

# A Prehistoric Burial with Shell Deposit at Ófehértó-Almező-dűlő Sites Nos. 18 and 19.

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Archaeologists of the Hungarian National Museum National Heritage Protection Centre (the former Field Service for Cultural Heritage) conducted an excavation of an area of 28,703 m<sup>2</sup> on the south-western margin of Ófehértó, along a section of the M3 Motorway between Nyíregyháza and Vásárosnamény. The excavation was conducted between the 1st of October 2009 and the 6th of December 2010, during which Early Bronze Age Sanislău (Hungarian: Szaniszló) and Sarmatian settlement remains were revealed.

Only two of the 272 features that were discovered at the site can be associated with the Sarmatians. A majority of the archaeological features are waste pits but storage pits, wells and a further peculiar pit were also found. The latter pit accommodated two contracted male skeletons placed in a way that their backs faced towards each other but the skeletons were situated in different depths. The upper skeleton was laid on his left side oriented in southwest-northeast direction and was provided with a bone arrow-head. The lower one, which was laid on his right side, was supplied with a pierced horn axe and a ceramic vessel. From beneath the latter one a coherent shell bed – sectioned by holes made by animals – was recovered.

During the excavation of the skeletons and the grave goods we aimed at gaining as many information concerning the structure and formation of the shell layer as possible. A detailed laboratory analysis indicated that the ca. 270-300 pieces of valves were generally arranged into three even layers of nearly the same thickness. Thus it might be concluded that the shell valves were originally placed in the pit in order that they would cover a certain area of the pit's bottom in even distribution.

The identified assemblage is primarily dominated by the *Unio pictorum* (LINNAEUS) but the *Unio tumidus* RETZIUS was also recovered in relatively great numbers. The occurrence of the *Unio crassus* RETZIUS is, however, fairly low in the assemblage. The recovery of a fragmented specimen of the *Viviparus contectus* (MILLET) in the assemblage serves as a unique example.

The analysed species might have been gathered in the surroundings of the site where they could have been available throughout the Bronze Age.

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