

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS OF THE TÜRR ISTVÁN MUSEUM IN BAJA

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One of the main activities of the Türr István Museum's NOBORDER project (co-financed by the Interreg VI A IPA program) is the presentation and dissemination of research results of the cemetery at the Sükösd–Árpás-dűlő site. This cemetery contains a unique Bronze Age grave, and the project seeks to share the research of its findings with both the scientific community and the wider public. The full restoration and conservation of the finds, their illustrated documentation, and most of the scientific analyses were made possible through an eight-million-forint grant from the Hungarian Genius Program. The same program also supported the presentation of research results and excavation experiences at national and international conferences (EAA 2022, UISPP 2023, ISARS 2024). The dating of the woman buried in the grave – nicknamed Kamilla – and the analysis of her ancient DNA were conducted in collaboration with the Lendület/Momentum research group. The archaeological exhibition itself was realized with co-financing from the National Cultural Fund of Hungary (NKA) Heritage Protection and Museum Professional Colleges, as well as the EU project, which also funded accompanying programs and publications.

Without support, a regional museum like the Türr István Museum could not have carried out research on the Bronze Age cemetery, nor mounted the subsequent exhibition. The exhibition titled *Kamilla, Daughter of Light. Do Clothes Make the Woman? Bronze Age Fashion Trend or Cultural Affiliation?* was funded by these grants, which covered exhibition design, new display cases, and the presentation of unique Bronze Age gold jewellery never shown in a regional museum before.

The exhibition's central question is whether we can speak of “fashion” in the Bronze Age. Do grave goods – clothing accessories and jewellery – express only wealth and social status, or do they carry deeper archaeological meaning? Though the proverb suggests that “clothes do not make the man,” garments and their adornments nonetheless provide a wealth of information about both individuals and their communities. The jewellery from the Sükösd–Árpás-dűlő cemetery demonstrates just how much cultural and social meaning clothing carried. It also reflects broader cultural identities, such as the Tumulus culture, whose members signalled belonging through shared jewellery styles and dress ornaments. While the jewellery in female graves of the Tumulus culture had stylistic precedents in earlier periods, research shows that women of higher prestige wore remarkably similar ornaments and even complete costumes across the wide geographic spread of the Tumulus culture – from present-day Germany, Czechia, and western and southern Poland to the Carpathian Basin. The exhibition also displays contemporary folk costumes from the Bácska region, highlighting the same abundance and diversity of information in a smaller, culturally rich area. Unlike archaeological remains, these garments survive intact: richly embroidered and brightly coloured, they demonstrate what has been lost to time in prehistoric clothing.

Interior designer Ervin Vass-Eysen created the exhibition's visual and technical designs, including the installations and lighting. The exhibition is designed to be accessible to all audiences. Visitors encounter seven panels presenting excavation results and scientific analyses through text and illustrations. At the centre of these panels – also the exhibition's focal point – is a large crimson emblem depicting a unique amber pendant from Kamilla's grave. When backlit, the pendant glows red and produces a cross-shaped symbol, which inspired the exhibition's title.

An open pedestal in the centre displays replicas of Kamilla's jewellery, which visitors are invited to touch. These reproductions, made of plastic, bronze sheet, and resin, provide tactile learning expe-

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Fig. 1. The opening of the exhibition

riences. A crimson-dyed resin replica of the amber pendant demonstrates its shifting colours when exposed to light.

The first panel outlines excavation results and anthropological analyses. Two panels focus on genetic and isotope studies, revealing Kamilla's age, physical traits, ancestry, and diet. Another presents the origins of her grave goods – namely an egg-shaped stone, mussels, and snails – alongside archaeobotanical findings from soil samples.

A separate section introduces the experimental reconstruction of Kamilla's clothing. Illustrated reconstructions, based on ethnographic and archaeological parallels, highlight the challenges of recreating ancient attire. Another panel explores the symbolic meaning of Bronze Age jewellery, particularly its connections to sunlight.

Two large horizontal cases display loaned archaeological finds, including jewellery from skeletal graves of the Tumulus culture, and hoards and depot assemblages spanning the entire Bronze Age. Thanks to collaboration with the King Saint Stephen Museum in Székesfehérvár, the exhibition also presents Grave 83 of the Máty–Méhes-dűlő Tumulus cemetery, displaying its jewellery in its authentic arrangement.

Five display cases feature the richness of Bácska folk costumes – from the sequined Sokác attire to the women's costumes of Érsekcsanád and Bunjevci, adorned with gold coins (*lázsiás*) and embroidery. While the colours, embroidery, and fabrics of Bronze Age garments have long since faded, small female figurines from the Lower Danube region dressed in festive attire testify to the pursuit of beauty among Bronze Age women. Replicas of nearly twenty such figurines, created by László Gucsi, are on display.

The exhibition opened in June 2024 and runs until 31 October 2025. For the 2025 Night of Museums, it was refreshed with new Bronze Age ornaments, including gold pieces and the special spiral-shaped bronze coil from Abaújvecser. A Late Bronze Age assemblage from Sopron-Várhely – excavated through a community archaeology program led by chief museologist Attila Mrenka – was also added, presented for the first time outside its home museum.

Two special gold armbands, perhaps contemporaneous with Kamilla, were loaned from the Hungarian National Museum – also a first for a regional museum. The Tápióbicske gold armband, purchased in 2016 for the Prehistoric Collection of the museum's Archaeological Department, is one of the largest and heaviest (303.7 g) crescent-ended examples known. It probably came from a Middle Bronze Age settlement located on the western edge of the village of Tápióbicske, beneath the ridges of Várhegy and Kalapos-hegy. Its



Fig. 2. Folk costume of the Bácska region displayed in the exhibition

an item of personal adornment but must have been part of a ritual or other type of symbolic activity. Although once it was dated to the Late Bronze Age Piliny culture (c. 1300-1200 BC), recent studies suggest it may instead belong to the earlier Füzesabony culture of the Middle Bronze Age (c. 1700/1500 BC).

The exhibition is grounded in extensive research, published both in *Archeometriai Műhely* (2024 XXI/4) and in book form: *Bronze Age Cemetery at Site V, Sükösd–Árpás-dűlő – Geoarchaeological and Archaeometric Studies* (Baja Papers, Vol. 25). The publication presents a complex bioarchaeological analysis (including anthropological, stable isotope, archaeogenetic, and radiocarbon) of the human remains from the graves, as well as full reports and results of the archaeometric investigations carried out to date on the samples taken during the excavation and from the archaeological finds.

In order to gather the most comprehensive information possible about the lifestyle and social networks of the Bronze Age community at Sükösd, our primary objective was to conduct as many scientific examinations as possible on the various finds. The research included a geophysical survey, traditional anthropological and archaeogenetic study, dating and isotope measurements, analyses of textile imprints, the egg-shaped stone, the black soil layer beneath Grave 1, malacological (mollusc) and carpological (plant seed and fruit) samples, as well as the analysis of the contents of a mug. The team also hopes its methods and findings will serve as models for future studies at other sites, in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the Bronze Age.

Education has been central to the project. With support from the Hungarian Genius Program and the NOBORDER project, museum educators Dóra B. Karai and Boglárka Pallós have created a thematic activity booklet and board game, *Kamilla, Daughter of Light*, and in recognition of their innovative work, they have been awarded the 2025 Museum Education Grand Prize. The richly illustrated 25-page booklet presents the latest research in an engaging, accessible way, connecting naturally to the archaeological exhibition. Together, the booklet and game offer students from all age groups and teachers a comprehensive view of Bronze Age life. It also provides museum education workshop leaders with concise, scientifically grounded information

closest parallel is an armband from Bilje, Croatia, held in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. In 1972, the unique Dunavecse gold armband, weighing nearly 300 g, was acquired by the Hungarian National Museum. Both armbands are decorated with symbols, probably representing various celestial bodies and phenomena. At the end of the Middle Bronze Age, probably leaders of their local community wore these prestigious ornaments on the wrist or upper arm.

The Abaújdevecser bronze coil was loaned to the exhibition by the Hermann Ottó Museum of Miskolc. The finder marked Abaújdevecser-Ortásföldek as the site where they found in 2002 the 12-kg bronze coil, but this could not be verified. During the verification excavation, the site yielded no traces of human activity. Due to its size, the object cannot be considered



Fig. 3. The symbol etched into Kamilla's amber necklace as the focal point of the exhibition

on each topic. Through engaging tasks, it inspires students to acquire knowledge independently, while also developing their vocabulary, reading comprehension, and logical skills.

Apart from explaining the archaeological period, the booklet devotes a whole chapter to the work of the archaeologist and the presentation of related research fields. The board game also familiarizes players with the details of archaeological work: players tag along with the archaeologist to discover and excavate together Kamilla's grave, and carry out detailed documentation and sampling for laboratory analysis, while enduring harsh weather conditions at the excavation.

In order to cater to all age groups, the methodology used in the booklet also helped to produce various versions of the curatorial texts, offering a richer experience to everyone in learning about a period absent from the usual history curriculum. The methodological structure of the booklet (which covers the presentation of the everyday life and festivals of Bronze Age people through archaeological finds) is easy to adapt for use in other museums, where the staff can select their own archaeological objects and historical era to acquaint visitors with the life of our ancestors.



Fig. 4. Museum education activity at the exhibition



Fig. 5. "Kamilla, Daughter of Light" board game

Museum workshops welcome children (ranging from kindergarten to secondary school age) not only from Baja but from across Hungary, including Bogyiszló, Budapest, Fajsz, Gara, and Vaskút. We have also adapted our materials for young people living with intellectual disabilities. We draw attention to the lifestyle, customs, and the differing rhythms of weekdays and holidays of the ethnographic groups living in Bácska, using objects preserved in the museum that once belonged to the ancestors of this region. Children may touch and even try on replicas, such as the decorative coins, embroidered slippers, the tambura, and the festive costume of the Bunjeveci region, Kamilla's jewellery and clothing.

The Sükösd archaeological finds have inspired numerous programs supported by the NOBORDER project. The 2024 Night of Museums titled *A Border that Does Not Divide* was dedicated to the same theme and featured 25 events including scientific, cultural, and culinary activities, and entertainment across ten locations. The 2025 Day of Archaeology will showcase the theme *Secrets of Treasure Chambers*, while the Autumn Festival of Museums will feature lectures, experimental archaeology, and art workshops for art school students. Led by textile artist Matild Jászberényi, the workshops will cover

the analysis and processing of the Bronze Age finds from Sükösd through an applied arts perspective, experimentation in clothing reconstruction, and the design of decorative reinterpretations of the objects, offering students the chance to broaden their interests with the help of this museum activity and through a public presentation of their projects after the workshops. We are attempting to reconstruct Bronze Age weaving techniques with the help of nettle, and there will be a fashion design task based on other Bronze Age finds also displayed in the exhibition. On the 2025 Day of Archaeology, we will present the process of making the garments, the results of the design work, and will hear a lecture on Bronze Age textile finds.

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