

Brief overview of Iron Age research in Hungary

Throughout the Early Iron Age, the Danube formed a distinct boundary between the settlement territories of the peoples inhabiting the Carpathian Basin. Transdanubia was settled by the peoples of the eastern Hallstatt culture, while the Great Hungarian Plain was occupied by various steppean tribes. The Iron Age history of the Carpathian Basin can, in a sense, be regarded as an interaction between the peripheries of two major culture provinces. To which we may add that the very perception and interpretation of this interaction largely depends on the amount and quality of the available evidence. The archaeological record of this period is rather sketchy and, as a result, there are still many controversial and unresolved issues in the research of this period (Harmatta, 1948; 1968; Vékony, 1973; Jerem, 1980; 1996; Patek, 1982; 1993; Szilágyi, 1992; Kemenczei, 1994b).

The systematic investigation of the Early and Late Iron Age was begun in the mid-19th century as part of the overall research of Hungarian prehistory. This period saw the identification and registration of the fortified hill forts, ditches and burial mounds dating to various periods on the entire territory of historical Hungary, i.e. the Carpathian Basin. The high number of bronze and gold hoards, as well as the finds brought to light during the excavations conducted on various settlements in the decades around the turn of the century led to important advances in this field of research.

The research of the Bronze Age in Hungary was on par with, and often eclipsed, the best European standards: suffice it here to refer to the activity and the studies published by F.Römer (1878), J.Hampel (1886-1896) and M.Wosinszky (1904). The publication of Hampel's monograph marked a milestone since it offered an excellent overview of the rich and varied bronze metallurgy of the period. The settlement and grave finds, as well as the bronze and gold hoards clearly showed that beside the Alpine region and Scandinavia, one of the major metalworking centres of Bronze Age Europe lay in the Carpathian Basin, specifically in the Upper Tisza region and in Transylvania.

In contrast, the research of the Iron Age was more or less restricted to excavations by enthusiastic amateurs and self-taught men who, as a matter of course, published their finds in Hungarian. Practically only the burial mounds uncovered at Sopron-Burgstall in northwestern Transdanubia and the finds from the (fortified?) settlement at Lengyel in southwest Transdanubia were known to international research. A major breakthrough in this respect came in the 1920s and 1930s when S.Gallus and T.Horváth (1939) published their corpus of the so-called pre-Scythian finds from Hungary; when S.Gallus' (1934) analysis of the figural representations from Sopron-Burgstall and Varishegy finally appeared in print, and when the Scythian princely burial unearthed at Zöldhalompuszta was published by N.Fettich (1928) in the *Archaeologia Hungarica* series. A number of monographs were also published in the 1930s and 1940s that

offered an excellent overview of the state of research in that period (Tompa, 1937; 1942; Mithay, 1941; Roska, 1942).

For many decades the study of the Early Iron Age was one of the most neglected fields of Hungarian prehistoric research, perhaps owing to the high costs involved. This period also saw the publication of various earlier finds and find assemblages from Sághegy, Velemszentvid, Vaszar and Somlóvásárhely (Lázár, 1951; 1955; Foltiny, 1958; Horváth, 1969). In his publication of the finds from a major new site, Szentese-Vekerzug, M. Párducz (1952; 1954; 1955) also offered a new perspective on the study of this period. A number of new sites have been investigated during the past twenty-five years, either as part of a systematic excavation programme, or in the course of rescue excavations. These include the settlement and cemetery in Sopron-Burgstall and Pécs-Jakabhegy, as well as the tumuli at Vaskeresztes, Süttő, Százhalombatta, Fehérvárcsurgó and Nagyberki-Szalacska in Transdanubia, and the Scythian cemeteries in Vámosmikola, Heves and Csanytelek in eastern Hungary. Only preliminary reports are available of the finds from most of these sites. The studies by M. Galántha (1981) and M. Fekete (1985) represent major advances in this field of research, as do the detailed surveys of the chronological issues of the Early Iron Age by M. Párducz (1973) and E. Patek (1993), as well as the still unpublished monograph by T. Kemenczei.

Considering details we stress only some themes. One of the main and, obviously, still not satisfactorily resolved questions of the Early Iron Age in Hungary is the ethnic identity of the population groups that settled in the Carpathian Basin during the 8th–5th centuries B.C. There seems to be a general consensus that in the mid- or perhaps later 9th century B.C., groups seceding from the Cimmerian tribal alliance occupied the greater part of the Carpathian Basin (Gazdapusztai 1963; 1967, is the single Hungarian scholar who has suggested that finds from the Carpathian Basin bearing a close resemblance to similar items in the Caucasus and the Pontic region should be interpreted as a reflection of trade contacts.). T. Kemenczei (1984), J. Gy. Szabó (1969) and E. Patek (1968; 1993) have convincingly demonstrated that this nomadic population group settled in the northern and northeastern area of the Carpathian Basin. The inhumation burials that differ conspicuously from the earlier funerary rites, the eastern weapon types, such as bronze-hilted iron daggers, horse-headed axes, items of harness (such as bits, pierced ornamental rosettes and buttons), and the mass appearance of iron artefacts definitely indicate a cultural — and ethnic — change in this region. The collapse of the Late Bronze Age Gáva–Reci culture of the Carpathian Basin and the burial of the so-called Hajdúböszörmény type hoards can be definitely linked to the appearance of this new population.

The evaluation of comparable finds from the areas lying to the west of the Danube is highly controversial from one aspect. The question can be put as follows: should the artefacts of ultimately eastern origin found in this region be seen as reflecting lively trade contacts or should they be taken to indicate the settlement in Transdanubia of smaller population groups, or did the 'mounted nomads' of the Tisza region merely

control smaller areas in this region? F. Köszegi (1988) has convincingly shown that the *status quo* of the Urnfield culture as a whole, or of its local groups, did not change significantly in the aftermath of the events occurring in the Carpathian Basin (in spite of the fact that a number of hoards came to be buried, the most distinctive among these being the Románd hoard; Németh, Torma, 1965; Mozsolics, 2000). It is nonetheless a fact that inhumation burials containing by the distinctive pre-Scythian pottery wares and metal artefacts, have come to light in northeastern and southern Transdanubia, as well as to the north of Lake Balaton (Budapest–Csepel Island, Kakasd, Somlószőlős; cp. Köszegi, 1988), suggesting that the 'mounted nomads' of the Tisza region controlled the western half of the Carpathian Basin, where they perhaps also established outposts. T. Kemenczei (1994b) also believes that the expansion of the pre-Scythian — Cimmerian — population groups to the Carpathian Basin and the effects of this expansion that were also felt farther to the west, in Central and Western Europe, occurred in several successive waves. This is apparently supported by the fact that the first pre-Scythian finds were found in the Hallstatt B, (Sülfried) phase of Austria, a little later to the north (Podoli) and in Este IIa and late Villanova contexts in Italy.

The interpretation of Herodotus' account from the 5th century B.C. of the geographical location of the Scythian tribes of the northern Pontic region and of the peoples under their sway — partly based on Hecataeus' descriptions from the 6th century B.C. — and the collation of the written records with the archaeological evidence still offers ample ground for heated debates. The linguistic evidence seems to suggest that the clash between the Cimmerians and the Scythians around 590 B.C. in southern Russia ultimately led to the disintegration of the Cimmerian tribal alliance (Harmatta, 1968). At this time certain population groups came to be dominated by the Scythians, whilst others moved to new territories. The appearance of the Agathyrsi in Transylvania, and of the Sigynnae in the Great Hungarian Plain can most probably be dated after this event. G. Vékony (1973; 1986; 1994) has argued that the use of the names Sigynnae and Agathyrsi can be linked to certain well-definable regions: the former to Oltenia, the southern areas of the Great Hungarian Plain and, possibly, the Drava–Sava interfluvium, whilst the latter to more westerly and easterly lying regions. The use of the name "Sigynnae" by the Greeks appears to be based on hearsay, whilst the Agathyrsi are mentioned in the 6th and 5th centuries, as well as later, in the 4th century B.C. by Aristotle. In any case, the archaeological finds from the Tisza region differ markedly from the artefacts of the preceding period and definitely suggest that an eastern population group settled in this region around 570–550 and, in consequence, the eastern half of the Carpathian Basin became the western periphery of an extensive conglomerate of mounted nomads. The extensive cemeteries (e.g. at Szentese-Vekerzug; cp. Párducz, 1952; 1954; 1955) and the princely burials (e.g. at Mezőkeresztes–Zöldhalompuszta, Tápiószentmárton, Gyoma and Ártánd; cp. Fethich, 1927; 1928; 1929; Párducz, 1965) offer a glimpse into the burial customs and funerary rites of this period that include also horse and chariot burials, as well as into the

material culture and offer an idea of the many strands that went into the rich tapestry of steppe art. The latter features stag-shaped shield ornaments, bronze rattles ornamented with bull and stag heads, and sacrificial bronze cauldrons. This population group that was well acquainted with the use of the potter's wheel — a fact mentioned also by Herodotus — introduced an intensive horse-breeding to the Great Hungarian Plain, on which it based its trade with faraway regions. This would explain the presence of a bronze cauldron manufactured in an eastern Alpine workshop and a bronze vessel from Sparta together with locally made weapons and jewellery in the princely grave at Ártánd (Párducz, 1965). J.Gy.Szilágyi (1965) has suggested that the Greek *hydria* from this burial reached the Carpathian Basin through Italy.

The period when the research of the Scythian Age was at its most intensive falls between the early 1950s and the mid-1970s, and can be primarily linked to M.Párducz's activity. Following the analysis and publication of a number of burial sites (such as Tápíósztele, Vámosmikola and Szentés-Vékerzug with its 149 graves) and of the princely burial at Ártánd, Párducz (1973) was the first to attempt a comprehensive survey of the 6th and 5th century B.C. finds from the eastern half of the Carpathian Basin, outlining at the same time the internal chronological framework and the intricate network of contacts.

The research of this period can be said to have stagnated since then. Only the discovery of a handful of new sites in the course of the Topographical Site Survey of southern Hungary, the excavation of a few settlements and the publication of three cemetery parts (Heves: Szabó, 1969; Orosháza and Csanytelek: Galántha, 1981) can be hailed as new advances. The Csanytelek cemetery, with its burials indicating a mixed funerary rite is especially interesting. 28 of the 132 graves excavated so far did not contain any human remains, 63 were scattered cremation burials, whilst 29 were partly extended and partly contracted inhumation burials. The deceased interred in grave 15 was cremated in the grave pit, a feature that can perhaps be taken to indicate a change in the dominant burial rites observed by the pre-Scythian native population (and a similar phenomenon can be quoted from the roughly contemporaneous Hetény/Chotin cemetery in southwestern Slovakia). In six graves the ashes were deposited into, or scattered around, a wooden kist of planks or branches. A few inhumation burials were also lined with wooden planks. The origins of this rite can be traced to the steppe.

It is generally accepted that the final phase of the Hallstatt B period saw the gradual integration of the western part of the Carpathian Basin, i.e. the greater part of Transdanubian and of southwestern Slovakia into the Statendorf-Gemeinlebarn-Kalenderberg culture. The retardation of the local population groups of the Daj-Battina/Kiskőszeg and the Maria Rast/Ruse-Dobova group of the Urnfield culture can only be demonstrated for the southern and southeastern areas of this region. Research in the past decades has largely concentrated on defining the nature of this process, on distinguishing possible phases, as well as on its more general and distinctly local features. The starting point was in part theoretical, focusing on problems of

settlement continuity and discontinuity, and in part the authentication of earlier known and disturbed sites (Gabrovec, 1966; Romsauer, 1986; Stegmann-Rajtar, 1992; Studenikova, 1996).

The available evidence suggests that the majority of the Urnfield settlement centres (such as Velemszentvid, Sághegy, Lengyel, Pécs-Jakabhegy and Pécs-Makárhegy; cp. Bándi, 1982; Kemenczei, 1994a) did not lose their importance during the Early Iron Age. The excavation conducted at Velemszentvid during the 1970s and 1980s definitely indicate the important role played by this site in the Late Bronze Age and in Celtic times (Fekete, 1986). However, little is yet known about the Early Iron Age layers at this site. The investigation of the Pécs-Jakabhegy site has revealed that the Early Iron Age settlement fortified with a stone ditch overlay an earlier settlement from the Hallstatt A period. There is no evidence, however, suggesting any continuity between the two settlements. The investigation of the burials from the Hallstatt C, period reflect the retardation of the Late Bronze Age material culture and also that the finds from southern Transdanubia and the Drava-Sava interfluvium can be confidently and precisely distinguished from the Kalenderberg type finds. As for the Cimmeric-pre-Scythian type finds dating to the Hallstatt C period, among which the Piatigorsk type dagger-hilt is undoubtedly the most characteristic, we should perhaps recall T.G.E. Powell's controversial remark that these were the copies of earlier pre-Scythian artefacts (Maráz, 1978; 1979; 1996).

The most rewarding excavations were conducted in the environs of Sopron in the 1970s. The excavations brought to light 7 upland sites covering an area 12 km long and 40 m wide that had no Late Bronze Age precursors. It would appear that, similarly to the Sütő settlement on the Danube, the Sopron-Burgstall site did not play a major role in the preceding period. The relative chronological framework for this period proposed by E.Patek (1993; cp also Eibner, Persy, 1980) was based on the fortified settlement of the newcomers, the Kalenderberg culture, and on recently excavated tumulus burials, as well as on the other finds from the Sopron area. This chronology is in part based on the stratigraphical evidence, and in part on pottery finds, since the Sopron burials contained few metal artefacts. Unfortunately, this chronological system is only valid for a specific region and is of a restricted value for the overall chronology of Transdanubia. Only after the publication of the finds from a number of cemeteries — some of which have been known since the last centuries — such as Százhalombatta (Holport, 1985; 1986) and Fehérvárcsurgó (Petres, Kovács, Jungbert, 1986) in northeastern Transdanubia, Sütő (Vadász, 1983) in the north, Vaszar (Horváth, 1969) to the north of Lake Balaton, Szalacska (Kemenczei, 1974) in the southwestern part of this region and Vaskeresztes (Fekete, 1985) in northwestern Transdanubia (the only one to be wholly published) can we proceed further. These cemeteries offer a more complete and detailed picture of burial practices since until now only burials lined with stone slabs have been documented, the only exception being Ságvár. A number of variations on stone and wooden constructions, as well as the occasional burial chamber with a dromos, have been uncovered at Vaskeresztes,

Sütő and Fehérvársurgó, and one of the tumulus burials has survived in an extremely good condition at the latter site. The wooden chamber was surrounded by a 4,5 m x 4,2 m large and 4,6 m high mastaba-like structure, also of wood, that was in turn covered with stone. The grave goods of this burial, dating to the Hallstatt C period, included bronze pins, an axe, iron horse-bits, pottery vessels, a bronze vessel adorned with animal figurines around its rim that had originally been laid onto animal hides or felt (Kovács, 1998). The Sopron-Burgstall and Vaskeresztes sites have yielded important evidence for the Hallstatt D period which is less known in this region.

It has still not proved possible to distinguish local groups. Previous attempts in this field are still linked to geographical regions, rather than on a detailed study and comparison of distinctive traits and characteristics. The boundaries of the distribution territory of the Kalenderberg culture, as well as of its southeastern Transdanubian and Drava-Sava region variant that differs from it in many respects, are still unclear. The determination of the latter would be highly important since it could turn out to be the missing link proving an ethnic continuity between preceding periods and later times in the western half of the Carpathian Basin. One question that still needs to be answered is which part of Transdanubia had been populated by the Early Iron Age ancestors of the non-Celtic tribes, the Pannons, of Pannonia province. The greatest deficiency of Early Iron Age studies in Hungary is the lack of a comprehensive survey of the socio-cultural attributes of the populations groups that settled in this region, and neither have their contacts with larger culture provinces been fully explored yet. Although it has in part been done by the international research (Siegfried, Weiss, 1979; Kossack, 1980; Kromer, 1986; Teržan, 1990; Hase, 1992; Nebelsick, 1994; Metzner, Nebelsick, 1996).

The Celtic finds excavated and collected by enthusiastic amateurs were first published by F.Pulszky (1879; 1897). Although he distinguished these finds from those of the Hallstatt period, he believed that the find assemblages from both periods represented the legacy of the Celts. Pulszky can definitely be credited with bringing an awareness of the importance of the research of the La Tène period, and with directing attention to the rich heritage of the Celtic period in Hungary. Still, the first monographic overview of the La Tène period finds only appeared many decades later (Márton, 1933). L.Hunyady's (1942-1944) overview of this period was based on all of the then known finds from the Carpathian Basin. She offered a detailed internal chronology of the La Tène period, based on a minute typological analysis of the finds, as well as an overview of chronological issues and the changes in the material culture, lifeways and customs of the Celtic population. Her monograph became the 'Bible' of Celtic studies for some three decades, even though the catalogue volume only appeared some twenty-five later. Unfortunately both volumes were published in Hungarian.

Major new advances in Celtic studies were made in the 1970s. M.Szabó's (1971) overview, published in several languages, a volume containing the papers read at an international Celtic conference held in Székesfehérvár and the catalogue

accompanying the exhibition organized for the occasion (Szabó, Petres, 1974) meant that Hungary had at last become part of mainstream Celtic studies. At present, Celtic studies in Hungary rest on two pillars: the series Corpus of Celtic Finds in Hungary, of which two volumes have been published so far (Horváth, Kelemen, Uzsocki, Vadász, 1987; Hellebrandt, 1999), and the continued efforts to publish the relevant finds of this period, as well as the growing number of studies focusing on a specific find group or region (Bónis, 1969; Petres, 1976; 1991; Maráz, 1977; Jerem, 1986). M.Szabó's (1988; 1991; 1992) studies on the Celts of the Carpathian Basin are in part based on these and in part on his own research.

However, the most significant advance in this respect is that in contrast to J.Filip's (1956) earlier view that the Carpathian Basin lay on the periphery of the Celtic world, it has now become clear that this region was one of the centres of the Celts from the 3rd century B.C. and that the cradle of eastern Celtic art lay here.

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