

“NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM”

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Hungarian Archaeology Vol. 10 (2021), Issue 3, pp. 72–75.

The lockdown period of 2020 and 2021 has been described with the movie title “Night at the Museum” by one of the leading foreign archaeological museums. Did this period really have this impact on museums? This paper reveals that there was no silence or emptiness behind closed doors, quite on the contrary! There was a lot of innovative and creative work going on, a creation of online appearances like never before. Although virtual tours could not give the feeling of a real-life experience, being open around the clock seems to be highly beneficial.

When browsing the websites of European museums, one thing catches the eye. While the museums were constantly trying to promote their online activity and content, the audience was informed about a total closure in the news. There was no attention paid to the ongoing research in the museum collections without which no exhibition or event is possible, although this had been the period when lot of time was dedicated to research and organizing the collections. It is clearly visible that both national and international museums tried to fill the gap during the lockdown and keep in touch with the audience, to be available for the public. Without any personal contact it was not a piece of cake to maintain the attention and interest of the core audience and draw the attention of new targets, using only the opportunities provided by virtual space and lacking any face-to-face experience. All the creativity and new skills of our colleagues were needed to create educational resources for children, D.I.Y. crafting videos, all the interactive content including the collections, anniversaries, and topicalities. In addition to online appearances, they also produced self-made face masks for citizens, and helped with the daily shopping for the elderly who were confined to their homes during the pandemic.

The lockdown due to Covid-19 has brought significant changes into the lives of several institutions including the Savaria Museum, which effects are still visible today. Our colleagues had been working from home for months, in a system which had been approved only in special cases before. The biggest responsibility fell on the IT department, for they had to create an IT environment in the shortest time with innovative online solutions which never before had been used, and the very weak internet connection just made it even more challenging.

The museums could not wait for the end of the “shutdown” last summer, everyone was convinced that we were going to get back to our normal lives, however, the next lockdown in autumn made it clear that nothing will be the same anymore. Museologists had to endure under these circumstances. The professional community proved their creativity and skills when it came to making the exhibitions available in the virtual space. Without presence on the most popular online platforms like YouTube, it would have been unimaginable to cope with the challenges in an era when museums all over the world use the advantages of spreading art and culture online in the most innovative ways.

Visiting World Heritage sights had not been available for everyone even before the pandemic. Seeing pieces of culturally and historically significant artefacts has always been complicated, provided that they were available for the public at all, which makes online tours, the possibility of exhibiting artefacts in the online space, the digitization a real milestone. The summer of 2021 has been the second season with tons of cancelled holidays and people not daring to go to destinations abroad. Analysing the statistics of the most popular Mediterranean countries with a seaside which normally would attract a huge number of tourists, it is striking that it was not these kinds of vacations that have been impacted by the pandemic, but the museums and archaeological sites: their popularity has decreased significantly, by as much as a third.

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Fig. 1. The Palace of Culture 1908



Fig. 2. The Savaria Museum after renovation in 2019

The very first months of the lockdown came as a shock for the museums, everyone was affected even emotionally by the fact that the visitors could not come. Organizing events and exhibitions, presenting the results of the research became impossible overnight. Nowadays museums are not ivory towers where research and artefact collections are enclosed in desk drawers, but the aim is to present the results and cultural values to the public. The Savaria Museum's very first YouTube video was created about a typhus epidemic sweeping the city in the early 20th century, when the museum building was converted into an epidemic hospital, although no analogies between the Covid-19 and earlier epidemics was evident in March 2020. There were similarities when it comes to the health system, but the most terrifying impact was doubtlessly on the social side. The epidemic 100 years ago had an equally shocking effect on the society (Fig. 1).

The interest of the visitors, who were not able to visit the museums during the pandemic, made it clear that operating static webpages is not enough, so it became inevitable to appear on new online platforms. Although the very first attempts turned out to be a little bit bumpy, the museums had the initiative. The experience gained in that challenging period, the reactions given and then their analysis is valuable and promises an innovative future.

Responses to Covid-19 lockdowns and the new online contents resulted in a variety of solutions in the museum institutions, from total rejection to real enthusiasm. The debate over digital media has become constant since these platforms have become essential, almost mandatory parts of the museum activities. It seems there will always be a disagreement between those insisting on the view that traditional values cannot be related to modern technology and the ones who cannot imagine innovation without that. There cannot be a general agreement in this question. We are convinced that the consequences of Covid-19 is creating an opportunity for experimenting for which there has been neither time, nor opportunity and, most of all, no courage (e.g. the Savaria Museum became a vaccination point 2021, as it was an epidemic hospital in 1908; Fig. 2).

FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY RESEARCH OF THE SAVARIA MUSEUM DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC (2020-2021)

As archaeology has mostly been related to construction works in the recent decades, it is dependent on them; field archaeological research in Vas County continued during the pandemic. Although we had little work in recent years – an area of about 12,000 m² has been excavated – we conducted lots of pre-emptive surveys, which usually create the need for rescue excavations too.

Our largest excavation, about 10,000 m², took place near *Bük*, where for example parts of a Roman cemetery were uncovered. The graves were lined with stone slabs or tegulas, they grouped around the two trenches and yielded some skeletal, but mostly cremation burials. The ashes were placed in ceramic or glass urns, but ash scattering rituals were evidenced as well (Fig. 3).

As part of the *Interreg project* called *ArcheON*, two planned excavations were carried out in 2020. The regions involved in the project, southern Burgenland and Vas County, are among the richest in archaeo-

logical and historical heritage. The area, which has been divided into two by a border for over a century, had been one geographic unit since the Neolithic. Archaeological works have always been carried out separately by the two countries, not even taking into account that this region used to be united, so no international collaboration has taken place when it comes to the archaeological research of the region. This, however, is inevitable in order to present the area’s historical and archaeological heritage, to make results available for the public and to offer an international touristic attraction. The Interreg project supports these endeavours. The diversified knowledge is put together by excavating and processing the finds of the six most important archaeological sites. To guarantee the project’s success, a wide range of informative activities supports the publicity of its historic and archaeological values.

The research of the *Sé-Malomi-dűlő* site was restarted, which is primarily known for the formative phase of the Lengyel Culture. As a result of the geophysical research, it turned out that not a double but a fourfold circular ditch system must be there. In addition to the rich findings, we managed to get six ¹⁴C samples as well. Another excavation near the village of *Dozmat* was also carried out in the framework of the ArcheON project, aiming to research the aqueduct system supplying the ancient city of Savaria (Figs 4–5).

The Savaria Museum is involved in more international projects related to historic and ethnographic research and innovations (e.g. Interreg, e-documenta Pannonica or Interreg Eurevita, DBU-Tündérveterán, Interreg border(hi)stories).

As the *Ják church* is being renovated, its archaeological research and the archaeological observation kept going. Unique findings that shed light on fashion history were unearthed from several graves, and even the burial of Márton Jáki Nagy was found. The previously raised theory that the ruins of a smaller church must have been under the current one, could be proved.

We carried out archaeological observations at more than 100 sites, more than 1000 times. Complementing the large-scale excavations that took place at the highest point of Szombathely, on the Oladi plateau between 2005 and 2008, we were able to research some Neolithic – Transdanubian LBK and some Lengyel settlements. Some parts of a Trans-



Fig. 3. Bük – Roman burial



Fig. 4. Sé-Malomi-dűlő – drone photo of the trench



Fig. 5. Sé-Malomi-dűlő – Lengyel period pit



Fig. 6. Ják-Benedictine Abbey – graves



Fig. 7. Farkas Forest – the site where László Molnár's plane crashed, and part of the team

danubian LBK settlement and four burial urns of an urn field were excavated near Hegyfalú during a survey. In addition to medieval and early modern settlements, a medieval and a Celtic burial with a sword and a spear from the late Iron Age were found. Within the framework of the *Rába Valley Flood Protection Project*, several smaller excavations took place near Ostffyasszonyfa and Pápoc, which aimed to research settlement parts from the Copper Age, Roman times, Árpád period and the Middle Ages. The most interesting find was a late Avar double burial from the 8th century.

In addition to some parts of an Árpád period settlement and one from the Bronze Age, we were given the opportunity to research the Roman aqueduct system in Szombathely, as part of the archaeological observation related to the construction of the Illés Academy. When it comes to the Iseum district, a verifying excavation took place in addition to two small surveys. In the city centre, we rescued the rich findings of a Roman burial found in a cellar, and Roman walls and building parts came to light. In the town of Kőszeg, which also has a historically significant centre, early modern walls and a stone-covered street were uncovered. In addition to the ones listed here, archaeological work was carried out in many other locations, such as Szombathely, Körmend or Csipkerek.

Metal detecting became a useful way of relaxation in the open air, and the fact that it can be done alone made it an even more appropriate leisure activity during the pandemic. The detectorists enriched the collection of the museum with many finds. A Roman military diploma made of bronze and a bronze fragment of a statuette of Hercules are worth to be mentioned among many others. The museum team even took part in the research of the site where the plane of lieutenant László Molnár, one of the most successful fighter-pilots in the history of Hungarian aviation, crashed.

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