

TWO FOURTH-CENTURY ROMAN SEALS FROM SLOVAKIA

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Abstract: Two Roman seals from the 4th century were found close to the village of Reca in the Senec District in 2015. They were discovered in an area known to have been intensely settled by Germanic peoples, but never systematically investigated by archaeologists. Finds of such seals are rare in Slovakia, with the only known finds besides these two being two seals from a Germanic settlement at Hurbanovo.

In 2015, during an amateur survey conducted during a walk, two interesting Roman lead seals were found and immediately handed over to the collection of the SNM-Museum of History. The seals were found at a location between the villages of Veľký Grob in Galanta District and Reca in Senec District, near the Zichy stream, at the site “Za potokom” (Fig. 1). The archaeological site extends to the east towards Šúr and towards the village of Čataj.

THE SETTLEMENT OF THE AREA IN THE ROMAN PERIOD AND FINDS OF SEALS IN THE TERRITORY OF SLOVAKIA

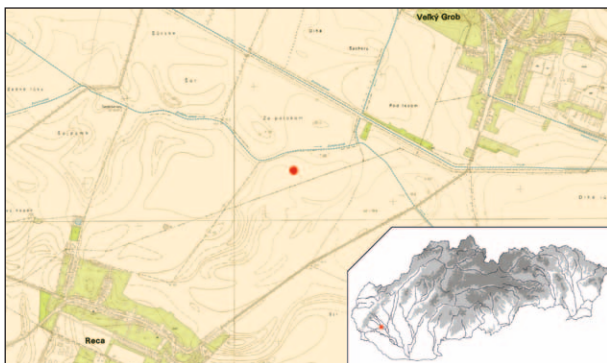


Fig. 1. Location of the find of Roman lead seals (author R. Čambal).

The site of the find and the nearby area was quite intensively settled in the Roman period, as shown by many archaeological and numismatic finds. Unfortunately, it is an area that has not received much attention from professional archaeologists but is often targeted by detectorists. Even so, it has been possible to preserve and document several interesting finds. The same location yielded an interesting trove of iron items from the Roman period, which can be dated to the second half of the 2nd century to the 3rd century AD (Bazovský 2007, 249–260). A shard from the 2nd century found together with the items supports the dating. On its eastern side, the site is adjacent to the Šúr site, where finds have included terra sigillata, Germanic ceramics and a deformed bronze fibula (Bartík/Štrbík 1992, 20, 21; 1995, 22, 23; Bazovský 2005, 132, no. 18). Several other significant archaeological and numismatic finds have been found between Čataj and Veľký Grob but unfortunately have not yet been processed. Most are artefacts found at the sites “Za záhradami” and “Pod Vinohradmi”, which are almost adjacent to the site of the find currently under discussion. These sites have yielded hundreds of Roman coins, including a gold aureus of Emperor Diocletian (284–305).¹ Even so, the literature includes only sporadic reports on a few of the Roman coins found in the region. There is a report of a Roman coin of Constantine I (306/7–337) found at the Zemianske-Gejzové site in Čataj, which was found in a child’s grave in a burial site from the 7th or 8th century AD (Kolníková/Hunka 1994, no. 168).

A great deal of related archaeological material has been found around Čataj, although the literature refers only to a few pins, frequently without specified locations (Bazovský 2005, 116–152). Other pins have been found in the area around Veľký Grob and Reca, which is further evidence that the area was intensively settled in the Roman period (Bazovský 2005, 116, no. 3; 139, no. 29/b).

¹ The unstudied material is mainly held in private collections and public institutions gain access to only a few such finds.

Another significant aspect of this find of Roman seals is providing evidence of contact between Germanic peoples and the territory of the Roman Empire. Such seals are extremely rare in the territory of Slovakia, with the only other currently known finds being two seals from a relatively significant site at Hurbanovo in Komárno District (Hrnčiarik/Kuzmová 2016, 152; Kolníková 2002a, 84, 85; 2002b, 295–303). This settlement underwent an economic boom in the second half of the 4th century, with which both these seals were associated.

THE SEALS

No. 1. (Fig. 2: 1)

Obv.: MAXIM-INE, draped bust right, wearing a crossbow brooch (fibula) on right shoulder, circular field, border or dots.

Rev.: Large Christogram, circular field, border or dots.

Sizes: 6.47 g; 14.1 × 13.8 mm

Dating: AD 364–376

Held by: SNM-Museum of History (Cat. no. S 87382; Acquisition no. 20/2016).

RFA – Obverse: Pb = 97.817%; Fe = 1.34%; Cu = 0.529%; Sb = 0.075%; Sn = 0.081%; Zr = 0.023%; Zn = 0.022%.

Reverse: Pb = 98.192%; Fe = 1.114%; Cu = 0.431%; Sb = 0.108%; Sn = 0.082%; Zr = 0.02%.²

The first seal is a well-known seal of Maximinus, the favourite of the Emperor Valentinian I, more than 50 pieces are known with three different obverses and reverses (Szabadváry 2018, 195–197; 472–484 with further literature; Vida 2016). Most of them are known from auctions and private collections, but several are known from museum collections as well, the find spots are always in Pannonia (Szabadváry 2018, 473–477), thus this is the first case such a sealing is found outside the Pannonian provinces (Fig. 3).

Although Maximinus was born in Sopianae, Pannonia his career – *praeses Corsicae et Sardiniae* (c. 364–365), *corrector Tusciae* (366), *praefectus annonae* in Rome (368–370), *vicarius Urbi* (370), *praefectus praetorio Galliarum* (371–376) – was not connected to Pannonia in any way; the seals must have been used by him as a private man, a landowner, not as an official of the Roman administration. In late Roman times, the members of the elite established their latifundia close to their birthplace, in Maximinus' case probably southern Transdanubia, where several of his seals without exact find-spots are known from. The find-spots of the seals – Carnuntum (Petronell), Arrabona (Győr), Brigetio (Komárom), Gorsium (Tác), Intercisa (Dunaújváros), Savaria (Szombathely), Siscia (Sisak), Sopianae (Pécs) are all administrative and military centres – suggest, that he was a supplier of the Roman army, the produce of his estates was bought by the military.

The seal had presumably got to the Barbaricum as booty, as it was most likely used for sealing the bags containing the agricultural produce, which could have been looted by the Quadi during their raid on Valeria in 374 (Kovács 2018, 92, 93).



Fig. 2. Lead seals from Reca (drawing R. Čambal, photo B. Ritterová).

² Cleaned seals were analysed using a Thermo Niton Analyzer XL 3t 970. The length of analysis was 30 seconds. We are grateful to Mgr. T. Maleček for carrying out the analysis.

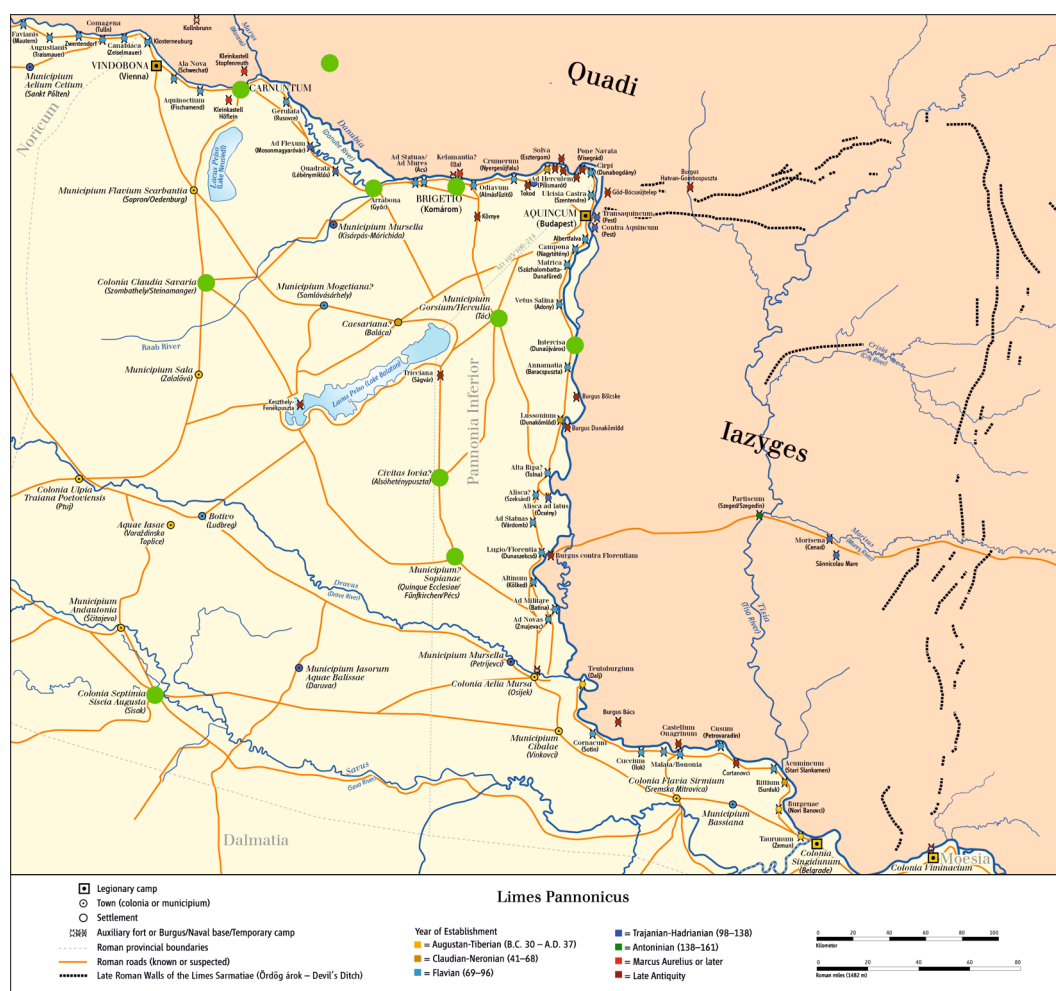


Fig. 3. The find-spots of the seals of Maximinus (author I. Vida).

No. 2. (Fig. 2: 2)

Obv.: Head right, circular field, border or dots.

Rev.: SOT/ERIO/[...], inscription in three lines, circular field, border or dots.

Sizes: 3.37 g; 13.02 × 11.43 mm.

Dating: 4th century AD.

Held by: SNM-Museum of History (Cat. no. S 87383; Acquisition no. 20/2016).

RFA – Obverse: Pb = 95.516%; Fe = 0.891%; Cu = 0.167%; Sb = 0.055%; Sn = 3.308%.

Reverse: Pb = 95.658%; Fe = 1.003%; Cu = 0.192%; Sb = 0.057%; Sn = 3.016%; Zr = 0.024%.

The portrait on the obverse is uncertain. It is most likely a head; details what seem to be folds of the drapery below are just surface damages. Whether it is a female or male head, young or old cannot be specified. The reading of the reverse is not clear. The SOT/ER of the first two lines is certain; the IO at the end of the second line is highly probable. The letters of the third line – if there is any – are illegible.

The type is unpublished, neither can it be found in auction catalogues, nor in the collection of the Hungarian National Museum or in the three major Hungarian private collections accessible to us. Though its surface is quite damaged, it can be dated to the 4th century AD on the basis of the style. The dating is also supported by the observation that – except for mythological and historical figures – the portraits of non-imperial persons appear on seals only in the late 3rd–early 4th century AD.

The seals are typically not found at the place of their production but rather at the destination where the goods were exported. The absence of the type from the Hungarian finds may indicate that it is not of local origin, but had got to Pannonia with imported goods and then to the Barbaricum through trade or looting.

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Dve rímske plomby zo 4. storočia zo Slovenska

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Súhrn

V roku 2015 sa v blízkosti obce Reca v okrese Senec našli dve rímske plomby zo 4. storočia. Ide o región, o ktorom archeológovia predpokladajú, že bol intenzívne osídlený, ale doteraz nebol predmetom systematických výskumov. Z regiónu nie je veľa publikovaných nálezov. Plomby sa našli v blízkosti súboru železných predmetov z druhej polovice 2. až 3. storočia. Tento nález je len druhým doteraz známym nálezom takýchto plomb na území Slovenska. Miesto nálezu sa nachádza neďaleko lokality Šúr, ďalšieho známeho germánskeho sídliska v blízkosti obce Čataj.

Obr. 1. Miesto nálezu rímskych olovených plomb (autor R. Čambal).

Obr. 2. Olovené plomby z Reca (kresba R. Čambal, foto B. Ritterová).

Obr. 3. Náleziská plomb z Maximina (autor I. Vida).

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