

University of Szeged

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Doctoral School of History

Archaeology Program

# **Cultural Transitions in the Iron Age of the Middle Tisza Region**

Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

**Péter Kovács**

Supervisor:

**Dr. habil. Valéria Kulcsár**

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The present dissertation seeks to explore and reconstruct the dynamics of transition periods in the Iron Age of the Middle Tisza region. At this stage, our understanding of almost a millennium of cultural transformation remains necessarily broad and schematic. The limited quantity of finds prevents meaningful comparisons between the major cultural complexes on a supra-regional scale. Nevertheless, it is evident that the North Balkans played a key role throughout the entire period. By contrast, the North Caucasus is relevant only during the Early Iron Age, with no later evidence that can be connected to this region.

There is likewise no indication that the long-distance trade characteristic of the Middle Iron Age persisted into the Late Iron Age. Finds of Black Sea origin appear during the Vekerzug culture (eye beads, dotted beads, ceramic influences) and continue into the Late Iron Age (mask-shaped beads, knobbed beads). Remarkably, glass beads occur in both phases of Black Sea-related connections.

Within the Late Iron Age, a distinct shift of emphasis can be observed. Between the late 4th/early 3rd century BC and the mid-3rd century BC, objects of predominantly western origin are most common, a phenomenon attributable to Celtic expansion. From the second half of the 3rd century BC, however, artefacts from the North Balkans gradually become dominant. At the same time, Transylvanian and Transdanubian imports are represented only by isolated coins. Thus, by the end of the Middle La Tène period, earlier networks of contact had been reconfigured, with new dominant actors emerging and previous ones relegated to secondary importance.

A comprehensive review of the evidence suggests that the most decisive processes of the Iron Age took place during the following relative chronological phases:

1. Ha B2/3–Ha C2
2. Ha D3–Lt B1
3. Lt C2–Sarmatian period

These were the critical junctures when earlier dominant assemblages apparently disappeared, only to be replaced by new ones. Settlement and burial evidence alike demonstrate that a process of cultural selection was at work: certain objects and practices fell out of use, while others survived and were integrated into the “toolkit” of the emerging archaeological cultures. The clearest expression of this process can be observed at La Tène settlements, where some vessel types typical of the Vekerzug culture persisted unchanged, while others vanished altogether.