

## EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF ARCHAEOLOGISTS 2020, VIRTUAL ANNUAL MEETING – REPORT ON A VIRTUAL INTERNATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE AND THE HUNGARIAN PARTICIPATION

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*A report penned by the organizers on the preparations for the 26th annual meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA) slated to take place in August of 2020 in Budapest appeared in the [spring issue](#) of Hungarian Archaeology. We wrote that about 2,600 applications for presentations or posters had been received for the 220 sections that had been announced. It was quite probable that the second largest gathering in the history of the EAA, after the 24th meeting in Barcelona in 2018, would be held in Budapest.*

However, everything changed suddenly in the middle of March. Due to the appearance of the COVID-19 virus and the rapid increase in the number of infections, our country and essentially all of Europe was forced into quarantine, along with a major portion of the rest of the world. Our previous lifestyle was altered, our earlier routines ceased, and suddenly everything became uncertain and unpredictable. Under these circumstances, we needed to make responsible decisions in terms of the future. The executive board and administrative staff of the EAA, constantly coordinating with the organizing committee in Budapest, published its resolution on the 21st of April. According to this, in consideration of the situation that had developed, it would not be possible to hold the conference in Budapest in 2020, but instead this opportunity would again be given to us in 2022. A decision was also made that the annual meeting would be held in Kiel in 2021 and in Belfast in 2023.

Already at that time, an outline emerged of the determined intention of the executive board of the EAA, and in particular its president Felipe Criado-Boado, to do everything possible so that 2020 would not be a “lost year” in the life of the EAA. A statement was published at the end of May that announced the solution that had been found, launching the organization of the EAA *Virtual Annual Meeting* (VAM). For this to happen, 150 of the previously reported sections and about 1,800 of the speakers agreed that they would be ready to make their presentations at this unusual and novel conference to be held virtually. Although life slowed down for a moment in the spring due to the pandemic, it then continued to flow within the altered context, and so the demand for the profession to be informed about current research and to discuss its results remained.

### EAA VAM – CONFERENCE IN A VIRTUAL SPACE

Logically, this conference took place within the scientific framework that had already been developed. It retained its slogan: *Networking*, combined with a new logo (Fig. 1), the dates did not change, the main topics and the related keynote speakers were retained, and a significant portion of the members of the Scientific Committee also decided that they would continue their work and support the successful realization of the VAM with all their strength. One of the reasons for the increasing success of the annual conferences of the EAA is that the people like to meet with one another, get to know each other, talk, discuss, jointly discover new places in the world, drink coffee, beer or wine together, dance with



1. kép. EAA 2020 VAM logo (Forrás: EAA2020 weboldal)

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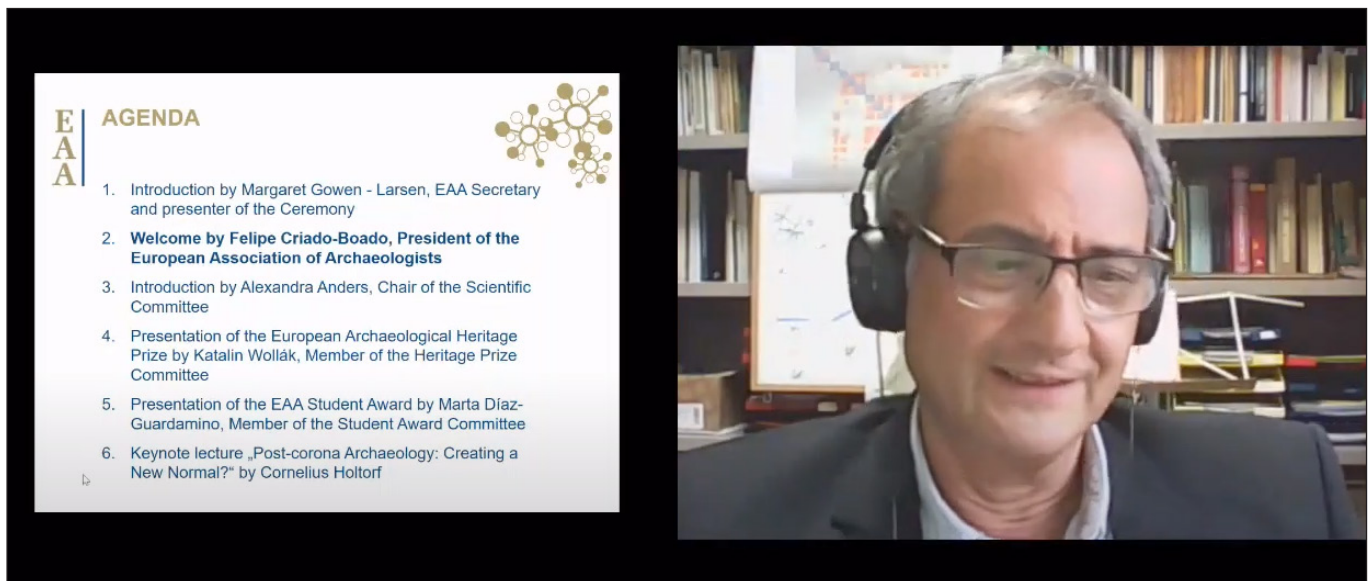


Fig. 2. Screenshot of the opening ceremonies (Photograph: Katalin Wollák)

one another, and the list could go on and on. The VAM either could not provide all of these opportunities, or only offer them to a limited degree, so the scientific role of the conference became even more emphasized. This is clearly indicated by the fact that numerous organizers decided that they would cancel their sections or postpone them to the next year. Despite this, 180 of the presenters from these cancelled sections decided that they would still like to participate in the conference with their presentations or posters. It was the job of the Scientific Committee to organize thematic groups from these presentations and delegate chairpersons to conduct these sections (#s500–519).

The opening ceremonies for the 26th annual conference took place on the 24th of August 2020, and more than 400 participants followed this event online. It retained the usual choreography (Fig. 2), but was held in a shorter amount of time. The organization's Heritage Prize was also announced, which Gilly Carr (University of Cambridge) won in the individual category, and *REMAINS of Greenland program and network* won in the institutional category. Finally, we were able to hear Cornelius Holtorf's (Linnaeus University, Kalmar) extremely topical and thought-provoking speech entitled, *Post-corona Archaeology: Creating a New Normal?*, in which he talked about the impact of the COVID-19 virus on archaeology and what lessons can be taken from this in terms of our present and future circumstances.

Finally, between the 24th and 30th of August 2020, about 1,420 presentations were given in 167 sections; the event was followed online by ca. 1800 participants. The sections had, on average, 31 participants (KvĚTINOVÁ 2020). The arrangement of the conference followed the usual order, the work took place in the sections between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. and the presentations were 15 minutes long. The chairpersons conducting the sections were entrusted with the decisions of when to take breaks and when to provide time for discussion, while the organizers saw to updating the daily program and publicizing it. There was also an [keynote lecturer](#) every day, presenting their talk in the virtual space of Hopin software's "stage" platform.

A customary part of the EAA's annual meeting is also the FAIR. This year, the exhibitors were able to participate within the platform on a separate channel. They were comprised mostly of publishers, and it was possible to visit them anytime and shop at a discounted price. The stands of varying sizes provided by the EAA were represented by advertising space, which every exhibiting representative strove to utilize to the greatest extent. Despite this, besides the lack of face-to-face encounters and evening programs, the publishers were perhaps affected the most negatively by this virtual conference. This was not just in a material sense, but also in a figurative way, since the FAIR usually occurs in a large communal space, and the coffee breaks are often connected with this site. Therefore, it is usually where personal encounters and discussions occurred in part, allowing the publishers to exchange words with the authors, editors and of course the professional audience. Unfortunately, this could not take place at all, and the provision of live-stream time

in the online space could not replace this, because without the busy program and face-to-face contact, the participants either did not or only rarely made use of this opportunity. The content of the advertising spaces and watching the often quite enjoyable short videos could not replace the experience of picking up a book and paging through it and exchanging information.

## TECHNICAL SUPPORT

To host the virtual conference, the executive board of the EAA selected the Hopin platform, which was previously unknown to many of us. Although the Hopin platform did not have some customary features present in other similar programs for virtual teamwork, it was able to handle several dozen sections running side-by-side at the same time. It was possible to join these sections as a listener or a commenter essentially without notice, which was much more pleasant and smoother than slipping in or out of a presentation through the creaky doors at a real conference. It was outstanding that the capacity of the platform did not limit the number of participants. Several hundred people arriving from various points on the globe at once could follow and comment on the events in real time. The posters were uploaded to a repository available to everyone, and there was an opportunity in a few sections for people to introduce themselves.

The communication between the speakers and the audience, the organizers and the volunteers for the most part took place effectively and quickly on the chat lines.

The system was even able to simulate the bustling atmosphere and unexpected encounters of the receptions to a certain extent; the software randomly brought together two registered participants for 3-5 minutes, then after this link was ended, the Hopin program selected another familiar or unfamiliar participant (it is an accidental and telling coincidence that the platform calls this portion “networking”). At this time, it was possible for the participants to talk with one another and have a brief conversation about the profession.

## PARTICIPATION OF ARCHAEOLOGISTS FROM HUNGARY

Members of the Scientific Committee were Erszébet Jerem (Archaeolingua), Attila Kreiter (Hungarian National Museum), Zsófia Rácz (Eötvös Loránd University) and Csilla Zatykó (Research Center for the Humanities, Institute of Archaeology), and its chair was Alexandra Anders (Eötvös Loránd University), who also spoke at the opening ceremonies.

The screenshot displays a virtual conference interface. The main window shows a presentation slide titled "Focus of the Bronze Age genomic researches". The slide content is organized into three columns: "Slovakia and Austria", "Western Hungary (Transdanubia)", and "Eastern Hungary (Alföld)".

Slovakia and Austria	Western Hungary (Transdanubia)	Eastern Hungary (Alföld)	Time Period
Chopice-Veselce	Vülföldi	Baden	3000/2900 BC
Nitra	Somogyvár-Vinkovci	Makó	2700/2500 BC
Únec	Gáta	Nagybánya	2200/2100 BC
Mad'arovce-Vetelov	Transdanubian Engraved Pottery	Maros	2000/1900 BC
	Tumulus	Füzesabony / Otomani	1600/1500 BC
	Urnfield	Pre-Gáva	1200/1100 BC
	Halstatt	Gáva	900/850 BC
		Presnyčan	

On the right side of the interface, there is a chat window with several messages from participants. The interface also includes a top navigation bar with "EAA 2020 Virtual Annual Meeting" and "European Association of Archaeologists", and a bottom status bar showing the time as 18:07 on 2020.08.03.

Fig. 3. Screenshot of Anna Szécsényi-Nagy's speech (Source: <http://mobilitas.ri.btk.mta.hu/>)



Traditionally the organization's European Archaeological Heritage Prize is handed over and the award winners are introduced at the [opening ceremonies](#), and this year the honor of performing this duty was given to Katalin Wollák, a member of the Heritage Committee.

To my great joy, I was able to introduce a young Hungarian researcher as the keynote speaker for Wednesday, Anna Szécsényi-Nagy (Eötvös Loránd Research Network, Institute of Archaeology). She summarized her most recent research results entitled *Prehistory of the Carpathian Basin from the Perspective of Archaeogenetics* (Fig. 3).

From Hungary, 112 persons registered for the conference, making our group the fifth largest after the UK, Germany, Italy and Spain (KVĚTINOVÁ 2020). Our archaeologists initiated the organization of 22 sections,<sup>2</sup> which covered a wide spectrum of research topics stretching from prehistory to the Middle Ages and from archaeology to heritage preservation (according to the document that regulates the annual meetings of the EAA, a section may be initiated by at least two researchers coming from different countries) (Kiss & KASZTOVSZKY 2020). Archaeologists linked to Hungarian institutions – university departments, research institutes, museums and heritage preservation organizations – were registered as the primary authors of 81 presentations (Figs. 4–5) and many others took part in presentations.<sup>3</sup> Alexandra Anders, Dávid Bartus, Zsolt Mester, Zsófia Rácz, Vajk Szeverényi, and Katalin Wollák agreed to chair and conduct the general sections.

The [Momentum Mobility Research Group](#), the [Eötvös Loránd Research Network Institute of Archaeology](#) and the [Eötvös Loránd University Faculty of Humanities, Institute of Archaeology](#) have also reported on the participation of their colleagues through their own channels.

<sup>2</sup> The sections were the following: #s45: Current research on Bronze and Iron Ages hoards (Marcin Maciejewski, János Gábor Tarbay, Kamil Nowak), #s46: Interaction in action: human and societal adaptability in response to changes in climate and environment in Medieval Europe (Kjetil Loftsgarden, Eva Svensson, László Ferenczi, Frode Iversen); #s63: The archaeology of the sky (Emilia Pásztor, Marc Frincu), #s106: Archaeology of the Silk Road: ancient pathway to the modern world (Branka Franicevic, Krisztina Hoppál), #s135: Archaeogenetics, the real meaning: towards synergies between genetics and archaeology (Anna Szécsényi-Nagy, Alissa Mittnik, Maite Rivollat, Stefanie Eisenmann, Karina Gerdau), #s185: Morphological diversity in archaeology. Data exploration and visualization by geometric morphometrics (Péter Csippán, Antony Borel), #s211: Truly interdisciplinary science! Ceramic, metal, glass, and stone provenancing studies as tools to understand the archaeology of trade and exchange (Evelyn Godfrey, Ineke Joosten, Heide Nørgaard, Zsolt Kasztovszky), #s218–219: Archaeology in 3D – new technologies for old questions. Part 1–2 (András Patay-Horváth, Sorin Hermon, Erzsébet Jerem), #s234: Collapse in the basin: regional perspectives on the 1500-1200 BC transition in the Carpathian Basin (Györgyi Parditka, Paul Duffy, Vajk Szeverényi, Dragan Jovanović, Barry Molloy), #s263: From fragmented artefacts to household activities. Potentials of household archaeology in settlement research (Dóra Szabó, Eszter Soós, Jonas Gregorio de Souza), #s279: Neolithic and Bronze Age tells and their networks in the Carpathian Basin and beyond (Klára Pusztainé Fischl, Tobias Kienlin, András Füzesi, Knut Rassmann, Eszter Bánffy), #s293: Round around the circle – circular phenomena and their meanings in European prehistory (Judit P. Barna, Emilia Pásztor, Klára Pusztainé Fischl, Tamás Pusztai, Jaromír Kovárník), #s299: Routed archaeology – archaeological routes and their impact on perception of archaeological heritage in the landscape (Marko Mele, Szilvia Fábián, Sanjin Mihelić), #s356: Mobility and population transformation in the Migration Period and Early Middle Ages: changing societies and identities (Corina Knipper, Tivadar Vida, Daniel Winger), #s376: Networks and mobility in the 3rd-2nd millennium BCE between the Middle-Danube and the Adriatic area: new ideas and interdisciplinary approaches (Claudio Cavazzuti, Alberta Arena, Mario Gavranović, Viktória Kiss, Mathias Mehofer), #s391: Prehistory, archaeology and archaeologists as reflected in school books and curricula (Katalin Bozóki-Ernyey, Jean-Paul Demoule, Michał Pawleta), #s400: Late Neanderthals of the Middle Danube basin in Central European context: cultural variability, interregional contacts, developmental capacities [PAM] (Zsolt Mester, Agnès Lamotte, Andrzej Wiśniewski), #s402: The imitation game: investigating the who, what, why, where and when of imitative coins (David Wigg-Wolf, István Vida, Jens Moesgaard), #s438: Archaeology and its political uses: historical, historiographic and ideological discourses (József Laszlovszky, Benedek Varga, Petar Parvanov), #s455: Knapp, knapp – who's there? Lithics and their interpretational attributes (Aleksandra Klecha, Diana-Mariuca Vornicu, Kristóf Szegedi), #s458: Interdisciplinarity in the archaeological research of religious phenomena (Ágnes Gresz, Dragos Gheorghiu, Tünde Horváth), #s462: The Mongol invasion of Central and Eastern Europe: archaeological and historical interpretations (Stephen Pow, József Laszlovszky), #s470: Non-invasive regional survey strategies: discussing the methodological golden mean (Gábor Mesterházy, Piotr Wroniecki, Koller Melinda), #s517: "More than just bones" – understanding past human behaviour through the study of human remains (Vajk Szeverényi). A short report in *Archaeometriai Műhely* discusses the sections organized by Hungarian archaeologists (Kiss & KASZTOVSZKY 2020).

<sup>3</sup> The data reflects the situation on 26 August 2020: <https://www.e-a-a.org/EAA2020virtual/Programme>

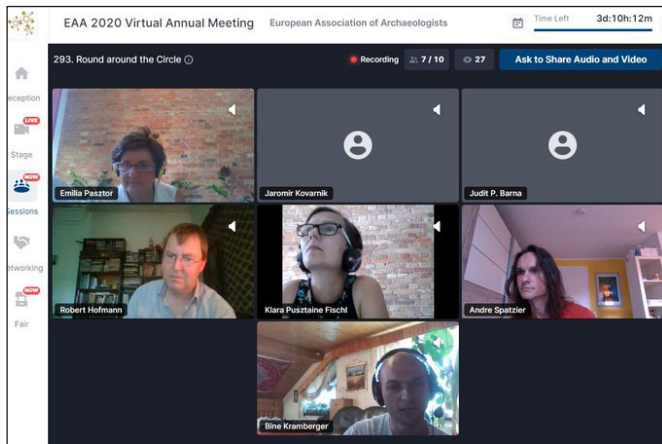


Fig. 4. Screenshot of section 293  
(Photograph: Felipe Criado-Boado, Twitter)



Fig. 5. The participants in section 297 in Budapest  
(Photograph: Tamás Pusztai)

The organization of every annual meeting would be inconceivable without the work of volunteers, and the work of the VAM was assisted by two Eötvös Loránd University scholarship PhD students, Anita Benes and Szilvia Johácz. <sup>4</sup>

A convincing majority of the members' general assembly of the EAA held on the 28th of August elected Eszter Bánffy, the director of the DAI Römisch-Germanische Kommission in Frankfurt, as president for the cycle beginning in 2021. Until then, she will take part in the work of the organization as the incoming president. In her, Hungarian archaeological research has gained a steady representative and supporter, "a true European archaeologist", as she stated while still a nominee in her introductory message.

## LESSONS AND THE FUTURE

The VAM has clearly justified those who were brave and were willing to make a go of this unknown initiative. They were justified by the large number of participants and their engagement in the talks and at other events, by the fact that it went off essentially without a hitch, and by the dependable technical support (the challenges that arose were no more than what are confronted by a genuine conference). As Felipe Criado-Boado stated, "*We weren't in the same place, but at the same time we were all in the same place*". The general opinion was that it was a perfect solution for the extraordinary circumstances and much was learned that can be utilized in the future as well, but we hope that from now on we will be able to get back to the usual form of the other 25 traditionally staged annual meetings of the EAA.

The majority of the presentations that were given were recorded and are continuously being uploaded onto the [Youtube channel of the EAA](#), where a portion of the talks from previous years can also be viewed.

The EAA 2020 VAM was so successful that the idea even came up that the future meetings of the EAA could be organized virtually alongside the actual conference. However, this initiative does not account for the fact that digital conferences also have expenses (which the EAA covered in this case from annual membership fees) and requires significant work from the organizers, which for the most part places a great burden that cannot be shared on a few people. In addition, the face-to-face contact, the charm of the sites and the real experience – everything that makes these meetings truly unforgettable – is lacking in this form. During the planning phase and for the duration of the meeting, the staff working at the EAA center in Prague (Katka Kleinová, Sylvie Květinová, Krisztina Pavličková, as well as Alena Lokajickova and Miloš Roháček) handled all the issues through great effort and professionalism to ensure the VAM would take place without any problems – and so I would hereby like to express my gratitude.

The [conference for the next year](#) is being organized by the University of Kiel and in 2022 it will hopefully be held in the real world in Budapest.

<sup>4</sup> For their report (in Hungarian), see: <http://regeszeti.elte.hu/wordpress/index.php/2020/09/16/onkenteskent-az-eaa-2020-on/>

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