

One Year After...

ON THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY AT THE NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE.

Belonging, identity formation and good practice

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The Department of Community Archaeology, an initiative with a nationwide effect, was set up under the National Archaeological Institute of the Hungarian National Museum in 2022. Such a department, dedicated solely to community archaeology, integrated into the structural frame of an institution, is a remarkable feature in Europe and a pioneering initiative in Hungary (VIRÁGOS 2022).

Keywords: Hungarian National Museum, National Archaeological Institute, Department of Community Archaeology, community archaeology

The department aims to integrate non-professionals into archaeology by providing opportunities to participate in professional archaeological investigations. The Hungarian National Museum – based on its accumulated intellectual heritage and vast collection of artefacts – can greatly contribute to forming and developing community identities. Integrating the public sphere into the museum's life is, therefore, a highly desirable matter.

A community archaeology programme set up by the museum's numismatist, István Vida, has already been in operation since 2017. This programme was essentially based on his network of interest with private collectors who, besides helping collect artefacts, provided valuable information to the museum. An outcome of this fruitful collaboration is the exhibition *Kincset Éró Közösség* ('A Community Worth Treasures'), now on display at Balácsa in Western Hungary.

Archaeological volunteers are kept up to date on upcoming events on Facebook at *Régészeti Önkéntesek Fóruma* ('Forum of Archaeological Volunteers'), while the Facebook group *Hephaistos* provides a platform to professionals for exchanging ideas on metal artefacts.

THE COMMUNITY OF THE NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE AS A REFERENCE

We live in an ever-changing world with fewer and fewer points of reference. Professionals in Hungarian archaeology come from various backgrounds with diverse experiences within a constantly transforming political, economic, technical, and moral environment; we are submerged in a fluidity in values and standards.

This context poses a severe problem for those dealing with – or trying to manage – community archaeology. Such complexity makes it more challenging to achieve consensus not only between the profession and the volunteers but also among the structural entities of the National Archaeological Institute. I believe that past, present, and future are organic parts of a whole. For the individual, the distant past and future exist within the community, while the present is either interconnected or fragmented to an individual level.

There are numerous community archaeology initiatives at various museums and archaeological institutions. There is not much variation in how these operate, as the regulations are clear on the role of archaeologists. Variation exists only in personal attitude.

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CONTRIBUTION AND METAL DETECTING

The relationship between professional archaeologists and volunteers is ambiguous. According to some, volunteers invest their time, funds, and equipment in exchange for certain privileges given to them by the archaeologist, including going on metal detector trips on their own or cooperating with archaeologists who are obliged to lead them to 'fields of plenty'. Metal detectorists may refuse to get involved in other tasks of field survey, such as collecting pottery sherds, and may even get boastful about their investment for the good of the museum. Thus, control can land in the hands of the volunteer who, in extreme cases, only craves to satisfy his compulsive appetite for excitement.

Control should, nonetheless, remain in the hands of the profession. While volunteering is a free choice, the decision may only be about participating in a project and by no means determining how it is carried out. It is our responsibility to clearly inform the participants what we expect from them for each project. If the motivation of archaeological volunteering is to assist the profession, then a negative field walking survey may also be a positive community archaeology experience. Such an event can also provide a sense of fruitful participation and raise interest in taking part in the next field trip as well.

The essence of volunteering lies in a sense of usefulness. This is a salient need in a world where only winners get to hold a stake. We aim to build a community of volunteers with a prospect beyond satisfying personal curiosity by focusing on preserving archaeological finds and sites. When participating in the excavation of early Arpadian Age cemeteries, for example, volunteers gain an understanding of the importance and urgency of preserving the archaeological heritage (RÓZSA, SZIGETI & VIDA 2022), as erosion, caused mainly by agricultural activity, is about to wipe out most of these sites within the next few years. Volunteers may learn about the importance of prevention by participating in topographical field surveys (such as the topographical projects along Routes 83 and M3-M30 or by Tisza Lake).



Fig. 1. Kelemér–Mohos-vár, an arrowhead from the debris
(photo by Gábor Mohos)



Fig. 2. Hungarian Conquest Period shepherd's axe from
the battlefield research project of the Battle of Mezőkeresztes
(photo by Szabolcs Ináncsi)



Fig. 3. Participants of the excavation of the Hungarian Conquest Period cemetery in Alsótold (photo by István Ignéczi)

We also nourish social cohesion and local identities by delivering a clear message on the importance of heritage preservation through good examples. The importance of our collective work is also emphasised by our efforts to report the results swiftly in our series of publications, the first volume of which appeared last Christmas (RÓZSA & SZIGETI 2022).

Volunteers are provided free choice about which projects to participate in (Figs. 1–4). Hungarian archaeology is deeply embedded in a museum-based structure with an inherent sense of territoriality. Just as the extent of archaeological patterns does not respect our present administrative borders, nor should we think of the work of volunteers as fragmented by the territorial division of the museum-based administration, volunteers in any part of the country serve the cause of Hungarian archaeology. Our finds are the building blocks of reconstructing the past of our national and European narratives. The central element of archaeology is, therefore, the artefact. The safekeeping of the recovered material and ensuring free access to these finds are some of the main responsibilities of archaeologists.

The Department of Community Archaeology operates on the principle of *primus inter pares* (first among equals); besides executing its own archaeological projects, it also connects participants in Hungarian archaeology. Our volunteers are, therefore, also encouraged to participate in archaeological community programmes organised by other institutions.

COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY CONFERENCE: WITH HONESTY TOWARDS A JOINT FUTURE

It is important to elaborate on a shared understanding of our present situation and set up clear goals for the future to achieve our goals. We, therefore, support the discussion-based series of conferences on community archaeology (RÁCZ & MAG 2021), the next venue of which will take place on 15 and 16 this September at the Mátyás Király Museum in Visegrád. This conference is co-organised by our department, the Association of Community Archaeology, and the Association of Hungarian Archaeologists. We hope to have there an honest discussion fuelled by critical voices.



Fig. 4. Anthropologists Ágota Madai and Enikő Szvák from the Hungarian National History Museum remove the human remains from Grave 5 in Alsótold (photo by Balázs Rázt)

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