

SEVENTH–EIGHTH-CENTURY SWORDS, SABRES, AND BACKWORDS DISCOVERED IN TRANSYLVANIA, MARAMUREȘ, AND THE ROMANIAN BANAT

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The chronological framework of the current subject is provided by the three main historical phases of the Avar Khaganate established in the Carpathian Basin. Geographically, the subject is limited to Transylvania, Maramureș, Crișana and the Romanian Banat. The catalogue of hitting/thrusting/cutting weapons discovered in western Romania lists 14 objects. The 14 artefacts were recovered from 12 cemeteries: 13 objects; and one settlement/house: one object. Based on the shape and characteristics of the blade, three main types of hitting, thrusting or cutting weapons have been distinguished: I – the Sabre; II – the Sword; III – the Backsword. The backswords have been further classified according to the characteristics of the hilt and cross-guard. Type III.1.a – backsword with the hilt ornamented with decorative thin precious metal foils covering the wood: Unirea/Vereșmort. Type III.1.b – backsword with an undecorated hilt, without a cross-guard: Dindești, Sfântu Gheorghe, Teiuș, Sânpetru German. Type III.2 – backsword with a hilt and a narrow rod-shaped cross-guard fixed perpendicularly on the blade, with a rhombic part whose sharp ends point towards the blade and the hilt: Aiudul de Sus. Type III.3.a – backsword with a ring-shaped cross-guard and a semi-circular pommel: Valea lui Mihai. III.3.b – backsword with a ring-shaped cross-guard and a simple, straight hilt: Timișoara. All deceased of the 7th–8th c. from western Romania that have been buried together with a sword, sabre or backsword, but also with other weapons or dress accessories, were men (adults). No woman's or child's grave contained, at least according to the current state of the research, swords, backswords or sabres. In 7th–8th c. western Romania the sword, the backsword and the sabre were the weapons used by the high-ranking Avar warriors within the military hierarchy of the Avar Khaganate.

Keywords: Romania, sword, sabre, backsword, Avars, Early Middle Ages.

BRIEF INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The swords, sabres and backswords were amongst the most representative weapons to be used throughout history. Each of them were adopted at different times and then constantly developed throughout history. Regarding the Middle Ages, the study of the three above-mentioned weapons was and still is a constant focus for archaeologists. The research on the various aspects concerning the swords, sabres and backswords, such as the occurrence, the origin of each type, the shape and evolution of these weapons throughout time and last, but by no means least, the archaeological contexts they were found in, provide opportunities for the study of several historical subjects. The swords, sabres and backswords share the fact that they are all personal weapons intended for a one-to-one combat (See for example *Bálint* 1978, 173–186; 1992, 338–343; *Csiký* 2009, 35–39, 106–188; *Garam* 1991, 157; *Kazanski* 1999, 197, 198, 204, 205; *Kirpichnikov* 1966; *Kokowski* 1993, 336; *Kolias* 1988, 133–161; *Korzuhina* 1950, 63–94; *Masia* 2000, 185–226; *Menghin* 1983; *Pinter* 2007, 18, 19, 41–46, 53, 54; *Ruttikay* 1976, 245–293; *Simon* 1991, 263–346; 1993, 171, 172; *Stachowski* 2004, 133–138; *Szóke* 1992, 92–96; *Yotov* 2004, 37–76, 205). Nevertheless, each

has a particular shape that entails distinct roles in the fight between the combatants, difference which will be explored in the following pages.

A series of studies have been elaborated in the European professional papers concerning the swords and sabres discovered at European sites that date to the 5th–10th c. On the one hand, the swords, sabres and backswords are introduced and discussed in distinct subchapters in the monographs of the sites where they were discovered. On the other hand, this type of weapons was the subject of separate analyses described in special studies. Both types of papers are extremely numerous (Aside from the papers listed in note no. 1, I include only a few contributions which refer to swords, sabres or backswords: *Čilinská* 1973, 23, 24; *Garam* 1979, 78, 79; 1995, 342–345; *Kaminsky* 1996, 95–98; *Kazanski* 2000, 199–212; 2012, 193–199, 290; *László* 1955, 228–230, 232–238, 261; *Legoux* 2005, 77–82; *Sós/Salamon* 1995, 66, 67; *Urlacher/Passard/Manfredi-Gizard* 1998). Several typologies have been put forward, as well as multiple theories about the role that these objects could have played in the communities where they were found. Briefly, what is understood from these studies is that during the Early Middle Ages there are different phases of use in the history of these swords,

Tab. 1. Sites where swords, sabres and backswords have been discovered.

	Cemeteries	Settlements
Transylvania	1. Aiudul de Sus (A.a.1) 2. Cicău (A.a.2) 3. Noşlac (A.a.3) 4. Şpálnaca (A.a.4) 5. Teiuş (A.a.5) 6. Unirea/Veresmort (A.a.6)	1.Sf. Gheorghe (A.c.1)
North-Western Romania	1. Dindeşti (B.a.1) 2. Săcueni (B.a.1) 3. Valea lui Mihai (B.a.3)	
The Romanian Banat	1. Dudeştii Vechi (D.a.1) 2. Sânpetru German (D.a.2) 3. Timișoara (D.a.3)	

sabres and backswords in the European area. The sword is a weapon that was used by the Germanic and Slavic tribes. The Avars, although they also fought with the sword during the first half of the 7th c., abandoned it in favour of the backswords (in the Hungarian language they are referred to as 'swords with a single blade', term that will be further discussed in the paper) and the sabres. The ancient Hungarians brought the sabres with them in the Carpathians Basin and only later adopted the swords as combat weapons. The presence or absence, as well as the primordial or less important role that each of the above-mentioned weapons had in the war-like communities, result from the fighting technique specific to each people that moved through Europe during the Early Middle Ages. However, generally, the heavy cavalry fought with the sword, whereas the sabre and the back-sword were used by the light cavalry.

If the swords, sabres and backswords discovered in Eastern, Central and Western Europe in contexts dated to the 5th–11th c. enjoyed a close interest from the specialists, the artefacts from 7th–8th c. archaeological sites of western Romania did not. There is no study dedicated to the aforementioned weapons. Reason enough for the current scientific effort, which aims to describe in detail all 7th–8th c. swords, sabres and backswords published in the Romanian professional papers, along with those unpublished, discovered in Transylvania, Maramureş and the Romanian Banat. If correctly described and typologically classified, as well as analysed in close relation with their archaeological context of discovery, the swords, sabres and backswords provide new opportunities for the decoding of some military, social, political, economic and other situations that manifested within the western Romanian territory during the 7th–8th c.

Remarks on the chronological and geographic context

From a chronological point of view, the studied time span is contemporary with the three main phases of the Avar Khaganate in the Carpathian Basin. Geographically, the area of interest is limited to Transylvania, Maramureş, Crişana and the Romanian Banat.

The above-mentioned four Romanian provinces are defined in the physical geography of Romania as distinct territorial units (Fig. 1; *Pop 2003*, 11–27). All have been affected during the 7th–8th c. by the migration of the Slavs and the expansion policy of the Avar Khaganate based in the Pannonian Plain. The Transylvanian Depression, encircled by the Carpathian Mountains, stands out from the other territories of western Romania (*Pop 2003*, 17–20). Maramureş includes the geographical and ethnographic areas of Sătmar, Oaş and the Historical Maramureş (*Stanciu 2011*, 17–21). The entire area



Fig. 1. Historical provinces of Romania.

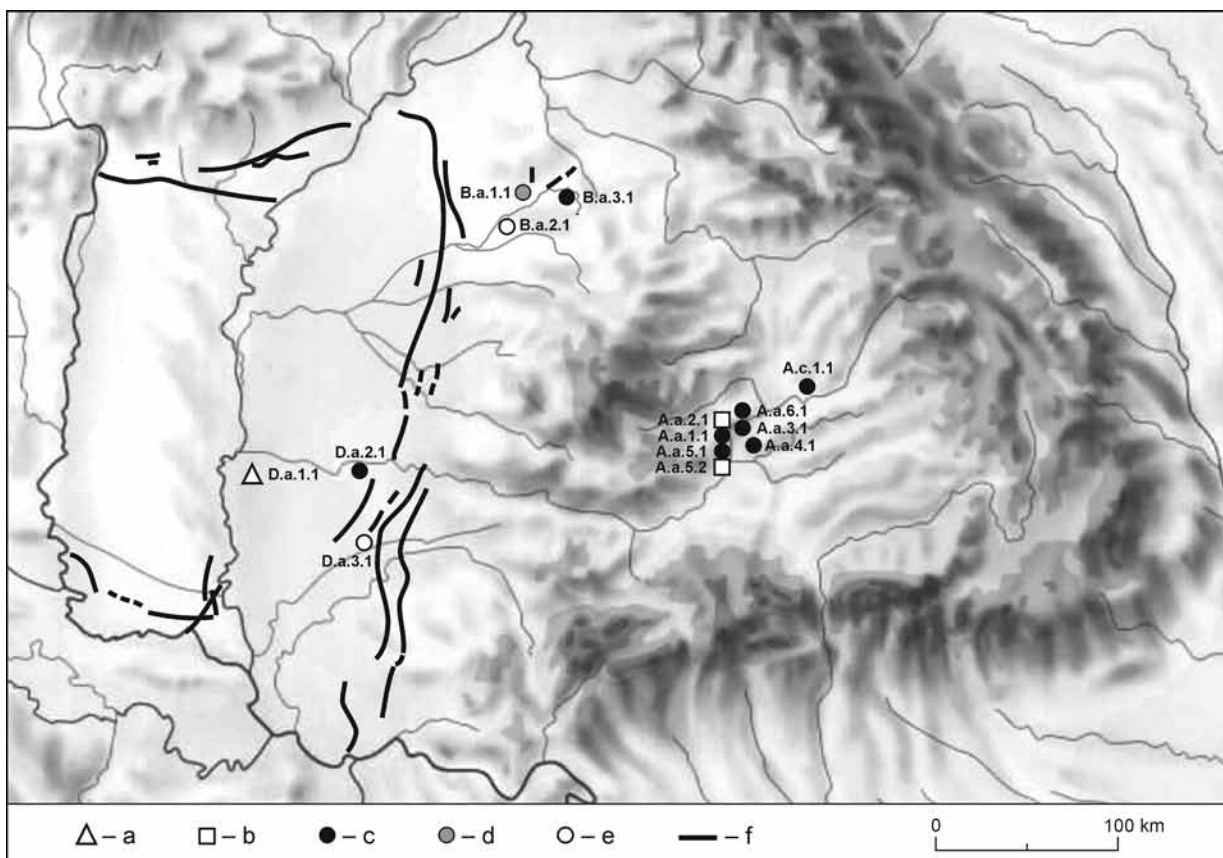


Fig. 2. Geographical distribution of the weapon finds. Identificators according to the catalogue. Legend: a – sword (600–650); b – sabre (650/670–710/720); c – backsword (650/670–710/720); d – backsword (725–780); e – backsword (720–810/830); f – earth dikes.

is generically (or conventionally) referred to as North-Western Romania (Cosma 2002, 16–19; Stanciu 2011, 16–21). Within the North-Western Romanian territory are incorporated also the western parts of today county Sălaj (Cosma 2002, 16–19; Stanciu 2011, 16–21). The geographic area Maramureş is bordered to the east by the Western Hills of Romania, to the north-east by the crests of the Maramureş Mountains, and to the south by the upper basin of the Eriu River (Cosma 2002, 16–19; Pop 2003, 12–22; Stanciu 2011, 16–21). The North-Western Romanian territory is from a geographical point of view part of the Northern Carpathians' area and of the upper basin of Tisa river (Stanciu 2011, 16–21). Crişana is bordered to the north by the upper basin of Eriu river, to the south by the Mureş valley, to the east by the Occidental Carpathians and to the west by the Tisa River (Cosma 2002, 16–19; Pop 2003, 11, 17–20). The Romanian Banat is limited to the east by the crests of the Occidental Carpathians, to the north by the Mureş River and to the south by the Danube (Mare 2004, 9–11; Pop 2003, 11, 15–21). North-western Romania, Crişana and Banat are structurally interdependent with the Tisa basin (Stanciu 2002, 203;

2011, 16–21). Southern Banat is incorporated in the lower basin of the Danube (Mare 2004, 9–11). The Transylvanian Depression was and still is connected with the areas across the Occidental Carpathians by the communication paths set along the main water streams that flow westwards, as well as by the passes of the Western Carpathians (Pop 2003, 19).

TYPOLOGY, ANALOGIES, CHRONOLOGY

In the western area of Romania the catalogue of finds lists 14 weapons for hitting, thrusting or cutting. The 14 artefacts are from 12 cemeteries (13 finds) and one single settlement/house: one find (Fig. 2; Tab. 1).

Based on the shape and characteristics of the blade there are three types of weapons for hitting, thrusting or cutting: I – the Sword, II – the Sabre, III – the Backsword. All three types are well defined in the Romanian archaeological professional papers (Pinter 2007, 18–20), applicable including for the Early Middle Ages in the Carpathian Basin (Bálint

1978, 173–186; 1992, 338–343; Csiky 2009, 35–39; Garam 1991, 142–160; Kokowski 1993, 336; Masia 2000, 185–226; Menghin 1983; Ruttkay 1976, 245–293; Simon 1993, 171, 172, 204, 205; Stachowski 2004, 133–138; Szóke 1992, 92–96; Yotov 2004, 37–76, 205). However, there are several terminological differences concerning the typology of these weapons, which will be detailed below.

Type I – the sword

The sword is a weapon with a straight blade and two cutting-edges. It has a hilt ended in most cases with a pommel of different shapes, meant to prevent the warrior's hand from slipping. The sword also has a cross-guard, although not allways preserved. As a weapon, it was used for hitting and thrusting (Csiky 2009, 35–39; Menghin 1983; Pinter 2007, 18; Simon 1991, 263–346). On the same subject, depending on the point of the blade, the swords have been split in two categories: those with a rounded point are considered hitting weapons; whereas those with a sharp point were evidently linked to both hitting and thrusting (Pinter 2007, 59–66).

Only one sword was found in western Romania. It was recovered from an Avar inhumation grave from Dudeștii Vechi, in the Romanian Banat (D.a.1.1; Fig. 2). The blade of the sword is straight, with two cutting-edges. It probably had a fuller. The blade is wider next to the cross-guard, and then narrows gradually towards the point, detail which suggests the efficacy of the weapon both for the hitting and thrusting of the enemy. The hilt didn't have a guard or it wasn't preserved. The hilt is wider next to the blade, but then narrows towards the end, where it had a rivet. Traces of the wooden grip were preserved on the hilt.

The swords, which originated in a Roman setting and are detected later in the Germanic milieu, were detected by the Avar warriors particularly during the Early Avar period (Csiky 2009, 107–109, 114; Menghin 1983; Pinter 2007, 18; Simon 1991, 263–346; 1993, 175). G. Csiky counts only few swords with two cutting-edges for the Late Avar period (Csiky 2009, 114). According to Csiky, these have a different shape from the swords of the Early Avar period and he sees no direct connection between the two types (Csiky 2009, 114). Considering the discovery of the sword from Dudeștii Vechi in an Avar grave, the analogies for its shape have been searched mainly in the Avar cultural milieu of the Carpathian Basin. The scarce technical details preserved identify the sword from Dudeștii Vechi with the V.I.A/1 type of the classification elaborated by G. Csiky for the swords indexed in the Avar Khaganate established

in the Carpathian Basin (Csiky 2009, 108–111). The swords without a cross-guard are considered older (used during an earlier time of the Early Avar period) weapons than those with a cross-guard, occurring during the 7th c. in the Carpathian Basin (Csiky 2009, 114). Certainly, the sword from Dudeștii Vechi was used by an Avar warrior who fought during the first half of the 7th c. in the Romanian Banat. The chronological framework is confirmed both by the analogies and the other artefacts found in the grave (Kisléghi Nagy 2015).

Type II – the sabre

The sabre is a hitting and cutting weapon intended for a one-to-one combat. The main characteristic of the sabre is the curvature of the blade inward, while its point curves towards the outside. The curvature of the blade and of the point is the main technical aspect which clearly separates the sabre from the sword (for example Csiky 2009, 35, 125–130; Garam 1991, 142; Korzuhina 1950, 63–94; Pinter 2007, 19; Simon 1993, 171, 172, 176; Stachowski 2004, 133–138; Yotov 2004, 59–76, 205). Most of the Early Middle Ages sabres in Europe have a more or less pronounced cross-guard and a hilt that curves in the direction opposite to the curvature of the blade (Csiky 2009, 35, 125–130; Garam 1991, 142; Korzuhina 1950, 63–94; Pinter 2007, 19; Simon 1993, 171, 172, 176; Stachowski 2004, 133–138; Yotov 2004, 59–76, 205).

Sabres of the above-described type were found within Transylvania in the Avar cemeteries at Cicău and Teiuș. The sabre from Cicău is relatively well preserved. In the middle, the blade, with only one cutting-edge, curves slightly towards the inside, while the point curves towards the outside. The cross-guard has the shape of a rectangular rod. The hilt is inclined in the direction opposite to the point. The hilt ends in an angle. At the end of the hilt the rivet meant to attach the wooden plates of the grip was preserved. The sabre from Cicău is 84.9 cm long and its blade is 3.2–3.4 cm wide (A.a.2.1; Fig. 2; 3; 4). The sabre from Teiuș has a curved blade (with only one cutting-edge) and point (A.a.5.2; Fig. 2; 4; 3).

Regarding their chronology, both the sabre from Cicău and Teiuș have clear discovery contexts. They were recovered from cemeteries, each from an Avar warrior's grave. Both cemeteries and implicitly both graves date to the Middle Avar period (650/670–710/720; Cicău – Winkler *et al.* 1977, 269–283; Teiuș – Cosma 2013, 23–29). Based on the ethnic configuration of the two cemeteries where the sabres were found, analogies have been searched in the Avar milieu of the Carpathian Basin, in order to confirm also by typological correspondences both

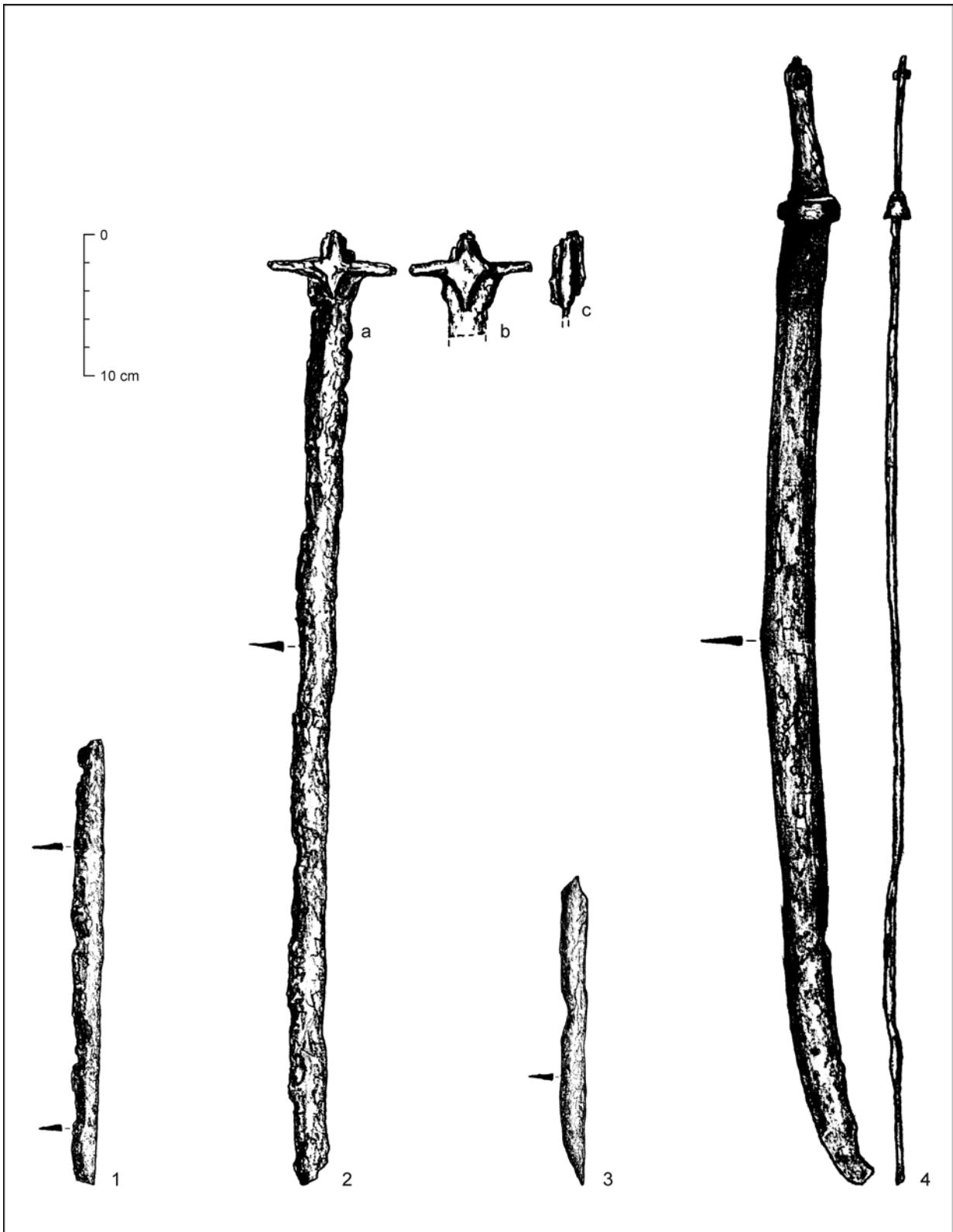


Fig. 3. 1. Backswords (1–3) and sabre (4) from Transylvania. 1 – Noșlac; 2 – Aiudul de Sus; 3 – Șpălnaca; 4 – Cicău (1–3 – according *Cosma 2017*; 4 – according *Winkler et al. 1977*).

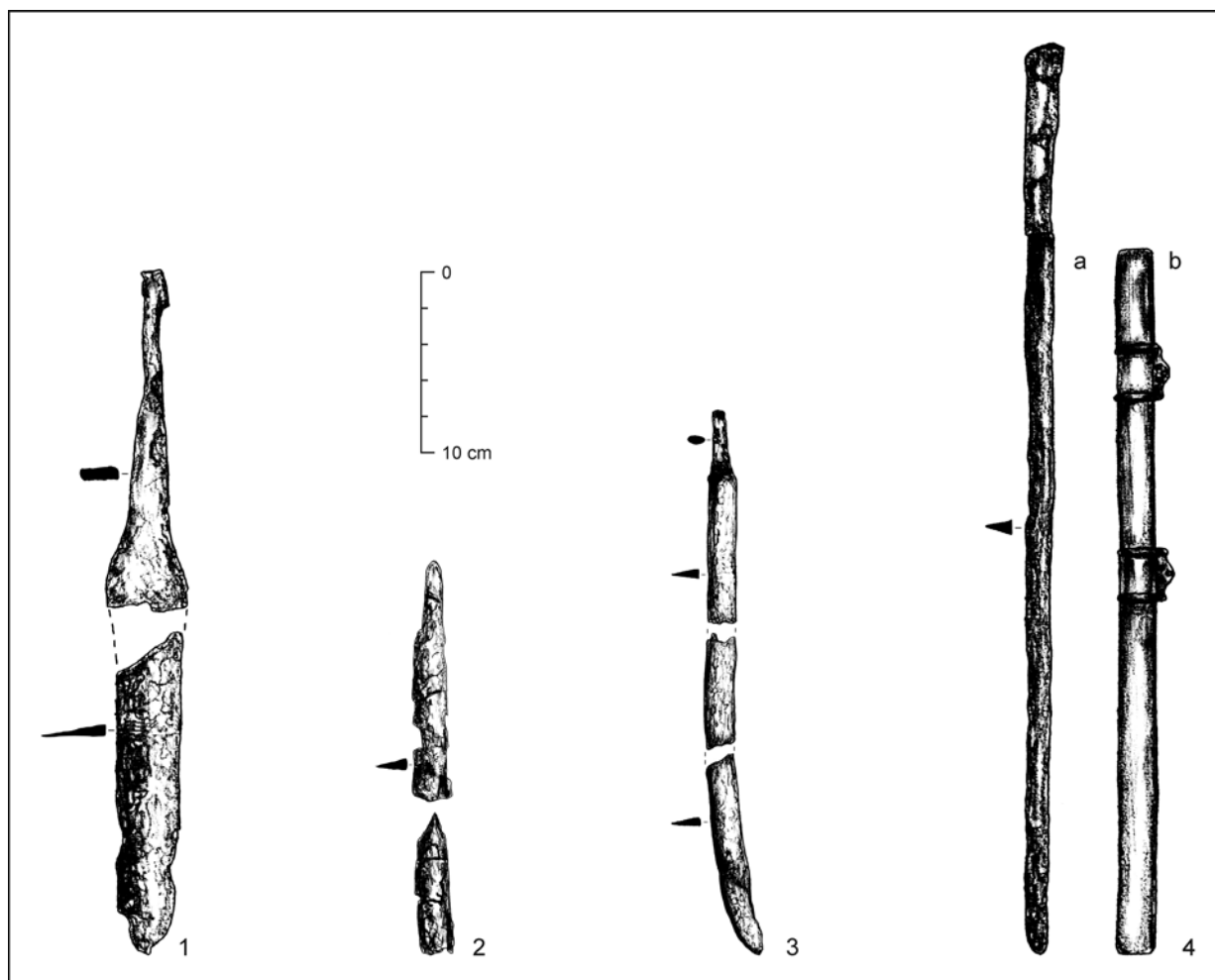


Fig. 4. Backswords (1, 2, 4) and sabre (3) from Transylvania. 1 – Sfântu Gheorghe; 2, 3 – Teiuș; 4 – Unirea II/Verșmort (1 – according Cosma 2013; 2, 3 – according Cosma 2017; 4 – according Cosma et al. 2013b; Rustoiu/Ciută 2015).

the dating and the ethnic-cultural identity suggested for the two cemeteries at Cicău and Teiuș. The two sabres from Transylvania do not possess unique typological traits which could justify a typological or chronological reassessment of the sabres discovered in the Avar cemeteries within the Carpathian basin. The sabres from Cicău and Teiuș fit in the group of sabres used by the Avar warriors in the Carpathian basin (Csiky 2009, 35, 125–130; Čilinská 1973, 23, 24; Garam 1979, 78, 79; 1991, 142; 1995, 342–345; Simon 1993, 171, 172; Sós/Salamon 1995, 66, 67). In fact, they can be included into the Csiky's V.III.A 'sabres with a slightly curved blade' type. The type appears at the end of the Early Avar period, it reaches peak popularity during the Middle Avar period and is still used afterwards during the Late Avar period (Csiky 2009, 131).

The numerous studies on the origin, typology and dating of the sabres from Early Middle Ages Central Europe note that their origin should be searched in Asia, from where they were introduced

in Europe along with the population movements from Asia into Europe, and date their use within the Avar Khaganate in the Carpathian Basin starting somewhere during the Middle Avar period (when most finds date to), after which it continued during the Late Avar period (Bálint 1978, 184–186; 1992, 338–343; Csiky 2009, 125–136; Garam 1991, 142–160; Simon 1993, 171–174). The adoption of the sabre has been directly linked with the stirrup, which eased the control of the horse by the light cavalry warriors and implicitly the handling of the sabre in a one-to-one encounter (Garam 1991, 160).

Type III – the backsword

The backsword is a hybrid weapon which combines the characteristics of the sword with those of the sabre. The backsword is a hitting/cutting and thrusting weapon. It has a straight blade, but one cutting-edge. In some cases, the point only can

be slightly curved towards the outside. The hilt is straight or slightly inclined (*Pinter 2007, 19; Simon 1993, 171*). From an etymological point of view, in the Romanian language the term *paloş* (backsword) originates from the Slavic languages, where it appears as *paloš* (*Csiky 2009, 35; Pinter 2007, 19; Zábajník 2004, 136*). The Slavs used this word to make the distinction between the sword (weapon with a straight blade, with two cutting-edges) and the weapon with a straight blade, but only one cutting-edge (*Csiky 2009, 35; Pinter 2007, 19; Zábajník 2004, 136*). Accordingly, the backsword is a weapon of a particular body/blade shape, distinct from the sword or sabre.

The backswords identified in western Romania were found in Transylvania at Aiudul de Sus (A.a.1.1; Fig. 2; 3: 2), Noşlac (A.a.3.1; Fig. 2; 3: 1), Şpálnaca (A.a.4.1; Fig. 2; 3: 3), Teiuş (A.a.5.1; Fig. 2; 4: 2), Unirea/ Vereşmort (A.a.6.1; Fig. 2; 4: 4) and Sfântu Gheorghe (A.c.1.1; Fig. 2; 4: 1), in North-Western Romania at Dindeşti (B.a.1.1; Fig. 2; 5: 1), Săcueni (B.a.2.1; Fig. 2) and Valea lui Mihai (B.a.3.1; Fig. 2; 5: 2) and in the Romanian Banat at Sânpetru German (D.a.2.1; Fig. 5: 3) and Timişoara (D.a.3.1; Fig. 2; 5: 4). From a typological point of view, all the weapons are identical. They have a straight blade with one cutting-edge and a point sharpened only at the cutting-edge. Most of the finds are fragmentary; therefore, it is difficult to evaluate the exact length of the blades. The preserved length of the blades varies between 0.60–1.05 m. Their width is between 2.5–4 cm. The weapons are with or without a cross-guard.

Except for the backsword found in a settlement/house from Sfântu Gheorghe, all the other backswords were recovered from funerary areas which belonged to the Avar milieu of the Middle and Late Avar periods. Consequently, the analogies for the finds from western Romania have been searched first of all in the Avar cultural milieu of the Carpathian Basin.

However, before introducing the analogies for the backswords from western Romania, several remarks should be made about the terminology used in the historiography of the countries neighbouring Romania to describe the weapon of the Avar Khaganate with a straight blade, with one cutting-edge and a hilt which has or hasn't a cross-guard. Most of the Hungarian archaeologists define the aforementioned weapon as 'the sword with one cutting-edge' (for example *Bálint 1978, 173–184; Csiky 2009, 35, 119–124; Garam 1991, 142–160; Simon 1993, 171–177*). G. Csiky distinguishes the *paloş*, as a weapon with a straight blade and one cutting-edge, from the sword with two cutting-edges (*Csiky 2009, 35*). Still, he prefers to refer to the weapons for thrusting, cutting and hitting with a straight blade and one cutting-edge, from the areal of the Avar

Khaganate, as 'swords with a straight blade and one cutting-edge' (*Csiky 2009, 35, 39, 119–124*). I have met in the Hungarian professional papers also the term *paloş* for the weapons with a straight blade and one cutting-edge (*Szóke 1992, 93; 2002, 77, no. 9b., 80, no. 13, 14*). In the Slovak archaeological papers, the weapons for hitting/cutting and thrusting with a straight blade and one cutting-edge are described in most cases as 'swords with a straight blade and one cutting-edge' (*Čilinská 1973, 23, 24*). J. Zábajník's separation between the sword and the weapon with a straight blade and one cutting-edge, named *paloš*, is notable. He adds that the latter term didn't prevail in the professional papers (*Zábajník 2004, 136*).

Personally, I consider that the term 'sword with a straight blade and one cutting-edge' is here improper, because it can cause confusion in the description and typological classification of the weapons for hitting and cutting. Both the sword and the sabre have well defined technical characteristics, which I have already highlighted. If the term 'sword with a straight blade and one cutting-edge' is accepted, then the essence of the definition of the sword, whose essential characteristic is the straight blade with two cutting-edges and a sharp or rounded point, disappears.

THE TYPOLOGY OF THE BACKSWORDS FROM WESTERN ROMANIA BASED ON THE HILT AND CROSS-GUARD

From the backswords discovered at Noşlac (Fig. 3: 1) and Şpálnaca (Fig. 3: 3) only the blades, which are straight with one cutting-edge, have been preserved. As a result, it is impossible to classify them based on the cross-guard and the hilt, elements which are used by the Hungarian archaeologists to typologically define the 'swords with a straight blade and one cutting-edge' of the Avar Khaganate (*Csiky 2009, 119–124; Garam 1991, 142–160*). Despite the absence of these elements, the two backswords from Noşlac and Şpálnaca can still be dated to the Middle Avar period, just as the archaeological finds associated with the swords confirm.

III.1 Backsword with a hilt without cross-guard

In Transylvania, Maramureş and the Romanian Banat were found also backswords whose upper part was preserved. Consequently, their typological classification based on the hilt and cross-guard is possible. Such finds were discovered at Dindeşti (Fig. 5: 1), Sfântu Gheorghe (Fig. 4: 1), Teiuş (Fig. 4: 2),

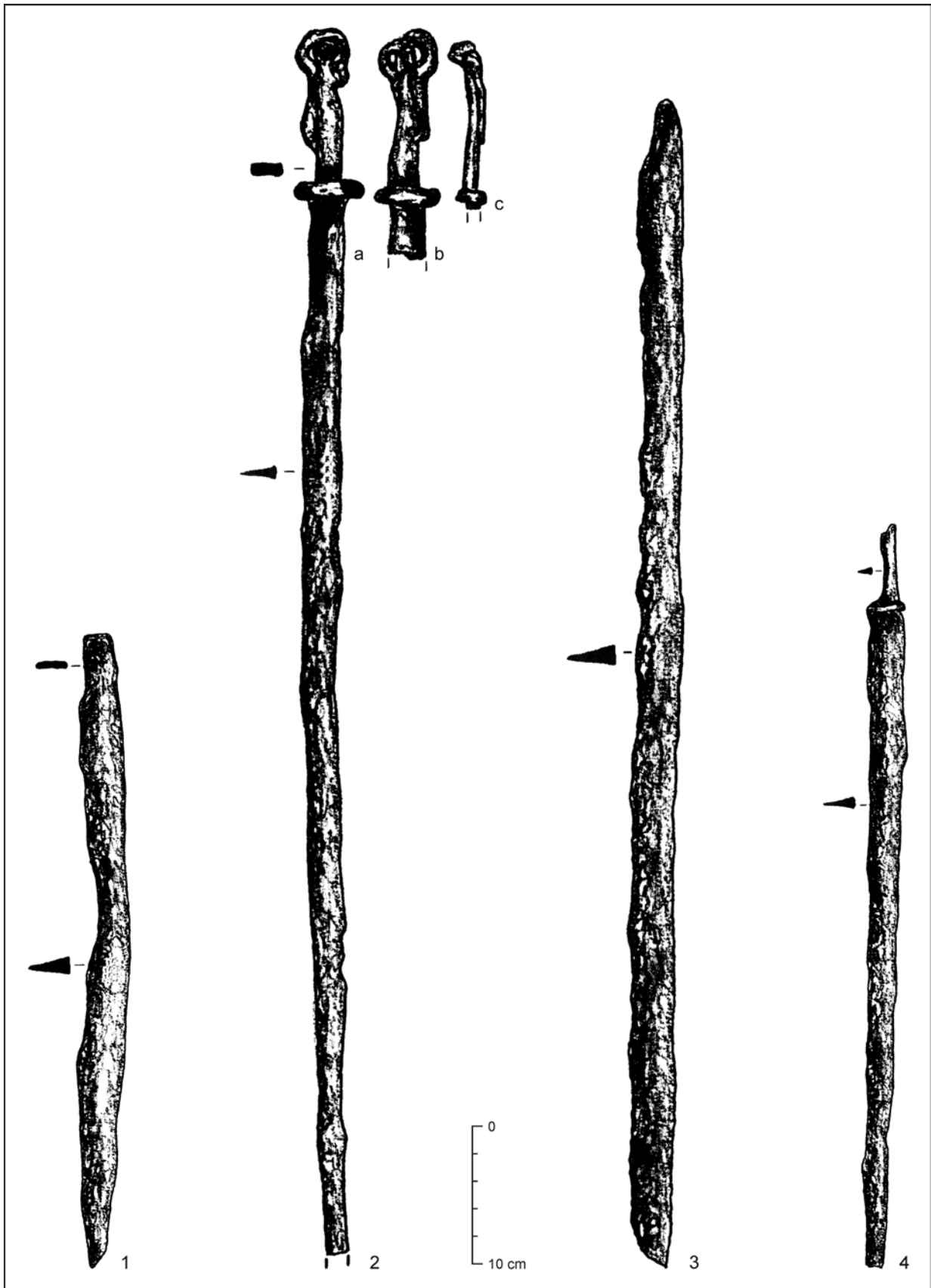


Fig. 5. Backwords from Maramureș (1, 2) and Romanian Banat (3, 4). 1 – Dindești; 2 – Valea lui Mihai; 3 – Sânpetru German; 4 – Timișoara (1, 2 – according *Cosma 2016*; 3 – according *Dörner 1960*; 4 – according *Cosma et al. 2013b*).

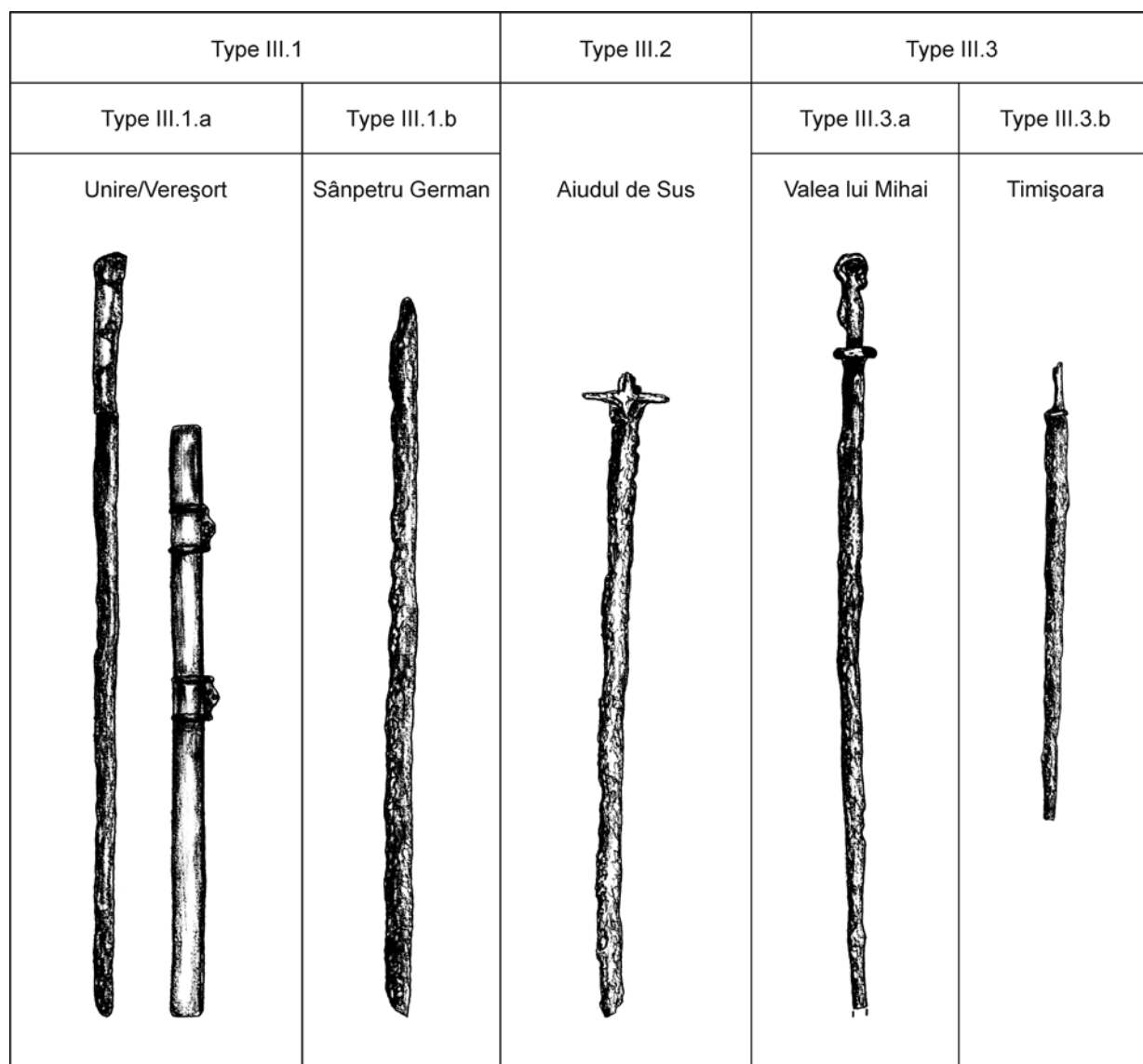


Fig. 6. Types of backwords based on the hilt and cross-guard.

Sânpetru German (Fig. 5: 3) and Unirea/Vereșmort (Fig. 4: 4). Depending on the ornamentation of the hilt, two types of backwords are described:

- III.1.a Backsword with a hilt ornamented with decorative thin precious metal foils covering the wood;
- III.1.b Backsword with an undecorated hilt.

III.1.a

At Unirea/Vereșmort the iron hilt of the backsword was covered by wooden plates fixed with iron rivets. The hilt was then plated with a thin silver foil. The silver part of the hilt, which has the shape of a reversed truncated cone with a circular-oval section, is formed by two unequal parts, fixed together transversally by narrow bronze bands decorated with parallel longitudinal ridges. At

the hilt's end is a circular iron ring, partially immersed in the silver covering. The scabbard of the backsword was also preserved, along with the bronze fittings that fixed it to the belt. Two sets of finds were placed along the length of the scabbard. One set was formed by two similar bronze plates, attached parallel to one another by five copper rivets. Starting at each end of the small plates, two parallel bronze bands decorated with ridges ran, in an oval pattern, transversally around the scabbard. On some of these bands the leather parts of the scabbard were still conserved. The other set was similar to the previous, but only one of the two small plates was preserved (Fig. 4: 4; 6). The backsword from Unirea/Vereșmort, based on both the hilt and the scabbard (the system of fixing to the belt), can be included in the Garam second type,

dated mainly to the second third of the 7th c. (*Garam 1991*, 145–148, fig. 11). In the typology of G. Csiky, the weapon from Unirea/Vereshmort is listed under the V.II.A/1b Csiky type (Straight swords with one cutting-edge, without a cross-guard, with a hilt ornamented with precious metal foils: *Csiky 2009*, 121). G. Csiky mentions some Early Avar finds, but dates most of the ‘straight swords with one cutting-edge, without a cross-guard, with a hilt ornamented with precious metal foils’ to the Middle and Late Avar periods (*Csiky 2009*, 121). This type of weapon is considered special, intended for the Avar elite (*Bálint 1978*, 173–184; 1992, 338–343; *Csiky 2009*, 121; *Garam 1991*, 145). The backsword from Unirea/Vereshmort is chronologically included, according to the finds it was associated with inside the warrior grave, in the Middle Avar period. The backsword is unique in Transylvania, but similar weapons were found in Alföld and more particularly in the area across the Danube (*Csiky 2009*, 120, 121).

III.1.b

The backswords from Dindești (Fig. 5: 1), Sfântu Gheorghe, (Fig. 4: 1), Teiuș (Fig. 4: 2; 6) and Sânpetru German (Fig. 5: 3), without a cross-guard, are of the Garam second type (*Garam 1991*, 145–152, fig. 11), or the Csiky V.II.A/1a type, named ‘swords with a straight blade, with one cutting-edge, without a cross-guard’ (*Csiky 2009*, 120, 121). G. Csiky underlines the frequency of this type in the Avar milieu, already used during the Early Avar period, and then frequently occurring during the Middle and Late Avar periods (*Csiky 2009*, 120, 121). A similar chronology was set also for a series of weapons found in Avar cemeteries across Slovakia (*Čilinská 1973*, 23, 24). According to the archaeological finds that the backswords are associated with in the contexts of their discovery, the backswords from Teiuș and Sfântu Gheorghe date to the Middle Avar period, whereas the weapon from Dindești is from the Late Avar period (Teiuș – *Cosma 2013*, 23–29; Sfântu Gheorghe – *Cosma et al. 2013a*, 100 wrongly identified as a sabre; *Cosma 2016*, 218).

III.2 Backsword with a narrow rod-shaped hilt and cross-guard, fixed perpendicularly on the blade, with a rhombic part whose sharp ends point towards the blade and the hilt

The backsword from Aiudul de Sus (Fig. 4: 4; 6) has a rod-shaped cross-guard perpendicular on the blade. The cross-guard has a rhombic central part with the sharp ends oriented towards the blade and the hilt. The rod of the hilt is broken above

Tab.2. Geographical distribution of swords, sabres and backswords.

Historical provinces/ Weapon type	Sword	Sabre	Backsword
Transylvania	–	2	6
North-Western Romania	–	–	3
The Romanian Banat	1	–	2

Tab. 3. Distribution of the swords, sabres and backswords in the Avar graves within the Band-Noșlac group.

Avar graves within the cemeteries of the Band-Noșlac group (Transylvania)	
Without swords, sabres, backswords	With swords, sabres, backswords
1. Bandu de Câmpie	1. Noșlac
2. Bistrița	2. Șpálnaca
3. Bratei	3. Unirea/Vereshmort
4. Fântânele	
5. Valea Largă	
6. Unirea/Vereshmort	

the cross-guard. Analogies for the cross-guard of the backsword from Aiudul de Sus are known in the Avar cemeteries from Slovakia (*Čilinská 1973*, 23, 24) and Hungary (for example *Garam 1979*, 78, 79; 1995, 342–345). Within the two aforementioned areas, cross-guards such as the one from Aiudul de Sus are mentioned on sabres, as well as on ‘swords with one cutting-edge’. Both types of weapons were recovered mainly from Middle Avar contexts. Fewer (almost none) contexts date to the Late Avar period (*Csiky 2009*, 169; *Garam 1991*, 148–153, fig. 13). Based on the objects associated with it, the backsword from Aiudul de Sus was buried sometime at the end of the Middle Avar period (*Horedt 1958*, 93, fig. 17: 1–4).

III.3 Backsword with ring-shaped cross-guard and hilt

III.3.a Backsword with a ring-shaped cross-guard and a semi-circular pommel

The weapon was found at Valea lui Mihai (Fig. 5: 2; 6). The cross-guard of the backsword is ring-shaped. The hilt ends in an iron semicircle with prolonged ends that were fixed on the hilt rod. At its discovery, the imprints of the wooden scabbard were still visible. I personally have yet to identify an analogy for the semicircle at the end of the hilt. The artefacts found together with the backsword in the grave from Valea lui Mihai date to the Middle Avar period (*Cosma 2016*, 211–213, 220, pl. 6). G. Csiky describes them as ‘popular (intended for ordinary

Tab. 4. Typological distribution of the swords, sabres and backwords in the Avar graves within the Band-Noşlac group.

Cemeteries of the Band-Noşlac group (Transylvania)	Total number of graves/cemetery	Total number of Gepid graves	Total number of Avar graves	Weapon type			Chronology of the Avar graves
				Sw.	Sa.	Ba.	
1. Noşlac	120	118	2	Sw.	Sa.	Ba.	650–710/720
			1	–	–	1	
			1	–	–	–	
2. Şpálnaca	39	36	3	Sw.	Sa.	Ba.	650–710/720
			1	–	–	1	
			2	–	–	–	
3. Unirea/Vereşmort	?	?	1	Sw.	Sa.	Ba.	650–710/720
			1	–	–	1	

Sw. – Sword; Sa. – Sabre; Ba. – Backsword.

people) weapons' and considers them characteristic for the Early Avar period (*Csiky 2009, 122*).

III.3.b Backsword with a ring-shaped cross-guard and a simple, straight hilt

A backsword of this type was found at Timișoara (Fig. 5: 4; 6). The backsword was recovered from a grave which contained artefacts from the Late Avar period. Weapons such as the backsword from Timișoara are very frequent during the Avar age. They appear during the Early Avar period, but their occurrence on a large scale is detected during the following Middle and Late Avar periods (*Csiky 2009, 120, 121*).

The conclusion of the above is that the chronology of the sword, sabres and backwords from western Romania corresponds to the chronological framework outlined for the hitting/thrusting/cutting weapons of the Avar Khaganate that have been discovered in the Carpathian Basin.

THE GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF THE SWORDS, SABRES AND BACKWORDS

Swords, sabres and backwords have been discovered in Transylvania, the Romanian Banat and in North-Western Romania. They are missing from the archaeological sites of the 7th–8th c. in Crișana (*Cosma 2015a, 266–268*; for Nădlac – *Cociș et al. 2016, 1–75*).

Most of the weapons are from Transylvania. Strictly typologically, there is no sword identified in the Transylvanian Plateau. Within the same territory, the backwords are more numerous than sabres, the latter counting only two. In North-Western Romania, on the other hand, only three backwords are known. The sword appears only in the Romanian Banat – one find. Along with it, other two backwords were found here (Tab. 2).

THE TYPOLOGICAL AND NUMERICAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE SWORDS, SABRES AND BACKWORDS ACROSS THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

In the 7th–8th c. settlements from Transylvania, only one backsword was found, together with other weapons, inside a house of the settlement at Sfântu Gheorghe, jud. Mureș (*Cosma et al. 2013a, 100–102*).

All the other sabres or backwords from the Transylvanian Plateau were discovered in cemeteries. Within the Band-Noşlac horizon, in the nine necropolises that included also Avar graves (*Cosma 2015a, 254, 255*), only three Avar graves of only three cemeteries contained backwords (Tab. 3; 4). One backsword was placed in an Avar warrior grave at Noşlac, which date to the second half of the 7th c. Due to the fact that the cemetery is still in preparation for publication, the number of graves which belonged to Avar warriors is unknown. Of the 39 inhumation graves from the 6th–7th c. mentioned at Şpálnaca, three of them are described as belonging to Avar warriors buried with horses, weapons, horse harness and jewellery (*Protase et al. 2000, 104*. Cemetery currently being prepared for publication by C. Cosma). However, only one included an iron backsword. The isolated grave from Unirea/Vereşmort, dated to the Middle Avar period, contained in its funerary set a special backsword linked to the Avar elite. Although unique on the site where it was found, the aforementioned grave was certainly linked with the cemetery of the Band-Noşlac group researched in 1934 by M. Roska at Unirea/Vereşmort (*Roska 1934, 123–130*; *Rustoiu/Ciută 2015, 108, 109*).

Within the 19 Avar cemeteries and/or graves identified in the Transylvanian Plateau, sabres and backwords were discovered in only three necropolises (Tab. 5; 6; for verification see *Cosma 2015a, 255–262*. The cemeteries from Gâmbaș/Ogoare and Sâncrai, jud. Alba, are unpublished and are currently

Tab. 5. Distribution of the swords, sabres and backwords in the Avar cemeteries from Transylvania.

Avar cemeteries and graves from Transylvania	
Without swords, sabres, backwords	With swords, sabres, backwords
1. Aiud	1. Aiudul de Sus
2. Bratei	2. Cicău
3. Câmpia Turzii	3. Teiuş
4. Gâmbaş/Cimitirul Reformat	
5. Gâmbaş/Ogoare	
6. Geoagiu de Sus	
7. Heria	
8. Leşnic	
9. Lopadea Nouă	
10. Măgina	
11. Râmeţ	
12. Sâncraii	
13. Sebeş	
14. Stremţ	
15. Târnavă	
16. Târnaveni	

being prepared for publication by C. Cosma). The cemeteries from Cicău and Teiuş provide each one sabre. The backwords occur at Aiudul de Sus and Teiuş. The backword from Aiudul de Sus was found together with a series of horse harness and weapons, which together certainly formed the funerary set of an Avar grave. At Cicău, only one of the six graves included also a sabre. In the cemetery at Teiuş, at least 60 Avar graves were researched. Only two contained a backword and a sabre. The cemetery at Teiuş is otherwise the only necropolis from western Romania where two types of weapons are listed: the sabre and the backword.

In North-Western Romania, the backword is the only type represented. It was discovered in three of the four settlements/sites with Avar funerary

vestiges of the 7th–8th c. (Cosma 2016, 205–233). One backword was placed in one of the two researched graves from the cemetery at Săcueni. The other two were discovered in the isolated graves from Dindeşti and Valea lui Mihai, which included each one backword (Tab. 7; 8).

The catalog of Avar cemeteries and graves from the Romanian Banat lists 17 archaeological sites within 11 localities (Cosma 2015a, 268–271). In only three cemeteries, a sword and two backwords were found. The sword appeared in one of the two Avar graves researched at Dudeştii Vechi. One backword was placed in one of the four graves at Timișoara, whereas the other was recovered from the isolated grave at Sânpetrul German/Magazin (Tab. 9; 10).

The statistics illustrated in the charts and tables above and synthesized in the table below (Tab. 11) are based on the current research level of the 7th–8th c. in Transylvania, North-Western Romania, Crișana and the Romanian Banat. Notably, 99 % of the swords, sabres and backwords were found in Avar cemeteries or graves. The 1 % difference is represented by the backword from the Early Middle Ages village at Sfântu Gheorghe. It is difficult to estimate the real number of swords, sabres or backwords for each Avar cemetery from western Romania (Cosma 2015a, 251–275), particularly because in most cases we deal with isolated graves. Even in the cemeteries where more graves have been identified, sabres or backwords were found in only one or maximum two graves (only at Teiuş).

THE ASSOCIATION OF SWORDS, SABRES AND BACKWORDS WITH OTHER ARTEFACTS

Without exception, all the types of weapons for cutting, hitting or thrusting here presented are associated in the graves they were found with other metal artefacts, such as different types of weapons

Tab. 6. Typological distribution of the swords, sabres and backwords in the Avar cemeteries from Transylvania.

Avar cemeteries and graves from Transylvania	Total number of graves/cemetery	Number of graves without swords, sabres, backwords	Number of graves with swords, sabres, backwords	Weapon	Type
1. Aiudul de Sus	?	?	1	– – 1	sword sabre backword
2. Cicău	6	5	1	– 1 –	sword sabre backword
3. Teiuş	60	58	2	– 1 –	sword sabre backword

Tab. 7. Typological distribution of the swords, sabres and backwords in the Avar cemeteries from North-Western Romania.

Avar cemeteries and graves from North-Western Romania	Total number of graves/cemetery	Number of graves without swords, sabres, backwords	Number of graves with swords, sabres, backwords	Weapon	Type
1. Dindești	1	0	1	– – 1	sword sabre backsword
2. Săcueni	2	1	1	– – 1	sword sabre backsword
3. Valea lui Mihai	1	0	1	– – 1	sword sabre backsword

Tab. 8. Numerical distribution of the swords, sabres and backwords in the Avar cemeteries from North-Western Romania.

Avar cemeteries and graves from North-Western Romania	
Without swords, sabres, backwords	With swords, sabres, backwords
1. Căuaș	1. Dindești 2. Săcueni 3. Valea lui Mihai

Tab. 9. The numerical distribution of swords, sabres and backwords in the Avar cemeteries from the Romanian Banat.

Avar cemeteries and graves from the Romanian Banat	
Without swords, sabres, backwords	With swords, sabres, backwords
1. Cenad	1. Dudeștii Vechi
2. Comloșu Mare	2. Sânpetru German/Magazin
3. Comloșu Mare	3. Timișoara
4. Comloșu Mare	
5. Denta	
6. Lunga	
7. Orșova Veche	
8. Sănandrei	
9. Sănnicolau Mare	
10. Sânpetru German/Goliat	
11. Vizejdia	

or horse harness (stirrups and/or horse bits), particularly spearheads, then axes and arrowheads. The backword from Cicău was associated with a spear and an axe. Traces of a bow and arrowheads have been identified at Unirea/Vereșmort. Other arrowheads were found at Valea lui Mihai, along with an axe. One arrowhead was discovered inside the grave from Sânpetru German. In other graves, the horse or only parts of it have been placed together with the deceased and the weapons. The

belt strap-ends and belt or horse harness appliques are amongst the objects which have been found in archaeological contexts containing swords, sabres or backwords. The jewellery is represented only by earrings, detected in the graves from Unirea/Vereșmort and Sânpetru German/Magazin, and beads, identified at Săcueni. Other artefacts that are placed together with the weapons inside graves are pottery and household items (particularly knives and strike-a-lights). Additionally, the graves from Sânpetru German/Magazin and Timișoara each contained a coin (Tab. 12; 13).

THE SYMBOLIC MEANING OF THE SWORDS, SABRES AND BACKWORDS PLACED IN THE GRAVES WITHIN TRANSYLVANIA, NORTH-WESTERN ROMANIA AND THE ROMANIAN BANAT

The interpretation of the presence of swords, backwords and sabres inside the Early Middle Ages graves on a large geographic area was and still is the focus of numerous professional studies (I mention here only a few studies that focus on a series of aspects concerning the interpretation of the occurrence of the swords, sabres or backwords in graves: *Bálint* 1978, 173–186; 1992, 338–343; *Bóna* 1979, 5–32; 1980, 31–95; *Csikó* 2009, 238–267; 2011, 9–34; *Čilinská* 1991, 187–212; *Garam* 1991, 142–160; *Kazanski* 1999, 197, 198, 204, 205; *László* 1955, 228–230, 232–238, 261; *Masia* 2000, 185–226; *Menghin* 1983; *Pedersen* 1997, 123–135; *Pinter* 2007, 21–40; *Simon* 1991, 263–346; 1993, 175; *Zábojník* 1995, 205–344; 2015, 277–291). The swords, backwords and sabres offered/laid inside the graves certify the warrior status of the deceased, a position which is often reinforced by the association with other types of weapons. The higher the quality of the swords, sabres and backwords, particularly those with the

Tab. 10. The typological distribution of the swords, sabres and backwords in the Avar cemeteries from the Romanian Banat.

Avar cemeteries and graves from the Romanian Banat	Total number of graves/cemetery	Number of graves without swords, sabres, backwords	Number of graves with swords, sabres, backwords	Weapon	Type
1. Dudeștii Vechi	2	1	1	1 – –	sword sabre backword
2. Sânpetru German/Magazin	1	0	1	– – 1	sword sabre backword
3. Timișoara	4	3	1	– – 1	sword sabre backword

Tab. 11. The list of archaeological sites and the number of 7th–8th c. swords, sabres and backwords from Transylvania, North-Western Romania and the Romanian Banat.

Historical provinces/ Discovery type		Archaeological sites	Number of finds				Total	
			Sword	Sabre	Backword	Sabre & Backword		
Transylvania	Cemeteries	Aiudul de Sus	–	–	1	–	1	7
		Cicău	–	1	–	–	1	
		Noșlac	–	–	1	–	1	
		Șpălnaca	–	–	1	–	1	
		Teiuș	–	1	1	yes	2	
		Unirea/Vereșmort	–	–	1	–	1	
	Settlements	Sf. Gheorghe	–	–	1	–	1	
North-Western Romania	Cemeteries	Dindești	–	–	1	–	1	3
		Săcueni	–	–	1	–	1	
		Valea lui Mihai	–	–	1	–	1	
The Romanian Banat	Cemeteries	Dudeștii Vechi	1	–	–	–	1	3
		Sânpetru German	–	–	1	–	1	
		Timișoara	–	–	1	–	1	
Total	Cemeteries	12	1	2	11	1	14	14

hilt and scabbard decorated with precious metal foils, the higher the social rank of the warrior must have been. In a similar manner, the combination of the weapons with other types of artefacts, such as dress accessories, jewellery, coins etc., inside graves, depending also on their quality, indicates the rank of the deceased within the military hierarchy of the Avar Khaganate in the Carpathian Basin.

All the deceased from the 7th–8th c. western Romania that have been buried with a sword, sabre or backword, but also with other weapons or dress accessories, were men (adults). For example, the anthropological analysis of the skeletons from Șpălnaca shows that the warrior buried with the backword was an adult (*Protase et al. 2000, 104*). The anthropological analysis of the warrior from Unirea/Vereșmort revealed that the deceased was an adult man (*Rustoiu/Ciută 2015, 116, 117*). There isn't, at least so far, any woman or child grave that

contained a sword, sabre or backword. Bases on the artefacts that have been discovered together with the weapons in the 7th–8th c. graves from western Romania, a certain pyramid of the military hierarchy of the Avar warriors from the Transylvanian Plateau, North-Western Romania or the Romanian Banat can be drawn. The highest position is occupied by the warriors from Unirea/Vereșmort, Cicău and Teiuș. The superior rank of the warrior from Unirea/Vereșmort is signaled by the ornamented hilt and scabbard of the backword he was buried with, both decorated with precious metal foils. The piece alone is recognized as an artifact specific to the Avar military elites (*Bálint 1978, 171–186; Bóna 1980, 48–52; Garam 1991, 145–152; László 1955, 228–230, 232–238, 261*). At Cicău, compared to the other five graves of the necropolis, the grave which includes a sabre is the only one with a rich funerary set. The deceased was certainly the chief of the Avar com-

Tab. 12. The association of the swords, sabres and backswords with other artefacts.

Discovery type	Weapon type	Sites	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	Chronology	
Avar cemeteries and graves from Transylvania	sabre	Cicău	●	●	●			●		●		●		650/670–710/720	
		Teiuş			●										
	backsword	Aiudul de Sus	●	●	●										
		Noşlac	●	●	●										
		Şpălnaca	●	●	●				●				●		
Teiuş		●		●	●	●	●		●	●	●				
Unirea II/Verşmort	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●				
Settlements from Transylvania	backsword	Sf. Gheorghe	●	●							●				
Avar cemeteries and graves from North-Western Romania	backsword	Dindeşti				●		●						650/670–710/720	
		Săcueni	●	●					●		●				
		Valea lui Mihai	●	●											
Avar cemeteries and graves from the Romanian Banat	sword	Dudeştii Vechi		●		●	●	●		●		●		580–630/650	
	backsword	Sânpetru German	●	●	●	●	●	●	●				●	650/670–710/720	
		Timișoara		●		●	●	●				●	●	710/720–810/830	

A – other types of weapons; B – horse harness; C – burial with horse; D – belt tongue; E – belt appliques; F – buckles; G – jewelry; H – harness appliques; I – pottery; J – household items; K – coin.

Tab. 13. The association of the swords, sabres and backswords with other types of weapons.

Discovery type	Weapon type	Sites	Spear	Axe	Bow	Arrows	Chronology
Avar cemeteries and graves from Transylvania	sabre	Cicău	●	●			650/670–710/720
		Teiuş					
	backsword	Aiudul de Sus	●				
		Noşlac		●			
		Şpălnaca	●				
Teiuş							
Unirea II/Verşmort				●	●		
Settlements from Transylvania	backsword	Sf. Gheorghe	●				750–810/830
Avar cemeteries and graves from North-Western Romania	backsword	Dindeşti					650/670–710/720
		Săcueni	●				
		Valea lui Mihai		●		●	
Avar cemeteries and graves from the Romanian Banat	sword	Dudeştii Vechi					580–630/650
	backsword	Sânpetru German	●				650/670–710/720
		Timișoara				●	710/720–810/830

munity from Cicău. The warrior from Teiuş that was buried with a backsword was laid in a wooden box, along with an extremely rich funerary set (belt strap-ends, appliques etc.). He is the only person amongst the 60 deceased from Teiuş that was associated with a rich and high quality funerary set, thus suggesting that he was the military and political chief of the community which buried its dead at the site. Amongst the other graves from the cemetery at Teiuş only two contained weapons, one a spear and the other a sabre. The deceased from the latter grave was certainly higher in rank than the one

buried with a spear. A series of small silver appliques decorated by pressing which have been discovered in the grave with the sabre, together with a horse, supports this conclusion.

The warriors from Şpălnaca and Noşlac occupied a lower position in the Avar military hierarchy from Transylvania, compared to the military chiefs from Unirea/Verşmort, Cicău and Teiuş. The fighters were buried merely with weapons and several other artefacts which cannot be considered evidence of a high social status in the Avar military hierarchy. Nevertheless, the backswords from the two graves

Tab. 14. The chronology of the 7th–8th c. swords, sabres and backwords from Transylvania, North-Western Romania and the Romanian Banat.

Historical province	Discovery type	Site/ Weapon type	Type I Sword	Type II Sabre	Type III Backsword					Chronology
					III.1		III.2	III.3		
					III.1.a	III.1.b		III.3.a	III.3.b	
The Romanian Banat	Cemeteries	Dudeștii Vechi	●							580/625–630/650
Transylvania	Cemeteries	Aiudul de Sus		●			●			650/670–710/720
		Cicău		●						
		Noșlac					?			
		Șpălnaca					?			
Teiuș			●		●					
	Settlement	Sfântu Gheorghe				●				
	Cemeteries	Săcueni						?		
Valea lui Mihai							●			
The Romanian Banat	Cemeteries	Sânpetru German				●				
Transylvania	Cemeteries	Dindești								710/720–810/830
The Romanian Banat		Timișoara							●	

Tab. 15. The chronology of the 7th–8th c. swords, sabres and backwords from Transylvania, North-Western Romania and the Romanian Banat.

Type	Chronology		
	580–625/630/650	650/670–710/720	710/720–810/830
<i>Type I Sword</i> Dudeștii Vechi	●		
<i>Type II Sabre</i> Cicău; Teiuș		●	
<i>Type III.1.a Backsword</i> Unirea/Vereșmort		●	
<i>Type III.1.b Backsword</i> Noșlac, Săcueni, Sânpetru German, Sfântu Gheorghe, Șpălnaca, Teiuș		●	
<i>Type III.2 Backsword</i> Aiudul de Sus		●	
<i>Type III.3.a Backsword</i> Valea lui Mihai		●	
<i>Type III.1.b Backsword</i> Dindești			●
<i>Type III.3.b Backsword</i> Timișoara			●

provide enough proof for a higher position of the two fighters in the Avar army, than for example the spearmen troops which took part in the conquest of the Gepid centers from Transylvania.

It is possible that the destroyed grave from Dindești, in North-Western Romania, which contained alongside a backsword also belt strap-ends and belt buckles specific to the Avar elite, belonged to a Avar military chief. The presence of the back-

swords inside the Avar graves from Săcueni and Valea lui Mihai (together with other weapons or horse harness) supports the positioning of the two warriors in the Avar military elite, on a higher rank than the one occupied by the spearmen.

A leading warrior was the deceased from Dudeștii Vechi, in the Romanian Banat. He was buried with a sword, as well as with a series of dress accessories specific to the Avar leaders of the first half of the

7th c. within the Carpathian Basin. The grave from Sânpetru German/Magazin also belongs to a warrior from the upper part of the military pyramid of the Avar Khaganate. The composition of the entire funerary set: weapons, dress accessories, gold coin, gold earring, leads to this conclusion. For example, the gold ring from the grave at Sânpetru German is an artefact occurring in the graves of the Avar military and political elites from Pannonia (*Bóna* 1970, 251, 260, 261; 1979, 5, 27; 1980, 39–42). A higher position in the military hierarchy of the Avar Khaganate was occupied also by the warrior buried in the grave from Timișoara. Based on the associated grave goods – a backsword and dress accessories specific to the Avar elite – he can be considered the chief of the Avar community from Timișoara/Podul Mодоș.

I will approach very briefly one other subject. It refers to the evaluation of the upper or lower status of the warriors using the two weapons they were buried with – the sabre or the backsword – as a criterion. It is noted that the backsword was the weapon most frequently used by the ordinary warriors of the Avar Khaganate (*Csiký* 2009, 122; *Garam* 1991, 156). However, in Transylvania the backswords were used also by the Avar military elite (Unirea/Vereshmort, Teiuș). Possibly, also the sabre was in Transylvania an attribute of the leading soldiers of the Avar armies, especially during the Middle Avar period (*Garam* 1991, 156), when the sabre from Cicău was buried. The grave containing a sabre from Teiuș shouldn't be omitted. Although it includes several appliques which can be connected with an upper status, the rank of the deceased is still lower compared to the military chief buried in the same cemetery together with a backsword and many other valuable artefacts.

FINAL REMARKS

The sword occurs only in the Romanian Banat, in an archaeological context which dates to the first half of the 7th c. In North-Western Romania and Transylvania, only backswords and sabres were found (Fig. 7; Tab. 14; 15).

The absence of the swords from the Avar milieu in Transylvania and North-Western Romania could be the consequence of the transformations which the Avar warrior elite underwent after the defeat suffered in front of the gates of Constantinopol in 626 (*Simon* 1993, 171, 172, 176). It is estimated that a significant part of the Avar nobility, which formed the heavy cavalry of the Khaganate, whose main weapon was the sword, died under the walls of Constantinopol (*Simon* 1993, 171, 172, 176). After 626 the sword falls out of fashion and is replaced by the backsword and/or sabre, which gradually became the weapons used

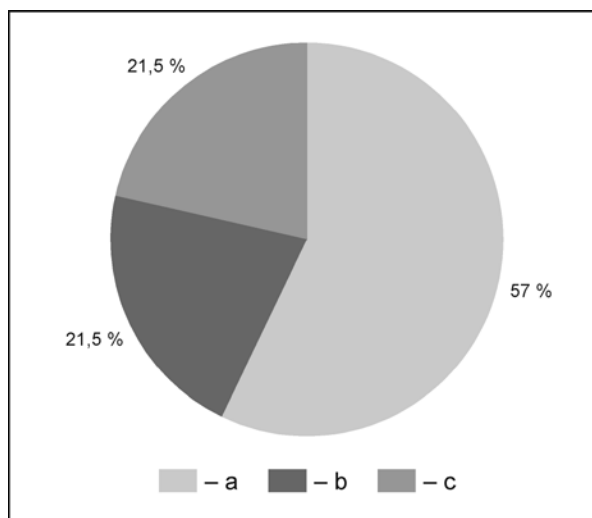


Fig. 7. Distribution of the 7th–8th c. swords, sabres and backswords in western Romania by historical provinces. Legend: a – Transylvania; b – North-Western Romania; c – Romanian Banat.

by the light cavalry of the Avar army (*Garam* 1991, 160; *Simon* 1993, 176). The absence of the swords from the Avar cemeteries, at least so far, suggests that the Avars entered Transylvania somewhere after 630, when the sword was no longer used by the Avar military elite. In the western Romanian territory, during the 7th–8th c. the swords, backswords and sabres were the weapons used by the Avar warriors occupying an upper position in the military hierarchy of the Avar Khaganate. The Avar soldiers buried with backswords at Unirea/Vereshmort, Noșlac and Șpălnaca can be considered amongst the military chiefs who led the Avar troops into Transylvania with the aim to conquer the Gepid centers. The cohorts of Avar ordinary warriors from Transylvania, North-Western Romania and the Romanian Banat used mainly the spear, less the battle axe and almost never the bow (*Cosma* 2015a, 251–275). For example, at Bratei/Cimitirul nr. 3 (Gepid-Avar cemetery), the Avar fighters were buried with horse harness and spears (*Bârzu* 2010, Grab. 66, 78, 83, 108, 274, 278).

Those buried in the Avar cemeteries from the Transylvanian Plateau with backswords or sabres were military and political chiefs of the 7th–8th c. communities in Transylvania. Conclusive examples in this regard are the two warriors from Cicău and Teiuș, who were political and military chiefs that led/coordinated the troops of Avar mounted spearmen, with the mission to control a significant part of the Transylvanian Plateau. However, it should be mentioned that these military and political chiefs were under the direct coordination of the Khagan established in Pannonia (*Cosma* 2015a, 254–262, 271–273; 2015b, 228–246).

CATALOGUE

A. Transylvania**a. Inhumation cemeteries****1. Aiudul de Sus (jud. Alba) – locality's boundary**

A.a.1.1.1. *Iron backsword with straight single-edged blade* (Fig. 3: 2). It has a rod-shaped cross-guard fixed perpendicularly on the blade, with a rhombic central part whose sharp ends point towards the blade and the hilt. The rod of the hilt is broken just above the cross-guard. Dimensions: L = 61 cm; $W_{blade} = 2.8$ cm; $L_{cross-guard} = 6$ cm.

Datation: 650/670–710/720.

Find circumstances: Grave 1/Warrior.

Bibliography: *Horedt 1958*, 93, fig. 17: 3.

Deposition: History Museum Aiud, inv. no. 5426.

2. Cicău (jud. Alba) – Săliște

A.a.2.1. *Single-edged iron sabre* (Fig. 3: 5), placed to the left of the human skeleton. The point is slightly curved towards the outside. The cross-guard has the shape of a rectangular rod. The hilt is inclined in the direction opposite to the point. The hilt ends in an angle. At the end of the hilt the rivet meant to attach the wood on the grip was preserved. Dimensions: $L_{total} = 84.9$ cm ($L_{hilt} = 10.6$ cm, $H_{cross-guard} = 1.2$ cm); $W_{blade} = 3.2$ –3.4 cm.

Datation: 650/670–710/720.

Find circumstances: Grave 3/Warrior.

Bibliography: *Winkler et al. 1977*, 270, fig. 4: 1; pl. I: 1.

Deposition: National History Museum of Transylvania Cluj-Napoca, inv. no. V. 32 380–32 874.

3. Noșlac (jud. Alba) – Grădina lui Hărăstășan

A.a.3.1. *Single-edged iron backsword, fragmentary* (Fig. 3: 1). At the time of its discovery, the cross-guard was still preserved. Dimensions: $L_{preserved\ blade} = 46$ cm; $W_{blade} = 3.2$ –3.4 cm.

Datation: 650/670–710/720.

Find circumstances: Grave 11/Warrior.

Unpublished (Archive: M. Rusu, Institute of Archaeology and Art History Cluj-Napoca).

Deposition: History Museum Aiud, inv. no. 5712.

4. Șpălnaca (jud. Alba) – Șugud

A.a.4.1. *Iron backsword, fragmentary*. Single-edged straight blade, with traces of wood from the scabbard (Fig. 4: 4). Only the upper part of the blade was partially preserved. The blade has one cutting-edge and a sharp point. Preserved dimensions: L = 23 cm; $W_{blade} = 2$ cm.

Datation: 650/670–710/720.

Find circumstances: Grave 19/Warrior.

Bibliography: *Protase et al. 2000*, 104.

Deposition: National Union Museum Alba Iulia, inv. no. F. 10226.

5. Teiuș (jud. Alba) – Cetățuie

A.a.5.1. *Single-edged iron backsword, fragmentary* (Fig. 4: 2). Very poorly preserved. Without a cross-guard. On some parts of the blade the traces of the wooden scabbard are still preserved. Dimensions: $L_{preserved} = 34$ cm.

Datation: 650/670–710/720.

Find circumstances: Grave 53/Warrior.

Unpublished.

Deposition: National History Museum of Transylvania Cluj-Napoca.

A.a.5.2. *Single-edged iron sabre, fragmentary* (Fig. 4: 3). The blade and the point slightly curved. Without a cross-guard. Dimensions: $L_{preserved} = 19$ cm; $W_{preserved\ blade} = 1.8$ cm. Datation: 650/670–710/720.

Find circumstances: Warrior grave with horse.

Unpublished.

Deposition: National History Museum of Transylvania Cluj-Napoca.

6. Unirea/Vereșmort (jud. Alba) – Traian str., no. 827

A.a.6.1.a. *Single-edged iron backsword* (Fig. 4: 4a). The hilt was formed from an iron rod on to which wood was fixed with iron rivets. The hilt was covered in a thin silver foil. The silver part of the hilt, in the shape of a reverse truncated cone with a circular-oval section ($d = 2.7 \times 1.37$ cm), has two uneven parts, joined together transversally by narrow bronze bands decorated with parallel longitudinal ridges. The hilt's end has a circular iron pommel ($d = 4.43$ cm), which is partially immersed in the silver covering. Dimensions: $L_{total} = 106$ cm, $L_{blade} = 84$ cm, $W_{blade} = 3.2$ cm.

A.a.6.1.b. *Scabbard of the backsword, with bronze fittings that fixed the scabbard* (Fig. 4: 4b). The fittings are part of two sets attached along the scabbard. One set was formed by two similar bronze plates, fixed by 5 copper rivets. Two parallel bronze bands decorated with ridges started from the upper and lower ends of the plates and then ran transversally around the scabbard creating an oval pattern. Pieces of the leather parts of the scabbard were preserved on some of these bands. The second set was similar to the first, only that just one of the two plates was recovered.

Datation: 650/670–710/720.

Find circumstances: Grave/Warrior.

Bibliography: *Rustoiu/Ciută 2015*, 109, pl. 1: 1, 2.

Deposition: National Union Museum Alba Iulia.

c. Settlements**1. Sfântu Gheorghe (jud. Mureș) – Pe Șes**

A.c.1.1.1. *Single-edged iron backsword, fragmentary* (Fig. 4: 1). From it are preserved the hilt and part of the blade. The hilt is straight and pointed towards the end. Probably, it has a button at the hilt's end. Dimensions: $L_{preserved} = 40$ cm; $W_{blade} = 3.6$ cm.

Datation: 780–850.

Find circumstances: House.

Bibliography: *Cosma et al. 2013a*, 100, fig. 69: 1a, 1b.

Deposition: Institute of Archaeology and Art History Cluj-Napoca.

B. Maramureș (North – Western Romania)**a. Inhumation cemeteries****1. Dindești (jud. Satu Mare) – Latura brazilor**

B.a.1.1.1. *Iron backsword, with one cutting-edge, fragmentary* (Fig. 5: 1). Hilt without a cross-guard. Dimensions: L: 48.7 cm. Datation: 725–780.

Find circumstances: Grave/Warrior.

Bibliography: *Cosma 2016*, 218, pl. 1: 1; *Németi 1983*, 137, fig. 3: 3.

Deposition: Municipal Museum Carei, inv. no. 3292.

2. Săcueni (jud. Bihor) – Veresdomb

B.a.2.1. Iron backsword.

Datation: 725–810/830.

Find circumstances: Grave 1/Warrior.

Bibliography: *Cosma 2016*, 218; *Nánáši/Wilhelm 1996*, 128, no. 7, 8.

Deposition: History Museum Săcueni, inv. no. 546 (the object was sent to the Archaeological Museum of Bucharest, untraced).

3. Valea lui Mihai (jud. Bihor) – Rétalj

B.a.3.1. Iron backsword with a single-edged straight blade (Fig. 3: 2). Placed on the left of the human skeleton, from the shoulder down to the waist. The cross-guard is made of a transversal iron rod. The hilt ends in an iron semicircle with prolonged ends that were fixed on the hilt rod. At the time of its discovery the imprints of the wood scabbard were still visible. Dimensions: L = 93 cm; L_{hilt} = 10.2 cm.

Datation: 650/670–710/720.

Find circumstances: Grave/Warrior.

Bibliography: *Cosma 2016*, 220, pl. 6: 5; *Németi 1983*, 146, fig. 8: 1.

Deposition: Municipal Museum Carei, inv. ro. 2280.

D. The Romanian Banat

a. Inhumation cemeteries

1. Dudeștii Vechi (jud. Timiș) – Movila IV

D.a.1.1. Double-edged iron sword. The blade is straight, wider near the cross-guard, then gradually narrowing towards the point. The hilt doesn't have a cross-guard. The hilt is wide next to the blade, and then narrows gradually

towards the end, where a rivet was fixed. The traces of the wooden plates that were fixed on the iron grip are preserved. Dimensions: L = 100 cm; W_{blade next to the hilt} = 5.2 cm; W_{blade at the point} = 2.5 cm; L_{hilt} = 12.4 cm; W_{hilt next to the blade} = 2.9 cm; W_{hilt's end} = 1.6 cm.

Datation: Early Avar period (?).

Find circumstances: Grave 2/Warrior buried with horse.

Bibliography: *Kisléghi Nagy 2015*, 123, 124; *Mare 2004*, 116; *Tănase 2015*, 220, pl. 1. A; *Tănase/Gáll 2012*, 705.

Deposition: Museum of Banat Timișoara.

2. Sânpetru German (jud. Arad) – Magazin

D.a.2.1. Iron backsword with a straight single blade (Fig. 5: 3).

From it are preserved the blade (in two fragments) and a small part of the hilt. The blade narrows towards both ends. The backsword was found on the left of the waist.

Dimensions: L = 90 cm; W = 3.1 cm; W_g = 0.7 cm.

Datation: 650–670.

Find circumstances: Grave/Warrior.

Bibliography: *Dörner 1960*, 424, fig. 3: 6; *Mare 1998*, 290, pl. VIII: 7; *2004*, 122, pl. XL: 9.

Deposition: Museum Complex Arad.

3. Timișoara (town, jud. Timiș) – Podul Modoș

D.a.3.1. Iron backsword, with a single-edged straight blade (Fig. 5: 4). It has a ring-shaped cross-guard. Dimensions. L = 63 cm; L_{blade} = 57 cm; W_{blade} = 4 cm.

Datation: 720–800/830.

Find circumstances: Grave 1 or 2/Warrior.

Bibliography: *Bejan 1983*, 489; *Mare 1998*, 292; *2004*, 125; *Cosma et al. 2013b*, 87, fig. 63: 1.

Deposition: Museum of Banat Timișoara, inv. no. 8460.

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Meče, šable a jednoostré meče zo 7.–8. storočia objavené v Sedmohradsku, Maramureși a v rumunskom Banáte

Călin Cosma

SÚHRN

Štúdia prináša detailný prehľad všetkých mečov, šablí a jednoostrých mečov zo 7.–8. stor. objavených v Sedmohradsku, Maramureși a v rumunskom Banáte (obr. 1), ktoré boli publikované v rumunských odborných textoch, prípadne ešte publikované neboli.

V západnom Rumunsku sa dosiaľ našlo 14 takýchto sečných zbraní. Artefakty boli objavené na 12 pohrebiskách (13 nálezov) a len jeden pochádzal zo sídliska/obydliia (tabela 1). Na základe tvaru a vlastností čepele boli rozlíšené tri hlavné typy týchto zbraní: I – meč, II – šabľa, III – jednoostrý meč.

Dosiaľ jediný meč bol objavený v avarskom kostrovom hrobe v Dudeștii Vechi (obr. 3: 1) v rumunskom Banáte. Používal ho avarský bojovník, ktorý bol, podľa dostupných analógií a skladby nálezov objavených v hrobe, aktívny v prvej polovici 7. stor.

Šable sa našli na avarských pohrebiskách Cicău (obr. 4: 4) a Teiuș (obr. 5: 2, 3) v Sedmohradsku, pričom šabľa z Cicău je relatívne dobre zachovaná. Obe šable sa našli v hrobách avarských bojovníkov. Obe pohrebiská aj konkrétne hroby sú datované do stredného stupňa doby Avarského kaganátu (650/670–710/720).

Jednoostrý meč je zbraň s rovnou čepelou a s jedným ostrím. V niektorých prípadoch je len špička mierne zahnutá smerom von. Rukoväť je rovná a mierne šikmá. Etymológia slova jednoostrý meč/paloš v rumunčine naznačuje pôvod v slovanských jazykoch, kde sa označuje ako paloš. Slovania používali tento názov, aby vyjadrili rozdiel medzi mečom (zbraňou s rovnou dvojstrou čepelou) a zbraňou s rovnou, ale jednostrou čepelou. Jednoostrý meč je teda zbraň so špecifickým tvarom tela/čepel, odlišným od meča alebo šable, ktorá má zahnutú čepel.

Typologicky sú jednoostré meče zo západného Rumunska, triedené na základe rukoväte a zástity (obr. 6). Spomedzi jednoostrých mečov objavených na náleziskách Noşlac (obr. 4: 1) a Şpálnaca (obr. 4: 3) sa zachovali len rovné čepel s jedným ostrím. Preto je ich typologické učenie na základe rukoväte a zástity nemožné. Nálezy zo západného Rumunska sa triedia nasledovne:

III.1 Jednoostrý meč s rukoväťou bez zástity

Podľa dekorácie na rukoväti sa rozlišujú dva typy jednoostrých mečov:

III.1.a Jednoostrý meč s rukoväťou zdobenou dekoratívnymi fóliami zo vzácneho kovu pokrývajúcimi drevo – meč tohto typu sa našiel na nálezisku Unirea/Vereşmont. Železná rukoväť jednoostrého meča bola pokrytá drevenými doštičkami, ktoré boli pripevnené železnými nitmi. Rukoväť pokrývala strieborná fólia (obr. 5: 4). Nález je datovaný do obdobia rokov 630–700.

III.1.b Jednoostrý meč s jednoduchou nezdobenou rukoväťou – jednoostré meče tohto typu boli objavené v Dindeşti (obr. 3: 1), Sfântu Gheorghe (obr. 5: 1), Teiuş (obr. 5: 2, 3) a Sânpetru German (obr. 3: 3). Meče z lokalít Teiuş a Sfântu Gheorghe sú datované do stredného stupňa obdobia Avarskeho kaganátu, zatiaľ čo zbraň z Dindeşti sa datuje do neskorého stupňa obdobia Avarskeho kaganátu.

III.2 Jednoostrý meč s úzkou tyčinkovou rukoväťou a zástitou pripevnenou kolmo na čepel, s kosoštvorcovou strednou časťou, ktorej ostré konce smerujú k čepeli a rukoväti

Meč nájdený na lokalite Aiudul de Sus má tyčinkovú zástitu s kosoštvorcovou strednou časťou s ostrými koncami smerujúcimi k čepeli a rukoväti. Tyčinkové telo rukoväte je zlomené priamo nad zástitou (obr. 4: 2). Na základe archeologických nálezov, ktoré sú s ním spojené, sa meč datuje do stredného stupňa obdobia Avarskeho kaganátu.

III.3 Jednoostrý meč s kruhovou zástitou

Rozoznávame dva typy:

III.3.a Jednoostrý meč s kruhovou zástitou a polkruhovou hlavicou – meč bol objavený vo Valea lui Mihai (obr. 3: 2). Jeho zástita kruhová, rukoväť je ukončená polkruhovou železnou hlavicou s predĺženými koncami upevnenými k telu rukoväte. Na základe predmetov, ktoré hrob obsahoval, možno nález datovať do stredného stupňa doby Avarskeho kaganátu.

III.3.b Jednoostrý meč s kruhovou zástitou a jednoduchou rovnou rukoväťou – meč tohto typu bol nájdený na lokalite Timișoara, v hrobe obsahujúcom artefakty datované do neskorého stupňa doby Avarskeho kaganátu (obr. 3: 4).

Pokiaľ ide od geografické rozšírenie, na Sedmohradskej vysočine meče absentujú. V porovnaní so šablami sa v tejto oblasti vyskytuje viac jednoostrých mečov. V severozápadnom Rumunsku sa našli len tri jednoostré meče. Zo spracúvaného súboru militárií sú meče zastúpené len v rumunskom Banáte, jedným nálezom, kde však boli zaznamenané aj dva jednoostré meče (tabula 2).

Typologické zastúpenie a početnosť mečov, šablí a jednoostrých mečov na archeologických lokalitách je nasledovne: z hodnotených militárií sa v sídliskovom prostredí našiel jediný jednoostrý meč, v interiéri obydlia skúmaného sídliska v Sfântu Gheorghe v Sedmohradsku. Všetky ostatné sečné zbrane zo západného Rumunska boli nájdené na pohrebiskách (tabula 3–11).

Čo sa týka výskytu mečov, šablí a jednoostrých mečov s inými predmetmi treba konštatovať že všetky typy sečných, úderných a bodných zbraní z hrobov boli nájdené spolu s inými druhmi zbraní a s časťami konského postroja – strmeňmi a zubadlami (tabula 12; 13).

Meče, šable a jednoostré meče uložené v hroboch mali svoj symbolický význam. Všetci zosnulí zo západného Rumunska zo 7.–8. stor., ktorí boli pochovaní s mečom, šablou alebo jednoostrým mečom, ale aj s ďalšími zbraňami a súčasťami odevu, sú dospelí muži. Teda dosiaľ žiadny zo ženských alebo detských hrobov tento druh zbrane neobsahoval. Vloženie meča, šable alebo jednoostrého meča do hrobu v 7.–8. stor. v západnom Rumunsku určuje identitu zosnulého. Na základe súboru ďalších artefaktov nájdených v hroboch a porovnaní so zvyškom hrobov z toho istého pohrebiska, možno majiteľov diskutovaných zbraní považovať za členov avarskej bojovej elity. Boli to vojenská a politická vládcovia spoločenstiev, ktoré obývali západné Rumunsko v 7.–8. stor.