



Book Reviews

THE LATE NEOLITHIC TELL SETTLEMENT AT POLGÁR-CŚÓSZHALOM, HUNGARY. THE 1957 EXCAVATION BY ESZTER BÁNFFY & IDA BOGNÁR-KUTZIAN

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This volume starts with a debt and ends with a transfer of the torch of research. It says much for the humane and collegiate Eszter Bánffy that she has honoured a long-standing commitment to a dear departed colleague and produced a volume in the spirit of the late Ida Bognár-Kutzian. Eszter Bánffy passed on the torch of research at Csőszhalom to Pál Raczky, who has been investigating the tell for the last two decades and who indeed purchased the monument when it came up on the open market to safeguard its future for Hungarian archaeology. The story of Csőszhalom thus connects three of the foremost Neolithic specialists in Hungary in the post-war period.

The story started with the discovery and the first excavations of the mound by Béla Bender in 1910. The second part started with Ida Bognár-Kutzian's study visit to North East Hungary in the early 1950s, during which she located several new sites and conducted excavations at several, including Csőszhalom and the famous Copper Age cemetery of Tiszapolgár – Basatanya. She excavated a 2 x 12 m trench in the South West part of the tell, dividing the excavated area horizontally into 2 x 2 m grids and vertically into 20 cm spits, as was the custom of the time. She encountered the remains of parts of six houses (A- F), seven burials (1-7), several pits and post-holes in a stratigraphy of almost 4m. It is the report on this 1957 excavation that forms the bulk of the present volume. The third, ongoing part of the Csőszhalom story began with the planned construction of the M-3 Motorway close to the tell. Pál Raczky and Walter Meier-Arendt started excavations on the tell but expanded to investigate the large horizontal settlement adjacent to the tell, which was directly threatened by the line of the motorway. Geophysical studies revealed a series of five concentric ditches around the tell, several of which were partially excavated. A 20 x 20 m open area was excavated on the tell itself, while an even larger surface was excavated on the horizontal Late Neolithic settlement. The preliminary reports published already for the excavations of this third phase (Raczky 1998; Raczky *et al.* 1997; 2002; 2007) provide a much more complete perspective on the tell than would ever have been possible for the Bognár-Kutzian trial trench. So why this volume and what does it tell us about Csőszhalom that the Raczky investigations could not tell?

The sole answer to the first question is that it is the professional duty of every archaeologist to publish all of their excavations. After all, this monograph was published to mark the 50th anniversary of Bognár-Kutzian's excavation. The second question is much harder to answer. Bánffy's decision from the outset was not to compare and contrast the results of the second and third projects – only very rarely does she slip from this aim - but this reviewer is not constrained in this way. There are some intrinsic results of interest in this volume and some data with which to assess some of Raczky's preliminary conclusions about Csőszhalom.

The volume includes an introductory scene-setting and a description of the techniques of documentation by Bánffy (pp. 1-18). The vast majority of pages (pp. 19-194) are devoted to a blow-by-blow descriptive account of finds from the houses and cultural levels, sub-divided by artificial 20 cm spits into 18 Levels. Those readers familiar with Bognár-Kutzian's (1963) account of the Basatanya cemetery grave goods will be familiar with the level of detail in these immaculate descriptions. There is a taste of Basatanya in the 14-page summary of the seven burials on the tell. Almost every feature sherd, lithic artifact, single find and grave good is illustrated - something that will not be possible for the third excavation! It is only in Bánffy's overview of the significance of the results (pp. 209-237) that some basic data analysis is introduced, focused mostly on the ceramic chronology. There are some new aspects here which have not been covered in Raczky's publications to date.

The Bognár-Kutzian excavation throws little light on the Late Neolithic houses at Csőszhalom in comparison with the later project, because of the size of the trench. The seven intra-mural graves have several interesting features, including the possibility that, in Grave 1, an infant was buried in the burnt rubble of an abandoned house. The deliberate removal of the right foot of an adult in Grave 3 is reminiscent of Lengyel practices, while Grave 7 is a symbolic grave with no human bones but with a boar mandible and a perforated polished stone axe placed near where the cranium would have been placed – also similar to Lengyel traditions. Sherds were thrown into the grave as it was being filled in three cases (Graves 3-5). Several of the children's graves are richly furnished with ornaments, especially red deer canine and *Spondylus* beads but Bánffy is mistaken to infer hereditary status from 'rich kids' burials', as Bob Chapman observed long ago: rather, the status of the parents often vanishes at adolescence. What is interesting is that, as in Obre I (Benac 1973), the vast majority of burials were made at the beginning of the occupation, to mark the first generation of tell-dwellers as ancestors-to-be. Another interesting grave good is the

fragment of a painted face-pot (cover illustration) that has been deliberately broken to remain as a synecdoche of a portrait - a common practice in the Neolithic and Copper Age (Chapman, J. 2000).

The main analysis that Bánffy explores is the diachronic distribution of the pottery shapes and decorative styles by Level. At the most general level, she confirms the absence of any Copper Age occupation on the tell, not even the Proto-Tiszapolgár phase, despite the suggestion (p. 212) of a Proto-Tiszapolgár 14C date. In slightly more detail, she confirms stronger links with Tisza communities to the South in Phase 1 (Levels 18-16), with innovations developing through contacts to Lengyel communities to the West and North in Phases II (Levels 13-7) and III (Levels 6-1). There are Level-by-Level distributions of the various forms of painted wares, including bitumen-coated wares and all the various styles of crusted painted wares (cf. Raczky *et al.* 2002).

It is possible to use the data in this volume to reflect upon two of Raczky's preliminary hypotheses about the Csőszhalom tell. The first concerns the distinction between everyday living on the horizontal site and 'ritual practices' on the tell (Raczky *et al.* 2002). Bánffy detects the widespread deposition of everyday objects in the second excavation, suggesting an alternation of the quotidian and the festive in the same houses. This alternation would also apply to the butchery of animal carcasses, for which 'ritual' butchery has been claimed but never satisfactorily proven.

The other interpretation of Csőszhalom, especially in its early phase, is as a centre for lithic exchange, linking the sources in the hills to the North with other Late Neolithic settlements to the South. The lack of sieving in the 1957 excavation led to the recovery of a very small lithic assemblage. While this assemblage has remarkably few obsidian objects, there is a high proportion of primary decortification flakes and débitage, suggesting local limnoquartzite production at the very least but no great use of the obsidian resources close to the North. Interesting though it is, the case for this tell as an exchange centre requires further support.

One minor point that should be mentioned is Bánffy's claim (p. 209) that Csőszhalom is the Northernmost tell in Europe (Chapman 1997). This is manifestly not the case, with at least one other 'local' Neolithic tell - Újtikos - Tikos domb - 5 km North of Polgár, the Bronze Age tell of Tiszadob - Reje tanya, some 15 km North of Csőszhalom (Bóna 1986), a Late Neolithic and Bronze Age tell at Bodrogzsádány in the Bodrog valley (Kalicz 1968 and three Early Bronze Age tells at Felsővadász - Várdomb, Alsóvadász-Várdomb and Edelény-Ludmilla dűlő in the Hernád valley (Kóos 1983; Simán 1980). A more general point, however, remains – that these tells in North East Hungary form the Northernmost tells in the entire Eurasian distribution, from India to the Carpathian Basin. It was one of the main aims of the Upper Tisza Project to explain why tell lifeways stopped here, rather than continuing on across the Carpathians (Chapman *et al.* 2003).

A last contextual comment concerns the reasons why the tell of Csőszhalom was located where it was. The Upper Tisza Project's intensive systematic fieldwalking conducted around the tell discovered that the greatest concentrations of Middle Neolithic surface scatters in the entire Polgár Block lay exactly in the area settled in the Late Neolithic village, suggesting that settlement of the antecedent landscape had already imbued the area of Csőszhalom with a prior place-value that was emphasized and extended by village and tell living (Chapman *et al.* 2003).

The third phase of excavations at Csőszhalom has taken the story of the tell much further than a single trial trench of 24m² (96m³) could ever have done. Thanks to Raczky's leadership of a large, inter-disciplinary team, we now have a solid radiocarbon chronology for both the tell and the adjacent horizontal settlement (Hertelendi *et al.* 1998), an outline picture of the contemporary environment on the Polgár loess island (Sümegei *et al.* 2005) and comprehensive analyses of the intramural burials (Anders & Nagy 2007). Analysis of the faunal and botanical remains have been partially completed (Schwartz 2002; Fairbairn, n.d.) and the ceramic and lithics analysis has made good progress (Bácskay & Biró 2002; Hardy in Chapman *et al.* 2006). The research element of the tell excavation has been well dovetailed with the motorway rescue excavation of part of the horizontal settlement to yield a detailed picture of one of the key Late Neolithic sites in Eastern Hungary. But it is to the immense credit of Eszter Bánffy that the full publication of at least one part of the tell is now complete. No doubt the torch passed to Pál Raczky also comes with a challenge – to complete the same for the larger project, even if not in quite the same meticulous detail as for the second campaign.

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