

COMMUNITY, ARCHAEOLOGY, HERITAGE. THE RESULTS OF COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY IN TOLNA COUNTY

Exhibition review

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On 27 January, the Wosinsky Mór County Museum launched its new temporary exhibition on community archaeology, open until June 12. The exhibition features 850 archaeological objects in 17 display cases, the majority being finds discovered by “museum friendly” metal detector hobbyists, and a few excavated within the framework of different projects. We asked Tibor Ákos Rácz to open the exhibition, who is the president of the Association for Community Archaeology and organized the first large-scale exhibition on community archaeology in Hungary (RÁCZ 2021). As so far no articles have been published on the results of community archaeological activities in Tolna County, the exhibition provides a great opportunity to talk about these achievements and the unique features.



Fig. 1. View of the exhibition area from the entrance.
Left: Introduction panel, center: showcase with modern-era finds, right: the unit with metallic waste.

After a few isolated attempts, community archaeological activities, similar to the ones across the country, started to take off in the mid-2010s in Tolna County. Certainly connected to the social and economic conditions of the region, the majority of these activities is museum-friendly metal detecting, and only a few are project-based and initiated by enthusiasts or conducted with their help. However, our exhibition covers the results of both, emphasising the often repeated truth that community archaeology does not equal museum-friendly metal detecting. Therefore, although all six archaeologists of our institution helped organising the exhibition, the three specialised in metal detecting (Attila Czövek, Gábor K. Tóth and the author of this article) selected the artefacts discovered using this method. The display cases presenting these items make up about three-quarters of the exhibition. Our original plan was to launch the exhibition in autumn 2020 and then, later, at the end of 2021, but due to the pandemic we had to postpone the opening several times.

There were no talks about the achievements of community archaeology in Tolna County at the archaeology events held in recent years. The only exception is Attila Czövek's lecture, *The state of community archaeology in Tolna County*, presented during last year's conference in Szentendre. For the very first time, our exhibition features a selection of various finds acquired by the museum. Our goal is to publish the documents – including a detailed catalogue – of the items after the closing of the exhibition, in order to make them accessible to the archaeological community.

After considering the amount of finds and the capacity of the area provided for our temporary exhibition, we decided to use as many display cases as possible. A separate showcase was assigned for each community archaeology excavation and the colleagues specialised in the area, making the total number up to seventeen. The remaining thirteen display cases focus on the best finds discovered via museum-friendly metal detecting. When we had to decide on the theme of the latter, we had two options: either group together the finds that were excavated at the same archaeological site and are connected to each other, or divide them by top-

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Fig. 2. The exhibition's introductory panel with a drone photo of an excavation, taken by one of our museum-friendly volunteers, and showcase no. 1 (Coins) on the right.

tions of archaeologists, as most finds will not be collected by them. That is why the dedication of the around twenty volunteers to save what is left over the last couple of years is extremely important. Unfortunately, the territorial coverage of their activities is disproportionate as, compared to the county's eastern and central areas, we have hardly any museum-friendly hobbyists in the less developed western part. Over the last decade, nearly 30,000 new metal finds have been added to our collection, some of which have already been featured in our exhibition series called "Artefact of the Month" or in publications. It should be clarified that the artefacts on display are exclusively from amateurs who entered into a cooperation agreement with the Museum and, thus, were able to obtain a permit. Most of the items are from the Middle Ages or the Roman Period, a few of them from prehistoric times, while the grave finds of disturbed cemeteries date back to the Migration Period.

Let us have a detailed look at the exhibition (the numbers of the display cases are included in brackets). The *coins* (1) are arranged in chronological order, starting from the Celts until the "Kuruc" period (the beginning of the 18th century). In addition to the more famous types, we also included several less common coins (e.g. Prague *grošchen*, Turkish *mangir*) and all the gold coins acquired by the museum (e.g., a Celtic *stater* and Suleiman's *altin*). A curiosity of the exhibition is the *moneta nova dinar* from 1522, stuck in a thimble. The display case for the coin and treasure hoards (*depots*) (2) contains three types of finds. Most of them, nine to be exact, are so-called purse finds (or "pocket finds"), when a larger amount of similar types of coins from the same period are discovered in a relatively small area. We only exhibit hoards where the coins were found stuck together, as that proves that they were stored in the same place. The second group consists of the coins collected during the field identification of three previous museum finds. Lastly, we also put a recently identified Turkish-age coin hoard on display. A selection of two Late Bronze Age assemblages represents the depots. The display case for *iron tools* (3) includes a compilation of the five Turkish-age hoards discovered along the river Danube in recent years. Two coulters found together represent the Roman Age. The display case exhibiting *items of apparel* (4) contains the most finds, presented in chronological order and by type: Roman fibulas, Avar belt fittings, belt mountings dated to the Hungarian Conquest Period, and mainly buckles

ics. For practical reasons we chose the second, and decided on the thirteen topics while arranging the finds. The list of objects includes a brief description of the finds, the period they are dated to, the name of the settlements but not the exact sites in order to protect these archaeological locations, and the monogram of the finders in brackets (their full names are listed at the end of the introductory text).

It is best to introduce a few aspects of the museum-friendly metal detectorist activities in Tolna County. The area has many Roman and medieval archaeological sites, resulting in increased activity by illegal treasure hunters in the recent decades, who often come from far away. This phenomenon kills the possibility of leaving the scattered finds in the upper, plow layer of the soil for future genera-



Fig. 3. The exhibition area viewed from the back wall, with showcases along both sidewalls, the installation with metallic waste in the middle, and the introductory wall behind that.

and fasteners from the Middle Ages and the Ottoman period. Two-thirds of the *jewellery* (5) are rings with characteristic chiselled heads and seal rings of the same historical period. There is a wide variety of objects among the *household implements* (6): from personal items (mirrors, tweezers, and thimbles) and house fixtures (locks, bands) to tools (knives, vine knives, axes). The lead fishing-net sinkers that were found coiled up are especially interesting, as they suggest a so far unknown type of archaeological site, fish camps along the Danube in the Árpáadian Age. The religious, *ecclesiastical artefacts* (7) not only include a few Roman items (votive, phallus-shaped pendant, statue of Venus) but also medieval and early modern artefacts, such as corpora, book accessories, devotional medals and crosses. The three-piece Bronze chrismal, the lead pilgrim's ampulla, and the three pilgrim badges are rare archaeological objects countrywide. In addition to the medieval scale



Fig. 5. The exhibition area viewed from the back wall, with the showcase for Mysterious objects front-centre, the installation with metallic waste behind that, and the introductory panel in the background.

parts and balance weights, we placed all the lead cloth seals that were discovered in Tolna County and have been identified by Maxim Mordovin, as well as the counting jetons in the *Economy* display case (8). The personal artefacts, such as items with monograms, inscriptions, or coats of arms, as well as the valuable finds made of noble metal were put among the *objects of prestige and representation* (9). The next collection is perhaps the most intriguing for non-professionals. It includes among others a decorative Bronze axe of the Vanya culture, two Roman statuettes (of Hercules and Hermes, respectively), a silver plate and gilded belt sets from the Avar Period, recovered from a grave, three medieval seals, two Turkish-age seals with Arabic letters, silver seal rings, and a crested team badge from the camp of the Christian army that recaptured Buda in 1686. In the display case for *weapons and horse gear* (10), most of the artefacts are, again, from the Middle Ages and the Ottoman period. An iron and a bronze mace, dating back to the Mongol Invasion of Hungary, a late medieval sickle with a straight blade, and buckles discovered at the aforementioned 1686 camps are all worth mentioning. In the display case named *Workshops, raw materials* (11) the finds of counterfeiting workshops from the Ottoman period, discovered recently in different parts of the county deserve our attention in particular. The next display case (12) is entitled *Settlements of peoples from the Balkans in the Ottoman Period*. It consists of the finds discovered through the latest archaeological prospections, and is the only one where we arranged the collection by the types of archaeological sites and not by topic. It includes the metal finds of the settlements that were systematically localised in the



Fig. 4. Showcases along the walls, with the one for Mysterious objects among them (right).

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Fig. 6. Showcase for Prestige objects and representation.

last couple of years. These settlements without a medieval background were established after the Long Turkish War, and people from the Balkans inhabited them until the Kuruc period.

The last three display cases placed along the walls show the results of the excavations initiated by the local community or carried out with their help. The first one (13) focuses on the earliest project, exhibiting the finds of a unique, Early Iron Age burial mound in Regöly with wide-ranging connections. Géza Szabó excavated the burial mound within the frameworks of the archaeology camps that were awarded with the so-called Heritage Cup (Örökség serleg in Hungarian). The second display case (14) contains the finds of Ete, a destroyed market town in the Sárköz region. Márta Vizi and Zsuzsa Miklós have been systematically researching the site for 25 years, and volunteers were involved in both the field survey and the processing of the finds. The third display case (15) shows the finds of the only excavation that was carried out on civil initiative. The Cultural Association of Kisszékely instigated and helped in the excavation of the medieval church in Kisszékely, in an effort to create a ruin garden. Uniquely, the items include numerous Baroque devotional medals, as the church, built in the 13th century, was used until the beginning of the 19th century.

A fascinating segment of our exhibition is the display case presenting non-archaeological items found using metal detecting (16), which are still worthy of being displayed in our museum. There are various objects with inscription, coat of arms, or year number (e.g. coins, badges, seals), as well as clothing accessories and articles of everyday use that people in the modern era lost in the region: buttons, tobacco pipe caps, pocket knives. These could capture the attention of both the archaeologist colleagues focusing on the Modern Age and local historians. It was important for us to present in addition to the cleaned and restored archaeological finds also the “by-products” of metal detecting, modern-era and contemporary archaeological objects, and waste with metal content that stresses the importance of environmental education. Our visitors are often shocked by the metal waste “poured” in the middle of the display room, and a cultural anthropologist may as well notice the changes in material culture over the last decades in the metal pile.

I would also like to mention an exciting initiative we started. We have put five artefacts, the function of which we were not able to guess, in the *Mysterious objects* display case (17) in the middle of the room. Those who are interested can write down their ideas concerning the function of the displayed objects. Meanwhile, we placed on the lower shelves a few stone tools and decorated ceramic fragments that our museum-friends collected on their metal-detector survey trips in order to emphasise that metal detecting is not limited to the collection of metal objects.

Among the contents displayed on the walls, we have to call attention to the panel introducing the visitors to an activity that is less popular in community archaeology. One of our museum friends regularly goes through the updated satellite images, often discovering new archaeological sites on them, while another helper locates the sites with a drone.

We hope that our exhibition provides new information to both those interested in local history and the members of our profession, while also giving feedback to the participants of our community archaeology programme on the best and scientifically most important results of the joint work.

RECOMMENDED LITERATURE

Rácz, T. Á. (szerk.) (2021). *Kincskeresés, kaland, tudomány. Közösségi régészeti projektek Pest megyében*. Szentendre: Ferenczy Múzeumi Centrum.