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**EASTERN MYTH ELEMENTS IN THE WEST  
IN LIGHT OF THE NART SAGAS AND THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
FINDS OF THE CARPATHIAN BASIN***Дзасохты Музаферы 80 азы бонмæ*

While researching the Indo-European ancient mythology, Georges Dumézil found a close connection between certain myths of the Caucasian, Italic, Celtic and Scandinavian people. One of the fundamental points of his works is that the mythic phenomena occurring in Caucasian epics had been taken on from the Indo-European language before its separation from the Indo-Iranian linguistic block, and while in Europe those were only preserved sporadically, their effects, due to the great migrations, can be traced as far east as Japan.<sup>1</sup> Based on kinship names, he puts the separation of Indo-European and Indo-Iranian people to the post-matriarchate period of social development.<sup>2</sup> Although it is undeniable that the Nart sagas<sup>3</sup> contain features pointing to an earlier period, their final formation could be dated to the beginning of the Iron Age, since the early part of the stories reflects this period. For instance, the word 'bronze' is not mentioned in the texts even once, meanwhile copper appears seven times, but always in some unusual role: a marvellous cauldron, a plate patching skulls, substituting a missing ear, ornamenting a palace, etc., but there is no one time when it is a common utility tool. Clearly, iron has the most dominant role, mentioned over a hundred times in some form or other. Steel appears about forty times as the name of the material and on a dozen occasions as an attribute (e.g. body of steel, Batradz the steely, steely sounding, etc.). It is also frequently used in word combinations (e.g. steel pike, steel casket, steel scissors, steel curb, steel spoke, steel sword, steel helmet, etc.). Iron occurs as an independent word on more than twenty occasions, and almost fifty times in a word combination (iron gate, iron door, iron curb, iron chain, iron column, iron hinge), and one of the most popular phrases was the *iron stallion*, which alone is mentioned one and a half dozen times. Looking at the list, it is apparent that they differentiated between iron and steel based on their quality, and that this metal was used not only for weapons, but already for producing several utility tools as well.<sup>4</sup>

However, throughout his extremely thorough and far-reaching work, which he based on folklore texts, ancient sources and linguistic research – as Mihály Hoppál has pointed out in the Hungarian research – Dumézil scarcely uses archaeological results<sup>5</sup> and this is why his works have been severely criticised – and in light of recent findings, it seems that even more rightly so. The debate, among other things, also raised the idea that if certain phenomena considered by him to be Indo-European are present in the Old Testament as well, those cannot be regarded as Indo-European.<sup>6</sup>

Considering the Regöly findings, possessing a wide system of relations, including to the Indo-Iranian peoples and, based on the astragalus bones, to the Nart sagas too, the question is raised whether certain myth elements observable among Caucasian peoples are really the scattered parts of the organic development of the western Indo-European cultural culture area from the beginning, which have been preserved better in traditional eastern communities – or should we expect some other processes behind the spreading of similar phenomena, doubtlessly existing in a large territory, maybe different from the direction Dumézil assumed?

The material of finds found in the Iron Age tumulus excavated in the southwestern parts of the Carpathian Basin, on the Strupka-Magyar estate in Regöly in 2011-12, presented a type of objects and phenomena yet unknown in our territory, pointing to an eastern connection, which suggests a population, who, regarding their lifestyle, is similar to the Scythians, but they got around the Black Sea not from the north, but from the south by traversing the Caucasus and Asia Minor. According to our present knowledge, there was only one such people during the period examined: the Cimmerians,<sup>7</sup> a part of whom spread over the northern side of the Black Sea fleeing from the Scythians to the west, while their another branch turned south, traversing the Caucasus and from the 8th century BC they were already fighting on the lands of Urartu, Phrygia, then later of Lydia.<sup>8</sup> This way it becomes clear how those arriving through the Balkans to Southern Transdanubia in the second half of the 7th century BC left behind a material of finds with a particular mix of the objects typical of eastern horse peoples and the advanced technology of the Ancient East. The historical data show as well that along the route of their migration from Central Asia to Europe, arriving in several waves from different directions, the Cimmerians transmitted a highly mixed material and spiritual culture towards our continent in the 9-7th century BC. For example, the cista fragments of Regöly, or the “cista cordoni” and incense burners featured on the reliefs of the Apadana of Persepolis, whose structure is similar to its hypostylic sepulchre, appear just in the very centre of the Zoroastrian religion, so they are clearly a part of it.<sup>9</sup> (Fig. 2 C, E) It was apparent from the first moment that the finds found in Regöly, that although the artefact types, having parallels traceable as far as the Etruscan territories, are clearly dated back to

the second half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, they cannot be fitted among the finds of either the Scythian, or the Hallstatt culture.<sup>10</sup> A significant part of the fragments share the closest connections with artefacts of archaeological groups of the same age lying south-southwest from our area (Japod, Martijanec, Kaptol, Dalj, Budinjak),<sup>11</sup> but they also reflect a number of differences as well. For this reason, as part of our previous researches on the southern half of Transdanubia, we have raised the opportunity of the existence of the *Regöly-group*, a small, self-contained kingdom as a territorial extension to the Croatian and Slovenian archaeological groups mentioned before.<sup>12</sup> We have regarded the objects discovered in the tumulus – taking into consideration the notes of ancient authors as well – as the legacy of a people with a yet unknown connection to the Sigynnae, called the Pannons, who occupied parts of Transdanubia south of the line of the Bakony Mountains from the last third of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC to the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC for a period of almost three centuries.<sup>13</sup> Based on the archaeological excavations, Herodotus' comment on the peoples living between the Danube and the Adriatic Sea, saying *the Sigynnae, south of the Istros wearing Median clothes*,<sup>14</sup> has to be taken just as literally as his description of Pyrene, the commercial town excavated near Heuneburg, Germany.<sup>15</sup>

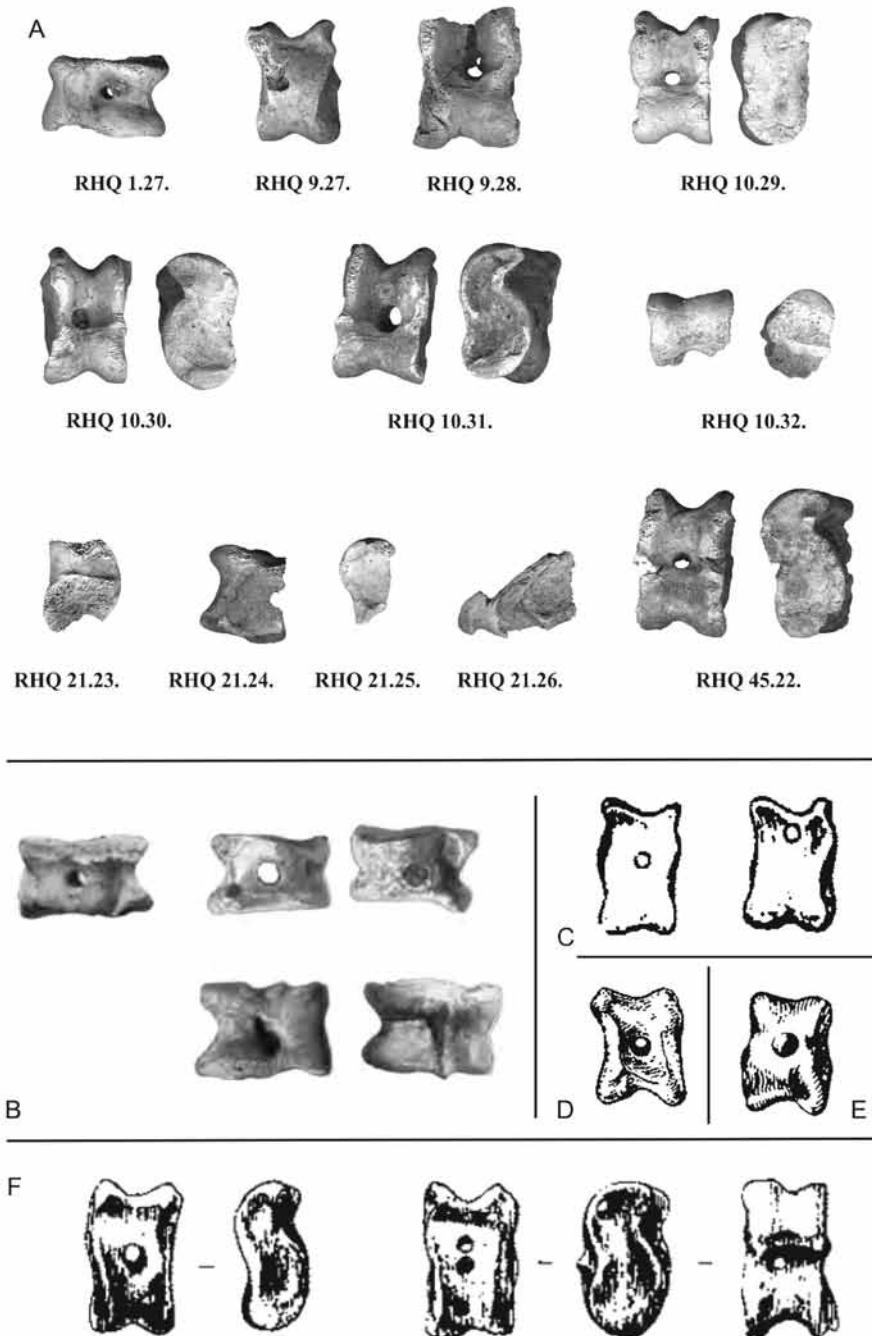
In light of the Regöly finds it is apparent that the tangible occurrence of phenomena related to the early ancient Mithra that had actually been canonised by Darius is in fact – based on Herodotus – may be linked to the Sigynnae people arriving from Median territories. On the whole, the recent finds of Regöly signify such a missing link in the research of this region which also serve as material proof of archaeologist and religion-historian István Tóth's most important conclusions about the Roman age ancient inhabitants. In his opinion, the Pannon people could have been the ethnic group *who were in connection both with the Greeks and the Etruscans, and who came to possess the astronomical knowledge not only of the Mediterranean world, but also the similar traditions of central Germania (the Saale region) and those they could cumulate in their own visions of afterlife. This ethnic group – neither Celtic, nor Illyrian – can be identified with the Pannons, whose notions of afterlife lived on with almost unvaried content in the minds and souls of the native people of Roman Pannonia as well.*<sup>16</sup>

In case of certain artefact types found in Regöly the possibility of their import may also be raised, precisely because of the immediately apparent especially wide system of relations ranging from Central Asia to Hallstatt and Etruscan territories. One of the peculiarities of the fluctuating views of European research of today is that the occurrences of foreign archaeological objects found in the continent's archaeological cultures are predominantly explained by trade and cultural influences. Therefore, this time instead of following the spectacular and well-traceable changes in weaponry, harnesses and vessel sets, we intend to take

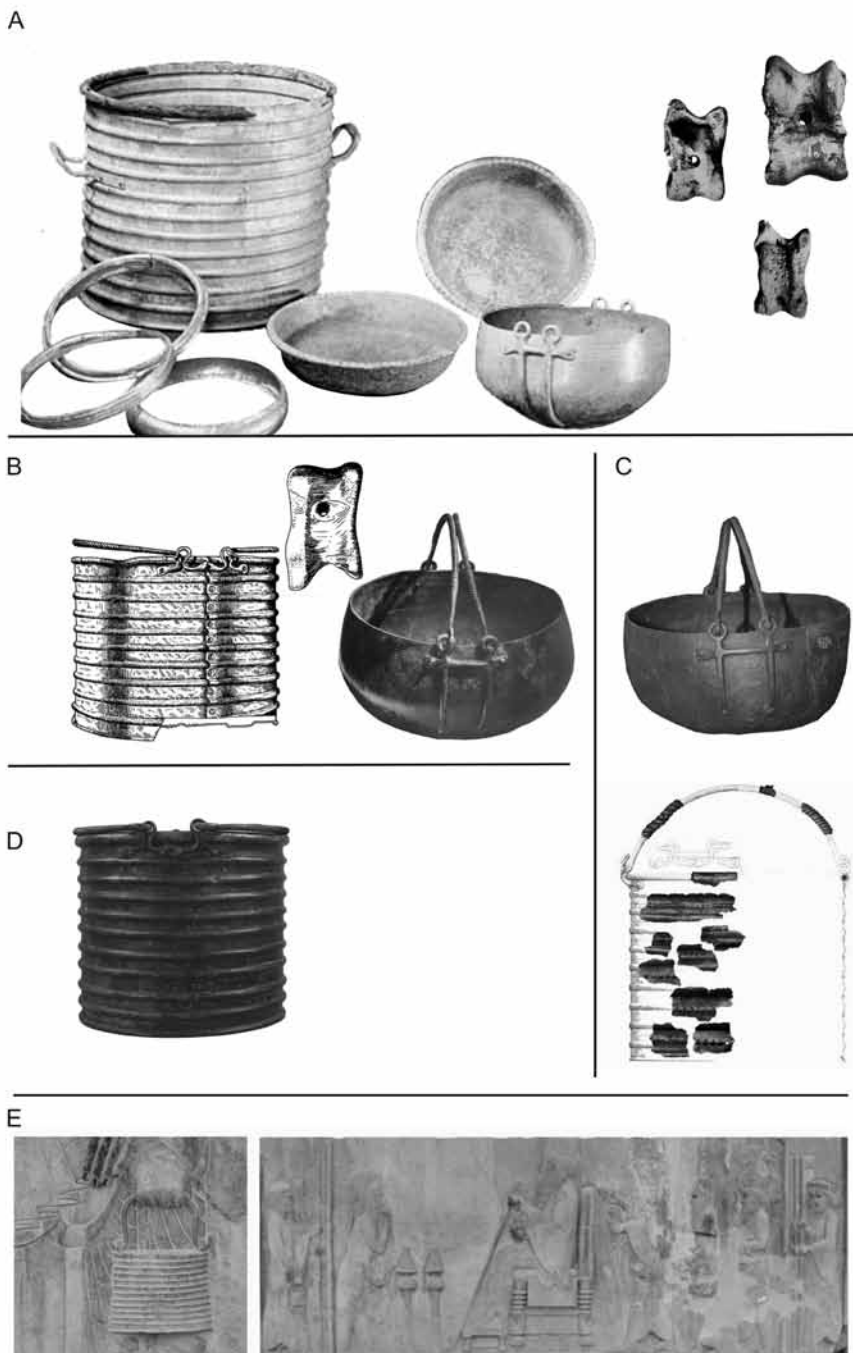
into consideration a phenomenon, the spreading of which doubtlessly cannot be explained by trade activities or fashion, since it is closely related to the people, their customs and cultic life moving with them, which change much more slowly. Such includes, for instance, the dozens of sheep astragalus bones excavated in Regöly that can be found throughout a wide range of territories and several archaeological sites of various eras, and also well known from the Caucasian Nart sagas. (Fig. 1 A)

Certain finds of the Regöly tumulus are clearly connected to the Indo-Iranian Sigynnae people moving from Media to the Carpathian Basin, so the appearance of the drilled sheep astragalus bones in the last third of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC in Pannonia is not a surprise. Unfortunately, no one, not Dumézil either, has examined this region during their research on Indo-Iranian myths. However, he has touched upon several times the parallels between the Celtic and Italic territories,<sup>17</sup> where based on the Heuneburg and Etruscan finds the use and depiction of astragalus bones indicate connections as well. Dumézil suggested that the similarities are due to the Indo-European traditions living on due to their tenacious and adaptive traits. According to him, *when some prehistoric, Indo-European notion is preserved at the same time – for example – by the Indo-Iranians and the Germans, or in the Indo-Iranian, Celtic and Italic people, we have to presume that this notion is connected to constant and necessary factors, which the migrations and new backgrounds cannot overcome. But for being able to endure this way, that notion had to continuously adapt to the geographic and sometimes historic conditions of that moment.*<sup>18</sup> Practically speaking, this conclusion sums up the lessons drawn from the debate around the turn of the 19-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, according to which the changing and integration of material culture is faster than the transformation of the elements of the spiritual sphere, and the regularities of the development of these two areas differ to a significant extent. However, the methods of archaeology are primarily applied for tracing the movements of objects and artefact types. This is the reason precisely while we put such a special archaeological find into the focus of our investigation that is available practically everywhere, so if necessary, it can be used anywhere in the world, while not having a practical value, and is practically worthless. Yet, as the Nart sagas and the archaeological observations clearly indicate, in certain territories for definite time periods it possesses a sacred role,<sup>19</sup> thereby belonging to a specific culture, so it is connected to both the material and spiritual spheres at the same time. It is obvious that it may be given a sacred role only in such a community with the necessary beliefs and customs that can retrieve such a role from it.

It is a peculiar characteristic of archaeological research that based on the perpetually increasing volume of material of finds our knowledge becomes more detailed and precise as well. In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, based on the avail-



**Figure 1.** Astragalus bones. *A:* Regöly, Strupka-Magyar estate; *B:* Kumbulta-Verchnaja Rutcha; *C:* Psedach; *D:* Verchnij Baksan; *E:* Eskakon; *F:* Tereze (*B-F:* Reinhold 2007. *Taf.* 219.5.; 220.6-7.; 264.50; 285.5.; 370.52.; 375.49., 51.)



**Figure 2. Cistas and cauldrons from various European and Iranian regions. A:** Heuneburg (Krausse et al. 2016, Fig. 112.; Sievers 1984, Taf. 241.); **B:** Hallstatt (Kromer 1959, Taf. 182.7.; 119.24.; Lammerhube et al. 2010.) **C:** Regöly; **D:** Kurd; **E:** Persepolis

able – mostly linguistic - data Dumézil was not able to interpret the parallels of the myths preserved in the Nart sagas and apparent in certain European focal points any other way than as a relic form that remained on our continent from the linear Indo-European to Indo-Iranian development, and lived on primarily among the peoples of the Caucasus and India.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, based on the Nart sagas, he expressly assumed the spreading of the myth elements in an Indo-European-Indo-Iranian direction, spatially speaking in the direction of West-East, the exact age of which he did not determine. He only referred to it by positioning the stories for after the disintegration of the “matriarchate”<sup>21</sup> – which, due to the social-historical background, could not have been later than the Neolithic era, which the majority of today’s research agrees with.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, the details of the question of the Indo-European-Indo-Iranian development and separation are still subject of continuous and heated debates regarding both the territories and the time period.<sup>23</sup> János Makkay dates the Indo-European-Indo-Iranian separation to the end of the Upper Palaeolithic; according to him the Gravettian forest steppe people are the ancestors of the Indo-Iranians, while the westward spreading Gravettian groups could have represented the ancestors of the dialect of the Western Indo-European (linear pottery culture) branch.<sup>24</sup> Thus, for example, if the astragalus bones-related customs, also mentioned in the Nart sagas, could be traced back to a common ancient root of both cultures, these objects should continuously occur at Neolithic and Bronze Age sites, at least in those European focal points where Dumézil found phenomena showing parallels with Indo-Iranian myths. Yet, there is no sign of that so far – just to the contrary. Both the Italic territories and early Celtic centres show that the phenomena reflecting parallels with Indo-Iranian myths,<sup>25</sup> and especially the regular use of drilled astragalus bones appear in the same period when the material of finds from the territories of the Villanova- and Hallstatt cultures also indicates a strong oriental-like influence from the 9<sup>th</sup> -8<sup>th</sup> centuries BC.<sup>26</sup> A part of the extremely divided opinion of the research considers these objects to be only the result of import and cultural influences having spread triggered by fashion, and they focus on continuous inner development.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, recent finds and modern genetic tests require an increasing number of new aspects to be considered.<sup>28</sup>

In Regöly, there were about a dozen burnt sheep astragalus bones found sporadically and in the tumulus layers. These drilled, sheep astragalus bones were massively burnt, similarly to the other finds. Practically lying in a secondary position within the filling layers, the mode and background of how this artefact type was used and how it is connected to other types of finds cannot be interpreted based solely on their place of discovery. Astragalus bones were quite widely known in archaeological and ethnographic material as being used by peoples originated from Inner Asia and the Caucasus for fortune telling or as a toy,

children even played with it as an “animal” harnessed to a small cart, and adults used it for dicing, but they were also favoured by the ancient Greeks and Romans.<sup>29</sup> It has a particular significance that Caucasian sources, the Nart sagas contain even two stories related to this bone, since this way we have a direct reference to the meaning of this type of artefact. The heavenly dweller Safa, patron of the domestic hearth, held a wake to his companions, where his foster son, named Soslan, being the youngest participant, had to serve the guests in the brightly lit halls they were drinking sweet brown beer (brew-*багъены*) from their aurochs’ horns at the tables laden with food. The feast was attended by Uastyrdzhi, patron of warrior men and travellers, Uacilla, the god of lightning, the one-eyed Afsati, the lord of noble beasts, Falvara, whom all the sheep, goats and other cattle obeyed, as well as the heavenly smith, Kurdalagon, and the grim Galagon, prince of all winds.<sup>30</sup> Then the guests, to express their gratitude, gave a present to Soslan, who bore the blood of the most famous Nart clan, the Akhshartagketa. The first one to rise and speak was Uastyrdzhi, who gave Soslan his *farink* sword (*фæринк*) as a present, which he received from the heavenly smith, Kurdalagon, on a feast just like this one.

*“Уæд Силæм бацыди, уу бирæгъæн йæ бæрзæйыл ныххæцыд æмæ йæ раласта сæттæмæ, Уырымæгмæ. Уырымæг – Æфсати, дæ бар сты сырдтæ уууылдæр, хохæй, быдырæй. Хъахъæныс сæ ды бæрзондæй æмæ сæм нæ уадзыс хæстæг бацæуын зæххон адæмы. Сафа дæр Сосланы фарс фæлæууыд æмæ дзуры Æфсатимæ:*

*– Дæ фос кæмтты дзæгъæлы куы сæфынц, уæд сæ цы хæлæг кæныс адæмæн? Чъынды ма у, Æфсати, бахай кæн адæмæн дæ фосæй, уыцы дзæбæхдзинад дын нæ базайдзæнис рохуаты.*

*– Хорз, – загъта сырдты хицау Æфсати, – бахай кæндзынæн æз Нартæн мæ фосæй, фæлæ бынтон лæвар нæ: цуанон-уу цуаны куы цæуа, уæд-уу рахæссæд йемæ æртæ чъирийы æмæ-уу сæ æфцæгыл мæ ном ссарæд. Стæй-уу Сау хохы сырд куы амара, уæд-уу ын йæ рахиз скуы радтæд, фыццаг ыл чи сæмбæла, уымæн – æмбæлæггаг.”<sup>31</sup>*

After giving Soslan the symbols of successful fighting and hunting, the rest of the heavenly dwellers present him with tools of the necessary knowledge: Falvara tells him the spell that will keep wolves away from the flock, Uacilla gives him grain seeds, Galagon sends him winds which carry away the chaff during harvest every year, while Donbettir requests his fast-treading daughters to turn the wheels of Nart-built water mills day and night. Finally, Kurdalagon forged the Narts a plough to break the fields with, for which Soslan expressed his gratitude by pledging: „*дæ номыл мах адджын бæгъены хсиддзыстæм æмæ дын уымæй уалдзæджы нæ хуымты дæ ном ардзыстæм!*”<sup>32</sup>



Afsati's request is a little bit tricky and witty, since he asks something, which is usually thrown away along with the feet of the animal left in its removed hide. So it is not really valuable, but the way of gaining and obtaining it requires particular attention – and those who have done it know exactly that it also requires a sharp knife and skilled hands. When the giant with the mottled beard did not let the Narts drive out their herd, and they were on the brink of starvation, they followed Afsati's instructions almost word by word. They invited the three Nart clans for a feast to choose a shepherd who can defend the cattle from the giant with the mottled beard. Urizmag „*Хонджытæ æппæт адæмы дæр æрхуыдтой. Куывды Уырызмæг скуывта æмæ загъта*”<sup>33</sup> - and offered those to anyone who had the courage to be the shepherd. However, no one was brave enough to take the cup and undertake the task with it. Only after several attempts could the attention of Batradz, a tiny child playing in the ashes and taken there from the house of Hamic, be attracted enough to hear Urizmag's call. But when he finally heard the calling „*загъгæ, куыддæр сдзырдта ацы хатт Уырызмæг, афтæ Батрадз бауад æмæ куæггаг райста. Куæггаг та уыд — æртæ гуыдыны æмæ галы сгуы.*”<sup>34</sup>

The ox astragalus bone symbolised the animals to be protected, and gulping it down gave him not only strength, but, as if it were his first trial, it already predicted the child Batradz's triumph and sealed the fate of the giant with the red beard. As it is apparent, the ox or sheep bones – called “skui” (*скуы*) in Iron<sup>35</sup> – appearing, for example, in medieval Hungarian graves, contrary to general opinion were not merely children's toys, but - more like rabbit bones - a specific symbol primarily of boys and strength, but at the same time also referring to animals.<sup>36</sup> This is also confirmed by the fact that these small bones were often drilled and stringed, which would not have been necessary, for example, for a game of dice. Among steppe peoples, such as the Scythians, the Avars, the conquering Hungarians<sup>37</sup> or the Mongolians, the occurrence of astragalus bones is quite common even today, and it is generally used for making sure that they would have the desired off-springs, or, for example, for hiding it under the children's pillow to protect them from evil spells.<sup>38</sup> Often no significance is attached to these small bones among the archaeological finds, and usually they are not even mentioned in - mostly the older - archaeological catalogues, and we should be glad if there is even a photo of them at all among the grave goods.

When analysing the Caucasian sources, which also helped interpret the astragalus bones found in Regöly, Dumézil described the people of the Nart sagas as the following: *south of the Chechen-Ingush people, in the heart of the Caucasus there lives a people altogether different, and of crucial importance regarding our problem: the Ossete. Their language is Indo-European; more specifically it belongs to the Iranian branch of Indo-European, therefore related to*

*the language of the Zoroastrian documents, the Persian, Afghan and Kurdish languages. ... We have to say, though with some reservations, that we know only the two endpoints of the two and a half thousand years long history of these European Iranians. Under such circumstances it is a miracle that we found so many "preserved artefacts" there. But this miracle is unquestionable: the Ossete are one of the most traditionalists of the Indo-European peoples.*<sup>39</sup> One of the fundamental points of Dumézil's works is that the mythic phenomena present in Caucasian epics had been taken on from the Indo-European sphere before the separation of the Indo-Iranian linguistic block, and while in Europe those were preserved only sporadically, their effects, due to the migrations, can be traced as far as Japan.<sup>40</sup> Based on kinship names, he dates the separation of the Indo-European and Indo-Iranian people to a much later period than Makkay,<sup>41</sup> to the post-matriarchate period of social development, the same as Kozaev does recently.<sup>42</sup>

The depositing of astragalus bones in graves is observed from the end of the Early Copper Age at the eastern steppes. During Govedarica's expansive collection of material, he found only a single occurrence among the early Pit Grave culture sites of the Eastern European region. This fact indicates that this habit was still an uncommon custom in this area during the early period. In the Voroshilovgrad tumulus no. 1 grave no. 5 there were 5 pieces of astragalus bones found lying in a row at the right side of the skull.<sup>43</sup> According to the author, the Early Pit Grave Culture III grave is one of the Novodanilovka group, present in the Dnieper-Donets region, dated by him between 4300 and 4000 BC.<sup>44</sup> This chronological classification corresponds to the Early- and Late Copper Age of the Carpathian Basin, that is, the transition period of the Tiszapolgár and Bodrogkeresztúr cultures.<sup>45</sup> However, we found examples of continuous and frequent usage of the talus bones only from later and from regions beyond the Ural. The one here is the farthest occurrence from our site and also the earliest one found in Asia, in the Minusinsk Basin, in the kurgan 19A grave 1 of the tumuli excavated near Suchanica.<sup>46</sup> Based on <sup>14</sup>C data it is dated around 2910-2880 BC, meanwhile it dates back to the Indo-European originated Afanasevo culture, foreign to this environment.<sup>47</sup> In the other case, there was also a child next to the two adults in the double grave IV/3,4.<sup>48</sup> In the south-eastern part of the Ural, near Chelyabinsk, in the Alakul culture site at Korkino<sup>49</sup> they found drilled sheep astragalus. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC the Alakul groups and Fjodorovo communities gradually changed to herding, started to produce more and more tin bronze tools, and from the steppe they spread north through the forest steppe as far as the taiga.<sup>50</sup>

In the European Bronze Age cultures west of the Carpathians, essentially in the territory of the Indo-European block, the custom of using talus bones – as indicated by the lack of such finds – did not take root. Outside and within the

Carpathians these finds first occurred sporadically at the beginning and the end of the Bronze Age, but in notable amounts only with the arrival of other significant groups of peoples coming from the east during the Early Iron Age.

The western, Carpathian occurrence of the talus bones – though still sporadic and temporary – seems to be related to the Yamnaya culture. In the Kétyháza-Törökhalom 3/b kurgan<sup>51</sup> – almost the same age as the tumuli in Suchanica – there were some astragalus bones found indicating a common cultural background,<sup>52</sup> which István Ecsedy considers to be child toys based on steppe parallels.<sup>53</sup> (It is important to note that several types of bronze axes in this period indicate an intense, though only temporary connection between the Carpathian Basin and the Caucasus.) After the lack of astragalus bones during the Middle Bronze Age, new finds come from the south-eastern parts of the Carpathians, from the cemetery of Câmpina dated around the 15-12<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>54</sup> Other data were published by Kashuba about astragalus bones found in the Early Iron Age period between the Dniester and Seret rivers, dated to the Saharna culture Saharna Mare, Alcedar III, second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century – first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. The talus bones found in Hungary, in the second mass grave near Pusztataskony, is related to the same horizon, also dated to the 9-8<sup>th</sup> century BC, Ha B<sub>3</sub> period.<sup>55</sup> Gábor Vékony's opinion becomes even more relevant especially in light of the Câmpina finds, since he already called attention several decades ago that, based on harness finds, the settlement of peoples of Iranian language within the Carpathians in Transylvania and the north-eastern part of the Great Hungarian Plain should be considered from around the 14<sup>th</sup> century BC, preceding the Gáva-Goligrad culture.<sup>56</sup> In spite of the large number of sites within the huge area of the Urnfield culture west of the Carpathians, ranging from Lower Austria to the Paris Basin, and from around Marburg to the Alps, Norbert Wiesner observed astragalus bones only in altogether 41 graves on 16 sites. Based on antique examples and sources, he considers these to be amulets, toys and fortune telling bones, even though no direct connections to those may be proven.<sup>57</sup> In the Urnfield sites near Vienna (Gemeinlebarn) there have been astragalus bones – even of horses and deer – starting from the RBz D/Ha A period.<sup>58</sup> At the sites around Innsbruck-Munich their use has been observed typically starting later, only from the second half of the Ha A period (Grünwald, Unterhaching).<sup>59</sup> During the Ha A<sub>2</sub>/B<sub>1</sub> transitional period the number of cemeteries, where astragalus bones were put into graves, increased compared to previous periods. However, considering the several thousands of excavated graves of the Urnfield culture, the relatively low number of astragalus bones clearly indicates that these do not belong to the general customs of the basic population, and that it is a radically new phenomenon, occurring in a wider tier of the central parts of Europe only from the 14-13<sup>th</sup> century BC. The increasing density of sites in two groups along

the Danube and its tributaries, as well as the earlier occurrences in the eastern parts indicate that this influence spread towards the central territory of the Urnfield culture along the river in an East-West direction. The harness finds, also considered to be related to the eastern, Indo-Iranian population, roughly appearing parallel to astragalus bones, as well as such recently published bone finds as those discovered near Mintraching-Kellerfeld further support the previous observations.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, the astragalus bones observed in the Ha B-C period sites (Pusztatacsony, Vienna-Groß-Enzersdorf, Hallstatt, St. Andrä<sup>61</sup>) clearly indicate that their use had been deeply integrated in the system of customs even in the western half of Europe. (Fig. 2 A, B)

The direct encounter with the peoples of the Scythian period opens a whole new chapter in Europe's history of relations with eastern regions. By virtue of its central position the kurgan excavated in Regöly plays a major role in this system of relations. It is also important in terms of the Central Asian parallels of the Regöly finds (fragments of Andronovo-type ceramics, cross-shaped strap distributor of the 83rd kurgan of Ujgarak, etc.) that in the Minusinsk Basin the Afanasevo culture, dating back to the turn of the Copper Age and the Early Bronze Age, constitutes the predecessor of the Andronovo sphere. This population, related to the eastern expansion of the Yamnaja culture – which also erected some of the tumuli of the Great Hungarian Plain<sup>62</sup> – but otherwise foreign to this environment, was succeeded by the Fjodorovo culture in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC due to the expansion of the Andronovo cultural family, while the eastern side of the Ural was taken by the people of the Alakul culture. Koryakova, based on her previous – comprehensive (linguistic, paleo-anthropological, ethnographic) – research of the Andronovo culture, considers the Alakul and Fjodorovo groups to be the predecessor to whom the eastern, Indo-Iranian people of Kazakhstan during the Late Bronze Age was related. Kuzmina similarly deems it evident that the ancestral home of the Indo-Iranian people is the Eurasian steppe, meaning the Andronovo culture of pit grave customs occupying the eastern side of the Ural. (From the aspect of our research it is not insignificant either that out of the written sources Kuzmina considers the Nart sagas the most important beside the Rigveda, Atharvaveda, Mahabharata and Shahname.<sup>63</sup>) Thus even a chronological conclusion of the direction of its spread might be drawn from the fact that in the Lower Dnieper region indications of continuous use of astragalus bones were only found – for the time being – starting from the appearance of finds connected to the Scythian period. At the same time, in the Caucasus – probably preserving the Early Bronze Age traditions – astragalus bones were more frequently put into the graves from as early as the Koban culture period. The custom observed widely in the territories of Ossetien (Digor, Kumbulta-Verchnaja Rutchka), Ingušetien

(Psedach), Kabardino-Balkarien (Verchnij Baksan), Karachaevo-Cherkessien (Eskakaon, Tereze), etc. is completely in accordance with the pertaining comments of the Nart sagas, clearly indicating close connection between the astragalus bones and the Indo-Iranian myths.<sup>64</sup>

Taking into consideration of the above mentioned parallels it is apparent that the custom first appeared in the territory of the steppe pit grave Yamnaja and Afanasevo cultures, dated back to the Late Copper Age – Early Bronze Age period, but in the Bronze Age, east of the Ural, it spread widely only in the territory of the Indo-Iranian Andronovo culture. The occurrence of finds collected up to this point consequently indicate that the spread of this custom in the Carpathian Basin and in Europe west of it is connected to the peoples arriving from the Caucasus or the steppe regions. Both the observations and the excavation data show that at those places where the graves contained astragalus bones, the rest of the finds can prove that in almost all of the cases, even in the Middle Ages, the population must be clearly of eastern origin, as seen in the graves of the Jász people of Hungary originated in Alania.<sup>65</sup> Thus, it is also worth to have a look at the similar prehistoric finds from the aspect of what type of relation could there be between the Indo-European population of our continent and the Indo-Iranian people arriving from the steppe to our area in several waves and from many directions, what was the actual direction of such relation and when it can be dated to. What could explain the isolated occurrences of mythological phenomena of Indo-Iranian origin within European territory, as observed by Georges Dumézil?<sup>66</sup> In this respect, examining the spreading of drilled astragalus bones seems to be a fortunate choice, since they are not worth anything in everyday life, so they surely cannot be considered as traded goods or imports of far regions. At the same time, they are present everywhere, while their use is still uncommon, as, for example, an amulet. Basically, Dumézil found elements having definite parallels traits with Indo-Iranian myths in the British Isles, Scandinavia, and the Celtic-populated areas of Germany and France, as well as in Italy. However, he considered these to be the strong surviving Indo-European roots of the Indo-Iranian culture, and emphasized the similarities between the two cultures while practically not distinguishing between the two, and completely merging the possible temporal and spatial differences as well. This could have been probably avoided if Dumézil had considered more the findings of archaeological research – which Mihály Hoppál also found lacking.<sup>67</sup>

From the Bronze Age, as it has already been mentioned, astragalus bone was found only in the Kétegyháza-Törökhalom 3/b kurgan,<sup>68</sup> which is almost of the same age as the Suchanica tumuli of the Yamnaja culture. Apart from this exception, placing drilled talus bones in graves was practically an unknown cus-

tom in Bronze Age Europe. Their occurrence in the recently excavated Regöly tumulus can be clearly linked to the Transdanubian immigration of an Indo-Iranian population of Central Asian roots, and strong relations to Asia Minor.<sup>69</sup> Thus, the astragalus bones occurring in the territories of the Urnfield culture, preceding Regöly, and of the Late Hallstatt culture of almost the same age, raise some particularly interesting questions from the point of view of European research rather presuming autochthonous development recently.<sup>70</sup> Along the upper Danube in Southern Germany there were drilled sheep talus bones as well among the finds of the Early Celtic regal centre of Heuneburg.<sup>71</sup> (Fig. 2 A) This town is often identified with the trading town of Pyrene, mentioned by Herodotus. The foundations of the south-eastern rampart of the site from the early end-of-the 7<sup>th</sup> century period was made of dried clay bricks, which a typical Ancient Eastern technology, as well as the “fachwerk” or timber framed wall structures of the buildings. Among the finds of the same age from Heuneburg and the Regöly tumulus there were some other objects beside the astragalus bones which showed a very close connection between the two sites: a kettle with double cross-shaped hanging ears occurring in both places, the bronze “cista cordoni” appearing on the relief of Dareios’ palace in Persepolis and the iron oboloses. (Fig. 2 A-E) Although it is not from Heuneburg, the nearby Ludwigsburg tumulus is also worth mentioning due to its close eastern relations, where there were a series of drinking horns found hanging on the wall.<sup>72</sup> According to Svend Hansen, the occurrence of such new habits as for example using drinking horns or the “kline” in Asia Minor, Hallstatt and Etruscan territories during the Iron Age is expressly connected to Iranian horse-nomad peoples.<sup>73</sup> It should be noted that the pots and tools – such as situlas, cauldrons, strainers, meat hooks or skewers – used for brewing beer with hops<sup>74</sup> or for making food for feasts are also part of this pattern, as seen in many graves of the Hallstatt cemetery as well. In spite of this, the strong eastern influences appearing within the material of finds of the Late Hallstatt culture is still often explained with trade activities. Though this might be an argument used about the adoption of technologies, but the occurrence of astragalus bones of no value in one of the most important centres of the Celtic world, especially in such environment, must be something worth reconsidering.

In the early Iron Age eastern influences reached the Italic territories also, where a series of archaeological finds also indicate how the Etruscan culture was in fact different and of varied composition region by region. The differences in artefact types and customs between the area of Bologna and the more southern Etruscan regions are well perceivable, which altogether indicate connections of different directions, but partly also of common background. It is the influences of the Northern Balkan and Hallstatt (mound-, skeleton- and horse burial, hinged

bit, composite helmet, twin vessels, carved situlas with geometric ornaments, etc.), also influenced by the steppe migration of the Cimmerians starting from the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC, whose appearance is observed in the material culture of the northern regions, also apparent in the neighbouring territories. The elements typically occurring with Etruscan groups more to the south (Luristan type bits, bronze shields, burial tombs cut into rock, stamped potteries, etc.) rather point to the direction of Asia Minor, and more specifically to Urartu and Phrygia, also stirred up by the Cimmerians. This duality is especially apparent in Hase's maps, for instance, where the Etruscan territories are surrounded almost in a pincers-shape embrace by two routes, varied both in their direction and their type, and well-visible based on the different types of bits. In the case of bits with cheek pieces and hinged bits we can trace parallels from the area of Bologna on land, through the Carpathian Basin as far as to the steppe, while in case of the different types of Vetulonian horse-bits favoured in South Etruria, harnesses similar to those rather lead through the Mediterranean towards Asia Minor and as far as Luristan.<sup>75</sup> All these weaken Briquel's allegation that no other people – or even ethnic groups – could have participated in the formation of the Etruscan culture.<sup>76</sup> In our opinion, in light of the recent finds, the question today is only the degree of external influence.

Based on Dumézil's research it is well apparent that the same as the material culture – easier to follow for the archaeologists – of the Etruscans significantly differs from that of nearby regions, their mentality, knowledge and social structure is also different. Analysing the legend about the flood of the Lake Albano: the rivalry between Rome and Veii for the hegemony over Italia, sheds light upon an important additional factor.<sup>77</sup> The Etruscans channelled out the lake's water collected inside the volcanic crater in a depth of approx. 100m from the crater's edge by cutting into the hillside and leading the water through a two and a half kilometres long canal to use it for irrigation. Canal building was a technology, known and used in the Middle East from the Antiquity, which the Etruscans were in possession of, while for the Romans it still counted as a miracle.<sup>78</sup> It was such an engineering skill which cannot be explained by trading activities or fashion. This cannot be deduced from the Villanova culture, since merely commissioning such a construction work requires at least the knowledge of understanding the role of irrigation canals. The origin of Roman law, regarded as the foundation of today's Western European legal system, also raises similar questions, since it cannot be deduced from Greek society, as the regulatory system of the Ancient East clearly manifests itself in it in a number of respects.<sup>79</sup> However, if the oriental influences were brought to Italia only through the mediation of the Greeks, then logically beside the new objects and motifs, also the customs, knowledge, legal system, etc. would have spread.

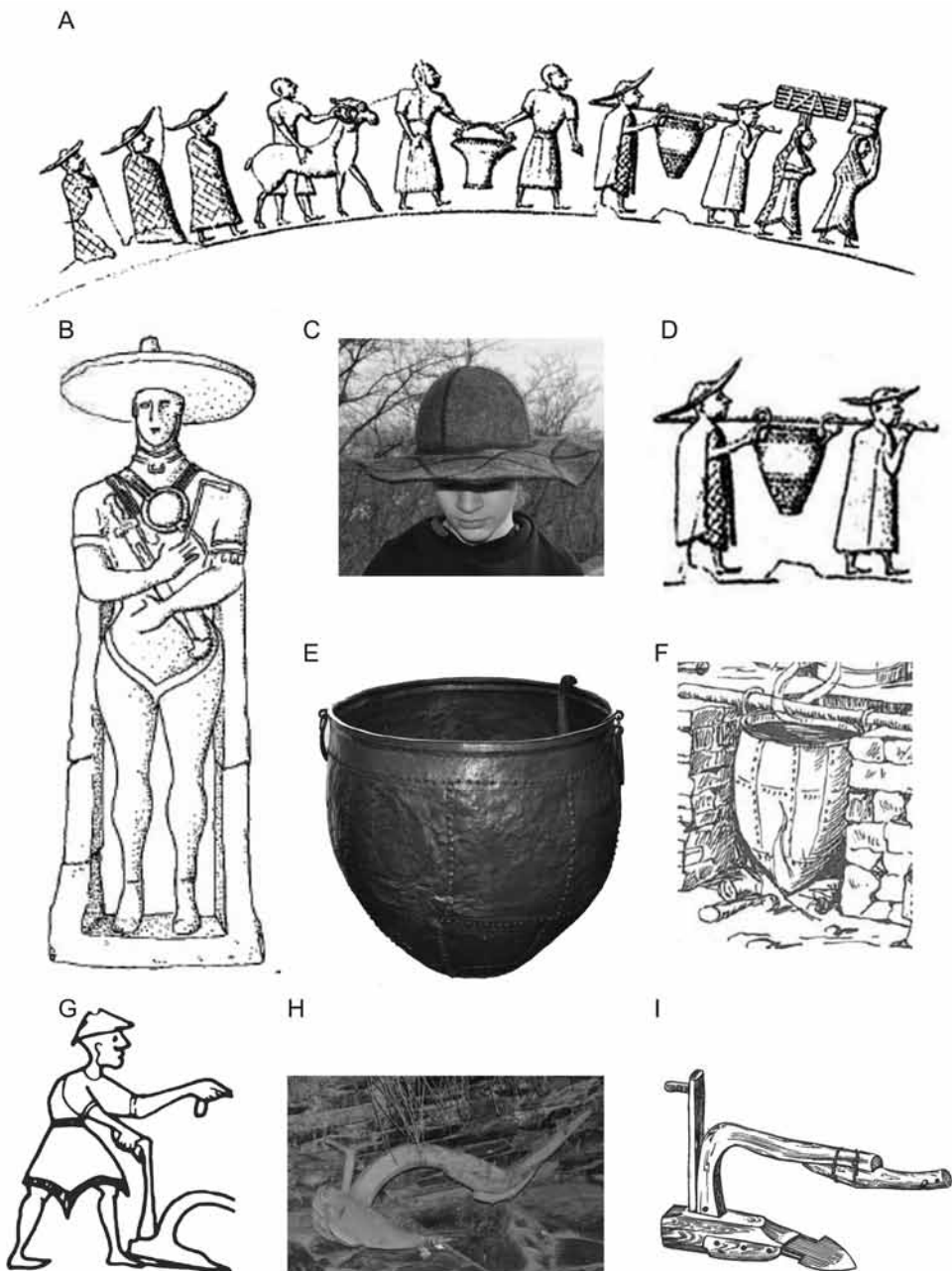
The archaeological finds indicate that from the Villanova Age, external influences, primarily on the level of the social elite, arrived in Italia from at least two different directions. The regions nearby Bologna connected rather to the European Iron Age and the Steppes, while the southern Etruscan regions to the more advanced Ancient Near East. As the above-mentioned examples demonstrate, beside objects and craftsmen, also customs, knowledge, as well as the people of the elite moved from both directions, causing dynamic changes extending almost to the whole of Europe. Yet, when Dumézil talks about myth elements being preserved, he presumes a basically static condition.<sup>80</sup> At the same time, the Regöly finds draw attention to some massive changes on our continent taking place from the Early Iron Age, during which at least as many new elements appeared in our region as many were preserved. If we position the sites of the already mentioned astragalus bones in space, it is well apparent that the drilled astragalus bones occur from the turn of the Copper and Bronze Age until the Iron Age, while in the 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC they rather occur on the eastern side of the Ural, in the territory of Indo-Iranian Andronovo culture groups. In the Caucasus, the astragalus bones observed in Koban culture territory indicate that the use of these objects became general only later. It may probably be explained by the movement of herding peoples, often covering huge distances, that in the beginning of the Early Bronze Age, then from the 15<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century BC there are some sporadic occurrences of astragalus bones also in areas west of the Carpathians. In accordance with other historical and archaeological data, the Nart sagas and the find discovered along the Lower Dnieper indicate that these objects continuously and in greater numbers appear only west of the Ural from the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, along the migration routes of the Cimmerian, Saka and Scythian peoples coming from Inner Asia.<sup>81</sup> Fleeing from the Saka and Scythian groups, the southern branch of the Cimmerians first settled in the foregrounds of the Caucasus, then after being driven out from there too, in Urartu, then, after Phrygia was overrun, in Media. According to historical data and the archaeological finds, ethnic groups of steppe origin started crossing the Caucasus and the strong and fast spreading of Indo-Iranian elements in the Ancient Near East are apparent from the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. In light of that, the creation of the Nart sagas and the spreading of the use of astragalus bones among the Caucasian peoples can be dated at the latest to the period of these two centuries of the Iron Age.

Hungarian archaeologist Géza Nagy, contemporary of A. A. Spicin, in his academic inaugural address about the history of the Scythians had already proposed the possibility half a century ago that the development of the Hallstatt, Celtic and Etruscan cultures is in fact due to the Cimmerian migration from Inner Asia.<sup>82</sup> Based on the recent finds of the Regöly tumulus it can be considered



proven that from the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC at the latest, the south-western part of the Carpathian Basin was also affected by influences directly related to the Indo-Iranian, Cimmerian migration, possibly through the settlement of the Sinyynae peoples, as it was mentioned by Herodotus. At the same time, the great number of finds discovered in the Regöly tumulus and pointing to the local Hallstatt culture clearly indicate that the shift was not complete and probably the settlers – the armed elite and their escort – only settled on, superimposed their own material and spiritual culture on that of the original inhabitants. They reorganised power relations, and did not completely eradicate the already existing structures, and rather become the new owners than the destroyers of those. However, parallel to their own customs, several objects not typical to the area before appeared in general use, among which the drilled astragalus bone is only one, but extremely typical object, which makes the process traceable in the Hallstatt and Early Celtic culture. The structure of the Regöly tumulus, as well as the Zoroastrian-related burial rite clearly indicate that the new Indo-Iranian population is a carrier of that eastern Sun worshipping and early Mithraic cult, which – inexplicably up to now - appeared almost from nowhere in Imperial Rome and spread from the west to the east.<sup>83</sup> Just to the opposite direction than it would be logical based on the position of Zoroastrian Persian territories. According to Herodotus' reports, it was the faith of the original inhabitants of Pannonia and Illyricum which the Roman conquerors applied so spectacularly as a method of Romanising and assimilating new territories the fastest way possible.<sup>84</sup>

Following the path of the drilled astragalus bones, it is apparent that the movement of their use and their users, that is the Indo-Iranian peoples, is clearly of East-West direction, based on additional archaeological finds, historical correlations and research findings. At the same time, the Indo-Iranian parallels to which Dumézil calls our attention are practically unprecedented in the western half of Europe, and only appear at the end of the Bronze Age and at the beginning of the Iron Age – a major part of which is occurring parallel to the spreading of forging and using iron. All these question Dumézil's presumption that the Nart sagas preserved Indo-European myth elements. On the contrary, the archaeological finds and observations, such as the astragalus bones and harnesses<sup>85</sup> occurring in the territory of the Urnfield culture in the Germany areas, just indicate that the expansion of the Indo-Iranian peoples from the RBz D-Ha period, roughly starting from the 15<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century BC, reached the Hallstatt, Early Celtic and Etruscan territories of Europe in several waves and on many routes. This is the way the mythological elements of the Nart sagas could get to the western regions provably superimposing the material and spiritual culture of the peoples inhabiting the area during the Bronze Age. This shows that contrary to Dumézil's opinion the Indo-Iranian groups that are also in close relation with today's



**Figure 3.** In Etruscan and Ossetian territories these phenomena are manifested in both the clothes and utility tools. **A, D:** Certosa (Körner 2010, Abb. 44.) **B:** Capestrano (Kromer 1986, Abb. 6.); **C:** Felt hat – *нимæтходæ*, Ossetia 2016.; **E:** Beer-brewing cauldron, Vladikavkaz **F:** The use of beer-brewing cauldron (Бедоева 2014, Таб. 2.2.); **G:** Magdalenska gora; **H:** Alagirskoe usele; **I:** Ossetien scratch plough – *дзыбыр* (Калоев 1973, Таблица 2.2.)

peoples of the Caucasus further enriched the old Europe with their own myths during their East-West migration starting from the 15<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century BC. This process, at first hardly perceivable, then unfolding and causing radical changes at the beginning of the Iron Age – as the Regöly, Heineburg, Etruscan and Early Celtic finds show – became determining in the history of Europe and in the development and formation of most of the peoples living today. This way the wide occurrence and spreading of elements preserved in the myths and customs of Caucasian peoples in the western parts of Europe no longer needs an explanation. The most beautiful pictorial proofs of these are from the 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century BC Italia: the Capestrano statue, the situla illustrations in Certosa and Bologna showing marchers wearing the same clothes that are still preserved in today's Ossetia, the broad-rimmed felt hat (*нимæтходæ*), or the typical scratch plough (*дзыбыр*)<sup>86</sup> illustrated on the bronze vessels of Bologna, Sanzeno and Montebellura, which were still in use in the Caucasus up until recently. (Fig. 3) The immigration of Indo-Iranian peoples in the Carpathian Basin started from the Late Bronze Age-Early Iron Age period and due to the multiple waves of migrations from the east – as the finds of the Jász graves in Hungary clearly show – lasted until the Middle Ages.<sup>87</sup> Today what we are witnessing is that this process had only paused, but did not end. We can experience firsthand that unlike Dumézil's and his followers' approach, instead of the continuous internal development of regions<sup>88</sup> far apart separated from each other, in the case of the similar motifs of Indo-European-Indo-Iranian myths in the western parts of Europe we need to reckon with continuous and direct interactions to a much more significant degree than before – i.e. ethnic connections and migrations that can be proven by archaeological finds and later by historic sources.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> DUMÉZIL 1986, 154., 529.

<sup>2</sup> DUMÉZIL 1986, 384.

<sup>3</sup> МИЛЛЕР 1881, ч. I; Нарты 1991; Нартские 2000.

<sup>4</sup> АБАЕВ 1949, 52; Чибиров 2008, 110-111.

<sup>5</sup> DUMÉZIL 1986, 530. This is why he could rather separate the individual myth elements only spatially, but he could not really follow their movement in time.

<sup>6</sup> DUMÉZIL 1986, 529.

<sup>7</sup> БРУЯКО 2005, Рис. 22; Ivantchik 1999; 2001.

<sup>8</sup> According to Marsadolov, the influences of the burial customs of Gordion can be traced as far as the Altai mountains and the Pazyryk kurgans. (MARSADOLOV 2000)

<sup>9</sup> FEKETE – SZABÓ 2015.

<sup>10</sup> SZABÓ-FEKETE 2011; 2014.

<sup>11</sup> RENDIČ-MILOČEVIČ 2004.

- <sup>12</sup> SZABÓ – FEKETE 2011.
- <sup>13</sup> SZABÓ – CZUPPON 2014; FEKETE – SZABÓ 2015.
- <sup>14</sup> HERODOTUS V.9.
- <sup>15</sup> KELTEN 2012, 116.
- <sup>16</sup> TÓTH 2009, 22.
- <sup>17</sup> HAMPE 1951.
- <sup>18</sup> DUMÉZIL 1986, 131.
- <sup>19</sup> Нартские 2000, 133-134.
- <sup>20</sup> DUMÉZIL 1986, 118–119.
- <sup>21</sup> DUMÉZIL 1986, 384.
- <sup>22</sup> КОЗАЕВ 1998, 329.
- <sup>23</sup> МАККАУ 1998.
- <sup>24</sup> МАККАУ 1998, 476–477.
- <sup>25</sup> АБАЕВ 1949, 592.
- <sup>26</sup> KIMMIG 1983; HARDING 2005; MILCENT 2009; METZNER-NEBELSICK 2000; 2002; POTREBI-  
CA 2005; TERŽAN 1998; 2005; 2012.
- <sup>27</sup> PALLOTTINO 1980.
- <sup>28</sup> BRISIGHELLI et al. 2009.
- <sup>29</sup> GULYÁS 2013; BIRTALAN 2002; 2006; KIRÁLY 2011.
- <sup>30</sup> Нартские 2000, 133-134.
- <sup>31</sup> Нарты кадджытæ: СОСЛАНЫ РАЙГУЫРД ÆМÆ ЙÆ БАЙСÆРЫН
- <sup>32</sup> Нарты кадджытæ: СОСЛАНЫ РАЙГУЫРД ÆМÆ ЙÆ БАЙСÆРЫН
- <sup>33</sup> Нарты кадджытæ: НАРТЫ БАТРАДЗ ÆМÆ ХЪУЛОНЗАЧЪЕ УÆЙЫГ
- <sup>34</sup> Нарты кадджытæ: НАРТЫ БАТРАДЗ ÆМÆ ХЪУЛОНЗАЧЪЕ УÆЙЫГ
- <sup>35</sup> KOVÁCS 2008, 347.
- <sup>36</sup> SELMECZI 2012, 57.
- <sup>37</sup> KISS 1983, 127, 67–69. tábla.
- <sup>38</sup> BIRTALAN 2002, 43.
- <sup>39</sup> DUMÉZIL 1986, 328.
- <sup>40</sup> DUMÉZIL 1986, 154, 529.
- <sup>41</sup> DUMÉZIL 1986, 384; МАККАУ 1998, 476–477.
- <sup>42</sup> КОЗАЕВ 1998.
- <sup>43</sup> Govedarica 2004, 137, Abb. 36. 3/1.
- <sup>44</sup> Govedarica 2004, 273.
- <sup>45</sup> DANI – HORVÁTH 2012, 73.
- <sup>46</sup> PARZINGER et al. 2010, Abb. 92. 3-4.
- <sup>47</sup> PARZINGER et al. 2009, 152-156., Abb. 106., 11.
- <sup>48</sup> PARZINGER et al. 2009, 90–93, Abb. 24.
- <sup>49</sup> KORYAKOVA – ЕРИМАКHOV 2007, 148, Figure 3.14. 9., 15.16.
- <sup>50</sup> KORYAKOVA – ЕРИМАКHOV 2007, 150.

- <sup>51</sup> DANI – HORVÁTH 2012, 80.
- <sup>52</sup> ECSEDY 1979, 25, Fig. 16. 5.
- <sup>53</sup> ECSEDY 1979, 44.
- <sup>54</sup> FRÎNCULEASA 2014, 204., Pl. 53.
- <sup>55</sup> KIRÁLY et al. 2012, Fig. 4.
- <sup>56</sup> VÉKONY 1989, 56-57.
- <sup>57</sup> WISNER 2013, 90., 107., Abb. 1.
- <sup>58</sup> WIESNER 2013, Tab. 2-3.
- <sup>59</sup> WIESNER 2013, 107-110.
- <sup>60</sup> SCHUMANN 2011, Abb. 14.
- <sup>61</sup> KIRÁLY et al. 2012, Fig. 4.; KROMER 1959, graves 129., 449. 475., 646., 968., WIESNER 2013, 109-110.
- <sup>62</sup> DANI – HORVÁTH 2012.
- <sup>63</sup> KUZMINA 2007, XVI–XVII.
- <sup>64</sup> REINHOLD, 2007, Taf. 219. 5; Taf. 220. 6-7; Taf. 264. 50; Taf. 285. 5; Taf. 370. 52; Taf. 375. 51.
- <sup>65</sup> SELMECZI 2005, 146–149; SELMECZI 2012: 52–53.
- <sup>66</sup> DUMÉZIL 1986, 120–121. WEST 2007: 20–25;
- <sup>67</sup> DUMÉZIL 1986, 530.
- <sup>68</sup> ECSEDY 1979, 25; DANI – HORVÁTH 2012: 80.
- <sup>69</sup> SZABÓ – FEKETE 2011, 2. tábla 1.
- <sup>70</sup> PALLOTTINO 1984; SZILÁGYI 2006; METZNER-NEBELSICK 2000; 2002.
- <sup>71</sup> SIEVERS 1984, Pl. 79, 1152–56; Pl. 241, 2400–2401, 1152.
- <sup>72</sup> KELTEN 2012, 233.
- <sup>73</sup> HANSEN 2011, 299.
- <sup>74</sup> АБАЕВ 1949, 338-353; КАЛОЕВ 2004, 263-265.
- <sup>75</sup> HASE 1969, Abb. 12. A. B.
- <sup>76</sup> BRIQUEL 2006, 27-28.
- <sup>77</sup> DUMÉZIL 1986, 92–136.
- <sup>78</sup> DUMÉZIL 1986, 131–136.
- <sup>79</sup> THÜR 2007, 2012.
- <sup>80</sup> DUMÉZIL 131.
- <sup>81</sup> БРУЯКО 2005, Fig. 31.
- <sup>82</sup> NAGY 1909.
- <sup>83</sup> LÁSZLÓ 2005, 121–122, 1. ábra; Szabó 2013, 54.
- <sup>84</sup> SZABÓ – CZUPPON 2014.
- <sup>85</sup> HÜTTEL 1981; HASE 1969; METZNER-NEBELSICK 1994.
- <sup>86</sup> КАЛОЕВ 2004, 156.
- <sup>87</sup> SELMECZI 2012.
- <sup>88</sup> DUMÉZIL 1986: 131.

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