

HUNGARIAN ARCHAEOLOGY AT THE TURN OF THE MILLENNIUM

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Fig. 5. Copper disc from Zalavár-Basasziget. Middle Copper Age, Balaton-Lásinja culture

decrease. These two cultures, both new arrivals to the Carpathian Basin, formed the basis of a process of uniformization that led to the emergence of the Baden culture in the Late Copper Age. The transition between the two is represented by the Protoboleráz horizon, a brief, but marked period in the Hungarian Copper Age. Major southern and eastern impacts can be noted in the Carpathian Basin during this period, spanning no more than a few generations. The blend of external influences and local traditions, some going back for many millennia, eventually led to the emergence of an unusually large cultural complex. The unity of material and spiritual culture is especially conspicuous in the Boleráz group, representing the early phase of the Baden culture. The nature of the cultural force that forged a uniform culture throughout the entire Carpathian Basin from the strongly different regional groups remains unknown. Neither is it clear to what extent the climatic change, bringing a wetter and, presumably, cooler climate at the very beginning of the Baden period, played a role in these changes. The classical Baden phase was marked by the disintegration of the initial unity and the appearance of a colourful patchwork of regional Baden groups. This period saw the appearance of four wheeled vehicles of eastern origin that brought a revolutionary change in transportation (Fig. 4). The resurgence of metallurgy, disrupted at the end of the Middle Copper Age, can also be noted. Although the internal development of the Baden culture is fairly well known, its close and its relation to the Early Bronze Age is still unclear. There is no evidence that this unprecedented development came to a sudden and drastic end.

Steppean Kurgan groups began infiltrating the eastern half of the Carpathian Basin during the Baden period, in the later 4th millennium B.C. At present, only the burials of the Kurgan culture are known: the smaller and larger burial mounds – called kurgans – dotting the Great Hungarian Plain usually contain the burials of one or several members of a community. The archaeological record indicates the peaceful coexistence of the Baden and Kurgan communities. It seems likely that these Kurgan groups played a role in the emergence of the Early Bronze Age.

A similar peaceful coexistence can be assumed in the case

of the Kostolac groups on late Baden sites at the close of the 4th millennium B.C. The period named after this southern population, arriving from the south along major waterways, such as the Danube, was a brief episode in the Late Copper Age.

The emergence of the Vučedol culture at the beginning of the 3rd millennium B.C., immediately preceding and surviving into the Early Bronze Age, can be located to Croatia. This culture was also distributed in southeastern Transdanubia. The stratified settlements, rich metallurgy and unique pottery of this culture set it apart from the other Copper Age cultures of the region.

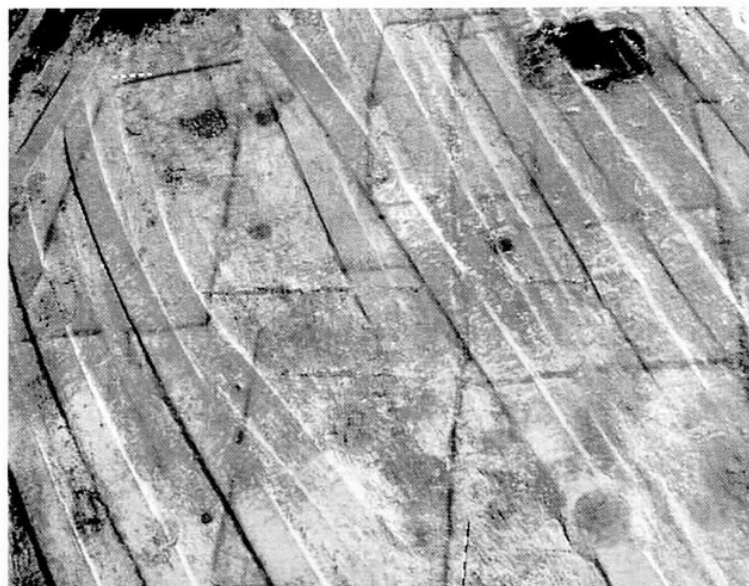
The absolute chronology of the Copper Age of the Carpathian Basin is based on calibrated radiocarbon dates. The Early Copper Age can be dated between 4500/4400–4000 B.C., the Middle Copper Age between 4000–3600/3500 B.C., while the Late Copper Age between 3600/3500–2600/2500 B.C. This chronology is also supported by the evidence from cross-dating and traditional archaeological comparisons. One case in point is the copper disc found at the Zalavár site of the Balaton-Lásinja culture – similar discs were still popular during the Stroke Ornamented Pottery period (Fig. 4). A similar disc was brought to light near Lake Boden on a settlement that was dated to the early 4th millennium using dendrochronology. This date supports the calibrated radiocarbon dates for the Middle Copper Age cultures of the Carpathian Basin.

SETTLEMENTS

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Our knowledge of Copper Age settlements has been greatly enriched by the large-scale excavations conducted over the past few years. This is especially true of Transdanubia, where there is now evidence for above-ground houses (Fig. 6). These new finds have modified earlier views on the use of pit-houses and suggest that the pits provided with

Fig. 6. Aerial photo showing the outlines of Early and Middle Copper Age houses. Győr-Szabadrétdomb



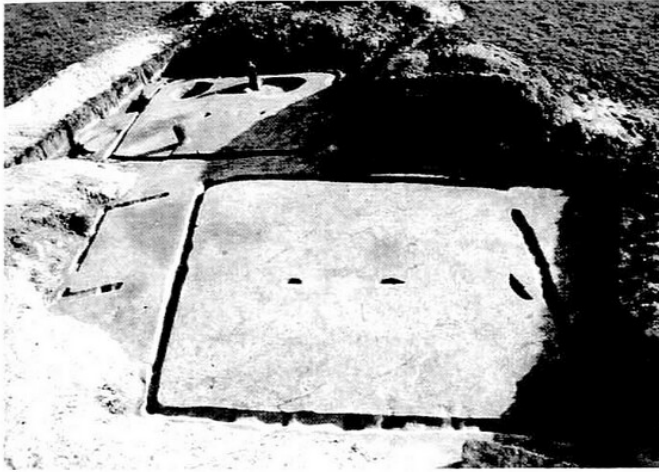


Fig. 7. Excavated houses from the Middle Copper Age settlement at Zalavár-Basasziget. Balaton-Lasinja culture

hearths or ovens were not necessarily residential structures, but served other purposes.

Compared to the Early Copper Age, a dense settlement network covered Transdanubia in the Middle Copper Age. In contrast, only a few Bodrogkeresztúr settlements are known from the Tisza region. The reason for this divergence can most likely be sought in the nature of the subsistence strategies adopted by these two populations. The stockbreeding communities in the Tisza region had an essentially mobile lifestyle and the small, temporary camp-

Fig. 9. Map of the excavated section of the Middle Copper Age settlement at Zalavár-Basasziget. Balaton-Lasinja culture

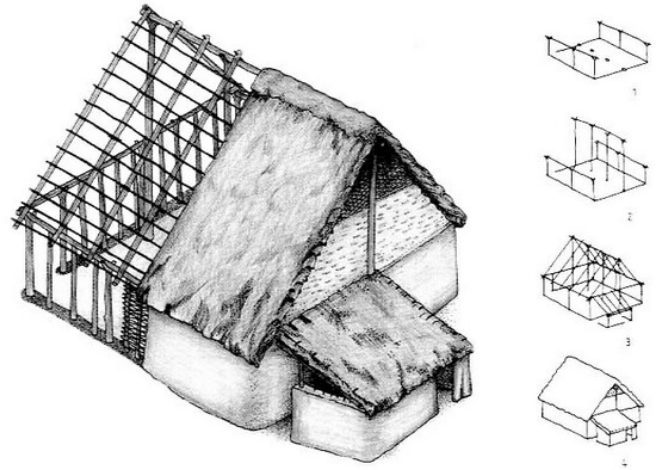
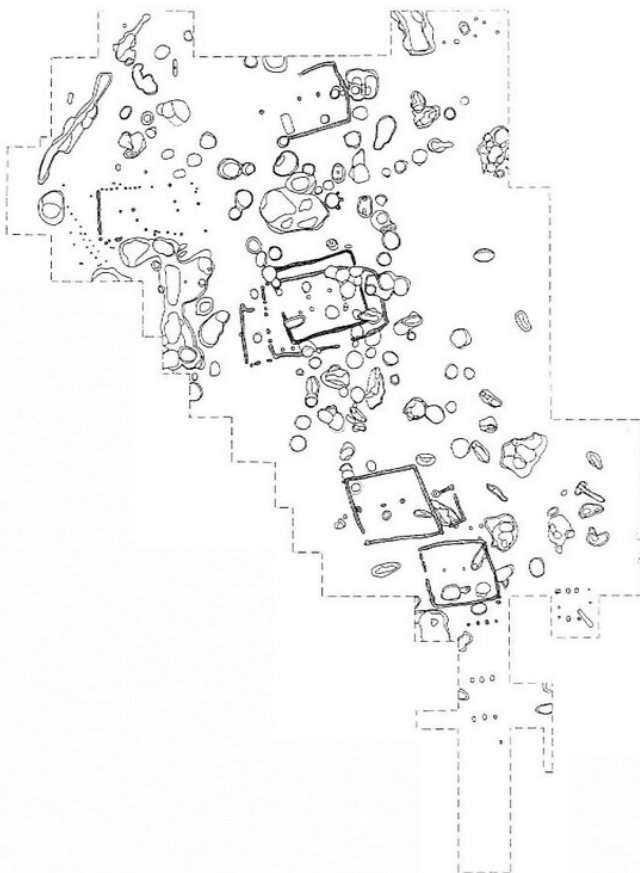


Fig. 8. Reconstruction of a Middle Copper Age house. Zalavár-Basasziget, Balaton-Lasinja culture

sites left few traces in the archaeological record. In Transdanubia, however, settlements were established in locations with a favourable environment near water; these settlements often lay quite close to each other and some had apparently been occupied over a longer period of time as shown by the abundance of finds. The remains of houses erected around a framework of massive timbers also suggest the longer occupation of these sites.

Most settlements were established on low islands or peninsulas that were especially suited to occupation in dry weather. Much more is known about the settlements of the Early and Middle Copper Age in Transdanubia owing to recent investigations.

The almost completely excavated Middle Copper Age settlement at Zalavár-Basasziget, sited on a small peninsula extending into the marshland of the Little Balaton, covered an estimated 5000 m² and can be assigned to the Balaton-Lasinja culture. The house remains, the refuse pits and the clay extraction pits indicate a continuous occupation. The settlement had two to four contemporaneous houses during the various occupation phases (Figs 7–9).

The sites investigated around Győr in the Hanság marshland offer a similar picture. The Middle Copper Age communities in this area lived in small hamlets with a few houses; these sites covered no more than 1–2 hectares. Scattered around the houses were storage bins and clay extraction pits that were eventually filled with refuse.

The one or two-roomed houses were 7 m wide on the average, their length often reached 20 m, although shorter houses about 10 m long were also quite frequent. The upright timbers reinforcing the walls and supporting the roof structure were set into a foundation trench or, more rarely, into a posthole. The use-life of these settlements was determined by a subsistence strategy based on animal husbandry. In contrast to the more briefly occupied settlements, the sites with massive timber structures can be regarded as more permanent settlements, although judging from the

finds uncovered on these sites, they were not particularly long-lived either. One unusual phenomenon is that the Ludanice communities of the early phase of the Middle Copper Age also settled in caves in the Budapest region and northeastern Transdanubia.

In the later phase of the Middle Copper Age, the number of settlements decreased in Transdanubia. The temporary settlements of this loose settlement network are marked by scattered pits. In contrast to the Tisza region, where village-like settlements with several houses have been uncovered, no houses have yet been found in Transdanubia from this period. The most thoroughly investigated site is the Tiszalúc settlement of the Hunyadihalom culture in the Great Hungarian Plain. The core of the settlement, a roughly 150 m by 100 m large area, was enclosed by a palisade fence of closely spaced posts set into a foundation trench. The houses in this protected area had been renewed several times; the pits yielded a varied assemblage of pottery fragments and animal bones, mainly from cattle. The timber framed, two-roomed houses measured 10–12 m by 6–7 m. The archaeological record indicates that there were twenty to twenty-two houses during one occupation phase (Fig. 10).

The unification process affecting the entire Carpathian Basin during the Late Copper Age is also reflected in the settlements. The over 1600 sites of the Baden culture from Hungary reflect a relatively dense settlement network. The Baden communities settled in a variety of envi-

Fig. 10. Map of the excavated section of the Middle Copper Age settlement at Tiszalúc–Sarkadpuszta. Hunyadihalom culture



Fig. 11. Oven plastered with pottery sherds. Sármellék–Égenföld, Late Copper Age, Baden culture

ronments, ranging from the plainland to upland locations, as well as settlements near waterways and in caves. Beside small, temporary campsites, a number of several hectares large villages have also been identified (for example at Pilismarót–Szobi rév). The excavations on Baden sites brought to light hearths plastered with pebbles and sherds, smaller ovens, as well as storage bins and refuse pits (Fig. 11). The archaeological record only offers a partial picture of the residential buildings since burnt daub fragments (clay mixed with vegetal remains) are all that survived of the one-time houses. The archaeological remains suggest that these buildings had terre pisé walls or were log cabins.

The late Baden settlements established near larger lakes and waterways indicate a contemporary occupation by Kostolac communities. The location of these settlements was no doubt influenced by the importance of fishing in the subsistence and the importance of waterways for transportation and communication. The briefly occupied Kostolac settlements had temporary, hut-like structures. The Baden population often established protected, fortified settlements in upland locations in northeastern Hungary during this late phase. The several meters high occupation deposits indicate a longer occupation. Some upland sites, such as Salgótarján–Pécskő, were inhabited up to the Early Bronze Age. The stratified settlements of the Vučedol culture, surviving into the Early Bronze Age, appeared at roughly the same time in the southwestern part of the Carpathian Basin.

EARLY METALLURGY IN THE CARPATHIAN BASIN

Zsuzsanna M. Virág

The earliest appearance of metals and metal artefacts, as well as lumps of worked copper preceded the Copper Age proper. The first use of copper can already be observed in the Neolithic. It would appear that Neolithic man began