

*The editors of Magyar Régészet – Hungarian Archaeology began a new column in its first issue of 2014, the purpose of which is to get experts and decision-makers in the fields of archaeology and heritage preservation to talk about the current topics and issues in the profession. The interviews appearing in our online magazine do not reflect the position of the editors – instead they would like to create an independent platform where various, at times differing opinions can be seen. It is our view that a discussion of this type is necessary, and that it should be conducted within Hungarian archaeology's own professional forums if we want the arguments to reach the community of archaeologists and the directors who oversee their activities in a form that is not distorted by politicians, business interests and the media. The subjects of the interviews naturally represent their own viewpoints, and we hope that through this a discussion will be initiated that will contribute to the revitalization of our profession.*

## INTERVIEW WITH BOLDIZSÁR CSORNAY ON THE SITUATION AT THE NATIONAL HERITAGE PROTECTION CENTRE AND ON ITS WORK

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*Our first interview is with Boldizsár Csornay, the director of the Hungarian National Museum's National Heritage Protection Centre, and deputy director of the Hungarian National Museum.*

***First off, I would like to begin with the status and actual work of the National Heritage Protection Centre – what is it that is currently under the jurisdiction of the Centre?***

The Centre is an affiliate of the Hungarian National Museum, but in certain areas it performs its tasks with essentially complete independence. It is an institute funded from the central budget that sees to public duties related to heritage preservation, and the main scope of its activities is to compile the necessary heritage preservation documentation for the areas to be developed by major projects and for investments into historic properties. We are talking about costly research work that provides a basis for structural investigations, plans for historic properties, restoration and structural stabilization involving archaeologists, architects, art historians and restoration experts.

One of the institute's most important jobs in the realm of archaeological heritage preservation is the compilation of preliminary archaeological documentation (PAD), which is required according to law and only the National Heritage Protection Centre as an independent organization can prepare, with the inclusion of its partner institutions. The PAD is a heritage preservation risk assessment – previously called a heritage preservation impact statement – which contains a calculation of the actual archaeological expenses prior to the commencement of major projects: the institute prepares a project plan that describes the stance of the archaeological profession as well as the methods, planned duration and cost of the research work. In all cases this can be determined on the basis of the given archaeological site's age, character, extent and intensity. In addition to this, the Centre also sees to the central coordination of preventive archaeological and heritage preservation research work when necessary. In connection with this, it supervises preventive excavations that affect more than one county, but at the same time the Centre must act when a municipal



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museum with county-wide jurisdiction cannot fully perform its duties due, for example, to a lack of capacity, or not accepting the responsibility for the preventive archaeological excavations. In these cases, up to this point the Centre has automatically been required to sign on and perform the work related to research and excavations. This has been modified slightly following the most recent amendment of the regulations, inasmuch as the Centre is dealing with problems with its capacities, the municipal museum with county-wide jurisdiction that has authority may also bring in other agencies that have the authority to perform excavations.

Finally it is also within the Centre's scope of duties to collaborate in the compilation of the system of considerations related to excavations, which are effective for the entire country. This system of considerations also includes the professional expectations that the institutes performing the excavations must adhere to when performing their tasks. The objective of the professional standards set forth is to make it possible to track and easily calculate the execution of the work, as well as to review the work schedule of the excavations and the standard costs. This guiding information can be accessed by anyone on the home pages of the Ministry of the Interior or the Hungarian National Museum.

***Many times the question arises, why must a central institute, the National Heritage Protection Centre, coordinate and see to the archaeological tasks related to major projects?***

The main reason is that in most cases the provincial museums simply do not have the capacity for this; they lack sufficient financial backing and the manpower that can be mobilized for this. Many museums are struggling for their survival, there is a great deal of downsizing and often they barely receive enough money to get by. More significant resources are only on hand in regions that are in better shape in terms of Hungary's economic condition. The other areas are often unable to see to the tasks accompanying archaeological heritage, which is why the work of the Centre is needed.

***At the same time the Centre often is burdened not only by a lack of funds, but also by difficulties arising from legal issues.***

Unfortunately this is true, as even the method of financing archaeological work is no longer set out sufficiently unambiguously and in detail by the ministerial agencies responsible for the field. The entire profession feels, and this is shown in practice, that the amount of time and money that can be provided for the excavations is too restricted. In the case of major projects they are provided with only two months and 1% of the project budget, with a maximum of 200 million forints, even though there are cases where the completion of the PAD costs more than this. If more funding is needed for individual tasks, then in every case the issue must be brought before the government, which as one can easily see makes the process ponderous.

Besides the legal problems we must also unfortunately confront a negative attitude towards archaeology and heritage preservation in general from local administrations as well as project backers and the government. It is well known that in recent years the view has generally spread that archaeological excavations and heritage preservation activities are very costly, and can even make the projects untenable. People are inclined to judge the entire profession on the basis of a few negative instances. I believe that the Centre has played an important role so that today this view of the profession has softened slightly, or at least has hopefully turned in a more positive direction.

Prominent support for culture and science has not been amongst the priorities of the government up to this point. The loser in many cases is primarily in the realm of the liberal arts. Moreover, heritage preservation is struggling with financing problems and cannot support the costs for laboratories, storage, restoration, scientific processing and publication through its own resources. At the same time, the 350-400 archaeologists actively working in Hungary are not uniformly qualified and experienced, and not all of them have access to the proper tools of the trade, in particular funding for fueling earthmoving machinery is always problematic. For example, in the county museums there are no laboratories with

up-to-date equipment capable of performing scientific analyses, these for the most part only operate at universities, at the Academy of Sciences and at the National Heritage Protection Centre, so – with a few exceptions – only these institutions are able to perform modern research and analysis in areas such as environmental reconstruction, anthropology, archaeozoology and material analysis. At several provincial museums they are decades behind in their restoration work, not to mention where they store their material finds – long term storage problems are amongst the most pressing issues to be resolved. However, we must note that despite the financial crisis, technical developments are taking place both at home and abroad that make the application of various modern scientific methods possible. Prominent amongst these are non-invasive methods – aerial photography, 3D scanning, geophysics, field walks – through which it is possible to increase the precision of archaeological indicators over a large area, simultaneously reducing the burden on the projects.

*The institutional problems of heritage preservation are also included in the issues of the profession – what do you think about this?*

With the dissolution of the Office of Cultural Heritage, heritage preservation was split into different branches institutionally, which has had negative consequences at least to the extent that the responsibility for it is divided between two ministries. Duties related to heritage preservation are split between the National Heritage Protection Centre, the Gyula Forster National Centre for Cultural Heritage Management and the Lajos Lechner Knowledge Center. Fortunately, the decades of cooperation between the coworkers now under the aegis of the successor organizations has helped in overcoming the initial difficulties.

The Centre is saddled with financial problems anyways and has been performing its work for years without state support. According to the promises of those with the responsibility for this in the government, they will settle the organization's budgetary issues by May. By all means, we would like to avoid more downsizing, as we have nearly 300 projects running parallel to one another. This amount of administration and professional work cannot be performed by a staff any smaller than the present.

*So again we come to financing problems – how do they manage this in western European countries and which model could Hungary follow?*

In France, for example, INRAP (Institut national de recherches archéologiques préventives) prepares the PADs and in this context performs the trial excavations as well, and all of this from the tax paid by the project investors! Every project throughout the country must pay 53 eurocents tax per square meter, which covers the expenses related to the INRAP PAD, and then they pay the full costs of the preventive archaeological excavations as well. Here at home a significantly simplified proposal similar to this was prepared, according to which the project backers would only have had to pay 1.5–2% of the total project investment as tax, from which, in contrast to the French model, the state would have provided the full costs of the excavations. This proposal would have resolved a great deal of the issues related to financing, but in the end it was not submitted to the government for debate. In my opinion even a tax below 1% would resolve the financing of the PAD and the related trial excavations, as well as the archaeological side of the preventive excavation, with the stipulation that the investor would have to provide the costs of manual or mechanical earthmoving work during the preventive excavation. This solution would encourage the investor to show self-restraint and perform the work efficiently. The backing for all of this is in place for the most part, because in particular for EU grant projects 5% of the funding support can be provided for preparatory work, so the necessary amount would be easily available.

*How is it possible to let it be known to the government and to society in general that it really is necessary to spend money for heritage preservation? What arguments can we use as evidence for how they deal with this issue in, say, England or the Netherlands?*

We need to raise the awareness of the people starting with schoolchildren that heritage preservation is in all of our interests, archaeologists and historic preservation experts work not for their own amusement, but for the good of the nation and society. Our built environment fundamentally defines our national identity, since we all have a connection to the landscape and cityscape. Tourists also for the most part come to Hungary so that in addition to relaxation they can see our architectural and natural treasures, in other words our cultural assets, not so that they can admire the factories or expressways we are building. Naturally the quality of the infrastructure also in many ways determines how comfortable foreigners feel, but fundamentally cultural tourism is interested in what is unique, what is characteristic only to us. I believe this motivation has sufficient weight in and of itself for us to understand why the preservation of our heritage for future generations is important.