

## EXPANDING THE KÖRÖS BASIN ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH NETWORK: NEW INTERNATIONAL PREHISTORIC PROJECTS

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*For more than a quarter of a century, the Körös Basin in southeastern Hungary has stood at the center of international archaeological collaborations anchored by the Körös Regional Archaeological Project (KRAP) and the more recent umbrella framework of the Körös Consortium. These initiatives—built on shared effort, long-term partnerships and friendships, training, and continuously expanding research capacity—have produced a sustained research environment that has transformed the Körös Basin into one of Europe’s most intensively investigated prehistoric landscapes. The newest projects—each directed by scholars affiliated with major North American institutions, aiming to illuminate cultural and economic developments spanning the Neolithic, Copper Age, and Bronze Age—continue this collaborative trajectory and expand this tradition into the next generation of prehistoric scholarship.*

The Körös Basin first emerged as the focal point of international, collaborative prehistoric research in the late 1990s, when William A. Parkinson (then a PhD student at the University of Michigan, now curator at the Field Museum of Natural History and professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago, USA) was drawn to the region by the rich archaeological record published in the Archaeological Topography of Hungary survey volumes. Building on this foundation, he conducted his doctoral fieldwork in the Körös Basin, examining the Early Copper Age social organization of the Great Hungarian Plain. Parkinson and Attila Gyucha (then an archaeologist at the Munkácsy Mihály Museum, Hungary, now professor at the University of Georgia, USA) established KRAP in 1998, and their first excavations were launched in 2000. Using a multidisciplinary research design that incorporated methods then still innovative within Hungarian archaeology, KRAP first explored Early Copper Age settlement organization at the sites of Vésztő-Bikeri and Körösladány-Bikeri before expanding in the 2010s to nearby Szeghalom-Kovácsshalom and Vésztő-Mágor to investigate the emergence and development of Late Neolithic tells and tell-centered nucleated villages. Most recently, KRAP launched its third multi-year initiative comparing the developmental trajectories of Neolithic and Bronze Age tell-centered communities, with state-of-the-art household-focused research at Szeghalom-Kovácsshalom, Békés(Tarhos)-Várdomb, and Vésztő-Mágor (Fig. 1).

Over the past decades, KRAP has functioned not only as a research initiative but also as a sustained training platform, supporting numerous undergraduate and master’s theses, as well as several doctoral dissertations by North American students whose work focused partly or entirely on the prehistory of the Körös Basin. At the same time, KRAP projects have actively trained Hungarian students and early-career scholars, contributing to capacity building and long-term professional development within Hungary. Many



*Fig. 1. Excavation and collection of micromorphological samples in a trench exposed at the Bronze Age tell site of Békés(Tarhos)-Várdomb in 2024*

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of these Hungarian and North American participants later returned as graduate researchers, postdoctoral fellows, or professors and went on to establish their own research programs in the Körös Basin. These efforts have given rise to second- and third-generation initiatives, such as the *Neolithic Archaeological Soilscaapes in the Körös Area* (NASKA; directed by Roderick B. Salisbury and Gábor Bácsmeği), the *Pre-historic Interactions on the Plain Project* (PIPP; directed by Danielle J. Riebe and János Dani), the *Bronze Age Körös Off-Tell Archaeology Project* (BAKOTA; directed by Paul R. Duffy and Györgyi Parditka), and the *Copper Age Settlement Project* (CASP; directed by William P. Ridge) (Fig. 2). These programs work in close collaboration, employing compatible field methods and documentation protocols that yield directly comparable datasets, regularly exchanging expertise and data, and sharing field equipment—thus allowing each project to benefit from the extensive physical and intellectual infrastructure that has been collectively developed over many years.



Fig. 2. Excavation at the Late Neolithic site of Csökmő-Káposztás-domb in 2022



Fig. 3. Conservation work in the sheltered excavation trench at the Vésztő-Mágor tell site in 2025

Importantly, each initiative operates with Hungarian co-directors and specialists, and actively includes Hungarian students, ensuring that the benefits of these collaborations directly strengthen Hungarian archaeology and facilitate the integration of new field and analytical methods into professional practice. Moreover, over the past decades, these programs have been supported primarily through North American and other international grants, bringing substantial external resources into Hungarian archaeological research and infrastructure.

To coordinate long-term collaborative research among these initiatives, the directors of KRAP (Gyucha and Parkinson), PIPP (Riebe), BAKOTA (Duffy), and CASP (Ridge) established the Körös Consortium. This collaborative body oversees the Vésztő-Mágor Conservation and Exhibition Program. Recognizing both the shortage of specialized conservation expertise in Hungary and the local community's need to safeguard the central attraction of the Vésztő-Mágor National Historical Park, the Consortium launched this program in 2021 to stabilize and preserve Europe's only sheltered, publicly accessible tell-stratigraphic trench and to develop best-practice protocols for conserving and interpreting earthen architecture at prehistoric sites across Southeast Europe (Fig. 3). The Consortium integrates conservation science, archaeological research, and community engagement, while also providing professional training opportunities for students.

The *Prehistoric Research in the Körös Region* book series—edited by Gyucha and Parkinson and published by Archaeolingua—further strengthens the collaborative, capacity-building, and knowledge-dissemination initiatives undertaken by the international research programs active in the Körös Basin. Established specifically to publish doctoral dissertations devoted entirely or substantially to the region, the series offers a dedicated platform for the dissemination of new, data-rich research and ensures that these results reach both Hungarian and international scholarly audiences.

Within this long-standing framework of collaboration, three new international research projects have recently been founded in the Körös Basin. The members of the Körös Consortium provide them with both professional and practical support—from integrating them into their professional networks and facilitating access to museum collections and field permits to sharing equipment, data, and local knowledge—thereby helping these emerging projects take root and develop successfully.

The first of these new initiatives is led by Mark Golitko (Assistant Professor, University of Notre Dame, USA), whose multi-year study investigates Middle Neolithic community formation, transformation, and disintegration in northern Békés County. Golitko's work focuses on the period of 5500–5000 BC marked by intensifying agriculture, expanding village life, and new forms of social organization. His research combines detailed study of unpublished museum collections with surface survey, geophysical prospection, and excavations to gain a better understanding of how Middle Neolithic villages were organized, what social and/or ecological pressures they faced, and how these communities may have contributed to the later rise of tell settlements that dominated the Late Neolithic sociocultural landscape.

The second new initiative is directed by Cassie Hausdorf (PhD student, University of Georgia, USA), whose project compares animal management, mobility, and subsistence strategies from the Late Neolithic to the Middle Bronze Age (ca. 5000–1500 BC). Through faunal analysis and isotopic studies of bone and teeth samples, Hausdorf investigates how prehistoric communities adapted herding practices in response to changing social networks, trade connections, environmental conditions, and resource pressures. Her research focuses on four faunal assemblages from major Körös Basin sites, including the Late Neolithic tell-centered settlement complex of Szeghalom-Kovácsalom, the multi-component tell of Vésztő-Mágor, and the Middle Bronze Age settlement of Békés(Tarhos)-Várdomb. By situating subsistence strategies within broader issues of resilience and sustainability, the project contributes to current discussions on long-term environmental adaptations.

A third research program—directed by Cayden Griffith (PhD student, University at Buffalo, USA)—turns to the Early Bronze Age (ca. 2800–2300 BC) and the Makó cultural horizon. The project integrates a plethora of methods—non-intensive survey, gridded surface collection, magnetometry, soil chemistry, and targeted excavations—to explore settlement use and identify patterns of shared labor. By examining how these settlements were structured and how people coordinated daily tasks, the research seeks to illuminate how Makó groups responded to the significant social, economic, and technological changes that accompanied the transition from the Copper Age to the Bronze Age. Griffith's multi-scalar research—ranging from investigations into site-specific activity areas to broader regional patterns—aims to produce the first comprehensive interpretation on Makó social organization in the Körös Basin.

Together, these new initiatives demonstrate the continued vitality of the collaborative research environment that has taken shape in the Körös Basin over the past decades. Building on the legacy of the Körös Regional Archaeological Project and supported by the organizational framework of the Körös Consortium, they help sustain a robust and enduring setting for international prehistoric research in the region. The cumulative results of decades of work by multiple international research projects in the Körös Basin now offer a uniquely rich and intellectually generative foundation on which future scientific programs can build, making it possible to articulate entirely new research questions and to apply genuinely comparative approaches—the single most important benefits of long-term, mutually reinforcing archaeological investigations concentrated within a single geographic region. As this cooperative network continues to expand, its synergistic dynamics further amplify these possibilities, ensuring that the Körös Basin retains its position as one of Europe's most productive and innovative regions for archaeological investigation well into the future.

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