

BOOK REVIEW: KELTA FALU GYŐR HATÁRÁBAN (A CELTIC VILLAGE IN NORTH-WEST HUNGARY), BY KÁROLY TANKÓ

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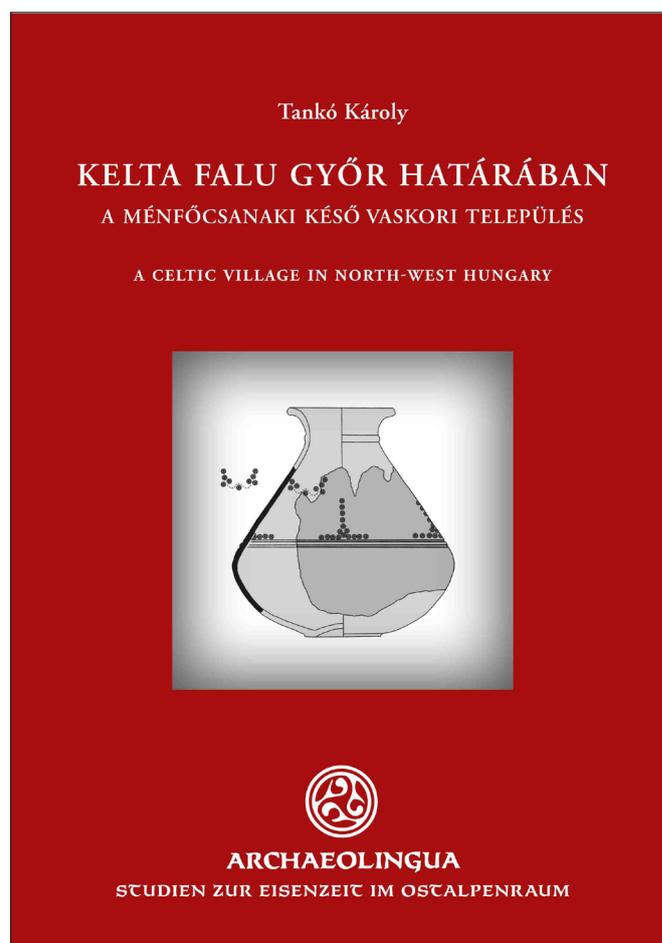
The book presents finds from the Late Iron Age settlement excavated at Ménfőcsanak, in the vicinity of Győr, as well as their evaluation, providing a comprehensive overview on the life of communities in the 4th–3rd centuries BC.

Research into the Late Iron Age in the past decades in Hungary have yielded multiple archaeological monographies, providing an increasingly detailed overview on Celtic material culture, settlement structure and funerary rites as well as the Late Iron Age of the Carpathian Basin in general. These volumes include the monographies written on the settlement excavated at Sajópetri (SZABÓ 2007) as well as the cemeteries excavated at Ludas (SZABÓ 2012) and at Sajópetri (SZABÓ 2018). The author of the volume presented here, Károly Tankó, was a recurring collaborator of all these works.

The Iron Age settlement at Ménfőcsanak is not a novelty in scholarly literature, as numerous details were published following the series of excavations conducted between 1993 and 1998. As the author himself puts it in the foreword, due to the ongoing nature of excavations, the state of the site presented in the book is subject to change. Nonetheless, by virtue of its complexity, the settlement part presented in the volume enables a comprehensive reconstruction of the whole settlement, including drafting the road system, economical facilities, edifices and the relations between them. The academic value of the book is further increased by the fact, that contemporary to its publication, Andrea Vaday and Károly Tankó examined and published the features of the related cemetery in an extensive article (VADAY & TANKÓ 2020).

The author was introduced to the find material as a student, which later on formed the groundwork for his doctoral dissertation he defended in 2005. Afterwards, he participated in processing pottery recovered from the settlement at Sajópetri and acquainted himself with its unique methodology, which is becoming increasingly popular nowadays when dealing with pottery from Late Iron Age settlements. However, in case of the settlement at Ménfőcsanak, the author utilised a rather classical typology, which he justified in his foreword.

The sectioning of the volume, the system of its chapters and subchapters render it a forthright handbook. The foreword and the introduction are followed by the general presentation of the site and its research his-



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tory (19 pages), and the catalogue of features and artifacts (88 pages). The next chapter covers settlement features (19 pages) and archaeological finds (63 pages), the subsequent chapter is titled “Evaluation” (16 pages), providing a joint interpretation and synthesis of previous contents. The volume is concluded by the short chapter titled “Summary”, which is a brief, clearly phrased and unannotated epitome of the previous “Evaluation” chapter, aimed perhaps at the layman. The 18-page-long abstract in English was set before the Bibliography and the Tables not as a chapter but as a standalone part of the volume. An appropriate measure, since this section may as well serve as an independent study, by virtue of its dimension and scope. Complete with bibliographical annotations and references to the bilingual figures and tables, it thoroughly evinces conclusions drawn from the examination of the settlement and places them in a broader geographical context.

Chapter 1, illustrated with military survey maps and regional riverbed changes, presents the climate, hydrography, topography and ecosystem of Ménfőcsanak, located near Győr. This chapter is concluded by research history and research methodology. Archaeological features and finds are presented in detail in a separate catalogue, with figures depicting each feature. The most significant finds are presented on tables placed at the end of the volume.

The analytical section of the book begins with the third chapter. Following a brief outlook on research history, the author interprets and classifies the 17 pit houses discovered at Ménfőcsanak according to the typology established by László Horváth and Raimund Karl. Afterwards, he sums up archaeological information on the architectural features of these edifices (namely floors, hearths and entrances) and proposes novel findings concerning their orientation. However, taking into account the chronological differences between individual pit houses, the lack of their more detailed function, the population deduced from their base area is plausibly incorrect. The author dedicated a lengthy section to the theoretical reconstruction of semi-subterranean structures, which is also a reconsideration of his article published in 2004 in light of recent similar experiments and received critical remarks. The second subchapter of Chapter 3 reviews surface roundhouses. Based on ethnographical analogies, the author rightly assumes that at least some of these buildings served economic purposes. The chapter is concluded by the analysis of pits, wells, and ditches.

Chapter 4 recounts archaeological find material, starting with the most extensive type, which is pottery, inspecting technological characteristics (inclusions, shaping, surface treatment and firing), forms and decorations. Of the typical ceramic small finds from Late Iron Age settlements, clay weights, spindle whorls, tokens were discovered at Ménfőcsanak. The generally scarce metal finds included Dux and Münsingen type brooches, as well as fragments of bracelets, an anklet and torques made of bronze and iron, and various tools (awls, knives, clasps, axes etc.). Stone tools, two glass beads and a few bone tools were also uncovered at the settlement.

Observations ascertaining the presence of industrial activities in a primarily agrarian village, were paramount in case of the Late Iron Age settlement at Ménfőcsanak. Based on graphite substances discovered on site, the author concluded that Ménfőcsanak played an important role in graphite trade and functioned either as a destination or some sort of distribution centre.

Chapter 5 discusses the structure and chronology of the settlement, as well as its relationship to the cemetery excavated nearby. Concerning the arrangement of buildings, the author notes that similarly to numerous other contemporary settlements, functional groups can be observed at Ménfőcsanak, separated by ditches and corrals. Based on mostly pottery finds a few of chronologically relevant iron objects, it can be ascertained that the settlement was established in the LT B1 phase, in the first half of the 4th century BC, and was abandoned either at the end of LT B2 phase or the beginning of the LT C1 phase, at the end of the 3rd century BC, similarly to the nearby cemetery of 277 graves, located approximately half a kilometre away.

By publishing the Celtic village at Ménfőcsanak, Károly Tankó enriched the scholarly literature of the Late Iron Age with an impactful piece of work. The method by which the research was presented is professional and coherent. His conclusions and findings complement our understanding on Late Iron Age settlements.

Furthermore, in keeping with the traditions of Archaeolingua Publishing, the second volume of the in-house series “Studien zur Eisenzeit im Ostalpenraum” conforms to the high standards set by other volumes by the publishing house. The volume is available as a large format hardcover, typical for academic

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titles. It has a reader-friendly typesetting, complemented by inset images. Chapter and subchapter divisions facilitate using it as a handbook. As the author himself phrased it in his foreword, “the book is aimed both at laymen and at the international academic community”.

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