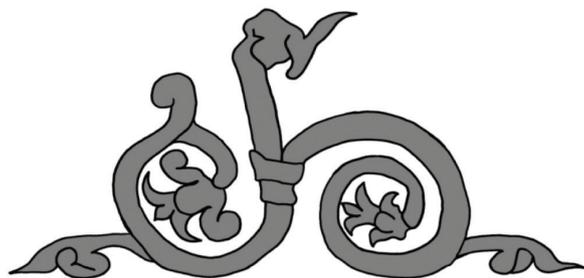


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Graves with Horses Discovered in the 7th–8th Centuries Cemetery in Șpălnaca/Șugud (Alba County)*

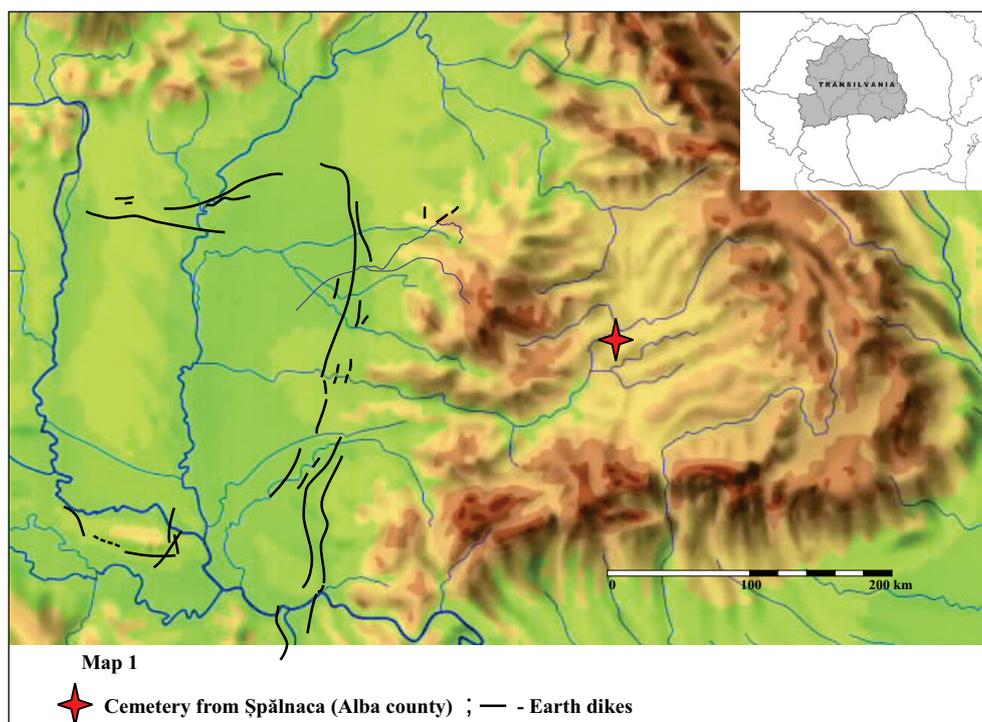
Călin Cosma

Abstract: Two graves, identical through their “funerary construction”, were discovered in the cemetery from Șpălnaca/Șugud (Alba County), i.e. with mortuary pits that contained human bodies buried together with horses. Through their constructive characteristics and through the position and orientation of the human skeleton, different from that of the horse skeletons, the two graves in Șpălnaca/Șugud are as yet unique finds among the archaeological discoveries from Transylvania dated to the 7th – 8th centuries.

The two graves with entire horse skeletons from Șpălnaca/Șugud are not an isolated phenomenon among the burials from the Carpathian Basin during the period of the Avar Khaganate. Graves of this type from Pannonia and West of the Danube, just like the ones in Șpălnaca/Șugud, are not very numerous in Avar cemeteries as compared to other types of graves with horses, but they did exist in the Carpathian Basin and became generalized during the 18th century.

Keywords: Early Middle ages, Transylvania, Avars, graves with horses, weapons, jewelry.

Thirty nine inhumation graves dated to the 7th – 8th centuries were researched archaeologically in the settlement of Șpălnaca (Alba County), on the spot called Șugud (Map 1)¹. Two funerary complexes (graves 19 and 37) out of the seven that can be attributed to the Avar environment (on the basis of their funerary inventories) contained an entire horse skeleton beside the human skeleton. A man/warrior was buried in grave no. 19, while a woman was inhumed in grave no. 37. Both had Mediterranean, Eastern-European physical characteristics, with Mongoloid influences².



* English translation: Ana M. Gruia.

¹ Mentions: Botezatu, Blăjan 1989, 351; Grosu *et al.* 1995, 276 and footnote 6; Protase *et al.* 2000, 104, nr. 143; Cosma 2017, 75–78.

² Anthropological analyses performed by Dan Botezatu (Iași): after the “Documentație de șantier arheologic” (Archaeological site documentation) Șpălnaca/Șugud (National Museum of the Union, Alba Iulia).

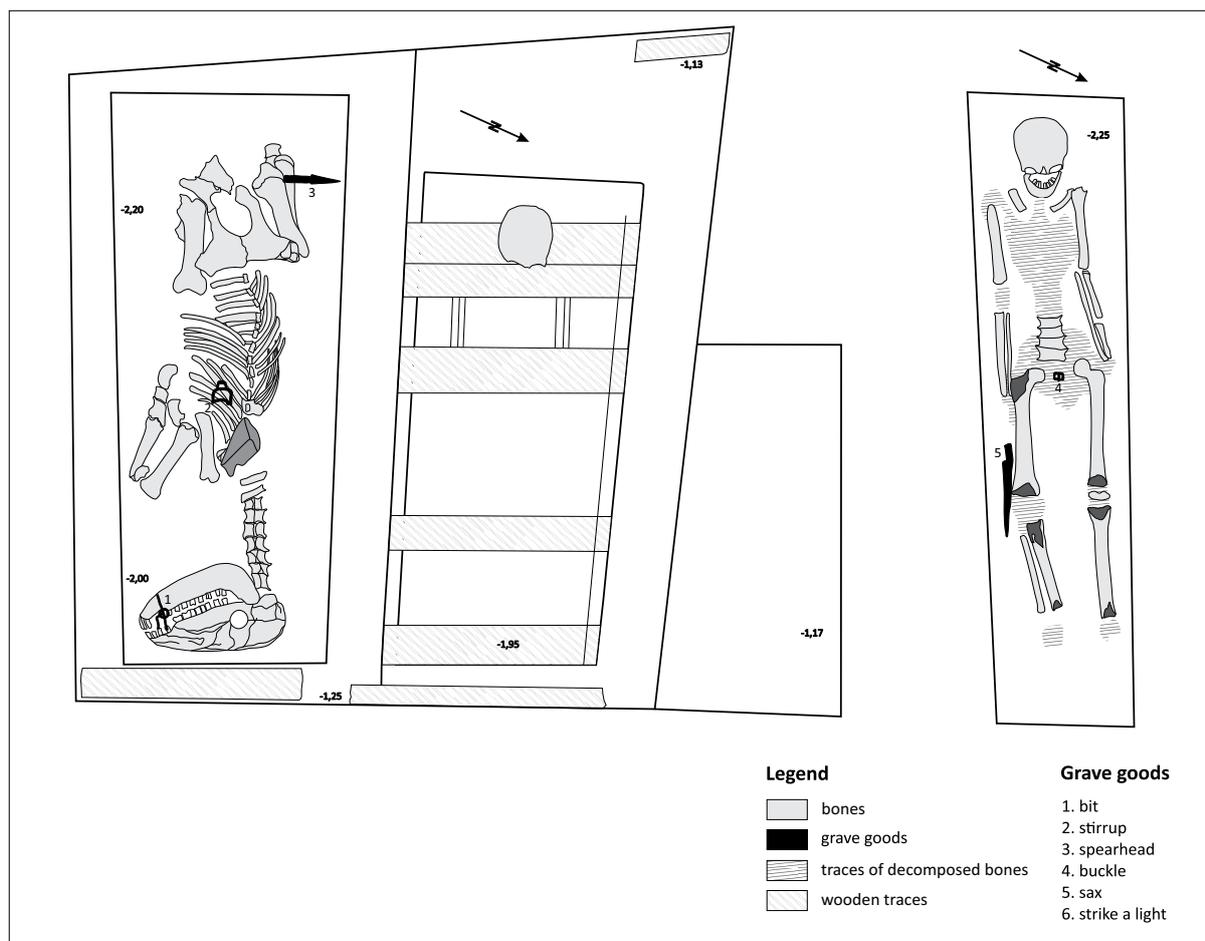
Description of the funerary complexes³

Grave 19

Grave of a warrior buried with a horse. The burial was discovered in Section A excavated in 1976 and 1979. The pit became apparent at -0.60/-0.70 m and the bottom was identified at -2.20 m. The bottom of the pit was narrower than the upper part. The mortuary pit was rectangular-lozenge-shaped, with the length sides having the following dimensions: the northern side measured 2.80 m in length, the western side 2.60 m, the southern side 2.50 m, and the eastern side 2.30 m. It was oriented W (with a slight SW deviation) – NE. On the northern side the pit had a step measuring 1.50 × 0.75 – 0.65 m, dug down to -1.75 m. Another step, with a semi-oval contour, was noted towards the eastern corner, dug down to -1.25 m.

The pit was divided into two compartments by a median wall cut into the clay, measuring 0.5 m in width. The median wall, oriented E-W, was performed at the depth of 1.90 – 2 m. The human skeleton was found in one of the compartments and the horse skeleton in the other. The human skeleton had been covered with wooden beams, placed 0.3 m above it. After the horse was deposited and a layer of earth filled the pit to the depth of -1.25 m, the entire grave (containing both man and horse) was again covered with beams. In the end, the grave was covered with soil forming a mound that had subsequently become flattened (Fig. 1).

The compartment with the human skeleton: Warrior. The grave was rectangular in shape, measuring 1.90–2.00 m × 0.55 m (west) × 0.45 m (east). The floor was identified at the depth of -2.25/-2.30 m; the skeleton (relatively well preserved) had been deposited in the pit in dorsal decubitus with the arms extended along the body. L_{skeleton} was of 1.65 m. The body was oriented W (SW)



³ For the description of the archaeological complexes and of the archaeological material discovered inside them I used “Jurnalele de săpătură” (the Excavation diaries), the ground plans and the drawings of the archaeological complexes and of the archaeological materials, corroborated with the research of the items preserved in the storage rooms of the National Museum of the Union in Alba Iulia. Some of the items mentioned in the diary could not be found in the storage, but their drawings have been preserved.

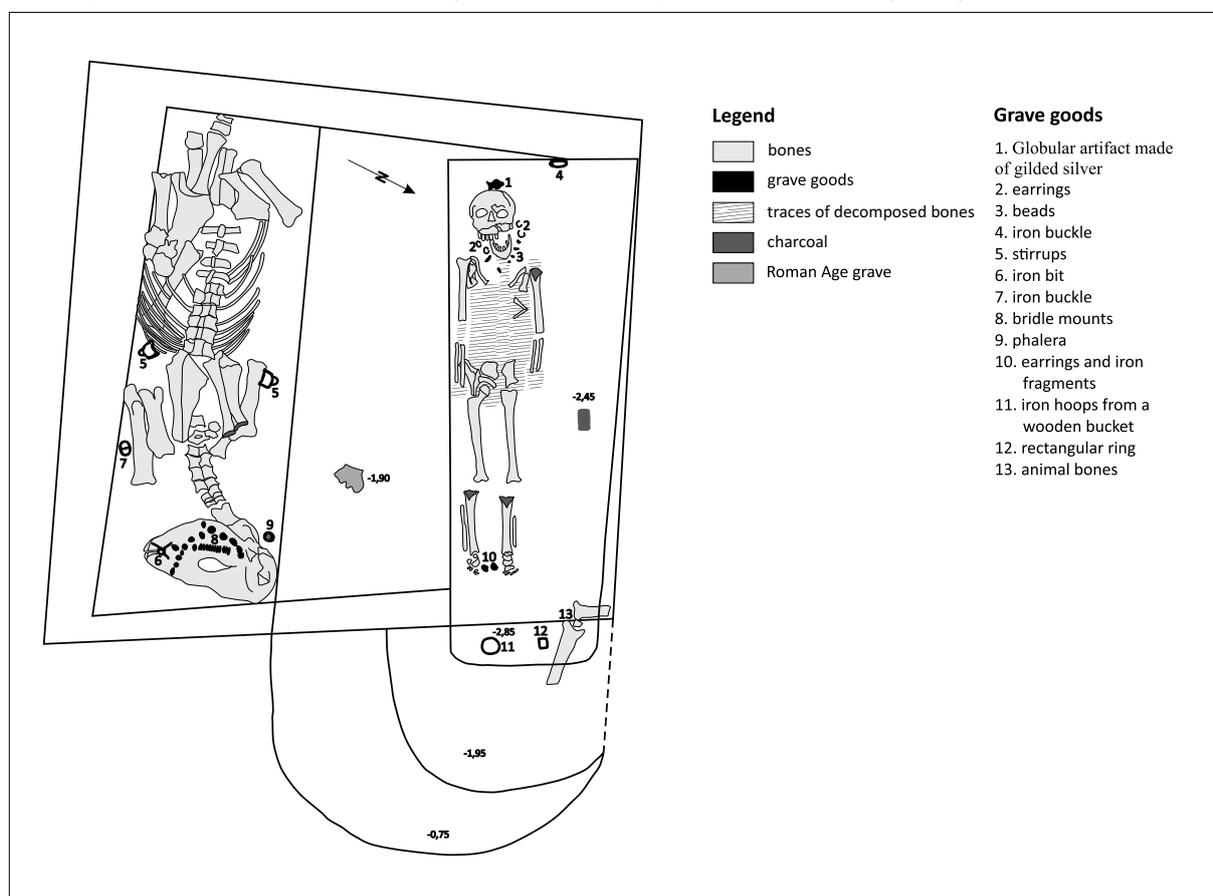
(the head) – E (NE) (the feet). The deceased had been covered with beams, the ends of which rested on supports cut into the clay on the long sides. The height of the two supports as 0.30/0.40 m. The beams measured 1.00 × 0.35 m (Fig. 1). The inventory of the grave consisted of the following items: 1. Iron firesteel, fragmentarily preserved, discovered in the area of the human pelvis (Pl. 1/5). 2. Iron sax, with wooden traces on the sheath, discovered by the right leg, with the tip pointing towards the feet (Pl. 1/7). 3. Rectangular belt buckle made of iron, discovered on the pelvis (Pl. 1/4). 4. Iron fragment.

The compartment with the horse skeleton: The pit was trapezoidal in shape and measured 2.30 m × 0.80 m (east) × 0.95 m (west). The floor was at the depth of –2.20 m. The pit for the horse was dug on the right side of the pit where the human skeleton was found. The body of the horse was deposited laying on the left side, with the legs bent under the abdomen, the head towards the east, and the rear end towards the west. The horse was male and relatively tall. It was tall at the withers. It was 6 or 7 years old and castrated at the moment of sacrifice. It was a horse used also for riding. The length of the horse skeleton measured 2.16 m (Fig. 1). The inventory of the compartment in which the horse was deposited included the following items: 1. Iron lance head, deposited with the tip towards the north, in the N-W corner of the pit, in the area of the hind legs (Pl. 1/6). 2. One iron bit, articulated, with side bars, discovered in the horse's mouth (Pl. 1/3). 3. Two iron stirrups, discovered on both sides of the spine (Pl. 1/1–2). 4. Very likely a horse saddle.

Grave 37

The grave of a woman buried with a horse. Was discovered in Section A excavated in 1979. The mortuary pit was rectangular-lozenge-shaped, with the ENE, ESE, and WSW sides measuring 2.30 m in length and the NW side measuring 2 m in length. The pit became apparent at –0.50 – 0.60 m and the bottom was found at –2.90 m. Starting from the depth of –2 m, the pit was divided into two compartments separated by a median wall dug into the clay that measured 0.50 m in width. One of the compartments contained the human skeleton and the other contained the skeleton of the horse (Fig. 2).

The compartment with the human skeleton (woman): Woman, around 50 years of age. She was approximately 1.70 m tall. The grave pit was trapezoidal, measuring: length = 2 × 0.75 to the



west × 0.70 m; on the eastern, shorter side – 1.95 m. The mortuary pit had a step, with an arched contour. The body was deposited in the grave in dorsal decubitus, with the arms extended along the body. The body was oriented W (the head) – E (the feet). $L_{\text{skeleton}} = 1.60$ m (Fig.2). The inventory of the grave consisted of the following goods: 1. Seven bronze earrings, deposited to the left and to the right of the skull, by the ears (Pl. 2/1–7). 2. Earrings found in the area of the feet. 3. String of beads discovered around the neck (Pl. 2/8–13). 4. Fragmentary iron knife discovered by the thorax (Pl. 2/9). 5. Oval bronze buckle, cast together with the fixing plate, discovered in the area of the feet (Pl. 2/14). 6. Globular artifact made of gilded silver discovered above the skull cap (Pl. 2/15). 7. Iron hoops and the handle of a small wooden bucket, found by the feet. 8. Fragmentary cramp iron found above the feet of the deceased woman. 9. Animal bones deposited as an offering (probably a bovid), discovered at her feet.

The compartment with the horse skeleton. The pit was almost rectangular in shape, measuring 2.00 m × 0.60 m (west) × 0.55 m (east). In the central part the depth of the pit was of – 3.00 m. The pit in which the horse was deposited is located on the right side of the pit that contained the human skeleton. The body of the horse was deposited on the left side, with the legs bent under the abdomen, the head extended to the E (NE) and the rear end to the W (SW). The horse was male and relatively tall. It measured 1.35 m in height at the withers. It was approximately 4 or 5 years old and castrated at the moment of sacrifice. It was a horse used for riding (Fig. 2). The inventory of the compartment in which the horse was deposited consisted of the following items: 1. Two gilded silver phalerae, discovered in the area of the eyes (Pl. 3/1–2). 2. 13 appliques made of gilded bronze, discovered in the area of the horse's jaws (Pl. 3/3). 3. Square-shaped applique discovered in the area of the horse's jaws (Pl. 4–5). 4. Cap-shaped applique (Pl. 3/6). 5. Fragments of a bronze sheath? 6. Iron bit, discovered in the mouth of the horse between the jaws (Pl. 3/7a-b). 7. Two iron stirrups, discovered flanking the horse skeleton's ribs (Pl. 3/8–9). 8. Very likely a horse saddle.

The funerary inventory

I. The funerary compartments that contained the human skeletons

I.1. Jewelry

I.1.1. Earrings

Earrings were only found in the woman's grave (no. 37). There were seven earrings, all made of bronze, discovered by the ears. From a typological perspective, they belong to **two distinct categories**.

I.1.1.1. Earrings made of twisted bronze bar, with attached pendant

The items measure between 2 and 2.5 cm in diameter. All have one pendant made of three small granules attached to the loop and a larger sphere attached to the three small granules. These pendants were only preserved on two of the earrings (Pl. 2/1–2). One notes two ways in which the pendants were attached to the earring loop. The first is through attaching the ornament directly onto the loop (Pl. 2/1). The second is through attaching the three granules to a ring inserted through the earring's main loop (Fig. Pl. 2/2–4).

The closest analogies from a geographic perspective of the torsaded earrings from Șpălnaca/Șugud, which are the only analogies from the territory of Transylvania, were found in the Avar cemetery in Sâncrai (Alba County) that can be dated to the Middle Avar Period⁴. The earrings from Sâncrai were made of both a single twisted bar and two plaited bronze wires. The latter look like twisted bars. An analogy a bit farther from the Avar center in Transylvania was found in the cemetery from Subotița-igraliste Sand (Serbia). Two earrings made of twisted bronze bar were found there in the Avar grave no. 3, dated to the seventh century⁵. Two earrings made of two twisted bars each and bulb-shaped pendants attached to the loop were discovered in Slovakia, in the 7th – 8th centuries cemetery from Zelovce, in grave no. 364 (a woman's grave)⁶.

It is possible that earrings made of twisted bar, with or without attached pendants, were modeled after the numerous earrings made of bars that are round in section, with pendants of various shapes discovered in many of the 7th – 8th centuries cemeteries from the entire area controlled by the

⁴ Cosma 2017, 68, M. 7–8, 72, M. 26, pl. 29, M. 7/3, M.8/1–2, 34/M. 26/1–2.

⁵ Balogh 2016, 37, fig. 5/6–7.

⁶ Čiliinská 1973, 100/Grab 357, Taf. LXI, Grab 364/2–3.

Avar Khaganate in the Carpathian Basin⁷. Bronze earrings with attached pendants, made of plain, untwisted bars, do not provide precise chronological benchmarks. They were used by the Avar populations in the Carpathian Basin throughout the Middle and Late Avar periods (650–800)⁸.

I.1.1.2. Earrings made of a round bronze bar, with open ends

Earrings with open ends, such as the ones in Špálnaca/Şugud (Pl. 3/5–7), are artifacts discovered in Avar cemeteries in the graves of both children and adults⁹. From the Avar environment, this type of earrings was adopted in the Bulgarian environment¹⁰. They are not precise chronological indicators, as such artifacts are encountered during the Middle and Late Avar periods¹¹.

I.1.2. Beads

Beads were discovered only in the woman's grave (no. 37), (Pl. 3/8–13). The beads are made of glass and silver plate, three-lobed or pumpkin-shaped. They are dress accessories often encountered in children's and adults' graves from the Avar cemeteries dated to the entire period of the Avar Khaganate in the Carpathian Basin¹².

I.1.3. Globular artifact made of gilded silver

The artifact was discovered in grave 37, above the woman's skull cap (Pl. 3/15). It consists of an orb made of two half spheres that were joined in the middle. The lower part displays a ring-shaped wide strap. The orb is decorated on the outsider with lines forming "fir tree motifs" and with triangles made through granulation forming lozenges. I mention the fact that I was unable to find any analogy for the item under discussion. This is certainly an imported item, most probably from the Byzantium. The fact that it was discovered above the head suggests that it was used as an ornament placed in the center of a hat. The artifact could have also been the upper end of a scepter.

I.2. Dress accessories

I.2.1. Buckles

I.2.1.1. Oval buckle

The item was found in grave 37. It was cast in bronze together with the fixing plate (Pl. 3/14). The rivets with which it was attached to the belt have been preserved on the obverse. The small dimensions of the item (3 × 2.5 × 1.9 cm) most likely include it among the buckles used for footwear.

Artifacts identical to the buckle described above have been found both in complexes dated to the 7th century and those dated throughout the 8th and 9th centuries. I mention for example the items from Kunagota¹³, Ozora¹⁴, and Szegvár¹⁵, dated with coins to the Early Avar Period. For the 7th century (the Early and Middle Avar periods), objects of this type were found in Kisköre¹⁶, Kiskörös¹⁷, Szekszard¹⁸, Zelovce¹⁹, and Csákberény-Orondpusta²⁰. The buckles from the latter location are catalogued as artifacts specific to the Avar environment²¹. According to the items with which they are associated, I mention for the Late Avar Era the buckles from the graves discovered in Kiskör²², Homokmégy-Halo²³, and Cikó²⁴. Their use during the first half of the 9th century is attested by the item discovered on the territory of Walachia, in Sultana²⁵.

In Transylvania, a buckle identical to the one in Špálnaca was discovered in the Avar cemetery of

⁷ Čilinská 1991, 9–38; Longaeuová *et al.* 1991, 45–47.

⁸ Čilinská 1966, 145/Abb 11/IV, 148–149; Čilinská 1975, 75–76, Abb. 1/VII, Abb.6; Garam 1995, 263–266.

⁹ Garam 1995, 284, abb. 149/17–18.

¹⁰ Grigorov 1999, 42, tab. 8, type I A; Grigorov 2007, 106–107, Pl. 1.

¹¹ Garam 1995, 284, abb. 149/17–18.

¹² See for example: Garam 1995, 290–298; Pásztor 1997, 213–230; Pásztor 2015, 127–150; Schmid 2015, 44–49.

¹³ Garam 1992, 137–138 and the chronological table on p. 170–171.

¹⁴ Garam 1992, 145–146, fig. 58/1 and the chronological table on p. 170–171.

¹⁵ Garam 1992, 139–140, fig. 15/17, 18, fig. 16/5 and the chronological table on p. 170–171.

¹⁶ Garam 1979, 15, M. 37, pl. 10/8.

¹⁷ Török 1975, M. 52, 295, 301, fig. 4/M. 52/1.

¹⁸ Rosner 1999, M. 687, 86, 113–117, pl. 45/M. 687/1.

¹⁹ Čilinská 1973, M. 490, 123–124, pl. LXXXIII/M. 490/5, 9.

²⁰ Francsalszky 2015, 169–171, Abb. 40/2.6.3.

²¹ Francsalszky 2015, 171, Abb. 40/2.6.3, Taf. 18/M. 226/3–4.

²² Garam 1979, M. 159, 31, 82, pl. 25/4.

²³ Garam 1975, M. 48, 28, 44, fig. 6/M. 48/1.

²⁴ Kiss / Somogyi 1984, 67, pl. 44/X/13.

²⁵ Mitrea 1988, 115, pl. 7/M. 61/2; Fiedler 1992, I, 203–204.

Teiuș, in the grave of a military leader (M. 53); the latter necropolis dates to the Middle Avar Period²⁶. Such buckles that can be dated to the 7th century were also found in the Avar environment from Crișana²⁷.

1.2.1.2. Rectangular iron buckle

The item was found in grave no. 19. The buckle was discovered on the abdomen of the deceased, thus it was used as the main buckle of the belt placed around the man's waist. Both bronze and iron buckles are items with poor dating value. They have been generally dated through association with other artifacts. The buckle discovered in grave no. 19 from the cemetery in Șpălnaca/Șugud, has analogies in numerous graves from the Avar cemeteries dated during all the stages of existence of the Avar Khaganate in the Carpathian Basin²⁸.

1.3. Household objects

1.3.1. Iron firesteel

Found in grave no. 19. Only half of the item has been preserved. The preserved end is first inwardly and then outwardly bent (Pl. 1/5).

Iron firesteels were objects part of the funerary inventories in different cultural environments, dated to distinct stages of the Early Middle Ages in the Carpathian Basin and not only. The earliest items discovered in Western Romania are relatively simple in shape, with a wide body and very little bent ends, such as the item discovered in the Slavic cemetery in Pișcolt (Satu Mare County), dated to the 7th century²⁹, or the item in the grave of a Avar-Gepid warrior found in Unirea II/Versmort³⁰. Subsequent to the mentioned period, the shape of firesteels evolved. The later items have narrower bodies, provided with a half circle in the middle, and their ends are long and inwardly bent, at different degrees, once or forming S-type shapes.

The firesteels with narrower body or those with a half circle in the middle, with thinned ends, inwardly bent, in different variants, are types discovered in men's graves in Avar Cemeteries that can be dated to all of the chronological stages in the development of the Avar Khaganate³¹. The most numerous items are found in Pannonia, on the right side of the Danube, and in the Vienna Basin³².

From the 17 Avar cemeteries catalogued in Transylvania³³, firesteels were only discovered in the necropolises in Gâmbaș³⁴ and Sâncrai³⁵, both dated to the Middle Avar Period.

The firesteel from grave 19 in Șpălnaca/Șugud can be dated on the basis of other artifacts in the grave to the final part of the Middle Avar Period. The item in question can be considered more evolved from a formal perspective than the three firesteels in Gâmbaș and Sâncrai due to the fact that the ends of the latter are only once in-turned, while the ends of the firesteel in Șpălnaca/Șugud are S-shaped.

1.3.2. Iron knife

Discovered in grave no. 37. Single bladed iron knives were discovered in many Avar graves dated to all of the chronological sequences in the development of the Avar Khaganate in the Carpathian Basin; the length of the great majority does not measure more than 15–16/17 cm³⁶.

1.3.3. Iron hoops from a wooden bucket

The items were discovered in the woman's grave (no. 37). Iron hoops reinforced the wooden staves of buckets. The head hoop was provided with an iron fixture where the handle was attached.

Wooden buckets with iron hoops have been deposited in a series of Avar graves in the Carpathian Basin³⁷. Only wider or narrower straps have been preserved, longer or shorter, which are obviously

²⁶ Cosma 2017, 86/5, pl. 52,3; Cosma 2018, 64/2, pl. 7,3.

²⁷ Cosma 2002, 123/7.2.2.

²⁸ Čilinská 1966, 176–179, fig. 19; Cosma 2002, 123–124. There are numerous analogies and one cannot mention them all. See for example the archaeological monographs of the Avar cemeteries in Hungary and Slovakia from the series *Archaeologia Slovaca Fontes* (Bratislava); *Cemeteries of the avar period Avar Period (567–829) in Hungary* (Budapest); *Fontes Archaeologici Hungariae* (Budapest); *Monumenta Avarorum Archaeologica* (Budapest).

²⁹ Stanciu 2011, 278, pl. 117/3–4.

³⁰ Cosma 2017, 91/nr. 75, pl. 61/7.

³¹ For example: Čilinská 1966, 183; Garam 1995, 336, Abb.199, 10–12; Sós, Salamon 1995, 58; Stadler 2015, 136.

³² Stadler 2015, 136, Tafel 151.

³³ Cosma 2017.

³⁴ Cosma 2017, 60, Pl. 20/M.11/3, M. 14/1, Pl. 33/M. 21/2.

³⁵ Cosma 2017, 69, Pl. 29/M.10/4.

³⁶ See for example: Horedt 1958, 70; Tomka 1972, 27–75; Winkler *et al.* 1977, 273; Garam 1995, 332, Abb. 1–7; Sós, Salamon 1995, 56–58; Cosma 2002, 120; Balogh 2016, 261–264.

³⁷ There are numerous example. I mention just some of them: Eisner 1952, pl. 8 and the subsequent ones; Horedt 1958,

artifacts that cannot be dated. The remains of a wooden buckle of which only the iron hoops have been preserved was found in a woman's grave (M. 4) from the cemetery in Gâmbaș, a necropolis dated to the Middle Avar Period³⁸.

Wooden buckets of which just the iron hoops and handles have been preserved were also discovered in the cemeteries investigated archaeologically on the left and on the right side of the Lower Danube³⁹. They were not missing from settlements either⁴⁰, nor from deposits of tools and weapons⁴¹. In the area of the Middle and Lower Danube wooden buckets are encountered during the entire period of the 7th-10th centuries.

I.4. Weapons

I.4.1. Sax

The item was discovered in grave no. 19. The sax is made out of iron. Wooden traces from the scabbard have been preserved on the blade (Pl. 1/7). The blade of the sax is straight, with a single sharpened edge. Towards the tip the sharp side becomes narrower and ends in a sharp tip. The blade is separated from the handle by a circular ring. The handle is rectangular in section and ends in a semi-circular pommel with a rivet in the center⁴².

The sax from Șpălnaca/Șugud can be included in Csiki type I of saxes discovered in the Avar cemeteries in the Carpathian Basin⁴³. The saxes of this type have blades measuring 20 cm, minus – plus 2 – 3 cm. G. Csiki states that the sax type in question is encountered in cemeteries from the right side of the Danube with Merovingian connections⁴⁴. G. Csiki also mentions that in Transylvania such weapons feature in the Gepidic environment and provides the example of a sax found in a Germanic grave from the cemetery in Noșlac⁴⁵. G. Csiki believes that the saxes from the cemeteries on the right side of the Danube date to the first half of the Early Avar Period exclusively⁴⁶. The stirrups discovered in the same grave that contained the sax in Șpălnaca/Șugud can be dated towards the end of the Middle Avar Period and to the subsequent period (see below), and this supports the same dating for the sax.

II. The funerary compartments that contained the horse skeletons

II.1. Harness items

II.1.1. Bits (Pl. 1/3, 3/7a-b)

One bit was found in each of the two graves, both in the compartments containing the horse skeleton. The two bits are identical. They are articulated bits with side bars. The bars end in 8-shaped elements. The two bars are connected to each other through two loops. The cheek pieces are bent at the ends (part of the ends are broken). They are inserted in the inwards holes of the two bars. Reins loops are inserted in the outer holes. The cheek pieces are wider in the middle and display rectangular holes.

The two artifacts can be included in the series of articulated bits discovered in graves belonging to the Avar environment with 8-shaped outer ends and curved cheek pieces with rectangular holes in the middle for the annex harness belts⁴⁷. The outer hole supported the ring to which the belt was attached and the inner one supported the mouthpiece. According to this element, the bit under discussion belongs to type IA Ruttkay⁴⁸ and type IA Mechurová⁴⁹, being a usual presence in necropolises from the Carpathian area during the 7th-8th centuries⁵⁰, also encountered during the subsequent period⁵¹.

70: Kovrig 1963; Cilinská 1973; Kovrig 1975a-c; Kiss 1977; Kiss, Somogyi 1984; Garam 1995, 373; Kiss 2001, 144, Grab B-449, Taf. 83, G. B 449/4.

³⁸ Cosma 2017, 58/10, pl. 18/10.

³⁹ Toropu, Stoica 1972, 171 and fig. 10; Văjarova 1976; Fiedler 1992 I, II.

⁴⁰ Comșa 1978, 117–119.

⁴¹ Canache, Curta 1994, 188.

⁴² Due to a severe error that I made, the artifact in question features in Cosma 2017, 76/M. 19/2, Pl. 41/7 as dagger and this is wrong. In a study that is under print I demonstrate that the item in question is in fact a sax.

⁴³ Csiki 2012, 377.

⁴⁴ Csiki 2012, 377.

⁴⁵ Csiki 2012, 377.

⁴⁶ Csiki 2012, 377.

⁴⁷ Stadler 2005, 148, 6.10.41, Taf. 188.

⁴⁸ Ruttkay 1976, 357, fig. 75, type IA.

⁴⁹ Mechurová 1984, 265–276, Tab. I, type IA.

⁵⁰ Mechurová 1984, 263–292.

⁵¹ Ruttkay 1976, 357; Mechurová 1984, 265–276.

In the Avar environment from the Pannonian Plain, the most numerous bits with curved-ended cheek pieces were discovered in contexts dated to the Middle and Late Avar periods⁵².

Many items were also discovered on the territory of Slovakia and they can also be dated during the 7th and 8th centuries⁵³. Z. Čilinská notes the fact that bits with S-shaped curved cheek pieces, like the ones in Șpălnaca/Șugud, feature in contexts from the second half of the 7th century and during the 8th century and the origin of this type of artifacts must be sought after in the extreme eastern part of Europe⁵⁴. Curved cheek pieces are also encountered during a later period⁵⁵. They feature in the extreme eastern part of Russia in contexts dated to the 9th-10th centuries⁵⁶.

A bit similar to the ones under discussion here was discovered in Northwestern Romania, in Valea lui Mihai⁵⁷. In Transylvania, bits identical or almost identical to those in Șpălnaca/Șugud were discovered in contexts that can be dated starting with the Middle Avar Period: Bratei/Cemetery 2; Bratei/Cemetery 3; Cicău⁵⁸.

II.1.2. Stirrups

Stirrups were found in both graves under analysis here. All four items are of the same type. Three of them are rectangular in shape, with the upper side strongly arched. The pad is wide, inwardly bent, and pulled upwards. There is a vein in relief on the reverse of the pad, probably meant to increase its strength. The loop fixing the stirrup leather is separated from the upper part of the stirrup iron and is square in shape (Pl. 1/1-2, Pl. 3/8). The fourth stirrup displays an upper part that is not as wide as that of the other three items (Pl. 3/9). All are large stirrups, measuring between 17.5 and 18 cm in height.

The first stirrups, like those in Șpălnaca/Șugud, were introduced in the Carpathian Basin in the end of the Middle Avar Period; as examples one can mention several stirrups discovered in Devínska Nová Ves⁵⁹. But the most numerous items are encountered especially during the 8th century, both in the Carpathian Basin⁶⁰ and on the territory of Poland⁶¹. Artifacts of this type, almost identical in shape, are also attested during the first half of the 9th century⁶².

The stirrups in the two graves from Șpălnaca/Șugud can be included in type IV/7 Čilinská, dated during the 8th century⁶³. Z. Čilinská states that the type in question originated in Asia, as it was discovered in various cultural environments, including the Avar one⁶⁴. É. Garam mentions the fact that stirrups with flat pads and the stirrup leather ring separated from the upper part of the stirrup iron, square or rectangular in shape, first appeared towards the end of the Middle Avar Period and became generalized during the Late Avar Period⁶⁵. C. Bálint also states that stirrups of the type mentioned above are specific to the Late Avar Period⁶⁶.

In Transylvania, stirrups identical or very similar to the ones in Șpălnaca/Șugud have been discovered in the cemeteries in Aiudul de Sus, Bratei/cemetery no. 2, Câmpia Turzii, Cicău, Heria, Lopadea Nouă, Măgina, Noșlac, and Teiuș⁶⁷. The cemetery in Cicău⁶⁸ and the grave from Noșlac⁶⁹ date from the end of the Middle Avar Period. The items in Bratei/cemetery no. 2, Câmpia Turzii, and Teiuș are

⁵² There are too many examples to mention exhaustively. See especially the monographs of Avar cemeteries in Pannonia: Cemeteries 1975; Kiss 1977; Kiss, Somogyi 1984; Garam 1987, 73-77, 85-88, 97; Balint 1989, 161-164, Abb74/2; Garam 1995, 354-358; Kiss 2001, Teil II.

⁵³ Čilinská 1966, 192-193.

⁵⁴ Čilinská 1966, 192-193.

⁵⁵ Jakubčínová 2016, 305-306.

⁵⁶ Kyzlasov 1955, 250, 256, fig. 40/4.

⁵⁷ Cosma 2016, 220, 4.6, pl. 6/3.

⁵⁸ Cosma 2017, Pl. 10/1, 14/12.

⁵⁹ Eisner 1952, M. 79, 24-26, pl. 31/12, M. 524, 119-120, pl. 71/9.

⁶⁰ See for example: Kiss 1977, M. 184, 56, 59, pl. XXII/13; Garam 1987, 75, 85, 88; Trugly 1987, 289; Garam 1995, 358, Abb. 215, 6/565, 7/1146; Juhász 1995, M. L, 35-36, 66, pl. XV/2; Kiss 1996, 243, Abb. 139; Kiss 2001, Teil II.

⁶¹ Zoll-Adamikowa 1992, 310, Abb. 3/e-f; Poleski 1997, 19, fig. 3/14.

⁶² Ruttkay 1976, type I, variant 2, p. 353-236, fig. 74/I/2.

⁶³ Čilinská 1966, 190, 192, fig. 22/IV/7.

⁶⁴ Čilinská 1966, 192.

⁶⁵ Garam 1987, 196-197.

⁶⁶ Bálint 1989, 161, Abb.74/1.

⁶⁷ Cosma 2017, pl. 10/7-8; 12/15; 23/1-2; 24/1-2; 25/1-2; 26/5; 54/1-2.

⁶⁸ Cosma 2017, 20.

⁶⁹ Dobos 2015, 70-71.

associated with artifacts dated to the 8th century⁷⁰. The stirrups from the other cemeteries listed above are stray finds. A stirrup almost identical to the ones in Șpálnaca/Șugud was discovered in Crișana, in Socodor; it is dated to the end of the 8th century⁷¹.

II.2. Harness accessories

II.2.1. Phalerae

Two phalerae made of gilded bronze, circular in shape, with a diameter of 8 cm, were discovered flanking the horse's skull in the woman's grave (no. 37) (Pl. 3/1–2). They were cut out of metal plate. In the middle, the phalerae were provided with a circular knob. The rivet with which the phalerae were attached to the reins is preserved on the inside.

Large phalerae, made both of metal plate and cast metal, decorated with zoomorphic and vegetal motifs, were introduced and were frequently used during the Late Avar Period in the Carpathian Basin⁷². The metals used for such items were preponderantly silver and bronze⁷³. Nevertheless, it was phalerae made especially of iron plate decorated with inlay that became specific to the final period of the Late Avar Age⁷⁴.

In Transylvania, phalerae were only discovered in the cemeteries of Cicău, Teiuș⁷⁵, and Lopadea Nouă⁷⁶. In all of the cases, the items are made of bronze. Those from Cicău are decorated and measure up to 5 cm. The artifacts from Teiuș and Lopadea Nouă are identical to the ones from Șpálnaca/Șugud. Both the cemetery in Cicău and the one in Teiuș date to the beginning of the eighth century. One iron phalera, measuring 7.5 cm, was discovered in a grave dated to the eighth century from the cemetery in Săcueni/Veresdomb (Bihar County)⁷⁷.

II.2.2. Appliqués

The following artifacts were discovered in grave no. 37: 14 appliqués made of silver plated bronze, circular in shape, with the diameter measuring 2.5 cm (Pl. 3/3), one square appliqué measuring 2.5 × 2.5 cm (Pl. 3/4), and one cap-shaped appliqué (Pl. 3/6). All of them once decorated the reins, as they were discovered in the jaw area of the horse's skull.

The artifacts in question are not items that provide clear chronological indications. Due to their association with the phalerae and the stirrups presented above, they can be dated to the eighth century. The suggested dating is also supported by a series of observations on the level of the late Avar cemeteries from the Carpathian Basin; for this period specialists have noted an increased use of appliqués for the decoration of harness belts, in close connection to the wide-range use of the phalerae⁷⁸.

II.3. Weapons

II.3.1. Iron lance head, with a willow leaf-shaped blade and the socketing tube flared towards the end.

Found in grave no. 19 (Pl. 1/6). The lance head belongs to the thrusting lance category. There are numerous variants and sub-variants of lance heads with narrow, willow leaf-shaped blades. The items in Șpálnaca/Șugud belong to type I/A2-B1 in the typology created by Á. Cs. Sós and Á. Salamon (for the cemetery in Pókaszepetk⁷⁹, type 5/115 Garam (the cemetery in Tiszafüred)⁸⁰, and type AAa Husár among the groups of lances dated to the 7th-8th centuries inventoried from the Carpathian Basin⁸¹. Á. Both, Cs. Sós and Á. Salamon on the one hand, and E. Garam on the other state that the respective

⁷⁰ Cosma 2017, 18–22.

⁷¹ Cosma 2002, 143, 10.1.2, pl. 236/2.

⁷² Garam 1987, 85–93; Garam 1987a, 197; Bálint 198, 163, Abb. 74, 4; Profantová 1992, 633–635; Zábojník 2004, 138.

⁷³ Garam 1987, 85–93; Garam 1987a, 197; Bálint 1989, 163, Abb. 74, 4; Zábojník 2004, 138. For verification, see a series of examples from Avar cemeteries in the Carpathian Basin: Szob: Kovrig 1975b, M. 90, 180, fig. 10/M.90/31–32, M. 125, 182, fig. 14/M. 125/14–19; Tiszaderzs: Kovrig 1975c, M. 88, 223, fig. 10/M. 88/1; Pilismarót: Szabó 1975, M. 82, 259, fig. 8/M. 82/1–7; Regöly: Kiss, Somogyi 1984, M. 175, 138, fig. 84/M. 175/21; Tiszafüred: Garam 1987a, 85–93; Garam 1995, 360, Abb. 216; Cicău: Winkler *et al.* 1977, M. 3, 271, fig. 5/20–24, pl. II/18–19.

⁷⁴ Garam 1987a, 197.

⁷⁵ Cosma 2017, 55, 87, Pl. 15/20–24, 55/2–3.

⁷⁶ Roska 2001, 168, 4 kép/11–11.a

⁷⁷ Cosma 2016, 219–220, pl. 4/2–3, 6.a-b.

⁷⁸ Garam 1987, 85–93; Zábojník 2004, 138.

⁷⁹ Sós, Salamon 1995, 67, 69, Pl. LXXXI/grave 332 type I/A2-B1.

⁸⁰ Garam 1995, 349, Abb.208. 5/119.

⁸¹ Husár 2014, 112–114, Taf. I-XI.

lance types were discovered in layers that can be dated to the Early Avar Period. In the typology of lance heads performed by G. Csiki in 2007, the item from Şpálnaca/Şugud can be included in type I.3.a Csiki⁸², and in his 2009 typology, the artifact from Şpálnaca/Şugud can be included in type L.I.B.3.e⁸³. In both works the author mentions the fact that the lance head type in question is specific to the Middle Avar Period⁸⁴. G. Csiki also states that lance heads with narrow, reed leaf-shaped blades, with their numerous variants, formed the type most widely distributed during the entire Avar Period⁸⁵.

As for the lance heads with narrow reed leaf-shaped blades, all of the items discovered in the cemeteries from Transylvania are dated after the year 630, but especially during the Middle Avar Period⁸⁶. The lance head from Şpálnaca/Şugud is to be dated, according to the stirrups and bits with which it was associated in the graves, during the second half of the Middle Avar Period.

No. G. E	J			DA	HO			HI			HDI		W			CI	AB	
	B	O	Bc	F	K	W	Bd	S	Sd	P	HA	Bs	Sx	A	L			
G. 19	HC			X	X									X				
	CH							X	X	X						X		
G. 37	HC	X	X	X	X		X	X									X	X
	CH								X	X	X	X	X					

Tab. 1: No. G. – Grave number; HC – Human compartment; CH – Compartment with horse; J – Jewelry; AV – Dress accessories; HO – Household objects; HI – Harness items; HDI – Harness decorative items; W – Weapons; CI – Cramp irons; AB – Animal bones.

E – Earrings; B – Beads; O – Orb; Bc – Buckle; F – Firesteels; K – Knives; W – Wooden buckets; Bd – Bits; S – Stirrups; Sd – Saddle; P – Phalerae; HA – Harness appliques; Bs – broad swords; Sx – Sax; A – Arrowheads; L – Lance heads.

Analogies for the graves with horses in Şpálnaca/Şugud

In brief, these are the data regarding the graves with horses found in Şpálnaca/Şugud: the two horses were placed in a separate mortuary compartment created especially for them, lying on the left side, with the legs bent under the abdomen. The horse skeletons were oriented opposite the human skeletons. They had their head stretched to the E and the rear end to the W. A warrior was buried in grave no. 19 and a woman in grave no. 37. Both persons displayed Mediterranean, Eastern European physical characteristics with Mongoloid influences. The funerary inventory of both graves places the two persons among the Avar elite in Transylvania. The horses in both graves were male. The horses were relatively tall: the one in grave 37 was 1.35 m tall at the withers. The length of the horse skeleton in grave 19 was of 2.16 m. The horse on grave 19 was 6–7 years old and the one in grave 37 was 4 years old, both castrated at the time when they were sacrificed. The horse in grave 37 was only used for riding, while the one in grave no. 19 was used for both riding and other activities.

The two graves in Şpálnaca/Şugud that contained a human skeleton and the skeleton of a sacrificed horse in the same funerary pit are not isolated funerary complexes among the burials in the Carpathian Basin during the time of the Avar Khaganate. The “burials with horses” phenomenon of the Avar world has been noted for a while and discussed in European specialized literature focusing on the research of the Early Middle Ages. Thus, the two graves with horses in Şpálnaca/Şugud have numerous analogies in the Carpathian Basin during the 7th–8th centuries⁸⁷. Entire horses feature especially in men’s graves that were, based on the funerary inventories, members of the Avar military elite⁸⁸.

⁸² Csiki 2007, 311, 2 k ep. I/3.a.

⁸³ Csiki 2009, 72–73, 75–76.

⁸⁴ Csiki 2007, 311; Csiki 2009, 72–73, 75–76.

⁸⁵ Csiki 2009, 65.

⁸⁶ Cosma 2015, 254–262; Cosma 2017.

⁸⁷ For example:  ilinsk a 1961, 325–346; Kiss 1963, 153–162; Garam 1987, 65–123; Trugly 1987, 251–344;  ilinsk a 1990, 135–146;  ilinsk a 1991a, 187–212; B ona 1990, 113–122; Balogh 2009, 9–42; Bede 2012, 41–50; Bede 2014, 211–225; Z abojnik 2015, 277–291.

⁸⁸ For example:  ilinsk a 1961, 325–346; Kiss 1963, 153–162; Garam 1987, 65–123; Trugly 1987, 251–344;  ilinsk a 1990, 135–146;  ilinsk a 1991a, 187–212; B ona 1990, 113–122; Balogh 2009, 9–42; Bede 2012, 41–50; Bede 2014, 211–225; Z abojnik 2015, 277–291.

According to the orientation and position of the horse in the grave in relation to the human body, the two graves from Șpălnaca/Șugud can be included in type I Kiss “Horse skeleton deposited on the right side of the human skeleton, with the first oriented in opposite direction than the latter”⁸⁹. In 1963 A. Kiss noted that this type of burial was very poorly represented in the cemeteries of the Early Avar Era and that the most numerous graves of this sort were discovered in Avar cemeteries dated to the Late Avar Period⁹⁰.

In 2009, Cs. Balogh published an article on the burials with horses between the Tisa and the Danube. The paper includes the observation that graves type I Kiss were not a frequent way of burial among the Avars from the Carpathian Basin as compared to type III Kiss “Horse skeleton placed on the left side of the human skeleton, both having the same orientation”⁹¹. Type I is not very often encountered in Inner Asia, but there are many examples in the Altai⁹². Cs. Balogh also remarked upon the fact that type I Kiss graves between the Danube and the Tisa are more rarely encountered during the Early Avar Period, but became generalized during the Late Avar Period⁹³. Cs. Balogh notes that between the Tisa and the Danube there are no actual data to allow for the dating of graves type I Kiss before the second third of the 7th century⁹⁴.

The two graves with horses from Șpălnaca/Șugud belong to type I.1 of graves with entire horse skeletons in I. Bede’s typology created for the discoveries of this kind made in the Carpathian Basin⁹⁵. Just like Cs. Balogh, I. Bede also states that the graves with entire horse skeletons are more frequent than other types of graves that only contain parts of the horses’ bodies⁹⁶.

The grave of the woman buried with a horse in Șpălnaca/Șugud is unique among the Avar cemeteries in Transylvania. Nevertheless, the archaeological complex has analogies on north-eastern north-eastern border of the Avar Khaganate, in the southern area of present-day Slovakia, where several graves of women buried with horses dated to the Avar Period were found⁹⁷. In Z. Čilinská’s typology of women’s graves with horses from the above mentioned areal the grave in Șpălnaca/Șugud belongs to type 2 Cilinska, regarding the deposition of the entire horse in the grave, type dated starting with the middle of the 7th century and during the 8th century⁹⁸. The funerary complex in Șpălnaca/Șugud is nevertheless different through the position and orientation of the two skeletons in the grave. The horses in type 2 Čilinská graves were placed on the left side on the human skeleton. The horses’ and the people’s bodies were oriented along the same direction, but in Șpălnaca/Șugud the horse was deposited on the woman’s right side and was oriented with the head towards her feet.

From the perspective of the orientation of the horse skeletons as compared to that of the human bodies, but also regarding the soil wall dividing the human skeletons from those of the horses, the two graves in Șpălnaca/Șugud lack analogies in the Avar cemeteries from Transylvania. Still, there is one grave with horse, discovered in the cemetery in Cicău, dated to the beginning of the 8th century, that can be presented as an analogy, but only regarding the fact that the man and the horse shared the same pit and the deposition of the entire horse along the human skeleton⁹⁹. As compared to the graves in Șpălnaca/Șugud, the differences reside in the fact that in Cicău the horse was deposited on the left side of the warrior, right next to him, and the fact that the two skeletons shared the same orientation: ENE head WSW (the feet).

The chronological and ethnic-cultural identification of the graves with horses found in Șpălnaca/Șugud

The analysis of the archaeological material discovered in the two graves with horses researched

⁸⁹ Kiss 1963, 153.

⁹⁰ Kiss 1963, 158 and tab. I-III.

⁹¹ Balogh 2009, 13.

⁹² Balogh 2009, 13.

⁹³ Balogh 2009, 14.

⁹⁴ Balogh 2009, 14.

⁹⁵ Bede 2014, 212–213, 218–219.

⁹⁶ Balogh 2009, 13; Bede 2014, 2012–2013, 218–219

⁹⁷ Cilinska 1990, 135–146; Zábajník 2015, 283–287.

⁹⁸ Cilinska 1990, 139.

⁹⁹ Winkler *et al.* 1977, 270 (M.3); Georoceanu *et al.* 1977, 285.

in Șpălnaca/Șugud does not provide data supporting their dating before the middle of the 7th century. Nevertheless, a number of artifacts, such as the stirrup, the bits, and the phalerae from the two graves are items that support the dating of the two funerary complexes in the end of the 7th century and the first decades of the 8th century.

The two persons buried in these graves shared the same ethnicity, having ancestors of Mediterranean, Eastern European, and Asian (Mongoloid) origin. The two individuals were buried according to the funerary rigor specific to the Avars, with analogies in numerous Avar cemeteries discovered in the Carpathian Basin.

The richness and high quality of the funerary furnishings, the complex design of the two graves, the desire to ensure the deceased a final resting place that was as comfortable as possible, the great depth of the pits, the deposition of the sacrificed horses (buried with all their harness elements, with the reins ornamented with various types of appliquéés)¹⁰⁰ stress the upper social standing of the two persons buried in the cemetery from Șpălnaca/Șugud. Both can be presumed to have been part of the higher echelons of Avar society in Transylvania.

The man was the military leader of the other five warriors in the cemetery from Șpălnaca/Șugud who were only buried with their weapons, not with their horses. The numerous pieces of jewelry and dress accessories with which the woman was buried as compared to those in the inventories of other graves from the cemetery in Șpălnaca/Șugud, demonstrate her high standing in her community, even higher than that of the warrior buried with his horse. It cannot be excluded that the woman in question was the leader of the community that buried its dead on the spot of Șugud in the settlement of Șpălnaca (Alba County). The warrior buried with his horse and the other five warriors buried with their weapons in the respective cemetery were her subordinates. As an analogy one can mention grave no. 4 from Gâmbaș/The Reformed Cemetery that contained a woman with an extremely rich funerary inventory as compared to the graves of the warriors¹⁰¹.

Brief final notes

Two graves, identical through their “funerary construction”, were discovered in the cemetery from Șpălnaca/Șugud (Alba County), i.e. with mortuary pits that contained human bodies buried together with horses. Through their constructive characteristics and through the position and orientation of the human skeleton, different from that of the horse skeletons, the two graves in Șpălnaca/Șugud are as yet unique finds among the archaeological discoveries from Transylvania dated to the 7th-8th centuries.

The two graves with entire horse skeletons from Șpălnaca/Șugud are not an isolated phenomenon among the burials from the Carpathian Basin during the period of the Avar Khaganate. Graves of this type from Pannonia and West of the Danube, just like the ones in Șpălnaca/Șugud, are not very numerous in Avar cemeteries as compared to other types of graves with horses, but they did exist in the Carpathian Basin and became generalized during the 8th century.

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¹⁰⁰ In many cases the deposition in graves with rich inventories of the sacrificed horse together with all its elements of tack (the harness belts also decorated with appliquéés, numerous and of different types) stress the high standings of the respective warriors. Still, one must also take into consideration the fact that the graves that also contain horses are not an exclusive attribute of the military elites. The presence of horses in graves rather attests the high social standing of the deceased. Both common warriors and free rich people, including women and children, were buried with horses: Čilinská 1991a, 187–212; Zábajník 2015, 277–291; Bede 2012, 41–50.

¹⁰¹ Cosma 2017, 20, 57–50, Pl. 18.

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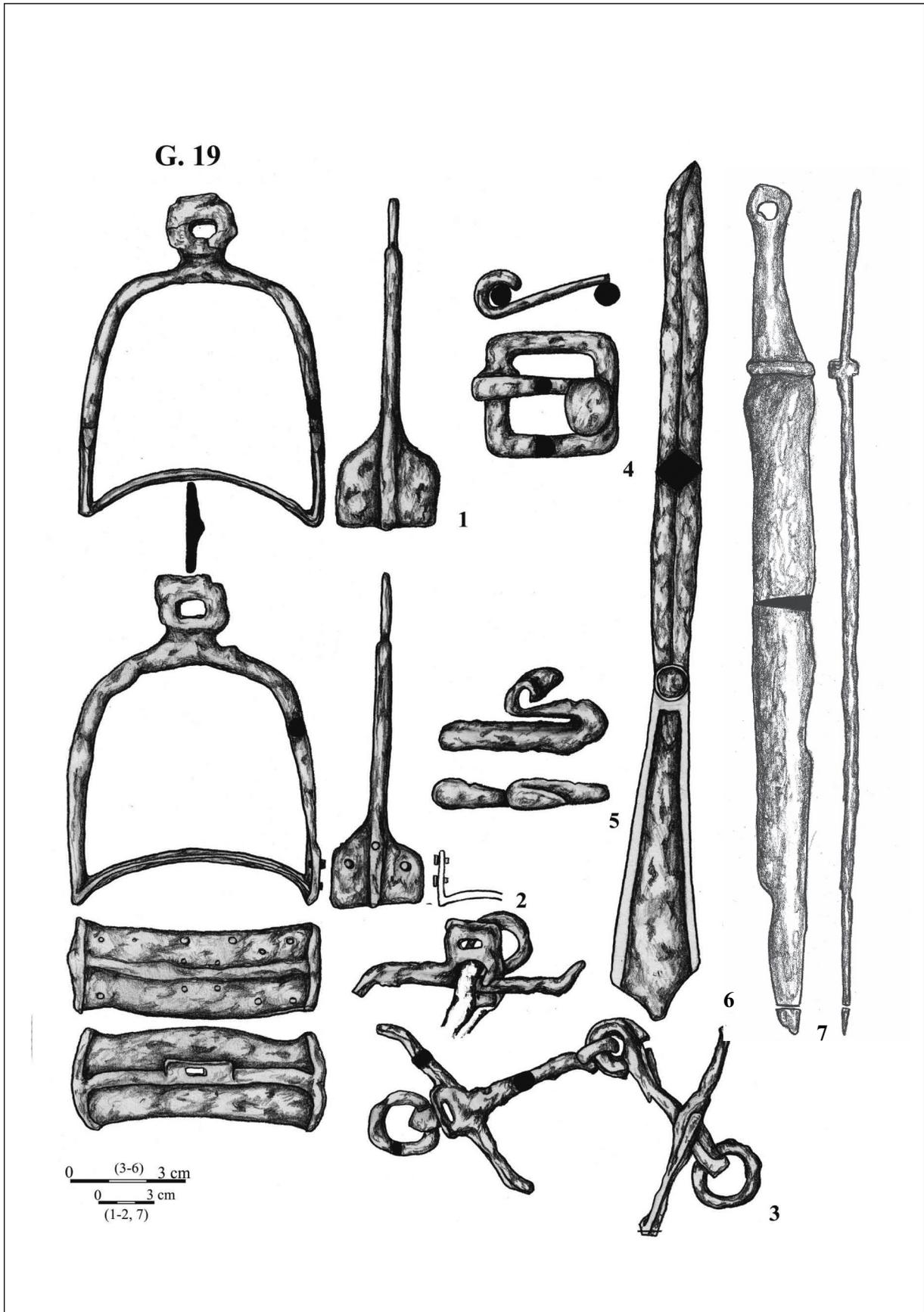


Plate 1. Grave no. 19.

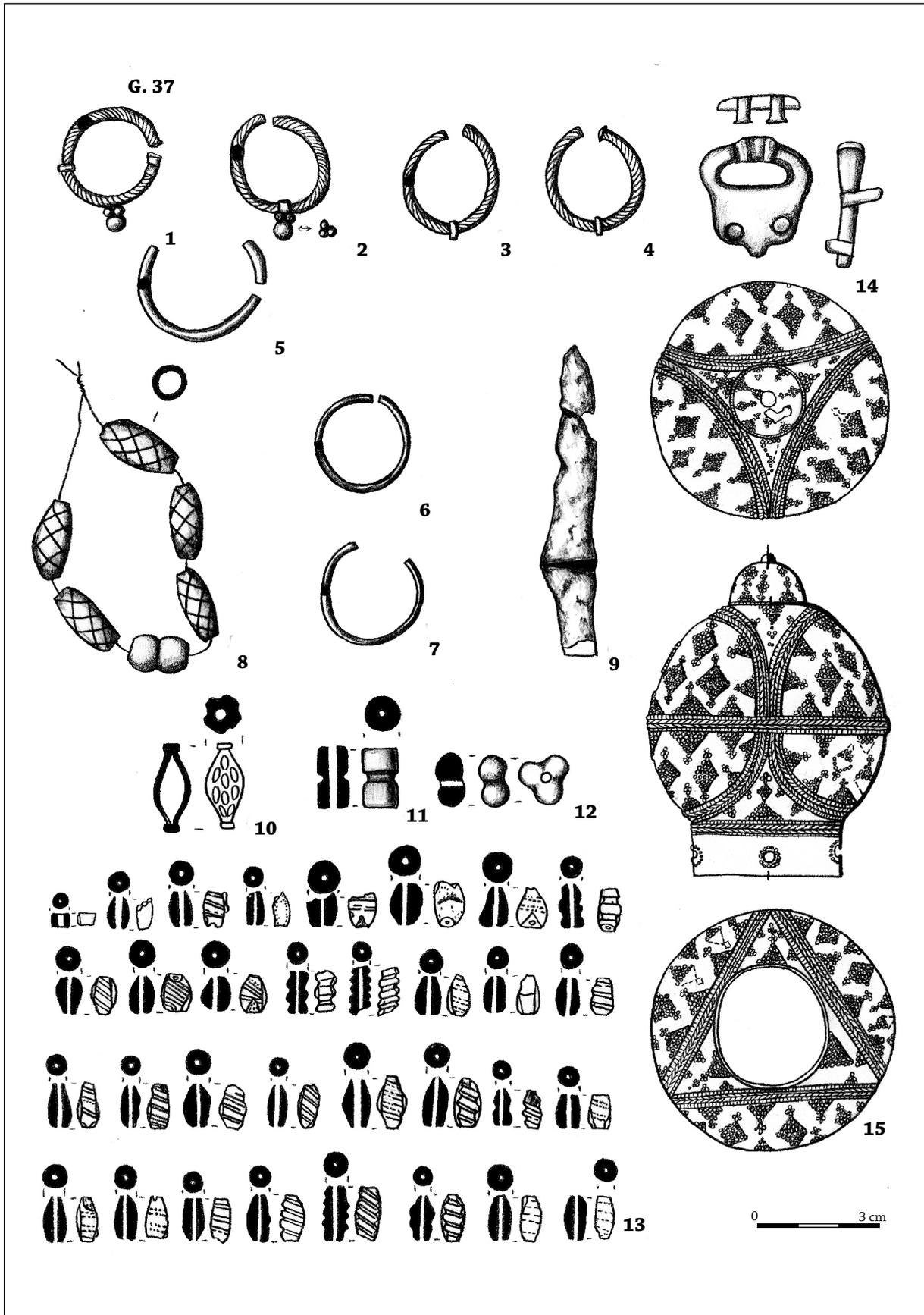


Plate 2. Grave no. 37.

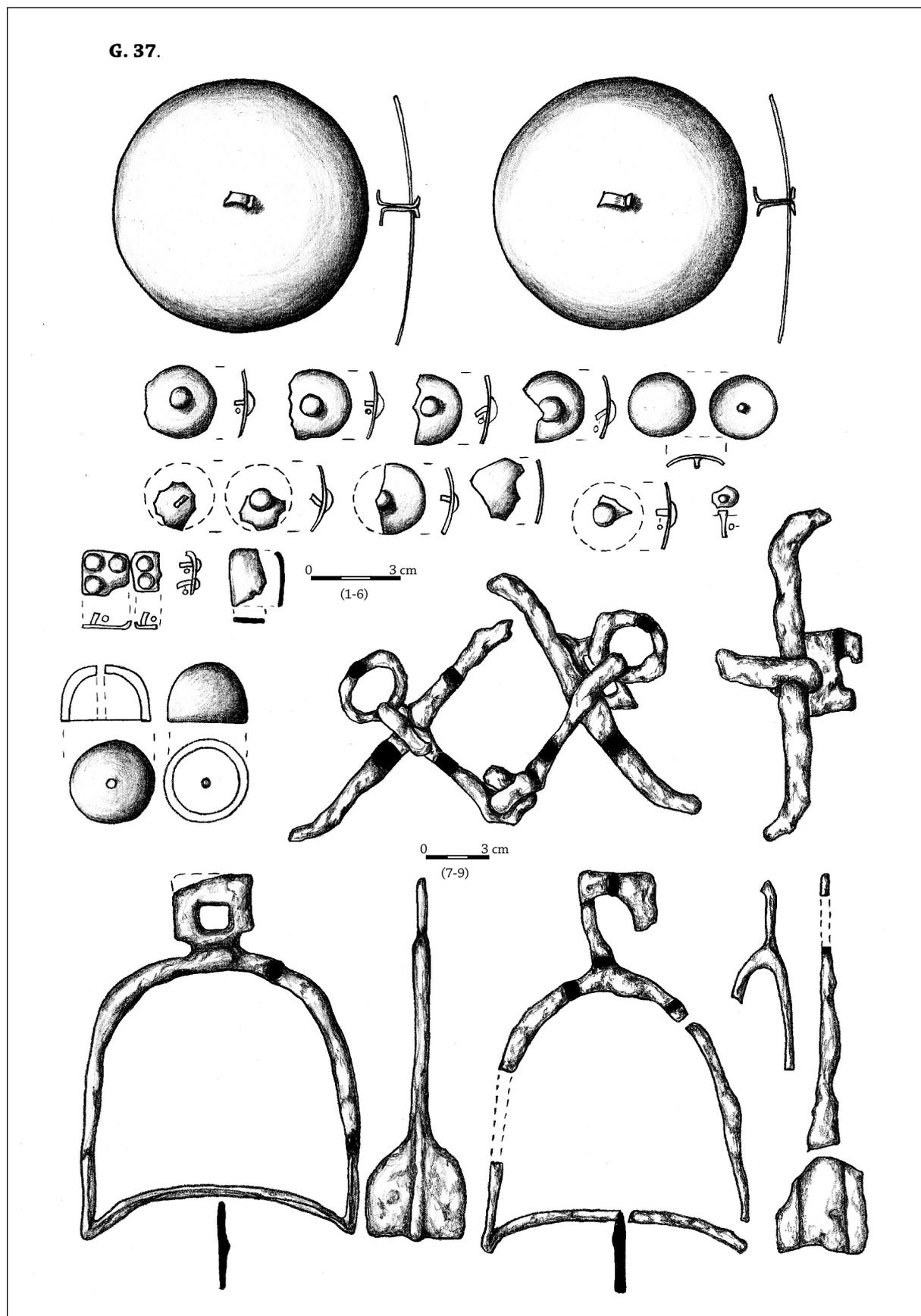


Plate 3. Grave no. 37.

