

**Gabriella Kulcsár**

**The Beginnings of the Bronze Age in the Carpathian Basin**

The Makó–Kosihy–Čaka and  
the Somogyvár–Vinkovci cultures in Hungary

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## FOREWORD

In contrast to most prehistorians working in Central, Eastern and South-East Europe,<sup>1</sup> Hungarian scholars generally link the onset of the Early Bronze Age to the cultural changes and the appearance of new cultures following the disintegration of the Baden–Pécel culture, the huge Late Copper Age complex of the Carpathian Basin.<sup>2</sup> The middle third of the 3rd millennium BC saw the emergence of cultures which both preserved certain traits of the late Vučedol traditions and transformed then by blending them with elements drawn from other sources. The first among these new cultures was the Makó–Kosihy–Čaka complex, followed by the Somogyvár–Vinkovci culture.

The archaeological record indicates that the onset of the Bronze Age, corresponding to the late Vučedol and the post-Vučedol period,<sup>3</sup> was a time of constant change, in part shaped by the spread of metallurgy and metalworking. In addition to similar metal artefacts such as shaft-hole axes and chisels, certain pottery vessels such as interior decorated footed bowls, encountered in a roughly similar form in several contemporary cultures, are also imprints of an extensive cultural network spanning large regions.

The Eneolithic of Central Europe and the Early Bronze Age of Hungary currently represent one of the most intensively investigated periods of prehistory, especially regarding the comparison of chronological systems. Owing to its central location, the Carpathian Basin plays a key role in the region's prehistory. The publication of the growing corpus of archaeological finds, including earlier assemblages, is not merely an important task, but also a prerequisite to the better understanding of the cultural trajectories and interactions shaping the Bronze Age of the Carpathian Basin.

The first overviews of the Somogyvár–Vinkovci and the Makó–Kosihy–Čaka cultures were based on stray finds because there were few stratified assemblages from professional excavations.<sup>4</sup> There has been a welcome increase in the material of this period during the past forty years. The greatest contribution, however, comes from the large-scale salvage excavations conducted over the past decade, bringing both a qualitative and quantitative growth in the corpus of finds. The assessment of these excavations will be one of the major tasks of Bronze Age studies over the next years.

The current work seeks to examine the Early Bronze Age 1–2 period in Hungary through the re-publication of several old find assemblages and various new, hitherto unpublished finds, combined with a re-assessment of the already published material. I was able to personally examine the finds in the museums of southern Transdanubia, in Counties Somogy, Tolna and Vas, and in County Csongrád in the region east of the Danube. The finds from County Somogy provide the backbone of the data collection in Transdanubia. During his investigation of the medieval Benedictine abbey on Somogyvár–Kupavárhegy, Kornél Bakay also uncovered the remains of a late Vučedol and Somogyvár–Vinkovci settlement on the eponymous site of the Somogyvár–Vinkovci culture. The

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<sup>1</sup> For problems of terminology, cp. *Burger* (1988) 210; *Govedarica* (1989a) Abb. 29; *Panajotov* (1989); *Bertemes* (1992) 86; *Parzinger* (1993) Abb. 16; *Panajotov* (1995); 23; *Lichardus–Vladár* (1996) 29; *Gogáltan* (1998); *Maran* (1998); *Gogáltan* (1999b); *Nikolova* (1999); *Bertemes–Heyd* (2002).

<sup>2</sup> For the terminology of the Early Bronze Age in Hungary, cp. *Bóna* (1961); *Kalicz* (1962); *idem* (1968); *Bóna* (1975a); *idem* (1975b); *Kalicz-Schreiber* (1976a) Abb. 1; *Ecsedy* (1979a) 118, Abb. 7–9; *Kalicz* (1982) Abb. 1; *Kalicz-Schreiber* (1982) Abb. 1; *Ecsedy* (1985) 93; *Raczky* (1988); *Kalicz-Schreiber* (1991) Figs 8–10; *Bóna* (1992a) 16; *Ecsedy* (1994a) 17–18; *Raczky* (1995); *Kalicz-Schreiber–Kalicz* (1997) Abb. 1–2; *idem* (1999); *Bondár* (2001) Figs 1–2; *Dani* (2001); *Tóth* (2003); *Dani* (2005c). The terminology of Bronze Age studies in Romania has taken a similar approach: *Roman* (1985); *idem* (1986) Fig. 7; *Roman–Németi* (1989); *Ciugudean* (1996); *Gogáltan* (1996); *idem* (1998); *idem* (1999b).

<sup>3</sup> *Ecsedy* (1979a) 118; cp. *Maran* (1998) 315, Taf. 82.

<sup>4</sup> *Bóna* (1965a); *Dimitrijević* (1966) and *Kalicz* (1962); *idem* (1968); *Vladár* (1966).



prehistoric occupation levels and pits were strongly disturbed during the construction of the medieval abbey, this being the main reason for the few stratified assemblages from this site. However, the finds are important even in themselves for they come from the northernmost settlement of the late Vučedol culture. The number of Early Bronze Age sites in County Somogy rose from eight to sixty following the examination of various museum collections and the material collected during earlier field surveys. This number grew to ninety-six following more recent salvage excavations. While the increase of the known sites represents little more than a quantitative growth, it does demonstrate the potentials of research in this field.

The backbone of the study is the gazetteer of the sites and finds of the Makó-Kosihy-Čaka and the Somogyvár-Vinkovci cultures. An overview of the two cultures' distribution is followed by a discussion of their settlements and settlement patterns, next comes the detailed typological analysis of the artefactual material. The conclusions drawn from this analysis will hopefully provide a sound basis for future investigations and, ultimately, a reliable starting point for the comparison of the chronological and typological frameworks used in Central and South-East Europe. The examination of the finds from a fresh perspective and the analysis of a combination of several classes of material called for the re-interpretation of cultures and groups which had hitherto been believed to represent uniform cultural complexes. The archaeological and palaeoenvironmental studies of the past ten years will no doubt modify our views on the period's social structure in several respects.

The idea for this book came from Prof. Dr. István Bóna. I am indebted to him for his invaluable and insightful comments.

The indispensable research facilities were provided by the Archaeological Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences from 1996, for which I would like to thank Csanád Bálint, Mária Bondár and László Kovács, as well as my colleagues at the Institute.

While researching the material for this book, I had the opportunity to study in various universities and institutions abroad by way of research grants. In 1999, I was able to study in the Department of Prehistory and Early History of Vienna University and to personally examine material in the collection of the Naturhistorisches Museum in Vienna through a research grant. In 2000, a DAAD and a DAAD-MÖB grant enabled studies in the Department of Prehistory and Early History of Heidelberg University. Special thanks are due to Prof. Dr. Joseph Maran, my research consultant in Heidelberg, and to Prof. Dr. Eszter Bánffy for providing this opportunity.

I received encouragement and help during my work from many colleagues, who read through and commented on draught versions and stimulated my research by sharing their ideas. Thanks are due to all of them, and especially to Mária Bondár, Szilvia Honti, Nándor Kalicz, Erzsébet Ruttkay, Ildikó Szathmári, István Torma and Gábor Kalla, as well as to the younger generation of prehistorians studying the Bronze Age: János Dani, Klára P. Fischl, Viktória Kiss, Gábor V. Szabó, Florin Gogâltan and Vajk Szeverényi.

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This study is an enlarged and updated version of my doctoral thesis, written in 2001 and successfully defended in 2003. I have made every effort to take into account the material and the new findings published since then. It is my hope that despite the traditional typo-chronological approach pursued in the examination of the evidence, the findings and tentative conclusions presented here will contribute to new studies on the cultural diversity of the 3rd millennium BC. While new advances in this field of research can, obviously, only be achieved through a combination with archaeometric analyses, the present study will hopefully be a useful starting point for future research.

\* \* \*

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