

THE SARMATIANS AFTER THE SARMATIAN PERIOD

The historical role of the Alans in Eastern Europe during the Migration period is an oft-discussed, but little-known issue. The main difficulty is that the Alan tribal alliance disintegrated after the arrival of the Huns: the Alanic tribes became part of various Turkic tribal confederations and disappeared from the scene in the meagre sources. The single exceptions are the Alans settling in the Caucasus, about whom there is an abundance of literary evidence. Archaeological and historical research tends to attribute a significant role to the Alans, both regarding their existence as a people and the survival of certain elements of their material culture¹¹⁶³.

Today, there are about 150-200 million people speaking an Iranian language¹¹⁶⁴, whose ranks include the groups who were the descendants of the steppe Scythian-type peoples discussed in the previous chapters. Although references to the Sarmatians/Alans become increasingly rare after the Hun period, there can be no doubt that they maintained a presence across Eurasia for a long time, indeed to this very day. The Caucasian Ossets are regarded as the Alans' direct descendants who preserved the ancestral language, while the Hungarian Jas (*Jász*/Jassones/lazyges) at the other end of the spectrum preserve some vestiges of their Sarmatian/Alanic identity at the most. The ethnographic record indicates that as part of the Chorezmi population, the Saka-Massagetae and the Alans were dominant components of several still-thriving peoples of Central Asia, such as the Karakalpaks, the Uzbeks and the Turkmens¹¹⁶⁵. In the following, we shall briefly survey the most important evidence relating to the continuation of the Sarmatians and the Alans from the Hun period to the present.

ALANS ON THE EURASIAN STEPPE

In the chapter covering the Late Sarmatian Age of the steppe, we saw that, like the »known« world, the steppe was also affected by a deep crisis from the 3rd century onward, reflected by the profound transformation of the Sarmatian *oikumene* after the appearance and expansion of the Huns and the Germanic peoples, the onset of the Great Migrations, and the final disappearance of the Late Scythian culture. One indication of these events in the archaeological record is the emergence and diffusion of the Černjahov-Marosszentanna/Sîntana de Mureş culture. We should also bear in mind that it is most unlikely that a thousand-year-old culture (and its representatives), such as that of the Scythians, Sarmatians and Alans, could have disappeared within the span of a few generations. As a matter of fact, there is ample evidence to the contrary.

Alans in the Crimea

It seems instructive to discuss this region separately from other parts of the steppe because there is a long trail of evidence for the survival of the Alans in this region. After the Huns occupied the steppe in the Lower

¹¹⁶³ Harmatta 1975, 256.

¹¹⁶⁵ Tolstova 1979, 154.

¹¹⁶⁴ For their distribution, see Makkay 1997a, 5-6.

Don region in the last quarter of the 4th century, some Alanic groups fled to the Crimea, as shown by the appearance of a series of new cemeteries. The two most important sites are Skalistoe and Lučistoe. The Huns also entered the Crimea at the close of the 4th century. Their archaeological heritage can be demonstrated in the central and northwesterly steppe regions of the Crimea and on the Kerč Peninsula. Procopius' remarks suggest that the Huns had occupied the region between the Bosporus and Chersonesus, and it is possible that they had a hand in the political collapse of the Bosporan Kingdom, although this hardly meant that life had ceased there^{1165a}. From the 6th century onward, the mountainous region of the Crimea controlled by Byzantium was populated by Goths and Alans, whose archaeological heritage reflects a strong Byzantine cultural influence and ethnic inter-mingling (fig. 311). The Gothic-Alanic population weathered the political storms, when the Khazars seized control over the region in the 8th century, and they absorbed the new Byzantine and Bulgarian ethnic groups. These groups all professed Christianity; the common religion no doubt eased the blending between them. According to the written sources, the Goths and the Alans preserved their ethnic identity even during the turmoil of the Middle Ages (the Seljuk Turkish occupation, the Mongolian invasion, the advance of the Golden Horde and the rule of the Crimean Tartar Khanate) and amidst the colourful ethnic kaleidoscope characterising the Crimea. A travel account written by the Venetian merchant Josaphat (Giosafat) Barbaro in the 15th century mentioned that the two tribes had co-mingled to the extent that they called themselves Gothoalans. Their archaeological and historical traces can be followed up to the 18th century¹¹⁶⁶.

Alans in the Northern Pontic

The reflection of the Hun invasion in the archaeological record of the steppe raises some intriguing questions. The first of these is how the Huns' material and spiritual culture – their archaeological legacy, their burial customs and their beliefs – relates to the earlier Sarmatian/Alanic heritage¹¹⁶⁷. We may agree with the scholars who interpret the appearance of new elements in the burial rite, such as cremation and solitary graves without a kurgan raised over them, as reflecting the influx of a new population. However, we also know that the Sarmatians/Alans left a lasting imprint on the Huns' life, their material culture and their beliefs¹¹⁶⁸.

We are faced with the problem that the sources fall silent on the steppe Sarmatians/Alans after the Hun invasion. The literary references indicate that the region between the Danube and the Don was occupied by the Kutrigur tribal alliance in the mid-6th century: the Utrigurs settled on the left bank of the Don, the Kutrigurs on the right bank. The ethnic make-up of this tribal alliance is not fully known. However, it is clear that the Avars subjugated the earlier population of this region during their expansion and ruled over them until the early 7th century, when they were ousted by the Bulgars coming from the Kuban Valley, who had in turn fled from the Khazars¹¹⁶⁹. Nothing is known about the Alans during this period. What we do know is that they re-appeared as the Jas in the 10th century¹¹⁷⁰, suggesting that the Alans had not disappeared from the steppe during the previous five hundred years, but had weathered the successive storms of various nomadic conquerors. The ethnic attribution of the few archaeological assemblages from this period, designated as late nomadic burials by Russian and Ukrainian scholars, is uncertain. For example, the lavish late 4th century burials without a kurgan known from the Lower Dnieper region, along the Volga, on the

^{1165a} Ajbabin 1999, 56-57. 71. 73. 77. – Procop. *Goth.* IV.5.23-30. – Gajdukevič 1949, 480-481.

¹¹⁶⁶ Ajbabin 1999, 225-230.

¹¹⁶⁷ See Zaseckaja 1999, for an overview.

¹¹⁶⁸ Makkay 1995; 1997b. – Istvánovits/Kulcsár 1998, 224-225.

¹¹⁶⁹ Harmatta 1975, 258. – Szádeczky-Kardoss 1998, 20-21.

¹¹⁷⁰ Bubenok 1997, 16-18.

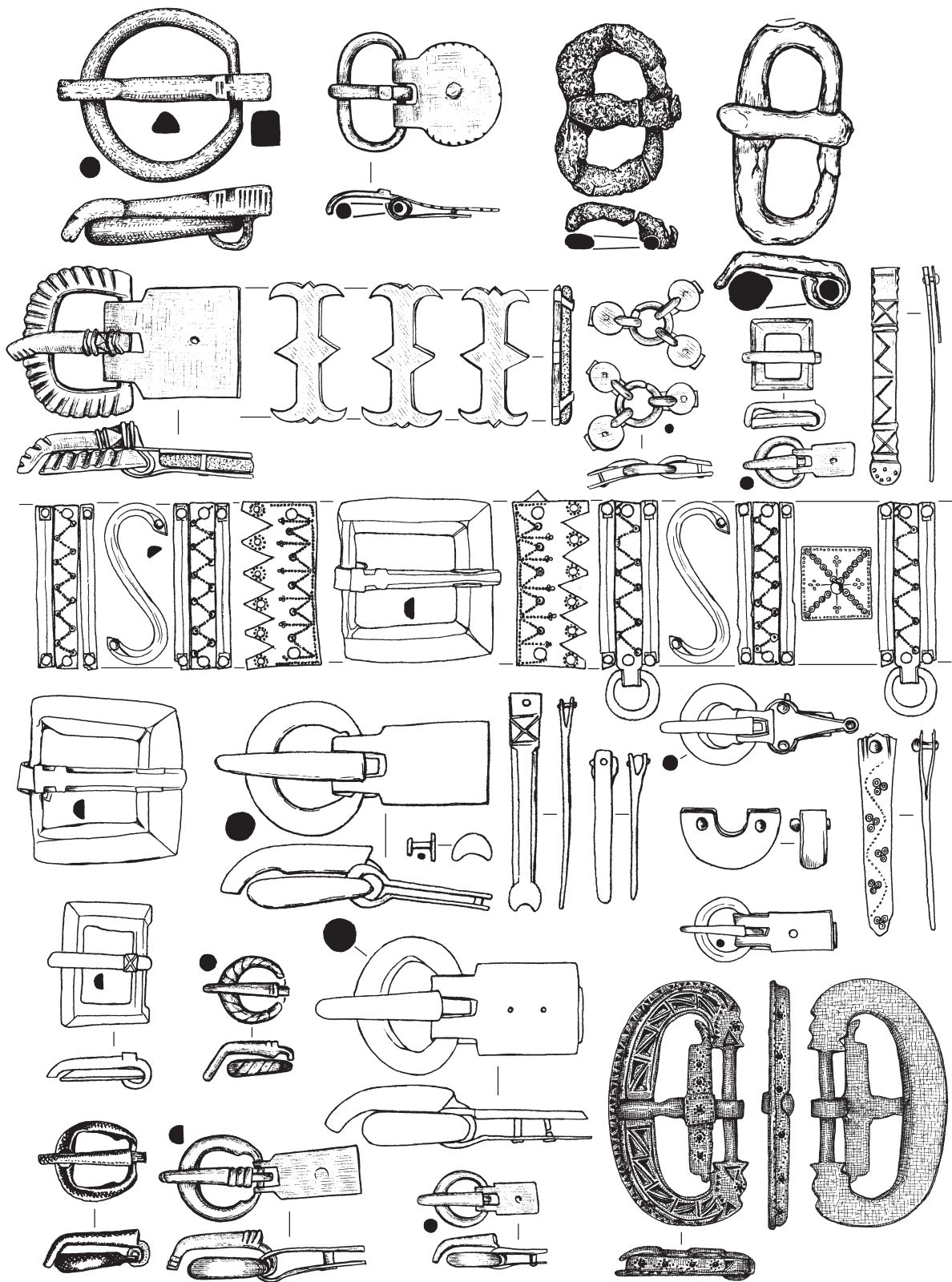


Fig. 311 Selection of finds from Lučistoe, a typical site of the 5th-6th century Gothic-Alanic population in the mountains of the Crimea. – (After Ajbabin/Hajredinova 2008, fig. 25).

northern shore of the Sea of Azov, in the Prut Basin and a few other areas were initially identified on the basis of their burial rite as the relics of a remnant Sarmatian population, but were later linked to the Huns¹¹⁷¹. Most scholars agree that the Alans were one of the major ethnic components of the Saltovo-Majak culture flourishing in the Don region from the second third to the middle of the 8th century. This is only conceivable if merely a part of the Sarmatians/Alans had been assimilated or had fled the Hun invasion, or if we assume that they had returned to the steppe. In the latter case, the agrarian Alans in question had moved to the region from the northern Caucasus around the 730s, at the time of the culture's emergence, after they had been expelled from their homeland by the Arabs. They probably encountered the Bulgars on the steppe. The Alans settled on the more northerly, forested steppe, while the Bulgar-Turks lived in the south¹¹⁷². This ethnic divide is reflected in the burial rites practised by the Saltovo culture: catacomb burials dominate in the north and simple shaft graves in the south. The written sources reported that the southern areas were peopled by Bulgars. At the same time, scholars have suggested that elements of the Sarmatian tradition can be distinguished in the cemeteries of the latter region as well. In this case, however, we can hardly speak of a returning population. It seems more likely that the sources do not mention the larger Iranian groups that had remained there because they had been integrated into the new Turkic tribal alliance^{1172a}. It is quite certain that two centuries earlier, at the time of the Hun conquest, an Iranian population had dominated the region north of the Sea of Azov and west of the Don. Harmatta contended that Ammianus' expression, *regiones Halanorum*, referred to a sizeable territory populated by the Alans¹¹⁷³. It seems inconceivable that a mass of people would have disappeared without a trace and it seems quite certain that the Alans of the Saltovo culture retained their custom of burying their dead in catacomb graves. It is unclear, however, which population interred its dead in the simple shaft graves.

In the 10th century, the Alans, who appear as Burtas in the Arab and Persian sources¹¹⁷⁴, moved to the Middle Volga region from the forested steppe of the Don region. Bubenok has argued that one and the same population is denoted by different names in the literary sources, a point that seems especially true for the Iranian population of the southern Russian steppe. European writers generally called them Alans, while Persian reports designated them as As in the 13th century. The Iranian speaking groups appear as Jas in Old Russian writings until the mid-12th century; later, they can perhaps be identified with the Brodniks. Together with the Alans, the earlier Sarmatian groups were probably absorbed by the region's later populations and thus played a role in the ethnogenesis of the Khazars, the Petchenegs, the eastern Slavs and other population groups¹¹⁷⁵. Writing in the 11th century, Al-Biruni mentioned the Alans living beyond the Caspian Sea, whose language had by then become an amalgam of the Chorezmian and Petcheneg tongues¹¹⁷⁶. In the 13th century William of Rubruck, the Franciscan friar who travelled to the Mongolian court on King Louis IX's orders, described the Christian Alans living in the Crimea and the Urals. He also mentioned Alans who served as soldiers in the Mongolian ruler's army and groups who had settled with their families on Chinese shores in the Far East¹¹⁷⁷. Scattered references to the Alans can be found in the works of Giovanni da Pian del Carpine (John of Plano Carpini) from the same period¹¹⁷⁸. Early Russian chronicles mention the Jas eleven times

¹¹⁷¹ Melyukova 1987, 116.

¹¹⁷² Kouznetsov/Lebedynsky 2005, 150. If we accept the re-migration theory, an explanation must also be sought for the peculiar position of the Bulgars, whose land was wedged inbetween the two Alanic territories.

^{1172a} For a good overview of previous research, see Bubenok 1997, 39-44. It is quite obvious that the different views are at variance with each other and that the linguistic, archaeological, historical and anthropological data need to be reconciled with each other.

¹¹⁷³ Ammian XXXI.3.1. – Harmatta 1975, 257.

¹¹⁷⁴ The Burtas are alternately equated with the Alans and the Finno-Ugrians, see Eggers 1998, 21 n. 124. Harmatta 1975, 260-261, suggested that the name can perhaps be related to the Borata kindred appearing in the Nart Epic. The problem has been recently discussed by Bubenok 2008.

¹¹⁷⁵ Bubenok 1997, 172.

¹¹⁷⁶ Tolstova 1979, 154.

¹¹⁷⁷ Farkas 2000b, 4.

¹¹⁷⁸ e.g. Carpini IV.26, VII.9.



Fig. 312 Kič-Malka, an early medieval Alanic hillfort (Kislovodsk Basin). – (After Korobov 2012, fig. 7).

between 965 and 1278¹¹⁷⁹. At the end of this period the centre of the Alanic lands between the Don and the Danube was probably Iași (known as Jászvásár, »market of the Jas« in Hungarian), whose first mention dates from 1232¹¹⁸⁰.

ALANS IN THE CAUCASUS

Following Abramova's research, the earliest archaeological traces of an Alanic presence in the Caucasus are generally identified with the catacomb graves of the 2nd-4th centuries in the Central Caucasus¹¹⁸¹. The burial rite of these graves, such as catacombs under kurgans and other cultural elements, resembles the funerary practice of the population identified with the Sarmatians/Alans living in the northern, steppe areas of the Caucasus¹¹⁸². A chain of Alanic hillforts and their cemeteries dating from the 6th-12th centuries stretches from the Taman Peninsula to the Caspian Sea along the foothills (**fig. 312**)¹¹⁸³. Several differences can be noted in the archaeological culture of the eastern and western region of the northern Caucasus populated by the Alans during this period, with the divide between the two marked by the Kislovodsk Basin. The sites of the eastern group extend far into the dry steppe along the Caspian Sea in the north, while in the south they dot the mountain region. The Alanic tribal alliance is characterised by a sedentary life-style and a dense settlement network during this period, whose sites – fortified settlements, town-like settlements, hillforts on high peaks – are fairly well-known from the excavations. The material heritage of the Alans is made up of richly varied assemblages blending steppe Sarmatian/Alanic elements and the culture of the autochthonous mountain groups. By the end of the 1st millennium AD, there emerged a fairly uniform Alanic culture in the Caucasus¹¹⁸⁴. The burial rite was dominated by the catacomb tradition

¹¹⁷⁹ Pčelina 1963, 157.

¹¹⁸⁰ <http://lexikon.katolikus.hu/> s. v. Jászvásár.

¹¹⁸¹ Gabuev/Malašev 2009, 6-8, with an overview of previous research and the earlier literature.

¹¹⁸² Gadlo 1979, 35-36.

¹¹⁸³ Gadlo 1979, 70. For a reconstruction of the territory controlled by the Alans as recorded in the written sources, see Munkácsi 1904, 6.

¹¹⁸⁴ Gadlo 1979, 200-201.

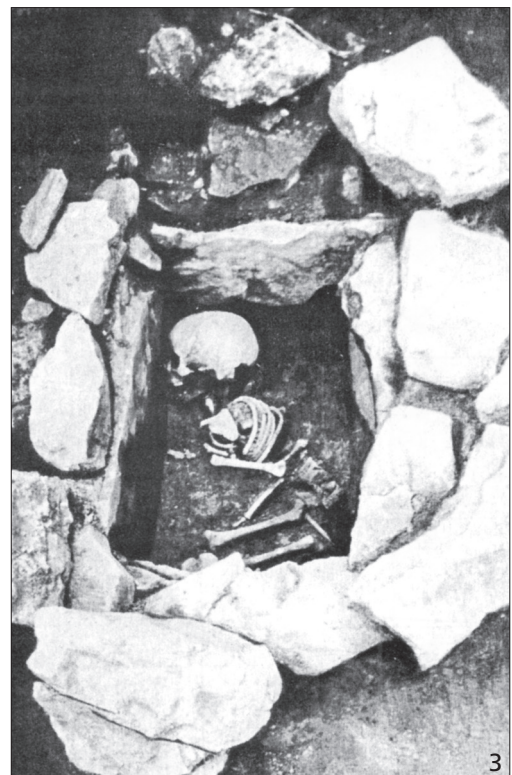
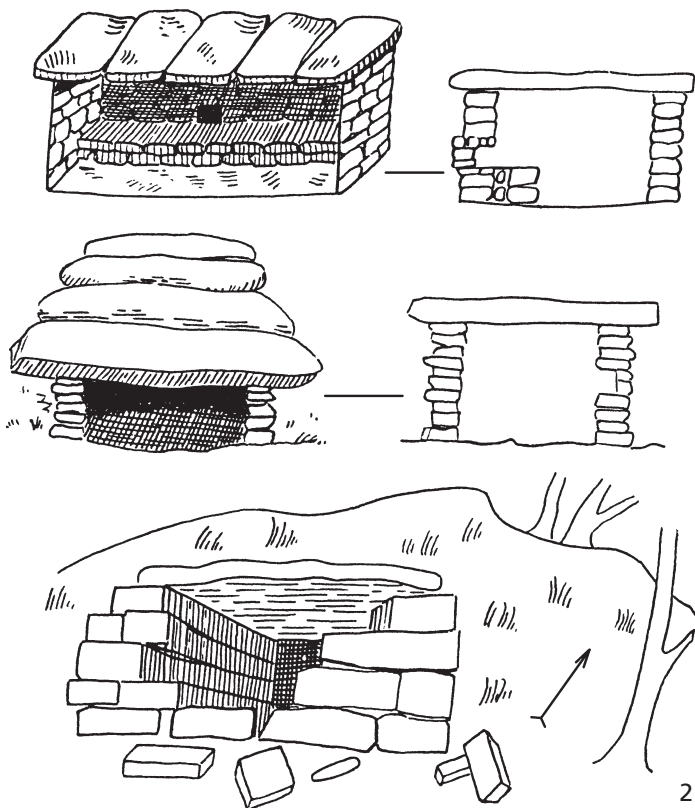
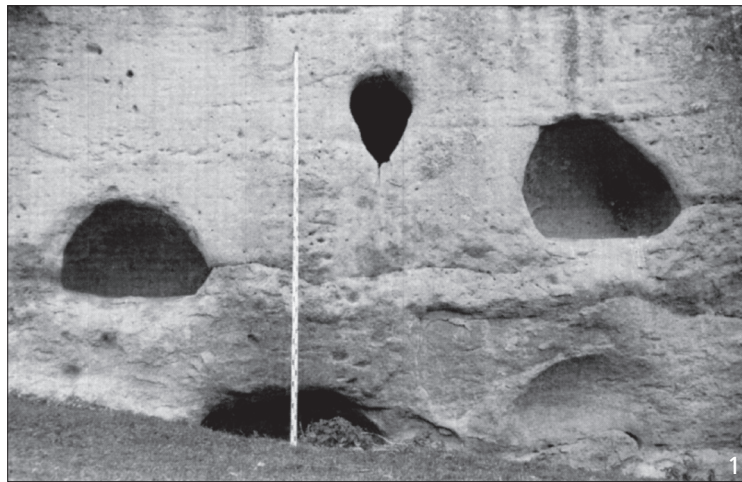


Fig. 313 Alanic burials in the Caucasus: **1** niche graves carved into the rock (after Kazanski/Mastykova 2003, 190). – **2** burials in stone chests from the Kuban region (after Kouznetsov/Lebedynsky 2005, 180). – **3** 7th century burial in stone chest, Ullubaganaly, Grave 21 (after Kovalevskaja 2005, fig. 3).

between the 4th and 9th centuries. Currently, we know about a thousand catacomb graves in the foothill region, while burials in stone chests and niche graves carved into the rock were the norm in the high mountains (fig. 313)¹¹⁸⁵.

The history of the Caucasian Alans in the second part of the 1st millennium was essentially determined by their geographic location. Their lands came under the cross-fire of Byzantine and Sassanian interests. Both

¹¹⁸⁵ Korobov 2003, 5-7.



Fig. 314 Aspar, a high-ranking official in the Byzantine court, and his family portrayed on a silver platter. – (After http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/28/Missorium_Aspar_434.jpg [9.1.2012]).

powers sought to enlist the Alans controlling the Caucasian passes as their allies. It is therefore hardly surprising that there are data showing that Byzantium made diplomatic overtures to the Alans of the western Caucasus, while their brethren in the eastern regions were wooed by the Persian Empire. In addition to the archaeological evidence, the written sources also mentioned the Byzantine connection. There were several high-ranking officials of Alanic stock at the Byzantine court, perhaps most renowned among them being Flavius Ardabur Aspar, who in the late 5th century was appointed *magister utriusque militiae* («Master of Soldiers») and thus probably played a key role in shaping imperial policy. Through his son's marriage, he was elevated to the rank of caesar, and there was very little between him and the imperial throne (fig. 314)¹¹⁸⁶. The influence of the Alans in Byzantium is amply reflected by the fact that they were the ones who »introduced« the Avars to the imperial court. Although dating from a much later age, mention must be made of a Catalan report from the early 14th century, according to which Alan mercenaries served under the Byzantine flag¹¹⁸⁷.

The earliest archaeological traces of the Alans tally neatly with the information contained in the Armenian and Georgian sources from the early and mid-5th century, which located the Alans in the Caucasus¹¹⁸⁸. Cer-

¹¹⁸⁶ Sanakoev 1992. – Doguzov 1992. – Dzattiaty 1992.
¹¹⁸⁷ Alemany 2000, 302-308.

¹¹⁸⁸ Gadlo 1979, 28. 46-48.

tain passages in the 11th century biography of Vahtang Gorgasal, the famed eastern Georgian ruler reigning in the late 5th century, have led scholars to suggest that Alans from the northern Caucasus served among his bodyguards¹¹⁸⁹.

In the 6th century, Procopius located the Alans in the area adjacent to the Sabirs¹¹⁹⁰. In 549-550, the Alans fought as allies in Lazika, supporting the king of the Lazi¹¹⁹¹ and Byzantium against Iran, although they later switched alliances. The Alanic tribal confederation apparently played a dominant role in the northern Caucasus and expanded its territory. Procopius' passages would imply that the Alans lorded over the western and central regions of the Caucasus and that their land extended as far as the Darial Pass¹¹⁹².

After 576, the Alans of the northern Caucasus came under the rule of the Turkic Khaganate and the power of their tribal alliance waned. While at the Byzantine court, Turxathos, the prince of the western Turks, boasted to Valentinus, the Byzantine envoy, how he had defeated the Alans. We learn that the Turks treated the Alans as their slaves and, more importantly for us, that they regarded them as a separate people¹¹⁹³. The expansion of the Khazar state into the Caucasus was immediately followed by an alliance with the Alanic ruler, an event recorded in the best-known sources of Khazar history, the Khazar-Jewish correspondence. The anonymous author of the Cambridge Document recorded that the alliance was necessary because the Alans were the most powerful people among the neighbouring nations¹¹⁹⁴. Along with other peoples, the Alans fought as auxiliaries in the Byzantine army, supporting the Khazars in the emerging Khazar-Arab conflict. Although during the 7th century, the Arabs led several campaigns against the Alans in the northern Caucasus, they were unable to gain a permanent foothold in the region¹¹⁹⁵. Theophanes, the single western source on Alania from the late 7th-early 8th century¹¹⁹⁶, spoke of an Alanic ruler, perhaps an indication of independence. Theophanes reported that the Alans were the single independent ethno-political formation in the region north of the Caucasus¹¹⁹⁷. The Khazar-Jewish correspondence also recorded that the Alans supported – or had no choice but to support – the Khazar military expeditions because otherwise the Khazars could hardly have used the main Caucasian pass, the Darial Pass (**fig. 82**), also known as the Alanic Gate, during their campaign against Transcaucasia in 730-731¹¹⁹⁸. In the late 9th and early 10th centuries, the Alans appear as the Khazars' allies, but they soon turned against them, probably reflecting the weakening of the Khazar state. Ibn Rusta's account, mirroring conditions in the 9th-10th centuries, would suggest that the Alanic lands extended for at least 200-250 km from east to west. After the fall of the Khazars, the Alans made their bid to extend the lands under their dominion both northward and westward. The medieval Alanic kingdom was born at this time, as recorded in the Arab sources and by Constantine Porphyrogenitus, who described the Alans as the equals of the Khazars¹¹⁹⁹.

There are indications that some Alan groups had embraced Zoroastrianism between the second half of the 7th century and the 9th century, although it is far from clear to what extent this was widespread. Two buildings interpreted as fire-temples, one in Humarin in the Upper Kuban region, the other in Nižnij Arhyz (Karachay-Cherkessia), and the niches carved in rock for entombing the dead in the Kislovodsk area and in Karachay-Cherkessia are cited as proof for this. The rock graves are regarded as evidence for Zoroastrianism because they conform to the religious precept that the body of the deceased should not »defile« the earth. It has been suggested that the new religion reached the western Alanic lands through Sogdian merchants

1189 Dzattiaty 1995.

1190 Procop. *Pers.* II.29.15.

1191 Procop. *Pers.* II.30.28. Living mostly in Turkey, the Lazi are a Caucasian people speaking a tongue related to Georgian.

1192 Procop. *Goth.* IV.3.4-5. – Gadlo 1979, 97-101.

1193 Menandros *Exc. de leg.* 208, quoted after Szádeczky-Kardoss 1998, 45. – Kulakovskij 1899, 48.

1194 Alemany 2000, 332-337.

1195 Gadlo 1979, 168-169.

1196 Alemany 2000, 198-204.

1197 Gadlo 1979, 167-168.

1198 Gadlo 1979, 131. 153.

1199 Kulakovskij 1899, 52-53. – Gadlo 1979, 191-194.



Fig. 315 10th century church in Nižnij Arhiz (Karachay-Cherkessia), regarded as the Alans' capital. – (After http://i2.guns.ru/forums/icons/forum_pictures/003541/3541009.jpg [9.8.2011]).

travelling the Silk Road. An alternative possibility is that following the Arabic conquest of Iran and Central Asia from the mid-7th century, the northern Caucasus became a refuge for the adherents of Zoroastrianism and other religions persecuted by Islam. Western Alania officially converted to Christianity in the 10th century under influence from Byzantium. The centre of the Diocese of Alania and its cathedral were located in the fortified settlement of Nižnij Arhiz (fig. 315)¹²⁰⁰.

Various dynastic marriages are eloquent testimony to the significance of the Alans in the Middle Ages. For example, Tamara, the Georgian Queen (1184-1213) who was of Ossetian lineage on her mother's side, married David Soslan, King of Alania¹²⁰¹.

¹²⁰⁰ Rudnickij 2001.

¹²⁰¹ Abaev 1990, 417-419.

The Alans disappear from the pages of the eastern, western and Russian chronicles and other documents from the 15th century¹²⁰², and are succeeded by the Iranian-speaking Ossetians on both sides of the Darial Pass (the Alanic Gate). Suffice it here to mention a single piece of evidence for the Alanic-Ossetian continuity: a passage that was first interpreted by the Hungarian scholar Moravcsik. The text in question is the epilogue to the Theogony of Johannes Tzetzes, the 12th century Byzantine poet, who recorded a sentence in Alanic that also makes perfect sense in Ossetian¹²⁰³.

ALANS IN WESTERN EUROPE¹²⁰⁴

Before dealing with the Alanic presence in Western Europe, we must briefly return to the events of the early 5th century. In 401, the Alpine provinces fought bitter battles with the Vandals, whose ranks possibly included Alanic groups. It is unclear where the Alans were located between 402 and 406: whether they returned to the east or whether they remained in Western Europe as *foederati*. Neither do we know when exactly the Alans banded with the Vandals and even less is known about when and where the Suebi joined them. Only this much is certain, that in late 406, the Vandals, the Alans and the Suebi gathered up their families and began their westward trek. They defeated the Franks defending the Empire's border and crossed the Rhine on the first day of 407. A smaller band raided northern Gaul, another group moved into the Rhône Valley, while the main group migrated south-westward in Gaul. Embroiled in their own inner affairs, the Romans took little notice of them¹²⁰⁵. In 409, this contingent crossed the Pyrenees and entered Spain¹²⁰⁶. Roman diplomacy played off the Visigoths against them, resulting in the slaughter of a substantial number of Vandals and Alans. In 429, the remnants marched to Africa, relinquishing the Iberian Peninsula to the Visigoths¹²⁰⁷. One sign that the Alans retained their ethnic identity after the interlude in Hispania is that the leader of the barbarian Carthaginian state is regularly styled as the Vandal-Alan king in the literary sources. The North African interlude was ended by the campaign led by the Byzantine general, Belisarius, in 533, after which we no longer hear of Alans in this part of the world¹²⁰⁸.

The other Alanic group marching into southern Gaul with the Visigoths broke away from their former allies in 414. The Romans forced the Goths into Spain, while the Alans received land between Toulouse and the Mediterranean in exchange for their loyalty. From here, the Alans controlled several coastal routes, such as the Via Domitia connecting Gaul with Spain. The memory of the Alans' settlement in this region is perhaps preserved by various toponyms in southern France, such as Alan in Haute-Garonne and Aaligne in the département of Aude¹²⁰⁹.

Archaeological evidence for the Alans' presence has recently also come to light. Two daggers or swords of the »Maeotian« type with a cross-shaped groove under the hilt of northern Caucasian origin that can be definitely linked to the Alans were recovered from the River Lot near Sainte-Livrade-sur-Lot in Aquitaine (district Lot-et-Garonne) in southwest France. It has been tentatively suggested that the daggers can perhaps

¹²⁰² Kulakovskij 2000, 31.

¹²⁰³ Moravcsik 1929.

¹²⁰⁴ This subject has been most comprehensively discussed by Bachrach 1973, whose book is the most authoritative study on the subject. Most scholars tend to quote his findings. In this section, we have kept the already known facts to a minimum because our aim is to review the new advances in this field.

¹²⁰⁵ Czúth/Szádeczky-Kardoss 1956.

¹²⁰⁶ Cf. Orosius' *Adv. Pag.* VII.38, description of the events of 418-419: »[...] nations irresistible in numbers and might who are now oppressing the provinces of Gaul and Spain (namely, the Alans, Suebi, and Vandals) were induced by Stilicho to take arms on their own initiative [...]«.

¹²⁰⁷ Czúth/Szádeczky-Kardoss 1956, 175.

¹²⁰⁸ Kuznecov 1992, 20.

¹²⁰⁹ Bachrach 1973, 28-30.

be regarded as the heritage of an Alanic group, who after a two-year-long sojourn in Gaul migrated to Spain through Aquitaine, while others settled near the town of Bazas. The site lies near Excisum (Eysses), a Gallo-Roman settlement at the junction of major strategic roads¹²¹⁰. A similar sword has recently been found at Flins-sur-Seine farther to the north of Gaul (Île-de-France). Although the sword did not have a specific archaeological context, it was found in a Gallo-Roman-Germanic milieu (fig. 316)¹²¹¹.

According to Gaulish sources, the Alans moved into the deserted lands along the Rhône in the 440s, which is also confirmed by the toponyms such as Allan and Alençone in the département of Drôme. The Alans settling here were given the task of controlling the Bagaudae and of checking the Visigoths' eastward expansion¹²¹².

At the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains (Battle of Châlons) in 451, the *laeti* and Sarmatians of Gaul were joined by the Franks, the Armoricians, the Burgundians, the Saxons, the Riparians and the Ol-ibriones to form the Gallian auxiliaries of the united Gothic-Roman army¹²¹³. In 457, the Alans participated in the campaign against the Hispanian Vandals led by Majorian, one of the last Roman emperors. After their defeat by the Vandals, the Alans ravaged southern Gaul and raided northern Italy. Their leader Beogar was killed in battle near Bergamo in 464. The remnants of his warriors probably divided, with some returning to Gaul and others settling in northern Italy among their Sarmatian and Alan brethren, who had migrated there earlier¹²¹⁴.

Similar to the situation in Italy, Iranians arrived in two major waves in Gaul: the Sarmatians from the Hungarian Plain transplanted in the 4th century and the Alans arriving in the early 5th century. Regarding the latter, we have no way of telling to what extent they represented steppe culture and to what extent Sarmatians from the Hungarian Plain had mingled with them. Imprints of both groups can be discerned in the archaeological and linguistic (toponymic) record. Toponyms that can be derived from the Alans' ethnonym mentioned above, such as Alaincourt, Alagne and Alain occur across France, as do place names reflecting a Sarmatian presence such as Sarmasia, Sermoise, Sarmace and Sarmeses¹²¹⁵.

The Alans merged with the surviving Gallo-Roman aristocracy within a few generations. This is all the more intriguing because, in contrast to the Goths who had embraced Arianism, the Alans had not converted to

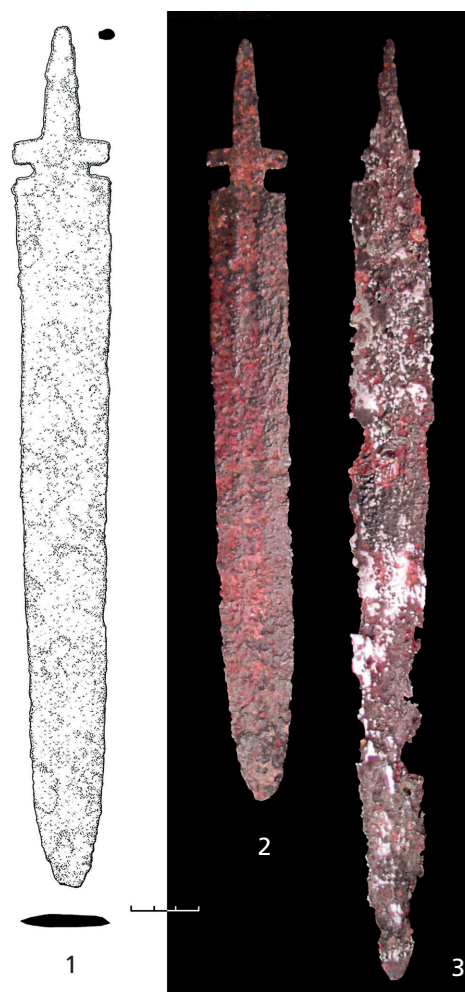


Fig. 316 »Maeotian« type swords associated with the Alans from France: **1-2** Sainte-Livrade-du-Lot (after Garnier/Daynès/Lebedynsky 2007). – **3** Flins-sur-Seine (after Barat/Soulat/Gauduchon 2009, fig. 3).

¹²¹⁰ Garnier/Daynès/Lebedynsky 2007. – Lebedynsky/Garnier/Daynès 2006/2007.

¹²¹¹ Barat/Soulat/Gauduchon 2009. We are greatly indebted to Lebedynsky for calling our attention to the sword finds from France.

¹²¹² Bachrach 1973, 31-33.

¹²¹³ Jordan XXXVI.191.

¹²¹⁴ For the settlement of the Sarmatians in Italy, see also Bachrach 1973, 31-33.

¹²¹⁵ Kovalevskaja 1993.

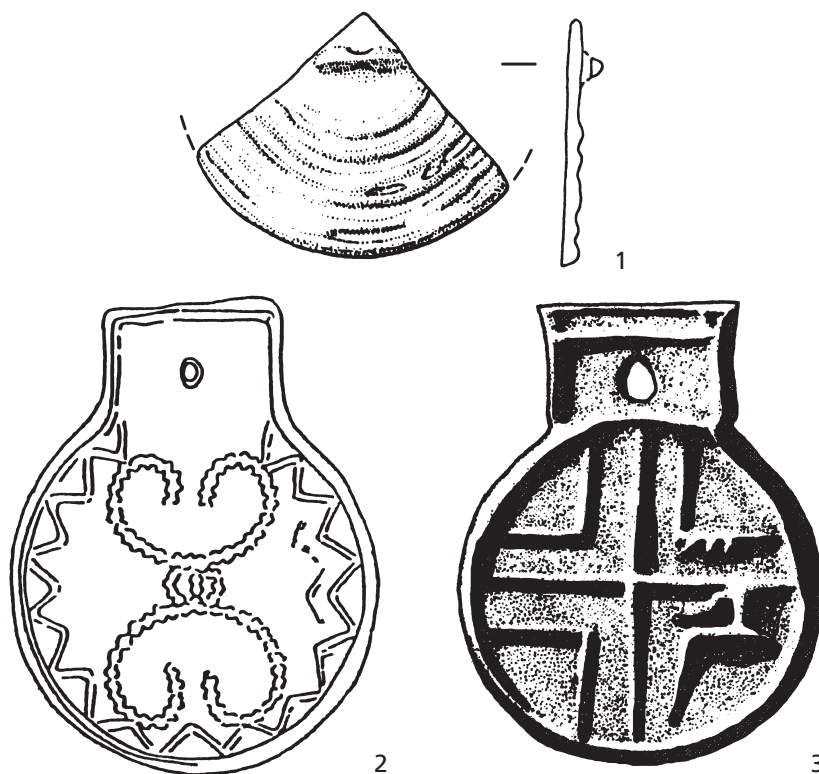


Fig. 317 Mirrors of Sarmatian character from Western Europe: **1** Saint-Sulpice (Switzerland) (after Kouznetsov/Lebedynsky 2005, 100). – **2** Reims-Fosse Jean-Fat (after Kazanski 1986, fig. 2). – **3** Krefeld-Gellep (Lower Rhine region) (after Pirling 1993, fig. 9).

Christianity at this time. Claudius Marius Victor, a local poet writing in the 5th century, mentioned that instead of revering gods, the Alans venerated their ancestors¹²¹⁶.

A grave uncovered at Reims-fosse Jean-Fat, Reims, contained a Sarmatian mirror pendant bearing a tamga sign whose counterparts are known from the Crimea and the Lower Dnieper region. The mirror was found together with a double-plate brooch of the type current in the late 4th and first half of the 5th centuries (fig. 317). The site lies in an area between Reims and Amiens where, according to the *Notitia Dignitatum*, there was a Sarmatian colony (*Praefectus Sarmatarum gentilium, inter Renos et Tambianos provinciae Belgicae secundae*)¹²¹⁷. A similar Sarmatian mirror was brought to light from a burial dated in the second half of the 4th century in the Krefeld-Gellep cemetery in the Lower Rhine region¹²¹⁸ and the fragment of an undecorated mirror of the steppe type with a suspension loop is known from Saint-Sulpice in Switzerland¹²¹⁹. These mirrors can probably be seen as the heritage of Sarmatians transplanted to these regions before the Hunnic conquest. A later period is indicated by a series of 5th-century barbarian warrior finds from Lower Normandy, which can in part be linked to the Alans. The burials differ from the graves of the local Late Roman population both anthropologically and regarding the finds, which can be best likened to assemblages in the Danube region¹²²⁰. The plate brooches from the Saint-Martin-de-Fontenay burial ground and the Airan find (Moult) reflect the fashion of the Danube region, while the diadem is virtually identical with a piece from the Gothic-Alanic cemetery at Lučistoe in the Crimea (figs 318-319). Pilet associated these finds with the warrior graves along the *litus saxonicum* (Saxon Shore), the defence line constructed for warding

1216 Mar.Vic. *Aleth.* 3.189-193, after Alemany 2000, 44-45.

1217 Kazanski 1986; 1993, 176 fig. 3. – *Not.Dign. Occ.* XLII.67.

1218 Pirling 1993, 112 fig. 9.

1219 Kouznetsov/Lebedynsky 2005, 100.

1220 Pilet et al. 1993.

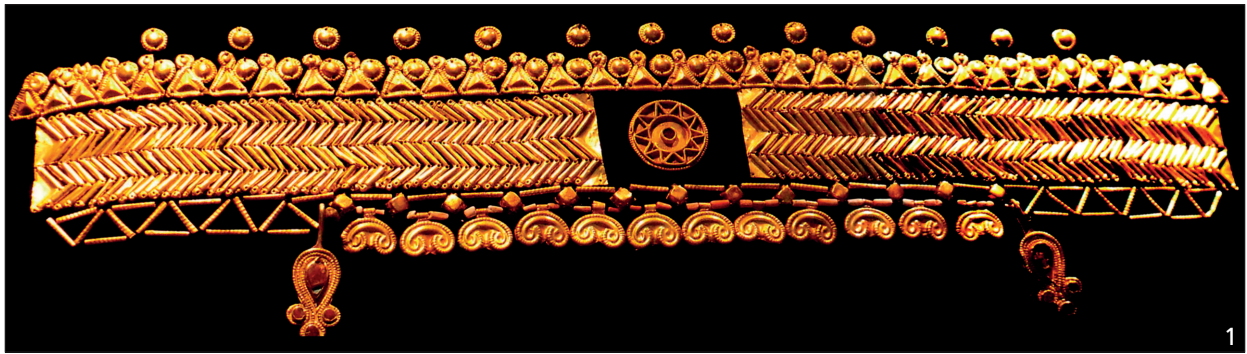


Fig. 318 W shaped ornaments are usually associated with the Alans. Ornaments of this type, probably adorning a headdress, have been found at: **1** Lučistoe in the Crimea (photo E. Istvánovits / V. Kulcsár). – **2** Regöly in Hungary (after Bóna 1991, pl. 15). – **3** Airan in France (after L'Or 2000, no. 12, 1. 6).



Fig. 319 Lučistoe – the earring similar to the one from Airan and the reconstruction of the headdress/diadem. – (After Hajredinova 2002, fig. 10; Ajbabin/Hajredinova 2008, fig. 26, 1-3).

off attacks from the coast¹²²¹. While the ethnic affiliation of the barbarians defending the »Saxon coast« remains uncertain, the ornate polychrome ornament of the Airan find made in the steppe Sarmatian style would suggest that their ranks included Sarmatians/Alans who played a key role in the emergence of a more or less homogenous fashion, the so-called Danubian costume, of the Huns' subjects.

SARMATIANS IN BRITAIN

Britain represents another important locale of the Sarmatians' presence in Western Europe. An oft-cited passage by Cassius Dio reported that, according to the peace treaty concluding the Marcomannic Wars, the emperor sent a 5,500 strong lazygian cavalry to Britain¹²²². Their presence has also been attested archaeologically at the northern border of Roman Britannia and it is possible that their memory also survived

¹²²¹ Pilet 1995; 2001.

¹²²² Dio LXXI.6.

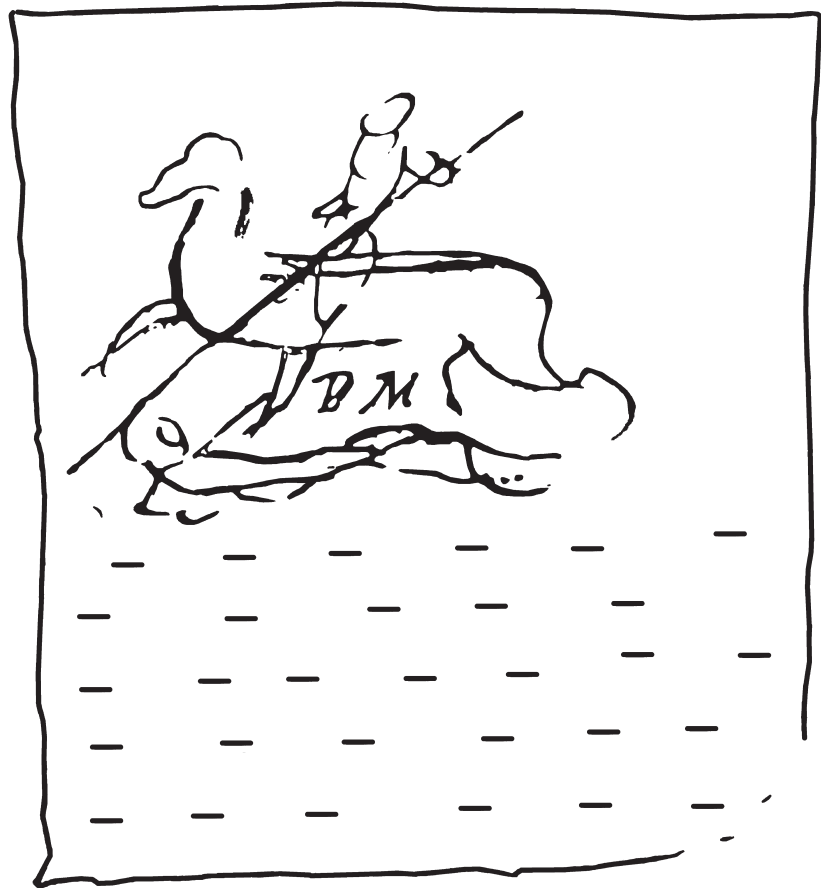


Fig. 320 A tombstone from Ribchester is regarded as evidence for the Sarmatians' presence in Britain. The text of inscription reads: D(is) M(anibus) / [...de(?)]c(urio) al(ae) Sarmata[rum] («To the spirits of the departed ... decurion[?] of the Cavalry Regiment of Sarmatians...»). – (After Wright/Richmond 1955, no. 595).

in medieval epic tradition. Currently, we know of six Roman inscriptions which can be associated with the Sarmatians. Three of these were found in Ribchester (Bremetennacum) (fig. 320). The Roman camp lies along a road in the north, which was already a major route in the Roman period, and it seems likely that it had been continuously garrisoned by cavalry troops. According to an inscription from 238-244, one of these was the *numerus equitum Sarmatarum Bremetennacensium*. By the 4th century, the *numerus* had become the *cuneus Sarmatarum* in the *Notitia Dignitatum*. The *ala Asturum*, comprising light cavalry equipped with Western European arms, was also stationed in the fort. The size of the Ribchester fort suggests an *ala* of 500 soldiers. According to Richmond, this indicates that the Sarmatians were divided into smaller, probably also 500-strong units in various part of the frontier zone, and it is possible that there were eleven such Sarmatian units acting as auxiliaries on the testimony of the inscriptions. The *Notitia Dignitatum* mentioned that *cataphractarius* troops were stationed in the fort of Morbium. In Richmond's view, they were the descendants of the Sarmatians¹²²³.

The eye-shield from a cataphract horse-mail found at Chester on Hadrian's Wall can perhaps be regarded as the heritage of one of these troops. A few beads from the Chester fort are similarly linked to the Sarmatians because their best analogies are known from the Hungarian Plain¹²²⁴. Rowntree mentions beads and metal artefacts from other sites that can also be linked to the Sarmatians, as well as six stone steles whose

¹²²³ Richmond 1945, 15. 18.

¹²²⁴ Sulimirski 1970, 176 fig. 66.



Fig. 321 Dragon banner on the Bayeux Tapestry. – (After Grape 1994, 164).

inscription refers to Sarmatian units (e.g. *numerus equitum Sarmatarum*), or bear depictions of Sarmatian mounted warriors with dragon standard, long lance and scale armour (fig. 220, 3)¹²²⁵.

SARMATIANS IN THE ARTHURIAN LEGENDS?

An imaginative and controversial theory claims that certain elements of the Arthurian legends preserve the memory of the Sarmatians/Alans in Western Europe because the best parallels are to be found in the Nart Epic of the Caucasus and in the works of Herodotus, such as the magical chalice and the sword in the stone conferring strength and power to its owner. Taking up Nickel's idea, Littleton and Malcor asserted that the Iranian epic motifs permeating Western European legends and mythic narratives originated from the Sarmatian auxiliaries in Britain and the Alans settling in Gaul, and that they were transmitted through the Arthurian cycle¹²²⁶. Makkay

has devoted several studies to the Hungarian dimensions of this theory¹²²⁷. For our part, we are not wholly convinced by the arguments that challenge King Arthur's indigenous Celtic roots and claim that the legendary ruler of the British Isles was of Sarmatian stock, even if there can be no doubt that the successive Iranian groups settling in Western Europe had an impact on both spiritual culture and the art of warfare, and it does not seem too far-fetched to assume that the roots of medieval chivalric culture can be traced to the Sarmatians/Alans of the Late Roman Age and the Early Migration period¹²²⁸ (figs 220, 1; 321).

THE SARMATIAN / ALANIC INFLUENCE ON EUROPEAN CULTURE: POLISH SARMATISM

The belief shared by Polish noblemen of the 16th-18th centuries that they were descended from the Sarmatians gave rise to the cult of Polish Sarmatism, which permeated all aspects of life. Polish noblemen adopted an attire with accentuated oriental elements such as a long, belted caftan and a distinct headgear, they pursued a distinctive style of warfare and, even more importantly, Sarmatism gave the nobility a sense of historical unity and was a source of national pride (fig. 322). The belief in a shared past traceable to

¹²²⁵ Rowntree 2011. We would here like to thank Rowntree for kindly showing us her manuscript and permitting us to quote from it.

¹²²⁶ Nickel 1975. – Littleton/Malcor 1994.

¹²²⁷ Makkay 1996; 1998c, both with the earlier literature.

¹²²⁸ One clear indication of the Sarmatian heritage is the dragon banner appearing on the Bayeux Tapestry. The Sarmatian origins of this banner are evident from the trail of various artefacts and depictions leading from Central Asia to the British Isles (Makkay 1996).



Fig. 322 Polish nobles regarded themselves as descendants of the Sarmatians. Polish noblemen's portraits from the 17th-18th century. – (After rugi-land.narod2.ru/antropoestetika/galereya_sarmatskogo_portreta/ [9.8.2012]).

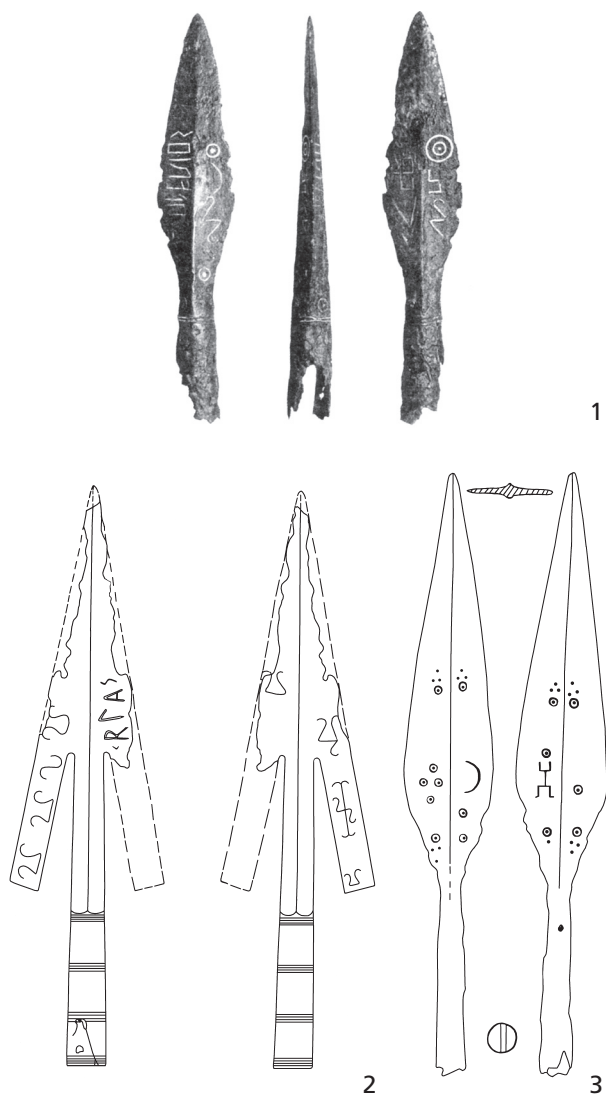


Fig. 323 Lances bearing tamga signs and runes from the second half of the 2nd century: **1** Suszyczno. – **2** Rozwadów. – **3** Bodzanowo. – (After Voronjatov/Mačinskij 2010, fig. 8, 2-3).

the Sarmatians was an important part of the ideology of the multi-ethnic Polish-Lithuanian state. At its core stood the love of freedom, a defining element in the Polish national character¹²²⁹. Using the term »Sarmatia« to denote Poland first appeared in documents from the first half of the 16th century, at roughly the same time that Ransanus claimed a Sarmatian origin for the ancient Hungarians.

Usually two passages from Pliny were cited, according to which, the Vistula marked the boundary of the Sarmatian lands¹²³⁰.

Sulimirski's comprehensive overview of Sarmatian archaeology and history is usually cited as the academically well-grounded source of the theory of Sarmatian-Polish kinship. Based on a series of uncertain linguistic arguments, such as the distribution of Chotin/Hotin type place-names, Sulimirski claimed a Sarmatian/Alanic origin for the ancestors of the Serbs and Croats, and he identified Jordanes' Anti with the Aorsi/Alans. In his view, Lesser Poland, Silesia and the southerly regions of Greater Poland were already occupied by the Anti, a »Sarmatian« tribe, from the late 2nd century. He claimed that the Alans were the ruling elite in the northern Slavic territories during the Hun period and that a series of lavish assemblages, such as the one from Jakuszowice, represent their heritage. Sulimirski believed that the Alans had later been assimilated by the Slavs¹²³¹.

Sulimirski's views, which are rather incoherent to say the least, were never taken seriously and discussed in Polish academic publications, which was tantamount to their rejection and thus the question of how Polish Sarmatism spread remained open.

Even so, there were attempts to demonstrate the traces of Sarmatian influence or at least of Germanic-Sarmatian contact on Polish territory, even if not of an actual Sarmatian presence. These traces are extremely scant and, in some cases, unconvincing¹²³². Several studies have been devoted to the silver lances bearing Sarmatian tamga signs, sometimes together with Nordic runes, most of which came to light in Poland, although a few specimens are also known from Germany and Norway. These lances are generally regarded as evidence for contact between the Sarmatians and the Germanic peoples (fig. 323)¹²³³. Nickel had already claimed a relation between the Sarmatian and Turkic signs, and the Glagolitic alphabet and various medieval

¹²²⁹ Grzybowski 1996. – Borowski 2001.

¹²³⁰ Plin. *NH* IV.XII.81, IV.XIII.97. The same information appears in Pomp. *Mela* 3.28, and Ptolem III.5. All three authors probably drew from the same source which contained this erroneous description because there is nothing in the archaeo-

logical record to suggest the Sarmatian occupation of Polish »Sarmatia«.

¹²³¹ Sulimirski 1970, 189-196.

¹²³² Dobrzańska 2001.

¹²³³ Ščukin 1994, 486-490.

marks, including those of the »Sarmatian« Polish nobles (the idea of the common origin of the Sarmatian and medieval Polish signs was first suggested by Sulimirski¹²³⁴). However, there is very little actual resemblance between these tamgas from different periods, different regions and widely differing cultural contexts, and we would therefore agree with Dračuk that these were not cultural borrowings, but represented independent developments from basic prototypes¹²³⁵. As far as contact between the Sarmatians and the Germanic peoples are concerned, some scanty traces have been documented in both the Przeworsk and the Wielbark culture¹²³⁶, as well as in the Sarmatian territory in the Hungarian Plain. The study of the nature of the contact between the two peoples remains a task for future research.

IRANIAN ELEMENTS IN THE HUNGARIAN CONQUEST PERIOD: THE ROLE OF SARMATIAN STUDIES IN CONQUEST PERIOD RESEARCH

The migration which in Antiquity was linked to the Scythians, was also closely related to the expansion of the Finno-Ugrian peoples, and especially of the Ugrian-Hungarian tribes. The Scythian question thus deserves our attention not only as a general field of scholarly study, but also in view of our own special research priorities, and it imposes upon us the obligation to shed light on newer and newer dimensions of this issue¹²³⁷.

There is increasing evidence that the ancestors of the Hungarians led by Árpád had come into close contact with various Iranian peoples during their steppe history before their occupation of the Carpathian Basin in the late 9th century. The Iranian loan-words in Hungarian are eloquent testimony to these contacts¹²³⁸. We know that these do not include words adopted from the Jas (*Jász*) population arriving in Hungary in the 13th century¹²³⁹. However, there is still much uncertainty as to when and where these loan-words entered the Hungarian language. Almost all regions of the vast expanse between the Caucasus and the Carpathian Basin have been proposed as possible contact points. Most scholars agree that the ancient Hungarians adopted one part of the Iranian loan-words from the Sarmatians/Alans¹²⁴⁰.

One key passage for elucidating this issue can be found in Simon de Keza's (Kézai Simon) 13th-century chronicle in the narrative of the Hungarians' origins where he mentioned an Alanic tribal leader. While pursuing the miraculous stag in the Maeotian marshland, Hunor and Magor, the mythical ancestors of the Huns and the Hungarians, come upon the daughters of prince Dulo and marry them (fig. 324). The Dulo kindred can be traced back to the 3rd century: the name appears on inscriptions from Tanais and it survived in the form *Dulatae* among Ossetian family names¹²⁴¹. The name *Duli* appeared in the Tisza region on Julius Honorius' map from the 4th century, which according to Bóna can be identified with the Alans^{1241a}. However, a detailed overview of these intriguing bits of information would exceed the scope of this study. A meticulous

¹²³⁴ Sulimirski 1970, 154. 166-167.

¹²³⁵ Nickel 1973. – Dračuk 1975, 93.

¹²³⁶ For a comprehensive overview, see Dobrzańska 2001 and Kokowski 2003.

¹²³⁷ Nagy 1909, 111.

¹²³⁸ For Alanic loan-words, see Munkácsi 1904.

¹²³⁹ Makkay 1997a, 36-40.

¹²⁴⁰ For a summary of the debate, see Makkay 1995, 90-103; 1997a, 34-41.

¹²⁴¹ The name *Dulo* is relevant to the research on the ancient Hungarians because it is identical with the name borne by the dynasty of the Onogur Bulgar khans (Korai magyar 1994, 118; Róna-Tas 1996, 63. 188), suggesting that one group of the Onogur Bulgars perhaps had an Iranian ancestry. Another argument supporting this possibility is that the name of Asparuh, son of Kuvrat the Bulgar khan, has a Middle Iranian etymology (Abaev 1979, 281-282).

^{1241a} Bóna 1986, 63 quoting Schmidt 1941, 105.



Fig. 324 Hunor and Magor pursuing the miraculous stag in the 14th century Illuminated Chronicle. – (After *Chronicon Pictum*, Folio 5).

assessment of these scattered references remains the task of future studies in the history of the ancient Hungarians. The relevance of the Iranian world of the steppe for the history of the ancient Hungarians has long since been recognised. Fodor, one of the leading scholars of the prehistory of the ancient Hungarians, aptly noted over four decades ago that: »After the separation of the Ugrians, the ancestors of the Hungarians should probably be sought on the territory of the ›Sarmatian culture‹ in Western Siberia and the South Ural region. Advances in clarifying the origins of the ancient Hungarians can be expected from the large-scale archaeological investigation of this period in these regions«¹²⁴². However, this field has been undeservedly neglected by research. Its significance is indicated by a few scattered studies, such as Makkay's writings¹²⁴³.

SARMATIAN SURVIVALS: THE JAS IN THE CARPATHIAN BASIN

The possible survival of Sarmatian groups in the Carpathian Basin is an important, yet little explored issue in Sarmatian studies despite the fact that it also has a major relevance for Hungarian ethnogenesis.

The archaeological finds of the Hungarian Plain and Transdanubia dating from the late 4th and early 5th centuries reflect a gradual uniformisation. An ethnic attribution is difficult, often downright impossible, owing to the period's general fashion across extensive regions. Possibly the best approach to the identification of ethnic groups is through burial rites. However, it must be borne in mind that this will at best lead to the separation of ethnic groups based on our own criteria. The real question is what sense of ethnic identity the period's groups had. However, this chapter is hardly the place for a detailed discussion of this thorny issue. Kiss correctly pointed out that ethnic affiliation has remained one of the cardinal issues of archaeological research in the Carpathian Basin since the seminal work by Jankovich and Pulszky¹²⁴⁴. The markedly homogeneous find assemblages of the 5th century pose serious obstacles to research in this field. According to one major trend in archaeological research, everyone was a Hun under the Hunnic rule, the implication being that, although research into ethnic affiliation during this period is, in a sense, meaningless, it is nonetheless important for understanding the history of the Carpathian Basin because it would otherwise be impossible to fully understand the linguistic and cultural influence on the later populations settling in this region, the ancient Hungarians among them. Research into the fate of the huge Sarmatian population and the incoming Alans can hardly be neglected, even if we are fully aware that this issue will likely come under heavier critical fire than any of the previously raised questions.

¹²⁴² Fodor 1973, 29-30 n. 98.

¹²⁴³ Makkay 1995, 88-108; 2009, 78-80 *passim*.

¹²⁴⁴ A. Kiss 1994, 167.

The written sources contain few references to the Sarmatians of the Hungarian Plain following the appearance of the Huns in the Carpathian Basin, despite the fact that the historical records clearly indicate that they continued to play an important role in the region's history up until the Avar period¹²⁴⁵. It is quite certain that the Sarmatians did not hesitate to exploit the Romans' dire situation and they strove to acquire as much plunder as possible¹²⁴⁶. Even though some groups moved west after the Hun conquest, the overwhelming majority of the Sarmatian/Alanic population remained in its former lands. The archaeological record would suggest that a huge mass of this population lived on the Hungarian Plain during the 5th century and there can be no doubt that they lived to see Gepidic rule.

Vaday has noted that a destruction level dating from the close of the Hun period can be observed in several settlements in the Middle Tisza region and in the southerly regions of the Hungarian Plain. The human and dog remains in these destruction levels would perhaps indicate that the Gepids destroyed these settlements (**fig. 325**)¹²⁴⁷. However, our own field observations made during several decades of research indicate that destruction levels are the exception, rather than the rule in Sarmatian settlements of the Hungarian Plain. Only in rare cases had the houses been burnt down and most had been systematically emptied before their abandonment as shown by the relatively few artefacts found inside them and the lack of household articles that would have been discovered inside the houses had they been destroyed suddenly. Neither can the skeletons found inside refuse pits be interpreted as an indication of destruction¹²⁴⁸.

The possible survival of Sarmatian groups into the Gepidic period has not been examined yet, despite the fact that strong Sarmatian/Alanic cultural influences can be noted in the burials of the 5th century, such as south to north orientation, the deposition of mirrors and skull deformation, etc. The assumption that the local population did not migrate to a new homeland is best borne out by the ceramic wares. The new eastern wares appearing in the traditional ceramic inventory of the Sarmatian settlements are generally dated to the Hun period and interpreted as an indication of a Sarmatian population remaining in its former territory and providing various services to the nomads¹²⁴⁹.

It should be recalled that some areas lack finds and sites that can be associated with the Gepids. These areas include the greater part of the Upper Tisza region where the 5th and 6th century finds brought to light during the recent years differ markedly from the »classical« Gepidic assemblages of the Hungarian Plain. A catacomb grave with a niche at one end of the grave pit excavated in Kótaj-Verba-tanya yielded silver gilt radiate-headed bow brooches (*Bügelfibeln*) of the type current in the early 6th century (**fig. 326**)¹²⁵⁰. The catacomb grave points towards a steppe or Caucasian-Iranian population. Considering that the Upper Tisza region was not part of the classical Gepidic settlement territory on the testimony of the finds, this burial perhaps represents the first clue to determining the region's ethnic conditions during the Hun period and its aftermath. The period's population was probably extremely mixed. Whilst the separation of individual groups based on the archaeological evidence has been a research priority for some time and several theories have been proposed for identifying ethnic affiliation¹²⁵¹, few advances have been made in this respect. The great difficulty for research in this area is the paucity of written sources and their unreliability, as well as the fact that the original local population was already strongly mixed and that many new population groups were swept along by the immigrants arriving from the steppe¹²⁵². The date of the Kótaj grave assemblage suggests that, in addition to groups fleeing the Hunnic advance, new waves of immigrants should be assumed after the Battle of Nedao.

1245 Harmatta 1952, 279. – Szádeczky-Kardoss 1998, 34. – Makkay 1997a, 29.

1246 Alföldi 1924/1926, 59.

1247 Vaday 1989b, 209-210.

1248 Istvánovits 1999, 176-178.

1249 e.g. Vaday 1989b, 209.

1250 Unpublished, from A. Jakab's excavation in 2006. We would like to thank him for sharing this information with us.

1251 e.g. Werner 1956. – Bóna 1991. – A. Kiss 1994; 1997. – Bierbrauer 2006. – Mesterházy 2009.

1252 For the problems of determining ethnic affiliation, see Brather 2004.



Fig. 325 The bodies dumped into pits found mostly on late Sarmatian settlements can probably be associated with ritual activities: **1** Nyíregyháza-Oros (G. Pintye's excavation, unpublished). – **2** Ecsér, Site 7 (K. Kóvári's excavation, unpublished).

Returning to the Gepidic period, there are also other areas – as in the Upper Tisza region – where typical Gepidic finds are lacking. There is still no adequate explanation as to why the Danube-Tisza interfluvium and the Jászság area in the Middle Tisza region are virtually »empty« during the Gepidic period, without any 5th or 6th century Gepidic finds¹²⁵³. Assuming that this region would hardly have remained unpopulated for some four generations, the need for a chronological re-assessment of the Sarmatian finds becomes even more pressing, especially in view of the region's later history and, specifically, of the later settlement of the Jás in this region. Moreover, the mass survival of the Sarmatian population seems even more probable here than in the territory east of the Tisza.

In addition to this extensive territory devoid of Gepidic finds, greater attention must be accorded to smaller pockets. An important example is the Tiszasziget area (formerly known as the village of Ószentiván) near the Hungarian-Serbian border in the southern part of County Csongrád. Here Pópity recorded 20 Sarmatian sites during his systematic field surveys in the area, but did not find any traces of a Gepidic occupation¹²⁵⁴.

A Sarmatian presence in the Carpathian Basin until the second half of the 5th century is indicated by certain passages in Jordanes' *Getica*¹²⁵⁵, although it remains unclear where exactly the Sarmatians should be sought:

[...] the Sauromatae, whom we call Sarmatians, and the Cemandri and certain of the Huns dwelt in Castra Martis. [...] The Sciri, moreover, and the Sadagarii and certain of the Alani with their leader, Candac by name, received Scythia Minor and Lower Moesia.

Jordanes' text would suggest that Sarmatian and Alan groups had been dispersed over several areas¹²⁵⁶. The Sarmatians, or at least some of them, are generally believed to have occupied areas near the Danube. The opinions are differing, some scholars favour the northern part of the Danube-Tisza interfluvium (we should at this point recall the lack of Gepidic finds in that area, especially in the Jászság region), although the southern part of the interfluvium is sometimes also suggested. The location of the areas occupied by the Sciri



Fig. 326 Excavation of a catacomb grave at Kótaj-Verba-tanya. – (A. Jakab's excavation, unpublished).

¹²⁵³ Bóna et al. 1993, map between pp. 172 and 173.

¹²⁵⁴ Pópity 2006, 111-112.

¹²⁵⁵ Jordan L.265, LIV.277, LVI.285.

¹²⁵⁶ Jordan L.265. The treaty that allowed various Iranian groups (Sarmatians, Alans, Sadagari) to settle in the territories mentioned by Jordanes was probably concluded with Emperor Marcian in 455; see Kiss 2004, 155, for an evaluation of the passage.

and the Sarmatians relative to each other is also unknown, and it is therefore unclear which of them lived in the north and which in the south. Jordanes mentioned two Sarmatian kings by name, suggesting that Sarmatian rule had survived over two separate territories¹²⁵⁷.

It would appear that the two Sarmatian kings, Beuca and Babai, supported the Suebi against the Goths in 469.

The kings [of the Suavi], Hunimund and Alaric, fearing the destruction that had come upon the Sciri, next made war upon the Goths, relying upon the aid of the Sarmatians, who had come to them as auxiliaries with their kings Beuca and Babai. They summoned the last remnants of the Sciri. [...] They had on their side the Gepidae also, as well as no small re-enforcements from the race of the Rugi and from others gathered here and there. Thus they brought together a great host at the river Bolia in Pannonia and encamped there¹²⁵⁸.

The Goths defeated this army¹²⁵⁹. It would appear that the Sarmatians returned to their lands and managed to avoid a retaliatory campaign by Thiudimer, the Gothic king, and that they even defeated a Roman general. In the meantime, Theoderich returned from the Byzantine court, where he had been held hostage, and in 472, eager to prove his mettle:

[He] took to himself [...] almost six thousand men. With these he crossed the Danube [...] and marched against Babai, king of the Sarmatians, who had just won a victory over Camundus, a general of the Romans, and was ruling with insolent pride. Theodoric came upon him and slew him, and taking as booty his slaves and treasure, returned victorious to his father. Next he invaded the city of Singidunum, which the Sarmatians themselves had seized [...]¹²⁶⁰.

It would appear, then, that Singidunum was in Sarmatian hands until the early 470s. Although the Sarmatians eventually lost control over the city, they remained in the vicinity because we hear about Sarmatians in the area beyond the Sava in 473, when the Ostrogoths left Pannonia:

[...] Thiudimer [military leader of the Ostrogoths] [...] crossed the river Savus with his men, threatening the Sarmatians and their soldiers with war if any should resist him¹²⁶¹.

These events certainly indicate that the Sarmatians still played an active role in the history of the Carpathian Basin. In 516, Emperor Anastasius still bore the title *Sarmaticus*, perhaps another reflection of the Sarmatians' presence¹²⁶².

¹²⁵⁷ Jordan LIV.277. – Kiss 1981, 170-172, with an overview of the earlier literature; Kiss/Fazekas 2005, 268-269 map on p. 270. The rampart in the Kiskunság (Cumania Minor) region must be mentioned in this respect because some scholars believe that it was constructed by the Sarmatians as a defence against the Gepids infiltrating from the south (Bóna 1986, 69). If this was indeed the case and the rampart can be dated to this period, it would play a crucial role in determining the location of the Sarmatian territory. However, the date of this earthwork – if it was indeed one – is uncertain and it would therefore be unwise to base elaborate theories on this assumption.

¹²⁵⁸ Jordan LIV.277. The battle was fought by the River Bolia, a name only appearing in Jordanes' narrative. The name of the

river is believed to be of Germanic (Quadic) origin and is generally identified with the Ipel/Ipoly (Lotter 1985). For a recent overview of the events, see Kiss/Fazekas 2005, with a survey of the earlier literature. Kiss and Fazekas also proposed that the Bolia be identified with the Sárviz in Transdanubia. See also Kiss 1997, 109. 118-120. We can see that the identification of the Bolia is still undecided and the exact location of the Sarmatian settlement territory thus remains uncertain.

¹²⁵⁹ Jordan LIV.279.

¹²⁶⁰ Jordan LV.282.

¹²⁶¹ Jordan LVI.285.

¹²⁶² Alföldi 1942a, 687, with the relevant sources.

The archaeological record is of little help at present because the upper chronological boundary of the Sarmatian settlements and cemeteries remains uncertain. There can be no doubt that, judging from recent large-scale excavations, there are cemeteries across the Hungarian Plain, including the Upper Tisza region, that were still used in the early 5th century, as we see from the buckles with thickened frame and prong coping over the frame and the glass vessels (**fig. 269**) found in the burials. One of these burial grounds is the recently published Madaras cemetery in the southern part of the Hungarian Plain, one of the most important sites of the period in question¹²⁶³. Several cemeteries were opened in the second half of the 4th century. The burial rite observed in these cemeteries suggests that they also contain the graves of the earlier Sarmatian population of the Hungarian Plain, even though the grave goods reflect a much wider range of cultural contacts than before (e.g. Tápé-Malajdok: **fig. 301**; Sándorfalva-Eperjes: **figs 303-304**; and Tiszadob-Sziget: **figs 299. 301**)¹²⁶⁴.

According to our present knowledge, the latest graves can hardly be dated after the first third of the 5th century. The only burials that can be securely dated to the middle third of the 5th century are the burials with »Maeotian«-type swords with rectangular cuts on the blade under the hilt, such as those found in the cemeteries at Jászberény and Csongrád-Kenderföldek/Laktanya (Military Barracks) (**fig. 302**). The latter burial ground also stands out by the high number of burials, 138 in all¹²⁶⁵. The assessment of the finds from this cemetery will no doubt contribute to a clearer picture of the 5th century Sarmatian presence in the Carpathian Basin.

The written sources are virtually silent about the Sarmatians of the Hungarian Plain for almost a century. This silence is broken by a passage in Paul the Deacon's history of the Langobards:

It is certain that Alboin then brought with him to Italy many men from various peoples which either other kings or he himself had taken. Whence, even until today, we call the villages in which they dwell Gepidan, Bulgarian, Sarmatian, Pannonian, Suabian, Norican, or by other names of this kind¹²⁶⁶.

This would suggest that the Langobards subdued the Sarmatians after their arrival in Pannonia and that when they departed for Italy in the face of the Avarian occupation, they dragged along the subjugated peoples, the Sarmatians among them. Obviously, this should not be taken to imply that all the Sarmatians left with the Langobards, especially because the Langobards were most probably accompanied by population groups from Transdanubia. The Sarmatian groups which had perhaps lived under Gepidic overlordship, probably stayed on under the Avars. Even less is known about the size of the Sarmatian population in Transdanubia than on the Hungarian Plain. It would appear that in addition to Sarmatian *foederati* or *laeti*, Sarmatian groups settled in Pannonia and Valeria after the abandonment of the provinces, sometime in the late 430s¹²⁶⁷, at the time of the Hunnic rule. If it can be conclusively proven that the Sarmatians had a major influence on the late Transdanubian ceramic wares with smoothed decoration (**figs 294-295**)¹²⁶⁸, then their number was probably quite high. Following the departure of the Langobards to Italy, the Sarmatian groups on both sides of the Danube probably became subjects of the Avars. The sources thus furnish indirect proof for the survival of the Sarmatians/Alans at least into the Avar period¹²⁶⁹.

¹²⁶³ Kóhegyi/Vörös 2011.

¹²⁶⁴ Párducz/Korek 1946/1948. – Vörös 1982/1983. – Istvánovits 1993a.

¹²⁶⁵ Párducz 1959, 310-318; 1963, 47-52.

¹²⁶⁶ Paul. Diac. II.26.

¹²⁶⁷ Tóth 2006, with a discussion of earlier views and the relevant literature.

¹²⁶⁸ Tóth 2005b.

¹²⁶⁹ Szádeczky-Kardoss 1992, 34. For the linguistic evidence of survival, see Makkay 1997a, esp. 55.

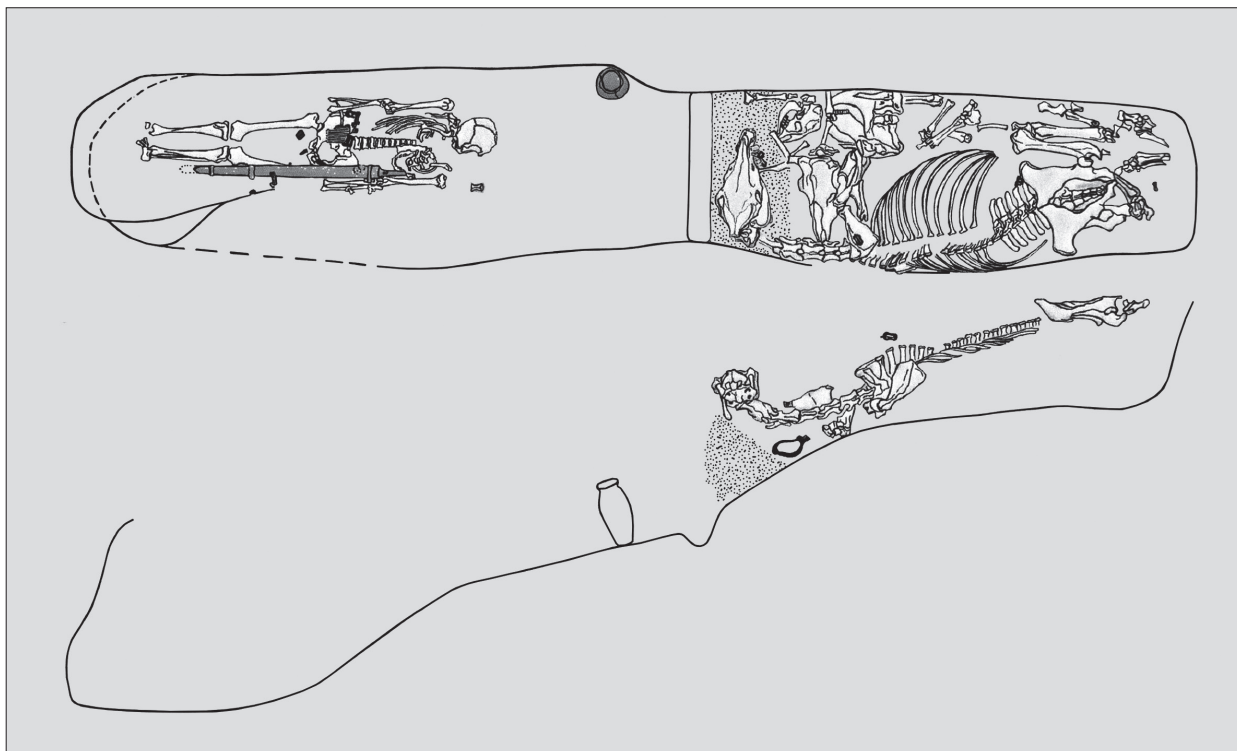


Fig. 327 Male burial in a niche grave at Szegvár-Orom-dűlő. – (After Lőrinczy 2001, figs 8. 10).

There is no direct archaeological evidence for the survival of the Sarmatians into the Avar period. However, new Iranian elements appear in this period, especially catacomb graves with a niche at one end of the grave pit¹²⁷⁰ on the Hungarian Plain, can perhaps be taken as an indication of a possible survival. A minute assessment of these graves will no doubt shed light on whether these burials have a possible Iranian/Alanian origin. This possibility must certainly be considered, given that the deceased laid to rest in some of the niche graves in the Avar cemetery uncovered at Szegvár-Orom-dűlő had a slightly deformed skull and that the grave goods included articles, such as mirrors, that are uncommon among the Avars, but more customary among the Alans (fig. 327). The catacomb rite and its more special and rare variant represented by this type of niche graves (Smirnov's Type II)¹²⁷¹ are typical for the Caucasus. Contrary to the currently accepted viewpoint, it seems most unlikely that graves of this type had evolved and spread independently of each other in various regions¹²⁷². It seems to us that the population among which the Alans subdued by the Avars can be found should be sought in the southern part of the Hungarian Plain, which is characterised by a distinct set of finds between the Körös-Berettyó line and the Aranka in the Banat¹²⁷³. Certain elements of these assemblages, identified by Lőrinczy, differ significantly from the other Avar finds of the Carpathian Basin. The niche and catacomb graves, the deformed skull of the deceased, the mirrors deposited in the burials, the Caucasian and Pontic parallels to certain artefacts and a burial dug secondarily into an earlier kurgan suggest that this population probably included Alans. Obviously, the assemblages also include a host of elements found across the entire Avar settlement territory which are generally characteristic of the period.

¹²⁷⁰ Lőrinczy 1992, 104; 1994, esp. 318-320; 1995.

¹²⁷¹ Smirnov 1972, 74.

¹²⁷² This seems to be the case, even though the lack of contemporaneous parallels from the steppe and the Caucasus calls for caution. However, in the case of this peculiar grave form, some

sort of connection seems more plausible to us despite the territorial hiatus and the chronological gaps than the assumption that they had evolved from the earlier simple niche graves of the Hungarian Plain. For a good overview, see Lőrinczy 1994.

¹²⁷³ Lőrinczy 2000, 52-56.

The possible identification of a particular group within the population of the Avar period that is related to the Roman Age population of the Hungarian Plain is a recurring theme in anthropological studies¹²⁷⁴. The greatest obstacle to any new advances in this field is the extremely poor preservation of the human skeletal remains from Sarmatian burials.

Finally, another indirect indication of the survival of the Sarmatians/Alans into the Avar period is grave looting. The overwhelming majority of the Sarmatian graves, including the ones dated to the latest horizon, are disturbed and looted (**fig. 183**). There is a general consensus that most of these burials were systematically looted at a later date, perhaps during the Avar period. It is also quite obvious that the grave robbers knew exactly the sex, age and perhaps the rank of the deceased¹²⁷⁵. This is only conceivable if the robbers were capable of interpreting the grave markers, suggesting that the kinsfolk of the deceased tended the graves and were familiar with the burial customs. Proof for contact between the Avars and the Alans comes from Menander's data for the year 558, mentioning a meeting between the two peoples. When the Avars reached the border of the Alan lands in the Caucasus, they requested that the Alans intercede for them at the Byzantine court¹²⁷⁶.

In the light of the above, it would be hardly surprising if new Alan groups from the steppe had reached the Carpathian Basin together with the Avars in 568 and with Kuvrat's son Kuber in the 670s¹²⁷⁷, indeed, it seems highly probable that this was the case. It is quite certain that immigrant groups from the steppe had swept along various other ethnic groups as well, and the Avars were no exception. Suffice it here to recall the colourful diversity of the burial customs practised by the Avars in the Carpathian Basin. The sources leave little doubt that the Avars had subdued a portion of the Alan population. The question is whether the Alanic element can be identified in the archaeological heritage of the Avar period.

In sum, we may probably safely assume the survival of Sarmatian remnants in the Hungarian Plain during the Avar period, as well as the appearance of new Iranian groups probably swept here by the Turkic elite arriving from the steppe. It is therefore hardly surprising that research on the period's religious beliefs and the linguistic record both indicate Iranian cultural influence in the Carpathian Basin up to the Hungarian Conquest period and even afterwards.

This is also borne out by the three different names of the Jas – *oszlár* or *eszlár*, *varsány* (asiān or osiāan) and *jász* – all of which can be derived from the *ās/as* form. The difference between the three forms can only be explained by assuming that in Hungarian each was adopted at a different time and through a different mediator, which would harmonise with the above¹²⁷⁸.

One new advance in this field of research is Kovács's study in which he convincingly demonstrates that the narrative of the single Middle Persian chronicle to survive in the original language, *The Book of the Acts of Ardašir son of Pābag*, written at the turn of the 5th and 6th centuries, is to a large extent identical with three classical Hungarian folk ballad types. Accepting Vargyas's assertion that textual similarities of this type »were hardly born independently of each other«, this would suggest that we should assume »a population group with an Iranian culture in the Conquest period« in the Carpathian Basin¹²⁷⁹.

Similarly to the period between the Hun period and the Saltovo culture on the steppe, traces of the Alan/Sarmatians fade between the Avar period and the early Árpáadian Age (the late 10th-12th centuries). At the same time, the date when the Jas first appeared in the Carpathian Basin remains controversial – they appear

¹²⁷⁴ For a discussion of the Sarmatians' anthropological material, see Marcsik 2011, 419-421.

¹²⁷⁵ Kőhegyi/Vörös 2011, 238, with further literature.

¹²⁷⁶ Menandros *Exc. de leg.* 442.3-27. – Quoted after Szádeczky-Kardoss 1998, 45.

¹²⁷⁷ Szádeczky-Kardoss 1998, 219-220.

¹²⁷⁸ See Makkay 1997a for an excellent overview of the problems surrounding the Sarmatians' survival and the Jas, with the relevant sources and the earlier literature.

¹²⁷⁹ Kovács 1996; 1997; 2005.

increasingly in the sources from the late Árpadian Age (13th century) onward. The possible survival of the Sarmatians can hardly be dissociated from the settlement of the Jas in Hungary.

Although a *Monasterium Jaz* appears in a charter of the Székesfehérvár chapter from 1256, it is far from certain that name of the monastery can indeed be linked to the Jas¹²⁸⁰. The first uncontested mention of the Jas dates from 1318: » [...] *ancille sue emptice nacione Jazonice Elysabeth nominate* [...]«. However, most scholars believe that the Jas arrived in the Carpathian Basin at an earlier date. They sometimes appear as *filiszteus* (Philistines) from the mid-14th century and *jazig* or *jaszig* (lazyges) in the sources. We are told that in 1323, they fought under the banner of King Charles Robert and that they received various privileges for their services. A charter from 1325 mentions four Jas¹²⁸¹.

There are three main views on the settlement of the Jas in Hungary. Firstly, according to Györffy and Kristó, there was no Jas presence in Hungary before the 14th century and the settlement of the Jas can therefore be dated to the second half of the 14th century. This theory is based on the lack of any references to the Jas in the literary sources before that period. Secondly, the most widely accepted view since the late 19th century is that the Jas arrived, together with the Cumanians, after the Mongolian invasion of 1241. One of the main proponents of this theory is Selmeczi, who devoted much of his energy to the systematic archaeological research of this problem. In his interpretation, the archaeological finds from Négyszállás, a site that can be associated with the Jas, indicate that the new population had settled in the Jászság region around the mid-13th century^{1281a}. The third view is that the Sarmatian population of the Hungarian Plain in the Roman Age survived and maintained a continuous presence. This was first suggested by the Humanist scholar Pietro Ranzano (Petrus Ransanus), a Dominican friar living in the 15th century, whose theory gained widespread acceptance in Hungarian scholarly literature after 1668¹²⁸². Makkay came to a similar conclusion after studying this question in the light of fresh evidence¹²⁸³. To which we may add that new Iranian groups were probably driven into the Danube Basin by the successive population waves from the steppe (Huns, Avars, ancient Hungarians and Cumanians). The claim that the Jas had only arrived sometime in the late 14th century can be rejected in view of the archaeological evidence, such as the burials in the Négyszállás cemetery in case they can be associated with the Jas¹²⁸⁴. However, it is far from decided which of the other two scenarios is more plausible.

One argument for a relatively late date is provided by certain words in the so-called Jas glossary, such as *gal* and *bäx*, that in Németh's view are related to the Caucasian Ossetian language. This glossary of forty Jas words was jotted down on the back of a Latin document issued by the Palatine Miklós Garai in 1422, which concerned a lawsuit over the property rights of a certain estate in County Fejér. The glossary was probably compiled at the same time as the document was issued (fig. 328). In his analysis of the glossary, Németh argued that the Jas of Hungary spoke a dialect in which elements of a Caucasian substrate can be demonstrated, implying that the Jas had arrived with the Cumanians because their language reflects a late linguistic state which could only have reached the Carpathian Basin through a group arriving from the Caucasus¹²⁸⁵. While it is quite possible that a new Iranian-speaking group had reached Hungary together with the Cumanians, this does not necessarily exclude the settlement of other groups as well. Irrespective of the above, the remnants of the earlier Sarmatian/Alanic population may have spoken another dialect that had developed locally and independently of the Caucasian one.

1280 For a compilation of the sources on the different names of the Jas and an overview of the relevant literature, see Fodor 1942, 111-115.

1281 Fodor 1942, 112. For a more recent and summarising study, see Alemany 2000, 160.

1281a For a discussion of earlier research on these two theories, see Selmeczi 2005, with an abundant literature.

1282 Fodor 1942, 114.

1283 Makkay 1997a.

1284 Selmeczi 1992a, 101-113; 1992b; 2005.

1285 Németh 1959, *non vidí*; 1960, 23. Sadly, not one single comprehensive new study has been written on the Jas glossary and thus we have no idea whether Németh's views are still tenable or not.

In addition to the linguistic arguments, archaeological evidence is also cited in support of a settlement in the 13th century¹²⁸⁶. The type finds were unearthed by Selmeczi in the burial ground at Négyszállás, a settlement which was demonstrably occupied by the Jas on the testimony of the written sources. The date of the cemetery's use was based on two coins of Béla III (1148-1196) modelled on Byzantine coins, both of which had been re-used as ornaments (one as part of a necklace, the other as the adornment of a headdress), recalling a coin found in a similar position in the Cumanian cemetery uncovered at Karcag-Orgondaszentmiklós. Selmeczi argued that the Cumans could not have reached the Hungarian Plain before the first third of the 13th century and thus the difference of roughly fifty years between the minting of Béla III's coins and their deposition in the burials is irrelevant in terms of dating. In his view, there can be no doubt about the contemporaneity of the two sites¹²⁸⁷. At the same time, the Caucasian Ossetian parallels to several unusual articles, such as cowry shells, needle cases, decorative mounts for headdresses, paired disc clasps and short swords or daggers found at Négyszállás, differing from the usual grave goods of the Árpadian Age, provide conclusive proof for the presence of a Jas ethnic group (fig. 329).

Irrespective of the date and ethnic attribution of the Négyszállás cemetery, the problem of finding a plausible explanation for the three different names denoting the Jas (*jász*, *eszlár/oszlár* and *varsány*) and the parallels in the ethnographic material remains if a single immigration in the 13th century is assumed. The Iranian loan-words in Hungarian pose another problem, as has been mentioned above. It would appear that the evidence rather supports the survival of some Sarmatian/Alanic groups from the Roman Age and the periodic infusion of these groups with new elements in the Carpathian Basin, despite the patchiness of the archaeological record.

The glossary from 1422 indicates that the Jas still spoke their own language in the 15th century. This is also borne out by Georgius Wernherus, a Silesian traveller, who in 1543, recorded that the Jas of Hungary spoke a language differing from Hungarian¹²⁸⁸, and by a passage in Nicolaus Olahus' (Oláh Miklós) work from 1568, in which the Humanist historian and Archbishop of Esztergom mentioned that:

Hungary comprises a great many nations: Hungarians, Germans, Bohemians, Slavs, Croatians, Saxons, Szeklers, Vlachs, Serbs, Cumans, *Jas*, Ruthenians and, by now, Turks; these all speak

¹²⁸⁶ Unfortunately, most of these studies are rarely based on the archaeological record; instead, we find that the archaeological finds are adjusted to the theory that the Jas had arrived in Hungary with the Cumans.

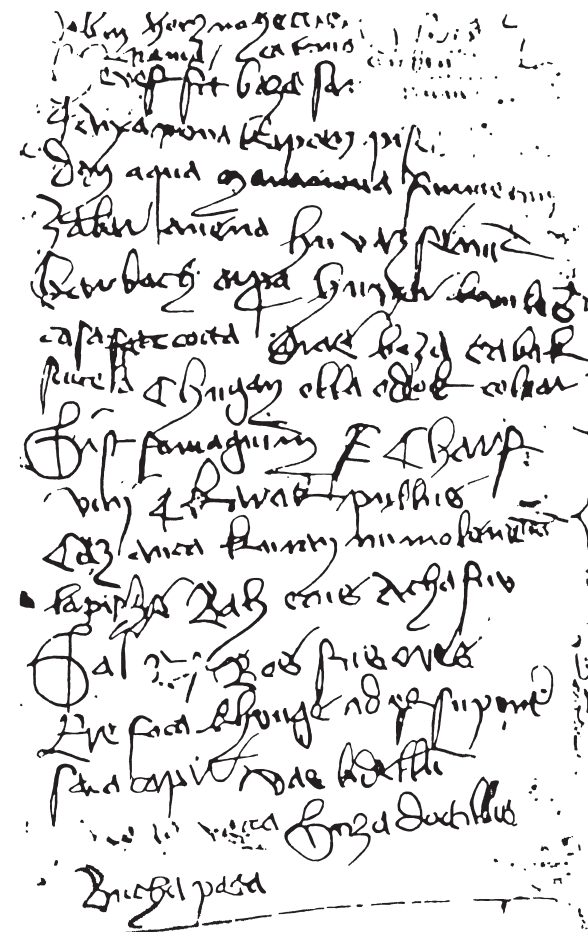


Fig. 328 The Jas glossary from the 15th century contains forty Jas words. – (After Gulyás/Szabó 2003, 33).

¹²⁸⁷ Selmeczi 1992a, 103-105.

¹²⁸⁸ Alemany 2000, 161-162.

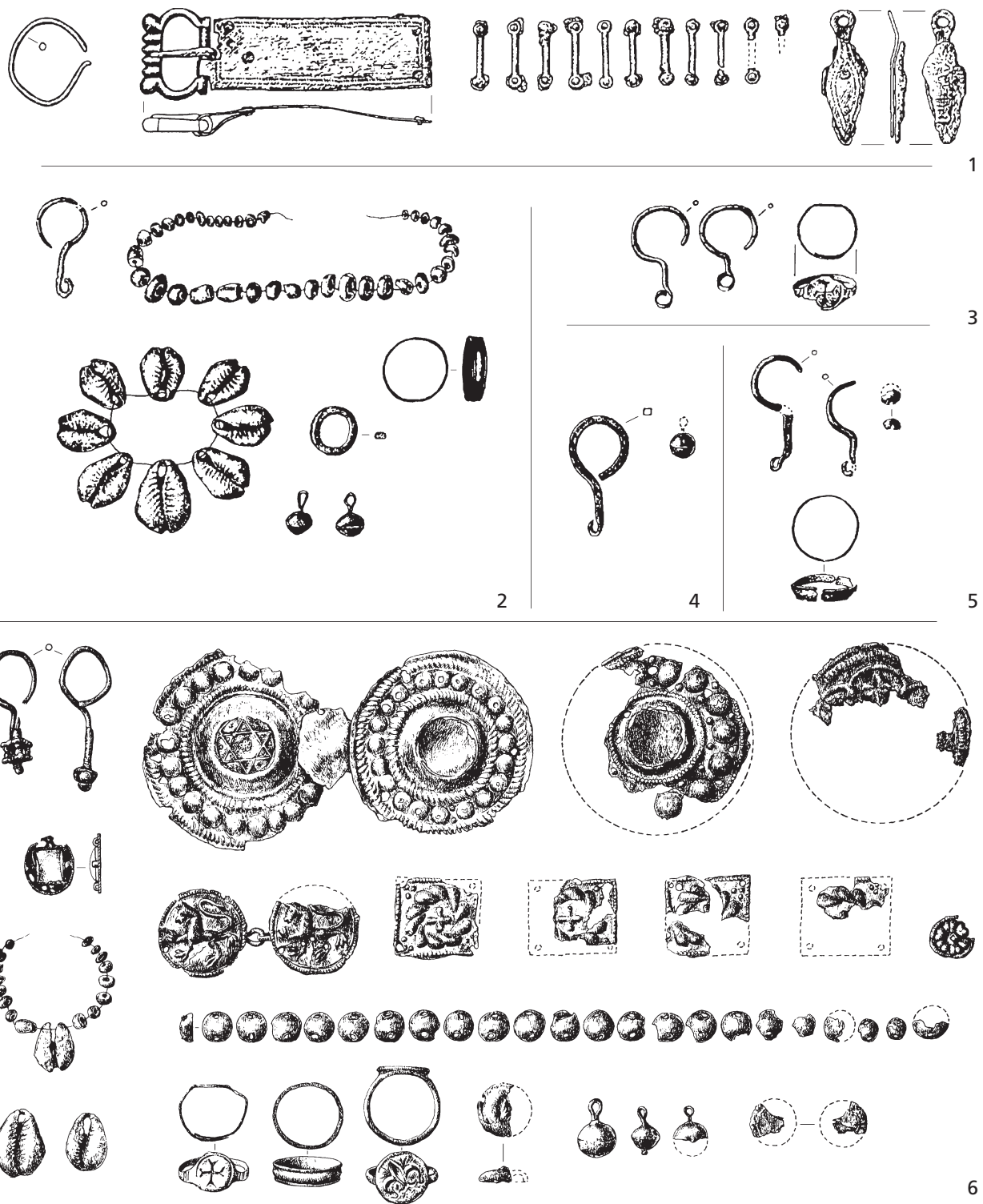


Fig. 329 Selection of finds from the 13th-14th century graveyard around the Négyszállás church associated with the Jas: **1** Cemetery II, Grave 24, 2-6. – **2** Cemetery I, Grave 118; **3** Grave 254; **4** Grave 206; **5** Grave 234; **6** Grave 180. – (After Selmeczi 1992a, pl. VII; 2005, figs 5. 13).

diverse tongues, although some words bear some resemblance and similarity to each other owing to long habit and mutual contact¹²⁸⁹.

It is therefore hardly surprising that several Jas names such as Bagdasa, Hunoka, Bosonga, Szaburán, Gargán and Budmán appear in the Turkish *defters* (tax registers) from the 16th century¹²⁹⁰. Finally, mention must be made of the Dutch traveller Matthias Qua von Kinkelbach who visited Hungary in the 1590s and recorded that the Jas are the descendants of the *lazyges Metanastae* and speak a tongue differing from that of the Hungarians¹²⁹¹. According to Fóris Ferenc Otrókócsi, the Jas spoke Hungarian in 1692¹²⁹². While there are no other references to the language spoken by the Jas from later periods, we do know that they enjoyed a certain measure of autonomy until the second half of the 19th century and that they have preserved their sense of identity as Jas, as well as certain customs to this very day. Ethnographers regard them as a distinct group.

¹²⁸⁹ Oláh XIX, italics added for emphasis.

¹²⁹⁰ Gulyás/Szabó 2003, 31.

¹²⁹¹ Makkay 1997a, 32-33.

¹²⁹² Németh 1990, 146. – Makkay 1997a, 32. – Alemany 2000, 162.