HUNGARIAN ARCHAEOLOGY



E-JOURNAL • 2014 AUTUMN

www.hungarianarchaeology.hu

NEW TOPOGRAPHICAL RESULTS FROM THE RESEARCH OF VEREBCE-TETŐ AT DÉDESTAPOLCSÁNY II

Results from the Topographical Research into the Iron Age Hilltop Settlement and the Graves, as well as the Surrounding Areas

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In the Spring 2014 issue of Hungarian Archaeology we introduced the history of the previous research on the settlement of extraordinary size on the Dédes Plateau (Fig. 1) and the results of the examination of the so-called "Vaskapu" (Iron Gate) section of the rampart that closed of the southern end of the fortification. On the basis of the positions of the 234 arrowheads identified there the armed conflict that took place at the end of the 7th century B.C. can be reconstructed. This conflict can be compared to a similar attack that took place during this same period at the fortification of Smolenice-Molpír in Slovakia, which is about 230 km away.



Fig. 1: The settlement on the Dédes Plateau from the valley of the Bán Stream (photograph: Gábor V. Szabó)

TOPOGRAPHICAL CONDITIONS OF DÉDESTAPOLCSÁNY-VEREBCE-TETŐ

As we presented in the first section of the essay, the archaeological site complex can be traced for about 2 km on a mountain ridge running to the north from the direction of the Bükk Mountains and is made up of three clearly differentiated units. (Fig. 2) A heavily terraced ridge runs for about 900 m in its southern section, known by the names Verebce-bérc (peak) or Vásárhely pada (bench). To the north of this is the so-called Kisvár (Small Fort), whose more pronounced system of terraces can only be observed in the southeastern portion of this zone that stretches for 600 m. Finally, the northern end of the ridge is comprised of the some 500 m long so-called Dédesvár (Dédes Fort) area. The formation of terraces also appears on the north of this section, and it is fortified along a short portion of its northwestern section. Verebce-bérc, which is virtually entirely terraced, can clearly be differentiated from the northern archaeological sites, since at the end of this section steeply sloping side valleys flank a narrow crest on both sides. The mountain settlement is not fully encircled by defensive works, in fact only on the southern side was a significant rampart constructed, at the previously mentioned Vaskapu. The fortifications were definitely not constructed on the steep eastern side, and on the western side, besides the northwestern tip, a defensive structure can only be traced in the southern section, becoming more indistinct as it stretches to the north. Therefore, within the complex of archaeological sites only the southern section, called Verebce-bérc, can be considered to have been fortified, and of that primarily the part that separated and closed the ridge from the direction of the Bükk Mountains. The great number of arrowheads dated to the Scythian period that have been identified on the surface of the inner rampart at the Vaskapu have great value in relation to the fortification as well, since the defensive works cannot be more recent than the arrowheads, in other words, no later than the second half of the 7th century B.C.

The earlier reports linked this mountain settlement to the Late Bronze Age Kyjatice culture. However, on the surface it is primarily Middle and Late Iron Age ceramics that have been collected and this suggests that the Late Bronze Age settlement was of far lower intensity than of the Middle and Late Iron Age. This

observation is also supported by the metal objects from the site that have definitive value for dating. We know of no Late Bronze Age metal objects from here, while objects indicating a system of relationships with the Scythians and some Celts have been found in large numbers. A bronze pendant that can be dated to the Scythian Period was found in the terraced zone near the Vaskapu, but particularly worthy of attention is the great number of Middle Iron Age knives. On the basis of investigations using metal detectors it seems that we must look for the Middle Iron Age settlement in the fortified and heavily terraced section of Verebce-bérc. The finds from the Late Iron Age settlement are made up of the socketed axes and socketed chisels bearing Late Iron Age characteristics found here, as well as the socketed iron axe found 40 cm deep in a layer mixed with charcoal pieces on a steep slope below the fortification at the Vaskapu.

The overwhelming majority of the archaeological finds that could be collected from Verebce-bérc are represented by 10–15 cm diameter balls of iron not taken by the people who illegally searched for metal objects here. We did not observe any slag, although during previous investigations Magdolna B. Hellebrandt and Tamás Pusztai identified burnt rocks and slag (?) in some pits in the southeastern exterior zone. Poor quality iron ore can be found relatively close to Verebcebérc, on the northern side of the valley of the

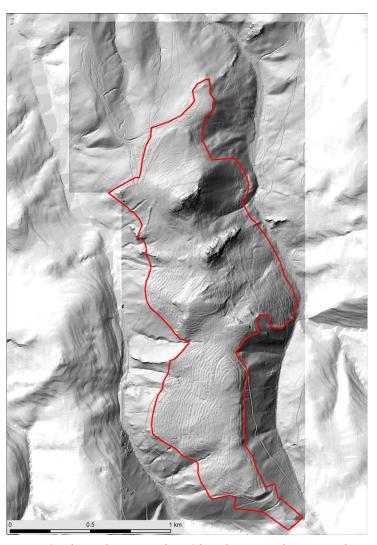


Fig. 2: The settlement on the Dédes Plateau on the map made using aerial laser scanning (ODD Kft; Balázs Holl, the survey way made possible by the TÉKA – Cadastre of Landscape Features abase program)

Bán Stream on the border of the villages of Nekézseny and Dédestapolcsány, no more than 4–5 km away. The portion closest to the surface of this siderite deposit, which is related to geologically old rock in the region, is considered the southernmost part of the Rudabánya deposit. It has undergone limonitization similar to the ore of Rudabánya and was still being mined in the 18th century.²

THE EARLY SCYTHIAN PERIOD CEMETERY

The research group of the Eötvös Loránd University's Institute of Archaeology performed investigations with metal detectors on this site in September of 2008 under the leadership of Gábor V. Szabó. At this time a great deal of stray finds came to light that could be linked to several Iron Age settlement horizons. During the deliberate uncovering of the stray finds, we came upon a Scythian Period cremation cemetery

¹ Hellebrandt, Magdolna: Mályinka-Dédestapolcsány-Verepce-vár és Miskolc-Kőlyuk I. barlang vasleletei / The iron finds from Mályinka-Dédestapolcsány-Verepce-vár and the Miskolc-Kőlyuk I. cave. *A Herman Ottó Múzeum Évkönyve* 46 (2007), 16–20.

László Dobosy gathered together the archaeological sites with iron slag found in the valley of the Bán Stream. Dobosy, László: Salaklelő és vasfeldolgozó helyek a Bán-patak völgyében (Sites Containing Slag and Iron Works in the Valley of the Bán Stream). A Miskolci Herman Ottó Múzeum Közleményei 12 (1973), 69–75; Czajlik, Zoltán: A fémnyersanyagok őskori kohósításának nyomai a Kárpát-medencében / Traces of prehistoric smelting workshop in the Carpathian Basin. Archeometriai Műhely (2012/2), 100.

on a plateau overgrown with young oaks on the western side of the ridge.³

The graves, which were found nearly 600 meters to the northwest of the Dédesvár, represent a new, as yet unknown, period for the site. The four excavated graves were scattered over an area of about 150×70 meters. On the basis of the large distance between the graves and the great number of Iron Age stray finds collected in the area, it became clear that we could presume the existence at the site of a relatively extensive cemetery with many more graves than those excavated. Unfortunately, the short time available and the conditions of the area, forest with dense undergrowth, made it quite hard to investigate in places and kept us from excavating any more graves. Further from the area of the cemetery, several stray finds presumably from the Iron Age or that could clearly be placed in the Scythian Period also came to light.

During the processing of the four graves excavated in 2008 it came to light that the known section of the cemetery could be dated to the Early Scythian Period, that is the second half of the 7th century B.C. and the first half of the 6th century B.C. (around the transition between the Ha C2/D1 phases). The grave goods and elements of apparel reflected a wide ranging system of contacts, primarily with



Fig. 3: Scythian Period graves during excavation in 2011 (photograph: Farkas Márton Tóth)

Subcarpathia, the Middle Dniester region, Transylvania and the Hallstatt culture of Transdanubia. At the same time, the surviving local traditions of Late Bronze Age cultures also express themselves in a quite marked manner.⁴

Between July 6th and 10th of 2011, an opportunity arose for us to perform further research on this site that is of outstanding significance from several aspects and appears worthy of further investigation (and which unfortunately has been continuously looted by illegal treasure hunters).⁵ During the brief 5 days available we located and then excavated another 11 graves in the vicinity of those excavated in 2008. These burials were discovered in a concentrated area that was relatively small compared to the presumed extent of the cemetery (*Fig. 3*).

The graves excavated in 2011 fit together well with those found in 2008 in terms of both the burial rites and the goods found in them. Without exception, all 11 graves were cremations: 7 with scattered ashes, 2 with urns and 2 combined (with urns and scattered ashes). 7 of the graves were covered with piles of stones and in 2 cases the ashes and grave goods were encircled by smaller, irregular rings of stones (*Fig. 4*).

³ The graves were located on a natural, roughly flat plateau (400 m altitude above sea level) running in a northwest-southeast direction, rising steeply above the valley of the Bán Stream in the southwestern section of the Vár-erdő (forest).

⁴ Tóth, Farkas Márton: Korai szkítakori sírok Dédestapolcsány-Verebce-tető lelőhelyen / Early Scythian Age Graves at the Site of Dédestapolcsány-Verebce-tető (NE Hungary). A Herman Ottó Múzeum Évkönyve 51 (2012), 63–91.

In addition to the metal detector research group from the Eötvös Loránd University's Archaeological Institute led by Gábor V. Szabó, a large team brought together through inter-institutional cooperation saw to the work: besides university students, the team, coordinated by Zoltán Czajlik, was assisted by András Bödőcs and Balázs Holl in the geodesic and GIS tasks, István Bacskai in the locating of finds using metal detection devices and colleagues from the Hungarian National Museum's National Heritage Preservation Center led by László Reményi and Zoltán Fullár in the excavation of more graves. In addition to these, taking part in the excavations were archaeologists Gábor Váczi, Kristóf Fülöp, Kata Groma, András Jáky, Mariann Novák and Gábor Tarbay (Archaeological Institute of Eötvös Loránd University's School of Liberal Arts), as well as the archaeologists Szabolcs Czifra, András Füzesi, Melinda Koller and Nándor Nagy of the Hungarian National Museum's National Heritage Preservation Center, and we hereby thank them for their enthusiastic work. The restoration of the archaeological materials was performed by the experts from the Hungarian National Museum's National Heritage Preservation Center. The National Cultural Fund and the Village Government of Nagyvisnyó contributed to ensuring the funding for the excavations, and workers from the Bükk National Park assisted in the field work. We hereby provide our thanks for this support and assistance!



Fig.4: Scythian Period grave covered with stones during excavation (photograph: Zoltán Fullár)

The finds discovered seem to confirm the results of the research performed in 2008 both in terms of the date of the site and the direction and intensity of the system of contacts of the community that used the cemetery (Fig. 5). At the same time a slight shift in emphasis can be discovered towards the Early Scythian Period forest steppe region and the Kustánfalva/Kustanovice Group. This cultural communication or origin is clearly exemplified by the cup with rooster comb handles found in grave 15, a type of object that is characteristic of pottery at the beginning of the Middle Iron Age from the above regions (Fig. 6). Few Hungarian sites that we have learned of (e.g. Alsótelekes-Dolinka⁶) show a chronological and cultural profile similar to that of Dédestapolcsány.

The 15 graves excavated to this point in the section of the cemetery at Dédestapolcsány-Verebce-tető fit in well with the horizon made up of Early Scythian Period archaeological sites that is becoming more positively defined in the area of the Great Hungarian Plain and the North Hungarian Mountains. We can now define more and more sites from this period extending from the middle/second half of the 7th century B.C. to the beginning of the 6th century

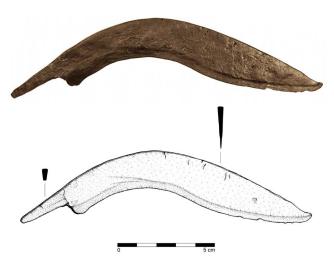


Fig. 5: Common grave good from the Scythian Period cemetery: an iron knife with a curved back (photograph and drawing: Farkas Márton Tóth)





Fig. 6: Cup with rooster comb handles found as a grave good in a Scythian Period unurned cremation burial (photograph and drawing: Hungarian National Museum, National Heritage Preservation Center and Farkas Márton Tóth)

B.C. (that is from the appearance of elements of Scythian-type material culture and the arrival of eastern communities to the spread of wheel-turned pottery). Through further research at the Dédestapolcsány site we can hope for significant progress in the more precise determination of this phase, which in several aspects

Patay, P. – B. Kiss, Zs.: Az Alsótelekes-dolinkai szkítakori temető közöletlen sírjai. (Az 1962. és 1964. évi feltárás eredményei.)
/ Die unpublizierten Gräber des skythenzeitlichen Gräberfeldes von Alsótelekes-Dolinka. (Die Ergebnisse der Freilegungen der Jahre 1962 und 1964) Folia Archaeologica 49/50 (2001), 79–141.

can be differentiated within the Scythian Period of the Carpathian Basin (the clearly datable Ha C2-D1 era finds, the lack of wheel-turned pottery and the prominent presence of Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age traditions).

Another question to be answered is the relationship of the population of the cemetery to the settlement hypothesized to the north of the Vaskapu and the attacking groups that left behind Scythian Period arrowheads. We must note here that we found types of arrowheads in the area of the cemetery similar to those at the rampart of the Vaskapu.

In addition to the Middle Iron Age graves, a few other important finds turned up during the investigations in 2008 in the zone lying to the south of Verebce-bérc. Among these, the fragment of a bronze brooch with plastic decorations clearly comes from the Celtic Period. A particularly significant piece is the openwork faux filigree bracelet fragment, which came to light in the Kisvár zone. A precise parallel is a piece that was recently

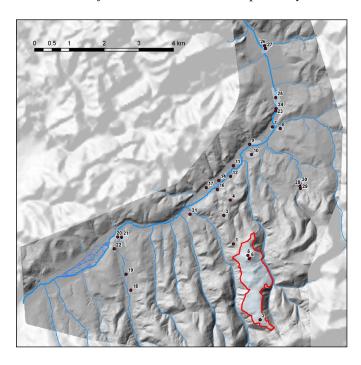


Fig. 7: The Dédes Plateau settlement and the archaeological sites of the valley of the Bán Stream (comprehensive map; László Reményi and Balázs Holl)

excavated in the Sajópetri-Homoki Szőlőskertek Celtic cemetery and can be dated to the 3rd century B.C.⁷ In the northern zones of Verebce-tető, which were used at a later time, we found medieval coins and arquebus balls.

RESEARCH INTO THE VALLEY OF THE BÁN STREAM

Earlier we mentioned that the raw material for the iron working activities at Verebce-tető was most likely provided by the iron ore in the valley of the Bán Stream. It is also clear that in the mountainous micro-region surrounding Verebce-tető, the upper section of the Bán Stream, running for about 8 km, was the most suitable for agricultural cultivation and human settlement. On the basis of the field walks and heritage value surveys⁸ the settlement history of the area from its beginnings to the start of the modern era can be sketched out (*Fig. 7*).

The area studied is found in the zone where two micro-regions, the Northern Bükk and the Uppony Mountains, meet, with the Bán Stream representing the border. Both micro-regions are characterized by individual climatic conditions that differ from the national average, more extreme than that of the Great Hungarian Plain or the Transdanubian regions. This influenced the settlement history of this deep valley between two medium-sized mountain ranges to a great degree. The settlement history profile that can be reconstructed on the basis of the data from the field walks and the written sources indicates that the valley was populated in a total of four historic periods: the Middle Neolithic Period, the period lasting from the Late Bronze Age to the Middle Iron Age, the Roman Imperial Period and finally in the Middle Ages, starting from the 13th century.

Szabó, Miklós – Tankó, Károly: Parures et accesoires vestimentaires. In: Szabó, Miklós (dir.) – Tankó, Károly – Czajlik, Zoltán (ass.): La nécropole celtique à Ludas – Varjú-dűlő (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2012), 108.

The heritage preservation (archaeological and historic property topography) asset survey research on the areas of the towns of Dédestapolcsány, Mályinka, Nagyvisnyó and Szilvásvárad by the National Heritage Preservation Center of the Hungarian National Museum (previously the Cultural Heritage Preservation Professional Service) was performed within the framework of the TÉKA – Cadastre of Landscape Features program supported by the Norwegian Fund.

Dövényi, Zoltán (ed.): *Magyarország kistájainak katasztere. Második, átdolgozott, bővített kiadás* (Cadastre of Hungary's Micro-Regions. Second, Revised and Expanded Edition) (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 2010), 739–742, 759–762.

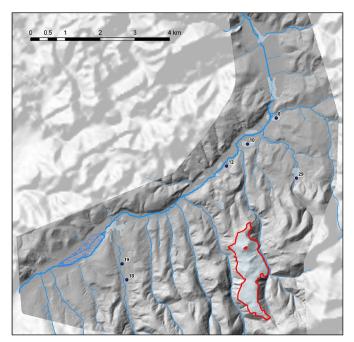


Fig. 8: Neolithic archaeological sites identified through field walks in the valley of the Bán Stream (László Reményi and Balázs Holl)

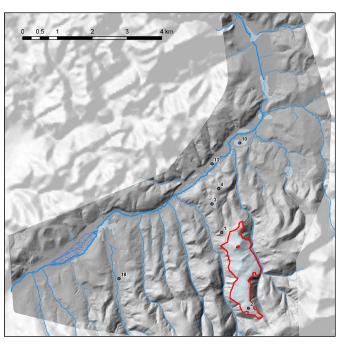


Fig. 9: Late Bronze Age/Iron Age archaeological sites identified through field walks in the valley of the Bán Stream (László Reményi and Balázs Holl)

Of the 31 archaeological sites identified, we have found six with finds that can be dated to the middle period of the Neolithic (5400/5300-4500/4400 B.C.) (*Fig. 8*). On the basis of these it can be verified that the first settlers to the valley can be linked to the Bükk Culture belonging to the Eastern Linear Pottery Culture. During the so-called Atlantic Period in palaeoclimatology, the Carpathian Basin was characterized by a Mediterranean or sub-Mediterranean climate. This climatic optimum provided the opportunity to populate areas, such as the Bükk Mountains, that had been uninhabited during most historical periods. The impact on the environment of communities that appeared and practiced agriculture through the clearing of forests in areas that had previously been heavily wooded can also be seen in other parts of northeast Hungary. Description of the clearing of the clearing of the clear of the cle

On the basis of the data from the field walks, the area was depopulated for a long time following the Middle Neolithic. The next period of settlement can be observed in the second half of the Late Bronze Age (from c. 1200 B.C.) (*Fig. 9*). The most spectacular relic from this time is the extensive fortified settlement that developed above the valley in the area of Dédestapolcsány-Verebce-tető. On the basis of the above discussed results of recent research, it was inhabited all the way to the middle period of the Iron Age, contrary to previous theories. The graves covered with stones discovered in the vicinity of the fortified settlement can likewise be dated to the Iron Age, and we can also presumably place the tumuli found a bit further away to this period. Below these aforementioned locations, sites dated to the period (three sites) have been identified in the valley of the Bán Stream and the Nagy-völgy (valley) at Nagyvisnyó, indicating the habitation of the river valleys that were suitable for agriculture. This period starting around 1200 B.C. comes at the same time as a climatic optimum.¹³ The sources available are not yet sufficient for

cf.: Korek, József – Patay, Pál: *A bükki kultúra elterjedése Magyarországon* (The Spread of the Bükk Culture in Hungary) (Budapest: Történeti Múzeum, Rotaprint üzem, 1958).

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¹² Sümegi, Pál: Ember és környezet kapcsolata a Kárpát-medencében az elmúlt 15000 év során (The Relationship between Man and the Environment in the Carpathian Basin over the Last 15,000 years). *Panniculus* Ser. B. No. 3. (Szombathely, 1998), 367–395.

¹³ Jan Bouzek: Climatic changes: new archaeological evidence from the Bohemian Karst and other areas. *Antiquity* 67/255 (1993), 386–393.

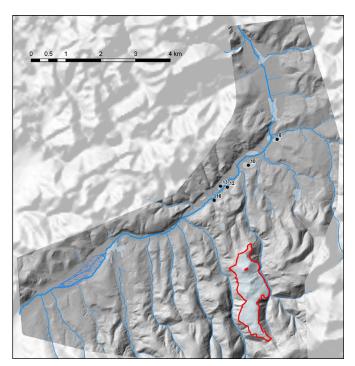


Fig. 10: Roman Imperial Period archaeological sites identified through field walks in the valley of the Bán Stream (László Reményi and Balázs Holl)

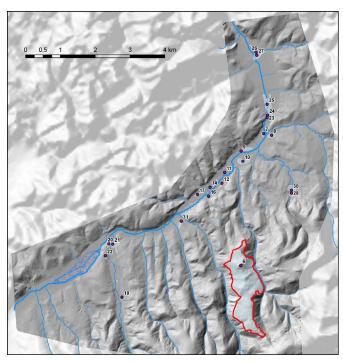


Fig. 11: Medieval archaeological sites identified through field walks in the valley of the Bán Stream (László Reményi and Balázs Holl)

us to determine whether the end of life at these sites can be dated to the Late Bronze Age or the Early Iron Age. The Celtic metal objects from the settlement on the Dédestapolcsány-Verebce-tető, including the faux filigree bracelet fragment are still difficult to interpret, because other Late Iron Age finds that can be linked to the Celts have not been found during the field walks so far, either in the valleys or in the vicinity.

The valley of the Bán Stream again became inhabited during the Roman Imperial Period (1st–5th century A.D.), as has been shown through the five sites identified during the field walks that can be dated to the period (*Fig. 10*). These belong to the archaeological group of sites in the area of eastern Slovakia and northeast Hungary that were built upon local Iron Age traditions, but by this time could be linked to the Germanic tribes (to the Quadi in the first half of the period, and presumably to the Vandals from the end of the 2nd century).¹⁴

We have no data about the habitation of the area in the centuries following the Roman Imperial Period. The repopulation of the valley can be substantiated from the 13th century, in connection with the deforestation and the appearance of villages¹⁵ (*Fig. 11*). The definitive center of the region in the Middle Ages was Dédes Castle built on Dédes-kő, which on the basis of the documentary evidence was built between 1247 and 1254. It was remodeled in the 14th century, and then changed hands several times in the 14th–15th centuries. In 1567, after a 15 day Turkish siege, the commander of the castle István Bory had it blown up due to the superiority of the attacking force. From this point it is listed in the sources as a demolished castle (*Castrum dirutum*).¹⁶

cf.: Salamon, Ágnes – Török, Gyula: Funde von Nordost-Ungarn aus der Römerzeit. Folia Archaeologica 12 (1960) 145–172; Lamiová-Schmiedlová, Maria: Römerzeitliche Siedlungskeramik in der Südostslowakei. Slovenska Archaeologica 17/2 (1969) 403–502; K. Végh, Katalin: Régészeti adatok Észak-Magyarország I-IV. századi történetéhez / Archaeologische Beitrage zur Geschichte Nordostungarn im I-IV. Jh. u Z. Herman Ottó Múzeum Évkönyve 13–14 (1975), 65–130.

¹⁵ Szabó, István: A középkori magyar falu (The Medieval Hungarian Village) (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1969).

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SUMMARY

During the research in 2011 it came to light that the archaeological site of Dédestapolcsány-Verebce-tető, previously considered an earthwork fort of the Kyjatice culture, became a truly important settlement in the Scythian Period following its settlement in the Late Bronze Age at a time that cannot be precisely determined. At the same time this means that through the work of the researchers at Dédestapolcsány-Verebce-tető, the results from the study of a quite extensive hilltop settlement and a cemetery can be integrated into the region's Iron Age history, in addition to the previously known important sites from the period (the cemetery at Alsótelekes-Dolinka, as well as the excavated settlements at Salgótarján Ipari Park II [Industrial Park]¹⁷ and Čečejovce¹⁸ where metallurgy took place). The significance of the arrowheads identified at the Vaskapu (Iron Gate) at Dédestapolcsány-Verebce-tető also provides information beyond the immediate or broader surroundings. They can be compared with what was up until now the only known evidence of an attack from this time at Smolenice-Molpír.¹⁹ The phenomena indicating an armed conflict that took place at the end of the 7th century B.C. reinforce the profile of the history of the Carpathian Basin during this period that has been formed through research in recent years.

The research based on the work of experts from the two institutes has proven effective. In a brief time, through the combination of numerous methods, we have gained a great deal of information that can be clearly assessed from an archaeological standpoint in such a way that excavations as understood in the traditional sense have not taken place on the site. Of particular note is the methodological significance of aerial laser scanning, which allowed for the detailed topographical analysis of the area, and the metal detection research documented with high-precision GPS. Through the aid of the latter method we were not only able to rescue important archaeological elements, but also the finds collected in this manner made it possible to date the entire site much more precisely than before.

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¹⁸ Miroššayová, Elena: Sidlisko z neskorej doby halštatskej Čečejovciach / Späthallstattzeitliche Siedlung in Čečejovce. *Slovenska Archaeologica* 42 (1994), 37–68.

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Patay Pál – B. Kiss Zsuzsa

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