

LATEST RESULTS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN THE 10TH-CENTURY MAROS ESTUARY

A review

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The series published by the Department of Archaeology of the Pázmány Péter Catholic University was expanded with a new volume in 2015, which was issued in conjunction with the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Research Centre for the Humanities Thematic Group for Hungarian Prehistory. With this new book, the series encompasses topics from the Hungarian Conquest Period and in part topics from Hungarian prehistory. On the cover there are color relief photographs of objects made using the 3D lacquer technique characteristic of the publication series, a grave drawing from an extraordinarily rich burial and the hypothetical reconstruction of the clothing from this burial. Readers hold in their hands an impressively well-made book of obvious high quality with front and back covers showing its title in two languages, and this quality continues in its internal content from the first page to the last.

In terms of its content, on the one hand, it contains in part the accounts on the materials from the published cemeteries on the western side of the mouth of the Maros River, which have been refined and supplemented quite a bit in places. On the other hand, it presents recent finds from the micro-region studied, and in the light of these it reexamines the conclusions that can be made in terms of the Conquest Period settlement history relationships for the area. The selection considerations for the six sites chosen for presentation and analysis are something new in Hungarian professional archaeological literature on the 10th century. The editors only featured sites that can be considered fully excavated according to our present-day conceptions, and radiocarbon dating and other bio-archaeological examinations have been performed on every grave. Thus, the analyses of these sites can be performed with maximum assurance according to current expectations and abilities. The re-presentation in part of the find materials, and in particular their reevaluation on the basis of greater information and the data from scientific examinations, now serves as an indispensable basis for the continuation of 10th-century research, not only for the region studied but also for areas further afield. The main content containing the essays ascribed to 16 authors – working in collaboration in all but one case – are followed by a separate bibliography, then a 12-page quite detailed summary in German that follows the chapter divisions, and finally an image chart presenting the finds, for the most part in colour illustrations.

The backbone of the volume is provided by the essay by Attila Türk and Gábor Lőrinczy, which provides data on archaeological and scientific findings on the 10th-century history of the western side of the mouth of the Maros River indicated in the title. Naturally, they do not merely report the information, but also provide an evaluation, setting it in its context. Following the introductory section in the initial portion



*Attila Türk – Gábor Lőrinczy –
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of the catalogue are the detailed presentations of six sites that up to this point have been known to the profession to varying extents. The presentation of each individual burial contains an introduction to each site and the find conditions followed by a description of the grave pit and human remains, the animal sacrifices if present and then the finds on the human remains and apparel goods, in that order. During the evaluation, the results of radiocarbon dating are emphasized from the start, being placed at the beginning of the grave descriptions. The authors feature the sites of Szeged-Kiskundorozsma-Hosszúhát-halom and Szeged-Kiskundorozsma-Hosszúhát separately, since in truth it cannot be proven that the graves located further apart from one another can be considered parts of a single cemetery. Moving on in the catalogue, the heretofore unpublished cemeteries of Szeged-Kiskundorozsma-Subasa and Szeged-Öthalom, Sandpit V follow, and then the cemetery of Zsombó-Bába-dűlő, which is covered in full detail for the first time here. The section is closed by the renewed presentation of the single male burial at Zsombó-Ménesjárs-dűlő (Kossuth u.), whose find registry has been available in print for a few years.

The extraordinarily thorough grave and object descriptions are followed by a list summarizing the other archaeological sites in this micro-region within a diameter of about 35-40 km, including data from the literature and in most cases a refinement of the previous data. This is followed by the detailed analysis of the sites reviewed, which within the outlining of the burial customs first touches upon the question of solitary graves and settlement cemeteries amongst the individual types of cemeteries. In connection with the latter, the authors establish that those cemetery sections of 2-6 graves where essentially only adult graves are known can probably be classified in this category. With respect to the burials, after the form of the grave pits is discussed, the regional variations of equestrian burials are introduced, both in relation to the horse bones and equestrian gear. It is pointed out that the placement of equestrian gear in the grave shows much lower variability than graves containing both horse bones and equestrian gear. The coins coming from the graves are analyzed in detail, grouped according to their function – placed in the mouth, covering the eyes or decorations on clothing or equestrian gear – which is followed by a discussion of offerings of food and drink, as well as coffins. The evaluation of the Szeged-Öthalom site is broken down in a similar way, but as a separate section. One of the sections of the essay that offers something new is comprised of the reconstruction of the apparel from grave 595 at Szeged-Kiskundorozsma-Hosszúhát. The authors consider the two types of small concentric fittings found at the shoulder and the upper arms – which research generally has referred to as clothing ornaments to this point – to be related to the ribbons laced into braids on the basis of the location of the finds observed in the grave, their organization and the remains of leather strips observed nearby. The hypothetical reconstruction drawing made of this can be seen on the back cover of the book.

Also relating to the issues of attire and burial customs is the assessment of the former appearance of the symbolic belt made for the grave, which has appeared previously in Hungarian research. In connection with grave 124 at Szeged-Öthalom found in 2009, a new, well documented example of bags with studded decoration is introduced. The ornamentation of this find is unique amongst studded bags known to this point in the Hungarian settlement area, and in addition it comes from a geographic area where until now no bags decorated with metal studs had been found. The location in the grave and the object type is presented separately for every analyzed phenomenon. Within the group of object types, our knowledge related to quivers is expanded considerably. Staying with object types, the possible former function of the twisted bronze wire from Zsombó-Ménesjárs-dűlő is discussed in a separate subsection. On the basis of analogies shown from the Carpathian Basin and a wider geographic overview for this previously unknown find, it has been hypothetically determined to be a part of a scourge or horse whip, however, in comparison to the Russian essay that previously dealt with this issue, the authors provide a slightly expanded analysis. A particular point of interest of the subsection is that by taking into account the results of the radiocarbon dating, the scourge or whip that this bronze wire was a part of came from the grave of a man who was presumably born in an area lying to the east of the Carpathians.

In the next subsection the authors survey the applicability of results from related fields from the point of view of archaeology. Although Hungarian archaeological literature on the Migration and Conquest Periods fortunately extends to the presentation of archaeometric and bioarchaeological research results, this essay is on the cutting edge, and this is one of its most significant results. Analysis of metals provides one of the

most important opportunities in this area, which in theory makes it possible to determine the origins of individual metal objects on the basis of a suitable control sample. If the studs were made using contemporary coins as their raw material and they were made without being remelted too many times or at too high temperatures, the coins used can be deduced through the detection of contaminants. In other words, following from this, *terminus post quem* data can be gained on each given grave, which, considering the difficulties of the relative chronology of the Conquest Period, could be a fundamental basis for a more certain dating. The authors, using not only the results from the micro-region they are studying but also those from previous analyses made at a German laboratory, show essentially all of the results to this point through tables that are clearly arranged. In addition to this, the examinations of material composition may be used to detect connections between individual sites. Furthermore, the authors draw attention to the need to consider not only the number of precious metal finds, but the ‘degree of purity’ of their raw materials in the archaeological evaluation of the ‘affluence’ of the graves, since the majority of cast metal objects are alloys.

The section dedicated to radiocarbon analysis forms a larger unit. In connection with the applicability of the procedure itself, a portion of the research represents a skeptical attitude, so the authors themselves emphasize that these measurements by themselves are not conclusive. It is an important step methodologically in the case of cemeteries that samples from every grave, or even multiple samples from each grave, as well as samples measured at multiple laboratories are reported, which in conjunction with the *terminus post quem* data from graves dated using coins can reinforce the faith in the utility of the method. They guide the reader in a slightly revised form compared to previously, re-examining their own earlier findings about the potential inherent in the procedure, as well as both the possibilities and difficulties regarding the evaluation of the results. In the wake of these analyses it was possible to show a difference of about half a century – which was not reflected clearly in the archaeological source material – between the two groups of graves excavated on the territory of the Szeged-Öthalom, Sandpit V site. The subsection is closed by the evaluation of the anthropological and archaeogenetic analyses. A particular point of interest in the latter is that it is from here that one of the cases of the burial of a mother and child at different cemeteries lying far from one another has been shown in the 10th-century Carpathian Basin.

The final subsection contains the comprehensive evaluation of settlement history for the micro-region, based on the results shown to this point. It outlines the factors of the physical geographical conditions affecting settlement, followed by the settlement history of the preceding Avar Period and the 9th century. On the basis of the radiocarbon data, they raise the possibility for the settlement of the Hungarians at the end of the 9th century, as early as the 860s and 870s. The authors point out that we know of many burials that, although they have scanty grave goods, do contain 9th-century coins, and radiocarbon dating could provide important data for this issue. In the wake of the analysis of the archaeological and anthropological find materials in the micro-region, we may need to consider the settlement of groups from the north on the basis of the authors’ seemingly well-founded reasoning.

The essay is closed by 157 illustrations, the significant majority of which are in colour or partially in colour. Colour photographs and drawings of the graves and objects are shown side by side in the illustrations, with the photographs and individual detail drawings often supplemented by drawings displaying and interpreting individual grave goods by the use of differing colours. Images showing the location of individual sites on three-dimensional illustrations of the terrain are outstandingly informative, and these are finished by graphics showing the calibrated results of radiocarbon measurements.

The abundant appendices of the book are comprised of another nine essays, which present a broad spectrum of results from numismatics, archaeometrics, anthropology and archaeozoology to interested readers based on the finds from the micro-region being studied. First, Simon Coupland and Luca Gianazza survey the Frankish coins from 10th-century graves – not only those found in the Hungarian settlement area – on the basis of Western European coins at the Szeged-Öthalom cemetery. The essay has significance in the history of research, since it is the most extensive evaluation to date in the study of Carolingian Period numismatics, or rather its wandering money from a western viewpoint. Its main intention is to strive to narrow the time coins linked merely to years of rule were struck through the determination of mint sites and also show the

possible history and path of these leading to their inclusion in the grave.

In the section on materials analysis it is first the essay by László Csedreki – Susanne Greiff – Péter Langó – Florian Störbele – Attila Türk that summarizes the available materials analysis results – in part already published and in part not yet reported – available on Conquest Period objects made from precious metals, thus making them available for future research. In their study, the review of the production technology for silver objects is provided in more detail, and this is information that is useful from the aspect of materials analysis as well. As a result of their work it was possible to delineate groups – in some cases for objects with different functions – on the basis of their material composition, which then also raises the possibility for their origins from a common source. Of these authors, the next essay is linked to the names of László Csedreki, Péter Langó and Attila Türk, and it introduces the reader to the comparative methodological analysis of XRF and PIXE procedures performed on Conquest Period silver objects, with the goal of determining the possible relationship of certain mounts and contemporary coins.

The essays of the anthropology section are opened by Antónia Marcsik's elaboration of the cemetery excavated at the Szeged-Öthalom, Sandpit V site, which alongside the description of the main characteristics of the skeletons discovered, also touches upon the practice of trepanation in a bit more detail and the possible value of this intervention. The published conclusion worthy of note from the archaeogenetic examination results by Aranka Csósz and Balázs Gusztáv Mende at the Szeged-Kiskundorozsma-Hosszúhát and the Szeged-Öthalom cemeteries, is that no maternal link can be found amongst the deceased at the two cemeteries. At the same time, no less interesting is the probability of a mother-child relationship between the child buried in grave 236 at Öthalom and one of the female deceased at the Harta-Freifelt cemetery that lies about 80 km away as the bird flies.

Antónia Marcsik, Zsuzsanna Just and Ferenc Szalai provide an anthropological analysis of two important cemeteries from the area of the mouth of the Maros River. However, due to the retention of the Szeged-Algyő source basis and to a lesser extent that of Sándorfalva-Eperjes, the analysis was only able to provide limited results. Despite the objective difficulties, they found that both cemeteries were used by a fragmented population, not a closed community. In addition to the lack of newborns – which could be traced back to various reasons – this is supported by the disproportionate representation of genders and the abnormally early deaths. Worthy of attention is the higher proportion of battle wounds observed on the males buried at the Szeged-Algyő cemetery, and the community's skill in healing, which in the case of both groups is shown in the support for the sick and wounded members of the community. On the basis of the examination of the skull remains from the aforementioned two cemeteries, László Szathmáry, Gábor Holló and Antónia Marcsik analyze the wider relationships of the communities in the Great Hungarian Plain, establishing that the two communities primarily show similarities with the contemporary populations of the southern area east of the Tisza River and the area between the Danube and Tisza rivers. Through the reporting of the anthropological materials in the area across from the mouth of the Maros River, Antónia Marcsik provides a coherent analysis of the population living in the area in the 10th century. The book is closed by István Vörös's archaeozoological essay, which contains the examination of the animal bones from the 10th-century graves in the aforementioned micro-region, showing their characteristics by species. This extends not only to the method of their placement in the grave, but in the case of food offerings also defining the individual processing units, or hypothesizing on their method of preparation and placement in the grave. At the end of the essay can be found a detailed description of the animal bone finds discovered at the Szeged-Öthalom, Sandpit V site.

The overt objective of the work was to provide a basis for comparison for the further continuation of micro-regional research, whether in geographic proximity to the region presented or further away. In this it was also successful without doubt, since the study integrates well into the context of strengthening regional analyses within Conquest Period research in the last 20 years, which is leading step by step to the ever more complete understanding of the period.

The overlapping information in places actually strengthen the findings in the book, and its usefulness is in no way reduced by the few insignificant errors that for the most part must have popped up in the final version due to the vagaries of printing technology.