ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE SEVENTH-EIGHTH-CENTURY HORSE BURIALS FROM TRANSYLVANIA

Călin Cosma

Abstract: The first and most important remark is that in Transylvania the funerary practice of burying horses or only parts of horses in graves can be attributed to the Avar milieu. The number of horse burials is very small in the Transylvanian Plateau in comparison with other areas of the Avar Khaganate. At the same time, not all types of horse burials identified in the Carpathian Basin are recognised in Transylvania. The number of horse burials is small also in comparison with the number of 7th–8th c. necropolises from Transylvania or to the number of graves within each cemetery. The most numerous are the graves accommodating the horse alone, followed by those with the human deceased accompanied by bones of the horse skeleton and, finally, by those with the deceased accompanied by a complete horse. The first type of burial dates from between the years 630 and 670, while the last type characterises the end of the Middle Avar period and the 8th c.

Very likely, the harness parts and the weapons specific to the Avar warriors which have been found by chance at different sites in the Transylvanian Plateau once belonged to horse burials. Still, it is just as possible that the artefacts thus found were the only additions to the funerary inventory, illustrating a distinct type of burial in the Avar cemeteries of the Avar Khaganate.

The occurrence of horse burials in Transylvania is exclusively associated with the Avars. They were the ones that buried not only their warriors but also important persons from the top of the Avar hierarchy together with horses, a funerary practice that the Avar tribes brought with them from Asia and the Eurasian steppes.

In the Gepid or Gepid-Avar cemeteries at Band, Bistrița, Bratei 3, Noșlac, Făntânele, Șpâlnaca and Valea Largă, the presence of horses or of only some bones of the horse skeleton in graves is the result of the effective presence of the Avars, who after the year 630 cohabitated with the Gepids and buried their dead in the Late Gepid cemeteries from Transylvania.

Keywords: Early Midle age, avar age, horse burials, funeral practices, Transylvania

Remarks about the geographical area and the state of the art

Geographically, the research is focused on the Transylvanian Depression or, more precisely, the historical region of Transylvania. The region, surrounded by the Carpathian Mountains, markedly stands out from the other territories of western Romania (Map 1). The Transylvanian Depression was in the past and continues to be in the present connected with the areas across the Western Romanian Carpathians by the communication routes which follow the course of the main rivers that flow westwards and by the mountain passes of the Western Carpathians.

1 NÉMETHI/KLIMA 1987–1989, 176, Type 5; BALOGH 2009, 9, 18–19.
3 POP 2003, 19.
During the 7th–8th c., a series of political events took place in the Transylvanian Plateau that resulted in the formation of an Avar power centre in the middle of Transylvania. The change of political power led to a series of modifications at a social, cultural and funerary level.

In the funerary domain, the 7th c. Transylvania is characterised by horse burials — alone in a single grave or in the same grave as the human deceased — discovered in the Gepid cemeteries, an unprecedented aspect in comparison with the previous centuries. During the second part of the 7th c., new inhumation cemeteries appear, belonging to the newcomers, the Avar tribes, whose cemeteries included horse burials. Horse burials are recorded during the 8th c. as well, in the bi-ritual cemetery at Bratei/Cemetery no. 2 (referred to below as Bratei 2).

Except for an article about the individual horse burials from the late Germanic cemeteries from Transylvania, there is no professional study in the Transylvanian historiography which catalogues and analyses the 7th–8th c. horse burials from the Transylvanian Plateau.

In this study, I propose to correct this absence. I have assembled a repertoire of all graves in which a horse is buried alone or with a human deceased, discovered in the Gepid-Avar, bi-ritual and Avar cemeteries from the Transylvanian Plateau. This repertoire is meant to highlight the valid archaeological data which can be used to evaluate the dimensions of the funerary practice of burying complete horses or only parts of their skeletons in the 7th–8th c. graves from Transylvania and to integrate this information into the European historiography on the subject.

The research that I propose refers to the archaeological data currently published in the professional papers discussing 7th–8th c. horse burials from Transylvania. The description of the funerary complexes begins with the earliest archaeological sites, thus following firstly a chronological criterion. Secondly, the finds have been organised around the ethnic-cultural group to which the horse burials belong. The bibliographic references to the description of the

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4 COSMA 2017, 10–11, 15–28  
funerary complexes and the date of the cemeteries where these have been found are given, for each archaeological site, in the repertoire of finds. I have opted for this method in order not to over-charge the description of the graves and also to avoid the excessive repetition of the bibliographical references⁶.

**7th–8th c. cemeteries from Transylvania where horse burials have been identified**

To the necropolises with horse graves identified by A. Dobos in 2010⁷ in the Band/Noșlac/Bratei 3 group, the cemeteries from Fântânele and Șpălnaca are added, bringing the total number to eight cemeteries which can be included in the discussion about the 7th c. horse burials from Transylvania (Tab. 1, Map 2).

The number of funerary complexes with horses varies with each cemetery. The largest number has been discovered in the necropolis at Bratei/Cemetery no. 3 (referred to below as Bratei 3) (twenty-seven graves), followed in a descending order by the cemeteries at Band (fourteen graves), Noșlac (five graves), Bistrița (two graves), Șpălnaca (two graves), Fântânele (one grave and one uncertain grave), Valea Largă and Unirea 2/Veresmort (each with one grave) (Tab. 1).

The vast majority of the horse burials from the cemeteries of the Band/Noșlac/Bratei 3 group were affected by robbing or ulterior disturbance, consequently, the correct determination of the type of grave is difficult. The definition of the types follows several criteria: the distinction between funerary complexes that included the horse alone or a human and the horse; the distinction between the burial of the complete horse or of only part of the horse skeleton; and the position of the horse bones inside the grave in relation to the human body.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Band-Noșlac-Bratei 3 Group</th>
<th>Cemetery</th>
<th>Total number of graves</th>
<th>Total number of horse burials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Band</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bistrița</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bratei/Cemetery no. 3</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fântânele</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1+1?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noșlac</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Șpălnaca/Șugud</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unirea 2/Veresmort</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valea Largă</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tab. 1. Gepid-Avar cemeteries with horse burials from Transylvania

In the bi-ritual cemeteries of the Transylvanian Plateau⁸, only in the necropolis at Bratei 2 have an individual horse grave and, very likely, a human grave with a complete horse or only parts of the horse skeleton been discovered. Altogether, twenty-six inhumation graves have been investigated in the cemetery. (Map 2).

Of the seventeen Avar necropolises from Transylvania⁹, there are only eight cemeteries where Avar graves with horse or horse parts are attested. The type of horse burial could be identified in only three of them. These are the graves from the cemeteries at Cicău, Gâmbaş and Luna.

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⁶ See the list of 7th–8th c. horse burials from Transylvania, with the bibliography and chronology corresponding to each archaeological site.
⁹ COSMA 2015, 296.
In the necropolises at Aiud, Aiudul de Sus, Lopadea Nouă, Măgina and Teiuș, we are certainly dealing with individual burials of horses, affirmation based on the association of the horse bones with artefacts that are specific to the Avars. However, the very precarious archaeological data available (these are chance finds, without an archaeological context) doesn’t allow a certain typological classification of the above-mentioned funerary complexes in one or another type of horse burial from Transylvania, below-described (Tab. 2, Map 2).

**Tab. 2. The number of Avar cemeteries with graves containing horses from Transylvania**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cemetery</th>
<th>Total number of graves</th>
<th>Total number of graves with horses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aiud</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aiudul de Sus</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cicău</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gâmbaș</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lopadea Nouă</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luna</td>
<td>peste 627</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Măgina</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teiuș</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Description of the archaeological data. Typology**

The typology that I propose for the horse burials from the 7th–8th c. Transylvania reflects the distinction between two types: **Type I. Burials of horses placed in individual pits.** **Type II. Burials of horses in the same pit as the human deceased.**
Within the two types, there are two ways of placing the horse inside the grave: 1. **Burial of only some bones of the horse skeleton** (partial horse burial) 2. **Burial of the complete horse**. Some explanations are in order concerning this latter typologic distinction. Just as already above-stated, many funerary complexes were affected by subsequent robbing or disturbance; therefore, the real situation at the moment of the burial was completely different from the one observed during the development-led or systematic archaeological excavations. These cases I have decided to include in the sub-chapter **Graves that are difficult to classify from the point of view of the typology of horse graves.**

**Type I. Burials of horses placed in individual pits**

**Type I. 2. Burial of the complete horse**

*Cemetery at Band / Dulăsvár*

One-hundred-eighty-seven funerary complexes have been discovered in the cemetery at Band. The graves no. 24, 44, 124, 150 and 168 from the necropolis included only bones from the different parts of the horse’s body. The bones have been found in different points inside the graves, obviously, as a result of ulterior robbing and disturbance.

Despite the damage, some of the obtained data shows that the horse skulls were placed on the short eastern side, while the bones from the lower part of the body were laid on the western side. M. 24 included bones from all parts of the body. In grave no. 44, a horse head has been found in the eastern part and a horse tibia in the western part of the grave. From M. 124, teeth, ribs and foot bones have been collected. In M. 150, many horse bones were scattered in the entire pit. In the grave M. 168, aligned SW-NE, horse teeth and a clay mug have been discovered in the SW part.

The dimensions of the graves no. 24, 44 and 150 fit into the length and width limits of the vast majority of the other graves from the cemetery at Band (L = 1.80 m/2.20 m; W = 0.70 m/0.80 m). Graves no. 124 and 168 are small in comparison with the other graves from the cemetery. The small size of the two pits (L = 1.00 m/1.20 m; W = 0.40 m/0.50 m) has been interpreted as an indication of the young age of the deceased (children or adolescents and very young horses?).

The archaeological finds from inside the graves include iron fragments and bands, fragments of iron belt loops and bronze appliqués for the harness, decorated bronze plates, rings for attaching the appliqués, plates for attaching the belt with bronze rivets, an oval bone object with a short neck, probably attached at the end of a whip handle, fragments of an iron knife and clay jars. The complete absence of weapons from the horse graves from Band can be considered the result of the grave robbing. The horizon with horse graves from the cemetery at Band has been dated to the late phase of the necropolis, most probably between 630–670 (see below- The chronology of the graves).

**The cemetery at Bratei 3**

In the cemetery at Bratei 3, twenty-one of the twenty-seven horse burials are individual graves with complete horses: M. 14, 16, 19, 23, 27, 39, 66, 78, 83, 86, 104, 105, 108, 132, 175, 201, 263, 274, 278, 283 and 294. All the pits from the cemetery at Bratei 3 which contained horses have a rectangular shape with rounded corners. The dimensions of the graves are: L = 2.12 m/2.40 m; W = 0.75 m/0.80 m; depth = -0.80/-1.30 m. One grave in the necropolis held three horse skeletons (M. 108). The horses buried in the graves from Bratei 3 were young at the moment of the sacrifice.
The horses were placed inside the graves in several ways: 1. Horse laid on the back, with the front legs bent and the rear ones gathered in the area of the pelvis: M. 27; 2. Horse laid on the abdomen, legs bent: M. 78; M. 274; 3. Horse laid on the right side of the body, front legs bent: M. 104; M. 283; 4. Horse laid on the left side of the body, legs bent: M. 108; M. 278 (Fig. 1/1–4); Unknown position: M. 201.

Inside the graves, the horses were aligned in various directions: ENE (the head) – WSW: M. 27, 78, 86, 105, 132, 108, 201, 263, 278 and 283; E (the head) – W: M. 83 and 175; W (the head) – E: M. 14, 16 and 66; WSW (the head) – ENE: M. 104 and 23; NE (the head) – SW: M. 274; SE (the head) – NW: M. 19 (Fig. 1).

Eleven graves included harness parts, weapons and pottery (M. 27, 66, 78, 83, 104, 108, 175, 201, 274, 278 and 283), seven held harness accessories and pottery (M. 14, 16, 19, 23, 39, 105 and 263), while three of the funerary complexes had no archaeological finds (M. 86, 132 and 294), though it must be kept in mind that many of the graves were subsequently robbed or disturbed; therefore, the possibility that some of the graves once included artefacts, while some of them held more objects, and more types, than discovered must be considered (Fig. 2/1–16).

It has been observed that the rings and iron buckles found in the graves without harness parts or weapons are similar to those from the graves containing harness parts. They were once part of the harness straps, thus indicating that the horses were buried with their complete harness. The pottery collected from the graves without harness parts or weapons is small, measuring up to 15 cm high. It illustrates rudimentary shapes, with analogies in the Avar milieu of the Carpathian Basin\(^\text{10}\). The pottery is identical to the one discovered in the graves containing harness parts and weapons. The funerary complexes above-discussed belong, together with the other graves from Bratei 3 that did contain harness parts and weapons, to the Avar cultural milieu. It is not be excluded that in some of the individual horse graves the funerary inventory was actually entirely absent. This is not a unique situation. Other individual horse graves without inventory have been discovered in the Avar cemeteries of the Carpathian Basin (see below – Typological analogies).

\(^{10}\) VIDA 1999.
The individual horse graves from Bratei 3 which included harness parts and weapons convinced the authors of the monograph of the cemetery that the horses belonged to some of the warriors of the community. While I don’t dismiss this supposition, other interpretations of the singularity of individual horse graves in cemeteries should be considered (see below – Typological analogies). The horizon with individual horse burials from the cemetery at Bratei 3 dates from the late phase of the necropolis, most probably between 630–670 (see below – The chronology of the graves).
The cemetery at Luna / Crossroad

The Avar cemetery at Luna was discovered in 2009. Archaeological excavations took place almost every year since, until 2017. The results of the research were published briefly in ‘Cronica cercetărilor arheologice din România’ of 2010–2018. It seems that over six-hundred-twenty-seven graves of the Avar period have been uncovered.

The first information about the occurrence of individual horse burials in the cemetery at Luna appeared in ‘Cronica cercetărilor arheologice din România’ published in 2017. In this volume, it is mentioned that the grave of a child and, alongside, an individual horse grave have been found in the proximity of a warrior grave. It is specified that the latter contained harness parts typical for the Avar milieu, thus dating the grave to the 7th c.

‘Cronica cercetărilor arheologice din România’ of 2018 mentions that several individual horse graves have been discovered in the cemetery no. 2 at Luna. They are grouped in the north-eastern part of the necropolis. The graves have been arranged in the same row and the same direction as the human graves, but inside they are differently aligned, with the head placed towards the east. The pits of the graves are narrower in the eastern part, where the head of the horse was. The funerary complexes which contained horses were robbed shortly after the burial of the bodies. The only objects that have been retrieved are an iron stirrup with the tread curved outwards, a lance head, buckles with an iron oval ring and bronze appliqués. The cemetery no. 2 at Luna is dated by the authors of the excavation to the 7th c.

This is the only information available about the site at Luna that refers to the horse graves from this cemetery. It allows, still, the classification of the funerary complexes as Type I. 2, namely individual burials of complete horses.

The cemetery at Noșlac/The backyard of Hărăștășan

One-hundred-and-fourteen inhumation graves have been studied in the cemetery at Noșlac. Five of the one-hundred-and-fourteen graves accomodated horses buried alone. The pits of the graves are rectangular with rounded corners. Their depth varies between 0.60 and 1 m below surface. The alignment of the horse skeletons inside the graves was east (the head) – W. The human graves were aligned W (the head) – E. Four of the graves were robbed, events reflected by the absence of archaeological finds. The horses were laid on the abdomen or on the left side with the feet gathered under the abdomen. The graves were interleaved with the rows of human graves.

Only one of the five graves of complete horses included harness parts and weapons (M. 12). Grave no. 12 was dug to the right of the human grave no. 11, parallel and very close to it. The human grave was aligned W (the head) – E, in the opposite orientation from the horse grave, aligned E (the head) – W. The pits of the two funerary complexes were separated by a 50 cm wide border. The very small distance between them and the fact that the archaeological finds belong to the same cultural horizon (Avar) support the idea that the two graves formed a unitary funerary complex, formed by the warrior grave and, very close to it, the grave of the warrior’s horse. The horse was laid on the left side, crouched. Its feet were tied. The funerary inventory of the horse grave included harness parts (a mouthpiece, two stirrups and iron buckles for the harness straps) and weapons (an iron axe – Fig. 3). Inside the human grave, the objects discovered are an iron backsword, bronze and iron buckles, a strike-a-light, an iron knife, an iron lance head, an iron nail and the rings and the iron handle of a wooden bucket (Fig. 3). The artefacts found in the graves no. 11–12 place the horizon of horse graves from Noșlac at the end of the 7th c. and during the first decades of the 8th c.
Archaeological Observations about the Seventh-Eighth-Century Horse Burials from Transylvania

The cemetery at Valea Largă / The limit of the village

In the cemetery at Valea Largă, six graves have been archaeologically investigated. Another three have been found by chance. One contained horse bones (M. 3). The pit of the
grave was 0.65 m deep and had an irregular shape. The pit was aligned NW-SE. The grave was subsequently robbed or disturbed. Only a part of the horse skeleton was still in the pit. Because the bones were scattered, neither the position nor the geographic alignment of the horse skeleton could be determined. The analysis of the bones from the grave indicated that the horse was approximately 1.60 m high and five years old. It was used for riding. The grave contained no archaeological inventory, but the cemetery has been dated to the 7th c.

The bi-ritual cemetery at Bratei 2

Of the twenty-six inhumation graves of the bi-ritual cemetery at Bratei 2, only one held the complete skeleton of a horse. The horse was laid inside the grave on its abdomen, with the feet bent under the abdomen. The pit was 1 m deep. The skull was located towards ENE and the feet towards WNW (Fig. 1/5). The grave was dug at the margin of the necropolis. There were no artefacts next to the horse skeleton. However, a clay jar that dates from the 8th c. has been found SSE from the grave and 30 cm above the horse skeleton.

Type II. Burials of horses placed in the same pit as the human body

Type II. 1. Human graves with partial horse burials

Cemetery at Band / Dulásvár

Among the one-hundred-eighty-seven graves archaeologically studied in the cemetery at Band, nine funerary complexes included human and horse bones (M. 25, 32, 48, 54, 140,154, 156,158 and 167). The pits of the graves are rectangular. The vast majority were aligned W-E. The pits are between 1.70/1.80/2.20 m long and between 0.70/0.80/1.00 m wide. The depth of the pits varies between 1.20 m and 1.50 m below surface. The small width of the pits is a clue that only some bones of the horse’s skeleton were added.

The human and horse bones were found in different parts and at different depths inside the pits, clearly signalling the subsequent disturbance of the graves. This situation limits the identification of the exact position of the horse bones in relation to the human body. Skulls, mandibulae, teeth and parts from the lower part of the horse’s feet have been discovered. It has been determined that the horse skull from grave no. 25 belonged to an 8–10 years old horse.

The objects left in the graves after the robbing consist of iron knives and bands, silver rivets, traces of wooden bands?, fragments of iron buckles, ceramic vessels (M. 140 and 167) and a spindle-whorl (M. 140). The horse burials have been associated with the late phase of the cemetery, most probably between 630–670 (see below- The chronology of the graves).

Bistriţa / East from the city, on the right side of the road towards Vişoara

At Bistriţa, sixty inhumation graves have been studied. Two graves included one horse mandibula each. One of the graves accommodated the body of a child (M. 32) and the other of a man (M. 35). Both pits are rectangular with rounded corners. The pits and the two human skeletons, still in an anatomic position, were aligned W (the head) – E.

The child grave was found together with a horse mandibula. The position of the latter in relation to the human body is not mentioned. The man grave, disturbed in the upper part of the body, included an oval bronze buckle in the abdominal area and a horse mandibula. The position of the horse bone inside the grave is again not given. The cemetery at Bistriţa has been dated at the end of the 6th c. and the beginning of the 7th c.
The cemetery at Bratei 3

Six graves (M. 9, 11, 42, 76, 85 and 133) from the cemetery at Bratei 3 belong to the type of burials where bones of a horse skeleton were added with the human skeleton. These graves, just like the other individual horse burials from the same necropolis, were affected by robbing and disturbance subsequent to the burial of the bodies. The pits of the graves have a rectangular shape with rounded corners. Their dimensions are: L = 2.12/2.40 m; W = 0.75/0.80 m; depth = 0.80 m/1.30 m. Inside the graves, the bodies were laid in dorsal decubitus. The geographic alignment of the human bodies was: W (the head) – E: M. 9; WSW-ENE: 11, 42, 76 and 133; WNW-ESE: M. 85 (Fig. 4).

Because of the ulterior robbing or disturbance of the funerary complexes, the exact position of the horse bones inside the graves is difficult to establish. Horse skulls, vertebrae, ribs and parts of horse feet have been discovered. The deceased buried with horse bones were adults (M. 9, 42, 76, 85 and 133) and adolescents (M. 11 and 133).

The funerary finds recovered from these six graves consist of jewellery, costume accessories and pottery. According to the funerary inventories, very likely, some of the graves, if not all, belonged to women? (Fig. 4) The horizon of horse burials can be placed in the late period of the cemetery at Bratei 3, most probably between 630–670 (see below – The chronology of the graves).

The cemetery at Fântânele / Dealul Popii

At Fântânele, a total of sixty graves has been archaeologically investigated. In grave no. 25, a horse mandibula has been found together with the human bones. The grave belonged to an adult. It was aligned WSW-ENE. The pit has a rectangular shape with rounded corners. The dimensions of the pit were 2.16 m × 0.98 m. The pit was 1.24 m deep. The mandibula has been recovered from the middle of the pit. I wish to mention that the grave no. 25 was completely destroyed by subsequent interventions; therefore, the initial position of the horse mandibula in relation to the human skeleton is unknown. The grave no. 25 had no funerary inventory, an absence that can be explained by the robbing of the grave. The necropolis has been dated to the 7th c.

The grave from Unirea 2 / Veresmort

The funerary complex discovered at Unirea 2/Veresmort has a rectangular shape and was aligned E–W. The deceased was laid inside the grave on the back, with the head facing east and the feet to the west. The bones of a horse were added to the left of the human body. Two fragments of radius, metacarpals, tibia, tarsi, metatarsi, phalanges and teeth have been identified, but no fragments of neurocranium or splanchnocranium. An improper collection from the grave could explain the absence of bone elements from the horse’s skull. The dental series is almost complete. The morphological information resulted indicates that it belonged, most likely, to a four-and-a-half – five years old male. The height measured using the values obtained for the metapode is of approximately 140 cm and the gracility index indicates an individual of a medium gracility. Based on the comparison with a series of horse skeletons from the Avar graves of the Avar Khaganate, the horse at Unirea 2/Veresmort has been identified with the Tarpan horse, a subrace used by the Avars from the Carpathian Basin.

The funerary finds found inside the human grave from Unirea 2/Veresmort consist of jewellery, costume accessories, weapons and military equipment. Harness parts have been found
next to the horse bones. The grave dates from between 630–650/670. Inside, a military leader of the elite of the Avar army was buried\textsuperscript{11}.

**Type II. 2. Human graves with complete horse burials**

*Cemetery at Șpâlnaca / Șugud*

A number of thirty-nine inhumation graves which date from the 7th–8th c. have been archaeologically studied at Șpâlnaca\textsuperscript{12}. Two funerary complexes (graves no. 19 and 37) of the seven belonging to the Avar milieu (according to the funerary finds) contained alongside the human skeleton a complete horse skeleton each. The grave no. 19 belongs to a male warrior, while the grave no. 37 to a woman.

The two graves were aligned W–E (with a slight deviation SW–NE). They have a quadrilateral-rhombic shape. The bottom of the pits was narrower than the upper part. The grave no. 19 was 2.20 m deep. The pit is 2.80 m long on the northern side, 2.60 m long on the western side, 2.50 m long on the southern side and 2.30 m long on the eastern side. On the northern side of the pit, a step of 1.50 × 0.75 × 0.65 m was dug up to 1.75 m below the surface. Another step with a semi-oval shape has been observed towards the eastern corner. It goes up until 1.25 m below the surface. The pit of the grave no. 37 is 2.30 m long on the ENE, ESE and WSW sides and 2 m long on the NW side. The bottom of the pit was reached at 2.90 m below the surface (Fig. 5).

Both mortuary pits were divided into two compartments, separated by a border obtained from the untouched clay. In both cases, the median wall was 0.50 m wide. The borders were shaped beginning at 1.90–2 m below the surface, with an elevation of 40–50 cm. The human body stood in one of the compartments, while the horse was put in the other (Fig. 5).

The pit of the grave no. 19 is 1.90–2.00 m long and 0.55 m (west) – 0.45 m (east) wide. It was dug until 2.25–2.30 m below the surface. The skeleton was 1.65 m long. The deceased was covered with wooden beams sustained at one end on the borders obtained on the long sides from untouched clay. The wooden beams were arranged 0.30 m above the human body. The dimensions of the beams were 1.00 × 0.35 m. After putting the horse in and adding a soil layer until 1.25 m below surface, followed another beam cover over the entire grave (man and horse). In the end, the grave was covered with an earth mound, subsequently flattened (Fig. 5).

The dimensions of the pit of the grave no. 37 are 2 m × 0.75 m on the western side and respectively 1.95 m long on the short eastern side. A step with an arched outline has also been observed inside the mortuary pit. The length of the skeleton was 1.60 m (Fig. 5). Both human skeletons were laid in the grave in dorsal decubitus with the hands stretched along the body. They were aligned W (SW) (the head) – E (NE) (the feet).

In the grave no. 19 the funerary compartment containing the horse is trapezoidal, with the following dimensions: 2.30 m × 0.80 m (east) × 0.95 m (west). The pit is 2.20 m deep. In the grave no. 37, the compartment is almost rectangular, with the dimensions: 2.00 m × 0.60 m × (west) × 0.55 m (east); and a maximum depth of 3.00 m below surface (Fig. 5).

Both horses were put in the compartments located to the right of those accommodating the human bodies. The bodies of the horses were laid on the left side, with the feet gathered under the abdomen, the head stretched towards the east and the rear towards the west (M. 11), and respectively the head towards the east (NE) and the rear towards the west (SW) (Fig. 5). Both horses were male. The height at the withers of the horse from the grave no. 37 was 1.35 m.

\textsuperscript{11} COSMA 2018, 69–78.

The horse skeleton from the grave no. 19 was 2.16 m long. The horse from the grave 19 was 6–7 years old, while the one from the grave no. 37 was 4 years old. The two horses were neutered at the time of the sacrifice. The horse from the grave no. 37 was used exclusively for riding, whereas for the one from the grave no. 19 riding was only one of the uses that it served.

In the grave no. 19, the compartment where the man/warrior was buried included a buckle, a strike-a-light, a sax and a lance head. The compartment with the horse included two

Fig. 5. – The human burials with horses from Špălnaca (Tip. II.2) A – grave 19. B – grave 37.
stirrups and a mouthpiece. In the grave no. 37, the compartment where the woman was placed contained also a series of jewellery (earrings, pearls, an ornament for the hat in the shape of a globe [?]), a buckle, a knife and a wooden bucket with iron rings. The compartment that accommodated the horse included two phalerae and a series of appliqués (both types of objects decorated the straps of the harness), two stirrups and a mouthpiece (Fig. 5).

Based on the anthropological analyses, the two deceased buried with horses at Șpălnaca belonged to the same ethnic, with ancestors of Mediterranean, East-European and Asian (mongoloid) provenance.

The richness and quality of the funerary sets found inside the human graves and the complex manner of arrangement of the graves denote the wish of those that organised the burials to ensure a forever place for the deceased that is as comfortable as possible. The depth of the pits and the addition of the sacrificed horses to the human graves (buried with all the harness parts, the bridle straps being decorated with appliqués of various types)13 indicate the upper status occupied by the two persons in the community. Both persons can be connected with the elite of the Avar society from Transylvania.

The man was the military leader of the other five warriors from the cemetery at Șpălnaca who were buried with weapons, but no horses. The numerous jewellery and costume accessories which accompanied the woman, in comparison with the finds from the other graves from the cemetery at Șpălnaca, illustrate the upper status occupied by the deceased in the community, including in relation to the warrior buried with a horse. It is not excluded that the woman was the leader of the community that buried its deceased at the site Șugud in Șpălnaca. In this case, the warrior buried with a horse and the five other warriors buried with weapons stood under her authority. As an analogy, the grave no. 4 at Gâmbaș is indicated. This grave also accommodated a woman with an extremely rich funerary set in comparison with the warrior graves from the cemetery14.

A series of artefacts, such as stirrups, mouthpieces or phalerae, found in the two graves date the two funerary complexes and the five Avar graves without horses at the end of the 7th and especially during the first decades of the 8th. c.

The cemetery at Cicău / Săliște

In the cemetery at Cicău, only in one of the five graves investigated the deceased was buried with a complete horse. The mortuary pit is square. The horse was placed inside the grave alongside the human skeleton, both at the same depth. The human skeleton was aligned ENE (the head) – SSW. The horse was placed to the left of the human skeleton, laid on the left side of the body, with bent feet. The skeleton of the horse had the same orientation as the human skeleton, namely ENE (the head) – SSW. The height at the withers of the animal was on average 1.40 m. It belonged to the Tarpan or to a related subspecies and it was used for riding. The horse was a 10 years old male. At the moment of its sacrifice, the horse was neutered.

The human deceased was buried with various costume accessories, weapons and, next to the horse skeleton, harness parts and harness straps. All considered, there is evidence that the man was an Avar warrior of a superior rank, who was the leader of the community that buried

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13 In many cases, the addition of the sacrificed horse, together with the complete harness (the straps decorated with numerous appliqués of various types), in rich graves suggests the upper status of the buried warriors. However, what must be kept in mind is that the human graves containing horses are not an exclusive attribute of the military elites. The presence of horses in graves rather attests to the social status of the deceased. Not only common warriors but also free and wealthy people, including women and children, were buried with horses: ČILINSKÁ 1991A, 187–212; ZÁBOJNÍK 2015, 277–291; BEDE 2012, 41–47.

its dead at Cicău\textsuperscript{15}. According to the funerary finds, the horse grave from Cicău dates from the second half of the Middle Avar period.

\textit{The cemetery at Gâmbaș / Reformed cemetery}

Only one funerary complex of the fourteen graves identified in the cemetery at Gâmbaș contained horse bones (grave 10). The information that the stirrups have been found one on the right side and the other on the left side of the horse skeleton indicates that the complete horse was inhumed. Furthermore, an iron buckle was found on the back of the horse and a mouthpiece was discovered in the horse’s mouth. Details about the position and alignment of the horse skeleton in relation to the human skeleton are not available. Consequently, the association of the funerary complex with one of the above-mentioned types of horse graves attested in the Carpathian Basin is difficult to determine.

The inventory of the grave consists of two iron stirrups, one found on the right side, one on the left side, an iron mouthpiece, found in the mouth, an iron buckle from the harness straps, fragmentary, found on the horseback, an iron lance head, found to the right of the human skeleton, and an iron lance head discovered below the stirrup on the right side of the horse skeleton. The grave belonged to a warrior. The cemetery where it was found, at Gâmbaș, is from the Middle Avar period.

\textbf{Graves that are difficult to classify based on the typology of horse graves}

\textit{Cemetery at Fântânele / Dealul popii}

Only animal bones have been recovered from the grave no. 15 from Fântânele. The grave was completely disturbed. As a result, the bones have been found only in the WSW half of the pit. The bones have not been analysed by an archaeozoologist. Solely based on analogies, it was supposed that they are horse bones. It is possible that grave no. 15 was the grave of a horse, if the large dimensions of the pit are considered. The pit has an oval shape, it was sunken and measures 1.93 m \times 0.72 m. It is also not beyond doubt that the bones in the grave were actually bovine.

\textit{Bi-ritual cemetery at Bratei 2}

Twenty-six graves have been investigated in the bi-ritual cemetery at Bratei 2. Aside from the above-presented individual horse grave (Type I. 2), there is information about the chance find and destruction of another funerary complex, from which not only harness parts and costume accessories have been recovered but also human and horse bones. It is also mentioned that this archaeological complex was located on the eastern margin of the bi-ritual cemetery. The metal artefacts are connected with the Avar culture and date from the 8th c.

\textit{The Avar cemetery at Aiud / Grapevine school}

In the Avar cemetery at Aiud, among the three published graves, grave no. 1 contained horse bones, two iron stirrups, an iron mouthpiece, an iron buckle and an iron lance head. The cemetery was used during the Middle Avar period.

\textsuperscript{15} COSMA 2018, 57–61.
Archaeological Observations about the Seventh-Eighth-Century Horse Burials from Transylvania

The Avar cemetery at Aiudul de Sus / The limit of the locality (?)

The only information we have about the finds from Aiudul de Sus is that at the boundary of the site, without giving the exact place, horse tibiae, human bones and metal objects – iron stirrup, fragmentary, iron backsword, iron lance head and two iron rods with a square cross-section – have been discovered. The cemetery dates from the Middle Avar period.

The Avar cemetery at Lopadea Nouă / Șanțuri

M. Roska mentioned a warrior grave containing a horse at Lopadea Nouă, but presented only the harness parts found inside the grave. He gives no description of the human and horse bones. The phalerae, also part of the funerary finds from Lopadea Nouă, provided the argument for the existence of an Avar grave ‘of a horse’ or ‘with a horse’ at the site. The archaeological finds date from the 8th c.

The Avar grave at Măgina/town Aiud (jud. Alba) / Backyard of Sas Cornel

In Măgina (today part of the town Aiud, jud. Alba), in the backyard of Sas Cornel, a grave was found and completely disturbed. The archaeologist who went to the place recovered a lance head and two Avar stirrups. He was informed that the pit included human and horse bones, but he could not determine whether the horse bones assembled a complete skeleton or they were only parts of the horse skeleton. The stirrups date from the 8th c.

The Avar cemetery at Teiuș / Fortress

On one of the bags stored at the Transylvanian National Museum of History in Cluj-Napoca, which contains archaeological finds discovered in the Avar cemetery at Teiuș, with over sixty graves investigated, is written: finds from the ‘The grave with horse’. Only the human teeth of an adult (35–45 years old) and several finds – fragments of a thin bronze sheet that plated two strap-ends and the fragment of an iron sabre – have been kept. The latter artefact indicates that the grave belonged to an Avar warrior.

We didn’t find any harness parts or the horse bones specified on the bag. It is possible, just as the inscription shows, that we are dealing with a complete horse burial. The possibility remains that only some bones of the horse skeleton were put in the grave. The cemetery at Teiuș dates from the Middle Avar period.

The finds of harness parts and weapons in the 7th–8th c. horse burials from Transylvania

Horse burials of the Gepid and Avar periods are mentioned at a series of sites in the Transylvanian Plateau. Yet, several sites from Transylvania were included in the list solely based on the presence of harness parts. More so, some of the entries do not even correspond to real situations – at the mentioned sites neither horse bones nor harness parts have been found.

In the Transylvanian Plateau, the finds which can be associated with the Avars consist mainly of harness parts and weapons. They have been identified in cemeteries and isolated graves, many of them following a chance discovery and, consequently, without any detailed

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16 ROSKA 2001, 166, 168, 4. kép.
17 GARAM 1987, 80, NO. 13; BÂRZU 2010, 163, no. 25.
18 See the list in: BÂRZU 2010, 161–164.
information about the archaeological context of provenance\textsuperscript{19}. These situations limit the correct classification of the discoveries in one of the types of horse burials recognised in Transylvania.

Very likely, the harness parts or the weapons which are specific to the Avar warriors from Transylvania were once included in graves containing horses or parts of horse skeletons. Just as likely is that some graves of Avar warriors included only these artefacts, a distinct type of burial recognised already in the Avar cemeteries of the Avar Khaganate\textsuperscript{20}.

Ultimately, all the above-presented graves, regardless if they contained complete skeletons or just bones of the horse skeleton or only harness parts and weapons, illustrate the funerary practice of horse burial or symbolic horse burial in the bi-ritual Gepid-Avar or Avar cemeteries from Transylvania. Analogies for the horse graves (individual) or the human graves with horses or only with harness parts are recognised in the Avar milieu of the Carpathian Basin (see below).

\textbf{Synthesis of the archaeological data about the horse burials from Transylvania}

\textit{The alignment and position of the horse skeletons inside the graves}

\textit{Type I. 2}

Most of the individual horse graves from Band were aligned E-W, with the head towards the east. The same situation is observed in the grave no. 3 from the cemetery at Valea Largă. In most of the individual horse graves from Bratei 3, the skeletons of the horses were aligned on the axis E (the head) – W, with deviations ENE – WSW. The horse skeletons from Noşlac have the same orientation (E: the head – W). The warrior buried in the grave no. 11 from Noşlac was aligned W (the head) – E, in the opposite direction from the horse skeleton (M. 12). The two graves form a single funerary complex (Tab. 3). In the Avar cemetery at Luna, the alignment of the individual horse graves towards the east (the head) and of the human graves towards the west is mentioned.

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Cultural group} & \textbf{Cemetery} & \textbf{Orientation of the horse skeleton inside the grave – Type I. 2} \\
& E-W & \textbf{ENE} & \textbf{V-E} & \textbf{WSW} & \textbf{NE} – \textbf{SW} \textbf{SE} & \textbf{NW} \textbf{SE} \\
\hline
\textbf{Band} & & & & & & \\
\textbf{Grupa Band/Noşlac/Bratei 3} & & & & & & \\
\textbf{Bratei 3} & & & & & & \\
\textbf{Noşlac} & E. G & & & & & \\
\textbf{H. G} & & & & & & \\
\textbf{Valea Largă} & & & & & & \\
\textbf{Bi-ritual cemeteries} & & & & & & \\
\textbf{Bratei 2} & & & & & & \\
\textbf{Avar cemeteries} & & & & & & \\
\textbf{Luna} & E. G & & & & & \\
\textbf{H. G} & & & & & & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

Tab. 3. The orientation of the horse skeletons inside the graves – Type I. 2

E. G – Individual horse (equine) grave; H. G – Human grave

At Bratei 3, the horses were laid inside the pit on the abdomen, on the back, on the left or the right side, with the feet gathered under the body. The horses from Noşlac were laid on the abdomen or on the left side, with the feet gathered under the abdomen. The one in the grave no. 12 had its feet tied. The horse from Bratei 2 was laid on the abdomen, with the feet gathered under the body, the head placed towards ENE and the rear towards WSW (Tab. 4).

\textsuperscript{19} COSMA 2017.

\textsuperscript{20} NÉMETHI/KLIMA 1987–1989, 176, Type 5; BALOGH 2009, 9, 18–19.
Position of the horse skeleton inside the grave

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cemetery</th>
<th>Bi-ritual cemeteries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Band/Noșlac/Bratei Group</td>
<td>Bratei 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the abdomen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the back</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the left side</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the right side</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tab. 4 – The position of the horse skeletons inside the graves – Type I. 2

**Type II. 1**

The human skeletons buried in the graves with bones of the horse skeleton were almost all aligned W (the head) – E. However, skeletons aligned E (the head) – W, with various deviations, occur as well (Tab. 5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cemetery</th>
<th>Human- (partial) horse graves – Type II. 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Band/Noșlac/Bratei 3</td>
<td>Orientation of the human skeletons inside the graves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W-E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bistrița</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bratei 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fântânele</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unirea 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tab. 5. The orientation of the human skeletons inside the graves with partial horse burials – Type II. 1

The exact position of the horse parts inside the graves in relation to the human bodies (Type II. 1) is difficult to determine because of the subsequent disturbance that affected the funerary complexes. The horse bones found inside the graves consist of skulls or parts of the skull, mandibulae, teeth, bones from the rear and lower parts of the feet. For example, at Brad, the bones were scattered on the entire floor of the graves. At Bistrița, the position of the two horse mandibulae inside the grave is not mentioned. Inside the graves from Bratei 3, the horse bones were found both around the head and in the area of the pelvis or feet of the human body. Inside grave no. 25 from Fântânele, the horse mandibula was discovered in the area of the pelvis of the human body. At Unirea 2/Veresmort, the horse bones were placed to the left of the human skeleton.

**Type II. 2**

The different orientation of the human bodies buried inside the two human-horse graves from the cemetery at Șpâlnaca, in comparison with the horses, is noticed. The humans were aligned on the direction W (the head) – E, while the horses were oriented E (the head) – W. The warrior and the woman from Șpâlnaca laid in the pit in dorsal decubitus. The horses were placed on the left side of the body, with the feet gathered under the abdomen (Tab. 6).
At Cicău, the warrior and the horse had the same ENE (the head)-WSW alignment. The man was placed in the grave in dorsal decubitus, while the horse laid on the abdomen, with the feet gathered under it (Tab. 6). There is no information available for the graves from Aiud and Gâmbaş.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural group</th>
<th>Cemetery</th>
<th>Orientation of the human and horse skeleton inside the grave - Type II. 2</th>
<th>Position of the human and horse skeleton inside the grave - Type II. 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Human skeleton</td>
<td>Horse skeleton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>W-E</td>
<td>ENE - SSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band/Noșlac/Bratei 3</td>
<td>Spălnaca</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avar cemeteries</td>
<td>Cicău</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tab. 6. The orientation of the horse skeletons inside the graves in relation to the human body and the position of the human and horse skeletons inside the graves – Type II. 2

We can conclude that the horse skeletons, whether buried alone or alongside a human deceased, were aligned E (the head) – W, in reverse to the human graves, which were aligned W (the head) – E. The observation is valid only in the cemeteries at Luna, Noșlac and Șpălnaca. The grave from Cicău is an exception from this rule. Here, the human and the horse have the same alignment (ENE: the head – WSW). Because there is no clear data about an association horse grave – human grave, the position of the deceased inside the graves in relation to the horse skeletons is difficult to determine in the other cemeteries.

About the position of the horse in relation to the human body, A. Kiss believes that the animal was placed according to the location of the human, but not the other way round21. The horse was mounted from the left side22. In Transylvania, this observation is reflected in the graves no. 11 and 12 from Noșlac, as well as at Șpălnaca and Cicău. The horses from Noșlac and Șpălnaca have been found to the right of the human skeletons, yet the alignment was in reverse to the human bodies. The head of the human deceased stood towards W, while the horse’s head was arranged towards E. Very likely, the same situation applies to the other four robbed graves from Noșlac or to those from Luna. At Cicău, the horse was put to the left of the human body, with the same alignment as the deceased.

Both ways of placing the horses recorded in the graves from Transylvania indicate that the horse was mounted from the left. The differences observed in the position of the horse in relation to the human body within the two types of burial, but eventually with the same result regarding the horse mounting – from the left –, has been explained by the existence of a shared background applied in various manners, while maintaining the primordial manner of mounting, from the left side23.

The position of the horse burials in the cemetery

At Bistriţa, the two human graves which included horse mandibulae were located in the centre of the cemetery. It is not excluded that the two graves, one of a child (M. 33) and the other of a man (M. 35), belonged together with the grave of a woman (M. 33) to a family of the community that buried its dead in the cemetery at Bistriţa. In the cemetery at Band, all types

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21 KISS 1963, 158.
22 KISS 1963, 158.
23 KISS 1963, 158.
of horse burials have been identified on the margin of the cemetery, on the western and eastern sides, forming two distinct areas in the necropolis\(^2\).

The vast majority of all types of horse burials from the necropolis at Bratei 3 were grouped on the north-eastern margin of the cemetery\(^2\). Also on the margin, a few graves have been revealed on the south-eastern side. The grave of horses or with horses from the cemetery at Bratei 3 formed together with surrounding graves small islands, which can be considered as the resting places of families.

At Fântânele, the human grave no. 25, containing a horse mandible, was dug on the margin of the cemetery, on the eastern side. The five individual horse graves from Noșlac have also been discovered on the margin, on the north-western side. They were interleaved with human graves. The graves from Luna were arranged in rows, where graves with horses interleaved with human graves.

In the cemetery at Valea Largă, the individual horse grave has been identified on the eastern side. However, given that only six graves have been excavated in the cemetery, the significance of this interpretation is not certain. The necropolis certainly included more funerary complexes.

At Șpălnaca, the two graves with horses and the five Avar graves above-mentioned were located on the margin of the cemetery, on the southern side.

Both horse burials from the bi-ritual cemetery at Bratei 2 were located on the margin of the cemetery, on the eastern side. Only a few inhumation graves are from this area, while most of the inhumation graves are located on the western side. The inhumation graves, both from the eastern and western corner of the cemetery, included archaeological finds with analogies in the Avar cultural milieu.

The grave of the military leader from Cîcău is arranged alone on an imaginary row. The other graves assemble two distinct groups. A first group is formed by a row of three graves (a woman grave with jewellery, a male grave with an axe and a destroyed grave) located at a certain distance from the grave of the military leader. The three deceased were probably the closest persons to the military leader from Cîcău. Other two graves were dug at a larger distance from the main group of graves. Until new archaeological data is identified, the cemetery at Cîcău, which can be dated at the end of the Middle Avar period, represents an example of the Avar family of a military leader from the upper ranks.

### The funerary inventory of the horse graves

The individual graves of horses included harness parts and, in few cases, weapons and pottery (Tab. 7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cemetery</th>
<th>G. No.</th>
<th>Artefacts found in the individual horse graves - Type I. 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Band</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>HP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>44</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>150</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>168</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^2\) See the plan of the cemetery in: DOBOS 2010/2011, 403, 3. tábla .

\(^2\) BÂRZU 2010, 416, HARTA 44; DOBOS 2010/2011, 402, fig. 22. tábla.
The finds discovered inside the human graves with bones of horse skeleton, such as at Band or Bratei 3, consisted exclusively of jewellery, costume accessories and household objects. The singular exception is the grave from Unirea 2/Veresmort, which alongside jewellery and costume accessories contained weapons and harness parts (Tab. 8).

Tab. 7. Artefacts found in the individual horse graves – Type I. 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cemetery</th>
<th>G. No.</th>
<th>Artefacts found in the individual horse graves – Type I. 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bratei 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>105</td>
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<td>283</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>294</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noșlac</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valea Largă</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bratei 2</td>
<td>E. G.</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luna</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Tab. 8. Artefacts found in the human graves with bones of a horse skeleton – Type II. 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cemeteries Band/ Noșlac/ Bratei 3</th>
<th>G. No.</th>
<th>Artefacts found in the human graves with bones of a horse skeleton – Type II. 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>J</td>
<td>CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
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<td>167</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Archaeological Observations about the Seventh-Eighth-Century Horse Burials from Transylvania

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cemeteries Band/Noșlac/Bratei 3</th>
<th>G. No.</th>
<th>Artefacts found in the human graves with bones of a horse skeleton – Type II. 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Bistrița</td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bratei 3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td></td>
<td>42</td>
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<td></td>
<td>76</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>85</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>133</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fântânele</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unirea 2</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tab. 8. Artefacts found in the human graves with bones of a horse skeleton – Type II. 1

The human graves with complete horses included harness parts, weapons and sometimes appliqués for the harness straps. The humans were buried with jewellery, costume accessories and household objects (Tab. 9).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cemetery</th>
<th>G. No.</th>
<th>Artefacts found in human graves with horses – Type II. 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ţăpălnaca</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td></td>
<td>37</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cicău</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gâmbaș</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aiud</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aiudul de Sus</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lopadaea</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Măgina</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teiuș</td>
<td>E. G.</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tab. 9. Artefacts found in human graves with horses – Type II. 2.

The age of the horses buried in the graves

The horse found in the grave no. 25 from Band was between 8 and 10 years old. The horse from Unirea 2/Veresmort was a 4.5–5 years old male. At Valea Largă, the horse was 5 years old and it was used for riding. The two horses from the graves no. 19 and 39 from Șpălnaca were males. Both were neutered at the time of the sacrifice. The horse from the man grave (M. 19) was 6–7 years old. It was used for traction and riding as well. The other horse from the woman grave (M. 37) was 4 years old and it was used exclusively for riding. The horse from Cicău was a Tarpan male horse, neutered, 10 years old at the time of its sacrifice. It was used exclusively for riding. In conclusion, the buried horses were between 6–7 and 8–10 years old. All were male and neutered at the time of their sacrifice.

I don’t believe that there was a pre-established age for the sacrifice of the horses. They were killed at the death of their owners, irrespective of their age. All the sacrificed horses from the graves from Transylvania were over 4 years old, an age when the horses began to be trained and used for riding or traction. The Avar warriors used several horses in battle. In this case, the question is which of the horses was killed so that it could accompany its owner in the grave. It was certainly the favourite animal of the warrior, regardless of its age. Still, a horse used in battle must be at least 5 years old. All the horses above-mentioned were over 5 years old at the moment of the sacrifice, thus substantiating the idea that they once served their owner in battle.

The small dimensions of two graves (nos. M. 124 and M. 168) from the cemetery at Band stand out in comparison with the other graves from the cemetery. The funerary complexes have been interpreted as the resting place of young individuals, children or adolescents, and very young horses. The presence of young horses signals the high social status of the deceased, who came from families that afforded to sacrifice the horses already before they could be used in battle or/and for traction.

The killing of the horses was also done at the wish of the Avar communities when it was considered that the horse possessed ‘magic powers’. Its sacrifice was a religious gesture, considered as an offering to the divinities. In this case, the selected individuals were probably those that reached maturity or even old ones, which over the years ‘demonstrated their positive influence’ on the community. This interpretation can be applied to the horse grave from the cemetery at Bratei 2.

The identification of exclusively neutered males in the graves from Transylvania can be easily explained. The male horse was the symbol of the warrior, whereas the mares were the symbol of fertility. More exactly, by giving birth to fouls they contributed to the multiplication of the human than mares or stallions. The latter are in many situations dominated by hormonal instincts of perpetuation of the species or of group dominance. The neutered horse will keep its resistance, speed, ambition and force, qualities that also a stallion has, but it won’t keep the habits and behaviour specific to a stallion, instead, it will become obedient, calm, relaxed and careful to the rider. Stallions are much more prone to illness than the neutered horses. The neutered horses are definitely the best for riding but also for traction. If properly cared for, a neutered horse will look exactly the same as a stallion: information provided by Prof. Dr. Alexandru Gudea – Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of the University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine at Cluj-Napoca.
Archaeological Observations about the Seventh-Eighth-Century Horse Burials from Transylvania

of the horses owned by the warriors’ families or by the families belonging to the upper ranks of the Avar hierarchy. Part of the above-presented personal considerations is based on the conclusions formulated by I. Bede in a study that incorporates these aspects

Remarks about the typology of horse burials from Transylvania

There are two main types of horse burials in the 7th–8th c. cemeteries from Transylvania: Type I – Burials of horses placed in individual pits. Type II – Burials of horses placed in the same pit as the human body. The two types further display two ways of arranging the horse inside the grave. The first way refers to the addition of some bones of the horse skeleton beside the human body (Type II. 1). The second form is represented by the burial of the complete horse alongside the human body (Type II. 2) (Tab. 10).

Type I. 2 (individual horse graves) dominates the number of horse burials both overall and within each cemetery. In descending order, the human graves which include only part of the horse skeleton (Type II. 1) follow. The two types of burials occur especially in the Gepid-Avar cemeteries of the Band/Noșlac/Bratei 3 group. Type I. 2 is present also in the bi-ritual cemetery at Bratei 3 (one grave) and in the Avar cemetery at Luna (several graves) (Tab. 10). The graves that contain parts of horse skeleton alone have not been identified in Transylvania (Type I. 1).

The human graves accompanied by complete horses, characterised by the type II. 2, have been discovered in the Gepid-Avar cemetery at Șpălnaca (two funerary complexes), while the rest of them have been detected exclusively in the Avar cemeteries from Transylvania, each including one grave (Tab. 10).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural group</th>
<th>Cemetery</th>
<th>Type I</th>
<th>Type II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Type I.1</td>
<td>Type I.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band/Noșlac/Bratei 3</td>
<td>Band</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bistrița</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bratei 3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fântânele</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Valea Largă</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unirea 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Noșlac</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Șpălnaca</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bi-ritual cemeteries</td>
<td>Bratei 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Avar cemeteries</td>
<td>Luna</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cicău</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gâmbaș</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graves, from Avar cemeteries, that are difficult to classify</td>
<td>Bratei 2</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aiud</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Aiudul de Sus</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lopadea Nouă</td>
<td>?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Măgina</td>
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<td>Teiuș</td>
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</table>

Tab. 10. The typology of the 7th–8th c. horse burials from Transylvania

1, 2 etc. – represents the number of such graves identified in the cemetery. Type I. 2. Burials of complete horses placed in individual pits. Type I. 2. Partial burials of horses, placed in individual pits. Type II. 1. Human burials with partial horse skeletons. Type II. 2. Human burials with complete horse skeletons.

30 BEDE 2017, 4–5.
Typological analogies

In 1962, Kiss Attila developed a typology of the horse burials from the Avar milieu of the Carpathian Basin, which he completed with a chronological list of the main types of burials that he identified at that time. His typology is still used in the present. It was followed by other studies which discussed the typological problems of horse burials in the Carpathian Basin, among which I mention those of M. Némethi and L. Klima, Z. Čilinká, E. Garam, Cs. Balogh, and I. Bede. Actually, the closest and the most numerous analogies for the 7th–8th c. horse burials from Transylvania are found in the ‘Avar milieu’ of the Carpathian Basin, discussed by the above-mentioned studies.

Type I. 2 in Transylvania

The individual graves of complete horses from Transylvania (Type I. 2) can be identified with Kiss’s type VII. From his chronological tables results that this type of burial occurs mostly during the Early Avar period and in a smaller number during the Late Avar period of the Khaganate. In the typology of M. Némethi and L. Klima, who included only the horse burials from the Carpathian Basin of the Early Avar period, the individual horse graves are grouped under the 4th type, a type frequent especially in the area across the Danube. However, burials of this type are also recognised in the Tisa river area. I. Bede defines the individual horse graves from the Avar cemeteries as the 3rd type of horse burials from the Carpathian Basin. E. Garam dates the seventy individual horse graves from the Late Avar cemetery at Tisafüred to the early phase of the cemetery. According to the author, the vast majority of these graves contained harness parts. Cs. Balogh describes them as ‘Horse graves’ and considers that they appear in the area between the Tisa river and the Danube at the earliest in the second quarter of the 7th c. She notes the occurrence of this type of grave in the Late Avar period as well, with many examples to the east of the Tisa river, but also across the Danube, to the south of the river.

Type II. 1 in Transylvania

The graves from Band, Bistrița, Bratei 3, Fântânele and Unirea 2/Veresmort that assemble the type II. 1 from Transylvania belong to Kiss’s types II/1 or II/2. The author placed this burial type mostly during the Early Avar period. M. Némethi and L. Klima observed that the graves in which parts of a horse were added alongside the human deceased (Némethi/Klima’s type 3) are frequent during the Early Avar period in the territory to the west of the Tisa river and across the Danube. In fact, Cs. Balogh considered that the partial burials of horses are specific

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31 KISS 1963, 153–162
34 GARAM 1987, 65–123.
35 BALOGH 2009, 9–42.
37 KISS 1963, 155–156, Tab. I-II.
38 NÉMETHI/KLIMA 1987–1989, 177, fig. 3.
39 NÉMETHI/KLIMA 1987–1989, 177, fig. 3.
40 BEDE 2014, 219–221.
42 BALOGH 2009, 16–18.
43 BALOGH 2009, 17–18.
44 KISS 1963, 158, Tab. III-IV.
to the Early Avar period\textsuperscript{46}. While citing Cs. Balint, she made the observation that the partial burials of horses have no precedent in Asia and indicated the origin of this funerary practice in the eastern Russian steppe\textsuperscript{47}. I. Bede noticed that this type of burial is more frequent during the Early Avar period, but uncertain during the Late Avar period\textsuperscript{48}.

\textit{Type II. 2 in Transylvania}

The two graves discovered at Ţpălnaca (Type II. 2) belong from the point of view of the alignment and position of the horse in relation to the human body to Kiss's type I: 'Horse skeleton laid to the right side of the human skeleton, with the horse skeleton aligned in reverse to the human body'\textsuperscript{49}. A. Kiss noted that this type of burial is very poorly represented in the Early Avar cemeteries, whereas most of the graves of this type have been identified in the Avar cemeteries of the Late Avar period\textsuperscript{50}.

The graves in which the human deceased were accompanied by horses form the Némethi/Klima's 1st type\textsuperscript{51}. The two authors considered this type of burial to be the most frequent funerary ritual practised in the Carpathian Basin during the second half of the Early Avar period\textsuperscript{52}.

In 2009, Cs. Balogh published an article about the horse burials between the Tisa river and the Danube, where he made the observation that the graves of Kiss's type I were not a very frequent way of burial for the Avars from the Carpathian Basin, in comparison with Kiss's type III. 'Horse skeleton laid to the left side of the human body, both having the same alignment'\textsuperscript{53}. Type I is not a very frequent occurrence in inner Asia, but many examples are known in the Altai\textsuperscript{54}. Cs. Balogh further observed that, between the Danube and the Tisa river, Kiss's type I is more rarely recognised for the Early Avar period, but becomes generalized during the Late Avar period\textsuperscript{55}. He noted that there is no explicit information about Kiss's type I between the Tisa river and the Danube before the second third of the 7th c.\textsuperscript{56}

The two horse burials found at Ţpălnaca belong to the type I.1 defined in I. Bede's typological classification of the discoveries from the Carpathian Basin\textsuperscript{57}. Just as Cs. Balogh, I. Bede observed that the burials with complete horse skeletons are more frequent than the other types of graves that contain only parts of the horse's body\textsuperscript{58}. The woman grave buried with a horse from Ţpălnaca is a singular example in the Avar cemeteries from Transylvania. Analogies for this archaeological complex are identified on the north-eastern border of the Avar Khaganate, in the area of today's southern Slovakia, where many Avar period women graves with horses have been found\textsuperscript{59}. According to the typology of women graves with horses from the above-mentioned geographic area, developed by Z. Čilinská, the grave from Ţpălnaca fits the description of the Čilinska's 2nd type – burial of the complete horse –, type dated to the middle of the 7th c.

\begin{thebibliography}
\bibitem{46} BALOGH 2009, 9.
\bibitem{47} BALINT 1971, 92–93; BALOGH 2009, 9.
\bibitem{48} BEDE 2012, 44.
\bibitem{49} KISS 1963, 153.
\bibitem{50} KISS 1963, 158 and Tab. I-III.
\bibitem{51} NÉMETHI/KLIMA 1987–1989, 177.
\bibitem{52} NÉMETHI/KLIMA 1987–1989, 177, fig. 2.
\bibitem{53} BALOGH 2009, 13.
\bibitem{54} BALOGH 2009, 13.
\bibitem{55} BALOGH 2009, 14.
\bibitem{56} BALOGH 2009, 14.
\bibitem{57} BEDE 2014, 212–213, 218–219.
\bibitem{58} BALOGH 2009, 13; BEDE 2014, 2012–2013, 218–219
\bibitem{59} CILINSKA 1990, 135–146; ZÁBOJNÍK 2015, 283–287.
\end{thebibliography}
and during the 8th c.\textsuperscript{60} However, the position and alignment of the two skeletons from inside the funerary complex from Șpălnaca are different. The horses found inside the graves of the Čilinská's 2nd type were put to the left of the human skeleton and were aligned in the same direction as the deceased. The horse inside the grave from Șpălnaca was not only placed to the right of the woman but it was also aligned with the head towards the deceased's feet.

The alignment of the horse skeletons in relation to the human body and the existence of a border that separates the human skeletons from the horse skeletons which characterize the two graves from Șpălnaca have no analogies in the Avar cemeteries from Transylvania. The only parallel could be the grave from Cicău, but only from the point of view of the ritual practice of burial with the complete horse. Otherwise, the funerary complex from Cicău is different from the two graves discovered at Șpălnaca. On the one hand, in the grave from Cicău there is no clay border between the human and the horse. On the other hand, the horse from Cicău was placed to the left of the human body and had the same alignment as the human skeleton: ENE (the head) – WSW (the feet). The grave from Cicău fits, instead, the description of Kiss's type III. In 1962, the author wrote that this kind of graves characterizes the Early and Late periods of the Avar time and that most examples are from the border areas of the Avar empire\textsuperscript{61}. The funerary complex from Cicău is also recognised in the type I.1 of horse burials defined by I. Bede\textsuperscript{62} and in the Némethi/Klima's 1st type\textsuperscript{63}.

In 2009, Cs. Balogh noted that Kiss's type III (horse placed to the left of the human body) is the most represented type in the cemeteries in comparison with the other horse burials\textsuperscript{64}. He also observed that between the Danube and the Tisa river the graves with horses appear only beginning with the second third of the 7th c., while most of them are from the Late Avar period\textsuperscript{65}. Kiss's type III is known in other areas of the Carpathian Basin as well, such as the north-western territory of the Avar Khaganate. In this area, a cemetery with several graves containing horses placed to the left of the human body, aligned the same as the human skeleton, has been investigated at Komárno, in Slovakia. The cemetery dates from the 8th c.\textsuperscript{66}Cs. Balogh identified analogies for the types I and III of A. Kiss in the Altai\textsuperscript{67}. It is possible that the grave from Gâmbaș also belongs to Kiss's type III.

**Short remarks about the practice of horse burials in the Avar milieu**

The practice of horse burials in the Avar milieu has been noticed and discussed by the European professional papers concerned with the Early Middle Ages for a long time\textsuperscript{68}. Referring to the origin of the horse burials in the Avar milieu of the Carpathian Basin, the vast majority of the Hungarian researchers agree that this funerary practice was adopted by the Avar warriors from the populations that they encountered on their way through Asia before they reached the Carpathian Basin\textsuperscript{69}. A series of studies addressed the importance of the horse in the Avar

\textsuperscript{60} CILINSKA 1990, 139.
\textsuperscript{61} KISS 1963, 153–156, Fig. 1, Táb. I-II.
\textsuperscript{62} BEDE 2014, 212–216, fig. 3, 4
\textsuperscript{63} NÉMETHI/KLIMA 1987–1989, 177, fig. 2.
\textsuperscript{64} BALOGH 2009, 13.
\textsuperscript{65} BALOGH 2009, 14.
\textsuperscript{66} TRUGLY 1987, 251–344.
\textsuperscript{67} BALOGH 2009, 13.
communities, as well as the religious significance of its presence in the Avar graves.\textsuperscript{70} In the following, I will point out to a series of general aspects about the horse burials that result from the above-mentioned bibliography.

The horse played a particular role in the communities that formed, on the way from Asia to Europe, the conglomerate of populations reunited under the name of Avars. Complete horses are identified particularly in men graves which, according to the funerary finds, belonged to the Avar military elite. The horse was the life partner of the Avar warrior. At the death of the warrior, the horse was inhumed alongside his owner and all of the harness parts and weapons so that it could continue to serve him in the afterlife. This funerary practice is recognised in the types I. 2 and II. 2 from Transylvania.

In other cases, at the death of the warrior, the sacrificed horse was consumed by the entire community as part of the burial rituals. As a result, only some bones of the horse skeleton were added in the grave. Most of these graves include skulls, mandibulae, horse teeth and bones from the lower part of the feet. The graves from Transylvania that form the type II. 1 belong to this funerary practice.

The human graves that contain horses or only bones of the horse skeleton are not an exclusive attribute of the military elites. The presence of horses inside the graves rather signals the social status of the deceased. Not only ordinary warriors but also free and rich people, including women and children, have been buried with horses. In Transylvania, such graves are recognized at Band, Bratei 3, Bistrița, Fântânele and Șpălnaca.

There were also symbolic horse burials. Several graves without archaeological finds from Bratei 3 could belong to this category. The Avar communities considered the horses to be ‘magic’, possessing supernatural powers. Their death, natural or by sacrifice carried out by the community, was a significant event in the life of the community. The horse was then honoured with a lot of pomp when it was placed in the grave. This funerary practice could be reflected in the horse grave from Bratei 2.

The different types of horse burials from the Avar Khaganate of the Carpathian Basin, observed from a cemetery to another, from a geographic region to another, had an ethnic connotation, especially during the Early Avar period, when the relations between the different tribes that formed the Avar conglomerate were still incipient and very fragile. When several types of horse burials are met in an Avar cemetery, it can be the case of cohabitation of two or more tribes with a different ethnic.

\textbf{Remarks about the chronology of the horse burials from Transylvania}

The time of the horse graves from Transylvania has been determined foremost based on the metal artefacts discovered inside the funerary complexes. In addition, the analogies above-presented and a series of historical remarks about the time of the arrival of the Avars in Transylvania have been used.\textsuperscript{71}

The vast majority of the horse burials from the cemeteries of the Band/Noșlac/Bratei 3 group, as well as those from the bi-ritual cemetery at Bratei 2, were arranged on the margin of the necropolises. This arrangement associates the graves with the late phase of the cemeteries.

The horse graves from Transylvania fit into three chronological horizons. A first chronological sequence is represented by the period between the year 630, after the Avars entered


\textsuperscript{71} COSMA 2017, 15–23.
Transylvania, and the year 670. This period includes the graves that form the type I. 2 and type II. 1 from the cemeteries of the Band/Noșlac/Bratei 3 group (Tab. 11). The cemetery at Luna has also been dated to the 7th c., though there is no data to confirm the suggested chronology. Within the type I. 2, the exceptions are the graves from Noșlac, which date from between 670 and 720 (Tab. 11).

All the graves of type II. 2 are from the Middle Avar period (670–720). Here included are two graves from the Gepid-Avar cemetery at Șpălnaca and one from the cemetery at Cicău. The same period of use has been determined for the cemeteries with horse burials which are difficult to distinguish typologically, at Aiud, Aiudul de Sus, Gâmbaș and Teiuș (Tab. 11). The two graves discovered at Bratei 2 and those found at Lopadea Nouă and Măgina date to the 7th c., most probably from the first half.

In conclusion, the types I. 2 and II. 1 are almost in their entirety characteristic for the 7th c. (630–670). The funerary complexes have been discovered in the Gepid-Avar cemeteries (Band/Noșlac/Bratei 3 group) from Transylvania. The only exception is the Gepid-Avar necropolis at Noșlac, where the horizon of horse burials dates from after the year 670 and from the first decades of the 8th c. (Tab. 11). The human-horse graves of the type II. 2 defined for Transylvania date from after the year 670 and from the 8th c. (Tab. 11).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural group</th>
<th>Cemetery</th>
<th>Grave type</th>
<th>Chronology</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Type I.1</td>
<td>Type I.2</td>
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<td>Lopadea Nouă</td>
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<td>Măgina</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bi-ritual cemeteries</td>
<td>Bratei 2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Tab. 11. The chronology of the horse burials from Transylvania

Remarks about the ethnic-cultural identification of the horse burials from Transylvania

I believe that the individual horse burials containing harness parts and weapons specific to the Avars, discovered in the cemeteries of the Band/Noșlac/Bratei group and in the bi-ritual cemeteries, belong to Avar warriors.

The Avar graves from Band and Bratei 3 are grouped in two areas arranged on the margin of the cemeteries. The funerary finds and the burial rite are the same in the two groups. In both

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72 COSMA 2017, 15–23.
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areas, individual horse graves and graves containing rests of horses have been found together\textsuperscript{73}. With very few exceptions, regardless of the way of burial, the horses were laid in the pit with the head towards the east and the rear towards the west, while the human bodies were aligned west (the head) – east (the feet). These details suggest that the Avars who were buried alongside the Gepids in the cemeteries at Band and Bratei 3 belonged to the same tribe or community.

More difficult to define ethnically are the burials from the cemeteries of the Band/Noșlac/Bratei 3 group in which the horses were not buried with harness parts, weapons or other artefacts specific to the Avars (for example stirrups or mouthpieces), but with objects, such as pottery or bone combs, of a Gepid origin. The most conclusive example is given by the six graves from the cemetery at Bratei 3 (M. 9, 11, 42, 76, 85, 133) included in the type II. 1 (Human graves with partial horse burial). The vessels and bone combs have close analogies in the Gepid milieu of the Carpathian Basin\textsuperscript{74}, thus suggesting the Gepid ethnic of those buried in these graves. In this case, the practice of adding horse parts in the graves was borrowed from the Avars. actually, the above-mentioned graves have been found within `circles’ located at the margin of the cemetery, which delimit graves that can be assigned to the Avar milieu. Extrapolating from this observation, it is not impossible that the graves containing combs and Gepid pottery actually belonged to Avar deceased who adopted these artefacts from the Gepids.

Another interesting example refers to the graves in which only horse mandibulae were added. In Transylvania, these have been identified just in two graves from Bistrița and one from Fântânele. In the professional literature, a series of studies present Merovingian graves from Western Europe which included horse skulls and/or horse mandibulae or horse teeth alone\textsuperscript{75}. However, it is not necessary to search for analogies for the finds from Bistrița and Fântânele in distant areas, namely in Western Europe. Graves with horse mandibulae, such as the ones from the cemeteries in Transylvania, appear in many Avar funerary contexts of the Carpathian Basin. Still, it is possible that the mandibulae were not the only horse bones added in the graves.

In the Transylvanian Plateau, at least so far, there are no horse burials identified in the Germanic cemeteries from the early or middle period of this cultural group\textsuperscript{76}. With this note, I wish to highlight the absence of a tradition of horse burials in the Gepid cemeteries from Transylvania prior to the 7th c. I know only one Gepid cemetery from Hungary, at Hódmezővásárhely-Kishomok, in which a grave contained a horse skull\textsuperscript{77}. I underline the presence of Avar graves in this cemetery\textsuperscript{78}. Otherwise, in the Carpathian Basin, the Gepids were inhumed exclusively with harness parts and weapons\textsuperscript{79}. In Transylvania, the horse burials appeared solely after the arrival of the Avars in the Transylvanian Plateau, most probably after the year 630.

The practice of adding parts of the horse skeleton alongside the deceased in the Gepid-Avar cemeteries from Transylvania is not connected with the west European Merovingian milieu. The horse burial was an Avar practice which some of the Gepids from Transylvania very likely borrowed. The contrary is also possible if the low number of individual horse graves with finds specific to the Gepids from the cemeteries of the Band/Noșlac/Bratei 3 group is considered. In this case, as above-stated, the graves with Gepid finds can be attributed to the Avars.

The persons buried with horses in the Gepid-Avar or Avar cemeteries from Transylvania came from the ranks of the Avar warriors. The varied status of these warriors is mirrored by the

\textsuperscript{73} DOBOS 2010/2011, 402, fig. 2, 403, fig. 3.
\textsuperscript{74} BÔNA/NAGY 2002.
\textsuperscript{75} MULER-WILLLE 1970–1971, 130, fig. 7.
\textsuperscript{76} See: HOREDT 1977, 251–268.
\textsuperscript{77} BÔNA/NAGY 2002, 42.
\textsuperscript{78} BÔNA/NAGY 2002, 140–143.
\textsuperscript{79} BALOGH 2009, 9, 18–19.
The woman buried at Șpălnaca with her jewellery and costume accessories, who was accompanied by a horse, in its turn put inside with harness parts and accessories, certainly occupied a superior position within the Gepid-Avar community that buried its dead in the point Șugud at Șpălnaca. According to the funerary finds, also the graves no. 9, 11, 42, 76, 85 and 133 from Bratei 3 were possibly women burials.

The vast majority of the graves with horses accommodated adult persons. There are, however, several graves of adolescents identified in the cemetery at Bratei 3 (M. 11 and 133) and of children, not very numerous (Band and Bistrița), buried together with horses or with bones of the horse skeleton, thus suggesting their upper status.

Final remarks

The first and most important remark is that in Transylvania the funerary practice of burying horses or only parts of horses in graves can be attributed to the Avar milieu. The number of horse burials is very small in the Transylvanian Plateau in comparison with other areas of the Avar Khaganate. At the same time, not all types of horse burials identified in the Carpathian Basin are recognised in Transylvania.

The number of horse burials is small also in comparison with the number of 7th–8th c. necropolises from Transylvania or to the number of graves within each cemetery. The most numerous are the graves accommodating the horse alone, followed by those with the human deceased accompanied by bones of the horse skeleton and, finally, by those with the deceased accompanied by a complete horse. The first type of burial dates from between the years 630 and 670, while the last type characterises the end of the Middle Avar period and the 8th c.

Very likely, the harness parts and the weapons specific to the Avar warriors which have been found by chance at different sites in the Transylvanian Plateau once belonged to horse burials. Still, it is just as possible that the artefacts thus found were the only additions to the funerary inventory, illustrating a distinct type of burial in the Avar cemeteries of the Avar Khaganate.

The occurrence of horse burials in Transylvania is exclusively associated with the Avars. They were the ones that buried not only their warriors but also important persons from the top of the Avar hierarchy together with horses, a funerary practice that the Avar tribes brought with them from Asia and the Eurasian steppes. In the Gepid or Gepid-Avar cemeteries at Band, Bistrița, Bratei 3, Noșlac, Fântânele, Șpălnaca and Valea Largă, the presence of horses or of only some bones of the horse skeleton in graves is the result of the effective presence of the Avars, who after the year 630 cohabitated with the Gepids and buried their dead in the Late Gepid cemeteries from Transylvania.

Translated Andreea Drăgan

List of cemeteries from the 7th–8th centuries with horse burials from Transylvania


80 NÉMETHI/KLIMA 1987–1989, 176, Type 5; BALOGH 2009, 9, 18–19.

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