

RECENT RESULTS FROM THE BRONZE AGE RESEARCH INTO THE BENTA VALLEY

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The Bronze Age Research group of the Institute of Archaeology of the Research Centre for the Humanities at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences has for years been conducting research on the Danube Valley south of Budapest. We have performed non-invasive investigations into several archaeological sites in the Benta Valley to the west of the Danube, followed by excavations with the support of the Wenner-Gren Foundation. Our micro-regional work investigating the settlement relationships that can be dated to the period of the Middle Bronze Age (2000–1500 B.C.) has been given new impetus by a grant received from the National Cultural Fund of Hungary in 2014. We also have research programs supported by the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund launched at the beginning of the year, which are investigating Early and Middle Bronze Age burials. Within the framework of the project we are studying an important site at the town of Érd in the Benta Valley, where in several pits partial or complete human skeletons have been discovered, and in four cases multiple burials. Our goal is to perform as comprehensive an examination as possible into the burials and the settlements of varying functions and patterns.

UNFORTIFIED SETTLEMENTS AND FORTIFICATION DITCHES

The Benta Valley project began as a portion of the Százhalombatta interational archaeological research program³ launched in 1997. The valley of the Benta creek is a clearly defined geographical unit that played an outstandingly important role in the Bronze Age and was linked to the tell settlement of Százhalombatta-Földvár on the bank of the Danube. During the first phase of the research a total of thirty-two Bronze Age sites were identified in the Benta Valley. The second phase of the project, from 2003–2007, built upon this. Its objective was to describe the sites and the settlement patterns as quickly and efficiently as possible through so-called shovel tests one spit deep performed systematically at the sites, and then later through processing the finds from small 1×1×1 meter test pits. On the basis of the results the thirty-two Bronze Age sites could be placed in various categories, providing a possible map of the Bronze Age settlement pattern.⁴

The *Institute of Archaeology of the Research Centre for the Humanities at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences* joined the work in 2012.⁵ We performed geophysical surveys on three sites with differing

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³ In summary: Earle, Timothy – Kristiansen, Kristian (eds): *Organizing Bronze Age Societies. The Mediterranean, Central Europe, and Scandinavia Compared* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); <http://szazhalombattaexcavation.info/>

⁴ Earle, Timothy – Kristiansen, Kristian (eds): *Organizing Bronze Age Societies. The Mediterranean, Central Europe, and Scandinavia Compared* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Earle, Timothy – Artursson, Magnus – Polányi, Tamás – Vicze, Magdolna: Rapid Assessment of Bronze Age Settlement Studies in the Benta Valley, Hungary: A Micro-regional Approach. *Ősrégészeti Levelek / Prehistoric Newsletter* 12 (2010 [2012]), 84–93. For earlier results of the research see the articles published in the winter 2012 issue of *Magyar Régészet / Hungarian Archaeology*: Earle, Timothy – Kiss, Viktória – Kulcsár, Gabriella – Szeverényi, Vajk – Polányi, Tamás – Czebreszuk, Janusz – Jaeger, Mateusz – Pospieszny, Łukasz: [Bronzkori tájakon a Benta völgyében / Bronze Age Landscapes in the Benta Valley](#). *Magyar Régészet / Hungarian Archaeology* 2012/4.

⁵ *Landscapes of Complexity: The Politics of Social, Economic and Ritual Transformations in Bronze Age Hungary* project. <http://www.wennergren.org/>; <http://www.wennergren.org/grantees/kulcsar-gabriella>

characteristics: an unfortified settlement at Tárnok 31/1, an external settlement next to a fortified settlement at Sósokút 26/4, and a minor fortified settlement at Bia 1/26. The magnetometer surveys at each site were performed over 2.5–5 hectares. In conjunction with this, at Sósokút and Bia we supplemented the results of the second phase of the Benta project with systematic field walks (performed on 10×10 meter squares). After we compared the geophysical results with the data from the field walks we also performed test excavations at Sósokút and Tárnok with the objective of discovering Bronze Age households (*Fig. 1*).

In one of the trenches at the Sósokút excavation we identified a compacted Bronze Age ground level, which was surrounded by several pits and post holes.⁶ Through the processing of the material finds from the pits and the radiocarbon samples we were able to identify a single-layer settlement inhabited for an extended time, nearly the entire period characterized by Vatyá type material (1880–1560 B.C.) (*Fig. 2*).

On the basis of the surface data, one of the most significant and largest settlements in this section of the valley was at Tárnok-Szőlőhegy. In the fall of 2012 Gábor Márkus⁷ performed a magnetometer survey on an area of nearly 5 hectares. A surprising result of this geophysical survey was the image of a settlement surrounded by a ditch. In December of 2012 Zoltán Czajlik took aerial images of the site, on the basis of which the continuation of the ditches outside the area of the geophysical survey was also observed.⁸ This was also reinforced and supplemented by Google Earth images taken at various times (*Fig. 3*). Since prior to this a fortification ditch had not been discovered at this site, further investigations supplementing the earlier shovel tests and test pits are necessary. We are planning on taking test cores and performing

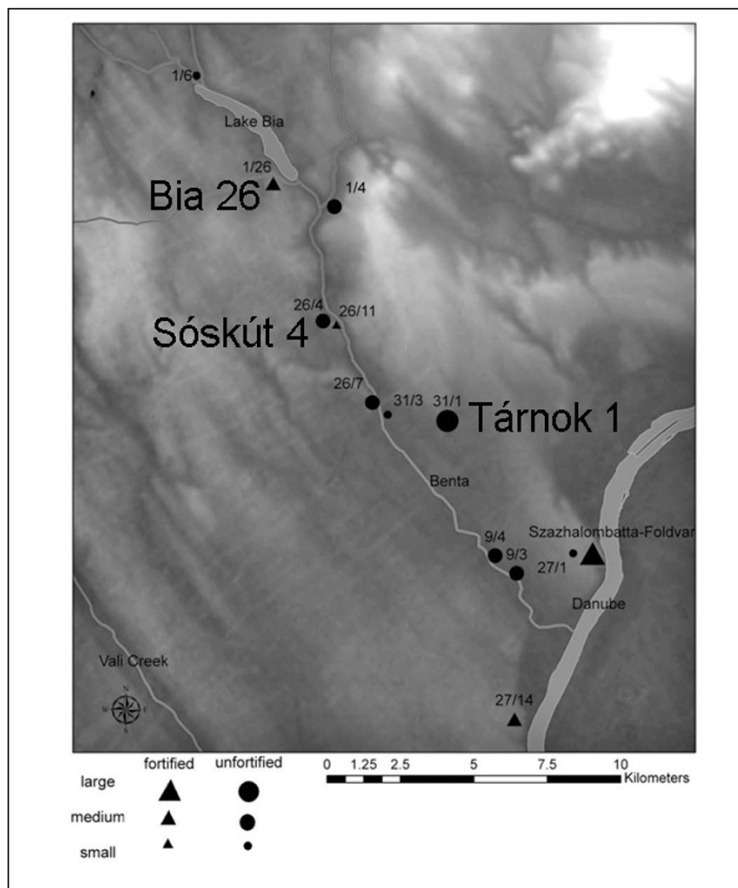


Fig. 1: The Bronze Age settlement pattern in the Benta Valley, with the three investigated sites highlighted (Earle et al. 2011, Fig. 1)

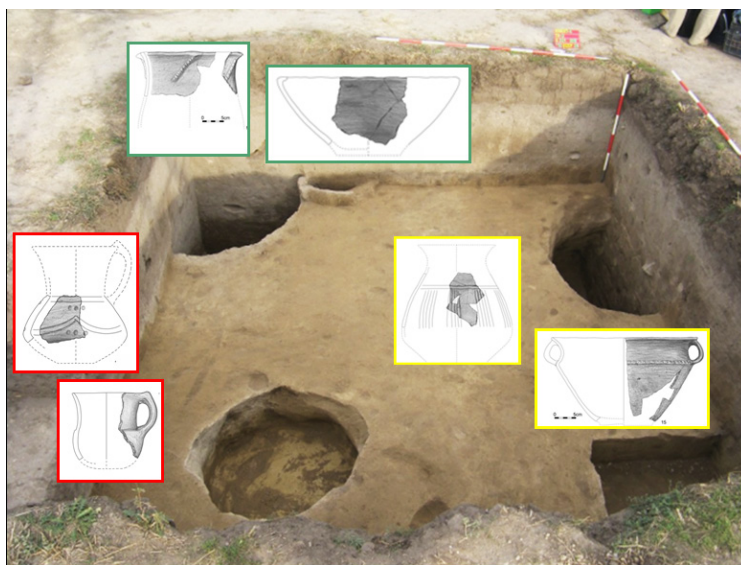


Fig. 2: Sósokút, the settlement pits in Trench 2 with a few selected finds

⁶ Earle, Timothy – Kiss, Viktória – Kulcsár, Gabriella – Szeverényi, Vajk – Polányi, Tamás – Czebreszuk, Janusz – Jaeger, Mateusz – Pospieszny, Łukasz: [Bronzkori tájakon a Benta völgyében / Bronze Age Landscapes in the Benta Valley](#). *Magyar Régészet / Hungarian Archaeology* 2012/4.

⁷ Archeodata 1998 Bt.

⁸ We take this opportunity to thank Zoltán Czajlik for bringing this phenomenon to our attention and allowing us to study the aerial photograph.



Fig. 3: Tárnok, magnetometer survey with the section of the ditch, supplemented by the section identified on the basis of the Google Earth satellite image (on the basis of the Archeodata 1998 Bt. survey)

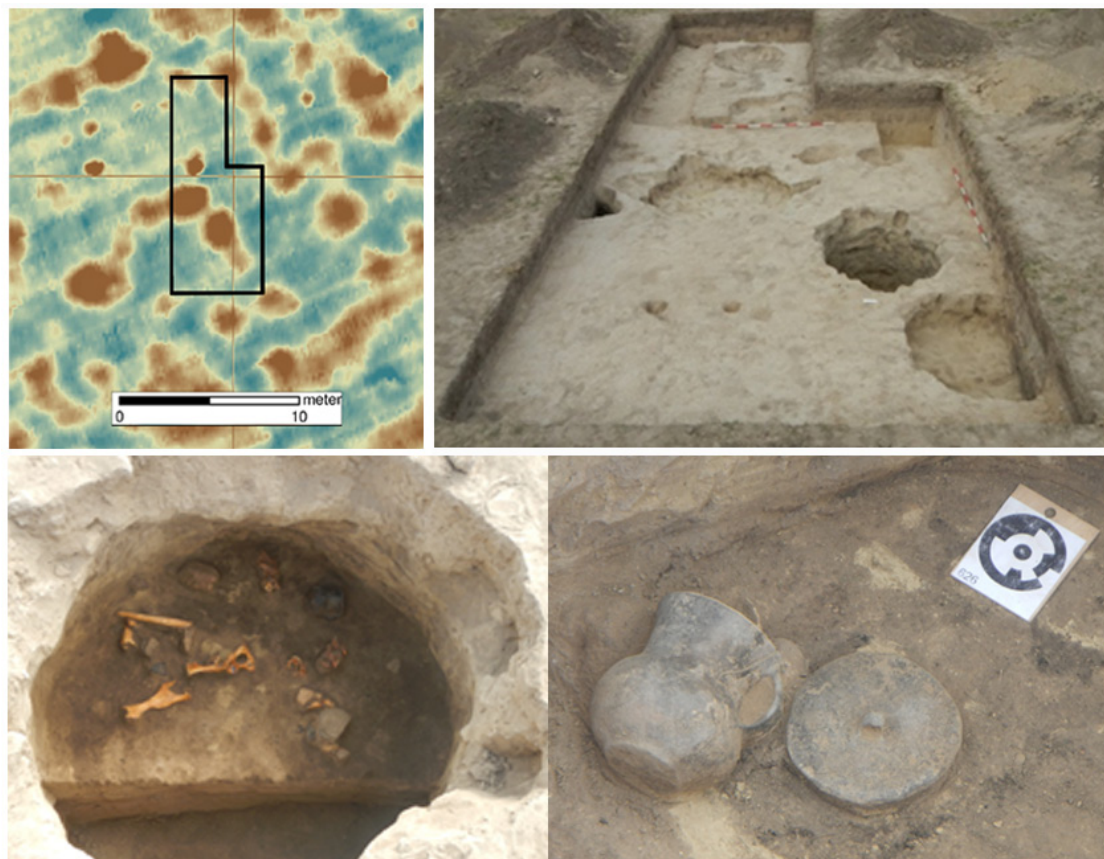


Fig. 4: Geophysical survey of Tárnok with the features and selected finds from the excavation trench

further systematic field walks to determine the age and character of the ditch as well as to clear up the stratigraphy of the settlement.⁹

In September of 2013 we uncovered settlement pits in the area within the ditch containing rich classical Vatyá type finds (Fig. 4). On the basis of the finds in the pits they can be dated to the mean of the Hungarian Middle Bronze Age.

BURIALS WITHIN THE SETTLEMENT

The Érd-Hosszúfölkék (Érd-4) site lies within the Benta Valley, where Katalin Ottományi and Gusztáv Tóth performed excavations in 2004 in connection with the planned right-of-way of the M6 motorway.¹⁰ In 24 of the settlement's Middle Bronze Age storage pits excavated here partial or full human skeletons were found, and in four cases multiple burials came to light (Fig. 5).¹¹

Of the total of 36 individual, full or partial skeletons that were excavated, some had observable traumatic injuries. The primary physical anthropological analysis of the human remains has been completed.¹² We would like to supplement this with comprehensive archaeological and anthropological processing, since these kinds of burials represent an exciting source of information for prehistoric archaeological research and raise new questions. This is also indicated by the heightened international interest in irregular or “deviant” burials.¹³ The Érd skeletons also belong to this category because according to the results of our archaeological research up to now, the deceased of this era in the region were buried in graves clearly separated from the settlement and their cremated ashes were placed in urns. Due to this, these burials will represent an important step forward in understanding the region's Bronze Age physical anthropological make-up as well. During our research program we would like to acquire data in relation to the inhabitants' biological reconstruction as well as their nutrition and their fundamental way of life through paleopathological



Fig. 5: Érd-Hosszúfölkék, pit no. 705 with human and animal skeletons

⁹ There will be an opportunity for performing the field walks and coring in collaboration with Pál Sümegi in the summer and fall of 2014 through the support of the National Cultural Fund of Hungary (3234/261) grant entitled *Research into Bronze Age Settlements in the Danube Valley*.

¹⁰ Ottományi, Katalin: A Vatyá-kultúra telepe Érdén (The Vatyá Culture Settlement in Érd). In: *Képek a múltból. Az elmúlt évek ásatásaiából Pest megyében* (Images from the Past. From the Excavations in Recent Years in Pest County), ed. Ottományi, Katalin (Szentendre: Pest Megyei Múzeumok Igazgatósága, 2008), 40–41.

¹¹ We owe a debt of gratitude to the excavators for allowing us to process the finds. The full analysis is taking place within the context of the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund grant number 108597 entitled *Migration and Cultural Changes in the Bronze Age Carpathian Basin*.

¹² Pap, D. Ágnes – Bernert, Zsolt – Évinger, Sándor – Tóth, Gusztáv – Gyenis, Gyula: Érd-Hosszúfölkék középső bronzkori temető embertani anyaga – The skeletal material of the Érd-Hosszúfölkék site from the Middle Bronze Age. *Anthropologiai Közlemények* 49 (2008), 21–34.

¹³ Müller-Scheeßel, Nils (Hrsg.): *‘Irreguläre’ Bestattungen in der Urgeschichte: Norm, Ritual, Strafe ...? / Akten der Internationalen Tagung in Frankfurt a. M. vom 3. bis 5. Februar 2012*. Kolloquien zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte der RGK, Band 19. (Bonn, 2013); Király, Ágnes: Elévült bronzkori bűnügyek a Kárpát-medencéből (Bronze Age Cold Cases from the Carpathian Basin). *Múltkor* 2014. Spring, 156–163. http://mult-kor.hu/20140320_elevult_bronzkori_bunugyek

examinations and stable isotope analysis. We are also looking for an answer to the question of whether the individuals buried in the pits were born in the area or migrated from other regions to this location, where they were ultimately buried. In 2012, a female skeleton was excavated in one of the pits from Trench 2 in Sóskút.¹⁴ This suggests that similar burials within settlements can be expected at more sites from this period. The radiocarbon dates of the samples taken from the Érd skeletons show that burial within the settlement was not a unique event, linked for example to a wartime conflict or an epidemic, but instead preserves the traces of a tradition practiced for a 500 year period. According to this, the skeletons found in the settlement may have been the result of various ritual activities that may even have involved killing humans. This is of great importance, since in chiefdom-type societies, like those of the Bronze Age, access to rites and ritual knowledge was an important power base of the elite.¹⁵ Accordingly, the presence of such rituals would be expected primarily in the Bronze Age centre of the Benta Valley, at the tell settlement of Százhalombatta-Földvár. Nevertheless, these are often complemented by community rituals, not connected to leaders, carried out locally, and significant ritual activity could indeed be observed at the smaller settlements in the hinterland. In this light we will have to refine our views on the ritual function of chiefs in the central part of the Carpathian Basin in the mid-second millennium B.C.

RECOMMENDED LITERATURE

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¹⁴ Earle, Timothy – Kiss, Viktória – Kulcsár, Gabriella – Szeverényi, Vajk – Polányi, Tamás – Czebreszuk, Janusz – Jaeger, Mateusz – Pospieszny, Łukasz: [Bronzkori tájakon a Benta völgyében / Bronze Age Landscapes in the Benta Valley.](#) *Magyar Régészet / Hungarian Archaeology* 2012/4, Fig. 7.

¹⁵ Earle, Timothy K.: Chiefdoms in Archaeological and Ethnohistorical Perspective. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 16 (1987), 279–308, primarily 298–300.