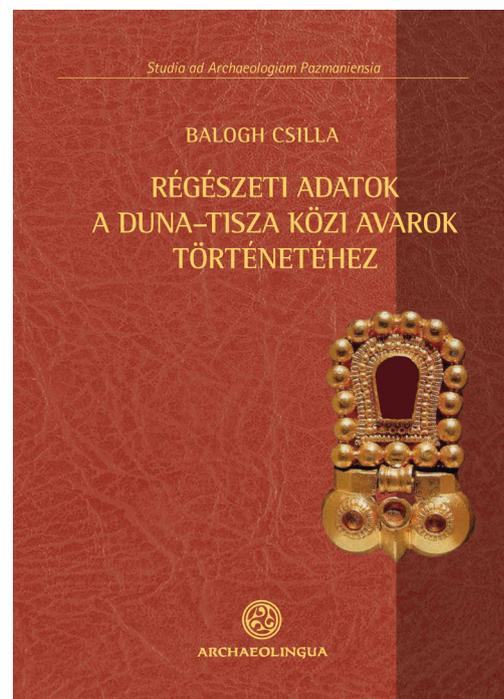


ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA ON THE HISTORY OF AVARS IN THE REGION BETWEEN THE DANUBE AND TISZA RIVERS

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This work of Csilla Balogh is the first comprehensive summary of the material culture of the Early Avar Period in the Carpathian Basin for a long time. Most recently, a work of this kind was published in 2005 from the pen of Livia Bende,¹ which highlights the importance of this book. Amongst other reasons, the topic is also significant because it deals with the settlement and occupation of a new ethnic group as well as the appearance of finds connected with this new community's material culture. The problem of the early "conquest" find materials in and of itself can bring us far in relation to both methodological approaches and the Avar Period finds.²

The second significant element that the author's work also relays is the necessity and unavoidability of regional research in relation to Avar Period remains. This research has a considerable tradition in the area of Hungary and the regions stretching beyond the present-day borders (Jozef Zabožník, Falko Daim and Péter Ricz), since the changes that occurred in the internal development of the individual regions and in the composition of their finds differ in many instances. This latter aspect should also be emphasized since it clearly shows the tendency that in the preceding period generally characterized research into this era. Previously the researchers thought in terms of the entire Carpathian Basin or the unity of the area affected by Avar settlement, and on the basis of this drew conclusions. However, since then the approach mentioned above has been given greater emphasis, and the diversity of groups that can be examined in the smaller sections within the larger unit has come to the forefront. The possibilities for this method were first recognized by Péter Tomka, who gathered and evaluated the burial customs of the Avar population in the Little



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¹ Livia Bende described the population living in the region between the Tisza, Maros and Körös rivers in the second half of the Avar Period on the basis of their archaeological remains and burial customs. Bende, Livia: *Temetkezési szokások a Tisza–Körös–Maros közén az avar kor második felében (Burial Customs in the Region between the Tisza, Körös and Maros Rivers in the Second Half of the Avar Period)*. PhD dissertation (Budapest, 2005).

² A new methodological approach was introduced due to the work of Heinrich Härke, which brought about significant changes in connection with the interpretation of the offering of grave goods. The researcher tried to understand the significance of early medieval Anglo-Saxon graves furnished with arms by combining continental and Anglo-Saxon methods. Härke emphasized the symbolic value of the arms placed in the graves, as well as the fact that they were the result of a conscious choice of grave goods. Another method, which was employed by Frank Siegmund and Robert Reiß makes conclusions not on social hierarchy from the combination of arms in male graves, but instead on armaments. Amongst Avar Period researchers, first József Szentpéteri and then Jozef Zabožník used the combination of arms for the examination of social hierarchy, amongst other factors. In connection with this topic, see: Bálint, Csanád: *Probleme der archäologischen Forschung zur awarischen Landnahme*. In: *Ausgewählte Probleme der europäischen Landnahmen des Früh- und Hochmittelalters*. Vorträge und Forschungen 41. (Müller-Wille, M.–Schneider, R. Sigmaringen 1993), 195–273.

Hungarian Plain region.³ He was followed by Livia Bende, who performed the evaluation on the second half of the Avar Period in the region between the Tisza, Körös and Maros rivers,⁴ and finally it is necessary to mention Gábor Lőrinczy, who followed a similar approach when he described the population of eastern European origin in the region east of the Tisza River.⁵ The latter work served as a model for the author in several aspects, since it considered a large, but relatively well definable geographic region to be a unit, and furthermore it examined every element of burial customs with the aid of data exclusively compiled following the most complete collection of materials.

The precursor to the book was Csilla Balogh's PhD dissertation that she defended in 2014, a partially reworked and supplemented version of which was published by Archaeolingua Publishing. The reworking of the manuscript dissertation entitled *A Duna–Tisza köze avar kori betelepülésének problémái (Problems of the Settlement of the Region between the Danube and Tisza Rivers in the Avar Period)* took place with the acceptance and integration of the opinions of the jury members Éva Garam and Béla Miklós Szőke. Due to this, the author expanded her work with a new chapter and placed greater emphasis on certain details, which made a change in title justified since the work does not only focus on the problems of settlement, but provides a comprehensive profile of the region's Avar Period remains. The book is divided into 10 chapters, with the sections on burial customs and material remains being the most extensive.

In the introduction it is possible to read about the structural arrangement of the work, and the author already emphasizes here that in place of the generally followed three-step separation into phases of the Avar Period, she divides it into two major phases. The unusual nature of the solution lies in the fact that the majority of researchers use the tripartite classification (early, middle and late) in the wake of Ilona Kovrig's analysis and elaboration of the Alattyán cemetery, and similar to this even more differentiated chronological divisions have been created in the usual analyses from German research.⁶ Csilla Balogh's decision is justified by the comparison of the characteristic changes between the two periods, since she examined the survival of the burial customs of the Early Avar population in the large mass of material from the second half of the Avar Period, and systematized the new phenomena while looking for the reasons that provoked the changes.

In the next two chapters one can read about the history of research on the region between the Danube and Tisza rivers and the methods employed during the research. The author employed quantitative methods,⁷ which were clarified with traditional typochronological analyses. In addition to this she also performed serialization analyses in the case of a few characteristic object types. Therefore, it is possible to talk about

³ Tomka, Péter: Adatok a Kisalföld avar kori népességének temetkezési szokásaihoz. Kés a sírban (Data on the Burial Customs of the Avar Period Population on the Little Hungarian Plain. Knife in the Grave). *Arrabona* 14 (1972), 27–75.; Tomka, Péter: Adatok a Kisalföld avar kori népességének temetkezési szokásaihoz II. A tájolás. (Data on the Burial Customs of the Avar Period Population on the Little Hungarian Plain II. The Orientation). *Arrabona* 17 (1975), 5–90.; Tomka, Péter: Adatok a Kisalföld avar kori népességének temetkezési szokásaihoz III. Koporsóhasználat a tápi temetőben. (Data on the Burial Customs of the Avar Period Population on the Little Hungarian Plain III. Use of Coffins at the Cemetery in Táp). *Arrabona* 19–20 (1977–1978), 17–108.; Tomka, Péter: Az avar kori temetkezési szokások kutatásának újabb eredményei. Kettős- és többes temetkezések. (Recent Results from Research into the Burial Customs of the Avar Period. Double and Multiple Burials). *Arrabona* 41 (2003), 11–56.

⁴ Bende, Livia: *Temetkezési szokások a Tisza–Körös–Maros közén az avar kor második felében (Burial Customs in the Region between the Tisza, Körös and Maros Rivers in the Second Half of the Avar Period)*. PhD dissertation (Budapest, 2005).

⁵ Lőrinczy, Gábor: A szegvár-oromdülői kora avar kori temető 1. sírja (Grave 1 from the Early Avar Period Cemetery at Szegvár-Oromdülő). In: *A Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve (Annual of the Móra Ferenc Museum)* 1984–1985/2 (1991), 127–154.

⁶ Amongst others, see: Daim, Falko: *Das awarische Gräberfeld von Leobersdorf, Niederösterreich*. Studien zur Archäologie der Awaren 3/1. (Wien, 1987); Zbojník, Jozef: Seriation von Gürtelbeschlagarnituren aus dem Gebiet der Slowakei und Österreichs (Beitrag zur Chronologie der Zeit des awarischen Kaganats). In: *K problematike osídlenia stredodunajskej oblasti vo včasnóm stredoveku* (Nitra, 1991), 219–321. Stadler, Peter: Archäologie am Computer: Awarische Chronologie mit Hilfe der Seriation von Grabkomplexen. In: *Reitervölker aus dem Osten. „Hunne + Awaren.“* (Halbturn, 1996), 456–461.

⁷ In the case of burial customs, Csilla Balogh examined the occurrence of individual phenomena in relation to the entire region between the Danube and Tisza rivers, and at cemeteries with a large number of graves where there was a great deal of data available, she prepared accounts for the individual cemeteries.

a complex statistical method, in which the aspects of relative chronology, stratigraphy and typology are employed together.

In the next two sections of the book it is possible to read about the natural conditions of the region between the Danube and Tisza rivers, as well as the possible survival and the settlement areas of the Sarmatian and Gepid ethnic groups that lived in the area before the Avars. Csilla Balogh shows 54 Germanic sites on the map between the Danube and Tisza rivers; however she notes that due to their character they are not suitable for determining the intensity of settlement. In her opinion the natural conditions of the region between the Danube and Tisza rivers influenced the development of the Gepid settlement area, thus also providing an explanation for why there are no known Gepid sites west of the Tisza River valley.

The core of the volume is provided by the presentation and interpretation of burial customs and material remains. It must be emphasized that Csilla Balogh further expanded the database that appeared in her PhD dissertation with the new sites that have become known between 2013 and 2016, and she also performed evaluations on these. She evaluates the changes in burial customs and the regional differences in ritual elements by comparing the two periods. Due to this, the changes in the character of the sites, the direction of orientation of the graves, the grave forms and structures, the positioning of the corpses in the grave, the use of coffins, the grave sacrifices and the objects for the afterlife become obvious. On the basis of her observations, she concludes that the dead from communities arriving to the region between the Danube and Tisza rivers from another area or areas at the middle-last third of the 7th century may have been laid in the newly opened cemeteries. This is indicated by the phenomena, rituals and new grave forms as well as the changes in the numbers and character of sacrificial animals that took place in the area at this time. She believes that the appearance of floor cavity burials and partial sacrificial animals shows a strong relationship with the region east of the Tisza River, and implies the resettlement of certain Early Avar Period communities. In connection with this, the question also arises about the extent to which these examples from east of the Tisza River can be considered relevant analogies, since in that region a northeast-southwest orientation, a cavity located on the right side, a greater number of full or partial sacrificial animals and a relative abundance of finds is characteristic. In contrast with this, in the region studied by the author a northwest-southeast orientation is dominant, the cavity is often located on the left side, the shaft is empty without exception and the grave goods are scanty. Csilla Balogh notes that the examination of the topic is made more difficult by the fact that a significant portion of Avar Period floor cavity graves are as yet unpublished, so their detailed analysis and a fully comprehensive comparison of their distinctive character is a task for researchers in the future.

During the presentation of the material remains the author did not separate the genders, due to the fact that several object types can be found in the apparel of both the females and males. In addition to the descriptions, a goal was the determination of types, the origin of objects, their place of production and their dating, as well as determining the social status of the users of the object groups. Following the analysis, the author reviews the relationship of the find materials to cultural history, the issue of power centers and the period entitled “after Kunábony” on the basis of the outstandingly rich grave goods. For the determination and differentiation of rank in the social hierarchy, archaeologists primarily included objects of prestige, studded belts that were previously interpreted as indicators of rank and gold objects.⁸ On the basis of the so-called chieftain graves in the region between the Danube and the Tisza rivers and on the basis of the

⁸ In the German professional literature, graves interred with rich grave goods are called *Prunkgrab*. Amongst the common features of rich graves are the observations of a special treatment of the grave area or that the goods placed in the grave reflected a rich lifestyle. See: Kossack, Georg: *Prunkgräber. Bemerkungen zu Eigenschaften und Aussagewert*. In: *Studien zur vor- und frühgeschichtlichen Archäologie. Festschrift für Joachim Werner zum 65. Geburtstag, Münchner Beiträge zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Ergänzungsband 1*. (Kossack, G.–Ulbert, G. München 1974), 3–33. Bálint, Csanád a *Prunkgrab* kifejezés kapcsán tett módszertani megfigyeléseket az avar társadalom vizsgálatára vonatkozólag (The Methodological Observations Made in Connection with the Term *Prunkgrab* in Relation to the Examination of Avar Society). See: Bálint, Csanád: *Der Reichtum der Awaren. „Fürstengräber”, Prunkgräber, Schatzfunde*. In: *Herrschaft, Tod, Bestattung: zu den vor- und frühgeschichtlichen Prunkgräbern als archäologisch-historische Quelle. Internationale Fachkonferenz Kiel 16.–19. Oktober 2003*. Universitätsforschungen zur prähistorischen Archäologie 139. (Carnap-Bornheim C. et al. Bonn 2006), 147–159.

other sites with the exception of the Kunpeszér cemetery, the remains seem to be scanty, and the females have obviously more modest grave goods than would be expected on the basis of the rich burials.

The problem of when and where the center of the Avars was located, or whether there was this kind of “central location” at all (for a shorter or longer period) has been a much debated issue in the research on the era.⁹ The possibility of one hypothetical central location is reinforced by the Carolingian sources that report on the sack of the “*Avar hring*”, and the existence of a center of this kind is also reinforced by contemporary examples that talk about the centers of similar groups/states (Khazars, Bulgars).¹⁰ If a center of this kind existed in the final period of Avar statehood, the question is from what time did it exist and where could it have been? Unfortunately, we do not have even this much data available in relation to earlier periods. Archaeology has tried to delineate this possible center on the basis of the distribution of rich graves. Csilla Balogh’s extensive examination on the archaeological remains shows that no materials indicating a khaganate center in the region between the Danube and Tisza rivers in the first third of the 7th century is known,¹¹ however the author believes that the seat of a chieftain in the northern section of the area outlined by rich graves became a power center from the second quarter of the 7th century. The graves in the northern third of the area are dated to 660, but the prominent role of the area later is also emphasized, supported by the layered burials with armaments surrounding the center.

The final three chapters present the chronological phases and system of relationships determined through the aid of the finds, and the closing summary of the volume outlines a model of the region’s Avar Period settlement. In terms of the material remains, the author indicates three possible influences that affected the region between the Danube and Tisza rivers: Late Antique/Byzantine, Germanic and Asian. Csilla Balogh reevaluates numerous issues in this section, such as the background of placing sickles in the grave. Péter Somogyi examined this issue previously, and according to him it is a phenomenon of eastern (Bulgar) origin, which hypothetically moved west, and thus into the Carpathian Basin as well, with the migration of the sons of Kubrat.¹² In contrast with this opinion, Csilla Balogh highlights the Germanic background of this custom, since as a work implement it appeared as a grave good already in the 6th century – although in very few cases – in Gepid and Longobard graves of the Carpathian Basin. In addition to showing the three influences mentioned above, the author separated out the objects and phenomena of foreign origin from the existing Early Avar Period remains in the Avar material culture that developed in the region between the Danube and Tisza rivers, and so composed a comprehensive profile of the first people who settled here.

During her presentation of the burial customs and material remains Csilla Balogh used a division into two periods, although she differentiated three main periods on the basis of the change, disappearance or emergence of new elements of customs, and these she then broke down into a further six chronological phases. In the three main periods (essentially the Early, Middle and Late Avar Periods) impulses are seen in the area, indicated by innovations or changes in the find materials. The starting point for settlement has for the time being remained undetermined, but it is known that the cemeteries opened in the Early Avar Period were established at strategically important points, and this is when the settlement of the region between the Danube and Tisza rivers began as well. In the time of the intermediate or Middle Avar Period there was a

⁹ The writers of histories did not make mention of the early khaganate seat, and we have no archaeological evidence, so the hypothesis of the Avar ring castle (*hring*) for the time being remains a romantic notion.

¹⁰ For the Carolingian sources, see: Szőke Béla: Az avarok hringje (The Hring of the Avars). *Archaeologiai Értesítő* (*Archaeological Bulletin*) 87 (1960), 61–63.

¹¹ This hypothesis is in harmony with the observations of József Szentpéteri, who placed the center of the early Avar Khaganate in the center of the region west of the Danube, in the vicinity of Zamárdi, and furthermore, according to his opinion the seat in the period indicated previously may have moved into the area being studied. Szentpéteri, József: A Barbaricumból Pannoniába. (Germán katonai segédnépek a kora avar kori Avar Kaganátus központjában) (From Barbaricum to Pannonia. [Germanic Military Auxiliary Troops at the Early Avar Period Avar Khaganate Center]). In: „*In terra quondam Avarorum...*” Ünnepi tanulmányok H. Tóth Elvira 80. születésnapjára (“*In Terra Quondam Avarorum...*” *Celebratory Essays for the 80th Birthday of Elvira H. Tóth*), eds. Somogyvári, Á.–V. Székely, Gy. *Archaeologica Cumanica* 2. (Kecskemét, 2009), 235–252.

¹² Somogyi, Péter: A Kárpát-medencei sarlós temetkezési szokás eredete (The Origin of the Custom of Burials with Sickles in the Carpathian Basin). *Archaeologiai Értesítő* (*Archaeological Bulletin*) 109 (1982), 191–200.

new group moving in from the east, and then the find materials from the late period are characterized by a large-scale standardization.¹³

The research performed by the author is the first step in the task to fill an existing gap. The work published here is a summary of nearly two decades of research work, since the author has already written numerous essays and articles on the burial customs and material finds of the region and the period. Since the selection and full examination of a micro-region is time-consuming and meticulous work, summaries of them are rare. This is also indicated by the fact that up to this point similar elaborations have only been produced on the region east of the Tisza River and on the Little Hungarian Plain region, which the author also compared with her own observations. The analyses in the volume are aided by 88 pictures, 5 diagrams and 31 charts, and the author did not only employ all of the literature on Avar Period research in the examination, but in addition compared the region being studied with a wider range of contemporary remains and archaeological phenomena (utilizing archaeological works on the steppe, Bulgar and Byzantine regions, as well as on Merovingian and Carolingian period areas). Thanks to the English language summary, the work is also accessible to international research. The brief summaries before the individual chapters and sub-sections aid in their interpretation, and the carefully selected photographic material and reconstruction illustrations help the reader understand the written descriptions. The informative picture captions appear in two languages, and the scale bars appearing in the tables aid scientific work, although in places – in particular in the case of graves – the lack of a direction arrow represents a problem. The incidence of burial customs and material remains is illustrated on maps by the author, but difficulty is caused by the fact that the listing of the sites is not found under the image, instead the number combinations are indicated in the table in the back of the book.

The publication of a “continuation” mentioned in the work can be expected in the near future, or in other words the publication of the corpus of cemetery reports that provide the basis of the previous elaborations, which will certainly be another cause for celebration amongst researchers dealing with the Avar Period.

¹³ Csilla Balogh's periodization: phase 1 (?/600–620/625), phase 2 (620/625–650/660), phase 3 (650/660–670–675), phase 4 (670/675–700/710), phase 5 (710/720–730/750), phase 6 (730/750–826).