

AVARS, BULGARS AND MAGYARS ON THE MIDDLE AND LOWER DANUBE

Editors

Lyudmila Doncheva-Petkova – Csilla Balogh – Attila Türk

Proceedings of the Bulgarian-Hungarian Meeting,
Sofia, May 27–28, 2009



National Institute of Archaeology
and Museum BAS
Sofia



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СОФИЯ – PILISCSABA
2014

The publication of this volume was funded by the generous grants from the National Cultural Fund
(Nemzeti Kulturális Alap, NKA 3437/01022) and the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund
(Országos Tudományos Kutatási Alapprogramok, OTKA PUB-K 111155, OTKA K 7106369, OTKA NK 72636)



Front Cover

Detail from Bowl No. 21 of the Nagyszentmiklós Treasure by Imre Huszár

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ISBN 978-963-9911-55-0
HU-ISSN 1215-9239

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ARCHAEOLINGUA

2014

ARCHAEOLINGUA ALAPÍTVÁNY
H-1014 Budapest, Úri u. 49.

Desktop editing and layout by Gergely Hös

Printed by Prime Rate Kft.

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TOWARDS A CLASSIFICATION OF GRAVE TYPES AND BURIAL RITES IN THE 10TH–11TH CENTURY CARPATHIAN BASIN – SOME REMARKS AND OBSERVATIONS

Attila TÜRK

*To the memory of Rasho Stanev Rashev
(1943–2008)*

INTRODUCTION

During the last 15–20 years, the archaeological investigation of the 10th–11th century Carpathian Basin has reached many significant results. This is mainly a consequence of the numerous rescue excavations, which resulted in many completely unearthened cemeteries. The many graves not only yielded grave-goods but also furnished valuable information regarding burial rites and grave types. There are some completely novel phenomena and also variants of the already well-known types.

A single earlier attempt (TETTAMANTI 1975) and a few recent studies¹ apart, there is no detailed and up-to-date survey of the grave types and burial rites practiced during the 10th–11th centuries in the

Carpathian Basin. The present article would like to contribute to this by presenting a few phenomena which have received little or no attention so far. In my selection I concentrated on the archaeological heritage of Eastern Europe in the 7th to 11th centuries and especially on the cases showing similarities and analogies to the Saltovo cultural-historical complex. The topics discussed can be grouped in three major categories: burials into or under kurgans, then stepped grave pits, and graves with a sidewall niche and with a niche dug at the foot-end of the grave, and last but not least the classification of horse burials, which is of course closely related with both.

THE QUESTION OF KURGANS

It is a widely held assumption regarding the general appearance of the cemeteries of the Hungarians arriving in 895 in the Carpathian Basin that those were (practically without exemption) only simple pit graves (TETTAMANTI 1975, 87–89).² It was well known, however, for Hungarian researchers that

there were some burials, which were secondarily dug into earlier kurgans. Burials in or under an artificially constructed grave tumulus, however, were not considered to be characteristic for 10th century Hungarians,³ although the practice has been noticed by many scholars (e.g. TETTAMANTI 1975, 88).

¹ VARGA 2013; BENDE–LÖRINCZY–TÜRK 2013.

² The absence of kurgans has been used as an argument first of all by Russian archaeologists in the interpretation of graves, which has been connected with the ancestors of the Hungarians on the east European steppe and forest steppe, e.g. in distinguishing Hungarian graves from those of the Pechenegs (ПЛЕТНЁВА 2003, 105, 107 and 123). Recently it has become apparent (e.g. in the case of Subotcy-type burials) that certain burial types are equally frequent in simple pits and in tumuli (KOMAP 2008, 216).

³ “In some of the grave tumuli at Hencida, Ohat and Zemplén it is perhaps conceivable, that they belonged to ethnic groups, which were not of ugor-magyar origin.” (TETTAMANTI 1975, 88; LÁSZLÓ 1944, 158–161).

GRAVES DUG INTO EARLIER KURGANS

There is an increasing number of known cases from the Hungarian Conquest Period, where the upper part of an artificial tumulus was used secondarily for later burials. In such cases, however, it is not easy to decide, whether the emerging hill is an artificial or a natural one, because most of these kurgans are not excavated properly and entirely. A further uncertainty is caused, if it is not known, whether it contained one or more burials.⁴ The use of grave tumuli has been traditionally connected with the general principle, that the Hungarians conquering the Carpathian Basin usually buried their dead on hills or such places, which were protected from groundwater and floods (TETTAMANTI 1975, 88). This seems to be borne out by the fact, that the majority of kurgan graves from this period is known from the Great Hungarian Plain,⁵ where there are only few natural heights. Moreover, it is exactly the Great Hungarian Plain, where according to the available evidence most kurgans have been destroyed by intensive agricultural activities. In those regions, where they are fortunately preserved,⁶ the custom of tumulus burial has sometimes survived even until the 11th century (LANGÓ-TÜRK 2004a, 205–206).

There are some cases, however, where there were no traces of a kurgan left, but special circumstances and observations during the excavation point to a secondary use of a tumulus for burial. In 2000 a few Sarmatian graves surrounded by rounded ditches were unearthed in the vicinity of Szeged (site Kiskundorozsma-Subasa M5 37 (26/78), see BOZSIK 2003). Among the Sarmatian graves, there were several other ones dating from the Hungarian Conquest Period, three of which were found inside the Sarmatian ditch circles (*Fig. 1. 1a–b*). The excavators have pointed out that this particular placement is most probably due to the circumstance, that in the 10th–11th centuries the remains of the original, ca. 600 years older tumuli were still visible on the surface, and they were intentionally reused for the new burials. One has to add, however, that there is no consensus among specialists, whether the Sarmatian burials surrounded by ditch circles were indeed covered by a kurgan or not.⁷

Kurgans from earlier periods were most often used in the 10th–11th century on the Great Hungarian Plain; their greatest density is observable to the east of the Homokhátság (Southeast Hungary).⁸ Nowadays we even know an example from Transdanubia

⁴ VÖ. Liska 1996, 183.

⁵ In the southern part of the Great Hungarian Plain, e.g. at Szeged-Székhalom (KÜRTI 1991, 55), and in its northern part, e.g. at Hajdúszoboszló-Árkoshalom (NEPPER 2002, I. 36. kép).

⁶ Kisombor-C Nagyhalom, on the plot of Matuszka Györgyné and László Györgyné (FEHÉR et al. 48, No. 574; KÜRTI 1994, 380, No. 46; TETTAMANTI 1975, 86, 109). This piece of information has been confirmed by recent excavations in 2003, verifying the results of the late F. Móra (LANGÓ-TÜRK 2004a, 204).

⁷ Some Hungarian researchers have interpreted the Sarmatian circular (and rectangular) ditches as tumulus burials (e.g. VÖRÖS 1985, 154–157; VADAY 1989, 197). Others have not accepted this view, and assumed that the trenches played a certain role only in the funerary rites following the burial (e.g. KULCSÁR 1998, 39). For a long time, the observations made by M. Kőhegyi at the Sarmatian tumuli and trenches in the cemetery of Madaras were considered to be decisive in this respect. According to his opinion, the ditches surrounding the tumuli are always uninterrupted, while graves surrounded by interrupted trenches did not have a tumulus (KŐHEGYI 1971, 213). Cs. Balogh has recently called attention to the fact, that the distinction is not so clear cut, since we know Sarmatian graves with uninterrupted ditch circle, where there was certainly no tumulus above the grave (BALOGH-HEIPL 2010). On the other hand, there is at least one Sarmatian grave known (Pilis-Horgásztó, Feature 2), which had an interrupted surrounding ditch and a tumulus (the remains are 45–50 cm high) above it (GULYÁS 2011).

⁸ Beside the above-mentioned Sarmatian barrows, prehistoric kurgans also often contain 10th century secondary burials, e.g. at Monaj (ERDÉLYI 2003, 29) or at Kunhegyes-Nagyszálláshalom (ERDÉLYI 2003, 26), each site yielding a single secondary burial. At the site of Békésszentandrás-Pálinkáséről most of the 47 graves had been dug into the barrow (ERDÉLYI 2003, 8), while at the site of Buj-(Gyeptelek)-Táncscsics M. TSz five similar graves were discovered (ERDÉLYI 2003, 11). Quite a few data from the recently published excavation notes of Gy. Kis léghi Nagy (KISLÉGHİ 2010), who excavated numerous barrows in the southern Great Hungarian Plain at the turn of the 19th–20th centuries, confirm the role of barrows in the burial customs of the 10th–11th centuries, e.g. Bukovapusza Tumulus II (1902) (KISLÉGHİ 2010, 67–68); Bukovapusza Tumulus IV (1903) (KISLÉGHİ 2010, 95–96); Bukovapusza Tumulus V (1904) (KISLÉGHİ 2010, 69); Nagyösz-Nagykomlós (1898) (KISLÉGHİ 2010, 28); Óbesnyő Tumulus I (1904) (KISLÉGHİ 2010, 102); Puszta-Vizezsda, Tumulus X (1900) (KISLÉGHİ 2010, 59–60). In the following cases we can suspect that the grave was dug into the fill of a kurgan: Nagyösz, Tumulus I (1898) (KISLÉGHİ 2010, 27); Puszta-Vizezsda, Tumulus III (1901) (KISLÉGHİ 2010, 62–63).

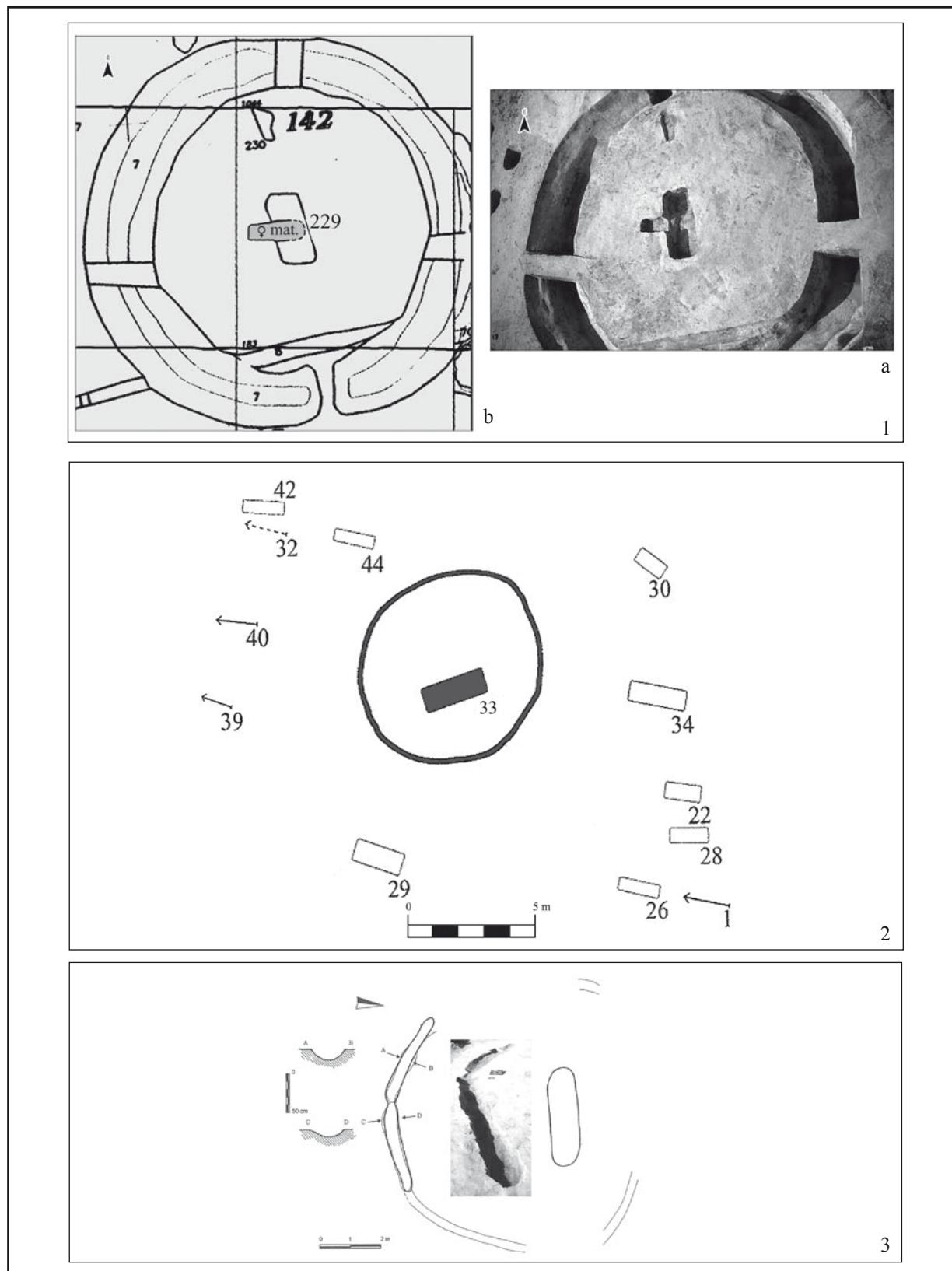


Fig. 1: 1: Graves dug into earlier kurgans in the Carpathian Basin of the 10th–11th centuries, Kiskundorozsma-Subasa, Grave 229 (after BENDE-LŐRINCZY-TÜRK 2013, 25. kép); 2–3: Burials under kurgans in the Carpathian Basin of the 10th–11th centuries, Törökszentmiklós-Szenttamáspuszta, Grave 33 and Szeged-Kiskundorozsma, Hosszúhát-halom, Grave 100 (after BENDE-LŐRINCZY-TÜRK 2013, 26. kép)

(e.g. at Kemenesszentpéter), where graves from the Árpád Period were dug into a tumulus of Roman date.⁹ This case shows quite clearly, that sometimes

even more graves were dug into the same kurgan. There are of course tumuli, which have been reused only once.¹⁰

BURIALS UNDER KURGANS

One has to begin with the statement of S. Tettamanti, who compiled the most complete list of the burial rites and grave types of the 10th–11th centuries in 1975: “*There are no kurgans known, which would have been constructed unquestionably in the 10th–11th centuries*” (TETTAMANTI 1975, 88). This statement holds true up to the present. But there are some cases, which were suspect in this respect,¹¹ and there is new archaeological evidence, which seems to confirm the use of this grave type. Grave 100 at Kiskundorozsma-Hosszúhát-halom was excavated in 1999 and published in 2002 (BENDE et al. 2002). The grave was situated on a conspicuous point of a long sand dune and was surrounded by the traces of a ditch, 40–50 cm wide and 10–30 cm deep. This trench has been best preserved on the south side, the other parts were unfortunately almost completely destroyed by ploughing. The ditch originally had the sahpe of a circle of 9 m in diameter, and the grave, which had approximately the same depth, was situated inside the circular ditch in its southern part (*Fig. 1. 3*).

There are other graves surrounded by a ditch (so possibly covered by a kurgan) from the Conquest Period, e.g. at Nógrádsáp-Tatárka (TÁRNOKI 1982, 384; ERDÉLYI 2003, 31). The concise report mentions a circular ditch (60 cm wide and 40 cm deep) of 6.8 m diameter. A third example of this type has been excavated recently in a cemetery discovered in Szolnok County (PETKES 2011, 206).¹² The whole Grave 33 at Törökszentmiklós-Szenttamás had been surrounded by a circular ditch. Unfortunately, there are no data available on the depth of the ditch and of

the grave. The diameter of the ditch is 6.6–7.2 m, and the trench itself is not interrupted anywhere, i.e. there are no traces of an entrance. The grave was placed to the south of the centre of the circle (*Fig. 1. 2*).

One can conclude at present, that graves surrounded by a circular trench in the 10th–11th centuries can be either solitary or separated burials (e.g. Kiskundorozsma-Hosszúhát-halom, Grave 100) or belong to a cemetery (e.g. Törökszentmiklós-Szenttamás Grave 33). It can be observed in addition, that the graves are not in the centre of the circular ditch, but to the south of it. In all three cases, the ditch formed a circle ca. 6–9 m in diameter, a fact which can only mean that the tumuli could not have been very high. They were bordered by a 40–60 cm wide and 10–40 cm deep ditch. The orientation of the entrenched grave at Törökszentmiklós was fitted into the lines of the other graves of the cemetery, a similarly to the one at Nógrádsáp.¹³

It is well known that the Hungarians, arriving and settling in the Carpathian Basin in 895, came from the east European region, where graves dug into kurgans were very common in many regions and periods of the Early Middle Ages. Moreover, this habit was widespread in those cultures, which show the closest analogies – at the present state of our knowledge – with the material record of the conquering Hungarians, i.e. in some of the Subotci type graves along the Middle Dnepr¹⁴ and to the east, in the South Ural region, in the Kushnarenkovo and Karayakupovo cultures (ИВАНОВ 1999, таб. 1). Kurgans are found in addition in the southern

⁹ MRT 4, Site 37/2 (cf. CSIRKE 2013). The fill of the kurgan was in this case clearly visible.

¹⁰ Kiskundorozsma-Subasa M5 37 (26/78), Feature 229 (*Fig. 1. 1*) (BOZSIK 2003, Fig. 1; BENDE–LÖRINCZY–TÜRK 2013, 25. kép).

¹¹ According to the excavation reports, the possibility of a kurgan burial has been considered in the following cases: Bodrogzserdahely; Bátorkeszi, Graves 4 and 5; Marcellháza, Grave 1; Hencida, Grave 5; Szabadegyháza; Ohat-Puszta-takócs-Csattaghalom; Hajdúszovát-Hegyeshatárhalm and the grave from Zemplén (for further details and bibliography see TETTAMANTI 1975, 88).

¹² Based on Gy. Kis léghi Nagy’s excavation notes, especially on the height of the kurgans, the location of the (central) burial and the depth of the graves, interment under a mound can be assumed in the following cases: Bukovapusza Tumulus III (1903) (KISLÉGH 2010, 79); Bukovapusza Tumulus VIII (1906) (KISLÉGH 2010, 121); Nagykomlós Tumulus I (1898) (KISLÉGH 2010, 23–24); Óbesnyő Tumulus V (1904) (KISLÉGH 2010, 102).

¹³ Verdohleby, Grave 1 (ПРИЙМАК–СУПРУНЕНКО 1994); Dmitrivka, Barrow 1, Grave 2 (СУПРУНЕНКО–МАЄВСЬКА 2007); Katerinovka, Kurgan 32, Grave 1–2 (КОМАР 2008, 216).

regions of the Saltovo cultural-historical complex in the form of the so-called “*kurgans with rectangular ditches*” (АФАНАСЬЕВ 2001, 53–54),¹⁵ and there are plenty of examples from the 10th–14th centuries among the nomad burials in East Europe.

I think, therefore, that although burials in or below tumuli are not attested in great numbers, they were nonetheless surely practiced by the Hungarians. This habit was – similarly to many other customs¹⁶ – part of their eastern heritage.

PIT GRAVE FORMS OF THE HUNGARIAN CONQUEST PERIOD IN THE LIGHT OF EASTERN ANALOGIES
GRAVES WITH A SIDEWALL NICHE AND WITH A NICHE DUG
AT THE FOOT-END IN THE CARPATHIAN BASIN OF THE 10TH–11TH CENTURIES AND
IN EAST EUROPE

Research on graves with a sidewall niche in the Carpathian Basin during the the 10th–11th centuries yielded significant results in the last few years. In 1975 only five occurrences of this type were known (TETTAMANTI 1975, 90), but in 2006 G. Lőrinczy and P. Straub already reported 16 sites in their study, in which they discussed all such graves of the Carpathian Basin of the Conquest and Early Árpád Periods (LŐRINCZY–STRAUB 2006, 291–292). In 2007 S. Varga also collected all the occurrences of this form of grave pits and developed a typological system. (VARGA 2013). As a result of his work, we now have data from 31 sites and 100 graves of this particular type. These figures not only reflect a growing interest for this subject, but also show that this grave type was much more frequently used during the 10th–11th centuries than recognized by previous scholars.

Sidewall niches are usually dug on the long sides of the grave, most often on the *southern* side (Type I) (Fig. 2. 2–4), less frequently on the *north* (Type II) (Fig. 2. 1).¹⁷ Most recent excavations show that there were also cases, where a small niche was dug at the shorter (eastern) side of the grave.¹⁸ This latter type is well known and widespread in East Europe during the 8th–9th centuries as well. It is found in early Bulgarian cemeteries along the

Middle Volga¹⁹ and among the pit-graves of the Saltovo cultural-historical complex.²⁰ e.g. in graves belonging to the Zlivki (ШВЕЦОВ 1991, 115) and Rzhevka-Mandrovo types.²¹ Regarding the exact terminology, one has to note that Hungarian archaeologists denote the niche dug on the long side of the grave as “*padmaly*,” while a similar niche dug on the short end of the grave is designated in other periods (e.g. in the case of Avar graves) as “*fülke*” – niche (LŐRINCZY–STRAUB 2006, 281, 284–285). Considering this distinction, the grave mentioned above at Törökszentmiklós does not belong to the same category as the other graves with niches on their long sides (Fig. 2. 6).²² A similar distinction between the different kinds of niches is practiced in other languages too.²³

Returning to the formal characteristics of the graves with a sidewall niche, one can see that every variety described by S. Varga (VARGA 2013) in the Carpathian Basin (Type 1: horizontal, Type 2: stepped and Type 3: symbolic) have excellent parallels in east Europe. These types of graves of the Saltovo cultural-historical complex are considered by east European researchers as one of the most characteristic features of the Khazars. O. V. Komar has even sketched an evolution stretching from the second half of the 8th to the end of the 9th century,

¹⁴ Nowadays the terminology has been refined and the usual designation is Sokolovskaya Balka type or Sokolovski-horizon (КРУГЛОВ 2006).

¹⁵ Cf. FODOR 1985, 20.

¹⁶ These groups are adapted from the typology developed by S. Varga.

¹⁷ Törökszentmiklós-Szenttamás, Grave 44. (Fig. 2. 6) (PETKES 2011, 3. kép).

¹⁸ E.g. Bol'she Tarhany I Graves 126 and 212 (ГЕНИНГ–ХАЛИКОВ 1964, рис. 4, 6).

¹⁹ Graves with a sidewall niche are also found in the classical chamber graves of the Saltovo-Mayatskaya culture, e.g. Mayatskoe gorodishche, Graves 109, 114, 132, 134 excavated in 1982 (ФЛЁРОВ 1993, 39–42).

²⁰ E.g. Mandrovo, Graves 7, 10, 24, 29 (ВИННИКОВ–САРАПУЛКИН 2008, 46), and Rzhevka, Graves 20 and 22 (САРАПУЛКИН 2006, 196).

²¹ The distinction between the sidewall niche and the niche is appropriate in my opinion because of the functional difference caused by their different size.

²² The Russian terminus for this variety is „ниш-подбой у торцевых стен” (ВИННИКОВ–САРАПУЛКИН 2008, 46).

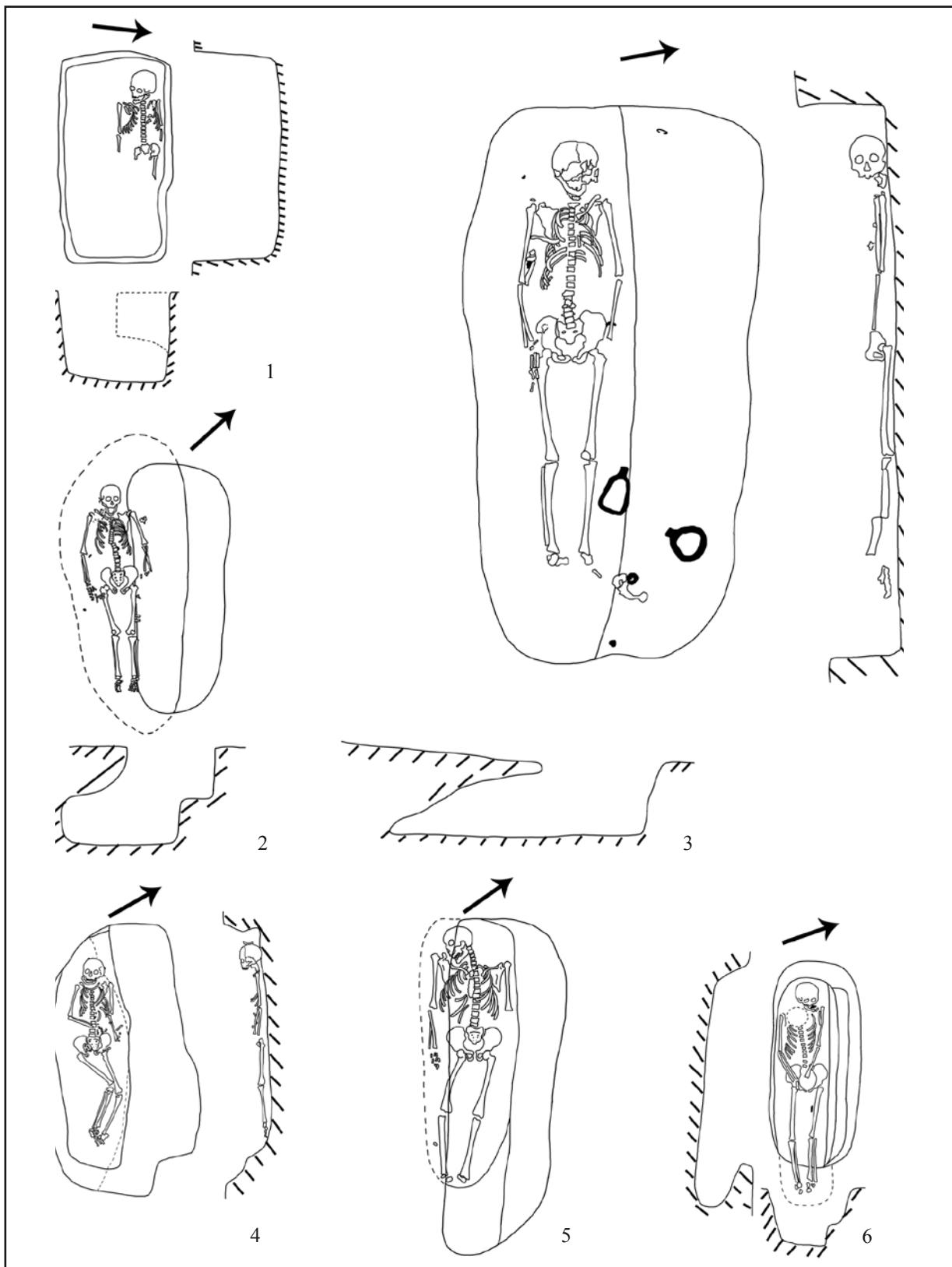


Fig. 2: Graves with a sidewall niche and with a niche dug at the foot-end in the Carpathian Basin of the 10th–11th centuries. 1: Homokmégy-Székes, Grave 142; 2: Cegléd 4/7, Grave 18; 3: Harta-Freifelt, Grave 13; 4: Harta-Freifelt, Grave 15; 5: Kecskemét-Kisfái, Kicsukás, Grave 139; 6: Törökszentmiklós-Szenttamáspuszta, Grave 44 (after VARGA 2013, 1–3. tábla)

which saw the transformation of the sidewall niches to so-called “semi-sidewall niches”, after that side-steps and finally simple grave-pits. He also assumed that this process of transformation reflects the transition of the people from nomadism to sedentism (КОМАР–ПИОРО 1999, 152).²⁴

Graves with horizontal niches and those combined with a step (*Fig. 3*)²⁵ – this variant has been detected only recently in Hungary – have exact analogies first of all in the Sokolovskaya Balka-type of the Saltovo cultural-historical complex. The grave types of this find horizon were summarized by A. A. Ivanov in 1999 (ИВАНОВ 1999a, 218, таб. 1), whose Group III is represented in Hungary as well.²⁶ Moreover, the arrangement is also identical, the sidewall niche being on the southern, the step on the northern side of the grave (КРУГЛОВ 2002, 62). Furthermore, all the formal variants have analogies in the Carpathian Basin of the 10th–11th centuries, such as the *low stepped*,²⁷ the *square stepped*,²⁸ the *high stepped*,²⁹ and the

multi-stepped variants (*Fig. 3. I–6*).³⁰ A further similarity is the presence of horse³¹ or horse-harness burials³² on the steps in both regions.

Regarding the origins of graves with sidewall niche one can conclude, that there is a considerable difference in the distribution of these graves in the Carpathian Basin during the Avar and the Hungarian Conquest Periods, although the earlier ones have always been regarded as prototypes of the later ones.³³ They were most popular in the Late Avar Period in Transdanubia,³⁴ but it is exactly this region, where they are unknown during the Hungarian Conquest Period. And vice versa: in the southern part of the Great Hungarian Plain, most importantly between the Danube and the Tisza they occur very frequently in the 10th–11th centuries,³⁵ but are missing in the Late Avar Period (BALOGH 2000). In spite of this, their influence cannot be completely excluded, as this was pointed out by S. Varga in his analysis of the cemetery at Csekej (Čakajovce, Sk).

STEPPED GRAVES IN THE CARPATHIAN BASIN OF THE 10TH–11TH CENTURIES

Stepped graves are not very numerous in the Carpathian Basin of the 10th–11th centuries (*Fig. 4*). The origin and interpretation of this grave type has attracted even less attention than graves with a sidewall niche (TETTAMANTI 1975, 90; BENDE–LŐRINCZY 1997, 225–226). Similarly to the grave type discussed above, the identification of stepped graves

is made difficult by the usual soil conditions. In the case of sandy soil, the internal form of the grave is not easy to observe, and the outlines are not clearly discernible either.³⁶ There are thus many uncertainties involved and it is hardly possible to collect all the graves which belong definitely to this type. Much depends on the methods and care of the

²² Criticised by ФЛЁРОВА 2002, 179.

²⁴ ИВАНОВ 1999а, 218, Type 3.1; a similar grave in the Carpathian Basin is Dormánd-Hanyipuszta, Grave 2 (RÉVÉSZ 2008, 77–78, Fig. 54).

²⁵ TÜRK 2010, 100.

²⁶ ИВАНОВ 1999а, 218, Type 3.2; a similar grave in the Carpathian Basin is e.g. Bánkeszi (Bánov, Sk), Grave 1 (*Fig. 3. 1*) (TOČÍK 1968, Abb. 3. 1).

²⁷ ИВАНОВ 1999а, 218, Type 3.3; a similar grave in the Carpathian Basin is e.g. Bánkeszi (Bánov, Sk), Grave 21 (*Fig. 3. 2*) (TOČÍK 1968, Abb. 4. 5).

²⁸ ИВАНОВ 1999а, 218, Type 3.4; a similar grave in the Carpathian Basin is e.g. Bánkeszi (Bánov, Sk), Grave 17 (*Fig. 3. 3*) (TOČÍK 1968, Abb. 3. 6).

²⁹ ИВАНОВ 1999а, 218, Type 3.5; a similar grave in the Carpathian Basin is e.g. Bánkeszi (Bánov, Sk), Grave 25 (*Fig. 3. 4*) (TOČÍK 1968, Abb. 5. 2).

³⁰ In the Carpathian Basin e.g. Szolnok, Lenin Tsz. (Ugar) Grave 5 (*Fig. 3. 5*) (MADARAS 1996, 3–4. kép).

³¹ In the Carpathian Basin e.g. Bánkeszi (Bánov, Sk), Grave 20 (*Fig. 3. 6*) (TOČÍK 1968, Abb. 4. 2).

³² There are in addition significant structural differences between the Late Avar and the Hungarian graves with a sidewall niche: in the Avar graves they are deep and clear-cut, while in the 10th–11th century the sidewall niches are generally shallow and are rather symbolic.

³³ Cf. the Avar cemeteries around Vörs (KÖLTÖ 2001). Late Avar graves with a sidewall niche, with rich grave-goods can be firmly dated even to the beginning of the 9th century (LŐRINCZY–STRAUB 2006, 282).

³⁴ E.g. the cemetery at Homokméggy and its surrounding area, where their number is extremely high: twenty of the hundred graves with sidewall niches were excavated here (GALLINA–VARGA 2013).

³⁵ For this last cf. FODOR 1985, 20; BENDE–LŐRINCZY 1997, note 12; GALLINA–HAJDRIK 1998, note 16.

³⁶ Due to the difficulties outlined above there are many cemeteries, usually excavated in an early phase of research, where the form of the graves were not observed at all. The distribution of certain grave types must therefore be considered very cautiously.

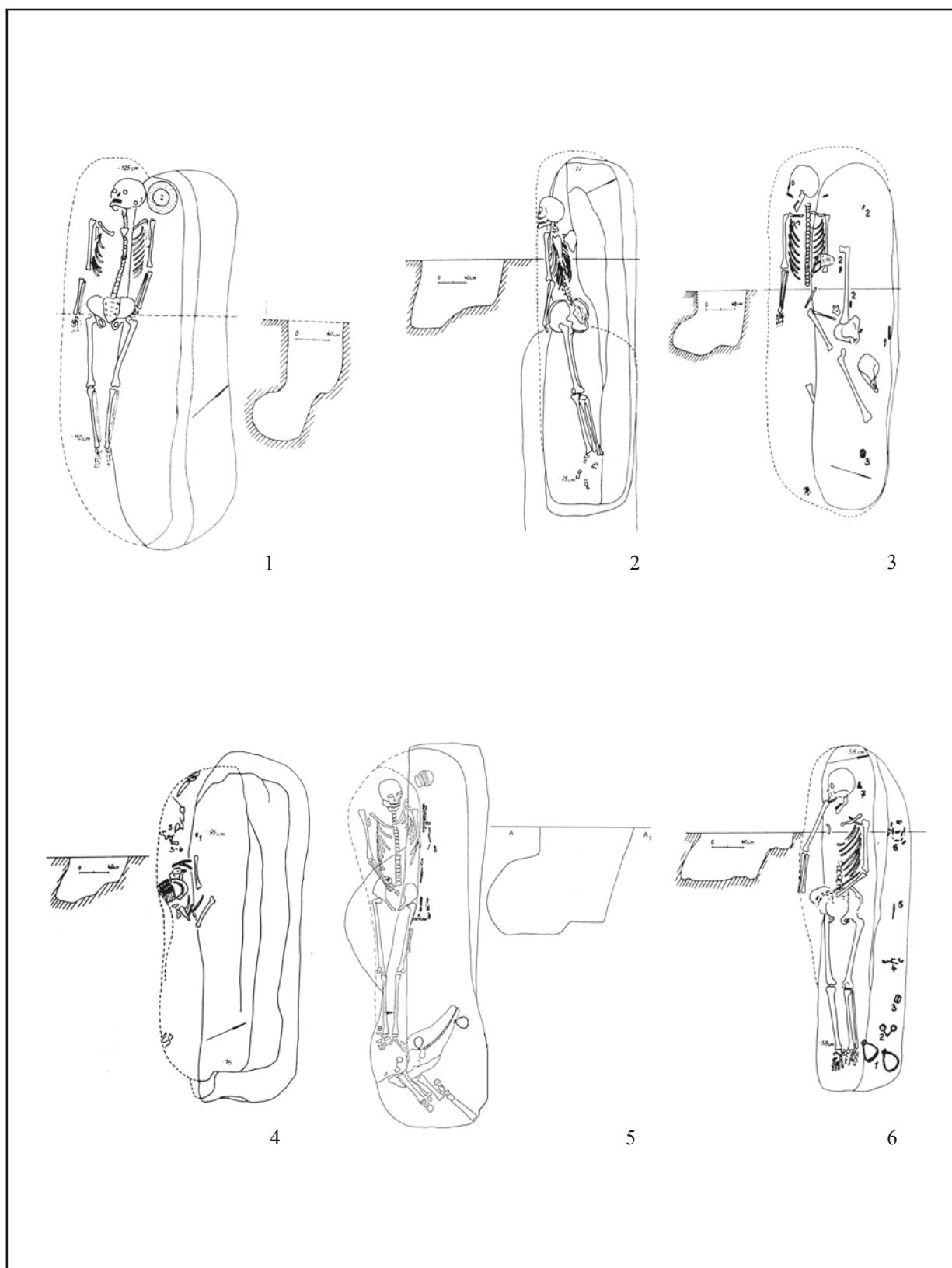


Fig. 3: Graves with horizontal niches and those combined with a step in the Carpathian Basin of the 10th–11th centuries. 1: Bánov, Grave 1; 2. Bánov, Grave 21; 3. Bánov, Grave 17; 4: Bánov, Grave 25 (after Točík 1968 Abb. 59); 5: Szolnok-Lenin Tsz. (Ugar), Grave 5 (after MADARAS 1996, 3–4. kép); 6: Bánov, Grave 20 (after Točík 1968, Abb. 4)

excavator.³⁷ A further difficulty is caused by the insufficient publications, which do not contain as a rule the cross-section of the graves, and the descriptions do not disclose details about sidesteps either.

Regarding the definition of stepped graves, I have adopted the criterium formulated by G. Lőrinczy, according to which the sidewall of the step is (nearly) vertical (LŐRINCZY 1992, Note 9).³⁸ The steps are usually 10–30 cm high and 5–25 cm broad³⁹ and according to their position in the grave, stepped graves can be divided in the following groups (*Fig. 4. 1–5*): step on all four sides of the grave (Type 1),⁴⁰ step on three sides (Type 2).⁴¹ The most common type has steps only on two sides of the pit (Type 3), usually on the long sides (Type 3.1),⁴² but there are also examples having steps on the short sides (Type 3.2).⁴³ Finally, it is also possible, that there is only one step in the

pit (Type 4), usually on the north side (Type 4.1),⁴⁴ but steps on the southern side are equally known (Type 4.2).⁴⁵ There are steps on the short sides of the grave, on the west end, next to the skull (Type 4.3),⁴⁶ and on the east, before the legs as well. (Type 4.4).⁴⁷ Some archaeologists excavating stepped graves have already called attention to structures, which resemble steps, but do not exactly conform with the above types (GALLINA–HAJDRIK 1998, 154), it is perhaps wise to treat them separately (Type 5).⁴⁸

Outside Hungary, steps are generally thought to have supported a timber cover above the dead,⁴⁹ but in the graves of the Carpathian Basin there are no clear signs for this practice. Their role or function remains thus uncertain, even if there are some cases, where a horse burial⁵⁰ or a horse harness⁵¹ has been placed on them (*Fig. 4. 3*).

NEW EVIDENCE AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE CLASSIFICATION OF THE HORSE BURIALS OF THE CARPATHIAN BASIN IN THE 10TH–11TH CENTURIES

Horse burials in the 10th century Carpathian Basin are without exception only partial horse burials and their number does not reach 10% of the total graves.⁵² In general, a similar type of horse burial is prevailing within each single cemetery.⁵³

A classification of the 10th century horse burials practiced by the Hungarians⁵⁴ was first attempted by Gy. László (LÁSZLÓ 1943, 46–60),⁵⁵ and was then elaborated by Cs. Bálint (BÁLINT 1969). His work has been published in Russian as well (БАЛИНТ 1972). To

³⁷ This should be stressed, because stepped graves with one step only along their long side result probably only from the inaccurate excavation of a grave with a sidewall niche.

³⁸ At Algyő there were two such graves, both of them without grave-goods (KÜRTI 1980, 342); Homokmégy-Székes, Graves 48, 155, 165 (cf. GALLINA–HAJDRIK 1998, 154); Perse (Prša, Sk) Grave 101 (TOČÍK 1968, 39, Abb. 14. 4); Pusztaszentlászló, Grave 175 (SZÖKE–VÁNDOR 1987, 1987, 48, 74. kép); Sándorfalva-Eperjes, Graves 23, 31, 78 (FODOR 1985, 20); Szegvár-Oromdűlő, Graves 425, 503, 523 (BENDE–LŐRINCZY 1997, 225); Velence, Graves 3, 6 (KRALOVÁNSZKY 1965, 3. ábra). Most probably the following ones also belong to the type of stepped graves: Ipolykiskeszi (Malé Kosihy, Sk) I Grave 25 (HANULIAK 1994, Tab. IV. E), Grave 42 (HANULIAK 1994, Tab. VI. E), Grave 43 (HANULIAK 1994, Tab. VII. B), Grave 51 (HANULIAK 1994, Tab. X. A), Grave 74 (HANULIAK 1994, Tab. XV. D), Grave 147 (HANULIAK 1994, Tab. XXXIV. A), Grave 526 (HANULIAK 1994, Tab. XCVI. B), although the walls of the grave are described as oblique (HANULIAK 1994, 13–14).

³⁹ Szegvár-Oromdűlő, Grave 425 (*Fig. 4.1*) (BENDE–LŐRINCZY 1997, 262).

⁴⁰ There is none at the eastern end of the grave e.g. at Homokmégy-Székes, Grave 254 (*Fig. 4.4*) (GALLINA–VARGA 2013).

⁴¹ Szentes-Derekegyházi oldal D-3 tábla, Grave 6 (*Fig. 4.5*) (LANGÓ–TÜRK 2004, 198).

⁴² Ipolykiskeszi (Malé Kosihy, Sk) I Grave 147 (HANULIAK 1994, Tab. XXXIV A).

⁴³ Orosháza, Puszta Ignáczné tanyája, Grave 1 (DIENES 1965, 145). It has been considered, that the grave was originally not a stepped one, but with a sidewall niche (cf. VARGA 2013).

⁴⁴ Homokmégy-Székes, Grave 166 (GALLINA–VARGA 2013).

⁴⁵ Sándorfalva-Eperjes, Grave 100 (*Fig. 4.2*) (FODOR 1985, 20, 3. kép 3).

⁴⁶ Bánkeszi (Bánov, Sk) Grave 27 (*Fig. 4.3*) (TOČÍK 1968, 16, Abb. 5. 4).

⁴⁷ Extremely small and irregular steps cannot, unfortunately, be detected, because there are many cases, where similar features are only due to inadequate excavation techniques.

⁴⁸ For a summary of stepped graves in East Europe see TÜRK 2009, 105–110.

⁴⁹ Öttevény (UZSOKI 1962, 9–26); Szentes, Derekegyházi-oldal D-3 tábla Grave 6 (LANGÓ–TÜRK 2003; LANGÓ–TÜRK 2004, 198).

⁵⁰ Koroncó-Bábota (LÁSZLÓ 1943, Abb. 2); Kiszombor C, Feature 37 (LANGÓ–TÜRK 2004a, 206).

⁵¹ A similar percentage has been observed among 8th-century finds (Novinki and Uren' horizons) on the Middle Volga (БОГАЧЁВ–ЗУБОВ 2003, 34).

⁵² On the other hand, e.g. in the cemetery at Tiszavasvári-Aranykerti tábla three major variants were observed (VÖRÖS 2001, 591).

⁵³ For some horse burials, a date in the 11th century has also been considered (e.g. Ópusztaszer, Kiszner-tanya, Grave 1 [VÁLYI 1994, 396]), but the exact date of these finds is still debated.

⁵⁴ For earlier research see NAGY 1893; MUNKÁCSI 1931; MÓRA 1932.

this fundamental study I. Fodor added some remarks regarding the eastern analogies (FODOR 1973, 161–162; FODOR 1977, Note 57), and L. Révész added some adjustments to the principles used for classification (RÉVÉSZ 1996, Note 62). The typology used by Cs. Bálint was based on archaeological criteria, and it was afterwards completed or corrected by the archaeozoologist I. Vörös based on the complete find catalogue of the Upper Tisza region (VÖRÖS 2001). In

2013 I. Vörös published a thorough study discussing the history of relevant research, the classification and other (such as religious) aspects related to this type of burials (VÖRÖS 2013).⁵⁶ Most recently P. Langó and A. Türk have published new archaeological evidence from excavations regarding the formal variants of horse burials and they also laid the foundations of a new classification (LANGÓ-TÜRK 2007, 9–10; LANGÓ et al 2008, 85).⁵⁷

HORSE BURIALS IN STEPPED GRAVES

Among the stepped graves discussed above, there are many cases, where remains of a horse or horse harness were placed on the step. A horse burial placed on the step (on the east side of the grave) has already been published from Slovakia.⁵⁸ In 2002 a grave, which was unearthed in the vicinity of Szentesz, yielded a horse burial, where the animal skin was folded and placed on a step running on the northern side of the grave pit (*Fig. 4. 5.*).⁵⁹ In the grave at Öttevény, there were equally some horse remains on the step (UZSOKI 1962). Horse harnesses, a kind of symbolic horse burial, are known e.g. from Koroncó-Bábota (LÁSZLÓ 1943, Fig. 2), and Kiszombor C.⁶⁰

Regarding the eastern analogies of this rite, one can refer to the Middle Volga, where horses were placed on a step in the grave, e.g. in the cemetery at Bol'she Tigani, Graves 12 and 28 (ХАЛИКОВА 1971, 55–56; CHALIKOVA-CHALIKOV 1981, Pl. 10. 23). Going to the south along the Volga there are partial animal burials among the finds belonging to the heritage of nomads of the Avilov-type (from the end of the 7th to the beginning of the 9th century); 44% of them were placed on steps in grave pits, and 67% were horse burials (КРУГЛОВ 1990, 47).⁶¹ There are

other analogies from the east European steppe that might be interesting in this context. In Grave 7 of Kurgan VI at Oktyabrsk near Donetsk (Ukraine) (KOMAP 2005) the placement of the horse legs was nearly identical with the arrangement found in Grave 6 at Szentesz, Derekegyházi oldal, D-3 tábla (*Fig. 4. 5.*). Taken the grave type and the burial rite together, the most exact analogies of the the burials in the Carpathian Basin are found in East Europe, especially in the 10th–14th centuries among Pecheneg-Oguz burials between the Volga and the Don.⁶² All the three variants of partial horse burials, as described by A. G. Atavin, have horse remains placed on a step (АТАВИН 1984, 138). The most common type is found in graves oriented towards the west,⁶³ but there are also burials oriented towards the east,⁶⁴ or the north.⁶⁵ In the system defined by A. G. Atavin, the variant II. 5 is most closely resembling the burials of the conquering Hungarians, regarding both the technique of skinning-stumping and the placement of the remains in the grave (АТАВИН 1984, 137). A. G. Atavin cites further parallels for the stepped horse burial found next to the fortress of Tsimlyansk,⁶⁶ e.g. from Kalmykia and the region of Astrahan' (АТАВИН 2006, 352).

⁵⁵ VÖRÖS 2013.

⁵⁶ Тюрк, А.: *Захоронения с лошадьми у древних венгров (X в.) в Карпатской котловине. Вопросы классификации и их аналогии в салтовской КИО.* In: IV Международная археологическая конференция «Культуры степей Евразии второй половины I тыс. н.э.» Самара 2008.

⁵⁷ Bánkeszi (Bánov) Grave 27 (*Fig. 4. 3.*) (Тоčík 1968, 15. Abb. 5. 4).

⁵⁸ Szentesz, Derekegyházi-oldal D-3 tábla, Grave 6 (LANGÓ-TÜRK 2004a, 198). The Grave 1 at Oroszáza, Puszta Ignáczné tanyája is similar to this one (DIENES 1965, 145).

⁵⁹ Kiszombor C, Feature 37 (LANGÓ-TÜRK 2004a, 206).

⁶⁰ The finds of the Avilov horizon was connected by E. V. Kruglov to the proto-Hungarians living on the territory of the Khazars, mostly because there were analogies pointing to the south Ural region (КРУГЛОВ 1990, 49–50).

⁶¹ There is also a written source, mentioning the Oguz custom of partial horse burial (cf. КОВАЛЕВСКИЙ 1956, 128).

⁶² On the northern step in 27 cases (variants 1, 2, 5, 7, 8), on the southern step in five cases (variants 1, 5, 7, 8) (АТАВИН 1984, таб. 1).

⁶³ On the left step in 11 cases (variants 5, 7, 8) (АТАВИН 1984, таб. 1).

⁶⁴ On the left step in one case (variant 7) (АТАВИН 1984, таб. 1).

⁶⁵ E.g. in Grave 41 and 43 at Sarkel fortress the horse remains were observed on 25 cm high steps (ПЛЕТНЁВА 1990, 10 and рис. 9).

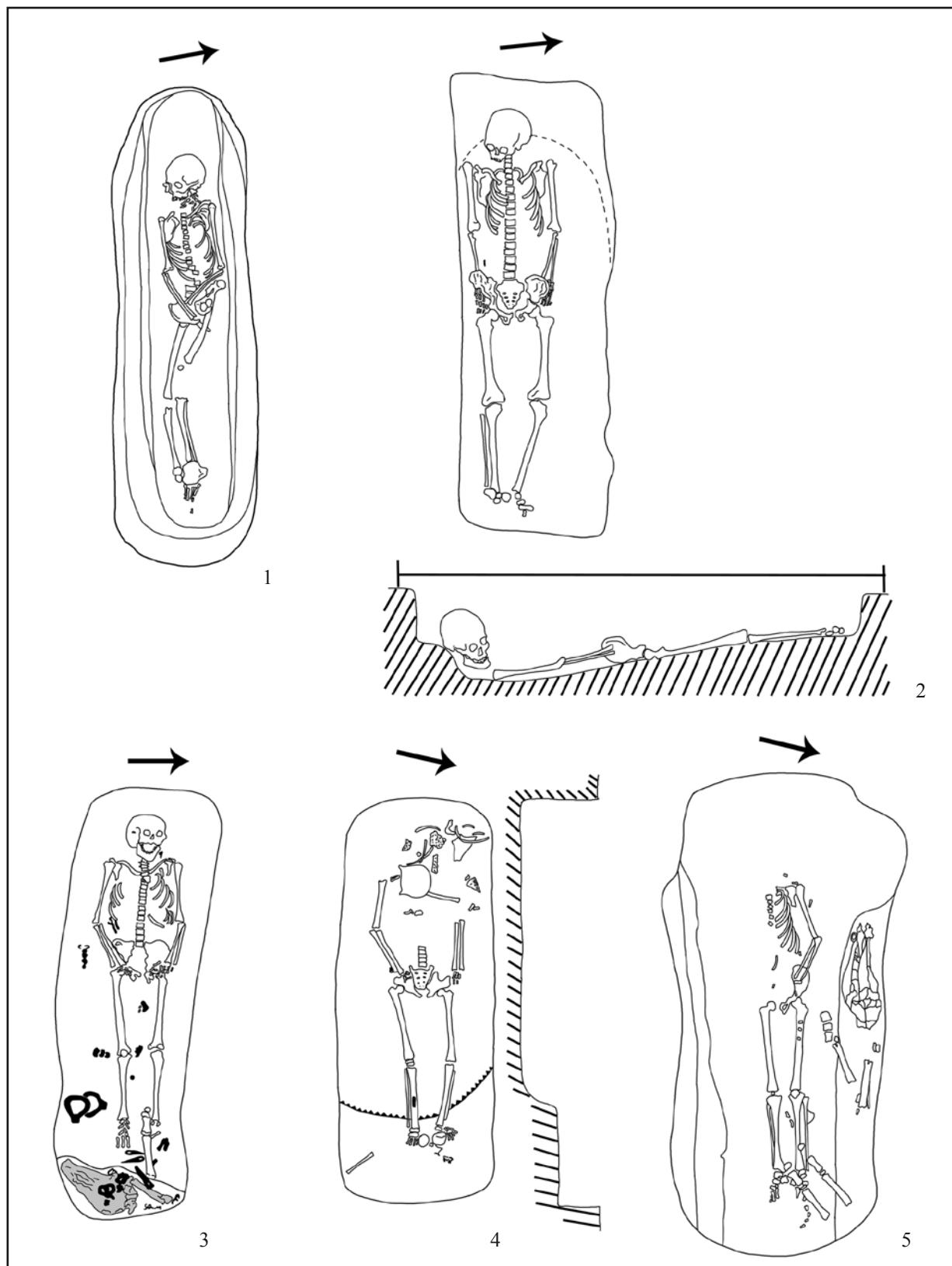


Fig. 4: Stepped graves in the Carpathian basin of the 10th–11th centuries. 1: Szegvár-Oromdűlő, Grave 425 (after BENDE-LÓRINCZ 1997, 262) 2: Sándorfalva-Eperjes, Grave 100 (after FODOR 1985, 20; 3: Bánov, Grave 27 (after TOČÍK 1968, Abb. 5) 4: Szolnok-Lenin Tsz. (Ugar), Grave 10 (after MADARAS 1996, 7. kép) 5: Szentes-Derekegyházi oldal D-3 tábla, Grave 6 (after LANGÓ-RÉTI-TÜRK 2011, Fig. 3)

ON THE ORIENTATION OF HORSE SKULLS IN THE BURIALS

In most of the horse burials hitherto known from the 10th–11th centuries in Carpathian Basin, the remains of the horses were placed towards the feet of the deceased, sometimes parallel to the skeleton. The horse skull may be in front of, above to the left or to the right of the feet, but it is always oriented to the west, i.e. the horse's head was looking towards the human head (*Fig. 5. 1*). There are, however, some exceptions to this rule. In Grave 595 at Kiskundorozsma-Hosszúhát (Szeged III. homokbánya) the animal skull was turned to the north, i.e. at a right angle to the axis of the grave (BENDE et al. 2013) (*Fig. 5. 2*). In Grave 27 at Bánov (Sk) the horse's skull was equally placed at a right angle to the axis of the grave, but it was turned to the south (TOČÍK 1968, 15, Fig. 5. 4) and in Grave 112 at Sárrétudvari–Hízóföld it was the same (*Fig. 5. 4*). There are a few other instances, where a similar placement of horses' skulls (at a right angle to the human skeleton) could be observed, but an eastward orientation occurs only twice (*Fig. 5. 3*).⁶⁷

The orientation of the horses' skulls in the graves of the Conquest Period has not attracted much scholarly attention so far, although it might prove to be historically relevant. Today, it is not only the early Bulgarian cemeteries from the Middle Volga, where there are partial horse burials occasionally placed at the feet of the deceased, but similar graves are known from the Saltovo-Mayatskaya culture and from other regions of the Saltovo cultural-historical complex. E. P. Kazakov has previously assumed that the western orientation of the horses' skulls in partial horse burials placed at the feet in the early medieval cemeteries of the Volga-Kama region is of "Ugric" origin. The placement at a right angle, on the other hand, was considered by him as a speciality of the Bulgarian-Turkic people moving from the Don to the Middle Volga region (КАЗАКОВ 1984, 105).

An increasing number of partial horse burials have been published recently from the simple pit graves

of the Rzhevka-Mandrovo type from the territory of the Saltovo-Mayatskaya culture. The placement of the animal bones to the feet of the deceased is also quite common, the skull being oriented most often to the north, less frequently to the south. In discussing the Rzhevka cemetery, V. A. Sarapulkin expressed doubts about the strict ethnic division on the basis of the orientation of the horses' skulls as proposed by E. P. Kazakov, because the cemetery contained graves with horses' skulls oriented in virtually every possible direction. He did not exclude, however, the possibility, that the appearance of horse burials (with the animal placed at the feet of the deceased) in the 9th century archaeological record of the given region in conjunction with the westward orientation of the horses' skulls could be interpreted as an influence on local burial habits exercised by the Hungarians passing by (САРАПУЛКИН 2006, 203–204).⁶⁸ Partial horse burials placed at the feet of the deceased are actually not typical for the Saltovo culture, but much more for the the Volga-Kama region (from the 6th to the 9th centuries) and for the Carpathian Basin during the 10th century. In the meantime some horse burials have been published from Bulgarian territory on the Danube, but the horses' skulls are placed in these graves at a right angle to the human skeleton.⁶⁹

The evidence currently available is not sufficient to draw detailed conclusions from it. The archaeological record of the Carpathian Basin in the 10th century contains some graves, where the horses' skulls are not oriented to the west, but the number of these cases is not significant. An important fact emerges, however, with certainty: partial horse burials placed at the feet of the deceased (and similar varieties of it) were much more common in early medieval Eastern Europe than previously assumed.⁷⁰ In order to detect their internal connections, typological differences or similarities between them, we have to await the establishment of their fine classification, revealing nuances like the orientation of the animal skull as well.

⁶⁶ Sárrétudvari-Hízóföld, Grave 146 (*Fig. 5. 3*) (NEPPER 2002, Fig. 222) and Nyíregyháza-Felsősimá, Grave 382 (JAKAB 2009, 101).

⁶⁷ Similarly cf. АКСЕНОВ–ТОРТИКА 2001, 203.

⁶⁸ Kabiyuk, Kurgan 4 (РАШЕВ 2007, 106–107. рис. 10).

⁶⁹ The best analogies of the 10th century horse burials of the Carpathian Basin among the finds of the Saltovo cultural-historical complex are the following graves: Netailovka, Graves 252 and 255 (АКСЕНОВ–ТОРТИКА 2001, 207); Volokovo ozero, Grave 8 (ТАТАРИНОВ et al. 1986, 218); Dronovka 3 (Limanskoe ozero) Graves 7 and 34 (ТАТАРИНОВ–ФЕДЯЕВ 2001, 367, 370); Rzhevka, Graves 20 and 39 (САРАПУЛКИН 2006, рис. 2. 1. and 2. 3).

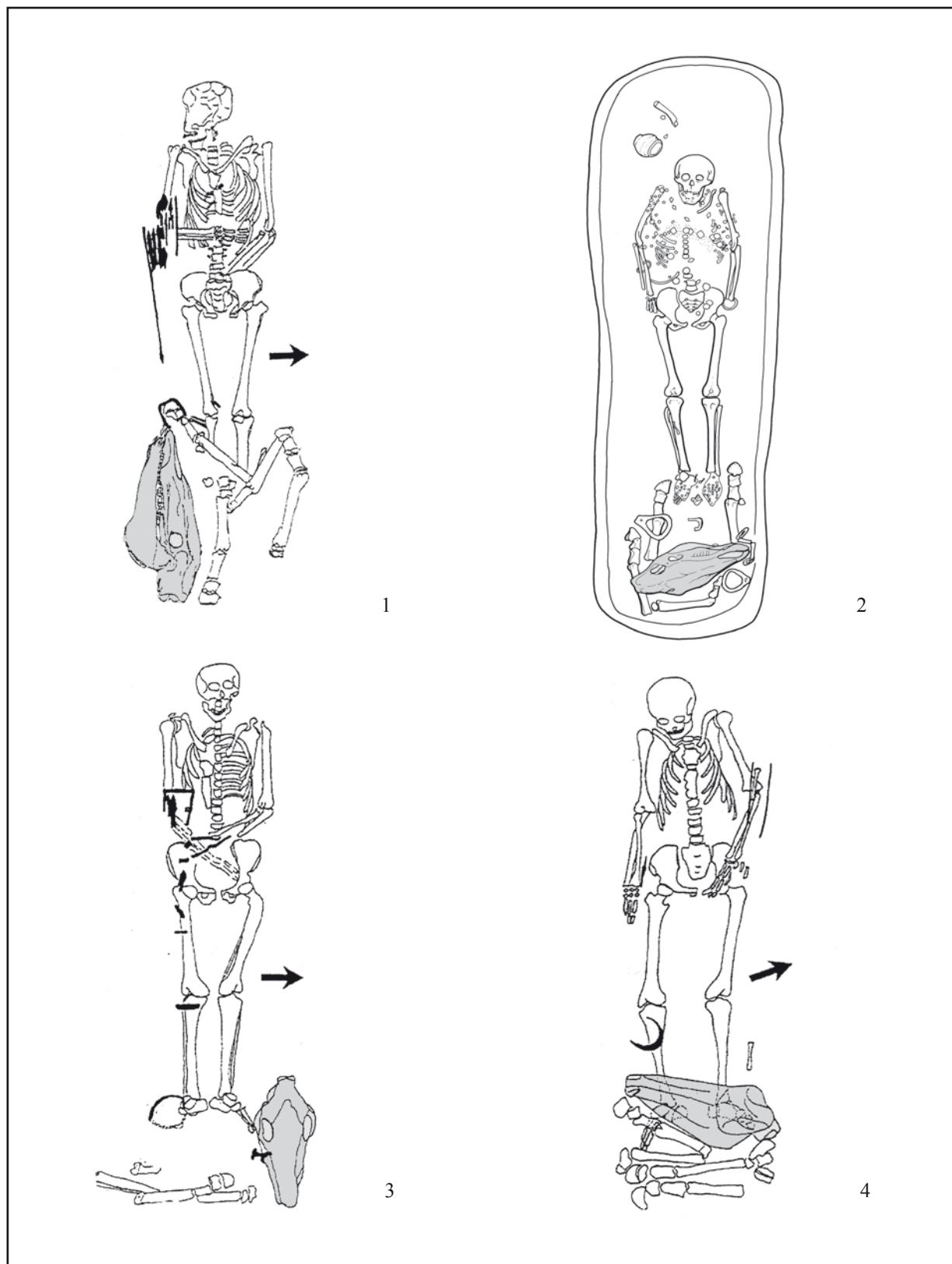


Fig. 5: Orientation of horse skulls in the burials in the Carpathian Basin of the 10th–11th centuries.
 1: Sárrétudvari-Hízóföld, Grave 213 (after NEPPER 2002, 229. kép) 2. Kiskundorozsma-Hosszúhát, Grave 595
 (after LÓRINCZY-TÜRK 2011, 8. kép) 3: Sárrétudvari-Hízóföld, Grave 146 (after NEPPER 2002, 222. kép)
 4: Sárrétudvari-Hízóföld, Grave 112 (after NEPPER 2002, 219. kép)

SUMMARY

The examples and problems discussed above clearly show, in my opinion, that a much greater attention to details is needed in the analysis of 10th–11th century burials in the Carpathian Basin, both during excavation and in the documentation. The genesis of the archaeological record of the Hungarian Conquest Period in the Carpathian Basin can hardly be explored without the observation of these details. I am convinced, that it is only these minor details, which may reveal with a high degree of certainty the connections of this material with the cultures of early medieval Eastern and Central Europe. For this kind of research, the evidence coming from Eastern Europe cannot be neglected; it is equally important as the material from the Carpathian Basin. New kinds of analogies may emerge, on the other hand, from new principles and new approaches in the study of the Hungarian material.⁷¹ Burial habits are generally considered to be very conservative, but caution is needed in the evaluation of similarities, because nowadays there is practically no culture known in Eastern Europe of the early Middle

Ages, which would appear to have used a totally homogeneous and uniform set of burial habits. This is particularly true for the Saltovo cultural-historical complex, which has been considered to play a decisive role in Hungarian prehistory. The regional variants of this culture are so different from each other, that it is actually impossible to find two cemeteries, which would be identical in this respect. This has already been pointed out by R. Rashev in his comparative study of Bulgarian pit graves on the Danube and the pit graves of the Saltovo cultural-historical complex (РАШЕВ 2003).⁷²

I think the phenomena discussed in this study belong to the eastern roots of the Hungarian tribes conquering the Carpathian Basin. Their exact identification and localisation will require still much effort and further successful and well-documented excavations both in the Carpathian Basin and outside it.⁷³

Translated by András PATAY-HORVÁTH

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⁷⁰ In this respect, I think that the methods, the historical and especially the archaeological approach to the early Middle Ages and the results of research in Bulgaria were excellent in the last decade (cf. *Проблеми на прабългарската история и култура* 4/1–2. София 2007).

⁷¹ Regarding the cemeteries of the 10th–11th centuries in Hungary cf. FODOR 2009, 102.

⁷² Thanks are due to Edit Ambrus, Csilla Balogh, Gergely Csiky, István Erdélyi, Eszter Istvánovits, Attila Jakab, László Kovács, Péter Langó, Gábor Lőrinczy, Beáta Pintér and especially to Sándor Varga, who reviewed this paper. In addition, I would also like to thank for the unselfish assistance and help received from all Bulgarian colleagues. This research was supported by the European Union and the State of Hungary, co-financed by the European Social Fund in the framework of TÁMOP 4.2.4. A/1-11-1-2012-0001 ‘National Excellence Program’.

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