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# „VADRÓZSÁBÓL TÜNDÉRSÍPOT CSINÁLTAM”

Tanulmányok Istvánovits Eszter  
60. születésnapjára

## „TO MAKE A FAIRY’S WHISTLE FROM A BRIAR ROSE”

Studies presented to Eszter Istvánovits  
on her sixtieth birthday

*Három egész napon át  
bújtam erdő vadonát,  
gombamezőt, sziklatetőt bejártam.  
Három egész napon át  
faragtam egy furulyát,  
vadrózsából tündérsípot csináltam.*

*(Weöres Sándor: Furulya)*

*Three days I spent in the forest’s arms  
exploring its enchanted charms,  
from its cliff-top crown to its mulchy toe  
Three days I spent in the forest’s arms  
and there a flute myself did carve  
to make a fairy’s whistle from a briar rose.*

*(Sándor Weöres: The flute)  
(Translated by John Conyers)*

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# Bowmen's Graves from the Hunnic Period in Northern Illyricum

Michel Kazanski

This paper will analyse two bowmen's graves from the Hunnic Period discovered in Northern Illyricum, with particular attention to the finds of bows in the context of European burials from the Great Migration Period.

One of these burials was discovered in the cemetery of Singidunum IV, located near the walls of the Late Roman/Early Byzantine borderland *castrum* of Singidunum in the province of Moesia I. This grave no. 2/2006 was an inhumation with the body in extended position, in a rectangular 2.7 x 1.2 m large grave pit (Fig. 1). Iron nails in the grave indicate that there was a wooden coffin. Although the burial was partially destroyed, relatively rich grave goods survived, particularly costume elements (a brooch, buckles, and a belt-end), weapons (a sword with details of a scabbard and a pendant, a spear, bone bow laths, arrows, shield boss and handle), a knife and a purse with coins of Marcus Aurelius and a fire-steel (Fig. 2). Publication of this grave is very detailed, suggesting its date to the late phase D2 according to the chronology of the European Barbaricum, that is to say, 420/430–450 AD (IVANIŠEVIĆ–KAZANSKI 2007.). Especially interesting are four laths of a bow, accompanied with a quiver with arrows (Fig. 2: 17).

The second grave was discovered in a small cemetery from the Great Migration Period in the Sava River Basin, on the left bank of the latter's tributary, Vranja, near the modern settlement of Hrtkovci (DAUTOVA–RUŠEVLJAN 1998.). This territory was subordinated to the province of Pannonia II in the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The grave contained a skeleton in extended position with the head to the west. Although contours of the grave pit remained untraced, there were iron clamps of a wooden coffin. The find material included a biconical vessel and eight bone laths of a bow (Fig. 3). The skull of the deceased bears traces of artificial deformation. This rite originated among the Sarmatians and the Alans and became well-known in the Middle Danube Region in the 5<sup>th</sup> century (ANKE 1998. 126–130). The ceramic pot from this grave is analogous with the vessel discovered in the same cemetery, in female grave no. 1, which was reliably dated to the late phase D2, that is to say, 420/430–450 AD (TEJRAL 2007. 78–81, TEJRAL 2011. 367–368). Both vessels were possibly made in the same workshop, and their chronologies are similar.

Bows with bone laths originated in Asia (HAZANOV 2008. 78–83). According to Joachim Werner, their distribution in Europe went on in several waves. They initially occurred among auxiliary “eastern” units of the Roman army that borrowed this type of bow from the Parthians. Then, in the Late Roman Period, bows with laths disappeared from the Roman army; following that, they occurred among the Huns, who originated from Inner Asia (WERNER 1956. 46–50). Bone bow laths are actually well-known in the funeral context in Inner Asia from the 4<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. in the moment when the Huns migrated to the West (ANKE 1998. 124–125, Taf. 62, BÓNA 2002. 100–102, fig. 97).

However, there are bone bow laths from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century known in the West, particularly in Mainz, Caerleon, Waden Hill, Buch, and Straubing, thus showing that this type of weapons continuously existed in the Empire (HAZANOV 2008. 84–85, KAZANSKI 1991. 135). Simultaneously, before the arrival of the Huns, bone bow laths existed among the peoples populating steppes of Eastern Europe from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, particularly among the Alans and Sarmatians (WERNER 1956. Taf. 37: 2, Karte 4, HAZANOV 2008. 84–85). This weapon was also known in the “Late Sarmatian Period” (2<sup>nd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> c.) and in the steppe of the Southern Ural and Northern Kazakhstan, i.e. in the area where the Huns should have arrived during their migration to the west in the 4<sup>th</sup> century (HAZANOV 2008. 73–75).

The 120–150 cm long bow with bone laths was the Huns’ main weapon (ALFÖLDI 1932. 18–26, ZASETSKAYA 1994. 35–36, BÓNA 2002. 117–121, KAZANSKI 2012. 193–194). The Huns usually used arrows with a relatively big, three-winged head (ZASETSKAYA 1994. fig. 4, type 3b), such as the pieces found in the grave of Singidunum IV (Fig. 3: 11). They caused the enemy and, no less important, its horses big open wounds doing voluminous bleeding. Three-winged arrowheads originated in the steppe but soon spread throughout Europe, so from the early 5<sup>th</sup> century on, they occurred among very different peoples along a vast tract from the forest zone of present-day Russia to Gallia (KAZANSKI 2009. 102, KAZANSKI 2014. 48–49).

Bodo Anke compiled a list of finds of bows with bone laths from the Great Migration Period (ANKE 1998. Karte 5, Fundliste 4). Although this list could be amended<sup>1</sup>, the data at our disposal clearly define two main areas of their distribution: Russian-Ukrainian steppes and the Middle Danube Region, where, apart from Singidunum IV and Vranja, finds from the Hunnic Period also include a grave in Wien–Simmering (Fig. 4, Appendix, 10–12). It is important to mention bow laths discovered in the fortress of Intercisa, where barbarian *foederati* of the Empire were stationed (TEJRAL 1988. Abb. 12: 1). Besides, there are finds of laths of the type in the Early Byzantine fortress of Pontes on the Danube, in Northern Serbia (ŠPEHAR 2010. 128–129, tabl. 38: 693, 695).

Graves from the Great Migration Period with bone laths of bow are known both among the peoples of the steppe and “settled” barbarians (Fig. 4, Appendix). This way, gold applications of bow are documented in graves of Hunnic leaders (BÓNA 2002. 131–133), particularly in Jakuszo-wice (WERNER 1956. Taf. 61, GODŁOWSKI 1995. Abb. 2: 1), even though not in all cases reconstructions of these bows seem reliable. Anyway, it is clear that bows were attributes of power in the “empire” of the Huns (LÁSZLÓ 1951).<sup>2</sup>

In the Post-Hunnic Period, deposition of bow and arrows into grave symbolised a relatively high status of the deceased at the Germanic tribes. Bow with bone laths and arrows in quiver were excavated from “princely” graves from the middle and the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century in Blučina, Moravia (TIHELKA 1963. 488–489, TEJRAL 2002. pl. 11: 11, 23), and in Esslingen–Rüden in South-western Germany (CHRISTLEIN 1972. 261–262). In the Early Merovingian Period (470/480–520/530 AD), bowman’s equipment, first of all arrows, of the Franks and the Alemanni was found in Samson, grave 12; Hermes, grave 2581; Charleville–Mezières, grave 68; Flonheim, graves 1 and 9, and Hemmingen, graves 2 and 21 (MARTIN 1993. fig. 1: 2).

Bow graves in Singidunum IV and Vranja are not connectable with 5<sup>th</sup> century social elites defined by Volker Bierbrauer for the Middle Danubian barbarians as Category I in his hierarchy.

<sup>1</sup> It is important to remember the bow lath from building VI in the settlement of Khitsy, belonging to the Pen’kovka archaeological culture, in the left bank of the Dnieper, which testifies to the spread of bows with bone laths among the Slavs (Antae) in the Hunnic Period (GORIUNOV 1981. fig. 21: 9, KAZANSKI 2014. 47).

<sup>2</sup> In the night of Attila’s death, Emperor Marcian saw a dream with the broken bow of this great leader of the Huns (JORDANES *Getica*, 255), which is an indirect reference for the bow’s symbolic role among the Huns.

There actually were no “high-status” goods, such as gold and rare imports (BIERBRAUER 1989.). However, bow graves undoubtedly possess specific position among the graves of the next in hierarchy Category II, and therefore they could be identified as those of “top middle class,” i.e. Category IIa. It is true that they contained remains of bows, which were relatively rare in the Hunnic Period outside civilisations of the steppe (see Appendix). It has already been stated that bow played a symbolic role among the Huns, and therefore among the peoples conquered by them. Bow became a part of grave goods of military leaders of the Germanic tribes in the Post-Hunnic Period (see above). No doubts, the Germans imitated prestigious funeral rituals of the Hunnic elite. The sword in the grave in Singidunum IV supplies another evidence of the special position of the deceased. This weapon most often occurred in privileged graves and clearly played an outstanding symbolic role in funeral rituals (KAZANSKI 1999.).

\* \* \*

In the Hunnic Period, the groups of cemeteries in the Middle Danube Region which contained weapon graves, particularly with bows and arrows, archaeologically reflect small militarised polities (“barbarian kingdoms”), which were to some extent controlled by the Huns (TEJRAL 2007. 82–86, 92–96, Abb. 27). Materials of these sites, particularly warrior and horse equipment, show visible influences from the steppe. Generally, the creators of these groups of sites were populations of heterogeneous culture, a part of which came to the Danube area from the outside. Their appearance was related to military, political and cultural changes happened when the Huns established themselves at the Middle Danube. After the fall of the “empire” of the Huns, these militarised groups established, sooner or later, alliances with the Roman Empire. These people formed embryos of “barbarian kingdoms”, or the *gentes* of the Post-Hunnic Period, such as the Ostrogoths, Gepids, Heruls, Langobards, and others (TEJRAL 1997. 139–162, TEJRAL 2002. 509–511, TEJRAL 2007. 102–111, TEJRAL 2011. 401–403). These groups appeared both in Roman provinces and in the neighbouring Barbaricum, on the other side of the Danube. According to Jaroslav Tejral, one of these groups formed the sites in Northern Illyricum (TEJRAL 1997. 143).

Translated from Russian by Nikita Khrapunov

### Appendix

Burials of the Hunnic Period with bone laths of the bow (Europe). Numbers correspond to the numbers on Fig. 4.

1. Solonchanka I (Солончанка I), barrow 1 (LIUBCHANSKIJ–TAIROV 1999. fig. 22).
2. Kyzyl-Adyr (Кызыл-Адыр), grave (ZASETSKAYA 1994. tabl. 36: 2–11, ANKE 1998. Taf. 121).
3. Zeelman–Rovnoe (Зеельман–Ровное), barrow D-42 (ZASETSKAYA 1994. tabl. 29: 4, ANKE 1998. Taf. 90: 1–11).
4. Engels-Pokrovsk (Энгельс-Покровск), barrow 17 (ZASETSKAYA 1994. tabl. 31: 4, KAZANSKI 2009. fig. 25: 16–17). The tomb may belong to the Post-Hunnic Period (ZASETSKAYA ET AL. 2007. 113).

5. Engels-Pokrovsk (Энгельс-Покровск), barrow 18 (ZASETSKAYA 1994. tabl. 31: 12–14, ANKE 1998. Taf. 90: 12–21, KAZANSKI 2009. fig. 25: 20, 22–24). The tomb may belong to the Post-Hunnic Period (ZASETSKAYA ET AL. 2007. 113).
6. Kubej (Кубей), barrow 8, grave 2 (ZASETSKAYA 1994. tabl. 47: 11, ANKE 1998. Taf. 128).
7. Kerch (Керчь), vault 154.1904 (ZASETSKAYA 1993. no. 229).
8. Starozhilovo (Старожилово) I, vault 4/4 (MASLENNIKOV 1997. fig. 11: 1–3).
9. Ust'-Alma (Усть-Альма), vault 635 (PUZDROVSKIJ–ZAITSEV–NENEVOLIA 1999. fig. 5).
10. Vranja, grave 2 (DAUTOVA-RUŠEVLJAN 1998., TEJRAL 2011. Abb. 289).
11. Wien–Simmering, grave (TEJRAL 1988. Abb. 18: 11–13, 15–16, ANKE 1998. Taf. 66: 14, TEJRAL 2011. Abb. 112).
12. Singidunum IV, grave 2/2006 (IVANIŠEVIĆ–KAZANSKI 2007., TEJRAL 2011. Abb. 288).
13. Almalyk-Dere (Алмалык-Дере), vault 118/2000, cremation grave 1/2000 (MAĆCZYŃSKA ET AL. 2016. Taf. 94).

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## Hun kori íjásztemetkezések Észak-Illyricumból

A tanulmány az Észak-Illyricumban talált íjásztemetkezésekkel foglalkozik: a Singidunum IV. lelőhely 2/2006. sírjával és a vranjai temető 2. sírjával. Az európai barbaricum kronológia szerinti D2 fázisra keltezhető, vagyis a Kr.u. 420/430–450 közötti periódusra. A népvándorláskorban a csont íjlemezek széles körben elterjedtek a sztyeppei népeknél és kevésbé általánosan a „letelepedett” barbárok között. Mivel a Hun Birodalomban az íjak hatalmi jelképként szolgáltak, okunk van feltételezni, hogy a letelepedett népesség temetkezéseiben egyrészt hun hatást tükröznek, másrészt az elhunyt személy különleges társadalmi helyzetét jelzik. A singidunumi és vranjai íjásztemetkezések az V. századi közép-Duna-vidéki barbároknak nem az elit rétegét képviselik, mivel sírjaikban nem kerültek elő „státusz” leletek, aranymellékletek és idegen származású tárgyak. Nagyobb valószínűséggel kapcsolhatók a „középosztály” privilegizált részéhez. A hun korban a Közép-Duna-vidéken ismerünk olyan temetőcsoportokat, ahol fegyveres sírokat, köztük íjat és nyilakat tartalmazókat találunk. Ezek régészetiileg a kisebb katonai államalakulatokra („barbár királyságok”) utalnak, amelyek a hunok különböző mértékű ellenőrzése alatt álltak. Az itt nyugvóhelyre talált lakosság heterogén volt. Az észak-illyricumi íjásztemetkezések, köztük a cikkben tárgyalt singidunumi és vranjai sír, egy ilyenfajta csoporthoz tartozhattak.

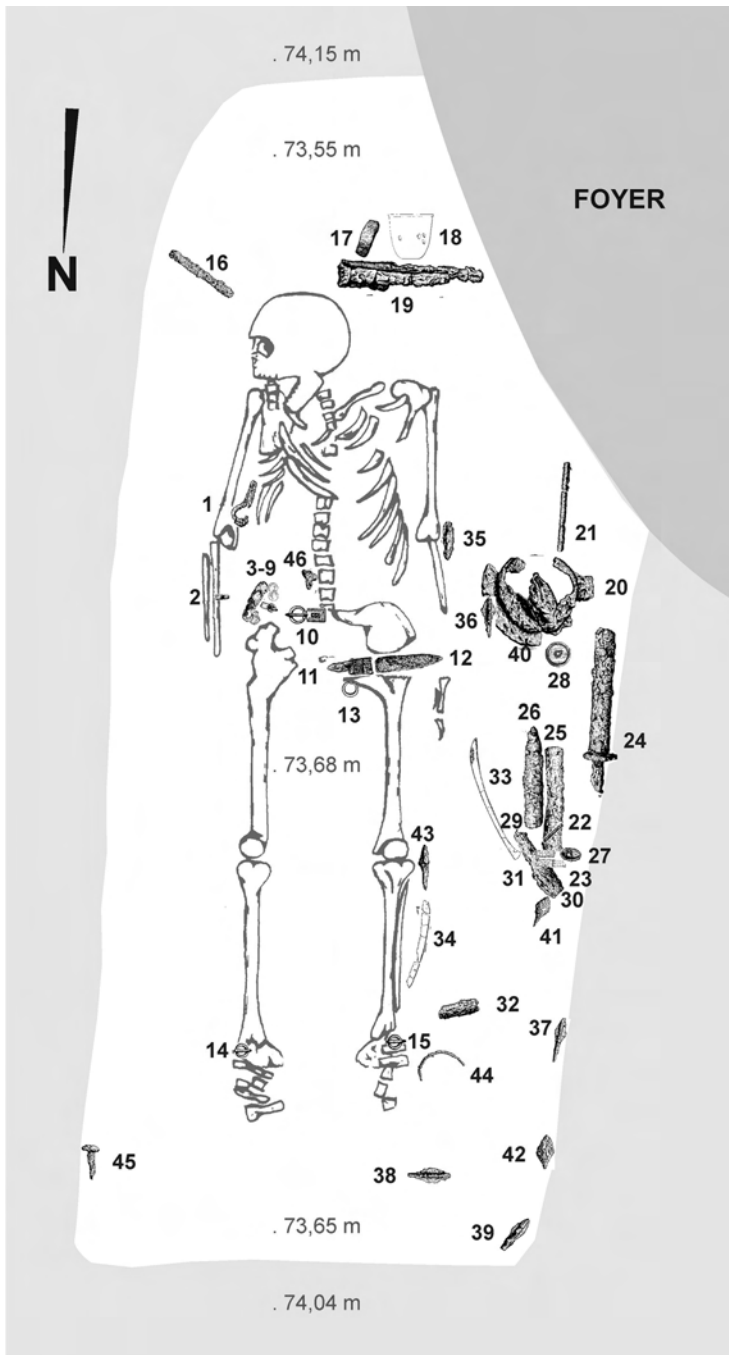
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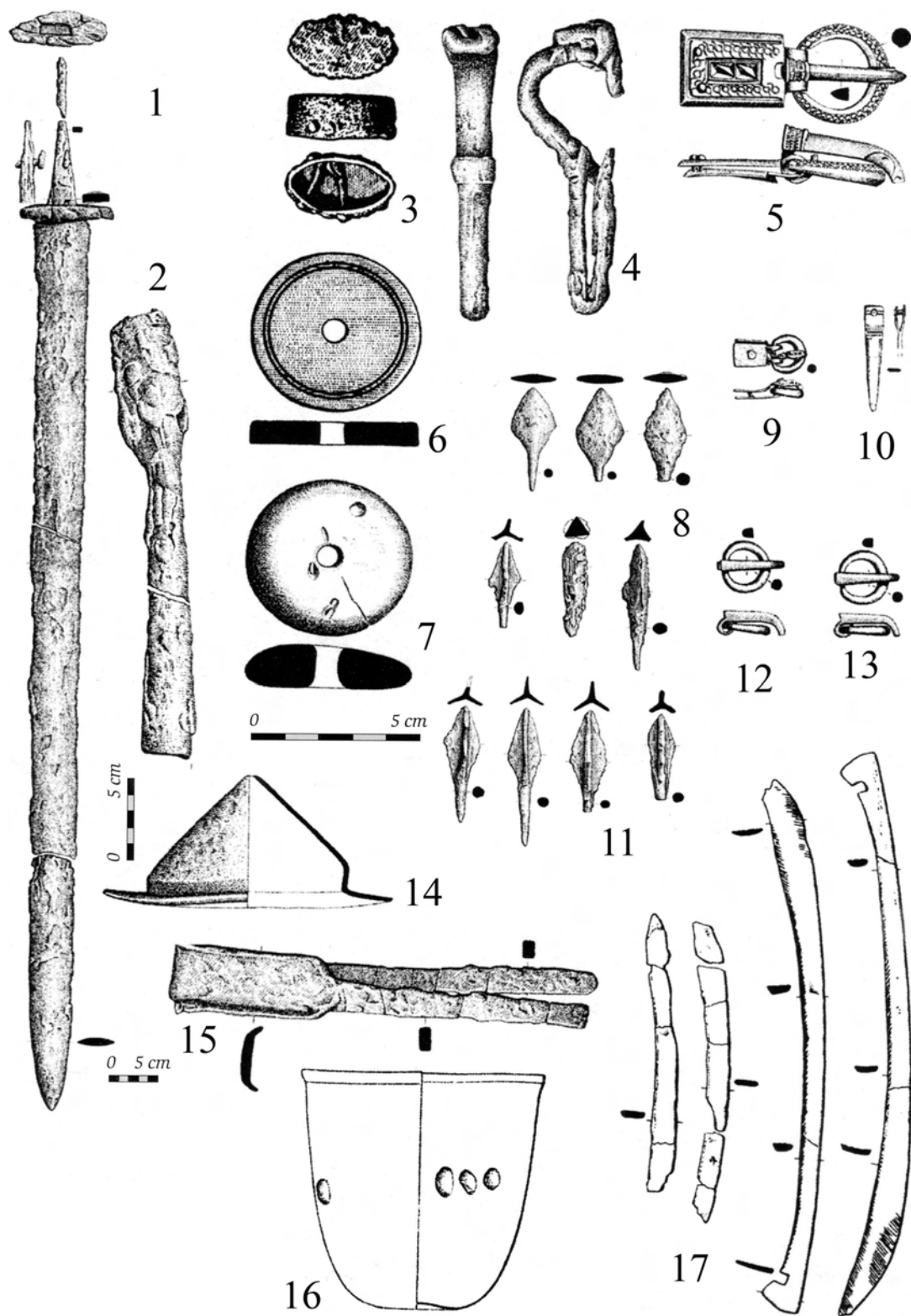
52. rue du cardinal Lemoine

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**Fig. 1**  
Singidunum IV, grave 2/2006

**1. kép**  
Singidunum IV, 2/2006. sír



**Fig. 2**  
Singidunum IV, grave 2/2006. Part of the grave goods

**2. kép**

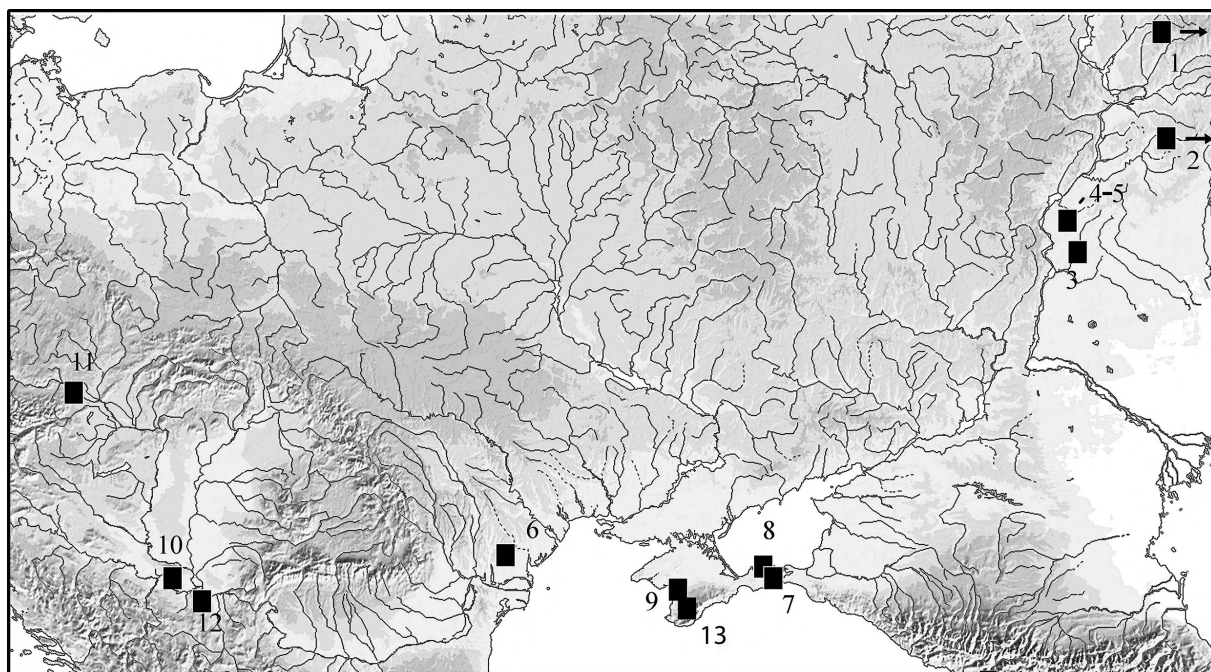
Singidunum IV, a 2/2006. sír néhány lelete



**Fig. 3**  
Grave from Vranja

**3. kép**  
A vranjai sír





**Fig. 4**

Burials of the Hunnic Period with bone laths of the bow. 1: Solonchanka, 2: Kyzyl-Adyr, 3: Zeelman–Rovnoe, 4: Engels-Pokrovsk, 5: Engels-Pokrovsk, 6: Kubej, 7: Kerch, 8: Starozhilovo, 9: Ust'-Alma, 10: Vranja, 11: Wien–Simmering, 12: Singidunum, 13: Almalyk-Dere

**4. kép**

Hun kori sírok csont íjlemezekkel. 1: Szoloncsanka, 2: Kizil-Adir, 3: Zeelman–Rovnoe, 4: Engels-Pokrovszk, 5: Engels-Pokrovszk, 6: Kubej, 7: Kercs, 8: Sztarozsilovo, 9: Uszty-Alma, 10: Vranja, 11: Wien–Simmering, 12: Singidunum, 13: Almalik-Dere