

# Notes on the Weapons and Weapon Depositions from Cemetery 3 at Bratei (Sibiu County, Romania)\*

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## The cemetery no. 3 at Bratei

**T**HE ARCHAEOLOGICAL excavations at Bratei (H: Baráthely, G: Pretai, Sibiu County) began in 1959. Soon Bratei became one of the most important sites from the perspective of the archaeology of the Migration Period and the Early Middle Ages due to the fact that in the following 32 years an isolated burial, several small grave groups, three cemeteries, and three settlements were identified. Chronologically, they cover the period between the Early Migration Period and the Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup> The cemetery no. 3 was researched between 1964 and 1969. The excavations, conducted by Ion Nestor with the assistance of Eugenia Zaharia and Ligia Bârză, led to the identification of 294 graves. It seems that the extraction works in the sand pit situated in the area destroyed at least 100 burials (Bârză-Harhoiu 2008, 513; Zaharia 2010, 7). Likewise, another part of the cemetery was disturbed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the construction works of the railway and the road (Nestor-Zaharia 1973, 198). Still, except the recently identified graveyard from Luna (Roman et alii 2014), the cemetery no. 3 from Bratei is the largest necropolis dated in the Early Avar Age from Transylvania.

The results of the excavations have not been published completely for a long period of time. They were presented very shortly in the frame of a preliminary report. The authors dated the cemetery in the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries and connected it to the late Gepids living under Avar rule. In the same time they noticed the large quantity of artefacts with Christian character and of the Byzantine import pieces (Nestor-Zaharia 1973, 199).

In a short time, the cemetery from Bratei was integrated in the chronological system elaborated for the row-grave cemeteries from Transylvania by Kurt Horedt. It was included in group IV (Horedt 1977, 267, Fundliste 1, no. 3), named former Band-Vereşmort group (Horedt 1958, 97, 100–103). Horedt dated this group exclusively in the 7<sup>th</sup> century and interpreted it as ‘late Germanic’ excluding any connection with the Gepids (Horedt 1977, 261–263; Horedt 1986, 29–36). Later it was pointed out that the early phase of the cemeter-

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ies of Band-Vereşmort type can be dated as early as the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century (Bóna 1979, 43–46; Harhoiu 1999–2001, 127–130). In the case of the cemetery 3 from Bratei it is difficult to establish whether its beginning can be traced back to the Gepidic Age or it belongs completely to the Early Avar Age. No grave discovered in the cemetery can be dated with certainty before the Avar Age, but a group of finds belonging to the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century was discovered in the vicinity of the necropolis (Bârză 1991). Unfortunately, a relation between the two find spots cannot be established (Harhoiu 1999–2001, 129; Bârză—Harhoiu 2008, 528, Abb. 13; Harhoiu 2010b, 154; Dobos 2013, 256). From an ethnic point of view, most of the scholars admit a late Gepidic interpretation for the population of the cemeteries belonging to the Band-Vereşmort group (e.g. Bóna 1979, 37–50; Bóna 1986, 163; Cseh 1990; Kiss 1992; Harhoiu 1999–2001, 145; Bârză—Harhoiu 2008; Harhoiu 2010a; Harhoiu 2010b), while in the case of the late elements different ethnic groups, generally of eastern origin, were postulated in the archaeological literature.<sup>2</sup>

A more detailed analysis of the general characteristics of the cemetery, including a chronological and ethnic interpretation was published in 2008 (Bârză—Harhoiu 2008). The publication of the cemetery in the form of a monograph was carried out in 2010, being signed by Lîgia Bârză with the collaboration of Radu Harhoiu (Bârză 2010). The cemetery was dated in the period lasting from the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century until the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century and ascribed exclusively to the late Gepidic community which went through a process of acculturation (Bârză—Harhoiu 2008; Harhoiu 2010a; Harhoiu 2010b).

## Theoretical and methodological aspects

**T**HE ANALYSIS of the weapon burials has been one of the central topics of debate related to the early medieval funerary archaeology.<sup>3</sup> Basically, the scholars have focused on one main question: what kind of social status can be assigned to those members of the community who were buried with weapons? Decisive in this respect is whether one accepts that the weapon combinations discovered in the graves reflect the real armament and, consequently, the original social status of the buried persons or not. According to several scholars who admitted that the weapons and weapon combinations identified in the graves reflect the original equipment of the deceased, the data obtained from the weapon burials in correlation with the written sources can indicate directly the social and legal status.<sup>4</sup> Heiko Steuer was the first who doubted this view and stated that grave-goods represent mainly the financial power of the deceased, but the social status is reflected only in some cases and indirectly, while the legal status cannot be deduced at all (Steuer 1968, 30). In the same time he drew attention to the importance of the regional differences among the Merovingian Age weapon burials (Steuer 1982, 314). The idea that grave-goods reflect, first of all, economical power and not necessarily the social or legal status was emphasized by Rainer Christlein who established three quality groups for the Merovingian Age graves from West- and South-Germany (Christlein 1973 [1975]). In the case of the cemetery from Marktoberdorf, the lack of lavish grave-goods included in category C was explained by Christlein with the poor economical power of the people who used the necropolis (Christlein 1973 [1975], 147). Still, none of the abovementioned theories questioned the basic idea that the weapons discovered in the grave represent the original armament of the deceased. A further step in this respect was taken by Frank Siegmund who admitted that the weapons deposited in the grave were

not necessarily used by the deceased during his lifetime and, therefore, these are not relevant if one wants to reconstruct the armament of that individual. On the other hand, he argued that the weapon combinations established on the basis of the burials are representative for the community in general and, consequently, different fighting methods can be reconstructed which bear also an ethnic significance (Siegmund 2000, 293–300). Similarly, Robert Reiß distinguished two main models of weapon combinations which, in his opinion, represent different fighting techniques (close-combat and distant-combat) (Reiß 2007, 223–230).

New results were achieved through the analysis of the Anglo-Saxon weapon burials carried out by Heinrich Härke who noticed that several undisturbed graves contain only one weapon (in many cases a shield) and the deposited weapon types do not form a functional assemblage which could have been used by a warrior during his lifetime (Härke 1992, 113–121; Härke 1997, 119–120). An important step taken by Härke was the correlation of the archaeological results with the anthropological data. On these grounds he managed to point out that several individuals buried with weapons were unable to participate in a real fight in their lifetime due to their physical condition (sickness, too young age etc.). Therefore, he assigned a symbolic value for the weapons which in his view had an ethnic and mythical meaning representing, as a potential symbol of power and violence, a kind of propaganda for the legitimacy of the existing social system (Härke 1997, 120–124).

It was already noticed for a long time that certain categories of weapons (mainly spears and arrows) occur in the burials of younger persons, while others (first of all the *spathae*) can be found only in the adult burials (see e.g. Veeck 1926, 158; Steuer 1982, 313–314). This general observation was confirmed by several studies involving both archaeological and anthropological analysis which pointed out that the representation of the gender and age had a significant role in the early medieval burial rite (see e.g. Härke 1992, 182–190; Stoodley 1999; Barbiera 2005; Brather 2005, 162–167).

## Typology

**T**HE TYPOLOGICAL and chronological analysis of the weapons from Bratei has already been carried out by Radu Harhoiu in the monograph of the cemetery (Bârzu 2010, 118–125). For this reason only the main aspects will be summarized and, in few cases, completions will be made.

### 1. Swords (Fig. 1/1–6)

**F**IVE GRAVES (58, 77, 185, 214, and 218) contained swords. All of them are double-edged swords with straight blade (*spatha*) (Fig. 1/1–5). *Spathae* were the most common sword types in the pre-Avar Carpathian Basin and they are typical for the Merovingian cemeteries. In the Avar Age they are common in the early phase, later being replaced by the single-edged swords (Csiky 2011–2012 [2013], 81–82). The majority of the finds come from Transdanubia and Transylvania, but they are known in a smaller amount from the Tisza-region, too. Based on the Germanic antecedents, as well as the distribution of the Avar Age examples, Attila Kiss interpreted the double-edged swords as an ethnic marker and connected them to the Gepidic communities living under Avar rule (Kiss 1992, 51, Karte 1–2).

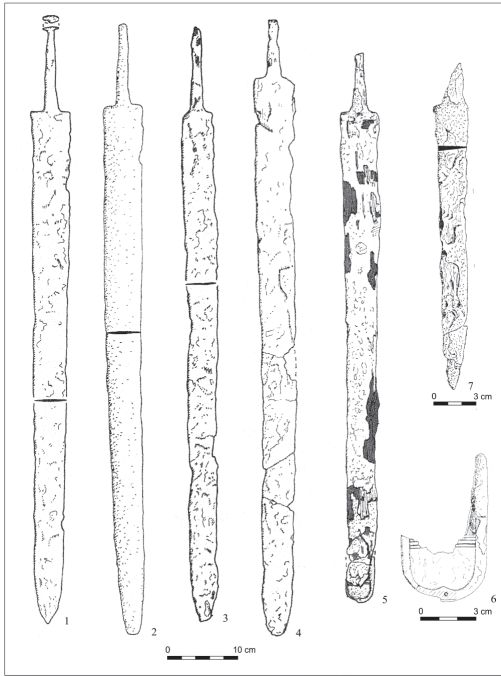


Fig. 1. Bratei, cemetery no. 3: 1–5. Double-edged swords: 1. grave 58; 2. grave 77, 3. grave 214; 4. grave 218; 5. grave 185; 6. Scabbard chape from grave 185; 7. Seax from grave 218. After Bârză 2010.

Traces of the scabbard were preserved only in the case of grave 185: a fragmentary scabbard mouth and a scabbard chape (Fig. 1/6). The latter was connected by Harhoiu with the scabbard chapes of Bülach-Valsgärde type, dated to the end of the 6<sup>th</sup>—first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> The sword from grave 58 has a pommel (Fig. 1/1). Similar pieces are known from several cemeteries from Transdanubia, like Kölked-Feketekapu A, grave 253 (Kiss 1996, Taf. 55/A 253.1), Kölked-Feketekapu B, grave 336 (Kiss 2001, Taf. 75/B 336.13), or Zamárdi-Rétiföldek, grave 523a (Bárdos—Garam 2009, Taf. 69/523/a.8, Taf. 228/5). The spade from cemetery A at Kölked-Feketekapu is dated *post quem* by a coin of Tiberius II (574–582) (Kiss 1996, 264). The spade from Kölked-Feketekapu B, grave 336 was accompanied by a three-part belt-set included in the 1<sup>st</sup> phase of the inner chronology elaborated for both cemeteries at Kölked, dated in the second half/last third of the 6<sup>th</sup> century (Hajnal 2012, 626). The cylindrical bone bead discovered in the area of the hilt belonging to the sword from grave 214 can probably be interpreted as a sword bead. Spathae provided with such beads are known in a great number from the European Merovingian Age row-grave cemeteries (Menghin 1983, 142–144, 355–357, Liste C I, Karte 19).

## 2. Seax (Fig. 1/7)

**T**HE ONLY seax from the cemetery 3 at Bratei, discovered in grave 218, is around 31 cm long (out of this the blade is approx. 27 cm) and 3.5 cm wide (Fig. 1/7, 4/2). On the grounds of the dimensions it was interpreted by Radu Harhoiu as a short seax (*Kurzseax*) (Bârză 2010, 123). Such weapons were widely distributed in the Merovin-

gian Age cemeteries during the 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> The short seaxes discovered in the Carpathian Basin can be dated roughly in the same period. The earlier examples are known from the Langobard Age cemeteries in Transdanubia (Christie 1991, 7), respectively from the Gepidic Age cemeteries in the Tisza-region (Cseh 1990, 40, 4. lista, IV. térkép). In the Avar Age the short seaxes are less frequent and can be connected to the cemeteries with Germanic characteristics from Transdanubia and Transylvania. Chronologically, they belong to the first part of the Early Avar Period (Csiky 2012, 377).

### 3. Spearheads (Fig. 2)

**R**ADU HARHOIU divided the spearheads discovered in the cemetery 3 at Bratei in two main groups: spearheads with willow-leaf-shaped blade (type 18b1—*weidenblattförmige Lanzen spitzen*) and simple spearheads with narrow blade (type 18b2—*einfache Lanzen spitzen mit schmalem Blatt*) (Bârză 2010, 121–122).

In the first group five spearheads were included: two from grave 21, two from grave 22 and one from grave 192. In our opinion this category can be divided further in two variants. The first variant is characterized by a total length of approx. 30 cm, a long and relatively narrow blade without having a tapered point, and a short, closed and narrow socket (the ratio between the blade and the socket is around 2:1). The blade is slightly rhomboidal in section; on one of the spearheads from grave 21 a narrow median rib can be observed. The four spearheads included in this variant (graves 21 and 22) belong to type III/2 according to Gergely Csiky's typology (Csiky 2007, 313–314, 4. kép/III.2) (Fig. 2/1). Their best analogies are known from the Early Avar Age cemetery at Pókaszpetk, graves 76, 88, 360 (Cs. Sós—Salamon 1995, Pl. IX/76.5–6, Pl. X/88.1–3, Pl. XXII/360.1, Pl. LXXXII/3–7, Pl. LXXXIV/4–5) and from Kisköre-Pap tanya, grave 43 (Bóna 2002a, Taf. 29/43.6–7, Taf. 86/4). The cemetery from Kisköre was published as belonging to the Gepidic Age (Bóna 2002a), but recent studies proved that it can rather be dated in the Early Avar Age.<sup>7</sup> It was already noticed in the monograph of the cemetery at Pókaszpetk that this type of spear was deposited quite frequently in pairs, or even in groups of three in the graves,<sup>8</sup> an unusual phenomenon if one considers the general customs of weapon deposition in the Avar Age. The same practice can be observed in the case of the graves 21 and 22 at Bratei. This custom was explained mainly on functional grounds, namely that the light spears belonging to this type were used rather as throwing weapons (Cs. Sós—Salamon 1995, 72; Csiky 2007, 313; Csiky 2011–2012 [2013], 80). Except the spearheads from Kisköre in the Tisza-region and the ones from Bratei in Transylvania, the type is known only from Transdanubian cemeteries (Csiky 2007, 313, 319, 7. kép; see also Csiky 2011–2012 [2013], 80–81).

The longer spearhead with leaf-shaped blade from grave 192 (Fig. 2/2) can be included in type Csiky III/1 considered to be one of the most widespread types in the Avar Age cemeteries in Transdanubia, but also in the Merovingian cemeteries on the territory of today's Germany. For this reasons it was connected in the Carpathian Basin to the Germanic communities living under Avar rule (Csiky 2007, 313–314; Csiky 2011–2012 [2013], 80).

Both variants of the spears with leaf-shaped blade are dated in the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup>—first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century (Csiky 2007, 313–314). Unfortunately, graves 21 and 22 did not contain any other grave-good, situation which makes impossible a more precise dating of the spearheads discovered in these tombs. The situation is not better in the case of

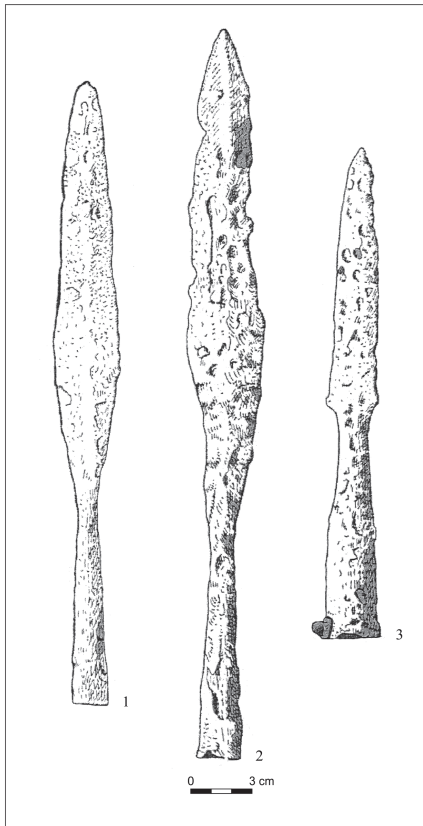


FIG. 2. Spearhead types from Bratei, cemetery no. 3: 1. Light spearhead with leaf-shaped blade and narrow socket; 2. Spearhead with leaf-shaped blade; 3. Spearhead with reed-leaf-shaped blade. After Bârzu 2010.

grave 192 either. The small buckle discovered in the grave belongs to the category of buckles with short U-shaped plate of Byzantine origin. The different variants of the type were used during the whole Early Avar Age and in the Middle Avar Age (Garam 2001, 94).

Harhoiu's second group corresponds to one of the most common types of the Early Avar Age, namely the spears with reed-leaf-shaped blade (Fig. 2/3).<sup>9</sup> Due to its morphological characteristics, it seems that these spearheads were functioning as pikes. Because they occur very frequently in horse or horseman graves, the spears with reed-leaf-shaped blade were associated with the heavy cavalry of the Avar army (Freeden 1991 [1995], 610; Csiky 2011–2012 [2013], 78–79).

From a typological viewpoint the five spearheads from Bratei (graves 175, 201, 218, 278, 283) belong to the same variant: the blade and the socket have approximately the same length, the socket is closed and (except the one from grave 278) on the lower end is provided with a loop. None of them is decorated.<sup>10</sup>

The spears with reed-leaf-shaped blade occurred for the first time in the Carpathian Basin after the Avar conquest. The decorated variant made of high quality material was connected to the first two generations of the conquering Avars and for the type itself an eastern, Asian origin was accepted (Kovrig 1955a; Kovrig 1955b; Garam 1990, 253). Later the possibility of a Byzantine origin has also been suggested (Freeden 1991 [1995], 619–623; see also Schulze-Dörlamm 2006, 488). The simple variant of inferior quality is the most widespread spear type of the Early Avar Age in the Carpathian Basin.

#### 4. Arrowheads (Fig. 3)

**A**MONG THE weapons, the arrowheads are best represented. They can be divided in three main categories (Bârzu 2010, 118–119, Abb. 64–65): arrowheads with rhombic blade and socket (Fig. 3/1), three-edged arrowheads (Fig. 3/2), and barbed arrowheads with socket (Fig. 3/3). All the three types were in use in the Carpathian Basin before the Avar conquest.

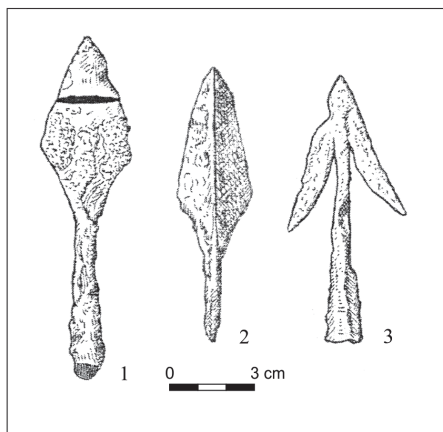


FIG. 3. Arrowhead types from Bratei, cemetery no. 3: 1. Arrowhead with rhombic blade and socket; 2. Three-edged arrowhead; 3. Barbed arrowhead with socket. After Bârzú 2010.

There were several attempts to isolate among the three-edged arrowheads those variants which appeared only in the Early Avar Age. Such efforts were based, first of all, on the dimensions of the arrowheads, but formal aspects played an important role as well.<sup>11</sup> Only the arrowhead from grave 68 can be included with certainty in this category.

Both the barbed and rhombic arrowheads were interpreted by Attila Kiss as ethnic markers of the Gepidic population in the Early Avar Period, in opposition with the three-edged arrowheads which were characteristic for the whole Carpathian Basin (including the Gepids). This conclusion was drawn based on the distribution pattern of the former two types (Kiss 1992, 52, Liste 5–6, Karte 5–6; Kiss 1996, 236, Liste 34). Indeed, this suggests a quite strong connection with the cemeteries with Germanic characteristics from the eastern part of Transdanubia and from Transylvania, but assigning a direct ethnic meaning to them seems to be too hazardous, taking into consideration that barbed arrowheads with socket are extremely rare in the Gepidic Period.<sup>12</sup>

## Discussion

IT IS extremely difficult to carry out a thorough analysis on the graves with weapons from the cemetery no. 3 at Bratei. First of all, such an attempt is seriously hindered by the fact that the mentioned graves were disturbed soon after the funeral took place. Therefore, they do not allow the complete reconstruction of the weapon combinations, the associated grave-goods or the original place of the objects inside the grave. Moreover, this impediment is doubled by the lack of anthropological analysis which hinders a deeper investigation of the social structures of the community to which the cemetery belonged. Taking into account the mentioned difficulties, only few cautious conclusions can be drawn which should be considered rather as working hypothesis than a solid result.

Altogether 51 graves contained weapons (Fig. 6), which represents 17.46% out of the 292 burials<sup>13</sup> belonging to the cemetery. Because of the high number of disturbed graves, one can presume that the initial proportion of the weapon burials might have been significantly higher. Unfortunately, none of the disturbed graves provided certain evidence regarding the existence of weapons which could have been taken out when the burials were reopened<sup>14</sup>. The lack of anthropological analysis makes impossible to establish the proportion of the graves with weapons among the male burials.

As mentioned before, the overwhelming majority of the burials containing weapons was furnished with arrowheads (42 graves = 82.35% of the weapon graves). However, the number of the deposited arrowheads varies from grave to grave: in most of the cases only one

piece was discovered, while the maximum number is eight (grave 121)<sup>15</sup>. From a typological point of view, no pattern can be established: the three arrowhead types discussed above can be found in different combinations in the graves, fact which points towards the conclusion that they were in use in the same period and, probably, the choice of the type(s) was made on functional grounds.

The other weapon categories are much less represented. The five burials with sword represent only 9.80% of the weapon graves. The low number of the seaxes (only one piece) is even more surprising (1.96%). The spearheads are represented in a somewhat higher degree, namely by ten pieces which were discovered in eight graves (11.68% of the weapon burials). However, in this case the typological analysis can offer some further details. As it was shown above, the different types show not only morphological, but also functional differences. The light spearheads discovered in pairs from graves 21 and 22 might be considered throwing weapons, the spearhead with leaf-shaped blade from grave 192 represents a common type used probably by the infantry, while the pikes can be associated with the cavalry. The latter type comes from five graves; out of them four are horse burials.

There were several attempts to ascribe the different weapon categories to ethnic groups. Regarding the Carpathian Basin in the Early Avar Age, the best known is the theory of Attila Kiss who, based on several artefact categories which were already in use during the Gepidic Period in the Tisza-region and Transylvania and of which distribution pattern in the Early Avar Age shows a concentration in Transdanubia and Transylvania, presumed that the cemeteries furnished with such items can be connected to the Gepids living under Avar rule (Kiss 1992). Out of the weapons he used in his argumentation the *spathae*, the shield-bosses and the barbed arrowheads (Kiss 1992, 51–52; Kiss 1996, 228–232, 235–236, 238–239). Of course, the theory was severely criticized, mainly because of the applied ‘artefact types = ethnic groups’ methodological concept (see e.g. Bálint 1993, 243; Bálint 1995, 310–311; Kiss 2011). However, even if simplified, Kiss managed to point out the existence of a series of artefacts which can be considered ‘foreign’ or different in comparison with the rest of the Early Avar Age archaeological material from the Carpathian Basin. On the other hand, taking into consideration the numerous contemporary analogies from Western- and Central-Europe, it has to be mentioned that not all the artefact categories listed by Kiss have exclusively Gepidic Age roots, but they can rather be integrated in a larger cultural milieu, that of the ‘Merovingian’ material culture. A further step in the investigation of the problem was taken with the analysis of the different grave-good associations, both in the female and male graves, in correlation with the burial customs. Concerning the men, emphasis was mainly put on the weapon combinations, the items of the personal ornament, and the harness. This approach led to the isolation of the assemblages with ‘Merovingian’ or ‘Germanic’ traditions<sup>16</sup>. Typical weapons of the male assemblages are the *spatha* (often with pyramidal strap retainers or other mounts of western origin on the *spatha*-belt), the *seax*, different types of spears (mainly with leaf-shaped blade), and the shields with iron boss. These weapons are, generally, combined with Merovingian type belt-sets (mainly the so-called three-part belt-sets) or buckles (with shield tongue). The main distribution area of such assemblages can be placed in the eastern part of Transdanubia, in Transylvania, and, in significantly less extent, in the Tisza-region. In Transylvania such burials are known e.g. from Unirea-Vereşmort,<sup>17</sup> Band,<sup>18</sup> Noşlac,<sup>19</sup> and Fântânele.<sup>20</sup>



The identification of the archaeological material belonging to the first two generations of the Avar conquerors has been the subject of a long debate in the archaeological literature (see e.g. Kovrig 1955a; Kovrig 1955b; Garam 1990; Bálint 1993; Bálint 2010). The most characteristic weapons of the early Avars are considered the composite bow with big three-edged arrowheads, the spears with reed-leaf-shaped blade, and the long single-edged swords with straight blade, frequently provided with P-shaped suspension loops. Connected to the warrior graves the apple-shaped stirrups with rectangular loop, the pressed belt-sets and harness mounts as well as the horse burials can also be mentioned (see e.g. Bálint 1989, 152–156; Garam 1990; Daim 2003, 465–468).

Taking a closer look at the associations of grave-goods of the weapon burials from Bratei one comes up against difficulties, caused again by the later disturbing activities. Except for graves 214 and 218, the burials with *spatha* did not contain any other weapons. In grave 214 a single rhomboidal arrowhead was discovered, while in grave 218 the *spatha* was associated with a short *seax*, a spearhead with reed-leaf-shaped blade, and a barbed arrowhead (Fig. 4). It is conspicuous that none of the graves with *spatha* were furnished with Merovingian type belt-sets or buckles. Therefore, in opposite to the cemeteries containing several burials with typical weapon combination of ‘Merovingian tradition’ from Transdanubia and Transylvania, at Bratei only grave 218 can be included in this category due to the *spatha*—*seax*—barbed arrowhead association. However, in this combination the spearhead with reed-leaf-shaped blade can be considered a ‘foreign’ element.

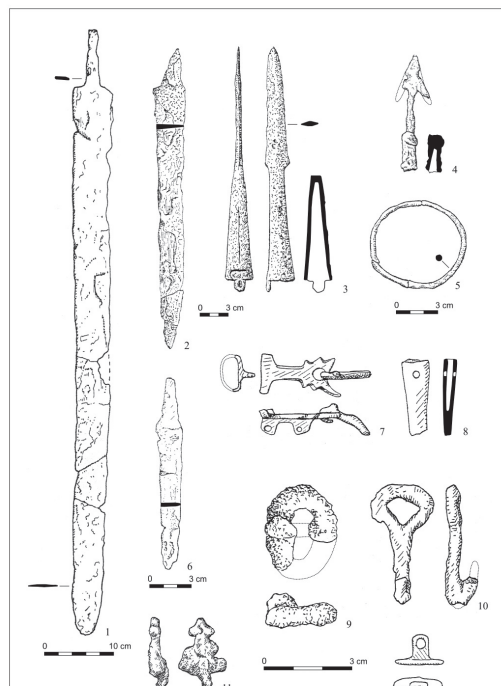


FIG. 4. Bratei, cemetery no. 3, grave-goods discovered in grave 218. After Bârzău 2010.

In the archaeological literature one of the central elements of the ethnic interpretation of the cemetery 3 from Bratei, and in general of the whole Band-Vereşmort group is represented by the horse burials. The general tendency in this respect is that these are connected to the Avars or some other ‘nomadic’ people (e.g. Cutrigurs, Bulgarians etc.) and, consequently, are considered to belong to newcomers or to represent Avar or nomadic influences (e.g. Kovács 1913, 387–388; Horedt 1958, 101; Bakó 1960, 26–27; Bakó 1962, 455–457; Rusu 1962, 291–292; Rusu 1975, 137–138; Bóna 1986, 163). An exception is represented by the hypothesis elaborated by Radu Harhoiu, according to which all the horse burials from the mentioned cemeteries can be ascribed to the late Gepids which went through a process of acculturation (Harhoiu 1999–2001, 145; Bârzău—Harhoiu 2008, 530–531; Harhoiu 2010a, 233–236; Harhoiu 2010b, 154–157). However, this theory questions the Avar origin of the horse burials neither,

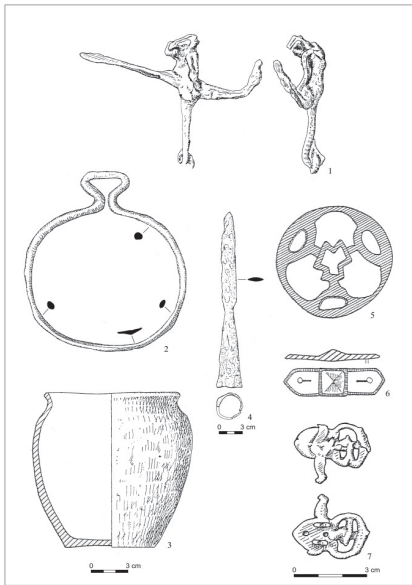


FIG. 5. Bratei, cemetery no. 3, grave-goods discovered in grave 278. After Bârzu 2010.

but it presumes that it was overtaken by the Gepids. István Bóna was the first who drew attention that, even if they are known in a reduced number, horse burials were not completely unknown in the Gepidic Age (Bóna 1979, 42). To this observation one can add that in the contemporary Merovingian cultural milieu (the closest to the Band-Vereşmort type cemeteries) the horse burials do not represent an exceptional phenomenon either.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the horse burials or horse bones in human graves cannot be interpreted *a priori* as signs of Avar or 'nomadic' presence or influence, but they should be analyzed in a larger context where both the type of the burial (complete or partial) and the grave-goods should be taken into account (Dobos 2010/2011, 388). From the perspective of the weapon graves from Bratei, a great importance can be assigned to the horse burials 175, 201, 278, and 283, furnished with reed-leaf-shaped spearheads. Out of these, in graves 175, 278 (Fig. 5), and 283 elements of the harness were also deposited.

Taking into consideration the abovementioned, in accordance with Ewin Gáll's hypothesis (Gáll 2014, 305), two different groups of weapon graves can be isolated: one with 'Merovingian' and one with 'Avar' traditions.<sup>22</sup> The former is characterized by inhumation graves furnished with spatha (in one case provided with sword bead), more rarely with seax or spearhead with leaf-shaped blade, while the latter by horse burials with reed-leaf-shaped spearheads and harness. Taking a look at the plan of the cemetery (Fig. 6), one can observe that the two groups do not cluster in well-defined groups, but they are spread mainly in the southern part of the cemetery. Even if they cannot be divided very sharply, it seems that the graves of 'Merovingian' tradition are situated more centrally, being surrounded from west and south by the burials of 'Avar' tradition. In this context it is worth mentioning that in the northern half of the cemetery the number of the weapon graves is significantly lower and is represented mainly by graves with arrowheads. The only exceptions are represented by graves 21 and 22, both containing a pair of light spearheads with narrow socket, which form a separate group in the north-eastern part of the cemetery, relatively isolated from the rest of the weapon graves.

On horizontal stratigraphic grounds, Erwin Gáll argued that the weapon graves of 'Merovingian' and those of 'Avar' tradition were contemporary and, therefore, represent two different communities which lived side by side at Bratei (Gáll 2014, 305). As it was shown above, a closer dating than the Early Avar Age is not possible in the case of the majority of the weapon graves. In any case, the combination of spatha and seax with reed-leaf-shaped spearhead in grave 218 can be a further indication that the weapons in question were used mainly in the same period of time. The grave can be dated, based on the small fragmentary buckle of Byzantine origin (probably belonging to type Pápa or Salona-Histria) (Fig. 4/7) to the end of the 6<sup>th</sup>-beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century (Garam 2001, 109, 111).

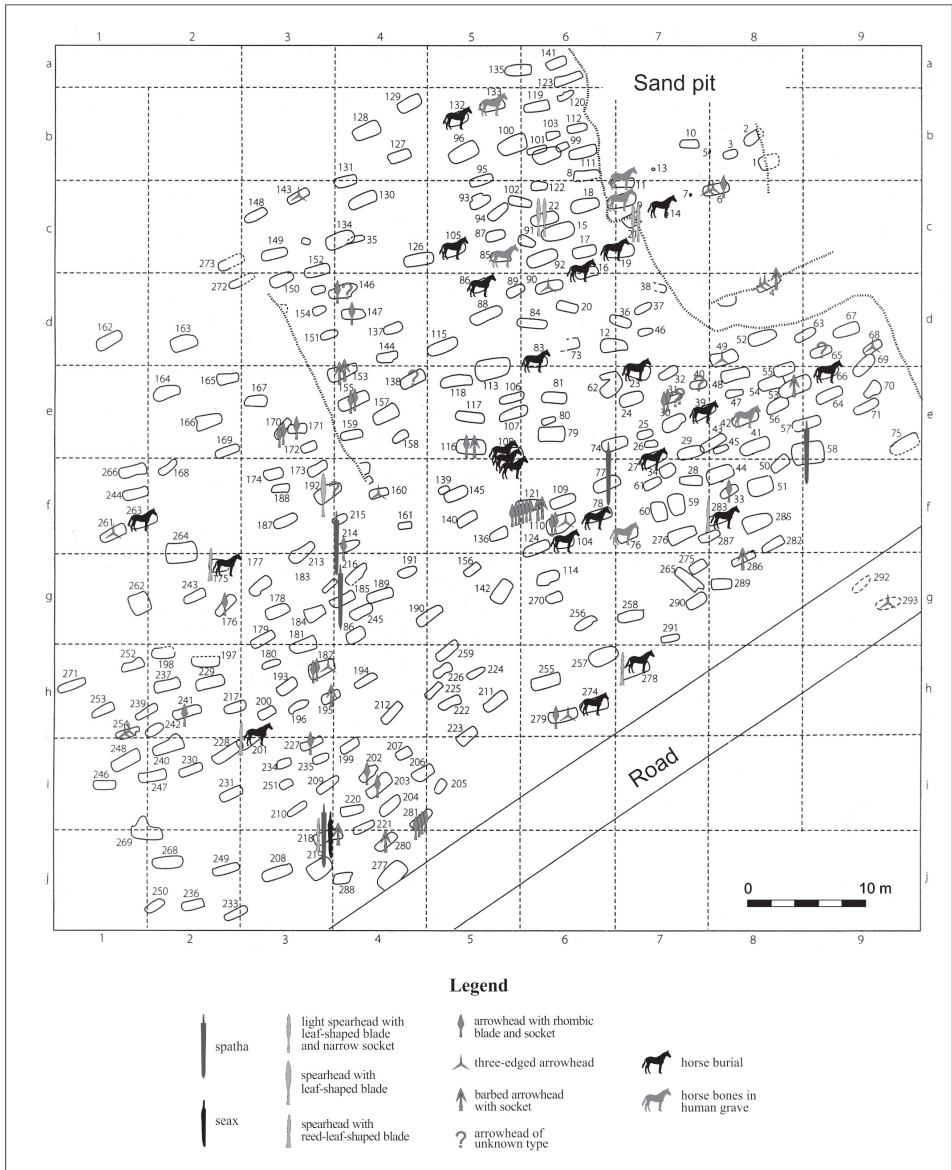


FIG. 6. Distribution map of the weapon graves and horse burials in the cemetery no. 3 at Bratei. Redrawn after Bârză 2010.

There is another interesting phenomenon which deserves attention. Unlike the weapon graves of 'Avar' tradition which are quite well definable on the basis of the burial rite and the combination of the grave-goods, the weapon graves of 'Merovingian' tradition contain very few typical elements in comparison to their counterparts from other cemeteries from Pannonia and Transylvania. As it was already pointed out, beside the low number of the seaxes and the large spearheads with leaf-shaped blade, the lack of the Merovingian type belt elements is conspicuous. The phenomenon catches one's eyes even more, if the investigation is extended on the whole cemetery: the buckles with shield tongue and the elements of the three-part belt-sets are completely missing. Moreover, a similar situation can be observed in the case of the female graves: the elements of the typical female assemblages of 'Merovingian' tradition defined on the basis of the Pannonian and Transylvanian cemeteries dated in the Early Avar Age (girdle-hangers, leg garters, amulets, hairpins etc.)<sup>23</sup> are extremely rare. Instead, both the male and female graves are furnished with artefacts of Byzantine origin. This phenomenon shows probably that the community which used the cemetery from Bratei had different connections than the other contemporary communities in Transylvania. While the other cemeteries of the Band-Vereşmort group had constant western relations and, so to say, followed the Merovingian 'fashion', at Bratei only a few elements of this cultural milieu can be identified. On the other hand, the large quantity of objects of Byzantine origin suggests that the community from Bratei had strong southern connections which determined a particular development of the material culture. The question what factors were the promoters of this phenomenon is still open for debate and needs a thorough analysis.

Unfortunately, because of the ulterior reopening of the graves, almost no relevant conclusion can be drawn regarding the social status of the persons buried with weapons. The lack of the anthropological data hinders even more the possibility to carry out such analysis. In this respect one can rely only on the scarce information given in the catalogue of the graves. According to this, all the swords, the only seax, and the all the spearheads discovered in human graves<sup>24</sup> belonged to adults. Unfortunately, no other details are available regarding the age of the individuals in question. Six graves (nos. 40, 65, 129, 160, 171, 202) belonging to juveniles were furnished with weapons, all of them with one arrowhead. Out of the children graves, four (nos. 33, 147, 254, 284) contained weapons, again arrowheads: grave 254 two pieces, the other three burials one each. It has to be mentioned that all the three types of arrowheads occur in the graves belonging to children. Based on these observations it can be concluded that, in accordance with the tendency detected in the contemporary cemeteries, the deposition of weapons in the graves belonging to children and juveniles was practiced by the community from Bratei, but it was restricted to arrows. Probably the reduced number of the arrowheads coming from such burials can also be related to the young age of the deceased.

**I**N CONCLUSION, one can argue that, based on the general characteristics, the weapon graves from Bratei show the closest relations with the rest of the cemeteries belonging to the Band-Vereşmort group on one hand, and with the graveyards from the eastern part of Transdanubia on the other. Similarly to the situation observed at Bratei, the latter group shows connections with the contemporary Merovingian cemeteries. In the same time the high number of the arrowheads and the occurrence of the spearheads in horse burials are characteristic elements of the Carpathian Basin during the Early Avar Age (Csiky 2011, 23).

□

## Notes

1. For the general situation see Bârzú – Harhoiu 2008, 513, Abb. 2; Zaharia 2010, 7–11, Abb. 1.
2. For a general overview of the history of research see Dobos 2013, 249–254.
3. For a general history of research see e.g. Härke 1992, 21–42; Csiky 2011, 11–14.
4. In this context, the sword (frequently combined with seax) was generally considered a sign of the free warriors, the spear and the bow the equipment of the half-free, while the graves without weapons were interpreted as burials of the unfree or servants, see e.g. Veeck 1926, 158–159; Alcock 1981, 176.
5. Bârzú 2010, 122; the type was defined by Wilfried Menghin: Menghin 1983, 350, Karte 17.
6. In South-Germany the type was dated by Jo Wernard in the phases 1 (first quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century – 570/580) and 2a (approx. 570/580–600/610): Wernard 1998, 774–776.
7. No convincing analogies dated in the Gepidic Age are known for the two mentioned spearheads from grave 43: Csiky 2011–2012 (2013), 80–81, note 81. Likewise, the girdle-hanger discovered in grave 42 of the same cemetery belongs to the so-called Mezőbánd type dated in the Early Avar Age: Garam 2011, 67–71, Tabelle 1/Obere Reihe/Kköre 42. It is worth noticing that for the cemetery at Kisköre-Pap tanya a late dating (i.e. in the 7<sup>th</sup> century) was already proposed at its first mentioning in the archaeological literature, see Szabó 1975, 78–79.
8. For example: Kisköre-Pap tanya, grave 43 (Bóna 2002a, 193–194, Taf. 29/43.6–7, Taf. 86/4); Pókaszeptk, grave 76 (Cs. Sós – Salamon 1995, 143, , Pl. IX/76.5–6, Pl. LXXXII/3–4); Cikó, grave B/1 (555) (Somogyi 1984, 65–66, 41. tábla/21–22) – two pieces; Pókaszeptk, grave 88 (Cs. Sós – Salamon 1995, 145, Pl. X/88.1–3, Pl. LXXXII/5–7) – three pieces.
9. Csiky type I (Csiky 2007, 307–313); Husár type AA, variant AAa (Husár 2014, 16–22).
10. The pikes from Bratei correspond to the variant I/3d according to G. Csiky's typology, see Csiky 2007, 311, 2. kép/I/3.d.
11. The following criteria were considered to be relevant: bigger dimensions and weight, truncated form of the blade and holes on the wings. For the most detailed analysis see Freedén 1991 (1995), 599–601. See also Bóna 1979, 39–40; Bóna 1988, 445.
12. To my knowledge, one example was discovered in the Tisza-region, in grave 191 from Szolnok-Szanda (Bóna 2002b, Taf. 52/191.1; Taf. 107) and, possibly, another one in grave 73 from Szőreg-Téglagyár (the piece in question is fragmentary and is rusted together with other two fragmentary arrowheads, probably with three edges: Nagy 2005, 132, Taf. 60/73.10.). From Transylvania two pieces come from grave CX 28B from Florești-Polus Center (Ferencz –Nagy–Lázárescu 2009, Pl. XI/3–4) without the possibility of a closer dating.
13. Graves 5 and 265 were not included in the statistics. Grave 5 is a cremation burial (Bârzú 2010, 172), while grave 265 is an inhumation burial without grave-goods which was disturbed by the Avar Age cemetery and was dated in the Halstatt period (Bârzú 2010, 258).
14. In the case of grave 257 wooden traces were identified which, according to the publisher, could have belonged to a scabbard: Bârzú 2010, 255.
15. Of course, the statistics show the situation in the moment of the discovery; thus, the initial number of the deposited arrowheads could have been higher before the reopening of the graves took place.
16. For a synthesis-like presentation of the problem and the characteristics of the male and female assemblages see Vida 2008, 18–29 (with further bibliography).
17. Graves 5: spatha, spearhead with leaf-shaped blade, rhomboidal and barbed arrowheads (Roska 1934, 125, Abb. 2/C, Abb. 4/D); 12: shield-boss, iron mount with silver wire inlay (Roska 1934, 128, Abb. 3/D); 13: spatha with pyramidal strap retainer, shield-boss, rhomboidal arrowheads, iron mounts with silver wire inlay (Roska 1934, 128, Abb. 4/A, C), and 16: spatha (Roska 1934, 129–130, Abb. 4/B, F).
18. Unfortunately, because of the later interventions which affected each grave of the cemetery in a different degree, the existence of such burials can be presumed only based on a few grave-goods which survived the disturbing activities. This is the case for the smith's grave 10 furnished, among

others, with an iron helmet, elements of a belt-set and smith tools (Kovács 1913, 284–296, 12–18. kép). In grave 36 a pyramidal strap retainer was discovered which indicates that initially the grave probably contained a spatha (Kovács 1913, 317, 32. kép/3, 36. kép). In grave 52 a spearhead with leaf-shaped blade, different types of arrowheads, and iron fragments belonging to a belt-set were discovered (Kovács 1913, 324–326, 43. kép).

19. Graves 6: spatha with pyramidal strap retainers, spearhead, elements of a belt-set; 16: spearhead with leaf-shaped blade, three-part belt-set; 17: spatha, three-part belt-set; 21: seax, three-part belt-set; 33b: seax, three-part belt-set; 43: spatha; 63: seax, belt-set; 68: seax; 89: spatha with pyramidal strap retainer, three-part belt-set, pyramidal strap crossing belonging to the harness (unpublished graves, excavations carried out by M. Rusu; a few weapons are published in Rusu 1962, Fig. 4).
20. In grave 19 a fragmentary shield-boss and pyramidal strap-retainer were found; the latter indicates that initially a spatha was also deposited (Dobos – Opreanu 2012, 69, Pl. 15).
21. See Müller-Wille 1970–1971; Oexle 1984; Schach-Döriges 2008; for examples from other territories of Europe see Gáll 2014, 304 (with bibliography).
22. The terms ‘Merovingian’ and ‘Avar’ do not denote necessarily an ethnic interpretation, but are rather conventional terms in order to determine the cultural traditions of the two groups.
23. For a general overview see Vida 2008, 25–29.
24. No information is available related to grave 21.

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## Abbreviations

- ActaArchHung Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae, Budapest.
- ActaMP Acta Musei Porolissensis, Zalău.
- APA Acta Praehistorica et Archaeologica, Berlin.
- ArchÉrt Archaeológiai Értesítő, Budapest.
- BerROB Berichten van de Rijksdienst voor het Oudheidkundig Bodemonderzoek, Amersfoort.
- CCA Cronica cercetărilor arheologice din România, București.
- Dacia NS Dacia. Revue d'archéologie et d'histoire ancienne, Nouvelle Serie, București.
- DissPann Dissertationes Pannonicae, Budapest.
- Dolg ENM Dolgozatok az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Érem- és Régiségtárából, Kolozsvár.
- Dolgozatok ÚS Dolgozatok az Erdélyi Múzeum Érem- és Régiségtárából, Új Sorozat, Kolozsvár.
- Fb. Schwaben N. F. Fundberichte aus Schwaben, Neue Folge, Stuttgart.
- FMSt Frühmittelalterliche Studien. Jahrbuch des Instituts für Frühmittelalterforschung der Universität Münster, Berlin – New York.
- Germania Germania. Anzeiger der Römisch-Germanischen Kommission des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Berlin.
- JRGZM Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz, Mainz am Rhein.
- JRMES Journal of Roman Military Equipment Studies. Dedicated to the Study of the Weapons, Armour and Military Fittings of the Armies and Enemies of Rome and Byzantium, Newcastle upon Tyne.
- MAA Monumenta Avarorum Archaeologica, Budapest.
- MCA Materiale și Cercetări Arheologice, București.
- MGAH Monumenta Germanorum Archaeologica Hungariae, Budapest.

NNU	Nachrichten aus Niedersachsens Urgeschichte, Hildesheim.
PAT	Patrimonium Archaeologicum Transylvanicum, Cluj-Napoca.
RégFüz	Régészeti Füzetek, Budapest.
SCIV	Studii și cercetări de istorie veche, București.
SZMMÉ	Szolnok Megyei Múzeumi Évkönyv, Szolnok.
UPA	Universitätsforschungen zur prähistorischen Archäologie, Bonn.
WA	World Archaeology, London.

### **Abstract**

#### Notes on the weapons and weapon depositions from cemetery 3 at Bratei (Sibiu County, Romania)

The cemetery no. 3 at Bratei is one of the largest Early Avar Age necropolises from the Transylvanian Basin. It belongs to the late group of the Transylvanian row-grave cemeteries, named Band-Vereşmort group in the archaeological literature. The aim of the paper is to investigate the weapon graves discovered in the cemetery. For this purpose the different weapon categories are analyzed from a typological and chronological point of view. Based on the weapon combinations correlated with the burial customs and the associated grave-goods two main groups can be isolated: burials with ‘Merovingian’ and with ‘Avar’ traditions.

### **Keywords**

Bratei, weapons, weapon combinations, typology, cultural traditions