

ARCHAEOLOGY DURING THE PANDEMIC

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Archaeological activities continued to be pursued in the Déri Museum during the Covid-19 pandemic. Various excavation projects in Debrecen were resumed and even a small exhibition was arranged. The museum also laid emphasis on being present online, and national and international projects also continued.

At the time of the pandemic's first wave, several development-led excavations conducted by the museum's Archaeology Department were in progress and thus we were continuously engaged in fieldwork during the first wave. Archaeological work associated with the greenfield investment of the BMW Group in the North-Western Economic Zone (ÉNYGÖ) of Debrecen was continued. A total of fifteen sites were registered on the 400 hectares large investment area. The excavations indicated the dominance of two main archaeological periods. The Deák-tanya 1 site was an extensive and intensely occupied settlement, a rural village dating from the late Roman Imperial period (late fourth–early fifth century AD) with a rich variety of settlement features such as houses, storage pits, clay extraction pits, smoking installations, ditches and ovens. The settlement features yielded as rich assortment of pottery, bone and metal finds. The other main archaeological period was represented by a farmstead-like settlement of the Late Iron Age Celtic period (La Tène C period, fourth–third centuries BC) and its wells, pits and a burial. Another late Roman Imperial-period settlement and its burial ground were discovered in the north-western corner of the BMW investment area (Rózsa-dűlő site). Fieldwork involving preventive excavations and other excavation work during construction work were undertaken in relation to the road, railway and public utilities infrastructure linked to the planned BMW factory (principally the Rainwater drainage [CS-1] and the Debrecen-Balmazújváros Railway Line 108 projects).

Given that the track of Line 108 ran along the western high bluff overlooking the Tóció Stream, an ideal location for human settlement, several exciting sites (most dating from the terminal Middle Neolithic and the Roman Imperial period) that lay in line with the Szántay and the László mounds could be investigated. The observations made in the broader area of the two kurgans investigated by Lajos Zoltai fit in nicely with his research findings and the more recent fieldwork conducted during the construction of the public utilities of a gated residential community in the 2000s (Fig. 1).

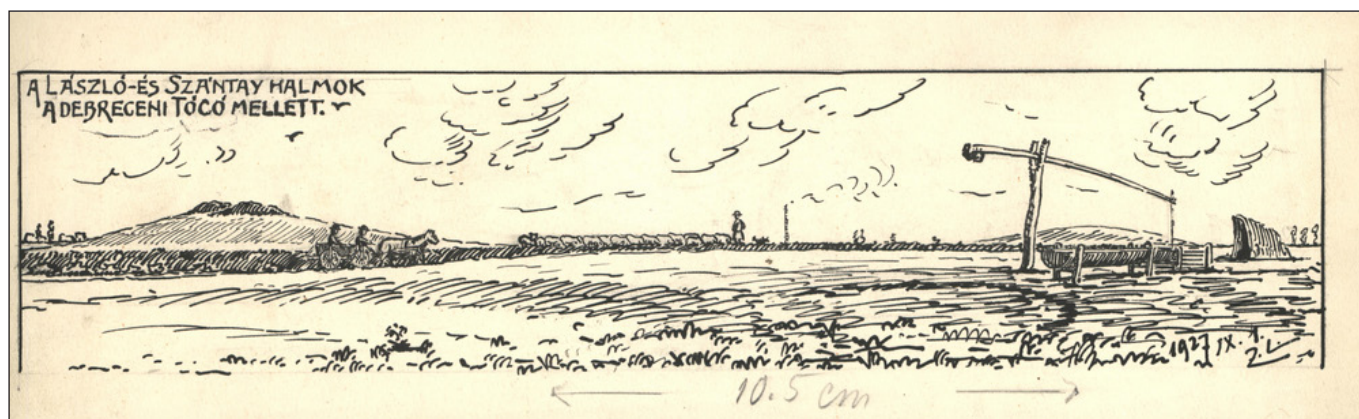


Fig. 1. Lajos Zoltai's pen and ink drawing of the László and Szántay mounds by the Tóció Stream (1927, Archaeological Archives, Déri Museum)

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Smaller development-led excavations were conducted in Debrecen ahead of investment projects (factory hall construction, logistic centre, workers' housing, etc.) (Fig. 2). Since construction work continued during the pandemic, we could not break off the archaeological excavations associated with these projects. Earth-moving operations generally required continuous archaeological monitoring, an ongoing task that could hardly be neglected. Each archaeological team complied with the pandemic regulations (face masks, use of sanitizers and disinfectants, hand-washing) during the fieldwork. We took particular care that the archaeologists and field technicians working in the same trench not be switched around either in the work locations or in the vehicles.

Several of our colleagues worked from their homes to perform tasks that had become timely owing to the continuous fieldwork: the steady IT development during the past few years provided adequate conditions for home work. These tasks included the completion of academic studies, editing work on two volumes intended for the general public (the preliminary report on the archaeological work conducted as part of the Motorway M35 and Motorway M4 projects, and the catalogue to our exhibition "The Khagan's Horseman"), as well as the always timely post-excavation work.



Fig. 2. Aerial drone photo of the preventive archeological works of a hostel on the eastern on the bank of the Tóció stream (Debrecen, Derék street) (photo: István Bacskai, Pelta Bt.)



Fig. 3. Early Bronze Age hoard found on the northern outskirts of Bojt (photo: Ilona Kiss Mrs Czinege, Déri Museum)

Our colleagues participated in several Hungarian and international research projects (see below for their brief descriptions), which, owing to the pandemic, were moved online. We have made every effort to keep abreast of the changes in methodology in international archaeology and have accordingly focused on gradually introducing non-invasive diagnostic procedures in many different research fields. We have been in continuous collaboration with major Hungarian and foreign institutions and laboratories (Hungarian National Museum, Heritage Science Laboratory (HSLab) of the Institute for Nuclear Research of the Eötvös Loránd Research Network, Institute of Archaeological Sciences of the Eötvös Loránd University, Institute of Archaeology of the Research Centre for the Humanities of the Eötvös Loránd Research Network, Hajdúság Museum, Palacký University of Olomouc, Czech Republic, and Department of Cultures of the University of Helsinki, Finland).

Special mention must be made of our collaboration with the Kiss Pál Museum of Tiszafüred, involving the meticulous excavation of a Middle Bronze Age mass grave discovered near the iconic Bronze Age site of Ásotthalom in the course of agricultural work as well as its presentation and additional interdisciplinary work on the site (see the [Kiss Pál Museum's website](#)).

Owing to the pandemic, last year we could only mount a small exhibition, "[Treasure: Found – Our Newest Treasures](#)". This exhibition showcased the most magnificent finds discovered during recent years by the museum's Archaeology Department.

The exhibition was organised around two main themes. The highlights of the first were two prehistoric hoards. One is a hoard of 1768 gold articles that had been concealed in a small Early Bronze Age

hand-thrown cup. One remarkable trait of this hoard is that the small adornments represent an entirely novel, previously unknown artefact type in both Hungarian and international archaeological scholarship (Fig. 3). Although this extraordinary prehistoric hoard had come to light in December 2017, on one of the sites monitored and then excavated ahead of the construction work on Motorway M4 (Bojt, Tökös Varga-tag 1), a case of exceptional archaeological luck thanks to the István Bacskai's systematic metal detecting survey, the assemblage was displayed for the first time as part of this exhibition.

The other unusual find assemblage came to light during the excavation preceding construction work in the inner city of Debrecen. On the testimony of the radiocarbon dates, the Middle Iron Age **gold hoard** was deposited in a pit sometime between 540 and 400 BC. This hoard, too, was discovered by the site's metal detecting survey. The hoard weighs roughly 100 g and is made up of three items: a small rectangular gold ingot and two "balls" of twisted gold ribbons, and it is the very first gold hoard found in the inner city of Debrecen. It was probably a founder's hoard, an Iron Age



Fig. 5. Visitors to the Nagy-Guthi Árpadian Age church at Nyíradony, one of the locations of the Archaeology Days programme (photo: Ilona Kiss Mrs Czinege, Déri Museum)



Fig. 4. "The Khagan's Horseman": exhibition in the Csók István Gallery, Székesfehérvár (photo: Artúr Molnár, Szent István Király Museum, Székesfehérvár)

goldsmith's stock of raw material that had been carefully wrapped in a leather or textile pouch before its concealment for reasons that remain unknown to us.

The other theme of the exhibition was the jewellery of the Early Avar period dating from the earlier seventh century: headdresses, necklaces and earrings. Outstanding among these were the headdresses adorned with precious metal mounts found at Derecske, Kösely-Tekeres Site II along the track of Motorway M35, which have not been previously found in County Hajdú-Bihar and are rare finds in the Carpathian Basin.

The golden earrings came to light during construction work on Motorway M4 (Bojt, Gulyalegő), where six of the twelve burials dating from the Early Avar period contained gold earrings decorated with granulation, a goldsmithing technique which, although highly popular during this period, ultimately drew from Byzantine traditions.

Our exhibition "The Khagan's Horseman", opened in 2019, which presented an Avar-period warrior interred with his armour, his weapons and his horse, could be visited in [the Szent István Király Museum of Székesfehérvár](#) between the two waves of the pandemic (Fig. 4). Regrettably it could not be opened in the other planned venue, the Hungarian Natural History Museum in Budapest, owing to the second wave of the pandemic.

In 20202, the Archaeology Department of the Déri Museum again participated in the European

Archaeology Days as in the previous year. During the two-day programme, we welcomed archaeology enthusiasts in open-air locations, where they had the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the heritage of the Árpadian Age (Fig. 5).

We held several presentations as part of our archaeology lecture series, “Archaeological Heritage of Debrecen”, presenting the new research results of the past decades. Regrettably, we also had to break off this lecture series owing to the pandemic. Instead, to ensure that the potential audience be provided with information, we offered a digitised version of previous lectures on the [museum’s YouTube channel](#), our rationale being that these would prove interesting to those who for one reason or another had been unable to attend the lectures and to those who might want to listen to these again.

The pandemic brought a fresh awareness of the fact with which we were already familiar – particularly so in the dynamically expanding technical civilisation of the twenty-first century – that much greater energy needs to be invested in creating online environments and in the delivery of engaging digital content. Online interactive spaces can substitute, even if not wholly, direct contact with visitors. The continuous development of online platforms, their regular updating and the uploading of fresh contents calls for major energies, for which we do not always have the necessary capacity. However, the [museum’s website](#) has been revamped and we make every effort to provide new, interesting content for our visitors.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF OUR RESEARCH PROJECTS

In 2020–2021 the museum has participated in the following projects:

- **“Settlement and subsistence in Eastern Hungary during the Late Bronze Age”, Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (OTKA) / National Research, Development and Innovation Office (NKFIH) grant:** The goal of the project is to explore the social and economic correlates of the Late Bronze Age settlement network in the southern Hungarian Plain (in 2020, we conducted systematic field surveys and magnetometer surveys at the Medgyesegyháza, Lagzi-dűlő site).
- **“Non-invasive investigation of Late Bronze Age fortified settlements in Eastern Hungary”, National Cultural Fund (NKA) grant:** There has been a growing interest in the Late Bronze Age hillforts of the Hungarian Plain, most of which rank among the largest prehistoric sites in Hungary as well as in Europe. The project’s goal is a better understanding of the Late Bronze Age hillforts of the Hungarian Plain using non-invasive methods (in 2020, we conducted systematic field surveys at the Pocsaj-Temető site).
- **“From bones, bronzes and settlements to societies: Multidisciplinary research on migrations and social changes in Bronze Age Hungary (2500–1500 BC), Lendület research group of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences:** In collaboration with various institutions, the Déri Museum among them, the [Lendület Mobility Research Group](#) led by Dr. Viktória Kiss has undertaken the study of mobility, settlement patterns and metalworking underlying the cultural changes during the Early and Middle Bronze Age in Hungary.
- **[CRAFTER](#): European crafts in the Bronze Age and today** (EU Creative Europe Programme, Culture Sub Programme, Call EACEA 35/2017 for Cooperation projects related to the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage): The project’s primary goal is to evoke the memory of the first major European networks and connectivities by inspiring new artistic creations that call for collaboration between various cultural heritage institutions, research institutions and the creative sectors (local potters) in four different countries (cf. VUČKOVIĆ et al 2021).
- **[The Yamnaya impact on prehistoric Europe](#) (YMPACT) ERC project** (University of Helsinki Department of Cultures, Principal Investigator: Prof. Volker Heyd): The Déri Museum is an active member of the international ERC project and County Hajdú-Bihar is one of the potential study regions. The goal of the research project is a detailed study of the Eastern European impacts (Yamnaya culture) on Europe at the close of the fourth and the onset of the third millennium BC.

- - The **EU IPERION HS Projects** are interdisciplinary EU projects in the field of heritage science. The museum participates both as an agent and a critical reviewer.
- **“First Royals. From Farmers to Kings in Prehistoric Southeastern Europe”** (Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, USA): Alongside the Hungarian National Museum and various other municipal museums, the Déri Museum has also contributed to the international exhibition (e.g. with a separate chapter written for the catalogue accompanying the exhibition).
- **“Prehistoric Interactions on the Plain” (PIPP) Project**: The project led by Dr. Danielle J. Riebe (University of Illinois at Chicago, USA) and János Dani (Déri Museum) and funded by the National Science Foundation (USA) (Grant BCS-1827362) focuses on the investigation of the Csökmő-Káposztás-domb settlement of the Late Neolithic Herpály culture.
- **Non-invasive analysis and technological study of the Copper Age and Bronze Age gold jewellery of the Carpathian Basin**: A **collaborative project** between the Hungarian National Museum, the Heritage Science Laboratory of the Institute for Nuclear Research, the Institute of Archaeological Sciences of the Eötvös Loránd University and the Déri Museum.
- **Analysis of the raw material, technology and cultural connections of the Hajdúböszörmény situla and hoard**: A **collaborative project** between the Hungarian National Museum, the Heritage Science Laboratory of the Institute for Nuclear Research, the Hajdúság Museum, the Palacký University of Olomouc and the Déri Museum (V. SZABÓ & BÁLINT 2016).
- **“The Khagan’s Horseman” project**: A research project focusing on the reconstruction of the early Avar-period armoured warrior uncovered at Derecske–Bikás-dűlő, as well as its interdisciplinary analysis and assessment, and its innovative display to the public. A research project conducted and funded by the Déri Museum.
- **The archaeological legacy of Debrecen project**: A lecture series and a planned volume on the city’s history and its archaeological research from prehistory (Neolithic) to the Middle Ages. A research project conducted and funded by the Déri Museum.
- **Cultural impact or migration? Population and lifestyle changes in the Carpathian Basin in the second millennium BC** (Young Researchers' Excellence Programme, Hungarian Scientific Research Fund, Grant no. 128013, Principal Investigator: Dr. Tamás Hajdú): our participation in this **project** calls for providing a secure archaeological background to the anthropological-bioarchaeological research project.
- **The Rise II Project** (Institutionen för historiska studier, Göteborgs Universitet): The complex interdisciplinary project directed by Prof. Kristian Kristiansen focuses on the major transformations of European prehistory from the Mesolithic (the Neolithic transition in Northern Europe) to the Iron Age. We participate with the following Copper Age cemeteries: Bojt–Tökös Varga-tag 2, Nagykereki–Körtvélyes 1 and Nagykereki–Szőlős-halom.
- In the second half of 2020, we participated in the elaboration of the research design of the Network project of the National Environmental Sciences and Isotope Analytical Laboratory to be submitted to the National Research, Development and Innovation Office. The project’s goal is to create a network of multidisciplinary laboratories with a major international impact through the collaboration of nine institutions.

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