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**HUNS, GERMANS, BYZANTINES?
THE ORIGINS OF THE NARROW BLADED LONG SEAXES**

ABSTRACT

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Among the seaxes of the Hun Period there is a type that can be clearly distinguished in the Carpathian Basin and in the second half of the 5th century, which has the blade length of between 30 and 60 cm and the width of between 3 and 4 cm. The type is known under assorted names: single-edged cutsword (scramasax, Langsax, *schmaler Langsax*) or narrow long seax. Starting from the 1990's and 2000's, increasingly recognized as a lesser-known single-edged combat weapon of the Byzantine army. The aim of this paper is to summarize the origine (Hunic, Byzantine) of this blade-weapon.

It is evident that the cognition and the reception of the basic form happened in the Hun Period. It is remarkable that in elsewhere in Europe, as compared to the Carpathian Basin, single-edged cutting weapons appear a generation later and are used briefly, only during the few decades following the Hun era. Immediately after the Hun era, in the period of row-grave cemeteries (*Reihen-gräberfeld*), quite a few of the narrow-edged lang seaxes were unearthed from areas under Gepid (6th century) settlement. The debate over the objects possibly crafted in Byzantine territory is not easily decidable. From the early Byzantine period only a single longer, single-edged cutting weapon is known (Sardis), apart from this find, narrow-bladed lang seaxes have been unearthed in Serbia and Bulgaria, but in the case of these burials is mostly safe to assume that they belonged to Germanic mercenaries who had arrived in the Balkans. Even if we assume that the number of the weapon finds will grow, with this state of research, the Byzantine origin of lang seaxes is not convincing.

Key words: Migration Period; Carpathian Basin; Gepids; Byzantine weapons; seax; blade-weapons

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INTRODUCTION

Identifying the origin, or, the place of production of different objects is a task forever addressed in archaeological research¹. These days the study of this matter may have become increasingly complex now that it has been proven multiple

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times that the similarity of form, style and ornamental motif need not always be the proof of common origin (D a i m 2000; D a i m, B ü h l e r 2012). But nowadays we can turn to the natural sciences with some of our questions, which not only help us deepen our knowledge but may also suggest new problems in need of investigation. To trace back the origin of different weapons, weapon types and their ornamental motifs may seem to be a harder task than to identify the manufacturing place of jewelry or dress accessories. The development of a combat weapon and its appearance in diverse cultures may result in the evolution of the basic form of this instrument while its elementary function is retained despite alterations. Literary and pictorial sources from the Early Middle Ages are far from satisfactory and rarely of help in identifying the history of a given weapon form. These problems of methodology are well known to any researcher studying the origins of Byzantine weaponry. In the case of Byzantium the basic sources of information are scarce indeed since most of the material evidence is missing from its early period. It is well known that the weapon finds from burial contexts and settlements are infrequent (R i e m e r 2000; Q u a s t 2012, 351–352). To complete this very mosaic-like picture it used to be common in research to apply the material from the territory neighboring the Empire, mostly barbarian, where weapon finds from cemeteries and settlements are much more common. In recent decades scholars tried to identify, mainly the missing offensive and defensive weaponry of the Byzantine Empire, by drawing on archaeological finds from the barbarian territory.

Building on such a foundation the research of the last decade began to put more emphasis on the study of different Byzantine elements in the Merovingian material culture of the Carpathian Basin. Of these more notable is the case of the so-called “narrow bladed long seax” (*Langsax*)²: previously supposed to have a nomadic (Hunnish) origin but, starting from the 1990’s and 2000’s, increasingly recognized as a lesser-known single-edged combat weapon of the Byzantine army (K a z a n s k i 1991; Q u a s t 1999). In correspondence with the 1990’s Byzantine orientation, the theory of the Hun origin of the narrow lang seax remained present in the research. Immediately after the Hun era, in the period of row-grave cemeteries (*Reihengräberfeld*), quite a few of the narrow-edged lang seaxes were unearthed from areas under Gepid settlement. The weaponry of the Gepids resembles the contemporary Merovingian, although a few differences make it more colorful (for Gepid weaponry of the Tisza environment see: K i s s P. 2012). The material culture of the Gepids of the Carpathian Basin was influenced, additionally to the Merovingian, by the Italian Ostrogothic,

² There is no proper nomenclature for the term seax in the Hungarian archaeological literature, similar to the one used in Western, mainly German works. I. B ó n a (1993, 165–166) tried to use the bowie-knife and assault dagger expressions for the seax, but it may seem anachronistic in the case of the latter. G. V ö r ö s (1988, 53) called the single-edged short “side arms” — distinguishing them from the double-edged daggers and swords — long knives. The term *scramasax* and *langsax* appear in an unaltered form in the works of J. C s e h, I. B ó n a and M. N a g y (2002, 212; see also C s e h 1989, 73; B ó n a 2002, 206).

the Mediterranean-Byzantine and the pre-Gepid era Hun culture. The nomadic predecessors and the intensive interaction between the Gepids and the Byzantine Empire makes the identification of the origin and supposed manufacturing place of the lang seax of the Gepid row-grave cemeteries even more troublesome. Can we advance arguments in favor of the Hun origin advanced by J. Werner, or in favor of the Byzantine origin that is becoming more and more powerful these days? Can there be a unified opinion, in which the possibility of nomadic, Byzantine and local German development may converge with one another? The present study attempts to answer such questions, taking the meager amount of sources into consideration as well.

PROBLEMS OF TERMINOLOGY AND NOMENCLATURE

In the classification of the seax in German archaeological works, the grouping of the 5th and 6th centuries AD, long, narrow-edged blades became a major problem. Among the seaxes of the Hun Period there is a type that can be clearly distinguished in the Carpathian Basin and in the second half of the 5th century, which has the blade length of between 30 and 50 cm and the width of between 2 and 3 cm. Different pieces of works consider these weapons to be of Hun origin ever since the revolutionary monograph by J. Werner, their distribution range is regarded as the memory of common warfare in the Germanic community as well. The type is known under assorted names: single-edged cutsword (*das einschneidige Hiebschwert*), scramasax, Langsax, *schmaler Langsax*³. Another remarkable fact is that this type antedates the earliest Western short seaxes by a half century and is found only in row-grave cemeteries, worn by the first members of the earliest Merovingian horizon. These cannot be fitted into the universal development of the seaxes, since the short- and narrow seaxes (*Kurz-sax*, *Schmalsax*) were technologically advanced from late antique progenitors (Martin 2000, 160–162). The short- and narrow seaxes are followed chronologically by the broad seax. The so-called lang seax evolved from the heavy broad seax during the late Merovingian and the early Carolingian period, made then with a 50–60 cm long and 4–5 cm wide blade (Wernard 1998, 778–779)⁴. However, in the Carpathian Basin of the 5th and 6th centuries, there is a type of seax that has similar characteristics and it predates the Western lang seaxes by 200 years.

³ See: Werner 1956, 43; Quast 1999; Kazanski 1991, 132–133; Wernard 1998, 772–773, Anke 1998, 93–99. The term *scramasax* probably cannot be used in the case of the examined weapons; see the argumentation in Martin 2000, 163–164. The term itself appears in the work of Gregory of Tours; the 6th century bishop probably used it for the short (*kurz* or *breit*) seax: “[...] cultris validis, quos vulgo scramasaxos vocant [...]”; see Gregory of Tours, IV. 51., p. 188.

⁴ As a result of Carolingian connections of the late Avar era the lang seax appears among the weapons of the Avars of the Carpathian Basin. According to G. Csiky (2012, 382–384, 386–387) the coming into use of the lang seax was facilitated by its similar function to the saber and the single-edged sword.

The cutting weapon has similar appearance and construction, but it is somewhat more slender than the Carolingian era standard. Also, it does not have the blade slot. To be able to make a distinction between the aforementioned forms and the Carolingian period ones, I will use the term “narrow bladed lang seax” (*schmale Langsax* by D. Quast) for the single-edged cutting weapon⁵.

THE PREDECESSORS OF THE SHORT BLADED LANG SEAXES

Even in the earliest research the appearance of the relatively longer bladed, single-edged cutting weapons was connected to the arrival of the Huns. In his revolutionary monograph J. Werner treated the different sized cutting weapons, which mainly appeared in the first half of 5th century and in the burials of the Germanic elite, as a sign of a nomadic tradition (Werner 1956, 43–46). He determined their function according to this as well. His opinion was that lang seaxes were typical cavalry weapons (in Werner’s words: “sabre like”) and their main function purpose was cutting. Conclusions as to the function, chiefly in the case of the earliest pieces, are rather problematic⁶. Although the shorter, stabbing versions of seaxes are recorded starting from the early imperial age, the longer, single-edged cutting types may be regarded as the result of a unique development (Westphal 2004, 541–544). The combination of a sword and a shorter cutting weapon was a common phenomenon on the steppe in the age of the Scythians and Sarmatians too. The material from the 1st century AD Andreevski kurgan group includes 60 and 70 cm long and 3 cm wide blades. Their grip ends in a ring or antenna, just as the weapons of the Sarmatian era (Khudyakov 2006, 47–50; for ring-gripped swords in the Carpathian Basin see Istvánovits, Kulcsár 2011). In the age of the pre-Hun nomadic cultures, single-edged cutting weapons are not infrequent finds. Shorter and longer versions can be found in the archaeological material of the Sienpi, and among the burials of the Kokel Culture and Berel Group (Khudyakov 2006, 47–48, 54–55, 64–65). The weaponry of the nomadic groups of Central Asia of the 2nd and 4th centuries AD presents a fairly uniform picture, probably due to the cultural influence of larger tribal alliances. The first sword-seax combination is known from the tomb of Tuzla (Taman Peninsula), where a 40 cm long, 2 cm wide seax was unearthed. The burial can be dated to the 1st and 2nd centuries AD (Anke 1998, 93–94). Longer pieces are known from the 3rd and 4th century, but they are sporadic.

⁵ The Hungarian terminology uses the term “scramasax”, only M. Nagy uses the term “langsax” properly, in parallel with the “narrow bladed lang seax”, which can be regarded as consistent, according to the German metrical system; see Bóna, Nagy 2002, 212; Cseh 1989, 73; Bóna 2002, 206. The term *scramasax* is often used by the early German and Hungarian scholars, and the French scientists of nowadays; see Kazanski 1991; Kazanski, Mastykova, Périn 2002; Kazanski 2012.

⁶ Werner 1956, 44–46. Subsequently, these views were refuted by E. Szameit (1984, 150–152). According to his opinion, mainly the Wien-Simmering XXI deposit specimens are not suitable for mounted warfare, they were probably utilized as close combat stabbing weapons.

In the eastern territories, from the 4th century onward, that is to say, at the beginning of the Hun era, the number of sword-seax combinations increase. However, it is notable that these pieces are much smaller than the later, longer versions, their length at between 28 and 35 cm, their width between 2,7 and 3,5 cm (Fig. 1)⁷. We can safely say that at the dawn of the Hun era there are no longer, single-edged cutting weapons, on the path of the Hun migration. Shorter seaxes characterize the Central Asian archaeological material. This statement can also be accepted for the age which came before and followed the Hun era. In addition to double-edged swords, smaller daggers and single-edged specimens are mainly unearthed from weapon burials. Botalov traced their origins all the way to China. At the same time, his opinion is that the basic forms, mainly their ornamentation, were fundamentally influenced by the Roman–Byzantine workshops (Botalov 2006, 37–40).

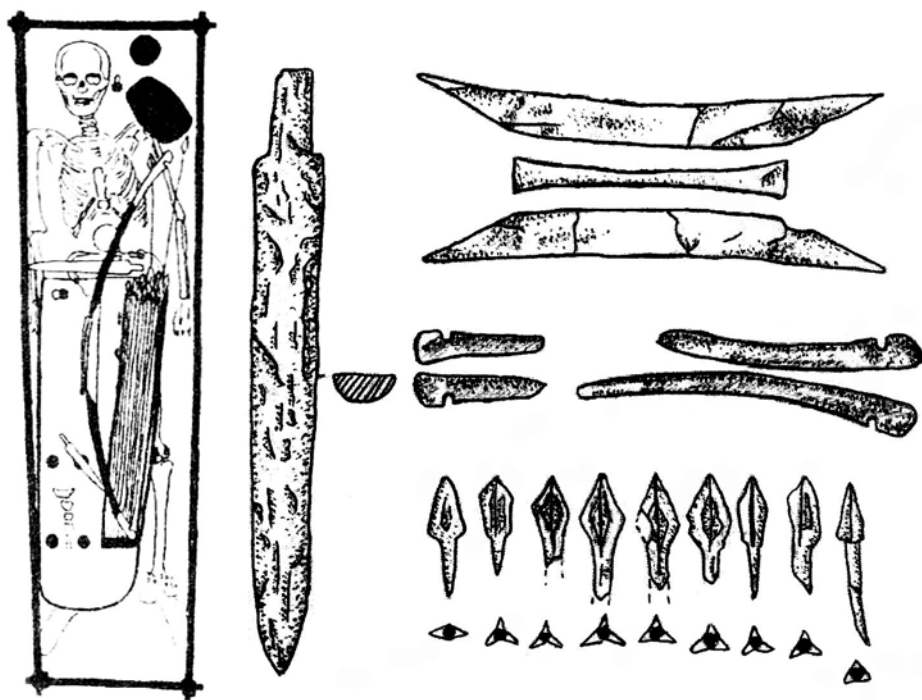


Fig. 1. Seax from the eastern territories. Grave of Aktobe II, Kirgizstan (no scale); after B. Anke (1998, Pl. 124); computer design A. P. Kiss and P. Jarosz.

⁷ In general, these are 34 cm long and 2.7 cm wide (e.g., Zevakino on the Irtysh River). At Kyzil-Kainartobe, a burial aligned NE-SW contained, next to an eastern sword, a 28 cm long and 3.5 cm wide fragmented objects. From Kirgizstan, from kurgan Baskiya No. 8, we know of 21.8 cm long “langsax”, dated to the Early Migration Period. At the excavation of Aktobe II comes a 35 cm long and 3.8 cm wide specimen. At Novogrigorevka a spatha was found together with a 24 cm long and 2.8 cm wide seax; cf. Anke 1998, 94–95.

The first seaxes appeared in the Carpathian Basin at the beginning of the 5th century AD. Of these the earliest (end of the 4th–beginning of the 5th century) is from Wien-Simmering (Wien-Simmering XI), where it was found in the company of a deformed mongoloid skull and the bone plates of a reflex bow (Fig. 2)⁸. This piece can absolutely be classified in the group of smaller versions, just as seax finds from Velatice (grave No. 9:1937), Csorna and Nagyvárad (Oradea).

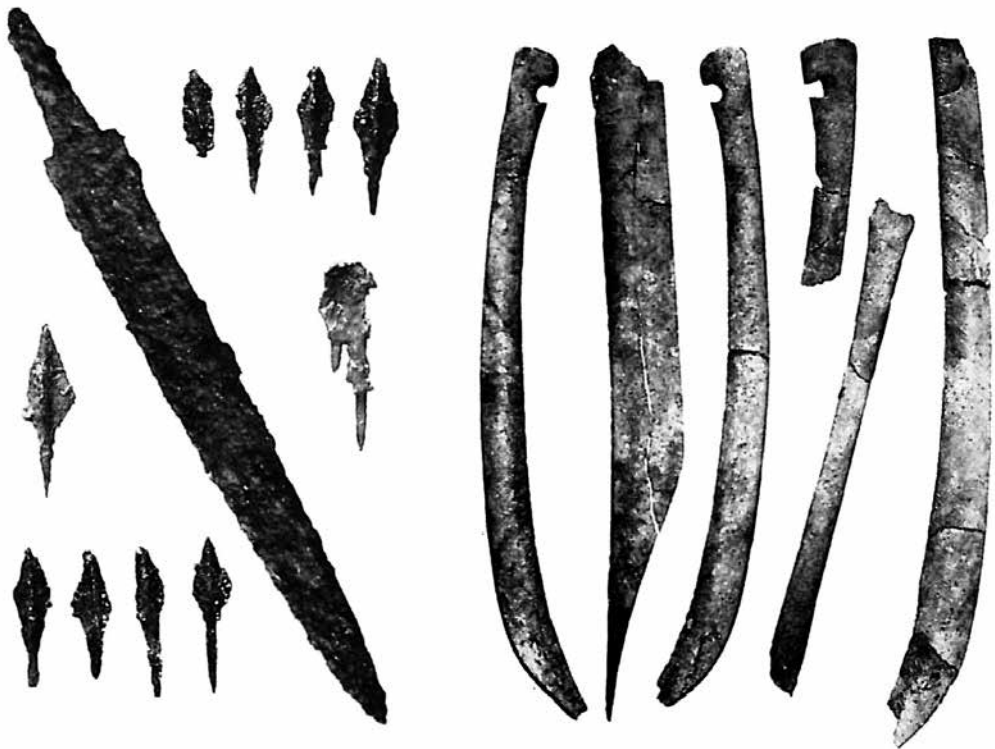


Fig. 2. Seax, the bone plates of a reflex bow and the arrowheads from Wien-Simmering, Austria, Grave No. XI (no scale); after J. Tejral (2007, 108); computer design A. P. Kiss and P. Jarosz.

The combination of the seax find from Velatice is closely related to the Wien-Simmering specimens, since we have an eastern influence here as well. For example, three-edged arrowheads and a deformed skull were unearthed during the excavation. To the same group of seaxes of less than 40 cm belong examples from Saratice (25 cm, mid–5th century), Oradea (Nagyvárad) and Ghenc (Gencs). It can be observed, even in the case of the earliest of these finds, that the grip barely parts from the back, except for the Velatice and Wien-Simmering cutting weapons, both of which have the grip in the middle (Fig. 3).

⁸ Anke 1998, 96. On the average, their length is between 24 and 34 cm. The Wien-Simmering finds were recently connected with the Hun material by J. Tejral (2010, 85–99).

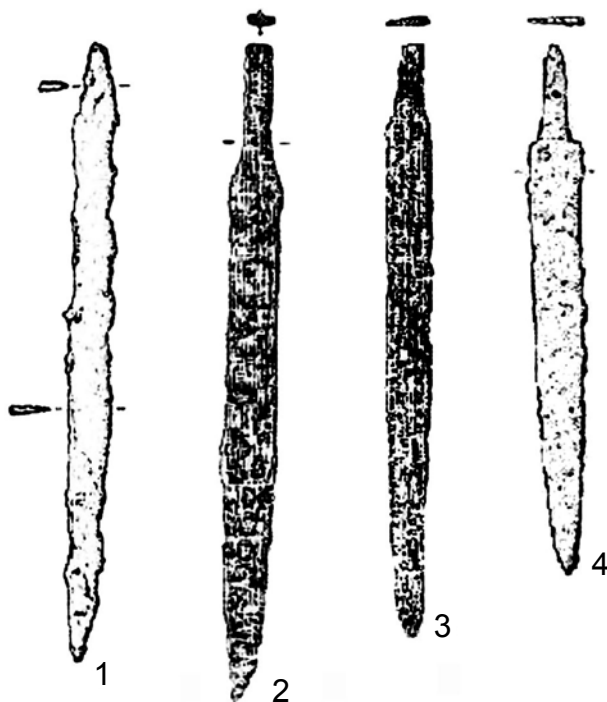


Fig. 3. Early seaxes in Eastern and Central Europe (no scale);
computer design A. P. Kiss and P. Jarosz.

1 — Wien-Leopoldau, Austria, Grave No. 3; after B. Anke (1998, Pl. 50:3); 2 — Velatice, okres Brno-venkov, Czech Republic, grave No. 1937:4; after B. Anke (1998, Pl. 64:4); 3 — Velatice, okres Brno-venkov, Czech Republic, Grave No. 1937:94; after B. Anke (1998, Pl. 64:3); 4 — Wien-Simmering, Austria, Grave No. XI; after B. Anke (1998, Pl. 66:1).

These early finds are followed during the second third of the 5th century by 40 and 50 cm long objects. It is difficult to tell if this change is the result of some internal development or of a continued east influence. Parallels for seaxes from the Carpathian Basin are mainly found in the Caucasian region, which prompted M. Kazanski to propose a Byzantine or Sassanid origin for the weapon (Kazanski 1991, 132–133; Kazanski, Mastykova, Périn 2002, 175–176, Kazanski 2012, 115–120; see Fig. 4). The first seax to occur in a combination with an eastern sword was found at Szirmabesenyő, and can be dated to the middle third of the 5th century (Megay 1952, 133–134; Tejral 2002, 500). Similar weapons are known from Tarnaméra, Csökmő, Oradea (Nagyvárad) and Gencs (Ghenc; 38 cm long) and may be dated to the Attila Period, the middle third of the 5th century (Fig. 5)⁹. A further pieces were buried in the northern

⁹ Čižmář, Tejral 2002, 107. The time of deposition of the Tarnaméra specimen is dated by other elements of the grave inventory (Entringen-Sindelfingen type of scabbard-chape) and the collateral findings was probably earthed after the Attila Period, so it augments the small number of solitary tombs with weapons of the second half of the 5th century; Menghin 1983, 138, 336; Tejral 1999, 257–258.

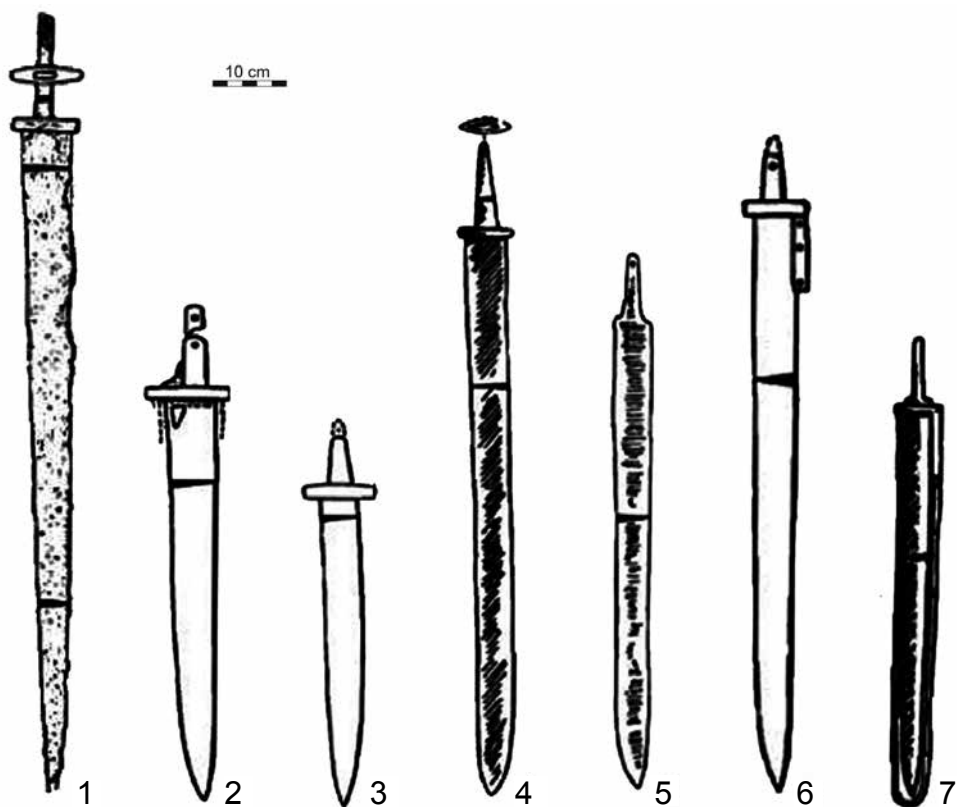


Fig. 4. Seaxes from Byzantine-Sassanid zone; after M. Kazanski (2012, Fig. 3); computer design A. P. Kiss and P. Jarosz.

1 — Noruzmahale, Iran; 2 — Tsibilium-3, Abkhazia, burial No. 435; 3 — Tsibilium-3, Abkhazia, burial No. 429; 4 — Shapka-Tserkovny Kholm-4 burial, Russia; 5 — Tsibilium-3, Abkhazia, burial No. 429; 6 — Tsibilium-1, Abkhazia burial No. 77; 7 — Shapka-Tserkovny Kholm-4, burial No. 7, Russia.

part of the Carpathian Basin and in the neighboring regions. Their size shows quite a large variety, since the Velatice seax was 25 cm long (3.5 cm wide), the Przemęczany piece was 42 cm long, the example from Levice (Léva)-Alsórték 3 burial was nearly 69 cm long (3.2 cm wide; see Anke 1998, 96–97; Tejral 2002, 503–504; *cf.* Fig. 6:1). Among the lang seaxes outside the Carpathian Basin, the fragmented Altlussheim weapon is the longest, with a surviving length of 61.8 cm, but it is possible that originally it may have been closer to 70 cm. It is clearly visible that in the chronological frame of the Hun Period and in the material from the Carpathian Basin the single-edged cutting weapons appear in a wide range of dimensions. It seems certain that the earliest objects (Wien-Simmering) can be related mainly to the eastern, short dagger-like seaxes of that era. Only one smaller group of seaxes is under 40 cm: Wien-Simmering, Saratice, Velatice, Oradea (Nagyvárad), Gencs (Ghenc). Most seaxes have a length of more than 40 cm, over 50 cm even (Tejral 2002, 504–505.). It is problematic whether

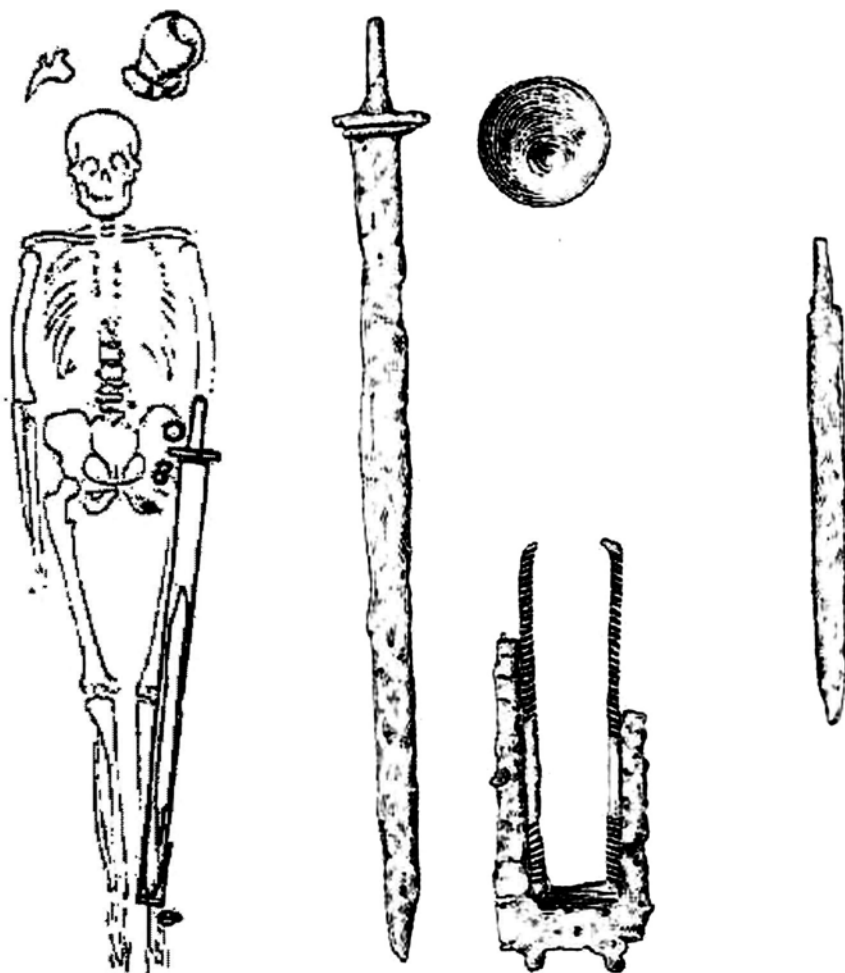


Fig. 5. Grave of Szirmabesenyő, megye Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Hungary (no scale); after G. M e g a y (1952, Fig. 1) and B. A n k e (1998, Pl. 91); computer design A. P. Kiss and P. Jarosz.

these shorter objects may be classified to the group of narrow-edged lang seaxes as in earlier studies (Werner, Anke). The basic studies dealing with the Hun era make no distinction between single-edged cutting weapons, all of them are described using the term *scramasax*, or narrow lang seax (*schmale Langsax*), while the German archaeological research of the previous decades has made a far more complicated system on the basis of the available metric data¹⁰. If we only

¹⁰ B. Anke rated the shorter pieces amongst the *schmalen lang seaxes* in his excellent monograph about the material culture of the Huns (A n k e 1998). Independently from Anke, Tejral and Kazanski also rated these short seax-like weapons into this category in most of their studies. Contrarily, for the summary of the latest categorization and nomenclature see: W e r n a r d 1998, 772–773.

take the firm metric-based distinction into account, then these weapons cannot be referred to as narrow-edged lang seaxes, perhaps, they may be regarded as their predecessors. Next to their differences in size their function could be dissimilar as well. The small short seax-like pieces may primarily have been used for stabbing while the specimens addressed here could mainly have been cutting weapons. It is debatable whether we can speak of distinct types in case of 10 or 15 examples. Those having a length of between 40 and 50 cm have been excavated together with eastern type swords, while the earlier seaxes appear on their own, or with eastern and late antique objects¹¹. Seaxes of under 50 cm were treated as a distinct group by J. Wernard, their form identified as “langen Schmalsax” to differentiate them from lang seaxes (Wernard 1998, 772–773). Single-edged weapon longer than 50 cm are rare, as shown by the unique case of the Levice (Léva) seax. Based on the above discussion we may claim that the predecessors of the single-edged cutting weapons in the Classical Hun era in the Carpathian Basin (D2/D3 period), and mainly in the second half of the period, also known to the Gepids, were present in the Carpathian Basin.

The lang seaxes spread to the Barbaricum west of the Carpathian Basin only a generation after the dissolution of the Hun Empire (Fig. 6). The narrow-bladed lang seaxes are present after the Hun era in burials of the German military elite as well (Tornai, Pouan-les-Vallées, Blučina; see Fig. 7:5–6). Presumably they may have been the predecessors of the objects recorded in the early row-grave cemeteries¹². Other than the spathas, seaxes appear as a secondary weapon in the burials of the elite of the second half of the 5th century, in exactly the same way as in the material from the Carpathian Basin. In Merovingian row-grave cemeteries the narrow-bladed lang seaxes imply eastern connections between the second half of the 5th century and the beginning of the 6th centuries since they frequently appear with objects of eastern origin (Anke 1998, 97)¹³. Objects from the western row-grave cemeteries (Basel — Kleinhüningen, Hemmingen, Eschborn, Westheim) not found in combination with a spatha — as opposed to the burials of the elite — all have a length of 40–60 cm and may be dated to the second half, or more likely, to the end of the 5th century (Anke 1998, 97; Reiss 1994, 64; cf. Fig. 7)¹⁴. Only the cutting weapons from grave No. 1 at Granschütz (71 cm) and grave No. 515 at Weingarten (78 cm) are made exceptional by their extraordinary length (Roth, Theune 1995, 154). In the west many of these forms have been unearthed together with three-edged arrowheads, but in row-grave cemeteries they have been found together with buckles of Mediterranean

¹¹ For the nature of cultural influences and for miscellaneous eastern and antique influences see: Tejral 2010.

¹² For the relations of the elite after the Hun era, the diversity of finds and a summary of Imperial relations see: Rummel 2005, 368–375.

¹³ E.g., the object from the cemetery at Eschborn is similar; see Ament 1992, 29–30; Koch 2001, 279–280.

¹⁴ To be precise, the weapon was excavated from grave 106 which also contained a spathe; cf. Martin 2002, 200.



Fig. 6. Narrow bladed langaxes in Carpathian Basin and West Europe in the second half of the 5th century (no scale); computer design A. P. Kiss and P. Jarosz.

1 — Levice (Léva), okres Levice, Slovakia; after B. Anke (1998, Pl. 67:24); 2 — Eschborn, Bundesland Hessen, Kreis Main-Taunus, Germany; after B. Anke (1998, Pl. 67:1); 3 — Esslingen-Rüdern, Bundesland Baden-Württemberg, Kreisstadt Esslingen, Germany; after B. Anke (1998, Pl. 67:10); 4 — Basel-Kleinhüningen, Kanton Basel-Stadt, Switzerland; after B. Anke (1998, 80); 5 — Pouan-les-Vallées, département Aube, France; after Ph. Riffaud-Longuespé (2007, Fig. on p. 206); 6 — Tournai, Province de Hainaut, Belgium, grave of Childerich; after M. Kazanski (2012, Fig. 5:2, 5).

type (Tejral 2005, 112). Their westernmost appearance was in modern Spain (Guereñu, Armissan, La Vernet-La Mouraut), where they were excavated from a cemetery dated to between the middle of the 5th and the beginning of the 6th centuries (Pinar, Ripoll 2007, 82–83).

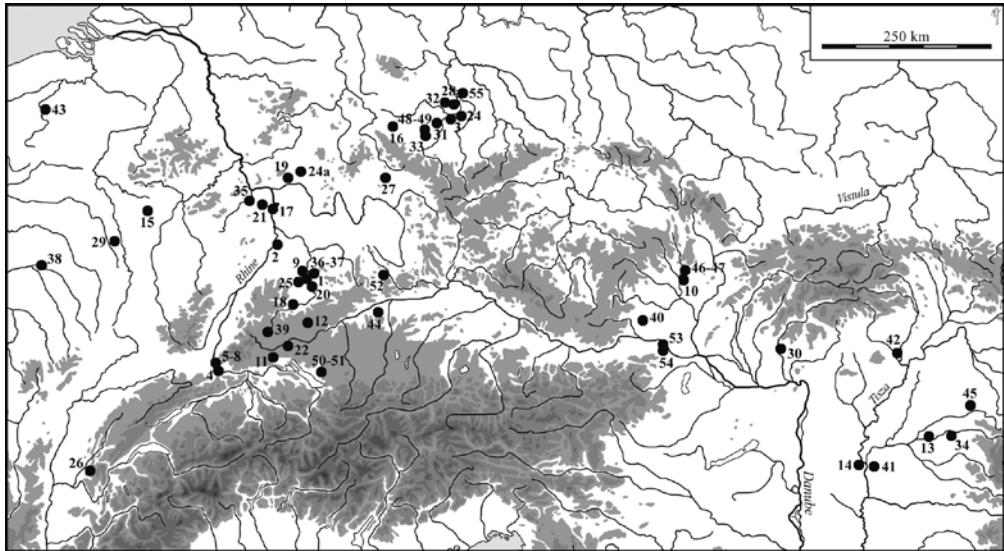


Fig. 7. Map of seaxes in Central and West Europe; after U. Koch (2001, Fig. 113; List No. 31; BL — Bundesland; K. — Kreis; DE — Germany; m. — megye, HU - Hungary); drawn by A. P. Kiss and I. Jordan.

1 — Adlingen, BL Baden-Württemberg, K. Tuttlingen, DE; 2 — Altlußheim, BL Baden-Württemberg, K. Rhein-Neckar, DE; 3 — Bad Sulza, BL Thüringen, K. Weimarer Land, DE; 4 — Basel-Gotterbarmweg, Kanton Basel-Stadt, Switzerland; 5–8 — Basel-Kleinhüningen, Kanton Basel-Stadt, Switzerland; 9 — Bietigheim, BL Baden-Württemberg, K. Ludwigsburg, DE; 10 — Blučina, okres Brno-venkov, Czech Republic; 11 — Blumenfeld, BL Baden-Württemberg, K. Konstanz, DE; 12 — Burladingen, BL Baden-Württemberg, K. Zollernalb, DE; 13 — Csökmő, m. Hajdú-Bihar, HU; 14 — Csongrád, m. Csongrád, HU; 15 — Cutry, département Meurthe-et-Moselle, France; 16 — Eberstadt, BL Thüringen, K. Gotha, DE; 17 — Eich, BL Hessen, Kr. Alzey-Worms, DE; 18 — Entringen, BL Baden-Württemberg, K. Tübingen, DE; 19 — Eschborn, BL Hessen, K. Main-Taunus, DE; 20 — Esslingen-Rüdern, BL Baden-Württemberg, K. Esslingen, DE; 21 — Flonheim, BL Rheinland-Pfalz, K. Alzey-Worms, DE; 22 — Fridingen an der Donau, BL Baden-Württemberg, K. Tuttlingen, DE; 23 — Ghenci, județul Satu Mare, Romania; 24 — Granschütz, BL Sachsen-Anhalt, Burgenlandkreis, DE; 24a — Groß-Karben, BL Hessen, Wetteraukreis, DE; 25 — Hemmingen, Kr. Ludwigsburg Baden-Württemberg, K. Ludwigsburg, DE; 26 — Izenave, département L'Ain, France; 27 — Königshofen, BL Baden-Württemberg, K. Main-Tauber, DE; 28 — Langeneichstädt, BL Sachsen-Anhalt, Saalekreis, DE; 29 — Lavoye, département Moza, France; 30 — Levice, okres Levice, Slovakia; 31 — Naumburg-Schönburgerstraße, BL Sachsen-Anhalt, Burgenlandkreis, DE; 32 — Oberschmon, BL Sachsen-Anhalt, Saalekreis, DE; 33 — Oberweimar, BL Thüringen, K. Weimar, DE; 34 — Oradea-Szalka, județul Bihor, Romania; 35 — Planig, BL Rheinland-Pfalz, DE; 36–37 — Pleidelsheim, BL Baden-Württemberg, K. Ludwigsburg, DE; 38 — Pouan-les-Vallées, département Aube, France; 39 — Rottweil, BL Baden-Württemberg, K. Rottweil, DE; 40 — Sigmundsherberg, Land Niederösterreich, Kreis Horn, Austria; 41 — Szentes, m. Csongrád, HU; 42 — Szirmabesenyő, m. Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, HU; 43 — Tournai, Province de Hainaut, Belgium; 44 — Unterthürheim, BL Bayern, K. Dillingen a.d. Donau, DE; 45 — Valea-lui-Mihai (Érmihályfalva), județul Bihor, Romania; 46–47 — Velatice, okres Brno-venkov, Czech Republic; 48–49 — Weimar, BL Thüringen, K. Weimar, DE; 50–51 — Weingarten, BL Baden-Württemberg, K. Ravensburg, DE; 52 — Westheim, BL Bayern, K. Weißenburg-Gunzenhausen, DE; 53 — Wien-Leopoldau, Austria; 54 — Wien-Simmering, Austria; 55 — Zwintschöna, BL Sachsen-Anhalt, Saalkreis, DE.

The use of narrow-bladed lang seaxes can be observed in the Carpathian Basin after the Hun Period, in the second half of the 5th century. At Valea lui Mihai (Érmihályfalva), similarly to the burials of the European elite, a object was unearthed with a spatha, while at Hács-Béndekpuszta a seax (43 cm long and

3 cm wide) was the only weapon in the tomb¹⁵. From the Transdanubium there is only one known and only partly published single-bladed cutting weapon, discovered in a grave, on the left side of the burial, resting on the leg bone¹⁶. After the second half of the 5th century narrow-bladed lang seaxes are not seen to the west of the Tisza. They are missing as well from burials of the Langobardic warriors.

The schmalen lang seaxes that appeared in western Europe (mainly Switzerland, South-Germany) also spread in the Carpathian Basin, primarily on Gepid territory (Fig. 8). In contrast to the Hun era, in the row-grave cemeteries of the Gepids there are no cutting weapons to be found other than single-edged lang seaxes. In this case, they take the role of the spatha, which was the principal

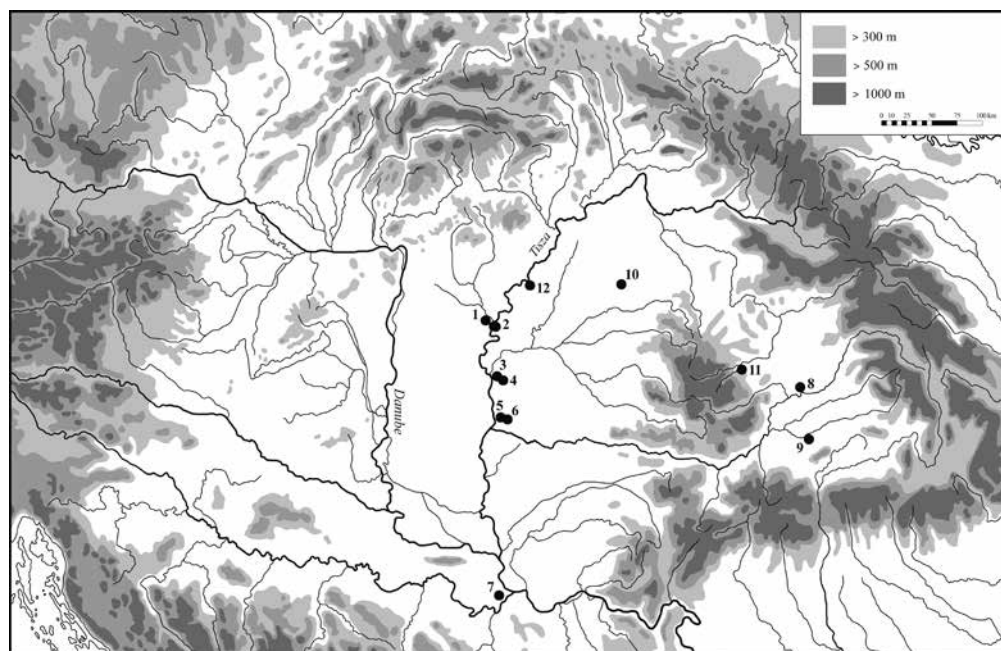


Fig. 8. Map of narrow bladed lang seaxes in the territory of Gepids (j. — județul; RO — Romana; m. — megye, HU — Hungary); drawn by A. P. Kiss and I. Jordan.

1 — Szolnok-Zagyvart-Alcsi, m. Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok, HU, grave No. 17; 2 — Szolnok-Szanda, m. Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok, HU, grave No. 30; 3 — Hódmezővásárhely-Kishomok, m. Csongrád, HU, grave No. 106; 4 — Hódmezővásárhely-Gorzsa, m. Csongrád, HU, grave No. 21; 5 — Szentcsanak, m. Csongrád, HU, grave Nos. 37, 68; 6 — Szentcsanak, m. Csongrád, HU, grave No. 57; 7 — Jakovo-Kormadin, opština Zemuna, Beograd, Republic of Serbia, grave Nos. 2, 14; 8 — Morești (Malomfalva), j. Mureș, RO, grave Nos. 8, 22; 9 — Baratei (Baráthely), j. Sibiu, RO; 10 — Valea-lui-Mihai-Krizsán (Érmihályfalva-Krizsán), j. Bihor, RO, grave No. 8; 11 — Turda (Torda-Ratul Sanmihaienilor), j. Cluj, RO, grave Nos. 1, 2; 12 — Pusztataksony-Ledence, m. Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok, HU, No. 1.

¹⁵ This cutting weapon is a good deal shorter, and it is doubtful whether it may be classified with these weapons; cf. Kiss 1995.

¹⁶ Ódor 2001, 34; 2011, 349. According to the preliminary reports, a buckle with almandine inlay was found next to the burial.

cutting weapon (Fig. 9). The introduction and the wearing of lang seaxes presumably took place during the early Gepid period, as suggested by the presence of their specimens in the earliest horizons of the row-grave cemeteries. The earliest of these could be the fragmented object from grave No. 30 at Szolnok-Szanda, dated to late 5th century by parallel findings by M. Nagy (Bóna 2002, 206; Nagy 2005, 154)¹⁷. Examples found near Torda, in a partly excavated cemetery, also belong to this group of early lang seaxes (Németi 2008, 360–365). The use of lang seaxes can be observed until the end of the Gepid era given that Hódmezővásárhely-Kishomok, grave No. 106, a specimen was unearthed with a Sucidava type buckle, which can be dated to the mid-third of the 6th century (Nagy 2004, 152–153)¹⁸.

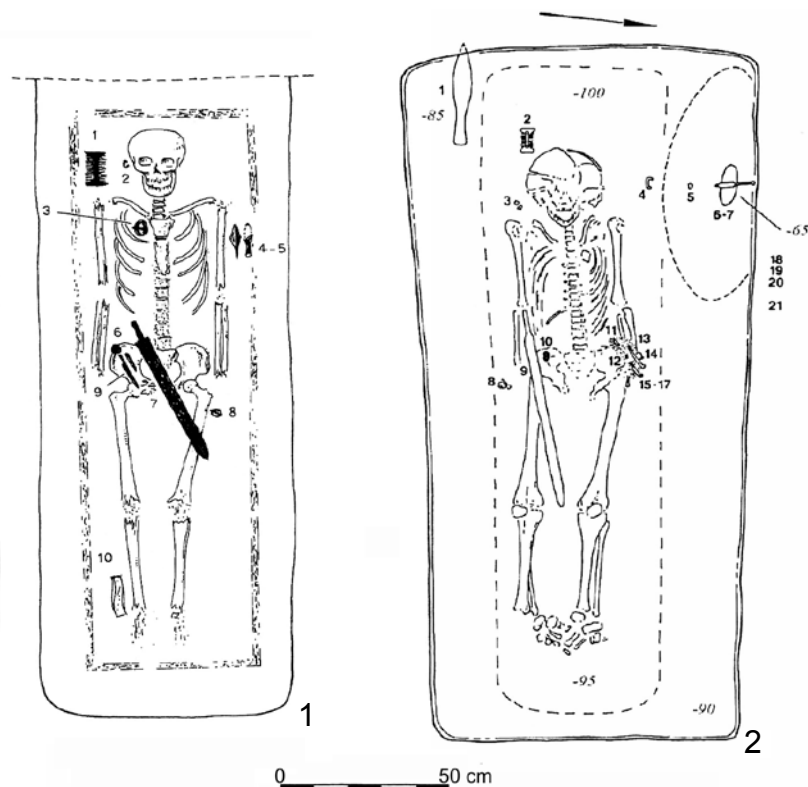


Fig. 9. Gepid graves with narrow bladed langseaxes; computer design A. P. Kiss and P. Jarosz.
 1 — Szolnok-Szanda, megye Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok, Hungary, grave No. 30; after I. Bóna (2002, Fig. 86:30); 2 — Szolnok-Zagyvapart-Alcsi, megye Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok, Hungary, grave No. 17; after J. Cseh (2005, Fig. 3:17).

¹⁷ Interestingly, the presence in the burial of an early arrowhead (to judge from its dimensions: 4.8 cm) may be considered a Hun legacy in the row-grave cemeteries of the Tisza region.

¹⁸ The specimen found in this grave belongs to the Sucidava type buckles with an mask-form opus interrasile ornamentation, classified by Schulze-Dörlamm in his study of buckles of Byzantine origin to group D2 and dated to the middle of the 6th century; cf. Schulze-Dörlamm 2002, 155.

The length of the narrow-bladed lang seaxes that appeared in the eastern part of the Carpathian Basin was between 47 and 68 cm while their width was between 2,4 and 4,3 cm. It is generally typical of lang seaxes that their grip passed to the blade without a break, and the that is at the same side like the edge, rarely in the middle. The back of the weapon is bent, the edge often begins to go upwards in the last third of the blade (Fig. 10:1–3). The point can usually be found at the same side like the edge, rarely in the middle of the blade (Cseh 1989, 73; 2005, 31)¹⁹. The cross-section of the blade is flat, triangular

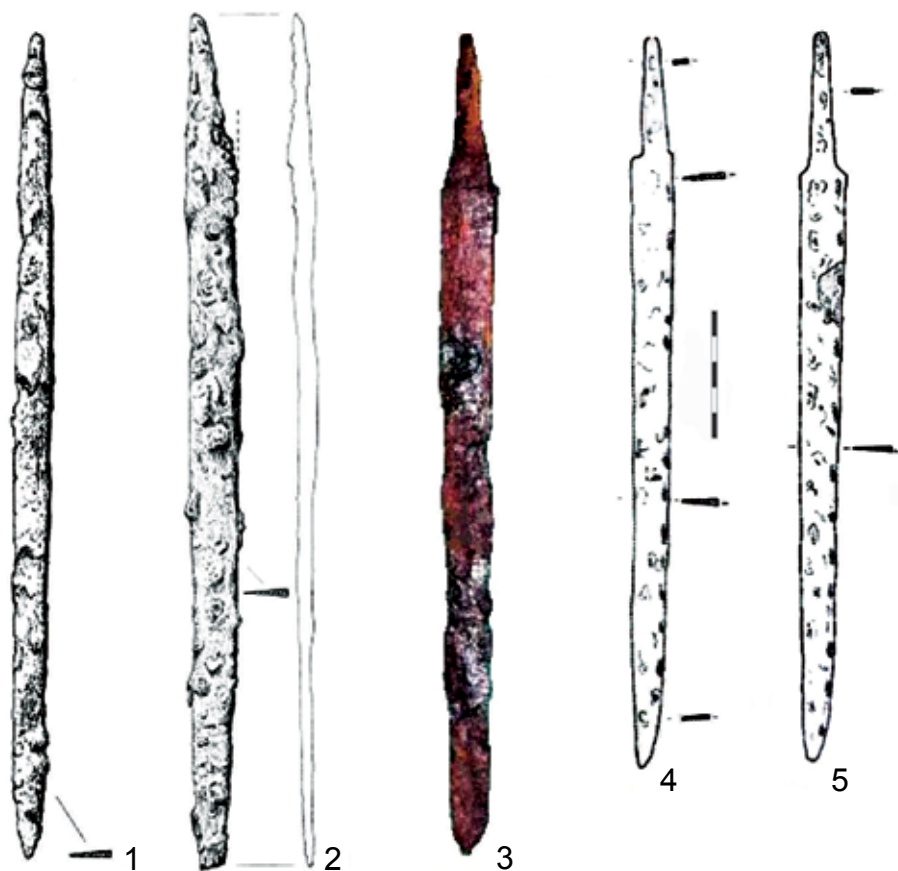


Fig. 10. Narrow bladed langseaxes from territory of Gepids (no scale; m. — megye; HU — Hungary; j. — județ; RO — Romania); computer design A. P. Kiss and P. Jarosz.

- 1 — Hódmezővásárhely-Kishomok, m. Csongrád, HU, grave No. 106; after I. Bóna, M. Nagy (2002, Pl. 27:106:1); 2 — Szolnok-Zagyvapart-Alcsi, m. Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok, HU, grave No. 17; after J. Cseh (2005, Pl. 38:1); 3 — Pusztataskony-Ledence, m. Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok, HU, No. 1; after B. Török, Á. Kovács (2011, Fig. 1); 4 — Torda (Ratul Sanmihaienilor), j. Cluj, RO, grave No. 1; after S. Nemeti (2008, Pl. XLIX:7); 5 — Torda (Ratul Sanmihaienilor), j. Cluj, RO, grave No. 2; after S. Nemeti (2008, Pl. XLIX:5).

¹⁹ This more or less fits into group II of Wernard (1998, 749).

shaped. Lang seaxes were primarily cutting weapons, probably the single edge and the fact that the weapon had no false-edge made it unsuitable for stabbing²⁰. Wooden fiber has been observed on the blade and on the grip of some specimens, the only vestige of their haft²¹. As to the weapon combinations, spear-heads and arrowheads are the main forms found with lang seaxes; defensive weaponry are rare items in the material from graves, exceptionally, a shield boss was found in at Szolnok-Zagyvart. If a narrow-edged lang seax was present in a burial than there would be no other cutting weapon place in the same grave (spatha or short seax in the case of Gepids).

Similar long and wide seaxes spread to territory of Elblag group in the 6th and the 7th century but these cross-sections of the blades are T-form shaped, which increased the cutting power of the weapons according to B. Kontny (2013, 218–221). These specimens are more than 60 cm long and 4.2–5.5 cm wide. Kontny thought that these evolved from shorter seaxes locally which were used in the Hunnic age. However, the Gepidian and Scandinavian origin can not be excluded on the basis of fittings perfectly (Kontny 2013, 222–226). In the region of the Sambian-Natangian group we can find blade-weapons like long seax but these evolved as a result of local self-development (started at the end of the 4th century; cf. Prassolow 2013, 123–127). It is a significant difference that they have blood grooves into the blade's surface and their formation of point.

In Scandinavia the seaxes have similar parameters during the north phase III (610/20–680) and the north phase IV (680–740/50) so this objects compared with Gepidic blade-weapons have circa 100–150 years delay (Jørgensen 1999, 146–149)²². The Scandinavian seax-development is mostly parallel with the Western European development (such as the presence of the long seaxes at the end of the 7th century). However, regional differences were observed in seax material in this region because for example the type SAX2 Jørgensen's is different from weapons (*Breitsax*) of Merovingian territories (Jørgensen 1999, 51–52, 147).

THE QUESTION OF BYZANTINE ORIGIN

Parallel to the theory of Hun origin another significant trend appeared in research during the 1990's. While it accepted an eastern derivation of the lang seaxes it also claimed that the 5th and the 6th century examples were of Byzantine make. M. Kazanski regarded the scramasax, which was also named by him, as a nomadic

²⁰ Csiky 2013, 82. According to G. Csiky the triangular or pentagonal segmented Avar cutting weapons were unsuitable for stabbing. Earlier studies, in case of the weaponry of the Gepids, suggest a stabbing function (Cseh 1989, 73; 2005, 31). The cutting function of the Carolingian lang seaxes, similar to 5th and 6th century objects, since it was proven by archaeometrical analysis that the cutting edge was hewed out more strongly (Szameit, Mehoffer 2002, 130–132, 146–147).

²¹ Observed on a piece from grave No. 17 at Szolnok-Zagyvart-Alcsi (Cseh 2005, 21–22).

²² Similar long, wide and constructed seaxes in Scandinavia: The type of SAX2 and SAX3 by Jørgensen (1999, 51–54).

weapon. He treated the 30–60 cm long pieces as scramasaxes, as well as the longer ones (65–100 cm), despite the fact that research places these weapons in a chain of evolution of single-edged swords or protosabres (Kazanski 1991, 132–133). Kazanski noticed that the mid-5th century specimens (Altlussheim, Pouan) were much longer than the nomadic predecessors. According to him this weapon form can actually be found on Hun territory and in Central Asia, but the best analogies point to the region of Transcaucasia. With regard to the Abkhazian and Caucasian finds their presence presumably may result from Byzantine and Sassanid influence besides the Hunnish one, so it is not impossible that in this region we can talk of weapons made truly by the Byzantines, which have nomadic predecessors. In the region of Azerbaijan, smaller examples can be found, and this region was under Sassanid control or influence during the 5th century. At the same time, the French researcher emphasizes further possible Abkhazian, Alan and Byzantine cultural, military and diplomatic relations which may have encouraged the appearance of certain object types in this region²³. His opinion is that in phases D2 and D3 the weapon was introduced to the Germanic tribes by the influence from the Huns. But the Sassanids stood in the background of the spread of the weapon in Central Asia while in Central Europe it was attributable to the Byzantines. Kazanski, in numerous cases, tried to make a distinction between the western and eastern Mediterranean place of manufacture. In the case of seaxes with ornate fittings or scabbards, based on the dissimilarity of decorative motifs and technological procedures, Kazanski identified eastern and western manufacturing centers in the Mediterranean (Kazanski, Mastykova, Périn 2002, 175). A half of the Mediterranean products observed in the Germanic territory are genuine, the other half are copies, similarly to weapons, they reflect the power and weight of the Byzantine military aristocracy, which the Germanic aristocracy tried to resemble, on the basis of the theory of *imitatio imperii* (Kazanski, Mastykova, Périn 2002, 176).

Regarding the origins of the blade-weapons which spread across the territory of the Gepids and the Alemanni in the 5th and 6th centuries, D. Quast (1999, 118–123) proposed that they could have been made by Byzantine armories. According to Quast, the weapon had eastern predecessors and Byzantine armories produced them as well. In his opinion, the Germanic elite of the second half of the 5th century no longer obtained their weapons directly from the nomads, but from Byzantine armories, and this is proven by the origin of the buckle and scabbard-chape types from Tournai-Puan type graves of the elite. He mentions a factual example, which was found in the east, in his study: a single-edged cutting weapon that was unearthed in the early Byzantine layers (395–616 AD) of Sardis (Quast 1999, 118; 2012, 359; see Fig. 11:3). Since Quast published his

²³ Kazanski, Mastykova, Périn 2002, 172. The foreground of the Caucasus has importance: the grave from Aktobe and similar others. According to Kazanski the introduction of the weapon may be viewed as a result of Byzantine — Sassanid connections. Aral, Panjakent, Iran, may be taken into consideration as possible locations of connections.

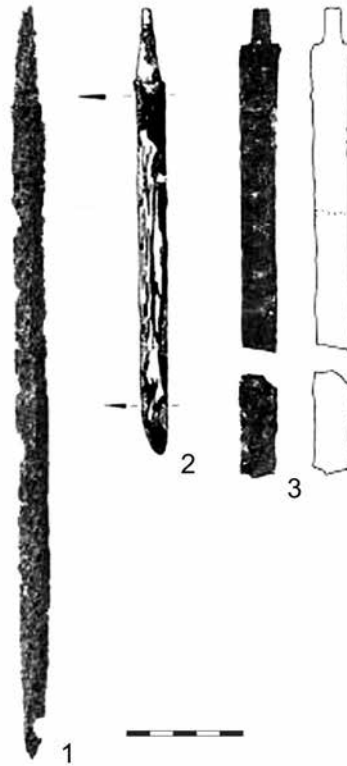


Fig. 11. Narrow bladed lang seaxes from territory of the Byzantine Empire; computer design A. P. Kiss and P. Jarosz.

- 1 — Prokuplje, Toplički okrug, opština Prokuplje, Republic of Serbia; after M. Milinković (2006, Fig. 6);
 2 — Košarevo, oblast Pernik, Bulgaria; after M. Daskalov (1998); 3 — Sardis, il Manise, Turkey;
 after D. Quast (1999, Fig 3; 2012, Fig. 9:1).

collection, two other single-edged, narrow bladed lang seaxes were unearthed in the Balkans, from the territory of the former Byzantine Empire. The scholars who published these burials, in both cases (Prokuplje in Serbia) and Košarevo in Bulgaria) envisaged a foreign (Germanic) presence which does not lend strength to the theory of Byzantine origin (Milinković 2006, 251–252; Daskalov 1998, 77–84; see Fig. 11:1–2). The German researcher taking the find from Sardis into consideration, proposes the possibility — similarly to Kazanski — that the narrow bladed lang seaxes were utilized at first by the Romans, then by the Byzantines, following a Persian model. These weapons appeared in Persian territory before the Hun era (Quast 1999, 118–123). It is noticeable however that in contrast to the lang seaxes known from the Danube region, the grip of the Sardis example is in the middle of the blade, while in most cases of the finds from the Barbaricum, the grip is in the horizon of the blade. In his research Quast takes account the finds that were unearthed together with lang seaxes to support the theory of the Byzantine origin. Besides cutting weapons, Byzantine-Mediterranean

type gem-socketed buckles, Baldenheim-type helmets, *solidi* and other Byzantine Mediterranean goods are found in a large quantity, and that, according to him, obviously indicates the place of manufacture.

The appearance of lang seaxes concentrates in two territories: the Gepid region of the Carpathian Basin and the Alemanni-occupied area on the upper Danube. In the case of the Gepids, Quast does not disregard the Hun origin, but with regard to the south-Germanic region, he takes into account two possibilities regarding the appearance of the lang seaxes: 1. mercenaries in Byzantine service and returning home, 2. immigrants from the Danube region and decent relations preserved with the Empire (Quast 1999, 123–124)²⁴.

J. Tejral was the only one to challenge the Byzantine origin in many of his writings drawing attention on several occasions to the fact that the weapons found in scarce numbers on the territory of the Byzantine Empire cannot be connected to the imperial army solely. The “Byzantine” adjective is problematic due to the fact that weapon finds from the Balkans to today’s Turkey were worn and used by mercenaries of various origin in service of the Empire (Tejral 2002, 505; Čižmář, Tejral 2002, 107). He highlights the Caucasus and its Byzantine connections, but draws attention — based on Kazanski — on possible Sassanid influence.

Given that theories formulated on the basis of archaeological evidence, conjectural and in some cases highly speculative, it may be worth examining whether weapons similar to the lang seaxes were used by contemporary Byzantine forces. Information on weapons used by the early Byzantine army in written and archaeological sources is limited. It is hard to make distinctions amongst the terminology of cutting weapons. Their role in warfare, similarly to earlier traditions, is significant, since all Byzantine forces, from the cavalry to the infantry uses their distinct types (Kollias 1988, 133–134). In the 4th century AD, swordmaking workshops capable of producing cutting weapons (*fabricae spathariae*) can be found mainly in western territories, in Italy and in Gaul, but naturally, in the vicinity of the eastern iron deposits, similar workshops can be found in later times (Kollias 1988, 135).

The chataphracts used a double-edged long sword, the call this *παραμήριον* recorded in the written sources, which was carried to a belt worn over one shoulder, next to a combat dagger attached to at the belt. In contrast, the infantry units had only one blade, the double-edged long *spatha*, which was attached at the belt (Kollias 1988, 137). There is no information about the infantry using cutting weapons similar to the *pugio*, but it was recommended to the cavalry multiple times. Provisions about weapon monopolies of the Novels of Justinian do not mention short knives, which possibly because they were easy to make and sell, were not rated as a weapon (Kollias 1988, 138–139).

Written sources on the age of interest, based primarily on late antique strategic literature, mention besides the double-edged cutting weapons, the *semispathium*,

²⁴ For the connections of the Danube region of the second half of the 5th century, see also: Quast 1997, 182–184; 2002, 286–290; Martin 2002, 217–218.

the *μάχαιρα, μεγάλη μάχαιρα*, which were presumably shorter and lighter than the double-edged long swords. The semispathium can be found in the work of Vegetius as well, as the supplementary-secondary weapon to the *spatha* that is mainly used by the cavalry²⁵. Following in the footsteps of classical ancient authors, Isidore of Seville also writes of this interesting weapon, the *mákhaira*, reporting that it is similar in size to the *gladius*, and defines it as a single-edged offensive weapon²⁶. It is a matter for debate whether Isidore only relays the knowledge from earlier centuries, as in most of his works, or whether we can use his information as a contemporary source of his. Other than in Isidore, the term appears in early Byzantine sources as a quasi-definition of a shorter cutting weapon (Kollias 1988, 138–139). Unfortunately, as to its origin and details of shape, there is no technical description, which makes comparing these forms to archaeological sources next to impossible. The *Strategikon* attributed to Emperor Maurice, one of the best descriptions of strategy and arms, does not inform on the different types of cutting weapons. On the contrary, according to this work, it is obvious that the early Byzantine army units had borrowed many forms of combat gear and military wear from the barbarian units serving in the Byzantine army²⁷. It is clearly visible that cutting weapons smaller than the *spatha* are known in contemporary sources. These are frequently single-edged, although they could have been shorter knives or daggers, rather than the 50–70 cm long cutting weapons examined here.

In spite of visible uncertainties, in the case of the Gepids it is worth examining the proposition of Quast, since the vicinity of the Byzantine territories lends strength to the possibility of influence from this direction. Similarly as with the Alemannic tribes in the archaeological material of the Gepids, quite a few Byzantine Mediterranean forms are observed besides the lang seaxes; they include mass produced buckles and belt buckles. Possibly the earliest of these Byzantine objects could be with the *cloisonné* decorated buckle with kidney-shaped plate (and the loop made of pumice) from grave No. 37 at Szentes–Berekhát. Next to recognizing the origin of the Mediterranean buckle type in recent decades attempts were made in the research identify its possible manufacturing centre (Fig. 12:1)²⁸. Dieter Quast has dated the stone inlaid, heart- or kidney-shaped

²⁵ “Haec erat grauis armatura, quia habebant cassides catafractas ocreas scuta gladios maiores, quos spathas uocant, et alios minores, quos semispathia nominant [...]”; cf. Vegetius II.15, p. 49, v. 4–7.

“Semispathium gladius est a media spatuae longitudine appellatum, non, ut inprudens vulgus dicit, sine spatio, dum sagitta velocior sit”; cf. Isidore of Seville XVIII.6.5., p. 715.

²⁶ “Nam Makron Graeci longum uocant; hinc et machaera. Machaera autem est gladius longus ex una parte acutus”; cf. Isidore of Seville XVIII.6.2., p. 715.

²⁷ In case of the infantry Maurice mentions the use of Gothic tunics and footwear, whereas in the case of heavy infantry he mentions the usage of the “Heruli” spathe; *Strategikon* XII.1.4, p. 420–421. As for the cavalry, he finds the Avar wear the most practical; see *Az avar történelem...*, p. 80–81.

²⁸ For an analysis of the material used in making the buckles see: Quast, Schüssler 2000. A similar buckle — although not with the loop made of pumice— from the Gepid territory was examined by E. Horváth with scientific methods. The buckle from Rákóczi-falva–Kastélydomb is definitely

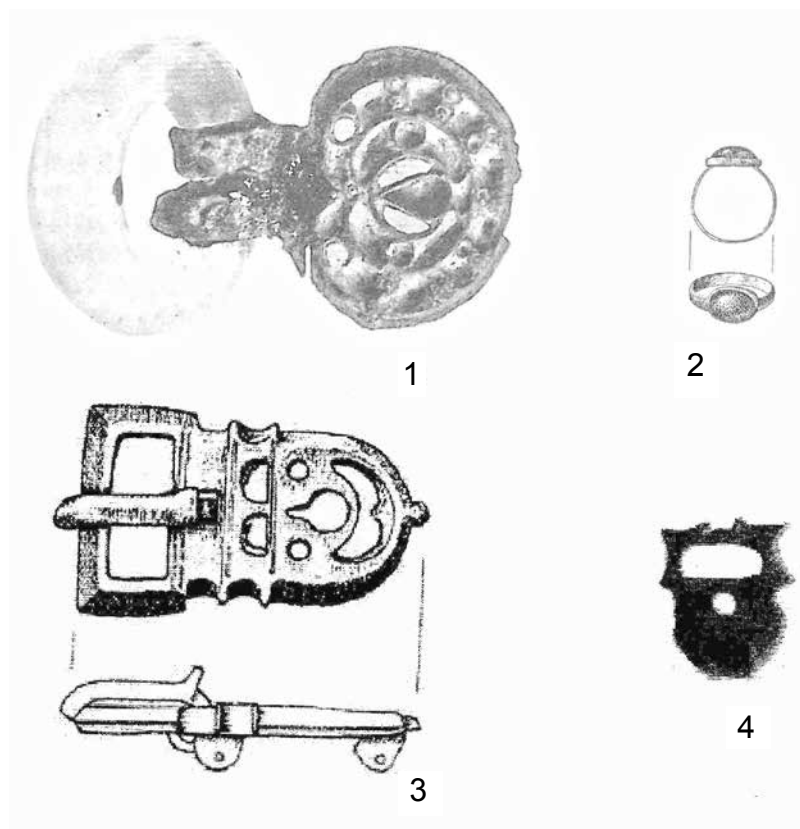


Fig. 12. Byzantine-Mediterranean ware from the Gepidic graves (no scale); computer design A. P. Kiss and P. Jarosz.

1 — Szentes-Berekhát, megye Csongrád, Hungary, grave No. 37; after D. Csallány (1961); 2 — Szolnok-Zagyvart-Alcsi, megye Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok, Hungary, grave No. 17; after J. Cseh (2005, Pl. 38:10); 3 — Hódmezővásárhely-Kishomok, megye Csongrád, Hungary, grave No. 106; after I. Bóna, M. Nagy (2002, Pl. 27:106:6); 4 — Szentes-Nagyhegy, megye Csongrád, Hungary, grave No. 7; after D. Csallány (1961, Pl. XXIII:15).

belt-clamped buckles to the end of the 5th century and to the first decades of the 6th century (Quast 1996, 333–336; 2001, 435). Pieces similar to these have been recognized as parts of the weapon belt, a typical item in the graves of those Germanic mercenaries who returned to the European Barbaricum (Drauschke 2008, 420; Schulze-Dörlamm 2002, 143–144).

Next to a lang seax grave No. 106 at Hódmezővásárhely–Kishomok cemetery held a Byzantine buckle, Sucidava type (Bóna, Nagy 2002, 76; see Fig. 12:3). This form is classified by Schulze-Dörlamm as type D2, probably brought to the territory of the Gepids from Emperor Justinian's fortifications on the Lower Danube between the first half and the middle of the 6th century

Mediterranean but in case of the other objects further examination may be reasonable, since imitation was a common phenomenon; see Horváth 2012, 334–336.

AD (Schulze-Dörlamm 2002, 155). Besides the lang seax, the same grave contained another weapon, a double-edged barrel-spiked arrowhead which has excellent parallels in the Balkans (primarily, in Byzantine fortifications), further evidence to support the Mediterranean connections of the material in this burial²⁹. Lang seaxes, helmets and other eastern luxuries recorded in association with Mediterranean-Byzantine buckles may be regarded as typical finds in the prominently rich graves in the row-grave cemeteries of the Merovingian age. Contrary to earlier opinion, objects discovered in western Merovingian graves (e.g., Baldenheim type helmets, lang seaxes and Mediterranean buckles) are being interpreted as items brought to their homeland by mercenaries returning from Byzantine service rather than as evidence on diplomatic relations of the elite of the two territories³⁰.

The finger-ring set with a stone from grave No. 17 at Szolnok–Zagyvarpart–Alcsi could enrich the points of connection with the Mediterranean and the Byzantines (Drauschke 2011, 159–160; Garam 2001, 84–87; see Fig. 12:2)³¹. J. Cseh, who published the grave, did not succeed in finding any parallels from the territory of *Gepidia* since ring finds are completely missing from row-grave cemeteries in the Carpathian Basin dated to the 6th century AD, both in the cemeteries of the Langobards and the Gepids³². Naturally, the graves of the late antique population in the vicinity of Keszthely are an exception (Müller 2010, 216–217). Parallels to the stone inlay rings from the Mediterranean are well known, inter alia from Italy as well, however we cannot be entirely certain about the Mediterranean origins of these objects (Riemer 2000, 99–102).

Probably one of the latest lang seax finds discovered in association with Byzantine-Mediterranean objects was unearthed from grave No. 7 at Szent-Nagyhegy. Its length exceeds that of the known cutting weapons discovered in vicinity of the Tisza, the western and southern Germanic areas of the Gepid era (Length: 72 cm, width of the blade: 2.9–1.6 cm; see Csallány 1961, 45; see Fig. 13:2). Its back and grip differ from that of similar forms unearthed in Gepid territory, since the back is not bent and the grip is not in the line of the edge, but it is in the middle. Its nearest formal parallel is from a male burial, grave No. 515 at Weingarten (Fig. 14). The length of the weapon is 78.6 cm (of this the grip is 13.3 and the blade is 65.3 cm long), its width is 3 cm, and the scabbard had a small silver plate ornamentation at the mouth (Roth, Theune 1995, 154). The burial itself, based on other elements of its inventory and the

²⁹ Arrowheads of this type are recorded in large numbers in the fortifications on the Lower Danube — Balkan region; cf. Ivanišević, Kazanski, Mastykova 2006, 41; Uenze 1992, Pl. 40, 45–54.

³⁰ Quast 2012, 366; Drauschke 2008, 389, 420. He is uncertain as to the Byzantine origin and commits himself to the nomadic origin. Page 415. The circle of luxury goods reaches only the elite, the situation and the amount and quality of import goods changes from the second half of the 6th century, the second half of the Merovingian era.

³¹ A sound parallel to this ring is known from Mediterranean environment, from Italy; cf. Riemer 2000, 481, Pl. 110:13.

³² Except for cemeteries carrying over from the late Roman Period. Rings reappear as everyday wear and among the grave goods during the Avar Period.



Fig. 13. Weapons from the grave No. 7 of Szentés-Nagyhegy, megye Csongrád, Hungary (no scale); after D. Csallány (1961, Pl. XLVI:1–2; XXIII:15); computer design A. P. Kiss and P. Jarosz.

position of the grave, was attributed to the earliest phase “A” of the cemetery by C. Theune, who published the find, according to her own chronology. This means that the grave belongs in the second half of the 5th century (Theune 2001, 330). The man lying in the grave probably belonged to the group which had founded the cemetery, whose graves cluster in the southwestern part of the burial ground³³. It should be noted that the individual resting in grave No. 238, belonging to the same group, was interred with a 65 cm long, narrow lang seax. According to Theune, these weapons — as well the early artefact — are the evidence of the miscellaneous origin of the newcomer groups. She states that the narrow lang seaxes can be interpreted as influences from the Danube region or of direct nomadic (Hun) impact. Still, the question is raised about origins of this early, exceptionally long weapon. Blade-weapons of this length are unknown in the Carpathian Basin during the second half of the 5th century, generally, the length of weapons, which were unearthed here, is between 50 and 70 cm and the width of the blade is between 3 and 4 cm. The weapons found at Lecive (Léva)-Rétiföldek and Altusheim dated to the Hun era and to its aftermath have a length reconstructed as 70 cm (Anke 1998, 96–97). The nearly 80 cm long blade is unique, similar in some of its attributes to the single-edged swords of the Avar Period, as was observed by M. Kazanski (in his phrasing proto sabre; cf. Kazanski 1991, 133). However, it is not impossible either

³³ Theune 2009, 25, 28. Male graves of this type: 77, 231, 232, 238, 409, 419, 510, 515, 712. The belt buckles are simple, at first buckle with club-shaped tongue (Kolbendorn) type, later, shield-on-tongue (Schilddornschnalle) typed, generally ornamented with silver linear inlay damascened decoration. Grave No. 238 is interesting as it contained a narrow long seax and lay in the southwestern part of the cemetery, just like the other early ones. It is very interesting that we are talking about a 65 cm long specimen, which is somewhat longer, compared to the other cutting weapons of the era. The deceased passed when about 40, so presumably they had migrated to the area in the middle of the 5th century.

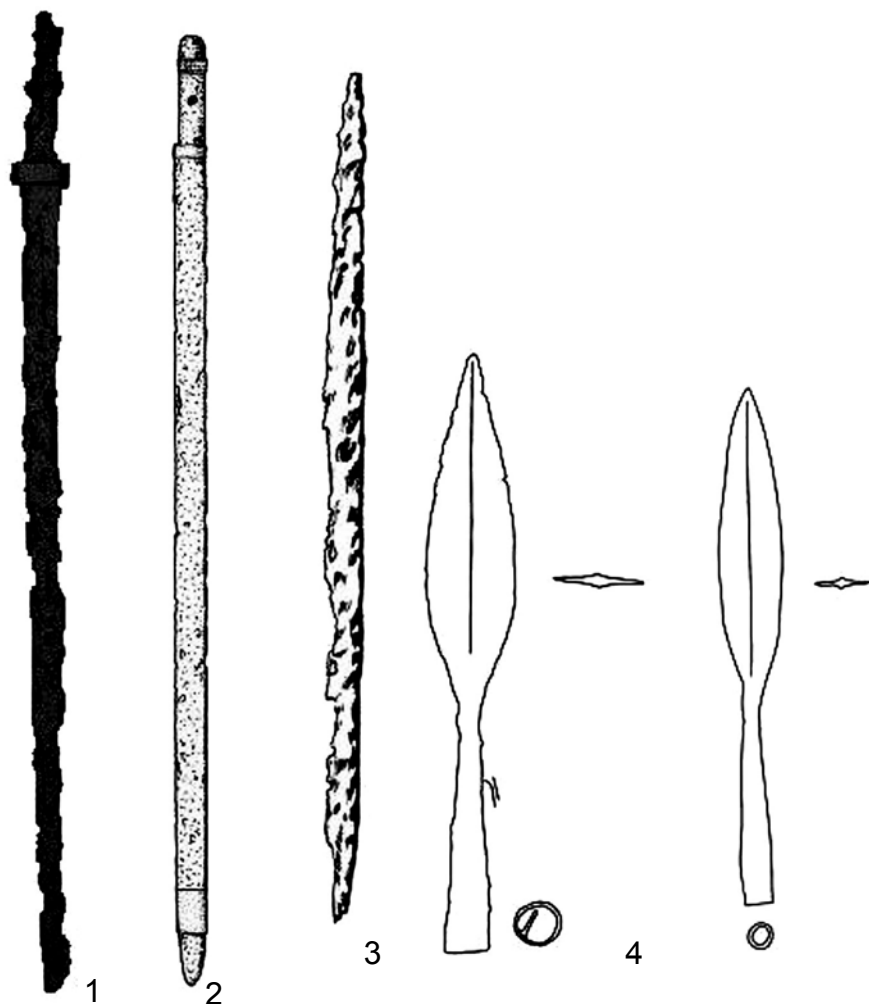


Fig. 14. Analogies of the weapons Szentes-Nagyhegy's (no scale);
computer design A. P. Kiss and P. Jarosz.

- 1 — Weingarten, Bundesland Baden-Württemberg, Kreis Ravensburg, Germany, grave No. 515; after H. Roth, C. Theune (1995); 2 — Kölked-Feketekapu-A, megye Baranya, Hungary, grave No. 227; after A. Kiss (1996, Pl. 52:8); 3 — Gyód-Máriahegy, megye Baranya, Hungary, grave No. 67; after A. Kiss (1977, Pl. IX); 4 — Spitzoval-typ (Typ III of Csiky) of the early avarian spear-heads; after J. Csiky (2007, Fig. 4, III, 1–2).

that this example is a unique and unusually long product of the ever experimenting smiths of the time.

Next to parallels of form it is worthwhile examining the chronological situation of the narrow-edged lang seax from Nagyhegy. Unfortunately, its grave inventory lacks a larger number of objects which can be dated precisely. Only the small bronze, shield-form, belt-clamped buckle, interpreted as an element of a military belt, has any value in this respect. It is dated by a parallel find from

the cemetery at Viminacium to the middle of the 6th century³⁴. This dating is also supported by the spearhead found in the same grave, which has excellent parallels in the Avar Period. The leaf-shaped spearhead type appears in earlier Merovingian deposits, and according the chronology of the south Germanic cemeteries, its earliest specimens can be dated to the middle of the 6th century³⁵. The assemblage of finds from the cemetery at Szentes-Nagyhegy, datable to the second half of the 6th century, is not considered rare, if we think of the early Martinovka type mounts and its Sucidava type buckle from grave No. 29³⁶. It is not impossible that the deceased deposited in the graves mentioned earlier were not buried in the days of the Gepid Kingdom but more likely after the Carpathian Basin was settled by Avars³⁷. In this case it may be safe to interpret the object under examination not as a lang seax but as a single-edged sword. The observation of D. Csallány who published this find can be clinching. According to him, the blade of the “sword” from grave No. 7 at Nagyhegy in its last 7 cm from the tip becomes double-edged, assuming the attributes of a sabre (Csallány 1961, 258). As stated by Csallány, we face a single- and false-edged sword that can be dated to a very early period, and this settles further chronological problems (Simon 1991, 270–271)³⁸. The description Csallány’s was correct, because the false-edge on the blade is even now visible but the total length of the original weapon is almost 10 cm shorter (63.6 cm)³⁹. The Nagyhegy example differs from similar weapons in its size, structure and other elements of its inventory. This would support its Avar dating, although its local production cannot be entirely excluded. Next to the possibility of the Avar dating, similarly to the blade-weapon from Weingarten, the possibility of individual production cannot be omitted, although this is not to be expected, taking broader correspondences into consideration. This way, the examined example may be discussed among the finds associated with the local Avar communities and not among the lang seaxes. To identify the specimens of Byzantine make, archaeometallurgical examinations are required, but since analysis of early Byzantine weaponry are lacking a potential comparison is impossible at present. As mentioned earlier, except for the two objects from the

³⁴ Ivanišević, Kazanski, Mastykova 2006, 25. It could have served as the suspension of the sword as well.

³⁵ In G. Csiky’s categorization the leaf-shaped, Spitzoval-type belongs to the III/1 type; cf. Csiky 2007, 313–314.

³⁶ One of the earliest Martinovka type mounts was a masked specimen. According to their up-setting and crafting technique (casting), they could be Byzantine ware, which do not come from the steppe environment, but from the Byzantine Empire (Crimea, Lower Danube region); cf. Balogh 2004, 250–251, 260.

³⁷ On Avar continuity see: Kiss 2010; 2011. About the problems of ethnic analysis of Transylvanian row-grave cemeteries see: Dobos 2013.

³⁸ The smallest single-edged sword is 70 cm long, generally they are between 83.1–95.9 cm. the bolster-edged sword is 97 cm long and the single-edged swords have the width of 3 to 3.9 cm. Single-edged swords can be found in the Early Avar Period, although local smiths had the mind of experimentation and mixing weaponry; see Simon 1993, 174–177.

³⁹ The weapon can be found now in the János Koszta Museum of Szentes where I have examined. Inventory number: KJM 57.8.41.

Balkans and one from Sardis, there are no known narrow-bladed lang seaxes that can serve as a proper basis for comparison. Some of the lang seaxes may have been made in the Empire, however, as the only scientific analysis reflects, the simple technique of production may not strengthen the possibility of the import (Török, Kovács 2011, 341–342). According to the opinion of B. Török, the lang seaxes were produced locally, by local smiths, who did not use any special crafting methods for their lower quality raw material.

A PRODUCTIVE UNCERTAINTY IN PLACE OF A SUMMARY

The survey of the finds, the theories on the origin and objects found in association with them, gives rise to a miscellaneous picture. Taking everything into account none of the theoretical trends offers a complete solution to the problem. It is evident that the cognition and the reception of the basic form happened in the Hun Period. In the middle of the 5th century (D2/D3), cutting weapons with the length of 50–70 cm resembling to the examples from the Gepid era, had begun to spread in the Carpathian Basin. It is notable that specimens somewhat longer than knives have no connection to this line of evolution. The literature may call these narrow-edged lang seaxes erroneously since, based on their metrical data, they do not belong to this category. It is remarkable that in elsewhere in Europe, as compared to the Carpathian Basin, single-edged cutting weapons appear a generation later and are used briefly, only during the few decades following the Hun era. Along with the burials of the elite, peculiar weapons appear — probably due to the connections with the Carpathian Basin — in the earliest phase of row-grave cemeteries, culminating at the turn of the 5th and 6th centuries AD. In contrast to this, the examples from the Carpathian Basin, as J. Tejral has noted, remain in use until the middle of the 6th century. Objects from the row-grave cemeteries of the classical Gepid period have very few parallels, moreover we are not familiar with any similar weapon finds from the western part of the Carpathian Basin datable to the 6th century. Basing on information now at hand it seems possible that the weapon form of the Hun Period, at the center of the former nomadic lands, with some minor, but remaining in use, and what is more, it became the primary cutting weapon alongside the *spatha*. We find ourselves in a similar situation if we consider the three-edged barrel-spiked arrowheads from Gepid cemeteries⁴⁰. After the Hun era this type of weapon continues in evidence in the eastern, Gepid ruled territory of the Carpathian Basin. Similar seaxes have come to light yet only in the northern part of present-day Poland from the 6th century but now it is not possible to know for sure that these cutting weapons evolved locally in the same way, or were imported (by Gepidis or Scandinavians).

⁴⁰ B. Kontny (2006, 117–119) showed that these weapons were adopted by non-nomadic groups in Eastern and North-Eastern Europe. In contrast to the earlier opinions the three-edged arrowheads are considered typical specimens of the age rather than ethnic marker.

The debate over the objects possibly crafted in Byzantine territory is not easily decidable. From the early Byzantine period only a single longer, single-edged cutting weapon is known, the piece discovered at Sardis. Apart from this find, narrow-bladed lang seaxes have been unearthed in Serbia and Bulgaria, and may be dated to the final third of the 5th, possibly, the beginning of the 6th century, based on other elements of their grave inventory. But in the case of these burials is mostly safe to assume that they belonged to Germanic mercenaries who had arrived in the Balkans (Milinković 2006, 251–152). The number of single-bladed cutting weapon finds from the territory of the Byzantine Empire is small but some new objects of Baldenheim type helmets were discovered quite recently in the fortifications in the Balkans (Werner 1988, 523–527; Quast 2001, 437; Ivanišević 2010, 25; 2012, 61–62; Glad 2012, 355–356). In case of the Baldenheim helmets, the new finds have freed the research from the impasse and lent support to their Byzantine origin (Fig. 15). Even if we assume that the number of the weapon finds will grow, with this state of research, the Byzantine origin of lang seaxes is not convincing.

Examining the territory of the Gepids, out of 17 narrow long seaxes discovered there only 4 were found in association with Mediterranean–Byzantine imported objects. It is a matter for debate whether the Mediterranean belt buckles designate the place of origin of the weapons or we should see the buckle as

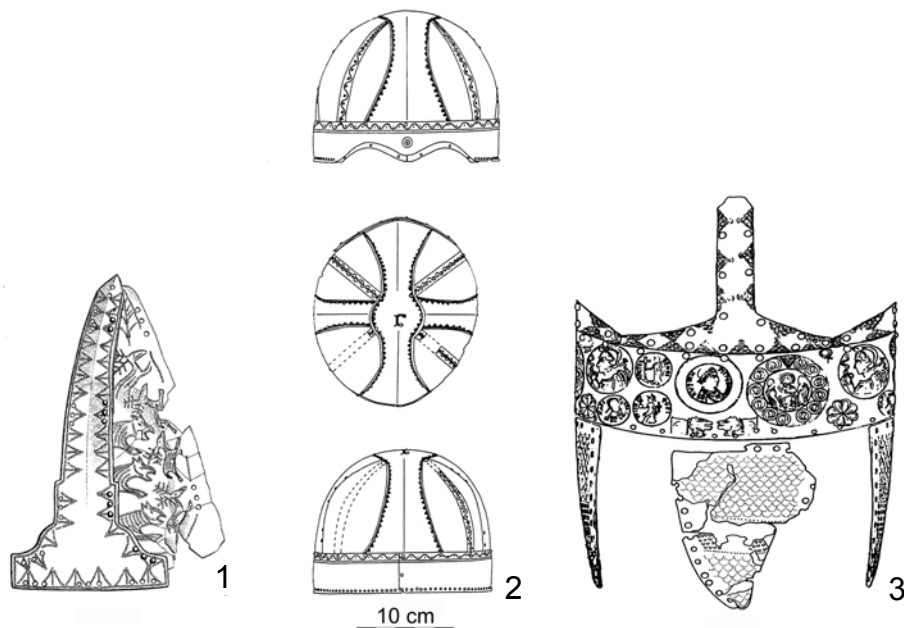


Fig. 15. Baldenheim helmets from the region of the Balkan; computer design A. P. Kiss and P. Jarosz.

- 1 — Caričin Grad, Jablanički okrug, Lebane opština, Republic of Serbia; after V. Ivanišević (2010); 2 — Šumen, oblast Šumen, Bulgaria; after D. Quast (2001, Fig. 8:1); 3 — Heraclea Lynkestis (Bitola), opština Bitola, region Pelagonije, Republika Makedonija (Former Yougoslav Republic of Macedonia); after D. Quast (2001, Fig. 8:2).

a fashion phenomenon. The vicinity of the Byzantine Empire does not discount the possibility that some objects were crafted in imperial manufactures, however, aside from one or two burials, we cannot trace the weapon from the Balkans, near the territory of the Gepids.

The forts of the Byzantine Empire in the region on the Lower Danube are rich in finds but they do possess a methodological pitfall: the soldiers manning them had different origins. In the early Byzantine fortifications we can witness diverse influences, of which the “purely Byzantine” is hard to separate (Ivanišević 2012, 61–62). Written sources complicate matters even further, since they speak of the settling of multiple Germanic groups. According to the historical sources, to oppose Gothic and Gepid tribes the Byzantines settled Heruli, also of Germanic origin, in the area around Singidunum (Marcellinus Comes, *Chronicon*, 512, p. 98). At the same time, we know of Gepids, who were in Byzantine mercenary service, from *De bello Gothico* (Procopius, *De bello Gothico* IV.8.15., p. 122–123). Consequently, in case of weaponry — like Baldenheim type helmets — found in the Balkans, it is advisable to tread. In the early Byzantine army different peoples fought alongside one another using their own weaponry, and the imperial army adopted those weapons that they used part and parcel with their fighting methods. It is even harder to determine which were the typically Byzantine weapons, in the early times of the Byzantine Empire (Kollias 1988, 140). In the Early Medieval Period in the Eurasian region, certain innovations spread rapidly, due to the intermediating role of different nomadic groups⁴¹. In this manner, the determination of the origins or place of manufacturing of weapons, even their methods of adaptation may be impossible for scholars.

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⁴¹ Menander Protector may refer to this as well, in connection with the envoys of c. 562 in Constantinople: “[...] they received their accustomed gifts from him [Emperor — A. P. K.] and were allowed to depart, having purchased whatever they required, both clothing and weaponry”; cf. Menander Protector, Fr. 5,4, 25, p. 52–53.

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