

DISSERTATIONES ARCHAEOLOGICAE

ex Instituto Archaeologico Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae



Ser. 3. No. 6. | 2018

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Budapest 2018

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Layout and cover design: Gábor Váczi

Budapest 2018

CONTENTS

Zsolt MESTER 9

In memoriam Jacques Tixier (1925–2018)

ARTICLES

Katalin SEBŐK 13

On the possibilities of interpreting Neolithic pottery – Az újkőkori kerámia értelmezési lehetőségeiről

András FÜZESI – Pál RACZKY 43

Öcsöd-Kováshalom. Potscape of a Late Neolithic site in the Tisza region

Katalin SEBŐK – Norbert FARAGÓ 147

Theory into practice: basic connections and stylistic affiliations of the Late Neolithic settlement at Pusztataskony-Ledence 1

Eszter SOLNAY 179

Early Copper Age Graves from Polgár-Nagy-Kasziba

László GUCSI – Nóra SZABÓ 217

Examination and possible interpretations of a Middle Bronze Age structured deposition

Kristóf FÜLÖP 287

Why is it so rare and random to find pyre sites? Two cremation experiments to understand the characteristics of pyre sites and their investigational possibilities

Gábor János TARBAY 313

“Looted Warriors” from Eastern Europe

Péter MOGYORÓS 361

Pre-Scythian burial in Tiszakürt

Szilvia JOHÁCZI 371

A New Method in the Attribution? Attempts of the Employment of Geometric Morphometrics in the Attribution of Late Archaic Attic Lekythoi

Anita BENES	419
<hr/>	
<i>The Roman aqueduct of Brigetio</i>	
Lajos JUHÁSZ	441
<hr/>	
<i>A republican plated denarius from Aquincum</i>	
Barbara HAJDU	445
<hr/>	
<i>Terra sigillata from the territory of the civil town of Brigetio</i>	
Krisztina HOPPÁL – István VIDA – Shinatria ADHITYATAMA – LU Yahui	461
<hr/>	
<i>‘All that glitters is not Roman’. Roman coins discovered in East Java, Indonesia. A study on new data with an overview on other coins discovered beyond India</i>	
FIELD REPORTS	
Zsolt MESTER – Ferenc CSERPÁK – Norbert FARAGÓ	493
<hr/>	
<i>Preliminary report on the excavation at Andornaktálya-Marinka in 2018</i>	
Kristóf FÜLÖP – Denisa M. LÖNHARDT – Nóra SZABÓ – Gábor VÁCZI	499
<hr/>	
<i>Preliminary report on the excavation of the site Tizsakürt-Zsilke-tanya</i>	
Bence SIMON – Szilvia JOHÁCSI – Zita KIS	515
<hr/>	
<i>Short report on a rescue excavation of a prehistoric and Árpáadian Age site near Tura (Pest County, Hungary)</i>	
Zoltán CZAJLIK – Katalin NOVINSZKI-GROMA – László RUPNIK – András BÖDŐCS – et al.	527
<hr/>	
<i>Archaeological investigations on the Süttő plateau in 2018</i>	
Dávid BARTUS – László BORHY – Szilvia JOHÁCSI – Emese SZÁMADÓ	541
<hr/>	
<i>Short report on the excavations in the legionary fortress of Brigetio (2017–2018)</i>	
Bence SIMON – Szilvia JOHÁCSI	549
<hr/>	
<i>Short report on the rescue excavations in the Roman Age Barbaricum near Abony (Pest County, Hungary)</i>	
Szabolcs Balázs NAGY	557
<hr/>	
<i>Recent excavations at the medieval castle of Bánd</i>	

THESIS ABSTRACTS

- | | |
|--|-----|
| Rita JENEY | 573 |
| <hr/> | |
| <i>Lost Collection from a Lost River: Interpreting Sir Aurel Stein's "Sarasvatī Tour" in the History of South Asian Archaeology</i> | |
| István VIDA | 591 |
| <hr/> | |
| <i>The Chronology of the Marcomannic-Sarmatian wars. The Danubian wars of Marcus Aurelius in the light of numismatics</i> | |
| Zsófia MASEK | 597 |
| <hr/> | |
| <i>Settlement History of the Middle Tisza Region in the 4th–6th centuries AD. According to the Evaluation of the Material from Rákóczifalva-Bagi-földek 5–8–8A sites</i> | |
| Alpár DOBOS | 621 |
| <hr/> | |
| <i>Transformations of the human communities in the eastern part of the Carpathian Basin between the middle of the 5th and 7th century. Row-grave cemeteries in Transylvania, Partium and Banat</i> | |

Archaeological investigations on the Süttő plateau in 2018

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Abstract

The Early Iron Age site complex of Süttő is located on a loess plateau on the right bank of the Danube. After a long history of research of the Early Iron Age fortified settlement, tumulus groups and flat cemetery, between 2013–2017, some pioneer investigations were carried out using non-invasive methods. In 2018, members of the Institute of Archaeological Sciences of the Eötvös Loránd University and the Archaeological Heritage Protection Directorate of the Hungarian National Museum conducted an interdisciplinary research project (archaeological excavation, geophysical measurements, metal detecting survey, systematic field walking, geological drilling) on the plateau in the framework of the Interreg DTP Iron Age Danube project. As a result of intensive research, it became clear that aside from the Early Iron Age necropolis, the eastern part of the plateau was used as a burial site in the Early Bronze Age, as a settlement in the Late Bronze Age, and we must consider the existence of a Late Iron Age settlement in this area as well.

Geographical background

The Early Iron Age settlement complex (Süttő-Nagysánctető, Nagysánc), and cemeteries (Sáncidűlő, Sáncföldek) were established on the top of the loess plateau next to the Danube. As detailed in our previous publication, there were two settlements on the loess plateau cut up by gullies, sloping into the Danube (the fall is approx. 40 m), and the necropolises were further south. The part of the plateau near the Danube was split into blocks separated by deep gullies due to the karstification of the loess, making them a naturally protected place for settlement. The series of loess plateaus, which can be followed from Dunaalmás to Tát, is bordered by hills from the south, and its Neszmély–Süttő section by the Gerecse mountain range, which is more than 600 m high.¹ While the right bank of the Danube is characterized by a bluff and hills, the left bank of the river (which belongs to Slovakia) is an almost flat, alluvial plane with traces of former river beds in the section between Virt (Vért) and Kravany nad Dunajom (Karva). Several major islands (e.g. Mocsi Island) are located in this part of the Danube. These topographical conditions made possible the formation of a unique micro-region, which was culturally connected to the territories north of the Danube in prehistoric times.



Results of previous topographical research

The first topographic research of the Süttő site (identified in the 1930s²) was carried out between 1968 and 1971 by István Horváth and István Torma in the works of the Archaeological Topography of Hungary. In addition to the identification of some of the tumuli, on the basis of the two previously known hillforts, an Early Iron Age site complex similar to Százhalombatta was documented.³ The research programs of Éva Vadász and Gábor Vékony between 1978 and 1990 included both the Nagysánctető settlement and the burial mounds, as well as the flat cemetery found in the meantime,⁴ however, their results could not be processed and evaluated before they deceased. The archaeological evaluation of their research is currently carried out by Katalin Novinszki-Groma, in her PhD-dissertation.⁵

In addition to the Early Iron Age site complex, archaeological remains of several other periods are also known on the Süttő plateau and in the narrow Danube bank below. Based on István Horváth's and István Torma's topographic research, and the excavations of Gábor Vékony, we have to reckon with the settlements of the Neolithic Age, Early Bronze Age(?), Middle Bronze Age and Late Bronze Age on the Nagysánctető prior to the Early Iron Age fortified settlement. István Horváth and István Torma observed the settlement remains of the Early Bronze Age Hatvan culture on a loess block called Kissánc, located east of the hilltop settlement.

The area called Nagysánc (MRT5, site 20/6) west of Nagysánctető is also known as an Early Iron Age settlement, where there were Late Bronze Age and Celtic settlements based on sur-

1 CZAJLIK et al. 2015, 62–66, Fig. 4.

2 TOMPA 1934–35, 104; MÉREY KÁDÁR 1958.

3 HORVÁTH et al. 1979, 311–313.

4 VADÁSZ 1983, VADÁSZ 1986

5 Preliminary reports: NOVINSZKI-GROMA 2017a; NOVINSZKI-GROMA 2017b.

face finds as well.⁶ This is confirmed by the publication of Márta H. Kelemen, who dated a characteristic ceramic bodysherd from here to the LTB–C1 period.⁷ Additionally, she assumed a contemporaneous cemetery near the Nagysánc settlement on the basis of the typical finds in Ilona Hunyady's monograph.⁸ At the site of Süttő-Sáncföldek, during the excavation of the Early Iron Age cemetery, Celtic settlement features (pits?) were also identified by Éva Vadász and Gábor Vékony (Fig. 1).

In the Hosszú-valley between the Kissánc and Nagysánc tető at the bank of the Danube, Erzsébet Patek and Amália Mozsolics excavated a part of a Middle Bronze Age (Magyarád culture, Transdanubian Encrusted Pottery Culture) settlement. Roman ceramic fragments were also reported from the same place.⁹ Moreover, under the bridge of the high road along the Danube, two Roman milestones were found in the section between Nagysánc tető and Nagysánc,¹⁰ suggesting that the *limes* road could follow the same trail as the modern road today.

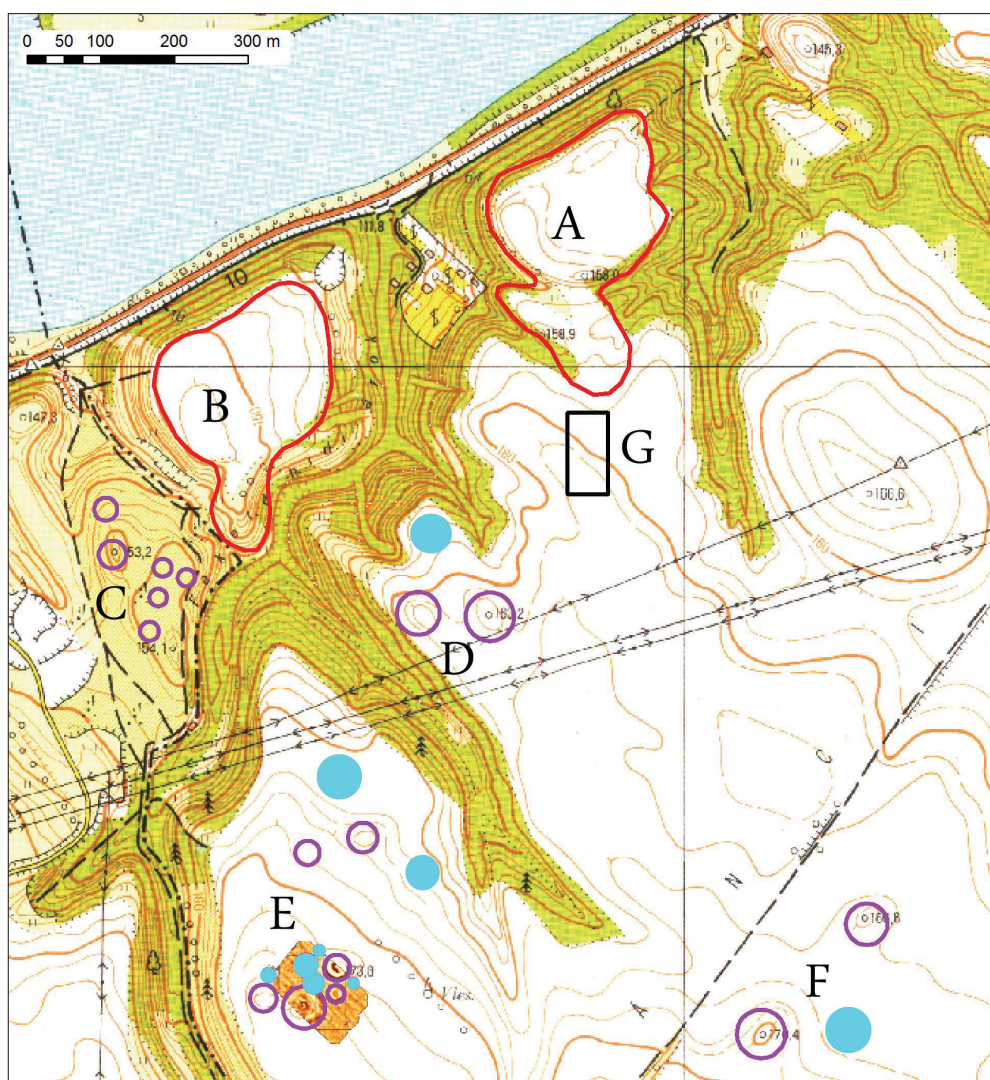


Fig. 1. The results of previous topographic research on the Süttő plateau (CZAJLIK et al. 2015, Fig. 7.).

- 6 HORVÁTH et al. 1979, 311–312.
- 7 H. KELEMEN 1987, 193–194, Pl. XI. 6.
- 8 H. KELEMEN 1987, 193, Pl. XI. 3.
- 9 HORVÁTH et al. 1979, site 20/15, 315–317.
- 10 RÓMER 1866, 161, 182.

Lessons learned from the study of archive aerial photographs and maps of the Süttő plateau

As part of the present research, we began collecting and studying relevant archive maps and aerial photographs about the Süttő micro-region. The first results are summarized below.

Traces of neither the fortified settlements nor the tumuli (that must have been taller then) were depicted on the map of the First Military Survey (1782–1785). This situation has changed in the case of the Second (1819–1869) and Third Military Surveys (1872–1884). On these two map sources, essentially the same phenomena were delineated from Süttő (Fig. 2): the tumuli that can still be well identified on the surface today, except for the tumulus group “C”,¹¹ which is located in a bushy, wooded area and which is not included in any survey. On this basis, two conclusions can be drawn. On the one hand, in the area that is cultivated continuously, we probably cannot count on the destruction of many large mounds in the last 250 years. On the other hand, for understandable reasons, no observations were made during the mapping work in the forested areas.



Fig. 2. The representation of the Süttő plateau in the First (1), Second (2) and Third (3) Military Survey (analysis by László Rupnik).

As far as we know, the earliest archive aerial photographs are from 1940, when the entire course of the river Danube was recorded throughout the country. Due to the conditions of the vegetation during the shooting, only traces of already known tumuli can be observed at Süttő.¹² In connection with his research of the Ripa Pannonica, Zsolt Visy also examined the archive footage of this *limes* section.¹³ He identified the double trenches of the Azaum 5 Roman Age watchtower and traces of Iron Age tumuli thanks to an aerial photograph from 1954.¹⁴ Recently, the number of available recordings has increased significantly through the webpage *fentrol.hu*. These images can be used for archaeological research in many cases, also in the case of Süttő. Thanks to the fortunate timing, positive crop signs of the trench of a previously unknown watchtower can be observed east of the Iron Age site on a photograph from 1975 (Fig. 3). However, full certainty requires field research. Besides that, we could identify additional linear phenomena (ditches, former road) as well, the exact age of which is also questionable. An excellent example of the “*in the right place and at the right time*” axiom of

11 CZAJLIK et al. 2015, Fig. 7.

12 The images are found in the collection of the Military History Institute and Museum, Budapest (Inv. Nr: HI 69398–69399).

13 VISY 2003, 41–42, Figs 62–64.

14 VISY 1990, 24; VISY 2003, 41, Fig. 62. (HI 23119). For the watchtower belonging to Neszmély by administration, see also: VISY 2011, 65, Fig. 51.

aerial photography is the 1987 series of images showing the open excavation trenches by Gábor Vékony and Éva Vadász (*Fig. 4*). The importance of this information is increased by the fact that a complete map of the excavation has not been retained, so its location can be reconstructed by fitting the aerial photographs. Using a photogrammetric process, with a sufficient number of photographs, a digital surface model (DSM) can also be made (*Fig. 5*). In the same series of photos from 1975, the Odiavum 5 Roman Age *burgus* is also visible (not covered by trees and bushes, *Fig. 6*).



Fig. 3. Trenches of a previously unidentified Roman Age watchtower(?) south of the Süttő-Kissánc site on an aerial photograph (March 1, 1975, fentrol.hu, László Rupnik).

Modern aerial archaeological photography at the Süttő site-complex

The aerial archaeological research of the Iron Age site complex began in 2008,¹⁵ and by the end of 2018 we carried out archaeological observations 12 times with Cessna aircrafts and Robinson helicopters. Of the spring/summer investigations, the most successful flights were June 6, 2013 and June 22, 2016. In 2013 it was possible to identify the circular ditch of the largest member of the tumulus group “D” in autumn-sown wheat, and the same plant made it possible to get to know the northern tumulus groups in detail in 2016. In 2016, the location of the 1983–1990 excavations, which were previously known from incomplete overview maps (and from the above mentioned synchronous aerial photos from 1987) could also be identified. Of the winter aerial surveys, it is worth mentioning the one on February 28, 2018, when the tumulus group “C”, located in a separate loess block, was first documented. At the edge of the plateau north of the tumuli, overlooking the Danube, the remains of the Odiavum 5 Roman Age watchtower – in the bushes – were also photographed (*Fig. 7*).

15 CZAJLIK et al. 2015, 64.

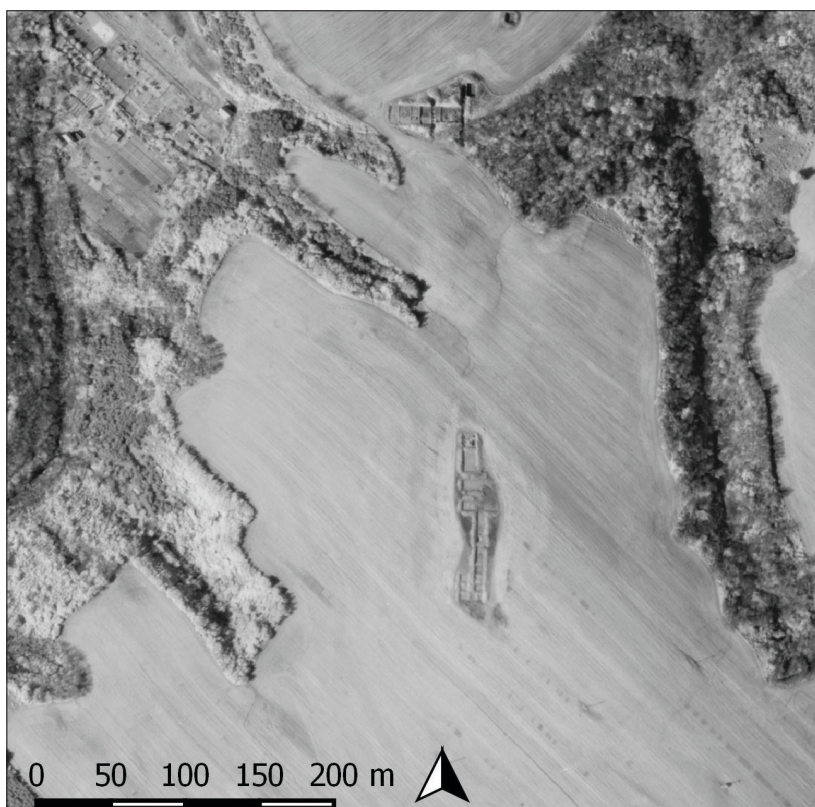


Fig. 4. The excavation trenches of Éva Vadász and Gábor Vékony on an archive aerial photograph (May 10, 1987, fentrol.hu, László Rupnik).

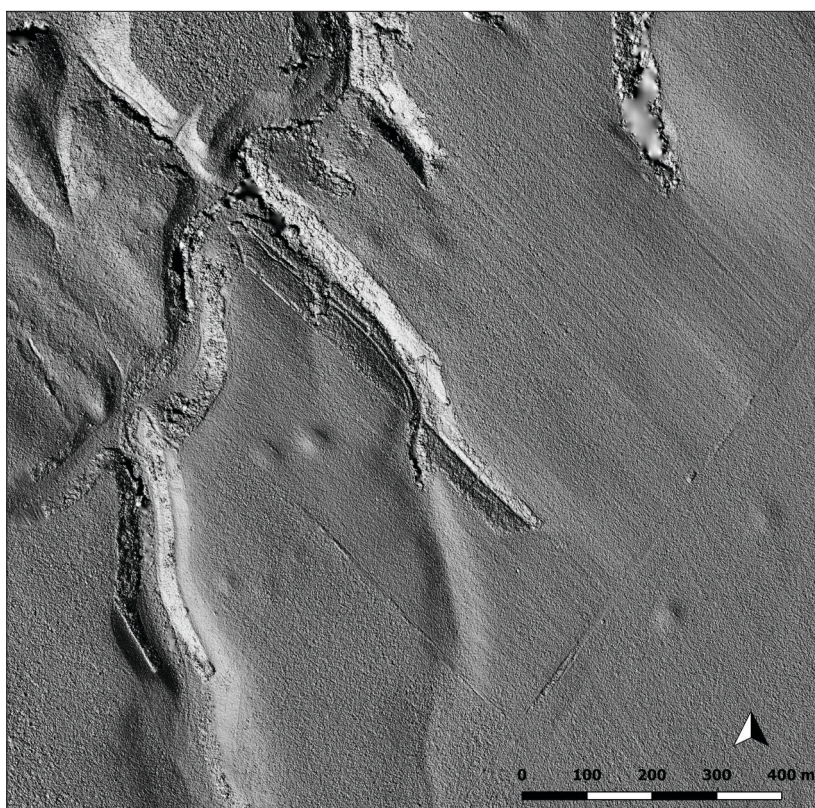


Fig. 5. A surface model based on archive aerial photographs of the Süttő plateau (March 1, 1975, fentrol.hu, László Rupnik).



Fig. 6. The remains of a Roman Age watchtower northeast of Süttő-Nagysánc on an archive aerial photograph (March 1, 1975, fentrol.hu, László Rupnik).

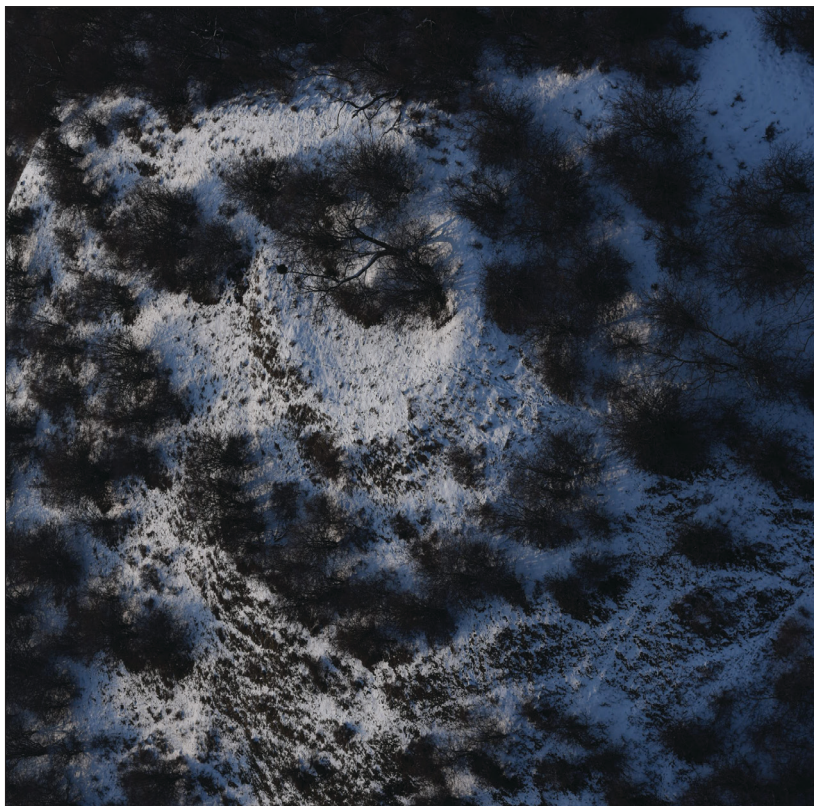


Fig. 7. The remains of a Roman Age watchtower northeast of Süttő-Nagysánc (Zoltán Czajlik, February 28, 2018).

Geophysical mapping, drone aerial photography, field surveys

Our field topographic research conducted on the Süttő plateau 2014–2017 was briefly reported last year.¹⁶ In addition to the regular aerial archaeological prospection, we conducted geophysical magnetometer surveys and minor field surveys in 2014. Magnetic research affected a small part (about 1 ha) of the tumulus group “E”, and besides the encircling ditches of the tumuli still identifiable on the surface, a trace of a smaller, circular ditch of approx. 20 m diameter was also mapped.¹⁷ In cooperation with the Institute of Archaeology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, we carried out Overhauser and fluxgate magnetometer comparative measurements in 2016. During the magnetic mapping, the circular ditches of the known mounds of the tumulus group “D” were identified, as well as a smaller circular ditch of approx. 20 m diameter that was non-observable on the surface. A relief model of this zone was also made on the basis of drone aerial photographs with surface measuring points. In the course of the simultaneously conducted large-scale field surveys and drone aerial photography, traces of a previously unknown Early Iron Age settlement west of the southern tumulus group (“F”) were observed. In the framework of the Iron Age Danube project, geophysical surveys were carried out in 2017 (2–2 days in the spring and the autumn) on the southernmost part of the site complex, south of the dirt road connecting Süttő and Dunaszentmiklós. The resulting magnetic anomaly map shows a remarkably clear geological background. The encircling ditches of the larger, well-known tumuli, as well as two additional, smaller (each one is approx. 20 m in diameter) circular ditches were observed, similarly to the situation of tumulus group “E” in 2014 and tumulus group “D” in 2016.¹⁸ In December 2017, field surveys were carried out to document the boundaries of the Early Iron Age settlement identified west of the southern tumuli group in July 2016. During the examination of the surrounding areas we identified a grave that could be dated to the transition of the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age period (*Fig. 8*).

Field research in 2018

The main goal of the geophysical research carried out in July and August 2018 was to survey the site of Süttő-Sáncföldek in accordance with the current cultivation status of the area and the aims of the planned excavation in September 2018. The surveyed area included the area of the Early Iron Age flat cemetery, excavated by Gábor Vékony and Éva Vadász in 1983–1990, as well as the Late Iron Age site presumed on the basis of previous topographic and excavation data.

Intensive field research took place between September 6 and October 10, 2018, in cooperation with the Department of Archaeometry, Archaeological Heritage and Methodology of the Institute of Archaeological Sciences, Eötvös Loránd University and the Hungarian National Museum.¹⁹

16 CZAJLIK et al. 2017, 350–353.

17 CZAJLIK et al. 2015, Fig. 8.

18 For the results of the geophysical surveys in 2017, see CZAJLIK et al. 2017.

19 MRT 5, site 20/7, here named Süttő-Sánci dúlő II, site ID: 2601. The works were implemented and funded by the Danube Transnational Programme, Monumentalized Early Iron Age Landscapes in the Danube river basin (Iron-Age-Danube, DTP1-1-248-2.2).

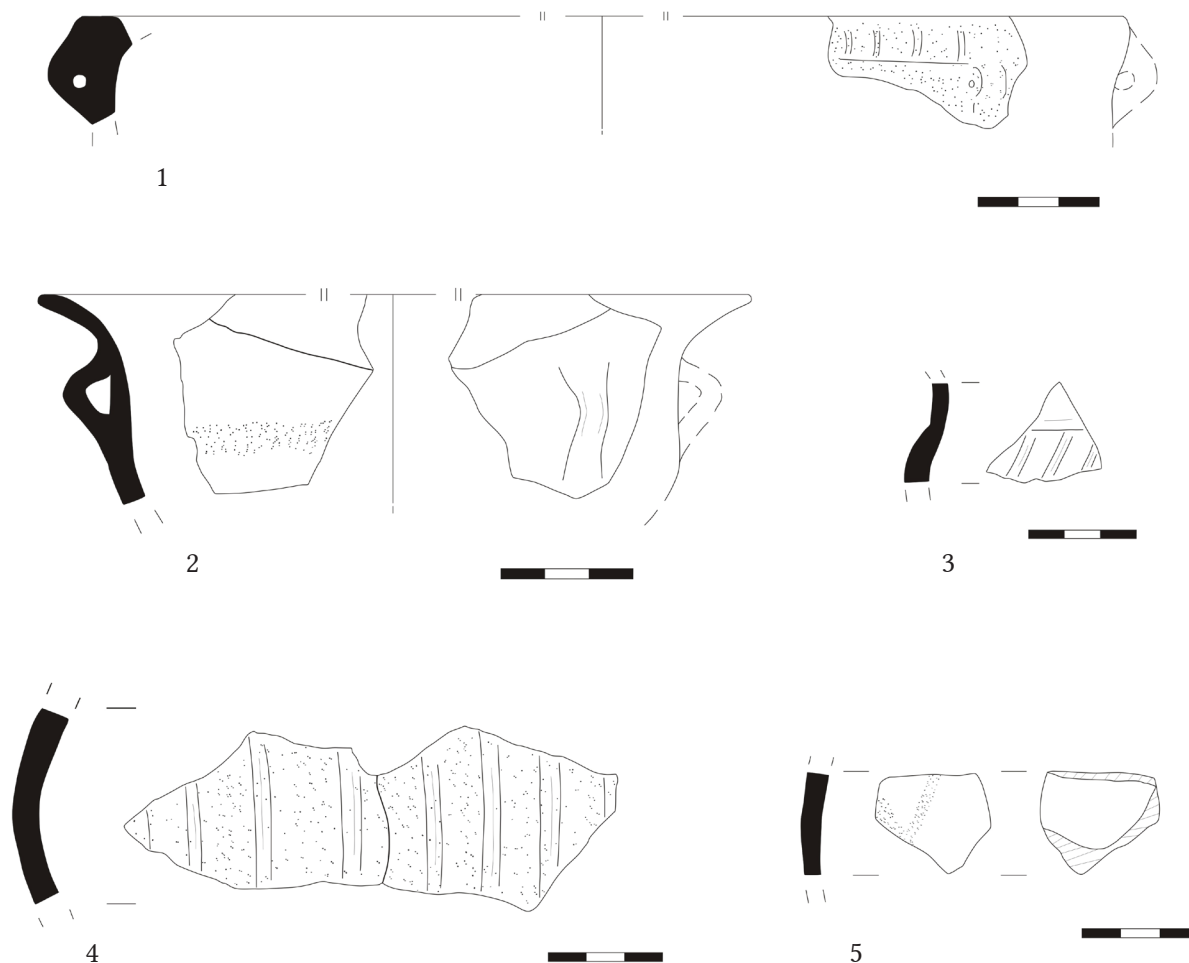


Fig. 8. The ceramic remains of a Late Bronze Age(?) grave at Süttő-Sáncföldek Sherds from the disturbed grave found during field survey (December 13. 2017.). 1 – rim of a large pot with handle and graphite painting on the surface, 2 – upper part of a larger bowl with handle and painted graphite stripe on the internal surface, 3 – profiled shoulder with sidelong cannelure, 4 – sherd with vertical cannelure and graphite painting on the external surface, 5 – sherd with graphite painted X-motives on the internal surface (Katalin Novinszki-Groma).

In the first five days of the research, we continued the archaeological geophysical measurements started in August with the following devices: two GSM19W Overhauser magnetometers and a Trimble Geo 7 GPS. They were arranged and used identically all year round. The measurement of the temporal change of the magnetic field was solved by local base measurements, and the rover unit proceeded in variometer layout; the distance between the lines was 0.75 m and the distance within the line was 0.5 m. The GPS data were corrected on the basis of base stations (Fig. 9).

In parallel with the geophysical measurements, a systematic field walking survey was also conducted, which was complemented by Lajos Sándor's metal detecting research. Finds from the surface collection were cleaned on the base and then sorted by age together with the objects from metal detecting (Fig. 10). The location of the excavation Trench 1 was designated based on the geospatial processing of the results compared to the map of the geophysical measurements, northwest of the previous excavations at a distance of 100–120 m.

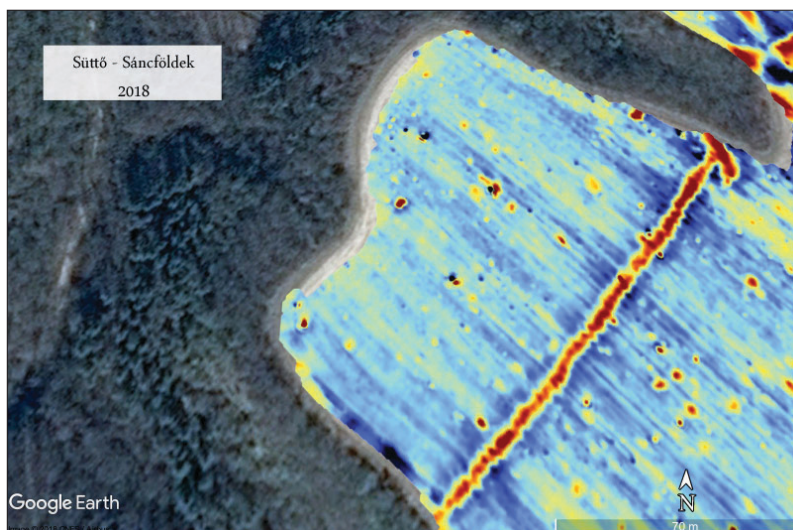


Fig. 9. Süttő-Sáncföldek, 2018. Geophysical mapping of the northern part of the site (Sándor Puszta – Zoltán Czajlik).

Trench 1 was opened on a 5×20 meter surface. At a depth of 20–30 cm, ceramic fragments were observed at locations predetermined by the map of the geophysical measurements, so we stopped machine earthwork on this level. At the same time, we extended the trench to the southwest with a 5×10 meter surface. Ceramic sherds appeared on the surface in this area of the “L”-shaped trench as well (Fig. 11).

After cleaning, most of the ceramic fragments collected on the surface turned out not to be related to any archaeological phenomenon; their context was probably destroyed by earlier agricultural works. In the northern part of our Trench 1 we discovered a short section of a ditch, possibly a loess hollow way, in which we could separate several layers of filling. Based on the map of magnetometer geophysical surveys, the end of a projection, branch of this phenomenon fell into Trench 1 as well. At the bottom of that, several large, near intact vessels, organic material residues, and fragments of 2–3 iron objects lying close to each other were discovered (Fig. 12).

Only one of the groups of ceramic fragments observed in Trench 1 proved to be a grave. Since this phenomenon was selected in cooperation with Mária Hajnalová, specialist of the Constantine the Philosopher University, Nitra for archaeobotanical sampling, its excavation was performed in a 50×50 cm grid system and a soil sample of each unit was taken every 5 cm. Based on the ceramic material from the phenomenon, the grave can be dated to the Early Bronze Age.

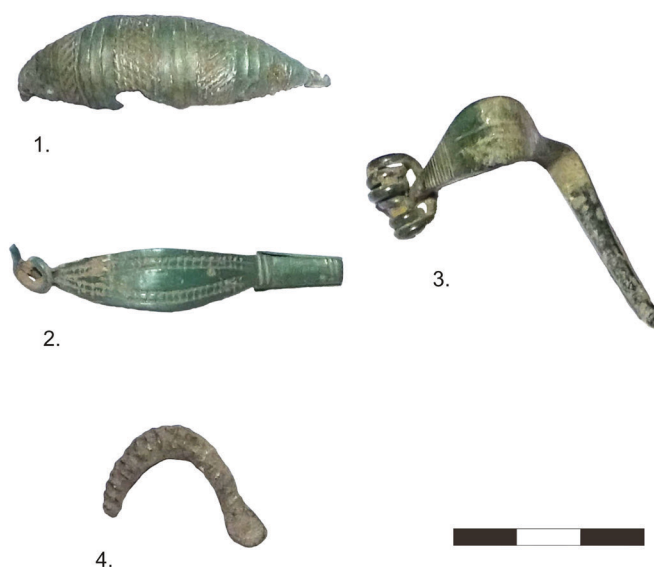


Fig. 10. Variations of Early Iron Age bronze Navicella (1–3) and Bow (4) fibulae from the metal detector survey of the Süttő plateau (September, October, 2018) Katalin Novinszki-Groma – Eszter Fejér).

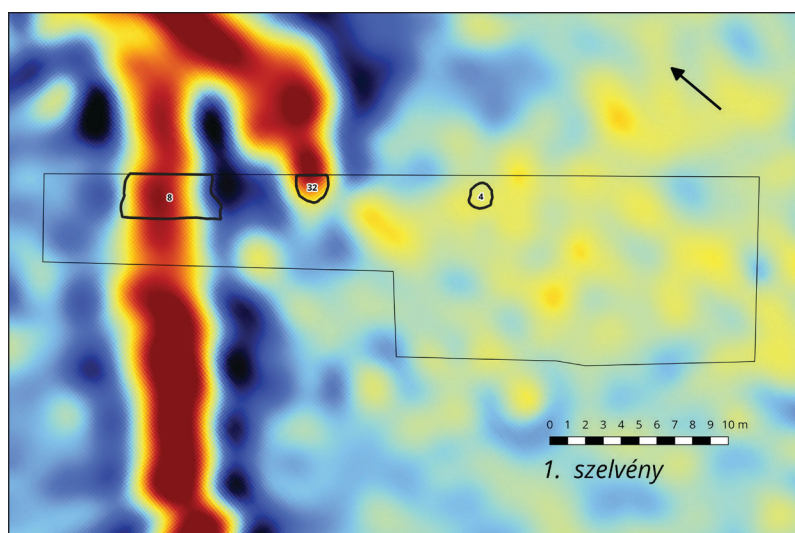


Fig. 11. The contours of the phenomena discovered in Trench 1 visualized on the map of the magnetometer survey (András Bödőcs – Sándor Pusztai).

On September 19, we opened Excavation Trench 2 southwest of Trench 1. This surface was also “L”-shaped, a 5-meter-wide section is attached to the west of the 5×25 meter trench. In Trench 2, we could mark several dark patches at a depth of 20–30 cm, in which fragments of burnt daub, ceramic sherds and bones could be observed. These were proven to be archaeological phenomena later.

In the northern part of Trench 2, we found a pit with grinding stones, probably Celtic on the basis of the accompanying ceramic material. These finds were laid over a charcoal layer. South of that, two oval pits were found, which contained large amounts of animal bones, ceramics and several metal finds. Based on a bronze dagger and ceramic material discovered here, the ensembles were dated to the middle of the Late Bronze Age. In the southern part of Trench 2, moving from east to west, there was a shallow feature probably dated to the Late Iron Age, a pit containing a whetstone and the remains of a building dating back to the Celtic period. The latter feature contained only a few finds and a child’s skull laid on its bottom.



Fig. 12. Intact vessel on the bottom of ditch feature 32 (3D model, András Bödőcs).

Parallel to the excavation work, Lajos Sándor continuously monitored the excavated spoil heap, and combed through an approx. 5 ha area in the vicinity of the excavation with metal detector. During the same period, Balázs Nagy and the students of the Department of Physical Geography of the Eötvös Loránd University collected core samples from a number of archaeological phenomena observed in geophysical surveys (e.g. circular ditches of tumuli), in order to determine their depth and shape.

The excavation was completed on October 10, 2018, with the back-filling of the two trenches.

Summary

Based on the results of previous archaeological works and modern landscape archaeological research started seven years ago on the Süttő plateau, we carried out intensive archaeological investigations, combining aerial, geophysical and metal detecting surveys, systematic field walking and excavations in 2018. Among the results of the aerial archaeological research, the examinations of watchtowers, especially the possibly Roman Age watchtower at the Süttő-Kissánc site (which has been newly identified on archive photographs) and the photogrammetric relief model of the whole site complex, should be highlighted. One of the most important lessons learned from the excavations of the NW zone of the Süttő plateau, which has been intensively researched with all the methods listed above, is that there are remains of more archaeological periods than has previously been known. An important novelty is the Early Bronze Age grave excavated with detailed sampling and the Late Bronze Age settlement features, while there is clear evidence of a Celtic settlement at the same place. Regarding the Late Bronze Age and Celtic settlements, it should be noted that traces of contemporary burials are likely to be identified on the Süttő plateau as well.

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