Chapter 5

BARBARIANS ON THE SIXTH-CENTURY DANUBE FRONTIER: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY

Following the collapse of the Hunnic polity in the mid-fifth century, and the military and political recovery of the Empire in the late fifth and early sixth centuries, the northern frontier along the Danube became a key element of early Byzantine foreign affairs. The fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries were also a period of dramatic changes among the Empire’s northern neighbors. For the making of the Slavic ethnicity, these changes were particularly crucial. Justinian’s defensive program on the Danube frontier triggered the social and political effects that led to the process of ethnic formation described in the last chapter. Equally important was the Empire’s relationship with the neighbors of the Slavs, the Gepids, the Lombards, the Cutrigurs, and the Avars. The boom which has taken place in medieval archaeology over the last few decades has made this relationship far more visible than was possible on the basis of written sources alone. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the results of archaeological investigations and the problems raised by their interpretation. Emphasis will be laid upon the use of material culture for building group identity or creating symbols of power. I will first examine the evidence from the sixth-century Carpathian basin and neighboring regions, followed by a brief survey of Avar archaeology. The last section of this chapter is devoted to the archaeology of the steppe north of the Black Sea and problems of chronology and interpretation of hoards of silver and bronze, which are relevant for the archaeological assemblages discussed in the next chapter.

THE CARPATHIAN BASIN

Attila’s death and the rapid demise of the Huns opened the way for the rise of new political forces in the Middle Danube region. The Gepids were among the first to take advantage of the power vacuum. Their king, Ardaric, who ruled between 451 and 455, became the new ally of Emperor Marcian, and the Gepids were now paid 100 lb of gold solidi annually. In 471, they occupied Pannonia Secunda (present-day Srem and Slavonia), but were attacked in 504 by an Ostrogothic army led by Count Pizas. The Gepids attempted to regain Sirmium, but Vitigis ousted them in 528. As the Gothic war started in Italy, however, they eventually occupied Sirmium and Bassana. They allied themselves with the Franks and began raiding into the Balkans. In response, Emperor Justinian decided to give the Lombards the annual subsidies until then paid to the Gepids. The Gepids were defeated in 547 by an allied Lombard–Byzantine–Herul force, and again, in 551 or 552, by Lombards alone. They were led by petty kings ruling over the eastern part of the Carpathian basin. In the late 480s, Thrasamila was “king” of Sirmium, followed at his death by his son, Thrasaric. Cunimund, who ruled between 560 and 567, also resided in Sirmium, together with the Arian bishop of the Gepids. In Sirmium, Cunimund minted silver imitations of Byzantine and Ostrogothic coins.

Following their victory over the Herules in c. 507, the Lombards moved south of the Danube’s middle course into Pannonia. At some point after 526, they seem to have established themselves permanently in that region. They were most likely federates, since they appear as defending the Danube frontier, much like Suebians before them. In addition, Justinian allowed them to expand between the Sava and the Drava rivers, which brought them very close to Sirmium and to other Gepid settlements. Wacho, the king of the Lombards, had close ties to the Merovingian rulers in Reims. His eldest daughter, Wisigarda, married Theudebert in c. 530, while his younger daughter, Walderada, became the wife of Theudebert’s son, Theudalbald (547–553). In addition, the collapse of the Thuringian “kingdom,” following Theudebert’s victory of 534 or 535, brought large numbers of Thuringians within the area controlled by Lombards. Auduin, who ruled from 547/8 to 560/5, married Rodelinda, the daughter of Herminfred, the last Thuringian king.

The first to speak of “Gepid culture” in relation to sixth-century artifacts found in the Hungarian plain (east of the Tisza river) was József Hampel, the founder of medieval archaeology in Hungary. The first cemetery was excavated in the early 1900s by Gábor Csallány at

1 Procopius, Wars vii 33.8–11; Secret History 18.16–19. See also Böna 1956:235 and 1976:16 and 71; Pohl 1980:289; Christon 1991:56. For the succession of Gepid kings, see Kiss 1989–90. During their raid of 539, the Gepid of Thrasaric killed magister militum Calluc (Jordanes, Romanae 387). To Jordanes, the Lombards were the allies of the emperor against the Gepids (Romanae 386). The chronology of the Lombard–Gepid wars has been disputed. Most scholars, however, adopted 547 for the first confrontation, 549 for the second, and 551 for the third war. See Christon 1991:84, 91, and 95; Pohl 1997:90.
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Berekhát, near Szentes. By 1925, Károlyi Eperjesy had unearthed the cemetery at Csanád-Bökény, the first to be coin-dated to the late fifth century. Shortly after World War II, Kurt Horedt began working at Morešti, in Transylvania, the first fully excavated, sixth-century, settlement in the Carpathian basin. The “Gepid culture,” however, came to be more often associated with burial assemblages. In his still unrivaled monograph of 1961, Dezső Csallány listed 275 cemeteries with more than 1,900 burials and an immense quantity of artifacts. Kurt Horedt first emphasized the association of the “Gepid culture” with contemporary assemblages in Germany and France and called it the easternmost Reihengräber group.

By contrast, the evidence of sixth-century burials in Transdanubia (i.e., the region west of the Middle Danube and presumably inhabited by Lombards) is comparatively meager. Only seventeen cemeteries are known so far in western Hungary with about 400 burials dated to the period of the Lombard presence in Pannonia. Ever since Joachim Werner subdivided the archaeological material attributed to the Lombards into three chronological phases, artifact-categories from Pannonia are viewed as different from those of Italy and the region north of the Danube river. Recent studies, however, have produced a far more complex picture. Instead of a uniform, unidirectional, migration movement, archaeologists now emphasize ties maintained between regions north and south of the Middle Danube. After c. 450, a new burial pattern made its appearance in Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia. Warriors were buried with large numbers of weapons (swords, spears, arrow heads, shield bosses, and axes). Close contacts were maintained with Merovingian Gaul, as indicated by the glass beaker found at Zohor, and with the Scandinavian world, as exemplified by the cross-brooch found at Orasice. A significant change in fashion is also visible in female burials. Besides a pair of brooches at shoulders, women wore one or two additional fibulae attached to leather straps hanging from the belt and adorned with amber or glass beads. That occupation of the area north of the Danube continued even after the Lombards established themselves in Pannonia is shown by finds of stamped pottery in Moravia. On the other hand, strong ties were maintained with the regions further to the north. This results, for example, from the unusual association at Kajdacs of thirty-eight inhumations with ten contemporary cremation burials. Further confirmation comes from finds of handmade pottery similar to that produced in central

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Bohemia. Some archaeologists laid a particular emphasis upon a variety of small, handmade pots, which were found only in children’s burials. Such pots were hastily classified as Slavic, Prague-type pottery, in an attempt to provide an archaeological illustration to Procopius’ story of Hildigis and his retinue of Scalvene warriors (see Chapter 3). Similar pots, however, appear in contemporary children burials east of the Tisza river, in “Gepidia.” This further indicates that deposition of handmade pots should be interpreted in terms of age status, not ethnicity. István Bóna rightly rejected the interpretation of handmade pots in connection with the episode of Hildigis, by pointing to substantial chronological differences.

Cemeteries in “Lombardia” appear along the right bank of the Danube, between Vienna and Budapest, often near already abandoned Roman forts, but no associated settlements have been found. Contacts with the western Frankish world increased during this period, as indicated by the growing number of Frankish–Alamannic brooches, which are otherwise absent from both Bohemian–Moravian and later Italian assemblages. The same is true for finds of swords with damascened blades (such as that from Tamási), which point to production centers in the Rhine valley. Unlike the Frankish Reihengräberkreis, cemeteries in western Hungary produced a relatively large quantity of millefiori beads. Such beads were produced in Italy or in some other place in the eastern Mediterranean. By contrast, amber beads almost disappear from funerary assemblages, though connections with Scandinavia certainly continued, as evidenced by the introduction of the so-called “animal Style I” for the decoration of local types of brooches or by finds of bracteates (e.g., burial 21 at Várpalota). Scandinavian connections, perhaps mediated via “Lombardia,” are also visible in funerary assemblages within the Empire’s frontiers. A pair of Scandinavian brooches was found in association with a freshly minted

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3 Hampel 1905:776; Bóna 1979b:110; Csallány 1961:17; Horedt 1979a. See also Horedt 1977. The term Reihengräberkreis was coined in 1958 by Ludwig Lindeschmidt and was used to describe funerary assemblages of the Merovingian period. The German archaeologist Joachim Werner first attempted to build a chronology for this archaeological horizon. See Werner 1933.


5 Lombard occupation of abandoned Roman sites: Bóna 1976:33. Sixth-century settlements in Bohemia and Moravia: Vojtěchovský and Plíšeková 1997; Csernák 1997. Replicas of two brooches from Várpalota and Hegykő were found at Huszlin (Bécsújt) and Wiedbaden (Germany). See Werner 1962:62; Kühn 1974:1076–86 and 1094–109. Conversely, tongued-fibulae, which are typical for funerary assemblages in Bohemia and Moravia, occasionally appear in the West (Kühn 1974:827–40). For damascened sword blades, see Bóna 1978:312. The most powerful example of Lombard–Frankish contacts is that from Mosonszentijános (northwestern Hungary). One of two burials found there produced a Frankish bell-beaker of Rheinsch origin and a wooden bucket with plate escutcheon mounts with anthropomorphic heads, which are also allied to an extensive group in the Rhemsh area. See Bóna 1976:72–4; Menghin 1982:66–7.
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solidus of Justinian (dated after 538), in a female burial in Gračanica (Kosovo, Yugoslavia). Their closest analogy is the fibula from Skodborgus (Denmark), which was found together with B- and D-bracteates, dated to the early sixth century.6

Archaeologists traditionally divide “Gepida” into three areas: the Tisza plain, north Serbia, and Transylvania. Large sixth-century settlements excavated in Transylvania include sunken buildings (Grubenhäuser) with a superstructure supported by five, six, or sometimes, even more posts, but without any heating facility. Such buildings were common in contemporary settlements of Central and Western Europe. The earliest, but also richest, burials, dated to the second half of the fifth century also come from Transylvania. High-status burials, with many types of often costly grave-goods, may indicate the presence of a power center, perhaps the most important in the area during the half-century following the demise of Attila’s Hunnic Empire.7

By 500, however, the distribution of wealth changed dramatically. Rich and isolated graves were replaced by relatively large cemeteries, and costly objects of gold by other, comparatively simpler, status markers. Unlike fifth-century funerary assemblages, such markers often appear in women’s graves. Among the most important were silver eagle-headed buckles, lavishly decorated with niello and cabochons and equally luxurious silver or gilded silver brooches of the Aquileia class. Both artefact-types also occur in contemporary funerary assemblages in Crimea, which

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points to long-distance contacts with “Gepida.” A small number of sixth-century Byzantine coins suggests that, in material culture terms, relations with the Empire had comparatively less importance.8

By contrast, contacts with Scandinavia were much stronger. Nils Åberg suggested that a true commercial network existed between sixth-century Gotland and Italy, in which “Gepida,” particularly after the conquest of Sirmium, played a major role. Two eagle-headed buckles were found at Tytkowo, a sixth-century cemetery in Mazuria, while Joachim Werner rightly pointed to “imports” from “Gepida” found in the warrior burial at Taurapilis (Lithuania). An equal-armed brooch found in grave no. 84 at Szentes-Nagyhegy, in Hungary, is a typical specimen of the animal Style 1 (phase B) in east Sweden, which dates from the early sixth century. To the same direction points the buckle accidentally found at Gyula, near the present-day Hungarian–Romanian border, which was certainly produced in Scandinavia in a style strikingly similar to local fibulæ decorated in animal Style I. Finally, the square-headed brooch with foot-plate bar, which was found in burial no. 124 at Szołnok-Szandaszéllö, is a unique continental specimen of a purely Scandinavian series of the early 500s. Such contacts were probably the result of a variety of factors, ranging from gift-exchange and exogamy to traveling craftsmen. It is much more difficult to identify trade connections. In any case, once they reached “Gepida,” few Scandinavian and Baltic goods were further redistributed into neighboring regions.9

This is most evident from the examination of sixth-century amber finds within the Carpathian basin. Unlike contemporary funerary assemblages in western Pannonia, burials in eastern Hungary and

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6 Millofi: beads: Tomka 1980:32; Koch 1974; Fiedler 1952:81. Amber beads: Böna 1956:213; Werner 1962:32. Bracteates: Haseloff 1981:702; Werner 1962:80; Böna 1976:pl. 80. Gračanica: Popović and Čeršek 1965:119-20; Vinski 1968:106 and pl. 6-41. Gračanica: Haseloff 1981:328-41 and pl. 32/1. Werner assigned the pair of fibulae to a Kentish variant of square-headed brooches, but no such specimen is known from Anglo-Saxon England. See Werner 1970:77; Hines 1997. That contacts with Scandinavia may have been mediated via “Lombardia” is shown by the large, single, fibula from Gračanica, with its footplate inspired by the Crevalle, Ravenna, and Castel Truso classes (Kühn 1974:187-91, 1217-24, and 1239-48). In addition, the Gračanica burial produced a buckle and two belt straps for which the closest analogues are those from the second burial at Moosonzentjáns. I wish to thank Dr Mihálo Mátolík (University of Belgrade) for his kind assistance in reconstructing the exact position of the grave-goods found at Gračanica and sharing with me his excellent knowledge of sixth-century archaeological assemblages in Yugoslavia.

7 Böna 1976:29-30; Cseh 1986:205. Settlements in Transylvania: Horváth 1979a: n. a. 1953a; Vlasv et al. 1966; Gari 1994; Bárti 1994:5; Zahara 1994:5. There are no fully excavated, sixth-century settlements in the Tisza region, only isolated buildings. See Cseh 1997. Cenobitás is similar to those from Transylvania were found in Germany (Bärhorst, Gladbach, Weimar, and Irland, England (West Stow), and Belgium (Brebières). See Kiss 1992:39. For late fifth-century, high-status burials, see Hartkou 1982:387. The Hunnic gold, or at least a good part of it, most likely fell into the hands of the anti-Hunnic coalition of 454. Knowing that the Gepid king Astark was the leader of this coalition, it is tempting to associate the “princes’ graves” at Apahida and it (with objects weighing more than 1 kg and 2 kg gold, respectively) with the late fifth-century Gepid royal seat. See Kiss 1989:2-38 and 61.

8 According to István Böna (1976:73), the main cause for the radical changes taking place around AD 500 was that “the majority of Gepids had lost their clan rights as many were hit by poverty, wealth and power being concentrated in the hands of a small group of nobles relying on their small armed retinues,” With no serious, quantitative, study of “Gepid” funerary assemblages, although plausible, Böna’s interpretation is no more than pure speculation. It is true, however, that in Transylvania changing burial patterns were accompanied by the rise of hillforts, a phenomenon probably linked to dramatic social changes. See Hrubec 1977, 1964, and 1999; Harhósi 1982:590. No such forts were found in the Tisza region, which produced, however, the richest and largest sixth-century cemeteries. Eagle-headed buckles: Rusin 1939; Böna 1976:13-14. Brooches of the Aquileia class: Kühn 1965:95-101; Harhósi 1982:386 and 1990:187. Contacts with Crimea: Ambrus 1968:14 and 17; Aibalin 1990:32-5. Sixth-century Byzantine coins in “Gepida”: Böna et al. 1993:77.

Transylvania produced a large number of amber beads, often in more than one specimen and in combination with glass or chalk beads. The largest quantity in a single cemetery (138 in total) is from Kiszombor, but neighboring cemeteries (Szentes-Nagyhegy, Berekhát, Szentes-Kökényzug, Szöreg) also produced large numbers of amber beads. A distribution map of all known finds (Figure 14) shows a concentration in “Gepidia,” especially in the region on the left bank of the Tisza, between the Körös/Criş and the Maros/Mureş rivers. Despite the lack of any characterization studies, it is possible that these beads were made of succin amber, which is found on the shores of the Baltic Sea. That amber traveled along the Vistula trade route is demonstrated by amber deposits, such as that found at Basonia, but none could be dated later than c. 450. The distribution map shows that if amber beads were imported into “Gepidia” from the Baltic coast, comparatively few were allowed to pass further, which may indicate that they were used, between c. 500 and c. 565, as markers of group identity in “Gepidia.” This is also suggested by the distribution of amber beads dated to the

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Early Avar period (c. 570 to c. 670), which sharply contrasts with the previous, more localized distribution (Figure 15). As shown in Chapter 1, emblemic style often marks and maintains boundaries and transmits a clear message to a defined target population. It becomes highly visible particularly in times of sociopolitical stress and between-group competition and hostility. Archaeological finds in Hungary and the neighboring regions, which could be dated to the late fifth century or to the first two-thirds of the sixth century, concentrate either on the right bank of the Danube or on the left bank of the Tisza river (Figure 16). There are few known finds in the land between the two rivers and no sites of a fortified nature. This area was interpreted as

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a “no man’s land” separating the Lombards from the Gepids. There was undoubtedly significant interaction across this buffer zone. The construction of male identity in both “Lombardia” and “Gepidia” operated with the same artifact-categories, which is most visible from the dress of the deceased at burial or from the provision of military gear. With few exceptions (such as the damascened blades from Tamási), there is no difference between swords found in warrior graves in western Pannonia and “Gepidia,” despite Jordanes’ claim that the euis was a typically Gepid weapon. In both cases, these were double-edged weapons, ranging from 80 to 100 centimeters in length. In both areas, as elsewhere in Europe, shield deposition signalized male adulthood. Both west of the Danube and east of the Tisza river the prevalent type of shield boss was indeed not different from contemporary Anglo-Saxon or west Merovingian specimens with convex cone, straight wall, and five flange rivets.\footnote{For the “no man’s land” between Lombards and Gepids, see Werner 1962:116; Christie 1993:55. Wacho, the Lombard king, married Austrigusa, the daughter of the Gepid king (Paul the Deacon, Historia Langobardorum 1 21). The episode of Hildigis also points to interaction between Lombards and Gepids. For the euis as a Gepid weapon par excellence, see Jordanes, Getica 50; Csallány 1961:96 fig. 1; Cseh 1990:20; Kiss 1992:52. For the distribution of graves with swords in pre-Avar “Gepidia,” see Kiss 1992:6 fig. 1. Shields and shield deposition: Hubener 1989:94; Dickinson and Hárke 1992:13–17 and 69. It is true, however, that well-datable burial contexts in western Pannonia show that by the mid-sixth century there was a change in shape of shield bosses from sugar-loaf to convex-coned, presumably under the influence of Gepid and Byzantine weapons (Werner 1962:80). Both forms of shield bosses were still in use during the Early Avar period; see Kiss 1992:52.}

Helmets of the Baldeheim class, which were also used by Roman army officers, were found in both “Lombardia” (Dolné Semerovce and Steinbrunn) and “Gepidia” (Batajnica and Berekhát) (Figure 17). Such rare and expensive artifacts, which clearly signalize high social status, are easy to distinguish from slightly later helmets of the Niederstotzingen class, for which parallels could be found as far as Bokchondong in South Korea.\footnote{Baldeheim helmets: Vinski 1957:pl. 1–vii/7 and 1982:pl. 1/1, vi/2–2, x/4, and x/5; Csallány 1961:pl. 1/8, lxxxv/3, and lxxv/3; Kiss 1983; Manea 1987; Pota 1987:394; Mikulčík and Nikuliška 1979:69 fig. 4; Georgiev 1985:6:210 fig. 6/3; Press et al. 1973:137 figs. 1–2; Bona 1976:30 fig. 11. See also Böhmer 1993:206. The Ostrogoth kings Totila and Theodahad were represented on their own, respective, coinage as wearing Baldeheim-type helmets. Similar helmets appear in very rich burials in Western Europe. For the rich decoration of the Bitora helmet, which imitates coin-studded jewelry, see Martens de 1996:294. Niederstotzingen helmets: Kovács 1913:281 fig. 13; Manea 1987:102; Cseh 1990a:20; Dörner 1990b:fig. 3/1; Vinski 1982:pl. XV. Such helmets originated in the far East. See Werner 1988. Their appearance in eastern and central Europe, as well as in Italy, is attributed to the Avars. See Vinski 1982:14; Manea 1987:102; Swietoslawski 1993:234; Krygianov 1996:76.}

Interaction between “Lombardia” and “Gepidia” is even more visible, when we examine finds of stamped pottery. There are about forty
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Figure 18 Distribution of sixth-century fibulae within the Carpathian basin

1 - disc-brooches; 2 - Gurzuf class; 3 - Hahnheim class and variants; 4 - Krainburg class; 5 - Reggio Emilia class; 6 - Szentes-Berekhát class; 7 - Wittlingsen class; B - Burgelgab class; C - Cividale class; G - Goethe class; R - Ravenna class; S - S-shaped brooches; T - Castel Trosino class; V - Trivières class; U - Ulm class; W - Wiesbaden class; Z - Zangefibeln

were also found in Italy, where they were interpreted as “imports” from “Gepidia.” Conversely, fibulae of the Reggio Emilia class may have been Ostrogothic “imports” into “Gepidia.” Two specimens of the Suuk Su group, that of Kiszombor (grafe 146) and that of Magyarétés, have analogies in Spain. Two other classes, Pfüllingen and Wittlingsen, originated in the West. By contrast, S-shaped fibulae and disc-brooches are very rare in the area east of the Tisza river.

The range of brooch classes in “Lombardia” is also very wide. A

22 Kühn 1974:758-66. For Italian specimens, see Biberbrauer 1975:284 and pl. xxii/2 and 1978:221-2 and pl. xxiii/7-3.
23 Kühn 1974:718-26. Assigned brooches: Szentes-Nagyhegy (grafe 8), Berekhát (grafe 105 and stray find), and Tiszafüred.
24 Kühn 1974:310-46 (Suuk Su), 639-48 (Pfüllingen), and 891-4 (Wittlingsen). Only one specimen of the Pfüllingen class is known, that of grave 247 at Kiszombor. Wittlingsen brooches: Gyöngyös, Oradea, Szarvas, Ösqény. The only known analog for the fibulae from Berekhát (grafe 202), Tiszafüred (grafe 1), and Bočar (grafe 4) is the specimen found at Menta (Kühn 1974:725-8). Three other brooches (Morestic, Novi Banovci, and Szentes-Kőkényzeg, grave 29), which belong to Kühn’s class Taman (Kühn 1974:766-79), have no analogies outside “Gepidia.”
25 S-shaped fibula: Szőreg (grafe XI). Disc-brooches: Tiszafüred (grafe 1) and Hödmezővásárhely (grafe 77).

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brooch of Kühn’s Burghagel class was found at Hégykő (grafe 21). Its closest analogy is a fibula from Besançon. Frankish analogies may also be cited for two specimens of the Trivières class, found at Várpalota (grafe 3) and Jutas. This is also true for the fibula of Kühn’s Ulm class found at Fertőszentmiklós, for the Zangefibeln found at Várpalota (grafe 13), and for the fibula of Kühn’s Wiesbaden class found at Hégykő (grafe 4). The only specimen of the Gurzuf class, which was so popular in contemporary “Gepidia,” was found at Szentendre. From the same cemetery (grafe 33) comes the only specimen of the Hahnheim class found west of the Danube river. By contrast, the number of S-shaped and disc-brooches is comparatively larger. The distribution of fibulae west of the Danube river is also characterized by a relatively large number of brooches without any analogies outside “Lombardia,” except Italy. Kühn’s Goethe, Cividale, Ravenna, and Castel Trosino classes are cases in point.

27 Kühn 1974:689-94 (Ulm class), 829-40 (Zangefibeln), 996-1006 (Goethe class), 1076-86 (Wiesbaden class), and 1094-106 (Trivières class), 1187-91 (Cividale class), 1217-24 (Ravenna class), and 1239-48 (Castel Trosino class). Two specimens of the Hahnheim class were found in Mistra and Vienna (see Werner 1962:68). S-shaped fibulae: Kajdacs (grafe 2), Rácalmás (graves 16 and 20), Fertőszentmiklós (grafe 9), Mohacs (grafe 3), Krajn (several specimens). Disc-brooches: Hégykő (graves 18 and 21), Bezeny (grafe 8), Kajdacs (grafe 2), Krajn (grafe 191, 1907, 43, 38, and 66). Goethe fibula: Keszthely (grafe 18) and Rácalmás (grafe 2). Cividale class: Hégykő (grafe 18). Ravenna brooches: Bezeny (grafe 20). Várpalota (graves 1, 17, and 19). Kápolnánádyék, Szentendre (graves 29 and 30), Kajdacs (grafe 2), Tamási (grafe 6), Rácalmás (grafe 16), and Fertőszentmiklós (grafe 9). Castel Trosino class: Bezeny (grafe 8).
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caused by Rosimunda, the daughter of the Gepid king, who was kidnapped by Alboin. This may suggest that aristocratic women played a major role in the display of emblematic styles.28

THE AVARS

Few events in the medieval history of East Central Europe were given more importance by historians than the annihilation of the Gepid and, later, Lombard “kingdoms” and the conquest of the Carpathian basin by the Avars. To many, the year 568 is the beginning of the Middle Ages, an East European equivalent of 476. Archaeologists working within a culture-historical framework maintain that AD 568 represents an important chronological marker and cultural watershed.29

József Hampel was the first to acknowledge the existence of two chronological horizons in the archaeological material attributed to the Avars. András Alföldi first pointed to the importance of Byzantine coins found in burials for the phasing of the “Avar culture.” Despite recent caveats, some fifty Byzantine coins found as either funerary offerings or ornamental objects in rich male burials still underpin the entire chronological system of Avar archaeology.30 There are more than 50,000 burials dated to the period between c. 570 (the foundation of the Avar qaganate) and c. 800 (the collapse of the Avar qaganate following Charlemagne’s victories). On the basis of her analysis of the Alattyán cemetery, Ilona Kovrig first divided this period into three phases, namely Early (568–650/60), Middle (650/60–700), and Late Avar (700–92). Only the first phase can be coin-dated, but Kovrig believed that some Early Avar assemblages, especially those associated with coins minted for Justinian, Justin II, or Tiborius II, were earlier than the first half of the seventh century. This claim, however, proved to be groundless, given the underlying problems of the chronological association of coins and artifacts and of their respective use-life.31

28 Theophylact Simocatta vi 10.8.
29 Pohl 1988:52–7. In Irvin Bona’s words (1976:103), the year 568 was the end of “almost 600 years’ rule by successive Germanic tribes in the Carpathian basin.”
30 See Hampel 1965; Alföldi 1914. For the use of Byzantine coins for the chronology of Avar assemblages, see Bona 1990a:113. Separating the Early Avar material from the Middle Avar one, however, is a very difficult, if not impossible, task. Coins are not always good guides to chronological studies. For example, a bracelet with trumpet-shaped ends was found at Szentesderek in association with a coin minted for Emperor Phocas (607–10). Its closest parallel is that from the Zemianszki Véverok hoard, which also produced nullaresa struck for Emperor Constantine IV (668–9). See Bánffy 1993:201. For the Szentesderek burial, see also Garam 1993:138–9.
31 Kovrig 1963. See also Bona 1971:291; SóS 1971:86. The existence of an Early Avar phase had already been postulated by Dezso Csallany, who was also the first to assign artifact-categories to

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The number of Byzantine coins produced so far by Early Avar assemblages, on the other hand, is remarkably small. As a consequence of various treaties with the Empire, Byzantine payments to the Avars between 568 and 626 totalled at least 6 million solidi. It is very likely that a good part of this incredible wealth was later redistributed within the Avar qaganate as gifts. It is possible that the majority of these coins were melted to provide raw material for gold jewelry, for the exact weight of the largest earrings with pyramid-shaped pendants, which are so typical for Early Avar assemblages, is equivalent to either eight or ten light solidi. Since the use of gold, instead of the usual silver, is restricted to a few exceptionally rich burials, it is possible that supplies of Byzantine gold became the monopoly of a small elite headed by the qagan. If this is true, it may be more productive to treat Early Avar assemblages as indicative of social stratification, than to continue to draw lists of chronologically sensitive artifact-categories.32

Some authors ascribe archaeological assemblages to the Early Avar period on the basis of their alleged analogies from Central Asia or the Middle East, but rarely can contemporary parallels for Early Avar artifact-categories be found outside the Carpathian basin.33 Equally unique are burials with both human and horse skeletons. Swords with P- or 3-shaped sheath attachments are typical for the earliest assemblages attributed to Avar warriors, but all of them predate their frequently cited East

32 Pohl 1991b:398. For a list of treaties and payments of gold to the Avars, see Pohl 1988:202. Unlike Goths, Lombards, or Gepids, the Avars never received payments in food. Like coins, most of Byzantine jewels are equally rare in Avar assemblages. For the weight equivalence between Avar earrings and solidi, see Bona 1990b:177. For gold as a monopoly of the Avar elite, see Garam 1990:258. For Avar assemblages as indicative of social stratification, see Szénáspeteri 1991a and 1991b.
33 Bánffy 1989:149 and 1993:214; Garam 1990:233. A clear Central Asian origin may be claimed only for bone artifacts, such as needle cases, buckles, awls, or belt pendants. See Sekeres 1957; Bona 1980:52 and 54. Of “Asian” origin may also be found single earrings with male skeletons, the deposition of the belt (without buckle), sword, and quiver on the right side of the skeleton, with the bow on top of the coffin. See Bánffy 1993:217–18 and 237; Tomka 1993:31. The only parallels for the deposition of armor are from the Altaï region and the Transylvania basin (Bona 1980:453). By contrast, there is no “Asian” element in the decoration of belt-buckles and plates. Silver rossette-mounts, which appear frequently in Early Avar assemblages, have no analogies outside the Carpathian basin, except two rich burials in Ukraine (Malos Pereleshchepino and Glodysy). See Bánffy 1993:214; SóS and Salamon 1993:53. In addition, the use of earrings by adult males most likely imitated Sassanian practices (Bona 1980:19). Attempts to identify Central Asian Avars by means of physical anthropology bore no fruits. See Toth 1997.
European or Central Asian analogies. It is also difficult to demonstrate a Central Asian origin for the wheel-made grey ware, which was produced only during the Early Avar period in southwestern Hungary.

Both bow-shaped stirrups and stirrups with elongated attachment loops, which are viewed as typical for Early Avar assemblages and the earliest European stirrups, were found in the Kudyrge cemetery in Tuva (west of Lake Baikal, near the Chinese–Russian–Mongolian frontier). Turkic archaeology, however, is notoriously lacking any firmly established chronological system. As a consequence, there is no possibility of deciding whether or not such stirrups were brought by the Avar horsemen from Central Asia or "invented" by them in the Carpathian basin. The majority of Early Avar burials were found either in isolation or in small groups of graves. In the absence of large cemeteries, which would permit an analysis of frequency, distribution, and toposeration of artifact-categories, the relative chronology of the Early Avar period remains problematic.

Another major difficulty is the dating of Middle Avar assemblages. On the exclusive basis of burial evidence and without sufficient settlement finds for comparison, it is almost impossible to discriminate between (late) Early and Middle Avar artifact-categories, although it is clear that the second half of the seventh century witnessed some dramatic cultural change. The Middle Avar phase was first identified within the Kiskőre-Halastó cemetery, but its best-known monuments are the rich burials of the so-called Tótipusza–Dunapentele–Igar group. Dated by means of coins minted for Emperors Constans II and Constantine IV, these burials have close analogies in extremely rich funerary assemblages from Ukraine, which will be discussed in the following section of this chapter (Voznesenka, Malo Pereshchepino, Glodosy, and Zachepilovka).

These astonishing parallels at such a great distance were interpreted as evidence for the migration into the Avar qaganate, by the late seventh century, of a Bulgar group fleeing the civil war inside the western Turkic qaganate. But there are also signs of remarkable continuity between the Early and the Middle Avar assemblages, particularly in western Hungary. Beginning with the last decades of the Early Avar period, belt buckles and plates were decorated with an original variant of the animal Style II, characterized by the frequent occurrence of the dentil pattern. Single-edged sabres, of a type commonly dated to the Middle Avar period, were found in at least three Early Avar contexts, that of the Sânpetru German burial (dated by means of a perforated coin struck for Herachius and Herachius Constantine), that of burial 239 from Kőlked-Feketekapu, and that of grave X from Tarnaméria–Urak dillő. Combat axes, though typical for the Middle, but especially for the Late, Avar period, are also known from Early Avar contexts and from seventh-century assemblages in Italy and Albania.

The understanding of Avar history and archaeology is crucial for the problem of Slavic ethnicity, particularly because, as shown in Chapter 3, in the aftermath of the Avar conquest, numerous groups of Slavenses became subjects of the qaganate. The subject of Avar–Slavic relations is extremely controversial. The debate has often been embittered by nationalistic claims, but there is also little understanding of how the Early Avar society and qaganate operated. As far as written sources allow us to tell, the territorial division following the conquest of the Carpathian basin resembles a Turkic scheme (of Chinese inspiration) based on dī ("the peace zone"), including all territories under the qagan’s direct rule, and pāgh, the territory of the enemy, who refuses to obey the qagan’s orders.

34 For burials with human and horse skeletons, see Bôna 1979c:18–19. For swords with P- or J-shaped sheet attachments, see Bâlint 1991:219. Abnomin 1986. The date of the Avar specimen is given by the warrior burial found at Szevgár-Sápold, in which a double-edged sword with P-shaped sheet attachments was associated with an imitation of a solidus struck for Emperor Maurice. Another, similar specimen was found in burial 2 at Kisszombor O, in association with a solidus struck for Emperor Phocas. The latest P-shaped sheet attachments known so far are those from the horsemans burial at Ivánca, dated to the late seventh century, but such artifacts were already rare by AD 650 (Garam 1992:152). Swords with J-shaped sheet attachments, such as found in Early Avar assemblages, have no parallel outside the Carpathian basin, except the rich burial at Malo Pereschepino.

35 Vidà 1990–91:133 and 1999:42–63. István Bôna claimed a Central Asian origin for this ceramic category, but other authors pointed to possible parallels in sixth-century ceramic assemblages in Romania, e.g. the so-called Ipopet–Cândega culture. See Vékony 1973. For ceramic categories with clear Central Asian analogies, see Vidà 1992.

36 Truly Avar stirrups first occurred in Merovingian burials in southern and western Germany during the last third of the seventh century. Replicas of Avar stirrups with elongated attachment loops were produced there as early as the second half of the seventh century. See Bött 1976:227. For Turkic archaeology, see Bâlint 1989:242–3 and 249. Large Avar cemeteries only appear after c. 650 (Bôna 1971:292). For large cemeteries with Early Avar material, see Salamon and Erdélyi 1971; Sós and Salamon 1995; Kiss 1996; Bárðos 1995. Toposetion: Dndjand 1985.

37 The first to postulate the existence of the chronological phase now known as Middle Avar was the Hungarian archaeologist Gyula László (1952). For the culture change of the mid-seventh century, see Bâlint 1991:201. The most important marker of this change is the shift from swords to sabres and combat axes, an indication of changing warfare practices. In addition, the Middle Avar period coincides with the introduction of a new decoration style primarily based on the interlaced pattern. See Bâlint 1989:156–66; Garam 1992:158–9. For the Tornyopsis–Dunapentele–Igar group, see Garam 1976:120 and 140; Fülop 1988 and 1990; Müller 1989. Avar settlements: Bôna 1968. The first (Late) Avar sunken building was excavated in 1962 by Otto Trojmayr at Bôna (Bôna 1971:313). The monograph of the site at Dunajváros remains the only comprehensive study of Early and Middle Avar settlements. See Bôna 1973.

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The Avars viewed the Danube river as the frontier between yäğı and ēl. Qagan Bayan considered the Slavenes in Walachia to be part of the ēl. Ethnic cleavage within the ēl may not be easily identifiable, particularly because the Avars themselves were subdivided into clans and tribes. The archaeological evidence substantiates this complex picture. Recent studies show that within the Carpathian basin, various artifact-categories, particularly dress accessories, have a restricted, localized, distribution, and, in fact, there are few items which could be considered “Avar” on the basis of their wide distribution.39

THE STEPPED NORTH OF THE BLACK SEA

There was no heir to the Hunnic “Empire” north of the Black Sea. Beginning with the late 500s, Cutrigurs, Utigurs, Saragurs, and Onogurs appear to have shared both the control over the steppe and the interest of historical sources. The first to mention the Cutrigurs were Procopius and Agathas. Both referred to them as “Huns.” A German historian of the Romantic era, however, claimed that the Cutrigurs and the Utigurs were Bulgars. To many, his claim is still indisputable truth, despite the fact that no source referring to Bulgars mentions the Cutrigurs and vice versa. The Bulgars appear in written sources as early as the mid-fourth century, but only in the region north of the Caucasian mountain range.40

By contrast, the “Hunnic” Cutrigurs were constantly located in the area close to Crimea and to the northern shore of the Black Sea. They probably controlled the entire steppe corridor up to the Danube river. Since Menander the Guardsman is the last source to mention the Cutrigurs, they most likely did not survive politically in the aftermath of the Avar invasion. During the last years of Justinian’s reign, the control of

39 Bracelets with trumpet-shaped ends of the so-called Szentendre type are a case in point. The majority of specimens known so far come from Transdanubia (Sós and Salamon 1995:45). The same is true about buckles of Iler’s classes Pécs and Nagybörzsöny. See Iler 1992:158 and 143. For Avar-Slavic relations, see Avenarius 1973 and 1987; Fritze 1980; Tyszkiwicz 1989. Yäğı and ēl: Gökçenjan 1991. Avar class and tribes, see Stepanov 1961:24-5. Non-Avar groups within the Avar qaganate: Pool 1988:223-26. On the basis of their archaeological distribution, scholars postulated the existence of a buffer zone between Middle Avar cemeteries in south and southeast Slovakia and presumably Slavic settlements with Prague-type pottery to the north. These cemeteries were interpreted as Avar outposts in Transdanubia against Samo and his “kingdom.” See Záborník 1988:401-2.

40 Zeus 1977:71-4; Romashov 1992:218. John of Antioch refers to Bulgars in relation to events taking place in 480 in the Lower Danube region, while other sources mention the first Bulgarian raid across the Danube in 499. They subsequently appear as the allies of the Gepids. Dezső Simonyi argued, therefore, that these were not Cutrigurs, but a separate group of Bulgars who came to Pannonia with the Huns and remained there until the arrival of the Avars. See Simonyi 1964. This theory was very popular in the 1960s and 1970s and had a considerable influence upon interpretations of the Early Avar archaeological evidence. See Caullery 1963; Fettich 1972; Bezechev 1981:85-6. Following István Bóna’s devastating critique, this interpretation is now abandoned. See Bóna 1981.

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the steppe was disputed between Utigurs and Cutrigurs, but the rise of the Gök Türk Empire brought the Utigurs, the Onogurs, and other groups under the domination of the western qaganate. At the same time, the Cutrigurs became subjects of Bayan, the qagan of the Avars. The two “Empires” most likely collided on the Don river. As the civil war broke within the western Gök Türk qaganate after the death, in 630, of the yabghu qagan Tüng, two confederations were competing for power and control over the steppe north of the Caucasus range: the Bulgars, under the leadership of a heir of the Dulo, the leading clan of the left division of the western qaganate, and the Khazars, led by a member of the charismatic clan Ashina of the Turkish qaganate, associated with the right division. The Bulgar qaganate established shortly after 630 by Koubrats, who concluded a treaty with Emperor Heraclius, probably reached the Dnieper river to the west, which is viewed as an indication that, in the first half of the seventh century, the steppe between the Dnieper and the Danube rivers were still controlled by the Avars.41

As in many other cases, the archaeological evidence does not fit the picture drawn by historians on the basis of written sources. The steppe north of the Black Sea has not produced so far any materials from the late fifth century. Finds of the following period (sixth to seventh century) fall into one of Ambroz’s groups IV, V, and VI. Group IV, which Ambroz viewed as representing the “lower class,” the “commoners” of the steppe society, consists of burials with no weapons, but with perforated buckles, mounts, and strapends, all datable to the late sixth and early seventh centuries (Veliki Tokmak, Akkerman, Bilozerk). By contrast, group V includes only extraordinarily rich burials, such as Malo Pereshchepino, Kelegia, and Glosody. In group VI, Ambroz included burials such as Sivash’ske, Kostogryzovo, Kovalyka, and Lablonia, in which a human skeleton (often a male) was commonly associated with that of a horse or with parts of a horse skeleton (skull and legs).42


42 Ambroz 1981; Orlow 1985; Baran and Kozłowski 1991:215. The continuity of the steppe “Hunnic culture” of the early fifth century well into the sixth century has recently been advocated by A. V. Bogachev (1996). The evidence cited, however, is far from conclusive. Most sixth- to eighth-century funerary assemblages in the steppe north of the Black Sea were found in the area between the Danube and Dnieper rivers. There are comparatively fewer finds in Left Bank Ukraine and virtually no finds between the Don and the Volga rivers. See Dimitrov 1987:95; Bilînt 1989:102. For a rare instance of perforated belt mounts in Left Bank Ukraine, see Lipking 1974:145-7. For the steppe east of the Don river, see Bezechev 1985.
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Anshu's tripartite scheme, which was designed to provide an easy model for understanding the society of the steppe nomads, does not seem to stand against the existing evidence. First, many burials at the site of Ambrosio, a Late Iron Age settlement in the Balkans, contain gold ornaments, such as belts and armlets. These finds suggest that the steppe nomads, particularly the people associated with the Avars, had a high status in society. However, it is important to note that these ornaments were not exclusive to the steppe nomads and were also found in other regions, such as the Asia Minor. The presence of these ornaments in the Balkans suggests that there may have been cultural exchanges between the steppe nomads and the people of the Balkans. This exchange not only influenced the material culture of the steppe nomads but also contributed to the development of new artistic styles. The steppe nomads were not only influenced by the Pannonian and Illyrian cultures but also by the cultures of the Byzantine Empire. The steppe nomads adopted and modified the art forms and techniques of these cultures, creating a unique style that is characteristic of the steppe nomads of the Late Iron Age. The steppe nomads were not only a nomadic society but also a cultural intermediate between the Mediterranean world and the steppe. This intercultural exchange not only influenced the material culture of the steppe nomads but also contributed to the development of new artistic styles. The steppe nomads were not only influenced by the Pannonian and Illyrian cultures but also by the cultures of the Byzantine Empire. The steppe nomads adopted and modified the art forms and techniques of these cultures, creating a unique style that is characteristic of the steppe nomads of the Late Iron Age. 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total quantity of types in the assemblage, gives, however, a picture radically different from that suggested by Korzukhina (Figure 25). Rich burials belong to the same cluster as hoards of silver and bronze, such as Kharyvki and Zenniansky Vrbovok. With a correspondence analysis, a technique recently introduced to archaeology, the relationships between hoards, between artifact-categories, and between artifact-categories and hoards may be all analyzed together and represented in the same scattergram or series of scattergrams produced by the plotting of pairs of orthogonal axes. What catches the eye at first on the scattergram showing the relationships between assemblages is the clear segregation between hoards and burials (Figure 26). An examination of the second scattergram, which represents relationships between artifact-categories found in both hoards and burials, indicates this split to be a chronological one (Figure 27). Burials are characterized by the presence of swords with typical cross-bars, similar to those depicted on seventh- and eighth-century Soghdian silverware or in fresco scenes at Afrasiab and Pendzhikent. Earrings with bead-pendants, such as found at Malo Pleshchepino, Glodosy, and Zachepilovka, are typically associated with Middle Avar assemblages. A specimen of this category was found at Ozora-Totipusza in association with a solidus minted for Emperor Constantine IV.

By contrast, hoards are characterized by the presence of repoussé bronze pendants, an artifact-category frequently encountered in Early Avar assemblages, but not later. Such pendants were only found with female burials. They might have belonged to corolla-type head-dresses (Figures 20–3). A. A. Spicyn called them "Antian antiquities," because he believed their distribution matched Procopius and Jordanes' description of the Antes. His idea had a remarkable influence on the development of Soviet archaeology, particularly after World War II. Many embraced G. F. Korzukhina's very influential suggestion that both the distribution and the composition of hoards of silver and bronze from the forest-steppe belt were different from those of rich burials of the steppe area. No hoards were found in the steppe area and none included either weapons or horse gear. By contrast, no burial produced such artifacts as bow fibulae or earrings with star-shaped pendant. This contrast has been interpreted as an indication of two different ethnic groups: the nomads (burials) and the Slavic Antes (the hoards). The distribution in the area north of the Black Sea of sixth- and seventh-century burials and hoards of silver and bronze, respectively, are indeed in sharp contrast (Figure 24).

A cluster analysis of eighteen hoards of silver and bronze and five burials by means of chi-square distance, which accounts for differences in


50 Swords with cross-bars: Ambroz 1986:61; L'vova and Semenov 1985:83. For earrings with bead-pendants, see Garam 1992:250. The correspondence analysis belongs to a group of data reduction methods, which became popular in the archaeological literature in the late 1980s. The method was first developed in the 1960s in France by J. P. Benzécri and his team of the laboratory of the Mathematical Statistics at the University of Paris VI. The first to adopt the correspondence analysis were Scandinavian archaeologists. See Bolvin et al. 1982. Its adoption by American and British archaeologists came comparatively later. For the algebra, see Sherman 1990:283–6; Ringrose 1992. For various statistical methods and their use in archaeology, see also Djindjian 1990.
or head-bands or might have trimmed veils or lappets hanging from the head-dress. Hoards produced other artifact-categories typically associated with Early Avar assemblages, such as “Martynovka mounts” and “Slavic” bow fibulae. The latter will be discussed in detail in the following chapter. Brooches with bent stems, such as those found at Koloskovo, Nova Odessa, Gaponovo, or Kozihevka, have good parallels in seventh-century funerary assemblages in Albania.\footnote{Repoussé bronze pendants: Szatmári 1980:100–1; Comşa 1984:70; Kiss 1996:201; Fiedler 1996:206–8. The closest parallel for the silver bow brooch with peacocks from Martynovka is that found in an Early Avar female burial at Kolik (Kiss 1996:201). For fibulae in seventh-century assemblages in Albania (the so-called “Koman culture”), see Gorurinov and Kazanski 1978:26; Vinski 1971:388; Uenze 1992:153–4.}

Burials such as Glodosy, Voznesenka, Kelegeia, and Malo Pereshche pipino also produced Sassanian silverware. Hoards often display sets of Byzantine stamped silverware manufactured as *lagito* objects for imperial distribution. Four control stamps on the base of the Martynovka cup are from the reign of Justin II, possibly from 577, when Theodore Petrus was the *comes sacrarum lagitionum*. The closest analogy for the large goblet is the chalice found at Kaper Koraon, stamped in 605–10. Five stamps on the base of the large silver bucket (*sutura*) from Veliki Kuchurov are from 613–29/30. Like most other groups of silver plate in “barbarian”
Figure 22 An early seventh-century hoard of silver and bronze from Khacki
Source: Bobrinskii 1901: p. xix

Figure 23 A seventh-century hoard of silver from Pastyrs'ke
Source: Branchev's'kit 1952b: pl. 1.
Europe, such as Sutton Hoo or finds from the Kama region, hoards display almost complete functional sets, with large plates, drinking vessels (goblets, cups, or bowls), and washing vessels (buckets, ewers, or basin). Since stamps not only guaranteed silver purity, but also authorized release of state silver, hoards with stamped Byzantine silverware are good indicators of the distribution of important people enough to own them. As diplomatic gifts or some other form of imperial largesse, Byzantine silver indicates that hoards with “Martynovka mounts” were not equivalent to “burials of commoners,” but truly symbolized the highest social status.32

However, not all hoards of silver and bronze were contemporary. A seriation of seventeen hoards reveals two groups, with the Martynovka hoard at an intermediary position (Figure 28). Applying a correspondence analysis to the same data, it becomes clear that we are actually dealing with three different groups (Figure 29). The second scattergram representing relationships between artifact-categories indicates three different chronological phases (Figure 30). Velikie Budki, Kozievka, Koloskovo, Nova Odessa, Gaponovo, Sudzha, Khacki, Iakhniki, and Malii Rzhavec are all earlier than Martynovka, Pustyri’ske, Poltava, and Kharyvky, which, in turn, are earlier than Krylos, Zalesie, Veliki Kuchurov, and Zemianský Vrbovok. Earlier hoards are characterized by repoussé bronze pendants, “Slavic” bow fibulae, “Martynovka mounts,” lead mounts, and brooches with bent stems, while later hoards include earrings with bead or star-shaped pendants. The association of earrings with star-shaped pendants with miliaries of Constans II in the Zemianský Vrbovok hoard and with hexagrams of Constantine IV in the almost contemporary coin hoard of Priseca, shows that the third phase represented on the first scattergram coincides in time with rich buried, such as Malo Pereschepeino or Zachepliuky.33


That Martynovka should be placed somewhere between the earliest and the latest hoards is suggested by the chronology of the nine anthropomorphic and zoomorphic mounts, traditionally said to have been used for the decoration of the saddle. Such mounts were found in late sixth- and early seventh-century burials at Pregradnaia and Kugul (North Caucasus), in association with “Martynovka mounts.” Similar specimens come from three early seventh-century burials in the Castel Tosino cemetery in Italy. Moreover, zoomorphic mounts were also found in the Malo Pereshchepino assemblage, dated to the second half of the seventh century, and in a collection of mounts from Thessaly, also from the seventh century.54

The interpretation of this pattern is most difficult, because of the lack of contextual information. It is clear, however, that the meaning behind hoards of silver and/or bronze did not remain constant. That the same type of hoard may be found in areas hundreds of kilometers apart raises important questions about demographic mobility, spread of fashions, and, ultimately, the significance of hoards. It is also interesting to note that later hoards were found north of the Carpathian basin, while earlier ones cluster in the Middle Dnieper area. Spicyn’s interpretation cannot be accepted, for the simple reason that no hoard can be dated earlier than c. 600. At that time, according to the literary sources analyzed in Chapter 3, the Antes had already ceased to exist politically. If not ethnicity, then what? There is nothing in these hoards that is obviously utilitarian, and in most cases we can use the evidence of contemporary funerary assemblages to infer that some, if not all, artifact-categories were female dress-accessories. Later hoards present some connections with contemporary, very rich, burials, which seem to have been male graves, for they produced weapons and horse gear. The lack of representation of high-status

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women in burials at this time suggests that, unlike the situation in the Carpathian basin, women were not vehicles for displaying the status of their husbands. What, then, is the significance of hoards, at least of earlier ones, in which female dress accessories played such an important role?

Hoards of silver were certainly not collections of raw silver or “hack-silver.” There are no broken objects and no metalworking residues. The deliberate choice of items, usually found in pairs or more than two specimens, and the value attached to Byzantine silver seem to indicate conspicuous consumption of a type known to anthropologists as potlatch. In times of social and political stress, such consumption may have served a number of functions, such as celebrating rites of passage or succession to office. It certainly was the privilege of an aristocratic group and probably involved the provision of food and of certain other valuables that did not

**CONCLUSION**

There are at least three important conclusions to be drawn from this sweeping survey of the archaeology of the Carpathian basin and the

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55 Artifacts in the Khacki hoard were wrapped in silk (Holbornskii 1961:147). It is tempting to associate the burial of earlier hoards, for which a date may be tentatively assigned to c. 650, with the beginning of the civil war within the western division of the Göktürk Empire and the subsequent rise of the Bulgar gogate. However, both were located in Left Bank Ukraine and the steppe north of the Caucasus mountains, at a considerable distance from the main concentration of hoards in the Middle Dnieper area. Moreover, the hoarding phenomenon clearly continued through the second half of the seventh century, as hoards were buried in Volynia and Slovakia.
The making of the Slavs

However, just as with displays of wealth in rich female graves, deposition of hoards may have served as “tournaments of value.”\(^{56}\) Like funerals, hoards were used for social display mainly during periods of instability when the status of the individual needed underlining. An important route to social advancement was most likely across to foreign goods, such as Byzantine silver plate. Within the Empire, the social status which silver plate conferred or reflected was often seen in terms of wealth and power. The donation of family silver to be recycled into liturgical silver or given to the poor became a literary topos. In “barbarian” contexts, transactions in which silver plate was symbolically displayed were certainly different. To claim that acquisition, imitation, and use of Roman silver plate reflects the degree to which barbarians were Romanized\(^{57}\) is simply to ignore that the symbolic system changed with the changing contexts in which imported objects were employed. There can be no doubt, however, that Byzantine silver plate was viewed as “exotic” and “precious” for an image of power, for stumped objects were only produced for imperial distribution. The ability to acquire fine langitio objects carried a considerable premium. The same is true for objects of possibly Sassanian origin, such as the Zemiansky Vrbovok bowl. On the other hand, that hoards of silver conveyed an image of power much stronger than grave-goods may be deduced from the fact that some contain several sets of ornaments, which suggests that such collections were the property of more than one person. In other words, hoards of silver and bronze may have permitted a more “extravagant” display of metalwork than the provision of grave-goods.

Finally, the survey of the archaeological evidence from the Carpathian basin and the steppes north of the Black Sea strongly suggests that in order for material culture to participate in the construction of social identities, artifacts need to be given meaning in social context. Swords with P-shaped sheath attachments or stirrups with elongated attachment loops were not “Avar” because of being of Central Asian origin, but because of being used in a specific way in specific transactions (such as display of grave-goods) in the new social milieu in which Avar warriors found themselves after c. 570. Similarly, there are no specific “Lombard” or “Gepid” brooches, for many fibulae found in female burial on both sides of the “no man’s land” were not “imported” and the imitated such exotic imports. There is, therefore, no “phenotypic” expression of a preformed ethnic identity, though identity is constructed by manipulating certain artifact-categories. The value of each of these artifact-categories depended less on questions of supply and origin than on the social strategies employed by those who used them. On the other hand...

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\(^{56}\) The phrase is that of Bradley 1990:139.

\(^{57}\) Mango 1993:81.
hand, objects that are the prerogative of an elite may be imitated by lower-ranking groups. “Citations” from the material culture discourse which can be identified in rich burials or hoards may be found in completely different contexts, such as settlements. As I will argue in the last chapter, just as in the case of “Lombard” and “Gepid” identities, Slavic ethnicity may have been communicated through displays of objects whose use was restricted to local elites. In such cases, artifacts similar to those found in Ukrainian hoards are not mere analogies. They have become metaphors.

Chapter 6

ELITES AND GROUP IDENTITY NORTH OF THE DANUBE FRONTIER: THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

If the social label of various ethnic identities in barbaricum, both East and West, can be pinned down to material culture, matters are more difficult when it comes to the symbols by which Slavic ethnicity may have been expressed. Archaeologists, from Ivan Borkovský to Volodymyr Baran, have focused on specific artifacts, particularly pottery, in an effort to reconstruct a “Slavic culture” by which Slavic ethnicity may be then identified at any place and time. In the first chapter, I discussed the problems and difficulties involved in this approach. I will attempt now to show that, just as with contemporary Gepids, Lombards, or Bulgars, no particular item was ethnically specific to the Slavs. Material culture, nevertheless, played a crucial role in building ethnic boundaries. The social mechanisms by which artifacts were manipulated and used for statements of group identity may well have been at work in “Sclavnia,” just as in “Lombardia” or “Gepidia.”

A survey of Slavic archaeology is beyond the scope of this work. By default, a discussion of Slavic ethnicity will entail only certain aspects of the Slavic culture, if such a thing ever existed. Instead of a standard description of material culture items, which is the current practice with monographs on the Slavic culture,¹ I will focus on only three issues, which I believe are relevant for the formation of a Slavic ethnie.

First, I will examine problems of chronology, which are fundamental for the understanding of changes in material culture and their historical background. Much too often, archaeologists have imposed the rigid framework of written sources on the archaeological record, without acknowledging chronological discrepancies. Second, I will focus on a specific group of bow fibulae, which the German archaeologist Joachim Werner first called “Slavic” brooches.² More than any other artifact-category (with the exception, perhaps, of pottery), this group of fibulae

¹ E.g., Paczewski 1993. ² Werner 1950.