

AKADÉMIAI KIADÓ

Acta Archaeologica
Academiae Scientiarum
Hungaricae

74 (2023) 1, 83–92

DOI:

10.1556/072.2023.00006

© 2023 Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest

ORIGINAL RESEARCH
PAPER



A prolegomenon to the study of the late antique casket of Traismauer (*Augustianis*)

Davide Bianchi* 

Institut für Klassische Archäologie, Universität Wien Franz-Klein-Gasse 1 1190, Wien, Austria

Received: February 6, 2023 • Accepted: March 21, 2023

Published online: May 17, 2023

ABSTRACT

This paper offers an updated and current picture of the history of research carried out by scholars affiliated with Austrian universities and institutions on late antique caskets found in the territories of the provinces of Noricum and Pannonia. The central figure in this research was Helmut Buschhausen who, notably in his monograph on the subject, collected a large number of casket mounts found particularly in the Pannonian provinces. Starting with Buschhausen's research, this paper focuses on the evolution of studies carried out in Austria on late Roman caskets to define the *status quaestionis*, also in consideration of the research carried out in this area by Hungarian scholars. The description of an interesting case study concerning the casket mounts found at the Austrian site of Traismauer (*Augustianis*) allows us to take stock of current studies of late antique caskets.

KEYWORDS

Late antique caskets, Pannonia, Noricum, Helmut Buschhausen, late antique iconography, Traismauer

INTRODUCTION

“Die spätrömischen Metallschreine dienen – wenn sie auch nicht ausschließlich dafür hergestellt wurden – als Grabbeigaben und tragen Bilder mit vornehmlich römisch imperialen Themen”.¹

This short and incisive sentence encapsulates the central theme of Helmut Buschhausen's monograph dealing with the study of late antique caskets and early Christian reliquaries (Figs 1–2). Roman caskets were inherently valuable containers, in which the casket's owners stored their most costly possessions, mainly jewellery. They were manufactured mainly from the early Imperial period to the beginning of the fifth century AD and their form derives from so-called “strong-boxes”, larger safes already known in the Roman Empire from the first century AD.²

The topic of this paper, which is intended as a methodological premise and an examination of the state of research, stems from an ongoing project on the late antique caskets found in areas of the former upper Danube provinces of the Roman Empire.³ The caskets known today are mostly rectangular in shape, the body having been a wooden box covered by bronze or silver sheets displaying figurative decoration with subjects spanning pagan and biblical iconography.⁴ Although examples from settlements and military forts are known,

¹“Late Roman metal scrinia, although not made exclusively for that purpose, serve as burial objects and bear images with primarily Roman imperial themes.” The sentence comes from the text of the inside front cover of Buschhausen's book. Buschhausen (1971).

²On such chests and boxes in the Roman world, see Richter (1966) 114 and Croom (2007) 138–143. For a detailed typological and functional analysis on the basis of written sources and Pannonian examples: Gáspár (1986) Vol. I.

³The topic is part of the habilitation thesis that the author intends to submit to the University of Vienna.

⁴Scenes include mythological images, official court representations, and personifications.

*Corresponding author.

E-mail: davide.bianchi@univie.ac.at



Fig. 1. Front page of the monograph of H. Buschhausen (© Photo K. Klein)

these caskets have been found largely in funerary contexts, especially in graves alongside the deceased.⁵ Completely preserved containers are very rare: due to the perishable nature of the wooden support, only metal plaques and mounts have been found in excavations.

Though known from written and visual sources and archaeological finds, research has hitherto failed to consider these carefully embellished but utilitarian objects in their original contexts of production and use.⁶ Indeed, these containers are an important archaeological record for scholars of late antiquity due to their multidisciplinary nature. The analysis of their morphology and material components, their decorative programs reflecting the religious and artistic milieu of that time, and their production techniques could expand our knowledge of their possible multiple uses – and reuses – as well as of late antique visual culture and manufacturing techniques in general.

⁵On the discovery of caskets in sepulchral contexts, see in particular Gáspár (1971) 278–280.

⁶Rare exceptions are the older publications of Aladár Radnóti and Dorottya Gáspár. See Radnóti (1957) and Gáspár (1986).

ÖSTERREICHISCHE AKADEMIE DER WISSENSCHAFTEN
KOMMISSION FÜR BYZANTINISTIK
INSTITUT FÜR BYZANTINISTIK DER UNIVERSITÄT WIEN

WIENER BYZANTINISTISCHE STUDIEN
BAND IX

HELMUT BUSCHHAUSEN

DIE SPÄTRÖMISCHEN METALLSCRINIA UND FRÜHCHRISTLICHEN RELIQUIARE

I. TEIL: KATALOG

Mit 709 Abbildungen auf 199 Tafeln und mit 70 Textabbildungen



WIEN 1971

IN KOMMISSION BEI HERMANN BÖHLAUS NACHF., WIEN–KÖLN–GRAZ

Fig. 2. Title page of the monograph of H. Buschhausen (© Photo K. Klein)

The exact origin and definition of late Roman caskets is a question still not fully answered by scholars. Admittedly the methodological approaches applied thus far to analyse these caskets have often followed specific aesthetic, art historical and chronological criteria aiming to classify them. Based on their morphology, scholars followed a methodology of chrono-typology, and these efforts have resulted in a classification of casket shapes and their development over time. Little attention has been given to a comprehensive understanding of the archaeological records that also considers their multiple meanings and their materiality. Although Nikolett Sey dealt in her PhD dissertation with questions around the workshops for bronze artefacts, including casket mounts in Pannonia,⁷ archaeometric analysis of the manufacturing and decoration techniques is still a *desideratum* in the study of ancient caskets.

⁷For the results of archaeometric investigations concerning these questions, see Sey (2013).

PREVIOUS STUDIES ON LATE ANTIQUE CASKETS

Concerning more precisely the geographic contexts of the Roman provinces of *Pannonia prima*, *Pannonia Valeria*, and *Pannonia secunda*, Hungarian scholars in the first half of the twentieth century, such as Géza Supka,⁸ Lajos Nagy,⁹ Zoltán Kádár¹⁰ and Aladár Radnóti,¹¹ published the casket mounts found in archaeological excavations in modern Hungary, but in many cases with laconic interpretations.

Most previous studies have analysed these containers by trying to separate them into functional categories. Some researchers, such as Erika Dinkler-von Schubert, have mainly considered Roman caskets as objects linked solely to the private and official spheres,¹² while other scholars like Dorottya Gáspár and Edit Thomas put their devotional aspects in the foreground.¹³ Thus, before the 1970s, systematic studies focusing on the origin and interpretation of the caskets in terms of their socio-cultural context and function were still limited to a local and regional sphere.

Focusing on research conducted in Austria, pioneering work in this regard was carried out at the Austrian Academy of Sciences by Helmut Buschhausen, who was the first scholar to investigate the late Roman caskets within a global context and also in relation to early Christian metal reliquaries.¹⁴ A look at the figure of Helmut Buschhausen is necessary to contextualize his research in the landscape of Viennese art historical studies of late antiquity (Fig. 3). Buschhausen, born in Castrop-Rauxel, North Rhein-Westphalia (Germany) on April 7, 1937, completed his studies first in Munster, then in Munich and finally in Vienna, where he became a student and later received his doctorate under the guidance of Otto Demus.¹⁵ After his postdoctoral qualification (habilitation) in 1973, he was



Fig. 3. Helmut Buschhausen (© Photo V. Pirker-Aurenhammer)

appointed professor in 1976 for a new type of chair, which was assigned to two university institutes: the Institute of Art History and the Institute of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies.¹⁶ Buschhausen's research was therefore part of the new and prominent line of studies dedicated to late antique art within the so-called 'Vienna School of Art History' founded by Franz Wickhoff and Alois Riegl, and continued by Otto Demus.¹⁷ Indeed, the research focus of these Viennese scholars was the visual culture developed in the last centuries of the Roman Empire. By examining the images represented in numerous late antique media, such as in the Vienna Genesis, in the paintings of the Roman catacombs and in early Christian sarcophagi, these scholars intended to free late antique art of the extant preconceptions of its decline and decadence and to endow it with its own genuine identity.

Among Buschhausen's various research topics, ranging from medieval sculpture to Armenian book illuminations, a particular theme was the visual and material culture of late antiquity and early Christianity. His scientific research

⁸Supka (1913) offers one of the first treatments of caskets with biblical depictions from the territory of modern Hungary.

⁹Nagy La. (1938).

¹⁰Kádár (1939). For the contextualization of caskets in the figurative art of late antique Pannonia, see Kádár (1968) and Kádár (1969).

¹¹Radnóti (1957). Radnóti's study focuses in particular on casket mounts from the Roman fort of Intercisa (Dunaújváros) on the Danube *limes*.

¹²E. Dinkler-von Schubert leans towards an exclusively private use of caskets, and ultimately also L. Nagy relegates the caskets to personal use only and argues at the same time that although biblical scenes are depicted on some of the casket mounts, they did not necessarily belong to Christian owners. On this issue, see Dinkler-von Schubert (1979), Dinkler-von Schubert (1980) and Nagy (2022).

¹³D. Gáspár interprets the casket as a container for storing the Eucharist, which the faithful could also keep privately, while E. Thomas speaks of reliquary-caskets. See Gáspár (1971) 13 and Thomas (1982) 279. More generally on Christianity in Roman Pannonia, see Thomas (1980), Gáspár (1998), Gáspár (2002) and Gáspár (2008).

¹⁴For other possible contexts of caskets' use and reuse, see Buschhausen (1971) 9–18.

¹⁵Details on his life in Schwarz (2012).

¹⁶Pillinger (2016) 73–74.

¹⁷On the Vienna School of Art History, Franz Wickhoff and Alois Riegl, see von Schlosser (1934) and Elsner (2021).

focusing on late antique caskets and early Christian reliquaries was as part of a research project conducted at the Austrian Academy of Sciences promoted due to the sponsorship of Otto Demus and Herbert Hunger, first holder of the Byzantine Studies chair in Vienna.¹⁸ With the aim of creating accurate photographic documentation of the artefacts and their written descriptions, Buschhausen made numerous research trips to Hungary and the Balkans. A particular scientific partnership was established with his colleague Edit B. Thomas, who actively collaborated with him in the years to come, not only showing him the casket mounts conserved mainly in the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest, but also accompanying the scholar and his wife on many trips to Yugoslavia and Bulgaria to view early Christian finds.¹⁹ In addition to the photographic documentation, Buschhausen made numerous drawings that allowed him to propose hypothetical reconstructions of the figurative cycles through the juxtaposition of the recovered metal sheets.

Three aspects were central to Buschhausen's corpus: the study of the iconographic themes of the late antique caskets, the possible derivation of Christian reliquaries from late Roman *scrinia*, and the occasional similarities in the deposition of these two kinds of artefacts in funerary contexts.²⁰ Among the archaeological evidence collected, which he divided into three groups, Buschhausen devoted most attention to remains of wooden boxes embellished with richly decorated metal sheets or mounts. One should note that these metal mounts are casket parts that have been mostly preserved and recovered in archaeological excavations.

Buschhausen analysed 107 casket mounts in the first part of his corpus, providing a description of the objects, specifically their iconography, and bibliographic references. Buschhausen's attention is focused on the metallic sheets with figurative themes which are as part of an image cycle repeated in the decoration of the caskets. Although the main subjects are drawn from pagan mythology and courtly tradition, about twenty metal sheets (between nos. A50–A87) contain scenes from the Old and New Testament, which are often represented on the same casket mount surface along with mythological iconography.²¹ The largest group of finds analysed in the corpus, mostly dated to the fourth century AD, comes from late Roman Pannonia, but Buschhausen aimed to investigate the wide-ranging distribution of these artefacts, and for this reason he also includes casket mounts from Italy, Great Britain and the Gallo-

Germanic provinces.²² However, the aspect that has most interested previous scholars and is given special weight in Buschhausen's study concerning the analysis and interpretation of late Roman caskets is the meaning of the figurative scenes. Indeed, these artefacts are therefore configured as authentic testimonies not only of material culture, but also of visual culture.

Buschhausen's study had the merit of collecting a notable group of casket mounts and providing scholars with a relevant bibliography, but some of his results have been criticized.²³ The most obvious shortcoming of his publication concerns the table of contents of his work. The planned second volume, which should have been dedicated to the iconographic and interpretative study of the caskets analysed in the catalogue of Volume One, was never published. His book contains isolated scientific results only on the first pages, excludes a summary and an interpretation of the data, and also contains errors in the dating of certain artefacts.²⁴ Among the most important elements not considered are the chronological and geographical classification of the casket mounts, an orderly presentation of the artefacts according to the places of discovery and storage, and above all an iconographic classification of the scenes represented. The limited results of the Buschhausen project left many research questions open.

One missing aspect for the complete understanding of these artefacts are the find contexts. However, resolving this issue is not an easy task because illegal or not scientific excavations in the twentieth century brought to light some casket mounts which entered numerous private collections, especially in Europe, without any kind of reference to their discovery. Some such artefacts have featured in the catalogues of many exhibitions dedicated to artefacts of the late antiquity and early Byzantine period.²⁵

Within the rich figurative panorama of late antiquity, recent studies by Hungarian scholars have specifically touched on the figurative scenes of the casket mounts, focusing on some motifs deriving from classical mythology, biblical episodes, and the representation of apostles or saints.²⁶ These studies have yielded fruitful points of departure for further analyses on the relationship between caskets and other visual media, particularly wall painting,

¹⁸Höle (2021) 12.

¹⁹Special thanks go to Heide Buschhausen, Endre Tóth and Tamás Szabadváry for providing me with useful information about Buschhausen's research trips to Hungary.

²⁰Buschhausen (1971) 11–14.

²¹Buschhausen (1971) 21–172.

²²Especially for these last two cases, see Buschhausen (1971) No. A1, p. 23; No. A34, pp. 75–76.

²³On this, see the review of his book by Engemann (1973) 554–557 and Dinkler-von Schubert (1977) 215–223. Gáspár (1986) offered new reconstruction suggestions to remedy some of Buschhausen's "incorrect" reconstructions.

²⁴Scholars have not accepted the author's interpretation of a close relationship between late Roman *scrinia* and Christian reliquaries and have criticized his dating of the casket from Yabalkovo in Bulgaria. On the study of this silver casket, see Buschhausen (1965).

²⁵On this topic, see for example the caskets published in Witt (2001).

²⁶Tóth (2014). For more on iconographic and stylistic issues, see in particular, Nagy (2012), Nagy (2014), Nagy (2016a, (2016b), Nagy (2021), Nagy (2022) and Szabadváry (2018).



sarcophagi, and gold glass.²⁷ Dorottya Gáspár,²⁸ Endre Tóth,²⁹ and most recently Levente Nagy³⁰ and Zsolt Visy³¹ have also dealt with this issue, but mainly focusing on the Hungarian context. Tamás Szabadváry has recently offered a careful review of the caskets preserved in the Hungarian National Museum.³² A valuable contribution of this study is that in some cases he has been able to reconstruct the origin of these objects thanks to the re-examination of archival documents.

Important contributions to the iconographic programs of caskets have been made by Levente Nagy especially within the bilateral project “Early Christianity in Hungary” based at the University of Pécs and at the University of Vienna in coordination with Renate Pillinger.³³ In many cases Nagy has advanced understanding of the figurative programs of these artefacts, and addressed the current problematic concerning the methodological and terminological approaches applied to discuss the meaning of the figurative scenes and their definition.³⁴

THE CASKET MOUNTS FOUND IN TRAISMAUER (AUGUSTIANIS): ONE CASE STUDY

Following the publication of Buschhausen’s corpus, interest among Austrian scholars in the study of these caskets diminished. However, archaeological excavations in the past decades have uncovered new decorated casket mounts. The finds in Austria were mostly uncovered in Roman *castra* and in settlements located along the Danube *limes*.³⁵ It should be stressed that archeological records of these caskets are attested not only in the province of Pannonia Prima, for example in Carnuntum and Vindobona (Vienna), but also in the province of Noricum.³⁶

An interesting case study among these finds are the metal sheets that originally covered a casket, dated to the fourth century AD, and found in the excavations of a tower of the Roman *castrum* of *Augustianis* (Traismauer), located on the right bank of the Danube (Fig. 4).³⁷

The metal fragments of the casket have been mentioned and shortly described in literature and exhibition catalogues on early Christianity in Austria, but an exhaustive study is still lacking.³⁸ Some preliminary considerations focusing on the iconography are presented here.

What remains of the decoration that once covered a wooden casket are three metal strips, fragmentary and in some parts damaged (Fig. 5). The bronze sheets, which originally embellished the front side of the casket as suggested by a keyhole in the first fragment, are each divided into four vertical rectangular picture fields. Each field is framed with a simplified egg-and-dart motif and contains a single standing figure. Inscriptions in Latin capital letters bearing the name identifying each figure are placed to the sides of the respective figure’s head. The first strip contains protagonists of episodes of the Old and New Testaments, while the two lower strips depict muses.

The strip with Christian themes begins at the left with the resurrection of Lazarus; it also bears an inscription with the name “LAZARUS”.³⁹ The large figure, presumably Christ, is shown standing on the right side of the framed field striding to the left. The perception of movement is created by the figure’s slightly raised left foot and the right foot set on the ground. This short-haired Christ wears a long pleated belted tunic and over it a mantle (*pallium*). The youthful-looking beardless face is facing left. The figure’s right arm stretches to the left and ends with an open hand, while the left is fragmentary, but it probably held a part of the *pallium*. A small aedicule, a representation of the tomb, appears in the lower left corner of the figurative field under Christ’s extended hand. Inside the arched entrance stands a small figure wrapped in numerous bandages which leave only the face visible.

The next field to the right depicts the sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham, who occupies the centre of the figurative field. He is shown in a standing frontal position following the model of the *contrapposto* pose. The figure wears a tunic and a *pallium* that falls from its left shoulder; also bearing a short haircut, his face is facing left in the direction of his right arm which holds the knife in anticipation of the sacrifice. The other hand rests on the head of a figure represented in smaller dimensions and in profile; it kneels on his knees according to the usual iconography

²⁷Within the Pannonian provinces some comparative studies have been carried out on the iconography of the casket mounts and the funerary paintings found in the sepulchral chambers of Pécs. On this, see Hudák (2009), Hudák (2014), Heidl (2014), Hudák and Nagy (2009, 2016). More generally on the early Christian legacy of Pécs and its monuments, see Tóth and Poulet (2022).

²⁸Gáspár (1971) and Gáspár (1986).

²⁹Tóth (1994) and Tóth (1995).

³⁰Nagy (2012), Nagy (2014), Nagy (2016a), Nagy (2019), Nagy (2021) and Nagy (2022).

³¹Visy (2020).

³²Szabadváry (2018).

³³On the bilateral research project, see Nagy (2013), Nagy (2015), and Nagy (2016c).

³⁴On terminological problems, see Nagy (2016a) 122–124.

³⁵See for example the catalogue entries in Humer and Kremer (2011) 430–431; 434. More specifically on the early Christianity in Northwest Pannonia, see Pillinger (2011).

³⁶More specifically on early Christianity in the *limes* Region from the beginning to the end of Roman rule, see Noll (1954), Harreither (1999), Pülz (2014) and Pülz (2015).

³⁷Inv. Nr. BDA-ZD-3F4. The artefact found in the fan tower of the fortification is now preserved in the collections of the Austrian Federal Monuments Authority, Department of Archaeology. Christa Farka described and published the casket mounts in a preliminary way in catalogue entries. However, the author does not undertake a critical and comparative study of the object. See Farka (2014). For more on the archaeological site, see Steigberger (2015).

³⁸See especially Offenberger (1983) 142 and Ubl (1994) 131.

³⁹Gv. 11, 39–44.



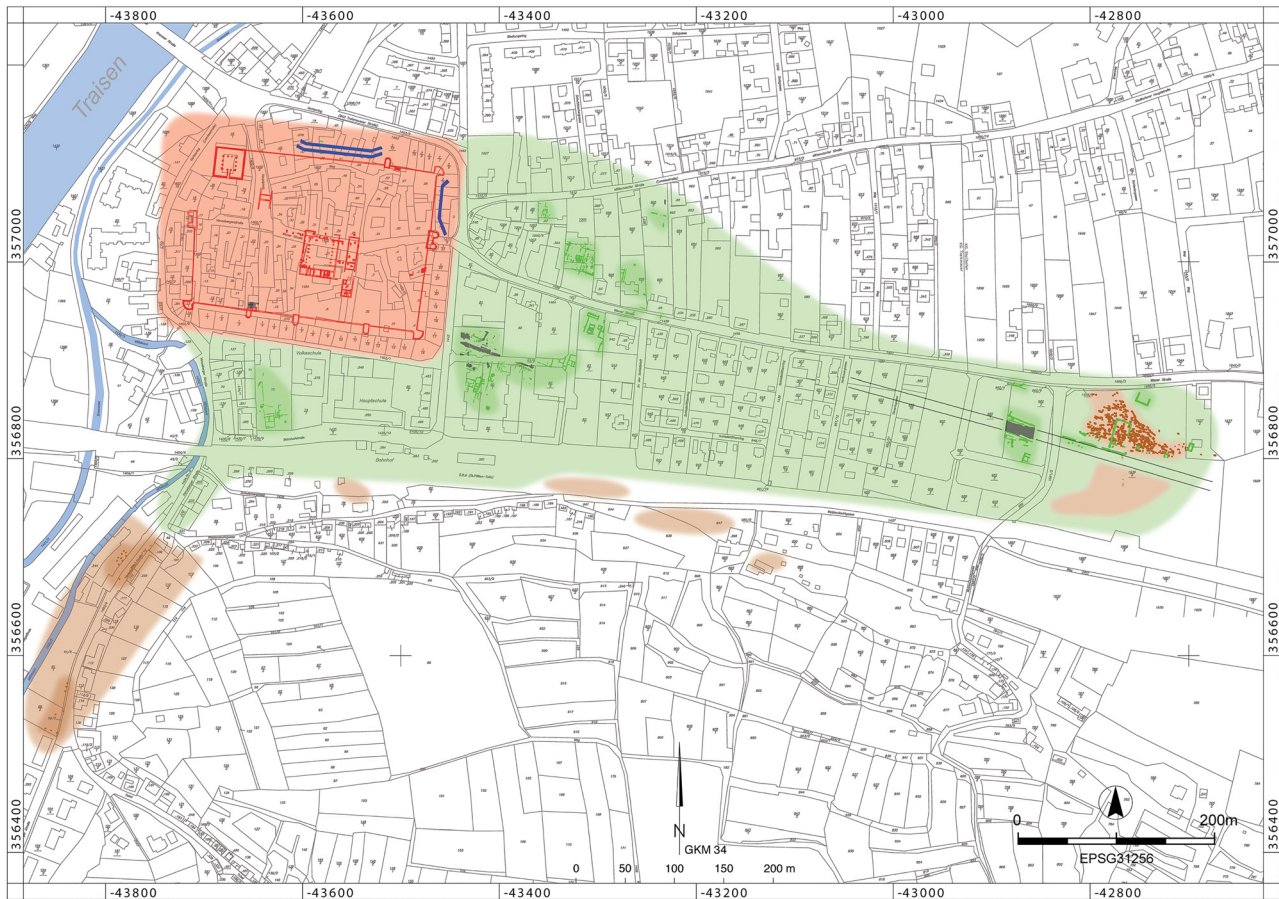


Fig. 4. The Roman castrum of Augustianis (Traismauer) (© Photo R. Ployer)



Fig. 5 Casket found in Traismauer (After Farka 2014, 293, © Photo N. Gail)

of Isaac which occurs in numerous other media.⁴⁰ Isaac is wearing a short tunic and has his hands tied behind his back and his face appears to be covered. The divine hand appears in the upper right corner to signify a saving intervention. Below it on the far right edge of the field is a pyre above the altar. The scene is completed in the lower left corner with the depiction of an animal, probably a small ram with a palm branch above it. The main figure's head is flanked by letters forming the word 'HABRAM'.

The centre of the following field contains a standing male figure in *contrapposto* pose. Also in this case, the man wears a long tunic and a *pallium* and his face is facing left. The figure's left arm rests at its side and holds a roll, while the right one is stretched out towards the lower left corner. Unfortunately, the metal surface around the keyhole, which punctuates the figurative field, does not allow verification of whether the right arm was holding the well-known *virga virtutis* used to perform miracles. On both sides of the figure's feet are seven baskets containing bread loaves, four on the left and three on the right. Although the iconographic subject refers to Christ's miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, the inscription near the figure's head bears the name 'MUSE' for Moses.

⁴⁰On this issue with some comparisons to caskets found in Hungary, see for example Nagy (2012) 68–71.

In the last figured rectangle of this strip, whose lower part is damaged, a figure is depicted standing again in *contrapposto* pose. Like the previous figures, it wears a long tunic and a *pallium* that descends from the left shoulder and is supported by its forearm, while its left hand holds a roll. The figure's bent right arm points towards the upper left corner with a long stick that touches the crest of a small, stylised mountain, from which a stream of water can be seen falling to the ground. At the foot of the rock, a smaller figure wearing a short tunic and a pointed cap, similar to the well-known Phrygian cap, is depicted with his hands turned to the sky as a sign of amazement at the miracle that has occurred. In her description of the scene, Christa Farka interprets the representation as the miracle of Moses causing water to flow on Mount Horeb.⁴¹ It is important to note that in the depictions of this Old Testament episode Moses is mostly represented alone. In this respect it is interesting to observe the iconography of the little character wearing a short tunic and the Phrygian cap. This attribute is an important element in identifying the scene because if the small figure were instead wearing a flat-topped hat, called *pileus pannonicus*, this would suggest that the figure performing the miracle was not Moses, but rather Peter as reported in the Apocryphal Acts of Peter attributed to Pseudo-Linus.⁴² However, the Phrygian cap wore by the small figure and seen in other casket mounts, may denote the Eastern origin of the figure.⁴³ This iconographic feature characterizes the three youths in the fiery furnace.⁴⁴ In both cases, whether the miracle performed by Moses or the one performed by Peter, it is possible to interpret the scene as a clear allusion to Baptism. This codification of the scene is confirmed if one dwells on the inscription that appears in the rectangular field bearing the name 'ZESU' which must be read as a possible corruption of the name Jesus. Considering how well the iconography would match well-known miracles of Moses and Jesus, it seems entirely plausible that the person who executed the names in repousse simply made a mistake and switched the two figures in the two last rectangular fields of the metal strip. However, the name "Zesu" for Jesus could also suggest reading the miracle of Moses in a Christological key, as Saint Paul in his writings already

proposes a connection between the rock from which water flows and Jesus.⁴⁵

The combination of this scene with the resurrection of Lazarus, linked to the interpretation of Baptism as a rebirth, seems to suggest that the two scenes opened and closed a figurative cycle combining the Old and New Testaments. This arrangement of both scenes not only finds an important series of comparisons especially on early Christian sarcophagi and in the paintings in the Roman catacombs, but could also suggest the width of the object.⁴⁶ The presence of the keyhole in the centre of the strip as well as the lateral continuation of the metal sheets beyond the scene of the resurrection of Lazarus and the water miracle seem to reconcile with the hypothesis that these plates curved around the edges to reinforce the corners of the casket.

It is important to point out that the sequence and association of the resurrection of Lazarus and the sacrifice of Isaac is not an isolated phenomenon; it is attested on other caskets such as, for example, a casket preserved in the private collection of Christian Schmidt in Munich.⁴⁷

The second metal strip is formed by four figurative fields displaying four muses.⁴⁸ The same subjects are also repeated in the third strip allowing their correct identification due to their combined state of preservation.⁴⁹ The first field shows the muse of history, Clio, as indicated by the inscription placed on both sides of the figure's head. She is depicted standing in a frontal position in *contrapposto* pose and wearing a long tunic like the Greek *chiton*; her head is facing right in profile. The figure's right arm is extended downwards and the hand appears to be holding a stylus. Below is a container for scrolls. The other hand holds an open diptych (*diptychon*).

The second figure – nearly destroyed in the second sheet but completely intact in the third sheet – is the muse Euterpe, patroness of lyric poetry, also depicted standing but in a mirrored position. She wears a tunic belted at the waist and a mantel seems to fall off her shoulders. Her head graced by a vegetal crown is facing left, and she holds two long flutes (*auloi*) in her hands. The third muse is Thalia, the patroness of comedy, identified by inscription as 'TALIA'. She is represented standing in a *contrapposto* pose,

⁴¹Farka (2014) 292.

⁴²According to the Acts of the Saints Processus and Martinian, the apostle Peter baptized two Roman soldiers with water spouted from a rock. On this issue, see Nieddu (2000) 217–218.

⁴³See the iconography of three youths in the fiery furnace on the casket mounts from Wiesbaden, Mainz-Kastel and the one now conserved in the Rheinisches Landesmuseum in Bonn, Inv. No. U 1697b. For a description of the artefact, see Ristow (2006). For analogies of the Moses scene from Traismauer in caskets found in Pannonia (Intercisa, Mursella, Keszthely-Fenékpuszta) and the strong spiritual connections between the iconography of this miracle and the baptism in early Christian iconography, see Nagy (2022) 111–112, with further literature.

⁴⁴See, for example, one of the earliest representations of the three young Jews in the furnace in the so-called "cubiculum della Velata" in the Roman catacomb of Priscilla. Nestori (1993) 24, n. 7.

⁴⁵1 Cor. 10:1–4. "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ."

⁴⁶For a statistic of the associations between the depictions of the resurrection of Lazarus with the miracle of the fountain in Roman catacomb painting and in early Christian sarcophagi and an extensive bibliography, see Dresken-Weiland (2012) 178–179, nt. 666 and 669.

⁴⁷Witt (2004).

⁴⁸Three figured fields of the first strip and one of the second strip are very damaged and limited to only a few fragments.

⁴⁹On the muses with an excursus on their iconography and meaning in the Christian context, see Schindler et al. (2013) 198–219.



wearing a tunica, facing right. Her bent right arm is raised, while her left holds a mask, the typical theatrical attribute. In the last field, the muse of tragedy Melpomene stands wearing a tunica and holding a long, curved stick similar to a *pedum* in her left hand, a typical attribute of satyrs but also of shepherds, mythological characters and divinities of a rural nature.

The four muses facing each other in pairs seem to establish a dialogic relationship and define a sort of iconographic cycle, as indeed is confirmed by the extending sides of the metal sheets which are equipped with holes to anchor them to the wooden casket. Although the preserved figures belong to both the Christian iconographic repertoire (first strip with Old and New Testament episodes) and the classical context (the muses), certain stylistic similarities tend to standardize the individual scenes in fixed iconographic motifs. These include the standing and frontal arrangement of the characters, the clothing in many cases common to both the muses and the biblical characters, and finally the desire to affix the inscribed name of the characters as if to ensure their correct interpretation. Another interesting feature is the correct association of the attributes of the muses with their names, a sign that the figurative models that represented them were known and circulating also in the decoration of caskets.

Considering the figurative theme of the Muses on late Roman caskets, it is important to mention that the casket mounts from Traismauer do not constitute an *unicum*. A good comparison is found in the small metal sheets of the casket from Kisárpás and preserved in the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest.⁵⁰ The representations of the muses on this casket are the closest both for the same choice of muses (Clio, Euterpe, Thalia, Melpomene) and for the similar stylistic rendering of the figures, especially in the clothing and in the representation of their attributes.

In the opinion of Levente Nagy, mythological figures like the muses as representative images of literary genres (comedy, tragedy, lyric poetry and history) on late Roman caskets may be allusions to *paideia*, classical Greek-Roman literacy or erudition: familiarity with the knowledge of the Roman past and Classical culture was, in fact, a very important value in late antiquity even for Christians. The author argues that this approach could be a possible solution to the question of joint representations of mythological and biblical scenes within the same image program.⁵¹

The combination of scenes featured on the casket certainly raises several additional questions, not only of an iconographic nature, but also of the socio-cultural context of the Romans who lived in the settlements along the Danube *limes* during the late antique period. In the context of studying the caskets recovered in that area, the most pertinent issue concerns the forms and modes of Christianisation of these frontier regions and the upper Pannonian provinces

as well as the persistence of classical culture among its inhabitants. Such questions together with a thorough analysis of the composition and technical aspects of these caskets' production are at the core of the ongoing research conducted by the author at the University of Vienna together with Hungarian colleagues. We hope that continued research will shed additional light on the matter.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to thank Basema Hamarneh, Levente Nagy and Renate Pillinger for their advice and the exchange of information regarding this paper.

REFERENCES

- Buschhausen, H. (1965). Ein konstantinisches Silberreliquiar aus Jabalkovo in Bulgarien. *Jahrbuch der österreichischen byzantinischen Gesellschaft*, 14: 157–206.
- Buschhausen, H. (1971). *Die spätromischen Metallschreine und die frühchristlichen Reliquiare, I: Katalog*. Wiener Byzantinistische Studien, 9. Wien.
- Croom, A. (2007). *Roman furniture*. Stroud.
- Dinkler-von Schubert, E. (Rev.) (1977). Buschhausen, Die spätromischen Metallschreine und frühchristlichen Reliquiare, 1. Teil: Katalog. Wiener Byzantinistische Studien, Band 9. *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, 20: 215–223.
- Dinkler-von Schubert, E. (1979). Ein Kästchenbeschlag des 4. Jahrhunderts in Mainz. *Beobachtungen zu Ikonographie und Funktion*. *Gesta*, 18: 89–98.
- Dinkler-von Schubert, E. (1980). Arca und scrinium. Zu Ikonographie und Zweckbestimmung spätromischer Kästchen. *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, 23: 141–157.
- Dresken-Weiland, J. (2012). *Immagine e parola. Alle origini dell'iconografia cristiana*. Città del Vaticano.
- Elsner, J. (2021). Alois Riegl: art history and the beginning of late antique studies as a discipline. In: Clifford, A and Formisano, M. (Eds.), *The new late antiquity. A gallery of intellectual portraits*. Bibliothek der klassischen Altertumswissenschaften, Neue Folge, 2, Reihe, 162. Heidelberg, pp. 167–182.
- Engemann, J. (Rev.) (1973). Helmut Buschhausen, Die spätromischen Metallschreine und frühchristlichen Reliquiare, 1. Teil: Katalog. Wiener Byzantinistische Studien, Band 9, hrsg. von Herbert Hunger. Wien 1971. 334 Seiten, 5 Abbildungen, 14 Figuren, 199 Tafeln. *Bonner Jahrbücher*, 173: 554–557.
- Farka, C. (2014). Beschläge eines Kästchens. In: Humer, F. (Hrsg.), *A. D. 313 – von Carnuntum zum Christentum. [Ausstellung im Archäologischen Museum Carnuntinum, Bad Deutsch-Altenburg, März 2013 – Oktober 2016]*. Katalog des Niederösterreichischen Landesmuseums, Neue Folge, 517. St. Pölten, pp. 292–293.
- Gáspár, D. (1971). *Spätromische Kästchenbeschläge in Pannonien. Textband*. *Acta Antiqua et Archaeologica*, 15.1 Szeged.
- Gáspár, D. (1986). *Römische Kästchen aus Pannonien, 1–2*. Antaeus 15. Budapest.
- Gáspár, D. (1998). Christianity in Pannonia. In: Fitz, J. (ed.), *Religions and cults in Pannonia. Exhibition at Székesfehérvár, Csók István*

⁵⁰Inv. Nr. 14.1927.3; Buschhausen (1971) No. A25, 57–60.

⁵¹Nagy (2016a) 130–132, with further literature, more recently Nagy (2021) 162–163.



- Gallery, 15 May – 30 September 1996. A Szent István Király Múzeum közleményei, A sorozat, 33. Székesfehérvár, pp. 43–50.
- Gáspár, D. (2002). *Christianity in Roman Pannonia. An evaluation of Early Christian finds and sites from Hungary*. Oxford.
- Gáspár, D. (2008). *Pannonia kereszténysége. A mai Magyarország területén, I* [Christianity in Pannonia in today's territory of Hungary]. Budapest.
- Harreither, R. (1999). Das frühe Christentum im Limesgebiet. Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende der römischen Herrschaft. In: Harreither, R. and Pillinger, R. (Hrsg.), *Frühes Christentum am österreichischen Donaulimes. Ausstellung im niederösterreichischen Landesmuseum für Frühgeschichte im Schloss Traismauer. 8. Mai bis 1. November 1999*. Wien, pp. 6–45.
- Heidl, G. (2014). Remarks on the iconography in the 'Peter-Paul' (No. 1) burial chamber of Sopiana. *Studia Patristica*, 73: 219–236.
- Höle E.-M. (2021). Vorwort. In: Buschhausen, H. and Prolović, J. (Hrsg.), *Erforschen – Erkennen – Weitergeben. Gewidmet dem Gedenken an Helmut Buschhausen*. Lohmar, pp. 11–13.
- Hudák, K. (2009). The chronology of the paintings in the Saint Peter and Paul burial chamber of Sopiana. In: Bíró, Sz. (Ed.), *Ex officina... Studia in honorem Dénes Gabler*. Győr, pp. 225–238.
- Hudák, K. (2014). Technical observations on the paintings in the St. Peter and Paul (No. 1) burial chamber in Sopiana. *Studia Patristica*, 73: 249–280.
- Hudák, K., and Nagy, L. (2009). *A fine and private place. Discovering the early Christian cemetery of Sopiana/Pécs*. Heritage Booklets, 6, Pécs.
- Hudák, K. and Nagy, L. (2016). Early Christian burial chambers and wall paintings in the Northern cemetery of Sopiana. In: Tóth, E., Vida T., and Takács I. (Eds.), *Saint Martin and Pannonia. Christianity on the frontiers of the Roman world. Exhibition Catalogue. Abbey Museum, Pannonhalma, 3 June – 18 September 2016, Iseum Savariense, Szombathely, 3 June – 13 November 2016*. Pannonhalma, pp. 77–83.
- Humer, F. and Kremer, G. (Hrsg.) (2011). *Götterbilder – Menschenbilder. Religion und Kulte in Carnuntum*. Katalog des Niederösterreichischen Landesmuseums, Neue Folge, 498. Bad Deutsch-Altenburg.
- Kádár, Z. (1939). *Pannónia ókeresztény emlékeinek ikonográfája* [The iconography of the Early Christian monuments of Pannonia]. Budapest.
- Kádár, Z. (1968). A ságvári későrómai szinkretisztikus ábrázolású ládikaveret [Le rappresentazioni sincretistiche dello scrigno tardoromano di Sagvar]. *Archaeologiai Értesítő*, 95: 90–92.
- Kádár, Z. (1969). Lineamenti dell'arte della Pannonia dell'epoca di antichità tarda e paleocristiana. *Corso di cultura sull'arte Ravennate e Bizantina*, 16: 179–201.
- Nagy, La. (1938). Pannonia sacra. In: Serédi, J. (ed.), *Emlékkönyv Szent István király halálának kilencszázadik évfordulójára* [Memorial volume to the 900th anniversary of the death of King Stephen I]. Budapest, pp. 29–148.
- Nagy, L. (2012). Bemerkungen zum ikonografischen Programm des frühchristlichen Kästchenbeschlags von Császár (Ungarn). *Mitteilungen zur Christlichen Archäologie*, 18: 61–90.
- Nagy, L. (2013). Early Christianity in Hungary. A new research project. *Specimina Nova*, 21–22: 325–334.
- Nagy, L. (2014). Zoltán Kádár and the Early Christian iconography of Roman Pannonia: some problems of interpretation. *Studia Patristica*, 73: 195–218.
- Nagy, L. (2015). Die Lage der Erforschung des frühen Christentums in Ungarn im Spiegel eines neuen Projekts. In: Pillinger, R.J. (Hrsg.), *Neue Forschungen zum frühen Christentum in den Balkanländern*. Archäologische Forschungen, 26. Wien, pp. 19–36.
- Nagy, L. (2016a). Interpretationen frühchristlicher Kunst am Beispiel pannonischer Kästchenbeschlüge. Methodische Probleme und unscharfe Terminologie. In: Bugariski, I., Heinrich-Tamáska, O., Ivanišević, V., and Syrbe, D. (Eds.), *GrenzÜbergänge. Spät-römisch, frühchristlich, frühbyzantinisch als Kategorien der historisch-archäologischen Forschung an der mittleren Donau. Akten des 27. Internationalen Symposiums der Grundprobleme der Frühgeschichtlichen Entwicklung im Mittleren Donauraum, Ruma, 4. –7.11.2015*. Remshalden, pp. 121–132.
- Nagy, L. (2016b). Myth and Salvation in the fourth century. Representations of Hercules in Christian contexts. In: Salzman, M.R., Sággy, M., and Lizzi Testa, R. (Eds.), *Pagans and Christians in late antique Rome. Conflict, competition, and coexistence in the fourth century*, Cambridge, pp. 377–398.
- Nagy L. (2016c). Early Christian Archeology in Hungary between 2010 and 2016. *Acta classica Universitatis Scientiarum Debreceniensis*, 52: 149–161.
- Nagy, L. (2019). Mitológiai és bibliai alakokkal díszített ókeresztény ládikaveretek értelmezési problémái [Early Christian casket mounts with mythological and biblical representations. Problems of interpretation]. In: Tóth, J.D. and Papp, Gy. (Eds.), *Studia Patrum, VIII: Az egyházatyák a reformáció és az ellen-reformáció korában. A Magyar Patrisztikai Társaság XVII. konferenciája az ókori kereszténységről* [Church fathers in the age of Reformation and Counter-Reformation. The 17th Conference of the Hungarian Patristic Society on Christianity in Antiquity]. Sárospatak, pp. 162–174.
- Nagy, L. (2021). Orpheus, az eszményi költő. Megjegyzések az intercisai Orpheus-ládikaveret mitológiai és bibliai ábrázolásainak értelmezéséhez [Orpheus the ideal Poet. Notes on the interpretation of mythological and Biblical representations of the Orpheus casket from Intercisa, Southeastern cemetery, grave 1023]. In: Tóth, J. and Nagy, L. (Eds.), *Studia Patrum, X: „Szóljak bár emberek vagy angyalok nyelvén”. Az emberi és angyali létezés kérdései az ókeresztény korban: Válogatás a Magyar Patrisztikai Társaság XV., XVI., XVII. és XIX. konferenciáján elhangzott előadások szerkesztett változataiból*. Debrecen, pp. 147–163.
- Nagy, L. (2022). Beiträge zum ikonografischen Programm der frühchristlichen Kästchenbeschlüge aus Intercisa, Grab 109 [Contributions to the iconographic programme of the early Christian casket mounts from Intercisa, Grave 109]. In: Takács, M., Masek Zs., Samu, L., and Vida, T. (Eds.), *Artificia mirabilia. Tanulmányok Vaday Andrea tiszteletére* [Vaday Andrea Festschrift]. Budapest, pp. 101–120.
- Nestori, A. (1993). *Repertorio topografico delle pitture delle catacombe romane*. Città del Vaticano.
- Nieddu, A.M. (2000). s.v. Miracolo della fonte. In: Bisconti, F. (Ed.), *Temi di iconografia cristiana*. Città del Vaticano, pp. 219–221.



- Noll, R., (1954). *Frühes Christentum in Österreich. Von den Anfängen bis um 600 nach Chr.* Wien.
- Offenberger, J. (1983). Das römische Lager Augustanis–Traismauer. *Fundberichte aus Österreich*, 22: 133–162.
- Pillinger, R. (2011). Frühes Christentum in Nordwest-Pannonien. In: Humer, F. and Kremer G. (Hrsg.), *Götterbilder – Menschenbilder. Religion und Kulte in Carnuntum*. Katalog des Niederösterreichischen Landesmuseums, Neue Folge 498. Bad Deutsch-Altenburg, pp. 136–143.
- Pillinger, R. (2016). The genesis of Early Christian archaeology at the University of Vienna. *Mitteilungen zur Christlichen Archäologie*, 22: 67–84.
- Pülz, A. (2014). Frühes Christentum am österreichischen Donaulimes. In: Humer, F. (Hrsg.), *A. D. 313 – von Carnuntum zum Christentum. [Ausstellung im Archäologischen Museum Carnuntinum, Bad Deutsch-Altenburg, März 2013 – Oktober 2016]*. Katalog des Niederösterreichischen Landesmuseums, Neue Folge, 518. St. Pölten, pp. 52–59.
- Pülz, A. (2015). Frühes Christentum am österreichischen Limesabschnitt. In: Gassner, V. and Pülz, A. (Hrsg.), *Der römische Limes in Österreich. Führer zu den archäologischen Denkmälern*. Wien, pp. 79–85.
- Radnóti, A. (1957). Möbel- und Kästchenbeschläge, Schlösser und Schlüssel. In: Radnóti-Alföldi, M. (Ed.), *Intercisa (Dunapentele), II: Geschichte der Stadt in der Römerzeit*. Archaeologia Hungarica, 36. Budapest, pp. 241–363.
- Richter, G.M.A. (1966). *The furniture of the Greeks. Etruscans and Romans*. London.
- Ristow, S. (2006). Spätantike Kästchenbeschläge aus Wiesbaden, Mainz-Kastell. In: *Von den Göttern zu Gott. Frühes Christentum im Rheinland, Ausstellungskat.* Bonn, Tübingen, p. 56.
- Schindler, C., Moormann, E.M., and Deckers J.G. (Eds.) (2013). *Musen. In: Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum. Sachwörterbuch zur Auseinandersetzung des Christentums mit der antiken Welt, Bd. 25: Mosaik – Nymphaeum*. Stuttgart, pp. 184–219.
- Schlosser, J.A. (1934). *Die Wiener Schule der Kunstgeschichte. Rückblick auf ein Säkulum deutscher Gelehrtenarbeit in Österreich*. Mitteilungen des Österreichischen Instituts für Geschichtsforschung, 13/2. Innsbruck.
- Schwarz, M. (2012). Helmut Buschhausen als Forscher und Lehrer. *Kunsthistoriker aktuell*, 19(3): 4.
- Sey, N. (2013). *A pannoniai római kori bronzművesség műhelykérdései* [Issues of the bronze working workshops in the Roman Age in Pannonia], PhD dissertation. Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest.
- Steigberger, E. (2015). Traismauer – Augustiana. Kastell – vicus. In: Gassner, V. and Pülz A. (Hrsg.), *Der römische Limes in Österreich. Führer zu den archäologischen Denkmälern*. Wien, pp. 219–223.
- Supka, G. (1913). Frühchristliche Kästchenbeschläge aus Ungarn. *Römische Quartalschrift*, 27: 162–191.
- Szabadváry, T. (2018). *Collectio Christiana. A Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum ókeresztény vonatkozású római kori iparművészeti emlékei [Artefacts with early Christian connections in the Hungarian National Museum]*. Libelli archaeologici, Seria nova, Supplementum, 2. Budapest.
- Thomas, E. (1980). Religion. In: Lengyel, A. and Radan, G. (Eds.), *The archaeology of Roman Pannonia*. Lexington, Budapest, pp. 177–217.
- Thomas, E. (1982). Das frühe Christentum in Pannonien im Lichte der archäologischen Funde. In: Straub, D. (Hrsg.), *Severin – zwischen Römerzeit und Völkerwanderung. Ausstellung des Landes Oberösterreich, 24. April – 26. Oktober 1982 im Stadtmuseum Enns*. Linz, pp. 255–293.
- Tóth, E. (1994). Das Christentum in Pannonien bis zum 7. Jahrhundert nach den archäologischen Zeugnissen. In: Boshof, E. and Wolff, H. (Hrsg.), *Das Christentum im bairischen Raum. Von den Anfängen bis ins 11. Jahrhundert*. Passauer historische Forschungen, 8. Köln, Wien u.a., pp. 241–272.
- Tóth, E. (1995). Ókeresztény ládikaveretek Ságvárról [Altchristliche Kästchenbeschläge aus Ságvár]. *Folia Archaeologica*, 44: 107–150.
- Tóth, E. (2014). Der heilige Timotheus in Pannonien. Bronzene Kästchenbeschläge aus der spätrömischen Innenbefestigung von Ságvár. In: Heinrich-Tamáska, O., and Straub, P. (Hrsg.), *Mensch, Siedlung und Landschaft im Wechsel der Jahrtausende am Balaton – People, settlement and landscape on Lake Balaton over the Millennia*. Castellum Pannonicum Pelsonense, 4. Budapest, pp. 125–136.
- Tóth, Z., and Poulet, D. (2022). Pécs ókeresztény öröksége. *Vezető a pécsi világörökség helyszíneihez* [Early Christian heritage of Pécs. A guide to Pécs world heritage sites]. Pécs.
- Ubl, H. (1994). Die Christianisierung von Noricum Ripense bis zum 7. Jahrhundert nach den archäologischen Zeugnissen. In: Boshof, E. and Wolff, H. (Hrsg.), *Das Christentum im bairischen Raum von den Anfängen bis ins 11. Jahrhundert*. Köln, pp. 129–151.
- Visy, Z. (2020). Early Christianity in the region of Sopianae and the new casket mounts from Bakonya. *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 60(1–2): 185–200.
- Witt, J. (2001). Fragment eines Kästchenbeschlages. In: Stiegemann, C. (Ed.), *Byzanz. Das Licht aus dem Osten. Kult und Alltag im Byzantinischen Reich vom 4. bis 15. Jahrhundert*. Katalog der Ausstellung im Erzbischöflichen Diözesanmuseum Paderborn, 6. Dezember 2001 bis 31. März 2002. Mainz, pp. 86–87.
- Witt, J. (2004). Kästchenbeschlag – Alt und neutestamentliche Szenen. In: Wamser, L. (ed.), *Die Welt von Byzanz – Europas Östliches Erbe. Glanz, Krisen und Fortleben einer tausendjährigen Kultur. Eine Ausstellung der Archäologischen Staatssammlung – Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, München vom 22.10.2004 bis 3.4.2005*. Stuttgart, p. 264.

