

A UNIQUE IBERIAN MAJOLICA FRAGMENT FROM THE MARKETPLACE OF GYŐR (HUNGARY)

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This paper explores the origin, chronology, and connections of a majolica vessel found during excavation in the marketplace of Győr. The piece is of exceptionally high quality and counts as exceptional in the archaeological record of Hungary. It is adorned with painted cobalt blue motifs and lustre decoration. Its analogies are known from major museums' collections, including the Metropolitan Museum, the British Museum, and the Louvre. Based on these, its place and time of origin could be identified as the 15th-century Valencia in today's Spain, more specifically, Manises (now a district of Valencia) and between the 1430s and 1450s (based on the detailed chronological framework established from excavation results in the area). According to written sources, ceramic vessels and architectural ceramics were produced in Manises, a workshop following Hispanic Moorish traditions, to be exported to distant lands and on the order by noble families and princely courts, thus influencing, for instance, the majolica production of Italy. Following the expansion of the Kingdom of Aragon during the reign of Alfonso V, the Manises ware also became important in the court in Naples. The diplomatic relations between the royal courts of Aragon and Hungary can be accounted for the appearance of such a vessel in the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary.

Keywords: late Middle Ages, majolica, lustre, cobalt blue, Győr, Valencia, Manises, Naples, Beatrix of Aragon

REDEFINING THE FINDSPOT

Győr, at the crossroads of important water and land routes, was founded as a bishop's seat by King Stephen I before 1009. The medieval suburban settlement serving the bishop's castle was established on the nearby Káptalandomb in the early 11th century. Its parish church, dedicated to St. Stephen protomartyr, was located in the south-eastern part of the west-east axis of the suburban town. A stone-paved market square was established in the centre of this axis in the mid-13th century, probably in connection with the town being granted market privileges by the king in 1271; the construction involved demolishing and levelling some earlier dwellings. The location of the square did not change during the past centuries; the medieval marketplace is under today's Széchenyi Square. The excavations revealed that its borders in the north, east, and west have also remained unchanged, albeit the southern part has been built in shortly (KOLLÁTH & TOMKA 2021, 93–98).

The record of the excavation of Széchenyi Square in Győr has been under processing since 2015 by the “Momentum” Medieval Hungarian Economic History Research Group.⁴ As only Roman Period features came to light in the square in the first excavations in 1968–69, Eszter Szőnyi and Péter Tomka did not expect to find medieval features there in 1998–99 but discovered a large, filled cellar with stone walls of medieval origin (dismantled to the foundation) in the east-northeastern zone (Feature 13, *Fig. 1*) (SZŐNYI & TOMKA 2002, 207–208). Therefore, they surveyed early modern written sources and found a passage in a 1664 description by Evliya Çelebi which seemed to fit the building perfectly: “In front of the German palace is a spacious square and a prison, as deep as hell (...) Next to the prison, there is an artificial well where water is drawn up with wheels without people having to reach for a bucket” (EVLIA 1908, 143). Indeed, a deep, carefully constructed medieval well was found next to the cellar (BÍRÓ *et al.* 2010, 46).

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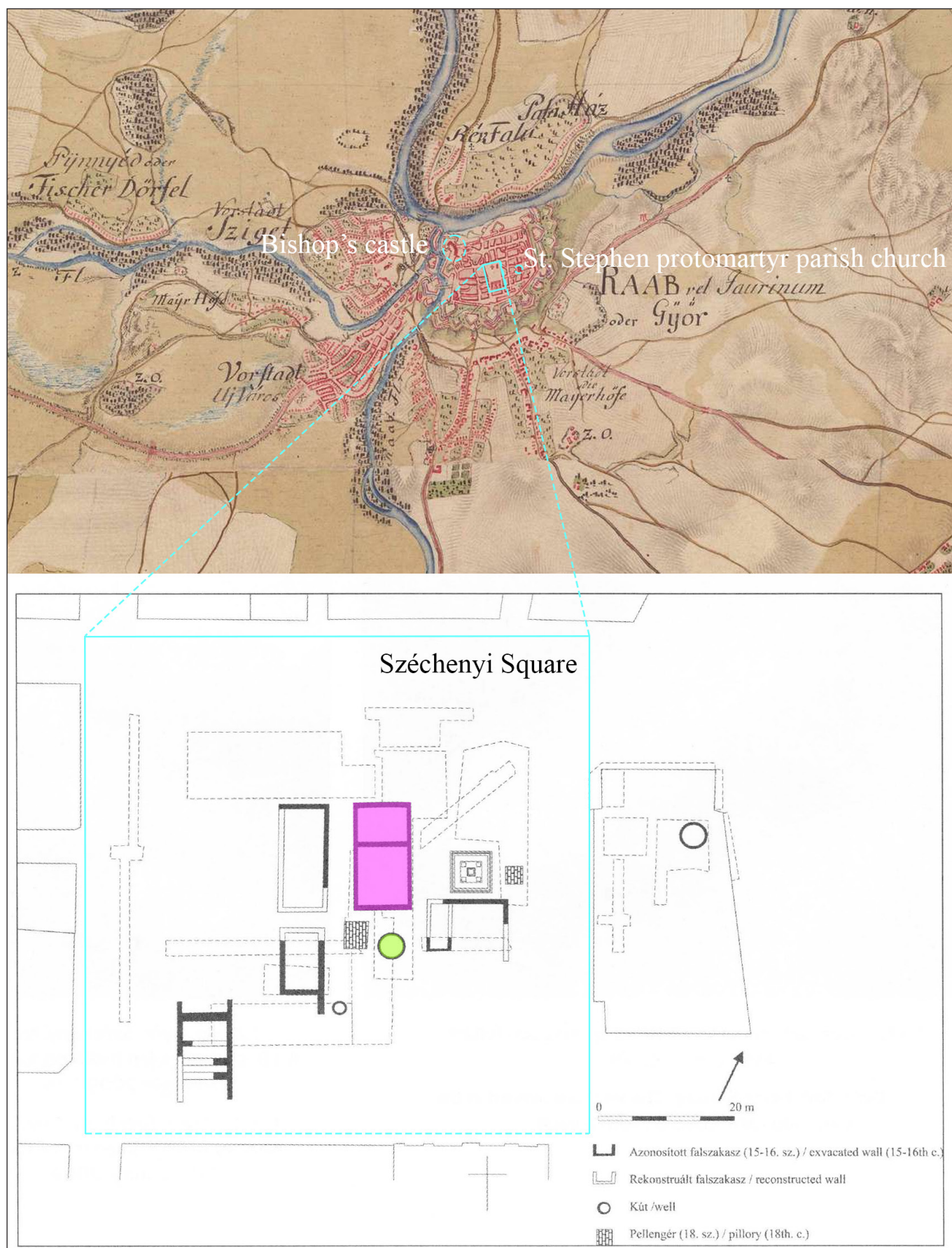


Fig. 1. Győr, Széchenyi Square on a map of the first Habsburg military survey. The medieval cellar is marked in pink (Feature 13, formerly "Ottoman dungeon"; based on maps.arcanum.com and BÍRÓ ET AL. 2010, 51, photo 8; made by Zsófia Náday)

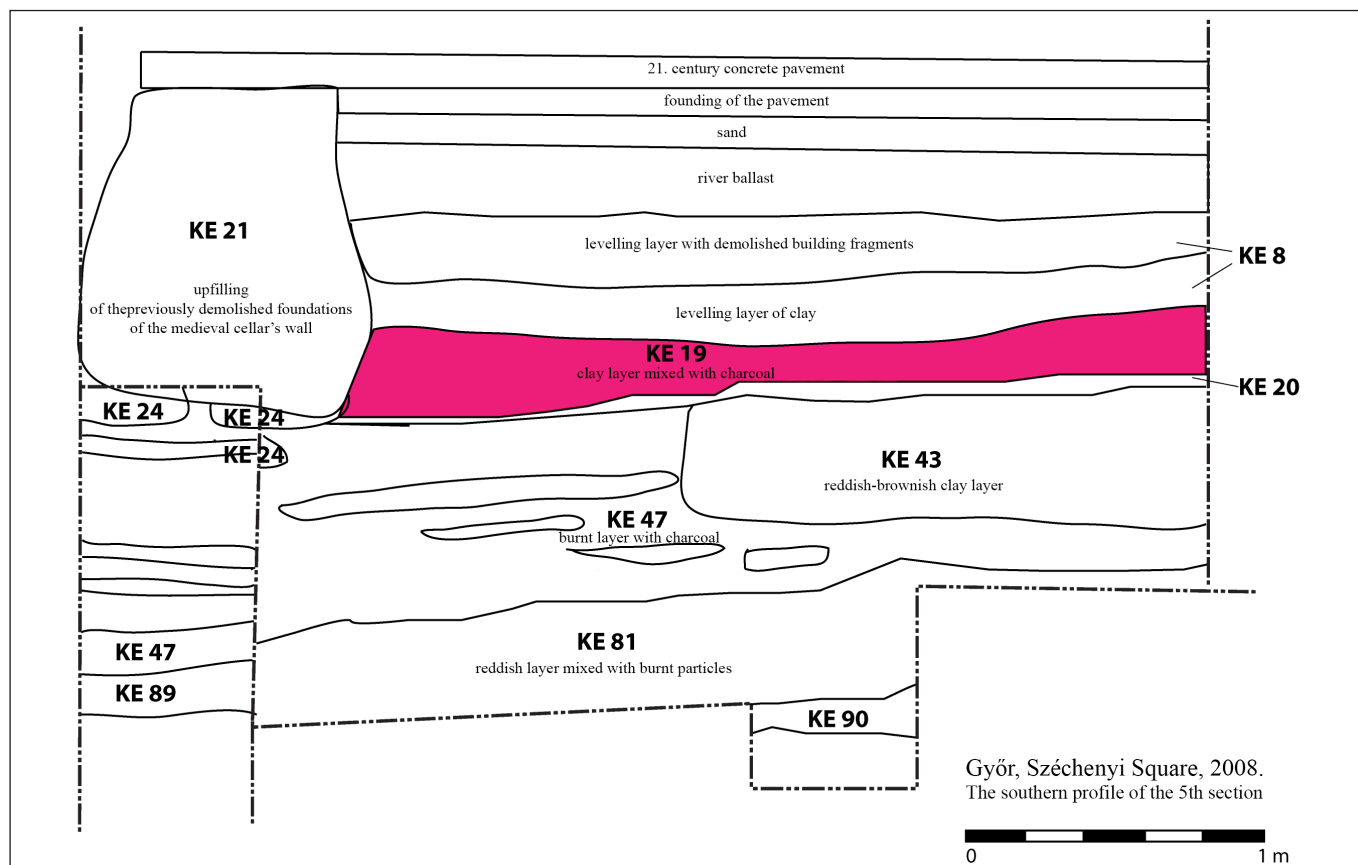


Fig. 2. Southern profile of the medieval cellar (Feature 13). The sherd from Manises was found in layer no. 19, marked in pink (field drawing digitised by Ágnes Kolláth)

The cellar thence was referred to in excavation documents as the “Ottoman prison”, although the 2008–2009 excavations revealed that several buildings stood on Széchenyi Square at the end of the late Middle Ages and the dawn of the early modern period (BÍRÓ *et al.* 2010, 44–45). However, a faience-like fragment of apparently non-local origin, with blue and white painting, found in a fill layer of the cellar (KE 19, Fig. 2) seemed to confirm the hypothesis and was packed as “Ottoman pottery”.

Only in 2022, when we started to process the finds from the cellar at the Institute of Archaeology of the Research Centre for the Humanities, did we notice the complete absence of the types linked with the Ottoman occupation. In principle, this could be explained by the short duration of the Ottoman occupation of Győr (AD 1594–1598). The other characteristic of the record was the prevalence of “early” types, which did not correlate in any way with Evliya’s description from the 1660s when the prison was still in use.

Late medieval pottery was preponderant in the find material of the cellar’s filling; besides, it contained Roman Period and Árpáadian Age ceramic fragments. Most late medieval pieces could be dated to the 15th–16th centuries and belonged to red, wheel-thrown, unglazed pots, as well as jugs, jars, and cups. The finds also included fragments of graphite-tempered grey and a few white or yellow-white pottery vessels from the same period. The predominance of red pottery was also observed in other coeval sites in the area (TOMKA 2011, 335; TAKÁCS 2021). Glazed pottery was almost absent from the layer that contained the majolica fragment and those under that, the types characteristic of the early modern and modern periods being predominant only in the uppermost layers. This suggests that the cellar had already been filled up to some extent during the 16th century; therefore, it is unlikely to be identified as the 17th-century dungeon.

THE MANISES MAJOLICA: ANALOGIES, WORKSHOPS, AND DATING

When we looked again at the blue-and-white pottery fragment (Fig. 3) with an eye to all the above, it became clear that its origins are not to be found in the Ottoman Empire. Although its decoration reflected Eastern

traditions, the colouring scheme was more similar to Western majolica types. However, macroscopic observation revealed that its production technique differed from the white tin-glazed majolica of Italy.

The fragment has a pinkish colour; both sides are covered with white slip (engobe), which is actually a fine-grain clay wash layer. It is decorated with a blue and orange-brown pattern with a metallic shine (lustre) overlaid with a transparent glaze. The word “lustre” is derived from the French “*lustre*”, meaning light or glitter. The metallic shine was obtained by adding various oxides or precious metals before firing the pot (BALLA 2008, 173). There are different lustre techniques, which involve different raw materials mixed in specific proportions and a multi-phase firing method; each workshop producing such ware made sure to keep its own recipe and production process a secret. Hungarian readers may be familiar with the lustre technique from the eosin-glazed ceramics of the Zsolnay porcelain factory, produced at the end of the 19th century.

Our fragment’s distinctive blue leaf pattern could be identified through close analogies in several art collections a lustre-decorated majolica vessel made in Manises, near Valencia, in the Iberian Peninsula.⁵ The analogies include a shallow plate from around 1430–1460⁶ and a deeper bowl from ca. 1440–1460⁷ in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum, while the collection of the Louvre holds a slightly younger bowl with a similar leaf motif and IHS inscription, dating from around 1450–1500.⁸ The British Museum also has several bowls with similar decorations from between 1430 and 1450.⁹ The bowl with IHS inscription in the Victoria and Albert Museum represents the closest analogy to our find in both shape, size, and decoration; it dates between 1430 and 1470.¹⁰

Only a single piece of Manises ware, a relatively large, flat dish, is known from excavation in Hungary.¹¹ It has been recovered in the excavations of László Gerevich from layer 4/A near the Chapel in layer 4 of the Great Courtyard (or Inner Courtyard, located within the First Dry Moat) in the Royal Castle of

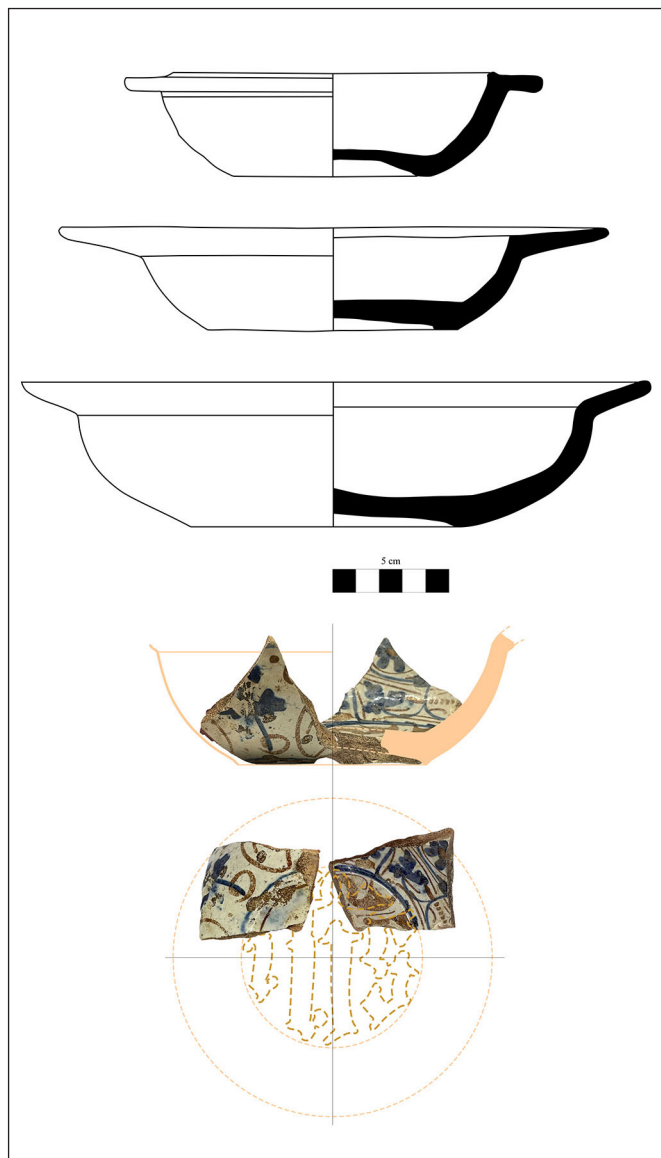


Fig. 3. Iberian majolica bowl with IHS inscription from Manises, found under the marketplace of Győr. Above: bowl, escudillo (LERMA ALEGRIA 1989, grupo plato, familia B, tipo 3b), centre: plate (LERMA ALEGRIA 1989, grupo plato, familia B, tipo 3), below: large plate (LERMA ALEGRIA 1989, grupo plato, familia B, tipo 3a) (by Zsófia Náday)

⁵ Manises is now part of the municipality of Valencia, but in the Middle Ages, it was an independent workshop centre like the neighbouring Paterna (LLIBRER ESCRIG 2014, 213).

⁶ MET, Inv. No. 56.171.103; (<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/471765>; Last access: 11.10.2023.)

⁷ MET, Inv.No. 56.171.77; (<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/471746>; Last access: 11.10.2023.)

⁸ Louvre Inv. No. OA 1434; (<https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010118101>; Last access: 11.10.2023.)

⁹ British Museum, Inv. Nos. G.524, G.569, G.571, G.572; (e.g. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_G-572; Last access: 11.10.2023.)

¹⁰ V&A Museum, Ceramic Collection, Inv. no. C.2046-1910; (<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O161791/bowl-unknown/>; Last access: 11.10.2023.)

¹¹ Budapest History Museum, Inv. No. 51.1591.

Buda (for a description by Eszter Kovács, see BALLA 2008, 81–82, 2.9 *Fragment of a bowl*). Based on its shape, the bowl fragment could be dated to the second half of the 15th century. The collection of the Museum of Applied Arts has another fragment,¹² with heavily damaged surface, dated to the 15th century (for the description by Iván Szántó, see BALLA 2008, 48, 1.10 *Bowl fragment*).

According to written sources, the Barri d'Ob-radors quarter of Manises was an important pottery centre in Iberia from the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries, its products having been market leaders until the first half of the 20th century; several workshops operate there today still. In the 1990s, archaeological evidence of the town's medieval origins was obtained with the discovery of a pottery workshop which was in operation from the first half of the 14th to the second half of the 16th century (ALGARRA PRADO & BERROCAL RUIZ 1993, 869).

In addition to dating, the excavation of the workshop also provided information on the production technique applied: the faulty pieces indicate that the vessels were fired in two consecutive phases. The engobe was added and patterns were painted on the vessel before the first firing to ensure better adhesion, and the tin glaze was applied and fired in a consecutive phase; as a result, the glaze, the painting, and the engobe melted into the material of the vessel and the cobalt paint coloured the glaze.

Chinese porcelain ware was made the same way (COLL CONESA 2010, 13), in contrast to the earlier Moorish tradition of majolica making, where first the sandy earthenware vessel, coated in a tin glaze, was fired so the glaze bonded into the material, while the painted decoration and transparent glaze were applied to the tin glaze in a following step (SZÁNTÓ 2008, 43). This means that the majolica technology of the Manises workshops represents an intermediate stage of development between the 13th–14th-century faience technology of Italy¹³ and its Moorish precursors.

Further excavations were carried out in the workshop quarter of Manises in the following decades; the stylistic evaluation and material analyses of the finds allowed for specifying the chronology of the related record by classifying lustred vessels into four main groups (Fig. 4) (REQUENA DÍEZ *et al.* 2019, 116–117). The patterns of the earliest blue-painted lustred vessel types, produced from the turn of the 13th to the mid-14th century, were of Andalusian Moorish origin (Malaga-style Valencian lustre, 4/1, early LVMDA and late LVMDE 4/2) (COLL CONESA 2010, 15–16). The workshops using the lustre technique were associated with the *Mudéjars*, Muslims who have remained and resided in the territory of today's Spain after the Reconquista and adapted to Christian rule (LLIBRER ESCRIG 2014, 217). They produced an advanced type



Fig. 4. Lustre ware types from Manises. Malaga-style Valencian lustre: 1, early (LVMDA) and 2, late (LVMDE); 3. Pula group (LVPD); 4. Classical types (LVDAC), 4.1. Moorish variant (LVDACM), 4.2 Gothic variant (LVDACG), 4.3 "Silversmith style" (LVDCO) (COLL CONESA 2010, 15–17).

¹² Museum of Applied Arts, Inv. Nos. 9895 and 6670.

¹³ In Italy, pots were first covered with engobe and tin glaze and fired, and the painted decoration was only added, with an optional transparent lead glaze, in the following phase (SZÁNTÓ 2008, 52).

for export (Pula group 4/3, LVDP;¹⁴ COLL CONESA 2010, 16) from the second half of the 14th century until its end. The highest-quality Valencian blue-decorated lustre vessels (LVDAC 4) date to the 15th century. Three stylistic variations of this ware could be distinguished: one with Islamic patterns (4/4.1 LVDACM) and another with Gothic patterns (4/4.2 LVDACG) in the first half of the century; these became more elaborate from the second half of the century, evolving into the so-called “silversmith style” (4/4.3 LVDCO) by its last quarter (COLL CONESA 2010, 16–17).

The fragment found in Győr belongs to the Gothic variant (LVDACG 4.2), comprising mainly bowls, plates and, to a lesser extent, jugs. In the lack of a complete profile (its everted rim had broken off), the exact type of the vessel cannot be determined. Functionally, it belongs to the group of plates or bowls (*plato*, *escudilla*), subtype of vessels without a foot ring and with a concave bottom (LERMA ALEGRIA 1989, *grupo plato*, *familia B*, *typo 3*; LERMA *et al.* 1986, 189, *plato V*, *escudillo VI*). As illustrated, these subtypes are distinguished only by the width of their rim (Fig. 3). Based on the results of previous research, these bowls first appeared in the first quarter of the 15th century, while the less profiled variants (flatter ones, those without a break between the body and the rim, and the ones where the break is only a circular rib) only became characteristic from the second half of the century (LERMA *et al.* 1986, 191, Fig. 5 and 203, Fig. 16).



Fig. 5. Manises ceramic bowl from the collection of the Louvre
(Inv. No. OA 1223;

<https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010118101>)



Fig. 6. Manises ceramic bowl from the collection of the Metropolitan Museum.
(Inv. No. 56.171.77; <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/471746>)

¹⁴ The name refers to the city of Pula in Sardinia (Capo di Pula or Pula; COLL CONESA 2010, 16).



Fig. 7. Manises ceramic bowl from the collection of Victoria and Albert Museum.
(Inv. No. C.2046-1910; <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O161791/bowl-unknown/>)

The bowls and plates usually have Ave Maria, the monogram of Christ (IHS) or a noble coat of arms – that of the client – in their tondos (round central fields), surrounded by floral arabesques comprising bryony, parsley, and ivy leaves, dot rosettes, ferns, crowns, crowns of thorns, bows, walnuts, and half oranges (COLL CONESA 2010, 16). Based on analogies of form and decoration,¹⁵ the ornamental pattern of our fragment comprised bryony leaves and dot rosettes, with the inscribed IHS in the centre, dating it in general to between 1430 and 1450 (Figs. 5–7).

We plan to specify the typological dating by material analysis, as the scientific analyses of the Manises ware indicate that the composition of the paint and the glaze are also chronological markers (COLL CONESA 2010, 14).

CRAFTSMEN, TRADERS, CUSTOMERS

From the 14th century onwards, several contemporary sources attest to the migration of craftsmen from Manises on commission and the long-distance trade of their products. For example, according to a contract from 1362, Juan Albalat and Pascasio Martín, master tilers and glaze makers from Manises, were employed in Avignon to make painted and glazed tiles in blue, white, green, and purple (OSMA 1923, 9–10, 94.95). In 1483, Francisco Eixemenes reported in his *Regimeni de la cosa pública* on the prestigious clientele: “The beauty of the lustre ware of Manises was so extraordinary that the Pope, the cardinals, and the princes of the world looked at it with particular respect” (OSMA 1923, 11). The Datini trade company transported numerous shiploads of lustre ware from the port of Valencia to the cities of northern Italy from the end of the century (WILSON 2013, 8–9). In 1444 and 1458, master Johan Almurci (or Murci) was reported to have been commissioned by King Alfonso V¹⁶ to make 44,300 tiles “*de obra de Manises*” for his Italian residences, the new castle of Naples (Castel Nuovo) and the castle of Gaeta¹⁷ (OSMA 1923, 54, 137–138).

¹⁵ E.g., British Museum, Inv. No. G.572; Louvre, Inv. No. OA 1223; MET, Inv. No. 56.171.77; V&A Museum, Ceramic Collection, Inv. No. C.2046-1910.

¹⁶ King Alfonso V of Aragon was also King of Naples as King Alfonso I of Naples.

¹⁷ It is worth noting that King Alfonso V of Aragon was the grandfather of Beatrix of Aragon, wife to Matthias Corvin, who grew up amongst Iberian majolica tiles in the court of Naples.

How could the workshops of Manises keep up with such a large quantity of quality orders? The answer lies in the hierarchical structure of production and economy that the settlements of Manises and Paterna had developed by the 15th century. This manifested in the pattern of the breaking up of the production process and the coordination of labour and the management of production and trade through a vast network of intermediaries with sufficient capital, who were not bound by the rules of the guild system (LLIBRER ESCRIG 2014, 238–239). This explains how the high-quality products, thanks to an advanced proto-industrial background and well-organised logistics, could reach many of Europe's royal and noble courts; however, the occurrence of a Manises majolica piece in the record of the main square of Győr is certainly surprising.

IMPORTED GOODS ON THE SQUARE: TRADE OR GIFT?

How did a piece of Iberian majolica end up in Széchenyi Square? Was it brought there by a wealthy merchant travelling the world? Even though today's Széchenyi Square was undoubtedly one of the main trading centres of Győr from the end of the Árpadian Age, once known for its bustling markets (KOLLÁTH & TOMKA 2017, 563), the finds processed so far show very little evidence of that. Besides the majolica fragment, the filling of the cellar (which certainly cannot be identified as the dungeon described by Evliya Çelebi) contained a few sherds of a cup from Loštice (Loschitz, North Moravia), tiny fragments of a grey cup of Austrian (or Moravian) origin, decorated with bands of stamped geometric motifs (KOVÁCS 2021, 272), and so-called Austrian grey pots and jugs (with or without graphite tempering). From other parts of the square, small fragments of a goblet from Loštice and a few fragments of Árpadian Age types, probably imports from Austria, are known so far (KOLLÁTH & TOMKA 2017, 569 Fig. 6; HERBST, KOLLÁTH & TOMKA 2017, 304 Fig. 8; 305). The relative lack of imported pottery may be related to the fact that from the beginning of the 15th century, the commercial importance of the town declined as it came under the control of the bishop and the chapter (HORVÁTH 2006, 13–15).

Or is it possible that it was a gift brought by an envoy? Upon processing the find material of Buda, Imre Holl raised the possibility that the appearance of unique pieces (e.g., Chinese porcelain) before the conquest of the Ottoman Empire may be linked with the arrival of envoys and the exchange of diplomatic gifts (HOLL 2005, 131–133). In the period when the majolica piece found in Győr was made, two prominent rulers of the Kingdom of Hungary – Sigismund of Luxembourg and Matthias I – strived for a position of great power through politics with military, diplomatic, and marriage strains. In 1415, in preparation for the Consistory of Constance, Sigismund visited Perpignan¹⁸ in the Kingdom of Aragon, where he negotiated with Pope Benedict XIII and later with King Ferdinand I of Aragon.¹⁹ Before and after the negotiations, until 1417, the rulers of the two kingdoms (from 1416, Alfonso V) exchanged envoys several times while the king of Aragon stayed in Valencia (ÁLDÁSY 1927, 47). After a short break, the kings regularly sent legates to each other between 1426 and 1433 when they sided with Milan against the Pope and the League of Florence and Venice (ÁLDÁSY 1927, 108–115). As the earliest estimated production date of the vessel is the 1430s, it is possible (albeit not probable) that it arrived in the Kingdom of Hungary with a legation during the reign of Sigismund.

Due to his fights with the Ottomans, János Hunyadi was also in contact with Alfonso V²⁰ (ÁLDÁSY 1927, 117–118), but only his son, King Matthias, maintained intensive diplomatic contacts with the Kingdom of Aragon, which resulted in him marrying Beatrix of Aragon, daughter of King Ferdinand I of Naples and Sicily and the natural son of King Alfonso V. While the wedding took place on 22 December 1476, Matthias' envoys negotiated the details of the marriage contract in Naples already from 1474 (MARTÍ 2017, 493; 504–517). The wedding was an important event in reinforcing relations: the attendees presented the royal couple with gifts and affirmed their loyalty, and the royal couple thanked them for their service; further-

¹⁸ Today, in south France, close to the Iberian Peninsula.

¹⁹ Father of Alfonso V, great-grandfather of Beatrix of Aragon.

²⁰ Alfonso V, king of Aragon, occupied the Kingdom of Naples in 1442.

more, it also served as a display of the power and magnificence of the king. Some persisting inventories²¹ also indicate that it also involved, to some extent, the redistribution of gifts (PASTRNAK 2023, 820–821).

The court of Naples was an important client of the workshops of Manises already at the time of King Alfonso V. Although, after him, the kingdoms of Aragon and Naples were no longer under the same crown, the products of the workshop most likely continued to be available in Naples, so the vessel could have been someone's wedding gift for the couple. Giving a majolica vessel or a set of tableware on such occasions was not unusual. For example, according to a currently accepted hypothesis, the so-called "Corvin dishes" made in Pesaro and adorned with the coat of arms of Matthias and Beatrix were a wedding gift from Constanzo Sforza and Camilla of Aragon. Beatrix, a well-known patron of Renaissance art and culture, was an admirer of majolica: Cesare Valentini, the envoy of Ferrara, advised Beatrix's sister Eleonora to send earthenware from Faenza to the queen, as she preferred it to any kind of silverware (BALLA 2008, 16–18; 28).

According to the customs of the time, the guests did not leave empty-handed, so they would herald widely the generosity of the ruler, even if that meant distributing all wedding gifts amongst them. Everyone received a gift from the king and/or queen, according to their rank: for example, lower-ranking participants were given a goblet or cup, occasionally filled with coins (PASTRNAK 2023, 819–820; 825). The vessel with the IHS inscription implies that both the giver and the receiver of the gift were men of the clergy, albeit the act was undoubtedly realised with the involvement of the royal couple. The discovery of a fragment from another excavation at the Buda Palace confirms this hypothesis. At that time, the suburb of Győr was under the authority of chapters and bishops, two of which, Bishops Orbán Dóczy of Nagylucse (SCHÖNHERR 1898, 66) and Tamás Bakócz (CSAPODI 1983, 59), were well-known patrons of Renaissance art.

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²¹ Pastrnak published two inventories from the Milan City Archives (Milan, Archivio di Stato), the first of which lists the gifts given by Matthias to Beatrix, while the second lists the gifts given by the couple to Beatrix's relatives attending the wedding, as well as to Italian noblemen. There is a telling passage at the end of the first inventory: "not to mention the many other things of similarly high quality and value" (PASTRNAK 2023, 823–825). One item received by Beatrix is especially important for us: the 800-piece white dinner service(?) given to her by Matthias for the wedding. The reference in Pastrnak's Italian translation is "Otto piatti grandi da vivande bianchi, che sono pezzi s(ent)o viii de peso de libr(i) circa vii c(ento), che per l'arzeno oro et magistero vagliono ducati viii m(ille) o piu", in English "Eight big white food platters that consist of eight hundred pieces(?), which weight roughly seven hundred pounds, which for silver, gold and skill have a value of eight thousand ducats or more." (PASTRNAK 2023, 824) Although the inventory is not clear at this point, it presumably describes the majolica vessels which may have been used at the wedding. The vessel from Győr, however, was hardly part of this set.

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