

VIVERE MILITARE EST

FROM POPULUS TO EMPERORS - LIVING ON THE FRONTIER
VOLUME I

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Kneza Mihaila 35/IV

11000 Belgrade

<http://www.ai.ac.rs>

institut@ai.ac.rs

Tel. +381 11 2637-191

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SIXTH-CENTURY FOEDERATI FROM THE UPPER MOESIAN LIMES: WEAPONS IN A SOCIAL CONTEXT*

IVAN BUGARSKI, *Institute of Archaeology Belgrade*

E-mail: ivan.bugarski@gmail.com

VUJADIN IVANIŠEVIĆ, *Institute of Archaeology Belgrade*

E-mail: vujadin.ivanišević@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In this article we present some of the most characteristic possessions (and status symbols) of sixth-century Germanic foederati in the Upper Moesian limes – their weapons. According to archaeological dating and historical records, the finds from the Jakovo, Batajnica, Singidunum, Margum and Viminacium cemeteries may be first ascribed to the Heruli, settled in the area from c. 512. The article studies weapon combinations in graves and recapitulates Herulic military practices. Our evidence reveals a clearly differentiated and internally stratified community with a privileged position, derived from its role in the defence of the border and engagement in numerous military campaigns of the Empire.

KEY WORDS. – SIXTH CENTURY, LIMES, FOEDERATI, HERULI, WEAPONS, CEMETERIES, GRAVES, MERCENARIES.

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INTRODUCTION

With its frontier cities and fortifications on the Danube, Northern Illyricum underwent drastic changes with the Gothic incursions of the end of the fourth and the fifth centuries.¹ Despite the efforts of Emperor Theodosius II in the defence of the Balkan provinces, particularly evident between 410 and 425, the settlement of the Goths as *foederati* was followed by movements, attacks, and further settlement of other peoples, which all culminated in the early four-forties with Hunnic operations led by Attila. Both the old legionary camps and the smaller fortifications along the Danube were to lose their importance.² Between the fifth and the seventh centuries, Germanic peoples were settled on both banks of the Danube, either as Roman enemies or as their mercenaries. There were three phases of their presence in the region within this span. Hunnic domination period was followed by that of Gepidic predominance, with 454 as a turning point, and the year 567–568, when the Avars established their rule in the Carpathian Basin, represents another critical moment in the history of Germanic presence in the region (Fig. 1).

Even if their overall number is not very high, and the sites producing them are not sufficiently explored and published,³ the finds of foreign ('barbarian') material culture – the bulk of which came from cemeteries⁴ – are illustrative of the changes that were taking place in the Central Balkans and particularly along the *limes*.⁵ On this occasion, we will present some of the most characteristic possessions (and status symbols) of Germanic *foederati* – their weapons – from both graves and the habitation layers in which they were found.

As in 447 the Empire and the Huns agreed to move their border away from the Danube to the vicinity of the city of Naissus,⁶ and given that it was only at the time of Anastasius's reign (491–518) that the Romans launched the reconquest of the Danube *limes*, our analysis will be mostly restricted to sixth-century finds.

1 Wolfram 1990a; Зечевих 2002.

2 Бугарски, Иванишевич 2012, 490–493; Ivanišević, Kazanski 2014, 131–136.

3 cf. note 5 and following syntheses: Dimitrijević et al. 1962; Mrkobrad 1980; Милинковић 1998; Milinković 2005; Ivanišević, Kazanski 2014; Bugarski, Ivanišević forthcoming.

4 Ivanišević, Bugarski forthcoming.

5 e.g. Popović et al. 2017; Ivanišević, Kazanski 2002; Димитријевић 1960; Bugarski, Ivanišević 2013; Поповић 1988; Ivanišević et al. 2006; Špehar 2012.

6 Priscus, frg. 7, 286,31–287,7.



EVIDENCE

From west to east, our survey starts in the Syrmia region, where the traces of Gepidic presence are indisputable, particularly in Sirmium itself;⁷ one could perhaps assign to them also the finds – including a spatha – from damaged graves at Rakovac.⁸ On the other hand, the area of the city of Bassianae in the southeastern corner of the Syrmia region remained within the Empire. From this part of Syrmia – Jakovo, Batajnica and Belegiš – came some well-known weapon graves.

Out of 87 recorded graves at the large Kormadin cemetery in Jakovo (only 26 of them, excavated after World War II, were properly documented, and many

Fig. 1. Northern Illyricum during the Migration Period: Cities, large cemeteries (1) and small cemeteries or single burials (2).

⁷ Popović et al. 2017.

⁸ Dimitrijević et al. 1962, 89–90, figs 2, 3; Ivanišević, Kazanski 2014, 145, fig. 18/1; Bugarski, Ivanišević forthcoming.

more destroyed), some eight were warriors'. From the 1904 excavations came a male grave with a sword; two poorly preserved seaxes (66 cm and 75 cm long), an 83 cm long spatha with a silver U-shaped chape⁹ and a 39 cm long lenticular (laurel-leaf-shaped) spear-head have also been collected. We know of two weapon graves from the excavations that followed: grave 3 produced an 85 cm long spatha, and grave 4 a 42 cm long lenticular spear-head,¹⁰ and the 1956–1958 professionally conducted excavations yielded two more such burials (Fig. 2.1–14). In grave 2, together with a heavily corroded spatha there were 12 arrow-heads of different types (rhomboid, laurel-shaped and three-winged, ending in either sockets or tangs), clustered together along the right femur and apparently kept in a quiver, and a bronze two-part buckle, bone purse clasp, and comb. The sword was found by the left leg of the deceased. From grave 8, a 37 cm long reed-like spear-head was recovered, together with a knife and a simple iron buckle.¹¹ The cemetery has been dated from the middle of the fifth (D2/D3/MD1 = 430–460 or D3/MD2 = 450–470/480) until at least the first (MD4 = 510–540/550) or the second half and even the end of the sixth century (MA2 = 520/530–560/570; MA3 = 560/570–600/610).¹² The best datable find from grave 2/1956 is the buckle; the analogous object comes from grave 11 at the Lombard cemetery Hegykő–Mező Utca which was dated between 510 and 568.¹³ This Mediterranean buckle, type Legoux–Périn–Vallet 161, belongs to the late MA2 and, particularly, MA3 phases of the Merovingian chronology of the sixth century (520/530–560/570–600/610).¹⁴

Apart from three graves with modest inventories, a well-known warrior's grave has been unearthed at the Bekića Salaš site near Batajnica. The grave produced a Baldenheim- type helmet, corroded and fragmented spatha, lenticular spear-head, umbo, simple snaffle bits, and Germanic stamped pot.¹⁵ The iron and bronze helmet with ear-pieces and mail neck guard bears gilding and punctured geometric and zoomorphic design – predatory birds, fish, and sheep (rather than fantastic ani-

9 cf. notes 34–36.

10 Димитријевић 1960, 6–7, Т. IX/2.

11 Димитријевић 1960, 10–11, 13, 18–20, Т. III/1–13, 16–20, 24, 26, Т. VII/6.

12 Ivanišević, Kazanski 2014, 145–146.

13 Bóna, Horváth 2009, 35, 204, Taf. 5/11, 126/1.

14 Legoux et al. 2004, n° 161; Ivanišević, Kazanski 2014, 146, fig. 16/8.

15 Vinski 1957, 3–27, Т. I–IX; Dimitrijević et al. 1962, 73–75.

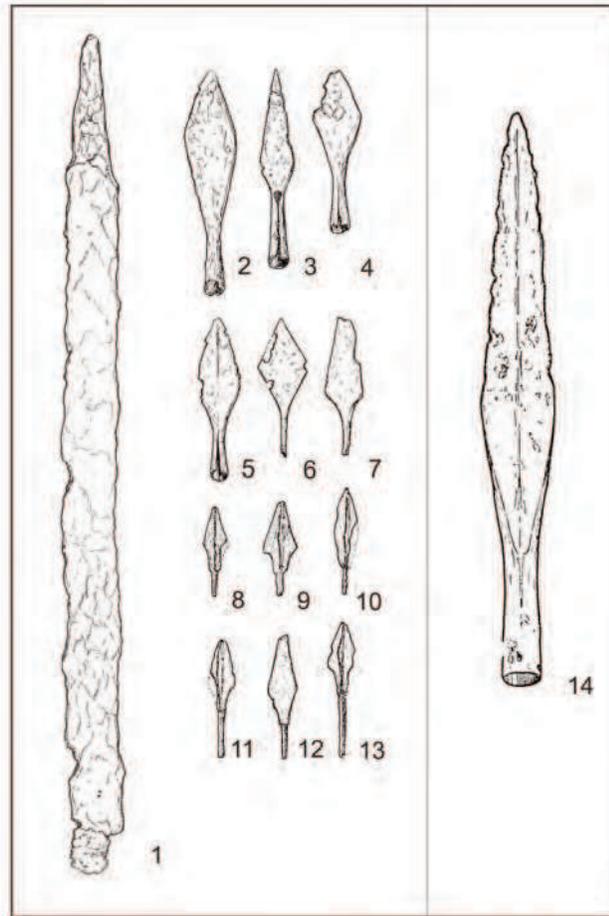


Fig. 2. Jakovo – Kormadin:
1–13. Grave 2; 14. Grave 8
(Scale 1:5).

mals?) (Fig. 3).¹⁶ The umbo is of the type with decorative rivets (14.7.2 at Viminacium), which was in use until the end of the sixth century;¹⁷ the grave from Batajnica has been attributed to a Gepid commander and dated to the middle of the sixth century, up to the year 567.¹⁸ Two lenticular spear-heads and two ceramic vessels have been recovered from two graves (?) at the Orthodox churchyard in Belegiš.¹⁹

¹⁶ Vinski 1954; Vogt 2006, 193–195.

¹⁷ Ivanišević et al. 2006, 42, Fig. 24/2–4.

¹⁸ Vinski 1954, 182; 1957, 26–27; Ivanišević, Kazanski 2014, 145.

¹⁹ Mrkobrad 1980, 52, n. 332; Simoni 1977–1978, 218–219; Bugarski, Ivanišević forthcoming.

Following three small Migration-Period necropolises, the damaged cemetery of 105 graves, Singidunum III, was formed above the edge of the former urban core and at the fringes of the Roman necropolis. Dating from the end of the fourth to the end of the sixth or the beginning of the seventh century, it was probably the main city cemetery in the course of the Migration Period. Only three graves contained weapons, one of them from the D2/D3 phase, Smolin horizon (430/440–470/480). Grave 56, of an adult male and again simply dug into the ground and damaged, produced a double-edged spatha datable to the fifth and the early sixth centuries (Fig. 4.1).²⁰ On the other hand, from brick-built grave 6, in which a male (?) aged about 20 was buried, three arrow-heads were recovered (Fig. 4.2–4). Two of them were three-winged, and the third was damaged, apparently laurel-shaped and ending in socket instead of tang. Judging by the other finds, particularly the bronze buckle and applique, this grave was dated to the first three quarters of the sixth century.²¹

The bulk of Migration-Period graves belong to the D2/D3 and D3/E periods. The buried were members of a heterogeneous barbarian group, mostly of Germanic descent, which settled in Singidunum in the middle and the second half of the fifth century and around the year 500. According to the written sources, by the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth century the city with its surroundings was settled by Ostrogoths, Gepids and Heruli. The grave finds, typical of Germanic peoples successively settling along the Danube limes and also those belonging to the Roman tradition, point to this kind of mixture, whether the buried were mercenaries or ruling-class people.²² One of the latest burials at the site, coming from the time when the city was reclaimed by the Empire, grave 6, may be attributed to the Roman *foederati*.

Situated at the confluence of the Danube and the Velika Morava, Margum regained its importance during the crisis of the Late Roman Empire, when a system of at least two fortifications on both banks of the Danube – Margum and contra Margum – was established, controlling a natural crossing point over the river.²³ Some intramural graves have been unearthed in the city, from a layer containing Late Roman and Migration-Period finds, including a cicada brooch. These graves

20 Ivanišević, Kazanski 2002, 123–124, 133, 139, pl. V/56-1, VIII/103-1.

21 Ivanišević, Kazanski 2002, 123, 124, pl. II/6.

22 Ivanišević, Kazanski 2002, 124–127; Ivanišević, Bugarski forthcoming.

23 Бугарски, Иванишевич 2012, 486; Bugarski, Ivanišević 2013, 473–474.



Fig. 3. Batajnica – Bekića Salaš: Baldenheim-type helmet.

produced finds such as a bronze earring with polyeder-like ending and simple cast bronze armrings,²⁴ generally attributable to the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century. In another location, almost 70 graves were recorded at the city cemetery. Apart from some prehistoric cremation burials and second- and third-century Roman graves, five brick-built graves were dated to the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century, and the same date has been suggested for some of the neighbouring graves.²⁵

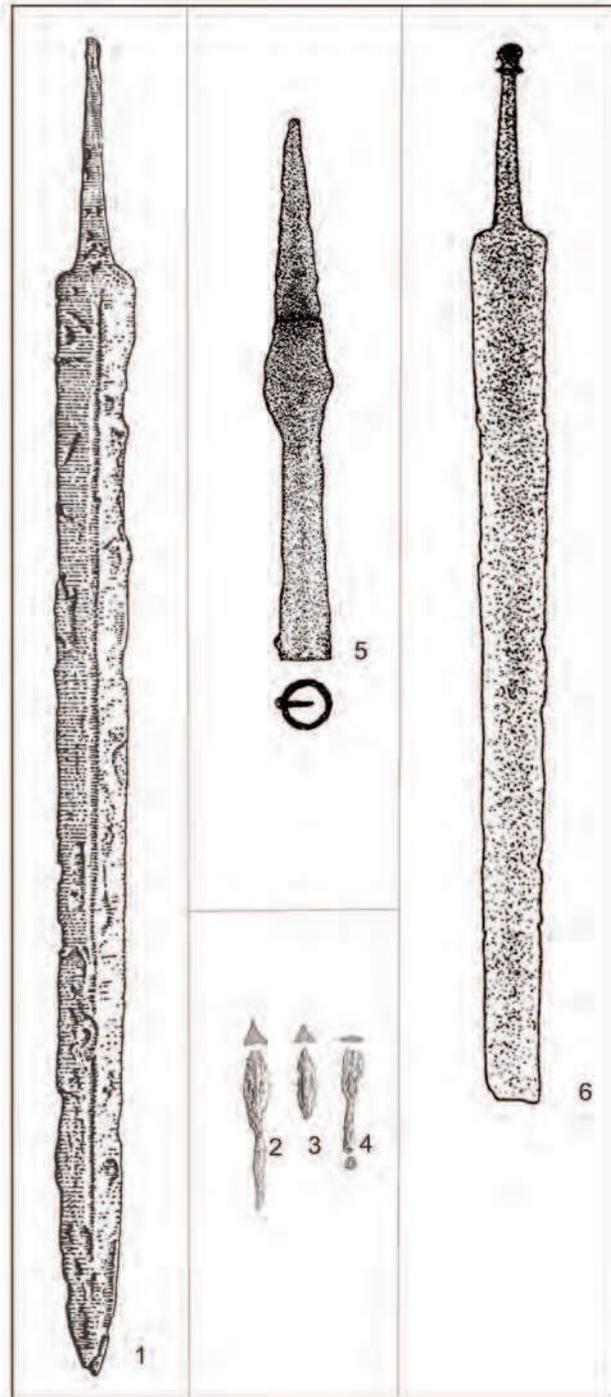
Four simply-dug graves have been attributed to the *foederati* who settled there before 568;²⁶ the fact that they had been buried among the locals was taken as a supporting argument. The series of brick-built graves with no inventories may also

24 Мано-Зиси et al. 1950, 144–153, 155–156, 159–163, сл. 5, 16, 29.11– 12; Dimitrijević et al. 1962, 119, sl. 1, 2.

25 Јовановић, Цуњак 1994, 119–120.

26 Цуњак 1992; Bugarski, Ivanišević 2013.

Fig. 4. Singidunum III: 1.
Grave 56; 2-4. Grave 6;
Margum: 5. Grave 15; 6.
Grave 17 (Scale 1:5).



have belonged to the sixth century,²⁷ as well as a few more, oriented as the four Germanic ones. These burials contained characteristic Germanic finds: pottery (a stamped pot and a burnished bottle), an iron spear-head and a sword (Fig. 4.5–6). The double-edged spatha with a grip ending in a pommel cast in bronze, preserved to a length of 71 cm, was unusually pointed to the head of the individual buried in grave 17, and from grave 15 came a socketed iron spear-head and a wheel-made pot decorated with rhombic stamps. Many parallels for the spatha and the spear-head finds have been offered recently by the present authors, coming from both Gepid and Lombard milieus.²⁸ To this group of burials also belongs grave 7 with a modest inventory, consisting of a knife, an arrowhead of an undetermined type, and a simple buckle – a common combination of finds in Gepid cemeteries.²⁹ Across the Danube, contra Margum, five Germanic graves have been unearthed at the Park site in Kovin, grave 2 labelled ‘warrior’s’. It was not described in detail;³⁰ yet in a published archival photograph one can see a lenticular spear-head.³¹

A total of 170 Migration-Period graves have been recorded at three cemeteries in the immediate vicinity of Viminacium, once the prosperous capital of Upper Moesia: 43 graves at Viminacium I (Burdelj), 106 at Viminacium II (Više grobalja) (Fig. 5), and 22 at Viminacium III (Lanci). No weapons are so far known from Viminacium I; as for the early weapon graves (phase A), grave 1607 from Viminacium II contained an umbo of the Liebenau type, datable to the end of the fourth and the first two thirds of the fifth century, a triangular spear-head and two knives (D1–D2/D3; most likely D1 or D2). A roughly 40-year-old male was buried in this simple grave. This individual could have been a member of the *foederati* garrison, or perhaps one of those who conquered the city alongside Attila. The B phase graves (D2/D3–E) did not produce weapon finds.³²

On the other hand, graves from the C phase are particularly important for our analysis. This phase lasted throughout the sixth and the first decades of the seventh century, and its earliest sub-phase is C1. In simple grave 152, of a male older

27 Јовановић, Цуњак 1994, 120–122.

28 Bugarski, Ivanišević 2013, 469–470, fig. 3.

29 Јовановић, Цуњак 1994, 120, сл. 7.

30 Pribaković 1963; cf. Milinković 2005, 208; Bugarski, Ivanišević 2013, 474.

31 Пековић 2007, 46, сл. 15

32 Ivanišević et al. 2006, 119–121, 212, pl. 38/1607.

than 45 at death, six arrowheads were found accompanying the burial – three of them three-winged – as well as a Germanic vessel, tweezers, and some other finds (Fig. 6.6–11). Grave 152 was dated to the E period (470/480–510).³³

From the C2 sub-phase, i.e. the middle third of the sixth century, came nine graves with weapon finds (113, 115, 121, 129, 141, 142, 1876, 2093, and 2142). While most of the graves contained single pieces of weaponry, the first three feature weapon combinations. A simple inhumation, grave 1876 of a male aged around 40, produced only a sword set (Fig. 6.5, 10.2). This was, however, a rather luxurious set, including an 85 cm long double-edged *spatha*, two silver sheath fittings, and amber pommel.³⁴ The U-shaped chape is typical of the A-C sword groups by Wilfried Menghin³⁵ and resembles both Gepidic and more distant finds, including those from Gaul and Britain,³⁶ while the analogous finds to the silver band decorated in a trellis motif can be found in Western and Northern Europe, but very seldom in the Middle Danube region (the Rakovac find).³⁷ The amber pommels ('magic sword pendants') have also been found in earlier contexts.³⁸

A male individual, older than 21 years at death, was buried in grave 142. This coffin burial contained a 29 cm long lenticular spear-head, characteristic Germanic vessel and a knife (Fig. 6.13). A very similar spear-head came from grave 2142 (Fig. 6.14). This simple male inhumation also produced an oval bronze buckle, a bone comb and purse clasp (rather than strike-a-light).³⁹

Only a shield handle and boss were found in simple male grave 2093, by the head of the deceased (Fig. 6.12). The umbo with silver rivets belongs to Hübner's type IV, while the handle is of a common shape, resembling that from grave 141 (Fig. 6.15), of a male individual older than 45 years buried in a wooden coffin, which also contained a bone comb and a characteristic silver belt set of the Pleidelsheim Y 20 type.⁴⁰ A male of the same age was buried in simple grave 129

33 Ivanišević et al. 2006, 121, 198, pl. 31/152.

34 Ivanišević et al. 2006, 216, pl. 39/1876, fig. 44/2.

35 Menghin 1983, 125.

36 cf. Ivanišević et al. 2006, 37.

37 Ivanišević et al. 2006, 38; cf. note 8.

38 cf. Biborski, Kaczanowski 2013.

39 Ivanišević et al. 2006, 122, 188, 233, pl. 27/142, 44/2142.

40 Ivanišević et al. 2006, 42–43, 122, 188, 223, pl. 25/141, 42/2093, fig. 24/3.

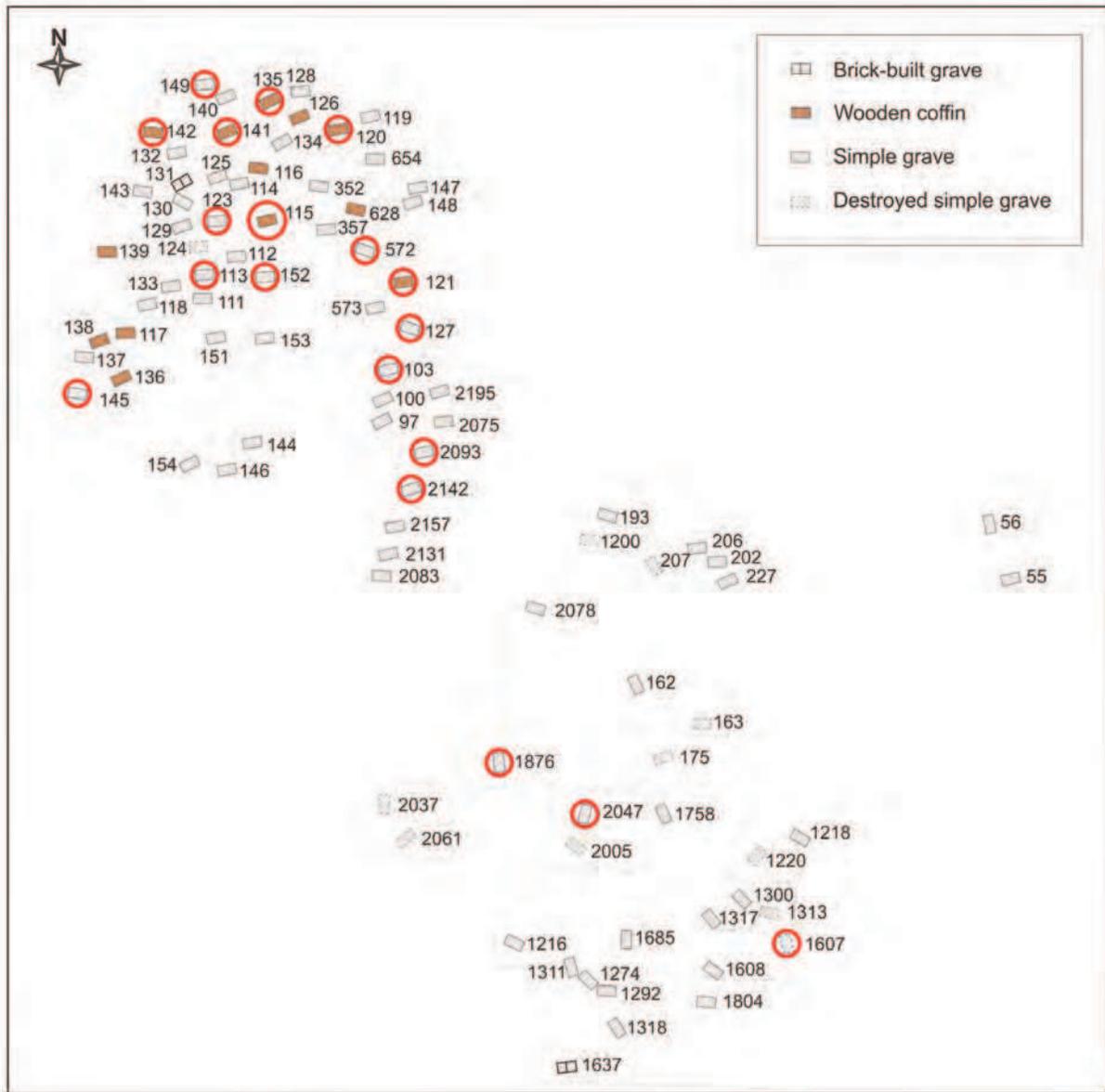


Fig. 5. Viminacium II:
Cemetery plan, red circles:
weapon graves.

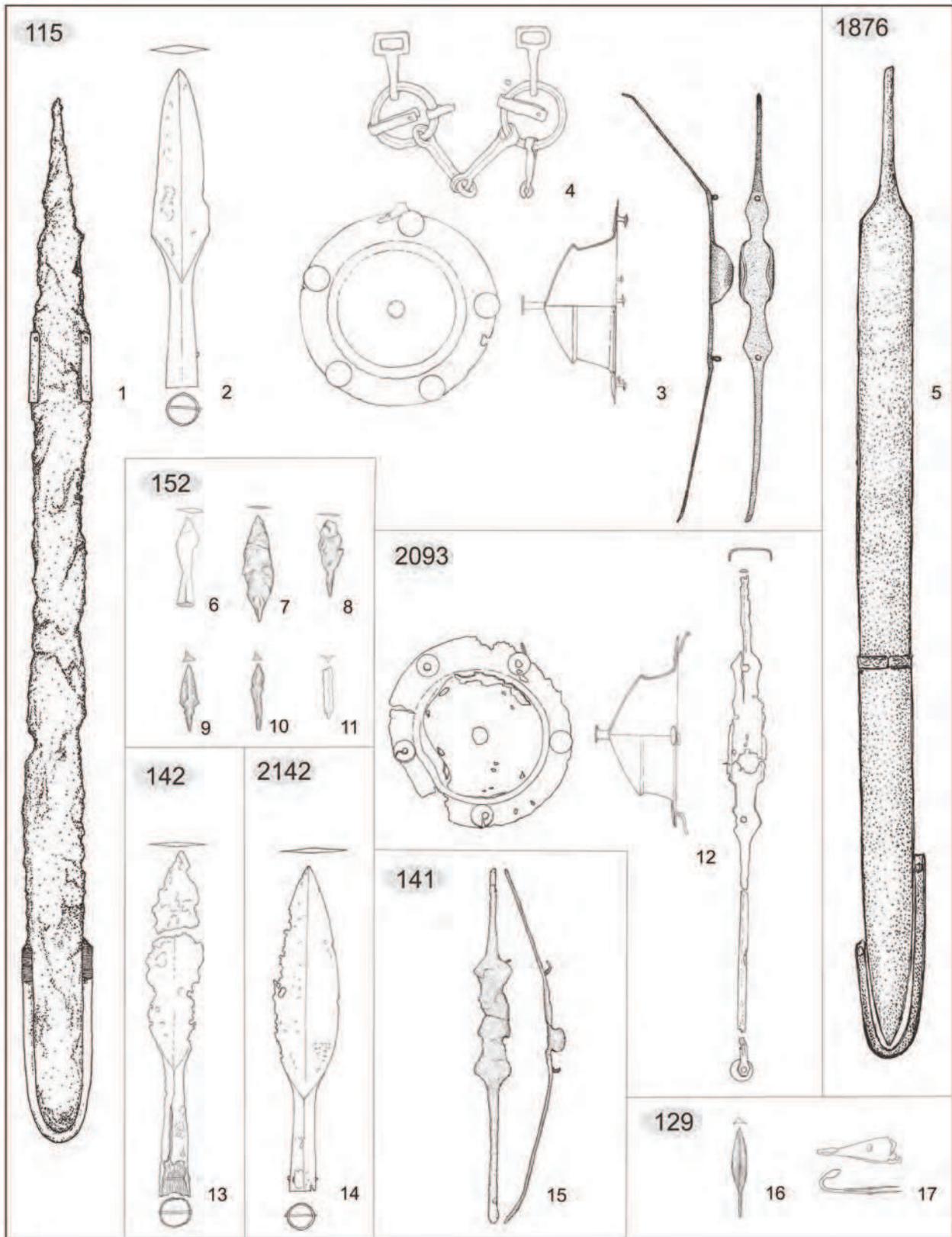


Fig. 6. Viminacium II: 1. 1-4. Grave 115; 5. Grave 1876; 6-11. Grave 152; 12. Grave 2093; 13. Grave 142; 14. Grave 2142; 15. Grave 141; 16-17. Grave 129 (Scale 1:5).

with a quiver hook, three-winged arrow-head, tweezers, etc (Fig. 6.16–17). Present in nomadic milieus, quiver hooks are seldom found in Germanic contexts.⁴¹

In grave 115 a mature male was buried, perhaps in a wooden coffin. His 90 cm long spatha had another silver U-shaped chape, and both the shield handle and umbo were preserved, belonging to the Hübner III type (Figs. 6.1–4, 10.1).⁴² In terms of typology, particularly interesting is the spear-head. In the original publication it was attributed to the type 14.3.2, comprising different lozenge-shaped, lenticular and triangular blades. It is wide but basically reed-shaped rather than lenticular, and 27 cm long.⁴³ A cast silver buckle also came from this grave, as well as a typical Germanic vessel, and snaffle bits – the only find of this kind at the Viminacium necropolises. The snaffle bits were found by the feet of the deceased.⁴⁴ Interestingly, the finds from both this grave and Batajnica belong to the simplest type, without cheek-pieces, which by that time had become rare in the Early Byzantine Balkans.⁴⁵

In addition to a 77 cm long spatha, lenticular spear-head (34 cm in length) and umbo, grave 121, in which a male aged about 45 had been buried in a coffin, also contained silver and bronze buckles, knife and comb (Fig. 7.2–4). The umbo does not have typological parallels in Hübner's classification.⁴⁶ The weapon combination recorded in grave 113 is different (Fig. 7.8–12). Two reed-like spearheads, 31 and 33 cm in length, were found by the feet of the male buried in this simple grave. This individual, older than 45 years at death, had also been buried with three arrow-heads – two of them barbed and one laurel-shaped – a sickle (?), knife, strike-a-light, bone comb, two bronze buckles, and tweezers.⁴⁷

The C3 sub-phase graves date from the last third of the sixth and the first half of the seventh century. Only two weapon graves have been ascribed to this period: graves 120 and 572. Another coffin burial of a male older than 40, grave 120 contained a 32 cm long lenticular spear-head, shield handle and boss (Hübner III), bone comb and knife (Fig. 7.13–14); in simple grave 572, of a male aged about

41 Ivanišević et al. 2006, 41, 122, 177, pl. 13, pl. 19/129; cf. Horváth 1991.

42 Ivanišević et al. 2006, 42, 166, pl. 13, fig. 24/2, 44/1, 46/1; cf. Hübner 1989.

43 Ivanišević et al. 2006, 39, 166, pl. 13, fig. 22/7–11, 45/8.

44 Ivanišević et al. 2006, 43, 166, pl. 13, 14/115.

45 Bavant 2012, 145, fig. 2, 3b.

46 Ivanišević et al. 2006, 42, 174, pl. 18.

47 Ivanišević et al. 2006, 39, 164, pl. 12/113.

45 years, a 21 cm long javelin was found together with several other objects (Fig. 7.6). These small projectiles are often found on Gepid and Lombard sites and in the Early Byzantine Balkans as well.⁴⁸

A series of weapon graves from the C phase could not be dated more narrowly (123, 127, 135, 145, 149, and 2047). A male aged between 35 and 45 years was buried in simple grave 123 with his 89 cm long *spatha*, two buckles, ceramic bowl and knife (Fig. 7.1). This grave has been damaged, and simple grave 127 as well, featuring a 32 cm long lenticular spear-head, biconical vessel and scissors (Fig. 7.5). In damaged grave 135, a roughly 30-year-old male was laid in a coffin with some modest finds and a 28 cm long lenticular spear-head (Fig. 7.7). Simple grave 145, of a male aged around 45 with artificially deformed skull,⁴⁹ contained an 83 cm long *spatha* and, among other finds (again modest), a total of 12 arrow-heads grouped together below the feet (Fig. 8.1–13). Furthermore, damaged simple grave 149, in which a male aged between 40 and 45 years was buried, produced another lenticular spear-head (30 cm in length) and a silver umbo rivet (Fig. 8.23), and in simple grave 2047 nine arrow-heads were found by the right shoulder of the deceased (Fig. 8.14–22). Eight of them were deltoid in shape, and only a single arrow-head was three-winged; those from grave 145 are chiefly laurel-shaped, with three (?) deltoid and two barbed finds.⁵⁰

To the last sub-phase of Germanic presence in the city (C3) one can also ascribe grave 23 from the Viminacium III cemetery, in which a 37 cm long reed-like spear-head has been found together with parts of a typical Germanic belt set of Western European origin, datable to the last decades of the sixth century and the first decades of the seventh (Fig. 8.24).⁵¹ Given its location, it is likely that this cemetery was used by the *foederati* garrison stationed at Svetinja, an Early Byzantine fortification in the immediate vicinity of Viminacium and perhaps the site of sixth-century Viminakion;⁵² with the help of numismatic evidence, Germanic presence there has

48 Ivanišević et al. 2006, 40–41, 122, 170, 203, pl. 16, 33/572.

49 Mikić 1994, 193.

50 Ivanišević et al. 2006, 121–122, 174, 176, 182, 190, 196, 218, pl. 19/123, 20/127, 22/135, 28, 30/149, 40/2047.

51 Ivanišević et al. 2006, 49, 229, pl. 45/23, fig. 41/5.

52 Ivanišević et al. 2006, 133; Ivanišević 2016, 91–92; Ivanišević, Bugarski forthcoming.

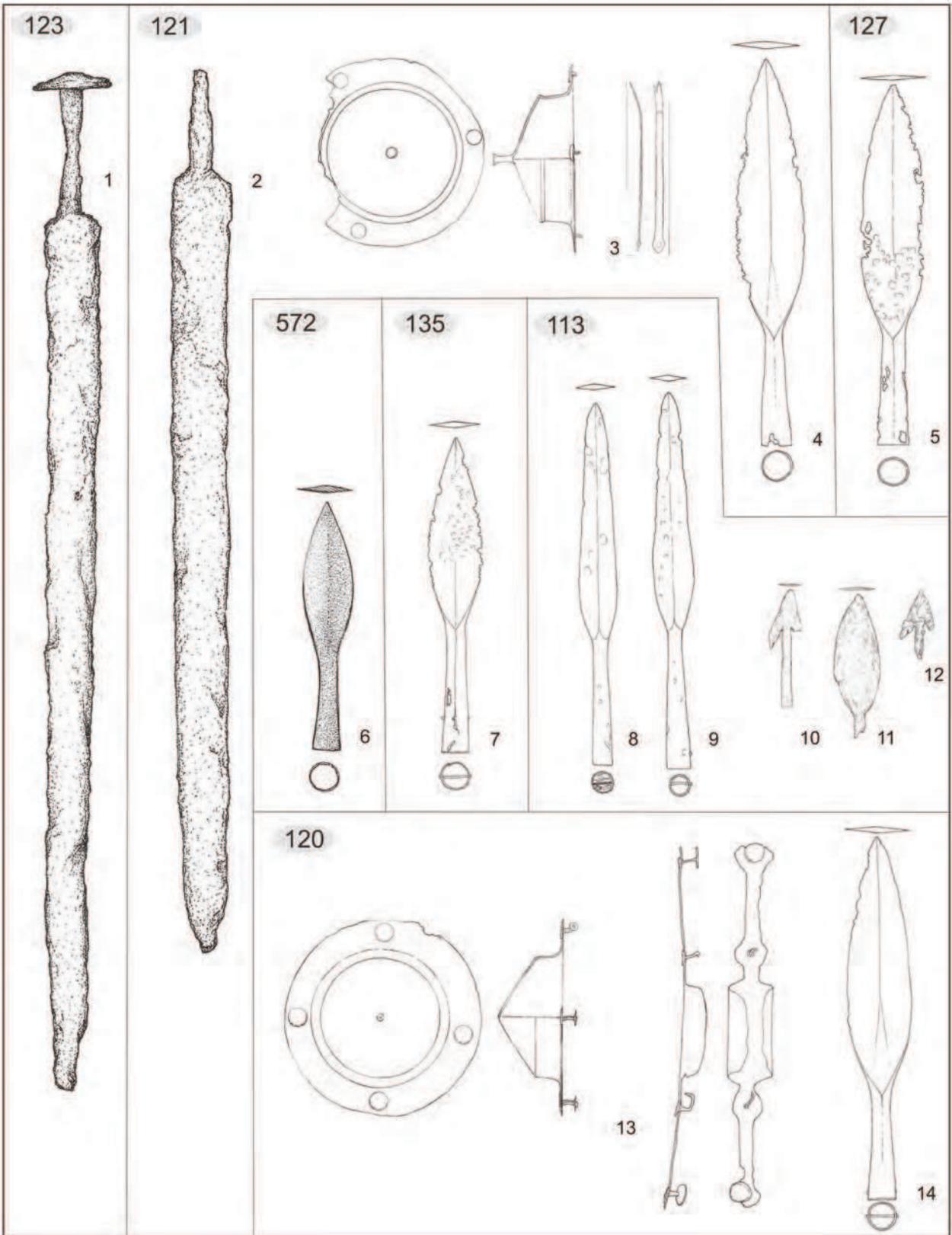


Fig. 7. Viminacium II: 1. Grave 123; 2-4. Grave 121; 5. Grave 127; 6. Grave 572; 7. Grave 135; 8-12. Grave 113; 13-14. Grave 120 (Scale 1:5).

also been dated approximately to the last third of the sixth century.⁵³

A total of nine rectangular timber-frame buildings have been documented next to the rampart built in *opus mixtum*, containing enormous quantities of amphorae and Germanic pottery among other finds.⁵⁴ Judging by the stratigraphy and coin finds, it appears that some of these buildings pre-date, and some post-date the Avar destruction of 584, and some other objects, such as a Yassi Ada-type buckle, fit nicely into this chronological framework. A bone horse harness buckle is another interesting find.⁵⁵ Characteristic parts of nomadic horse riding equipment, such as buckles have been found in Avar cemeteries, but also in Caričin Grad, the metropolis of that time; a similar find also came from Pontes.⁵⁶ As for weaponry, a shield handle of the same type as those from the Viminacium II necropolis was found, together with four arrow-heads – three of them three-winged and one barbed (Fig. 8.25).⁵⁷ Especially important are the finds of at least two lamellar armours (Fig. 9). The bulk of iron lamellae came from the floor of a smithy; they were found together with the folles of Emperor Maurice minted in Constantinople in 587/8 and 590/1.⁵⁸

From the Balkan hinterlands, but apparently connected to the limes, we know of two Germanic burials from Kamenovo by Petrovac upon the Mlava River. Those graves, of a warrior and a female, were found among some non-Germanic (Roman?) graves (Fig. 8.26-28). The warrior's grave contained a lenticular spear-head, scramasax (29 and 25 cm long, respectively), a laurel-shaped arrow-head, fragmented scissors, a knife, and a stamped pottery vessel. The Kamenovo graves were dated to the last third,⁵⁹ or more likely to the middle, of the sixth century.⁶⁰

53 Поповић 1988, 26–31.

54 Милошевић 1988.

55 Поповић 1988, 25, сл. 19/4, 20/1.

56 Ivanišević 2012, 60, fig. 2/10; Špehar 2010, 58, cat. no. 66.

57 Поповић 1988, 30–31, сл. 24.

58 Bugarski 2006.

59 Simoni 1977–1978, 209–214, T. I, II, III/1; Милинковић 1998, 250–253; Špehar 2012, 51, fig. 28.

60 Kiss 1984, 136; Bugarski – Ivanišević 2013, 473.

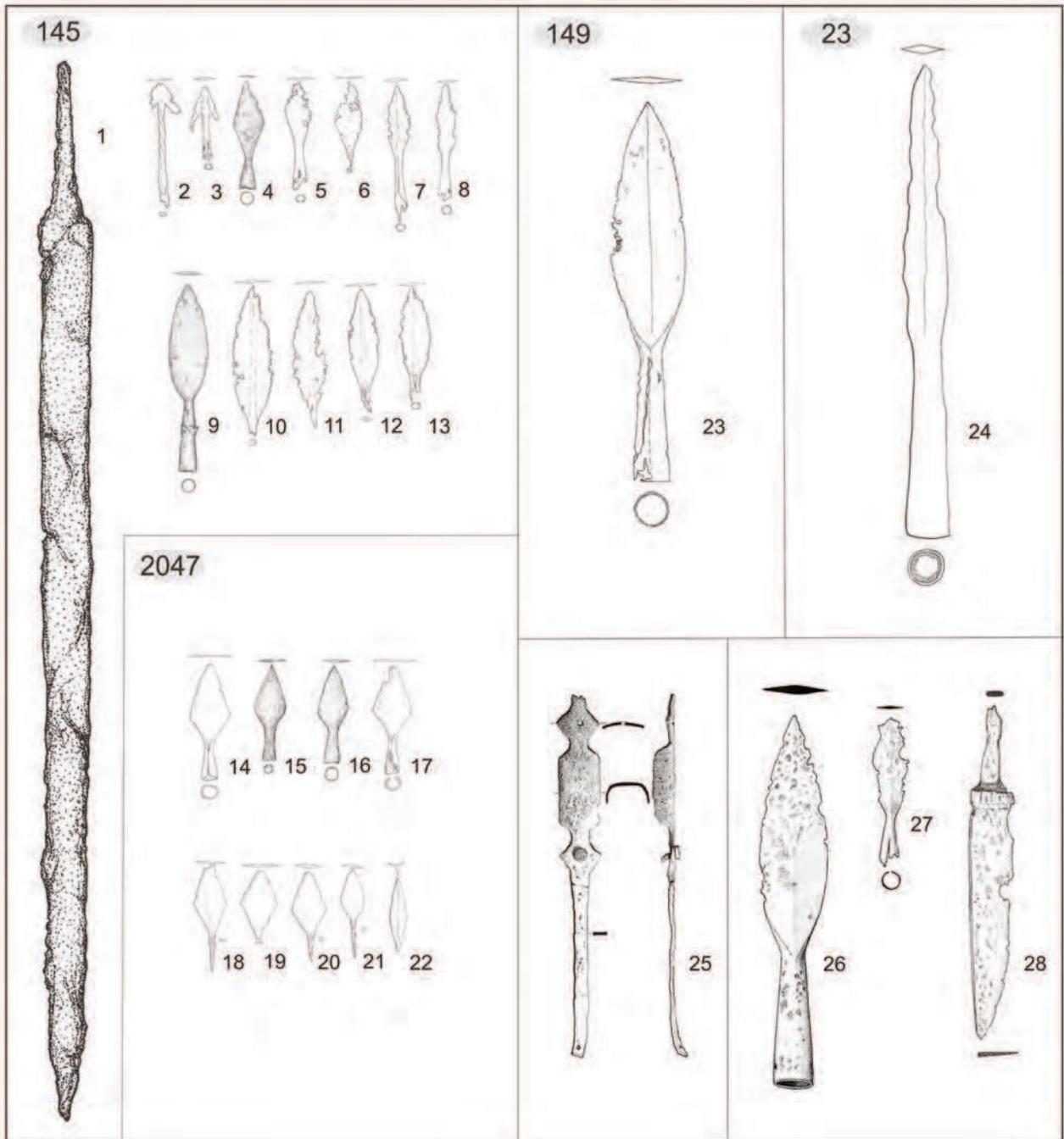


Fig. 8. Viminacium II: 1-13. Grave 145; 14-22. Grave 2047; 23. Grave 149; Viminacium III: 24. Grave 23; Viminacium – Svetinja: 25; Kamenovo: 26-28 (Scale 1:5).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Recently, an ethnic interpretation was attempted of the sixth-century Germanic finds from these parts, suggesting that most of the finds from Banat and Bačka (including those post-dating 567/8)⁶¹ may be seen as Gepidic, as well as those from the western part of Syrmia. Yet, as it is apparent from the scarce written sources that during most of the period of our concern the Gepids were enemies of the Empire,⁶² it has been doubted if they were engaged in defending the Danube limes.⁶³

On the other hand, the sources recorded that the Heruli had been settled within the Empire, along the limes. This ethnic group was for decades engaged in military operations in Illyricum and Thrace, and also in the Persian, Vandal, and Italian campaigns. According to a well-informed contemporary, Marcellinus Comes, in the year 512 the Heruli crossed into the territory of the Empire with the approval of Emperor Anastasius: *Gens Herulorum in terras atque civitates Romanorum iussu Anastasii Caesaris introducta*.⁶⁴ This piece of information does not specify which parts were settled, but the possibility that it was a wider area should not be excluded, as the towns/communities are mentioned in the plural form (*civitates*). It is commonly believed that they settled in the area of Bassianae in Syrmia,⁶⁵ which is derived from the supposition that the eastern part of Pannonia Secunda with the city of Bassianae was reclaimed by the Empire already in 510, upon the terms of the treaty between the Goths and Byzantium. This delineation was mentioned in Justinian's Novel 11 of 14 April 535,⁶⁶ and an important note left by Menander Protector, that the '...Emperor was planning to settle the tribe [Avars] on the land which the Heruls had earlier inhabited, which is called Second Pannonia'⁶⁷ testifies to the same effect.

Procopius left a somewhat different picture of the settlement of the Heruli, who 'crossed the Ister River and decided to live as neighbours to the Romans in that region; this was during the reign of the Emperor Anastasius, who received

61 Bugarski, Ivanišević 2016.

62 Sarantis 2016, 266–278, 312–323.

63 Ivanišević et al. 2006, 133–136.

64 Marcellinus Comes, Chronicle, ad. 512,11.

65 Stein 1949, 145–146, 156; Dušanić 1967, 74–75; Mirković 1971, 50–51; Sarantis 2010, 369.

66 Novellae 11.

67 Menander Protector, History, fr. 5.4. 2–6. Transl. R. C. Blockey.



Fig. 9. Viminacium – Svetinja: Lamellar armour – preserved rows of lamellae (no scale).

them with great friendliness and allowed them to settle where they were.’ In other words, they are said to have crossed into the Empire on their own will. Soon after arrival they started a rebellion; the uprising was crushed by the Roman army, and the lives of those who survived were spared.⁶⁸

Historical sources from the reign of Emperor Justin I do not mention the Heruli. However, the news from the first year of Justinian’s rule, that they were given fertile lands and other possessions, while Justinian persuaded them to adopt Christian faith,⁶⁹ speaks for their importance to the Empire. As for the cities and areas of their settlement, Procopius mentions Singidunum in two instances. Particularly important to us is the second piece of news, which reads as follows: ‘Other towns of Dacia also, about the city of Singidunum, had been taken over by the Eruli as a gift from the emperor, and here they are settled at the present time, overrunning and plundering Illyricum and the Thracian towns very generally.’⁷⁰ It

68 Procopius, Wars, VI.xiv.28–32.

69 Procopius, Wars, VI.xiv.33–34.

70 Procopius, Wars, VII.xxxiii.13. Transl. H. B. Dewing.

is stated here, as well as in Marcellinus Comes,⁷¹ that the Heruli settled other cities of the Diocese of Dacia too. Taking into account their spread along the Danube limes, one would first think of the key strongholds there – Margum and Viminacium⁷² – where parts of the above-discussed large cemeteries have been recorded, datable precisely to this period.⁷³

Certain groups of the Heruli were engaged in the Roman army, serving among other *foederati*. They were regularly paid from Constantinople for their services, even if they plundered the Romans.⁷⁴ Their status is usually perceived as that of the Gepids and Lombards – the allies of the army, or *xymmachoi*.⁷⁵ In the capacity of *foederati*, they were most certainly obliged to protect the frontier and to take part in the defence of the Empire from the other barbarians' raids, as evidenced by their role in breaking a Slavic raid from across the Danube which took place after 545.⁷⁶ Significant contingents of the Heruli took their share in the conquests of Africa (1,000 of them and Huns altogether) and, especially, of Italy – 2,000 men were recorded there in 538, and 3,000 mounted warriors in 552.⁷⁷

It is important to address the issue of their numbers in the northern part of Illyricum, from where, according to Procopius, they were recruited.⁷⁸ Alexander Sarantis estimated that some 1,500 to 2,000 Heruli lived there; however, bearing in mind the strength of their overseas contingents, he left the possibility open that the Herulic settlement was in fact more significant.⁷⁹ Their numbers may have been larger if we take into account the information on another division of theirs in 549, when 1,500 Heruli under the leadership of Philemuth took the Roman side, and 3,000 joined the Gepids in their war against the Lombards. Many Herulic rebels were killed by the Roman army.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, as mentioned before, already in 551/2 a large num-

71 cf. note 64.

72 Ivanišević 2016, 89–99, fig. 1.

73 Ivanišević, Kazanski 2014, 131–160, fig. 1; Ivanišević, Bugarski forthcoming.

74 Procopius, Wars, VII.xxxiii.13–14.

75 Sarantis 2010, 381.

76 Procopius, Wars, VII.xiii.21–26.

77 Jones 1964, 667–668; Sarantis 2010, 384–385.

78 Procopius, Wars, VII.xiii.21–26.

79 Sarantis 2010, 377–378; cf. Иванишевич, Казанский 2010, 148.

80 Procopius, Wars, VII.xxxiv.42–47.

ber of Herulic warriors took part in the Italian campaign.⁸¹ Soon after that, the Heruli vanished from the historical stage, apparently scattered in small groups – either within the limits of the Empire or melting into other ‘barbarian’ communities, notably Gepidic. The news left by Menander Protector, that Justinian suggested to the Avars to settle ‘on the land which the Heruls had earlier inhabited’, is taken as confirmation that the latter left the lands they had occupied for almost four decades.⁸²

The Migration-Period cemeteries along the limes, from Jakovo via Singidunum and Margum to Viminacium, testify to the importance of ‘barbarian’ settlement there, Herulic in particular.⁸³ The finds from the southeastern corner of Syrmia may be assigned to them, although the Jakovo necropolis was labelled as Gepidic already in the title of an article by Danica Dimitrijević and is still commonly attributed to them.⁸⁴ The same could be true for the Batajnica grave⁸⁵ and the sixth-century Germanic finds from the Serbian Danube region – many of them surveyed here – and perhaps for those from the bridgeheads in southern Banat as well. We could not interpret with any certainty other finds from the Central Balkans. Although the hinterlands of present-day Serbia were not part of Gepid lands, Germanic finds from that area were assigned to them and interpreted in light of their movements after the 567 defeat.⁸⁶ However, given the historical circumstances and the scarcity of precisely dated finds, we maintain reservations about such an attribution.⁸⁷

In light of these estimations, in grave 6 at Singidunum III a member of the Herulic garrison may have been buried, and those four individuals from the Margum cemetery have been interpreted in the same way, as against the original publications where they had been seen as Gepids.⁸⁸ In addition to the historical background, another argument for such an attribution is that the four graves were

81 Procopius, Wars, VII.xxv.13.

82 cf. note 67.

83 Иванишевич, Казанский 2010; Bugarski, Ivanišević 2013; forthcoming.

84 Димитријевић 1960; cf. Ivanišević, Kazanski 2014, 145; contra: Bugarski, Ivanišević 2013, 476; forthcoming.

85 Милинковић 2010, 66; Bugarski, Ivanišević forthcoming.

86 e.g. Simoni 1977–1978; Милинковић 1998.

87 Kiss 1984; Ivanišević et al. 2006, 133–140; Bugarski, Ivanišević forthcoming.

88 Цуњак 1992; Јовановић, Цуњак 1994.

extramural, situated in the old city cemetery, unlike the intramural ones which thus can be dated to the period of Germanic rule over the city and the region, between ca 441 and 510.⁸⁹ Moreover, as the grave-finds from Kovin resemble to a great extent the ones from the C phase graves at Viminacium II, one may believe that they belonged to the Heruli of Justinian's era, serving in Constantiola as Roman *foederati*.⁹⁰ Viminacium apparently provided the most illustrative settlement and funerary contexts for our analysis. Most weapon burials at Viminacium II date from the second third of the sixth century, and the social status of the members of this band of mercenaries exceeds that of their predecessors.

Serving directly under their leader, the *foederati* were not incorporated into regular units, nor did they have to be trained like regular soldiers.⁹¹ Our scant written sources do not tell much about Herulic warfare practices. Yet, the little information from Justinian's time is in line with that from the previous period in stating that the Heruli fought lightly armed.⁹² Procopius wrote that they did not wear armour, helmets or corselets, but only a shield and thick jacket instead; this may have contributed to their mobility and readiness to perform ambushes.⁹³ The frequency with which they were called upon to serve in the Imperial armies (in different geographical conditions and against different opponents) and the responsibility given to their commanders point to their military strength.⁹⁴ On the other hand, that their leaders wore helmets we know from Paul the Deacon, who noted that after the Lombards had won a battle and killed their king, they carried off the banner of Rodolf (Bandum) 'and his helmet which he had been accustomed to wear in war'.⁹⁵

According to our evidence, the *foederati* were buried much like the other Germanic peoples of that time, excluding the Lombards who, while still in the Carpathian Basin, laid plenty of arms in their graves.⁹⁶ Equipped with weapons of their own (seaxes, spathae and possibly spear- and arrow-heads) and Byzantine

89 Bugarski, Ivanišević 2013; Ivanišević, Bugarski forthcoming.

90 Ivanišević, Bugarski 2008, 45, fig. 8; Bugarski, Ivanišević 2013, 474.

91 cf. Bachrach 2008, 173.

92 Jordanes, *Getica*, 261.

93 Procopius, *Wars*, II.xxv.27.

94 cf. Sarantis 2010, 384–385.

95 Paulus Diaconus, *History*, XX 37. Transl. W. D. Foulke.

96 cf. Bóna, Horváth 2009; Kiss 2015, 287.

manufacture, in fortifications along the Danube where they had been engaged they could also have used other types of weapons, such as reflex bows.⁹⁷ After the second half of the fifth century, long seaxes became few in contexts other than Gepidic; it is not likely that they were of Byzantine make.⁹⁸ Particularly interesting is the 75 cm long find from Jakovo, which in its length resembles Avar-Period single-edged swords – ‘proto-sabres’.⁹⁹

The Baldenheim-type helmets were long believed to have been of Germanic origin; however, the finds from Caričin Grad (Justiniana Prima) and Heraclea Lyncestis testify to their Byzantine provenance and confirm their dating within the sixth century.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, western, Merovingian origin is commonly suggested for umbos with silver rivets, also known from Gepid and Lombard contexts, and for accompanying shield handles. On the other hand, those pieces of weaponry have also been found in the Early Byzantine Balkans,¹⁰¹ present-day Turkey (Mersin – Elaiussa Sebaste) and Israel (Jerusalem – Mamilla), and had even been depicted on a sixth-century mosaic in Constantinople.¹⁰² By all appearances, lamellar armours from Svetinja are also Roman products. Coming from a troublesome border area, they have most probably not been produced but only serviced there.¹⁰³ That those armours were valuable is evident from the fact that they were very seldom laid in prominent warriors’ graves.¹⁰⁴

Helmets of the Baldenheim type were highly prestigious items. As noted by Herwig Wolfram, one such piece had the value of several villages.¹⁰⁵ Out of almost 50 finds, many helmets came from the graves of Germanic military commanders who, judging by their spatial spread, were of Frank, Alemannic, Gepid, Lombard, and, if our suggestion were to be followed, Herulic descent. This is still a small number, ‘indicating that their role as symbols of rank or status may have been much

97 cf. Špehar 2010, 128–131; 2012, 46–51.

98 Kiss 2014, 143–144, 156–158; on *spathae* cf. Menghin 1983.

99 Kiss 2014, 153; cf. Kazanski 1991, 132–133.

100 Bavant 2008.

101 Hübner 1989; cf. Ivanišević et al. 2006, 42–43; Ivanišević 2012, 58–59, fig. 2/2, 3.

102 Quast 2012, 357, Abb. 5, 6.

103 Bugarski 2006, 174–175; cf. Glad 2010, 184.

104 cf. Kory 2004.

105 Wolfram 1990b, 311; cf. Милинковић 2006, 256, н. 32, 33.

more important than their role in war.¹⁰⁶ Those may well have been diplomatic gifts;¹⁰⁷ one could easily speculate that the murdered king's helmet might have been of the same type. Therefore, we must conclude that the commander buried in Batajnica, near Singidunum, was of very high rank. If he was a Herul, his grave would turn out to be one of the most important Herulic burials, in a way matching that of a high-born woman at Gračanica (Ulpiana – Justiniana Secunda).¹⁰⁸

This grave is exceptional not only for the helmet find. Even if the finding circumstances are not clear, a spatha, shield, lenticular spear-head and snaffle bits have also been recovered. Except for the helmet, almost the same combination of finds was registered in grave 115 at Viminacium II, which contained a reed-like instead of lenticular spear-head, while grave 121 did not produce snaffle bits. In this context, we believe that they symbolised horse-riding and used to depict the buried individuals as mounted warriors. Coffin burials 115 and 121 also featured silver belt buckles; they can be compared with graves 1 and 7 at the Gepidic cemetery of Hódmezővásárhely–Kishomok, the latter also producing snaffle bits,¹⁰⁹ and with graves 17 at Szolnok–Zagyva–Part and 128 from Szőreg–Téglagyár, all of the same affiliation.¹¹⁰ Far more numerous burials of this kind have been encountered in Lombard possessions in present-day Hungary;¹¹¹ out of 32 (?) graves surveyed here, the three singled out are of the highest status, the Batajnica burial in particular.

From damaged simple grave 149 at Viminacium II a shield and a lenticular spear-head have been recovered; perhaps some grave-goods are missing. On the other hand, the same combination of weapons came from another coffin burial, grave 120. Another two graves – 141 at Viminacium II and 23 at Viminacium III, both with coffins – produced silver belt pieces in association with single weapon finds: a shield and a reed-like spear-head, respectively. In addition to this, a single shield came from grave 2093 at Viminacium II, and single reed-like spear-heads from simple graves 15 in Margum and 8/1956 in Jakovo. A single javelin came from simple grave 572, while single lenticular spear-heads were recovered from

106 Härke 1990, 25–26.

107 Vogt 2006, 177–189.

108 Kovačević 1963–1964; Milinković 2006.

109 Bóna, Nagy 2002, 111–116, Taf. 6, 9.

110 Cseh et al. 2005, 31–32, 48, 164–177, Taf. 16–18, 38, 64.

111 cf. Bóna, Horváth 2009; Keresztes 2015.

graves 142, 2142, 127 and 135 at Viminacium II (both simple and coffin burials), and from Kovin, Belegiš and Jakovo (grave 4).

Another interesting combination of weapons is recorded in graves 2/1956 at Jakovo and 145 at Viminacium II. Both simple graves, they contained a spatha and 12 arrow-heads each. It should be noted that the same number of arrow-heads of different types was registered in grave 59 at the Gepidic cemetery of Szolnok–Szanda, and as many as 14 in grave 191.¹¹² Nine and six arrow-heads respectively were found in simple graves 2047 and 152 at Viminacium II, and three came from brick-built grave 6 at Singidunum III. Simple graves 7 at the Margum necropolis and 129 at Viminacium II each produced an arrow-head. In simple grave 113 from this cemetery, three arrow-heads were found in association with two reed-shaped spear-heads. For comparison, a pair of such spear-heads was found in grave 43 at another Gepidic cemetery, Kisköre–Pap Tanya,¹¹³ and only a single Lombard grave in present-day Hungary, grave 1 at the Mező Utca site in Hegykő, produced two spear-heads.¹¹⁴ Finally, from grave 2 from Kamenovo a scramasax, a lenticular spear-head and an arrow-head have been recovered.

A general problem in the study of weapon combinations is the issue of ‘grave disturbing activities’ – namely, looting. Whether swords were indeed more ‘popular’ than spear-heads, or just more easily accessible for looters, Alpár Dobos allowed for the possibility that the initial proportion of weapon burial in the late row-grave cemeteries in Transylvania was in fact considerably higher than when excavated.¹¹⁵ For comparison, out of 19 weapon graves at Viminacium II, four have been damaged. In one such grave a spatha was found, two produced spear-heads, and in the fourth there were a spear-head and a shield – that is, only a silver umbo rivet.

While we are aware that some of our contexts are (and some could be) incomplete, it is still worthwhile to investigate if they might have reflected Germanic (Herulic) warfare practices, or, in other words, if they represented functional weapon sets. Different opinions have been expressed concerning this issue. At first, Germanic weapon burials were used to reconstruct their standard weapon sets and fighting practice, implying that the weapons have been utilised by

112 Bóna, Nagy 2002, 210, 228, Taf. 36/59, 52/191.

113 Bóna, Nagy 2002, 194, Taf. 28/43.

114 Keresztes 2015, 471, fig. 2/3, 4.

115 Roth 1977; Dobos 2015, 72, 80–81. On ‘Grabraub’ most recently cf. Aspöck 2018.

the deceased during their lifetime.¹¹⁶ Later scholarship, spearheaded by Heinrich Härke, was much more sceptical towards this simplified interpretation. One of the reasons is that not all weapons belonging to a deceased were laid into his grave. For example, from written sources such as the *Beowulf*, we learn that some swords were handed down over several generations.¹¹⁷

The largest and best studied reference group are fifth-to-seventh century Anglo-Saxon weapon graves.¹¹⁸ Altogether, 44% of all those burials contained a spear, 26% a shield, and only 12% produced a sword.¹¹⁹ Our sample is different, presenting 62% of weapon graves with a spear, 22% with a shield, and as many as 28% with a sword (Table 1).¹²⁰ As Härke further put it, while the ‘majority of weapon sets, be they single weapons or combinations of several weapons, look practical enough,’¹²¹ a ‘considerable proportion (about 25%) of weapon sets do not make any practical sense at all: they are made up of a single throwing spear [...] or even a shield on its own.’¹²² In the same spirit, it has recently been stated that, due to the symbolic nature of this burial rite, functional weapon combinations could not be reconstructed from Avar weapon graves.¹²³

While reed-shaped spears are usually seen as thrusting weapons, at least some of the lenticular blades (the narrower ones) were thrown. The fact that they have been found in pairs has significantly contributed to such a conclusion.¹²⁴ On the other hand, the pair from grave 113 at Viminacium II includes reed-like spearheads longer than 30 cm; only the weapon from grave 572 is a typical javelin. This is the only piece of weaponry in the grave, and the additional two graves featured single shields. The three ‘no-sense’ sets constitute 9% of all.

116 e.g. Werner 1968; Steuer 1968.

117 Härke 1990, 34, n. 23; Effros 2003, 93.

118 Härke 1992.

119 Härke 1997, 119. Taking into account only the undisturbed weapon burials from 47 cemeteries, statistical ratios change dramatically: 84 (86) % weapon graves with spears, 45% with shields, and 11 (12) % with swords (Härke 1990, tab. 1; 2005, tab. 2).

120 When disturbed graves are excluded, in our sample there are still 54% weapon graves with spears, 21% with shields, and 29 % with swords.

121 Härke 1990, 33, tab. 2, n. 21. The term ‘set’ is used even for single weapon finds in graves.

122 Härke 1997, 119.

123 Csiky 2015, 389–390.

124 cf. Dobos 2015, 65–67.

In general, the deposition of weapons in graves has something to do with 'wealth', but archaeology by itself cannot explain why some men have been buried with weapons, and some others have not. These and other artefacts – archaeological burial data – were put into graves by the mourners, and thus are *intentional* data, while *functional* data provide information about the actual life of the buried and are not affected/distorted by the burying community.¹²⁵ They primarily come from physical anthropological analyses, crucially important to burial archaeology, which have revealed that some of the males buried in Anglo-Saxon weapon graves were too young, too old or too sick to be warriors. In contrast to this, many individuals bearing the marks of fighting, including cut marks on the skull, have been buried without any weapons.¹²⁶ In the Avar sample as well there are weapons in infant, juvenile and senile graves, which makes 'deposition of weapons in burials [...] much more closely associated with social maturity than with fighting ability'.¹²⁷

Again, our sample shows a different trend. Buried with weapons in either simple graves or coffins, men from Viminacium were all adults, and almost all aged between 30 and 50 years. The individual inhumed in grave 145, equipped with spatha and a 'full' set of arrows, had an artificially deformed skull. Published anthropological analyses are not detailed enough to allow us to determine if some of those warriors (?) actually had battle wounds,¹²⁸ but in our analysis we can still lean on both intentional and, to an extent, functional data.

A weapon burial rite is, after all, a social phenomenon. In terms of individual burials and from the angle of contextual archaeology, 'the choice of armament deposited in a particular grave depicted how kin wished to remember the deceased, an image tempered by local custom and the amount of wealth that family members were willing or able to devote to the funeral ceremony'.¹²⁹ On a group level, and not contradicting the previous point, weapon burials served as an ethnic marker, underscoring the group's biological origin, which is one of the elements in the process of ethnic identity formation, and its differentiation from the local population. In this context, weapons were used as 'symbols of real or potential

125 Härke 2005, 197.

126 Härke 1997, 120; 2005, tab. 7; cf. Effros 2003, 95.

127 Csiky 2015, 385.

128 Mikić 1994; 2008; Микић 2007.

129 Effros 2003, 95.

Table 1. Sixth-century foederati from the Upper Moesian Limes: weapon combinations in graves.

<i>cemetery</i>	<i>grave no.</i>	<i>grave type</i>	<i>date</i>	<i>age</i>	<i>helmet</i>	<i>shield</i>	<i>seax</i>	<i>scramasax</i>	<i>spatha</i>	<i>lenticular spear-head</i>	<i>reed-like spear-head</i>	<i>javelin</i>	<i>arrow-head</i>	<i>quiver</i>	<i>snaffle bits</i>	<i>other valuable finds</i>
Jakovo	several	simple	mid 5 th - 6 th ct.				2		2/1 set	1						damaged
Jakovo	3	simple	mid 5 th - 6 th ct.						1							no
Jakovo	4	simple	mid 5 th - 6 th ct.							1						no
Jakovo	2/1956	simple	?						1				12	1		no
Jakovo	8/1956	simple	mid 5 th - 6 th ct.								1					no
Batajnica		?	mid 6 th ct. 2. third 6 th ct.		1	1			1	1					1	?
Belegiš	two?	?	6 th ct.							2						damaged
Singidunum III	6	brick-built	500–575	ca 20									3			damaged
Margum	7	simple	6 th ct.										1			no
Margum	15	simple	6 th ct.								1					no
Margum	17	simple	6 th ct.						1							no
Kovin	2	simple	6 th ct.							1						?
Viminacium II	152	simple	470–510	>45									6			no
Viminacium II	1876	simple	2. third 6 th ct.	ca 40					1 (set)							no
Viminacium II	142	coffin	2. third 6 th ct.	>21						1						no
Viminacium II	2142	simple	2. third 6 th ct.							1						no

<i>cemetery</i>	<i>grave no.</i>	<i>grave type</i>	<i>date</i>	<i>age</i>	<i>helmet</i>	<i>shield</i>	<i>seax</i>	<i>scramasax</i>	<i>spatha</i>	<i>lenticular spear-head</i>	<i>reed-like spear-head</i>	<i>javelin</i>	<i>arrow-head</i>	<i>quiver</i>	<i>snaffle bits</i>	<i>other valuable finds</i>
Viminacium II	2093	simple	2. third 6 th ct.			1										no
Viminacium II	141	coffin	2. third 6 th ct.	>45		1										silver
Viminacium II	129	simple	2. third 6 th ct.	>45									1	1		no
Viminacium II	115	coffin?	2. third 6 th ct.	mat.		1			1 (set)		1				1	silver
Viminacium II	121	coffin	2. third 6 th ct.	ca 45		1			1	1						silver
Viminacium II	113	simple	2. third 6 th ct.	>45							2		3			no
Viminacium II	120	coffin	3. third 6 th – 1. third 7 th ct.	>40		1				1						no
Viminacium II	572	simple	3. third 6 th – 1. third 7 th ct.	ca 45								1				no
Viminacium II	123	simple	6 th – 1. third 7 th ct.	35–45					1							damaged
Viminacium II	127	simple	6 th – 1. third 7 th ct.							1						damaged
Viminacium II	135	coffin	6 th – 1. third 7 th ct.	ca 30						1						damaged
Viminacium II	145	simple	6 th – 1. third 7 th ct.	ca 45					1				12			no
Viminacium II	149	simple	6 th – 1. third 7 th ct.	40–45		1				1						damaged
Viminacium II	2047	simple	6 th – 1. third 7 th ct.										9			no
Viminacium III	23	coffin	6 th – 1. third 7 th ct.	adult?							1					silver
Kamenovo	2	?	mid 6 th ct.					1		1			1			no

Fig. 10. Viminacium II:
Silver U-shaped chapes – 1.
Grave 115; 2. Grave 1876
(no scale).



violence, and their display in a ritual projects an image of martial prowess and/or power – and they have been used as such throughout history.¹³⁰ On this we can only agree with Härke, and – to put aside the apparent disproportion in their size¹³¹ – it may well have been the reason that our sample differs from the Anglo-Saxon in age structure and in displaying a higher ratio of offensive weapons.

This is so because the presented sample was not drawn from a sedentary population, either conquering or native, but instead represents the military core around which the populace was formed – Justinian's mercenaries. In this case, therefore, weapon graves did contain 'tools of their [...] trade'.¹³² More richly furnished weapon burials from the C2 phase, including graves 115 and 121, cluster in the northern part of the necropolis (Fig. 5). From the same area came (medium) rich women's burials of the same date – graves 133, 138, 2083, and the particularly wealthy female grave 118, which, among other finds, contained a faceted crystal bead, a silver strap-end and brooch, and a large bronze bowl (Fig. 11.1–5).¹³³ One may suppose that these women were somehow related to prominent males buried with weapons.

Successors of those were perhaps not Heruli – with the arrival of the Avars the Heruli disappeared from the written sources¹³⁴ – but still maintained their gainful position until the end of the sixth or the beginning of the seventh century. The finds of lamellar armours from Svetinja speak for the garrison's importance to the Empire, and the vast

130 Härke 1997, 120.

131 cf. notes 119, 120.

132 cf. Härke 1990, 22.

133 Ivanišević et al. 2006, 122–127, 168, 170, pl. 15, figs 3, 48; for the bowl cf. Vida 2016, 86–88, figs 90, 91.

134 Schwarcz 2005, 512.



Fig. 11. Viminacium II: 1–5.
Grave 118.

share of amphorae found in pottery contexts there¹³⁵ indicates that those mercenaries were involved in another lucrative activity – the distribution of goods.¹³⁶

These commodities came from the *annona*. Justinian's *Quaestura Exercitus* was established in 536 to ensure that the troops on the Danube – *limitanei* and *comitatenses* – receive supplies from the Aegean provinces.¹³⁷ Several decades later those ended up in the hands of the mercenaries, probably in the form of the *annona foederatica*.¹³⁸ It should be noted here that Florin Curta, while writing about Slavic leaders of the second half of the sixth century north of the Danube, mentions archaeological finds of amphorae there, illustrating that 'olive oil, wine or garum were as good for showing off as horses, weapons, and gold.'¹³⁹

135 Поповић 1988, 13–19, сл. 13, 14.

136 Ivanišević 2016, 92.

137 Karagiorgou 2001, 149–154; Curta 2016, 307–334.

138 cf. Bachrach 2008, 172.

139 Curta 2010, 308, n. 20, 21. On amphorae from Early Avar contexts cf. Csiky, Magyar-Hárshegyi 2015.

These observations bring us back to the assessment of the status of the most prominent individuals in our sample. In cultural-anthropological terms, they can be labelled ‘big-men’.¹⁴⁰ While ‘great-men’ would lose their status after the conflict, ‘chiefs’ usually led larger groups. In the context of Early Mediaeval archaeology, this concept was recently tested by Stefan Eichert, who summarises that ‘big-men’ were ‘leaders that can receive their position because of individual skills and actions. Economical aspects are more important and they act as redistributors of different goods (agriculture, prestige goods). Big-men keep their status in peace times, because they control or manipulate the material-economical wealth of their community’¹⁴¹, above all by receiving money from the Empire to pay and maintain the soldiers.¹⁴²

After studying sixth-century Germanic finds from the Upper Moesian limes, including both the settlement and funerary contexts – weapon graves in particular – we may conclude that our evidence reveals a clearly differentiated and internally stratified community with a privileged position, derived from its role in the defence of the border and engagement in numerous military campaigns of the Empire. There is little doubt that we can ascribe these finds, particularly those from the second third of the sixth century, to Herulic mercenaries and their leaders.

Translated by Ivan Bugarski

140 e.g. Sahlins 1963; Lindstrom 1981.

141 Eichert 2017, 18.

142 Bachrach 2008, 173.

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