

## ANCIENT DEATH MASKS AND THE PREHISTORY OF HUNGARIANS

### LESSONS OF A MUSEUM EXHIBITION

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From June to September 2013 I was organizing an exhibition entitled “Ancient Death Masks” in the Hungarian National Museum. The most important goal of the exhibition was to display for visitors an idea supported by scholarly research. According to this conclusion, silver and gold death masks observed in the graves of the 10<sup>th</sup> century Hungarians who settled in the Carpathian Basin originated from Magna Hungaria, the Uralian territory of the Hungarians. We displayed death masks found in three large regions of Eurasia: that of Tashtyk Culture in the Yenisei Valley (1<sup>st</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> cc.), 6<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> century masks of the Ural Region, and 10<sup>th</sup> century masks from the Carpathian Basin (*Fig. 1*). Although the religious background of the masks in the three territories is similar, the forms of manifestation are different. From the shape of the masks we can clearly conclude that the 10<sup>th</sup> century Hungarians brought this burial custom from the Ural Region, Magna Hungaria. This can be cited among the few pieces of archaeological evidence (compare to the historical evidence) attesting to the migration of the Hungarians from the east to the west.

**Keywords:** death masks, Hungarian early history, burial customs

As soon as human beings exist and think, they try to determine their place in the world, in the cosmos and determine whether or not they have substance only in their physical bodies or also in spiritual individuality, a spirit or soul. Already in the early phase of thinking, people were fascinated by questions regarding the forms of existence in the spiritual world and the nature of life after death. Burials first appearing in the late period of the Old Stone Age show that people had been preparing themselves for life in the other world already during their presence among the alive. These early communities formed the obligatory rules of farewell to the dead.

The subject of the present exhibition is an important element of these old customs: the death mask. Already in very ancient (several thousand years old) burials it was observed that the faces of the dead were covered by wet clay that stiffened after drying and became a kind of a mask. Later several forms of the masks spread both in the Old and the New World. They were made out of metal, clay, plaster,

leather and other materials. Undoubtedly there existed a more or less similar system of beliefs that gave birth to these objects that served as a border between life and death. However, these beliefs were not identical everywhere. This could be traced in the shape and outlook of the masks. Traditions connected with the burial of the dead survived very consistently for centuries and even millennia, therefore the death masks became the petrified relics of the history of certain human communities. In the following we examine this characteristic custom in the case of three peoples living far from one another: the Iron Age inhabitants of the Minusinsk Basin, the Medieval people of the Ural-Kama region and the ancient Hungarians. The question to which we are seeking an answer is whether there were similarities in this custom or some relationship between the three regional units.

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At the upper reaches of the Siberian Yenisei River, around the town of Minusinsk, a basin of characteristic soil and climate is situated. From the earliest times the region was highly suitable for human settlement and for the beginning of high quality farming and culture. It was the population of the Neolithic Afanasievo Culture that produced here a significant cultural legacy. Later, in the Bronze Age, the Okunevo and Tagar Culture left serious traits in the history of the region. Their huge burial mounds of complicated structure, fine art appearing engraved into stone evoked general fascination (not only by archaeologists).

First, the process of peaceful development had been broken by warlike conquerors arriving from the south around 300 BC. They were the warriors of the Asian Hun Empire formed in the territory of present day Mongolia. They disturbed the life of the local ancient population, its settled peasants dealing with animal husbandry and agriculture. Part of the Huns consisting of several ethnic elements settled at the conquered territory and from now on the system of the local economy had been directed by pasturing (nomadic) shepherds. The mainly semi-nomadic farming became dominant. Pastures of the Minusinsk Basin rich in grass were suitable for this type of economy. Animal husbandry became the leading branch of farming involving cow- and horse-keeping that played the main role. Population changed also from anthropological point of view. In the burials of this people animal bones, metal parts of the horse harness and bone coverings of the saddle bow are frequently found.

Archaeologists named this new phenomenon *Tashtyk Culture* after a local river. It can be dated around the 1<sup>st</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> century AD (Kiselev 1949, 216–68; Kyzlasov 1960; Okladnikov 1968, 257–61; Vadetskaya 1992, 236–46; Yanin 2006, 351–5). We do not know the ethnic attribution, selfname or the language of the representatives of the culture. Grave finds only attest to the fact that the an-

thropological characteristics of the population changed a lot, it became much more mixed. While earlier the Euroid type was the most characteristic, in the age in question representatives of the Mongoloid type played an outstanding role. The latter must have been Inner Asian elements arriving together with the Huns.

Already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, archaeologists investigating relics of the Tashtyk Culture had pointed out the unusual features of the burials and rich art legacy. Local people buried their dead in two different ways: the corpses were placed into gravepits lined and covered with timber, or corpses were burned and the ashes placed into grave chambers of a room size, laid with timber and stone plates. In both cases they were keen on preserving the individual features of the dead. The bodies were embalmed, and a death mask was made after the face of the dead. In case of cremation masks made on a high artistic level from plaster or clay were also deposited in the graves. These masks became the famous memories of the ancient Tashtyk art all around the world despite of the fact that only a total of ten pieces had been preserved completely. (This is the reason why only photographs can be seen at our exhibition.)

Only professional and accurate archaeological records of the recent decades have been able to reconstruct the complicated process of the burial ritual. Right after the death, the face of the dead person was covered by birchbark or leather that symbolized the wall separating the worlds of the dead and of the alive. Eyes and mouth were covered with a piece of textile with cut openings above the eyes and mouth. Following it, the whole face was covered with textile or leather, and holes were cut again at the place of the eyes and mouth. Following that the death mask was made: two or three layers of wet, finely ground plaster (more rarely, clay) were put onto the face. These layers got glued to the surface so stiffly that it was impossible to take away the slip without hurting the face. (Later archaeologists themselves broke the vulnerable masks when trying to get it off the face of the dead.)

After that the artists painted the mask. There were different colors of the paint used in case of women and men. The basic color of men's masks was scarlet painted with black, bright blue and green. The surface of women's masks remained white, covered with red, black, dark or bright blue patterns.

As a matter of fact, only female masks had patterns, while the ones of the men were covered only by lines. The most interesting figure at the women's masks is a spiral painted onto the forehead (*Figs 2–3*) (Fodor 2013, 4, 15; *Figs 1, 7*). According to some scholars this is the representation of the journey made by the dead person's soul moving to the other world at a complicated, intricate path (Kuzmin 2006, 350). However, there is an argument opposing this idea: spirals are found only on women's masks. It is more probable that it was the symbol of the Sun. It is also possible that local population took it over from the Chinese system of symbols, where spiral represented long life, immortality. A figure similar to the spiral

is painted also at the sides of the head, where ears or braided hair is marked, the latter usually with black (Fodor 2013, Figs 6, 7, 11–13, 20, 29). Eyes are marked with blue.

For a long time scholars have been dealing with the question where this colorful art came from and became typical in the Minusinsk Basin, practically without any antecedents. Several researchers think that local antecedents do appear at this territory, namely in the Okunevo Culture dated to the 19<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. On engraved stone plates we see human heads with “radial” decoration and signs in a way similar to the ones of the Tashtyk Culture. Of course, we cannot neglect these ancient prototypes, however, the true antecedents of the Tashtyk art, symbols met at the masks we find mainly in the Chinese art, especially among Chinese textile patterns. So, it seems that mask painters took over and painted the patterns of burial cerements made of Chinese silk. Art style influenced by the Chinese was undoubtedly brought by the population arriving with the Huns (Vadetskaya 2007, 128–30).

Painted patterns on the men’s masks are much simpler. Usually they include one or, more rarely, two or three horizontal black stripes running under the eyes (Fodor 2013, Figs 8–10, 20, 30). Masks found in the graves of adolescents and children are similar. An interesting observation is that plaster or clay masks of men were always put onto Chinese green silk cerements (*Fig. 4*) (Fodor 2013, 21; *Fig. 10*).

We have to note that Tashtyk masks were always crafted with a great care and accuracy. Sometimes they covered not only the face, but also the neck and the breast of the dead. As a matter of fact, the latter ones cannot be considered masks, but should be categorized as urns with faces – real sculptural creations correctly preserving individual facial features of the dead. Judging from them we also can determine the anthropological characteristics of the population in question (Fodor 2013, Figs 10, 45).

Hollow manikins made of wood or leather served as containers for the ashes of the cremated dead (part of the ashes was placed into urns). In the grave chambers archaeologists find remains of not only one person, but of several, sometimes around hundred corpses. When the chamber reached its capacity, it was burned. Beside manikins and masks other kinds of grave-goods were placed into the chambers: food (meat and drink), horse harness, sometimes weapons, tools. In this way the dead could have continued their mundane activities. Jewelry and all kinds of precious objects are also found in the chamber graves. So, there is no surprise that soon after closing them, chamber graves were plundered. It could be done by people who took part at the funeral and knew what kind of grave-goods were buried together with the dead.

Even today scholars can only guess what kind of ancient beliefs are hidden behind this complicated funeral ritual. Perhaps, we never will be able to find out the

details. However, the old Tashtyk population with a high degree of probability believed that human soul did not die together with the body and was going to continue its life in the other world.

They also probably thought that the soul continuing its existence lived in the head, that is why it was necessary to preserve the facial features of the dead for eternity. (Mask was placed also onto the face of the manikins representing the cremated dead.) So they must have believed that the soul hiding the essence of the human being in itself not only continued to live after the death of the body, but remained in this world for a while. This is the reason why they made a case for the soul, the burial manikin. (Our closest language relatives, the Mansi and Khanty people have been making such manikins up to the present.) (Karjalainen 1921, 137–44; Chernetsov 1963, 148–52.) It could not be incidental that there were holes cut on the cerement at the place of the eyes and mouth. Behind it we find the belief according to which the soul, continuing its existence, left the body for the other world through these openings. So, in the above we could learn the main features and role of the Tashtyk death masks.

Earlier Russian scholars emphasized the importance of these masks from the point of view of Hungarian ancient history (though Hungarian research mostly neglected these investigations at that time). Archaeologist Leonid R. Kyzlasov, an outstanding researcher of the Tashtyk Culture, professor of the Lomonosov University in Moscow thought that there was relationship between the death masks of the Tashtyk Culture and that of the objects observed in Ob-Ugric milieu of our language relatives discussed below. From this he made a far reaching historical conclusion according to which the representatives of the Tashtyk Culture were Ugric (Ob-Ugrians and ancient Hungarians) who wandered from the Yenisei to the Ural Mountains. Later our ancestors went even farther, to the valleys of the Danube and Tisza (Kyzlasov 1960, 166–77). Today we know that this suggestion cannot be supported by appropriate scientific evidence and now belongs to the outdated work hypotheses.

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True that ancient death masks can be found on the both sides of the Ural Mountains at a vast territory (see map). Ethnographers recorded this custom connected with the cult of the dead at the Western Siberian Ob-Ugrians (Mansi and Khanty people) even in the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> century (Kharlamovich 1908; Vysotskii 1908; Karjalainen 1921, 92–5). They covered the face of the dead with textile or reindeer leather and sewed coins, buttons or thin plates to the place of the eyes, mouth and nostrils. In the cemeteries dated to the 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> century, investigated in the area of Salehard in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century this custom was observed everywhere (Rudenko 1914, 36; Mogilnikov 1964, 265; Murashko–Krenke 2001, 29–32). Re-

mains of these ceremonies were recorded also in the old Ob-Ugric burials. It was F. Martin, a Swedish researcher of Siberia who in 1891 recorded small silver plates on the place of the eyes of the dead. It happened during his excavations at the right bank of the Ob River, west of Surgut, in an 8<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> century, ancient Khanty cemetery (111 graves) of Barsov Gorodok (*Fig. 5/1*) (Arne 1935, 52, 127; 2005, 16, 111). During the recent excavation of this cemetery archaeologists made similar observations in the case of several burials. Remains of identical ceremonies were found in the neighboring cemetery of Saigatka and the Kintusovo lying south of the above mentioned necropolises. (Belavin–Ivanov–Krylasova 2009, 105–22) In several graves of the 13<sup>th</sup> century cemetery of Zelionyj Yar near Salehard, on the face of the dead there were metal masks cut out of bronze cauldrons (Fedorova 2005, 100–14).

We know most of the death masks and ceremonies from the western side of the Ural Mountains, especially from the Kama Valley and the neighboring territories. Appearance of ceremonies made of metal is dated around the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century AD, when mobile nomadic communities moved to this area from the south, the steppe and forest steppe belt. The two earliest cemeteries dated to the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century, the one in Borganiol and Vislianka were found at the northern part of this territory, in the land of the Komi, north of Syktyvkar. The necropolises of both communities completely differ from their milieu: both the burial rite and the ground plan of the cemetery show southern, nomadic features. In both burial places eye and mouth plates were unearthed with an opening part cut on them. These plates were made of silver in the case of the Borganiol grave and of gold in Vislianka (*Fig. 5/2–3*) (Saveleva 1997, 417–8).

In the 7<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> century cemeteries of the Kama Region left by the population of the Lomovotovo Culture this custom connected with the cult of the dead was observed in a number of graves. Burials where masks and ceremonies were unearthed almost exclusively belonged to men supplied with rich grave-goods showing their high rank in the society. Here the face of the dead was covered with textile, and plates marking eyes and mouth or masks were put onto it. The shapes of the ceremonies covering the face can be more or less put into chronological order. The earliest ones are the Borganiol and Vislianka types where eye and mouth plates resemble theatre masks. Later half-masks came into fashion and finally the whole masks spread. Thin plates marking the place of the eyes and of the mouth do not fit into this chronological line, they occur in all periods. These masks were in use until the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, later a cup or a cauldron was placed onto the face (head) of the dead. Plates, coins and buttons sewn onto some material, marking eyes and mouth (sometimes also the ears and nose) have been used in Ob-Ugric cemeteries until the recent times.

Photographs of the exhibition represent the types mentioned above. Eye and mouth plates cut out of a golden plate were found in the rich man's grave in the

cemetery of Gorbuniata east of Perm. A silver mask was unearthed in a 10<sup>th</sup> century warrior burial in the cemetery of Redikor situated at the upper reaches of the Kama River (Fodor 2013, Fig. 33).

Our exhibition shows the masks of the Kama Region, based mainly on the find material of the Baianovo cemetery situated 100 km north of Perm, at the western slopes of the Ural Mountains. The first 17 graves of this cemetery came to light in the 1950s, while starting from 2006 a Perm archaeologist, A.V. Danich has been conducting excavations here and investigated further 300 burials. The cemetery is situated on the high bank of the old bed of the Kosva River. The graves were dug in west-southwest – east-northeast directed rows. There are many male graves supplied with rich grave-goods. In all probability these are burials of the armed escort of the clan aristocracy. Warriors were accompanied in the graves with their weapons – sabre, axe, dagger – and weapon belt decorated with silver and bronze plates, the latter showing their rank. In some of the graves even two belts were found, one of them embracing the waist of the warrior, the other used for attaching weapons to it. Death ceremonies and masks were found in these rich male graves. Local population used this cemetery in the 9<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. In the earlier graves archaeologists found eye and mouth plates and half-masks (*Fig. 6*), in the later ones whole masks (*Fig. 7*). Each of them was made of silver, the majority of the masks was gilded. At some of the masks blistering points hammered from the backside of the plates marked the place of the eyes, mouth, moustache, eyebrows and eye-lashes, thus providing the masks with individual features. In many cases remains of textile ceremonies, silk were observed. In some cases two masks were found in one grave referring to a double burial. In one of the symbolic burials (cenotaph) that was made for someone who died far away from home, archaeologists found three masks evidencing that the burial was made for three persons (Fodor 2013, Figs 34, 35; Belavin–Ivanov–Krylasova 2009, 120–2).

Recently grave robbers who continue their activity in Russia practically with impunity found in the vicinity of Perm a ceremony without analogies: this is a purse plate identical in shape with Hungarian plates of the Conquest Period (9<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> century). Judging from the figures depicted on the plate it could have been made in Magna Hungaria. However, its northern owners did not know what this object was for. So, they cut three openings on it at the place of the eyes and mouth, and put it onto the face of the dead, using it in an opposite position compared to the original function of the purse plate (*Fig. 8*) (Belavin–Krylasova 2010).

The first groups of the Volga Bulgars who spoke a Turkic language (from which several loanwords were taken over by our ancestors) settled in the region of meeting Volga and Kama Rivers in the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century. We do not find the traces of the burial rite described above, but find it in a great number in the

burial ground of Tankeevka dated to the 9<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> century. Here, they put onto the face of the dead silver death masks similar in shape to the Kama ones. An opening marked the place of the eyes and mouth, and there are also masks where characteristic features of the face were elaborated in details (Kazakov 2007, 126). It was observed here, too, that the face of the dead first was covered by a fine textile, and the mask was put over it. In some cases we meet again the type of cerement where thin silver plates mark the place of the eyes and mouth. In the Volga Bulgarian milieu of southern origin this characteristic tradition was kept by the Finno-Ugric language speaking population of the Kama Region. Only the spread of Islam taken by the Bulgars in 922 effaced the custom.

Around the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century the ancestors of Hungarians – similarly to the above mentioned migrants arriving to the Kama Region – started their move from their original homeland in Western Siberia and settled in the territory between the Ural Mountains and Volga River, approximately in the eastern part of modern Bashkortostan and Tatarstan. (This great migration of peoples in the Western Siberian steppes could be evoked by the wars preceding the formation of the Türk Empire.) Sometime around 750 – for a still unknown reason – Hungarians of the area split into two parts and a large group crossed the Volga and moved to the region of Don and Donets Rivers. (Their successors later conquered the territory of Carpathian Basin.) The part of people which remained in the east was found by Dominican friar Julian who called this land Magna Hungaria, that is to say, old Hungary. Today already archaeological discoveries also support his report. The friar found one of the Hungarian communities only at a two-day walking distance from the former Volga Bulgarian capital, Biliar. Exactly in this region, near the village of Bolshie Tigany an 8<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> century cemetery was excavated in 1974 that shows close relationship with the ancient Hungarian graves of the 10<sup>th</sup> century in the Carpathian Basin. These similarities are so close that today all the archaeologists agree on the Hungarian ethnic attribution of the cemetery (Fodor 1982, 195–210). Among the most important similarities we should mention thin silver plates found at eyes and mouth, attesting to the use of the above described cerements (*Fig. 9*) (Chalikow 1986; Chalikova–Chalikov 1981, 103, 105, 111, 118, 121, 126, 127). The Sterlitamak (Bashkortostan) cemetery of the same age also can be considered Hungarian. Here archaeologists found in the graves gold and silver eye plates with characteristic openings on them (*Fig. 10*). A death mask of thin silver produced somewhat later covered the face of a nomadic mounted warrior buried at the northern side of Lake Chelkar (south of the previous site) (Fodor 2013, Fig. 39).

We have not yet been dealing with the question how the masks and cerements could spread in the huge territory embracing the Ural Mountains. It is well known that the covering of the face of the dead with a clay mask, the filling of the orbit and oral cavity can be observed in the southern steppe areas starting already from



the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. Around the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium death masks made of golden sheet are known from Parthian graves. A number of golden masks, eye and mouth plates were found in the cemeteries of the Greek towns of the North Pontic region (Fodor 2013, Fig. 40). We are also aware of the fact that starting from the Scythian Age the population of the Ural Region conducted active trade with these territories paying with fur for the southern goods. So, it cannot be ruled out that metal masks and cerements of the Urals originate from southern regions. However, we do not have clear evidence at the moment (Fodor 1972; German 2000; Piotrovsky 2009).

There would be more chances to answer the question what kind of population practiced this characteristic death cult in the Ural Region. From the facts cited above it can be concluded that west of the mountains this element of the burial rite must have arrived from Western Siberia around the 6<sup>th</sup> century. It is also likely that horsemen wandering in western direction belonged to the Ugric language family. By that time this language family split into the Ob-Ugrians and ancient Hungarians, however, the burial rite in question became traditional in both groups: the Ob-Ugric people living north, and ancient Hungarians situated south of them. The Ob-Ugric settlement territory west of the Urals is firmly attested by toponymy and written sources. It is important to note that only an earlier version of the custom spread among the Hungarians of Magna Hungaria, where the place of eyes and mouth was marked by thin silver plates or two-part cerements.

A silver mask unearthed at the Dnieper, near Manvelovka may indicate the traits of Hungarians on their way to west. The age of the grave from where the plate comes fits into this suggestion, because it can be dated to the 9<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time, until now no death masks covering the whole face have been found either in Magna Hungaria or in the Carpathian Basin (Fodor 2013, Fig. 41).

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Eminent Hungarian archaeologist István Dienes made a decisive observation during his second excavation in Bashalom. This research took part in 1958 and revealed a small cemetery of ancient Hungarians including 13 burials. On the basis of the finds unearthed in grave 7 Dienes succeeded in reconstructing the system of the 10<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian men's belt. Based on his observations made in grave 12 he was able to retrace the way of wearing the women's braid-discs. Finally, he recorded *in situ* (in original position) silver plates covering the eyes and mouth on the trepanned skull in grave 10 (*Fig. 11*) (Dienes 1963; 1963a; Fodor 1996, 185–93).

For the interpretation of the latter discovery Dienes was consulting Valerij Chernetsov, the prominent Russian archaeologist and ethnographer, and at the First International Finno-Ugric Congress arranged in 1960 in Budapest he pre-

sented his preliminary results in the course of the discussion. As an analogy he referred to the similar element of the cult of the dead observed among Ob-Ugrians and expressed his opinion according to which Hungarian custom of using cerement went back to the period of the Finno-Ugrian coexistence (that is to say, to the Bronze Age). The later research revealed that this suggestion cannot be justified, but it is true that Hungarian custom has common origins with that of Khanty and Mansi.

Recognizing the cerements also made archaeologists to re-interpret not yet realized phenomena of earlier excavations. It came to light that some of Hungarian archaeologists already at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century understood what kind of death cult ancient Hungarians practiced. They also compared these traditions with ethnographic data, but could not give a more comprehensive explanation for the phenomena in question. So, the researchers forgot about it. At the same time in 1926 near the Erdős farm of Vid, in the vicinity of Hajdúböszörmény a mounted warrior grave was discovered. There were two golden plates covering the eyes and an open-work plate at the place of the mouth (Fodor 2013, Fig. 42). Only more than 50 years later Károly Mesterházy found out that an accurate drawing of the spot depicting the grave was made and even published in a Debrecen newspaper. After the publication of István Dienes's study in 1963 in Hungarian (Dienes 1963a), remains of cerements started to show up one after another in the 10<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian cemeteries, mostly in the shape of small, broken pieces of plates. Their fragmentary character makes it difficult to recognize their original function and identify them in the graves. The other problem is that even today some archaeologists do not pay enough attention to these fragments. This must be the explanation for the fact that at some large regions of historical Hungary (e.g. Little Hungarian Plain) cerements are not known.

Though there have been no records of textile traits on the face of the dead in the cemeteries found in Hungary, it is obvious that plates were sewn onto some kind of textile similarly to the Ural Region. So, this phase of escorting the dead on its leave to the other world must have been almost identical with that in the mentioned eastern territories. This similarity of customs was supported by the new type cerement unearthed in 1974, in Strázsadomb, situated in the vicinity of Rakamaz. During earthworks an ancient Hungarian cemetery, including remains of burials of high-ranking people supplied with rich grave-goods, was at a greater part demolished by excavator machines. Among the finds mostly discovered and stolen by occasional "archaeologists" there was a gold cover resembling a theatre mask, with openings marking the details of the skull (*Fig. 12*) (Fodor 1996, 110–9). Above we could see that similar golden cerements are known from the Urals, in the valleys of Kama and Vychegda and in Magna Hungaria.

Scholars proposed several opinions considering the beliefs hiding in the background of ancient Hungarian cerements. The most significant recognition, em-

phasized already by István Dienes, was that, according to our ancestors' belief, common all around Northern Eurasia, human being had two souls. One of them is the *body-soul* or *breath-soul* living inside the chest, that ceases to exist when the body dies. The other one is the *free soul* or *shadow soul* situated in the head, that stays in this world for a while following the death of the person, and only after a certain amount of time leaves to the grave, to the other world. At different peoples, the family members of the dead made manikins for the latter soul. That was the place where it could live in the interim time. In other versions of the custom they dressed the spear of the dead, erected stone sculpture depicting the dead, etc. This kind of soul had a special name in ancient Hungarian language (*is*), today, however, it is gone. This belief is exceptionally old among the peoples of the Finno-Ugric language family. This is attested by the fact that relatives of Hungarians mark the free soul with the same word, the other meaning of which is 'shadow'. This soul can leave its home, the skull. According to the ancient belief, that is what happens during the night, when the soul can roam far, both in the worlds of the dead and alive. This is the way how our ancestors explained the dreaming. However, if the soul stays away for a long time, the person who accommodated it, gets sick and arrangements should be made to make the soul return. In such cases the curing shaman carved a symbolic circle on the skull to provide a place to get back for the strayed soul. (Traces of this painful operation are suggested to be the so-called symbolic trepanations observed on the skulls of ancient Hungarians.) (Dienes 1976; 1979; Fodor 2009; 2009a, 54, 56.)

Covering of the mouth and eyes of the dead could be a kind of protection against the returning of the free soul. Different ways of this protection are well known in Hungarian folk beliefs. There are traits of it also in the cemeteries of ancient Hungarians. István Dienes recorded in Orosháza, and I myself made the same observation in Tiszafüred that after the burial the grave pit's head part was opened again and the skull was dug into a deeper layer face down in order to prevent the soul to come out and disturb the alive (Fodor 1982, 313). However, it would be difficult to explain the cerements of Rakamaz type in this way, because in that case our ancestors acted in an opposite way: they cut a hole over the eyes and mouth. Probably they had a different intention in this case: they wanted to open a path for the soul moving to the other world. We should not be surprised at the possibility of such twofold, opposite explanations, because we have thousands of examples showing that the fear and love of the dead went close together in the folk beliefs.

The main conclusion of this overview and of the exhibition may be that ancient Hungarians undoubtedly brought the element of death cult in question from the east, from the former Magna Hungaria. This is supported by the fact that we find the same type of cerements in their graves as in the burials of their distant eastern homeland. It is also beyond dispute that this custom formed on a territory where

they lived close to Ob-Ugric people, their language relatives. By that time their languages split from each other, but there were still common elements in their world of beliefs. So far archaeology presented only few such convincing evidences on the ancient homeland and on western wandering of our people.

On this exhibition, one of the most important archaeological sources of the Hungarian early history is represented. It clearly and lively justifies the migration route of the Hungarians from the east to the west. This is an important form of scholar evidence, taking into consideration that in these days thousands of dilettante try to falsify Hungarian early history. On the present exhibition everybody can ascertain the false character of their “arguments”. It lively shows that conceptual, well-organised exhibitions have got serious scientific significance. Today people who make decisions about museums are mostly incompetent in museology. According to them, exhibitions must serve as entertainment for the people, considering them as reanimated versions of old amusement parks. Count Ferenc Széchenyi, the founder of the Hungarian National Museum, his contemporaries and followers considered museums to be the scenes of national science and education. We can only hope that those museologists who will act in the museums of the future, return to this idea.

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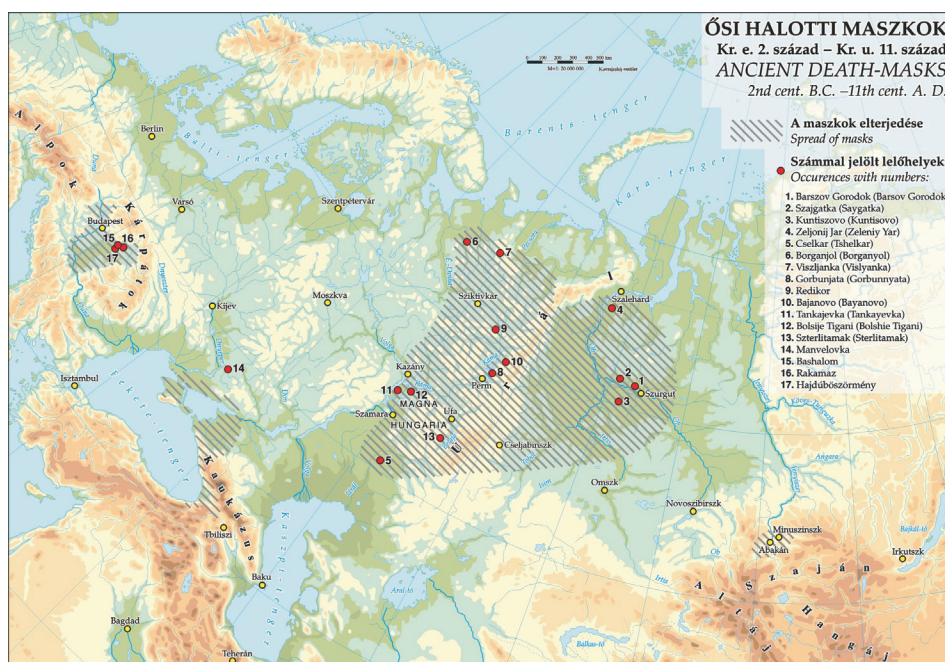


Figure 1. Ancient burial masks in Eurasia



*Figure 2.* Women's mask, Oglakty IV, 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century, Russia, Siberia, Khakasia



*Figure 3.* Women's mask, Koybal, 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century, Russia, Siberia, Khakasia



Figure 4. Men's mask, Koybal, 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> century, Russia, Siberia, Khakasia



Figure 5. 1. Barsoff Gorodok, 9<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> century, Russia, Western Siberia, Surgut Region  
2. Borganyol, 6<sup>th</sup> century 3. Vislyanka, 6<sup>th</sup> century, Russia, Komi Republic





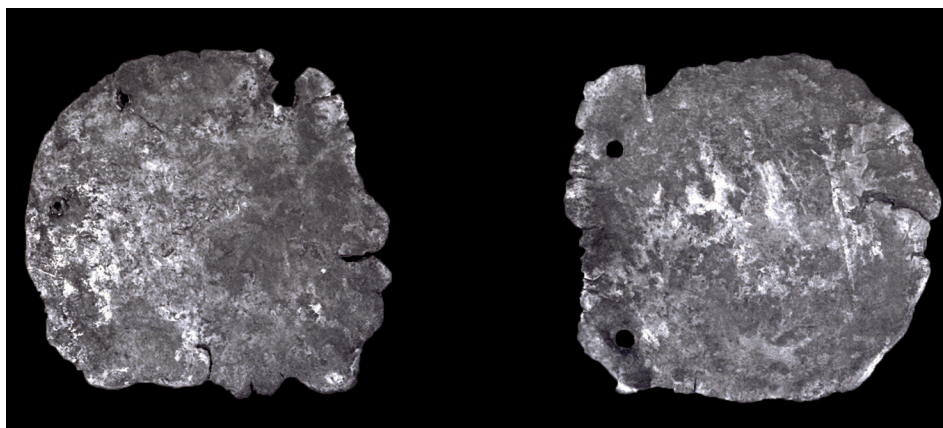
*Figure 6.* Half-mask, Bayanovo, 9<sup>th</sup> century, Russia, Perm Region



*Figure 7.* Mask, Bayanovo, 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> century



*Figure 8.* Silver mask, gilded, 10<sup>th</sup> century, Russia, Perm Region



*Figure 9.* Mask, Bolshie Tigany, 9<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> century, Russia, Tatarstan



*Figure 10.* Golden and silver masks, Sterlitamak, 8<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> century, Russia, Bashkortistan



*Figure 11.* Silver plates of burial mask, Tiszaeszlár–Bashalom, 10<sup>th</sup> century, Hungary



*Figure 12.* Golden mask, Rakamaz, 10<sup>th</sup> century, Hungary