

ÁRPÁD PERIOD MUSLIM SETTLEMENT AND CEMETERY IN OROSHÁZA

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“Because a country of one language and one tradition is weak and fallible...” wrote King Stephen I in his admonition to his son, Prince Emeric. And in truth, in terms of both ethnicity and religion, medieval Hungary was one of the most diverse countries in Europe at the time. However, this variety only reveals itself to 21st century researchers in very fortunate instances. A 12th–13th century settlement and its cemetery, which we have been able to determine to be Muslim on the basis of our present knowledge, has been discovered in Orosháza. This Árpád Period settlement in Orosháza provides an outstanding example of the economic and military role of Muslims that is known from written sources. We suspect that amongst the inhabitants there were people who were farmers of the mint, were occupied with contemporary trade, money-changing, and possibly with military service and guarding the frontiers.

Orosháza and its vicinity, which lies on the borders of three geographical micro-regions, seems to have been a region that played both a central role as well as being in the periphery in the periods covered by the archaeological sources. This is because the former channels of the ancient Maros River only occasionally provided the sufficient necessities for life to support the people here, and therefore the Árpád Period inhabitants also shaped their environment with varying intensity throughout the centuries. As can be seen on the basis of the ever increasing quantities of varied archaeological finds, due to the region's geographical environment it was never able to emerge from its role as a transit point; the channels of the ancient Maros River only occasionally filled with water, which primarily favored transitory traffic.

The houses dug into the ground, the pits and the ditches of this Árpád Period settlement that has been excavated on the outskirts of Orosháza correspond to the general image of the surroundings of an Árpád Period village known from excavations, and the main parallels to the material finds are found in digs from the Carpathian Basin as well. However, a few types of finds have turned up that change the picture a bit from the usual. Following cauldrons and pots, the third most common find type was bottles and jugs. These for the most part may have been purchased at the local markets by the former inhabitants of the village, but nevertheless, their great numbers suggest that the dining culture of the settlement's inhabitants differed to a certain extent from the ordinary. The fragments of enormous bell-shaped baking lids and the massive flanged baking trays accompanying them that were found in one of the houses make it possible to make inferences about their particular customs. This house was located in the central portion of the settlement. The barrel vaulted oven made of brick and sunk below the floor stands out from the group of other houses in the settlement that were similar in structure. The genuine significance of this object is nevertheless provided by what is written above, on the basis of which we hypothesized the practice of communal cooking in this log building. The bone processing workshop found in the settlement is also considered unique in these village surroundings.¹

The scale pans found amongst the objects at the site bear evidence to the occupation of the settlement's inhabitants. These make it possible to conclude that the people here were involved in commerce. The geographical surroundings and the network of roads leading to fords at the main rivers were of great service

¹ Lichtenstein, László – Rózsa, Zoltán – Tugya, Beáta: Adatok a XII. század végi Orosháza iparához. Egy csontmegmunkáló műhely hulladékanyaga (Data on Industry in Orosháza at the end of the 12th century. The Waste Materials from a Bone Processing Workshop). In: „Hadak útján” – Népességek és iparok a népvándorlás korában (“On the Path of War” – Peoples and Industry during the Period of the Great Migrations), ed. Újlaki Pongrácz, Zsuzsanna (Nagykovácsi: Pars kft, 2006), 273–285.

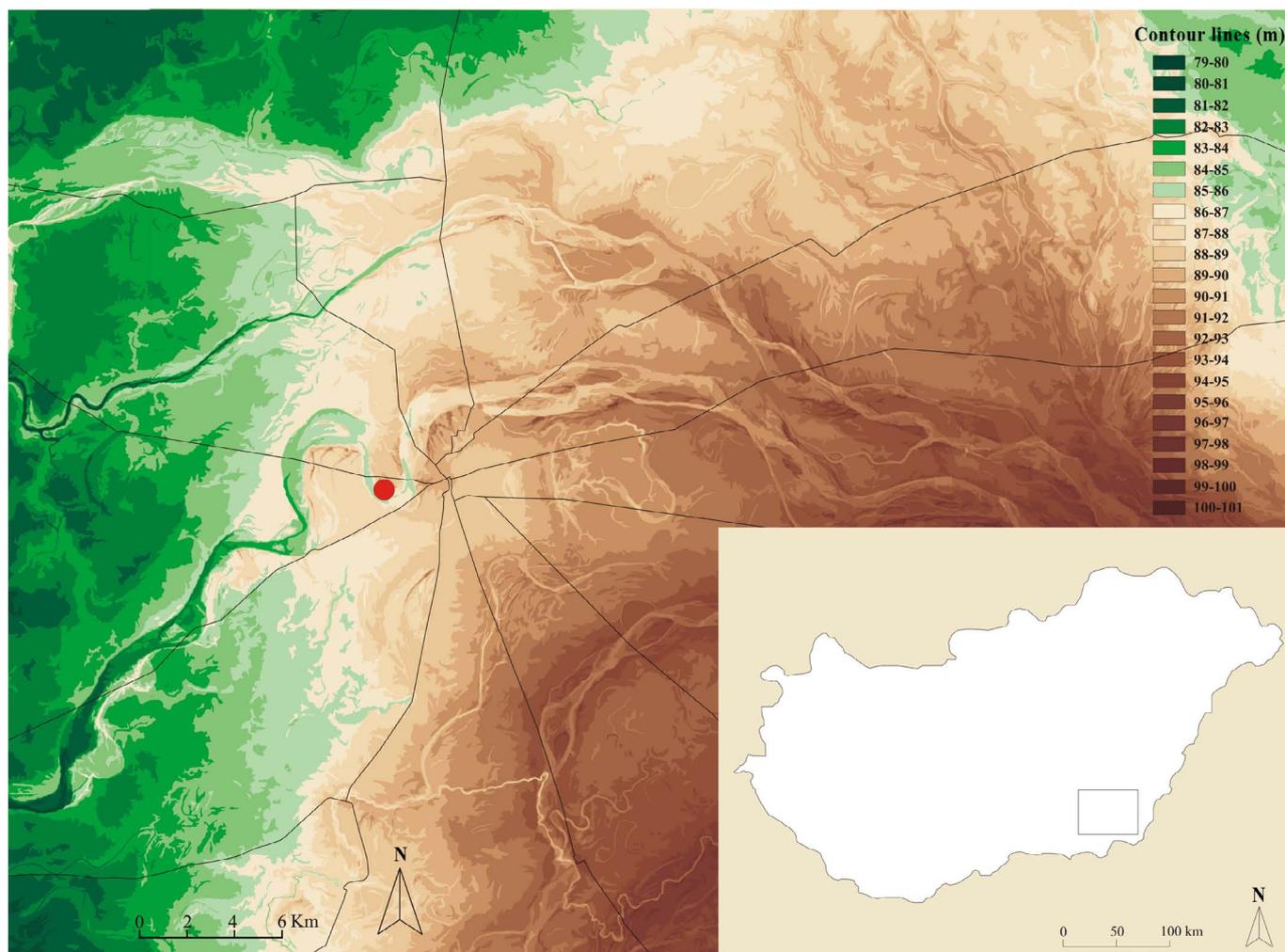


Fig. 1: Relief map of Orosháza's broader region, with the archaeological site (Orosháza, Bónum-faluhely, KÖH 29828) and the present network of roads resting on Bronze Age foundations (prepared by: Zsolt Horváth – Dániel Rédei)

on both a regional and a national level to the commercial and military objectives of the area's aristocracy at any time; and this was also so in the Árpád Period. The analysis of the animal bone material reveals even more about the community. The nearly 400 structures excavated contained 15,657 pieces of animal bone, but of these only 24 could be identified as pig bones (and these could also be interpreted as scattered finds from the Avar settlement that was also excavated here). So, it can be safely stated that the inhabitants of the settlement did not eat any pig. A similar phenomenon has been observed in connection with a few other medieval Hungarian sites as well, and in these cases the research provided the historical explanation that the religious as well as the ethnic character of the given community differed from those of the surrounding settlements. According to our current knowledge, a parallel from Árpád Period Hungary is at (Hajdú) Böszörmény, where the number of pig bones were also negligible.² The excavated settlement is considered by research to be the archaeological legacy of an Ishmaelite group due to the Böszörmény place name associated with them. The word *Böszörmény*, similar to Ishmaelite or Saracen, was primarily a religious designation in the Middle Ages (Muslim), although the possibility of its identification with a group from the lower Syr Darya River or in the end with the Khwarezmian people has also arisen.³ In connection with the group of finds originating from a closed context within the territory of the Buda Castle, the analysis

² Szabó, László: Megjegyzések a Böszörmények kérdéséhez. A Hajdúböszörmény határában talált Árpád-kori falu régészeti leletei alapján (Notes on the Issue of the Böszörmény People. On the Basis of the Archaeological Finds from the Árpád Period Village Found on the Outskirts of Hajdúböszörmény). *Debreceni Déri Múzeum Évkönyve 2002–2003* (2003), 73–108.

³ Czeglédy, Károly: Az Árpád-kori mohamedánokról és neveikről (Árpád Period Muslims and Their Names). *Nyelvtudományi Értekezések* 70 (1971), 254–259.

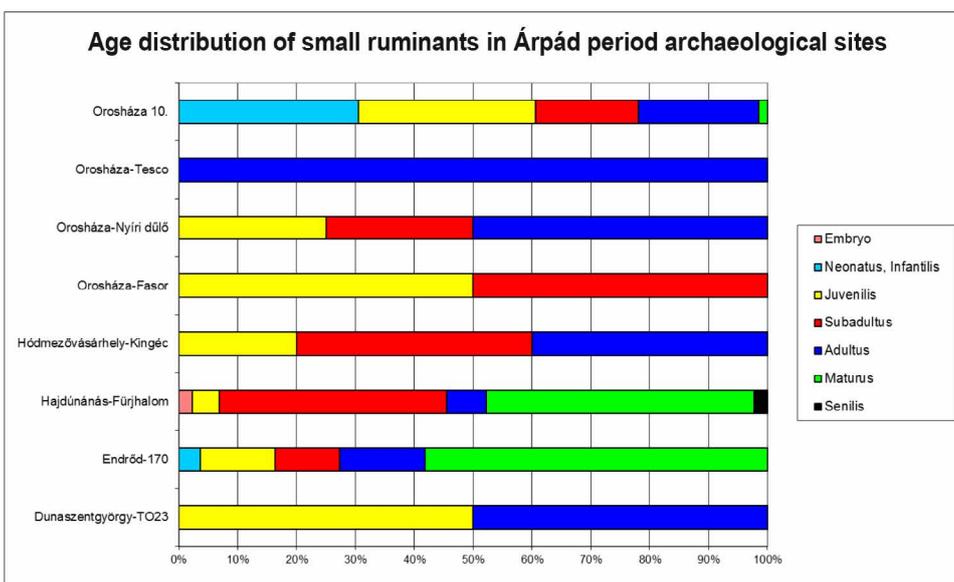
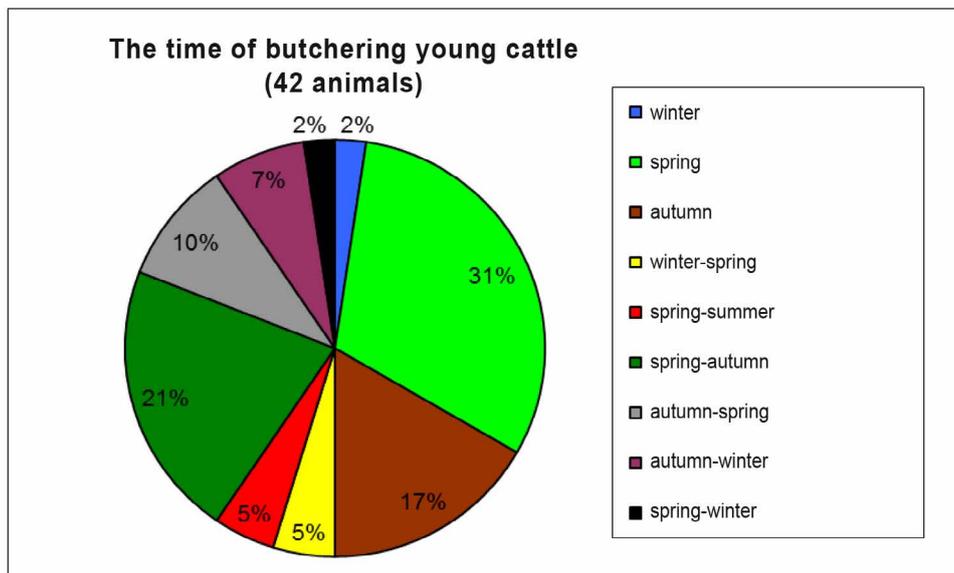
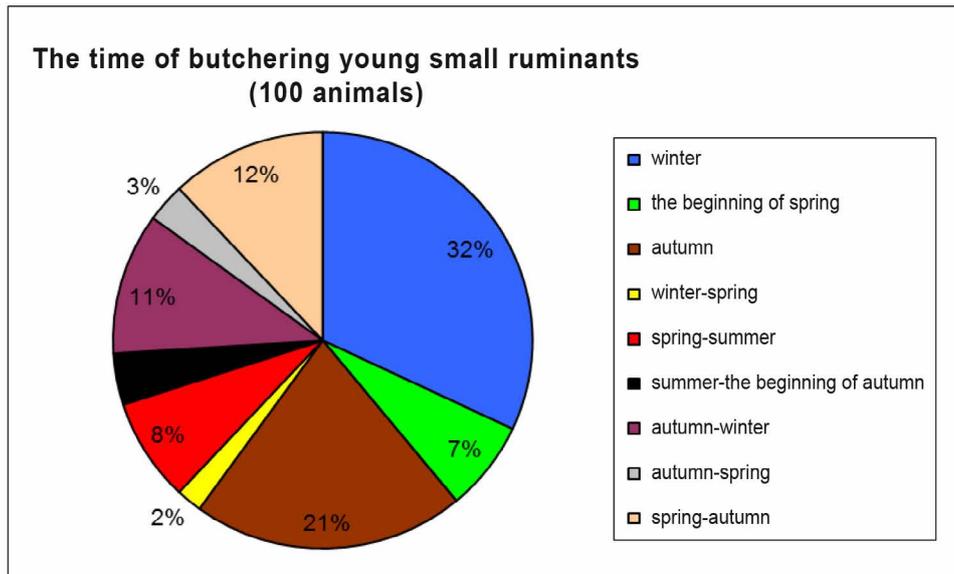


Fig. 2: Results of the analysis of the animal bone material



Fig. 3: Cross-section and photographs of grave 63 during the excavation (photograph: Ferenc Lénárt)

connected the lack of pig bones to the local Jewish community.⁴ A further result of the analysis of the Orosháza settlement's imposing number of animal bones indicates a large proportion of cattle and small ruminants butchered at a young age, which also differs from customary practice. This may show the relative wealth of those living here – they were able to allow themselves to use young animals for their meat – but the explanation may be more complicated than this as well.

Although written sources connected with the settlement are quite scanty, they still represent an aid in interpreting the archaeological results through what they reveal about the inhabitants here. The amount of written data coming from the period is insignificant; only deeds for land grants or for reaffirming grants that come from later centuries are available. Of these, one that mentions the place name of Böszörményestelek at the northern border of Orosháza stands out from the perspective of our topic. On the basis of this it seems that there are grounds for presuming the presence of a Muslim community here. A community with a different religion from the surrounding inhabitants, and connected with this perhaps a different ethnicity, may represent an explanation for the phenomena observed during the excavation that differ from the customary Árpád Period model. It has already been mentioned in connection with the lack of pig bones that in similar cases this was related by the research to an Islamic or Jewish community. On the basis of the data suggesting a large number of animals slaughtered at a young age, one of the Islamic world's important celebrations also arises. Eid al-Adha (the Feast of the Sacrifice) is connected to Ramadan, following it by 70 days, so its date varies from year to year. According to religious prescriptions, on this day young animals – primarily cattle, sheep or goats – of flawless quality are sacrificed. The small ruminants with a fall-spring

⁴ Csippán, Péter: Az állatsontok eltérő kulturális szokásokat jelző szerepe. 14–16. századi állatsontleletek Budáról (The Role of Animal Bones in Indicating Differing Cultural Customs. 14th–16th Century Animal Bone Finds from Buda). *Budapest Régiségei* 41 (2007), 299–316.

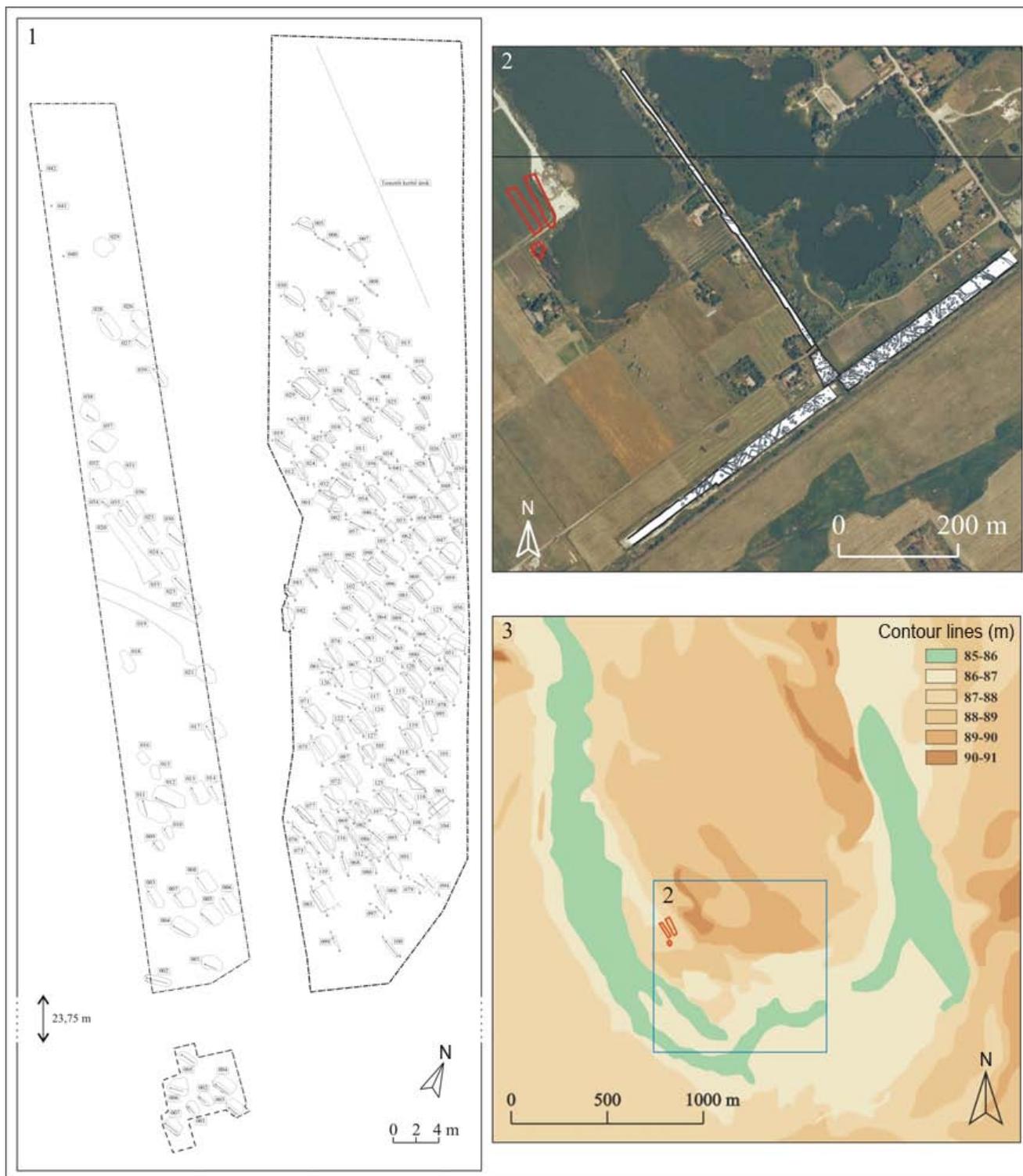


Fig. 4: Topographical location and plan of the excavated section of the cemetery (prepared by: Archeoline Kft. Szeged, Zsolt Horváth – Dániel Rédei)

mortality and the calves butchered for the most part in spring-summer “fit together” in a way, and form a profile that corresponds to Islamic religious prescriptions.

In recent decades several hundred graves from an extensive cemetery have been destroyed to the northwest of the village due to quarrying activities. However, in the past few years it has been possible to excavate nearly 170 graves on the site. The connection between the settlement and this cemetery, which is very poor in finds, is made possible by a ring that can also be dated to the Árpád Period. Every one of

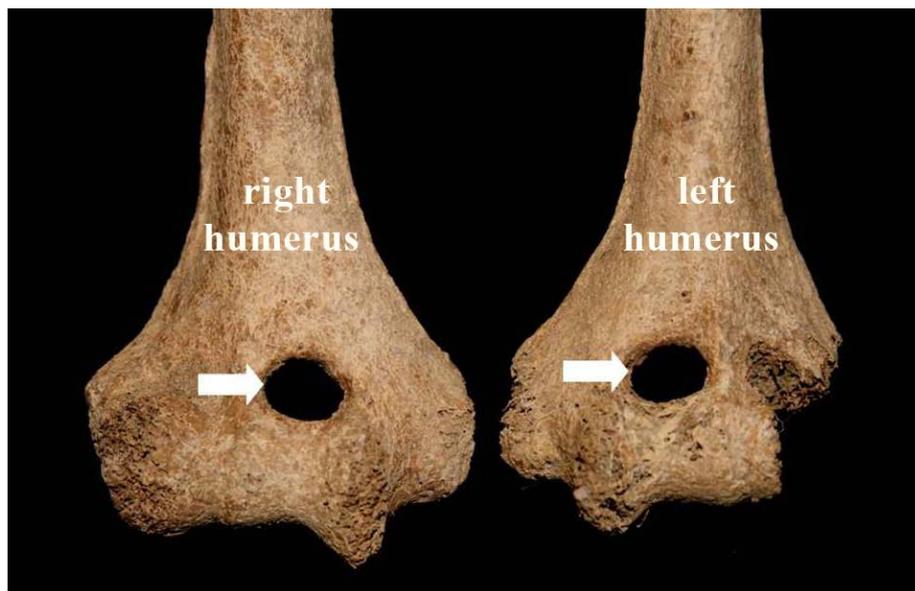


Fig. 5: Supratrochlear foramen, Orosháza archeological site 10 (2013), grave 83 (photograph: János Balázs)

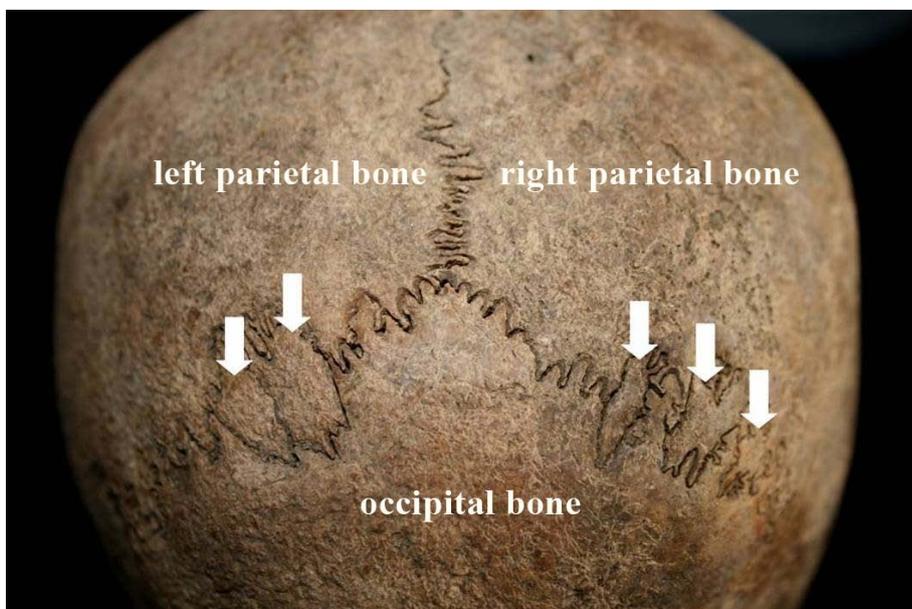


Fig. 6: Wormian bones, Orosháza archeological site 10 (2013), grave 12 (photograph: János Balázs)

these graves, which were ordered in rows, were formed with a side-wall niche, which means that below the southern wall of the pit a side cavity with steps leading down was dug out, connected to the pit by a narrow shaft. In the cemeteries surrounding the Árpád Period church, this type of grave is not normally found; the deceased are ordinarily buried in simple rectangular graves (pit graves). The grave form with a side-wall niches suggests a community whose system of burial customs differed from those of the surrounding area. The positioning of the skeletons' arms and hands varies due to the narrow opening, and they were generally laid on their sides. However, the heads of those interred were consistently turned in one direction, south by southeast. This probably indicates the direction of Mecca, although in this and in the orientation of the graves the religious prescriptions – according to which the deceased should be looking towards the Kaaba – were only met in part. The explanation for this in our opinion is lack of geographical knowledge, and perhaps the community followed the direction for their former home.⁵ Islamic burials, in conformity with

⁵ The Muslims of Orosháza – who dealt in money changing and salt trading – most probably were Khwarezmian, but it is still not known from which direction they arrived. Rózsa, Zoltán – Tugya, Beáta: Kik voltak az első Orosháza lakói? Problémafelvetés egy kutatás kezdetén (Who Were the First Inhabitants of Orosháza? Raising a Question at the Beginning of Research). *Mozaikok Orosháza és vidéke múltjából* (Mosaics from the Past of Orosháza and its Vicinity) 6 (2012), 17–31.

the supplementary rules, are based on a mutual agreement or the traditions of a given community. The shape of the grave does not appear in the prescriptions of Islam, so the unusual form with a side-wall niche only suggests a community whose customs differ from those of the surrounding area. However, the orientation of the skeletons and the graves can be interpreted as a custom in accordance with Islamic prescriptions.⁶

On the basis of the analysis of the bone remains it came to light that the anthropological portrait of the former community was quite heterogeneous, with the differences in height between men and women greater than the average at about 20 cm. The great number of anatomical variations should be highlighted; it was possible to observe supratrochlear foramen (a hole above the humeroulnar joint) in 30% of the arm bones that could be examined and wormian bones (extra bone pieces within the suture between the parietal bone and the occipital bone) in 60% of the skulls that could be examined.⁷ These anatomical characteristics indicate that the community differed to a certain extent from the average Árpád Period population.

The 12th–13th century settlement must be examined together with its greater surroundings to provide us with a fuller picture of the community living here. According to our opinion, it was part of the salt transportation route whose axis was comprised of man-made river-sized canals connecting the Igrış Abbey, Pereg and the area of the Körös rivers. The Böszörmény people of Orosháza presumably were Khwarezmians familiar with the trade in salt, who according to the writings of Rogerius, the canon of Oradea, most likely lost their lives at Pereg during the Mongol Invasion.⁸ The profile of the community, which was probably settled here in connection with the centrally directed trade in salt, is little known today. It is a task for the near future to compare the research findings with certain parallels (Hajdúböszörmény) in the interest of drawing as precise a profile as possible of the Muslims of Hungary – notwithstanding the fact that they certainly had quite a variety of customs and material cultures. Due to the above, the two Böszörménys also connect the treasure caches hidden during the Mongol Invasion with one another in an understandable manner. These treasures indicate that this ethnic group played a more important role than the average in the economic life of the Árpád Period and therefore had a greater deal of wealth.

RECOMMENDED LITERATURE

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⁶ We thank Ebubekir D. Ferenczi for his assistance!

⁷ Platzer, W.: *Anatómia I* (Anatomy I). (Budapest: Springer, 1996), 113, 309.

⁸ On the site's long distance contact network to the south and east: Langó, Péter – Rózsa, Zoltán: Az Árpád-kori Orosháza kapcsolatrendszeréről. Az alsó íven négy soros gyöngydróttal és három gyöngykoszorúval díszített függők (The Contact Network of Árpád Period Orosháza. Pendants decorated with a four-row beaded wire and three bead rings on the lower arch). *Mozaikok Orosháza és vidéke múltjából* 7 (2012), 40–47. On the region's contact network: Rózsa, Zoltán: Amiért 70 falu népének vére folyt. A peregi vérmező lokalizálásának kérdése (Why the Blood of the Population of 70 Villages Flowed. The Question of the Location of the Battle of Pereg). *Mozaikok Orosháza és vidéke múltjából* 9 (2013), 3–11.