

Alsónyék-Bátaszék: Foreword

The journal *Bericht der Römisch-Germanischen Kommission* (Report of the Romano-Germanic Commission) was established shortly after the foundation of the research institute. In 1905 it already contained a report on the results of research activities in the previous year. Furthermore, the first director of the RGK, Hans Dragendorff, made clear in his preface that the *Bericht* will also reflect on parallel research from other countries such as England, France and the Danubian states, in order to provide better possibilities of comparing finds and findings from areas neighbouring Germany (*Bericht der RGK* 1904/1905/: 1–2). In fact the *Bericht* sometimes contained long, detailed summary reports and studies almost the size of a monograph. To name just one such extensive study that was written – similar to the current volume – about prehistoric research in Hungary, in the *Bericht der RGK* 24–25, 1934–1935 Ferenc Tompa published “25 Jahre Urgeschichteforschung in Ungarn”.

In the more than hundred years of its history, the *Bericht* has also been a reflection of our institute’s own research. The summaries of these research projects may come close to the size of a monograph, such as is the case with RGK project “*SINCOS I – Sinking Costs. Geosphere, Ecosphere and Anthroposphere of the Holocene Southern Baltic Sea*”, published in *Bericht der RGK* 88, 2007.

Having made clear why thematic volumes about the RGK’s research projects are by no means a novelty in the tradition of the *Bericht*, I owe the reader an explanation as to how Bayesian chronological modelling of the south Hungarian site Alsónyék-Bátaszék is connected to our institute. The ERC Advanced Grant project “*The times of their lives: towards precise narratives of change in the European Neolithic through formal chronological modelling*” started in 2012. This project is making ground-breaking progress towards the construction of much more precise chronologies, of the tempo of change within generations even in the 6th or 5th millennium cal BC, and together with this, what is perhaps a new kind of thinking about prehistory for the Neolithic period in Europe. In the beginning, the extensive programme was widely conceptualised and intended to involve only the large site of Alsónyék-Bátaszék. But as the project evolved, more Neolithic sites from the same south Transdanubian region, like Versend and Szederkény, became part of it, whilst the final stage will encompass aspects of the whole Lengyel period in the western part of the Carpathian basin. The other facets of the same ERC grant research are being published in leading journals and books, including an article (about the Bayesian modelling of the eponymous Vinča site) in our *Germania* in 2016.

While Alasdair Whittle and Alex Bayliss are the programme’s two principal investigators, I myself headed the work of the Hungarian workgroup within the project from the very beginning.

Quite independently of the “*Times of their lives*” ERC project, the RGK already became involved in research on the Sárköz Neolithic around Alsónyék and neighbouring sites like Tolna-Mözs or Fajszt in 2011, followed by two further campaigns in 2013 and 2014. The RGK team carried out geomagnetic surveys on Hungarian multi-period settlements. The main goal was to evaluate the excavations at the sites, which had by then been completed, together with the results of the geophysics. This combined investigation provided a good opportunity of estimating the size of the settlements, as well as gaining data at a landscape level.

From 2013 this cooperation was intensified by my appointment as director of the RGK, and in the very same year could be further reinforced by the signing of a Memorandum of

Understanding between the Institute of Archaeology, RCH, of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and the RGK as part of the German Archaeological Institute (DAI). Since then the original projects have been brought under the umbrella of the RGK and, what is more, the continued evaluation of the extremely rich features, finds and environmental data gained from the site at Alsónyék have been supported by substantial financial input. The close cooperation between the two institutions was then additionally bolstered, beyond the personal and financial ties that already existed, by the opening of an RGK-DAI research unit at the Archaeological Institute in Budapest. The presentation of the research in this thematic volume of the *Bericht* is thus a clear reflection of the deep involvement of the RGK.

Finally, there is yet another important facet that should be mentioned. One of the crucial criteria of the ERC programme “*The times of their lives*” is the dissemination of the method, the possibilities and the caveats of Bayesian statistics and chronological modelling, especially in countries where it has not yet been dynamically introduced. The *Bericht* reaches out to a broad range of scholars dealing with all archaeological periods, among them possibly many who might not think that radiocarbon chronology and, specifically, ^{14}C dates evaluated with Bayesian statistics may offer new perspectives in their own field. They will hopefully be positively surprised by this volume and will investigate the possibilities of using the method discussed here for other periods and areas, in order to be able to construct a fine chronology for households within settlements and within grave groups or individual graves, to provide a novel insight into old cultural sequences, and thus to create a new chapter in archaeological research on prehistoric and later periods.

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