

## ÁRPÁD-ERA COINS IN THE NECROPOLIS OF VĂLCANI\*

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**Cuvinte-cheie:** necropolă secolele X–XI, monede maghiare.

**Abstract:** The early medieval burial sites near Vălcani have been discovered alongside other archaeological elements dating from the Neolithic era to the Modern Age. The funerary site from the 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries has been much more varied than the former ones and is the biggest one in Banat. The 197 graves uncovered here constitute the biggest funerary site in the western part of today's Romania. The majority of the graves are orientated – with minor differences – in the W-E direction, but in some cases we registered E-W orientations too. The arms of the deceased were primarily found in very heterogeneous positions. Burials with horses were documented in ten cases, in four other cases only the horse trappings were deposited in the burials (stirrups, bits, harness buckles). As food preparation, some parts of the animals were placed in the graves (probably sheep). The material culture, like the ritual practices, is very heterogeneous: jewellery was registered (earrings, lock rings, rings, bracelets), weapons (bows, quivers, arrowheads), horse trappings (pear and trapeze shaped stirrups, horse bits, harness buckles), tools (needle case, needle, strike-a-lights), coins (Arpadian-issues). Some aspects of the material culture have connections with the material culture of the Late Avar Age (for example the needle case). In this article we have analyzed the Arpadian coins issued in the 11<sup>th</sup> century found in the necropolis – Stephen I (1), Andrew I (2), Solomon (3), unidentified (1) – and their analogies in the area of Banat, but also in the region extending to the north, delimited by the Criș River. While they correspond to previous finds in cemeteries in which the most recent coins are from the reign of Solomon (1063–1074), similarly to those finds, they do not provide new answers to the

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existing questions regarding the exact chronology or chronological sequence of the encountered monetary types of 11<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian coins.

**Rezumat:** *Siturile funerare medievale timpurii de lângă Vălcani au fost descoperite alături de alte elemente arheologice, care datează din neolitic până în epoca modernă. Situl funerar din secolele X–XI a fost mult mai variat decât cel anterior și este cel mai mare din Banat. Cele 197 de morminte descoperite aici constituie cel mai mare sit funerar din partea de vest a României de astăzi. Majoritatea mormintelor sunt orientate – cu mici diferențe – V-E, dar în unele cazuri am înregistrat și orientări E-V. Brațele defuncțiilor au fost înregistrate în poziții foarte diferite. În mormântările cu cai au fost documentate în zece cazuri, în alte patru situații fiind depuse în morminte doar elementele harnașamentului (scărițe, mânere, catarama de ham). Ca preparat alimentar, în morminte au fost depuse unele părți de animale (probabil ovi-caprine). Cultura materială, ca și practicile rituale, este foarte eterogenă: s-au înregistrat bijuterii (cercei, inele cheie, inele, brățări), arme (arcuri, tolbe, vârfuri de săgeți), accesorii pentru cai (etriere în formă de pară și trapez, zăbale, catarama de harnașament), unelte (tub de os pentru ac, ace de fier), monede (emisiuni arpadiene). Unele aspecte ale culturii materiale au legătură cu epoca avară târzie (de exemplu, tubul pentru ace). În acest articol, am analizat monedele arpadiene emise în secolul al XI-lea descoperite în necropolă – Ștefan I (1), Andrei I (2), Solomon (3), neidentificat (1) – și analogii ale acestora din zona Banatului, dar și din regiunea care se extinde spre nord, delimitată de râul Criș. Deși corespund unor descoperiri anterioare, din necropole în care cele mai recente monede sunt din timpul domniei lui Solomon (1063–1074), în mod similar descoperirilor respective, ele nu oferă răspunsuri noi la întrebările existente cu privire la cronologia exactă sau la succesiunea cronologică a tipurilor monetare întâlnite pe monedele maghiare din secolul al XI-lea.*

The opportunity of archaeological researches at Vălcani, Timiș County occurred with land development works through the mechanized levelling of a promontory, several graves having already been destroyed before the researches could have begun. Eventually, the works were stopped by the Timiș County Cultural Office, however, the land was partially damaged at the time.

The rescue operation was carried out in several stages. First, we managed to rescue the first graves (1–11) in the late autumn of 2019, which were heavily affected by the earthworks, with the bones basically unearthed, on the surface. In the summer of 2020, the research was carried out through 3–4 successive mechanized excavations on the same site together with the progressive research of the outlined tomb. As a result, the investigation revealed complexes from the Bronze-Age, the 7<sup>th</sup> century and the 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>1</sup>.

## The physical-geographic setting of the Vălcani site

The researched area is located 1.3 km southeast of the Aranca River, which in the past had countless meanders and backwaters that were periodically flooded. The landscape is a low, wet plain, with arising ridges and promontories with small differences in altitude from the flood zone<sup>2</sup>. The site is 2 km west of the present village (Fig. 1) and 600 m from the political border between Romania and Serbia.

<sup>1</sup> GÁLL, GINDELE, BLASKÓ 2023, p. 69–88.

<sup>2</sup> For a look at the geographical realities of the Banat area, see, for example, KÓKAI 2010, p. 17–36.

Road 59F, that leads from Vălcani to the Romanian-Serbian border, crosses a water regulation channel located about 500 m from the last houses of the village. Northwest of the bridge, about 200 m away, a ridge emerging from the flooded lowland was clearly visible.

In the first Austrian military topographical survey (1769–1772), a promontory is visible in the immediate eastern vicinity of the researched area, marked with the sign for a place of executions. This promontory, clearly visible in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, was probably just as clearly visible in the early Middle Ages, thus being destined to be a funerary site. This promontory is no longer illustrated on later maps, likely indicating that it was no longer used as an execution site and its purpose was changed to agricultural use, as shown by Austrian military surveys during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### The funerary site from the 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries

The 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries necropolis (Fig. 2), compared to the 7<sup>th</sup> century funerary site with 36 graves, is much more extensive, with 197 graves. It is a necropolis in rows, which characterizes the funerary sites from the 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>3</sup>. The majority of the graves were oriented, with minor differences, W-E, while some others were oriented in the opposite direction, i.e. E-W<sup>4</sup>. The shape of the grave pits is rounded square (some larger ones: no. 52 was 74 × 250 cm), and in several cases we were able to record *a step next to the walls of the pit*, at a depth of 30–40 cm from the level of the grave. Regarding the position of the deceased in the graves, in addition to the usual position, we were able to record crouched positions or placed on the right or left side.

The main characteristic is the rather significant number of horse burials (graves no. 22, 27, 53, 54, 91, 107, 113, 122, 145 and 161, that is, 5.07% of the graves, however, the percentage would be much higher if we knew the exact number of graves dating from the *pagan* period of the necropolis), which integrate Vălcani into the horse burial phenomenon of the 10<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, a nomadic cultural habitus.

Of the 197 burials, in approximately 29 cases, we find graves with richer inventories (graves no. 3, 11, 16, 21, 34, 80, 83, 84, 86, 95, 97, 111, 133, 146, 163, 172, 173, 186, 203, 205, 206, 222, 227, 240, 241, 244, 257 and 268), that is, 14% of the graves, while the other graves have poorer annexes or no grave goods at all. The main feature of these inventories are clothing items, mainly a significant amount of various jewellery, among which the inventories of graves no. 3 and 16 are noteworthy.

Several typical elements of material culture of the 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries were found in the investigated graves, including jewellery (earrings, lock rings, rings, bracelets), weapons (bows, quivers, arrowheads), harness elements, and tools (needle boxes, needles). In some cases, particularly in the graves with fewer goods, these are mixed with the elements of the previous era (tubes of hairpins, whip ends, or a shepherd's staff, respectively a famous item of the Avar era, the disentangling hook). Thus, by the nature of the inventory, it appears that in addition to the clear aspects of female and male material culture from the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the identification of aspects

<sup>3</sup> In this sense, see KOVÁCS 2013, p. 511–604, with bibliography.

<sup>4</sup> About the burials in the opposite direction from W-E, i.e. E-W, cf. GÁLL 2013, p. 597–601.

of material culture points out connections with the late Avar period (grave no. 207), posing many problems regarding the cultural origin(s) of the population buried at Vălcani.

### The position of the coins in the graves

The early medieval cemetery contains seven coins discovered in six of the 197 investigated graves. They were distributed as follows: grave no. 38 – an unidentified half coin (**Fig. 3**); grave no. 97 – a coin from Stephen I (1000–1038), type H.1 (**Fig. 5/1**); grave no. 99 – a coin from Stephen I, type H.1 (**Fig. 4/99/1**); grave no. 176 – a coin from Andrew I (1046–1060) type. H.9 (**Fig. 3/176/1**); grave no. 78 – two coins from Solomon (1063–1074), one type H.15 and one type H.17 (**Fig. 4/78/1–2**); grave no. 90 – an H.17-type coin (**Fig. 4/90/1**).

The literature generally identifies the coins deposited in graves from the 11<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> centuries are generally identified as funerary obols<sup>5</sup>; however, in the case of the Vălcani coins, the ritualistic role of some of them is seriously questioned. While in the case of the coins from graves no. 90, 99, and 176 their obol function is quite obvious, in graves no. 38 and 78, their positioning is difficult to explain, although we cannot exclude the possibility that they were moved as a result of disturbances. At the same time, the pierced medallion (the coin of Stephen I) can be considered as a jewel, along with the twisted gorget.

**Table 1.** The positions of the coins in the graves, respectively the issuer and their types.

No. 38	under the pelvic bone	?	Unidentified
No. 78/1	under the pelvic bone, next to the finger	Solomon (1063–1074)	H17
No. 78/2	under the pelvic bone, next to the finger	Solomon (1063–1074)	H15
No. 90	on the sternum	Solomon (1063–1074)	H17 (?)
No. 97	as a pierced medallion, in the mouth	Stephen I (1000–1038)	H1
No. 99	in the mouth	Stephen I (1000–1038)	H1
No. 176	in the mouth	Andrew I (1046–1060)	H9

### Analogies of the coins in 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup>-centuries necropolises of nearby regions (Map 1)

The Vălcani necropolis is part of the 11<sup>th</sup> century grave finds in the area of the confluence of the Mureş, Tisa, and Aranca Rivers. Among the burial sites that underwent archaeological research, Hungarian coins from the 11<sup>th</sup> century were found in Banatsko Aranđelovo, Novi Kneževac municipality<sup>6</sup>, Deszk<sup>7</sup>, and Kiszombor<sup>8</sup>. On the basis of these discoveries, the analysis of analogies is geographically expanded in the southern direction in Banat, and in the northern direction, to the Criş River.

<sup>5</sup> About the discoveries of obols in the area of the Transylvanian Basin, the Crişana, Ierului, and Banat areas, cf. GÁLL 2013, p. 613–615, with bibliography.

<sup>6</sup> KOVÁCS 1992, p. 37–74.

<sup>7</sup> BÁLINT 1991, p. 218, no. 56.

<sup>8</sup> KÜRTI 2008.

Stephen I's coins provided a dating of the cemeteries at Hodoni<sup>9</sup> and Szentes-Kistőke<sup>10</sup>, where these coins are the only ones to be found. In the researched region, they were also found in necropolises containing coins from later periods, such as those from Gerendás<sup>11</sup> (the most recent from Andrew I), Hódmezővásárhely-Kopáncs<sup>12</sup> (the most recent from Solomon), Csanytelek<sup>13</sup>, and in Várşand<sup>14</sup> – both with the most recent coins issued by Ladislaus I (1077–1095).

Andrew I's coins were found in the necropolises at Fábiansebestyén<sup>15</sup> and Hódmezővásárhely-Rárós<sup>16</sup>, Gerendás<sup>17</sup>, and Pădureni<sup>18</sup>. In burial sites that have the most recent coins from Solomon, they are found at Szegvár<sup>19</sup> and Szentes-Szentlászló<sup>20</sup>, and in burial sites with the latest coinage from Ladislaus I, at Csanytelek<sup>21</sup>, Deszk<sup>22</sup>, Kiszombor<sup>23</sup>, Szentes-Kaján<sup>24</sup>, Gyomaendrőd<sup>25</sup>, and Várşand<sup>26</sup>.

In the burial sites at Hódmezővásárhely-Kopáncs<sup>27</sup>, Szentes-Szentlászló<sup>28</sup>, Szegvár<sup>29</sup>, and at Elek<sup>30</sup>, Solomon's coins are the most recent ones. Coins of the same king are found in six other burial sites where the most coins are issues of Ladislaus I, at Csanytelek<sup>31</sup>, Hódmezővásárhely-Barcirét<sup>32</sup>, Gyomaendrőd<sup>33</sup>, Örménykút<sup>34</sup>, Várşand<sup>35</sup>, and Banatsko Aranđelovo<sup>36</sup>.

Both Andrew I's and Solomon's coins can also be found in necropolises where later issues, up to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, were also discovered such as those from Biharkeresztes<sup>37</sup> – with the most recent one from Coloman (1095–1116);

<sup>9</sup> BEJAN, MOGA 1979, p. 155–168; GÁLL 2013, p. 228–235, and Vol. II pl. 107/Gr. 2, gr. 4.

<sup>10</sup> FEHÉR, ÉRY, KRALOVÁNSZKY 1962, p. 73, no. 1012–1013.

<sup>11</sup> DIENES 1965, p. 136–174.

<sup>12</sup> PÁRDUCZ 1943, p. 183–192.

<sup>13</sup> SZÉLL 1941, p. 245–255.

<sup>14</sup> MEDGYESI 1995, p. 98–118; GÁLL 2013, p. 207–225.

<sup>15</sup> FEHÉR, ÉRY, KRALOVÁNSZKY 1962, p. 36, no. 308.

<sup>16</sup> FEHÉR, ÉRY, KRALOVÁNSZKY 1962, p. 41, no. 405.

<sup>17</sup> DIENES 1965, p. 136–174.

<sup>18</sup> GÁLL 2013, p. 478.

<sup>19</sup> BENDE, LŐRINCZY 1997, p. 201–285.

<sup>20</sup> SZÉLL 1941, p. 233–244.

<sup>21</sup> SZÉLL 1941, p. 245–255.

<sup>22</sup> BÁLINT 1991, p. 218, no. 56.

<sup>23</sup> KÜRTI 2008.

<sup>24</sup> FEHÉR, ÉRY, KRALOVÁNSZKY 1962, p. 73, no. 1009.

<sup>25</sup> MEDGYESI 2015, p. 63.

<sup>26</sup> ROSKA 1941, p. 45–61; MEDGYESI 1995, p. 98–118; GÁLL 2013, p. 207–225.

<sup>27</sup> PÁRDUCZ 1943, p. 183–192.

<sup>28</sup> SZÉLL 1941, p. 233–244.

<sup>29</sup> BENDE, LŐRINCZY 1997, p. 201–285.

<sup>30</sup> MEDGYESI 1996, p. 197–206.

<sup>31</sup> SZÉLL 1941, p. 245–255.

<sup>32</sup> BANNER 1937, p. 50–69.

<sup>33</sup> MEDGYESI 2015, p. 63.

<sup>34</sup> LISKA 1996, p. 175–208.

<sup>35</sup> ROSKA 1941, p. 45–61; MEDGYESI 1995, p. 98–118; GÁLL 2013, p. 207–225.

<sup>36</sup> KOVÁCS 1992, p. 37–74.

<sup>37</sup> MESTERHÁZY 1990, p. 50–57.

Magyarhomorog<sup>38</sup> – with the most recent one from Stephen II (1116–1131); Békés-Povádzug<sup>39</sup>, – both having Béla II's (1131–1141) coinage as the most recent.

The presence of Stephen I, Andrew I, and Solomon's coins within the same necropolis was observed at Csanytelek<sup>40</sup> and Várşand<sup>41</sup>. Outside the area, this simultaneous presence can be seen in necropolises dated later, such as Biharkeresztes<sup>42</sup>, Magyarhomorog<sup>43</sup>, and Hajdúdorog<sup>44</sup>.

In addition to the discovery in grave no. 78 from Vălcani, which contains two coins from Solomon, in the analysed area, the simultaneous presence of several coins in a single grave can also be observed in the necropolises of Szentés-Szentlászló, Csanytelek, and Banatsko Aranđelovo. In these cases, Solomon's coin is found alongside an unidentified coin at Csanytelek<sup>45</sup> and alongside two coins of Ladislaus I at Banatsko Aranđelovo<sup>46</sup>. The association of two coins from the reign of Solomon is also confirmed in the necropolises near the northern bank of the Crişul Repede River, at Biharkeresztes<sup>47</sup>, and at Magyarhomorog<sup>48</sup>. In light of coin couplings in the graves, while pre-Solomon issues co-occur with earlier issues, Solomon's coins co-occur only with later coins from Ladislaus I.

Within the settlement network from the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries in the micro-region south of the Aranca River – since the coins from Teremia Mică are unidentified – the Vălcani necropolis is the only one with a dateable coin. Among the burial sites that underwent archaeological research in the area of the Mureş–Tisa–Aranca Rivers, the majority do not contain coins, while those containing coins are dated later than the Vălcani cemetery, with coins from the reign of Ladislaus I.

The early medieval necropolis at Vălcani is congruent with other burial sites from the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries in the researched area that contain coins, thorough the simultaneous presence of Stephen I, Andrew I, Solomon coins. Just as in the case of the burial sites discussed above, at Vălcani, Solomon's coins are not simultaneously present alongside older coins in the same grave.

In regard of the numismatic material, the necropolis is consistent with the previous discoveries, but like these, it does not offer any new information regarding the question of the chronology of Arpadian monetary types from the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>38</sup> KOVÁCS 2006, p. 215–248.

<sup>39</sup> TROGMAYER 1962, p. 9–38.

<sup>40</sup> SZÉLL 1941, p. 245–255.

<sup>41</sup> ROSKA 1941, p. 45–61; MEDGYESI 1995, p. 98–118; GÁLL 2013, p. 207–225.

<sup>42</sup> MESTERHÁZY 1990, p. 50–57.

<sup>43</sup> KOVÁCS 2006, p. 215–248.

<sup>44</sup> AH 1996, p. 226–231.

<sup>45</sup> SZÉLL 1941, p. 246, grave no. 25.

<sup>46</sup> KOVÁCS 1992, p. 47, grave no. 2/1903.

<sup>47</sup> MESTERHÁZY 1990, p. 50, grave no. 95.

<sup>48</sup> KOVÁCS 2006, p. 20, graves no. 335 and no. 482. In grave 93, Solomon's coin is coupled with an unidentified coin.

## Regarding the inventories in the graves

Even if the coins represent a definite *post-quem* term, it is also useful to analyse the other goods discovered in these graves. Of the six graves, in graves no. 97 and 99, other types of goods beside numismatic material have been identified.

Simple loop rings from grave no. 99 are very interesting, because in most cases these types of jewellery are associated with much earlier items, being dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> century<sup>49</sup>. At the same time, in our case, the identification of the coins discovered in the graves dates these simple loop rings (1a-b)<sup>50</sup> much later, in the second part of the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

In the case of the twisted torques made of bronze alloy, their dating is accepted in the second half or the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, but the massive-heavy ones can be dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> century<sup>51</sup> (Fig. 6/5). In the case of Válcáni, this earlier observation is reinforced by the dating of the coin and the discovery of the Kovács 3*b*-type bracelet with zoomorphic decoration, previously dated exclusively to the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century<sup>52</sup>. Therefore, the observation gains new support from grave no. 97 (Fig. 5/3, Fig. 6/4), dated by a pierced *H1* coin.

## Conclusions

1. From a planimetric point of view, the graves with horses or with inventories of weapons, apart from grave no. 91, are not part of the group of graves dated with coins. In the current phase of the research, we can state that from the point of view of relative and absolute chronology, the graves with coins are the latest. At the same time, considering the significant number of elements specific to the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century (e.g.: trapezoidal stirrups<sup>53</sup>), the necropolis was probably in use from the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 2).

2. For the relevance of dating the graves with coins, they certainly offer a clear *post-quem*, but no precision regarding the burial period. Thus, based on the planimetry of these burials, at the current stage of the research, it seems to us that they represent the last phase of the burials<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> GÁLL 2013, p. 640–660.

<sup>50</sup> GÁLL 2013, p. 654–655.

<sup>51</sup> SZŐKE 1962, p. 92–94; GIESLER 1991, p. 116–120, pl. 53; KOVÁCS 1994, p. 115.

<sup>52</sup> KOVÁCS 1994, p. 131, Abb. 31/3b.

<sup>53</sup> GÁLL 2015, p. 373–377.

<sup>54</sup> In order to clarify these dilemmas, we are planning on carrying out radiocarbon analyses in the case of the dated coins (also).

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**Fig. 1.** The position of the archaeological site in the microregion: 1 – Today (Google Earth.com); 2 – On the First Military Survey map, 1782–1785 (maps.arcanum.com).

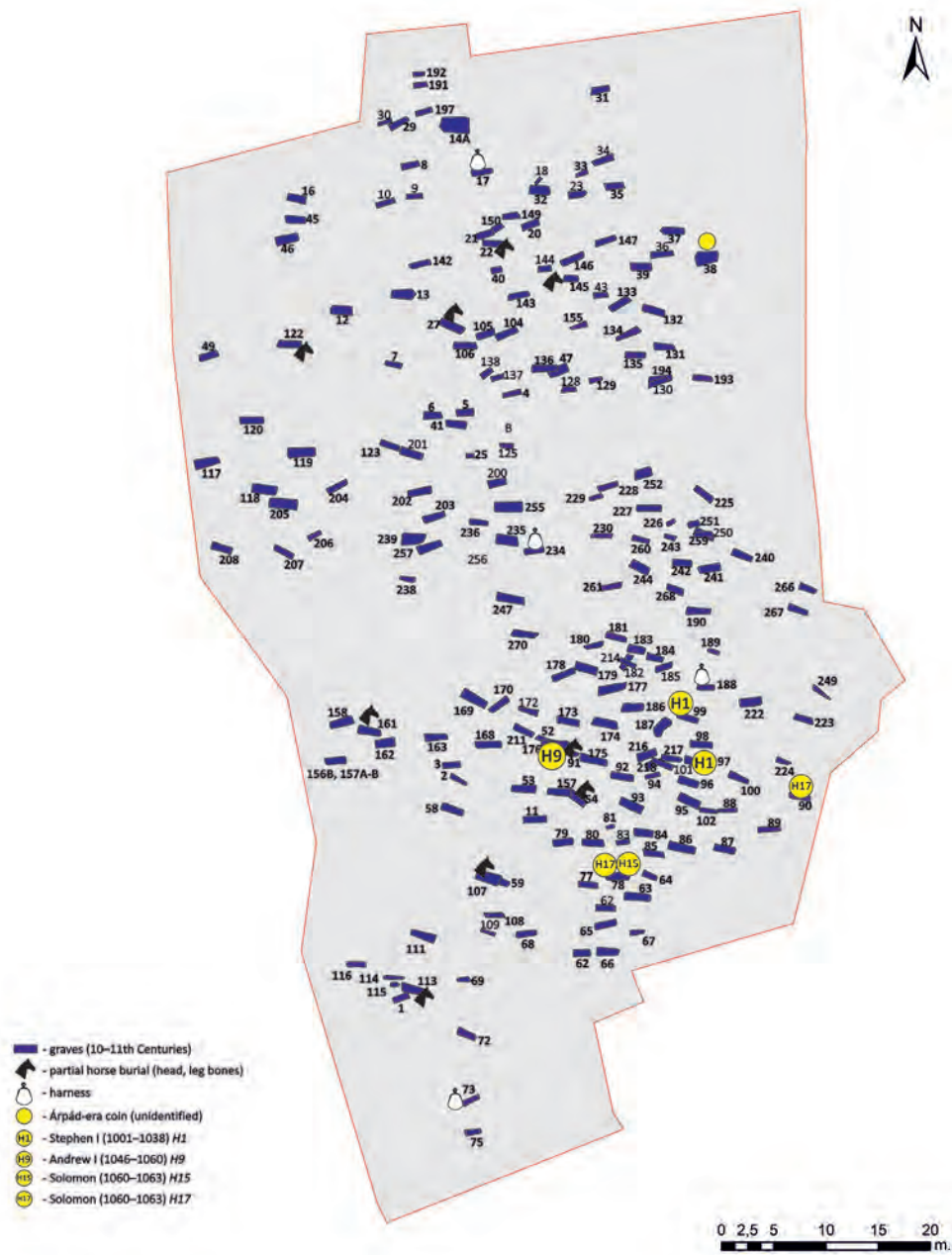


Fig. 2. Survey map of the 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup>-centuries funeral site.

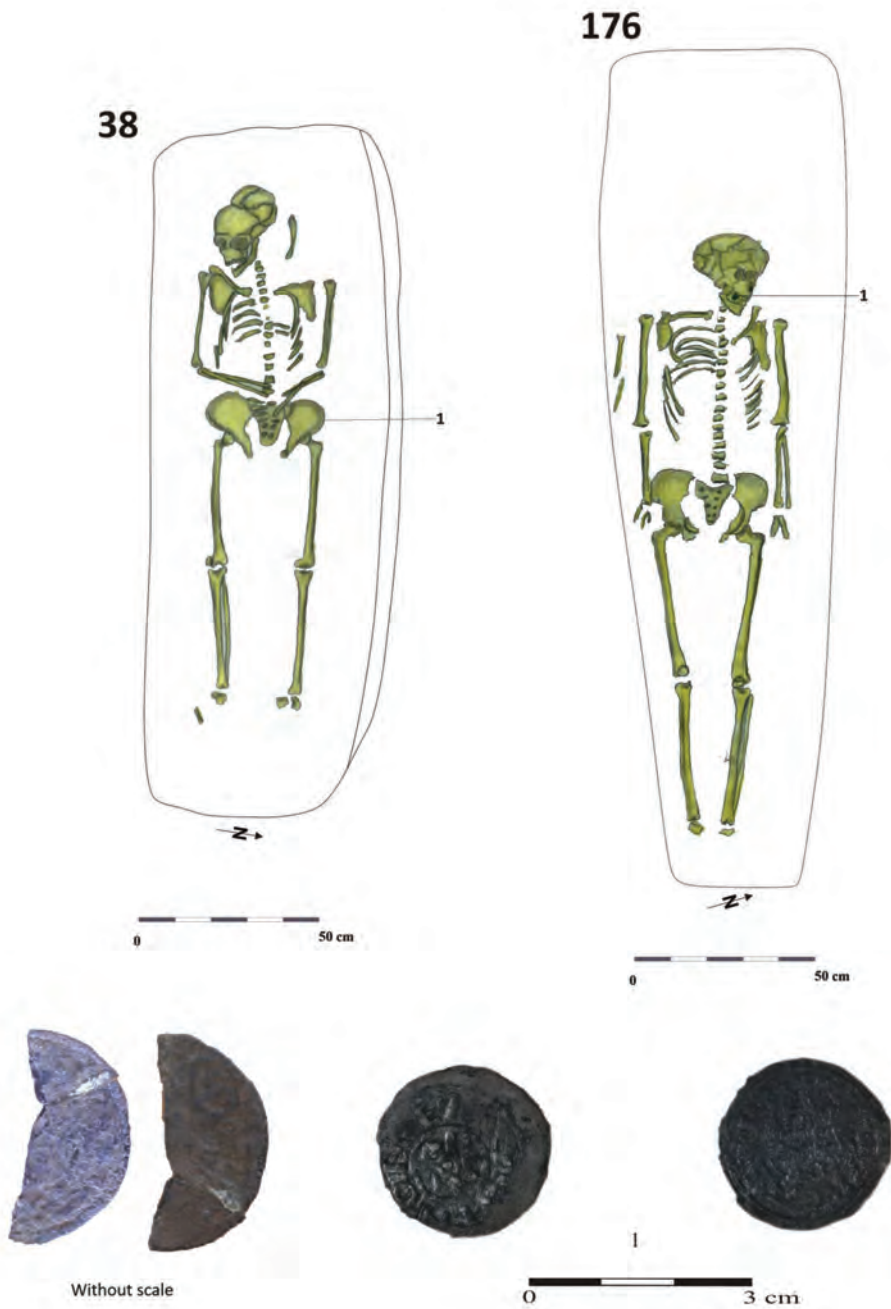


Fig. 3. Funerary inventory in graves nos. 38 and 176.

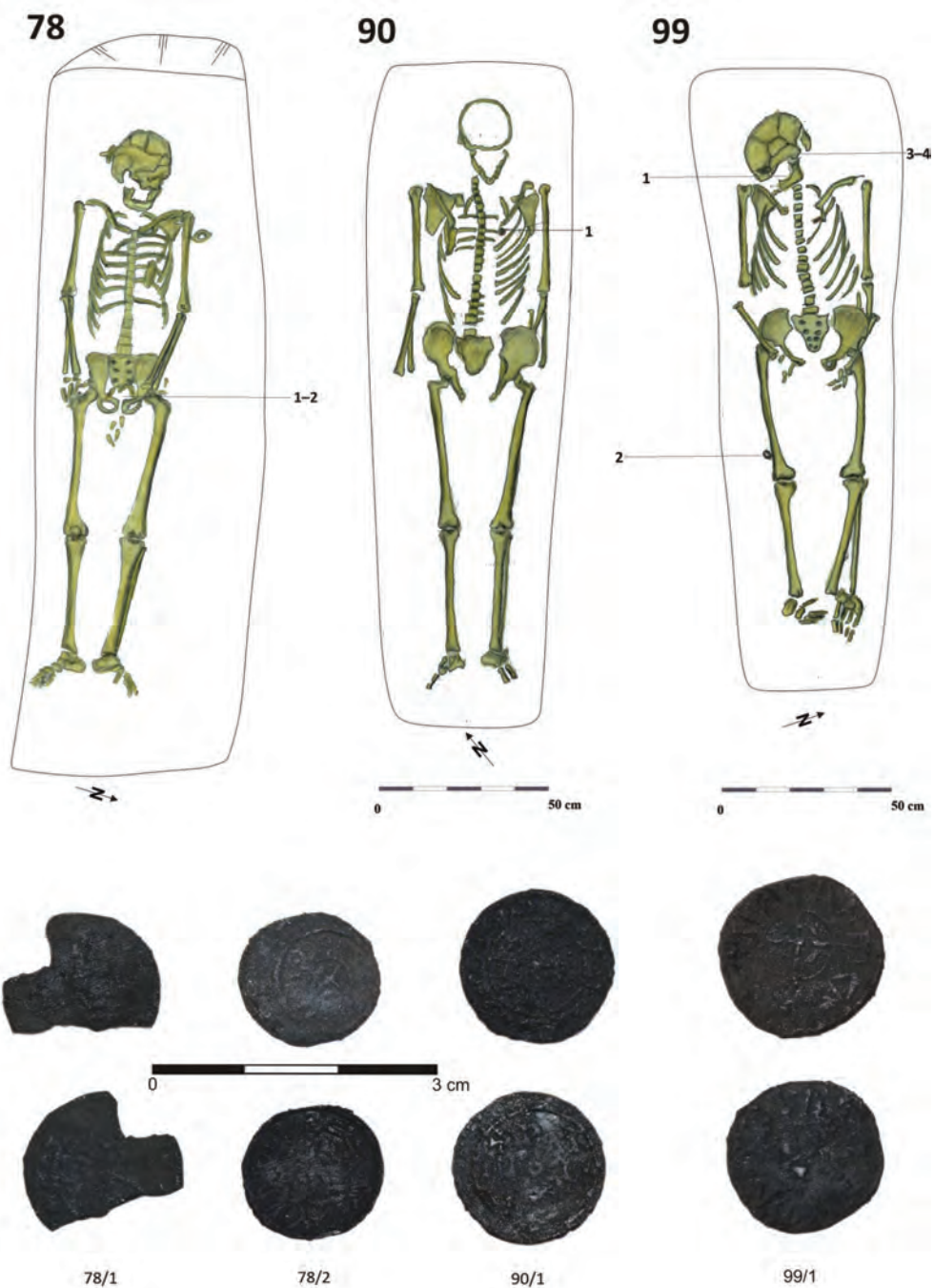


Fig. 4. Funerary inventory in graves nos. 78, 90 and 99.

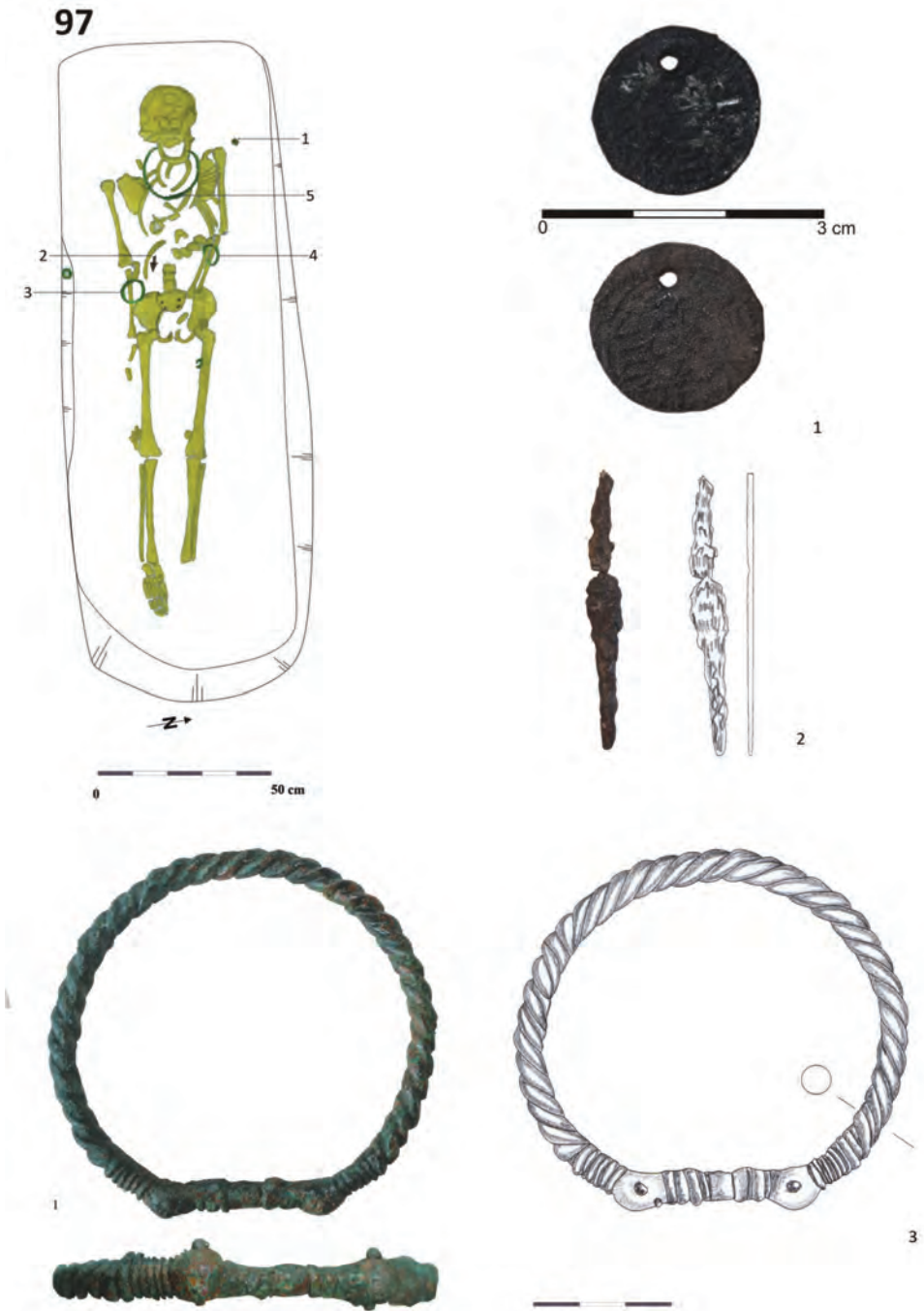


Fig. 5. Funerary inventory in grave no. 97.

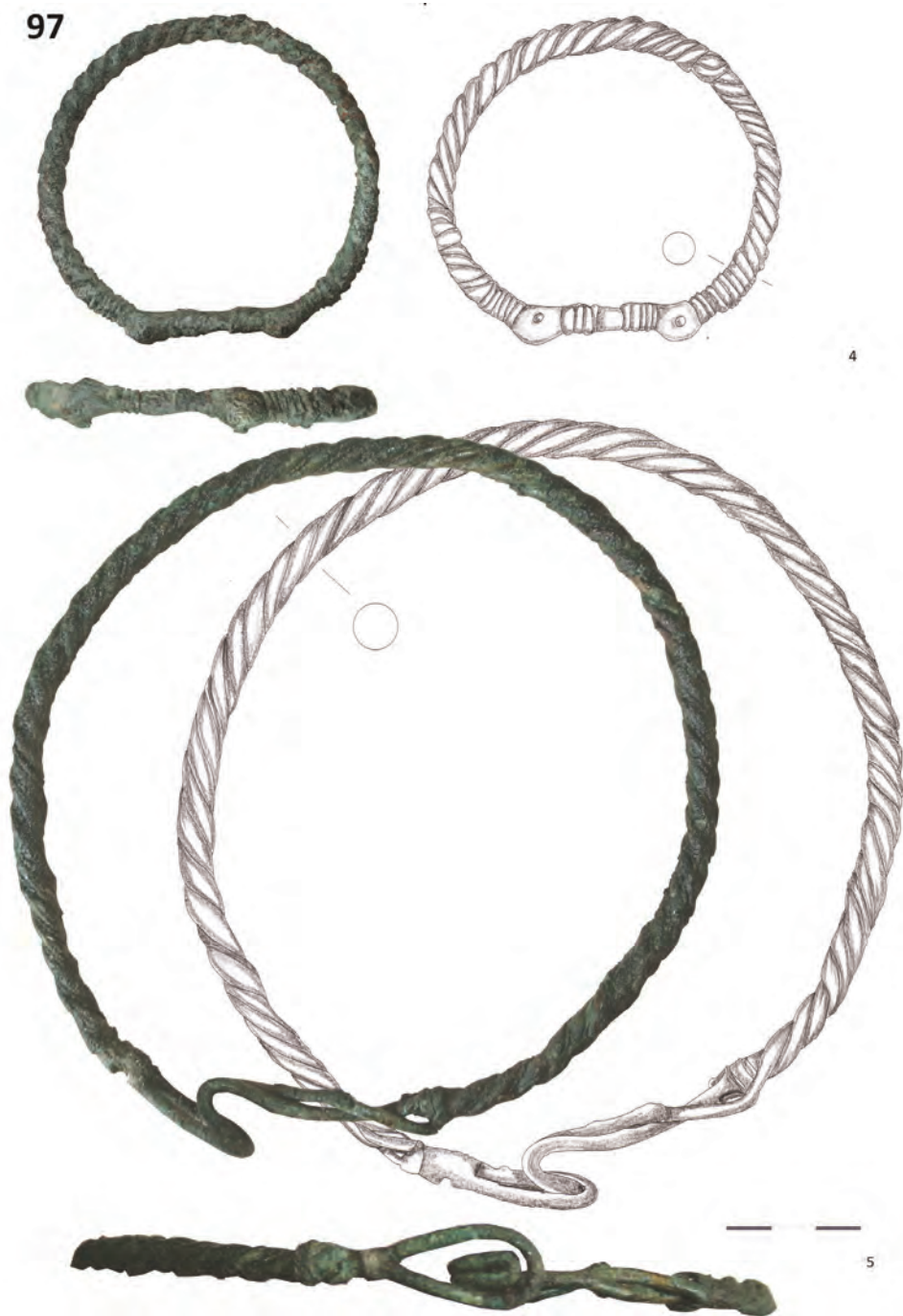
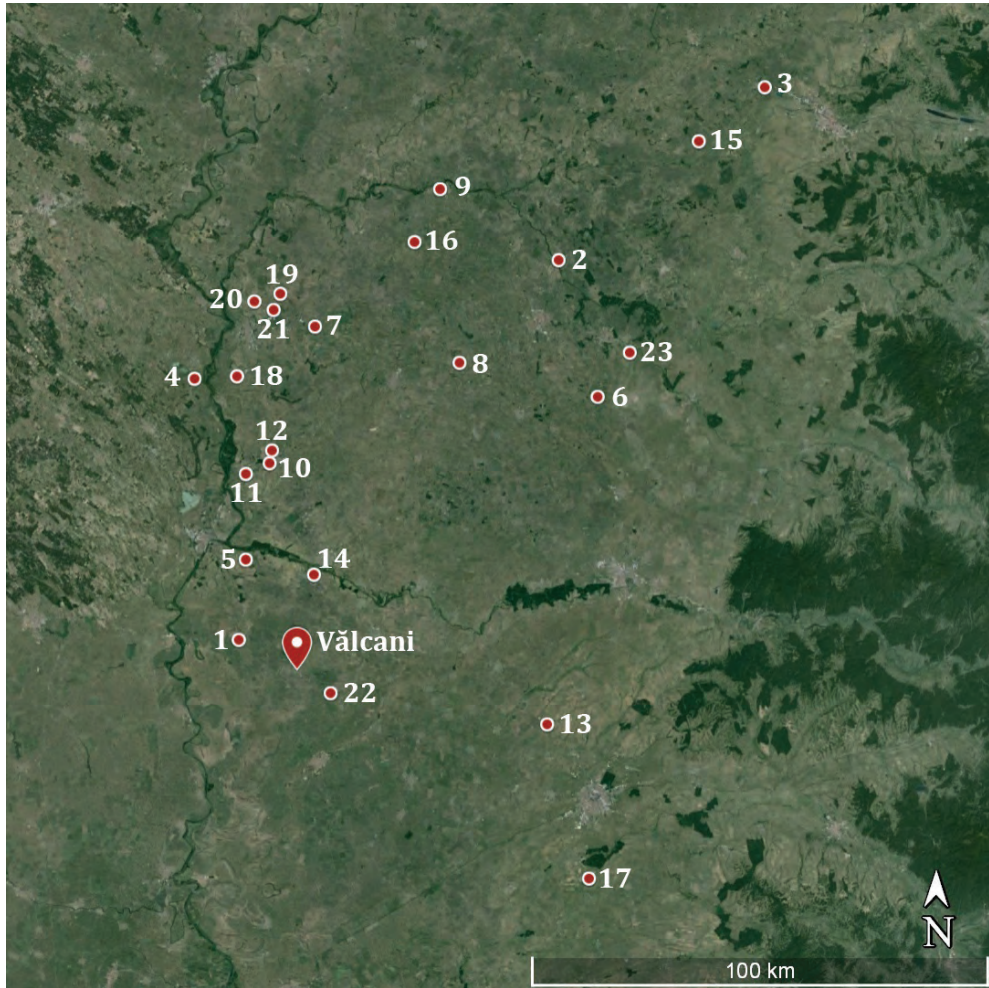


Fig. 6. Funerary inventory in grave no. 97.



**Map 1.** The list of the discoveries mentioned in the text: 1 – Banatsko Arandelovo; 2 – Békés; 3 – Biharkeresztes; 4 – Csanytelek; 5 – Deszk; 6 – Elek; 7 – Fábiánsebestyén; 8 – Gerendás; 9 – Gyomaendrőd; 10 – Hódmezővásárhely-Barcirét; 11 – Hódmezővásárhely-Kopáncs; 12 – Hódmezővásárhely-Rárós; 13 – Hodoni; 14 – Kiszombor; 15 – Magyarhomorog; 16 – Örménykút; 17 – Pádureni; 18 – Szegvár; 19 – Szentes-Kaján; 20 – Szentes-Kistóke; 21 – Szentes-Szentlászló; 22 – Teremia Mică; 23 – Várşand.