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COMPARATIVE REFLECTIONS ON THE RECENTLY UNEARTHED CHARIOT BURIALS AT PÁTY AND SAJÓPETRI (HUNGARY)

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Abstract: *The recently unearthed chariot burials at Páty and Sajópetri has been studied in this paper. The two-wheeled war chariot is one of the emblematic finds of La Tène culture and analyzed in detail in many recent publications. At this stage of the research, three new chariot burials were unearthed by modern excavation methods and well documented in Hungary in the last two decades. Generally, the discoveries of La Tène chariots or their elements are relatively rare in the Carpathian Basin. The necropolis of Sajópetri is considered a particularly important site with the two cremation burials including the iron elements of chariots. Another remarkable chariot burial was discovered in Páty, ten kilometers west from Budapest. There are some similarities and differences between them, which have many major aspects to our knowledge about chariot burial unearthed in the Carpathian Basin and Northwest-Balkan.*

Keywords: *La Tène culture, Celts, chariot burials, warrior graves, Carpathian Basin.*

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UPOREDNA RAZMIŠLJANJA O NEDAVNO OTKRIVENIM GROBOVIMA SA KOLIMA NA LOKALITETIMA PATI I ŠAJOPETRI (MAĐARSKA)

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Apstrakt: U članku se proučavaju nedavno otkriveni grobovi sa kolima u Patiju i Šajopšetriju. Borna kola sa dva točka su jedan od reprezentativnih nalaza latenske kulture i detaljno su analizirana u mnogim recentnim publikacijama. Na ovom stupnju istraženosti, u Mađarskoj su u poslednje dve decenije iskopana modernim istraživačkim metodama tri nova groba sa kolima. Generalno gledano, nalazi latenskih kola ili njihovih elemenata su relativno retki u Karpatskom basenu. Nekropola Šajopetri smatra se posebno važnim nalazištem, sa dva groba sa kremacijom koja sadrže gvozdene elemente kola. Još jedan grob sa kolima vredan pomena bio je istražen u Patiju, 10km zapadno od Budimpešte. Među njima postoje sličnosti i razlike, koje odražavaju mnoge važne aspekte našeg znanja o grobovima sa kolima otkrivenim u Karpatskom basenu i severozapadnom Balkanu.

Ključne reči: latenska kultura, Kelti, grobovi sa kolima, ratnički grobovi, Karpatski basen.

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The two-wheeled war chariot is one of the emblematic finds of La Tène culture and analyzed in detail in many recent publications (e.g. Furger-Gunti 1991; Egg and Pare 1993, 212–218; Pare 1992; Schönfelder 2002; Karl 2003). The Celtic chariot burials are present practically throughout the territory of the La Tène culture from Newbridge near Edinburgh in Scotland (Carter et al. 2010) to Mezék in Bulgaria, located just a few kilometres from the Turkish border (Fol 1991, 384; Emilov and Megaw 2012), although concentrated in a few specific places. However, differences exist not only from a geographical point of view but also from a chronological point of view. Most of the four-wheeled wagons and two-wheeled chariots were unearthed in Central Rhine region in contexts ranging from the late Hallstatt to the late La Tène periods

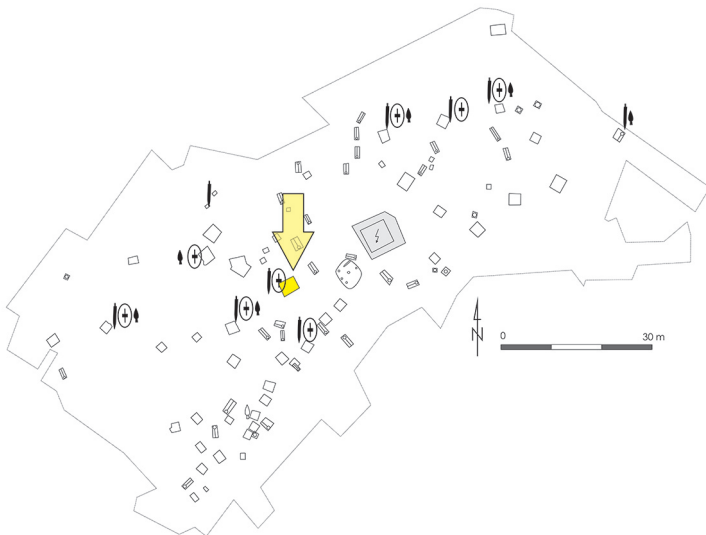


Figure 1. Sajópetri – Homoki-szőlőskert, excavation plan of the La Tène necropolis, where the warrior graves are marked with the stylized symbols of weapons. The place of chariot burial is marked with a yellow arrow (graphic: K. Tankó).



Figure 2. Sajópetri – Homoki-szőlőskert, grave 2/2 (graphic: K. Tankó).



Figure 3. Sajópetri – Homoki-szőlőskert, grave 2/2 (photo: K. Tankó).

(Haffner and Joachim 1984; Van Endert 1987; Egg and Pare 1993, 213–218), in Champagne in the early and middle La Tène periods (Bretz-Mahler 1971; Egg and Pare 1993, 213–218); in the territory Belgium and Netherlands in the whole time of La Tène culture (Metzler 1986; Van Endert 1987; Egg and Pare 1993, 213–218), in the British Isles in the middle and late La Tène periods (Stead 1979; Egg and Pare 1993, 213–218) as well as in the Northwest-Balkan (Guštin 1984, 111–132) and the Carpathian Basin in the middle and late La Tène periods (Berecki 2018, 143–164). On the other hand, a significant change has been done in the funerary rite over time. Some skeletal burials sometimes contained complete chariots before the middle La Tène period, but later with the generalization of the rite of cremation, only a few elements of the chariot were incinerated with the dead human body and were deposited in the grave (Karl 2003, 3–4). That is why in some cases, the chariot would only be represented by a few selected pieces, what M. Schönfelder defined as „pars

pro toto” in burial rite (Schönfelder 2002, 311–316).

Thanks to the many iron elements found in favorable situations practically have premise the reconstruction of the Celtic chariot (Fox 1946; Metzler 1986; Furger-Gunti 1993, Abb. 4–5; Neugebauer 1992, 2; Karl 2003, Fig. 12; Carter et al. Fig. 14). Comparing the different hypotheses, we find that there is a consensus regarding its basic structure: the Celtic war chariot was made of wood

and it was reinforced by many pieces of iron elements (Fig. 5). In general, the different attempts at reconstruction show a relatively solid structure, with the joints of beams and other wooden elements of both substructure (axle-tree and pole) and superstructure (platform, sideboards) permanently connected to each other by nails or other permanent methods of fixing two wooden elements to each other (Karl 2003, 8–10).

At this stage of the research, three new chariot burials were unearthed by modern excavation methods and well documented in Hungary in the last two decades. Generally, the discoveries of La Tène chariots or their elements are relatively rare in the Carpathian Basin (Fig. 10). Beside the barely more than a dozen known graves east of the Danube (Berecki 2018, 144, 152), the necropolis of Sajópetri is considered as a particularly important site with the two cremation burials including iron elements of chariots (grave 2/2 and 72/147 in Szabó and Tankó 2018, 22–24, 104–106, 192–196)(Fig. 1).

There were found U-shaped joint of felloe, bent fragments of two iron tyres, four nave hoops and a ring assembly in Sajópetri grave 2/2 (Fig. 2–4) (Szabó and Tankó 2018, Pl. II/1; Pl. I/15–16; II/6a–e; III/5–7). There was linchpin, rein terrets, iron nails and a U-shaped joint of felloe in grave 72/147 (Szabó and Tankó 2018, Pl. XLIII/10, 12–13, 16–18). It is remarkable that the grave 2/2 contained the element of two wheels, whereas – except the U-shaped joint – only iron parts of the frame and of the axle have been uncovered from grave 72/147. There was a snaffle bit in grave 2/2 (Szabó and Tankó 2018, Pl. I/6), which is one of the most common amongst horse bridle bits for riding or charting and appeared in many graves of La Tène culture (Werner 1988, 61–73; Schönfelder 2002, 250–255, Abb. 157/1–3, Tab. 42). Bronze phalera of horse harness was also found in the grave 72/147 (Szabó and Tankó 2018, Pl. XLIII/7).



Figure 4. Sajópetri – Homoki-szőlőskert, grave 2/2. Iron weapons and remains of the iron elements of chariot deposited in a heap in the grave (photo: K. Tankó).

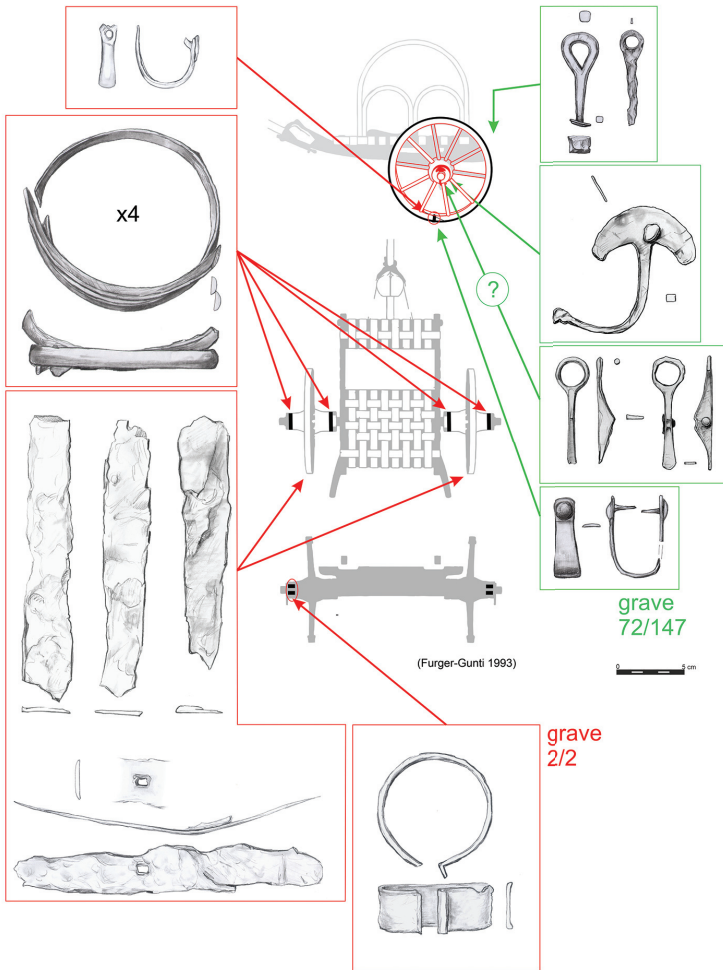


Figure 5. Sajópetri – Homoki-szőlőskert, iron elements of Celtic chariot from the graves 2/2 and 74/147 (graphic: K. Nagy and K. Tankó after A. Furger-Gunti’s reconstruction).

It seems that the burial 2/2 contained only two parts of the wheels, while the grave 72/147 – with the exception of the U-shaped joint of felloe wheel fitting – contained only iron elements of the wooden superstructure and the axle. It might arise that, the iron elements of two chariot were complemented each other at Sajópetri (Fig. 5). In other words, the iron parts of the two graves form one chariot, which has all of the necessary components. However, this assumption needs to be handled with care, because it’s just a hypothesis and there is no direct evidence of it.

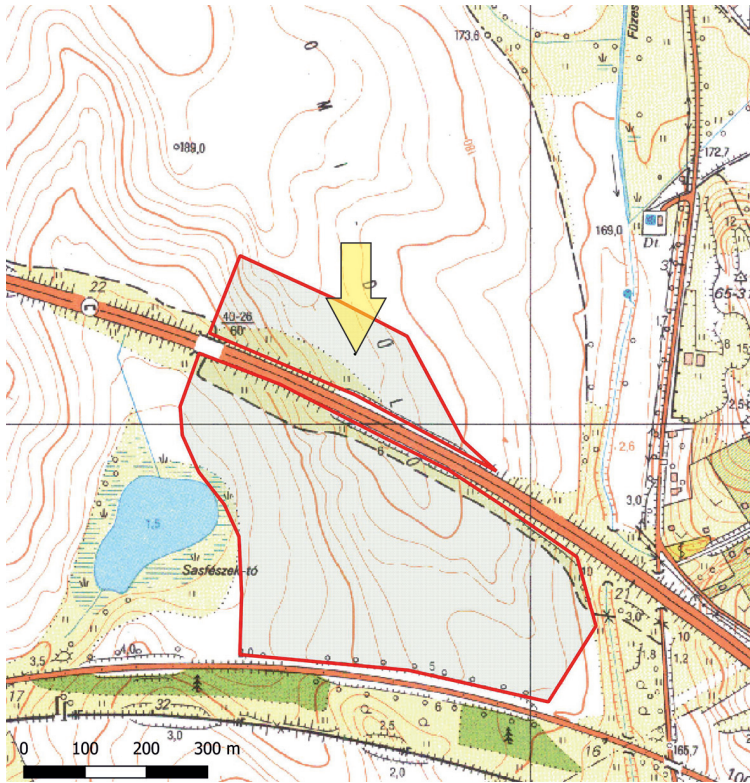


Figure 6. Páty – Malom-dűlő, the place of chariot burial (marked with yellow arrow) in the excavated area (limited with red line) (graphic: K. Tankó).

Another remarkable chariot burial was discovered in Páty, ten kilometers west from Budapest in 1997.⁵ This was a single Celtic tomb unearthed on top of Malom-dűlő hill (Fig. 6).

There was a rescue excavation that connected to the establishment of an industrial park next to M1 motorway. Large Roman vicus and its cemetery were excavated almost completely in ca. 15 hectares (Ottományi 2007; Ottományi 2014; Ottományi 2019, 9–11), however, there was the only one Celtic grave (see the position of the „kelta” grave on the site map in Ottományi 2019, 11). It is a chariot burial with cremated human remains, bones and ashes of an adult male deposited in the center of the grave. Traces of wooden boxes or coffins were detected during the excavation process of grave pit. Fired and strongly corroded iron tyres, sword and scabbard, shield buckle and handle, as well as fragments of

5 This was the first Celtic grave which the author of this study as student fortunately uncovered and documented in this excavation under the directions of Éva Maróti and Katalin Ottományi. Here I take the opportunity to thank the archaeologist colleagues for the possibility of participating and gaining experience.

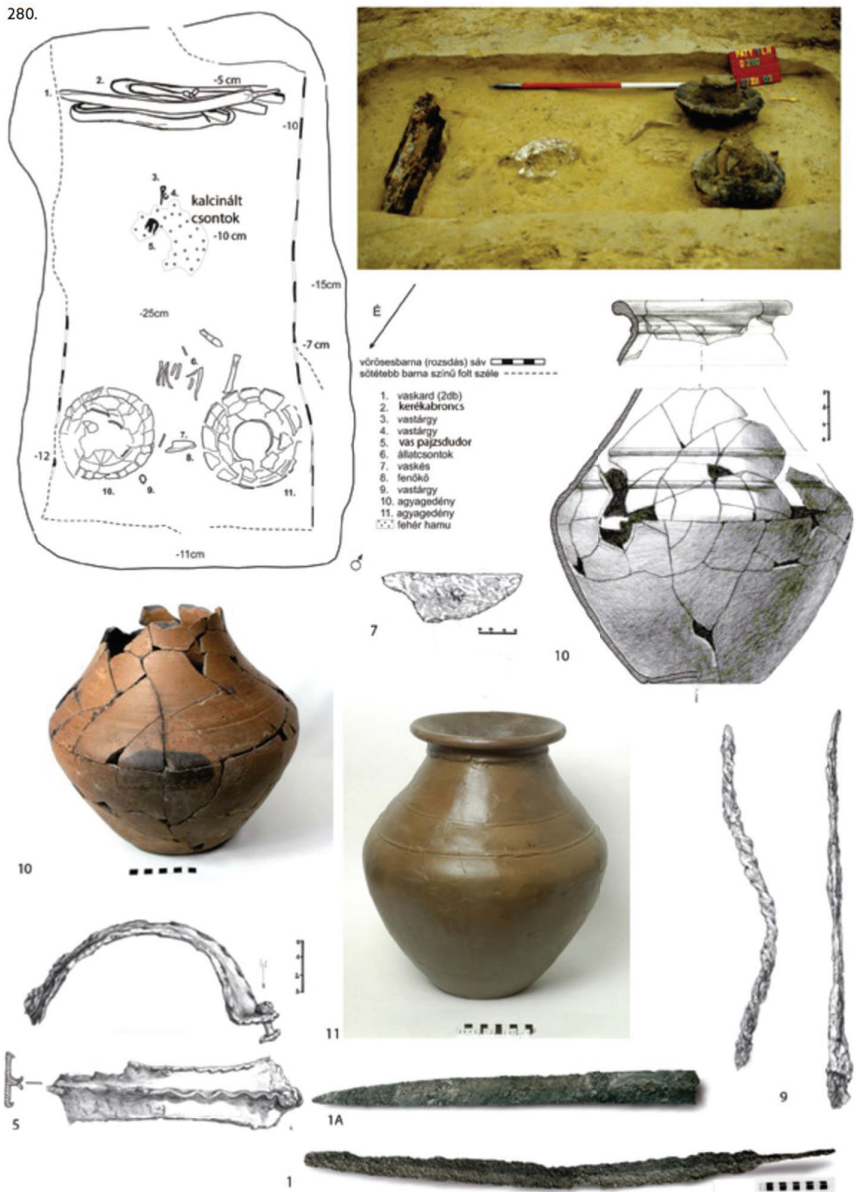


Figure 7. Páty – Malom-dűlő, finds from grave 280 (after Ottományi 2019, Pl. 22).

iron chain, were found in a heap in the south-eastern part of the grave (Fig. 8–9). Two vessels, iron knife and hone stone were deposited in the north-western part of the grave (Fig. 7)(see description detailed of the grave in Ottományi 2019, 26).

We have to interpret chariot burials as *pars pro toto* partial funeral both on Páty and Sajópetri, where not the whole chariots but only some specific parts were buried. This feature of burial rite is not unprecedented in the territory of La Tène culture. The most obvious examples of this trend are the so-called *pars pro toto* „symbolic chariot burials” which more obvious manifestations are in Middle Rhine region, where was not the entire chariot only the horse harness or bridle and some small iron elements were deposited beside the deceased (Schönfelder 2002, 311–316). As S. Berecki informed us in detail recently, no entire chariot was documented in the Carpathian Basin for the La Tène period. Moreover, the archaeological context could be

reconstructed, when based on descriptions or illustrations it is obvious that the elements of the chariots were placed dismantled in the graves. Consequently, even if the number of funerals and domestic assemblages with chariot components in the Carpathian Basin is low, we can state that, the main feature of the burial rite is *pars pro toto*, as well as the earliest dateable finds in chariot burials, are in La Tène B2 period and the latest well-dated components are in La Tène C1 (Berecki 2018, 147–149).

There are some similarities between Sajópetri grave 2/2 and Páty grave 280. Not only that the chariot was in the grave, but the method of deposition and the relative position to the other elements of inventory is broadly similar. Both are *pars pro toto* chariot burial, where only the fired iron components of tyres were placed in the grave during the funeral process. The next similarity is armament. Bended iron sword and scabbard were next to the remains of tyres in a heap. Other iron elements of the Celtic armament like shield and fragment of iron belt chain was found only Páty and iron spearhead was in the grave of Sajópetri. In both cases, the iron finds were separated in a heap in the south or south-west part of the grave. Two large pots were placed along the north-eastern wall of the grave pit at Páty and four pots in different sizes



Figure 8. Páty – Malom-dűlő, grave 280 (photo: K. Tankó)



Figure 9. Páty – Malom-dűlő, grave 280. Iron weapons and remains of the iron elements of chariot deposited in a heap in the grave (photo: K. Tankó)

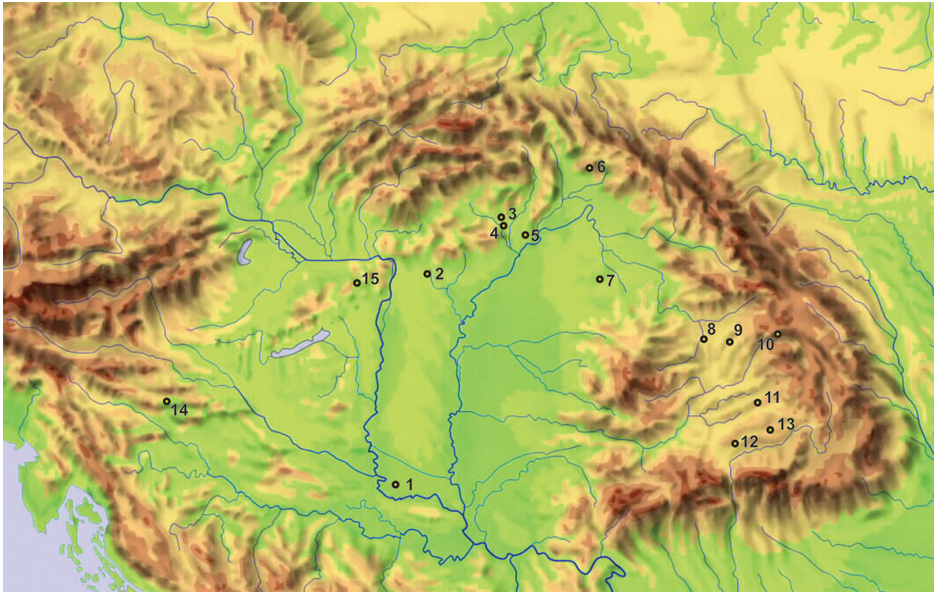


Figure 10. Chariot finds in the Carpathian Basin. 1: Odžaci (SRB), 2: Hatvan – Boldog (HU), 3: Arnót (HU), 4: Sajópetri – Homoki-szőlőskert (HU), 5: Balsa (HU), 6: Mukacsevo (UA), 7: Curtuiuşeni (RO), 8: Apahida (RO), 9: Fântânele (RO), 10: Gălăoia (RO), 11: Cristuru Secuiesc (RO), 12: Vurpăr (RO), 13: Toarcla (RO), 14: Brežice (SLO), 15: Páty – Malom-dűlő (HU) (graphic: K. Tankó after Berecki 2018, Fig. 1. with geographic base map of B. Holl).

and conditions, as well as one bowl and one small cup with handle, was in the northern part of the grave at Sajópetri. The animal offerings situated next to pottery toward the center of the graves. The iron knife was also found in both graves, but slide stone was only in Páty. The cremated human remains were separated in a heap (detailed description of the graves: Szabó and Tankó 2018, 22–24 and Ottományi 2019, 26). The anthropological determination of calcinated human bones was an adult male at Páty and only an adult person without sexual determination was in the case of Sajópetri (Bózsing 2018, 249).

From a chronological point of view, we have no easy situation. There are not so many diagnostic finds such as a fibula or other jewel, which can be dated the grave very precisely. The chape of the scabbard from Sajópetri is a Hatvan – Boldog type which was used in La Tène B2a period (Szabó and Tankó 2018, 171–174) while the other finds are also characteristic for the La Tène B2b period, meanwhile the Hatvan – Boldog type sword also occurs in this later period (Szabó and Tankó 2012, 115). The scabbard from Páty is strongly corroded, but the chape of it is ‘V’ shaped. On the basis of its chape, the scabbard can be assigned to group B of J. M. De Navarro’s Middle La Tène scabbard types (De Navarro 1972, 151–200). The chape and length of the scabbard correspond most closely to Th. Lejars’ group 5A in the typological scheme based on the

swords from Gournay-sur-Aronde (FR), approximately corresponding to the La Tène C1 chronological horizon (Lejars 1994, 35–36, 49–52). The iron belt chain is also strongly corroded but, it could be assigned this chain in A. Rapin's system as type F1, which dating between 260–230 BC (Rapin 1995, 284–290) and analysis of the Chotín (SK) cemetery revealed that this chain type first appeared in the second phase of the cemetery, corresponding to the LTB2/C1 transition period (Gebhard 1989, 83–92). The umbo from Páty has analogies in 6th horizon of Ludas cemetery in north-eastern Hungary which corresponds in La Tène C1 period (grave 1056 and 1057: Szabó and Tankó 2012, 146, Fig. 187. Pl. XLII/8 and XLIV/2). The sword scabbard and iron belt chain from Páty has a good analogy from Balassagyarmat in North-East Hungary (Tankó 2003, 94–97). All of the pottery type found in graves at Páty and Sajópetri were generally used in La Tène B2 and C1 periods (Tankó 2016, Pl. 5). Summarising the chronological data it can be stated that the chariot burial form Sajópetri can be dated to LT B2a/B2b (Szabó and Tankó 2018, 212) and the grave from Páty to the C1 (Ottományi 2019, 26).

In conclusion, the chariot burial in Sajópetri is located in the center of the necropolis of ninety graves. The situation represents the higher social status of the deceased warrior in his community. The chariot burial of another Celtic warrior was uncovered alone on top of a hill in the vicinity of Páty. Here the geographical situation is also remarkable. It can be supposed that the warrior – who may have died in an injury – was buried by his brother-in-arms far from his family and homeland. In the case of Sajópetri there is another important aspect. The known chariot burials in the eastern part of territory occupied by the Celts in the Carpathian Basin concentrated in Northeast-Hungary and Transylvania (Fig. 10) (Szabó and Tankó 2018, 196, Fig. 154; Berecki 2018, 152, Fig. 1). In addition, the chariot burials at Brežice in Slovenia and Odžaci in North-Serbia (Guštin 1984, 11–127), as well as the „horseman grave” in Beograd – Karaburma and its circle (Božič 1984, 133–139) may be formed another group of the equestrian military unit of the Eastern Celts. However, the single grave unearthed near Páty is not suit to these groups because its location is west to the Danube in the northeast part of Transdanubia. Consequently, the discovering of similar chariot graves may occur in the Transdanubian region, but further research is needed in this regard.

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Károly Tankó

Comparative reflections on the recently unearthed chariot burials at Páty and Sajópetri (Hungary)

Summary

In this paper the recently unearthed chariot burials at Páty in North-Transdanubia and Sajópetri in Northeast-Hungary has been studied. The two-wheeled war chariot is one of the emblematic find of La Tène culture and analysed in detail in many recent publications. Thanks to the many iron elements found in favourable situations practically have premise the reconstruction of the Celtic chariot. Comparing the different hypotheses, we find that there is a consensus regarding its basic structure: the Celtic war chariot the Celtic chariot was made of wood and it was reinforced by many pieces of iron elements. In general the different attempts at reconstruction show a relatively solid structure, with the joints of beams and other wooden elements of both substructure (axle-tree and pole) and superstructure (platform, sideboards) permanently connected to each other by nails or other permanent methods of fixing two wooden elements to each other. At this stage of the research three new chariot burial were unearthed by modern excavation methods and well documented in Hungary in the last two decades. Generally, the discoveries of La Tène chariots or their elements are relatively rare in the Carpathian Basin. The necropolis of Sajópetri in Northeast-Hungary is considered as a particularly important site with the two cremation burials including the iron elements of chariots. Other remarkable chariot burial was discovered in Páty, ten kilometres west from Budapest. There are some similarities between Sajópetri grave 2/2 and Páty grave 280. Not only that the chariot was in the grave, but the method of deposition and the relative position to the other elements of inventory is broadly similar. Both are pars pro toto chariot burial, where only the fired iron components of tyres were placed in grave during the funeral process. From chronological point of view the chariot burial from Sajópetri can be dated to LT B2a/B2b (Szabó and Tankó 2018, 212) and the grave from Páty to the C1. The majority of these graves that the previously known chariot burials concentrated in Northeast-Hungary, Transylvania and the northwest Balkan. However, the single grave unearthed near Páty is not suit to these groups because its location is west to the Danube in northeast part of Transdanubia. Consequently, the discovering of similar chariot graves may occur in the Transdanubian region, but further research is needed in this regard.