

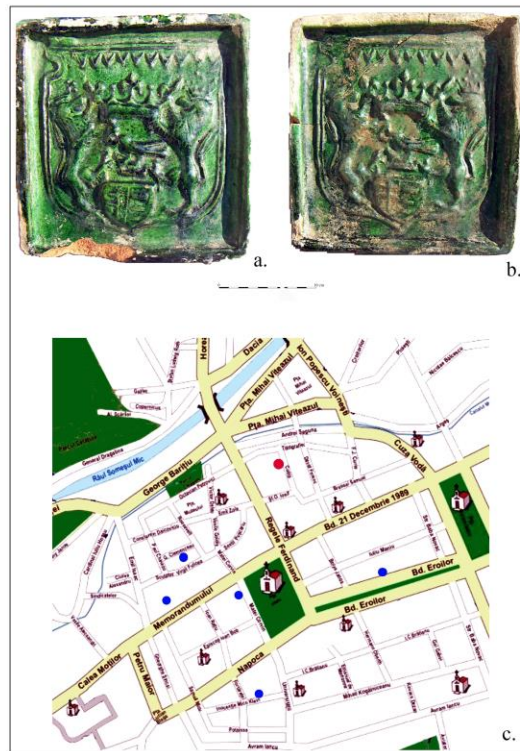
Adrian Andrei Rusu

Stove Tiles with the Royal Coat of Arms of King Matthias I Corvinus

The finds.

The city of Cluj experienced an intense building activity over the last decades. Archaeological research was needed in most cases. It is mostly performed by the History Museum of Transylvania and less by the Institute for Archaeology and Art History of the Romanian Academy or the „Babeş-Bolyai” University. Since the lack of specialists in medieval archaeology is persistent, the task is almost always performed by specialists in prehistoric and classical archeology.

During 2007, conf. Dr. Alexandru Diaconescu, expert in Roman archaeology, working at the „Babeş-Bolyai” University has signed a research contract for a site located on the north-eastern corner of the medieval city. Today the site is known as the Bent Street („strada Cotită”) (plate 1/c).



Pl. 1: a-b. Cahlele de la Cluj; c. Locul de descoperire al cahlelor cu emblema regelui Matia (roșu) și alte cahle figurate (albastru)

The discovery of several entirely preserved stove tiles in a pit situate on the south-western corner of the researched perimeter has determined the author to contact me for the publication of these items.

In disagreement with the author of the discovery¹, I have considered that the context belonged to a large medieval building, probably to the courtyard annexed to an ancient building once rising towards the west with the main façade towards the old Bridge Street, a building today completely destroyed by the first floor of the first universal store of the city.

What is important is how the stove tiles were discovered. They were preserved un-fragmented, with little or no traces of use, and without elements that would indicate their inclusion in a stove. There was also nothing to indicate the usual context of a destroyed tile stove (e. g. fragments of clay, burnt materials, and small

¹ I believe that the level of the preserved walls in this area is too high to pertain to be Roman buildings.

fragments of tiles). In other words, the tiles were found un-shattered and isolated from other conclusive archaeological materials.

The stove tiles.

Two tiles (pl. 1/a-b) have been discovered on the site, with rectangular surfaces of 23.8 x 25.4 cm. and 18.5 cm-deep conical tubes attached on the reverse, having each one slightly splay orifice with a diameter of 20 cm. One of the tiles (pl. 1/b) was deteriorated on a part of its lower frame, while the corner of the second was broken during discovery and re-attached afterwards.

The almost square front of the tiles is framed by a simple border with two retreats in its thickness towards the main field. The inner relief decoration is composed of two series of elements: in the upper part a frieze of triangular, double "teeth" and an ample heraldic device. A tournament shield, marked by a double line in relief, is placed in the center of the field. Its typological identity is indicated by the semicircular cut of its upper left corner, destined for the leaning of the tournament lance.

A small shield with vertical divisions contains the symbols of the Kingdom of Hungary (the double cross and the fasces). It is surmounted by a crown and on it one can see a bird, almost as big as the shield, turned to the left and holding in its beak a ring. The most probable interpretation holds that the latter detail is in fact the raven with ring, the symbol of the nobles of Hunedoara. Two affronted rampant lions support with the behind paws the crown above the small shield while with their front paws they support another crown placed above the bird. The lions are carefully drawn, with their open mouths and detailed hair. Only on the right-hand lion can one see that the tail is a double, braided one. If the crowns above the small shield and on the lions' heads are identical in shape, the upper crown has clearly marked lily-shaped corners.

The two stove tiles are good-quality products. As it usually happens, the glaze covered some of the details of the negative impression in the wet clay. But the glaze is also of good-quality, preserving its vivid green color and its shine.

The identification of a new series of stove tiles.

A tile extremely similar to those in Cluj has been published recently, bringing a novel element into discussion. The tile has been discovered in Nyírbátor (north-west of Transilvania), in the noble residence of the Bátori family (Virágos, 2006: 76, fig.

115.)². No details on the item or its exact context of discovery have been published, but it was dated „around year 1500” (Virágos, 2006: 75-76)³. There have been more identical tiles, once part of an entire stove (pl. 2/c).



Pl. 2: a-b. Cahlele de la Nyírbátor; c. soba reconstituită.

I had access to these items through the help of a Hungarian colleague⁴.

Several interesting aspects can be noted through the close analysis of the tiles in Nyírbátor. Two similar, yet distinct molds have been used. The closest to the tiles in Cluj, without being identical to them, is the green glazed one (pl. 2/a).

The second (pl. 2/b), gray glazed item, includes more differences. The supporting shield has the semicircular opening on the right side, the row of triangles is simpler, the crown surmounting the smaller shield is placed higher up and the raven has lowered his beak holding the ring; the large crown is also simpler, while the lions

² The tile is also reproduced on the cover.

³ The indicated analogies do not resemble the type of tiles under discussion.

⁴ I thank Sabján Tibor for all his help. I also owe him the reproduction of the stove reconstructed on the site.

have lost their well-drawn bodies and their imposing posture. The entire tile is also smaller than the others, made larger by an added exterior border, marked by a line imitating a torsade. Smaller tiles are always the result of copying, through the shrinking of clay during drying and firing. The analysis of the details on the tiles from Nyírbátor indicates that they belong to variants related but also newer and less successful than those from Cluj.

The only connection between the two sites, Cluj and Nyírbátor, is Stephen Bátori, voivode of Transylvania between 1479 and 1493. He might have been responsible for the transfer of the motif and in such case, one would be able to date with increased accuracy the interval when the tiles were in use.

Figurative stove tiles from medieval Cluj.

In what the urban taste for decorative heraldic representations in general is concerned, the most ancient testimonies date to the time of king Sigismund of Luxemburg (on the western portal of the parish church of St. Michael, still visible, and on the tower above the gate of Mănăştur, today destroyed). Such representations have then forth multiplied, being installed on most of the city gate towers, especially during the times of Mathias Corvinus. At least one of the archstones of the only gates of Gothic urban houses from Cluj has also been created in the time of King Mathias (the parish house with the heraldic device of Georg Schleinig).

The history museum of Cluj holds one of the largest stove tile collections in Transylvania. Unfortunately, the tiles are mostly items collected in the end of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century. The collection, today mostly catalogued and published (Marcu-Istrate, 2004: 187-202, 357-376.), does not include any item similar to those under discussion.

The archaeological discoveries of the last decades have provided an insight on the issue of tile use in the city (pl. 1/c). It is almost certain that such items were already used in the end of the fourteenth century⁵. In the first half of the next century one finds stove tiles with good-quality figurative decoration (depicting lions and pelicans). It is not certain whether they were produced locally.⁶ One might suspect that they made their way in the city in the luggage of merchants.

Pot-shaped tiles dominated the local market and production until the middle of the fifteenth century. The discoveries of 2007 have revealed a varied series of pot-shaped stove tiles in an old fountain, in another site of old Cluj.⁷ The association of

⁵ Probably in the former episcopal house, later on the parish house. The tiles were discovered in 1883 and are now kept in the collections of the County Museum Tg. Mureş.

⁶ Unpublished discoveries, Adrian A. Rusu, Micu Klein Street.

⁷ Unpublished discoveries, Adrian A. Rusu, Eroilor Boulevard no. 21.

items is so unexpected (deep pot-shaped tiles, short ones with rectangular and triangular openings, and bulb-shaped ones) that it suggests a possible presentation set for buyers to choose from.

The situation radically changed in the second half of the fifteenth century. Already by 1453, the city certainly hosted more potters grouped topographically in a *vicus latifigulorum*. (Szabó, 1882: 525-541, 729-745.) They also turned towards the production of technical ceramics. We still have little information on the matter. But one knows that in this period, several easily-recognizable types were in use, some largely-used in the Hungarian kingdom, such as the knight in tournament. Other tiles had an accentuated Transylvanian specific, such as religious scenes ("The Good Samaritan" and "David and Goliath"). The activity of a tile workshop that also used glazing has been attested for the end of the fifteenth century, or more probable, to the beginning of the next century (Crişan, 1996: 388.). The production of figurative stove tiles can even be distinguished stylistically, with a relatively new repertoire including the "Annunciation", "St. Ladislas", another type of "Knight in Tournament", etc.

The context of discovery and dating.

The isolated presence of two entire tiles with no traces of secondary firing could be explained either by the fact that they never got to be installed in the composition of a stove or they that they were removed from a stove right after the death of King Mathias, in 1490.

If one accepts the first variant, then it might have been the case that the tiles were commercial products that were never sold and whose utility or need for disappeared suddenly with the change of dynasty.

In the second suggested scenario, one needs to consider a sumptuous stove located in some important building of medieval Cluj. Only two tiles have been preserved because the initial lot was mostly sold or because there was only a limited number of tiles or maybe because a composite stove was intended, combining plain tiles and tile with other decorative motifs.

After 1490, both mentioned possibilities indicate that the presence and display of such tiles was no longer wanted. They would have even signified an affront towards the new Jagellion dynasty. The new king was Wladislas II and Mathias's bastard John Corvinus was still regarded with suspicion, as a possible candidate to the throne. The same historical context provides a clear dating for our tiles: they must have been produced *before 1490* and discarded *immediately after the same year*.

Heraldic decoration on medieval stove tiles from Transylvania.

Until now, researches have no clue to testify the use of heraldic motifs on tiles until the middle of the fifteenth century. But such motifs featured in plenty numbers after that time. A lot of tiles from Moldavia (the principality neighboring Transylvania towards the east) show that the decorative techniques have come through, maybe even directly from Transylvania. The discoveries in Baia contain clear elements of precisely the coat of arms of the family of Hunedoara (the raven with ring and the crowned lion) (Bătrăna, 1984-1985: 149-161.) (pl. 3/a-b)),



Pl. 3: a-b. Cahlele de la Baia.

while in the time of Stephen the Great (1457-1504) stove tiles with complex or simplified heraldic decorations (shield, crest, and supporters and shield with boar head held by an angel respectively) were used in the princely court of Suceava. (Batariuc, 1999: 112-118, 240-245.)

The discoveries from Baia (Moldova) seem to indicate that the tiles with the symbols of the Corvinus family were produced in the town of Bistrița. It was not

only the closest production center, in neighboring Transylvania, but also one of the new possessions of the family. The use of heraldic elements seems to have started in Sibiu in the second half of the fifteenth century. The first used there were the symbols of the city. (Marcu-Istrate, 2004: 98.) Tiles discovered in Sighișoara seem to indicate already the use of Episcopal coats of arms as auxiliary elements, in the final years of Mathias Corvinus' reign. (Marcu-Istrate, 2004: 93.)⁸

One needs to note that none of the already mentioned items are glazed. It makes us believe that also under this respect the tiles from Cluj are first of their kind in Transylvania, both artistically and considering their technology of production.

Analysis of the heraldic decoration of the stove tiles from Cluj.

The main element of the "antique" shield is the emblem of the Hungarian Kingdom (vertical division with the double cross and the fasces). Above the shield there is a crown with a bird carrying a round object in its beak. This representation leaves no doubt on its identification as the main symbol of the noble royal family of Hunedoara: the raven with ring. The most frequent representations known so far belong to the heraldic type where the main representation, that of the kingdom, is superposed by another small central shield that includes the raven with ring. The type was mostly promoted through coins. Most royal obol-coins and denari are at least stamped with a small shield with raven. As one can note, the creator of the tiles have chosen to remove the raven from the large shield and its inclusion as a crest. The solution is argued by the fact that on pottery the representation from coins would have rendered the raven almost invisible, even more considering the glaze cover.

But on the tile from Cluj the lions became exterior elements, also wearing crowns and having a new function. They are depicted rampant and affronted, three of their lifted paws supporting crowns: on the lower part - the crown above the state shield and on the upper part the large, supplementary crown. The depiction of the lions is the only element reminding the heraldic device of the Hunedoara family in the middle of the fifteenth century. The addition of another crown, with the use of supporters, is taken from older scenes of the Crowning of the Virgin. The element began to be employed in representations of royal crowning, as the relief of king Mathias from Bautzen indicates.

The general arrangement of the devices is new. In fact, a shield with supporters is placed on another, larger shield. The latter is not an independent element in itself, but another frame replicating in the main field the general frame of the tile. If the inner part is "modern", the outer shield is archaic in aspect and more clumsily

⁸ Reinterpretation of the symbol in Rusu (under print).

rendered⁹. One also notes that the contours of the larger shield, in simple, even graphic lines, is strikingly similar to contemporary Czech tiles (Brych - Strehlíková - Žegklitz, 1990: 27, nr. 52.). The noted contrast seems to prove that the master potter took over the inner decoration or re-arranged two different older compositions, out of which only one was of a better quality.

Comparison to the known heraldic representations.

Mathias' official heraldic can be easily followed on the base of the preserved examples. It can be reconstructed from coins, seals, architectural elements, and codex illuminations. It displays numerous manners of arrangement that convince us that no restrictions were imposed.

The lions were added to the coat of arms of the Hunedoara family after governor John, the father of the future king, was granted in 1453 the diploma regarding the town and the domain of Bistrița (pl. 4/a).

⁹ Due to the one-century span, one cannot decide whether it is by pure chance that a tile belonging to Bishop Wilhelm (1361-1374) discovered in Pécs (Hungary) depicts a crowned rampant lion in a shield framed by triangles. *Pannonia Regia. Művészet a Dunántúlon 1000-1541. Kunst und Architektur in Pannonien 1000-1541*. Budapest, 1994, p. 307-308, v-29. One also notes that the rendering of the contour of the large shield is strikingly similar to that of the contemporary Czech stove tiles. Brych - Strehlíková - Žegklitz, 1990: 27, nr. 52.



Pl. 4: a. blazonul acordat la 1453; b. pecetea regală din 1464; c. emblema regală în Cronica lui Turoczi; d. emblema lăpică de la Bistrița, 1484.

On that document, a single rampant lion with a hawthorn-shaped tail offers the crown with its front paws. After 1464 the royal coat of arms (pl. 4/b) features unique representations of crowned rampart lions. The interpretations of specialists lean towards the revival of a component of John of Hunedoara's coat of arms (Kumorovitz, 1932: 8-9; Bándi, 1991: 68-69; *Sigillia regum, reges sigillorum*. Budapest, 2001, p. 74-75.) with a slight change (the crown on the lion's head). Other opinions suggest that this might have been a symbol of the "kingdom" of Cumania. Independent of the heraldic value given to the fictitious Cuman kingdom, the royal seal seems unbalanced if one does not accept that in the lower part, under the large shield supported by an angel once featured on the right corner a shield with raven and on the left a lion from the coat of arms of 1453. On the great royal seal one cannot discern for certain if the lion is wearing a crown or not.

A bohemian lion was added to the coat of arms of King Mathias after 1469. As known, in the lack of color, the only attributes that can identify, to a significant

degree of certainty, the bohemian lion are its rampant position, the crown, and the double braided tail.

Among the official testimonies on the coats of arms of the members of the family of Hunedoara containing the representation of the lion, one discovers that the lion wearing a double crown appears on the front page of John Thuroczi's *Chronicle* (pl. 4/c). There too the crown is both in the lion's paw and on its head. According to some opinions, the animal seems to be the Luxemburg lion (of Limburg). Apparently, from the moment the lion offering the crown was also wearing one, the composition spread and almost generalized. Precisely in Bistrița though, a well-dated coat of arms from 1484 (pl. 4/d), fixed on the fronton of the parish house, preserves the strict shape of the coat of arms donated by King Ladislas V. With due precaution, one might suspect that the masters of Bistrița did not contribute to the creation of the representation on the tiles from Cluj.

The case of Bistrița indicates, if extra proof were needed, how little rigorous heraldic was at the time. On the other hand, supporting the same conclusion, one must note that royal coats of arms decorated on the inner part with "stepping" lions, such as in the royal palace of Buda.

For the situation under discussion, the most important aspects pertain to the outer arrangement of the shield with the coats of arms of the kingdom. From this point of view, the most ample and spectacular preserved representations are kept in the Corvinian codices. On the base of analyses performed several years ago, one notes that the most frequently used supporters of the royal symbols were angels, either alone or in pairs. Their representations can even be grouped in categories (children, mature figures, standing or lying down, flying, etc.). (Lombardi, 2002: 117.)

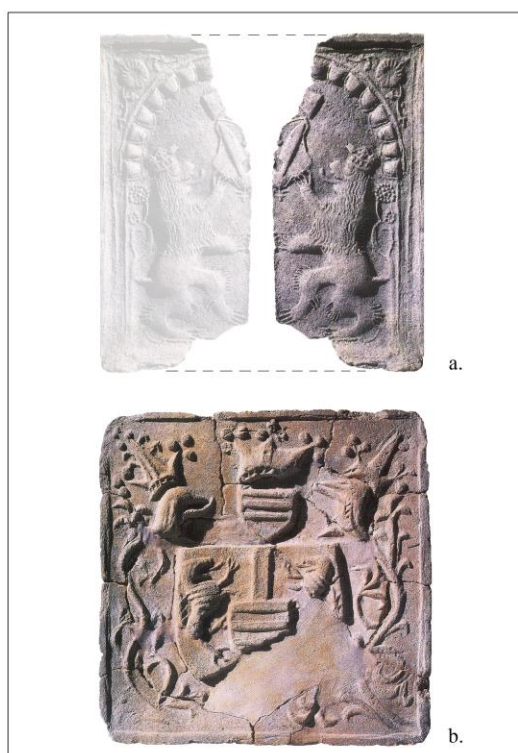
The Corvinian books offer clues to the use of birds, possibly peacocks, as heraldic supporters (on a manuscript illumination In Cod. Lat. 224 c 1r, from the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek Vienna.) or the use of dolphins (on a goldsmith item, Rozsondai, 2002: 249. After the Cod. Lat. 121 c. fr. Szécsény Library Budapest.). On the preserved throne carpet one can see eagles in half profile (E. Kovács, 1990: fig. 20.), even if they are not shown as supporters. The representations in stone are less numerous and they usually focus on the content of the heraldic shields. Unexpectedly, the tile from Cluj seems to be the only example found so far that uses lions as supporters. For this reason I believe that this particular detail could play an essential part in the development of the Corvinus coat of arms.

The possible origin of the representations.

From the above mentioned, it becomes clear that in the middle of the fifteenth century, the use of heraldic representations on stove tiles had just started in

Transylvania. According to all the clues, it did not include sufficient details that can be considered essential to the composition on the tile from Cluj dated to the time of Mathias. We thus have all the reasons to suspect that it followed more distant models.

A tile from Zapsáno (the Czech Republic) contains the same combination of a large and a smaller shield. In the same time, the supporters are depicted as double helmet crests placed in the corners of the shield with ample draping. (Brych, 2004: 52.) It is important to note that supporting lions preserving the general similar look feature in Hudlice u Berouna on a tile (pl. 5/b)



Pl. 5: a. Cahla din Praga; b. cahla de la Hudlice

from the time of George Poděbrad (Brych, 2004: 43, nr. 38.). From the series of Czech stove tiles one may conclude that the development of the coat of arms and its various supporters becomes fairly usual during the first half of the sixteenth century. Although it has no connection to any royal heraldic representation, we do have an example where the lion is strikingly similar (pl. 5/a). (Brych, 2004: 49.) One

might even hypothesize on the existence of common sources for the stove tiles under discussion.

The next example that brings us closer to Transylvania is a tile from present-day Slovakia, from the ancient Pozsony (Bratislava, Slovakia) (pl. 6/a)



Pl. 6: a. Cahla din Bratislava, b. cahla de la Cluj.

(Hoššo, 2005: 147, obr. 5/1.). Considering that it was a city from the Kingdom of Hungary, although the most visible of the lions depicted on the stove tile wears a crown, nothing can make us suspect that the carver intended to represent the emblem of the neighboring kingdom. In other words, although it originally had a precise heraldic value, the lion departed from that original meaning in time. In Bratislava, just like in Cluj, the lion supporter has lost any certain identity, keeping a pure decorative function.

The overall manner of representation suggests possible German inspiration sources. A decorative element on the city hall of Wrocław (Breslau, Silesia, Poland), installed around 1480¹⁰, already contains lion supporters. The last examples to be

¹⁰ Image reproduced in PAPP, 2005: pl. CLXIII, nr. 403.

used here can be found on the tomb of Emperor Frederic III († 1493), where lions very similar to those in Cluj are depicted. But the details are substantially different. In the sixteenth century, lions as supporters became increasingly frequent. One only needs to mention the device Nicolaus Olahus, printed on books or carved on his tombstone (1568, Tyrnavia).

Conclusions.

The tiles in question are probably among the most important discoveries of material culture related to the history of the late medieval city of Cluj. They are unique pieces, created through a combination of motifs. On the base of the elements available at this point, one might suspect that the decorative arrangement was created locally starting from elements inspired or maybe even copied from Central Europe.

Stove tiles were included in the spirit of the royal cult, promoted though in a particular fashion, outside the aulic context. The use itself was strictly restricted both geographically and chronologically, to Transylvania and the close-by regions and to ca. 1490.

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