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“ARMOUR FRAGMENT” FROM THE SZENTES-LAPISTÓ
EARLY AVAR PERIOD BURIAL – DATA FOR SADDLE TYPES
OF THE EARLY AVAR AGE TRANSTISZA REGION

Bence GULYÁS*

In the 6th–7th century, elites of Eastern Europe and the Carpathian Basin used similar objects to represent their power – mainly the swords with P-shaped suspension loops and horse harnesses. Of the latter, this paper concerns saddles, to the pommel of which a rectangular piece of chainmail was installed, often further ornamented with bronze and silver fittings. The artefact from Szentes-Lapistó, originally described by Dezső Csallány as a “neck-covering net” can be identified as one of these ornaments.

A 6–7. századi kelet-európai és Kárpát-medencei elit hasonló eszközöket használt hatalma reprezentálására. Közéjük tartoztak bizonyos fegyvertípusok – mint a P alakú függesztőfüles kardok – vagy lószerszámok. A jelen cikkben elemzett nyergek elülső kápájára láncpáncél részletet erősítettek, melyeket több esetben ezüst vagy bronz díszveretekkel láttak el. A Szentes-Lapistórol ismert, Csallány Dezső által „nyaktakaró hálóként” elemzett tárgy az újabb elemzés alapján ebbe a körbe sorolható.

Keywords: *saddle, Eastern Europe, Transisza region, 6th–7th century*

Kulcsszavak: *nyereg, Kelet-Európa, Tiszántúl, 6–7. század*

Introduction

In October 1932, at the site currently known as Szentes-Lapistó an Early Avar Period burial was unearthed during construction. The SE-NW oriented niche grave had originally been dug into a Bronze Age burial mound. In its entrance pit hide (?) of a horse was discovered (Csallány 1933–1934, 206; Lőrinczy 1996, 183, footnote 24). The notable finds were a double-edged sword with crossguard, cast silver fittings of the horse harness, and fragments of the rectangular chainmail piece. The author pointed out that the grave goods – except for the sword – were found around the skull of the horse (Csallány 1933–1934, 206). The position of the cast silver fittings contradicts the assumption of Cs. Balogh, who identified these ornaments as belt mounts (Balogh 2004, 248). For a long time, this burial was regarded as the sole kurgan burial of the Avar Age. Based on the kurgan and the cast masque-type mounts, it was attributed to the first generation of the Avars in the Carpathian Basin (Lőrinczy 2017, 160–161).

This grave complex is of major significance, as it

was the one, upon which D. Csallány reconstructed the characteristic burial customs and grave goods of the immigrant population settling in the Early Avar Period Transisza region (Hun. ‘Tiszántúl’), and established the theory of its Eastern European origin (Csallány 1933–1934, 210–212). In spite of its importance, this burial is still to be reassessed based on recent data that in many aspects contradict the conclusions of D. Csallány. Hereinafter we analyse the piece of chainmail in detail, concerning its origin, distribution, and function.

Identification of the object

The piece of rectangular chainmail, identified by D. Csallány as a “neck-covering net” measures 11×13 cm, and was ornamented with a single silver and two bronze discs (*Fig 3, 1*; for detailed information on the items see *Table 1*) (Csallány 1933–1934, 207). The item is no longer in the collection of the Koszta József Múzeum in Szentes, thus its study must rely on the publication and on analogies. A similar item was discovered in Grave 33 of the Szegvár-Oromdűlő

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Fig. 1 The sites mentioned in the paper. 1: Szentés-Lapistó; 2: Szegvár-Oromdúló; 3: Unirea-Vereşmort (Felvinc-Marosveresmart); 4–8: Klin-Yar III–IV; 9: Verkhny Sadon; 10: Sivashovka; 11: Matyukhin Bugor
1. kép A szövegben említett lelőhelyek.

burial (Fig 3, 2). In the entrance pit of the end-niche grave a complete equine skeleton, and the skulls and leg bones of two further horses were discovered. The intact animal was completely harnessed, and the piece of chainmail was located between its spine and left scapula (Fig 2, 1) (Lőrinczy, Somogyi 2018, 234). The authors deemed the chainmail to be the part of the horse armour, emphasizing its nearly exact match in size with the Szentés-Lapistó specimen (Lőrinczy, Somogyi 2018, 244). The horseman's grave of Unirea-Vereşmort (Felvinc-Marosveresmart) also contained a piece of such chainmail, although its original location in the grave could not be defined due to the finding circumstances (Rustoiu, Ciută 2015, 109–110). The burial customs that the authors described, namely the East-West orientation and the partial horse burial culturally link the grave to the population settling in the early Avar Age Transisza region.

Chainmail fragments as parts of the harness also occurred in Eastern Europe, but they were predominant in the Northern Caucasus region. At the site of Klin-Yar III four graves contained such objects (Fig. 4, 1–2), assessed by the publishers as either parts of chain hauberks or tunics (Belinskij, Härke 2018, 247–248, 302). Although some of the graves were disturbed, the location of these items within the grave seems to be constant, as they were always discovered among horse harness pieces near the entrance. In many cases leather

remains were observed on the back side of the chainmail – the leather itself was folded over the chainmail and sewn to it (Belinskij, Härke 2018, 247–248, 284, 325). This phenomenon excludes the possibility that the chainmail fragment was originally a cutout piece of a chain hauberk or horse armour. In the heavily disturbed Grave 9 of Klin-Yar IV, the strongly damaged chainmail was found among equine bones in the dromos (Belinskij, Härke 2018, 406).

The fortunate climate of the Catacomb no. 68 in Verkhny Sadon preserved organic materials in a rather good condition, thus the leather attached to the chainmail's backside also remained intact. Like on chainmail pieces of Klin-Yar, the leather was folded over the edges of the mail. To the front side of the object five disc-shaped fittings were attached – two on the upper, and two on the lower end, reinforcing the hypothesis of D. Csallány (Fig. 4, 3) (Kadzaeva 2018, 341, Ris. 1, 52). The object's exact location in the grave has not been described in the publication, but the author supposed that the chainmail had belonged to the saddle (Kadzaeva 2018, 340).

Similar chainmail pieces are known from two graves of the Eastern European Steppe. Grave 12 of Matyukhin Bugor – located on an island of the river Don – has not been completely published till date, its only object thoroughly described and discussed being a lamellar armour (Ishaev, Smolyak 2017). According to the grave plan, the chainmail piece was

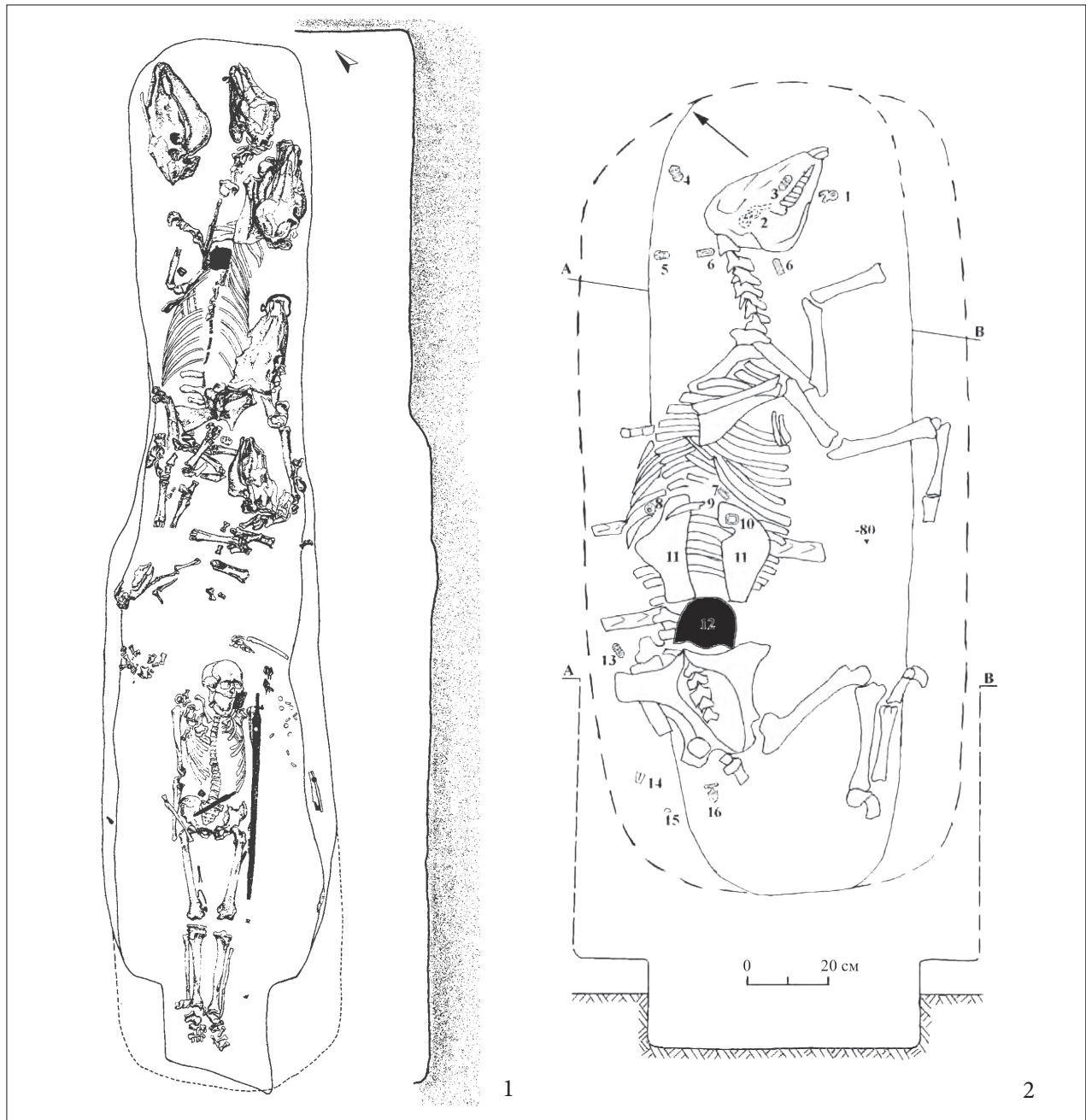


Fig 2 *In situ* chainmail fragments 1: Szegvár-Oromdűlő, Grave 33 (Lőrinczy, Somogyi 2018, 232, Abb. 1, 1);
 2: Sivashovka, Mound 3, Grave 2 (Komar et al. 2006, 248, Ris. 3)
 2. kép *In situ* talált páncéltöredékek. 1: Szegvár-Oromdűlő 33. sír (Lőrinczy, Somogyi 2018, 232, Abb. 1, 1);
 2: Zivasovka 3. kurgán 2. sír (Komar et al. 2006, 248, Ris. 3)

found in the southwestern end of the niche, among harnesses (Fig. 3, 4). The authors suggest that the chainmail was part of the lamellar armour, although the latter was observed on the inner side of the niche, by the head (Cf. Ishaev, Smolyak 2017, 163, Ris. 3). The original function of the chainmail pieces is well demonstrated by the one found in Grave 2 of the Mound 3 from Sivashovka (Fig. 3, 3). Due to the optimal soil conditions the saddle, put on the laterally

positioned horse was well preserved (Fig 2, 2). The chainmail piece was found *in situ*, perpendicular to the two parts of the seat, at the place of theommel, the imprint of which is distinctive on its corroded backside (Fig 3, 5) (Komar et al. 2006, 293). This suggests the frontal side of the saddle as the chainmail's original basis, explaining why the object was recurrently discovered in close proximity of harnesses.

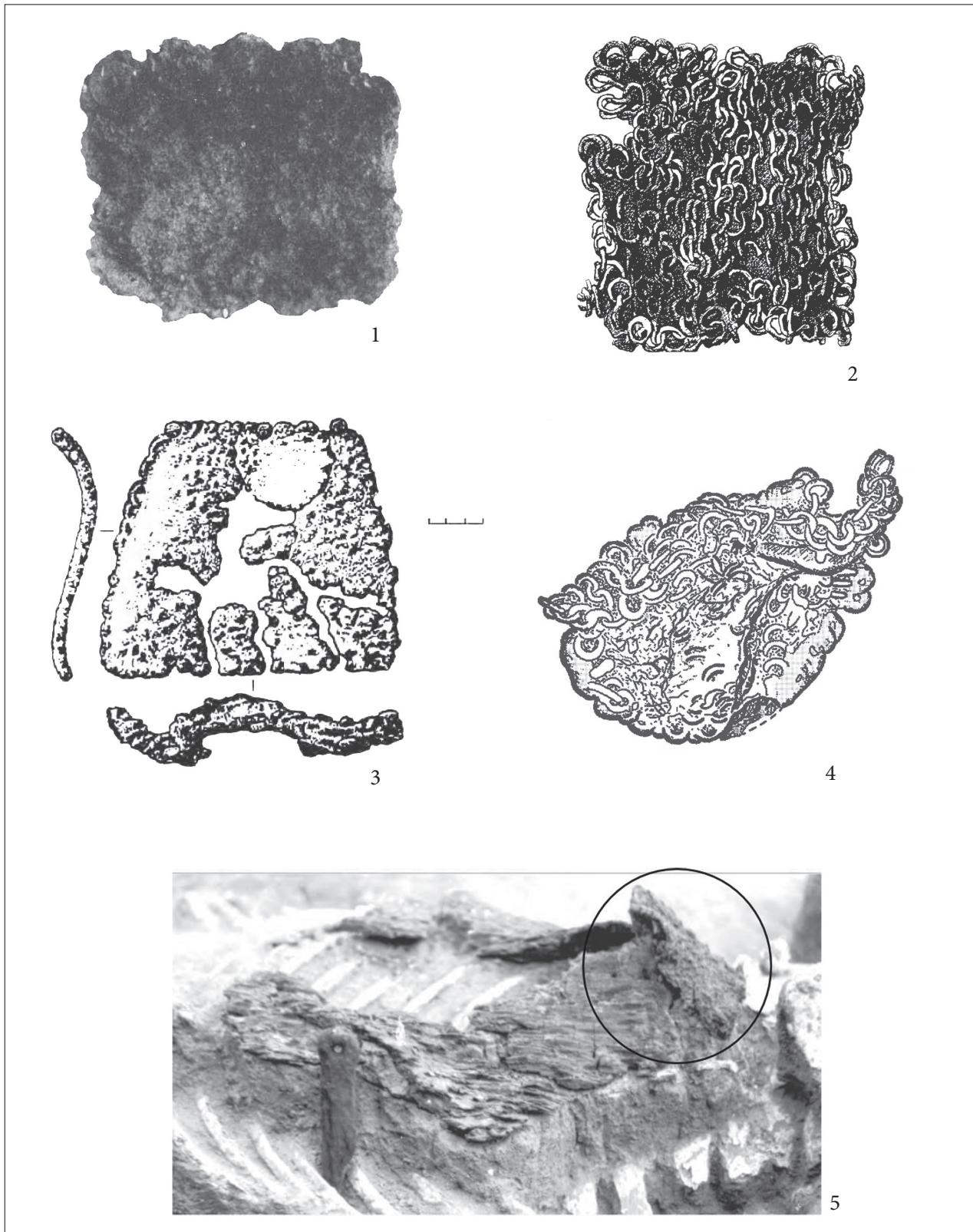


Fig. 3 Chainmail fragments from the Carpathian Basin and Eastern Europe. 1: Szentcs-Lapistó (Csallány 1933–1934, LVIII. t. 9); 2: Szegvár-Oromdűlő, Grave 33 (Lőrinczy, Somogyi 2018, 235, Abb. 2, 8); 3, 5: Sivashovka, Mound 3, Grave 2 (Komar et al. 2006, 294–295, Ris. 23, Ris. 24, 4); 4: Matyukhin Bugor, Grave 12 (Ishaev, Smolyak 2017, 163, Ris. 3)

3. kép Láncpáncél töredékek a Kárpát-medencében és Kelet-Európában. 1: Szentcs-Lapistó (Csallány 1933–1934, LVIII. t. 9); 2: Szegvár-Oromdűlő 33. sír (Lőrinczy, Somogyi 2018, 235, Abb. 2, 8); 3, 5: Zivashovka 3. kurgán 2. sír (Komar et al. 2006, 294–295, Ris. 23, Ris. 24, 4); 4: Matyukhin Bugor 12. sír (Ishaev, Smolyak 2017, 163, Ris. 3)

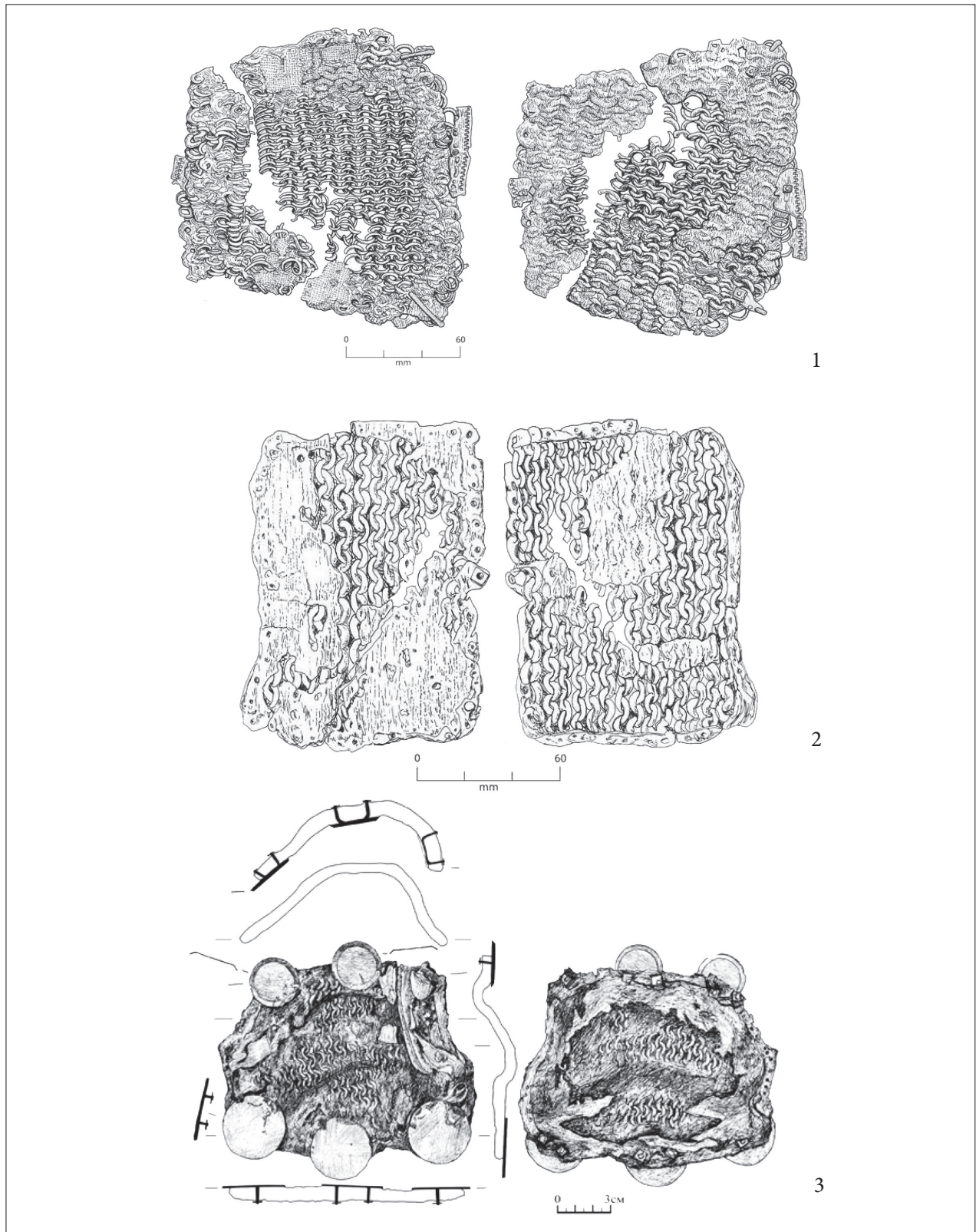


Fig. 4 Chainmail fragments in the Northern Caucasus. 1: Klin-Yar III, Grave 341 (Belinskij, Härke 2018, 244, Fig. 60, 28); 2: Klin-Yar III, Grave 360 (Belinskij, Härke 2018, 323, Fig. 137, 81); 3: Verkhniy Sadon, Grave 68 (Kadzaeva 2018, 341, Ris. 1, 52)

4. kép Láncpáncél töredékek az Észak-Kaukázusban. 1: Klin-Yar 341. sír (Belinskij, Härke 2018, 244, Fig. 60, 28); 2: Klin-Yar 360. sír (Belinskij, Härke 2018, 323, Fig. 137, 81); 3: Verkhniy Sadon 68. sír (Kadzaeva 2018, 341, Ris. 1, 52)

Distribution

The aforementioned sites (*Table 1, Fig. 1*) are located far from each other – the Eastern half of the Carpathian Basin, by the Azov Sea and in the North-western Caucasus. They are linked not only by the chainmail-ornamented saddles, but in many other aspects of material culture and funerary ritual. The resemblance between the early Avar Period burials in the Transtisza region and the Sivashovka-type assemblages has been known for a long time in Hungarian research. The concordance in the funerary rites of the two regions is so pronounced, that it cannot be explained by the impact of interregional communication, but rather by the common origin of their populations (Gulyás 2015).

Many of early Avar Age object types' closest cognates were found in larger counts in the Caucasus region. The strainer spoons (Lőrinczy, Straub 2005, 128) and the Deszk-type earrings with pyramidal pendant (Balogh 2014, 119) are both frequent in the Transtisza region in the Carpathian Basin. G. Lőrinczy and P. Straub concluded that the similarities of the Transtisza and Caucasian material cultures resulted in the Byzantine influence present in both regions (Lőrinczy, Straub 2005, 130). However, on the other side, many of these regions' object types are scarcely found or even missing in the well-researched regions under intensive Byzantine influence like Southwestern Crimea or Abkhazia. Cs. Balogh suggested that Avars had met the earrings with pyramidal pendant first time during their short presence in the Caucasus region (Balogh 2014, 109, 121). However, neither the Szegvár, nor the Deszk type can be linked to the first generation of the Avars in the Carpathian Basin. Based on the available data in the 7th century, direct contacts were maintained between the Transtisza region and the Northern Caucasus, but the exact character of these still cannot be established and demands further research.

Dating

Based on the presence of cast masque-type mounts and the lack of stirrups G. Lőrinczy linked the Szent-Lapostó burial to the first generation of the Eastern European population occupying the Transtisza region (Lőrinczy 2017, 160–161). The authors dated Grave 33 in Szegvár to the second quarter of the 7th century, based on the pressed mounts with „fishtail” shaped end, the propeller shaped mount and some of the burial customs (Lőrinczy, Somogyi 2018, 246).

The most characteristic find of the Vereşmort / Marosveresmart grave is the sword with triple-arched suspension loop, which is prevalent at sites of the so-called Kunbábony–Bócsa circle, dated to the second third of the 7th century (Csiky 2015, 286). However, a suspension loop similar to the Vereşmort / Marosveresmart one, but simpler in design was found in the solitary grave of Mandjelos, Serbia, which was dated to the last third of the 6th century upon the cast masque-type mount (Balogh 2004, 263). Gábor Lőrinczy dated this grave to the second half of the 7th century based on the analogous triple-arched suspension loops and the antler ornaments of the quiver (Lőrinczy 2017, 161–162).

For the Northwestern Caucasus, Yu. Malashev created a widely utilized chronological system based on pottery, according to which the Klin-Yar graves were dated into three periods. The oldest is the Grave 357, belonging to the phase I.d–e, which is dated to the 6th century (Belinskij, Härke 2018, 288). The majority of the graves (Grave 352, 360 of the site III, and Grave 9 of site IV) belongs to the period IIIa (mid-7th century) (Belinskij, Härke 2018, 274, 304, 402), whereas the youngest is Grave 341, dug in period IIIb, in the second half of 7th, or at the beginning of the 8th century (Belinskij, Härke 2018, 238). The Verkhniy Sadon grave may also be dated to period IIIa, but its publisher, Z. Kadzaeva remarks that the grave must be dated to the last third of the 7th century, based on the presence of a stirrup (Kadzaeva 2018, 342).

The Matyukhin Bugor burial was dated to the last third of the 6th century by the authors publishing its armour (Ishaev, Smolyak 2017, 164). The grave complexes in the Kama region they cited contain local variants of the masque-type belt fittings, thus have little relevance for dating the Don-valley site. In our opinion, the usage of the objects found in the grave dates between the last third of the 6th century and the mid third of the 7th century – a more precise dating could only be obtained by detailed chronological analysis of belts from steppean context. Dating of the Sivashovka grave has been debated for a long time in Russian and Ukrainian research. Based on its Eastern European parallels I. Gavritukhin argued for a dating between 600 and 630 (Gavritukhin, Oblomsky 1996, 91). In contrast, the burial was dated to the last third of the 7th century in the chronological system of O. Komar (Komar et al. 2006, 309). Since the grave goods have early Avar Period parallels without exception, we support the former of the two possible solutions.

If we accept the dating of G. Lőrinczy, the saddle with chainmail covered pommel is one of the oldest in this object type, and was contemporary with Grave 357 at Klin-Yar III. The heyday of this object type is the first half and middle of the 7th century – the Klin-Yar, Verkhny Sadon, Szegvár and Vereşmort / Marosveresmart specimens were all dated to this period. To the best of our current knowledge the chainmail ornamented saddles appeared in the steppe also in this period. The latest specimen from Grave 341 of Klin-Yar III was dated to the second half of the 7th, or the beginning of the 8th century at the latest.

Function

During the reconstruction of the Sivashovka saddle, O. Komar engaged the function of the chainmail piece as well. In his theory it protects the horseman from a frontal attack that is not parried by the head of the horse (Komar et al. 2006, 247). However, in my opinion, the tiny chainmail could have covered only the groin, thus rather maintained the function of representation. This is also supported by the fact that – with one exception – all the graves contained belts with multiple fittings, weaponry (often sword), in addition to the chainmail. The central part of site Klin-Yar III, along with the aforementioned catacombs is considered by H. Härke as a burial ground of the elite due to its well-furnished graves (Belinskij, Härke 2018, 32–34). In Catacomb 9 of Klin-Yar IV only a single adult female and two children were found, and no male skeleton. Based on the grave goods and the cranial deformation on the 2nd skeleton D. Korobov concluded that the 8–9 years old child was of high social status (Belinskij, Härke 2018, 125). The two grave complexes from the Eastern European steppe are also among the better furnished burials of the region – Sivašovka due to the intact horse, and Matyukhin Bugor due to the lamellar armour.

Harness was an important medium in the social display of well-born people during the Early Middle Ages, expressing long-distance elite contacts. Thus, specimens of the same type appeared at great distances from each other. The heyday of this phe-

nomenon was the end of the 5th and the first half of the 6th century, when phalerae and mounts with precious stone inlays were ubiquitous in every significant grave complex, e.g. Tournai, Apahida, Morskoy Chulek (Quast 2007). Though in this era the representative harness was ornamented with semi-precious gems and made of precious metals, later this material aspects were of less importance. Good examples for this tendency are anthropomorphic and zoomorphic saddle fittings of copper alloys, which – as emblematic object types of their age – were distributed from the valley of the Oka River to the Caucasus and to the Carpathian Basin (Akhmedov 2018). Most likely, the chainmail ornamented saddles belonged to the group of the representative objects of relative simplicity.

Summary

Based on the available analogies the Lapistó chainmail fragment was originally attached to the saddle, and more precisely, to the pommel. This is not exceptional in the early Avar Period, as a similar specimen was found in Grave 33 of Szegvár-Oromdűlő, and the fragment from Unirea-Vereşmort may have had the same function. Outside the Carpathian Basin, analogies occurred in the Eastern European steppes as well, but examples of the saddle type were more numerous in the Northern Caucasus region. According to the Szentes-Lapistó and one of the Klin-Yar specimens, the emergence of the type can be dated to the last third of the 6th century, but the most cases are dated to the first half and middle of the 7th century. This type of saddle ornament – similarly to anthropo- and zoomorphic saddle fittings – were probably representative objects of the Eastern European elite, spread over large geographical distances where this elite had its connections.

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„PÁNCÉLTÖREDÉK” A SZENTES-LAPISTÓI KORA AVAR KORI TEMETKEZÉSBŐL
– ADATOK A KORA AVAR KORI TISZÁNTÚL NYEREGTÍPUSAIHOZ

Rezümé

1932. októberében Szentes-Lapistó lelőhelyen földmunkák során egy kora avar kori temetkezést találtak. A sírt másodlagosan ásták bele egy bronzkori halomba. A DK-ÉNy-i tájolású temetkezés eredetileg padmalyos kialakítású lehetett, az aknában egy ló részleges (?) maradványait figyelték meg. A leletek közül a keresztvassal ellátott kétélű kard, az ezüsből öntött lószerszámveretek és a láncpáncél töredéke említendő meg. Jelen tanulmány tárgya az utóbbi tárgyítípus, melyet Csallány Dezső „nyaktakaró hálóként” azonosított.

A rendelkezésünkre álló analógiák alapján a lapistói láncpáncél töredék eredetileg a sírba tett nyergen, pontosabban az elülső nyeregkápán helyezkedhetett el. Ez a kora avar korban nem tekinthető egyedülállónak, Szegvár-Oromdülő 33. sírjában találtak hasonlót, de ugyanilyen funkciója lehetett az Unirea-Vereşmört/ Felvinc- Marosveresmartról (RO) származó töredéknek is. A Kárpát-medencén kívül a

kelet-európai sztyeppéről ismerünk analógiákat, de legnagyobb számban az Észak-Kaukázusból ismert ez a nyeregtípus. A láncpáncél darabok közös jellemzője, hogy majdnem négyzet alakúak, méretük 10–16 cm között mozog. A jó megtartású kaukázusi darabokon jól látszik, hogy a hátulján található bőrdarabot a szélein előre hajtották, és úgy erősítették a láncpáncél részlet elülső oldalához. Csallány Dezső leírása alapján a lapistói példányon kerek bronz- és ezüstveretek voltak, a díszítés párhuzama Verkhny Sadonból ismert. A láncpáncél töredékével díszített nyergek megjelenésével a szentesi és az egyik klin-jari példány alapján a 6. század utolsó harmadától számolhatunk, de a legtöbb példány a 7. század első felére–közepére keltezhető. Ez a nyeregtípus – hasonlóan az antropo- és zoomorf veretekkel díszített példányokhoz – a kelet-európai elit reprezentációjának egyik kifejezőeszköze lehetett, amely megmagyarázza, hogy miért voltak ugyanakkor divatban egymástól nagy távolságra.

Table 1 General information of the finds mentioned in the text
1. táblázat A szövegben említett leletekre vonatkozó általános információk

ID	Site/Grave	Location	Disturbance of the grave	Size of the chainmail piece(s)	Mounts on the chainmail piece	Condition of the chainmail piece(s)	Horse	Horse harness	Position within the grave	Illustration referred in the text	Literature
1	Szentes-Lapistó	Csongrád-Csanád County, Hungary	Unknown	11×13 cm	Two bronze, one Silver	Good	Skull and legs (?)	Fittings	„Near the skull”	Fig. 3, 1	Csallány 1933–1934, 206–207.
2	Szegvár-Oromdűlő, Grave 33	Csongrád-Csanád County, Hungary	Intact	11×9.5 cm	–	Good	One horse skeleton and two skulls with legs	Horse bit, two stirrups, two bone girth buckles, harness fittings	On the back of the equine skeleton, between the spine and the left scapula	Fig. 3, 2	Lőrinczy, Somogyi 2018, 231–234.
3	Unirea-Vereşmort/Maros-veresmart	Alba County, Romania	Unknown	6.8×9; 3.2×2.2; 3.5×2; 6.14×5.8 cm	–	Fragmented	Skull and legs (?)	Horse bit, two stirrups, harness fittings	No documentation		Rustoiu, Ciută 2015, 106–107, 110.
4	Klin-Yar III, Grave 341	Kislovodsk, Stavropol Krai, Russia	Intact (bones and items are poorly preserved)	16×15.5 cm	–	Good	Horse skeleton	Horse bit, two stirrups, one iron buckle, harness fittings	Near the feet of the human skeleton, at the stirrups and the horse bit	Fig. 4, 1	Belinskij, Härke 2018, 238, 247–248.
5	Klin-Yar III, Grave 352	Kislovodsk, Stavropol Krai, Russia	Intact (bones and items are poorly preserved)	14×16.8 cm	–	Good	None	Horse bit, harness fittings	On the floor of the catacomb, at the eastern wall		Belinskij, Härke 2018, 274, 284.
6	Klin-Yar III, Grave 357	Kislovodsk, Stavropol Krai, Russia	Yes	13×8×5.5 cm (largest fragment)	–	Fragmented	Skull and legs (near the dromos)	Saddle ornaments (?), harness fittings	In the catacomb, at the entrance		Belinskij, Härke 2018, 288, 302.
7	Klin-Yar III, Grave 360	Kislovodsk, Stavropol Krai, Russia	Intact (bones and items are poorly preserved)	13.8×10.1 cm	–	Good	Horse skeleton	Horse bit, one stirrup, one lyre-shaped iron buckle, harness fitting	At the entrance of the catacomb, next to the horse harness	Fig. 4, 2	Belinskij, Härke 2018, 304, 325.

<i>ID</i>	<i>Site/Grave</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Disturbance of the grave</i>	<i>Size of the chainmail piece(s)</i>	<i>Mounts on the chainmail piece</i>	<i>Condition of the chainmail piece(s)</i>	<i>Horse</i>	<i>Horse harness</i>	<i>Position within the grave</i>	<i>Illustration referred in the text</i>	<i>Literature</i>
8	Klin-Yar IV, Grave 9	Kislovodsk, Stavropol Krai, Russia	Yes	10.2×6.8 cm (largest fragment)	–	Fragmented	Disturbed	Fragments of a horse bit, harness fittings	In the dromos, among the scattered horse bones		Belinskij, Härke 2018, 402–406.
9	Verkhniy Sadon, Grave 68	Sadon, Northern Ossetia, Russia	Yes	14×10.5 cm	Five silver	Good	Unknown	Horse bit, two stirrups, two girth buckles, harness fittings	Unknown	Fig. 4, 3	Kadzaeva 2018, 340–342.
10	Matyukhin Bugor, Grave 12	Porechny, Rostov Oblast, Russia	Only the entrance pit	14×10.5 cm	–	Good	Skull and legs	Horse bit, bone girth buckle, bone strap fastener	In the western end of the niche, next to the other parts of the horse harness	Fig. 3, 3	Ishaev, Smolyak 2017, 165, ris. 4.
11	Sivashovka Mound 3 Grave 2	Kherson oblast, Ukraine	Intact	13×16 cm	–	Good	Horse skeleton	Horse bit, saddle, iron girth buckle, harness fittings	On the equine skeleton, the wooden parts of the saddle are partially preserved	Fig. 3, 4	Komar, Kubyshev, Orlov 2006, 245–247, 293.

