

OUR HERITAGE FROM THE DEPTH OF THE GROUND

Archaeological excavations of the Kiss Pál Museum at Tiszafüred (Hungary) between the 19th and 21st centuries

EDIT MESTER¹

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The new exhibition and research center presenting the archaeological excavations in Tiszafüred opened its doors on the 24th of November 2021. It was our great pleasure, that through a series of museum education and volunteer programmes, we could call the attention of the local public the importance of the archaeological findings and the protection of their local heritage. In 2020 we reinitiated archaeological research, marking a successful return to the goals and spirit of the past founders of the institution.

The Archaeological Association of Tiszafüred Region was the first to collect “antiquities” at Tiszafüred and its vicinity. The issue of founding a self-motivated organization was first raised in 1872 by Endre Tariczky (1818–1912) the Roman Catholic priest of Tiszafüred, who gained nationwide recognition by contemporary academia through organizing and supervising archaeological excavations. The Association was formally established in 1877, its purpose was “the excavation of antiquities, the dissemination of archaeological knowledge, the development and nurturing of archaeological interests and the foundation of an archaeological special library and antiquity collection”. The Association’s area of interest encompassed the Middle Tisza region: from Tiszaroff and Kőtelek to all the way to Egyek and the vicinity of Poroszló. Following its rapid expansion, the assemblage was divided into four major groups: the numismatic collection, the antiquity collection, the miscellaneous artifacts collection and the library (Fig. 1). Béla Miliesz (1843–1912), a teacher of the Calvinist school, was another great organizer of the Association, who documented the collected finds with great professional care and precision, although the circumstances of their recovery cannot be deemed archaeological excavations by modern standards. Unfortunately many of his notes have perished and the remaining finds need to be identified via a few photographs and inventory records. Similar to many other researchers who were active during the late 19th century, they concentrated primarily on artifacts and did not note any circumstances or context concerning the site itself (Fig. 2). Both of them corresponded frequently with scholars active in other parts of the country, who helped them in classifying finds. Prominent pioneers of Hungarian archaeology, such as Flóris Rómer, József Hampel, Ferenc



Fig. 1. The museum at the end of the 19th century



Fig. 2. Ásotthalom at the end of the 19th century

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Pulszky and Ottó Herman were notified of local results, which were presented on scientific conferences and published in the volumes of the *Archaeologiai Értesítő*.

In 1896 the association changed its title to Museum and Library Society and its collection, having attained wide recognition by then, was housed in the first floor rooms of the town hall. The founders of the assemblage both deceased in 1912, by that time the numismatic collection contained 3.298 items, the antiquity collection 7.409 items, the miscellaneous collection 1.440 items and the library 5.872 volumes. During the World Wars, the collection could no longer be substantially expanded, and wartime activities resulted in the loss of numerous artifacts, the numismatic and antiquity collections suffered almost complete destruction. Following the wars, efforts were made to restore the still impressive, survived proportion of the museal collection and exhibit it. In 1952 the institution took up the name of Pál Kiss, a colonel in the Hungarian war of independence of 1848–1849 and moved to the former Lipcsey Manor, an edifice under monumental protection.

In the 1960s, the collection of the Archaeological Society was transferred to the Damjanich János Museum in Szolnok, thus it has completely disappeared from the cultural life and memory of the city. In 2018, we borrowed some of these artifacts to be on display on our temporary exhibition titled “The 7000-year-old hidden treasures of our city” which is still open for visitors in the main building of the Kiss Pál Museum in the Lipcsey Manor.² However, most of the finds remained at Szolnok, for this reason, in parallel with relaunching archaeological research in 2020, we wanted to create a worthy, permanent space for this valued collection at Tiszafüred.

Our plans were fulfilled this year, when the local government provided the museum with a new research center for the purpose of fulfilling archaeological tasks. The former office of the local pediatrician has been renovated and furnished with external funds and lots of voluntary work. Alongside storage and restoration duties, we deem it important that the institution serve as a cultural, educational, recreational and experience-oriented open space. The renewed institution was named after Endre Tariczky, a polyhistor archaeologist and clergyman, the first prominent researcher of our town.



Fig. 3. The antiquarian and naturalist labs



Fig. 4. The first curious visitors

In creating the concept of the exhibition, our main aim was to present the past and present of the museum in parallel with each other, especially, because present-day excavations are conducted almost on the same sites, where our founders did their research. We strove to collect as many information and document on the founders' lives and collections as possible, including photographs, inventories, contemporary news articles and other references concerning findspots.

The exhibition follows a chronological order, beginning with ice age animal bone finds, up to Modern

² <https://kisspalmuzeum.hu/allando-kiallitasok/>



Fig. 5. The interactive storage exhibit

ethnographic and historic objects. Glass containers and custom installations serve to encourage visitors to actively participate and try themselves the tasks of archaeologists, anthropologists and restorers (*Fig. 6*). The antiquarian and naturalist labs are outfitted with refurbished furniture from the former medical offices, enabling visitors to examine remains and prepared samples recovered from the archaeological excavations through microscopes (*Figs 3–4*). Alongside classical exhibitions spaces, we transformed two rooms of our storage facility to serve as “storage exhibits” for visitors, granting them insight into continuous selection and restoration works and also a place for hands-on experience (*Fig. 5*).

The first two rooms display a selection of archaeological finds recovered from Tiszafüred Ásotthalom, Majoros-halom, Tiszaörvény, Tiszaszőlős and Egyek during the course of the 19th–21st centuries, organized with emphasis on parallel timelines (*Fig. 7*). The most significant artifacts are the restored grave goods recovered from the Bronze age mass grave of 42 individuals at Majoros-halom Site Nr. III during autumn 2020, which are first on public display at the research center (MESTER et al. 2021). A reconstruction of the burial and a section dedicated to presenting key results of related bioarchaeological research complement the finds on display (*Fig. 8*). The research is conducted in the framework of an extensive national and



Fig. 6. The excavation corner



Fig. 7. Archaeological finds discovered in the 19th century

international scientific collaboration between the Department of Biological Anthropology at the Eötvös Loránd University, the “Momentum” Mobility Research Group within the Institute of Archaeology of the Research Centre for Humanities of the Eötvös Loránd Research Network (ELKH) and the Déri Museum at Debrecen. The most up-to-date methods utilized on archaeological excavations (such as georadar surveys, photogrammetry and 3D scanning), alongside the complex bioarchaeological analysis of carefully collected human, floral and faunal remains, provides a unique means in reconstructing the environment of past settlements on the banks of the Tisza and the living conditions of their inhabitants. Alongside classic visual post-



Fig. 8. Artifacts recovered from Site Nr. III at Majoros-Halom in 2020 alongside the reconstruction of the burial

reveal new connections and provide new data for national ethnographic research.

We hope that in upcoming years, the professional rebirth of the Kiss Pál Museum shall contribute significantly to the research and presentation of the archaeological heritage of the Middle Tisza region.

The curators of the exhibition: Edit Mester, Tamás Hajdu, Szilvia Judit Morava



Fig. 9. The most exquisite glazed pottery fragments from the 19th century pottery waste pit on display in the storage exhibit

ers, these results are also presented through a series of meaningful movies made on site and interviews with researchers, available on display devices (Kiss PÁL MÚZEUM, s.a.).³

The rich archaeological material recovered from a 19th century pottery workshop located on the courtyard of the Nyúzó Gáspár Traditional Pottery Workshop at Tiszafüred in the summer of 2021, is on display in the next three halls. So far, only a few pottery waste pits have been uncovered in Hungary in the framework of professional archaeological excavations, thus the documentation and processing of the approximately 30.000 sherds is of utmost importance (Figs 9–10). Precise statistical analysis of distinct types, as well as the analysis focused on the stylistic development of different shapes, may



Fig. 10. The room presenting the excavation of the pottery workshop

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³ <https://kisspalmuzeum.hu/regeszeti/regeszeti-feltaras/>

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