



## ΜΩΜΟΣ ΙΧ.

A RITUÁLÉ RÉGÉSZETE  
Őskoros Kutatók IX. Összejövetelének  
konferenciakötete

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF RITUAL  
Proceedings of the IXth conference  
of researchers of prehistory



DISSERTATIONES ARCHAEOLOGICAE  
ex Instituto Archaeologico  
Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae  
*Supplementum 3.*

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Miskolc, 2015. október 14–16.

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of researchers of prehistory  
14–16 October 2015, Miskolc

edited by

Piroska CSENGERI – András KALLI – Ágnes KIRÁLY – Judit KOÓS



Budapest 2020

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# Előszó

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2015. október 14–16. között a miskolci Herman Ottó Múzeum rendezte meg a IX. ΜΩΜΟΣ konferenciát, vagyis az Őskoros Kutatók IX. Összejövetelét. E konferenciasorozat 1997-ben indult útjára, és hagyományosan két évente, mindig egy meghatározott témakörben ad lehetőséget az ősrégészet kutatóinak újabb eredményeik bemutatására. Debrecen, Szombathely, Kőszeg és Százhalombatta után Miskolc városa először adott otthont a programnak.

A konferencia témája ezúttal „*A rituálé régészete*” volt, a tematika kidolgozását az ELTE BTK Régészettudományi Intézetének kutatói segítették. A felvezető és összefoglaló előadásokon túl a *Strukturált depozitumok; Rituális cselekvésmódok és rituális specialisták; Rituális tér (rituális építmények, rituális táj, rituális térhasználat)*; valamint a *Temetkezések mint rituális cselekvésformák* altémák köré rendeződött a program. A konferencia fő célja az volt, hogy közösen számba vegyük azokat a jelenségeket, melyek ebben a körben értelmezhetőek, ütköztessük az eltérő megközelítéseket, interpretációkat, és közös fogalmi keretet alakítsunk ki – hiszen a kutatás így tud megújulni, fejlődni.

Ezeknek a céloknak csak részben tudtunk megfelelni, a konferenciát mégis eredményesen zártuk. A három nap alatt 31 előadás hangzott el, mellettük 12 poszter is bemutatásra került. A résztvevő 120 kutatót és érdeklődőt rendhagyó módon fogadó „Pannon-tenger Múzeum” hangulatos helyszínnek bizonyult, és sokat jelentett, hogy a szervezésben a Múzeum munkatársai és a közel 40 fős Régészeti Tár egy emberként vett részt.

Az esemény óta eltelt négy évben több kutató munkája is megjelent, így ebben a kötetben tizennégy tanulmány kapott helyet. A közlések a konferencia altémáit felbontva, immár időrendi sorrendben, a kőkorszaktól a vaskor végéig foglalkoznak a „rituálé régészettel”, eredményeiket egy kulturális antropológiai tanulmány egészíti ki. A kötet kiadása egy sikertelen pályázatot követően a Herman Ottó Múzeumban anyagi nehézségekbe ütközött, emiatt a Szervezők nevében szeretnénk megköszönni az ELTE BTK Régészettudományi Intézetének a lehetőséget, és különösen Váczi Gábor áldozatos munkáját, amelynek révén a *Dissertationes Archaeologicae* sorozat *Supplementum* köteteként végül mégis hozzáférhetővé válhat a kutatás és az érdeklődők számára.



# The Role of Sun Symbols in the Burial Rite of the Middle Bronze Age Vatya Culture

## A case study

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### **Abstract**

*The case study investigates the burial customs of the Middle Bronze Age Vatya culture in the Carpathian Basin. It aims to deliver a comparative analysis of the archaeological finds and characteristics of several cemeteries where communities cremated and buried their dead in urns.*

*It also examines the ways grave artefacts are placed, and the shape and ornamentation of ceramics. It also gives a concise review on beliefs related to cremation. The case study aims at presenting just how much information the seemingly monotone burial customs of the Vatya culture can offer on their belief system by analysing the shapes, arrangements and ornamentations of buried artefacts.*

*The decoration of grave ceramics often includes solar – light symbols, therefore, the author argues that the regular use of light symbols has a significant role in their belief system, especially in the deceased's journey to the Otherworld.*

---

## Introduction

The most important information about the burials of the Vatya culture were provided by the research of I. Bóna and M. Vicze.<sup>1</sup> The high number of graves in cemeteries, the apparently 'boring' uniform funeral ritual provides excellent opportunity for analysis. The chronology of these cemeteries also provides the chance to observe temporal changes of the burial ritual.

In the present study, I have collected the most relevant and important information about the cemeteries listed in *Table 1*. In many cases, however, the publications do not present material for each grave. If so, their description is often left incomplete. Their orientations are inaccurate, and the description about the position of each find is also too generic. Old publications did not place any emphasis on the exact description of the ornaments on the objects either. When presenting information about ornamentations, very often, even the clearly visible, independent motifs and/or symbols are divided into parts, and the description merges them with the elements of other decorations. Therefore, motifs considered to be sun symbols are not or hardly recognizable based solely on the description like in case of zigzag ornaments, garland ornaments, dotted or vertical scratched lines, etc.

This article is also intended to be a case study that aims to interpret, to look for relationships between phenomena, and perhaps to convey the belief itself through the analysis of the materialized elements of the faith. Despite the difficulties described above, I think I managed to prove on the basis of the material available that the reason for the use of sun symbols could be the belief in death. My previous work provided the necessary basis for identifying the sun-

1 BÓNA 1975; VICZE 2011.



moon symbols.<sup>2</sup> The primary role of ethnographic cases mentioned in the study is to give an insight into the native ideas about death. An important aspect when finding analogies was to locate similar ecological environments, often including isolation, which ensured the survival of ancient traditions for a long time.

## **The role of death rites: the ideology of cremation**

A death ritual is always some sort of religious, spiritual event. From an anthropological point of view, burial rituals represent the last phase of rites of passage. Rites of passages indicate the most important stages of human life such as birth, adulthood, marriage, retirement and death. Every culture marks and commemorates them according to their own traditions. The most significant of them are burial rites.

If they are not held following community traditions, it can greatly hinder the process of mourning and can have a significant impact on the living.<sup>3</sup>

Anthropologist Christopher Carr investigated the nature of death ceremonies in the case of 32 non-state social communities. In a comprehensive study, he claims that besides the social situation of the deceased in the community, philosophical-religious beliefs such as worldview, ideas on the soul and its impacts on the living play the most important role in death rituals. The preparation and placement of the corpse, the orientation of graves and the spatial arrangement of grave finds provide the most useful information for studying belief systems.<sup>4</sup> All this should also encourage archaeologists to identify beliefs. Archaeologists can investigate much more than just simply describing the details of the funeral. They can gain some insight into their beliefs as well by comparing funeral details with ethnographic-historical data. Ian Hodder had already drawn attention to this in the early 1980s. The basic elements of a community's view of the world are worthy of archaeological investigation. Traces of their worldview could be found in archaeological finds and the material culture of death ceremonies.<sup>5</sup>

## **What does death mean to believers?**

Death leads to another status, it is not the end of life, only a transition. The deceased continue their lives according to local beliefs of the afterlife. The Otherworld, the World of the Dead, is very often the 'projection' of the Real World. The dead live in better conditions, but in a similar way to the world of the living. Contemporaneous with the Vatyá culture, the Hittite even imagined a separate sun goddess in the realm of the dead, who was the underground pair (impersonator) of the celestial Sun and whose task was to open the portal. She brought evil and unclean things, diseases on earth.<sup>6</sup>

Cremation is not only the physical destruction of the body for health reasons. The ideology of uniting fire and death in some cultures also reflects the meaning and significance of life. Its implementation is governed by countless beliefs based on myths and religious instructions.

2 PÁSZTOR 2015; PÁSZTOR 2017a; PÁSZTOR 2017b.

3 VAN GENNEP 1909; BALLARD 2008.

4 CARR 1995, 157, 168, 188–189.

5 HODDER 1982, 215.

6 TARACHA 2009.

The process, through its symbolic details, gives a picture on the beliefs of the culture, on the meaning of life and the importance of human destiny. Fire and death themselves represent strong symbolism. The fire is a universal symbol. It carries numerous meaning from chaos, destruction, purification to cosmos where the heavenly fire is the guard of the Sun and the cosmos. Its sacred character is present in all cultures. In Hinduism, e.g. the most important fire sacrifice is the cremation of the deceased.<sup>7</sup>

Death is one of the most important station of human life. Thus, uniting fire and death is more than a simple death ceremony. Fire is also the means of transformation, and with its help, the deceased reaches the Otherworld where he continues his 'life'. Therefore, fire is also a symbol of rebirth.<sup>8</sup>

According to Carr, the direction of the dead body placed in a grave (orientation) primarily reflects the view on afterlife. The orientation often shows the way to the Realm of Death.<sup>9</sup> In case of cremation, there is only one direction: upward to the sky.

Siberian tribes leading a traditional way of life are believed to use cremation to force the soul to leave the dead body, and the living. On the other hand, cremation is also beneficial for the deceased as with the flames and upward smoke the soul can reach heavenly regions faster. Many other communities such as the North American Tlingit tribe believe that cremation is good for the dead because those who have been cremated can expect a warm and comfortable life in the Otherworld, while others buried differently will suffer from the cold. The Australian and Melanese natives also believe that cremation on pyre is good for the dead as it protects them from the cold, or illuminates the way to the realm of the dead. At the same time, the fire is also considered to be a cleaning medium.<sup>10</sup>

## Cremation

According to archaeological data, the earliest evidence for cremation can be found in Europe. There are cremation graves dating back to the earliest period of Mesolithic Lepenski Vir culture between 9500/7200–6000 BC (Vlasac).<sup>11</sup>

Cremation was practised in the Carpathian Basin even before the Bronze Age.<sup>12</sup> This ritual, however, did not become common for a long time. At the end of the Late Copper Age (4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC) there was a change in the burial cult of some communities as cremation became dominant.<sup>13</sup>

Significant change occurred at the beginning of the Bronze Age in the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC.<sup>14</sup> Cremation became almost exclusive in the Central and Western parts of the Carpathian Basin. This method further popularized and expanded in time, which may have

7 OESTIGAARD 2005.

8 DAVIES 2005, 186–190.

9 CARR 1995, 157.

10 LOPATIN 1935, 171–172.

11 LETICA 1974.

12 Körös culture, Gorzsa-Cukortanya: GAZDAPUSZTAI 1957; Tisza culture: RACZKY 1987, 80; Lengyel culture: KALICZ 1985; Tiszapolgár and Bodrogkeresztúr cultures: BOGNÁR-KUTZIÁN 1963.

13 Baden culture: KALICZ 1963.

14 MARKOVÁ – ILON 2013, with further literature.

contributed to the development of increasingly special bronze objects made in fire, and the development and flourishing of bronze art. This funeral ritual became uniform at the end of the Early Bronze Age in some major communities. Cremation gradually replaced skeletal burials and became dominant during the transition from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age. This change was accompanied by a number of phenomena such as cemeteries with hundreds (if not thousands) of graves and ever-decreasing amount of finds in the graves.<sup>15</sup>

The burial rite of the Vanya culture based on archaeological remains appears to be essentially uniform in every cemetery of the culture where the dead were buried in urns (*see Tab. 1*). Defined grave groups were observed in these cemeteries. Urns were usually not buried deep and graves could have been marked. In many cases, stone coverings were also observed.<sup>16</sup> Urns were always covered with a bowl or its mouth was closed with a smaller bowl.

The graves almost always contained a small pot (mug, jug). Jewels were cremated together with the dead and were put next to the ashes or into a separate, small hanging pot or mug, often placed outside the urn.

These ritual elements are not new. Naturally, there are many common features between the burial rite of the Vanya culture and the urn grave cemeteries of the former Nagyrév culture (e.g. Dunaújváros-Duna-dűlő, Kisapostag, Szigetszentmiklós, Kulcs, etc.).

The use of bowl covering or closing the neck of the urn can be found in earlier cultures as well. The application of double sealing also appears in graves belonging to the Kisapostag culture.<sup>17</sup> It is undeniable, however, that this custom would eventually characterize the burial rite of the Vanya culture.

Another common feature is that they put similar number of pots in the graves (3–4 pieces). Small mugs are placed inside and outside the urn (or possibly in the covering bowl). In the case of the cemeteries investigated (where data were given, e.g. Szigetszentmiklós, Kulcs) mugs outside the Nagyrév and Vanya urns were usually placed on the sides facing East, South-East, South, South-West, West – sides facing the Sun's path.

Based on the facts listed above, Rózsa Kalicz-Schreiber claimed that the differences between these cultures could not have been caused by ethnical change.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, there is no gap in their beliefs, just development.

## Ritual manifestation in material culture

### *Closing the mouth of the urn*

Vanya culture is not the only one whose burial ritual involves covering the mouth of the urn with a bowl. It can also be seen in the urn graves of Kisapostag and Nagyrév cultures. This custom was certainly preserved and continued by succeeding generations. The popularization of this belief is proven by the more frequent use of double sealing (a small bowl in the mouth of the urn and whole is covered by a larger bowl) during the existence of the Vanya culture.

15 REBAY-SALISBURY 2012, 21.

16 E.g. Százhalombatta-Alsószőlők: POROSZLAI 1990; Budatétény-Növény utca, Budapest XI.-Halmi út, Sós-kút-M7 motorway 191: REMÉNYI 2002; Dunaújváros-Duna-dűlő: VICZE 2011.

17 E.g. Dunaújváros: graves 516 and 544: SZATHMÁRI 1983, 10.

18 KALICZ-SCHREIBER 1995, 33.

It is also interesting to point out that the custom of covering various things with a bowl can occur even in skeletal burials. The double grave of Vučedol culture excavated in the vineyards of Streim near Vukovar in 1990 presents a good example. Two people were buried with characteristic white encrusted pots in an early classical phase (B1) grave. The interesting feature about the funeral is that the two skeletons were covered with a single large, unornamented vessel, leaving the heads open.<sup>19</sup> A similar ritual could also be observed in another *Vučedol* twin grave found on a nearby hill (Gradac). The phenomenon was also observed in the Gomolava grave dating back to the late Kostolac culture, but is also well-known from other Copper Age graves of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.<sup>20</sup>

Besides cemeteries, covering objects or human remains by a vessel can also be observed in ritual environment. Two cases of cultic ensemble of Tripoli-Cucutenian cultures (Phase B1) offer good examples for this. At the archaeological site at Buznea-Siliște / După Grădini (Romania), four clay human figurines were discovered in an independent house, arranged in a cross form. They were covered with a single bowl. Six small, painted bowls were also placed around the central grouping at equal distances. Another cult ensemble was discovered in Nedeia-Ghelaiesti (Romania). In the southeast corner of house 5, there were six vases placed in a circular form under the floor. In the center, four small, anthropomorphic clay statues were placed symmetrically inside an amphora. The mouth of the amphora was closed with a small bowl and the whole was covered with a larger bowl. Both covers were placed with their openings facing downward.<sup>21</sup>

Several depots are known from the Bronze Age and also from the Carpathian Basin where pots are placed with their mouths facing downwards in the pit. Sacred meanings are attributed to them.<sup>22</sup> Even in the ‘contemporaneous’ Hittite rituals, the sacrificial dishes were often placed with their mouth facing downwards. Some of the numerous rituals included the magic closure of evil spirits.<sup>23</sup> The ruins of a collapsed building were also closed in a ritual before a new construction began. In this ritual, a bowl containing the remains of a sacrificed pig was placed upside down in the pit.<sup>24</sup> Marina Hoti claimed that the dead were covered to prevent the bad spirits – including the spirit of the dead from leaving the grave and enter the living world as a spirit.<sup>25</sup>

This argument can also be used to explain the burial rite of the Vatyá culture. They wanted to close the mouth of the urn by all means. If no bowl was made for this purpose, then they covered it with the bottom of another dish. The grave or the urn, is actually the entrance to the Other-world – its closing prevents the soul from coming out of it – returning to the world of the living.

This was also confirmed by the practice of packing stones on the graves.<sup>26</sup> Its traces were observed in some Vatyá cemeteries.<sup>27</sup>

19 HOTI 1994, Fig. 1.

20 HOTI 1994 with related references.

21 MAKKAY 1992; HOTI 1994, 191–193, with further references.

22 L. NAGY 2013 with further detailed literature.

23 MAKKAY 1992, 224–226.

24 ÖKSE 2015, 126.

25 HOTI 1994, 194.

26 POROSZLAI 1990, 210.

27 Budatétény-Növény utca, Budapest XI.-Halmi út, Sósút-M7 motorway 191: REMÉNYI 2002; Százhalombatta-Alsó Szőlők: POROSZLAI 1990; Dunaújváros-Duna-dűlő: VICZE 2011.

### ***Intentional fracture***

In a cemetery at Biatorbágy-Szarvasugrás, it was observed that many objects were deliberately damaged before being placed in the grave and only then, they were put on the pyre.<sup>28</sup> M. Vicze argues that in the case of certain types of artefacts (e.g. torcs) only the Vatyá culture is characterized by this death ritual feature.<sup>29</sup> It was also observed in the Budatétény-Növény utca cemetery that large part of the various ceramic sherds found in graves were already in a fragmented state when they were placed inside the grave.<sup>30</sup> The practice of deliberate breakage has significant literature. In my study, I do not wish to deal with it in detail but only refer to an ethnographic analogy.

Ownership has a strange meaning in the worldview of native tribes of the Amur Basin, North-East Asia, and the American Indians. Death does not take away deceased person's right of owning the possessions they owned during their life. His spirit has the right to everything he owned in his life. Since the deceased is now a spirit, they only need the spirit of their belongings. Therefore the objects are broken or burnt on the grave so that their spirit can follow their master through their 'death'.<sup>31</sup>

### ***The shape of the urn***

The cremated body is placed in a large pot. Its shape can be similar to the storage vessels of settlements. Sørensen and Rebay argue that Vatyá graves may refer to a storage pit, a pit that is a characteristic element of its tell settlement. This feature may indicate a common ideological background behind graves and storage pits.<sup>32</sup> The shape of the dishes varies over time. The early, spherical shape is transformed.

One of the most popular urn types in the flourishing period of the Vatyá culture is the double truncated cone body with beveled, funneled or slightly curved neck (rarely cylindrical neck). The settlement version of the most widespread urn type could store cereals. The funeral ritual does not really reflect the age and gender of the deceased. Perhaps the urns symbolized the human body as decorations looking like parts of the human body also appear on them. Except the well-known urn of Dunaújváros, where a dagger-holding hand is formed on the belly of the urn and therefore may represent a male body, the other gender-bearing decorations are more of a female character. Two bumps representing female breasts can be seen on several urns (e.g. Lovasberény-Jánoshegy *k* and *r* graves, Cegléd-Öreghegy) (*Fig. 7*).

### ***Decoration***

Regarding burial rituals, the most notable feature of grave ceramics is not their shape but their decoration. It was not particularly remarkable in the first half of the Vatyá period. Although the Nagyrév culture played a role in the formation of Vatyá culture, the complex symbolic system found on many Nagyrév-type ceramics was not used anymore. It occasionally appears here and there but disappears from the collection of motives used by their descendants. The general style changes in later periods, but especially in the Koszider period. An ornamental

28 MALI 2014, 26.

29 VICZE 2011, 108.

30 REMÉNYI 2002, 85.

31 LOPATIN 1935, 136.

32 SØRENSEN – REBAY-SALISBURY 2008, 59–61.

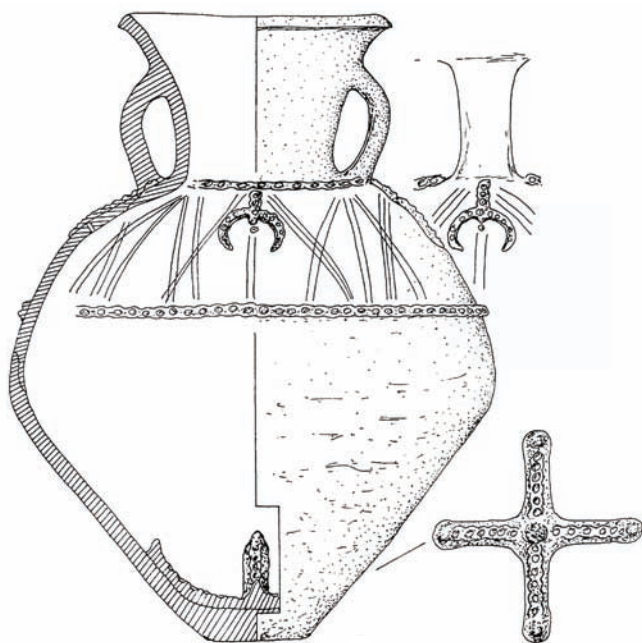


Fig. 1. Dunaújváros, grave 929 (VICZE 2011, 141).  
1. kép. Dunaújváros, 929. sír (VICZE 2011, 141).

bowls. Such triangular – sunbeam-like or circular cross motifs are often seen at the bottom of small hanging pots, which are always richly decorated if they are found among the finds. Mugs are rarely ornamented. In the late period, they may be decorated with concentric circles or the characteristic group of three dots. In addition to ornamental elements considered to be sun symbols, symbols clearly representing the moon can also be seen. On the neck of the urns in graves 26, 39 and 829 in Dunaújváros, the well-known crescent shape can also be found among pendants, which perhaps represent a necklace (Fig. 1).

system with new elements and complex motifs is created in which older and newer motifs are used and mixed more freely and abundantly.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, the way of decorating the vessels is transformed, it becomes finer and more elaborate. The upper part of urns becomes more pronounced, maybe they wanted to make them visible when they were put into the graves.<sup>34</sup> The new decorative elements include motifs that are often referred as solar symbols.

Ornaments, seen from above on the shoulders of urns often form an independent motif, e.g. triangular patterns or regular line bundles starting at the neck line resemble the motif treasure already known from the outside of the

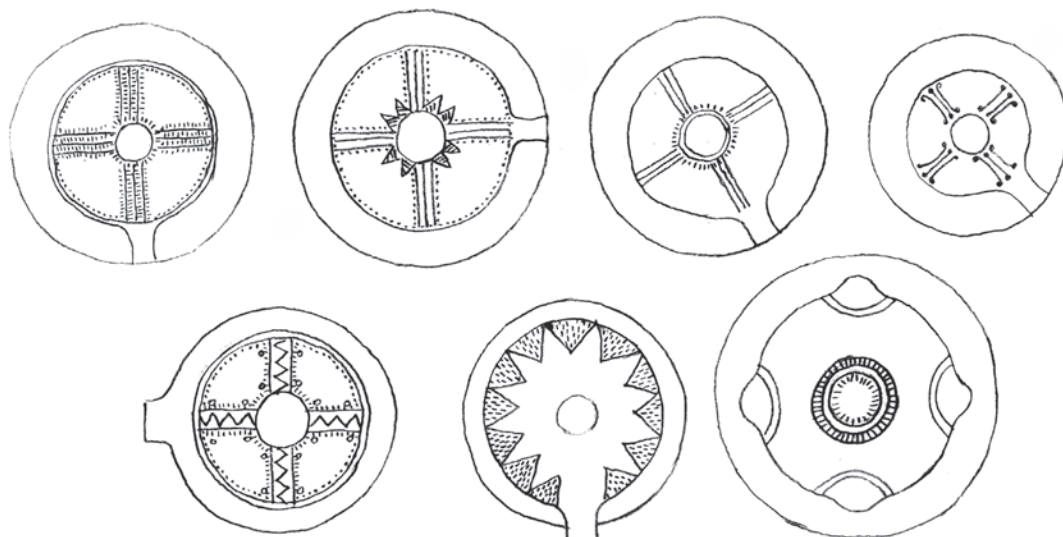


Fig. 2. 1 – Tiszaug-Kisrépart, 2 – Ladánybene, 3–7 – Újhartyán-Vátya (BÓNA 1975, Taf. 30).  
2. kép. 1 – Tiszaug-Kisrépart, 2 – Ladánybene, 3–7 – Újhartyán-Vátya (BÓNA 1975, Taf. 30.)

33 VICZE 2013, 16.

34 VICZE 1992, 94.

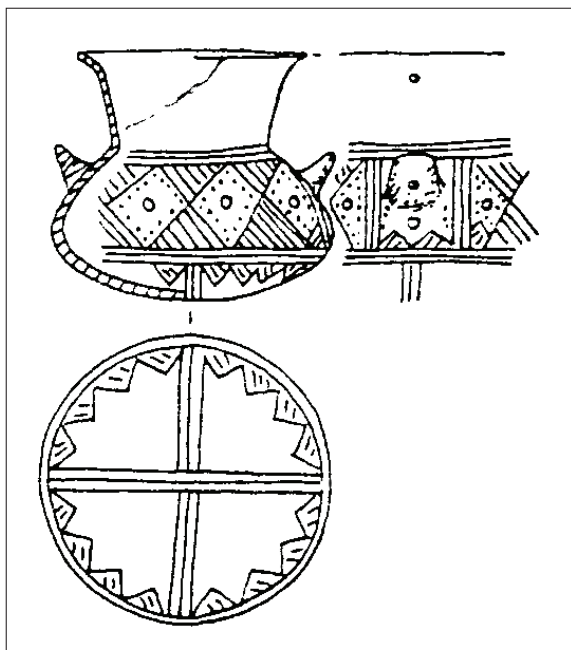


Fig. 3. Dunaújváros-Duna-dűlő, grave 1074 (VICZE 2011, 62).

3. kép. Dunaújváros-Duna-dűlő, 1074. sír (VICZE 2011, 62).



Fig. 4. Kelebia, the urn of grave 114.

4. kép. Kelebia, a 114. sír urnája.

The comparative study of Bronze Age symbols in connection with the Sun and the Moon demonstrates that, apart from the simple radial sundisc and moon crescent, these symbols actually can also represent atmospheric phenomena (halo) generated by the sun and moonlight.<sup>35</sup> Since both celestial bodies – although with different frequency – can create the same light phenomena, the celestial bodies themselves could not have been important for the Bronze Age people, but rather the spectacular celestial phenomena around them. Therefore, it is more suitable to call them light symbols.<sup>36</sup>

The most common light symbol among decorative motifs appears to be a huge four-spoked wheel in the sky. This halo is already well known from the crossed-rib pendant of Middle Bronze Age depots and it is the main motif for the Late Bronze Age pierced pendants. Most often, this ‘wheel’ motif decorated the outer surface of the bowls covering the mouth of urns<sup>37</sup> (Fig. 2), as well as the bottom of ornamental hanging vessels (Fig. 3).

This circle-cross pattern is common in the late period of the Vátya culture.<sup>38</sup> Rich examples are known from Vátya III period.<sup>39</sup> One can also find simpler halo and corona phenomena depicted as concentric circles, carved and filled with lime, for example, on several Kelebian-type urns,<sup>40</sup> on tall lime-encrusted cover dishes,<sup>41</sup> and also as the only motif on mugs. They are primarily found on forms influenced by Transdanubian Encrusted Pottery Culture (Fig. 4).

On the golden armlets with crescent-end found at Bellye (Bilje) and Dunavecse, the three bumps surrounded by smaller dots symbolize the Sun with two mock suns. This symbol played an important role in determining the chronology of the armlets and finding out other information about them. Tibor Kovács believed that the pattern appeared first and foremost

35 PÁSZTOR 2015; PÁSZTOR 2017b.

36 PÁSZTOR 2017a.

37 In all late-phase cemeteries, for example, Kelebia graves 22, 40: ZALOTAY 1957; Nagykarácsony: KESZI 2003; Dunaújváros graves 101, 266, 748: VICZE 2011.

38 REMÉNYI 2002.

39 BÓNA 1975.

40 E.g. graves 23, 38, 40, 46, 74, 107: ZALOTAY 1957.

41 E.g. graves 2, 27, 31, 67: ZALOTAY 1957.

on ceramic and bronze artefacts of people living in the Eastern part of the Carpathian Basin in the last period of the Middle Bronze Age.<sup>42</sup> Rarely, but the three dots also appear on the burial ceramics of the Vatia culture (urn, mug, bowl).<sup>43</sup>

Although, the forms of grave ceramics are often similar (or the same) to the shape of domestic pots, but several elements (symbols?) of their decoration differ from that of domestic ones. The decoration of the fine ceramics of settlements is similar to decorations visible on the outer surface of the bowls placed in graves, but is less frequent.

Why were grave ceramics decorated at all? Could the motifs and symbols have any relation to the burial rite? Ethnographic research provides many examples of the role of symbols in rituals related to death. Here, only a few relevant examples are mentioned.

Escorting the deceased with sun and moon symbols was among the customs of the Obi-Ugrian people. Some Khanty (Ostyak) communities used to draw solar and lunar symbols with charcoal on the inner wall of the coffin, or they cut them out of birch bark and nailed them to the inside wall of the coffin. The Yuganians, however, drew only half a sun and moon, because the other half was left in the sky 'to illuminate the living'.<sup>44</sup> It was also recorded about the Sosva Vogul people that they drew sun and moon on the coffin to give light to the dead.<sup>45</sup>

The ritual dress of shamans is a treasure trove of symbols. For example, the purpose of the metal sun and moon symbols on the back of the Yakut shaman's garment was to illuminate the path of the shaman when he escorted the dead in the dark Otherworld.<sup>46</sup> Also a good example for believing in the 'magic power' of symbols is the Romanian habit of giving *pomána*. In the Romanian system of archaic thinking, the notions of purity, light and abundance play an important role in the passage rites of death. They believe that the dead will use some of the sacrifice as toll to enter the Otherworld. The soul



Fig. 5. *Pomána* cakes from Romania.

5. kép. *Pomána* kalácsok Romániából.

starts a difficult journey where he also has to pay a toll to continue. Without this help, the dead would linger and endanger the living and become a ghost. Cakes can also serve as a toll and have rich symbolism. Among the many types of *pomána* cakes (hooks, ladders, crosses, swastikas, etc.) the *parastas* and the *prinós* actually represent a sun wheel. All cakes have their task in the afterlife, for example, sun-cakes provide light (Fig. 5).<sup>47</sup>

42 KOVÁCS 1991, 23.

43 E.g. Kelebia, graves 29, 52, 54: ZALOTAY 1957; Dunaújváros, grave 811: VICZE 2011.

44 KULEMZIN et al. 2006, 66.

45 VÉRTES 1990, 124.

46 HOPPÁL 1993, 188.

47 GAZDA 2001, 304–306.



Ancient Greek archaeological finds from the Hellenistic period also provide examples for the use of the light symbol in death rituals. In the cemetery of the ancient Kydonia (today Chania, Crete), a coin (obolos) was placed in the mouth of the death as a payment for Kharon. These coins often depicted a wheel-shaped sun symbol or a sun disk with rays and the soul bird in the middle (Fig. 6).

The application of motifs similar to Vatyá culture symbols is not uncommon on the burial artefacts of contemporary archaeological cultures. Studying the sun symbols of the Middle and Late Bronze Age burials in Romania, Nona Palincaş argues that these are the signs of an actual sun cult.<sup>48</sup>

Although, I would not speak of a fully formed cult, but the Sun certainly played a significant role in their beliefs about the death. However, such a comparative study is not the purpose of this paper.

## Summary

The study of cemeteries belonging to the Vatyá culture indicates that burial customs related to cremation were very similar to each other. Throughout the life span of the culture, they became almost uniform not only in the arrangement of objects and ashes in the grave, but also in the form and decoration of grave vessels. Writing about the 1600 grave Dunaújváros cemetery, Magdolna Vicze says that the classic Vatyá urn became even more uniform and hardly distinguishable over time.<sup>49</sup> This is true for many other cemeteries.

It is the ‘monotony’ of the archaeological traces of Vatyá burials, the ‘tiringly’ common characteristics observed in all cremation cemeteries that justify the reliability of the data and support the conclusions drawn from their observation.

### ***Why do they place ashes into an urn and not in the grave pit? Why are they covered with one or two bowls?***

Maybe they wanted to force the spirit of the dead into a limited space which also served as a portal to the Otherworld. The bowl placed over the mouth of the urn, as the final step in the closing ritual, could also contain food offering (and possibly also drink offering in a small mug). Covering with a larger dish may indicate a growing belief in the closing ritual inherited from the ancestors of Kisapostag and Nagyrév cultural groups.



Fig. 6. Obolos depicting a light symbol from the ancient Kydonia cemetery (4<sup>th</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> century BC). Archaeological Museum of Chania, Crete.

6. kép. Fényszimbólum ábrázolása obuluson, Kydonia temetője (Kr. e. 4–3. század). Archaeological Museum of Chania, Kréta.

48 PALINCAŞ 2013.

49 VICZE 2013, 16.

***Could the shape of urns have a special role?***

A large pile of grain was found together with a vessel of relief ornamentation in one of the Vatyá pits at Százhalombatta-Földvár tell settlement. On two sides of the dish's belly there are two slender female arms with bracelets and two bumps between them, marking female breasts.<sup>50</sup> The vessel dates back to the Rákospalota phase and its shape is identical to the shape of the classic Vatyá urn (Fig. 8). This archaeological finding supports the assumption that classic urns found in all cemeteries symbolize the pregnant female body in order to visualize the reproductivity/fertility to everyone. So they put the ashes into a 'pregnant female body' in order to assist the dead's rebirth in the World of the Dead (Fig. 7).

***Was it important to decorate grave ceramics?***

Ethnographic analogies prove that the decoration on ritual objects also has a significance. Signs considered as symbols of the Sun played an important role. They secured the light for the dead during the dark, long and harsh path leading to the Otherworld. Without them, the soul of the dead would not find the way in the darkness. Maybe we should accept this association in interpreting the use of light symbols on the grave ceramics of Vatyá culture. There is a well-known golden armlet which was made in Transylvania and not at a Vatyá workshop,<sup>51</sup> but it was discovered at Dunavecse, in a Vatyá cultural region. Thus, it proves well the significance of light symbols in the contemporaneous religious world.<sup>52</sup> The importance of the Sun (sunlight?) is also reinforced by the definite tendency of placing small mugs on the sunny side of the urns such as East, Southeast, South, and Southwest.

Siberian beliefs regarding cremation indicate that cremation cannot be clearly attributed to the celestial spheres. The Vatyá culture does not use sun symbols in the early phase of the it.

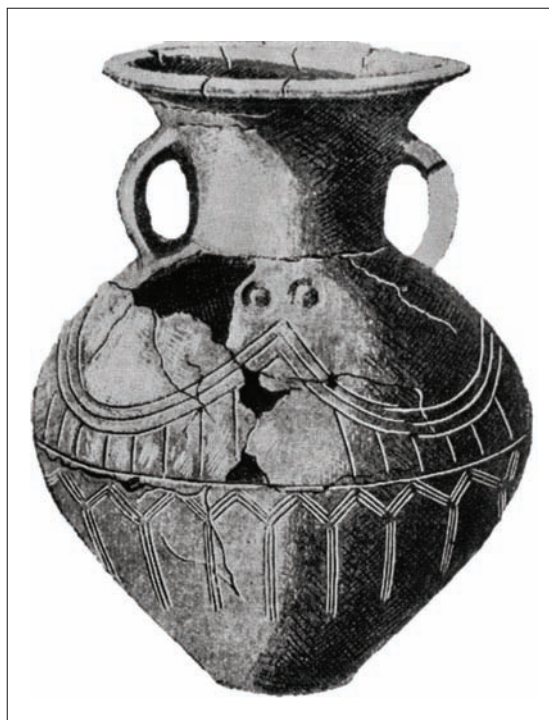


Fig. 7. Urn of grave at Lovasberény-Jánoshegy. 7. kép. Urna Lovasberény-Jánoshegyről.

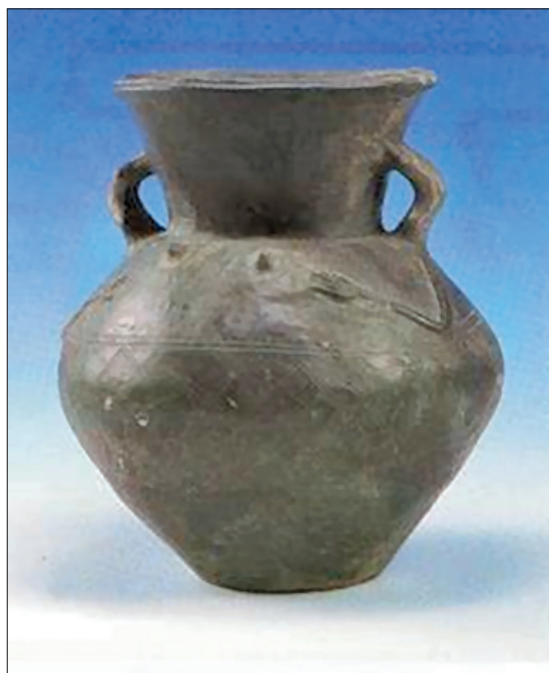


Fig. 8. A storage container from the tell settlement of Százhalombatta-Földvár. 8. kép. Tárolóedény Százhalombatta-Földvár tell településéről.

50 POROSZLAI 2003, 153.

51 KOVÁCS 1991, 24.

52 PÁSZTOR 2015.

The use of light symbols increased during later periods, in the second half of the Middle Bronze Age, especially during the Koszider era. It marks the enrichment of the belief system and perhaps the entry of celestial spheres into the notions about the Afterlife. There are elements of the beliefs related to death, and observed in burial customs, that survived throughout the entire duration and range of the culture. Over time, perhaps, a unified belief system was emerging for those who chose cremation.

## Conclusion

The death ritual is one of the most important passage rites and is associated with an extensive and complex tradition. It would be a mistake to assume that the concept of death is eternal and does not change over time and space. Our current relationship with death cannot be projected back into the past. However, ethnographic analogy can offer a lot of help, especially in understanding the traditional mindset about death and the afterlife. These beliefs can differ in detail even within a larger community, and change over time. Funeral rituals are not static and not universal even for groups belonging to the same cultural group. Beliefs vary according to the socio-economic situation of the period and region and differ within the official and folk religious paradigms. Therefore, it would be misleading to assume that faith and ritual were unified within one archaeological culture. Although, there was a period in the life of the Vátya culture when they were very close to this ‘ideal image’ – as various archaeological finds and features prove it.

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## **A napszimbólumok szerepe a Vatia-kultúra temetkezési rítusában Esettanulmány**

Az esettanulmány a Vatia-kultúra temetkezési rítusát tanulmányozza több temető összehasonlító elemzésével, a térbeli és időbeli tényezők figyelembe vételével. Vizsgálja a mellékletek elhelyezési módját, a kerámia formáját és díszítését. Rövid áttekintést nyújt a halotthamvasztáshoz kapcsolódó hiedelmekről.

A tanulmány célja, hogy a mellékletek elhelyezésének, illetve a formák és díszítések elemzésével bemutassa, hogy az „egyhangú” temetkezési rítus milyen sok információt szolgáltathat ennek a régészeti kultúrának a hitvilágáról.

A kerámiamellékletek díszítése gyakran tartalmaz napszimbólumot is, ezért a szerző szerint annak szándékos, rendszeres alkalmazása a hitvilágban betöltött különleges szerepére utal.

Emília PÁSZTOR

<i>Site</i>	<i>Chronology</i>	<i>Graves</i>	<i>Rite</i>	<i>References</i>
Adony-Plébánia-kert	Vatya Phase I and II	33 urn graves	14/16 graves covered with bowl (87%)	JUNGBERT 1985
Biatorbágy-Szarvasugrás	Vatya Phase I	115 urn graves	no data per graves, but it follows the characteristic ritual	MALI 2014
Budatétény-Növény utca	from Nagyrév to Koszider period	126 urn graves	no data per graves, but it follows the characteristic ritual, stone packing	REMÉNYI 2002
Csanytelek-Palé	late Vatya or Koszider period	42 urn graves	18 graves covered with bowls (43%)	LŐRINCZY – TROGMAYER 1995
Csongrád-Vidre-sziget	late Vatya grave group – Vatya III	20 urn graves	no data about position of dishes, could be assumed	G. SZÉNÁSZKY 1977, 18–42
Csongrád-Saroktanya (homokgödör)	late Vatya grave group – Vatya III	10 urn graves	8 graves covered with bowls, closed with small bowls (80%)	G. SZÉNÁSZKY 1977, 43–44
Dömsöd	early phase of Vatya	59 graves	9/16 urn grave covered with bowl (56%)	BUTLER – SCHALK 1984
Dunaújváros-Duna-dűlő	Vatya I–II–III Koszider period	517 cremations /530 graves (98%) Koszider period: 216 cremations /226 graves (95%)	regular rite, neck closed with small bowl, covered by larger bowl, ashes in anatomical order, stone packing	VICZE 2011
Ercsi-Sinatelep	early Vatya: Kisapostag–Nagyrév (group V)	37 urn graves	regular rite, possible closing bowl	BÁNDI 1966
Kelebia	Vatya III – Koszider period	99 urn graves	89/99 urn graves covered with bowl (90%)	ZALOTAY 1957
Kisapostag-Zagyvatároló	late Nagyrév and Kisapostag, Vatya formative phase	10 urn graves	bowl in the neck of 4/10 urn graves (40%)	PÁSZTOR 1997
Kiskőrös	Vatya III	17 urn graves	urn covered with bowl	Harkai István – Mészáros Patrícia – Sz. Wilhelm Gábor (verbal communication)
border of Kiskunfélegyháza	Vatya III – Koszider period	7 urn graves	covering bowl in 2 cases, the other disturbed	SOMOGYVÁRI 2016
Kulcs-Császártanya	early Vatya	72 urn graves	regular rite, proportion in grave groups: III 88%, IV 83%, V 33%, VI 83%, VII 75%, VIII 100%, IX 100%, X 80%	BÓNA 1960; BÓNA 1975
Lovasberény-Südi József szőlője	Vatya III	26 urn graves	13 closing bowl (50%)	PÓSTA 1897

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Nagykarácsony-Temető	Vatya III – Koszider period	1 urn grave	covering bowl	KESZI 2003
border of Szalkszentmárton	used over an extended period	18 urn graves	covering or closing bowl	Kovacsóczy Bernadett (verbal communication)
Százhalombatta-Alsó Szőlők	Vatya III	21 urn graves	bowl in the mouth of 17/21 urns (81%)	POROSZLAI 1990
Szigetszentmiklós-Felsőtag	Nagyrév – Early Vatya	48 urn graves	bowl with bottom upward 35/48 (73%)	KALICZ-SCHREIBER 1995
Törtel	beginning of the Koszider period	10 urn graves	4 /10 covering bowl (40%)	KOVÁCS 1974
Újhartyán-Vatya	Vatya II-III, Vatya-Koszider	364 urn graves	no data about position of dishes for each grave, but covering or closing bowl is characteristic	KADA 1909

Table 1. Urn cemeteries involved in the investigation.

1. táblázat. A kutatásba bevont urnatemetők.



