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BOOK REVIEW



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Károly Tankó: Kelta falu Győr határában. A ménfőcsanaki késő vaskori település. A Celtic village in North-West Hungary

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K. Tankó (2020). Kelta falu Győr határában. A ménfőcsanaki késő vaskori település. A Celtic village in North-West Hungary. Studien zur Eisenzeit im Ostalpenraum 2. Archaeolingua, Budapest. 320 pages, 52 plates, 96 figures. ISBN 978-615-576-641-1

The archaeology of the open settlements of the Middle La Tène period has never been uncomplicated. These settlements were made up of loose groups of houses usually occupying the southern side of a mound near a stream or river, which means today's archaeologists must excavate large areas in order to fully explore them. As this type of research is very work-intensive and therefore expensive, it is not surprising that the excavations of entire settlements are connected almost exclusively to rescue excavations preceding the constructions of motorways, commercial centres, or industrial facilities. The evaluation of the finds is also very demanding because huge numbers of artefacts have to be sorted and studied, and only at the end is it revealed whether the effort was worth it. The site of Ménfőcsanak-Szeles-dűlő is situated on the outskirts of Győr, in the north-western part of Hungary. Excavations commenced there in 1993 and ended in 2011 after the exploration of more than a square kilometre of the surface. As well as finds and structures from the Iron Age, traces of human occupation were found from virtually all archaeological periods ranging from the Copper Age to the Late Middle Ages.

The present publication deals with only a part of this huge site which was once a Celtic village. The excavation of this part lasted until 1998. The author of the study, Károly Tankó, has long experience in studying Middle La Tène period settlements and cemeteries. The book is based on his PhD thesis but has been extensively reworked since his graduation in 2005. Meanwhile, it has been revealed that the Celtic village extended far beyond the area originally investigated. However, due to uncertainties associated with the reorganization of the Hungarian institutional system, further research had to be postponed. Even so this is one of the largest excavated Iron Age settlements in Hungary, which makes the present publication extremely important. We should note here that previous research focused on the fortified settlements of the Late La Tène period, while lowland villages such as the subject of the present study were largely neglected. Ménfőcsanak was also in a key position during the Celtic expansion of the 4th century BC, which makes its archaeology more significant.

After the description of the site and its surroundings in Chapter 1, K. Tankó gives a detailed description of the structures and finds in Chapter 2. The structures are shown in figures, and the finds were rendered onto plates attached to the end of the text, which allows the reader a broad overview of the pottery types. The book has a summary of 18 pages in English which is detailed enough to allow foreign readers to understand the main conclusions, but the descriptions were published only in Hungarian. This is not such a problem regarding the finds because most of them are displayed in tables, but it would have been useful to provide a legend to the most important features (size, colour, etc.) and most of all to amend the structures' descriptions with abstracts in English. Fortunately, the figure captions have been translated into English.

The book's following chapters are its most important parts. Chapter 3 is essentially a long study of the excavated structures. Since many of those structures resemble the pit houses known from the vernacular architecture of the 19th and 20th centuries, a significant part of this chapter deals with the identification of the building types and their classification. Unfortunately, the author here falls into the same trap as his predecessors when he assumes that

the diversity of the archaeological structures directly implies a diversity of architectural types. It seems to be the least likely possibility that the 16 pit houses found there would represent 10 pit house-types. The classification is based mainly on the arrangement of the postholes, but it has not been taken into consideration that the survival of the postholes seems to be rather a matter of chance, and so the present remains do not necessarily correspond to the original forms of the structures. Nevertheless, the information published in this chapter is very important and it is also obvious that a definite conclusion on the matter cannot be reached without further excavation. This is the primary reason that the author has left some questions unanswered.

The strength of K. Tankó's book resides in the detailed analysis of the finds in Chapter 4. There we find an overview of the pottery finds, accompanied by numerous statistics, spatial analyses, and assessments of the vessel types and their decorations. The author's top-notch proficiency cannot be questioned here, and this is also reflected in his chronological considerations. The sections on iron artefacts, and the analysis of the iron slags yields significant results, as does the study of the graphite fragments. It is an important addition to our view of the period's economy that the raw graphite material originated from the North rather than the region of Bavaria.

The concluding chapter is closely bound to the previous chapter. Chapter 5 begins with a summary recapitulation of the settlement's layout and architecture, but also includes the main results regarding chronology which were derived from the study of the finds. It has to be remarked here that the chronology of the Central European Middle La Tène period was established by Ilona Hunyady in the 1940s, and was subsequently refined by Hungarian, German and Austrian researchers. As this chronology is based mainly on finds from funeral contexts, its usefulness for the dating of settlements seems to be rather restricted. The principal problem is that a series of more or less intact vessels from burials cannot be compared directly with thousands of small sherds coming from the excavation of a settlement. Although there was a methodology based on French standards developed for the study of a site at Sajópetri, lying on the Hungarian Plains in Eastern Hungary, and this has been

successfully adapted to the features of Hungarian archaeology, it could not have been utilized for Ménfőcsanak. The primary study of the pottery of Ménfőcsanak was done years before the excavation of Sajópetri, and a re-examination was not possible. It is also an important factor that the pottery of Sajópetri shows a strong Scythian influence which is absent at Ménfőcsanak. Thus, the author had to select the most relevant types of artefact for the site and prepare their statistics from thousands of pottery fragments in order to establish their relative chronology. This is the core evidence which had to be put into context with other artefacts that could be specifically dated. Beyond providing dates for the existence of the present site, this could also be the basis of a chronology for the sites of Western Hungary.

We also find a wider view on the neighbouring cemeteries in this chapter, which is also indispensable for cross-checking the established datings. Unfortunately, the final conclusion is rather succinct and it lacks a synthesis based on a comparison with similar sites. References were included throughout the text but it would have been perhaps not inutile to dedicate a few pages to a longer summary of the types of Middle La Tène period settlements and their archaeology in the Carpathian Basin, especially in the chapter which has been translated to English. It also has to be noted that the study of a significant part of the site which was excavated between 2009 and 2011 has not been finished yet, and the analysis of the assemblages from approximately 200 burials could also lead to new results.

Károly Tankó's book is a long-needed and important contribution to Late Iron Age studies of settlements in the Carpathian Basin. The detailed and useful catalogue, as well as the descriptions and statistics, underline the huge amount of work put into this publication. This is why it is of premier importance: without such profound studies there is little chance to have an overview of Late Iron Age settlement archaeology and architecture to pull together the largely uncompleted jigsaw puzzle we have today. As previously mentioned, the excavation of these sites is difficult and the study of the finds is very time-consuming. Therefore, such contributions are most welcome, and we only hope that this book will be followed by similar in-depth analyses in the near future.