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The connecting river. Diachronic assessment of fords crossing the Tisza river

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ABSTRACT

The *Lendület BASES* project offers a unique opportunity for diachronic analysis, enabling changes in landscape, land use, and communication systems to be examined on the basis of archaeological and written evidence from widely separated periods – in this case, the Middle Bronze Age and the Middle Ages. In this article, we investigate the fords of the River Tisza, a key determinant of transport in the Carpathian Basin. Our comparative analysis identified two shorter river sections between Tiszadob and Csongrád where fords occur in greater density. Both areas are well attested in both periods, although the individual crossing points were not necessarily of equal importance throughout time. The evidence also suggests that the stretch of river between Szolnok and Csongrád retained particular significance across both eras, with its fords appearing to be more stable than elsewhere. These results suggest that questions of continuity and discontinuity should be examined not only at the level of individual settlements, but also on the scale of micro-regions.

KEYWORDS

diachronic study, Middle Bronze Age, Middle Ages, fords of the river Tisza, continuity

The dominant feature of the lowland landscape of the Carpathian Basin is the River Tisza, whose meandering course has historically favoured transversal rather than longitudinal movement. The river's broad floodplain strongly influenced accessibility, while its complex hydrological system – especially on the left bank, with its oxbows, cut-off meanders, and intermittent watercourses – also played a major role in shaping communication routes.¹ The shifting riverbed of the Tisza transformed not only the course of the river itself but also its floodplain. All these processes took place in a landscape of minimal elevation differences, 1–2 m in general.

Because of these geographical characteristics, the settlement network of the region has undergone numerous changes over the millennia. Nevertheless, certain sites close to the river show a surprising degree of long-term stability. At first glance, these appear to be linked to the main river-crossing corridors.

The *Lendület BASES* project has provided an exceptional opportunity for archaeologists to collaborate across distant periods, revealing recurring spatial patterns and striking similarities in how prehistoric and medieval communities structured their landscapes.² Within this diachronic framework, we examined a series of sites using both archaeological and historical (written and cartographic) sources, even though the evidence stems from widely different epochs.

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¹Pinke (2017).

²To cite a few examples: Marta (2017) (correlation of Bronze Age depots and medieval salt roads in present-day Northwestern Romania); Pusztai and P. Fischl (2018) (correlation of Bronze Age and medieval settlement patterns on the South Borsod Plain); Kiss and F. Romhányi (2023) (diachronic assessment of Central European copper production and copper/bronze trade).

Despite the chronological gap between these datasets, they share a crucial feature: all predate the massive river-regulation works of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These engineering interventions transformed the landscape on a scale that erased relationships that persisted for millennia. For example, when regulation of the Tisza began on 27 August 1846 at Tiszadob (Szabolcs County) and Szerderkény (now Tiszaújváros, Borsod County), the great bend at Tiszalúc was cut through, removing one of the oldest and most intensively used fords at Lúcs. Although the confluence of the Sajó and the Tisza remained, the altered course meant that the Sajó now joins the regulated Tisza at Tiszaújváros instead of at Kesznyéten, radically changing the position and role of nearby settlements within the local network.

In several places, our analysis also includes the intersections where lowland ramparts – such as the Devil’s Dyke and other longitudinal ditches – meet the river. The interpretation of the Devil’s Dyke remains debated:³ whether regarded as a defensive structure, a transport route, or partly a water-management installation, the junction between the Tisza and the Dyke must have become a focus of settlement activity once the feature had been constructed. Yet, judging from the relationship between certain Bronze Age sites along the Tisza and these longitudinal ditches, the causal direction may, at times, have been reversed: the ramparts appear to have reached the river at points that were already prominent features of the landscape. In other words, the longitudinal ramparts were adapted to pre-existing structures and, once built, acquired a dominant role of their own (see Alpár).

Below, we discuss both Bronze Age and medieval evidence, arranged in pairs of sites along the Tisza. We then examine more closely those clusters of settlements that show long-term spatial stability. Our study focuses on the river section between Tiszalúc and Csongrád, where medieval sources suggest that possible crossing points lay closer together than elsewhere (Fig. 1). Throughout the article, river crossings are conceptualised not as fixed points but as spatially flexible sections of the river, whose precise location could shift seasonally and over longer chronological horizons.

1. TISZALÚC – TISZADOB

The Bronze Age site of Tiszalúc–Dankadomb lay on the edge of a large western bend of the Tisza until the onset of nineteenth-century river regulation (Fig. 2). The site was excavated by Nándor Kalicz in 1957⁴ and again in 1960. Further geophysical surveys and systematic surface collections were carried out by the BORBAS project in the outer settlement area.

The ford connected Tiszalúc with Tiszadob. Although the two villages are now about eight kilometres apart in a

straight line, maps of the Second Military Survey show that the left bank of the great bend once consisted of a frequently inundated floodplain. While the right bank remained uniformly dry, the area around Tiszadob on the left side formed the first stretch of permanently dry ground. Near the site of the Andrassy Palace (later Gyermekváros), Márta L. Nagy published twenty-one burials of the Füzesabony culture, and excavations in 2013 uncovered several Bronze Age features and artefacts, including three further burials of the same cultural group. West of the palace, at the site known as Tiszadob–Sziget – which lay on the right bank before regulation and belonged to Ókenéz – Eszter Istvánovics excavated Bronze Age remains (Füzesabony and Gáva cultures) in the 1980s, and another Bronze Age grave was found here in 2018.

The Bronze Age communities of Tiszalúc and Tiszadob may have been contemporaneous, though the finds also allow for the possibility of a lateral shift in settlement. According to M. Thomas, the Tiszadob material belongs to phases 1 and 2 of the Füzesabony Culture, although one grave displays strong Hatvan connections. The assemblage from Dankadomb includes elements of both the Hatvan and Late Hatvan phases. No settlement associated with the excavated graves is known at Tiszadob; field survey and aerial imagery suggest that it may have been destroyed during the construction of the Andrassy Palace.

In the Middle Ages, the Lúcs ford—and later the toll road connected with it – played a key role along the northern margin of the Great Hungarian Plain. It was first mentioned by Anonymus at the beginning of the thirteenth century. A charter of King Béla IV from 1261 records that one-third of the “dry and wet” tolls belonged to the bishop of Eger. In the papal tithe register (1332–1337) the priest of Lúcs paid a tithe of five grossi, placing the parish in the average income category. By 1435 the village consisted of two parts, indicating a relatively substantial population. The local branch chamber is mentioned in a charter of Imre Szapolyai from 1467. Although the village does not appear by name on the Lazarus Map, it may correspond to one of the three unnamed settlements depicted opposite Tiszadob.

The first mention of Dob, on the opposite bank, occurs in the Várad Register of 1220. Its priest paid four grossi in the papal tithe register, slightly below average. A 1338 document refers to a toll at the settlement, though it disappears from later records. By that time the village was divided into two parts (*duae possessiones Dub iuxta fluvium Tycia*). From 1430 onwards it belonged to the bishop of Eger and is named on the Lazarus Map.⁵

Between the two settlements, Tiszalúc clearly held greater medieval importance, but by the early sixteenth century Tiszadob may have taken over this role. The fact that only the latter is named on the Lazarus Map, though not decisive, may hint at such a shift. Its later prominence is underscored by the development of the Andrassy family’s manorial centre and the construction of their palace here in the 1880s.

³Istvánovics and Kulcsár (2014, 2017).

⁴Hungarian National Museum, Central Database 341.T:IV.

⁵Németh (2010).

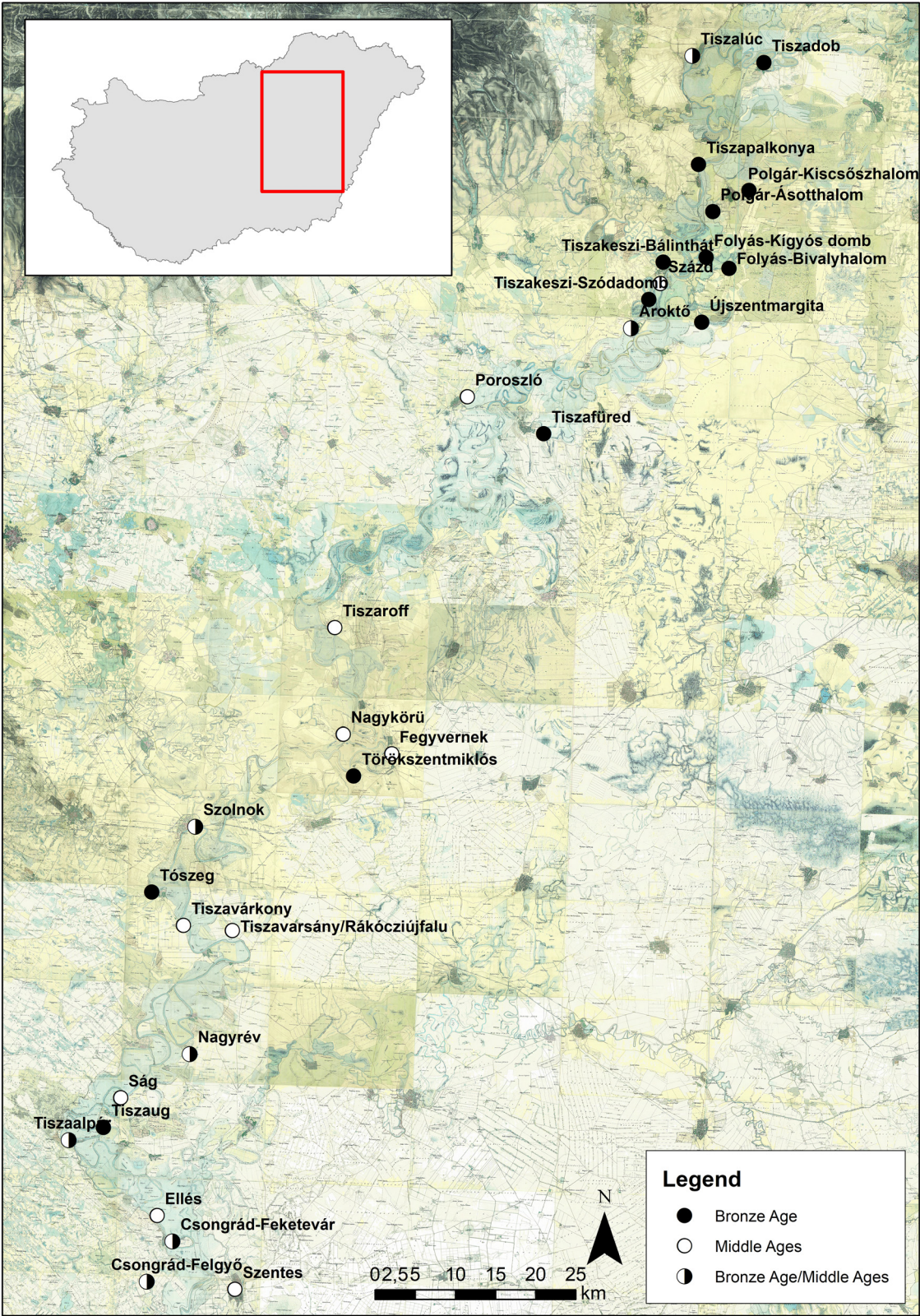


Fig. 1. Sites mentioned in the study

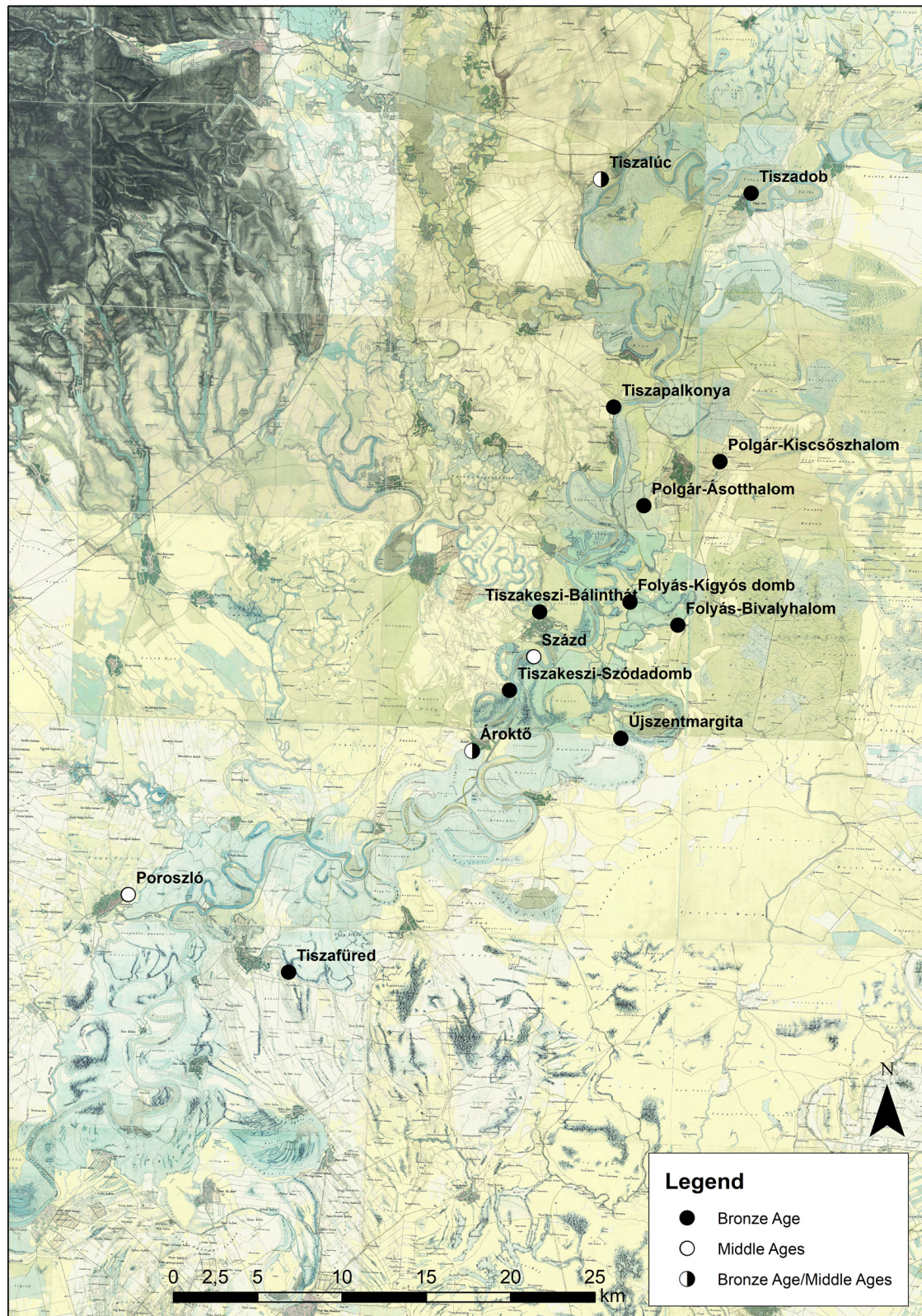


Fig. 2. Sites in the northern section of the study area

A section of the Devil’s Dyke joins the river near the Tiszadob island (Table 1).

2. TISZAPALKONYA – POLGÁR

The outstanding significance of Polgár Island during the Neolithic and Bronze Age is beyond doubt.⁶ Bronze Age sites cluster around two tell settlements, both located on the western edge of the island, offering excellent access to waterborne transport (Fig. 2). These sites lie on a slightly elevated zone beyond the left bank of the Tisza, adjacent to a broad wetland, which suggests that a relatively long waterway once connected the two riverbanks.

The crossing between Polgár and present-day Tiszaújváros is indicated by the cemeteries of Tiszapalkonya-Erőmű, the tells of Polgár-Ásotthalom and Polgár-Kenderföldek-Kiscsoszhalom, and their associated cemeteries at Polgár-Kenderföld-Majoros tanya, Polgár-Királyérpart (site M3/29), and Polgár-Homok dűlő.

Table 1. Bronze Age sites and medieval villages of Tiszalúc and Tiszadob

	Bronze Age	Middle Ages
Name	Tiszalúc-Dankadomb	Lúc (Zemplén county)
Period	Early and Middle Bronze Age	13th–16th centuries
Character of site	multi-component Bronze Age site with tell core	ford, parish, branch chamber (salt)
Literature	Kalicz (1968) 114–115, 136–142; Almásiné Vecseri (2021); P. Fischl and Pusztai (2018) 102–103, 112–113, 115	Szentpétery (1938) 60; Fejérpataky (1887) 340, 345, 361; Csánki (1890) 355; Iványi (1906); Weisz (2013) 259–260
Name	Tiszadob-Andrássy kastély/Gyermekváros	Dob (Szabolcs County)
Period	Middle Bronze Age	13th–16th centuries
Character of site	cemetery	toll (1338)
Literature	L. Nagy (2013); Piros-Pozdora (2022, 2024)	Fejérpataky (1887) 343, 359; Csánki (1890) 512; Németh (2010); Weisz (2013) 126
Name	Tiszadob-Sziget	
Period	Bronze Age	
Character of site	settlement and cemetery	
Literature	Piros-Pozdora (2022, 2024)	

⁶Mesterházy (2017, 2022).

These sites are notable for their unusually rich assemblages of gold artefacts.⁷ Additional Middle Bronze Age sites have recently been identified south of Polgár – Folyás-Kigyósdomb (?), Folyás-Bivalyhalom, Újszentmargita-Tuka, and Kunszög⁸ – demonstrating the island’s dense occupation during the Middle Bronze Age. The settlement associated with the Tiszapalkonya-Erőmű cemetery situated on the boundary of modern Tiszaújváros has not yet been located.

The northern line of the Devil’s Dyke reaches the Tisza on the border between Oszlár and Tiszaújváros.

Both Palkonya and Polgár (the latter including Folyás until 1992) appear in medieval written sources, but neither played a major role. Palkonya is first mentioned in 1245 as land belonging to the serviens of Borsod Castle. Although the village was destroyed during the Mongol invasion, its church, dedicated to Saint Bartholomew, appears again in a charter of 1323. Nonetheless, it is absent from the papal tithe register (1332–1337), which suggests that it had not yet become an independent parish. The village reappears in 1459 as a parish under the ownership of the Eger Chapter.

Polgár is listed in the Várad Register of 1234 and, about a century later, in the papal tithe register, in which its priest paid seven grossi – approximately the average parish income. In the 1490s the settlement belonged to the bishop of Eger, and from the sixteenth century to the Eger Chapter. By 1569 it was already described as a market town (*oppidum*), a category that at that time also encompassed larger villages with central-place functions, among which Polgár was probably counted. Both historical and archaeological evidence indicate that this stretch of the Tisza, although settled on both banks, was not an especially busy crossing point in the Middle Ages, and neither Palkonya nor Polgár appears on the Lazarus Map (Table 2).

3. TISZAKESZI, ÚJSZENTMARGITA

The Bronze Age tell and outer settlement at Tiszakeszi-Bálint-hát Újtemető mark the confluence of the Rigós-Énekes stream and the Tisza River. Along this section of the stream lie the Bronze Age settlements of Mezőcsát-Pástidomb, Mezőcsát-Laposhalom, and Emőd-Karolaszölők, representing a network of communities along the stream which is connected to the main channel of the Tisza at this site (Fig. 2). The site was excavated by Ferenc Tompa in 1936; its internal structure became known through the non-invasive investigations carried out within the BORBAS Project.

South of the present-day village and of the Százd Island lies the area known as Szóda-domb, situated directly on the right bank of the main bed of the Tisza. It is among the few Bronze Age sites that have yielded finds from other periods as well. Its significance is indicated by continuous settlement from the Neolithic to the Árpadian Period, with the sole

⁷Dani et al. (2016).

⁸Dani et al. (2019).

Table 2. Bronze Age sites and medieval villages of Tiszapalkonya and Polgár

	Bronze Age	Middle Ages
Name	Tiszapalkonya-Erőmű	Palkonya (Borsod county)
Period	Middle Bronze Age	13th–16th centuries
Character of site	cemetery, gold finds	village
Literature	Kovács (1979)	Györffy (1967) 798–799; Csánki (1890) 177
Name	Polgár-Ásotthalom	Polgár (Szabolcs County)
Period	Early and Middle Bronze Age	13th–16th centuries
Character of site	multi-component Bronze Age site with tell core, gold hoard	village (minor market town in the mid-16th century)
Literature	Dani et al. (2019)	Csánki (1890) 524; Nyakas (1975) 72
Name	Polgár-Kenderföldek-Kiscsöszhalom	
Period	Early and Middle Bronze Age	
Character of site	tell settlement, gold finds	
Literature	Dani et al. (2000, 2004, 2019)	
Name	Polgár-Kenderföld-Majoros tanya	
Period	Early and Middle Bronze Age	
Character of site	cemetery associated with Polgár-Kenderföldek-Kiscsöszhalom	
Literature	Dani et al. (2000, 2004); Dani and V. Szabó (2004)	
Name	Polgár-Királyérpárt (site M3/29)	
Period	Early and Middle Bronze Age	
Character of site	cemetery belonging to Polgár-Ásotthalom	
Literature	Dani and V. Szabó (2004); Dani et al. (2019)	
Name	Polgár-Homok dűlő	
Period	Early and Middle Bronze Age	
Character of site	cemetery belonging to Polgár-Ásotthalom	
Literature	Dani and V. Szabó (2004)	
Name	Folyás-Kígyós-domb (?)	
Period	Neolithic, Bronze Age	
Character of site	tell (?)	

(continued)

Table 2. Continued

	Bronze Age	Middle Ages
Literature	Dani et al. (2019)	
Name	Folyás-Bivalyhalom	
Period	Early and Middle Bronze Age	
Character of site	tell, gold finds	
Literature	Dani et al. (2019)	

exception of the Avar period. In other words, it represents a point of outstanding, long-term importance along the Tisza.

Opposite the two Bronze Age sites of Tiszakeszi – facing the mound of Ároktő-Dongó-halom – on the left bank of the river lies Újszentmargita-Tuka, Kunszög, a scarcely investigated site that may be regarded as a potential settlement counterpart on the opposite bank.

In the mid-eleventh century the area formed part of a ducal estate, a portion of which Duke Géza granted to Count Peter of the Aba kindred. In 1067 Peter founded the monastery of Százd from this estate complex. Although the abbey probably perished during the Mongol invasion, the intention to revive it can be inferred from the fact that King Béla IV had its charter transcribed in 1267. Archaeological excavations on the site of the monastery – geographically located between the two Bronze Age tells – identified slight architectural remains and eleventh-century burials.

In the papal tithe register, the parish of Tiszakeszi, situated about two kilometres from the abbey, is recorded. Its priest paid an average annual tithe of eight *grossi* placing him among the wealthier rural clergy. The subsequent medieval history of Keszi is little known; the next mention occurs only in 1487.

On the opposite bank of the Tisza, within the modern boundaries of Újszentmargita, stood the medieval village of Fehérszentmargita, first mentioned in a charter of King Béla IV dated 1261, among the estates granted by Saint Stephen to the Eger Diocese. The village did not function as a parish centre in the Middle Ages – presumably, as in later periods, it was served from nearby Polgár. The site of its medieval church (or chapel) was identified in 1965 when the remains of a church and eleventh-century burials were excavated.

Neither of the riverbank settlements appears on the Lazarus Map (Table 3).

4. ÁROKTŐ

At Ároktő-Dongó-halom, on the right bank of the Tisza, a Bronze Age settlement was established on the edge of the flood-free terrace (Fig. 2). Above the single-layer Hatvan culture settlement, a Füzesabony culture tell was constructed, preserving the same structural layout but with an

Table 3. Bronze Age sites and medieval villages of Tiszakeszi and Újszentmargita

	Bronze Age	Middle Ages
Name	Tiszakeszi-Bálinthát-Újtemető	Százd (Borsod county)
Period	Early and Middle Bronze Age	11th–13th century
Character of site	multi-component Bronze Age site with tell core	monastery
Literature	Kienlin et al. (2018) 258–265; P. Fischl et al. (2022) 100–103	Sörös (1912) 364–365; Györffy (1967) 804–805; F. Romhányi (2000) 60; Kemenczei and Végh (1966); Takács (2000) 546
Name	Tiszakeszi-Szódadomb	Keszi (Borsod County)
Period	Neolithic, Early, Middle and Late Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman Period, Árpadian Age (see Százd)	14th–16th century
Character of site	multi-component Bronze Age site with tell core	village, hamlet-like settlement
Literature	P. Fischl and Kienlin (2015), Kienlin et al. (2018) 267–273; P. Fischl et al. (2022) 104–107	Györffy (1967) 780; Csánki (1890) 174
Name	Újszentmargita-Tuka, Kunszög	Szentmargita (Szabolcs County)
Period	Early Bronze Age	11th–16th century
Character of site	multi-component Bronze Age site with tell core, fragment of a golden plate	village, chapel
Literature	Dani et al. (2019)	Csánki (1890) 526; Soós (1985) 412

enlarged inner core. Excavations were conducted by Andor Saád and Géza Megay in 1930 and later by Tibor Kemenczei in 1966.

Beyond the significance of the Bronze Age site itself, it is noteworthy that this is the point where the southern line of the Devil's Dyke reaches the Tisza – a feature also mentioned in the foundation charter of the abbey of Százd (as *Aruk*). The toponym Ároktő ("at the ditch") likewise reflects this. The aforementioned site of Újszentmargita-Tuka, Kunszög lies on the left bank of the river, between Tiszakeszi and Ároktő.

The name Ároktő first appears in a forged charter issued in the name of King Béla III, dated 1194 but actually produced around 1230. According to the papal tithe register, the village priest paid an average annual tithe of twelve *grossi*, indicating a relatively prosperous parish. The village is only rarely mentioned in the late Middle Ages (1459, 1460, 1466), but it does appear on the Lazarus Map (Table 4).

Table 4. Bronze Age sites and medieval villages of Ároktő

	Bronze Age	Middle Ages
Name	Ároktő-Dongóhalom	Ároktő (Borsod county)
Period	Early and Middle Bronze Age	12th/13th–16th century
Character of site	tell-type settlement of complex structure	village
Literature	P. Fischl (2006); Kienlin et al. (2018) 149–154; P. Fischl et al. (2022) 42–45	Györffy (1967) 753; Csánki (1890) 168

5. TISZAFÜRED-SZIGET

The Tiszafüred-Ásotthalom tell settlement and its associated cemeteries (Tiszafüred-Majoroshalom, Tiszafüred-Kenderföld, Tiszafüred-Akasztódomb, Tiszafüred-Fertőihalom) are well known in the Bronze Age literature (Fig. 2). Early research at these sites, alongside several other archaeological locations, is associated with Endre Tariczky, Béla Miliesz, and the Tiszafüred Regional Archaeological Society (Tiszafüred-vidéki Régészeti Egylet) founded by them, and later with the Tiszafüred Museum and Library Society (Múzeum- és Könyvtáregylet).

The creation of the Tisza Lake significantly altered the landscape and the course of the river. In several publications and letters, Tariczky describes Tiszafüred and its surroundings as being located on a former Tisza island. He even mapped the island in two of his works. Based on these descriptions, a hydrologically enclosed, contiguous area – a former island – can be reconstructed around Tiszafüred, similar to the Polgár Island. According to Tariczky, the island was bordered by the Tisza River to the west and north, and by the waters following the course of the Árkus stream (former Tisza branches) to the east. The southern entrance to the island was at Zádorrétság, near Üllőlapos in Madaraskarcag. Tariczky notes that in ancient times, "the Tisza had two passages along this island, one between Egyek and Dorogma and another between Tiszaörvény and Poroszló".⁹

From the territory of Egyek, evidence is known for Middle Bronze Age cemeteries (Egyek-Szőghatár; Egyek-Bodajcs-oldal), as well as further, less certain information deriving from the excavations conducted by the Tiszafüred Museum and Library Society.¹⁰ The village Egyek itself was one of the key sites (site Szőlőskert) – temporarily eponymous – of the early Late Bronze Age Tumulus culture.¹¹

No Bronze Age site is known from Tiszadorogma.

Within the present-day administrative boundaries of Tiszafüred, Tiszaörvény-Temetődomb was excavated by Sándor Gallus, who uncovered graves of the Hatvan culture. The associated settlement remains unknown.

⁹Tariczky (1892, 1906); Prohászka (2012).

¹⁰Miliesz (1905).

¹¹Kovács (1965b, 1966).

On the right bank of the Tisza, opposite Tiszafüred, no finds attributable to this period are recorded from the territory of Poroszló in either the archaeological literature or the Hungarian National Archaeological Database. However, excavations conducted between 1900 and 1910 to the north of Poroszló, in the areas of Ráboly-puszta and Kápolnás-halom by the Tiszafüred Museum and Library Society, uncovered Bronze Age layers and artefacts at a multi-period site. Evidence for this derives from entries in the Antiquities section of the Society's Register and from a remark by Mílesz in the 1904 issue of *Archaeologiai Értesítő*, in which he identifies the excavated area as a terramare-type settlement.¹²

A major Bronze Age site, however, is the Ásotthalom settlement, located east of present-day Tiszafüred, together with several known cemeteries arranged around it: Majoros-halom, Kenderföldek, Fertőihalom, and Akasztódomb, situated on the edge of the first dry land on the left bank of the former Tisza. The tell at Ásotthalom, containing layers from the Neolithic, Copper Age, Hatvan and Füzesabony culture, has now been almost completely destroyed by early excavations and hydrological works.

The first graves at the Majoroshalom cemetery were uncovered in 1961 under the direction of József Csalog. A few years later, between 1964 and 1972, Tibor Kovács and Éva Garam conducted a nine-year excavation campaign, uncovering 622 yet unpublished graves of the Füzesabony culture, as well as 382 published graves of the Tumulus culture. Most recently, under the leadership of the Kiss Pál Museum in Tiszafüred, with participation from the MTA-BTK Lendület Mobility Research Group, excavations were conducted on the outer part (Majoros-halom III) of the multi-component settlement with tell core, including a unique mass grave containing at least 42 individuals. Another part of the outer settlement territory was located with non-destructive methods at the Fok-alja archaeological site.

At the Tiszafüred-Fertőihalom site, Ilona Stanczik uncovered Füzesabony-period inhumation and Tumulus culture graves, as well as Scythian cremation burials. In 1972, Tibor Kovács excavated further Bronze Age graves at Akasztódomb (graves A–J), including a Celtic burial. At the Tiszafüred-Kenderföldek cemetery, Zsolt Csalog salvaged a total of 27 graves: 21 Füzesabony, 2 Late Bronze Age (Tumulus culture), 3 Celtic, and 1 generally prehistoric. Records indicate that at least 50 further graves were destroyed. For a summary of the research history of these sites, see P. Fischl-Fülöp (in press).

Prestige objects from Majoroshalom,¹³ the Ásotthalom gold find,¹⁴ as well as horse harness finds¹⁵ and casting moulds¹⁶ from the tell, all confirm the outstanding role of this area.

In the Middle Ages, the relationship between the two banks of the river was exactly reversed. Füred, a fishing village of the Bishop of Várad, is first mentioned in 1275, and in 1334 in connection with the road leading to Egyek. Later references are not known. However, there are several early, eleventh–thirteenth century cemeteries and settlement remain in the area (Tiszafüred-Majoroshalom and Fok-alja; Tiszafüred-Kenderföldek), along with a significant Avar cemetery. On Örvény-Templomdomb, within modern Tiszafüred, Béla Horváth uncovered an eleventh–thirteenth century settlement with church and cemetery. Another archaeological site belonging to the same settlement was uncovered on Tiszafüred-Morotvapart where late medieval findings also came to light, proving the limited survival of the village into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹⁷ The village itself is listed in 1261 by King Béla IV among the oldest estates of the Bishop of Eger donated by Saint Stephen. The bishopric had the right to have a large ship in Örvény which could transport people, animals, and charts to the opposite bank of the river when the Tisza flooded. The village had a church in the thirteenth century, and its priest acted as a witness in Tiszaörs in 1292. Nevertheless, it does not appear in the papal tithe register, indicating it never became a parish, although the cemetery was used until the 17th century. At the end of the fifteenth century, Örvény belonged to the chapter of Eger (1482, 1494). Although documentary evidence on settlements on the left bank of this stretch of the Tisza is sparse, both Füred and Örvény, as well as the slightly further north Csege, appear on the Lazarus Map.

Much more is known about Poroszló on the opposite bank. Its ford and earthwork are mentioned by Anonymus, indicating it was already an established settlement in the early thirteenth century. The abbot of its monastery is first documented in 1219. Although located in an area heavily affected by the Mongol invasion, the monastery did not disappear in the mid-thirteenth century. In 1292, both the abbot and the village appear as witnesses in the same will in which the Örvény priest was mentioned. The abbey subsequently disappears from the record, but the settlement retained its significance. According to the papal tithe register, its parish priest was among the wealthier ones, paying on average 18 *grossi* per year—roughly three times the median. The importance of the local crossing is highlighted in the diploma of King Louis I from 1347, mentioning that there was no crossing on the Tisza between Poroszló and Várkony (see below), and the king ordered that no new crossing must be established either. In 1427, two churches are recorded in the settlement: one, formerly the abbey church, had two towers and was roofless (later repaired and used by the believers of the Reformed confession), and the other, a parish church without a tower, was tiled. In the fifteenth century, Poroszló also had a salt chamber, and in 1460 it was

¹²Mílesz (1904) 287.

¹³Kovács (1973a, 1979, 1982, 1995, 1996).

¹⁴Mozsolics (1967) 114; Gávan (2015) cat. no. 65.

¹⁵Mozsolics (1953); Bándi (1963).

¹⁶Bóna (1960).

¹⁷Cseh et al. (1991). Recently, Edit Mester conducted research on the territory. The results are only accessible on the homepage of the museum: <https://kisspalmuzeum.hu/regeszet/templom-domb/> (accessed: 05.02.2026).

designated a market town (*oppidum*). It does not appear on the Lazarus Map, although it is possible that the site marked as ‘Arky’ opposite Tiszafüred actually corresponds to Poroszló, while ‘Arky’ (Ároktő) refers to a slightly upstream, unlabeled location.

Topographically, the Poroszló earthwork suggests a crossing near the current bridge. However, according to Tariczky, the ford of Poroszló was located south of the settlement, opposite Tiszaörvény. Ásotthalom and its cemeteries are actually further from both points. In the absence of precise localisation, one of the access points to Füred Island can be reconstructed somewhere within the present-day administrative boundaries of Tiszafüred and Poroszló (Table 5).

6. TÖRÖKSZENTMIKLÓS, NAGYKÖRŰ, AND FEGYVERNEK

Terehalom at Törökszentmiklós is located on the eastern bank of the large left-hand bend of the river known as the Alsóréti-Holt-Tisza (Fig. 3). The Bronze Age settlement belongs to the chain of Hatvan culture sites along the Tisza. Bronze Age sites continue along the left bank of the Tisza all the way to the Tiszazug microregion. However, north of Tiszazug, in a triangular area opening between the left-bank Tisza sites and those aligned along the Berettyó–Körös rivers, no settlements are currently known.

Although medieval finds are known from the wider area – including the cup of Kétpó¹⁸ – Szentmiklós itself is first mentioned as late as in 1399. Around 1500, both (Bala) Szentmiklós and Tiszabala, located to the north, were parishes within the Kemej archdeaconry of the Eger Diocese. Both settlements appear on the Lazarus Map (although it is possible that the two inscriptions were transposed). The 1571 Ottoman defter records Szentmiklós as a town with 102 houses, indicating that it remained one of the more populous settlements of the region.

In the Middle Ages, two settlements near Törökszentmiklós – Nagykörű and Fegyvernek – played a significant role. Although located on opposite sides of the Tisza, their functions apparently alternated over time. The monastery and abbot of Körű are mentioned multiple times between 1212 and 1245. After this period, they disappear from the sources, and the name appears only as a toponym in the early fourteenth century. According to the papal tithe register, the village priest paid around the average rate. Subsequently, the village is rarely mentioned in documents.

By contrast, Fegyvernek is first documented in the eleventh century, when Prince Domoszló donated the estate to the Pécsvárad Abbey, and its boundaries were recorded during the reign of King Saint Ladislaus (1077–1095). Apart from this, nothing of particular note is associated with the settlement. In the Várad Register, an entry dated before 1222

Table 5. Data of the Bronze Age and medieval sites of Tiszafüred, Tiszaörvény, and Poroszló

	Bronze Age	Middle Ages
Name	Tiszafüred-Ásotthalom Tiszafüred-Majoroshalom III Tiszafüred-Fok-alja	Füred (Heves County)
Period	Neolithic, Copper Age, Early and Middle Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman Period, Avar Period	11th–13th century, 16th century
Character of site	multi-component Bronze Age site with tell core	settlement, cemetery
Literature	Kovács (1965a, 1973b, 1992); Mester et al. (2022)	Györffy (1987) 94; Csánki (1890) 62
Name	Tiszafüred-Majoroshalom	Tiszafüred-Majoroshalom Tiszafüred-Fok alja
Period	Middle and Late Bronze Age	Árpadian Age
Character of site	cemetery of the settlement of Tiszafüred-Ásotthalom, outstanding prestige objects, golden objects	settlement
Literature	Kovács (1975)	Fodor (1977a, 1977b, 1989)
Name	Tiszafüred-Kenderföldek	Tiszafüred-Kenderföldek
Period	Middle Bronze Age, Late Bronze Age, Iron Age	Árpadian Age
Character of site	cemetery	cemetery
Literature	Csalog (1965); Kovács (1975) 39; Hungarian National Museum, Central Database, Tibor Kovács Personal Archives Collection	Fodor (1974a, 1974b, 1976a, 1976b)
Name	Tiszafüred-Akasztódomb	Örvény (Heves County)
Period	Middle Bronze Age, Late Bronze Age, Iron Age	11th–16th century
Character of site	cemetery	church, settlement
Literature	Kovács (1975) 39; Hungarian National Museum, Central Database, Tibor Kovács Personal Archives Collection	Györffy (1987) 121; Csánki (1890) 68; Horváth B. (1970); Weisz (2013) 292–293
Name	Tiszafüred-Fertőihalom	Poroszló (Heves County)
Period	Middle Bronze Age, Late Bronze Age, Iron Age	(12th)–16th century
Character of site	cemetery	abbey, ford, earthwork, salt chamber

(continued)

¹⁸Fodor (1975) 263.

Table 5. Continued

	Bronze Age	Middle Ages
Literature	Kovács (1975) 39; Hungarian National Museum, Central Database, Tibor Kovács Personal Archives Collection	Györfy (1987) 126–127; Csánki (1890) 56; Sörös (1912) 7, 366; Szabó (1979); Weisz (2013) 315–316
Name	Tiszaörvény-Temetődomb	
Period	Early Bronze Age	
Character of site	cemetery	
Literature	Kalicz (1968) 127	
Name	Egyek-Szőghatár	
Period	Middle Bronze Age	
Character of site	cemetery	
Literature	M. Nepper and Sz. Máthé (1972)	
Name	Egyek-Bodajcs oldal	
Period	Middle Bronze Age	
Character of site	cemetery	
Literature	Zoltai (1907); Lehoczky (1912); Szeverényi et al. (2021)	

records that the local castle warrior (*iobagiones castri*) accused six people from Ecseg here. Almost a century later, in 1320, the estate was granted to Master Gregory, the grandson of Kompolt from the Aba kindred, who was obliged to build and maintain a bridge over the watercourse called Büdös-ér. By then the village priest was already paying slightly above-average sums in papal tithes.

By the end of the fourteenth century, the settlement had already become a royal customs point, and in 1417 King Sigismund granted permission to hold a national fair. The number of fairs increased to three by the end of the Middle Ages. The wealth of the market town is reflected in the imposing tower built at the parish church at the end of the fifteenth century, which still dominates the visual character of the settlement today (Table 6).

7. SZOLNOK, TÓSZEG, TISZAVÁRKONY, AND TISZAVARSÁNY (RÁKÓCZIÚJFALU)

Even if the settlements listed in the title of the subchapter were at some distance from each other, they form a distinct group of sites (Fig. 3). The main reason is that they occupied

key nodes in the micro-region, connected on both sides of the Tisza River, and despite the distance between them they were neighbours as only scattered, hamlet-like sites appeared between them. Therefore, in the context of the research they can be considered as a cluster.

Excavations conducted within present-day Szolnok, at the site of the medieval castle, have uncovered Middle Bronze Age features that led the investigators to reconstruct a fortified settlement situated north of the confluence of the Tisza and Zagyva rivers.

Additional Bronze Age stray finds are known from areas south of the confluence (Szolnok–Marx Park). Taken together, this evidence suggests that the vicinity of the Zagyva estuary was occupied during the Bronze Age period under examination.

Northwest of modern Szolnok, on the bank of a large, cut-off right-hand bend of the Tisza, lies the site known as Szolnok–Feketeváros. The archaeological assemblage from this locality spans the entire chronological sequence represented in the Tószeg stratigraphy.

From the eleventh to the early thirteenth century Szolnok served as the centre of a geographically discontinuous county that extended in a chain of smaller jurisdictions from the Tisza to northern Transylvania. First mentioned in 1075 alongside Csongrád in the foundation charter of Garamszentbenedek Abbey (Hronský Beňadik, Slovakia), this early *comitatus* played a key role in channelling salt from the northern Transylvanian mines into the kingdom's centre. Around 1200 Szolnok also became the seat of an archdeaconry of the Vác Diocese, while its administrative agglomeration likely spanned both banks of the river, with the collegiate chapter of Tenyő on the left bank emerging around the same time. Despite its early prominence, the castle seems to have declined before the Mongol Invasion of 1241–42: it is absent from the list of devastated settlements, although located in a region that suffered severely during the campaign.

By the fifteenth century Szolnok had regained regional significance. In 1429 King Sigismund authorised tenant peasants to settle freely in the town – designated in the charter as a *civitas* – indicating a policy of strengthening its urban character. From the mid-fifteenth century Szolnok belonged to the Pálóci family; the fragment of a carved red marble tombstone found during castle excavations shows that the family viewed the town as a suitable place for aristocratic representation. Szolnok functioned as a market town (*oppidum*) and the seat of the county court (*sedes iudiciaria comitatus*) and is also depicted on the Lazarus Map. Its strategic value increased after the fall of Buda, when work began on a new castle. Because the fortifications were still incomplete, the Ottomans captured the site in 1552; once in control, they finished the defences and made Szolnok a key stronghold for governing the northern Great Hungarian Plain.

Tószeg–Laposhalom, situated on the right bank of the Tisza at the edge of the flood-prone zone, is among the most renowned prehistoric sites in Hungary. Thanks to the early excavations and the attention it received from foreign

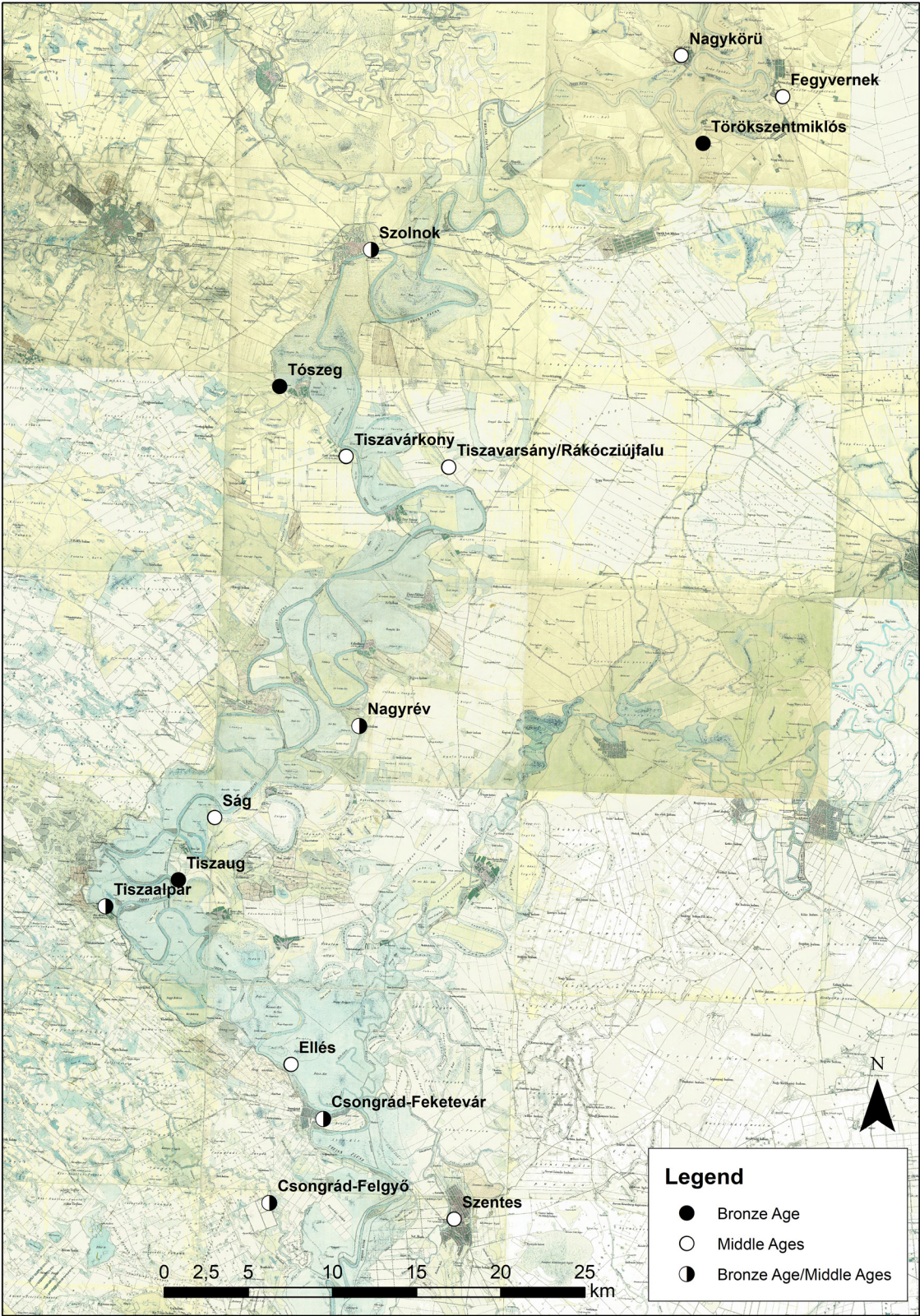


Fig. 3. Sites in the southern section of the study area

Table 6. Bronze Age sites and medieval villages of Törökszentmiklós, Nagykörű, and Fegyvernek

	Bronze Age	Middle Ages
Name	Törökszentmiklós-Terehalom	Balaszentmiklós (Külső-Szolnok County)
Period	Early and Middle Bronze Age	14th–16th century
Character of site	tell settlement	village
Literature	Tárnoki (1992, 1996)	Csánki (1890) 71 ; Bagi (2019)
Name		Körű (Heves County)
Period		12th–15th century
Character of site		monastery, village
Literature		Györffy (1987) 110 ; Csánki (1890) 66
Name		Fegyvernek (Heves County)
Period		11th–16th century
Character of site		village (market town)
Literature		Györffy (1987) 92–93 ; Csánki (1890) 54 ; D. Mezey (2021) ; Weisz (2013) 155

scholars participating in the 8th International congress of Anthropology and Prehistoric Archaeology, held in Budapest in 1876, the site soon entered the canon of major European archaeological localities.

Four main occupation periods can be distinguished at the site. Based on these, the first Bronze Age chronologies for Hungary were established ([Tompá, 1936](#); [Patay, 1938](#)), attempting to outline the chronological and cultural sequence of the entire Carpathian Basin. The Tószeg-based chronology was later replaced in the 1960s by the 3 × 3 system developed by István Bóna.¹⁹ Although different scholars have classified the major phases in various ways (Nagyrev–Hatvan–Perjámos–Füzesabony(?)–Vatya [Koszider]²⁰), it is nonetheless clear that the site occupied a strategically important position valued by communities belonging to different material cultures. At the site Ökörhalom, near Laposhalom, there is a cemetery belonging to the early Nagyrev phase of the tell.

This strategic location, ensuring continuity of occupation from the later Early Bronze Age to the end of the Middle Bronze Age, defines its importance for the present analysis.

Despite its prominence in the Bronze Age, Tószeg is only sporadically attested in medieval sources. It is first mentioned in a charter of 1368 as an estate. In the late

fifteenth century, it was granted to Pál Kinizsi, and in 1521 to Stephen Werbőczy. During the sixteenth century, its population grew, and by the mid-century the Ottoman defters record it as a (market) town.

Even more significant, however, are Tiszavárkony to the south and Varsány (today Rákócziújfalú) on the opposite bank. It was most likely at Várkony that King Andrew I and his brother Prince Béla held their famous meeting, during which Béla was offered the choice between the crown and the sword. Afterwards, Várkony disappears from the sources for a long time and is not listed in the papal tithe register. By the late fourteenth century, however, its importance resurfaces: its harbour is mentioned in 1387, and in 1397 it appears as a branch salt chamber under the authority of the Szeged salt office. Although described as an *oppidum* in 1501, its earlier prominence during the Árpadian and Angevin periods seems to have been gradually transferred to Varsány on the opposite side of the river.

Varsány, first mentioned in the foundation charter of the Garamszentbenedek Abbey in 1075, was already a parish by 1332, is mentioned as an *oppidum* in 1464 which even issued charters in the late Middle Ages. The lively trade in the market town is attested by the large number of late medieval and early modern textile seals found there. Both settlements – Tiszavárkony and Varsány – appear on the Lazarus Map ([Table 7](#)).

8. NAGYREV-ZSIDÓHALOM

Nagyrev (recorded as *Nagy-Rév* on the Second Military Survey map) carries in its name the settlement's function as a crossing point over the Tisza River. The site is well known in prehistoric research as the eponymous site of the Nagyrev culture ([Fig. 3](#)). In addition to finds typical of the Nagyrev culture, artefacts in the Hatvan style have also been identified here. Research on the Bronze Age settlement at Zsidóhalom began at a very early date (excavations by Ferenc Kubinyi in 1864–1865; Farkas Széll and Flóris Rómer, then by Tompa in 1925–1926 and 1928). As a result, apart from confirming the existence of the settlement itself, only the material from its cemeteries is known in greater detail. The Bronze Age settlement stood to the south of the large meander that existed before the river regulation works on the bank of an earlier, smaller bend of the Tisza.

Each of the three major Bronze Age sites in the Tiszazug microregion – Nagyrev-Zsidóhalom, Tiszaug-Kéménység, and Szelevény-Menyasszonypart – occupied strategic positions along the high banks of the flood-prone areas within the triangle formed by the confluence of the Tisza and Körös rivers.

Little is known about medieval Nagyrev. The village is rarely mentioned in charters, but within its shared boundary with Cibakháza lay the settlement of Monostorossáp, whose thirteenth-century small and simple monastic church, along with a portion of the village's main street, was excavated in the 1990s by József Laszlovszky. Since no residential monastic buildings were found near the church, the term *monostor* ("monastery") in this case likely referred to a

¹⁹Bóna (1961).

²⁰Banner et al. (1957); Bóna (1980, 1992); Stanczik (1980).

Table 7. Bronze Age sites and medieval settlements of Szolnok, Tószeg, Tiszavárkony, and Tiszavarsány (Rákócziújfalú)

	Bronze Age	Middle Ages
Name	Szolnok-Vár	Szolnok
Period	Middle Bronze Age	11th-early 13th century, 15th–16th century
Character of site	fortified settlement	county castle, ecclesiastical centre, market town, early modern castle
Literature	Kertész (2021)	Csánki (1890) 666 and 670, D. Mezey and Kertész (2015, 2018); Kertész et al. (2018)
Name	Szolnok-Feketeváros	Tószeg (Külső-Szolnok County)
Period	Early and Middle Bronze Age	late Middle Ages
Character of site	settlement	settlement
Literature		Csánki (1890) 671
Name	Tószeg-Laposhalom	Várkony (Külső-Szolnok County)
Period	Early and Middle Bronze Age	Árpáadian Age, late Middle Ages
Character of site	tell settlement	royal manorhouse, village, port
Literature	Banner et al. (1957); Bóna (1980, 1992 with further literature); Stanczik (1980)	Csánki (1890) 671; Weisz (2013) 423–424
Name	Tószeg-Ökörhalom	Varsány (Külső-Szolnok County)
Period	Early Bronze Age	late Middle Ages
Character of site	cemetery	market town
Literature	Csányi (1997)	Csánki (1890) 666; Lakatos (2019) 656–657; Masek and Laszlovsky (2021); Mordovin (2021)

church institution with several priests serving a broader pastoral area – perhaps a collegiate chapter – which indirectly points to the area’s relatively dense population.

In the Late Middle Ages, Nagyrév occasionally appears in sources as part of noble family names, but – despite its name indicating the existence of a ford – it does not appear on the Lazarus Map (Table 8).

9. TISZAUG, SÁG, AND TISZAALPÁR

Tiszaug-Kéménytető is one of the three major well-known tells of the Tiszazug region mentioned above (Fig. 3).

Table 8. Bronze Age sites and medieval villages of Nagyrév

	Bronze Age	Middle Ages
Name	Nagyrév-Zsidóhalom	Nagyrév (Külső-Szolnok vm.)
Period	Early and Middle Bronze Age	Árpáadian Age, late Middle Ages
Character of site	tell settlement	village, “pastoral centre”
Literature	Kalicz (1959) 5–15, 53–55; (1968) 127	Csánki (1890) 669; Rácz and Laszlovsky (2005)
Name	Nagyrév-Zsidóhalom	
Period	Early and Middle Bronze Age	
Character of site	cemetery	
Literature	Csányi (1992); Nagy (2018)	

The site entered scholarly literature as a “triple mound,” which likely reflects the cross-section of the inner tell core, the surrounding ditch, and an outer, intensively inhabited ring-like zone. As at Nagyrév, the layers of the Nagyrév culture here are overlain by Hatvan style material. The site gained particular recognition for a building with walls decorated by geometric motifs. After the excavations conducted by the Tiszazug Archaeological Society, research was resumed between 1980 and 1983 under the direction of Ilona Stanczik.

Tiszaug is mentioned very early in medieval sources: in 1075 it was granted, together with several other estates in the Tiszazug area, to the Abbey of Garamszentbenedek. After the Mongol invasion, the abbey lost its possessions here; the villages were mentioned only sporadically thereafter, and none of the settlements of this area are shown on the Lazarus Map.

The village Ság and its market are also mentioned in the foundation charter of the Garamszentbenedek Abbey.²¹ The market itself, along with the free crossing, highlights the prominent position of this village, although it appears in the part of the charter interpolated in the thirteenth century.

²¹DHA 1992, 216–217: *Ex alia vero parte Tize villam, que dicitur Sagi, cum terra sua mercatumque in eadem cum vado libero; nullusque de hoc participetur, nisi solus abbas, dedi cum propriis terminis, qui termini ita dividuntur: primum ubi fluvius Huger de aqua Tiza egreditur, qui circuit totam partem aquae Kesekun iuxta aruch dividens, usque ubi stat Scilu piscina, que cum tota insula in partem Sancti Benedicti devenit. Deinde Taka mons terminus est usque ad alium montem nomine Sorul, exinde ad quendam fontem, cuius decursus terminus existit, quoadusque circumveniens intrat ad eundem fluvium Huger, postea donec idem fluvius Huger decurrens prope villam Kurth, quam supradixi, et cadit in Tiza, ultimus terminus est. The parts of the text written in spaced-out type are, according to György Györffy, interpolations (cf. DHA 1992, 205). For the localisation of the place names and their geographical interpretation see Laszlovsky (1986).*

Based on recent archaeological excavations carried out by Gábor Wilhelm Ság survived until the end of the Middle Ages,²² however, it was not a parochial centre either in the early fourteenth century, or around 1500, and it does not feature on the Lazarus Map either.

Opposite Tiszaug, on the right bank of the Tisza, lies Tiszaalpár-Várdomb. The sandy loess bluff beginning above Alpár and continuing as far as Csongrád rises 4–5 m above the former floodplain of the Tisza in the western and southern parts of the Várdomb, and as much as 10–12 m toward the east and northeast. Beneath the late medieval layers, excavations carried out between 1974 and 1977 uncovered a fortified settlement of the Vátya culture. Anonymus refers to the site as *castrum Olpár*. After 1075, the orthodox monastery of Szávaszentdemeter (Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia) received estates at Alpár, including the ford across the Tisza. The lower (Alsó-)Alpár ford, known in the twelfth century as *Görög-rév* (*portus Graecorum*, “Greek ford”), took its name from its Greek owners. Although excavations at the Bronze Age fortified site yielded no traces of early Árpadian occupation,²³ finds from the tenth and eleventh centuries were discovered in the 1880s nearby, at Dunszt-tanya.²⁴

By the late Middle Ages, the settlement straddling the border between Külső-Szolnok and Csongrád counties had become divided into two parts, whose importance is indicated by the fact that both appear on the Lazarus Map (*Alparfelsev* and *Alparalso*).

The coincidence of Bronze Age and medieval occupation, together with written evidence concerning the ford, clearly shows that the site owed its enduring topographical significance to the Tisza crossing located here (Table 9).

10. CSONGRÁD AND FELGYŐ

The present-day village of Felgyő was established in 1948 as a socialist village centre, created from the manor farms (*major*) of the Károlyi estate (Fig. 3). Its construction was accompanied by more than two decades of continuous archaeological research. Excavations by Mihály Párducz and Gyula László, as well as field surveys by Júlia Kovalovszki, revealed artefacts from the Copper Age, Bronze Age, Pre-Scythian, Sarmatian, Avar, and Árpadian periods, indicating almost uninterrupted occupation of the area.

The settlement and cemetery of the Vátya culture are located on the western bank of the Vidre stream. Within Felgyő's territory, cemeteries from the eleventh–twelfth centuries and traces of Árpadian-period settlement have also been identified.²⁵ Júlia Kovalovszki associated this early

Table 9. Bronze Age sites and medieval villages of Tiszaug and Tiszaalpár

	Bronze Age	Middle Ages
Name	Tiszaug-Kéménytető	Ug (Külső-Szolnok vm.)
Period	Early and Middle Bronze Age	Árpadian Age, late Middle Ages
Character of site	tell settlement	village
Literature	Kalicz (1968) 127–128, Csányi and Stanczik (1982, 1992)	Csánki (1890) 671; Bagi (2008)
Name	Tiszaalpár-Várdomb	Ság (Csongrád vm.)
Period	Middle Bronze Age	Árpadian Age
Character of site	fortified settlement	village, market place
Literature	Bóna and Nováki (1982)	DHA 1992, 205 and 216–217; Laszlovszky (1986)
Name		Alpár (Külső-Szolnok vm.)
Period		[Árpadian Age], late Middle Ages
Character of site		village
Literature		Csánki (1890) 667; Bóna and Nováki (1982); Weisz (2013) 53

medieval settlement with the village called *Deucha* and explained its topographical position by the presence of the nearby ford at Bölde, which may also account for settlement continuity since earlier periods. According to Kovalovszki, a double-edged sword from the cemetery at Geda-halom (Csizmadia-tanya) is related to the royal supervision of ferries and crossings during the reign of King Saint Stephen.²⁶

The settlement was first mentioned in the 1075 foundation charter of the Abbey of Garamszentbenedek. In 1108, Prince Álmos granted it to the provostry of Dömös. At that time, it was inhabited by sixty-three servile families belonging to the fifth *kenyéradó* (grain-paying) hundred, which indicates a relatively large population engaged primarily in cereal cultivation. In subsequent centuries, Felgyő appears only rarely in written sources. The prefix of its modern name first appears in the fifteenth century, and it is recorded in this form on the Lazarus Map.

To the northeast of Felgyő, at the confluence of the Tisza and Körös rivers, lies Csongrád – one of the earliest mentioned *comitatus* (county, ispánság) centres. By the time of the Mongol invasion, however, it had already lost much of

²²The results of the excavations are unpublished, but a preliminary report appeared on the Archeologia website: <https://archeologia.hu/avar-kortol-lakott-kozepkori-falut-tarnak-fel> (accessed: 05.02.2026).

²³Bóna and Nováki (1982) 100–101.

²⁴Bóna and Nováki (1982) 26.

²⁵Balogh and P. Fischl (2010) 9–22.

²⁶Kovalovszki (1957) 31.

its significance. It is not listed among the settlements destroyed by the Mongols, although it lay in one of the regions that was the most severely affected by the invasion. By the late Middle Ages, Csongrád was part of the domain of the castle of Szeged. The location of the early county castle remains debated. Excavations at the site known as *Feketevár*, within the modern town of Csongrád, have revealed a Bronze Age earthwork overlain by late medieval finds, but no Árpadian layers have yet been identified.²⁷ What is certain is that during the Ottoman period a palisaded fort stood at Csongrád, protecting the ford. Another candidate for the early county seat, *Szentes-Várhát*, has not yet been systematically excavated, though surface finds and documentary evidence both suggest dense medieval occupation. On the Lazarus Map, Csongrád appears as a settlement on the left bank of the Tisza.

Opposite Csongrád, just north of the mouth of the Körös, lies *Ellésmonostor*, the third important medieval site of the region. The remains of the former monastic church and its adjoining domestic building were excavated by Éva Pávai. Based on the finds and documentary evidence, the complex was built around the turn of the twelfth–thirteenth centuries; although it suffered damage during the Mongol invasion, it continued to function until the last third of the thirteenth century. In the fourteenth century, a branch of the Bár-Kalán kindred took its name from Ellésmonostor. Although the site is mentioned several times in the fifteenth century, it had lost its importance by the end of that century and does not appear on the Lazarus Map.

A key factor in the settlement history of Csongrád and its surroundings are two long linear earthworks of debated date: the eastern one runs along the Körös and can be traced as far as Kunszentmárton, while the western one follows the opposite bank of the Tisza from Gátér toward the Danube. The confluence of the two rivers must already have acted as a strong attractor for settlement before these earthworks were built, and their construction – perhaps itself based on earlier habitation – helped stabilise the region's fundamental spatial structure. Together, these features demonstrate the enduring stability of the Tisza and Körös crossing points in this area (Table 10).

DISCUSSION

Before the advent of the railway, the concept of the road differed fundamentally from its modern sense. Rather than being perceived as a linear feature, it was understood as a broader transport corridor, whose width was determined partly by natural conditions and partly by the volume of traffic passing through it. Where there were no natural constraints, the importance of such a corridor was precisely

Table 10. Bronze Age sites and medieval villages of Csongrád and Felgyő

	Bronze Age	Middle Ages
Name	Csongrád-Felgyő	Felgyő (Csongrád vm.)
Period	Middle Bronze Age	11th–12th century, 16th century
Character of site	settlement and cemetery	village, cemetery
Literature	Balogh and P. Fischl (2010)	Györffy (1967) 895–896; Csánki (1890) 681; László (1978)
Name	Csongrád-Feketevár	Csongrád
Period	Middle Bronze Age	11th–16th century
Character of site	earthwork	county castle, Ottoman period palisade fort
Literature		Györffy (1967) 893–894; Csánki (1890) 680; Weisz (2013) 95 (Bód)
Name		Ellésmonostor
Period		12th–13th century
Character of site		church, monastery
Literature		Györffy (1967) 895; Csánki (1890) 680; F. Romhányi (2000) 22–23; Pávai (1994); Szaszko (2013)

indicated by the number of alternative routes within it. At the same time, this network also had certain key points where several possible routes converged. These nodes were defined partly by natural factors (such as fords or passes) but could also develop where the prevailing power structures of a given era determined their location. Differences between Bronze Age and medieval crossing configurations are therefore interpreted primarily as consequences of changing settlement organisation rather than as evidence for major riverbed displacement. If such a node appears across several chronological periods, remaining stable in the landscape, its outstanding significance is evident.

One specific feature of the Great Hungarian Plain is that, although it was generally less densely populated than the Transdanubian region or the foothills of the surrounding mountains (the North Hungarian Mountains and the Apuseni Mountains), this roughly 100.000 km² area, traversed by the Tisza River and its tributaries, has played a key role in shaping the connectivity and functioning of the entire Carpathian Basin. The crossing points examined here, situated between Tiszadob and Csongrád – each of them far from being a single point in space – represent crucial nodes in the internal communication network of the region. The road systems passing through them linked the loosely structured settlement network of the Plain both internally and with regions along its margins or beyond.

²⁷Recent archaeological research, conducted by Csaba Szalontai, has not yet been published. Reports are available at: <https://ng.24.hu/kultura/2024/11/03/bebizonyosodott-a-csongradi-feketevar-letezese/> (accessed: 05.02.2026).

This characteristic of the Carpathian Basin's spatial interconnections has often been noted in the geographical literature.²⁸

From the perspective of medieval historical geography, one might alternatively approach these crossings through the network of central places as first outlined for the Great Hungarian Plain by András Kubinyi²⁹ and further refined in subsequent scholarship. Such models presuppose a relatively coherent hierarchy of urban or proto-urban centres connected by stable long-distance routes. However, recent large-scale database-driven analyses of settlement and communication patterns on the Plain suggest a more fragmented picture. While major transversal routes crossed the region, the core network itself appears surprisingly loose, closely reflecting the low-density and unevenly nucleated settlement structure of the area. The principal urban and market-town centres that structured long-distance exchange – such as Pest, Debrecen, or Várad – were located on the margins of the Plain, and even important market towns like Kecskemét or Cegléd were situated at a considerable distance rather than along the Tisza itself. Within the river corridor studied here, no crossing point developed into a fully urban-type settlement; even Szolnok long remained halfway between a large village and a market town, gaining decisive importance only in the sixteenth century, primarily as a fortified stronghold rather than as a commercial node. Between Tiszadob and Csongrád only three prominent locations can be distinguished where urban features appeared, mainly in the form of economic capacity combined with modest cultural performance: Poroszló, Nagykörű–Fegyvernek, and Tiszavárkony–Tiszavarsány. Under these conditions, river crossings along this stretch of the Tisza were defined first and foremost by natural constraints, which were only secondarily translated into the settlement network along the river. A systematic reassessment of central-place models³⁰ for the Great Plain, incorporating these new results, must therefore be deferred to a separate study.

However, both the Tisza and its tributaries are highly variable, which directly affected the location and function of the ferries.³¹ Some ferries were only usable seasonally, and in some cases a crossing point disappeared and a new one emerged elsewhere. We even have medieval documentary evidence for such shifts: in 1399, at Tiszaroff, the community requested royal permission to relocate the main road because the ford was no longer in its former position due to changes in the riverbed. Nevertheless, the presence of stable crossing points between Szolnok and Csongrád indicates that this part of the Great Plain maintained a continuously important role.

Traditionally, both archaeological and historical narratives assume that the continuity of settlements can be

identified through uninterrupted occupation and the preservation of toponyms. Yet we often encounter situations where continuity is not tied to a single settlement but rather to a micro-region. Although the exact locations of habitation may shift, the continuous or recurrent use of the same micro-region can be demonstrated. This repetitive pattern suggests similar land-use practices not only in the narrow strip along the Tisza examined here but also in the surrounding lowland areas. Consequently, the question of continuity versus discontinuity is best studied within well-defined clusters of settlements.

In the Bronze Age Tószeg zone, the role of Tiszavárkony became prominent in the Árpadian period, while Tiszavarsány (Rákócziújfalú) on the opposite bank gained importance in the late Middle Ages – both appearing on the early sixteenth-century Lazarus Map. Within the same zone, Szolnok re-emerged as a key centre after its early eleventh-century status as a county seat, regaining significance again in the late medieval and Ottoman periods.

Our composite map shows that the distribution of crossing points along the studied river section is far from uniform. Between Ároktő and Szolnok, only two are visible – at Tiszafüred/Poroszló and Törökszentmiklós/Nagykörű – while in the long stretch between them no crossings can be identified. Moreover, the upper section (between Tiszadob and Ároktő) differs markedly from the lower one (between Szolnok and Csongrád). Functionally speaking, during both examined periods the crossings at Lúci and Tiszakeszi-Ároktő appear to have been the most significant on the upper section. Interestingly, the crossing at Polgár-sziget seems to have dominated in prehistoric times – precisely where the northernmost branch of the Devil's Dyke reaches the Tisza. The best-known central branch (Ároktő – whose name itself refers to the Dyke) clearly retained its importance, whereas the southernmost branch played little subsequent role. On this upper section, most Bronze Age *tells* lack direct medieval counterparts. In contrast, on the lower section, medieval data appear more numerous, but the overall picture is more balanced, as several of the medieval sites refer to functionally consecutive settlements (e.g. Nagykörű and Fegyvernek, or Tiszavárkony and Tiszavarsány).

The enduring functionality of these locations is confirmed both by the massive section wall of the Tószeg tell, associated with the ford at Tiszavárkony, and by the persistent royal presence along this river stretch from the eleventh century at least until the reign of Sigismund. This is evident from the early county castles of Csongrád and Szolnok, the royal manor at Várkony, and, indirectly, from the large ecclesiastical landowners such as the bishops of Eger and Vác or the abbot of Garamszentbenedek. Royal possession did not disappear entirely even later: Tiszavárkony, for example, repeatedly became royal property in the fifteenth century, and remained close to the royal court even when not held by the crown, being owned successively by Michael Szilágyi and John Corvinus in the century's final decades.

Taken together, it is particularly striking how many closely spaced, recurrent crossing points can be observed

²⁸Csüllög et al. (2014).

²⁹Kubinyi (2000).

³⁰Christaller (1933); Hodges (1982).

³¹For a comparable methodological discussion in a different river environment see Laszlovsky and Nagy (2022).

between Szolnok and Csongrád: Tószeg–Tiszavárkony–Tiszavarsány, Tiszaalpár, and Csongrád. Nagyrév also belongs geographically to this stretch; its name itself refers to a crossing, and it is the eponymous tell site of a Bronze Age culture (see Table 8). However, no finds or written sources have yet been discovered that would conclusively place it in the same category.

In this study, we compared the Bronze Age and Árpá-dian/medieval settlement patterns on both banks of the Tisza, focusing on sites that probably functioned as crossing points. Similar settlement patterns can likely be detected in the intervening periods as well.³² For this reason, we also incorporated into our analysis the intersections of the Tisza with the linear earthworks (ditches or causeways) of the Great Plain – at Tiszalúc, Ároktő, Szolnok, and Csongrád. Parallels between Bronze Age networks, the Sarmatian-period road system, and the distribution of Roman artefacts, as well as the special role of the Szolnok–Csongrád–Baja–Solt quadrangle within the communication system of the Great Plain, have already been highlighted in earlier research.³³

To complete the picture, it will be necessary to examine the intervening periods from a similar perspective. Yet the available evidence already suggests that the crossings examined here fall into two clearly distinguishable groups, of which the southern group appears considerably more stable, as confirmed by both archaeological and written data. On this basis, we may propose that control of the Tisza stretch between Szolnok and Csongrád was of strategic importance already in the Bronze Age. The basic spatial structure established by that time was subsequently respected – and occasionally reused – in later periods. This is indicated not only by the alignment of the various branches of the Devil's Dyke, but also by the reoccupation of Bronze Age built heritage, such as the earthworks and tell settlements.

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³²cf. Vaday (1998, 2003); Masek and Laszlovszky (2021).

³³P. Fischl and Kiss (2015); F. Romhányi (2017).

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