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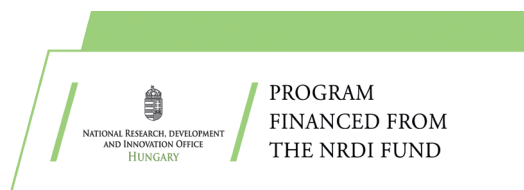
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TARTALOM – INDEX

FROM LOCAL TO MICROREGIONAL AND BEYOND: SPATIAL STRUCTURES IN AND AROUND THE EARLY MEDIEVAL CARPATHIAN BASIN

Papers submitted to the session organised at the 28th EAA Annual Meeting, Budapest, Hungary,
31 August–3 September 2022

Edited by Ivan BUGARSKI – Erwin GÁLL – Gergely SZENTHE

Ivan BUGARSKI

- Space use in Syrmia during the Migration and Avar periods 7
Térhasználat a Szerémségben a népvándorlás korában és az avar korban 29

Bartłomiej Szymon SZMONIEWSKI

- Central places or ritual places and the oldest hillforts in Slavic territory
in Central and Eastern Europe (5th/6th–7th centuries) 31
Központi- vagy rituális helyek, és a szláv terület legkorábbi magaslati erődjai
Közép- és Kelet-Európában (5/6.–7. század) 55

Roman SAUER – Falko DAIM – Katharina RICHTER

- Petrographical and mineralogical analyses of pottery from the cemetery of
Mödling-An der Goldenen Stiege (Lower Austria): Methods and preliminary
results 57
Mödling-An der Goldenen Stiege lelőhelyről (Alsó-Ausztria) származó
kerámiák petrográfiai és ásványösszetételi elemzése. Módszerek és
előzetes eredmények 78

Zsófia BÁSTI – Bence GULYÁS

- Burials with sheepskins in light of the changes between the Early and
Late Avar periods 81
Juhbőrös temetkezések a kora és késő avar kori változások kontextusában 107

Réka FÜLÖP

- Typological analysis of beads from selected Late Avar cemeteries 109
Késő avar kori temetők gyöngyanyagának tipológiai elemzése 134

Pia ŠMALCELJ NOVAKOVIĆ – Anita RAPAN PAPEŠA

- Make me a star. Crescent hoop earrings from the southwestern edge
of the Khaganate – Identity and status markers 135
Csillagok, csillagok... Csillag alakú csüngővel ellátott fülbevalók
mint az identitás és a társadalmi helyzet markerei az avar kaganátus
délnyugati peremvidékén 159

Erwin GÁLL – Levente DACZÓ

- Asymmetrical relationship between a peripheral region and the Late Avar Khaganate: The Sighişoara microregion in the Early Middle Ages (7th/8th–9th centuries) and the importance of microregional research 161
- Aszimmetrikus regionális kapcsolatok a késő avar kaganátusban. Segesvár kistérsége a kora középkorban (7/8–9. század) és a mikroregionális kutatás fontossága 192

Natália GERTHOFFEROVÁ

- ‘Nitra-type’ cast earrings in the Middle and Lower Danube region 193
- „Nyitra-típusú” öntött fülbevalók a Közép-Duna-medencében és az Al-Dunánál 204

Milica RADIŠIĆ – Viktorija UZELAC

- The southernmost exceptional archaeological discovery from the Hungarian Conquest period: The significance of several finds from the Bačka region (Serbia) 207
- A legdélebbi jelentős honfoglalás kori lelet. Néhány Bácska területén előkerült tárgy jelentőségéről 235

Cristina PARASCHIV-TALMAȚCHI

- Considerations on the production and distribution of pottery in Dobruja at the beginning of the Middle Ages 237
- Gondolatok a dobrudzsai kerámiaelőállításról és -terjesztésről a középkor elején 252

* * *

Kristóf István SZEGEDI – György LENGYEL – Tibor MARTON

- The problem of ‘Epipalaeolithic’ in the Carpathian Basin: Lithic finds from Hont-Várhegy, Northern Hungary 255
- A Kárpát-medence „epipaleolitikumának” kérdéséhez: pattintott kövek Hont-Várhegyről (Észak-Magyarország) 265

János Gábor TARBAY – Zoltán KIS – Boglárka MARÓTI

- X-ray and neutron radiography of Late Bronze Age weapons and armour from Western Hungary 267
- Késő bronzkori, nyugat-dunántúli fegyverek és páncélok röntgen és neutronradiográfias vizsgálata 280

János Gábor TARBAY – Tamás PÉTERVÁRY – András KOVÁCS – Bence SOÓS

- A Late Bronze Age collar from Somló Hill: Preliminary report on Somló hoard VII 283
- Késő bronzkori nyakék a Somlóról. Előzetes jelentés a VII. depóról 310

Bence SOÓS – Balázs LUKÁCS – Csilla LÍBOR

A unique Early Iron Age brooch from Somló Hill	313
Egy különleges kora vaskori fibula a Somló-hegyről	324

RECENSIONES

Rózsa DÉKÁNY

Beszédes József: Római kori sírkövek Carnuntumból és városi territoriumáról	327
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TÓTH Boglárka

Jiří Košta, Jiří Hošek, Petr Žákovský: Ninth to Mid-Sixteenth Century Swords from the Czech Republic in their European Context. Part I: The Finds. Part II: Swords of Medieval and Early Renaissance Europe as a Technological and Archaeological Source	331
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ASYMMETRICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A PERIPHERAL REGION AND THE LATE AVAR KHAGANATE.

THE SIGHIȘOARA MICROREGION IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES (7TH/8TH–9TH CENTURIES) AND THE IMPORTANCE OF MICROREGIONAL RESEARCH

Erwin GÁLL¹  – Levente DACZÓ² 

Altogether, nine sites dated to the 7th/8–9th/10th centuries have been recorded during planned and rescue excavations and fieldwalking campaigns in the Sighișoara microregion, which lies in the inner part of the Transylvanian Basin, almost at the centre of a distinct geological and tectonic unit. Only four of these have been excavated (Sighișoara-Weinberg / Dealul Viilor: ‘Settlement / Siedlung’, and ‘Funerary site / Gräberfeld’, Albești-Cetățea, Albești-Școală), while the others were identified only through fieldwalking surveys, i.e. their extent and character have yet to be specified. There is no decisive and firm archaeological evidence that the microregion of Sighișoara and the eastern parts of the Transylvanian Basin were active parts of the political power network of the Late Avar Khaganate. These territories may be better described as a land of politically unorganised communities with clearly asymmetrical links to the power centre and the peripheral regions of the Avar Khaganate.

Az Erdélyi-medence belsejének különálló geológiai és tektonikai egységét alkotó segesvári (Sighișoara) kistérségből kilenc lelőhelyet ismerünk a 7/8–9/10. századból. Ezek közül mindössze négy lelőhelyet tártak fel régészeti ásatások során (Segesvár-Szülőhegy: település és temető, Fehéregyháza/Albești-Cetățea, Fehéregyháza/Albești-Școală), a többi lelőhelyet terepbejárás során azonosították, azaz kiterjedésük és jellegük nem egyértelmű. Emiatt nincs egyértelmű bizonyíték arra, hogy a segesvári mikrorégió, valamint az Erdélyi-medence keleti területei aktív részei voltak a késő avar kaganátus hatalmi hálózatának. A területen inkább politikailag szervezetlen közösségekről beszélhetünk, amelyek aszimmetrikus kapcsolatban álltak az Avar Kaganátus központjával és periférikus régióival.

Keywords: *Early medieval archaeology, 7th/8th–9th/10th centuries, Sighișoara microregion, Late Avar Period, settlement archaeology*

Kulcsszavak: *Kora középkori régészet, 7/8.–9/10. század, Segesvár/Sighișoara kistérség, késő avar kor, település-régészet*

The Sighișoara microregion lies in the inner part of the Transylvanian Basin,¹ almost at the centre of a distinct geological and tectonic unit. Altogether, nine sites dated to the Late Avar and post-Avar periods, i.e., the 7th/8–9th/10th centuries, have been recorded during planned and rescue excavations and fieldwalking campaigns in our microregion. Only four of these have been excavated (Sighișoara-Weinberg: ‘Siedlung’ / ‘Settlement’, and ‘Gräberfeld’ / ‘Funerary site’, Albești-Cetățea, Albești-Școală), while the others were identified only through fieldwalking surveys, i.e. their extent and character have yet to be specified. Therefore, we must be very cautious in making observations and conclusions related to them. The archaeological record of the Late Avar Period (dating from the late 7th to the 9/10th centuries in general) in the studied microregion has a markedly different character from that in the west-

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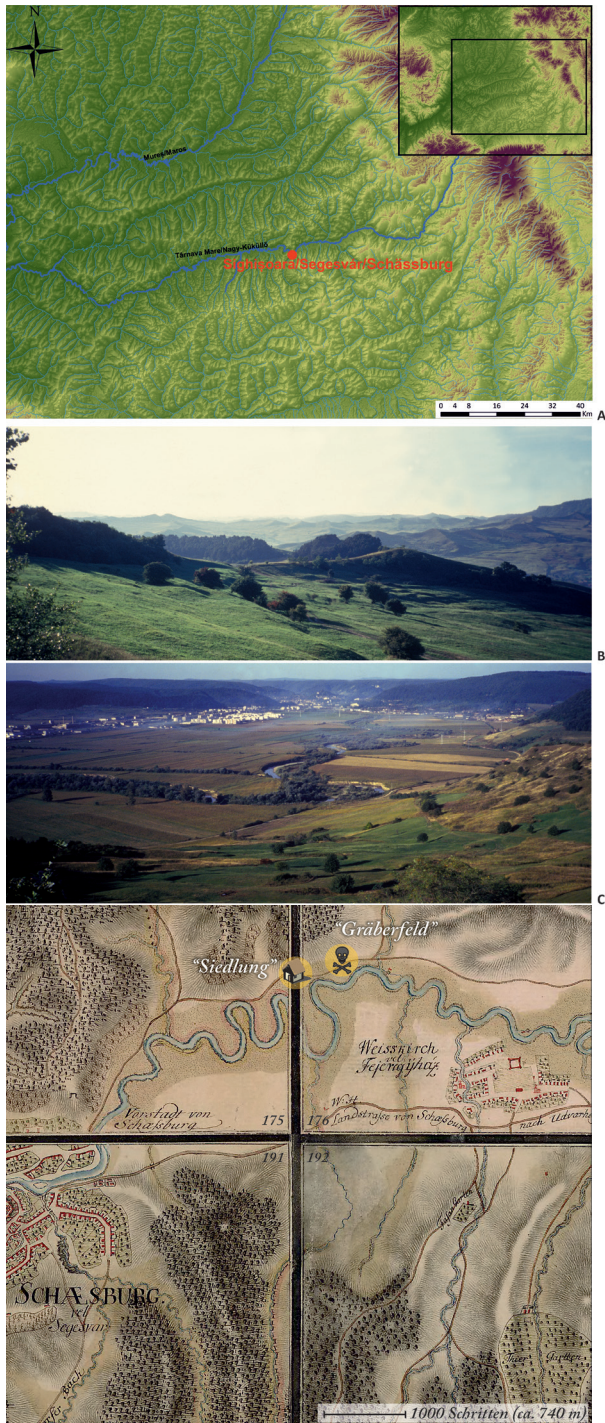


Fig. 1. A: The Sighișoara microregion on the Transylvanian Plateau; B–C: the Târnava Basin in the east and west, photographed from the vicinity of the site; D: the Josephinian Land Survey (*Josephinische Landesaufnahme*) of the Sighișoara microregion with the two sites at Weinberg (Harhoiu et al. 2020, Abb. 3)

1. kép. A: Segeșvár kistérségének földrajzi helyzete az Erdélyi-medencében; B–C: A Küküllő medencéje keleti és nyugati irányban, a lelőhely közeléből fényképezve; D: az első osztrák katonai felmérés (*Josephinische Landesaufnahme*) a segeșvári kistérségről a Weinbergben található két lelőhellyel (Harhoiu et al. 2020, Abb. 3)

ern parts of the Transylvanian Basin. The cemeteries and burial sites identified in the western part of the Transylvanian Basin represent the periphery of the cultural habitat of the Carpathian Basin. The respective cultural phenomenon emerged in the west and spread from the area of Vienna, and can be traced up to the central Mureș Region – but not east of that. In conclusion, there is no decisive and firm archaeological evidence that the microregion of Sighișoara and the eastern parts of the Transylvanian Basin were active parts of the political power network of the Late Avar Khaganate. These territories may be better described as a land of politically unorganised communities with clearly asymmetrical links to the power centre and the peripheral regions of the Avar Khaganate. These are regions of populations with ‘no history’.

Introduction: ideologies and archaeology

The ideologies of the 19th and 20th-century nation states fundamentally determined the directions, approach, and, thus, results of archaeological research on the Late Avar Period, and we still have to deal with the aftermath of this early phase today. Network theory-based micro- and mesoregional research only gained ground recently in Eastern Europe. This paper, as expressed in the title, focuses on the Late Avar Period evolution of the Sighișoara microregion.

Matching the research trends of the time in Romania, the archaeological investigation of the 7th–9/10th centuries in the Sighișoara area² took off after 1946,³ with the foundation of a national archaeological network. Professional archaeological excavations targeting the period in focus started in this microregion in the 1970s (Harhoiu et al. 2020, 13–29). In this respect, this paper may be considered a pioneer study on the micro- and macroregional processes (migrations, wars, etc.) that influenced and determined the development of the Sighișoara microregion in the Early Middle Ages.

The geographical environment of the microregion and the archaeological sites of the period

The Sighișoara microregion is a depression in the central basin of the Târnava Mare River, which descends from the east and runs towards the west, from the Eastern Carpathians to the centre of Transylvania and the Mureș Valley. It is relatively open

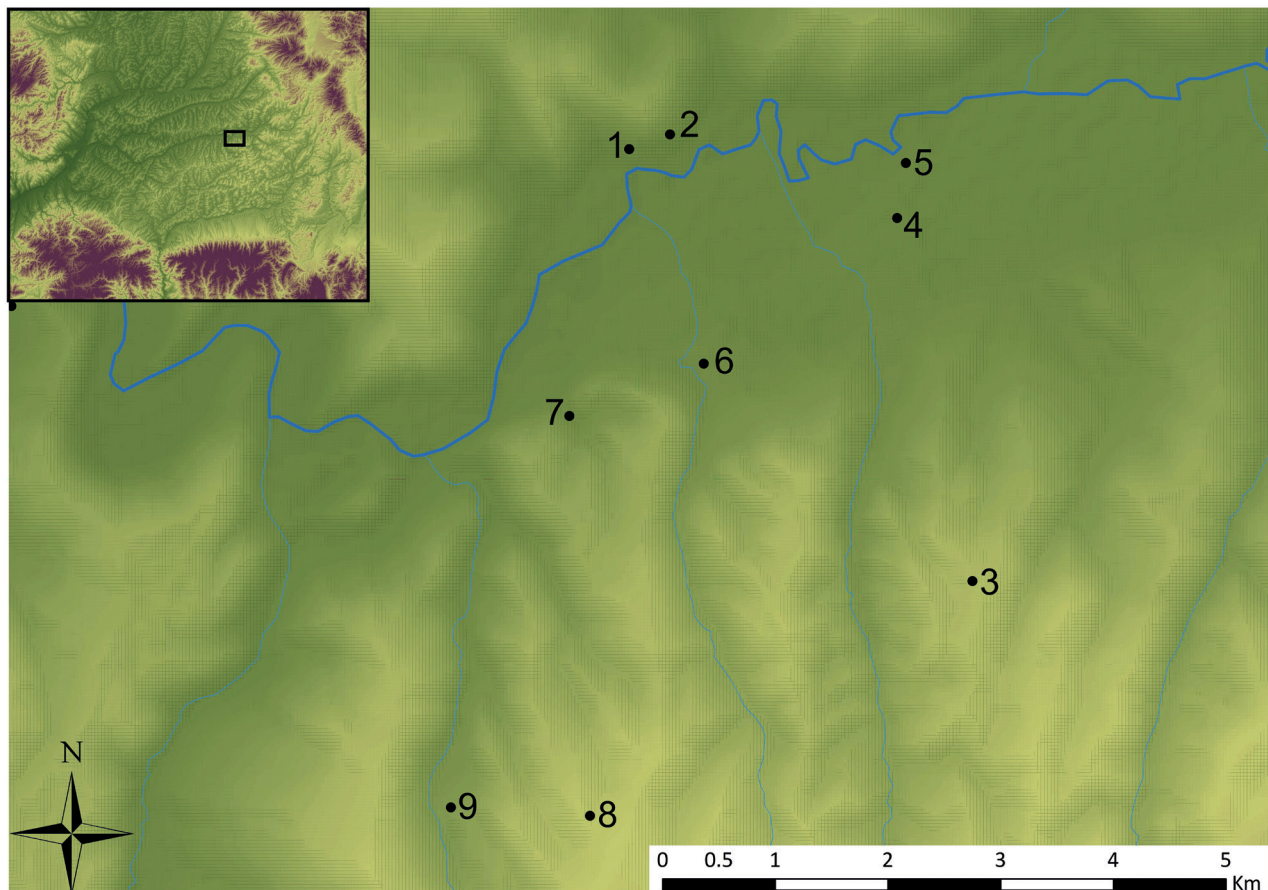


Fig. 2. The geographical distribution of late and post-Avar sites in the Sighișoara microregion. 1: Sighișoara-Weinberg 'Settlement'; 2: Sighișoara-Weinberg 'Funerary site'; 3: Albești-La Cetățea/Sub Cetățea; 4: Albești-Școală; 5: Albești-Valea Hotarului; 6: Sighișoara-Valea Dracului-'La podul de beton'; 7: Sighișoara-Cartierul Plopilor-Herțes; 8: Sighișoara-Valea Cânepii (Hanfau)-În fundătura; 9: Sighișoara-Între Glimeii/Zwischen den Bücheln (Aurel Vlaicu)

2. kép. Segesvár kistérségének késő- és poszt-avar kori lelőhelyeinek földrajzi elterjedése. 1: Segesvár-Weinberg 'Település'; 2: Segesvár-Weinberg 'Temető'; 3: Fehéregyháza-La Cetățea/Sub Cetățea; 4: Fehéregyháza-Școală; 5: Fehéregyháza-Valea Hotarului; 6: Segesvár-Valea Dracului-'La podul de beton'; 7: Segesvár-Cartierul Plopilor-Herțes; 8: Segesvár-Valea Cânepii (Hanfau)-În fundătura; 9: Segesvár-Între Glimeii/Zwischen den Bücheln (Aurel Vlaicu)

towards the west, the southwest, the east, and the southeast. It lies in the inner part of the Transylvanian Plateau, at almost the centre of a distinct geological and tectonic unit (Fig. 1).

From a topographical point of view, the microregion is located in the valley of the Târnava Mare River, running in a gorge-like, deep bed cut into a terrace system of hard Pontian sandstone bedrock. Its micromorphology makes the area a key part of the Târnava Mare corridor, as the gorge is an unskippable crossing point towards the eastern and southeastern parts of Transylvania. The relief in the Sighișoara area was part of an ancient plateau of the Pannonian Sea that had formed hundreds of millennia ago; the Târnava Mare River and its tributaries carved it into terraces, and meadows developed along the valleys of these watercourses. The interfluvies south of

Târnava Mare are parallel and perpendicular to the river. From an environmental point of view, the microregion is quite varied, including a great diversity of landscape components and a particularly high variety of relief and climate types and natural resources, which have determined the oscillating evolution of the human habitat (Török 1939, 199–220; Grecu et al. 2008, 7–15).

The Josephinian Land Survey (*Josephinische Landesaufnahme*) recorded the Sighișoara (Schäsburg/Segesvár) microregion in four sectors, illustrating its elementary characteristics that shaped the landscape: the Târnava Mare River is the 'backbone', surrounded by hilly areas portrayed with hashes instead of contour lines, and tributaries connecting the area with other microregions in the south and north.

Archaeological database of 7th–9th-century sites

Altogether, nine sites dated to the Late Avar and post-Avar periods, i.e., the 7th/8–9th/10th centuries, have been recorded during planned and rescue excavations and fieldwalking campaigns carried out in our microregion. Naturally, this chronology is not set in stone, as a vast proportion of the material found at these sites is pottery that is quite difficult to position precisely within the respective period of several centuries, not to mention that only four sites were investigated by planned and rescue excavations (Sighișoara-Weinberg ‘Settlement’ and ‘Funerary site’, and Albești-Cetățea), while the rest were only identified during fieldwalking surveys, i.e. their extent and character have yet to be clarified.

The investigated sites are Sighișoara ‘*Siedlung*’ and ‘*Gräberfeld*’: two archaeological sites were identified on the first and second terraces of the right bank of the Târnava Mare River, about 4 km east of the gorge-like riverbed section mentioned above and the castle hill, at the widest point of the valley, where the Târnava floodplain opens significantly (Fig. 1. 3). From a distance, the Weinberg (Dealul Viilor) on the northeastern border of the town of Sighișoara looks like a huge amphitheatre facing south. Its western periphery is marked by an almost vertical fault, ending today in a clay quarry opened by The Brick Factory (now SICERAM) (Harhoiu, Baltag 2006, Vol. I, 7). The northeastern area of this large hill formation, called Dealul Viilor, is dominated by another, heavily eroded promontory, Cornul Viilor. The site



Fig. 3. The topographical positions of Sighișoara-Weinberg ‘Settlement’ and ‘Funerary site’ (Harhoiu et al. 2020, Abb. 4) 3. kép. Segesvár-Weinberg „Település” és „Temető” lelőhelyeinek topográfiai helyzete (Harhoiu et al. 2020, 4. ábra nyomán)

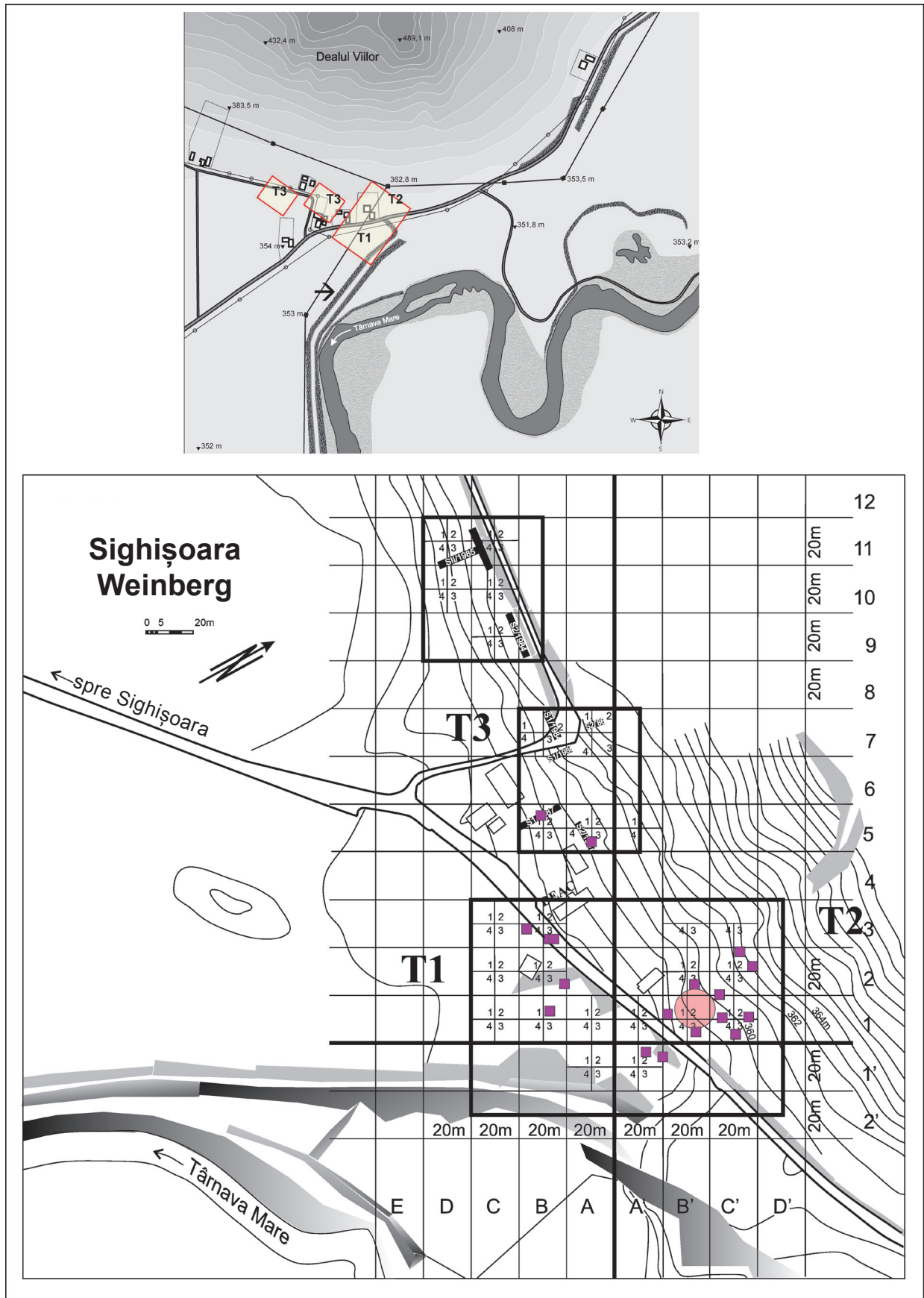


Fig. 4. Sighișoara-Weinberg ‘Settlement’ (cf. Harhoiu, Baltag 2006, Fig. 5)
 4. kép. Segesvár-Weinberg „Település” (Vö.: Harhoiu, Baltag 2006, Fig. 5)

Nos.	The number of feature	Harhoiu, Baltag 2006 – typology of houses	Size	The number of surfaces
1	028	05b	3 sqm	T.2
2	012	05f	7.5 sqm	T.2
3	014a	05b	9 sqm	T.2
4	013	05f1	8.4 sqm	T.2
5	008	07a2	9 sqm	T.2
6	016a	05f	8.5 sqm	T.2
7	009	05f	10 sqm	T.2
8	016	07a	12 sqm	T.2
9	017	05f	12 sqm	T.2
10	015	01	9.5 sqm	T.2
11	039	07a1	13 sqm	T.1
12	081	05a	11.42 sqm	T.1
13	039a	07a1	12 sqm	T.1
14	115	04d	14.80 sqm	T.1
15	003	06a	15 sqm	T.1
16	004	05f?	15 (?) sqm	T.1
17	116	06a	16.8 sqm	T.1
18	120	05x	?	T.3
19	123	?	?	T.3
20	125	01?	?	T.3
21	108 ⁴	05x	>20.25 sqm	T.3

Fig. 5. Floor area (m²) of houses in Sighișoara-Weinberg-‘Settlement’
5. kép. Segesvár-Weinberg „Település” lakóházainak mérete (m²)

named ‘*Siedlung*’ (‘Settlement’) by the leader of the excavation, Radu Harhoiu, stretches at the base of this promontory, while the ‘Funerary site’ (‘*Gräberfeld*’) lies east of that. Based on the location and extent of the two sites, ‘Settlement’ and ‘Funerary site’ are likely two parts of the same site, especially as they are only 300 metres apart (as clearly visible on Fig. 3).

*Sighișoara ‘Settlement’*⁴

Radu Harhoiu and Gheorghe Baltag opened three relatively large trenches (T.1, T.2, and T.3) in the ‘*Siedlung*’. They attempted to systematise the features identified on the three different terraces (Fig. 2. 1).

Amongst the 120 features excavated in the three trenches, the remains of about sixty residential buildings of various sizes were identified, most with a floor area of about 8–13 m² and only a few with a floor space of around 14–16 m² (Harhoiu, Baltag 2006, Vol. I, 19–20). These trends are similar to the

ones identified in other Late Avar settlements, such as Balatonőszöd-Temető-dűlő (Belényesy, Mersdorf 2004, 43), Bratei-Settlement 2 (Zaharia 1994–1995, 297–356), Eperjes (Bálint 1991, 13–14, 17), Gornea-Căunița de Sus (Țeicu, Lazarovici 1996, 18, 21, 25), Hajdúnánás-Mácsi-dűlő (Bajkai 2014, 3. kép), Pócspetri-Nyírjes-felső-Erdőszél-M3-Site 201 (Bajkai 2012, 421–424), Lazuri-Lubi tag (Stanciu 2016a, 25, Tab. 1), Nagykálló-Harangod (Gergely 2018, 189, 192, 195, 198, 201), Nyíregyháza-Oros (Istvánovits, Lőrinczy 2017, 113, 115, 118), Rákóczi-falva-Bagi földék (Kondé 2015, 73), Szeged-Fertő-Jóhart tanya (Benedek, Pópity 2010, 193–195), Szentés-451. út (Madaras 2000, 238–239), Giarmata-Baraj (Stanciu et al. 2021, Fig. 8), etc.; houses larger than 20 m² were only found at Hajdúnánás and Nyíregyháza-Oros. Moreover, similar house dimension trends have been outlined in Moldavia or Wallachia (Teodor 1984, 49–73).

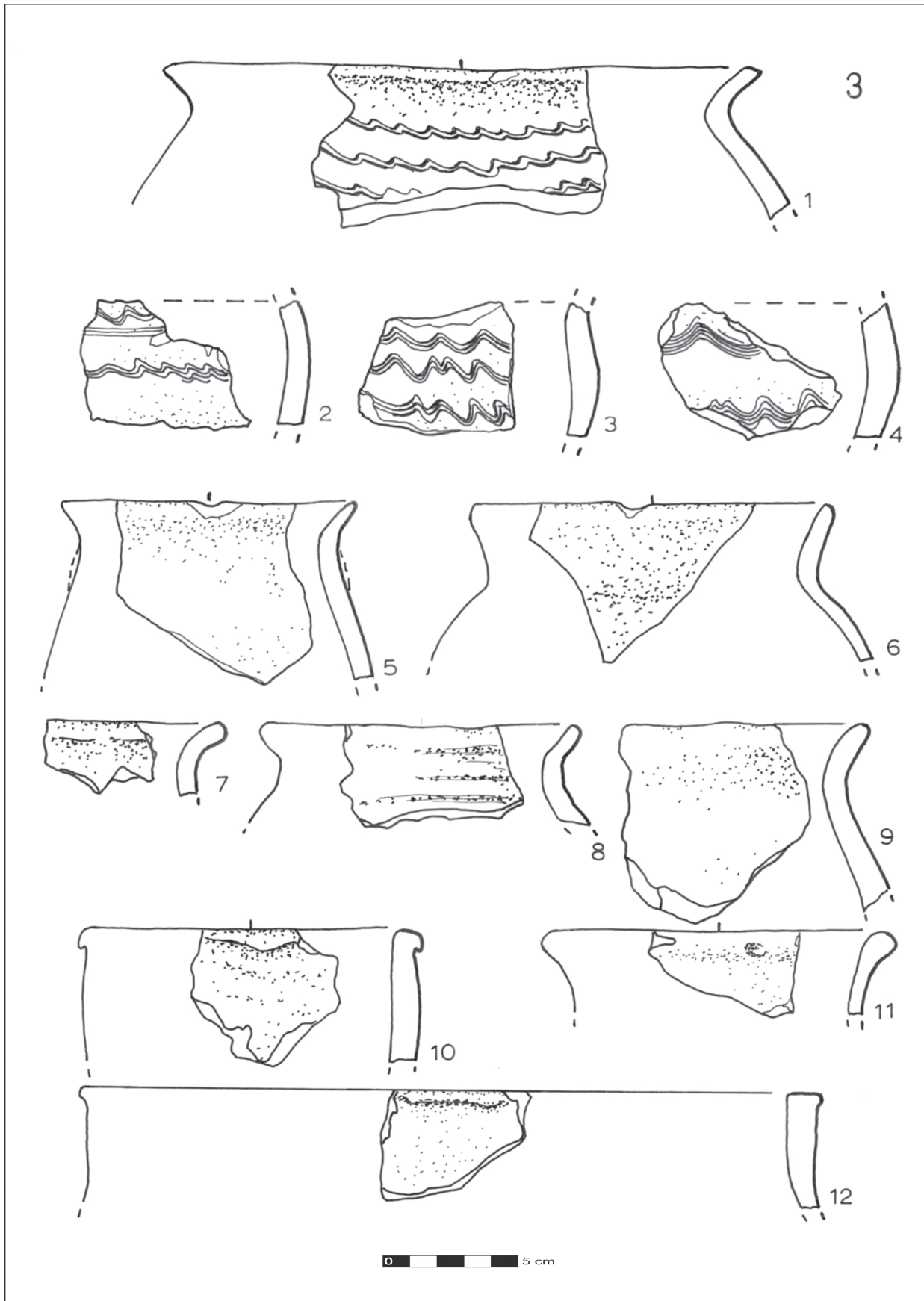


Fig. 6. Pottery from Pit house 3 of Sighișoara-Weinberg 'Settlement' (Harhoiu, Baltag 2007, Pl. 13)
 6. kép. Segesvár-Weinberg „Település” 3. számú gödörházából előkerült kerámia (Harhoiu, Baltag 2007, Pl. 2)

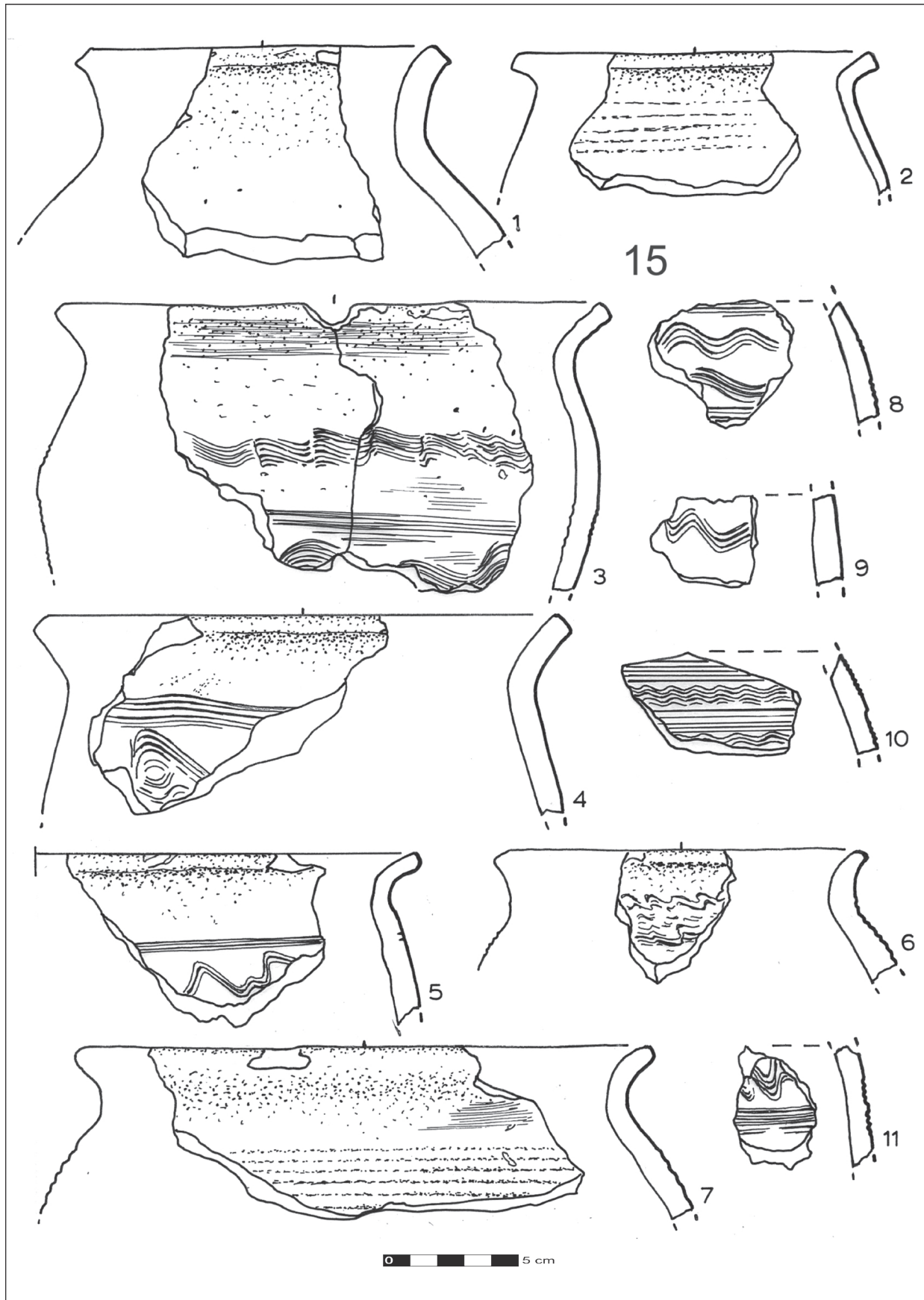


Fig. 7. Pottery from Pit house 15 of Sighişoara-Weinberg 'Settlement' (Harhoiu, Baltag 2007, Pl. 40)
 7. kép. Segesvár-Weinberg „Település” 15. számú gödörházából előkerült kerámia (Harhoiu, Baltag 2007, Pl. 40)

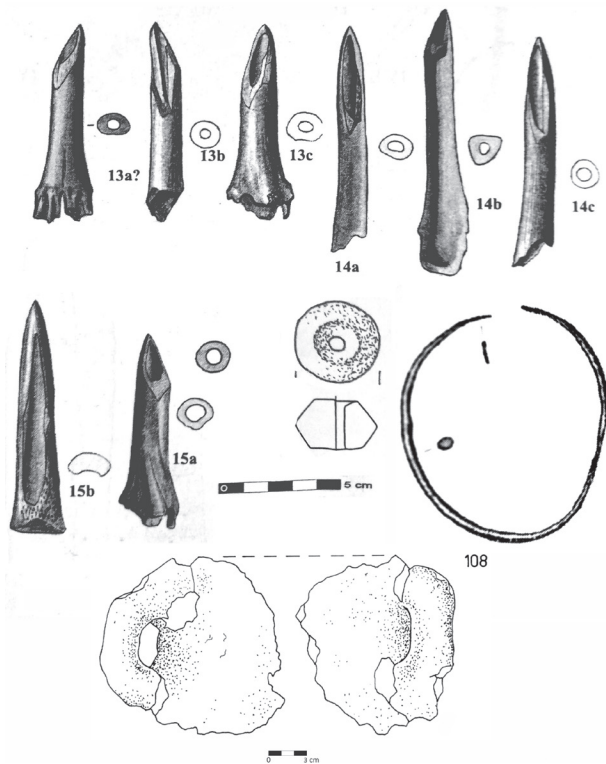


Fig. 8. Bone awls, spindle whorls, bracelet and baking bell from Sighișoara-Weinberg 'Settlement' (Harhoiu, Baltag 2006, Figs. 676–678; Harhoiu, Baltag 2007, Pl. 187.1)

8. kép. Csontárák, orsónehezék, karperec és sütőharang Segesvár-Weinberg „Település” lelőhelyéről (Harhoiu, Baltag 2006, Figs. 676–678; Harhoiu, Baltag 2007, Pl. 187.1)

Radu Harhoiu and Gheorghe Baltag classified the houses into nine types based on shape; twenty buildings were assigned to the Late Avar Period based on their find material (Harhoiu, Baltag 2007, Vol. II). Most buildings were pit houses with hearths (Harhoiu and Baltag's Type 5); these contained more than half of the recovered finds.

A significant amount of pottery fragments makes the bulk of the find material of the houses (Figs. 6–7). Despite Harhoiu and Baltag invested enormous energy in classifying the recovered pottery, they were forced to admit that the relative chronological evolution of the excavated features, including the settlement features, cannot be reconstructed with certainty based on the pottery record of the twenty pit houses. They dated the site to the 8th century (Harhoiu, Baltag 2006, 505–506). However, Debrecen-Bellegelő, a site with a similar pottery in terms of technology and shape, was radiocarbon-dated to the 8th but mainly to the 9th century (Bajkai, Kolozsi 2017, 117, 6. ábra). In summary, the

internal chronology of the Avar settlement could not be specified based on either house forms or pottery, while chronological conclusions based on the absence of 'Bulgarian' amphorae should be treated with reservation.⁵

Besides pottery, a few other finds were discovered (bone awls, spindle whorls and discs, knives, whetstones, grindstones, and a hammered bronze wire bracelet).⁶ Bone awls are special among these finds, not only because they might be used in the future for radiocarbon dating to specify the calendar age of the settlement. Their analogies, such as the fifteen specimens from the Daruszentmiklós Site F-005 (Szenthe 2009; Bárányi 2014) and the bone object known from the Pitvaros burial site (Bende 2017, 90), corroborate the 8th-century dating.

The archaeological record of the site included another special item, a baking bell. This artefact type was almost unknown in the eastern half of the Transylvanian Basin (Sighișoara, Șimonești) (Fig. 9),⁷ unlike the plains of the Transylvanian Plateau.⁸ Harhoiu and Baltag dated the recovered specimen to the 7th century (Harhoiu, Baltag 2006, Vol. II, 94–95, Pl. 185.1), while Frederik Puskás-Kolozsvári believes it to be part of the 8th–9th-century record instead (Fig. 8. 18; Puskás-Kolozsvári 2002, 57, 103, XXXVIII. t. 3). In the western part of the Transylvanian Plateau, baking bells in significant quantities are only known from Jucu (about fifteen pieces; Bonta 2017, 118) and Stupini further east;⁹ however, this lack of analogies clearly shows the shortcomings of the research on the Transylvanian early medieval period.¹⁰

As for settlement structure, Late Avar pit houses in Trench T.2 were seemingly arranged concentrically, which may indicate a specific settlement organisation (Harhoiu, Baltag 2006, 500, Figs. 966–967). However, not all buildings were arranged this way: in Trench T.1, they formed a semicircle, while the three buildings in Trench T.3 (see also Fig. 4) were insufficient for interpretation. The group of houses in Trench T.2 perhaps mark the so-called 'village centre'.

The evaluation of the archaeozoological material of the settlement features has yet to be carried out. The general condition of the bones is fairly good. Hence, we can only hypothesise about the lifestyle (settled or not?), the economic activities, and diet/nutrition of the inhabitants of this settlement.

Sighișoara 'Funerary site'

In contrast to the 'Settlement', the Weinberg 'Funerary site' ('Gräberfeld') or site part is characterised

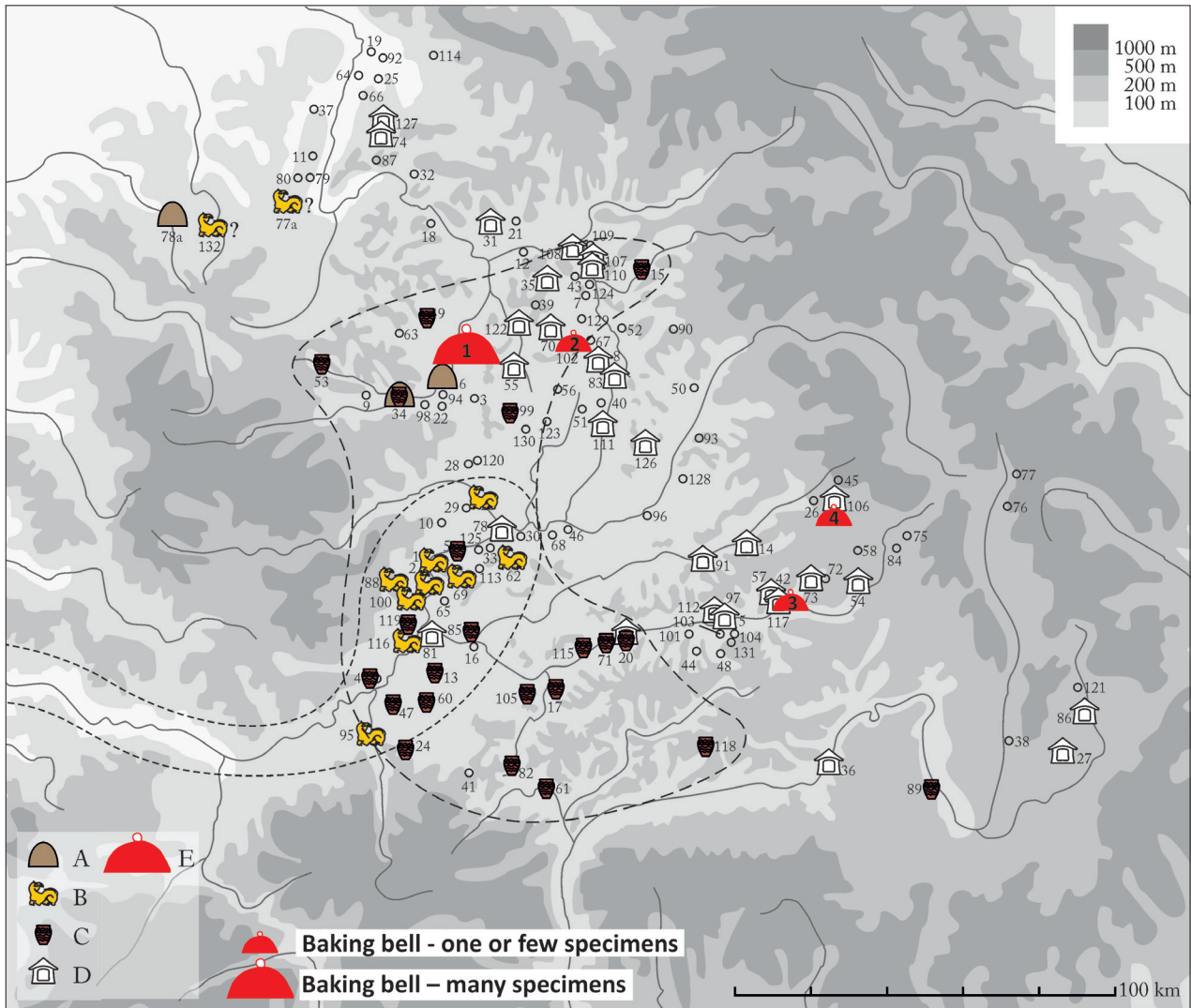


Fig. 9. Distribution of baking bells in the Transylvanian Basin in the 7th–8th centuries (Harhoiu et al. 2020, Fig. 84). 1: Jucu; 2: Stupini; 3: Sighișoara-Weinberg; 4: Șimonești

9. kép. A sütőharangok 7–8. századi elterjedése az Erdélyi-Medencében (Harhoiu et al. 2020, 84. kép). 1: Zsúk; 2: Mezősolymos; 3: Segesvár-Weinberg; 4: Siménfalva

by cemeteries and burial grounds. Burial sites from six distinct historical periods were found there, but none from the 7th–11th centuries, i.e. the Late Avar, post-Avar, and Hungarian Conquest periods, or the early Árpád Age. The 5th–6th-century funerary site is followed by a 12th-century cemetery part with 108 skeletons recovered from 97 graves (see Fig. 2. 2; Harhoiu et al. 2020).

The number of Late Avar features found at ‘*Funerary*’, at a 300 m distance from the settlement on ‘*Siedlung*’, is much lower: only four have been identified in a rather large excavation trench (Fig. 11; Harhoiu et al. 2020, Abb. 77). Based on those, one cannot tell whether the two settlement parts were connected. However, their meagre scatter definitely outlines the eastern border of the settlement. The

least significant of the four features is 146, a partially excavated open-air pottery kiln with a few slow-wheeled and hand-formed fragments (Harhoiu et al. 2020, 198–199, Abb. 83, Bf. 146) and charred waste in the fill of its oval ash pit, Feature 280.¹¹

Amongst the Late Avar settlement features, Feature 359, a pit house, is especially important. It is the largest residential building (approximately 25 m²) excavated in Sighișoara, with a carefully constructed large hearth built of river stones in its eastern part. Radu Harhoiu assigned the house to the Late Avar Period based on a few slow-wheeled and hand-formed potsherds with combed or brushed horizontal lines, recovered from the street level and the fill of the feature (Harhoiu et al. 2020, 220, Abb. 80–82). The dimensions of the house are akin to the buildings

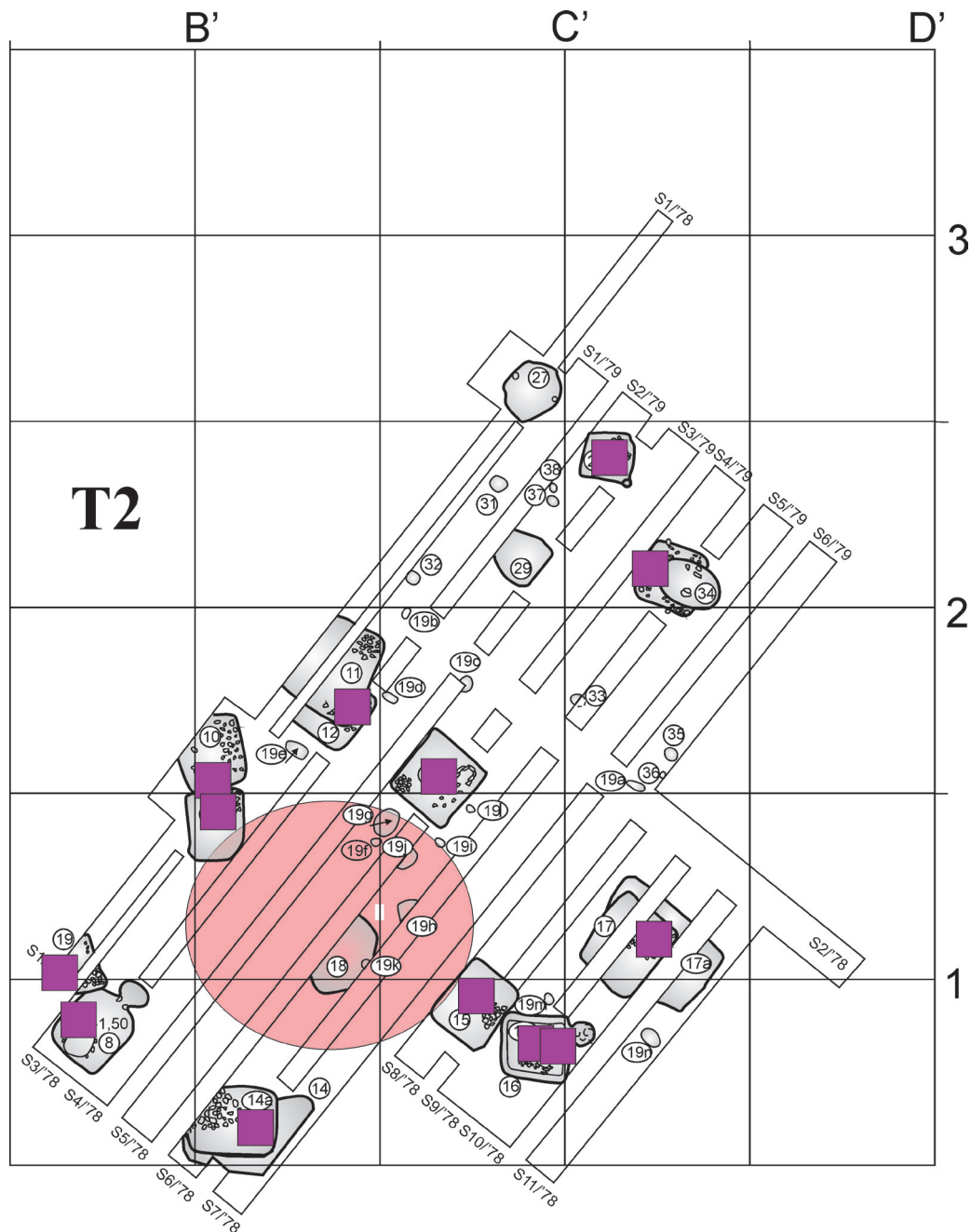


Fig. 10. Circular arrangement in Trench 2 at Sighisoara-Weinberg-‘Settlement’ (Harhoiu, Baltag 2006, Fig. 967)

10. kép. Kőr alakú településszervezés Segesvár-Weinberg „Település” 2-es szelvényéből (Harhoiu, Baltag 2006, Fig. 967)

unearthed at Hajdúnánás-Mácsi-dűlő (mentioned above) and Nyíregyháza-Oros. The technical and typological analysis of the pottery and its analogies in the Middle and Lower Danube Region (Harhoiu et al. 2020, 211–220) indicate that the Sighisoara community was familiar with the pottery technology of the time, which suggests direct or indirect connections between the communities of the two areas (Fig. 13). Unfortunately, the lack of animal bones prevents the radiocarbon dating of the features.

A discovery of research-historical significance and the most important Late Avar structure on ‘Funerary site’ is Feature 410, the only divided pottery kiln discovered on the Transylvanian Plateau thus far. It was found at the foot of the steep slope ‘Weinberg’, northeast of pit house 359; it consists of a working pit and a kiln. The working pit, more than 3 m wide on the east-west axis and ca. 5 m long on the north-south axis, expands over the limits of the excavation area and thus could not be fully unearthed (Fig. 14. A).

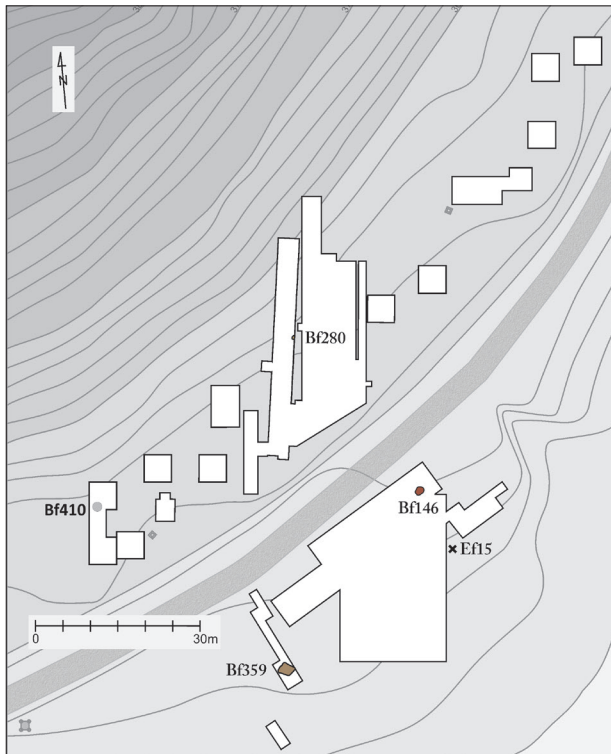


Fig. 11. Topographical position of Late Avar features at Sighișoara-Weinberg 'Funerary site' (after Harhoiu et al. 2020, Abb. 77)

11. kép. Segesvár-Weinberg „Temető” késő avar kori objektumainak topográfiai elterjedése (Harhoiu et al. 2020, Abb. 77)

The kiln consisted of a firing chamber, a combustion chamber, and an external stoking channel; the lower and upper chambers were separated by a thick, perforated clay floor (Fig. 14. B). Together, the two complexes form a distinct archaeological feature and a distinct chronological unit, from which 235 ceramic fragments, almost all (227 out of 235) from inside the kiln, have been collected, documented, and evaluated statistically (Spânu, Gáll 2016, 183, Fig. 6). Most belong to 8th century-, mainly slow-wheeled vessels (mostly pots),¹² some decorated with incised horizontal line bundles, a decorative element known in all regions of the Carpathian Basin at the time.¹³ The most characteristic types of 8th-century (and in some areas, even 9th-century) slow-wheeled pottery are pieces tempered with grit and/or rubble and small pebbles and adorned with incised line bundle patterns (Fig. 15). Only three fragments (two of them matching) came from hand-made pots.¹⁴ Unfortunately, archaeometric analyses have yet to be carried out (such analyses on other coeval records of other sites have revealed unequivocally that all wheel-thrown pottery vessels were made of the same mate-

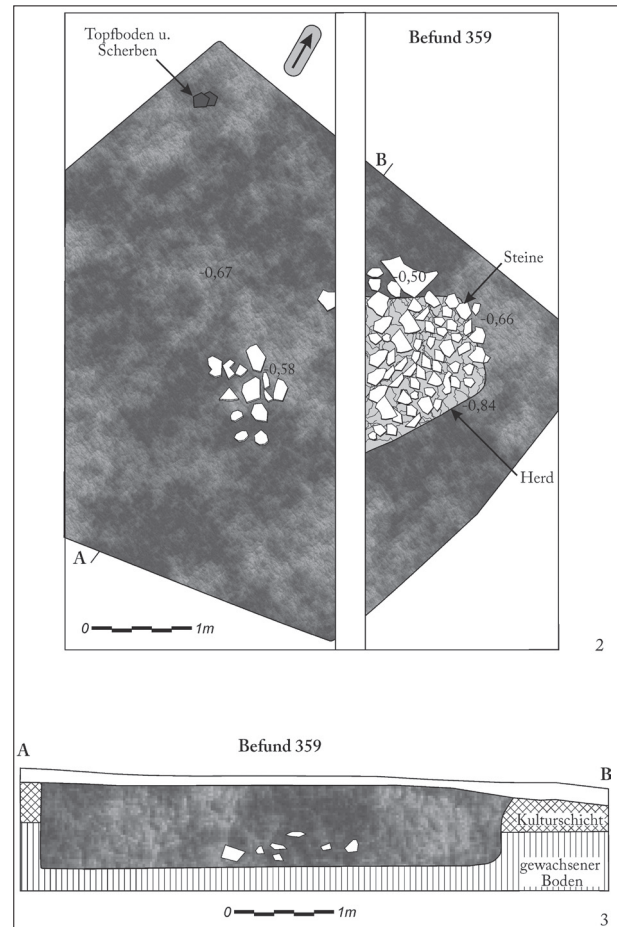


Fig. 12. Survey drawing and cross-section of Late Avar house No. 359 at Sighișoara-Weinberg 'Funerary site' (after Harhoiu et al. 2020, Abb. 68)

12. kép. Segesvár-Weinberg „Temető” késő avar kori 359. lakóházának felszín- és metszetrajza (Harhoiu et al. 2020, Abb. 68)

rial; see, e.g., Kreiter et al. 2017, 28); nevertheless, the local pottery seems to represent lower quality compared to the central areas of the Avar Khaganate.¹⁵

From a microtopographical point of view, the workshop with pottery kilns seems to have been set up in a dedicated area, perhaps on the periphery of the settlement, since the 8th-century habitation is concentrated in the 'Settlement' (Harhoiu, Baltag 2007, 513–514, Figs. 966–967), more than 250 m east-southeast of the kiln (see Figs. 3–4, 10). Until further clarification, the potter's workshop in Sighișoara can be considered to having been located east of the late Avar habitation area, at the foot of 'Weinberg'.

Besides some 4th-century pottery kilns discovered at 'Weinberg', both in the 'Settlement' and 'Funerary site' parts (Harhoiu, Baltag 2007, 25–26, 496; Harhoiu et al. 2020, 113–117, 406–407, Abb. 139/Bf. 243), the Late Avar Period kiln is another piece of

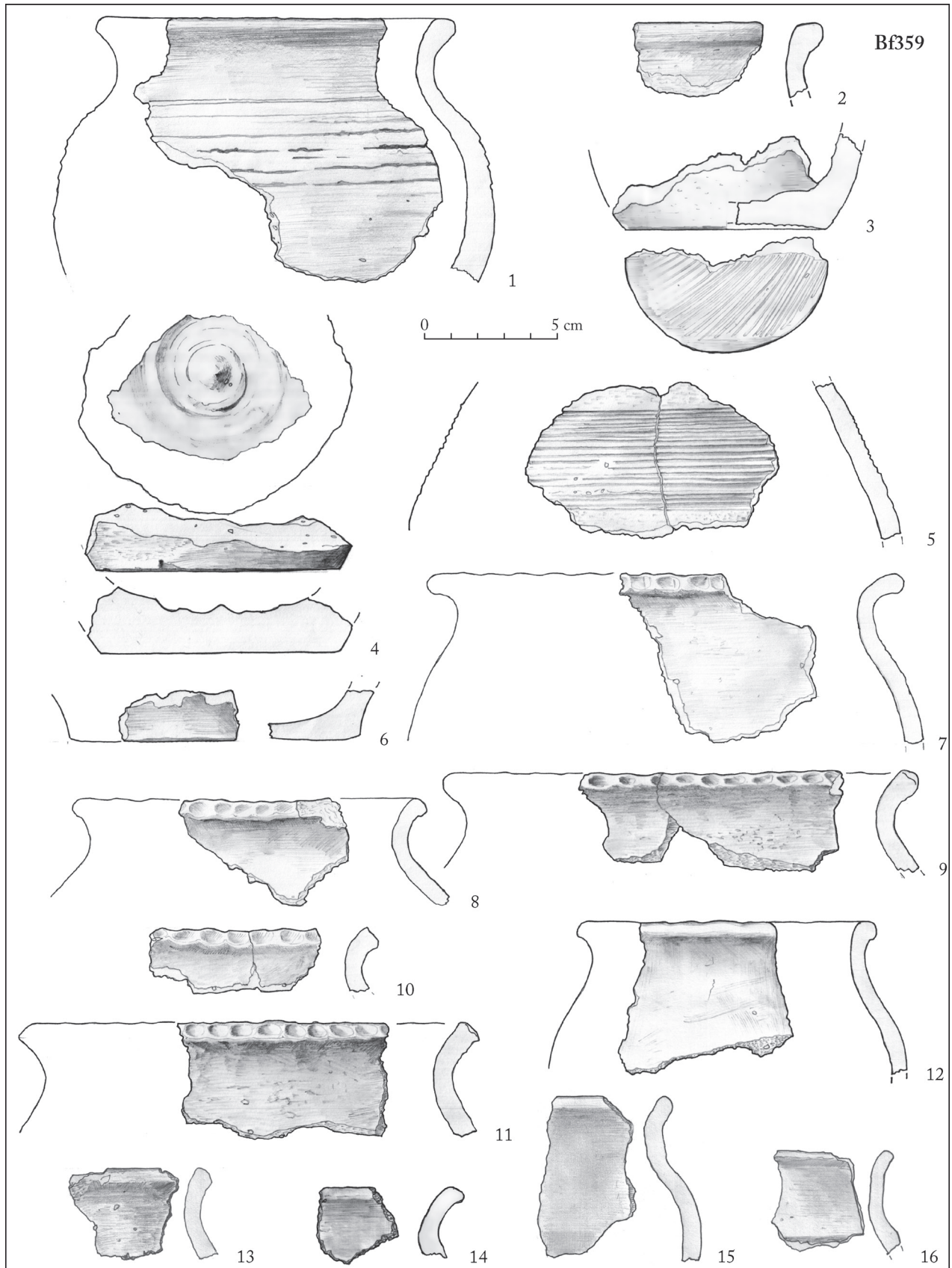


Fig. 13. Pottery from Pit house 359 of Sighișoara-Weinberg 'Funerary site' (Harhoiu et al. 2020, Taf. 47)
 13. kép. Segesvár-Weinberg „Temető” 359. számú gödörházából előkerült kerámia (Harhoiu et al. 2020, Taf. 47)

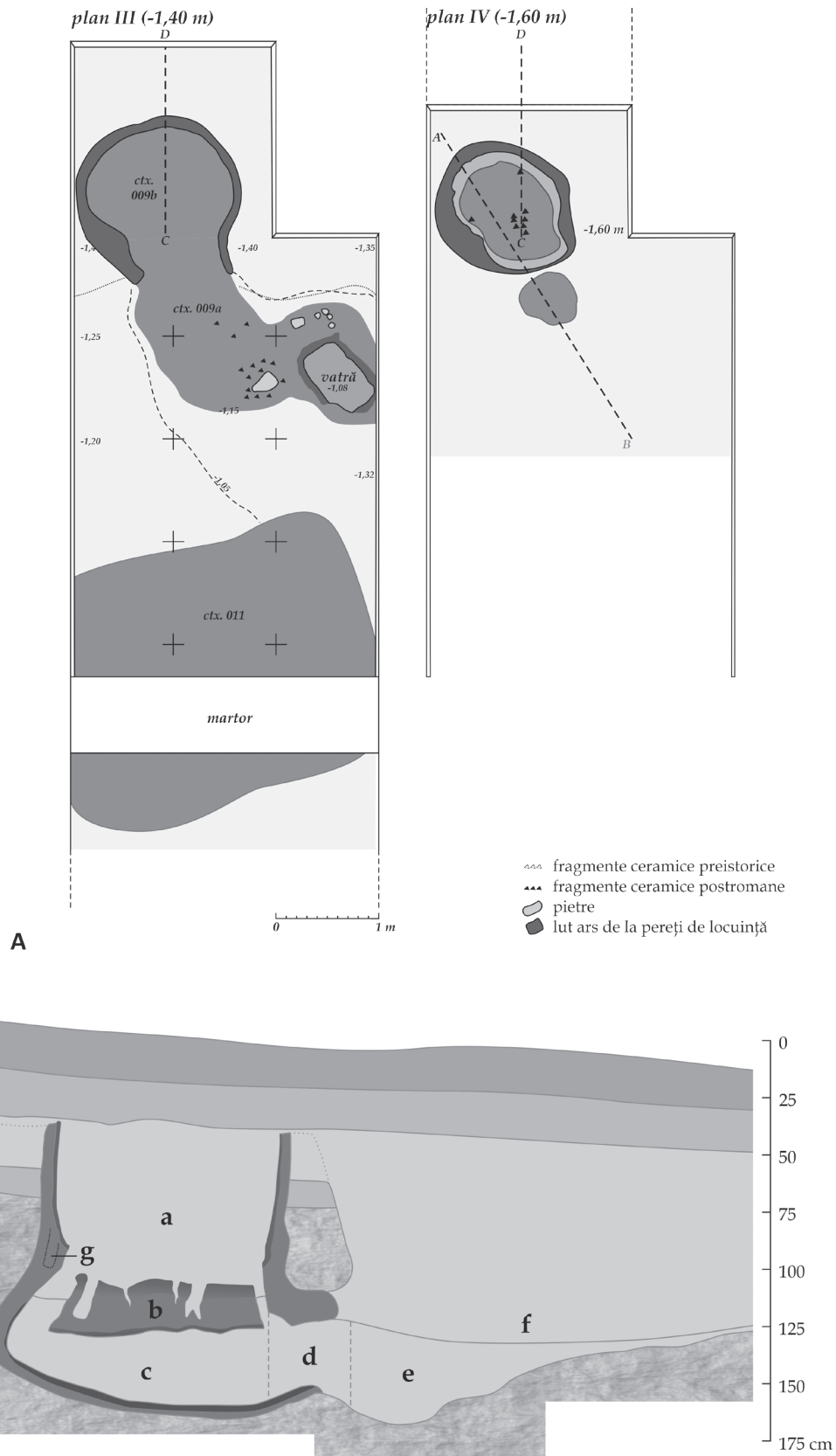


Fig. 14. Floor plan and profile of the Late Avar pottery kiln No. 410 at Sighișoara-Weinberg 'Funerary site' (after Spânu, Gáll 2016, Figs. 3, 5)

14. kép. Segesvár-Weinberg „Temető” késő avar kori 410. edényégető kemencéjének felszín- és metszetrajza (Spânu, Gáll 2016, 3. és 5. kép nyomán)



Fig. 15. Pottery from Feature 410, a pottery kiln (Spânu, Gáll 2016, Pl. 2)
15. kép. A 410. számú edényégető kemence kerámia leletanyaga (Spânu, Gáll 2016, Pl. 2)

evidence of local pottery production, the presence of which was indicated also by some 6th-century rejects found in the ‘Settlement’ and interpreted as corroborating evidence (Harhoiu 2009, 207–209, Fig. 9). While the number of open-air domestic furnaces is considerable in the Late Avar Period (Spănu, Gáll 2016, 187, note 20), the same cannot be said about pottery kilns, which are known from only six sites from the entire Carpathian Basin. As settlement research in the territory of the Avar Khaganate has been intensive and effective, the conspicuously low occurrence of pottery kilns is difficult to explain.¹⁶

Based on their location, the relative and absolute chronological relationship between the four features discussed above is unclear and cannot be resolved with archaeological dating methods alone.

Albești-La Cetățea/Sub Cetățea

The *La Cetățea* site is located at the southern fringes of Albești, where the Șapartoc Stream separates Cetățea Hill (or Piscul Cetățea in the east) from Mănăstirii Hill (also known as Fața Mănăstirii, in the west) (see Fig. 2. 3). Two terraces (‘Sub Cetățea’),

separated by a 15–20 m deep and 25–30 m wide ravine of a torrent (Pârâul Cetățea) that flows into the Șapartoc Stream, stretch at the foot of Cetățea Hill, above Șapartoc Valley, at an altitude of 400–425 m asl.

The early medieval site on the northern terrace (Terrace A, a.k.a. ‘The Base’) has been researched. However, the results were not published in a monograph¹⁷ but only in two smaller papers, presenting contradictory data. For example, the site was dated to the 7th–8th and 9th–11th (Baltag 1994, 75–77; Șovrea 2019, 47–62), the 7th–9th and 8th–10th (Baltag 2000, 171) and the 7th–8th and 9th centuries (Baltag 2004, 143–144), respectively, the differences stemming from the basic controversies characterising the archaeology of the 7th–11th centuries in Eastern Transylvania (Gáll, Mărginean 2022, 211–213).

In his most complex synthesis, Baltag divided the early medieval site into two distinct horizons, assigning 45 features to the 7th–9th-century inhabitation (buildings with one or two rooms, workshops, kilns, ‘ritual pits’, household pits), and only twelve

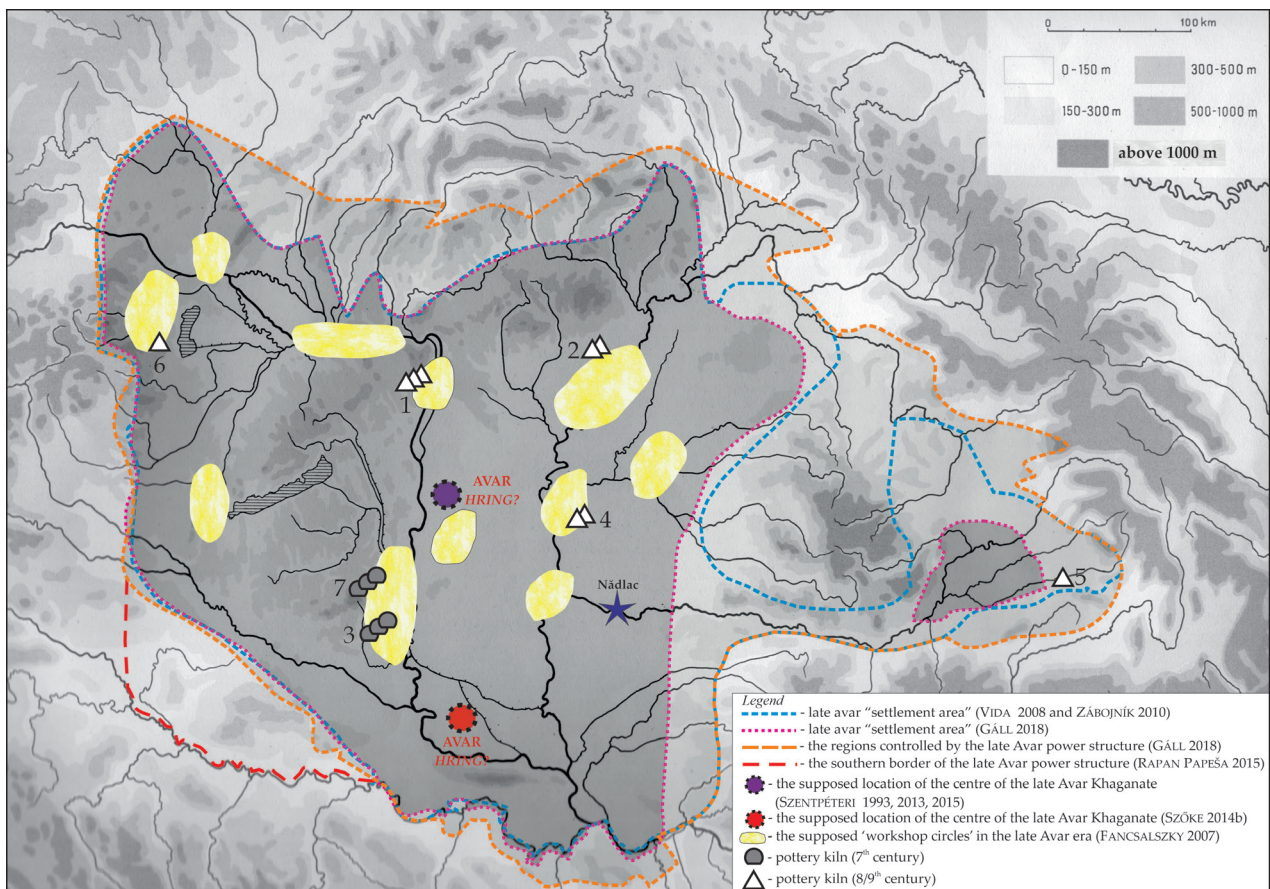
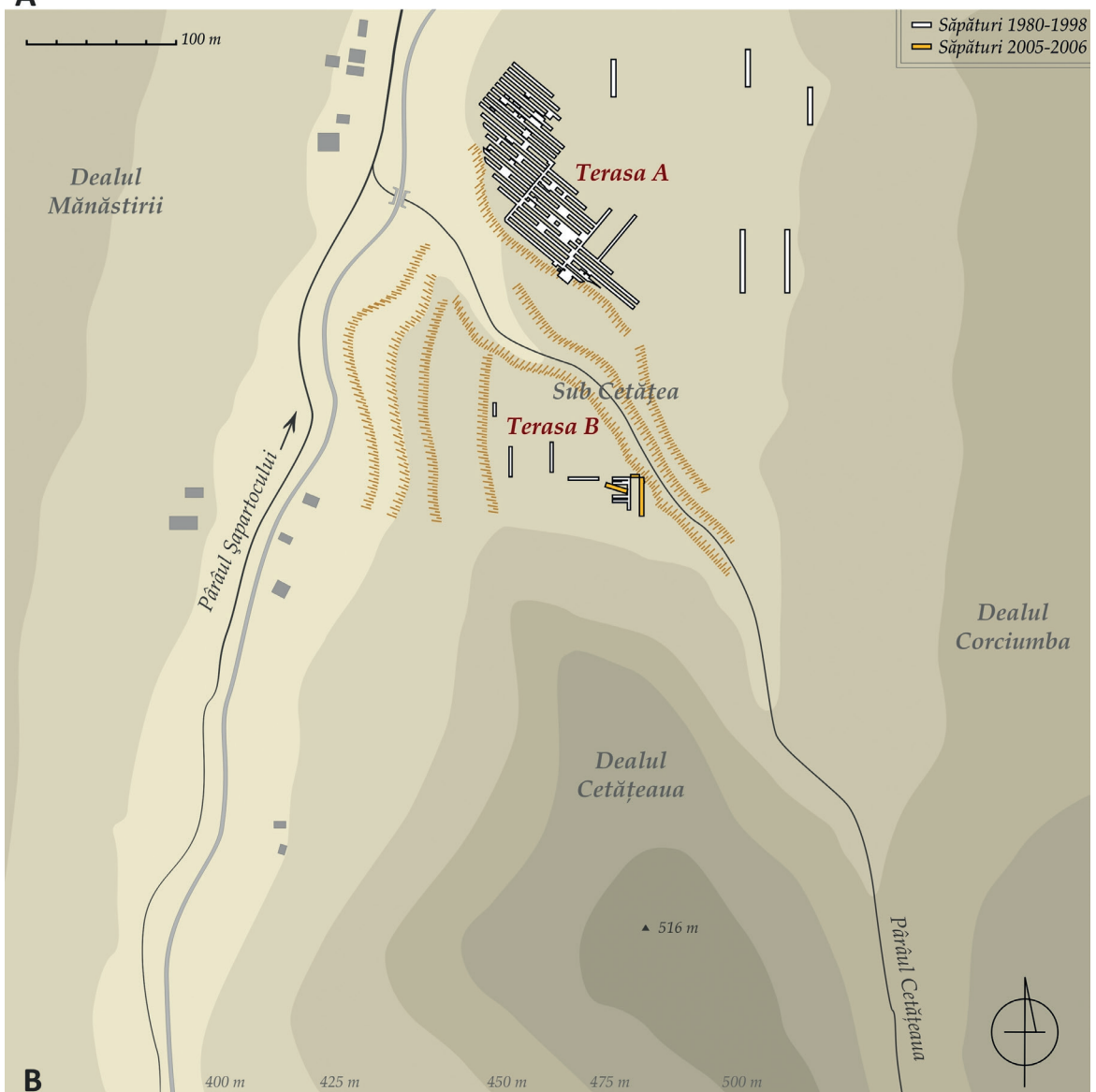


Fig. 16. The Late Avar Khaganate and pottery kilns in the Carpathian Basin (after Gáll 2018, Fig. 70)
16. kép. A Késő Avar Kaganátus és az edényégető kemencék elterjedése (Gáll 2018, Fig. 70)



A



B

Fig. 17. The position of the Albești-La Cetățea site, terraces A and B (after Spânu 2014, Fig. 1)
 17. kép. A Fehéregyháza-La Cetățea lelőhely elhelyezkedése, valamint az A és B terasz (Spânu 2014, Fig. 1)

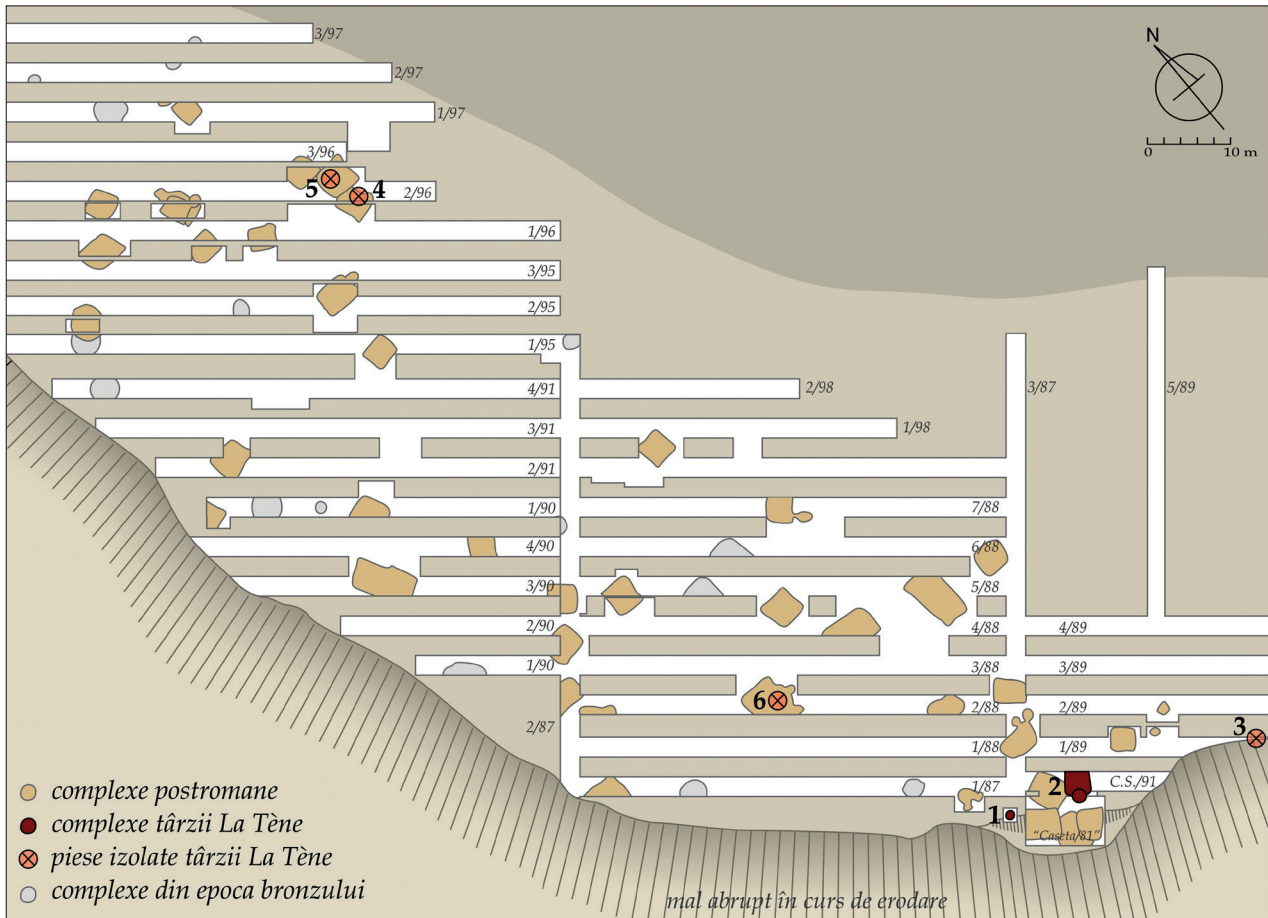


Fig. 18. Site map of terrace A in Albești-La Cetățea (after Spânu 2014, Fig. 2)
 18. kép. A Fehéregyháza-La Cetățea „A” terasz lelőhelytérképe (Spânu 2014, Fig. 2)

to the younger, 8th–10th-century horizon (mentioning eight residential buildings and four ‘ritual pits’ in his study published in 2000, but only six or seven residential buildings four years later; see Baltag 2000, 171–174; Baltag 2004, 144). According to him, the sizes of the houses and stone hearths of the older and younger settlements were also different. The pit houses excavated at Albești-La Cetățea are generally akin to the residential buildings unearthed at Sighișoara-Weinberg ‘Settlement’ (Baltag 2004, 152), but the find material recovered from the features – pottery, metal artefacts, spindle whorls, loom weights, stone tools, (millstones made of volcanic tuff or mica slate), etc. – is much more diverse picture compared to the Sighișoara-Weinberg sites. It must be noted, though, that no data is available on the proportions of the artefact types mentioned in the record of the two settlements.

In another study (Baltag 2004, 152), Baltag also describes the different structures of the two settlements: the houses of the older form an ellipsis, while in the younger, they are arranged in two rows.¹⁸ It

must be noted, though, that no such patterns can be discerned on the published site map.

Based on pottery decoration (vertical line patterns and ‘fork’ motifs, analogies to which are known from Dridu, Wallachia), Baltag dated the twelve features of the younger occupation to the late 10th century (Fig. 19).¹⁹ However, these decorative elements (along with many others) appeared in the area of the Central Danube Basin already in the 7th–8th centuries; thus, their chronological value is low²⁰ and their geographical and cultural connections are much more broad than the late archaeologist from Sighișoara believed²¹ – illustrating excellently the many pitfalls of dating by analogies.

It is very important to emphasise that there is no mention of a baking bell from the site. Based on the findings and the observed phenomena, the daily practice of the inhabitants included household crafts (pottery-making, spinning and weaving of plant and animal fibres, and metallurgy, traces of which have not yet been identified in Sighișoara-Weinberg). Unfortunately, no data is available on the archaeo-

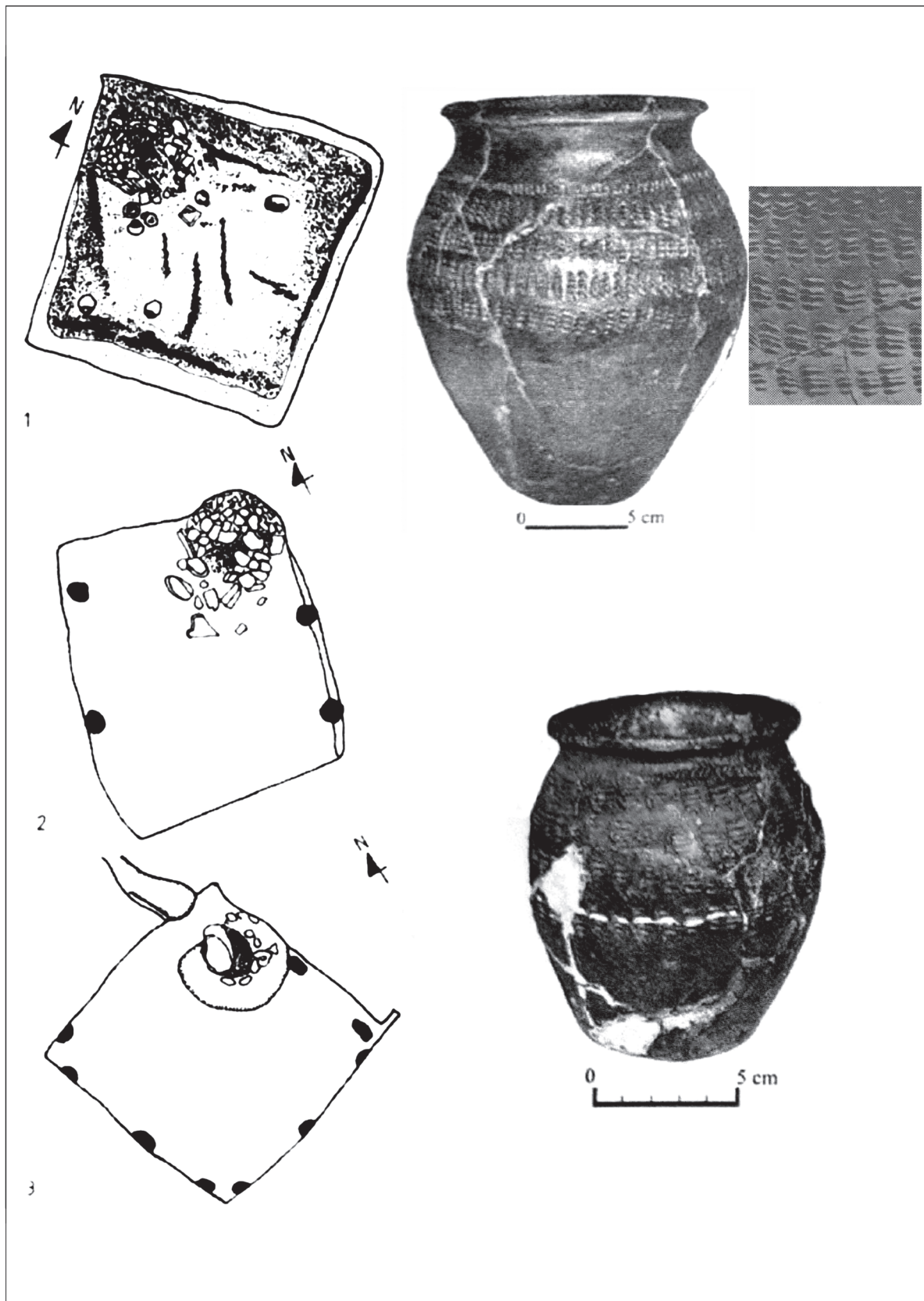


Fig. 19. The pit houses of Albești-La Cetățea and the so-called fork ornament on pottery
 (Baltag 2000, Pl. III; Șovrea 2019, Fig. 1. 27, 30)
 19. kép. Fehéregyháza-La Cetățea gödörházai és az úgynevezett „villás” díszítés az agyagedényeken
 (Baltag 2000, Pl. III; Șovrea 2019, Fig. 1. 27, 30)

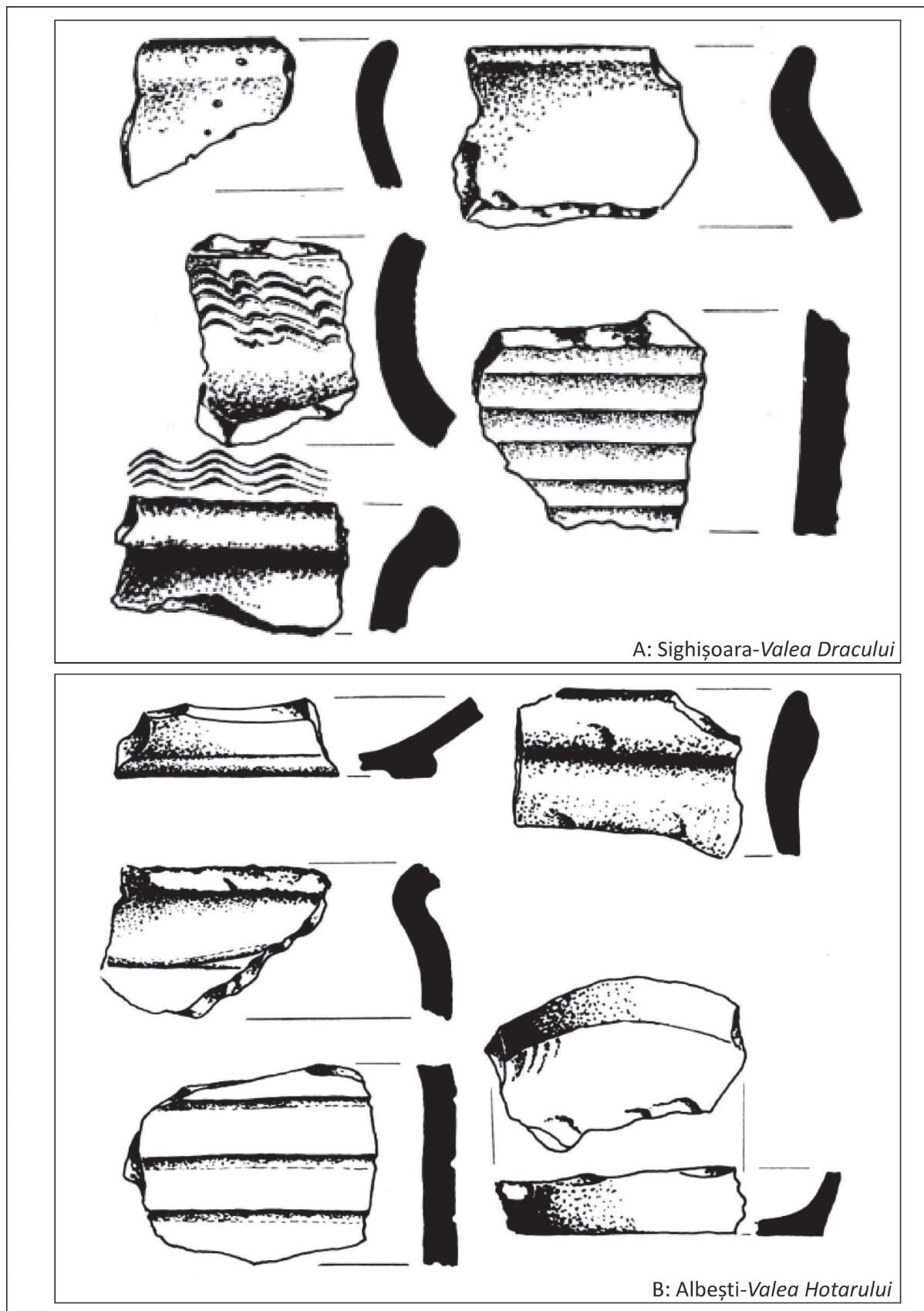


Fig. 20. Pottery from A: Sighișoara-Valea Dracului and B: Albești-Valea Hotarului (Baltag, Amlacher 1994, Pl. CXI, CXX)
 20. kép. Segesvár-Valea Dracului (A) és Fehéregyháza-Valea Hotarului (B) lelőhelyeinek kerámia leletanyaga (Baltag, Amlacher 1994, Pl. CXI, CXX)

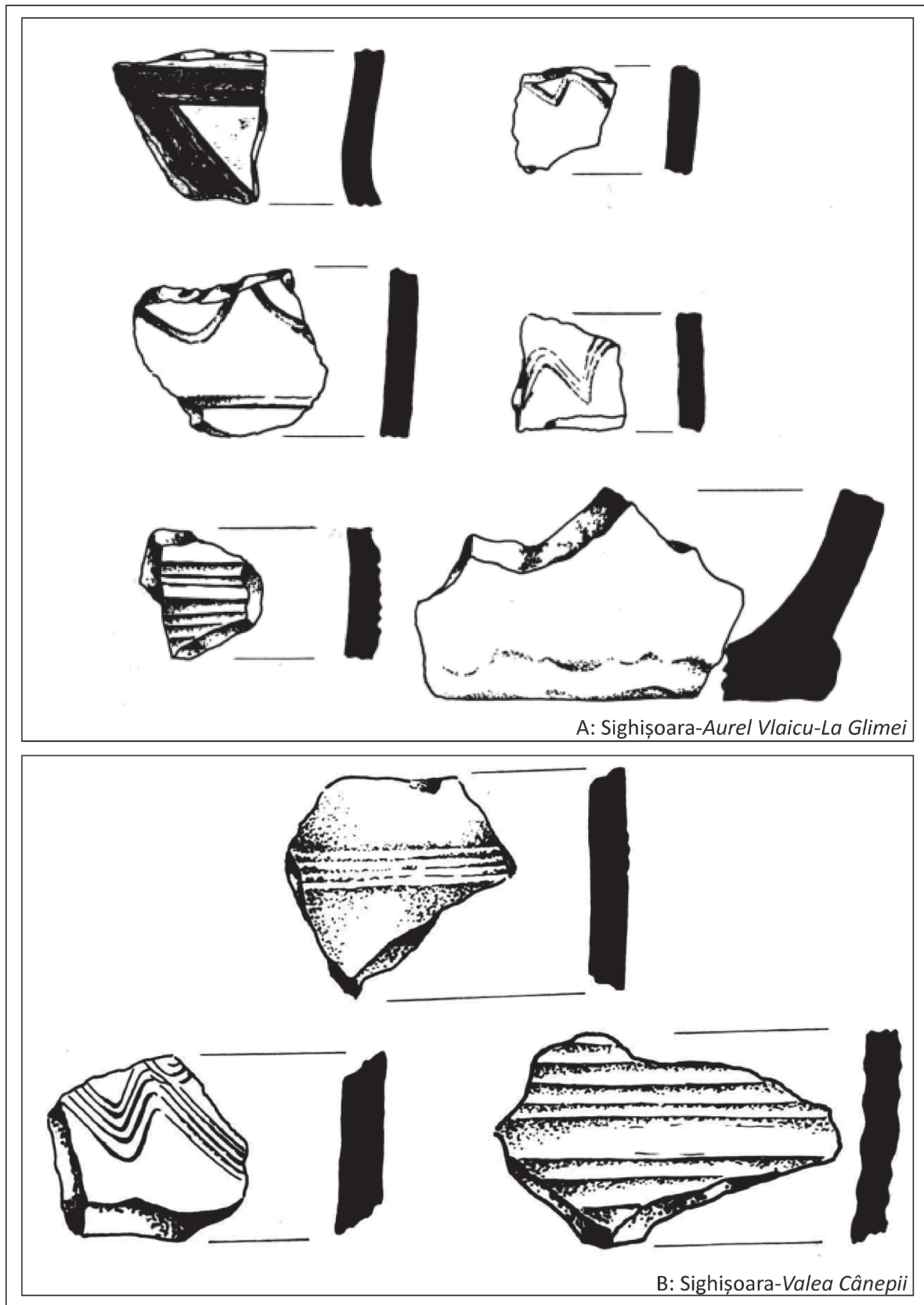


Fig. 21. Pottery from A: Sighișoara-Aurel Vlaicu-Între Glimeii/Zwischen den Bücheln and B: Sighișoara-Valea Cânepii (Baltag, Amlacher 1994, Pl. CIV, CX)

21. kép. Segesvár-Aurel Vlaicu-Între Glimeii/Zwischen den Bücheln (A) és Segesvár-Valea Cânepii (B) lelőhelyeinek kerámia leletanyaga (Baltag, Amlacher 1994, Pl. CIV, CX)

zoological record of the settlement.

From our argument, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Without a site monograph, one cannot tell whether the unearthed features belong to a single, long-lived settlement or two distinct occupations. The published data are far from enough to outline the relative chronological evolution of the unearthed features, not to mention their absolute chronological positions. Some researchers delving into this period consider the dating of the settlement to the 9th–10th centuries indisputable; however, the current data is insufficient to support such far-reaching conclusions.²² The site map, masterfully enhanced by Daniel Spânu, tends to support the possibility of a single settlement with a relatively long lifespan.
2. Although the find material allows one to draw diverse conclusions about the daily life of the community, the lack of an archaeozoological analysis deprives us of many observations.
3. No funerary site connected to this settlement was identified, similar to the Sighișoara-Weinberg sites.
4. A single, 7th- or 8th–9th-century baking bell is known from Sighișoara-Weinberg, but none from Albești-La Cetățea (or maybe they were not published?), indicating perhaps the absence of a particular kitchen technique. At the same time, the
5. Based on several published archaeological finds, the settlement was inhabited in the 7th/8th–9th centuries.
6. The differences in pottery decoration between Albești-La Cetățea and Sighișoara-Weinberg cannot necessarily be explained by a chronological difference, especially as research in other microregions has revealed that pottery in this period did not evolve along general trends, thus, a chronological framework based on pottery cannot be developed. Within a period, common characteristics of pottery can be identified within a region but not between distinct regions; not understanding this in the past led to interpreting some observed differences as chronological markers (Skriba 2010, 233; Takács 2016, 53). In summary, any pottery-based chronological conclusion related to the two sites must be treated with caution.
7. In addition to these three well-researched sites, several other sites dated to this era are known in the microregion; their data come from small-scale and rescue excavations and fieldwalking surveys. Two more sites are known from the vicinity of

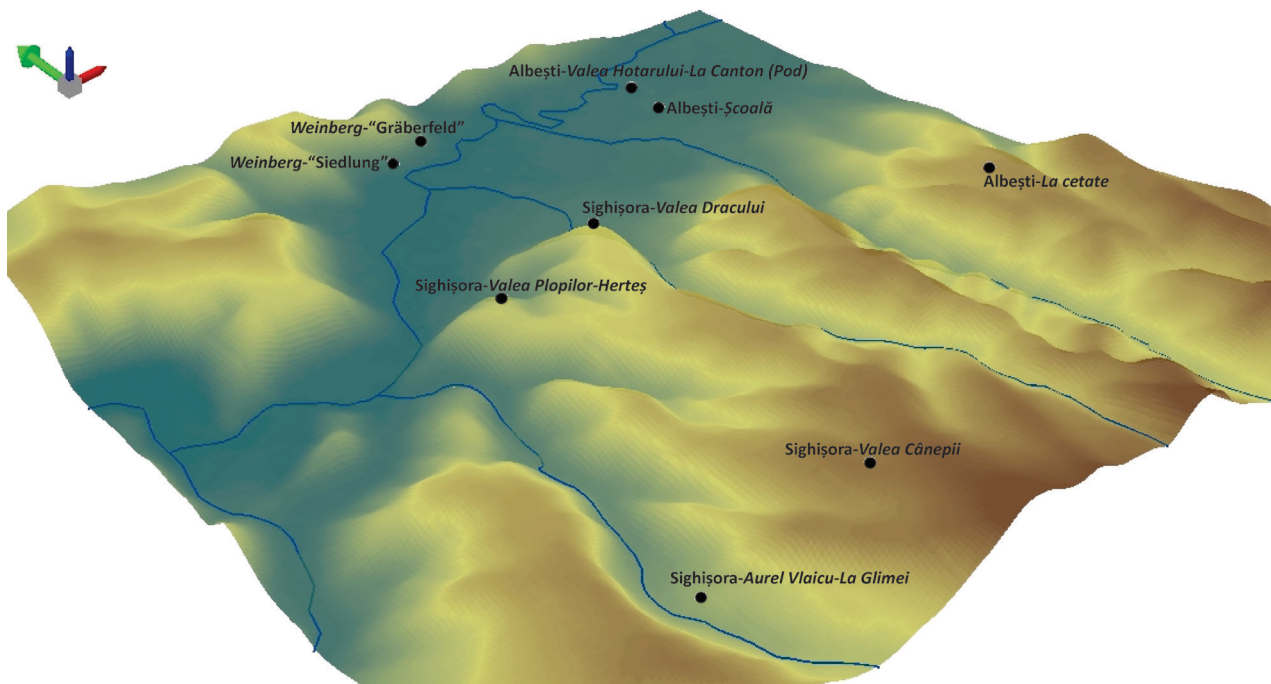


Fig. 22. 3D model of the sites of the Sighișoara microregion, clearly displaying the altitude differences between the locations of the sites

22. kép. A segesvári kistérség lelőhelyeinek 3D modellje, amely jól mutatja a lelőhelyek elhelyezkedése közötti szintkülönbségeket

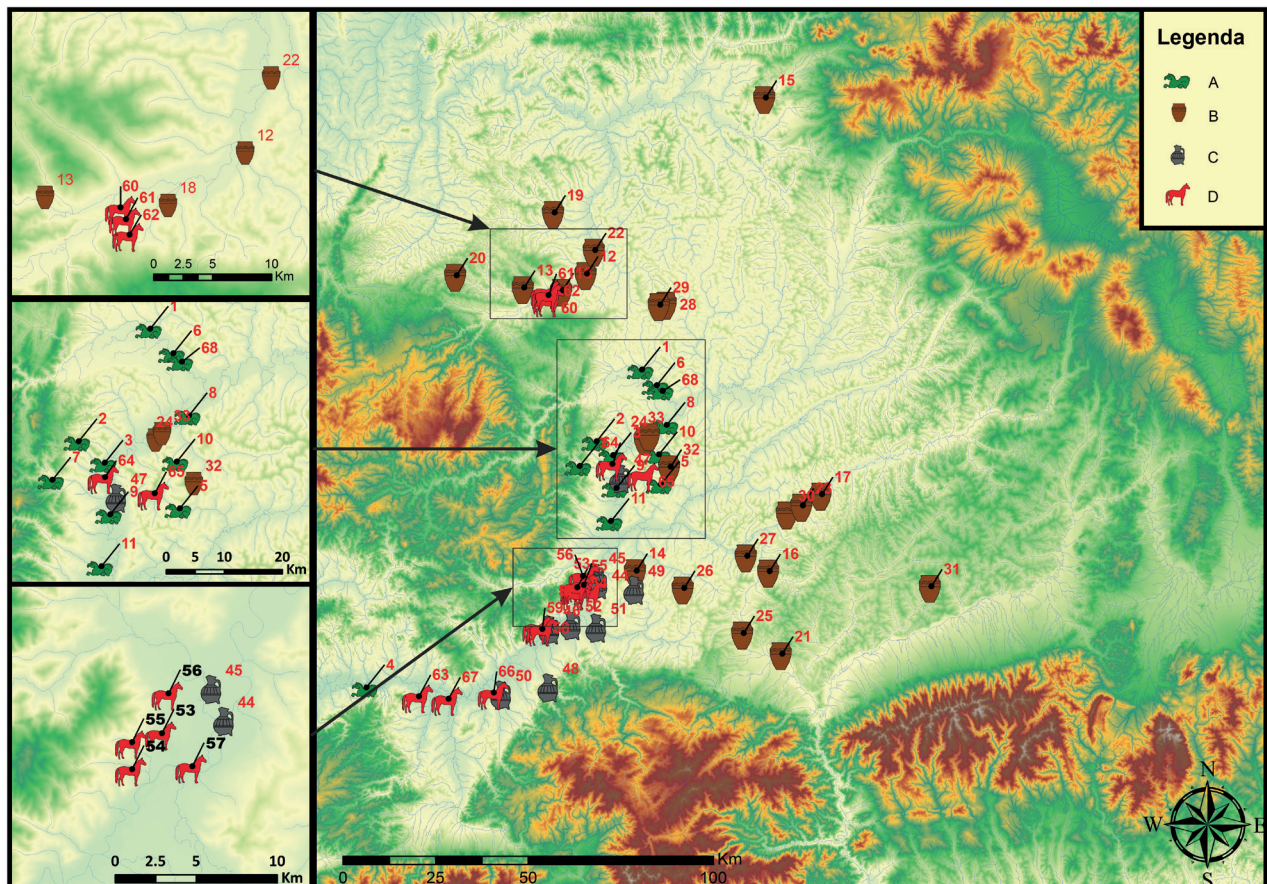


Fig. 23. Geographical distribution of burial sites from the 7/8th–10th centuries in the Transylvanian Basin, with a visible lack of sites in the eastern parts (after Gáll et al. 2021, Map 2)

23. kép. A 7/8–10. századi temetkezési helyek földrajzi eloszlása az Erdélyi-medencében, a keleti részeken látható a temetkezési helyek hiányával (Gáll et al. 2021, Map 2)

the Târnava Mare floodplain: Valea Hotarului-Canton (B) (Baltag 1979, 101, Pl. LXIV, Figs. 5–6; Baltag, Amlacher 1994, 189, Pl. CXX, Figs. 7–9) and Albești-Școală (A) (Baltag, Harhoiu 2018, 239–240, Fig. 2).

A 0.40–0.50 m thick cultural layer was identified northeast of the settlement at Albești, on the left bank of the Târnava Mare River during a fieldwalking campaign next to the Valea Hotarului Stream. The collected slow-wheeled, rough, reddish-brown pottery is characteristic of the Late Avar Period (Baltag 1979, 101, Pl. LXIV, Figs. 5–6; Baltag, Amlacher 1994, 189, Pl. CXX, Figs. 7–9) (Fig. 2. 5, Fig. 20. B).

Four 4th-century graves and four round pits were unearthed in the two trenches opened at Albești-Școală. Only Pit 4 was dated to the Late Avar Period; however, ‘Migration Period’ pottery was also found in Pit 2 (Baltag, Harhoiu 2018, 239). According to the archaeologists excavating the site, the fragments of a perhaps single Late Avar vessel, the ash mixed

with charcoal grains and burnt soil, and the burnt and intact bone fragments discovered in Pit 4 may be the remains of a burial; unfortunately, no anthropological or archaeozoological analysis has been carried out on them.²³ That is all the more regrettable as otherwise, no burial place could be connected with the sites discussed above (Fig. 2. 4).

The dating of the iron smelting furnace excavated at Sighișoara-Cartierul Plopilor-Herțes is not indisputable because (according to Baltag) after operating as a smelting furnace, the feature was used for domestic activities, as attested by the chicken bones and the characteristic Late Avar pottery fragments in its fill.²⁴ As for the location of the only item rescued by non-specialists from the site, it was not found in the Târnava Mare floodplain but on higher grounds (Fig. 2. 7).

Sighișoara-Valea Dracului-‘La podul de beton’, an about 300–400 m long and 150–200 m wide settlement site, is located on the right bank of the stream bearing the same name, on a ground much higher

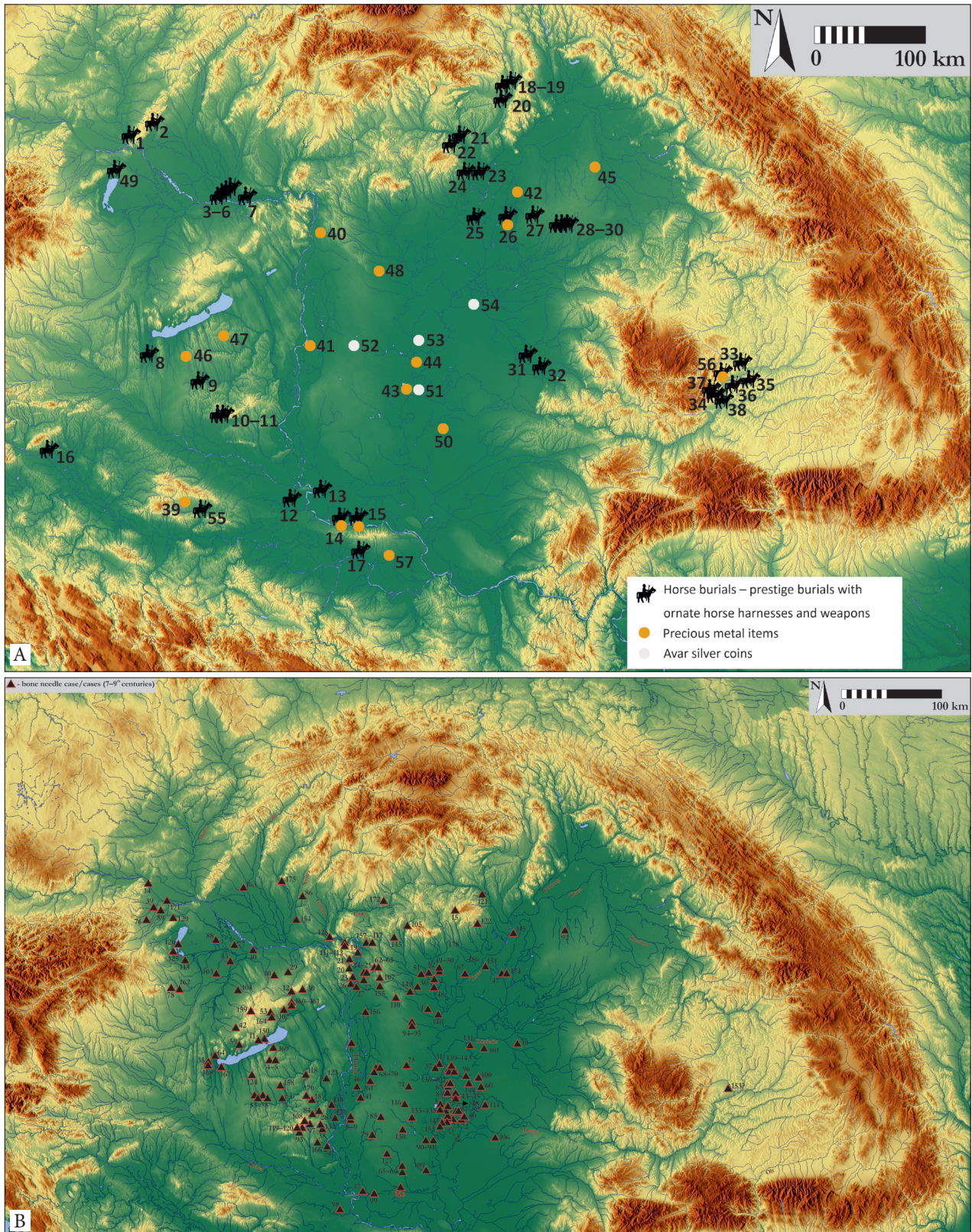


Fig. 24/A–B. Traces of the political power system of the Late Avar Khaganate in the archaeological record of the Carpathian Basin (Szenthe 2021, Fig. 1) and the distribution of bone needle cases, a flagship type of the Late Avar record (Szenthe, Gáll 2021, Fig. 4)

24/A–B. kép. A késő avar kori kaganátus hatalmi rendszerére utaló nyomok a Kárpát-medence régészeti hagyatékában (Szenthe 2021, Fig. 1) és a késő avar kor egyik leggyakoribb tárgytypusának, a csont tűtartóknak a földrajzi elterjedése (Szenthe, Gáll 2021, Fig. 4)

than the Târnava Mare floodplain, at the edge of a forest accompanying the stream. It was discovered during a fieldwalking campaign in the 1970s (Baltag 1979, 100–101). Its record is characterised by slow-wheeled and a very small amount of hand-made pottery, dating the site to the 7th–8th centuries. The site was investigated by a rescue excavation in 1995 (Fig. 2. 6, Fig. 20. A).²⁵

The other two sites at the fringes of the microregion lie on higher terraces. The first, known as Valea Cânepii (Hanfau)-În fundătura, was identified during a fieldwalking survey in the upper reaches of the stream mentioned above, a tributary of the Pârâul Câinelui/Hundsbad Stream (Baltag, Amlacher 1994, 184, Pl. CXI,5–9). It was explored with a small trench opened in the central part of the old castle; slow-wheeled 7th–8th-century pottery with wave decoration was recovered from the unearthened cultural layer. At 469 m asl, this site is interesting because of its location (Fig. 2. 8, Fig. 21. B).

Traces of a small settlement were identified at a similar altitude, on a flat terrace on the right bank of the Pârâul Câinelui/Hundsbad Stream, at a location referred to by historical maps as Între Glimeii/Zwischen den Bücheln (Aurel Vlaicu). According to Baltag, traces of five to ten residential buildings could be identified there. While this information should be treated with some reservation, the approximately forty pottery fragments from the site undoubtedly date the settlement to the 7th–8th centuries (Fig. 2. 9, Fig. 21. A; Baltag, Amlacher 1994, 182, Pl. CIV,1–11; Baltag 2004, 177).

Conclusions

Microregional aspects

In the current state of research, the presented microregional observations are no more than hypotheses, as decisive evidence was only discovered at the Weinberg site, and some data are available on partial results from Albești-La Cetățea.

1. Based on the nine sites and find collections registered thus far, not only the Târnava Mare floodplain and the small terraces were inhabited, used as venues of everyday (economic) activity or in other ways during the period in focus, but also the terraces and plateaus of the tributaries, some, such as Albești-La Cetățea, at a significant altitude (up to 500 m asl). *Differences between the topographical positions of settlements – on floodplains, higher terraces, or plateaus – are more likely indi-*

*cating their close connection and complementary role, corroborated by the pottery made using very similar or identical technology on all of them.*²⁶

2. Regarding these geographical differences, one cannot exclude that these settlements found in diverse but close, likely adjacent geographic environments may have been part of a specific seasonal system: the related communities or some of their members lived in the large river valleys from autumn to spring, while from spring to autumn, they moved to higher plateaus with rich pastures. The traces of iron metallurgy at Albești and the pottery kiln in Sighișoara-Weinberg suggest that these communities were involved in a wide range of activities and were, in some aspects, also specialised. Overall, however, there is no data on the role of these communities in the exploitation of the resources of the microregion, how they organised it, what role they had in the transfer of resources from other microregions to other regions (trade routes), and the settlement network in the Sighișoara microregion. For now, these questions have remained unanswered, awaiting further research.

In other words, even if one does not include in the interpretation natural impacts (e.g., the cooling down of the climate in the 7th–8th centuries) or even macro-political events, one must consider micro-regional effects, processes, and trends when interpreting the development of material culture.

3. It seems obvious that the circular or elliptic arrangement of the buildings on the settlements excavated so far (even if only partially) indicates a specific settlement organisation for each. Settlements with such a structure may have been part of a specific network that generally applied the same standards (Fig. 4).
4. Based on the Late Avar pottery kiln in Sighișoara-Weinberg and other analogies, a settlement network and some kind of settlement organisation can be reconstructed in the Sighișoara microregion.

The distribution area of the products of this workshop could be estimated by relying on Gyula Rosner's observations on the pottery centre at Szekszárd. While almost every grave of the cemetery at Szekszárd-Bogyiszlói Street, in the immediate vicinity of the workshop, contained pottery vessels, in the coeval cemetery at Gyöng-Vásártér, 28.5 km to the north, such additions were extremely rare (one ves-

sel for every fifty graves). Based on that, the distribution area of the products of an Avar Period pottery workshop in the central areas of the Avar Khaganate did not exceed approximately 30 km.

E. No burials are known from the microregion of Sighișoara either, which raises further questions: could this lack be due to a specific rite²⁷ or is it simply research bias?

The Sighișoara microregion and the Transylvanian Basin in the 7th–9th centuries

The presented Late Avar archaeological finds from our microregion, dated between the end of the 7th and the 9th century, show significantly different characteristics than the coeval record in the western parts of the Transylvanian Basin. Besides pottery and bone awls, to which Radu Harhoiu and Gheorghe Baltag published loose analogies from the Central Danube Basin, Wallachia, Moldavia, Bessarabia, and Dobrudja (Harhoiu, Baltag 2006, 378–483), elements of the material culture that would indicate contacts with the western parts of the Transylvanian Basin are almost completely missing; the single piece of such ‘evidence’ is the baking bell discussed above. That may indicate that the ‘Mediterranean diet’ reconstructed by Vida (Vida 2011, 734–737) was hardly or not at all widespread among the communities of Eastern Transylvania (including the Sighișoara microregion) at the time.

A significant difference between the Sighișoara microregion (and Eastern Transylvania as a whole) and the western parts of the basin is the lack of 6/7th–11th-century cemeteries and burial sites in the east. No Early and Late Avar Period horse and weapon burials are known from the Sighișoara microregion; such features only appear as an ‘enclave’ in the Salt Land of Western Transylvania. There are no cremation, biritual, or even partial horse and weapon burials, typical of the conquering Hungarians, either, and not any mortuary phenomenon is known from the microregion in general. Thus far, the lack of burials in the east could not be explained convincingly; however, we summarised this very complex phenomenon in three points in another study (Gáll, Mărginean 2022, 211–213). The eastern border of the distribution of the known burial sites outlines a kind of ‘Maginot line’ between Eastern and Western Transylvania.

Perhaps also due to the current state of research, the characteristics of our microregion differ from Western Transylvania and can be compared to

Eastern Transylvania. Except for pottery (extensive analogies to which were presented from the Central Danube Basin, Wallachia, and Moldavia by Radu Harhoiu and Gheorghe Baltag) and bone awls, the scarcity of deposits in these settlements leaves room for very few possible interpretations, while the lack of cemeteries and burial sites clearly draws a cultural border between Western Transylvania and the Sighișoara microregion, the latter belonging to Eastern Transylvania instead.

The Sighișoara microregion and the question of territoriality in the late Avar Khaganate (7th–9th centuries)

According to the current academic consensus, which can be traced back to the 19th-century *nation-building* era,²⁸ the Avar Khaganate extended its authority to the *entire* Carpathian Basin,²⁹ and this nomadic empire – using the terminology of Jenő Szűcs – developed into a territorial (early medieval) state (Szűcs 1997, 301–317). *It must be noted that no such simplified and uniform construction of a homogenous cultural space took place in the Carpathian Basin in the early medieval period; such a notion is merely a product of the European nationalist ideologies of the 19th and 20th centuries.* However, the representation of the extents of the Avar Khaganate in the Carpathian Basin, as appearing on maps in archaeological and historical studies, does not necessarily reflect only the influence of diverse political ideologies but also the lack of micro- and mesoregional research.

This generally popular theory envisages the emergence of a communication system encompassing the entire Carpathian Basin and outlining a homogeneous (archaeological) culture in the Late Avar Period. However, by looking at the find material of the Carpathian Basin and projecting onto a map the scatter of the most important archaeological phenomena and artefact types, the need to nuance the picture from the perspective of the Transylvanian Plateau, Eastern Transylvania, and the Sighișoara microregion becomes obvious.

1. Contrary to the theory mentioned above, the archaeological record does not yield any evidence that the ‘entire’ Carpathian Basin was part of the Avar political power network; in fact, it proves the exact opposite, as the map in *Fig. 23* clearly shows. As for the Transylvanian Plateau, one must clearly distinguish between Eastern and Western Transylvania. Save for some general elements of the material culture, which were pre-

sent in a vast area from the Baltic region to the Balkans and the Caucasus (e.g., some pottery types mentioned above, which do not hint at the power structures of the Avar Khaganate in a way like 11th–12th-century pottery marks the area of the Kingdom of Hungary³⁰), the archaeological record of the Sighișoara microregion, belonging in this respect to Eastern Transylvania in the Late Avar Period and between the end of the 7th and the 9th century in general, bears completely different characteristics than that of the central and semi-peripheral areas of the Carpathian Basin (Fig. 24. A–B).

- The second conclusion follows from the first: the cemeteries and burial sites in the western part of the Transylvanian Plateau represent the periphery of the cultural habitat of the Carpathian Basin, stretching from the vicinity of Vienna in the west to the salt lands in the central region of the Mureș River, but not further east. This habitat ends about 200 km from the eastern mountains of the Carpathian Basin (Brașov, Ciuc, and Gheorgheni depressions). The relative scarcity of

‘Avar’ burial sites in the western part of the Transylvanian Plateau can be explained by the peripheral position of the communities of these areas in the Avar military-political and social networks. One may interpret this area as part of the Middle Danube Basin Avar network, representing the easternmost fringes of the Avar Khaganate.

According to our current knowledge, the eastern regions of the Transylvanian Basin, not having been integrated into the ‘Avar political power network,’ could be areas outside the authority of political power, with uncertain status or simply *without status*. These early medieval ‘*no man’s lands*’, including the Sighișoara microregion, fundamentally differed from the Avar dwelling areas in Western Transylvania. No written source mentions Eastern Transylvania; these regions and communities are ‘*without history*’ in the twilight of the early medieval period. Fig. 25 is a model of the political power relations summarising our current understanding.

In conclusion, there is no clear, decisive archaeological evidence that the Sighișoara microregion or the eastern regions of the Transylvanian Plateau

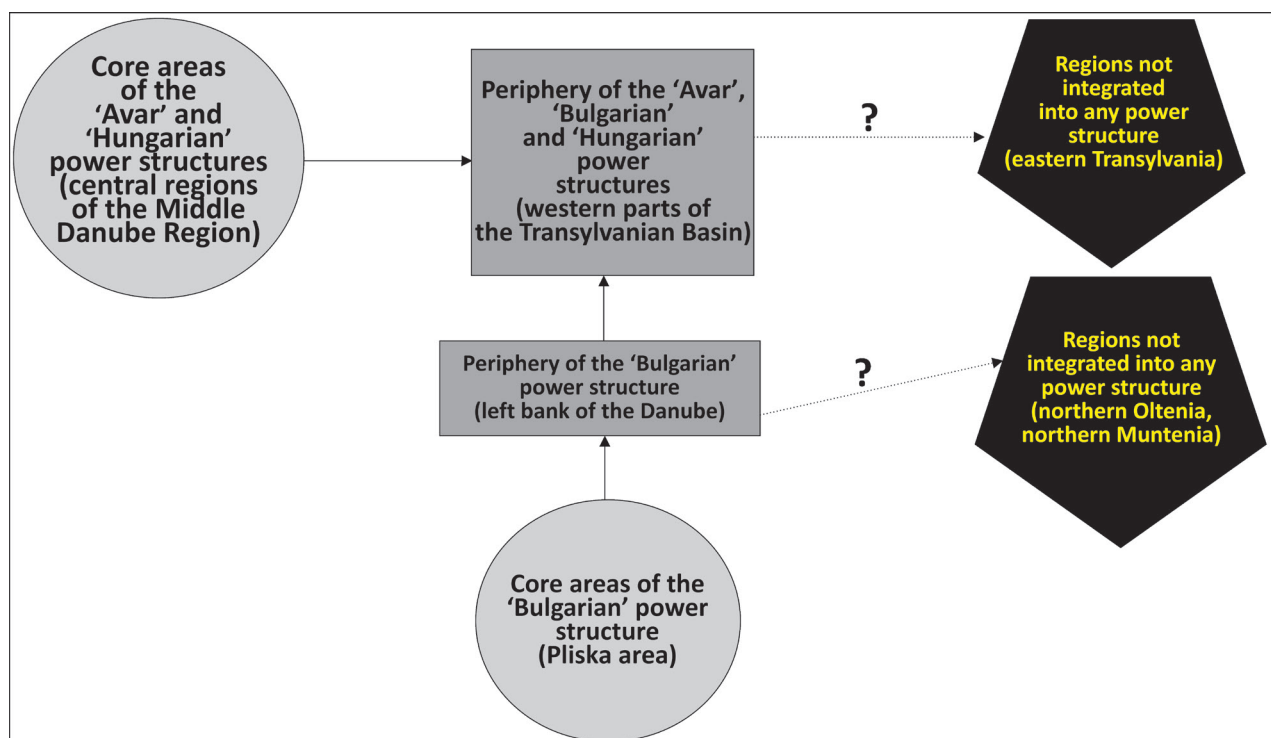


Fig. 25. Relationship between central areas, peripheries, and territories ‘without political status’ (‘without history’), based on archaeological data, and the asymmetrical relationship between the communities inhabiting the peripheries and the political and military power networks in the area

25. kép. A centrum, a periféria és a „politikai státusz nélküli” területek közötti kapcsolat típusának grafikonja a régészeti adatok tükrében, illetve a politikai-katonai hatalmak és a különböző területek lakossága közötti aszimmetrikus kapcsolatok ábrája

were active parts of the political power network of the Late Avar Khaganate. One may interpret these areas rather as inhabited by ‘politically unorganised’ populations, outlining an asymmetrical relationship between the centre and the peripheral regions of the

Avar Khaganate. In this respect and based on other observations,³¹ *it is incorrect to equate the (Late) Avar Khaganate with the geographical Carpathian Basin.*

Notes

- 1 The research behind this study was implemented with the support provided by the Ministry of Innovation and Technology of Hungary from the National Research, Development and Innovation Fund, financed under the TKP2021-NKTA-24 funding scheme.
- 2 For the first analysis of the Sighișoara microregion in a global context (even if of the Iron Age archaeological record), see Spânu 2014, 105–124.
- 3 From an institutional point of view, the first fundamental changes with negative and positive repercussions (a common characteristic of all modernisation attempts) were brought about by the measures of the communist regime after 1946 (see Bărbulescu 2022, 296–304 on institutional development). After 1958, the new directives with a prominently nationalist-communist character led – without resembling Lenin’s regime, not to mention the philosophy of Marx or Rosa Luxemburg – to an unprecedented modernisation of Romania (see, e.g., Ban 2014, 41–81; Tamás 2021).
- 4 Although Harhoiu and Baltag dated it to the 7th century, based on the chronology suggested by Frederick Puskás-Kolozsvári, we have accepted the 8th century dating (Harhoiu, Baltag 2007, 94–95).
- 5 According to the authors, since no ‘Bulgarian’ amphora is known from the settlement, it cannot be dated to the 9th century (Harhoiu, Baltag 2006, 378).
- 6 The wire bracelet can also be dated to the 7th century (Harhoiu, Baltag 2006, 362).
- 7 The Șimonești site was dated to the 7th–9th centuries (Benkő 1992, 146, Taf. 22. 8–9, 11).
- 8 For a list and analysis of 7th–9th-century baking bells from the Carpathian Basin (see Vida 2011, 726–728, Map 6). Since Vida’s excavation, other specimens, mostly fragments, have been found in many other sites.
- 9 Gaiu dated it to the 8th–9th centuries Gaiu 2000, 383–384.
- 10 For an analysis of baking bells from the Carpathian Basin (see Stanciu 2016a, 128–129; Stanciu 2016b, 38). These studies do not mention the Șimonești and Sighișoara finds.
- 11 For practical reasons, only a part of these was excavated (Harhoiu et al. 2020, 198–199, Abb. 83. Bf.280).
- 12 For another opinion, see Stanciu 2016a, 199, note 699.
- 13 E.g., Vida 1999; Skriba 2010, 7. kép 15, 20, 9. kép 1, 11. kép 25; Bajkai 2012, 4. kép 8, 5. kép 39; Benedek, Pópitay 2010, 9. kép 1–2.
- 14 For a detailed pottery analysis (see Spânu, Gáll 2016, 183–187, Figs. 6–7, Pls. 1–9, 1–8).
- 15 See, e.g., Dunaszentgyörgy (Kreiter et al. 2017, 21–102).
- 16 For example, tens or hundreds of settlement features (buildings, storage and waste disposal pits) have been observed at Dunaujváros or Kölked, but no pottery kiln (Takács, Vaday 2004, 9–10, note 19).
- 17 As Daniel Spânu clarified, no finds were found from this period on Terrace B (see Spânu 2008).
- 18 Baltag 2004, 143–144, with the map showing the elliptical arrangement of the houses in Fig. 4.
- 19 “*Pe de altă parte decorul din bandă îngustă de trăsături verticale cu pieptenul apare în ceramica de tip Dridu începând din sec. al X-lea*” (Baltag 2000, 177).
- 20 Comb and fork motifs are well-known from Avar Period pottery, but they are very rare, appearing, e.g., in the record of Solt, 3. Jászárokszállás-André féle homokbánya Grave 2 (Vida 1999, 216: Kat. No. 137, 277: Kat. No. 668, Taf. 54. 3, Taf. 98. 3, Taf. 159. 4), dated to the Late Avar Period (ADAM 2002, Vol. I, 174) and Čakajovce Grave 449, dated to the 9th or 10th century (Rejholcová 1995, Vol. I: 48–49, Tab. LXXI. 10, Vol. II: 107, 111). Similar pottery decoration is also known from Silesia (Pankiewicz 2020, Fig. 36.a, Fig. 37.c). The motifs do not appear on 10th–11th-century grave pottery in the Transylvanian Plateau (Gáll 2013, Vol. I: Fig. 270).
- 21 In Baltag’s opinion, this decoration style is regional: “*Trebuie observat și faptul că cele trei puncte (Albești, Filași și Oțeni) în care a fost deja semnalat acest tip de decor la nivelul sec. VIII-X se situează la limita și pe cursul superior al bazinului râului Târnava Mare, făcând parte dintrun areal geografic cu trăsături particulare, zona podișului înalt și împădurit din estul Transilvaniei...*” (Baltag 2000, 178; for macroregional analogies, see note 20).
- 22 According to Radu Harhoiu, who had an opportunity to study the finds from the 1980s and 1990s, the settlement can be dated to the Late Avar Period (Radu Harhoiu’s letter: 29.12.2023).
- 23 Baltag, Harhoiu 2018, 240. The whereabouts of the bones are unknown.
- 24 “*După încetarea folosirii cuptorului în scopul pentru care a fost construit, el a fost reutilizat pentru nevoi casnice, în vatră descoperindu-se oase de pasăre și câteva*

- fragmente ceramice dintr-un vas. Ceramica descoperită are caracteristicile ceramicii din secolele VI-VII, din pastă aspră, brun-roșcată, cu mult nisip, lucrată la roată lentă*” (Baltag 1979, 99).
- 25 Unpublished excavation (Baltag, Amlacher 1994, 185, Pl. CX).
- 26 Daniel Spânu observed a similar phenomenon on the Iron Age sites of the Sighișoara microregion (see Spânu 2014, 105–124).
- 27 E.g., Maddrell et al. 2023, 34–35.
- 28 Anderson 2006; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1990. For more on Hungarian ‘nation-building,’ see Gyurgyák 2007. Building upon this notion, historians and archaeologists have created a nation concept, simplified to distortion, which perhaps could be considered in some parts of the world in the 19th and 20th centuries but certainly not in the pre-modern era.
- 29 For an expressive presentation (see Bóna 1988, 164–177).
- 30 See Gáll 2016, 141–162.
- 31 As Radu Harhoiu noted, cultural areas were determined throughout history fundamentally by the basins and valleys of watercourses, while mountains played a secondary role in the process. In this light, a part of the eastern Transylvania Plateau, more precisely the Olt Basin, belongs to the Lower Danube Basin, while the other part to the Middle Danube Basin. This also means that, from a cultural point of view, one cannot speak about a(n unified or homogenous) Avar Period Carpathian Basin; this is a 19th-century dogma, which Harhoiu criticizes severely (Harhoiu 2020, 12, Fig. 8).

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ASZIMMETRIKUS REGIONÁLIS KAPCSOLATOK A KÉSŐ AVAR KAGANÁTUSBAN.
SEGESVÁR KISTÉRSÉGE A KORA KÖZÉPKORBAN (7/8–9. SZÁZAD)
ÉS A MIKROREGIONÁLIS KUTATÁS FONTOSSÁGA

Összefoglalás

A segesvári mikrorégió az Erdélyi-medence belsejének különálló geológiai és tektonikai egysége, amely majdnem a medence központi részén fekszik. A kistérségünkben végzett ásatások, mentőfeltárások és terepbejárások során összesen kilenc lelőhely vált ismertté, amelyek a késő avar és poszt avar korszakra, illetve abszolút kronológiailag a 7/8–9/10. századra keltezhetőek. Ezek közül mindössze négy lelőhelyet tártak fel régészeti ásatások során (Segesvár-Weinberg: „Siedlung”, település és „Gräberfeld”, temető, valamint Fehéregyháza-Cetățea, Fehéregyháza-Școală), a többi lelőhelyet terepbejárás során azonosították, azaz kiterjedésük és jellegük nem egyértelmű. Ezen okok miatt megfigyeléseinket, észrevételeinket és következtetéseinket nagyon óvatosan tehetjük meg.

Mikrorégióink késő avar kori régészeti emlékei – összességében a 7. század végétől a 9/10. századig – jelentősen eltérő jelleget mutatnak az Erdélyi-medence

nyugati részeihez képest. Az Erdélyi-medence nyugati részén azonosított temetők/temetkezési helyek a Kárpát-medencei kulturális habitus perifériáját képviselték, amely nyugaton Bécs környékéről indult és a középső Maros vidékéig nyomon követhető. Keleti irányban, Baráthelytől kezdődően azonban nem ismerünk egyetlen temetőt sem!

Ezen megfigyelésekből kiindulva, nincs egyértelmű régészeti bizonyíték arra, hogy a segesvári mikrorégió, valamint az Erdélyi-medence keleti területei aktív részei voltak a késő avar kaganátus hatalmi hálózatainak. Inkább politikailag szervezetlen közösségek által benépesített területről beszélhetünk. E csoportok aszimmetrikus kapcsolatban álltak az Avar Kaganátus központjával és az azt körülvevő befolyási övezettel. Segesvár környékén ilyenformán „történelem nélküli” népességek éltek a korai középkorban.