

”TREASURE HUNTING” ALONG THE BORDER

Report on the current state of community archaeology in the collection area of the Hanság Museum

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The article surveys the emergence of community archaeology and the skyrocketing of civil initiatives in the last years in the collection area of the Hanság Museum and the various ways in which the institution, based in Mosonmagyaróvár, collaborates with the public.

Keywords: community archaeology, Hanság Museum

The Hanság Museum in Mosonmagyaróvár has always been open to development and strived to meet the changes the 21st century brought to such institutions. The traditional threefold function, including the collection, preservation, and exhibition of the relics of the past, was expanded by the 21st century, as local museums today clearly must play a significant role in building local communities and strengthening and preserving identity. The Hanság Museum has provided a basis for many civil initiatives and has always been positive towards them. It must also be highlighted that the life of the museum has been determined from the very beginning by being located in the border zone.

The history of the institution goes back to the end of the 19th century when a desire emerged in the learned residents of the town to establish an organisation aimed at researching and protecting the heritage of our common past. This became the Moson County Historical and Archaeological Society, founded in 1882 by Ede Ivánfi, Ágost Sötér, and Imre Deininger, a predecessor to today's Hanság Museum. Over the decades, the institution had an adventurous history; its scope was expanded, it lost its town museum status, and it was almost degraded to a simple exhibition space several times. Due to the Trianon peace treaty, many settlements in its former collection area became part of today's Austria and Slovakia; however, the find material obtained via 19th-century excavations has remained part of its collection.

Nowadays, the institution is a town museum with a collection area including 29 settlements. These are very diverse, ranging from very small, remote villages to the town of Mosonmagyaróvár, with a population of almost fifty thousand. Diversity is also present from an archaeological point of view; while the collection area is dominated by Roman monuments, it also abounds with relics of medieval and prehistoric settlements.

THE DAWN OF COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE LIFE OF THE HANSÁG MUSEUM

Community archaeology has been an integral part of the museum's life very early on, almost from the start, as even the foundation – unlike in the case of many other museums – reflected a demand of the local community instead of having been the deed of a wealthy patron. Community archaeology was a daily practice there already in the 1980s and 1990s when the concept did not even exist. That, however, required the friendship of an open-minded archaeologist and director and a teacher absolutely committed to the past. Rezső Pusztai recognised early on the enormous power of loyalty to the community and place of residence and gave way to the zeal of Alajos Németh, a secondary school teacher. Thanks to their legendary cooperation, looters with metal detectors and little consideration for anything but their own financial gain could not set foot in the collection area of the museum, and several archaeological sites, clearly identifiable even to civilians, were saved from being looted.

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In addition, archaeologists have had an opportunity to build a community and welcome volunteers from the civil sphere who want to get a glimpse of the heritage of their ancestors and contribute to the museum's work in their free time. In many cases, archaeologists have spent extra hours organising exciting archaeology-related programmes and excavations for civilians to meet this demand and provide them with an activity with the potential for satisfying people in a way hobbies typically do.

Field walking can be such a programme, a recreational activity that makes lay enthusiasts feel they spend their time usefully while being enriched with new experiences. However, field walking trips and site authentication surveys must be organised in advance.

COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY TODAY

The region has been a major destination for internal migration not only in historical times but also today, primarily because of its vicinity to the border, which allows commuting to Austria. This has also been reflected by the changes in its load: new residential areas have been created in 90% of the 29 settlements in the museum's collection area to serve the demand of the increased population, with most constructions requiring the work of archaeologists in some form.

From the beginning until 2020, the museum employed only one archaeologist permanently; later, it became apparent that this was not enough due to the increased number of developments in the collection area, and another permanent archaeologist position became available from 2020, facilitating considerably not only the coping with everyday tasks but also the organising and implementing of community archaeological programmes.

The museum has been running an organised community archaeology programme since 2015. The period before that was about finding a way, with individuals rather than groups assisting in programmes related to the public. The current programme was announced basically as a topographical project to survey already known sites and specify their extent based on new data.

The programme has also been important because it is part of our efforts to stop the ever-increasing illegal metal-detecting activity in the region. Being so close to the border, the region struggles with specific problems in this field since not only domestic illegal metal detecting activity has increased, but also Austrian and Slovakian illegal metal detectorists have been plundering the sites since border control ceased. They can do that because, in the border zone, they can leave the country with the illegally excavated archaeological finds in a few minutes. Unfortunately, the number of foreign metal detectorists increases significantly every year.

Today, the basic goals of the programme are protecting, locating, and surveying archaeological sites (with a sad but important side goal to keep archaeological findings within the borders of our country), strengthening the local identity of the residents, and introducing local youth to our cultural heritage. We present two examples below.

ROMAN COINS IN HEGYESHALOM

Most archaeology-related tasks of the institution are monitoring construction work, supplemented roughly once or twice a year by small-scale preventive and test excavations in relation typically to minor investments. As a result, there is no suitable field for training volunteers, as the ones mentioned above are unsuitable. The number of archaeological monitoring projects has increased continuously in the past few years due primarily to the ever-growing willingness to invest near the border. While in 2015–2016, the museum had 20–30 such projects a year, the number increased to about 50–70 in 2021–2023. Note that this is the number of projects, not field days, which has increased from 80–100 to 200–220 per year.

Such a project was related to the development of a new residential area in the eastern part of Hegyeshalom. The planned development concerned an area between two known archaeological sites (*Fig 1*). After the topsoil layer had been removed from the first exploratory trenches, it became obvious that archaeological phenomena were also to be found in the area between the two sites. Altogether, twelve – predominantly Roman – archaeological features were unearthed by the museum's team with the help of volunteers,

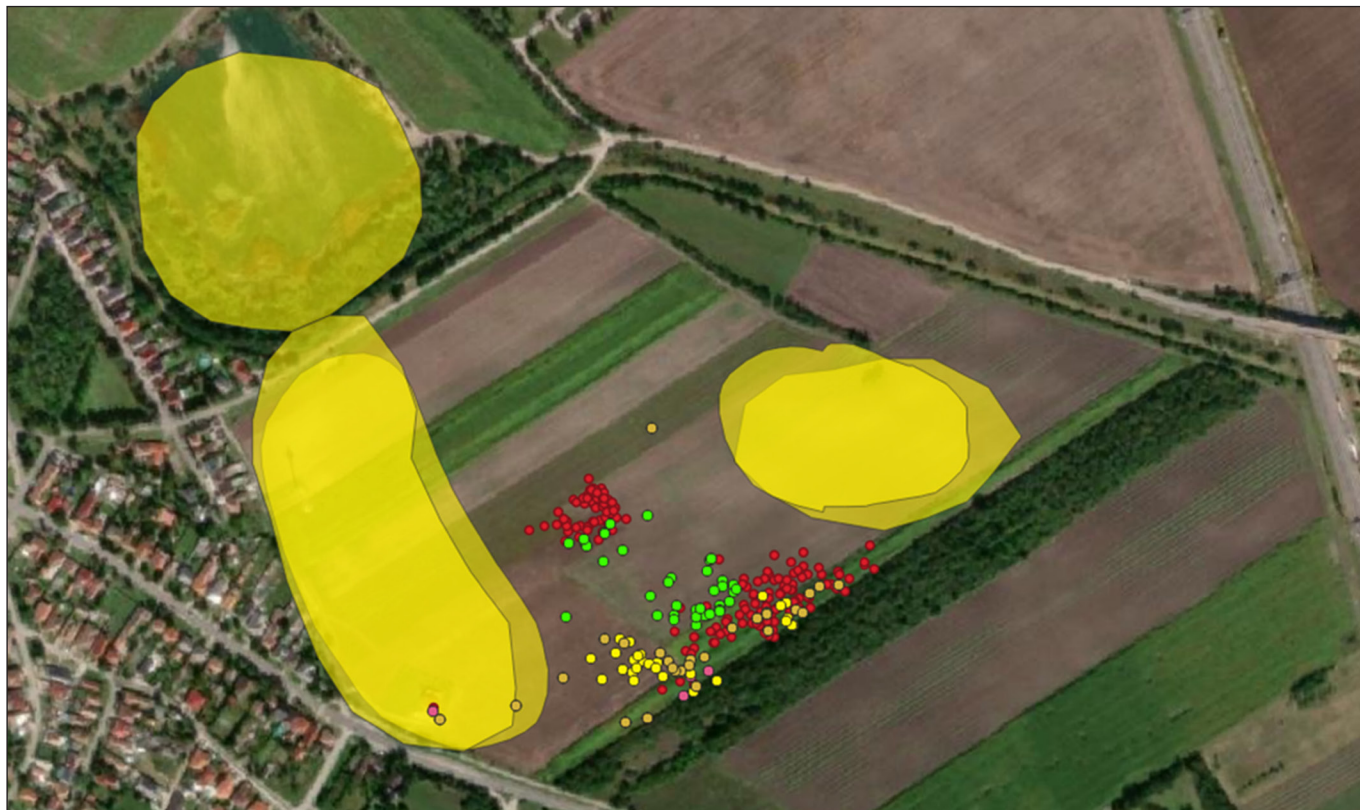


Fig. 1. The distribution of Roman Period finds and the extents of known sites in the area of Hegyeshalom (created by Tamás Czuppon)



Fig. 2. Coin of Constantine I, minted in Cyzicus, from Hegyeshalom (by Veronika Cz. Németh)

raising the need for inspecting the remaining areas concerned, which were still intact at the time. First, nearly 200, while to this day, more than 400 Roman coins, mainly from the 4th and 5th centuries AD, were collected there.

The conservation and evaluation of the finds is still in progress; the record includes, for example, a Constantine I coin minted in Cyzicus in the territory of today's Turkey (Fig 2). We plan to publish a detailed assessment after processing has been completed. This project proved important also because we could specify the position of a known archaeological site located before the era of GPS receivers and determine that, as it lies south of the official polygon marking its limits, the investment will reach it in the following phase. After updating the national site register, it will be necessary to carry out archaeological monitoring during construction in these areas as well, which will allow us to obtain additional information about these sites.

AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE OF COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY IN BEZENYE

The presentation on the forms of community archaeology included a lecture held on October 20, 2022, in the Hanság Museum and a practical part the next day, when the participants travelled to Bezenye, a village 12 km away from Mosonmagyaróvár.

The history of Bezenye dates back to prehistoric times. Several phenomena of archaeological age can be observed in the administrative area of the settlement, the oldest being Bronze Age burial mounds (FIGLER 2008). The current inhabitants are mainly descendants of Croats who fled Dalmatia nearly 400 years ago (MARTINSCHICH 2021). As a result of its proximity to Pozsony/Bratislava, the settlement has also welcomed many new Slovakian residents in the last decade. Most people are proud of their Croatian roots and the past of their place of residence. The community considers it important to learn about its past and pass on this heritage to younger generations (Fig 3).

This gave the idea that Bezenye could provide a place for a presentation in practice of the "toolkit" of community archaeology. A metal detector survey was conducted in the south-western part of the settlement, in a known but still unexplored area, with the local government staff and students from the local elementary school. In the 19th century, Ágost Sötér (SÖTÉR 1898) and half a century later, István



Fig. 3. Drone image of the community archaeology programme in Bezenye (by Tamás Czuppon)



Fig. 4. Roman Period coin from Bezenye (photo by Tamás Czuppon)



Fig. 5. Children participating in the programme getting familiar with a metal detector (photo by Tamás Gécz)

Paulovics observed the remains of a Roman Period watchtower, named later *Gerulata burgus No. 3*, on a higher plateau south of the village and west of Road 150 (VISY 2000).

In agreement with the owner of the land concerned, we visited the area with a team of six metal detectorists. A small group of schoolchildren, their teachers, and local residents followed the event with great interest. They could get familiar with metal detectors and gain insight into the particulars of field research (Fig 4).

The professional team of the museum considers it important to involve the residents in this way, as it makes them feel much closer to the cultural heritage of their locality, thus contributing to ensuring its protection (Fig 5).

And this is especially important for the archaeological sites of Bezenye, as "rootless" newcomers and illegal metal detectorists coming from nearby Slovakia and Austria cause significant damage. Rebuffing Hungarian heritage protection legislation, they loot our sites and take the objects they find to sell them, in most cases, on the antiquities market of nearby Vienna.

This can only be prevented by involving the local community. As the result of cooperation between the civil police of the settlement, hunters, and local farmers, it was possible to prevent the plundering of sites around Bezenye in many cases. The Hanság Museum strives to make local communities aware of the problem and motivates them to learn about our common past and heritage, thus involving them in their protection.

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