
ISTVÁN PÁNYA*, BERNÁT RÁCZ**

A BRAVE NEW WORLD: CRISIS AND TRANSITION IN THE LATE MEDIEVAL GREAT HUNGARIAN PLAIN AS WITNESSED BY THE FRIARY OF BÁTMONOSTORA AND ITS PATRON FAMILY

Abstract: The purpose of this study is to examine the historical development of the friary of Bátmonostora and the history of the family who possessed it. The rise and fall of this rural centre in the long fifteenth century illustrates the changes in this period in the society of the Great Hungarian Plain. The main subject of examination is the lay religious life at the friary and its eventual demise. While discussing this lay religiosity, we present the history of the previously unexamined monastic treasury of Bátmonostora, which was quite outstanding due to some of its special reliquaries. The fate of the family and their eventual alienation from the sacred objects show how the political and cultural changes completely transformed lay piety at the end of the period and led to the unfortunate fragmentation of the collection and the decline of the family.

Keywords: Lay piety, monastic treasury, Austin Hermits, family history, relic veneration

* Dr István Pányá – PhD, geographer working at the Katona József Museum of Kecskemét, Hungary; e-mail: panyaistvan@gmail.com; ORCID: 0009-0007-1807-2183.

** Bernát Rác – PhD candidate at the Department of Medieval Studies at the Central European University; e-mail: raczbernát@gmail.com; ORCID: 0009-0002-5159-872X.

Introduction

In the Great Hungarian Plain,¹ much of the medieval intellectual network was represented by the private monasteries (*Eigenkirche*) dotting the landscape.² These were places that had multiple functions. Initially, many of them were established in the twelfth century to serve as imposing spiritual centres and burial sites for families. In this period, these were already important cultural hubs that had produced and stored documents and were responsible in some cases for the religious life of large populations. In the following, we will sketch the history of medieval Bátmonostora, its friary and its family to portray the changes that took place in this large area of East Central Europe in the long fifteenth century. The transition can be perceived at several moments in the site's history, most importantly, for example, in the evacuation of its treasury and its archives. In this period, the Ottoman expansion was unfolding in the southern parts of medieval Hungary and by the third decade of the 1500s the settlement of Bátmonostora became so exposed that the wealth of the family had to be transported to safer areas. The liturgical equipment described and mentioned in the first half of the sixteenth century, in connection with this evacuation, greatly illustrates the transformation of the society. Instead of finding peace in the 'embracing arms of the Mother Church,' the end of the Middle Ages brought chaos for the nobility as the artistic objects, formerly great representatives of an intellectual culture and participants of the mysteries of Catholic religion, became mere objects of value. Lay piety clearly survived, but the transition was so intense that the rebuilding of noble society took a very different, post-medieval turn, which the history of the site, the patron family and the objects illustrate perfectly.

¹ This region is a large flatland (characterised by the so-called 'puszta' landscape) that today extends over parts of Hungary, Serbia, and Romania.

² István Petrovics, "Nemzetségi monostoraink problematikája," *Acta Universitatis Szegediensis: acta iuvenum: sectio historica* 1 (1978): 11–24; Erik Fügedi, "*Sepelierunt corpus eius in proprio monasterio*. A nemzetségi monostor," *Századok* 3 (1991): 35–68; Péter Levente Szócs, "Private Monasteries of Medieval Hungary (Eleventh to Fourteenth Centuries): A Case Study of the Ákos Kindred and Its Monasteries" (PhD diss., Central European University, 2014); Idem, "Monasteries Under Private Patronage Within the Social and Economic Topography: Centers, Residences, and Estates. Several Case Studies of Medieval Hungary," in *Monastic Life, Art, and Technology*, ed. Ileana Burnichioiu (Alba Iulia: Mega Publishing House, 2015), 161–70.

Bátmonostora, a late medieval rural spiritual and economic centre

The first monastery of Bátmonostora flourished before the Mongol Invasion and after 1241 the ruined buildings stood uninhabited for several decades.³ Yet the late Middle Ages, and particularly the long fifteenth century, brought prosperity to this site. At the site of the ruined monastery, a new late medieval centre developed, starting from the last decades of the thirteenth century.⁴ The site was given to Emerich Becse by Charles I (1308–1342) in 1322, who started to reconstruct the rural centre.⁵ Pope Clement VI (1342–1352), upon request, gave permission to the Archbishop of Kalocsa for the reconstruction of the monastery.⁶ The change of the times, however, resulted in the invitation of the Austin Hermits.⁷ In 1345, the pope gave permission for the establishment of a friary for twelve friars. These friars were brought in to be in close contact with the local population, but also to ensure the conversion of the region's Cuman population, brought there during the thirteenth century to repopulate the devastated landscape. Following

³ Beatrix F. Romhányi, *Kolostorok és társaskáptalanok a középkori Magyarországon* (Budapest: Arcanum, 2008), 12.

⁴ Emese Tarjányi, "A Becsei-Báthmonostori család birtokainak kialakulása és gazdálkodása a XIV. században" (PhD diss., Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, 1973); 1270: Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Diplomatikai Levéltára, Budapest (The National Archives of Hungary, Archives of Diplomas and Charters, from here on: DL – reproductions of these are accessible in the www.hungaricana.hu online database) DL 87249; 1320: DL 86938; Piroska Biczó, "A Bátmonostor-Pusztafalu lelőhelyen végzett ásatás építészettörténeti-történeti értékelése" (PhD diss., Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, 1993).

⁵ 1322, 1323, 1364: *A zichi és vásonkeői gróf Zichy-család idősb ágának okmánytára. Codex diplomaticus domus senioris comitum Zichy de Zich et Vasonkeo*, ed. Imre Nagy, Iván Nagy and Dezső Véghely (Pest: Magyar Tört. Társulat, 1871), I: 221; Gyula Kristó, *Anjou-kori Oklevéltár. Documenta res hungaricas tempore regum andegavensium illustrantia* (Budapest and Szeged, 2000), VI: 151, DL 76308.

⁶ 1345: Augustino Theiner, *Vetera Monumenta historica Hungariam sacram illustrantia*, ed. Augustin Theiner (Romae: Typis Vaticanis, 1859), I: 689.

⁷ The Augustinians appeared in Hungary very early. By the fourteenth century they established friaries in several other rural centres similar to Bátmonostora. See Beatrix F. Romhányi, "Monasteriologia Hungarica Nova. Monasteries, Friaries, Provostries and Collegiate Churches in Medieval Hungary" (MTA diss., Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1996), 81–86; Beatrix F. Romhányi, "Ágostonrendi remeték a középkori Magyarországon," *Aetas* 20.4 (2005): 91–101; Eadem, *Kolduló barátok, gazdálkodó szerzetesek: koldulórendi gazdálkodás a késő középkori Magyarországon* (Budapest: Martin Opitz Kiadó, 2018).

this, the friary and the settlement grew and became a major rural centre, a so-called market town (*oppidum*).⁸ According to written sources, it also had a bath, which, among others, was used by the Polish Duke Sigismund in 1500, when he was travelling in Hungary.⁹ It also had a hospital dedicated to St Elizabeth, where the local poor were cared for physically and spiritually.¹⁰

The market towns – compared to the villages – were large settlements often without walls and a few, long streets. Based on the topographic research carried out in the area, the size (length) of the average village was 100–500 metres. In contrast, the main street of Bátmonostora was 1.5 km long (Fig. 1).

According to Jacques Le Goff's famous theory, these mendicant orders were signs of urban development and indeed, the settling of the Austin Hermits at Bátmonostora was a result of the growth of the settlement. In addition, their presence certainly contributed to an even greater expansion and importance, while still preserving the rural appearance of the town (Fig. 2a).¹¹ While this character was certainly there, the monastic complex, the parish church and the fortified manor of the patron family must have shown further signs of urbanisation. Furthermore, from an intellectual and cultural perspective, it should also be emphasised that a school of the Austin Hermits was functioning in the market town.¹² Finally, as it will be shown, in the case of the treasury, the friary was home to special artworks, which indicated that the site was more important than just any market town.

⁸ Katalin Éder, *Mezővárosi plébániatemplomok középkori városmentes tájakon* (Budapest: Martin Opitz Kiadó, 2022); Vera Bácskai, "Small Towns in Eastern Central Europe," in *Small Towns in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Peter Clark (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 77–89; András Kubinyi, *Városfejlődés és vásárhálózat a középkori Alföldön és az Alföld szélén* (Szeged: Csongrád Megyei Levéltár, 2000).

⁹ 1500: Zoltán Horogszegi and Krisztina Rábai, *Szemelvények Zsigmond lengyel herceg budai számadásaiból*. Documenta Historica 67 (Szeged: JATEPress, 2005), 44.

¹⁰ 1505: DL 82224.

¹¹ Jacques Le Goff, "Ordres mendiants et urbanisation dans la France médiévale," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 25.4 (1970): 924–946.

¹² Beatrix F. Romhányi, "A koldulórendek szerepe a középkori magyar oktatásban," in *A magyar iskola első évszázadai (996–1526) / Die ersten Jahrhunderte des Schulwesens in Ungarn 996–1526*, ed. Katalin Szende and Péter Szabó (Győr: Győr-Ménfőcsanak Múzeumok Igazgatósága, 1996), 37.

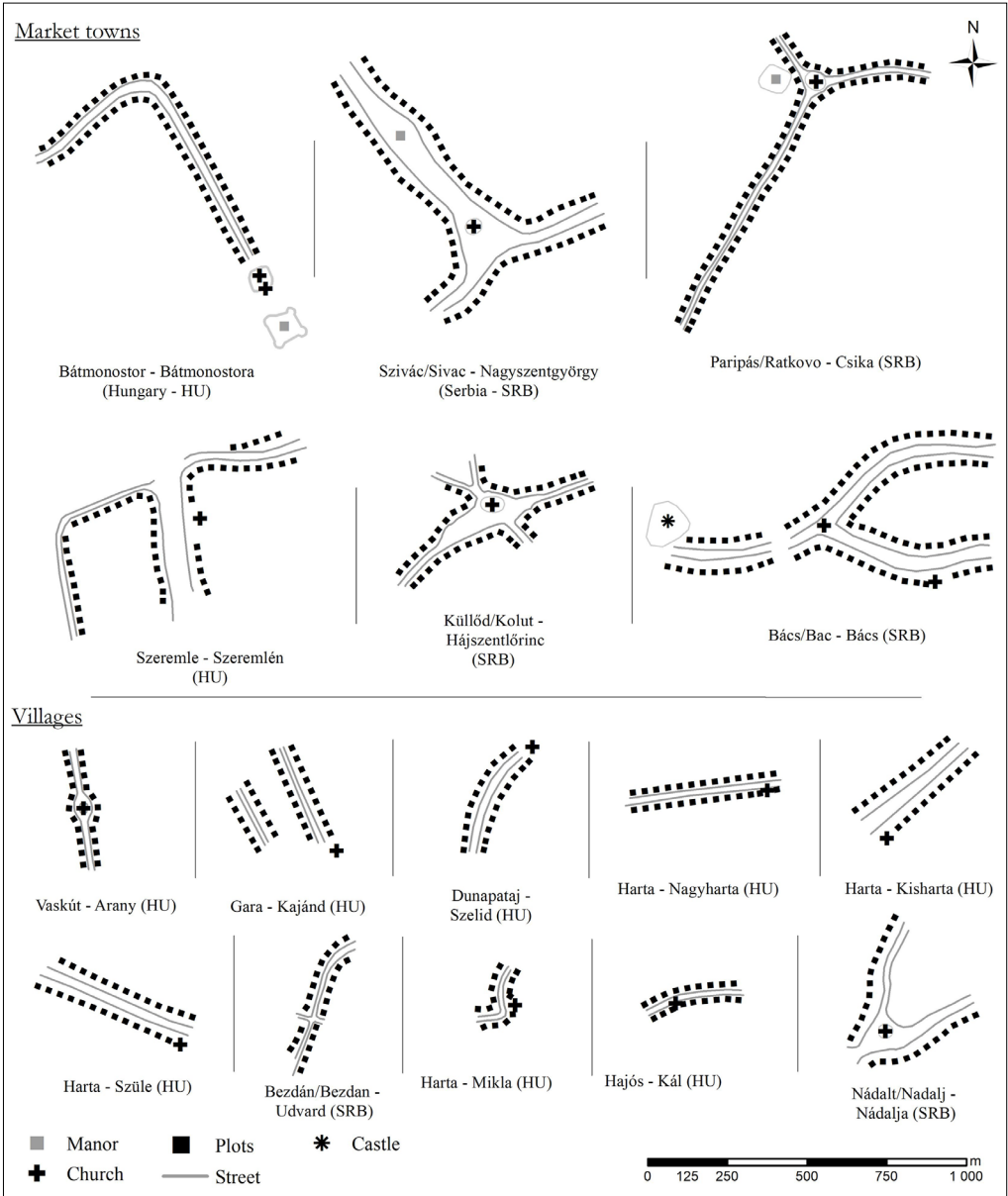


Fig. 1: A structure comparison of Bátmonostora and other surrounding settlements at the end of the fifteenth century

The ruin of the Romanesque basilica (27.7 × 16.6 m) was extended in the late Middle Ages, finally reaching approximately forty metres in length with its new gothic polygonal apse (Fig. 2b).¹³ Immediately next to it, a large parish church was built for the population, which in its final stage was thirty-four metres long and only eight metres in width.¹⁴ Both of these were excavated,¹⁵ but the excavations of the cloister were limited and only recent surveys provided accurate information about its nature.

Apart from this considerable ecclesiastical area, another major building of the settlement was the fortified noble manor (Fig. 2c). It was one of the most important noble residences in the Danube-Tisza Interfluvium Region. Buildings similar to this probably existed in the region, for example in Coborszentmihály (today Zombor/Sombor, Serbia) the Cabor family may have had such an estate, however, due to modern construction, there are no significant traces of it today. Non-destructive research (aerial archaeology, GPR and magnetometric survey) of the building complex is currently underway, the aim of which is to further develop the 3D models created on the basis of previous excavations (Fig. 3).¹⁶

¹³ Piroška Biczó, "Egy középkori birtokközpont egyházi épületei: A török hódoltság idején elpusztult Bátmonostor templomainak régészeti feltárása," in *Népek és kultúrák a Kárpát-medencében: Tanulmányok Mesterházy Károly tiszteletére*, ed. László Kovács and László Révész (Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, 2016), 673. In general, see also Biczó, "A Bátmonostor-Pusztafalu"; Eadem, "A bátmonostori ásatások," in *Középkori régészetünk újabb eredményei és időszerű feladatai*, ed. István Fodor and László Selmeczi (Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, 1985), 363–372.

¹⁴ This was built on the ruins of the previous small Romanesque parish church. See Biczó, "Egy középkori birtokközpont", 679.

¹⁵ Excavations and surveys had already begun at the site in the second half of the nineteenth century. The excavations of Piroška Biczó in the 1970s and 1980s revealed that the earlier interpretations were partially incorrect. The monastic complex has not been excavated. Cf. Imre Henszlmann, *Die Grabungen des Erzbischofs von Kalocsa Dr Ludwig Haynald* (Leipzig: C. A. Haendel, 1873).

¹⁶ We would like to thank Balázs Szőke (researcher at the Gál Ferenc University of Szeged) for providing us with his 3D reconstructions.

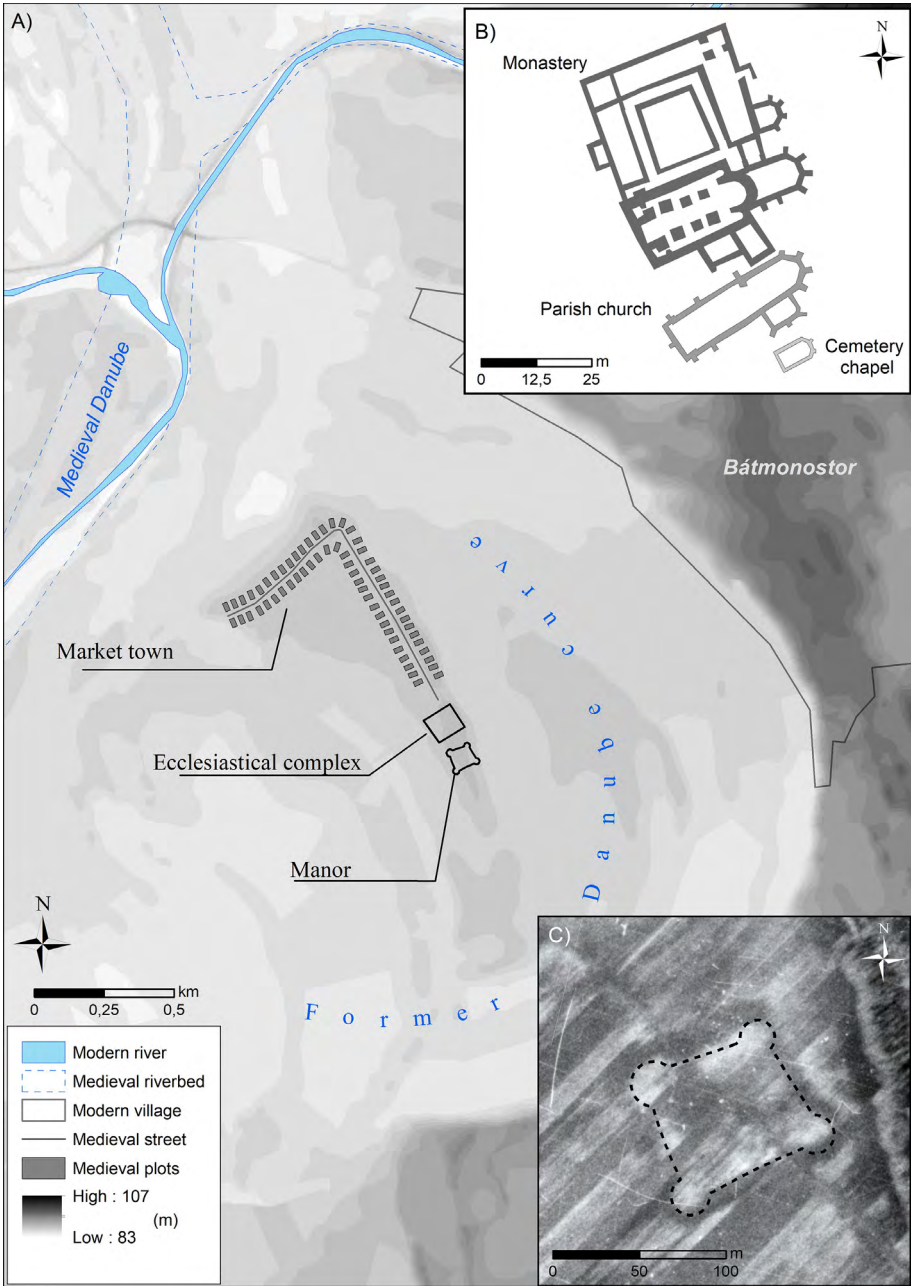


Fig. 2a: Location of the market town of Bátmonostora
Fig. 2b: Layout of the medieval ecclesiastical complex based on the excavations
Fig. 2c: Traces of the fortified manor house on an aerial photograph from the 1950s



Fig. 3: 3D reconstruction of the late medieval manor and ecclesiastical complex (reconstruction by Balázs Szőke)

The monument complex illustrates that the market town had some urban aspects, and that even if we do not know much about its life, it was an important place. Our limited knowledge of the site does not mean that it was not wealthy or even extraordinary in some aspects. Its fifteenth-century life and religious culture are illustrated well by an early-fifteenth-century document, which was also reused later – an act that will be relevant for the present discussion. The original text was written by John of Tapolcsány, who was the provincial of the Austin Hermits, on 26 August 1415. It declared that Gregory Zsana (Sana), castellan of Zsembéc, and his family were accepted into the confraternity of the order.¹⁷ Zsembéc was a castle of the Töttös family in the northern part of the nearby Dunafalva. It was the fortified “court” that Gregory was managing, and this is why, through the Töttös family, he was accepted into the confraternity.¹⁸ Thus, from this document, we have a glance at the cultural and spiritual impact of this friary on the

¹⁷ 1415: *A zichi és vásonkeői gróf Zichy-család idősb ágának okmánytára. Codex diplomaticus domus senioris comitum Zichy de Zich et Vasonkeo*, ed. Imre Nagy (Budapest: Magyar Tört. Társulat, 1894), VI: 366; DL 79273.

¹⁸ This castle was only five kilometres away from Bátmonostora. See István Pánya, “Zsembéc vára,” *Várak, kastélyok, templomok* (2020): 106–109.

lay elite in the relatively peaceful times of the reign of Sigismund of Luxembourg (1387–1437). This document arrived from the provincial probably to the friary, where the castellan and his family would become involved in the life of the confraternity. Nonetheless, as mentioned, this document is also relevant for a later text that was added to it. An undated list appears on the document, which can be dated to ca. 1500.¹⁹ It lists several liturgical artworks of different materials. If we accept that the document was sent to the friary and that it remained there until its reuse, it is possible that it was used by the friars and that it may describe part of the liturgical equipment of the monastic church.²⁰ This list, possibly written in the first two decades of the sixteenth century, already attests to the troubles the monastic institution had to face during the turbulent times of the period. It is known that the development and peace of Bátmonostora was already interrupted in 1514 when a crusader army caused damage to the noble mansion.²¹ It is likely that during this time the friary was also partially impacted. The threats to the family and the friary only increased from this point on. This is evident from the correspondence of the Brothers Várdai, who became the owners of this land after 1466 through the marriage of John of Várda.²² In 1517, the Bishop of Transylvania, Francis of Várda, asked his brother John (who was the *comes* of Bodrog County) to transfer the family archives to the castle of Máré due to the exposed nature of the unprotected medieval friary in the heart of the kingdom.²³ We do not know what exactly happened after this, but what is certain is that in 1520 Francis, who alone managed all the possessions of the family, chose to divide the family wealth. The possessions and the profits from the market town of Bátmonostora were given to John and Michael of Várda. The castle of Kisvárda, which will later be relevant for our discussion, was given to Emerich and Ambrose of Várda.

Around this time, the southern defense system was weakening and this had a strong impact on the life of Bátmonostora. In 1518, the

¹⁹ We are thankful for the opinions of Norbert C. Tóth and Katalin Szende on the dating of the text.

²⁰ See below.

²¹ 1526: DL 89222.

²² 1466: DL 81612.

²³ 1517: DL 89109.

Ottoman attacks on the similar settlement and friary of Kabol resulted in serious damages (Fig. 4):

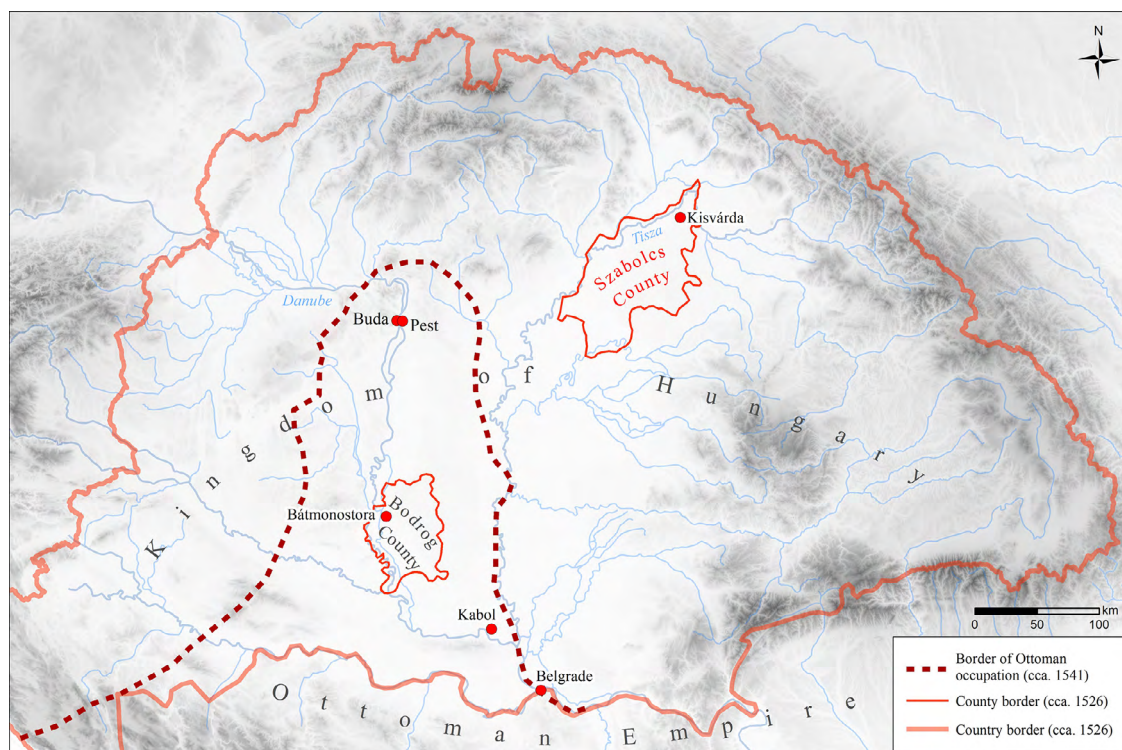


Fig. 4: Location of Bátmonostora and Kisvárdá in the territory of the Hungarian Kingdom

On the last feast day of St. Mark the Evangelist, a great legion of Turks, having prepared a fleet and a naval campaign [...] attacked the market town of Kabol in Bács County on the banks of the Danube. They completely devastated the town and burned the mansion of the local lord. The charters ensuring his privileges, his right of property and possessions were, along with his possessions in his mansion, destroyed. And since they valued the silk and the wax more than the writing and the contents of the charters, they took them and partly ripped them apart, and partly trampled them. They cut the wax destroying the seals and, along with the silk threads that were used for hanging them, they took them away. Finally, they burned the entire market town with the parish church and the friary of the Observant Franciscans, along with the aforementioned mansion.²⁴

²⁴ 1518: DL 93788.

After the capture of Belgrade (Nándorfehérvár), the attacks against the southern counties of the Kingdom of Hungary intensified. The County of Bodrog and Bátmonostora were not reached by the Ottoman forces until 1526. However, it is likely that due to this intensifying threat, several nobles started to worry and began to evacuate their wealth and archives to the north. Among them was Francis of Várda, who, again in his letter of 31 March 1524, shortly before his death, urged his brother Michael to keep his soldiers ready for departure and to bring their archives as well as their mother to the castle of Várda (Kisvárda) in Szabolcs County:

Our beloved brother! [...] there is terrible news coming, especially from the outer parts of Hungary, we think it would be appropriate to send a servant to our outer possession, [that is] to send to Monostor (Bátmonostora), and to encourage your brother John to take the confirmations of our privileges and our mother to Várda on shared expenses. We see these times to be so difficult, especially in those parts, that we think neither the charters ensuring our privileges nor our mother should be left in those parts for there they might perish.²⁵

The most important documents securing the privileges and possessions of the family were most likely taken to Várda soon after the letter. Yet, there are documents that were made there after 1524 about the settlements of the family. It is likely that these were taken to Várda before the end of the summer of 1526, just before the catastrophic Battle of Mohács on 29 August, or very soon after the defeat. Two members of the family actually participated in the battle: *comes* Michael survived the battle, however, his brother Emerich died.²⁶ Following the battle,

²⁵ 1524: Vince Bunyitay, Rajmund Rapaics and János Karácsonyi, *Egyháztörténeti emlékek a magyarországi hitújítás korából* (Budapest: Szent-István-Társulat Tud. és Irod. Osztálya, 1902), I: 128–129; DL 89189.

²⁶ *Magyarország családai. Címerekkel és nemzékrendi táblákkal*, ed. Iván Nagy (Pest: Ráth Mór, 1865), XII: 57; Ágota Henzsel, “A Várdai család birtokügye 1550-ben,” in *Studia professoris-professor studiorum Tanulmányok Érszegi Géza hatvanadik születésnapjára*, ed. Tibor Almási, István Draskóczy and Éva Jancsó (Budapest: Magyar Országos Levéltár, 2005), 134; János B. Szabó and Norbert C. Tóth, “‘Árnyék-boksz az árnyéksereggel’ – avagy már megint mindenért Szapolyai a hibás / ‘Shadowboxing with the Shadow Army,’ or it is again Szapolyai to Blame for Everything,” *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 131 (2018): 297.

Michael took refuge with his belongings in Máré Castle and then eventually joined the other members of the family at Várda.²⁷

The importance of Bátmonstor declined after the Battle of Mohács.²⁸ It is likely that the monastic complex was abandoned and was rapidly declining after 1526. This situation was typical, and it is no wonder that Hungarian historiography often takes this 1526 date as the end of both the Middle Ages and also the end of the long fifteenth century, at least in the Great Plain. Nonetheless, the two decades following can demonstrate how the long fifteenth century paved the way for a very different type of post-medieval world, where society, culture and politics transitioned into something else. Particularly interesting are the transformations connected to the family immediately after 1526.

In the Ottoman tax registers, there is no mention of the friary nor of the Austin Hermits, yet the settlement itself continued to exist even after 1526. It is likely that it suffered a similar attack as the friary of Kábol, even if some of the late medieval population continued to survive until the end of the sixteenth century. Nonetheless, the formerly prosperous market town became a small village.²⁹

The fate of the treasury and the Várdai family

After the Battle of Mohács, the Várdai family could no longer control its southern possessions in Bodrog County (including those of Bátmonstora) even if they firmly insisted on the right to possess these lands.³⁰ They could not, however, extract any wealth from these areas since their taxes were controlled by the royal stronghold of Sziget, which needed wealth from a vast area to subsist as a key point of defense against the Ottomans. The lack of these revenues had a strong impact on

²⁷ Henzsel, "A Várdai család", 139; *Magyarország családai*, 57–59.

²⁸ 1557: Antal Velics and Ernő Kammerer, *Magyarországi török kincstári defterek* (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1886), I: 107; 1558: György Tímár, *Királyi sziget. Szigetvár várgazdaságának iratai 1546–1565* (Pécs: Pécsi Szikra Nyomda, 1996), 271.

²⁹ Gyula Káldy-Nagy, *A szegedi szandzsák települései, lakosai és török birtokosai 1570-ben. Dél-Alföldi évszázadok 24* (Szeged: Csongrád Megyei Levéltár, 2008), 171.

³⁰ Samu Borovszky, *Bács-Bodrog Vármegye I–II. Magyarország Vármegyéi és Városai* (Budapest: Országos Monografia Társaság, 1909), 30; István Iványi, *Bács-Bodrog Vármegye földrajzi és történelmi Helynévtára* (Szabadka: Székely Simon, 1889), 331.

the family. In 1528, the brothers Michael, John and Ambrose reviewed the testament of Francis (d. 1524) related to the possessions (*fassio perennalis*). It is in this document that we hear again about the sacred artworks and equipment of the friary of Bátmonostora. It describes the brothers dividing the gold and silver objects and that the overall value of the treasury amounted to 8000 gold florins. It also mentions that during the division of goods they placed them into an iron chest, which they all sealed with their own personal seals, before sending the chest to Várda Castle.³¹

Eventually, they were all forced to retreat to Várda. An interesting series of events attest to the complete lack of stability in this period: In 1531 they hired soldiers to protect the castle, however, one day when the brothers were attending Vespers, the soldiers locked them out of their castle.³² Eventually, three military officers recaptured the castle in the service of the Brothers of Várda, however, the end result was much the same. After recovering the castle, instead of giving it back to the owners, they decided to keep it for themselves. Many of the valuables were stolen, and they only agreed to give back the castle after receiving lands with a value of 1200 florins.

During this period, John Szapolyai (1526–1540) and Ferdinand of Habsburg (1526–1564) were both rulers of Hungary. They were elected by different factions in 1526 after the death of the Jagiellonian Louis II (1516–1526) at the Battle of Mohács.³³ In 1536, the Várdai family turned to King John Szapolyai for justice, who wrote to the occupying military men.³⁴ We do not know what happened to the chest during the occupation, but the heritage of the friary seems to have been still intact during this period. In 1537, soldiers who were on the side of John Szapolyai were moved to the castle.³⁵ And yet again, in 1541, the family was locked out

³¹ Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár (from here as MNL), Zichy család levéltára, OL P 707 fasc. 5, no. 2018.

³² Zoltán Ács, "A kisvárdai vár XVI. századi hadi krónikája a korabeli források tükrében" *Hadtörténelmi közlemények* 95.1 (1982): 61; MNL OL E 148 (Neo-Regestrata Acta) fasc. 356, no. 33.

³³ See for example: János M. Bak, *Königtum und Stände in Ungarn im 14.–16. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1973), 70–73.

³⁴ 1531: MNL OL P 707 fasc. 4, no. 1799.

³⁵ Zoltán Simon, *A kisvárdai vár inventáriumai. Adalékok a kisvárdai vár történetéhez és helyrajzához* (Kisvárdai Rétközi Múzeum–Rétközi Múzeum Baráti Köre Egyesület, 2008), 16.

of their castle. This time, however, we know (from a 1550 document) that Michael of Várda took the sealed chest with the treasures of Bátmonostora, and this the last time we hear about the complete treasury.

Around the Epiphany in the year of the Lord 1541, the mentioned Michael of Várda for unknown behest, took with his wife all of the gold and silver objects of the mentioned monastery, which Ambrose and John of Várda, and the claimant lady and young lady, had the same right to possess as Michael of Várda. Having ripped off the seals, they broke the mentioned chest and like thieves had it taken away and carried away, and did whatever they pleased. As a result of this, Michael of Várda caused the claimant lady and young lady a damage of 5000 florins.³⁶

It is interesting in this document that out of the treasure worth 8000 florins he only took objects worth 5000 florins. In 1542, King Ferdinand demanded the capitulation of the castle in vain. At the end of 1543, Ambrose and the ‘castellan’ reached an agreement that led to the family reacquiring their possessions in 1544.³⁷ This included both the archives and the treasury. It was around this time that Ambrose and Michael agreed that Michael would give back the rest of the treasury. However, this never happened. After the death of Ambrose, his widow, Petronella Bánffy, attempted to get hold of the treasure she was supposed to inherit from her husband. The last information we have about the treasure is from 1546 when she tried to reacquire the treasures without success.³⁸ The treasure was possibly dispersed and partially melted, but some unidentified pieces may survive from it. In the following, a description and analysis of the treasury of Bátmonostora is provided, along with an interpretation of its connection to the 1415 document with the somewhat later text of around 1500 and its relationship to the artworks.³⁹

³⁶ 1550: MNL OL P707 fasc. 5, no. 2018.

³⁷ 1544: Menyhért Érduhelyi, “Báthmonostori apátság,” *A Bács-Bodrog Megyei Történelmi Társulat Évkönyve* 15.3 (1899): 116; Imre Henszlmann, “Abbatiae Benedictorum de Báth-Monostor effossa mense Octobri 1871,” in *Schematismus cleri Archidiecesis Colosensis et Bacsensis* (Kalocsa: Malatin et Holmeyer, 1872), XI; MNL OL E 148a fasc. 194, no. 12. 1543: MNL OL P 707 fasc 4, no. 1883. Simon, *A kisvárdai vár inventáriumai*, 16.

³⁸ 1546: MNL OL E 148a fasc. 194, no. 12.

³⁹ Post-1415: “Likewise, a reddish-purple chasuble, with a sown humeral veil with its fine accessories. Likewise, another chasuble with yellow stripes and small accessories. Likewise a cope with varied colors. Likewise, a simple yellow

Analysis of the inventories and the reconstruction of the treasury

The partial lists connected to the friary of Bátmonostora are special because they tell us about the treasury of a regional centre from which otherwise we have very few artefacts – mostly some pieces of stone decoration. We do not know what led to the composition of the first list, but whatever reason was behind its compilation, eventually the document became the testimony of a catastrophe. The lists are also remarkable because they name peculiar objects that rarely survived from the collections of such medieval private institutions. This is especially striking in the case of Bátmonostora since today nothing is visible from the former market town and its imposing central buildings. The site is not unique in this context since most late medieval centres of the Great Plain appear in a similar way and we do not know anything about their treasuries. Nonetheless, when looking at the list one should also keep in mind that it mostly includes objects that have a material value; no paintings or statues are present. The items are mainly portable objects with considerable value, and it is obvious that many other artworks disappeared without a trace.

The two lists differ slightly in their content and their quality, too. The 1550 list includes more special objects with a much higher quality

dalmatic. Likewise, a silk altar cloth. Likewise another silky linen altar cloth. Likewise, another altar cloth. Likewise, another painted/dyed (?) altar cloth. Likewise, another altar cloth made of red and variously colored damask. Likewise, a large chalice with precious stones. Likewise, another large chalice without stones. Likewise, seven other chalices, with one broken. Similarly a [relic] container or head with a crown bedecked with gems. Likewise, two altar cruets (?). Likewise, a silver and fully gilded pyx (or container) filled with relics. Likewise, a small patriarchal cross with precious stones. Likewise, a Bible. Likewise two decorated 'robes' (pepla). Likewise, a sealed chest filled with relics. Likewise, a book for preaching (sermocinale de sanctis), which starts with the line 'Prepare your hearts'. Likewise, a small breviary. Likewise, a corporal with a new cloth." 1550: "Two gilded monstrances; one golden chalice, and many other silver chalices; two heads of saints covered in silver, similarly silver crosses and hands of saints, which are also covered with silver. Sacred vestments (*indumenta*) decorated with pearls and precious stones and priestly vestments (*sacerdotalia*), and other things from the monastery of Bátmonostora amounting up to 8000 florins." Add: DL 79273; MNL OL P 707 fasc. 5, no. 2018.

We would like to thank Benjámín Borbás for the translations and Dávid Davidovics for additional analysis of the texts.

in general. Firstly, it describes two monstrances, then two golden chalices and several silver chalices. It is after these that the list mentions the most special and most valuable artworks: two objects, which were most likely head reliquaries covered with silver. One of them was special because it had a crown bedecked with precious stones, this was possibly a martyr or a holy king. Similar reliquaries are found in major ecclesiastical centres, usually bishoprics or archbishoprics, however, not so much in monasteries similar to Bátmonostora.⁴⁰ Such reliquaries have a long history and were often participants in processions. In Hungary, without doubt, the most famous one is the fifteenth-century Head Reliquary of St Ladislav (Fig. 5), which was based on an earlier model that was destroyed in a fire.⁴¹ One can also mention the St Dorothy Head Reliquary (Fig. 6), which was at least partially made in Buda in the 1420s – if not entirely.⁴² Head reliquaries are usually high quality and it can be presumed that the crowned one of Bátmonostora was a particularly fine piece, possibly connected to the tradition of the above-mentioned examples. While we do not find these in similar monasteries, we do find them in cathedrals. The 1531 list of the inventory of the Cathedral of Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia, Romania), the seat of the Transylvanian Bishopric, also mentions head reliquaries.⁴³ It is striking that the enormous treasury, of which approximately only one percent survived, contained only three head reliquaries and one arm reliquary. This is all the more relevant because the inventory mentions that two of the silver head reliquaries – commissioned previously by

⁴⁰ Or at least they are not mentioned: DL 15996, DL 13926, DL 232633; Zsigmond Jakó, *A kolozsmonostori konvent jegyzőkönyvei, 1289–1556* (Budapest: Magyar Országos Levéltár kiadványai, 1990), I: 119, 182, 193.

⁴¹ *Sigismundus rex et imperator: Kunst und Kultur zur Zeit Sigismunds von Luxemburg 1387–1437: Ausstellungskatalog*, ed. Imre Takács (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2006), cat. 4.91. The parish church of Bátmonostora was dedicated to St Ladislav and it is possible that one of the head reliquaries belonged to this institution and depicted the patron saint. Apart from the one, formerly at Várad, another one showing Ladislav also survived, see Takács, *Sigismundus rex et imperator*, cat. 4.89.

⁴² Takács, *Sigismundus rex et imperator*, cat. 4.9.

⁴³ Antal Beke, "Az erdélyi székesegyház készlete," *Magyar Sion* 5.3 (1867): 188–199; Károly Vekov, "Középkori és reneszánszkori tárgyak a gyulafehérvári káptalan kincstárában," in *Urbs, civitas, universitas: ünnepi tanulmányok Petrovics István 65. születésnapja tiszteletére*, ed. Sándor Papp, Zoltán Kordé and Sándor László Tóth (Szeged: Szegedi Tudományegyetem Középkori és Koraújkor Magyar Történeti Tanszék, 2018), 316–324.



Fig. 5: St Ladislav Head Reliquary, after 1406 (with a later crown), Győr Cathedral. Photo: Károly Zsolt Nagy



Fig. 6: St Dorothy Reliquary, around 1400 (with a later crown), made in Buda or Wrocław (?). Property of National Museum in Wrocław, V-2378. Photo: National Museum in Wrocław

Bishop Ladislav Geréb (1452–1502) – were later ordered to be gilded by Francis of Várda. Interestingly, the Bishopric had three head reliquaries and only one hand reliquary, which contained the arm of Luke the Evangelist. This shows that, indeed, the treasury at Bátmonostora was fairly unusual, especially from a monastic and lay devotional perspective.

In the case of the Várad (Oradea, Romania) Cathedral, an important bishopric connected to the veneration of St Ladislav, we only know of one reliquary bust, the St Ladislav presented here, and two arm reliquaries from its late medieval treasures.⁴⁴ These two arm reliquaries were of the Kings Stephen (1000–1038) and Ladislav (1077–1095). Thus, while there were only two, we can be sure that their quality was outstanding due to the importance of the saints. While at Bátmonostora there were

⁴⁴ See Árpád Mikó and Antal Molnár, “A váradi középkori székesegyház kincstárának inventáriuma (1557),” *Művészettörténeti Értesítő* 52.3–4 (2003): 303–318.



two monstrances,⁴⁵ at Várad there were sixteen, but such artworks were quite common even in villages (Fig. 7).⁴⁶ The difference in quantity is striking, yet still, Bátmonostora had more head reliquaries and possibly the same amount or more of arm reliquaries, which is unexpected.⁴⁷

It is only the 1550 document that mentions hand reliquaries, the post-1415 list does not tell us about them, and in the 1550 list we do not learn the exact number, only that there were many. This list is more modest in the head reliquaries, too, since it mentions only one compared to the later two. From the 1550 list, it seems like the friary had more arm reliquaries than the cathedral of Gyulafehérvár. These were usually life-sized, depicting arms covered in silver as the description also states. These pieces

Fig. 7: Monstrance from Szendrő, Hungarian National Museum, 1937.4. Photo: Hungarian National Museum

⁴⁵ Some of these might have come from the treasury of Kalocsa, which, like Bátmonostora, was also evacuated: Mikó and Molnár, "A váradi középkori," 305.

⁴⁶ At the Cistercian monasteries of Bélháromkút and Zagreb there was only one monstrance. At the Cistercian monastery of Pétervárad (Petrovaradin) there were two, however, the difference in the number of cruets is striking: at Bátmonostora only two are listed, but there fourteen pieces are mentioned.

In general, apart from the head and arm reliquaries, the other objects seem to be matching in quantity. The low number of books at Bátmonostora suggests that only a fraction of the books was mentioned. This might indicate that the ones mentioned were above average. See Tibor Rasztik, "A pétervárad apátság leltára 1495-ből," in *Tanulmányok Borsa Iván tiszteletére*, ed. Enikő Csukovits (Budapest: Magyar Országos Levéltár, 1998), 197–214.

⁴⁷ At Pannonhalma, one of the most important monasteries of Hungary, only two hand reliquaries are mentioned, one of diverse relics and one of St Pantaleon. See Pongrácz Sörös and Tibold Rezner, *A pannonhalmi Sz. Benedek-rend története* (Budapest: Stephaneum Nyomda, 1905), 383, 710. No reliquary bust or reliquary head is mentioned.

usually contained multiple relics and were not limited to relics of hands.⁴⁸ Similarly to head reliquaries, they were already used before 1000 but became very popular in the Romanesque period and continued to be produced in the Gothic period. A fine example of a late medieval arm reliquary is a Swiss piece kept at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Fig. 8). Importantly, they were also used for liturgical purposes in the High Middle Ages, specifically for blessing the congregation.

Reliquaries shaped as body parts served multiple functions. Their most important quality was that they could symbolise heaven and its dwellers in a human form. The gold, silver and precious stones that covered the objects presented familiar human forms in an otherworldly way. The material value of these was important, but the rare and shiny surfaces created a unique type of spiritual encounter, similar to a vision. This was not only due to the material but also because, compared to arm reliquaries, they were able to provide a much more intense experience due to the presence of the face. It is not a coincidence, therefore, that in Várad oath taking and trials by ordeal happened in front of the tomb of Ladislav and his imposing head reliquary. As mentioned, these types of statues were also participants of processions, giving them mobility, which also contributed to their human-like nature.

Among the chalices mentioned, one is important to discuss because it is listed



Fig. 8: Arm Reliquary of St Valentine, fourteenth century, made in Basel, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917), 17.190.351a, b. Photo: The Metropolitan Museum of Art

⁴⁸ Cynthia Hahn, "The Voices of the Saints: Speaking Reliquaries," *Gesta* 36.1 (1997): 21.



Fig. 9: Chalice, 1462. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Gift of The Salgo Trust for Education, New York, in memory of Nicolas M. Salgo, 2010), 2010.109.6. Photo: The Metropolitan Museum of Art

separately. In the 1550 list, a golden chalice is present and in the post-1415 text two golden chalices are discussed, one with stones and one without. It should be noted that these lists are not very descriptive. They have a particular concern for describing the material but not the technique. Therefore, we can assume that, even if it was figurative or if it had filigree or filigree enamel, this would not be mentioned. It is clear that this chalice was valuable and that it belonged to a wealthy noble family. Therefore, it can be compared to finer pieces of the period. For example, it would have been similar to many of the Central European chalices of the fifteenth century, or specifically to that of the Metropolitan Museum of Art presented here in *modo transilvano* (Fig. 9).

It is hard to say more about the quality of the treasury. It is evident, however, that it is only a fragment of the church's equipment and may only include the particularly fine pieces. The list of liturgical books is not complete,

especially for a monastic church. Even the description of the inventory of a fourteenth-fifteenth-century small village parish church that is not too distant from Bátmonostora had more books than those listed here.⁴⁹ A Bible, in particular, stands out since that was not a common part of the medieval liturgical equipment and could possibly belong to the friary, indeed the 1523 inventory of the Augustinian friary of Fiume (Rijeka, Croatia) also contains a Bible.⁵⁰ The only other books the Bátmonostora

⁴⁹ See István Pánya and others, "A középkori Valfer templomának felszerelése," *Cumania* 30 (2023): 221.

⁵⁰ DL 232633; Ozren Kosanović, "Inventar pokretnih dobara augustinskog samostana sv. Jeronima u Rijeci iz 1523. godine," *Problemi sjevernog Jadrana* 17 (2018): 48–62.

list mentions are a breviary, which could be secular or monastic, and, importantly, a *sermocinale*. The description of the latter suggests that it was a book for preaching, in which the texts were organised based on the feast days of saints (*de sanctis*). It states that it starts with the line *praeparate corda vestra* (“prepare your hearts”), which most likely was the beginning of a sermon for which there are many examples.⁵¹ Such a book could have been used in the town’s parish church but books like this were also used in a monastic context.⁵²

Regarding the differences between the two lists, it can be said that the post-1415 text describes only a few pieces of clothing, mentions two chalices, and one cross. The 1550 list does not provide a number for the clothing and, in general, provides a much wealthier image. The cross, the chalice and the head reliquary seem to appear in both lists. The partial liturgical equipment and the mention of the head reliquary, which was quite a rare object type, could indicate that the post-1415 list describes part of the treasury. But, notably, even this short but more specific list contains very valuable pieces. The partial nature of these inventories is particularly visible when compared with other monastic and ecclesiastic inventories from the period where a more diverse group of monastic objects is mentioned.⁵³

The fact that Bátmonostora had such an important treasury shows us that it was a wealthy friary. It indicates that even if the market town was not a ‘real town,’ it was still an important rural centre, and most importantly, that it was a spiritual centre of the lay elite as is also shown from the original text of the 1415 document. It is possible that while the settlement of Bátmonostora does not show major differences when compared to similarly sized market towns, its centre was much more imposing – as is visible on the settlement plans and on the reconstruction.

⁵¹ We are very grateful for the help and opinion of Anja Božič and Olga Kalashnikova with this item on the list. The line also appears as a responsory and traces its origins in the Old Testament: Samuel 7:3. See, for example, Sankt-Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek 391. “*Praeparate corda vestra Domino, et servite illi soli et liberabit vos de manibus inimicorum vestrorum.*”

⁵² Timothy M. Baker and Beverly Kienzle, “Monastic Preaching and the Sermon in Medieval Latin Christendom to the Twelfth Century,” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Monasticism in the Latin West*, ed. Alison I. Beach and Isabelle Cocheilin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 712–713.

⁵³ See Rasztik, “A pétervárad apátság leltára 1495-ből”; Sörös and Rezner, *A panonhalmi*, 706–711; Gyulafehérvár see Beke, “Az erdélyi székesegyház készlete,” 188–99 or that of Kolozsmonostor see Jakó, *A kolozsmonostori*, 119, 182, 193.

It may have been the lay piety of the patrons during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that led to the appearance of outstanding artworks in the monastic institution. The social and cultural importance of the site may have contributed to this with the baths, the hospital and the monastic school.

We know even less about this town than about the existence of the friary, and the lifestyle and social position of these inhabitants are relatively unknown. It is particularly unclear how they were perceived in society, since they thought of themselves as citizens, but the outside world, including the local lord, did not acknowledge this status.⁵⁴ If it were not for the survival of these documents, we would have a very different image of the friary of Bátmonostora. The excavations at the site did not bring about any fragments that indicated that this was a rich monastic institution. Whatever was found was either connected to the pre-Mongol Invasion monastery or to the settlement. It should be emphasised that treasuries, even during their lives, were often used for financial benefits even by the religious community, but more often by the lay patrons in such circumstances. Objects were often reused to make new artworks or liquidated in times of hardship. In the case of Bátmonostora, the extremely difficult changes arriving around the turn of the sixteenth century resulted in the complete ending of the treasury's function as an 'institution'. Even when it survived in pieces, it was eventually dispersed since the political situation did not improve and by the end of the long fifteenth century, it ended its existence as a collection of artworks.

⁵⁴ Katalin Szende, "Was There a Bourgeoisie in Medieval Hungary?," in *The Man of Many Devices, Who Wandered Full Many Ways: Festschrift in Honor of János M. Bak*, ed. Balázs Nagy and Marcell Sebők (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999), 448. On different types of towns in medieval Hungary see József Laszlovsky and Katalin Szende, "Cities and Towns as Princely Seats: Medieval Visegrád in the Context of Royal Residences and Urban Development in Europe and Hungary," in *The Medieval Royal Town at Visegrád: Royal Centre, Urban Settlement, Churches*, ed. Gergely Buzás, József Laszlovsky and Orsolya Mészáros (Budapest: Archaeolingua, 2014), 9–44.

Conclusion

It is fascinating to observe the many changes that took place in the lives of the nobility during the events discussed here. Instead of being centered in a representative site with archives and a friary, as at the beginning of the long fifteenth century, at the end of the period the family ended up crowded in one castle (or at its gates) fighting multiple enemies both physically and verbally. Eventually, instead of having a confraternity, the family was in complete discord, stealing from each other and having constant legal battles over whatever remained of their wealth. The precious artworks of Bátmonostora, once focal points of a regional cult with special artworks, were degraded to mere material objects that stored wealth for political power. The powerful cultic head reliquaries, once representing earthly manifestations of divine intervention, were, by this time, not even described by name, only through references to their value. This is partly due to the change in socio-economic circumstance, but it is also part of a greater process that started during the High Middle Ages and rapidly intensified in the fifteenth century. This new type of thinking about artworks, particularly goldsmith's works and other precious objects, and the slow but steady replacement of religious artistic objects by more secular ones, would represent the collection of many families, also in East Central Europe, mostly starting from the fifteenth century onward.⁵⁵

The end of the Middle Ages brought a period of decline for the Great Plain of Hungary. After the Mongol Invasion of 1241–1242 these settlements and religious communities flourished again as is evident with the treasury of Bátmonostora. The heyday truly came about in the fifteenth century when the settlement and the friary were at their peak. It is likely that this was the period when many of the artworks of the treasury were commissioned. Yet by the end of the long fifteenth century this was completely changed and the religious institution and the market town rapidly declined. From the perspective of the greater

⁵⁵ In regard to this, as Erika Kiss recently highlighted, these troublesome times also gave birth to many valuable and creative metalworks. See Erika Kiss, *Az mi kevés ezüst marhácskám vagyok: ötvösművek a három részre szakadt Magyarországon* (Budapest: Martin Opitz Kiadó, 2022). See also Evelin Wetter, *Objekt, Überlieferung und Narrativ: Spätmittelalterliche Goldschmiedekunst im historischen Königreich Ungarn*. *Studia Jagellonica Lipsiensia* 8 (Ostfildern: Thorbeke, 2011).

historical context, the development of military systems, equipment and new types of empires were the source of the rupture at the end of the Middle Ages that marked the end or caused a profound transformation to this large part of the Central Europe. Ultimately, as it is shown in the case of Bátmonostora's treasury, it decimated the Great Hungarian Plain's cultural heritage, and by the end of the long fifteenth century most of its society, as the Várdai, entered a completely different reality.

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