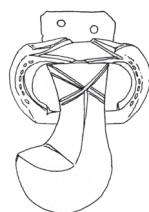


**INSTYTUT ARCHEOLOGII
UNIwersYTET MARIi CURIE-SKŁODOWSKIEJ
W LUBLINIE**

**THE TURBULENT EPOCH
II**



MONUMENTA STUDIA GOTHICA
t. V

pod redakcją
Claus von Carnap-Bornheim - Jørgena Ilkjæra - Andrzeja Kokowskiego

Instytut Archeologii Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej w Lublinie

THE TURBULENT EPOCH
New materials from the Late Roman Period
and
the Migration Period

Herausgeber - Edition

Barbara Niezabitowska-Wiśniewska
Marcin Juściński, Piotr Łuczkiwicz, Sylwester Sadowski

Lublin 2008

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Vujadin Ivanišević, Ivan Bugarski

Western Banat during the Great Migration Period

Western Banat is the eastern part of the present-day Serbian Province of Vojvodina, bordered from the West and South by two rivers – the Tisza and the Danube. The history of Banat in the first centuries AD was marked by newcomers from the East, from Pontus to far-away Asian territories. Among them the Sarmatians were the most important (fig. 1). A population of Iranian origin, they invaded the Great Pannonian Plain in the 1st century AD. These Sarmatians – Jazyges Metanastae – after the Dacian Wars spread towards the South, to the Bačka and Banat regions, all the way to the limes (Mócsy 1977, p. 439-466).

The Sarmatian newcomers occupied the wide plain, while the Dacians were partly pushed towards the Carpathian mountains. It is certain, however, that the old Daco-Celtic population remained in this area, as may be concluded on the basis of continuity in the sphere of material culture, which changed only gradually, under the influence of newcomers of the Pontic-steppe circle and under the strong impact of Roman civilisation as well (Párducz 1941, p. 43). The material culture of the Sarmatians itself changed, with the appearance of new waves of settlers from the Pontus area, especially in the second half of the 2nd century, after the Marcomanic Wars. The funeral rites changed along with the material culture.

The abandonment of the Province of Dacia in 271 under pressure of the Goths had a far-reaching impact on both the Empire and the developments in the *Barbaricum*. Great ethnic changes caused by movements of, first of all, Germans, affected wide areas, including the Banat region in the immediate vicinity of the northern border of the Empire and close to the former Dacia Province. The Sarmatians found themselves surrounded by the Empire and the Germanic tribes: in the North there were the Quadians and the Vandals, in the Northeast the Gepids, and the growing force of the Goths was coming from the East (Soproni 1969, p. 121-122). In the context of these movements we record the appearance of new heterogeneous populations of the Sarmatians, whose material culture can be easily traced precisely in Banat and Bačka. From Banat we single out the Banatski Despotovac necropolis, which belongs to the Kisyombor-Ernöhaza group of sites. What particularly characterizes this period is the increasing number of Sarmatian settlements and the enlargement of their sites (Dimitrijević 1975, p. 54).

The reinforcement of the Danube limes led to the growth of the political strength of the Sarmatians, as they assumed the role of the outer defences of the Roman border. For this purpose the line of the limes was erected in the *Barbaricum*, facing the mutual enemy – the Goths. According to S. Soproni, a part of the limes was built already after 271 (Soproni 1969, p. 121). It is more likely that the earthen limes was built after the consolidation of the Roman-Sarmatian alliance. According to A. Vaday a system of limes was erected after 322, and another one after 358 (Vaday 2001, p. 249-276). The first one is connected with the renewing of the Roman limes itself that took place under the rule of Constantine I, in the course of which “advanced” fortifications on the left bank of the Danube, like Drobeta and Lederata, were formed. Besides the big ditches in Oltenia, a part of the system was constructed in the Pannonian basin too. A defence system planned in this fashion relied on the



Fig. 1. Western Banat. Sarmatian settlements and necropolises (after Dautova-Ruševljanin 1990; Map: *Geomorphological map of the Autonomous Region of Vojvodina*, Belgrade 2005: *Geozavod-Gemini*).

Sarmatians – vassals of the Empire conquered in the great victory Constantine I achieved on their territory in 322. The other system was established after another Roman victory, by Constantius II in 358. As the situation in areas that used to be under Sarmatian control changed, the Gepids took the opportunity to spread towards the South, down to the Körös river which became the new frontier between themselves and the Sarmatians (Dimitrijević 1975a, p. 60-66). M. Đorđević (1996) also singled out the strategic significance of the southern part of Banat to the Empire, mentioning the intensive constructive activities carried out there after the victory achieved by Constantine I.

To the period of the clashes between the Romans and the Sarmatians we may ascribe two significant finds from the Banat region. The first find comes from the vicinity of Starčevo (fig. 2). Three golden *Zwiebelkopf* fibulae were found, together with the golden torque, two golden earrings, 12 golden coins, two of them being multiplae, and a silver plate. This hoard consisting of precious objects may be linked to donation to some Sarmatian leader, or possibly to booty from the Province of Moesia I. Based on the coins, the hoard is dated to after 336/7 (Noll 1974, p. 69-70; Vasić 2001, p. 175-200; Popović 2004). It is unlikely that it represents a donation to some distinguished Roman citizen, since two imitations of Roman solidi were part of the find.

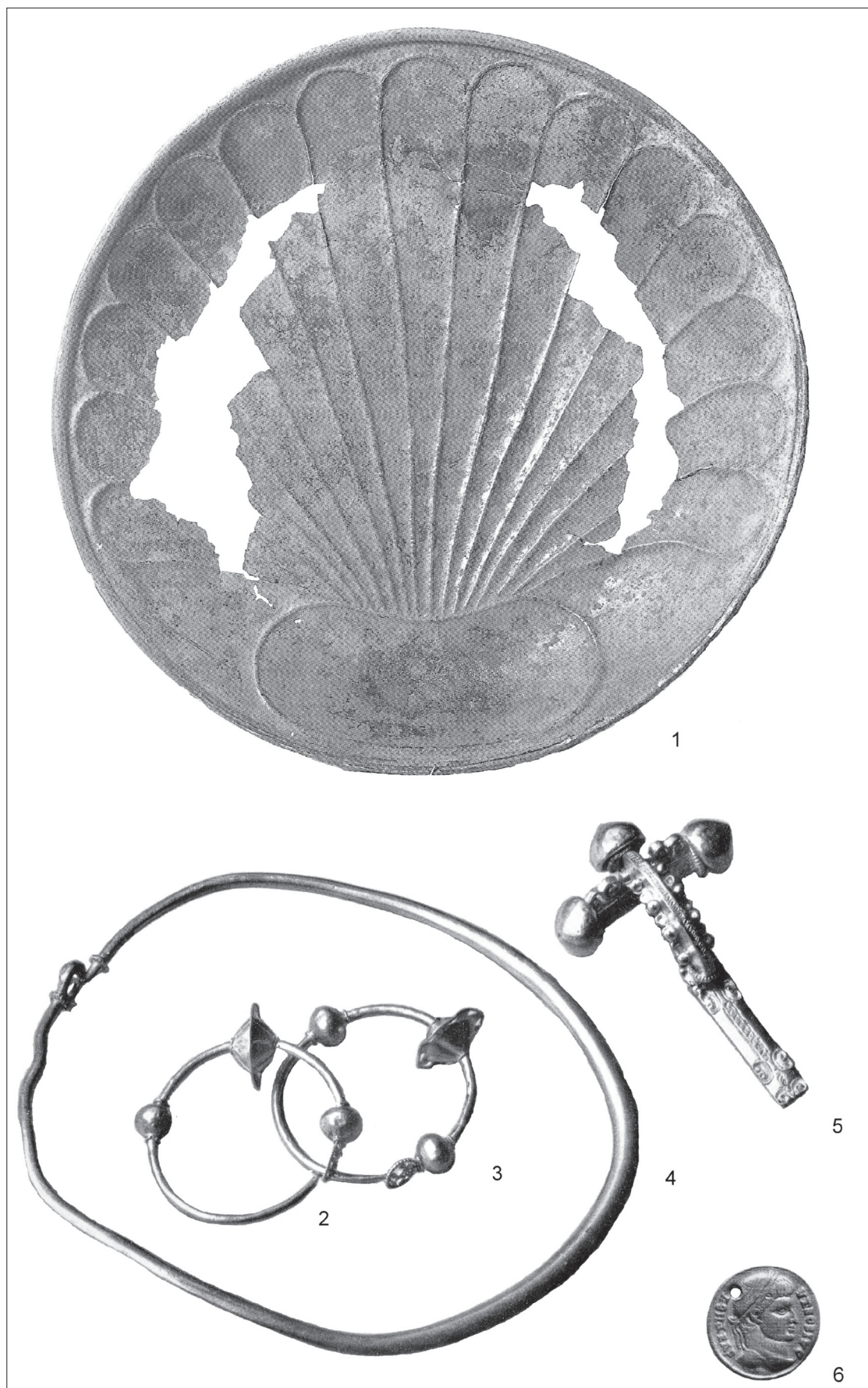


Fig. 2. The Starčevo hoard (1: after Popović 2004; 2-6: after Noll 1974; no scale).

From a similar context comes the finding of a fragmented golden bracelet with an incompletely preserved inscription *D N CONSTANTI...* housed in the Vršac Museum. This bracelet was found in Vatin and may be regarded as the Emperor's donation to some prominent Sarmatian leader (Barački 1971, p. 287, 305).

Traces of Sarmatian material culture are scattered across the Banat region (Dautova-Ruše-
vljan 1990, p. 81-94). For our topic especially interesting are the 4th century necropolises and settle-
ments that clearly point to a significant level of settling of the *Barbaricum*. As an example we mention
some important necropolises.

At the Pančevo-Vojlovica site some 55 graves were discovered, dated to the 3rd and 4th cen-
turies, many of which were robbed. What may be concluded from the discovered material is that
a wealthy population was buried together with the warriors: in a few graves weapons were un-
earthed, among them long double-edged straight swords that came into use in these areas during
the 3rd century (Batistić-Popadić 1985).

A warrior grave comes from the Crvenka necropolis near Vršac too. This grave (no. 11) was
linked to the similar graves that come from the necropolises of the Tapé-Malajdok type, dated to the
second half of the 4th century and the beginning of the 5th century (Simovljević 1957, p. 60; Párducz
1950, p. 248).

The finds mentioned clearly point to the increasing role of the warriors in the Sarmatian
society, now underlined by laying weapons in graves.

From Banat the Sarmatians continued their raids on the territories of the Empire. They at-
tacked Moesia I in the summer of 374 but were defeated by Theodosius, a young Byzantine general
(*Amm. Marc.* XXIX.6). The on-going wars with Rome as well as the appearance of other tribes, nota-
bly Germanic and Hunnic, were to destabilize the Sarmatian domination in Banat that had lasted for
centuries. Quite early, already after 377, a heterogeneous group of Huns, Goths and Allans penetra-
ted the territories of the Empire, settling down gradually along the Danubian limes. According to the
account of Zosimus, Uldin, a leader of the Huns, set his residence opposite Margum, an important
strategic place that secured the control of both crossing the Danube and of inroads into the Roman
Illyricum (*Zos.* V 22; Kovačević 1960, p. 34-35).

A number of archaeological finds testify to the early presence in Banat of the Germans and
probably of other tribes, only a small number of which was ascribed to this horizon due to incom-
plete observation of the archaeological material. Thus only certain groups of objects, like fibulae,
elements of belt garnitures, combs etc., were attributed to this Germanic horizon. Pottery, as the most
numerous kind of archaeological material, was disregarded in these analyses. On the other hand, in
some other studies pottery enjoyed special treatment, in order to single out a certain group of hand
formed vessels and to link them to the Slavs. In some articles the very presence of the Germans in
Banat and Bačka has been largely denied (Trifunović 2000, p. 57).

Beyond any doubt, to the horizon of Germanic and other settlers one may ascribe several finds
(fig. 3). From Šurjan there is the finding of fibula that probably comes from a ruined grave (fig. 4: 1).
From the area of the Roman castrum on the Sapaja locality in Stara Palanka comes an accidental
finding of a fibula. From Stara Palanka also come five characteristic semi-circular handled combs.
A grave was found in Starčevo, containing a comb of the same type. These finds have been dated to
the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 5th century (Ivanišević 1999, p. 99).

Besides these characteristic finds, certainly the largest group of archaeological material
representing this period is pottery. The grey burnished Murga pottery leans on the traditions of
the Chernyakhov-Sîntana de Mureş culture (fig. 5). This particular type of ceramics was noticed on
numerous sites but in most cases it was incorrectly ascribed. It consists mostly of pots, bowls and

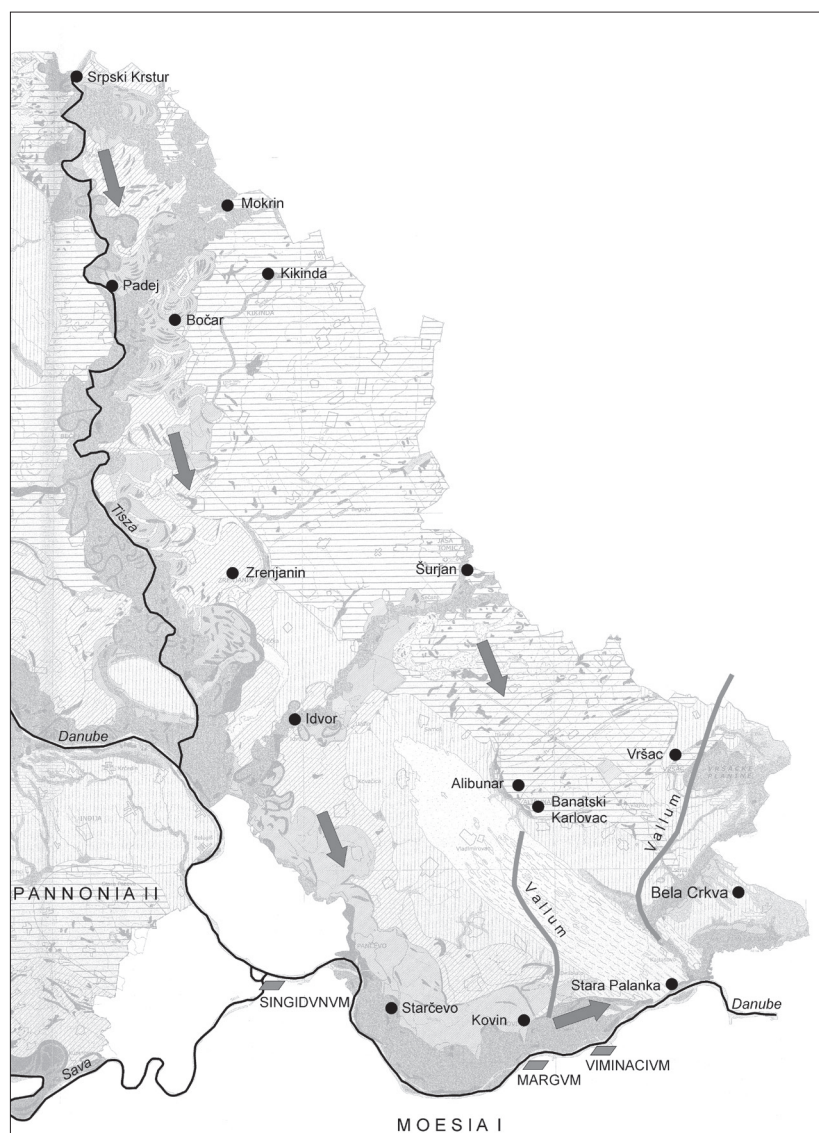


Fig. 3. Western Banat. Germanic settlements and necropolises (Map: *Geomorphological map of the Autonomous Region of Vojvodina*, Belgrade 2005: Geozavod-Gemini).

pitchers (Bjelajac, Ivanišević 1993, p. 131-133; Vagalinski 2002, p. 9-39). The vessels were found in Alibunar (fig. 5: 9-11), Padej and Banatski Karlovac but one may expect similar findings on other sites too (Trifunović 2000, p. 66-68), having in mind the kiln discovered in Crvenka near Vršac, containing matching ceramic fragments (fig. 5: 1-8; Rašajski 1957, p. 39-55). On the Staro selo locality in Idvor together with pottery of this type a hoard of iron objects was found (Đorđević, Đorđević 2005, p. 258-261). In Banat, this pottery was thus made locally, which points to the developed manufacture of a sedentary population.

The Sarmatians, now directly subjected to the Huns, continued to live in Banat, but the material culture changed due to various influences, the ones coming from the Pontus region being strongest. It has to be pointed out that the level of the archaeological exploration does not allow us to resolve the problems of interaction between the native population and the newcomers – the Huns, the Germans, but the Allans as well. The number of settlements and necropolises that can be precisely dated to the end of the 4th and to the 5th century is small. On the contrary, the accounts of Roman writers, above all Priscus, point to the presence of the Huns. These are the widely known news depicting the conquest of Viminacium and Margum back in 441 and the journey of the Roman diplomatic

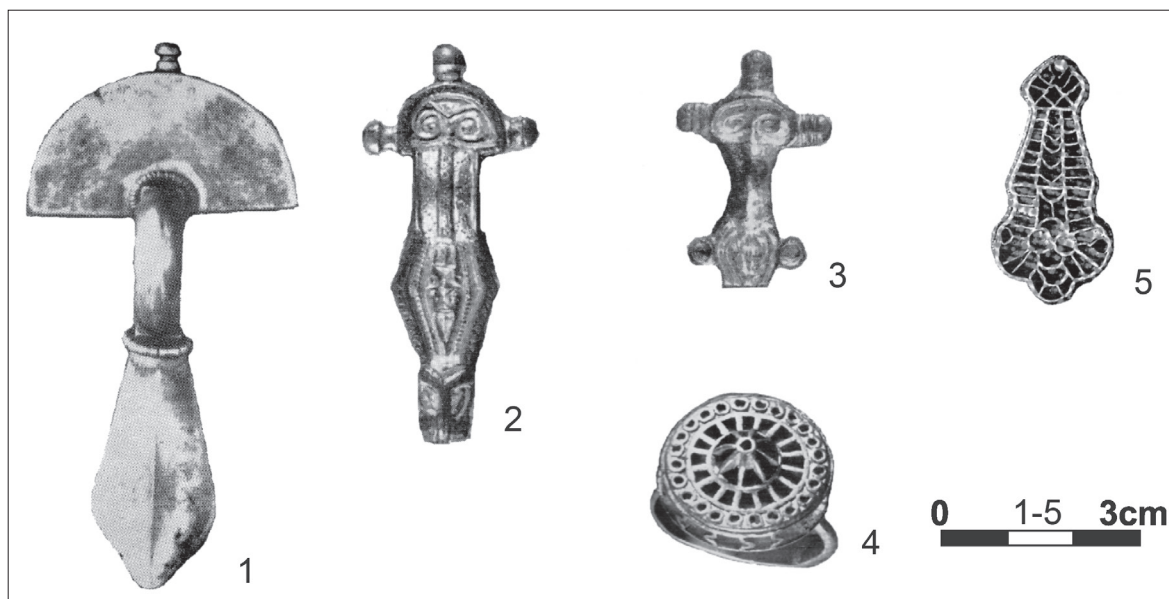


Fig. 4. 1: Šurjan; 2-4: Srpski Krstur; 5: Stara Palanka (after Dimitrijević *et alii* 1962).

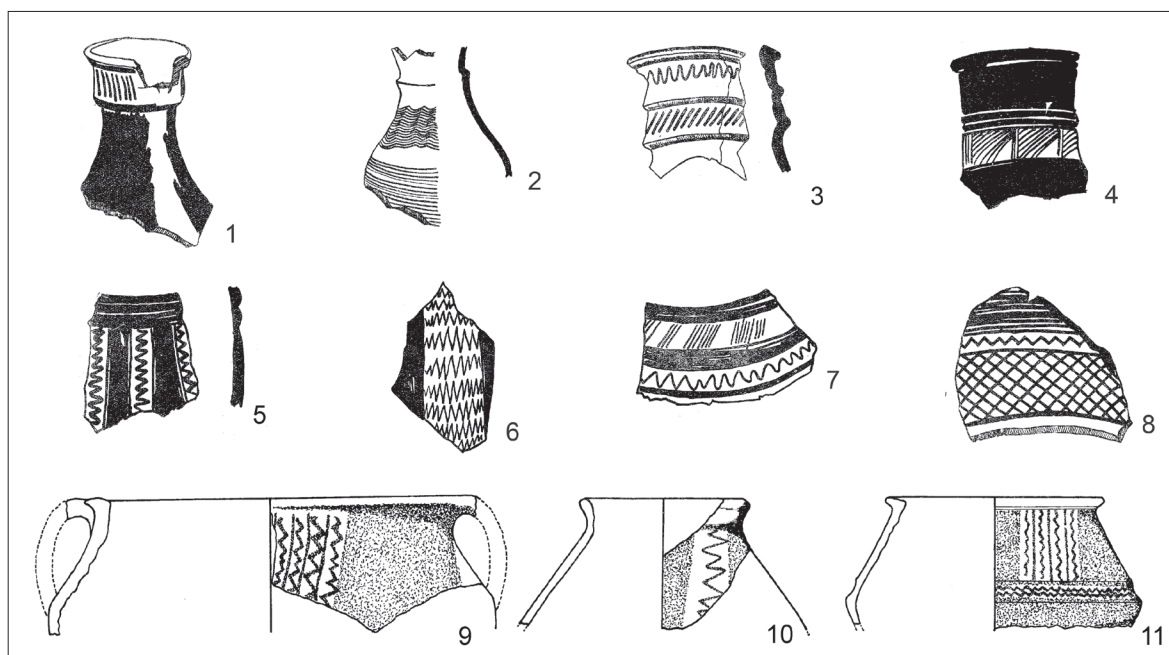


Fig. 5. Burnished pottery. 1-8: Crvenka; 9-11: Alibunar (1-8: after Rašajski 1957; 9-11: after Trifunović 1990a; no scale).

mission to the court of Attila in 448. This mission, in which Priscus himself participated, crossed the Roman border on the Danube by monoxiles, with help from the barbarians (*Priscus frag.* 8). The data provided by Priscus lead us to conclude that the *Barbaricum* was inhabited by a settled population. Following D. Dimitrijević, we believe that most of the barbarians were in fact Sarmatians (Dimitrijević 1975b, p. 77-82).

Together with the other tribes, the Sarmatians are mentioned as participants in the battle on the Nedao rivulet which the antihunnic coalition won in 454. The Gepids, who led the coalition, freed themselves from the Hunnic yoke and expanded their territory from Dacia to the Tisza river. The Sarmatians still played an important role. After the disintegration of the Hunnic union they occupied Singidunum; it was only in 472 that the Goths under Theodoric wrested the town away from them. Theodoric himself had previously defeated the Sarmatians on their territory and killed

their king (*Jordanes, Get.*, LV, 282). In the course of time the Sarmatians were gradually assimilated and disappeared from the written sources. A golden fitting found in Stara Palanka belongs to the depicted period. Originally it was decorated with inlays of almandine or glass (fig. 4: 5). This fitting has been studied by Z. Vinski and correctly linked to a group of similar objects from Gothic Italy (1964, p. 157-178).

The region of Banat was dominated by the Gepids for many decades but according to the archaeological record no large-scale settling north of the Danube limes was undertaken. It seems that the Tisza and Körös rivers remained the ethnic boundaries of the Gepids. In Banat there are only a few sites that may be ascribed to this horizon, among them the localities already mentioned where grey burnished pottery was found. That pottery was still in use in the 6th century (Vagalinski 2002, p. 77). A few sites are of special importance.

In Bočar, on the Pesak site, some 400 m from the old Tisza riverbed, a necropolis was registered in 1959. In the course of earthen works a part of it was ruined and some findings collected were given to the National Museum in Kikinda. The archaeological researches lasted for three years. A total of 67 graves were excavated, many of them having been robbed or ruined previously. The dead were buried in the usual way, in grave-pits of rectangular shape. In two graves iron nails were found, so it has been suggested that coffins were used. Graves were orientated West-East, only one of them being orientated North-South, which suggests a Sarmatian funeral. Besides numerous fibulae and buckles (fig. 6: 4-8), most characteristic of this site is a significant number of weapons unearthed. A total of nine spear-heads were found, together with an umbo, six swords, a scramasax, a battle-axe and various arrow-heads (fig. 6: 9-10). From female graves come bracelets, pins, buckles, brooches, strings of glass beads, combs, spindle whorls, and in one case a mirror of the Čmi-Brigetio type, Berjovka-Carnuntum-Mödling variant (fig. 6: 1-3; Milinković 2005, p. 208). Especially important is the finding of a gilded fibula similar to the Tiszafüred ones (Csallany 1961, tabl. CXCVI: 7). In one grave a solidus of Justinian I minted in Constantinople was found. Pottery was also mentioned by D. Dimitrijević and M. Girić. A total of 13 pots were found, one of them with stamped ornaments, seven of them burnished and three carrying burnished ornaments. The remaining two pots are worked out roughly (fig. 7). This necropolis was linked to a settled population and dated from the end of the 5th to the middle of the 6th century by the authors (Dimitrijević, Girić 1971, p. 190-193; Milinković 2005, p. 207-212).

From Srpski Krstur comes a ruined female grave (?) containing two fibulae, a golden ring and two beads (fig. 4: 2-4). The grave (?) is dated to the first half of the 6th century (Dimitrijević *et alii* 1962, p. 27-28).

From the fortification raised in Kovin (Constantia, Augustoflaviensia, Constantiola?) on the left bank of the Danube river, contra Margum, we mention a typical gilded rectangular part of a buckle that ends in the form of an eagle's head (fig. 8: 7). Some other important finds also come from Kovin. During the 1963 archaeological researches remains of a necropolis were discovered, when five graves were excavated. Speaking of small findings, fragmented fibulae were collected, together with the buckles, bronze torques, a knife and two biconical pots decorated with burnished ornaments (fig. 8; Milinković 2005, p. 208-212; Peković 2006, p. 41-43; Peković 2007, p. 45-48). This material corresponds to a great extent to the material found in the C phase graves of the Više Grobalja necropolis in nearby Viminacium (Ivanišević *et alii* 2006).

It is likely that the finding of a buckle from Mokrin and another finding from Kikinda also belong to this horizon (Girić 1963, p. 132-133; Dimitrijević *et alii* 1962, p. 18).

In 568, the political situation in Pannonia was changed dramatically. The Lombards went to Italy, displaced by the Avars (fig. 9). Their appearance caused movements of the other ethnic groups,

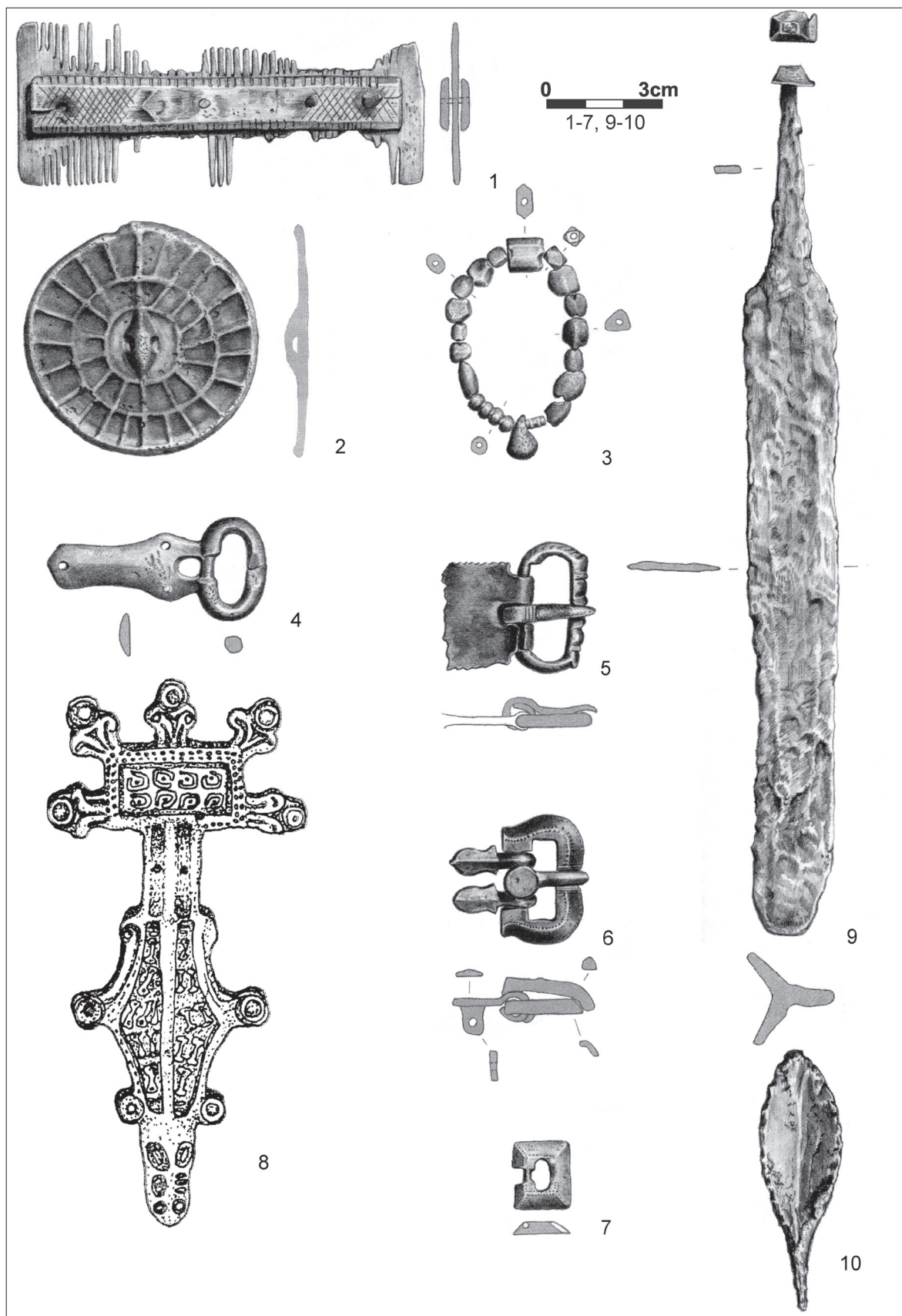


Fig. 6. Findings from Bočar (1-7, 9-10: after Milinković 2005; 8: after Dimitrijević, Girić 1971; no scale).

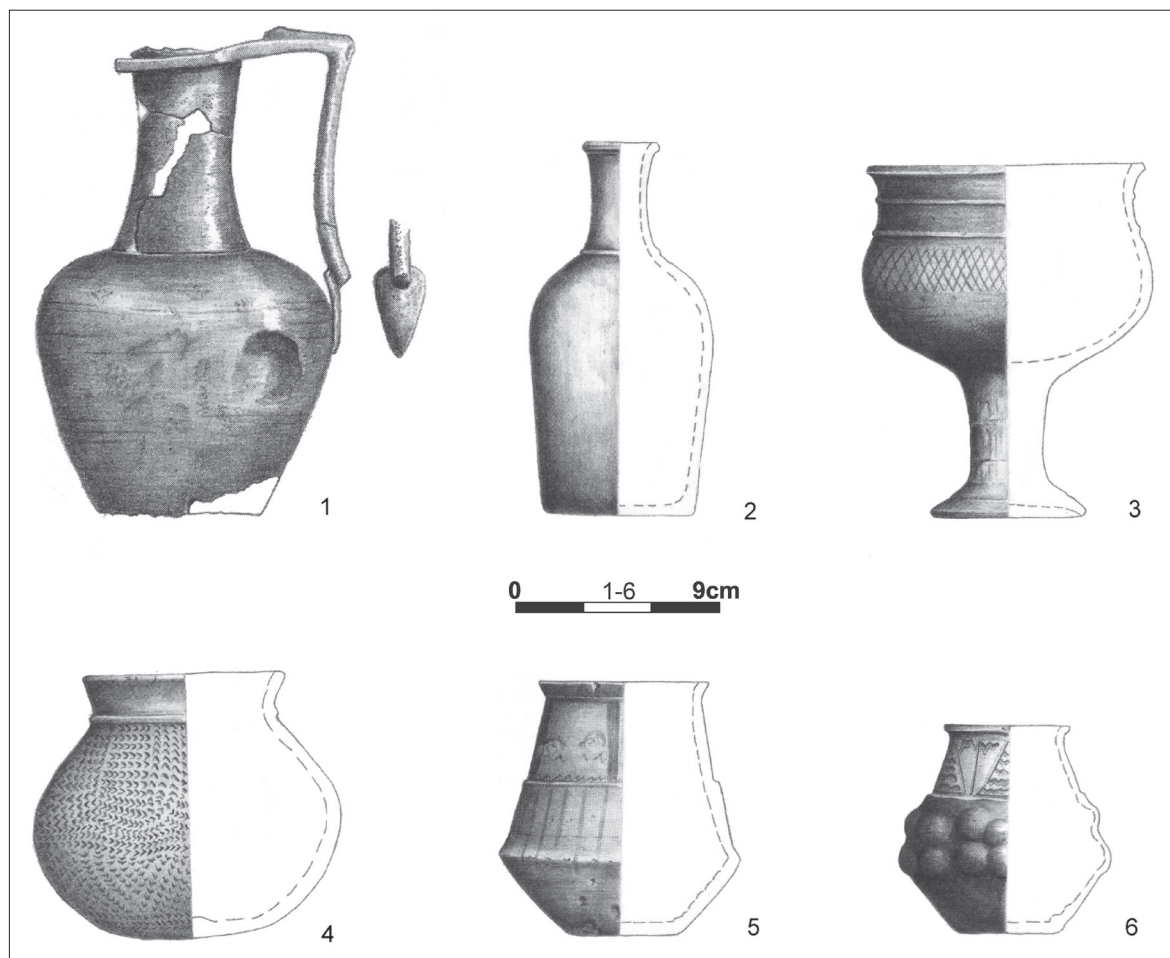


Fig. 7. Findings from Bočar. 1: Bronze vessel; 2-6 pottery (after Milinković 2005).

first of all the Slavs, who gradually spread into the *Barbaricum* and later even to devastated areas of the Empire. Banat was gradually settled by the Avars, while its previous population remained there at least for the next few decades. The news of the last Byzantine military campaign to the *Barbaricum* that happened in 600/601 is of special significance. The Avars were defeated on the Tisza river and according to an important historical source 3.000 of them were captured, together with 4.000 and 2.200 other barbarians and 8.000 Slavs (*Theophylact Simocatta, Hist, VIII, 3*). Among the barbarians mentioned most probably were the Gepids, who are named in the next account: the Byzantine army, having defeated the Avars, is said to have burned three Gepid villages and slaughtered 30.000 Gepids. These accounts are very important for providing us with data on the ethnic structure of the population of Southern Banat under Avar rule. The reflections of these events are also found later, in *Theophanes I, 282*.

In both sources "other barbarians" are mentioned, just as some anonymous barbarians had been referred to before by Priscus. Perhaps one should not entirely exclude the possibility that these were Sarmatians, and not Dacoromans as considered by numerous authors. This assumption is supported by the observation of E. Fóthi that the anthropological features of the Sarmatians buried at Szentes-Kistóke resemble to a great extent the Avar-time population buried at Szentes-Kaján (Fóthi 2000). Yet Hungarian archaeology set the year 480 as the upper limit of Sarmatian presence in Pannonia for a good reason. Hopefully the future anthropological researches of necropolises belonging to this period will provide answers to a number of questions this "turbulent epoch" has left behind.

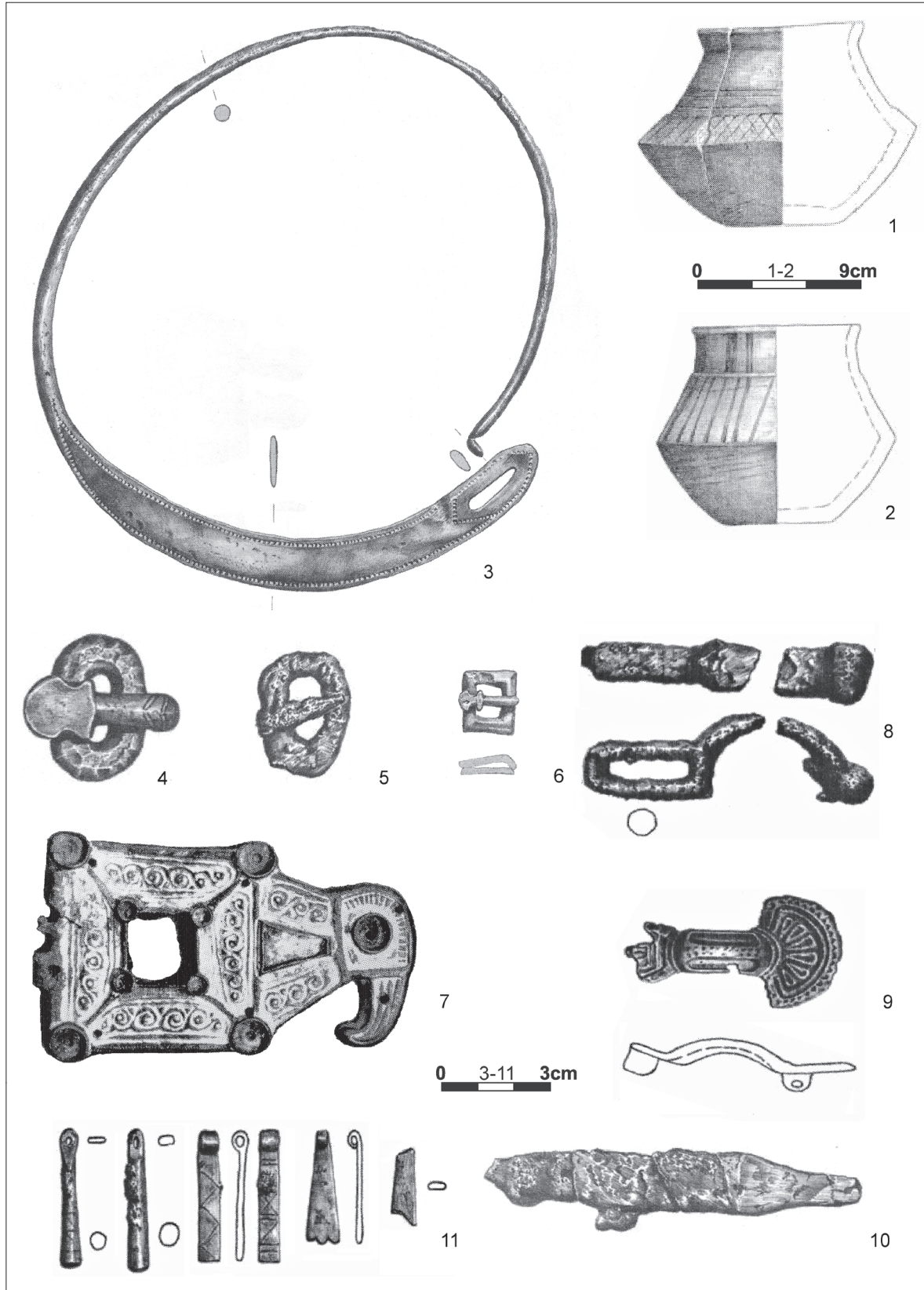


Fig. 8. Findings from Kovin (1-2, 4-5, 10: after Peković 2006; 3, 6, 9: after Milinković 2005; 7: after Dimitrijević *et alii* 1962; 8, 11: after Peković 2007).

Avar clans populated Banat as an independent entity until the arrival of the Bulgarians. We have chosen to depict Western Banat of the Early Avar age, which lasted up to 670/680. It is necessary to underline that the authors of this overview are not of the opinion that the Early Avar reference in

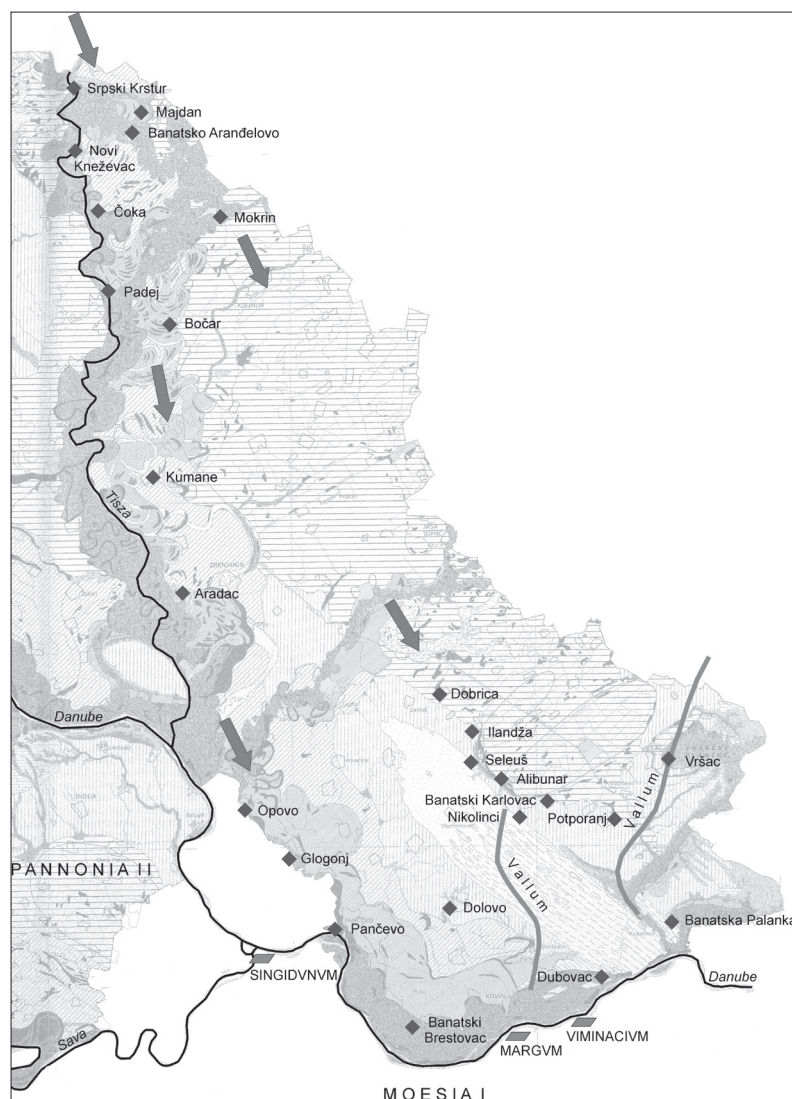


Fig. 9. Western Banat. Avar settlements and necropolises (Map: *Geomorphological map of the Autonomous Region of Vojvodina*, Belgrade 2005: *Geozavod-Gemini*).

Banat or in Pannonia generally should be regarded in a strict ethnic sense, for it is obvious that the ethnogenesis of the Avars was multi-layered and that their Khaganate was multi-ethnic. The (Early) Avar notion is, then, taken as a chronological-cultural umbrella label rather than a purely ethnic one.

As in the case of the periods previously mentioned, the level of exploration is not very high and that of scientific publishing is even lower. Only a single monograph dealing with an Early Avar site from Western Banat has been published (Ranisavljev 2007). Other localities and individual finds were published more summarily, whereby chronological and/or ethnic attribution was not properly conducted in all cases. For this reason it was necessary to re-interpret both the sites and the findings published, in order to extract the Early Avar horizon in Western Banat as clearly as possible. We offer the summarized results of these analyses.

In Srpski Krstur (Szerbkeresztúr), during the excavations of the prehistoric settlement that took place in late 19th century, two graves were discovered, one of them containing two coins. The golden coin of Heraclius stands out (Somogyi 1997, p. 58, no. 42).

From Majdan there is an accidental find of a female grave containing a pair of golden earrings with pyramidal pendants that are to be dated to the end of the 6th and the first half of the 7th century (Vinski 1956, p. 71; Garam 2001, p. 28-29).

Several graves from Banatsko Arandjelovo (Oroszlámos) were mentioned in older Hungarian literature. It has been stressed that the findings were not available (Dimitrijević *et alii* 1962, p. 12-13; Mrkobrad 1980, p. 94, n. 623). However, on the basis of the findings of a golden earring with the pyramidal pendant and a bronze chain these graves should be dated to the first half of the 7th century (Garam 2001, p. 28-29; Garam 2002, p. 163-164).

From two sites in Novi Kneževac (Törökkanisza) come the findings of very similar horse-men graves in which characteristic belt sets made of sheet bronze elements, decorated with pressed motifs, were found (fig. 10: 1-16). Although these burials were dated to the first half of the 7th century (Vinski 1958, p. 10-11), matching belt elements are attributed to the MS I phase and dated to 650-675 in the seriation accomplished by J. Zábójník (1991).

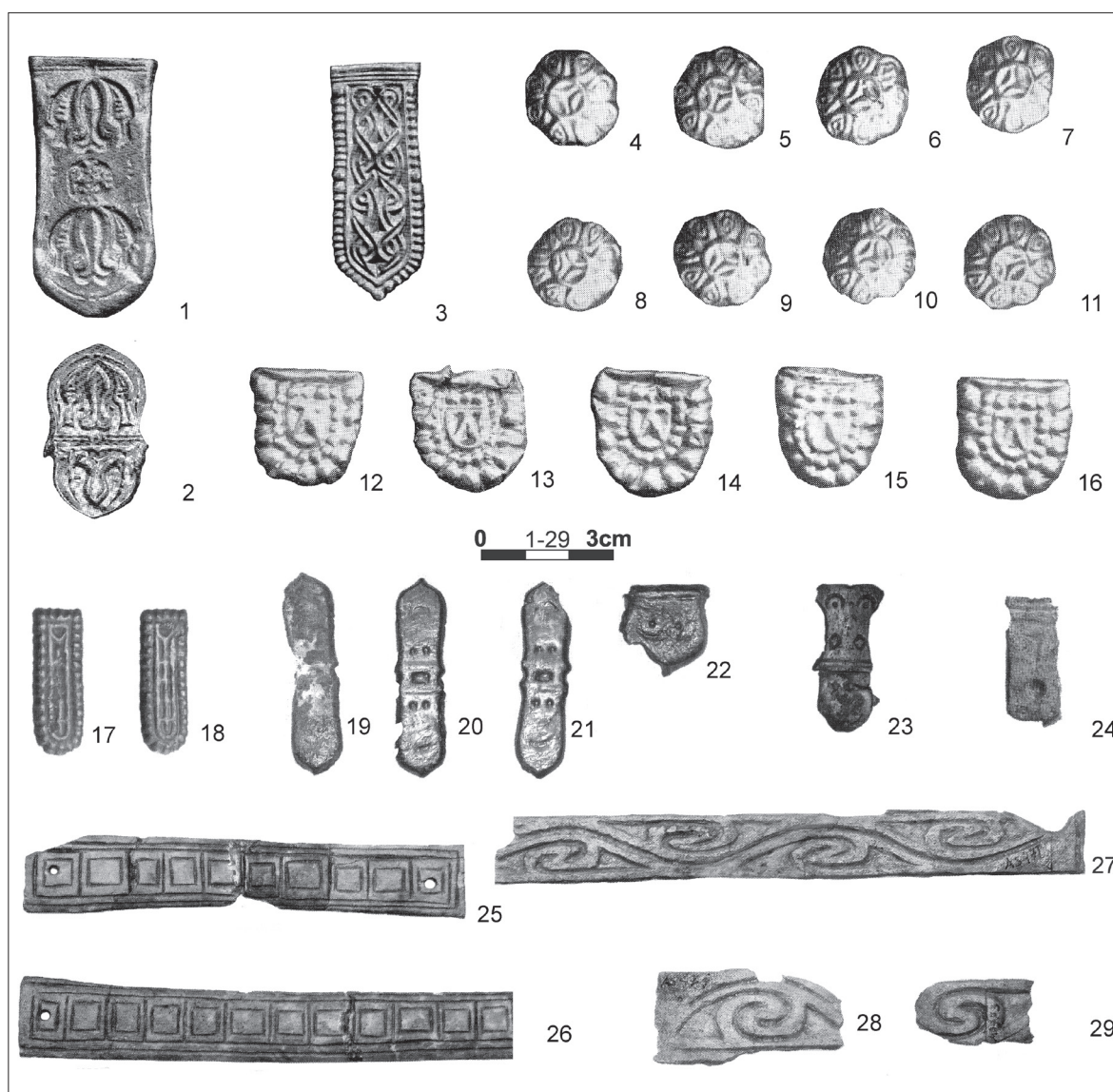


Fig. 10. 1-16: Novi Kneževac (after Dimitrijević *et alii* 1962); 17-29: Mokrin (after Ranisavljev 2007).

From Čoka (Csóka), an Avar necropolis has been published that was formed in the middle of the 7th century (Kovrig, Korek 1960). Among the older graves at the site is the one in which the belt set wholly resembling those from Novi Kneževac was found (fig. 11).

It has already been noted that a monograph dealing with the Mokrin (Homokrév) necropolis was published recently (Ranisavljev 2007). Some 100 graves were excavated, which the author attri-

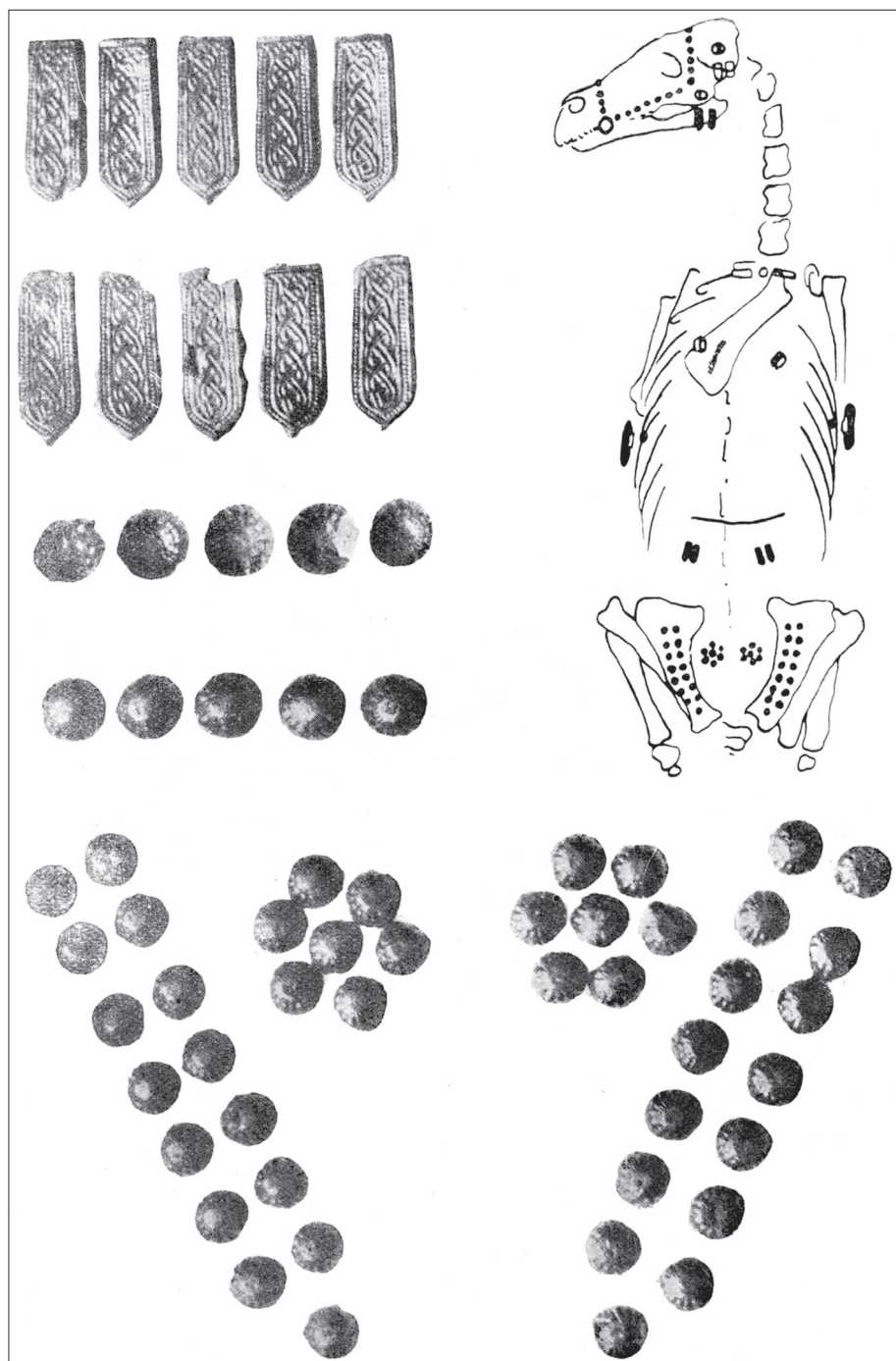


Fig. 11. Grave inventory from Čoka (after Vinski 1958; no scale).

buted to the Kutrigurs and dated until 632. On the basis of the archaeological material displayed, it is more likely that the necropolis was an Early Avar one, formed with the very arrival of the Avars and abandoned around 670/680. One may assume that this necropolis was attached to a settlement still undetected, having in mind the relatively large number of graves and some conclusions based on the geography of Pannonia that are going to be elaborated in greater detail below. On the other hand, among the very attractive archaeological material coming from the grave inventories (fig. 10: 17-29) one may notice certain objects of clear nomadic origin. So the Mokrin necropolis is one of the localities demonstrating that a population that used to be nomadic settled soon after arrival in Pannonia (Bugarski 2007, p. 440, 443-444).

Fragments of pottery from a big pit at the Višnjevača site in Padej have been dated to end 6th/beginning 7th century (Trifunović 1997, p. 120, tabl. VI, VII). Comparing the drawings of some of the hand formed vessels with the results of the analyses carried out by T. Vida (1999), one may assume that these pots are to be dated to the first half of the 7th century. There are fragments of hand formed vessels decorated with vertical incised lines (fig. 12: 3-4), having analogies from the Slavic context (cf. Vida, Völling 2000, p. 55, fig. 15). From the same locality comes another hand formed pot, ornamented with triangles incised beneath the rim (Stojić 2002, tabl. 6: 1). One may suppose that these may in fact be an imitation of the Germanic decoration model (fig. 12: 2). Based on the finds depicted, the Višnjevača settlement should be attributed to the Early Avar Period, while the possibility that it was populated by Slavs is still open.

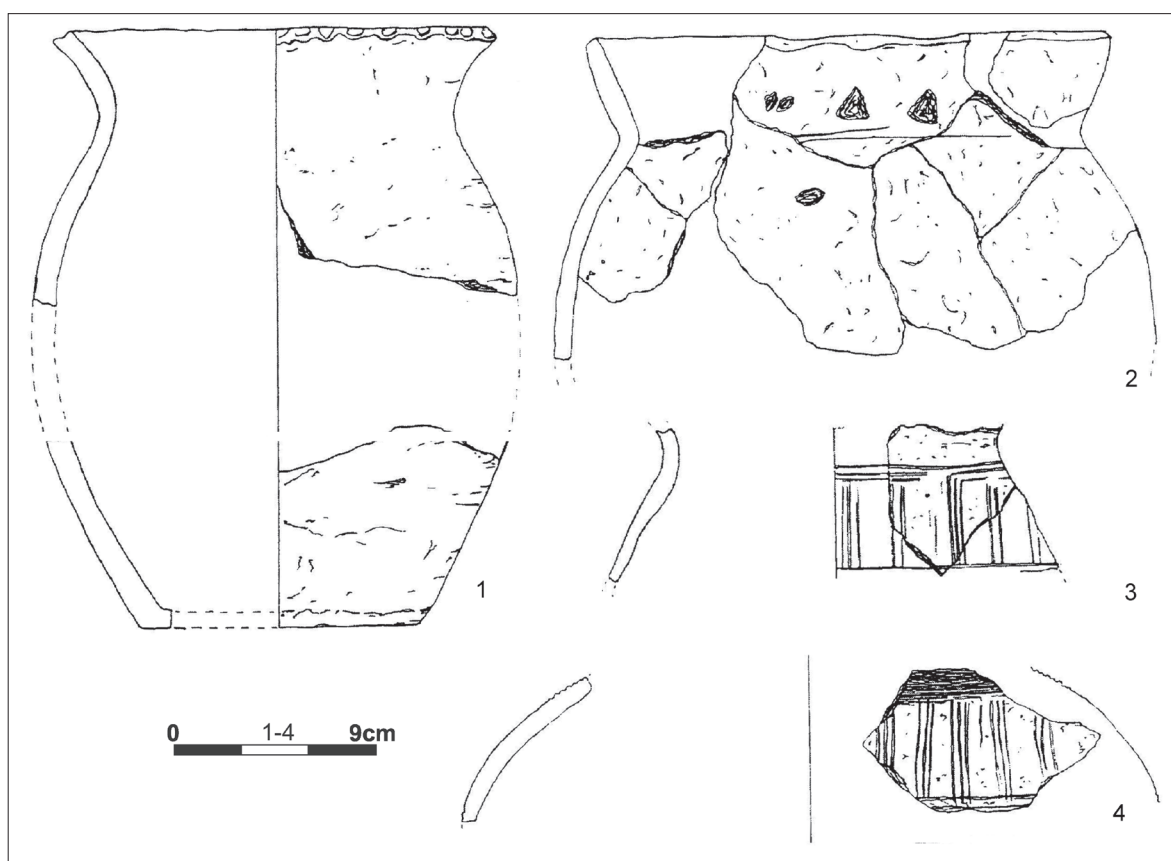


Fig. 12. Pottery from Padej (1-2: after Stojić 2002; 3-4: after Trifunović 1997).

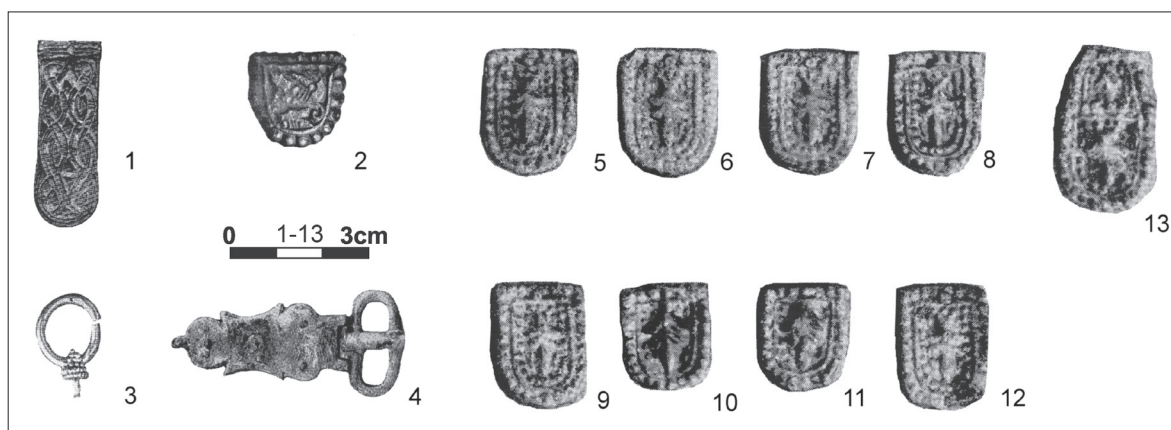


Fig. 13. Findings from Aradac (after Dimitrijević *et alii* 1962).

A single horseman's grave from the northern periphery of Bočar (Bocsár) is mentioned in the literature, probably from the Early Avar context (Dimitrijević *et alii* 1962, p. 14).

Data from the late 19th century Hungarian literature are cited concerning some 20-30 Early- and Late Avar graves from the ruined Kumane (Kumánd) necropolis (Szentpéteri 2002, p. 217). Elsewhere it has been claimed that the older horizon of the necropolis was Sarmatian, while the younger one was described as Avar or even later (Mrkobrad 1980, p. 106, n. 703).

The necropolis was found in Aradac (Aradka) at the Mečka site and has been published. Some 90 graves were dated to the second half of the 6th and the beginning of the 7th century (Nađ 1959), or until the middle of the 7th century (Dimitrijević *et alii* 1962, p. 9-12). It is likely that the necropolis should be moved to 670/680, on the basis of some susceptible objects found, e.g. a strap-end decorated with incised floral motif made of sheet bronze (fig. 13). On the same locality a Mediaeval dugout has been excavated as well.

In the vicinity of Dobrica, on eight localities pottery dated to the 6th-8th centuries was registered. Fragments of ceramic vessels that come from these multi-layered archaeological sites are dated widely, from Prehistory to the Late Middle Ages (Trifunović 1990a, p. 99-100).

To the northeast of Ilandža (Ilánca), on the very rim of the Deliblato sands, a multi-layered locality 11 is situated, surfacing ca 250 x 100 m. Fragments of ceramic vessels dated to the 5th-7th centuries were collected, together with pottery dated to the Prehistory, the Roman Period and the Middle Ages. At the nearby site 12 a fragment of the rim of a pot has been found bearing a decoration incised by fingernail (Trifunović 1990a, p. 100, tabl. IX: 8). This pot may be dated to the Early Avar period.

Locality 18 is to the east of Seleuš (Keviszólós) and surfaces approximately 200 x 100 m. Pottery fragments are dated widely, ranging from Prehistory to modern times. It was noted that some of the material collected belongs to the 5th-7th centuries, the illustrated fragment being later, from the Late Avar Period (Trifunović 1990a, p. 100).

From five multi-layered sites from the vicinity of Alibunar come findings of pottery dated to the Early Avar Period. A fragment of a rim impressed by finger that is illustrated appears to be from this period (Trifunović 1990a, p. 101, tabl. IX: 8). From Alibunar as well is a pair of golden earrings with pyramidal pendants composed of large granulae (fig. 15: 7), dated to end 6th/beginning 7th century by É. Garam (1993, p. 52-53, no. 4a, b, tabl. 2: 1, 2).

The Early Avar time pottery comes from six multi-layered sites in the vicinity of Banatski Karlovac. The 38 site (Kalvarija) is especially interesting. Five completely preserved pots were collected there (Trifunović 1990a, p. 102, tabl. VIII: 1-5). According to the local brick-factory workers, these pots came from the graves (fig. 15: 1-5). Human bones were noticed during the field survey too. It is likely that the site represents a ruined necropolis: from the same context probably comes the finding of a 6th century Early Byzantine fibula (fig. 15: 6; Trifunović 1990b, p. 215, 218, tabl. III: 1-6). The pots found may be compared to the types of T. Vida (1999) and dated from the very appearance of the Avars onwards, until around 650. This ruined necropolis should be regarded as Early Avar and not Slavic, which was allowed as a possibility (Trifunović 1990a, p. 105).

The 42 site is placed near Nikolinci (Nikolince), on the lowest plateau descending towards the fen. This is a multi-layered site, the pottery fragments found were dated widely, ranging from Prehistory to the Middle Ages. Some of it belongs to the 5th-7th and 7th-8th centuries, while Mediaeval pottery prevails (Trifunović 1990a, p. 102).

From Potporanj (Porány) comes an accidental find of a follis of Justin II (Somogyi 1997, p. 73, no. 57a) which does not prove Early Avar presence in this location.

From the vicinity of Vršac (Versec) comes an accidental find of a solidus of Justin II (Somogyi 1997, p. 94, no. 85a) which also does not confirm Early Avar presence.

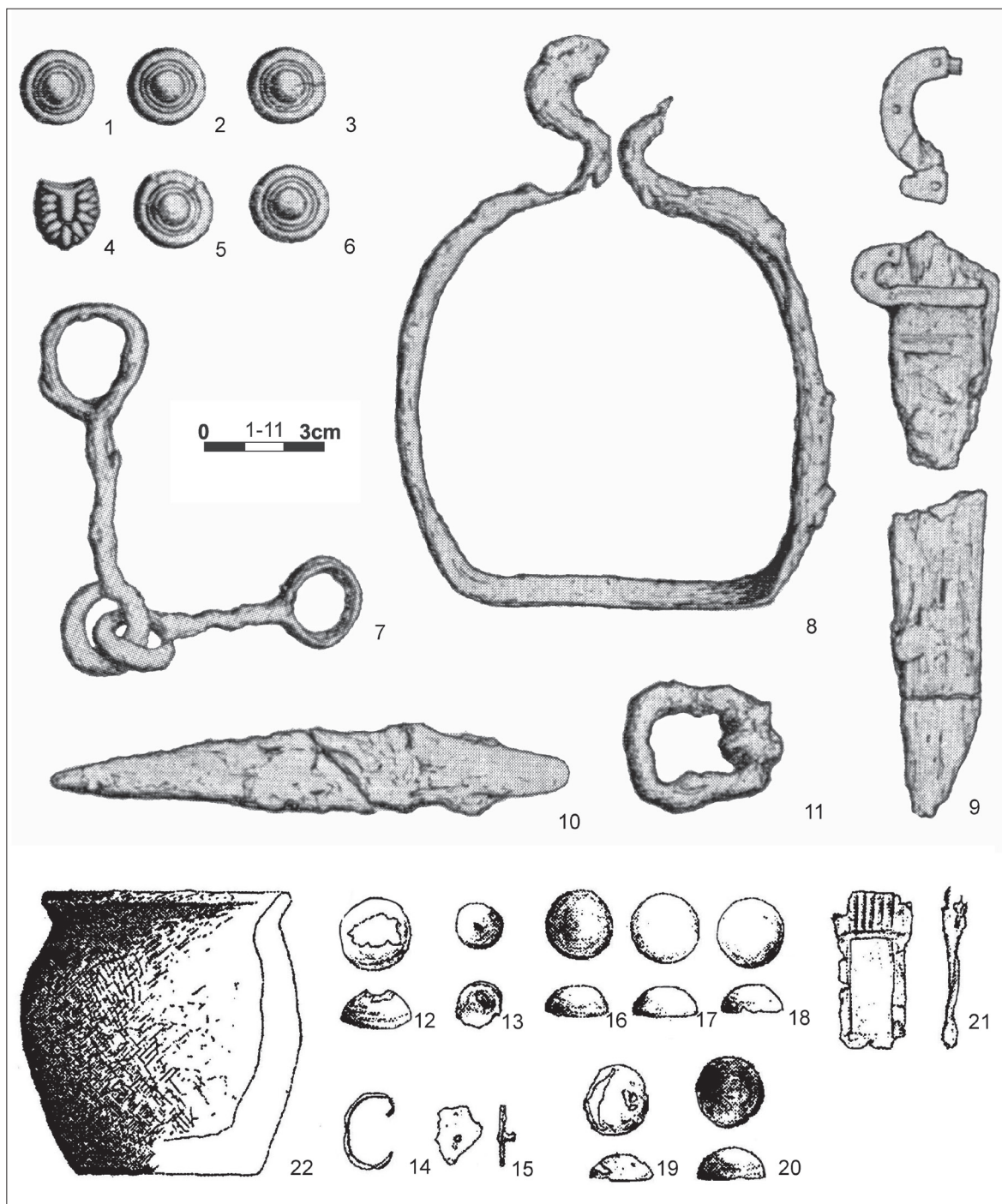


Fig. 14. Horsemen's graves inventories from Pančevo (1-11: after Prikic 1975; 12-22: after Košuh 1995; no scale).

In Opovo (Oppova), at the Selište site, pottery was found which suggests at least two Medieval horizons. The older one has been dated to the 7th-8th centuries (Brmbolić 1991, p. 60, fig. 8-12). The pot illustrating this horizon should be dated from the second half of the 6th century until around 650, using the results of T. Vida (1999).

During protection excavations of the prehistoric site at Glogonjski rit near Glogonj (Glogonj), a plundered grave was found (Dimitrijević *et alii* 1962, p. 17; Mrkobrad 1980, p. 81, 96, n. 499). It was an Early Avar burial: matching strap-ends (fig. 15: 8) are dated up to ca. 650 (Zábojník 1991, p. 233, tabl. 1: 1-3; 20: 1-4) or a bit wider, up to 670/680 (Garam 1995, p. 188, fig. 91: 1-7).

At the Ciglana site on the Deliblato road near Dolovo, traces of settlements were noticed, dated to the Sarmatian domination time, Early Middle Ages and the 12th-13th centuries. The Early Mediaeval settlement has been dated roughly to the 6th-8th centuries (Brmbolić 1991, p. 58, fig. 1). A pot illustrating that horizon probably belongs to *Prague* type and should be dated to the second half of the 6th century. Although pots like this are not to be automatically attributed to the Slavs (Vida 1999, p. 153), one should not exclude the possibility that the Early Mediaeval settlement in Dolovo was a Slavic one.

Objects from a few ruined Early Avar horsemen graves found at the Naselje Tesla site in Pančevo (Pancsova) have been published by M. Prikić (1975). Judging by the sword and the horsemen equipment these graves probably belong to the beginning of the 7th century (fig. 14: 1-11). From the Ulica Žarka Zrenjanina site comes a very interesting grave, in which the horseman was buried together with a dog (Košuh 1995, p. 59, tabl. I). Pressed sheet bronze harness pieces from this grave (fig. 14: 12-22) resemble those found in grave no. 1 at the Hajdúdorog necropolis, dated with a coin of Heraclius (610-641); (Garam 1992, p. 171). At the site of Bivša ciglana Bachmann in Pančevo, rich horsemen graves (?) were found in the first half of the 20th century, but there is no field documentation. Particularly significant is the finding of an Early Byzantine model (Novaković 1939, p. 46-48; Vinski 1958, p. 12; Dimitrijević *et alii* 1962, p. 24-25), after which the matching type of strap-ends was named (fig. 15: 9). This interesting object should be dated to the second and third quarters of the 7th century (Garam 2001, p. 148).

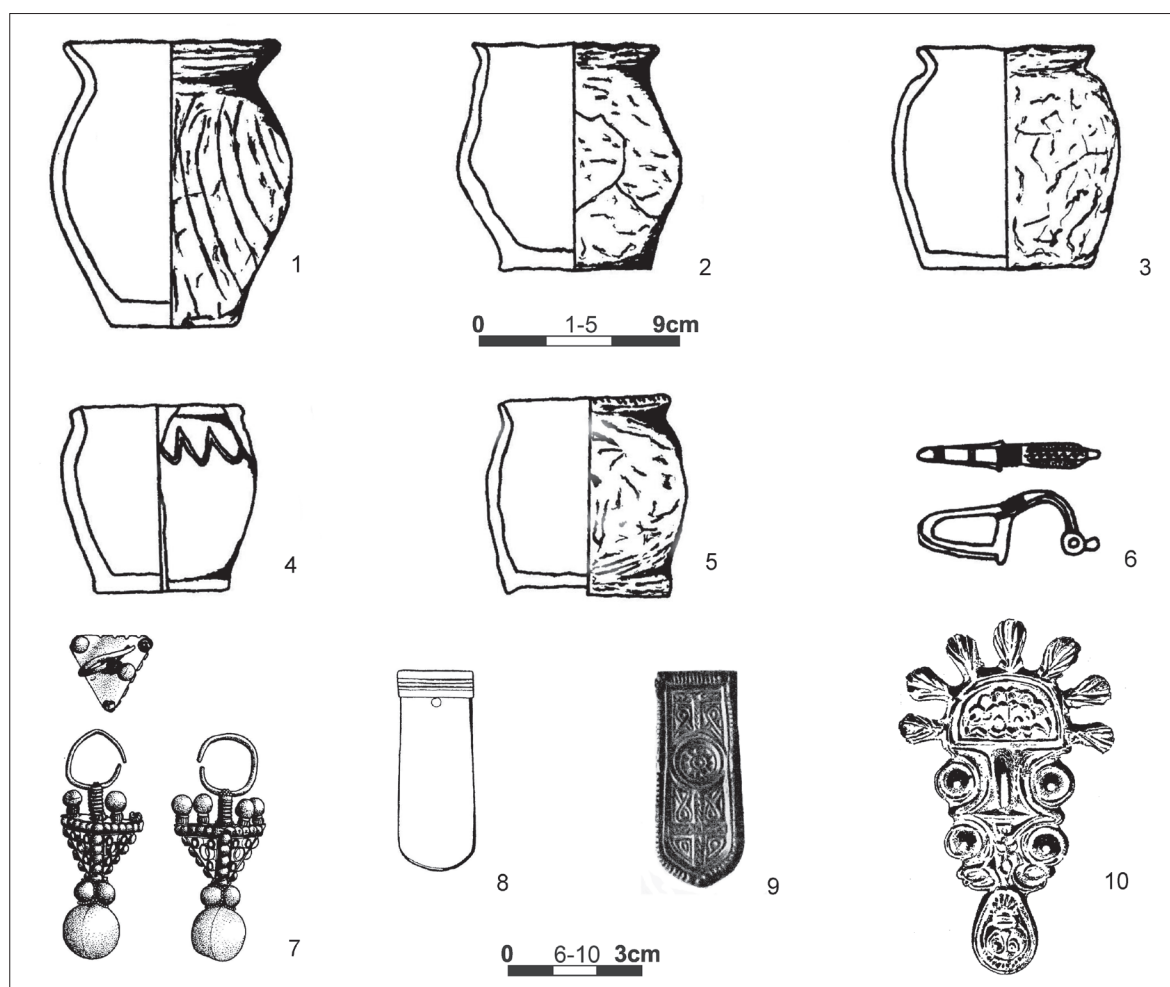


Fig 15. 1-6: Banatski Karlovac (after Trifunović 1990b); 7: Alibunar (after Garam 1993); 8: Glogonj (after Dimitrijević *et alii* 1962); 9: Pančevo (after Vinski 1958); 10: Dubovac (after Dimitrijević *et alii* 1962); 6-10 scale 2:3.

At the Najeva ciglana site near Pančevo a Sarmatian settlement and corresponding necropolis were found, together with two horsemen graves, most probably from the Early Avar Period. One of these graves was dug in a slightly awkward fashion: the horse was placed above the horseman, in the area of his legs, on top of the clay layer. A dog was buried in the same grave. Above the Sarmatian settlement another one was placed, attributed to the Slavs by the authors. Perhaps the three mentioned but undocumented graves in urns together with numerous fragments of the so-called Slavic pottery belong to the same horizon (Mano-Zisi *et alii* 1948). It is very hard to attribute this settlement in both the chronological and the ethnic sense on the basis of insufficient and unclear illustrations provided by the authors, but it is possible that it belongs to the Early Avar Period, given the horsemen graves found at the site.

A considerable number of accidental findings of folles come from Banatska Palanka (Donauufer), that were minted in Cyzicus for Justinian (Mrkobrad 1980, p. 107-108). These folles perhaps came from a hoard.

From Dubovac (Dunadombó) there is a well-known fibula found by chance (fig. 15: 10). Similar fibulae were attributed to the Slavs earlier (Werner 1950), while nowadays authors are reserved as to that kind of ethnic interpretation. The Slavs used such fibulae by all means, but still these objects cannot be considered to be a reliable ethnic indicator (Vida, Völling 2000, p. 32), nor are they ascribed to Hellenized or Romanized populations (Vagalinski 1994, p. 294). These fibulae are probably of Germanic origin. In the Avar context such findings come from wealthy female graves dated to the second half of the 6th and the 7th century (Garam 2003, p. 123). A buckle found in Dubovac is mentioned too (Mrkobrad 1980, p. 92). Maybe it belongs to the Early Byzantine type of buckle with U-shaped body, commonly dated to the end of the 6th and the first two thirds of the 7th century (Garam 2001, p. 88-95).

From Kovin there are some unclearly described beads (Mrkobrad 1980, p. 96, n. 640), insufficient to testify to an Early Avar horizon here.

From the vicinity of Banatski Brestovac (Torontálbresztovác) comes an accidental finding of a coin minted for Justin II (Somogyi 1997, p. 31, no. 12) that also does not confirm Early Avar presence.

As a result of this overview, one may count around 20 places mentioned in the literature or elaborated in greater detail that show more or less reliable traces of Early Avar presence, making Western Banat a poorly explored Avar land. The fact that the number of sites surpasses this score because in some places several localities were documented, mostly in the course of surveying, does not improve the general impression considerably. The southern part of this region has been better researched, thanks to the efforts of S. Barački (1977)¹, M. Brmbolić (1991) and, especially, S. Trifunović (1997; 2000). The middle part of Western Banat, as shown on the map, lacks documented Early Avar traces, a matter to be discussed below. To the north, the situation is somewhat better. However, it is obvious that the level of archaeological record cannot possibly match the level of use of the area of Western Banat at the time and, consequently, enable us to draw entirely reliable conclusions.

The sample being as it is, still some results and assumptions based on them may be offered. As one of the authors of this article has already suggested, and shown on the example of the neighboring Bačka region, the Avars settled the areas of South Pannonia soon after they arrived, gradually losing their nomadic character. This became evident when the archaeological evidence of the (Early) Avar sites was displayed on the geomorphological map. These maps were chosen because they record geomorphological units which were formed as a result of long-lasting natural processes.

¹ Although S. Barački did not mention sites which could be considered as Early Avar ones.

They differ from physical-geography maps of Vojvodina very much, since after intensive hydro-regulatory works carried out in modern times this area looks very different now. It was concluded that in times ranging from Prehistory to the Middle Ages the regions of South Pannonia could have been used to a considerably lesser extent, mostly because large areas were under water, or regularly flooded, which prevented any permanent settling. So only the edges of the flood area could be settled, together with the seams of other geomorphological units chosen since more opportunities were present to exploit the terrain (Bugarski 2008). In Banat the number of places positioned in that way prevails even today, thanks to jagged relief, i.e. the existence of many seams of geomorphological units there (Ćurčić, Đuričić 1994, p. 165-166).

Here we are not going to analyze the sustainability of places once chosen for settling but will satisfy ourselves with the conclusion that the disposition of the Early Avar sites commands attaching a settlement character to them. This refers to necropolises as well, prevailing in the structure of the Early Avar sites. Such a situation is common: the simplest explanation is that traces of dugouts are much more difficult to notice in the course of, for example, farming work than skeletons in a necropolis. The settlements are detected mostly by systematic surveying.

It is also of importance to notice that in the time of expansion of some population the particular area is not settled completely, but according to the model of communication lines, in this case consisting of the places geomorphologically sustainable for settling. In the neighbouring Bačka, three such communication lines were suggested: along the Danube and the Tisza rivers, and a middle one, stretching mostly along the course of the Krivaja rivulete (Bugarski 2008, p. 450-451).

Analyzing the disposition of the Early Avar sites in Western Banat, it is evident that one line was created along the course of the Tisza river, from Srpski Krstur to Aradac, and after the Tisza confluence with the Danube along the course of the Tamiš river up to Banatski Brestovac in the south. The other line could stretch from Majdan via Banatsko Aranđelovo and Mokrin in the north, then possibly across the long line to Dobrica, a section for which the archaeological documentation is missing, and finally from Dobrica to Potporanj and Banatska Palanka in the very south. As in Bačka, the Avars used longitudinal north-south communication lines (fig. 9).

The Banat Early Avar sites along the Tisza and Tamiš rivers are positioned on the seams of geomorphological units – the alluvial plains of these rivers and the loess terrace, i.e. on the line that is mostly protected from flooding. The loess terrace is the largest geomorphological unit in Banat, most settlements being positioned on the borders of that unit towards lower grounds (Ćurčić, Đuričić 1994, p. 156). As to the second communication line, the northern localities are determined by geomorphological factors too. The south-western part of this assumed line consists of sites in the vicinity of the Deliblato sands, surrounded by the loess plateau from three sides. The sites mentioned stretch mostly along the border of that plateau and the loess terrace (Ćurčić, Đuričić 1994, p. 154-156).

Necropolises were noticed or explored on ten sites of all the Early Avar localities coming from Western Banat. On two spots traces of settlements were found next to the necropolises – in Banatski Karlovac and at the Najeva ciglana site near Pančevo. A total of 12 necropolises makes almost 50% of some 26 Early Avar sites. In addition to this, the accidental findings of a fibula and a buckle from Dubovac, together with the single finds of coins that came from three places, may in fact have been grave findings. A group of folles from Banatska Palanka perhaps came from a hoard, as suggested before.

Besides the Pančevo – Najeva ciglana one, the Early Avar Period settlements come from five places. In the vicinity of Banatski Karlovac traces of six settlements were noticed, and from the neighbourhood of three other places there were 15 settlements documented too. So a total of 27 Early Avar Period settlements comes from 10 places.

The disposition of the Early Avar sites in Western Banat, then, clearly implies that these locations were used for settling. The same is the case with the locations where necropolises were found: these belonged to settlements. A total of 27 settlements coming from ten places indicates that the net of settlements was relatively dense, much more developed comparing to the superficial impression one may get on the grounds of what has been explored and/or published.

The disposition of older, Sarmatian sites points to a different way of space use (fig. 1). The Sarmatian sites are, like the Early Avar ones, positioned on the seams of geomorphological units, i.e. in places suitable for settling, but wider. The communication lines were most likely of some importance in this case too, but perhaps to a lesser degree, for it is obvious that the Sarmatian settling of Western Banat was more intense and lasted longer than the Early Avar one. The stable, settled Sarmatian population had enough time and possibilities to cover the area of Western Banat to a greater extent than could have been achieved during a single century of Early Avar domination. Besides the map we have attached to this text, this is also apparent if one takes into account the map S. Barački had published in his catalogue of the Sarmatian jewellery from the Banat region (Barački 1975).

The fewest sites are attributed to Germanic populations. The older ones, probably Gothic, come from Starčevo and Banatska Palanka, i.e. from the border of the Danube alluvial plain, and from Šurjan, placed on the junction of the Tamiš river and the Lanka Birda riverbed. The later sites, certainly Gepidic, mostly stretch along the Tisza river. Srpski Krstur, Bočar and Zrenjanin are positioned on the seam of the inundation plain and the loess terrace (Ćurčić, Đuričić 1994, p. 156). Gepidic localities come from Kovin and Bela Crkva too: these places are also determined by geomorphological features of the terrain. The few Germanic sites enable us to assume that the Goths were situated along the Danube and Tamiš rivers. On the other hand, the disposition of Gepidic sites leads us to conclude that they were grouped down the Tisza and Danube rivers. It is likely that the Gepids used these two communication lines, together with a third one to the East, a conception similar to the Early Avar one (fig. 3).

It is conspicuous that the middle part of Western Banat lacks archaeological documentation of settling. This was mentioned already in the Early Avar context; at this point we may note that Sarmatian sites, being more numerous in general, and also Germanic ones, are missing. This fact may be due to an insufficient level of research, but not necessarily. The area in question is crossed with big and secondary hydroregulating channels. The efforts undertaken in the course of regulation of the water flows were of the utmost importance in enabling modern settling of the areas of South Pannonia, as mentioned. One may, however, assume that this part of Western Banat was extremely unsuitable for settling during earlier historical epochs.

From the above it is obvious that the area of Western Banat has not been explored sufficiently, nor were the interpretations of the findings completely reliable. Together with a reinterpretation of the available data, we have offered a geographical-historical overview of the Migration Period space use. The Sarmatian, Germanic and Early Avar concepts of space use could not have been the same given the different historical circumstances, but all these populations respected the natural, geomorphological features of the terrain. This conclusion may be drawn even on the basis of scarce archaeological evidence, since the statistical sample dictates it practically with a hundred-percent certainty. New finds will in any case improve our knowledge and perhaps change some of our conclusions.

Be that as it may, it is likely that numerous Early Mediaeval settlements will be discovered in Western Banat in the years to come. A fact announced by S. Trifunović in course of oral presentation of the results of systematic surveying of the territory of the Novi Kneževac municipality is very illustrative in that sense: the number of some 130 previously known sites from all the epochs has thanks to these recent efforts risen to 300!

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