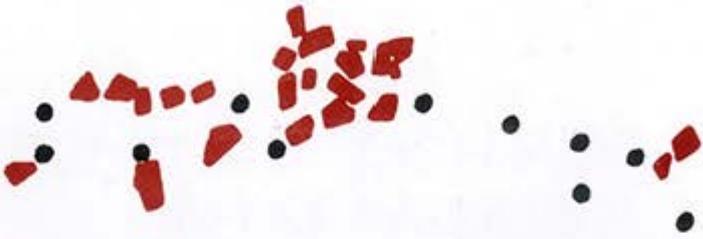


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**EARLY BRONZE AGE  
SETTLEMENT PATTERNS  
IN THE BALKANS**  
(CA. 3500–2000 BC, CALIBRATED DATES)

Part 3



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## AN EARLY BRONZE AGE SETTLEMENT IN SOUTHWESTERN TRANSDANUBIA

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A brief glance at the maps in the various studies dealing with the prehistoric cultures of Transdanubia shows that its southwestern area continues to be a "terra incognita".

Bronze Age sites began to dot the distributions maps of the region as a result of systematic investigations during the past twenty years: topographic field surveys, the large-scale archaeological investigations and rescue excavations linked to the Little Balaton project, as well as the micro-regional investigations supported by the National Research Fund (OTKA). This is especially exciting for the Early Bronze Age investigation of prehistoric settlement patterns that has long been a major topic of research. Because of the lack of sites, and for theoretical considerations, the results of these surveys have been extrapolated for the less intensively investigated areas of Transdanubia - using various graphic techniques, such as hatching, screen patterning and tinting - in various comprehensive studies, as well as in studies dealing with individual and smaller cultural units; this area has rarely been depicted as a "terra incognita", devoid of sites, reflecting the actual state of research.

In this paper I would like to present an Early Bronze Age settlement from this area whose rich finds offer a better insight into the Somogyvár-Vinkovci culture.

The site of **Börzönce** lies in the centre of Zala county in a valley of the Hahót basin: a small settlement half-way between Nagykanizsa and Zalaegerszeg.

The extent of the site, on the basis of the surface pottery finds and burnt daub fragments, is estimated between 8 to 10,000 m<sup>2</sup>. About ten percent of the site has been investigated.

Between 1988 and 1993 I uncovered 890 m<sup>2</sup> of the settlement, roughly 10 % of the total site, with a total of 35 settlement features. Distinctive Somogyvár-Vinkovci pottery wares were recovered from thirty pits. Ten Bronze Age pits only contained a handful of pottery sherds, whilst the others yielded an abundance of finds. Three pits were especially rich in finds.

The Early Bronze Age pits were either relatively shallow, with straight walls and flat floors or deeper, beehive-shaped pits with a round opening, roughly 1.5 m in diameter. Some of these pits had a peculiar rounded "extension" with straight walls and flat floor whose function unclear. The fill matched that of the Early Bronze Age features, and yielded only a few sherds.

The features appeared as dark soil patches, and Early Bronze Age finds were apparent

already at a depth of 0.40 m from the modern surface. The fill of these features was reminiscent of a "layered cake", with several distinct levels. In some features the base was dug out to form a bench or platform on one side. An intact cup or jug stood on the floor of some features, whereas in others the fragments of pots, cups and bowls formed a distinct cluster. In one case a cup and a jug were laid to their side, with a larger stone lying above them.

I did not find any features that can be considered to be dwelling houses or above-ground structures. Only feature G, a large, roughly rectangular feature with a "terraced" interior, can perhaps be interpreted as such on the basis of its dimensions and form: however, no postholes, and no wall or floor remains were noted, it is better considered as a large storage pit. Two explanations can be cited for the lack of habitation buildings: either they were log constructions (an alternative that is, however, contradicted by the numerous burnt daub fragments found in the features) or that the houses are in the unexcavated area of the site.

The finds from the features form an extremely rich assemblage. Over sixty vessels were either found intact or could be assembled from their fragments; also among the finds was an intact idol, the head of another, the fragment of a wagon model, clay wagon wheels, a clay mould, miniature animal statuettes, spindle whorls, two stone axes and a few silex blades.

The **ceramic inventory** from Börzönce shows a wide range of forms. Most pottery

fragments came from *storage jars* and *pots*, with a high number of *bowl* fragments. *Jugs*, *juglets*, *cups* and *amphorae* were fewer in number, similarly to *cylindrical flasks*, *oil lamps* and *lids*. No sharp distinction can be drawn between coarse and fine wares in terms of fabric and finish. The upper half of bowls, pots and large storage jars was smoothed, whilst their lower part was roughened, either by a technique reminiscent of brushing, in an almost "barbotine" technique or by applying another uneven clay layer.

Sand and crushed pebbles were used for tempering the clay. Vessels were fired in one of two ways: firing in a reduced atmosphere gave colour shades ranging from grey to black; in contrast, firing in an oxidizing atmosphere resulted in shades of ochre and orange. Both types of firing can be noted among jugs and bowls, as well as among pots and storage jars.

The hitherto known Somogyvár-Vinkovci ceramic inventory has been enriched by newer types through the Börzönce finds, offering a possibility for a more detailed typology. The variants of individual pottery types move on a wide scale, proving once again that the ceramic inventory of this culture consists not merely of a handful of distinctive vessel types, but that the type variants add up to a wide range of forms.

A **clay mould**, used for casting pins, was recovered from feature 'O' of the Börzönce site. Moulds were generally manufactured from some durable substance, generally stone, and clay moulds are considerably less frequent. The reason that so few clay moulds have survived might be sought in the fact

that they were liable to break and new ones had to be made from time to time - at the same time, the discarded and broken moulds are seldom found in the course of excavations. An alternative possibility is that the fragments of clay moulds that were deformed during casting are not recognized for what they are and are not published owing to their deformation and coarse finish. The mould from Börzönce offers new evidence for Early Bronze Age metalworking, indicating that bronze was used not only for the manufacture of jewellery and weapons, but also for some pin types that only gained wider currency in the later periods of the Bronze Age. It would appear that various pins of southern origin first appeared in Transdanubia not with the Kisapostag culture, but much earlier, in the Somogyvár-Vinkovci culture.

The mould from Börzönce is obviously unable to answer the question of whether metalworking was practiced by local or by migrant bronzesmiths. This find, however, does strongly argue in favour of local metallurgy, even if the possibility that individual metal articles reached a given settlement through trade cannot be rejected out of hand.

The small animal figurines found at Börzönce mostly depict bovines, sheep, pigs, recognizable from their marked bristle, and dogs. These figurines share a feature that the legs were not fitted to the body separately: the fore- and hind feet were pinched into form from the body. The sex of the male animals is strongly emphasized. The schematic modelling nonetheless reflects important traits that bespeak the

sophistication of the sculptors and also suggests that the inhabitants of the Börzönce settlement lived in close quarters with these animals and that their observation into difficulties. These small animal figurines were recovered from refuse features, together with pottery fragments: there were no indications whatsoever of cultic deposition. The economic and religious importance attached to these animals undoubtedly differed from that of the Late Copper Age Baden culture. An ornamented figurine fragment, found in a Glina III context, has been reported from Odaia Turcului, and similar animal statuettes are also known from the late Vučedol, Coşofeni and Glina III-Schneckenberg cultures. Miniature animal statuettes, although in a somewhat different style, occur also later in the Hatvan culture.

A wagon model came to light from the bottom of feature J, without any indication that this object had any special function. Contemporaneous analogies to the wagon model from Börzönce are known from the territory of present-day Romania (Kucsuláta/Cuciulata, Szalacs/Salacea).

The importance of the wagon model from Börzönce lies in the fact that it is the "missing link" between the Late Copper Age models from Budakalász and Szigetszentmárton, and the Middle Bronze Age specimens, proving that wagons were not entirely unknown in the Carpathian Basin during the Early Bronze Age.

Aside from the wagon model, a number of **clay wheels**, both intact and fragmentary, were recovered from various settlement fea-

tures. A total of seven intact and nine fragmentary wheels were found; their diameter varies between 3 cm and 8 cm, suggesting that the wagon models to which they had originally belonged also differed in size. Some six to eight wagon models can be assumed from the number of wheels, of which we only found a single one. Bearing in mind the number of wheels from other Somogyvár-Vinkovci sites, the probable number of wagon models is even higher.

The fact that these wagon models some in varying sizes and have been almost without exception been found in refuse features would imply that carts and wagons were by this time a natural part of day to day life and that cult practices were no longer associated with them; they can even be seen as children's toys.

It is generally accepted that these wagon model types originated in the Ancient Near East (Mesopotamia and Anatolia) since the earliest and most frequent occurrences and depictions of similar wagons are known from this area. Opinions are divided, however, as to the exact route of their distribution to the Carpathian Basin. Three major intermediate areas can be considered in this respect: the steppe area north of the Pontic, the Balkans or the Mediterranean and Italy. Of these, the Balkans seems to be the most probable"seeing that the closest analogies come from the Glina III-Schneckenberg culture of Romania.

One intact **female idol** and the head of another one was found at the Börzönce site. The height of the intact female statuette is 7 cm. Its head is triangular and slightly

thrown back. On the back of the head is the schematic depiction of a bun or a shawl, and she wore a long dress that reached to the ankles. The female character is indicated by the depiction of breasts. The face is rather schematic, the nose is uncommonly large. Eyes are indicated by a pair of barely visible incisions, as if she wore a mask or a veil. The outstretched arms are no more than knob-like clay stumps. Similar to the pottery, the clay was tempered with crushed pebbles and quartzite. The characteristic thrown-back head of the Börzönce idol, as well as its modelling, suggests links with the Balkans and Anatolia.

Research on the Somogyvár-Vinkovci culture both by Hungarian and other scholars is a mere thirty years old, and yet many studies have been devoted to the various aspects and problems of this exciting period - the Early Bronze Age.

A more detailed version of this paper, complete with the history of research, and a detailed evaluation of the finds, is scheduled for publication in volume 22 of *Antaeus*, the yearbook of the Archaeological Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

The many studies devoted to the Early Bronze Age shows that no consensus has been reached on a number of major issues, especially the boundary between the Copper and the Bronze Age.

A patchwork of widely diverse opinions can also be noted as far as absolute chronology is concerned. A wide, several centuries long gap, unbridgable at present, separates the adherents of the traditional chronology

based on historical sources and the advocates of the  $^{14}\text{C}$  based chronology.

Even though in the past few years there have seen a proliferation of studies on the Early Bronze Age and a number of conferences have been organized on this theme, site publications have not kept up with new methodological considerations. This deficiency has become an element encumbering further research since there is no possibility for comparative analyses, e.g. the refinement of typology or more precise internal periodization.

The new analogies for the Börzönce finds share the most similarities with finds from the late Vučedol C and the Vinkovci A1 period, suggesting the survival of Vučedol elements as late as the period represented by the Börzönce site. Contact with the Coțofeni culture, as well as with the Gyula-Rosia and the Belotić-Bela Crkva groups, the Ljubljana culture and the Proto-Nagyrev material is also be evident.

The Börzönce finds seem to be most closely bound to the distant Glina III-Schneckenberg culture. The parallels to the wagon model, the wheels, the animal statuettes, the idols, the metallurgy, the jugs, juglets and amphorae tend to underline this connection. This surprising statement can be more readily accepted if we are prepared to discard the static, geographical approach to chronology.

According to the chronological framework based on geographical distance, sites lying farther from the main distribution are generally later than the central sites since

the population groups of a given culture obviously migrated from the centre.

The distance between Vinkovci and PecsNagyirpad is roughly 120 km, and some 105 km separate Vinkovci and Szava; in view of the contemporaneous modes of transport, and bearing in mind both the obstacles posed by uncharted, thick woods, marshland, swamps and unregulated rivers, and the advantages of wheeled transport through the use wagons, this distance could probably be covered within one or two weeks. Borzonce lies some 280 km away from Vinkovci, implying that this distance could be covered within a month! These differences of weeks or months are obviously untraceable in the archaeological record, but they do call for a break with, or at least a reassessment of, this static approach.

Accepting the above assumption, the Vinkovci A pottery could have appeared fairly quickly in counties Baranya, Zala or even Fejér. (There is a general consensus that the ultimate reason for a large-scale migration would have been the aggression of the southern population groups who had reached the Danube-Sava confluence.) Smaller migrations could have been motivated by a number of different - economic and human - reasons. Smaller migrations would also explain the presence of larger settlements and, also, of sites yielding but a handful of vessels and graves. This is perhaps the reason that little is known about the cemeteries of the Somogyvár-Vinkovci culture, of formal cemeteries separate from the settlements existed at all, and the deceased were not buried outside the settlement in a wholly random place that is more difficult

to locate. These smaller migrations could, obviously, also have involved the movement of a smaller group from Borzönce back to their kinsmen, colouring later distribution maps with the occasional broken vessel or solitary grave. This would also explain the subtle regional differences within the apparently uniform assemblages, for "alien" elements could easily have been added to the original ceramic inventory after an arrival to a new cultural environment through marriage, barter, or more developed forms of trade, etc. It is this hardly surprising that the Somogyvár-Vinkovci culture has links with distant areas and regions, and that its movement and its "expansion" cannot be traced step by step in the intermediate areas. These remarks may well be self-evident; if so, they prove once again that prehistoric research does not always subscribe to an approach with living people in mind.

When searching for distribution maps with actual Somogyvár-Vinkovci sites in earlier publications, I found that a comprehensive distribution map of this culture is lacking both in Hungarian and Yugoslavian studies. I have therefore attempted to complete a distribution map on the basis of the published data.

The centres that can be identified from the distribution maps were in my opinion established more or less contemporaneously. The Somogyvár-Vinkovci culture encountered diverse populations in these areas, explaining local and regional variations in apparent uniformity (southern elements).

The animal statuettes, the wagon model and the mould found at Börzönce represent new

elements in the currently known material of the Somogyvár-Vinkovci culture. The ceramic inventory too has been augmented by new forms: the vessel open at both ends, the vessel with a constricted neck, strainer bowl, oil lamp, pots, etc. The small number of decorated vessels is also striking.

Most interesting among the few decorated pottery fragments is the bowl fragment from feature J, ornamented on its exterior and interior. The decoration of this fragment that probably comes from a carefully made footed bowl recalls similar bowls from the Vučedol C period in Slovenia. The decoration pattern is composed of hatched triangles separated by bundles of incised lines and the alternation of ornamented and unornamented fields. The fabric and ornamentation differ from comparable Makó bowls. Aside from Slovenian type late Vučedol influences, Kostolac reminiscences too can be noted in the ornamentation.

Owing to the "sterility" of the Börzönce assemblage I have not addressed certain important issues, such as the interrelations between the Somogyvár-Vinkovci and Makó cultures. The common traits shared by these two cultures (settlements of short life-span occupied by smaller communities, the paucity of settlement features, the few buildings, the lack of separate cemeteries, similarities between certain pottery forms and ornamental motifs, comparable life-ways, etc.) undoubtedly reflect a common ancestry. However, a more precise definition of this common ancestry is still lacking and might not even be demonstrable using archaeological techniques. Accepting that the general use of wagons made both

cultures more mobile, it is hardly surprising that these common traits and elements, the so-called cultural interrelations, are to be found in regions lying 2-300 km away from each other and that they cannot be demonstrated in the intermediate area, with only the occasional grave or pit marking the route of the migration.

As a consequence, the role of certain "diagnostic" ceramic wares needs to be re-evaluated. First among these should be the occurrence of *footed bowls decorated on their interior* for their presence or absence in a given culture was taken to indicate chronological differences. The mapping of the distribution of this bowl type and the definition of the cultural context of its occurrences will undoubtedly offer a definitive answer as to whether this vessel

type can be used as a clear-cut chronological indicator. *The cylindrical flask*, considered to be the type fossil of the Somogyvár-Vinkovci culture, must likewise be re-evaluated. This pottery type is present in the late Vučedol period, in the Makó culture, in the Bell Beaker-Csepel group, in the Proto-Nagyrév culture and in the Glina III-Schneckenberg culture. Similarly, the distribution and the cultural context of *oil lamps* that were hitherto lacking in the Somogyvár-Vinkovci culture, but were present in the Makó, the Bell Beaker and the Ljubljana culture, as well as in the Bela Crkva and Ig group, must also be re-assessed. Further studies must also be devoted to the *anthropomorphic and zoomorphic depictions* that appear to be superficially similar in various cultures, but might easily have had a different cultural setting.