
The warrior aristocracy of the Late Bronze Age Urnfield culture in County Somogy in southern Transdanubia

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Résumé

This presentation covers the presence of a warrior aristocracy in south-western Hungary, principally in County Somogy, during the Urnfield period (Bz D, Bz D-Ha A1, Ha A2-B) based on the archaeological record.

The offensive and defensive weapons wielded by the warrior aristocracy during the Urnfield period are exclusively known from hoards – none have yet been recovered from burials. Greaves, part of the defensive armour, are frequently found in the hoards of the formative and early Urnfield period (Bz D-Ha A1) brought to light in southern Transdanubia (Nadap, Nagyvejke, Rinyaszentkirály, Lengyeltóti V) and in the territory between the Danube and the Sava rivers (Veliko Nabrde, Slavonski Brod, Boljanić) in the Urnfield distribution territory. These prestige articles probably marked the high rank of the prominent warrior aristocracy. Greaves are often adorned with wheel motifs in delicate repoussé. Finds of similar greaves in more southerly regions, for example in Italy (Malpensa) and Greece (Athens, Acropolis) attest to trade relations and to the close contacts between the period's workshops.

Hoard V from Lengyeltóti, which contained a greave, was made up of over seven hundred artefacts, which represent the sophisticated bronze metallurgy of the Kurd horizon of the Transdanubian Urnfield period (12th century BC). Some of the hoard's artefacts can be assigned to the middle Urnfield period, to the Gyermely horizon (11th century BC). This period was marked by the flourishing of the Urnfield culture in the Balaton region and to its south, in northern Croatia. Most settlements and cemeteries were established during the formative Urnfield period (13th century Bz D, Bz D/Ha A1) and attained their greatest extent during the early Urnfield period (Ha A1). The settlements began to be abandoned during the middle Urnfield period (Ha A2). This tendency can be clearly observed in County Somogy: much fewer sites can be dated to the Ha A2 and the subsequent Ha B period.

The Bz D, Bz D/Ha A1 period saw the emergence of a warrior aristocracy, which consolidated its power and flourished during the early Urnfield period (Ha A1). The Urnfield population lived in fortified settlements and hillforts such as the one investigated at Lengyeltóti-Tatárvár. The hoards found at this site (Hoards II, III and IV) as well as the 'Oreglak hoard discovered near this settlement attest to a flourishing bronze metallurgy during the Ha A1 period.

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Hoard V from Lengyeltóti represents the Ha A1-A2 transition. By this time, the period's warrior aristocracy had assumed control over the bronze metalworking centres as well as over the trade networks. The number of settlements and burials declined drastically in the region during the ensuing Ha B period.

Mots-Clés: Warfare, Bronze age