

COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY PROGRAMME AT THE SZENT ISTVÁN KIRÁLY MUSEUM IN SZÉKESFEHÉRVÁR

Development, protocols, and achievements

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The number of volunteers involved in the Community Archaeology Programme at the Szent István Király Museum counted ca. 70 people in May 2021. The programme is regulated by a protocol issued in March 2020 and coordinated by four archaeologists of the community archaeology team in the Museum. Two of them, the authors of this article, are also founding members of the county's representative organisation in the Association of Community Archaeologists. Although the pandemic has impeded our activities, several successful projects have been finished that involved lay enthusiasts. There was virtually no excavation of the Museum without volunteers in the Program participating. The excavations at Csákberény–Orondpuszta must be mentioned as an example; here the volunteers helped us to unearth 88 Avar period graves, and they were also active in field walks conducted with metal detectors that yielded interesting topographic data and facilitated the discovery of special artefacts. Coordinators of the program lay a special emphasis of cooperation with community archaeology projects in neighbouring counties in order to harmonize different practices. In this paper we aim to provide a glimpse into how our Programme started, how it works, and what are our most important achievements so far.

Keywords: community archaeology, metal detecting, volunteers, Fejér County

LOCAL BACKGROUND

The beginnings: law-abiding metal detectorists at the Museum (2013–2016)

In December 2013 an enthusiastic layman, József Meleg came to the Szent István Király Museum (henceforth: SZIKM) and offered to assist the Museum's research with his metal detector. There had been precedents when archaeologists cooperated with private persons who owned metal detectors, but a more organised, institutionalised form of this activity was yet to be introduced. Both the museum leadership and the archaeologists held the view that the Museum should refrain from commissioning private persons to use metal detectors independently and on their own, but they must work under the supervision of a trained archaeologist appointed by the Museum. In 2014, a team of four-five volunteers started to form, and they participated in several field walks organised by the Museum, including the topographic survey that aimed to reconstruct the Árpád-period settlement pattern between the villages Aba and Seregélyes (mentioned in POKROVENSZKI & BELEGRAI 2018, 54). They also joined us and helped with their metal detectors at some of the excavations.

A new government decree in 2015 (Decree 39/2015, III.11) created a new situation, because it prohibited the use of metal detectors for non-qualified laymen without a license. From 2015 onwards, the Museum's leadership stopped supporting the cooperation with law-abiding metal detectorists, and so in this period these projects were stuck. However, regardless of the Museum's decision, the Government Agency of Fejér County continued issuing licences for metal detecting (*Table 1*).

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Year	Number of licence applications submitted to the Government Agency of Fejér County	Number of licences granted by the Government Agency of Fejér County
2015	9	8
2016	23	23

Table 1. The number of licences for non-qualified persons to use metal detectors in Fejér County, based on the SZIKM registry

The great opening-up (2017)

From January 2017, a new legislation (Government Decree 496/2016, XII.28) came into force, and it made it compulsory to attach to licence applications a copy of an assignment contract or cooperation agreement signed with an institution that has the right to conduct excavations.

This year, the attitude of the Museum leadership changed and, totally contradicting its 2014–2015 policies, the Museum started to hand out cooperation agreements with which people were allowed to conduct metal detecting individually (!), provided that they had the necessary licence. In 2017, altogether 34 people signed such an agreement. Among these there were only two who had cooperated with the Museum earlier, the others were ‘trusted blindly’ and were allowed to work in bigger or smaller areas of Fejér County. Two main cooperation agreements considered the beaches of the Velencei Lake, while others involved either only certain plots, or vast areas covering lands around several settlements. It is telling that from the 34 people who had an agreement with the Museum, only 21 applied to the Government Agency for a licence (Table 2).

Number of cooperation agreements signed by SZIKM	Number of applications submitted to the Government Agency of Fejér County for a licence	Number of licences issued by the Government Agency of Fejér County
34	21	21

Table 2. The number of cooperation agreements on the use of metal detectors by non-qualified laypersons and the number of licences in Fejér County in 2017, based on the SZIKM registry

The roots of community archaeology (2018–2019)

In late 2017 and early 2018, young archaeologists who had just joined the museum team, were inspired by the community archaeology project in Pest County that had been initiated by Tibor Ákos Rácz and had operated with success. They wished to end the practice that museums chose to abstain from exercising their authority in terms of inspections (RÁ CZ 2017, 1–7). In order to overcome the shortcomings of earlier practice, they drew on experience considering the legal background and the everyday realities, and called everyone interested in the field to start a dialogue, hoping to create a framework of cooperation that is acceptable for all parties. However, this initiative proved to be too naïve, and the goals and interests could not be harmonized.

Then those who asked for a cooperation agreement were divided into two groups. The first one comprised those whose aim was to search for metal objects that bathers lost at the Velencei Lake on the lake’s bottom (these were the “water agreements”), while in the second group were those who had already had some form of cooperation with the museum and wanted to survey dry land (“dry land agreements”) (Table 3). The regulation concerning the latter became more strict. The detectorists had to report to the Museum’s contact person before starting the metal detecting activities and upon finishing it; moreover, it became mandatory to have an activity log, to record GPS coordinates for every artefact they found, and, of course, to turn in all the finds to the Museum by a deadline. In case of non-compliance with these conditions, the Museum terminated the cooperation agreement with that person. It was planned to organise joint field walks as well as training days and educational talks, which was definitely a step towards community archaeology. However, the high fluctuation at the museum, the constant changes in the staff impeded the development of a community archaeology project, and only a few, *ad hoc* surveys were conducted. For example, when the

Hungarian Conquest period and Celtic cemetery at Bodajk was excavated, it seemed worthwhile to survey and map with the help of volunteers the neighbouring site of Proletár-földek I, which had been identified as an Árpád-period site but was only known from field walks. Thanks to this new investigation and data collection, a Roman villa was identified at this site, and a spectacular find, a pair of golden earrings was also unearthed.

Year	Number of cooperation agreements signed by SZIKM	Number of applications submitted to the Government Agency of Fejér County for a licence	Number of licences issued by the Government Agency of Fejér County (“water”+“dry land”)
2018	25	25	25 (13+12)
2019	16	16	16 (10+6)

Table 3. táblázat. The number of cooperation agreements on the use of metal detectors by non-qualified laypersons and the number of licences in Fejér County in 2018–2019, based on the SZIKM registry

In the summer of 2019, we started exploring the Avar cemetery at Csákberény-Orondpuszta, the excavation of which had stopped in 1939. The excavation was organised as a community archaeology project. We were able to bring to light 53 burials with the help of 36 volunteers. It was mostly due to the volunteers’ meticulous work that traces of wooden burial monuments were recorded in minuscule details in 33 – mostly middle Avar – graves. This facilitated the precise reconstruction of most burial monument types (SZÜCSI in press). This success proves that the help and work of volunteer laypersons can be invaluable during excavations (Fig. 1) (SZÜCSI 2020, 1–11). This excavation proved to be a real community archaeological experience, not only because of the high number of volunteers but also due to the many tourists, local people and children who visited the excavation (Table 5), not to mention the interest expressed by the media.



Fig. 1. A group of children visits the excavation of the Avar cemetery at Csákberény–Orondpuszta (photo by D. Nagy)

After a police announcement in the autumn of 2019 rumours started circulating that criminal proceedings were brought against several metal detectorists who had cooperation agreements with the SZIKM. These developments urged both the Museum leadership and the archaeologists to reconsider the practice of such collaborations and create a new framework, and therefore, in early 2020 the Museum terminated all cooperation agreements involving the use of metal detectors by non-qualified persons. There was unanimity that the events must not result in the Museum’s refusal to engage with metal detectorists. In most museums of the country where there is an archaeology department, by then it had become customary to cooperate with amateur metal detectorists who observed the regulations of archaeological surveys (see LASZLOVSZKY 2017, 1; BÍRÓ & RÓZSA 2017, 2–6; BAKOS 2020, 65–70; KOCSIS 2020, 1–4).

Community archaeology programme in Fejér County (2020–)

In our view, in order to protect archaeological heritage from illegal metal detectorists the policymakers should make the acquirement of such an instrument subject to authorisation, and make sure that such authorisation can only be obtained through a cooperation agreement or assignment contract with a museum, in accordance with the present legislation and criminal liability connected to heritage protection. Without a legal framework that would ensure heritage protection, not even the actions taken by the authorities can keep illegal metal detectorists from unlawful surveys. Based on our local experience, in most procedures

not even a criminal accusation is made, and these cases typically do not go to court. In the absence of efficient actions taken by the authorities, we cannot have the luxury of turning a blind eye to the damage done to our national heritage by illegal metal detectorists. Integrating into the museum sphere those metal detectorists who are law-abiding and willing to cooperate can offer a solution, even if only partially. This way they will be able to pursue their hobby in a legal manner, under the supervision of museum archaeologists, and they can invest their knowledge, talent and free time into the exploration, protection, and rescue of our common archaeological heritage.

We deemed it important, however, that they should be aware of the responsibilities inherent in such a hobby. They must familiarise themselves with the complexities of archaeological research and the basics (field protocols, common artefact types etc.). To acquire this knowledge, it is not sufficient to participate in metal detecting field walks and a few educational programmes; they need a training during which they can actively contribute to the archaeologist's work, participate in excavations, join the exploration of features and the preliminary processing (inventory) of the finds. The community archaeology programme in Pest County, organised by the Association for Community Archaeology, served as a model (RÁCZ 2019, 149–157).

These thoughts and experiences brought to life the initiative of the SZIKM Community Archaeology Programme and the protocol that regulates it, which came into force on 4 March 2020. The Programme is operated and coordinated by the Community Archaeology Working Group, which consists of four archaeologists specialised in different periods. Those who want to join the Programme have to fill in and submit an application form, in which they accept the protocol and express the consent to be bound by it. There is one condition in the protocol that must be mentioned here: the applicant must not possess a collection of archaeological artefacts from any period; otherwise, his application will be turned down automatically. Just like it is unethical for an archaeologist to build a private collection of finds, it must be held unethical for non-qualified laymen as well, moreover, if such collections exist, there may be a conflict of interest between the metal detectorist and the museum. Another important condition is that the applicant accepts to be mandated to use his device only after entering into a cooperation agreement with the museum, in accordance with the licence received from the heritage protection authorities, or at archaeological excavations under the supervision of an archaeologist. Only those metal detectorists can participate at excavations (including intensive surface surveys) of the SZIKM who are members of the Museum's Community Archaeology Programme, or another community archaeology programme hosted by the Museum's partner institutions.

The SZIKM attaches a number of conditions to fixed-term cooperation agreements with non-qualified metal detectorists, in conformity with the current legislation. Taking into consideration the local particularities in Fejér County, there are three types of these agreements:

- 1) cooperation agreement to conduct metal detecting surveys outside of registered archaeological sites, aiming to locate and collect archaeological artefacts;
- 2) cooperation agreement to conduct metal detecting surveys on the bottom of Velencei Lake, aiming to locate and collect objects that are not classified as cultural heritage;
- 3) cooperation agreement to conduct metal detecting surveys in order to collect objects classified as heritage of military history.

The first agreement type, the so-called “dry land agreement” is signed with members of the Programme who accumulated at least 50 points according to the protocol. Most points can be acquired for participating in preliminary find processing (5 points per occasion). Points are also given for participation in uncovering archaeological features at excavations (3 points per day), in talks and educational programmes (2 points), and in excavations using metal detectors (1 point). Volunteers who have a cooperation agreement or assignment contract with another museum, get a one-time 30 or 20 points plus, depending on whether the SZIKM has a cooperation agreement covering the field of community archaeology with the given institution. The goal is to acknowledge volunteers who have already proved their abilities at other museums. Besides, we also would like to facilitate interoperability between different community archaeology programmes.

The second type, the “water agreement” can be made with anyone who is a member of our Community Archaeology Programme.

The third type, the “military objects agreement” can be made on the condition that the applicant has a letter of recommendation from the Museum of Military History (Table 4).

<i>Number of cooperation agreements signed by SZIKM (“water” + “dry land” + “military objects”)</i>	<i>Number of applications submitted to the Government Agency of Fejér County for a licence</i>	<i>A Fejér Megyei Kormányhivatal által kiállított engedélyek száma (“water” + “dry land” + “military objects”)</i>
17 (13+4+0)	13	13 (10+3+0)

Table 4. The number of cooperation agreements on the use of metal detectors by non-qualified laypersons and the number of licences in Fejér County in 2020, based on the SZIKM registry

EVENTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND DIFFICULTIES IN THE TIME OF THE PANDEMIC

Although we had already started to get volunteers involved in data collection on the field earlier, cooperation with laypeople became more frequent after the Programme was launched and the regulations and protocols were there to provide the necessary support. As a first step, volunteers were integrated into the mandatory (field) tasks the Museum has to perform. As a result, the use of metal detectors became more customary, and the number of finds discovered through these means started to rise. The human resource offered by the volunteers enabled us to conduct more efficiently the field walks and the exploration of archaeological features, associated with various projects we were involved in.

An important, or perhaps the most emphatic, segment of the Programme is topographic research. As part of this endeavour, we conduct authenticating field walks and intensive surface surveys with the participation of volunteers (Fig. 2). Field walks that involve metal detecting partly aim at prevention, and cover sites that are especially vulnerable to illegal metal detecting and disturbance through ploughing. Therefore, among others, we conducted a survey of the site at Szabadbattyán, Sárvíz–Malom-channel on 1 February 2020.² The main goal is to make a systematic gathering of finds after ploughing so that these artefacts that have the potential to yield important information will not end up in the hands of illegal metal detectorists. Although this well-known site has been subjected to robbing on a large-scale, the 785 artefacts we collected within one day’s time testify that such collecting expeditions are not in vain. Intensive surface survey also serves as means to authenticate sites that are in the public register, as well as to discover yet unknown ones. Although these surveys are still organised in an improvised way, they have yielded new or more precise information on the size and age of sites that had been known only from field walks or were unknown. One of the most fascinating investigations last year was carried out during an archaeological survey we did in the puffer zone of the site of Aba–Varjaskéri. This Roman period site had already been identified in 2015, but information was lacking about its character or precise age, and so we made a metal detecting survey in order to collect more data. The artefacts collected during this fieldwork include a varied and rich array of Roman objects (brooches, coins, fragments of a military diploma, belt and harness fittings, fragments of a mirror and bronze cauldrons, capsule for storing wax, etc.), as well as artefacts from the Árpád period (ball button, mounts), and a coin hoard of 62 quartings dated to the time of



Fig. 2. Intensive surface survey at Martonvásár (photo by Cs. Libor)

² Altogether 19 volunteers participated in the event. In addition to metal detectorists from Fejér County, the Community Archaeology Association of Pest County and the law-abiding metal detectorists of the Laczkó Dezső Museum also joined in.

Sigismund of Luxembourg (r. 1387–1437) (Fig. 3). During the field walk we were able to determine the extension and age of the Roman settlement, and the 10th-century objects we collected suggest that there is a Hungarian Conquest period cemetery here as well.

In accordance with modern topographic research, we aim to systematically map a microregion or a natural geographical unit. Last year we started to map the network of Roman villas in the Móri-trench at the fringes of the Vértes Hills; within the framework of this project, we conducted field walks in the area of the villages of Bodajk, Csákberény and Fehérvárcsurgó. Although these surveys are still in an initial phase, it proved possible to acquire new information or even modify our preliminary assumptions about the sites. In the area of the Roman villa of Csákberény–Orondpuszta that had already been known, with the aid of satellite images we were able to identify further buildings outside the site, which, however, must have belonged to it. Among the artefacts yielded by our field walks the fragment of a silver crossbow brooch decorated with niello inlay and a late Roman spur must be mentioned here.

In the summer of 2020, between the two waves of the pandemic, we continued the excavations in the Avar period cemetery of Csákberény–Orondpuszta. These surveys are already well-known; in this season we unearthed 35 graves. Two horse graves, also equipped with weapons (graves 508 and 540) are of special interest, as well as the undisturbed grave of a woman dressed up in a Merovingian fashion (grave 523). From the latter, a full set of leg wrap fittings (two large and two small bronze strap ends and two bronze buckles) came to light, along with an almost fully intact pressed bronze disc brooch found between the knees. Although only a short survey was possible due to restrictions made necessary by the pandemic, the number of both the volunteers and the site visitors grew (Table 5).

Year	Duration	Number of volunteers	Number of visitors
2019	3 weeks	36	~230 (including 120 children)
2020	2 weeks	37	~380 (including 200 children)

Table 5. The open days (when it was possible for the public to visit the site) of the excavation at Csákberény-Orondpuszta, and the number of volunteers and visitors

Even though archaeological research was only minimally hampered by the pandemic, it had a severe impact on the Community Archaeology Programme, because the events that constituted its major component had to be postponed. In the course of 2020, our volunteers helped us to recover more than 2000 artefacts; we intended to enter these finds into the inventory also with their help. Due to the restrictions, however, it was possible to organise only one such event in the Archaeological Park of Tác-Gorsium (Fig. 4). It was partly this situation that urged us to involve in the registration of finds the high school students who did their compulsory community service at the museum. First, they helped



Fig. 3. A disc brooch ornamented with enamel, found at Aba-Varjaskéri (photo by B. Tóth)



Fig. 4. Primary find processing in Gorsium (photo by F. Szücsi)

us prepare the lists of objects. The almost 1500 items digitized by them contributed to the acceleration of the process, although there is still a lot to be done before these artefacts can be properly entered into the inventory. The educational talks were also negatively affected by the pandemic, and most of these events had to be cancelled.

It is worthwhile to mention here the practice of turning in archaeological artefacts, which is closely associated with community archaeology. Perhaps it is not too far-fetched to assume that the popularization of community archaeology and the nationwide promotion of such programs contributed to the rise in the number of artefacts handed over to the museum. While in 2018–2019 only a negligible number of archaeological finds were brought to the museum by locals, in 2020 more than 500 objects were relinquished thanks to law-abiding metal detectorists and locals. Among such donated objects there are artefacts of everyday use, e.g., a set of winged brooches from Noricum/Pannonia, a crucifix fragment from Limoges, and a straight iron sword (*spatha*).

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