"ISLAMIC" ARTIFACTS IN HUNGARY FROM THE REIGN OF BÉLA III (1172–1196): TWO CASE STUDIES[1]

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Many objects produced in the Islamic world were particularly valuable and often sought-after in medieval Christian Europe for the quality of their craftsmanship and exotic appearance. Adopting artifacts could also involve adapting them, i.e., modifying their appearance to be more easily acceptable and conceivable in their new settings. A further step could be the imitation of some of their features that were considered to be particularly characteristic. All these approaches towards a particular foreign visual culture, objects produced in the Islamic world, can be attested in Hungary roughly around the turn of the thirteenth century; the present essay focuses on only two cases: a ring discovered in the tomb of Béla III in Székesfehérvár, and pseudo-Arabic coins issued by the same king.

Other examples of Islamic artifacts in Hungary from this period are problematic and therefore excluded from the present study. A prime example is the rock crystal pommel of the royal scepter, which scholars usually regard as having come from Fatimid Egypt (969–1171), despite the lack of evidence for their opinion. If one looks at this object and compares it with genuine Fatimid rock crystals, one finds that it is devoid of delicately carved lines and any sort of additional decoration – such as palmettes, dots, and hatching along the outlines – typical of Fatimid pieces are absent. The techniques applied might be comparable between the pommel and Fatimid rock crystal objects, but the lack of precision and fineness separates it sharply from those. In short, it is simply unknown where and when the pommel was produced.[2] Even more disturbing than the problem of its origin is the lack of evidence for the presence of the rock crystal pommel in Hungary before the seventeenth century, when King Matthias II (1608–1619) was depicted with the scepter and other pieces of the royal regalia.[3] Tempting

[1] This paper is based on ideas developed in "Islamic Art and Artefacts in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Hungary," my MA thesis, Central European University (Budapest, 2015).

[2] These ideas were formed together with Marcus Pilz (Ludwig Maximilians University, Munich) for our co-authored conference paper: "Medieval Rock Crystal Pommels: Five Pieces from Fatimid Egypt?" presented at the conference "Crossroads: East and West. Cultural Contacts, Transfers and Exchange between East and West in the Mediterranean," University of Split, 17 September 2015.

[3] The earliest written record of the scepter dates from 1613: Péter Révay, *A Szent Korona eredete: Révay Péter Turóc vármegyei főispán rövid emlékirata Magyarország több mint 600 éve tündöklő*

as it might be to attribute the sceptre to Béla III, as many have done, further arguments built on this hypothesis are weak per definition.

Béla III's Ring

In early December 1848, workers in Székesfehérvár discovered two sarcophagi made of lavish red limestone, and János Érdy excavated the tombs. The two royal burials contained numerous goods in addition to the two skeletons; the king was interred with a crown, a sceptre, a sword, an encolpion (a pectoral medallion), a bangle, a pair of spurs, a processional cross, and a ring; his wife had a crown and a ring. It is noteworthy that many of the goods are humble symbols of kingship produced for the burial, while the two rings, the encolpion and the processional cross had been used before.[4] Reverend János Pauer, Érdy's assistant, was the first to attribute the two skeletons to Béla III and his first wife, Agnes of Antioch.[5] His arguments have been accepted ever since then, but Endre Tóth recently queried them, and proposed attributing the tombs to Coloman (1095– 1116) and his wife

Szent Koronájának eredetéről, jeles és *győzedelmes voltáról, sorsáról* [The origin of the Holy Crown: Short memoires of Péter Révay, count of Turóc County, on the origin, illustrious and victorious story and fate of Hungary's Holy Crown which coruscates for more than 600 years], ed. Péter Kulcsár (Budapest: Budapest Magyar Ház, 2010), passim.

[4] For the discovery, see János Érdy, "III. Béla király és nejének Székes-Fehérvárott talált síremlékei" [The tombs of Béla III and his spouse discovered at Székesfehérvár], in *Magyarország és Erdély képekben*, vol. 1, ed. Ferenc Kubinyi and Imre Vahot (Pest: Emich Gusztáv Bizománya, 1853), 45. The grave goods have still not been adequately published and discussed, but see Béla Czobor, "III. Béla és hitvese halotti ékszerei" [The burial regalia of Béla III and his spouse], in *III. Béla magyar király emlékezete*, ed. Gyula Forster (Budapest: A Magyar Kormány, 1900), 207–30; Éva Kovács, "III. Béla és Antiochiai Anna halotti jelvényei" [Funeral insignia of Béla III and Anne of Antioch], *Művészettörténeti Értesítő* 21 (1972): 1–14; or in German: Éva Kovács, "Die Grabinsignien König Bélas III. und Annas von Antiochien," *Acta Historiae Artium Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 15 (1969): 3–24; and Éva Kovács, *Romanesque Goldsmiths' Art in Hungary*, trans. Lili Halápy (Budapest: Corvina, 1974), no. 10–11.

[5] János Pauer, *A Székesfehérvárott fölfedezett királyi sirboltról* [About the royal tomb discovered at Székesfehérvár] (Székesfehérvár, 1849), 19–34; see also Aurél Török, "Jelentés IIIik Béla Magyar király és neje testereklyéiről" [Report on the relics of King Béla III of Hungary and his wife], *Értekezések a Természettudományok Köréből* 23, no. 4 (1893): 196–97.

instead.[6] The anatomical data of the two skeletons, however, agree with what is known about Béla and Agnes from written sources[7].

Fig. 1. The ring of Béla III. Stone: almandine, Iran, eight–tenth century, inscription: ʿten Allāh ibn Muḥammad; ring: gold, Hungary, last third of the twelfth century. Photo by András Dabasi ©, Hungarian National Museum, Budapest, no. 64.1848.2g. (Reproduced with permission).

Fig. 2. The ring of Béla III. Drawing by Giuseppe Moretti (not in copyright).

The ring found on Béla's right index finger is made of gold and has a purple almandine (iron-rich garnet) gemstone held by four half-round-shaped tripartite prongs, with an Arabic name, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muḥammad, engraved on it (*Figs 1–2*). A peculiarity of the ring is that by pulling out two small prongs from the side, the bezel opens and reveals a small locket under it. The type is often described as a "poison ring," supposedly used for hiding poison intended for suicide or murder. Such legends apart, the main function of locket rings was to contain small personal objects, especially relics of saints.[8]

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[6] Endre Tóth, "III. Béla vagy Kálmán? A székesfehérvári királysír azonosításáról" [Béla III or Coloman? On the identification of the royal tomb at Székesfehérvár], *Folia Archaeologica* 52 (2005/2006): 141–61.

[7] Kinga Éry, Antónia Marcsik, János Nemeskéri and Ferenc Szalai, "Embertani vizsgálatok III. Béla és Antiochiai Anna földi maradványán" [Anatomical examination of the remains of Béla III and Agnes of Antioch], in *150 éve történt: III. Béla és Antiochiai Anna sírjának felfedezése* [After 150 years: The discovery of the tomb of Béla III and Agnes of Antioch], ed. Vajk Cserményi (Székesfehérvár: Szent István Király Múzeum, 1999), 9–15.

[8] William Tudor Jones, *Finger-Ring Lore: Historical, Legendary, Anecdotal* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1877), 141–143; 432–436; O. M. Dalton, *Catalogue of the Finger Rings: Early*

The biography of the ring can only be reconstructed from close analysis of the object itself. First, it has been pointed out that the hoop of the ring was extended at the shoulders.[9] Some signs of the extension are indeed visible, especially on its inner rim, and the loop seems to be larger than an average male finger. Second, the Arabic name on the stone is written in negative, from left to right, which means that it was produced as a seal for its owner, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muḥammad. Third, although the stone of the ring, cut *en cabochon*, is almost perfectly round at the base, its upper part is rather oval, indicating that originally the stone was oval as well. Fourth, one of the four prongs is situated close to the inscription, and thus it would impede – or at least make it uncomfortable – to use it as a seal, which suggests that the stone lost its original function when it was mounted onto the ring.

Fig. 3. Seal stone. Almandine, Iran, eighth–tenth century, inscription: Aḥmad ibn Būya, possibly the same person as the Būyid ruler Muʿizz al-Dawla (945–967). Provost and Fellows of The Queen's College, Oxford ©, on loan to the the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, no. LI902.16 (reproduced with permission).

Now that it has been established that the stone had a history separate from the ring, it can be compared with other Islamic seal stones. These objects in various European collections are of the same raw material, and feature an inscription with a name in angular script. These are all attributed to early Islamic Iran (*Fig. 3*), leaving little doubt about the origin of the stone in Béla III's ring.[10] However, all the

Christian, Byzantine, Teutonic, Medieval and Later (London: British Museum, 1912), xxxiv, lv; John Cherry, "Medieval Rings, 1100–1500," in *The Ring: From Antiquity to the Twentieth Century*, Anne Ward, John Cherry, Charlotte Gere and Barbara Cartlidge (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), 57.

[9] Czobor, "III. Béla és hitvese," 215–16; Mária Hlatky, *A magyar gyűrű* [The Hungarian ring] (Budapest: Pallas Nyomda, 1938), 46.

[10] See Ludvik Kalus, *Catalogue of Islamic Seals and Talismans* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), nos 1.1.1, 1.2.2 and 1.3.8; Venetia Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals and Amulets in the British Museum* (London: British Museum 2011), no. 41, 51, 65, 73, 82, 83, 85 and 290;

comparable seals are oval in shape; round or rectangular seals are rare and always feature a flat surface,[11] which corroborates that the ring's stone was originally oval as well, and that it had to be modified when mounted onto the ring. Consequently, the ring had originally been produced for a different, round-shaped, stone. Mounting the new stone on it might well have occurred when it was resized for an owner with a fleshy finger. Judging from the skeleton discovered, Béla III's body weight was over 100 kilograms (220 pounds),[12] which accords with the large size of the hoop. In other words, neither was the stone made for the mount nor vice versa, and the king created a ring for himself bearing the name of someone else. These observations lead to the conclusion that the king valued the stone and the ring separately, which explains why he kept and modified both objects rather than ordering a new piece.

Pseudo-Arabic Coins

A little-understood and surprising chapter in the numismatic history of Árpád-age (1000–1301) Hungary is coins that feature imitations of Arabic inscriptions. The doyen of Hungarian numismatics, László Réthy, identified three different variants of this type and labelled them CNH 101 to 103, but the second one later turned out to be a gilded forgery,[13] and the third one should be considered a poor imitation of the first. Therefore, the present study focuses on CNH 101 as the pseudo-Arabic type (*Fig. 4*).

CNH 101 features four lines of "legend" on the obverse, encircled by a fifth line on the margin. The reverse has a similar arrangement but with only three lines across the field within a roundel smaller than on the other side. The signs

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Ludvik Kalus, *Catalogue des cachets, bulls et talismans islamiques* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1981), 1.3.14; Béla Kelényi and Iván Szántó, *Artisans at the Crossroads: Persian Arts of the Qajar Period (1796–1925)* (Budapest: Museum of Applied Arts, 2010), no. 5.3.7; Derek J. Content, ed., *Islamic Rings and Gems: The Benjamin Zucker Collection* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 1987), seals no. 8, 16, 42–43, rings no. 46 (mounted on a later ring). The catalogue only describes the material as garnet.

[11] Kalus, *Catalogue des cachets*, 9; Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals*, 16.

[12] Éry et al., "Embertani Vizsgálatok," 11.

[13] László Réthy, *Corpus Nummorum Hungaricae: Magyar egyetemes éremtár* (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1899), no. 101. Lajos Huszár, *Münzkatalog Ungarn von 1000 bis Heute* (Budapest: Corvina, 1979), no. 73; Géza Jeszenszky, "Az első magyar rézpénzek" [The first Hungarian copper coins], *Numizmatikai Közlöny* 34–35 (1935–1936): 46–47. For a detailed analysis of many variants with numerous illustrations, see Csaba Tóth, József Géza Kiss, and András Fekete, "III. Béla kufikus jellegű rézpénzeinek osztályozása: Classification of the Cufic-like Copper Coins of Béla III," *Numizmatikai Közlöny* 106–7 (2009–10): 73–87.

Fig. 4. Copper coin of Béla III (1172–1196), CNH 101, Hungary. Pannonia Terra Numizmatika © (reproduced with permission).

can clearly be identified as imitations of Arabic characters, but trying to read them would be both impossible and against their original purpose; the minters intended them as "decorative" elements rather than readable inscriptions. Despite featuring no legible legend, this coin is now unquestionably dated to the reign of Béla III, together with the other type of copper coin, the so-called "Byzantine" type (CNH 98).[14]

László Réthy was first to point out that Almoravid (1062-1143) coins struck in Andalusia feature the same arrangement of legends as CNH 101, but he did not have detailed catalogues at his disposal for the identification of the exact exemplar.[15] Róbert Ujszászi has recently suggested that the model for CNH 101's obverse was one of the *dīnār*s of Muḥammad ibn Mardanīsh (1147–1172), ruler of the principality of Murcia after the Almoravids, but, oddly enough, he only compares their obverses. One important sign he notes is the five-pointed star on several of Ibn Mardanīsh's coins, which, according to him, would have been simplified into an X-shaped sign on the Hungarian pieces.[16]

[14] Jeszenszky, "Az első magyar rézpénzek," 39–46; Lajos Huszár, "A horti XII. századi rézpénzlelet" [A find of twelfth-century copper coins at Hort], *Folia Archaeologica* 16 (1964): 145–55; Róbert Ujszászi, *A XII. századi magyar rézpénzek* [Twelfth-century copper coins in Hungary] (Budapest: Magyar Éremgyűjtők Egyesülete, 2010), 8–11, 35. No one has yet found the Byzantine exemplar of CNH 98; I suspect that it was rather based on coins from Norman Sicily, but this topic must be discussed on another occasion.

[15] László Réthy, "Réthy László igazgató-őr jelentése spanyolországi tanulmányútjáról" [Report of head curator László Réthy on his study trip in Spain], *Jelentés a Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum 1906. évi állapotáról* (Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, 1907): 141–49.

[16] Ujszászi, *A XII. századi magyar rézpénzek*, 43. For the Andalusian coins, see A. Canto García and Tawfīq Ibn Ḥāfiẓ Ibrahim, *Moneda Andalusí: La colección del Museo Casa de la*

*Fig. 5. Gold coin (*dīnār*) of ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿIyāḍ (1145–1147), Murcia, 540AH/1145AD. Coins of al-Andalus: Tonegawa Collection (not in copyright).*

Convincing as this argument might be, there is yet another *dīnār* issued by the previous ruler of Murcia, ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿIyāḍ (1145–1147), which is more plausibly comparable with CNH 101 (*Fig. 5*).[17] The epigraphic style of the legends of this piece are more angular than those on the *dīnār*s of Ibn Mardanīsh – and thus closer in style to the signs on CNH 101 – and the arrangement of the legends is more similar to the appearance of CNH 101. Instead of the five-pointed star on Ibn Mardanīsh's coins, the *dīnār* of ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿIyāḍ features a four-lobed sign as mint mark, which could have just as easily been simplified into the X-shaped sign on CNH 101. Most significantly, the mint mark on the coin of ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿIyāḍ is placed between the letters *rāʾ* and *wāw* in *amīr muʾminīn* ("leader of the believers"), just as it appears on the obverse of CNH 101, and unlike on most of the coins of Ibn Mardanīsh.[18]

As for the reverse of CNH 101, no attempt has been made to identify its exemplar so far. It can be demonstrated that the arrangement of the signs resembles Almoravid *dīnār*s, albeit, contrary to what might be expected, these signs match with the legends on obverses of some Almoravid pieces including a *dīnār* of Yūsuf ibn Tāshufīn (1087–1106) issued in 488AH/1095AD in Murcia

Moneda (Madrid: Fundación Real Casa de la Moneda, 2004), nos 517–696.

[17] Antonio Vives y Escudero, *Monedas de las dinastías arábigo-españolas* (Madrid: Real Academia Establecimiento Tipográfico de Fortanet, 1893), no. 1926. See also Tawfiq Ibrahim, "A Dinar of ʿAli ibn ʿUbaid Struck in Murcia in the Year 542H.," *XIII Congreso Internacional de Numismática, Madrid, 2003* (2005), 1593–1597.

[18] I could find only one exception where a coin of Ibn Mardanīsh features similar arrangement, which is García and Ibn Ḥāfiẓ, *Moneda Andalusí*, no. 685. But the style of this particular piece is noticeably curvilinear, and thus dissimilar to CNH 101.

*Fig. 6. Gold coin (*dīnār*) of Yūsuf ibn Tāshufīn (1087–1106), Murcia, 488AH/1095AD. Coins of al-Andalus: Tonegawa Collection (not in copyright).*

(*Fig. 6*).[19] The two little circles at 12 o'clock on the reverse of CNH 101 (*Fig. 4*) derive from the two *mīm* letters in the word *imām* ("leader") on the Almoravid coins. At the bottom of the Hungarian coin one little circle can be seen in between two fishhook-shaped signs (on some variants vertical lines)[20] that derive from the letters *rāʾ* and *wāw*, respectively, in *amīr muʾminīn* on Almoravid coins – similarly to what appears on the obverse of CNH 101. In addition, some other signs also show close parallels between these two types of coin, even though the reverse of CNH 101 ostensibly simplifies the appearance of its exemplar.[21]

Consequently, whoever minted CNH 101 used two different Andalusian coins as exemplars, one issued by ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿIyāḍ, and one certainly an Almoravid piece. The Hungarian minters copied the imagery from the two obverses of the Andalusian coins to the two sides of CNH 101, but its reverse is clearly a less careful imitation. This is particularly important for the argument of the present study, because it shows that the minters did not pay attention to copying an Arabic inscription as something unchangeable. They did not worry about losing either the meaning of the text or the arrangement of the two sides of a coin, but rather created imagery recognizably similar to Islamic coins.

Scholars usually attribute the pseudo-Arabic coins to the Muslim population of medieval Hungary. In fact, the mint was strictly under royal control at the time, and there should be no doubt that the king and his advisors decided on the preferred imagery for the coins. Generations of excellent scholars reiterated

[19] See Coins of al-Andalus: Tonegawa Collection, accessed 3 February 2016, http://www.andalustonegawa.50g.com/almoravids1.htm; Yusuf ibn Tashfin, Madinat Mursiya (Medina Murcia) 488H.
[20] See Tóth, Kiss and Fekete, "III. Béla kufikus jellegű," fig. 2.
[21] García and ibn Ḥāfiẓ, *Moneda Andalusí*, nos 541, 558, 559, 686.

the same myth about Ishmaelite minters until Nora Berend eventually made the effort to read the sources closely. She argues convincingly that in the only source which mentions Ishmaelite *monetarii*, a charter from 1111 (more than six decades before CNH 101 was struck), the Latin term does not mean "minters," but rather "tax collectors" or other agents of the royal fisc.[22] Even if some Muslims worked at the mint, they would have known hardly any Arabic, and it sounds anything but reasonable for a king to allow his minters to strike odd motifs as they wished. Otto of Freising, who travelled through Hungary in 1147, states that "in so vast an area no one but the king ventures to coin money."[23]

The reason why Béla III decided to imitate Islamic coins cannot be separated from the fact that the pseudo-Arabic type is made of copper. The fact that two different types were issued by the same king, presumably around the same time and in great numbers, eliminates the possibility that the pseudo-Arabic coin was made exclusively for Muslims. Conversely, it seems that the king initiated a monetary reform after the troublesome decades of devaluing money from the early twelfth century onwards. The several variants, the great number, and the wide circulation of copper coins suggest that it was, in the short run, quite successful. Sooner or later the money lost value and many coins were eventually pierced to be used for secondary purposes, and superseded by bracteate-type coins.[24] The two types of copper coin served the same purpose as species, but those were always struck from silver in medieval Hungary. A tentative explanation of why Béla III introduced copper instead of silver is that silver was temporarily unavailable, which accords well with the so-called silver famine, the scarcity of silver in this period.[25]

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[22] Nora Berend, *At the Gate of Christendom: Jews, Muslims and 'Pagans' in Medieval Hungary, c.1000-c.1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 121–22. See also Berend, "Imitation Coins and Frontier Societies: The Case of Medieval Hungary," *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 10 (1998–1999): 5–14; Katarína Štulrajterová, "Convivenza, Convenienza and Conversion: Islam in Medieval Hungary (1000–1400 CE)," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 24, no. 2 (2013): 185. For the charter, see *Diplomata Hungariae Antiquissima*, vol. 1, *1000–1131*, ed. György Györffy (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1992), 382–83, no. 138/I

[23] Otto of Freising, *The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa*, trans. Charles C. Mierow and Richard Emery (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1966), 67.

[24] Jeszenszky, "Az első magyar rézpénzek," 39; Márton Gyöngyössy, *Magyar pénztörténet (1000–1526)* [The monetary history of Hungary (1000–1526)] (Budapest: Martin Opitz Kiadó, 2012), 21. On dating the bracteates to Béla III's reign, see Bálint Hóman, *Magyar pénztörténet 1000–1325* [The monetary history of Hungary 1000–1325] (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1916), 238–39.

[25] For the manifestation of this "famine," see Szabolcs Rosta, "Pétermonostora pusztulása" [The devastation of Pétermonostora], in *Carmen miserabile*: *A tatárjárás*

Analogies from Elsewhere in Europe

Available evidence in Hungary is scarce for both the ring and the pseudo-Arabic coins, and regrettably inadequate for providing an interpretation for either case. Numerous analogies from other parts of Christian Europe, however, provide close parallels and thus valuable information for understanding these items. Even though the Islamic seal mounted on a ring in a Christian territory is a unique case to my knowledge, there are many instances when Islamic objects were reused in similar fashion, just as Islamic coins were imitated in some cases.

Islamic objects were transferred to Europe in great quantity during the crusades in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. King Andrew II (1205–1235), the son of Béla III, led a Crusade to the Holy Land in 1217–1218, and returned home with the body relics of Saint Stephen protomartyr, Saint Margaret, the virgin, Saint Thomas apostle and Saint Bartholomew, a piece of Aaron's rod, and one of the jars in which Jesus allegedly turned water into wine at the marriage at Cana.[26] Regarding the last object of this impressive list, one may rightfully doubt that the king actually found a twelve hundred-year-old vessel; many similar myths were created about Islamic objects in medieval Europe. One particularly interesting object in reference to the jar of Andrew II is a fourteenth-century Alhambra vase, made in Málaga and originally kept in Famagusta, which was believed for centuries to be one of the jars from the marriage at Cana.[27] The fact that Islamic objects often bear Arabic inscriptions served to corroborate such legendary connotations.

Attitudes towards Islamic objects in Christian Europe are particularly well attested in Venice, a city-state with close ties to the Middle East, where numerous objects survive intact. The so-called Throne of Saint Peter in the San Pietro di Castello Church was believed for centuries to be the original seat of the apostle

magyarországi emlékei, ed. Szabolcs Rosta and György V. Székely (Kecskemét: Kecskeméti Katona József Múzeum, 2014): 205–6; and Mária Vargha, *Hoards, Grave Goods, Jewellery: Objects in Hoards and in Burial Contexts during the Mongol Invasion of Central Europe* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2015), 19, 38.

[26] "Chronici Hungarici Compositio Saeculi XIV," ed. Sándor Domanovszky, in *Scriptores Rerum Hungaricarum*, vol. 1, ed. Imre Szentpétery (Budapest: Nap Kiadó, 1999, reprint), 466. On his crusade, see László Veszprémy, "The Crusade of Andrew II, King of Hungary, 1217–1218," *Jacobus* 13–14 (2002): 87–110.

[27] Otto Kurz, "The Strange History of an Alhambra Vase," in *The Decorative Arts of Europe and the Islamic East: Selected Studies* (London: Dorian Press, 1977), 205–12; Avinoam Shalem, *Islam Christianized: Islamic Portable Objects in the Medieval Church Treasuries of the Latin West* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996), 135, no. 287.

despite the Arabic, actually Quranic, inscriptions engraved on it. The throne is made of different marble pieces; the backrest is an Islamic tombstone, probably from Syria. The slab came to Venice in the period of the crusades and was assigned with a completely new function and meaning in the bishopric church of the city.[28] The treasury of San Marco in Venice contains an extensive collection of Islamic objects, especially rock crystals, used for centuries as reliquaries or liturgical objects.[29] The most striking example among them is a Fatimid rock crystal bottle mounted on a gold chalice, originally a secular vessel as its Arabic inscription says "blessing and glory [to the owner]". Despite that, it was revered as a holy reliquary as the Latin inscription on its mount reads *hic est sanguinus XRI* ("this is the blood of Christ"). It is also clear in this case that the Arabic inscription was mistaken for a decorative motif.[30] Similar cases have recently been examined, when Islamic objects were used as Christian reliquaries on the Iberian Peninsula.[31]

These examples and countless others when secular Islamic artefacts were used in sacred contexts in medieval Christendom demonstrate that Arabic inscriptions were not conceived of as such, but rather as motifs associated with the Holy Land. A visibly Islamic object – i.e., one bearing Arabic inscription – was considered to be perfectly appropriate for containing a Christian relic or other religious purposes. Similarly, Islamic textiles with or without Arabic inscriptions were often used to wrap relics. Furthermore, when an Islamic object was not available at hand, sanctity was even "faked" by adding pseudo-Arabic decoration, similar to what appears often in Renaissance paintings in Italy.[32]

There are fewer instances of imitating Arabic coins in Latin Christendom. Most importantly, Almoravid gold coins, called *morabetinos*, circulated and were

[28] Staale Sinding-Larsen, "Saint Peter's Chair in Venice," in *Art, the Ape of Nature: Studies in Honor of H.W. Johnson*, ed. Moshe Barasch, Lucy F. Sandler, and Patricia Egan (New York: Abrams, 1981), 35–50; Stefano Carboni, ed. *Venice and the Islamic world 828–1797* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007), no. 87.

[29] See Hans R. Hahnloser, ed. *Il tesoro e il museo [di San Marco]* (Florence: Sansoni, 1971), nos 117–39.

[30] See Hahnloser, ed. *Il tesoro e il museo*, no. 128; Shalem, *Islam Christianized*, no. 47; Anna Contadini, "Translocation and Transformation: Some Middle Eastern Objects in Europe," in *The Power of Things and the Flow of Cultural Transformation*, ed. Lieselotte E. Saurma-Jeltsch and Anja Eisenbeiß (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2010), 47–8.

[31] Mariam Rosser-Owen, "Islamic Objects in Christian Contexts: Relic Translation and Modes of Transfer in Medieval Iberia," *Art in Translation* 7, no. 1 (2015): 39–64; cf. Avinoam Shalem, "From Royal Caskets to Relic Containers: Two Ivory Caskets from Burgos and Madrid," *Muqarnas* 12 (1995): 24–38.

[32] Rosamond E. Mack, *From Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300–1600* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 51–71.

highly regarded in the Christian kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula as the most valuable currency of the period. After the end of the principality of Muḥammad ibn Mardanīsh in 1172, the supply of *morabetinos* dwindled, and Alfonso VIII of Castile (1158–1214) began minting his own imitation of Almoravid coins.[33] They feature the general appearance of the *morabetinos*, with the Arabic language for the legends, but significantly modify the inscriptions to a Christian meaning, and add a cross to the obverse of the coin.[34] This phenomenon was clearly driven by economic considerations, namely, to issue coins which could replace the earlier Almoravid ones.

The Arabic coinage produced in the crusader states before 1251 is comparable to the case in Hungary, as Islamic coins – especially those of the Fatimid caliphs al-Mustanṣir (1036–1094) and al-Āmir (1101–1130) – were copied. Later, the legends were changed to feature Christian meaning, but they retained the Arabic language.[35] Finally, coins with Arabic inscriptions were also issued in Norman Sicily following the conquest of the island in 1091. This phenomenon, however, is hardly comparable with the Hungarian pseudo-Arabic coinage. As Jeremy Johns has pointed out, the Normans initially simply employed the same Muslim mint officials whom they found in office, and so the coinage did not change abruptly. Starting with Roger II (1030–1154), the Arabic language was widely used in the administration as a propagandistic form of royal representation.[36]

[33] Peter Spufford, *Money and Its Use in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 168–69; Ronald A. Messier, "The Almoravids: West African Gold and the Gold Currency of the Mediterranean Basin," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 17, no. 1 (1974): 31–47; Miquel Crusafont, Anna M. Balaguer, and Philip Grierson, *Medieval European Coinage with a Catalogue of the Coins in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge*, vol. 6, *The Iberian Peninsula* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 62–63, nos 360–362.

[34] Jerrilynn D. Dodds, ed., *Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), no. 133 (adapted translation).

[35] See Michael L. Bates and D. M. Metcalfe, "Crusader Coinage with Arabic Inscriptions," in *A History of the Crusades*, vol. 6, *The Impact of the Crusades on Europe*, ed. Kenneth M. Setton, Harry W. Hazard, and Norman P. Zacour (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 421–482.

[36] Jeremy Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily: The Royal Dīwān* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 77–8 and passim. See also Lucia Travaini, "Aspects of the Sicilian Norman Copper Coinage in the Twelfth Century," *The Numismatic Chronicle* 151 (1991): 159–174.

Conclusions

The first thing one can learn from the two examples presented above is that Islamic artifacts in Hungary cannot be conceived of as a single coherent phenomenon. The seal, after it made its way to the royal treasury of Hungary, was transformed into a personal object of the king; thus, it entered the royal representation, even though it had definitely been made for a Muslim person. Almandine is not a particularly valuable material and is available in many places of the world, i.e., a king could certainly have afforded a more precious material. Yet Béla chose this piece of stone, even at the expense of recutting it, just as he chose the ring, even though it needed to be resized. The Arabic name was hardly recognizable as such, and, just as on many Islamic objects reused as reliquaries in Europe, was probably mistaken for a motif associated with the Holy Land. This would explain why Béla considered it valuable enough for mounting on his similarly precious, almost certainly reliquary, ring.

Conversely, Andalusian coins, having arrived at the Hungarian royal court, were used quite differently. It has been pointed out above that at least two Andalusian coins were taken to the mint and imitated on the two sides of CNH 101. The king's intention for these definitely valuable Andalusian coins was probably to take advantage of their imagery. The aim behind their imitation was certainly not to reproduce their original value, but likely to add the value of imagery to the otherwise valueless material, copper. The users of CNH 101 must not have recognized the exemplar coins as Andalusian (just as they are rarely recognized as such today), but logically associated them with a territory where some Hungarians had actually seen money with Arabic legends, i.e., the Holy Land. Taken as a whole, the phenomena of the ring and the coins are hardly anomalies, as they are often considered, but rather sensible achievements of a king with a sense of majesty and a crusading spirit.