

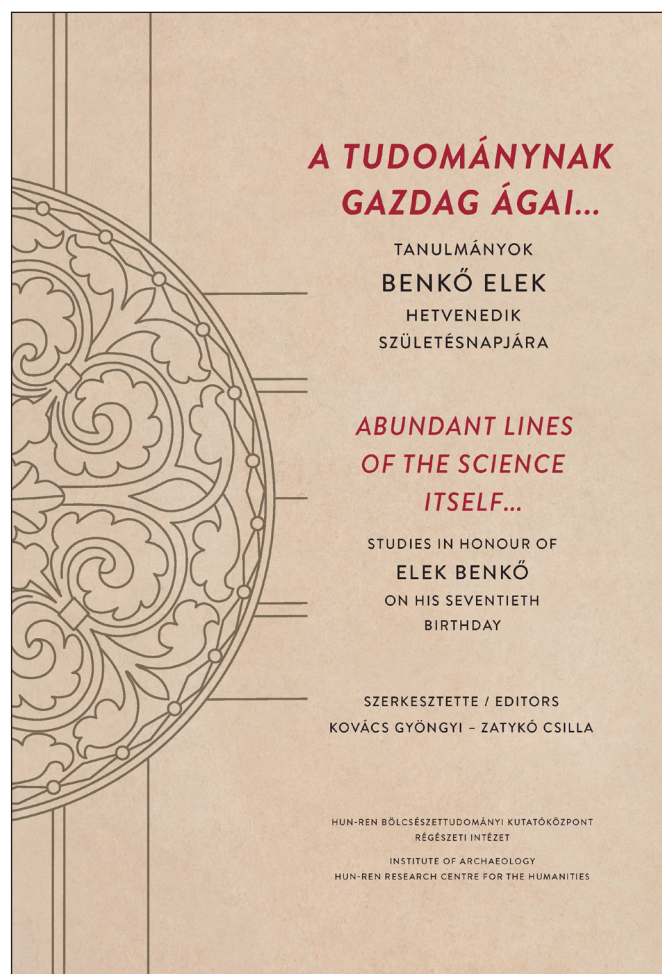
A NEW OVERVIEW OF MEDIEVAL ARCHAEOLOGY IN HUNGARY. REFLECTIONS ON A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS PUBLISHED IN HONOUR OF ELEK BENKŐ

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Hungarian Archaeology Vol. 15 (2026) Issue 2, pp. 42–48.

Festschrift volumes has a special place in academic publishing. Such a publication is traditionally presented as a gift, and often as a surprise, to a highly esteemed scholar, recognised in their field for their achievements. In these books, colleagues, students and associates pay tribute to the honouree through either a personal essay or, more commonly, an academic paper. The reflections that follow, and indeed this review itself, cannot therefore be separated from this context. For this very reason, the brief summaries of the articles always reflect on how the topics relate to the honouree's oeuvre. However, this essay also has another aim. It asks how various publications (including Festschrift volumes) can serve as overviews of Hungarian medieval archaeology.

One unwritten rule of a *Festschrift* is that the scholarly contributions should, as far as possible, relate to the honouree and their achievements. In Hungary, this genre disappeared entirely after the Second World War; until the 1980s, it was virtually impossible to publish such a volume in archaeology or history. According to the authorities in charge of the entirely state-controlled publishing sector, there was no place for volumes produced out of respect for a particular researcher. Occasionally, editors might have dedicated an issue or volume of a scholarly journal to such a person, but in reality this was not very common. There was one notable exception: in 1984, Elemér Mályusz, the doyen of Hungarian historians, was honoured with a volume by distinguished scholars, in which many of the papers are still regarded as fundamental studies (H. BALÁZS, FÜGEDI & MAKSAJ 1984). Following this, however, *Festschrift* volumes began to appear more frequently. Those being honoured often received such gifts at a much younger age, sometimes at the expense of quality. In many cases, critics also argued that these publications included any kind of papers the authors had readily available and could publish without particular academic scrutiny, often simply because of an upcoming milestone birthday. Another criticism



A tudománynak gazdag ágai... Tanulmányok Benkő Elek hetvenedik születésnapjára.

Abundant Lines of the Science itself... Studies in Honour of Elek Benkő on his Seventieth Birthday.

Edited by Kovács Gyöngyi & Zatykó Csilla.

Institute of Archaeology, HUN-REN Research Centre for the Humanities, MTA Centre of Excellence, Budapest, 2024.

468 pp., black-and-white and coloured figures, plates and maps. ISBN 978-615-5766-73-2

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levelled at such volumes, namely, that they are difficult to find, is now less relevant in the age of the internet. Researchers were also aided by resources such as the index of historical commemorative volumes, which contained data on studies published in such volumes between 1884 and 2004, organised by key terms (LAKATOS & PAKSA 2006). In this way, scholars can still find the often valuable contributions written to honour distinguished colleagues.

But why is it worth making these remarks – which are primarily related to the history of science – in connection with the volume published in honour of Elek Benkő? Because two aspects set it apart from the usual *Festschrift* volumes. Both are closely linked to the honouree himself. Firstly, it is the academic standard of the articles published here. Everyone knows that, in his scholarly work, Elek Benkő was determined to meet the quality standards he set for himself and the professional expectations placed on him, under all circumstances. This applies to research, knowledge of the specialist literature and the accuracy of publications alike. In short, we do not publish anything until it is ready and meets these fundamental requirements. In today's world, characterised by a relentless pressure to publish, this is not something everyone takes for granted, but in the case of Elek Benkő, this is not an issue on which compromises can be made. He applied the same standards to the work of others in his roles as reviewer, external reader and editor. For this very reason, it was clear to the authors whose essays appear in this volume that one could not simply submit 'any old thing' to it – a piece of writing that was 'just sitting in a drawer'. This is evident from the studies themselves, regardless of their authors' fields or generations.

The volume's other distinctive feature, and another theme of this review, relates to the state of medieval archaeological research in Hungary, which emerged early, even by European standards, and was relatively quickly recognised as an independent field within archaeology. At the same time, unlike in other countries, this did not mean that a journal or series of publications had been established that focused specifically on medieval archaeology. This gap was, more or less, filled by conferences held from time to time and their published volumes, which aimed to provide a somewhat comprehensive overview of the entire field. As one of the most prominent figures in Hungarian medieval archaeology, Elek Benkő not only provided fundamental overviews of individual specialist fields (2002) and, through decades of work, produced a comprehensive study of every aspect of a historical region of medieval Hungary (2012), but also considered it important to participate actively in the production of major synthetic volumes. He also co-edited one such volume (BENKŐ & KOVÁCS 2010), whilst the research project and volume covering the central region of medieval Hungary (BENKŐ & OROSZ 2012) can likewise be regarded as such an effort. He also edited a thematic collection of studies in honour of Imre Holl, a leading figure in Hungarian medieval archaeology (BENKŐ, KOVÁCS & OROSZ 2017; LASZLOVSKY 2018).

It is hardly a coincidence that, in this volume, several papers seek to offer a scholarly overview of the current state of research. Among them, László Bartosiewicz's article certainly stands out, as he provides an overview of the zooarchaeology of the Middle Ages by analysing seventy years of research in Hungary. The starting year of this study is no coincidence. It marks the year of Benkő's birth and the year the study, in which Sándor Bökönyi essentially laid the foundations for this field of research in Hungary, was published. Similarly, another summary study focuses on the history of the research, interpretative possibilities, and problems to be resolved. Péter Langó and Miklós Takács examine the excavation of Árpád Age village cemeteries from the perspective of a related academic discipline: settlement archaeology. In Elek Benkő's research on the Székely people, these two issues were similarly intertwined, and their joint analysis, drawing on often fragmentary written sources and, more recently, genetic studies, has led to fundamentally new findings. In settlement archaeology, György Terei focuses on large Árpád Age subterranean buildings, offering important insights into structures with varying functions found in rural settlements of that era.

Another characteristic of similar volumes is that researchers specialising in 'adjacent' periods present a set of issues, whilst also outlining common methodological conclusions applicable to both periods. In this respect, too, this volume is innovative, even in cases where colleagues and friends have written individual studies. László Kovács formulates general observations regarding the well-studied issue of *szállás* (temporary settlement) cemeteries from the time of the Hungarian conquest, which is thus closely linked to the

aforementioned study on burials from the Árpád Age. Béla Miklós Szóke and Tivadar Vida analyse a find horizon and an object of outstanding importance, in both cases artefacts from an earlier period, whilst also highlighting the problem of the networks of relationships that can be traced amongst archaeological finds, which likewise offers scope for important methodological and theoretical conclusions. Csanád Bálint outlines the complex relationship between numismatic sources and archaeological interpretations in relation to coins discussed within the context of a problematic group of artefacts, the ‘Khazar coinage’, providing a further example of methodological and interpretative possibilities spanning different periods. And such an ambitious work would not be complete without studies that span different periods and analyse genuine continuity, such as the contribution by Réka Fülöp, Anna Győri-Pórszász, László Révész and Ágnes Ritoók, which examines artefact types, dress customs and their survival from the 8th–9th centuries by analysing the finds from 10th–11th-century graves. A perfect example of research analysing similar artefacts across different periods is provided in this case by Ádám Bollók, who draws on the example of late antique rattles from the Levantine provinces of the Eastern Roman Empire to shed light on the background to magical traditions during the Avar period and the Hungarian conquest. In this way, archaeological finds become manifestations of various religious concepts or magical traditions, just as Elek Benkő’s works on various metal objects have, in many cases, illustrated different layers of medieval religiosity (BENKŐ 2001; BENKŐ 2002; BENKŐ 2010a). Another study turns to research questions concerning the period immediately following the Middle Ages. Ibolya Gerelyes explores the Ottoman artistic antecedents of Balkan-origin jewellery found in Ottoman Hungary.

Representatives of ‘related’ disciplines also regularly contribute to the summarising volumes mentioned in the introduction. Here too, alongside the contributors’ esteem for the honouree, methodological lessons can once again be highlighted, drawing attention to their impact on the development of medieval archaeology. The volume focuses primarily on the parallel analysis of written sources and art-historical approaches. Beatrix F. Romhányi analyses cults, cultural regions and *hospes* settlers, this time based on the patron saints of parish churches recorded at the beginning of the 14th century, primarily by quantifying them and examining the spatial distribution of the churches associated with them. Boglárka Weisz also uses data from written sources to describe the different types of marketplaces in the medieval Kingdom of Hungary, a topic of key importance for archaeologists studying medieval villages, market towns, and towns with special privileges. This issue was also examined by Elek Benkő in his works discussing settlement history and settlement structure (BENKŐ 1980; BENKŐ, DEMETER & SZÉKELY 1997; BENKŐ 2004). Gábor Sarbak’s contribution examines Pauline bells using medieval texts, thereby paying tribute to how the honouree elevated the study of Hungarian medieval bells to the forefront of European research (BENKŐ 2002). The relevant data on the Pauline Order, the only monastic order founded in Hungary, especially those drawn from contemporary sources that also cover the order’s own history, contribute, beyond individual examples, to the understanding of ‘soundscapes’, a field of research that has recently attracted considerable interest. Attila Zsoldos reflects on another aspect of Elek Benkő’s work, again relying primarily on medieval texts. The battles that took place in the centre of the country are important not only from the perspective of political or military history, but also because this central region, the *Medium Regni*, has long been at the centre of medievalists’ interest, and the most recent and comprehensive presentation of this subject area also forms an important part of the honouree’s scholarly achievements and contributions to academic organisation (BENKŐ & OROSZ 2012). An important example of art-historical research into this period is the work of Pál Lövei, who articulates key research ideas concerning the crusaders and depictions of the cross, drawing examples from the world of tombstones, whilst focusing not merely on their interpretation or artistic value, but on the misconceptions associated with them. One of the studies examining the links between material culture and archaeology in relation to individual finds, or case studies, is the article written by Orsolya Mészáros and István Fórizs. Through finds from a late medieval glass workshop at Visegrád, the authors also show how archaeometric analyses contribute to the understanding of the site and the artefacts recovered from it, highlighting the importance of an interdisciplinary approach. The latter is a prominent feature of several studies in this volume, and indeed of Elek Benkő’s scholarly work as a whole. The most obvious example of this

is the study by Gusztáv Jakab, Erzsébet Csengeri and Gábor Timár, which analyses the lessons to be learnt from medieval water management. As representatives of different academic disciplines, they bring distinct perspectives to the study, yet they find a common language that is indispensable in environmental history and environmental archaeology. This is another example of a research topic that played a significant role in Elek Benkő's work and in a large-scale multidisciplinary research programme, as well as in the major thematic publication presenting its results (BENKŐ & ZATYKÓ 2021). Erika Gál's article also reflects this interdisciplinary approach; based on animal bone finds unearthed during the excavation of Csókakő Castle, she has expanded our knowledge of vultures. Gábor Hatházi and Gyöngyi Kovács discuss archaeological research at Csókakő Castle. Using evidence from Sigismund-era tile stoves and an Ottoman stove with concave glazed tiles, they examine variations in the use of stoves as a means of display across the two periods. Such finds have long played an important role in material culture studies. Márta Vizi's contribution focuses on polychrome-glazed stove tiles from another fortified site, Ozora Castle. The choice of topics in these two articles is again no coincidence, since this important category of artefacts also figured prominently in the honouree's scholarly work (BENKŐ 1984).

As already noted, the analysis of the broadest range of metal artefacts holds a special place in Elek Benkő's research. This encompasses both the largest objects, the finest products of medieval bronze craftsmanship, such as bells, and the smallest finds, often overlooked in earlier studies, such as pilgrim badges. In these areas too, we must thank the honouree for his fundamental and pioneering work in medieval archaeology in Hungary. András K. Németh and Máté Varga demonstrate the significant research potential of these 'trifles' through the example of the Nuremberg bells and a recently found pilgrim's badge, clearly illustrating how these small objects serve as vital evidence of medieval networks, as they draw attention not only to the movement of artefacts but also to the mobility of people. The period's exceptionally important and complex networks of connections emerge through the study of the buildings of medieval monastic orders, namely monasteries. Elek Benkő has long worked on analysing excavation material from one of medieval Hungary's most important ecclesiastical institutions: the Cistercian monastery at Pilisszentkereszt, a royal foundation. Adrián Berta, Ákos Ekrik, and Bianka Gina Kovács also address this subject in their study of non-destructive archaeological investigations at the Cistercian abbey at Ábrahám. This is also important from a methodological perspective, as the geophysical surveys initiated by Elek Benkő played a key role in subsequent investigations at Pilisszentkereszt (BENKŐ 2010b). Archaeological research into medieval monasteries also occurs in another study, once again drawing our attention to the network between unique metal artefacts and monastic communities. Archaeological excavations yield remains of destroyed monasteries, and their scholarly examination and art-historical analysis also reveal the broader context. Szabolcs Rosta's excavations at Pétermonostor and Bernát Rácz's analysis of a find from that site, which is sensational in every respect, highlight the fact that, alongside the liturgical objects from Limoges, which have already been analysed by several scholars, we must also take into account the influence of the Maas region, particularly during a period when it held outstanding significance in the ecclesiastical art of Europe.

Last but not least, it is worth mentioning those studies linked to Elek Benkő's early professional career and his homeland. His work has consistently been influenced by his Transylvanian roots. He conducted his research during a very dark historical chapter of the region, and the countless publications that grew out of it are recurring elements of his oeuvre. András Sófalvi, a member of a new generation of researchers working in Romania and studying the heritage of medieval Hungary, ensures that this aspect of Elek Benkő's work remains represented in the volume by presenting the remnants of an Árpád Age rotunda. In doing so, he also highlights how an architectural monument, which, in itself, might not seem particularly remarkable, can contribute to reconstructing the medieval history of an entire region through a broader topographical study, just as Elek Benkő himself demonstrated in an early study (BENKŐ 1992).

Finally, we must mention Teréz Oborni's historical study on István Báthory's diplomatic missions to Vienna and his captivity. This paper falls outside the medieval archaeological and related methodological framework that runs through almost the entire volume. In this piece, the author selects a segment from her own research that is not directly linked to the honouree's well-known personal and professional con-

nections. However, it evokes a world which, through his family background, played an important role in shaping the honouree's worldview. This particularly rich volume, which in many respects goes beyond the usual content of *Festschrift* volumes, is made complete by this contribution, precisely because it embodies the finest elements of a publishing tradition, and also because it brings 'Abundant Lines of the Science itself...' to a perfect conclusion. With it, we have gained yet another comprehensive synthesis on medieval archaeology.

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