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Entangled traditions: Lengyel and Tisza ceramic technology in a Late Neolithic settlement in northern Hungary

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ABSTRACT

The Late Neolithic period (5000–4500 BCE) of the Carpathian Basin is characterised by two major cultural complexes: the Lengyel culture in western Hungary and the Tisza–Hérvály–Csőszhalom complex in eastern Hungary. The occupation area of the two cultural complexes had a ‘common border’ along a large area in recent northern Hungary, from the Danube River to the Upper Tisza River region. Their relationships are indicated in the mixed nature of their material culture, settlement types and mortuary practices. The focus of this paper is the site of Aszód–Papi földek, which was situated in the borderlands. A peculiarity of this site is that a considerable number of the ceramic finds represent typological forms and decorations characteristic of both the Lengyel and Tisza cultures. Lengyel and Tisza ceramics appear together in the settlement features and graves, and no spatial or chronological distinction has been identified between them or the features containing them. The number of Tisza and Lengyel vessels appearing together indicates that this site could have been a meeting point for the cultures. The mixed nature of the ceramic assemblage at Aszód therefore has profound implications concerning the cultural relationships in Late Neolithic Hungary. In order to better understand Lengyel and Tisza relationships at Aszód, ceramic petrographic analyses were carried out on 68 ceramic samples from the site and on seven local sediment samples. The results indicate that both Lengyel and Tisza vessels were made from locally available raw materials, and there was no technological distinction between them. Only stylistic features can be used to distinguish between Lengyel and Tisza vessels. The similarities between Lengyel and Tisza ceramic technologies could only have existed if there was a more complex social relationship and interaction between the people and communities who produced these two pottery styles than has previously been assumed. The results are also compared with other, previously analysed, sites, showing that the ceramic technology at Aszód corresponds well with technological results from other Late Neolithic sites. The Late Neolithic period witnessed considerable changes in ceramic technology, namely a sharp increase in grog tempering and also a sharp decrease in chaff tempering. These changes distinguish this period from the Early and Middle Neolithic in Hungary, which are also represented at Aszód.

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1. Introduction

The Late Neolithic period (5000–4500 BCE) of the Carpathian Basin is dominated by two major cultural complexes: the Lengyel culture in western Hungary and the Tisza–Hérvály–Csőszhalom complex in eastern Hungary. This period is characterised by the appearance of extensive settlement networks; in the case of the Tisza–Hérvály–Csőszhalom complex, as well as larger and smaller horizontal settlements; the appearance of the first tell settlements on the Great Hungarian Plain is also attributed

to this period (Kalicz and Raczky, 1987, 14–19). On the tells, only a small number of people were buried from the former community, mainly children and men (Siklósi, 2013a, 424–425), while on the horizontal settlements inhumations appear scattered or in small groups (Anders and Nagy, 2007; Korek, 1989, 39–45; Sebők, 2012). The Tisza ceramic style is characterised by incised meander decorations organised in panels, black painting and variable appliqué decorations. The most common vessel types are mugs, short pedestalled bowls and pedestalled mugs, cylindrical and rectangular flower-pot shaped vessels and deep bowls.

In contrast, in Transdanubia, the territory of the Lengyel culture, extensive (several tens of hectares) large horizontal settlements with enclosures and large timber-framed houses emerged (Bertók and Gáti, 2011; Osztás et al., 2012; Zalai-Gaál, 1982). Their burial practices

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show considerable differences: the deceased were buried within the settlements, but with variable spatial distribution of the graves and mortuary practices. In eastern Transdanubia, burials form groups that are distributed across the whole settlement area. These burials show early signs of social inequality (Siklósi, 2013b; Zalai-Gaál, 2008, 2010). From other parts of Transdanubia few burials are known; those that have been found seem to be exceptions rather than representing a common burial rite (Kalicz, 1985, 21–22). The ceramics are polychrome (yellow, white and black painting on a red base) and incised. The motifs comprise lines and geometric forms; spiral motifs usually appear incised. The most characteristic forms include high pedestal bowls, biconical bowls, cups with conical necks, amphorae and Butmir-type vessels.

The Late Neolithic also marks the appearance of the first copper horizons (Kalicz, 1992; Siklósi et al., 2015; Zalai-Gaál, 1996). Moreover, the more than 1000-year-old exchange system, the most well-known commodity of which was *Spondylus* transported from the south (Bajnóczi et al., 2013; Kalicz and Szénánszky, 2001; Séfériadès, 2009; Siklósi and Csengeri, 2011), changed its centre and gradually shifted from south to north-east (Biró, 1998; Kaczanowska, 1985; Kaczanowska and Kozłowski, 1997, 226; Kovács, 2013a). The ceramic technology differs considerably from the earlier periods, as grog tempering becomes ubiquitous, and chaff tempering, which was the most characteristic tempering practice in the Early Neolithic, almost disappears (Kreiter et al., 2013b).

The occupation area of the two cultural complexes had a 'common border' along a large area in recent northern Hungary, from the Danube River to the Upper Tisza River region. Their inter-relationship is indicated by the mixed nature of the material culture, settlement types and mortuary practices found in the border area. The focus of this paper, the site of Aszód-Papi földek, was situated in this borderland.

Concerning the connection between the Lengyel and Tisza–Herpály–Csőszhalom complexes, Aszód is one of the most important sites of this period in Hungary (Fig. 1). Systematic research has been conducted there since the 1960s by Nándor Kalicz (Kalicz, 1971, 1974–75, 1985, 1998, 96–112, 2006, 2008; Kalicz and Kalicz-Schreiber, 1983–84). The almost 31 ha horizontal settlement is situated 50 km east of Budapest, on a natural elevation that faces towards the valley of the Galga stream. A 5000 m² area has been excavated, revealing different settlement features such as large pits, remains of houses with daub wall and post structures (Kalicz, 1985, 12–20; Kalicz and Kovács, 2010), and 224 burials (Kalicz, 1985, 21–41; Siklósi, 2007), dated between c. 4750 and 4650 cal. BCE. The majority of the finds are represented by ceramic

sherds, although clay altars, boat models and anthropomorphic and zoomorphic finds have also been recovered (Kalicz, 1985, 19, 52–62, 1998, 103–112).

A peculiarity of this site is that a considerable number of the ceramic finds represent typological forms and decorations characteristic of the Early Lengyel culture, with slightly fewer Tisza-style ceramics present (Fig. 2). The Lengyel and Tisza ceramics appear together in settlement features and graves, with no identifiable spatial or chronological distinction between them or the features containing them (Kalicz, 2006, 2008). Evaluation of the Tisza-style pottery from the site has changed considerably during the last few decades as the site assemblage has been processed. Until the mid-2000s, the Tisza ceramics at the site had been considered to be imported, thus suggesting an increased social interaction between Lengyel and Tisza communities (Kalicz, 1969, 186–188, 1985, 78–80).

Tisza ceramics at other Lengyel sites occur in the north-eastern and, in much smaller numbers, south-eastern territory of the Lengyel-occupied area. At these sites, from Svodín to Zengővárkony, because of the smaller number of Tisza-type ceramics, they are commonly interpreted as imports (Němejcová-Pavúková, 1986; Pavúk, 1981, 1994, 2007; Zalai-Gaál, 2002). This is why the relatively high number of Tisza ceramics at Aszód has received particular attention, and Aszód is considered to be one of the most important links between the two complexes (Kalicz, 2008; Kovács, 2013b, 205–212; Raczky, 2002, 82–83; Sebők, 2012). Additionally, Lengyel-type ceramics appear in varying quantities at Tisza sites, further indicating a complex relationship and possible mixing of the two communities (Kovács, 2013b, 159–197; Raczky, 2002; Sebők, 2007, 2012). As assessment of the Aszód assemblage progressed during the 2000s, the number, quality and importance of Tisza characteristics present at Aszód indicated a much more complex relationship between the Lengyel and Tisza–Herpály–Csőszhalom societies than previously realised. Kalicz thus reconsidered the significance of the Tisza-style pottery and their characteristics, and began to regard Aszód as a combined Lengyel and Tisza settlement (Kalicz, 2008; Kalicz and Kovács, 2010, 31). In order to assess the possible technological relationships between Lengyel and Tisza ceramics, 68 ceramics were chosen for petrographic analysis.

2. Theoretical background

In the Late Neolithic period, ceramic production was performed in regionally specific ways, leading to diversity in practice and regional styles. The temporal and regional variability across Hungary has been used to develop chronologies and distinguish local and regional cultural groups. However, the technology of ceramics has been understudied even though such studies can provide valuable insight into the relationship between cultural groups (e.g. Blinkhorn, 1997; Calvo et al., 2013; Gosselain, 1998; Lemonnier, 1993; Livingston Smith, 2000; Sillar and Tite, 2000). This is particularly valid for Aszód, where Lengyel- and Tisza-style pottery appear together.

Assessment of the site and its finds suggests that two communities lived together at Aszód that had originated from different areas, and had different material cultures, social and economic structures and ritual traditions. The complexity of the assumed relationship between the Lengyel and Tisza–Herpály–Csőszhalom societies made a re-evaluation of the presumed imported Tisza ceramics necessary, as ceramic typology on its own cannot provide a detailed understanding of ceramic production and provenance.

The first question to be addressed by scientific analysis was whether the Tisza-style vessels were in fact imported or locally made. If both Lengyel- and Tisza-style pottery were produced locally at Aszód, each according to their own cultural traditions, several more questions are raised. What technology was used, what were the differences and similarities between the technologies of Lengyel and Tisza vessels, and how do they fit into the technological tradition of the Late Neolithic pottery known from other sites?

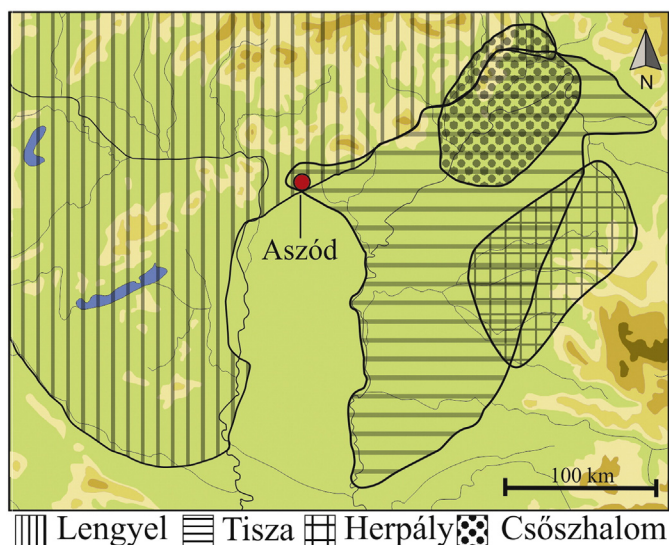


Fig. 1. Late Neolithic cultural complexes in the Carpathian Basin.

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