

HAJDÚBÖSZÖRMÉNY 2.0: An old hoard in a new perspective¹

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One of the most fascinating pieces of the known Hungarian Late Bronze Age bronze vessels has recently arrived in the collection of the museum of Hajdúböszörmény. The fate of this uniquely beautiful artifact sadly mirrors the present state of Hungarian heritage management and the hopeless fight against robbers using metal detectors. In spite of its negative finding circumstances, the bronze vessel places the Hajdúböszörmény hoard, known since 1858 and comprising bronze objects of outstanding quality and quantity, as well as Late Bronze Age bronze deposition practices, into a new perspective.

A HOARD FROM 1858

In May 1858, two day labourers discovered an exceptionally rich hoard in the outskirts of Hajdúböszörmény (Fig. 1). They were preparing a dug-out fireplace when the artifacts came to light: first two bronze helmets, then under and right next to them three decorated bronze situlae, two bronze cauldrons, and a bronze cup, and about thirty swords down below. The swords were laid down in a regular order, with their tips pointing in opposite directions.

A reformed pastor of Hajdúböszörmény Imre Pápay and a landowner Mihály Gál obtained some of these artifacts, probably directly from the finders. Less than a month later, they sent a situla, a cauldron, a cup, a helmet, and four swords to the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest. At the same time, most likely through the local parish, seven bronze swords were sent to the collection of the Reformed College of Debrecen.



Fig. 1: The hoard of Hajdúböszörmény, found in 1858 (Photo: András Dabasi)

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The remaining pieces of the hoard, mainly swords, were obtained by an obsessive collector Emmanuel von Graffenried, living in Vienna. All we know about Graffenried (*Fig. 2*) is that he was a military officer coming from a Swiss aristocratic family, that time performing diplomatic service in Vienna, and that he was in possession of a remarkable collection of antiquities. Graffenried must have been a highly motivated collector with a scholarly interest and an extensive network of contacts. A proof of his obsession may be that hardly had the Hajdúböszörmény hoard been unearthed when he travelled to the site in order to obtain the artifacts. On his arrival the pieces of the hoard were no longer together, but he managed to purchase some of them. We may assume that he ascertained the finding conditions of the objects himself during his trip, since the story of the discovery and the exact position of the finds have been known from his notes.

The adventurous journey of the objects, however, did not end there: the Hungarian National Museum was only able to acquire the larger bronze cauldron from the presbytery of the Hajdúböszörmény Reformed Church in 1883. From among the scattered pieces of the hoard, a pharmacist in Hajdúböszörmény acquired a sword, which he donated to the Hungarian National Museum in 1882, while another sword was added to the collection of antiquities of the local grammar school, wherein it got lost later on. In 1883, the items previously included in the Graffenried Collection, along with some other pieces of the collection, were purchased by the National Museum, presumably on József Hampel's initiative.

The hoard, consisting of nearly 40 artifacts but unfortunately incomplete today, has become an emblematic find of the European Late Bronze Age. Its composition and the particular position of the artifacts that could be reconstructed has made it a frequently quoted example of papers investigating the motivation behind deposition practices. Even today, however, it is primarily its richness that renders it unique, since there are only a few hoards from this period which contain so many intact and good-quality objects.

A SITULA FROM 2015

It was one of the leading police news in the year 2015 that the Art Protection Department of the National Bureau of Investigation seized a bronze vessel of great value in the house of a person practicing illegal metal detecting.

The bronze vessel had come within the sight of archaeologists years before. First, in 2007, we saw its picture at an Internet forum discussing metal detectors. We tried to detect the find place of the vessel but the only information we managed to learn was that it had been found by a Hungarian person using a metal detector somewhere in Hajdú-Bihar County, and that he was offering it for sale in Hungary, Austria, and Germany for several millions of forints.⁴ However, as a result of the investigations conducted by the Hajdúsági Museum, in 2013 the situla turned out to have been found near Csege-halom (Csege Mound) in the outskirts of Hajdúböszörmény—in the region where the great hoard had come to light 158 years before.

In the same year, the Hajdúsági Museum initiated proceedings for the search of the illegally unearthed vessel. The prolonged police investigation, however, only turned successful in 2015, after the National Bureau of Investigation had joined in and seized the vessel in cooperation with the German Police.



Fig. 2: Portrait of Emanuel von Graffenried (lithography from 1857)

⁴ V. Szabó, Gábor: Egy hiányzó láncszem...Adatok egy új késő bronzkori szitulatípus kapcsolatrendszeréhez (Ein fehlendes Bindeglied...Daten zum Verbindungssystem eines neuen spätbronzezeitlichen Situlentyps). *Tisicum* 19 (2009), 281–298.

RELATIONSHIPS OF A SPECIAL OBJECT TYPE

The recently discovered bronze vessel of Hajdúböszörmény is a unique piece (Fig. 3). Bigger in size and thicker in material, it is much more robust than the situla type of the 1858 hoard.⁵ Its handles are also different: while the four wide handles of the latter are made of sheet metal and start from the rim, the former is provided with two cast handles of circular cross-section, fixed on the belly.

Its shape, body proportions and handles represent a bronze vessel form which developed in the 11th–10th centuries BC and is recognized, based on analogies, as the Hosszúpályi variant of the Kurd-type of situla.⁶ Nevertheless, a closer look at its decoration technique and the system of the applied motifs, as well as the cone-headed rivets used for attaching the handles clearly indicate that the new vessel is analogous with the so-called Hajdúböszörmény-type situlae of the first hoard.

The Hajdúböszörmény-type situlae represent a form that was widespread in Europe in the 10th century BC (Fig. 6). Almost two dozen similar pieces are known in European museums and private collections; however, they occur in the greatest number east of the Tisza river in the Carpathian Basin. It is probable that this special form, presumably used as mixing or serving container in ritual alcohol consumption, had evolved in workshops related to the Upper Tisza region's social elite, and then reached today's Denmark, Germany, Switzerland, and the Northern Balkans via a well delineated, primarily Central and Northern European network.

Only three analogies of the recently found bronze vessel are known, which is few compared to the number of pieces related to the first hoard's situlae. The first instance of this vessel form appeared in the international art market in the beginning of the 2000s (Fig. 4). The bronze vessel decorated with the well-known ornamental motifs birds and sun disks of Late Bronze Age iconography was included, together with ten bronze cups, in the 14 November 2001 auction catalogue of the Dorotheum, Vienna but its finding place or the circumstances of its discovery were not



Fig. 3: The bronze situla acquired by the Hajdúság Museum in 2015 (Photo: Tamás Horváth)



Fig. 4: The situla of Abos/Obisovice (Catalogue Vienne 2000: Catalogue Vienne. Antike Kunst und Fossilien, 1948. Kunstauktion im Palais Dorotheum, 13 Dez. 2000. (Vienne: Dorotheum, 2000), 54.)

⁵ The height of the Hajdúböszörmény situla found in 1858 is 31.5 cm, mouth diameter 31.7 cm, whereas the height of the new bronze vessel is 56 cm, mouth diameter 50 cm.

⁶ Patay, Pál: *Die Bronzgefäße in Ungarn*. Prähistorische Bronzefunde, Abteilung II: Band 10 (München: C. H. Beck, 1990), 37–40.

mentioned. A few years later suspicion arose that the bronze vessel assemblage put up for auction in Vienna originated from the Late Bronze Age fortified settlement of Abos/Obišovce in Eastern Slovakia, and it was a part of a larger, illegally unearthed depot.⁷

The third instance of this unique artifact type is one of those rare bronze vessels that have a recorded archaeological context (Fig. 5). It came to light during rescue excavations preceding the construction of the M3 motorway, in the periphery of a settlement dated to the Gáva culture, in the outskirts of Pócspetri. The situla was placed in a shallow depth with two bronze ingots right next to it.⁸

The vessel's external features and the chronological position of its analogies clearly indicate that the new Hajdúböszörmény situla – similarly to the items of the first Hajdúböszörmény hoard – was made during the HaA2-B1 period in the 10th century BC. This vessel type had most probably developed among the bronzesmiths active in the Hajdúság and Nyírség area in the northern part of the Tiszántúl region, and became an important representative object of the local elite.

The Bronze Age situlae found in hoards in all cases belonged to representative sets. In Mezőkövesd two cauldrons, a helmet, and two arm spirals were deposited with the situla.⁹ In Unterglauheim (Southern Germany) two cauldrons and two gold cups,¹⁰ and in a depot uncovered by robbery in Northeast Hungary two cauldrons, three cups, two arm spirals, a torques and an object resembling a helmet's ear protector were placed beside the situlae.¹¹ In several cases the vessels were hidden alone, as illustrated by the examples of the Pócspetri and possibly the second Hajdúböszörmény situlae.



Fig. 5: The situla found in Pócspetri (Kalli András: Késő bronzkori településrészlet Pócspetri határában. In: *Ante viam stratam. A Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum megelőző feltárásai Kántorjánosi és Pócspetri határában az M3 autópálya nyírségi nyomvonalán*, szerk. Szabó Ádám – Masek Zsófia [Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, 2012], table 8.1.)

A NEW PERSPECTIVE: RITUAL LANDSCAPE IN THE BRONZE AGE?

Although thousands of hoards are known from the European Late Bronze Age, we have very little information on what meaning and significance the particular part of the landscape where the act of deposition took place had for the community hiding these objects.

⁷ Bártik, Juraj: Predmety z doby bronzovy zo súkromnej zbierky (Bronzezeitliche Gegenstände aus einer Privatsammlung). Zborník Slovenského Národného múzea CI. *Archeológia* 17 (2007), 34. The vessel and the ten bronze cups were offered for sale again in the [Hermann Historica auction house](#) in 2009. This time an additional information was given that the vessel originated from Altenfließ, Brandenburg, was found in 1899, and had been in family possession ever since.

⁸ Kalli, András: Késő bronzkori településrészlet Pócspetri határában (Detail of a Late Bronze Age settlement in the outskirts of Pócspetri). In: *Ante viam stratam. A Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum megelőző feltárásai Kántorjánosi és Pócspetri határában az M3 autópálya nyírségi nyomvonalán*, eds. Szabó, Ádám – Masek, Zsófia (Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, 2012), 167–168.

⁹ Patay, Pál: Der Bronzefund von Mezőkövesd. *Acta Archaeologica Hungarica* 21 (1969), 167–216.

¹⁰ Wirth, Stefan: Die Goldbecher von Unterglauheim. In: *Gold und Kult der Bronzezeit*, ed. Springer, Tobias (Nürnberg: Germanisches Nationalmuseum, 2003), 132–141.

¹¹ V. Szabó, Gábor: Late Bronze Age Stolen. New Data on the Illegal Acquisition and Trade of Bronze Age Artefacts in the Carpathian Basin. In: *Moments in Time. Papers Presented to Pál Raczky on His 60th Birthday*, eds. Anders, Alexandra – Kulcsár, Gabriella (Budapest: L'Harmattan 2013), 798–801, Fig. 4–5.

European examples prove that depositing bronze objects was a general ritual practice rarely connected to built structures or sanctuaries known from the antique world. Hoards were deposited in a landscape that was in mental terms multi-structured, where certain areas played an important role in the collective memory and mythical stories determining the identity of a community. It is probable that not only the value and amount of the deposited objects, their selectivity applied to a given situation, or the personal meaning of certain objects bore a message, but also the location of the deposition carried an encoded content during the ritual acts.¹²

The two hoards of Hajdúböszörmény, revealed in 1858 and 2007 respectively, offer a number of new aspects for decoding the landscape and hoard relationship. In 2014, the Hajdúböszörmény Museum and the Institute of Archaeological Sciences

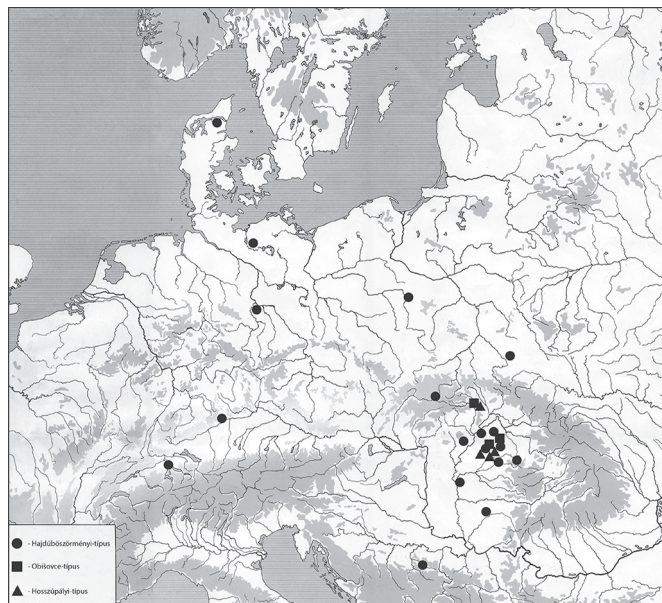


Fig. 6: Distribution of the Late Bronze Age situla types discussed in the article



Fig. 7: Csege-halom near Hajdúböszörmény (Photo: Gábor Szabó)

¹² Fontijn, David: Landscapes without boundaries? Some thoughts on Bronze Age deposition areas in North-West Europe. In: *Hort und Raum. Aktuelle Forschungen zu bronzezeitlichen Deponierungen in Mitteleuropa*, eds. Hansen, Svend – Neumann, Danie – Vachta, Tilmann (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 49–68; Ballmer, Ariane: Zur Topologie des bronzezeitlichen Deponierens. Von der Handlungstheorie zur Raumanalyse. *Prähistorische Zeitschrift* 85 (2010), 120–131; Hansen, Svend: Parallele Raumkonzepte: Bronzezeitliche Rituallandschaften. In: *Parallele Raumkonzepte*, eds. Hansen, Svend – Meyer, Michael (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2013), 157–174.

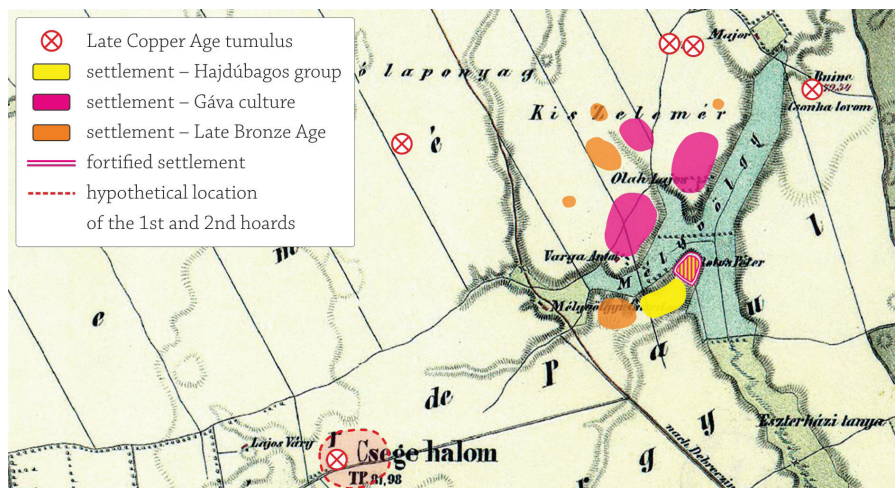


Fig. 8: The supposed find place of the two Hajdúböszörmény hoards and the sites mentioned in the article marked on the map of the Second Military Survey

of the Eötvös Loránd University launched a research programme aiming to understand these inter-relationships.

The exact find place of the first hoard is unknown, but as assumed by Amália Mozsolics in the 1980s, it was discovered in the surroundings of the still existing prehistoric kurgan Csegehalom¹³ (Fig. 7). The burial mound supposedly erected at the end of the Late Copper Age in the 3rd millennium BC, is a dominant element of the surrounding landscape to this day. If our informants are to be believed, the

situla found in the mid-2000s also came to light in this area, a few hundred meters from the mound.

The archaeological research into the hoard's find place and environment (Fig. 8) has involved field walking over an area of ca. 9 km² so far, completed with geophysical and metal detecting research. In a 4 km² zone around the mound we did not find any trace of Late Bronze Age inhabitation. It appears that this land fragmented by rivulets was not intensely populated in any archaeological period, since only a few traces of small, shortly inhabited Neolithic, Roman and Late Middle Age settlements could be localized in the investigated area.¹⁴ We also carried out a magnetic survey in the narrower vicinity of the mound, which outlined the concentration of archaeological features of unknown period north of the kurgan. Later on, we intend to clarify their exact age and function by excavation.

A higher Late Bronze Age settlement concentration can be found at around 2 km east of the mound, at the confluence of two former watercourses Tócsó and Mély-völgy. Remains of a monumental fortified settlement, the so-called Zelemér earthwork, can be recognized on the steep-sided elevation situated at the mouth of the two streams. We examined this triangle-shaped fortification of 6.5 hectares by intensive field walking, metal detecting and magnetic survey. The latter made it clear that the earthworks and trenches were renewed in several periods, and in some cases they cut each other. In lack of excavation, however, the exact date of the different fortification units cannot be determined.

Results of the grid-based surface collection indicate that the elevation had its densest population in the beginning of the Late Bronze Age, in the period dated by the Hajdúbagos-type pottery (15th–14th century BC). The area surrounded by earthworks was also inhabited in the 10th century BC, the period characterized by the Gáva-culture pottery, when the great bronze hoard and the single situla were deposited in the vicinity of Csegehalom; however, the amount the pottery is insignificant compared to the previous period. At this time, the previous settlement concentration was replaced by a looser network of small settlements occupying the high banks of nearby streams (Fig. 8).

Based on our current studies, the particularities of the deposition zone in the surroundings of the Hajdúböszörmény hoards of 1858 and 2007 can be outlined in the following, yet highly hypothetical model:

13 Mozsolics, Amália: Rekonstruktion des Depots von Hajdúböszörmény. *Praehistorische Zeitschrift* 59 (1984)/1, 81–93.

14 A similar uninhabited zone surrounded the hoard consisting of two swords with cup-shaped hilts (*Schalenknaußschwert*), contemporaneous with the Hajdúböszörmény hoards and unearthed by our research group in the outskirts of Mezőberény in autumn 2014.

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1. An unpopulated area seems to have taken shape in the environment of Csege-halom, where a highly valuable group of objects and an individual vessel having special value was hidden underground in the 10th century BC. We have no information on the chronological relationship of the two acts of deposition; they could take place at the same time or even decades in succession.
2. Although we cannot exclude that the monumental burial mound as a dominant landscape element played an important role in selecting the deposition site, this alone does not explain the outstanding significance of the area. Beside Csege-halom, the wider area is delimited by another five, similar-sized mounds, but no Late Bronze Age hoards are known from their vicinities. The area marked by the two investigated depots was unpopulated in the Late Bronze Age and sparsely inhabited in other prehistoric periods too. It is possible, therefore, that for some reason this landscape section had a special role in the world and landscape use of nearby farming and pastoral communities in different periods.
3. This landscape section, probably already associated with a specific meaning in the mental landscape of the local communities, heightens the importance of the deposition act. In addition to the spectacular, valuable items and the rituals related to the deposition, the characteristic landscape, endowed with meanings unknown to us and maybe carrying specific stories or mythological references, helped the act to make a stronger imprint on the collective memory.
4. Although the prehistoric fortification of Zelemér, surrounded by monumental earthworks, was not intensely inhabited at the time of the deposition act that took place near Csege-halom, a settlement concentration composed of small inhabited areas evolved around it. The fortification, probably still standing in the 10th century BC, must have been, similarly to the mounds, an impressive and significant element of the surrounding landscape, associated with real or mythical stories by local communities.
5. Communities living within the area of the settlement concentration may have played an important role in the power hierarchy of the neighborhood and possibly the wider region, as suggested by the two hoards of much higher value and quality than the average depots, placed at a frequented site of their territory. The placement of high value objects may have invested a portion of the landscape with special significance, thereby increasing the symbolic capital of the group of people ruling the area.

We are still at the initial steps of interpreting the landscape relationships of the two hoards found in the surroundings of Csege-halom in Hajdúböszörmény; moreover, at several points even the available information is uncertain. However, the aspects roughly outlined above may call attention to how complex the cultural landscape surrounding Bronze Age people may have been both in the physical and mental sense.

RECOMMENDED LITERATURE

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