



AKADÉMIAI KIADÓ

Some observations on the three vessels with characteristic decorative elements of La Tène culture from the cemetery in Szob

Archaeologiai Értesítő

147 (2022) 1, 133–144

DOI:

10.1556/0208.2022.00034

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Received: July 1, 2022 • Revised manuscript received: September 20, 2022 • Accepted: September 22, 2022

SHORT
COMMUNICATION



ABSZTRAKT

A tanulmány három, a szobi kelta temetőből a Magyar Nemzeti Múzeumba került edényt mutat be, amelyek ugyan nem ismeretlenek a tudományos közönség számára, és különböző aspektusokból korábban már többen foglalkoztak velük, de a minden részletre kiterjedő publikálásuk eddig még nem történt meg. A leletek a magyarországi késő vaskor kutatásának egyik kulcsfontosságú lelőhelyéről kerültek napvilágra, éppen ezért a rövid tanulmány célja az eredeti dokumentációk áttekintésén és a modern digitális módszereken alapuló szakszerű közlés, valamint az újabb adatokon és jelenlegi kutatási eredményeken alapuló kontextusba helyezés.

KULCSSZAVAK

díszített edény, pecsételt díszítés, állat alakú fül, kelta művészet, La Tène kultúra, késő vaskor, Kárpát-medence

ABSTRACT

In the focus of this paper stand three remarkable vessels with characteristic decorative elements of the late Iron Age, associated with the La Tène material culture of Central and Eastern Europe. The finds from one of the key sites of the late Iron Age research in Hungary were brought to the Hungarian National Museum from the cemetery of Szob. These pots are not unknown to the scientific community, they have been dealt with in various aspects in the past. However, the full details have not yet been published. The aim of this short study is to publish these vessels precisely, based on a review of the original documents and using modern digital methods. It also examines and contextualizes these important findings in the light of recent data and research.

KEYWORDS

decorated vessel, stamped motif, zoomorphic handle, Celtic Art, La Tène culture, late Iron Age, Carpathian Basin

The La Tène cemetery of Szob is one of the key sites dating to the Iron Age period in the Carpathian Basin. Szob is a town in Pest County near Hungary's northern border with Slovakia (*Fig. 1a*). It is situated on the northern bank of the Danube, east from the river's confluence with the Ipoly (Ipel, SK) River at the foot of the Börzsöny Mountains (*Fig. 1b*). The archaeological site is located on a low bank where the Danube and its tributary body meet (*Fig. 1c*). This territory had been disturbed by railroad construction done between Budapest and Bratislava (Pozsony/Pressburg, SK), as well as establishing of rock breakers and a wagon loading station in the middle of the 20th century. Nowadays, industrial buildings, offices and maintenance shops stand on this field, with railway tracks and train switches covering the area with potential for research. From a wider perspective, this area of the Danube bend has been at the crossroads of overland trade routes and waterways up until the present day. Massive sandbars are on the river, which made it easy to cross before modern times. Close to the site there is a known ford in the Danube connecting the northern and southern sides of the river, which could have perhaps been used during the Iron Age as well.

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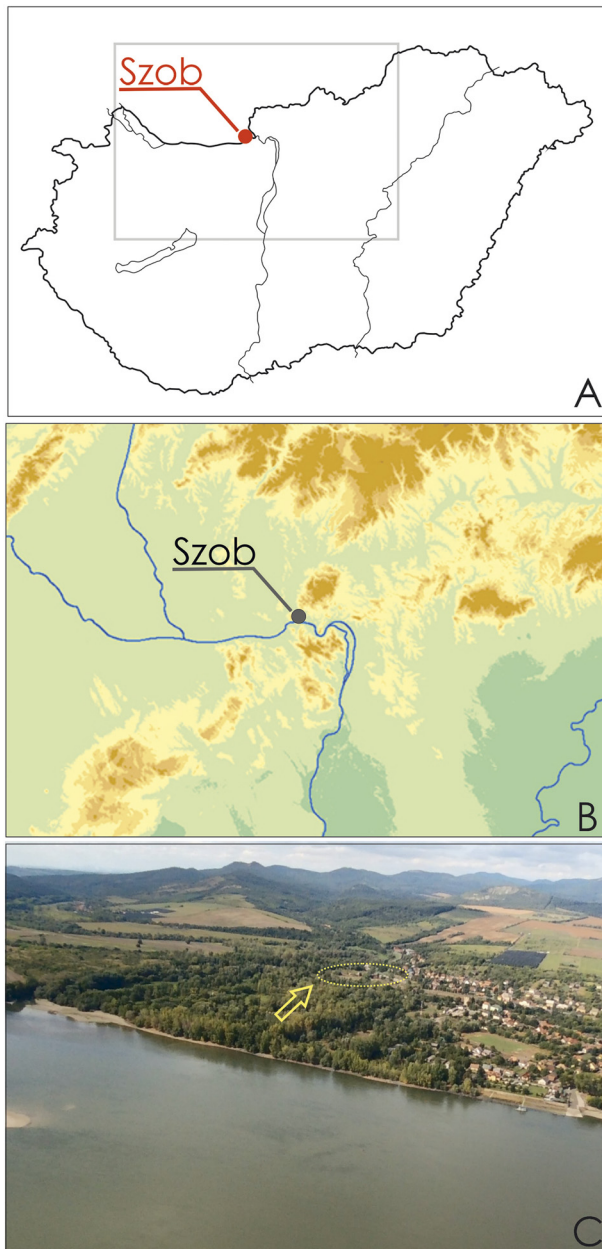


Fig. 1. The late Iron Age cemetery and its environs
1. kép. A késővaszkori temető és környezet

The first grave from the late Iron Age was found by pioneers of Hungarian archaeology in the Szob cemetery in 1847. The finds from the inhumation burial of a weapon equipped male were collected and deposited in the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest.¹ The historical significance of this grave is that based on it F. Pulszky outlined the remains of Celtic material heritage in Hungary in 1879.² The next La Tène burials were discovered during construction

¹Érdy (1861) 35, Képtalasz Pl. IV–V.

²Pulszky (1879).

works on the left bank of the Ipoly in the following century. This territory had been disturbed by railroad construction, as well as establishing of rock breaker and a wagon loading station in the 1910s and 1930s. Uncountable La Tène graves were unearthed during the constructions and a huge amount of relics were collected by the workers. Many iron weapons, rings, bracelets made of bronze, also silver and gold were sold to antiquities dealers, who made profit from selling these objects to collectors as well as museums in and outside of Hungary (Fig. 2). It was a fortunate situation that the Hungarian National Museum obtained a part of the finds unearthed in Szob. Shortly before the outbreak of Second World War a local schoolmaster, J. A. Horváth, also became interested in antiquities from the dug up Celtic graves and became a frequent visitor of the site. As a local historian, he was soon permitted to excavate the graves with the support of the Hungarian National Museum. He discovered and precisely documented 17 graves and he found – among other things – the Hellenistic bronze kantharos, one of the most famous unique finds both in Hungary and the Eastern Celtic World.³ Due to the tragical circumstances of Second World War, the results of his excavation and fieldworks were published in a short preliminary report with multiple errors and bad-quality illustrations.⁴ Additionally, the Allies bombed the Ipoly Bridge along with the railway installations near Szob. The military activities destroyed the whole area, including the site of the late Iron Age cemetery.⁵ In the meantime, the building of the Hungarian National Museum was hit by several air strikes and artillery shells during the Soviet siege of Budapest. Most of La Tène finds from Szob were destroyed in a fire caused by a bomb hitting the Hungarian National Museum's building in January, 1945.⁶ The damage done to the museum was extensive, at least 376 artifacts were lost only from the Szob collection. Only a few finds from Szob survived the times of war.⁷

Thanks to researchable archives and new online databases,⁸ many sporadic data about the destroyed and remained finds are already available, together with the circumstances of their discoveries. Analyzing these pieces of information, many details regarding the features and object types come to light, and thus give new aspects about the necropolis. For instance, an iron rod-shaped pin can undoubtedly be linked to the Mokronog group, and the spear-butt with a long spike, which also occurs in the northern zone of the Carpathian Basin, distributes mainly along the Sava and Drava Rivers in the southwestern

³Tompa (1936) 112.

⁴Horváth (1945) 60–63; Hunyady (1957) 154–161.

⁵Tankó (2019) 168–169.

⁶Szende (2011) 209–519.

⁷For example, decorated swords and scabbards published by M. Szabó and É. F. Petres: Szabó and Petres (1992) 180.

⁸For example, <https://archeodatabase.hnm.hu/>; <https://ivo.lechnerkozpont.hu/>; <https://www.arcanum.com/hu/>; <https://fortepan.hu/>; etc.



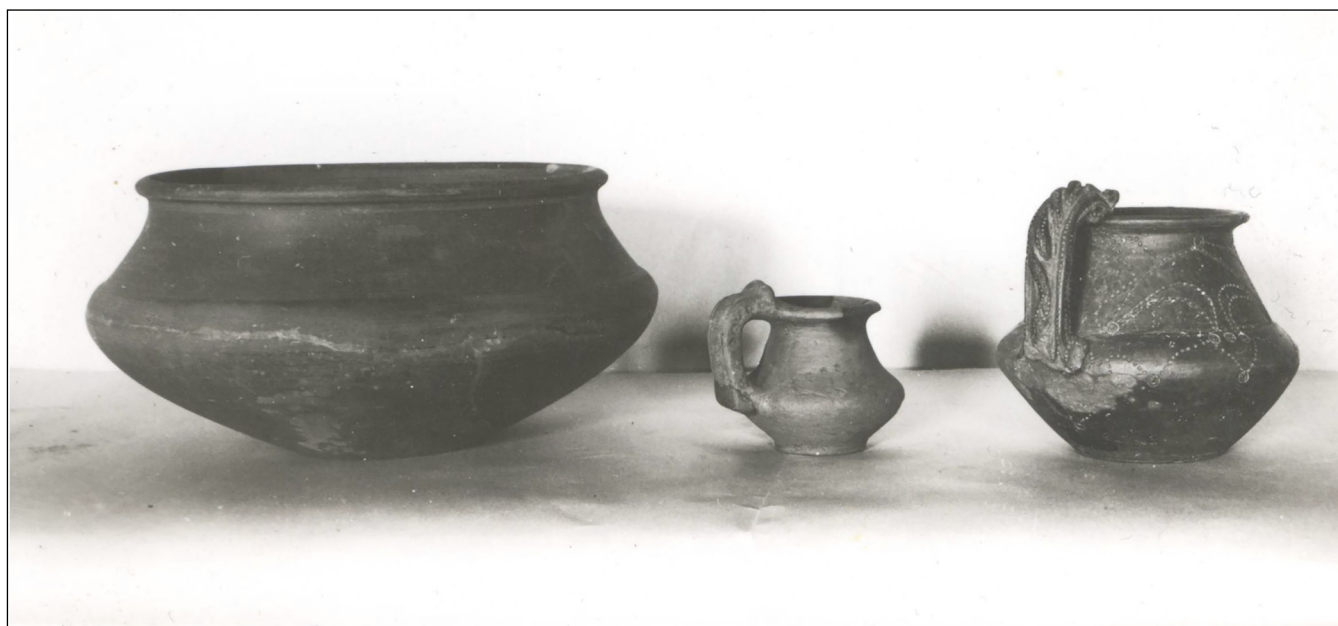


Fig. 2. Archive photo of late Iron Age vessels from the Szob cemetery in the collection of Bálint Balassa Museum, Esztergom
2. kép. Késő vaskori edények archív fényképen a szobi temetőből az esztergomi Balassa Bálint Múzeum gyűjteményében

regions. Analogies of a bronze fibula decorated with pseudo-granulation and pseudo-filigree technique mostly known from Hungary, but can also be found in territories of Slovenia and Slavonia, etc. Generally, the La Tène burials of Szob fit nicely into the sequence of cemeteries dating to the same period unearthed in northern Hungary, however some characteristic features link them with burial grounds uncovered in the southwestern regions of the Carpathian Basin.⁹

All information about the cemetery cannot be published here, therefore the present study focuses only on a small group of finds. Despite most of the pots being destroyed during the war, three of them survived that are particularly interesting. Their significance does not merely lie in being among the few that remained in the collection, but also being uniquely decorated (*Fig. 3*).

The first remarkable object is a large pot with sealed decoration on its shoulder (*Fig. 4*).¹⁰ Looking at the impressions, there is no doubt that the motifs were made with three different types of tools. The first stamp has a complex design, a triskele symbol within a toothed circle frame. Three of them were connected to each other with dotted arcs, slightly above the horizontal line on the pot's shoulder (*Fig. 5*). The other element of decoration are the sealed circles with concentric circle of more or less trapezoidal or hash-shaped elements inside as well as a small circle in the center. These were arranged in a triple group at the same height as another stamped design on the shoulder of the vessel (*Fig. 6*). These

decorative motifs, consisting mainly of stamped concentric circles and triskeles were usually placed on typical vessels belonging to the Central European La Tène tableware.¹¹ This way of decorating the vessel is typical of the eastern spread of the La Tène culture, but have undoubtedly been sealed with a unique tool on the surface of this vessel. We undoubtedly know vessels, on which the 'same' stamps were found and they can be grouping well in the territory of Eastern-Austria and Western-Hungary.¹² However, in the case of rosettes, such uniformity and concentration cannot be demonstrated. More or less similar rosettes to the stamp combined with the triskele of Szob can also be found in other places in the Carpathian Basin.¹³ The triskele patterns in these sites show relation in terms of both production technique and composition. Another common feature is that the pattern, composed in a circular form and having an independent effect, stands out in each piece against a recessed background. To make the stamps, masters of craft in the late Iron Age used tools, which were generally used of metal smithing. This shows the direct relationship between individual pieces and the precise knowledge of the metal analogies, confirming the hypothesis that the spread of this type of stamp can be attributed, among other things, to itinerant metalworkers¹⁴ or – as beside the pottery many bone and metal finds can be considered indirect evidences – multitalented craftsmen. The

⁹Tankó (2014) 259–267.

¹⁰Jerem (1975) 52, Taf. 15. 1, Taf. 19. 5, 15.

¹¹Szabó (1971) 40; Rustoiu (2014) 165–170; Tankó (2020) 176–181.

¹²Zeiler et al. (2009).

¹³Jerem (1975) 52–53; Zeiler (2010) 114–115; Rustoiu (2014) 176–179.

¹⁴Jerem (1975) 52–55; Jerem (1984) 57–80.



Fig. 3. Archive photo of late Iron Age vessels from the Szob cemetery in the collection of Hungarian National Museum, Budapest
3. kép. Késő vaskori edények archív fényképen a szobi temetőből a Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum gyűjteményében

characteristics of the technical execution of the similar motifs on different material also support this view.¹⁵

The second noteworthy object is the one-handled biconical cup, which have grey color and were made wheel-throw. The zoomorphic plastic decoration on the cup's raised handle is fragmented (Fig. 7). It very likely would be an animal head, but the exact species cannot be identified. This vessel was originated from the Grave no. 3, but our information about circumstances of discoveries is incomplete. Only two bronze pendants (Fig. 7, 3–4) and a fibula lost in meantime can be identified in the grave context. There could probably be other things here, but we don't know about them. The vessel presented here is a typical form of eastern La Tène culture, which has many analogies in the eastern part of the Carpathian Basin. For example, 23 one-handle cups (*cruche* in French) were found in the Sajópetri necropolis.¹⁶ These – and also the aforementioned cup from Szob – are the type II.7.2. in classification of the local pottery production. This group of cups is technologically homogeneous as they are mostly made of CTFS and CTFC, i.e. wheel-thrown fine ware.¹⁷ As it can be seen in the example of

Sajópetri, the majority of these cups are decorated in individual styles and only a few were made without any decoration. Scratched lines, arcs and triangles, smoothed waves, sealed dots and circles were the most frequent techniques, however, the plastic style also appears on some of these vessels. The zoomorphic cup with small incised geometric pattern on the spout from tomb 87/167 in Sajópetri is a particularly interesting find in relation to the cup from Szob.¹⁸ This find has a stylized animal head on the high-raised handle to which the artefact presented here may have been quite similar. As a chronological reference point, there are LT C1 fibulae, fragments of hollow cast bronze anklets, pseudo filigree bronze jewellery and melted glass beads in the female tomb in Sajópetri.

The third interesting ceramic find from Szob was first published at the exhibition “Eastern Celtic Art” held in Székesfehérvár in 1974.¹⁹ This is also a one-handled biconic cup, which made as black-burnished ware with polished surface. The body and handle of the cup is decorated with intricate motifs. Stamped circles are connected by dotted arcs of different radii. The combination of dotted arches and sealing circles on the body of the vessel give the impression of a floral

¹⁵Ramsl (2014) 73–74.

¹⁶Szabó and Tankó (2018) 199–200.

¹⁷Szabó and Tankó (2007) 168–177; Szabó et al. (2007) 229–252.

¹⁸Szabó and Tankó (2018) 123–126, Fig. 164, Pl. 58. 3.

¹⁹Petres and Szabó (1974) 26–27, Fig. 51.



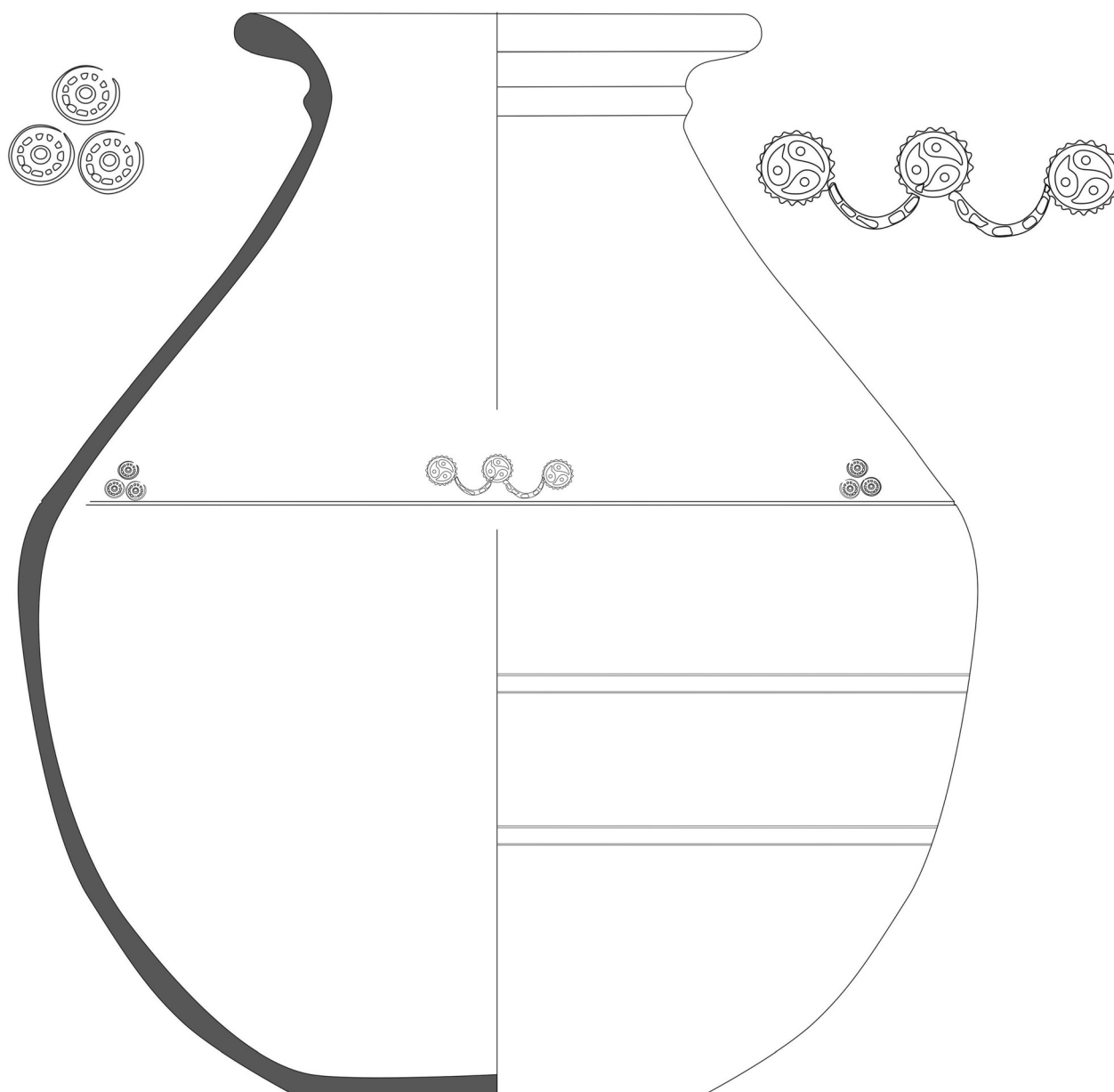


Fig. 4. Vessel from the grave no. 9 in Szob
4. kép. A szobi 9. számú sírból származó edény

entanglement (*Fig. 9*). It seems, a fantastic creature shaped by the handle of the pot emerges from this vegetation environment and is climbing to the rim (*Fig. 8*). This composition is not unique in the Eastern Celtic Art. A similar position of two boar-handles can be seen on the pseudo kantharos in tomb 726 in Ludas, which is a prominent work of Celtic koiné from 3rd century BC.²⁰ Without mentioning all known

analogies, other interesting two-handled vessels were uncovered from Kosd²¹ and a female grave at Csobaj.²² The handles of both kantharos are adorned with ram heads placed on the rims of the vessels. Discussing the elements of these details, previous research has suggested that their origins considered in the zoomorphic decoration of the first

²⁰Szabó (2001) 1715–1727; Szabó (2005) 163–166; Szabó and Tankó (2012) 38–39, Pl. 19.

²¹Szabó (1973) 754, Fig. 1; Petres and Szabó (1974) 18, 63, Fig. 43.

²²Hellebrandt (1989) 33–51.



Fig. 5. Stamped motif on the shoulder of the pot from grave no. 9 in Szob

5. kép. Pecsételt díszítés a szobi 9. számú sírból származó edény vállán



Fig. 6. Stamped motif on the shoulder of the pot from grave no. 9 in Szob

6. kép. Pecsételt díszítés a szobi 9. számú sírból származó edény vállán

Iron Age pot series.²³ It is now generally accepted that this type of decoration had been shaped by a variety of cultural influences.²⁴ The diverse cultural background and artistic composition resulted in both similarities and differences on

²³Szabó (1973) 754–755; Szabó (1992) 171–173.

²⁴E.g. Tankó (2005) 158; Rustoiu and Egri (2010) 227; Egri (2014) 74–76.

the vessels. For example, the kantharos from Novo mesto combines both zoomorphic and anthropomorphic details, its handles are longitudinally decorated with incisions of vegetal elements representing vine tendrils. All of it constitutes a good example of the way in which various decorative traditions were mixed.²⁵ On the other hand, this object is a representative example of how handled vessels decorated with animal heads and human masks can in some respects belong to a large group.

Obviously, single- and double-handled zoomorphic vessels cannot be analyzed separately. The vessels with two zoomorphic handles is to be classified among the so-called pseudo-kantharoi, which have continued to pique curiosity among researchers since the first half of the 20th century.²⁶ It is also worth mentioning, that the vase found in Ludas – along with the bracelet with openwork pseudo-filigree decoration²⁷ – is now part of the representative works of the art of the Celts of the East. Absent from the western Celtic milieu, the presence of this type in the La Tène material culture of the Carpathian Basin is essentially explained by the role of the local non-Celtic substratum: the surviving population of the late Hallstatt culture to the west and the Scythian influenced Vekezug culture to the east (and partly north) of the Danube. The popularity of the kantharoi in 2nd century BC. was also due to the new relations with the Mediterranean world after the Balkan invasions, in other words to Hellenistic influences.²⁸ Nevertheless, the early local imitations of Hellenistic prototypes appeared in the Middle Danube Basin already during significant phase of Latèzation at the end of 4th century BC. However, a few generations later, its popularity has come to the fore when the militant groups participating in Balkan campaigns retreated into the Carpathian Basin.²⁹

In conclusion, the three decorated pottery vessels from the cemetery of Szob presented here, illustrates a series of particular aspects regarding the use of such ornaments in the Eastern Celtic World. All of them decorated in a distinctive way and has wider connections with other Celtic motifs as well as La Tène pottery forms. However, the analogies show the diversity of decorative motifs and the variety of forms. These aspects were determined by the heterogeneity of the La Tène communities that occupied the Carpathian Basin in the 4th and 3rd centuries BC.³⁰

²⁵Knez and Szabó (1981) 85–87; Megaw and Megaw (2001) 150–151; Szabó (2005) 161–162.

²⁶For the history of research: Kruta and Szabó (1982) 51–52.

²⁷Szabó and Tankó (2012) 103–109.

²⁸Knez and Szabó (1981) 65; Szabó (2005) 161–162; Szabó and Tankó (2012) 135.

²⁹Rustoiu (2008) 69–70, Fig. 27; Rustoiu and Egri (2010) 220.

³⁰Thanks to my daughter Mira for the beta reading.

Grave 3.



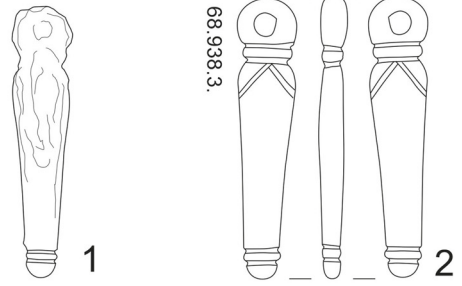
4b



4c



4d



3

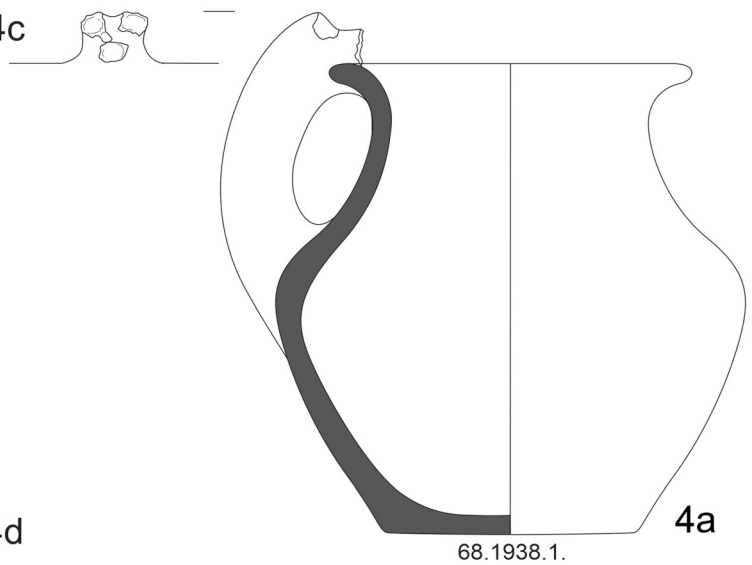


Fig. 7. Finds from the grave no. 3 in Szob
7. kép. Leletek a szobi 3. számú sírból



Fig. 8. Decorated vessel from the cemetery at Szob
8. kép. Díszített edény a szobi temetőből



Fig. 9. Detail photos and drawing schematic representation of the vessel's decoration from the cemetery at Szob
9. kép. A szobi temetőből előkerült edény díszítésének részletfotói és rajz sematikus ábrázolása

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A La Tène kultúra jellegzetes motívumaival díszített három figyelemre méltó edény a szobi temetőből

Tankó Károly

A szobi temető a La Tène kultúra egyik legfontosabb lelőhelye a Kárpát-medencében. A 19–20. század folyamán különböző építési munkákhoz kapcsolódóan számos késő vaskori temetkezést bolygattak meg a lelőhelyen, és jelentős régészeti leletek kerültek a Magyar Nemzeti Múzeumba, ahol a szobi gyűjtemény nagyobb része a 2. világháború során elpusztult. A megmaradt tárgyak közül három edény díszítése miatt különösen figyelemre méltó.

Az első edény egy nagyméretű fazék, amelynek vállán egyedi pecsételt motívumok láthatók. A három koncentrikus körből álló pecsétcsoport mellett három, tűzdelt ívekkel kapcsolatos triszkeléses rozetta díszíti az edényt. Az edény díszítésének ilyen módja tipikus a La Tène kultúra keleti elterjedési területén,³¹ de a pecsételt motívum kétségkívül egyedi, a fémművességgel kapcsolatba hozható eszközökkel készült.³²

A második figyelmet érdemlő edény az egyfülű bikónikus korsó, amely töredékes állapotban megmaradt stilizált állatfejjel díszített. Ez a forma tipikusnak tekinthető a keleti kelta fazekas termékek között,³³ de a hasonló zoomorph füllel való díszítés csak néhány és főként pseudo-kantharoszok esetében fordul elő.³⁴

A harmadik különleges edény már az 1974-ben Székesfehérváron megrendezett „Keleti kelta művészet” kiállításon a figyelem középpontjába került.³⁵ Ez a fényezett felületű, fekete színű, egyfülű csésze plasztikus, tűzdelt, bekarcolt és pecsételt technikákkal gazdagon díszített. Az edény vállán lévő pecsételt köröket különböző sugarú pontozott ívek bonyolult szövevénye köti össze. A szemlélődő számára úgy tűnhet, a tűzdelt ívek és a pecsételő körök összessége valamilyen vegetációs környezetet alkot az edény testén, amelyből a fogantyú által megformált fantasztikus lény kiemelkedve felkapaszkodik az edény peremére. Kétségtelen tény, hogy ez a csésze a keleti kelta művészet kiemelkedő alkotása,³⁶ amely jól illeszkedik a már ismert állatfejes edények sorába, továbbá több fül kialakítása és a díszítés tekintetében egyaránt felvethető a pseudo-kantharosz edénytípushoz való rokonítás.³⁷

Összefoglalva, az itt bemutatott három megmaradt szobi sírkerámia a keleti keltákra jellemzően, de egyedi jellegzetességeket mutató módon díszített. Ezek szempontjait pedig a Kárpát-medencét a Kr. e. 4. és 3. században elfoglaló La Tène közösségek kulturális fejlődése határozta meg.

³¹Szabó (1971) 40; Rustoiu (2014) 165–170; Tankó (2020) 176–181.

³²Jerem (1975) 52–53; Rustoiu (2014) 167–169.

³³Szabó and Tankó (2018) 199–200.

³⁴Szabó (1973) 754, Fig. 1; Petres and Szabó (1974) 18, 63, Fig. 43; Hellebrandt (1989) 33–51; Szabó (2001) 1715–1727; Szabó (2005) 163–166; Szabó and Tankó (2012) 38–39, Pl. 19.

³⁵Petres and Szabó (1974) 18, 63, Fig. 43.

³⁶Szabó (1973) 754–755; Szabó (1992) 171–173.

³⁷Pseudo-kantharoszokról a teljesség igénye nélkül: Szabó (1973) 754–755; Knez és Szabó (1981) 85–87; Kruta és Szabó (1982) 51–52; Megaw és Megaw (2001) 150–151; Szabó (2005) 161–162; Szabó (1992) 171–173; Rustoiu és Egri (2010) 227; Szabó és Tankó (2012) 103–109; Egri (2014) 74–76.

