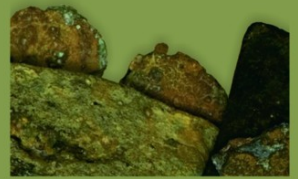


DISSERTATIONES ARCHAEOLOGICAE

ex Instituto Archaeologico Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae



Ser. 3. No. 2. | 2014

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Budapest 2014

Dissertationes Archaeologicae ex Instituto Archaeologico
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Preliminary report on the excavation of a new Late Bronze Age cemetery from Jobbágyi (North Hungary)

KRISTÓF FÜLÖP

*Institute of Archaeological Sciences
Eötvös Loránd University
fulopkr14@gmail.com*

GÁBOR VÁCZI

*Institute of Archaeological Sciences
Eötvös Loránd University
vaczigabor@gmail.com*

Abstract

During the summer of 2014 an archaeological team of the Institute of Archaeological Sciences of the Eötvös Loránd University participated in the excavations preceding the expansion of main road No. 21 in Nógrád County.¹ This project provided an opportunity to unearth a section of a large, biritual Late Bronze Age cemetery in the vicinity of the village of Jobbágyi.

The cemetery is situated on the edge of a marshy floodplain of the Zagyva River, on a shoreline running North to South (*Fig. 1*). Based on the excavated burials and the finds collected from the surface, its estimated expansion might cover an approximately 150×300 metres area. The excavation was carried out in two 20×150 metre sectors and a narrow trench, in which 207 Late Bronze Age burials came to light. Larger stones and stone piles covering the graves, as well as some burials with urns were visible right under the ploughed soil layer, in a depth of approximately 40 centimetres. The grave pits were southwest-northeast oriented, oblong with rounded corners, and their depth varied between 60 and 140 centimetres. Within the cemetery two densely used areas could be observed with groups consisting of 10–15 burials. These burials laid closely, 1–1.5 metres from each other within the groups (*Fig. 2*).

Due to agricultural activities no surface grave marks (piles of stones or burial mounds) could be detected, only scattered stone groups were noticeable on the surface. Smaller stone piles – one metre in diameter, half metre high and often oblong – were observed in their original position in several cases; they were 40–50 centimetres above the recent ground level.

The most frequent burial practice of the Jobbágyi cemetery was scattered cremation, during which remains of the cremated deceased (or parts of the remains)² were strewn onto the bottom of the burial pit, and the vessels were placed around them, often upside-down (*Fig. 5.1*). Bronze ornaments of the departed – among which bracelets, rings and pins occurred most frequently – were usually placed onto the bones (*Fig. 5.4–7*). In several cases bronze artefacts were positioned among and on the top of the remains secondarily, completely merged (*Fig. 5.6*). The way of placing these grave goods on the pyre may have partly resulted from their diverse function and character (the personal objects of the deceased). In the case of a

1 The project was supervised by Gábor V. Szabó, and Katalin Sebők helped our fieldwork, for the support of whom we are very grateful.

2 Concerning the amount of the remains significant differences could often be noted both in the case of scattered cremations and urn burials. It means a broad spectrum of amounts from a symbolic handful to hundreds of grammes. Beyond technical and ritual questions regarding the treatment of the cremations (for example collecting the remains, the way of the cremations until their final placement), this phenomenon clearly highlights the fact that the physical complex of the former body was not necessary for fully representing the deceased when placing him/her into the grave.

few burials the ashes and bone shards were deposited in some kind of a textile wrapping, which can be concluded from the regular contour of the cremations as well as the large pin once holding the mouth of the textile together (Fig. 5.4). Small, charred wood remains could also be observed among the ashes in some cases; however, the cremation had never taken place in the burial pit itself. Its location is yet unknown, since the place or places of the cremation did not fall into the excavated areas.

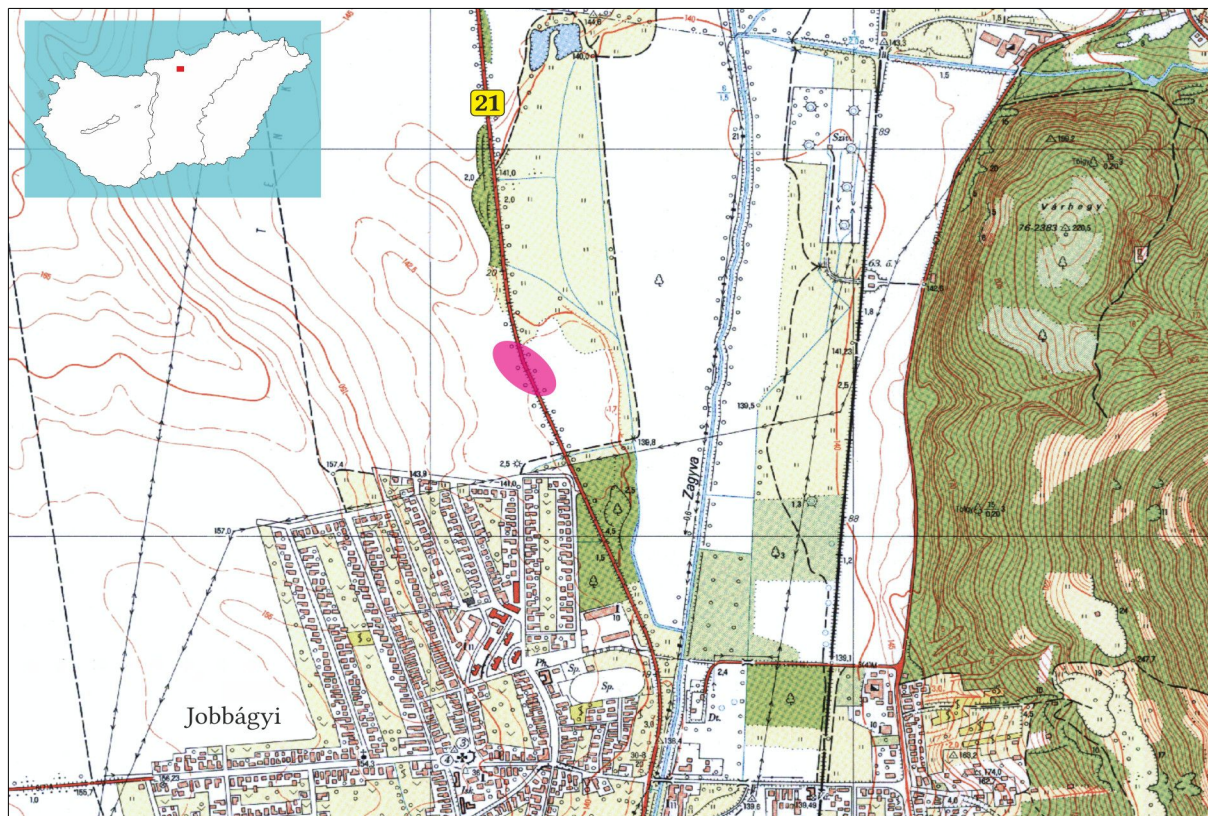


Fig. 1. The location of the Late Bronze Age cemetery in the vicinity of Jobbágyi.

The second most common form of deposition of the cremations was urn burials (Fig. 5.2). The remains were collected from the pyre into a ceramic vessel of the household (storage vessel, amphora, pot or a deep bowl), and no vessels made for this special purpose were used. Urns were usually situated in the middle of the grave pits. In some cases a mug and the bronze ornaments of the deceased were also put into the vessel used as an urn, and then the urn was covered with a bowl or sometimes with a flat stone (Fig. 5.3; Fig. 6.2). In many instances further vessels (small-sized pots, bowls) were placed outside of the urn – either next to it, onto the bottom of the grave pit, or onto its shoulder, in the case of larger urns for example amphorae – which may have been household utensils of the deceased (Fig. 5.2).

Inhumation burial can be considered a secondary burial practice, which constitutes a special element of the cemetery, since only children were buried by this funeral rite. However, compared to cremation burials, no differences can be observed apart from the treatment of the body. The construction of the grave pits is the same, and various pottery as well as bronze ornaments can be equally found among the grave goods. Owing to their age they might have formed a segment of the society which did not involve cremation burial practice, which was only due to grown-up members of the community with a “full” social status (Fig. 6.6).

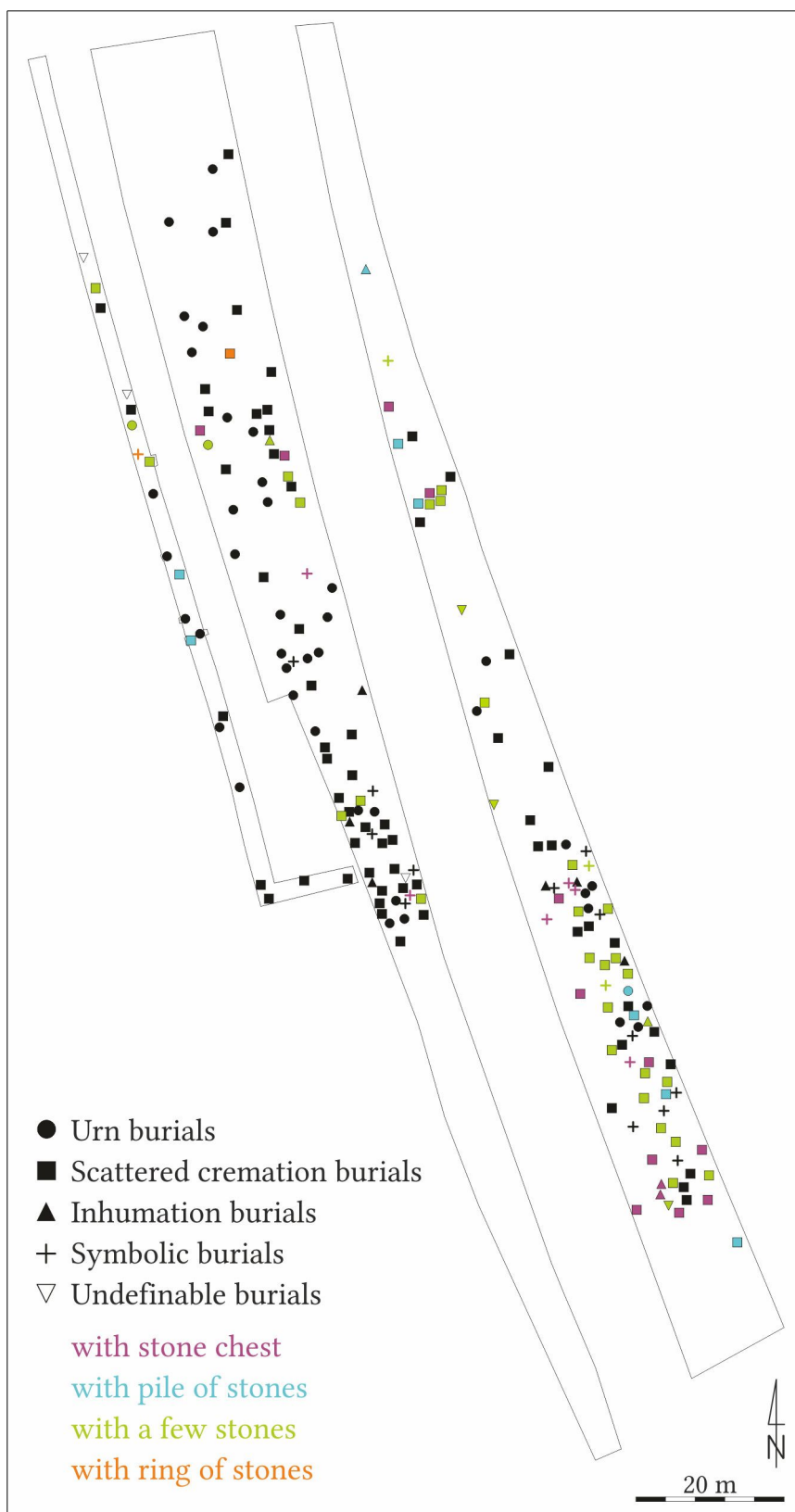


Fig. 2. A schematic map of the cemetery with the various burial practices.

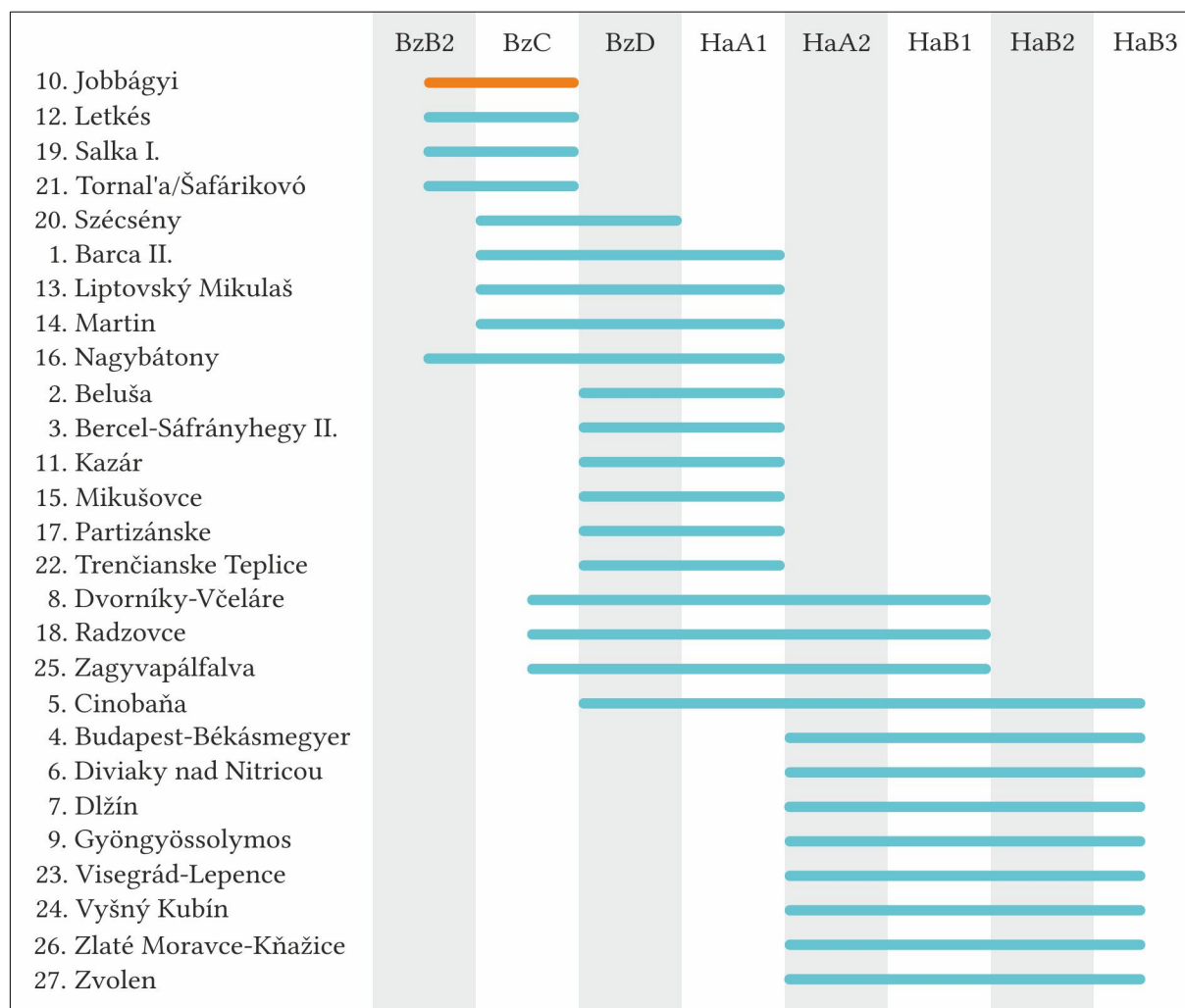


Fig. 3. The chronological position of stone constructions and stone-using burials in the Northern region of the Carpathian Basin.

Beside the graves containing cremations or a skeleton, symbolic burials without human remains also occurred in a small number (Fig. 6.1). In these cases only ceramic vessels were placed into the regularly formed graves, which were often constructed by stones (Fig. 6.3, 5). Some features also came to light which can be interpreted as symbolic graves; however, they differed from them in a few significant aspects. One or two drinking vessels (mugs) were placed into the middle of these smaller, shallow pits with no characteristic shape. An active relation between the departed and the living members of the communities is well documented not only in this period (for example the cemetery of Pitten³) but in other ones too. These simple, deposited drinking vessels may be the evidences of rituals (for example feasting) taking place during or after burials.

Different forms of stone use can be observed over the entire area of the cemetery; however, group-specific characteristics cannot be revealed (Fig. 2). Most frequently a few ashlar were placed above the grave or into the grave pit beside the cremations (Fig. 5.1; Fig. 6.2). One of its variants is the formation of a large pile of stones on the burial. Another version is when constructing a stone chest, thus putting flat stones set on the edge around the wall of the grave pit, then covering them with one or more large and flat stones (Fig. 6. 3–4). In the case

3 SØRENSEN ET AL. 2008.

of a simpler version of this complex construction flat stones set on the edge were only placed by the wall of the grave, in a symbolic way (Fig. 6.5–6).

Based on stylistic characteristics of the grave goods the use of this biritual cemetery can be dated to the Late Bronze Age, more precisely to the BzB2–BzC period, and it can be associated with the Tumulus culture. Its grave goods, burial practices and time of usage also confirm that the closest parallel of the Jobbágyi cemetery is the Salka I. cemetery excavated by the Ipoly River.⁴

Among the above presented burial practices the Jobbágyi cemetery differs from other Hungarian Tumulus culture sites in the outstanding and diverse use of stone. Marker stones, rings of stones, piles of stones and stone chests appear in the northern regions of the Carpathian Basin in the beginning of the Late Bronze Age, and they remain in use until the end of the period (Fig. 3). This burial practice, independent of the change of ceramic styles and applied over centuries, can be also found at Tumulus, Piliny, Lausitz, Urnfield and Kyjatice culture sites. The distribution of Late Bronze Age graves with stone constructions is concentrated in an area bordered by the Vág, Hernád and Upper Zagyva Valleys and the Danube Bend (Fig. 4). The graves of the Jobbágyi cemetery with stone constructions represent the southernmost occurrence of this burial rite. The establishment of long-distance relations maintained by those who used this cemetery is most probably due to the significant role of the Zagyva Valley functioning as an important North-South route of cultural and economical interactions.

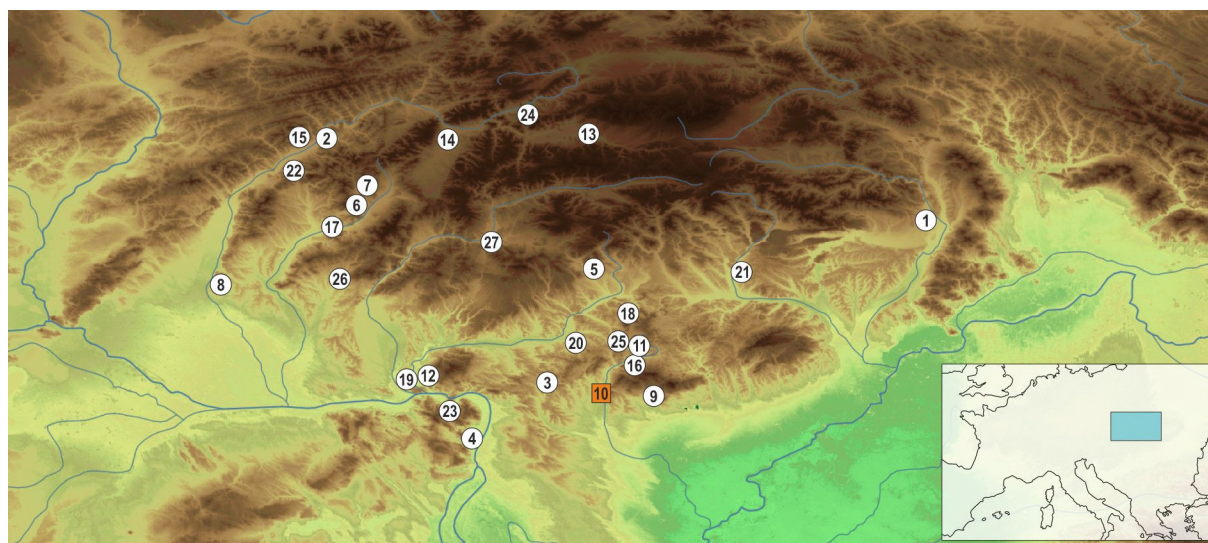


Fig. 4. The location of stone constructions and stone-using burials in the Northern region of the Carpathian Basin. 1. Barca II. (JÍLKOVÁ 1961); 2. Beluša (FURMÁNEK 1970); 3. Bercel-Sáfrányhegy II. (GUBA 2009); 4. Budapest-Békásmegyér (KALICZ-SCHREIBER-KALICZ 2002); 5. Cinobaňa (FURMÁNEK-MITAŠ-PAVELKOVÁ 2010); 6. Diviaky nad Nitricou (VELIAČIK 1991); 7. Dĺžin (BUDINSKÝ-KRIČKA 1962); 8. Dvorníky-Včeláre (LAMIOVÁ-SCHMIEDLOVÁ 2009); 9. Gyöngyössolymos (PÁSZTOR 1929); 10. Jobbágyi-Hosszú-dűlő; 11. Kazár (CSALOG-KEMENCZEI 1966, 81); 12. Letkés (NAGY 1970); 13. Liptovský Mikuláš-Onarašová (VELIAČIK 1975); 14. Martin (BENKOVSKÁ-PIVIVAROVÁ 1975); 15. Mikušovce (PIVOVAROVÁ 1965); 16. Nagybátony (PATAY 1954); 17. Partizánske (BENKOVSKÁ-PIVIVAROVÁ 1975); 18. Radzovce (FURMÁNEK 1990); 19. Salka I. (TOČIK 1964); 20. Szécsény (CSALOG-KEMENCZEI 1966, 81); 21. Tornal'a/Šafáriková (FURMÁNEK 1968; 1970); 22. Trenčianske Teplice (PIVOVAROVÁ 1965); 23. Visegrád-Lepence (GRÓF 2009); 24. Vyšný Kubín (ČAPLOVIČ 1957); 25. Zagyvapálfalva (HILLEBRAND 1926; GUBA-VADAY 2008; GUBA 2010); 26. Zlaté Moravce-Kňažice (KUJOVSKÝ 1994); 27. Zvolen (BALAŠA 1964).

4 TOČIK 1964.

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Fig. 5. A selection of the most common burial practices and bronze objects.



Fig. 6. A symbolic grave (1) and use patterns of ashlar in the burial constructions (2-6).