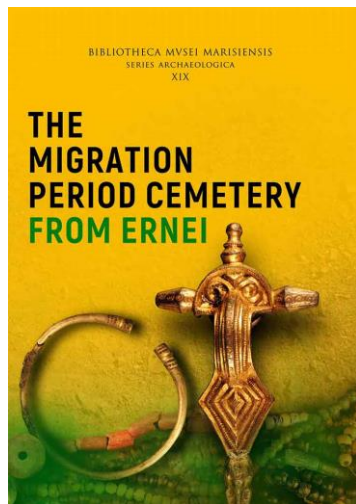


Alpár Dobos, Sándor Berecki (eds.), *The migration period cemetery from Ernei*, Bibliotheca Mvsei Marisiensis, Series Archaeologica, XIX, Editura Mega, Cluj-Napoca, 2023, 192 p., 47 pl., 40 fig., ISBN 978-606-020-636-1.

This book represents the results of the archaeological rescue excavations that took place in the summer of 2015 in the Ernei commune, near Târgu Mureş, in Mureş county, Transylvania, necessary for the construction of the “Alternative Eastern Bypass Road of Târgu Mureş Municipality”. The excavations were undertaken in the Ernei-Köles-kert archaeological site (RAN code 116661.02), located between the left bank of the Mureş River and the right bank of Terebici river, on a terrace. The volume is edited by Alpár Dobos and Sándor Berecki, and contains the valuable works of several other researchers: Márton Ferenczi, Szilárd Sándor Gál, Mihály Huba Hógyes, Norbert Kapcsos and Zsolt Körösfői, that also took part in the excavations.



In the *Introduction* (11-15 p.) the authors describe the archaeological background of the area, where multiple artifacts of various chronological periods were discovered, from the Neolithic period (Criş culture), the Bronze Age (Wietenberg and Noua cultures), the Early Iron Age (Gáva culture), the Roman period, and from the Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages. However, the subject of the book is centered around a cemetery composed of 70 burials, dated between the middle and the third quarter of the 5th century AD, during the Migration period.

In the second chapter – *Catalogue of the graves* (17-41 p.), each grave is described in a very elaborate manner, even if the vast majority of them were greatly disturbed, therefore making the exhaustive research a rather difficult endeavor. The catalogue consists of data regarding the orientation and the dimensions of the graves, the presence (or absence) of grave goods, as well as details about the age, sex and stature of individuals, where possible. The careful observation of every detail during excavation (stratigraphical evidences for the existence of coffins, analysis regarding the process of reopening, extensive descriptions of the grave goods and their spatiality etc.) is very important especially in this case, where several burials have suffered various disturbances. Just in one case (grave no. 43), the burial was not disturbed, representing an opportunity for more in-depth research.

Chapter III – *Anthropological analysis* (43-49 p.) represents a selection of osteological remains (bones, teeth), in which the author delves into different physical aspects observed through “macro-morphological” methods. In total, the remains of 24 individuals were analyzed, the majority of which are children. Only 3 individuals’ gender could be certainly identified (2 males and 1 female) and, in one case (grave no. 43, female), the stature was determined (1.53 m). Even though multiple factors such as the poor state of preservation of the bones, high acidity of the soil and the reopening of graves disrupted the anthropological analysis, some pathological data (dental diseases, physical trauma, metabolic lesion etc.) regarding the individuals could still be collected.

In the Chapter IV – *Grave reopening* (51-62 p.), the phenomenon of reopening of the graves, characteristic of this period, is briefly presented. With numerous parallels in Western Europe and Central Danube region, in the case of Transylvania the necropolis from Ernei stands out. As stated above, only one grave was left undisturbed, the rest of them showing clear evidence of reopening. Visible differences in soil show the way in which every grave was reopened, as we can see from the figures provided by the authors and, based on the observations from the field, it seems that the graves were opened at a relatively short period of time after the burials. Although the detailed study of this custom is still at the beginning, in this book we are presented with a well-documented case, and with relevant references and analogies.

The fifth chapter (*Burial Customs*, 59-62 p.) highlights the importance of this particular necropolis in the historical context of the region. Additionally, some particularities of the burials such as the orientation (mainly W-E) and their spatial distribution are concisely presented. Unfortunately, due to the factors mentioned above regarding the poor state of the skeletal remains, the only archaeological evidence for the positioning of the bodies is the sole undisturbed grave (no. 43). The individual was placed lying on her back, with arms extended, parallel to the body, a common positioning for the deceased of that period, thus one can expect that the rest of the bodies would have been placed in a similar way. In the case of 15 graves, evidence for the presence of coffins were observed. The emergence and distribution of the row-grave cemeteries, mentioned previously in the book, is also discussed in detail in this chapter.

Chapter VI – *Analysis of the grave goods* (63- 106 p.) offers a comprehensive description of the artifacts found in the necropolis, being structured in 5 main parts. The first category discussed are the dress accessories and jewellery (63-93 p.), including beads, brooches, pins, bracelets, rings and buckles. The second subchapter (93-94 p.) describes the only 3 weapons discovered, 2 spearheads and one possible arrowhead. Several tools (94-98 p.) such as combs, spindle-whorls and knives were

also found in the burials from Ernei. Pottery (98-103 p.) and glass vessels (104-106 p.) are the subject of the last two subchapters, in which the authors discuss about typological, chronological and technological aspects, as well as some implications regarding the burial rites and the connection between pottery and the individuals, especially in the case of pottery. According to the authors, the nature of these grave goods is a testimony for the influence of both the Hun Age elite and of the Late Roman funerary customs on this Gepidic community, as well as the evidence for cultural and economic ties of this community with other regions of Europe.

Finally, in the *Conclusions* part (107-117 p.) the authors offer their final remarks on the results of the excavations undertaken at Ernei and the significance of this key discovery in the study of the Gepidic communities of the Transylvanian Plateau. In a period of political and social changes such as the 5th century AD, the necropolis from Ernei is a clear example for the customs and particularities of a certain group.

There are 40 figures throughout the text include maps, aerial views, on-field pictures during the excavations, several images of the grave goods and plans of the spatial distribution of the burials, alongside 47 plates containing good quality pictures and drawings of the artifacts and graves. Moreover, the authors even managed to provide radiocarbon dating charts for 3 of the graves (nos. 43, 46 and 48), which correlates with the data collected from the grave goods. The volume is published in English, thus the information presented can be more accessible by a larger audience. At the same time, the *Bibliography* is composed of up-to-date works and well-established publications from the past.

To conclude, taking into consideration the fact that this necropolis is one of the largest of its kinds in the Carpathian Basin (even though it was in use for just a brief period), the current volume represents a very important contribution which enriches our understanding of the transition between Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages, and also offers new valuable data for further research. Given the poor preservation of the skeletal remains, I consider that the authors succeeded in both obtaining as much information as possible from the excavations and in delivering it in a very well-structured and scientific manner.

Vlad CIUR

“Gavrilă Simion” Eco-Museum Research Institute, Tulcea, Romania
ciurvlad@gmail.com

ORCID ID: 0009-0005-3320-8128