

THE CARPATHIAN BASIN BEFORE THE HUNGARIAN CONQUEST

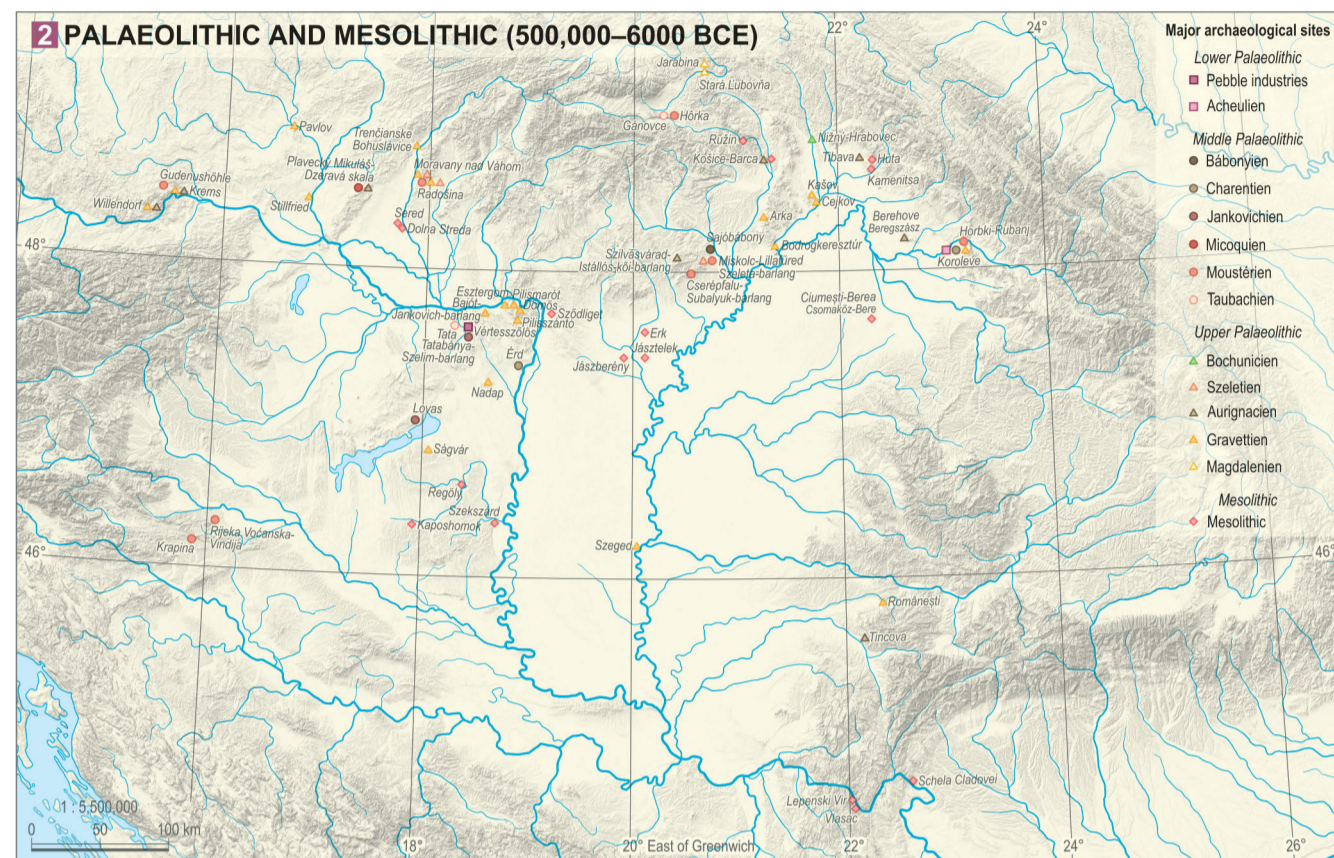
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Prehistoric times

The Carpathian Basin and the adjacent areas have been inhabited by humans for hundreds of thousands of years. Featuring varied topographic, climatic and soil conditions, the natural landscape of the region was and is shaped by the diverse lifestyle adaptations of earlier humans. With their fertile loess soils, the river valleys were favourable agricultural areas for the prehistoric communities, while the mountains provided diverse sources of raw materials. Meanwhile, a dense network of rivers facilitated transportation. The first written sources, including geographical and folk names, date to the Iron Age, with descriptions being given by Herodotus in the 5th century BCE. Archaeology offers insights into earlier periods of the prehistoric era. Spatial and temporal classifications can be made by employing the concept of archaeological culture, based on the characteristic material culture, settlement forms or burial customs. This concept is still employed in Central European archaeology. The various cultures were named after outstanding sites, distribution areas, typical types of objects, and burial customs **1**.

The Palaeolithic, Neolithic and Copper Age

The earliest sporadic traces of human settlement found in the Carpathian Basin stem from the early *Upper Pleistocene*, the *Lower Palaeolithic*. An outstanding archaeological site from this period is Vértesszőlős, where the remains of early man (*Homo erectus*) and thousands of small pebble tools, wood ash and the bone fragments of hunted animals have been found **2**.



The *Middle Palaeolithic* saw the spread of the *Homo neanderthalensis* in Central Europe. The chipped stone tools of the period typically reflect two different forms of technology: unifacial and bifacial. Archaeological cultures using the former are classified under the term *Moustérien*, yet both types were in use in the Carpathian Basin. Unifacial and bifacial tools have been found at open-air sites (Érd, Tata) and more typically in caves (Suba-lyuk, Jankovich and Szeleta).

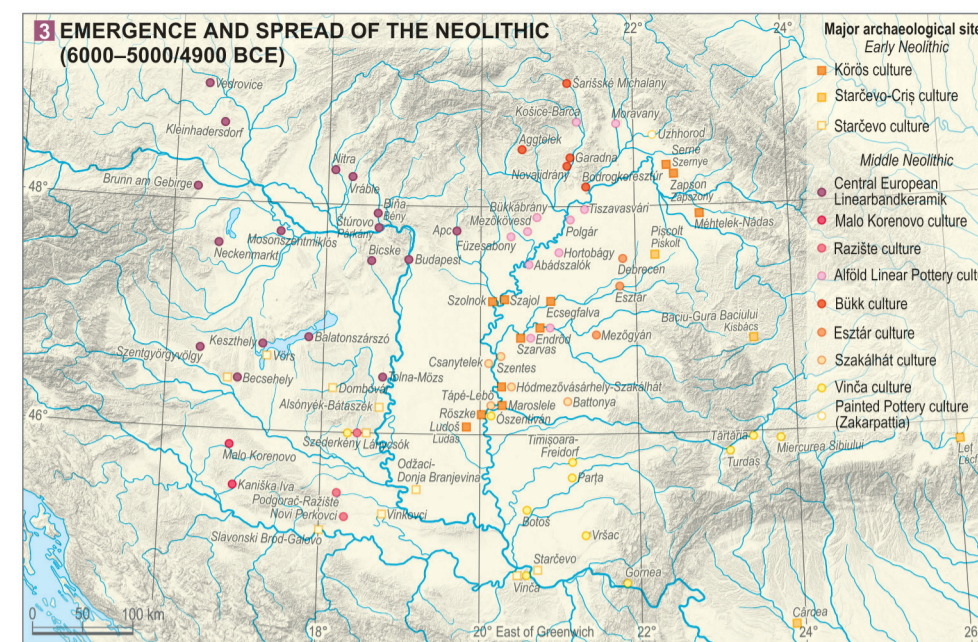
The *early Upper Palaeolithic* (*Early Stone Age*) was the period of the spread of *Homo sapiens* in Europe. In the Carpathian Basin, this period saw the emergence of several cultures, including the *Szeletien*, known from the eponymous Szeleta Cave and the Váh valley, and the *Aurignacien*, known from both open-air and cave deposits. Bifacial bay-leaf-shaped spearheads were left behind by the former **1**.

Around 28,000 BCE, the *Gravettien* culture, appeared in the region. Using mainly blade tools, it is thought to have spread in three chronologically separate waves from the east. *Gravettien* settlements have been detected primarily in open-air deposits and in loess layers, for example in the Danube Bend or the Váh valley. Livelihoods came from specialized hunting for herd animals (mammoth and reindeer). The remains of the earliest dwellings in the region (at Ságvár) can also be linked with *Gravettien* people.

Around 11,000 years ago, during the transition between the *Pleistocene* and the *Holocene*, major environmental changes took place in the Carpathian Basin. In this part of Europe, the Stone Age dates to the *early Holocene*, a period known as the *Mesolithic* (*Middle Stone Age*). Mesolithic sites have been found along rivers, for example in the Jászság region or in the Kapos



1 Leaf-shaped spearheads. Palaeolithic, Szeleta industry (c. 45,000 BCE). Szeleta Cave



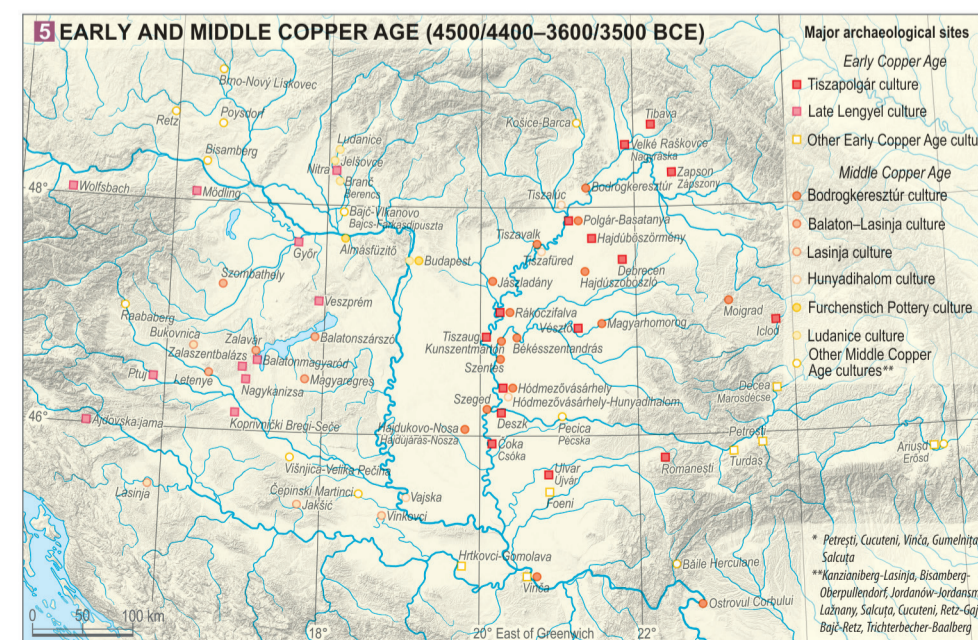
valley in Transdanubia. During the Mesolithic, groups of humans continued to support themselves mainly by hunting, but fishing and specialized gathering activities also gained in significance. Among the various chipped stone tools typical of the period, the smaller, so-called geometric ones are common.

At the beginning of the *Neolithic* (*New Stone Age*), neolithization (i.e. the replacement of the hunter-gatherer lifestyle by animal husbandry and crop cultivation) marked a major turning point in human history. Coming from the southeast, arable and livestock farmers formed the first communities along major rivers, populating much of Southeast Europe within a few centuries. Their livelihood was based on crop and animal species that were previously unknown in the Carpathian Basin, but which had already been domesticated in Southwest Asia, including cereals (spelt, einkorn wheat, emmer wheat, barley) as well as sheep and goats. During the Neolithic Age, pig keeping was also common, and the share of cattle steadily grew. The settlements of the new arrivals typically featured permanent clay-walled buildings, pits and ovens. The arrival of such groups has been dated to the turn of the 7th and 6th millennia in eastern and southern parts of the Carpathian Basin **3**. New elements in Neolithic material culture were polished stone tools and, above all, ceramic vessels, which were often decorated with nail impressions. Clay figurines of women are characteristic ritual objects of the early Neolithic.



2 The 'sickle god' figurine. Late Neolithic, Tisza culture (5000–4500 BCE). Szevár-Tűzköves

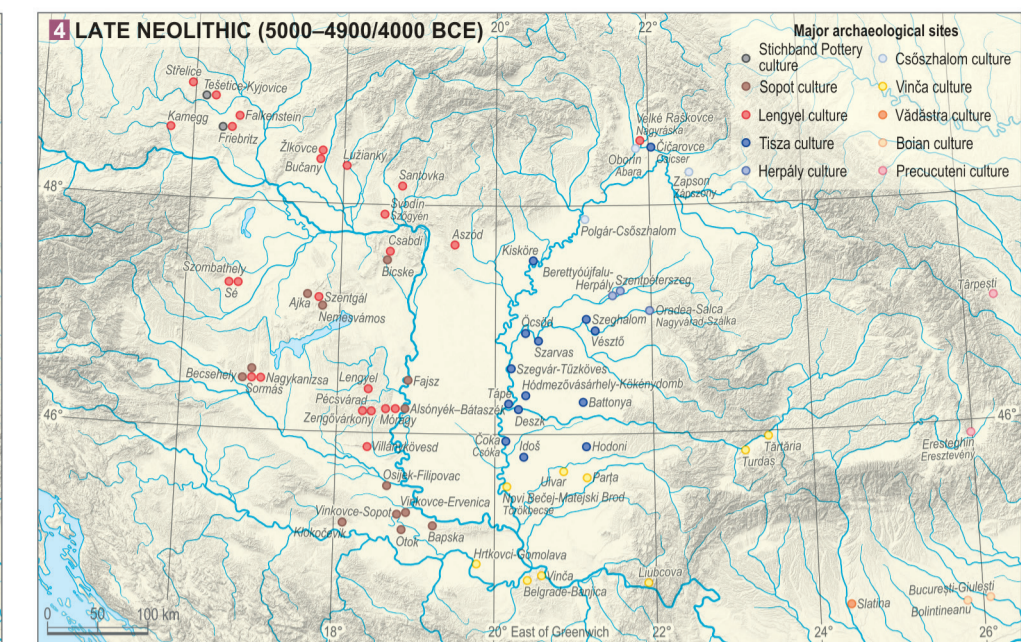
The development of the *Central European Linearbandkeramik* culture began in Transdanubia around 5500 BCE. With its spread, the first agricultural communities appeared to the west of the Carpathian Basin, populating the central part of Europe within a few generations. Common features were scratched pottery and



settlements consisting of so-called longhouses with column structures. Concurrently, the *Alföld Linear Pottery* culture formed on the plains, which was succeeded by the *Szakálhát* culture with its southern influences. Sites of the *Vinča* culture, which was concentrated in the northern Balkans, have also been found in various parts of the Carpathian Basin, including the Tisza–Maros region, the southeastern part of Transdanubia, the Vojvodina, and the Maros valley in Transylvania. Meanwhile, the settlements of *Bükk* culture spread in the northeastern part of the Carpathian Basin.

Around 5000 BCE, the *Late Neolithic* began, which was accompanied by fundamental changes in the social and settlement structure **4**. In western parts of the Carpathian Basin, the sites of the *Lengyel* culture are characterized by longhouses, multi-grave cemeteries, and circular ditch systems built for communal purposes. Burial accessories are commonly found in the graves: polished stone axes, jewellery made from shells or – more rarely – copper, and characteristic painted ceramic vessels. In this period, many of the settlements of the *Tisza*, *Herpály* and *Csőszhalom* cultures in the Alföld were multi-layered, so-called tell settlements that 'formed' over a lengthy period of use and which were usually surrounded by deep ditch systems. Alongside the characteristic combed/braided pottery, the *Tisza* culture also featured clay sculptures, including the most famous, the so-called 'sickle god' figurine **2**.

Based on the dispersal of large copper tools, daggers, flat axes and pickaxes, as well as gold jewellery, the *Copper Age* (*Chalcolithic*) began in the Carpathian Basin in the second half of the 5th millennium BCE **5**. At the start of the Copper Age, the *Lengyel* culture continued to exist in western parts of the Carpathian



Basin, but archaeologists have found no signs of the large settlement agglomerations of earlier periods. The Middle Copper Age is characterized in the region by the settlements of the *Balaton–Lasinja* culture of southern origin around 4000 BCE. Thereafter, deposits featuring *grooved or studded pottery* are known.

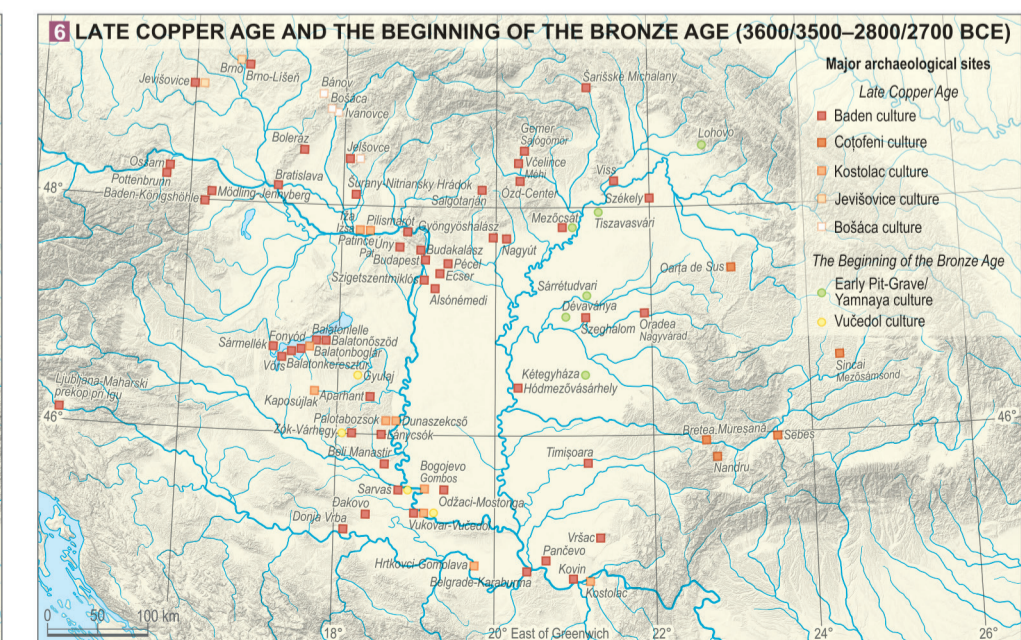
In the eastern regions, the tell settlements steadily disappeared. The *Tiszapolgár* culture of the *Early Copper Age* featured cemeteries that lay outside the settlements and had a large number of graves. The graveyards often lay alongside the burial sites of the partly contemporaneous *Bodrogheresztúr* culture.

In the eastern part of the Carpathian Basin, communities practising mound burials of steppe origin made their first appearance during this period. In the Tisza region, the *Hunyadihalom* culture, which was distinguished by its vessels with so-called seal handles and had arrived from the southeast, spread in patches.

Between 3600/3500 and 3000/2800 BCE, the *Baden* culture of the *Late Copper Age* formed a dense settlement network throughout the Carpathian Basin **6**. This period saw the relative decline of copper and the advent of innovations such as wheel transport, evidenced indirectly by the ceramic cart models or the general spread of wool processing. In the pits of settlements, multiple ceramic fragments have been found, and excavations indicate that animal sacrifices were common. Discoveries include the remains of cattle as well as mass human graves. The latter arose during epidemics or as the outcome of ritual acts. Particularly special finds are the clay mask unearthed in Balaton-őszöd and the urns patterned with human figures from Ózd-Center.

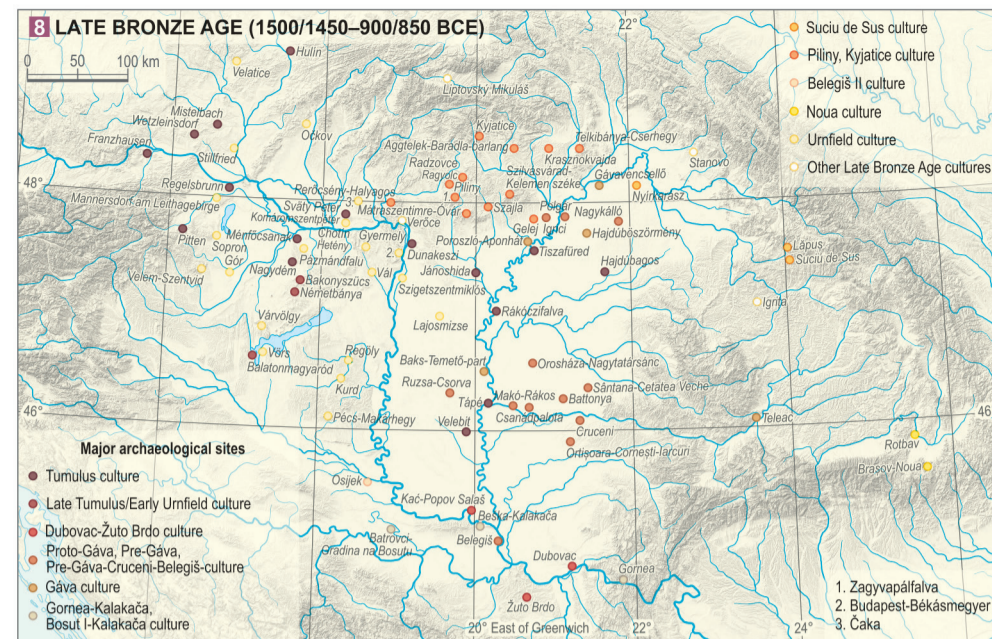
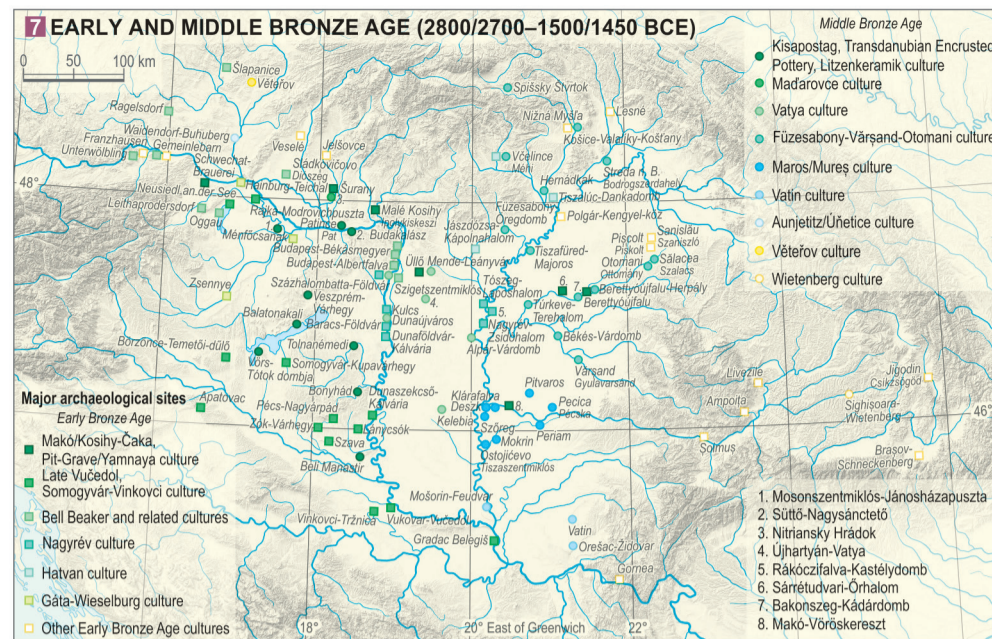
The Bronze and Iron Age

The next major juncture in the history of the Carpathian Basin is linked with the changes that occurred in the 3rd millennium BCE. It was at this time that the



1 PERIODIZATION OF PREHISTORY			
Time frame (BCE)	Age	Period	Archaeological unit
500,000–300,000	Palaeolithic	Lower Palaeolithic	Pebble industries, Acheulien
300,000–45,000		Middle Palaeolithic	Moustérien, Charentien, Jankovichien, Micoquien, Bábonyien, Taubachien, Jankovichien
45,000–10,000		Upper Palaeolithic	Bochunicien, Szeletien, Aurignacien, Gravettien, Magdalenien
10,000–6,000	Mesolithic	Early Mesolithic	Sauveterien, Janislawicien, Iron Gates Mesolithic, Northern Alföld Mesolithic industry
6,000–5,400		Late Mesolithic	
6,000–5,400	Neolithic	Early Neolithic	Körös/Cris, Starčevo
5,400–5,000/4,900		Middle Neolithic	Central European Linearbandkeramik, Alföld Linear Pottery, Esztár, Bükk, Szakálhát, Vinča, Malo Korenovo, Razšite, Painted Pottery culture (Zakarpattia)
5,000/4,900–4,500/4,400		Late Neolithic	Sopot, Lengyel, Tisza, Herpály, Csőszhalom, Vinča, Stichband Pottery, Precucuteni, Boian, Vádatra
4,500/4,400–4,000	Copper Age	Early Copper Age	Tiszapolgár, Late Lengyel, Petrești, Cucuteni, Vinča, Gumelnița, Salcuța
4,000–3,600/3,500		Middle Copper Age	Bodrogheresztúr, Hunyadihalom, Balaton-Lasinja, Lasinja, Kanczianberg-Lasinja, Bisamberg-Oberpullendorf, Jordanw-Jordansmühl, Furchenstich Pottery, Ludanice, Laznáry, Salcuța, Cucuteni, Retz-Gajáry, Bajč-Retz, Trichterbecher-Baalberg
3,600/3,500–2,800/2,700		Late Copper Age	Baden, Cotofeni, Kostošć, Jevišovice, Early Pit-Grave (Yamnaya), Vučedol
2,800/2,700–2,000/1,900	Bronze Age	Early Bronze Age	Makó/Kosihy-Čaka, Pit-Grave/Yamnaya, Late Vučedol, Somogyvár/Vinkovci, Bell Beaker, Leithaprodersdorf, Unterwöbling/Gemeinlebam, Corded Ware/Eastern Slovakian tumuli, Gáta-Wieselburg, Nitra, Chlčpice-Veselá, Nyírség, Saniszló, Glina III-Schneckenberg, Jigodin, Soimus, Livizle, Gornea-Orlești, Košťany, Nagyrév, Kisapostag, Maros/Mures, Hatvan
2,000/1,900–1,500/1,450		Middle Bronze Age	Transdanubian Encrusted Pottery, Litzenkeramik, Madarovec, Unterwöbling/Gemeinlebam, Gáta-Wieselburg, Košťany, Early Tumulus, Vátya, Hatvan, Füzesabony/Várgand/Otomani, Maros/Mures, Vatin, Aunjetitz/Únětice, Věleňov, Wietenberg
1,500/1,450–900/850	Iron Age	Late Bronze Age	Tumulus, Late Tumulus-Early Umfield, Dubovac-Zuto Brdo, Pre-Gáva, Pre-Gáva/Cruceni-Belegiš II, Cruceni-Belegiš, Belegiš, Gáva, Gornea-Kalakača, Bosut I-Kalakača, Suciu de Sus, Berkesz, Pilly, Kysajce, Virovica, Daj, Noua, Igrita, Umfield, Lausitz, Stanovo
900/850–700		Early Iron Age	Hallstatt, Pre-Scythian
700–450		Middle Iron Age	Hallstatt, Scythian, Early La Tène (Celtic)
450/400 BCE – end of the 1st century BCE	Iron Age	Late Iron Age	La Tène (Celtic), Scythian

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inhabitants of the region became familiar with the alloying of copper and tin. The resulting bronze material largely defined the following period. The Bronze Age is traditionally divided into three main periods (early, middle and late).

At the start of the *Early Bronze Age*, there was an encounter between communities with eastern (*Kurgan pit-burial culture*), western (*bell-shaped vessels culture*) and southern (*Vučedol* and *Somogyvár–Vinkovci* cultures) links. They were joined by the *Makó culture* [7]. In view of the geographical location of the Carpathian Basin, this basic 'triad' was also a feature of subsequent periods of the Bronze Age. The Danube in part separated the regions but it also served to connect them. For the first time since the Neolithic period, tell settlements could be found both along the Danube and in the Tisza region. Such settlements concealed a rich architectural and material world. In the aftermath of the *Nagyrev* culture of the Early Bronze Age, numerous communities featuring their own pottery stylistic elements were established during the *Middle Bronze Age*. Among them was the *Füzesabony* culture, which was present in the eastern areas of the Carpathian Basin but also had connections extending all the way to Lesser Poland and even Scandinavia. Its material culture was highly decorative and based on spiral patterns. The culture gave rise to a complex network of settlements, with trade routes in the river valleys. An important route for the trade of salt, amber, gold, metal raw materials and finished goods lay along the Danube, where a chain of settlements belonging to the *Vátya* culture ensured links with Southern, Central and Western Europe. The history of the landscape in areas to the west of the Danube underwent a somewhat different development in the Early and Middle Bronze Ages. Its merger into one area was due to the culture of *lime-inlaid pottery*, which featured sophisticated ceramic craftsmanship. For geographical and climatic reasons,



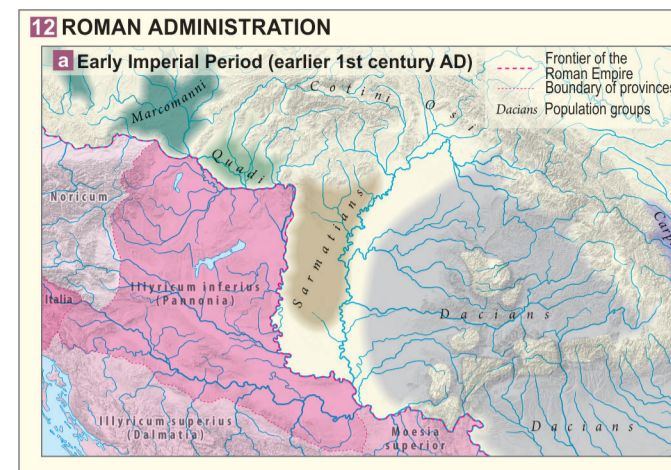
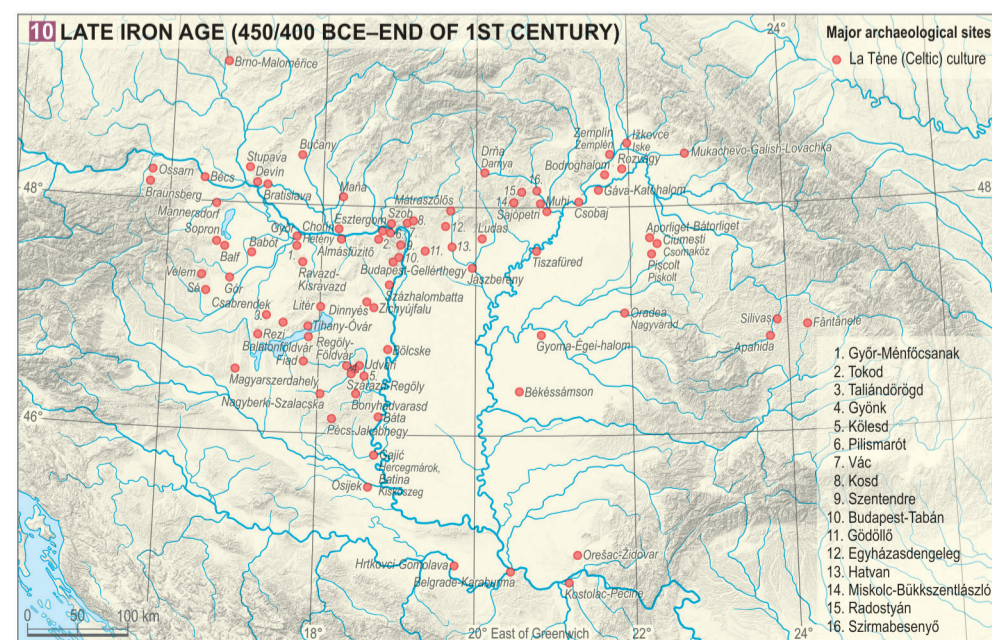
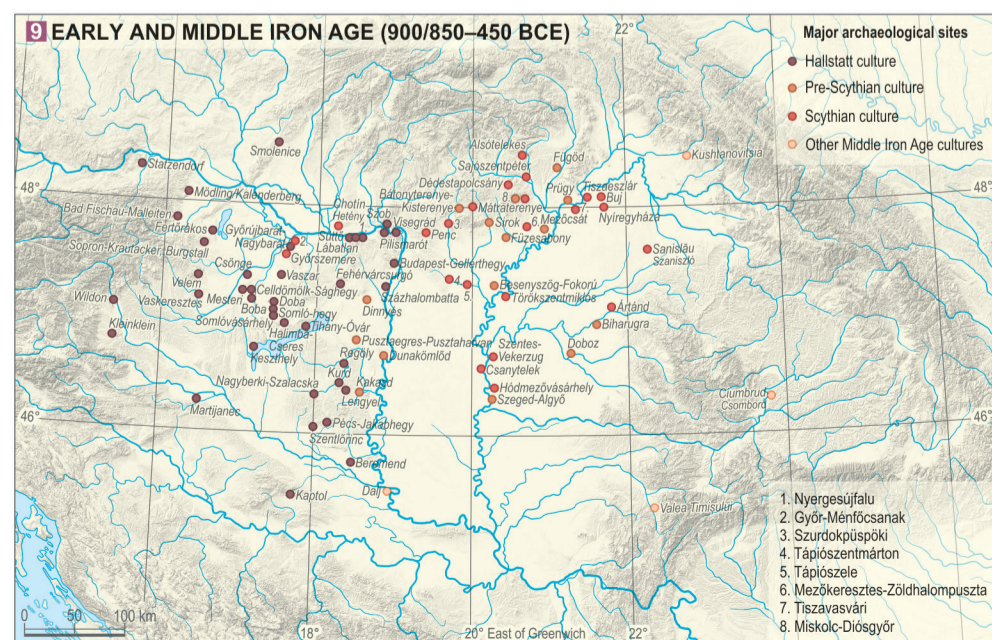
3 The bronze treasure of Hajdúböszörmény. Late Bronze Age, c. 1000 BCE

tell settlements did not develop here. In cultural terms, the culture was principally oriented towards Central and Western Europe. Communication along the route of what later became known as the Amber Road is perceptible in this period. The *Late Bronze Age*, a period lasting several hundred years, brought radical changes to the Carpathian Basin and to Europe as a whole. Human communities moved into hitherto uninhabited areas, especially in the mountainous regions. The number and quality of objects left behind in bronze treasures increased exponentially. Agriculture underwent a transformation, and the period also saw the spread of a new food and beverage culture [3]. The duality defining the region can still be observed in this period. In western areas (up to the Tisza in the east), the communities generally belonged to the *mound-grave (Tumulus)* culture and then to the *Urnföld* culture. In contrast, in the Tisza and Maros areas (and, indeed, all the way to what is now Moldova), groups belonging to the *Gáva* culture were dominant. These groups had multiple links to Southeastern and Eastern Europe [8]. In the early part of the 1st millennium BCE, objects and weapons made of iron began to appear in Cen-

tral and Southeastern Europe. With the production of hand tools and horse tools from iron, the use of bronze gradually declined. This marked the advent of the *Iron Age*, which lasted from the 9th–8th centuries BCE until the rise of the Roman Empire. During the *Early Iron Age*, the areas lying west and east of the Danube belonged essentially to two distinct cultural milieus [9]. Transdanubia formed the eastern branch of an almost uniform cultural area that extended from France in the west to the Carpathian Basin in the east and which is known today as the *Hallstatt* culture. The central, elevated and fortified settlements of this culture were found at the main strategic junctions. High-status individuals were laid to rest in mound graves.

At the beginning of the *Iron Age*, the area to the east of the Danube was inhabited by *pre-Scythian* and then *Scythian* communities, who had arrived from the steppes of Eastern Europe. The collective term *pre-Scythian* denotes a mysterious period in the Early Iron Age that remains hidden to this day. The weaponry and horse tools associated with an equestrian lifestyle and with equestrian warfare can be traced back to eastern models that had a significant impact on the history of Central Europe. Around the mid-7th century BCE, a new era began to the east of the Danube, in the mountainous regions, and in the northern part of the Kisalföld region. These developments likewise had roots in the steppes that lay to the north of the Black Sea and even further afield. The cultural relics of Scythian culture are found mainly at burial sites and include sumptuous graves with unique objects.

Large parts of the Carpathian Basin were settled by *Celts* from the end of the 5th century BCE during what is known as the *Late Iron Age (La Tène age)* [10]. Their earliest sporadic appearance – in the Fertő region and along the Danube – dates to the end of the 5th century BCE. The first half of the 4th century BCE saw a larger expansion that marked the beginning of



the eastern Celtic wave of migration. Concurrently with their occupation of northern Italy, they also settled in the northern part of Transdanubia. From the mid-3rd century BCE, the number of sites increases rapidly throughout Transdanubia and in the Alföld. For a time the Celts appear to have lived alongside the Scythian communities [4]. The arrival of the *Scordisci* in the area between the Drava and Sava rivers can be traced to this time. They founded the city of Singidunum, the predecessor of today's Belgrade. The north-



4 Front and back of a Zichyújfalu type tetradrachm. Late 3rd century BCE. Dunaújváros

Year	Period	Dunántúl	Alföld	Northern areas	Transylvania
1	ROMAN PERIOD	Early Imperial Period (27–96 BCE)	Early Sarmatian period (1920–180)	Marcomanni	Dacian Kingdom (1st century BCE–101/106)
50		Middle Imperial Period (96–294)	Middle Sarmatian period (180–270)	Quadi Przeworsk culture population	Middle Imperial Period (101/106–271/275)
100		Late Imperial Period (284–430)	Late Sarmatian period (270–380/400)		Sártaña de Mureș-Chernyakhov population
450	MIGRATION PERIOD/EARLY MIDDLE AGES	Hunnic Empire (430–454/455)	Hunnic Empire (380/400–454/455)	Hunnic Empire (380/400–454/455)	Hunnic Empire (380/400–454/455)
500		Ostrogothic Kingdom (468–473)	Gepid Kingdom (454/455–567)		Gepid Kingdom (454/455–567)
550		Lombard Kingdom (no. 510–568)			
600	HUNGARIAN CONQUEST PERIOD	Avar Khaganate (568–800/822) Earlier Avar period (568–650/670)	Avar Khaganate (567/568–800/822) Earlier Avar period (567–650/670)	Avar Khaganate (567/568–800/822) Earlier Avar period (567–650/670)	Avar Khaganate (567/568–800/822) Earlier Avar period (567–650/670)
700		Later Avar period (650/670–800)	Later Avar period (650/670–800)	Later Avar period (650/670–800)	Later Avar period (650/670–800)
850		Carolingian Empire (800–900)	Avars (800–895)	Moravian Principality Slavs	Ancient Bulgars Slavs
950		Hungarian Principality (900–1000)	Hungarian Principality (895–1000)	Hungarian Principality (895/905–1000)	Hungarian Principality (895–1000)

ern part of the Carpathian Basin was ruled by the *Boii*, while the southwestern part lay under the rule of the *Taurisci*. In 88 BCE, the Romans defeated the *Scordisci*. In a military sense, the loosely organized Celtic population was no obstacle for Rome. After the Roman occupation of *Pannonia*, the Celtic population was organized into *civitates*, which preserved their identity for hundreds of years.

The Roman Era

After the founding of *Aquileia* in 181 BCE, Rome increasingly laid claim to the Eastern Alpine region and the Balkan Peninsula. The Romans took control of the Carpathian Basin in a gradual process [11]. Initially, their aim was not to conquer the region but to control its raw materials and the ancient long-distance routes that ensured their supply (Sava valley, Amber Road).

For the region as a whole, a key development was the campaign launched by Octavian, who would later become Emperor Augustus. Focusing upon the northern Adriatic coast and the southeastern part of the Alpine region, he succeeded in capturing *Siscia*, a city on the Sava. The ostensible aim of the military venture was to stem the 'Dacian threat' but this turned out to be little more than political propaganda. On domestic political grounds, Octavian turned against the *Delmatae* tribal community and took possession of the *Dalmatian* coast. The outcome was the establishment of *Illyricum* as an independent province. In the ensuing years, the peoples of the Eastern Alpine and Southern Pannonian regions reportedly threatened the interests of Rome on multiple occasions. Yet the Roman occupation of the Drava–Sava region did not occur until after the end of Tiberius's war in 12–9 BCE. At that time, the area controlled by Augustus reached as far as the Danube in *Syrmia*. The next decisive political step was elicited by the Pannonian-Dalmatian rebellion between 6 and 9 CE. On geostrategic grounds, *Illyricum* was divided into 'lower' and 'upper' provinces, which later became independent as *Pannonia* and *Dalmatia* [12a].

The area of *Illyricum inferius* achieved independent status as the province of Pannonia in the mid-1st century during the reign of Emperor Claudius [5]. Pannonia emerged as a military border region, with a border (*limes, ripa*) that consisted of camps housing the army, the adjacent civilian settlements, watchtowers and military roads. Much of the Empire's defensive line was built near rivers (Rhine, Danube), which formed natural barriers. A linear defence system had been constructed by the early part of the last third of the 1st century, and the garrisons of the fortresses became permanent in the early years of the 2nd century. Rome's sphere of influence extended to both sides of the border. On the far side of the Danube, for instance, a Roman presence was signalled by forts, marching

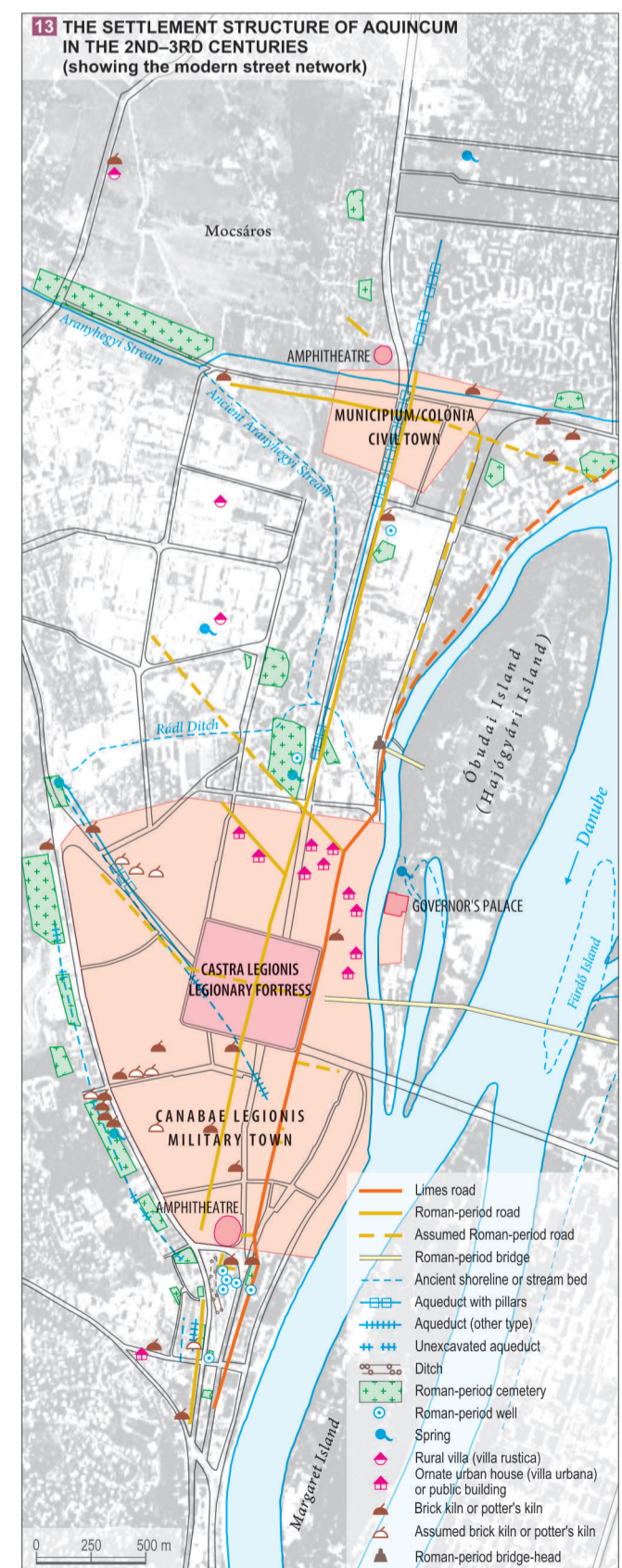


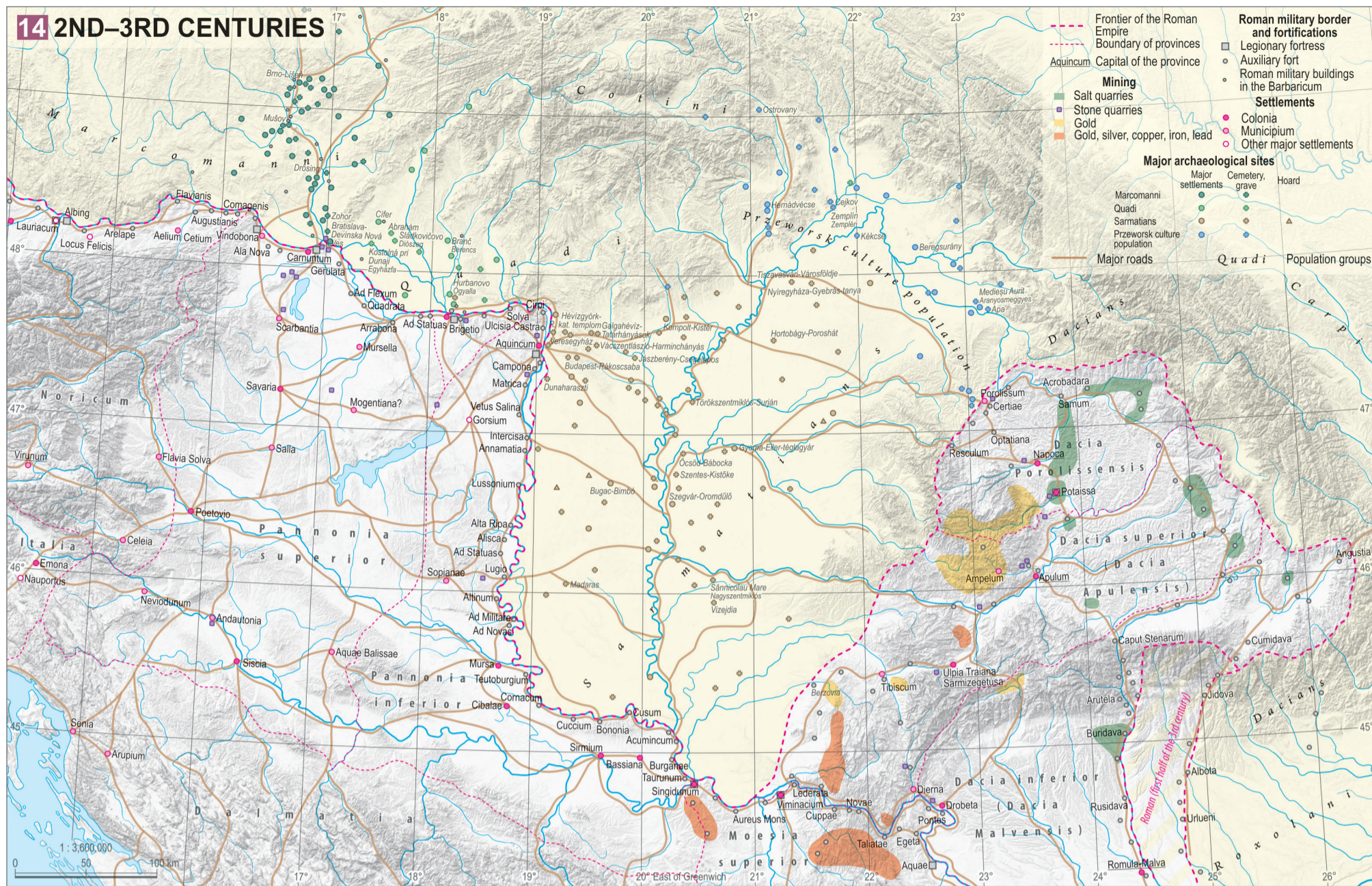
5 Native tomb stele of Bilatusa. Second half of the 1st c. Bruckneudorf

camps, watchtowers, way stations, and commercial settlements.

In the early 2nd century, *Pannonia* was divided into two provinces. The military centre and provincial headquarters of the eastern province were located at *Aquincum* [13]. The situation was rectified with the transfer of Brigetio to *Pannonia inferior* at the beginning of the 3rd century [12b].

The first cities were founded near the Amber Road. *Savaria/Szombathely* was a Claudius-era *colonia*. It was preceded by the *oppidum* of *Scabantia/Sopron*, established during the reign of Tiberius. In the second half of the 1st century, towns were often founded in the Drava–Sava region. The granting





6 Bust of Emperor Valentinian II, Second half of the 4th century. Pécs (Sopiane)

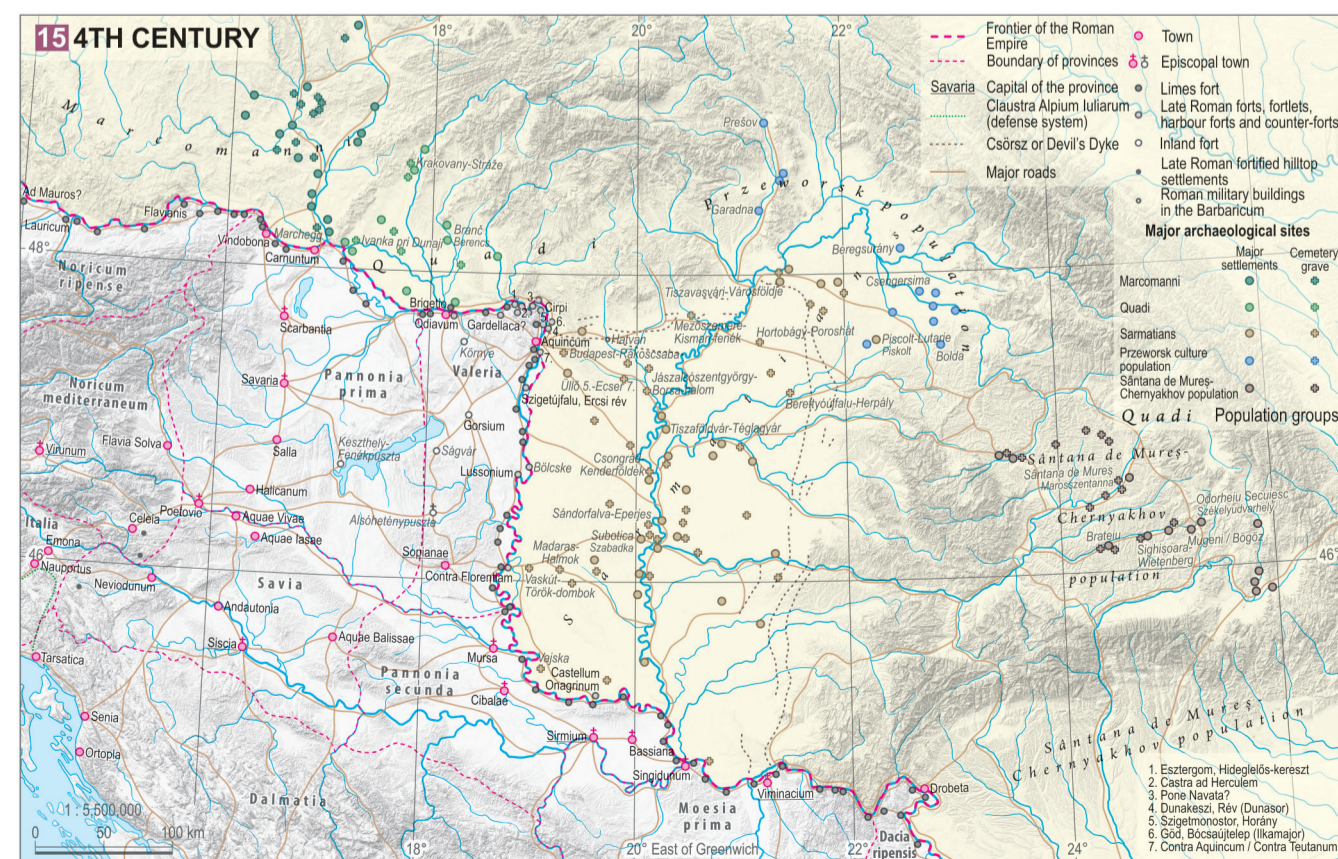
of municipal status to settlements along the Danube began in the first third of the 2nd century 14. With the conquest of Dacia, which Trajan accomplished in two wars in the early 2nd century, the Empire's military centre of gravity shifted from the Lower Danube defensive line to a long land border along the Carpathians. The defensive and administrative system of the new province, which was extremely rich in natural resources, was more or less finalized based on the experiences of the first 10–15 years of military occupation. Two provinces were initially established in Dacia, but a third was soon added.

forces from Dacia and reconsolidate the Lower Danube border. The invaders were attracted primarily by the Balkanic provinces rather than by Roman Dacia. The early years of the 4th century saw significant changes in everyday life in Pannonia affecting both public administration and military policy. A separation was made between the civilian and military administrations. Both provinces were divided into two parts, with their reorganization probably taking place in several stages. New fortifications were built throughout the region 12c 6. The construction work extended to both sides of the border in Pannonia. Further, five so-called inner fortresses were built in the interior of the province. Beyond the Limes, in Sarmatian Barbaricum, the Romans began building an extensive ram-

part system (the Limes Sarmatae). Inside the Empire, along the line separating the northeastern part of Italy from Illyricum, a linear defence system was established. Comprising walls, towers and fortresses (Clastra Alpium Iuliarum), the system was designed to prevent barbarian invasions of Italy 15. Along the Lower Danube, the camps that had once constituted the Roman Limes were transformed into fortified settlements, some of which still existed in the early Byzantine period. 7

Barbaricum in the Roman Period

The 1st century saw a major shift in power in the central areas of the Carpathian Basin, accompanied by changes in the ethnic composition of the local populations. Around 18/19–50 CE, the Alföld region was



7 The hunter platter of the Seso treasure with the inscription Pelsa



8 The Sarmatian mound graves at Vaskút

occupied by Sarmatians of Iranian origin, who were related to the Scythians. The name Sarmatian seems to have denoted several tribes. Among them, the Iazyges moved to the Alföld. 8

At the time, Celtic and Dacian groups lived in the northern and eastern parts of the Carpathian Basin. The Dacian kingdom was the most powerful actor: its authority extended to the Lower Danube region, Transylvania, and a part of the Alföld. The northern part of the Carpathian Basin continued to be inhabited by peoples of Celtic origin (Cotini, Osi), who were gradually replaced by Germanic peoples. In the first half of the 1st century, the Quadi appeared in the Kislalföld region. In the Northeastern Carpathians, the Przeworsk culture, which was associated with the Vandals, expanded southwards to the Upper Tisza region. The Marcomanni occupied and took control of the Moravian Basin. During the Marcomannic–Sarmatian wars of the 2nd century, many Roman military objects were established deep inside the barbarian lands.

For several centuries, Sarmatian–Roman relations saw the alternation of peaceful alliances with bloody conflicts. During Trajan's Dacian wars (101–106), the Iazyges became allied with Rome in opposition to the Dacians, thereby taking control of the plains beyond the Tisza. The Sarmatians, who inhabited the area between Pannonia, Dacia and Moesia for some 170 years, developed intensive relations with the Roman Empire.

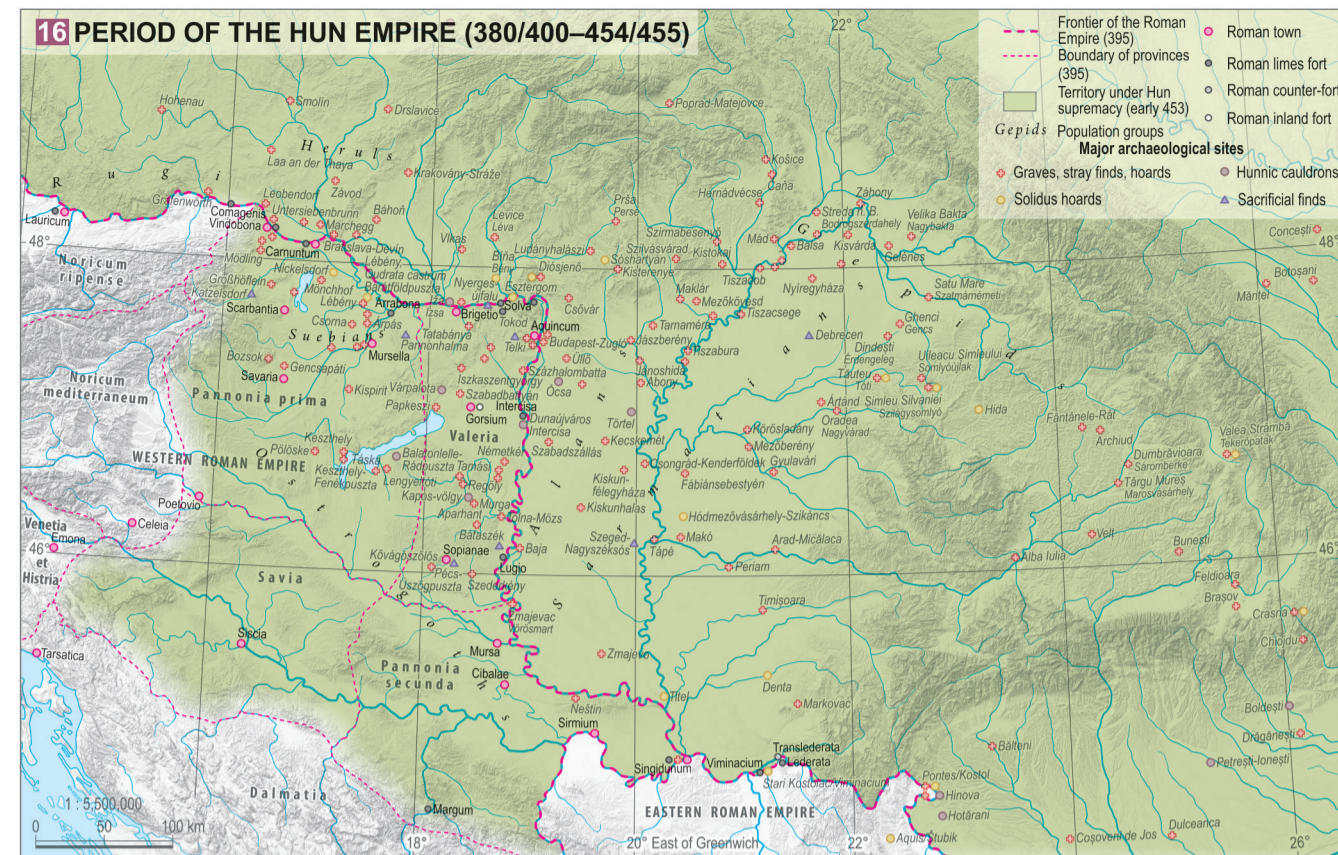
In the 2nd and 3rd centuries, the power of the Eastern Sarmatians declined on the Eastern European Plain. From the 3rd century until the end of the Roman era, the Sarmatians of the Alföld constituted the last isolated remnant of the Iranian world in ancient Europe. After the surrender and demise of Dacia, the Goths settled in Transylvania (Sântana de Mureş culture). In the late Roman period, the area settled by the Quadi expanded up the river valleys. The people of the Przeworsk culture lived in the Carpathians until the end of the Roman period.

The Migration Period

First wave

The Huns crossed the Volga around 375/376. Their conquest of Eastern Europe occurred rapidly, causing panic and a great wave of migration. Some of the fragmentary groups fleeing the Huns crossed into the Roman Empire in the Balkans, while others arrived in the Carpathian Basin. Having conquered the territories of the Alans, Eastern Goths and Western Goths, the Huns reached the Carpathian Basin within a few years, pushing numerous ethnic groups ahead of them.

These events impacted greatly on the peoples of the Carpathian Basin. The Sarmatians, acting in conjunction with the Quadi, launched their last major incursion into Pannonia in 374–375. The migrations triggered by the Huns were the ultimate cause of these events. The Huns began to conquer the Alföld in the 380s, establishing their rule there by the beginning of



the 5th century at the latest. They expanded their territory into parts of Pannonia in the early 5th century 16.

The sources hardly mention the Sarmatians after the 380s. A part of the Sarmatian population may have fled to the west. Those who remained joined the nomadic empire, as some of their settlements and cemeteries remained in use. The displaced population contributed to the founding of kingdoms in Western Europe during the Migration Period.

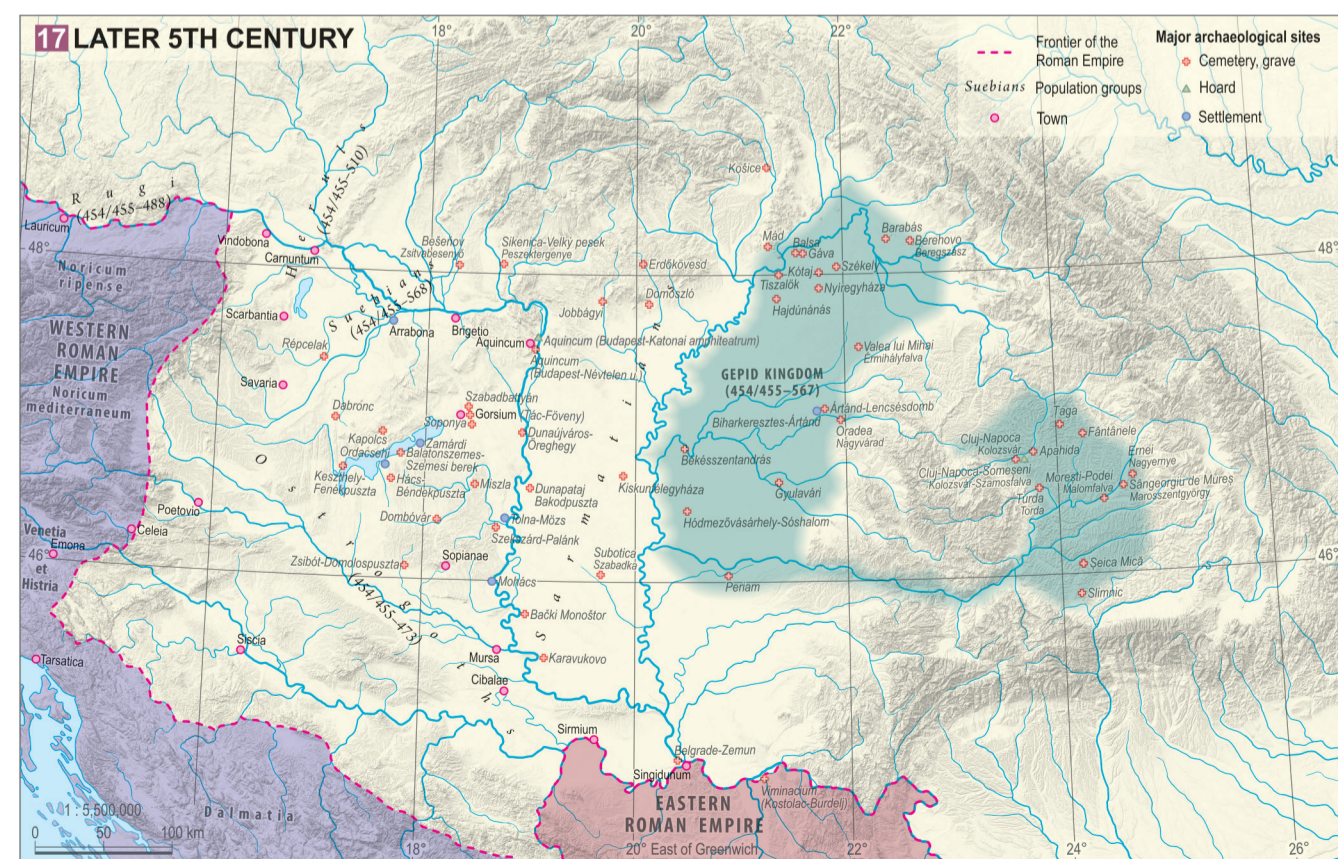
A part of the population of Pannonia, primarily the Romanized elements belonging to the wealthy imperial administration, left for the interior of the Empire. Nevertheless, some inhabitants remained in Pannonia, adapting to the new circumstances. The various barbarian groups were superimposed on society, whereby their material culture gradually became a part of the newly emerging cultural traditions of the Carpathian Basin. This may be viewed as part of a longer process of transformation, for the settlement of barbarian peoples because of pressure from east had begun in the 4th century when Pannonia was home to a vibrant late Roman and early Christian culture. Some of the Roman military objects, towns and rural centres (villas) continued to exist in the Hunnic era, while others were destroyed or declined in significance. The remaining communities typically retreated behind walls, which

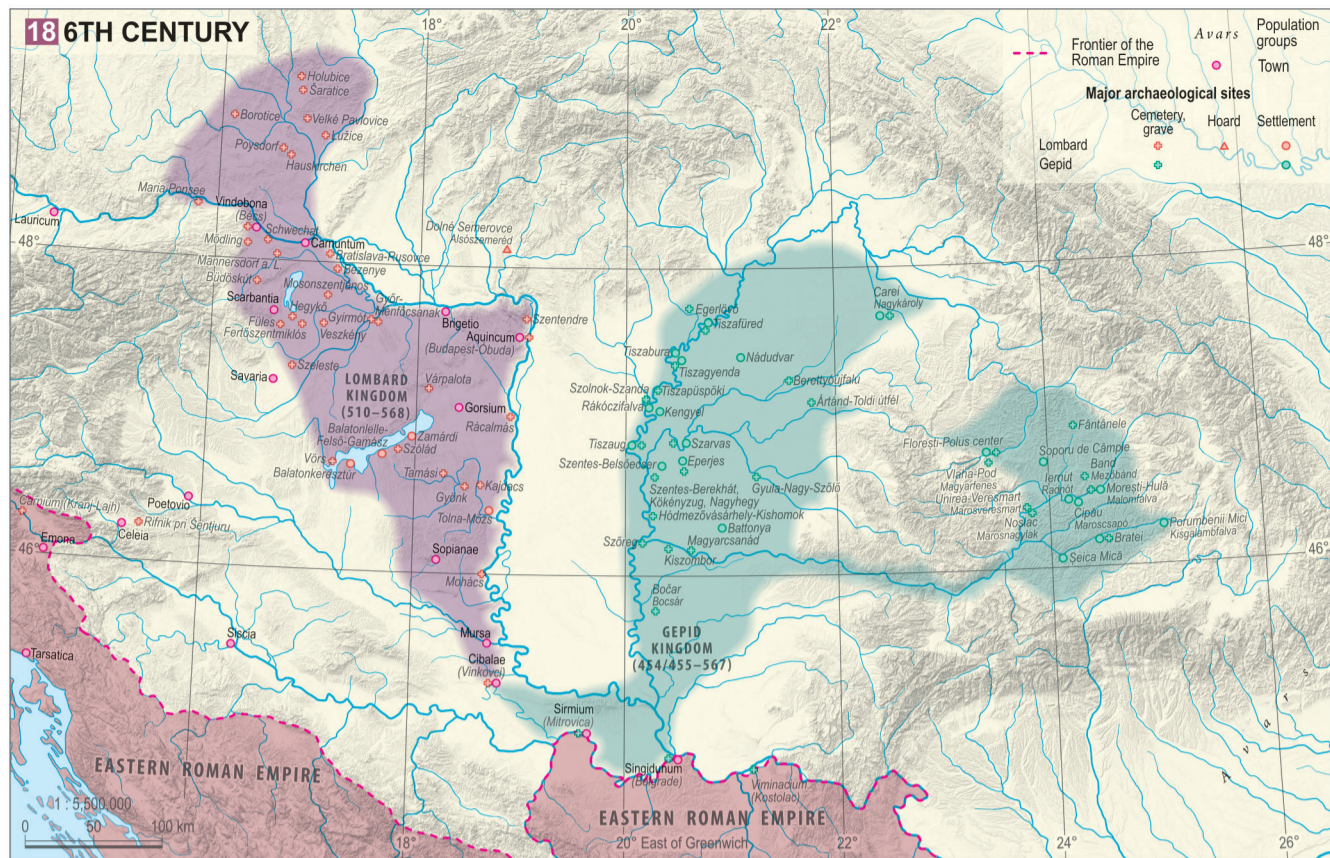
offered protection against the waves of passing barbarians. The burial sites from this period feature both local Romanized and novel barbaric elements.

The centre of the Hunnic Empire appears to have been in the Black Sea region until the 410s, when the sources mention the concurrent rule of several kings. Subsequently, the centre may have shifted to what is now Wallachia for a brief time. Thereafter, however, the Hunnic imperial centre lay in the Alföld (420s). This was certainly the case by the early 430s. In 435, Bleda and Attila controlled the empire. Attila took charge as sole ruler (445–453), having murdered his elder brother.

Booty stemming from the Hunnic offensives against the Eastern and Western Roman Empires and the substantial ransoms and tributes paid in gold by Rome and Byzantium resulted in the accumulation of great wealth in the Carpathian Basin. A significant part of this wealth was soon buried in the ground, resulting in sumptuous treasure. Jewellery and clothing items have also been found in Hunnic-era graves.

The peoples of Pannonia and the Sarmatians usually performed inhumation burials. The latter also undertook trench burials and established mound grave cemeteries. Cremation was typically performed in areas inhabited by the Quadi, Vandals and Dacians. Cem-





10 Fibula, Lombard period, mid-6th century. Tamási-Csikölegelő
11 Tombs of Gepid noblemen: eagle-shaped fittings. Second half of the 5th century. Apahida, grave 2

er centre lay in Transylvania, as indicated by the royal tombs in Apahida 11. Transylvania's natural resources continued to be exploited during this period. East of the River Tisza, a dense network of Gepid settlements and cemeteries arose, primarily near rivers. However, the area between the Danube and Tisza rivers became almost completely depopulated after the Hunnic era.

Archaeological finds related to the immediate post-Hunnic period exhibit similarities with those of the Hunnic period, but the ritual elements of Asian origin had disappeared by the second half of the 5th century. Alongside the local Roman, Eastern and Mediterranean cultural features, there was more interaction with the Merovingian world of Western Europe. It is only worth linking the archaeological material to ethnic groups where such groups became long-term power actors.

In the early decades of the 6th century, the most significant battles in the Carpathian Basin were those fought by the Ostrogoths and the Gepids for possession of Sirmium. The Gepids ruled the former imperial city from the 470s to 504 and again from 536 to 567. They initially maintained peaceful relations with their new neighbours, the Lombards. However, the relationship became a hostile one in the 540s, with strife breaking out around 550. The conclusion of the Gepid-Lombard conflict sealed the fate of the Carpathian Basin for some time. With victory in mind, the Lombards allied themselves with the Avars, who had recently appeared at the fringes of the Carpathian Basin. In a two-pronged attack, the Gepid Kingdom was destroyed in 567. However, the true victors of the war were the Avars: at Easter in 568, the Lombards led by King Alboin fled the Avars for Italy.

The Avar period and the 9th century

The first incidental mention of the Avars, a steppe people, stems from the late 460s. They appear in the written sources from the late 550s onwards. In the first half of the 550s, the Avars fled the Turkic Khaganate, leaving their grazing lands in Asia and moving to Europe. At this time, the steppe lying to the north of the Caucasus became their new home. Having allied themselves with Constantinople, they subjugated the Sabirs, Utigurs and Kutrigurs. All these peoples kept livestock and grazed their animals. By 562, the Avar armies had reached the Lower Danube. In search of a new homeland, they formed an alliance with the Lombards against the Gepids. After the defeat of the latter in 567, the peoples of the Avar khagan (or prince) took possession of the Carpathian Basin as far as the Danube. In 568 they extended their rule to the former territories of the Lombards, who had left the region for Italy.

The Avar Khaganate, which formed in the Carpathian Basin in 567-568, controlled a part of the Eastern European steppe and ruled over many ethnic groups 19. Some of the Gepids who came under Avar rule

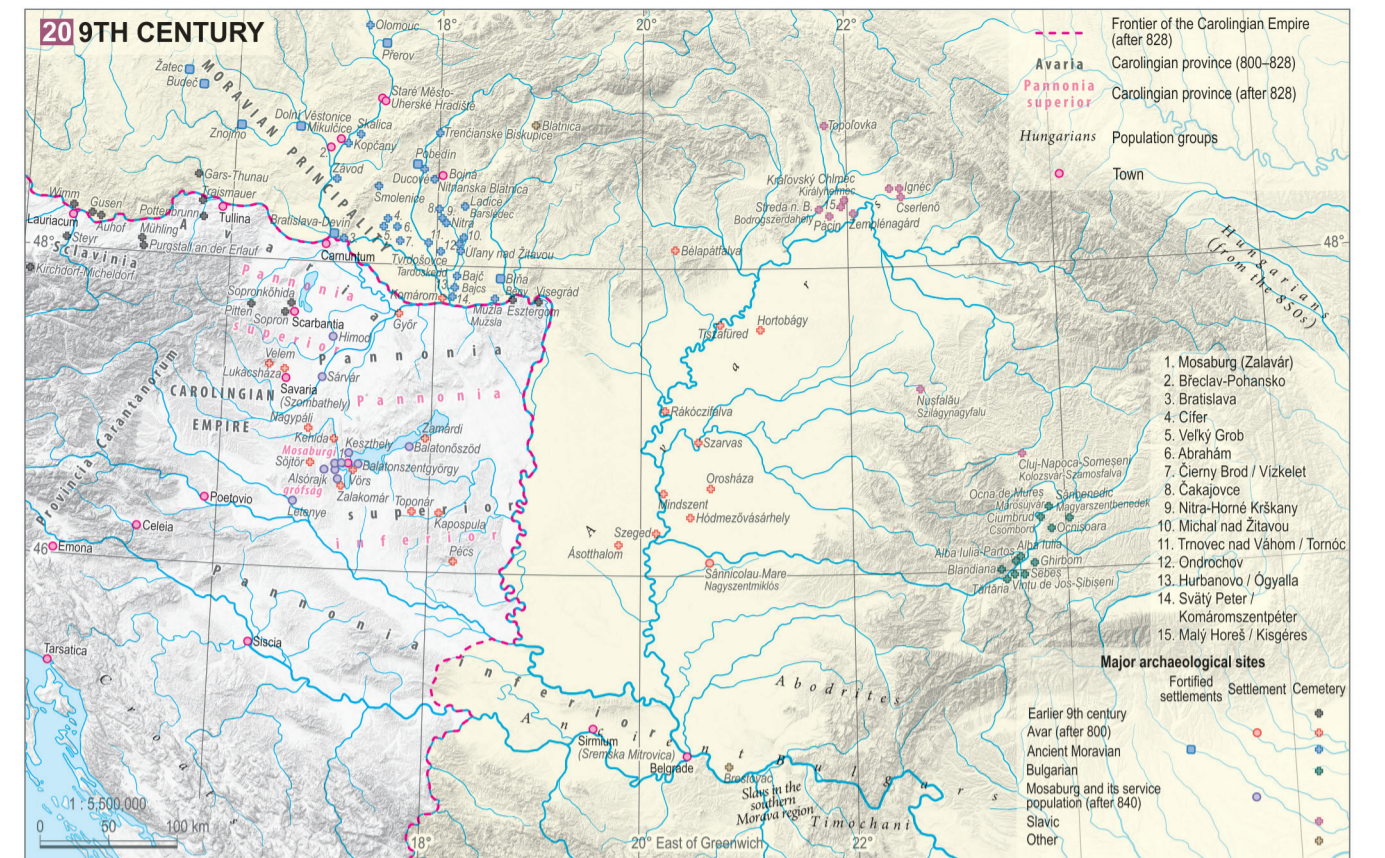
continued to inhabit Transylvania and the region to the east of the Tisza. A large part of the latter region was granted to the communities that had joined the Avars, having been conquered by them in the steppe region of Eastern Europe. A new power constellation arose in Transdanubia, based on the Lombard groups that had chosen Avar rule, Gepids displaced from the Tisza region, and several other ethnic groups. Although they retained their own leadership, they became a part of the Khaganate headed by members of the Khagan clan. Their core areas lay in the eastern part of Transdanubia and along the Danube. Southern Transdanubia was still home to a group with a Romanized culture. This latter group can also be observed in some other areas of Transdanubia. In the early 7th century, some families from among the subject peoples with Eastern European roots appeared in several places in Transdanubia. Traces of the ruling Avars can be found in many parts of the Carpathian Basin. Based on the larger cemeteries of Transdanubia and the region to the east of the Tisza, we can infer the presence of Avar groups wedged between the various other communities subject to the Khaganate. Larger groups of Avars may have emerged in the area between the Danube and Tisza and in the Kislétföld region in the last third of the 6th century and the initial decades of the 7th century.

Between 567 and 626, the Avars launched successful campaigns against the Eastern Roman territories to the south of the Danube. The Roman border system on the Lower Danube was steadily erased. This ended Constantinople's rule in the northeastern Balkan region or it resulted in a dual power system in the region, facilitating observation of the enemy and guaranteeing the marching routes. During these decades, Constantinople paid substantial tributes in gold to the khagans, and the amounts increased with each new peace agreement. In the early 600s, however, the Byzantine Empire was forced to give up most of its Balkan possessions, so the termination of tribute payments was merely a matter of time. That moment came after 626, when the imperial city successfully resisted a siege by the Avars. The declining revenues of the Avars brought an immediate response from the communities that had previously accepted the rule of the khagan and his retinue: a rebellion led by Samo broke out on the northwestern border, while in the Eastern European steppe region a Bulgar khan named Kubrat achieved independence for his people around 630. An uprising also broke out against the Khagans in the Carpathian Basin, but it was defeated.

From around this time onwards, archaeologists can prove the presence of the Khaganate centre location on the Danube and Tisza 12, whereas its earlier location can only be surmised. The cessation of the campaigns against the Eastern Roman territories led to many other changes, with the demographic centre of gravity shifting to the north. New cemeteries were established by communities that had previously inhabited other areas of the Khaganate. Burial grounds with hundreds of graves signal that these communities stayed in place from the mid-7th century until the end of the 8th century and beyond. Archaeologists have also noted an increase in the number of settlements dating to this period. Evidently, the more nomadic way of life of earlier periods was gradually replaced by a settled rural existence. In the course of the changes of the 7th century, the Avar Khaganate, which had been a typical eastern-type (steppe) political formation, became an early medie-



12 A false buckle, treasure or grave find. Early Avar period, middle third of the 7th century. Tépe



val agrarian society. Even so, it preserved in its symbology many features of its warlike steppe past (horse burials, weapon accessories) 13. This is also reflected in its worldview, insights into which can be gleaned from the visual world of the Treasure of Nagyszentmiklós (Sännicolau Mare).

From the middle third of the 7th century, the leaders of the Khaganate and their retinue are mentioned increasingly rarely in the written sources. Not until a century later was more interest shown: in 782, Avar envoys arrived at the court of Charlemagne. In contrast to the 6th and 7th centuries, when the khagan was referred to as the sole ruler, in this period mention is made of other dignitaries (jugurrus, tudun, etc.), signalling the advent of a more decentralized form of government. This latter development contributed to the disintegration of the state under growing pressure from the Carolingian Empire in the late 8th century. In the aftermath of Charlemagne's campaign against the Avars in 791, the collapse of the Khaganate became unstoppable. Internecine strife broke out among the Avars, resulting in the murder of both the khagan and the jugurrus in 796. By the early 800s, the territory of the state had been divided into smaller political units. The khagan's sphere of authority was pushed back to the east of the Danube, a development confirmed by the various interested parties at Aachen in 811. The region to the west of the Danube was recognized as Sclavinia, Avaria and Pannonia. These administrative areas were then incorporated into the Carolingian Empire. North of the Danube the Principality of Moravia emerged in the shadow of the decline of the Khaganate. As the eastern part of the region between the Drava and Sava rivers had come under Bulgar control, the part of Transdanubia to the south and east of the Rába became known as Pannonia inferior, while Pannonia Superior was reduced to the area between the Rába and the Danube, as well as the Tulln and Vienna basins. A major change in Pannonia inferior occurred around 838-840, when Louis I donated an extensive area to Pribina, who began to establish his seat of power at Mosaburg (a site at today's Zavalár).

Until the first decade of the 9th century, the popu-

lation of the Khaganate to the west of the Danube continued to use the burial places of their ancestors, signalling that they remained in place. New cemeteries, indicating a restructuring of the settlement area, were opened in certain areas, including the Vienna and Tulln basins. A significant shift, however, occurred with the development of the Mosaburg power centre in the 840s. Around Mosaburg 14, which had developed into a pre-urban centre in the span of a few decades, noblemen constructed mansions, with the neighbouring villages being settled by serfs. By the final decades of the 9th century, Mosaburg had become the Pannonian seat of the East Frankish king Arnulf. The development of this 'royal city' was halted by the arrival of the conquering Hungarians, who occupied the region in 900 20.

In contrast to Transdanubia, in those parts of the Alföld that remained in the hands of the Avars, traces of the 8th-century communities are only sporadically found in the latter decades of the 9th century. There is no consensus among researchers about the fate of the communities of the Avar period. Some experts claim that climatic changes resulted in



14 Floor plan of the Church of St. Adrian in Mosaburg. Mid-9th century. Zavalár

a significant population decline in the area, while others argue that a sizeable portion of the population survived the arrival of the conquering Hungarians, subsequently becoming integrated into the Principality of Hungary and then the Christian Kingdom of Hungary. Similar uncertainty surrounds the fate of the descendants of the communities of Bulgar origin, whose traces have been found in a broad area around Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) near the Maros river.

eries with both cremations and inhumations were a feature of the Sántana de Mureş culture. These cultural features disappeared during the Hunnic era. In the Carpathian Basin, inhumation burials became the dominant type, often supplemented with new, eastern ritual elements. Many attempts have been made to distinguish between the archaeological legacy of the Huns of Asian origin and that of their subjugated peoples. Eastern influences resulted in many elements of cultural unification becoming part of the archaeological heritage of the Danube region. Asian artefacts such as large cast-iron cauldrons 9 appeared, as did various sacrificial objects. Hunnic customs such as skull distortion also spread.

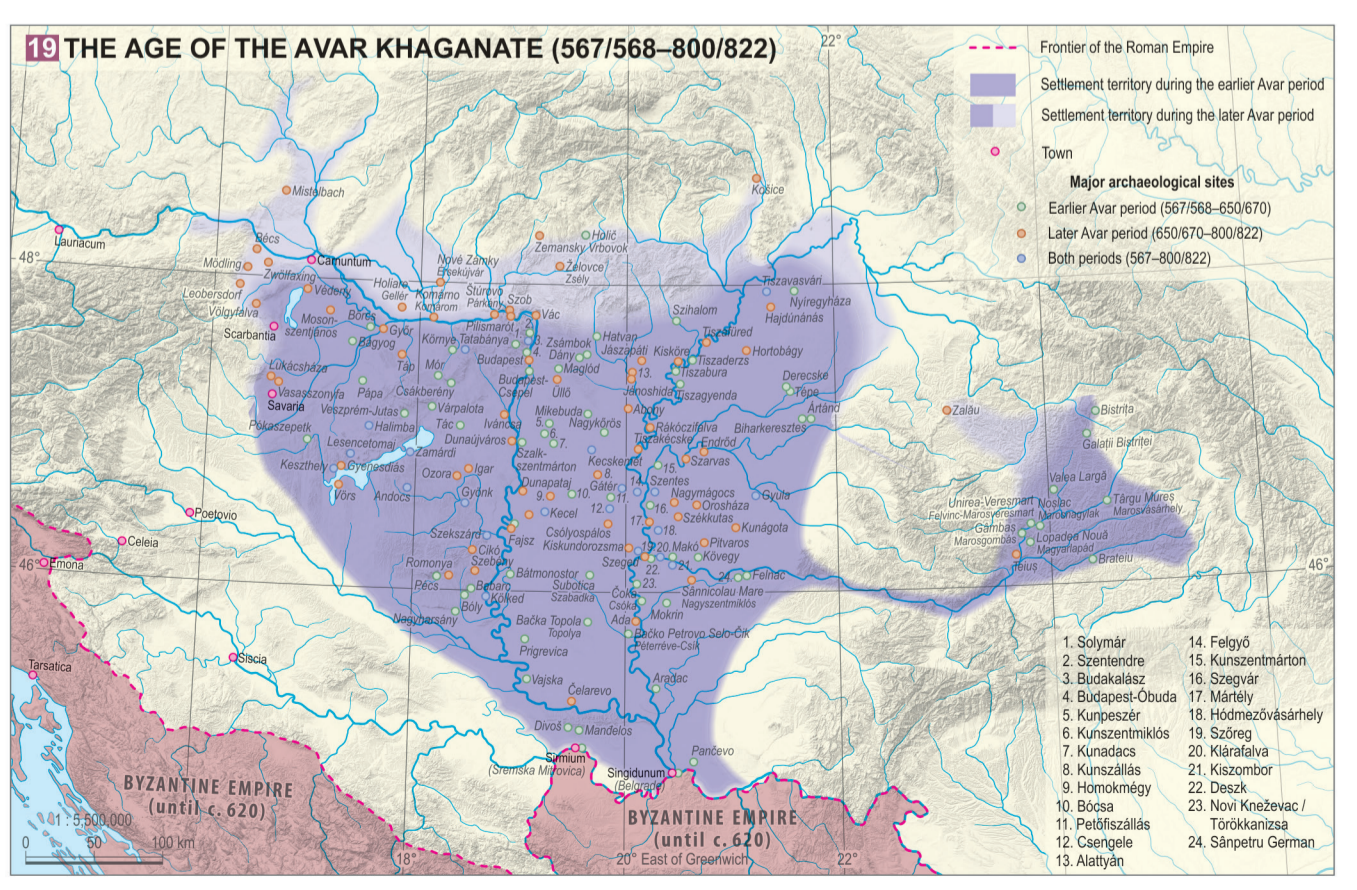


9 Sacrificial cauldron. Hun period, late 4th century to first half of the 5th century. Törtel

After the unexpected death of Attila (453), the political situation in the Carpathian Basin underwent a transformation 17. In the Battle of Nedao (454/455), Huns, Goths, Gepids, Rugii, Suevi, Alans, and Heruli fought each other in a struggle for the legacy of the empire. The victorious group was led by Ardarik, king of the Gepids. The Gepid Kingdom (454/455-568) was established in the central areas of the Hunnic Empire. Attila's sons were defeated in the battle and they proceeded to leave the Carpathian Basin.

After 455, several ethnic groups sought admission to the territory of the Empire. Other smaller groups settled alongside the Danube in the Northern Balkans. Most of Pannonia was shared between three Ostrogothic kings. The Romanized population survived at the western edge of the province. The Ostrogoths ruled for a fleeting time (456-473). Theodoric the Great attempted to extend his rule to the southern part of Pannonia (Savia). In 489, however, he left for the west, founding the Kingdom of the Ostrogoths in Italy.

The power vacuum in Transdanubia was filled by the Lombards 18. This Germanic people arrived from the north in the final decades of the 5th century, occupying the Bohemian and Moravian basins and gradually expanding towards the southeast. Around 510, they occupied the northern areas of Transdanubia, subsequently conquering the southern part of Pannonia around 540. Their archaeological relics have often been found near Roman infrastructural elements, but there are barely signs of movement into urban settlements 10.



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Cover design

Gáspár Mezei – Geographical Institute, CSFK, HUN-REN, Ildikó Kuti – Civertan Bt.

Design and typography

Ildikó Kuti – Civertan Bt.

Printing

Keskeny és Társai 2001 Kft.

keskeny nyomda.hu

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Publisher: László Kiss (Director general)

Hungarian Research Network (HUN-REN) Research Centre for Astronomy and Earth Sciences (CSFK), www.csfk.org

© Geographical Institute, CSFK www.mtafk.hu, Budapest, 2024

The publication is supported by:

Government of Hungary

Hungarian Research Network (HUN-REN)

Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA)

Closing date of editing: 20th August 2024

ISBN 978-963-9545-58-8ö

ISBN 978-963-9545-70-0

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