

MAGYARORSZÁG RÉGÉSZETI TOPOGRÁFIÁJA. MÚLT, JELEN, JÖVŐ (The Archaeological Inventory of Hungary. Past, Present and Future).

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The volume that was created from the presentations heard at the conference entitled “The Archaeological Inventory of Hungary. Past Present and Future” held between the 11th and 13th of May 2015 is a high-quality, scientifically demanding work that introduces numerous research trends. Elek Benkő in his essay that was also intended to be an introduction to the book states that the identification, recording and researching of archaeological sites “is of fundamental significance to the internal development and the scientific questions of the study of archaeology as well as to the perspectives of investment and heritage preservation.” Through this he points out that research into the inventory of archaeological sites cannot be merely for the sake of the profession, but must show openness towards scholars from other fields of study and towards society. Not only did the audience of the conference reflect this approach, but also the presentations heard there, since numerous studies were performed in the spirit of interdisciplinary research and heritage preservation.

The editors are colleagues at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Research Center for the Humanities Institute of Archaeology, Elek Benkő, Mária Bondár and Ágnes Kolláth, and have published the 36 essays in the volume in alphabetical order by the authors’ last names. Although there were no sections at the conference, the selection of topics for the presentations proved to be quite varied and the completed book might have been better served from a professional perspective if the essays had been arranged according to subject, a fact I felt I must mention in this review. The articles appearing in the volume could have been placed into four major subject categories. In my review, the research history of archaeological inventory work will be followed by the essays belonging to the topic of the archaeological inventory of general interest (heritage preservation and public registration). The third topic is research methodology, while the final section is the varied range of case studies, find reports and interdisciplinary inventory studies.

The “past, present and future” appearing in the titles of both the conference and the book links the research on the subject on several levels, since we deal with the past, we are nurtured by the work of our predecessors and our present and the future of the science is defined by the image of archaeology



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constructed in the public consciousness. If it is necessary to point out an important past event in the history of the study of the Hungarian archaeological inventory, then it was without doubt the launching of the Hungarian Archaeological Inventory program. This survey work of archaeological sites in its nationwide, systematically planned implementation received a prominent role at the Archaeological Research Group created at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, but in terms of its initiative it may owe more to the socialist leadership of the field at the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s. The “legends” surrounding the creation of the inventory program and the history and precedents of the work were summarized by Mária Bndár with the uncovering of exciting contemporary documents. Related to her essay are the publications introducing the work on countywide archaeological inventories written by Eszter Istvánovits and Péter Szőcs (Upper Tisza Region), András K. Németh (Tolna County), Gyöngyi Kovács, Marietta Csányi and Judit Tárnoki (Tiszazug, Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County) and Imre Szatmári (Békés County). Standing out slightly from these, but still integrally linked to them is the summary by István Feld and György Terei on the research history on the survey of castles, as well as János Gömöri’s essay on the history and realization of the survey of Hungarian industrial archaeology. The essays touch upon the main researchers in detail and in certain cases even provide the names of enthusiastic amateurs from outside the field that worked with the archaeologists (the essay by A. K. Németh), showing that the archaeological inventory work also requires public interest. However, in terms of the present and the future, the attitude of the authors of the essays is not entirely positive, pointing out the methodological, institutional and financial shortcomings and difficulties. The answer may be provided by the cross-border program introduced in the article by Eszter Istvánovits and Péter Szőcs, which resulted in the collaboration of Hungarian and Romanian museums through a European Union grant.

László Reményi, Károly Tankó and Zsolt Visy provided a look into the site inventory work that was performed in the community interest and the problems of public registration in their articles. In László Reményi’s study he introduced in detail the relationship between professional and legal issues and recommended that the results of the inventory work could be published digitally according to a centralized system and in accordance with the heritage preservation laws. Károly Tankó placed emphasis on the imprecision of the currently operating public registration system and the status of the renewed survey of conditions for known archaeological sites, directing attention towards the cost-effective field work inherent in the heritage preservation impact assessments related to town planning as an alternative to the centrally organized inventory survey programs. Zsolt Visy surveyed the methods and problems of domestic cartography related to the Pannonian Roman limes World Heritage nomination in his essay, touching upon the significance of non-invasive research methods within the research program.

The main body of public archaeological registration is provided primarily by the data from the Hungarian Archaeological Inventory program in those counties where it operated, but how did the processing of the data take place? This work process that up until now was unknown to the profession was outlined in a particularly valuable essay by Judit Kvassay. Heritage preservation and registration still stand in a close relationship, but the article by Gábor Mesterházy and several other authors leads in the direction of methodology, and they examined the possibilities of predictive modeling through the use of differing topographical models. The article by Balázs Holl made recommendations on the determination of the boundaries of archaeological sites from various perspectives on the basis of numerous interesting examples. Katalin Tolnai reached similar conclusions while expanding the range of the issue in the direction of registration and spatial analyses. Going beyond their spatial extent, Zsófia Masek examined the possibilities for the ability to date sites and drew attention to their re-verification in connection with Sarmatian sites on the Great Hungarian Plain. Máté Stibrányi in his study argued that the joint employment of field walks, geophysical surveys and aerial photography must be definitive in the collection of inventory survey materials in the 21st century, and the uncovering of their complex relationships could make the long-term solution for the problems outlined above possible.

Máté Szabó’s article following the non-invasive site identification methods and examining the place of aerial archaeology formulated recommendations on the creation of a uniform aerial photograph

archaeological site database through protocols, which Gábor Bertók and Csilla Gáti presented in the book through a possible example and utilization. Roads and mounds from the historic period that also appear on aerial photographs represent unique heritage preservation features. Magdolna Szilágyi detailed the possibilities for unique research methodology and registration of the former, while Ádám Bede and the “Yamnaya Impact Project” group of participants did so for the latter. The colleagues from Eötvös Lorand University reviewed the results of various non-invasive site identification methods in connection with the ancient military town of Brigetio.

A characteristic of Hungarian research, primarily due to the shortage of technical requirements, is that the areas that are more difficult to research from an archaeological perspective (forests, marshy areas, bodies of water) have up to now received less emphasis in the methodology for their examination in terms of inventory surveying. In addition to this, there is also a deficiency in the area of analyzing “off-site” find materials related to the use of the landscape, such as intensive agricultural cultivation. Unfortunately there are only references to the above topics that can be found in the articles on the subject of methodology. However, the manner in which they are referred to is a characteristic of Hungarian research, so it does not take away from the value of the studies. It is my opinion that in the future greater energy must be mobilized for the formulation of research methodologies for the topics outlined above.

The case studies and presentation of materials shed light on the complexity and various aspects of inventory research. The lessons to be taken from field walks on the level of sites, micro-regions or the administrative territories of individual towns were summarized by Adrián Berta (Lake Ludas), István Knipl (Hajós and Császártöltés), Zsuzsa Pető (Szendró Basin) and Márta Vizi (the market town of Ete) in their articles. Gábor Szilas and Farkas Márton Tóth related new information related to prehistoric settlement gained from the processing of old excavation materials. Alongside the excavation find materials, Gábor Ilon as well as Gábor Lassányi and Paula Zsidi presented in their publications of materials the spatial distribution of metal finds from archaeological sites. In their studies, Gábor Máté, László Szende and the trio of authors Dénes Saláta, Edina Krausz and Ákos Pető directed attention towards the historic sources, manuscripts and maps with value to the surveying of inventory and the information that can be gained from these. Marianna Bálint, Máté Stibrányi and Csilla Zatykó reported on complex inventory survey work related to the Middle Ages that primarily reflects the economic and social aspects of the settlement network and land use, showing how site identification through the utilization of diverse archaeological and historical sources can succeed in reconstructing historical processes and tendencies.

In conclusion, it can be stated that a quality volume of essays from a professional standpoint was created from the presentations at the conference, and it is particularly fortunate that they could be published with color illustrations. The articles fundamentally approach the issues of inventory surveying from the direction of the problems, touching upon the concept of the archeological site as well as the opportunities for identification, registration and analysis while also showing the wide range of materials with value as sources. The essays achieve their objectives, the thoughts on shaping opinions and approaches indicate new directions and areas of emphasis for the profession and society in relation to both the present and future of Hungarian archaeological inventory survey research.