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**LATE IRON AGE SETTLEMENT IN THE
VICINITY OF MÉNFŐCSANAK
(Road no. 83 and Bevásárlóközpont)**

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LATE IRON AGE SETTLEMENT IN THE VICINITY OF MÉNFOCSANAK

(Road no. 83 and Bevásárlóközpont)

KÁROLY TANKÓ

In the vicinity of Ménfőcsanak, near the city of Győr, on top of a levee on the southern side of the Marcal river lies a complex of La Tène sites including a large cemetery and cluster of settlements (fig. 1).

The first burials were uncovered by earthworks carried out in 1967. The ten burials recovered during this short period of rescue excavation made Ménfőcsanak a key La Tène site in the Carpathian Basin.¹ Excavations started on a larger scale in 1993 in and around the area of the previously known cemetery. Two and a half hectares were investigated and 277 burials unearthed, making this the largest excavated Celtic burial ground in the Carpathian Basin.² According to preliminary reports the cemetery dates to the LT B1-C period.³

While Ménfőcsanak became an important archaeological site in terms of burials in the history of the Celtic wandering in 4th century BC, the Late Iron Age settlement to the east of the cemetery has not yet received the attention it merits. The completion of the processing of material from excavation prior to the construction of Road no. 83 (which took place in 1993) and the Bevásárlóközpont excavation (in 1995, 2006) provide an opportunity to shortly summarize the settlement features and archaeological assemblages.⁴

The Late Iron Age settlement site is located on the gentle slope of the Szeles-dűlő hill rising above a bend in the Marcal river to the north of Ménfőcsanak, and is surrounded by the marshy meadows of the Pándzsa stream.

The orientation and inner structure of the settlement was influenced primarily by hydrogeological, topographic, environmental and agricultural criteria. During the establishment of the settlement the easy access to water and the shape of the slope could have been key factors to the site's location, considering that the main concentrations of Late Iron Age features are located on the higher grounds of the slope and separated by 50-200 m wide "featureless voids" (fig. 2). This particular situation might be explained by the flood hazard at the confluence of four rivers (Duna, Rába, Rábca and Marcal).

The northeastern area of the site is the most complex section of the settlement where evidence for subterranean pit-houses, post-built structures and wells were found. Here the structure of the settlement was divided by ditches interpreted as fencing. On the southeastern fringe of the site a 70 m x 150 m rectangular area was surrounded by a ditch (feature no. 95/111), its entrance situated on the south. Within this enclosed area there were no remains of any buildings, rather only two wells, and it could be interpreted as a paddock or animal enclosure (fig. 3.4).

Another rectangular area was similarly surrounded by a ditch (93/136) lay to the northwest, and had parallel sides with the other enclosure, with an entrance to the southeast. In the middle of the c. 40 m x 50 m area were found a dividing ditch, two buildings with a storage pit situated on their northeast side and several postholes to the southwest. The orientation of building no. 93/100 located to the northeast was parallel to the enclosure ditch suggests the contemporaneity of the two features. The building unearthed in the northern corner (93/138) may also have been an outbuildings to the complex. The interpretation of relations in between the rectangular ditch and the postholes observed in the enclosure's western corner is problematic since only a small number of finds were discovered here. Postholes found on the western side of the dividing ditch possibly belong to a stilted building above the ground surface (presumably with produce storage function) (fig. 3.2).

Similar rectangular areas surrounded by ditch-system are known from France ("*enclos*"), and are typical to primarily agricultural settlements.⁵ According to these analogues it can be concluded that the purpose of the ditched enclosed areas was the separation of zones of agricultural use, produce storage, residential areas and also for keeping livestock.

As well as these enclosed areas the settlement included numerous clusters of buildings. In the northeastern part of the investigated area six buildings aligned in a

¹ UZSOKI 1987.

² EGRY 2007, 32-33.

³ VADAY 2006; EGRY 2007, 33.

⁴ The archaeological process of the Celtic settlement of Ménfőcsanak was included in the PhD dissertation of the present author defended in 2005.

⁵ Including, but not limited to the followings: GAUTIER 1999, 63-69; NILESSE 1994, 277-293; NILESSE 2004, 275-281; MALRAIN 1994, 185-203; FÉMOLANT-MALRAIN 1996, 39-53.

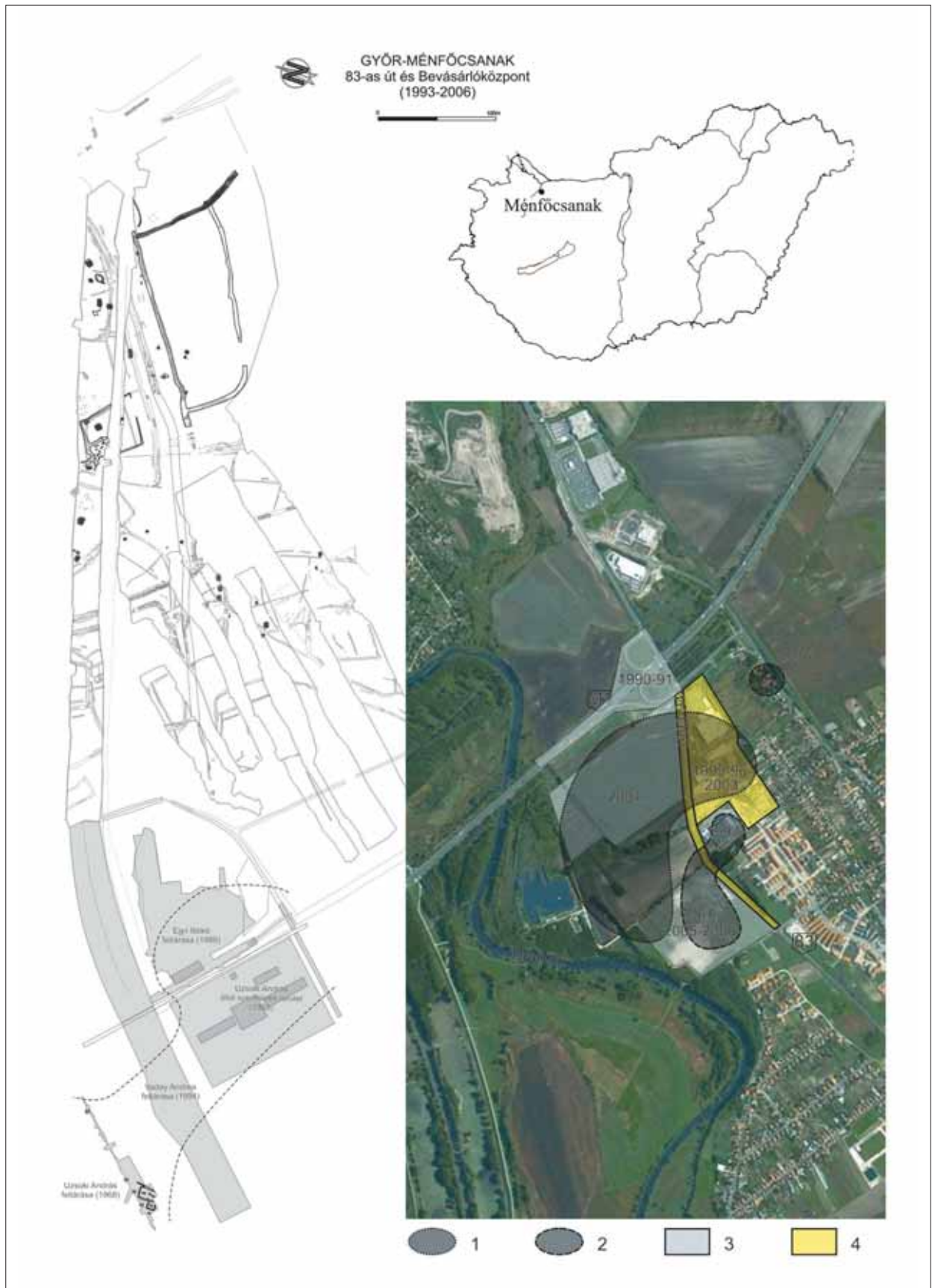


Fig. 1: Győr-Ménfőcsanak, Szeles-dűlő Site plan
1: Celtic settlement, 2: Celtic cemetery, 3: excavated area, 4: Road no. 83 and Bevásárlóközpont.

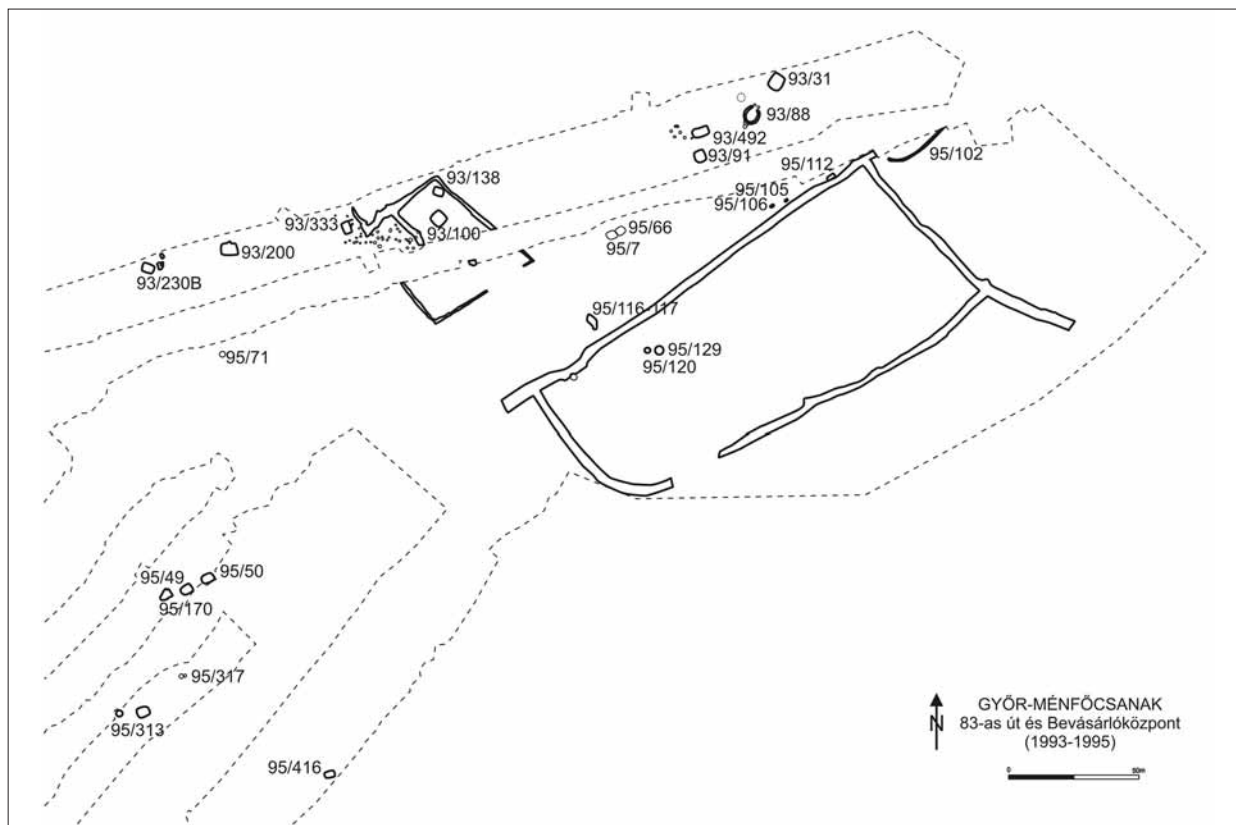


Fig. 2: Győr-Ménfőcsanak, Szeles-dűlő (Road no. 83 and Bevásárlóközpont). La Tène settlement.

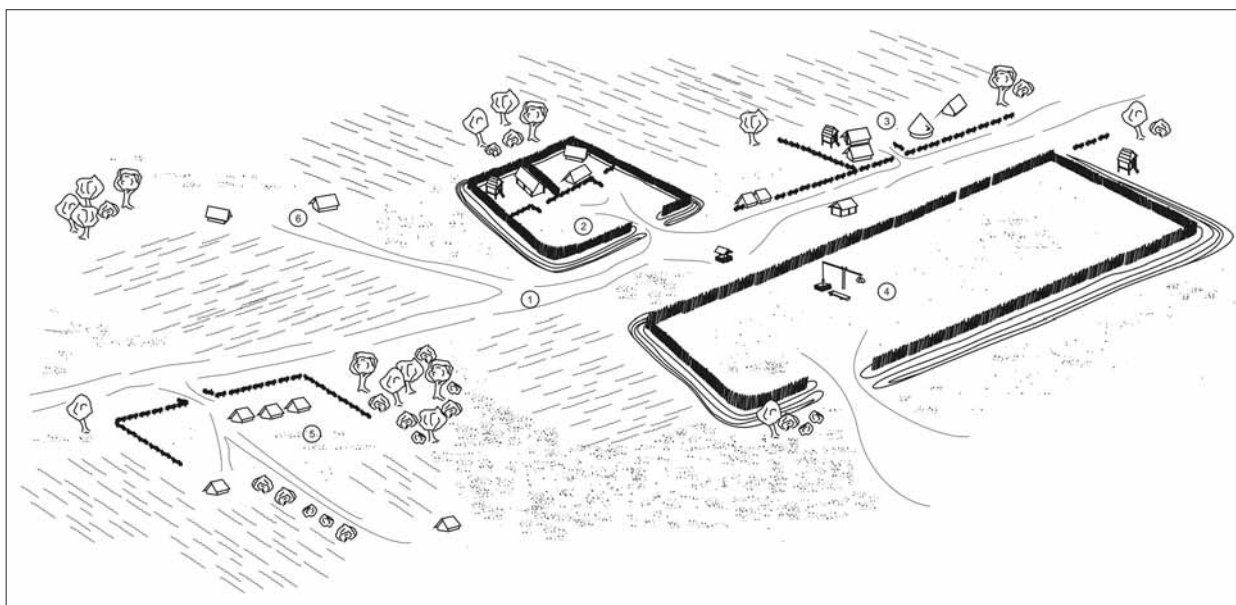


Fig. 3: Győr-Ménfőcsanak, Szeles-dűlő (Road no. 83 and Bevásárlóközpont) Reconstruction of the La Tène settlement.

row were unearthed (95/7, 95/66, 93/492, 93/91, 93/88 and 93/31 – fig. 3.3). This particular NE-SW orientation was observed similarly in the case of building clusters of 95/105, 95/106 and also of 95/49, 95/50 and 95/170 (fig. 3.5).

Based upon base-plan measurements, the Late Iron Age building excavated at Ménfőcsanak exhibit a fairly uniform construction. Most of the buildings (e.g. 95/49 – fig. 4A) could be classified under the Horváth–Karl basic type no. 2; namely the construction of a rectangular pit with an additional posthole on both shorter sides.⁶ Buildings no. 95/50 and 95/170 are a little different. In these cases beside the postholes to support the ridge-pole a third posthole can be observed. Building no. 95/313, a rectangular building with rounded corners, is unique in its construction: a berm was found along the south eastern side, and along the wall in the northern corner three postholes were found at similar distance to each other (fig. 5A). The study of building no. 93/31 and its theoretical reconstruction of was published in a paper previously.⁷ This study discusses the reconstruction of a subterranean building with short walls and a roof that did not rest upon the ground. Despite the fact that this theoretical reconstruction can not be accepted in every detail anymore,⁸ the stratigraphy in feature no. 93/31 is clear evidence of a subterranean building with short but standing walls in the La Tène period.

Roads provided basic access both inside and in between settlements. Well-constructed roads of stone were not built prior to the Roman Age. It is difficult to reconstruct main prehistoric transport routes because of scarce archaeological evidence. At Ménfőcsanak the two rectangular shaped boundary ditches and also the buildings erected along the same alignment (building nos. 95/31, 93/88, 93/91, 93/492, and 95/49, 95/50, 95/170) suggest the existence of an Iron Age road which was rebuilt later in the Roman Age⁹ (fig. 3.1). The orientation of the ditches and buildings imply the establishment of the La Tène settlement along the prehistoric road (NE-SW) which was renewed in the Roman Age by determining the entire structure of the settlement.

When analysing the relations of the settlement structure the key point is to distinguish which buildings and pits were used contemporarily. The features of the La Tène period did not cut each other, and superposition was not detected. It can not be excluded that variation within settlement structure (e.g. orientation) suggest different time periods, although the typology of the ceram-

ics does not support this assumption. Different orientation of buildings proved to be an important observation. This data on its own does not provide genuine basis for dating, although it is conspicuous that several buildings (no. 95/100 and 95/230B) were oriented NW-SE, while most of the buildings were aligned along a NE-SW axis. Based on current information, significant transformation did not occur within the settlement during its occupation. There is no evidence of any destruction layer at the site which would imply a catastrophic ending in the abandonment of the site.

Among the archaeological material excavated at Ménfőcsanak – since it was a settlement – the ceramics dominant. Several differences in technique and decoration were observed in the ceramic assemblage. The proportion of wheel-thrown vessels (50-70%) comprise the majority of the assemblage in contrast to the hand-formed sherds (30-50%) which suggest the existence of a pottery workshop in the uninvestigated part of the site. The large amount of graphite-tempered pottery in the assemblage (43%) is significant considering that on the sites of the surrounding area dating to the same period this proportion is substantially lower (2-16%).¹⁰ Feature no. 95/112 may be identified as a workshop, as large amounts of graphite-dust and a graphite block weighing 40 kg were recovered. Analysis carried out on the graphite indicates it originates from an area in the Czech Republic from where it could have been transported on water along the Danubian trade route.

The repertoire of the Ménfőcsanak vase forms is primarily based on the determination by characteristic fragments (e.g. mouth, rim, base, handle etc.). According to the ceramic material's fragmentation the amount of typologically valuable pieces varies around 20-30 %.

Typical pieces of the ceramic assemblage are the *hand-formed bowls* with a conical, hemispherical body, or with an inverted rim (fig. 4B. 5, 5B.5, 7). These were summarized under Type 12 by Ilona Hunyady who suspected a Scythian origin for these vessels and suggested they only became widespread among the Celts in the LT D period.¹¹ Unfortunately, this assumption can not be accepted nowadays. This type was continuously present since the Late Bronze Age in the Carpathian Basin,¹² and also often appear in numerous early La Tène assemblages.¹³ The *bowl type with an S-profile* often discovered in features is a characteristic piece of Eastern Celtic pottery production (fig. 4B.4, 6, fig. 5B. 9-10). The profile and the rim could be formed in various

⁶ HORVÁTH 1987; KARL 1996.

⁷ TANKÓ 2004.

⁸ TIMÁR 2007, 204-206.

⁹ SZÓNYI 1997, 97-108.

¹⁰ WALDHAUSER 1992, 387.

¹¹ HUNYADY 1944, 54, 132-133.

¹² SZABÓ–TANKÓ–SZABÓ 2007, 236.

¹³ VÁLYI 1983, I. 1, 5; II. t. 13-14; HORVÁTH 1979, 62-63, XII .t. 10; HORVÁTH 1987a, Pl. XXIX/13.

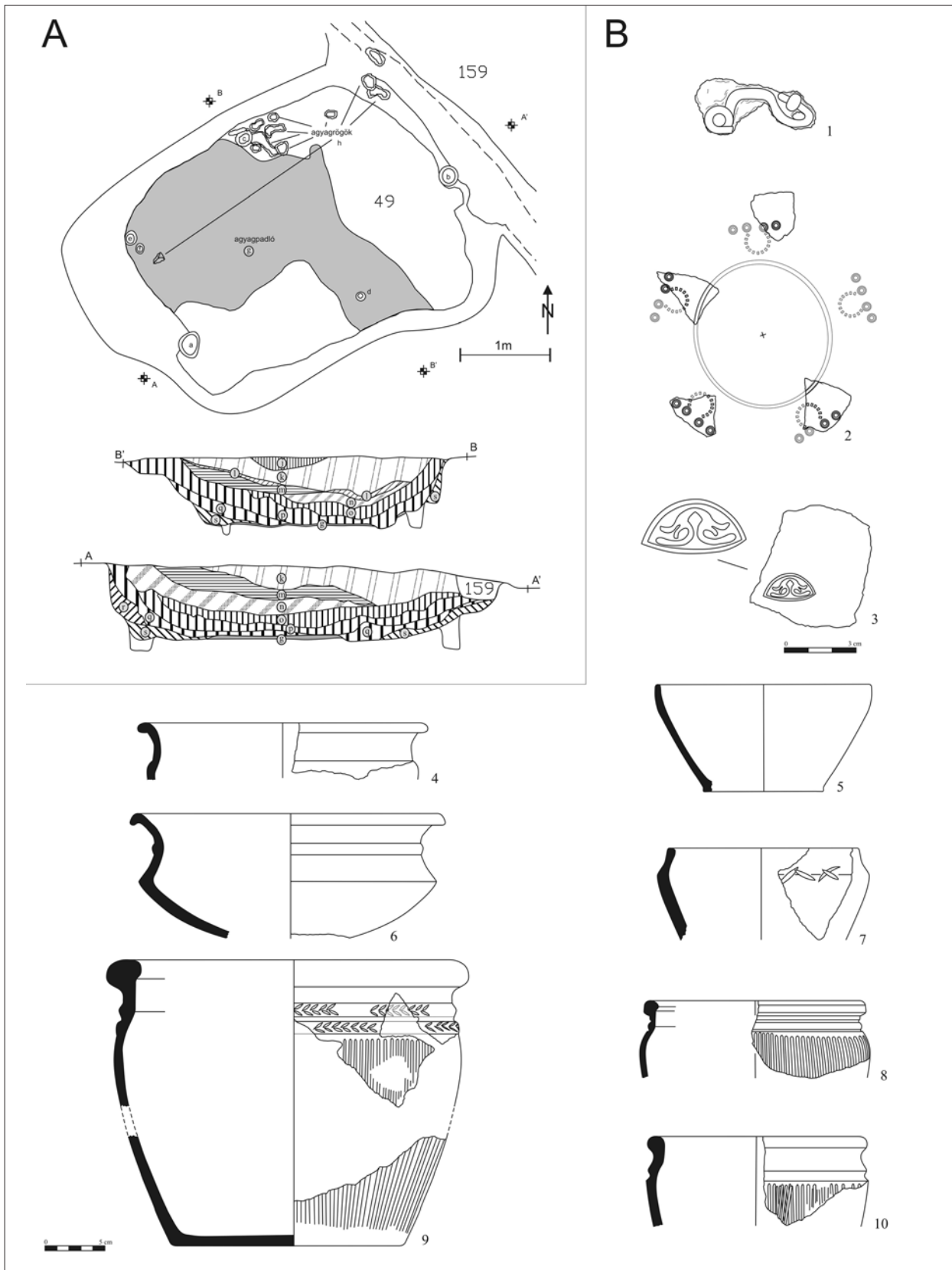


Fig. 4: Győr-Ménfőcsanak, Szeles-dűlő (Road no. 83 and Bevásárlóközpont). Feature no. 95/49.

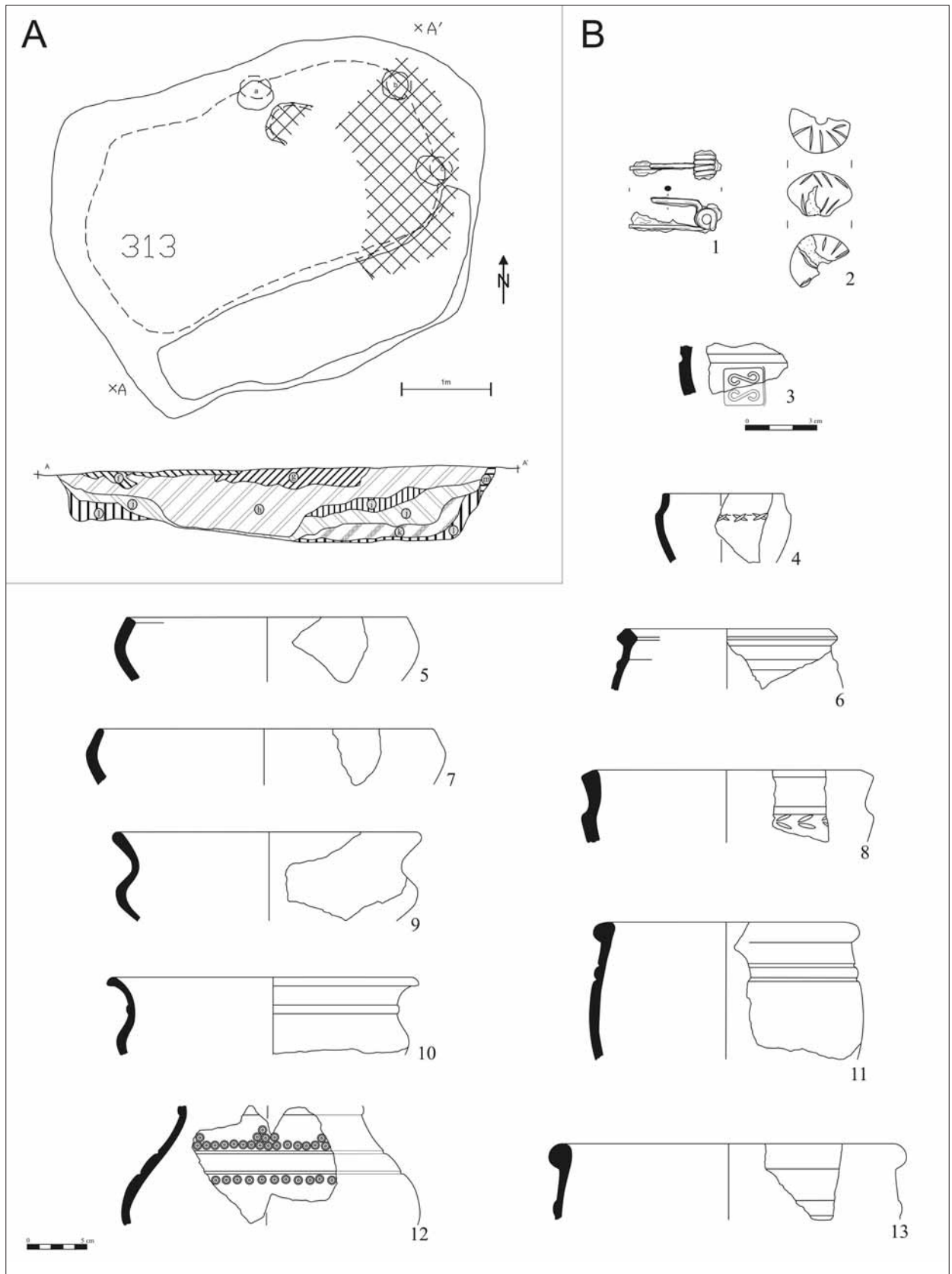


Fig. 5: Győr-Ménfőcsanak, Szeles-dűlő (Road no. 83 and Bevásárlóközpont). Feature no. 95/313.

ways.¹⁴ The inner surface of the bowl is often decorated with a stamped pattern. Slightly elongated *jars* with S-profiles and a significantly larger sized *biconical pot* (fig. 5B. 12) are also typical La Tène forms. Ilona Hunyady in relation to determining the types emphasized the difficulties of distinguishing on a formal and also on a chronological basis.¹⁵ At Ménfőcsanak the discovered fragments were difficult to fit into the Hunyady type categories. The majority of *Early LT pots* were generally formed by hand, although pieces made on a slow-wheel are also known (fig. 4B. 7, 5B. 4, 8). These are mostly conical or slightly curving bodied, stubby vessels often with slanting incisions on the shoulder. These types appear primarily in the territories of southern Bavaria, Austria and the Czech Republic in LT A – LT B assemblages.¹⁶ Ceramic *situlas* are thought to be typical household ware of this period. The clay was strongly tempered with graphite, the shape was formed on a wheel, and the surface is usually vertically combed (fig. 4B. 8-10). Often on the shoulder of the *situlas* a rib or channel runs horizontally. The rib itself is frequently decorated with slanting incisions or spike motifs (fig. 4B. 9). Good comparative examples of these decorations are known from southwestern Slovakian burial assemblages,¹⁷ although they are also found among the material of eastern Hungarian settlements.¹⁸ There are several contradictions concerning the dating of the graphite-tempered *situlas* with combed decoration. Graphite-tempered *situlas* with combed decoration dated and classified by Paul Reinecke to the LT C period have become an established fact.¹⁹ Since then the LT C phase by Reinecke was corrected in several details,²⁰ which effected the dating of this particular vessel type as well. Jiří Meduna in his summarizing work of Moravian Celtic settlements also used Reinecke's preconception as a basis, however analyzing the closed-find assemblages, concluded that the combed decoration on graphite-tempered pottery could have appeared in southwestern Slovakia and Moravia already in the beginning of the LT B1 period.²¹ Based on these data and the observations regarding the material

from Ménfőcsanak it seems that the earliest combed and graphite-tempered *situlas* start to appear in the end the 4th century BC (LT B1), although the type only becomes widespread in the first half of the 3rd century BC (LT B2).²² Subsequently, non-graphite-tempered *situlas* without combed decoration also occur (fig. 5B. 6, 11, 13). Currently no chronological difference can be detected between the graphite-tempered and non-graphite-tempered variants or *situlas* with or without combed decoration.

There are several fragments with stamped decoration among the ceramic assemblage from Ménfőcsanak. This decoration technique was mostly used on the inner surface of S-profile bowls (fig. 4B. 2) and on the outer surface of biconical pots (fig. 5B. 12). Stamped impressions with concentric circles occur most often, combined with furrowed lines and horizontal ribs providing a basis for complicated patterns. The star-shaped stamped motif composition on the inside surface of (reconstructed) bowl found in feature no. 95/49, is especially elaborate (fig. 4B. 2). The closest analogues for this decoration pattern are from burial assemblages of Au,²³ Győr-Újszállás²⁴ and Kósd.²⁵ A fragment with double-lyre stamped motif unearthed in feature no. 95/313 (fig. 5B. 3) yields new valuable data in terms of the distribution of this characteristic stamp-type in Central Europe.²⁶ Stamped motifs represented on graphite-tempered sherds from feature no. 95/31 and 95/49 are particularly beautiful (fig. 4B. 3). Zoomorphic figures are arranged back-to-back in a semi-circle. The stamped motifs from Ménfőcsanak are iconographically very similar in their detail to the continuous tendril compositions on ornaments known from Bussy-le-Château²⁷ and Waldalgesheim.²⁸ Similar iconographic relations can be detected between the decoration motifs published from Cernon-sur-Cooles,²⁹ Pottenbrunn³⁰ and the Münsingen³¹ sites with roots in the Waldalgesheim decoration style (fig. 7). The vessel from Sopron-Bécsidomb provided evidence that on the products of the eastern Celtic circle's pottery manufacture, motifs related to the Waldalgesheim decoration style appear on Celtic ceramics in the Carpathian Basin as well.³² The Mén-

¹⁴ HUNYADY 1944, 127-133; SCHWAPPACH 1975. Taf.6.; SCHWAPPACH 1979, 22-26.

¹⁵ HUNYADY 1944, 136-139, 142-148.

¹⁶ KAPPEL 1969, 58-65.

¹⁷ BENADIK 1957, Taf. IX. 12., XI. 10., XV. 22; BENADIK 1983, Taf. VIII. 11., LI. 3., LXI. 15; BUJNA 1989, Taf. VI. 10., XXXV. 12; BUJNA 1995, Taf. 40 A2., 40 B2., 42 C5., 55 A5.

¹⁸ SZABÓ-TANKÓ-SZABÓ 2007, 241-242.

¹⁹ REINECKE 1906, 292; PITTIONI 1930, 101; HUNYADY 1944, 141-142; KAPPEL 1969, 53; JEREM *et alii* 1985, note 74.

²⁰ POLENZ 1971, 31-43; HAFFNER 1979, 405-409.

²¹ MEDUNA 1980, 65.

²² SZABÓ 2007, 317-318.

²³ NEBEHAY 1973, Taf. XIX.

²⁴ HUNYADY 1944, LX. t. 4.

²⁵ HUNYADY 1944, LX. t. 1.

²⁶ MEGAW-MEGAW 2006.

²⁷ STÖLLNER 1998, Abb. 18/a.

²⁸ JOACHIM 1995, Abb. 45/5 és 47/5.

²⁹ DUVAL-KRUTA 1982, Fig. 3.

³⁰ RAMSL 2002, Abb. 124.

³¹ HODSON 1968, pl. 28. 851.

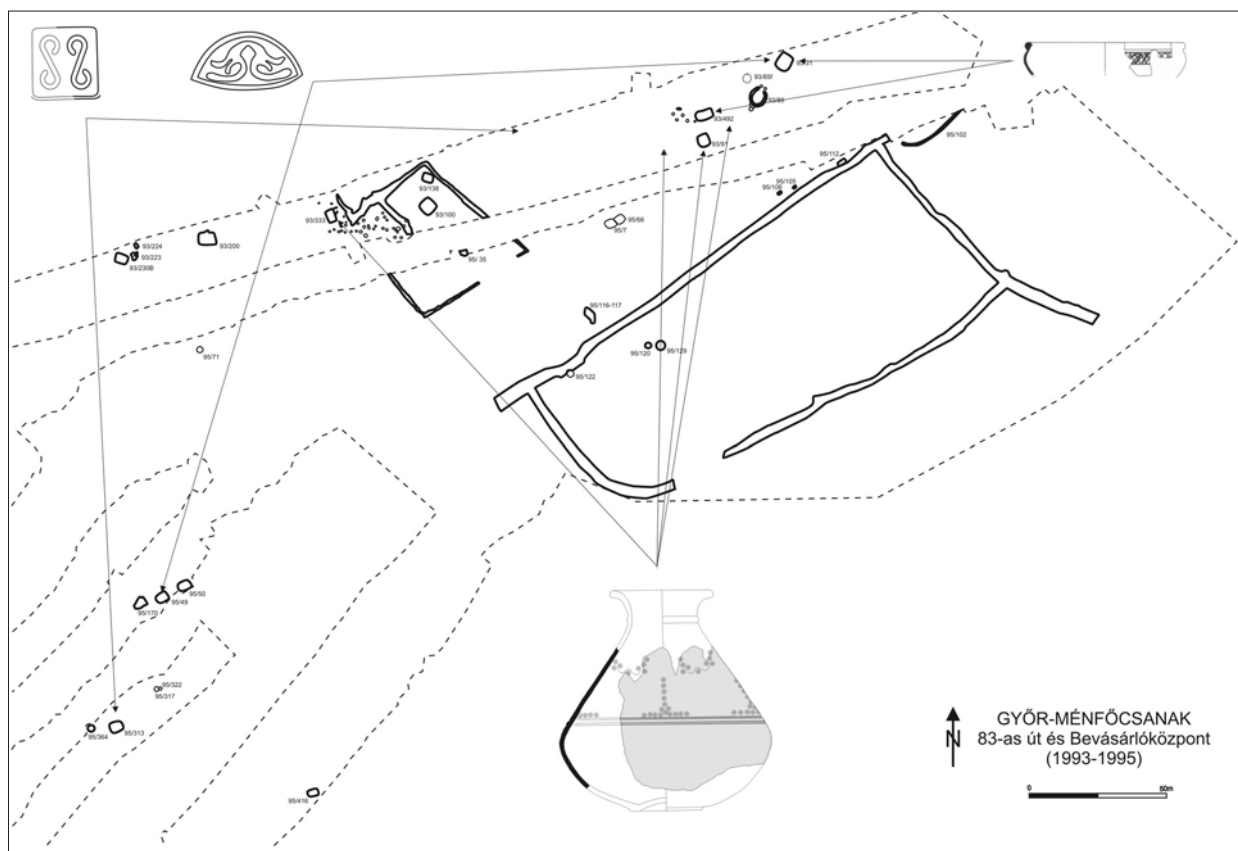


Fig. 6: Győr-Ménfőcsanak, Szeles-dűlő (Road no. 83 and Bevásárlóközpont). Distribution of ceramic fragments.

főcsanak stamp-decoration analogous to the fibula belonged to horizon 'H' of the cemetery of Münsingen dated to the end phase of the Central European LT B1 period.³³ This zoomorphic representation shows similarities to circular animal-headed (griffin,- or dragonhead) fibulae with back-turned foot styling. This ornament type originated in the Carpathian Basin and most definitely was manufactured in local workshops and can be placed in the Duchcov-Münsingen phase, also dating to the LT B1 phase.³⁴

At Ménfőcsanak superposition in between the Late Iron Age features, which would provide relative chronological guidelines, could not be detected. Dating has to be carried out based entirely on the material discovered. It needs to be noted here that the finds came from the fill of settlement features, so among them was material contemporaneous with the use of the feature and also fragments discarded after the feature became abandoned. Fragments of some vessels distributed in a larger area, were recovered from several different features (fig. 6). It can be concluded that these buildings did not perish by a sudden catastrophe (e.g. fire), rather the material, con-

sidering the usage of settlement features, provides *ante quem* (chronological) information. It is also problematic that while the dating is almost entirely based upon the ceramics, in the case of most of the features the majority of sherds were too fragmented to be typologically classified. Vessel types staying in use for a long period and forms without significant change in fashion cause further difficulties, and their date can only be determined to within broad chronological boundaries.

Considering the above mentioned details LT B – B2/C1 vessel types dominate in the settlement's ceramic material. Beside these, some early types are also present which show resemblance to pottery manufacture at the LT A settlement sites in Austria. Their proportion does not imply occupation of Ménfőcsanak in the LT A period but rather an early LT B horizon where the archaic forms were still in use.

Besides the significant amount of pottery, metal objects were scarcely present. From the fill of building no. 95/49, a fragment of strongly corroded Dux type iron fibula (Bujna EF-A1 / EF-A2 type) came to light, characteristic object of the LT B1 phase.³⁵ Another Dux type piece³⁶

³² SCHWAPPACH 1971, 150-172.

³³ HODSON 1968, 29.

³⁴ SZABÓ 1974, 71-86.

³⁵ BUJNA 2003, 61-65.

³⁶ TANKÓ 2004, Abb. 4.

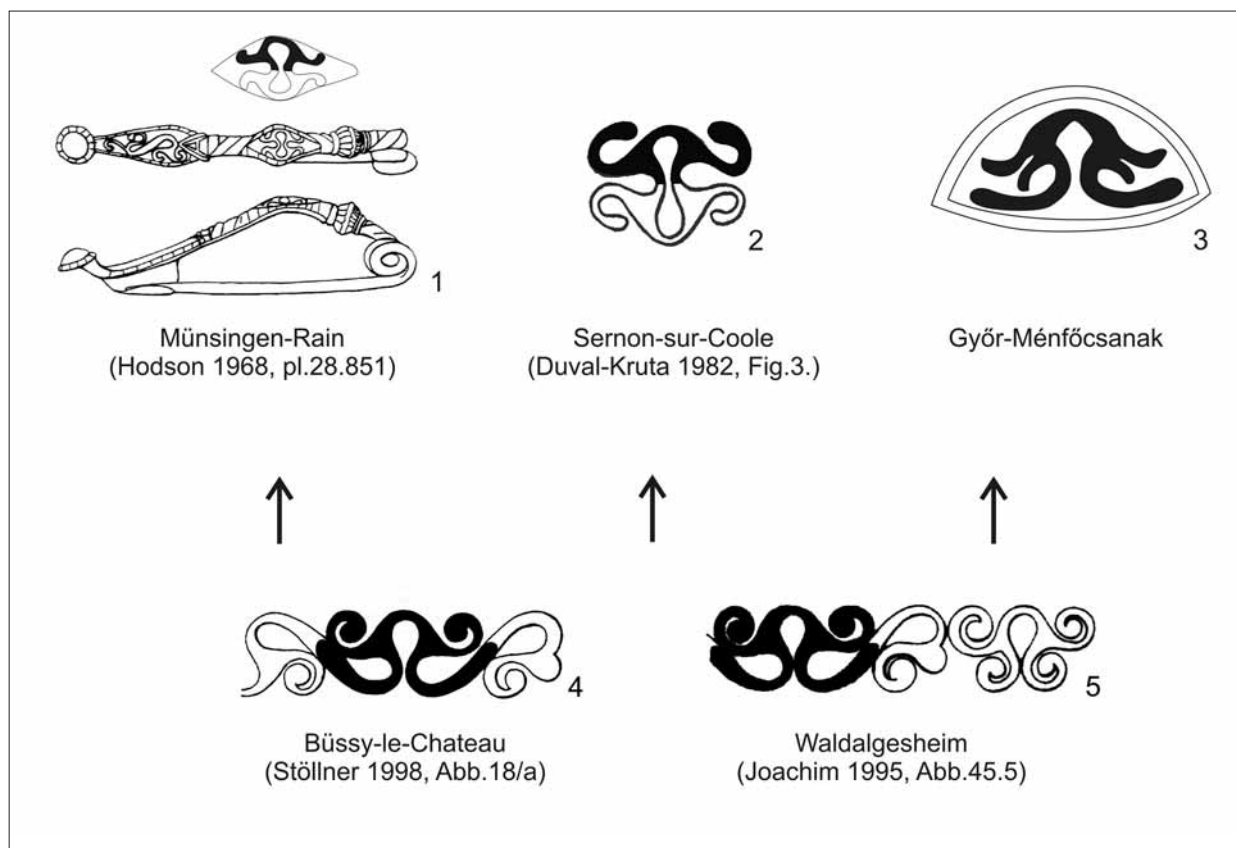


Fig. 7: Analogues of the Ménfőcsanak stamp motif (after Ramszl 2002).

(Bujna BF-A2-A type)³⁷ recovered from building no. 93/31. and a Münsingen type bronze fibula (Bujna BF-D1-A type)³⁸ found as a stray find date to the same period.

According to current data it is apparent that the Celtic cemetery of Ménfőcsanak was established in the LT B1 phase, in the second half of the 4th century BC. It was abandoned during the LT B2/C1 transition period at the latest, in the second half of the 3rd century BC (fig. 8.).

The dating of the settlement corresponds with the usage of the cemetery excavated *c.* 500 m to the west. This spatial and chronological relationship strongly suggests that the habitants of the settlement were buried in the nearby cemetery. Although, it has to be noted that the published ceramic burial assemblages often differ in form and decoration from the material of the settlement. This can be explained by the functional and qualitative differences of burial pottery and household ware.³⁹

Regarding the larger extent of the Ménfőcsanak Late Iron Age settlement, it fits tightly into the row of settle-

ments along the Rába river and in the surroundings of Győr dating to the 4th-3rd century BC. According to present data the settlement's continuous development started in the beginning of the 4th century BC and was part of a large scale occupation along the lower part of the Rába river, especially in area around the confluence of the Rába, Rábca, Marcal and Duna rivers. Rows of sites on the right bank of the Rába (Árpás, Koronóc, Gyirmót, Ménfőcsanak, Győr-Újszállás, -Szeszgyár, -Kálvária) possibly aligned along a main transport route used since prehistory.⁴⁰ The concentration of early and middle La Tène cemeteries around Győr imply the significance of this area. Moreover, strong relationships can be demonstrated with the wider area, including the Small Hungarian Plain, southwestern Slovakia and eastern Austria. The burial assemblages suggest a primarily militarist community with good strategic sense consciously occupying hilltops, river crossings and main transportation routes.⁴¹

³⁷ BUJNA 2003, 47-48.

³⁸ BUJNA 2003, 53.

³⁹ See the pottery analysis of the Ludas cemetery's burial assemblages: SZABÓ-TANKÓ 2006, 339-341.

⁴⁰ UZSOKI 1969, 69-82.

⁴¹ UZSOKI 1970, 54-55.

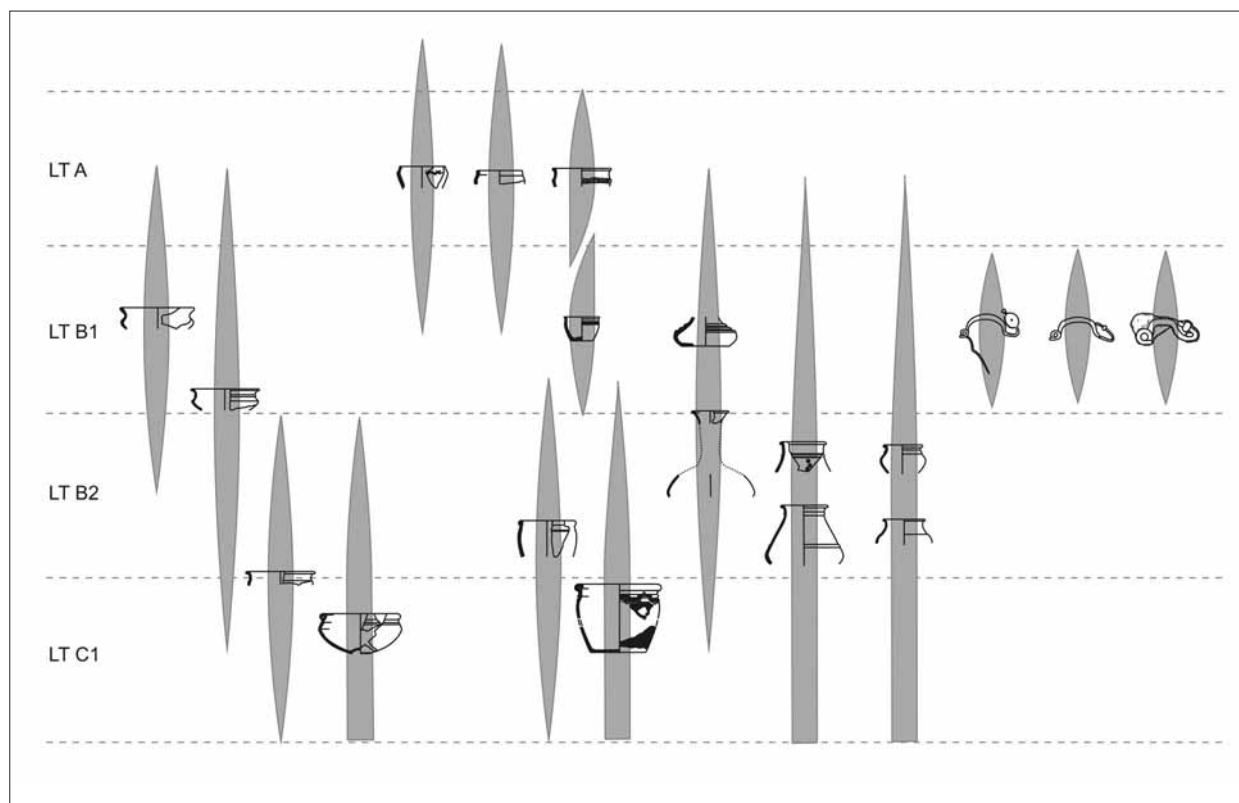


Fig. 8: Chronology of the La Tène settlement of Ménfőcsanak

It is still an open question why the La Tène cemeteries and settlements in the Carpathian Basin come to an end in the first half of the LT C period.⁴² Since no destruction layers were discovered at Ménfőcsanak, the Celtic community must have abandoned the site peacefully. It is

tempting to link this phenomenon with the establishment of the oppida, but unfortunately there is, at the moment, no supporting evidence from the Carpathian Basin concerning this matter.⁴³

⁴² BUJNA 1982, 343-344; SZABÓ 2007, 316.

⁴³ FICHTL 2000, 36-40; SZABÓ 2005, 57; SZABÓ 2007, 319.

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