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# HOARDS, GRAVE GOODS, JEWELLERY

OBJECTS IN HOARDS AND IN BURIAL  
CONTEXTS DURING THE MONGOL INVASION  
OF CENTRAL-EASTERN EUROPE

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Back cover: Bird-shaped brooch from Kána village. Photo: Bence Tihanyi

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## Preface

Material objects affect us – their appearance, haptic qualities, taste, and smell induce reactions beyond rational consideration, and even more so, they trigger emotional impulses based on personal and culture-bound experience. Material objects offer “deals of interaction”, and humans evaluate what is being offered in light of their own needs and expectations. These facts are not only the basis for market analyses in contemporary economic systems, but in a broader sense also the basis for the analysis of premodern material cultures, particularly in archaeology. The main question we face, when holding an unknown, small find in our hands, is: “What is it?” – followed by: “What is it for?” Asking for the meaning of things in a historical context helps reveal the value of things – and the manifold archaeological contexts are the main sources to supply answers for both: they shed light on how things acquire value through cultural appropriation.

It is the defining merit of this publication that the author, Maria Vargha, highlights these considerations by emphasizing the relationship between human actors and their social goods, along with the materialized traces of this kind of interaction. Based on three main archaeological categories – hoard finds, burial goods and settlement finds – the author works out that each context category “produces” its own history of human actors and their objects of value. This kind of perspective is the precondition for further comparative analyses: Only by taking these context-oriented results seriously is it possible to produce an increasingly differentiated picture of the cultural phenomena of “treasures” as objects of value in a variety of personal, social, or culture-bound connotations. Based on these results Maria Vargha also reflects on the crucial importance of a context-related valuation of things for archaeological analyses: Even the potentials and problems with typochronological framing of small archaeological findings can be reconsidered by using the contextual comparative approach as worked out by Maria Vargha. Therefore this book may be warmly recommended not only to all scholars who are interested in the crucial questions related to dealing with material culture, but also to all archaeologists reflecting upon their own struggles to bring artefacts into a chronological scheme. Thus I wish this publication a broad dissemination and a positive reception from the academic community.

Krems, August 2015

Thomas Kühtreiber





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The present monograph in its first form has been my MA thesis written at the Medieval Studies Department at Central European University. I am by no means its sole contributor of this work in its present form. There are a number of people behind this study to whom I would like to give my thanks here.

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Last, but not least, I wish to thank my friends and family for being patient and supportive while I spent more time with the dead than the living.



## Introduction

*For Where Your Treasure Is, There Will Your Heart Be Also*  
Matthew 6:21

As the biblical quotation in this introduction suggests, treasure is an immensely complex subject. Everyone *treasures* something, be it material or non-material, and ascribes a value to the accumulation of such objects and subjects. Regardless of whether the connection is spiritual or materialistic, the bond between people and their treasures is immensely important. To know the treasure is to know the people, and vice-versa, it seems. Such readings, however, rely on assumptions that this study probes as it examines similar types of jewellery (and dress accessories such as buttons) found in different contexts: burial goods, treasure hoards, and individual finds.

Though this study focuses on hoards connected to the Mongol invasion of Hungary in 1241-42, it is relevant beyond this specific context. Given that this work addresses issues concerning hoard finds and material culture, and examines how finds are related when found in different contexts (a hoard, a grave, or a settlement feature), the questions raised and conclusions reached are important for other medieval hoard finds. By comparing hoards related to a single historical event to a contemporaneous site – containing a village, a church, and a cemetery – that has been excavated in its entirety, assessments can be made regarding how hoards reflect social issues such as stratification, wealth, status, and fashion. By placing hoards in a larger perspective, more general conclusions (and concerns) about the interpretation of medieval treasures are made.

Whenever treasure is the topic of research, the first element that should be investigated is the relationship between the people and their treasure. Academic research has used a variety of means to explain medieval treasure. The disciplines used in this interdisciplinary research include literature, anthropology, sociology, economics, archaeology, and art history.<sup>1</sup> Even the depiction of treasure troves in medieval written sources has been scrutinised.<sup>2</sup> However, no comprehensive research has been done solely using archaeological methods for the Middle Ages in Central Eastern Europe. Hoard horizons, a series of hoards that can be connected to one historical event or to one particular ethnic or social group, are extremely diverse, spanning large geographies and time scales. Though the topic has been much examined in prehistory, archaeologists of the Middle Ages have paid less attention to the issue – particularly in certain regions of Europe where such questions have been neglected for reasons that will be discussed later.

This study examines one specific hoard horizon: those connected to the Mongol invasion of Hungary (1241-42). With this event, the historical context is both well known and

much discussed by contemporaries and modern scholars;<sup>3</sup> the rationale for hiding such assemblages is also quite clear. This opportunity to examine material that is connected to a sole event, but across a broad spectrum of geographical space and social class, is unique for hoard horizons in Hungary, and, for that matter, in Europe.<sup>4</sup> This uniqueness justifies their separate study, while also providing possible insights into other medieval hoards, hoard horizons, and other individual finds.

We must, however, be aware of potential differences in conceiving what treasure was to those who were contemporaneous to the finds, and to what modern archaeologists consider treasure. The notion of treasure for those in the Middle Ages clearly existed, and was widely used.<sup>5</sup> Written sources, both records and literature, confirm this. For a modern archaeologist, conceiving what *exactly* was considered treasure has difficulties owing to the material nature of the discipline. Typically, only non-degradable material is uncovered, which limits modern understanding of the medieval. Limitations, however, also occur with finds that survive. Objects that could have been considered treasure in medieval times can be subjected to different modern views. A modern discoverer can ignore a rusty find because it does not *appear* to be treasure. This can affect the scholar as well as a member of the general public. A prime example of such neglect is the amount of scholarly attention, when compared to finds of gold and silver, directed at iron hoards.<sup>6</sup> The reverse is also true: a button, found in a waste-pit, can be regarded as a valuable object for archaeological interpretation when it may have been little lamented by the last owner. Consequently, the analysis of such treasures is strongly connected to the value systems of the historical periods and to our present day understanding.

This posits the question ‘What is treasure?’ Treasure is an object that has value that can be recognised. The diversity of values is reflected in the diversity of what is considered treasure. Such values can include market, artistic, spiritual, emotional, and scholarly. Market value, when the object is made from a precious metal, can correspond to present sale

<sup>3</sup>For recent comprehensive views on the period, see *Historicizing the ‘Beyond’: the Mongolian invasion as a new dimension of violence?*, ed. Frank Krämer, Katharina Schmidt, Julika Singer (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2011).

<sup>4</sup>As a consequence of this rarity, the use of this material to address historical problems is scarce. One exception is the use of numismatic evidence to address heraldic questions in Tamás Körmendi, ‘A magyar királyok kettőskeresztes címerének kialakulása’ [The emergence of the double-crossed hatchment of the Hungarian kings], *Turul* 84 (2011: 3): 73-83.

<sup>5</sup>For a general synthesis see Thomas Kühtreiber, ‘Einführung’ in *Von Umgang mit Schätzen*, pp. 7-20.

<sup>6</sup>For exceptions see Stefan Hesse, ‘Der Schatz im Dorf – Bemerkungen zu Randphänomenen’ in *Von Umgang mit Schätzen*, pp. 247-68, and Róbert Müller, *A mezőgazdasági vaseszközök fejlődése a késővaskortól a törökör végéig* [The Development of Agricultural Iron Tools from the Late Iron Age until the end of the Ottoman Era] (Zalai Gyűjtemény 19; Zalaegerszeg: Zala Megyei Levéltár, 1982).

<sup>1</sup>Lucas Burkart (ed.), *Le Trésor au Moyen Âge. Discours, pratiques et objets*, (Micrologus Library 32; Florence: SISMEI, 2010).

<sup>2</sup>*Von Umgang mit Schätzen*, ed. Elisabeth Vavra, Kornelia Holzner-Tobisch, and Thomas Kühtreiber (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007).

value. Artistic likewise. By contrast, spiritual and emotional value may not be so readily apparent, nor, for that matter, as easy to distinguish (and may not originally have been distinct). Scholarly value can trump the previous categories, praising an object for its rarity or for being an anomaly, or for informing us of a specific detail, unconnected to the medieval value system. Treasure is not just wealth that stored and accumulated over time, or hidden in a hurry owing to a threat;<sup>7</sup> treasure is a broad subject. The ‘what is treasure’ question is further complicated by the issue of context. Though archaeology is based on the idea that objects are provided meaning and value by context, the three different types of context for treasure – hoards, grave goods, and individual finds – have, problematically, been given different levels of importance by scholars.

Hoards have been extensively studied. They are, to use a recent definition, “only those deposits which have been buried to be retrieved at a later time”.<sup>8</sup> For the economic value of a hoard, the easiest method to calculate its value is the coinage. If the hoard includes jewellery, potential value in addition to the raw material is given by the craftsmanship. The amount is important. Problematic however is the possibility that all the material was viewed as raw material. If the material is broken, the likelihood is greater. Research however has predominantly focused on the coinage, neglecting the information contained in the jewellery and overlooking the reasons behind the hoarding.<sup>9</sup> Research has either focused on a single or specific set of treasure trove(s) connected to a historical event,<sup>10</sup> or examined hoard horizons belonging to a particular ethnic or social group such as Anglo-Saxon,<sup>11</sup> Baltic,<sup>12</sup> and, the most studied, Viking.<sup>13</sup> The latter sort, using a time frame of centuries, can mean studying quite different

compositions of finds. For instance, Anglo-Saxon hoards can range from relatively few coins to the great wealth of the Staffordshire Hoard. In the most notable group of finds, like the Sutton Hoo burial, there are similar contents: gold coinage, diverse jewellery and dress accessories, and personal articles such as bowls and cutlery.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, Viking hoards are not homogenous but have re-occurring features: mainly compromising silver (often scrap – an implication of its role in the local economy), jewellery, and coins. Though frequently similar, the rationale behind each hoard may be as diverse as their varied dating: there is no clear reason for their existence.<sup>15</sup> Baltic hoards, habitually associated with Viking hoards, also include a thirteenth-century sub-category that can be connected to the northern crusades of the period. Though variable in date (and, consequently, not attributable to a single event), this group of hoards, containing coins and silver bars, is the best comparison to the subject of this study, the Mongol invasion hoards.<sup>16</sup> Unlike the Anglo-Saxon and Viking hoards, which can have religious connotations and ritual elements to their burial (and possibly were not meant to be recovered), the crusade-era subgroup of Baltic hoards and the Mongol invasion hoards have a clear reason behind their burial: the goods were buried to be recovered later.

To be clear: the rationale behind hoarding is important. In addition to religious beliefs, earthy explanations can be enumerated: hiding of looted objects, covering of goods by smugglers or merchants to avoid tolls, and burial of family valuables in fear of future crises. The agency of hoarding is vast. It can communicate socioeconomic issues, illuminate local events, and sometimes inform about local beliefs and/or conflicts. In each case, the reason can be diverse, and consequently the hoard’s possible agencies can be different as well. If more hoards could be connected to a well-known and easily detectable event – such as a crisis – they can provide more information as a collection than as individual finds. For example: coins found together with dress accessories provide an opportunity to investigate the relationship between adornment and identity, and possessions and social class.

Equivalent materials – particularly in regards with jewellery – to that is found in hoards is found in burials. It is important to note the similarities and differences between these two contexts. In early medieval, pre-Christian eras, such burials marked the social position of the deceased: grave goods – including jewellery and dress accessories – had economic and symbolic value.<sup>17</sup> With Christian burials, this is not the case. In the first centuries following the conversion of a society, the gradual impoverishment of graves can be observed even if no regulation is known prohibiting grave goods, personal adornments, and fine clothing. This, it has to be noted, is a highly antinomic issue: it frequently appears in the research of different periods if the disappearance of grave goods in cemeteries dating from a period can only be connected to the spread of Christianity.<sup>18</sup> This makes the study of such artefacts difficult, as archaeological investigation of jewellery and dress accessories has predominantly relied on finds recovered

<sup>7</sup> Michele Tomasi, ‘Des Trésors au Moyen Âge: enjeux et pratiques, entre réalités et imaginaire’, *Perspective* 1 (2009): 137-38.

<sup>8</sup> Florin Curta and Andrei Gândilă, ‘Hoards and Hoarding Patterns in Early Byzantine Balkans’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 65-66 (2011-2012): 45-111 (p. 45).

<sup>9</sup> The work of Nanoushka Myrberg is the exception: see ‘The social identity of coin hoards: an example of theory and practice in the space between numismatics and archaeology’ in *Coins and Context I*, ed. Hans-Markus von Kaenel and Fleur Kemmers (Studien zu Fundmünzen der Antike 23; Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur: Mainz, 2009), pp. 157-71, and ‘The Hoarded Dead: Late Iron Age Silver Hoards as Graves’ in *Döda Personers Sällskap: Gravmaterialens identiteter och kulturella uttryck* [On the Treshold: Burial Archaeology in the Twenty-first Century], Ing-Marie Back Danielsson et al (Stockholm Studies in Archaeology 47; Stockholm: Stockholms Universitet, 2008), pp. 131-45.

<sup>10</sup> Recent, representative examples are *Der Schatzfund von Fuchsenhof*, ed. Bernhard Prokisch and Thomas Kührtreiber (Linz: Oberösterreichisches Landesmuseum, 2004); *Der Schatzfund von Wiener Neustadt*, ed. Nikolaus Hofer (Vienna: Verlag-Berger, 2014); *Treasures of the Black Death*, ed. Christine Descatoire (London: Wallace Collection, 2009); Kevin Leahy and Roger Bland, *The Staffordshire Hoard*, (London: British Museum Press, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> A comprehensive study of Anglo-Saxon is still awaited, but for an overview see Helen Geake, ‘Accidental losses, plough-damaged cemeteries and the occasional hoard: the Portable Antiquities Scheme and early Anglo-Saxon archaeology’ in *Studies in Early Anglo-Saxon Art and Archaeology: Papers in Honour of Martin G. Welch*, ed. Stuart Brookes, Sue Harrington and Andrew Reynolds (BAR British Series 527; Oxford: Holywell Press, 2011), pp. 33-39.

<sup>12</sup> For a comprehensive study of a particular hoard, see Tatjana Berga, *Piltenes Depozīts: Naudas apgrozība Kurzemē 13. gadsimtā* [The Piltene Hoard. Coinage circulation in Courland in the 13th century] (Riga: Zinātne, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> For the hoards of the Nordic areas (Scandinavia, the Baltic nations, and Northern Poland), see Brigitta Hårdh, *Silver in the Viking Age: A Regional-Economic Study* (Acta Archaeologica Lundensia 25; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1996)

<sup>14</sup> David A. Hinton, *Gold and Gilt, Pots and Pins*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 62 and 67.

<sup>15</sup> Hårdh, *Silver*, pp. 13-15.

<sup>16</sup> Berga, *Piltenes Depozīts*, pp. 9-11.

<sup>17</sup> Heinrich Härke, ‘Grave goods in early medieval burials: messages and meanings’, *Mortality* 19. 1 (2014): 1-21.

<sup>18</sup> For example Hinton, *Gold*, p. 97.

from burials. The small amount of treasures from everyday people that appear less frequently in the graves of the poor in the High Middle Ages cannot be tracked in such a way. This is an important feature to note when comparing the Mongol invasion hoards with grave goods, as jewellery and dress in graves is not a question of pagan-Christian relations, but other factors. This includes the emotional agency of the treasure: a representation of the identity of the deceased or the living mourners, and a potential reflection of attitudes towards the afterlife. As a consequence, burial goods are characteristic of personal beliefs, even if they are not, owing to their lesser number of goods, comparable in economic terms to hoards. Interpretation of such finds however is mostly based on what was recovered; as a consequence, the burial gives context to the artefacts, and the tendency towards circular arguments occur. Added to this is the difficulty of connecting such burial goods to historical events that could illuminate contemporary hoards. In the case of the Mongol invasion hoard horizon, this issue is resolved by the findings of the twelfth and thirteenth century churchyard cemetery in the former village of Kána, on the south-west border of modern Budapest. Careful excavation and analysis focused on the site as a whole – a unique excavation of a 12-13th century settlement that included along with the village (and its church) nearly 1100 graves – rather than merely pondering on the grave goods. This site can be placed alongside other less-known and less studied cemeteries of a similar date. This permits a study of the hoard horizon within this historical – and, potentially, geographical – context. As such, it is one of the few occasions that material goods from a living context can be compared goods found among the dead.

This leads to the last, but not least, type of treasure that are comparable to hoards: finds from contemporary settlements. This typically means artefacts that have been lost while they were being used (such as a piece of jewellery that broke), but it also includes finds from destroyed settlements, where an entire site has been made a time capsule owing to an incident of violent destruction. Though the most noted value of modern metal detecting has been in the discovery of spectacular hoards – and this is likely to be the impetus for its continuing popularity – it has been of great use in the discovery of numerous small finds. These loose artefacts – small treasures – are rather rare finds in traditional archaeological excavations, and, consequently, are underappreciated and underused in scholarship. Though cataloguing such finds

is variable (the Portable Antiquities Scheme is the most organised and efficient example), attention towards such finds is increasingly important. They provide examples of contemporary fashion that are quite rare in excavations. With regards to the other context, that of destroyed settlements, this also provides important information that is not typically uncovered in usual excavations. To use the example of a building that collapsed because it was deliberately burnt with the residents still inside, the artefacts can be found among the dead without any tampering by the culprits or later generations. These two contexts, the individual and isolated finds and the destroyed settlements, show the artefacts as contemporary people used them and establish the fashions of the time.

In order to achieve these goals, the study focuses on the following issues. Firstly, with the complex relationships between finds plotted above, it shows to the archaeological and non-archaeological reader the possibility to interpret such treasures using archaeological techniques. Secondly, it investigates the twelfth and thirteenth century, a period not known for such archaeological interpretation of treasures. Different archaeological contexts and associations may indicate different social, economic, and even chronological characteristics of these objects. As the most frequent artefacts in such treasures are dress accessories and jewellery, research can reveal a finer typochronology and provide a sociological and economic evaluation of these objects. In addition to providing an insight into the historical event, such studies also illuminate the personal values and the social and economic situation of the owners. The study is divided into three chapters. The first reviews past and present day interpretations of comparative finds from different contexts (including field cemeteries, churchyard cemeteries, hoards, and destroyed settlements). The second takes a more detailed look at jewellery types of the period, examining the various types from a chronological, typological, and functional type of view. This establishes what kind of jewellery is associated with which context. The final chapter, evaluating the social and economic aspects of all types of finds – including a comparison with iron depots – in graves, hoards, and settlements, concludes the study. This research, examining what treasure meant to people, investigates these concerns in relation to the past, and addresses issues for academic research in the present and the future.