

NAGYBERKI-SZALACSKA – A HALLSTATT PERIOD CENTRE OF POWER IN TRANSDANUBIA

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The hilltop settlement at Nagyberki-Szalacska (Somogy County, Hungary) is usually regarded as one of the most important Early Iron Age (EIA) centres of power in Transdanubia. This perception is largely based on the evidence provided by the adjacent tumulus cemetery comprising more than a hundred burial mounds. Due to the outstanding grave assemblages, Nagyberki-Szalacska is a relatively well-known Early Iron Age site in Western Hungary, however, an assessment of the results of these excavations at the site is still missing. In addition, in the 1980s excavations were carried out at the hilltop settlement. These unearthed a large number of Early Iron Age features and finds that hold valuable, yet unpublished information about the Early Iron Age community at Szalacska. In this paper, my aim is to provide sort of an overview of the Early Iron Age site at Nagyberki-Szalacska.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, my attention was caught by fragments of a vessel made of thin bronze sheet held in the Prehistoric Collection of the Hungarian National Museum (HNM). Based on their structural and ornamental properties the find dates to the Early Iron Age (EIA). Although, nothing is sure about its provenience, former employees of the museum proposed the possibility of the find originating from Nagyberki-Szalacska. But, without any firm evidence, the remark ‘Szalacska (?)’ in the inventory book is nothing more than an educated guess (Soós/Lukács 2023). Despite the guess being unsubstantiated, it is worth discussing why Nagyberki-Szalacska seemed like an obvious candidate for the provenience of the bronze sheet fragments.

First of all, due to its exceptionally long research history and some remarkable discoveries, Nagyberki-Szalacska is one of the most well-known EIA sites in Western Hungary. Over the last one and a half century the three excavation campaigns carried out within the extensive tumulus cemetery north of the prehistoric hilltop settlement near Szalacska led to the accumulation of a considerable EIA assemblage in the Prehistoric Collection of the HNM which contains several fragments of different kinds of bronze vessels, though, the bronze sheet fragments of unknown provenience are in much better condition and are of a vessel type hitherto unknown among the finds recovered from the site (Soós/Lukács 2023).

In addition, the site complex near Szalacska resembles those settlements of the Hallstatt East which are commonly seen as centres of power insofar as the settlement near Szalacska occupies a prominent position on a small hill as well as overlooks an extensive tumulus cemetery (Egg 1996, 59; Metzner-Nebelsick 2017a, 444). Similar patterns can be seen at a number of sites in Western Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, and Austria, with the Burgstallkogel and the Sulmtal cemetery as a paragon. Importantly, it is the separate tumulus group of the cemetery in the Sulm Valley near Kleinklein, the Pommerkogel and the Kröllkogel to be precise, that provided the best analogies of the vessel fragments kept in the HNM. It seems as if by writing the name Szalacska on the box containing the bronze vessel fragments, former colleagues at the museum were trying to show support for C. Dobiat’s opinion that Nagyberki-Szalacska is indeed the easternmost location of the Sulmtal group, a concept he put forward in his monograph on the tumulus cemetery in the Sulm Valley (Dobiat 1980, 176). Although a resurfaced looter’s find from Szalacska might serve as such a proof, today’s researchers tend to think of Kleinklein and Nagyberki-Szalacska as sites of different cultural groups of the Eastern Hallstatt zone (Egg 2021, fig. 3; Metzner-Nebelsick 2017b, fig. 1).

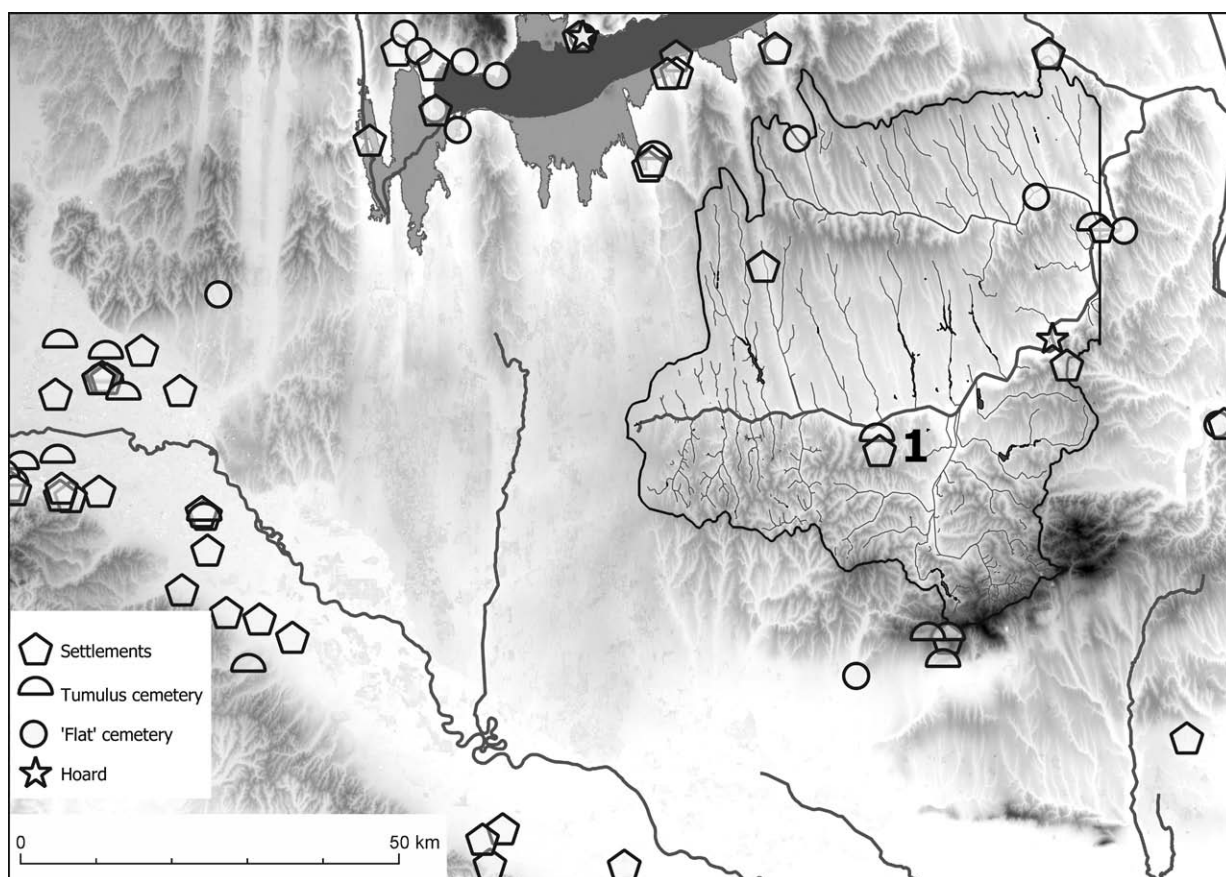


Fig. 1. Regional overview of the EIA sites in Southern Transdanubia and adjacent regions with the catchment of the Kapos River highlighted. 1. Nagyberki-Szalacska. Map by the author.

Despite the importance and long research history of the site, the tumulus cemetery and, even more so, the hilltop settlement are still somewhat obscure. In this paper I would like to shed some light on what there is to know about the EIA site near Szalacska.

CONTEXT AND TOPOGRAPHY

The prehistoric fortified settlement on the Szalacska hill is located in Southern Transdanubia, in the central part of the catchment area of the Kapos River (Fig. 1). In fact, the prehistoric site is situated along the south-eastern border of a small valley linked directly to the Kapos River. In terms of sheer numbers, the distance between the hilltop settlement and the Kapos River is 3 km. As a result, the hilltop settlement, reaching the height of 239 m a.s.l., has often been seen as central place exercising control over the Kapos Valley along the middle course of the river, at least during the later prehistoric periods (Patek 1968, 19; 1993, 132).

Owing to the works of Zoltán Czajlik and Balázs Holl, we now have a fairly clear picture of the extension and inner structure of the tumulus cemetery which due to agricultural cultivation endures continuous destruction (Holl/Czajlik 2013). The burial mounds form uncertainly distinguishable groups in the small valley running from south to north. Most of the mounds are situated north of the hilltop settlement marking a possible route connecting the hilltop and the Kapos River.

In fact, this possible route also takes shape if we look at how one could have been able to perceive the local landscape from the hilltop settlement. Based on the viewshed analysis of the landscape around the hilltop settlement conducted on the digital elevation model created by the South-Transdanubian Water Management Directorate, it becomes apparent that the mounds follow the line along which the hilltop settlement could have had visual contact with the Kapos Valley (Fig. 2: 1). Having mentioned that, the fact also has to be highlighted that based on the same analysis the settlement had strong visual contacts

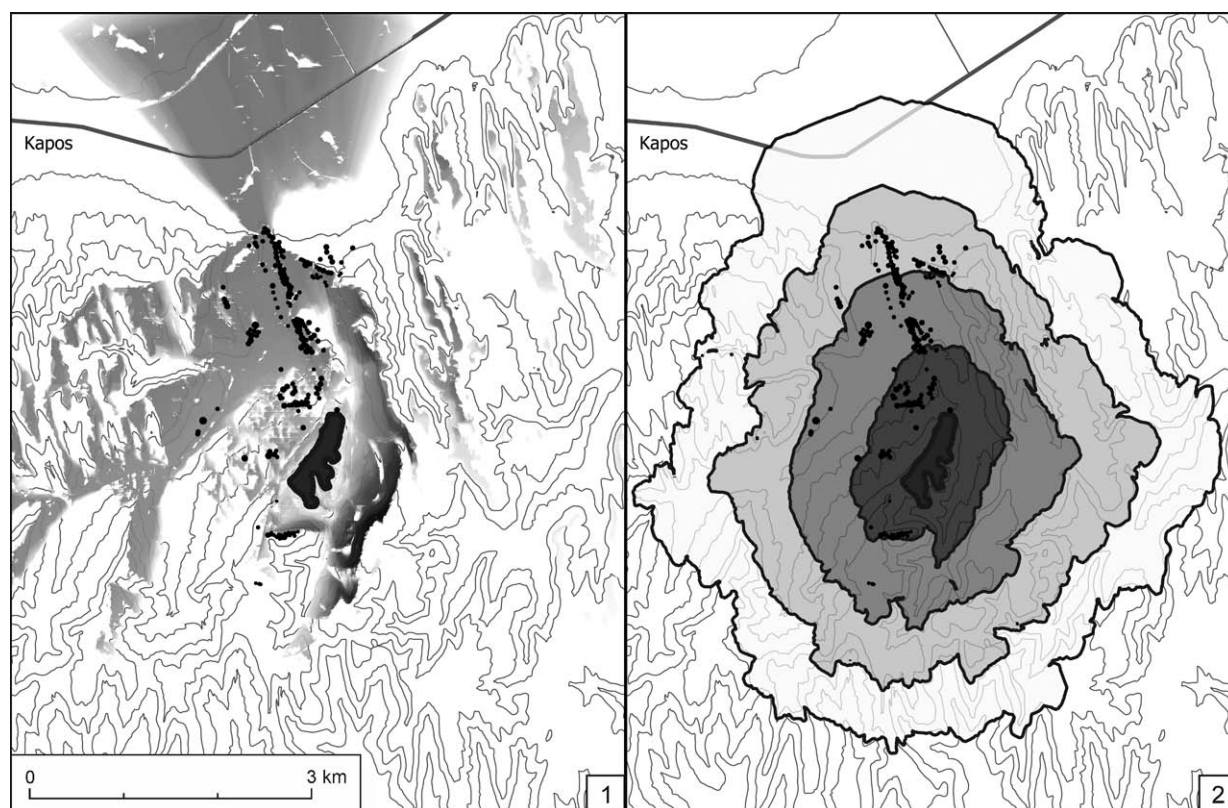


Fig. 2. Topographical map of the Szalacska site complex. 1 – viewshed analysis of the Szalacska hilltop settlement; 2 – 60-minute-walk least-cost site catchment of the Szalacska settlement. Map by the author.

towards the west and even more so to the east. However, as opposed to the landscape directly to the west, the current state of research does not have any firm evidence of prehistoric activities in the areas adjacent to the settlement to the east.

Having mentioned prehistoric activities outside the prehistoric hilltop settlement, it is worth looking at the topographical properties of the settlement and its possible catchment area. The prehistoric settlement on the Szalacska hill is supposed to have occupied an area of approximately 22 hectares covering large parts of the hilltop. In addition, archaeologists of the Rippl-Rónai Museum of Kaposvár suggest that there are prehistoric settlement traces in the western foreground of the hill (Fig. 4). Unfortunately, at this point we cannot be sure whether the EIA settlement on the hill occupied the entire hilltop. What seems to be sure is that the EIA settlement extended from the southern rampart to the chapel in the north, but more on this topic later. Given the uncertainties regarding the extent of the prehistoric settlement the catchment area shall be calculated around the extent of the polygon of the official heritage record. During the calculations, I applied the so-called ‘modified Tobler’ algorithm (Herzog 2020, table 18: 2; Márquez-Pérez/Vallejo-Villalta/Álvarez-Francoso 2017). Isochromes of multiples of 15 minutes and concentric zones between them were calculated around the hilltop settlement. Comparing the extent of the cemetery with the least-cost zones reveals that the layout of the cemetery extends beyond the areas conventionally thought to be theatres of everyday activities of the population of the hilltop settlement (Fig. 2: 2). As a result, it seems reasonable to suggest again that the mounds could have been built so that they follow the main route from the Kapos River to the settlement. Also, it would appear, that the community living on the hilltop could have used the surrounding areas for purposes other than funerary. Interestingly, the probably less known southern tumulus group of the cemetery, the so-called Csille mounds, outline both the southern part of the 15-minute isochrome and the southern horizon seen from the hilltop settlement.

Even though the tumulus cemetery seems to underline the strong contact of the hilltop settlement towards the Kapos River, and there is a recurrent opinion that the Szalacska hilltop served as a centre of power in the region, there are hilltop settlements along the river valley which have a more direct relationship to the Kapos. The best example is probably the prehistoric hilltop settlement near Regöly,

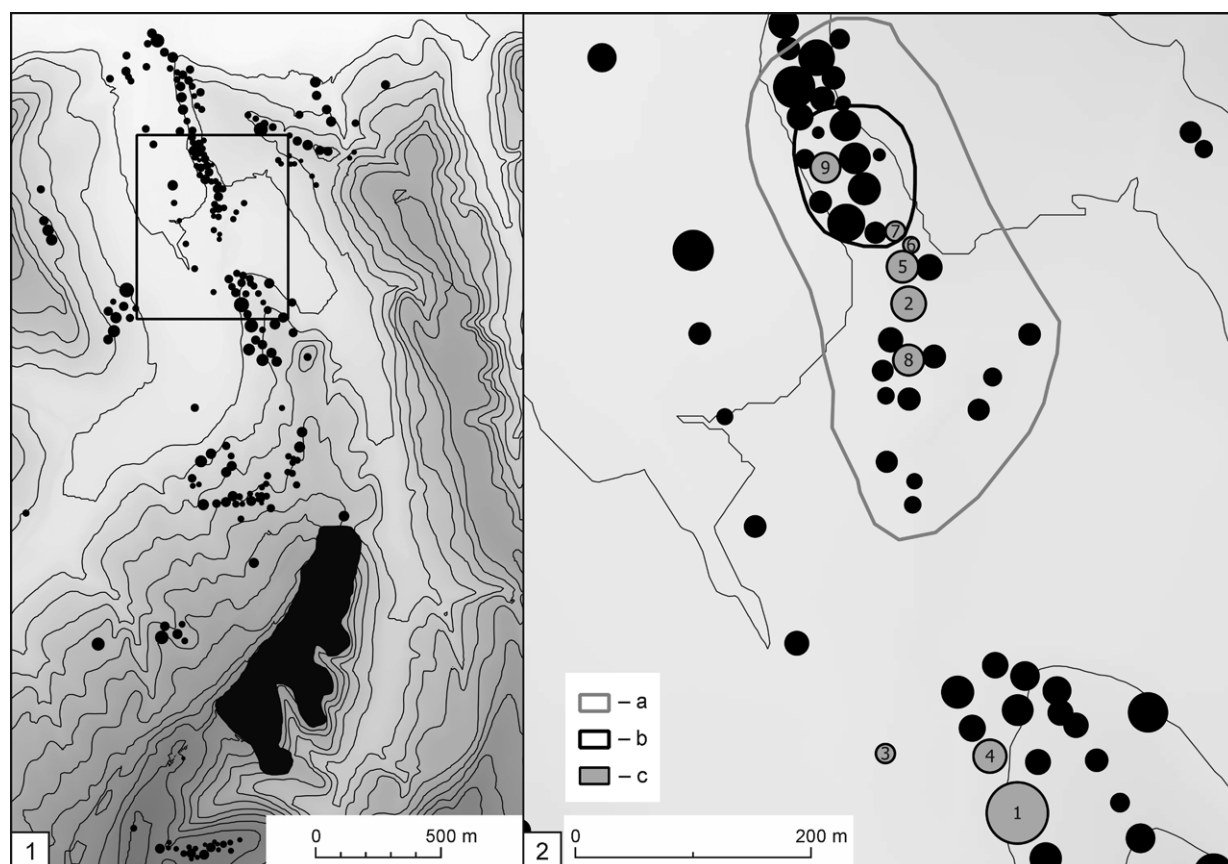


Fig. 3. Excavations in the Szalacska tumulus cemetery. 1 – overview of the Szalacska hilltop settlement and burial mounds identified in the surrounding landscape; 2 – part of the Szalacska cemetery marked on the left image. Legend: a – area where the excavation in 1876 took place; b – area where the excavation in 1943 took place; c – tumuli excavated in the 1970s (numbers after T. Kemenczei). Map by the author.

whose significance in the EIA is highlighted by the recently excavated tumulus (Szabó/Fekete 2014). The prehistoric settlement near Regöly is located on a loess plateau emerging adjacent to the confluence of the Kapos River and Koppány stream, as a result, the prehistoric occupants had a direct overlook on both waterways.

Interestingly, while there are at least three prehistoric hilltop settlements, with EIA occupation, which are commonly seen as important centres of power in the Kapos Valley (Patek 1968, 20), the EIA settlement network within the catchment area of the Kapos River is still mostly unknown (Fig. 1; Patek 1993, 132). Currently, there is only one EIA settlement in this region whose EIA occupation is confirmed by documented excavations. Hence, one of the main tasks of the research in the near future is to uncover further nodes of the EIA settlement network. For the time being, however, one has to rely on the settlement discovered near Mernye-Rézdomb when investigating settlements traditionally thought to lack central functions (Honti *et al.* 2016, 216).

Although there are other EIA hilltop settlements in the catchment area of the Kapos River, the largest tumulus cemetery in the region is, beyond dispute, the one near the Szalacska hilltop with well over a hundred burial mounds (Holl/Czajlik 2013).

FROM THE HEROIC PAST TO YESTERDAY

The history of research near Nagyberki-Szalacska begins with a survey and excavation initiated by Flóris Rómer. Since he was overwhelmed with the organisation of the 8th International Congress of Anthropology and Prehistoric Archaeology, he asked historian Ernő Kammerer and architect Antal Hencz to carry out investigations at the tumulus cemetery near Nagyberki-Szalacska. Hencz made the first detailed

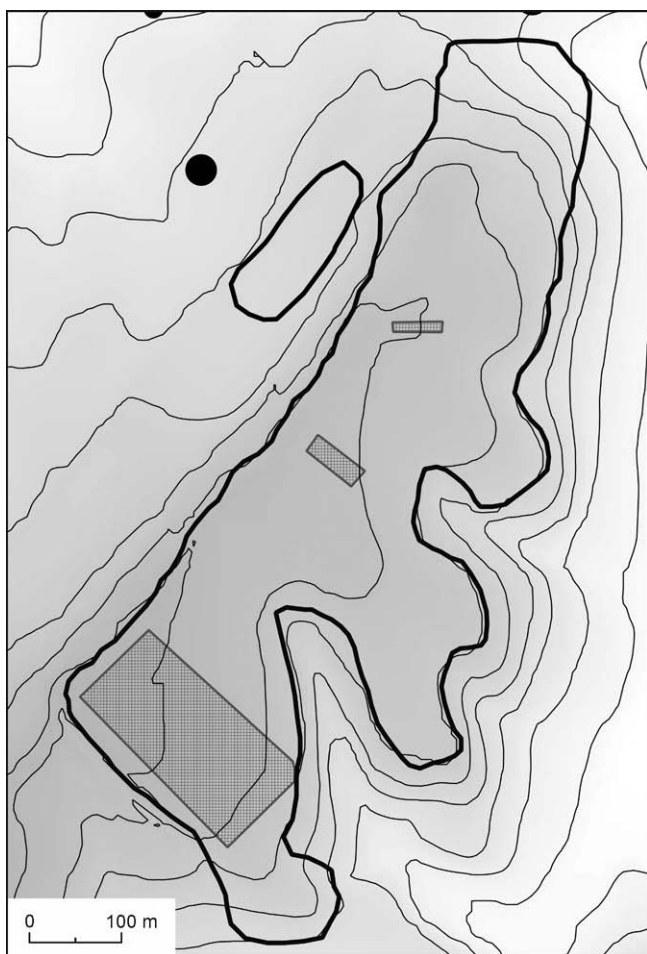


Fig. 4. Zones where the excavations on the hilltop in the 1980s took place. Map by the author.

his investigations on the hilltop until 1910, published several articles about his discoveries, however, never provided a detailed summary of his works.

Between the two world wars the idea of the commencement of new excavations in the tumulus cemetery was constantly on the table in the Hungarian National Museum, however, due mostly to financial reasons, the works led by Sándor Gallus began only in 1943. Gallus investigated five mounds in the vicinity of the farmstead near Szalacska (Fig. 3). This means that he conducted his excavations near the tumuli which had been opened in the 1870s. Although, his drawings of the archaeological features and his notes survived, they are hardly of use for today's research because he never entered the finds of his excavation into the inventory of the museum and never prepared a detailed documentation of his investigation because he left Hungary in 1944 and never returned. To make matters worse, the majority of the finds he recovered went missing during the siege of Budapest in the winter of 1944/45. The surviving items were finally inventoried in 1951, however, there were several inconsistencies with Gallus' notes. Hence, when Éva Kabay published the finds from the Szalacska tumuli that were still locatable in the late 1950s, she had to face with many difficulties (Kabay 1960). Nevertheless, her article was the main source about the EIA of Szalacska for nearly 15 years and still remains exceedingly important.

The next stage of the research of the Szalacska necropolis began in 1971 when the local agricultural cooperative demolished two of the burial mounds (Kemenczei 1974). Because in one of them the workers came across a stone chamber, they informed the Hungarian National Museum. This is how Tibor Kemenczei's excavations in the cemetery began. In the following three years he investigated nine mounds in total (Fig. 3; Kemenczei 1975). His excavations are invaluable for several reasons. First, he was the first to excavate mounds south of the northernmost tumulus group. Secondly, the quality and detailedness

map of the tumulus cemetery, although, his survey did not extend to the whole cemetery. However, the map clearly indicates where the subsequent excavations took place (Rómer 1878, fig. 32). According to Rómer's account as well as the inventory book of the HNM, Kammerer investigated nine mounds of the same tumulus group in the northernmost section of the cemetery just where the small valley below the Szalacska hilltop settlement reaches the Kapos Valley (Fig. 3).

Rómer briefly described the results of the excavations and some of the finds, also he dated the burials to the Late Roman period (4th–5th century; Rómer 1878, 115–121). However, it was Lajos Márton who correctly dated the burials to the EIA (Márton 1913, 147, 148). Although Rómer was mistaken about the correct chronological position of the discoveries, he, as it later turned out, was right when he put forward the idea that a pre-historic settlement should be located on the Szalacska hill (Rómer 1878, 120). In 1906 his assumption gained proof when Kálmán Darnay began his fieldworks and excavations on the hill. Although his most famous discovery is the Late La Tène minting workshop, he also collected important data about earlier periods of the occupation on the hill (Darnay 1906; 1909; 1910). Noteworthy are the EIA fibulae among which there is a half-finished boat-shaped fibula (Darnay 1910, 130), probable evidence for the metal production on the hilltop (Fekete 1985a, 87). Darnay proceeded

of his documentation far exceeds the ones made during previous excavations. Thirdly, he inventoried the archaeological material recovered during the excavations, and the grave assemblages are consistent.

While there has been a constant curiosity about the tumuli near Szalacska, the EIA settlement on the hilltop did not attract scholarly attention for several decades after Darnay's investigations in the 1900s. Apart from a small-scale excavation campaign led by Károly Sági in 1954, motivated by investigations for looted Roman period jewellery, there was no documented archaeological investigations on the hilltop until the 1980s. In 1982, however, Szilvia Honti began her excavations on the Szalacska hill. In five excavation campaigns during the 1980s she probed the prehistoric hillfort at several locations (Fig. 4). Unfortunately, however, the results of her excavations were never published.

Since then, research of the site complex near Szalacska has been limited to topographical investigations. Among these B. Holl and Z. Czajlik's work (Holl/Czajlik 2013) deserve special attention.

A CEMETERY OF SOME RENOWN

As for the EIA funeral customs in the Szalacska cemetery, the most important and reliable information comes from Kemenczei's excavations, however, previous discoveries provide additional but indispensable data. Every mound contained a cremation burial (Fig. 5). The calcined bones were mixed with remains of the funerary pyre and placed in most cases into a shallow grave pit of either rectangular or oval shape deepened into the soil (Kemenczei 1975; 1976, 203). There are, however, exceptional mounds. The burnt remains in Tumulus 1973/4 were scattered onto a layer of clay with which the builders plastered the soil. Tumulus 1971/1 is exceptional for several reasons.

During the excavation Kemenczei found a rectangular 6.25 by 5.75 m burial chamber made of stones (Fig. 5). The walls were 0.7 m high at the time of the excavation and their width was approximately 0.75 m. The builders had plastered the inner area of the chamber with stone blocks and subsequently remains of the funerary pyre were scattered onto the floor of the chamber at two places. So far, this is the only well-documented case of a burial chamber made of stone in the Szalacska necropolis. However, the so-called Tumulus 'A' excavated in the 1870s is supposed to have had a small burial chamber, too. Moreover, it has been suggested that locals had been exploiting Tumulus 'A' for stone blocks for some time before the excavation (Kabay 1960, 47). Reportedly, during the excavation in 1876 Kammerer and his colleagues found a small stone chamber. However, contrary to any other excavated tumulus in the Szalacska cemetery, this burial is supposed to have been located quite near to the top of this vast tumulus with 30 m in diameter and approximately 11 m in height. Also, the dimensions of this so-called burial chamber seem disproportionate to the dimensions of the mound (Kabay 1960, 47). Furthermore, based on the information available there were no pottery in this grave which is quite unusual for the funerary customs of the Szalacska cemetery. As a result, one might entertain the idea that Kammerer and his colleagues did not in fact dig to the bottom of the mound but they discovered a secondary burial near the top of one of the largest tumuli in the cemetery.

Among the five tumuli excavated by Sándor Gallus there is none which would have contained a burial chamber built of stone blocks similar to the one found in Tumulus 1971/1. The inner structure of Tumulus 1943/3, however, is not simple. Based on the drawings Gallus made, one can suggest that it contained a chamber made of wooden beams and posts. However, it would appear that at the corners this wooden chamber was supported by stone blocks (Kabay 1960, 51).

As mentioned above, the calcined human remains were usually scattered in the shallow grave pit. Usually, they were mixed in a layer comprising ashes, remains of the funerary pyre, and broken pottery (Kemenczei 1974, 11; 1976, 203). Importantly, Kemenczei's investigations found no evidence for using ceramic vessels as urns. By contrast, however, in Gallus' notes there are certain allusions to the possibility of a few cases where pottery vessels could have been used as containers of cremated human remains. This, however, is still an unlikely scenario because among the pottery vessels recovered from the tumuli opened in the 1970s intact specimens are definitely exceptional. This is also true for the ceramic material recovered from the Szalacska mounds in the 1870s, however, one has to bear in mind that these finds were subject of damage and loss during the historical events of the 20th century. Kemenczei claimed that the ceramic vessels whose fragments came to light from the graves could have been intentionally broken during or before the funeral and only fragments accompanied the remains of the deceased into the grave (Kemenczei 1974, 11; 1975, 165; 1976, 204). Importantly, contrary to metal finds in the graves, signs of secondary exposure to considerable heat or transformation due to secondary burning of the ceramic fragments are seldom in the pottery material of the Szalacska mounds.

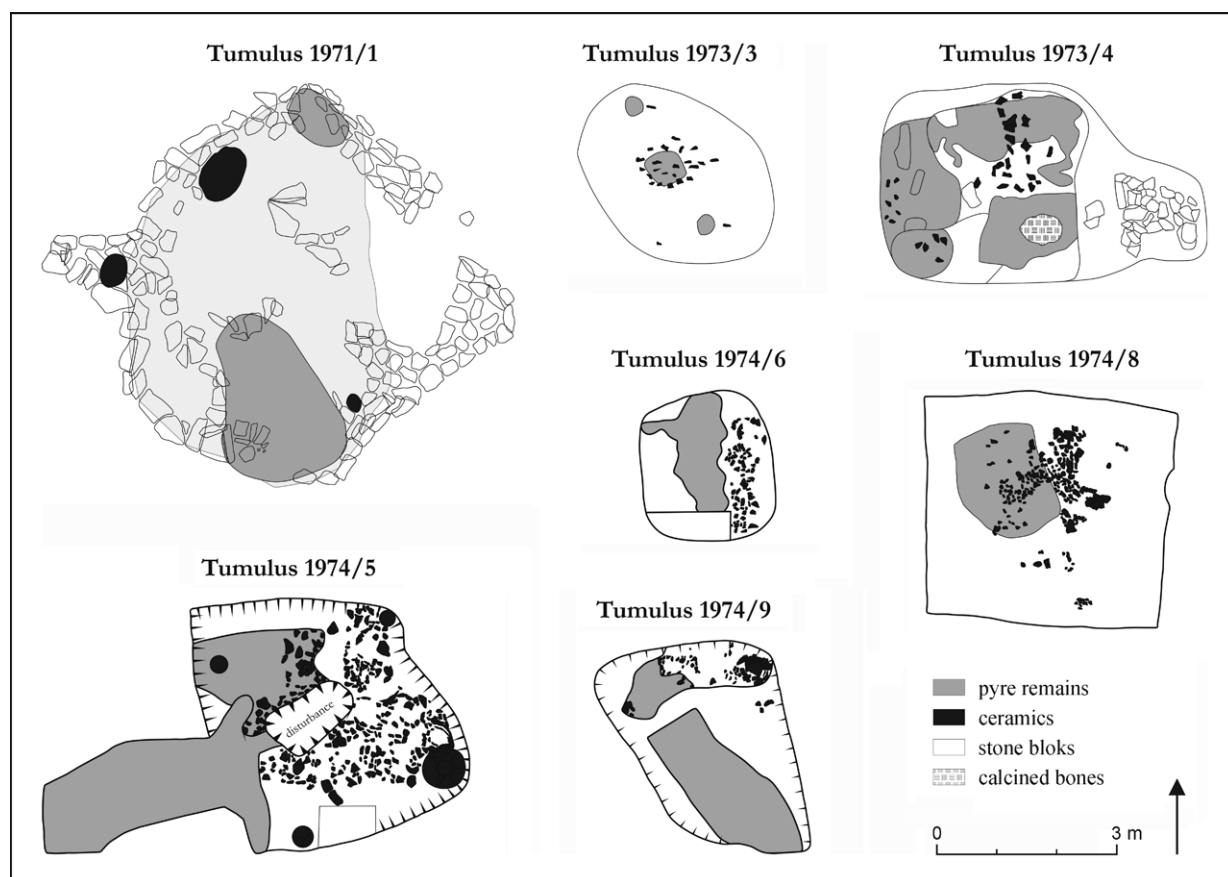


Fig. 5. The graves in the burial mounds excavated by Tibor Kemenczei in the 1970s. Figure by the author.

Considering their highly fragmented state, it is questionable whether it is reasonable to speak about ceramic sets when dealing with the composition of the ceramic material in the Szalacska graves. However, it is worth looking at the typological spectrum of the ceramic finds occurring in the graves. In the case of the tumuli excavated by Tibor Kemenczei, every grave contained large pots with conical neck (*Kegelhalsgefäße*), however, in terms of minimum number of distinguishable specimens their number varies greatly among the burials. It appears that the burial chamber of Tumulus 1971/1 yielded fragments of at least seven such pots. On the other end of the spectrum, we have graves containing fragments of only two such vessels. Tumulus 1974/9 yielded the fragments of a large, black, polished vessel with fluted decoration on its shoulder and below its rim and the fragments of a specimen decorated with black geometrical patterns painted over a brick-red background (Fig. 6). Importantly, every mound excavated by Kemenczei contained ceramic vessels with red-black painted decoration, although in greatly varying amounts (Kemenczei 1976, 206). Interestingly, in the burial chamber of Tumulus 1971/1 only a few fragments of red-black painted vessels were found, however, the adjacent but considerably smaller Tumulus 1973/3 contained the pieces of at least two nearly entirely restorable vessels with red-black painted decoration (Kemenczei 1976, 206). Noteworthy that red-black painted decoration is not limited to large pots with conical neck, but this kind of decoration appears on a variety of vessel types.

For instance, among the ceramic sherds found in Tumulus 1974/8 there are fragments of a vessel with short conical neck. According to C. Metzner-Nebelsick's recent assessment, these vessels can mainly be found in EIA graves in the region between the Lake Balaton and the river Sava (Metzner-Nebelsick 2017a, 433). Hence, it is hardly surprising that specimens of this vessel type frequently occur among the ceramic material of the Szalacska graves excavated by Kemenczei, although, their majority does not have red-black painted decoration but dark burnished surfaces and fluted decoration. Tumulus 1971/1 contained fragments of several vessels with short conical neck, although, they show considerable variability in shape (Kemenczei 1974, fig. 2: 3, 4; 3: 3; 4: 1).

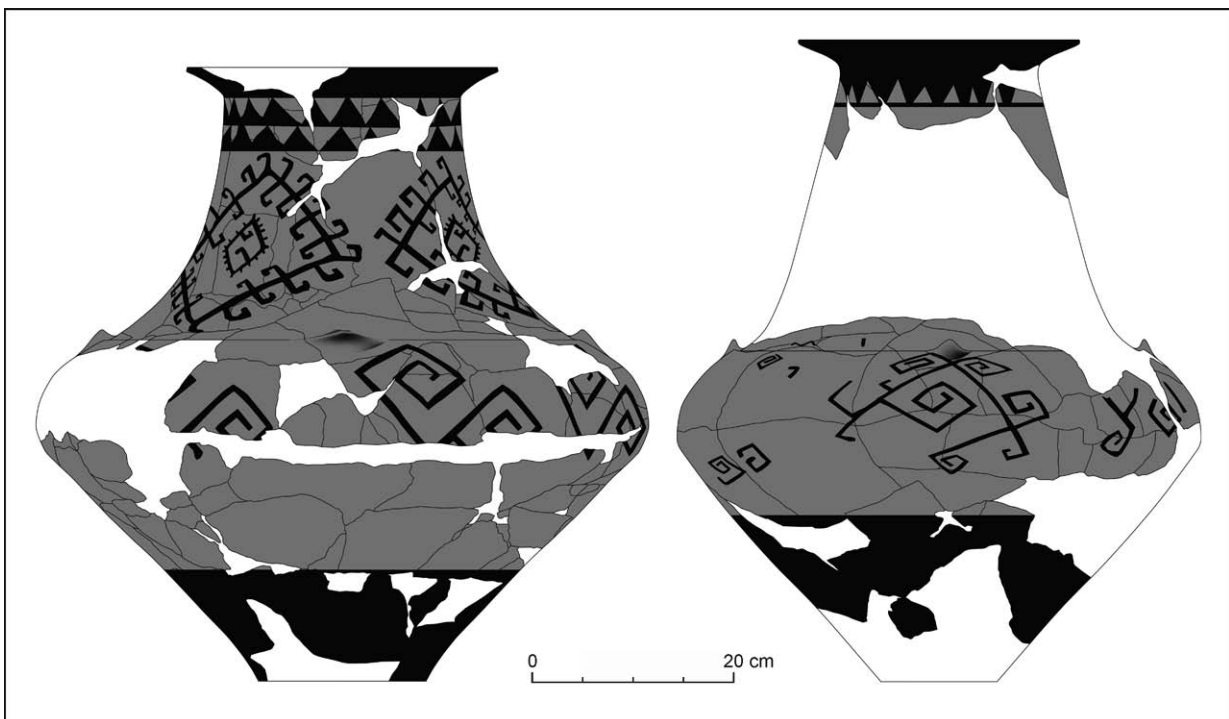


Fig. 6. Red-black painted vessels from Tumulus 1974/5. Figure by the author.

Having excavated nine mounds of the Szalacska cemetery, Kemenczei assumes that there is a notable proportionality between the size of the tumuli and the amount of metal objects among the pyre goods (Kemenczei 1975, 165). As opposed to the observation of the proportionality between the tumulus sizes and the amount of metal objects in the graves, such clear proportionality cannot be seen between the tumulus sizes and the amount of pottery finds in them (Kemenczei 1976, 204).

Although Kemenczei's observation about the amount of metal finds is worth emphasising, one has to draw attention to the fact that excavations of the Szalacska tumuli tend to unearth only a handful of (and mostly badly damaged) metal items. Noteworthy among these are the iron skewers unearthed in Tumulus 1971/1. Fragments of at least two skewers lay among most of the finds in the southern corner of the burial chamber (Kemenczei 1974, 4). Importantly, skewers, evidence of the influence of the Mediterranean cultures on the Hallstatt communities had, are usually associated with the most ostentatious graves of the Eastern Hallstatt zone and could have served as status symbols (Egg/Munir 2013, 272). Similar to Tumulus 1971/1, Tumulus 1943/3 also ranks among the largest tumuli of the cemetery. As Gallus's notes suggest, this is another tumulus that contained iron skewers (Kabay 1960, 51).

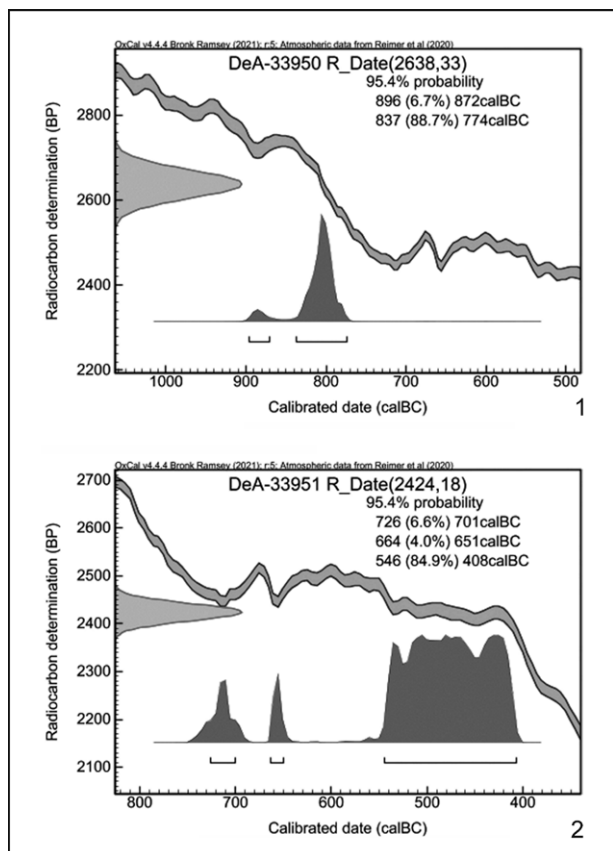


Fig. 7. Probability distribution of the results of the radiocarbon measurement conducted on the samples taken from Tumulus 1973/3 (1) and 1973/4 (2) of the Szalacska cemetery.

Besides skewers, bronze vessels, in general, are thought to have served as feasting equipment in burial contexts. In the Szalacska cemetery, remains of bronze vessels are scarce but certainly not unprecedented. Probably, the most recognizable evidence originates from Tumulus 1943/2. Gallus's excavation brought to light a broken angular handle of presumably a broad-rimmed bowl (*Kabay 1960*, fig. 15; *Patay 1990*, 83). According to Gallus' notes the grave goods and calcined remains of the deceased laid in a simple shallow grave pit with no signs of any grave architecture (*Kabay 1960*, 50, 51). In addition, Tumulus 1971/1 also yielded several bronze sheet fragments held together by bronze pegs. They are, in all likelihood, fragments of a situla-like bronze vessel (*Soós/Lukács 2023*).

Interestingly, both weapons and parts of horse harnesses are rare among the finds recovered by the excavations of the Szalacska cemetery. In the 1970s only two pieces of iron spears came to light. On the one hand, in the assemblage found in Tumulus 1973/3 there was a spearhead in the small shallow oval grave pit. The other iron spearhead was part of the assemblage of Tumulus 1971/1 (*Kemenczei 1974*, 4). In addition, this is the only grave that so far yielded items easily recognizable as parts of horse harnesses. Also, Tumulus 1943/3 and Tumulus 1943/5 contained several bronze buttons which probably served as decoration of the harness (*Kabay 1960*, 52, 53).

As for the chronology of the burial mounds at Szalacska, Kabay agrees with Gallus's opinion that the burial mounds he excavated date to the Ha C period (*Kabay 1960*, 58). Based on the tumuli investigated in the 1970s, Kemenczei argues that, in fact, none of the hitherto excavated burials date before the Ha C2 phase (*Kemenczei 1974*, 14). In her seminal monograph, B. Teržan argued that the so far excavated tumuli of the Szalacska cemetery belong to Phase III of the relative chronological system she outlined for the Drava region and the region of Slovenian Styria (*Teržan 1990*, 158).

Recently, animal bones from two tumuli have been submitted to AMS radiocarbon analysis. Samples were taken from a wild boar scapula (Tumulus 1973/3) and from a horse metatarsus (Tumulus 1973/4). Both measurements resulted relatively early dates. The radiocarbon date was calibrated with the IntCal 20 atmospheric calibration curve in the OxCal v4.4.4 software (*Reimer et al. 2020*). While the sample from Tumulus 1973/4 dates either to the period from the second half of the 6th century to the end of the 5th century BC or, which is in our view more likely, to the late 8th century and the first half and middle of the 7th century BC, the sample from Tumulus 1973/3 resulted a surprisingly early date, i.e. the 9th and early 8th century (Fig. 7). Since the sample contained very small amount of collagen, one has to be cautious with the result of the latter measurement.

THE EARLY IRON AGE SETTLEMENT

Apart from the few metal finds recovered by Darnay's excavation, the archaeological material of the EIA settlement on the hilltop used to be nearly completely unknown before Szilvia Honti carried out her excavations. Moreover, even today the excavations conducted in the 1980s provide the single most valuable source of information about the EIA occupation on Szalacska hill.

The excavations began in the summer of 1982 and until the end of 1989 five excavation campaigns were carried out. Honti and her colleagues opened seventeen trenches in total, at six different locations on the hilltop. Most trenches were located in the south, namely, near the rampart. However, they investigated the settlement remains at a few locations to the north, too. The latter along with the EIA finds found during Darnay's excavation strongly suggest that the Hallstatt period settlement extended to large parts of the hilltop, i.e. it could have covered an area of some 15 hectares, however, since Honti and her colleagues only excavated some 550 m² with an average dimension of 35 m² per trench, it is nearly impossible to say anything about its inner structure and density of the occupation.

The majority of the EIA archaeological features unearthed by Honti and her colleagues are pits of various dimensions and shape. Due to later activities on the hilltop disturbing the EIA features, the evaluation of their function is somewhat complicated. Among the features there are beehive-shaped pits of different sizes (Fig. 8). Similar beehive-shaped pits came to light from the EIA settlements near Balatonboglár (*Jáky 2016*, 150) and Alsópáhok (*Horváth 2015*, 233) along the shores of the Lake Balaton, and near Letenye (*Horváth 2012*, 123) some 16 km from the confluence of the Mura and Drava rivers. Since these lowland settlements were excavated to a large extent, the observation that beehive-shaped pits are the most frequent among the EIA features seems worth highlighting.

Although the excavation unearthed some postholes, without reliable evidence their chronological position cannot be accurately determined. While the existence of LBA and La Tène post constructions

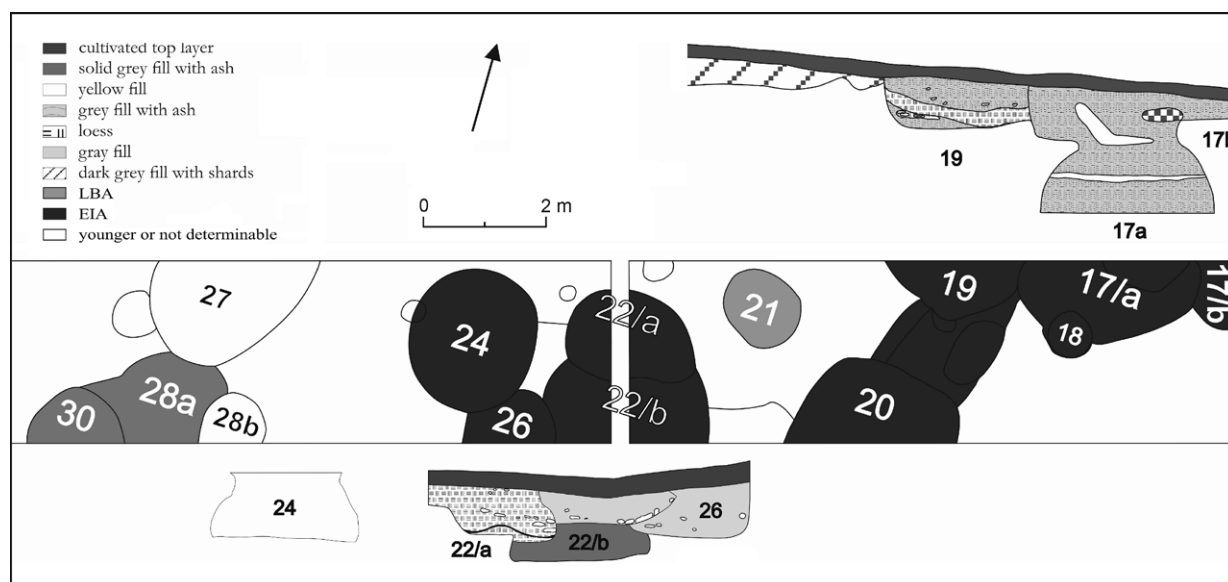


Fig. 8. Trenches VI and VII of the excavation in 1982. Figure by the author.

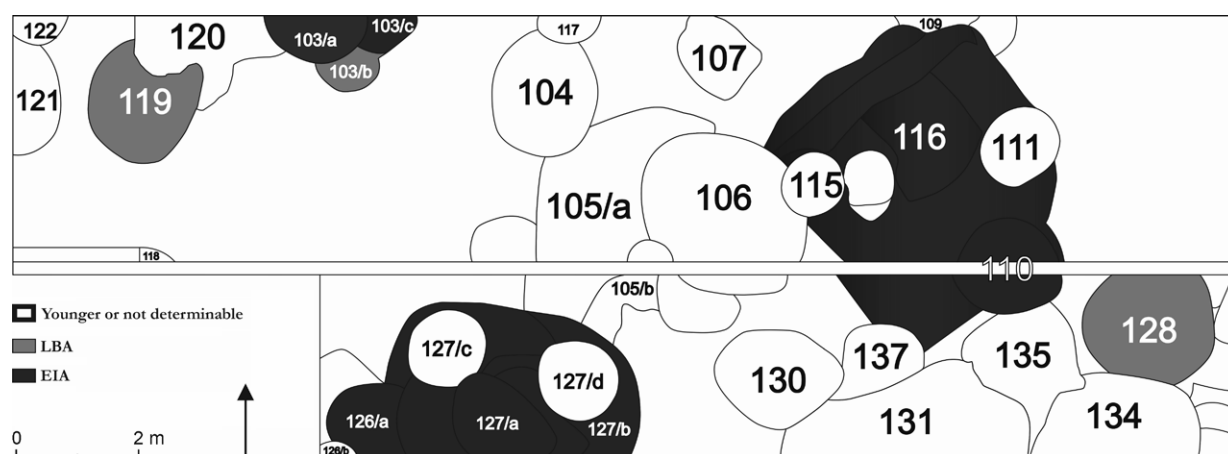


Fig. 9. Trenches XVI and XVII of the excavation in 1989. Figure by the author.

seem substantiated by the discoveries, due to several Late Iron Age pits and the limited horizontal extent of the trench, Honti's assumption of an EIA post construction cannot be verified.

In the last year Honti and her colleagues found two pits with rectangular ground plan with 4.1 to 4.5 m length along their edges (Features 116 and 127; Fig. 9). Similar features are often interpreted as sunken houses. As for the similar rectangular pits of the EIA settlement near Balatonboglár, András Jáky distinguished two types based on their size (Jáky 2016, 151). Considering this, the sunken houses of Szalacska belong to the larger type of houses. Similarly, based on their size, the two houses from the Szalacska settlement rank among the larger buildings found near Vát (Molnár/Farkas 2010, 123). Both rectangular pits had nearly flat floors and relatively steep walls, however, the northern building (Feature 116) had a somewhat stepped structure along its walls and a shallow pit-like depression in the central part of the floor. Feature 127 to the south had been considerably damaged through Late Iron Age pits and was not entirely excavated, thus its inner structure is somewhat obscure. In Feature 116, however, in its western corner the excavation revealed a posthole, but this is the only structural element indicative of a superstructure.

Hardly surprisingly, the most common finds recovered from the EIA archaeological features are ceramic fragments. They show considerable typological variability (Fig. 10). Common vessel types include

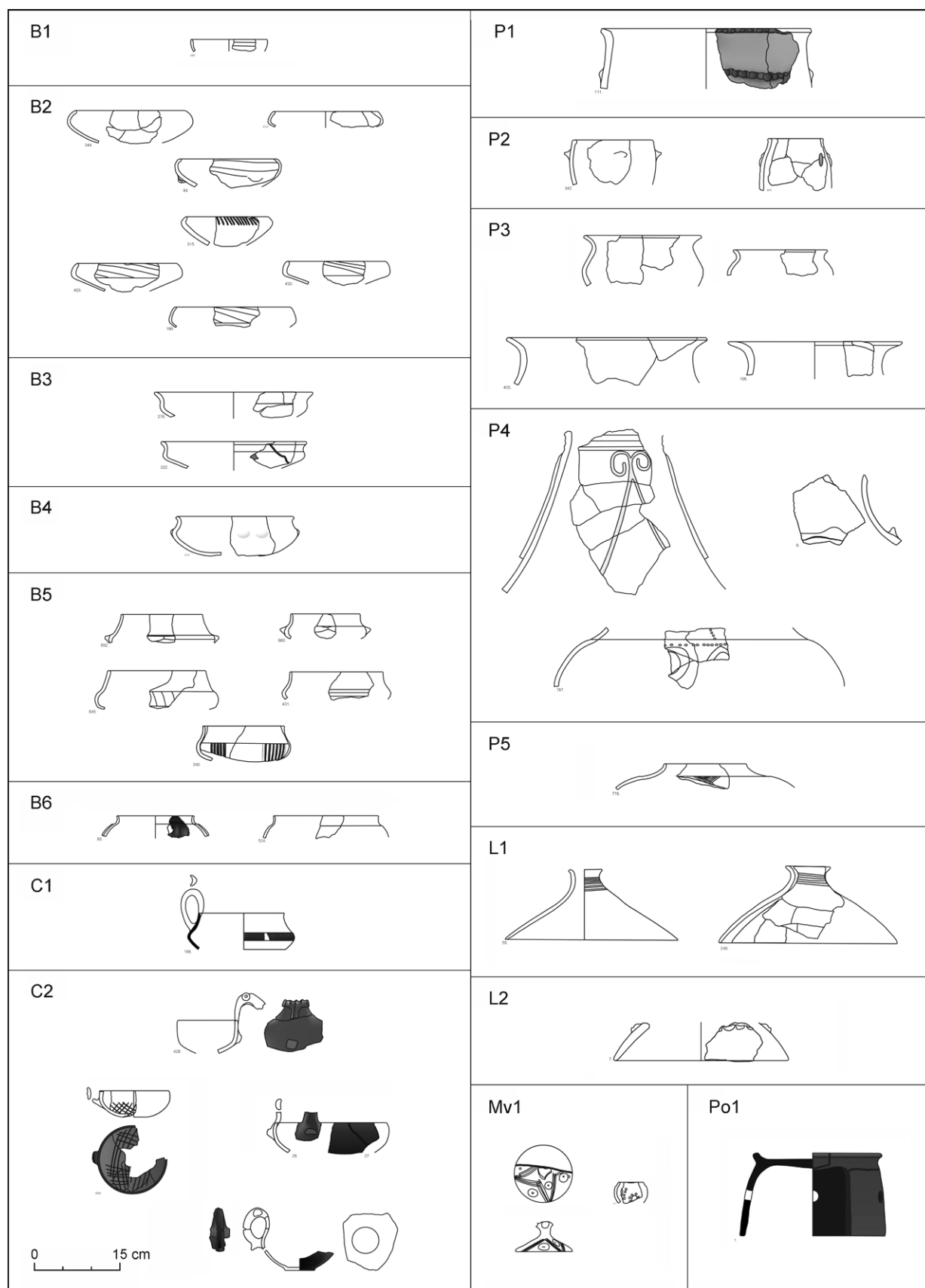


Fig. 10. Typological overview of the pottery discovered on the Szalacska hilltop site. Figure by the author.

bowls with inverted rim (B2) and bowls with conical neck (B5). The former type includes specimens with and without decoration. The decoration of bowls with inverted rims show a large variability as far as the method of decoration is concerned. Bowls with inverted rims decorated with horizontal or oblique faceting are nearly as frequent as the ones decorated with oblique fluting.

Bowls with conical neck seem to represent the finest products of EIA potters at the Szalacska settlement. All fragments show a polished and burnished surface with occasional graphite-coating. They are also characterized by thin walls. Usually the potters decorated the belly of the bowls. There are two main type of decoration of the bowls with conical necks. On the one hand, the belly of the bowls is decorated with densely spaced vertical or oblique fluted lines. On the other hand, fragments of bowls with horizontal faceting on the belly also frequently occur in the ceramic material recovered from the Szalacska hilltop.

Among the bowls with conical neck, Honti's excavation brought to light several fragments of bowls with S-shaped profile. This type is closely related to the former, however, the specimens of the latter have less accentuated profile. They are frequently decorated on their belly with vertical fluted lines, and similarly to the bowl with conical neck, usually their outer surface is carefully burnished. Importantly, there are bowls with S-shaped profile have a variant which comprise bowls with strongly everted rim (B3). These are also of exceptionally fine quality and, in some cases, they bear red-black painted decoration.

As opposed to bowls, cups are somewhat seldom. Based on their shape, distinguishing two groups among them seems reasonable. On the one hand, there are cups with conical neck (C1). In terms of typological characteristics, these vessels are hardly distinguishable from bowls with conical neck, the main difference is the handle. However, in the case of small fragments, this distinction cannot be made.

The second type of cups are of globular body (C2). Some specimens of this very heterogeneous type are worth considering in detail. The pit-complex excavated in Trench X yielded a particularly characteristic set of Hallstatt period ceramics. One of them shows the straight rim, slightly bulging body and decorated handle of a fine-quality cup. The handle of the vessel is raised above the rim and could have been decorated with knobs or horn-like extensions. Near the top of the handle it has a rectangular cross-section but downwards it transforms into a circular cross-section and just at the lower joint of the handle the potter shaped a support for the grip. Although such supports are not unprecedented on cups in the EIA material from Western Hungary (*Horváth 2012*, fig. 2: 2; 12: 137), they are rather characteristic of the cups recovered from the Sulmtal necropolis (*Dobiat 1980*, pl. 38: 6; 42: 10; 67: 5; 92: 7). These cups appear in the Phase 2 of the cemetery but their proliferation is seen in the latest stage of the cemetery. Being the youngest grave within the cemetery, the ceramic material recovered from the Kröllkogel underlines this observation (*Kramer 2013*, 374). In terms of the decoration of the handle and the overall shape of the vessel, the best comparisons of the cup found in the Szalacska settlement are the ones found in the Kröllkogel (*Kramer 2013*, 337–339).

Already in the first year of Honti's excavations in Trenches VI and VII a large number of EIA features were found. From a relatively shallow layer two fragments of a globular cup with zoomorphic handle came to light. Closest analogies of this cup came to light from the Gamulica tumulus near Martijanec in Northwestern Croatia (*Vinski-Gasparini 1961*, pl. VII: 1). In addition, there are fragments of comparable cups among the pottery finds of Tumulus 2 near Vaskeresztes near today's border between Austria and Hungary (*Fekete 1985b*, fig. 20: 7, 8).

A third type of cups can only be assumed to have been used in the Szalacska hilltop settlement. Feature 10/b–c yielded the fragment of a band-like handle with a central rib. Although further fragments of the vessel did not turn up, based on its fine quality and red-black painted geometric decoration it could have been part of a cup similar to those recovered from Tumulus 2 near Vaskeresztes, although, instead of black painting the geometric motives on this specimen were created with tin foils (*Fekete 1985b*, 48).

The ceramic material recovered from the EIA settlement on the hilltop contain fragments of vessels with conical neck (P4). Some of them are elaborately decorated, and one of them is a reminiscent of the large vessel recovered from Tumulus 1971/1 (*Kemenczei 1974*, fig. 8). In contrast to the ceramic assemblages in the tumuli, fragments of vessels with short conical neck are not frequent in the ceramic material of the EIA settlement (P5). More common elements of the ceramic material are the fragments of pots of various shapes. Similar to other EIA settlements in Western Hungary and the adjacent regions, barrel-shaped pots seem predominant among them (P2; *Horváth 2012*, 126). In addition, there are several fragments of coarse baking lids (L2), but fragments of elaborate lids of fine quality are also common in the ceramic material (L1). Pyraunoi (Po1), loom weights and spindle whorls are less frequent.

It is worth briefly describing the relationship between the settlement and the tumuli based on their respective ceramic materials. There are several dissimilarities between them. First, while the typological spectrums of the vessels included in the burial assemblages and of those found in the settlement are largely overlapping, pyraunoi, baking lids and miniature vessels are only attested in the settlement material. By contrast, vessels decorated with red-black decoration are considerably less frequent on the hilltop than in the burial assemblages. Furthermore, while there are two tumuli which yielded ceramic bull protomes (*Kemenczei 1974*, fig. 5: 6), such finds are absent among the ceramic fragments hitherto found on the hilltop.

Since the excavations in the 1980s found only a few metal finds and they are hardly of any help in evaluating the chronological aspects of the settlement, we have to rely on the ceramic material. In this regard, the cups are of significance. However, before dealing with their chronological position, I have to touch upon the evidence Darnay brought to light in the early 1900s. In the northern part of the settlement, near to the chapel his excavations brought to light a few EIA fibulae. Presumably, these fibulae were already in a secondary context when unearthed. However, their presence on the hilltop is hardly independent of the EIA settlement. One of them is worth highlighting (*Darnay 1910*, fig. 3) because based on M. Fekete's assessment, this fibula suggests activities on the hilltop in the latter phases of the Ha D period (*Fekete 1985a*, 83). Unfortunately, the evidence suggesting a similar conclusion is thin as far as the results of the excavations in the 1980s are concerned. However, bowls with embossed decoration and the elaborate drinking vessels strongly suggest that the EIA settlement flourished in the Ha C2–Ha D1 phases.

THE QUESTION OF CENTRALITY

It is a recurrent notion in the literature that Szalacska should have played some sort of central role among the EIA communities in the Kapos region. Yet, this claim has been largely based on the evidence gathered from the tumuli, and little attention has been paid to whether the EIA settlement on the hill would corroborate this notion.

Unfortunately, the excavations on the hilltop have not yet provided evidence for the concentration of power or wealth in terms of architecture. The houses so far documented are both in terms of shape and dimension comparable to those found during the excavations of the Balatonboglár (*Jáky 2016*, 151) and Letenye settlements (*Horváth 2012*, 123). Another aspect worth considering is how the ceramic materials recovered from the Szalacska hilltop and other settlements in the region compare to each other. Possibly, the most illuminating example is the EIA settlement near Balatonboglár. This settlement lies near the southern shore of the Balaton. In Iron Age times it could probably have been located just at the shore (*Jáky 2016*, 149). Owing to the works of A. Jáky (2016), research now has a broad scale understanding of this settlement. As far as the archaeological features excavated at both sites are concerned, no striking difference appears. A similar situation takes shape when looking at the spectra of vessel types used by the communities of the settlements. Hence, at first glance there are no fundamental dissimilarities between the two sites, of course, apart from the fact that one of Western Hungary's largest EIA tumulus cemeteries is located just below the Szalacska hilltop. By contrast, current research does not know about EIA tumulus burials near the Balatonboglár settlement. However, a more thorough survey of the ceramic materials reveals several minor differences. But first, it has to be mentioned that due to the large-scale excavation of the Balatonboglár settlement we have a more complete and clearer understanding of it than of the Szalacska settlement. One of the dissimilarities is the nearly complete absence of fragments of red-black coated vessels in the material unearthed at the Balatonboglár site (*Jáky 2016*, 155). In addition, while the Szalacska settlement yielded several elaborately decorated lids, at the Balatonboglár site lids and baking lids of rather coarse quality are hardly distinguishable. Another visible difference between the ceramic materials of these sites is that there are some elaborate cups among the vessels recovered from the Szalacska hilltop which do not find counterparts among the potteries found at the Balatonboglár settlement.

These cups bear significance. Their size and elaborate decoration suggest that they could have been personal belongings used for personal consumption of beverages, possibly, in context of feasts or libation rituals. Based on their analogies found in ostentatious graves (e.g. Tumulus II near Vaskeresztes, the Gamulica tumulus near Martijanec) they might be seen as an evidence for the existence of an elite at the Szalacska settlement.

However, the existence of an elite does not necessarily translate to the settlement being a central place. Instead, based on D. Knitter and O. Nakoinz's recent assessment of the approaches to the concept of centrality in archaeological contexts the following aspects of the cemetery and settlement near Szalacska are worth considering (Knitter/Nakoinz 2018).

One of the central functions is security. Although, there are ramparts on the hilltop, little is known about their chronology. As a result, we cannot be sure about whether the EIA settlement on the hilltop had artificial fortifications. However, given its elevated location, one could argue that the settlement on the hilltop was naturally fortified. As for administrative functions, arguably, the large number of tumuli and their sizes suggest that their construction required both vast energy investment and considerable organizational power (Soós 2017). Some of the hitherto excavated tumuli yielded compelling evidence for the existence of elite burials, however, as the recently investigated tumulus near Regöly shows (Szabó/Fekete 2014), the accumulated wealth and prestige items in the tumuli near Szalacska is certainly not unrivalled. Hence, assuming that the elite associated with Szalacska had exclusive administrative functions, if any, over a large area is not reasonable. Also, as the above cited authors emphasise, without written sources administrative functions can hardly be assessed (Knitter/Nakoinz 2018, 13).

Similarly, the direct evidence for trading activities at Szalacska is exceedingly thin. Although, some researcher pointed out the proximity of Szalacska to the Kapos River, which is supposed to have been a major trade route (Patek 1968, 19, 1993, 139), wares directly associated with this route are not abundant. One notable example of imports at Szalacska, however, is a so-called Arnoaldi type fibula recovered by Gallus's excavations (Fekete 1982, 133). Fragments of the fibula was found in Tumulus 1943/3, i.e. the burial mound with the wooden chamber (Kabay 1960, 53). The centre of the production of such fibulae could have been in Verucchio, but specimens occur in various regions of Central Europe (Bentini et al. 2020, 391).

Another aspect worth considering is craft. As already mentioned, the half-finished boat-shaped fibula is seen as a proof of local metalwork production, however, the excavations in the 1980s did not find further similarly or more compelling evidence. Assuming that ceramic production could have taken place in the settlement is fairly reasonable. The more so, if the characteristic red-black painted ceramics are taken into consideration. Importantly, in the catchment of the Kapos River, such red-black painted pottery seems to have been closely associated with the Szalacska cemetery and the settlement on the hilltop, although, one must bear in mind how limited the knowledge of EIA settlements and cemeteries in the region under consideration is.

As for cult, there is hardly any direct evidence for it on the Szalacska hilltop. However, given the outstanding size of the tumulus cemetery in the valley, one might propose the idea that, similar to the proposition for the Sulmtal cemetery (Hellmuth Kramberger et al. 2019, 47), it could have served as a central cemetery of a community well beyond the occupants of the hilltop settlement.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite its long research history and the remarkable finds that surfaced there, Nagyberki-Szalacska is both a well-known and, at the same time, an obscure site of the Early Iron Age of Western Hungary. One of the largest tumulus cemeteries in the region and the hilltop settlement overlooking the burial mounds have always been a perfect candidate for locating a central place of the EIA. The assessment of the currently available evidence, however, only reveals how limited our understanding of the period in Southern Transdanubia is, how limited our knowledge about the life of the settlements and the network of settlements in the region is. Nagyberki-Szalacska certainly seems to be a special site within the context of the EIA in Transdanubia, but there is still a huge amount of work to be done before its contextual evaluation becomes possible.

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Nagyberki-Szalacska – mocenské centrum z doby halštatskej v Zadunajsku

Bence Soós

Súhrn

Napriek dlhej histórii výskumu a pozoruhodným objaveným nálezom je Nagyberki-Szalacska známou a zároveň neznámou lokalitou zo staršej doby železnej v západnom Maďarsku. Jedno z najväčších mohylových pohrebísk v regióne a osada na vrchole kopca s výhľadom na mohyly boli vždy ideálnym kandidátom na lokalizáciu centrálného miesta staršej doby železnej. Zhodnotenie v súčasnosti dostupných dokladov však ukazuje, aké obmedzené je naše poznanie tohto obdobia v južnom Zadunajsku, aké obmedzené sú naše poznatky o živote na sídliskách o osieti osád v regióne. Nagyberki-Szalacska je unikátnou lokalitou v kontexte staršej doby železnej v Zadunajsku, ale ešte je potrebné vykonať obrovské množstvo práce, kým bude možné jej kontextuálne zhodnotenie.

- Obr. 1. Prehľad lokalít zo staršej doby železnej v južnom Zadunajsku a v priľahlých regiónoch v povodí rieky Kapos (vyznačené). 1 – Nagyberki-Szalacska. Mapa autor.
- Obr. 2. Topografická mapa sídliskového areálu Szalacska. 1 – analýza viditeľnosti z výšinného sídliska Szalacska; 2 – oblasť dosiahnuteľná v rámci 60 minút pešej chôdze zo sídliska Szalacska. Mapa autor.
- Obr. 3. Výskum na mohylovom pohrebisku Szalacska. 1 – výšinné sídlisko Szalacska a mohyly v jeho okolí; 2 – časť pohrebiska Szalacska, vyznačená na obrázku vľavo. Legenda: a – oblasť výskumu v roku 1876; b – oblasť výskumu v roku 1943; c – mohyly skúmané v 70. rokoch 20. stor. (číslovanie podľa T. Kemenceiho). Mapa autor.
- Obr. 4. Miesta preskúvané na výšinnom sídlisku v 80. rokoch 20. stor. Mapa autor.
- Obr. 5. Hroby v mohylách, ktoré skúmal Tibor Kemenczei v 70. rokoch 20. stor. Obrázok autor.
- Obr. 6. Nádobý s červeno-čiernou maľovanou výzdobou z mohyly 1974/5. Obrázok autor.
- Obr. 7. Rozptyl pravdepodobnosti výsledkov rádiouhlíkových meraní vzoriek z mohýl 1973/3 (1) a 1973/4 (2) na pohrebisku Szalacska.
- Obr. 8. Sondy VI a VII z výskumu v roku 1982. Obrázok autor.
- Obr. 9. Sondy XVI a XVII z výskumu v roku 1989. Obrázok autor.
- Obr. 10. Typologický prehľad keramiky objavenej na výšinnom sídlisku Szalacska. Obrázok autor.

Text translated by the author

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