

# Aegyptus et Pannonia IX.



Acta Symposii anno 2023

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BUDAPEST

# Aegyptus et Pannonia IX.

Acta Symposii anno 2023

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On the cover: Vase from the Zsolnay factory, © private  
collection (see FULLÉR – FERÓ, fig. 14. )

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# Aegyptus et Pannonia IX.

Objects and Concepts.

Proceedings of the Conference

19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> January, 2023, Budapest, Hungary

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## THE 'OBJECTS AND CONCEPTS' CONFERENCE AND THE HEFS AEC

**DR. HEDVIG GYÓRY, PHD**

HEFS AEC president

The Ancient Egyptian Committee of the Hungarian-Egyptian Friendship Society (HEFS AEC / MEPT ÓEB) organised the 'Objects and Concepts' conference in collaboration with the Semmelweis Medical History Museum of the Hungarian National Museum on 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> January 2023. Scholars joined the event in person in Budapest and online from around the world.

The conference aimed to provide a platform for presenting ongoing Egyptological and medical historical research projects related to artefacts, as well as results. It also offered the professional community and a broader interested audience the opportunity to become acquainted with new discoveries, as well as theoretical and methodological approaches. A key objective was to initiate dialogue among specialists in Egyptology, archaeology, ancient history, ethnography, cultural anthropology, Oriental studies and African studies. This would broaden professional perspectives, expand and share knowledge, and shape research approaches. This objective was largely achieved during the conference.

From an Egyptological standpoint, 2022 marked a dual jubilee: the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Jean-François Champollion's decipherment of hieroglyphic writing, and the commemoration of the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb 100 years earlier. Drawing inspiration from these events, the conference aimed to reconsider what Tutankhamun's artefacts have taught us about ancient Egyptian culture and how the decipherment of hieroglyphs has deepened our understanding of ancient perceptions of artefacts, their meanings and their uses. The presentations focused on research projects exploring the understanding and interpretation of material culture in ancient and modern societies. This was achieved by reconsidering the real or perceived meanings of objects, or by examining their function, use, and social value.

Following the period of disruption caused by the COVID pandemic, this *Aegyptus et Pannonia* conference was announced as an in-person event in the hope that academic life would return to normal. In practice, however, online

participation has become a permanent feature of scholarly communication. There was still strong demand for remote presentations, with several participants requesting the option to attend online. To a limited extent, this was accommodated, and the conference was organised in a hybrid format. In keeping with tradition, the programme included both English- and Hungarian-language sections. Nevertheless, all contributors were asked to submit written versions of their papers in English for the conference volume. The speakers included nearly equal numbers of Hungarian and international scholars. Most of the studies published in the conference volume are revised versions of the presentations and reflect the discussions held during and after the event. A few papers were omitted due to the authors' other commitments. These were replaced by a study of Bes amulets, as a continuation done on the ornamental Bes amulets during the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Abstracts submitted to the 'Objects and Concepts' conference are available in a separate booklet and on the 'Fáraók Földjén' (In the Land of the Pharaohs / [ibisz.iif.hu/ozirisz](http://ibisz.iif.hu/ozirisz)) website of the HEFS AEC, in both Hungarian and English.

**Thursday, 19 January 2023**

10:00–10:30

Arrival and Greeting

HEFS / MEBS + HNM CCP Semmelweis Medical History Museum (SOM)

10:30–12:00 / EN

Virginia Webb: Reception and alteration: Aegyptiaca in 8<sup>th</sup>- and 7<sup>th</sup>-century East Greece through the lens of sanctuary deposits on Samos and Miletus. Import or local production?

Benedek Varga: Connections in the museum representation of the Seuso Treasure

Urška Furlan: A case study of society through the production, consumption, and circulation of amulets of the Nile Delta in the first millennium BCE

12:30–14:00 / HU

Dóra Bohacsek: „Idézlek téged, démon, bárki vagy is (...)” – Latin nyelvű átoktáblák Észak-Afrikából [“I summon you, demon, whoever you are (...)” – Latin curse tablets from North Africa]

Krisztina Scheffer – Hedvig Győry: Udzsat szem amulettek a SOMban [Wedjat eye amulets in the collection of the HNM Semmelweis Museum for Medical history]

Gabriella Vámos: „Fújtak rá cukrot, hogy ne fájjon annyira...” A cukor mint a népi gyógyászat egyik alapanyaga [“They sprayed sugar on it so it wouldn't hurt so much...” Sugar as one of the ingredients of folk medicine]

**Friday, 20 January 2023**

10:00–11:30 / EN

Rita Simon: The curious history of Tutankhamun's scarab

Afaf Wahba: Objects associated with burials: concept, purpose, and meaning, with examples from recent excavations in Egypt

Esther Pons Mellado: A Predynastic vessel with human and animal representations

12:00–13:00 / HU

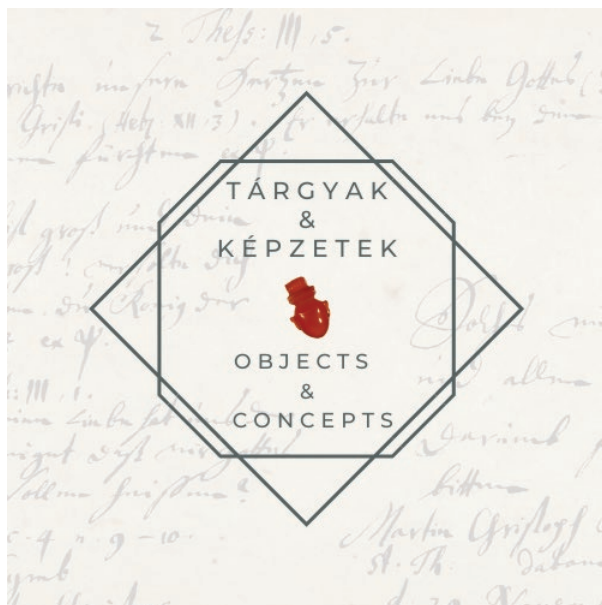
Andrea Fullér – Eszter Ferő: Tutanhamentől a szecesszióig: a Zsolnay gyár egyiptizáló díszműáruja [From Tutankhamun to Art Nouveau: the Zsolnay factory's Egyptionizing decorative goods]

Péter Véninger: Medma és Hipponion, két ókori görög város kerámia emlékei fazekas szemmel [Clay objects of two ancient Greek towns, Medma and Hipponion, with a potter's eye]

Hedvig Győry: Az év ókori egyiptomi emléke: A Thoerisz/Taweret amulettek kérdéséhez [The ancient Egyptian object of the year: To the question of the Thoeris/Taweret amulets]

13:00–13:30

Closing remarks



The title and design of the conference were linked to the double anniversary in 2022. In Hungary, as elsewhere, considerable attention was devoted to Jean-François Champollion, who used the Rosetta Stone to decipher the hieroglyphs, establish their grammatical system and identify their vocabulary. This paved the way for a new understanding of ancient Egyptian culture. Decades of intensive scholarly work have built on his results, enabling

modern audiences to read hieroglyphic texts and gain an understanding – at least in broad outlines – of the thought processes of ancient Egyptians. Nevertheless, further refinement is necessary in this field. One consequence of this breakthrough was that the interpretation of material culture reached a new level: previously uninterpretable or largely speculative assumptions were replaced by interpretations supported by textual sources or more precise approaches to perceived meanings.

The conference logo features a heart-shaped amulet inside a geometric frame, set against a 19<sup>th</sup>-century manuscript. This symbolises the ancient Egyptian belief that the heart was the key to both biological life and emotions and thought.

However, reading ancient Egyptian texts does not mean that all questions have been answered. One such issue concerns the Stela of Djedher<sup>1</sup> in the Museum of Fine Arts. In this stela the adoring official offering to Osiris, Isis, and Nephthys is shown – following New Kingdom models – with a balm cone on his head, yet its design suggests that its original meaning was lost in later periods. It became a cone-shaped element with branching lines emerging from it. This motif also highlights the deteriorated condition of the centuries-old models, later alterations to which were not always distinguished from the original forms by subsequent artists. By contrast, the jackal figure standing on a boat in the upper register of the stela – despite being a rare depiction – clearly symbolises Anubis's role as 'guide of the soul' in the afterlife. This role is explained from multiple perspectives in written Egyptian sources. For this reason, the stela was chosen as the backdrop for the call for papers.

Another significant anniversary in 2022 was the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon's discovery of the treasures in Tutankhamun's tomb. The objects unearthed at that time had an enormous global impact thanks to their breathtaking beauty, unique forms and exquisite craftsmanship. Public interest in ancient Egypt in Hungary has always been intense,<sup>2</sup> as evidenced by numerous Egyptian-style monuments, such as the

1 MEKIS, Tamás, *Quelques données nouvelles sur les stèles Budapest MBA inv. no 51.1928 et Prague MN P 1636, et sur la famille de Iâhmès fils de Smendès, propriétaire de la statue Caire JE 37075*, in Coulon, Laurent, *La Cachette de Karnak Nouvelles perspectives sur les découvertes de Georges Legrain*. Bibliothèque d'Étude 16. Cairo: Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities – Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale 2016, 383-395.

2 For today's interest see e.g. FERÓ, Eszter, *The Body of Nefertiti: The Curious Incident of the Little Warsawa the Venice Biennial*, in JÚNOVÁ, Adéla Macková – STORCHOVÁ, Lucie – JÚN, Libor (eds.), *Egypt and Austria X – Visualizing the Orient: Central Europe and the Near East in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*. Prague: Academy of Performing Arts in Prague 2016, 107-118.

Jewish cemetery in Budapest,<sup>3</sup> the Szivárvány Cinema in Kaposvár,<sup>4</sup> and the monuments in Csákvár and Hédervár,<sup>5</sup> or part of them<sup>6</sup>. Likewise, the Zsolnay Factory's Egyptianising artefacts<sup>7</sup> testify to this enduring popularity. Other Egyptian and Egyptianising artefacts illustrate this phenomenon further, including the wooden stela painted by Blanka Teleki (1806–1862). This was deciphered and published based on her painting by Emil Haeffner (1892–1953).<sup>8</sup> When the stela – long thought lost – was later rediscovered, it emerged that the painting was an almost perfect copy.<sup>9</sup> Further artefacts

3 FULLÉR, Andrea, *Egyiptizáló síremlékek a budapesti zsidó temetőben a 19–20. század fordulóján*. Ókor 18/3, 2019, 96-112; FULLÉR, Andrea, *Egyptianizing Funerary Architecture in Budapest*: Mladen Tomorad (ed.): *Egypt and Austria XII – Egypt and the Orient*, in *The Current Research. Proceedings of the Conference held at the Faculty of Croatian Studies, University of Zagreb* (September 17<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup>, 2018). Oxford-Zagreb 2020, 353-373

4 FULLÉR, Andrea, *A kaposvári Szivárvány Kultúrpalota egyiptizáló dekorációja*. Ókor 4/2014, 67-78; FULLÉR, Andrea, *Egyptianizing Decoration of the Szivárvány Cinema in Kaposvár*. in JŰNOVA Macková, Adéla – STORCHOVÁ, Lucie - JŰN, Libor (eds), *Egypt and Austria X. Visualizing the Orient: Central Europe and the Near East in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries*. Prague: Academy of Performing Arts in Prague 2016, 179-191; FULLÉR, Andrea, *A kaposvári Szivárvány Mozi – A húszas évek egyiptomi stílusú mozzijainak hazai példája*, in BÁCS, Tamás – DEZSŐ, Tamás – VÉR, Ádám (eds.) *Aegyptiaca et Assyriaca. Tanulmányok az Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Ókortudományi Intézetéből*. Antiqua et Orientalia 5. Budapest: ELTE Eötvös Kiadó 2015, 76-92.

5 FERŐ, Eszter, *Csákvári piramis és hédervári szfinx: a magyar egyiptománia nyomában*. 4. Ókor 2014, 55-66; FERŐ, Eszter, *Pyramids in the „Back Garden”: Some Remarks on Egyptomania in Hungary*. Lecture at *The Perception of the Orient in Central Europe (1800–1918)*. Conference *Egypt and Austria IX*, 2013. Betliar, Slovakia, 2013. október 21-23; FERŐ, Eszter, *Az egyiptománia jelensége az újkori Magyarországon, avagy hogyan kerül piramis egy Esterházy kastélyparkba?* in BÁCS, Tamás – DEZSŐ, Tamás – VÉR, Ádám (eds.) *Aegyptiaca et Assyriaca. Tanulmányok az Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Ókortudományi Intézetéből*. Antiqua et Orientalia 5. Budapest: ELTE Eötvös Kiadó 2015, 59-76.

6 GULYÁS, András, *A house with winged sundisks in Peterdy street, Budapest*, in *Festschrift Gábor Schreiber*, in print.

7 See the article in this volume, and FERŐ, Eszter, *In Search of the Orient: The Zsolnay Way*, in CZERNY, Ernst (ed.): *Egypt and Austria XI – In Search of the Orient*. Proceedings of the Symposium held at the Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien (September 20<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016). Egypt and Austria – Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien - Kraków 2018, 45–57; FERŐ, Eszter, *Zsolnay-titok másképp: egyiptománia a magyar iparművészetben*. *Zsolnay's secret in a new light: Egyptomania in Hungarian applied arts*. *Belvedere* 31/1, 2019, 166-178 – DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14232/belv.2019.1.11>; FERŐ, E. – FULLÉR, A. *Tűzben született lótuszvirágok*. *Egyiptizáló alkotások a Zsolnay gyárban*. Pécs: Janus Pannonius Múzeum 2023; FERŐ, Eszter – FULLÉR, Andrea, *Eosin Cat and Pyrogranite Sphinx – New Remarks on the Egyptianizing Colours of the Zsolnay Factory*, in HUDAKOVA, Lubica – HUDEC, Josef (eds.), *Egypt and Austria XIII – Between the treaties of Sistova and Lausanne: Contacts between the Orient and Central Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*. Proceedings of the Conference held by the Aigyptos Foundation and the Egypt and Austria Society at Topoľčiansky (October 21st-25th, 2020). In press.

8 HAEFFNER, Emil, *Ein verschollene Stele aus der Sammlung F. Kiss in Buda*. *Oriens Antiquus*, Budapest I, 1945, 59-65.

9 See the latest publication of the Stele at MEKIS, Tamás, *Quelques données nouvelles sur les stèles Budapest MBA inv. no 51.1928 et Prague MN P 1636, et sur la famille de Iâhmés fils de Smedès, propriétaire de la statue Caire JE 37075*, in COULON, Laurent, *La Cachette de Karnak*.



in this field have been brought together in a recently published volume by the Museum of Fine Arts<sup>10</sup>.

*Nouvelles perspectives sur les découvertes de Georges Legrain.* Bibliothèque d'Étude 161. Cairo: Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities and Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale 2016, 383-398.

<sup>10</sup> KÓTHAY, Katalin Anna – LIPTAY, Éva, *Az ókori Egyiptom Magyarországon. Pillanatképek a magyarországi Egyiptom-képek, egyiptizálás és aegyptiacagyűjtés történetéből a 18. század kezdetétől 1939-ig, az első egyiptomi kiállítás megnyitásáig.* Budapest: Szépművészeti Múzeum 2025, with contributions from András Gulyás, Flóra Kevély, Katalin Kóthay, Éva Liptay and Tamás Mekis.

Motivated by the growing interest in Egyptology, our committee launched the annual 'Ancient Egyptian Object of the Year' initiative. The first object was the lotus flower in 2019; the bee from royal titulary was selected in 2020; Amenhotep, son of Hapu, in 2021; the Thoeris/Taweret amulet, which initiated the Taweret research project, in 2022; a representation of the goddess Seshat in 2023; the figure of the goddess Maat in 2024; and the Middle Kingdom soul house in 2025. These naturally formed part of the research and outreach programme for those years. Alongside this, we continued to deliver our customary public lectures at our headquarters and in schools. Our members pursued their own research, and we continued to hold our scholarly international conferences and annual student drawing competition. Selected submissions from the latter are usually displayed in an exhibition. Just a few days ago, we opened a children's drawing exhibition at the Child Museum in Cairo for the first time in our Society's history. This is the Egyptian presentation of our 2024 exhibition, 'The Holy Family in Egypt', organised jointly with the Deák 17 Gallery. This time, it was organised in Egypt with the support of the Hungarian Liszt Institute in Cairo. In addition to raising awareness, we conducted research largely related to anniversaries that year.

The Tutankhamun jubilee in 2022 was commemorated internationally and aroused widespread interest in Hungary. To mark the occasion, the Hungarian Post issued a commemorative stamp block and matching envelope<sup>11</sup> depicting the famous gold mask and nested coffins. In the background is a gold relief scene from a small shrine (JE 61481<sup>12</sup>) from the tomb depicting Tutankhamun and his wife, Ankhesenamun. Among the finds from this naos was a pendant depicting the standing king being suckled by Weret-hekau, the snake-bodied goddess ("*Great of Magic*"; JE 61952)<sup>13</sup>, suspended from a necklace. As the shrine had been found looted, it is not known whose statue it originally adorned. The Hungarian Minting Company also issued a gold-plated silver coin<sup>14</sup> featuring Tutankhamun's mask on the front and a 3D image of his tomb on the reverse. A documentary presenting the latest research was shown in cinemas – the Italian movie 'The Temples of Art: Tutankhamun – The Latest Exhibition', which was shown from May onwards. All of these events were preceded by the international travelling exhibition 'Tutankhamun: The Pharaoh's Burial Chamber', which ran from 2019 to 2020, but unfortunately closed prematurely due to the COVID pandemic. Although it presented only high-quality replicas, it nevertheless made artefacts that were previously only known through images tangible for many

11 The blocks were printed by Pénzjegynyomda Zrt. based on the designs of the graphic artist György Kara.

12 <http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/gri/carter/108.html>

13 <http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/gri/carter/108c.html>

14 <https://www.erekmibocsato.hu/webaruhaz/tutanhamon-maszki-100-efordulo>

Hungarian visitors. Since November, the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM) has presented the assemblage in all its glory.

In addition to our educational outreach work, we continued to conduct research. The jubilee gave us the chance to focus more intensively on our Nephthys Project, which centres on Egyptian mummies. Within this framework, we organised several scholarly events, including a workshop on current issues in mummy research at the Hungarian Natural History Museum, as well as a special programme at the Semmelweis Museum dedicated to Tutankhamun's mummy. The amulets<sup>15</sup> placed on his body in multiple layers played an important role in this programme. According to the Murray-Nuttall Handlist, there were 78 pieces in total. Interestingly, only three of these depict anthropomorphic deities, none of which are in the customary striding pose. Instead, they are all seated with their knees drawn up (Anubis, Thoth and Horus), and all have plain, undecorated backs. Among the animal amulets, in addition to various snake forms, only the vulture is depicted. There are two plant amulets (leaf and double leaf) and the majority are object amulets. Several are specifically royal protective objects, such as the was sceptres, while others are rare or otherwise unknown forms: Y- and T- shapes, knots, a khepesh, a mallet, a knife, a miniature bracelet, and a rhomboid form. Well-known examples include the wadj and the ankh. There is also a striking number of djed pillars and Isis knots, with seven of each. Two amulets stand out due to their material: an iron wedjat eye and an iron headrest amulet. The latter only became common in the Saite period. Carter recorded ten further items, which he simply called "amulets". One of these is a heart bearing a crest relief, and there are several beads inscribed with Tutankhamun's name, as well as a shell. The assemblage is supplemented by two earrings.

The objects around us reflect the era in which we live and our identity, whether our lives are structured according to religious or secular principles. In ancient Egypt, these two aspects were inextricably linked, as is perfectly illustrated by amulets. They were chosen to provide protection and enhance outward appearance. Beyond religious and secular considerations, their protective and aesthetic functions were expanded by elements that shaped identity. From this perspective, fashion and social expectations also played a significant role, sometimes even overriding individual characteristics — particularly in the case of a pharaoh. It is therefore especially interesting to examine the amulets placed on Tutankhamun's body to protect him in the afterlife. Even a young pharaoh was provided with everything necessary, since he was already regarded as a god in life — a status that became even more pronounced after death.

15 <http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/perl/gi-ca-qmakeres.pl?sid=41.33.51.9-1766043880&qno=1&sta=0&qtx=amulet>

The exceptionally high quality of the amulets reflects his rank, and the selection clearly reflects the period in which he lived: the transition from the Amarna reform to the Ramesside era, which emphasised individual religiosity.

As a result of the presentation of Tutankhamun's mummy, the HEFS AEC and the Semmelweis Museum have jointly initiated a project aimed at analysing the SOM amulets from historical, medical and religious perspectives. While the SOM amulets cannot rival Tutankhamun's exceptional *wedjat* eye, magnificent divine figures, or elegant papyrus columns, the everyday beauty of the SOM heart amulet likewise merits attention. Although the museum's *wedjat* eye amulets played a central role in the conference presentation, the heart, scarab, *djed* pillar and other amulets received limited attention. Nevertheless, this joint article focuses on the *djed* pillar. From a historical perspective relating to the museum's collections, it occupies a special place alongside the scarab with which it was acquired. As the scarab (*hpr* beetle) from one of Tutankhamun's pectorals is emphasised elsewhere in the volume, we have chosen to focus on the *djed* pillar instead. This symbol also played an important role in Tutankhamun's tomb. In addition to the seven *djed* amulets placed on his body, one<sup>16</sup> was deposited in a niche on the southern side of the burial chamber in the western corner and subsequently walled up. Another pillar<sup>17</sup> was found almost at the centre of the southern side of the fourth, innermost naos, directly in front of the sarcophagus. The solar-lunar form of the *djed* pillar also appears on one of the pharaoh's pectorals<sup>18</sup>.

The first article in the volume summarises the research of Andrea Fullér and Eszter Feró on Zsolnay ceramics, with a particular focus on the Tutankhamun series. Through their meticulous research, the authors were able to ascertain the location of numerous pieces, establish the identities of the artists, trace the origins of the motifs, and determine the sources of the images used. They also demonstrated that works produced prior to the discovery of the tomb were in fact included in the Tutankhamun series.

The author's study categorises 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty naturalistic Bes amulets according to their iconography. Using excavation finds and museum collections

16 That is beside the head. Carter no. 260, H: JE 61379. <http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/perl/gi-ca-qmakesumm.pl?sid=82.131.230.142-1766356119&qno=1&curr=260>

17 Carter no. 250, JE 61785, max. H: 56 cm – <http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/perl/gi-ca-qmakesumm.pl?sid=82.131.230.142-1766356119&qno=1&curr=250>

18 Carter no. 261i – M: 12x 16,3 cm. The pectoral is representing the *djed* pillar topped by moon sickle and sun disc between Isis and Nephthys. Another pectoral in the same set has in the middle an Osiris figure, while at the third pectoral the central figure is missing. See <http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/perl/gi-ca-qmakesumm.pl?sid=82.131.230.142-1766356119&qno=1&curr=261i>.

as a basis, the study attempts to map the relationships between the resulting groups, as well as their chronological and spatial distribution. The study also highlights new conceptual phenomena present on amulets predating the Amarna period.

The third article, which was also written by the author, focuses on Old Kingdom Taweret amulets. It is primarily based on publications documenting excavations conducted by Guy Brunton in the Qau-Matmar region of Middle Egypt. As well as analysing iconographic groupings, the article examines the usage of Taweret amulets across individual cemeteries, assesses usage patterns and attempts to reconstruct contemporary perceptions of the goddess based on assemblages.

Esther Pons Mellado presents a Naqada II vessel from the Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid, the provenance of which is unknown. The vessel is lavishly embellished with depictions of antelopes, goats, and gazelles, whose parallel depictions are listed on a variety of other vessels. Together, these vessels vividly illustrate how the ‘green desert’ surrounding the Nile — the Sahara of today — was able to sustain such rich wildlife during the Predynastic period.

In their joint study, the author and Krisztina Scheffer trace the acquisition of the djed pillar amulet in the Semmelweis Museum’s collection, explore the possible motivations behind its purchase, and introduce the collector who once owned it. The study also provides an overview of djed pillar representations and variations of the amulet form across periods, alongside an examination of their associated Pharaonic concepts. It also takes a brief look at some modern reinterpretations of the form.

Rita Simon examines one of Tutankhamun’s pectorals, the central feature of which is a scarab crafted from Libyan Desert Glass. She discusses the discovery of this material and considers possible pathways by which it arrived in Egypt, taking into account the contemporary role of the Western Desert. She also provides a theological interpretation of the composition as a whole. Her new interpretation emphasises Tutankhamun’s solar-lunar character.

Gabriella Vámos examines the medicinal use of sugar in eye treatments in Hungary using historical and ethnographic sources, which can be traced back to domestic sources from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Her research shows that, initially, cane sugar was used primarily among aristocratic circles to treat cataracts and trachoma. From the late 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, sugar made from sugar beets appeared in peasant eye treatments; the most recent ethnographic source of which dates to 1974.

In his contribution, Péter Véninger discusses a technical phenomenon identified during a joint Hungarian–Italian project on terracottas from the southern Italian cities of Medma and Hipponion. Votive figurines in the

sanctuaries of these cities, founded by the Calabrian Lokroi, were typically produced not by trained craftsmen, but by the dedicators themselves. This meant that, in addition to offering tangible objects, they also offered their own labour to the goddess venerated at the sanctuary.

Afaf Wahba presents an Old Kingdom burial assemblage from Saqqara, notable for its reed coffin. Although the owner was not one of the wealthiest individuals, he can still be considered relatively prosperous. His body was wrapped in domestic linen, and he was given a headrest to accompany him into the afterlife. Anthropological analysis suggests that he was a middle-aged man whose skeletal remains show signs of diseases and alterations that may indicate his occupation.

Virginia Webb compares Egyptian and Egyptianising faience objects from the Heraion on Samos and the Sanctuary of Aphrodite at Miletus (Zeytintepe). She discusses these objects in several groups, including scarabs, amulets, falcon and cat figurines, non-suspendable bird, animal and human figurines, and miniature baskets. Her analysis reveals that visitors to the sanctuaries of the two goddesses offered Egyptianising objects that were made outside Egypt and differed from each other in many respects at the two sites.

As this brief overview demonstrates, the studies in this volume examine various aspects of Egypt's material culture, including archaeology, art, craftsmanship, everyday life, religion, and the country's influence on the wider world. A study also presents an example of ethnographic methodology, tracing the origins of the Hungarian use of sugar for medicinal purposes and illustrating how economic changes can lead to significant transformations in the use and interpretation of materials over time. This diversity of examples has enabled us to fulfil our primary objective of examining the historical changes and transformations in the meanings, interpretations and functions of objects.

Unfortunately, the publication of the volume was delayed due to technical and organisational issues, including a damaged hard drive. This resulted in the publication appearing later than planned. Nevertheless, the thorough and professional research conducted by the authors, the support received, and the efforts of the other contributors made the publication possible.

Firstly, we would like to thank the speakers who delivered inspiring lectures and shared insights into their research. We would also like to thank the HNM PCC Semmelweis Museum and its Director General, Benedek Varga; the House of Nations and its President, György Kilián; as the venue providers, and all the collaborators for their hard work on the technical and organisational tasks during the conference.

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Thanks to everyone's devoted efforts, we are once again able to present readers with a high-quality publication in both print and digital formats.

2025, December

## **“They blew sugar on it to alleviate the pain ...” Details on the role of sugar in folk eye treatment in the 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The consumption of sugar was introduced in the broader society during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century with the spread of beet sugar. However, it remained a luxury item among the peasantry until the early 1900s. After World War I, the use of sugar by peasants increased, and the number of sugary festive dishes also rose. The 1920s marked the beginning of the sugar jam and jelly-making era. For the poorer sections of peasant society, consuming sugar outside of high holidays was rare. Therefore, it is no coincidence that sugar has become a little-used ingredient in folk medicine. While researching the collections of the Semmelweis Museum, Library, and Archive of the History of Medicine, as well as the Folk Medicine Archive, it became apparent that sugar was also used as an element in treating eye diseases, such as cataracts and trachoma, in addition to aiding wound healing and treating the common cold. My study focuses on the role of sugar in the treatment of eye diseases. By putting the use of sugar in a new perspective, it seeks to answer questions about the effects of the healing images and practices associated with this sweet ingredient.

**KEYWORDS:** folk medicine, eye disease, sugar, Folk Medicine Archive

### **THE CASE OF THE BLIND LINA**

In 1939, in his study of the every day life of Cserszegtomaj in Zala County, the Hungarian ethnographer, Aurél Vajkai (1903-1987) reported among the medicine men in the hill community, on the then sixty-five-year-old Blind Lina, who was considered one of the village's healers. Vajkai described

that, although neither the garbling was far away from the sightless woman, she made a living by fortune-telling, necromancy, healing and, in a strange way, wax casting and card reading. According to Vajkai, Lina was not one of the pleasant informant; she spoke quickly, she promptly burst into tears, and what she had to say was accompanied by constant lamentation and complaining. In response to the collector's curious questions, she "repeated mechanically things that she had already said obviously many times, for example, the methods of treating his sick eyes", which Vajkai summarises as follows:

*„Blind Lina has been blind since she was 6 years old. Her parents tried to cure her blindness in various ways (according to her story). They went to Vasvár five times for the celebration of the patron saint of the church, washed her eyes with holy water, and brought water home in a small bottle. They put various things in her eyes, such as a mixture of broken, cut, and sieved glassware and tortoise shell or the mixture of dried human feces, powdered white sugar, and a mixture of glassware. Elderberry-mushrooms (probably *Lachnella alboviolascens*, in Transylvania wood ear *Auricularia auricula-judae*) were picked from a bush, soaked in warm water, and tied to her eyes: pitted plums were soaked in mulled wine and placed on her eyes. Her brother licked and spat at her eyes, but that didn't help either. They also took her to Pest, but the doctors there couldn't help her either. (...) Lina remained blind”<sup>1</sup>*

Although Vajkai had doubts about Lina's blindness on several points,<sup>2</sup> and the woman's story did not reveal how she lost her sight, it is clear that her parents – around the beginning of the 1880s – did everything they could to help their daughter: they not only turned to doctors and supernatural healing powers, but also used a wide range of folk eye medicine practices, as they knew well that caring for and providing for a blind child would place an enormous burden on the family and the wider community. Lina could not be fully relied on for work, for the care and maintenance of the family, and for ensuring its continuity; she could only count on the compassion of her family and the community.<sup>3</sup>

Lina had been coming to Cserszegtomaj since 1906 to heal, tell fortunes and do cartomancy, and then moved there permanently in 1926. She did not start a family, at first she took in poor orphan girls who took care of her in the hope of an inheritance, but the girls had meanwhile married and moved away, leaving Lina alone. When Vajkai visited her in 1939, he saw that locals and residents of neighbouring mountain villages were coming to her, and Lina was helping them with their ailments with “generally known

1 VAJKAI 1939, 196. and 200.

2 “*Maybe she's not quite that?*” asks the researcher. VAJKAI 1939, 196.

3 For the blind child's position in society see DEÁKY 2011, 350–362.

peasant remedies”<sup>4</sup>. According to Vajkai, Lina seemed more like a “swindler”, but people believed and feared the methods of “Lina, the witch”, “and looked anxiously towards her house on the mountain side”,<sup>5</sup> from which, barely two hundred meters away, domestic and foreign cars were already roaring away one after another towards the European-famous spa town of Hévíz.

We do not know whether she herself applied the remedies described in her story about the sick eye to others, but by telling them again and again, she kept alive the knowledge that was connected with methods that can be traced back centuries.

The aim of my paper is to present the process by which sugar became one of the essential ingredients of folk eye medicine. Despite the fact that we also encounter the use of sugar in veterinary medicine, my work focuses on the treatment of human eye problems. I consider my writing to be the first stage of an initial work, therefore the range of sources used is only a selection that I would like to expand in the future.

### **THE ROLE OF SUGAR IN EYE TREATMENT**

In Europe, sugar appeared in the 10<sup>th</sup> century as a medicine and as a raw material for medicaments under Arab influence, and then in the 14<sup>th</sup> century it was added to the list of pleasure items together with several spices. Sugar also played an important role in the preservation of medicines, and from the Middle Ages to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the so-called sugar-honey pharmacy<sup>6</sup> was typical. However, despite the spread of sugar cane plantations and the start of beet sugar production, sugar was considered a luxury item among the peasantry until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup>

The treatment of the eyes with sugar was not unknown in previous centuries, but since cane sugar or cane honey was a very expensive product, its use for eye problems remained in sources associated with aristocrats.<sup>8</sup> In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the nobleman Tamás Nádasdy (1498-1562), whose family had frequent eye problems and who himself regularly suffered from them, was

4 VAJKAI 1939, 196.

5 VAJKAI 1939, 200.

6 BARTÓK 2009, 172.

7 In 14<sup>th</sup> century France, sugar was recommended for meals prepared for the disabled and sick. KISBÁN 1987, 239.

8 An old name for sugar, referring to the fact that before the discovery of sugar, food and bitter medicines were sweetened with honey. This name was dropped in the 19<sup>th</sup> century after the spread of sugar production from sugar beets. See CZUCZOR – FOGARASI 1862-1874, and later BENKŐ 1970, 991.

advised<sup>9</sup> by his doctor to tie a bag of *tutia praeparata*<sup>10</sup> and *aloe vera* as a painkiller, then put it in a mixture of rose water and fennel water, and finally place it on his closed eyes. Even better, he can also dissolve fine Venetian sugar<sup>11</sup> in this water and wash his eyes with it.

Cane sugar is also found as an ingredient in the recipes recommended for various eye ailments in the work *Pax Corporis*, published in 1690 by the influential 17th-century physician Ferenc Pápai Páriz (1649-1716). Pápai's work went through several editions and had a great influence on the medical literature of the time. It is proof that the science of its author was based on the teachings of Hippocrates and folk healing, which he enriched with his own experiences, and what was described in it thus became the modern science of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12</sup> The volume, published in Hungarian, was also written for those who did not have the opportunity to consult a doctor and were therefore forced to cure themselves. It is clear from it that Pápai intended his work for a wide readership, which is why he recommended several remedies for each disease.<sup>13</sup>

It follows that the descriptions of diseases collected in *Pax corporis* and the therapies recommended for their treatment are formulated in a way that is easy to understand. Pápai was interested in healing itself, and in the treatment of all diseases he emphasized warming, sweating, lubrication, baths, laxatives (vomiting, laxatives), bloodletting and proper diet. In his therapeutic toolbox we encounter substances taken from nature, which became known as part of folk medicine in later centuries.<sup>14</sup> Cane honey also appears in his work,

9 More than 250 years later, Sámuel Diószegi (1761-1813), botanist, Calvinist pastor and deacon, in his work entitled "*Orvosi fűvészkönyv, mint a' magyar fűvész könyv praktika része*" [*Medical Herbal Book, as a Practical Part of the Hungarian Herbal Book*], published in Debrecen in 1813, also recommends the use of aloe for sore eyes: "( ) if its powder is sprinkled on the eroded wounds and the crusted skin, or is sprayed on the inflamed, weeping eyes; it heals them." (sic!) [„(...) ha porát az eves sebekre, és a' revesedő tsontokra hintik, vagy a' megtüzessedett könyhező szembe fujják; azokat meggyógyítja (sic!)”] DIÓSZEGI 1813, 219.

10 *Tutia praeparata* is a mixture of zinc oxide, silicon dioxide and clay. Zinc oxide is white and can later be used in cosmetics as a talcum powder, but it can also be added to ointments and used as adhesive plaster. Silicon dioxide is the raw material of ceramics and glass. MAGYARY-KOSSA 1929, 75.

11 The term Venetian sugar here refers to the fact that cane sugar came to Hungary from the east, through Italian mediation, via Germany. In the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, we often find cane honey and sugar candy (white crystalline sugar) in aristocratic households, which pharmacists traded with. MAGYARY-KOSSA 1929, 189.

12 OLÁH 1969, 87.

13 SOLYMOSI ET ALII 2020, 1730–1733.

14 OLÁH 1969, 88-89.

but similarly to the recipe recommended to Nádasy, he recommends it mixed with other substances in case of eye problems:

*“Just pure Boris, with a little cane honey it cleans the eyes nicely.”*<sup>15</sup>

A remedy specifically recommended for very watery eyes:

*“Pour as much water as will fit in an eggshell, as much fleaworts (Plantago (probably) lanceolata), rose, eyebright (Euphrasia officinalis) and cumin water, add in it two pinches<sup>16</sup> of burnt alum and burnt gallstones, boil them, add a little cane honey; when it has cooled, wash the watery eyes with it.”*<sup>17</sup>

Extremely exciting is the small manuscript book by Gergely Gellén (1664-1713) from 1680, entitled: *“A medical book about all kinds of ailments, diseases of people and horses, about bees and the future of the year”*<sup>18</sup>. The editor, Margit S. Sárdi, believes that Gellén copied the recipes in his book from several sources. Since he could not read every word of the texts taken as samples, errors and shortcomings can be discovered in the copy. Gellén’s book is interesting not only because of the writing technique characteristics just mentioned, but also because it contains numerous eye-healing recipes, all of which can be prepared at home and bear the influence of manuscripts and printed publications from earlier centuries. Among the recipes recommended for eye pain, we find many ingredients of plant and animal origin, including cane honey, as follows<sup>19</sup>

*“221. For eye pain. Probatum [tried]*

*Take cane honey, crush it very finely, and take a little crushed soft alum, and mix it so that a quarter of the materia is alum, and sprinkle his eyes with it, opening them well from the inside” [sic].*<sup>20</sup>

15 In Hungarian: „*Tsak a’ tiszta Bor is egy kis Nádmézzel együtt szépen tisztította a szemet.*”

16 In Hungarian „*póltura*”, a 17-18th century type of money

17 Pápai Páriz 1690, 52 and 54-55. „*Egy Tyukmony hajban mennyi férme, annyi Úti fű, Rósa, Eufrásia és Kömény vizeket tölts öszve, abba vess égetett Témsót és égetett Gálitz-követ mindeniket két-két póltura nyomót, forrald-fel őket, egy kevés Nád-mézet is vetvén belé; ha meghül azzal mossad könyvező szemeidet.*”

18 In Hungarian „*Orvosságos könyv mindenféle nyavalyákról, embereknek és lovaknak betegségekről, méhekről és az esztendőnek holnapiról.*”

19 S. SÁRDI 2019, 46, 56 and 58. In the original manuscript of 1680, the recipe numbers are 221, 283 and 298.

20 In Hungarian: „*Szemfájásról. Probatum [kipróbált] Végy nádmézet, törd meg igen szép lágyan, és szép lágy témsót [tim-sót], töröttet, timporáld el ann[y]ira, hogy negyedrésze legyen az témsó benne, és azzal hintegesd az szemét, belől jól felnyitván [sic].*”

283. *For red eyes*

*Boil rose water and cane honey in a mug with stream water, and drop in this water into the eyes in the evening and morning. Tried.' [sic!].<sup>21</sup>*

298. *Remedy for swollen eyes*

*Baked apples [as the word got a smear of ink, he repeated above the line: apples], camphor, rose water, cane honey; mix these together like porridge, and bandage them over his eyes [sic!]<sup>22</sup>*

In the sources that have survived since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, we increasingly encounter the use of sugar, but it is still used alongside other materials, such as eggshells, tortoise shells, and crab eyes.<sup>23</sup> It is not possible to leave out the „Medical Book” by Anna Zay (before 1681 – after 1731), which survived from 1718.<sup>24</sup> It was based on the work of Pietro Andrea Mattioli (1501–1577), a physician and botanist of Siena, written originally in Latin and then translated into Czech in 1690,<sup>25</sup> and on her own collections and experiences. Anna Zay tested most of the recipes she collected on people living in her own environment.

21 In Hungarian: *Veres szemrűl való. Rózsavízet, nádmézét, azt forrald fel egy begrében patakvízben, és abban az vízben bocsádd az szemébe este és reggel. Próbált [sic!]*

22 In Hungarian: *„Dagadt szemrűl való orvosság. Sült almát [a szóra tintapaca esett, a sor fölött megismételte: almát], kámfort, rózsavízet, nádmézét; ezeket öszvekeverje, mint az kását, úgy kösd az szemére [sic!]*”

23 The material from the 18<sup>th</sup>-century manuscript recipe book in the collection of the Library in the HNMPCC Semmelweis Museum, Library and Archive of the History of Medicine (S 1096. 35) also illustrates this well: *“For external cataract, take the shell of the first hatched egg from under the brooding hen, crush it into powder and blow it into the eye.” “If a person starts to develop cataracts in the eye, crush a dried bee-beetle into powder and blow it into the eye, and the cataract will be removed in one night.”* In his 1905 writing summarizing the healing practices recorded among the Göcsej and Hetés people, Ferenc Gönczi (1861-1948) reported that in Lenti, Zala County, *“white crayfish eyes (i.e. the hemispherical, small, white calcareous cartilage formed in the stomach of the river crayfish) are broken and blown into the cataractous eye.”* Gönczi 1905, 347.

24 The whole title of the book is: *“Orvos könyv, Mellyet Néhai tudós és igen híres Doctor Mathiolus Tseh nyelvre fordítatott, s bővítetett Herbáriumából A' Nyavallyáknak rende Szerént Dantzkai keserves bujdosásában maga és gyermekei Számokra öszveszedegettett és Magyar nyelvre fordított Néhai T.N. Vay Ádám Uram Árva özvegye Tsömeri Zay Anna”.*

25 Mattioli was the physician of Ferdinand of Habsburg and later of Maximilian II. His work *Materia medica* (Medicine), published in Italian in 1544, is a translation of Dioscorides and the commentaries written for it. His main work, *Compendium de plantis omnibus* (Collection of all plants), was published in 1571. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there were already sixty-one different editions, and in Hungary, through the manuscript translation from Czech by Gáspár Madách, he also influenced the practice of lay medicine in Hungary.

Her work spread in manuscript copies<sup>26</sup> and not only preserved the language of 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian medical language, but also influenced folk medicine.

The carefully written recipes mainly contain herbs, but there are also animal-derived medicines and coprotherapy recipes, reflecting the medieval influence, that is, recipes using human body secretions and metabolic products. Anna Zay's work has preserved several pharmacy medicines (*Pilula Aleophangias*) and “peasant medicine”, but it also provides information on the quantities and units of measurement of the time, the regularity and method of dosing the preparations.<sup>27</sup> In addition to beauty care advice, preparations against plague, and recommended remedies for war injuries, the work also contains information relevant to the eyes:

“17. *Against cataracts*

*Take some wood oil soap<sup>28</sup>, scrape out a silver spoonful of powder from it and mix it with cane honey, and take a new egg breaking the top, and pouring out suddenly the egg, leaving a little white in it. Put the mixture in the egg shell, and milk there some breast milk, and apply it with a feather to the cataractous eye three times a day, and it will heal nicely. When it runs out, renew it again.”<sup>29</sup>*

The book *Confectes*<sup>30</sup> by Count Erzsébet Terézia Pekri/Pekry, which

26 Anna Zay's collection was copied for her own use by Kata Wesselényi in 1766. SZABÓ 2020, 137. 27 SZABÓ 2020, 139.

28 Venetian soap or Venetian wood oil soaps were popular in aristocratic circles from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. This is why Erzsébet Pekry's book, *Confectes* also contains a recipe for “useful water” for sick eyes, in which Venetian soap is one of the ingredients: “161. *Water that is very useful for the eyes, from Count Jánosné Károlyi: Take half a walnut of white Venetian gallstones, half a piece of Venetian soap, crush and break them, put them in a new and well-burnt pot, pour half a cup of fresh well water on them, let it boil until two fingers boil, and when it has cooled, filter it five times through absorbent paper so that it is nice and clean, then drop five drops of it into the painful eye; it heals and refreshes the eye.*” KOVÁCS – KÜNSTLERNÉ VIRÁG 2020, 100.

29 SÁRDI 2020, 248. In Hungarian: *A hályag [hályog] ellen. Vegyen f[a]jolajsappant, vakarjan belőlle egy ezüstkalányit por nádmézzel elegy, s vegyen egy új tojást, a tetejét törje meg, s hirtelen öntse ki belőle a székit, kevés fejr „Gróf Pekri Erzsébet Terésia Asszony Confectes könyvének párja. Kit is Gazdasszonyságának toabra valo gyarapodasnak okaiért maga számára le iratott Groff Teleki Susanna Asszony Ó N[agysa]ga Zelizi Mihaly által Ezer het száz harmintzad esztendőben Böjt más havának tizennyoltzadik napján [1730. március 18.] M[agyar]. Bükösön. maradjon benne, s tegye belé a tojáshajba, s fejjenek csecstejet, s egy tollúval kenje a hályagas szemét mindennap háromszor, s szépen meggyógyul. Ha elfogy, ismét újítsák.”*

30 We have no information about the original booklet. We learn about the creation of the copy from the first page of the volume: “A counterpart to the book *Confectes* by Count Pekri

we know today from a copy made for Count Zsuzsanna Teleki by Mihály Zelizi in Magyarbükös (now Bichiş, Mureş County, Romania) in 1730–31, is roughly from the same time as Anna Zay's work. The source not only contains descriptions of dishes and syrups, but also includes numerous medicinal preparations. Although the copy of Erzsébet Pekry's recipe book<sup>31</sup> was made in the years mentioned above, the original recipes could have been created several decades earlier. It is certain that they were tried-and-tested recipes, which is why they were considered worthy of being recorded, and this was also the aim behind their copying. Housewives of the time learned from each other in this way, so enriched their knowledge, and expanded the list of recipes for various dishes and medicinal preparations. The volume was compiled without any particular editorial principle, but there was a noticeable effort to place preparations and medicines of similar types or ingredients used for same diseases side by side. Some recipes contained expensive, hard-to-obtain ingredients, which suggests that they were written for the upper social classes. It was typical of this period that manuscripts and printed materials also contained medicines that served to prevent diseases and were aimed at treating epidemics, infectious diseases, injuries, wounds, women's problems and digestive problems.

Here too, a separate group of recipes is formed by the healing procedures for the head and its diseases, among which we find medicines containing sugar and recommended for eye problems.

*"229. Take cane honey, which is made from 1 lat of white lead sugar<sup>32</sup>, 3 köntings<sup>33</sup> of duci, and as much prepared, mixed,<sup>34</sup> grated, and as much finely crushed beads<sup>35</sup> as possible. When someone's eyes are watering, or*

*Erzsébet Terésia; Her Majesty Groff Susanna Teleki had it copied by Mihály Zelizi in 1730, on the eighteenth day of the month of Lent [March 18, 1730] in Magyarbükös, in order to further increase her household skills." („Gróf Pekri Erzsébet Terésia Asszony Confectes könyvének párja. Kit is Gazdasszonyságának továbbra való gyarapodásnak okaiért maga számára le iratott Groff Teleki Susanna Asszony Ő N[agysa]ga Zelizi Mihály által Ezer het száz harmintzad esztendőben Böjt más havának tizennyoltzadik napján [1730. március 18.] M[agyar]. Bükösön.)* The title of the work comes from the Latin *confectus, confecta, confectum* and the Italian word *confetto* derived from it, which means *delicacy, sweetness, sweet jam*. Kovács – KÜNSTLERNÉ VIRÁG 2020, 11.

31 Kovács – KÜNSTLERNÉ VIRÁG 2020.

32 The Hungarian word is *plebász*, a *terminus technicus* for white lead sugar, also known as lead acetate. It is a compound formed when lead is heated in an acidic liquid (vinegar, wine), and is toxic if consumed over a long period of time.

33 *Könting* is a weight unit, one-quarter (about 4.3 g) of one lat (about 17.5 g).

34 The Hungarian word is *mix*, as a *terminus technicus*.

35 In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, stones and minerals disappeared from the list of ingredients, leaving only

*hurting no matter how much, take ophthalmen or eye-healing herb water, and take a knife-tip of the said powder, put it in it, and anoint the eye with it. But he who cannot stand water, as he often does because of great pain, should use the powder dry, and put a little in both corners of his eye.”<sup>36</sup>*

233. *“Remedy for cloudy eyes*

*Take a new egg, boil it hard, take out the yolk, cut it in two, put cane honey in place of the yolk, and tie it over the cloudy eye.”<sup>37</sup>*

The first of the two quotes is particularly important, because here we see the explanation of where and based on what observation the technique of blowing sugar powder onto/into red, cataractous eyes leaked out and continued to live on in folk practice: if instilling the liquid or compressing it is too painful for the patient, sprinkling, scattering, blowing seems to be a simpler solution.

From the 18<sup>th</sup> century, sources have survived not only from noblewomen and lay healers, which recommended similar recipes for eye treatment. Among the contemporary printed materials, the recipe in the book *Orvosló könyvetske* [Medical Booklet] by József Csapó (1734-1799), published in 1791, is noteworthy, which he recommends against cataracts on the eye:

*„Cataracts in the eye arise after severe swelling of the eye, or after smallpox: If this is seen outside in the light of the human eye, it should be treated first, so that it does not spread further and does not become thicker; First, therefore, those big blooded should cut a vein in themselves, and let them be cleansed by a bowel laxative, that is, a medicine that stimulates the bowels; After this, the cane honey or sugar should be ground into a very fine powder; which powder should be ground with a tin pestle in a tin vessel until it changes to the desired colour; some of this powder should be blown three or four times a day with a plume to the cataract of the eye; A tip of a knife-amount of this powder can be mixed with half a small glass of rose water, and sometimes, when warm, it can be dropped on the cataractous eye. [sic!]”<sup>38</sup>*

one or two expensive materials. Beads are also often used in various recipes by Anna Zay. S. SÁRDI 2010, 534.

36 In Hungarian: „Végy nádmézét, melyet a plebásztból csinálnak egy lattal, 3 könting duci és annyi elkészített mix reszelt és amint lehet aprón tört gyöngyöt, mikor és ~~annyi~~ az embernek könyvez a szeme avagy fáj akármely nagyon, végyen ophthalmen avagy szemgyógyítófű vizet és az említett porból végy egy késhegynyi, tedd belé, és azzal kend meg a szemit. Aki pedig el nem szenvedheti a vizet, aminthogy úgys léssen gyakran nagy fájdalom miatt, éljék a porral szárazon és egy keveset belétévén a szemnek mind a két szegeletibe.”

37 In Hungarian: „Végy egy új tojást, főzd meg keményen, vedd ki a székít, vágd ketté, a széki helyett tégy nádmézét, kösd fel az homályos szemre.” KOVÁCS – KÜNSTLERNÉ VIRÁG 2020, 120.

38 In Hungarian: „A’ szemem való hályog támad szemnek kemény dagadása után, vagy az himlők

The description provided by Csapó, known as the chief physician and botanist of the city of Debrecen, is an exciting cultural historical data in several respects. The author wrote his work in Hungarian at a time when the institutional framework and reforms of state-organized healthcare had already been established in Hungary, but the low number of doctors and pharmacists, the poverty of the rural and market town population, and the lack of healthcare facilities were still a huge problem. As a practicing physician, Csapó could see that although the separation of official and traditional medicine had already progressed by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, their boundaries were permeable, and the contemporary disease treatment methods showed an extremely mosaic picture: professionals with diplomas had to reckon with the activities of a large number of folk healing specialists, itinerant and lay healers.<sup>39</sup> József Csapó felt a responsibility towards the poor of the country, and he wrote his work with the aim of helping the poor population, who rarely saw a doctor or pharmacist, to ease their own suffering with the help of herbs, flowers, and ingredients easily available in their environment. The descriptions he published serve as evidence that official medicine in the 18<sup>th</sup> century still used and applied traditional healing methods and ingredients within its own system. Csapó's sense of responsibility towards the people is also shown by the fact that the remedies published in his work were simple, practical advice formulated in Hungarian that anyone could implement. Another interesting aspect of the cited remedy is that it mentions cane honey and sugar side by side, which are recommended to be crushed into a fine powder and blown onto the cataractous eye. This data suggests that cane sugar and sugar may have been known and used by the peasantry at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>40</sup> but it is important to emphasize that there were regional differences among sugar users at the time: it was much more widespread in western Hungary, while the inhabitants of the north eastern regions did not keep up with the sugar consumption trends.<sup>41</sup>

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*után: Ez ha kívül az Ember szeme fényén láttatik, azt, még nagyobbra nem terjed, és vastagabbá nem lesz jó előre orvosolni kell; Előre azért bőv vérűek magokon eret vágassanak, és Bélek Laxativa, az-az: beleket megindító orvosság által ki-tisztítsassék; Ennekutánna a' nádméz, vagy tzukor igen apró porrá töretessék; melly port ón kalánnal egy ón edényben mind addig kell törni, még kellő színre nem változik, melly efféle porból osztán napjában háromszor 's négyszer keveset tollon által s' szemnek hályogára fúni kellekik; Ezen porból egy kés hegyére feröt lehet fél kis üveg pohárba való rósa vízben-is keverni, és néha melegegetskén a' hályogos szemre tseppenteni."* [sic!]. See CSAPÓ 1791, 44-45.

39 For more information see: DEÁKY 2002.

40 KISBÁN 1987, 244.

41 KISBÁN 1987, 245.

This is also suggested by the manuscript recipe book that survived from around 1780, which was owned by Zsigmond Stróbel, a teacher from Göcsej (a region in Zala County, Hungary), and later by his family members. Unfortunately, we have no information about the writer of the recipes, we can only assume from the usage of the words (e.g. patient) and the materials used (e.g. vitriol<sup>42</sup>) that he was a doctor. Its author copied the recipes therein and apparently relied on several sources, but it is also possible that he himself collected, observed and wrote down folk healing procedures. In any case, the source that survived thanks to him shows that the use of sugar to cure cataracts was a common practice in this region:

*“Crush vitriol and sugar finely crushed, put a little on the cataract every morning, for old people take less sugar, let the patient lie on his back.”<sup>43</sup>*

or

*„If you have smallpox<sup>44</sup> in the eye, in the morning and evening, as I mentioned above, crush the sugar and tutia<sup>45</sup>, and sprinkle it on the eye, then tie it up with warm human manure juice<sup>46</sup> between two cloth.”<sup>47</sup>*

42 Concentrated sulphuric acid. Its preparation was already known to Arab alchemists in the 8<sup>th</sup> c. AD. Its use is also mentioned later; the vitriol-oil name is known from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In the sources that have survived to us from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, sulphuric acid is mentioned as a medicine that, in its diluted form, is known for its appetite-stimulating, stomach-strengthening, and fever-reducing effects when taken internally. It was used externally to treat seizure accompanied by intense, shooting, radiating pain and numbness. It was mixed with charcoal powder and applied to the painful areas until a small brown crust formed. During this period, the factory production of sulphuric acid also began, so it was no longer among the drugs produced in pharmacies. VERESS 2019.

43 In Hungarian: „Vitriolt, fejer tzukrot aprón törd őszve, minden reggel tégy egy keveset a hálogra öregnek kevesebb czukrot végy a patiens hanyatt feküdjék.”

44 The Hungarian tséts was a vernacular name for smallpox (bárányséts = chicken pox).

45 Zinc sulphate powder, has been used for catarrhal diarrhoea and inflammation of the mucous membranes and as an astringent on the conjunctiva of the eyes. Used internally as an emetic. Magyar Gyógyszerésztörténeti Társaság / Régi gyógyszerek lexikona: Nagylexikon, 163.

46 The medicinal use of human and animal excrement has been known since ancient times, appearing in some pharmacopoeias until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, then by the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century disappearing from this circle, but continuing in folk medicine. (MAGYAR (trans.) 2015, 151–154., SZABÓ 2020, 137.) This is proven, for example, by the remedy recommended for eye inflammation from Gömör and Kishont counties, which survived through János Hunfalvy: “Against eye inflammation, an inside well-salted half-boiled egg white is tied up, – or soft fresh cow dung soaked in milk, between two layers of cloth, and also a cloth soaked in milk is usually tied up, and even boiled beef spleen is used.” Hunfalvy 1867, 180.

47 In Hungarian: „Ha a tséts szemben szokott reggel es este mint fellebb említettem tzukrot, és tutiat törd porrá azzal hintsd bé a szemet az után ember ganej lottját melegén két ruha közt kösd rea.”

The process of separation of official medicine and traditional medicine accelerated from the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the gradual separation of the two areas can be observed. More and more qualified, state-recognized health professionals appeared in the country, alongside whom folk healing specialists, itinerant and lay healers alike coloured the multi-coloured world of contemporary medicine.<sup>48</sup>

However, members of traditional peasant society hardly encountered the modern institutional system of medicine, which was due to the lack of doctors, the lack of education of the peasant population, but even more so to its poverty. The words of János Hunfalvy (1820-1888), a geographer and younger brother of the linguist and ethnographer Pál Hunfalvy (1810-1891), are instructive. He described in 1867, while speaking about the counties of Gömör and Kishont, the conditions of the time as follows:

*„The people of our county generally make do with a small number of medical personnel. The reason for this lies partly – especially among the mostly agricultural people – in the little or no sense of need in this direction, and partly in the general oppressive financial circumstances. The first may depend on the smaller spread of diseases among this class of people, but the frequent success of the necessary natural medicine industry and the low level of intellectual education also seem to be involved here. The latter is also due to the small number of medical care provided by the state. Because the number of poor patients treated at state expense is very small, especially in later times. There are very few doctors, whether paid by the state, or private companies, or city or manorial doctors. [...] The treatment, which is only rarely used in cases of serious illness, cannot be called regular, especially in large rural areas, because the common people, as a rule, initially treat all ailments in folk ways, and as soon as the doctor’s medicine does not help, they return to witchcraft – unless they leave their illness completely alone, for the good luck. Only a few wealthy, intelligent people can sometimes be subjected to more persistent treatment, and then only in the case of a more certain diagnosis and prediction communicated in advance.” [sic!]<sup>49</sup>*

The conditions recorded by János Hunfalvy were typical even several decades later, but it should also be considered important that the industrialization that developed from the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and then the construction of the railway network, not only did diseases characteristic of certain areas cease, but the unification of public health conditions can also be observed. Not only people and diseases, but also new medicines and treatments spread

48 DEÁKY 2002, 9–10.

49 HUNFALVY 1867, 120–121.

faster due to technical progress.<sup>50</sup> At that time, beet sugar production also began in Hungary, which by the 1860s had grown into an export-capable industry. The reduced per capita sugar consumption ratio for sugar increased continuously. The railway also created industry and jobs, and sugar reached areas where it had previously been little or unknown.

Although sugar has been found in common households since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, its use among peasants really developed after the First World War, when the number of sugar containing festive dishes increased, and from the 1920s onwards the era of making jams and preserves with sugar began. Based on the surviving collections, it can be seen that sugar can also be observed in the toolkit of folk eye medicine,<sup>51</sup> as the knowledge learnt in previous centuries through the influence of literacy and calendars became folkloric, and then it got combined with elements of folk natural knowledge, common sense observation, and often with elements of folk belief and folk religiosity.<sup>52</sup>

The folk practice of sugar blowing has also survived in ethnographic collecting that became more popular in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. When describing the counties of Gömör and Kishont, János Hunfalvy reported among the *folk remedies* a method observed in the treatment of eye inflammation:

*“Sugar powder, even soft salt, is poured under the eyelid several times a day, – sometimes even scraping the dry precipitate of urine from a stinking night vessel, they rub it with sugar, as well as yellow copper rust, prepared almost in this way; they blow it in through a feather, – all this is done only in cases of more chronic illness: which is hardly permissible by inexperienced people even in this case: The “nothing powder” (white galicz, zinc, sulphur)<sup>53</sup> is used as eyewash with water. [sic!]”<sup>54</sup>*

50 DEÁKY 2002, 10.

51 For further information, see KISBÁN 1997, 533–537.

52 Ferenc Gönczi wrote down incantations among the people of Göcseji that were considered the best cure for cataracts. GÖNCZI 1902, 129.

53 HUNFALVY 1867, 180–181. Loose, white precipitate, mainly zinc oxide, that precipitates in the upper, cooler part of the furnace during the smelting of zinc-containing materials. Grabarits 2008, 234.

54 In Hungarian: „czukorport, sőt lágy sót is fiunak be naponta többször is a szemhéj alá, – olykor még bűzös éji edényről is levakargatva a vizelet száraz csapadékát, czukorral eldörzsölik azt és így valamint a sárga réz rozsdát szinte ekként elkészítve, befujják tollon át, – mindezeket csak idültebb bajnál teszik: a mi avatlanoknál még így is alig engedhető meg: A „semmi por” (fehér gálicz, zinc, sulfur) vízzel szokott szemvív. [sic!]”

The data provided by Hunfalvy is also extremely valuable in that it clearly shows the coexistence of folk practices and remedies used by official medicine, and the folk substitution for forbidden remedies and raw materials.<sup>55</sup> Hunfalvy's notes, but even more so the data from the collections that can be researched in the collection of the Folk Medicine Archive, illustrate well the survival of the known method of sugar in eye treatment. Before I turn to the presentation of the data related to sugar, it is also worth briefly mentioning the history of the Archive, so that the work of the collectors listed later is also placed in a broader context: in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Vilmos Diószegi proposed the creation of an archive that would aim to collect all the living and historical material of folk medicine. Diószegi's work, which began as a solo effort, took off indeed when, in November 1962, he continued the challenging task of building a corpus together with Éva Pócs. The financial background for the creation of the archive was provided by her workplace, the Damjanich János Museum in Szolnok. Their goal was to make also the medical history material available in the archive, collecting of which undertook Tamás Grynaeus. They prepared a folk medicine questionnaire, and their further goal was to create a folk medicine atlas. The latter was not created, but the archive was.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, it happened in an era when the peasant folk medicine practice that had been alive for centuries was disappearing due to the rapid economic and social changes taking place. Thanks to the efforts of the collectors, a knowledge was recorded based on the stories of those living at the time, which was a living and applied practice at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The majority of the data related to sugar was collected by Vilmos Diószegi. Between 1950 and 1953, Diószegi recorded the use of sugar among the resettled Szeklers of Bukovina on several occasions, which is how we get information about their eye-healing practices in the resettled Egyházaskozár (a village in Baranya County), Majos (a town in Tolna County), and Gara (a village in Bács-Kiskun County). Diószegi's notes are great because they provide a good documentation of the Szeklers' approach to disease, the method of blowing into the eyes, and the materials used in addition to sugar. He also reflects on the previously unsettling question of what happened after the sugar melted when blown into the eyes. We find the answer to this in the Gara collection:

*"If a drop of blood got in the eye, from a stab wound, they blow powdered sugar into the eye, which chews the drop of blood out. They drill a hole in the elderberry, and fill in with a little sugar; they hold that end to the eye,*

55 Pelech 1873, 902–903.

56 For further information, see Szakál 2021, 165–173.

*and while put the other end to the mouth, they blow it into the eye. If it doesn't work, once the sugar has melted, a clean white rag<sup>57</sup> is dipped in cold water or sweet milk and they cover the eye with it.”<sup>58</sup>*

Diószegi continued his collecting ten years later, returning from his fieldwork in Turkey and Siberia. As a result, he also recorded data on sugar from Vajta in Fejér County, Dusnok, Bátmonostor and Hercegszántó in Békés County, Tótkomlós in Békés County, and Órhalom in Nógrád County.<sup>59</sup>

The data available in the Archives and preserved from the late 1950s and early 1960s mention sugar, which was mixed with finely ground white glass and porcelain in a mortar and blown into the patient's eyes, both for human and animal healing. Further expanding the list of settlements that can be placed on the map, Balázs Gémes contributed to the existing knowledge with data collected from Újdombrád in Szabolcs-Szatmár Bereg County, Margit Békefi from Nyírtura, Andor Oláh from Békés County, Éva Pócs from Zagyvarékas, and Judit F. Virányi from Galgamácsa.<sup>60</sup>

Among the other collecting, it is worth highlighting Éva Gulyás's 1976 note from Jászdózsa, in which powdered sugar blown into the eye appears as a material used to remove a foreign body that has fallen into the eye.<sup>61</sup> This idea is also well documented among the concepts related to the crab eye, and the essence of the method was that one foreign body can pull out the other out of the person's eye. Based on the collections in the Archive, it can also be stated that among the tools used for blowing, we find reed, paper funnel, goose quill, and in their absence, the use of the human palm.

It can be seen that over the centuries, the various raw materials

57 It is worth noting here that in 1960, Andor Oláh also recorded the use of handkerchiefs soaked in milk and then placed over the eyes from Zsadány settlement in Békés County. MTA NTI VI. 2. 314–421. box 21.

58 In Hungarian: „Ha valami vércseppet kap a szem, döféstől, akkor porcukrot fújnak a szembe, az kirágja azt a vércseppet. A bodzát kifúrják, egy kicsi cukrot beleöntnek, azt a végét odatarja a szemhez, és a másik végét a szájhoz veszi és befújja a szembe. Hogyha az nem használ, mikormár a cukor elolvadt, akkor tiszta fehér ribanckát belemártanak hideg vízbe, vagy édes tejbe és ráborítják.”

59 MTA NTI VI. 2. 135–153. box 10, MTA NTI VI. 2. 314–421. box 21, MTA NTI VI. 2. 361–377. box 25.

60 Gémes Balázs, Békefi Margit Hungarian Academy of Sciences Ethnographic Research Group Manuscript Library (available at the Folklore Department, ELTE BTK) 87., 92., collected by Andor Oláh: MTA NTI VI. 2. 314–421. box 21, collected by Éva Pócs Éva and Judit F. Virányi: MTA NTI VI. 2. 135–153. box 10.

61 MTA NTI VI. 2. 314–421. box 21.

and tools of folk eye treatment, e.g. curdled milk, crab's eye, urine, feces, chamomile, etc., were also included in the list of ingredients and tools used in folk eye treatment, as a result of agricultural and technical development, and the collections found in the Folk Medicine Archive testify that it was a raw material known and used throughout the country. Thanks to the development of chemical and medical knowledge, we have since then learnt that sugar is indeed suitable for the treatment of chronic wounds, as it has antibacterial, wound cleansing, anti-inflammatory and pain-relieving, and tissue-forming effects.<sup>62</sup>

### CONCLUSION

In 1892, while reading an 18<sup>th</sup>-century “interesting manuscript” found in his great-great-grandfather's library, literary historian and teacher Samu Veres (1857–1932) pondered the future of folk remedies and healers, and then summarized his views as follows:<sup>63</sup>

*“With the progress and spread of true medical science, the star of village old women and witch doctors has passed. (...) True science today no longer gives credence to incantations, grass leaves, and balms, and if it is discovered that there is an old woman in a village who dares to cure diphtheria or cholera in her own way, it sends the county to immediately abandon her profession. In this way, village scholars of medical science are becoming rarer by the day, and it will not be long before we will find popular modern medical books on the shelves. [...] In one hundred and sixty-five years, the world has changed a lot, village botanists have become extinct, Cisio<sup>64</sup> are no longer believed, and everything has been taken over by specialized science. [sic!].”<sup>65</sup>*

Samu Veres then thought that the star of folk medicine had set, and that the age of methods based on scientific foundations was coming. We have since learned that he was only partially right. With the establishment of modern healthcare, the number of untrained healers did indeed decrease, but many records of their operations even decades later remained.

62 E.g. TÓTH 2024, HAESLER 2023, NASELLI ET ALII 2017.

63 VERES 1892, 60–64.

64 The cisio ment originally a perpetual calendar consisting of 24 lines of verse, but by this time it had become synonymous with the Calendar containing common old outdated knowledge of astronomy, health, and animal husbandry. BORSA 1978, 265-347.

65 VERES 1892, 60–61.



Sugar container in the “Fekete Sas” Pharmacy Museum, Budapest

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[elsegely/14760/por\\_es\\_kristalycukor\\_a\\_sebre](https://e-nepujtag.ro/articles/a-kensav-es-a-saletromsav#)

VERESS 2019 = Veress László, A kénsav és a salétromsav – <https://e-nepujtag.ro/articles/a-kensav-es-a-saletromsav#>

#### **MANUSCRIPTS AND DATABASES**

##### **HNM PCC Semmelweis Museum, Library and Archive of the History of Medicine**

S 1096 – *Recipe collection (Manuscript), 18<sup>th</sup> century*

S 1002 – *Recipe book (Manuscript) around 1780*

##### **Folk Medicine Archive**

MTA NTI VI. 2. 135–153. box 10.

MTA NTI VI. 2. 314–421. box 21.

MTA NTI VI. 2. 361–377. box 25.

##### **Hungarian Academy of Sciences Ethnographic Research Group Manuscript Library** (available at ELTE BTK, Folklore Department)

87. Collector: Margit Békefi, *Nyírtura, 1959 September*

92. Collector: Balázs Gémes, 1959, *Újdombrád (County Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg)*

