

SCYTHIAN PERIOD SITES IN NÓGRÁD COUNTY

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VADAY, Andrea – SZAKOS, Éva. Lokality zo skýtskeho obdobia v Novohradskej župe. Našou snahou je zber informácií a pokus o charakteristiku skýtskych lokalít z Novohradskej župy. Po krátkom úvode do histórie bádania kladieme dôraz na geografickú charakteristiku regiónu, ktorá mohla byť, v tejto oblasti, dôvodom imigrácie nových kmeňov, čím sa stala determinantom ekonomickej situácie v neskorej dobe bronzovej a včasnej dobe železnej. V diskusii sa zaoberáme vojenským významom skýtskej invázie. V krátkosti sa venujeme i otázke prežívania pôvodného obyvateľstva v skýtskom období na lokalite Salgótarján, poloha Priemyselný park II vo svetle pozostatkov detských hrobov zo zvyškami kostenných a kovových predmetov odkrytých v troch objektoch na lokalite.

Kľúčové slová: doba železná, Skýti, vojenská okupácia, netypické kostené detské hroby, Novohradská župa (Maďarsko);

Keywords: Iron-age, Scythians, military occupation, atypical inhumation burials of children, Nógrád county (Hungary);

The investigated area (Figure 1: 1) is surrounded by the Börzsöny Mountains on the West, the Mátra Mountains on the East, and the Karancs-Medves Mountains on the North. Its territory is divided by the ridge of the Cserhát Mountains extending from SSW to NNE, bounded by the Nógrád Basin to the North, and the Cserhátalja Hills to the South, a region located partly in a hilly area, partly in lowlands. The Cserhát also has a watershed character; in the north the river Ipoly collects the water of streams from the south, while to the south of the range of mountains streams reach the Zagyva and Galga river from the north.

On the basis of the excavations of J. Nyáry (1868; 1870) at Piliny, Borsos in the 60s of the 19th century, put Nógrád county on the distribution maps of the Scythian Age. These finds were basis for later references (Hampel 1876; 1893; Reinecke 1897; Rómer 1878). It was not before the end of the 20th century when the Piliny finds that Nyáry had donated in 1872 to the Museo Civico Correr in Venice were reviewed by E. Gilli (1999).

At the end of the second decade of the 20th century, the excavation of B. Dornyay (1926; 1928) once again drew attention to the region. However, the fundamental breakthrough came only later, with the researches of P. Patay (1955; 1956; 1961; 1962).

Some of the findings were published by É. Ghillány (1945) and also reported by M. Párducz (1960; 1968; 1970). In connection with a number of unearthed Scythian findings from other counties, great many referred to objects from Nógrád county, and even some significant artifacts – including clay stamp seals (pintaderas), mirrors, bits, rattles, ornaments of shaft ends, weapons etc.¹ – were also mentioned in critical summaries. Previous research regarding the Bronze and Early Iron Age of the Carpathian basin was summed up by T. Kemenczei (1970; 1980; 1985; 1986), referring also to the Scythian finds of the county.

After the change of regime in 1989, the number of excavated sites in Hungary generally increased. However, this is not the case in Nógrád county. Partly because of the scarcity

¹ See in the Catalogue by name.

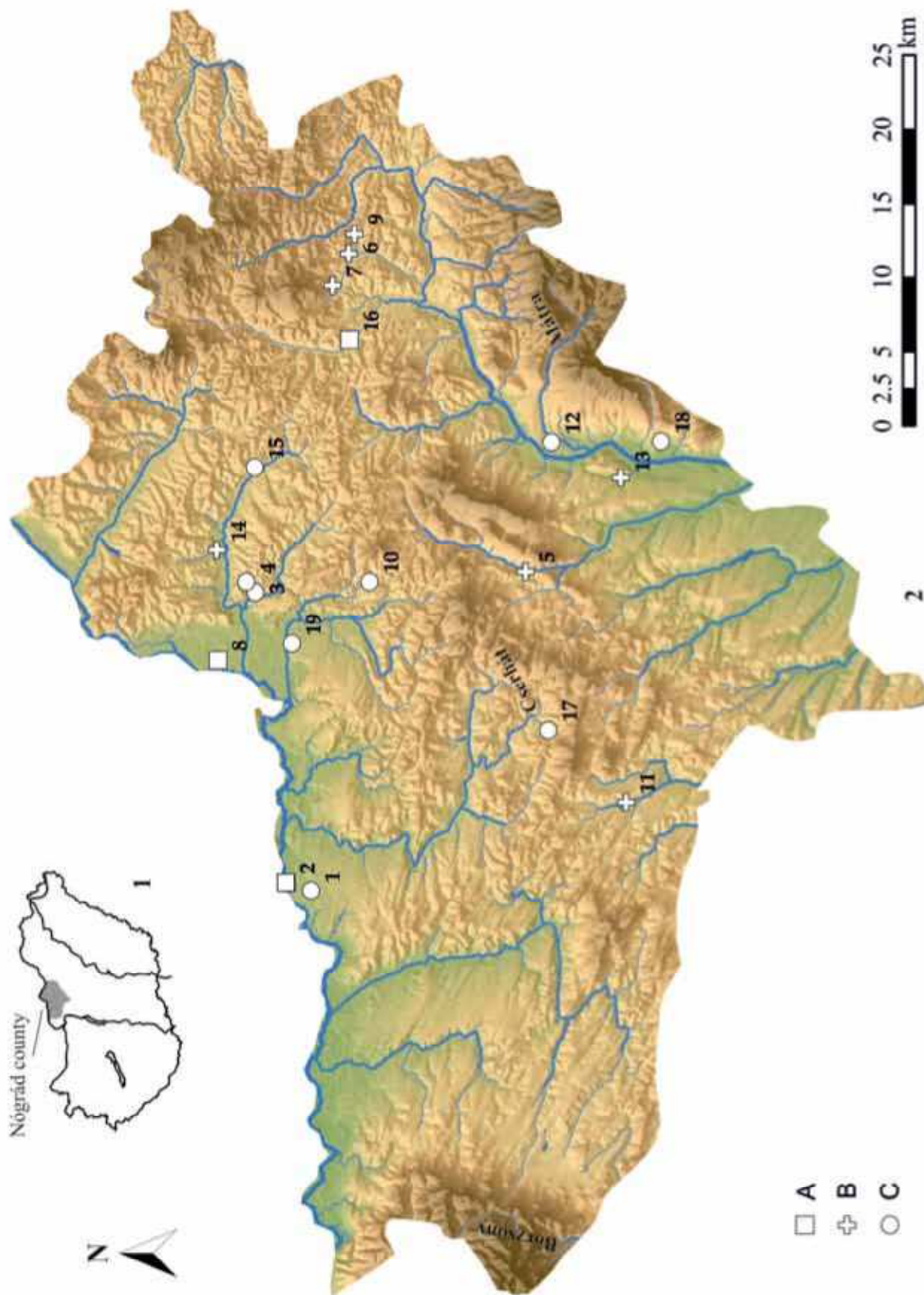


Figure 1. 1: Situation of Nógrád county; 2: Scythian sites of Nógrád county.
A - settlement; B - grave/cemetery; C - stray find. Author: É. Szakos

of investments in the region, the number of sites defined as Scythian was enriched only with three more in the past two decades (Bácsmegi 2005; Guba 2007; 2008; 2010; Vaday 2001; 2003). Nevertheless, it should be emphasized, that scarcity of Scythian settlement sites is presumed to reflect the persistence and coexistence of earlier populations. Assemblage of finds is enriched also by those that have formerly been in the collection of Kubinyi Ferenc Museum (Majcher 2000; Tankó 2015). Previously known sites and objects were also re-evaluated and referred by new summaries (Kemenczei 2001; 2009; Tézer 2005).

One might have difficulty managing the information data of the sites that do not dispose of the same value. Only published excavations can be considered a value of hundred percent, in the case of an incomplete site report or lacking documentation a significant decrease may be counted. Recent excavations of trial trenching and large surface are well-documented, but reduced is the information content learned during field walkings and site surveys. Even worse is the case with stray finds that entered the museum collection through purchase or as gifts. However, some of these have burn marks that indicate that they might have been found in a cremation grave.

The periodisation of sites in the archaeological site register system² – e. g. Iron Age or Early Iron Age – is often insufficient for determining a culture or ethnic group more accurately. Unpublished excavations, field walkings, site surveys, collections of data are still inadequate for one to decide if the material comes from a cemetery, a settlement, or perhaps from both. Existing problem that is gaining ground today not to seek a more accurate ethnical or cultural affiliation. As a matter of fact, after taking a closer look at the finds from these sites it can be considered, that some of them belong to the Preschythian Age or the Mezőcsát Culture, however, it must be noted that the identification of small, plain and featureless fragments of ceramics is not possible in all cases.

In the Late Bronze Age the area was densely populated. A number of settlements and cemeteries of the Pilinyi Culture is known, and fortified sites, e. g. hillforts at a high altitude can be found as well (Matuz/Nováki 2002). The Pilinyi Culture continued its habitation at the time of the Kyjatice Culture, the culture that during its formation was merging multi-ethnic groups (Kemenczei 1970, 40-42).³ Compared to the Scythians these cultures cover a longer period and thus have more sites with more specific data. Nevertheless, it should be noted here that in the county of Nógrád accurate spatial data is known only at half of the Scythian sites. Still it is worth comparing – albeit they are nearly not the same number – the above mentioned different periods sites with less or more accurate spatial data in Nógrád county.⁴

Considering the spatial information of the sites the graphs illustrate (Figure 2; Table 1) the characteristics of mountainous habitation and location of cemeteries at different bigger periods,⁵ while also showing the extent of lost information in the case of Scythian sites.

It is clear that the geographical conditions of the area always had a decisive role. The wealth of the population in the Bronze Age was characterized by a positive balance of trade.⁶ Mined

Table 1. Spatial data of sites and cemeteries.
Author: É. Szakos

	Pilinyi Culture	Kyjatice Culture	Early Iron Age	Scythian
Site	43	18	8	3
Cemetery	18	2	0	5
Σ	61	20	8	8

² Earlier National Office of Cultural Heritage (KÖH), in 2016 Gyula Forster National Heritage and Asset Management Centre.

³ The finds of the culture can also be detected at former fortified settlements. For example Karancsalja, Kápolnahegy and Szanda, Várhegy: Matuz/Nováki 2002, 16, 17.

⁴ In the case of stray finds the exact location of the sites is not possible to determine.

⁵ The data indicate the height above the Baltic Sea.

⁶ The characteristics of the balance of trade in the Bronze Age were determined by the ratio of exported and imported goods. Metal objects and raw metal materials were gradually more expensive, than the imported materials needed by the local population.

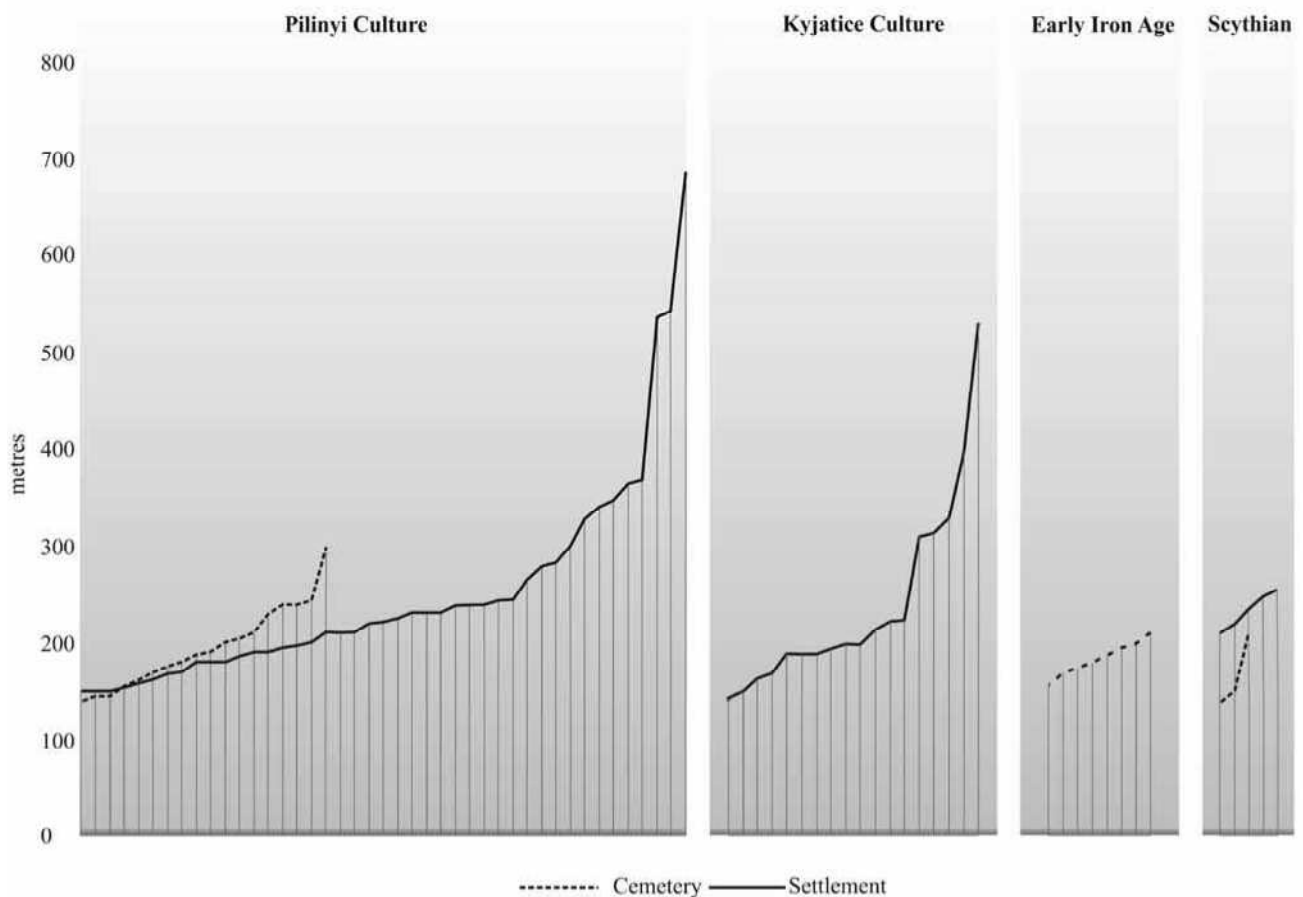


Figure 2. Spatial data of sites and cemeteries. Author: É. Szakos

and forged metal raw materials and finished products reached the Hungarian Plain poor in raw material at the north-south direction routes.

Power changed in the region with the appearance of the Scythians. Their lifestyle east of the Carpathians was largely horizontal nomadism,⁷ which was unsuitable for the Carpathian Basin. However, invasion of the Nógrád county territory was crucial, as it provided connection between the south of Slovakia and the Hungarian Plains, with a military nature for the Scythians. The newcomers, with a number significantly smaller than the indigenous population, but also with the benefits of unusual tactics and military power, were able to preserve and take advantage of the economic backdrop the former residents of the area ensured them. In addition, their presence also involved the surveillance of indigenous population. It is no coincidence that the known sites are situated in river valleys or near smaller valleys closed between mountain ranges – but also along roads near springs, close to important former centers of local population like Benczúrfalva, Major-hegy, Piliny, Salgótarján – Industrial Park II. etc (Figure 1: 2).

Military-related weapons and harness components are mostly found along the roads, indicating military occupation and also ongoing commercial activities (Figure 3).

In 2000, at the excavations of Salgótarján, Industrial Park II a part of a smaller settlement belonging to the Scythian Period was unearthed (Vaday 2001; 2003). It is important to note that there was no significant difference in the settlement materials between the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age phases, a couple of burn marks recorded are not interpreted as the signs of violent destruction, but of natural disasters or possibly of negligence of the inhabitants (Vaday 2001, 212). This confirms that the homes of indigenous people were not eradicated by Scythian invaders, and they were able to continue their previous activities.

⁷ 'Tiller Scythians' engaged with cultivation are known at areas close to Pontus Euxinus.

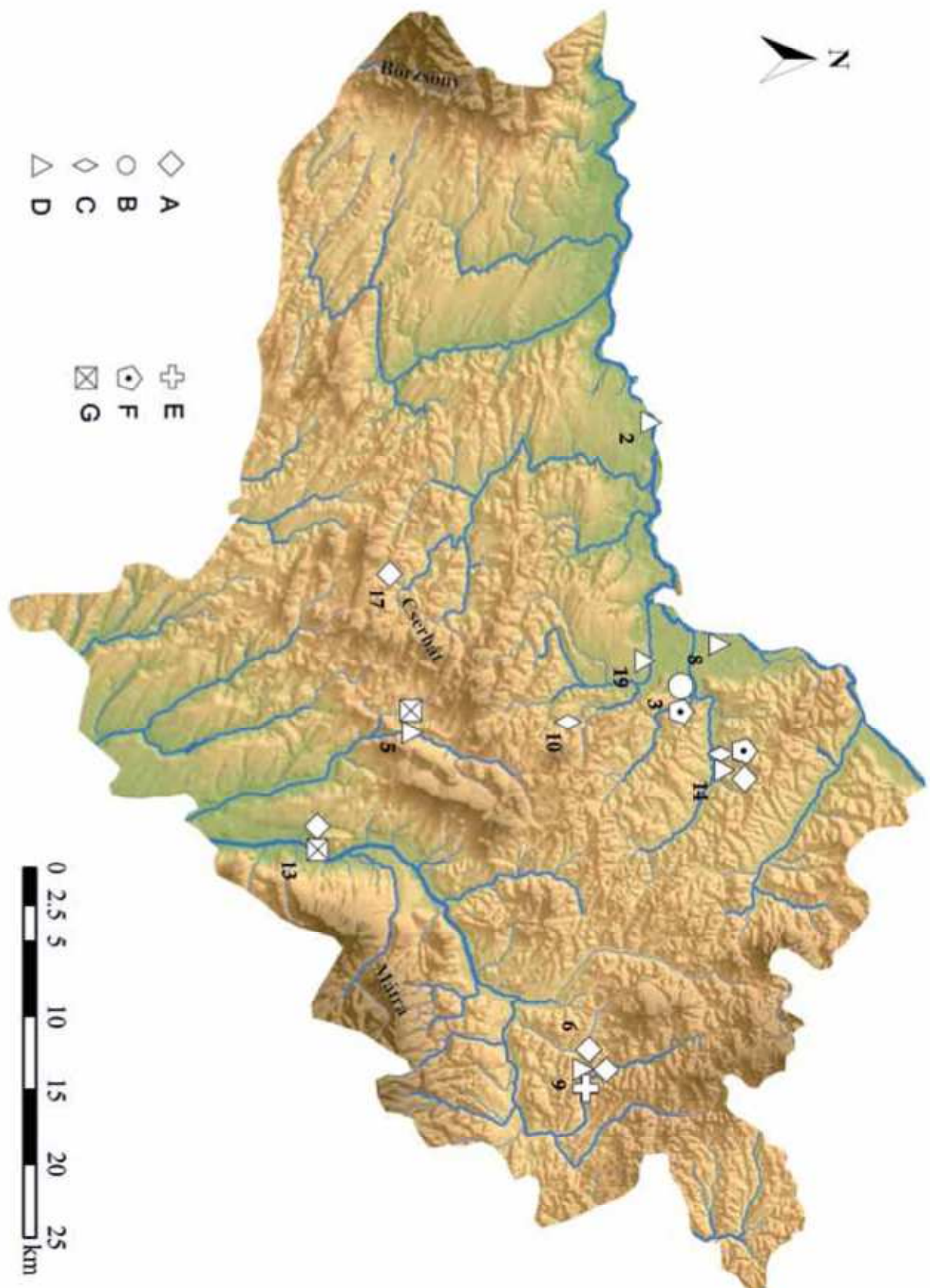


Figure 3. Sites with weapons and harness components linked to military presence. A – axe; B – bridle mount; C – spearhead; D – arrowhead; E – bow case mount; F – iron dagger; G – bit.
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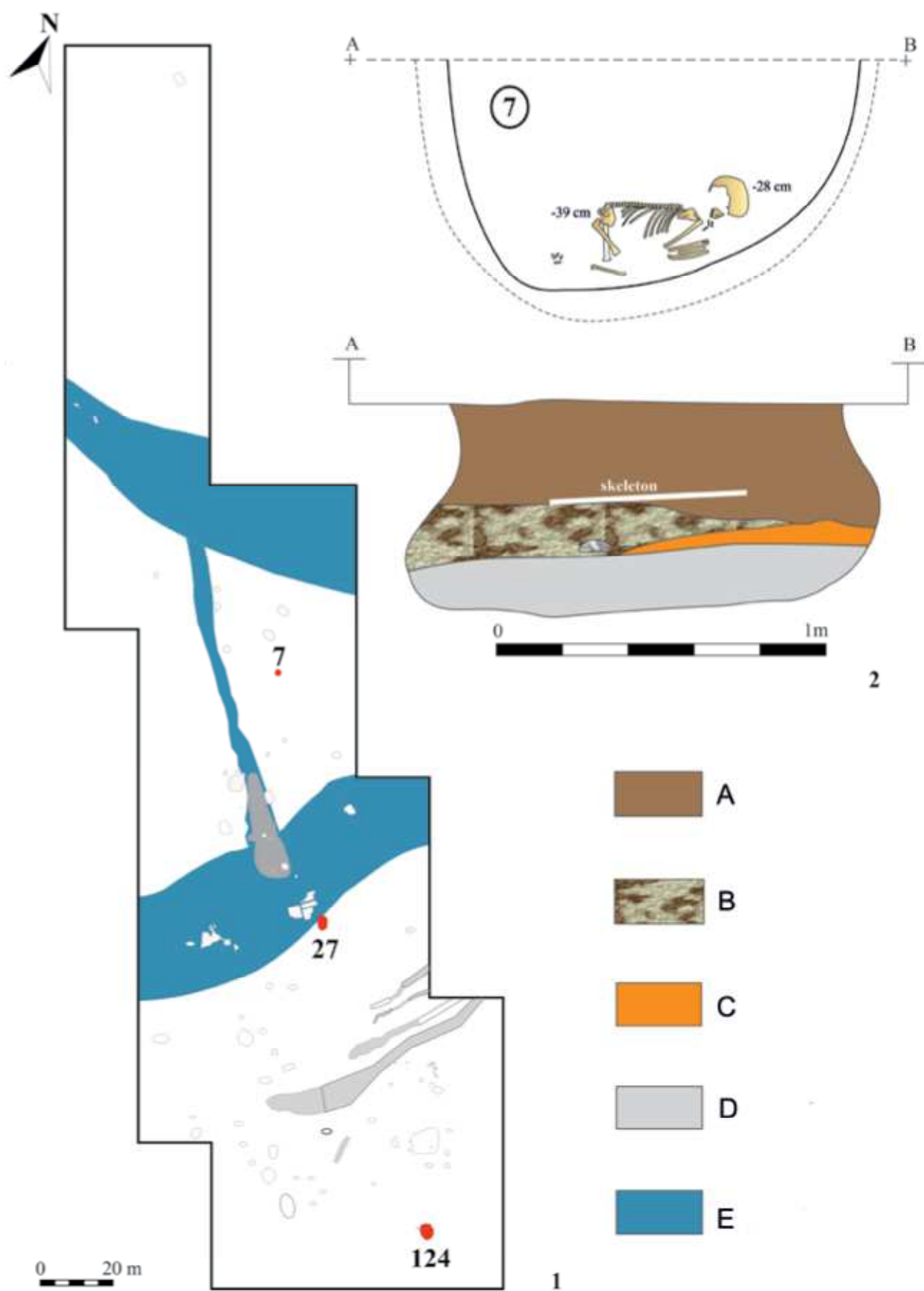


Figure 4. Salgótarján, Industrial Park II. 1: features with human bones and skeletons; 2: feature No. 7 with the skeleton. A – homogeneous brown; B – yellowish-brown, mixed with gravel and lime concretions; C – strongly burnt, red; D – light-grey, ashy; E – previous, filled-up water-course. Author: A. Vaday



Figure 5. Salgótarján, Industrial Park II. Left – feature No. 27 with the human bones; Right – feature No. 124 with the skeleton. J – brownish-grey, bound; K – light-grey, ashy; L – daub; M – charcoal; N – yellowish-brown, mixed with gravel and lime concretions; P – bones; Author: A. Vaday

Generally speaking, Scythian settlements and cemeteries in the Carpathian Basin remain separate from each other. At the site of Industrial Park II adult Scythian tombs have not been found, nor at the latter excavation site to the north from here, at the entrance of the Kincsesvalley. At the site of Industrial Park II – further away from each other – in three cases children skeletons have been found (Figure 4 and 5) whose existence needs to be explained. The matter of human skeletons occurring in settlements in earlier and later periods would lead us too far.⁸ However, in the case of Salgótarján human remains found at the settlement add another aspect to the phenomenon. On the roads running close to the stream Tarján leading to the river Zagyva constantly trailing Scythian warriors could establish contact with the inhabitants of the small village. Those little children could have been descendants of indigenous women and Scythian men buried by a new rite, in the territory of the village.

The three – already abandoned – features including child bones with no grave furniture or other objects attached were features No. 7, 27 and 122 (124).⁹ In two cases skeletons were laid in contracted position over two layers filled up with household waste at the upper part of the features. A three-year-old girl was in Feature No. 7, remains of an infant at Feature No. 124.¹⁰ In the upper layer of a house of Feature No. 27. the remains of metacarpals, metatarsals and pelvic bones of a little girl of about three years old were found,¹¹ the rest of her bones due to – unattended – removal of the humus preceding the construction work has been destroyed together with parts of the house.

⁸ For instance Neolithic, Bronze Age, Sarmatians, Mongol invasion etc.

⁹ Vaday 2001, 210, 211, fig. 8. It should be noted here that fig. 5 was incorrectly presented as fig. 4 in the text, with a wrong caption. See also Vaday 2003, 33.

¹⁰ The infant skeleton has the separate Feature number of 122.

¹¹ We would like to thank Gusztáv Balázs Mende for the identification of bones.

Beside the Late Bronze Age vessel fragments, other artifacts as animal bones and iron objects were also among the waste material of the last two features, confirming the date of the Scythian period.¹²

In Feature No. 27 there was a D-shaped oval iron buckle, with only a fraction of its tongue remained, together with other iron objects¹³ (Pl. I: 1-2, 8). Under Feature No. 122, an infant skeleton in Feature No. 124 ten different iron objects were found (tools and equipment),¹⁴ (Pl. I: 3-7; II: 1, 2, 5, 6) and a fraction of a bone bit were also unearthed¹⁵ (Pl. II: 3). Iron lumps, slaggy half products, various slag and furnace remains found on the settlement also suggest the metallurgical activity of the Scythian period (Czajlik *et al.* 2003).

Below is a list of Scythian sites in the county, including the relevant literature.

Catalogue¹⁶

1. **Balassagyarmat**, the Hungarian National Museum bought stray finds, bronze rattle and bell. *Kemenczei 1980, 65; 2009, 167.*

2. **Balassagyarmat**, Káposztások, settlement. Unpublished excavation of Gábor Bácsmegei in 2004. *Bácsmegei 2005, 171; Kemenczei 2009, 167.*

3. The grave find is a stray, a short sword, the site is known under different names. *Hampel 1876, 49; Hampel 1893, 387*, mentioned as Piliny; *Patay 1955, 69*: „the site is presumably Dolány (today **Benczúrfalva**).” According to Tibor Kemenczei Nógrád county: *Kemenczei 2009, 172.*¹⁷

4. According to *Kemenczei (2009, 174)* around **Benczúrfalva**, „Szécsény”. From a grave (?) found in 1977 bronze arrowhead.

5. **Cserhátszentiván**, grave or graves, stray bridle bit and arrowhead. *Patay 1955, 68, 69, 71, 72; Kemenczei 1985, 56; 2009, 167.*

6. **Kazár**, Alsó-dűlő, grave ceramics, *Majcher 2000, 43; Tankó 2015, 432-434.*

7. **Kazár**, Mizserfa bányatelep, elsewhere: Szőlőtető-Bányatelep, Szöllőverő-alja, grave finds. *Dornyay 1926, 11; Patay 1955, 69; Majcher 2000, 42.*

8. **Ludányhalászi**, Kavicsbánya (Homokbánya), settlement. *Guba 2007, 226; 2008, 244; 2010, 262; Kemenczei 2009, 169.*

9. The site is known under different names: **Mátraszele/Kerekdomb/Kazár**, Körte-völgyi Kerek-domb/Mátraterenye/Mátraszele-Homokterenye. Graves from the excavations of Béla Dornyay and then Pál Patay. *Dornyay 1928, 340; Fettich 1931, Taf. 17; 1934, Taf. 12; Patay 1961, 23; 1962, 72-76; Kemenczei 2009, 170.*¹⁸ 35 bronze arrowheads and a bow case mount.

10. **Nagylóc**, stray iron spear-head, grave?, *Patay 1955, 69.*

11. **Nógrádkövesd**, Víztarozó és környéke, excavations of Pál Patay, graves. *Patay 1955, 61-65; 1956, 186, 190; Kemenczei 2001, 15; 2009, 171, 172.*

12. **Pásztó**, stray grave finds.¹⁹

13. The site is known under two names: **Pásztó**, Gegyenpart and **Szurdokpüspöki** Zagyvapart. Stray grave finds. Bits, bronze axe, other finds. *Párducz 1970, 49-58; Kemenczei 2009, 175; Tankó 2015, 435.*

14. **Piliny**, Borsos, graves from the excavations of Jenő Nyáry. Among the finds are iron dagger, two iron pickaxes and two iron spearheads. In 1872 the excavator donated several

¹² The finds are located in the Kubinyi Ferenc Museum, Szécsény, henceforward abbreviated as KFM.

¹³ Inv: KFM 2000.1.30, 2000.1.35, 2000.1.37.

¹⁴ Inv: KFM 2000.1.152-162.

¹⁵ Inv: KFM 2000.1.165.

¹⁶ The Catalogue numbers are equalled with the numbers on the map.

¹⁷ In József Hampel's work inaccuracies repeatedly occurred. Recently Tibor Kemenczei decided to define it as Nógrád county. However, the most likely site-definition could be the one that Pál Patay published, who was working in the county between 1950 and 1957, and was the best expert in Nógrádian sites.

¹⁸ *Fettich 1929*, referred here is wrong, correct *Fettich 1931*.

¹⁹ The finds are probably at Gábor Vékony, they did not get into the Museum in Szécsény. See also the data of KÖH 600/592/1/2004.

artifacts to the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Venice, among them were three bronze arrowheads. *Nyáry* 1868, 266, 267; 1870, 125-128; *Hampel* 1876, 120, 121, 125, 129; 1893, 387, 395; *Rómer* 1878, 182, 183; *Reinecke* 1897, 21-13; *Bottyán* 1955, 54; *Patay* 1955, 66, 67; 1956, 188; *Gilli* 1999, 128-133; *Kemenczei* 2001, 146; 2009, 172, 173; *Tézer* 2005, 5.

15. **Ságújfalu**, stray pot. *Patay* 1955, 69.

16. **Salgótarján**, Industrial Park II settlement. *Vaday* 2001, 209-216; 2003, 31-38; *Kemenczei* 2009, 174.

17. **Szanda**, stray iron pickaxe. *Patay* 1955, 69; *Kemenczei* 2009, 174.

18. **Szurdokpüspöki**, bone objects found during construction works. *Ghillány* 1945, 51; *Patay* 1955, 68; *Párducz* 1970, 57; *Kemenczei* 2009, 175; *Tankó* 2015, 435.

19. **Szécsény**, stray grave find. *Párducz* 1960, Taf. 28: 1; 1968, Taf. 26; *Tézer* 2005, 5; *Kemenczei* 2009, 174.

CONCLUSION

In the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age a variety of settlements and cemeteries of the surviving population are known in Nógrád county. However, the presence of Scythian invaders meant a numerical minority compared to the autochthonous population. Newcomers with equestrian combat tactics and a range of weapons were ensured in the success of their conquest. For the mostly nomadic Scythians, the mountain regions of the county were not suitable for their lifestyle they got used to in the East. Nevertheless, several other aspects were important to them because it created a connection between today's southern Slovakia and the Hungarian Plains.

This clarifies the nature of military occupation, referring to objects turned up close to paths along rivers and streams and well illustrating military presence (Figure 3). Another aspect of the Scythian conquest is of an economic concern, since the remained metal mining, knowledge of smelting, production of raw materials and finished products, which reached the Plain poor in raw material through trade. Skeletal remains of children and iron objects found in the features at Salgótarján, Industrial Park II (Figure 4 and 5) well illustrate the contact between the natives and the Scythians.

A serious lack of information had to be taken into account among several of the 19 Scythian period sites in the county, therefore our statements need to be supplemented with further research.

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RESUMÉ

Lokality zo skýtskeho obdobia v Novohradskej župe

Z Novohradskej župy (obr. 1: 1) poznáme širokú škálu sídlisk a pohrebísk (obr. 1: 2) prežívajúceho obyvateľstva, ktoré tu sídlilo v neskorej dobe bronzovej a včasnej dobe železnej. Vzhľadom k počtu pôvodných obyvateľov bol počet skýtskych útočníkov veľmi nízky. Novoprišelci však vďaka jazdeckej bojovej taktike a škále zbraní (obr. 3) boli predurčení na dobytie územia.

Pre Skýtov, ktorí vo svojej domovine na východe žili najmä nomádskeho spôsobom, neboli horské oblasti Novohradskej župy vhodné pre život. Boli pre nich však zaujímavé z iného dôvodu, predstavovali totiž spojnicu oblastí južného (stredného) Slovenska a nížin v Maďarsku.

Nálezy, ktoré sa našli v blízkosti ciest tiahnúcich sa pozdĺž vodných tokov (obr. 3), jasne dokladajú skýtsku vojenskú prítomnosť a pomáhajú pochopiť charakter vojenského „ŕaženia“. Ďalším aspektom skýtskeho područia je vplyv na hospodárstvo, keďže práve prostredníctvom kontaktov a obchodu sa do oblasti maďarských nížin, chudobných na nerastné suroviny dostávajú vedomosti o ŕažbe rúd, tavbe kovov, výrobe polotovarov a produktov. Kostrové pozostatky detí (obr. 4; 5) a železné predmety (tab. I; II) nájdené v objektoch na lokalite Salgótarján, poloha Priemyselný Park II dobre ilustrujú kontakty pôvodného obyvateľstva so Skýtmi.

Je potrebné si zároveň uvedomiť, že vo viacerých prípadoch z 19 skýtskych lokalít (viď Katalóg) Novohradskej župy máme len útržkovité informácie, preto je pravdepodobné, že ďalší výskum naše závery spresní a doplní.

Zoznam príloh

Tabela 1. Priestorové údaje sídlisk a pohrebísk. Autor: É. Szakos

Obr. 1. 1: Lokalizácia Novohradskej župy; 2: Skýtske lokality v Novohradskej župe. A – sídlisko; B – hrob/pohrebisko; C – náhodný nález. Autor: É. Szakos

Obr. 2. Priestorové údaje sídlisk a pohrebísk. Autor: É. Szakos

Obr. 3. Lokality s nálezmi zbraní a súčastí konského postroja – doklad vojenskej prítomnosti. A – sekera; B – strmeň; C – hrot kopije; D – hrot šípu; E – puzdro na luk; F – železná dýka; G – hrot. Autor: É. Szakos

Obr. 4. Salgótarján, Priemyselný Park II. 1: objekty s ľudskými kosťami a kostrami; 2: obj. 7 s kostrou. A – homogénna hnedá; B – žltá-hnedá, premiešaná so štrkom a vápennými konkréciami; C – silno prepálená, červená; D – jemne šedá, popolovitá; E – opätovne zaplnené koryto. Autor: A. Vaday

Obr. 5. Salgótarján, Priemyselný Park II. Vľavo – obj. 27 s ľudskými kosťami; vpravo – obj. 124 s kostrou. J – hnedo-šedá, hutná; K – svetlo-šedá, popolovitá; L – mazanica; M – uhlík; N – žltá-hnedá, premiešaná so štrkom a vápennými konkréciami; P – kosti; Autor: A. Vaday

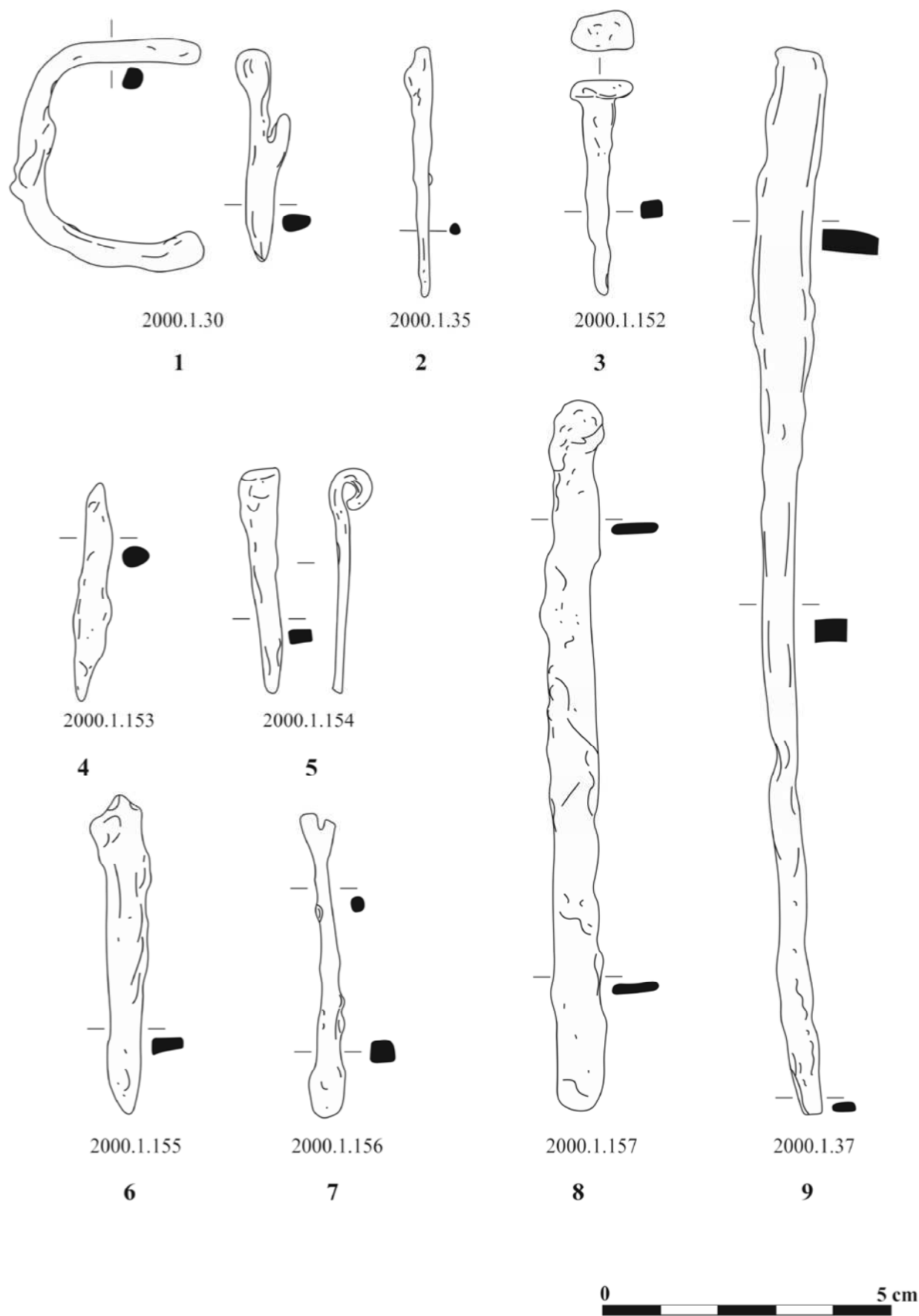
Tab. I. Salgótarján, Priemyselný Park II. Železné predmety. 1-2, 9: obj. 27; 3-8: obj. 124. Autor: A. Vaday

Tab. II. Salgótarján, Priemyselný Park II. 1-2, 4-6: železné predmety; 3: kostný predmet z obj. 122 (124). Autor: A. Vaday

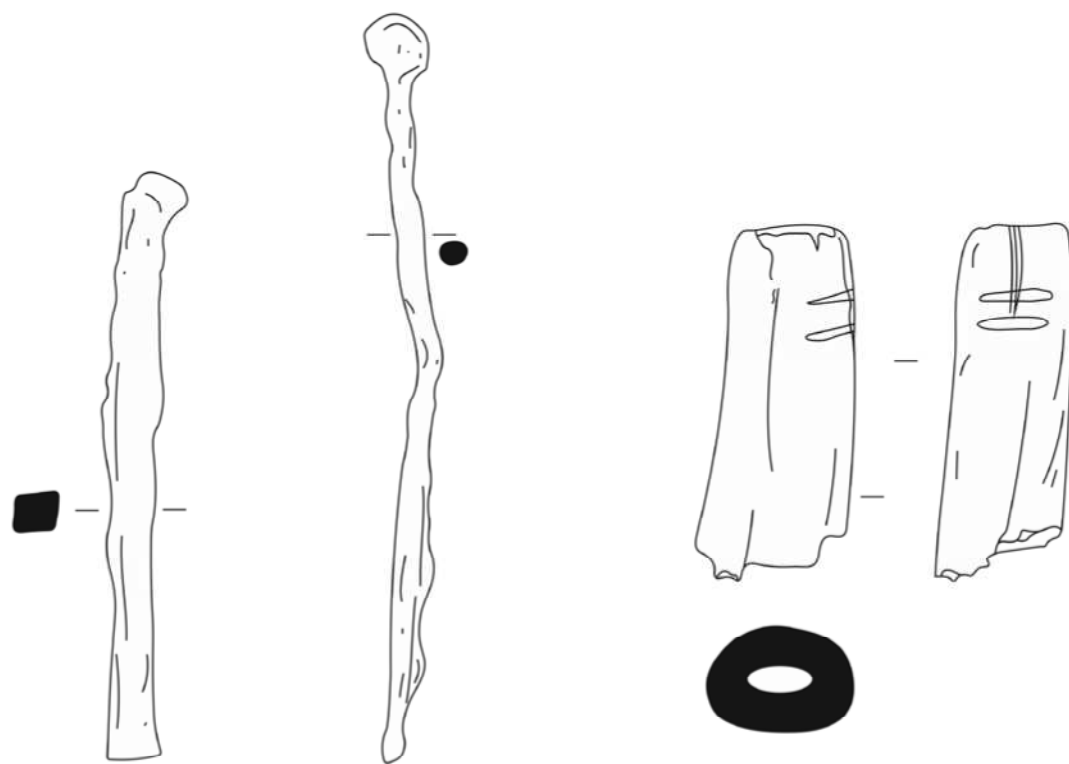
Translated by Éva Szakos

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Pl. I. Salgótarján, Industrial Park II. Iron finds. 1-2, 9: Feature No. 27; 3-8: Feature No. 124.
Drawing by: A. Vaday



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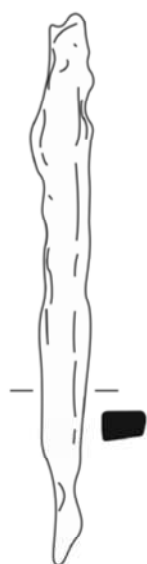
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Pl. II. Salgótarján, Industrial Park II. 1-2, 4-6: iron finds; 3: bone object from the feature No. 122 (124). Drawing by: A. Vaday