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A RITUAL DEPOT FROM THE OUTSKIRTS OF SIROK

Krisztina Marczel*

A deposit from the end of the 4th – early 5th century AD was discovered in a metal detector survey on the site Sirok-Alsó Rozsnak, Kígyós-patak partja. The findspot of the recovered artefacts (a shield boss, two bronze buckles, and a pair of strap divider discs from a horse harness) proved to be a north–south directed, artificial platform on which the items had been placed and covered with stone packing. The excavation brought to light nails with silver-coated heads, a silver strap end, and glass cup fragments. The lack of human remains, the shallowness of the base platform, the natural setting of the feature, and the recovered drinking vessel remains indicate that the feature unearthed at Sirok was a ritual deposit.

Sirok-Alsó-Rozsnak, Kígyós-patak partja lelőhelyen a 4. század végére – 5. század elejére keltezhető depólelet került elő fémkeresőzés közben. A talált leletek (pajzsdudor, bronzcsatok és lószerszám szíjelosztó korongjai) helyén feltárással sikerült azonosítani egy É–D tájolású, mesterségesen kifaragott platformot, melyre a leleteket helyezték, és az egészet kőpakolás borította. A feltárás során ezüstözött fejű szegecsek, ezüst szíjvég és üvegpoharak töredékei is előkerültek. Az emberi maradványok hiánya, a jelenség sekély volta és struktúrája, a természeti környezet jellege és az előkerült ivóedény-töredékek alapján a Sirokon feltárt depozitum rituális jellegű leletnek tekinthető.

Keywords: *depot, structured deposit, offering, votive ritual, stone packing, shield boss, buckle, horse harness, glass drinking vessels, strap end*

Kulcsszavak: *depó, strukturált depozitum, áldozati rituálé, kőpakolás, pajzsdudor, csat, lószerszám, üveg ivóedények, szíjvég*

The excavation

Sirok lies in the Pétervására District of Heves County, by the Tarna River between the Mátra and Bükk Mountains.[1] The narrow ridge under the top of which József Barta, a local resident, discovered Migration Period finds in December 2020, stretches east of the settlement, perpendicular to the broad alluvial valley of the Kígyós Stream on the eastern bank (Lot 0243/1) (*Fig. 1*). He reported the finds to the museum, and in March 2021 Gergely Szenthe from the Hungarian National Museum conducted an authentication excavation on the site. Upon arriving at the site, the archaeologists observed recent plunder pits around the findspot of the recovered findings, indicating illegal metal detector activity there since the discovery of the first artefacts.

After removing the topsoil layer, a stone packing directed north–south, i.e. perpendicular to the natural line of the ridge, became visible (*Figs. 2–4*); the reported findings came from its north-western corner. The stones were missing from the north-eastern part of the feature due to disturbance caused probably by the finder of the assemblage; the rest was intact. Despite being interwoven with roots for centuries, the original arrangement of the stones remained discernible: the frame of large stones lining the sides and corners of the rectangular structure was filled with smaller ones. After removing the stones, an almost perfectly regular rectangular platform with a flat bottom came to light (*Fig. 5*). The platform was cut into the hard bedrock of the ridge; the northern and western sides could be followed based on hardness and colour, while on the eastern side, it ended in

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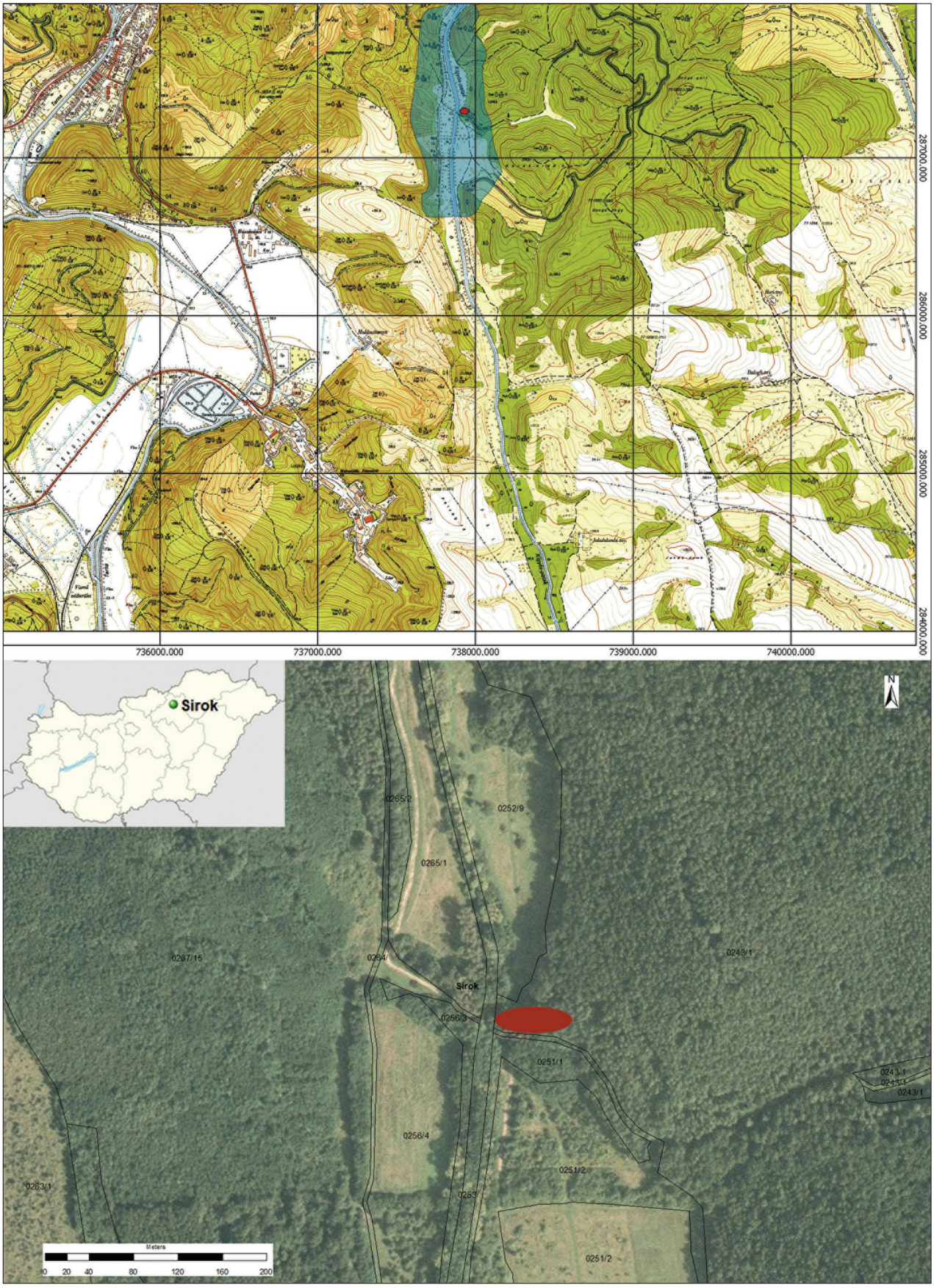

Fig. 1. The location of the site
1. kép. A lelőhely elhelyezkedése

Fig. 2. The stone packing after the removal of the topsoil layer (photo by Attila Király)
2. kép. A kőpakolás a felső humuszréteg eltávolítása után (fotó: Király Attila)

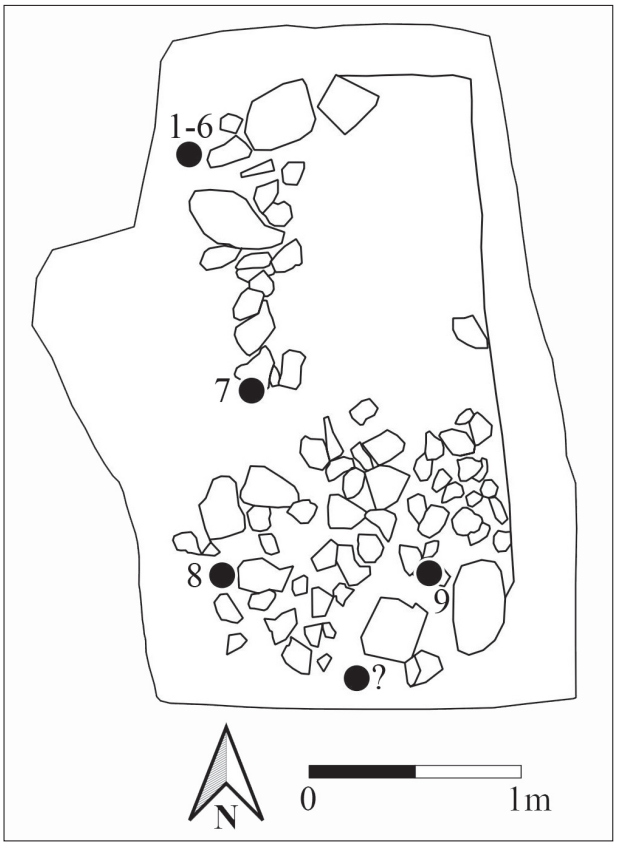

Fig. 3. Survey map of the feature with the finds. 1–6: shield, boss, buckles, strap divider discs; 7: strap end; 8–9: nails; ?: glass sherd
3. kép. A feltárt objektum és a leletek elhelyezkedése. 1–6: Pajzsdudor, csatok, szíjelosztó korongok; 7: szíjvég; 8–9: szegecs; ?: üvegtöredék (13–16?)

a 5–6-cm high, straight, vertical wall. Both the regularity of the platform and the structure of the stone packing indicated that the feature is man-made. The feature extended to 3 × 1.20 m, with a relative depth of 20–30 cm on the western and 40–50 cm on the eastern side (from the current surface).

The finds

According to the report of Mr Barta, the finds were piled up in the north-western corner of the feature: lowest down the strap dividers with the small fastener plates folded inwards, with two bronze buckles on top, all covered by a shield boss (with the conical centre looking upwards). During the excavation, the small assemblage was completed by a silver strap end discovered under a thick root in the western part of the stone packing (*Fig. 6*) (however, one must take into account that the growing roots have probably dislocated the findings). Two bronze nails with silver-foiled heads were discovered *in situ*, a metre apart in the southern zone of the feature, and two more, plus one without silver wrapping, were retrieved from the fill. Besides, four fragments of three separate glass vessels – two cups with incised line bundles and one with blue dots – were collected. One of these fragments was found at the edge of the stone packing on the southern side (cannot be specified based on the field documentation). The remaining three sherds were scattered in the fill on the level of the stone packing. Field walkings did not yield further finds from the era either near the feature or around the mounds, identified via aerial photos, in the stream's valley.[2]

Catalogue

Cat. 1. Conical iron shield boss (umbo) (*Fig. 7. 1*). Found with the cone upwards, in the north-western corner of the stone packing. The conical part is broken, and a 5–7 cm long part is missing from the top and the mantle. Height: 9.6 cm, diam.: 15 cm, rim width: 2.5 cm, thickness: 0.2 cm. With five single rivet holes of 0.3–0.4 cm in diameter around the rim.

Fig. 4. The stone packing in profile (photo by Attila Király)
4. kép. A kőpakolás a metszetre bontás után (fotó: Király Attila)

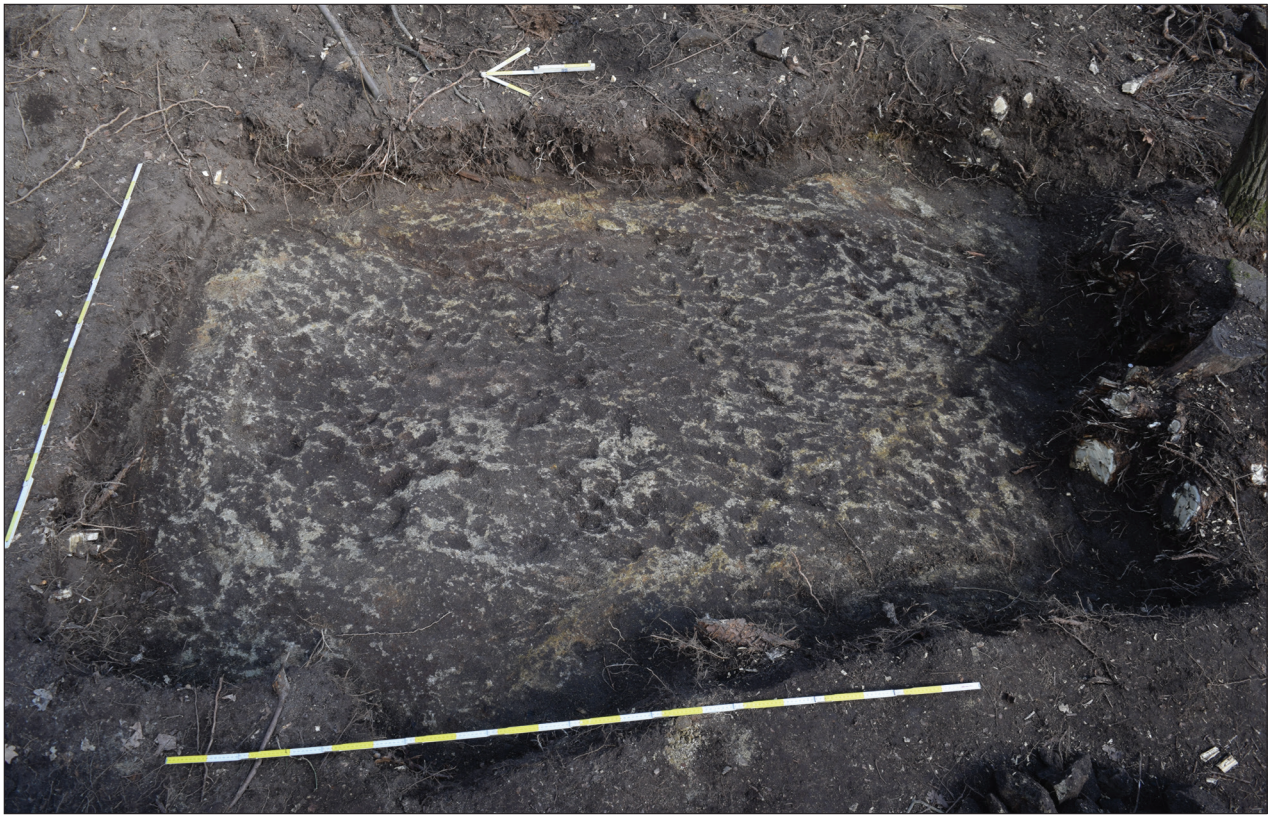

Fig. 5. The stone platform carved into the bedrock (photo by Attila Király)
5. kép. Az alapkőzetbe faragott plató (fotó: Király Attila)

Cat. 2. Iron rivet for fastening the shield boss (*Fig. 7. 2*). Length: 4.6 cm, thickness: 0.2–0.4 cm. The probably round head is fragmentary; current diam.: 0.9 cm.

Cat. 3–4. A pair of bronze buckles (*Fig. 8. 3–4*). Found under the shield boss. Both are complete; the green patina layer was not removed from their surface during conservation. The cast frames are slightly bulging, oval and have a round profile. The sheet buckle plate, with two rivet holes, is folded over the bar; the front plate is thicker than the backplate. *Cat. 3* has a semicircle-profile pin ending in a bud-like relief ornament bent over the frame. Total length 3.8 cm, frame length 2.2 cm, width 2.8 cm, thickness 0.4–0.7 cm; pin length 2.4 cm, thickness 0.4 cm; buckle plate: total length 2.2 cm, width 1.7 cm, sheet thickness 0.2 cm. The pin of the buckle of *Cat. 4* overextends the frame and ends in three ribs. Total length 4 cm, frame length 2.2 cm, width 2.7 cm, thickness 0.4–0.6 cm; pin length 2.6 cm, thickness 0.5 cm; buckle plate: total length 2.4 cm, width 1.7 cm, sheet thickness 0.2 cm.

Cat. 5–6. Openwork bronze strap dividers with silver foil coating from a horse harness (*Fig. 8. 5–6*) from under the buckles. The three small fastener plates, suspended from the divider discs by cast-on loops, were folded inwards. The outer sides of the cast bronze divider discs were wrapped in silver foil; the foil had worn off in places. The backside was not covered and features use-wear marks. The lace pattern of the openwork discs is identical, consisting of a central circle with four attaching square arms; the loops of the fastener plates are attached to the outer side of three of the four semicircular spaces between the arms. The loops, having worn thin the frame of the discs at three points, distorted it; thus, the original semicircular shape only remained unchanged in the fourth field, where no loop was attached. The fastener plates were also made from bronze; *Cat. 5* still has its original silver foil cover, indicating that the rest were adorned this way. The quadrangular strap fastener plates were attached with a pair of rivets to the strap ends. *Cat. 5*: diam. 4 cm, thickness 0.5 cm, fastener plate: total length 2.6 cm, width 1.3 cm; *Cat. 6*: diam. 4.1 cm, thickness 0.5 cm, fastener plate: total length 2.4 cm, width 1.2 cm.

Cat. 7. Silver strap end (*Fig. 8. 7*) from under a thick root in the western part of the stone packing. The strap-side end is rectangular in profile; it is divided in two by a five-mm-deep cut at the rim. This end is 1.4 cm wide, while

Fig. 6. The shield boss, the strap dividers, the strap end, and the buckles (photo by Iván Jaksity)
6. kép. Pajzsdudor, lószerszám szíjelosztói, szíjvég, csatok (fotó: Jaksity Iván)

the other, tapered one, is only 4 mm, ending in a round-profile, hammered tang on a round, profiled base. The strap fastener part features no rivet holes or other details to help fasten it on the strap end, but it is heavily worn. Total length: 4.9 cm, width: 1.4–0.4 cm, thickness: 0.2 cm, diam. of the profiled end 0.15 cm.

Cat. 8–12. Bronze nails with a flat round head, all but one (*Cat. 12*) covered in silver foil (*Fig. 9. 8–12*). *Cat. 8* and *9* were found in situ, the rest in the fill of the feature; *Cat. 8* was discovered in the southern part of the stone packing, near the western edge of the platform; length 0.6 cm, width 0.1 cm, head 1.2 × 1 cm. *Cat. 9* was discovered in the southern part of the stone packing, a metre apart from *Cat 8* at the eastern edge of the platform; length 0.6 cm, width 0.1 cm, head 1.2 × 1 cm. *Cat. 10*: length 0.6 cm, width 0.1 cm, head 1.3 × 1.1 cm. *Cat. 11*: length 0.5 cm, width 0.1 cm, head 0.8 × 0.9 cm. *Cat. 12*: length 0.5 cm, width 0.2 cm, head 0.8 × 0.8 cm.

Cat. 13. Side fragment of a glass cup with blue dots (*Fig. 9. 13*). Colourless glass sherd with tiny bubbles and a blue dot at one corner. Ca. 4 × 3 cm, thickness 0.1 cm.

Cat. 14–15. Matching rim and side fragment of a colourless glass cup with tiny bubbles and incised line bundles (*Fig. 9. 14–15*). *Cat 14*: rim fragment with a line bundle around the rim and two more around the body. Size: 6 × 4.2–4.8 cm, thickness 0.2 cm, with a polished horizontal rim of the same thickness; rim diameter ca. 10 cm. *Cat 15*: matching side fragment with incised line bundles. Size: ca. 6 × 2 cm, thickness 0.2 cm.

Cat. 16. Side fragment of colourless glass cut with tiny bubbles and an incised line bundle (*Fig. 9. 16*). Size: ca. 2.5 × 2 cm, thickness 0.15 cm.

Shield boss (umbo)

The original position and condition of the shield boss is known only from the description of its finder: it was discovered lying with the already broken cone up in the north-western corner of the stone packing. Only one of the five nails that once fastened it to a shield was found, in situ, still in a hole in the rim.

The high, slightly curved mantle of the shield boss attaches to the gently sloping rim with a cylindrical neck. Based on these typological traits (Istvánovits, Kulcsár 1987–1989, 72; Zieling 1989, 12, 125; Kazanski 1994, 441; Kiss 2020, 121), the find could be classified amongst conical umbos and identified as a Congrád/Zieling L type (Zieling 1989, 125). It is undecorated, which is a characteristic of the shield bosses in Germanic territories (Zieling 1989, 298) in contrast to Roman ones.

Conical shield bosses were found from the Baltic region to the Caucasus; their distribution does not outline closed, distinct groups, which also holds for Zieling's Type L. The earliest examples of this type appeared in the territory of the Przeworsk Culture in the early 4th century AD (Zieling 1989, 126), while in the Carpathian Basin, they were occasionally added to graves of the Tiszadob Group in the Northern Hungarian Plain and south of it from the end of the century (Istvánovits, Kulcsár 1987–1989, 72; Kiss 2020, 121). Such umbos in the Pontic region have only been found in Abkhazia in contexts dated between AD 310 and 410 (Chapka-Abgydzrahu Graves 41 and 43; Kazanski 1994, 441).

In the 1980s, E. Istvánovits and V. Kulcsár collected twelve conical shield bosses from the non-Roman parts of the Carpathian Basin, but without attempting a precise typological classification (see Istvánovits, Kulcsár 1987–1989). Of these, the piece recovered from Grave 4 unearthed at Csongrád-Berzsenyi Str. is the closest analogy to the shield boss from Sirok, albeit somewhat bigger (height: 12.2 cm, diam. 16 cm; Istvánovits, Kulcsár 1987–1989, 73), just like the Zieling L-type umbo from Tiszavalk-Kenderföldek Grave 17 (height: 10 cm, diam. 19.4 cm; Istvánovits, Kulcsár 1987–1989, 76; Kiss 2020, 131). On average, the shield bosses discovered in the Carpathian Basin in contexts dated to the end of the 4th – early 5th centuries AD are bigger than the piece from Sirok (height: 10–13.5 cm, diam. 16–22 cm; Istvánovits, Kulcsár 1987–1989, 73–75), while the ones smaller than those have been recovered from older features (Nyíregyháza [Hungary], Zemplín and Kostolná pri Dunaji [Slovakia]) and form a distinct group within the conical shield bosses of the Carpathian Basin (Istvánovits, Kulcsár 1987–1989, 74, 76). The less high, wider variant is typical of the Chernyakhov Culture and the Pontic Region (Istvánovits, Kulcsár 1987–1989, 76–77), which raises the possibility of linking it with workshops in the east. Shield bosses of a similar height as the Sirok find have been recovered from Kerch (1904. VI, a double burial chamber), Mogoşani, and Ozernoye; however, these are all considerably wider and have a different design (Istvánovits, Kulcsár 1987–1989, 76–77). Only two Csongrád/Zieling Type L umbos are known from the Pontic Region, both from Chapka-Abgydzrahu in Abkhazia (Graves 41 and 43; Kazanski 1994, 441). They were published without exact measurements; however, their size can be estimated from the drawings as the following: From Grave 41: height: 9 cm, diam. 17 cm and from Grave 43: height 11 cm, diam. 18 cm (Voronov, Shenkao

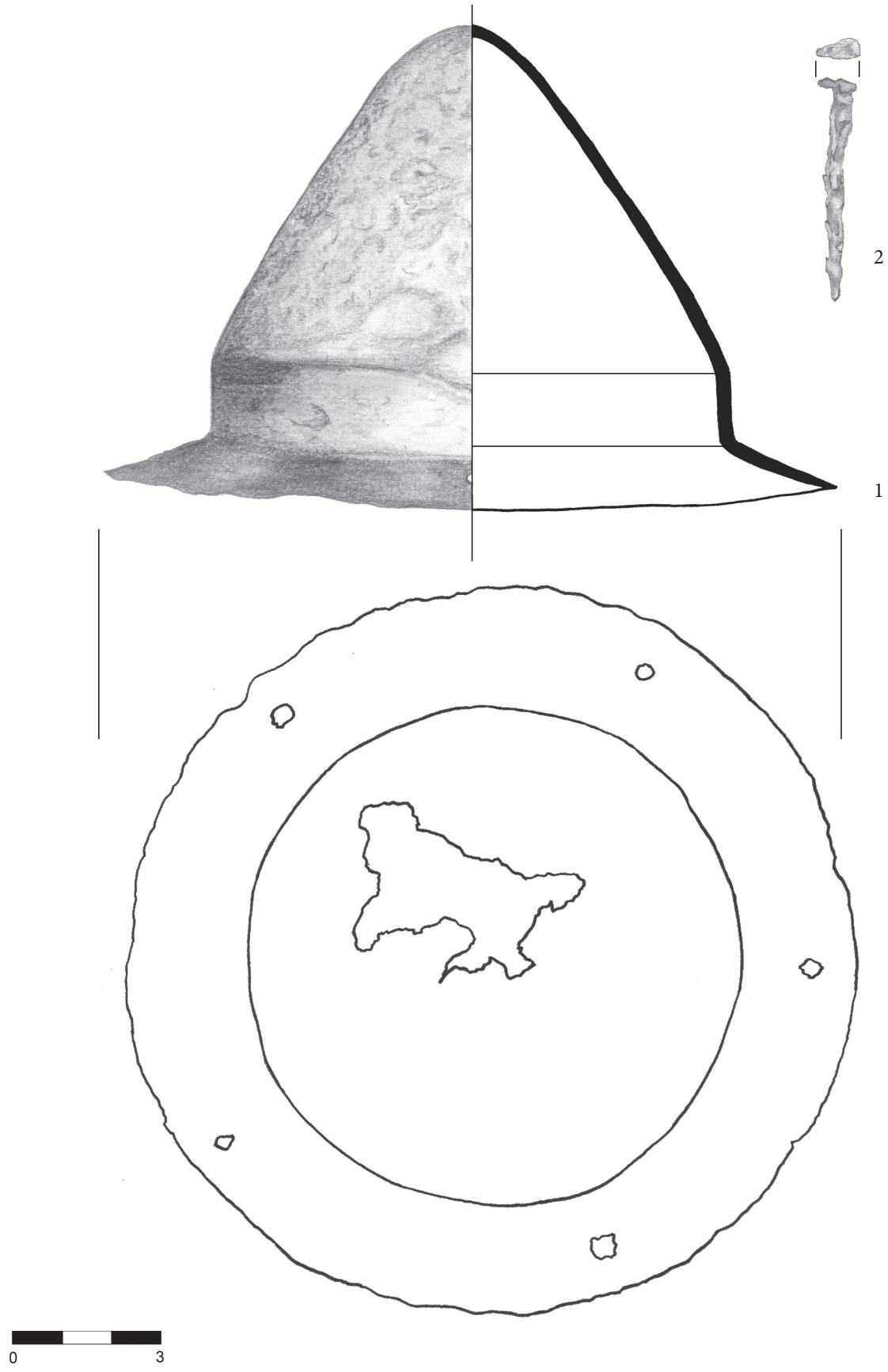

Fig. 7. 1: shield boss; 2: iron nail from the shield boss
7. kép. 1: pajzsdudor; 2: pajzsdudor vasszege

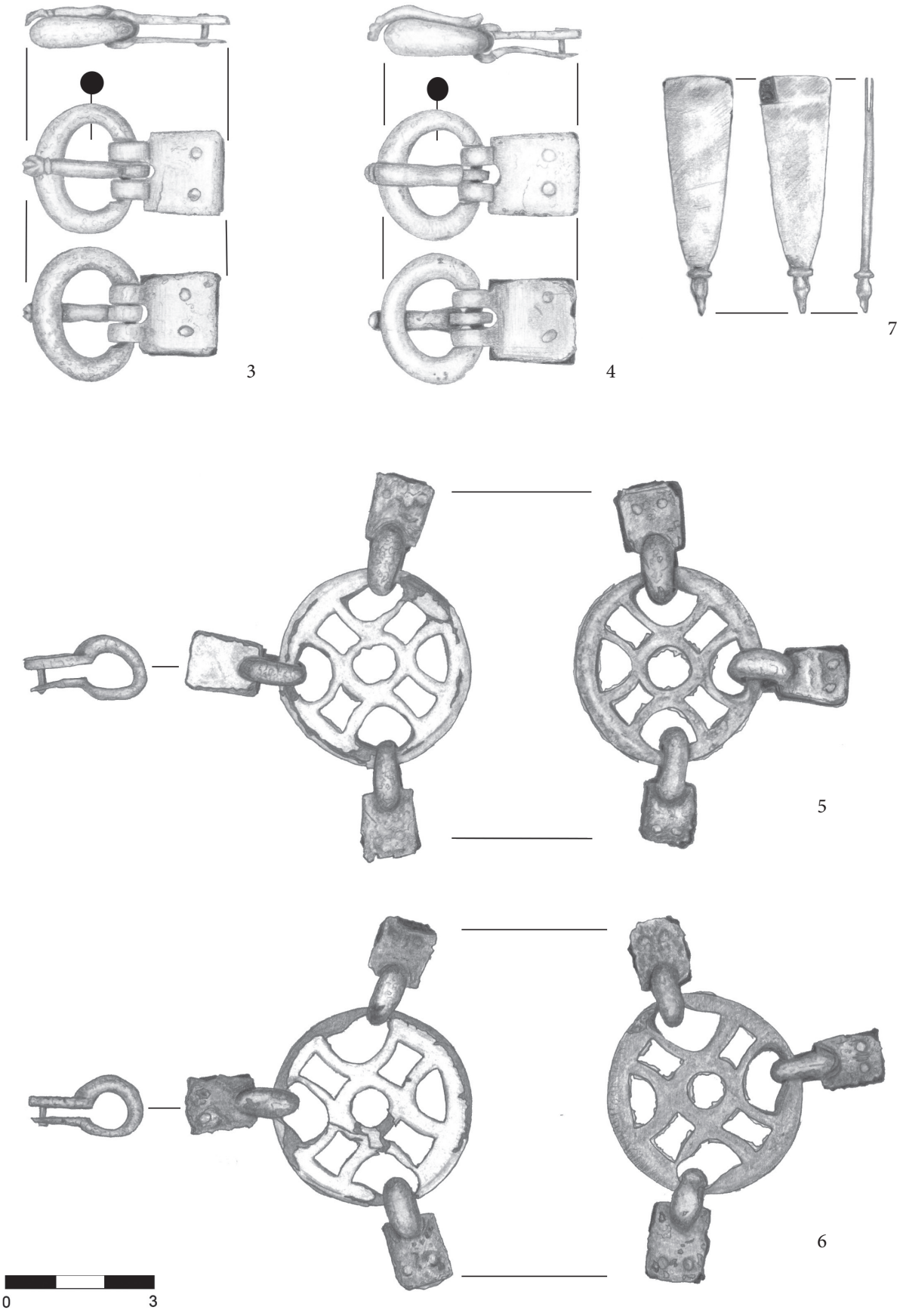

Fig. 8. 3–4: bronze buckle; 5–6: silver-plated bronze strap divider discs from a horse harness; 7: silver strap end
8. kép. 3–4: bronzcsat; 5–6: lószerszámhoz tartozó, ezüstlemezes bronz szíjelosztó korong; 7: ezüst szíjvég

1982, Ris. 5, 14, 16). As for its size, the Sirok piece is similar to the average of Zieling L-type umbos found north of the Carpathian Basin (height: 7.6–9.7 cm, diam. 16.2–20 cm), but those are considerably older, all discovered in graves dated to the early 4th century AD (Zieling 1989, 125–126).

In summary, the shield boss from Sirok has abundant typological analogies in a vast area. Its size is close to the northern ones, but those are older. It is unlikely that it has any connection with workshops in the east as the pieces found there are usually less high and wider. The coeval umbos from the eastern part of the Carpathian Basin are slightly bigger, but the difference is only borderline significant. Conical shield bosses – including the Csongrád/Zieling L-type finds from Csongrád-Berzsenyi Str. and Tiszavalk-Kenderföldek – are considered chronological indicators in this area as they seem to be linked with the burials of Phase D1. Therefore, and because of the dating of the other finds in the find assemblage, I believe the shield boss from Sirok cannot be older than the end of the 4th century AD.

Regarding the number and arrangement of nails, the way Zieling L-type umbos were fastened to the shields is not uniform: some were nailed with 3 × 1, while others with 3 × 2 or 4 × 3 nails (Zieling 1989, 125), and this holds for all conical umbos. The solutions applied to the specimens known from the Carpathian Basin link them with the territories in the north, as the prevalent solution in both areas is 6 × 1 nails, with the 2 × 2, 3 × 1, and 3 × 3 variants also appearing (Istvánovits, Kulcsár 1987–1989, 75–77). The eastern areas, including the Pontic Region and the Chernyakhov Culture, are different in this respect, too, outlining another workshop circle, where the usual variants include 8 × 1, 4 × 3, 4 × 2, and 3 × 2 nails (Istvánovits, Kulcsár 1987–1989, 77). The shield boss from Sirok was fastened with 5 × 1 nails to the wooden shield (as indicated by the burr that has remained intact on the backside), which is currently unparalleled in both the Carpathian Basin and the areas of the northern and eastern workshops.

In connection with the nails, some remarks must also be made about the shield. According to the report by the man who discovered the shield boss, he saw a hollow in the soil after removing it, which he believed to be the place of the decayed wooden shield. However, as neither a grip nor further nails were found around the small depot, it is more likely that only the shield boss, detached from the shield, had been interred. While the grip could have been made from organic material, too, the lack of nails, hardly explainable otherwise, is a strong argument in favour of this hypothesis. Besides, the estimated size of the one-time shield also tells against the depositing of the complete artefact. N. Zieling collected several luckily preserved shield remains from Germanic territories; the average size of both the round, the oval, and the rectangular shields was around 70–100 cm (Zieling 1989, 354–358). The umbo from Sirok was found in the north-western corner of the feature, i.e. certainly west of the undisturbed part of the stone packing (also marked on the survey drawing), and there clearly was no place for such a big item in this part of the plateau-like depression in the sandstone bedrock.

In estimating the original size of the shield, one can also rely on more direct data: the length of the nail used to fasten the umbo to the shield. Based on the nail length of coeval shield bosses, the thickest part of Germanic shields in the late Roman Imperial Period was around 1–1.3 cm (Zieling 1989, 288). In contrast, the entire length of the nail in the shield boss from Sirok is 4.6 cm. Extracting 3 mm for the nail head and 2 mm for the thickness of the umbo's rim still leaves 4.1 cm for the thickness of the shield, which is highly unusual. As even 1.5–1.7 cm thick shields are thought to have been extremely thick and heavy (Zieling 1989, 287–290), the presence of unusually long nails is often explained by the umbo and the grip having been fastened to the shield with a single nail; it is unlikely, however, that the length of the nail in the shield boss from Sirok is indicative in any way to the original size of the shield. Conclusively, it is unlikely that the nail in the shield boss is proportionate to the one-time shield or reflects its original size.

In the Roman Imperial Period of the Carpathian Basin, placing a shield into the grave was a custom typical of the Germanic peoples of the Barbaricum, the Quadi in the first place. The custom of depositing weaponry in the grave faded after the Marcomanni Wars, only getting a second wind in the north-eastern parts of the Carpathian Basin parallel with the vanishing of the cremation burials of the Przeworsk Culture in the 3rd century AD (Kiss 2020, 119). The upswing did not last, though, and the lower number of weapon burials in the second half of the 3rd and throughout the 4th century AD may be interpreted as a change in funerary rite (Kiss 2020, 120). In the Great Hungarian Plain, the first shield burials appeared in the Germanic borderland at the end

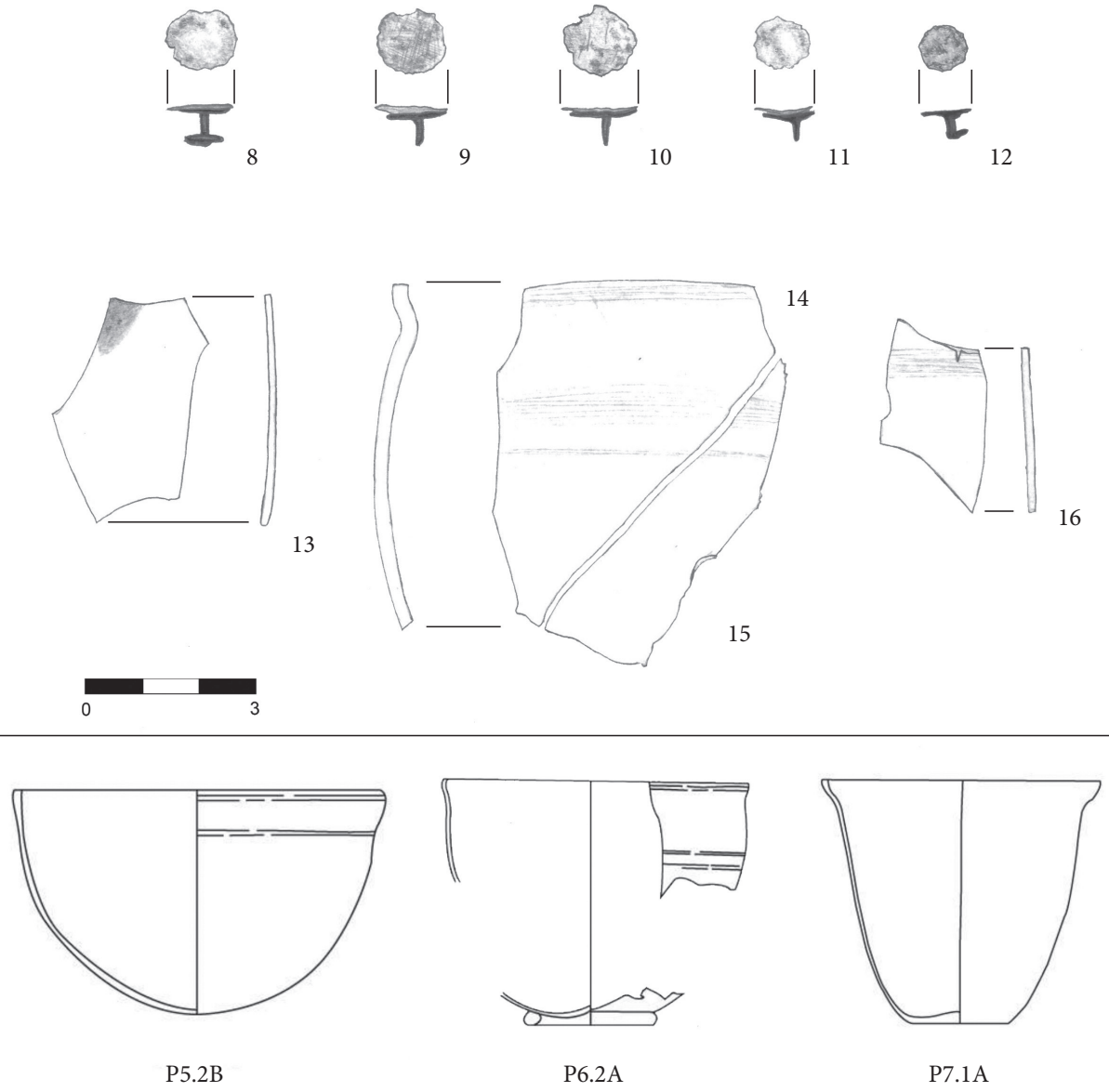

Fig. 9. 8–11: bronze nails with silver-plated heads; 12: bronze nail; 13: side fragment of a glass cup with blue dot decoration; 14–15: matching rim and side fragments of a glass cup with incised line bundles; 16: side fragment of a glass cup with incised line bundles; P5.2B, P6.2A, P7.1A: the possible types of the glass of Cat. 14–15 (Dévai 2013, Fig. 2)
9. kép. 8–11: ezüstfóliás fejű bronzszegecsek; 12: bronzszegecs; 13: kék pettyes üvegpohár oldaltöredéke; 14–15: bekarcolt vonalköteg díszű üvegpohár összeillő perem- és oldaltöredéke; 16: bekarcolt vonalköteg díszű üvegpohár oldaltöredéke; P5.2B, P6.2A, P7.1A: az üvegpohár lehetséges típusai, amelyhez a 14–15. töredékek tartoztak (Dévai 2013, Fig. 2)

of the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD; this was followed by a period characterised by the lack thereof in the late 3rd and the first two-thirds of the 4th century AD. During this time, the custom was maintained in the neighbouring areas of the Barbaricum (Istvánovits, Kulcsár 1987–1989, 70–71). Shields with metal fittings appeared again in inhumation burials on the Great Hungarian Plain from the end of the 4th or early 5th centuries AD; the conical shield boss variations, interred most frequently together with spears and swords, are characteristic of this horizon (Istvánovits, Kulcsár 1987–1989, 72). That was the time of increased migration flow in the area, bringing about a general upswing in furnishing the burials with weapons; accordingly, the re-appearance of shields in a funerary context might be the result of the arrival or at least influence of a new people (Istvánovits, Kulcsár 1987–1989, 82; Kulcsár 1998, 45; Kiss 2020, 120). Most frequently, shields were interred as part of complete weaponry, but sometimes

the deceased was given only an umbo or a shield grip, meaning he was not buried in full weaponry as that surely constituted way more (usable) items. Following the pars pro toto idea, the shield parts in these burials may symbolise the whole weaponry of the warrior or, being parts of the armour, were bearing apotropaic functions and were added to protect the deceased on his afterlife journey (Smółka-Antkowiak 2021, 107).

Buckles

The two buckles were found under the shield boss, on top of the pair of strap dividers. Both have a bulging oval frame with a pin with an ornate end bent on the frame and a rectangular buckle plate.

Oval and round buckles with rectangular buckle plates were widespread in space and time. The earliest variants, with rectangular frames and buckle plates, appeared in the western and central regions of the Nothern Caucasus already at the end of the 1st century AD, and the type remained in use, undergoing minor transformations, until the end of the Sarmatian Period (Tejral 2011, 211). The plate was fastened to the strap usually with a single rivet or two; the two-rivet solution appearing on some pieces from Budennovskaya Sloboda, Bratskoye, and Kispek (Abramova 1998, Ris. 1. 37–38, 48) makes them analogous with the finds from Sirok. Besides, the buckles from Sirok have excellent analogies in the Late Sarmatian Period (Phase C3) record of Crimea, with already similar details, like the bulging frame and the rib decoration at the tip of the pin (Sharov 2022, 69, Ris. 130. I/1, Ris. 169. 8–9). Bulging frames (where the external part of the frame is thicker than the lateral ones and the bar side) first appeared in the east generally in the 4th century AD (Abramova 1998, 222).

With time, buckles of similar design became widespread also west of their area of origin, in the Chernyakhov Culture, the Carpathian Basin, and the lands west and north of it (see, e.g. the bronze buckles from Sântana de Mureş / Maroszentanna [Romania] Graves 1 and 63 and a silver buckle in Grave 40 in the same cemetery; Kovács 1912, 257–258, 5. kép 1a–1b, 313–314, 86. kép 4a–4b, 291–292, 52. kép 7a–7b). The buckle in the depot of Valea Strâmbă / Tekerőpatak-Kápolna-oldal (Romania) has a round frame and a rectangular plate with a single rivet, dating the assemblage to the end of the 4th or first decades of the 5th century AD (Gáll et al. 2016, 337). Similar buckles from Untersiebenbrunn, Grave 1 represent the upper chronological limit of the type's spread (Schmauder 2002, 99, Taf. 221). A coeval analogy to the buckle from Valea Strâmbă is known from the find assemblage of Ernei-Carieră / Nagyernye (Romania), a possible agrarian ritual depot (Crişan, Lăzărescu 2010, 232). Another buckle in the Valea Strâmbă depot has analogies in the Lower Danube Region and Central Europe, which also date to the end of the 4th–early 5th century AD (Gáll et al. 2016, 337). This specimen has an oval plate, but its frame is similar to the piece from Sirok. Similar buckles are also known from relevant cemeteries in the eastern part of the Carpathian Basin, like, e.g. Tiszadob-Sziget and Tápé-Malajdok (Istvánovits, Kulcsár 1999, Fig. 8. 4–5, Fig. 19. 2–3, 5; Schmauder 2002, Abb. 3). The record of these sites and the region is characterised by an influence of the Chernyakhov-Sântana de Mureş Culture, manifesting in details like the spread of buckles with the pin bent on the frame (B. Tóth 2003, 293). Based on the typological traits of their material, these analogies can be dated to the end of the 4th and early 5th century AD (Istvánovits, Kulcsár 1999, 69, 83). In Central Europe – by the Elbe River, in the Vistula Basin, and south of the Carpathians – bulging frames came in fashion uniformly at the turn of the 4th and 5th centuries AD (Madyda-Legutko 1983, 132). Having been part of the attire of men and women in practically every cultural unit of the era (Madyda-Legutko 1983, 132), the buckles with a round or oval, bulging frame and a long pin and with or without a buckle plate were popular throughout the whole continent (Crişan, Lăzărescu 2010, 233). Based on its analogies and chronological connections, the piece from Sirok fits well the types characteristic of the find horizon representing the end of the 4th and early 5th centuries AD.

As the feature unearthed at Sirok was not a burial, the artefacts were not interred in a wearing position, which makes the identification of the buckles' original function considerably more difficult. They were deposited as a pair, which would suggest they were shoe buckles if their size were not bigger than the known ones. Even so, the appearance of a pair of buckles (instead of only one) at Sirok is not unparalleled, as buckles were worn in pairs in several regions, including the Northern Caucasus, the Chernyakhov Culture (Istvánovits, Kulcsár 2002, 102), the Upper Tisza Region (Tomka 2001, 170), the Wielbark and Przeworsk cultures in the north (Madyda-Legutko 1983, 133), and the Sarmatians of the Great Hungarian Plain – but not the 'classical' Sarmatian steppe, where buckles in pairs only ap-

pear in 3rd-century AD burials in the Crimea (Istvánovits, Kulcsár 2002, 105). Of the regions listed above, the custom's presence is the most intense in the record of the Sarmatians dwelling in Barbaricum in the Carpathian Basin (Istvánovits, Kulcsár 2002, 104). The burials of both males and females contain buckles in pairs; while in men's graves, the custom seems to have been more widespread in the late Sarmatian Period than before, it never became common (Vörös 2001, 322–325). When a grave contains two buckles, one is usually part of the attire, while the other could belong to a weapon's suspension strap, worn according to Roman style. Based on the available find material, such an arrangement – one buckle fastening the belt and the other worn as part of the balteus (Istvánovits, Kulcsár 2002, 102, 104) – are exclusive in Roman provinces, and the use of sword suspension straps has been proved in the Przeworsk Culture and amongst Sarmatians, too (Istvánovits, Kulcsár 2002, 102). However, as two buckles also occur in graves of men buried without weaponry and women (Istvánovits, Kulcsár 2002, 102), there is no direct and exclusive connection between the pair of buckles in the grave and weapon burials. Another hypothesis explains the presence of a second buckle with a second belt, either part of the undergarment (as opposed to the first one which fastened the overgarment; Madyda-Legutko 1983, 133) or worn beside the first one as a 'tool belt', used for hanging personal tools like a knife, bodkin, or purse (Vörös 2001, 322–232).

The two buckles from Sirok are almost identical in size; the width of the buckle plates indicates that both were fastened to 1.7 cm wide and 3 mm thick leather straps. That raises the possibility of their similar function, namely that they belonged to different belts. In that case, the reasons behind their internment may include symbolic ones, as besides deliberate selection, depositing artefacts in pairs may be a characteristic of ritual deposits (Polányi 2008, 26). In contrast, the fact that only one strap end was found in the feature may tell against this interpretation and, as the find assemblage did not contain any personal tools of the kind which could be worn hanging from the belt, and the secondary belts, from which they were hung, were usually closed by smaller strap ends similar to that of the 'main' belt (Vörös 2001, 323), it is unlikely that the second buckle belonged to such a 'tool belt'. It could not be the weapon's suspension belt either, as the shield boss was the only piece of weaponry in the find assemblage. There is another possibility, though: that the buckles belonged to a horse harness instead of being part of the attire. Such an interpretation is underpinned by the similarity of how buckles' and strap dividers' plates were fastened to the straps (with two rivets in all cases) and their seemingly identical material (bronze).

Strap dividers from a horse harness

Two strap divider discs were found under the shield boss and the pair of buckles. Both discs have three fastener plates, which had been folded inwards upon internment (according to the finder's report), indicating that they were not attached to straps then. The front faces of the openwork discs were covered in silver foil; based on one of the small rectangular panels, still featuring the remains of the one-time silver coating, the fastener plates were probably adorned the same way.

Openwork horse harness accessories were widespread in the Roman Imperial Period. Strap divider discs were decorated with diverse patterns regardless of their exact function; no tendencies are grasped in the patterns used for decorating them. Most openwork horse harness parts have been dated to the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, and little is known about the persistence of the fashion in the 4th century AD (Palágyi 1989, 127).

The openwork pattern of the discs from Sirok – a full circle in the centre surrounded by four attaching semicircles – has no analogies, probably because Barbarian metalsmiths and their customers preferred custom-designed horse harnesses, in sharp contrast with the mass-production characteristic of Roman territories (Lau 2009, 278). The closest analogies to the finds from Sirok are the strap divider discs in the hoard from Coşoveni de Jos (Romania). These clearly prestige items were made from silver, coated with a gilded silver sheet, and adorned with punched patterns; the central element of their openwork decoration is a solid cross with arms ending in semicircles. The four kidney-shaped strap fastener plates, each with three rivet holes, have been attached to the outer ring at the parts inside the semicircles. As can be seen, the strap divider discs from Coşoveni differ from the Sirok pieces in several details, including raw material, decoration, and even size (in contrast to the 4–4.1 cm of the discs from Sirok, the Coşoveni pieces are 7.6 cm in diameter; Zeiß, Nicolăescu-Plopşor 1933, 274); conclusively, they cannot be regarded as close analogies, but currently, they are the closest known. Accordingly, the strap divider discs from Coşoveni

have no close or direct analogy either; however, there is a connection between them and the findings from Kerch (Zeiß, Nicolăescu-Plopşor 1933, 276). Two burial mounds in this area contained pressed gold sheet horse harness mounts with stone inlays: the tomb with the 'Golden Mask' unearthed in 1837 near Glinische and Adzhimushkay Kurgan 1, excavated in 1841 (Ajbabin 2012, 33; Sharov 2022, 29, 42). The dating of the tri- and quadripartite strap divider discs and those with swastika decoration in their assemblages ranges in a pretty wide period; however, the accompanying finds date the 1837 tomb to the second half of the 3rd century AD (Ajbabin 2012, 33; Sharov 2022, 32, 70), while Kurgan 1 to the early 4th century AD (Sharov 2022, 45). The Coşoveni assemblage is considerably younger than either of the graves from Kerch, as the punched decoration links it to the Untersiebenbrunn horizon, where artefacts with such decoration appear in graves dated to between the mid-4th and the first decades of the 5th century AD (Madyda-Legutko 1983, 114; Schmauder 2002, 44). This decoration was also in fashion in Northern Europe as part of the so-called Sösdala style between the mid-4th and the first half of the 5th centuries AD (Kazanski, Mastykova 2017, 297). The Scandinavian and Eastern Central European horizons do not form a single style group but are coeval and originate from identical Roman prototypes, albeit representing two distinct, parallel strains in the record linked with the barbarian military elite. The basic designs of the horse harnesses in these horizons have elements in common, but the pieces themselves are all unique, probably made on order; such items are known from the Middle Danube Region to the right bank of the Dnieper River (Kazanski, Mastykova 2017, 297). The foci within the distribution area of these finds, similar in both technology and ornamentation, are the Danube Region (with the sites containing such finds clustering almost exclusively in former Roman provinces and along the Danube; Tejral 1973, 12) and the coastal area of the Sea of Azov, i.e. the Kerch burial ground (Tejral 1973, 10). The so-called Kačin–Coşoveni de Jos group is a distinct unit within the Untersiebenbrunn horizon, comprising a coeval variant with purely barbaric stylistic traits (Tejral 1973, 13). The punched decoration represents a link between these stylistic units; the oldest appearances of the technique are linked with the Late Roman Imperial Period Wielbark and Chernyakhov cultures and the fort of Gundremmingen (a destruction layer dated by coins minted between AD 378 and 383; Godłowski 1995, 156; Kazanski, Mastykova 2017, 303). In summary, the punched decoration characterising the find horizon in focus has Late Roman origins, appeared already in the last quarter of the 4th century AD, but only developed fully in the first decades of the following century (Godłowski 1995, 156).

As the strap divider discs from Sirok bear no punched decoration, their relation with the Untersiebenbrunn horizon cannot be analysed; they can only connected with that circle indirectly via the analogy of the Coşoveni finds. The design of the fastener plates represents another link with said circle: although the size and shape of the fastener plates and the number of rivets vary on a wide scale per site from Scandinavia to the Black Sea, they all share a basic structure and technology.[3] Conclusively, the strap dividers from Sirok fit into the Sösdala and Untersiebenbrunn horizons at the end of the 4th and start of the 5th centuries AD. As the analogies from Kerch are older, they can be interpreted as predecessors of the strap divider discs of said horizons, while the fashion of the related horse harnesses also stems from the Roman style.

The discs found in Sirok were certainly strap dividers, just like their analogies mentioned above. Their size might represent a clue as to which part of the harness they belonged to. In the Roman Imperial Period, the smallest discs were usually part of the headgear, the ones of about 5.6–9.2 cm in diameter of the breast collar harness or the breaching, while the even bigger ones – as a strap divider or decoration – of the wagons (Palágyi 1989, 123). The discs that could simply be nailed on were ornamental, while the ones with fastener plates usually had a function (Palágyi 1989, 125). Besides size, use-wear marks may also help with identifying the original function of a disc. The backsides of the discs from Sirok are scratched, and the fastener plates had been eroded flat where they were in contact with the horse's body. Prolonged use has left the most conspicuous marks on the semicircular parts where the fastener plates attach to the disc, as all their loops wore thin the outer ring of the disc in a corner. The position of these worn-out parts indicates the directions of the one-time straps (i.e. where they pulled the fastener plates). Based on the reconstructed strap positions and the size of the discs, they were most likely part of the headgear, positioned on the two sides of the head, connected to the cheekpiece and the upper and lower straps of the nose band, with the fourth side (the one without any wear mark)

facing towards the bit (supposedly, the bit was attached to the headgear through another leather strap). In this reconstruction, Cat. 5 was on the right, while Cat. 6 on the left side of the horse's head. According to another interpretation, the two discs were part of the breast harness or the breeching, positioned on the breast or buttocks of the animal, respectively, in a way as reconstructed in horse harnesses from Pannonia and the Crimea (Palágyi 1989, Abb. 5; Sharov 2022, Ris. 82, 13); however, they are smaller than the average discs in these positions in Roman harnesses.

Providing the deceased with a horse and harness for the afterlife was a custom widespread in the elite burials of groups of steppe origin (mainly Huns and Alans) in the late Roman Imperial and Migration periods. From the Hun Period, both nomadic and settled communities practised horse burial throughout Europe, and horse harnesses were a frequent addition to ritual depots in the Middle Danube Region (Kazanski, Mastykova 2017, 299, 301). The custom of burying horses/horse harnesses spread in Central and Western Europe, probably from the east, with the migrating Huns, Alans, and East Germanic peoples (Kazanski, Mastykova 2017, 302, 305; Kazanskij, Mastykova 2018, 121). The custom of offering horse harnesses reached Scandinavia as well, albeit most such finds from the area are known from ritual assemblages instead of burials (Kazanskij, Mastykova 2018, 118). At the same time, burials comprising a horse harness count as a rarity in the Sarmatian Barbaricum, concentrating in the northern and eastern borderlands of their dwelling area; the phenomena in this context can be linked with the emergence of a new elite after the Marcomanni Wars (Kulcsár 1998, 45, 66). Horses represented considerable value due to their role in transport and warfare (Kontny 2019, 344); thus, it could have been important that they accompany, in some form, their deceased owner to their afterlife journey. Therefore, a horse harness in the grave may substitute for a horse offering. Horse harnesses comprising expensive or even precious metal parts were probably less widespread, as only the members of the elite could be affluent enough to afford the cost of the relatively large amount of bronze and precious metals needed for one (especially as precious metal mounts usually have exclusively decorative purposes; Lau 2009, 279). Conclusively, these horse harnesses were prestige items and markers of a higher social position (Smółka-Antkowiak 2021, 107). The strap divider discs from Sirok have been made of bronze, but their external faces, together with those of the fastener plates, were silver-plated, indicating their one-time owner having been part of the higher echelons of society.

Strap end

A silver strap end has been found in the western end of the feature, under a thick tree root. Its strap-side end is flat and rectangular in profile, while the opposite, tapered one is pointy and round in profile. Albeit some elements of its design resemble Late Roman amphora- and spearhead-shaped strap ends, it cannot be classified into either typological group based on its form.

Only two analogous finds are known from the Carpathian Basin. One was discovered in the grave of a Sarmatian woman, unearthed near Zagyvarékas in 1970 (H. Vaday 1975, 81). The mortuary clothing of the woman included a full set of belt fittings, i.e. a mount-decorated belt, including a silver belt buckle with an oval frame and a rectangular buckle plate and an elongated triangular silver strap end ending in a tripartite row of spheres (H. Vaday 1975, 83). The strap end had no analogies at the time of publication. The accompanying finds – some typical of the late Sarmatian record, while others bearing characteristics linked with the Germanic or Hun horizons instead – dated the assemblage to the turn of the 4th and 5th centuries AD (H. Vaday 1975, 84, 87). The other analogy, a bronze strap end, is a settlement find recovered from a coeval context in Suceagu / Szucság in Transylvania (Opreanu 2001, 467). Both pieces were adorned with punched patterns, which confirm their dating.

Strap ends of this type were usually fastened to the straps with a strap fastener or two nails at their strap-side end. Both nails of the piece from Zagyvarékas have been persisting (H. Vaday 1975, 83), while the fastener mechanism of the strap fastener from Suceagu was already damaged when the artefact was interred: the hole in its middle perhaps indicates that it was reused as a pendant (Opreanu 2001, 467, 469). The strap end from Sirok, however, lacks not only the nails but also their holes by the strap-side end, suggesting that the mount had been fastened to the strap in some other way, e.g. by simply having been hammered on the strap (although this solution is not typical of the belts of either Romans or barbarians). Moreover, with a 4.9 cm total length, it is considerably shorter than the piece from Zagyvarékas (8.5 cm; H. Vaday 1975, 83) and the in-

complete item from Suceagu (6.7 cm; Opreanu 2001, 467). This perhaps also corroborates the hypothesis that the strap-side end of the strap end from Sirok had broken off or had been cut off, and the piece had a secondary role.

C. Opreanu considers the type a blend of diverse Late Roman strap end types and sees its origins in the Late Roman Imperial Period material culture of the limes area in Pannonia (Opreanu 2001, 469). The punched decoration and high quality of the strap end from Suceagu seem to confirm this hypothesis, as does the fact that the known coeval distant analogies, i.e. the amphora- and spearhead-shaped strap ends got to the territory of Transylvania from the border zone of Pannonia (Opreanu 2001, 469–471).

Ornamental nails

Two of the five nails were discovered in situ, a metre apart in the southern zone of the stone packing, and three more amongst the stones. Four heads were covered in silver foil, and originally, the fifth must have also been adorned this way. The nails are small, only 5–6 mm long, each with a round, flat head of about 1 cm in diameter. While their number matches that of the holes at the rim of the shield boss, it is unlikely that they were used for fastening it to the shield because the holes are 3–4 mm in diameter and the nails only 1–2, meaning they could not hold the umbo firmly. Besides, they are way too short for this task. Considering the rest of the finds in the assemblage (especially the strap end), they could better be part of a belt.

Glassware

The find assemblage unearthed at Sirok contained four pieces of glass altogether. All of them are colourless, with tiny bubbles; one is adorned by a blue glass dot, the others with incised line bundles. The four fragments came from three different drinking vessels. The one with the blue dot probably was part of a conical glass with an approximately straight side. Two of the three incised sherds (Cats. 14–15) are matching fragments of, based on the profile, a hemispherical or ovoid cup. The arch of the third sherd, being larger, could not be part of the same cup but more of a straight-walled conical one, akin to the one with the blue dot. In the lack of a bottom fragment, however, the exact type of neither the first nor the third cup could be determined.

The incised line bundle decoration is characteristic of Late Roman Period glassware, mainly cups; the bundles were distributed in one or more zones under the rim and on the side of the vessels (Dévai 2012, 24). The decoration became ubiquitous in the territory of the Roman Empire in the 4th and 5th centuries AD, appearing in the Black Sea region, the Near East, the Balkans, Pannonia, and the western parts (Dévai 2012, 159). In the Carpathian Basin, such cups are known from the records of sites clustering around the Tisza River and the Tisza–Maros–Körös region (Varga 2016, 41).

The three incised glass sherds belong to two different cups: a straight-walled, perhaps conical, non-specified type (Cat. 16) and another, providing more information (Cats. 14–15). The matching side and rim fragments outlined a vessel adorned with circular line bundles, one under the rim and a wider and a narrower one distributed over the body. Based on the rim fragment (Cat. 14), the cut and polished rim of the small vessel was as thick as the wall, while the cup was about 10 cm in diameter. This rim design is characteristic of one-piece mould-blown glass vessels (Dévai 2012, 28). Typologically, the vessel was probably a hemispherical or semiovoidal cup; while these types overlap, the hemispherical variant is older than the semiovoidal one (Dévai 2012, 144). Hemispherical cups (types P5 and P6 in the classification system by K. Dévai) were amongst the most common drinking cup types in the Roman Empire, widespread in time and space. The first variants appeared as early as in the 1st century AD, became popular in the 3rd century AD, and remained so during the 4th century AD (Dévai 2012, 141). The type became in fashion in Pannonia around the AD 330s and remained popular until the AD 370s; diverse variants occasionally occur in the record of the area also later, up to the mid-5th century AD (Dévai 2012, 144). Variants with a flat base (without a foot ring) were preferred in the southern parts of the province in the first place, spreading out of the borders of the Empire from the 4th century AD, while the ring-footed types were favoured in the eastern parts, rarely occurring in the west (Fenyvesi 2020, 29, 30). These cups were typically 4.7–6.7 cm high, with a mouth of about 8.5–11.1 cm in diameter. They were mostly undecorated, albeit incised and engraved variants also appeared (and quickly became widespread) at the end of the 3rd – start of the 4th century AD (Dévai 2012, 143). The incised decoration was usually arranged in a zone under the rim and another on the body, while rarely, it was distributed between two or three circular zones (Dévai 2012, 144) – like

on the fragments from Sirok. Chronologically, these variants are followed by semiovoidal cups (Type P7), which first appeared (and became prevalent) in the last third of the 4th century AD and remained in fashion also in the early 5th century AD (and even later; Dévai 2012, 147). Their main distribution area was the Pontic Region, but diverse variants were also in use in the western parts of the Roman Empire. Their occurrence in Pannonia at the end of the 4th century AD has been linked with the arrival of the foederati. Based on elaboration and raw material, the cups recovered from the territory of the province were local products rather than imports (Dévai 2012, 148). Semiovoidal cups were in use everywhere throughout Pannonia province, with concentrations along the limes section between Arrabona and Intercisa; also, green shade variants were frequent additions to burials in 5th-century AD cemeteries (in contrast to colourless ones). Such cups typically have curved and cut rims; they are about 6.3–7.7 cm high and have a mouth of 5.6–10 cm in diameter (Dévai 2012, 149–150).

The glass sherd with the blue dot probably came from a conical cup variant with a straight wall. Conical cups were popular at the turn of the 4th and 5th centuries AD; most examples having been found in the Danube–Tisza Interfluve indicates that the type is probably of Pannonian origin (Varga 2016, 41). Cups decorated with blue dots were in fashion in the 3rd–5th centuries AD (Dévai 2012, 23). They appeared first in the eastern parts of the Roman Empire (e.g. in the coastal zone of the Pontic Region) and spread towards the west with migrating barbarian groups. Blue dot decoration came into fashion in the coastal zone of the Black Sea in the 4th century AD, appearing exclusively on cups, and such cups remained typical of the local glassware until the end of the 6th century AD (Kazanski 1994, 441; Dévai 2012, 153). The first cups in Pannonia appeared simultaneously with the emergence of the type in the Pontic Region and can be linked with the last two phases of Pannonian glass production (330–380 AD and 380 – first half of the 5th century AD; Barkóczi 1971, 87–88; Dévai 2012, 154). The second chronological group of the glass cups with blue dot decoration represents a new style of glass production that started in the final decades of the 4th century AD and linked with the Hun, Alan, and Goth foederati settled in the region at that time (Barkóczi 1971, 87–88). They occur more frequently in clearly non-Roman burials both in Pannonia and outside (Dévai 2012, 158). The colour, decoration, elaboration, and quality of the glass cups with blue dot decoration produced in Pannonia make them similar to those made in the Pontic Region and the Balkans (Dévai 2012, 159).

The custom of providing the deceased with a set of glass drinking vessels has Roman roots (Tejral 2011, 232). However, glass artefacts were also placed (occasionally) in graves in the Barbaricum already in the 1st century AD (Varga 2016, 20), just like in Germanic territories, where glass objects appeared in quantity only in the 4th and 5th centuries AD (this record including Roman and south-east European products; Fenyvesi 2020, 57). In the Sarmatian Barbaricum in the Carpathian Basin, all glass vessels known from a 2nd–3rd-century AD context come from graves of the elite, while simple type variants appear in larger quantity in burials dated between the end of the 3rd and the early 5th century. All glass vessels in the Great Hungarian Plain were imported, coming (akin to the glassware in Germanic territories) from both the Roman Empire and south-east Europe (Fenyvesi 2020, 24, 40–41). In the first centuries AD, glassware was added to the burials of the members of the Germanic and Sarmatian elite as prestige items; it seems to have become more available (and, thus, widespread) around the end of the 4th – early 5th centuries AD, but even then was added rather to the graves of the relatively affluent. This popularity concerned the semiovoidal and conical cup variants in the first place, the simple design of which – akin to pottery vessels – made them practical for everyday use (Varga 2016, 21). Although glassware was not a privilege of the top elite in barbarian societies, ornate, high-quality pieces must have been costly (Varga 2016, 17).

Chronology

The finds of the assemblage unearthed at Sirok point to a narrow period. The shield boss, the bronze buckles, the strap dividers and the strap end date the feature to Phase D1, i.e. the end of the 4th and early 5th centuries AD. The precise chronological position of the glass finds is less clear: the incised line bundle decoration became common in the Roman Empire in the 4th–5th centuries AD, and the blue dot pattern was also popular in the 4th century AD. Hemispherical cups were used in Pannonia from the middle third of the 4th century AD, replaced by semiovoidal ones in the last third of the same cen-

tury. In conclusion, the glass finds in the Sirok assemblage could be dated to the 4th century AD with certainty; based on the accompanying finds, their chronological position may probably be specified as the end of the century.

The find assemblage as a ritual phenomenon

Depositions can be classified into distinct categories based on their composition, the set of items selected for burial, structure, way of hiding, and purpose.

Ritual or profane?

The first and fundamental question is whether a depot was created for profane or ritual purposes. Profane depots are created for practical reasons, like interred treasures (Versteckfunde) made for stashing away valuables, typically in times of conflict and migration (Polányi 2008, 20). Storage depots (Verwahrfunde), just like tool and raw material depots, had similar purposes (Schmauder 2002, 35; Polányi 2008, 16). In contrast, ritual depots always served a symbolic idea: they could be offerings for a deceased for the afterlife, votive offerings to communicate with gods and spirits, or burials of powerful objects made taboo and disposed of that way (Randsborg 2006, 49).

As the depots like Versteckfunde or Verwahrfunde were meant for later use and, thus, had to be retrievable, these depots can be considered temporary – in sharp contrast with ritual ones, which are mostly permanent (Polányi 2008, 16; especially those in water or a bog). However, 'dry' deposits (interred in the ground) were not guaranteed to be retrievable later either; to ensure that, they had to be hidden at characteristic points of the landscape, or their place had to be marked for later identification. The elements of the natural setting could also have a symbolic meaning, which became important upon creating ritual depositions.

The amount of effort invested into the creation of a deposit also tells apart profane and ritual depots: while energy investment – for practical reasons – is minimal in the case of profane hoards, ritual depots were usually created with considerably more energy investment accompanied by less consideration regarding efficiency in that respect (Polányi 2008, 24). The related elements of a ritual feature may include choosing the right place (often hard to access, outside inhabited areas), consciously selecting the items for offering and arranging them in specific patterns, and digging deep or raising a mound – parts of a process requiring careful planning and the investment of considerable time and energy.

In light of the above, the feature unearthed at Sirok is a ritual deposition. Albeit its basic character (in the ground, marked by stones) fits the description of temporary depots, several details hint at it being a permanent one: the base platform with a regular shape cut into the hard bedrock, the seemingly conscious arrangement of the finds, and the structured stone packing, neither characteristic of a deposition created hastily due to some looming danger or with an eye to efficiency.

The role of the natural setting

The system of beliefs of Germanic peoples had a close connection with the natural environment, as evidenced, for example, by Tacitus: 'The Germans, however, do not consider it consistent with the grandeur of celestial beings to confine the gods within walls, or to liken them to the form of any human countenance. They consecrate woods and groves…' (Germania 9). Most ritual depots have been discovered in protected places far from the one-time living area (Polányi 2008, 26); for example, Germanic deposits were established preferably in a forested, hard-to-access place (Szenthe 2021, 570). Besides, waterside environments like swamps, bogs, and main rivers were favoured. Due to their liminal character, these areas represented hypothetical (consensual) or actual (physical) borders between lands, geopolitical units, or even cosmological entities (like the worlds of the living and the dead; Raffield 2014, 639–640). Similarly, 'dry' in-ground depots have often been established in the border zone of diverse elements of the landscape, where the mountains meet the agricultural area (e.g. a Viking Period axe deposited in a rock fissure in Berg, Norvegia; Raffield 2014, 649), an uninhabited area surrounded by one-time settlements (e.g. the site of Ure in Estonia, interpreted as a Roman Imperial Period sacrificial place; Mägi 2020, 85), at administrative borders (e.g. depots from Finnestorp and Skedemosse in Sweden; Mägi 2020, 85), etc.

The setting of the Sirok depot comprises all these liminal elements of a symbolic landscape. It has been established on top of a ridge overlooking the valley of the Kígyós Stream in a forested (and, thus, sheltered) mountain area far from any settlement, where land and water, the mountains and the valley meet. The setting of the Telki depot, dated to the AD 440–

470s, was closely similar (Szenthe et al. 2019, 12): the find assemblage was discovered in a forest on top of a narrow, north-south plateau at the feet of a steep slope, accessible from the Zsámbék Basin through a road banked in the bottom of a ravine (Szenthe et al. 2019, 15–17). Another example is Valea Strâmbă, where the depot was found in 1939 in a stone quarry in (probably the western side of) a volcanic cone east/south-east of the modern settlement; this area was certainly unsuitable for settling at the time of depositing (Gáll et al. 2016, 332–333).

Structure

The structure of a deposit may be a strong argument for its symbolic, ritual character. Unlike in the case of expressly practical profane depositions, the creation of ritual ones revolves around a symbolic central idea, which affects every choice in the process, from selecting the place to arranging the offered items. The deposit at Sirok was well-designed: the makers cut a relatively large (3 × 1.20 m), few centimetres deep, almost perfectly regular rectangular platform into the sandstone bedrock of the hill above a stream, just beneath the top. The flat bottom and straight eastern side also speak for the feature being artificial. Next, the items were carefully arranged on the platform: the strap dividers were placed first, with the fastener plates folded inwards, with the buckles on top of them and the small heap covered by the shield boss in the north-western corner of the platform. The positions of the two in situ nails at the southern end of the platform also reflect conscious arrangement: they were about a metre apart at the same depth (the remaining three nails have been found in a secondary position due probably to disturbance caused by the roots over time). Similarly, the strap end could have also been dislocated by the large tree root under which it has been discovered. Finally, the platform and the objects have been covered with a 30-centimetre-thick stone packing lined with large stones and filled with smaller ones. In summary, the design and elaboration of the plateau and the stone packing followed a plan, and their making required the investment of a considerable amount of energy, indicating that the depot had been created for ritual reasons and/or purposes.

Stone packing

Stone packing was widespread in Europe in both time and space; the early medieval occurrences were rooted in a northern/western and an eastern tradition. The custom in the northern, north-western, and north-eastern parts of the Barbaricum originates from Celtic and Germanic, while in the Pontic Region in Sarmatian and Hellenistic Scythian practice (Nagy 2018, 75). Both strains influenced the funerary practice of the peoples dwelling in the Carpathian Basin throughout the centuries, as did the burial mounds of the Roman Period (their impact manifesting in the form of stone-packed burials of the Germanic elite concentrating in the northern and western border zones of the Barbaricum, where the custom was present, as well as the eastern cluster of princely burials in the 3rd century AD, which also follow a mortuary practice with Roman precursors; Nagy 2018, 85). Stone packing is relatively rare in the Sarmatian cemeteries of the Great Hungarian Plain, even compared to the dwelling areas of Sarmatians in the east (Kulcsár 1998, 47; Kulcsár 2001, 47), with which they are not coeval (Nagy 2018, 85). Stone-packed graves concentrate mainly in zones where stone is easy to find: along the routes to the dwellings of Germanic peoples in the Upper Tisza Region and in the Gödöllő Hill Range (Nagy 2018, 88, 90; e.g. Budapest XVII. Rákoscsaba-Péceli Road, Ecser site 7 [Nagy 2018, 87], Vácszentlászló-Harminchányás, Isaszeg-Katonapallag, Isaszeg-Nagy Sándor Street 6, and Szihalom-Budaszög [Kulcsár 2001, 47]). All graves mentioned could be dated to the 3rd–4th century AD (Nagy 2018, 89), except the 4th–5th-century AD burial at Szihalom-Budaszög (Kulcsár 2001, 47), which means it is close to the Sirok feature in both time and space.

While covering a stone with stone packing could undoubtedly have its practical advantages (like providing support for the coffin or protecting the burial from looters), such a feature could also have a symbolic meaning, perhaps one linked with social position, like in the cemetery of Budapest-Péceli Road (see Nagy 2018, 57, 60–70). This element of rite cannot be linked with ethnic identity; for example, in cemeteries of the Lübsow Group, stone packing occurs in both cremation and inhumation burials (marking out the elite of different peoples), and stone-packed graves may be found on either side of the Devil's Dykes (considered the border of the Sarmatian dwelling area; Nagy 2018, 75, 92).

The composition of the find assemblage

When a find assemblage only contains certain object types and combinations, it is undoubtedly the result of conscious selection. The patterns change

in time and space, and the depositions of a period and/or area may be characterised by the prevalence of certain types (Polányi 2008, 8). The composition of the depots in the 4th–5th-century record of the Carpathian Basin is diverse but not at least accidental (Wieszner, Nagy 2021, 297): steppe-style find assemblages comprise elements of attire, weapons, and horse harness fittings, and have an overall male character (Szenthe 2021, 566), while the ones identified (and interpreted) as Germanic-style deposits are dominated by items linked with females in the first place, e.g. metal sheet brooches (Szenthe 2021, 570).

The depot from Sirok also bears the characteristics of conscious selection. It comprises a weapon (a shield boss), elements of attire (a strap end, ornamental rivets), and a horse harness (the strap dividers, buckles?), all of which can be linked with men. Nevertheless, it cannot be considered a depot of pure steppe character as this composition may also appear in deposits in other cultural circles. Moreover, the structure of the feature and the setting also argue against its creation following steppe traditions, as do the lack of burn marks on the finds and that of a general funerary character, both of which are essential traits of steppe-type deposits.

Ritual damage

There may be a deeper, symbolic meaning behind the intentional damaging of utility objects. Ritual damage cannot be proven in every case as the object could suffer damage during use; however, that is highly unlikely in some cases. Several examples can be cited from the Migration Period archaeological record: shattered vessels and animal bones, the remains of a feast (Kulcsár 1998, 47, 73), folded, burnt horse harnesses found in the perimeter ditches of Late Sarmatian graves (Wieszner, Nagy 2021, 281), and broken mirrors and swords in the graves themselves (Kulcsár 1998, 65). Bent, twisted, and flattened weapons are frequent in the record of Germanic peoples (Czarnecka, Kontny 2009, 30). Ritual find assemblages from the Hun Period often contain damaged metal objects, mainly folded and burnt horse harnesses (Wieszner, Nagy 2021, 282), and the large metal cauldrons, typical of the period, are also often damaged or fragmentary when interred (Szenthe 2021, 568).

The possibility of intentional damage arose in context with the find assemblage from Sirok, too, as indicated perhaps by the damaged shield boss and the broken glass cups, and perhaps the condition of the strap dividers – not to mention the silver strap end, in the case of which the lack of a fastening mechanism (rivet holes) may be explained by that part having been severed when the metal fitting was cut from the strap.

In the case of weapons, it is usually problematic to make a difference between the traces of use-related and ritual damage. When a weapon has been repaired, the related damage was (or has been) probably use-related, as the effort was made in order to make it fit for being used again (Zieling 1989, 322; Czarnecka, Kontny 2009, 30). As opposed to repair, ritual damage renders the object unserviceable, thus removing it from use. There may be several reasons behind that: the ritual 'killing' of the artefact so it can follow and serve its owner in the afterlife; the fear of the deceased 'coming back', and making sure, therefore, that he cannot use his weapons anymore (Czarnecka, Kontny 2009, 39); or the destruction of an object that for some reason 'became dangerous' (Randsborg 2006, 49).

As for shield bosses, use-related damage occurs mainly on variants with a pointed spike and is less characteristic of the more sturdy hemispherical and domed ones, of which hardly any repaired specimen is known (in their case, repair is usually restricted to the replacement of the broken or missing fastening nails; Czarnecka, Kontny 2009, 34–35). The 5–7 cm long tear on the conical mantle of the shield boss from Sirok can be identified most probably as post-depositional damage. One must keep in mind that the umbo was deposited separate from the shield, as indicated by the lack of a shield grip, at least four of the five fastening nails, and the fact that there was simply no room for a complete shield in that part of the feature where it was found. Removal from the shield can be considered a form of ritual damage, as it rendered the shield boss unserviceable and useless.

Intentional damaging of horse harnesses was widely practised during the Migration Period. The strap divider discs from Sirok, however, do not bear clear traces indicating damage by fire or folding: both are complete, albeit the silver coating has been worn off at places, and the outer ring is worn thin at points, both of which are wear marks related to prolonged use. The discs are only mentioned here because of their arrangement within the assemblage: according to the description of the man who found them, both discs were lying with all fastener plates folded inside, towards the centre of the disc, which suggests they had been cut from all straps before internment – which is not damaging in the strict sense

of the word but rendered them unserviceable nonetheless, depriving them of their original function, similarly to the shield boss which had been dismantled from the shield preceding internment.

The breaking of vessels was an important element of rites from the Neolithic (Polányi 2008, 24). In the Migration Period, the most conspicuous occurrence of the custom was the breaking of metal cauldrons in the Hun Period: while some cauldrons were intact upon internment, others were heavily damaged, and in some cases, only a fragment of the vessel became deposited. Probably every variation had its own symbolic meaning: perhaps cauldrons represented community feasts and, thus, intact vessels symbolised the whole community, damaged ones the loss of the community's integrity because of the death of a member, and fragments could also bear a specific meaning (Szenthe 2021, 568). The fragments of the three glass cups at Sirok were found in the southern zone of the stone packing. Interestingly, the three vessels they belong to represent different types, and only a single sherd from each had been included in the assemblage (two of the four sherds match), indicating that the cups had been shattered intentionally, and a single fragment from each was added to the deposit. Breaking them could be part of the deposition ritual, which perhaps included a libation ceremony, the paraphernalia of which – the glass cups – having their own symbolic meaning, also became part of the deposit.

Food and drink offerings

A characteristic of ritual deposits is their being associated with eating and drinking (Polányi 2008, 26). Vessels or animal bones in a deposit may indicate ritual feasts, albeit the latter can also be the remains of a sacrificed animal that was not necessarily eaten. The food offering in a grave, an element of the funerary rite, also falls in this category, just like the burial feast, the depositing of a large cauldron symbolising community feasts, and libation ceremonies. The fragments of the three glass cups from Sirok indicate that the chain of acts related to the creation of the deposit included drinking. That only a single fragment from every cup had been included in the depot suggests intentionality; conclusively, the breaking of the glass vessels could have also been part of the ritual.

The purpose of ritual depositions

Ritual depositions have been classified into several categories based on purpose and the thought behind their creation. These find assemblages are especially frequent in the steppe zone, where their occurrences are often associated with burials: most of them are clearly funerary deposits interred in the mantle of lesser burial mounds or large kurgans or their vicinity (Wieszner, Nagy 2021, 293). While this kind of deposition is not typical of Central Europe in the period (Szenthe 2021, 567), some deposits associated with burials are known (see Wieszner, Nagy 2021). When a deposit cannot be linked with a burial, it is usually interpreted as a votive offering. As anything can have both capital and symbolic value, any object can be an ex-voto. Some offerings represent power and wealth, others symbolise the pledge to someone or something (Raffield 2014, 649), while the offerings to gods and spirits may express gratitude or attempt to secure their favour (Randsborg 2006, 58), the latter working upon the idea of 'do, ut des', i.e. that the person offering the goods expects something in exchange from the entity receiving them (Polányi 2008, 12). Besides, some objects are considered dangerous or to have some kind of power: for example, an object can 'gain power' during its life (as a subject of exchange, having been paraphernalia in rituals, or used in fights), which makes it potentially dangerous and, thus, a taboo that cannot be simply disposed of but has to be rendered out of use permanently and irrevocably, i.e. by removing it from the world of the living (Randsborg 2006, 49).

The feature unearthed at Sirok does not contain human remains, and so far, none is known from its vicinity either. The only identified barbarian site in the area of the modern village – a still-unpublished burial linked with Vandals, of which little information is available in the literature – is located north of it (Szabó 1969, 47 without further specification). The sources are inconsistent, mentioning an umbo, a pair of spurs, shears, spears, and fragments of an iron sheet or plate and bronze and pottery vessels (Török 1933–1934, 193; Szabó 1969, 47; K. Végh 1975, 68) having been recovered from the site. It is no longer possible to determine how many burials these objects belonged to, but probably a single one (personal communication by Eszter Soós) from the 3rd century AD (Szabó 1969, 43). Interestingly, no coeval settlement (nor of the Przeworsk Culture; Soós 2019, 81) or one dated to the Roman Imperial Period or even only the Migration Period is known from the administrative area of Sirok.[4] The closest known Migration Period archaeological feature is a Sarmatian settlement (identified by field walks)

in Egerbakta-Szóláth-völgy and a Sarmatian grave from the turn of the 4th and 5th centuries AD.[5] While the burial is coeval with the deposit, there is no connection between them.

Based on the lack of a related burial, one might exclude that the deposit has a funerary character; however, there is still the possibility to interpret it as a symbolic grave, where the large rectangular platform is the grave pit, even its north–south orientation matching the trends of the region in this period (Kulcsár 1998, 19; the opposite, south–north orientation – as here without a skeleton one cannot decide which was the 'head' side – was also common in Sarmatian cemeteries at that time; Kulcsár 1998, 16). Furthermore, stone packing in the focus region is usually associated with burials. The arrangement of the objects, however, argues against the interpretation of the feature as a cenotaph: the horse harness parts, the buckles, and the umbo were piled up in the north-western corner, the strap end was lying near them, while the ornamental nails scattered in the southern part of the feature, which does not match their wearing position. In contrast, the items in the deposit unearthed at Telki were arranged to outline the regions of a human body laid to rest oriented with the head towards the north (Szenthe et al. 2019, 14), indicating the efforts made to deposit them in a pattern where each object is close to its original wearing position.

In summary, as the deposit unearthed at Sirok-Alsó-Rozsnak is not connected to any known burial, it cannot be interpreted as a steppe-style funerary offering. It may be a symbolic grave and, thus, of mortuary character, but the arrangement of the items within the platform tells against that (as the objects were not placed in a wearing position). Based on the details, the feature certainly has a ritual character; therefore, it was supposedly a votive offering.

The cultural background of the deposit

The deposits created in Central Europe in the 4th and 5th centuries AD represent diverse coexisting cultural traditions (Szenthe et al. 2019, 16). The main distinction between the find assemblages representing the Germanic and the steppe traditions is based on their gender association: the ones comprising items related to the female gender are considered Germanic, while those consisting of objects linked with males are thought to be of steppe character. Albeit the finds in the Sirok assemblage – a piece of weaponry, horse harness and belt fittings – are undoubtedly 'manly', one cannot state that the deposit is of steppe character because it is not related to a burial (although it may be interpreted as a symbolic grave) and the deposited artefacts do not display marks of burning, which is an important element of the depots created following steppe traditions (Szenthe 2021, 566). Moreover, the forested mountain area of the findspot is also typical of Germanic-style depositions. The stone packing is no argument in favour of either tradition as it appears in both Roman, Germanic, and Eastern-style graves of the period, marking social status rather than ethnic identity.

The connection network outlined by the artefacts is a lace of diverse cultures. The shield boss resembles the types of the Przeworsk Culture while adding a shield to the grave is a Germanic custom. The strap end with the profiled ending is not identical to any known Late Roman stap end type, but its origins may be sought in the limes area in Pannonia. The precursors of the horse harness appear in Crimea in the Pontic Region, which also evolved from Roman types. However, furnishing the burials with a horse harness is an Eastern European custom introduced to Central and Western Europe during the Migration Period by Huns, Alans, and East Germanic peoples. The belts with a buckle with a pin bent on the frame got into the record of the Carpathian Basin in a similar way. Hemispherical glass cups and glassware with incised line bundles were widespread in the Roman Empire; the earliest appearances in the Barbaricum could be dated to the 4th century AD. Semiovoidal cups were typical to the Pontic Region, just like the drinking vessels adorned with blue dots, a variant that emerged there. Both types became significant in the record of Pannonia at the end of the 4th – early 5th century AD; the finds of this horizon could be linked with the settling of the foederati.

Summary

The site and the excavation

The depot found on a survey trip by a metal detectorist was reported to the local museum in December 2020; it consisted of a shield boss, two buckles, and two strap divider discs from a horse harness. Its findspot was authenticated by excavation in March 2021. The site lies on top of a ridge accompanying the Kígyós Stream from the east, in the lands of

Alsó-Rozsnak, east/south-east of the modern village of Sirok. The excavation brought to light a rectangular, north-south oriented feature around the find spot of the artefacts; it consisted of a flat platform cut into the bedrock and a stone packing covering it. The stone packing was structured with a frame made from large stones and filled with smaller ones. Based on their shape and design, both the platform and the stone packing were artificial.

Finds and chronology

Originally, the finds recovered by the metal detectorist (the shield boss, the buckles and the strap dividers) had been piled up in the north-western corner of the feature.

The conical shield boss is a Csongrád/Zieling L type variant, which became widespread from the territory of the Przeworsk Culture as far as Abkhazia. The first occurrences in the eastern part of the Carpathian Basin can be dated to the end of the 4th century AD; they can be considered a chronological indicator in this region, dating the feature from Sirok to Phase D1. The way the umbo from Sirok was fastened to the shield (with five single nails) has parallels in the north and the Carpathian Basin but no close analogies. The single recovered nail associated with the shield boss is disproportionate, indicating either an impractically thick shield or that the nail was not used for fastening the umbo to the shield.

Both bronze buckles have a bulging oval frame, a pin with an ornate tip bent on the frame, and a rectangular buckle plate. Their precursors appear in the record of the Sântana de Mureş–Chernyakhov Culture, Crimea, and the northern Caucasus, while analogies are known everywhere in Central Europe, where the type became in fashion from the end of the 4th century AD. As they were not interred in a wearing position, the original function of the buckles in the depot from Sirok has remained a question. They could be part of belts or a horse harness, but based on their size, not shoes.

The silver-foiled strap divider discs belonged to the horse harness. The pattern of the openwork decoration has no exact analogies, although the discs in the hoard discovered at Coşoveni de Jos can be mentioned as the closest ones. The precursors of these prestige items are known from the Pontic Region; their style is rooted in Roman traditions. However, based on their punched decoration, the specimens from Coşoveni could be dated to the end of the 4th – early 5th centuries AD. Conclusively, the strap divider discs found at Sirok can also be dated to Phase D1. They could be part of the headgear, the breast collar harness, or the breaching; both feature heavy wear marks indicating prolonged use.

A silver strap end with profiled ending was recovered from the western part of the feature. Its analogies are known from coeval contexts (turn of the 4th and 5th centuries AD) from Zagyvarékas and Suceagu. The fastener mechanism of the Sirok piece was probably missing upon discovery (perhaps it had been cut off), as the artefact did not include any functional solution for fastening it to the strap.

Two ornate nails were discovered in situ in the southern zone of the feature and three more amongst the stones. The heads of four of the five were covered in silver foil. They are too small to have been used for fastening the umbo to the shield and probably belonged to a belt instead.

The southern end of the stone packing also hid four glass fragments: a sherd from a straight-walled cup with a perhaps conical bottom and blue dot decoration, another from a cup of similar shape but adorned with engraved line bundles, and two matching sherds (a rim and a side fragment) of a hemispherical or semiovoidal cup, also with incised line bundle decoration. The characteristics of their shape and decoration date all cups to the 4th century AD, while the accompanying finds specify this to probably the end of the century.

Conclusively, based on the umbo, the buckles, the horse harness and the strap end, the find assemblage from Sirok was interred at the end of the 4th – early 5th century AD, a transition between the Late Roman Imperial and Hun periods.

Ritual deposition

Diverse evidence corroborates the ritual character of the feature, such as the symbolic elements of the natural environment surrounding the site (uninhabited, forested area near a watercourse, where the mountains and the valley meet); the structure of the feature (the plateau carved into the bedrock and the stone packing indicate a conscious planning, large energy investment and permanent character); the conscious selection of object types (weaponry, elements of attire and horse harness parts) and their structured arrangement on the plateau as well as the presence of glass vessels (drinking, libation ceremony). The remains of the glass cups (of which only a single

sherd from each had been added to the deposit), the shield boss, and the strap divider discs raise the possibility of deliberate damage.

The purpose of the deposit

As the depot unearthed at Sirok did not contain human remains, it cannot be interpreted as a burial, and no graves are known from its vicinity to which it could belong. Despite the above, one cannot exclude the funerary character of the depot as it perhaps can be interpreted as a symbolic grave. However, the arrangement of the finds argues against an interpretation as a cenotaph, as the items were not arranged in a wearing position on the plateau. Conclusively, the find assemblage was most probably a votive offering or gift.

Cultural background

The feature unearthed at Sirok is a depot including male gender markers like the elements of weaponry, attire, and horse harness. Despite that, it cannot be interpreted as a steppe-type deposit because Germanic traits (the setting and the shield boss) are more significant, and the assemblage contains artefacts of Roman origin (strap end) typical also to the Pontic Region (glassware and horse harness). This blend of cultural traits, obviously, cannot be linked with a single ethnic group; however, the dating of the feature – to the end of the 4th – early 5th centuries AD – and the characteristics described above point to the barbaric groups which, fleeing the conquering Huns, arrived from the east and settled in the Carpathian Basin at that time.

Notes

1 This paper is a reworked version of the author's MA dissertation entitled *A siroki áldozati leletegyüttes* [The ritual deposit of Sirok] submitted to the Institute of Archaeological Sciences of the Eötvös Loránd University in 2023. I am grateful to Dr Zsófia Rácz, my consultant, as well as Dr Gergely Szenthe, leading archaeologist of the excavation at Sirok, Dr Tivadar Vida, and Dr Kata Dévai for their help with the writing of the original dissertation. I am also indebted to everyone who contributed to my work with professional advice or in any other way. Finally, I thank Dr Katalin Sebők for the English translation of the manuscript.

2 József Barta also reported on Iron Age finds, including a burnt chain belt, iron knife, and other iron fragments, from the lower end of the ridge near the stone packing.

3 Such solutions appear on coeval finds from Vennebo (GHA 1988, 450, XI. 7. f), Jakuszowice (Godłowski 1995, Abb. 4, 1a–b, 2e–f), Kačin, Untersiebenbrunn, Bar, Coşoveni de Jos (Kazanski, Mastykova 2017, Figs. 2, 4, 5, and 7), and those from an older context in Kerch-Adzhimushkay (Sharov 2022, Ris. 84, 11, 17, Ris. 130, B/11).

4 Hungarian National Museum Archaeology Database, https://archeodatabase.hnm.hu/hu/s?s=egerbakta&v=list, 10th October 2023

5 Hungarian National Museum Archaeology Database, https://archeodatabase.hnm.hu/hu/s?s=egerbakta&v=list, 10th October 2023

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RITUÁLIS EGYÜTTES SIROK HATÁRÁBÓL

Összefoglalás

Sirok (Heves vármegye, Magyarország) község kelet-délkeleti határában, Alsó-Rozsnak lelőhelyen, 2020 decemberében fémkeresős találat egy Csongrád/Zieling-L típusú pajzsdudort, két ovális karikájú, négyzetes testű bronzcsatot és két, lószerszámhoz tartozó, áttört díszű, ezüstözött bronz szíjelosztó korongot hozott napvilágra. A leletek előkerülési helyét 2021 márciusában a Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum régésze, Szenthe Gergely vezetésével, műszeres felderítéssel és feltárással sikerült azonosítani, melynek során maga az objektum és további leletek: ezüstözött fejű bronz díszszegecsek, profilált végű ezüst szíjvég, valamint két bekarcolt díszű és egy kék pettyes üvegpohár töredékei kerültek elő. A pajzsdudor, a csatok, a lószerszám és a szíjvég egyöntetűen a D1 periódusra, azaz a 4. század végére – 5. század elejére keltezik a depót.

A leletek egy mesterségesen kialakított, É–D tájolású, 300 × 120 cm területű, téglalap alakú, az alapkőzetbe 5–6 cm-t lemélyülő, egyenesre faragott aljú

platformon helyezkedtek el: a korábban kiszedett leletek az objektum északnyugati sarkában, egymásra helyezve (a szíjelosztókra tették a csatokat, majd ráborították a pajzsdudort), a szíjvég a plató nyugati, a szegecsek és az üvegtöredékek pedig a déli részében. Mindezt strukturált módon kőpakolással borították: a nagyobb köveket a platform sarkaira és peremére, a kisebbeket a belső területre helyezték. Ez a rend a gyökerek általi jelentős bolygatás ellenére is megfigyelhető volt. A kövek az északkeleti részen hiányoztak, ami valószínűleg recens bolygatás eredménye, mivel a helyszínen friss beásás nyomait azonosították, és az objektum többi része érintetlennek bizonyult.

A depólelet rituális jellegét több tényező is alátámasztja. Az objektum struktúrája arra utal, hogy a platformot és a kőpakolást kétségkívül emberi kéz alkotta, és maga a helyszín is a „szimbolikus táj" jellegzetességeivel bír. A depó a Kígyós-patak völgyére merőlegesen húzódó gerinc tetején, erdős, lakatlan területen került elő; a völgy és a hegyvidék találkozása és a víz közelsége pedig, szimbolikus vagy tényleges liminális jellegénél fogva, gyakori eleme a rituális depozitumokat körülvevő természeti környezetnek. A leletegyüttes összetételében megfigyelhető a tárgyak szelekciója (fegyver, viseleti elem, lószerszám), illetve a leletek elrendezése sem véletlenszerű, ami a lószerszám-csat-pajzsdudor együttesnél egyértelműen kitűnik. A depó struktúrája tehát előre tervezésről és nagy energiabefektetésről tanúskodik, ami a profán depozitumokkal ellentétben a rituális jellegűek esetében tipikus. A pajzsdudor, a lószerszám és az üvegpoharak esetében a szándékos rongálás megléte is feltételezhető. Az étel-, illetve italfogyasztással való asszociáció is kimutatható az üvegpoharak jelenlétével.

A sztyeppei típusú áldozati leletegyüttesek egyik jellemzője, hogy kapcsolatban állnak temetkezéssel. A siroki depó azonban nem tartalmazott emberi maradványokat, és nem is mutatható ki semmilyen kapcsolat egyéb temetkezéssel. A funerális jelleg mégsem zárható ki teljes mértékben, ugyanis felmerülhet az objektum jelképes sírként való értelmezése is. Az effajta interpretáció viszont kérdéses, mivel a tárgyak nem a viseleti helyzetnek megfelelően helyezkedtek el a platformon. A rituális jelleg azonban bizonyos, ezért a depóleletet akár votív felajánlásként is értelmezhetjük.

Összességében tehát egy rituális karakterű, a 4. század végén – 5. század elején földbe került strukturált depozitumot sikerült feltárni Sirokon, amelynek összetételében érvényesül a szelekció (fegyver, viseleti elem és lószerszám), az elrejtés módjában pedig a germán világot tükrözi. A leletek római, germán és fekete-tengeri előképei, analógiái is összetett kulturális hátteret rajzolnak ki, ami alapján valószínűsíthető, hogy a deponálás a hun hódítás következtében keletről érkező, a Kárpát-medencében megtelepedő új barbár csoportokkal hozható összefüggésbe.