

HUNGARIAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF CENTRAL AND SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

CSANÁD BÁLINT

Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest,
Hungary

At first I would like to try to answer a question, which many would raise as I did when I received the invitation to Bloomington. It was and is still not obvious, why the organizers of the conference considered it necessary to make somebody speak about Hungarian archaeology? Looking at the program, this question will become meaningful, because one may observe that there are other branches of social sciences neglected at this conference, although they play – or appear to play – a more important role in our modern world. I think that many people in academic circles, at least Professors Mihály Szegedy-Maszák and László Borhi most certainly knew: Hungary played an eminent role in archaeology for about a century. This is one more reason to survey the greater part of the facts and factors connected with the subject.

Hungarian archaeology was in good health and flourishing until about the 1960s. This period appears to us as to have been the golden age, but it is doubtless the chronological distance that can make such impression. In fact the overall state of development in Central Europe until World War II did not actually favor a real golden period, and it would be a grave error to embellish those times when archaeologists were compelled to count every penny. This epitaph “golden age” may be justified exclusively in comparison to other countries within the region in the same period. Why it was so reaches far beyond my profession, being not specialized in nineteenth- and twentieth-century history, but the fact is that the latter mentioned circumstance contributed also to the good reputation of Hungarians in world archaeological research.

Considering the actual “health” of Hungarian archaeology, it is surely still not “ill”, but fits the general situation in countries within the former Soviet block. The cessation of the formerly outstanding international representation of Hungarian archaeology is simply due to the fact that the financial support for archaeology in this country lags far behind that provided in other Central and Eastern European lands. This paper is doubtlessly not the right place to analyze this political phenomenon. (In using the word “political” I don’t mean the actually general policy of states all over the world in financing social sciences and science in general as such.) Let it be enough to remember very briefly the exclusive role of

archaeology in the state ideology of a good number of Central and Eastern European countries (reflected in Pan-Slavism and of the theory of Daco-Rumanian continuity) and of certain Asian and African states too (e.g. the recent interdiction of all research on pre-Islamic times in certain Islamic lands). As for Hungarian archaeology, it represented always a relatively refreshing island in the turbulence of nationalism. Namely when Hungarian archaeologists were theoretically in position to provide a place for ideological influences (until 1944/45), they kept a clear distance from all non-scientific tendencies in their research. Later, after World War II none of them would dare to make the mistake of right-wing deviation (when left-wing deviations and "internationalism" were in the 1950s officially expected...). No wonder that post-communist Hungary is actually searching in its cultural policy for a new attitude towards its past and its cultural heritage.

But let us now turn to the first century of Hungarian archaeology. (The developments since the 1960s concern too much the present day and will have to be by the following generation.) There were three factors that ensured a differentiated role in international research to Hungarian archaeology and archaeologists until the arrival of modern times.

1. Geographical and cultural factors

The climate of the Carpathian Basin is temperate continental: the summer is warm but not hot (the average temperature is 25 °C), the winter is mild (around 0 °C) rarely decreasing under -10 and only for shorter periods. This climate is due to the Carpathians which protect the basin against a 'Russian winter'. (The winter average temperatures is -7 °C to the north and east of the Carpathians.) Another example serves as an important climatic and far-reaching cultural basis for comparison: vine does not grow north and northeast of the Carpathian mountains. The Carpathian Basin is very rich in rivers, and Lake Balaton is the largest lake in Central Europe. These waters offered an inexhaustible source of nourishment until the middle of the twentieth century and relatively easy communication by water between the Western and Southeastern Europe. (Travelers crossing Hungary in the Middle Ages wrote that in Hungarian rivers only half is water while the other half is fish. It was also said that until river regulations in the middle of the nineteenth century watering horses proved difficult in the Tisza River because they were incessantly disturbed by the fish.) The Carpathian Basin has natural resources, which were known as early as in the Palaeolithic period and, which have been used basic raw materials for millennia. Such were for example the obsidian, the volcanic glass in the Tokaj-Eperjes mountains, which was sent hundreds of kilometers during the Palaeolithic and Neolithic periods, and also the salt and the copper mined in Transylvania. (For millennia this was one of the only salt sources in Central and Eastern Europe; the nearest other source was in

the area of present-day Salzburg. These especially favorable geographical circumstances lie behind the following facts:

a) The Carpathian basin has continuously been inhabited since the Palaeolithic age (one of the oldest Palaeolithic sites in Europe – uninhabited by 350 thousand B.C. – was found at Vértesszöllös.)

b) The Neolithic evolution (its population and/or its inventions) expanding from the Near East in the 6th millennium B.C. reached this area. In fact further toward the north or west it would not have found suitable natural setting for its agricultural and animal herding way of life.

c) The vast grasslands of the Great Hungarian Plain always attracted the mounted nomadic peoples of the Eurasian steppes. (Kimmerians in the sixth century B.C., Scythians in the fifth century, Sarmathians in the first through third centuries A.D., Huns in the fifth century, Avars in the sixth century, Magyars in the ninth century, Cumanians in the thirteenth century.)

d) Peoples migrating out from their homes in Western Europe chose this region to cross or to settle (the people of bell beakers ceramic and of the urn-field culture, the Celts).

e) The Roman Empire set up a province named Pannonia in the western part of the basin at the beginning of the first century.

There were only a few groups that could settle and/or rule over the whole of the Carpathian Basin as the Celts, the Avars and the Magyars. This is why it was always a culturally divided frontier zone where western, eastern and southern elements were mixed together. It is also the cause, together with the intensity of Hungarian archaeological research, that the number of sites is compared with other regions of Central and Eastern Europe exceedingly high. For example, 160 sites have been registered in the area of a single little village on the Great Hungarian Plain. There are sometimes not that many sites from a whole archaeological period in certain countries of Northern and Western Europe! For them it is hard to imagine the several thousands of sherds unearthed in a single Neolithic site! There are archaeologists who constantly try to develop more perfect methods, for example, in counting and evaluating the ceramic findings in Northern and Northwestern Europe. In the meantime their colleagues in Central and Southeastern Europe have to face the problem of where to store the tons of sherds dug up during one single excavation campaign of a Neolithic or Bronze Age settlement. The registration and excavation of all these requires considerable energy and resources. So Hungarian archaeologists, as most of their neighbouring colleagues, do not feel the necessity – and certainly do not have the time – to waste energy on purely theoretical problems. This is also why we do not have New Archaeology or post-processualism. Hungarians like their colleagues in the Carpathian Basin have to rescue the finds from ultimate destruction. This is doubtless more urgent than to write the ethical codex of archaeology.

We also need to draw to the front attention that danger lurks not only in deep ploughing or highway constructions which demolish whole settlements and cemeteries, but international smugglers cause an even greater loss. I mention this here because the degree of the damage is not generally known outside the circle of archaeologists. I do not want to speak about the one of the most sensational finds of the whole late Roman era, the silverware treasure called Seuso, whose origin was considered by the New York judiciary without paying attention to the soil analysis that proved its Hungarian origin and did not support the Lebanese version, as certain documents and quittances of international art dealers would suggest. The consequences of illegal excavations and antiquity trade cause unimaginable and irremediable damage to science. The greatest loss for archaeology is that some beautiful objects may get into the show cases of Western or Japanese museums, or private collections through these sources. But first, these objects have been removed from that scientific context, which is indispensable for their evaluation, determination of chronology, and reconstruction of everyday use. Second, the curators of the collections, those who write the catalogues, sometimes do so without much knowledge of the local language and culture, and being often inexperienced in local archaeology do not know how to handle their finds. So they are often not able to provide more than an art historical analysis. Third, the gap between "royal," "princely" finds and that of common people becomes even more deep, regardless of the fact that they belonged to the same society, to the same culture. If these objects had been left in their original context, they might have served as historical sources, which is the final aim of the archaeology.

2. Cultural factors and traditions

It is obvious that the variability and richness of archaeological material in the Carpathian Basin, which meant Hungary until 1920, stimulated the formation of Hungarian archaeology and attracted specialists from all over the world. Moreover, this variable and rich material was easily accessible to archaeologists from other countries. Hungary borders Western Europe and at the end of the nineteenth century the total length of its railway lines was triple that of the neighbouring countries. Public security at that time was excellent. Hungarian scholars, even if their strong accent is easily recognizable all over the world, are polyglots, which is rooted in three psychological circumstances. The fact of their linguistic isolation, the old notion that 'we are alone,' and the political structure and mentality of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

Beside the politically and culturally decisive role of the German language in Hungarian, and in general in Central European archaeology, a historical aspect must also be considered. Europe was born in the Early Middle Ages, most cer-

tainly in Carolingien Empire from joining of the Latin mentality and the German capacity for industry. The birth of the modern archaeology was similarly, on the basis of the eternal attraction of the Germanic peoples to the Roman world. It was the German Johann Winckelmann in the eighteenth century, the Danish Christian Thomsen in the first half of the nineteenth century and the Swedish Oscar Montelius in the second half of the nineteenth century who founded an archaeology that was no longer restricted to the collection of singular objects but included the need for their systematic analysis. The affinity of Hungarian archaeology to its German counterpart can not exclusively be explained by geographical, political and cultural connections. German archaeology is the only one where science is not directed by ephemeral personal or institutional contacts, by casual excavations, or a preference for certain periods. It has a general interest toward the whole region. For leading German scholars, researchers and leaders come and go, institutions close down or change, but finds of world historical importance stay in the earth and they must be reached.

In this situation it is evident that for Hungarian archaeologists the German language has been essential. I must, however, emphasize that should the need arise, each of us could cope with English and/or French or Italian, and it should also be mentioned that until 1945 Latin was a compulsory subject for the examinations. From 1950 on Russian became compulsory in primary and secondary schools. Its knowledge is indispensable for specialists in Hungarian prehistory and can be very useful for an understanding of publications in all Slavic languages. (The abandonment of teaching Russian for sake of the English followed the change of the political system. It deprives the younger generation of direct contact with some of the neighbouring countries.)

Archaeology does not mean exclusively work in a library. Excavations, visiting museums, and monuments is also integral part of it. Study trips of Hungarian archaeologists, naturally, were aimed at Austria and/or Germany, and it was also evident that the regular spring or autumn excursions of archaeological departments were organized mostly in Italy and Greece. The possession of a classical education was also natural until the 1920s and 1930s not only for archaeologists but for everybody who studied social sciences. Classical archaeology is also an indispensable skill for researchers of the migration period (even if many of them unfortunately still do not know it). The question of belonging to Europe did not emerge as a problem for Hungarian archaeologists – they did belong to Europe until 1945 – or even until the Communist takeover in 1948.

So perhaps it is more understandable that at the beginning of world archaeology, in 1876, the International Congress of Anthropology and Prehistory held its meeting in Budapest. That is also why the Union Internationale des Sciences Préhistoriques et Protohistoriques, uniting all archaeologists of the world (until the secession in 1986) appointed Budapest to be the host of the first congress after its foundation in 1936. It was “only” history that impeded its organization.

First, Hitler banned it in 1940, as did Stalin eight years later. After 1945 there were endeavors on both sides of the Iron Curtain to ease isolation even in the hardest times of the dictatorship. In 1955 János Banner (1888–1981) a professor acknowledged both within and outside Hungary succeeded in organizing a 'mini-Pan-European' congress. During the Dark Age of political isolations at the middle of the twentieth century, the greatest help in maintaining contacts was provided by German and Austrian colleagues and by the Swede Wilhelm Holmquist and Holger Arbman, who by sending off-prints, books and later, when it became possible, invited well-known specialists to ease their isolation and organized study trips for their students to Hungary. In this way they helped to maintain the standard of Hungarian archaeology in spite of political circumstances. One of the greatest personalities of world archaeology, the English Gordon Childe, also added considerably to it. Due of course to his international esteem and Childe's flirtation with Marxism, he was an endured or even a favored guest in the Soviet Union and the countries of the Soviet block.

3. Institutional and personal contributions

Founded in 1802 the Hungarian National Museum (Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum) is one of the oldest museums in Europe that was not established royal or princely finds. The leading Hungarian archaeological journal (*Archaeologiai Értésítő*) is one of the oldest still existing periodicals in the world (published since 1867), while the *Archaeologiai Közlemények* was started in 1858. The chair of archaeology ("Cathedra numismatica et archaeologica") of the Péter Pázmány (since 1951 Loránd Eötvös) University founded in 1778 was the very first among Central and Eastern European universities. Its first professor was István Schönvizner (1738–1818) who started the excavations of the Roman cities Aquincum and Savaria and published the first synthesis of Hungarian numismatics. After the foundation of Hungary's second university at Kolozsvár (today Cluj, Rumania) Béla Pósta in 1899 began systematic exploration and archaeological research in Transylvania. After the peace treaty of World War I the former Kolozsvár University settled in Szeged and from 1929 on archeological research came under the leadership of János Banner and his chair became the seed of modern Hungarian archaeology. Aside from the most important excavations on sites of the Neolithic era, the Migration Period and the Middle Ages, they developed settlement archaeology, and prepared the concept of Archaeological Topography, which would be realized some thirty years later. Approximately a dozen provincial museums have been founded in the second half of the nineteenth century, and a monographic series and periodicals in German or in bilingual version have been published (*Dolgozatok* [Kolozsvár and later, Szeged University, from 1910], *Archaeologia Hungarica* [National Museum, from 1926], *Dissertationes*

Pannonicae [Budapest University, from 1933]. It is impossible to give even a shortened list of the many excavations, which has been made and constitute the basis of archaeology in the whole Carpathian Basin.

As everywhere in Europe at the turn of the century, only a few full-time researchers with university degrees represented "official" Hungarian archaeology: János Érdy (1796–1881), archaeologist and numismatist of the National Museum, and Bálint Kuzsinszky (1864–1938) whose name is inseparable from the excavation of the ancient Roman city of Aquincum and who was the founder of its museum. Pioneers of the well-excavated prehistoric settlements were Lajos Márton (1867–1934) and Ferenc Tompa (1893–1945). Between the 1920s and 1950s under the direction of the Count István Zichy in the National Museum and Árpád Buday and János Banner at Szeged University Hungarian archaeologists did their best work. Between the 1930s and 1960s, and beyond the following also made important contributions to archeology Jenő Hillebrand, Aladár Radnóti, Tibor Nagy, Károly Sági, Ilona Kovrig, László Barkóczi, Ida Kutzián, Éva Bónis, Pál Patay, Amália Mozsolics, respectively Mihály Párducz, Alajos Bálint, József Korek and Gyula Török). The Kolozsvár school worked obviously on the archaeological exploration of Transylvania, but its achievements contributed to the research of all Central and Southeastern Europe. The prehistorian Márton Roska (1880–1961) also deserves mention. History didn't care, of course, not even archaeologists. The careers at József Csalog, a specialist in prehistory and of Dezső Csallány (1903–1977) who worked on the early Middle Ages stopped after 1945 and they were compelled to live and work in less advantageous circumstances.

Under these academic "generals," a long line of "enlisted men," often with very modest education, constituted the real "army." The battle, however, was fought and won at the birth and in the childhood of Hungarian archaeology. From the point of view of European archaeology and science we are and will be grateful to them. In Hungary at the turn of the century researchers carried out archaeological work modestly and with due reverence and respect toward scholarship. The researchers of the Hungarian conquest period remain grateful forever to a chief medical officer András Jósa (1834–1918) for the excavation of hundreds of graves from the tenth-eleventh centuries in the region of Nyíregyháza which provides one of the richest finds of this period. The exemplary personality of medieval archaeology in the 1950s István Méri (1911–1976) was originally a modest restorer. His professional humbleness and relentless effort to note every minor detail exceeded those of many academic colleagues. All specialists of medieval settlements consider themselves, at least indirectly, as his pupils. Scientific ethics and love of work can be learnt from them and from many others in Hungary as well as abroad.

It is very difficult to exactly estimate the significance of the pioneers. Everything should be evaluated by taking into consideration the tendencies of the ep-

och and the social and cultural opportunities of the given region. We hardly note any longer Miklós Jankovich (1772–1846), who discovered the first grave of the conquering Magyars in 1832; Ferenc Pulszky (1814–1897) ambassador of the first independent Hungarian government to London (1849), when in 1883 showed that in Central and Eastern Europe prehistory did not only consist of the Stone and Bronze Ages but Copper Age as well. He was also the first who found some of the archaeological material of the Celts in Central Europe and that of the sixth and seventh century Avars. The polymath Ottó Herman (1835–1914) excavated the first Paleolithic site of the Carpathian Basin. He wrote among others monographs on spiders and on the fishing of the Hungarians as well. Working on the prehistory of this part of Europe, who can forget or avoid the publications of the Benedictin Flóris Rómer (1815–1889) and the Cistercian Arnold Marosi (1873–1939)? It is a big loss to research that the lifework of Géza Nagy (1855–1915), remains unknown. He first attempted to evaluate finds of the Migration period together with that of the orient and also combined archaeological data. Interestingly little of the work of József Hampel (1849–1913), a young archaeologist of the Hungarian National Museum on the Bronze Age, is valid any more. It has nevertheless been used all over the world for the great bulk of material it contains. His other important book, the complete publication of finds from the Migration Period in 1905 has many items that have retained their value. And when at the turn of the century the modern archaeology of the Near East appeared, Ferenc László (1873–1925), a grammar school professor in Sepsiszentgyörgy having unearthed the first early Neolithic settlement in 1907, already knew that the seemingly insignificant and esthetically minor sherds and objects from his excavations were traces of a civilization born in the Near East and the Aegean.

A special contribution to European archaeology represented the greater part of Géza Fehér's (1890–1955) lifework. Working in Bulgaria as member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences he became the "father" of modern archaeology of the Protobulgar period in Bulgaria. His excavations collecting data on history and archaeology were supported by the king of Bulgaria. Unfortunately his name and his work became banned during the Communist time.

Study trips abroad did not mean cultural tourism for Hungarian archaeologists. In 1895 in the expedition to the Orient sent by the count Zichy, Mór Wosinsky (1854–1907), a parish priest from Szekszárd and Béla Pósta (1862–1919), later the first university professor of archaeology in Kolozsvár, were looking for the antecedents of the Avar and Magyar finds. And when the modern period arrived, it was the Hungarian Nándor Fettich (1900–1971), as well as the Finn A. M. Tallgren, who first went in 1924 to the Soviet Union and saw the collections in the Ural region. He collected data and published them in the following decades, rendering it accessible to the whole scientific world. As editor of the journal

Archaeologiai Értesítő, he concentrated on publishing the papers of eminent foreign scholars. The same Nándor Fettich together with Gyula László (1910–), a master of many generations of specialists of the early Middle Ages, who in the midst of the war, dressed in hated German uniforms but packed and rescued the collections of the Kiev Museum and the Church Treasury. The Red Army thanked them in a special dispatch. (This latter was “forgotten” by the communist authorities and both of them got into trouble on account of this journey to the East.)

I want to finish the review of the accomplishment of Hungarian archaeology with the activities around the end of the World War II. The real achievements (excavations, publications) reached with smaller or larger delays the scientific world. The real scholars themselves could travel to Western Europe first in exceptional cases, but then more and more frequently. The scientific community of the Western world, however, similarly to the politicians accepted the status quo. László Vértes (1914–1968), acquired great international acknowledgment for his study of the Palaeolithic age got his post at the end of the 1940s based on political consideration and without any university degree. From his own enthusiasm real scientific achievement emerged and he became a well-known specialist with academic degrees.

It is impossible to forget to mention here that Hungarian archaeology was the first in Central and Eastern Europe to introduce intensively interdisciplinary researches. The contribution of well-known paleoanthropologists (Lajos Bartucz, János Nemeskéri, Pál Lipták) and a paleozoologist (Sándor Bökönyi) have served scholarship.

As for the chronological limit of the present paper, I do make an exception here in the case of Hungarian archaeologists, who become established abroad. Their emigration was not simply a change of residence. The first name on the list must be that of András Alföldi (1895–1981), professor of the Budapest University, author of classical books on archaeology and the history of the Roman Age, as well as the Migration period. He left the country in 1947 and after a stay in Switzerland went to Princeton, the Institute for Advanced Studies, where he continued to write basic monographs on Roman history. István Foltiny (1909–1996), who dealt with the Copper and Bronze Ages joined him there later. During his visits back to Hungary in the 1970s, he always found a way to give some help to Hungarian colleagues. Nobody knows what direction the research of eleventh through fourteenth century Hungarian art would have taken in Hungary if Magda Bárány-Oberschall had not emigrated and settled in Germany after the World War II. The young György Szabó was forced by the failure of the revolution in 1956 to New York, where he became curator of a private collection. At home he could have become a dynamic personality of the newborn medieval archaeology. At the same time it was good luck for universal science that these losses are not real “war losses” since the emigrants always enriched the recipient

country. It can also be added that in the harshest years of the Stalinistic period (1949–1953) they could do research easier than their friends and colleagues, who stayed at home and were obliged e.g. to hear ideological seminars.

However, notwithstanding the political atmosphere, it would be a mistake to omit the positive achievements after the World War II. The campaign to inventory the finds kept in provincial museums, the foundation of the *Acta Archaeologica* by the Academy of Sciences (1951), a journal in foreign languages, the project to publish the whole list of names and the materials of the greatest cemeteries of the Avar and early Hungarian period, the first volume of the *Handbook of Archaeology*, the start of a series of long-term excavations on the Neolithic and Middle Ages, the establishment of a supervisory board of the provincial museums were doubtlessly signs of a more serious attention to archeology.

Epilogue

Despite of all developments and results made scientiometry, I am simply convinced that achievements in the social sciences are numerically not measurable, especially not research, which has a certain national character. Of course one may become a well-known Egyptologist or specialist of John Donne's poetry in Hungary too, but publishing papers of the provincial museums or universities can certainly not bring them big international reputation. So what could be expected if somebody is working on the subject of popular theaters in Hungary in the eighteenth century? If somebody takes seriously the concept of multiculturalism, it is unimaginable without national cultures.

It can be stated that Hungarians as compared to the other Eastern and Central European countries have an outstanding place. To preserve it, or at least to stay in the vicinity of the top, individual achievements are no longer enough. Our science needs better financing we need also a regularly functioning institutional background, libraries and relevant publication possibilities. Politicians simply must decide, shall they answer to the question of Marc Bloch, put exactly sixty years ago: "Que demander ... l'histoire?" And afterwards they should reflect a little bit on another question, that of Paul Gauguin: "D'ou venons-nous? Qui sommes nous? Ou allons-nous?" If they do it, the past will have future.