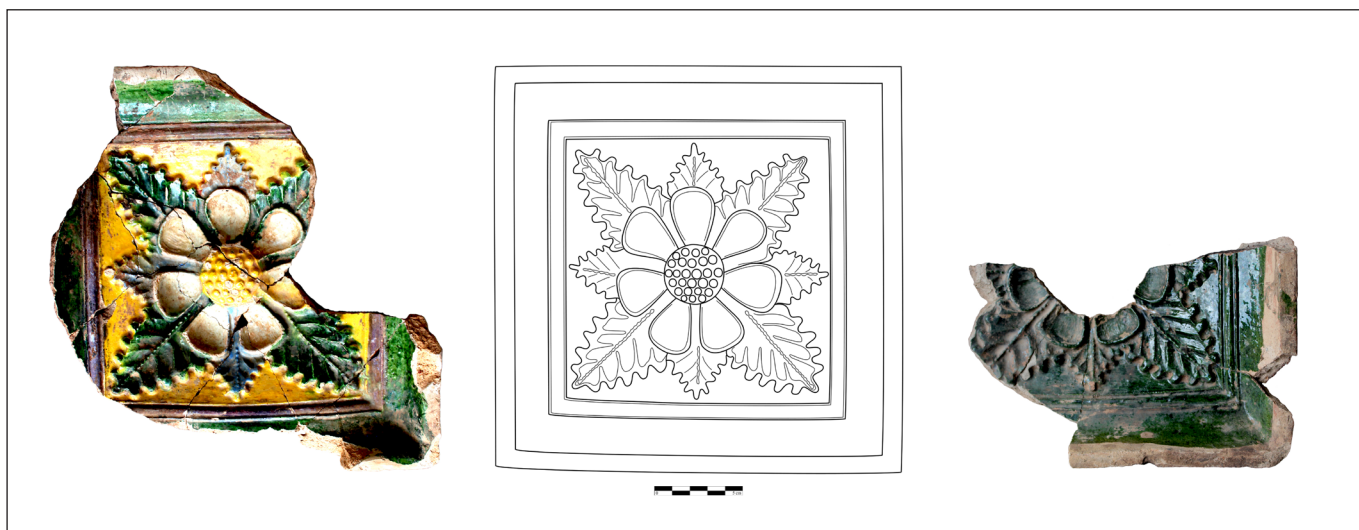


Fig. 12. Type 6 – A central flower

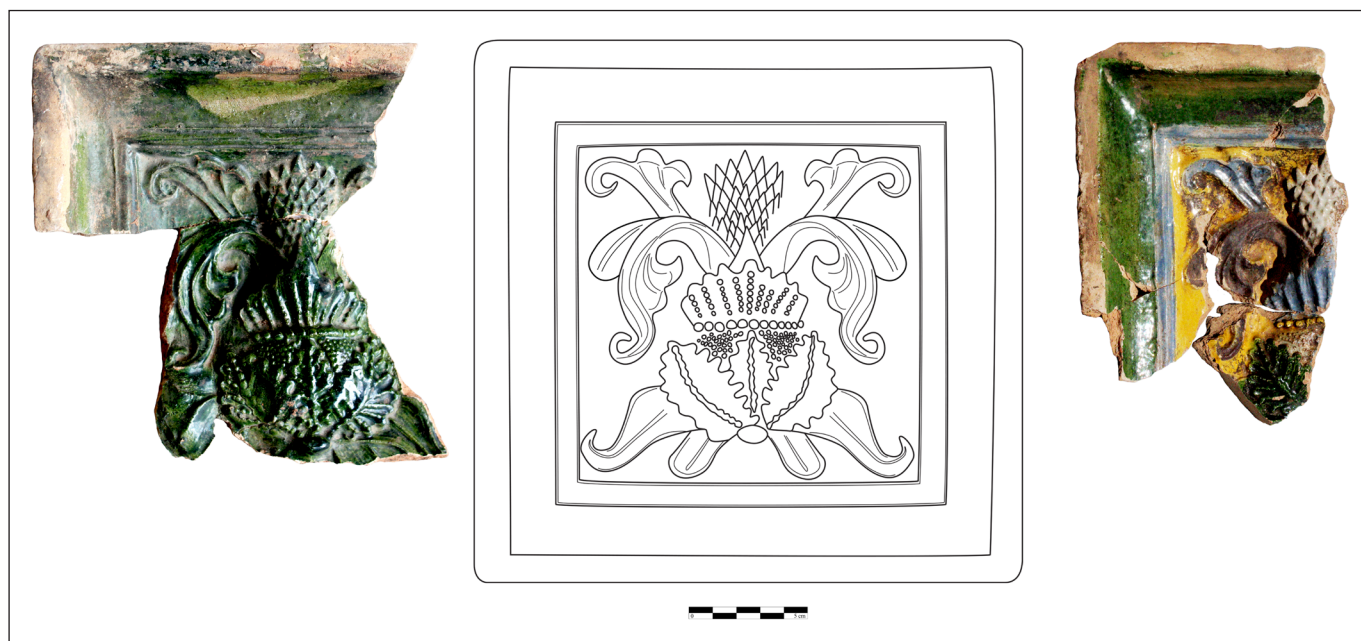


Fig. 13. Type 7 – A pomegranate



Fig. 14. A Type 7 corner tile

tical analogue comes from Selmečbánya (LABUDA, 2005, 177; 181, Abb. 9). **Type 9** forms a rectangular piece, which is at the same time decorated with vegetal tendrils that – presumably – belonged to the base of the stove (Fig. 16). This creeping plant motif was very common on stove tiles: it also emerges in the towns of Tábor and Bechyně (KRAJÍČ, 2005, 163, Abb. 278–279) and in the above-mentioned Rožnov (PAVLÍK & VITANOVSKÝ, 2004, Kat. 1283). However, a matrix-identical tile comes from Selmečbánya (LABUDA, 2005, 177, 181, Abb. 8).

The stove tiles discussed above can be divided into two groups. These are the rectangular, figural pieces with a half-cylinder back, and the square-shaped tiles with vegetal motifs to which wheel-

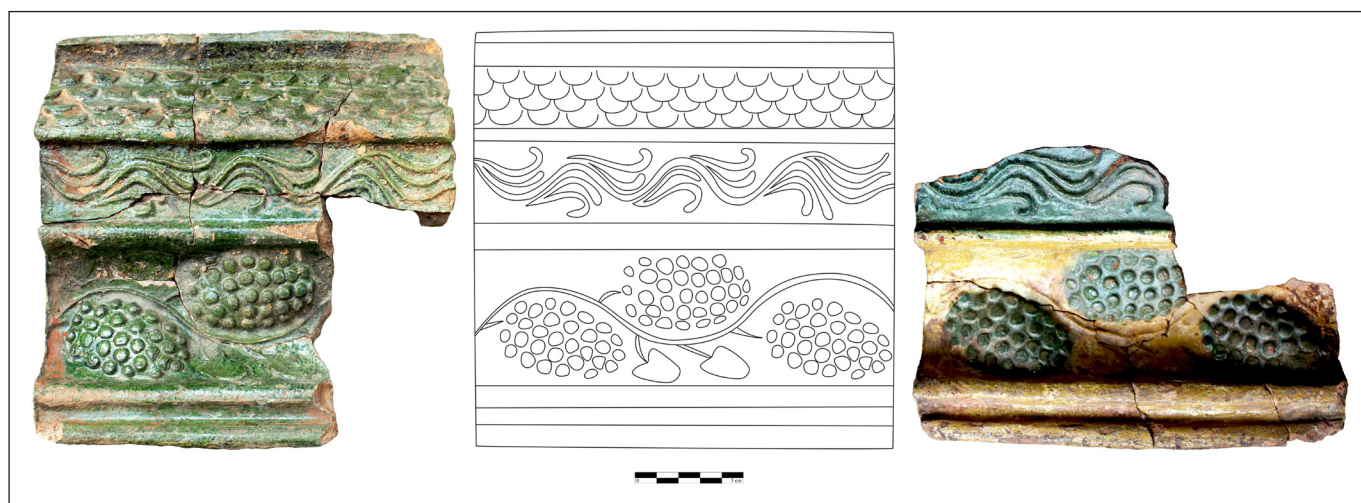


Fig. 15. Type 8 – A cornice tile with blackberry vines



Fig. 16. Type 9 – A cornice tile with creeping plant

turned side panels were stuck. Based on the two types of tiles, we can infer to a stove with a prismatic lower body decorated with vegetal motifs. The idea of the prismatic body is also supported by the corner tiles belonging to Type 7. The upper part, on the other hand, could have been formed by the rectangular stove tiles with figural decoration. No corner tiles were found here, so we may infer to a stove with a polygonal, tower-like upper body. The two parts of the stove may have been separated by the cornice tiles with roof tile decoration, while at the stove tiles with the herald holding the coat of arms must have belonged to the crest cornice of the stove (Fig. 17).

THE “HONT GROUP”

The matrix-identical analogues of the Csábrág stove tiles come from four sites: Selmecebánya, Ipolyság, as well as the Castles of Bozók and Sztitnya. These five locations – including Csábrág – are not only connected by the same moulds, but also the fact that all of them are located in the territory of the former Hont County. Therefore, the map depicts the “Hont group” the workshop of which must have been located in Selmecebánya that was an important and rich mining town similarly to Besztercebánya in that period (Fig. 18). This proposed workshop worked in a similar style to the Besztercebánya circle, but the majority of the depictions differ from the “original” pieces.

Nevertheless, the date still remains uncertain. The use of the Csábrág stove tiles ended around



Fig. 17. The reconstruction of a stove

1600 (MORDOVIN, 2015, 272), which seems a somewhat late date if we accept the assumption that stoves were made in the late 1400s (VOIT & HOLL, 1963, 49). Historical data, however, offer hints for the dating. At the end of the fifteenth century, the Horváth family was the proprietor of the castle, and for this period we have evidence about property disputes between the two heirs. Demjén Horváth bequeathed the estate to his brother, Péter and his widow, Eufrozina (RAKONCZAY, 2018, 252). In 1511, however, the castle was bought by Tamás Bakócz, the Archbishop of Esztergom, and major constructions took place from that time on. We also have information about a building inscription from 1520, and based on dendrochronological data, the cannon terrace of the castle was completed in 1517.

This is a much more plausible period for the building of new stoves, which represented the highest standard of the era, and therefore they could take their rightful place in the rooms of the archbishop, who was nearly elected a pope.

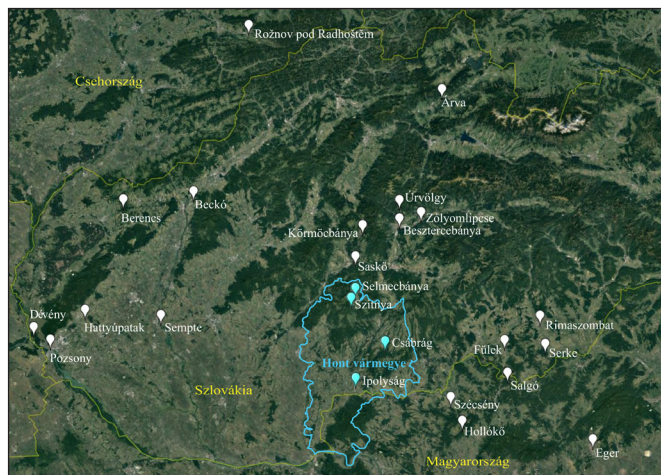


Fig. 18. The location of the “Hont group” within the sites of the “Besztercebánya circle”

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