

Gallina, Zsolt and Sándor Varga:
Cemeteries, Grave Findings and Treasures of the Age of the Conquest of the
Homeland and the Early Period of the Age of the Arpads in the Danube-Tisza
Interfluve. Vol. I.
THE KALOCSA SÁRKÖZ REGION IN THE 10TH -11TH CENTURY

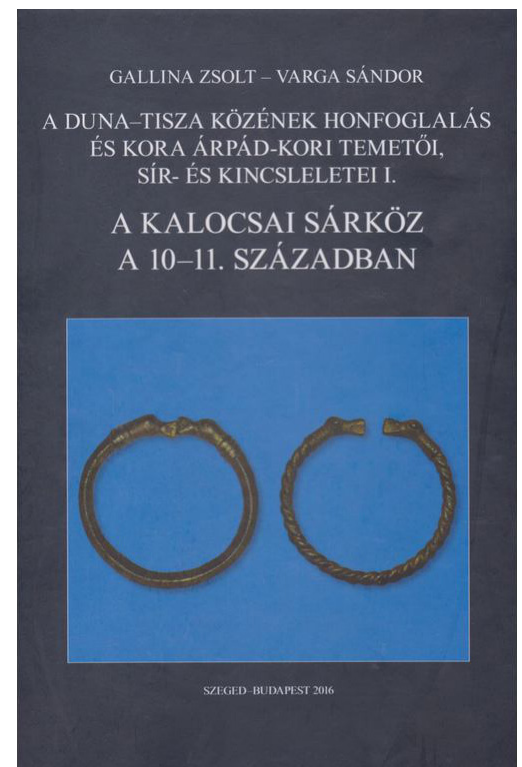
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The history of the archeological research on the period of the Hungarian conquest of the homeland began in 1834 when the grave of a warrior buried along with numerous and rich grave goods was uncovered by the wind out from the sand near Ladánybene, in today's Bács-Kiskun County. The uncovered items already outlined the range of objects characteristic of the Hungarian conquest era, and served as a reliable foundation for later research. The geographical region between rivers Danube and Tisza have proven to be no disappointment throughout the following one and the half centuries for researchers of the period: our understanding was further deepened by the rich burial sites and smaller cemeteries excavated here, and by finds such as sabretache cover plates and a bone-plate quiver ornament with runic script. It is perhaps unexpected in the light of these circumstances that the archeological research of the period would return with a new volume on the subject in late 2016 to Bács-Kiskun County, more precisely to its lesser known south western corner.

The latest volume published at the end of last year in the series describing grave findings of conquest age and the early Arpadian period is beneficial for the professional community and an interested lay public alike, thanks to the cooperation of four institutes: The Faculty of Archeology of the University of Szeged, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Research Centre for Humanities Institute of Archeology, the Hungarian National Museum, and the Viski Károly Museum of Kalocsa. The cooperation also included the sponsorship of the National Cultural Fund of Hungary, the OTKA tender, the Viski Károly Museum of Kalocsa, and the Ásatárs Ltd.

Such cooperation is a reason for hope for the research, and the ambitious title is just as promising: *Cemeteries, Grave Findings and Treasures of the Age of the Conquest of the Homeland and the Early Period of the Age of the Arpads in the Danube-Tisza Interfluve. Vol. I. The Kalocsa Sárköz region in the 10th -11th centuries.* It is not only that the designation as 'volume one' indicates the intent of further volumes; rather I would put the emphasis on the final part of the title, which suggests more than a simple listing and description of the cemeteries and graves.

Before delving into the volume however, the series itself deserves a few words. It is great to have such a long standing book series on Hungarian archeology that now has produced its 10th volume without interruptions or delays. The strength and viability of a series is never defined by the significance and the great quality of its initial volumes, but is revealed only by time. There were too many great concepts and ideas



Archeological findings from the Age of the Conquest of the Homeland and the Early Period of the Age of the Arpads in Hungary volume 10.

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582 p., 319 black-and-white and color images, 32 tables, and 145 black-and-white and color figures and illustrations, print

for series in Hungarian archeology that died off after initial enthusiasm. This series on the period of the Hungarian conquest, on the other hand, demonstrates quite the opposite trend; after overcoming some initial difficulties, the pace of publishing new volumes has not slowed but remained steady, producing further additions in the last few years, which reflects the devotion and determination of editors László Kovács and László Révész. Thanks to their work, there are fewer and fewer regions of the Carpathian Basin that are only partially explored, as it is illustrated on the overview map of the series on the inner side of the cover of this volume. The two editors embraced the task by a genre that is sometimes underestimated by scholars, and pursued primary source collection, reaching back to original descriptions and even the finds themselves. By doing so, they produced a foundational groundwork for research that can hardly be ignored; a corpus that provides a holistic view of each geographical area opening the way for regional research and a framework for the analysis of the archeological findings and phenomena. Surveying the volumes of the series reveals that the basic concept – the framework of publishing an overview and description of the finds of a given geographic area – also gives room for the authors to work with their own original insights and theories; such as, in the case of Gábor Kiss and his volume on Vas County, or the volume on the Rétköz region by Eszter Ivánovits. The present volume also builds on the same concept and framework as its contents go far beyond the region's 10th-11th century findings.

The current volume is the work of two authors. The studies of Zsolt Gallina cover a wide range both in terms of time and subject, as the time frames span from the age of the Sarmatians to the Middle Ages, and research touches upon diverse topics ranging from settlements through iron smelting to burials. Indeed, the backbone of this volume relates to the excavation at the Homokmégy-Székes site that was led by Gallina between 1996 and 2002: the findings and details of these works he had already introduced to the scholarly community in the form of studies and many lectures in the past ca. two decades. His co-author, Sándor Varga from the Museum of Szeged, is a well-known expert on the period of the Hungarian conquest, and has also already given a catalogue of the 10th-11th century findings of Bács-Kiskun County in his studies.

Similarly to the earlier volumes on the regions of Rétköz, Nyíri Mezőség and Taktaköz, a smaller region of Hungary, namely the Kalocsai Sárköz region is the focus in this case as well, more precisely, the region's findings from the age of the Hungarian conquest and the early Arpadian period are collected and analyzed in the volume. After the introduction and acknowledgement, the author gives the reader a thorough analysis of the geography and the historical geography of the region. While some of the earlier volumes of the series were lacking geographic description of the given region, the current work definitely benefits from the inclusion of this part. As the role of regional and micro-regional focus increases, dealing with the geographical features of the region in question becomes indispensable.

The following chapter returns to the conventional introduction of archeological sites of the region in alphabetical order. Among the 16 sites, the cemetery of Homokmégy-Székes soon gains prominence, as this cemetery has been excavated in its entirety, with only small portions lost and ruined, it is also excellently documented and by far outnumbers other cemeteries in the amount of its graves. The authors aimed at completeness in their overview, and amended the conventional archeological description with insights from fields like anthropology and metallurgy. The analysis is aided by spread maps and summary charts as well, beyond the exemplary and detailed description of burial customs and artefacts.

I would like to call attention to the last two parts, in a reverse order. In the last chapter, entitled “Foreign elements in the population of the burial site”, the authors clearly put forward the idea of a continued local (indigenous) population, pointing to the insights from anthropology and metallurgy, adding also that “the grave findings and other objects of use and garment do not help to uncover the origin of the population”. At the same time, in the part before the last section of the archeological analysis, the authors date the cemetery to the time period from the middle third of the 10th century to the turn of the 10th and 11th centuries, as well as to the first quarter of the 11th century, and conclude that 2-4 generations may have used the place, resulting about 300 graves at the site. The last two elements of their evaluation discuss key points of interests in the current research of the period. The thesis of significant numbers of a late Avar – i.e. 9th century – population has increasingly gained acceptance among researchers, as such a surviving population could have given the

basis for the relatively large grave numbers in the cemeteries of the age of the Arpads. Yet the authors date the emergence of these cemeteries, quite like in the case of the cemetery at the Homokmégy-Székes site, only to the middle of the 10th century.

Beyond the above thesis, the Székes site cemetery's anthropological analysis by Antónia Marcsik, Zsolt Bereczki and Erika Molnár provides significant insights about contagious diseases, lifestyle and even the symbolic trepanation that can also be observed here. Probably, most will agree that the metallurgic research is without doubt a relevant and the most progressive section of the analysis of the cemetery. This auxiliary science is often neglected by researchers of the period simply because of the lack of expertise or trained experts, even though the field can contribute to the research significantly. The portion by Béla Török et al., and also the one by László Költő have two significant observations. 'Not all that glitters is gold' could well be the title of the first one, meaning simply a critique of the practice of cataloguing or identifying objects of non-ferrous or precious metal merely by its color; a practice proven here beyond debate as unsustainable and mostly mistaken or at least inaccurate. The second observation of great importance is that the identifiable metal smith techniques and techniques of jewel craft hint at an ancestry in the Avar age.

Of course, other cemeteries described in the volume beyond the Homokmégy-Székes cemetery are just as relevant in addressing points of interests in the current research. Perhaps the most intriguing is the cemetery at the Homokmégy-Halom site. The position of the authors is certainly not enviable as the evaluation of this site and its findings, its long and troubled history poses a difficult task. Publishing the entire collection of findings that were discovered in 1951 and 1952 is an achievement in itself, although the possibilities for analysis are strongly limited, as the site was disturbed and the findings were mixed or lost. A valuable find is the bone-plate quiver ornament with runic script from grave 7, as well as the remnants of some kind of textile from grave number 3. The discussion of these artefacts amends the description of the cemetery site.

The other two cemeteries that are relevant for the research on the period of the Hungarian conquest were found near the boundaries of Kecel. The cemeteries at the Lehoczky Farm site and the Vádé Ridge site were both well published and well known for researchers; nonetheless, a modern re-listing of them fills a gap that was much needed.

The discussion of the cemeteries of the Kalocsai Sárköz region is followed by a listing of sites that were mistakenly attributed to the time period by earlier research, soon after which we find an overview of the grave findings of a later time period of the 10th and 11th centuries. Before the latter overview, however, there is an analysis of the population in the region in the period before the Hungarian conquest, amended by a map of known Avar settlements and cemeteries. At first, such a topic may appear out of place, especially in the context of the preceding and the following chapters, however, considering the aforementioned thesis of a surviving Avar population, and the map in the next chapter that projects the settlements from the age of the Hungarian conquest and the early Arpadian age onto the map of known Avar settlements and cemeteries, a clear train of thought appears.

A conventional anthology of findings would likely end after the overview of the grave findings of a later period of the 10th and 11th centuries; however, the editors of the volume did not confine themselves to such limits at the expense of their original insights. That is the reason why one may consider the promise suggested by the volume's title fulfilled. There are three further studies dedicated to the settlement structure, villages, churches and other ecclesiastical locations of the Kalocsai Sárköz region in the Arpadian period, appended by an impressive table of 1160 archeological sites of the smaller region summing up the era from the Migration Period to the late Middle Ages. The source of the topographic studies is data from site reviews from the past decades, as at least two thirds of the region are well documented.

The latest volume in the series describing grave findings of the age of the Hungarian conquest and the early Arpadian period, presenting a catalogue of findings and sites in the smaller Kalocsai Sárköz region time period of the 10th and 11th centuries, certainly has achieved its goal. It provides a foundational work with a well-defined structure and a clear detailed discussion of grave findings of the selected region. It is a representative of the latest trends and questions of the field, and is aligned with the growing reliance on the natural sciences for auxiliary data. The way it articulates the concept of a significant surviving Avar popula-

tion in the Carpathian Basin is in line with the – for the moment somewhat reserved, but – growing consensus in scholarship that such a population could account for the relatively large cemeteries at settlements in the early Arpadian period. Articulating such an opinion illustrates well how far the research community has moved from the hypothesis that viewed the Carpathian Basin before the time of the conquest as a largely uninhabited region. Accepting the concept that Avar population survived in great numbers, the conclusion that our understanding of the conquest of the homeland and the early history of the Hungarians will soon change, is worth considering.