

RESEARCH INTO THE STRUCTURE OF LATE BRONZE AGE SETTLEMENTS IN THE SOUTHERN GREAT HUNGARIAN PLAIN: “ENCLOSED SPACE – OPEN BORDERS” PROJECT

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Around 1300 B.C. significant changes in the structure of settlements can be observed in the southern part of the Great Hungarian Plain, as a result of which a series of fortified settlements was established in the Békés-Csanád loess plateau and the Temesköz regions. These changes indicate important political, economic and ideological transformations in the area. Within the framework of the project presented here we are examining these changes through investigations into the earthworks in the vicinity of Csanádpalota and the presumably multi-tiered settlement system connected with it. The research may provide new perspectives for the interpretation of the Late Bronze Age in the southern part of the Great Hungarian Plain.

The opportunity rarely presents itself for Hungarian archeologists to continue and build upon the results of their work carried out at a large-scale rescue excavation within the framework of a follow-up micro-regional research project. During the excavations begun in 2011 on the archeological site number 55 along the section of the M-43 motorway between Makó and Nagylak the features of a Late Bronze Age settlement with a complex system of fortifications began to take shape (Fig. 1). The fortified oval center of the settlement is located a few hundred meters to the north of the right-of-way. The results of the preventive excavation served as a basis for the “Enclosed Space – Open Borders” project, in the context of which we performed field research based on various methods in 2012–2013 in the central section of the ca. 400 hectare fortified settlement, and we set a goal of investigating the settlement’s wider micro-regional and regional significance as well.

During the course of the excavation of the M43 motorway’s right-of-way, we combined the methods characteristic of large-scale digs with more delicate excavation techniques, the recording of strata and and



Fig. 1: Csanádpalota

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Fig. 2: Pit 44/51 and its complex fill with burnt strata and finds



Fig. 3: The concentric ditches of the earthworks' central section and the excavated area (red) along the motorway's right-of-way

systematic sampling generally used in planned excavations, so we obtained more detailed information in relation to the archeological site. We were able to isolate several features that can be placed in the middle period of the Late Bronze Age (Pre-Gáva period, 1300–1100 B.C.).² However, evidence suggesting buildings – debris, remains of wooden structures, postholes and floors – was unfortunately not discovered. On the other hand, the pits of various sizes that were rich in finds served as proof of Late Bronze Age settlement. In the fill of the majority of these we came across traces of complex, presumably ritual acts (Fig. 2).

Besides these pits, we also uncovered sections of the ditches belonging to the system of fortifications (Fig. 3), which we identified on the basis of old and new³ aerial photographs and satellite images from Google Earth. The complex system of ditches can be interpreted in several ways. It is possible that they served the defense of the settlement, a view supported by the ditches with U and V shaped cross-sections, as well as the presence of ramparts within them.⁴ However, this view – for practical reasons – is less convincing, since it would have been difficult to properly defend the full length of the 2 km long straight section of the ditch running in a north-south direction. According to another possible interpretation, it may be the traces of a corral for livestock. This is contradicted however, by the fact that livestock could have been kept within an area that was much smaller enclosed by ditches that could have been dug with less work. According to a third possible interpretation, the system of ditches may have separated a seasonally used monumental ritual center from the profane world.

During the course of the further field research we selected methods through which we were able to gain as much data as possible on the central section of the settlement. Therefore we performed intensive field walks in the northwestern section of the central oval fortification in 2012 and in the southwestern section in 2013. On the basis of the finds collected (ceramics, pieces of daub) we were able to more precisely determine the location of the rampart encircling the central section and we identified more Late Bronze Age features (Fig. 4). Already at the commencement of our research we planned to examine the structure of the oval inner rampart through an excavation, which we carried out in July of 2013. This was preceded by geological coring and a magnometric survey,⁵ and we designated the location of the planned excavation on the basis of these

² Trogmayer, Ottó: Beiträge zur Spätbronzezeit des südlichen Teils der Ungarischen Tiefebene. *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 15 (1963), 85–122; V. Szabó, Gábor: A Csorva-csoport és a Gáva-kultúra kutatásának problémái néhány Csongrád megyei leletgyűttes alapján (Problems of Research into the Csorva Group and Gáva Culture on the Basis of Some Collections of Finds from Csongrád County). *A Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve – Studia Archaeologica* 2 (1996), 9–109.

³ Taken by Pazirik Ltd.

⁴ Keeley, H. Lawrence – Fontana, Marisa – Quick, Russell: Baffles and Bastions: The Universal Features of Fortifications. *Journal of Archaeological Research* 15 (2007), 55–95.

⁵ This was the work of Tamás Polányi.

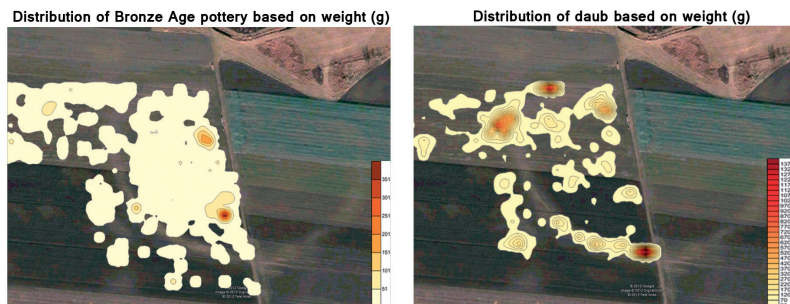


Fig. 4: Results of the systematic field walks



Fig. 5: Burnt remains from the rammed clay rampart

results. The cores showed the rampart as well as two ditches that were about 3 m deep, which was supported by the images from the magnetometer.

We opened a 3×40 m trench running north-south, perpendicular to the rampart. By sieving the excavated soil we were able to collect even the smallest finds. The remains of the rampart appeared in the central part of the trench, but due to agricultural cultivation had only survived to about the height of 50 cm. Its internal structure, presumably made from rammed clay, was only indicated by a 30–40 cm wide strip of burnt daub (Fig. 5). On the inside of the rampart, parallel to it, a row of postholes were discovered, which according to our hypothesis may have been part of a palisade wall (Fig. 6). Two nearly 3 m deep ditches with V shaped cross-sections ran through the central and southern parts of the trench (Figs 7–8). The ditches – just as with the sections of ditch discovered earlier along the right-of-way of the motorway during the preventive excavation – contained a great amount of characteristic Late Bronze Age ceramics.



Fig. 6: The clay-lined postholes of the palisade wall



Fig. 7: Ditch No. 201

The fortifications extended to ca. 400 hectares, thus we identified the largest prehistoric fortification presently known in Hungary (Fig. 9). However, this site, unparalleled in Hungary, can be connected with a system of fortified settlements spread over a large area, since fortification systems of similar size were erected across the border in Serbia and Romania as well. The existence of several fortified settlements in the area of the Békés-Csanád loess plateau and Temesköz regions can be demonstrated during the Late Bronze Age. These earthworks were varied in both their sizes and the number of fortifications. More than twenty fortified settlements of this type can be found in Békés, Csongrád, Arad and Timiș counties. The field research on these in Hungary has been limited up to this point to just a few sites, such as Orosháza-Nagyatársánc⁶ and

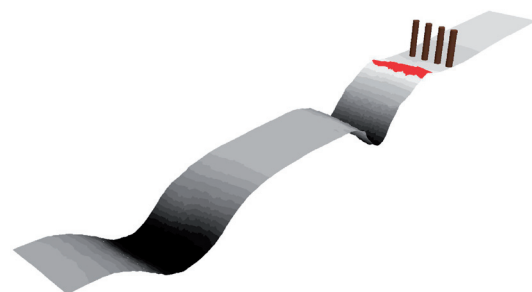


Fig. 8: Relief map of the ditches and the rampart, as well as the 3D reconstruction of the palisade wall

⁶ Banner, János: A hódmezővásárhelyi Nagyatársánc (Die Grosse-Tartarenschanze bei Hódmezővásárhely) (The Great Tatar Rampart of Hódmezővásárhely). *Dolgozatok* 15 (1939), 93–114.



Fig. 9: The system of fortifications at Csanádpalota-Földvár on the Google Earth image

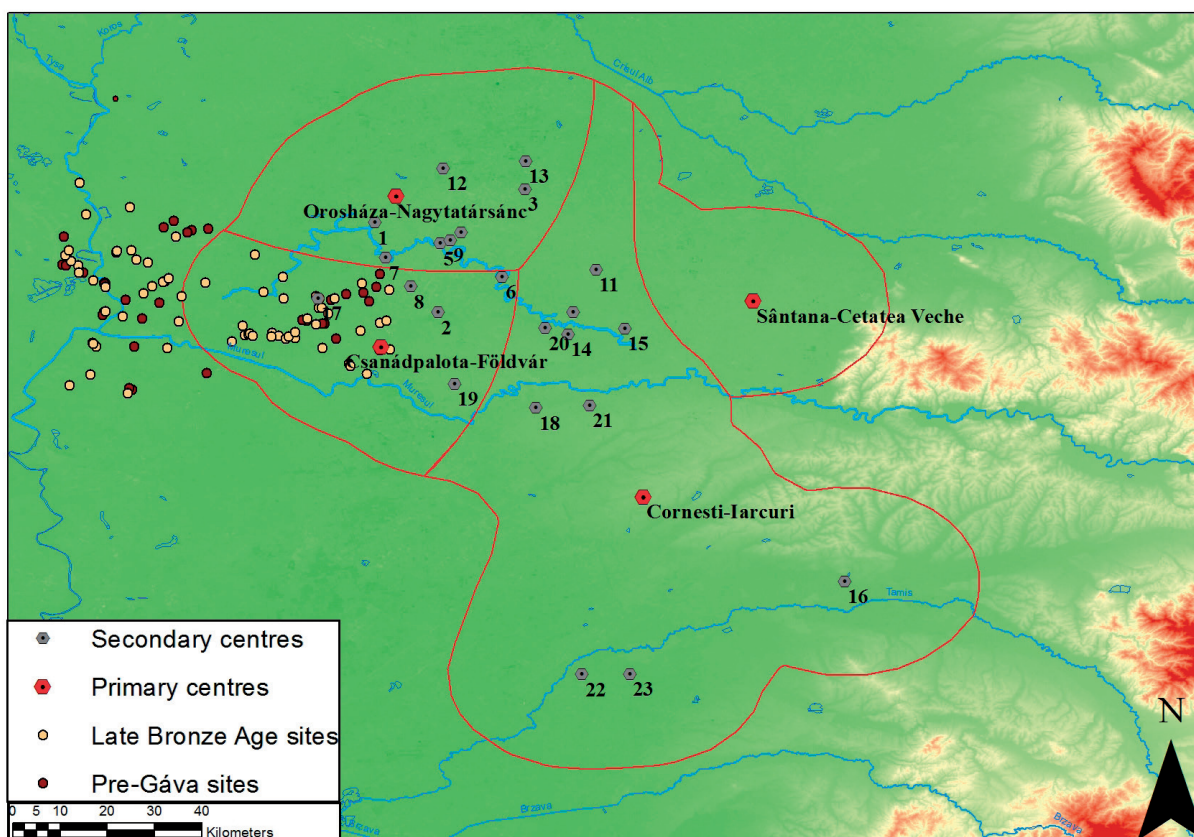


Fig. 10: Weighted Thiessen polygons around the largest fortified settlements, with secondary centres and known Late Bronze Age and Pre-Gáva period archeological sites in Csongrád County. Secondary centers: 1. Békéssámsón, Szőlősi-határ-dűlő; 2. Mezőhegyes, Árkos-puszta; 3. Medgyesegyháza, Lagzi-dűlő; 4. Nagybánhegyes, Kis-Ádáz-dűlő; 5. Végegyháza, Zsibrik domb; 6. Battonya, Parázs-tanya; 7. Tótkomlós, Határ-dűlő; 8. Mezőhegyes, Komlósi út; 9. Reformátuskovácsháza, Szalai-dűlő; 10. Battonya, Vörös-dűlő; 11. Kisdombegyháza, Szederjes-dűlő; 12. Csanádapáca, Kis-Ápáca; 13. Újkigyós, Örök-dűlő; 14. Turnu; 15. Variașu Mare; 16. Topolovățu Mare; 17. Makó, Rákos-Császárvár; 18. Munar/Munár; 19. Semlac/Szemlak, “Pusta lui Cucu”; 20. Pecica/Pécska, “Duleul lui Bran”; 21. Bodrogu Nou/Újbodrog; 22. Vinga; 23. Firiteaz/Féregyház



Fig. 11–12: The excavation team

Archaeology students from the University of Pécs and the University of Szeged took part in the excavations in 2013: Zoltán Bartók, Mónika Békefi, Roland Bogár, Dávid Féderer, Zsófia Gonda, Zsófia Kántor, Ferenc Kustár, Péter Lamm, Adrienn Mészáros, Artúr Nyírő, Eszter Pákozdi, Ádám Pálfi, Elvira Simon, Orsolya Szabó, Anna Székely, Tibor Sztankovánszki and Ilona Bede (Université Paris I-Panthéon-Sorbonne)

Végegyháza-Zsibrik-domb.⁷ In recent years the examination of two particularly large earthworks at the Sântana/Újszentanna-Cetatea Veche⁸ and Cornești/Mezősadány-Iarcuiri⁹ archeological sites in Romania commenced within the framework of international research projects.

The finds from several previous surveys and small-scale excavations in the area of Csanádpalota can be placed in the Pre-Gáva period. On the basis of these we hypothesize that the settlements in the environs of the earthworks were part of a complex hierarchy. We began micro-regional research in 2012 with the goal of determining the function of the earthworks as well as verifying whether it had been a primary centre in this system of settlements, as its size would suggest. With the assistance of Geographic Information Systems and social archeological methods we chart the relationship between all of the about two dozen fortified settlements in the entire region stretching across the borders. We can differentiate between the earthworks according to whether they can be identified as primary or secondary centers. The primary centers must have stood at the head of the Late Bronze Age political units, the so-called chiefdoms. The territorial scope of these units can be modeled using Thiessen polygons,¹⁰ and we can also determine how many subordinate, secondary centers or smaller villages may have belonged to each primary center (Fig. 10).

Future research plans include investigating the known contemporaneous archeological sites in the region through surveys and test excavations. We hope to gain more detailed data on the internal structures of both the fortified settlements and the smaller villages, their relationships with one another, and through this, the social, economic and political organization of the Late Bronze Age communities of the southern Great Hungarian Plain.

⁷ Milo, Peter – Lichstenstein, László – Rózsa, Zoltán – Tencer, Tomáš – Fekete, Zoltán – Vlach, Marek: Geophysical Survey at archaeological site Kaszaper, Békés County, Hungary. *ArcheoSciences* 33 (2009), 115–116. Lichstenstein, László – Rózsa, Zoltán: Bronzkori csalafintaságok a középkori Kaszaper területén [Bronze Age trickeries in the vicinity of Kaszaper]. *Múzeumi Kutatások Csongrád Megyében* (2008), 43–65.

⁸ Gogáltan, Florin – Sava, Viktor: *Sântana Cetatea Veche – a Bronze Age earthwork on the lower Mureș* (Arad: Complexul Muzeul Arad, 2010).

⁹ Szentmiklosi, Alexandru – Heeb, Bernhard S. – Heeb, Julia – Harding, Anthony – Krause, Rüdiger – Becker, Helmut: Cornești-Iarcuiri – a Bronze Age town in the Romanian Banat? *Antiquity* 85 (2011), 819–838.

¹⁰ In the case of a set of points (here the points are the fortified settlements), Thiessen polygons enclose an area around a given point where the other points within the polygon lie closer to the given point than any other point.

RECOMMENDED LITERATURE

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