

Hargita Oravecz

## AN EARLY BRONZE AGE BOAT-LIKE REPRESENTATION FROM RAKAMAZ, NORTHEAST HUNGARY

*This article offers an analysis of an Early Bronze Age boat-like small vessel probably datable to the period of the Nyírség Culture around the year 2500 BC, and gives an overview of previous findings of boat remains and the main types thereof. It is argued that this small vessel displays a number of technical features that are characteristic of plank boats. The hypothesis of an early familiarity with and use of this boat type is supported by the wooden boat remains found in various major European bodies of water. A further hypothesis raised in the article is that this find, isolated as it is, must have served a special rather than a quotidian purpose as a grave object linked to some funerary rite. This idea is based on such considerations as the miniature size of the object, its symbolic boat-like shape, the context of similar clay representations, and the presence within the territory of Hungary of various boat-related concepts (boat shaped urn funerals, tree-trunk coffins, etc.).*

*Key words: boat-like clay representation, Nyírség culture, second half of Early Bronze Age, northeastern Hungary.*

### *Introduction*

The boats of the Bronze Age, or generally speaking of all prehistoric periods, have not been fully investigated by Hungarian researchers. This lacuna can be explained by the fact that the wooden vessels left only sporadic traces and many of the discovered samples perished during or after having been unearthed. Thus the Hungarian evidence that can serve as the object of study is still limited, ethnographic and iconographic parallels (clay imitations, scratches on bronzes or clay objects) are the main sources of our present knowledge.

The pioneering article about such vessels was written by F. Horváth, who summarised the hitherto known Neolithic and Chalcolithic finds discovered in the Hungarian and south-east European archaeological context, suggesting the existence of an extended waterway network in the eastern part of the country as early as the Neolithic Age (HORVÁTH 2003, 263–275).

The only ‘Hungarian’ Bronze Age vessel model to be found and described in published form so far has been discovered at the site of Darda in what is today Croatia (BANDI–ZOFFMANN 1966, 47–48, VI.t. 4–5). Here, one miniature triangle-shaped object was found and identified by V. Kiss as a representation of a plank boat on the basis of similar find from Bulgarian Orsoja (KISS 2002, 60–65; KISS 2007, 119–129). Its specific context was investigated by J. Šimić and V. Kiss, who ascribed the origin of the model to a child’s grave on the basis of the context of the small objects at Balkans Bronze Age sites (ŠIMIĆ 2000, 56–58, 155, T.5. 3; KISS 2002, 60–65; KISS 2007, 119–129).

The archaeological evidence suggests that boat motifs, usually along with likenesses of birds and sun or wheel, were used as early as the Middle Bronze Age of Hungary. This subject was discussed by Sz. Guba and V. Szeverényi in relation to clay bird representations collected from the Carpathian Basin (GUBA–SZEVERÉNYI 2007, 75–110). In their opinion these



symbols play an important role in the religious and cosmological ideas of Bronze Age people. G. Ilon, who studied the bronze artifacts of the Late Bronze Age 'treasure' of Szombathely, is of a similar view. He argued that such motifs as 'bird-ship' and 'bird-sun-ship' must have had social significance, as well (ILON 2003, 119–148).

In his monograph published in the mid-1970s I. Bóna demonstrated that the Middle Bronze Age graves of Kisapostag and Vatyá cemeteries display an oval structuring. Likewise, urns of the deceased in the cemeteries of Kelebia, Kulcs, Dunaújváros and Lovasberény showed an obvious oval structure (BÓNA 1975, 52, 59, Plan 13). Later investigations in the area of the cemeteries of Dunaújváros, Szalkszentmárton, Kunszentmiklós and elsewhere confirmed his observation (SZATHMÁRI 1983, 17, Abb. 2; VICZE 2011, 38, Plan 1).

The specific role of boats may be considered on the basis of hewed tree-trunk coffins discovered by J. Dani and G. V. Szabó at some Middle Bronze Age cemeteries of the Füzesabony Culture near Polgár village (DANI–V. SZABÓ 2004, 9–119). These coffins were shaped similarly to the dug-outs, which may have served as 'transport for the deceased', as many scholars have surmised concerning such boat-graves (MÜLLER–WILLE 1978, 249–251; HARDING 2000, 109).

Recently discovered boat-shape houses near Budapest and in Transdanubia are yet another hint at the existence of a boat-tradition at Bronze Age settlements in Hungary. Post holes showing an oval or boat-like house form can be observed at several sites, for example at Albertfalva, Szigetszentmiklós, Érd, Bucsú, etc. (ENDRŐDI–REMÉNYI 2003, 146–150; ENDRŐDI–REMÉNYI 2005, 128–134; 146–150; ILON 2004, 179; ENDRŐDI–REMÉNYI 2007, 128–134; MESTER–OTTOMÁNYI 2005, 213–215; ENDRŐDI–PÁSZTOR 2006, 7–25). The above data give force to the assumption that the 'boat phenomena' did not represent an isolated case

but rather a diverse tradition of the Hungarian Bronze Age.

#### *About the Rakamaz find*

The object was discovered at Rakamaz village (Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County) during the rescue excavation of a cemetery dating from the time of the Hungarian Conquest, conducted by István Dienes in 1963 (Fig. 1. 1).<sup>1</sup>

His fieldwork diary specifies that the site was located at the extremity of Rákóczi Street at a distance of about 150 m on the left, on a hill situated in a northeast-southwest direction which the local people had long utilized as a sand mine. Most of it perished through the removal of the sand.

The find was discovered directly next to the wall of the mine at a depth of 120 cm, resting on its side surrounded by scattered animal bones at the time of discovery (Fig. 1. 2).

The object has a conical body, its sides standing apart from one another and broadening slightly in the middle, then in a concave arch thickening and meeting towards the ends (Fig. 2. 1a–d). The inner part of the vessel is trough-like the base is of an oval form and omphalic. The rim is strongly elongated like the base and was originally decorated with two animal heads, which were aligned to the axis of the vessel and leapt out from both ends. The remaining head is sketchy, one eye being indicated only by a mildly deepened oval, and the mouth impressed by a dot, the necks is perforated slightly obliquely. The vessel is finely cut on the edges of its front and back sides. This ornament is hardly visible on the drawings because of the abrasion. Its clay is tempered with fine-grained grog. The surface is spotted and is of a dark gray and brown color. Traces of ochre might be detected on the surface of the vessel, since one finds what appears to be spoor of faded or removed red ochre paint or colouring under the 2 to 3 mm thick inner dirt (sinter) layer as well as in one of the apertures. The



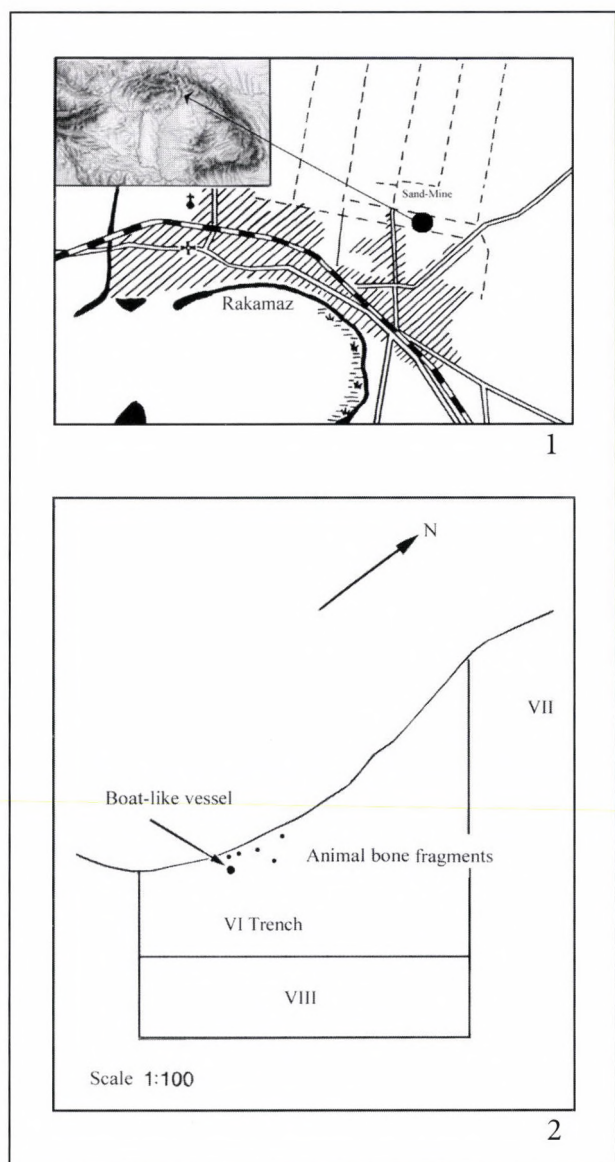


Fig.1.1: Rakamaz Sand-Mine (Eastern Hungary),

Location of the site, scale 1: 50.000 (redrawn after I. Dienes), 2: Detail from the excavation map signing the finding spot of the boat-like vessel and the bone fragments, scale 1:100 (redrawn after I. Dienes)

height ranges between 3 and 3,6 cm. At the rim its measures are 5 x 9 cm across, at the heads it is 13 cm, while at the bottom it is 7 x 3,4 cm. The thickness of the wall varies between 0,3 and 0,4 cm. The inventory number in the Pre-historic Collection of the HNM is 2003. 7. 1. The vessel's condition is good, almost well-pre-

served, and it shows merely modern damages on the rim and on one of the animal heads.

The finding can be dated despite having very modest decoration. The short vertical incisions on it can be connected to the pottery decoration of the Nyírség Culture, as can its specific fabric and the burning technology (KALICZ 1968, 75–76). This date is further supported by the pottery fragments (Inv. Nos. HNM 2003. 7. 2–15) from its vicinity (Fig 2. 2–10) which show the same technology, light brown and gray colour, fine-grained grog tempering and the usual designs of the Nyírség Culture, namely a deeply engraved 'fishbone' motif, impressed dots, V-shaped prick marks, randomly incised lines (KALICZ 1968, 75–76, Taf.12. 7, Taf. 13. 2, Taf.15. 1–4, 6, 9, Taf. 20. 4–6, 20, Taf. 25. 10–14; DANI 1999, 57–64, 75). The pottery fragments to be mentioned were kept in the same box with the boat-like clay vessel. Even though the researcher made no mention of these, they must have originated from the latter's immediate vicinity, and at any rate from the area of the excavations.

According to the accepted Hungarian pre-historic chronology the Nyírség Culture represents the second half of the Early Bronze Age (KALICZ 1981, 67–74) dated 2500 BC (ECSEDY 1994, 17–21).

The vessel has everted and straight sides like those of the prehistoric bowls of the conical type. However, this specimen cannot be considered as a simple imitation of the bowl because it has a narrower and more elongated oval form than bowls usually do. Regardless of its concave base, the vessel possesses many details observable on boats. For example, its oval shape which broadens along the middle and narrows towards the ends resembles real boat bodies made by the cutting and bending of planks. The manner in which the sides were put together, i.e. the thickening nature of the ends, suggests vertically placed assets often used on plank boats. The heightened ends may be interpreted as the protruding prow of the vehicle.



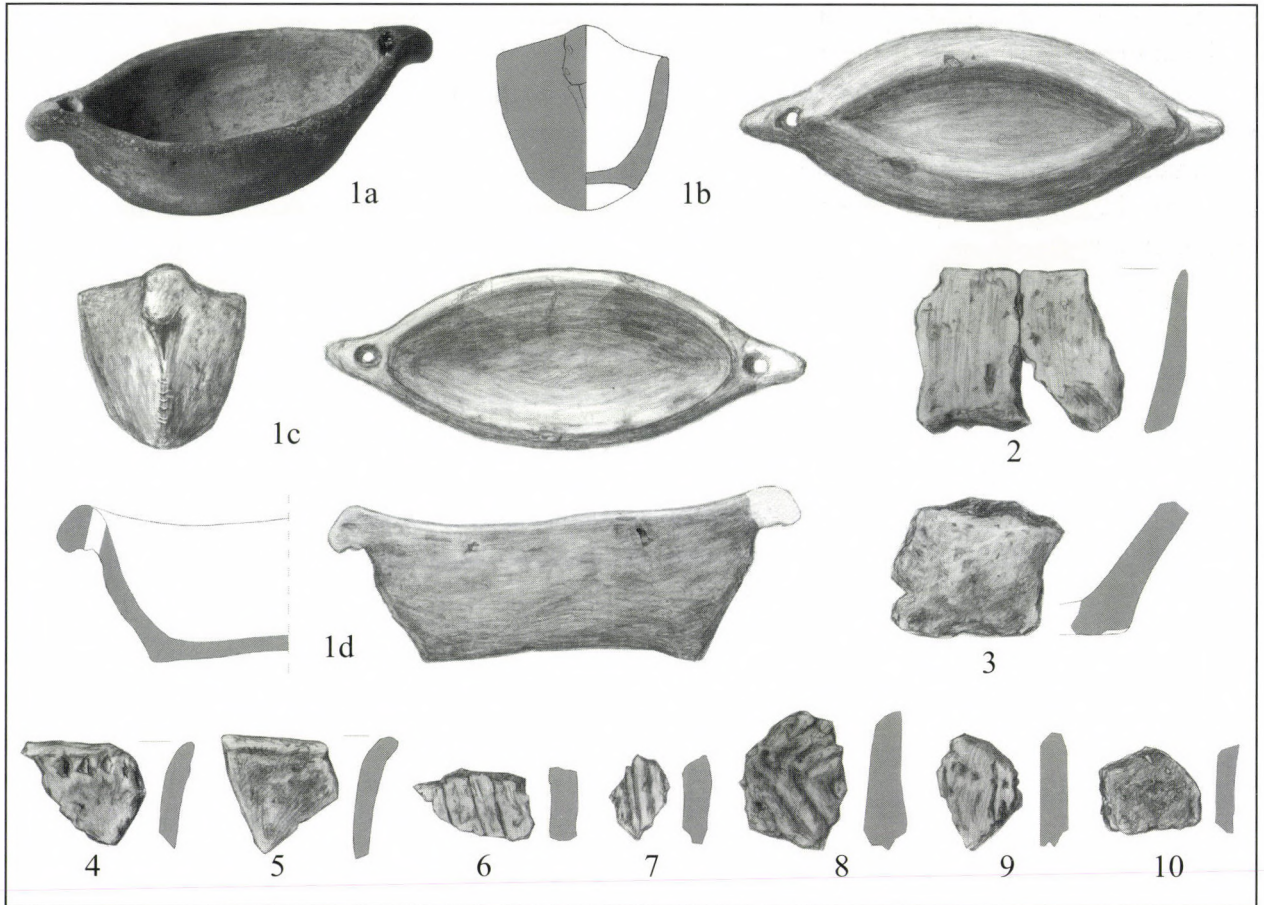


Fig. 2. 1a-d: Rakamaz Sand-Mine, Boat-like clay vessel. Early Bronze Age, Nyírség Culture. L: 12,5-8 cm. 2-10: Rakamaz-Sand-Mine, Pottery fragments from the site. Early Bronze Age, Nyírség Culture, scale 1:2.

The animal heads on them can be identified as idols, which resemble to the graven images frequently used on boats. The slant apertures may be regarded as openings indicating the places of the rowers. It is likely that its trough-like inside was also modelled on a boat and not on a simple bowl. Particularly, the heightened and flexed body suggests that it was made after a plank boat. In general, this kind of boat was represented with a form broadening at the stern and ribs, while the dugout type was formed with a narrow and elongated shape, often U-like in the cross-section.

The find bearing the above details can be defined as a vessel-like boat, or conversely as a boat-like vessel, an object whose body shows

features of both, i.e. of bowl and boat.

The Bronze Age boat representations show great variation. This kind of plastically formed imagery belongs to a separate group of boat representations. It is for that reason that we will not be detained by the entire Bronze Age iconography here, but only by the clay images, since the latter show the most resemblance to the boats.

#### *Other boat-like vessels, models and survivals*

The Rakamaz find has no parallels in the Bronze Age context. No other ovally formed vessel body with two antithetic heads has been found or analyzed in a publication, in either Hungary or Europe. However, it remains a



possibility that such features might be found in the similarly shaped 'fish-roast pans' which have not been researched from this aspect. The vessel form of the 'deep bowl with bird-head protomes' cannot be reckoned among the boat-like vessels, since their body show non-boat characteristics (GUBA-SZEVEÉNYI 2007, 98).

Only one similar shape is known from the Croatian site Dalj-Livadice (Fig. 3. 1). This piece is oval, has one bird head on the rim and a handle on its side, characteristics that can be dated to the Middle Bronze Age Encrusted Pottery Culture of this region (BULAT 1974, 45–46; MIHELIC 2006, 87).

Miniature boat-like vessels with bird heads were made as early as the Neolithic Age at the site of Vinča, Crnokalačka Bara or Dikili Taš (Fig. 3. 2), mentioned by F. Horváth (HORVÁTH 2003, 269, Fig. 5. 7). Their presence can be detected later too, at the Iron Age sites. For example, three miniature clay boat-like vessels with bird heads are found in Tarquinian Villanova site (HÖCKMANN 2001, 228, Abb. 3-5). One of them is quite similar to the Rakamaz find, which has an ovally shaped form with two antithetic and protomes-like replaced bird representations (Fig. 3. 6-7).

The bird and horse represented Bronze Age fragments from the Slovakian sites Ipel'ský Sokolec and Veselé-Maďarovce are vague parallels to the Rakamaz find, despite their having been reconstructed as protomes of the boat-like vessels (PAULIK 1999, 29–54, obr. 2, 4). It is impossible to know with certainty what kind of object these plastic images without lower parts really belonged to.

Another group of boat representations are the clay models, which depict the boats in a much more realistic way than do the boat-like vessels. The aforementioned Darda site yielded such a miniature copy with a triangular and arched body, low and vertical walls, pierced rim and two narrow belt-like joining elements at the base. The finding was interpreted by V. Kiss as a model of the sewn boat type on the basis of anal-

ogous object from the Bulgarian cemetery at Orsoja (KISS 2003, 60–65; KISS 2007, 120). The Darda sample is covered with a series of long scratched lines and concentric circles looking like flowers and cross hatched triangles. Its rim, bottom and sides show dense and short incised lines imitating the sewing. This decoration pattern is well known from the Encrusted Pottery Culture dated back to the Middle Bronze Age of Transdanubia (BÁNDI-ZOFFMANN 1966, 47–48; KOVÁCS 1977, 93; ŠIMIĆ 2000, 58–59).

The Orsoja cemetery has yielded two boat models. One of them displays almost the same shape as the Darda one. This piece is also oval-shaped and has three joining elements at the bottom, which have been interpreted as the ribs, the holes under the rim as the place of the oars, the main technical elements of real plank boats (Fig. 3. 3). Its surface is decorated with engraved flower and paddle-like motifs characteristic of the Lower Danube Encrusted Pottery Culture (FILIPOV 1976, 5; BONEV 1988, 48–49; SHALGANOVA 1995, 300, Fig. 5. 85). Since only a side view of the other model is available, one cannot do a closer observation of its type (Fig. 3. 4). A somewhat bigger model than the previous one, it has a raised stern and prow, probably a flat bottom, and decoration made up of geometric and encrusted patterns specific of the Lower Danubian Encrusted Pottery Culture (SHALGANOVA 1995, 300, Fig. 5. 86).

Furthermore, V. Kiss mentions a boat model with three joining elements from the Rumanian Bronze Age cemetery at Cărna Ostrovogania, also related to the Danubian Encrusted Pottery Culture (KISS 2007, 112, footnote no. 15).

Other boat images found in Hungary do not fit into the clay representation groups. They represent the boats in very simplified forms, so that it is hardly possible to decide whether they are ornamental motifs or really images. This sort of representation can be observed on the bronze finds from Hajdúböszörmény, Zajta, Hajdúsámson, etc. There is only one specimen – the rattle of Zagyvapálfalva – which unquestionably



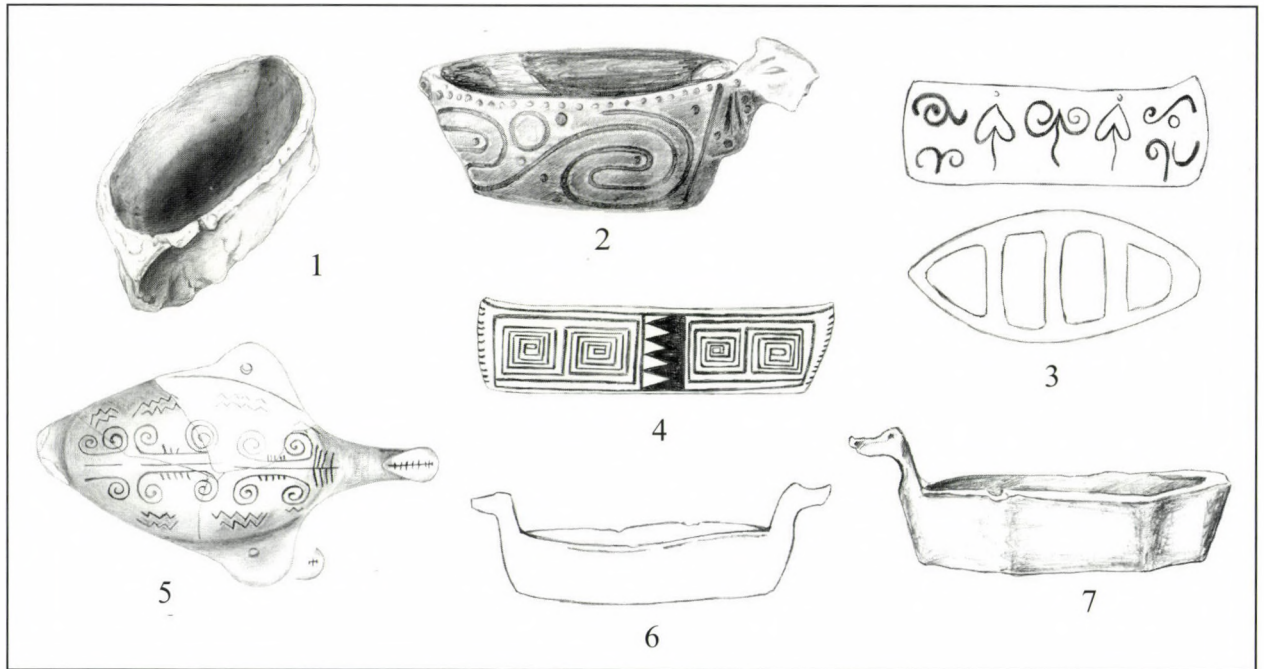


Fig. 3. 1: Dalj-Livadice (Croatia), Small boat-like vessel. Middle Bronze Age, Encrusted Pottery Culture (after MIHELIC 2006, without scale), 2: Dikili Taş (Greece), Miniature boat-like vessel. Neolithic Age (after TEOCHARIS 1973, L: 14,4 cm); 3: Orsoja (Bulgaria), Clay representation of a plank boat. Middle Bronze Age, Lower Danube Encrusted Pottery Culture (after SHALGANOVA 1995, L: 7 cm); 4: Orsoja, Boat model of unknown type. Middle Bronze Age, Lower Danube Encrusted Pottery Culture (after SHALGANOVA 1995, L: 9,6 cm); 5: Zagyvapálfalva (Western Hungary), Clay rattle with boat representations. Middle Bronze Age, Transdanubian Encrusted Pottery Culture (after GUBA-SZEVERÉNYI 2007); 6-7: Tarquinia (Italy), Boat-like clay vessels. Iron Age, Villanova Culture (after HÖCKMANN 2001, L: 24, 8 and 21,4 cm)

represents boats with raised prow and stern, the crew on the deck and the rippling water (Fig. 3. 5).

There is no doubt that the basic evidence for boats must be the wooden remains. Prehistoric boats have survived in wet and anoxic circumstances lacking at most archaeological sites of Hungary, and thus exist mostly in the northern and western regions of Europe.

Only two prehistoric vessel remains from Hungary can be mentioned. One was discovered in the twenties at the famous Bronze Age tell site of Tószeg-Laposhalom, in the lowest Early Bronze Age level, flooded by the Tisza River during thousands of years (KŐSZEGI 1988, 286). The remains of this boat are absent, probably perished during the process of recovery. The surviving documentation does not allow

us to decide what type of boat it might have been. The other specimen, however, was certainly a monoxilon-type boat. This was discovered during the dredging of Gyöngyös stream near the town of Keszthely in a peat bog area formerly part of Hévíz bay of Lake Balaton (BAKAY-KALICZ-SÁGI 1966, 76). On the basis of the structure of the bog layers it has been possible to deduce that the boat originates from the Neolithic Age or an even earlier, and by no means later period (BAKAY-KALICZ-SÁGI 1966, 76; BÁNFFY 2006, 130–131). Because of a lack of adequate conservation the boat, like so many such objects removed from a layer of mud, has perished.

Two main types of boats are known from the Bronze Age: dugouts (tree trunk boats or canoes) and plank boats.



The simplest form of boat was the dugout, made from divided and hollowed tree trunks. These vessels were commonly used despite the fact that they were less stable and of more sluggish motion than the plank boats.

The earliest example originates from the Mesolithic site at Pesse in the Netherlands, dated to 5150 BC (ELLMERS 1986, 601–602). A well-preserved Copper Age ‘survival’ was found at Hüde am Dümmer in Germany (Fig. 4. 1). This boat represents a particular ‘spoon-like’ version of the vessels (ELLMERS 1986, 604–605), which is likely to be the type represented, with a somewhat shorter prow, by the clay model find at the Hungarian Neolithic site of Aszód (Fig. 4. 2).

Whole Bronze Age dugout remains were found in neighboring Croatia and Bosnia near the Sava River. One was discovered at Sisak-Mali Kaptol (Fig. 4. 5), two others at Donja Dolina (Fig. 4. 6-7) (ROSSI 2006, 92–93). An approximately eight-meter-long canoe was found at Erlach Heidenweg in Switzerland, whilst almost twenty tree-trunk vessels came from Bad Buchau in Germany. Until now, the biggest exemplar is 13 m long and 1 m wide, found at Roseninsel (PROBST 1999, 146–147, 274). So far the most interesting Bronze Age dugout is known from Warnsdorf (Fig. 4. 4), a boat that is a 4 m long, finely hewed craft with two channels on its ends for the vertically inserted plates against inflowing water (ELLMERS 2004, 14, Abb. 2). Exactly the same canoe variation can be seen as a clay model from the Bulgarian site Teliš-Redutite (Fig 4. 3).

Boats made of planks are attested as early as the Copper Age from the Danish site of Øgård, dated to 3190 BC (SCHUSTER 2004, 68). A plank fragment was identified at the Danish Åmose and dated by the radiocarbon method to around 2700 BC (SCHUSTER 2004, 68).

Plank remains from the Bronze Age are known in greater numbers from England. Five different plank boat remains have been discovered at North Ferriby along the Humber River.

The best-known remain is the fourth, which was reconstructed as a 9,6-m-long and 2,4-m-wide, round-bilge boat with bent frame, being the earliest example of this kind (HARDING 2000, 180). Another plank remain is the Ferriby fifth, which possessed with the details of integral cleat (WRIGHT-SWITSUR 1993, 46–56). The biggest and best-preserved plank boat was discovered at Dover, whose length approximates 15 m, the width 2,2 m (HARDING 2000, 180–181).

In parallel with these boats, presumably other types were also used, for example, boats made of bundles of reed, leather or cane that have perished without a trace, even though their presence can be surmised on the basis of depictions or ethnographic parallels.

Undoubtedly, the most complete archaeological evidence is associated with the plank boats and dugouts, which have been used longest, from prehistoric times to the 20th century. It seems likely that they were the most practical and useful vehicles on European waters (KUTZY 1976; ELLMERS 1978, 10–18).

#### *The probable use of the Rakamaz vessel*

The primary role of the boats was utilitarian – they were actually used for the purposes of everyday life: gaining one’s livelihood, communication and transport. After some time they came to fulfil other functions as well, an observation that can be supported by a careful analysis of contextual evidence or the finds themselves.

The original context in which the Rakamaz boat-like vessel was used had perished. It was found in a secondary position in ‘mixed’ soil, unlike the bones and the shards in its vicinity which were strongly fragmented and shabby. Its good texture gives the impression that it is not simply a stray ceramic or useless waste, but rather a find from an ‘ensemble’ probably subsequently destroyed.

The situation of the Dalj boat-like vessel is similar in that it has an unfamiliar location in



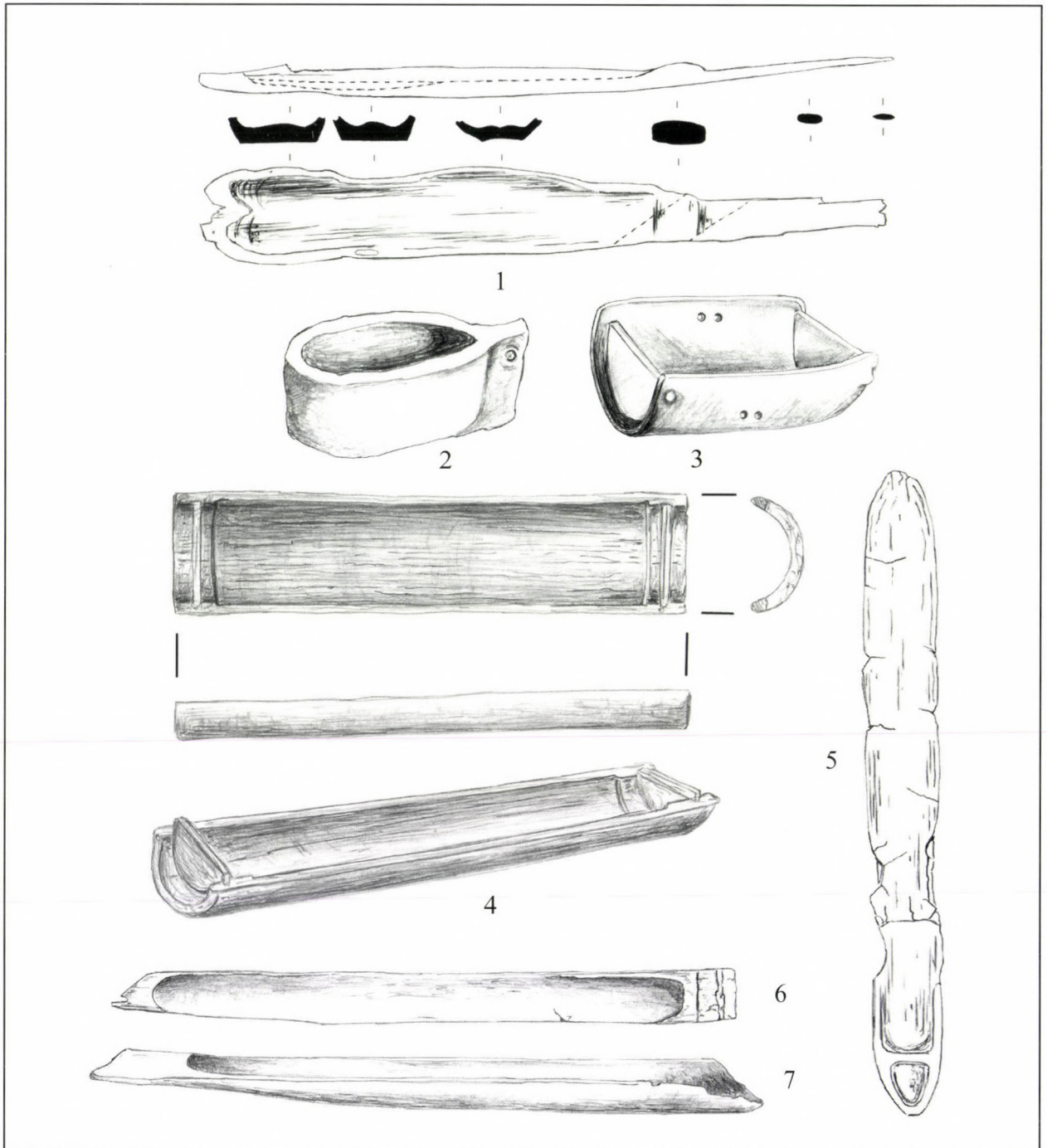


Fig. 4. 1: Hüde am Dümmer (Germany), 'Spoon-like' dugout remain. Copper Age (after ELLMERS 1986, L: 4, 65 m); 2: Aszód-Papi földek (North Hungary), Clay representation of a 'spoon-like' boat. Late Neolithic, Tisza Culture (after HORVÁTH 2003, L: app. 15 cm); 3: Teliš Redutite (Bulgaria), Clay representation of a dugout. Copper Age (after FREY 1991, L: 19,2 cm); 4: Warnsdorf (Germany), Dugout remain. Bronze Age (after ELLMERS 2004, L: 4 m); 5: Sisak-Mali Kaptol (Croatia), Dugout remain from Sava River. Bronze Age (after ROSSI 2006, without scale); 6-7: Dugouts from Sava River at Donja Dolina (Bosnia). Bronze Age (after ROSSI 2006, without scale)



which it was found, while its nearly intact condition gives the impression that it was a particular find rather than a piece of household refuse.

The context of the Darda boat model can be reconstructed with more or less certainty. It was kept together with a group of other objects (miniature basket-shaped vessels, cups, fragment of chair, bronze bracelet, pins and pots) labelled as 'Dárda' by a private owner. On the grounds of the style of decoration it has been clarified that these finds were associated pieces originating from an urn grave of the destroyed Darda cemetery. However, its precise location inside the grave has remained unknown (BÁNDI-ZOFFMANN 1966, 47–48; BÁNDI-KOVÁCS 1969–1970, 97–111; ŠIMIC 2000, 56–58; KISS 2002, 60–65; KISS 2007, 2).

So far, only the Orsoja boat models have a known context. These finds came to light accompanied by a bell-skirted idol and a model chair 'intentionally arranged', interpreted as a 'cult scene'. This means that boats were placed behind the idol which was put on the miniature chair within burned human bones and ashes in the urn (FILIPOV 1976, 5; BONEV 1988, 48–49).

We have no information about the exact place of the Romanian boat model from Carna Ostrovogania, too, but basing on the text of Kiss, one can assume a grave context in the cemetery (KISS 2007, 15<sup>th</sup> footnote).

Not merely the above small boats, but generally the miniature objects have a grave context. Examining the cemetery of Mosonszentmiklós from the territory of the Transdanubian Encrusted Pottery Culture, V. Kiss found that the miniature objects can be traced to childrens' graves in most cases and to adults' graves in a smaller number of cases. This fact means that the small finds associated with children can be interpreted as toys, and those belonging to adults as grave goods, perhaps with non-ferial meaning (KISS 2004, 254, 18<sup>th</sup> footnote).

Besides the context of the finds, there are some other features that can be cited to argue for the relationship of the boats and funerary

rites. First, there are the 'boat burials' with tree-trunk coffins which were widely used in the northern and western regions of Europe (MÜLLER-WILLE 249–251; HARDING 2000, 109). The same funerary custom was recently attested in the Middle Bronze Age cemeteries of Central Europe as well, for example at Austrian Franzhausen I (NEUGEBAUER 1994, 83, Abb. 39), at Slovakian Nižna Myšľa (OLEXA 1992, 197) and at Hungary's Polgár site (Fig. 5. 1). The latter has yielded three cemeteries with fifty-two tree-trunks made similar to dugouts. The massive tree trunks, in which the corpses and grave goods were placed, were bisected and hewn, then hooded and closed at both ends (DANI-V. SZABÓ 2004, 97–98, Figs. 3, 4, 12–14). Many researchers believe that these sorts of coffins symbolized the 'boat of death' and the 'final voyage'. This concept is supported by the fact that sometimes proper boats were used as coffins or with burials in the Nordic areas of Europe (HARDING 2000, 109).

Further correlations between the boats and graves are the 'ship settings' (Fig. 5. 2). These oval boat-like graves, outlined with or covered by stone plates, represent the funerary custom of western and northern Bronze Age cultures. They had a role and meaning similar to the graves with wooden coffins, but expressed in a more symbolic manner (HARDING 2000, 109–111).

Boat-related customs can be attested in other cemeteries in Hungary as well, such as those of Kelebia, Kulcs, Lovasberény, Dunaújváros and Szigetszentmiklós, mentioned in the introductory sections of this essay. The funerals of persons linked to the same extended family – that is to say, related in terms of kinship and consanguinity – were apparently arranged in groups of graves of oval or boat-like shape (VICZE 2011, 38 Plan 1). What concepts might have given rise to this funerary custom remains a matter for speculation (Fig. 5. 5).

It is not only in funerary rites but also in the shape of the houses of the settlements that the



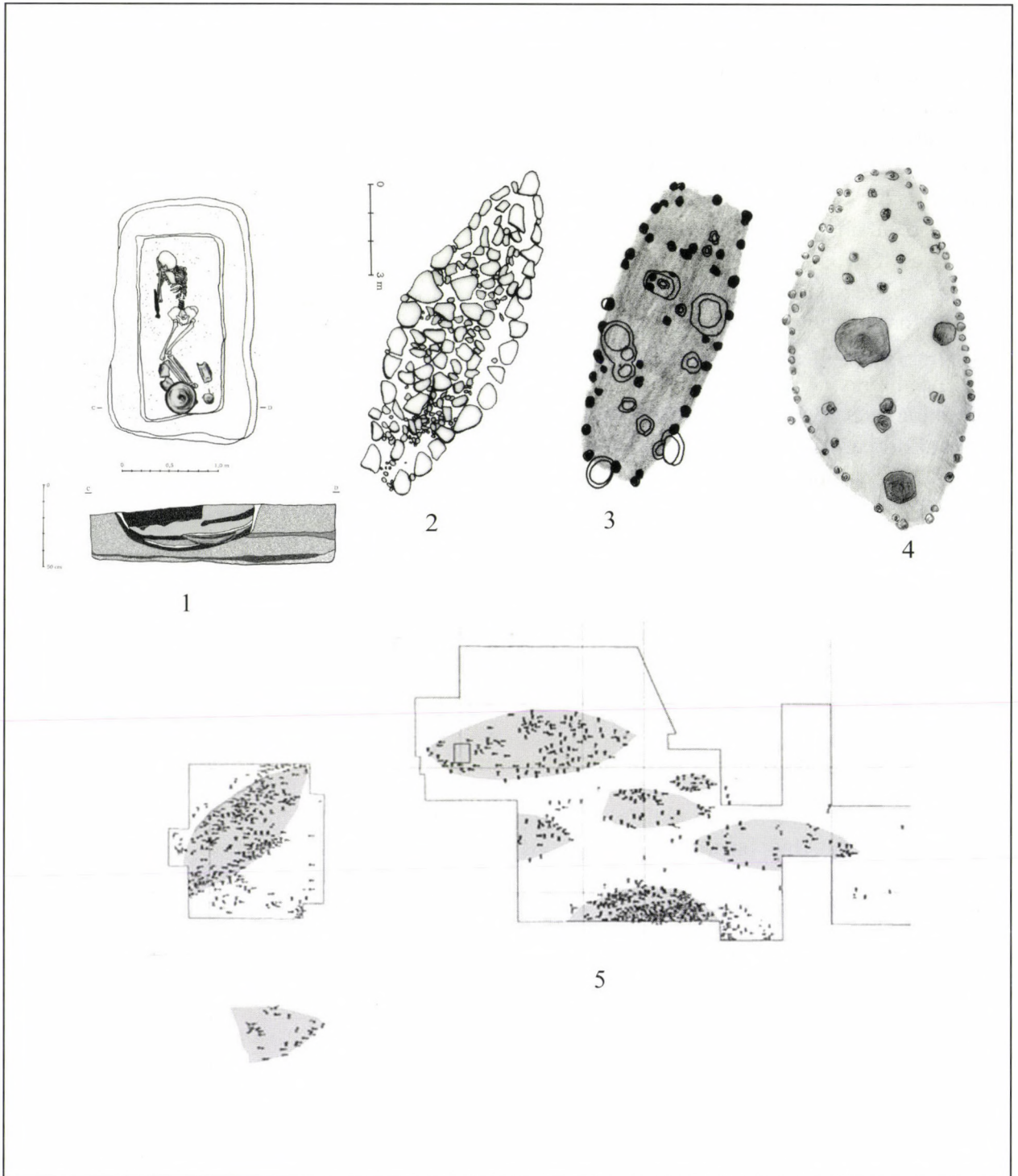


Fig. 5. 1: Polgár-Kenderföld (Northeast Hungary), Tree-trunk burial. Middle Bronze Age, Füzesabony Culture (after DANI–V. SZABÓ 2004); 2: Slätteröd (Sweden), Ship-setting, Bronze Age (after HARDING 2000); 3: Albertfalva (Budapest XI district), Boat-shaped house plan resembling on the plank boat, Bronze Age, Bell-Baker Culture (after ENDRŐDI–PÁSZTOR 2006); 4: Érd-Kertészföldek (Budapest County), Oval shaped house plan. Bronze Age (after MESTER–OTTOMÁNYI 2005); 5: Dunaújváros-Duna-dűlő (Budapest County), Oval or boat-shaped grave groups in the cemetery (after VICZE 2011)



boat tradition manifests itself in the Bronze Age, as evidenced at the moment by 24 plank structured houses resembling the shape of boats. According to their timber arrangements, they represent two building variants. The first one has walls curved on the longer and straight on the shorter sides, resembling the plank boats with horizontal assets at front and aft; such are the houses at Albertfalva and Szigetszentmiklós (Fig. 5. 3). The second variant is simply elongated, of an oblong shape like most boat forms (Fig. 5. 4); an example is the house from Érd. A. Endródi and E. Pásztor, who studied these houses together with the symbolic features of their surroundings, raised the possibility of a sacralized function (ENDRÓDI-PÁSZTOR 2006, 18).

The images on the Rakamaz find are said to be specific. Originally, it had two animal heads, protome-like and placed in an antithetic way. They were strongly simplified so that neither a frontal nor a profile view could decisively classify them as a bird or some other animal. The thickening end at the mouth suggests an ungulate (perhaps calf or sheep), whereas the overall shape is reminiscent of a swimming bird, or more precisely of both.

The animal head on the Dalj vessel is vaguely identifiable, since it has a pointed beak like most birds. This head is also particular, as viewed from above it appears triangular and flattened, making the impression of a mask.

Both artistic manners, i.e. the mixing and masking of animals, are common in Bronze Age bird representations. These birds are given dissonant zoomorphic or anthropomorphic attributes, for instance, they were depicted with feet or horns and are therefore defined by researchers as 'imaged' or 'created' like the mythological animals of later ages (GUBA-SZEVEÉNYI 2007, 87–88).

The most frequent animal pattern on the boats are birds, usually aquatic ones, giving rise to the term 'bird-boats' ('Vogelbarken'), while their combination with sun is the 'bird-sun-

boat' motif. According to recent investigations, these can be explained as symbols which played a prominent role in the religious and cosmological ideas of Bronze Age people (HARDING 2000, 321–325; WIRTH 2006, 552–563; GUBA-SZEVEÉNYI 2007, 85–110; KAUL 122–138).

Summing up the above arguments – namely the context of comparable finds, the burial practices linked to the boats and the iconographic details of the find – it seems confirmed that the Rakamaz vessel was made for a funerary purpose. Considering the patchy nature of the evidence, too far-reaching conclusions cannot be drawn, but of course it is justified to make some observations.

Boats were the primary means of waterborne transport in the Carpathian Basin for millennia. Their importance rivals that of wagons. As a vehicle of transport they were in use from the end of the 7th millennium BC. Their invention must have received the most important impetus from the extensive network of waterways within the Carpathian Basin. Boats were bound to appear on these rivers, lakes and temporary bodies of water filling low-lying patches of land. At first simple monoxilon-type boats made of tree trunks, and later boats constructed of planks were produced, bearing testimony to an adequate, indeed remarkable, knowledge of building materials and construction technologies, as well as navigation skills, all over Europe in the Bronze Age.

### *Resume*

The size and accessories of the boats used in the Carpathian Basin was suited to fit the natural conditions, the limited range of movement provided by the local waterways. Thus the local boats tended to be smaller and simpler than parallels found elsewhere in Europe. They were indispensable as means of transport of people and goods, but they never came to play as prominent a role as their counterparts did



in the Middle East and the regions adjacent to the North Sea. However, their impact on religious and mythological concepts must have been equally great. As attested by the variety

of objects, images, representations and funerary rites inspired by the boat, the local variant of Bronze Age cultures attributed a comparable outstanding role to boats.<sup>2</sup>

#### Notes

- 1 It was delivered to the Prehistoric Collection of the Hungarian National Museum by László Révész, to whom I would like to express my gratitude for allowing me the publication.
- 2 I thank dr. Zoltán Szombathy and Kata Hajnal for their English translation; Bernadett Andics and

Éva Richter for their drawings and execution of the tables, my colleagues Katalin Biró and Ildikó Szathmári for their patience over the manuscript. A special word of thanks to Viktória Kiss for her proofreading and helpful advices.

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H. Oravecz  
Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum  
Budapest, Múzeum krt. 14–16. Pf. 364  
H-1370  
oraveczh@hnm.hu



