

DATA ON EARLY BRONZE AGE APPAREL ON THE BASIS OF A CREMATION GRAVE EXCAVATED AT MÉNFŐCSANAK-SZÉLES-FÖLDEK

ESZTER MELIS

Between 2009 and 2011, prior to the construction of a shopping center, we excavated nine cremation rite Early Bronze Age burials at a site on the border of Győr-Ménfőcsanak in northwestern Transdanubia that has been known since the end of the 19th century and contains finds from several archaeological periods. Taking into account the method of the large-scale excavation the complex study of these graves is currently ongoing. The produced results added to our relatively scanty radiocarbon data from Transdanubia, and they have increased our knowledge about food provision for the afterlife in connection with Bronze Age customs. In addition, they have contributed to our view of the apparel from the period, which I would like to illustrate with the example of the most abundant grave, No. 8464.

In the Little Hungarian Plain, on the border of Ménfőcsanak, part of the city Győr, the section of river bending to the northwest called the Marcal Backwater (Old Rába) formed the system of sand hills that has been frequently inhabited during numerous archaeological periods (Copper, Bronze, Celtic, Roman, Avar and Árpád Ages). A road, which is near modern Route 83 and can be definitely dated back to the Roman Age and probably back into prehistory, split these hills into two in northeast-southwest direction. From 2009 to 2011 we performed large-scale excavation at this site, also referred to as the Széles-földek², in the course of which nine cremation burials – eight urn graves and one scattered cremation burial – from the end of the Early Bronze Age were discovered in the low-lying northwestern section of the 27.7 hectare investment area (Fig. 1). The studying of the graves began in 2012, with the participation of several experts.³

The richest burial of the grave group turned out to be No. 8464. This urn burial was indicated in the humus layer by a bronze spiral bracelet and a gold hair ring discovered by metal detector within it. On the basis of these we unearthed a disturbed urn tipped over on its side, another bronze bracelet, scattered burnt bone fragments (Fig. 2), and a fragment of a flint tool below the urn. No further grave goods were discovered from the interior of the urn in the restoration workshop (Fig. 3), the pair of the gold hair ring, tiny fragments of drilled animal teeth and remains of shells were found, while the ashes from the grave pit were being washed. The 4 gramme burnt fragment of human bone could be identified as remains of an individual who was older than 14. The only vessel in the grave was a relatively small urn, in which the ashes

¹ Hungarian National Museum National Heritage Protection Centre, Regional Office no. II, Szombathely

² This extensive (ca. 150 hectare) archaeological site also contains the excavations referred to under the names Ménfőcsanak-Savanyító, Ménfőcsanak-Szeles-dűlő, Ménfőcsanak-83. sz. főút, Ménfőcsanak-Bevásárlóközpont and Ménfőcsanak-Eperföldek. For a summary of the history of previous research see Takács Miklós: A Ménfőcsanak-Szeles dűlői lelőhelyen 1990–91-ben feltárt, Árpád-kori veremházak / Pit-houses from the Árpád Age found at the site of Ménfőcsanak-Szeles-dűlő in 1990–91. *Arrabona* 44/1 (2006), 537–540. With colleagues from the Hungarian National Museum, National Heritage Protection Centre (excavation leader: Gábor Ilon, research workers: István Eke, Ciprián Horváth, Eszter Melis) we performed a preventive excavation on the section of the site bordered by Route 83 and the roads leading to Gyirmót and the Achilles Park. We are planning to publish the results of the periods preceding the Celts and a further history of the research in three VIA volumes (eds. Ilon, Gábor and Pető, Ákos).

³ Katalin T. Biró (identification of stone implements), Szilvia Döbröntey-David and the Archaeolore Kft. (restoration, XRF analysis of metal objects), Árpád Kenéz (archaeobotany), Gábor Nagy (zooarchaeology), Pál Sümegi (malacology) and Gábor Tóth (anthropology). Lajos Sándor (metal detection), Ernő Wolf (excavation), János Hatos (photography) and Jenő Ritly (drawings) participated in the field work. I need to thank all of them for their work. I am particularly grateful to Szilvia Döbröntey-David (XRF) and Pál Sümegi (malacology) for their selfless assistance. Last, but not least, I thank the excavation leader Gábor Ilon for accessing me the finds and providing for me during the analysis.

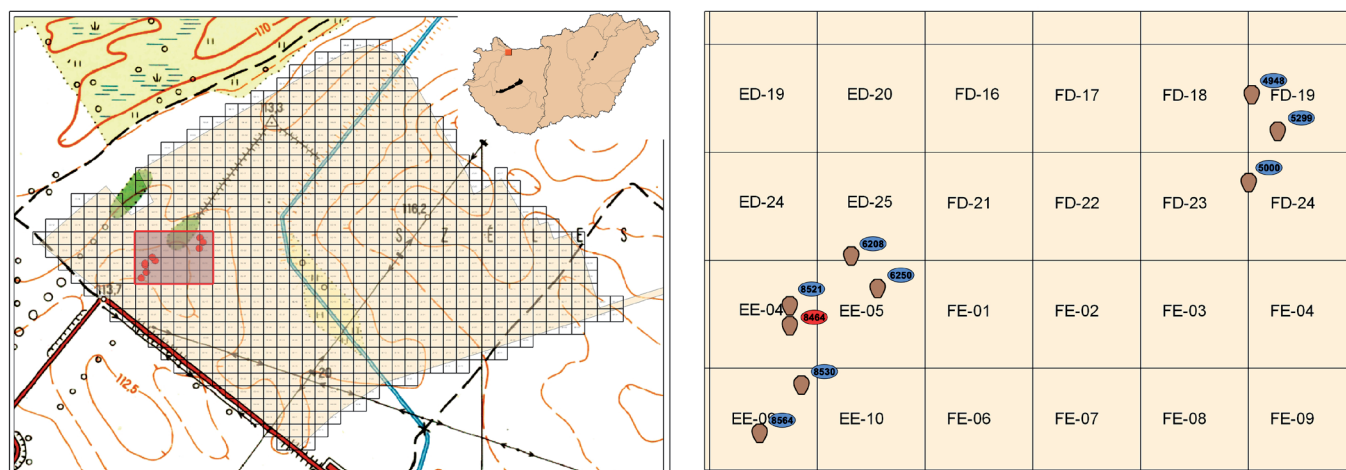


Fig. 1: Győr-Ménfőcsanak-Széles-földek and the location of the grave number 8464 (by István Eke)

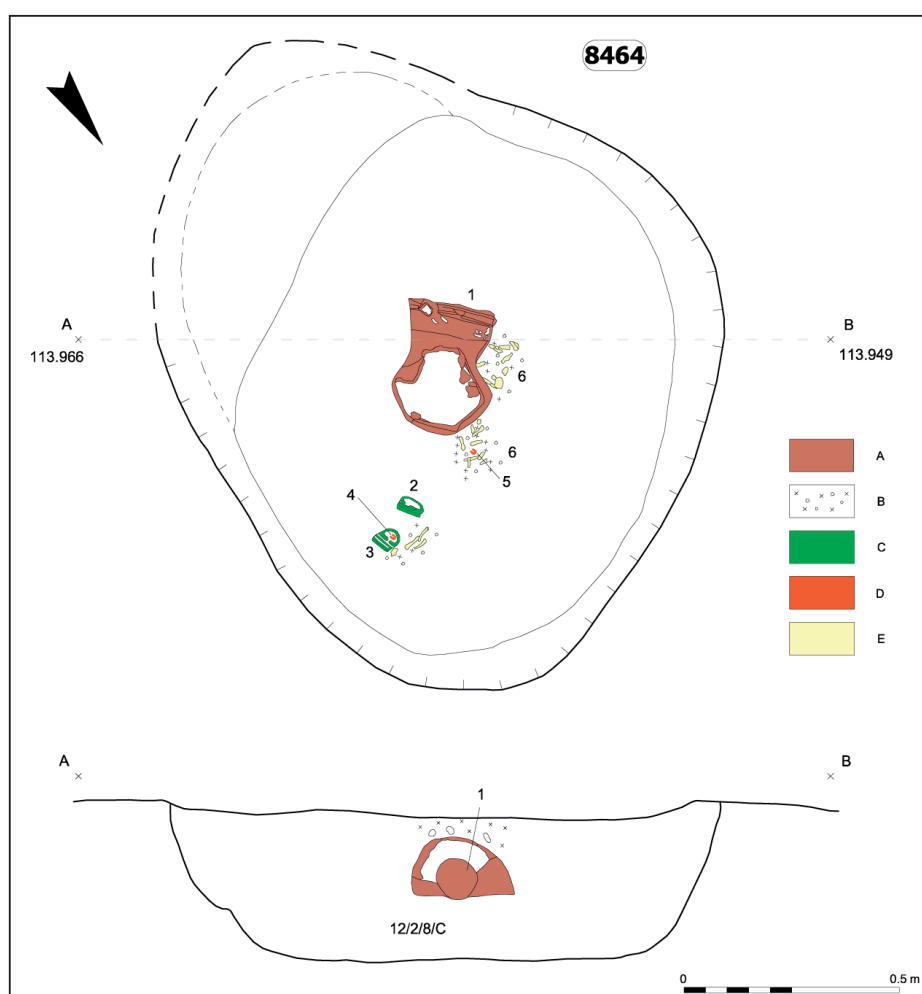


Fig. 2: Drawing of the grave No. 8464. Legend: 1. urn, 2–3. bronze bracelets, 4–5. gold hair rings, 6. fragments of burnt wild boar teeth and shells. A: ceramics, B: ashes, C: bronze, D: gold, E: burnt animal tooth. 12/2/8C: reddish brown, moderately compacted, sandy humus with ceramics (by Zoltán Kovács and István Eke, on the basis of Jenő Ritly's ground plans)



Fig. 3: The grave's urn during restoration (by Archeolore Kft.)



Fig. 4: The grave's urn following restoration (photo: Tibor Takács)

and the grave goods had been placed at sometime. The thin, reeled stick decoration of the urn, originally filled with white encrustation, dates the grave to the classical period of the Kisapostag Culture,⁴ the 3rd period of the Transdanubian Early Bronze Age (Fig. 4).

Despite the cremation rite, the grave abounded in outfits: one bronze spiral bracelet wound three times around and one wound five times were found (Fig. 5), which are considered a popular type of jewelry in the Early Bronze Age of central Europe – a period that is partly contemporaneous with the Middle Bronze Age in Hungary. Based on their X-ray fluorescence analysis, however, their high copper content (90.25% and 92.96%) and their undetectable tin content imply the lack of alloying and the period of the Hungarian Early Bronze Age. According to their conspicuously small diameters (3.2 – 3.7 cm) burial of a young 14–16 year old girl can be supposed. For example, a similar 3.5 cm diameter bracelet is known from Zsennye, from an inhumation grave, in which the age of the deceased can be determined with greater confidence: between 15 and 20 years old.⁵

The two hair rings were made by wounding a gold wire, which had a round cross section that narrows at the end, around a time and a



Fig. 5: Bronze spiral bracelets (photo: Tibor Takács)



Fig. 6: Gold hair rings (photo: Tibor Takács)

⁴ When the findings from the Kisapostag cemetery were published, the Kisapostag Culture was separated on the basis of the decorations made with fur or string reeled sticks, pressed into the rim and handles of the vessels (Mozsolics Amália: *A kisapostagi korabronzkori urnatemető / Der frühbronzezeitliche Urnenfriedhof von Kisapostag*. Archeologia Hungarica 26. Budapest: Magyar Történeti Múzeum, 1942). This culture was widespread in Transdanubia with the exception of the westernmost areas (the vicinity of Sopron, Vas and Zala counties) in the 3rd period of the Early Bronze Age. The vessels with reeled stick decorations without encrustation can be dated to the early (1st) phase, and with encrustation to the classical (2nd) phase (Torma, István: *A kisapostagi kultúra telepe Balatonyörökön / Eine Siedlung der Kisapostager-Kultur in Balatonyörök*. *Veszprém Megyei Múzeumok Közleményei* 11 (1972), 15–34). Their close relationship with the Transdanubian Encrusted Pottery has been proven (Honti, Szilvia – Kiss, Viktória: *Középső bronzkori leletek Somogy megyéből (Middle Bronze Age Finds from Somogy County) / Funde aus der Mittelbronzezeit im Komitat Somogy*. *Somogyi Múzeumok Közleményei* 12 (1996), 17–37). The separation of the Kisapostag Culture was questioned by Gábor Bándi in the 1960–1970s (Bándi, Gábor: *A mészbetétes edények népe északdunántúli csoportjának kialakulása és elterjedése / Die Entstehung und Verbreitung der nortransdanubischen Gruppe des Volkes der inkrustierten Keramik*. *Veszprém Megyei Múzeumok Közleményei* 11 (1972), 41–57.), as has been suggested again by Géza Szabó in relation to the excavation of the cemetery in Bonyhád.

⁵ http://sirasok.blog.hu/2010/01/19/a_fiuk_a_banyaban_dolgoznak_5 Visited 25 August 2013.

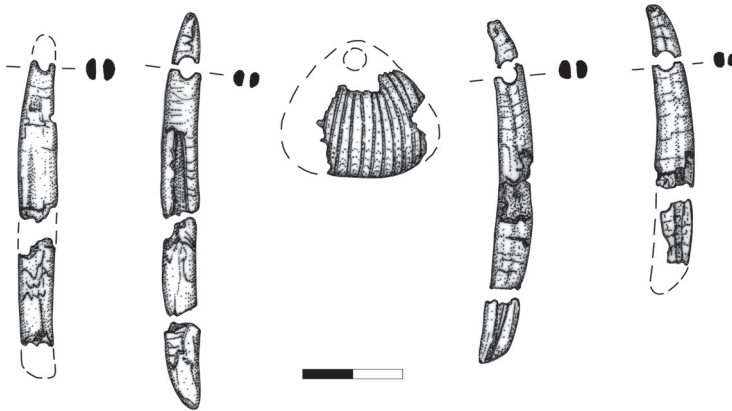


Fig. 7: Wild boar teeth in better condition and shell fragments from the grave (drawing: András Radics)



Fig. 8: Reconstruction of the fragments of wild boar teeth and shells as a necklace (by Gábor Nagy, photo by Tibor Takács)

half, therefore they are open at one end and at the other end the spiral ring is bent back forming an S shape (Fig. 6). It occurred that they might have been worn as earrings, but nowadays this type of object is generally interpreted as a lock ring or possibly a finger ring. This type of gold jewelry, called a “Noppenring”, probably spread from the west, was discovered in the vicinity of Kaposvár, in an inhumation grave from the Kisapostag Culture. The finds from Ménfőcsanak were made from gold with a high silver content (20.45% and 18.73%), which is characteristic primarily of gold from mines in Transylvania, although from the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age panning for gold in the area of Bratislava, the Csallóköz (Žitný ostrov) region and the valleys of the Žitava and Nitra rivers could be considered. Therefore, the origin of the raw material can be investigated through further chemical analysis.

During identification of burnt bone fragments around the urn it was possible to isolate five fragments of scallop shell (*limnocardium*) and 90 burnt, drilled pieces of wild boar teeth, which on the basis of the number of remaining holes were from at least 29 incisors (Fig. 7). The shells are clearly fossilized, from 10 million year old strata, and could have come from the area around Lake Fertő or the Bakonyalja region, while the wild boar incisors suggest the killing of at least eight animals that were over three years old. Garlands made from animal teeth (particularly teeth of canidae) and shells, as well as bone ornaments sewn on clothing are primarily known from Early Bronze Age inhumation rite cemeteries in Slovakia, Austria and the Maros/Mureș region. Although no jewelry made from animal teeth was known from the Kisapostag Culture previously, its discovery is not surprising, since bronze jewelry in larger amounts only occurred from the Middle Bronze Age. In the case of grave No. 8464, due to its cremation rite, it cannot be determined where and in what manner the wild boar teeth and the shells would have been worn. On the basis of their large number and the discovery of the bracelets, it can be ruled out that they would have been worn on the arm. They are probably parts of a necklace, or they could be ornaments sewn onto clothing. A possible reconstruction of the former can be seen in Fig. 8.

During the analysis of the soil samples from the grave pit, 37 pieces of a porridge-type food were recorded at the Budapest laboratory of the Hungarian National Museum National Heritage Protection Centre, which widened the known Early Bronze Age customs of food provision for the afterlife. These food remains may have been scattered from the urn along with the grave goods when it was disturbed. The radiocarbon dating of the burial from charcoal samples was performed at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences' Institute for

⁶ Ring-shaped jewelry with varying diameters wound several times from bronze or gold wire with loop-like or “S” shaped decoration found from the Early Bronze Age of the Middle Danubian Region.

Nuclear Research laboratory, and on the basis of the results the grave can be dated to between 1960–1870 B.C. (Fig. 9).⁷

In the case of the Ménfőcsanak burial No. 8464, we were able to uncover a rich set of characteristic jewelry of the Transdanubian Early Bronze Age. In the research of the Hungarian Bronze Age it is unique that jewelry made of teeth was discovered from a cremation burial, although we hope the number of these finds will increase with the publication of the results of recent, more extensive excavations (e.g. Mernye). The role of the animal teeth as protective amulets is known since the Neolithic. At the end of the Early Bronze Age the inheriting of valuables within the family can be taken into account, and the existence of this custom is reinforced by the example of grave No. 8464. The making of this piece of jewelry from teeth presumes the killing of eight wild boars, and without doubt, based on the small diameter of the bracelets, the individual buried here was not capable of this. On the basis of the jewelry made of teeth as well as the hair rings made of the valuable material, gold, the deceased, most likely a young girl, resting in the urn may have belonged to the elite of the small community living amongst the marshes of the Rába River at the end of the Early Bronze Age.

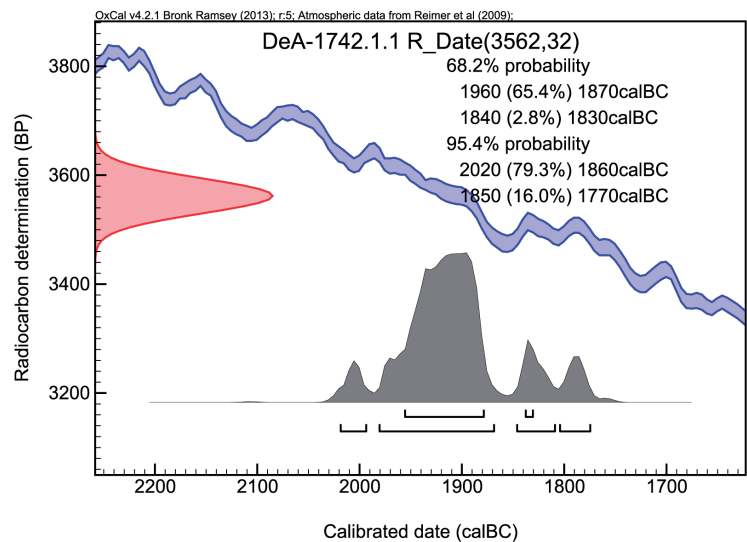


Fig. 9: The radiocarbon data from grave No. 8464 (by Zsuzsanna Siklósi)

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