

RE-EVALUATION OF THE “VANDAL GRAVE” FROM MUHI-KOCSMADOMB (NORTHEAST HUNGARY)

Eszter Soós

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Abstract: The site of Muhi-Kocsmadomb in Northeast Hungary has been cited as a Vandal grave in archaeological literature since the first half of the 20th century. However, based on the re-evaluation of the original documentation, no trace of Roman Period burial can be identified at the site. A silver denarius of Traian and a bronze spur type Ginalski E7 were found as scattered finds from the territory of the Iron Age cemetery. The Muhi-Kocsmadomb site is located in the Roman-Sarmatian-Germanic contact zone, with Sarmatian sites in its immediate vicinity. In contrast to the Danube Germanic territories, where bronze spurs of Ginalski E types are well known from both side of the Pannonian limes, no bronze specimens were found in the area of the Inner-Carpathian Przeworsk culture. In the northern foreland of Dacia, Ginalski E type bronze spurs were found only in provincial sites associated to military environment and as scattered finds, presumably from the Sarmatian zone. Based on these, the Muhi specimen could have been associated with Roman military activities.

INTRODUCTION

In the northeastern part of the Carpathian Basin a new archaeological material had appeared in the middle of the 2nd century AD, that can be associated with the Przeworsk culture had spread contemporary in Poland.¹ Research has long correlated this migration wave with the arrival of the so-called Hasding Vandal, Victofal and Lacring groups, mentioned among the events of the Marcomannic-Sarmatian Wars (*Andrzejowski 2010*, 19, 20, fig. 19; *Godłowski 1994*, 70–73, Abb. 2).

The vast majority of the characteristic Przeworsk-type cremation burials including those with weapons can be dated to period B2/C1–C1a, that is, between the second half of the 2nd century and the first decades of the 3rd century AD. The artefacts from these burials correspond with the weapon group of *Godłowski 5* and partly *6* (*Godłowski 1994*, 72, 73; *Hullám 2012*, 85, 92). From the second half of the 3rd century, the Przeworsk-type cremation graves disappeared from the archaeological record, and no burial remains can be found in the region until the appearance of skeletal burials in the early Hunnic Period, which marked a new cultural era (*Soós 2019a*, 697–700). The phenomenon is likely not attributable to demographic factors, such as population replacement, but more likely due to changes in burial customs. This is supported by data from settlements that were continuously inhabited, showing that the population lived without interruption until the end of the 4th century AD (*Soós 2019b*, 239–241). Most of the settlement remains, similar to the graves, can be dated from the periods B2/C1–C1a. However, based on the analysis of large-scale excavated sites, numerous settlements were continuously inhabited even after the abandonment of the province of Dacia (Fig. 1; *Gindele/Istvánovits 2009*; *Soós 2019b*, 229–233).

In the Carpathian Basin, the Przeworsk-type archaeological material was primarily outlined based on the remains of cremation graves contained iron weapons from the 19th century (*Diculescu 1923*; *Jahn 1921*; *Török 1934*). Despite the traces of several hundred settlements, until recently, the remains of only about 50 burials were known from barely 40 sites (*Hullám 2012*).²

¹ The writing of this paper was supported by the research project no. PD 147993 of the National Research, Development and Innovation Office, Hungary.

² The Rankovce site in eastern Slovakia has been known since the 2010s. The evaluation of the almost fifty graves discovered there will greatly enhance our knowledge of the Przeworsk-type burials of the era (*Rákoš 2019*).

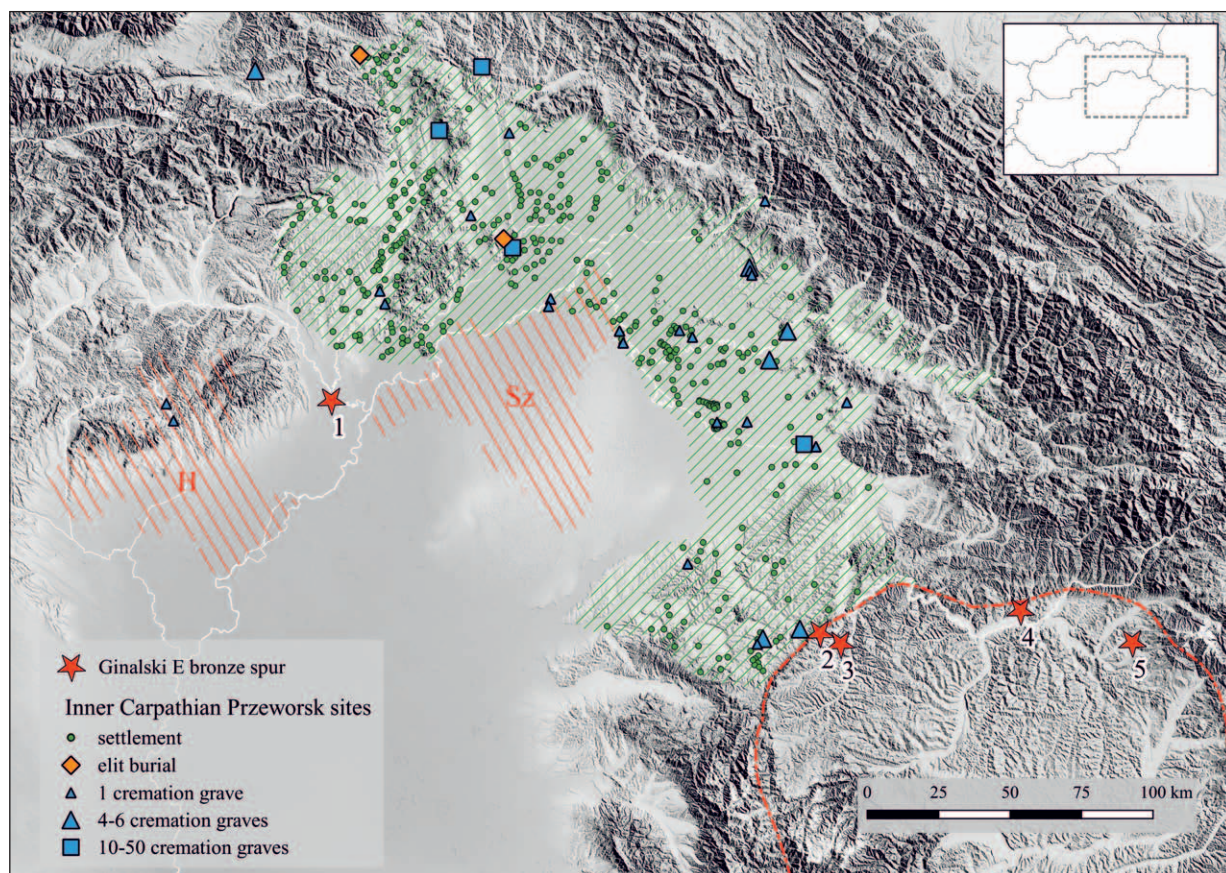


Fig. 1. Sites of the Inner-Carpathian Przeworsk culture and the location of the Ginalska E bronze spurs by the northern border of Dacia province. 1 – Muhi-Kocsmadomb; 2 – Porolissum; 3 – Jac; 4 – Ilișua; 5 – Orheiul Bistriței. H – Heves County; Sz – the former Szabolcs county (map E. Soós).

However, the informational value of this funerary remains is low. A minuscule percentage of the artefacts have been uncovered during archaeological excavations; thus, their original context is unknown, and the association of the finds is often questionable.

There have been several attempts in the literature to collect grave remains identified as Vandal. The early summaries were mainly territorial collections, in which, without reconstructing the original context of the finds, sites not related to burial activities and the era were also included.³ In recent decades, collections have focused more on the find types, disregarding whether they were grave or settlement finds (Ardeleanu 2009; Istvánovits/Kulcsár 1992). A comprehensive, critical processing of the inner Carpathian Przeworsk burials is still missing.

The site of Muhi-Kocsmadomb also appears as a Przeworsk grave in the collections and maps that compile Vandal burials until the most recent times (Ardeleanu 2009, 61; Godłowski 1994, 71, 72, Abb. 2; Istvánovits/Kulcsár 2017, 257, fig. 203; Soós 2019b, fig. 1; Végh 1975, 76, XVIII. t. 1).

THE SITE MUHI-KOCSMADOMB

The village Muhi, located in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county, is situated on the western bank of the Sajó River, approximately one and a half kilometres south of the former mouth of the Hernád. The surrounding region is a low-relief alluvial cone plain, divided into low ridges by the Sajó and Hernád rivers and smaller watercourses

³ In the first half of the 20th century, research was strongly influenced by a source from Jordanes, which mentioned the Vandals between the Körös and the Maros rivers in the 4th century AD. As a result, assemblages from the Sarmatian and Gepidic periods were included among the Vandal artefacts (Nagy 1994; Török 1934).

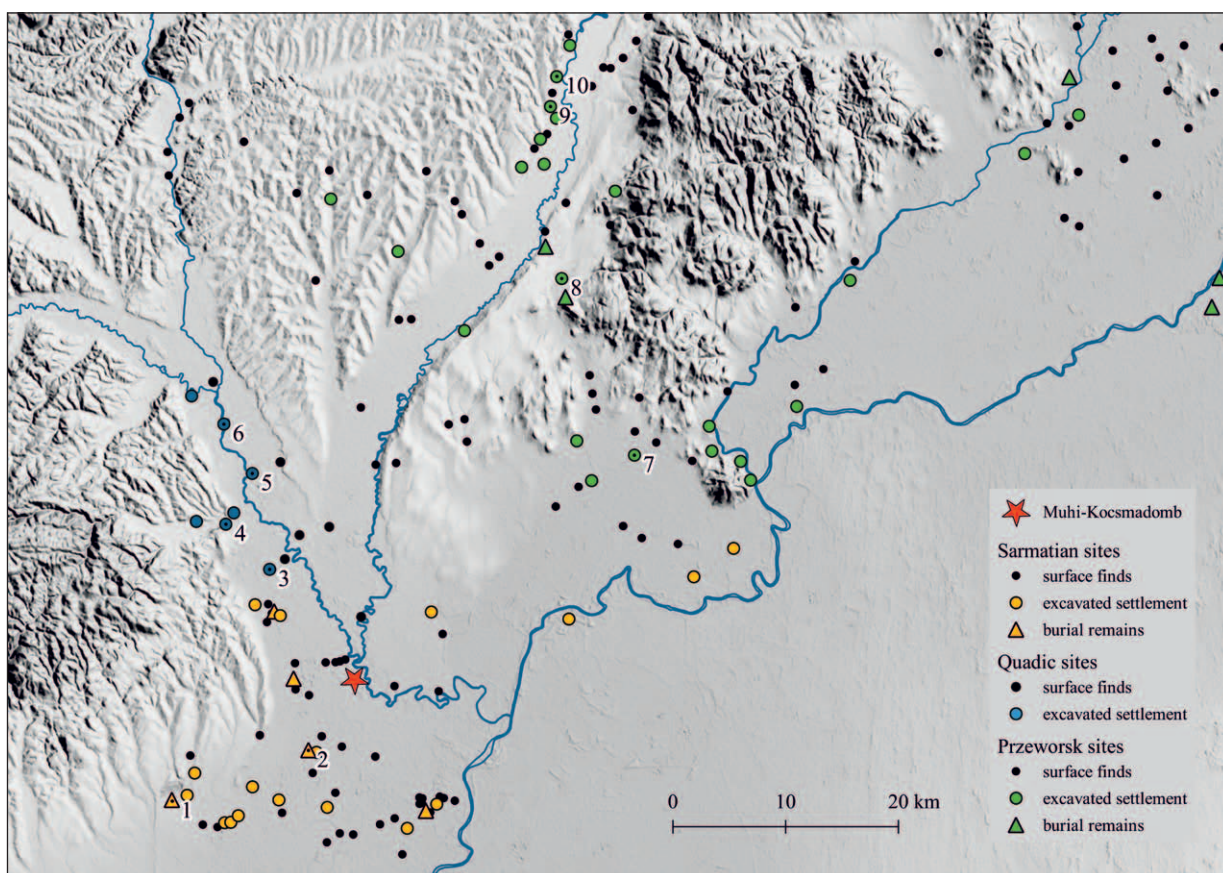


Fig. 3. Roman Period sites in the Sajó-Hernád plain. 1 – Bükkábrány-Bánya, XI/A; 2 – Hejőpapi-Heves county landfill; 3 – Miskolc-Szirma; 4 – Miskolc-Sötétkapu; 5 – Szirmabesenyő-Homokbánya; 6 – Sajókeresztúr-Homokbánya; 7 – Mezőzombor-Temető; 8 – Abaújszántó-Gyűr-tető alja; 9 – Garadna-Kovács tanya; 10 – Hernádvécse-Nagy rét (map E. Soós).

The use of the site in the Roman Period is indicated only by the Roman silver coin and the bronze spur, which can be treated as scattered finds.

Muhi-Kocsmadomb site is located on the fringes of the Sarmatian, Quadic and Przeworsk settlement zones. In its immediate vicinity there were Sarmatian sites (Fig. 3).

The Inner-Carpathian Przeworsk settlement zone extended southwest to the Hernád valley and the southwestern foothills of the Zemplén Mountains. Excavated settlement remains, dated from the end of the 2nd century AD, are known from Hernádvécse-Nagy rét (Soós 2019b, 233–235, fig. 4; 5), Garadna-Kovács tanya (Soós 2019b, 229–233, fig. 2, 3), Abaújszántó-Gyűr-tető alja and Mezőzombor-Temető (Csengeri 2015, 39–41, 1–3. kép).

In the valley of the Sajó river, up to the area of Miskolc-Szirma, the settlement remains show a Quadic character. The finds known so far do not indicate the Roman Period settlement of the territory before the middle third of the 2nd century AD. Most of the sites can be dated to the end of the 2nd – beginning of the 3rd century AD. This is strengthened by the results of the Slovakian research that dates the Quadic expansion in the Northern Hungarian Range from the Severan period (Beljak *et al.* 2012; Soós/Tankó 2018, 292, 293).

Based on the available data, the Sarmatian and Przeworsk sites show a sharp separation along the Tisza River. A similar phenomenon can also be expected on the Sajó-Hernád plain, where Sarmatian material sharply replaces the Germanic settlements on the west side of the Sajó, south of Kistokaj. However, the beginning of the Sarmatian settlement is questionable there. One of the earliest sites is Bükkábrány-Bánya, XI/A, where a small Sarmatian cemetery with richly equipped burials was excavated. The community's strong connections to the Germanic territories from the end of the 2nd century AD are evidenced by a silver brooch with silver filigree decoration of Almgren ser. V type 8 found in one of the women's graves (Tutkovics 2015, 248–250, 7. kép 1, 8. t. 1). A heavily disturbed Sarmatian cemetery with 52 graves was excavated on the outskirts of

Hejőpapi. The presence of shield, sword, and spears as weapons, along with horse harnesses as grave goods, links the site to the so-called Hortobágy-Poroshát type cemeteries. These were likely in use in the first third of the 3rd century AD (Gregóczy 2011; Makoldi 2011, 242). The other sites are known from field surveys (Fig. 3).

Weapon cremation graves, such as those found in Sirok, Terpes (Hullám 2012, 11, 12. ábra), and Levoča/Lőcse-Novoveská cesta (Tamaškovič et al. 2019) also deposited outside the designated settlement zones of the Inner-Carpathian Przeworsk area (Fig. 1). One possible explanation for this phenomenon is that during the Marcomannic wars, the areas under the military supervision of the Przeworsk groups were more extensive than the zones of their later settlements. This explanation is supported by the Pócspetri site, where a single burnt-out building containing exclusively hand-formed Przeworsk type pottery was found. This area was Sarmatian region from the end of the 2nd century/2nd–3rd century AD until the late Roman period (Masek 2012, 254–255; 37. t: 8–14; 39. t: 1–3).

Another explanation suggests that military reasons justified the presence of weapon graves in the border zone of the Przeworsk settlement territory. Cemeteries and grave groups with larger number of burials are known only from the interior of the Inner-Carpathian Przeworsk area. In contrast, single weapon graves are located on the southern and eastern borders, in front of the plainy Sarmatian areas. These graves could have served to mark the border and maintain control over the Tisza fords, even during the Severan era. The Kékcsé assemblage, found on the southern bank of the Tisza and dated to the C1b–C2 period, likely represents a later horizon than the early occupation period (Hullám 2012, 89, 10. ábra; Istvánovits/Kulcsár 2017, 255, fig. 202). For a more detailed evaluation of the phenomenon, we cannot refine the chronology of the sites.

However, the Roman period finds from Muhi-Kocsmadomb do not indicate a burial context, suggesting that they may need to be interpreted differently.

THE FINDS FROM MUHI-KOCSMADOMB

The probable mintage of Traian's silver denarius is 114–117 AD (Huszár 1954, 90, XIX, 142; Leszih 1939, 70).⁵ Roman coins, minted before the Marcomannic wars, are rare in the Upper Tisza region. Eszter Istvánovits dated the circulation of Roman coins in the region to the Domitian-Traian period, linking it to the Roman-Sarmatian alliance during the Dacian wars. It is noteworthy, however, that the majority of coins earlier than the middle of the 2nd century AD were found outside the Sarmatian settlement zone, in Przeworsk area (Istvánovits 2002, 277, 278). However, silver coins could remain in circulation in Barbarian territory until the end of the Roman era. The Muhi piece has no dating value for the site.⁶

The bow-shaped spur can be classified as Ginalski E7 type (Tejral 2003, 255, Abb. 1: 9; Végh 1975, 76, XVIII. t: 1).⁷ Its strongly curved bows ended in small, round knobs folded back, and their cross-section is roof-shaped. The large, conical prick is wide, massive, hollow inside, separated from the bow by a double engraved line. A narrower line under the prick can also be observed. The upper part of the bow is angular in one side, there the root of a further hook can be seen. It has broken off, there the surface has become rounded from use. Noticeable traces of wear can be observed at the tip of the prick and the lower edge of the bow. Dimensions: length: 7.4 cm, knobs diameter: 0.7 cm, maximum width: 3.6 cm, prick diameter: 2.8 cm, height: 3.7 cm (Fig. 4).

The spurs of type Ginalski E, characterized by curved bow and broad prick, were widespread in the central and southeastern zones of the Przeworsk culture and the northeastern part of the Carpathian Basin during the B2/C1–C1a periods. The iron specimens were placed in pairs as grave goods in weapon male graves (Ginalski 1991, 61, 62, Ryc. 12). Most of the iron spurs found in Inner-Carpathian Przeworsk burials were Ginalski E2, E5b and E6 types. Some differences can be observed in their forms, but their use and chronological position were the same (Ardeleanu 2009, 56–58).

The Ginalski E7/Jahn 58 type spurs can be distinguished from the above pieces based on the extra knob or hook placed in one side of the upper part of the bow, which presumably served for a more secure fastening. The technical solution already points towards the Ginalski G types, but their asymmetrical form can be clearly

⁵ http://barbaricoin.elte.hu/AFE_HU/show_coin?coin_id=3099 (29. 02. 2024)

⁶ The appearance of Roman denarii in the northern Przeworsk area is also not connected with the political events of the Dacian wars (Dymowski 2019).

⁷ M. Ardeleanu defined it as Ginalski E2 type (Ardeleanu 2009, 61).

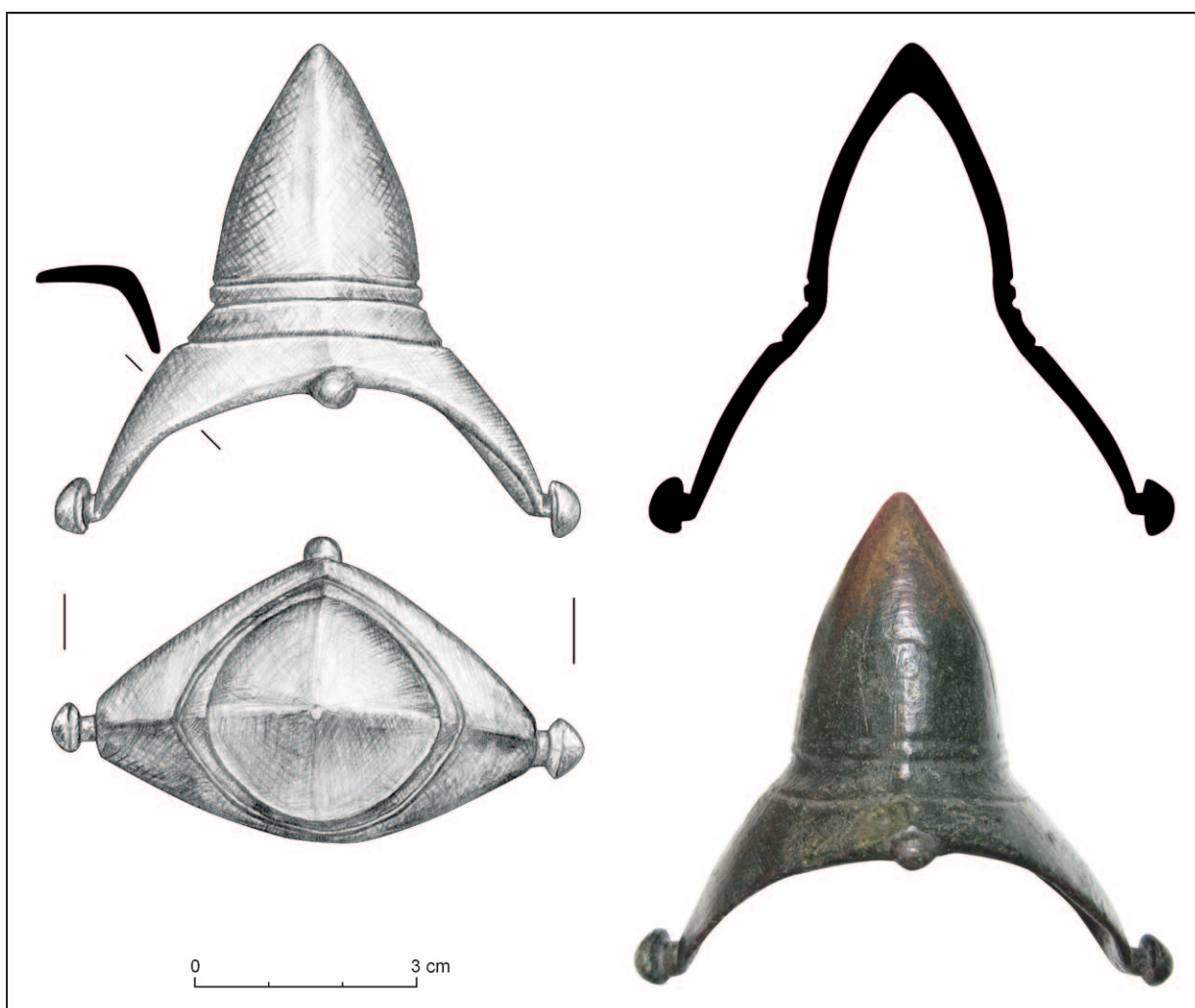


Fig. 4. The bronze spur from Muhi-Kocsmadomb (drawing Zs. Varga, photo E. Soós).

distinguished from the E series. Ginalski E7 spurs are rare, the collection revealed only two specimens from Greater Poland (Ginalski 1991, 63, 64, Ryc. 11: 23; 12; Jahn 1921, 52). The Muhi spur is distinguished from the contemporary heels by its material and particularly large size.

The Ginalski E bronze spurs are concentrated in the border zone of the Danube provinces during the Marcomannic wars and the following decades. In Pannonia, they are typically found in the limes section between Carnuntum and Brigetio from military environment or as scattered finds.⁸ There are many more, with over 57 Ginalski E5 and E6 bronze specimens found north to the Danube, mainly along the lower Morava region as scattered finds, dated to the end of the 2nd and beginning to the 3rd century AD (Jílek *et al.* 2023, 7, fig. 5; Tejral 1999, 160–167; 2002, 171).

In this period, bronze versions of artefacts and wear items appeared in both side of the Danube limes, which were typical to the Przeworsk and Wielbark cultures and originally made of iron. In addition to brooch types of northern origin, which were foreign to the local milieu, Roman-Barbarian hybrid forms can also be observed. Research has been dealing with the background of this phenomenon for a long time. Jaroslav Tejral linked the distribution of these find types in the Danube Germanic territories with archaeological sites connected to the Roman military presence, thus explaining their appearance as a direct Roman influence. The distribution of these bronze artefacts can be associated with Germanic groups alien to the Danube Barbarian territory, which were temporarily under Roman administration (Tejral 1999, 189–193).

⁸ Arrabona, Edelstal, Pér-Mindszentpuszta, Brigetio but also from East-Pannonia: Intercisa, Sárszentlőrinc (Bóna 1963, 293, 296; Masek 2013; Tejral 2003, 252, fig. 7).

Based on our data so far, it cannot be decided whether these artefacts were products of a Roman or Barbarian workshop. A semi-finished Ginalski E6 bronze spur has come to light in Ruhhof in Austria, from the territory of a Roman camp (Groh/Sedlmayer 2015, 136, Abb. 98:1). A bronze mould of a spur was recently published from the Barbarian area, discovered by metal detector survey in site Luleč around Vyškov. The authors considered the find to be evidence of local production of the find type (Jílek et al. 2023). While previous research emphasized the role of the Roman industry in the origin of these bronze items, nowadays data indicating their production in Barbaricum can also be provided. Since semi-finished pieces and moulds of Barbarian brooches have been found recently in the Danube Germanic area, it is also worth considering the local development of Barbarian metalwork. The background of the procession could have been the large amount of bronze raw material left as scrap metal in Germanic territory after the Roman military presence during the Marcomannic Wars (Jílek et al. 2023, 9; Vích/Kmošek 2020, 101).

CONCLUSIONS

Returning to the Muhi site, in the northern foreland of Dacia province there are far fewer similar sites, and the archaeological context of the spurs also differs from the Pannonian border zone (Ardeleanu 2009, 72, fig. 7; Tejral 2003, 255, Abb. 10). The Ginalski E bronze spurs found in archaeological context are known there only from provincial territory (Fig. 1). The sites of Ilişua, Jac, Moigrad/Porolissum, Orheiul Bistriței and Toarcia (except for the first one) are all places where presence of Roman auxiliary troops can be identified (Tejral 2003, 255, Abb. 7: 2, 4, 5; 10). According to Coriolan Horatiu Opreanu, the spurs could also belong to Roman military equipment. He did not rule out the Germanic origin of their users, because the concentration of other, typically Germanic ceramic and brooch types (Almgren 43 and Almgren 129) can also be observed in the mentioned sites (Cociş/Opreanu 1998, 198–200, fig. 6: 39–43; 9: 58–61; tip. 5 d, 1–5; 6–8; Opreanu/Cociş 2002, 236, 241, Abb. 17: 4–6).

Between the limes of Dacia Porolissensis and the site of Muhi-Kocsmadomb stretched a wide settlement zone of the Inner-Carpathian Przeworsk culture. Bronze spurs have not been found there, despite the fact that iron specimens are known not only as grave goods, but also as settlement finds (Gindele 2010, Abb. 63: 1–3). In the Inner-Carpathian Przeworsk area, there is no evidence of non-ferrous metallurgy up to now. Besides, there is no evidence of a temporary Roman military presence outside of Dacia province as well. Considering the results and interpretations of the Central European research, the bronze heels, and also the Muhi specimen, can be connected more to the Roman military milieu in the periphery of Dacia.

Bronze spurs of Ginalski E type are also known from the Sarmatian-Germanic contact zone, but their context is uncertain. An E6 heel with a square cross-section prick has been published for a long time from Szabolcs County (Jahn 1921, 122; Jóna 1899, no. 28, 97; Richthofen 1930b, 239). A Ginalski E5 and a decorated E6 specimen were also reported from the area of Heves County (Szabó 1969, 47, 22. kép). It is worth considering that the territory of the former Szabolcs county, as well as the largest part of the present-day Heves county, belonged to the Sarmatian settlement zone in the Roman Period. The above mentioned Ginalski E5 and E6 bronze spurs could be linked to Sarmatian environment, similar to the Muhi specimen (Fig. 1).

The uncertain data may indicate that the Ginalski E bronze spurs, originally evolved as a result of a complex Roman-Germanic interaction, may have been connected to the Sarmatian environment in the fringes of Dacia in the turn of the early and late Roman Period.

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Prehodnotenie „vandalského hrobu“ z lokality Muhi-Kocsmadomb (severovýchodné Maďarsko)

E s z t e r S o ó s

Súhrn

Archeologický horizont vnútrokarpatskej przeworskej kultúry bol vymedzený od 19. storočia najmä na základe spálených pozostatkov uložených spolu so železnými zbraňami, ktoré sme datovali do stupňov B2/C1 a C1. V zbierkach a na mapách, na ktorých sa uvádzajú pohrebiská przeworského typu, sa však nachádzajú aj lokality, na ktorých nie je možné preukázať existenciu pohrebiska z tohto obdobia.

Na skýtskom pohrebisku v Muhi-Kocsmadomb Andor Lešich identifikoval dva hroby, ktoré vykopal v roku 1930, ako vandalské a spojil ich s Trajánovým strieborným denárom a veľkou bronzovou ostrohou typu Ginalski E7 nájdenou na tejto lokalite. Na lokalite nie sú žiadne doklady o pochovávaní v dobe rímskej, ostrohu a mincu možno považovať za ojedinelé nálezy. Lokalita Muhi-Kocsmadomb sa nachádza v rímsko-sarmatsko-germánskej kontaktnej zóne, v jej bezprostrednej blízkosti sa nachádzajú sarmatské lokality.

Bronzové ostrohy Ginalski E sa vyvinuli ako výsledok zložitej rímsko-barbarskej vojenskej a kultúrnej interakcie počas markomanských vojen v pohraničnej oblasti podunajských provincií. Na rozdiel od podunajských germánskych oblastí, kde poznáme veľké množstvo bronzových ostroh Ginalski E, z územia vnútrokarpatskej przeworskej kultúry nie sú publikované žiadne bronzové exempláre. V severnej Dácii sa bronzové ostrohy typu Ginalski E našli len na provinciálnom území vo vojenskom prostredí, prípadne ako roztrúsené nálezy v pravdepodobne sarmatskej sídelnej zóne. Na základe týchto zistení by ostroha z Muhi mohla súvisieť s rímskou vojenskou činnosťou v období markomanských vojen.

Obr. 1. Lokality vnútrokarpatskej przeworskej kultúry a distribúcia bronzových ostroh Ginalski E pri severnej hranici provincie Dácia. 1 – Muhi-Kocsmadomb; 2 – Porolissum; 3 – Jac; 4 – Ilișua; 5 – Orheiul Bistriței. H – Hevešská župa; Sz – bývalá župa Szabolcs (mapa E. Soós).

Obr. 2. Lokalita Muhi-Kocsmadomb na mape prvého vojenského mapovania (mapa E. Soós).

Obr. 3. Lokality z doby rímskej na planine Sajó-Hernád. 1 – Bükkábrány-Bánya, XI/A; 2 – Hejőpapi-Heves okresná skládka odpadu; 3 – Miskolc-Szirma; 4 – Miskolc-Sötétkapu; 5 – Szirmabesenyő-Homokbánya; 6 – Sajókeresztúr-Homokbánya; 7 – Mezőzombor-Temető; 8 – Abaújszántó-Gyűr-tető alja; 9 – Garadna-Kovács tanya; 10 – Hernádvécse-Nagy rét (mapa E. Soós).

Obr. 4. Bronzová ostroha z Muhi-Kocsmadomb (kresba Zs. Varga, foto E. Soós).

Eszter Soós, PhD.

ELTE Research Centre for the Humanities

Institute of Archaeology

Tóth Kálmán utca 4

H – 1097 Budapest

soos.eszter@htk.elte.hu

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2442-2323>