INTRODUCTION

Excavations on fortified tell sites in the 20th century formed the basis for construction of Bronze Age chronology in the Carpathian Basin. Typological and stylistic elements observed at these sites were used to create archaeological cultures for large areas, whose distributions changed over time (Bóna 1975, 1992). Decorations such as spirals were considered primary elements of all regional cultures such as the Gyulavarsánd (Bóna 1975). However, the use of large archaeological groups masks internal regional variation, both chronologically and stylistically. In this study, we treat river-valleys as micro-regions in order to investigate the possibility that they formed the basis for regular interaction, community activities and social practices, and thus, may have left distinctive material culture. Our research questions are as follows:

- Is there stylistic variation present in ceramic elements across river valleys in the same large cultural unit?
- Do cemeteries and settlements show differences among preferred decorative elements?

BACKGROUND AND METHODS

We used three different datasets:

- Surface collected ceramic assemblages from 17 Bronze Age sites in the Lower Körös Basin obtained during the Hungarian Archaeological Topography (MRT) surveys in the 1970s and 1980s (Figure 1, 3) (Ecsedy István et al. 1982; Jankovich B., Dénes et al. 1998 MRT 10).
- Békés 103, a Bronze Age cemetery that includes 68 burials excavated between 2011 and 2015 by the BAKOTA project (Duffy et al. 2014, Pajé et al. 2017). The most intensive use period of the cemetery falls in the second half of Middle Bronze Age and the earlier part of the Late Bronze Age (1600 - 1300 BC), therefore partially overlapping with the Middle Bronze Age Gyulavarsánd culture (Duffy et al. 2017).
- A reconstructed river system from the Medieval Ages, that provides a reasonable proxy for major Bronze Age drainage locations (Duffy 2014).

We coded the stylistic properties of 563 sherds from 17 likely settlements and 122 vessels from the Békés 103 cemetery. Cultural association was assigned through analysis of stylistic elements of ceramics, which included vessel form, shape, macroscopic fabric inspection, and 21 design elements that spanned from Early to Late Bronze Age. Our final analysis narrowed the dataset to those assigned to the Gyulavarsánd culture (Table 1). We grouped the sites by drainage (Figure 2), and used the rank order of the most common two or three decoration in each drainage to compare variation between settlements. Finally, we compared ceramic dataset in different settlement regions to variation at Békés 103.

RESULTS

- Low numbers of ceramics identifiable to specific Bronze Age phases prevents rigorous analysis, and patterns remain impressionistic.
- Where higher numbers of diagnostics can be found (the Fás, Fehér, and Sebes Körö), incising and channelling form high percentages of the decorations, with similar rank orders.
- The neighbouring Fás and Fehér Körös river valleys have the same rank order of decorations.
- Spirals do not form the most common decoration in any drainage.
- Ticks are only found in high percentages in the Sebes Körös.
- The Békés 103 cemetery is the only site with a high percentage of prow and a low percentage of incising.

Table 1: Distribution of most common decorations in each valley.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valley</th>
<th>Incised</th>
<th>Channelling</th>
<th>Sebes</th>
<th>Kettős</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fás</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fehér</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sebes Körös</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Békés 103</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DISCUSSION

- This study represents the first effort to systematically code and compare stylistic elements of different Bronze Age sites in the Körös region.
- Though sample sizes remain low and patterns cannot be verified, there seems to be variation in decorations between the drainages.
- Stylistic similarities between river valleys in close proximity such as the Fás and Fehér Körös may suggest low levels of conscious, differential signalling.
- Overall, spirals are rare in the Lower Körös Basin, potentially marking a difference with other major regions of the Gyulavarsánd area.
- Clear differences between the presence of some decorations (prow) and absence of others (incising) at Békés 103 may be a consequence of vessel form. Urns are very common in the cemetery, but could be comparatively rare on settlements. Incised vessels may be less common in mortuary contexts. Alternatively, the appearance of prows may simply be a relatively late stylistic feature not present on the other sites.
- Greater numbers of ceramics will be needed to confirm the hypothesis that arte culture area terms such as ‘Gyulavarsánd’ seem to mask variation between sites and valleys.

References

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