

REVIEW

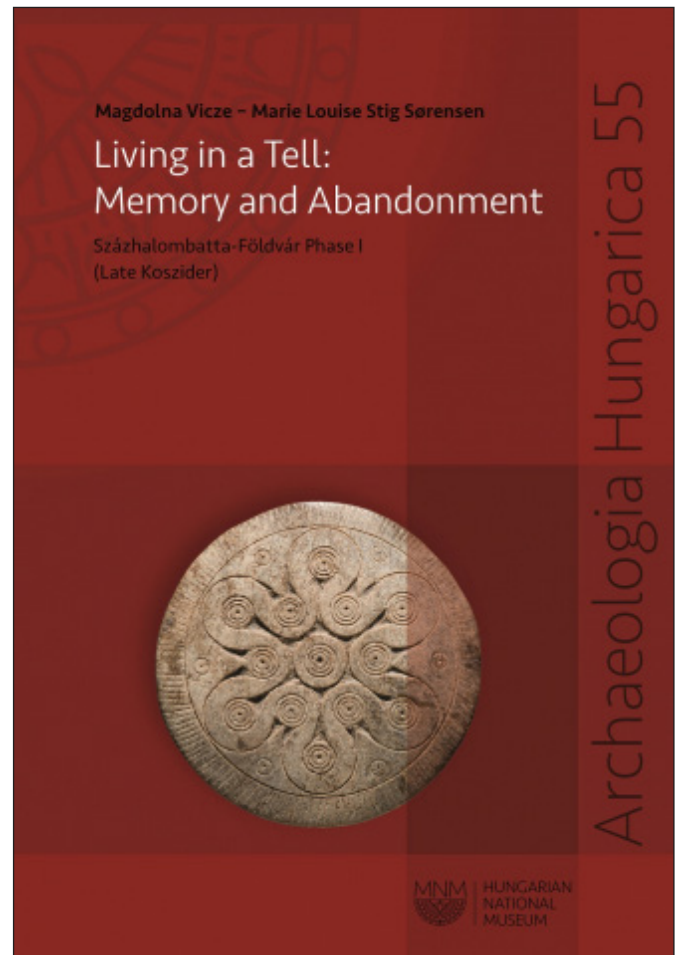
Vicze, M. & Stig Sørensen, M. L.: *Living in a tell: Memory and Abandonment.*KRISTIAN KRISTIANSEN¹

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This book is about the archaeology of the final phase in a classic Hungarian Bronze Age tell settlement at Százhalombatta–Földvár, Phase I (Late Koszider). Importantly, it is also a book about excavation methods and how they are brought into dialogue with interpretation. Finally, the book exemplifies in an extraordinary way how to publish complex data in a systematic way so the reader can make sense of the results. The archaeological reports on the excavation and the documented structures are followed up by specialist reports, first out the animal bones (VRETEMARK & STEN 2020), soon followed by the pottery (JONES, SOFAER & VICZE in prep.).

CHAPTERS I–III. BACKGROUND

First, a brief overview of the structure of the book: the first three chapters are short. Chapter I is about ‘The Significance of Tells’. It contains a concise history of research, a discussion of the Vátya culture, and the old question about the abandonment of tells. It is now clear that this is less well understood today than previously thought: all upper layers of *tells* were not systematically excavated, and the Koszider horizon covers a longer period. Chapter II provides a background to the site and its geology, while Chapter III describes ‘Approach and Aims – Turning Data into Evidence’. It is a clearly written methodological statement about the purpose and method of excavation: a modern, single-context excavation, divided into 2 × 2 and 1 × 1 m grids, all fills screened providing important information on small-scale evidence normally missed, as well as water-screening for seeds from both general and specific contexts. The amount of data recorded, therefore, is enormous (not to speak of the many tons of screened soil), but the authors have found a way to present data both quantitatively and qualitatively in a coherent and easily understandable form, divided into Phase I with six levels covering the final period of the *tell*’s life before its abandonment around 1450BC.



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CHAPTER IV. PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE ACTIVITIES OF LEVELS 6-1.

This approach is applied to the main chapter of the book, Chapter IV, which goes through Phase I, Levels 6–1, from page 53 to 184. Each level is thoroughly presented, combining quantification of data, qualitative descriptions, and interpretations, all supported by small reconstruction drawings. The combination of quantification and interpretation of individual features and finds is outstanding. The authors have found a way that allows the reader to follow arguments and their reference to evidence without getting lost. This format should surely be followed in the next publications because it works so well. A real feat.

As the documented six levels represent a break-up phase, the authors are able to document a whole series of activities never before found or at least never documented at a *tell* site: they look more like short-term improvisations; first, a production workshop for pottery with some racks possibly for drying, followed by an area with a clay patch used for wattle-making of small wall parts to be added to new houses or for repairs, later also an area for threshing. Finally, a never-finished house had been constructed before the ritual killing of a bull ended the settlement. In short, an open-space area was created to fulfil several *ad hoc* functions for a number of households during perhaps two or three generations. These results should be of great importance for future *tell* excavations.

CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION: PHASE I-THE STORY EMERGING

The Százhalombatta tell site is remarkable because the upper layers before final abandonment have been preserved rather undisturbed; accordingly, they are the focus of this first volume. Thus, the evidence presented is unique and holds the potential to document what really happened during the final period of the *tell*'s existence, covering an estimated 50–90 years. However, since the layers of house constructions and the street that went before this final phase are already excavated and known (but not yet published), the authors can say that the final phase represents a break with the old pattern, a break-up that created an open space where new more improvised activities took place, and fewer houses were constructed. Thus, a century-old tradition of replacing old houses with new ones in the same place, stressing continuity and tradition, came to an end. Much fewer houses were now built and many activities were moved out in the open. It seems reasonable to interpret this as a sign of crisis, as it terminated routines that had prevailed for many generations.

Among the traces of new activities were also ovens for food preparation in the open area, which also represent a break with tradition, according to which ovens are always found inside houses. The authors go through evidence for plant processing; threshing is well documented, and bread baking must have been of major importance (see Subchapter 1). Also, cattle must have been held right outside the central settlement, as traces of manure have been found through soil morphology. Household activities are also dealt with in Subchapter 2, while the most stimulating Subchapter 3 deals with attitudes to cleanliness and dirt. While house floors were kept clean, garbage and dirt were thrown outside houses or into the small corridors between the houses, and must have smelled and been a place for parasites and possible pathogens to develop. In Subchapters 4 and 5, material culture and trade are discussed before the chapter is concluded with Subchapter 6 on tradition, memory, and abandonment. It represents a most stimulating discussion on the role of memory and continuity and what the breaking with the tradition may have implied.

CHAPTER VI. SPECIAL REPORTS

The final chapter of the book presents special reports on worked bones, antlers, and teeth by Alice Choyke and Zsuzsanna Tóth, worked stone by Éva Halbrucker, bronze objects by Magdolna Vicze and Marie Louise Stig Sørensen, loom weights by Sophie Bergerbrant, beads and pendants by Marie Louise Stig Sørensen, river pebbles by Adrew Fiasco, and finally soil micromorphology by Gabriella Kovács.

CONCLUSION

This is one of the best excavation monographs I have read, and I have literally read it because it is indeed readable! Which is unusual. The authors have put a lot of time and effort into finding a structure that allows for summarising and quantifying bulk evidence, while still allowing special finds and individual structures to be presented and interpreted in a meaningful way. Given the amount of material, this is a remarkable feat and should serve as an example for future *tell* monographs. One final detail: I would have appreciated a link to an online digital storing/presentation of the data, or I may have overlooked it.

REFERENCES

Vretemark, M. & Sten, S. (2020). *Animal bones from the Bronze Age tell settlement of Százhalombatta-Földvár in Hungary*. Százhalombatta Archaeological Expedition (SAX) 3, Százhalombatta.

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