

## OF FINDS AND MEN: DETECTING THE PAST AT PÁPA

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*Our story goes back to 2015, when organised public participation in archaeological site-surveys and small-scale excavations under the aegis of Gróf Esterházy Károly Museum began. This method of public participation soon spread throughout County Veszprém and, for a few years, the focus of community action shifted to the Laczkó Dezső Museum at Veszprém. Pápa has, however, regained its vigour and now plays a respectable role in Hungarian community archaeology. Our participatory program ‘Detecting the Past’ links the profession with a range of enthusiasts and some really intrigued minds.*

‘Detecting the Past’ is set up to integrate (1) people who pursue metal detecting in search of knowledge about their cultural landscape and (2) the archaeological crew of the museum, who are responsible for collecting, storing, and evaluating finds and relevant information. Those who practice metal-detecting with us do not seek financial reward for recoveries, as financial gain from archaeology is not their interest. In return for their contribution the museum offers legality and organised archaeological surveys (Fig. 1).



*Fig. 1. Participants of the ‘Detecting the Past’ project in the Sávolyi dűlő area near Pápa*

Due to increased availability of technology and information, metal detecting has become the main driving force in blurring the boundaries between ‘the profession’ and ‘the public’. Community archaeology is, however, not for treasure hunters who have no respect for the law. Nor is it metal-detecting itself that we aim to pursue. For us, metal-detecting is one of the methodological means of gaining information of the past to provide as genuine a narrative as possible. This approach of focusing on information is the main theme of our collaboration. Focusing on information can be enhanced through involvement in processing the finds, which means participation in primary cleansing, registering (with description of artefacts), photo documentation and narrative evaluation.

The mission of ‘Detecting the Past’ is to reveal the cultural richness of the landscape, primarily to those who live within that landscape, through archaeological experience. It is our belief that raising the level of consciousness of the cultural environment leads to protection of archaeological sites and historical buildings.

Our community is open to the public. We welcome all who obey the law and approach us with respect. We expect our members to refrain from any illegal archaeology-related action and we do not promote trade of artefacts in any illegal or even legal manner.

There are a few positive signs of change in our ranks: (1) more and more young people participate in fieldwork and (2) the old camouflaged look is gradually replaced with families and the laughter of children. We come together to enjoy the day whatever discoveries it throws in our way.

The Gróf Esterházy Károly Museum operates in the Pápa District located in the north of County Veszprém. It includes Pápa and 48 villages and consists of 4663 km<sup>2</sup>, one quarter (23%) of the territory of County Veszprém (Figs 2–3). The geography of this area is diverse. To the South lies the Bakony Mountains. The northwest sloping, creek-segmented flanks of these mountains merge gradually into the Pápa Plain where tributaries of the Danube, the Rába river and its tributary, the Marcal flow.

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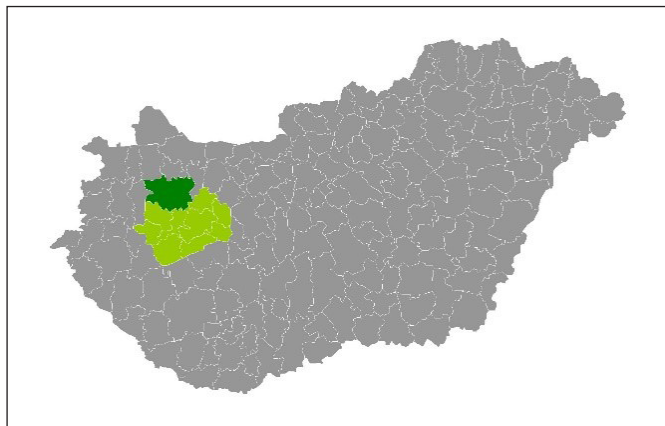


Fig. 2. The Pápa District (dark green) in Veszprém County

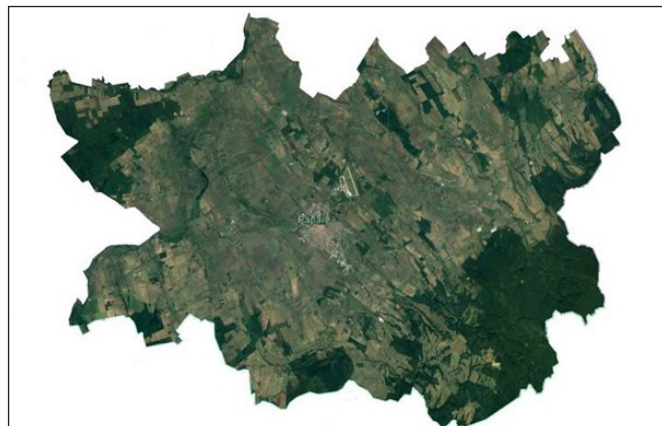


Fig. 3. The satellite image of Pápa District (Google Earth)

### SURVEYS

For one and a half years ‘Detecting the Past’ has conducted surveys at more than ten archaeological sites. It is our policy to return to a site more than once to leave as few artefacts in the ground as possible for those of illicit interest. All our major discoveries are shared on the spot in our private group on the net so those at present and those not in the field can experience the unfolding of the ‘expedition’. This private group is also excellent for communication and sharing thoughts and ideas on finds and sites. In addition to collaboration with the public we invite academic professionals and students of archaeology to participate in finds evaluation. Development of this intellectual network is an important task for the foreseeable future.

The Pápa District expands into the Bakony Mountains to the south. Our surveys revealed the hilltop locations of a smaller bronze age hoard from c. 1500 BC and a Roman site of probable military purpose (Figs 4–5). Our most prolific research, however, took place at Homokbödöge, where the quality and the sheer quantity of the finds prompted us to return on more than ten occasions. This site, therefore, deserves a few words of introduction.

Homokbödöge lies between the Bakony Mountains and the Pápa Plain and it boasts of an interesting medieval origin. On one of the characteristic gravelly wide ridges late Bronze Age (c. 1500–850 BC) and late medieval (AD 1301–1711) pottery sherds



Fig. 4. Surveying a hillfort in the Bakony Hills, with participants Hajnalka Tóthné Radics, Katalin Kasza and Csenge Péterváry

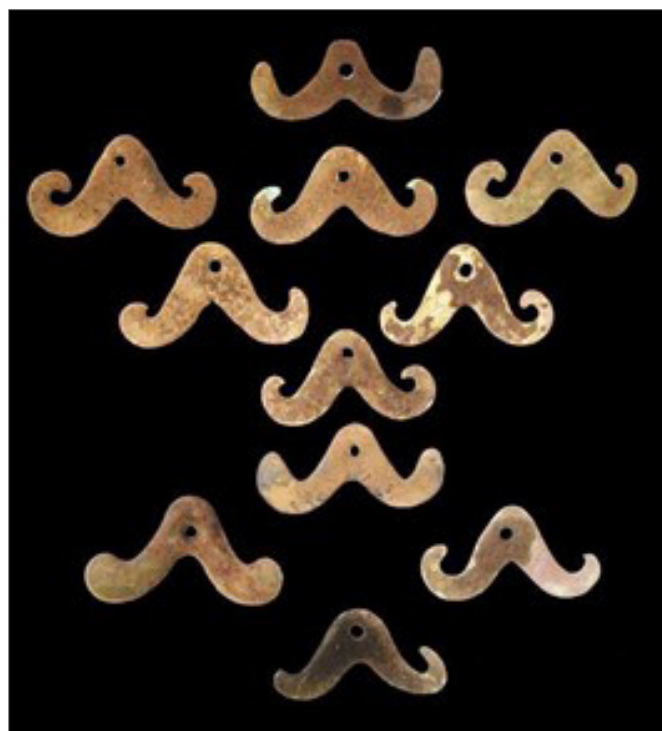


Fig. 5. Bronze Age pendants from the Magas Bakony hills, discovered by Attila Kónyai, Attila Kocsis, Róbert Kurdi and Róbert Bálint



Fig. 6. Late Bronze Age sword from Homokbödöge, discovered by Ferenc Herczeg



Fig. 7. Árpád-period press of a smith from Egyházasködöge, discovered by Norbert Bracza and Viktória Kovács

were collected during county-wide field walking surveys in the 1960s. A record from the 19th century speaks of a Roman ‘stone coffin’ to have been recovered here. Flóris Rómer, besides alluding to a Roman helmet that had come from this site, noted that “in the field of the local notary, under the foundation of the church there lies a crypt.” According to local tradition the church stood on the top of the ridge where tilling turned up bricks. The church (now wiped off the visible landscape) and its close surroundings can be identified as the medieval settlement of Egyházasködöge.

Our inventory of metal finds from this site consists of more than a thousand artefacts dated to the Neolithic, the Late Bronze Age, the early and late Imperial Rome, the age of the Avars and Hungarians, the medieval and the early post-medieval periods (Fig. 6). The distribution of the finds dated to the timespan of the Árpád dynasty (AD 1000–1301) is particularly dense around the church building, the remains of which are depicted on the first Ordnance



Fig. 8. 13-century ecclesiastical stamp from Egyházasködöge, discovered by Róbert Bálint

Survey maps (1763–1787). Analysis of the GIS data also detected workshops near the church. The significance of the site is illustrated by a 13-century ecclesiastical stamp and copper-alloy presses of a smith (Figs 7–8).

## PREVENTION

The location of our survey is often chosen not on scientific considerations but on a degree of site vulnerability. Illegal metal-detecting flourishes in Hungary, which urges us to place a high value on prevention. Unofficial collection of finds and usually their subsequent trafficking leaves an ever-growing gap in the available archaeological record, which hinders the provision of a genuine and detailed narrative of the past.

The flourishing of the market for archaeological artefacts is due to a few factors, of which the following ones are noteworthy:

- Metal-detecting devices need no registration in Hungary;
- Law enforcement agencies and other official bodies, as well as the public itself, are poorly informed on the subject;
- The capacity of museums is low; these institutions are poorly funded and often turn a blind eye on prevention and collaboration with benevolent metal detectorists;
- Poor or irrelevant central leadership on the subject combined with a mixture of *ad hoc* intervention and *laissez faire* attitude in policy-making.

The archaeological finds represent a non-renewable resource. It is our duty to visit the endangered sites and recover and record as many artefacts as possible and to place them in safety in the museum. While ‘fighting windmills’ is a tiresome exercise, it is the human face of our community that provides inspiration and ensures endurance.