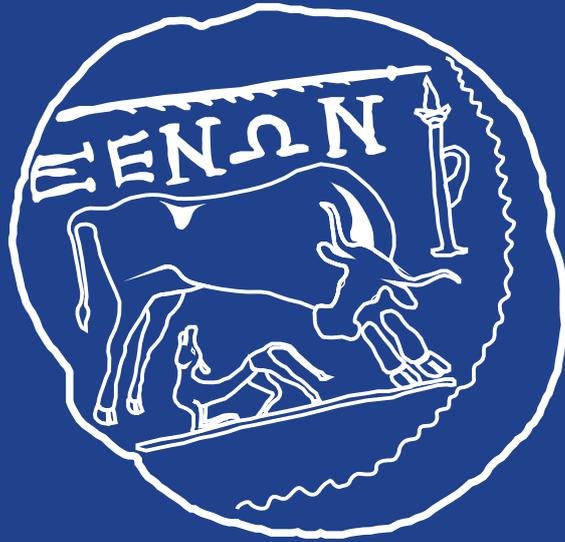


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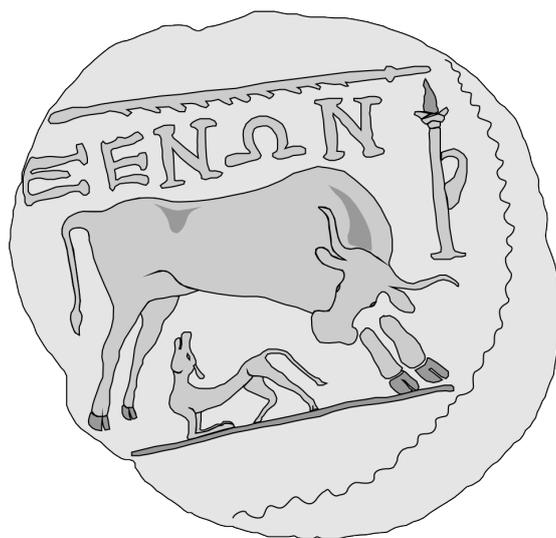
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*This volume is dedicated to Florin Drașovean at 70 years*

*Acest volum este dedicat lui Florin Drașovean cu ocazia împlinirii a 70 de ani*





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# Social and Gender Symbolism of Earrings in the 7th–8th Century Avar Communities of Transylvania

**Călin Cosma**

**Abstract:** This article proposes an applied analysis of earrings from the point of view of social and genre symbology in the Avar communities on the territory of Transylvania, a rather novel topic in Romanian historiography. Thus, we studied the presence, respectively absence of earrings in the Avar cemeteries and inhumations from 7th-8th century Transylvania. Secondly, we analysed the number of earrings within the graves, then the complexity of artefact making, the raw material of which these were made, all mirrored in their appearance and value. Last but not least, we highlighted and analysed the association of different earring types with other artefacts within the graves. The accomplished analysis of archaeological data suggests that earrings may be interpreted not only as mere adornments, jewellery items or dress accessories, but also as indicators of the owner's social standing. The overall analysis of the presence/absence of this artefact type within the graves offers first clues on social layering, starting from the hypothesis expressed in the academic literature regarding the relationship between this artefact and social symbology. Furthermore, generally believed a gender marker, the analysis of earring depositions in the Transylvanian Avar cemeteries documents the diffusion of such practice in female graves, yet also in civil or warrior male graves. Next, more refined statistical research according to other indicators, number, manufacture technique/ type, metal, other artefacts placed in graves, allows the outline of a more complete image on social hierarchies in the Avar communities from this area.

**Keywords:** earrings; gender attribute; economical attribute; social attribute; the Avars; Transylvania.

## Introductory specifications

In the academic literature, earrings are believed important objects for the Avar communities from the view of social and genre symbology<sup>1</sup>, thus we proposed an analysis of such type for the territory of Transylvania, which is rather novel topic in Romanian historiography. We have already published information on earrings recorded as having been discovered in Avar cemeteries, including technical data on their raw material, types/forms as well as decoration, all in a different study issued in the "Ziridava" Journal<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 1).

Consequently, we propose here, starting from data compiled on the types of discovered earrings, to continue their research from the view of archaeological symbology. In addressing the topic, we chose to present data quantitatively as a working method. Later, we used such data in the qualitative and analytical interpretation of earring use in order to decipher local peculiarities, possibly regional and general, firstly in relation to the social and genre structures at the level of Avar communities in Transylvania.

Thus, we attempted to examine the presence, respectively absence of earrings in the Avar cemeteries and inhumations of 7th – 8th century Transylvania. Secondly, we intended to analyse the number of earrings yielded by the graves, then their manufacture complexity, the raw material of their making, all mirrored in their appearance and value. Last but not least, we wish to highlight and discuss the association of different earring types with other artefact types identified within the graves. Based on said data, we aim at outlining the potential role of earrings in social and gender symbology in the Avar society of 7th – 8th century Transylvania.

<sup>1</sup> See for instance: Bóna 1970, 243, 252; Horváth 1972, 119-122; Bóna 1979, 5, 27, 29-30; Horváth 1979; Szentpeteri 1985, 79-110; Heinrich-Tamáška 2011, 89-110; Balogh 2016, 149-150, 337; Bende 2017, 291; Curta 2021, 1-19; Máté Horváth 2021, 51.

<sup>2</sup> Cosma 2022a, 205-248.

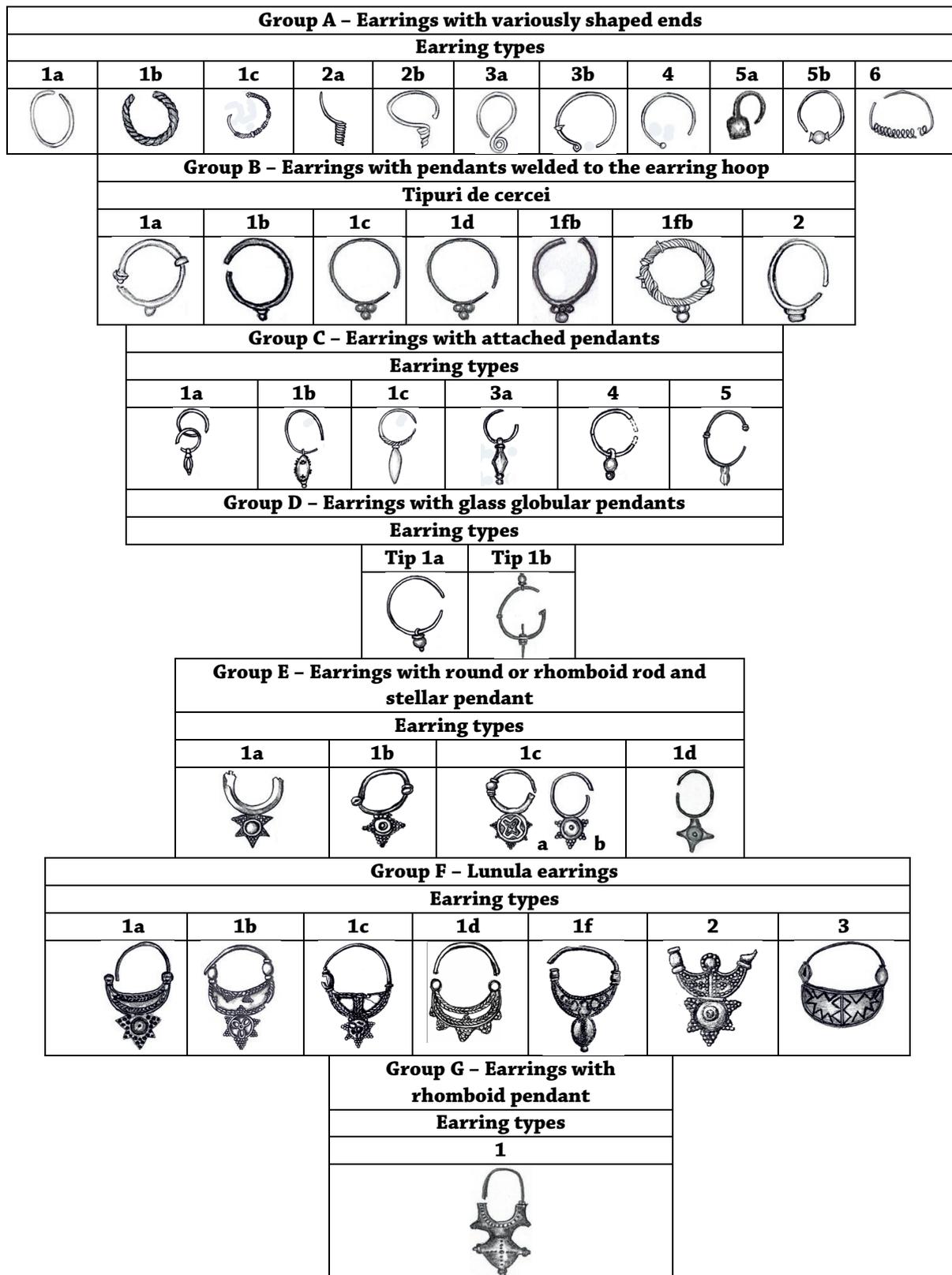


Fig. 1. Types of earrings from Avar cemeteries in Transylvania.

### The presence and absence of earrings in cemeteries, graves and isolate finds

In Transylvania, a number of twelve sites have been catalogued as yielding Avar burial find<sup>3</sup>. Earrings have been discovered in nine of these: Câmpia Turzii; Cicău; Gâmbaș/Cimitirul reformat/

<sup>3</sup> We specify that we excluded from analysis the Gepid-Avar cemeteries that form the Band-Noșlac-Bratei 3 group from

hereinafter Gâmbaş 1; Gâmbaş/Ogoarele de jos/hereinafter Gâmbaş 2); Lopadea Nouă; Sâncrai; Șpálnaca; Teiuș<sup>4</sup> and Ghirbom/Gruicul măciuliilor/hereinafter Ghirbom 1<sup>5</sup>. In eight sites from Transylvania, there were identified by chance a number of eight singular Avar graves: Geoagiu de Sus, Heria, Leșnic, Măgina, Stremț, Târnăve<sup>6</sup>, Târnav<sup>7</sup> and Moldovenești<sup>8</sup>. Earrings were discovered only in the graves of Moldovenești and Târnava. Therefore, out of twenty cemeteries and isolate finds, earrings were discovered in nine cemeteries and two isolate finds, namely in a 55% proportion of total Avar sites archeologically investigated in Transylvania.

The Avar cemeteries where graves containing earrings have been identified, lie geographically in the Avar power centre of Transylvania or in an area very close to it, located approximately in the middle of the Transylvanian Plateau, in the area where the Mureș river alters its course from the east-west direction to the north-south<sup>9</sup> (Fig. 2).

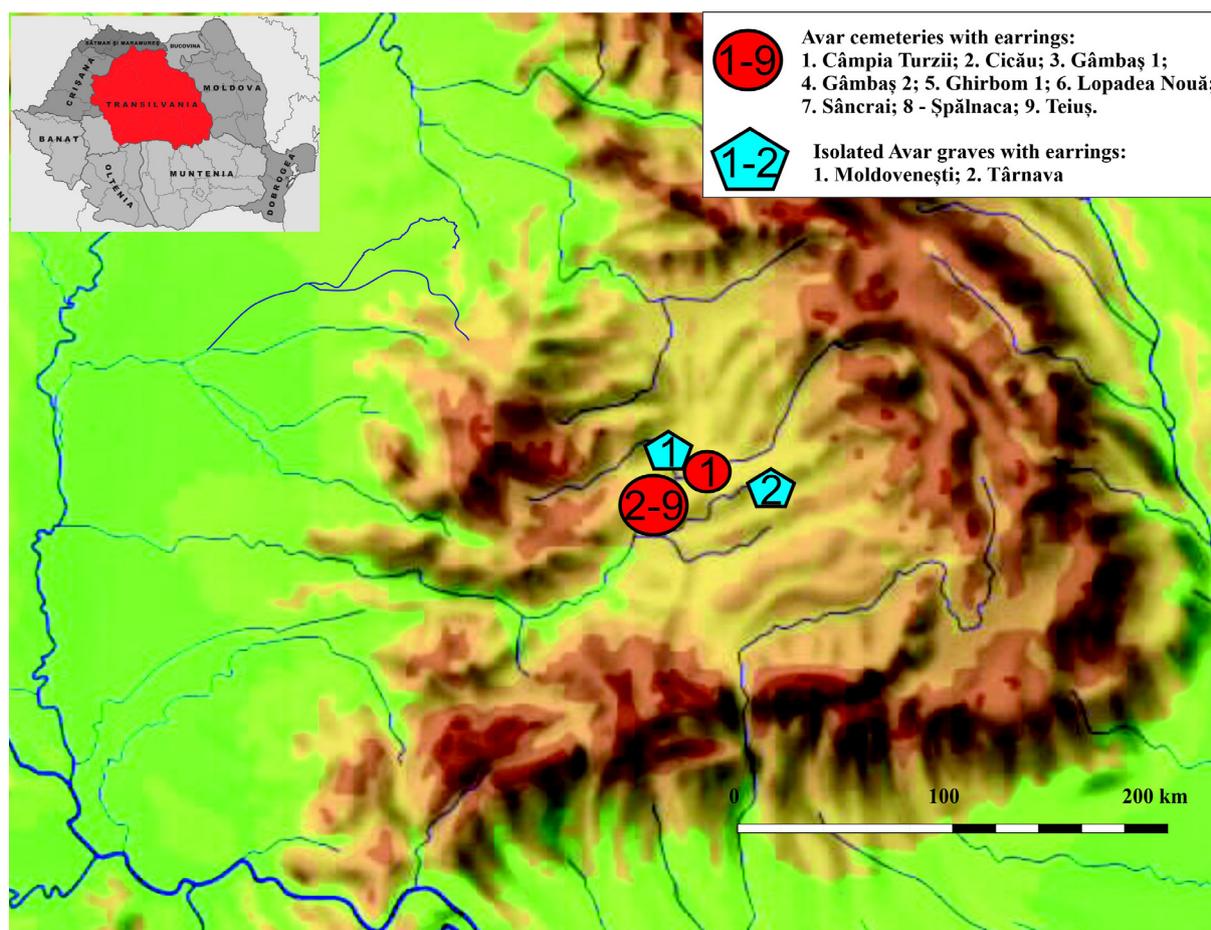


Fig. 2. Geographical distribution of cemeteries and isolated Avar graves with earrings in Transylvania.

From the view of the number ratio between graves with or without earrings at the level of Avar cemeteries in Transylvania, the situation is as follows. The cemetery of Câmpia Turzii cannot be statistically included as there are no number data on total graves. Existing information on the cemetery reveals the possibility there existed three burial pits where earrings had been discovered. At Cicău, out of the six graves, only two contained earrings. In the Gâmbaş 1 cemetery fourteen graves were archaeologically investigated. Earrings were yielded by three of these. Both graves of Gâmbaş 2

Transylvania.

<sup>4</sup> Cosma 2017, 52-64, 75-79, 79-89.

<sup>5</sup> Stoicovici, Blăjan 1982, 139-154.

<sup>6</sup> Cosma 2017, 62-64, 75, 79.

<sup>7</sup> Horedt 1941, 124-125; Horedt 1958, 101-102; Cosma 2017, 79.

<sup>8</sup> Palkó 1972, 678-679.

<sup>9</sup> Cosma 2017, 18-22, Map 5; Cosma 2019, 47-65.

comprised earrings. In only one of the two graves at Ghirbom 1 were discovered earrings. At Lopadea Nouă, two earrings were identified in the single entirely recovered grave. In the Sâncrai cemetery, one-hundred and nine human graves and one of horse were found. The number of graves yielding earrings is of fifty-five burial features. Out of the thirty-eight Avar graves from the Șpálnaca cemetery, fifteen burial pits contained earrings. For the Teiuș cemetery there are secure archaeological data on the existence of sixty-one inhumations. It is possible their number had been higher. In fourteen of the sixty-one graves earrings were discovered (Tab. 1).

Tab. 1. The presence or absence of earrings in isolated avar cemeteries and graves in Transylvania

Location	Avar cemeteries			Isolated avar graves		
	Entire graves	Graves without earrings	Graves with earrings	Entire graves	Graves without earrings	Graves with earrings
<b>1. Aiud</b>	3 +?	3	0			
<b>2. Aiudul de Sus</b>	?		0			
<b>4. Câmpia Turzii</b>	3 +?	?	3			
<b>5. Cicău</b>	6	4	2			
<b>6. Gâmbaș 1</b>	14	11	3			
<b>7. Gâmbaș 2</b>	2	0	2			
<b>6. Ghirbom 1</b>	2	1	1			
<b>7. Lopadea Nouă</b>	1+?	?	1			
<b>8. Luna</b>	unpublished	?	?			
<b>9. Sâncrai</b>	109	54	55			
<b>10. Șpálnaca</b>	38	23	15			
<b>11. Teiuș</b>	61 +?	47	14			
<b>1. Geoagiu de Sus</b>				1	1	0
<b>2. Heria</b>				1	1	0
<b>3. Leșnic</b>				1	1	0
<b>4. Măgina</b>				1	1	0
<b>5. Moldovenești</b>				1	0	1
<b>6. Stremț</b>				1	1	0
<b>7. Târnavă</b>				1	0	1
<b>8. Târnaveni</b>				1	1	0
<b>Total</b>	239	143	96	8	6	2

Thus, in smaller cemeteries, the proportion of graves comprising earrings is high, as registered at Gâmbaș 2, Ghirbom or Cicău, while in the cases of Lopadea Nouă and Câmpia Turzii, as previously mentioned, the situation is unclear as there are no accurate data on the number of graves in the two cemeteries. At Gâmbaș 1 and Teiuș, cemeteries with fourteen, respectively sixty-one graves, the proportion of those containing earrings is of 21%, respectively almost 30%. The percentage of graves with earrings increases in the case of the thirty-eight graves cemetery of Șpálnaca to 39.5% and at Sâncrai, the largest excavated cemetery, with one-hundred and nine graves, to 50 %. At the level of singular graves, discovered by chance, earrings were discovered, as shown, only at Târnavă and Moldovenești. Out of the total graves identified within cemeteries and isolate finds, amounting to two-hundred and forty-seven graves, the ratio of the earrings is almost 40%. The percentage may be deemed as a diffusion indicator of this jewellery type. Above statistics evidences that earrings were discovered in a significant proportion of the studied graves. A particular situation is noticeable within the isolate graves, discovered by chance. The earrings' frequency in these graves is almost half smaller compared to cemetery graves. Within the graves discovered by chance, the two graves that yielded earrings represent a 22% percentage of total burial pits in this category, where earrings were found.

Thus, it may be specified that not all members of the Avar communities of Transylvania were buried with earrings. The number of individuals buried with earrings is generally smaller in all cemeteries compared to that of individuals buried without earrings and only in a few cases, equal or almost equal with the latter. If, according to the academic literature, earrings may be deemed a social hierarchy marker, at the base of the Avar social pyramid of Transylvania lay those buried without earrings, who represented around 60% of the persons whose status may be analysed based on burial finds to date. If we take into consideration investigated sites with more than three and up to fifty graves, the percentage of those placed by the base of community hierarchy is of 67% at Cicău, 79% at Gâmbaş and 1.60% at Şpălnaca. In the two sites with more than fifty investigated graves, the situation is as follows: 77% at Teiuş and almost 50% at Sâncrai. Percentages are orientative, general in nature, structuring the Avar society of the region depending on earring depositions, respectively their lack, without taking into consideration any other possible artefact deposition types within the graves, important from the view of social symbology.

### Earrings within the graves depending on gender and age

Still generally, a few conclusions may be issued in relation to the gender symbology of earrings in this region. It is agreed that earrings are believed a gender marker for women<sup>10</sup>.

Upon the analysis per cemeteries, it is very likely that the three graves from the Câmpia Turzii cemetery where earrings were discovered had belonged to women. In the two graves that contained earrings in the cemetery at Cicău, women had been buried. In the Gâmbaş 1 cemetery, in the three graves where earrings were found, women had been interred. In the grave with earrings of Ghirbom 1, a female was buried. However, it may be also noted that at Gâmbaş 2, the two graves that yielded earrings had belonged to males. At Lopadea Nouă, the grave with earrings had belonged to a warrior. In the Sâncrai cemetery, earrings were discovered in thirty-seven female graves, yet also in twelve male graves, in four adult graves, in one infant grave and one of cenotaph type. In the Şpălnaca cemetery, earrings were identified in thirteen female graves, yet also in a male grave and in one of a warrior. In the Teiuş cemetery as well, one of the graves with earrings had belonged to a male. In all the other twelve graves comprising earrings, females had been buried. The grave with earring from Târnavă had belonged to a warrior, and in that of Moldoveneşti a woman was buried (Tab. 2).

Therefore, it is obvious that earrings were discovered in female yet also male, warrior and infant graves. On the other hand, graves with earrings ascribed to women are in a considerably larger number compared to that of male, civilian or warrior or infant graves. Thus, few males and infants in the Avar

Tab. 2 – Number of graves with earrings in Avar cemeteries in Transylvania by gender

Cemeteries	Total cemetery graves	Number of graves with earrings in cemeteries by gender					
		Men	Women	Adults	Warriors	Children	Cenotaph
1. Câmpia Turzii	?	0	3	0	0	0	0
2. Cicău	6	0	2	0	0	0	0
3. Gâmbaş 1	14	0	3	0	0	0	0
4. Gâmbaş 2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0
5. Ghirbom 1	2	0	1	0	0	0	0
6. Lopadea Nouă	1?	0	0	0	1	0	0
7. Moldoveneşti	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
8. Sâncrai	109	12	37	4	0	1	1
9. Şpălnaca	38	1	13	0	1	0	0
10. Târnavă	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
11. Teiuş	61 +?	1	13	0	0	0	0
<b>Total graves</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>

\* Sites without graves with earrings were not included in the table.

<sup>10</sup> Máté Horváth 2021, 51.

communities of Transylvania were buried with earrings. Out of the total graves that yielded earrings, these were found in only a percentage of 16 % in male graves belonging to the civil society, to which add three warrior graves, four adult graves in which the gender of the deceased could not be established, one of an infant and one cenotaph grave. Regarding the number of warrior graves discovered in the Avar cemeteries of Transylvania (except for the cemetery at Aiudul de Sus), it counts thirty-two burial features, to which add seven isolate finds<sup>11</sup>. It is also worth noting that out of the thirty-nine warrior burials discovered in this region, only three contained earrings, one grave in each of the cemeteries at Lopadea Nouă and Șpálnaca and an isolate grave at Târnava. This is indicative of the fact that the presence of earrings in warrior graves from this area is rather atypical and might be related to the standing of the warrior in the military hierarchy of the time. I. Bna had evidenced that Avar military chieftains of the Carpathian Basin were also buried with earrings, this burial practice originating from Asia<sup>12</sup>. Closest examples geographically on this burial custom are those of Unirea 2/Veresmort<sup>13</sup> in the Transylvanian Plateau and Sânpetru German, in the Romanian Banat<sup>14</sup>. Then, only an infant grave of the three and one of cenotaph type of the six in the Sâncrai cemetery had contained earrings. The two infant burials in the Teiuș cemetery did not contain any grave goods. Regarding women graves that yielded earrings in relation to the total graves where this jewellery type had been identified, they represent a percentage of 74.5%. This percentage reveals, as mentioned above, that this jewellery type was found mainly in women graves (Fig. 3).

Regarding the number of graves with earrings in each cemetery, depending on gender, burial pits where women had been buried compared to those of men, differ from one cemetery to another. As shown, in the sites of Câmpia Turzii, Cicău, Gâmbaș 1, Ghirbom and the grave at Moldovenești,

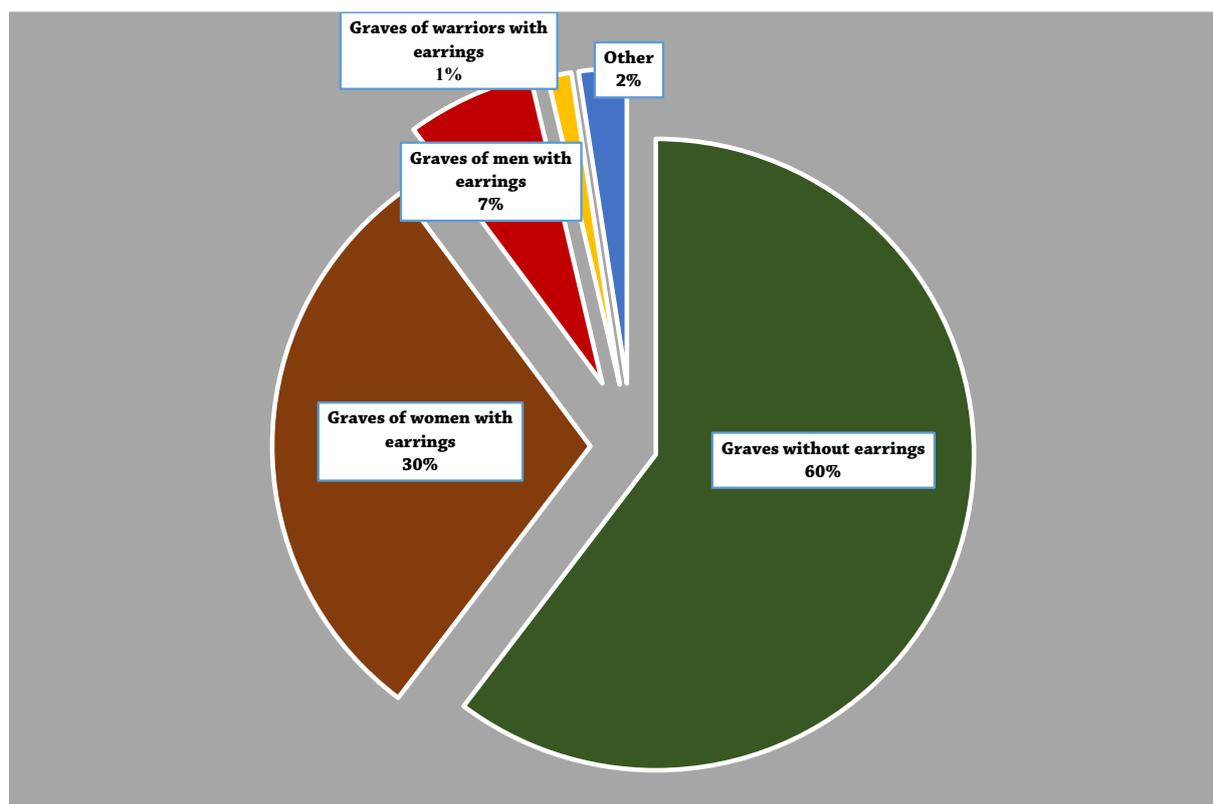


Fig. 3. Graphic representation of graves with and without earrings.

<sup>11</sup> These were discovered in the Avar cemeteries of: Aiud (three graves, and other destroyed), Cicău (two graves), Gâmbaș 1 (three graves), Lopadea Nouă (one grave), Sâncrai (thirteen graves), Șpálnaca (eight graves) and Teiuș (two graves). To these add the singular warrior graves discovered by chance at Geoagiu de Sus, Heria, Leșnic, Măgina, Stremț, Târnava and Târnăveni: Cosma 2017, 62 – 64, 75, 79.

<sup>12</sup> Bóna 1979, 5, 27,29-30

<sup>13</sup> Rustoiu, Ciută 2015, 107-127.

<sup>14</sup> Dörner 1960, 425, no. 9, fig. 4/4.

earrings were discovered only in female graves, while at Şpálnaca and Teiuş, in most part only in female graves, yet also a male grave at Teiuş and one of a warrior in the Şpálnaca cemetery. A special situation is found in the “cemetery” at Gâmbaş 2, where the two male graves had contained earrings, and at Sâncrai, where earring wearing in civil society males, seems rather spread compared to other locations (22% of the graves with earrings there). These aspects evidence hypothetical community peculiarities concerning earring wearing by women and men.

Past these local specificities it may though concluded that from the view of gender symbology, in the Avar communities of Transylvania earrings had been a mainly feminine adornment. These were also worn in small numbers by the men in the Avar civil society and, scarcely, by warriors.

### **Number of earrings and their location within graves**

The number of earrings in the Avar cemetery graves varies between one and seven exemplars. The majority are graves with two earrings (34), followed closely by graves with one earring (30), which could be found in both male and female graves, women grave numbers being in both cases higher. Similarly, graves with three to seven earrings are mainly female graves. Among the fourteen graves with four earrings, twelve were women graves, while with five earrings a male and two females graves were identified. With seven earrings were buried three females.

Within cemeteries, it may be noted for instance the fact that at Sâncrai, the largest investigated cemetery, the burial practice of three to seven earrings was better spread compared to other sites, nineteen women and five men being buried there with several earrings, then at Şpálnaca, four women and two men, Gâmbaş 2 (one male) and Gâmbaş 1 (one female) and Teiuş (two females).

One earring wearing seems rather diffused and was practiced by females, males and warriors alike. Similarly spread was also the wearing of two earrings. It remains debatable whether in general, the number of earrings that the deceased wore upon burial is a self-indication of social prestige. It may be noted that the relation between women burials with several earrings respectively men with several earrings favours the first category. With seven earrings were discovered only two women graves (Table 3, Appendix 9). The circumstances in Transylvania are also found in other areas of the Avar Khaganate from the Carpathian Basin<sup>15</sup>.

The position of earrings in relation to the human body placed in the burial pit is disputable, similarly to the symbolical value of their positioning. Then, there are no data on the deposition place of earrings in the case of all graves. According to existing information, there are a series of graves where these were discovered on either side of the skull, yet there are graves where these were also placed in the chest and pelvis area.

In the case of graves with a single earring, it was discovered on one of the two sides of the skull, its singularity most likely evidencing the fashion of single earring wearing, used regardless of gender, by men and women alike. It may also have other inferences, like for instance that of burial offering or of an object fulfilling an apotropaic purpose<sup>16</sup>.

In the case of burials with two earrings, these were discovered to the left and right side of the skull, in the ears' area. Typologically, these are earrings of a single type, yet also of different types, like for instance those in one of the women graves at Cicău and one at Teiuş. According to their position within the grave in the ears' area, including also those of different types, earrings may be deemed adornments used in the daily attire. In the case of two different earrings deposited in the grave, one may wonder whether these were worn simultaneously or alternatively.

In the case of graves where four earrings were discovered, some of the same type, yet also of different types, it may be assumed that respective earrings were not artefacts worn concurrently by the deceased in their lifetime. In general, earrings could not be attached to the ear two on the same side, two on the other, as the pieces became entangled, the lower earring becoming almost invisible, having no visual impact on the others. We believe that earring pairs of type F and E discovered in women graves at Gâmbaş 1 or Sâncrai, may interpreted as artefacts part of the adornment dowery of respective women, objects that the family had placed in the grave beside the deceased. The fact that all four earrings

<sup>15</sup> Bende 2017, 291.

<sup>16</sup> Horváth 1972, 119-122; Horváth 1979 online; Máté Horváth 2021, 51.





with a hole (a procedure used for beads) and then threaded on the rod soldered to the earring hoop. The number of earrings of the type amounts to thirteen exemplars. They were discovered in eight graves of four cemeteries. Two earrings originate from just a man grave in the Gâmbaş 2 cemetery. The remaining were found in women graves in the cemeteries of Sâncrai (four graves/six earrings), Şpălnaca (one grave/two earrings) and Teiuş (two graves/three earrings). Their frequency is lower, representing 6% of the earrings found in women graves, to which are added the two earrings from the man grave mentioned above. (Tab. 4, Appendix 5).

The production of earrings in groups C, E, F and G requires higher know-how in their making. The items were cast-mould. Some earrings with an ovoid pendant attached to the earring hoop (Group C) were decorated by the filigree technique. All earrings in groups E, F, G have one of the sides/the reverse decorated in different manners with lines and small spheres, made at the time when the items were cast in the mould or later, after these were removed from the moulds (in the case of soldered small spheres on the obverse of the earring plates). In these cases, know-how was needed for making the moulds, for the melting of raw material of which the earrings were made and last but not least, high skills were required for their finishing once removed from the moulds. These procedures required skilful goldsmithing. (Tab. 4, Appendices 4, 6-8)

Earrings in group C (with attached pendant) originate from five cemeteries, the lot containing thirty exemplars discovered in twenty graves. The statistics in women graves with earrings reveals a percentage of 10%, a proportion similar to that of type B. After type A earrings, in frequency terms, this type ranks second among earrings types found in men graves, with a percentage of 23% of the total found in men graves. Statistically, earrings identified in men graves were overwhelmingly of type A and C, in a proportion of 80.5%. (Tab. 4, Appendix 4).

Within Group E (earrings with a stellar pendant), a number of nine earrings were registered, discovered in four graves of three cemeteries. Group E earrings are found only in women graves. (Tab. 4, Appendix 6).

Group F (lunula earrings) comprises a number of thirty-four earrings from four cemeteries and two isolated, fortuitously discovered graves. The number of graves with earrings of this type is twenty-one burial pits. The model framed in Group F is more specific to women as well, thirty-five earrings representing 16% of the total discovered in women graves, the second most frequent type after those in type A. (Tab. 4, Appendix 7).

Two earrings framed within group G were identified in a woman grave from the Sâncrai cemetery (Appendix 9). Type G is not found in men graves. It is noteworthy that the eleven earrings in groups E and G were discovered only in women graves.

Thus, it may be argued that groups C, E, F and G, which required higher know-how in their making, were better represented in women graves, at a percentage of 32% of the total exemplars from Avar female graves in Transylvania, while such exemplars were few in male graves, twelve exemplars, with no earrings from groups E and G.

According to the above, it may be specified that, in all Avar cemeteries of Transylvania, the number of simplest earring types from the point of view of their production complexity (groups A-B, D) was higher, but also proportions within the ensemble of male graves with earrings, respectively women graves with earrings, were higher, both at the macro level and at the level of each cemetery individually, compared to earrings that required higher technical skill for their making (groups C, E, F, and G). 68% of the earrings discovered in the Avar graves belonged to groups A, B, D, being the simplest variants in terms of execution, and 32% to groups C, E, F, G.

Valuing percentages from the social symbology view, in this case, data must be viewed reversely. The smaller number of artefacts, respectively the percentage, represents the types used by the elites of the Avar communities in the Transylvanian Plateau. The number of these artefacts thus correlates with the reduced number of graves in which these were discovered. We believe that earrings which required particular goldsmithing skills for their making, such as those in the already mentioned groups C, E, F, and G, belonged to those individuals in the upper half of the social hierarchy within the human communities. It is significant to note that numerically, as well as typologically, these were representative especially for the female elites of the time. As an elite/gender marker, a percentage of 77% of the earrings in groups C, E, F, G were discovered in women graves. In fact, as we have already shown, types E and G were only found in women burials.

Going further, taking into account the metal of which these were made, it is possible to further refine the social layering within the analysed communities. Thus, in the Avar cemeteries of Transylvania, a number of one-hundred and sixty-eight bronze earrings were discovered. The number of those identified in male graves of Avar cemeteries in Transylvania amounts to thirty-one items. In women graves, one-hundred and twenty-eight bronze earrings were discovered. In the cemetery of Șpálnaca, a warrior grave contained three bronze earrings. One bronze earring was discovered in the singular, warrior grave of Târnavă. Thus, the number of bronze earrings in the two Avar warrior graves amount to four exemplars. The adult graves, the infant grave and the cenotaph, all from the Sâncrai cemetery, contained eight bronze examples.

Beside bronze earrings, which predominate the whole of these artefact finds, silver earrings were identified as well, a more valuable metal compared to the first, which may be associated with wealth and higher standing in the society. Thus, in the Avar cemeteries of Transylvania were found sixty-one silver earrings. Male graves with silver earrings were discovered in the cemeteries of Gâmbaș 2 (one earring/one grave), Sâncrai (four earrings/two graves) and Teiuș (one earring/one grave), thus a total of six earrings. A warrior grave which contained two silver earrings was found in the Lopadea Nouă cemetery. Women graves that yielded silver earrings originate from the cemeteries of: Cicău (two earrings/two graves); Gâmbaș 1 (eight earring/three graves); Ghirbom 1 (two earrings/one grave); Sâncrai (thirty-four earrings/fourteen graves); Șpálnaca (four earrings/two graves); Teiuș (seven earrings/four graves). One silver earring was found in the singular woman grave of Moldovenești. Silver earrings amount to a total of fifty-three exemplars originating from female graves. It is also worthy of note that in a series of burial pits were identified both bronze and silver earrings, which we shall discuss elsewhere.

In conclusion, a preponderance of bronze earrings may be noted among the finds, representing a percentage of 74% of the total earrings discovered in the investigated sites, a much smaller percentage, of 26%, being silver earrings. Then, in both men and women, bronze earrings dominate, 71% of total earrings from women graves and 81% from civilian and warrior male graves. All earrings from adult graves, infant graves and cenotaphs were only made of bronze. If we consider the value of the metal used in earring making as an indication of social differentiation in itself, we notice an intermediate category in the social pyramid of the communities, that of the bronze earring bearers (Tab. 5).

In what silver earrings according to gender is concerned, notably 87% of these were identified in women graves. More than half of silver earrings discovered in female graves come from the Sâncrai cemetery, to which add three silver earrings found in male graves. However, as it is the largest excavated site, yielding a total of one-hundred and forty-one earrings, the frequency of those in silver

Tab. 5 - Number of earrings by gender and the metal they were made of.

Cemetery	Earrings according to the metal they are made of								
	Bronze						Silver		
	Men	Women	Adults	Warriors	Children	Cenotaph	Men	Women	Warriors
<b>Câmpia Turzii</b>		6							
<b>Cicău</b>		1					2		
<b>Gâmbaș 1</b>								8	
<b>Gâmbaș 2</b>	5						2		
<b>Ghirbom 1</b>								2	
<b>Lopadea Nouă</b>									2
<b>Moldovenești</b>								1	
<b>Sâncrai</b>	23	78	4		2	2	3	29	
<b>Șpálnaca</b>	3	26		3				3	
<b>Târnavă</b>				1					
<b>Teiuș</b>		17					1	8	
<b>Total</b>	31	128	4	4	2	2	6	53	2
<b>Total cercei</b>				171				61	

is 4.4, smaller compared to most small and middle-size sites. The frequency of silver earrings upon cemeteries is higher, from 1 to 1 in smaller sites like Ghirbom, Lopadea and Moldovenești, where were found two earrings, both in silver, respectively a single earring, yet still in silver. Also, at Gâmbaș 1, out of the eight discovered earrings, all were in silver. At Cicău, the same indicator is 1.5, at Teiuș, 2.8, at Gâmbaș 2, 3.5, at Sâncrai, as mentioned 4.4, and at Șpălnaca 11.6. One may notice that in some findspots, all identified earrings were in silver. However, a small, insignificant number of graves were excavated there. Several earrings originate from cemeteries with several investigated graves like: Teiuș, Șpălnaca or Sâncrai, where though, beside silver earrings were also found numerous in bronze. It must be also specified that at Câmpia Turzii and Târnavă, no silver earrings were found, which could indicate the lower wealth degree of the communities there.

Then, if silver earrings express social nobility through metal nobility, another level may be noticed in the social pyramid, lower compared to others established based on the absence of earrings within graves, namely burials with bronze earrings. What must also be highlighted is that silver earrings are indicative of nobility primarily within the female elite of the communities, among which the phenomenon of burials with multiple earrings may also be noted.

It must also be specified that no golden earrings have been discovered in the Avar communities from Transylvania, which could primarily suggest a moderate degree of wealth of the communities of this area; however, silver was also a noble metal of which artefacts, including earrings, were made for the members of the upper classes among the steppe peoples arriving in Europe during the second half of the first Christian millennium.

Accordingly, in the Avar communities of Transylvania, there existed a series of individuals (men, warriors and mainly women) who composed a class located in the upper part of the social pyramid, owners and bearers of silver earrings, which marked a social difference in relation to those wearing bronze earrings. The latter were a class placed somewhat midway the social pyramid of the Transylvanian Avar communities.

The analysis of the earrings value, usable in social symbology, may continue by corroborating earring type with the material of which it was made. Thus, most earrings in group A were bronze-made. These count one-hundred and fifteen specimens and furthermore, the most numerous, one-hundred and one earrings fall into group A.1a-c. These may be considered the most popular earrings in the Avar cemeteries of Transylvania of that time. The number of earrings part of earring groups A.2-6 are numerically fewer compared to those in group A.1.a-c., totalling fourteen exemplars. The number of silver earrings in group A counts thirteen artefacts. These thirteen silver artefacts in this popular model represent only 10.5% of the total earrings in this typological category and 21.3% of the total silver earrings discovered. Another noteworthy aspect is that this silver earring type was discovered only in women graves (Tab. 6, Appendices 1-2).

The number of bronze earrings with soldered pendants, which form group B (types B.1a-1c, 1fb, 2), amounts to eleven specimens. Silver earrings number ten artefacts. It is noticeable that in this type, bronze and silver earrings are very close numerically, with silver specimens representing 48% of this typological category and 16% of the total silver earrings discovered (Table 6, Appendix 3). Furthermore, all earrings in group D, considered simple in terms of manufacturing technique (earrings with globular glass pendants), are made of bronze. Silver earrings in groups B and D were also discovered only in women graves (Tab. 6. Appendix 5).

In group C, believed to require a more complex manufacturing technique, the number of bronze earrings with attached pendants is twelve specimens. The number of silver earrings counts eighteen specimens. More technically complex earrings, as already shown, were also distributed into categories E, F, G. Thus, earrings with a stellar pendant, which compose group E of Avar earrings in Transylvania, were made of both bronze and silver. The bronze exemplars number three artefacts. The number of silver earrings counts six examples. Group F of earrings (earrings with a lunula pendant) consists of fourteen bronze earrings and twenty silver earrings. The two earrings in group G of earrings from Transylvania, discovered in the Sâncrai cemetery, were made in bronze (Tab. 6, Fig. 4, Appendices 4, 6-8).

Thus, except for group G, which included bronze earrings, in groups C, E, F the number of silver earrings was higher than those in bronze. Twenty-eight bronze earrings frame in these typological classes. The number of silver earrings in typological groups C, E, F is of forty-four, while their ratio is

Tab. 6 - Number of earrings depending on the type and metal they were made of. Br - Bronze, Ag- Silver

Cemeteries	Number of earrings depending on the type and metal they were made of													
	Groups of earrings/Metal													
	A		B		C		D		E		F		G	
	Br	Ag	Br	Ag	Br	Ag	Br	Ag	Br	Ag	Br	Ag	Br	Ag
	Number of earrings													
<b>Câmpia Turzii</b>	3		1						2					
<b>Cicău</b>						1					1	1		
<b>Gâmbaş 1</b>		2							6					
<b>Gâmbaş 2</b>	3		1				2					1		
<b>Ghirbom 1</b>				2										
<b>Lopadea Nouă</b>						2								
<b>Moldovenești</b>													1	
<b>Sâncrai</b>	69	7	3	8	10	11	6		1		11	10	2	
<b>Șpălnaca</b>	27	2	4		1	2	2							
<b>Târnavă</b>													1	
<b>Teiuș</b>	8	2	2		1	2	3				1	7		
<b>Total earrings</b>	110	13	11	10	12	18	13		3	6	14	20	2	

of 72% of total silver-made earrings. From a different view, these are indicative of their owner's rank in the social pyramid of the Avars in Transylvania during the reference period.

From the gender view, it is noticeable that bronze earrings in groups C, E, F, G, were three times more numerous in female graves than in male graves. Their more emphasized complexity compared to the earrings from groups A, B, D may be indicative of a better position on the value scale of earrings in the Transylvanian Avar communities. Silver earrings were also more numerous in women graves than in men graves. Silver earrings in types A, B, D, hence simpler, yet still in silver, were discovered only in women graves. Silver earrings in groups C, E, F with female owners, represented 56% of total silver

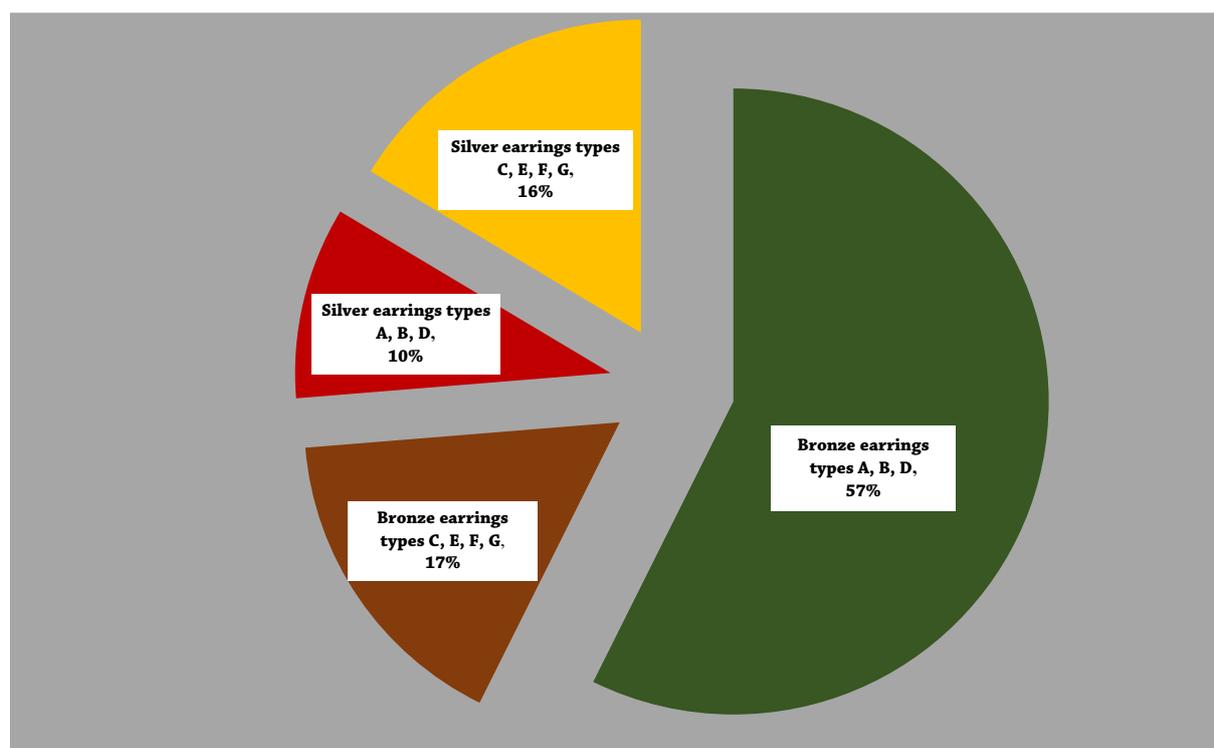


Fig. 4. Earrings from graves by metal and type.

earrings discovered and were 4.5 times more numerous than silver earrings of these types discovered in male graves. Thus, their presence in women graves play an important role in evidencing the elite ranking of the deceased in their old communities of origin. These individuals, even though wearing such earrings on a daily basis or only benefited of these as funeral offering, may be placed in the upper part of the social hierarchy of the Avar communities in Transylvania (Fig. 3-5).

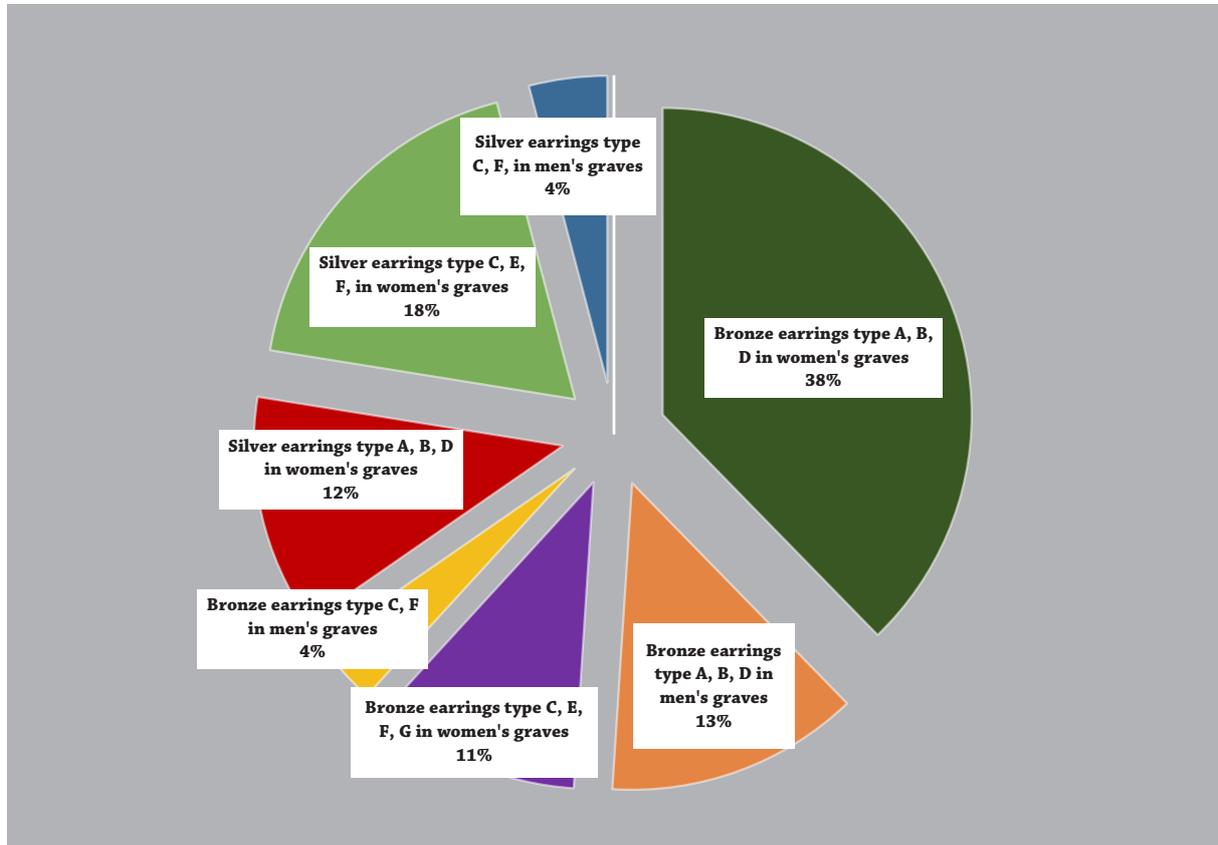


Fig. 5. Representation of the distribution of earrings by material, type and gender.

### Association of earrings in graves with other artefact types

Prior to discussing artefact types associated with earrings within the graves, we re-emphasize the cases of multiple earring depositions within the graves. Out of the total burials with earrings, thirty-three graves contained more than two earrings, a number which represents 34% of total graves that yielded earrings. Most numerous cases were encountered at Sâncrai, with twenty-four graves, then Șpălnaca, with six graves. Worth mention is that their great majority were female graves, with only seven male graves, of which one of a warrior. Upon earring types, most frequent association of artefacts is that between items in group A and B. Group C is rarely associated with earrings in group A type 1a. Groups E and F emerge singular, unaccompanied by other earring types within the graves. In what the metal of which earrings were made is concerned, some of these graves contained only bronze earrings, yet there are cases when bronze earrings were associated with silver earrings, in approximately 1/3 of the cases. Bronze and silver earring associations were also noted in eleven burial pits, one grave each at Cicău, Gâmbaș 2, Șpălnaca and Teiuș. Six graves with this association type were found at Sâncrai. At Gâmbaș 2, one of the two male burials contained four bronze earrings and one in silver. At Cicău, a female grave contained a bronze earring and one in silver. In the Sâncrai cemetery, in six women graves were discovered fourteen bronze earrings and eight silver earrings. At Șpălnaca, a single woman was buried with two bronze earrings and two silver earrings. Still a single female grave that contained a bronze earring and one in silver was discovered also in the Teiuș cemetery. It may be thus noticed that in just one male grave, that of Gâmbaș 2, this practice could be identified. A peculiar situation is revealed by the finds at Sâncrai, where six women graves contained bronze and silver earrings (Appendix 9).

Both the number of earrings in graves and the presence of silver earrings among these could be taken into consideration from the social symbology point of view. Indicative of a higher wealth degree, these artefacts place their owners towards the peak of the communities' social hierarchy. Furthermore, another aspect highlighted by data is the custom of depositing several earrings, predominantly in women graves. Consequently, beyond social implications, this practice also has a gender significance.

With reference to other artefacts types associated with earrings within graves, the most widespread artefact deposited with earrings was beads. Thus, 60% of these graves with earrings in the Transylvanian Avar area also contained beads. This was not identical in the different archaeologically investigated communities. In the small sites of Gîmbaş 1 and 2, all graves with earrings also contained beads, and at Cicău, out of two graves, one contained beads as well. In contrast, at Câmpia Turzii, the three excavated graves did not contain other burials items besides earrings. Larger sites reveal particular situations, with increased proportion of beads deposited with earrings within graves, in somewhat relation to their size. At Şpălnaca and Teiuş, the proportion of graves with earrings and beads was below the general average, of 27% and 43%, respectively. At Sâncrai, out of the fifty-five graves with earrings, 76% also contained beads, highlighting a more widespread practice of associating the two jewellery types. From a percentage perspective, the custom of depositing beads in graves with earrings is notable, especially at Gîmbaş 1 and 2, Cicău, and Sâncrai. (Appendices 10-12).

The second most frequent object in the depositions of other artefacts alongside earrings was knives. Overall, they were found in 25% of the graves with earrings. However, it must be specified that no knives were found in graves with earrings either at Câmpia Turzii or Cicău or Şpălnaca. One grave with earrings and a knife was discovered at Gîmbaş 1 (out of three graves) and Gîmbaş 2 (out of two graves), and two at Teiuş (out of fourteen graves). In contrast, this association is frequent at Sâncrai where, out of fifty-five graves, 36% of the graves with earrings also contained knives. This type of artefact association, also considering beads, reveals similarities between the burial practices of Gîmbaş 1, Gîmbaş 2 and Sâncrai. (Appendices 10-12).

Among other artefacts deposited in graves with earrings also count pottery and wooden buckets, household objects, found particularly in women graves. These do not emerge in all Avar cemeteries. They were identified in graves with earrings at Gîmbaş 1 (in two out of three graves with earrings) and Teiuş (in four out of fourteen graves with earrings). There are also few graves with earrings associated with buckles, numbering five: one each from Gîmbaş 2 and Şpălnaca, the remaining three from Sâncrai. Brooches were also discovered in a grave at Gîmbaş 1- important objects from the ethnic symbology view - as well as arrows in one from Şpălnaca. At Sâncrai was noted the greatest diversity of objects deposited in graves with earrings, even if in small numbers. To the already mentioned, add two graves in which earrings are associated with finger rings, an adornment type less used by the Avars in Transylvania<sup>18</sup>. This is specific to only one grave with earrings and another grave where, besides earrings, beads were also found. To these add two graves with fire steels, two with spindle whorls and one with appliques (Appendices 10-12).

Thus, beads are artefacts that appear alongside earrings in many of the 7th–8th century graves from Transylvania. Furthermore, knives were associated with earrings in graves. There are graves with earrings, very few otherwise, that also contained other types or categories of objects. These are limited to dress accessories, such as brooches (Gîmbaş), finger rings (Sâncrai), weapons and harness items (Lopadea Nouă, Şpălnaca), household and domestic objects (Sâncrai) or pottery (Gîmbaş 1, Teiuş). Examples are not many. Some of these artefacts may serve as support gender ascribing to individuals, in cases where anthropological analyses are impossible, or for ethnic affiliation.

### Final notes

All criteria proposed for discussion in order to prove whether earrings may be deemed a tool in sketching social layering allow the inference of a number of appreciations regarding the social differences extant in the human communities of 7th-8th century Transylvania.

The presence within the graves of artefacts, among which earrings occupy a prominent place, suggests that two different social classes existed within the Avar communities of Transylvania. A first

<sup>18</sup> Cosma 2022b, 357- 371.

class consists of those individuals in whose graves neither earrings nor other artefacts were discovered. They were part of the lower half of society. They were slaves or simply poor people. The absence of earrings from graves may also be caused by the lack of the right to wear and be buried with earrings. These individuals were quite numerous within the communities, convincing examples in this regard being the cemeteries of Sâncrai, Șpálnaca, and Teiuș, where the number of excavated graves is large and allows illustrative statistics of graves with and without grave goods of different types, including earrings.

In the upper half of the Avar communities may be placed individuals in whose graves various artefacts were discovered, among which earrings played a special part. At this society level, differentiation occurred on the basis of the earring types worn by individuals, on the one hand, completed by the metal of which these were made, on the other hand. Social stratification within the human communities of Transylvania may be generally refined according to these two criteria. Free people, involved in various economic activities, hypothetically wore bronze earrings of simple, easy-to-make types, such as those in groups A, B, D. Atop in the social hierarchy lay those individuals who wore bronze earrings in types that required special skills for their manufacture. These include bronze earrings in groups C, E, G, and F, which may be integrated into an intermediate class, located above the previously presented class and lower in relation to the individuals who owned silver earrings. This class included people close to the families at the head of the human communities in Transylvania during the 7th–8th centuries. The military and political entourages of the Early Middle Ages human communities were likely recruited from among them. Within the local Avar communities, these were not many.

The individuals who may be placed at the top of the social pyramid are distinguished by wearing silver earrings in groups C, E, F. The artefacts mix noble metal with superior technology required for their manufacture. These earrings were adornments that necessitated special know-how in their making. The individuals who wore such silver earrings within the Avar communities were almost entirely women, who may be considered the spouses of the military and political chieftains of the Avar community in Transylvania. They are extremely few within each Avar cemetery in Transylvania. This reality is not uncommon. It is known that great military and political leaders of the Early Middle Ages also displayed their social standing through the attention they gave to their spouses and/or women part of their household or retinue that accompanied them. The care for asserting status was manifest in the dress accessories that women used to adorn their attires or heads. The more sophisticated the jewellery, the higher the rank of the person who wore it in the society of the time<sup>19</sup>.

These statements rely on specific situations identified within the cemeteries where earrings were discovered. At Cicău, one woman grave contained a silver earring with attached pendant in Group C and a bronze lunula in Group F. The second woman grave contained a lunula earring in Group F type 1b, made of silver. The specified archaeological situation suggests a social differentiation between the two women from Cicău. The stellar pendant earrings in Group E, discovered in the two graves from Gâmbaș 1, were made in silver. These two graves certainly belonged to women from the elite of the Avar community of Gâmbaș 1, in contrast with the person buried in grave 7, where a simple silver earring and a bronze one with the end twisted into a spiral shape were discovered. It must be mentioned that these three graves are, in fact, the only burial features of the cemetery that contained earrings.

In the Sâncrai cemetery, with one-hundred and ten excavated graves, twelve bronze earrings were discovered in eleven graves, with spheroid and biconical pendants in group C type 1b and 3a. The earrings come from women and men graves. Nine silver earrings, in Group C1a-b, were discovered in four graves, two of which are men graves. From the same cemetery come also nine bronze lunula earrings, which were discovered in six graves. One was a male grave, the remaining being female graves. The vast majority of these bronze earrings are small in size. The silver earrings of Sâncrai amount to a number of nine exemplars. They were discovered in three women graves. Eight of these were discovered, two each in four graves and a single specimen in one grave. It is noteworthy that the silver earrings in the three graves are large in size (Group F type 1b, d and 2). In all graves with silver lunulae, women were buried. It can be thus inferred that in the human community of Sâncrai, the difference in social status at community level is very well highlighted. (Gr. 6)

<sup>19</sup> See for instance: Heinrich-Tamáská 2011, 102; Cosma 2018a, 9–20, with references.

In the Şpálnaca cemetery, thirty-eight burial features that may be ascribed to the Avars were archaeologically investigated. From within these originate three silver earrings: two in group A type 1a and one with a spheroid pendant in group C type 1b. All the other earrings discovered in the cemetery are bronze-made. The number of graves in which artefacts were found is very small at cemetery level. Also, within the cemetery, two graves with horses stand out. One belonged to a warrior and did not contain earrings. The second grave with a horse belonged to a woman. Several earrings were discovered in the grave, all made of bronze. The “finest” earrings are those in group B/type 1e. Silver beads and a silver-plated bronze piece were also discovered in the grave, likely a mace head or hat ornament<sup>20</sup>. Within the entire cemetery, the woman grave had the richest grave furnishing. Even though the earrings in the grave were only bronze-made, the fact that she owned a silver-plated bronze item, in addition to being buried with a horse, supports the fact that the woman was part of the upper class of the Avar community of Şpálnaca. The absence of stellar pendant earrings (group E) as well as the lunula earrings in bronze or silver (group F) from the thirty-eight graves at Şpálnaca, compared to other Avar cemeteries of Transylvania, represents an archaeological fact which implies social differentiations within the human communities from the Transylvanian plateau during the 7th – 8th century, an aspect which shall be discussed elsewhere (Gr. 4).

In the Teiuş cemetery, with sixty archaeologically investigated graves, according to the silver earrings and number of graves where these were discovered, there were five individuals that may be placed in the upper part of the Avar community social hierarchy of Teiuş (Gr. 5).

The complex manufacturing process of the earrings (for instance groups E and F), completed with the metal of which these were made (especially silver), their presence or absence within the graves in the Avar cemeteries, may evidence existing economic and social differentiations within the Avar communities of Transylvania. It may be assumed that even within the communities there was a certain difference in affluence. There were economically poorer and richer communities, with wealthier leaders who could afford to purchase silver earrings for their spouses, of higher quality in terms of form and execution.

Applied analysis of the three larger cemeteries mentioned above, Şpálnaca, Teiuş and Sâncrai, may complete above statements.

Thus, at Şpálnaca, as already shown, more than half of the graves did not contain earrings, which would indicate that the deceased buried there were commoners. Also, simpler bronze earrings in groups A, B, D dominate, in both women and the two men graves, one of which was of a warrior, in which type A bronze earrings were found. Among the more sophisticated earring types, these were found in only two women graves, being type C, in bronze and respectively silver earrings. Neither silver earrings were widespread there, being discovered only in women graves. Along with those already mentioned, of type C in bronze, silver earrings of type A were discovered in another grave. It may be noted that in this site, although almost half of the graves comprised earring depositions, these emerged overwhelmingly in women graves, and only in two men graves. Furthermore, most earrings were bronze-made, of simple types, A, B, D. In the more sophisticated earrings typology, of groups C, E, F and G, in only two graves, women graves too, their simplest version, earrings in group C. moreover, only two graves contained silver earrings. All are indicative of a rather more modest nature of the community overall, even though half of the graves contained earrings. Their majority were bronze-made, the most common types. Furthermore, males wore earrings as an exception, and in these cases, earrings were made of bronze (Gr. 4).

At Teiuş, more than three-quarters of the graves did not contain earrings, as already seen. Thus, there we are dealing with a much more extensive class of commoners than at Şpálnaca, with graves without earrings. Half of the earrings discovered there were made of bronze, type A, B, D, all in women graves. One woman grave contained a more sophisticated bronze earring, type C. Graves with silver earrings were few; these were all type C and E, found mainly in women graves. Only one man was buried with earrings, in silver and more sophisticated, namely, type F.

Compared to the Şpálnaca cemetery, at Teiuş those buried without earrings are in a larger proportion, which is indicative of widespread earring wearing at Şpálnaca. In both sites, earrings were characteristic to women burials, with only three males in total benefiting from the deposition of this

<sup>20</sup> Cosma 2023, 73-81.

artefact in the grave. Regarding earring value, a larger number of silver earrings is noted at Teiuș, both in type C and in the more sophisticated type F (Gr. 5).

The cemetery at Sâncrai seems the most spectacular in terms of earring deposition within the graves. This is the largest excavated Avar cemetery, with the largest and most diverse number of graves with earrings, given as well the find of an infant grave (with a type C bronze earring) and of a cenotaph with earrings (bronze, type A). The 40% proportion of graves without earrings evidences a lower ratio, hypothetically, of the commoners within the community three, who did not benefit from this type of deposition in the burial pit, compared to the Șpălnaca and Teiuș cemeteries. This also means a widespread earring deposition within the graves and their wearing, compared to the two mentioned sites, a first indication of a more obvious prosperity. Furthermore, 42% of all earrings were made of bronze, type A, B, D and discovered in women graves. 10% of all earrings were discovered in men graves, these being bronze earrings of type A, the only type among the simple earrings (A, B, D), somewhat specific to a part of the men from Sâncrai buried with earrings. Another specificity is given by the proportion of 11% of all earrings, of the simple silver ones, types A, B, found only in women graves. Then, the artefacts identified in this site evidence a wider diffusion of more sophisticated bronze earrings, of all types determined by us, D, E, F, G, 12% of all earrings and in 7% of all cemetery graves, all women graves. Regarding these more complex earring types, in men graves from Sâncrai they were discovered in far fewer burial pits, these being bronze earrings of type C, F (6% of all earrings, in 4% of the cemetery graves) and a single man grave with silver earrings of type C. In equal proportions (7%), there are graves with silver earrings of type A, B, respectively silver earrings of type C and F, all burial pits in which women were buried. (Fig. 6-8).

A few observations are worth making also in relation to smaller cemeteries, respectively the singular burials discovered.

We have already specified that the total number of graves in the Câmpia Turzii cemetery is unknown. However, the three graves with bronze earrings may be ascribed to women part of the upper class of the Avar community that buried their dead within the limits of the current city of Câmpia Turzii. Regarding the Cicău and Gâmbaș 1 cemeteries, respectively, which consist of a small number of graves, six and fourteen, they may be interpreted as mirroring smaller human groups, or perhaps

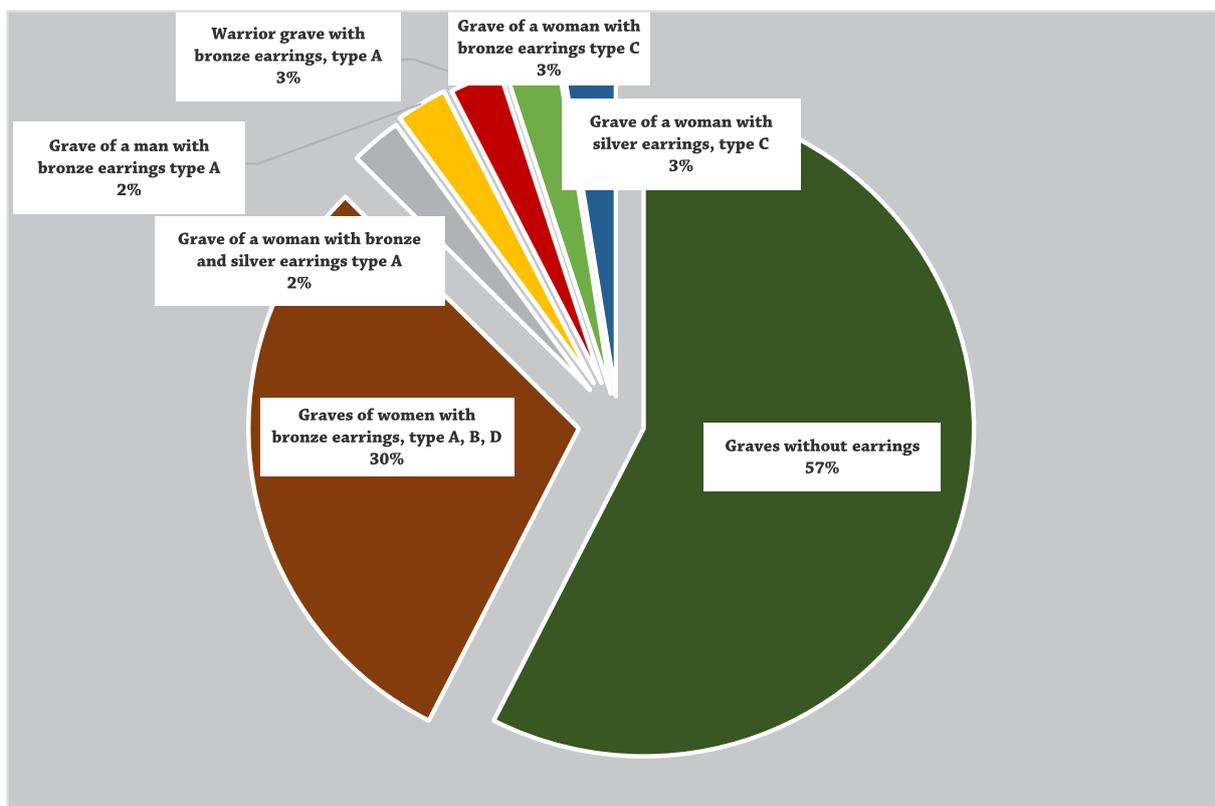


Fig. 6. Graves from Șpălnaca, without and with earrings (depending on gender, metal and type).

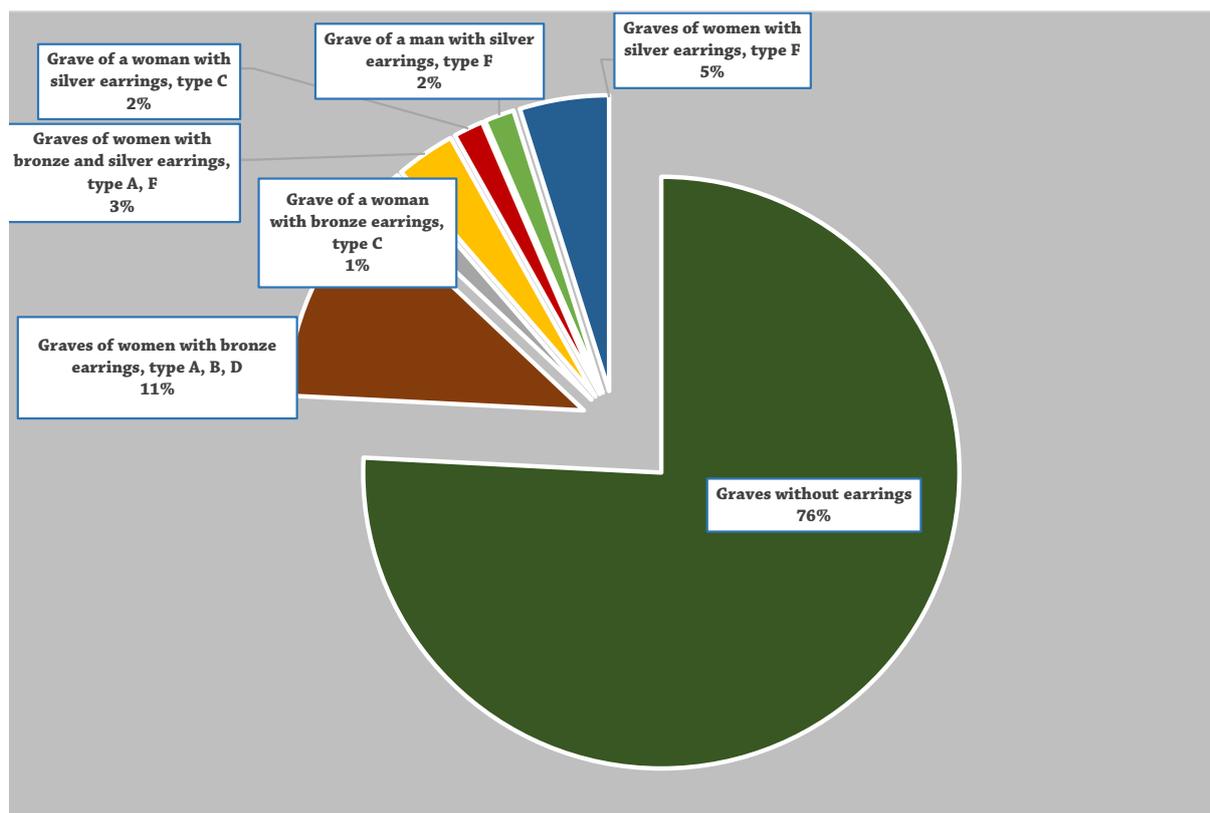


Fig. 7. Graves from Teiuș, without and with earrings (depending on gender, metal and type).

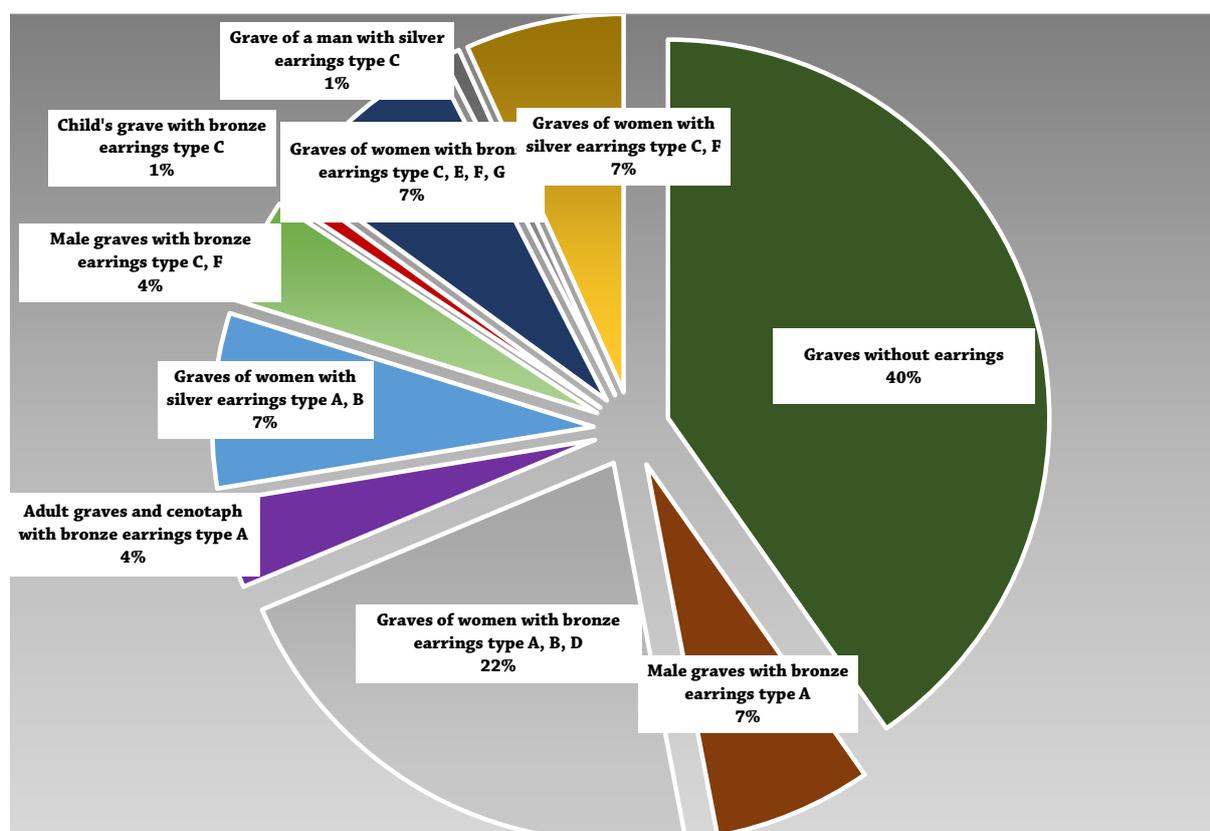


Fig. 8. Graves from Sâncraia, without and with earrings (depending on gender, metal and type).

larger ones that had not completed their migratory process. Significantly, in these cemeteries, were discovered two and three graves with earrings, all belonging to women. At Cicău, all three discovered

earrings – one in bronze and two in silver - belonged to type C, other two (one in bronze and one in silver) to type F, illustrating typologies of more complex earrings from the view of their manufacture. Two of the graves at Gâmbaş 1 contained one, four earrings, the other two earrings, all in silver of type E. The third grave contained two type A silver earrings. The discovered earrings evidence an elite status of the women buried there with earrings.

The two male graves from Gâmbaş 2, located outside the geographical area of the Ghirbom 1 cemetery, yet not very far from it, as well as the two singular women graves of Ghirbom 1, may be believed burials that may be hypothetically linked to communities in motion. However, the value of the earrings placed in the burial pits may also evidence hypothetical elite burials outside the community cemeteries, given that singular graves with rich and expressive furnishings are also present in other places within the Avar Khaganate of the Carpathian Basin<sup>21</sup>.

There also add the two singular graves discovered at Târnava and Moldovenești, one of a warrior another of a female, buried the warrior with a bronze earring and the woman with a silver earring, both objects framed in type F of earrings. The Târnava grave may be related to an Avar warrior, the earring being discovered beside weapons. He likely had the mission to monitor/control the Slavic community that buried their dead in the biritual cemeteries at Palamor and Cimitirul Ortodox in Târnava<sup>22</sup>. Regarding the find of Moldovenești, the site lies nearby the salt mine of Turda, on the road running downstream the Arieș river to the gold fields of Transylvania. It is possible in this case that we are dealing with a woman involved in the salt trade, possibly even gold (?), from respective area. The higher standing of the woman in the Avar society is suggested by the silver earring. Another possible interpreting of this isolate grave is identical to that of the graves at Gâmbaş 2 and Ghirbom 2, already discussed.

However, in the definition of the social status of individuals buried with earrings are also important other types of dress accessories, like beads, brooches or other adornment objects discovered in graves beside earrings, data presented in appendices 10-12. The raw material, quality and decoration of these jewellery items may reflect their intrinsic value and concurrently, welfare of the owner. The value of associated artefacts reinforces the quality of the earrings as artefacts with social symbological significance. Thus, graves in which earrings associate with silver beads mirror a higher social standing of the owners in the community in contrast with the individuals buried with bronze earrings, typologically simple and easy to make<sup>23</sup>.

The most conclusive examples supporting the above statement come from the Gâmbaş 1, Sâncrai and Șpâlnaca cemeteries. The female in grave 4 at Gâmbaş 1 was buried with three necklaces, one with silver beads, another with glass beads and the third with beads of yellow led and tin pigment, two pairs of silver earrings and a pair of bronze brooches. The deposition of multiple necklaces in the grave may be interpreted as a mark of the individual's social standing within the community, while the association of these necklaces with silver earrings ranks them in the upper tier of the Avar community's social hierarchy at Gâmbaş 1. Moreover, the two brooches are indicative of the woman's Gepid identity. In grave 6 at Sâncrai, beside the silver earrings there was also discovered a necklace of gilded silver beads and an applique made of the same precious metal. Last but not least, similarly suggestive is grave 37 in the Șpâlnaca cemetery of a female buried with horse, an archaeological feature presented above. In the burial pit were discovered silver and glass beads, bronze earrings and a silver-plated adornment object. Alongside the horse, harness pieces and a series of appliques that adorned the leather components of the harness were deposited in the grave. In this case, along with the mentioned jewellery, the horse itself is a symbol of the deceased's power and prestige, linked to its value and symbology in the warlike societies of the time<sup>24</sup>.

Therefore, the existing archaeological data on the Avar inhumation cemeteries of Transylvania, suggests that earrings may be interpreted not only as mere ornaments, jewellery, or dress accessories, but also as a marker of the owner's social status. The overall analysis of the presence/absence of this artefact type within the graves provides first evidence on society layering, starting from the hypothesis

<sup>21</sup> Heinrich-Tamáška 2011, 89.

<sup>22</sup> Blăjan, Botezatu 2000, 456-457.

<sup>23</sup> Cosma 2022a, 205-248.

<sup>24</sup> See for instance: Čilinska 199, 187–212; Heinrich-Tamáška 2011, 89-110; Bede 2012, 41–50 Bede 2014, 211–225; Bede 2017 online; Cosma 2018b, 75-110.

expressed in the academic literature concerned with the relationship between this artefact type and social symbology. In addition, generally believed a gender marker, analysis of earring depositions within the graves from this area provides insights into the diffusion of this practice in women graves, as well as in those of civilian or warrior men. Furthermore, more refined statistical research based on other indicators - number, manufacturing technique/type, metal, other artefact types deposited within the graves - allows the outline of a more complete picture of the social hierarchies within the Avar communities in this space.

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**Appendix 1 – Presence of group A of earrings in graves from the Avar cemeteries at Câmpia Turzii, Gâmbaş 1, Gâmbaş 2, Şpálnaca and Teiuş, depending on type, method of making and metal. B – Bronze; A – Silver. M – Men, W – Women, Wa – Warrior**

		Group A																
		Earring types								Graves number by gender		Graves number by metal						
Avar cemeteries	Gender	Grave number	1a	2b	3a	3b	Earrings number in the grave/ Metal						M	W	Wa	B	A	
							B	A	B	A	B	A						B
Câmpia Turzii	Women	G. 3	1											2		2		
		G. 4	1															
Gâmbaş 1	Women	G. 7	1							1			1			2		
Gâmbaş 2	Men	G. 1	2								2							
		G. 2			1										3			
Şpálnaca	Men	G. 29	3								1				3			
		G. 5	1															
		G. 6	2															
		G. 9	2 2															
		G. 13	1															
		G. 15	1															
		G. 18	4									11		21	2			
	G. 19	1																
	Women	G. 29	3															
		G. 31	1															
G. 32		2																
G. 37		3																
Warriors	G. 38	3										1		3				
Teiuş	Women	G. 6	2															
		G. 8							1									
		G. 20	2	1								5		8	2			
		G. 28	1															
		G. 33	1			1 1												
<b>Total number of graves</b>		<b>23</b>									<b>3</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>6</b>			
											<b>23</b>				<b>46</b>			
		<b>Total number of earrings</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>										
			<b>39</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>		<b>1</b>											
			<b>46</b>															
		<b>Total number of bronze earrings</b>													<b>40</b>			
		<b>Total number of silver earrings</b>													<b>6</b>			



<b>Cenotaph</b>	<b>G. 37</b>	<b>2</b>					<b>1</b>		<b>2</b>									
<b>Total number of graves</b>	<b>40</b>									<b>M</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>Ad</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>7</b>			
										<b>9</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>76</b>				
										<b>40</b>								
<b>Total number of earrings</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>					
	<b>48</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1</b>									<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
									<b>76</b>									
<b>Total number of bronze earrings</b>									<b>69</b>									
<b>Total number of silver earrings</b>									<b>7</b>									
									<b>76</b>									





**Appendix 5 – Presence of group D of earrings in graves from the Avar cemeteries at, Gâmbaş 2, Şpálnaca, Şpálnaca and Teiuş, depending on type, method of making and metal. B – Bronze; A – Silver. M – Men, W – Women.**

			Group D								
			Earing types								
Avar cemeteries	Gender	Grave number	1a		1b		Graves number by gender		Graves number by metal		
											
			Earrings number in the grave/ Metal								
			B	A	B	A	M	W	B	A	
Gâmbaş 2	Man	G. 1	2					1		2	
		G. 48									
Sâncrai	Women	G. 86	1		1						
		G. 100	1					4		6	
		G. 103	1								0
Şpálnaca	Woman	G. 13			2			1		2	
Teiuş	Woman	G. 8	1								
		G. 30	2						2		3
<b>Total number of graves</b>		<b>8</b>						<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>0</b>
			<b>8</b>		<b>5</b>			<b>8</b>		<b>13</b>	
<b>Total number of earrings</b>			<b>8</b>		<b>5</b>						
			<b>13</b>								
<b>Total number of bronze earrings</b>									<b>13</b>		
<b>Total number of silver earrings</b>									<b>0</b>		

**Appendix 6 – Presence of group E of earrings in graves from the Avar cemeteries at Câmpia Turzii, Gâmbaş 1, Sâncrai, depending on type, method of making and metal. B – Bronze; A – Silver. W – Women**

			Group E								Graves number by gender	Graves number by metal	
			Earring types									Women	B
Avar cemeteries	Gender	Grave number	1a	1b		1c		1d					
													
			Earrings number in the grave/Metal										
			B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A			
Câmpia Turzii	Woman	G.	2								1	2	
Gâmbaş 1	Women	G. 4	2		a = 2						2	6	
		G. 13			b = 2								
Sâncrai	Woman	G. 97					1				1	1	
<b>Total number of graves</b>		<b>4</b>									<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>
											<b>9</b>		
<b>Total number of earrings</b>			2	0	0	2	0	4	1	0			
			2		2		4		2				
			9										
<b>Total number of bronze earrings</b>									3				
<b>Total number of silver earrings</b>									6				

**Appendix 7 – Presence of group F of earrings in graves from the Avar cemeteries at Cicău, Gâmbaş 2, Sâncrai, Târnava and Teiuş, depending on type, method of making and metal. B – Bronze; A – Silver. M – Men, W – Women, W – Warriors.**

		Group F																			
		Earring types																			
		Earrings number in the grave/Metal																			
Avar cemeteries	Gender	Grave number	1a		1b		1c		1d		1f		2		3		Graves number by gender	Graves number by metal			
			B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	M	W			Wa	B	A
Cicău	Women	G. 6	1																		
		G. 2			1												2	1 1			
Gâmbaş 2	Man	G. 1					1										1	1			
Moldoveneşti	Woman	G. 1											1				1	1			
		G. 1											2				1	2			
	Sâncrai	Women	G. 6			2								2							
			G. 15			2															
			G. 18	1																	
			G. 48	1																	
			G. 68			1										2					
			G. 74	1																	
	Sâncrai	Women	G. 75											1							
			G. 79							2						10		11 10			
G. 95											2										
G. 109											2										
Târnava	Warrior	G. 1					1											1 1			
	Man	G. 23									1				1			1			
Teiuş	Women	G. 19											2								
		G. 42			1																
		G. 55	1								1				4		1 6				
		G. ?	1										1								
<b>Total number of graves</b>		<b>21</b>															<b>3</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>20</b>
		<b>Total number of earrings</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>					
			<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>												
		<b>Total number of bronze earrings</b>																			
		<b>Total number of silver earrings</b>																			

**Appendix 8 – Presence of group G of earrings in graves from the Avar cemeteries at Sâncrai depending on type, method of making and metal. B – Bronze; A – Silver. W – Women.**

Group G					
Avar cemeteries	Gender	Grave number			Total number of grave
			B	A	
Sâncrai	Woman	G. 109	2		2

## Annex 9 – Number of earrings in graves in Avar cemeteries of Transylvania

The Avar cemeteries from Gâmbaş 1, Gâmbaş 2, Ghirbom 1, Lopadea Nouă, Șpálnaca, Teiuș, și mormintele de la Moldovenești și Târnavă					Sâncrai cemetery			
Cemeteries	Grave number	Gender	Number of earrings in graves		Grave number	Gender	Number of earrings in graves	
			Bronze	Silver			Bronze	Silver
1. Câmpia Turzii	M.3	Woman	2		1	Man	3	
	M. 4	Woman	2		2	Man	1	3
	M. ?	?	2		5	Woman	2	
2. Cicău	M. 2	Woman		1	6	Woman		4
	M. 6	Woman	1	1	7	Man	2	
3. Gâmbaş 1	M. 4	Woman		4	8	Woman	2	
	M. 7	Woman		2	13	Woman	1	
	M. 13	Woman		2	15	Woman	4	
4. Gâmbaş 2	M. 1	Man	4	1	18	Woman	2	
	M. 2	Man	2		19	Man	1	
5. Ghirbom 1	M. 1	Woman		2	20	Woman		2
6. Lopadea Nouă	M. 1	Warrior		2	23	Woman		4
7. Moldovenești	M. 1	Woman		1	24	Woman	1	
	M. 5	Woman	1		26	Woman	2	
	M. 6	Woman	2		28	Woman	1	
	M. 9	Woman		2	30	Man	1	
	M. 15	Woman	1	1	31	Man	2	
	M. 18	Woman	3		34	Man	1	
	M.19	Woman	1		36	Man	1	
	M. 21	Woman	3		37	Cenotaph	2	
	M. 22	Woman	1		38	Man	3	
	M. 28	Woman	3		41	Woman	5	2
	M. 29	Man	3		43	Woman	1	
	M. 31	Woman	1		44	Woman	2	
	M. 32	Woman	1		45	Man	3	
	M. 37	Woman	7		48	Woman	4	1
	M. 38	Warrior	3		49	Bărbat	4	
M. 47	Woman	2		53	Woman	1		
9. Târnavă	M. 1	Warrior	1		62	Woman	2	
	M. 6	Woman ?	4		63	Man	1	
	M. 8	Woman ?	2		67	Adult	1	
	M. 13	Woman ?	1		68	Woman	3	2
	M. 19	Woman ?		2	71	Woman	3	
	M. 20	Woman ?	3		74	Woman	1	
	M. 21	Femeie ?		2	75	Woman	2	2
	M. 23	Bărbat		1	79	Woman		4
10. Teiuș	M. 28	Woman ?	1		80	Child	2	
	M. 30	Woman ?	2		81	Woman	3	
	M. 33	Woman ?		1	83	Woman	3	
	M. 35	Woman ?	2		84	Woman	2	
	M. 42	Woman ?		1	86	Woman	2	
	M. 55	Woman ?	1	1	87	Woman	7	
					89	Adult	1	
					95	Woman	4	
				96	Woman	2		
				97	Woman	1		
				99	Woman	3		
				100	Woman	4		
				101	Adult	1		
				103	Woman	1	2	
				104	Woman		4	
				105	Woman	2	2	
				107	Adult	1		
				108	Woman	1		
				109	Woman	4		

**Appendix 10 – Association of earrings with other earring or artefact types within the graves of Câmpia Turzii, Cicău, Gâmbaş 1, Gâmbaş 2 and Șpălnaca cemeteries.**

A. Câmpia Turzii cemetery				B. Cicău cemetery				
G. no.	Earrings			G. no.	Earrings			Beads
	Group A		Group B		Group C		Group F	
	Type		Type		Type		Type	
	1a	2a	2		1b	1a	1b	
3	•	•		2			•	•
4	•		•	6	•	•		

C. Gâmbaş 1 cemetery								
G. no.	Earrings		Beads	Fibulae	Knife	Ceramics	Wooden bucket	
	Group A							Group E
	Tip							
	1a	3a						
4			•	•	•		•	
7	•	•						
13			•	•		•		

D. Gâmbaş 2 cemetery						
G. no.	Earrings			Beads	Buckle	Knife
	Group A	Group B	Group F			
	Type	Type	Type			
	3a	1b	1c			
1			•	•	•	•
2	•	•		•		

E. Șpălnaca cemetery						
G. no.	Earrings			Beads	Buckle	Arrows
	Group A	Group B	Group C			
	Type	Type	Tip			
	1a	1f	1b			
5	•					
6						•
8	•					
9	•			•	•	
15	•		•			
18	•					
19						
21	•			•		
22	•					
37	•	•		•		
38	•					•
42	•					
47	•			•		



95	.							.		.	.
96	.										
97						.				.	
99	.									.	
100	.	.								.	.
101	.									.	
103	.	.								.	
104		.								.	.
105	.		.							.	.
107	.		.							.	
108		.									
109								.	.	.	.



