

CADASTRAL FIELD WORKS ON PREHISTORIC MOUNDS IN THE CENTRAL PART OF THE TISZÁNTÚL REGION

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Abstract: The aim of the present paper is to provide a comprehensive report on the cadastral works of mounds in the central part of Tiszántúl (the region east of the Tisza River), taking the burial mounds of the Late Copper Age Yamnaya entity as a starting point. Theoretical and field research began around the beginning of the 19th century, and in the second half of the 20th century systematic site registration took place, mainly due to the so-called ‘Archaeological Sites of Hungary’ project. Later on national surveys and local initiatives were carried out, but they are of very different quality. In addition to the main characteristics and results of the creation of these cadastres, we also outline further scientific studies on mounds.

Keywords: burial mounds (kurgans), Late Copper Age, Yamnaya entity, cadastral field works, Tiszántúl region

INTRODUCTION

Mounds are not only salient, determining cultural elements of the landscape of the Great Hungarian Plain, but are also of outstanding geological and conservational significance. Through their detailed, multifaceted examination we can study not only the history of millennia, the everyday lives of the people and communities, their archaeological heritage and customs buried in them, but also the inhabited environment, the flora and fauna that once lived there, and the geological formations on the surface and underneath.¹ Their names and the stories associated with them reveal a hundreds of years’ long history.²

In the Carpathian Basin, primarily in the Great Hungarian Plain, and especially in the region east of the Tisza River, from the Late Copper Age to the Early Bronze Age, the Yamnaya entity of Eastern European origin – also called the People of the Pit Grave Kurgans – played a decisive role.³ Their heritage are the thousands of mounds that still exist today. Other cultures that also built and used mounds in the Great Hungarian Plain and in the Tiszántúl region during prehistory and the Migration Period (Scythians, Sarmatians, Hungarians, Cumans, etc.) are not covered in our paper. The reason for this is that, compared to the Yamnaya culture, their barrows are relatively small in number, and for some ethnic groups it is highly questionable if they practiced mound building in the Carpathian Basin at all, despite the fact that there had been strong tendencies in this regard in all of them in Eastern Europe.⁴

¹ BEDE 2008, 5–9; PETŐ–BARCZI 2011; DANI–HORVÁTH 2012; BARCZI 2016; BEDE 2016; RÁKÓCZI 2016; DEÁK 2018.

² TORMA 2008; TORMA 2015, 71–72; BEDE 2016, 56–74.

³ ECSEDY 1979; DANI–HORVÁTH 2012.

⁴ PÁLÓCZI HORVÁTH 1996, 18, 30; KULCSÁR 1998, 40–46.

STUDY AREA

Our research area is the same as that of the Körös-Maros National Park (*Fig. 1*) which – with the exception of the Partium region – covers roughly the middle part of the Tiszántúl region. Since the official boundaries of a public institution define our study area, it is unfortunately necessary, at least in part, to have artificial or political boundaries. The borders are roughly: the Tisza in the west; in the south the current state border delineated by the Bánság-sarok (Banat Corner), the Maros River and the Csanádi-hát area (Csanád Ridge); in the east the current state border; in the north the midline of the Kis-Sárrét (Little Sárrét) and Nagy-Sárrét (Great Sárrét) (which is also the administrative boundary of Békés County) and the Körös floodplain.⁵

In this paper, the Great Plain refers to the Great Hungarian Plain defined as a geographical concept with only natural (and not political) borders. An integral part of this is the Bánság (Banat of the Temes/Timiș and Torontál), which is the actual southern Tiszántúl. There is a tendency in the current interpretation of this landscape and common thinking to forget that Bánság (Banat) is part of Tiszántúl and tries to force the landscape concept of Tiszántúl within the modern borders determined in the Trianon Treaty. In contrast, Tiszántúl as a geographical term (geographical name) has been used since the Middle Ages – from the 16th century onwards – and traditional geographical descriptions thinking within the framework of the Carpathian Basin as a geographical unit have all interpreted this area this way.⁶

CADASTRAL WORKS AND THEIR RESULTS

In the past two hundred years so much diverse and multifaceted research has affected the mounds of our research area that it is impossible to present all; here we are trying to outline concrete mound investigations as the direct antecedents of our own survey. For each of the regions we have already described in detail the archaeological surveys and the research on landscape and environmental history, first is in the vicinity of Szentendre and then in other parts of the study area as well.⁷

Already the very first, 19th-century local works emphasized the importance of collecting and organizing the mounds, and geographers were looking for the regularities in their location.⁸ In the 1850s and 1860s, the geologist József Szabó studied the structure of the mounds of Békés and Csanád Counties in addition to other regions.⁹ The local history literature of the 19th century also often mentions the mounds, usually highlighting their local aspects, but with little recognition of their wider connections and the relationship between the individual regions at that time.

Systematic research started only from the first half of the 20th century. In his writing Béla Kozma examines the distribution and geomorphological characteristics of the mounds through the eye of a geographer. His map appendix, which was edited on the basis of a later, lower resolution version of the Third Military Survey, depicts the entire Great Plain, including the entire Tiszántúl region; it depicts 127 mounds in our study area (*Fig. 2*).¹⁰

In our area, the first work specifically designed to register mounds is connected to the name of Gyula Szeghalmi (*Fig. 3*), who collected the mounds of Nagy-Sárrét area belonging to the Szeghalom District in Békés County, a total of 60.¹¹

József Csalog, as director of the Koszta József Museum, surveyed the most important mounds in the wider area of Szentendre. He examined their condition, environment, relationship to each other and to other sites, and collected scattered finds from their surface. He made a repository report (field log) of the surveyed mounds and the finds found during each survey. He also mentions a map he himself made, showing the results of the mound registration efforts in the vicinity of Szentendre; however, we have not been able to find it so far. He made useful observations about the geographic location of the mounds, their relief and hydrological context, and other related phenomena observable in the field, such as rings surrounding the mounds.¹² It is fortunate to have his field observa-

⁵ DÖVÉNYI 2010; DEÁK 2010; JAKAB–DELI 2012, 26–27.

⁹ SZABÓ 1859.

⁶ KISS 1988, II, 653; KÁDÁR 1941.

¹⁰ KOZMA 1910, Pl. XXVII.

⁷ BEDE 2008, 10–17; BEDE 2016, 17–25.

¹¹ SZEGHALMI 1912; SZEGHALMI 1936.

⁸ PERECSENYI NAGY 1819, 80; NAGY 1819, 37.

¹² CSALOG 1954, 82.

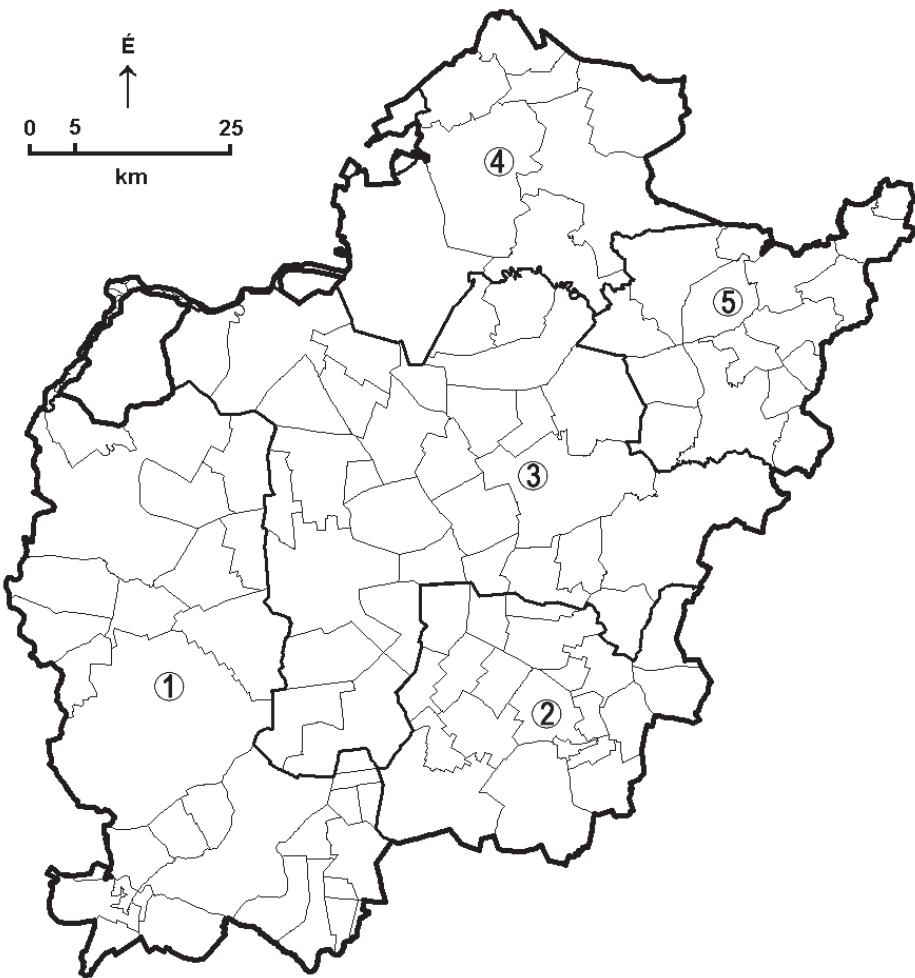


Fig. 1. The study area with the border lines of settlements and surveyed land units.
1: Eastern part of Csongrád County; 2: Csanádi-hát area; 3: Békési-hát area; 4: Nagy-Sárrét area; 5: Kis-Sárrét area

tions made in the first half of the 1950s, preceding the spread of deep ploughing and heavy-duty machines, so he could see the mounds in a more original and intact state.¹³

In Békés County, the first mound registration works were launched within the framework of the ‘Magyarország Régészeti Topográfiaja’ (=MRT, ‘Archaeological Sites of Hungary’) research program. The MRT staff set the goal of gathering, in the long term, all the sites that could still be detected and identified by field walking. This is how the research started in the northern and central parts of Békés County, which were jointly carried out by the experts of the Institute of Archaeology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Békés County Museum Directorate. The work started in 1969 and is practically still in progress.¹⁴ The results of the decades-long effort are three published volumes¹⁵ and one more in preparation.¹⁶ In addition to the sites of other periods, the mounds were also collected as comprehensively as possible, adding accurate, reliable data and status descriptions to the cadastre (Fig. 4; Table 1). A total of 644 kurgans were registered during the surveys.

The next cadastre was created by Dénes Virág for István Ecsedy’s book discussing the kurgans of the Tiszántúl region; he collected 909 mounds from our study area.¹⁷ His work relies almost entirely on the results of the MRT, but he also conducted independent research, mainly on the basis of the First and Second Military Surveys,

¹³ BEDE 2008, 14.

¹⁴ BAKAY 1971.

¹⁵ MRT 6; MRT 8; MRT 10.

¹⁶ MRT IV/4.

¹⁷ ECSEDY–VIRÁGH 1975; VIRÁGH 1979.

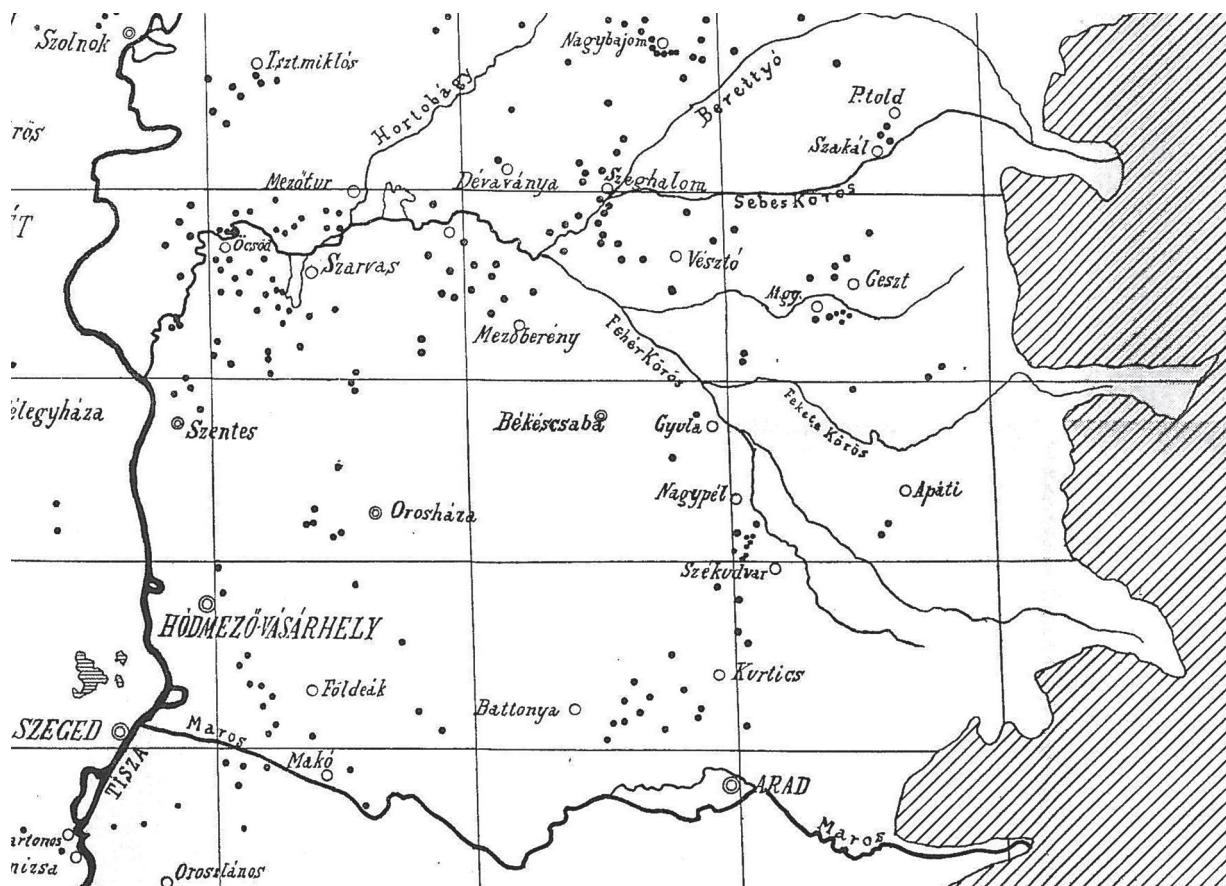


Fig. 2. Béla Kozma's map with kurgans in the study area (KOZMA 1910, Pl. XXVII)

but without field surveys and identification (*Fig. 5; Table 1*). The cadastre is a laconic list, never including the exact location, and only marks the mounds on a large-scale sketch map. Since Virágó did not check the data obtained from the maps in the field, there were a relatively large number of elevated points that are not anthropogenic mounds but natural geological formations.

In 1979, with the help of the interwar version of the Third Military Survey, on-site inspections, and even test coring, Gábor Rózsa prepared a mound cadastre for Csongrád County, which contained a total of 118 mounds in our test area.¹⁸ The most significant mounds appear – on a sketch map – with their best-known names (*Fig. 6; Table 1*). Rózsa also copied the mound descriptions of the Béla Bodnár's toponym collection for geographic purposes¹⁹ and provided them with comments. In many cases he arbitrarily and erroneously criticized Bodnár's more thorough and accurate work.²⁰

Later on László Szelekovszky sketched a brief review of the mounds of Békés County. He listed 558 in his cadastre. Most of this list was compiled from the MRT volumes, but – mainly in the central and southern parts of the county – he also carried out independent research.²¹ However, his work is superficial and abridged; the list does not contain coordinates, and the map appendices are difficult to interpret (*Fig. 7*).

In 2001, the Institute of Archaeology of the Eötvös Loránd University also compiled a list of mounds²² for which the data from the MRT and Dénes Virágó's work were copied – most often erroneously. This work is virtually unusable due to the inaccuracy of the coordinates; furthermore, no field surveys were made. There are 159 mounds in the list from our area, whose coordinates are more or less real (accurate within 100 m).

¹⁸ RÓZSA 1979.

¹⁹ BODNÁR 1983.

²⁰ RÓZSA 2002.

²¹ SZELEKOVSZKY 1999.

²² ELTE 2001.

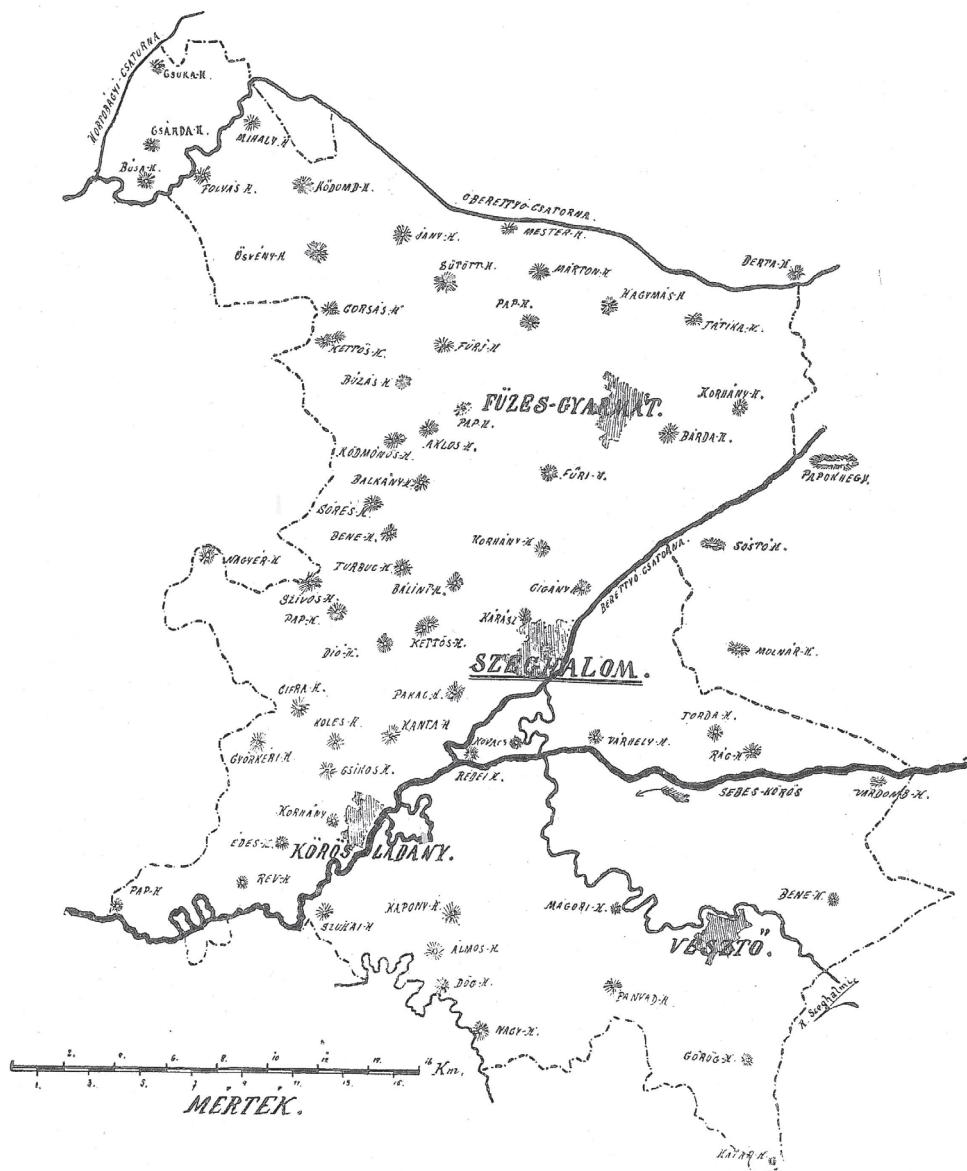


Fig. 3. Gyula Szeghalmi's map with the kurgans in the vicinity of Szeghalom (SZEGHALMI 1912, 279)

Another cadastre was completed in 2002, within the framework of the so-called 'Kunhalom-program', under the co-ordination of the Alföldkutatásért Alapítvány (Foundation for the Study of the Great Hungarian Plain) from Kisújszállás. Its aim was to collect all (or mainly the still existing) mounds in the entire territory of the country.²³ This cadastre is more detailed, multifaceted and accurate than the previous three, but it contains much less mounds: 474 in our study area (Fig. 8; Table 1). Another disadvantage of the survey is that the database contains a large number of natural elevations that are not anthropogenic mounds. Despite the problems outlined, the 'National Kunhalom Cadastre and Database', implemented within the framework of the 'Kunhalom-program', was a huge step forward in the survey work, as no such co-operation and organization (apart from one or two local initiatives) took place before. However, we have to see that the results obtained are not sufficient, especially in the case of the lowest, non-significant mounds, so filling in the gaps and adding the missing mounds to the database is absolutely necessary in the future.

²³ Kunhalom-program 2002; TÓTH-TÓTH 2011.

Table 1.
Cadastral works on mounds in the study area

Settlement	MRT 6, 8, 10, IV/4	VIRÁGH 1979	RÓZSA 1979	Kunhalom-program 2002	BEDE 2016
Almáskamarás	–	0	–	0	4
Ambrózfalva	–	0	0	0	0
Apátfalva	–	3	0	0	5
Árpádhalom	–	5	0	2	17
Battonya	–	15	–	12	42
Békés	25	12	–	6	59
Békéscsaba	8	2	–	2	18
Békéssámon	–	3	–	0	9
Békésszentandrás	17	15	–	8	26
Bélmegyer	10	8	–	7	31
Biharugra	41	41	–	35	51
Bucsa	4	4	–	0	7
Csabacsűd	3	3	–	1	3
Csabaszabadi	0	3	–	0	4
Csanádalberti	–	1	1	1	4
Csanádapáca	–	0	–	1	10
Csanádpalota	–	2	0	3	12
Csárdaszállás	11	8	–	7	20
Csorvás	–	2	–	1	12
Derekegyház	–	5	4	2	6
Deszk	–	5	3	14	25
Dévaványá	70	70	–	69	114
Doboz	1	3	–	0	5
Dombegyház	–	8	–	6	29
Dombiratos	–	2	–	0	4
Ecségfalva	6	4	–	4	16
Elek	–	5	–	0	12
Eperjes	1	6	4	5	10
Fábiánsebestyén	–	5	6	0	13
Ferencszállás	–	1	0	0	4
Földeák	–	5	2	2	6
Füzesgyarmat	46	46	–	40	74
Gádoros	–	0	–	0	1
Gerendás	–	0	–	0	7
Geszt	30	27	–	0	48
Gyomaendrőd	65	53	–	28	124
Gyula	29	26	–	10	64
Hódmezővásárhely	–	42	20	20	166
Hunya	0	0	–	0	0
Kamut	0	1	–	0	1
Kardos	0	0	–	0	1
Kardoskút	–	3	–	1	9
Kaszaper	–	1	–	0	1
Kertészsziget	6	6	–	4	6
Kétegyháza	6	24	–	1	72
Kétsoprony	0	0	–	0	1
Kevermes	–	5	–	2	18
Királyhegyes	–	3	2	1	5
Kisdombegyház	–	2	–	0	7
Kiszombor	–	9	5	2	11
Klárafalva	–	3	1	3	3

Table 1. cont.

Settlement	MRT 6, 8, 10, IV/4	VIRÁGH 1979	RÓZSA 1979	<i>Kunhalom-program</i> 2002	BEDE 2016
Kondoros	0	3	–	0	4
Körösladány	36	35	–	14	63
Körösnagyharsány	8	8	–	3	10
Köröstarcsa	12	15	–	4	24
Körösújfalu	19	19	–	3	31
Kötegyán	0	0	–	0	0
Kövegy	–	0	0	0	0
Kunágota	–	1	–	0	10
Kunszentmárton	–	1	–	1	1
Kübék háza	–	8	1	3	11
Lőkösháza	–	1	–	0	7
Magyarbánhegyes	–	0	–	0	0
Magyarsanád	–	12	1	4	22
Magyardombegyház	–	0	–	0	0
Makó	–	19	10	11	48
Maroslele	–	3	1	2	5
Mártély	–	3	3	2	25
Medgyesbodzás	–	0	–	0	7
Medgyesegyháza	–	5	–	3	20
Méhkerék	2	1	–	0	5
Mesterszállás	–	0	–	0	0
Mezőberény	12	13	–	3	40
Mezőgyán	15	10	–	0	25
Mezőhegyes	–	2	1	1	5
Mezőkovácsháza	–	1	–	0	9
Mezőtér	–	1	–	0	4
Mindszent	–	8	7	4	9
Murony	0	0	–	0	0
Nagybánhegyes	–	0	–	0	0
Nagyér	–	0	0	0	1
Nagykamarás	–	9	–	3	29
Nagylak	–	1	0	0	2
Nagymágocs	–	1	0	0	10
Nagyszénás	–	5	–	3	6
Nagytőke	–	7	6	4	23
Óföldeák	–	8	3	2	20
Okány	4	3	–	0	4
Orosháza	–	2	–	0	27
Öcsöd	–	0	–	0	3
Örménykút	6	5	–	5	7
Pitvaros	–	2	1	1	10
Pusztaföldvár	–	0	–	0	3
Pusztatölggye	–	1	–	1	11
Sarkad	0	0	–	0	3
Sarkadkeresztúr	1	0	–	7	17
Szabadkígyós	3	0	–	1	16
Szarvas	24	21	–	11	46
Szeged	–	0	0	0	0
Szeghalom	58	58	–	16	108
Szegvár	–	7	7	4	17
Székkutas	–	15	5	4	47
Szelevény	–	0	–	0	0

Table 1. cont.

Settlement	MRT 6, 8, 10, IV/4	VIRÁGH 1979	RÓZSA 1979	Kunhalom-program 2002	BEDE 2016
Szentes	2	42	24	17	86
Tarhos	1	0	–	0	6
Telegerendás	0	0	–	0	1
Tiszaföldvár	–	0	–	0	0
Tótkomlós	–	2	–	1	15
Türkeve	8	4	–	1	18
Újkigyós	5	0	–	0	27
Újszalonta	0	0	–	0	0
Végegyháza	–	3	–	0	6
Vésztő	28	28	–	14	58
Zsadány	21	19	–	21	37
total	(644)	909	(118)	474	2335

OUR SURVEY AND THE MAIN RESULTS

Our research was carried out with the commission and support of the Körös-Maros National Park Directorate. Our task was to fully map and survey the state of the mounds in the operation area of the directorate. This work was carried out through interconnected landscapes (*Fig. 1*): 1. Csongrád County's part in the Tiszántúl region (665 mounds); 2. the Csanádi-hát area (Csanád Ridge) (252 mounds); 3. the Békési-hát area (Békés Ridge) (552 mounds); 4. the Nagy-Sárrét of Békés County (535 mounds); 5. the Kis-Sárrét of Békés County (331 mounds). It covers the administrative area of 114 settlements with a total area of 797,703 ha (or nearly 8 000 km²); a total of 2335 mounds were mapped (*Fig. 9; Table 1*).²⁴

In addition to 18th–20th-century manuscript and printed maps, we also used archival sources, repository reports, and literature from local history, archaeology, ethnography, onomastics and natural sciences.

The primary objective of the survey of the mounds of the central Tiszántúl region was to search for mounds with natural and landscape value, and those that had been hitherto unknown; thus, we also carried out a survey of their natural state, and geoarchaeological and environmental historical aspects were also kept in mind. We were also curious about the main geomorphological characters, natural conditions and the ecological features and values of the mounds of a well-defined and relatively uniform landscape. This required the complete collection of the mounds of the study area. Furthermore, such a large-scale, representative study with a large number of mounds focusing on multiple details can provide a method and model for future mound research that will allow us to compare the various – often genetically different – landscapes of the Great Hungarian Plain. In order to collect data, in addition to the basic cadastral research and status survey, we also carried out landscape archaeological, environmental historical, geomorphological, archaeological stratigraphic, GIS, botanical and onomastic studies.

OTHER SCIENTIFIC EXAMINATIONS OF THE MOUNDS

In the central Tiszántúl, not only mound registering and status surveys have been carried out; some researchers also conducted other scientific investigations and for the sake of the review we would like to mention these as well in a paragraph.

The geomorphological and landscape geographical features, anthropogenic effects, microclimate and soil conditions,²⁵ and later the botanical aspects of the kurgans of Kétegyháza were investigated²⁶ and their reconstruction possibilities assessed.²⁷

²⁴ BEDE 2016, 27–55.

²⁶ KERTÉSZ 2000; MEDOVARSZKY 2010.

²⁵ DÖVÉNYI *et al.* 1977, 48–49, Fig. 1; RAKONCZAI 1986,

²⁷ NAGY 2012; BEDE–CZUKOR 2018.

10, 16; DÖVÉNYI 1986, 83, 94; BARCZI 2016, 102–107.

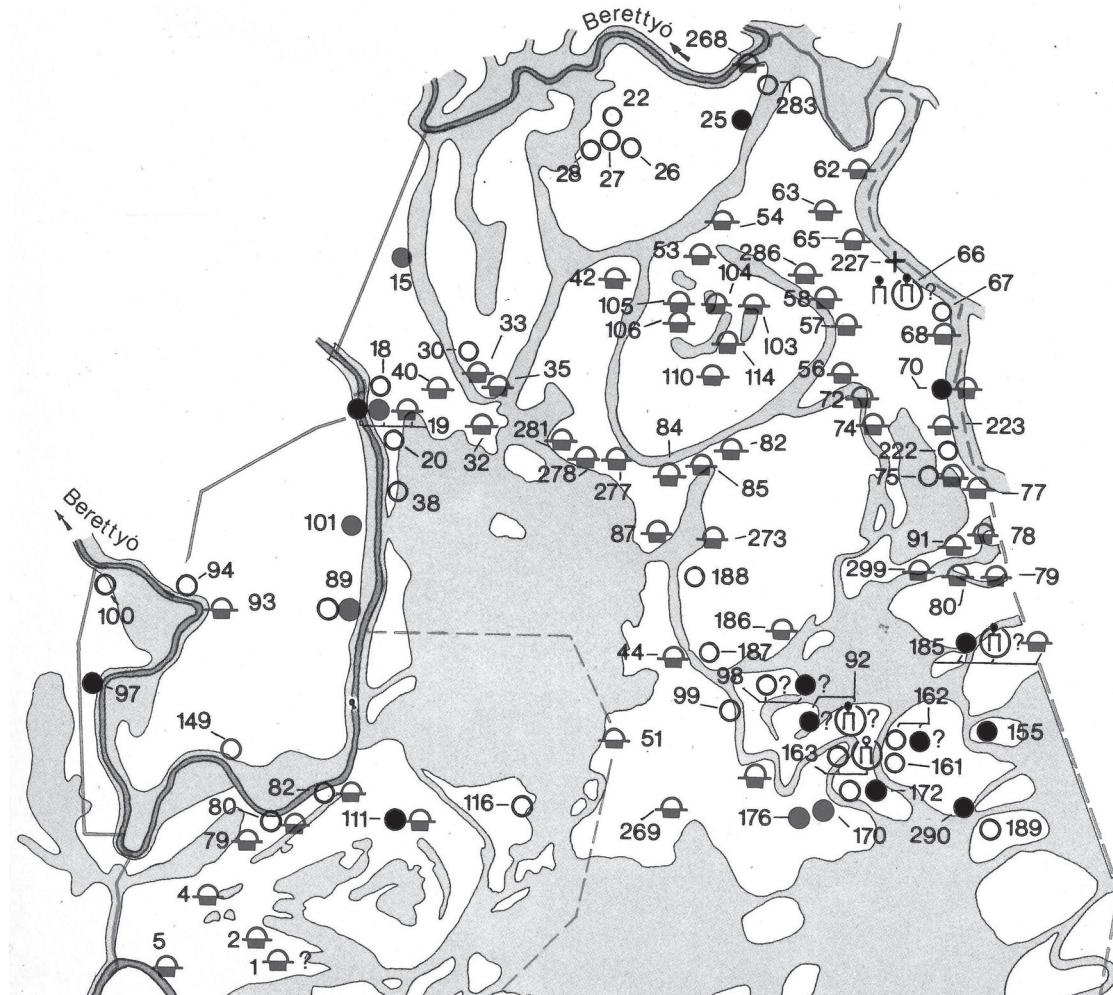


Fig. 4. Kurgans near Gyomaendrőd on the map by Archaeological Sites of Hungary (MRT 8, Annex 2)

Botanists have gathered floristic data from a number of kurgans in the Maros–Körös Interfluve.²⁸ They evaluated the vegetation of a few mounds near Szentes,²⁹ characterized the weeds and landscape history of the Hegyes-halom near Mindszent,³⁰ investigated the soil and the connections between hydrology and vegetation on the Kántor-halom near Szentes,³¹ surveyed the vegetation of the Sáp-halom near Szegvár,³² and in addition to the study of vegetation, the effects of farming were also analysed at the Hegyes-halom near Kéthegyháza, the Bekai-halom in Magyarsanád and the Bőve-halom in Hódmezővásárhely.³³ Complete flora lists were made on all the mounds of the Csanádi-hát area with permanent vegetation³⁴ and the mounds around Szarvas were also surveyed.³⁵

Zoologists also gathered information about periwinkle insects,³⁶ beetles,³⁷ molluscs³⁸ and vertebrate fauna.³⁹

²⁸ KOVÁCS–MOLNÁR 1986, 187–192; MOLNÁR 1992, 22–23; KAPOCSI *et al.* 1998; PENKSZA–KAPOCSI 1998; KÉRTÉSZ 2000; TÓTH 2003; JAKAB–TÓTH 2003; DÉAK 2018, 78–81.

²⁹ KISPÁL 2002; 2004.

³⁰ BEDE 2016, 89.

³¹ BARCZI 2003; VONA–PENKSZA 2004; PENKSZA *et al.* 2005; HERCZEG *et al.* 2006b.

³² HERCZEG *et al.* 2006a.

³³ PENKSZA *et al.* 2005; HERCZEG 2005; HERCZEG *et al.* 2009; BARCZI *et al.* 2011; HERCZEG 2015, 43–53.

³⁴ CSATHÓ 2008; BEDE 2016, 86–87.

³⁵ DÉTÁR 2012.

³⁶ KRAUSZ *et al.* 2000.

³⁷ MERKL *et al.* 2014.

³⁸ DOMOKOS 2018a; DOMOKOS 2018b.

³⁹ CSIZMAZIA 1982; CSIZMAZIA 1986.

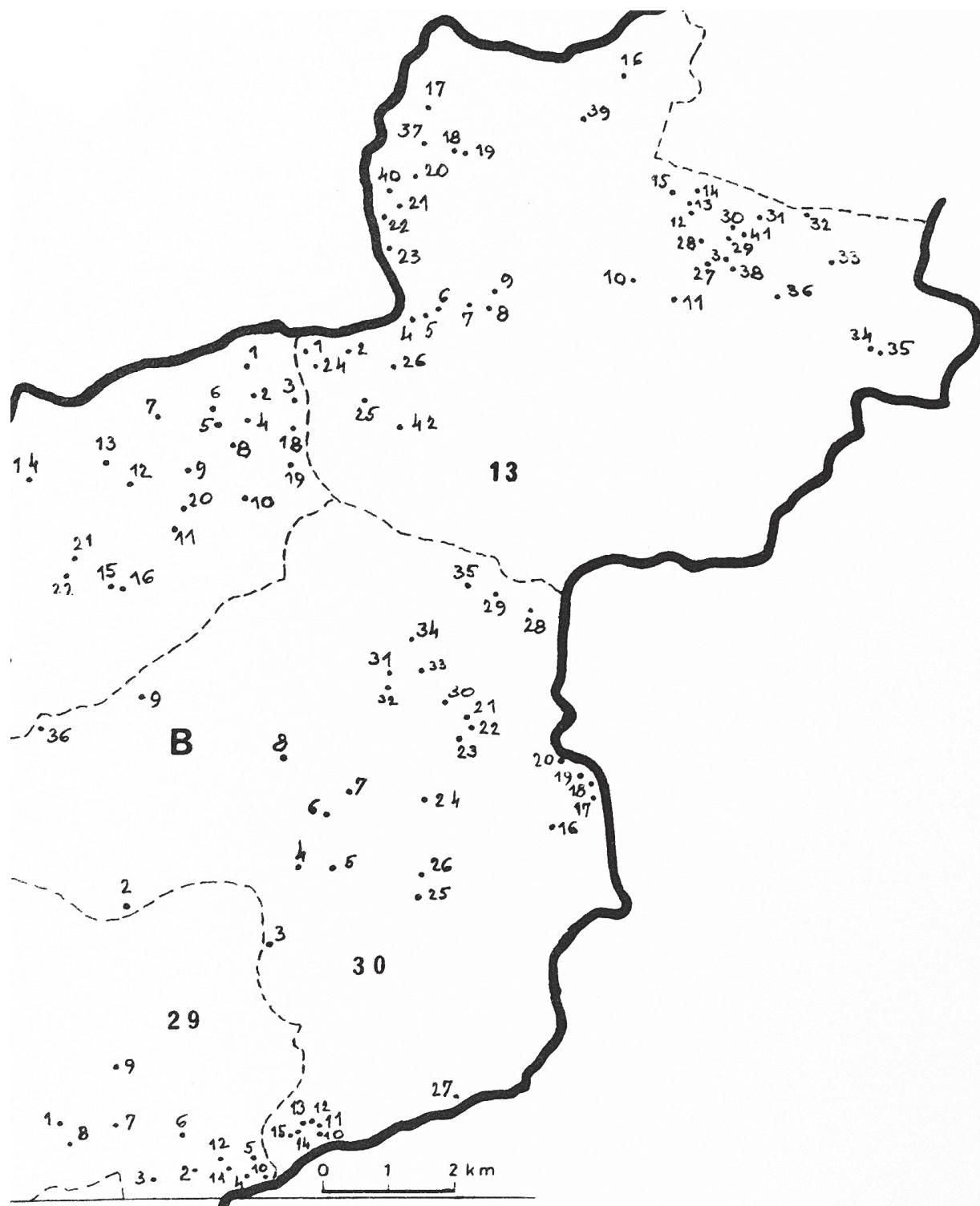


Fig. 5. Dénes Virág's map with the kurgans in the Kis-Sárrét area (VIRÁGH 1979, Suppl. 4)

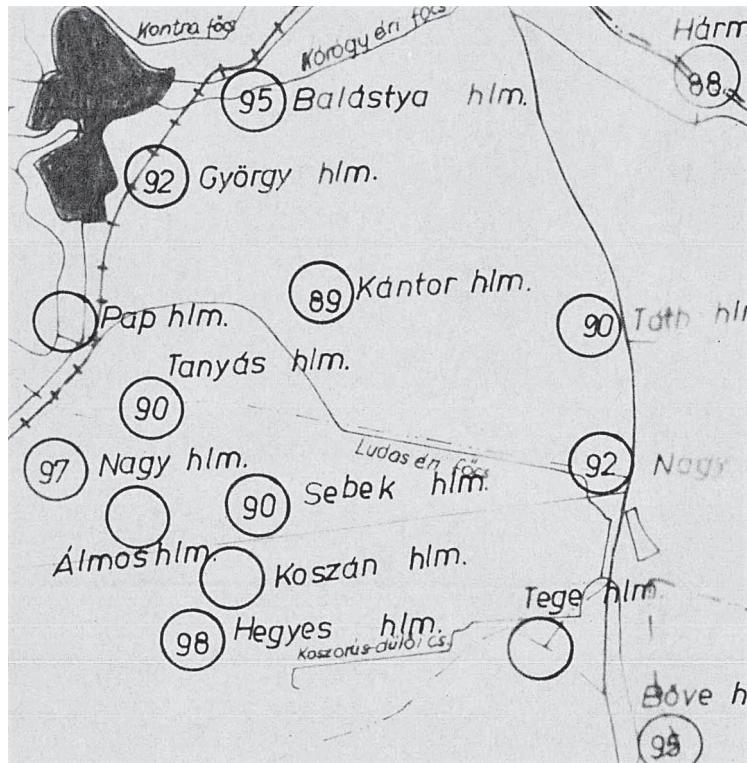


Fig. 6. Cadastre of Csorongrad County by Gábor Rózsa with the kurgans near Szegvár (RÓZSA 1979)

Antónia Marcsik⁴⁰ and Zsuzsanna K. Zoffmann⁴¹ analysed several human skeletal remains discovered in kurgans in our area. Sándor Bökönyi investigated the vertebrate fauna from Kétegyháza,⁴² while the chemical composition of the ochre pieces from the Tiszántúl region was analysed by György Duma.⁴³

Attila Rákóczi analysed the ecological changes on previously cultivated mounds. An important aspect of his research was the mapping of the local communities' relationship with the barrows.⁴⁴

CONCLUSION

In the study area – the central Tiszántúl region – there has been continuous development both professionally and methodologically and with regard to instrumental analyses in connection with the registration of mounds. The published and unpublished (in preparation) volumes for Békés County of the 'Archaeological Sites of Hungary' (MRT) series provide a milestone in this research. Already the authors of the topographic volumes had recognized the need to analyse manuscript maps and archival documents, and due to the use of these sources, fundamental observations were made regarding the number, location and condition of the mounds. Some of the subsequent cadastral works also used this elaborate working method in their own surveys.

In the future it is absolutely necessary to include other sample areas in the Great Plain (especially east of the Tisza) with similar sample numbers and sizes, so that the properties of the mounds of each region can be compared. It is important that surveys and evaluations should be consistent on their own, but they should also be comparable to the results of other surveyed areas. We are thinking here primarily of the use of the sources, the protocol of field observations and site surveys, and the need to strive for completeness. We are confident that these regional researches on mounds will start in the near future in other parts of the Carpathian Basin as well in increasing numbers.

⁴⁰ MARCSIK 1979.

⁴³ DUMA–ECSEDY 1975; DUMA 1979.

⁴¹ K. ZOFFMANN 1978; K. ZOFFMANN 1984.

⁴⁴ RÁKÓCZI 2016.

⁴² BÖKÖNYI 1979.

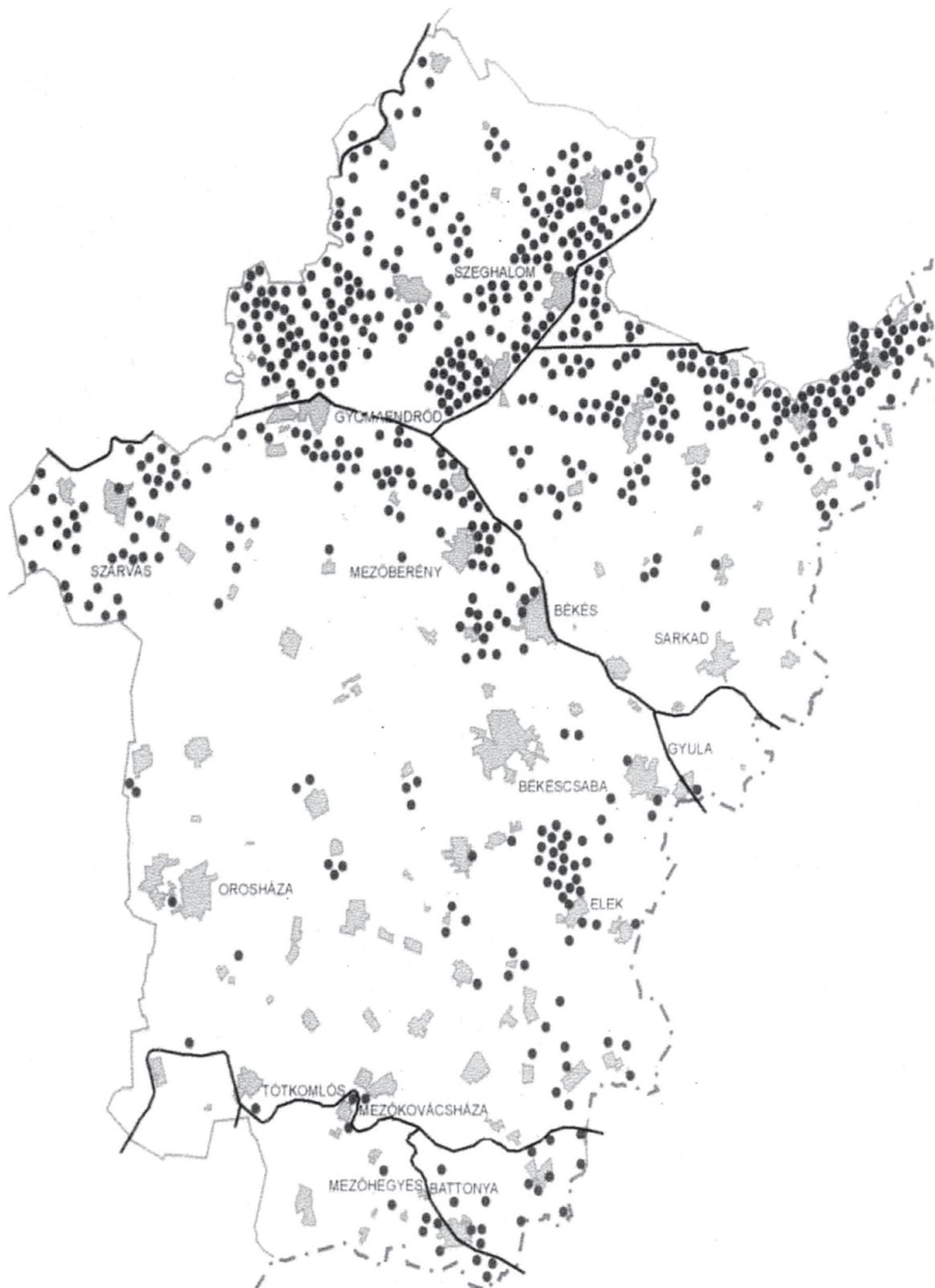


Fig. 7. László Szelekovszky's map with the mounds of Békés County (SZELEKOVSZKY 1999, 3)

Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae 70, 2019



Fig. 8. The assessed kurgans by the 'Kunhalom project' in the study area (based on *Kunhalom-program* 2002)

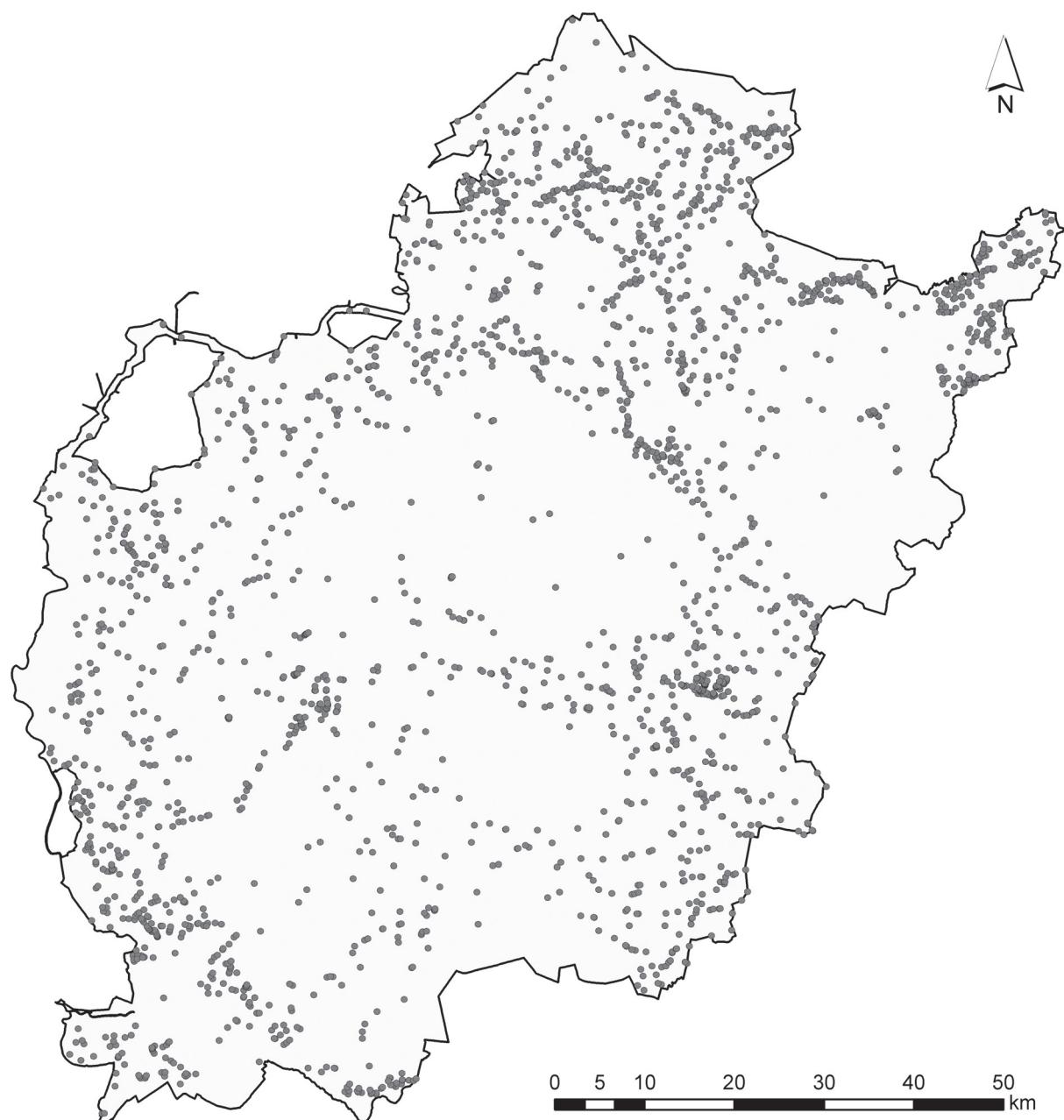


Fig. 9. The registered burial mounds in the study area from our survey (2335 kurgans) (BEDE 2016, 134)

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