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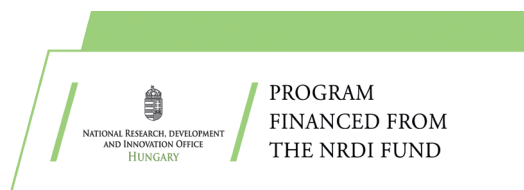
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BURIALS WITH SHEEPSKINS IN LIGHT OF THE CHANGES BETWEEN THE EARLY AND LATE AVAR PERIODS

Zsófia BÁSTI¹  – Bence GULYÁS² 

The article discusses graves in the Carpathian Basin that contain the skulls, legs or other remains of flayed sheep. Based on the distribution of the phenomenon, the burials of the Early and Middle-Late Avar periods can clearly be distinguished from each other. In the Carpathian Basin, burials with sheepskins concentrated east of the Tisza River in the Early Avar Period and reflect connections to the Eastern European steppe. After the mid-600s, the phenomenon became common in a much wider area and the method of flaying also changed.

A cikk azokat a Kárpát-medencei sírokat tárgyalja, amelyekben különleges módon megnyűzott juhok koponyáját, lábát vagy egyéb maradványait találták meg. A jelenség térbeli elterjedése alapján egyértelműen elkülönülnek egymástól a korai, illetve a középső-késő avar kori temetkezések. A juhbőrmelléklet adás szokása a kora avar korban a Kárpát-medencében a Tiszától keletre koncentrálódott és a kelet-európai sztyeppével való kapcsolatokat tükrözi. A 600-as évek közepét követően a juhbőrös temetkezések a Kárpát-medence sokkal szélesebb területén váltak általánossá. Emellett a nyűzés módja is megváltozott a korábbi technikákhoz képest.

Keywords: *sheepskin in grave, burial customs, flaying techniques, Avar Period*

Kulcsszavak: *juhbőr deponálás a sírban, temetkezési szokások, nyűzési technikák, avar kor*

Introduction

One of the most emblematic burial customs of the Avar Period is the placing of sacrificial animals into the grave.¹ Both whole and partial remains of animals are known from mortuary contexts; partial remains only include skulls and leg bones, probably skeletal parts left in the skin or hide.² Horse, cattle, sheep and goat species were the most common choices; however, the number and species composition of sacrificed animals vary by period and region within the studied 300 years.

Animal offerings have traditionally been examined according to species, and research focused mostly on burials with horses in the past sixty years (Kiss 1963; Garam 1987; Čilinská 1990; Némethi, Klima 1991; Makoldi 2008; Bede 2012; Garam 2018, 253–275; Gulyás et al. 2021; Szenthe, Gáll 2022b, 96–106). Cattle remains from the Avar Period received much less attention since the incipient stud-

ies of the Sopronkőhida cemetery (Török 1973, 33–34; Szőke 1979; T. Szőnyi, Tomka 1985, 111–115). So far, only one article addressed specifically sheep burials,³ and even that did not attempt an exhaustive review (Gulyás, Lőrinczy 2020). According to another approach, there is no significant difference in meaning between animal species in this context, especially in the case of the partial animal burials, (T. Szőnyi, Tomka 1985, 112). Following that, Gábor Lőrinczy, Livia Bende and Jozef Zábójník discussed flayed horses, cattle, and small ruminants together (Lőrinczy 1993, 111–117; Zábójník 2007; Bende 2017, 312–314). Furthermore, recent research has pointed out that the species of the animal offered is related mostly to the gender of the deceased: men received mainly horses, women cattle and sheep, and children sheep (Zábójník 2007, 371; Gulyás 2023b, 166).

In this article, we do not discuss all types of mortuary animal sacrifices, only burials with sheepskins.

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We focus on whether the rite appears as part of a homogeneous set of cultural knowledge in each period or is it a fashion element taken out of its context. To answer this question, we use both quantitative and qualitative analytic methods.

Several factors hinder us from achieving accurate results. Strict species identification is mostly unavailable, as only a few discussed cases were examined by an archaeozoologist. The exact position of the animal bones in the graves was usually not recorded, especially at earlier excavations. As a result, it is impossible to decide whether the animal's skin was spread over the coffin or rolled up in the grave in many cases. This situation is further burdened by grave disturbance, especially during the Late Avar Period. The illustrations of the related graves often are omitted in 20th-century publications, or they are too schematic for identifying skinning methods based on them. Taken together, the quality of the available dataset is extremely uneven for our purposes; however, it is suitable for drawing important conclusions even with its shortcomings.

Burials with sheepskins in the Avar Period – interpretive framework

The skull and leg bones found in graves, referred to as partial animal remains, were traditionally interpreted by Avar Period research as animal parts left in their skin (Rosner 1977, 96–100; Lőrinczy 2022, 40). Besides their different appearances, functional differentiation was hypothesised between complete and partial horse remains in this context. Research associated complete horses with representation while partial horse burials with community rituals, which, according to István Bóna, are a degraded form of representation. In discussing the Szegvár-Sápoldal burial, he suggests that the mourners could not afford to place two horses in the grave and consume a third one on the funeral feast. Instead, the meat of one horse was served as a funerary meal, and only its skin, containing the head and the feet, was buried next to another, complete horse in the grave (Bóna 1979, 19–21).⁴

Miklós Béla Szőke also assumed a simplification in the ritual; according to him, the complete animals were first replaced by the skins containing the skull and the legs, and then by the skulls only. At the same time, he did not take a position on whether this development was related to religious and/or social changes (Szőke 1979, 97). In our opinion, the burial

variants cannot represent diverse stages of a unilinear process because they appear simultaneously. In addition, we assume different approaches behind the variants, which might be indicated by the fact that some of the partial horse remains in the early burials were not harnessed (Lőrinczy, Straub 2005, 140–141), i.e., the horses did not appear as riding animals in them.

Less conventional approaches are also known in the interpretation of animal remains. László Bartosiewicz suggested that the sheep's head and feet found in a grave in Paks-Gyapa were food offerings, which he also supported with examples from Anatolia (Bartosiewicz 2012). Elvira H. Tóth was of a similar opinion; she distinguished the sheep skull and leg bones found in a heap in the corner of the Kunadacs grave from the one discovered at Szabadszállás, where the animal bones were above the skeleton level. She interpreted the former as a food offering and the latter as a flayed animal skin (H. Tóth 1981, 178–179). Discussing the Komárom-Hajógyár cemetery, Jozef Zábójník considered such remains as sheepskin burials only in the cases where a zoologist has confirmed that the skull and leg bones belonged together (Zábójník 2007, 357). The early medieval burial at Kostohryzove on the northern coast of the Sea of Azov gives justice to his concerns: there, the sheep's leg bones were found on the border of the main shaft and the niche, while the skull had been placed next to the human skull in a wooden bowl (Komar et al. 2006, 323).

In the second half of the 20th century, animal skulls in Late Avar mortuary contexts were usually interpreted as burials with animal skins.⁵ Béla Miklós Szőke identified these as a simplified form of partial animal burials (Szőke 1979, 97). Jozef Zábójník, on the other hand, did not accept this interpretation and treated graves with animal skulls and those with partial skeletons separately (Zábójník 2007, 376–377). In our opinion, there is not one interpretation relevant for all these phenomena because the Carpathian Basin in the Avar Period was inhabited by groups with different *habituses*; thus, each case has to be assessed individually. Sheep and goat skulls are probably remains of food offerings in several graves in the Danube–Tisza Interfluvium. In Áporka-Úrbőpuszta Grave 4, the animal bone was at the left wrist, and in Felgyő-Ürmös-tanya Grave 235 at the right upper arm (Bóna 1957, 149; Balogh 2010, 221–222). Grave 191 of Kiskőrös-Város alatt contained the skull of a young sheep (Balogh 2016, 121).

Theoretical background

Our study addresses cultural processes that can be inferred from the change in the spread of certain burial customs – in our case, sheepskin additions. Research usually suspects migration in the background of such cultural phenomena. This approach, as well as interpreting the phenomenon as an ethnic marker, have provoked intense debate in recent decades (Brather 2004; Curta 2007; Siegmund 2009; Brather 2011; Curta 2011; Curta 2013). In the research of the Avar Period, similar concerns did not arise until recently, when the distribution of certain ritual elements was used for identifying migration routes.⁶ Currently, however, it is argued that following the occurrence of a burial custom alone is not suitable for modelling migration processes since the individual ritual elements could be present in vast regions simultaneously.⁷ A theory proposes that based on burial customs, the archaeological record of the community which settled in the Trans-Tisza Region in the Early Avar Period is closely related

to that in the Eastern European steppe region in the 6th–7th centuries. (Somogyi 1987, 149; Gulyás 2015; Gulyás 2023a). Instead of seeking for specific elements, the researchers delving into this topic were looking for a region where burial customs characteristic of the Trans-Tisza Region appeared together (Somogyi 1987, 149; Somogyi 1997, 105–107; Gulyás 2015, 505–506; Lőrinczy 2017, 161). According to this theory, the population of the Trans-Tisza Region immigrated as a single block from Eastern Europe (inferred based on their specific set of burial customs that can easily be distinguished from the local funerary practice). Nowadays, this picture needs to be nuanced. The newcomers could incorporate groups from other regions of the Avar Khaganate, who could also adopt this mortuary practice. Therefore, these communities were not necessarily ethnically homogenous (Gulyás 2023a, 746–747). Additionally, in their new home in the Carpathian Basin, these groups then integrated newly arriving ones from the Eastern European steppe with which they maintained contact, with their identity changing

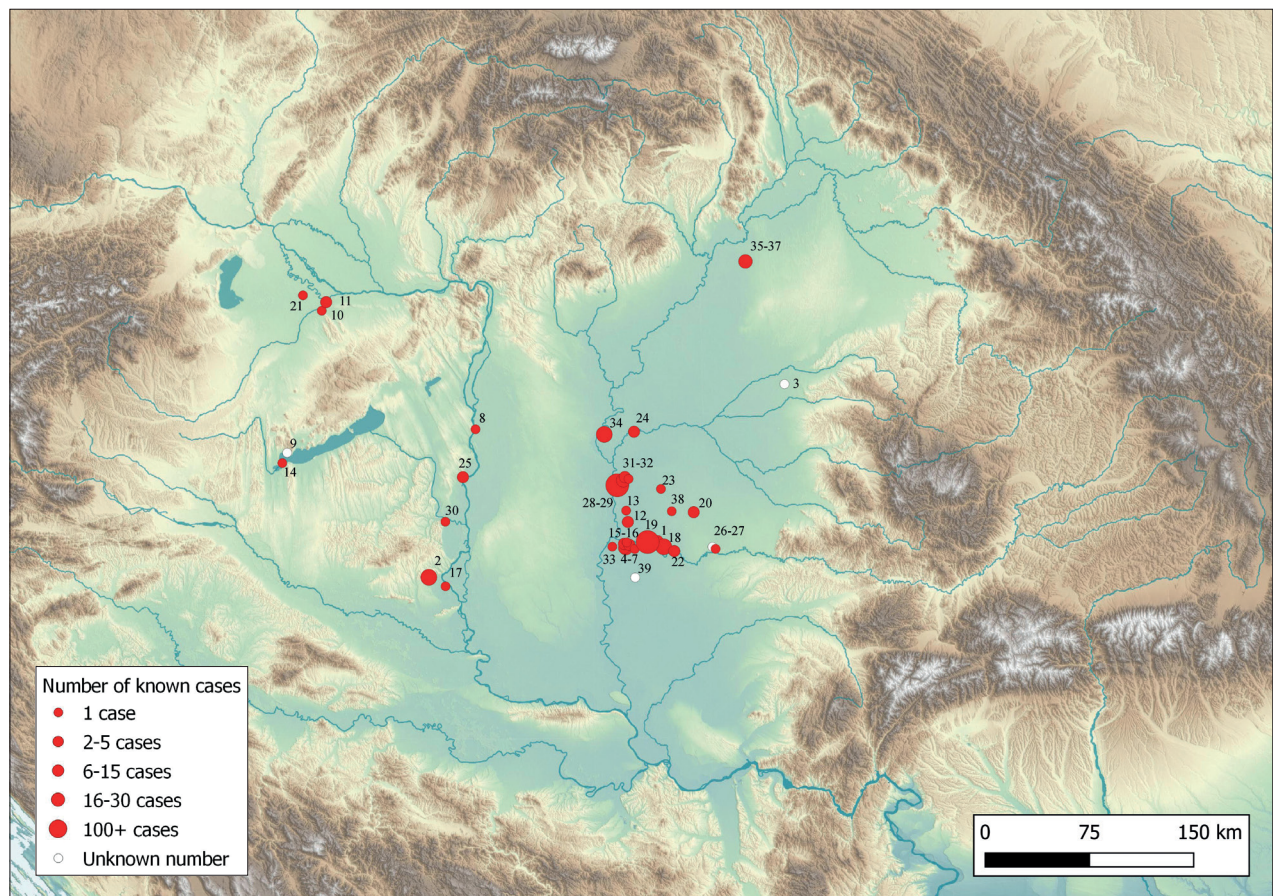


Fig. 1. Distribution of Early Avar sites with graves with sheepskins. Numbers: see Table 2 for site names
1. kép. A kora avar kori juhbőrös temetkezések elterjedése. A számozáshoz ld. az 2. táblázatot

and developing in the process; and that probably did not leave their burial rites unaffected either. Based on the concentration of Byzantine and precious metal objects in the Maros Valley and around Szegvár, the prosperity of the respective communities began in the first third of the 7th century. This boom is also detected in funerary representation: from this period on, many more animal skins were placed in the graves, which led to an increase in grave sizes and the gaining ground of the grave type with an end-wall shaft (Gulyás 2023a, 743).

The custom of burying people with flayed animal skin is part of a complex ritual that reflects identity and is the result of a conscious decision by the mourners. The mortuary segment of the cultural tradition was exposed to far-reaching changes determining the life of the community. Thus, both the execution and the communal meaning of the flayed animal skin in a burial may have changed during the Avar Period.

The other focus of our study, independent of the ritual aspect, is the flaying techniques which result in skins and hides with parts which are discernible with archaeological methods, thus indicating their former presence, even under continental climatic conditions. The bones remaining in the skin – the skull, the caudal vertebrae, and the lower legs – and the flaying and chopping marks that can be observed on them testify to unconsciously applied, therefore truly inherited, and long-term traditions.

This system of relations can be interpreted with the help of the *habitus* concept by Pierre Bourdieu. According to him, *habitus* is an *inherited* system that contains all learned courses of action and ideas about the world. This complex body of knowledge is called *doxa* (Bourdieu 1977). In relation to the phenomenon discussed, elements of the *doxa* are practical techniques for slaughtering and skinning animals. Burial customs are more special and complex elements of the *doxa*, because the ritual toolkit available to the community, from which they choose when making individual decisions, can be extremely large. This variability enables funerary rites to simultaneously express and affect the actual identity of a community. Thus, in extreme cases, these rites can express a closed group identity (ethnicity?) (Gulyás 2021, 139–140). In light of this concept, the number of archaeologically traceable versions of funerary rites in the Carpathian Basin and within the 300 years of the Avar Period can be unpredictably wide. Due to their essence, the same variability is expected in the meanings of these rite variants.

The advantage of the *habitus* concept is that it reflects not only on the characteristics of the end result but also on the technique (the process) through which it had been formed (Dietler, Herbich 1998). The methods of animal flaying practised in the Eurasian steppe vary over time and can be interpreted as cultural traditions.⁸

Three main flaying methods were practised in the Avar Period Carpathian Basin. In the early Avar Period, the so-called bone-cut flaying method was the most typical: the radius and tibia were split at an angle at the distal end (Lőrinczy 2016, 157). In contrast, in the Late Avar Period, the flaying started by cutting through the knee joints, and the skin was peeled off from there (Lőrinczy 2016, 166). More recently, a previously unknown technique was discovered at Tiszakürt-Zsilke-tanya, dated to the middle and last thirds of the 7th century: several sheep's leg bones were crushed with a blunt object (Gulyás et al. 2023, 357).

We propose that examining burials with sheepskins is suitable for modelling internal migration processes. However, for a distributional analysis like this, not only the presence of sheepskins but also their position in the grave, the method of skinning, and other burial customs linked to them must also be taken into account.⁹

Burials with sheepskins in the Early Avar Period

The remains of at least 849 specimens from the Early Avar Period are known from 39 sites (Table 2).¹⁰ These are rather unevenly distributed; 460 sheepskins were found in the Szegvár-Oromdűlő cemetery with 467 graves, and 254 in the Makó-Mikócsa-halom site with 251 graves. The skulls and leg bones of 16–30 sheep were found at three sites, Babarc-Mérvénység telep, Kövegy-Nagy-földek, and Tiszakürt-Zsilke-tanya each. In addition, the records of Tiszavasvári-Utasér-part-dűlő and Szegvár-Sápoldal held the remains of 6–15 animals, while the rest of the sites, 1–5. We have data on the presence of sheepskins from four sites where the exact number of cases is unknown.

29 of the studied sites are located in the Trans-Tisza Region (Fig. 1),¹¹ accounting for more than two-thirds of all cases. Traditionally, research has recognised another group there that appeared at the same time as the Avars and is characterised by quite diverse burial customs, different from the Avars'. The most common grave orientation is E–W or NE–SW,

while N–S and W–E are much less common. Besides simple shaft graves, there are many graves with two ledges, a sidewall niche, or an end-wall shaft. Flayed remains of horses, cattle, sheep and goats are common in the main shafts of the graves, often spatially separated from the deceased. Vessels were placed next to the head of the deceased in 20–50% of the cases in every site. Sheep rump was a common food offering (Lőrinczy 1998, 344; Gulyás 2023a, 704–706) (Fig. 2). Gábor Lőrinczy previously assumed that these communities first appeared along the lower course of the Maros and Tisza rivers and gradually expanded their dwelling areas towards north of the Körös rivers (Lőrinczy 1998, 354–355). Our distribution map shows that the majority of burials with sheepskins are concentrated in the Maros Valley, although the exact case number is unknown (Fig. 3). There is another concentration in a strip on the left bank of the Tisza between Szentes and Hódmezővásárhely, while in more distant areas, except for the area around Tiszavasvári, such graves appear more sporadically.

In addition to the Trans-Tisza Region, burials with sheepskins were frequent in southeastern Transdanubia in the Early Avar Period. Altogether 23 such burials are known from Babarc-Mérnök-ségi telep, currently known only from preliminary reports, two from Kölked-Feketekapu Cemetery B, and one from Szekszárd-Bogyiszlói Street. The common feature of the cemeteries mentioned above is the diversity of their burial rites, indicating several co-existing cultural traditions in the respective communities, although in different proportions. The groups of burials with sheepskins have the same burial rites as Early Avar communities in the Trans-Tisza Region (described above). Babarc and Kölked were characterised by NE–SW, E–W, while Szekszárd by N–S orientation. In addition to simple shaft graves, all three sites included graves with sidewall niches, and Babarc also a grave with an end-wall shaft. An important similarity is that the animals at the Transdanubian sites, just like those in the Trans-Tisza Region, were bone-cut flayed. Because of all that, it has been suggested that these communities moved from areas east of the Tisza River at the beginning of the 7th century (Gallina et al. 2022; Gulyás 2023b). In addition to the sites mentioned, sheep skulls and leg bones were documented in three graves in the Paks-Gyapa cemetery. Based on the preliminary report, the burial customs of this community, characterised by SW–NE orientation

and simple shaft graves, differ significantly from the ones practised on the sites mentioned above (Bartosiewicz 2012, 172). Based on the descriptions, the sheep found at Paks were flayed by cutting at the joints (Bartosiewicz 2012, 175). As we demonstrate below, this method was more characteristic of the Middle and Late Avar periods. Therefore, the graves unearthed at Paks-Gyapa, even if they also exhibit Early Avar features, possibly belong to the second half of the Avar Period.

Recently, a group of Early Avar Period burials with sheepskins can be identified in the Little Hungarian Plain. A total of six partial sheep remains have been mentioned from three sites, Győr-Pápai vám, Mosonszentmiklós-Pálmajor, and Gyirmót-Borsódűlő, although the latter two have not yet been published in detail. The graves at Győr are oriented NNW–SSE; in addition to simple shaft graves, the cemetery included a grave with a sidewall niche. One grave contained a ceramic vessel behind the skull, while remains of sheep and cattle rumps and a fowl were found in the leg area in two burials. The animals were bone-cut flayed (Nagy 2011, 13, 15–16). Based upon these burial rite elements (apart from orientation), the site could be related to communities of Eastern European steppe origin.

Flayed sheep remains from the first half of the Avar Period were found only in Grave 701 of Dunavecse-Kovacsos-dűlő in the Danube–Tisza Interfluve. The burial is oriented NW–SE, and based on its elongated shape, the archaeologist leading the excavation suggested that it was originally an irregular grave with an end-wall shaft (Balogh 2016, 44; Lantos 2019, 100).¹² Fowls were placed in the grave as food offering, and a harness symbolised the horse. Partial sheep remains alone do not imply that the grave is related to the Early Avar population of the Trans-Tisza Region. This grave is probably more akin to the features of Paks-Gyapa; the connection is also corroborated by the appearing skinning method.

A physical anthropological evaluation is available for 381 Early Avar individuals,¹³ and almost half of the related graves included partial sheep remains. Of these, 47% contained the remains of children, 29% of adult females, and 21% of adult males. It is striking that the majority of the deceased, 121 people, fall into the *Infans I* age group. After that, a sharp decrease in numbers could be observed in the *Infans II* (55) and *juvenis* (46) groups, and then another surge in the *adultus* (73) and *maturus* (59) age groups.¹⁴

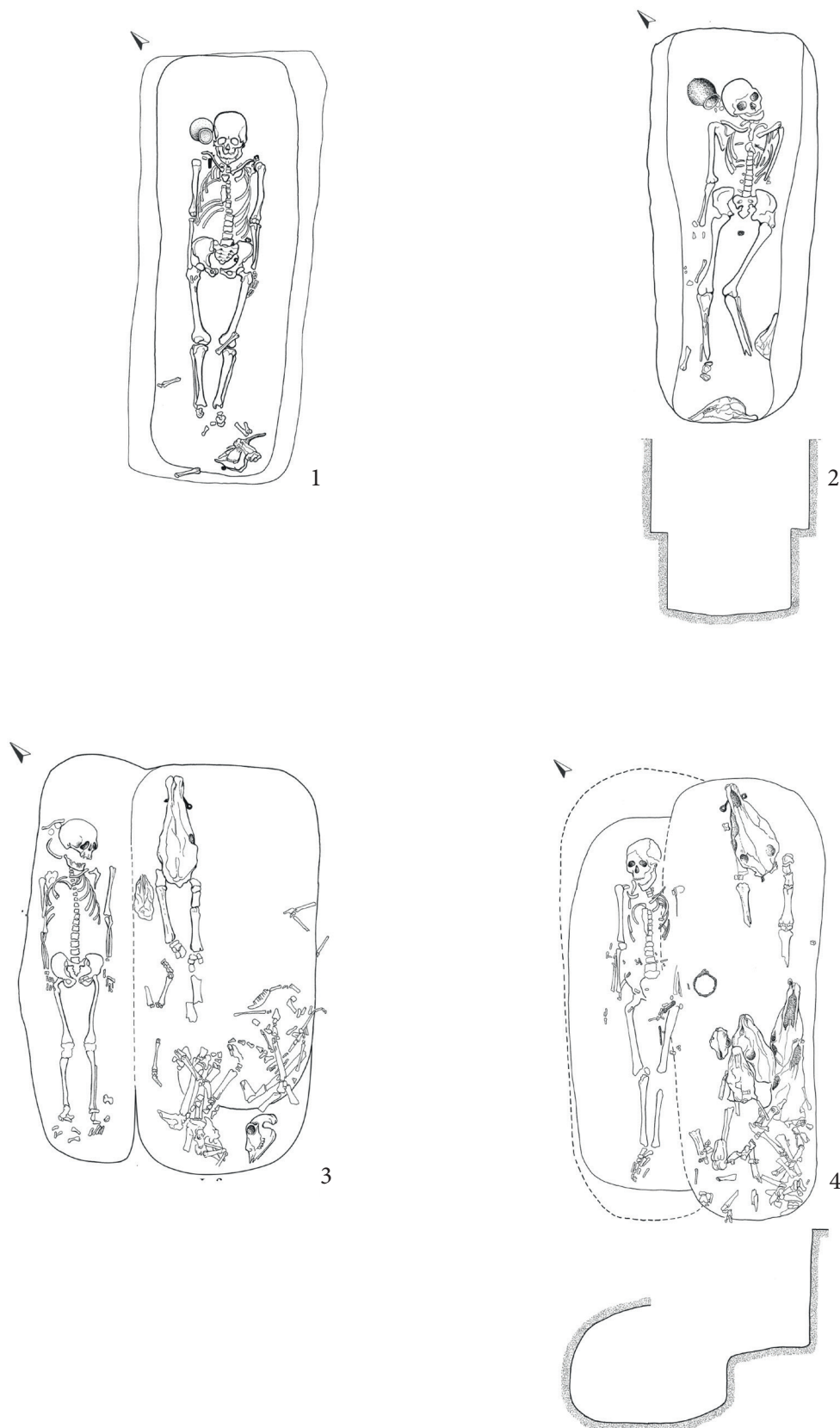


Fig. 2. Graves with sheepskins from Szegvár. 1: Grave 165; 2: Grave 323; 3: Grave 517; 4: Grave 539
(after Lőrinczy 2020)

2. kép. Juhbőrös temetkezések Szegvár-Oromdűlőből. 1: 165. sír; 2: 323. sír; 3: 517. sír; 4: 539. sír
(Lőrinczy 2020 nyomán)

Burials with sheepskins in the Late Avar Period

We examined Late Avar 46 sites with at least 521 graves containing skulls and legs or just animal skulls (Table 3).¹⁵ These sites scatter much more evenly in the Carpathian Basin than the Early Avar ones (eight in the Trans-Tisza Region, nine in Slovakia, thirteen in the Danube–Tisza Interfluve, and sixteen in Transdanubia). The number of cases by region is lower than in the previous period: 88 graves are known from the Trans-Tisza Region, 298 from the territory of Slovakia, 48 from the Danube–Tisza Interfluve, and at least 89 from Transdanubia (Fig. 4). In the Körös–Tisza–Maros Interfluve, the number

of graves with partial sheep remains shows a sharp decrease in the second half of the Avar Period. Only the Pitvaros–Víztorozó and Székkutas–Kápolnadúló cemeteries yielded relatively many cases (with 29 and 38 graves, respectively). Only a part of the faunal material from the Szarvas–Grexa téglagyár site underwent zoological examination (Bende 2017, 312), so the number of such burials there is probably higher than known today. The animal parts were placed in the main shafts of the graves with an end-wall shaft, just like in the previous period, and near the feet outside the coffin in simple shaft graves (Bende 2017, 312). In this period, sheepskin was placed mainly in the graves of adults regardless of gender,

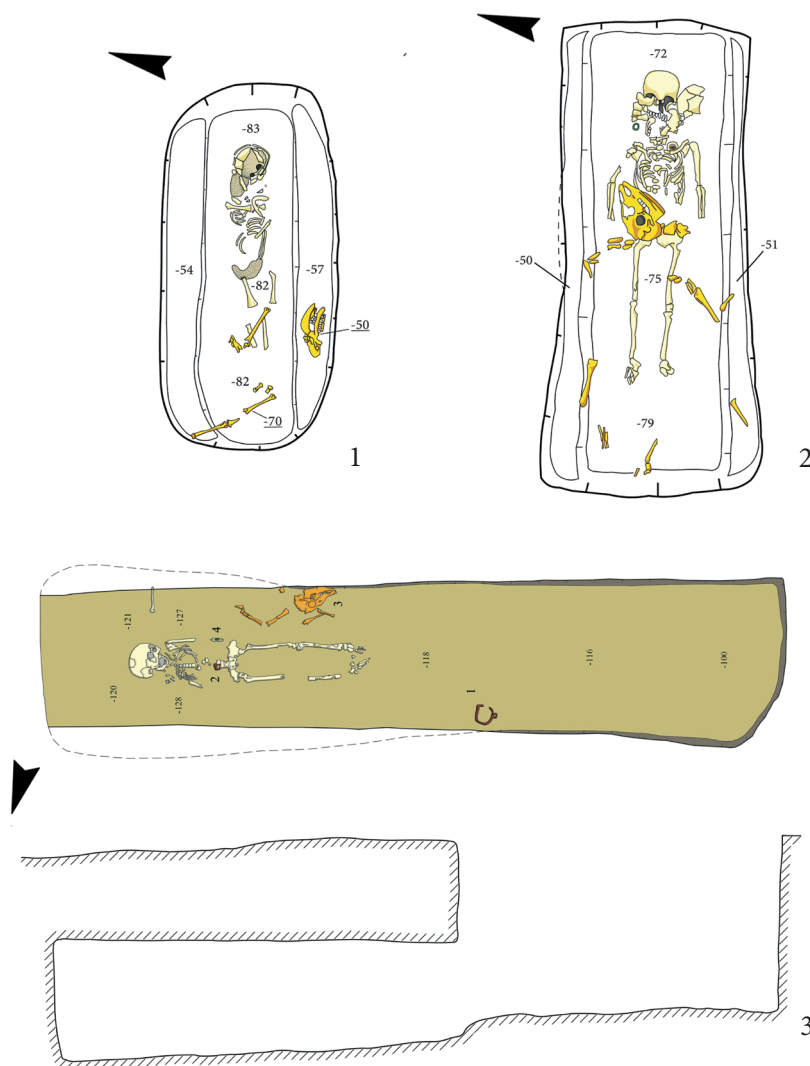


Fig. 3. Graves with sheepskins and sheep skulls from the Lower Maros Valley. 1: Kövegy-Nagy-földek Grave 18; 2: Kövegy-Nagy-földek Grave 22; 3: Apátfalva-Nagyút-dűlő Grave 376 (1–2: Benedek, Marcsik 2017; 3: Cseh, Varga 2017)

3. kép. Juhbőrös és juhkoponyás temetkezések a Maros alsó folyásánál. 1: Kövegy-Nagyföldek 18. sír; 2: Kövegy-Nagyföldek 22. sír; 3: Apátfalva-Nagyút-dűlő 376. sír (1–2: Benedek, Marcsik 2017; 3: Cseh, Varga 2017 nyomán)

departing from previous trends in the region (Bende 2017, 312). Few graves containing partial sheep remains are known from the area south of the Maros River; however, unlike the Early Avar record, the Late Avar material from the excavations of Ferenc Móra and Dezső Csallány is not known at all. Partial sheep remains were also found during recent excavations in Szőreg-Belső-Ugar and Nădlac (Nagylak, Romania) cemeteries 3M-S and 7M. Nevertheless, Late Avar cemeteries are much more modest compared to the previous period, with predominantly simple shaft graves oriented N-S and NW-SE. An independent horse burial is also known from both the Szőreg and Nădlac 7M sites each, showing the spread of this burial custom towards the inner Carpathian Basin (Lőrinczy, Szalontai 1993, 289–291; Cociş et al. 2016, 35–48; Gáll 2017, 47–49). Several burials of the Nădlac 3M-S site had a grave pit with a sidewall niche, a rare phenomenon in the Körös-Tisza-Maros Interfluvium in the second half of the Avar Period (Gáll 2017, 51).

Partial sheep remains occur sporadically in the mortuary record of the Little Hungarian Plain in the second half of the Avar Period. Three graves with small ruminant bones are known from Bágyog-Gyúrhegy, with both skulls only and skull-feet assemblages amongst them. These animal remains were situated above the skeleton level (probably on top of the coffin), or at the foot end of the grave (Csordás 2022, 114–115). In contrast, sheep skulls and leg bones lay in depressions at the feet of several deceased interred at Ménfőcsanak-Eperföldek (Nagy 2008, 186). Although the respective publications do not mention flaying methods, based on the published figures, the skins were peeled off at the joints.

A relatively small concentration of graves with sheepskins is known from the western Balaton Basin. Although some of these probably display Early Avar traditions, there are several arguments for their younger dating. We know of only one burial with an Avar rite from Keszthely-Fenekpuszta, Pusztaszentegyházi-dűlő near Lake Balaton (Müller 2014, 168). Grave 2000/150, oriented E-W, contained a child's skeleton, with a pot next to the skull and the remains of a sheep above the deceased. According to Tivadar Vida, analogies of this rite occur in the Middle Avar Period, which should be taken into account when dating this grave (Vida 2018, 198). About a third of the graves in Gyenesdiás contained sheep and goat skins spread over the coffin or rolled up and placed in the foot area (Fig. 5) (Müller 2019, 64–84). In the

absence of a complete publication, little is known about their chronological position; in preliminary reports, at least one grave was dated to the Early Avar Period. Based on a sheet metal bracelet with flared ends it contained (Müller 2008, 280), Grave 19, with a rite similar to that of the burial in Fenékpuszta (Müller 2008, 279), can probably be dated to the middle third of the 7th century.¹⁶ Overall, since graves with sheepskins make up a small proportion of the Gyenesdiás cemetery, and the rite of the Middle and Late Avar burials follow that of the Early Avar ones in all respects, the graves of the cemetery should rather be dated together to the second half of the Late Avar Period – even more so because the published grave plans suggest that the animals were flayed by cutting the legs at the joints (the method of skinning is not described in the text). Also, the previously characteristic E-W orientation gradually disappeared, and burials with horses became more frequent at the site in the Late Avar Period (Müller 2019, 64–84). One of the most important graves in the cemetery is Grave 64. It contains the skeleton of a bridled horse and the skull and leg bones of a goat. The sabre, the golden earrings, the gilded bronze belt mounts, and the Byzantine *solidi* of Constans II and Constantine IV (654–659) indicate the high rank of the deceased (Müller 2008, 282–283). The grave was dated to the Middle Avar Period. We have little information about the burial customs in Vörs-Papkert Cemetery B, another site in the Balaton Basin. Most graves have a W-E orientation, but an opposite orientation also occurred. Forty burials with horses were discovered, of which only eight were undisturbed upon discovery. Similar to Gyenesdiás, partial sheep remains were found in graves regardless of age and gender (Szentpéteri 1991).

While in the earlier period, the discussed rite was only present on the western shore of Lake Balaton, it also appeared on the southern one from the end of the 7th century. Fifteen of the 44 graves in the cemetery near Balatonkiliti contained sheep skulls and/or feet bones (Bartosiewicz 1995, Table 1). Grave 65 contained remains that resemble typical sheepskin burials: the skull and three leg bones have been found in a layer above the deceased. The skin was probably spread over the coffin (Bartosiewicz 1995, 174). Most graves in the cemetery were oriented WSW-ENE and several had a depression at each end of their bottom. Eggs and fowl were the most common food offerings, and many graves also contained pots (Költő 1994, 57).

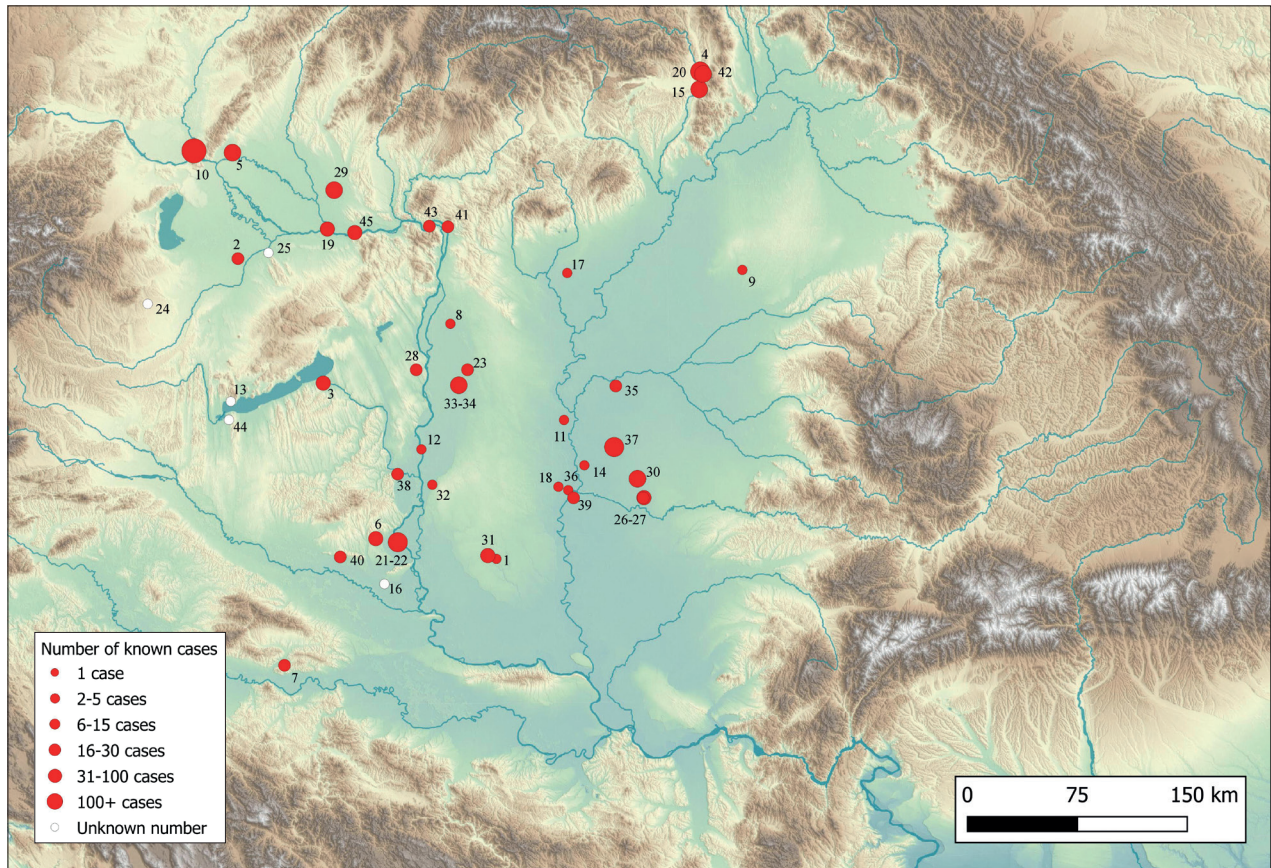


Fig. 4. Distribution of Middle and Late Avar sites with graves with sheepskins. Numbers: see Table 3 for site names

4. kép. A közép és késő avar kori juhbőrös temetkezések elterjedése. A számozáshoz ld. a 3. táblázatot

Like in the Early, sheepskin was a relatively popular grave offering in southeastern Transdanubia in the Late Avar Period, too, appearing in more cemeteries than before. The distribution of such graves is uneven between the six cemeteries: almost three-quarters of the cases come from Kölked-Feketekapu Cemetery B. The Early and Late Avar graves there seem to be connected only by the presence of the sheepskin rite. Based on the grave maps, besides general changes in the burial customs (affecting orientation and grave types; see, e.g., Kiss 2001, 218, 353; Kiss 1977, 149; Pásztor 1990, 132–133; Kiss 2001, 353), there is also a change in flaying method, bone-cut flaying having been replaced by cutting through the joints first (e.g. Kiss 1977, 144, Fig. 67; Kiss 2001, 165, Abb. 49, 177, Abb. 52).

Compared to the Early Avar Period, the change is the most striking in the Danube–Tisza Interfluvium in the second half of the Avar Period. Sheep skulls and legs in graves were common there from the mid-7th century, concentrating mainly in the Szabadszállás–Kunadacs area and the northern Bačka Region. We

have more data on the former. As mentioned, the sheep body parts were placed differently into the graves in Kunadacs and Szabadszállás, having been rolled up and put into one end of the grave in the former and spread over the coffin in the latter. In one case, the coffin was placed on a spread animal pelt (H. Tóth 1981, 178–179). According to Csilla Balogh, several cemeteries were established in the northern and central zones of the Danube–Tisza Interfluvium in the second half of the 7th century. Early Avar burial customs were practised there, the appearing elements of which include graves with sidewall niches, ledges or other niches in the graves, partial animal burials, sheep rump as food offering, and placing pots behind the head of the deceased (Balogh 2016, 79). The sites listed by the author are not at all or only partially published, so it is difficult to verify her data. The proportion of graves with ceramic vessels in the Kunadacs and Szabadszállás cemeteries is 54.5% and 54.4%, respectively, which is higher than the Early Avar Period average in the Trans-Tisza Region (see Balogh 2016, Table 17). In contrast, graves

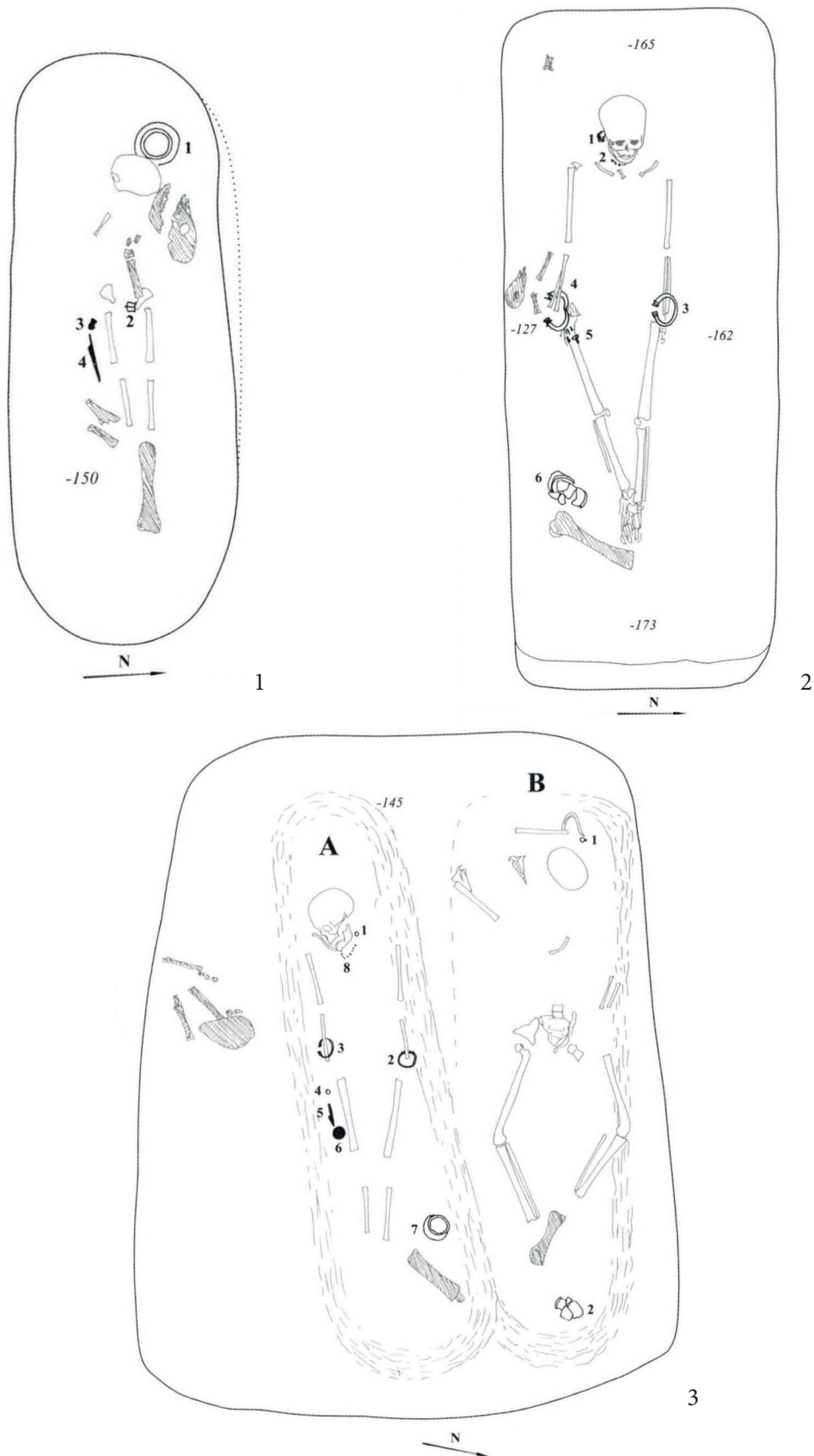


Fig. 5. Graves with sheepskins and sheep skulls from Gyenesdiás. 1: Grave 65; 2: Grave 168; 3: Grave 81 (after Müller 2008)

5. kép. Juhbőrös és juhkoponyás sírok Gyenesdiásról. 1: 65. sír; 2: 168. sír; 3: 81. sír (Müller 2008 nyomán)

with a sidewall niche are much rarer; they are only known in greater numbers from Szabadszállás-Batthyányi Street, accounting for 11% of all burials (Balogh 2016, Table 6). Regarding skinning methods, we only have certain data from Szabadszállás-B Gyakorlótér: based on the published grave plans, the animals were probably flayed by cutting through the knee joints first (Balogh 2004, 84). In our opinion, the evidence listed here is not decisive of a migration in the mid-7th century; for that, the mentioned graves should be known in their entirety.

In the Bačka Region (Serbia), six graves from the Stara Moravica (Bácskossuthfalva) cemetery and one from Bački Sokolac (Bácsandrászfalva) contained partial sheep remains. The skins were spread over the coffin in half of these cases and placed rolled up into the bottom of the graves in the other half. The rite is characteristic of burials of adults of both sexes (Balogh 2016, Table 15), most of them interred in simple shaft graves. Besides, 11 graves with a sidewall niche were unearthed in Bački Sokolac and one in Stara Moravica (Bácskossuthfalva) (Balogh 2016, 6, Table 14). The niches of the graves at Bački Sokolac, as the detailed and illustrated descriptions show, were on the right side of the grave pit, unlike in similar Early Avar features in the Trans-Tisza Region (Ricz 1995). Grave 36 in Bački Sokolac stands out from the rest of the cemetery because of the niche, the sheep remains, and a pot placed next to the left temple bone of the deceased. Csilla Balogh claims that the rite observed there can be linked with the Early Avar population of the Trans-Tisza Region (Balogh 2016, 88). However, this hypothesis cannot be proven without having a publication of the grave.

Several other regions with partial sheep remains in only a few cemeteries are known in the Carpathian Basin. In northeastern Transdanubia, two graves contained skinned small ruminant remains at Nagyvenyim-Munkácsy-Fűzfű Streets, but only a skull is known from one. Five graves contained horse remains at the site, and some burials had grave structures (Szücsi 2015, 23–24). Two sheepskins were spread over the coffin in one of the graves excavated at the end of the 1960s at Visegrád-19 Szechenyi Street (Szőke 1970).

In the second half of the 7th century, the Avar habitation area expanded significantly to the north, and many cemeteries were established in the territory of today's southern Slovakia. At some sites, sheep remains were almost as frequent as in the Trans-Tisza Region in the Early Avar Period. These cemeteries can

be classified into a western and an eastern group. The most significant site of the western group is Devínska Nová Ves (Dévényújfalva) with 119 graves containing sheep bones. According to Jan Eisner, most features included both skulls and other smaller bones, but due to the lack of accurate documentation, it is not known whether the latter were leg bones (Eisner 1952, 235).¹⁷ Most of these remains were found in one end or the corners of the grave, and sometimes in a layer above the human remains (Eisner 1952, 236; Szőke 1979, 93). Jan Eisner interpreted these sheep remains as food offerings (Eisner 1952, 236); besides, Béla Miklós Szőke mentions that usually, poorly furnished graves contained such grave goods (Szőke 1979, 92). The predominant orientation in the cemetery was SE–NW, and timber constructions (perhaps both coffins and burial chambers) were observed in 118 graves (Eisner 1952, 226–232). Burials with weapons and horses were much more frequent there than in the coeval cemeteries in the central part of the Avar Khaganate (Eisner 1952, 232–233). The Bernolákovo (Cseklész) cemetery contained the most sheep remains relative to the total number of graves; skulls were observed in 29 graves, usually together with lower leg bones, situated above the deceased, indicating that an animal skin had been spread over the coffin. The main orientations at the site are E–W and NE–SW. Only four burials with a horse could be observed there, i.e., considerably fewer than in Devínska Nová Ves (Kraskovská 1962). Based on both the orientation and the occurrence of graves with horse remains, the cemetery of Žitavská Tõh (Zsitvatõ), with six sheepskin burials, also belongs to this group (Budinský-Krička 1956; Čilinská 1963).

Based on the elements of the local funerary rite, two cemeteries stand out, to some extent, from the western group. The site at Nové Zámky (Érsekújvár) included 25 graves with sheep or goat skulls and other animal bones, perhaps of the leg. These were found either above the upper body of the deceased or in the head end of the grave. Traces of coffins and burial structures were common in these graves, indicating that the animal skins had been spread on those (Szőke 1979, 86). The predominant orientation in the cemetery was NW–SE, but about one in every ten graves was oriented oppositely (Čilinská 1966, 115). Burials with horses were relatively rare in the cemetery; only twelve such graves are known (Čilinská 1966, 121). Sheep remains were found in eight graves in the Komárno-Lodenice cemetery. Due to extensive disturbance throughout the site, the exact reconstruction of the rite is difficult, but,

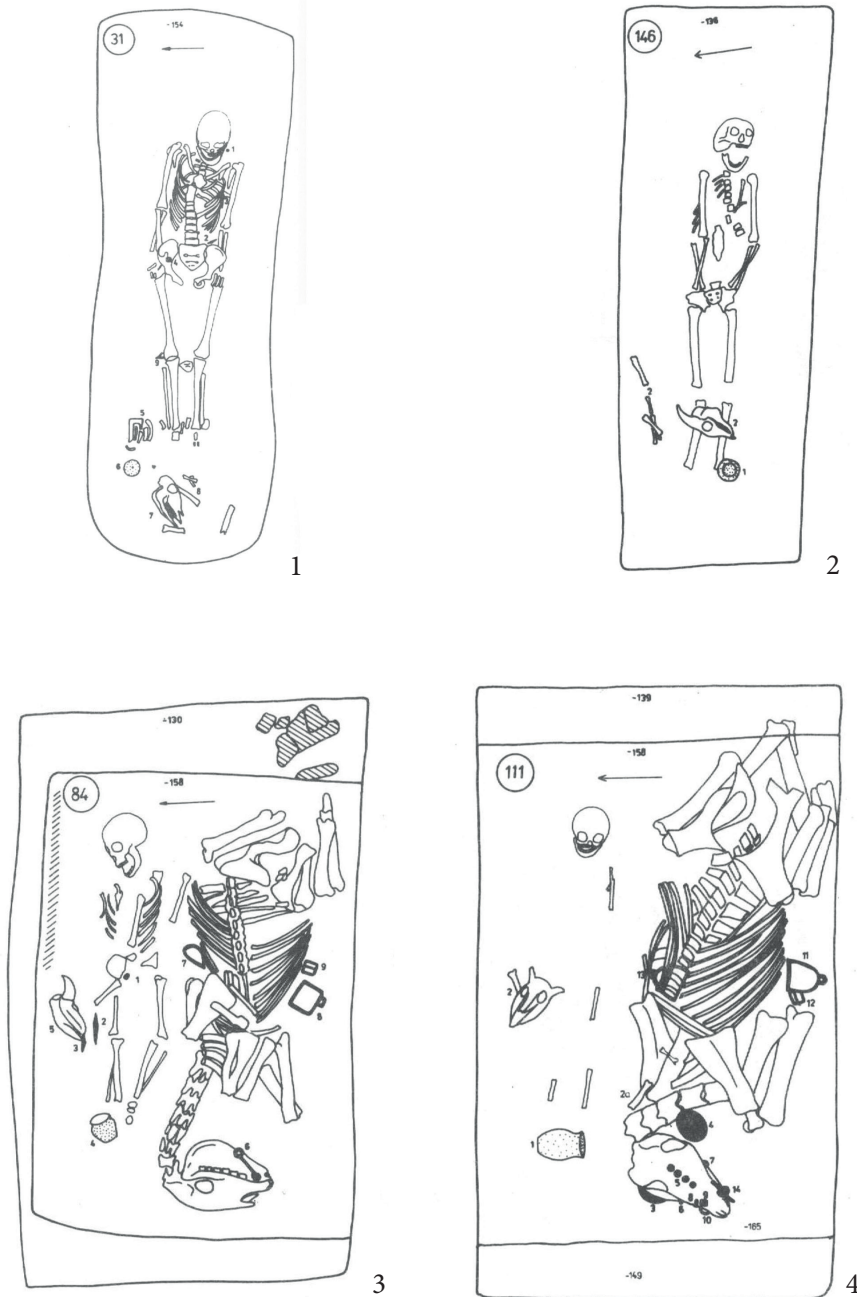


Fig. 6. Graves with sheepskins and sheep skulls from Košice-Šebastovce. 1: Grave 31; 2: Grave 146; 3: Grave 84; 4: Grave 111 (after Budinský-Krička, Točík 1991)
 6. kép. Juhbőrös és juhkoponyás temetkezések Košice-Šebastovce (Kassa-Zsebes) temetőjéből. 1: 31. sír; 2: 146. sír; 3: 84. sír; 4: 111. sír (Budinský-Krička, Točík 1991 nyomán)

according to the archaeologist leading the excavation, the remains were found in higher layers of the grave fill (Trugly 2008, 87). The predominant orientation in the cemetery was NW–SE, but oppositely directed burials were also relatively frequent. All unearthed features were simple shaft graves, with relatively large plank coffins or burial chambers in forty of them. A significant number of males had been interred with complete and equipped horses,

and partial cattle remains were found in the graves of females (Trugly 2008, 79–88). Based on the observations of Sándor Trugly and Béla Miklós Szőke, as a trend, mostly the graves with modest furnishings of females and children contained sheep remains in both cemeteries (Szőke 1979, 86; Trugly 2008, 87). Šebastovce (Kassa-Zsebes), Barca (Bárca), Valaliky-Všechsvätých (Kassamindszent), and Kechnec (Kenyhec) are four important published cemeteries

in the Košice Basin. The predominant orientation in all four was E–W, known from the peripheral areas of the Carpathian Basin in the Late Avar Period (Kiss 1996, 167). The only exception to this was Kechnec, where most graves were S–N-oriented (Pástor 1971, 89). Burials with weapons and a horse are common in the region, and occasionally, a grave also contains partial cattle remains or those of complete dogs (Fig. 6) (Csiky 2006, 112–113). It should be emphasised that cremation graves were also documented in the larger cemeteries, which is why research hypothesised a mixed Avar-Slavic population behind them (Fiedler 1996, 198–200). Based on the E–W orientation and the burials with animal skins, Zoltán Tóth suggested that the Avars settling in the Košice Basin probably moved there from the Trans-Tisza Region (Tóth 2018, 270). However, as a completely different flaying method characterises the Košice Basin than the Early Avar Period in the Trans-Tisza Region, this hypothesis should be treated with reservation.

Finally, Brodski Drenovac (Kisdarnóc, Croatia) should be mentioned as the southernmost cemetery with sheepskin burials. It is characterised by an E–W orientation and a relatively high proportion of burials with weapons and horses, similar to Devínska Nová Ves and Šebastovce in Slovakia.¹⁸ The remains of sheep were found in four graves, the skins lying both spread over the coffin and folded in a short end of the grave (Vinski-Gasparini, Ercegović 1958, 132–136).

Altogether 264 graves with partial sheep remains from the second half of the Avar Period, representing 54% of all known cases, were examined by physical anthropologists. About a third, 34% of the investigated graves belonged to adult males, 38% to

adult females, and only 19% to children. Looking at the gender of the interred (as determined from grave goods), this ratio changes slightly: men make up 24% of all cases, women 27%, while the proportion of adults whose gender cannot be determined is 32%. Based on these, there is a slight shift of preference towards adults compared to the Early Avar Period. The distribution of the phenomenon by age group sheds more light on this change: mostly *adultus* and *maturus* burials contain sheep remains, accounting for 69% of all anthropologically evaluated graves. As for its distribution by gender and age at death, regional differences can also be observed. We examined three well-studied regions, the southern Trans-Tisza Region, southeastern Transdanubia, and eastern Slovakia. The proportion of children in the southern Trans-Tisza Region is lower than in the other two, and burials with sheepskins are more frequent in the *senium* age group.

Case study: burials with sheepskins in southeastern Transdanubia

Eight sites, including cemeteries from both the first and second halves of the Avar Period, are examined in the study (Table 1). Both phases are present at Kölked-Feketekapu Cemetery B; these were treated here separately. As shown in the table below, the proportion of graves with sheepskins was markedly different at each site.

Due to the distorting effect of the highly different case numbers, the evaluation is based on the relative occurrence of each funerary rite element per site. Graves without data on orientation, shape, and food

Table 1. Cemeteries with graves containing sheepskins in Southeast Transdanubia
1. táblázat. Juhbőrös sírokat tartalmazó temetők a Délkelet-Dunántúlon

<i>Archaeological site</i>	<i>Chronological position</i>	<i>Case count</i>
Babarc-Mérenökségi telep	Phase 1	23
Kölked-Feketekapu B	Phase 1	2
Szekszárd-Bogyiszlói út	Phase 1	1
Bóly-Sziebertpuszta A	Phase 2	6
Gerjen-Váradpuszta	Phase 2	1
Kölked-Feketekapu A	Phase 2	3
Kölked-Feketekapu B	Phase 2	48
Paks-Gyapa	Phase 1	3
Szekszárd-Palánki-dűlő	Phase 2	4
Terehegy-Márfai dögkút	Phase 2	2

offerings were omitted from the analysis. After that, we performed cluster and correspondence analyses on the find material. Both led to the same result.

The first ‘early’ group consisted of the early graves at Babarc-Mérenökségi telep and Kölked-Feketekapu Cemetery B, characterised by E–W and NE–SW orientation, graves with a sidewall niche, and the presence of sheep rump as a food offering. The group, with steppe connections, is related to the Early Avar Period Trans-Tisza Region. The burial from Szekszárd-Bogyiszlói út, despite its N–S orientation, is also related to this group. Since it was the poorly furnished grave of a child, the ritual elements appearing in it were not spectacular. However, assessed in the context of the other graves with a similar orientation in the cemetery, a sidewall niche, and the presence of partial horse and cattle, one may conclude that the respective community practised an Eastern European steppe-style funeral representation (Gulyás 2023b, 160–168).

Middle and Late Avar sites make up the second, larger group. These are characterised by W–E and NW–SE orientation and the exclusivity of simple shaft graves. Graves with equipped horses, cattle leg bones as food offerings, and pots were found in two sites. The correspondence analysis separated them according to different orientation traditions. It is not clear whether the link between the Early Avar Paks-Gyapa and the Late Avar sites stems from the same cultural background. In any case, it should be noted that at these sites, the sheep were flayed the same way, by cutting through at the joints first.

Based on the results, the examined groups probably migrated there from the Trans-Tisza Region in the Early Avar Period. These groups followed Eastern European steppe traditions in their burial customs, as reflected in the variability of orientation and grave forms, burials with the skins of bone-cut flayed sheep, and sheep rumps as food offerings.

A significant reorganisation took place in the region from the Middle Avar Period. In Kölked, where the Early Avar Period is only represented by a few graves, burials with sheepskins became more frequent in the Late Avar Period. This rite can be considered sporadic at other sites. Kölked illustrates a trend observed in other regions as well: cemeteries with many burials with partial animal remains (Gyenesdiás, Devínska Nová Ves, Kölked) are surrounded by ones where similar features occur only sporadically.

The Paks-Gyapa cemetery stands apart from these and is connected to the other sites in the region only

by the presence of sheepskins. The site lacks strong ties to Early Avar Period sites, showing a closer connection with the Middle and Late Avar sites in the region. This perhaps indicates that another group moved into the area in the 7th century, the funerary rites of which included partial sheep burials. We cannot date exactly their arrival, but Paks-Gyapa is probably the earliest site of this group.¹⁹

Summary

The custom of adding sheepskins to graves is present throughout the entire Avar Period but with significant differences between its first and second halves. According to our current knowledge, the rite appeared first only in a limited area, mainly in the Trans-Tisza Region and a part of southeastern Transdanubia, and such graves were established only sporadically in other regions between the 6th and the mid-7th centuries. In these two regions, sheep parts are elements of a well-defined and complex funerary rite, characterised by NE–SW and E–W orientation and a diversity of grave types (including graves with a sidewall niche or ledges, simple shaft graves and graves with an end-wall shaft). In addition to sheepskins, they often contain horse and cattle remains, and the choice of species seems connected with specific parts of society: graves of adult males usually contain horses, those of adult females, cattle and/or sheep, while children’s graves include sheep. With few exceptions, the animals were bone-cut flayed, i.e. the tibia and the radius were chopped in two at the distal end. Besides partial animal remains, the addition of complete horses is rare; they were mainly placed next to men buried with weapons and belts. Small ruminant bones, especially the sacrum or lumbar vertebrae, were documented as remains of food offerings, and pots were found in 20–50% of the graves, almost always near the skull. Apart from the Carpathian Basin, the discussed ritual elements appear together on the Eastern European steppe; based on that, we can assume closer connections between the two regions.²⁰ We claim that in the Early Avar Period, the custom of burials with sheepskins was an integral part of a ‘package’, a complex funerary rite the elements of which were practised by, or at least present in the same communities simultaneously, appearing in the same cemeteries. Importantly, this package appeared in the Early Avar Period only in a limited area and more or less isolated, to such an extent that research could even connect its appearance

with that of a distinct form of identity or even ethnic group within the Early Avar world.

Fundamental changes took place in the second half of the Avar Period, as marked by the spread of the sheepskin rite in a wider area but accompanied by the loss of its original meaning. The distribution of the phenomenon over this larger area is much more even than in the Early Avar Period; the custom is present everywhere in the dwelling area of the Avars, except for Transylvania. The presence of the custom is more significant in a few micro-regions, but graves with sheepskins also appear beyond these. In the Körös–Tisza–Maros Interfluvium or the northern Bačka Region, burials with sheepskins appeared together with ones established according to a rite characteristic of Early Avar populations of Eastern European steppe origin, featuring a sidewall niche, partial cattle burials, and sheep rump food offerings. At the same time, there are cemeteries where the similarity to Early Avar burials, i.e., the connection to the Early Avar Period, is attested only by the presence of partial sheep remains in the graves.

Another significant change is the appearance of graves containing only animal skulls that can be interpreted, based on the context, not as food offerings but as parts of flayed skins. However, not all lonely sheep skulls indicate skins; this also depends on the context, which should be investigated thoroughly in every case. The best hint at the one-time presence of animal skin or hide is the position of the skull above the skeleton layer, usually in the feet area.

As for the other elements of the funerary rite, it is striking that the Trans-Tisza Region (the Körös, Tisza, and Maros valleys in particular) and the Danube–Tisza Interfluvium have similar grave types, sacrificial animals, and food offerings in the two periods. The peripheries of the Avar Khaganate in the 8th–9th centuries are linked to the Early Avar Period Trans-Tisza Region only by the E–W orientation of the graves and some burials with cattle remains. Therefore, we believe the available evidence is insufficient to prove a migration to the area of today's southern Slovakia. The bone-cut flaying method, characteristic of the Early Avar Period, did not remain in use in the second half of the Avar Period; it was replaced in all studied regions by the one that involves cutting through the leg joints of the animal first. Another notable difference can be seen in the demographic composition of the people interred with sheepskins. While in the 6th–7th centuries, the recipients had been typically women and children, in later times,

no such discrimination (by age or gender) can be observed. In the absence of written sources, one can only guess the function of this ritual element. However, the skins spread over the coffin and placed in the shafts and niches of the graves occupied a well-visible place during the funeral, providing visual stimuli for the spectators, which is important in the formation of collective memory.²¹

Two traits can be identified in the spread of the sheepskin rite: first, it appeared in large numbers in the cemeteries of the new communities in the northern Carpathian Basin during the Middle and Late Avar Periods. Second, it was present sporadically, usually limited to one or two graves per cemetery in the inner Carpathian Basin. In the Late Avar Period, this rite became detached from the funerary package with flayed horse and cattle skins, graves with a sidewall niche or end wall shaft, and the orientations characteristic of these. To some extent, the change can be observed even in the strictest area of the custom's emergence along the Maros River. However, its persistence in this area reflects a decline in funerary representation, a parallel decrease in the number of large livestock killed for mortuary purposes, and, eventually, the survival of the Early Avar custom, even if in a reduced, altered form. The characteristic link between the choice of species and gender and age groups in the cemeteries of the Körös–Tisza–Maros Region in the Early Avar Period – where sheepskin was added to burials of children as a scaled-down version of the rite for adults – disappears with the period. By the Late Avar Period, sheepskin had become a grave good added predominantly to the graves of adults.

For this reason, the sheepskin rite in Middle and Late Avar Period cemeteries is considered an element of a cultural package of steppe origin, inherited from the Early Avar Period and appearing sporadically but regularly. At that time, however, the custom became independent from the other elements of that package – other animal remains (horses) in the graves, special grave types and orientation – with which it was closely connected in the Early Avar Period.

This rite sheds special light on the cultural homogenisation taking place in the Carpathian Basin during the Late Avar Period, bringing about a unification of orientation and grave type and a significant reduction in funerary representation. The elements of the 'package' of Early Avar funerary representation became detached from each other in the Late Avar Period (Szenthe, Gáll 2022a, 315–332). As a result, the addition of horses and weapons, as

well as mounted belts, became separated in funerary representation. The sheepskin rite underwent a similar process at the turn of the Early and Late Avar periods. Interestingly, the graves with horses and weapons were concentrated in the same peripheral areas where those with a sheepskin appeared, albeit partly in different cemeteries. However, the concentration of the former rite elements is linked to funerary representation, which is hardly the case with sheepskins. After its detaching from the conceptual package of nomadic, steppe origin, the meaning of the sheepskin rite in the new environment probably changed, as the results of the statistical evaluation of the three elements (weapon, horse, mount-decorated belts) imply (Szenthe, Gáll 2022a, 325–327). The less intensive but widespread presence of sheepskin burials in the second half of the Avar Period proves its popularity in the Avar Khaganate. The rite originated in the traditions of nomadic groups and spread by cultural homogenisation during the Late Avar Period.

An interesting feature of the process is that the cultural trait (sheepskin rite) was originally part of a package with a geographically limited presence, and spread later, in the second half of the 7th century, from two southern hubs over the entire Carpathian Basin. One triggering factor of this rapid expansion was perhaps location. The two southern hubs are situated in the centre of the Late Avar settlement

and road network. These roads lead radially north and west, along which the spread of many Late Avar object types began (cf. Szenthe, Gáll 2021, 357–360).

The biggest enigma is the reason behind the change in the flaying method because that means altering an element with no visual significance, which is, accordingly, is likely insignificant from the ritual's point of view, but which is rightfully expected to be the most stable and learned part of the whole rite. The spread of the rite across the entire Carpathian Basin can be considered proof of two factors. On one hand, it shows the significant role of the steppe population in forming the cognitive background and rituals of the Avar cultural circle. On the other hand, it seems that everyday life, farming methods, animal husbandry and its tools did not originate from this steppe component. Even the origin of the flaying technique cannot be identified; its presence proves that the know-how behind the spread of rural communities all over the Carpathian Basin in the Late Avar Period does not originate in nomadic steppe traditions. Thus, the bearers cannot be identified as steppe peoples either. Based on the composition of their livestock, these rural communities were engaged largely in household animal husbandry and farming. In addition, regional groups in the Trans-Tisza region in the Late Avar Period continued large livestock husbandry similar to their predecessors of steppe origin in the preceding era.

Notes

- 1 The study has been 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 The Hungarian and German archaeological literature refers to this phenomenon as partial animal burial.
- 3 From an archaeozoological point of view, the distinction between sheep and goat remains is problematic. Since the publications usually write about sheep remains, we use this terminology for simplicity, but it cannot be ruled out that there are also goat skulls and limb bones among the cases examined.
- 4 This double interpretation also appeared in relation to the Eastern European steppe (Rashev 2007, 94).
- 5 This arose mainly in connection with graves containing mutilated cattle skulls in the so-called Sopronköhida-type cemeteries (Török 1979, 33).
- 6 Károly Mesterházy, for example, tried to prove the Inner Asian cultural roots of the Ártánd and Bihar-

- keresztes warriors in connection with the horse hides in their graves (Mesterházy 1987, 236–238).
- 7 The suggestion was most recently formulated in connection with partial horse burials (Gáll, Märginean 2020, 400–402).
- 8 In Soviet research, this was traditionally theorised in an ethnocultural framework; see Atavin 1984; Vörös 2013, 328.
- 9 We did not have the opportunity to review the original documentation of the Slovakian cemeteries, so we adopted the authors' interpretation. A detailed study will be attempted in a separate article in the future.
- 10 Only those cases from the excavations of Ferenc Móra and Dezső Csallány in the vicinity of Szeged were included, where the location or description of the remains definitely indicates a burial with animal skin.
- 11 In this paper, the Trans-Tisza Region in Hungary is discussed together with the Banat Region in Romania and Serbia.
- 12 The main shaft of the grave is much larger than usual,

- almost twice the size of the ‘niche’, and has an irregular shape. Most of the finds lay on top of the human skeleton (cf. Lantos 2019, 110, fig. 3), which, in our opinion, excludes the possibility that the deceased was slid into the ‘niche’ from the side, as was customary with graves with an end wall shaft. For this reason, we do not consider the burial to be a grave with an end-wall shaft.
- 13 The physical anthropological results come mainly from the cemeteries in the Trans-Tisza Region and Babarc.
 - 14 In the case of some graves, the age of the deceased could not be determined precisely, and the estimated range covers several age groups (e.g., *adultus-maturus*). In these cases, the respective grave was indicated in both groups.
 - 15 In five cases, the exact case within the site is not known.
 - 16 The best analogy to the ornamentation of the object can be observed on the bracelets of the Stejanovci assemblage, which also includes a *solidus* issued by Constantine II in 659–668 (Garam 2001, 69).
 - 17 Part of the excavation documentation was destroyed in World War II.
 - 18 Gábor Kiss was the first to notice the similarity in rites between the cemeteries on the peripheries of the Avar Khaganate (Kiss 1996, 170–171). According to Gergely Szenthe, the spread of communities represented by weapons in the peripheral regions points to a conscious internal organisation (Szenthe 2019, 240).
 - 19 The graves of the Paks cemetery have not yet been published, so we cannot date them precisely.
 - 20 Ethnic connection behind this similarity can be assumed; however, one can only talk about identical representational patterns in this case. Archaeogenetic studies carried out on large series would be necessary to clarify this question, but we have very few graves from Eastern Europe (Gulyás 2023a, 714).
 - 21 For the mnemonic effects of perception, see Hamilakis 2014.

Table 2. Distribution of graves with sheepskins in the Early Avar Period
2. táblázat. A kora avar kori juhbőrös temetkezések elterjedése

	Site	Case number	Type	Reference
1.	Apátfalva-Nagyút-dűlő	4	skull and legs	Cseh, Varga 2017
2.	Babarc-Mérenökségi telep	23	skull and legs	Personal information of Zsolt Gallina and Zsolt Tóth
3.	Bojt-Legelő-dűlő, dél	<i>No Inf.</i>	skull and legs	Hága 2021
4.	Deszk G/P	4	skull and legs	Lőrinczy 1993
5.	Deszk H	1	skull and legs	Lőrinczy 1993
6.	Deszk L	1	skull and legs	Lőrinczy 1993
7.	Deszk O	1	skull and legs	Lőrinczy 1993
8.	Dunavecse-Kovacsos-dűlő	1	skull and legs	Lantos 2019
9.	Gyenesdiás-Avar utca	<i>No Inf.</i>	skull and legs	Müller 2019
10.	Gyirmót-Borsó-dűlő	1	skull and legs	Tomka 2008
11.	Győr-Pápai vám	4	skull and legs	Nagy 2011
12.	Hódmezővásárhely-Batida, IX. homokbánya	2	skull and legs	Lőrinczy, Varga 2022
13.	Hódmezővásárhely-IV. számú téglagyár	1	skull and legs	Lőrinczy, Varga 2022
14.	Keszthely-Fenekpuszta, Pusztaszentegyházi-dűlő	1	skull and legs	Müller 2014
15.	Kiszombor B	1	skull and legs	Lőrinczy 1993
16.	Klárafalva, Barna I. földje	1	skull and legs	Lőrinczy 1993
17.	Kölked-Feketekapu B	1	skull and legs	Kiss 2001
18.	Kövegy-Nagy-földek	20	skull and legs	Benedek, Marcsik 2017
19.	Makó-Mikócsa-halom	254	skull and legs	Balogh 2021

20.	Mezőkovácsháza-Új Alkotmány Tsz.	1	skull and legs	Lőrinczy 1993
21.	Mosonszentmiklós-Pálmajor	1	skull and legs	Tomka 2008
22.	Nádlac 3M-N	5	skull and legs	Gáll 2017
23.	Orosháza-Bónum	1	koponya	Lichtenstein 2006
24.	Öcsöd 96a lh.	3	skull and legs	Madaras 2004
25.	Paks-Gyapa	3	skull and legs	Bartosiewicz 2012
26.	Pecica-Duvenbeck	<i>No Inf.</i>	skull and legs	Mărginean et al. 2022
27.	Pecica-Est/Smart Diesel	1	skull and legs	Mărginean, Gáll 2022
28.	Szegvár-Oromdűlő	460	skull and legs	Lőrinczy 2022
29.	Szegvár-Sáppoldal	10	skull and legs	Lőrinczy 2018
30.	Szekszárd-Bogyiszlói út	1	skull and legs	Rosner 1999
31.	Szentes-Borbásföld	4	skull and legs	Lőrinczy 1996
32.	Szentes-Derekegyházi oldal	1	skull and legs	Lőrinczy 1993
33.	Szóreg A	1	skull and legs	Lőrinczy 1993
34.	Tiszakürt-Zsilke-tanya	19	skull and legs	Gulyás et al. 2023
35.	Tiszavasvári-Kashalom-dűlő	2	skull and legs	Lőrinczy, Rácz 2014
36.	Tiszavasvári-Koldusdomb	3	skull and legs	Gulyás, Lőrinczy 2018
37.	Tiszavasvári-Utasér-part-dűlő	19	skull and legs	Istvánovits, Lőrinczy 2017
38.	Tótkomlós-Békéssámsoni út	1	skull and legs	Rózsa, Vörös 2002
39.	Válcáni	<i>No Inf.</i>	skull and legs	Gáll et al. 2023

Table 3. Distribution of graves with sheepskins or skulls in the Middle and Late Avar Period
3. táblázat. A közép és késő avar kori juhőrös temetkezések elterjedése

	Site	Case number	Type	Reference
1.	Bački Sokolac	1	skull and legs	Balogh 2016
2.	Bágyog-Gyűrhegy	3	skull and legs; only skull	Csordás 2022
3.	Balatonkiliti	14	skull and legs	Bartosiewicz 1995
4.	Barca	2	only skull	Pástor 1954
5.	Bernolákovo- Šakoň	29	only skull	Kraskovská 1962
6.	Bóly-Sziebertpuszta A	6	skull and legs	Papp 1963
7.	Brodski Drenovac	4	skull and legs	Vinski-Gasparini, Ercegović 1958
8.	Bugyi-Ürbőpuszta	1	only skull	Bóna 1957
9.	Debrecen-Bellegelő, Bordás-tanya	1	skull and legs	Kolozsi, Szabó 2012
10.	Devínska Nová Ves	119	only skull	Eisner 1952
11.	Felgyő-Ürmös-tanya	1	only skull	Balogh 2010
12.	Gerjen	1	skull and legs	Gere 1991
13.	Gyenesdiás-Avar utca	<i>No Inf.</i>	skull and legs	Müller 2019
14.	Hódmezővásárhely-Kishomok	1	skull and legs	Bende 2017
15.	Hraničná pri Hornádé	20	only skull	Pástor 1971
16.	Jagodnjak	<i>No Inf.</i>	only skull	Dugonjić et al. 2022
17.	Jászapáti-Négyállás	1	only skull	Madaras 1994

18.	Kiskundorozsma-Hármashatár	1	skull and legs	Vályi 2003
19.	Komárno-Lodenice	8	only skull	Trugly 2008
20.	Košice-Šebastovce	65	skull and legs; only skull	Budinský-Krčka, Točík 1991
21.	Kölked-Feketekapu A	3	skull and legs	Kiss 1996a
22.	Kölked-Feketekapu B	48	skull and legs	Kiss 2001
23.	Kunadacs	4	skull and legs	H. Tóth 1981
24.	Lukácsháza	<i>No Inf.</i>	skull and legs	Kiss 2009
25.	Ménfőcsanak-Eperföldek	<i>No Inf.</i>	skull and legs	Nagy 2008
26.	Nádlac 3M-S	8	skull and legs	Gáll 2017
27.	Nádlac 7M	2	skull and legs	Cociş et al. 2016
28.	Nagyvenyim-Munkácsy utca és Fűzfa utca	2	skull and legs	Szücsi 2015
29.	Nové Zámky	25	skull and legs	Čilinská 1966
30.	Pitvaros-Víztározó	29	skull and legs	Bende 2017
31.	Stara Moravica	6	skull and legs	Balogh 2016
32.	Sükösd-Ságod	1	skull and legs	Balogh 2016
33.	Szabadszállás-B gyakorlótér	1	skull and legs	Balogh 2004
34.	Szabadszállás-Batthyány út	24	skull and legs	H. Tóth 1981
35.	Szarvas-Grexa-téglagyár	5	skull and legs	Bende 2017
36.	Szeged-Fehértó A	1	only skull	Madaras 1995
37.	Székkutas-Kápolnadűlő	38	skull and legs	Bende 2003
38.	Szekszárd-Palánki-dűlő	4	skull and legs	Kőrösi 2007
39.	Szőreg-Belső-Ugar	4	skull and legs	Lőrinczy, Szalontai 1993
40.	Terehegy-Márfai dögkút	2	skull and legs	Kiss 1977
41.	Vác-Kavicsbánya	5	skull and legs; only skull	Balogh 2016
42.	Valaliky-Všechsvätých	24	skull and legs; only skull	Zábojník, Béreš 2016
43.	Visegrád-Széchenyi utca	2	skull and legs	Szóke 1970
44.	Vörs-Papkert B	<i>No Inf.</i>	skull and legs	Szentpéteri 1991
45.	Žitavska Tůň	6	only skull	Budinský-Krička 1956; Čilinská 1963

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JUHBŐRÖS TEMETKEZÉSEK A KORA ÉS KÉSŐ AVAR KORI VÁLTOZÁSOK KONTEXTUSÁBAN

Összefoglalás

Az újabban juhborösnek nevezett, a hagyományos magyar szakirodalomban részleges juhtemetkezésként hivatkozott sírok az egész avar korban jellemzők voltak. Ennek ellenére az avar kor első és második felében nagy különbségek mutatkoznak nemcsak a rítus elterjedésében és a nyúzási technikában, hanem az előfordulás kontextusában is. A kora avar korban 39 lelőhelyről minimum 849 esetről van tudomásunk. Túlnyomó többségük a Tiszántúlról ismert (29 lelőhely), valamint a Délkelet-Dunántúlon és a Kisalföldön jelentkeztek elszórtan. Meglehetősen egyenetlen eloszlásukat tovább torzítja, hogy a nagy részük Szegvár-Oromdúlóról (460 juhmaradvány) és Makó-Mikócsa-halomról (254 juh maradványa) származik. Az állatmellékletek ezen formája a kora avar korban a Tiszántúlon és a Délkelet-Dunántúlon – például Babarc-Mérnöksegi-telep, Kölked-Feketekapu B, Szekszárd-Bogyiszlói út – szinte kivétel nélkül olyan közösségekben fordul elő, amelyek a funerális reprezentáció tekintetében egyértelműen a kelet-európai sztyeppe 5–7. századi pásztorkodó közösségeivel mutatnak rokonságot. A közösség temetőire a temetkezési szokások kötöttsége jellemző: a sírok tájolása ÉK–DNy-i, K–Ny-i, ritkábban É–D-i vagy Ny–K-i. Az egyszerű aknasírok mellett nagy számban fordulnak elő a kétoldali padkás, a padmalyos és a fülkesírok. A temetkezésekben általánosak az állatmellékletek, ezek legtöbbször ló-, szarvasmarha- és juhkoponyák, valamint lábszárcsontok. Ezeket az állatokat kivétel nélkül az ún. csonkolásos módszerrel nyúzták meg, vagyis a *tibiát* és az *ulnát* az egyharmadánál kettéhasították. A Maros alsó folyása mentén, illetve Szegvár környékén az állatmellékletek halmozása figyelhető meg, szélsőséges esetekben akár 14 egyed maradványát is dokumentálták. Átlagosan körülbelül minden ötödik temetkezésben voltak edények, amelyeket legtöbbször az elhunyt koponyája mellé helyeztek. Ugyanitt kerültek elő a húsos ételmelléklet maradványai, ezek közül a leggyakoribbak a juh keresztcsontok, ágyék- és farokcsigolyák. A Kisalföldön ezektől némileg eltérő rítusú sírokban is előfordulnak juhkoponyák és végtagsontok, azonban a pontos értékelést nagyban megnehezíti, hogy az itteni lelőhelyek közül csak a Győr-Pápai vám került teljeskörűen publikálásra.

A kora avar kori juhborös temetkezéseknek kevesebb mint a felét vizsgálták antropológusok. Ezek alapján a juhmaradványok főleg gyermekek sírjaiból ismertek (47%), ezt követik a nők (29%) és a férfiak (21%). A rítus az *infans I* korcsoportban a legnépszerűbb, majd némi visszaesést követően az *adultus* és *maturus* korcsoport sírjaiban fordulnak még elő juhmaradványok nagyobb számban.

Az avar kor második felében juhborös temetkezések 46 lelőhelyről és minimum 521 sírból adatoltak. A szlovákiai lelőhelyek esetében a dokumentáció alapján nem egyértelmű, hogy juhborös vagy juhkoponyás sírokról van szó, így az esetszám meghatározása nem lehetséges. Ebben az időszakban a juhborös temetkezések már nem kötődtek szorosan egyetlen régióhoz, Erdély kivételével gyakorlatilag az egész avar szállásterületen megjelentek. Ha lelőhelyek helyett az esetek számát vizsgáljuk, akkor a szóródás már kevésbé egyenletes: 288 sír ismert Szlovákiából, a Tiszántúlról 88, a Dunántúlról pedig 89. A temetkezési szokásokat tekintve a kép nem annyira egységes, mint az avar kor első felében. A juhborös temetkezések egyéb rítuselemei megegyeznek az adott régió több sírjában megfigyelt rítusokkal. A juhmaradványok mellékelése a továbbiakban nem kapcsolódott egyetlen nemhez vagy korcsoporthoz sem, illetve a sírmellékletek minősége és mennyisége sincs összefüggésben a rítus meglétével. A kora avar korhoz képest a korszak második felében a nyúzási mód megváltozott, az állatok bőrét az ízületeknél fejtették le.

A fentiek alapján arra következtethetünk, hogy a kora avar korban a juhborös temetkezések azokkal az – elsősorban a Tiszántúlon letelepedett – közösségekkel kapcsolhatók össze, amelyek a temetkezési szokásaik alapján erősen kötődtek a kelet-európai sztyeppehez, egy részük talán onnan is származott. A juhborös temetkezési módot is tartalmazó rituális eszközkészlet dunántúli felbukkanása mögött valószínűleg migrációs folyamatokat sejthetünk. Ehhez képest az avar kor második felében a rítus sokkal nagyobb területen jelent meg. Ekkortól kezdve a juhborös temetkezési mód már nem társult egyéb speciális funerális szokásokhoz; kortól, nemtől, vagyoni helyzettől függetlenné vált. Mindezek arra utalnak, hogy

a jelenség már nem specifikusan egy kulturális (etnikus?) csoporthoz kapcsolódott, hanem a késő avar korban divatjelenséggé vált. Ugyanakkor feltűnő,

hogy az esetek többségében az Avar Kaganátus peremén felbukkanó, fegyveres, lovas temetkezéseket végző közösségekben felülreprezentált a számuk.

