

FRAGMENT OF A 'HEDVIG BEAKER' FROM THE ROYAL PALACE OF BUDA

Since the end of the last century art history has been concerned with the so-called⁶ Hedvig beakers', exquisite pieces of medieval glass-work. Neither the age nor the place of their manufacture, however, could be determined. They have been dated to the 10th as well as from the 12th c., labeled Islamic and also Byzantine and while mostly they are accepted as original, though some specialists have argued that they are forgeries from the 17th c.² Exact dating, however, can be achieved only with the help of new archaeological finds.

A new fragment has been found during the excavations at the Royal Palace.³ It was published in Hungarian.⁴ Because of the international interest surrounding the object it was thought that a review in a foreign language was needed. The fragment is no larger than 2.5×2.7 cm and made of thick glass. All the characteristics of the type can be found: the relief-shaped ornamentation, made most probably by blowing into a carved wooden mold, and the linear carved ornamentation of the surfaces. It has a neutral colour, somewhat yellowish. It is reminiscent of the fragments from the Weibetrei bei Weinsberg castle (Baden-Württemberg).⁵ The circumstances do not reveal even in this case, anything about when it was made. Presumably, it was carried as a reliquary from the earlier royal seat (Esztergom) to Buda during its construction in the 13th century, where it remained until the Turkish occupation in 1541.

To be able to say more about the history of the Hungarian fragment, it was necessary to study the published pieces in detail.⁶ The most important task was to separate real data from the varied interpretations of the specialists. Some pieces were in their original mounts, often linked to the name of a goldsmith (Namour), which may be traced back as far as the beginning of the 13th c. Another important piece of information is provided by the mount of a Silesian beaker made in 1528 depicting Hedvig's figure, that is, the name of the beaker also harks back to the historical past. As for the depictions on the beakers, the motifs (eagle, lion, palmette, spiral) can be found in Islamic as well as in Byzantine art, from where it was introduced into the European romanesque style. Thus, these variables do not offer safe guidelines. Still, it did prove possible to separate one object: the polished glass beaker from the beginning of the 11th century, found in a sunken ship along the Turkish coast (Bodrum). It is decorated with a walking lion, attesting to the presence of such a motif on glass-wares.

¹ E. CZICHAK: Die Hedwigsgläser. ZfCK (1980) 329–354; E. BAUMGARTNER—I. KRUEGER: Phoenix aus Sand und Asche. Ausstellungskatalog. Basel 1988.

² J. SCAPOVA: A propos des coupes dites de Saint Hedwige. Annales du 7^e Congrès de l'Association Internationale pour l'Histoire du Verre 1977, Liège 1978, 257.

³ In the collection of the Budapest Historical Museum. Inv. No.: 52. 276.

⁴ H. GYÜRKY K: „Hedvig poharak”. Egy XII. századi üveg ereklyetartó pohár a középkori budai

királyi kápolna kincstárából. Művelődéstörténeti Tanulmányok a magyar középkorról. Budapest 1986. 234–253. H. GYÜRKY K: Az üveg. The glassware Catalogue. Medieval Collection of the Budapest Historical Museum. Budapest, 1986 XIII. I. p. 54, Plate XXIV, Fig. 1.

⁵ R. KOCH: Schliffgläser des hohen Mittelalters. ArchKorr (1977) 229–234.

⁶ The Basel Congress and exhibition (August 28—September 3, 1988) helped the case most valuably.

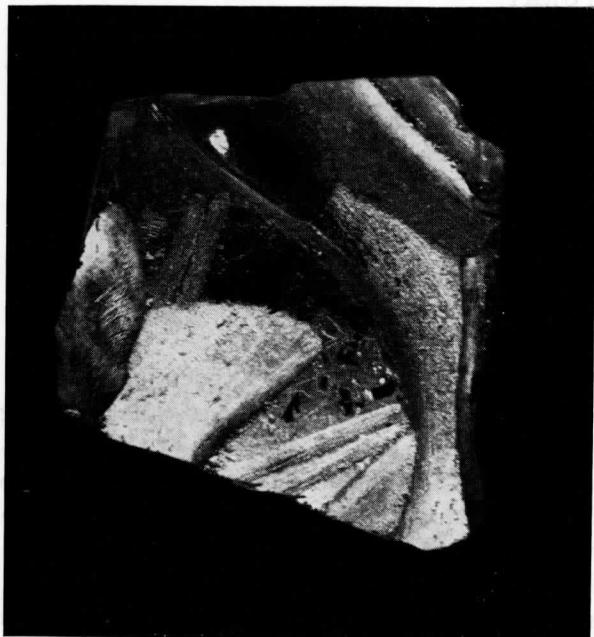


Fig. 1. The fragment of a 'Hedvig-beaker' from the Royal Castle in Buda

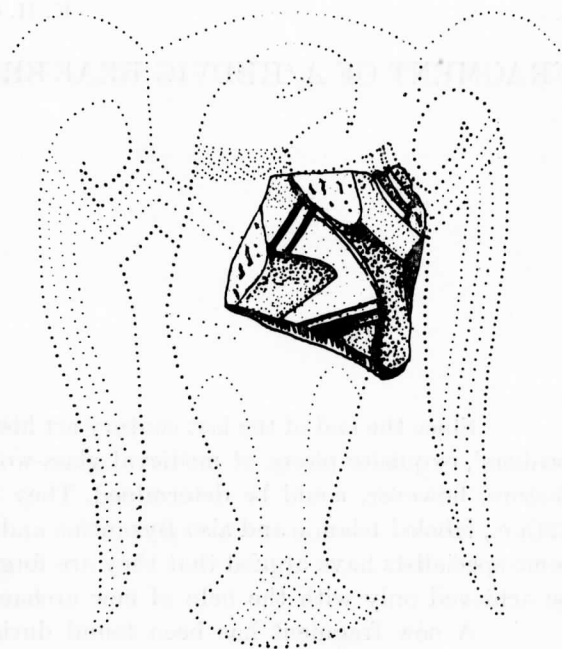


Fig. 2. Reconstruction of the decoration on the original beaker

The result of mapping where the known Hedvig beakers were originally kept or discovered was that all had been found in Europe. Apart from the piece from Novogradok and the three Silesian beakers, they were all scattered over territories where people had participated in the crusades. In the case of the Namur beakers, it may be supposed that they were presents from Jacques de Vitry, the founder of the monastery where they were kept.⁷ A castle with another beaker was built as late as the 12th c. These data delimit the period when the beakers were taken to Europe between the 2nd half of the 12th c. and the beginning of the 13th c. The best dated piece is the Novogradok find unearthed during archaeological excavations,⁸ because the find unit, also consisting of several other glass objects came to light in a house which had been demolished in the 2nd half of the 12th c. In the case of the Novogradok and the three Silesian beakers, the connection with the crusades cannot be demonstrated. At the same time, this period witnessed a vivid urban development and the upswing of long-distance trading in parallel with the strengthening of relations to Byzantium. Silesia's golden age came during the reign of Henrik the Bearded and his wife Hedvig (from whom the beakers got their name). Henrik opened the gates of the country to long-distance trade at the very beginning of his reign. Arabic tradesmen took glass-ware to Silesia as early as the 11–12th cc.⁹ The crusades, however, blocked the route for the Arabic tradesmen. Their place was taken over by tradesmen from Novgorod and Kiev. Consequently, fine Byzantine glass must have come to Silesia via Russian tradesmen, since Byzantine glass-ware had been present in Russian Orthodox churches since the 11th to 12th cc.

⁷ C. J. LAMM: *Mittelalterliche Gläser und Steinschnittarbeiten aus dem Nahen Osten*. Berlin 1929–1930. I. 170. — J. PHILIPPE: *Le monde byzantin dans l'histoire de la verrerie*. Bologna 1970, 26–29.

⁸ F. D. GUREVICH: *Steklanny resnoy bokal iz Novogradka*. *SovArch* (1963) 143–246. — F. D. GUREVICH: *Dom boyarina v Drevnirusskom Novog-*

rudke. *Khratkiye Soobshenia archeologii Akademia Nauky SSSR*. Moscow (1964) 97–102.

⁹ M. DEKÓWNA: *Naczynia Szklane Pochodzenia obcego na ziemach Polskich we wczesnym sredniowieczu (X. w.-polowa XIII. w.)*. *Slav. Ant.* (1962) 219–254.



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Fig. 3. The beaker in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, upon which the reconstruction was based



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Fig. 4. The beaker attributed to Saint Elisabeth the Hungarian (photo Kunstsammlungen Veste Coburg)

The Novogroudok find, or rather finds (several fine pieces of glass have been found) may be considered, contrary to the publication, not merely the equipment of a rich household, but rather as the stock of a merchant.

According to the legend of Hedvig, the wine poured in her beaker turned to water. Usually this legend and its depictions from the 15th c. are have been linked to the name of the beakers.¹⁰ This reasoning is, however, naive. It is more probable that the origin of the name "Hedvig's beaker" derives from the fact that one of the beakers was kept in a monastery founded and probably also furnished by Henrik and his wife Hedvig, where Hedvig was buried in a specially built chapel after the ceremony of canonization (Trebnitz).

The gorgeous rock crystal vessels made by 10th c. Islamic artists became knightly presents, part of the trousseau. Rock crystal was quarried in the mines of Iran, India and Afghanistan. Due to the crusades allowed access to this precious material in limited quantities. At the same time, interest in objects of eastern art grew in Europe and attention to them widened. The crusaders never returned without relics for the churches and monasteries. This was the period when the treasuries of the European castles of the crusaders were enriched with precious Byzantine or even Islamic art work, sometimes acquired by means of imprudent and merciless pillaging (Byzantium was sacked in 1204!). These tokens were carried, surely not without the mountings and if selling relics meant business for the local inhabitants, it was no less a chance for the artisans.

¹⁰ J. SCAPOVA: A propos des coupes dites de Saint Hedwige. *Annales du 7^e Congrès de l'Association*

Internationale pour l'Histoire du Verre 1970. Liège 1978, 257.

A high level of glass-ware manufacture was carried at several places along the Syrian coast.¹¹ The precious and rare rock crystal, which was already known in Europe, was replaced by glass resembling the engraved rock crystal vessels, a material present in any quantity. It is not accidental that art history deals with the two objects together, although their material and techniques are totally different. The artisans making the Hedvig beakers may have intended them to be reminiscent of those objects.

Given the knowledge of this historical background there are two dating possibilities for the Buda fragment:

1. The reign of Béla III. who was educated in Byzantium (1172—1196).

2. The crusades led by Endre II. in 1217—1218. His route was described in a letter to the pope by Jacques Vitry, who at that time, was the bishop of Akkon.¹² Before becoming bishop he founded the cloister in Namour (France) where two fine Hedvig beakers (one ornamental and the other decorated with an animal motif) were kept, and which he presented to the cloister on his return following the short period of his episcopate in Akkon. Endre the second's troops settled at Akkon, Vitry accompanied by a high priest, carried a relic of the Holy Cross to their camp. This relic was met by the barefooted king and his court. The *Képes Krónika* (Pictured Chronicle) says that Endre had even sold Queen Gizella's crown to buy relics and he returned heaped with them.¹³ Endre the second's wife, Gertrude was a princess of Andechs and sister of Hedvig, the queen of Silesia from whom the beakers got their name. She was also the mother of Saint Elisabeth, who married the marquis of Thuringen, and to whom the preservation of the beaker in the Koburg castle is owed. It could be possible that Elisabeth's ornamented beaker and the one with animal depictions from Buda made a single pair. In addition to the beaker pair Namur, the one in the Cathedral of Halbestadt was also one of a pair according to the literature.

The persons connected to the beakers by the legends all lived in the same period were themselves linked as well. This time period is the beginning of the 13th c. The find from Novogroudok, however, brings the time of manufacture of the beakers down to the second half of the 12th c. This 40 to 50 years, within which the beakers were made (perhaps not even all at the same time) is not a long period for the development of an artistic style especially considering the cause that led to its rise, the long duration of the wars of the Cross. The synchronous residence of Endre II. and Vitry in Akkon allows us to suppose that the beakers were made in one of the great glass-ware producing centres along the Syrian coast, probably Akkon, famous for its glass products.

¹¹ Benjamin of Tudela, Guillaume de Tyr and Jacques de Vitry (bishop of Akkon) reported in the 12—13th cc. that Tyros and Akkon, Beyrut and Hebron just as Antioch had been famous for their glass products since Antiquity. W. HEYD: *Geschichte des Levantehandels im Mittelalter*. Stuttgart 1879, 197—198. — C. MIGEON: *Manuel d'art musulman*. Paris 1927, 124. — E. ASTHOR: *Républiques urbaines dans le Proche Orient à l'époque des croisades*. CahCivMed (1975) 117.

¹² G. FEJÉR: *CodDipl VII/1. Budae 1831 197*. "Jacobi Acconen Episcopi ad Honorium PP. III. de Andrae II. R. H. in terra S. Gestis Epistola."

¹³ "... He stayed there for three months at last emptying the royal treasury he acquired relics from different saints: this skull of the martyr Saint Stephen, the skull of the Virgin Saint Marguerite the martyr, the right hands of Apostle Saint Thomas and Saint Bartholomew, a piece from Aaron's rod and one of the six jugs in which Christ turned water to wine, and many other objects that he could collect and returned to Hungaria with the precious treasures of the saints." Quotation from the *Képes Krónika*, from the Hungarian translation in 1986, chapter 175.