

WHERE HAVE ALL THE AVARS GONE? A VIEW FROM EASTERN EUROPE

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ABSTRACT

The presence of the Avars in Eastern Europe, particularly in the lands between the Carpathian Mountains and the river Dnieper, has so far been a matter of concern for historians. Archaeologists are skeptical: except for a couple of finds from Budureasca, there are no Early Avar belt fittings anywhere to the north, east, and south from the Carpathian Mountains. In Poland, Avar-age finds cluster in the south (Silesia and Lesser Poland) and are dated after AD 700. The vast majority of those finds, however, are from the very end of the 8th or even the early decades of the 9th century. The sudden interest in Avar things in the lands north of the Sudeten and Carpathian Mountains may signal a desire of local elites to employ the modes of status (and, supposedly, power) representation inside the Avar Qaganate. It is however truly surprising that such an interest coincides in time with what historians believe to be a period of decline of the Avar polity. The symbolism of the Avar belt fittings was also harnessed by members of communities who buried their dead in cemeteries excavated in southern Romania. By contrast, there are no Avar-age belt fittings anywhere in the lands to the east from the Carpathian Mountains. During the second half of the 8th and the early 9th century, this region experienced something of a demographic boom, as indicated by the large number of settlement sites. There are also hillforts, but a true concern with marking social status in the material culture cannot be dated before the mid-9th century. When such markers of social prominence became necessary, the language of representation was completely different from that employed earlier by elites in southern Poland who wanted to emulate the Avars. In Eastern Europe, after 850, elites emulated the Khazars, not the Avars.

Keywords: Avars, Khazars, belt fittings, social elites, hillforts

Taking at face value the information in the *Short History* of Patriarch Nicephorus, the Austrian historian Walter Pohl maintained until recently that the Avar rule over the lands extending to the east from the Carpathian Mountains beyond the river Dnieper ended with Kuvrat's revolt. He was the nephew of Organa and the chieftain of the Onogundurs who, according to Nicephorus, chased all Avars from his country (Pohl 2018, 325, on the basis of Nicephorus 1990, 70).¹ Before Pohl, several other historians have declared themselves in favor of the Avar power extending to the lands east from the Carpathian Mountains during the first third of the 7th century (Szádeczky-Kardoss 1975; Curta 2001, 209; see also the map published in Bollók 2021, 67 fig. 37). Archaeologists, however,

¹Pohl denies the possibility of the final battle between Avars and Onogundurs taking place somewhere to the east from the river Dnieper and is convinced that the information got to Nicephorus from a written source based on the accounts of the Roman hostages returning from the Avars at the time of the negotiations between the qagan of the Avars and Maria, Emperor Heraclius's sister, who obtained the release of her son, Stephen (hostage in Avaria between 623 and 630 or 635).

have been much more cautious. On one hand, according to some of them, a group of cemeteries and isolated burials in eastern Hungary must be attributed to immigrants from the steppe lands north of the Black Sea. This conclusion was drawn on the basis of analogies with burials of the so-called Sivashyvka group on the eastern shore of the Sea of Azov (Lőrinczy 2001; Gulyás 2015; Gulyás 2016; Gulyás 2018; Гуяш и др. 2019; Гуяш и др. 2021. For the Sivashyvka group, see Рашев 1998; Комар и др. 2006; Комар 2008, 197 – 212. For a critique of the attribution, see Bálint 2019, 70 – 76). On the other hand, missing from the said region, as well as from the entire area of the steppe lands in Eastern Europe, is the evidence of contacts with, or cultural influences from the Carpathian Basin, where the Avars had already established themselves by 600. A belt mount and a strap end, both found in Budureasca (near Vadul Săpat, in the municipality of Fântânele, Prahova County, Romania) are dated to the first half of the 7th century on the basis of analogies from burial assemblages in Hungary (Măgureanu 2005, 189, 191, 196 fig. 1; Măgureanu 2012, 313, 314, 317, and 315 fig. 1/2). No such artefacts are known from the entire, vast area between the Carpathian Mountains to the west and the Volga River to the east.²

Artefacts dated to the Early or Middle Avar age (ca. 570 to ca. 680) are also rare in the lands to the north from the Carpathian Mountains. Out of 26 Avar-age finds from Poland known until 2000, only two could be dated before 700 (Zoll-Adamikowa 1992, 303 – 307). Only one of those finds is associated to the typically Avar symbolism of the belt with side straps.³ Despite the increasing number of finds during the last few years, Early or Middle Avar specimens are still rare.⁴ Rare also are the finds dated to the first two phases of the Late Avar age. The strap ends from Damice near Cracow and Pełczyska near Pinczów, in the same region of Lesser Poland, are the only finds that could be dated to the first phase of the Late Avar age (680 – 720) (Poleski 2009, 3 and 28; Rudnicki 2009, 242 with fig. 11).⁵ Both strap ends are specimens of Zábójník's type 8. Three other artefacts – two strap ends of Zábójník's type 47 from Swaryczów near Lublin, in eastern Poland, and a fragment of a hinged belt mount of Zábójník's type 240 found in Chorula near Opole (in Silesia) – belong chronologically to the second phase of the Late Avar age (720 – 760) (Poleski 2009, 29; Szydłowski 1959, 53 and 57 pl. VIII/2; see also Zábójník 1991, 93 pl. 14 and 318 pl. 39).⁶

Most Avar-age finds from the lands to the north and to the south of the Carpathian Mountains are dated to the last two phases of that age, i.e., to the last third of the 8th and the first decades of the 9th century (see Table 1). The propeller-shaped belt mount of Zábójník's type 156, which was found in Cracow is most typical for phase III of the Late Avar age (Jamka 1965, 217 with

²Erdélyi 1981, 58, treated as Avar the arrow heads with three edges found in 7th-century settlement sites excavated in what is now the Republic of Moldova. Leaving aside the problem of the ethnic attribution of arrow heads, those artefacts do not necessarily signal contacts with the Carpathian Basin, as such weapons appear everywhere else in Eastern Europe.

³Namely, the bronze model for belt mounts found in Jakuszowice, near Kazimierza Wielka, in the voivodship of Świętokrzyskie (Zoll-Adamikowa 1992, 303; 299 fig. 1d). The model was dated to the Middle Avar age (ca. 630 – ca. 680). However, the dating to the (Early) Avar age of the lance head from Gródek near Gorlice (Lesser Poland) has been disputed (Kokowski, Kokowska 1995; Szymański 1995, 137).

⁴One of the most interesting among those rare specimens is the circular pendant with open-work ornament from Kielary near Olsztyn (in the voivodship of Warmia-Mazuria), for which see Rudnicki 2009 – 2010. This is most likely a Middle, not Early Avar artefact (see Garam 2018, 169 and 173). For bridle bits with bone side-bars believed to be Avar, see also Kontny et al. 2009, 181 and 181 fig. 12e.

⁵Another find from Pełczyska is a fragmentary buckle with rectangular mount decorated with scrollwork (Rudnicki 2009, 244 și fig. 12). The strap end is a specimen of type 8 after Zábójník (Zábójník 1991, 82 pl. 3). For the chronology of the Avar age, see Stadler 2008, 59.

⁶Poleski 2009, 5 wrongly dates the artefacts from Dobrzeń Mały and Gilów to the second phase of the Late Avar age. As already noted by Zoll-Adamikowa 1990, they are in fact typical for the next phase, which is commonly dated after 760.

fig. 20; Zoll-Adamikowa 1992, 302 and 299 fig. 1e; Zábójník 1991, 309 pl. 30). The same may be said about the strap ends of Zábójník's type 113 from Dobrzeń Mały near Opole and Gilów near Wrocław, the strap end of Zábójník's type 116 from Nowa Huta, as well as the belt mounts of Zábójník's types 170 and 171 from Naszacowice near Nowy Sącz and Trepcza near Sanok, respectively (Hachulska-Ledwos 1976; Kosmala, Tomczak 1991, 244 with fig.; Poleski 1991; Zoll-Adamikowa 1992, 303 and 290 fig. 1g; Jaworski 2005, 81 – 82 and fig. 26c; Poleski 2009, 29; see also Zábójník 1991, 303 pl. 24, 311 pl. 32 and 312 pl. 33). To phase III of the Late Avar age one can also date the finds in southern Romania, particularly the belt buckle of Zábójník's type 132 from Târgșor, the strap ends of Zábójník's types 113 and 62 from graves 61 and 104 of the cemetery excavated in Sultana, the strap end from an unknown location in Walachia, as well as the belt mount of Zábójník's type 170 from grave 304 of the cemetery in Izvoru (Pârvan 1926, 28 and fig. 18; Diaconu, Diaconu 1962, fig. 2/2; Mitrea 1988, 115, 117 – 118, 130 pl. 7/T61.3 and 134 pl. 13/T104.4; Mitrea 1989, 207 and 208 fig. 48/304.1; see Zábójník 1991, 296 pl. 17, 298 pl. 19, 303 pl. 24, 306 pl. 27 and 312 pl. 32). The only find from the lands to the east from the river Dnieper – the strap end of Zábójník's type 87 discovered in Velyka Krucha, in the Poltava region of Ukraine – may be dated to the same phase of the Late Avar age (ГОЛОВКО 2010a, 175 and 176 fig. 1; ГОЛОВКО 2010b, 104 – 107 and 105 fig. 2/5; Zábójník 1991, 301 pl. 2). By contrast, the strap end of Zábójník's type 51 discovered in Ripniv near L'viv, in western Ukraine is typical for the last phase which may be dated shortly before and shortly after the year 800 (АУЛИХ 1963, 366 – 367 and 377 fig. 9/16; Zábójník 1991, 294 pl. 15). To that phase may also be dated a number of other finds from Poland: the strap ends of Zábójník's types 51 and 357 from the environs of Warsaw and from Nowa Huta, respectively; the belt mounts of Zábójník's type 172 from Biskupin near Żnin and from Naszacowice near Nowy Sącz, as well as the belt mount of Zábójník's type 337 from Wyciąże (Rajewski 1939, 343 and pl. LXV/2; Szymański 1962, 304 – 305 and 306 fig. 14; Hachulska-Ledwos 1986, 119 fig. 15; Poleski 1996b, 257 and fig. 1a; Poleski 2003, 215 – 216 and 216 fig. 1a; Zábójník 1991, 294 pl. 15 and 312 pl. 33). Two other belt mounts of his types 172 and 337 have been found in graves 7 in Izvoru and grave 52 in Obârșia Nouă, both in southern Romania (Mitrea 1967, fig. 8; Toropu, Stoica 1972, 181 and 185; fig. 8/1; Mitrea 1989, 148 and 147 fig. 4/7.3; Zábójník 1991, 312 pl. 33).

Although the finds from southern Romania have clear analogies in Late Avar assemblages from the Carpathian Basin, they have recently been interpreted in association with the elites in early medieval Bulgaria, which during the second half of the 8th century were desperately trying to survive the onslaught of the Byzantine armies under Emperor Constantine V.⁷ It is important to note in this respect the finds from southern Romania, given that they have been found in burial assemblages. In some cases, it is difficult to deny a practical function, even if no evidence exists that belts with side straps, so typical for the Avar milieu, were in fashion in Bulgaria. For example, the belt buckle from Târgșor was found on the ilium of a man who died at 30 to 40 years of age. There was no strap end in or around the hip bone, and no belt mount has been found in the grave, but there was a second buckle, which suggests the deposition of two belts (Diaconu, Diaconu 1962; for the sexing and aging of the skeleton, see Nicolaescu-Plopșor, Paul-Bolomey 1962). A similar situation has been

⁷Teodor 1999, 75 – 76 (reprinted in Teodor 2003, 495 – 509) treats the burial in Târgșor as Avar, but wrongly dates it to the late 7th century, and thus almost a century too early. He also attributes to the Avars a number of belt fittings with no analogies in Avar-assemblages, such as the mount found in Șirna. By contrast, to Станилов 2009, 147, the belt buckle found in Târgșor has good analogies in the burial assemblages from Gledachevo, Divdyadovo and Kabiuk; it must therefore be attributed to Bulgars, not Avars. The number of finds of belt fittings with clear analogies in Avar-age assemblages has increased lately, and some Bulgarian archaeologists do not hesitate to attribute them to a cultural influence from the Carpathian Basin. See Станилов, Атанасов 1993; Плетньов 1995; Fiedler 1996; Инкова 1997; Иванова 1997; Инкова 2005; Szenthe 2014.

observed in grave 104 of the cemetery excavated in Sultana: a strap end of Zábójník's type 62 was found on the hip bone of an adult individual of about 50 years of age, together with another belt fitting (wrongly interpreted as "pseudo-buckle") (Mitrea 1988, 117). However, in other cases, one can raise doubts about the practical function. Despite being found in the region of the abdomen of a new-born baby, the belt mount of Zábójník's type 170 in grave 304 from the Izvoru cemetery was not accompanied either by other mounts and strap ends or by a buckle (Mitrea 1989, 207). Similarly, in grave 7 of that same cemetery, there were no other belt fittings besides a belt mount of Zábójník's type 172, which was found on the hip bone of the male skeleton (50 years of age). Both cases strongly suggest a symbolic deposition of the belt mount, which therefore had absolutely no practical function in relation to the clothes in which the child and the man were supposedly buried. A symbolic deposition results also from the position of the strap end from grave 61 in Sultana – next to the northern side of the grave pit, away from the body of the 35-year old man who was buried there (Mitrea 1988, 115).

Unlike the belt fittings in southern Romania, those from Poland are either stray finds or discoveries from Early Medieval strongholds (Poleski 2009, 9). Some of those strongholds were undoubtedly occupied in the 9th century, as indicated, among other things, by the dress accessories or the hoard of iron implements and weapons from Trepcza, all categories of artefacts with analogies in Moravia (Ginalski 1997; Jaworski 1997; Jaworski 2012; Kotowicz et al. 2019; for 9th-century hoards of iron implements and weapons from Moravia, see Curta 2011; Kouřil 2013; Müllerová 2020).⁸ The presence of Late Avar belt fittings in strongholds from Poland and their association with Carolingian materials reminds one of a perfectly symmetrical situations elsewhere outside the Carpathian Basin. In both Slovenia and Bohemia, for example, most Avar-age belt fittings have been found inside strongholds (Karo et al. 2011, 132 – 136 and 155 pl. I/1, 3 – 5, 8; for Bohemia, see Bubeník 1968; Justová 1985; Boháčová et al. 1983; Profantová 2020a; Profantová 2020b). Naďa Profantová, the first archaeologist who had the idea of a comparative approach to Avar-age finds from the territories located to the north, north-west and north-east from the Carpathian Basin, seems to have missed an important difference between Bohemia and Moravia, on one hand, and Poland, on the other hand (Profantová 1992). The largest number of Late Avar belt fittings found anywhere in the Czech Republic are from the Tismice stronghold. The constituent parts of at least 13 or 14 belts have been discovered by means of a metal detector in that stronghold, almost all dated to the third phase of the Late Avar age (Profantová et al. 2020, 264 – 265). Besides the considerable number of specimens, with no parallel in Poland, the stronghold in Tismice also produced miscasts, crucibles, and casting drops – all indications of local production of Avar-age belt fittings.⁹ One cannot exclude the possibility of something similar coming to light in Poland at some point in the future. However, on the basis of the existing evidence, one can conclude that the belt fittings found in Poland were not produced locally, but came from the Carpathian Basin. A careful study of the distribution map of all finds of Avar-age belt fittings in the lands to the north, east and south from the Carpathian Mountains (fig. 1) confirms that conclusion. In Poland, Avar-age finds cluster in two specific regions, both in the southern part of the country, next to the Carpathian Mountains – Silesia and Lesser Poland (Poleski 2009, 5: out of 26 Avar-age finds from

⁸There are also finds from Trepcza that indicate a later occupation phase (11th to 12th century). See Ginalski 1999 – 2000; Ginalski 2001; Ginalski 2003; Ginalski 2012. For another 9th-century stronghold that produced Avar-age belt fittings, see Szydłowski, Pierzyna 1970. For a hinged belt mount of Zábójník's type 245 dated to the third phase of the Late Avar age and found in the rampart of a late 10th-century stronghold in Czeremno, see Wołoszyn et al. 2016, 697 and 698 fig. 4.

⁹Another production center has been recently discovered in Moravia (Macháček et al. 2021).

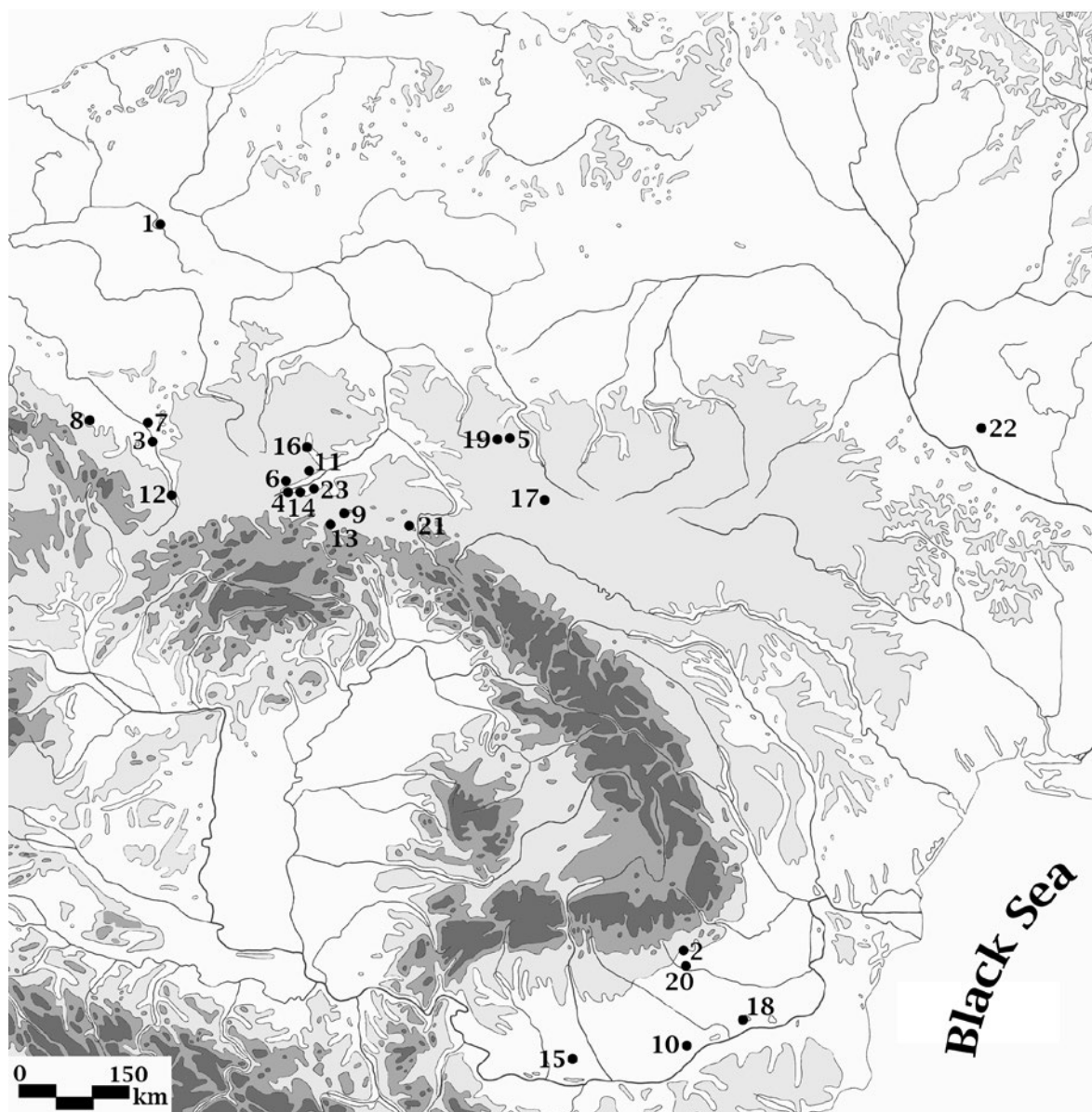


Fig. 1. The main sites mentioned in the text: 1 – Biskupin; 2 – Budureasca; 3 – Chorula; 4 – Cracovia; 5 – Czeremo; 6 – Damice; 7 – Dobrzeń Mały; 8 – Gilów; 9 – Gródek; 10 – Izvoru; 11 – Jakuszowice; 12 – Lubomia; 13 – Naszacowice; 14 – Nowa Huta; 15 – Obârşia Nouă; 16 – Pełczyska; 17 – Ripniv; 18 – Sultana; 19 – Swaryczów; 20 – Târgşor; 21 – Trepcza; 22 – Velyka Krucha; 23 – Wyciąże. Sites inside the Carpathian Basin and in the Northern Balkans (south of the river Danube) have not been plotted on the map

Обр. 1. Основните обекти, споменати в текста: 1 – Бискупин; 2 – Будуряска; 3 – Хорула; 4 – Краковия; 5 – Чермно; 6 – Дамице; 7 – Добжен Мали; 8 – Гилов; 9 – Грудек; 10 – Извору; 11 – Якушовице; 12 – Любомия; 13 – Нашаковице; 14 – Нова Хута; 15 – Обършия Ноуа; 16 – Пелчиска; 17 – Рипнив; 18 – Султана; 19 – Сваричов; 20 – Търгшор; 21 – Тречча; 22 – Велика Круча; 23 – Вицяже. Обектите от Карпатския басейн и от Северните Балкани (южно от р. Дунав) не са нанесени на картата

Poland, 17 are from Lesser Poland. For finds from Silesia, see Szydłowski 1960b. For distribution maps of Avar-age finds in Poland, see Szymański 1960, 42 fig. 5; Zoll-Adamikowa 1992, 306 fig. 6. For gazetteers, see Szymański 1982, 254 – 257; Poleski 2009, 27 – 30). In both regions, the belt fittings may have been used by local elites, or at least by those members of the local elites who used strongholds as seats of power.¹⁰ Because most Late Avar finds cluster in those two regions, and because most were found in strongholds, some have gone as far as to establish a direct connection between the cultural influences from the Carpathian Basin and the rise of the Polish state (Szydłowski 1960a). Others, more concerned with the ethnic attribution of those finds, preferred to accept the cultural influences from the Carpathian Basin, but not the presence of the Avars in Poland (Rajewski 1974). Both attitudes are now outdated. Nonetheless, one still has the impression that some in southern Poland (Silesia and Lesser Poland) developed a sudden interest in Avar elite models. Why exactly were symbols of social rank from the Late Avar society chosen and borrowed to mark, supposedly, the elevated status of some members of communities located north of the Sudeten and the Carpathians is a question still without answer. This question is even more intriguing when one takes into consideration that, judging from the chronology of belt fittings, the cultural transfer took place during the last years of the Avar polity, a period during which that polity is said to have been in rapid decline, on the point of collapse.¹¹ Leaving aside the obvious need to abandon historiographic stereotypes concerning the Avars, such observations are of great value because they match those made in relation to other territories beyond the Carpathian Basin, for example Dalmatia or Moravia (Curta 2022). In both regions, much like in Poland, local elites suddenly began during the second half or even last third of the 8th century to display belt fittings imitating those in Avaria. This phenomenon coincides in time, at least in the case of Dalmatia, with the beginnings of the Frankish encroachment in South-Eastern Europe. The link between these two political and cultural phenomena has not been sufficiently studied yet, much like the relations between Avaria and Bulgaria during the 8th century. Suffice to note, for the moment, that there are no analogies in Transylvania for any of the belt fittings found in southern Romania, an indication that their origin is either local or in the central parts of the Carpathian Basin.

Most surprising is that on taking a quick glimpse at the distribution map of Avar-age belt fittings, one notes their complete absence in the regions to the east of the Carpathian Mountains. Unlike southern Romania, the lands between the Carpathian Mountains and the river Dniester are completely devoid of such finds. Moreover, there are no Avar-age belt fittings in the lands between the rivers Dniester and Dnieper.¹² Except the specimen from Velyka Krucha, there are no such finds in Left-Bank Ukraine either. Specimens that can be compared to those from Avar age assemblages in Central Europe have been found only in the Volga-Don region, where they are coin-dated to

¹⁰The social and/or political interpretation of the numerous strongholds found in Poland and dated to the 8th and 9th centuries is a thorny issue of the medieval archaeology in that country. However, all archaeologists who dealt with this problem agree that strongholds were associated with local elites, irrespective of the specific function that each one of them may have had (Poleski 1996a; Kurnatowska 2005; Parczewski 2006). For a good survey of the debates up to 2000, see Buko 2008, 84 – 99.

¹¹According to Pohl 2018, 401, the economic and political decline of the Avar Qaganate began in the mid-8th century. The idea that the Late Avar age was one of decline has been recently and forcefully rejected by Szenthe 2021.

¹²Without belt fittings, Vékony 1986 believed that the so-called “sacrificial” knives with handles decorated with volutes, which have been found in Moldova, must have come from the Carpathian Basin. In reality, the widespread distribution of such artefacts in East-Central and Eastern Europe raises serious doubts about Vékony’s interpretation. Instead of an influence from the Carpathian Basin, the „sacrificial” knives are most likely the result of an East European influence upon the Late Avar culture (Szymański 1987; Королькова 1996; Ковалевский 1998; Рабинович 2010; Мысько, Пивоваров 2010).

the 8th century (Gavritukhin 2008, 81 – 82 and 85 – 86).¹³ No such burial assemblages, nor any cultural element associated with them has so far been found in the lands between the Carpathian Mountains and the river Dnieper. At least for the 8th century, it is therefore wrong to advance the idea of a *pax Chazarica* in those lands, for that century represented anything but peace for the Khazars, whose power could not have reached Right-Bank Ukraine, much less the lands beyond it, to the west (Тентюк 1999, 226; Musteață 2018, 230). It is equally wrong to maintain the idea of the power of the Avars extending to the east from the Carpathian Mountains (Teodor 1999, 76). In the absence of belt fittings, one cannot even argue in favour of a cultural or political influence.

Many settlements have so far been discovered in the lands between the Carpathians and the Dnieper, which may be dated to the 8th and 9th centuries (Musteață 2018, 23 and map 3, with several clusters in the lands between the Carpathians and the Dniester; see also Musteață 2005; Михайлина 2007, 45 – 57).¹⁴ There are also strongholds dated to those same centuries (Teodor 1978, 319 map 3; Musteață 2005, 40 – 41). To be sure, the dating of those open settlements and strongholds from Eastern Europe must be treated with caution, given that it is primarily based on the dating of the pottery, itself without verification through independent dating methods (such as radiocarbon) (Рабинович, Рябцева 2016 raise the question of the chronological differences between open settlements and strongholds. The latter, according to the two authors, must be later than the open settlements, at least those dated on the basis of the pottery of the Luka-Raykovetskaya group). However, there can be no doubt that at least some of those settlements may be dated to the second half of the 8th and the early 9th century. Conspicuously absent are any elements of material culture that could signal social differences or local elites. That the latter are invisible archaeologically results not only from the analysis of settlements, but also from that of cemeteries (Postică 1999; Musteață 2005, 131 – 136 uses the archaeological evidence to argue in favour of a social organization based on village communities [*obști sătești*], but admits that “local leaders” did not appear before the 9th century). The absence of Late Avar belt fittings must therefore be explained in terms of the lack of interest in symbols of social status and claims to power. This, however, is not just cultural difference; missing are not only Avar-age belt fittings, but *any* other, equivalent elements derived from other, different cultures.¹⁵

Ion Tentiuc has attributed to the Alans the wheel-made pottery with burnished ornamentation, such as found on the 8th – to 9th-century settlement site in Durlești (Republic of Moldova) (Tentiuc 2012, 92). Leaving aside the problems of ethnic attribution in archaeology, this ceramic category raises interesting questions regarding its function and the possibility of its ceremonial use. This pottery would thus be the only indication of preferential consumption, perhaps of spe-

¹³Given that those assemblages are dated to the period of the Arab-Khazar wars, they could be interpreted as „compensatory” monuments meant to prop the claims of local elites in their desperate attempt to preserve their social and political prominence. Such an interpretation may in turn explain the use of „exotic” symbols borrowed from distant culture – either Byzantine metal vessels or Late Avar belt fittings (e.g., Ильюков, Косяненко 2007). For Byzantine metal vessels, see Naumenko, Bezuglov 1996. Barrows with square ditches, another category of funerary monuments in the Volga-Don region, may equally be interpreted as commemorative, at a time of great political and social tumult caused by the wars with the Arabs, which ended with the military disaster of 737 (e.g., Аксёнов 2005). For the Arab-Khazar wars, see Семёнов 2008 – 2009; Makó 2010. For the military disaster of 737, see Новосельцев 1990, 184 – 186.

¹⁴Тентюк 1999, 225 notes that the 8th century was a period of demographic growth and relative prosperity in the lands between the rivers Prut and Dniester, for the number of settlements recorded so far rose to 600 from only 240 for the 5th to 7th centuries.

¹⁵The horseman-shaped amulets, which some have attributed to the Alans and dated to the 8th and 9th centuries, turned out to be of a much later date (10th to 11th, or even 11th to 12th centuries) (Postică, Tentiuc 2014; Валериев 2015; Komatarova-Balinova 2019). Some still insist on an 8th – to 9th-century date (Bilavschi, Berzovan 2020).

cial beverages and foods, and therefore of the existence of local elites preoccupied with marking social differences by means of rituals. The context in which fragments of wheel-made pottery have been found seems to substantiate that interpretation. Besides wheel-made pottery, house 14/25 in Durlești also produced five amphora fragments, unfortunately too small for classification (Tentiuc 2012, 49 and 93). Globular amphorae, however, were produced in the 8th and 9th centuries in the Crimea for the transportation of cheap wine, often mixed with spices (Сазанов 2020; such amphorae have recently been found on sites along the Black Sea coast of Bulgaria, for which see Todorova 2012, 13 – 14 and 28). Those two ceramic categories could in principle be interpreted as the material culture correlates of feasts organized by community leaders with ‘big man’ qualities. Such a scenario may explain in turn the absence of any interest for the Avar-age belt fittings, which are typically associated with an aristocracy well entrenched in a society that was substantially different from that of the ‘big men’ in Durlești. In order to be accepted, such an interpretation, however, will need first to be confirmed by the analysis of other assemblages with wheel-made pottery. Amphora fragments are known from other sites in the Republic of Moldova, but only from contexts dated to the 9th century, at the earliest (Musteață 2005, 83). In other words, the dating of the assemblage in house 14/25 in Durlești will need to be confirmed.

Out of four houses in Durlești in which wheel-made pottery has been found, three stand out through the associated finds of clay figurines in the shape of bulls, dogs, horses, birds, boards or saddles (Tentiuc 2012, 38 – 41 and 48; 65 fig. 29/1, 3, 5, 6, 8; 66 fig. 30/1, 2, 4, 5, 6; 67 fig. 31/9, 11, 15, 17, 18; 68 fig. 32/3 – 7, 9, 11, 12, 14, 16 – 18; 69 fig. 33/6, 7, 10). Tentiuc has interpreted the animal-shaped figurines as the result of an influence from eastern nomads (Tentiuc 2012, 66)¹⁶. Such figurines have indeed been found on sites of the Saltovo-Mayaki culture, on which they supposedly played a religious or magic role (Гриб 2019). The ritual interpretation of the deposition of clay figurines is confirmed by finds from Moldova: most specimens have been found in special pits dug underneath ovens or have been embedded into the walls of ovens inside dwellings (Тентюк 1990). Not all dwellings have such ritual deposits, which raises again the question of social differentiation, this time based on religious criteria. Be that as it may, the social structure of communities in Eastern Europe, such as derived from the archaeological evidence, lacked a well-established hierarchy and therefore the need for rank symbols, such as belt fittings.

The first signs in the lands to the east from the Carpathian Mountains of political leaders with a social status derived from economic privileges cannot be dated before the second half of the 9th century. The silver torc, the finger-ring with “stone” bezel, the gilded silver buckle and belt mounts from the Răducăneni hoard are all symbols of elevated social status, which was most likely based on wealth differentials, as suggested by the associated coins and silver ingots (Teodor 1980, 403 – 417 and figs. 4/4 – 13, 5/4 – 13, 6/1, 7/3 – 11, 8/3 – 11 [reprinted in Teodor 2003, 176 – 195]). The latest coins in the assemblage have been struck in the name of the Abbasid caliph Abu Djafar Harun al-Rashid ibn al-Mahdi (786 – 806), but two of them are pierced. It is important to note in this context that Riabceva 2002 has linked the Răducăneni hoard to the first strongholds in Moldova). None of those symbols, however, has anything to do with Avaria, and some of them have very good analogies in those territories which were part of the Khazar Qaganate during the 9th century¹⁷. Some have even attributed them to the Magyars (Рябцева, Рабинович 2018, 432 and 453). Irrespective of their attribution, simple torcs like that in the Răducăneni hoard appear in 9th-century burial as-

¹⁶ The earliest animal-shaped, clay figurines in Eastern Europe are those from assemblages attributed to the Imen’kovo culture in the Middle Volga region (Рудуенко 2021, 99 – 100).

¹⁷ Most analogies for the finger-ring with “stone” bezel are from assemblages of the Saltovo-Mayaki culture (Шпилев 2017, 177 – 179; Колода 2021).

semblages such as the barrows with cremations discovered in Alcedar (Рябцева, Рабинович 2018, 441 and 443 fig. 3/5). At the time such symbols were put on display, the Avar social models from the Carpathian Basin were already history. In Eastern Europe, the Avars were forgotten, long before they perished.¹⁸

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¹⁸ According to the Russian Primary Chronicle, “there is to this day a proverb in Rus’, which runs, ‘They perished like the Avars’. Neither race nor heir of them remains.” (Chronicle 1953, p. 56). The proverb in question was most likely taken from a letter of Patriarch Nicholas I Mystikos, who was writing in the early 10th century to Symeon of Bulgaria, to remind him that even the Avars disappeared without a trace (Mystikos 1973, p. 70).

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КЪДЕ СЕ ИЗГУБИХА ВСИЧКИ АВАРИ? ПОГЛЕД ОТ ИЗТОЧНА ЕВРОПА

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РЕЗЮМЕ

Присъствието на аварите в Източна Европа, особено в земите между Карпатите и река Днестър, до момента притеснява историците. Валтер Пол например твърди, че до въстанието на Кубрат, вероятно срещу тях, аварите са управлявали земите, простиращи се източно от Карпатите, отвъд река Днестър. Археолозите са скептични – с изключение на няколко находки от Будуряска ранноаварски коланни обкови не са открити никъде на север, изток и юг от Карпатите. Такива няма и в земите на север от Карпатите, които попадат в границите на Полша. Повечето находки от аварската епоха там са датирани в последната третина на VIII и първите десетилетия на IX век и са групирани на юг (Силезия и Малополша). Към края на късния аварски период могат да бъдат датирани и находките в Южна Румъния, особено тези от редица некрополи, разкопани във Влашко – в Султана, Извору и Обършия Ноуа. Със същата дата е и единствената находка от земите на изток от река Днестър (накрайникът, открит във Велика Круча, Полтавска област, Украйна). Находките от Румъния наскоро бяха

интерпретирани във връзка с елитите на ранносредновековните българи, но някои от тях имат явна символична роля в рамките на съответните гробни комплекси. Коланната апликация от гроб 304 в Извору например не е придружена нито от други елементи и накрайници, нито от тока. За разлика от коланните обкови в Южна Румъния, тези от Полша са или случайни находки, или са намерени в ранносредновековни крепости, някои от които несъмнено са били обитавани през IX в. В такива случаи те понякога са придружени от каролингски материали – ситуация, напояща за крепостите в Словения и Бохемия. Големият брой бракувани отливки, както и находките от поти и леярски капки от крепости в Бохемия, като Тишмице, предполагат много силно местно производство на коланни обкови от аварската епоха. Същото не е валидно за Полша, където внезапната поява на аварски предмети в земите на север от Судетите и Карпатите може би показва желанието на местните елити да използват механизмите за демонстриране на статуса (и, предполага се, на властта) в Аварския хаганат. Въпреки това е наистина изненадващо, че такъв интерес съвпада във времето с това, което историците смятат за период на упадък на аварското държавно устройство. В това отношение ситуацията в Полша е пряко сравнима с тази в Далмация, където местните елити започват да употребяват коланни гарнитури, имитиращи тези в Аварския хаганат през втората половина или дори последната третина на VIII в.

Символиката на аварските коланни обкови е използвана и от членовете на общности, които са погребвали мъртвите си в проучените некрополи в Южна Румъния. В контраст с тях никъде в земите на изток от Карпатите няма коланни апликации от аварската епоха. През втората половина на VIII и началото на IX в. този регион преживява нещо като демографски бум, както се вижда от големия брой селища. Има и укрепения, но реален стремеж за отбелязване на социален статус в материалната култура не може да бъде датиран преди средата на IX век. Следователно липсата на късноаварски коланни обкови трябва да се обясни с липсата на интерес към знаците на социален статус и претенции за власт. Разбира се, има ясни признаци на видимо потребление – изработена на колело керамика с излъскана украса и амфори, които може да са индикация за празненства, организирани от високопоставени лидери на общността. Първите признаци в земите на изток от Карпатите за политически водачи със социален статус, произтичащ от икономически привилегии, не могат да бъдат датирани преди втората половина на IX век. Колективната находка, която най-ясно се свързва с това явление, е съкровището от Радуканен, което съдържа сребърна торква, пръстен с „каменно“ гнездо и позлатена сребърна тока с коланни апликации – всички символи на висок социален статус. Нито един от тях няма нищо общо с аварската култура от миналия век, а някои от тях имат добри аналогии в териториите, които са част от Хазарския хаганат по това време. Някои дори са приписвани на маджарите. Когато знаците, маркиращи високо социално положение, стават необходими, езикът на представянето им е напълно различен от онзи, използван по-рано от елитите в Южна Полша, които подражават на аварите. В Източна Европа след 850 г. елитите подражават на хазарите, а не на аварите.

Ключови думи: авари, хазари, коланни обкови, социални елити, укрепления