

THE TRANSFORMATION OF PREHISTORIC EUROPE IN THE 3RD MILLENNIUM BC

International conference in Budapest on the latest results of research on the period

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The conference “The Transformation of Europe in the Third Millennium BC” was held in Budapest on 24–27 April 2024. The aim of the meeting was to summarise in an inspiring dialogue the exponential increase in the quantity and quality of cross-disciplinary knowledge accumulated in archaeology, anthropology, genetics/genomics, linguistics and other biological and environmental disciplines in recent years. Through internationally renowned invited speakers and a poster session, we gained insights into the history of the 4th and 3rd millennia BC, a period of great change in the transformation of prehistoric Europe.

TWO CONFERENCES IN RIVA DEL GARDA AND BUDAPEST

The title “The Transformation of Europe in the Third Millennium BC” covers two events. The first meeting was held in October 2023 in Riva del Garda, Italy, while the second took place on 24–27 April 2024 in Budapest at the Institute of Archaeology HUN-REN RCH.

The first meeting focused on the western part of Europe, while the Budapest meeting revolved around the history of the eastern, central, and northern parts of the continent in the 3rd millennium BC (Figs. 1–2), with a special focus on Yamnaya (Yamna, Pit-grave), Globular Amphora, and Corded Ware cultures in the Caucasus, the Eastern European steppe zone, the Danube Valley, the Carpathian Basin, the Polish Plain, and Scandinavia.

The significance of the turn of the 4th and 3rd millennia BC lies in that the communities reaching western Eurasia from the Eastern European steppe completely transformed the cultural relations known until then there, which led to the emergence of the origins of the genetic map of today’s Europe. The history of the period is marked by the acceleration of the domestication of horses, the growth of dairy consumption, the emergence of the technological foundations of Bronze Age crafts, and the formation of new networks. The process spanned a vast area and likely brought along the spread of the Indo-European language family. The history of the period was probably not without its difficulties. The people flowing into Europe may have been physically strong (much taller and more robust than the local population),



Fig. 1. Poster of the Budapest conference

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Fig. 2. Participants of the Budapest conference (photo by János Beregszászi)

and dominating territory was important to them. They also brought diseases with them; for example, the emergence of the plague is linked to them.

Over the four days of the conferences, renowned invited speakers summarised the current state of research in an opening and closing lecture and 27 lectures (fourteen keynotes and thirteen others). Invited speakers came from the most important research centres of the period: Bulgaria (Sofia), Denmark (Aarhus, Copenhagen), Finland (Helsinki), the Netherlands (Leiden), Croatia (Zagreb), Poland (Krakow, Poznań, Rzeszów), Hungary (Budapest, Debrecen, Szeged), Republic of Moldova (Kisinyov), Italy (Trento, Venice), Germany (Berlin, Bonn, Kiel, Leipzig, Mainz, Munich), Romania (Cluj-Napoca), Switzerland (Bern), Sweden (Gothenburg, Lund) and Harvard Medical School, USA. The conference was accompanied by sixteen poster presentations on a screen projector. All presentations were broadcast live on the HUN-RENRCH YouTube channel. Many visitors attended the presentations and related discussions during the four days of the conference. The online audience was consistently high (50–70 people), and a large number of people watched the presentations later. One of the main objectives of the conference was to focus on Hungarian results alongside those of international research and to maximise the number of both senior and young presenters. A particularly important element was the series of keynote lectures on the final day of the conference, which also provided an exceptional opportunity in Budapest to hear the latest results presented by distinguished colleagues such as David Anthony, David Reich, and Kristian Kristiansen. We had a very good conference at the end of April, with a friendly atmosphere and many valuable new contacts, project plans, and days of thinking together.

THE RELATED PHOTO EXHIBITION

The photo exhibition “Ancient Horizons—Kurgans in the Landscape” by János Beregszászi was displayed in the Gallery of the MTA HTK building. The pictures explore the relationship between man and landscape and their interaction, especially the kurgan as a dominant landscape element (*Fig. 3*).

FIELD DAY OF THE CONFERENCE IN HUNGARY

On the field day of the conference, the attendees took a trip to the Kiskunság National Park. Near the community centre in Harta, we visited the Oltó-halom on Böddi-szék on the outskirts of Dunatetőlen (*Fig. 4*). This protected natural area of national importance is on the list of the Ramsar Convention for the Protection of Wetlands of International Importance. The largest mound of the Kiskunság, a protected natural area of national importance, a natural monument and an archaeological site, lies on the north-eastern fringes of the Böddi-szék, near Lake Kígyós. We thank Rozália Kustár of the Dunatáj Nature and Environment Protection Public Foundation and Réka Balázs and her colleagues of the Kiskunság National Park Directorate for organising the trip. The Dunatáj Nature and Environment Protection Public Foundation and the Kiskunság National Park Directorate cooperated in the organisation of this programme.



Fig. 3. Photo exhibition of János Beregszászi at the MTA HTK Gallery (photo by János Beregszászi)



Fig. 4. Participants of the field trip of the conference at Dunatetőlen-Böddi-szék-Oltó-halom (photo by János Beregszászi)

ORGANISERS, SUPPORTERS, AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The main organisers and supporters of the Budapest meeting were Volker Heyd, [ERC YMPACT project](#) leader (University of Helsinki), Franco Nicolis (Archaeological Heritage Protection Office, Trento, Italy), and Gabriella Kulcsár (Institute of Archaeology HUN-REN RCH). The National Cultural Fund (NKA 207108/00508) also supported the event.

The conference publications are a tribute to the work of the Archaeolingua Foundation. The [Momentum Vegetation and Seed Bank Dynamics Research Group](#) brought all participants closer to a personal understanding of the former natural environment with a special selection of ancient seed species. The photo exhibition was made possible thanks to Salisbury Ltd.

AFTERWORD – PREHISTORY FOR ALL – OPEN ACCESS LECTURES ON THE PREHISTORY OF EUROPE

Recordings of the presentations of the two international conferences are now available on the [HUN-REN BTK YouTube channel](#). We hope that they provide a great opportunity for not only scholars of the period but also for those interested in the prehistory of Europe, both university and high school students, to gain insight into this seminal period. The initiative aims to make the scientific results as widely accessible as possible in the context of open and community science. Visitors can view [28 presentations](#) from the meeting in Italy and [24](#) of the 28 presentations from the four days of the conference in Budapest.

Several posts on the event's Facebook page reported on the conference and related topics. In addition, the Danube Valley Public Foundation [Facebook page](#), the central HUN-REN website, the individual websites of the related institutions, and the website and Facebook page of *The Yamnaya Impact on Prehistoric Europe* ERC project (Finland) also reported on the events. It is also worth mentioning that The [Economist](#) reported on the important scientific results discussed at the conference.