

# **HUNGARIAN ARCHAEOLOGY AT THE TURN OF THE MILLENNIUM**

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Fig. 17. Crucible and copper ornaments. Zalavár–Mekenye, late phase of the Middle Copper Age, Stroke Ornamented Pottery culture

have been found on several settlements of the Stroke Ornamented Pottery culture at Zalavár, Bak and Pusztaszentlászló (Fig. 17).

A conspicuous decline of copper metallurgy and copper finds can be noted in the Baden period (Late Copper Age, 3600/3500–2800/2700 B.C.). Gold articles also disappeared. The decline of the flourishing South-East European metallurgy is usually attributed to the arrival of various groups from Eastern Europe and the north Pontic steppe, as a result of which the trade and cultural relations between the various metallurgical workshops were disrupted. To this we may perhaps add the exhaustion of the surface ore deposits in the Carpathian Basin. The drop in the number of copper articles during the Baden period can perhaps also be associated with changes in the attitude towards the social and economic role of copper and it is possible that the accumulation of copper articles lost its former significance. Copper finds, such as breast ornaments, spiral armrings, neckrings and diadems, are rare over the entire, rather extensive Baden distribution; these copper articles were probably insignia of power or personal ornaments of high status individuals, or perhaps the paraphernalia of rituals. Copper daggers were also rare (Fig. 18).

Aside from a range of new copper types indicating eastern connections, the simple copper beads and rings from the burials and the small copper awls from settlements were no doubt local products. The crucibles found on sites in the Mecsek Mountains (Lánycsók) and eastern Slavonia indicate the continuity of local metallurgy, although on a much smaller scale. The Baden period also saw the use of new raw materials – provenance studies indicate the use of arsenic copper for the production of metal articles that had earlier only been used in the east and in the Alpine region.

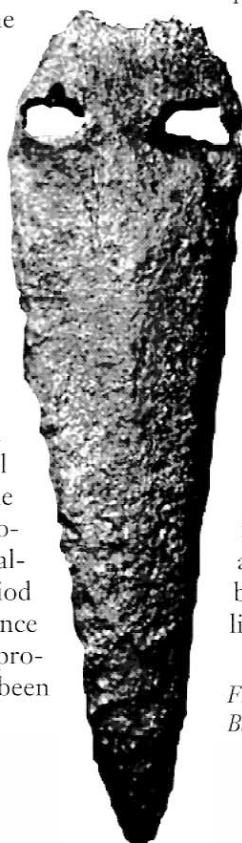


Fig. 18. Copper dagger. Sármellék, Late Copper Age, Baden culture

## COPPER AGE RELIGION AND BELIEFS

(cemeteries, cult places, art)

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The changes in the later half of the 5th millennium B.C., marking the advent of the Copper Age, also influenced religious beliefs. In spite of the survival of some earlier beliefs, the finds that can be associated with religion testify to substantial changes.

One of the most important indications of this change is the transformation of funerary practices following the abandonment of the large, permanent settlements. The small, briefly occupied Copper Age settlements could not serve as an adequate resting place for the deceased. This led to the emergence of independent cemeteries, in which the burials were arranged into rows. Cemeteries, rather than settlements, became the symbol of permanence and the survival of the community. Many large cemeteries that had been established in the Early Copper Age were still in use during the Bodrogkeresztúr period of the Middle Copper Age (Tiszapolgár–Basatanya, Magyarhomorog Tiszavalk–Tetes).

In contrast to the Tisza region, a different attitude towards the deceased can be noted in Transdanubia, where hardly any burial grounds are known from the Early and Middle Copper Age. The few solitary graves and grave groups from the Ludanice distribution indicate the survival of inhumation. The burials found on settlements preserved many Neolithic traditions.

The treatment of the deceased is in many cases an adequate reflection of the society of the living and, at the same time, it also reveals much about the community's beliefs concerning the afterworld. In the cemeteries of the Tisza region, the deceased were laid to rest in a contracted position on their side and provided with various articles that were believed to be necessary in the afterworld. Multiple burials were also quite frequent. Copper weapons and long stone knives were laid beside the men's skulls, while women were usually provided with pottery vessels and copper ornaments, as well as small stone and bone implements. The belts strung of beads (Fig. 19) were part of the female costume, as were gold pendants that were fastened onto headbands and worn by high status individuals (cp. Fig. 14). Boar mandibles were only recovered from male burials. The richness of the grave goods from a few male and female burials exceeds by far that of the average grave: the reflection of social differences in burials can already be noted at the end of the Neolithic. Gold articles were probably acquired by high



Fig. 19. Middle Copper Age female burial, with a multiple string of stone beads around the waist. Szibalom–Pamlényi-tábla, Bodrogkeresztúr culture  
Key: 1–7. vessels, 8. animal bone, 9. string of beads

status individuals only – this increased the value of gold and, at the same time, it enhanced its role as marking social status. The possession of gold articles was also important for the living and gold articles were no doubt part of the paraphernalia used in various rituals and ceremonies.

The gold hoards from Hencida, Tiszaszőlös and Csáford also indicate the role of gold in Copper Age society. The gold discs, stylized female depictions, are important relics of human representations in an age when these declined significantly (cp. Figs. 14–16). There are very few idols made from clay or other materials from this period. Their buxom form recalls the traditions of Neolithic statuettes (Fig. 20).

The continuity between Neolithic and Copper Age beliefs is also indicated by a number of buildings and other phenomena that can be associated with cults and rituals. In the Neolithic, these were usually performed within the settlement, while in the Early Copper Age, special cult places, entirely separate from the settlement, also appeared, parallel to the emergence of independent cemeteries. The sacrificial pit too survived into the Copper Age as shown by a ritual child burial from the Little Balaton region dating to the Middle Copper Age. The pit with an *omphalos*-like floor uncovered at Balatonmagyaród contained the skeleton of a 5–6 years old boy, provided with a few vessels and a grinding

stone that was practically inutile. The *omphalos* (central place, centre of the universe), the body of the boy still not entirely divorced from the world of the ancestors and the symbolic grinding stone are all elements well known from various Neolithic sacrificial assemblages.

Enclosures were also built during the Early and Middle Copper Age. A huge oval enclosure was identified at Balatonmagyaród, a site dated to the latest phase of the Lengyel culture extending into the Copper Age (c. 4300 B.C.); the enclosure ditch reflects the continuity of Central European Neolithic traditions. One of the gates of this enclosure was also excavated (Figs. 21–22).

Lying farther to the east, a Middle Copper Age enclosure uncovered near Füzesabony is perhaps even more significant. An enclosure of two concentric, slightly oval ditches was identified at Füzesabony–Pusztaszikszó. The width of the two V sectioned ditches was a mere 50 cm, suggesting that they could hardly have been defensive in nature (Figs. 23–24). The enclosure was interrupted by a gate on the southern side. A row of heavy posts was aligned along the inner ditch – these can perhaps be interpreted as a row of columns resembling the slightly later structures of massive stone blocks, such as the one at Stonehenge. The most important area of the site was again the ‘navel’, the centre of the area enclosed by the ditches, where an almost 5 m deep sacrificial pit was found. Intact vessels and animal bones, the remains of meat offerings, were deposited into the pit during the periodically repeated rituals. An intact, articulate goat skeleton, most likely the offering presented during the consecration rite, lay on the floor of the pit. The most intriguing aspect of the enclosure and its finds is that even though the Füzesabony site lies in the Bodrogkeresztúr distribution, the enclosure has a distinctly Central European ancestry, and the finds too have more in common with the cultures succeeding the Lengyel complex than with the Bodrogkeresztúr culture.

A similar sacrificial site or cult place was uncovered at Szarvas; the finds suggest that this site was the scene of bloody offerings.

The Late Copper Age Baden period shows a colourful variety of beliefs based on both local traditions and cultural influences from other culture provinces. Similarly to the earlier phases of the Copper Age, the paraphernalia of rituals were for the



Fig. 20. Clay idol. Tiszafüred, later phase of the Middle Copper Age, Hunyadibalom culture

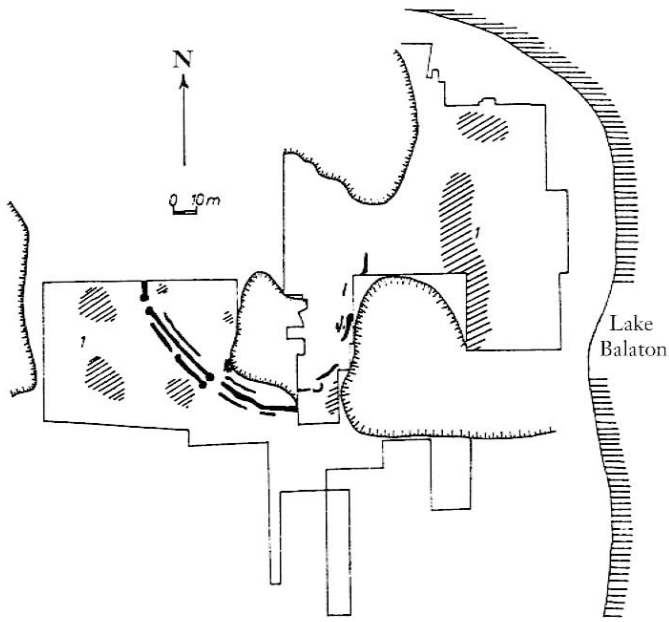


Fig. 21. Groundplan of an Early Copper Age enclosure. Balatonmagyaród-Hídvégpuszta, late Lengyel culture

Fig. 22. Excavated section of the Balatonmagyaród enclosure, with a section showing the infill levels

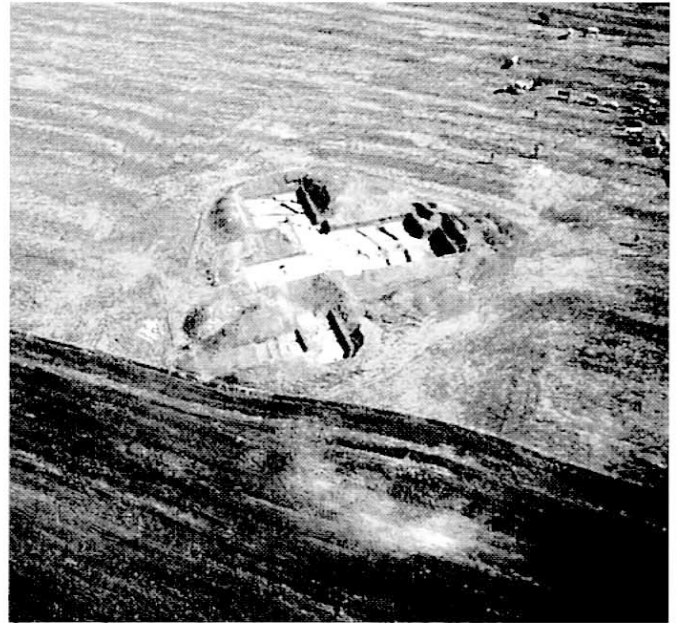
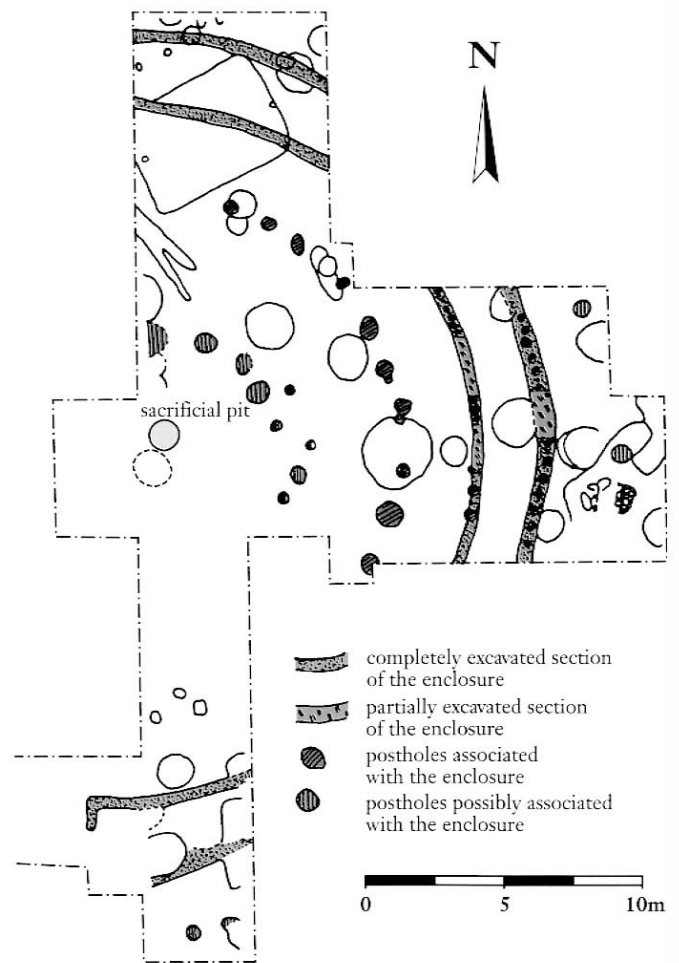


Fig. 23. Aerial view of a Middle Copper Age enclosure during excavation. Füzesabony-Pusztaszikszó, Ludanice culture

Fig. 24. Plan of the excavated section of the enclosure. Füzesabony-Pusztaszikszó, Middle Copper Age, Ludanice culture



greater part made from perishable materials. The cult objects include anthropomorphic urns and the flat, headless, female statuettes of clay (Fig. 25), found throughout the entire Baden territory. Probably broken as part of a ritual, the idols were thrown into the refuse pits of the settlements. Some sites – such as Győr-Szabadrétdomb and Tököl – yielded an unusually high number of idols, while only a few were brought to light at others, such as Pilismarót. The clay mask found at Balatonőszöd, a unique find from this period, was probably used during rituals (Fig. 26).

In contrast to the earlier sporadic occurrences, the custom of cremation became more widespread in the Baden period, a practice that can no doubt be associated with the belief in the cleansing properties of fire. In the cemetery at Pilismarót–Basaharc, containing a total of 110 burials, the ashes of the deceased were scattered on the ground and the vessels used in the funerary rite were placed beside them. A mound of flat stones was raised above the grave at the end of the burial ritual (Fig. 27). In some cases the ashes were collected and placed inside an urn. Quite unique anthropomorphic urns were found at Ózd–Center; their faces recall the depictions on the anthropomorphic vessels from Troy, even though we now know that the Ózd urns predate the latter (Fig. 29). Comparable vessels have been found at a number of other sites in the region, for example at Méhi (Včelince, Slovakia), where one of the burials yielded an urn modelled on the female body and a small female statuette, suggesting that the



Fig. 25. Headless idol. Zamárdi, Late Copper Age, Boleráz group

different types of representations – such as the face pots and idols – of Neolithic and Copper Age small sculpture were in essence the expressions of the same set of beliefs. The symbolism of fertility and femininity, the association of women with the concept of birth and death, as well as rebirth, was at least three thousand years old by the Baden period.

Beside the cremation of their dead, the Baden communities also practiced inhumation. The deceased were laid to rest in burial grounds separate from the settlements. In addition to small burial grounds containing no more than ten to twelve graves, large cemeteries used over a longer period of time are also known. At the same time, some individuals were buried in or very near to the settlement; the reason for this practice is not known.

Mass graves containing both regularly interred individuals and skeletons suggesting that the corpses had been simply thrown into the pit have also been found. The reason for these mass graves remains unknown: perhaps they are indications of an illness or a plague that led to the more or less simultaneous death of several members of the community (Fig. 28).

The largest cemetery of the Baden culture, containing a total of 437 burials, was uncovered at Budakalász. The earliest burials in the cemetery, used for an estimated two hundred years, were cremation burials. After the burial of the ashes, the graves were covered with stones. Stones were also

Fig. 26. Clay mask, modelled on the human face. Balatonőszöd–Temetődűlő, Late Copper Age, Baden culture

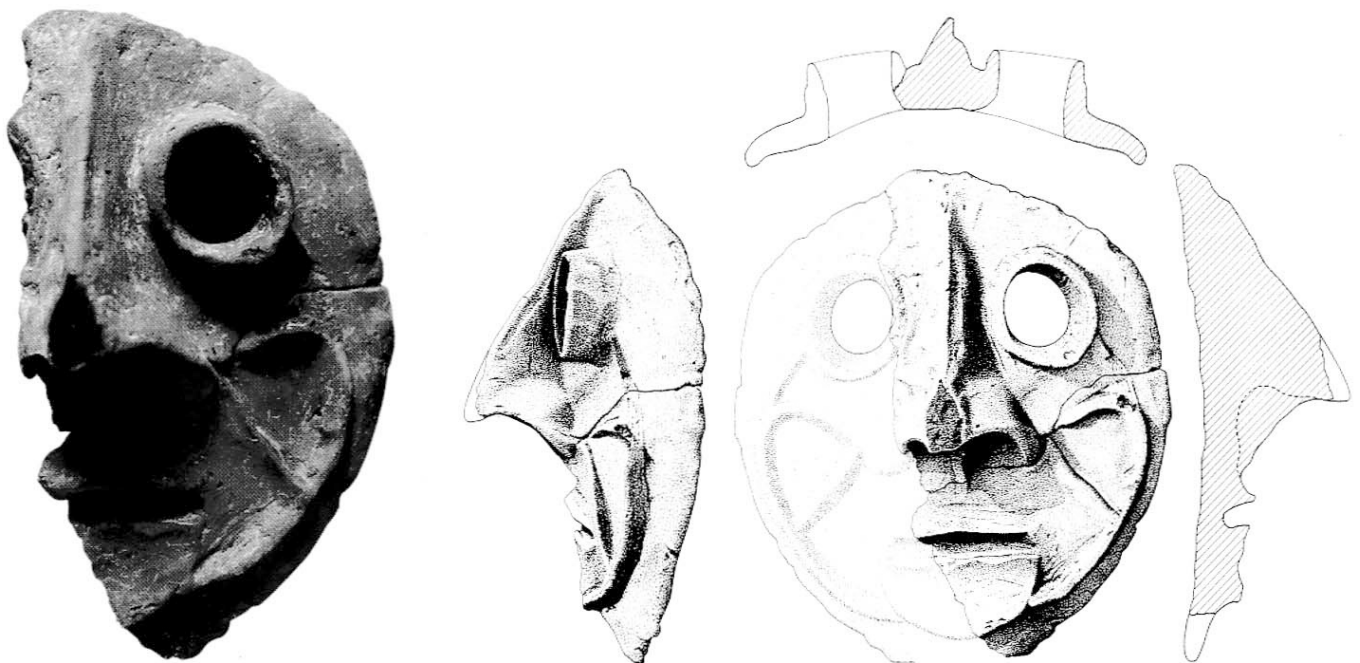




Fig. 27. Late Copper Age grave with stone packing. The discoloured patch of the grave pit can be seen beside the stones. Pilismarót-Basaharc, Boleráz group



Fig. 28. Mass grave from a Late Copper Age settlement. Sármellék-Égenföld, Baden culture

thrown into inhumation burials as part of the burial rite. The separate, smaller grave groups can perhaps be interpreted as the burials of one family. Powerful symbols of social cohesion, the burial grounds containing the remains of the ancestors were revered as sacred places by later generations.

These burial grounds contained not only human remains, but also a wide range of pottery, tools, implements and ornaments, as well as animal remains. The clay wagon models used as ceremonial vessels, such as the ones found at Budakalász and Szigetszentmárton, no doubt had a unique function (*cp. Fig. 4*). Cattle were also revered in some form as shown by the cattle burials, found both on settlements and in cemeteries, where they were buried either alongside their owners or in separate graves. One of the graves in the Budakalász cemetery contained the bodies of a man and a woman, as well as two cattle skeletons; the position of the human and animal skeletons suggested that a wooden cart had probably also been placed into the grave. It seems likely that only high status individuals had the right to take these valuable animals with them to the afterworld.

At the close of the Copper Age, we witness the appearance of certain finds reflecting beliefs that can be associated with the appearance of eastern, steppean groups in

the Carpathian Basin. These steppean nomadic communities lived peacefully with the local Copper Age population of the Tisza region. The Baden communities apparently adopted the custom of erecting stone grave markers (steles) from these eastern groups: the oldest stone stele from Hungary, found at Mezőcsát, was no doubt erected to protect the entire cemetery. This almost two meters high stele was found in the Great Hungarian Plain, a region poor in stone resources (*Fig. 30*). The transportation of this heavy stone from the Northern Mountain Range called for the concerted activity of many individuals even if we assume the use of wheeled wagons.

The Kurgan people often buried their dead in Baden cemeteries, indicating the joint use and, also, the reverence of burial grounds as sacred areas. The grave pit under the burial mound (kurgan) was usually covered with wooden planks; the grave goods included carpets, furs and textiles (*Figs 31–32*). The presence of red ochre in these burials can also be related to religious beliefs. The colour red had a special meaning in Copper Age beliefs; its use suggests that the deceased were symbolically restored to life before departing to the afterworld.

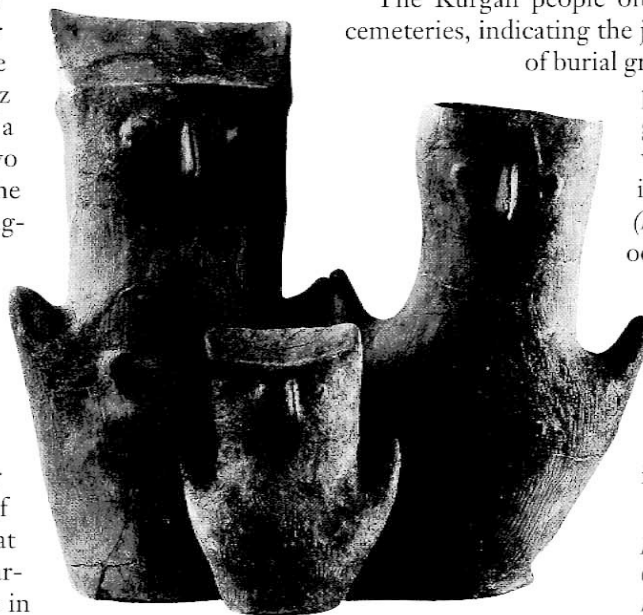


Fig. 29. Anthropomorphic urns. Ózd-Center, Late Copper Age, Baden culture



Fig. 30. Stone stele, during excavation. Mezőcsát, Late Copper Age, Baden culture

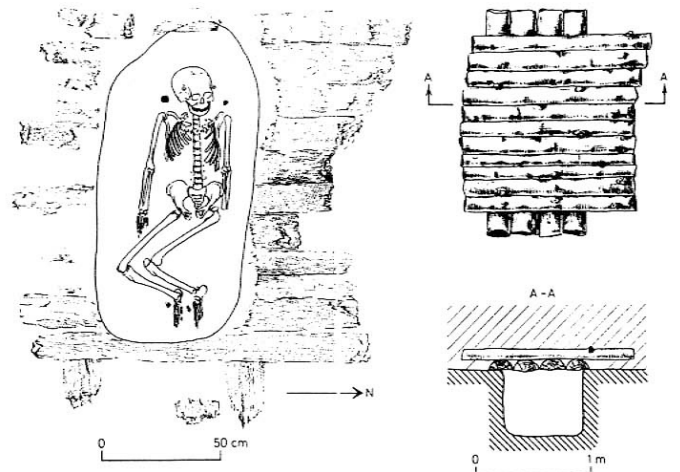


Fig. 31. Burial mound (kurgan), during excavation. Kétegyháza, Late Copper Age

Fig. 32. Excavation drawing of a kurgan burial. Kétegyháza, Late Copper Age