QUESTION: Does the structure of ceramic assemblages differ between cremation urn cemeteries?

Not much.

Figure 2: Comparison of ceramic assemblage between sites by vessel type.

Figure 2: Comparison of ceramic assemblage between sites by vessel type.

QUESTION: Does location of decorative elements on cremation urns vary between different mortuary traditions?

Probably.

Urn: Channel Location Comparison

Figure 3: Design element locational map with reclassified landmarks (center).

Békés 103 tripartite urn (left) and Csánytelek 7 biconical urn (right).

QUESTION: Does the vessel sub-type vary between mortuary traditions?

Yes, a lot.

Figure 5: Urn Body Shape.

Figure 6: Bowl Body Shape.

Figure 7: Cup Body Shape.

Figure 5-7: Comparison of vessel body shapes attributed to specific vessel types.

Methodology

We used a standardized coding system for design elements (channel, thin channel, node etc.) to describe the design elements present in the ceramic assemblage from each site, but we restricted the analysis to cremation urn graves, and those graves with better preservation. For element location on urns, we used a generalized location map to accommodate the different urn form (biconical and tripartite) present in each mortuary tradition (Fig. 3). While we had access to the actual ceramic material from Békés 103 for coding, for Csánytelek 7 we coded vessels based on the publication by Lörinci and Trommey (1995), and excluded the element if ambiguous. Here we report only our most robust results.

A systematic comparison between ceramic assemblages from the two cemeteries reveals strong similarity in structure at a general level (Fig. 2). For both cemeteries, the burial practice requires burying individuals in a single urn, with an accompanying bowl and cup. The specific form that each of these vessels took in the two cemeteries differed strongly, however. The urn forms, for example, are majority tripartite in Békés 103 while biconical in Csánytelek 7 (Fig. 5-7). The locations of specific elements on urns from both sites are also different (Fig. 4). Channeling occurred mostly at the neck-body line at Csánytelek 7, and in the lower body at Békés 103.

Discussion and Future Direction

This exploratory study highlights structured variation within mortuary communities in Bronze Age Hungary that has never been discussed. A standard ceramic assemblage seems to be the normative mortuary treatment in the cemeteries from both archaeological cultures. The specific vessel form contrasts between communities, however, and the location of common elements shared between urns in both cemeteries differs. The vessel sub-type and location could be intentional, meaningful contrasts between communities, as both forms of variation are highly visible. Nonetheless, the cemeteries are 100 km apart, and patterning should be studied with a larger set of cemeteries and combined with other elements of mortuary display to offer stronger evidence.

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