

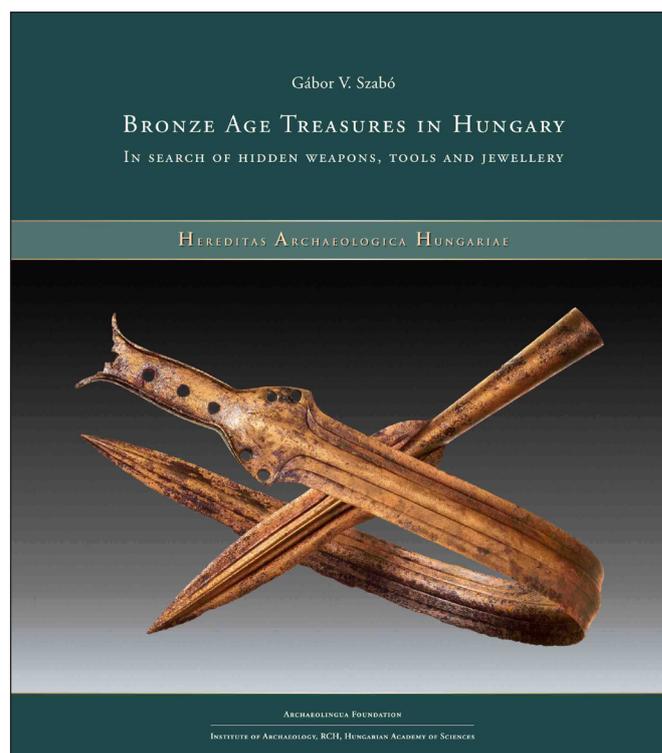
BOOK REVIEW:

Gábor V. Szabó: *Bronze Age Treasures in Hungary. The Quest for Buried Weapons, Tools and Jewellery*

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Depots of metal objects form fundamental sources of knowledge of past populations, both in terms of the representation of their artefacts, production processes and long-distance contacts, as well as in terms of understanding their social relationships and symbolic behavior. Mass finds can help us with the knowledge of the range of products of ancient populations as well as their relationship to the landscape, and they can further contribute to the identification of crafts workshops, market centers, long-distance roads and sacred places. By far the largest number of non-coin metal hoards comes from the Bronze Age, including thousands of mass finds of metal objects (mainly bronze and copper, but also gold and other metals) that have appeared throughout Central Europe. Their number has been growing in recent decades, but at the same time this comes due to illegal looting using metal detectors and results in an equally significant decrease in these often quite extraordinary components and the loss of scientific knowledge. Gábor V. Szabó was aware of this and took an active role in improving this unfortunate situation. He created a long-term project for rescue, protection and preventive surveys on selected sites, thanks to which he has managed since 2006 to save 39 hoards mainly from the Urn-field period and the Early Iron Age and thousands of individual metal finds. These are artefacts that would otherwise likely have ended up on the black market and in private collections. The results of this highly individual project are now being made available to the general public in the book being reviewed here.



Gábor V. Szabó: *Bronze Age Treasures in Hungary. The Quest for Buried Weapons, Tools and Jewellery*
Budapest, Archaeolingua, 2019

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with color and grayscale illustrations,
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At first glance, the book impresses with its high-quality appearance, full of beautiful photographs, drawings and plans. This fact will certainly contribute to the attractiveness of the book to the general public. However, the publication is above all a valuable overview of the recently rescued depots and the circumstances of their discovery, which are often unique. This is what makes these hoards different from most depots found in both the past and the present-day without the presence of an archaeologist. The reader learns, for example, about hoards from the areas of settlements and fortifications, from caves and the open countryside. At the same time, the presence of depots often significantly aids in interpreting a given site, as Gábor V. Szabó convincingly demonstrates through many examples. We are able to see a settlement on an island in the Tisza River at Baks-Temető-part in a new light, for example. This site contained three depots and

more than 2,500 individual bronze artefacts, indicating the site must have been a central settlement with concentrated production and trade, and which was probably suddenly and violently destroyed. Three hoards found individually in a field near the village of Pázmándfalu contained extraordinary equipment for warriors, including fragments of a bronze cuirass and a helmet, and show a ritual deposit related to the hero's cult. Other depots were undoubtedly connected to various religious rituals, again in various places. This is indicated by treasures of a votive nature from some highland settlements or hillforts, as well as a hoard of two swords from a seemingly indistinct flat landscape near the village of Mezőberény. The latter could be related to the symbolic demarcation of a newly colonized area. The book also includes some exceptional sets both in terms of find locations and artefact composition (e.g. hoards of gold products from the Baradla Cave, horse bridles and harnesses from one site near Szilvásvár or a depot of seven extraordinarily large fishing hooks from the hillfort near Telkibánya), as well as features related with depots (such as an structure artificially created from earthworks in the form of an animal, perhaps a horse, near the Szilvásvár-Kelemenszéke fort, where two depots were found and where there are several groups of perhaps contemporary mounds in the vicinity).

The advantages of this publication include its clarity together with a demonstration of the variability of individual hoards – their size, composition, find circumstances, relationship to the surrounding landscape and settlements of their time, as well as their possible interpretations. The book is divided into 5 basic chapters according to possible interpretations of the meaning of the hoards. These represent examples of depots with possible sacred or ritual significance, hoards consisting of unclaimed property after the violent destruction of a site, depots from fortifications that demonstrate the social status of their owners, finds from the edges of settlements and depots associated with a ritualized landscape. Each of these chapters is divided into several subchapters that report on specific sites, listing the find circumstances of the hoard or hoards and briefly describing their composition and relationship to the site as well as providing a possible interpretation of the hoards. Everything is complemented by a great deal of high-quality photographic and planning documentation from the field, as well as photographs and/or drawings of similarly high quality depicting the artefacts that were found.

These passages are preceded by an introductory chapter, aptly titled “Treasure Hunters”, in which the reader is provided with a relatively rich history of the knowledge of Bronze Age depots in Hungary and the problem of the current looting of these sites by amateurs. The author also presents his research project here, the most interesting results of which are then published in the following chapters. The book concludes with a summary chapter, which lists, among other things, all possible interpretations for the hoards included in the publication and their significance for understanding this pan-European phenomenon.

There is practically nothing that can be faulted in this book that has been very well and honestly produced. A foreign reader would perhaps welcome a simple table showing the current periodization of the Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age in Hungary, including a chronological delineation of the individual stages and phases. This would avoid the possibility of certain misunderstandings, when, for example, the findings from the 9th century BC are repeatedly cited by the author as finds from the beginning of the Iron Age, while in the reviewer's country (Bohemia) they would be included in the Final Bronze Age (Ha B3). The title of the book does not fully correspond to its content, because in it we read only about depots from the Late and Final Bronze Age to the beginning of the Early Iron Age, but not about hoards from the earlier phases of the Bronze Age. However, these criticisms are only small details in the overall very positive tone of the whole work.

The latest publication by Gábor V. Szabó will certainly find its audience not only among specialists in Bronze Age hoards, but also among the general public due to its character. At the same time, it will be appreciated by foreign researchers, for whom it provides an overview in a basic form of many extraordinary ensembles with their rich informative value. I believe that the book will not only find an audience, but also followers; it will become an inspiration for other archaeologists to carry out similar field rescue or preventive surveys and to make them available to the public in a similar form. Depots from the Bronze Age and other eras certainly deserve this attention.