

LAND OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL MIRACLES – COUNTRY IMAGE 1876

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The 28th annual meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA) was organised in Budapest between 31 August and 3 September 2022, jointly hosted by the Hungarian National Museum and the Eötvös Loránd University. Budapest and Hungary last attracted such great professional attention on the occasion of the VIIIth International Congress of Anthropology and Prehistoric Archaeology in 1876. Events dedicated to the World Congress (preparation, networking, lectures held there, and related publications) had extraordinary impact on the nascent Hungarian archaeology. One of the greatest gains of the congress was that it directed the world's attention to Hungarian archaeological heritage and the scientific work carried out in the country in that early period. Our commemoration of the World Congress comprised an exhibition of eighteen tableaux, which welcomed, looking down from the fence of the Hungarian National Museum, both the visitors of the EAA annual meeting and the pedestrians of Múzeum körút.

Keywords: tableau exhibition, EAA, VIIIth International Congress of Anthropology and Prehistoric Archaeology, Flóris Rómer, archaeological heritage, Copper Age, country image, science history

The quote in the title of our exhibition comes from a writing by Ingvald Undset, a Norwegian archaeologist and participant of the World Congress:² “The country, which lies south of the Carpathians, appears to me as a land of archaeological miracles; such great is the wealth of the forms that has surprised me here, and such is the weight of the statements I have encountered [...] Once I arrived in Hungary in 1876 and saw the historical treasures they had gathered in the exhibition of the National Museum, I was truly surprised and impressed” (UNDSET 1880). We intend to reflect by the exhibition's subtitle (“Country image 1876”) that Flóris Rómer, the main organiser, and his colleagues used the opportunities offered by the World Congress not only to introduce the richness and high quality of Hungarian archaeology to the World, but also to claim Hungary to be a civilised nation.

The title and the reflections written above were placed on the opening tableau of the exhibition, next to an 1882 view of Budapest with the Buda Castle and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences with the Chain Bridge in-between. Probably such a view greeted the foreign scientists visiting Budapest back in 1876 (Fig. 1).

The second tableau evokes the circumstances of the creation of the World Congress from 1865 on and the main scholars participating in it, as well as the locations of previous sessions (La Spezia, Paris, London, Copenhagen, Bologna, Brussels and Stockholm), indicated on a contemporary map. The third tableau represents the 1867 World Congress in Paris, where both the exhibition presenting the archaeological relics of



Fig. 1. Opening tableau of the exhibition on the Múzeum körút (photo by Andrea Tulok)

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² He cited the quotation from the chapter dedicated to Hungarian fibulae of the book of Undset Hans Olof Hildebrand (1872–80). The Hungarian translation was made by Ferenc Pulszky (1883, 21–22).

Hungary, curated by Flóris Rómer, and its guide in French (RÓMER 1867) gained great success and professional recognition. According to Rómer's reminiscences, that was when the research on Hungarian prehistory really started. The fourth tableau is given the title "... I wonder whether the city of Budapest is willing to embrace the international congress...", and recollects the most significant Hungarian references of the 1874 Stockholm congress. It was a significant appreciation of Rómer's contribution that he was elected to the council of the congress. His new membership earned him the opportunity to lobby for the next congress to be held in Hungary: "The Russians made huge efforts to bring the event to Moscow still we managed to win all votes but three or four" (PROHÁSZKA 2013, 89).

We present the preparation and the most important contributors of the World Congress on tableaux 5–10. Firstly, we introduce the key person of implementation under the title "*The man to whom we owe Hungarian archaeology and the World Congress: Flóris Rómer, the scholar monk.*" The title emphasizes probably the two most remarkable characteristics of his personality: scholar and monk. Although it may sound like a commonplace, still we consider him to be the father of Hungarian archaeology. The tableau displays some decisive moments of his adventuresome life and career. Three different types of his works have been selected to illustrate how diverse his activity was from non-formal education through field survey to editing scientific journals (Fig. 2).

The title of the sixth tableau, "(...) let's be vigorous and respectable members of the world's cultured society!", is a characteristic example of what we would call today a country-image-forming attitude, one that inspired the exhibition's subtitle. Rómer instigated the museums, professionals and private collectors



Fig. 2. The portrait of Flóris Rómer (1815–1889) with his personal motto (lithography by Miklós Barabás, 1863. The Graphic Collection, Hungarian Historical Gallery, HNM)



Fig. 3. The portrait of Elek Jelenik Csetneki (1856–1899), a clerk and, later, assistant guard in the Hungarian National Museum, who did the lion's share of the preparations. Photo taken around 1886–89, currently in the art gallery of István Goszleth, Budapest (Historical Photo Department, HNM)

to contribute via printed appeals – e.g., with the following words in the 3 August, 1785 issue of the *A HON* journal: “(...) we shall prove the world that we are not sleeping but are moving friskily, even though without remarkable noise, knowing clearly that we count as much among the nations of the world as we achieve in education” (PROHÁSZKA 2013, 98). The tableau also presents Rómer’s associates, Elek Csetneki Jelenik (Fig. 3) and József Hampel.

The seventh tableau, “*Myriads of large and small things*”, sheds light on Flóris Rómer’s enormous venture invested in the organisation of the World Congress by citing József Hampel’s words from 1891: “(...) he dedicated one and a half years of his life to the event, during which he was making such a great effort as no one else could. He was up and down the country, encouraged and collected, conducted excavations, exchanged thousands of letters, gathered data from everywhere for a prehistoric map of Hungary, and accomplished myriads of large and small things relating to organisation and administration.”

“*What our homeland’s mysterious past had preserved underground for science*”, the eighth tableau presents some archaeological sites where excavations began in the preparatory phase of the congress: Tószeg-Laposhalom, Szelevény-Menyasszonypart and -Demeterpart, Sobor, the Transylvanian Tordos/Turdaş, the Haligóc/Haligovce and Baradla caves, Százhalombatta, Eresztvény, Tátika, Százhalom site between Szűcs and Bakonybél, and Pátka (PROHÁSZKA 2013, 96–97).

The ninth tableau, titled “*...what we did, where we stand, where we want to go...*”, revives the process of the creation of a map of prehistoric sites (Fig. 4), one of the greatest endeavours of the congress organisers. We set the map to be the tableau’s central element (RÓMER 1878) so bystanders could browse it and get absorbed in the details. The title is a quotation from the printed appeal by Rómer, published on 3 August, 1875 (RÓMER 1875), in which he gave an account of the current status of the preparations, naming, as



Fig. 4. Map of prehistoric sites in the territory of 19th-century Hungary, created for and displayed in the World Congress. It was published in print later (RÓMER 1878, source: Arcanum)



Fig. 5. Face lid of the Vinča culture from Tordos (Old Archaeological Collections Unit, Department of Archaeological Collections, HNM Inv. no.: 81/1913.13.)

woman archaeologists worldwide. Her work earned world fame for the Neolithic site at Tordos (Fig. 5).

“Be welcomed in the capital of Hungary and may success be with you in your endeavours”, said Ágoston Trefort, minister of religion and public education, in his opening speech of the congress, in which key figures of the contemporary prehistoric archaeological and anthropological research participated, in the State Room of the Hungarian National Museum on 4 September 1876. The eleventh tableau represents the opening ceremony and the participating foreign and national scholars, with such renowned researchers as Sir Arthur Evans, Jens Jacob Asmussen Worsaae and Oscar Montelius (the archaeologists who created the fundamental periodisation of prehistory for archaeology in Denmark and Sweden) among them.

We dedicated the subsequent tableau to the sections of the congress, a report from the 8 October, 1876 issue of the *Vasárnapi Újság* newspaper, and illustrations of the organisers (Rómer and Pulszky) and participating scientists (Fig. 6). The article, using colourful wording, is readable for those understanding Hungarian, whereas foreign readers can astonish how high the quality of the newspapers was in Hungary in 1876.

The thirteenth tableau, “Scholars on the railway”, provides insight into the excursions arranged for the congress participants. We highlighted the trip to Hatvan, which was made memorable on one hand by the “creative” management of a demonstrative excavation by József Spertlág, a local pharmacist and amateur archaeologist, and, on the other hand, by the dance event coming after the professional session: “(...) The Mons Provost donated, almost *gratis*, a cask of Reims wine and Géza B. Podmaniczky 108 bottles of Érmellék wine from the year 1834, so it is no surprise that the learned gentlemen fell to the dance and kissing the lassies of Hatvan, who still pride themselves on the many kisses they got from Brits and Frenchmen” (PROHÁSZKA 2015, 93).

Was there a separate Copper Age that preceded the Bronze Age? The presentation by Ferenc Pulszky and the question presented in the title provide the topic of the fourteenth tableau. There was a lively debate following the lecture, not free from sceptical comments; however, Hungarian research has never disputed the existence of a separate Copper Age, although its internal division changed several times over time. The

an encouragement, all those who contributed with information. Some data providers were also named on the tableau. One of them was Imre Méry, whose letter, listing all objects that he had sent for the exhibition, appears as an illustration.

The following tableau, titled “(...) it's a pity she is not a man”, commemorates Zsófia Torma, one of the informants and private collectors who contributed to the exhibition. The quotation is by Flóris Rómer, whose appeal was responded by Zsófia Torma with enthusiasm. She got herself noticed by the national and international scholarly world at a time when Hungarian archaeology was still making its first steps and women were remarkably rare in the academic field. She is regarded as one of the first



Fig. 6. Tableau introducing the World Congress's sections.

tableau is illustrated by photographs of some heavy copper objects displayed in the exhibition related to the World Congress, some of which are part of the Hungarian National Museum's collection (Fig. 7). Due to its science historical significance, a contemporary drawing of the copper treasure from Szege-Szillér, which, retrospectively, proved Ferenc Pulszky's theory on the existence of an independent Copper Age, is also represented on the tableau.

Copper Age gold plate discs with bosses provide the topic of the next tableau *"Tiny golden bowls" from the well's wall*. These finds, displayed, besides copper artefacts, in the exhibition, are also called "Jankovich's gold discs" after their donator. The rather adventurous history of the discovery of some very similar golden discs near Osijek demonstrates well the contemporary archaeological and property ownership relations. We intended to visually emphasize these artefacts partially by drawings from the book *"The Copper Age in Hungary"* by Ferenc Pulszky, and partially by recent photo images (Fig. 8).

The title *"Tószeg – on the way of world fame"* was given to the sixteenth tableau. Participants of the World Congress had the opportunity to visit archaeological sites and take part in the excavations, and what is more, they were even allowed to take home some finds. Of these we highlighted Tószeg-Laposhalom (Fig. 9), which has become a cornerstone of the research of the Bronze Age in Hungary. The



Fig. 7. Copper axe-adze that was also exhibited in the World Congress.



Fig. 8. Tableau of the Copper Age gold plate discs with bosses (photo by Júlia Szatmári)



Fig. 9. The tell at Tószeg-Laposhalom, a site that has become almost completely destroyed since, on an illustration from 1888 (by Tivadar Dörre, after PULSZKY 1888)

Bronze Age *tell*, a multi-layer settlement mound, gained international recognition after having been visited by the foreign scholars, who also took part in the excavations (PROHÁSZKA 2014).

“*The cost of success – the World Congress in numbers.*” To illustrate the magnitude of the efforts related to the event, the tableau displays an enumeration of the activities, events, and participants contributing to the organisation and implementation of the World Congress.

The tableau titled *What we owe to the World Congress* is the final element of the exhibition. We also show a caricature from a contemporary comic book to demonstrate to what degree did the event attract the public, spotlighting archaeology not only for scholars but also for the public, involving a variety of social strata. An undisputed achievement of the World Congress was to contribute to a closer cooperation between archaeology and anthropology within its framework and lectures (RÓMER 1877), a turn that has also proved to be pivotal for the further development of both fields in Hungary.

Curators of the tableau exhibition: Judit P. Barna, archaeologist (HNM NIA CDD) and Péter Prohászka, research fellow (Institute of Archaeology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences Nitra). The exhibition was displayed on the fence of the Hungarian National Museum between 29 August and 19 September; inaugural speeches were delivered by Dr. Gábor Virágos, Deputy Director General of Archaeology of the HNM and Prof. Dr. László Borhy, rector of the Eötvös Loránd University (Fig. 10). Graphic design: Ákos Kappéter; English translation: Valér Bedő (HNM NIA CDD).



Fig. 10. Margó Kósa, deputy director general of social relationships and communication of the HNM, with Dr. Gábor Virágos, deputy director general of archaeology of the HNM, and Prof. Dr. László Borhy, rector of the Eötvös Loránd University, on the opening ceremony of the exhibition (photo by Júlia Szatmári)

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