

AKADÉMIAI KIADÓ

Graves of the early medieval nomads from the eastern Azov region

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Archaeologiai Értesítő

148 (2023) 1, 29–48

DOI:

10.1556/0208.2023.00044

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Received: May 5, 2023 • Accepted: August 24, 2023

Published online: September 18, 2023

STUDY



ABSTRACT

Described and discussed here are the “nomadic” burials of two sites, Serbin and Udarnyi (Krasnodar Krai, Russia). A total of four graves were found at the former Serbin site, while an early medieval grave dug into a prehistoric kurgan was excavated at Udarnyi. The burials broadly date from the fourth–seventh centuries AD on the basis of their poor grave inventories and are culturally related to the so-called post-Hunnic- and Sivashovka-type burials. Three burials contained the skulls and limbs of various domestic animals, indicating that the animals had been skinned. “Head and hooves” deposits were quite common in early medieval Eastern Europe. There are several different traditions of skinning, indicating different cultural traditions. The study describes the burials and their finds, and presents their regional parallels.

KEYWORDS

Kuban region, post-Hunnic period, Sivashovka-type burials, burial rites, skinned animal remains

ABSZTRAKT

Ebben a cikkben Udarnij és Szerbin (Krasznodári határterület, Oroszország) települések határában feltárt két lelőhely „nomád” temetkezéseit mutatjuk be. Az előbbi lelőhelyen négy, míg az udarniji kurgánban kora középkori sírt került elő. A temetkezések a szegényes leltár alapján a Kr. u. 4–7. századra datálhatók, és kulturálisan az ún. poszt-hun és a Szivasovka-típusú temetkezésekhez tartoznak. A temetkezések közül háromban különböző háziállatok koponyáit és végtagjait találták meg, ami arra utal, hogy a bőrt megnyúzták. Ez a rítus meglehetősen gyakori volt a kora középkori Kelet-Európában. A nyúzásnak többféle hagyománya van, ami különböző kulturális hagyományokra utal. A következőkben regionális párhuzamokat mutatunk be.

KULCSSZAVAK

Kubán vidéke, poszt-hun időszak, Szivasovka-típusú temetkezések, temetkezési szokások, nyúzott állatmaradványok

INTRODUCTION

Systematic research on the population groups of the Eastern European steppe between the fifth to seventh centuries has been underway since the 1980s, but still grapples with several unresolved issues. The most important problem is the small number of published graves, with little more than 100 known from the area between the Dniester and the eastern Ural region.¹ Therefore, each new site sheds important new light on these communities. Two new sites in the Kuban Basin are presented below, with a detailed analysis of the burial rites and the artefact types from the graves.

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¹For the most recent overview of this, see Gulyás (2022).

SERBIN-1

Between August and November 2021, ITC Spetsialnyi Rabot Ltd. excavated the Serbin-1 site (Krasnodar Krai, Slaviansk-na-Kubani District) (Fig. 1. 1), where, in addition to settlement remains dating to the third to sixth centuries BC, graves from various other periods were also found. Four of them can be dated to the early Middle Ages (Fig. 2).

Grave 5

The grave pit was roughly rectangular with rounded corners, gradually widening from west to east (Fig. 3). The pit was filled with medium-dense blackish-brown loam. The body of the deceased man (30–35 years old) was laid centrally along the long axis of the pit in a supine position.² The skull was slightly tilted to the left, facing upwards. The right arm, not preserved, was probably extended beside the body. The left arm was bent at the elbow and the hand was placed on the pelvis. The legs were extended. There were traces of enamel hypoplasia on the teeth and osteophytosis and Schmorl nodes were identified on the bones. The muscular relief was moderately developed on the long bones of the upper limbs, and weakly on the long bones of the lower limbs. Orientation: ENE–WSW. L.: 1.97 m; W.: 0.4–0.68 m; depth (from the modern surface): 1.36 m.

Grave inventory: **1.** Single-edged iron sword beside the skeleton, adjacent to the left hand (Fig. 3. 2, Fig. 4. 1). Straight blade, slightly tapered towards the tip, with rectangular, slightly widening tang with rounded tip and two iron rivets for reinforcing the hilt. Wood remains were preserved on the tang and the blade. Total L.: 87.3 cm; L. of blade: 73 cm; dimensions of the blade at the base: 3.4 × 1.2 cm; L. of tang: 10.5 cm; dimensions of the tang: 2.1 × 0.9 cm. **2.** Bimetallic buckle on the spine (Fig. 3. 3, Fig. 4. 2). The broken oval frame is made of iron with rounded cross-section. The iron tongue is curved, slightly projecting, and bent over the frame. Two slender rectangular copper sheets are folded over the frame for the buckle plate, which was attached to the belt with a rivet. Dimensions of frame: 2.8 × 2 cm; diam. of rod: 0.4 cm; L. of plate: 2.7 cm; W. of plate: 0.6 cm; Th. of plate: 0.1 cm; diam. of rivet: 0.2 cm; L. of rivet: 0.7 cm; L. of tongue: 3.1 cm; W. of tongue: 0.4–0.6 cm; Th. of tongue: 0.4–0.6 cm. **3.** Bronze staple-shaped artefact by the left elbow joint (Fig. 3. 1, Fig. 4. 5). Made of a thin rod with rectangular cross-section. It has a rectangular shape; its ends are open; one end is missing. Dimensions: 3.1 × 1.4 cm; cross-sectional dimensions: 0.3 × 0.2 cm. **4.** Fragment of an iron object (possibly a strike-a-light) on the left femur, partially under the radial bones of the left hand (Fig. 3. 5, Fig. 4. 3). Flat, wedge-shaped with curved sides and rounded ends. L.: 9.2 cm; W.: 3.4 cm; Th.: 0.6 cm. **5.** Flint under the iron object (Fig. 3. 6, Fig. 4. 4). Trapezoidal; light brown with whitish specks. Retouching and blocking on the facets are visible on its

surface. Dimensions: 2.2 × 2.1 × 1 cm. **6.** Fragmented iron object (possibly an awl) by the left hip joint (Fig. 3. 4, Fig. 4. 6). One end is rounded with a broken tip, the other has a rectangular cross-section. There are wood remains on the flattened part. Diam. of round part: 0.5 cm; dimensions of flattened part: 0.6 × 0.4 cm. **7.** Iron combat(?) knife by the left femur (Fig. 3. 7, Fig. 4. 7). Single-edged knife with slightly curved back, triangular blade and a collar between the tang and the blade. There are wood remains on the tang. The tip of the blade is missing. L.: 18.4 cm; cross-sectional dimensions of the blade: 2.1 × 0.5 cm; cross-sectional dimensions of the collar: 2.5 × 1.2 cm; cross-sectional dimensions of the tang: 1.9 × 0.4 cm.

Grave 12

Niche grave (Figs 5 and 6). The entrance pit had an irregular rectangular shape with rounded corners. It was filled with blackish-brown loam of medium density. The body of the buried man (40–45 years old) was laid in the niche, extended on his back. The skull faced upwards, slightly tilted to the right. The arms were extended beside the body, the right arm was slightly bent at the elbow. The hands were not preserved. The legs were extended with the heels touching. The feet were missing. Cervical caries was noted on the preserved teeth. A slight wear of the articular surfaces, strongly developed muscular relief of the lower extremities, especially on the tibia, and osteophytosis of the lumbar spine was observed. Orientation: ENE–WSW. L. of entrance pit: 2.1 m; W. of entrance pit: 0.6 m; depth of entrance pit (from the modern surface): 1.53 m; depth of niche (from the modern surface): 1.7 m.

Grave inventory: **1.** Skull and limbs (without hooves) of a horse in the entrance pit. It lay in an extended position, oriented to the east-northeast (Fig. 6. 2). **2.** Iron knife by the left hip joint (Fig. 5. 2, Fig. 7. 1). Single-edged knife with rectangular tang and straight back; the blade has a triangular cross-section. There are wood remains on its surface. Total L.: 12 cm; the L. of tang: 3.2 cm; W. of blade: 2.3 cm; Th. of blade: 0.8 cm. **3.** Iron buckle on the right pelvic bone (Fig. 5. 1, Fig. 7. 2). An elongated lyre-shaped buckle. Dimensions: 3.6 × 2.3 × 0.8 cm. **4.** Whitish-brown flint between the legs (Fig. 5. 3, Fig. 7. 3). It is elongated tetrahedral-shaped. The surface is retouched and chipped. Dimensions: 4.2 × 2.2 × 1.7 cm.

Grave 13

The grave pit was rectangular with rounded corners (Fig. 8). It was filled with blackish-brown loam of medium density. The buried child (8–9 years old) was extended on the back, along the long axis of the burial pit. The skull rested on the occipital bones with the face upward. The bones were poorly preserved; the spine, the thorax, and the left arm were missing. The right arm was extended beside the body, the hand was also missing. The legs were extended, with only the thigh bones preserved. The permanent teeth show traces of enamel hypoplasia. Orientation: ENE–WSW. L.: 1.77 m; W.: 0.48 m; depth (from the modern surface): 1.61 m.

²The anthropological analysis of the Serbin graves was carried out by Ye. G. Zubareva.



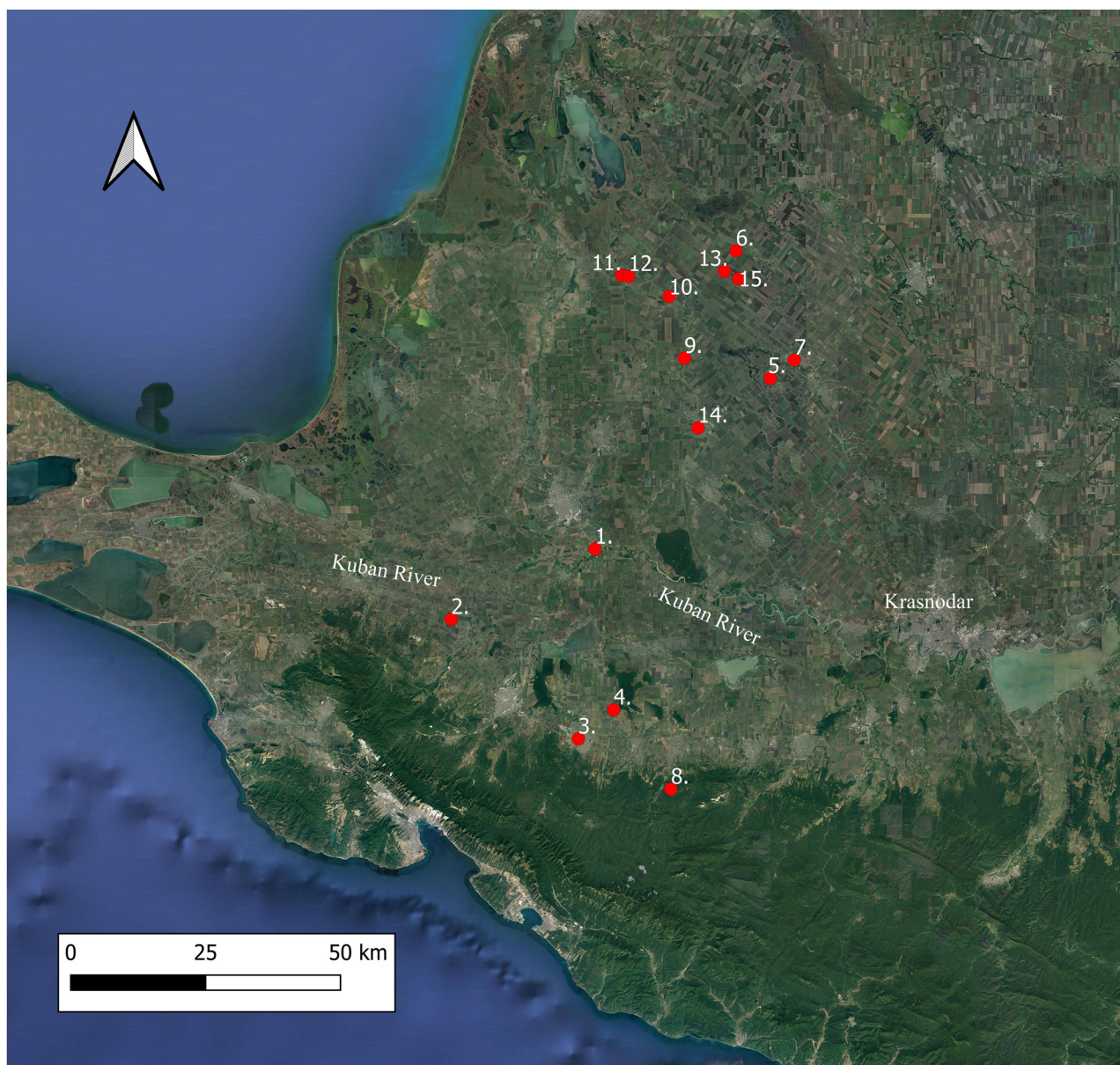


Fig. 1. Early medieval nomadic burials in the Kuban region

1. kép. Kora középkori nomád lelőhelyek a Kubán vidékén

1: Serbin; 2: Udarnyi; 3: Abinsk; 4: Bugundyr; 5: Chapaevskiy; 6: Greki; 7: Kalininskaia; 8: Kholmokoe; 9: Krupskoy; 10: Lebedi I; 11: Lebedi IV; 12: Lebedi VIII; 13: Malai; 14: Staronizhesteblievskaia; 15: Vostochnyi Malai

Grave inventory: 1. Two irregularly shaped, pyramidal amber beads on the skull (Fig. 8. 1, Fig. 10. 1, 2). They were drilled from one side. Dimensions: 1.1×1.1 cm and $1.3 \times 1.2 \times 1.1$ cm. 2. Segmented bead made of opaque black glass on the right humerus (Fig. 8. 2, Fig. 10. 3). Dimensions: 1×0.3 cm.

Grave 14

The grave pit was rectangular with rounded corners and was filled with black-brown loam of medium density (Fig. 9). The body of the buried woman (55–60 years old) was laid in a supine position along the long axis of the grave pit. The skull rested on the occipital bones, with the face upwards.

The skeletal bones are poorly preserved; the spine, thorax, pelvis, and right arm were missing. Part of the left humerus is preserved. Judging by its position, the left arm was extended beside the body. The legs were extended, touching at the knees; the feet were missing. Orientation: ENE–WSW. L.: 2.45 m; W.: 0.8 m; depth (from the modern surface): 1.8 m.

Grave inventory: 1. Skull fragments, the first *phalanx* and two *metapodia* of a small ruminant behind the human skull, by the eastern wall of the grave pit (Fig. 9. 1, 2). 2. 20 glass and stone beads under the mandible (Fig. 9. 1.1, Fig. 10. 4–23). Dimensions: $0.3 \times 0.3 \times 0.3$ – $1 \times 1 \times 0.7$ cm. There are different types:

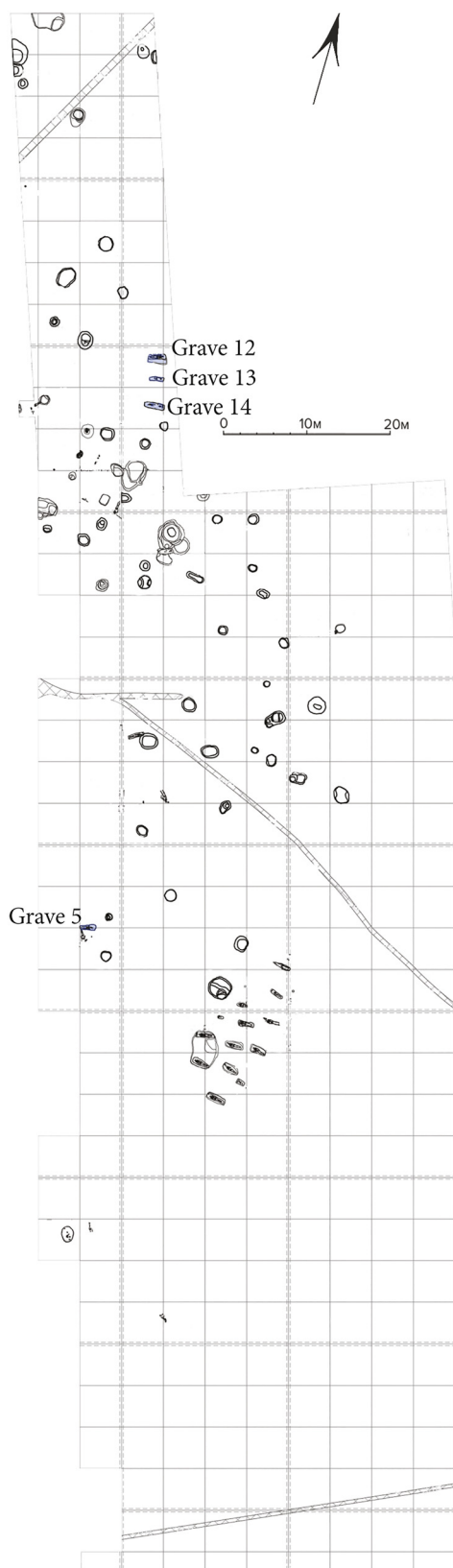


Fig. 2. Serbin-1. Plan of the site
2. kép. Szerbin-1. A lelőhely térképe

a) Three flattened spherical carnelian beads of red-orange-white colour. The perforation was bilaterally drilled; b) Small flattened spherical chalcedony bead of opaque white colour – the perforation was bilaterally drilled; c) Spherical glass bead of light blue colour; d) Two flattened spherical glass beads of dark colour; e) Three millet-shaped black glass beads; f) Ten amber beads of irregular shape and different sizes. 3. Fragment of an iron knife on the left hip (Fig. 9. 1.2, Fig. 10. 24). Single-edged; the blade has a triangular cross-section and straight back. The tip and the tang are missing. L.: 5.2 cm; W.: 1.9 cm; Th.: 0.7 cm.

UDARNYI-I MOUND

The site is located between the villages of Keslerovo and Kievskoe (Krymsk District) (Fig. 1. 2). The kurgan was first found in 2011, and excavated in 2022. The early medieval grave described here was uncovered in 2022.

Grave 6

The grave was found in the central trench; the form and the dimensions of the grave pit were not observed (Figs 11 and 12). It was dug into the fill of the original barrow built over Grave 4. The skull and phalanges 1–3 of the four limbs of a 6–7 years old stallion were found immediately above the human skeleton at a depth of 0.78 m. The hide covered the lower legs and feet of the deceased; the skull of the horse was oriented to the north. The second molar in the animal's upper jaw was pre-mortem deformed, possibly due to malnutrition. The proximal end of the left foreleg was cut (Fig. 12. 2).³ The body of an adult man (25–35 years old) lay underneath the horse bones. The body was laid extended on the back. The skull was turned to the right and faced west. The skull was artificially deformed, of the fronto-occipital type (Fig. 12. 3). The arms were extended and tightly pressed against the body, with the hands under the pelvis. The legs were also extended parallel and tightly pressed together, with the knees touching and the heels turned outwards. Judging by the position of the bones, the deceased had been very tightly wrapped or bound. Orientation: N–S. Depth: 0.8–1.15 m. It was located 8.18 m north of the centre marker of the barrow.

Grave inventory: 1. Skull and limbs (without hooves) of a horse on the legs of the deceased. It was in a folded position and oriented to the north (Fig. 11. 1, Fig. 12. 1). 2. Four fragments of an iron object (perhaps a knife) under the pelvis, beside the right arm (Fig. 11. 1.3, Fig. 13. 3). Single-edged with straight back; the blade has a triangular cross-section and sloping shoulders under the rectangular tang. Reconstructed L.: 24.5 cm; W. of blade: up to 2.8 cm; Th. of blade: up to 1.3 cm; W. of tang: 1.7 cm; Th. of tang: 0.55 cm. 3. Four fragments of another iron object (perhaps another

³The archaeozoological analysis was carried out by A. E. Chushkin.

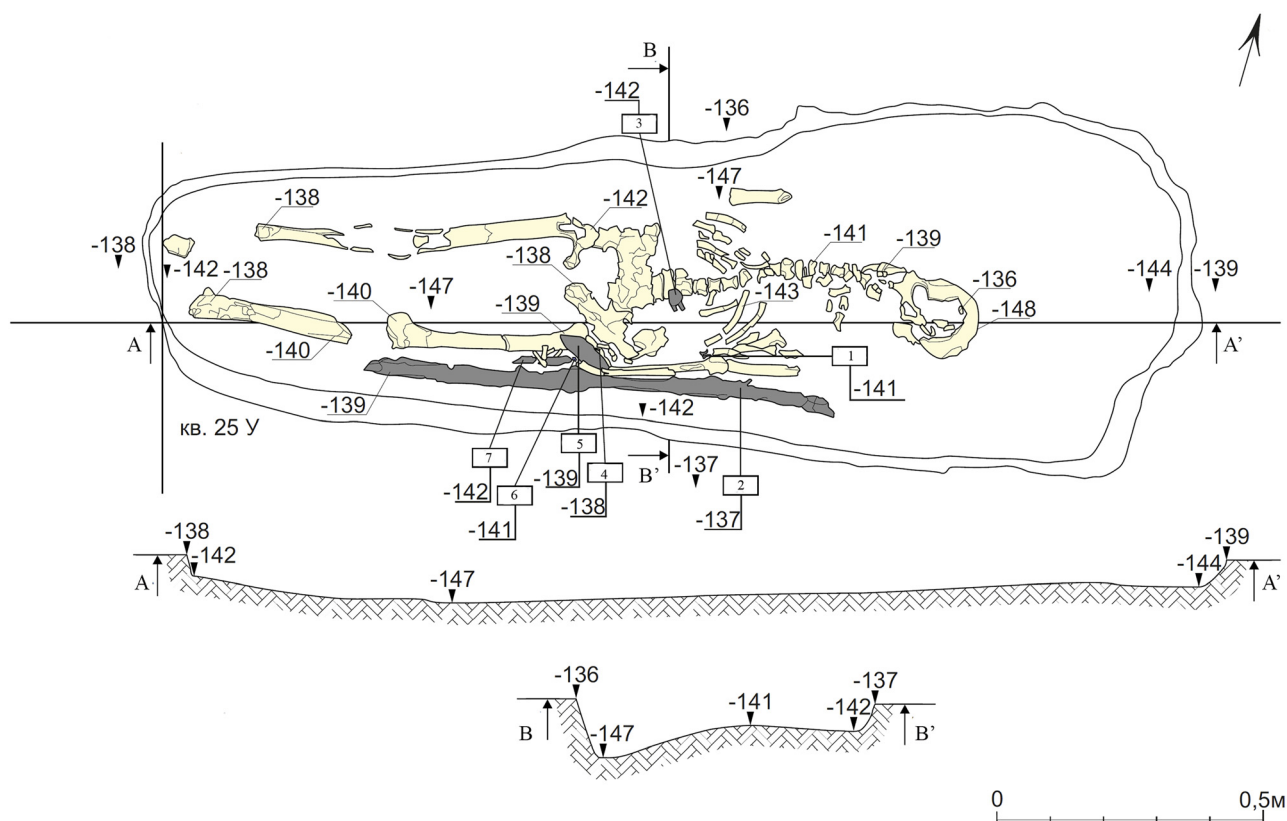


Fig. 3. Serbin-1. Grave 5
3. kép. Szerbin-1. 5. sír

knife) beside the previous item (Fig. 11. 1.4, Fig. 13. 4). Single-edged with straight back; the blade has a triangular cross-section. The tang is flat and has a rectangular shape. Reconstructed L.: 16 cm; W.: up to 2.3 cm; Th.: up to 0.5 cm; W. of tang: 1.4 cm; Th.: up to 0.6 cm. 4. Fragmented iron object (perhaps a strike-a-light) between the man's legs, near the left femur (Fig. 11. 1.2, Fig. 13. 2). It has a rectangular shape. Dimensions: 1.6 × 1.4 × 0.8 cm. 5. Fragmented flint between the legs, close to the left femur (Fig. 11. 1.1, Fig. 13. 1). Blade-like rectangular form, shaped with retouching and chipped surface; grey with yellow specks. Dimensions: 3.9 × 1.15 × 1.1 cm.

THE BROADER AREA OF THE SITES

The two sites are located in Krasnodar Krai on the eastern coast of the Sea of Azov. Systematic research has been carried out in the region since the 1970s, in the course of which some 20 nomadic burials dating from the fifth to the seventh centuries have been investigated (Fig. 1).⁴ Most date from the period between the later sixth century and the middle third of the seventh century and represent the so-called Sivashovka type. Only Grave 3 of Mound 35 in Kalininskaia

can be dated to the Hunnic period, while Grave 12 of Mound 1 in Vostochnyi Malai to the post-Hunnic period between the later fifth and the earlier sixth century.⁵

Looking at the geographical distribution of the sites, a particular pattern can be noted. The vast majority of the excavated graves are located north of the Kuban River, in the Kalinin district, with only the Abinsk, Kholmiskoe, and the above-presented Udarnyi burials located south of the river. In this area, in addition to the steppe groups, we can also expect to find so-called Pashkovskaia-Karpovka-type burial assemblages. This population is most often associated with indigenous groups, although other theories have also been put forward.⁶ The site closest to the steppe is the small cemetery at Varnavinskoe-3, which also shows strong nomadic influences.⁷

BURIAL RITES

Nature of the sites

The two study sites represent different types. Serbin-1 is a small group of four graves. This type of site is rare on the Eastern European steppe, with more than one burial

⁴Atavin (2008); Chkhaidze (2010); Chkhaidze (2011); Limberis and Marchenko (2011); Skarbovenko and Lifanov (2012); Kondrashev et al. (2017).

⁵Limberis and Marchenko (2011) 420, 438–439; Kazanskyi (2020) 92.

⁶Cf. Mast'ykova et al. (2016) 99–106.

⁷Sukhanov and Sviridov (2018).

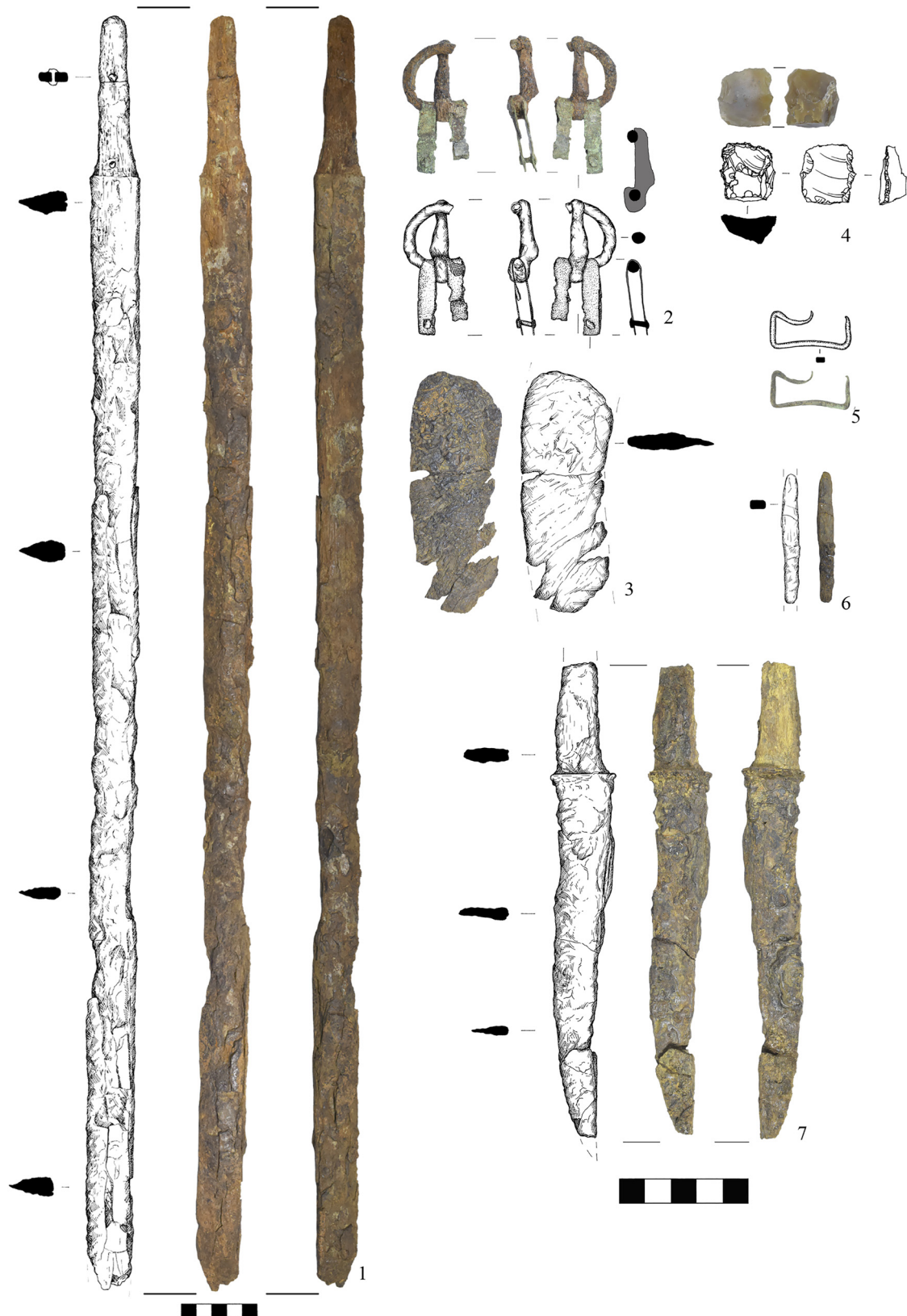


Fig. 4. Szerbin-1. Inventory of Grave 5
4. kép. Szerbin-1. Az 5. sír leletanyaga

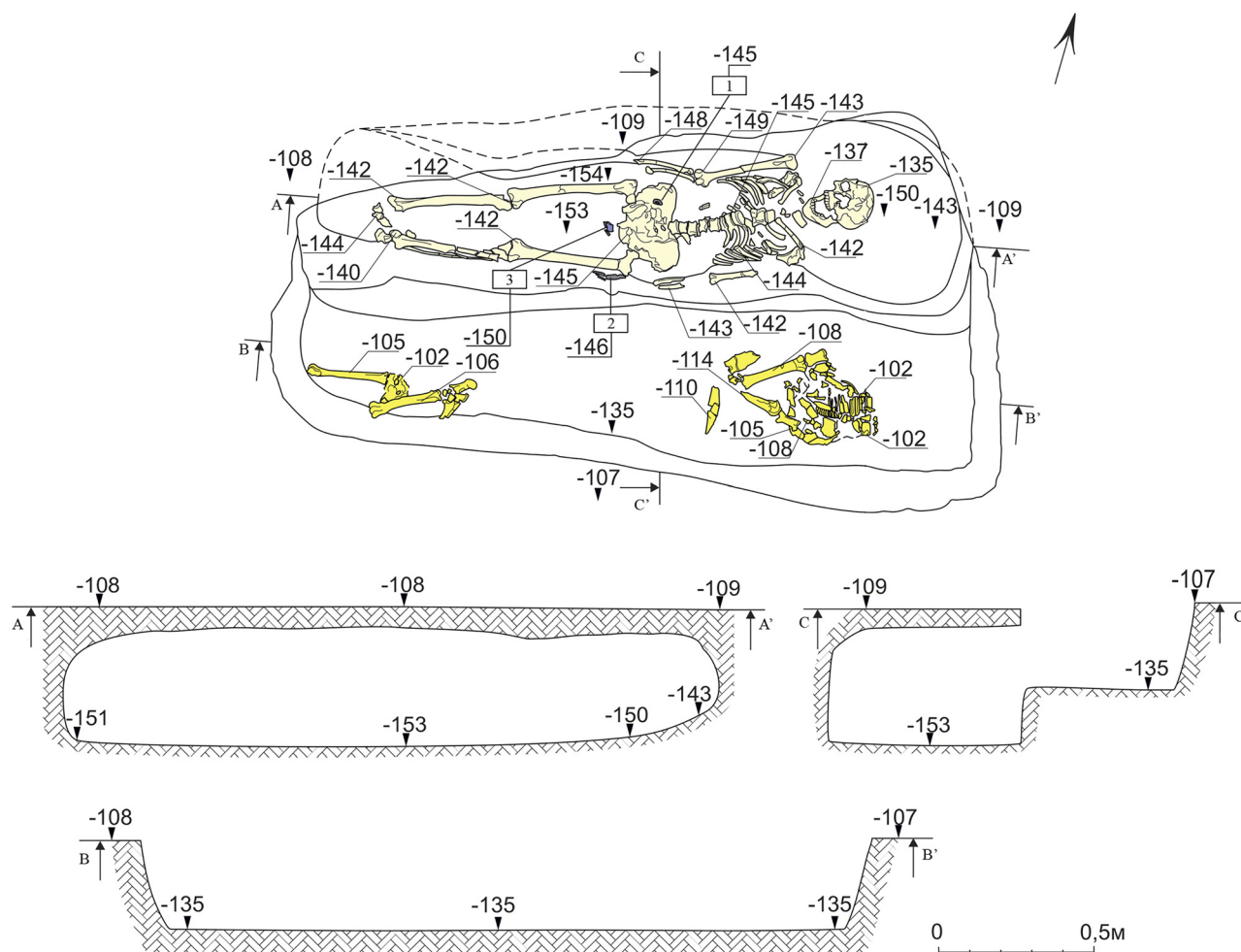


Fig. 5. Szerbin-1. Grave 12
5. kép. Szerbin-1. 12. sír

documented in only one of four cases.⁸ Four graves were found in only two cases. At Lebedi-IV, the burials were dug into three mounds.⁹ The site of Ryabovka-3 in the basin of the Vorskla River has more in common with Szerbin, where there were also graves without mounds; however, only one adult and three child burials were found there.¹⁰

The grave at Udarnyi was a solitary burial, dug into an earlier kurgan. Early medieval steppe graves in Eastern Europe were generally found singly, a phenomenon documented for three-quarters of the sites. They are widespread across the steppe, dating from the Hunnic period to the middle third of the seventh century.¹¹ R. Rashev considered the use of earlier mounds as one of the period's distinctive features.¹² According to the most recent survey, 80% of the period's graves were dug into earlier, mainly Bronze and

Iron Age mounds. The secondary burials are mostly located in the middle of the mound or, as observed in Udarnyi, in its north-northeastern sector.¹³

Orientation

Different orientations were documented at the Szerbin and Udarnyi sites. At the former, the graves were oriented ENE–WSW, which can be interpreted as a variant of the E–W alignment. This appeared sporadically on the steppe as early as the Hunnic period¹⁴ and gradually became dominant from the sixth century, characterizing about 60% of the graves. They are relatively evenly distributed across the steppe, being only less common in the Volga region.¹⁵ It is also attested in the Kuban region, where six graves were oriented E–W.¹⁶

⁸Gulyás (2022) 325.

⁹Skarbovenko and Lifanov (2012) 24–29.

¹⁰Oblomskyi and Terpilovskiy (1993).

¹¹Gulyás (2022) 324.

¹²Rashev (2007) 70.

¹³Gulyás (2022) 330–331.

¹⁴Zasetskaia (1994) 19.

¹⁵Gulyás (2022) 336.

¹⁶Atavin (2008) 28; Chkhaidze (2010) 51, 54; Skarbovenko and Lifanov (2012) 24–28.

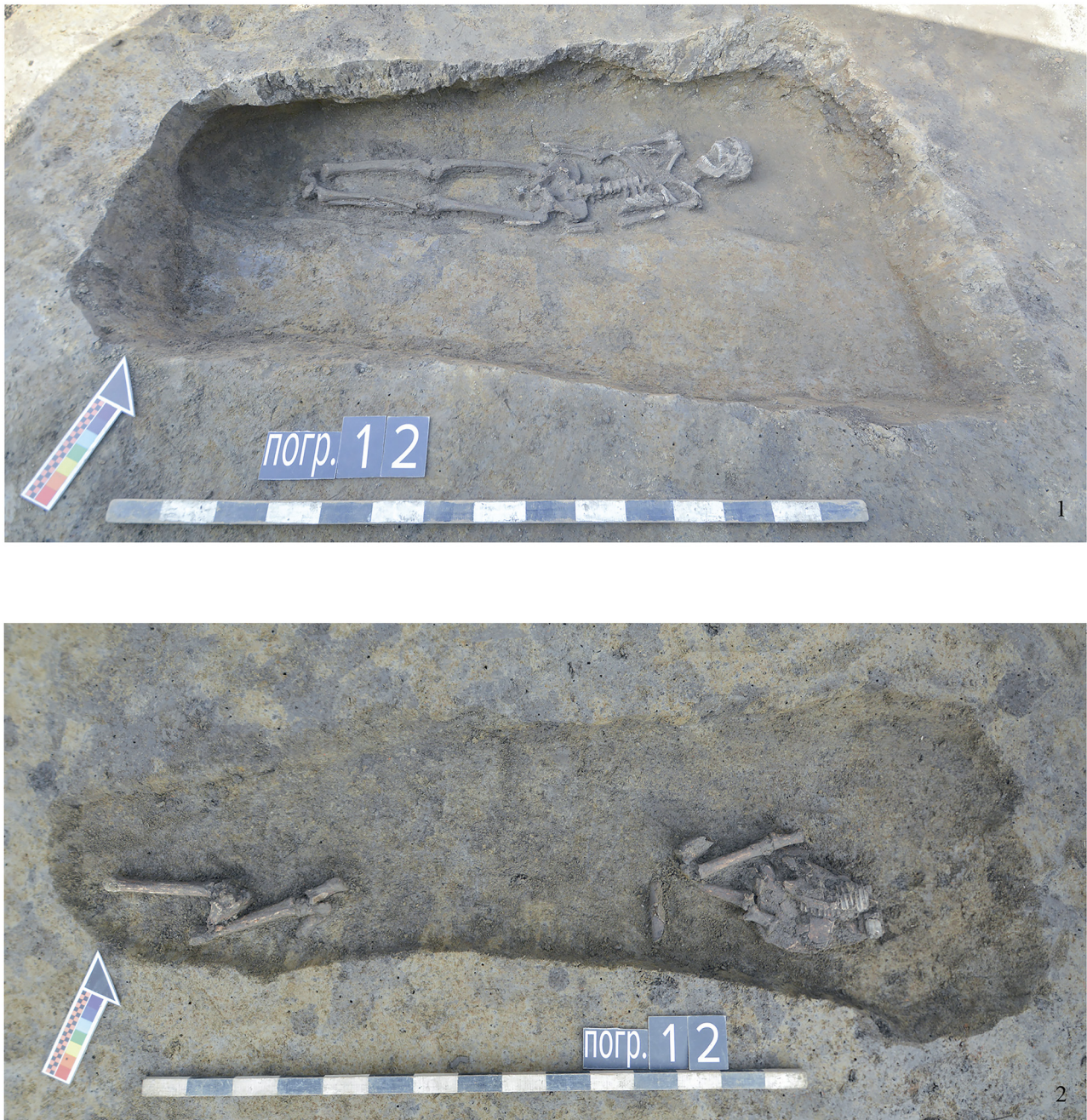


Fig. 6. Serbin-1. Photos of Grave 12
 6. kép. Szerbin-1. A 12. sír részletfotói

The N–S orientation was already dominant in the Volga region in the late Sarmatian period and became more widespread in both Eastern and Central Europe during the Hunnic period.¹⁷ Between the later fifth century and the middle third of the seventh century, its importance waned, with this orientation remaining typical for no more than about one-quarter of all graves,¹⁸ most of which date to the post-Hunnic period. For the later burials, the N–S

orientation was documented by O. Komar and his co-authors among the different Bulgarian tribes.¹⁹ In the Kuban region, this orientation is rare, observed only for Grave 6 of Mound 2 at Lebedi-VIII mound 2 and Grave 1 of Mound 8 at Staronizhesteblienskaia.²⁰ The former is usually dated to the later sixth century, while the dating of the latter is contested: it is traditionally dated to the second half or the

¹⁷Moshkova (2009) 93; Zsetskaia (1994) 19; Rácz (2016) 307.

¹⁸Gulyás (2022) 338.

¹⁹Komar et al. (2006) 369.

²⁰Skarbovenko and Lifanov (2012) 29; Atavin (2008) 40.



Fig. 7. Szerbin-1. Inventory of Grave 12
7. kép. Szerbin-1. A 12. sír leletanyaga

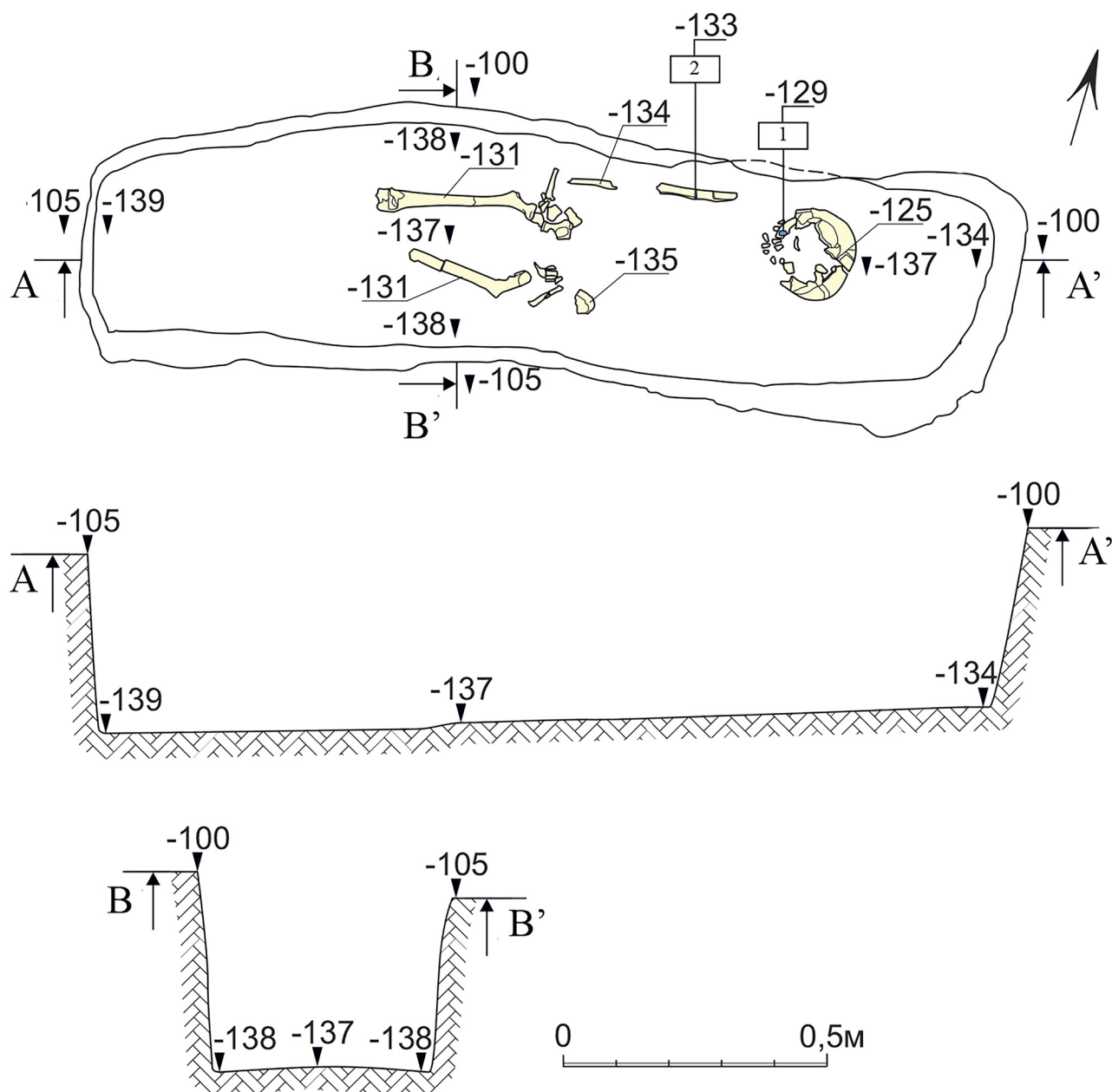


Fig. 8. Serbin-1. Grave 13
8. kép. Szerbin-1. 13. sír

end of the seventh century, but we believe that this dating is uncertain due to the uniqueness of the grave goods.²¹

Forms of the grave pit

Of the examined graves, we only have data on the form of grave pit for the four burials from Serbin. Three of these are simple pit graves. About one in three burials were deposited in simple grave pits on the Eastern European steppe. They are typically long and narrow, with a side ratio ranging from 2.1 to 4.4.²² This applies to the Serbin graves as well, where the ratio was 3.6, 3.7, and 3.1.

Thirty-six niche graves are known from the Eastern European steppe, which accounts for just over one-third of all graves. According to P. Somogyi, they were earlier known mainly in the Volga region, but more recent research indicates that they are distributed more evenly.²³ Nevertheless, in the Kuban region, only the burials of Grave 6 of Mound 1 at Greki II, Grave 12 of Mound 1 at Vostochnyi Malai II, Grave 2 of Mound 2 at Vostochnyi Malai II, and, hypothetically, Grave 6 of Mound 2 at Lebedi VIII can be

²¹Atavin (2008) 39; Komar (2006) 102, 115; Gulyás (2022) 190.

²²Gulyás (2022) 342–343.

²³Somogyi (1987) 145; for the distribution of niche graves, see Gulyás (2022) 348, Fig. 33.

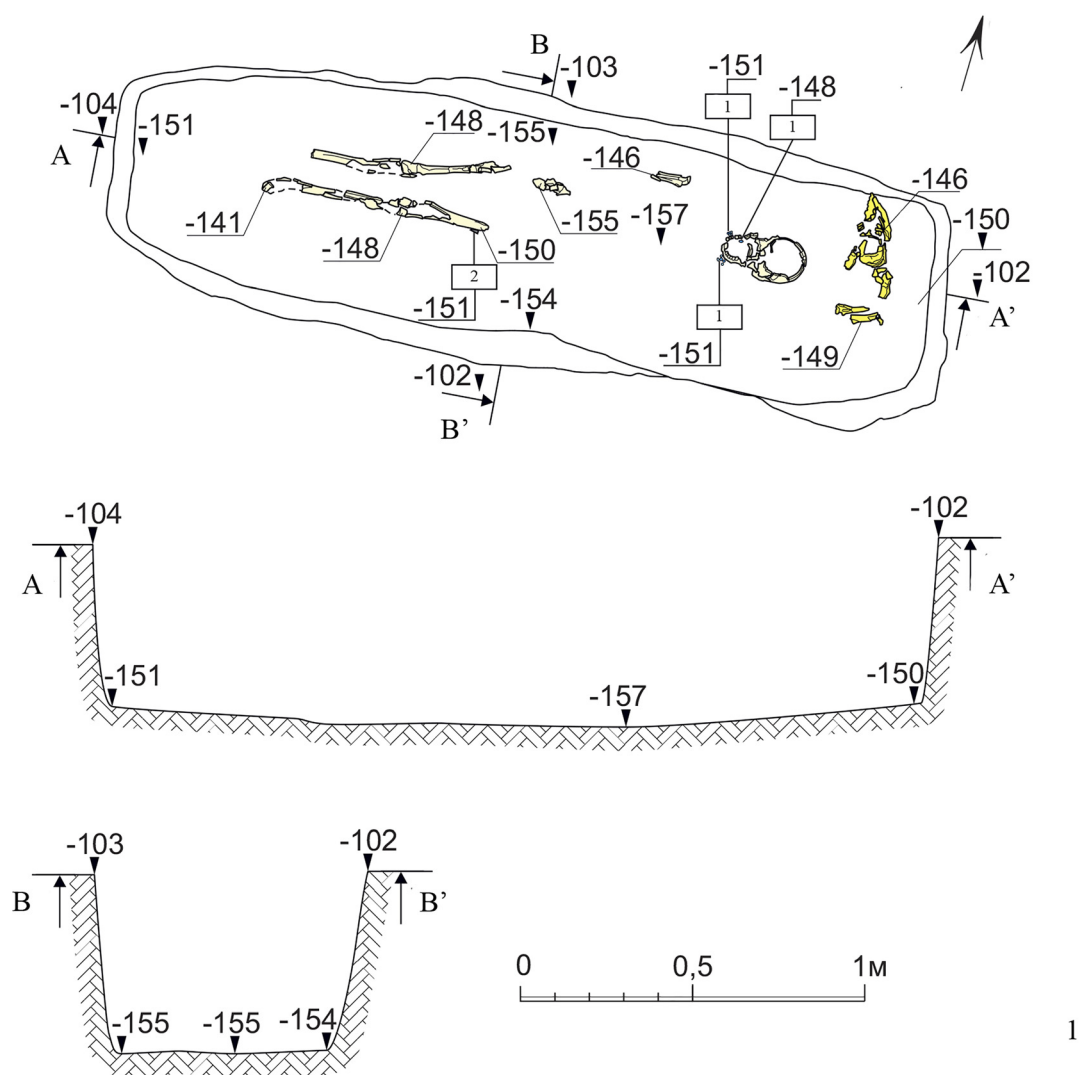


Fig. 9. Serbin-1. Grave 14
9. kép. Szerbin-1. 14. sír

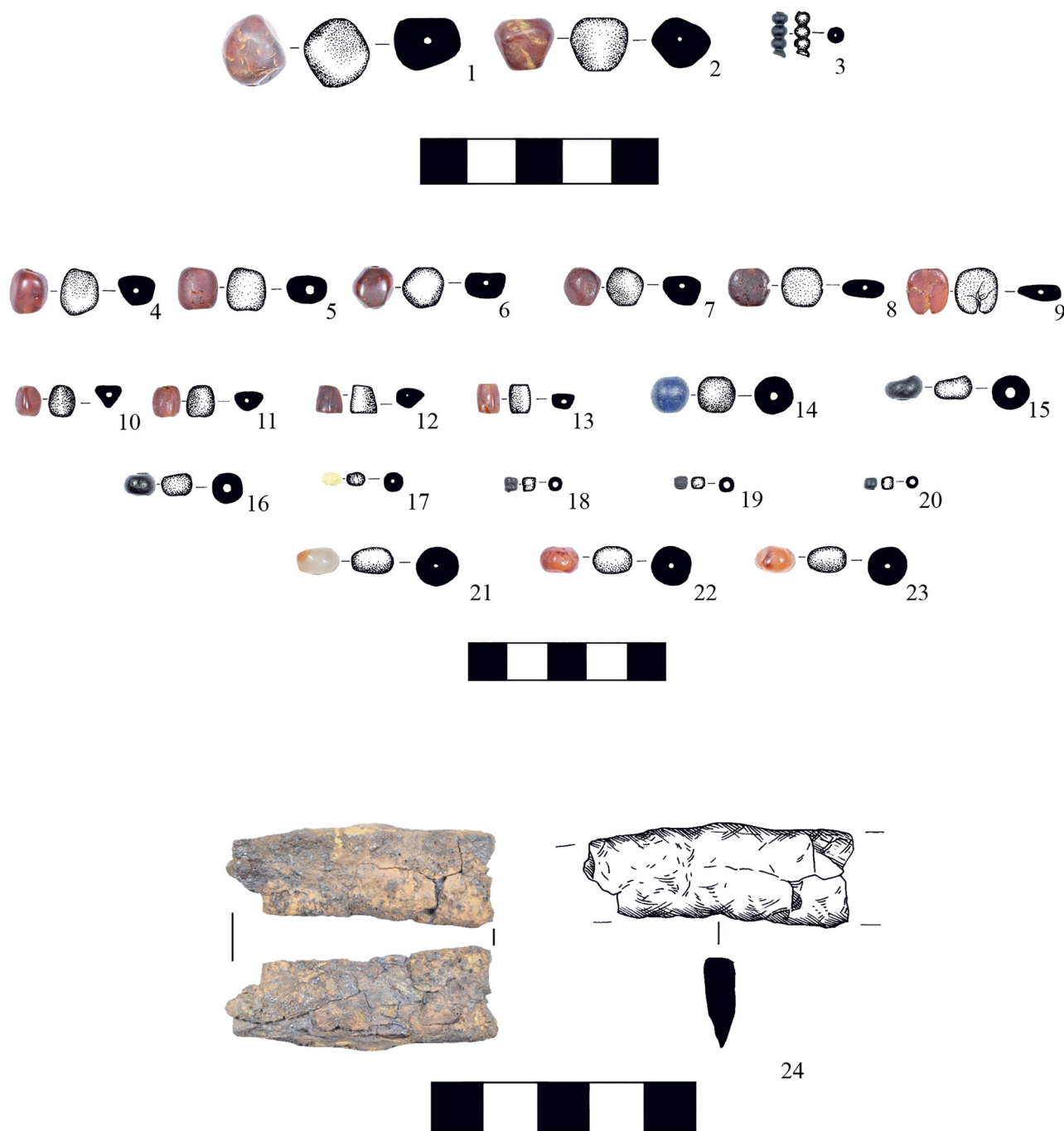


Fig. 10. Serbin-1. Inventory of Graves 13 (1-3) and 14 (4-24)
10. kép. Szerbin-1. A 13. (1-3) és 14. sír (4-24) leletanyaga

assigned here.²⁴ Three of the four burials date to the sixth century, and three from the Lebedi IV site are probably later. Their shared trait is that the entrance of the niche is located in the left wall of the entrance pit. The remains of larger animals were always placed in the entrance pit, with the

skins of small ruminants being the only ones to be deposited directly next to the deceased in some cases.

Body placement

In all cases, the deceased were laid on their backs. The position of the arms is unclear due to poor preservation, but in most cases, they had probably been extended. However, in Graves 5 and 12 at Serbin, it was observed that one arm was slightly bent at the elbow, with the back of the hand resting on the pelvis (*Figs 3 and 5*). In the Udarnyi grave, the arms

²⁴Chkhaidze (2011) 117; Skarbovenko and Lifanov (2012) 25, 29. Based on their shape and the position of the animal remains, the graves found at Lebedi IV and VIII can be considered to be hypothetical niche graves.

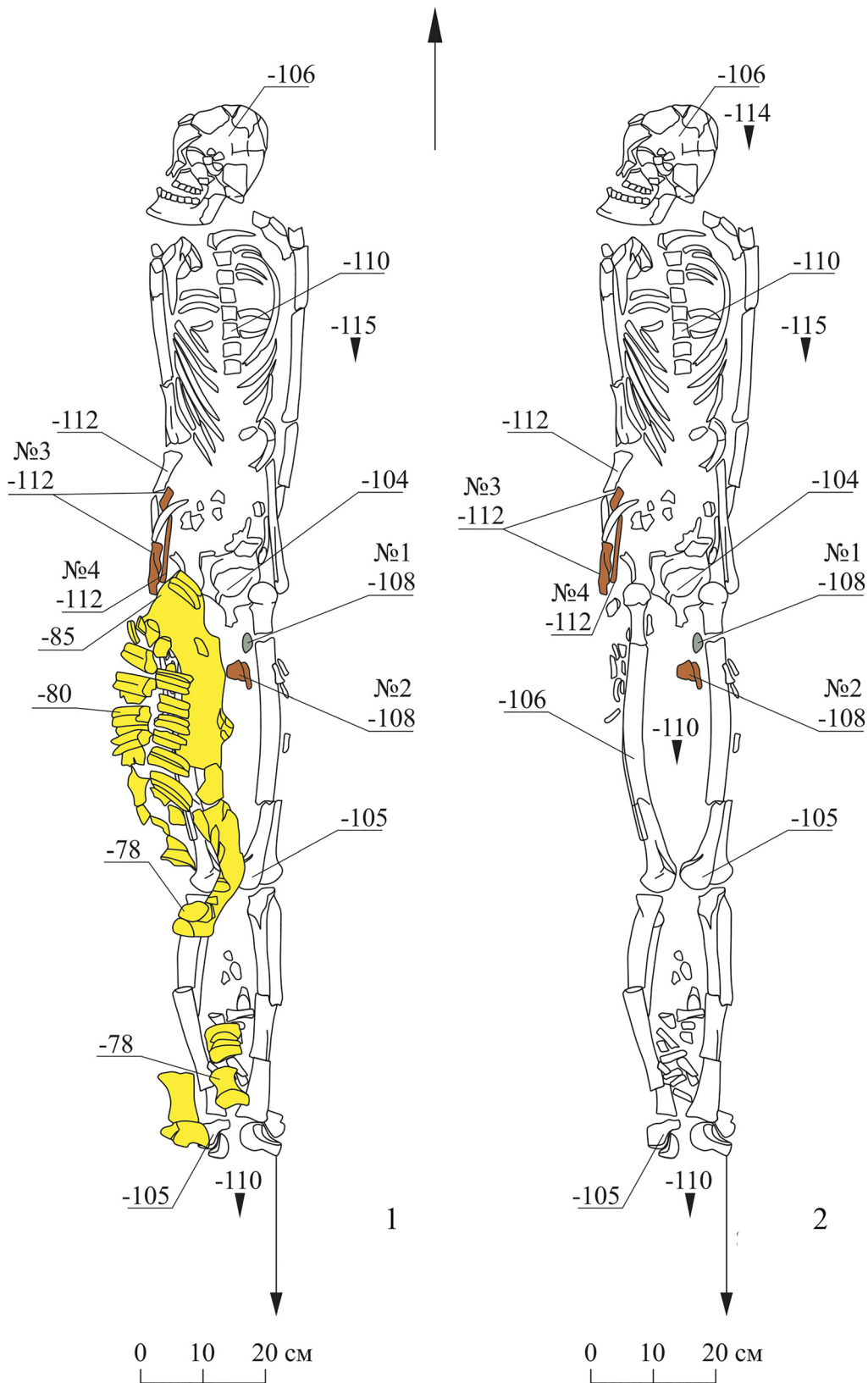


Fig. 11. Udarnyi-1. Grave 6
11. kép. Udarnij-1. 6. sír



Fig. 12. Udarnyi-1. Photos of Grave 6

12. kép. Udarnij-1. A 6. sír részletfotói

of the deceased were close to the body and the hands were under the pelvis, suggesting that the body may have been tightly wrapped in some material (Fig. 11).

Animal remains

Animal sacrifices are common in Eastern European steppe burials. In most cases, however, these are “head and hooves” deposits, with the skinned hide containing solely the skull and the extremities of the legs rather than the whole animal. Grave 12 at Serbin (Fig. 5) and the Udarnyi burial (Fig. 11) contained the remains of horses, while Grave 14 at Serbin (Fig. 9) the remains of small ruminants. Skinned horses

appeared as early as the Hunnic period,²⁵ although the rite only began to be widely practiced from the later sixth century onward. A total of thirty-four graves from the Eastern European steppe of the fifth–seventh centuries contained the remains of skinned horses. Graves of this type have a wide distribution, from the southern Bug to the mouth of the Volga. Most of the remains were spatially separate from the deceased. Two main groups can be distinguished according to the position of the animal in the grave: in the northern Black Sea, the horse skins are mainly spread out, while in the Volga valley, they are folded at the foot. The latter practice has a chronological significance, as these graves can be dated to the fifth or sixth century.²⁶

The skulls and leg bones of small ruminants have been documented in sixteen graves on the Eastern European steppe, which represent almost 15% of all graves. They are attested east of Crimea, in the Kuban region, Grave 2 of Kurgan 29 at Chapaevskiy, Grave 6 of Kurgan 1 at Greki II, Grave 2 of Mound 2 at Lebedi IV, and Grave 6 of Mound 2 at Lebedi VIII can be mentioned.²⁷ The rite itself is dated from the post-Hunnic period on the steppe, the earliest graves being known from Shipovo, near the Ural River.²⁸ There is little anthropological data on the sex and age of the deceased. Based on these and the nature of the grave offerings, we can conclude that there is no correlation between age and sex and this grave offering, although it is more characteristic of male burials in the Kuban region.²⁹

Skinning methods

On the early and late medieval steppe, there were different ways of skinning the shanks, depending on which joint the skin was taken off. Both I. Vörös and A. Atavin interpreted the different skinning methods as an ethnic marker.³⁰ Little information is available on the skinning techniques used in Eastern European burials; earlier publications have only marginally addressed the skinning method. A. Atavin discussed the skinning method in his publication of the tombs in the Kuban region, as did I. Sinitsyn in his study on the early medieval tomb at Berezhnovka II.³¹ They both describe what is termed the mutilation method in the Hungarian archaeological literature. In these cases, the tibia and ulna of the animal were split obliquely at about the lower third above the wrist joint, leaving them and the skull in the skin. Only these remains were then deposited in the grave.³² In the earlier literature, descriptions and drawings were used to find fourteen examples of this technique. In the case of

²⁵Zasetskaia (1994) 19–21.

²⁶Gulyás (2022) 375–376.

²⁷Atavin (2008) 29; Chkhaidze (2011) 117; Skarbovenko and Lifanov (2012) 25, 29.

²⁸Minajeva (1929) 195, 198.

²⁹Gulyás (2022) 383–384.

³⁰Vörös (2013) 324; Atavin (1984).

³¹Atavin (2008) 28; Sinitsyn (1960) 106.

³²Lőrinczy (1992) 110.

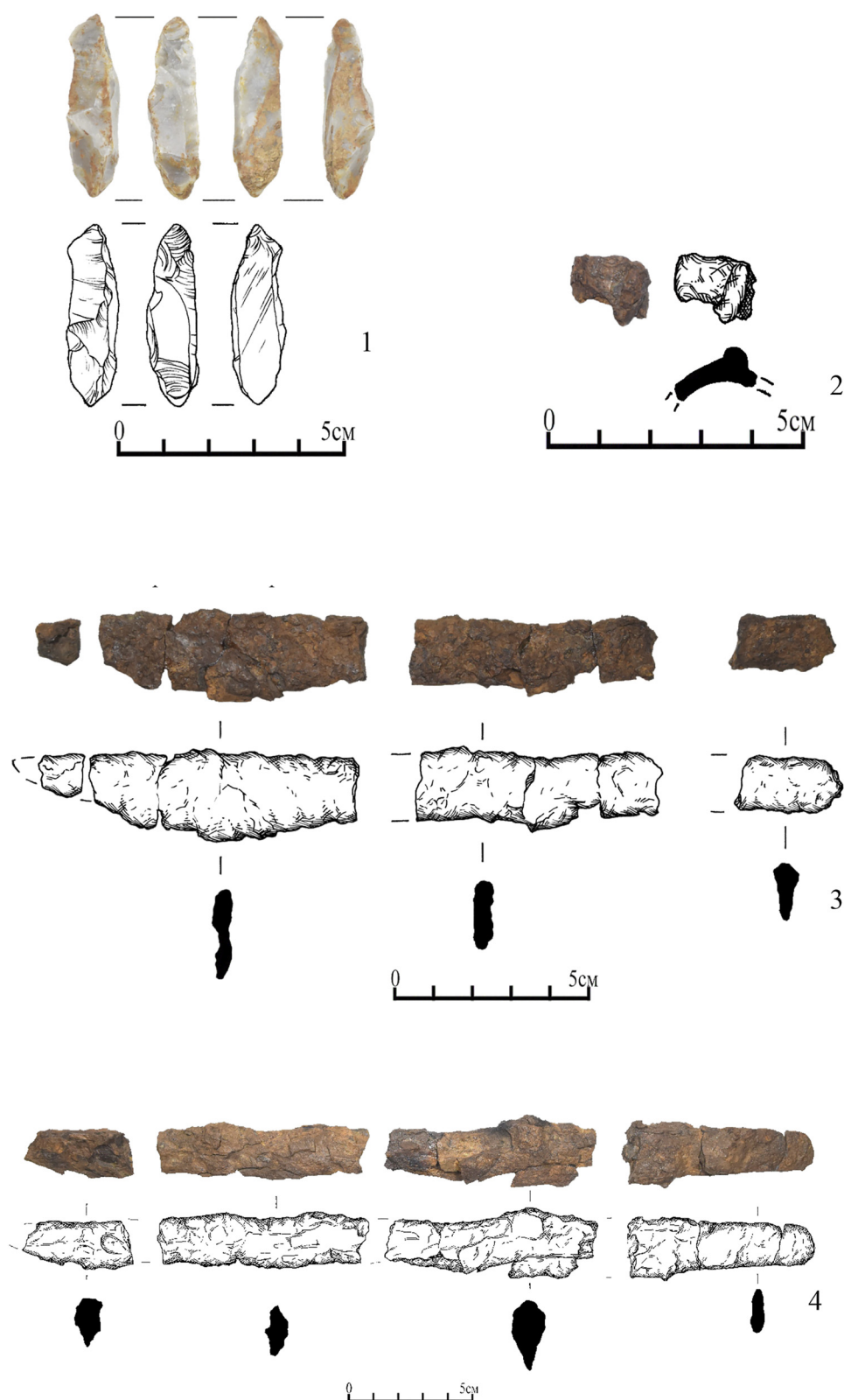


Fig. 13. Udarnij-1. Inventory of Grave 6
 13. kép. Udarnij-1. A 6. sír leletanyaga

Grave 16 of Mound 4 at Lebedi-I and Bugundyr, the use of this method can only be assumed. A sheep was placed in the grave at Dugino and a horse in the others.³³ The practice is mainly common on the eastern coast of the Sea of Azov, but it is sporadically attested also in the northern Pontic and the Lower Volga regions. The above list can be complemented with the horse remains from Grave 12 (Fig. 5) and the sheep remains from Grave 14 (Fig. 9) in Serbin.

A variety of skinning techniques can be found along the middle reaches of the Don, in the Volga valley, and east of the Urals. At the Kamennyi Ambar-5 site and in the grave of Mound 1 at Politotdelskoe, the bones of the feet without the metapodium were left in the skin. At Staritsa, on the Volga River, the hooves of horses were retained alongside the phalanges. In Grave 2 at Taganskyi and at Borodaevka, the skin was deposited at the first joint.³⁴ The skinning method observed at Udarnyi (Fig. 11) is closest to that noted at Staritsa.

ASSESSMENT OF THE GRAVE GOODS

Beads

Beads were recovered from Graves 13 and 14 in Serbin (Fig. 10. 1–23). Their material differs, but most were made of glass. Several types can be distinguished in terms of shape. Small millet beads were also found in three burials on the steppe, but unlike the ones from Serbin (Fig. 10. 17–20), they are of a lighter colour.³⁵ Grave 13 of Serbin yielded a segmented bead of annular segments and slender connecting elements (Fig. 10. 3). This type is known only from Pukhliakovskiy khutor in the Don region and from Grave 1 of Kurgan 7 in Novaia Odessa-I. They do not have exact analogies beyond the steppe.³⁶ The small spherical bead represents V. Kovalevskaja's Group 90, which was mainly distributed in the Crimea and the Caucasus, but occurs in all regions.³⁷ The two dark-coloured, flattened spherical beads can be assigned to V. Kovalevskaja's Group 91, which was mainly popular in the fifth and sixth centuries, but can also be found in later periods (Fig. 10. 15–16). It was principally distributed in the Kislovodsk Basin in the northern Caucasus.³⁸

The two carnelian beads were recovered from Grave 14 in Serbin. It is reddish-orange-white and has a flattened spherical shape (Fig. 10. 22–23). The specimen belongs to V. Kovalevskaja's Group 1, Type b, which appeared sporadically as early as the fifth–sixth centuries in the northern foothills of the Caucasus, but most of the pieces date to the

seventh century.³⁹ These beads are widespread in the Caucasus and Crimea, and V. Kovalevskaja suggested that they may have been produced locally there.⁴⁰ The only similar piece known from the steppe comes from Abinsk.⁴¹

Grave 14 at Serbin contained an opaque blue spherical glass bead (Fig. 10. 14). The type appeared in the north-western Caucasus as early as the Roman period. It was widespread during the Migration period, with specimens known from the Crimea, the Carpathian Basin, and the Urals.⁴² V. Kovalevskaja suggested that their spread in the northern Caucasus during this period could be linked to a local branch of the Silk Road.⁴³ This type is not known from any other grave on the steppe.

Grave 13 of Serbin yielded two amber beads, while Grave 14 contained ten (Fig. 10. 1–2, 4–13). This semi-precious stone was a popular raw material in the Migration period and the Early Middle Ages. Several deposits of amber have been identified, with the largest quantities coming from the Baltic region.⁴⁴ Sixteen burials are known from eight sites dating from the fifth to the seventh centuries, of which Bugundyr and Lebedi-I 5 are located in the Kuban Region. With the exception of a sword bead, they were strung into necklaces. Typically, there were one to three pieces per grave, and the ten pieces found in Grave 14 therefore represent an exceptionally high number.⁴⁵

Lyre-shaped iron buckle

Grave 12 contained an elongated, lyre-shaped buckle (Fig. 7. 2). This type is known mainly from the wider area of the Caucasus. One good analogy can be cited from Grave 179 of the Diurso cemetery on the north-eastern coast of the Black Sea, dated to the sixth–seventh centuries.⁴⁶ In the Kislovodsk Basin, parallels are known from Catacomb 117 at Mokraja Balka and Catacomb 374 at Klin Yar-III.⁴⁷ Iron buckles of a similar shape, but smaller size are also known from Klin-Yar, which, judging from their position in the grave, may have been part of the horse harness.⁴⁸

Oval iron buckle

The buckle found in Grave 5 at Serbin is unique in that it has two bronze sheets folded over the frame for the buckle plate, whose ends were held together by rivets (Fig. 4. 2). Similar buckles are known from Grave 3 of Mound 5 at Zaplavka

³³Gulyás (2022) 387.

³⁴Cf. Gulyás (2022) 387.

³⁵Gulyás (2022) 148.

³⁶Gulyás (2022) 150–151.

³⁷Kovalevskaja (2000) 6.

³⁸Kovalevskaja (2000) 7.

³⁹Kovalevskaja (1998) 17–18.

⁴⁰Kovalevskaja (1998) 18.

⁴¹Kondrashev et al. (2017) 73, Ris. 5. 3.

⁴²Mastykova et al. (2006) 25.

⁴³Kovalevskaja (1998) 26.

⁴⁴Bliujienė (2011).

⁴⁵Gulyás (2022) 152.

⁴⁶Malyshev (2021) 289, Ris. 216. 2.

⁴⁷Afanasiev and Runich (2001) 209, Ris. 134, 13; Belinskij and Härke (2018) 359, Fig. 173. 14.

⁴⁸Belinskij and Härke (2018) 321, Fig. 135. 68.



and the Voznesenska assemblage in the Dnieper region, although they are square and trapezoidal in shape.⁴⁹ The latter two are dated to the end of the seventh century;⁵⁰ however, the simpleness of the technical solution suggests that this buckle type may have been used earlier.

Single-edged sword

The weapon found in Grave 5 at Serbin is a single-edged sword (*Fig. 4. 1*). Seven graves have yielded comparable swords of this type on the Eastern European steppe, of which Chapaevskiy and Grave 1 of Mound 1 in Staronizhesteblievskaia lie on the eastern coast of the Sea of Azov, while Grave 3 of Kurgan 5 at Vinogradnoe on the northern coast.⁵¹ Similarly to the Serbin sword, these also lack a crossbar. It should be noted that these weapons are longer than the one from Serbin, with an average length of around 1 m.

Knives

An iron knife was found in Grave 12 at Serbin (*Fig. 7. 1*) and two in the Udarnyi grave (*Fig. 13. 3, 4*). These are straight-backed, single-edged pieces, with remains of wood on the tang. The type is common in the burials of the fifth to seventh centuries on the steppe. While they are usually found singly, there were two or three pieces in Grave 10 of Mound 4 at Kalininskaia, and Grave 1 of Kurgan 1 at Staronizhesteblievskaia.⁵² They are usually found on the left side of the dead.

Combat knife?

A single-edged knife with a curved blade was found in Grave 5 of Serbin (*Fig. 4. 7*), which can be interpreted as a combat knife.⁵³ There are 11 similar objects in the Eastern European material, of which only the combat knife of Krupskoy comes from the Kuban region.⁵⁴ Their length varies between 12.5 and 27.8 cm. They are all single-edged, with the exception of the exemplar found in Grave 2 of Mound 2 at Vasilievka.⁵⁵ The blade is curved in several cases; the best parallel to the Serbin knife comes from Grave 7 of Mound 1 at Kostogryzovo.⁵⁶ All but one of the pieces from the steppe have a fixed position in the grave, next to the left femur, as in the case of the Serbin specimen.⁵⁷

Awl

The awl found in Grave 5 at Serbin (*Fig. 4. 6*) is a rare artefact type on the steppe; the single other exemplar was found in Grave 1 of Kurgan 5 at Lebedi IV in the Kuban region. The handle is circular in cross-section, with a pointed part with a square cross-section.⁵⁸ The two are linked by that both graves contained male weapon burials. Moreover, the position of the objects in the grave was roughly identical: in the Lebedi burial, the awl was placed between the lower right ribs and the pelvis, similarly as at Serbin, which lay by the hip.

Strike-a-lights

Grave 5 at Serbin-1 and the burial at Udarnyi each contained an iron object (*Fig. 4. 3*), which can be interpreted as a strike-a-light. Both are rectangular; the Serbin piece is curved. Eighteen burials on the Eastern European steppe contained a strike-a-light, although two of these are uncertain. All but one were found west of the Volga region.⁵⁹ Nine pieces were rectangular, some with curved sides.⁶⁰ Except for the Kholmskoe strike-a-light, these artefacts were all recovered from male graves. They were typically found in the region of the pelvis, suggesting that they were kept in a pouch. In four cases, this was also underscored by the leather remains corroded onto them.⁶¹

Flints

There was one flint each in Graves 5 (*Fig. 4. 4*) and 12 (*Fig. 7. 3*) at Serbin and Grave 6 (*Fig. 13. 1*) at Udarnyi. The raw material was not specified in any case. Flints were often deposited in Eastern European burials, occurring in 22 graves. It is striking that in nine cases they were not accompanied by a strike-a-light,⁶² as in Grave 12 at Serbin.

ARTIFICIAL CRANIAL DEFORMATION

In the Udarnyi grave, the skull of the deceased showed signs of severe circular deformation. This practice was documented in fourteen cases between the later fifth century and the mid-seventh century, although not all have been anthropologically examined.⁶³ In the Kuban region, skull deformation was documented in Grave 19 of Mound 5 at Lebedi-I and Grave 12 of Mound 1 at Vostochnyi Malai.⁶⁴ The strong deformation observed at Udarnyi is rare in the period under study and has only been observed at Poliotdelskoe, in Grave 2 of Mound 3 at Ilovatka and Mound 3

⁴⁹Shalobudov (1983) 67, Ris. 1. 6, Khrissimov (2009) 14, Ris. 4. 1.

⁵⁰Komar (2006) 123.

⁵¹Atavin (2008) 29, 4, Tab. 5; Chkhaidze (2011) 121; Orlov and Rassamakin (1996) 111–113.

⁵²Atavin (2008) 55, Tab. 11. 4, 6; Chkhaidze (2011) 121.

⁵³For the identification of the combat knives, see Komar et al. (2006) 283, 318.

⁵⁴Atavin (2008) 29, 47, Tab. 3. 1.

⁵⁵Khardaev (2015) 108.

⁵⁶Komar et al. (2006) 332, Ris. 39. 11.

⁵⁷Gulyás (2022) 233.

⁵⁸Skarbovenko and Lifanov (2012) 26, 41, Ris. 7. 12.

⁵⁹Gulyás (2022) 284.

⁶⁰Gulyás (2022) 285.

⁶¹For the Kholmskoe specimen, cf. Kondrashev et al. (2017) 65; Gulyás (2022) 285.

⁶²Gulyás (2022) 286.

⁶³Gulyás (2022) 110.

⁶⁴Chkhaidze (2010) 54; Limberis and Marchenko (2011) 438.



at Shipovo.⁶⁵ The dating of Politotdelskoe is uncertain; Shipovo is dated to the post-Hunnic period, while Ilovatka to the end of the sixth century.⁶⁶

DATING OF THE GRAVES

Due to the lack of dateable types of artifacts, the dating of the study sites is somewhat difficult. The Udarnyi grave resembles the post-Hunnic burials of the Volga region because it is oriented north to south, it contained a “head and hooves” deposit in a horse skin at the feet, and the deceased had cranial deformation. The three burials at Serbin cannot be more precisely dated within the period spanning the fifth to seventh centuries. The best parallels to the sword, the combat knife, and the buckle of Grave 5 (Fig. 4) can be found in the Sivashovka-type burials, suggesting that the assemblage can be dated to the end of the sixth century or to the beginning of the seventh century at the latest. The four graves found at Serbin form a group on the basis of their relationship to each other and the common rite, and therefore the other burials probably date from the same period.

CONCLUSION

A group of four burials was found at Serbin-1, while a solitary burial was found at Udarnyi-1. The Serbin graves are probably of the Sivashovka type. The Udarnyi burial dates from the post-Hunnic period based on the rite and is the only one of its kind in the region. Despite their poor grave goods, they provide important data regarding the burial assemblages of the steppe on the eastern coast of the Sea of Azov. Previously, mainly the more richly furnished male burials from the region were published, while burials of children and women were scarcely known. Thus, the Serbin graves offer a picture of these groups of nomadic communities.⁶⁷

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⁶⁵Balabanova (2005) 60; Maslovski (1929) 209–210.

⁶⁶Kazanskyi (2020) 126–127; Gulyás et al. (2021) 162.

⁶⁷The paper was written as part of the project TKP2021-NKTA-24.



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Kora középkori nomád temetkezések az Azovi-tenger keleti partvidékéről

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A kelet-európai sztyeppéről kevés 5–7. századi, nomádokhoz köthető temetkezés ismert, a Dnyeszter és az Urál közötti területről körülbelül 100 sírról van tudomásunk. Emiatt minden újonnan publikált leletegyüttes nagy jelentőséggel bír. Tanulmányunkban két újonnan felfedezett lelőhely öt sírját mutatjuk be. Szerbin-1 lelőhelyen, egy antik település feltárása során négy kora középkori temetkezés látott napvilágot. Ezek KÉK–NyDny-i tájolásúak, a három aknasír mellett egy padmalyos temetkezést is dokumentáltak. A 12. sírban egy ló, a 14. sírban pedig egy kiskérődző koponyája és végtagcsontjai voltak. Az állatokat az úgynevezett csonkolásos módszerrel nyúzták meg, azaz *tibiát* és az *ulnát* a kétharmadánál ferdén kettéhasították. A sírok szegényes mellékletűek voltak, egyedül az 5. sírből került elő fegyver. A többiben gyöngyök, kések, csiholók és kovák voltak.

Udarnij-I lelőhely a Kubán folyótól délre található. A korábbi kurgán betöltéséből egy kora középkori

temetkezés is előkerült. A sír É–D-i tájolású, az elhunyt lábai fölött egy ló koponyája és lábfejcsonthajói voltak. Az *adultus* férfi koponyáján erőteljes mesterséges torzítás nyomai látszódnak. A temetkezés jellegtelen mellékletei – kések, csiholó – nehezen keltezhető, de a rítus és a koponyatorzítás miatt valószínűleg az 5–6. századra keltezhető.

Az általunk bemutatott sírok jól illeszkednek abba a körülbelül két tucat temetkezésbe, amelyek a Kubán folyó vidékéről ismert. Az udarnij-i sír jelentőségét az adja, hogy a régióból egyetlen kalininszkajai sírt leszámítva nem ismertünk az 5–6. századra datálható sírt. A 6. század második fele és a 7. század középső harmada közé keltezett, eddig publikált temetkezések főleg fegyveres-lovas sírok közé tartoztak, ezért a korszak szegényesebb férfi és női temetkezéseiről kevesebb adattal rendelkezünk. A szerbini leletek ezekhez a társadalmi csoportokhoz szolgáltatnak újabb információkat.

