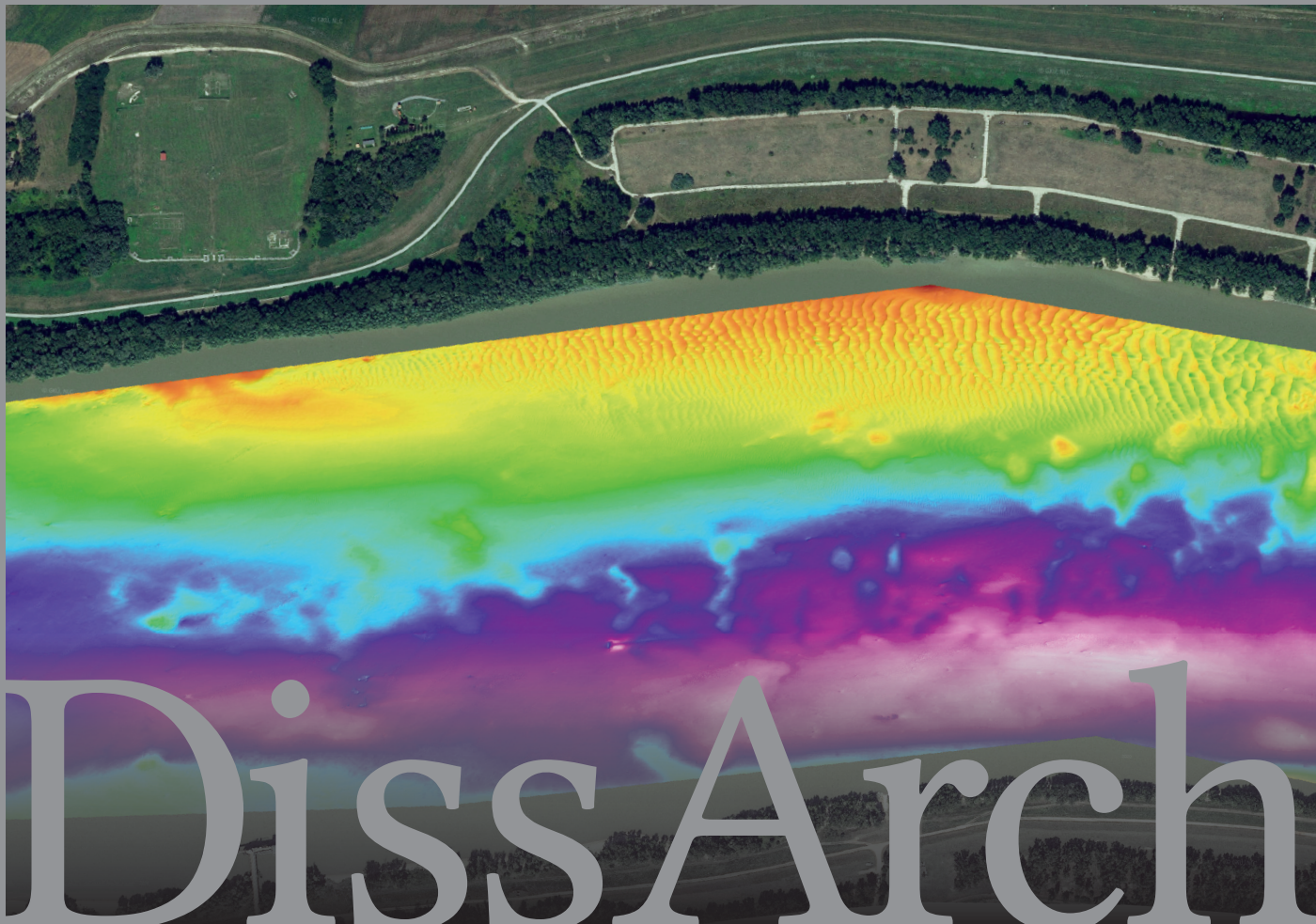


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ex Instituto Archaeologico

Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae



Ser. 3. No. 13. | 2025

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Ceramic Depositions, Ritual Features, and Irregular Burials of the Tumulus Culture in Hungary

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Abstract: This study provides an overview of vessel depositions and non-normative burials of the Tumulus Culture in Hungary, dated between the phases of Br B1 and Br D across the culture's distribution area. In contrast to other periods of the Bronze Age, the Tumulus period has received relatively little scholarly attention, despite the substantial amount of data and published material. Statistical analyses of the depositions, based on defined criteria, allow the identification of several categories reflecting both the number of vessels and the estimated size of the associated communities, as well as the character of the ritual sequences/operational chains involved. Beyond the well-documented remains of communal feasting, a noteworthy aspect of recent research is the recognition of sacrificial rituals marked by complex sequences of actions. Find assemblages involved in these rituals are sometimes linked to animal or even human sacrifices. These phenomena are confined to the earliest phase of the Tumulus period, the so-called Koszider horizon.

Keywords: Tumulus Culture, Hungary, vessel depositions, non-normative burials, rituals

Introduction

This article summarizes and evaluates the ceramic depositions associated with the Tumulus Culture/Period in Hungary, dated between the phases of (Reinecke) Br B1 and Br D across the culture's distribution area (covering the territories of the Middle Danubian and Carpathian Tumulus groups approximately). The study does not include material from other cultural groups inhabiting the larger part of the Great Hungarian Plain, Eastern Slovakia, the Partium, or Transylvania.

The issue of Late Bronze Age ceramic depositions has only been explored in depth by Hungarian research in the past few decades.¹ Investigations on the vessel depositions associated with the Tumulus Culture in the frontiers of the NE Alpine region were in the focus of numerous studies previously.² Although comprehensive works on the subject have long been available, research until now fell short in cataloguing and re-evaluating depositions from Hungary. The interpretation of such finds as vessel depositions began after the 1980s³ in the region, but research gained real momentum at the turn of the millenium.⁴ After 2010, two important ceramic depots (or ritual assem-

1 V. SZABÓ 2004; ILON 2012; KALLA *et al.* 2013; ILON 2014; VÁCZI 2018.

2 WILLVONSEDER 1937; EIBNER 1969; DONEUS 1991; DONEUS 1994; LINDINGER 1999; STAPEL 1999; PALÁTOVÁ – SALAŠ 2002; BARTÍK – HAJNALOVÁ 2004; REITER 2019.

3 Debrecen: POROSZLAI 1984; Hegykő: ILON 1999.

4 Oszlár-Nyárfaszög: KOÓS 2003; KOÓS 2004; Balatonboglár, Ordacsehi: HONTI *et al.* 2004; HONTI *et al.* 2007; KISS 2007; KISS 2011; Rákoscscaba: REMÉNYI *et al.* 2006a; REMÉNYI *et al.* 2007; SZILAS 2017b.

blages) were published by Gábor Ilon.⁵ Several Late Bronze Age settlements were also reported to contain ritual ceramic depositions.⁶ The author of this paper also described vessel depositions from Domaszék-Börcsök tanya.⁷

In some cases, although the authors did not explicitly describe the assemblages as depositions, the context and the condition of the vessels strongly suggest an act of deposition.⁸ When detailing the largely Tumulus-period assemblage from Felsőpusztaszer, István Foltiny notes that 13 vessels were recovered together in a deposition, although it is no longer possible to identify the clusters these vessels were originally part of.⁹ Complete storage vessels found buried either in archaeological contexts or the humus layer¹⁰ can also be interpreted as a form of (profane or ritual) deposition.¹¹

In the Upper Tisza region, numerous Late Bronze Age ceramic depots have been discovered at Suciú de Sus, Lapus, at settlement sites linked to the Proto-Gáva and Gáva Cultures. However, due to their geographical distance, chronological attribution, and distinct cultural connections, they will not be discussed here.¹²

Non-normative settlement burials and vessel depositions were documented at Oszlár-Nyárfaszög,¹³ at Ménfőcsanak,¹⁴ and at Paks-Gyapa.¹⁵ Ágnes Király evaluated Late Bronze Age–Early Iron Age (Br C/D–Ha B3) non-normative burials from northeastern Hungary in her PhD dissertation.¹⁶ More recently, Gábor Ilon interpreted three previously published¹⁷ ‘burials’ from Nagydém as evidence for ritual behaviour, although only Feature 1A contained human remains, while Features 10 and 12 did not.¹⁸

Methods and angles of interpretation

When an assemblage from a domestic context comes under examination a central question is how to determine the reason for its (initial) deposition.¹⁹ If the objects were buried for a specific reason,

5 Veszprém-Kádárta-Geleméri-dűlő: [ILON 2012](#); Győr-Ménfőcsanak-Széles-földek: [ILON 2014](#).

6 [MALI 2018](#); [MALI 2020](#).

7 [SÁNTA 2020](#); [SÁNTA in print](#).

8 Battonya-Balogh-tanya and Battonya-Vadaszán-tanya: [SZ. KÁLLAY 1983](#); Gellénháza-Budai szer II: [H. SIMON – HORVÁTH 1999](#); Kóny-Barbacsai tópart-Gázvezeték: [EGRY 2002](#), and Nagyvejke-Kovácsi dűlő: [KŐSZEGI 1988](#).

9 [FOLTINY 1945](#).

10 [SZ. KÁLLAY 1983](#); [SÁNTA in print](#).

11 The term ‘deposition’ is employed in the literature in both ritual and profane contexts ([KISS 2007](#); [DAÑHEL 2009](#); [KISS 2011](#); etc.). In its broader sense, it primarily denotes, in my view, the intentionality underlying the action and the placement of a specific assemblage as something other than household waste. Nevertheless, household waste—or even an entire house—can become the focus of ritual practices, for instance in connection with the clearing of a field or the treatment of a (burnt) house’s remains (see [SZEVEÉNYI 2013](#)). Profane, storage-related placement may also intersect with ritual activities, and vice versa, though this dimension is only briefly considered in the present study.

12 [TÓTH – MARTA 2005](#); [MARTA 2009](#).

13 [KOÓS 2004](#).

14 [ILON 2014](#).

15 [MALI 2020](#); personal communication.

16 [KIRÁLY 2019](#). Some of them can be identified and dated as Tumulus assemblages, therefore included in this review.

17 [ILON 1999](#).

18 [ILON 2024](#), 365; personal communication.

19 In the present study, only vessel depositions and non-normative burials recovered within the perimeter of settlement sites are considered; putative sacrificial pits identified in mortuary contexts are not included in this paper.

the vessel(s) or their fragments, or selected pieces, were likely placed in the pit simultaneously, probably shortly after the ritualistic event took place. In such cases—ideally—intact, crushed, or deliberately broken vessels are found. Recognizing depositions containing intentionally broken vessels is not always straightforward. The interpretation of such assemblages is a complex issue, and a comprehensive investigative approach is necessary to gain a better understanding. This requires the analysis of the composition of depositions, the types and functions of the vessels, associated features and other finds, along with plant and animal remains. The location of the depositions within the settlement and the landscape, as well as their spatial distribution and statistical evaluation, should also be considered.²⁰ An additional innovative approach examines the life history of objects, their use, and their depositional state (intact, broken, or burnt).²¹

In their seminal analysis of ceramic depositions, Hana Palátová and Milan Salaš distinguished four depot types:²²

1. Food offerings (agricultural or ‘storage’ offerings): pits containing storage vessels or larger household assemblages, together with remains of (ritual) food offerings;
2. Pledge/oath-related depositions with libations: ritual waste from feasts or pledge/oath-related events;
3. Foundation offerings;
4. Other depositions unrelated to burial: unclassifiable, unique assemblages.

Following Andrea Stapel,²³ Gábor V. Szabó classified Eastern Hungarian Late Bronze Age (Br D–Ha B) vessel deposits as the following:²⁴

1. Depositions containing large and medium-sized storage and serving vessels;
2. Individual, large, decorated vessels;
3. Sets of smaller drinking and dining vessels accompanied by a few larger serving or storage vessels.

Recent studies have provided important criteria for identifying depositions associated with communal eating and drinking events or ‘feasts’.²⁵

Detailed research into construction and foundation sacrifices is a relatively recent topic. The practice of depositing vessels in small pits or postholes near domestic buildings was widespread in the Alpine region during the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age. Some fundamental works by the Austrian archaeologist Peter Trebsche provide a starting point for interpreting these phenomena. Trebsche considered posthole depositions intentional when: 1) the object was located at the margins of the structure (directly at the base or against the side), and 2) the object was intact or deliberately broken but could still be restored. In the latter case, the circumstances of excavation and documentation must also be considered.²⁶ Posthole depositions are generally associated with both foundation offerings and with demolition; the ritual burial of the house. Considering the foundation offerings, the position of the vessels had to correspond with the supporting post, whereas in the other case, the vessels were deposited after the demolition of the house, and their size was only influenced by the

20 EIBNER 1969; LINDINGER 1999; STAPEL 1999; PALÁTOVÁ – SALAŠ 2002; LINDINGER 2003; V. SZABÓ 2004; KOS – PARMA 2005; ILON 2012; ILON 2014; KRENN – LEEB 2014; ZUBER 2015; VÁCZI 2018; ILON 2024.

21 ARNOLDUSSEN 2008; GUCSI – SZABÓ 2018.

22 PALÁTOVÁ – SALAŠ 2002, 146–152.

23 STAPEL 1999.

24 V. SZABÓ 2004, 86.

25 For example: ILON 2012; KALLA *et al.* 2013; ILON 2014; GUCSI – SZABÓ 2018.

26 TREBSCHKE 2008, 123; TREBSCHKE 2014, 306; TREBSCHKE 2017, 181–182.

dimensions of the hole itself.²⁷ In Hungary, the practice of depositing vessels in postholes or pits in relation to buildings was first recognized in a Late Bronze Age context by Gábor Váczi.²⁸

Analysis

A comprehensive survey in Hungary resulted in the identification of 42 ceramic depositions, ritual features, buried storage vessels (Fig. 1, Tab. 1), and 9 non-normative burials²⁹ (Tab. 5) attributed to the Tumulus Culture between the phases Br B1 and Br D. For the earliest and the latest period, only those depositions explicitly assigned to the Tumulus Culture were considered.³⁰ The combined discussion of the categories is justified by the overlaps between them.³¹ The data are presented in the table listing the site names, feature numbers and types, the character of the assemblages (e.g., ceramic depositions, non-normative burials), the number and types of vessels, associated finds, links to buildings, evidence of burning, the condition of the vessels, the presence of human and animal remains, relative and absolute dating. The tables include references to the primary literature for each site, which are not always repeated in the main text; later they are cited only by their catalogue number and a shorter site name. Finally, the features are classified according to the framework established during the evaluation (Tab. 1, Tab. 5).

All cases regarded as depositions by the original authors were included, while those considered questionable were examined separately. Some earlier publications present assemblages without mentioning deposition, which, according to modern criteria, can be clearly interpreted as ceramic depots or ritual features.³² The dataset also includes cases where vessels were broken when buried, but their restorability, accompanying phenomena, or the composition of the assemblage indicate deliberate deposition.³³

When only one or two vessels were found intact or could be reconstructed (cups, jugs, pots), contextual analysis plays a crucial role in the identification process.³⁴ At Oszlár-Nyárfaszög, Features 94,³⁵ 224,³⁶ and 477 (along with casting moulds)³⁷ can certainly be identified as depositions³⁸ of the Br D–Ha A1, Proto-Gáva period; therefore, they are not included here. Moreover, many contexts contained only a few (1–3) intact vessels (mostly drinking vessels, pots, and bowls),³⁹ which, without

27 TREBSCHKE 2005; TREBSCHKE 2008, 71.

28 VÁCZI 2018.

29 Additional data suggest that the range of irregular burials associated with the Tumulus Culture is likely to expand. At the site of Jászberény, Hűtőgépgyár II, three Late Bronze Age features containing human remains were excavated recently (GULYÁS 2020), see in detail later.

30 The ceramic depot of Budajenő, whose character although closely resembles Tumulus sacrificial features (dated to Br B1) in fact belongs to the Vátya Culture and is therefore not included in the collection. Nevertheless, due to numerous similarities, it has been extensively taken into account during the assessment (see GUCSI – SZABÓ 2018). Furthermore, certain similar but younger (Ha A1) assemblages from Oszlár-Nyárfaszög have likewise been omitted from the catalogue (see KOÓS 2004).

31 Győr-Ménfőcsanak: ILON 2014; Sárvár: ILON – TÓTH 2022.

32 Gellénháza: H. SIMON – HORVÁTH 1999; Battonya: SZ. KÁLLAY 1983.

33 Balatonboglár: HONTI *et al.* 2004; Domaszék: SÁNTA 2020.

34 TREBSCHKE 2008; SÁNTA 2020.

35 KOÓS 2004, Tabs 19–24.

36 KOÓS 2004, Tabs 42–45.

37 KOÓS 2004, Tabs 79–82.

38 KOÓS 2004, 26.

39 For example, Features 5, 8, 12, 22–23, 88, 113, 115, 137, 179, 251, 268, 313, 323, 329, 335, 407, 417, 426, 551, 569, 606, 665, 684, 688, 723, 737, 758, 785–786, 796, 825, 867, 881, 890, 1046, etc.; see the plates in KOÓS 2004.

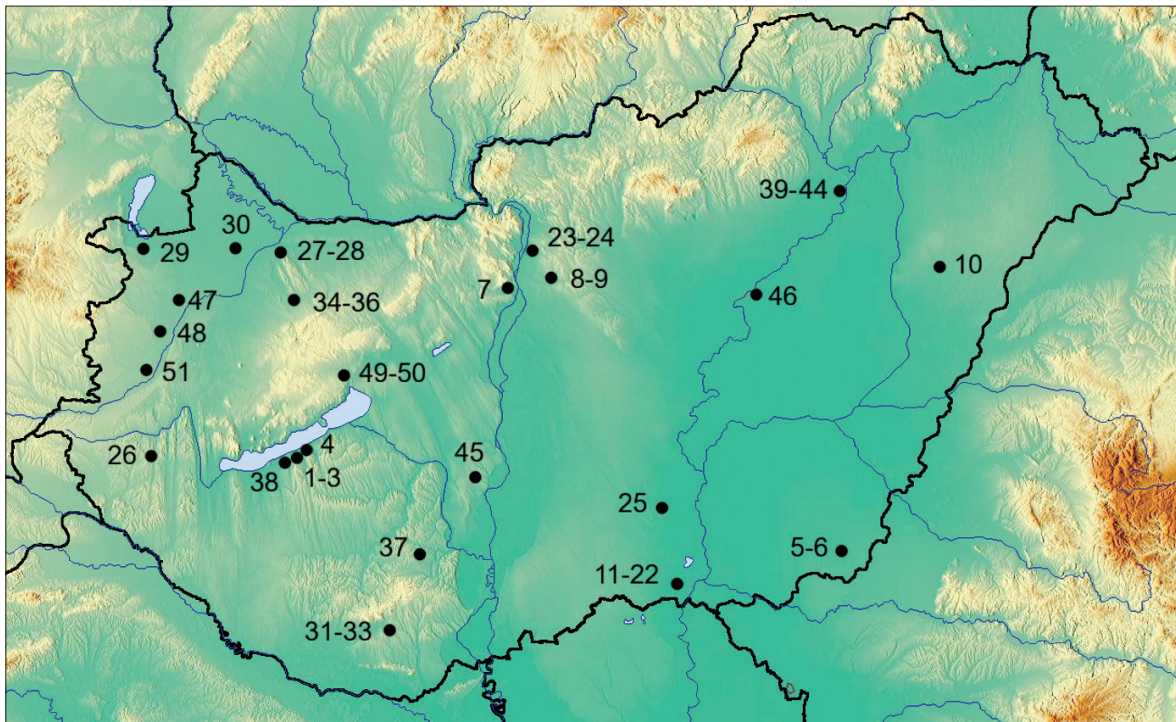


Fig. 1. Tumulus Culture ceramic depositions and non-normative burials, features containing human remains in Hungary (based on Tab. 1). 1–21, 23–26, 28–33, 35–40, 46–47, 49–51: ceramic depositions; 22, 27, 34, 41–45, 48: non-normative burials, features containing human remains.

1 – Balatonboglár-Berekre-dűlő 1691, 2 – Balatonboglár-Berekre-dűlő, Deposit 2, 3 – Balatonboglár-Borkombinát, 4 – Balatonlelle-Országúti-dűlő 161, 5 – Battonya-Balogh-tanya-Vörös Október Tsz., 6 – Battonya-Vadászán-tanya, 7 – Budapest-Budai Skála 128, 8 – Budapest-Rákoscsaba-Major-hegy-South 450, 9 – Budapest-Rákoscsaba-Major-hegy-South 904, 10 – Debrecen-Kossuth laktanya, 11 – Domaszék-Börcsök-tanya 150, 12 – Domaszék-Börcsök-tanya 173, 13 – Domaszék-Börcsök-tanya 202, 14 – Domaszék-Börcsök-tanya 230, 15 – Domaszék-Börcsök-tanya 246, 16 – Domaszék-Börcsök-tanya 320, 17 – Domaszék-Börcsök-tanya 381, 18 – Domaszék-Börcsök-tanya 385, 19 – Domaszék-Börcsök-tanya 392, 20 – Domaszék-Börcsök-tanya 463, 21 – Domaszék-Börcsök-tanya 479, 22 – Domaszék-Börcsök-tanya 422, 23 – Dunakeszi-Székesdűlő 1709, 24 – Dunakeszi-Székesdűlő, Deposit 2, 25 – Felsőpusztaszer, 26 – Gellénháza-Budai-szer II. 5/97, 27 – Győr-Ménfőcsanak-Széles-földek 7765, 28 – Győr-Ménfőcsanak-Széles-földek 2676, 29 – Hegykő-Kisér, 30 – Kóny-Barbacci-tópart, gas pipeline 267, 31 – Kozármisleny-97/-Fuel station 234, 32 – Kozármisleny-97/-Fuel station 207, 33 – Kozármisleny-97/-Fuel station 500, 34 – Nagydém-Középrépaszta 1A, 35 – Nagydém-Középrépaszta 10, 36 – Nagydém-Középrépaszta 12, 37 – Nagyvejke-Kovácsi dűlő, 38 – Ordacsehi-Bugaszeg 1326/1926, 39 – Oszlár-Nyárfaszög 887, 40 – Oszlár-Nyárfaszög 205, 41 – Oszlár-Nyárfaszög 411, 42 – Oszlár-Nyárfaszög 726, 43 – Oszlár-Nyárfaszög 1010, 44 – Oszlár-Nyárfaszög 1133, 45 – Paks-Gyapa-Rosti-pusztá O619/S838 and S859, 46 – Pusztataskony-Ledence 637, 47 – Répcelak-Galagonyás-dűlő 50, 48 – Sárvár-Alsó-/Felső-mező 61, 49 – Veszprém-Kádárta-Geleméri-dűlő 50/SNR 282–283, 50 – Veszprém-Kádárta-Geleméri-dűlő, North side of main road 8, 113/621, 51 – Zsennye-Kavicsbánya 25.

a full review of the documentation and the material, cannot be confidently identified as depositions belonging to the Tumulus phase of the site. However, their occurrence highlights the complexity, challenges, and potential of the issue of Tumulus vessel depositions.

The presence of human remains—especially skull fragments⁴⁰—raises the possibility of intentional deposition even in otherwise refuse-like assemblages. The identification of assemblages composed of intentionally broken vessels as depositions remains difficult, particularly for older excavations or contexts with limited documentation.

40 Domaszék Feature 422, cp. SÁNTA in print.

Spatial and chronological distribution

The majority of depositions occur in Transdanubia and around Budapest (Fig. 1). Their spatial and temporal distribution corresponds well with that of contemporaneous ceramic depots in Lower Austria, the Czech and Moravian territories, and western Slovakia (Fig. 2).⁴¹ The highest number of vessel depositions at a single site has been documented at Domaszék-Börcsök tanya (12, depots placed mostly in postholes).⁴²

The number of ceramic depositions is high in both the early and classical phases, indicating significant depositional activity throughout the Tumulus period, which only declines in the latest phase (Fig. 3). Many Bronze Age vessel depots from Central Europe can be associated with the Tumulus Culture.⁴³ A similar trend is observable elsewhere in Central Europe, with deposition activity reaching its peak during the classical and Late Tumulus periods (in phases Maisbirbaum–Zohor and Strachotín–Velké Hosteřádky), particularly in Austria.⁴⁴ In the Czech territories, the practice began in period Br B, while in Moravia it is already observable in the Early Bronze Age. In Slovakia, the main phase of deposition activity occurs at the end of the Early Bronze Age, but it is also characteristic during the course of the Tumulus Culture, then it ceases in the Urnfield period. In general, ceramic deposition practice is on the decline from the Ha A2 onwards.⁴⁵

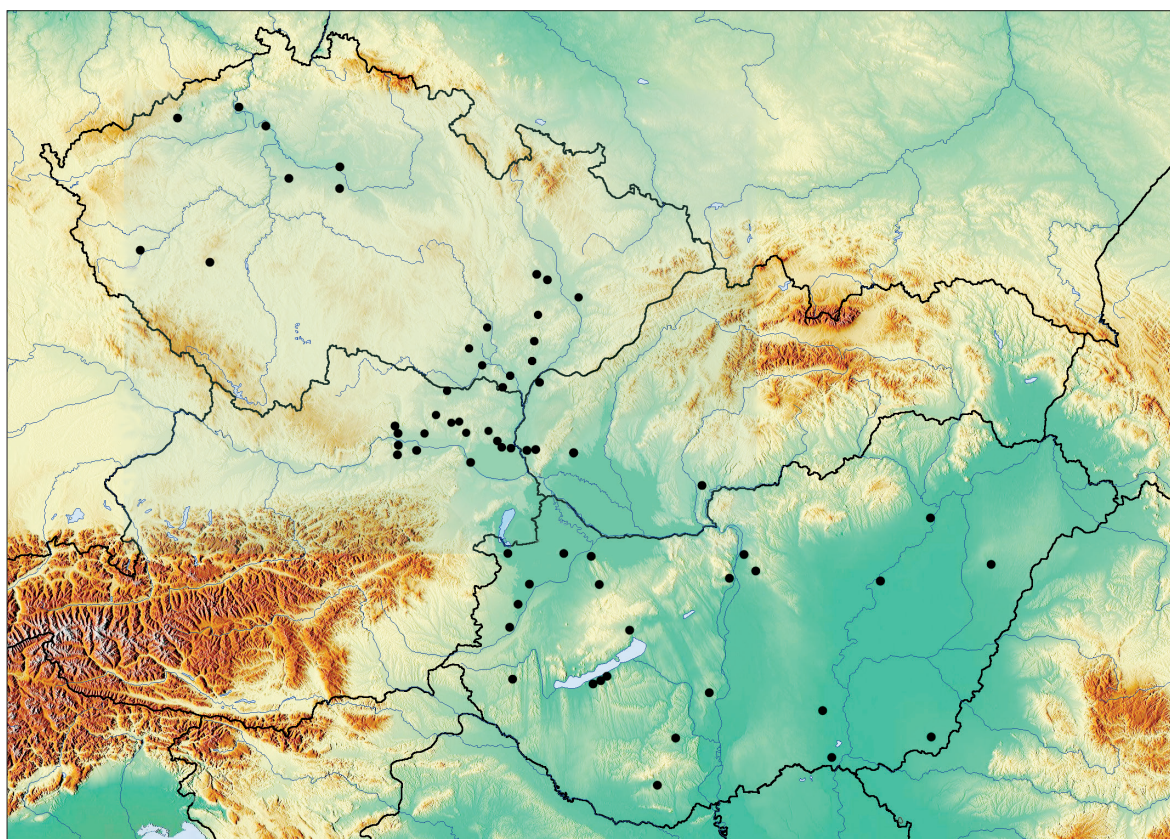


Fig. 2. Distribution of Tumulus Culture ceramic depositions in Central Europe (the data in this paper were integrated with those from REITER 2019, Abb. 13, based on PALÁTOVÁ – SALAŠ 2002).

41 PALÁTOVÁ – SALAŠ 2002, 66, Obr. 9; REITER 2019, 124–126, Tab. 2., Abb. 13.

42 SÁNTA 2020; SÁNTA in print.

43 PALÁTOVÁ – SALAŠ 2002, Obr. 15.

44 PALÁTOVÁ – SALAŠ 2002, 84–85, Obr. 11–12.

45 PALÁTOVÁ – SALAŠ 2002, 86–87, Obr. 13–14.

Number and types of vessels

Based on the number of vessels recovered from the depositions, the following observations can be made (Fig. 4). The majority, i.e. half of the registered ceramic depots (26 cases) contain 1–3 vessels. The minority, larger depositions contained 7–13 or 18–37 vessels. Although it might seem reasonable to merge the last two categories, the number of vessels occurring in them are consistent, and the two groups appear to be distinct throughout the assessed assemblages. Many depots contain 7–11 vessels (Felsőpusztaszer, Hegykő, Nagydém, and Oszlár; Cat. 25, 29, 34–36, 39),⁴⁶ moreover depositions with a minimum of 4–6 vessels (Budapest-Rákoscsaba, Domaszék, Sárvár; Cat. 8, 16, 48) are likely belong to this group.

The ceramic depots containing 18–37 vessels stand out as a category (Battonya-Balogh-tanya, Budapest-Rákoscsaba, Gellénháza, Ménfőcsanak, Kozármisleny, Nagyvejke, Pusztataskony; Cat. 5, 9, 26, 27, 31–32, 37, 46). The two largest depots contained 60–70 and approximately 150 vessels (Cat. 7 and 49).⁴⁷

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In the depot category containing 1–3 vessels, drinking vessels (jugs, cups, beakers, 12 cases), pots (8 cases), bowls (6 cases), storage vessels/pithoi (4 cases), and amphorae (2 cases) occur. In depositions with 3 vessels, serving sets are also identifiable (drinking: jug–bowl–cup at Ordacsehi (Cat. 38); pot–beaker–cup set at Oszlár (Cat. 39); consumption: storage vessel–pot–bowl set at Répcelak (Cat. 47). Sets of 1–3 storage vessels may relate to unconsumed, stored food in profane (Battonya-Vadaszán-tanya, Domaszék, Dunakeszi-Székesdűlő; Cat. 6, 21, 24) or possibly sacred (Zsenyve; Cat. 51) contexts. Burying vessels in the soil for functional reasons are common (e.g. protection, keeping cool, etc.), as the case of Domaszék (Cat. 21) Feature 479 demonstrates (Fig. 5.1–2).

Clear signs of intentionality are often evident especially in the cases of possible posthole or building structure related depots (cups, pots: Domaszék, Oszlár, Kóny; Cat. 12–13, 15, 17–19, 40, 30).

Depositions containing 7–13 vessels (7 cases) consist of bowls (6 cases), drinking vessels (jugs, cups, beakers, 6 cases), amphorae (5 cases), pots (3 cases), a storage vessel (1 case), and a strainer (1 case). These are mostly household tableware sets and can reasonably be linked to households or slightly larger communities. They often exhibit organized, structured arrangements: vessels placed mouth-down, covered with bowls, or stacked (e.g. Balatonboglár, Hegykő; Cat. 1., 29; see Fig. 6, Oszlár; Cat. 39).

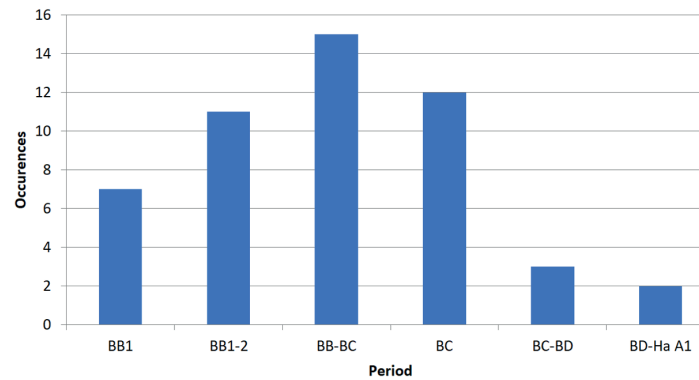


Fig. 3. Relative chronological distribution of the examined phenomena (n=50).

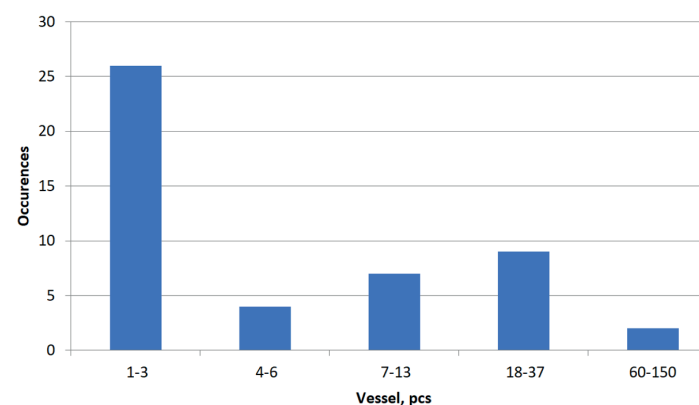


Fig. 4. Minimum number of vessels in the presented features, grouped (n=48).

46 The archaeological sites and catalog numbers correspond to Tab. 1.

47 Veszprém: ILON 2012; Budapest-Budai Skála: SZILAS 2017a.



Fig. 5. 1 – Domaszék-Börcsök-tanya Feature 479 (Cat. 21) excavation photo, 2 – the storage vessel (Inv. no. MFM Ő. 2007.2.1645) from Feature 479 (Cat. 21).

An early example for the practice of ceramic deposition is an assemblage of 8 vessels from the Věteřov Culture at Pravčice, where 4 pots, a storage vessel, a dipper, and a cup with knob-pedestals were placed mouth-down on the floor against the wall of a semi-subterranean building. Its interpretation is difficult, as both ritual and storage functions may apply. Vessel deposition had been common in the region from the Copper Age all the way to the Ha B.⁴⁸

Depots containing 18–37 vessels (9 cases) without exception include drinking vessels and bowls, typically amphorae (5 cases), pots (4 cases), and storage vessels (2 cases). The key characteristic of these assemblages the high number of drinking vessels (mugs, cups),⁴⁹ followed by jars/jugs, bowls, amphorae, pots, and storage vessels. These depositions appear to reflect communal feasting events involving drinking and eating beyond individual households. The finest example of this is the depot from Budapest, Rákoscsaba Feature 904 (Cat. 9).⁵⁰ Here, the deliberate, structured arrangement is less pronounced. A similar, well-documented assemblage is known from Reyersdorf, where 40 vessels were found: 24 drinking vessels (cups, goblets), 11 bowls, 1 stemmed bowl, 1 jug with a rectangular pedestal, 1 cooking pot with a single handle, 1 storage vessel, 1 amphora.⁵¹ Given the number of drinking vessels, the event linked to this deposition likely involved at least 20 participants taking place around the establishment of the site in the Late Tumulus period, with each participant using their own drinking vessel. The ritual nature of the event may have been emphasized through the use of archaic or traditional types of vessels.⁵² Notably, the number of drinking vessels is double than the bowls (24 vs. 12), and the 11 animal bones found in the pit may be related to the number of bowls. Paired items in other assemblages⁵³ could indicate bilateral rituals involving two parties/groups or pairs of individuals participating in a feast, possibly related to negotiation or agreement.⁵⁴ Accepting the personal nature of drinking vessels, the

48 DAÑHEL 2009.

49 With the exception of the unusual deposition of Pusztataskony (Cat. 46), see FÜLÖP 2020.

50 SZILAS 2017b, 317.

51 REITER 2019, Abb. 1, Tab. 1.

52 REITER 2019, 127–129.

53 GUCSI – SZABÓ 2018, 238; BLÁHOVA – SKLENÁŘOVÁ 2018, 643.

54 REITER 2019, 128–129.

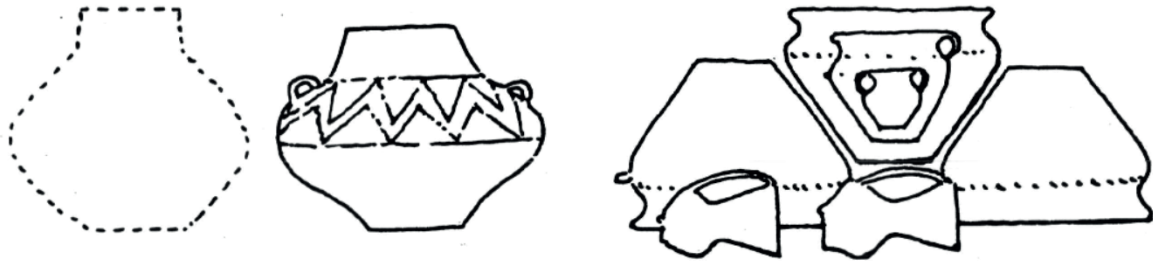


Fig. 6. Organized, structured deposition of a vessel of the Early Tumulus culture from Hegykő-Kisér (Cat. 29, after ILON 1999, Fig. 9).

unique jug with a rectangular pedestal⁵⁵ and stemmed deep bowl⁵⁶ may signify a distinguished participant leading the ritual or feast, possibly reflecting their status or social/ritual role.

In the two largest ceramic depots from Veszprém-Kádárta (Cat. 49) and Budapest-Budai Skála (Cat. 7), the presence of storage and serving vessels alongside dominant drinking vessels suggests communal events involving at least 15 and 50–60 participants, respectively, with remnants of drinking and eating.⁵⁷ The large number of vessels indicates a gathering involving the entire community or of regional significance, while also reflecting the high status of the organizing group. A close analogy is the 72-vessel assemblage from Horny Počaply.⁵⁸

Location

The ceramic depositions and non-normative burials typically occur on settlements, in the context of domestic refuse pits, and in one case, in a well.⁵⁹ There is little data on their direct association with buildings, and assemblages as such should be treated as a separate category. At Domaszék-Börcsök tanya, 8 building-related and posthole depositions, as well as a pit containing human remains, were identified (Cat. 11–13, 15, 17–19, and 21).⁶⁰ At Kozármisleny, the two pits (Cat. 32–33) of ritual function may have been located inside houses.⁶¹ At Nagydém-Középrépuszta, the 3 non-normative burials/cultic objects (Cat. 34–36) were observed near (or within) a rectangular ditch structure (possibly a house with a foundation trench, Fig. 7).⁶² At Kóny-Barbacs-tópart, 2 intact drinking vessels deposited in Feat. 267 (Cat. 30) were found south of Building V, possibly at its southwest corner. The pit predates the building, but their exact relationship is unclear.⁶³ At Budapest-Rákosc-saba (Cat. 9), a ceramic depot was located at the edge of the settlement.⁶⁴

In two cases, the Tumulus Culture depositions may be associated with cemeteries established during an earlier period. At Zsennye, Feat. 25, the Late Bronze Age ceramic depot (Cat. 51) was observed 10 m away from the burials of the Gáta-Wieselburg Culture, while a Tumulus period settlement was approximately 100 m away.⁶⁵ At Battonya-Balogh-tanya (Cat. 5), the Tumulus vessel

55 REITER 2019, Taf. 1.4.

56 REITER 2019, Taf. 1.2.

57 ILON 2012, 35–37; SZILAS 2017a, 225.

58 BOUZEK – SKLENÁŘ 1987, 38–39.

59 FÜLÖP 2020.

60 SÁNTA 2020; SÁNTA in print.

61 MALI 2018, 302; MALI 2020, 293.

62 ILON 1999, 4. ábra; ILON 2024, 496–497.

63 The southeastern posthole was dug into the pit, see EGRY 2002, 10, Map 3, Fig. 5.

64 SZABÓ 2024.

65 NAGY 2013, 86; ILON 2024, 494, Fig. 7.3,12; personal communication.

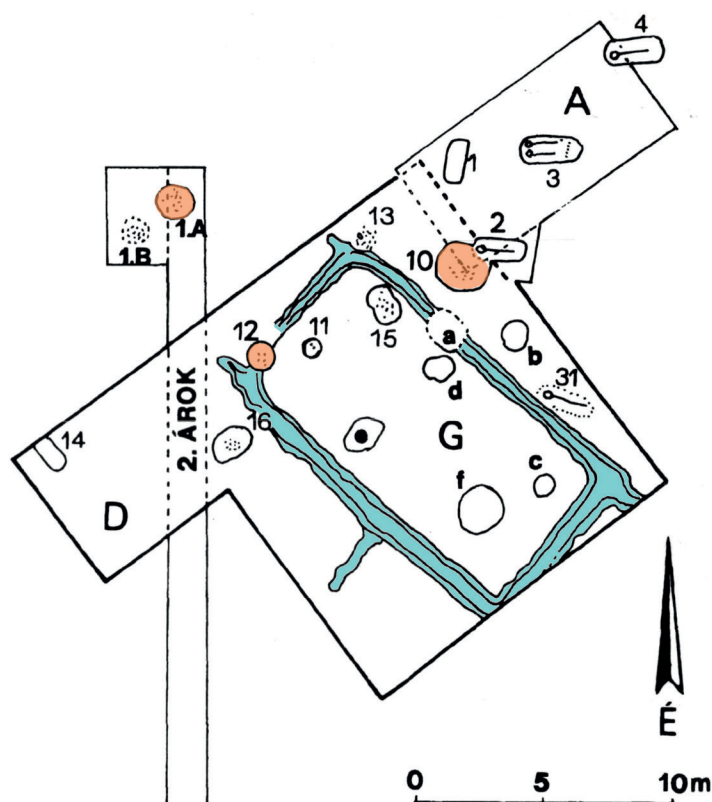


Fig. 7. Excavation plan of Nagydém-Középrépuszta. Features 1A, 10 and 12 (Cat. 34–36) are marked in light brown. A rectangular trench (possibly the foundation of a house or the boundary of a precinct) is marked in turquoise (after ILON 1999, Fig. 4).

deposition was found within the area of the cemetery utilized during the Early and Middle Bronze Age.⁶⁶ These instances may reflect the awareness and continuity of the sacred character of earlier consecrated burial places.

Associated phenomena and finds

Ritual destruction was primarily carried out through the use of fire and intentional breaking of vessels and offerings.

Both in the Early and in the Classical periods, vessels deposited intact and those deliberately broken are present in roughly equal proportions. The practice of intentional breaking, however, declined by the end of the period (Tab. 2). The most common associated phenomenon of deposition is the use of fire: vessels showing evidence of secondary burning, the presence of ash and burnt debris, charcoal, and scorched clay (see previous section), which sometimes indicates a fire lit in the pit,⁶⁷ potentially for the destruction of objects.⁶⁸ It is necessary to distinguish between traces of fire (ash, charcoal, burnt clay fragments, etc.) and the deliberate secondary burning of ceramics. Both are common, but neither is a 'mandatory' element of these depositions. In the Br B1–2 period, over half of the cases show evidence of fire (ash, charcoal, burnt clay), while secondary burning of ceramics is observed in 1/3 of them. For depositions classified as classical or general Tumulus period (Br B–Br C, Br C), the use of fire as integral part of the practice is widespread (present in 65–80% of cases), whereas

66 SZ. KÁLLAY 1983, 60; SZABÓ 1999.

67 STAPEL 1999, 83–85; H. SIMON – HORVÁTH 1999, 193; RUTTKAY 1966, 224; KISS 2011, 101; ILON 2014, 5–6.

68 GUCSI – SZABÓ 2018, 229–234; REITER 2019, 119–120.

Tab. 2. Condition of vessels in Tumulus Culture depositions and non-normative burials classified according to their most precise dating.

Period	Condition				
	intact	deliberately broken	intact and broken	unknown	no pottery
Reinecke					
Br B1	3	3	1	0	0
Br B1–2	3	3	4	0	1
Br B–BC	7	7	1	0	0
Br C	6	5	1	0	0
Br C–BrD–(Ha A1)	2	1	1	0	1

secondary burning on pottery is observed in only about 1/4 of the cases. In the later Tumulus period (Br C–Br D), none of the examined cases show evidence of fire (ash, charcoal, or burnt clay/daub), and secondary burning of vessels is observed in only one case (Tab. 3). Fire was used for the ritual destruction of objects,⁶⁹ but it also played a role elsewhere in the ritual process, which cannot be precisely reconstructed at present due to the lack of sufficient data in terms of quantity and quality.

Tab. 3. Evidence of burning, human, and animal remains in Tumulus Culture ceramic depositions and non-normative burials classified according to their most precise dating.

Period	Characteristic			
	Traces of fire (yes/no/unknown)	Secondary burning on the ceramics (yes/no/unknown)	Human remains (yes/no)	Animal remains (yes/no/unknown)
Reinecke				
Br B1	4/3/0	2/5/0	1/6	5/1/1
Br B1–2	5/4/2	3/5/2	3/8	5/1/5
Br B–BC	8/3/4	2/8/4	1/14	3/6/6
Br C	6/3/3	2/4/7	1/11	3/9/0
Br C–Br D–(Ha A1)	0/2/2	0/1/3	3/1	1/0/3

Animal bones frequently occur as components in Bronze Age vessel depositions.⁷⁰ In Hungary, animal bones are mainly associated with the early Tumulus period (Br B1–2), occurring in 4/5 of the depositions, whereas in the classical period (Br B–Br C, Br C) animal remains appear only in 1/3 of the cases. In the late period, this practice is represented by only a single case (Tab. 3). In the sacrificial pits at Nagydém (Cat. 34–36), pig and cattle bones dominate; remains of a few small ruminants were present, and red deer is also documented. At Veszprém-Kádárta (Cat. 49), in addition to sheep, cattle, and hare, almost exclusively pig bones were recovered.⁷¹ In Domaszék-Böröcsök-tanya, Feature 320 (Cat. 16), 3 bird bones were found.⁷²

69 GUCSI – SZABÓ 2018, 229–234; REITER 2019, 119–120, 128–129.

70 VÖRÖS 1995; ILON 1999, 253; STAPEL 1999, 84–85; JELÍNEK – VAVÁK 2013. It is important to consider taphonomic aspects as well, since in some earlier excavations—particularly those conducted before the second half of the 20th century—animal bones were not always collected or kept, resulting in the loss of data. However, most of the assemblages considered here come from more recent excavations, so the information available to us is likely to be complete.

71 VÖRÖS 1995; ILON 2012, 20.

72 SÁNTA in print.

Tab. 4. Associated finds occurring along Tumulus Culture ceramic depositions and non-normative burials in Hungary.

Accompanying find	Cases
pottery sherds (waste)	12
grinding stone	9
clay weight, clay object	7
jewelry, personal adornment, bracelet, pin (bone, bronze, shell)	7
wattle-and-daub	5
pebble, hammerstone, smoothing stone, „stone”	4
spindle whorl	4
antler object	3
bronze chisel	3
flaked stone tool	3
boat model	2
polished stone tool	2
pyraunos	2
bone skate	1
bronze lump	1
casting mould	1
ceramic rod	1
cereal and food remains (bread)	1
clay spoon	1
gable ornament	1
graphite lump	1
household waste	1
millet	1
shell	1
whetstone	1
no accompanying find	8
unknown	13

Among the depositions and non-normative burials, 29 contained other finds as well, while 8 did not, and in 14 cases it is unknown whether associated finds were present at all (Tab. 4). Frequently occurring artefacts are ceramic fragments (12 cases), grinding stones (9 cases), jewellery (4 cases in non-normative burials, 3 in depots), clay weights/clay objects (7 cases), wattle-and-daub (5 cases), spindle whorls (4 cases), stones (pebbles, smoothing- or hammerstones, 4 cases), bronze chisels (3 cases in unusual burials/ritual pits), flaked stone tools (3 cases), antler objects/tools (2 cases), boat models (2 cases), polished stone tools (2 cases) and pyraunoi (2 cases). In at least 6 cases, an unusually wide spectrum of associated finds was recovered,⁷³ indicating complex sequences of actions and sacrifices.⁷⁴

73 Nagydem-Középrépuszta, Features 1A, 10 and 12 (Cat. 34–36): ILO 1999; ILO 2024, 497, personal communication; Győr-Ménfőcsanak-Széles-földek (Cat. 27): ILO 2014; Gellénháza (Cat. 26): H. SIMON – HORVÁTH 1999; Kozármisleny, 2 cases (Cat. 32–33): MALI 2018; MALI 2020, 293.

74 ILO 2014; ILO 2024, 496–497.

The Veszprém deposition (Cat. 49) contained traces of cereals and foodstuffs, similarly to the ceramic depot of Lozorno, containing grains of millet (*Panicum milliaceum*), goosefoot (*Chenopodium album*), and barley (*Hordeum* sp.), along with the charred remains of oak (*Quercus* sp.), pine (*Pinus* sp.), and ash (*Fraxinus* sp.). A meal of millet and goosefoot could be assumed placed in two separate vessels.⁷⁵

Unfired clay is also frequently used, either as fill or construction material.⁷⁶ Decorated daub fragments and structural elements of buildings are particularly noteworthy,⁷⁷ along with portable hearths (*pyraunoi*) that occur repeatedly.⁷⁸ Placement of stone blocks, grinding stone fragments, hammer or smoothing stones, and pebbles is also observed.⁷⁹ Grinding stones can be associated with ritual grinding and food preparation, and can also be interpreted as symbols of agriculture in a spiritual context.⁸⁰ Stones may also have been used for breaking the vessels.⁸¹

The presence of ceramic fragments is often interpreted as household waste mixed in with the fill, but in better-documented cases, it is considered contemporary with the depositions themselves. Therefore it can be assumed, that at one point in the chain of events, some fragments of broken vessels were buried together with more intact pieces.⁸²

Evaluation

For a comprehensive reconstruction of the processes underlying ceramic depositions and non-normative burial practices, a single approach is insufficient. It is essential to consider separately the series of actions resulting in the creation of such depositions (Categories A–E) and the scale of the participating communities involved in these ritual activities (Categories 1–4).

The two schemes of classification presented here provide complementary perspectives on the depositional sequences. However, they cannot always be distinguished unequivocally. Some assemblages display characteristics that span across multiple categories, reflecting the complex nature of the ritual and/or depositional practices. For example, Domaszék, Feat. 422 (Cat. 22)⁸³ combines elements of offering, ritual and non-normative burial practices. The best example is Pusztataskony (Cat. 46),⁸⁴ which can primarily be interpreted as a demolition or dismantling offering (Group B) associated with a well. However, it also exhibits clear characteristics of both the communal feasting practices typical of Group A and the sacral ritual sequences characteristic of Group C.

These overlaps highlight the necessity of interpreting the depots within both actional and social contexts. Rather than treating the two schemes as mutually exclusive, they should be considered complementary, providing a more nuanced understanding of Late Bronze Age depositional practices and social dynamics.

Non-normative burials will be discussed in detail later, but they are mentioned here for the sake of completeness in the categorization.

75 BARTÍK – HAJNALOVÁ 2004, Tab. 1.40–41.

76 Feat. 173 at Domaszék (Cat. 12): STAPEL 1999, 83–85; KISS 2011, 101; SÁNTA 2020.

77 BOUZEK – SKLENÁŘ 1987, Obr. 8.8, 38; STAPEL 1999, 83–85; ILON 2014, Abb. 13.

78 RUTTKAY 1966, 229, Taf. 3, Abb. 6; ILON 2014, 5, 22; FÜLÖP 2020, Fig. 6.11.

79 ILON 1999, 242–243; STAPEL 1999, 84; ILON 2012, 20; ILON 2014, 25, Abb. 16; REITER 2019, 110, 119.

80 ILON 2014, 31.

81 ILON 2012, 37; SZILAS 2017a; SZILAS 2017b.

82 Budajenő: GUCSI – SZABÓ 2018; Reyersdorf: REITER 2019, 127–129.

83 SÁNTA in print.

84 FÜLÖP 2020.

On the basis of these characteristics, the examined assemblages may be grouped into the five following categories of activities (Fig. 8):

A) Feasts, votive offerings, and libations, e.g. Budapest-Rákoscsaba (Cat. 9), Hegykő (Cat. 29), Oszlár (Cat. 40). Serving, cooking, and storage vessels; predominance of drinking vessels and bowls; generally few or no associated finds (Palátová-Salaš⁸⁵ Type 2). The communal nature of the event is pronounced.

B) Foundation and demolition offerings, for example Domaszék (Cat. 11–13, 17–19), Pusztataskony (Cat. 46). In many cases, depots of 1–3 vessels associated with buildings or other structures (e.g. wells⁸⁶), few accompanying finds, often showing evidence of burning (Palátová-Salaš Type 3).

C) Cult objects, sacrificial assemblages, for example Gellénháza, Kozármisleny (Cat. 32–33), Nagydém (Cat. 35–36). Objects preserving the traces of a complex ritual, including a wide range of items and evidence of burning (Palátová-Salaš Type 1). The ritual nature of the event is pronounced.

D) Profane, storage-related deposition, for example Battonya-Vadaszán-tanya (Cat. 6), Domaszék (Cat. 21), Dunakeszi (Cat. 24). Storage vessels buried in the ground or in pits (Palátová-Salaš Type 1?).

E) Non-normative burials, cult objects. Domaszék (Cat. 22), Ménfőcsanak (Cat. 27), Nagydém (Cat. 34), Oszlár (Cat. 41–44), Sárvár (Cat. 48). Assemblages containing human remains, and in several cases vessels, traces of burning, and a wide range of associated finds. Categories C and E are mainly distinguished by the presence or absence of human remains.

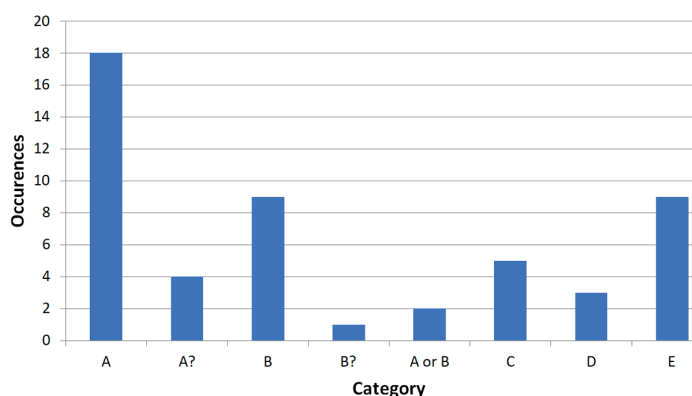


Fig. 8. The distribution of categories distinguished on the basis of the nature of the actions (Groups A–E) (n=51)

Based on the number of vessels and the estimated size of the associated community, the following groups can be distinguished (Fig. 9):

1. Depositions of 1–3 vessels associated with households;
 - 1a. Votive offerings, for example Oszlár (Cat. 40), Répcelak (Cat. 47) (Palátová-Salaš Type 2);
 - 1b. Foundation and demolition offerings/posthole depositions, e.g. Domaszék (Cat. 11–13, 17–19), Győr-Ménfőcsanak (Cat. 28) (Palátová-Salaš Type 3);⁸⁷
 - 1c. Storage, for example Battonya-Vadaszán-tanya (Cat. 6), Domaszék (Cat. 21), Dunakeszi (Cat. 24).
2. Depositions of 7–13 vessels, linked to small or medium-sized communities (households and beyond), representing traces of votive offerings, feasts, libations, rituals, or possibly storage, e.g. Balatonboglár (Cat. 1), Felsőpusztaszer (Cat. 25), Hegykő (Cat. 29), Nagydém (Cat. 35–36) (Palátová-Salaš Type 1–2).
3. Depositions of 18–37 vessels, associated with larger communities (several households), representing traces of votive offerings, feasts, libations, or rituals, for example Battonya-

85 PALÁTOVÁ – SALAŠ 2002.

86 FÜLÖP 2020.

87 TREBSCH 2008; VÁCZI 2018.

Balogh-tanya (Cat. 5), Budapest-Rákoscsaba (Cat. 9), Kozármiseny (Cat. 31), Ménfőcsanak (Cat. 27), Pusztataskony (Cat. 46) (Palátová–Salaš Type 2).

4. Depositions of 60–150 vessels, associated with village- or regional-level communities, representing traces of votive offerings, feasts, libations, or rituals, e. g. Veszprém (Cat. 49), Budapest-Budai Skála (Cat. 7) (Palátová–Salaš Type 2).

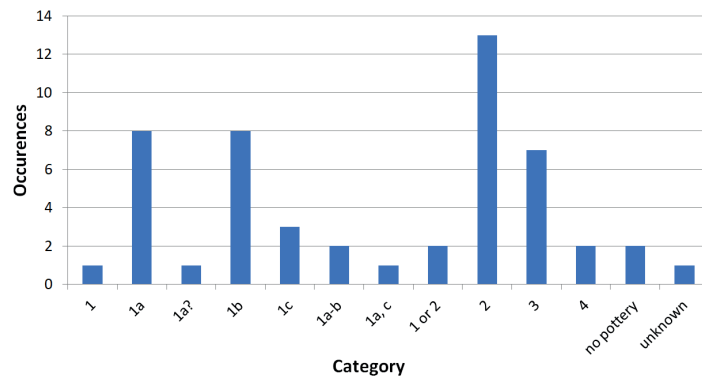


Fig. 9. The distribution of categories, distinguished according to the number of vessels and the size of the participating communities (Groups 1–4) (n=51).

It is worthwhile to compare the above-outlined system with the classification of ceramic depositions characteristic of the second half of the Late Bronze Age in the Tisza region. Among the Tumulus Culture vessel depositions, those containing large serving vessels (V. Szabó, Type 1) are represented by Domaszék Feats 230, 320 (Cat. 14, 16), and Pusztataskony (Cat. 46), although they are rare in the Tumulus period. V. Szabó's Type 2 (large, solitary amphorae) does not occur; instead, large, sack-shaped storage vessels were documented. In the case of Gáva-period (Ha A2–B) depositions of decorated vessels, in addition to storage, the communal consumption or ritual offering of the associated contents may also be envisaged.⁸⁸ Depots containing drinking, serving, and storage vessels, reflecting traces of feasting (V. Szabó Type 3), are also common among the Tumulus-period indicating continuity.

A) Feasts and votive offerings

Rituals associated with drinking and eating, including pledges and/or oaths, are classified in Group A. The deposition of vessels occurred as part of, or at the conclusion of the ritual, after their contents had been consumed or offered. The vessels themselves did not constitute value; they were deposited because they had been ritually 'charged' and were no longer usable in the profane world (*ritual refuse*).⁸⁹ The varied composition of these depots indicates their use during feasts.⁹⁰ The sacrificial character of these feasts (primarily libations) was emphasized by Jan Bouzek and Karel Sklenář regarding the depot at Horní Počaply. The assemblage was exceptionally large and diverse, containing 72 vessels representing a wide range of types: amphorae, storage jars, large bowls, deep bowls, cups, mugs, jugs, and pots. Decorated daub fragments were also recovered from the pit.⁹¹

Based on the number of vessels, such events took place both within households and in smaller communities, as well as larger groups (1a, 3–5). The first deposition recovered from Oszlár-Nyárfaszög (Cat. 39, 8 vessels) is interpreted to be associated with a (married) couple and the ritual they performed.⁹² The Budapest-Rákoscsaba-Major-hegy-Dél Feat. 904 deposition (Cat. 9, 37 vessels) can

88 V. SZABÓ 2004, 88–89.

89 EIBNER 1969, 47; BOUZEK 1996, 421; BOUZEK – SKLENÁŘ 1987, 39; CZYBORRA 1997, 91–92; SCHAUER 1996, 408–410; STAPEL 1999, 139–141; PALÁTOVÁ – SALAŠ 2002, 129–133, 148–149; V. SZABÓ 2004, 87.

90 KALLA *et al.* 2013, 16, Tab. 1.

91 BOUZEK – SKLENÁŘ 1987, 38–39.

92 KOÓS 2003, 124.

be linked to a larger group.⁹³ Particularly large assemblages, such as those from Veszprém-Kádárta (Cat. 49, 60–70 vessels) and Budapest-Budai Skála (Cat. 7, 150 vessels – 50 individuals), could be associated with entire villages or communities on a regional level.⁹⁴

A closely contemporaneous, well-analyzed deposition is known from Budajenő-Hegyi-szántók (Feat. 80). Dated to the Koszider phase of the Vatya Culture (Br B1 period), it comprised of 72 vessels representing almost all domestic ceramic types. A significant portion had evidence of secondary burning, likely intentionally, after which, the still intact vessels were deliberately broken, and additional fragments representing the settlement's ceramic types were mixed in. Stone fragments, shells, and loom weights were also placed in the pit. Based on paired vessels, it is suggested that two individuals were at the center of the event (feast). Two oval, boat-shaped bowls⁹⁵ from this assemblage are comparable to the two boat models⁹⁶ from the Kozármisleny depositions (Cat. 32–33). According to the authors' estimate, 130–150 individuals may have participated in the event, suggesting the involvement of village- or regional-level communities, as observed in the case of Budapest-Budai Skála (Cat. 7).⁹⁷

Similar depositions are known from Slovakia, dating to the Late phase of the Otomani–Füzesabony Culture, containing drinking vessels, and in one case, acorns, seeds, fish bones, small animal bones, and shells. In the Maďarovce Culture, vessel depositions are also known from sites such as Vrábce, the most remarkable being the assemblage from Gáň, comprising of 28 almost identical mugs, perhaps made by the same potter.⁹⁸

B) Foundation and demolition offerings

Some vessel assemblages, mostly associated with building structures, can be interpreted to be linked to so-called 'opening' or 'closing' rituals symbolising the lifecycle of a building/feature and are classified within Group B (primarily at Domaszék, Cat. 11–13, 15, 17–19, and Pusztataskony, Cat. 46).⁹⁹ Most of them represent foundation/building offerings¹⁰⁰ or demolition/posthole depositions. The latter may be associated with the ritualistic burial of house itself.¹⁰¹ This category also encompasses the Br D–Ha A1, Proto-Gáva deposition from Tiszabura¹⁰² and includes Győr-Ménfőcsanak (Cat. 28).¹⁰³ Building offerings, including bronze objects and ceramics, are widely reported across Slovakia from periods immediately preceding or contemporary with the phase studied here. At Rybník, a pot containing two bird-head figurines was found in the foundation trench of a house at a Maďarovce–Northern Transdanubian Encrusted Pottery Culture settlement.¹⁰⁴

93 REMÉNYI *et al.* 2007, 174, Fig. 4; SZILAS 2017b.

94 ILON 2012; SZILAS 2017a.

95 GUCSI – SZABÓ 2018, 238–239, Fig. 17.2–3.

96 MALI 2018, 6. kép, 7. kép 2; MALI 2020, 293.

97 SZILAS 2017b; GUCSI – SZABÓ 2018, 234.

98 BÁTORA 2018, 287–289, Figs 242–243.

99 The high number of depositions containing only 1–2 vessels occurring within a single site at Domaszék-Börcsök-tanya is particularly noteworthy, while several unconfirmed cases from Oszlár-Nyárfaszög caution that the practice may have been more widespread than previously thought, yet its recognition is context-dependent and not always self-evident. See Footnote 35 and the plates in KOÓS 2004.

100 PALÁTOVÁ – SALAŠ 2002, Type 3.

101 TREBSCH 2008, 71.

102 VÁCZI 2018.

103 ILON 2024, 497.

104 BÁTORA 2018, 287.

At Pusztataskony-Ledence (Cat. 46), a unique ritual phenomenon of the Tumulus Culture was discovered, consisting of a ceramic deposition associated with a well (Feature 637).¹⁰⁵ At the bottom of an abandoned well, at least 29 vessels were found, together with numerous accompanying artefacts—including grinding stone fragments, an antler axe, a bone skate, a pyraunos, a spindle whorl, a polished stone tool, and a decorated clay object—as well as animal bones.¹⁰⁶ Traces of fire were evident, indicated by daub fragments and secondarily burnt ceramics. The well also contained the remains of a wooden lining, as well as pieces of wood and rope, attesting to its earlier profane, utilitarian function. After the sacrificial event, the well was deliberately filled in, with soil extracted from Feature 633, located immediately adjacent to the well. This feature was almost entirely devoid of finds and appears to have been dug specifically for this purpose.¹⁰⁷

According to Kristóf Fülöp's interpretation, in the 'life cycle' of the well, the ritual event can be connected to the death and afterlife of the water source.¹⁰⁸ Consequently, the assemblage may be understood as a 'funerary' offering for the well itself, in which not the physical structure of the well but rather its symbolic (healing) and mediatory (passageway) role was of primary importance—serving as a conduit to the transcendent sphere (purification, healing).¹⁰⁹

The well's function as means of communication with the sacred realm could justify its classification within Group C (see below). However, some accompanying finds—such as the wood and rope fragments, and possibly the animal bones and grinding stone fragments—might represent domestic refuse rather than ritual depositions. On this basis, the assemblage could alternatively be assigned to Group A, among votive offerings or communal feasting depositions.

The composition of ceramic deposits is dominated by forms used for storage (amphorae) and food preparation (cooking pots), while jugs and mugs, which are frequent elsewhere, are underrepresented. Bowls occur only in small numbers and mainly as fragments. The original contents of the vessels—if any—remain unknown, and it cannot be determined whether any substances were offered during the ritual act. Nevertheless, the event undoubtedly involved a communal feast extending beyond the individual household level; yet the emphasis appears to have lain not on the communal aspect itself, but rather on the attempt to establish a connection with the otherworld.¹¹⁰ A strong parallel can be drawn with the sacrificial well at Gánovce, associated with the Otomani-Füzesabony Culture, which was constructed over a thermal spring and yielded a series of votive offerings. The feature's connection to healing and medicinal practices, and as a site of pilgrimage,¹¹¹ is highly probable. Since it also contained human remains, this parallel is discussed in greater detail in the section detailing non-normative burials.¹¹²

105 FÜLÖP 2020, 173–176, Figs 3–4.

106 FÜLÖP 2020, 177–178, Figs 5–7.

107 FÜLÖP 2020, 176–177.

108 FÜLÖP 2020, 171–175, Fig. 1.

109 FÜLÖP 2020, 186–187. Since its close resemblance to a closing ritual and specific features of the ceramic assemblage, the depot can be assigned to the Br C period. The settlement was occupied during the Br B2–C phases (FÜLÖP 2020, 172).

110 FÜLÖP 2020, 186–188. K. Fülöp also mentions another well deposition at Pusztataskony, Feature 533, which contained 8 vessels and fragments of daub. This feature however, is of an entirely different character than Feature 637. Based on the preserved traces and rope remains, two of the vessels likely served as tools for drawing/scooping water. In the absence of further information, it cannot be determined whether the remaining vessels accidentally fell into the well during use or were intentionally deposited as part of a ritual (FÜLÖP 2020, 179). Due to the lack of contextual data or associated finds that could aid interpretation, this feature has not been included in the present collection.

111 FÜLÖP 2020, 188.

112 BÁTORA 2018, 283–284, 404, Fig. 117.1, Figs 238–239.

C) Cultic objects and sacrificial assemblages

H. Palátová and M. Salaš¹¹³ primarily explained food offerings in terms of ritual purposes (Type 1). These assemblages contain both animal and plant remains found in the vessels, but data is limited and their reliability is low. Depositions also included items associated with cultivation and grinding, which is why they tend to be linked with agricultural (chthonic) rituals, which may have been accompanied by animal offerings. The presence of fire may indicate offerings through burning. The ritual refuse appears to have remained within the sacred area, being intentionally broken or destroyed and ritually buried.¹¹⁴ This category corresponds to the now separate Group C (cult objects, sacrificial assemblages). However, there is no sharp distinction between the phenomena classified into groups A and C, except in the characteristics of the associated archaeological features and finds. In Hungary, many more accompanying phenomena can be observed, and the characteristics assigned to this category are typical of the earliest Tumulus period, suggesting the possibility of a genuinely distinct deposition variant.

The depositions assigned to Group C—Kozármisleny (Cat. 32–33), Gellénháza (Cat. 26), Nagydém (Cat. 35–36)—suggest a complex sequence of events involving the use of fire. The role of fire in the sacrificial process can clearly be discerned in the case of Gellénháza (Cat. 26),¹¹⁵ where the vessels and accompanying finds were burnt in a fire lit at the bottom of the pit; at Kozármisleny (Cat. 32), where the fill containing ash layers was sealed by a single layer indicative of a final burning; at Nagydém (Cat. 35–36), where the fill was rich in ash, the bones of the sacrificial animals were partially burned, and the upper layer contained charcoal. Based on these examples, fire or burning as part of the events of Category C is associated not only with the destruction of vessels, but more broadly with the ritual transformation of sacrificial offerings and can also be interpreted as marking the conclusion of the process.

Péter Mali suggests that the wide spectrum of sacrificial finds from the Kozármisleny depositions (Cat. 32–33)—dated to the Br B1—represents activities carried out within the community, with a special role attributed to the boat models as symbols of transition and journey. In his view, the complexity and rarity of these assemblages point to an action that was not socially embedded. Such phenomena are characteristic of transitional periods, when established rites lose their efficacy, fail to provide solutions to emerging problems, and no longer reflect the new order.¹¹⁶ The ceramic assemblage recovered from the features at Kozármisleny is homogeneous and shows neither southern nor local¹¹⁷ traditions, therefore, it may reflect the appearance of an altogether new tradition foreign to the locality. This may also indicate the weak social embeddedness of the sequence of actions.¹¹⁸

The Gellénháza deposition (Cat. 26), with its complex character and strong evidence of burning, can also be assigned here. Although the feature was disturbed during the Middle Ages, the documented details suggest that the vessels and accompanying finds were burnt in a pit dug specifically for this purpose, which had remained open for some time prior to the event.¹¹⁹

Likewise the Nagydém depositions (Feat. 10 and 12, Cat. 35–36) also fit into this group, which contained evidence of burning, animal remains, and bronze artefacts. Feature 10 yielded 8 vessels,

113 PALÁTOVÁ – SALAŠ 2002.

114 PALÁTOVÁ – SALAŠ 2002, 146–149.

115 H. SIMON – HORVÁTH 1999.

116 INSOLL 2013, 16–17; MALI 2018; MALI 2020, 293.

117 Transdanubian Encrusted Pottery Culture.

118 MALI 2018, 302.

119 A redeposited (washed-in) clay layer was observed directly below the vessels (H. SIMON – HORVÁTH 1999).

together with daub fragments and a bronze chisel, while Feature 12 also contained 9 vessels; in the top fill were fragments of a grinding stone, a daub layer with charcoal and sherds underneath, while lower down ash, animal remains, the vessels, and another bronze chisel were discovered.

Feature 1A, owing to the human bone it contained, was classified into a separate category (E), yet by the character of the actions involved, it fits into this group as well.¹²⁰ The complexity of the rite also applies to the Ménfőcsanak feature containing an anomalous burial (see below). A further common trait of the assemblages discussed here is that, without exception, they date to the earliest and early phases of the Tumulus Culture (Br B1–2), reinforcing their association with a transitional period as proposed by Mali.¹²¹

D) Storage vessels

Category D represents single pieces or pairs of buried storage vessels—Battonya (Cat. 6), Domaszék (Cat. 21), and Dunakeszi (Cat. 24)—, whose primary purpose may have been the storage of household foodstuffs. These features were always intact and never associated with fire or any accompanying finds. However, at Balatonboglár-Borkombinát (Cat. 3), the storage vessel was deliberately broken and burnt, then covered with a repacked layer, which rather suggests a ritual deposition (Group A?).¹²²

Distribution

Throughout the entire Tumulus Culture, remains of feasts and votive offerings classified within Group A occur most frequently (18 certain cases and 4 uncertain cases; Fig. 8). The depositions falling within this rather heterogeneous group, containing a varying number and composition of vessels, are united by the ritualistic act of the offering, which may have been accompanied by food consumption and drinking.

A further 9 cases can be securely interpreted as such, 1 case possibly represents a foundation or dismantling (opening or closing) offering (Group B), and in 2 cases it remains unclear whether the feature constitutes a votive offering or a foundation deposition. (Of course, actual overlaps between these categories cannot be excluded.)

Five cases can be confidently addressed as cult object or sacrificial assemblages (Group C), whereas the burials of storage vessels (in 3 cases) appear to reflect profane depositions (Group D). 9 cases have been categorized as non-normative burials (Group E, see below).

The participating communities (Fig. 9) were typically small, with ritual activities largely occurring at the household level. Votive offerings and foundation/dismantling depositions (Groups 1a–b) were each observed in 8 (a total of 16) cases, whereas in 3 instances the vessels may be attributed to household-associated storage (Group 1c), while in 7 cases the nature of the event could not be determined with certainty. These depositions can be regarded as the material traces of ‘private’ events, remaining within the household and reflecting the interactions of household members among themselves and with the spiritual realm (‘household spirits’, ancestors).

Thirteen assemblages comprised of 7–13 vessels (Group 2), which can be associated with events at the household or slightly larger community level.

In contrast to the smaller-scale depositions, these assemblages likely represent events of a more public or demonstrative character, reflecting the household’s social status and its concern with external representation.

120 ILON 1999; ILON 2024, 365; personal communication.

121 MALI 2020, 293.

122 HONTI *et al.* 2004, 6.

Larger-scale communal events, such as feasts and celebrations, may be inferred from depositions containing 18–37 vessels (Group 3, seven cases), presumably reflecting participation of approximately 20–25 individuals.¹²³ In 2 instances the ceramic depots comprised of 60–150 vessels (Group 4) represented much larger communities, which—based on vessel counts—likely correspond to events involving three-and-a-half to four times as many participants (ca. 100–150 individuals),¹²⁴ at the level of an entire village or regional community. Notably, as the number of vessels increases, the number of occurrences decreases roughly by half or more (26–13–7–2). Although this pattern may be entirely random, it clearly indicates that larger-scale events were less frequent and carried greater social and ritual significance.

E) Non-normative burials, human remains

A total of 9 non-normative burials from the Tumulus Culture (Group E, [Tab. 5](#)) are listed here; with the exception of some unpublished cases, which cannot be included due to the lack of detailed information.¹²⁵ Four cases belong to the Early Tumulus period (Br B1–2), while 2 examples are documented from the Classical (Br B–Br C) and 3 cases from the Late (Br C/Br D–Ha A1) phases.

They occur in two forms:

- a) Archaeological features containing skeletons: Győr-Ménfőcsanak (Cat. 27), Oszlár (Cat. 41–44), Paks (Cat. 45), and Sárvár (Cat. 48).
- b) Archaeological features containing one or two human bones: Domaszék (Cat. 22), Nagydém (Cat. 34).¹²⁶

Among the non-normative skeleton burials (a), the remains of a single individual were recovered in 4 cases, 2 individuals in 1 case, and 3 individuals in 2 cases. Altogether, 4 adults and 7 children can be identified, while in 1 case the age could not be determined. In 2 features no vessels were present, in 2 cases a single vessel, in another 2 cases at least 3 vessels, in 1 case at least 6–7 vessels, and in 1 case as many as 33 vessels were found. Bronze artefacts are frequently associated with the assemblages. At Oszlár (Cat. 41–44), bronze rings, beads and ring-ornaments were likely elements of the attire, possibly serving as ornaments or fasteners.¹²⁷ The cases at Ménfőcsanak (Cat. 27)¹²⁸ and Sárvár (Cat. 48)¹²⁹ are notable due to the high number of vessels and the richness of associated finds. The body positions of some individuals suggest that they had been bound prior to the deposition.¹³⁰

At Nagydém-Középrépaszta, Features 1A, 10, and 12 (Cat. 34–36)¹³¹ have more recently been interpreted by the lead archaeologist as ritual features.¹³² In Feature 1A (Cat. 34), a human metacarpus¹³³ was found, together with a bronze bracelet and a bronze chisel inside an amphora. In addition, the feature yielded animal bones, 7 vessels, sherds, clay objects, a grinding stone, a quern, and antler implements.¹³⁴ The remains of the (sacrificial?) animals—calf and bull, pig, lamb and

123 V. SZABÓ 2004; REITER 2019.

124 SZILAS 2017a; GUCSI – SZABÓ 2018.

125 For example, Jászberény-Hűtőgépgyár II (GULYÁS 2020).

126 Feature 506 at Oszlár-Nyárfaszög cannot be certainly associated with the Tumulus Culture and is therefore not included in the present corpus (see also Footnote 117 and KIRÁLY 2019, 112).

127 KOÓS 2004, 32–33.

128 ILON 2014.

129 ILON – TÓTH 2022; ILON 2024, 495–496.

130 KOÓS 2004, 32–33.

131 ILON 1992; ILON 1999.

132 ILON 2024, 365.

133 VÖRÖS 1995, 150; ILON 1999, 241.

134 ILON 1999, 241–243.

ram—some of them burnt, were placed in a structured manner near the decorated amphora.¹³⁵ These phenomena may have been related to a rectangular (foundation?) ditch—perhaps a ritual building or sacred precinct.¹³⁶

At Győr-Ménfőcsanak-Széles-földek (Cat. 27), an incomplete skeleton of a child was uncovered in pit SNR 7765, among the fragments of a storage vessel, which the publisher regarded as a form of pithos burial¹³⁷ also employed in the Tumulus Culture. The associated finds—33 vessels, a house gable ornament with spiral motifs, grinding stones, and pyraunos fragments—make the ritual interpretation of the feature feasible.¹³⁸

At Sárvár-Alsó/Felső-mező (Cat. 48), the feature (Fig. 10) contained the mixed bones of an adult female (mother?) and two children (siblings). The remains had been exposed to c. 400 °C heat (glowing embers). It is assumed that a longer period had elapsed after death, so that advanced decomposition caused the disarticulation of the bones. No bitemarks of carnivores were observed, suggesting that the corpses had been kept in an enclosed or covered place.¹³⁹ Both profane explanations (epidemic, accident/conflict) and ritual interpretations have been proposed for these non-normative burials.¹⁴⁰

At Paks-Gyapa-Rosti-puszta (Cat. 45), the prone, extended skeleton of a 10–12-year-old child (boy?) was found laid on the stepped edge of a large beehive-shaped storage pit (O619/S838 and S859). Within the pit, fragments of a grinding stone, sherds, and animal bones were also discovered. The feature can be dated to the Early Tumulus period (Br B).¹⁴¹

At the site of Oszlár-Nyárfaszög (NE Hungary), an extensive settlement of the Late Bronze Age was brought to light. In the wider region, the Piliny Culture is represented; however, the site itself exhibits Carpathian Tumulus characteristics, which is why it has been included in the present catalogue. The settlement was established during the Br B phase, attained its greatest intensity throughout the Br C–D periods, and ceased to exist by Ha A1. Within the excavated area, in 4 instances, atypical or irregular burials were identified.¹⁴² On the basis of the obtained radiocarbon dates, as well as the associated ceramic



Fig. 10. Non-normative burial of Sárvár-Alsó/Felső-mező Feature 61 (Cat. 48, after ILON – TÓTH 2022, Fig. 1).

characteristics, which is why it has been included in the present catalogue. The settlement was established during the Br B phase, attained its greatest intensity throughout the Br C–D periods, and ceased to exist by Ha A1. Within the excavated area, in 4 instances, atypical or irregular burials were identified.¹⁴² On the basis of the obtained radiocarbon dates, as well as the associated ceramic

135 VÖRÖS 1995, Figs 1–2.

136 ILON 1999, Fig. 4; ILON 2024, 365.

137 CSÁNYI 2016, Tab. 1.

138 ILON 2014; ILON 2024, 416.

139 ILON – TÓTH 2022, 81; ILON 2024, 495–496.

140 KOÓS 2004, 33–34; ILON 2014; ILON – TÓTH 2022, 83; ILON 2024, 496.

141 MALI 2020, 293; personal communication.

142 KOÓS 2004, 33; KIRÁLY 2019, 110–116. In the case of Feature 506, the pelvic bone of a 5–6-year-old child was discovered, in close proximity to Feature 411. As the context of this feature and its relationship to Feature 411 remain unclear, and the documentation is inconclusive, Feature 506 has not been included in the present catalogue (KIRÁLY 2019, 112).

and metal grave goods, these interments can be attributed to the Classical and Late phases of the Tumulus Culture.¹⁴³

In Feature 411, the remains of 3 subadult individuals were interred, one of whom exhibited traces of perimortem trauma. The radiocarbon determination provided an age of 2999 ± 27 BP (1374–1127 cal BC = Br D, maybe Ha A1). Feature 726 yielded the remains of an adult female and a child, positioned above a burnt layer; the corresponding radiocarbon date is 3076 ± 26 BP (1412–1269 cal BC = Br C–D).

Within the enclosing Ditch 1, human remains were documented at two distinct points. Feature 1010 contained a disturbed and incomplete skeleton of a robust adult male, with the cranium absent. Associated artefacts comprised a cup, stones, a shell, and animal bones. The radiocarbon dating produced an age of 3129 ± 26 BP (1491–1302 cal BC = Br C). Approximately 50 metres away, Feature 1133 contained another disturbed and incomplete skeleton, likewise lacking the cranium. The disposition of the bones suggests that certain body parts may have been deliberately disarticulated or severed and subsequently redeposited within the pit. Associated finds included several ceramic vessels, among them fragments of a deliberately broken bowl with an inverted rim, together with fragments of grinding stones.¹⁴⁴ This feature has been classified among the atypical Tumulus burials due to its ritual similarities and proximity to the previously described Feature 1010.

Several additional pieces of evidence suggest that the range of irregular burials associated with the Tumulus Culture is likely to expand. At the site of Jászberény-Hűtőgépgyár II, human remains were discovered in 3 large storage pits. Pit 1 contained the collected, tightly packed remains of at least 3 individuals (possibly buried in a sack or wrapped in cloth) in the centre of the pit. Each of Pits 2 and 3 contained the skeleton of a young individual laid tightly against the wall of the pit.¹⁴⁵ As the assemblage is currently known only from a preliminary report, these burials cannot yet be analysed in detail and are therefore not included in this corpus. Nevertheless, their discovery fits well within the series of non-normative burials that became widespread in the Late Bronze Age throughout the Tisza Region.¹⁴⁶

Non-normative burials can also be cited from the preceding and subsequent periods. Analyses of the Middle Bronze Age ‘irregular burials’ at Makó-Dáli ugar and Érd-Hosszúföldek suggest multiple possible explanations for the phenomenon. At Makó, several archaeological features at a Maros Culture settlement contained human skeletons or bones, often accompanied by animal remains, ceramic vessels, and bronze ornaments. In one case, even traces of charcoal were recorded (Feat. 245). The positions of several skeletons suggest that the individuals had been bound. Numerous perimortem traumas were observed on the remains, indicating violent death.¹⁴⁷

At Érd, a Vátya Culture settlement yielded multiple pits containing human remains; pits no. 705, 1039, 1581, containing complete skeletons. In several cases (Feats. 207, 705, 1581), animal remains were also deposited alongside. In Feature 154, the mandible of an adult male was placed on a stone, with a dog buried above it.¹⁴⁸ The general health of the individuals was poor, and perimortem traumas suggesting violent deaths in multiple cases. The authors argue that the deposition of a single or a few bones may represent unrecognized elements of normative burial practices, particularly if the graves were manipulated post-burial. Although interpreting the features containing complete

143 KIRÁLY 2019; KOÓS 2004.

144 KIRÁLY 2019, 110–116.

145 GULYÁS 2020, 125.

146 KIRÁLY 2019; KIRÁLY 2020.

147 SZEVEÉNYI *et al.* 2020, 362–366.

148 SZEVEÉNYI *et al.* 2020, 366–372.

skeletons is extremely difficult, the presence of ceramic vessels, bronze objects, and animal remains suggests that these assemblages more likely represent ritual offerings. Chronological evidence indicates that this practice cannot be assigned to a single period, but was carried out throughout the entire occupation of the sites.¹⁴⁹

A non-normative multiple burial at Balatonkeresztúr-Réti-dűlő, associated with the Transdanubian Encrusted Pottery Culture, contained the remains of 8 individuals (5 children and 3 adults) placed in a beehive-shaped storage pit. No chronologically diagnostic artifacts were present, but radiocarbon measurements dated the feature to the Middle Bronze Age (95.4% probability: 1870–1620 BC). No signs of sudden or violent death were observed on the bones, nor were there indications of ritual activity. The individuals may have died during a sudden, tragic event (possibly an epidemic) and were buried by their community in a non-normative manner.¹⁵⁰

At Tiszafüred Majoros-halom III, the external settlement of Tiszafüred–Ásotthalom *tell* (Otomani–Füzesabony Culture), several irregular burials were recorded. Grave 1 was located in a large beehive-shaped storage pit, with an isolated skull, numerous animal bones, and fish scales above it. A contracted skeleton of Grave 1 lay on a contiguous shell layer, without associated artifacts. In Grave 4, interpreted as a mass burial, the remains of 42 individuals were recovered. On the top of the feature lay sherds of formerly complete vessels, articulated animal remains, and a shell layer, with human remains beneath in multiple strata. Upper layers contained mostly body parts, middle layers larger skeletal elements, and lower layers complete skeletons, reflecting different stages of decomposition. Some bones showed traces of burning. Approximately 60% of the individuals were children, compared with 34% present in the tell's cemetery. Associated finds included bone tools, an awl, a pendant, and a figurine. Within the mass grave, fragments of bowls, drinking and cooking vessels, portable hearths, querns, and animal bones (mainly sheep-goat, cattle, and pig) were found. One child had a bronze dagger. Most of the ceramics were deposited as waste, though some, such as a bowl at the top, were deliberately placed on top of the burial as a final act of a ritual. Ongoing scientific analyses aim to clarify the identities of the interred, the time and cause of death, and the circumstances of deposition.¹⁵¹

Several examples can also be cited from the territory of Slovakia from the Otomani–Füzesabony Culture. At Nižná Myšlá, Feature 308 yielded fragments of a child's skull and the remains of 4 individuals. This has been interpreted as the residue of a violent ritual. Animal bones, stone tools, and ceramic sherds were also recovered. The ash layer indicates that the ritual culminated in the use of fire, probably for the burning of sacrificial offerings.¹⁵²

At the fortified settlement of Spišský Štvrtok, Feature 40 contained the skeletons of 9 individuals, including 7 children, together with destroyed votive offerings. The authors interpret the finds as the result of ritual cannibalism.¹⁵³

At Gánovce, an 8–9 m deep wood-lined sacrificial well built over a thermal spring contained two stratified fills, including a layer of grain. Broken and partially burnt human bones from the upper level suggest possible ritual cannibalism. The lower level yielded a unique iron object (knife/sickle), gold and bronze ornaments, limestone idols, spindle whorls, bark vessels, ceramic vessels (bowls, amphorae, mugs, strainers, ash covers), a spoon, a mould, and a perforated antler fragment. The site may have functioned as a regional cult center, surrounded by a rampart, and is likely associated with the nearby Spišský Štvrtok settlement.¹⁵⁴

149 SZEVEŘÉNYI *et al.* 2020, 373–375.

150 KISS *et al.* 2023, 239, 245, Figs 4–5.

151 MESTER *et al.* 2022.

152 GANCARSKI *et al.* 2002, 33; BÁTORA 2018, 283.

153 GANCARSKI *et al.* 2002, 39–41; BÁTORA 2018, 283.

154 BÁTORA 2018, 283–284, 404, Fig. 117.1, Figs 238–239.

At Jelšovce, an Úňetice Culture settlement, a grain storage pit (Feat. 528) contained the remains of 5 individuals, immediately below a layer of charcoal and burnt soil. At the top of the fill, an upright quern stone was installed, partially rising above the pit's edge and likely serving as a stele within this context.¹⁵⁵ Other Úňetice settlement features, at Nitra-Kršany, Paté, and Žlkovce, also contain 'irregular' burials with the remains of 3–9 individuals. Excavation contexts suggest that these were important persons, killed as part of fertility–chthonic rituals and accompanied by human sacrifices.¹⁵⁶

At Budmerice, a site of the Maďarovce Culture, Feature 1 yielded a non-normative burial. Alongside the skeleton of a woman aged ca. 30 years of age, vessels, querns, shell and bronze ornaments, spindle whorls, bone and antler tools, a stone blade, charred wood fragments, and animal bones (e.g., dog) were recovered. In Feature 2, beneath a child's skull, a vessel depot was found, including 29 complete and 6 fragmentary vessels, querns and grinders, weights, charred oak planks, fingerprinted daub, burnt stones, two moulds, a nozzle, crucible fragment, slag, a *Brotlaibidol*, a bone arrowhead, a spoked ceramic wheel fragment, and a bronze ring. At the bottom of the pit, in a burnt grain layer, lay a complete and two fragmentary adult male femurs along with animal bones. In total, 21 non-normative burials containing complete skeletons are known from the Maďarovce Culture, one of which (Štúrovo-Obidská pusta) dates to the late Maďarovce–early Tumulus period.¹⁵⁷ Based on these data, Jozef Bátora argues that fertility, metalworking, and the activities of metalworkers, who may have performed “shamanic” functions, played a central role in contemporary rituals.¹⁵⁸

Some features at Górkápolnadomb from the Urnfield period, containing the remains of 3 robust adult males along with objects associated with metalworking, are interpreted by Gábor Ilon as evidence of cannibalism and ritual sacrifices related to metalworking. At Sármeleg-Száraz Eleje, above a mould placed in a storage vessel, fragments of the skull of a 30–35-year-old Cro-Magnoid male, as well as fragments of bowls and cups, a spindle whorl, a bronze ring, and a bone bead were recovered.¹⁵⁹ These are currently the only known non-normative burials from the Urnfield Culture in Hungary.¹⁶⁰

From northeastern Hungary, at least 140 irregular burials (using Ágnes Király's terminology: human remains found within settlements) are known from altogether 25 sites of the Late Bronze Age (Tumulus, Proto-Gáva, Gáva, Piliny, and Kyjatice Cultures, Br C/Br D – Ha B3 periods). Király interprets these as non-random but frequently repeated actions (specific rituals) and as a form of treatment of the dead. Recurrent elements of the presumed rituals include querns and the use of fire.¹⁶¹

Taken together with the earlier and later parallels presented above, the non-normative deposition of human remains during the Tumulus Culture is more likely to be explained by ritual motives and indicates continuity with earlier traditions. Examples of Nagydém highlight the important role of metalworking and/or metalworkers in ritual practice, with precedents visible in the Maďarovce Culture and traces of this practice persisting into the Urnfield period.¹⁶² The burials at Ménfőcsanak, Sárvár, Paks, and Oszlár can be directly paralleled with human sacrifices from the 2nd millennium BC in the Carpathian Basin. The skull fragments in Domaszék, Feature 422, can be aligned with the mandible deposited in Érd, Feature 154. In the case of Nagydém, Feature 1A, the composition of ob-

155 BÁTORA 2018, 283, Fig. 237.

156 JELÍNEK 2010, 99.

157 JELÍNEK – VAVÁK 2013, 271, Tab. 1; VAVÁK 2015.

158 BÁTORA 2018, 285.

159 ILON 2024, 290.

160 KIRÁLY 2020, 240–243; ILON 2024, 498–499.

161 KIRÁLY 2019, 213–214; KIRÁLY 2020, 240–243.

162 ILON 2024, 290, 498–499.

jects and associated animal sacrifices¹⁶³ also clearly indicate a connection to the examples above.¹⁶⁴ The unusual burials of the Tumulus Culture demonstrate continuity between earlier and later cases. In Transdanubia, however, this phenomenon appears to decline during the Urnfield period, while in the Tisza region it becomes highly frequent from the Br D period onwards.¹⁶⁵

Conclusions

The present study aimed to demonstrate that the deposition of vessels, known from both earlier and later periods of the Bronze Age, also occurred intensively during the Tumulus Culture in the territory of Hungary. Rites and/or communal events were widespread in contemporary societies, occurring at the level of individuals or households, beyond the household itself, at the scale of entire village communities, or even regional groups. Based on the composition of the vessel assemblages, the associated archaeological features and finds, depositions of votive or feasting (Group A, the emphasis is on the community), foundation or demolition offerings (Group B, both the social and ritual dimensions are important), cult or sacrificial features (Group C, the emphasis is on the ritual), and profane depositions with storage function (Group D/Group 1c) can be distinguished.

The tableware used in votive events and feasts, involving drinking and eating (Group A), occurring throughout the Tumulus period, generally includes drinking and serving vessels, with fewer cooking and storage vessels. Associated finds are less characteristic for these deposits.

Smaller deposits comprising 1 to 3 vessels (mostly Group B/Group A/Group 1a-b) represent the material traces of private household activities, reflecting the relationships maintained among household members and with the spiritual sphere ('household' or 'domestic spirits', ancestors). Assemblages containing 7 to 13 vessels (Group A/Group 2) also originated at the household level, yet they can be interpreted as the remains of more outward-oriented events, suitable for expressing social status and representation. Deposits with a larger number of vessels (18–37 and 60–150, Group A/Groups 3 and 4) occur rarely and can be associated with more formal or significant communal events, involving approximately 20–25 and 100–150 participants, respectively. The latter likely reflect activities encompassing the entire settlement community or even regional groups. Their distinct quantitative differentiation indicates that the size of the participating communities was structured in accordance with the nature of the events, as conditioned by the community's traditions.

Sacrificial features (Group C/Group 2 and 3), by contrast, contain complex assemblages, most often associated with fire, and sometimes including animal or even human offerings ('non-normative burials', see Group E). These are accompanied by a wide spectrum of symbolic objects representing different aspects of life, with a distinct role of metalworking and a pronounced chthonic character. Sacrificial features occur exclusively in the earliest Tumulus period, the transitional phase of the Middle and Late Bronze Age (Br B1–2). Transitional periods are characterized by socially unembedded sequences of actions, when established rites no longer provide solutions to pressing problems and fail to reflect the societal changes underway.¹⁶⁶

In the dynamic 16th century BC (Koszider phase), a period of social and environmental change—with increasingly complex networks and rapidly shifting climatic conditions¹⁶⁷—both individuals

163 ILON 1999; ILON 2024.

164 JELÍNEK – VAVÁK 2013; BÁTORA 2018; SZEVERÉNYI *et al.* 2020.

165 KIRÁLY 2019; KIRÁLY 2020.

166 INSOLL 2013, 16–17.

167 DEMÉNY *et al.* 2019.

and communities may have perceived the disruption of the former ‘order’, its disintegration, and the emergence of new relationships or even entirely new communities. This process may be reflected by the sacrificial assemblages characteristic of the earliest Tumulus phase. At Domaszék-Börcsök-tanya, variations are observable in traditions, spatial organization, and status of early, contemporary households, presenting a picture of a community that was initially not fully integrated.¹⁶⁸ Rituals symbolizing a wide range of life aspects, household activities, and society as a whole—including boat models representing travel and transition—may have facilitated the integration of groups with different origins and traditions (e.g. Kozármisleny, Paks-Gyapa).¹⁶⁹

Non-normative burials (Group E) are lesser known from the Tumulus Culture material compared to earlier and later periods. While profane explanations are also possible, these deposits are generally interpreted in a religious context, closely associated with complex sacrificial rituals or the special treatment of the dead. Metalworking and metalworkers played an important role in rituals with a pronounced fertility (chthonic) character, resembling those of Group C. A strong connection can be observed between these practices and sacrificial objects of the Mad’arovce and Otomani-Füzesabony Cultures, with the tradition continuing into the Pre-Gáva/Urnfield period, particularly in the Upper Tisza region.

Supplementary material

The data sets in Table 1 and Table 5 are available and can be referenced on the Zenodo platform. Tab. 1: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18411743>; Tab. 5: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18411869>.

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