

SUMMARY

01. History of archaeological research at Sighișoara - Dealul Viilor, site „Necropolă” (1987 - 2010). (Radu Harhoiu)

The site „Necropolă (Cemetery)” is located on the eastern edge of the municipality of Sighișoara (german Schäßburg, hungarian Szekesvár), county Mureș. It lies on the second terrace of the right bank of the river Târnava Mare, cca. 350 m upstream from the settlement of Prehistory and the 3rd-8th and 12th Century AD at Dealul Viilor (site „Așezare (Settlement)”). The country road connecting Sighișoara to the Boiu parish forms a kind of artificial axis for the studied site, with contexts uncovered both north of the road (zone „A”) and to the south (zone „B”). It is very likely that further archaeological traces (including burials) lie under the road, but it was not possible to excavate them.

In 1987 the research at the site „Așezare” had practically reached the limits of the area accessible for excavation. Several layers of settlements covering the time from pre- to post-roman times had been uncovered (HARHOIU, BALTAG *Sighișoara-Dealul Viilor*).

One of the questions, which had always been in the focus of the team then, was to identify the burials corresponding to the various settlement levels at the site „Așezare”. For this aim, repeated surveys were carried out, as a consequence of which in 1987 some human bones were found at the site later named „Necropolă”. In the first control-trench excavated at this point, five post-roman burials were identified, as well as some pre-roman settlement traces. In fact that was the beginning of a new archaeological research programme, which has unfolded with varying intensity until today, and in which

scientists, museum specialists and student from Romania and other countries participated.

Although the scientific aims are clear, in spite of the fact that the research at the site „Așezare” has been published in a monograph and ignoring the fact that at Sighișoara - Dealul Viilor a base-camp has been established, where the archaeological material has been put into order, processed and documented in best conditions, the Ministry of Culture (Ministerul Culturii), through its Archaeological Commission (Comisia Arheologică) has repeatedly interrupted the financing of research or refused excavation permits. The granting of symbolic financial means only underlines the grotesque and irresponsible politics of those who have taken the responsibility of heading archaeological research in Romania, illustrated also by the reduced dynamics of the archaeological research at the important site of Sighișoara - Dealul Viilor - „Necropolă”.

The archaeological studies at the site of Sighișoara - Dealul Viilor - „Necropolă” have led to the identification of important remains (412 contexts) originating from pre-roman times (cultures of Wietenberg, Noua, Early Iron Age and Late La Tène), the post-roman and Early Medieval periods. The post-roman remains, which often disturbed the prehistoric contexts, are represented by three necropolises (from the 3rd Century AD, the 4th Century AD and the 6th Century AD), pottery kilns from the 4th and the 8th Centuries AD, while the Early Medieval period is represented by settlement contexts and a cemetery of the late 12th and early 13th Century AD.

02. Prehistoric settlement traces and burials (Nikolaus Boroffka, Rodica Boroffka)

The excavations at the site „*Necropolă*” uncovered numerous funerary and settlement remains belonging to the cultures of the Bronze Age (Wietenberg and Noua) and the Early Iron Age (Channeled Pottery and Gáva), to which a few pottery fragments may be added, which date much earlier, Neolithic or Eneolithic, but whose exact cultural attribution can not be determined.

The majority of documented materials consists of pottery and fragments of burnt daub, besides which there are objects from clay (small finds such as spindlewhorls, wheel-models, heads of staffs) or stone, a few metal objects and animal and/or human bones (some worked), sometimes burnt.

Two burnt clay platforms, covered by daub from collapsed walls belong to the Wietenberg culture, as well as some pits and typical pottery sherds from the cultural layer, all from the southern excavation area (Area B) of the site „*Necropolă*”. Five cremation burials in urns were located not far from the two mentioned structures, some disturbed, and some with ceramic or other (bone beads) inventory. North of the country road (Area A) which cuts the excavation area of „*Necropolă*” a small pit and another cremation burial were found, also of the Wietenberg culture. The pottery characteristics allow a clear attribution to phase C of the culture according to the classification of BOROFFKA *Wietenberg*. The small distance between the platforms and the burials raises the question as to which extent these constructions are remains of living quarters or whether they are features connected to funerary practices.

Pottery sherds characteristic of the Noua culture were found in the cultural layer of most excavated areas, while north of the country road remains of a clay platform and three find concentrations were identified, which indicate living contexts. Fragments of kantharoi with button handles, sack-shaped

vessels, simple plastic rib ornaments and narrow channeling are present among the Noua material from „*Necropolă*”. A partial chronological overlapping of the Noua settlement with the Wietenberg presence can not be excluded.

Some contexts similar to those mentioned above are of special interest (clay platforms and pits). They were uncovered in the northern and the southern study area and contained Noua material in association with early channeled pottery of Urnfield/Hallstatt type. At least in the case of the house remains these materials were „sealed” by the remains of the collapsed walls, which had fallen onto the pottery found on the beaten clay floors. In this case the contemporaneity and cohabitation of Noua communities with those of the beginning Urnfield/Hallstatt period is clearly demonstrated.

Distributed over the entire studied area and more numerous are contexts of the Early Hallstatt period and the Gáva culture: houses, pits, fireplaces, concentrations of finds, sherds in the cultural layer, and certainly one cremation burial in an urn, possibly also several other cremation burials in pits. The walls of the houses were built from beams, boards and wattle twigs, all of which have left impressions in burnt daub. Among the pits some may be remarked due to their greater distance from other contemporary structures and by the contents, which consist of ashes, charcoal, and highly burnt pottery and daub, sometimes to deformation and vitrification. Some also contain animal bones. The later pottery, judging by shapes and ornaments, belongs to the classical phase of the Gáva culture. Two fragmentary objects, strongly burnt secondarily (partly vitrified) stand out: a kind of portable fireplace and a large clay basin.

The analysis of context and material, especially the pottery and clay remains, from „*Necropolă*” allow the reconstruction of architectural techniques for the prehistoric houses, as well as providing new data on Gáva funerary practice, perhaps also of the

Wietenberg culture. The presence of a characteristic sherd of late Monteoru type, found in the cultural layer in the southern part of „Necropolă”, may be connected to one of the Bronze Age cultures (Wietenberg or Noua) while a fragment with cord-impression documents contacts with the Cruceni-Belegiș I culture towards the southwest for the early Urnfield Period.

The discussion on periodisation and chronology of the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age in Transylvania is encumbered by the postulation of numerous cultural groups, often without clearly outlined contents, chronology or spatial distribution. A useful instrument for ordering the material is the dating by radiocarbon analysis.

The uncovered situations and inventories of the settlements at the sites „Așezare” and „Necropolă” together offer the image of a loosely settled area. The prehistoric settlement of the Bronze and Early Iron Ages appears to have existed without observable interruptions for almost a millennium, from around 1750 BC (Wietenberg C) to around 850 BC (end of classical Gáva). The cultural evolution appears gradual and without indications of violent conflict, facts which indicate peaceful cohabitation of the communities, integrating various elements from differing material cultural traditions.

03. The La Tène period materials and their relevance for the microregion (Daniel Spânu)

Some pottery sherds and a bone comb with semicircular handle indicate a small settlement of pre-Roman time. Most probably the material can be dated to the 1st Century BC. Although very modest, this site of the late La Tène period fits well into the complex archaeological landscape formed by the treasures from Hetiur and Șaeș, other settlement remains at Sighișoara „Valea Dracului” and Albești „Sub Cetățea”, traces which all gravitate around the *oppidum* of Sighișoara „Wietenberg”.

04. Necropolis 1. A cemetery of the 2nd-3rd Century AD (Daniel Spânu)

At the site „Necropolă” nine cremation burials were found in urns of various shapes, made from fine grey ware and produced by means of the rapidly rotating wheel. With a single exception (two cauldron-shaped pendants in grave 195), these burials did not contain metal inventory. By the similarity of rite, another two cremation burials in pits may probably also be attributed to this cemetery. The chronological and cultural determination of this small cemetery leads to the discussion of analogies with characteristic materials of Provincial Roman kind and the Poieniști-Vârteșcoiu culture, as well as some differences compared to the rituals of the Sântana de Mureș - Cherneakhov culture. Most probably these cremation burials belong to a rural Provincial necropolis of the 2nd Century AD and first half of the 3rd Century AD.

05. Context 243/ 271. A pottery kiln of the 4th Century AD (Radu Harhoiu)

The pottery kiln (context 243/271), oriented NE-SW, consists of a firing chamber dug into the yellow clay of the sterile soil. Inside this chamber two rectangular sandstone slabs were fixed in the clay, onto which stone slabs were mounted in horizontal position, probably to serve as grate on which the pottery was placed for firing; in the SE of the firing chamber lay a channel for feeding the fire, which widened out to the working pit. The kiln contained animal bones, among them two horns of young stags, as well as wheel made pottery, and in lesser quantity, hand made ceramics. The wheel made pottery includes gray ware, with rough, cement-like surface and sand temper, sometimes lightly polished inside and outside, such as is the case with a fragmentary mortarium bowl, or fine gray ware with polished decorations. The gray ware of lower quality, with larger stones in the temper, is a specific technical variety for

pots with rounded body, squat pots which may be reconstructed, some misfired fragments (bloated) and thin-walled pots. The fragment of an *oenochoe* jug from gray, cement-like clay with fine sand temper and polished surfaces allows dating the context 243 to the 4th Century AD. Deformed fragments of reddish fine ware, sometimes with gray core, and the fragmentary mortarium bowl made from cement-like clay, slightly polished on both surfaces, offer arguments for a pottery production in Roman tradition after the Province had been given up.

06. Necropolis 2. A cemetery of the 4th Century AD (Radu Harhoiu)

The spatial distribution of burials dating from the 4th Century lies both north and south of the virtual axis of the research area (the road Sighișoara-Boiu), with a tendency to concentrate to the west. However, it needs to be mentioned that the graves of the 12th Century appear to have destroyed the central part of the 4th Century cemetery.

An analysis of the funerary ritual indicates a relationship to Sarmatian culture, but also to the Sântana de Mureș - Cherneakhov culture. Thus, the N-S orientation is one of the characteristics of the funerary horizon of the Sântana de Mureș - Cherneakhov culture, while the provision of a niche for inventory vessels is encountered both in burials attributed to the Sarmatians, and among those of the Sântana de Mureș - Cherneakhov culture. Connections to the two cultural phenomena are also suggested by the costume accessories observed. Thus, long strings of beads, some perhaps sewn onto clothing, or small decorations of the arms with strings of beads are usual especially among the Sarmatian burials, while the wearing of two fibulae on the shoulder is better known from the Sântana de Mureș - Cherneakhov area.

The typological study of the inventories allows dating them to the end of the 3rd Century and throughout the 4th Century AD. In this sense costume accessories as well as ornaments are relevant: the bone comb with

semicircular handle, the fibula with lateral pin-rest (type A. VI, 2), the fibula with trapezoidal foot turned underneath (type A. VI. 181) or the fibula with narrow foot, just as wide, slightly rounded and turned underneath (type 09b2), but also the glass vessels (fragments of cups decorated with hexagonal facets) or the pottery (pots and jugs) deposited in the graves. The typological analysis shows connections to similar objects from burials east or south of the Carpathians and to the Tisza Plain, which are attributed to the Sarmatians, but especially to the repertoire of types specific for the Sântana de Mureș - Cherneakhov burials.

The funerary contexts of the 4th Century at Sighișoara can thus be included in what K. Horedt named: „Sântana de Mureș culture with foreign influences“ - a cultural group in which, besides the specific elements of the Sântana de Mureș - Cherneakhov culture, represented in Sighișoara by the glass vessels or the pottery produced on the fast rotating wheel, to which costume parts and the burial rites may be added, foreign elements also appear, whose origins may be seen in the burials ascribed to the Sarmatians (long strings of beads, hand-made pots with knobs etc). This phenomenon, observed in the valley of the Târnava Mare at Rugănești as well, may represent one of the consequences of the cultural uniformisation of the extra- and intracarpethian space as a result of the formation of the Sântana de Mureș - Cherneakhov culture at the end of the 3rd and during the 4th Century.

Historic-archaeological background

The funerary remains of the last decades of the 3rd and from the 4th Century at *Dealul Viilor* need to be connected to a „drawn out conquest of Transylvania“ by the Goths, or, more precisely, with the spread of the Sântana de Mureș - Cherneakhov culture in parts of the former Province Dacia. This connection also implies a discussion of the burial rites attributed to the autochthonous population which remained on the territory of the former Province Dacia after it was abandoned by the Romans.

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The construction of inhumation burials with bricks or tiles, the re-use of some sarcophagi, the deposition as inventory of jewellery, as well as earrings with cubic pendants, hairpins with polyhedral heads, pendants in the shape of Hercules clubs, fibulae with onion-shaped knobs, bracelets, besides the inclusion of coins of the late 3rd and the 4th Century, illustrate a funerary horizon characteristic of the former urban settlements. Unfortunately, most such contexts come from unclear research circumstances. The chronological placement of this horizon, to the last decades of the Province and the beginning of the following century may need correction.

The burial built from bricks and tiles with a Hercules-club pendant from Miercurea Sibiului belongs to the second half of the 3rd Century, as do the burials with fibulae with onion-shaped knobs from Turda and Târnăvioara (type 1 after Pröttel, dated to the 60s of the 3rd Century). The bracelets from the cemetery placed in the *Thermae* at Alba Iulia, or the coins from the same site, whose context remains unclear, plead for a date sometime in the 4th Century. The same chronological period is also suggested by the octagonal pendant or the hairpins with polyhedral heads from the „southeastern cemetery” of Cluj.

The cremation burials from Iernut (one dated by a coin of Severina, from the year 275), and the pottery from Baciul or Cuci illustrate manifestations of a rural society, which can not be dated later than the end of the 3rd Century.

The funerary discoveries of Obreja, Soporul de Câmpie, Mediaș and Șopteriu have been connected to the immigration and settlement of the Carps in the Province of Dacia. The Amphora-urn from Grave 143 indicates a relationship between the cremation Necropolis 1 of Sighișoara Dealul Viilor and the Poienești-Vârteșcoiu („carpic”) culture. Independently of their ethnic attribution, their hypothetical date to the end

of the 3rd Century, at latest, appears very likely.

The survival of all these burial groups in the 4th Century is far from clear. They can thus hardly be used as a decisive argument for a late date of the integration of Transylvania, only in the second half of the 4th Century, into the distribution area of the Sântana de Mureș - Cherneakhov culture. Dating these various burial variants to the period of the second half of the 3rd Century and the beginning of the following Century, as a reflection of the dark years of abandonment of the Province, seems more plausible.

Just like in Moldavia or in Muntenia, but also in the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, the Sântana de Mureș - Cherneakhov burials in Transylvania are characterised by the burial of the deceased in large necropolises, in which inhumation is practiced, with cremation present rarely. The orientation of the graves is N-S, but may also be W-E and a large variety of pottery shapes, jewellery and costume accessories, or tools, are included as inventory, while armament is lacking. This phenomenon of cultural unification appears to end in the last quarter of the 4th Century.

The large pits, sometimes with burnt walls, in which animal remains were deposited (sometimes bovines), to which may be added the inclusion of tools, and especially the complete lack of cremated human bones, make the so-called cemetery 1 of Bratei an unusual situation, not only in the Carpathian Basin.

The cultural landscape of Transylvania in the 4th Century can be completed by some settlements (Mugeni, Sighișoara, Sugeagu, Țaga) which have houses built of structures including wooden posts, others with heating installations, such as stone ovens or fireplaces.

The potters of Sighișoara - Dealul Viilor at the sites „Așezare” and „Necropolă” produced ceramics on the fast rotating wheel, from coarse or fine clay, fired in a reducing

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atmosphere. The large quantity of animal bones, amongst which bovinds, caprids and pigs dominate, then the sickles, ploughshares, smithing tongs or goldsmiths tools found in the pits of cemetery 1 at Bratei demonstrate the variety of activities of the inhabitants of the former Province. There are serious arguments in favour of connecting this horizon with the romanian population of the former Roman Province, although its duration as an independent identifiable manifestation with presently applicable archaeological methods remains unclear.

The funerary horizon Fântânele „Rât” of northern Transylvania is closely connected to the end of the intracarpethian Sântana de Mureş - Cherneakhov culture. The specifics of this group are demonstrated by the strict S-N orientation of the deceased and the deposition of arms (axes). This archaeological expression, with analogies in the Upper Tisza Basin and in the Dobrodzien group of Poland, is dated to the last decades of the 4th Century and the first decades of the following Century and may be attributed to the Gepids, at that time under the authority of the Huns.

With the end of the Sântana de Mureş - Cherneakhov culture the uniform cultural evolution of the intra- and extracarpethian parts of Romania ceased, and that for more than 1500 years. On the other hand, the Vizigoths, bearers of the Sântana de Mureş - Cherneakhov culture, became archaeologically visible only a hundred years later, and that only after the foundation of the Tolosan Kingdom and only in Central Castille and in Septimania.

07. Necropolis 3, a cemetery of the eastern circle of row-burials (Radu Harhoiu)

All funerary finds of the 6th - 7th Century are inhumations, a rite specific to Transylvania in this period, while outside the Carpathians, with only few exceptions, cremation was practiced, as far as we can

judge from the still unpublished cemetery with several hundred burials at Sărata Monteoru.

Different from the burials of the 4th Century, in this period seizably more cases of structural features in the grave pits are documented. The rectangular pit with rounded corners of the strongly disturbed grave 115, observed at -0,60 m, suddenly narrowed at -0,85 m, forming a kind of ledge, on which a wheel-thrown vessel had been deposited. Otherwise, in the case of Grave 3, undisturbed in Antiquity, the pit is very narrow, rounded moreover in the SW, while in the NW, near the feet, a space is left, in which nothing was deposited.

Traces of wood in graves 10, 14, 18 and 175 may be remains of troughs or coffins or of boards in or on which the dead had been placed. In grave 10, the *tibiae* and the bones of the feet lay at -1,70 m, i.e. 5 cm lower than the *femura*.

The dominant orientation of the burials is WSW, similar to those in cemetery 3 at Bratei and conform to the general image of burials from the 6th - 7th Centuries in Transylvania and the Tisza Basin.

Differently from the burials of the 4th Century, in the 6th - 7th Century the disturbances by secondary interventions usually concern the entire skeleton. The motives for such disturbances (robbing, profanation) remain undetermined. The hypothesis of robbing is countered by the situation in cemetery 3 at Bratei where, although the graves were heavily disturbed, many inventory pieces (costume accesories, weapons, horsegear) were left behind, often in their original position. The intensive disturbance of burials of the 6th - 7th Centuries fits into a phenomenon with strong resonance in the funerary parctices of Transylvania, the Tisza Basin and Pannonia.

The dating of the studied burials into the eastern circle of row-burials (end of the 5th - first half of the 7th Century) is supported by several arguments:

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a. Details of the pit furnishing, dominant WSW orientation, elements of inventory and grave offerings, amongst which the deposition of weapons (grave 15) and the hypothetical deposition of parts of an horse (grave 186) have special importance.

b. Stratigraphic overlappings. Thus, grave 183, oriented WSW, disturbed and without inventory, belonging to the eastern circle of row-burials, lies above grave 184, oriented N-S, belonging to the burials of the 4th Century. This situation also allowed the chronological attribution of burial 182, nearby, to the eastern circle of row-burials.

c. The typological network of inventory objects, with analogies both in the eastern circle of row-burials, and in the contemporary funerary horizon of the Tisza Plain.

d. Differently from the graves of the 4th Century, those dated to the 6th Century (and the first half of the following one) tend to group south of the virtual axis of the funerary space, and south of the burials of the 12th Century.

Historic-archaeological background

The deposition of dead in groups or individual burials was given up in Transylvania during the 6th Century, as well as the fastuous funerary expression. It was replaced by a new tendency – *the eastern circle of row-burials* – with the deceased oriented W-E, and equipped with weapons, tools, and usually a single pottery vessel. The repertoire is formally dominated by *fibulae* with cast relief decoration or with circle-and-dot ornaments, earrings with massive polyhedral end, less often with openwork ends, buckles with eagle-heads, as well as buckles with cell-work on the plate, oval buckles, usually of bronze and combs with two rows of teeth. The funerary inventory and the burial practice show close connections to the contemporaneous mosaic of the Tisza Basin and demonstrate the archaeological reflection of the power structure of the Gepid kingdom, as suggested by the distribution pattern of the

buckles with eagle heads. Their dating to the first two thirds of the 6th Century (more precisely up to the collapse of the Gepid kingdom in 567) appears convincing. The typological connection of the archaeological material (earrings with polyhedral ends, structure and system of fibula decoration) are suggestive, but also certain aspects of the burial practice of the second half of the 5th Century (inhumation burials oriented W-E, deposition of weapons).

The Avar conquest of the Carpathian Basin in 567 also caused significant change in Transylvania. Cemeteries with larger numbers of burials (Archiud, Band, Bistrița, Bratei, Gâmbaș, Noșlac or Valea Largă) are characterised by the deposition of new kinds of arms (helmets, winged arrowheads) and an intensification of pottery deposition. New earring-shapes appear (with star-shaped or spherical pendants) and the belt components are accentuated (belt-tongues, buckles with shield-shaped spikes, byzantine buckles or silver-plated belt parts). Among the new elements with animal style, toothed ornaments, and pressed decorations may be mentioned. Many clothing accessories or pieces of jewellery come from the Empire, but those produced by local masters are no less frequent, as may be exemplified by the Gepid master from Grave 10 at Band. All these elements define a group dated to the last quarter of the 6th Century and the first half of the following one.

Probably due to the cultural influence of the Avar Khaganate horsegear, horses or horse-parts are placed in the graves. At the same time the analysis of burial habits shows some continuity of traditions inherited from the previous funerary horizon. In the cemetery at Band and in cemetery 3 at Bratei the horizontal stratigraphy of details in the burial rites suggest a phenomenon of acculturation which, during the 7th Century, eventually led to the disappearance of the Gepids in an archaeologically recognizable form. This funerary horizon should not be interpreted as an archaeological reflection of

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ethnic refugee groups fleeing from the Avar advance, but rather as a component of the new power installed on the Middle Danube after the year 567.

Contemporary to the late phase of the row-burials is the so-called early Avar group, documented in cemeteries with burials containing swords, axes, parts of horse skeletons together with harness equipment, earrings, sometimes with globular or pyramidal pendants. The lack of connections to the funerary horizon of the 6th Century, but also of characteristic elements of the late group of the eastern circle of burials in rows permits the classification of cemeteries like Lopadea Nouă or Cicău into a distinct group, with very close connections to the Early Avar necropolises of the Hungarian Plain.

The Transilvanian settlements of the 6th - 7th Century were not fortified and probably appeared as small villages of 10-15 homesteads, in which, during one generation, around 30 to 50 individuals lived. While at Morești, Bratei and other sites pit-houses dug into the ground were identified, with wooden post structures but without fire-installations, at Sighișoara - *Dealul Viilor* - „*Așezare*” the pit-houses did have such commodities. Evidently some of the houses without provisions for heating were probably workshops, such as those for weaving at Morești, whose inventory also included a large number of clay loom-weights. Surface houses were also inhabited, as is suggested by the gravel platforms discovered at Morești, probably provided with heating installations. The potters of the time produced a remarkable variety of shapes from gray coarse or fine clay on the fast rotating wheel, decorated with polished or stamped ornaments, such as were also similar for the ceramics from the Tisza Basin or Pannonia in the west.

In the upper Olt Basin, during the second half of the 6th Century, and in other areas only after the end of the period of row-burials,

probably after the middle of the 7th Century, a cultural phenomenon may be remarked, which is characterised by pottery of low quality, shaped by hand, sometimes decorated with impressions, pans and pots of the „Prague” type, then by pottery made on the slow rotating wheel, and with pit houses, without wooden suprastructure, containing stone ovens, sometimes of impressive dimensions. This archaeological group has close connections to Moldova and Muntenia and is documented in Transylvania in the Târnava (Sighișoara, Sălașuri) and Mureș Basins (Morești). It seems that this looser archaeological group becomes more consistent when the late Avar power is reorganised, and when it becomes identifiable as the Mediaș funerary group.

The archaeological expression from the second half of the 5th Century up to the middle of the 7th Century can be documented only in the western and central parts of Transylvania. The south-eastern zone does not appear touched by this phenomenon; here extra-Carpathian cultural elements may be observed. The border between these two spheres does not coincide with the impressive chain of the Carpathian mountains, but corresponds to the watershed between the Mureș Basin (part of the Middle Danube Basin) and that of the river Olt (part of the Lower Danube Basin). The new power structures, which appeared on the Lower Danube, as well as those on the Middle Danube after the middle of the 6th Century, led to the crystallisation of new and differing archaeological expressions. The archaeological types are not uniform and express formally differing structures, determined by differing cultural-geographic areas: Transylvania, as part of the Middle Danube Basin, Moldova, Muntenia and Oltenia as part of the Lower Danube Basin. Diversity and not uniformity are characteristic of the picture of settlements, as well as the repertoire of shapes and decorations.

08. Pottery kiln of the 8th Century. Archaeological context and analysis of the ceramics from the kiln (Daniel Spânu)

The research campaigns of 2012-2013 led to the discovery of a pottery kiln from the Late Avar period. The find consists of the production pit and the kiln itself. The excavation aimed at documenting the spatial organisation and the building structure of the ensemble. At the same time all the pottery from inside the kiln was recovered, documented and studied. The ceramics can be dated to the Late Avar period, i.e. the 8th Century. This discovery documents the use of the double-chambered kiln with vertical draught and a grate supported by consoles in the eastern extreme of the Avar Khaganate.

09. Cultural context of the pottery kiln from the Late Avar period. (Erwin Gall)

While the number of domestic ovens, placed in open air, from the period of the Avar Khaganate is considerable, that of pottery kilns from the same period is surprisingly small. So far only seven centers of pottery production have been identified for the three centuries of the Avar period, and they stand in sharp contrast to the high number of known cemeteries and settlements, but especially to the great quantity of ceramics of the period.

In order to explain this situation, in the research of the Avar period, two hypotheses have been expressed. According to an older hypothesis, proposed by M. Takács and A. Vaday, firing of pottery was done outside the settlements, in open air. Another idea was described by analogues from the research on pottery production in the Arpadian period. According to this, the ceramic production of the late Avar period was concentrated in certain specialised centers, not all identified, from where the end-products were distributed over large areas.

The period of functioning of the Avar period pottery kilns was probably short. Both at Kompolt and at Sighișoara the pottery

kilns were used as rubbish dumps shortly after they were abandoned. The ceramic materials from Sighișoara are very similar to those at Kompolt, so that their relative contemporaneity and the dating to the 8th Century may be presumed.

The distribution area of the products from this workshop may be analogous to the pottery center at Szekszárd, which was of a radius of 30 km at most. From this perspective the products from the workshop at Sighișoara could be spread to the west, perhaps even up to Bratei, or to the east, to the communities on the upper course of the Târnava Mare.

At the present stage of research the pottery kiln from Sighișoara – *Dealul Viilor* is the only one known in the Transylvanian Basin, and one of the few in the Carpathian Basin, dated to the time of the Avar Khaganate.

10. Context 359, a house of the 8th Century (Radu Harhoiu)

The context 359, a large surface dwelling, belongs to the Late Avar period. In the eastern corner it contained a heating installation, built from large stones with clay mortar and a fireplace with a red-fired surface. The inventory of the house includes pottery made on the slow wheel, in lesser quantity, and hand-made ceramics. The lack of shapes produced on the fast wheel characteristic of the Blandiana group (two-handled amphorae from fine gray clay etc.) dating from the 9th Century, and the general analysis of the inventory give important arguments for dating the context 359 to the Late Avar period (last decades of the 7th Century - beginning of the 9th Century).

Historic-archaeological background

The failed Avar siege of Constantinopol in AD 626 unleashed a long period of crisis in the Khaganate, marked by internal conflict and uprisings, such as those just a few years before (623/624) and that of the Frankonian merchant Samo, the founder of the first

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western-slavic political structure. Possibly the burying of the large hoard with *solidi* in the forests of the hills of Firtușu, in the upper Târnava Mare basin is connected to these events. Simultaneously to the penetration of the Protobulgars to the Danube during the last part of the 7th Century, probably the immigration of new groups from the steppe took place into the Avar Khaganate. These phenomena of migration were also followed by gradual cultural transformation marked by taking over traditions and elements of eastern culture, amongst which perhaps the most spectacular is the symbolism of the griffon.

The archaeological picture of the second half or last quarter of the 7th Century up to the beginning of the 9th Century has a distinct expression, of differing power structures - some specific to Transylvania, as part of the Middle Danube basin, while others of the South- and East-Carpathian territories, as part of the Lower Danube basin. In Transylvania, especially in the Middle Mureș Basin, a group is documented, which is represented by inhumation burials oriented NE-SW. The deceased were provided with cast belt sets, some decorated with griffons, arms (swords, lanceheads or arrowheads) or horse harness. Offerings in clay or wooden vessels are frequent. Often complete or partial horse skeletons are found beside the buried individuals. The close relationship of this group to the Late Avar horizon of the Carpathian Basin is evident. Their concentration in the region of the Middle Mureș may have been determined by the salt resources of that area.

Another category of burial grounds from the end of the 7th Century and from the 8th Century is represented by the necropolises of the Mediaș group. Differently from the funerary practice along the lower Danube, characterised by cremation burials in urns or in pits, the cemeteries of the Mediaș group are virtual. The modest funerary inventory consists of earrings with grape-shaped pendants, simple buckles and sometimes cast

belt fittings, strike-a-lights, knives or arrowheads. The urns are vessels produced on the slow wheel. The necropolises of this group are concentrated especially south of the Mureș, in the basin of the Târnava Mare and Târnava Mică.

The picture is completed by the burial mounds at Nușfalău and Someșeni in the valley of the Someșul Mic, which have funerary chambers and wooden platforms, onto which the cremated bones were placed in the middle, together with costume parts (including cast belt fittings), while laterally urns with cremated bones or wooden buckets were placed. This complex funerary horizon did not survive after the beginning of the 9th Century. An integral part of the Avar power structure, this horizon disappears with the fall of the Avar Khaganate.

The eastern influence visible during the 7th Century, in the structure of the dwellings from the settlements in eastern Transylvania, led to the crystallisation of an archaeological expression characteristic for the 8th Century. Living took place in villages with houses dug into the earth, amongst which few had structures supported by wooden posts and were provided with heating installations. Surface houses with well fired clay floors are rare. Dwellings dug into the ground, with stone ovens or fireplaces dug into the earth, dominate. Their rooves were probably supported by beams and posts fixed on the edges of the pits. In the inventories pottery produced on the slow wheel from coarse ware and with incised ornaments dominates, the repertoire being completed by fine pots thrown on the rapid wheel, hand-made pots and pans, as well as a variety of tools and utensils: hand mills, spindewhorls, knives, bone awls, sickles, woodworking tools.

The treasure from Sânnicolaul Mare is impressive by the integration and wealth of social, political and cultural values, which are synthesised from different origins (byzantine or central asian elements), with gold vessels, produced probably from the gold of the Late Avar Khaganate, and buried as a result of

tragic events, which led to its removal from the scene of history.

11. The settlement of the 12th-13th Century (Adrian Ioniță)

In the area of the site Sighișoara - Dealul Viilor - „Necropolă” a number of contexts and materials were discovered, which belong to a settlement of the 12th-13th Century. During almost 15 years of research 12 features were identified (dwellings, fireplaces, pits, a concentration of stones, charcoal and pieces of daub). The majority was brought to light in soundings excavated outside the funerary space. A total of 129 moveable objects was recovered, amongst which 116 fragments of pottery vessels and 13 diverse other objects, from 7 contexts, as well as *passim*. The 13 objects (7 of metal, 5 of bone and one whetstone) served various purposes - tools, utensils, arms and different other or not identifiable functions. To these we may add another 15 contexts (7 dwellings, 6 pits, one oven, one fireplace) excavated at Sighișoara - Dealul Viilor in the years 1976-1987 at the site „Așezare” - situated on the same terrace of the Târnava, around 300 m downstream from the site „Necropolă”, thus supplementing the settlement data for the period of the 12th-13th Century on the right bank of the Târnava in the Dealul Viilor area.

12. Necropolis 4, a burial ground of the 12th Century (Erwin Gáll)

At Sighișoara - Dealul Viilor - „Necropolă” 94 graves were excavated, in which 106 skeletons could be identified, which were attributed to the medieval cemetery on account of their spatial position and inventory. A total of 101 skeletons was recovered complete, another 5 had been disturbed, while 4 graves (numbers 140, 159, 172, 173) could not be excavated for various reasons and one pit (number 157) did not contain a skeleton. The central part of the cemetery was destroyed by the modern road. However, the great concentration of graves

and the frequency of overlays are characteristic for a funerary enclosure organised around a cult building (engl. „churchyard”, germ. „Kirchhof”, hung. „templom körüli temető”). The position and structure of the presumed church cannot be discussed; the remains were probably disturbed or destroyed by the mentioned road, which could not be excavated.

The burial ritual is exclusively inhumation. Among the deceased 22 adults, 32 adult-matures, 2 juveniles and 38 infants were identified visually, without professional anthropology performed. The high number of skeletons of small children is conform with observations of the Early Medieval Period concerning infant mortality. In the case of grave 31, a foetus was observed in the belly region of the adult (mother); both probably died due to complications at birth. A good analogy for the high infant mortality at Sighișoara - Dealul Viilor is illustrated in the cemetery at Vâl (12th-16th Century). There the highest risk of death is for children between 5 and 9 years and women between 15 and 19 years of age.

The cemetery at Dealul Viilor began to function in the first decades of the 12th Century and was in use up to the end of the reign of Béla III. The coins (hoard/purse) from grave 28B represents the last functional period of the cemetery, which dates to the end of the 12th Century or the beginning of the following Century.

The topographic position of the settlement and the cemetery may explain the status and the sense of the community on the banks of the Târnava Mare. Although the written sources of the time do not offer definite information, the settlement may have been a customs point for the salt transport to the west. An argument in support of this hypothesis is the hoard from Sânpaul-Bélabánvára, with coins of Ladislau I, Coloman Cărturar and Béla II.

The lack of chemical analyses on the bones does not permit scientific discussion of the way of life and diet of the community from

Summary

Sighișoara - *Dealul Viilor*, although it is generally considered that until the 14th Century the main occupation was stockbreeding. If we take account of the surrounding environment of the settlement and the cemetery at *Dealul Viilor*, the wide spacious valley and the proximity of water, then stockbreeding may be assumed for the community at *Dealul Viilor*, which would also have been essentially determined by climate evolution. We may presume a social multifunctionality of the settlement and a varied socio-economy of this community. It can be hypothesised that somewhere in the neighbourhood of the cemetery and settlement of the 12th Century a fortification from earth and wooden may have existed - possibly even a royal castle which controlled the narrow valley and the roads which intersected in the area of Sighișoara.

The community buried at *Dealul Viilor* did not occupy a position on the extreme south-

eastern border of the Hungarian Kingdom. This is demonstrated by the settlements, churches, cemeteries, hoards and isolated discoveries found to the south-east and east of Sighișoara, which also document the existence of a dense network of settlements datable to the 12th Century: the cemeteries around the churches of Avrămești, Chilean Cristuru Székely, Drăușeni, Feldioara, Jacodu, Odorheiu Secuiesc-*Szentimre*, Mugeni, Meresti, Ocland, Peteni, Petriceni, Ulieș, Viscri, Zăbala; „*motte*” type fortifications at Ocland, Racoșu de Jos-Rika, Racu (Ciuc)-Pogányvár, Tușnad-Vártető; royal castles at Odorheiu Secuiesc-*Budvár* or Praid; rural settlements at Văcărești, Bârzava, Ciceu, Misentea, Racu, Șumuleu, Ciuc-sângeorgiu, Sântimbru, Lelicieni, Sansimion, Tomești, Tușnad Sat, Garciu, Cotormani, Sfântu Gheorghe-Bedeháza and Turia.