

## Mesolithic-Neolithic contacts as reflected in ritual finds

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**ABSTRACT** – *The beginnings of settled life in Central Europe were marked by a series of interactions between local foragers and immigrants of southern origin. The Carpathian Basin is the last region to have had direct contact with Balkan peoples in the early Neolithic. In the course of the interaction, not only did two groups of different origin and manners meet and merge: two ways of symbolic thinking, two kinds of cult life, two perceptions of space and time must have come face to face. We know much more about south-east European Neolithic cults and ritual life, as reconstructed from enormously rich finds of material consisting of figurines, house models, anthropomorphic vessels etc. In the western part of the Carpathian Basin there are local imitations of these finds, thanks to contact. However, the figural representations almost entirely disappear by the developed phase of the Linear Pottery culture in Central Europe. Thus, we may find some hints about the other, local way of thinking. The possible causes of this change and also different perspectives in the symbolic meaning of this process are discussed in this short paper.*

**IZVLEČEK** – *Začetek stalne naselitve v Srednji Evropi je zaznamovala serija interakcij med lokalnimi lovci in nabiralci in priseljenci z juga. Karpatski bazen je področje, ki je imelo v zgodnjem neolitiku neposreden stik s prebivalci Balkana. Med interakcijami se nista srečevali in mešali samo dve skupini ljudi različnega porekla in navad, srečala sta se tudi dva načina simboličnega razmišljanja, dve obliki kulturnega življenja in dve dojemnji prostora in časa. Veliko vemo o neolitskih kultih in obredih jugovzhodne Evrope, rekonstruiranih iz izjemno bogatih materialnih najdb kipcev, vzorcev hiš, antropomorfnih posod itd. Zaradi kontakta se v zahodnem delu Karpatskega bazena pojavljajo lokalne imitacije teh najdb. V času razvite faze LTK figuralna plastika v Srednji Evropi povsem izgine, v čemer lahko prepoznamo namige o drugačnem, lokalnem načinu mišljenja. V članku bomo pretrlesli možne razloge te spremembe in tudi različne perspektive ter simbolični pomen tega procesa.*

**KEY WORDS** – *Neolithic transition; Western Carpathian Basin; different cult traditions*

### INTRODUCTION

In the western part of the Carpathian Basin, i.e. Transdanubia, little was known about the Mesolithic-Neolithic transition until the last few years. In the Early Neolithic, the late Starčevo find material is fairly unified over an immense distribution area of the culture, including Croatia or Southern Transdanubia, whereas the Northern half of the region was supposed to have been unpopulated until the formulation of the Linear Pottery culture (Fig. 1). Most re-

cently, on the basis of both scientific and archaeological evidence, it seems rather clear that we have found the traces of surviving late Mesolithic foragers still living in their traditional biotope, but coming into contact with the newly arrived Starčevo people, and adopting some of their major innovations. The analysis of the settlement structure, pottery, flints, geological and pollen samples, as well as the hydrological circumstances all speak for the

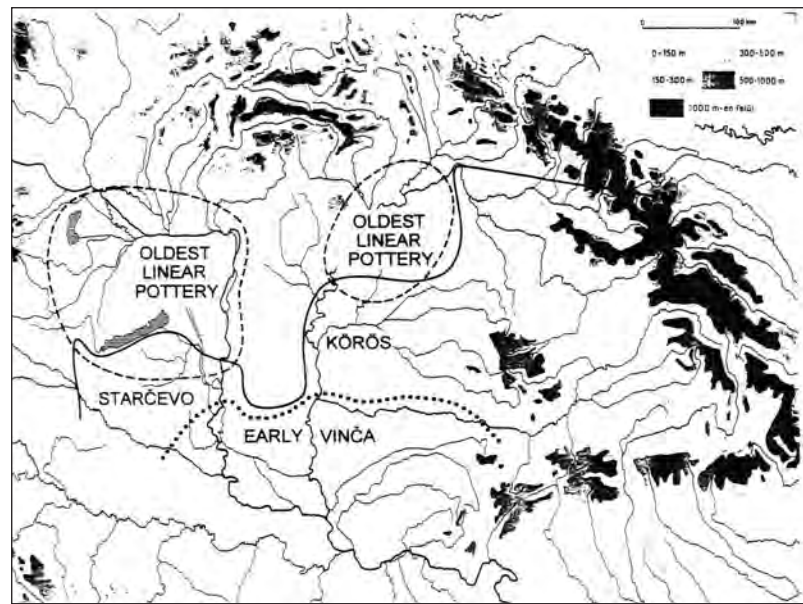
adaptation of pottery-making and the production, and possibly also for the adaptation of a (more) settled life (Fig. 2).

Thus, we believe to have found local forager settlements, late Mesolithic slowly adopting Neolithic inventions. Some transitional sites would also make a strong argument for assuming an interaction zone: the existence of a culturally and possibly ethnically mixed group in Western Transdanubia! The result of this mutual adaptation is the formation called earliest LBK in Transdanubia. The changes within the Mid-Balkan way of life and material culture were immense.

The arguments for a contact zone in Western Transdanubia would be much weaker without a real transitional settlement. The site called Pityerdomb, near the village of Szentgyörgyvölgy, has three basic features reflecting three different cultural formations. First, its flint industry is if a basically late Mesolithic tradition (The finds are presented by *Biró 2002; Biró, in press*). Secondly, amongst the pottery, some 15 thousand fragments and many complete vessels, the late Starčevo type kit and decoration is overwhelming. Third, the settlement consists of two houses, which considering their characteristics are Central European Older LBK long houses (*Bánffy 2000*).

Among these, the finds connected with ritual life and changes that can be observed in their appearance is of special importance. The animal figurine (Fig. 6), the anthropomorphic vessel (Fig. 5), the human foot (Fig. 8) and the altar fragments have good South-East European analogies, while the idol head (Fig. 4) and the altar fragment (Fig. 7) have both Balkan and Central European parallels, even if only in the early Linear Pottery horizon. Similarly to the pottery decoration, the early art relics also reflect the strong cultural impact of the South-East European Early Neolithic. If there was boundary and a long period of interaction, there must have been some kind of interaction regarding religious beliefs and cult practices.

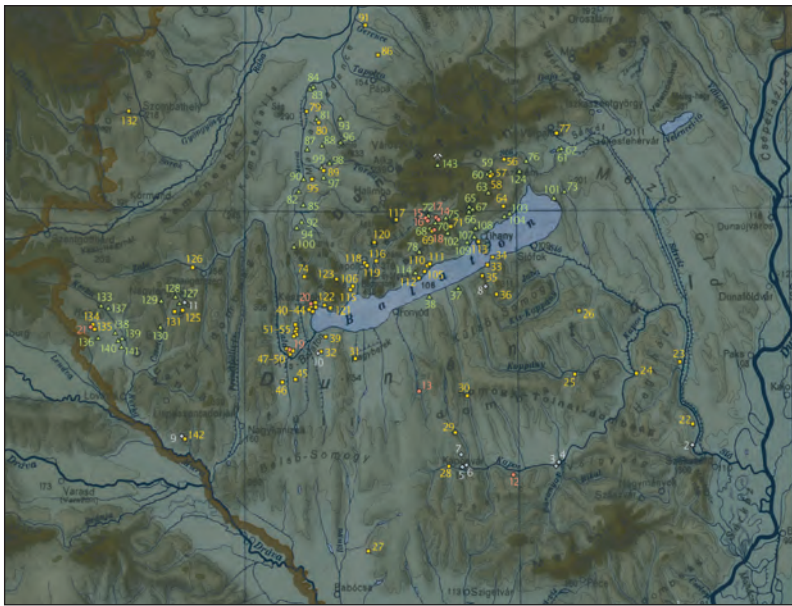
The layout of the settlement, the location and the distance between the two houses reveals that there



**Fig. 1. Early Neolithic cultural distribution in the Carpathian Basin.**

was no communal space at Pityerdomb. We did not observe any cult features, such as sacrificial pits, and because bones have not been preserved in the soil, we found no burials. The single clear indication of the intentional, conscious arrangement of cult finds comes from feature 11, in which we found the animal figurine; another rather uncertain case for the intentional deposition of an object can perhaps be made for feature 20, a human foot lying on the debris of the hearth in house II. These two instances would perhaps be sufficient, had the Pityerdomb settlement not been a site caught up in the process of the Neolithic transformation of Central Europe. Set against this wider background, it seems instructive to examine whether one or more specific features can be distinguished in the early Linear Pottery assemblages from Pityerdomb and other Transdanubian sites that can be regarded as the first indications of a change in the cult finds and the ritual practices of the Linear Pottery communities of Central Europe.

There were two distinct ways of life, material culture and, no doubt, religious beliefs and ritual practices in the mid-6<sup>th</sup> millennium BC in Europe. The climate and environment of South-East Europe and the southern part of the Carpathian Basin differed markedly from the other regions of the continent; the first studies in prehistoric religion, reconstructing a Magna Mater-like cult and associated fertility rites from the rich archaeological legacy of the first agriculturalists, were published in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For many years, studies discussing these cults began with the Neolithic. Only a few isolated graves, occa-



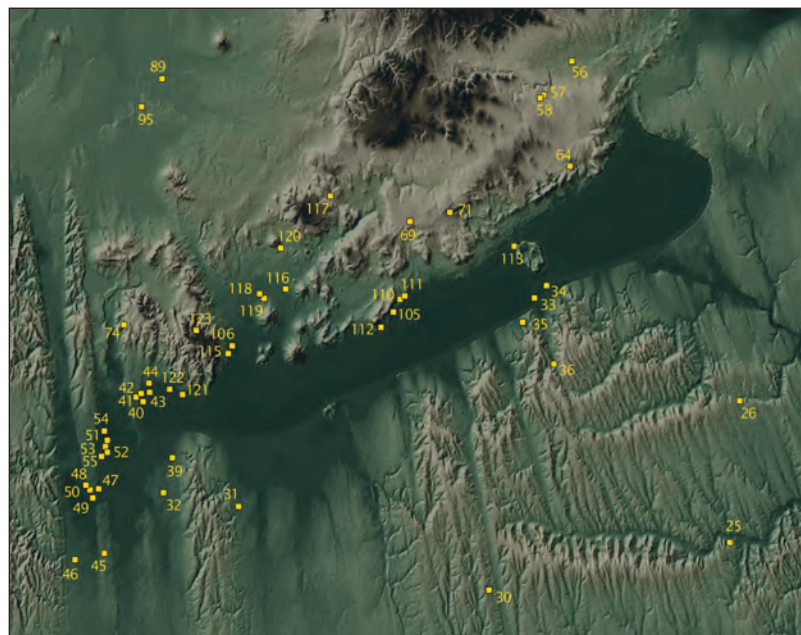
**Fig. 2. Mesolithic (pink), Starčevo (white), early LBK (yellow) and classic LBK (green) sites in Western Transdanubia.**

sionally with unusual grave goods, were known from the European Mesolithic, but these scattered finds were insufficient for drawing any far-reaching conclusions. Our knowledge of the ways of life and subsistence of Mesolithic hunter-gatherer communities has increased vastly during the past three decades. Accepting the tenet that the lifestyle of a given population is not independent of the nature of its beliefs, it seems worthwhile to examine this question, even though there is little in the way of direct evidence from Central Europe and the Carpathian Basin.

Countless studies and analyses have been devoted to the religious beliefs of the farmers colonizing South-East Europe and to the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines, altars and house models on which these analyses were based. Many studies drew ideas and parallels from ethnography, psychology, the general history of religions, linguistics, philosophy, and even from modern politics, in their argumentation.

Gimbutas' controversial theory on early religion was based on Bachofen's studies of matriarchal societies and Frazer's monumental work citing thousands of eth-

nographic and ancient examples (Bachofen 1978; Frazer 1965). The pantheon of the Eastern Mediterranean and South-East Europe, as reconstructed by Gimbutas, populated chiefly by female goddesses, is still a rather arbitrary conclusion to say the least. Gimbutas' books paint an idyllic, almost utopian world of peace preceding the world dominion of men (Gimbutas 1982; 1989; 1991). It is quite obvious that Gimbutas contrasted the religion of the "Goddess" and her cult, practiced mainly by women, with her other pet theory, the influx of patriarchal Indo-Europeans whom she identified with the Kurgan people, and who subjugated the peaceful farming communities of Europe in the Early Bronze Age (Cf. Gimbutas 1994, a summary of her views, published posthumously). (As a matter of fact, most prehistorians also reject the Kurgan theory.) Her work can only be understood if these two theses are viewed together. The strong positivist critique of Gimbutas' 'Old Europe' theses has much in common with the arguments put forward by the advocates of the New Archaeology, according to which archaeology is not a special branch of historical studies, but rather a backward field of the natural sciences in which there is no room for imaginative interpretations.



**Fig. 3. The earliest Neolithic sites around Lake Balaton.**

Binford argued that culture was nothing other, and certainly no more, than a response to environmental challenges (Binford 1968). In contrast, B. Trigger believed that the intricate system of cultural symbols could hardly be described with processes taken from biology (Trigger 1989:350). Offering a new interpretation of Gimbutas' ideas and, at the same time, sometimes challenging them, feminist gender archaeology was in essence one of the responses to processual critique, although often spiced with modern political undertones (Walde and Willows 1991; Conkey and Williams 1991; Conkey and Tringham 1995; Tringham 1991). The reaction to the positivism of Gimbutas' critics led to the rise of post-processual, 'reflexive' archaeology, as well as to countless new studies presenting and analyzing Neolithic finds and religious beliefs, enriching the already prolific works in this field. The most outstanding representatives of this approach regard the archaeological heritage and especially cult assemblages – containing little data and allowing wide scope for interpretation – as the fossils of a set of symbols, the integrated part of a bygone system of communication, and a reflection of spiritual contents in the material culture.

A few moderate analyses were also born in the heat of these debates. For example, Renfrew refined the concept of cognitive archaeology, originally based on New Archaeology, on the strength of Hodder's cri-

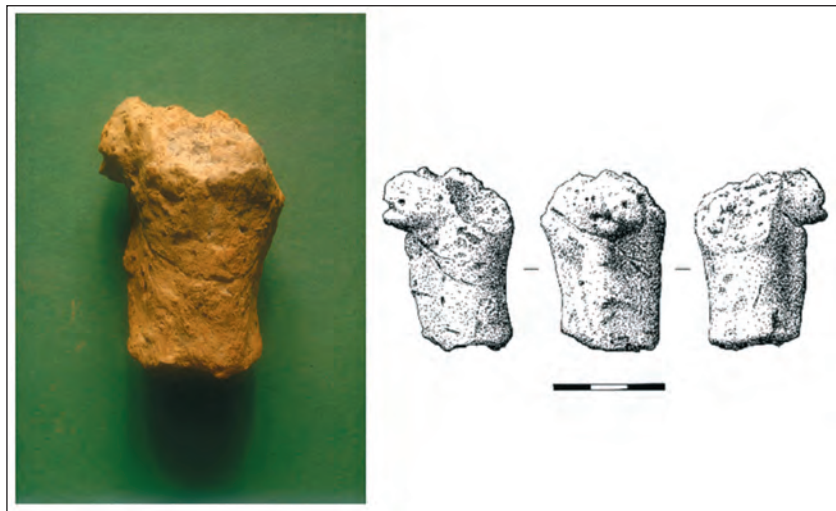


Fig. 4. Szentgyörgyvölgy-Pityerdomb – idol head.

tique (Renfrew 1985; Renfrew and Zubrow 1994). Renfrew and his followers argued that material culture was a more-or-less accurate reflection of the mindset of the one-time makers and users – they were content to attempt to understand the nature of this mindset and its impact on the actions of a given community. This is far from actually understanding the meaning of cult objects and cult phenomena, a field they left to post-modern archaeologists.

During the last decades, our perception of Neolithic religious beliefs has been shaped by the many research projects and studies on this subject. The Neolithic households of South-East Europe were the settings for ordinary, day-to-day activities; at the same time, these could have been vested with a symbolic, religious function. In the case of house models and altars it could be demonstrated that the different types were made at different times and for different occasions, since some objects depicted the house or

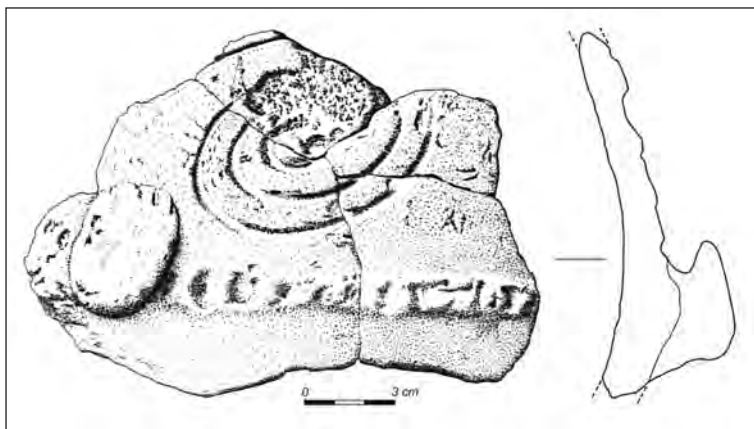
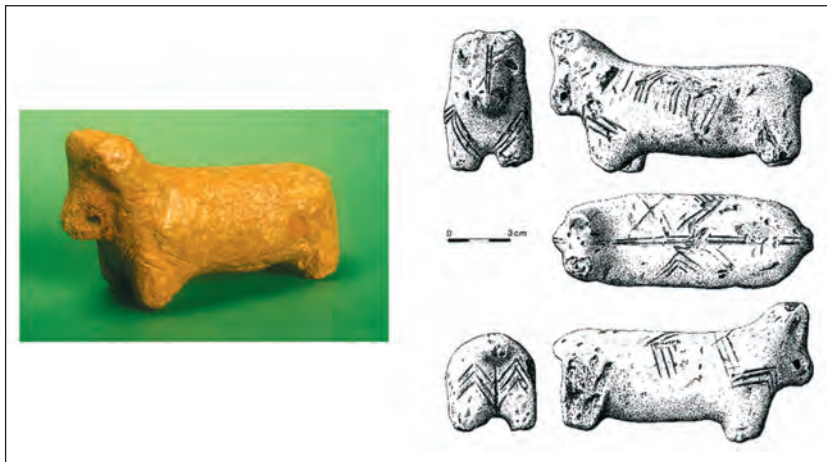


Fig. 5. Szentgyörgyvölgy-Pityerdomb – vessel fragment with a human hand shaped lug.

the altar in their ordinary, secular form, while others in their festive, religious form (Bánffy 1986; 1990–91; 1994; 1997). I believe that Neolithic rituals and cult life were private matters for individual families, and that everyday acts were vested with a religious meaning by various rites that served to ensure the order of the micro-cosmos. The transformation of the ordinary, of the profane, into the festive and religious can be traced on various types of cult finds or, to use a different expression, on various *objets d'arts*. The Neolithic household provided a framework for



**Fig. 6. Szentgyörgyvölgy-Pityerdomb – animal figurine.**

certain aspects of life, such as gender roles both in the family and in the community, as demonstrated e. g. by Chapman's studies (Chapman 1991; 1994). Hodder's concept of *domus* is useful in this sense (Hodder 1990), as it describes the communal unit of the South-East European Neolithic where rituals were performed, and where the cult finds are found during excavations; the house and its yard, the space around it, were all important parts of the *domus*. It must be noted here that that this type of cult practice underwent a significant transformation when the central orientation of tell settlements was replaced by loose chains of farmsteads with north-oriented longhouses. The contrast between *domus* and *agrios*, the outer world obviously took on a different meaning in a closed settlement where everyday activities were conducted in communal spaces between houses, unlike a settlement where everything beyond the house was part of the *agrios*, of the external world.

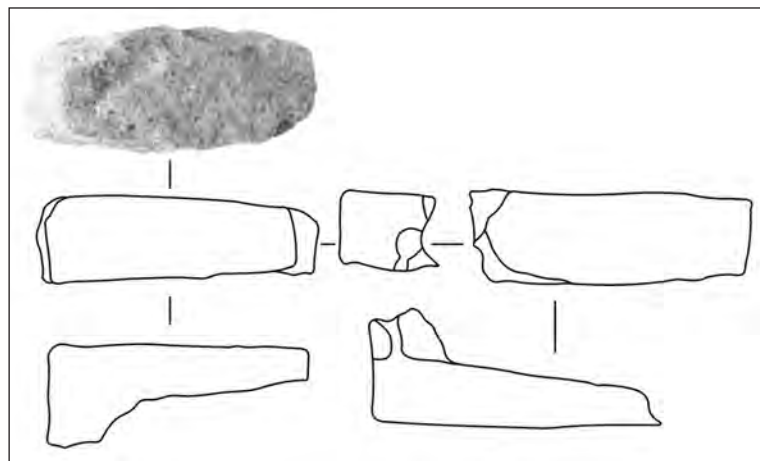
This brief overview shows that cult finds and religious beliefs and, through them, the social organization of early farming communities have never failed to hold the interest of prehistorians during the past two centuries. Research on the Mesolithic in Central Europe stands in sharp contrast to this. Although there has been a welcome proliferation of studies on the Mesolithic environment, the population density of Mesolithic Europe, the assumed population movements during the Mesolithic, the subsistence strategies of Mesolithic groups and even the health of individuals based on skeletal finds, very little is

known about the social organization and the beliefs of these communities.

Symbol-creating thought, called to life by the need for communication and the general need for co-operation, can be demonstrated for hunter-gatherer societies. Although the symbols themselves are arbitrary, and the meaning attributed to a specific symbol may vary in space and time; symbols were necessary for the organization of hunt-

ing and distribution, as well as for transmitting knowledge to younger generations. Mithen argued that a receptiveness to symbols can also be traced in the manufacture of purpose oriented tools instead of earlier, uniform implements – by removing the superfluous sections of an antler, a special tool suited only to fishing was created (Mithen 1996a.185). So, transformation itself is a symbolic event.

Rituals, an early form of religion, were most likely practiced by pre-Neolithic hunter-gatherer communities. The idea of the “awesome” and of the “sacred”, the practice of conferring qualities transcending biological and everyday experience on various objects and phenomena, developed in all mobile communities. The core of any religion is comprised of two components: (a) the belief that inanimate objects in nature (water, rocks, the moon) possess the qualities of animate beings (humans, animals, plants): they too are born, live and eventually die; (b) the belief that all actors in the world may possess qualities that contradict the laws of biology: these in-



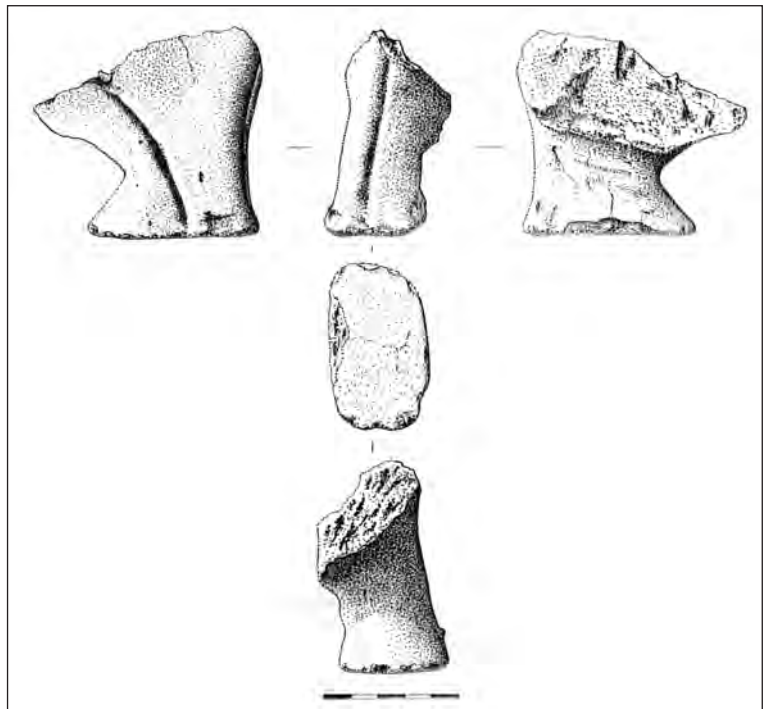
**Fig. 7. Szentgyörgyvölgy-Pityerdomb – fragment of an altarpiece.**

clude people after death, all beings that belong to a supernatural power and, later, deities. The archaeological evidence suggests that the mental structures described above emerged well before the Neolithic, and that they had an impact on mobile communities' perception of the world, from which it follows that rites, a series of repetitive acts ensuring the correct functioning and order of the world also made their appearance (Mithen 1991; 1996b.86–95; In a more recent study, Mithen lists five characteristics common to all religions: Mithen 1998.98–99).

Animals were especially important elements of nature in the life of hunter-gatherer communities: they were a major source of food, their behaviour often forewarned of some danger, and by the Mesolithic some had become companions: the dog was domesticated by this time. The animal bone sample from Lepenski Vir contained a high number of dog bones. In Bökönyi's interpretation (Bökönyi 1969; 1970) dogs were domesticated for amusement and used mainly in hunting. In contrast, Ruth Tringham has argued that dogs were used for herding more or less domesticated deer herds. (Tringham 1973.562). Domesticated dogs have also been found in Moldavia at the Soroki site of the early Bug–Dniester culture (Markević 1965). We know that pigs and, in some areas, cattle were domesticated in temperate Europe during the Mesolithic (Zvelebil 1995.86; Rowley-Conwy 1986.23).

A hiatus can be noted during the centuries of the Mesolithic following the anthropomorphic representations of the European Gravettian. This may be one of the reasons that the study of idols practically begins with the Neolithic. Interestingly enough, figurines were not produced in the European Mesolithic, in spite of the fact that there was probably a greater need to express social organization and an incipient social ranking, one of the explanations cited as the ultimate reason for the creation of figurines, than in the Upper Palaeolithic.

Our knowledge of customs differing from day-to-day activities is rather scanty for the European Mesolithic. A number of Scandinavian burial grounds offer some clues as to the complexity of mortuary



**Fig. 8. Szentgyörgyvölgy-Pityerdomb – leg of an anthropomorphic vessel.**

practices and their symbolism: Larsson has reported on a complete dog skeleton found in a burial, on incomplete dog skeletons found in three others, and on eight separate dog burials (Larsson 1990.155, Fig. 1). It would appear that domesticated dogs were not only seen as companions in the after-life, but were also buried in their own right. The assemblage of buried skulls found at Ofnet Cave in Southern Germany is not merely an indication of armed conflict and aggression (Jochim 1998.212). A total of thirty-three male, female and child skulls lay in a “nest of skulls”. Over four thousand shells, native to the Central Danube region and the northern Mediterranean, lay around the female skulls. Similar Danubian shells were found near the skull burial at Höhlenstein–Stadel (Jochim 1990.188–189). Rähle (1978), also discussed the problems of origins). Apart from some dog burials in Scandinavia, only the “nest of skulls” in the German Ofnet Cave and in Höhlenstein can be mentioned, arranged with imported Danubian and Mediterranean shells.

These few examples suggest that symbolic thought and artistic creations can be assumed for the period preceding the shift to sedentarism and a farming economy in Europe. There is increasing evidence that an incipient social ranking can be traced in the perfection of tool manufacture and in the emergence of far-ranging contacts well before the advent of the Neolithic.

Interestingly enough, none of the objects that reached distant regions and left a trace in the archaeological record – various lithic raw materials, recent and fossil shells – were commodities necessary for basic subsistence. Good quality rock was available near most settlements, including Pityerdomb. However, the occupants of Pityerdomb procured cores for their tools from the Szentgál mine, lying at a distance of some 200 km. Similarly, about one-third of the stone tools used at the early Linear Pottery settlement of Brunn near Vienna were manufactured from the raw material mined in the Bakony; Gronenborn has noted that red Szentgál radiolarite was transported as far as central Germany (Gronenborn 1994; 1997). Recently, it was demonstrated convincingly that Szentgál rock reached Southern Moravia well before the dawn of the Neolithic: it has been found in late Mesolithic assemblages, offering an explanation for the quick neolithisation process, using already existing contacts. (Mateiciucová 2002; 2004). One possible explanation for the consistent preference of this rock type and the wide distribution of Danubian shells and, later, of Aegean Spondylus could be that there was a demand for commodities that were not readily accessible and whose possession was suitable for enhancing their owner's prestige and symbolizing social status. This

would fit nicely with the suggestion that some rudimentary form of social ranking had emerged before the Neolithic.

It has also been suggested that the ownership of domesticated animals and plants were also a means of enhancing social prestige (Mithen 1996a.223–224). This assumption can obviously be challenged or downright rejected on the grounds that food production, the manipulation of the environment, was an economically useful activity. Yet, it has also been demonstrated that the life of farmers was more difficult and more toilsome in many respects than that of hunter-gatherers (Tringham 2000; Radovanović 1996; Voytek and Tringham 1989; Mithen 1996b; Bar-Yosef 1984; Rozoy 1996, Gronenborn 1994; Bonsall et al. 2000; Bonsall et al. 1997; Bettinger 2001.167–172). Sedentarism involved the accumulation of refuse, giving rise to epidemics. In view of the above, it seems premature to reject the interpretation of Neolithic innovations as prestige commodities.

Late Starčevo pottery and cult finds occur in many early Linear Pottery assemblages that should perhaps be better regarded as transitional assemblages. It is perhaps possible that the acceptance and adoption of the lifestyle, the clay vessels, the cult paraphernalia, and perhaps the beliefs of the newcomers from the south in the early phase of the Neolithic was motivated by considerations of prestige, rather than of economic gain.

One obvious consequence of the shift to sedentarism and to a production economy was the creation of food stores – the accumulation of foodstuffs no doubt stimulated the emergence of an incipient social ranking. The emergence of social ranking and of a set of beliefs differing from those of agrarian communities apparently began during the early Mesolithic. The Mesolithic landscape had its own symbolic landmarks, places of sacred power, such as the barren mountain peak towering above Lepenski Vir (Bánffy 1990–91.205); it seems likely that waters too had a special meaning. The settlement of Mesolithic communities in close proximity to water

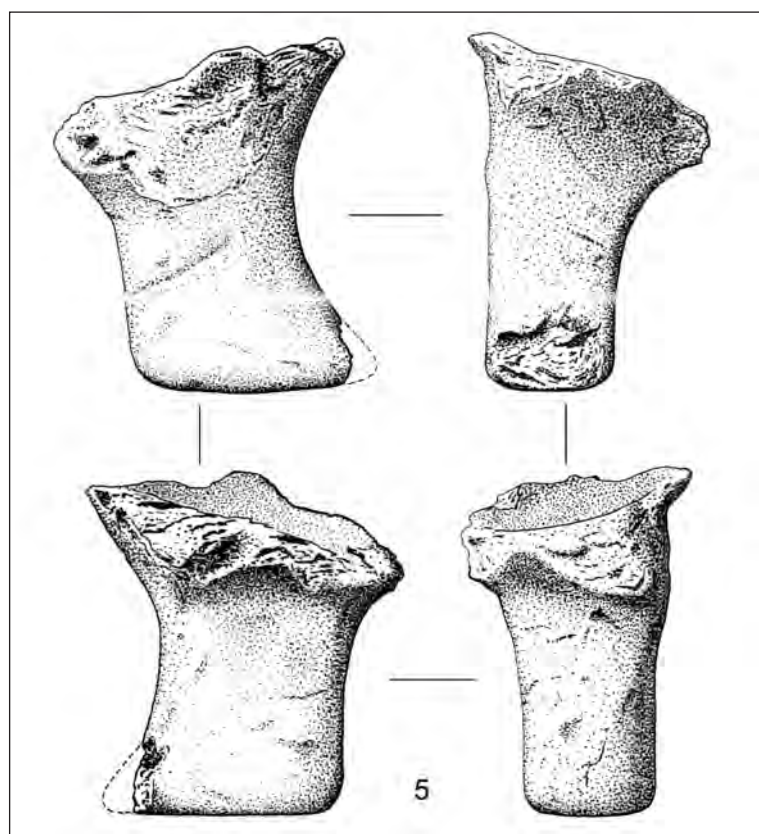


Fig. 9. Balatonszentgyörgy – leg of an anthropomorphic vessel.

cannot have been mere chance: rivers, streams and lakes cut by the earlier ice sheet were a major source of food and played an important role in their life. It seems to me that Lake Balaton was a locality with both a practical and symbolic meaning. (The marshland around Lake Balaton, where the early Linear Pottery settlements lie, was most unsuited to cereal cultivation.) Hunters-gatherers probably did not draw a sharp distinction between the animal and the human world, but viewed them as part of the same landscape.

The early farmers of South-East Europe brought with them a material culture rich in cult paraphernalia, reflecting a developed set of beliefs. A gradual transformation can be noted in the Carpathian Basin and especially in the Central European regions beyond the Carpathians. What are the indications of this transformation and can we suspect cultural impacts from the local Mesolithic?

In one of his studies on the transition from the Mesolithic to the Neolithic, Gronenborn claimed that some Linear Pottery symbols were rooted in the Mesolithic, (*Gronenborn 1999.173*) quoting various examples from Central European regions lying beyond the Carpathians. Gronenborn suggested that the cremation burials found on early Linear Pottery sites in Little Poland represent the Mesolithic tradition in the archaeological record (*Gronenborn 1999.175. Cziezla 1992*). He regarded the burial of an adult woman at the Samborzec settlement as an excellent example of Mesolithic symbolism: the grave goods from this burial included a necklace of animal teeth and bone beads lying in the pelvic region, probably the remains of a belt (*Kulczycka-Leciejewiczowa 1988.176*). In Gronenborn's interpretation these were indications of a mortuary practice alien to the traditions of early Balkan farmers: the presence of animal teeth perhaps indicates the adoption of an animal identity, a practice differing significantly from the Linear Pottery traditions. He believes that the woman buried at Samborzec was a shaman (*Gronenborn 1999.178*). At the same time, the earth around the deceased woman's head was sprinkled with red ochre, a practice that fits in with the Balkan Körös-Starčevo tradition. The artistic relics of the late Mesolithic from Denmark generally take the form of stone engravings depicting various animals, birds and boats, as well as hunt and dance scenes with humans; however, the human specimens rarely include expressly female figures (*Larsson 2000*). The Mesolithic images of Spanish rock art were carved in a similar vein (*Beltran 1982*). Images resembling



**Fig. 10. Kéthely – fragment from a human headed altarpiece (after Sági-Törőcsik 1991).**

the Magna Mater or the Great Goddess of South-East European fertility cults have not yet been found in Mesolithic art and its artistic vocabulary (*Newell et al. 1990*).

The description and evaluation of the cult finds from Pityerdomb indicate cultural impacts from the Balkans. The same holds true for other figural representations from the region. It is possible, however, that idols with a tilted-back head can be regarded as a local type. Although indications of coiffure and hairstyle can be noted on early Neolithic idols from Thessaly, (*Papathanassopoulos 1996.Cat. no. 233; Galis and Orphanidis 1996.Cat. no. 12–24*) the tilted-back head and coiffure of curly locks (sometimes indicated with tiny globules) first appeared at early Linear Pottery sites in Transdanubia. An extremely worn idol head from Pityerdomb perhaps represented this type.

Some other finds suggest that an individual who had just begun to familiarize himself with Neolithic innovations copied one of the cult devices of the Starčevo culture. A poor quality imitation of the Starčevo type human leg from Pityerdomb (Fig. 8) was found at the shore of Lake Balaton (Balatonszentgyörgy, Fig. 9). The altar fragment from Kéthely (Fig. 10), a site lying on the eastern edge of Little Balaton, can be assigned to a type decorated with human or animal heads resembling its renowned forerunner, the altar from Lánycsók (Fig. 11). The specimen from

Kéthely, however, was made from poorly fired and poorly levigated clay tempered with chaff. The effort to copy the Balkan cult object is also reflected in the fact that in contrast to the altar from Lánycsók and other South-East European pieces decorated with animal or human heads, two cereal grains denoted the eyes of the head on the Kéthely fragment. This suggests that cereal grains were a powerful symbol of agriculture and, also, of sedentism and food production. The use of this symbol probably also indicates a knowledge of and, perhaps, the adoption of the worship of the supernatural powers revered by the Balkan immigrants. The two grain eyes can perhaps be interpreted as a symbol of the wish to assimilate into the world of early farmers.

The other major change is the gradual disappearance of the idols' buxom forms, their corpulence and steatopygia, as well as of the representation of pregnant women and their replacement with angular, flat idols. Idols practically disappeared from Central Europe during the Linear Pottery period. A few idols were still made during the early Linear Pottery period, mostly in regions that, on the testimony of the archaeological finds, were colonized fairly rapidly by Transdanubian Neolithic communities, such as Eilsleben in the Elba-Saale region, Brunn II and Bad Nauheim-Niedermörlen in the Wetterau area to the northwest. The finds from these sites, especially from the two latter ones, reveal a striking resemblance to the formative Transdanubian Linear Pottery from Pityerdomb and to the late Starčevo site at Vörs-Máriaasszonyisziget (*Schade-Lindig 2002a; 2002b*). Conforming to the general pattern of Neolithization, the distribution of cult finds reveals a mosaic pat-



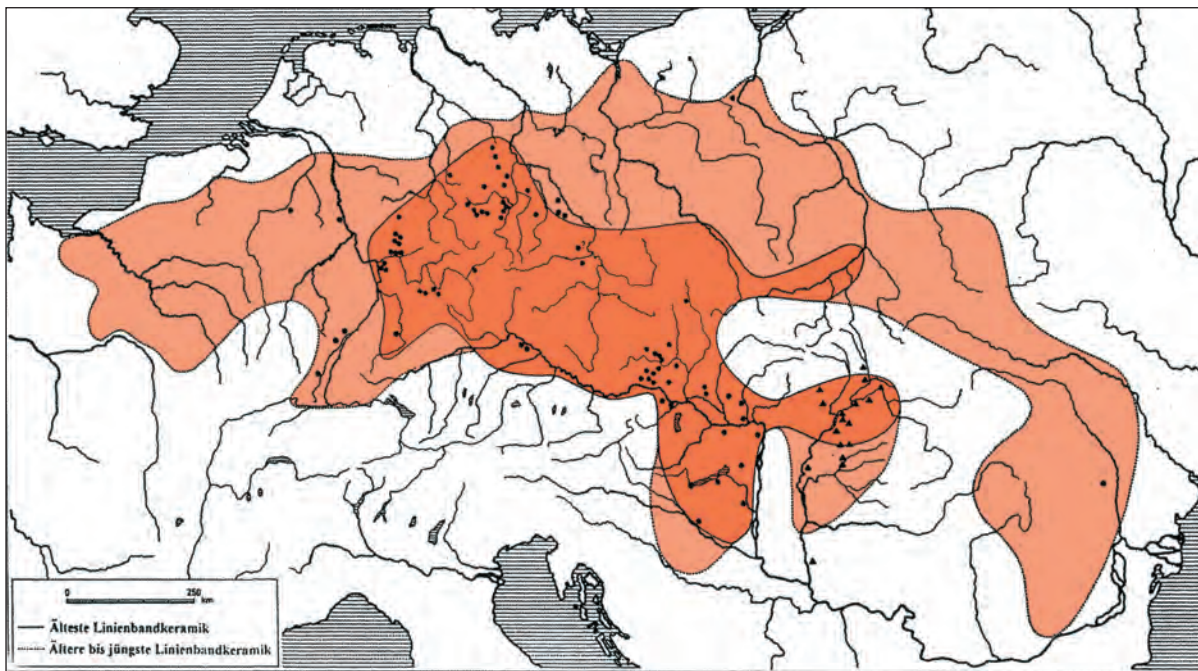
**Fig. 11.** Lánycsók – human headed altarpiece (after Kalicz 1990).

tern, rather than a steady and even diffusion. Figurines virtually disappeared during the Central European development. A rare idol from the Rössen or the Münchshofen group, contemporaneous with the Hungarian Late Neolithic and Early Copper Age, can probably be ascribed to Lengyel influences, i.e. to cultural impacts from the southeast (One idol of this type from the Münchshofen culture has been published by L. Kreiner. *Kreiner and Pleyer 1999*). House models, altars and anthropomorphic vessels are virtually unknown west of Lower Austria.

When searching for local, hunter-gatherer elements in the beliefs of the early Linear Pottery communities, we should have a closer look at the decoration on the back of Linear Pottery idols. O. Höckmann suggested that these herringbone and zigzag patterns were in fact a representation of skeletal bones, with the oblique lines symbolizing ribs and the vertical line between them representing the spine (*Höckmann 1985; 2001*). In his opinion, the symbolism of this “X-ray” style had more in common with osteopathy and bone magic practices of the northern hunter-gatherer communities, than with the beliefs of the South-East European farming groups. The depiction of the skeleton, or of individual bones, can be regarded as early vestiges of shamanistic beliefs (*Eliade 1982. esp. Chapter 5, parts 6–7: 159–161*). Höckmann also noted that in contrast to the emphatically female Balkan depictions, the imagery of Linear Pottery was genderless – only in rare instances was the female nature of idols indicated.

Accepting Höckmann's analysis, we may say that the Linear Pottery idols decorated with a herringbone pattern express the idea of South-East European clay figurines combined with the symbolism of the local population.

These clay figurines disappeared after a while. The distribution of the idols of Central European Linear Pottery is illustrated on Hansen's map on which the boundaries of early and late Linear Pottery distribution are also marked (Fig. 12). Not one single idol has yet been found in the late Linear Pottery distribution, a phenomenon that can be taken to indicate that the beliefs of the indigenous population proved stronger in Central and Northern Europe than the cultural influences from the south. Agriculture and pottery, as well as certain – modified – forms of house architecture survived and gradually transformed the original social structures. However, beliefs are by their nature highly conservative; it would appear that although the alien, Balkan influences were en-



**Fig. 12. Distribution of sculpture from the Linear Pottery culture in Europe (after Hansen 2001.48).**

dured for some time, they eventually faded from the collective memory.

This would answer one of the important questions that hovers over Hansen's study: why did figurines disappear during the Neolithic development of Central Europe? My answer to this question is that the two highly conservative sets of beliefs clashed, and that the beliefs of the local hunter-gatherer communities eventually proved stronger in the life of the Central European Linear Pottery communities.

Finally, we should not complete this chain of inferences without mentioning one major theoretical thesis implicitly included in the argumentation. It has become fairly clear that the process of the Neolithisation in Transdanubia lacked any kind of violence and outbreaks of hostilities between local and migrating groups (*Bánffy 2004, Chapters 9 and 10*). When, however, assuming a clash of two different backgrounds of cult life and systems of beliefs, it is relevant not to take the same pacific procedures as evident. How is it possible that the fall of a highly developed South East European cult life, with all its rich and abundant paraphernalia, caused no conflict within the culturally and most probably genetically mingling groups? How can we reconstruct a new, self-confident Neolithic identity, without assuming an alien, "pagan", inferior contrast?

One possible solution lies in the nature of early religions. According to our recent knowledge, prehi-

storic systems of beliefs must have been permissive, rather than exclusive or eliminative. Both archaeological and religio-historical phenomena reveal many hints of this. Intercultural prehistoric finds and features over a vast area of Europe, within both settlements and cemeteries reflect on almost identical, at least very similar beliefs, with probably very similar 'god' figures participating, albeit under different names. There are many gods from a certain pantheon have their equivalents, differently named, in other systems, such as the various so-called Great Goddesses in various Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cultures. Even peripheral cultures outside of great archaic empires found no difficulty in naming and worshipping their neighbours' gods or goddesses, since they acknowledged that only the names were different (*Bánffy 2001*). In these cases, cultural differences are not reflections of the discriminating cult life of another group, but rather an opportunity to build a bridge by experimenting similarities lying behind two different traditions. The differences may have been based rather in the cult paraphernalia, and the series of actions, i.e. the rites, and not in the basic cornerstones of the beliefs.

The first attempts to create religions which claimed other cult beliefs as hostile, barbarian and thus forbidden, were that of Amenhotep IV/Ekhnaton in the 14<sup>th</sup> century BC, Moses for Judaism and in its wake, the Christian victory over permissive and syncretic Roman polytheism. In this way, all hypothetical events before these times, when two ethnic groups

with different religious beliefs met, can rather be reconstructed as a relieve for a better understanding between the groups.

In this sense, the picture of cult changes observable in Transdanubia is a good parallel to the general cultural changes observed on the basis of other archaeological and scientific methods. It corresponds to the general cultural processes. Hansen's map is able to show the basic diachronic change in religious customs: figurines, representing the survival of south east European paraphernalia. They were not destroyed or forbidden: the first generation(s) of ethnically mixed immigrants kept the old traditions. They slowly changed in accordance with the formulation of the developed phase of the LBK.

Although it would be highly premature to draw any inferences about the local foragers' religious beliefs, about its interference with Balkan cult life, it is

highly probable that there are no radical differences in viewing the world. It did not that the symbols used differed, if the symbolic thinking was present in both types of communities. The differences may have been in how certain ideas were stressed, and even more in their outer forms. In other words: steatopygous female figurines or house models may have seemed strange to indigenous people in the Danube area, but the principles and purposes behind them may have been shared.

The ideas they represented were probably culturally translatable and mutually understandable. If this process possibly could have happened in this way, it would have had a wider meaning for the interaction of indigenous and immigrant groups. In this sense, the transitional forms and changes in cult practises at the beginnings of settled life may become an important element in the study of the whole process of neolithisation.

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