

MAKLÁR–NAGYRÉT II BRONZE AGE CEMETERY AND SETTLEMENT (PRELIMINARY REPORT)

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In 2021 and 2022, preventive excavations were carried out at Maklár–Nagyvér II, where more than two hundred Bronze Age (around 1500–1300 BC) cremation burials and five settlement features were found. The paper presents a preliminary report summarising the results of the fieldwork.

Keywords: Bronze Age, Carpathian Basin, Tumulus culture, funerary archaeology, cremation

THE SITE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

Maklár–Nagyvér II is situated at the northern fringes of the Great Hungarian Plain, near the southern foothills of the Bükk Mountains, on a low plateau at the right bank of the Eger Stream (*Fig. 1*). Besides Nagyvér II, three Bronze Age sites are known from within a few square kilometres in the area south of Maklár. In chronological order, the earliest one is Maklár–Baglyashalom on a slight elevation on the left bank of the Rima stream. It is a multi-layered, fortified *tell* settlement of the Hatvan and Füzesabony cultures, dated between 2000–1500 BC based on relative chronological evidence (KALICZ 1968, 133; KIENLIN, P. FISCHL & PUSZTAI 2018, 205–212; MENGYÁN 2019). The second site is Maklár–Kospérüm, located on a small, natural mound on the right bank of the Eger Stream. It is a multi-period cemetery where around 130 cremation graves of the Tumulus culture, along with burials from other periods, were excavated in 1960 and 1962 (SZABÓ 1963; KOVÁCS 2001). Finally, a small part of a Bronze Age settlement was excavated on Maklár–Nagyvér, 300 m to the west of Maklár–Kospérüm, by Ágota Sz. Kállay in 1983. This site was assigned to the Piliny culture based on pottery finds (KÁLLAY 1984, 18–19).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT MAKLÁR–NAGYRÉT II

The site was discovered during a field survey by János József Szabó in 1981 (*Fig. 2*), when sherds assigned to the Late Bronze Age (according to the Hungarian Bronze Age chronology) were collected in the northern zone of the site (SZABÓ 1981). Systematic archaeological investigations had begun there, preceding the construction of a factory in 2013. During that year, László Reményi, later he and Csilla Farkas carried out fieldwalks on the site, clarifying its extensions (REMÉNYI 2014). The identified dimensions were confirmed by later research. Besides Late Bronze Age features, a Sarmatian find horizon was identified there. In 2016, the first Bronze Age cremation burials were found in the southern–south-eastern part of the site during archaeological monitoring led by Ágoston Halász (HALÁSZ, HAVASY & HRABÁK 2016). Further research, a geophysical survey, and a trial excavation led by Éva Szakos were carried out on approximately 21 hectares southwest of the site, between Road 251 and the railway line, in 2019. The presence of archaeological features in that area could not be confirmed, as only a ditch section was unearthed there, and even that contained no finds (SZAKOS 2019). Péter Bíró found some more Bronze Age cremation burials during a trial excavation, this time in the south-western part of the site. The graves were interpreted as belonging to the same cemetery as the burials

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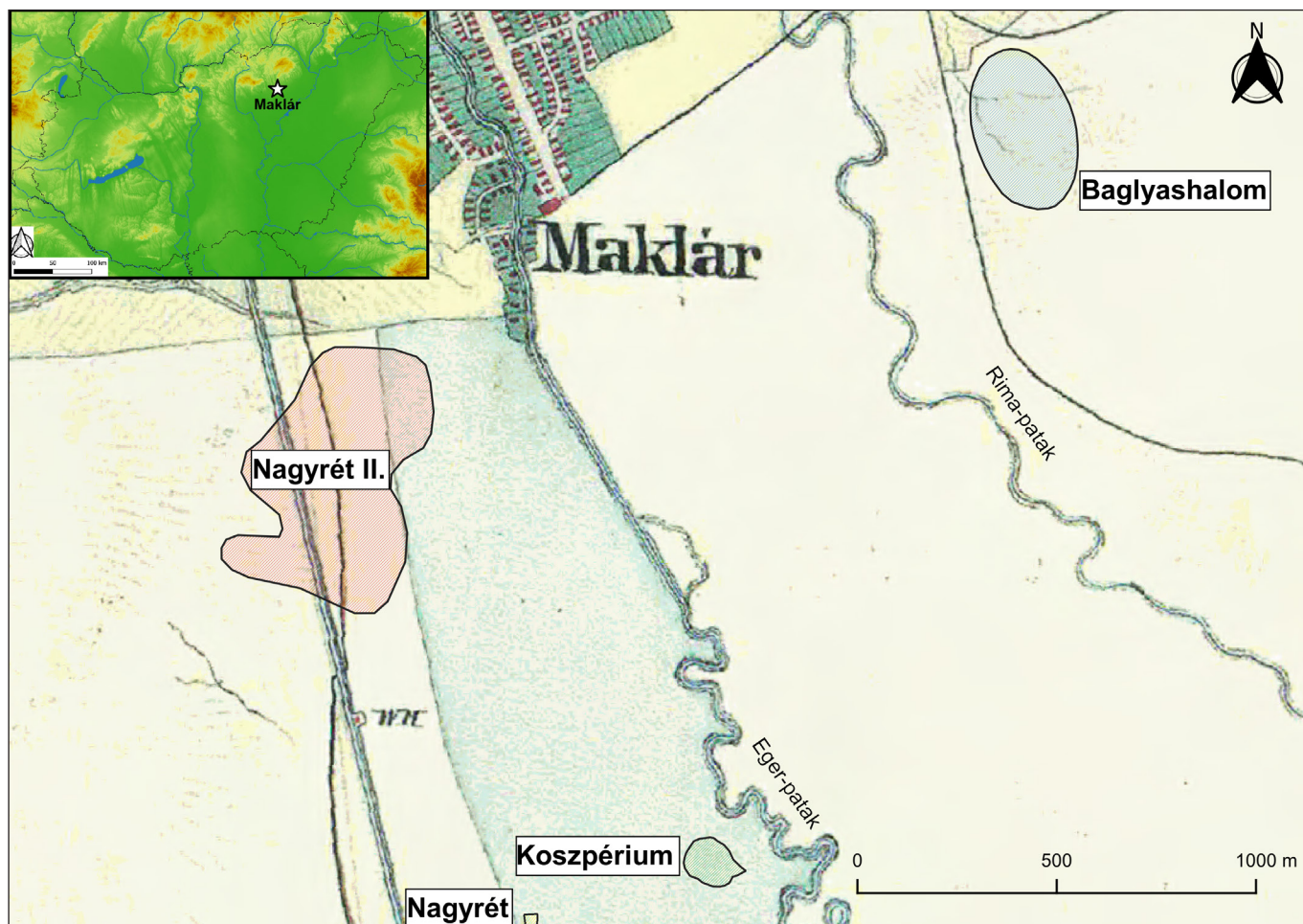


Fig. 1. Bronze Age sites south of Maklár on a map of the Second Military Survey of the Habsburg Empire (1819–1869). Legend: red: Maklár–Nagyvér II, green: Maklár–Kospérium, blue: Maklár–Baglyashalom, yellow: Maklár–Nagyvér (map by Ákos Mengyán)

found in 2016. The survey has revealed that a preventive excavation is required before construction can begin (Bíró 2021).

The preventive excavation was carried out by the Castle Headquarters Nonprofit Ltd. and the Hungarian National Museum, National Institute of Archaeology in several stages between 6 September and 7 October, as well as 6–13 December 2021 and 2–30 March 2022. Four zones in an area of ca. 1.43 hectares were surveyed; the fieldwork revealed a part of a Bronze Age cremation cemetery and five settlement features. Simultaneously, the parts north and south of the excavated areas were monitored, but no archaeological features were discovered there. This paper presents the field observations concerning the cemetery, the settlement structure, and the burial rite, as well as a preliminary chronological evaluation.

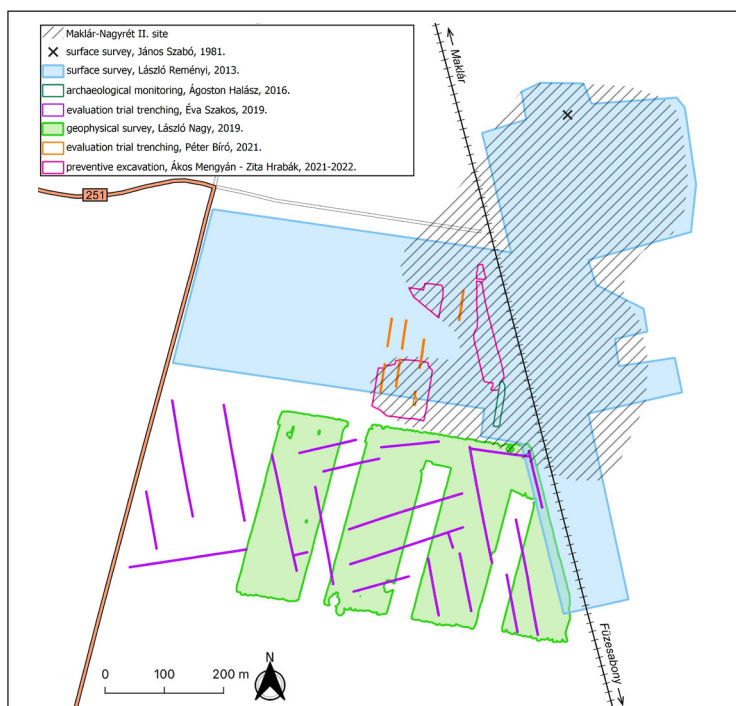


Fig. 2. Survey map of archaeological investigations in Maklár–Nagyvér II (map by Zita Hrabák)

THE CEMETERY

Burials have been found in the southern and southwestern zones of the excavation area. Altogether 210 graves were unearthed: 112 urn and 95 scattered cremation burials, and three without any human remains (*Fig. 3*). The northern, western, and southwestern boundaries of the cemetery could be identified with reasonable certainty, but the eastern boundary was outside the excavated area and has remained to be determined. A dense part of it probably lay between the two main excavation areas in an area unaffected by the construction project and, thus, has not been excavated.

Most graves were found in the humus layer, at a depth of only ca. 30–50 cm; therefore, no grave pits could be detected, and most burials had been damaged by agricultural activity. The upper part of the urn burials was probably above the Bronze Age surface and covered by soil; thus, originally, they might have been visible above ground. Scattered cremation burials could also have been marked on the surface because the graves were placed in orderly lines, and only a couple of them were superposed and solely at the densest, southwestern part of the cemetery. The cemetery stretched in a northwest-southeast direction, as also indicated by the orientation of the few detected grave pits.

The urn burials were usually covered by bowls (*Fig. 4*), while in the case of a few scattered cremation burials, the cremains were perhaps wrapped in some organic material (leather or textile) as they appeared as relatively compact patches in the graves. In addition, the organic wrapping could have been fastened with the bronze pins found on the top of the cremated remains (*Fig. 5*), as these pins were almost intact upon discovery. However, the rest of the pins were found deformed and damaged by fire among the cremains, indicating that they were probably placed on the pyre as part of the attire or shroud. Similar observations were made at Jobbágyi–Hosszú-dűlő (FÜLÖP & VÁCZI 2015, 413–414).

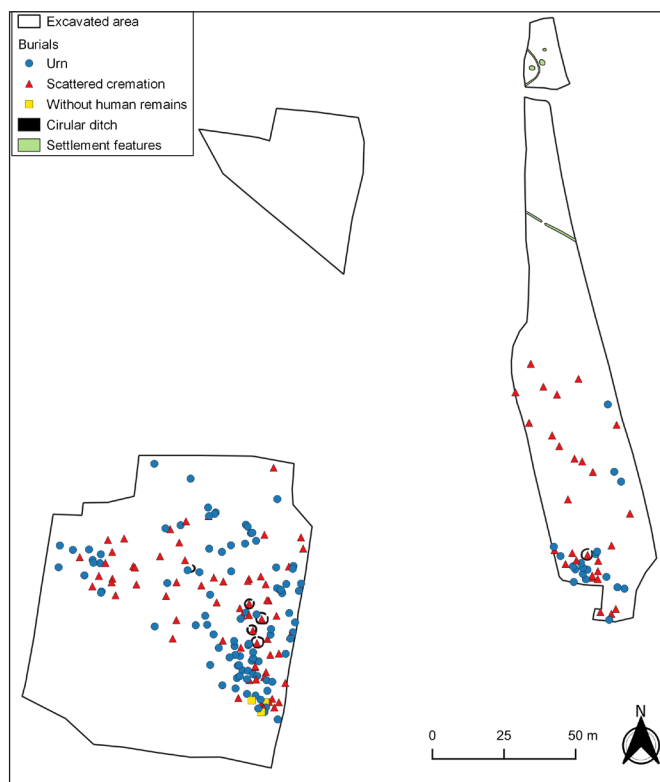


Fig. 3. Survey map of the site with the area excavated in 2021 and 2022 (map by Ákos Mengyán)



Fig. 4. Urn grave No. 84 at Maklár–Nagyvér II. Fragments of the covering bowl are clearly visible on the urn on the left (photo by Zita Hrabák)



Fig. 5. Scattered cremation burial No. 126 (photo by Ákos Mengyán)

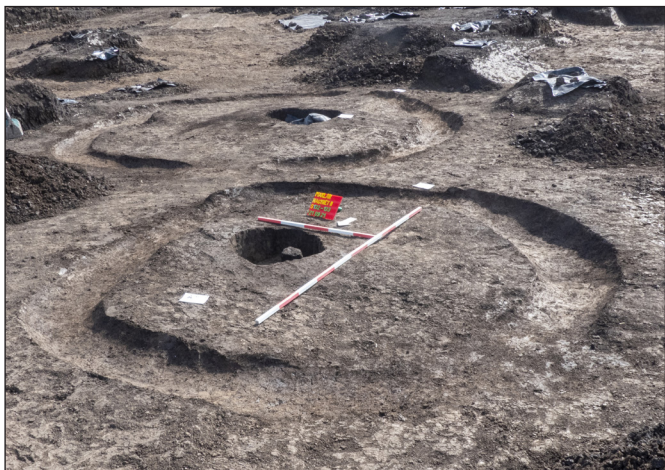


Fig. 6. Circular ditch burials at Maklár–Nagyvér II (photo by Zita Hrabák)

Five graves were surrounded by ring ditches (3–3.5 m in diameter and 30–40 cm wide), four in the western excavation area and one in the eastern (Fig. 6). These features had been established according to strict burial rites: only one central burial was placed within them, all of them contained scattered cremations, and each grave pit was oriented northwest-southeast. Each ditch had an opening or “entrance”: most at the north-eastern, one at the northern, while another at the north-western part. Ring-ditch burials first appeared in higher numbers in Central Europe during the mid-2nd millennium BC (TOČIK 1964; BÁTORA 2012; GODIŠ & HARUŠTIAK 2020, Fig. 7). Similar graves are known from the Tumulus culture in Central Europe, including the Carpathian Basin, generally the early phase

representing the Rei Bz A3–B periods (CSÁNYI 1980, 163–164). This dating might also be supported by Maklár–Nagyvér II. Ring-ditch graves are known from Hungary from Maklár–Kospérüm (SZABÓ 1963), Mezőnagy Mihály–Nagyecsér-Észak (P. FISCHL & HAJDU 2016), Jánoshida–Berek (CSÁNYI 1980; 2016), Kiskunfélegyháza–Pákapuszta (SOMOGYVÁRI 1992) and Budapest–Nagyvér–Érdliget (SZILAS 2017)

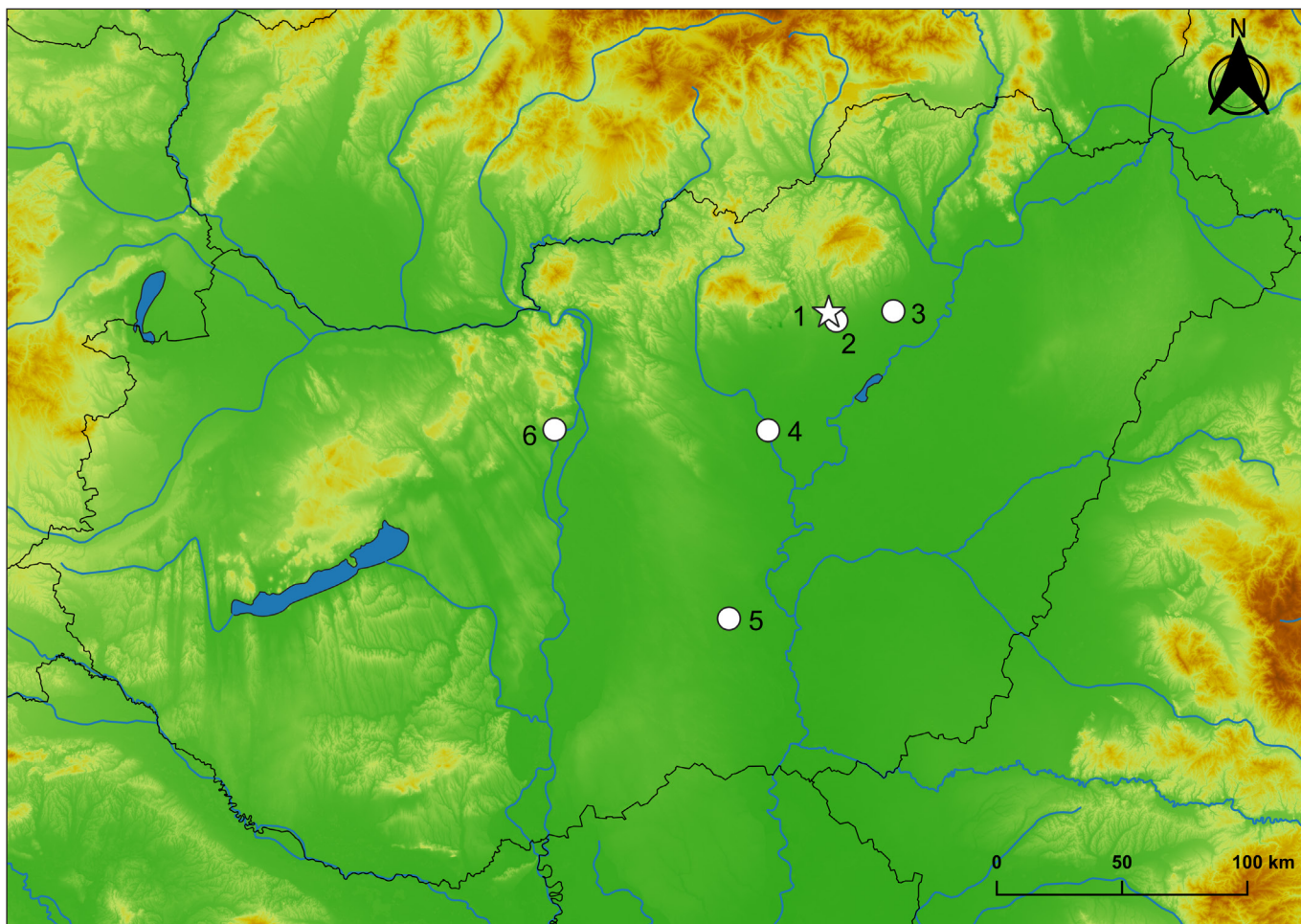


Fig. 7. Sites with ring-ditch graves in Hungary around 1500 BC: 1. Maklár–Nagyvér II, 2. Maklár–Kospérüm, 3. Mezőnagy Mihály–Nagyecsér-Észak, 4. Jánoshida–Berek, 5. Kiskunfélegyháza–Pákapuszta, 6. Budapest–Nagyvér–Érdliget (map by Ákos Mengyán)



Fig. 8. Urn grave No. 49 with a burnt layer partly covering the urn (photo by Zita Hrabák)



Fig. 9. Stone shaft-hole axe from burial No. 98 at Maklár–Nagyvér II (photo by Ákos Mengyán)



Fig. 10. Scattered cremation grave No. 81 (photo by Ákos Mengyán)

(Fig. 7). The central burial is usually inhumation, except for Maklár–Nagyvér II and Maklár–Kospérrium where only cremation burials were surrounded by ditches (SZABÓ 1963). The number of graves placed within a ditch may vary from site to site depending on the specifics of the burial rite practised by the actual community. It can be assumed that a 1–1.5 m high earthen tumulus was erected over the central grave, which had might been entirely destroyed by erosion and agricultural activity. However, we only have clear evidence from Neusiedl am See, Austria, of rig-ditch graves covered by earthen mounds (KAUS 1994).

A few centimetres thick burnt layer was observed in nearly ten burials, sometimes around or on the vessels or the bottom of the grave pit (Fig. 8). This phenomenon might be interpreted as the remains of the pyre collected separately from the human remains.

Two packings of 30–50 cm-large stones were recorded in the cemetery (Fig. 9). Stone packings are common in the cemeteries of the Tumulus culture (FÜLÖP & VÁCZI 2015); however, in these cases, no graves but only a few potsherds were found beneath them, suggesting perhaps that the graves were destroyed or the stones do not belong to the Bronze Age cemetery.

The most common grave goods were pottery, such as cups, bowls, and pots, which appeared in both urn graves and scattered cremation burials (Fig. 10). The pottery style reflects that of the Northern Great Hungarian Plain group of the Tumulus culture (KOVÁCS 1966). Most bronze artefacts found among the cremains



Fig. 11. Fragments of a short bronze sword under the human remains (photo by Hrabák Zita)

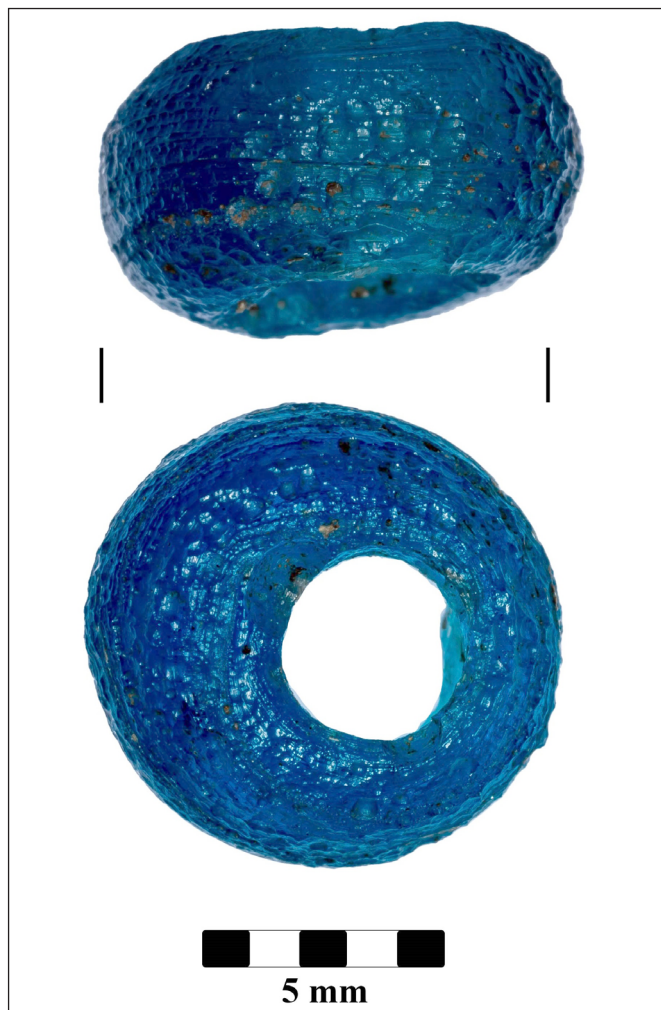


Fig. 12. Blue glass bead from grave No. 91 (photo by László György)

were damaged and/or deformed, so it can be assumed that they were placed on the pyre. In one case, a short bronze sword was placed under the human remains. It had probably been broken intentionally into several pieces before placing on the pyre (Fig. 11). The most common bronze artefacts were disc- and nail-headed pins, bracelets, horseshoe-shaped and spiral pendants, and rings.



Fig. 13. Disturbed stone packing at Maklár–Nagyret II (photo by Zita Hrabák)



Fig. 14. Scattered cremation burial No. 82 with three conical ceramic artefacts (photo by Zita Hrabák)

In the western excavation area, 34 blue glass beads were found in eleven graves altogether. The beads are 0.5–0.9 cm in size, perforated, translucent, blue and turquoise (Fig. 12). They could have been part of the necklaces of prominent women, like in other parts of Europe in this period (VARBERG, KAUL & GRAUTZE 2020, 6). The chemical composition analysis of the beads' material is in progress.

Stone artefacts were also found as grave goods: for example, a stone shaft-hole axe (Fig. 13), a spindle-whorl, and a few chipped stone tools, including an arrowhead.

Finally, it is important to mention that three conical, perforated ceramic artefacts were found in a burial of probably a child; these could be toys and/or pendants (Fig. 14).



Fig. 15. Settlement features at Maklár–Nagyvér II (photo by Ákos Mengyán)

THE SETTLEMENT

Five settlement features, two ditches and three pits were excavated approximately 50 metre north of the burials (Fig. 15). Running northwest-southeast, the ditch closest to the burial ground aligned with its structure, which suggests that the settlement and the cemetery could be contemporaneous and also that said feature perhaps served as a divider between them. The features yielded a relatively high number of pottery, animal bone, and daub fragments. The ceramics show characteristics of the early Piliny pottery style; however, their accurate dating requires a detailed analysis.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

According to our preliminary observations, the cremation cemetery unearthed in Maklár–Nagyvér II can be dated to the early and classical phase of the Tumulus culture around ca. 1500–1300 BC (Rei Bz B–C phases). Based on the preliminary evaluation of the ceramic record, the excavated settlement features can be at least partly contemporary with the cemetery. However, further analysis is needed to understand the relationship between the cemetery and the settlement and specify their chronological positions. Another important task for future research is to analyse the connection between Maklár–Nagyvér II. and the Maklár–Kospérrium cemetery less than 1.5 km away.

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