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*Hiatus, lacunes et absences : identifier et interpréter les vides archéologiques*  
*Hiatus, lacuna and absences: identifying and interpreting archaeological gaps*  
Actes du 29<sup>e</sup> Congrès préhistorique de France  
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*Où sont les femmes ? Archéologie du genre dans la Préhistoire et la Protohistoire :  
la France à l'écart des gender studies ?*

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## **Of Women, Their Lives and Ways of Being Depicted in the Late Neolithic of Hungary**

### ***Des femmes, de leurs vies et de leurs modes de représentation dans le Néolithique tardif de la Hongrie***

Alexandra ANDERS, Zsuzsanna TÓTH

**Abstract:** In this study, we have set out to make visible the females of the Late Neolithic (5000-4900 – 4500-4400 cal. BC) communities living in the territory of Hungary. The period in question represents the prime of the Neolithic in the study area, featuring densely inhabited extended settlements with abundant evidence for a sophisticated material culture and ideology. We have surveyed the appearance of the female body in the Late Neolithic of Hungary through a few selected case studies; we have not sought to be exhaustive. We have examined several different related aspects of, and evidence for, gender-specific behaviour: the activities in which women were engaged during their lives (bioarchaeology); how their bodies were treated in death (rituals); and how they were represented in imagery (figurines). We also focused on a specific bone tool type, trapezoidal burnishers, and on the question of pregnancy and childbirth. Our short survey has concluded that there are no general elements or rules valid across the whole period or the whole study area. On the contrary, we observed a “heterogeneity in microcosm” on every level we investigated, appearing as a coexistence of ever-changing local and regional practices.

**Keywords:** Late Neolithic, gender archaeology, woman, burial rites, osteology, figurines, activity markers, Hungary.

**Résumé :** Dans cette étude, nous avons voulu rendre visibles les femmes des communautés du Néolithique récent (5000-4900 – 4500-4400 cal. BC) qui vivaient sur le territoire de l'actuelle Hongrie. La période en question représente l'apogée du Néolithique dans la zone d'étude, avec des établissements étendus et densément peuplés ayant fourni d'abondants témoignages d'une culture matérielle et d'une idéologie sophistiquées. Nous avons étudié l'apparence du corps féminin dans le Néolithique récent hongrois à travers quelques études de cas sélectionnées ; nous n'avons pas cherché à être exhaustives. Nous avons examiné plusieurs aspects connexes des comportements de genre et les indices de ces comportements : les activités auxquelles les femmes se livraient au cours de leur vie (bioarchéologie), la façon dont leur corps était traité lors de la mort (rituels) et la façon dont elles étaient représentées dans l'imagerie (figurines). Nous nous concentrons également sur un type d'outil en os spécifique, les brunissoirs trapézoïdaux, et sur la question de la grossesse et de l'accouchement. Notre brève enquête a permis de conclure qu'il n'existe pas d'éléments ou de règles générales valables pour l'ensemble de la période ou de la zone d'étude. Au contraire, nous avons observé une « hétérogénéité en microcosmes » à tous les niveaux que nous avons étudiés, se manifestant par la coexistence de pratiques locales et régionales en constante évolution.

**Mots-clés :** Néolithique récent, archéologie du genre, femme, rite funéraire, ostéologie, figurine, marqueur d'activité, Hongrie.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Anne Augereau, Sophie Archambault de Beaune, and Caroline Trémeaud, the organisers of Session E1 at the Congrès préhistorique de France 2021, wrote the following about gender archaeology in the session's proposal: "Although almost all European countries have developed this field, it is still not very present in French archaeology, at least not for the pre-and protohistoric periods." This statement is also valid for the situation in Hungary today. Studies focusing on gender have only started to appear recently, and most have been published in a foreign language, in non-Hungarian journals and volumes of studies (Siklósi, 2007; Anders, 2016; Stratton, 2016; Anders and Nagy, 2019; Szeverényi et al., 2020; Čermaková, 2021; Anders, 2023). The "invisibility" of the topic in Hungarian research until now is well illustrated by statistics relating to *Archaeologiai Értesítő*, the essential archaeological journal in Hungary since 1868: only one of the 146 published volumes contains articles pertaining to gender, with a study relating to Early Middle Age children (Borzová and Molnárova, 2017) and a discussion article on the archaeology of identity (Koncz and Szilágyi, 2017), appearing in the 2017 volume.

The study presented here aims to address the need for more gender-related archaeology in Hungary. It also enables us to comment on the conclusions of a study by John Robb and Oliver Harris concerning gender during the Neolithic, where they wrote, "Neolithic gender appears to have been less firmly associated with personal identity and more contextually relevant" and "...these differences do not indicate a consistent, systematic, or widespread pattern of gender difference" (Robb and Harris, 2018, p. 128 and p. 141). In our opinion, the examples from the Late Neolithic of Hungary (5000-4900 – 4500-4400 cal. BC) presented here might serve to qualify their statement.

The period in question represents the prime of the Neolithic in the study area, featuring densely inhabited extended settlements with abundant evidence for a sophisticated material culture and ideology. At that time, the Great Hungarian Plain was inhabited by communities of the so-called Tisza-Herpály-Csőszhalom (THCs) cultural complex; the first appearance of a new settlement type of Anatolian origin, *tell* mounds (multi-layer settlements, often enclosed) in the history of the Carpathian Basin may be linked to these communities. The people of the THCs complex also established single-layer settlements, both in the vicinity of tells and elsewhere. Tell mounds are most likely to have been places where community events took place; thus, they played a crucial role in maintaining the cohesion of communities (Raczky, 2015). In contrast, the Lengyel territory in Transdanubia (as well as in neighbouring Austria and Slovakia) was characterised by single-layer settlements. Concentric ditch-and palisade-systems are often associated with these sites, which may have had a similar function to tells

(Raczky, 2015). The "two worlds" in the Late Neolithic of the Carpathian Basin, namely, the THCs complex in the Trans-Tisza region and the Lengyel culture in Transdanubia, connected at various points: for example, the THCs tell at Polgár-Csőszhalom was surrounded by a fivefold Lengyel-type enclosure-and-palisade system (Raczky, 2015, p. 240), while in another Tisza-culture settlement, the graves were equipped with characteristic Lengyel-style vessels which had been made locally (Sebők, 2012). And, of course, we must also mention Aszód-Papi-földek, a coeval settlement on the eastern fringe of the Lengyel culture's distribution area, with several aspects of its archaeological record linking it to the cultural milieu of the Great Hungarian Plain (Kalicz, 2008; Siklósi, 2013a, p. 56).

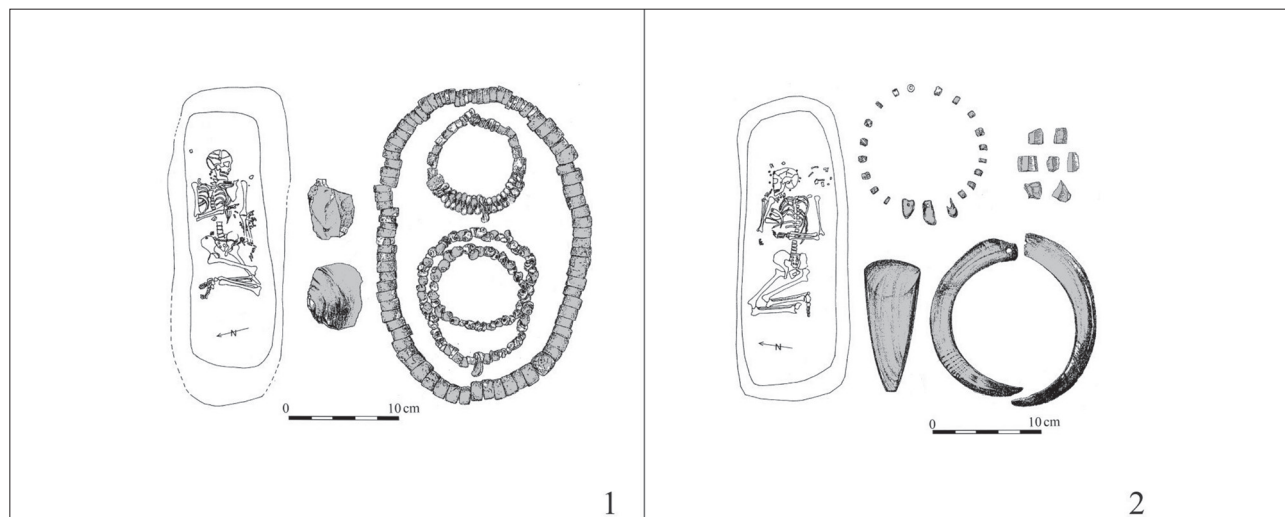
The vast majority of Late Neolithic burials are found in settlements, but in the territory of Eastern Transdanubia, some cemeteries are formed by smaller groups of graves within settlements. Most of the graves are crouched inhumations. The position of the body varies from region to region, from site to site (see below for more details). The most common orientation is east-west. Typical grave goods are stone tools (mostly polished) and various types of ornaments (bracelets, beads) made of spondylus, stone and copper in smaller numbers. In a few cases, status and prestige objects such as wild boar mandibles/lower jaws and boar pendants are also found (Siklósi, 2013b; here: fig. 1). The number of excavated graves is about 3,000 (ca. 2,400 graves from Alsónyék-Bátaszék, not yet published in detail: Köhler, 2012). This number is far from the estimated number of past populations, based on settlement size and number of houses. It seems that the majority of Prehistoric burials remain invisible to us (Anders and Nagy, 2007; Siklósi, 2013a; Raczky and Anders, 2017).

Fortunately, both the number of known graves and the *corpus* of related bioarchaeological data have grown considerably during the past years. There is no significant difference regarding the main elements of the burial rite as compared to previous periods, except for an increase in the number and raw material variety of grave goods; this is the first time that copper artefacts appear in quantity. Transdanubia and the Great Hungarian Plain were similar in many respects, while differences tended to appear on a local scale, that is at the level of individual sites (Siklósi, 2013a, p. 187-198; Borić, 2015; Osztás et al., 2016, p. 182-189).

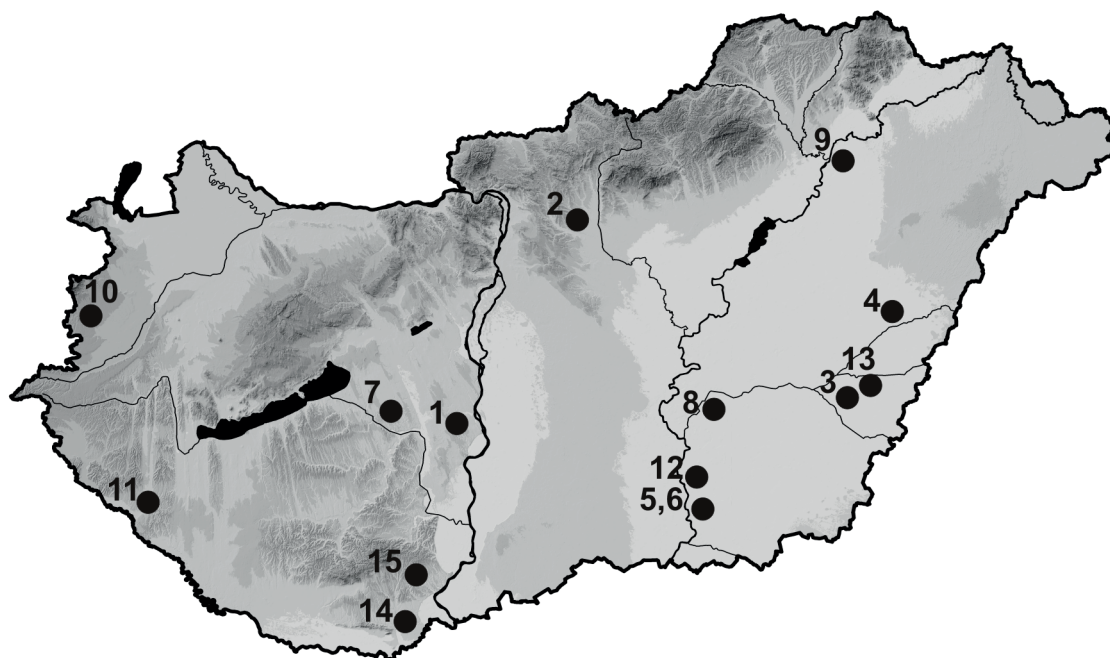
Our study surveys these abundant archaeological and bioarchaeological data, focusing on activities related to women and the appearance of the female body in funerary practices and in imagery. Our survey is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather another step forward on a path already taken in previous studies (Anders and Nagy, 2019; Anders, 2023). Our goal is to change the character of Prehistoric research in Hungary, which has previously been described as "gender-free" (Chapman, 1997, p. 137). We aim to learn about the roles of women, men and children in the community "through the prism of women", as the session's proposal indicated, and make women visible.

But what is to be learned about the lives of those approximately 1,000 women for whom we could obtain information? Too little, we believe, because the large cemeteries and the important finds are of no use if the archaeological and bioarchaeological results of the related research remain unpublished. (For example, no comprehensive archaeological or osteological assessment is available for

Alsónyék-Bátaszék, a site of the Lengyel culture with about 2,400 burials; see Osztás et al., 2016.) Moreover, as noted above, the topic of gender did not feature in previous research (Chapman, 1997; Chapman and Palincas, 2013; Anders and Nagy, 2019). Consequently, the examples discussed here do not represent a suitable base for generalisation, but are perhaps enough to raise attention (fig. 2).



**Fig. 1** – Polgár-Csőszhalom, horizontal settlement. Typical female (1) and male burial (after Anders and Nagy, 2019).  
**Fig. 1** – Polgár-Csőszhalom. Inhumation typique d'une femme (1) et d'un homme (d'après A. Anders et E. Nagy, 2019).



**Fig. 2** – Map of Hungary with the main sites mentioned in the text: 1. Alsónyék-Bátaszék; 2. Aszód-Papi-földek; 3. Békés-Povád; 4. Berettyóújfalu-Herpály; 5. Hódmezővásárhely-Gorzsa; 6. Hódmezővásárhely-Kökénydomb; 7. Mórág-Tűzkődomb; 8. Öcsöd-Kováshalom; 9. Polgár-Csőszhalom; 10. Sé; 11. Sormás-Törökföldek; 12. Szegvár-Tűzköves; 13. Vésztő-Mágor; 14. Villánykövesd; 15. Zengővárkony.

**Fig. 2** – Carte de la Hongrie avec les principaux sites mentionnés dans le texte : 1. Alsónyék-Bátaszék; 2. Aszód-Papi-földek; 3. Békés-Povád; 4. Berettyóújfalu-Herpály; 5. Hódmezővásárhely-Gorzsa; 6. Hódmezővásárhely-Kökénydomb; 7. Mórág-Tűzkődomb; 8. Öcsöd-Kováshalom; 9. Polgár-Csőszhalom; 10. Sé; 11. Sormás-Törökföldek; 12. Szegvár-Tűzköves; 13. Vésztő-Mágor; 14. Villánykövesd; 15. Zengővárkony.

## 2 APPEARANCE OF THE FEMALE BODY

### 2.1 Activities

Marks on humans' teeth and bones, caused by different activities, can provide evidence of gendered aspects of life (Robb and Harris, 2018, p. 139-140). While these traces are few, often unclear, and difficult to link with specific activities, it is worth collecting them as their evaluation might enable us to understand better people's daily lives.

### 2.2 Activity stress markers

The most common pathological alterations relating to physical activity are enthesal lesions (principally of the calcaneum and the patella), generally considered to be markers of an active lifestyle. In the community of the THCs complex's tell settlement at Hódmezővásárhely-Gorzsa on the Great Hungarian Plain, "degenerative changes and musculoskeletal stress markers were very common, affecting 62.5% of young adults and all the old adults. Sixty percent of young adult females and 70% of all adult females suffered some degree of mechanical changes" (Masson, 2014, p. 278). The proportion of such alterations was clearly higher with women, although Muriel Masson notes that "[due to] the underrepresentation of males (only 23 men for 31 women) in this sample, care must be taken not to over-interpret these results, especially for gender-related studies".

In contrast, in the large and more sex-balanced series from the Lengyel-culture settlement at Alsónyék in Transdanubia, enthesopathy was more frequent in men, especially in the adult-mature and mature age groups; 308 cases were recorded from a total of 862 graves analysed by physical anthropology (248 males, 336 females, 147 children, and 131 indeterminate skeletons; Köhler, 2012). The lesions were mostly found on the lower limb bones, indicating a relatively active lifestyle. According to Kitti Köhler, this distribution might reflect a gender-based division of labour where the physically more challenging tasks were assigned to men (Köhler, 2012, p. 97, and 2021, p. 163). As for heel bones (calcanea), the proportion of enthesopathic alterations was 70% for men and 60% for women, suggesting an equally active lifestyle involving a lot of moving for both sexes.

The distribution of enthesopathic alterations between men and women was similarly balanced in the Polgár-Csőszhalom series, a single-layer settlement where 108 graves were analysed in physical anthropology. They included 33 male, 47 female and 28 child skeletons (Zoffmann, 2012). Excessive lesions were only observed in one case, on the tibiae of an adult man (Zoffmann, 2012, p. 105).

### 2.3 Weaving?

Macroscopic analyses were carried out on the bones of 59 individuals from the Lengyel culture cemetery at

Zengővárkony where the total number of graves is 368. These meticulous investigations revealed bone rims on the proximal phalanges of the left hand of four women and one man. The bone rim was 2 to 4 mm thick, indicating extreme physical activity in one case. The bone rims resulted from excessive straining of the hand's short muscles and lumbricals, caused probably by weaving (according to V. Smrčka and his colleagues). The lesions also suggest that the analysed women were right-handed (Smrčka et al., 2018, p. 60, and 2021, p. 58-59).

### 2.4 Working tools? Trapezoidal burnishers

Some artefacts found in the graves might also refer to various activities that could be gender-specific. Furthermore, some of these tools may have meanings that extend beyond their everyday function. For example, in the Late Neolithic context, polished stone axeheads occur almost exclusively in male graves and thus might be a marker of manhood (Anders and Nagy, 2007; Borič, 2015). At Polgár-Csőszhalom, some 24 polished stone axeheads have been recovered from the graves of men and, probably, boys. The axeheads' size, shape, degree of wear, and raw material were highly varied and did not show any sign of standardisation (Szakmány et al., 2019). While graves of both sexes generally contain bone awls and scrapers, one specific type of bone tool: the trapezoidal burnisher, is only found in females' graves (graves nos. 111, 836, 944, and 1164). An additional example was discovered in a settlement context (feature 1099; here: fig. 3).

Grave 111 was the final resting place of an adult woman, aged 34-38 at death, laid on her left side in a crouched position. She wore two necklaces of polished spondylus shell beads and red deer canine beads and a two-row set of spondylus beads around her waist. She had a trapezoidal burnisher next to the right elbow. There were no pathological lesions on her skeleton (fig. 3, no. 1).

Grave 836 comprised the remains of the most distinguished woman in the community of Polgár-Csőszhalom. The mortuary costume of the matron, aged around 51-57 at death, comprised a headdress ornamented with a double strand of spondylus beads, two necklaces of spondylus beads and red deer canine beads, three spondylus arm-rings on both upper arms, a bone ring, and marble beads around the waist. In addition, her grave was equipped with two bone tools, a small ceramic vessel, and more beads and red ochre in a small separate pile (Raczky and Anders, 2017, p. 66-69; here: fig. 3, no. 2). Her right arm was bent at the elbow, with the hand placed on the chest, and the trapezoidal burnisher was discovered next to the right wrist.

The woman in grave 944 was a senile, over 60 years old at death. She was placed on the bottom of the grave pit on her left side, in a crouched position. Her attire was unadorned, and her grave was equipped with two tools, of which one is a trapezoidal burnisher, found probably in a secondary position in the grave's southeastern corner (fig. 3, no. 3). She must have led an active life: due to



**Fig. 3** – Trapezoidal burnishers from Polgár-Csőszhalom: 1) Grave 111; 2) grave 836; 3) grave 944; 4) grave 1164 (photo N. Faragó).

**Fig. 3** – *Brunissoirs trapézoïdaux de Polgár-Csőszhalom* : 1) tombe 111 ; 2) tombe 836 ; 3) tombe 944 ; 4) tombe 1164 (cliché N. Faragó).

arthritis, the radial tuberosity on her right radius had flattened and widened, becoming discoid. Furthermore, mild arthritis was observed on the distal ends of both tibiae and fibulae (Zoffmann, 2012, p. 105).

In grave 1164, an adult woman was laid on her left side in a crouched position. Her lower limbs and feet were covered in ochre, and a small ochre lump was placed by her left upper arm. The right arm was bent at the elbow, and a trapezoidal burnisher was placed next to the hand, in line with the left elbow (fig. 3, no. 4).

Trapezoidal burnishers clearly belong to what Alice M. Choyke has termed Class I tools, which are planned and produced with a specific purpose in mind (Choyke, 1997). As for their raw material, both animal species and skeletal element choices were rigorous: these objects were made of mammalian scapulae; the *chaîne opératoire* was well-planned and multi-staged, and the end product was consistent in shape and size. In their present condition, however, the specimens of the type show significant variation in size due to heavy use and repeated reworking. The first step of the manufacturing process consisted of roughly scraping off the scapula's outer surface, probably to remove the periosteum. Next, lines were incised into the surface, outlining the future tool's desired shape, followed by division of the scapula into sections. The final shape and the working edge were then created by abrasion.

Use wear was observed both on the working edge and at the opposite, "inactive" end of these tools. In several cases, the inactive end suffered damage in the form of breaks and the chipping off of larger transverse flakes from the surface. This damage was not subsequently repaired, but the tool was used nonetheless. The manufacturing marks at the inactive end are usually covered

by intense use polish and by handling polish, giving them a moderate sheen. In contrast, the active edge was heavily used, to judge from our observations of considerable damage in the form of micro-chipping, densely covering the surface. The flakes start from one side, suggesting a dedicated use side of the tool (the front and back of the tool were not interchangeable). The working edge, especially on smaller examples, is asymmetrical. This phenomenon is connected to the degree of flaking, with more heavy flaking at the more damaged side of the edge; this may give us a direct hint about the tool's working direction.

Towards the middle and inactive part of the tools, handling polish and rounding can be observed, suggesting that these tools were used both with bare hands and set into a handle.

Regarding the life histories of these tools, the ones with the least use-wear are the piece found on the settlement and the burnisher in grave 1164, while the most heavily used ones are those from graves 836 and 944. The burnisher in grave 1164 is extremely thin, which raises the question of useability. The object had definitely been used, but we may assume that this tool would not have lasted as long as the others, made of thicker raw material (from graves 836, 944 and 1099). The trapezoidal burnisher from grave 111 is unique in its shape of the inactive end. It is conceivable that this was the original shape of many or all such burnishers, but that due to considerable reshaping over the course of the objects' use (featuring transverse flaking at the inactive end), this original shape is no longer visible in most cases. This would be consistent with the hypothesized use of the tools as burnishers: they would be pushed with medium force, thereby causing the observed flaking, deformation, and shortening of

the active edge. This hypothesis is yet to be tested experimentally, however.

Today, we know of no analogy for these objects and, consequently, we cannot reliably determine the activity in which they were used, but clearly their use was gender-specific.

### 3. THE BODY ITSELF

We can study the evidence of gender through the human body itself, not only by examining how it was dressed and how it was arranged in the grave, but also on a more abstract level that of imagery, through how it appears in visual representations.

#### 3.1 The body in the grave

The funerary rite reflects several important decisions made by the mourning community: how to orientate the grave pit, in what position to place the body in the grave (lying on the back, face down, or on one side or another), and how to arrange the arms and feet. Many combinations of these decisions are known, thanks to the diverse traditions of different cultures (Häusler, 2000 and 2003). One of the oldest sites with a gendered burial practice involving body position is the Varna cemetery in Bulgaria, dated to 4590-4340 cal. BC (Krauß et al., 2014). Later on, gendered burial practices also appeared in the Copper age Tiszapolgár and Bodrogkeresztúr cultures in the Carpathian Basin. By the Early Bronze age, the funerary rite involving body position had developed into a highly complex system, as reflected by the graves, extending from north-west Europe to the upper Volga river in Russia and as far as western Anatolia around 2900-2800 cal. BC (Sofaer-Derevenski, 1997; Chapman, 2000; Häusler, 2000 and 2003; Szeverényi et al., 2020; Rebay-Salisbury et al., 2022). We have been interested in a possible relationship between biological sex and body

position (crouched on the right or left) in Late Neolithic communities in the territory of today's Hungary, as our source material seems to be coeval with or somewhat older than the Varna cemetery.

For a correct assessment of a community's practice regarding the treating of deceased men's and women's bodies in the course of a funeral, we needed to have a related archaeological evaluation and a determination of biological sex through osteological or aDNA analysis of the skeletons in question. A survey of the eligible sites from Hungary revealed that only a tiny proportion match this condition, as in many cases, either the anthropological analysis has not been carried out or the archaeological evaluation is not yet published<sup>(1)</sup>. We have found four suitable sites of the Lengyel culture in Transdanubia (Aszód-Papi-földek, Mórágyp-Tüzködomb, Villánykövesd, and Zengővárkony) and another four of the THCs complex in the Great Hungarian Plain (Békés-Pováád, Öcsöd-Kováshalom, Polgár-Csöszhalom, Vésztő-Mágör), with 502 individual cases suitable for analysis in total (table 1). The cultural differences in treating the dead between Transdanubia and the Great Hungarian Plain are marked. While in the Lengyel culture, sex does not seem to be a determining factor in deciding on body position, with the preferred body position seeming to vary by settlement (thus, community), in the sites of the THCs complex, there is a clear connection between sex and body position, and some sites show a recurring preference of laying women mainly on their left, and men on their right side. This pattern is especially apparent with the graves at Polgár-Csöszhalom. According to our previous analysis, at Polgár-Csöszhalom, this element of the funerary rite also applied to children (Anders and Nagy, 2007; Raczky and Anders, 2017; Anders and Nagy, 2019).

#### 3.2 The body in the life

Some data on pregnancy and childbirth have been obtained in Neolithic Transdanubia. Examples of women who died during childbirth are known from two sites in

Site	Culture	Position in the grave						Reference
		right			left			
		female	male	child	female	male	child	
Békés-Pováád	THCs	1	3	0	1	0	0	Siklósi, 2013a
Öcsöd-Kováshalom	THCs	2	4	3	5	1	1	Siklósi, 2013a
Polgár-Csöszhalom	THCs	4	29	17	44	1	8	Anders, 2017
Vésztő-Mágör	THCs	1	8	0	3	6	6	Siklósi, 2013a
Aszód-Papiföldek	Lengyel	47	37	50	7	1	9	Siklósi, 2013a
Mórágyp-Tüzködomb	Lengyel	29	14	20	2	2	5	Zalai-Gaál, 2002
Villánykövesd	Lengyel	0	0	1	8	5	7	Gábor, 2021
Zengővárkony	Lengyel	0	2	1	10	14	3	Gábor, 2021
Total		84	97	92	80	30	39	

**Table 1** – Position of bodies in Late Neolithic burials of men, women and children in Hungary.

**Tabl. 1** – Position des corps dans les sépultures d'hommes, de femmes et d'enfants du Néolithique récent de Hongrie.

the Lengyel culture; the graves did not contain any grave goods. In these cases, death was probably due to a “narrow pelvis”, i.e. a disparity between the opening of the pelvis and the head of the foetus, with the foetus becoming stuck in the birth canal (Köhler, 2021, p. 165). Grave 10 in Villánykövesd cemetery contained the remains of a woman who was approximately 30-40 years old at death, with fragments of a foetal skeleton in her pelvic bones (Zoffmann, 1968, p. 26; Köhler, 2012, p. 102). The foetus had liver disease, as evidenced by trace element analysis and macroscopic identification of pelvic and endocranial periostitis. The mother was not local, and her elevated  $\delta^{15}\text{N}$  values indicated animal protein sources obtained through fish consumption (Srmčka, 2021, p. 351). Two graves of women with perinatal babies, probably still in the birth canal, are known from Alsónyék-Bátaszék (Köhler, 2012, p. 101-102, 3. táblázat; Köhler, 2021, p. 164-165). The woman in grave 474 was about 23-29 years old, and the woman in grave 4414 was about 40-44 years old at death. The positions of the foetal skeletons suggest that both women died in late pregnancy or during childbirth (Köhler, 2012, p. 102). Currently, we have no information on the general age at which women began having babies in the Neolithic. Nevertheless, the women from grave 10 in the Villánykövesd cemetery (about 36-40 years old) and the woman from grave 4414 in Alsónyék-Bátaszék (40-44 years old at death) appear to be far too old to have a first child. Based on the results of pelvic marker analysis on Bronze age women, some of them had already given birth at around 17-19 years of age (Rebay-Salisbury, 2017).

Birth-related spondylotic lesions were observed on the pubic bones of two women at Polgár-Csőszhalom<sup>(2)</sup>. Grave 332 was the final resting place of a woman aged 52-56 years, buried without any grave goods, while the woman in grave 332, aged approximately 31-35 years old at death, possessed a necklace and a two-row set of waist beads.

### 3.3 The body in imagery

In Late Neolithic art, the human body is represented in many ways, all connected with clay: in the vessel form itself, on the vessel surface as an incised, painted, or applied element, or as an individual statuette. Several comprehensive surveys dealing with the topic have already been published (Hansen, 2007; Bánffy, 2017). There is a sharp difference between Transdanubia and the Great Hungarian Plain: while the Lengyel culture is abundant in figural representations, for example: 130 such items have been recovered from an area of only 1,000 m<sup>2</sup> at Sé (Kalicz, 1998, p. 65), the number of examples known from the sites of the THC's complex is considerably lower.

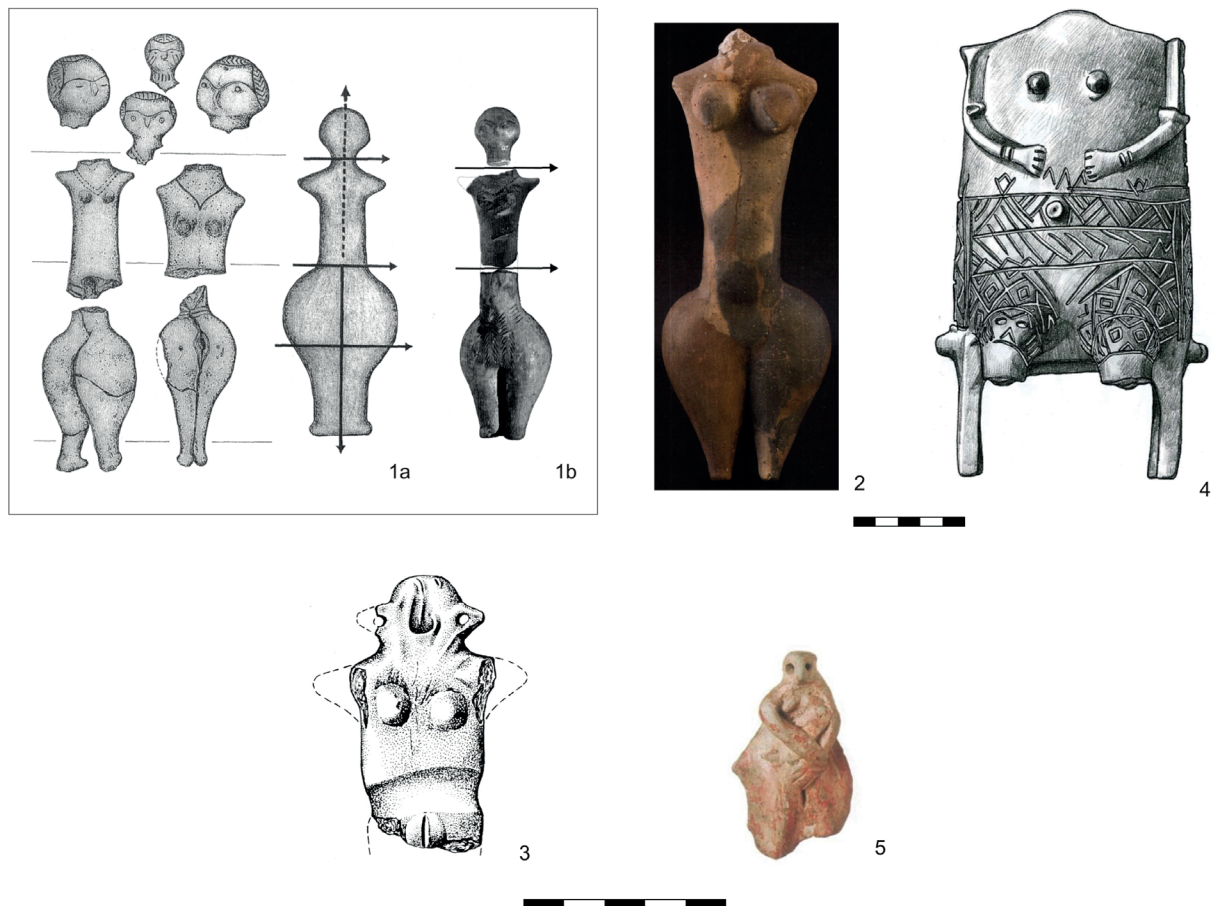
In the western Lengyel culture, figurines seem to have been standardised: the visual canon prescribes a spherical head, an elongated neck and upper body, stump-like arms, and exaggerated buttocks. The legs are often modelled separately and assembled from two halves. Most figurines indisputably depict female bodies with accen-

tuated breasts and a fat, strongly protruding steatopygous bottom (fig. 4, nos. 1a and 1b). The head is always elaborate, with detailed representations of the hairdo, eyes, nose, and ears, but interestingly never the mouth (Kalicz, 1998, p. 96-112; Bánffy, 2017, p. 714-715; Barna, 2017, p. 219-220). The neck, hips, thighs, and knees are often covered by incised or painted patterns; based on that, a detailed reconstruction of women's attire has been made (Barna and Tóth, 2005).

The number of anthropomorphic representations from contemporary sites in eastern Hungary is significantly lower. In contrast, their formal variety is much higher, even within a single site, as shown by finds from Polgár-Csőszhalom, where a small, realistic figurine, a schematic one reflecting archaic Early Neolithic traditions, a fat-bottomed idol consisting of two matching halves, and an anthropomorphic vessel have all been discovered in the tell area and the surrounding single-layer part of the settlement. The fat-bottomed figurine and the anthropomorphic vessel clearly depict women (Anders and Nagy, 2019, p. 194-195, fig. 5). However, the archaeological record of another contemporary tell settlement, Berettyóújfalu-Herpály, contained only a few schematic figurines with accentuated breasts and pubic region, clearly depicting women (Kalicz and Raczky, 1987, p. 123; here: fig. 4, no. 3). The type characteristic of the settlements in the southern part of the THC's complex is the so-called “Kökénydomb Venus”, an anthropomorphic vessel type representing the human figurine sitting on a stool (“throne”). With this type, the cylindrical vessel's surface is densely covered by intricate geometric and meandering (so-called “textile”) patterns, and the marking of the sex is minimal, restricted to two small knobs representing the breasts and an incised triangle for the pubic region (Trogmayer et al., 2005, p. 59-61; here: fig. 4, no. 4). The type also comprises a specimen interpreted by many as undisputably representing a male: the world-famous terracotta statuette of a man with a sickle from Szegvár (Bánffy, 2017, p. 713). As for other specimens of the type (Trogmayer et al., 2005, p. 62-64), also called “Venuses”, we think their interpretation as depicting women is questionable: of the Kökénydomb series, breasts are only marked on Venus no. 2, but not the others. In addition, Svend Hansen has argued that linking anthropomorphic vessels and statuettes with either sex is problematic and cannot be carried out based solely on the presence or absence of the marking of breasts, as in many cases a figurine displays both breasts and male genitalia (see for example anthropomorphic vessels nos. IV and V from Szegvár-Tűzköves; Hansen, 2007, p. 344-345). Besides these large representations, lesser, often fragmentary, schematic figurines are also known from the area. These often come with (female?) breasts, incised pubic triangles (for example Öcsöd-Kováshalom), or an oval incision representing the vulva (Berettyóújfalu-Herpály); thus, their interpretation as a woman is more certain (Hansen, 2007, Tafel 236-237).

Inspired by the Villánykövesd individual, István Zalai-Gaál collated information on Central and Southeast





**Fig. 4** – Late Neolithic anthropomorphic representations from the territory of Hungary : 1a) Sé; 1b) Sormás-Törökföldek (after Barna, 2017); 2) Sé (H.: 20.5 cm; after Ilon, 2007); 3) Berettyóújfalu-Herpály (H.: 6.7 cm; after Kalicz and Raczky, 1987); 4) Hódmezővásárhely-Kökénydomb (H.: 21.2 cm; after O. Trogmayer et al., 2005); 5) Zengővárkony (H.: 5 cm; after E. Nagy, 2014).

**Fig. 4** – Représentations anthropomorphes du Néolithique récent, Hongrie : 1a) Sé ; 1b) Sormás-Törökföldek (d’après Barna, 2017) ; 2) Sé (h : 20,5 cm ; d’après Ilon, 2007) ; 3) Berettyóújfalu-Herpály (h : 6,7 cm ; d’après Kalicz et Raczky, 1987) ; 4) Hódmezővásárhely-Kökénydomb (h : 21,2 cm ; d’après Trogmayer et al., 2005) ; 5) Zengővárkony (h : 5 cm ; d’après Nagy, 2014).

European representations where women were depicted with a large belly (which he interpreted as a marker of pregnancy; I. Zalai-Gaál, 2007).

There is a figurine, the so-called “Madonna of Zengővárkony,” which probably depicts a mother and her child (fig. 4, no 5). The piece was originally intended to be applied to a vessel, and its entire surface has been covered with red. The figurine is an unambiguous representation of a woman (with marks of breasts and a vulva) holding another smaller figurine, a child, in her hands crossed on her chest (Nagy, 2004).

#### 4. DISCUSSION

We shall now attempt to synthesise the wide-ranging and diverse quality data set described above.

Amongst the individuals buried at Zengővárkony, four women and a man had bone rims on the right hand’s proximal phalanges, caused probably by weaving (Smrčka et al., 2018, p. 60 and 2021, p. 58-59). However, other

repeated activities might also cause the lesions, such as manufacturing cords, grinding grain, or basketry (Dočkalova, 2008, p. 308). Weaving and cloth manufacturing, in general, were part of the so-called “maintenance activities” that stabilise daily life and provide it with a framework (other maintenance activities are caregiving, feeding, and food processing, performing hygiene-, public health- and healing-related tasks, engaging in the socialisation of children, and fitting out and organising the related spaces: González-Marcén et al., 2008, p. 3; Chapman, 2020, p. 52). In addition, weaving is one of the most time-consuming tasks besides gathering firewood and bringing water (Chapman, 2020, p. 52). Weaving tools, including spindle whorls and loom weights, have been recovered in relatively small numbers from settlements of the Lengyel culture (Barna, 2017, p. 208). At Sormás-Törökföldek, more than 40 different spindle-whorls and a clay weight have been found, the latter with the imprint of simple canvas fabric (Barna, 2004, p. 180, 9 kép 3, fig. 4.1b). Altogether 32 flat weights indicating a loom were discovered in a small pile in the corner of house no. 2 at Aszód-Papi-földek; one of the

weights had a textile impression on its surface. Also, in the case of a painted vessel from the same site, it is possible that the fine grid decorating it was created by dipping a piece of fine cloth in the paint substance and covering the surface with that (Kalicz, 1985, p. 52, Abb. 85, 3-4). The presence of lesions possibly related to weaving on the hand of a man is fascinating because, as Paloma González-Marcén and her colleagues have highlighted, probably every member of the community had to participate in maintenance activities (González-Marcén et al., 2008, p. 3).

Although we cannot define it precisely yet, the activity involving trapezoidal burnishers was probably carried out primarily by women. The fact that such objects were placed as grave goods of four women of totally different age and social status (young and old, the richest amongst the excavated graves and one otherwise lacking any grave good) is worth highlighting. With a single exception, trapezoidal burnishers seem to have been placed in the grave always in the same position, left of the body, in line with the elbow and the hand. That these tools were precious possessions is well-reflected by the fact that only a single specimen was discovered in a settlement context among the 1787 bone tool finds. Based on their diverse life trajectories, with their condition ranging from almost new to heavily worn, the latter with marks of repeated reworking, these tools were probably part of the deceased's personal belongings, used by them during their lives in an activity known and/or practised by few people. In the Late Neolithic, tools of bone and other hard animal material were equally rare in graves in Transdanubia and the Great Hungarian Plain (Siklósi, 2013a, p. 171 and p. 191).

In general, the presence of a gendered burial practice is best observed in grave goods and in elements of the funerary costume, including jewellery (Siklósi, 2013a, p. 114; Borić, 2015; Chapman, 2020, p. 107). From the Late Neolithic on, a new set of elements, including diverse body positions and orientations for men and women, became involved in expressing gender in a funerary context in Europe (Rebay-Salisbury et al., 2022). According to the archaeological and osteological data currently at hand, such a distinction was first made in settlements in the Great Hungarian Plain during the Late Neolithic (Chapman, 2000, p. 46; Anders and Nagy, 2007, p. 90-93; Siklósi, 2013a, p. 175); in the middle and northern part of the distribution area of the THCs complex, women were laid to rest crouched on their left, while men were laid on their right side (table 1). One cannot say, though, that this practice was general: while gendered burial practices were usually extremely strict, with a clear-cut distinction between men and women and direct links with dedicated sides for each, we know of several cases displaying mixed signals. For example, some individuals at Polgár-Csőszhalom do not seem to be arranged according to a strict binary funerary pattern. It is noteworthy that in these cases, female gender roles seem to be more fluid: that is, the appearance of male gender markers in the burial of biological women is more frequent than *vice versa* (Anders and Nagy, 2019, p. 190-193). Based on pep-

tide-based sex identification, it was twice as frequent in the Bronze age cemetery of Franzhausen to bury girls as boys and women as men than the opposite (Rebay-Salisbury et al., 2022, p. 9).

In Neolithic imagery, women are considerably more frequently portrayed than men, although the focus is usually only on sexual characteristics rather than the whole body (Hansen, 2007, p. 341-345; Robb and Harris, 2018, p. 134; Chapman, 2020, p. 131-140). Generally speaking, the extremely simplified figurines in the Hungarian Late Neolithic match this trend, even if the numbers vary by cultural context. The only exception is the elegant and realistic Sé-type figurines, representing the choices of a local group of the Lengyel culture (fig. 4, no. 2). However, irrespective of style and elaborateness, all figurines represent and refer to the same thing: the human body (Nanoglou, 2008). The interpretation of the jewellery and clothing appearing as decoration on these figurines is far from being unproblematic. There are reconstructions of attire created based on the patterns (Barna and Tóth, 2005; Chapman, 2020, p. 145, fig. 4.34), but the depicted clothing does not seem to match grave finds: for example, there is no evidence of belts in burials of the Lengyel culture, while that piece of costume is a key element on the figurines (Barna and Tóth, 2005, p. 54-55). Obviously, it is possible that the belts of the mortuary costume were made of organic materials, but that is yet to be proven. The differences in the wearing style of waist beads at particular sites of the THCs complex seem to reflect local choices and traditions: while no such item was found in any grave at Szegvár-Tűzköves (Korek, 1987, p. 58), at Polgár-Csőszhalom, waist beads were an essential element of expressing femininity (Anders and Nagy, 2019, p. 189-193). In contrast, spondylus and copper bracelets do not seem to have been gendered, appearing in burials of both men and women (Anders and Nagy, 2007 and 2019; Siklósi, 2013b). Bracelets are known from representations where they appear in the same position as in graves (Siklósi, 2013b). In our opinion, these examples are warnings that the attires appearing in imagery and in graves are not necessarily the same, both being highly complex representations of specific aspects of past reality. An interpretation of a figurine's shape and the patterns adorning it can only be complete and relevant when revealing and considering how living individuals appeared and were dressed and adorned (Bailey, 2005; Nanoglou, 2008; Bánffy, 2017; Robb and Harris, 2018; Chapman, 2020). These aspects could not be discussed in this study.

Pregnancy and childbirth are areas of Prehistoric women's lives that are extremely hard to research (Chapman, 2020, p. 45). Luckily, several comprehensive ERC projects focusing on Prehistoric times have been launched recently, including BIRTH (Births, mothers, and babies: prehistoric fertility in the Balkans between 10000-5000 BC), led by Sofija Stevanović, and VAMOS (The Value of mothers to society: responses to motherhood and child rearing practices in Prehistoric Europe), led by Katharina Rebay-Salisbury<sup>(3)</sup>. The results of these

projects will benefit related research focusing on the Hungarian Neolithic (Anders, 2023).

The interpretation of figurines with large belly as a marker of pregnancy (Zalai-Gaál, 2007), faces the same difficulties as for the reconstruction of costumes. The correlation between pregnancy, fertility and visual representations in the Early Neolithic of the central Balkans has previously been the subject of statistical analysis (Trpković et al., 2017). This research concluded that representations of pregnancy are scarce among figurines and that it is highly improbable that the large belly of the figurines in question depicts pregnancy (Trpković et al., 2017).

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

We have surveyed the appearance of the female body in the Late Neolithic of Hungary through a few examples, collected without the intention to undertake an exhaustive review. We have examined several different related aspects: in what activities women were engaged during their lives, how their bodies were treated in death, and how they were represented in imagery, focusing on pregnancy and childbirth in particular. Obviously, there are many more ways and approaches (for example, bioarchaeology) to investigate the life, death, and representation of Neolithic women (for a fresh study, see Bickle and Sibbesson, 2018).

For the time being, the short survey presented here has revealed an essential trait of the context of gender in the Late Neolithic: there are no general elements or rules that are valid for the whole period or the whole of the study area. On the contrary, we observed a “heterogeneity in microcosm” on every inspected level. “Neolithic gender seems to be more contextually relevant” (Robb and Harris, 2018, p. 142), appearing as a coexistence of ever-changing local and regional practices. There are exceptional Neolithic sites, such as Polgár-Csöszhalom, where the complexity and quality of the available data make it suitable for gender research. We hope that the ongoing bioarchaeological research of the anthropological record of Polgár-Csöszhalom, including stable isotope, aDNA and activity marker analyses, might in the future contribute significantly to our understanding of the life of Late Neolithic women.

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## NOTES

- (1) One must handle with caution the frequently cited example of Szegvár-Tűzköves, where “30 males had been laid on their right side, and 15 of the 18 females on their left side” (Korek, 1987, p. 58), as there is no available anthropological sex determination of the series in question. Therefore, we had to exclude that site from our evaluation.
- (2) Z. Zoffmann, unpublished reports.
- (3) <https://www.ercbirth.com/>,  
<https://www.oeaw.ac.at/oeai/forschung/praehistorie-wana-archaeologie/praehistorische-identitaeten/the-value-of-mothers-to-society>

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