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SEVENTH-EIGHTH CENTURIES FINGER-RINGS DISCOVERED IN TRANSYLVANIA

Călin Cosma¹

Abstract: *Finger-rings of the 7th–8th century discovered in Transylvania were yielded only by cemeteries, both of inhumation and biritual. The inhumation burial grounds where finger-rings were identified include those of Gâmbaș/Cetățuie or Cimitirul reformat/further Gâmbaș P², Sâncraii³ and Teiuș⁴. In biritual cemeteries, finger-rings were found in the burial grounds of Bratei⁵ and Sibiu/Gușterița⁶. The few cemeteries with finger-rings is linked to the small number of burials which contained objects of respective type, and concurrently, with the small number of finger-rings. The Avar cemeteries count a total of five burials with finger-rings among the grave goods, their number amounting to eight exemplars. In the biritual cemeteries mapped in Transylvania, two cremations yielded each a single finger-ring and just one inhumation which contained a single finger-ring. Typologically, finger-ring types are few as well. They come down to two main groups, namely plain finger-rings and finger-rings with ornaments in the upper part of the ring hoop. Plain rings are represented by simple hoops made of iron, bronze or silver threads or thin bars. To the second group belong finger rings of thin sheet, with an ornament in the upper part in the shape of round spheres or round or oval plates. The small number of Avar cemeteries and graves from Transylvania in which finger-rings were found may be the result of various causes. It is very likely that finger-ring wearing was not fashionable in the Avar communities of Transylvania. A second element that may be taken into consideration to interpret the few such artefacts at the level of the archaeological sites from the Transylvanian Plateau is related to the assertion of social standing of those buried with finger-rings as well. The typological identity of the finger-rings from Transylvania (type B), together with the few items and graves where these were discovered may be interpreted as the display of ethnic identity of finger-ring bearers. Lastly, another interpreting acceptable for the finger-rings present in the Avar cemeteries of Transylvania is that of magical object playing an apotropaic role.*

Keywords: *Finger-Rings, Transylvania, Early Middle ages, cemeteries.*

In the Transylvanian academic literature focused on the study of early Middle Ages, there is no study to catalogue and analyse finger-rings discovered in the Transylvanian Plateau area. For this reason, this study aims to fill a gap in the adornment research, in the case here of finger-rings, that human communities inhabiting Transylvania over the course of the 7th–8th century had used.

The type of archaeological sites where finger-rings were discovered.

Finger-rings of the 7th–8th century discovered in Transylvania were yielded only by cemeteries, both of inhumation and biritual. The inhumation burial grounds where finger-rings

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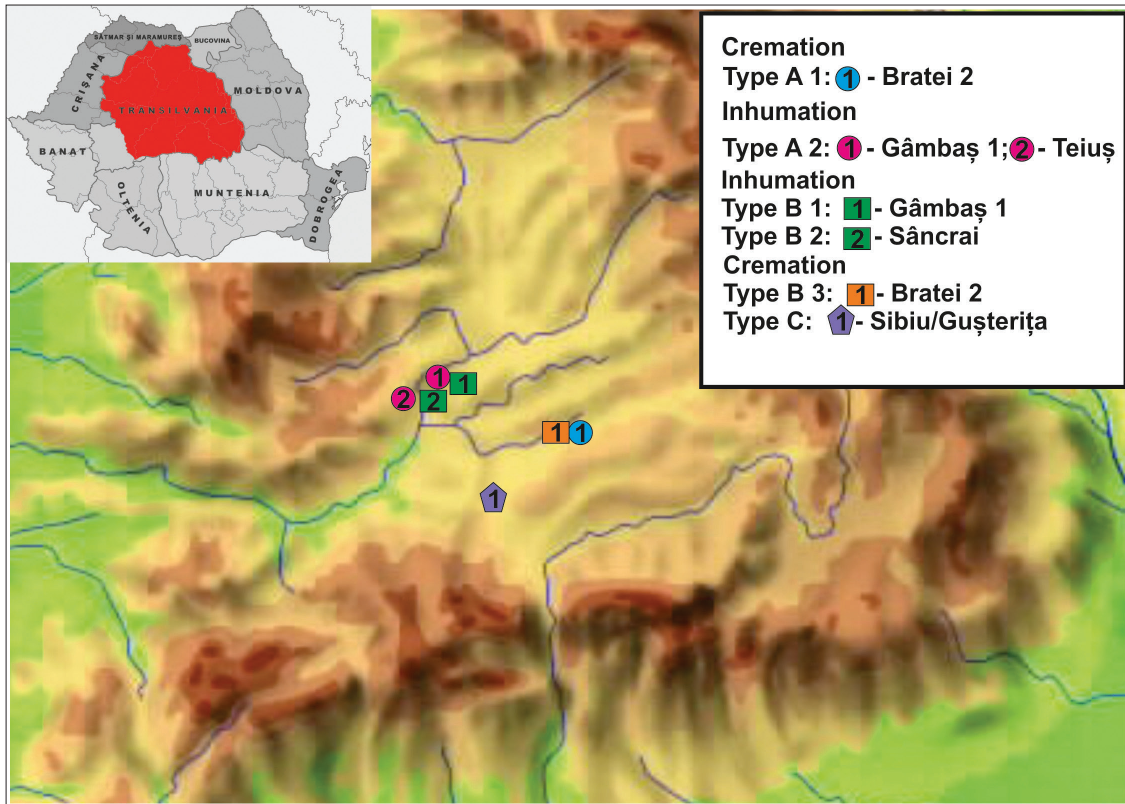
² HOREDȚ 1958, 95–100; COSMA 2017, 56–61.

³ COSMA 2017, 65–75; archaeological excavations in progress, C. Cosma, G. Balteș, C. Florescu.

⁴ HOREDȚ 1958, 105; COSMA 2017, 79–89.

⁵ ZAHARIA 1977.

⁶ NĂGLER 1971, 63–73.



Map 1- Geographical distributions of Avar and bi-ritual cemeteries from Transylvania where finger rings were discovered

were identified include those of Gâmbaș/Cețațuie or Cimitirul reformat/further Gâmbaș 1⁷, Sâncrai⁸ and Teiuș⁹. In biritual cemeteries, finger-rings were found in the burial grounds of Bratei 2¹⁰ and Sibiu/Gușterița¹¹.

Typology and parallels

The finger-rings discovered in Transylvania may be divided into two groups. This classification is based on the presence or absence of an ornament in the upper part of the items.

Group A – Plain finger-rings

The objects were made of metal wire, round in diameter. These are simple hoops, easy to make. Rings are of two types: **A.1.** – hoops with twisted ends; **A.2.** – round hoops.

A.1. One finger-ring with twisted ends was discovered in grave 166, where the cremation remains were deposited in a pit, in the biritual cemetery of Bratei 2¹². The artefact is in

⁷ HORED T 1958, 95–100; COSMA 2017, 56–61.

⁸ COSMA 2017, 65–75; archaeological excavations in progress, C. Cosma, G. Balteș, C. Florescu.

⁹ HORED T 1958, 105; COSMA 2017, 79–89.

¹⁰ ZAHARIA 1977.

¹¹ NÄGLER 1971, 63–73.

¹² ZAHARIA 1977, 23.

iron, and according to its description, its ends are twisted. It has a diameter of 1.8 cm. We were unable to locate its storage location.

A.2. – Two round finger-rings were discovered one, in the Avar cemetery at Gâmbaş 1, and the second, in the Avar cemetery of Teiuş (Fig. 1).

The Gâmbaş 1 ring was identified in grave 13, underneath the deceased's skull. It appears in the shape of a round hoop, made of a thin bar, round in cross-section, in poor quality silver/potín. Its diameter is of 1.9 cm. The item is stored with the National Museum of Transylvanian History (inv. no., III, 8778)¹³.

The finger-ring of Teiuş was discovered subsequent a field survey in the area where the 60 Avar burials were identified. The object was found beside other two *lunula* earrings. The finger-ring is in the shape of a round hoop made of thin bronze thread. Its diameter was of 2.1 cm. The artefact is stored with the National Museum of Transylvanian History of Cluj-Napoca (inv. no. IN 6026)¹⁴.

Simple rings made of silver, bronze or iron round bar/wire begin to emerge in the Avar environment of the Carpathian Basin from early first half of the 7th century, remaining fashionable until late 8th century¹⁵. The items have opened or joined ends. Such objects were discovered in female, infant and male graves from a series of Avar and Slavic-Avar cemeteries like for instance those at: Nové Zámky¹⁶, Pókaszeptk¹⁷ and Csákberény-Orondpuszta¹⁸. Above argument supports the interpreting of the objects from Transylvania as finger-rings and not rings that supported knives hanging from the belt. The ring of Gâmbaş 1, grave 13 was discovered underneath a human skull. The gravepit of said burial did not yield any iron knives or dress accessories that might have been worn as hanging by the belt.

Group B – Finger-rings decorated in the upper part of the hoop

B. 1. – Rings with round sphere, flanked by an ornament composed of three small spheres each set in the extension of the central sphere

Such a finger-ring was discovered in the Avar cemetery of Gâmbaş 1, grave 11¹⁹. The item was found near the left hand. The object was made of poor-quality silver (potín). The hoop was made of sheet and had open ends. The ornament was cast and soldered to the upper part, on the two hoop extremities. It consists of a round sphere delimited to the left and right by three, still round spheres, smaller in size, set in the form of a grape bundle. The graphic reconstruction of the finger-ring allows us to specify hoop sizes, whose diameter was of 2.1 cm. The decoration was 1.5 cm long. The sizes of the central sphere are of 0.5 × 0.5 cm. The

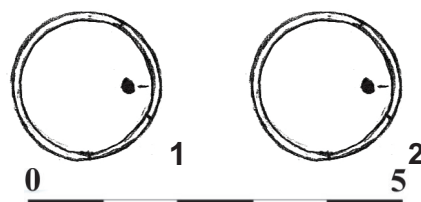


Fig. 1 – Finger rings type A.2
1- Gâmbaş 1; 2- Teiuş

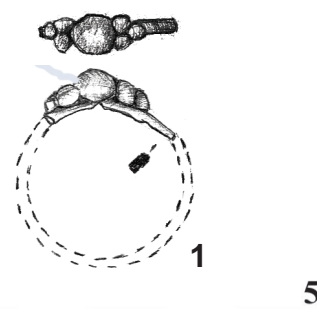


Fig. 2 – Finger ring type B.1
1 – Gâmbaş 1

¹³ HOREDT 1958, 100.

¹⁴ HOREDT 1958, 105.

¹⁵ ČILINSKÁ 1975, 89, Typ I.

¹⁶ ČILINSKÁ 1966, 156, Abb. 13/4.

¹⁷ SOS/SALAMON 1995, 38, 52, Gr. 20, 192, 211, Pl. II/2, XVI/5, XVII/2, Pl.

¹⁸ PÁSZTOR 2015, 153, Grab 251, 364, 367, Taf. 21 Taf. 31–32.

¹⁹ HOREDT 1968, 99.

finger-ring is stored with the National Museum of Transylvanian History of Cluj-Napoca (inv. no. III.8872/V.1484), (Fig. 2).

Very likely, the specimen of Gâmbaş 1 duplicates a series of golden finger-rings discovered in Avar graves from Pannonia²⁰.

Rings similar in shape with the item discovered in grave 11 at Gâmbaş 1 come from Durankulak, Skala, Okorș, in Bulgaria²¹. These were framed into type VI. 2 of finger-rings identified in Bulgaria. Respective artefacts were fashionable during the period comprised between mid 9th century and first decades of the 12th century²².

B. 2. Finger-rings with ornament in the form of an oval, flat plate, delimited to the left and right by three round spheres set in the shape of a grape bundle.

The finger-rings in group B 2 were discovered in the Avar cemetery of Sâncrai, graves 18, 26 and 82. Grave 18 yielded three finger-rings. In the other two mentioned graves were identified one exemplar in each gravepit. The finger-rings of Sâncrai are stored with the National Museum of the Union at Alba Iulia.

Grave 18

1. A first ring from grave 18 was made in bronze. It was identified next to the right hand. The ring hoop is made of flat sheet, rectangular in cross-section, with open ends. The ornament was cast and soldered in the upper part on the two ends of the hoop. It appears in the shape of an oval, flat plate, delimited to the left and right by three round spheres of small sizes, set in the form of a grape bundle. The likely diameter of the ring was of 2 cm; the sheet width is of 0.2 cm; the ornament is 2.2 cm long; the sizes of the central sheet are of 1.1 × 0.6 cm²³ (Fig. 3/1)

2. The second ring from grave 18 was bronze made as well. It was discovered next to the right hand. The ring hoop is of flat, rectangular section sheet, with open ends. The ornament was cast and soldered/ in the upper part, on the two ends of the hoop. It appears in the form of an oval, flat sphere, delimited to the left and right by three round spheres of smaller sizes, set in the shape of a grape bundle. The likely diameter of the ring was of 2 cm; sheet width is of 0.2 cm; the ornament length is of 1.5 cm; the sizes of the central plate are of 0.5 × 0.4 cm²⁴ (Fig. 3/2).

3. The third ring from grave 18 was still made of bronze. It was discovered next to the left hand. The ring hoop is of concave section sheet, with open ends. The ornament was cast and soldered in the upper part, on the two hoop ends. It appears in the form of an oval, flat plate, delimited to the left and right by three round spheres of small sizes set in the shape of a grape bundle. The ring diameter is of 1.8 cm; the sheet width is of 0.1 cm; the ornament was 1.2 cm long; the sizes of the central plate are of 0.7 × 0.5 cm²⁵ (Fig. 3/3).

Grave 26

The finger-ring from grave 26 is in bronze. It was discovered next to the right hand. The ring hoop is made of sheet, with open ends. The sheet is divided into three registers by two ribs, which trace the ring hoop outline. The ornament was made by casting. It was soldered in the

²⁰ See for instance: GARAM 1993 Taf. 55, 5–12.

²¹ GRIGOROV 2007, 197, Fig. 67/6–8.

²² GRIGOROV 2007, 186, 201, Fig. 73.

²³ COSMA 2017, 71.

²⁴ COSMA 2017, 71.

²⁵ COSMA 2017, 71.

upper part, on the two hoop ends. It appears in the form of an oval, flat plate, delimited to the left and right by three round spheres, smaller in size, set in the form of a grape bundle. The ring diameter is of 1.8 cm; the sheet width is of 0.1 cm; the ornament is 1.5 cm long; the sizes of the central plate are of 0.7×0.5 cm²⁶ (Fig. 3/4).

Grave 82

From the finger-ring in grave 82 survived only the ornament in the upper part of the item. It was identified near the right hand. It was made of bronze, by casting and soldered in the upper part on the two hoop ends. It appears in the form of an oval, flat plate, delimited to the left and right by three round spheres, smaller in size, set in the form of a grape bundle. Likely, the ring diameter was of 1.8 cm; the ornament length was of 1.7 cm; the sizes of the central plate are 0.7×0.6 cm²⁷ (Fig. 3/5).

It is noted that none of the upper plates of finger-rings in Group B2 have settings where precious stones could have been inlaid. Also, the ring plates do not exhibit traces of precious stones gluing.

The objects that compose Group B.2 of finger-rings from Transylvania stand out by their ornaments consisting of small round spheres set in the shape of a grape bundle to the left and right sides of the central plate. The finger-rings in group B.2 from Transylvania are simple compared to a number of finger-rings discovered in a series of Avar cemeteries from Pannonia, objects which in the upper part of the hoop are provided with different types of ornaments, some more sophisticated than other²⁸. As parallels for the upper ornament comprising the central plate flanked by small round spheres on exemplars from Transylvania, we mention two finger-rings coming, the first from grave 1 in the cemetery of Szigetszntmiklós-Háros²⁹ and the second from grave 1 in the Csepel-Haros cemetery, Duna-gat³⁰. It must be specified that in both cases, the finger-ring plate also had a bezel in which a precious stone was inlaid. Both graves in which finger-rings were identified had belonged to female individuals. The funerary features were dated to the 7th century.

Finger-rings similar to the specimens discovered in graves 18, 26 and 82 at Sâncrai were identified on the territory of Bulgaria³¹. The examples were framed in type VI.1 of Bulgarian finger-rings. Respective ring type is found starting with mid 9th century until first decades of

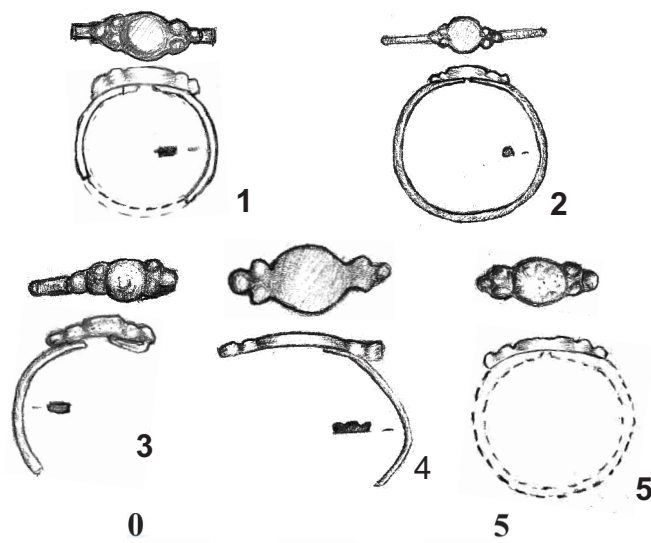


Fig. 3 – Finger rings type B.2
1- 5 – Sâncrai (1-3 – M. 18, 4 – M. 26, 5 – M. 82)

²⁶ COSMA 2017, 73.

²⁷ Archaeological excavations C. Cosma, G. Balteş, Cr. Florescu.

²⁸ See for instance: GARAM 1993, Taf. 9/4–5, 31/7, 40, 2, 3–4, 48/10–15; 55/5–12; GARAM 2001, Taf. 50/7–9, 51–52–53.

²⁹ SÓS 1961, 32, A, 3 kép/6; GARAM 2001, 85, Taf. 52/1.

³⁰ NAGY 1998, I, 146, II, Taf. 99, B/1.

³¹ GRIGOROV 2007, 196, Fig. 66/9–10.

the 12th century³². As parallel for the ring in grave 18 (described above at no. 2), we mention a finger-ring discovered at Durankulak, in Bulgaria³³. The object from Bulgaria is part of group VI.2 of finger-rings from the territory of Bulgaria, group of items found especially during the 10th–11th century³⁴.

B. 3. – Finger-ring of thin bronze sheet, wide in the upper part, which contained a small sphere made of powdery-white paste (likely, crushed stone)

The item was discovered in inhumation no. 219 from the biritual cemetery at Bratei 2. It is specified that it was small. Owing to its friability, the ring could not be salvaged³⁵.

According to the description made by the excavator³⁶, the ring at Bratei 2 may be framed in type IV Čilinská, of which it is specified that emerges in the Avar Khaganate by mid 7th century and remains in use throughout the 8th century³⁷. It is assumed that finger-rings with settings and different types of variously coloured glass spheres from the Carpathian Basin are replicas of Byzantine finger-rings³⁸. The specimen of Bratei 2 has no drawings or photos, therefore it is impossible to identify accurate parallels for respective ring, especially for its upper part. In the Carpathian Basin, in a series of Avar cemeteries discovered in the Carpathian Basin area, finger-rings with different upper part shapes and various setting types and inlaid spheres³⁹ have been identified.

C – Finger-ring with flat upper part, oval in shape, decorated

The artefact was identified in a destroyed cremation (likely an urn cremation) from the biritual cemetery of Sibiu/Gușterița⁴⁰. The ring was made in bronze by casting. On the interior, the ring hoop is flat, while its exterior is concave. In the upper part, the ring hoop is wide and ends in an oval plate. The plate is decorated by incision with straight and curved lines. Ornaments are also found on the upper part of the hoop. They emerge in the form of vertically straight lines set on the ring hoop. The sizes of the finger-ring from Sibiu/Gușterița are the following: internal diameter = 18.2 cm, external diameter = 2 × 2.2 cm. The upper plate is sized 0.10 × 0.12 cm. The object is stored with the Brukenthal National Museum of Sibiu (inv. no. A 8582), (Fig. 4).

Formally, the finger-ring of Sibiu/Gușterița is paralleled in Ukraine, in sites dated to the 8th, 9th and 10th century⁴¹. Also, rings like that of Sibiu/Gușterița are also found on the territory of Bulgaria. There, these finger-rings compose group II.1 of finger-rings from the territory of

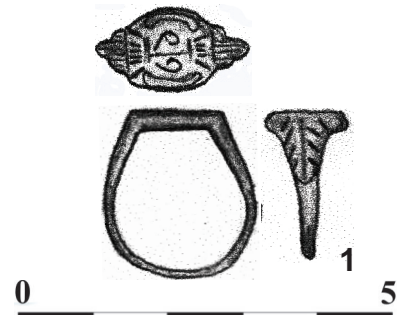


Fig. 4 – Finger ring type C
1. Sibiu/Gușterița

³² GRIGOROV 2007, 201, Fig. 73.

³³ GRIGOROV 2007, 197, Fig. 67/6.

³⁴ GRIGOROV 2007, 201, Fig. 73.

³⁵ ZAHARIA 1977, 58.

³⁶ ZAHARIA 1977, 58.

³⁷ ČILINSKÁ 1975, 90, Abb 10/2,4; STADLER 2005, 137, Taf. 152.

³⁸ ČILINSKÁ 1966, 158.

³⁹ See for instance: GARAM 1993, Taf. 9/4–5, 31/7, 40, 2,3–4, 48/10–15; 55/5–12; GARAM 2001, Taf. 50/7–9, 51–52–53.

⁴⁰ NAGLER 1971, 70–71.

⁴¹ PLETNEVA 1981, 150, Pl. 37/7, 100, 142–143.

Bulgaria⁴². Their upper plate is decorated with designs of various types⁴³. Rings in group II.1 from the territory of Bulgaria are found in contexts dated to the second half of the 8th century until late 9th century⁴⁴.

Presence of finger-rings within graves according to gender and their association with other artefacts

Inhumation cemeteries

In grave 13 from the cemetery at Gâmbaş 1, beside the finger-ring in group A.2 were discovered two earrings with stellar pendant, made of poor-quality silver (potin), beads of different types and a clay pot. These artefacts support the ascribing of respective grave to a female.

Grave 11 at Gâmbaş 1, which yielded the finger-ring in group B.1 suggests, according to the other items in the composition of the grave goods (iron flint, iron buckle, iron knife, iron lancehead and clay cup) that a male was buried in the gravepit.

In graves 18 and 26 from the cemetery at Sâncrai, according to the anthropological analyses, female individuals were buried, while in grave 82 a male was interred.

In grave 18, beside finger-rings were also discovered simple earrings, an earring with spiral-shaped lower part and a *lunula* earring⁴⁵. In gravepit 26, beside the ring, were also found two earrings made of bar, covered with twisted wire, an earring with a spherical pendant set to one of the extremities and beads⁴⁶. A male grave, grave 82, beside the finger-ring, also contained a decorated bronze belt fitting, a belt buckle, belt appliques, a knife and iron arrowheads⁴⁷.

Biritual cemeteries

Inhumations

It is possible that the finger-ring discovered in inhumation no. 219 from the biritual cemetery of Bratei 2 had belonged to an infant. The ring was the only grave good identified in the gravepit.

Cremations

The ring in pit cremation no. 166 at Bratei 2 was identified among the cinerary remains surviving after the pyre burning of the individual from respective community. The pit had no other furnishing.

The destroyed burial urn from the cemetery at Sibiu/Gușterița, near to which was discovered the type C finger-ring from Transylvania, did not yield any archaeological material.

Chronology of the finger-rings from Avar cemeteries in Transylvania

Parallels from Bulgaria do not constitute chronological landmarks for dating the Transylvanian finger-rings. The chronology of the rings from Bulgaria may be though taken into consideration as reference point for only the finger-ring of Sibiu/Gușterița, framed in type C from Transylvania.

⁴² GRIGOROV 2007, 186.

⁴³ GRIGOROV 2007, 188.

⁴⁴ GRIGOROV 2007, 200, Fig. 71.

⁴⁵ COSMA 2017, 70–71, Fig. 32/M./G. 18

⁴⁶ COSMA 2017, 73, Fig. 34/M./G. 26

⁴⁷ Archaeological excavations C. Cosma, G. Balteș, Cr. Florescu.

The single chronological certainties for dating the finger-rings discovered in the inhumation and biritual cemeteries from the Transylvanian Plateau are represented by the associated artefacts in the burials' furnishing, and obviously, the suggested chronology of the archaeological sites where finger-rings were identified.

Thus, it may be noted that inhumation cemeteries yielding finger-rings (Gâmbaş 1 and Teiuş) date to the period comprised between 650/670 – 720⁴⁸. The most recent archaeological excavations conducted in the cemetery of Sâncrai revealed a series of data which support the chronological framing of the cemetery to the first half of the 8th century⁴⁹ (Tab. 1).

The biritual cemetery of Bratei 2 was dated to the 7th–8th century⁵⁰. It is possible that this cemetery had developed over several chronological phases. The oldest, represented by pit cremations, could be dated to the 7th century. The finger-ring identified in cremation no. 166 (Group A.1) may be framed to this period. The following phase, which includes the inhumations from the cemetery, dates to the 8th century. In this time span may be placed the finger-ring from Group B3, discovered in inhumation 219 (Tab. 1)

The cemetery of Sibiu/Guşteriţa was chronologically framed to the 8th–9th century⁵¹. Parallels for the finger-ring support the dating of the artefact to the late phase of the Sibiu/Guşteriţa cemetery, more specifically the timespan from late 8th century and early 9th century (Tab. 1).

Tab. 1 – Chronology of finger rings from the 7th–8th centuries in Transylvania

Cemeteries	Groups of finger rings	Chronology			
		601–700	650/670–720	700–750	750–830
Bratei 2: cremation G. 166	A. 1	●			
Gâmbaş 1: G. 13			●		
Teiuş: M. ?	A. 2		●		
Bratei 2: inhumation G. 2019				●	
Gâmbaş 1: G. 11	B. 1		●		
Sâncrai: G. 18, 26, 82	B. 2			●	
Bratei 2: inhumation G. 2019	B. 3			●	
Sibiu/Guşteriţa: cremation G. destroyed	C				●

Notes regarding the presence and number of finger-rings in 7th–8th century archaeological sites from Transylvania

The finger-rings recorded in the Transylvanian Plateau were discovered only in cemeteries, in both Avar and Slavic-Avar biritual burial grounds. In the biritual cemetery of Bratei 2, finger-rings were yielded by both cremations and inhumations. At Sibiu/Guşteriţa, the finger-ring was found in a cremation (Tab. 2).

Tab. 2 – Finger rings in the Avar and bi-ritual cemeteries of the 7th–8th centuries in Transylvania

Cemeteries		Group A		Group B			Group C
Avar cemeteries		A.1	A. 2	B.1	B.2	B.3	
Gâmbaş 1	M. 11			1			
	M. 13		1				

⁴⁸ COSMA 2019, 48–52.

⁴⁹ Unpublished archaeological excavations: C. Cosma, G. Balteş, Cr. Florescu.

⁵⁰ ZAHARIA 1977, 91, 94, 98–99.

⁵¹ NAGLER 1971, 72–73.

Cemeteries		Group A		Group B			Group C
Avar cemeteries		A.1	A. 2	B.1	B.2	B.3	
Sâncrai	M. 18				3		
	M. 26				1		
	M. 82				1		
Teiuş	M. ?		1				
Bi-ritual cemeteries		A.1	A. 2	B.1	B.2	B.3	C
Bratei 2	cremation: M. 166	1					
	inhumation: M. 219					1	
Sibiu/Guşteriţa	cremation: M. distrus						1

Avar cemeteries

It must be specified from the beginning that the number of Avar cemeteries and isolate graves where finger-rings were discovered is rather small compared to the total number of burial sites from Transylvania ascribed to the Avars. Out of the 18 Avar cemeteries and graves from Transylvania⁵², in only three were identified finger-rings (the cemeteries of Gâmbaş 1, Sâncrai and Teiuş). The small number of cemeteries where finger-rings were discovered is linked to the small number of graves which yielded such artefacts. At Gâmbaş 1, out of the 14 archaeologically investigated graves⁵³, in only two were identified finger-rings. In the Sâncrai cemetery, out of the 110 archaeologically excavated graves⁵⁴, in only three burial pits were found finger-rings. At Teiuş, none of the 60 graves contained finger-rings⁵⁵. The single item from there is the result of a field survey. In this case, it may be assumed that respective object was part of a destroyed grave (Fig. 5/Gr. 1–4).

The small number of cemeteries and graves within these, with finger-rings, is also mirrored by the small number of yielded objects. In the three Avar cemeteries, a number of eight finger-rings were discovered. From Gâmbaş 1 come two finger-rings discovered one in each of the two graves. At Sâncrai, a grave contained three finger-rings and other two graves contained each a single ring. From Teiuş comes a single finger-ring (Tab. 2, Map 1).

Biritual cemeteries

Out of the 19 biritual cemeteries mapped in Transylvania⁵⁶, in only two archaeological sites were discovered finger-rings: Bratei 2 and Sibiu/Guşteriţa. Similarly to the Avar inhumation cemeteries, in the two above mentioned cemeteries, graves with finger-rings are very few. At Bratei 2, out of 210 cremations⁵⁷, only one contained a finger-ring, while out of 34 inhumations from the same burial ground⁵⁸, only one had a finger-ring. From Sibiu/Guşteriţa, with 74 excavated graves⁵⁹, in only one cremation was discovered a finger-ring. The total number of finger-rings from the biritual cemeteries of Transylvania counts three specimens (Tab 2, Fig. 5/Gr. 5–7, Map 1).

Lastly, it may be specified that the number of Transylvanian cemeteries and graves, together with the number of finger-rings dated to the 7th–8th century, is extremely low

⁵² COSMA 2019, 51.

⁵³ COSMA 2017, 56–61.

⁵⁴ COSMA 2017, 65–75 (graves 1–33); archaeological excavations C. Cosma, G. Balteş, Cr. Florescu (graves 34–110).

⁵⁵ COSMA 2017, 79–89.

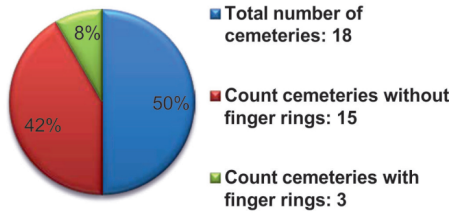
⁵⁶ HORED T 1976, 35–57; ŢIPLIC 2002–203, 10–13.

⁵⁷ ZAHARIA 1977, 15

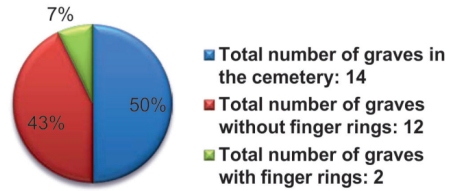
⁵⁸ ZAHARIA 1977, 56

⁵⁹ NÄGLER 1971, 63–73; HORED T 1975, 385, HORED T 1976, 51.

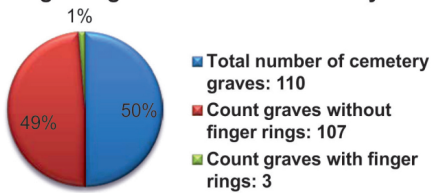
Gr. 1 - Avar cemetery without and with finger rings from Transylvania of the 7th-8th centuries



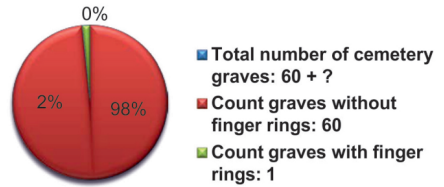
Gr. 2 - Graves without and with finger rings from the Gâmbaș 1 cemetery



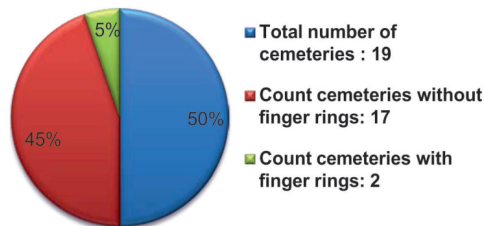
Gr. 3 - Number of graves without and with finger rings from the Avar cemetery at Sâncrai



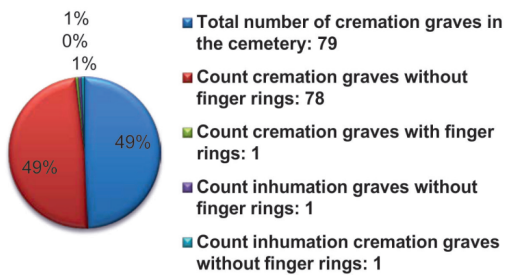
Gr. 4 - Graves without and with finger rings from the Avar cemetery at Teiuș



Gr. 5 - Bi-ritual cemeteries without and with finger rings from Transylvania of 7th - 8th centuries



Gr. 7 - Graves without and with finger rings from the Sibiu/Gușterita biritual cemetery



Gr. 6 - Graves without and with finger rings from the biritual cemetery at Bratei 2

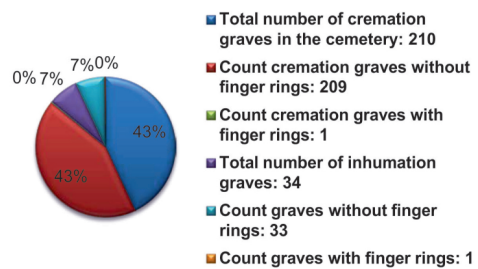


Fig. 5: 1-7 – Graphs: The presence or absence of finger rings in cemeteries and graves in Transylvania of the 7th-8th centuries

compared to other jewellery types, like earrings or beads, which are found in many of the Avar cemeteries and graves mapped in Transylvania. Identical circumstances are noted in the biritual cemeteries from the Transylvanian Plateau, as well.

The small number of graves with finger-rings compared to the total number of graves from the cemetery, together with the small number of such artefacts, are also noted in a series of Avar cemeteries from Pannonia, like for instance at Alattyán⁶⁰, Tiszafüred⁶¹, Csákberény-Orondpuszta⁶², those discovered within the range of Budapest⁶³, yet also other from the territory of Hungary⁶⁴. Therefore, the small number of 7th–8th century cemeteries and graves from Transylvania that yielded finger-rings is not peculiar compared to other Avar territories from the Carpathian Basin⁶⁵.

Significance of finger-rings from 7th–8th century graves of Transylvania

The small number of Avar cemeteries and graves from Transylvania where finger-rings have been identified may have diverse causes. A series of reasons explaining above presented circumstances may be taken into account.

A first aspect would be fashion related. It is very likely that in Transylvania of the 7th–8th century there was no fashion of finger-ring wearing. This is confirmed by the total lack of finger-rings from the great majority of Avar cemeteries and burials. This is furthermore proven by the small number of burials with finger-rings in both the cemetery of Gâmbaş 1 and that at Sâncrai. It is specified that finger-rings entered the Avar world of the Carpathian Basin as imports from Byzantium⁶⁶. Very few though, reached Transylvania. And those discovered may be interpreted as replicas of items from Avar Pannonia.

A second element that may be taken into consideration in order to interpret the small number of finger-rings at the level of the archaeological sites from the Transylvanian Plateau is related to the assertion of the social standing of the individuals buried with finger-rings. Clearly, not everybody from the Avar communities of Transylvania wore finger-rings. At Gâmbaş 1, only one male and just one female were buried with finger-rings. At Sâncrai, only two women and a single man were interred with finger-rings. In both cemeteries were identified female and male graves, which according to their grave goods, formed part of elite of the Avar communities at Gâmbaş 1 and Sâncrai. Nonetheless, finger-rings are missing from these burials. The presence of finger-rings in the few graves of Gâmbaş 1 and Sâncrai, beside other jewellery, like stellar or *lunula* pendant earrings, some in silver, together with beads, yet also other types of dress accessories prove that respective individuals belonged to the higher social level of the Avar societies' elite from Transylvania, compared to the other individuals from respective communities, mentioned above, also part of the Avar elite from Transylvania. The few finger-ring exemplars from the Avar world between the Tisza and the Danube were interpreted as rank symbols. The items were discovered mainly in rich women graves, part of the Avar communities' elite⁶⁷. Male graves with finger-rings are very few, the owner being persons part of the Avar military elite⁶⁸.

⁶⁰ KOVRIG 1963, 116, 121, 159, 166,

⁶¹ GARAM 1995, 304.

⁶² PASTOR 2015, 153–154.

⁶³ NAGY 1998, I–II.

⁶⁴ CEMETERIES 1975; KISS 1977; KISS/SOMOGYI 1984.

⁶⁵ BALOGH 2016, 179–180, 181; VIDA 2018, 241.

⁶⁶ ČILINSKÁ 1975, 89–90; BALOGH 2016, 179 180; VIDA 2018, 241.

⁶⁷ BALOGH 2016, 179, 181.

⁶⁸ BALOGH 2016, 179, 181.

The fact that in both the cemetery of Gâmbaş 1 and that of Sâncraii almost all discovered finger-rings composed the same type suggests on one hand, that the objects were made by the same artisan. On the other hand, the typological identity of the items together with the small number of items and graves where these were found may be interpreted as display of ethnical identity of the finger-rings wearers. This supposition may be supported by the exogamy phenomenon occurring at the level of respective time communities. In this case, we may assume that the two women from the Sâncraii cemetery, buried with the same finger-ring type entered by marriage the Avar community of the mentioned place. They preserved however their rings, wishing to display their original ethnicity, different than that of the community where they would further belong to. The presence of finger-rings in some of the graves from Avar Pannonia was believed an expression of Romanisation, as personal local or regional peculiarity or related to the migration of other personas from the Balkans⁶⁹.

Lastly, another acceptable interpretation of the present finger-rings in the Avar cemeteries of Transylvania is that of magical object fulfilling an apotropaic role⁷⁰. In this class may be framed a finger-ring, simple, in silver, discovered underneath the skull of the female in grave no. 13 from the Avar cemetery of Gâmbaş 1. Respective female, according to the grave goods (silver earrings with stellar pendant and beads) was part of the Avar community elite. Her family placed the ring below her skull, gesture that may be interpreted as meant to show the deceased's social standing, while its position within the grave, in reference to the human body, as object with magical/apotropaic powers.

It is difficult to very convincingly interpret the role that finger-rings played in the cremations and inhumations from the biritual cemeteries of Transylvania. It is very likely that the rings in the biritual cemetery of Bratei 2 were worn by the finger by respective individuals.

According to its shape, the Sibiu/Guşteriţa ring may be interpreted as an artefact worn by a male. Since it is the single finger ring from the biritual cemetery of Sibiu/Guşteriţa, we may hypothesise that the individual wearing respective artefact was part of the upper class of the Slavic community cremating their dead in the Sibiu/Guşteriţa cemetery.

Similarly applicable is the interpreting of finger-rings from Bratei 2 and Sibiu/Guşteriţa as burial depositions, made by the families of the deceased with the intent of displaying the higher social standing of the deceased or implying their magical, apotropaic role.

Final conclusions

In conclusion to the above presented, one must note that in Transylvania, 7th–8th century finger-rings were discovered in a rather small number of archaeological sites. They were yielded only by cemeteries, both of inhumation and biritual. The inhumation burial grounds where finger-rings emerged count Gâmbaş 1, Sâncraii and Teiuş. At the level of biritual cemeteries, finger-rings surfaced in the Bratei 2 and Sibiu/Guşteriţa graveyards.

The few cemeteries with finger-rings is linked to the small number of burials which contained objects of respective type, and concurrently, with the small number of finger-rings. The Avar cemeteries count a total of five burials with finger-rings among the grave goods, their number amounting to eight exemplars. In the biritual cemeteries mapped in Transylvania, two cremations yielded each a single finger-ring and just one inhumation which contained a single finger-ring.

Typologically, finger-ring types are few as well. They come down to two main groups, namely plain finger-rings, and finger-rings with ornaments in the upper part of the ring hoop. Plain rings are represented by simple hoops made of iron, bronze or silver threads or thin bars.

⁶⁹ VIDA 2018, 241.

⁷⁰ GRIGOROV 2017, 104.

To the second group belong finger rings of thin sheet, with an ornament in the upper part in the shape of round spheres or round or oval plates.

Finger-rings were discovered mainly in female graves. They are not missing from male or the kids graves either. The small number of Avar cemeteries and graves from Transylvania in which finger-rings were found may be the result of various causes. It is very likely that finger-ring wearing was not fashionable in the Avar communities of Transylvania. A second element that may be taken into consideration to interpret the few such artefacts at the level of the archaeological sites from the Transylvanian Plateau is related to the assertion of social standing of those buried with finger-rings as well. The typological identity of the finger-rings from Transylvania (type B), together with the few items and graves where these were discovered may be interpreted as the display of ethnic identity of finger-ring bearers. This supposition may be supported by the exogamy phenomenon occurring within the communities of respective time. In the case here, we may assume that the two women buried in the Sâncrai cemetery with the same finger-rings type, had entered by marriage the Avar community of the mentioned place. They retained their rings in the wish to display origin, which was different than that of the community they had entered into. Lastly, another interpreting acceptable for the finger-rings present in the Avar cemeteries of Transylvania is that of magical object playing an apotropaic role.

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