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EARLY MEDIEVAL BURIAL OF WOMAN AND FOX AT THE SLOG NECROPOLIS IN RAVNA (*TIMACUM MINUS*) IN EASTERN SERBIA*

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Abstract. – On the eastern slope of Slog Hill in Ravna, some 400 m to the west of the Roman fortification of *Timacum Minus*, a multilayered necropolis was investigated from 1994 to 1996 and from 2013 to 2015. There are two main horizons of the necropolis – Late Roman and Early Medieval. The late Roman necropolis has three phases dated from the middle of the 4th to the middle of the 5th century. The early medieval necropolis, according to the new excavations, has two phases, the earlier dated to the 8th – 9th centuries and the later from the end of the 9th to the beginning of the 11th century. An interesting grave (G 159), belonging to the earlier medieval phase of necropolis, was discovered in 2014. It is a unique burial of a woman and a fox, which has its only analogy in a disturbed woman and fox grave (grave 16) at the early Avar necropolis in Bečej. The burial with a fox could be interpreted in two ways – that the animal has a cult – ritual – magic meaning or that the fox was a pet of the deceased.

Key words. – Early Medieval period, necropolis, woman and fox burial, physical anthropology, archaeozoology

Since 1975, the Institute of Archaeology in Belgrade, in collaboration with the Homeland Museum in Knjaževac, has been continuously conducting systematic archaeological investigations of the Roman fortification and civil settlement of *Timacum Minus*, situated in the village of Ravna, 10 km to the north of Knjaževac (Fig. 1).

Archaeological investigations of the fortification of *Timacum Minus* within an area of approximately 2 ha at the site of Kuline revealed remains of a Roman fortification, the dimensions of which are 144 x 112 m (Fig. 2). The earliest earthen western rampart with a palisade and square timber towers and a defensive trench, *fossa*, along the eastern rampart were dated to the middle of the 1st century AD. This earliest fortifica-

tion was garrisoned by the *Cohors I Thracum Syriaca*. The first stone fortification of a rectangular plan with rounded corners and internal square towers was built in the first half of the 2nd century AD.¹

There are three more phases of construction of *Timacum Minus*: the first dated to the middle of the 3rd century, the second in the first half of the 4th century and the last at the end of the 4th century. From the time of construction of the stone fortification, the garrison of *Timacum Minus* consisted of the *Cohors II Aurelia Dardanorum*, until the Late Roman period, i.e. the last decades of the 4th century, when they were replaced

¹ Petrović 1995, 40–41; Petković *et al.* 2005, 13–15.

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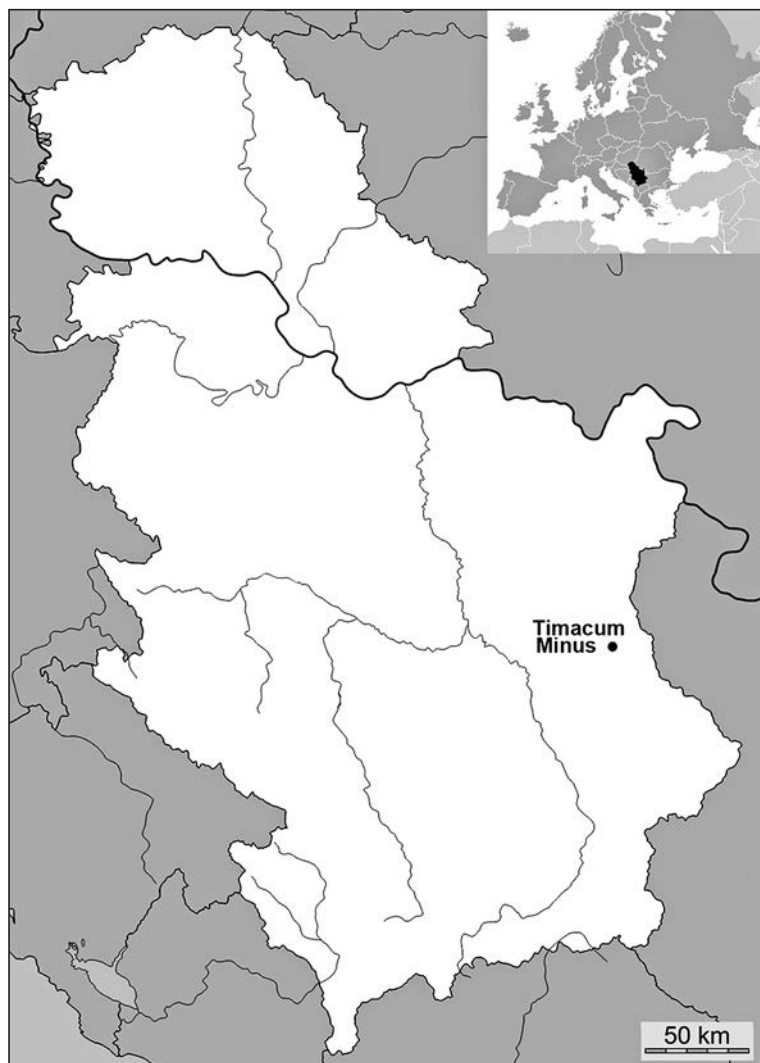


Fig. 1. Map of Serbia with the position of the Roman fortification and the settlement of *Timacum Minus*

Сл. 1. Карта Србије са положајем римској ујврђења и насеља *Timacum Minus*

by the *pseudocomitatenses Timacenses auxilarii*. This fortification was destroyed by a conflagration in the middle of the 5th century, as is suggested by the layer of burning in the southern gate sector.²

Investigations in the southern gate sector confirmed building activities in the first half of the 5th century, including the construction of a building complex of dry masonry leaning on the southern rampart and the towers of the south gate. There are three phases of reconstruction confirmed in the sector of the southern gate, dating from the end of the 4th to the mid-5th century.³ In this sector, life was interrupted in the middle of the 5th century as a consequence of the mass destruction in a conflagration, probably during the Hunnish invasion of the Lower Danubian provinces (441–443 AD).

To date, the archaeological investigations have not confirmed that the fortification of *Timacum Minus*

was restored after the Hunnish devastation. Even though Procopius mentions two fortresses in the *Aquis* region that include the hydronym *Timacum* in their name – the restored *Timakiolon* (Τιμακίολον) and newly built *Timathohiom* (Τιμαθοχιωμ), neither of them could be identified with any certainty as *Timacum Minus*.⁴ Also, no traces of Justinian's restoration of the ramparts and towers have been ascertained and there were no findings dated to the 6th century discovered in the fortification or in its surrounding.⁵

² Петковић, Јовановић 2001.

³ This was revealed in the latest campaign of excavations led by Sofija Petković in 2019.

⁴ *Procop. De aedif.* B. IV. iv. 3.

⁵ Petković *et al.* 2005, 16.

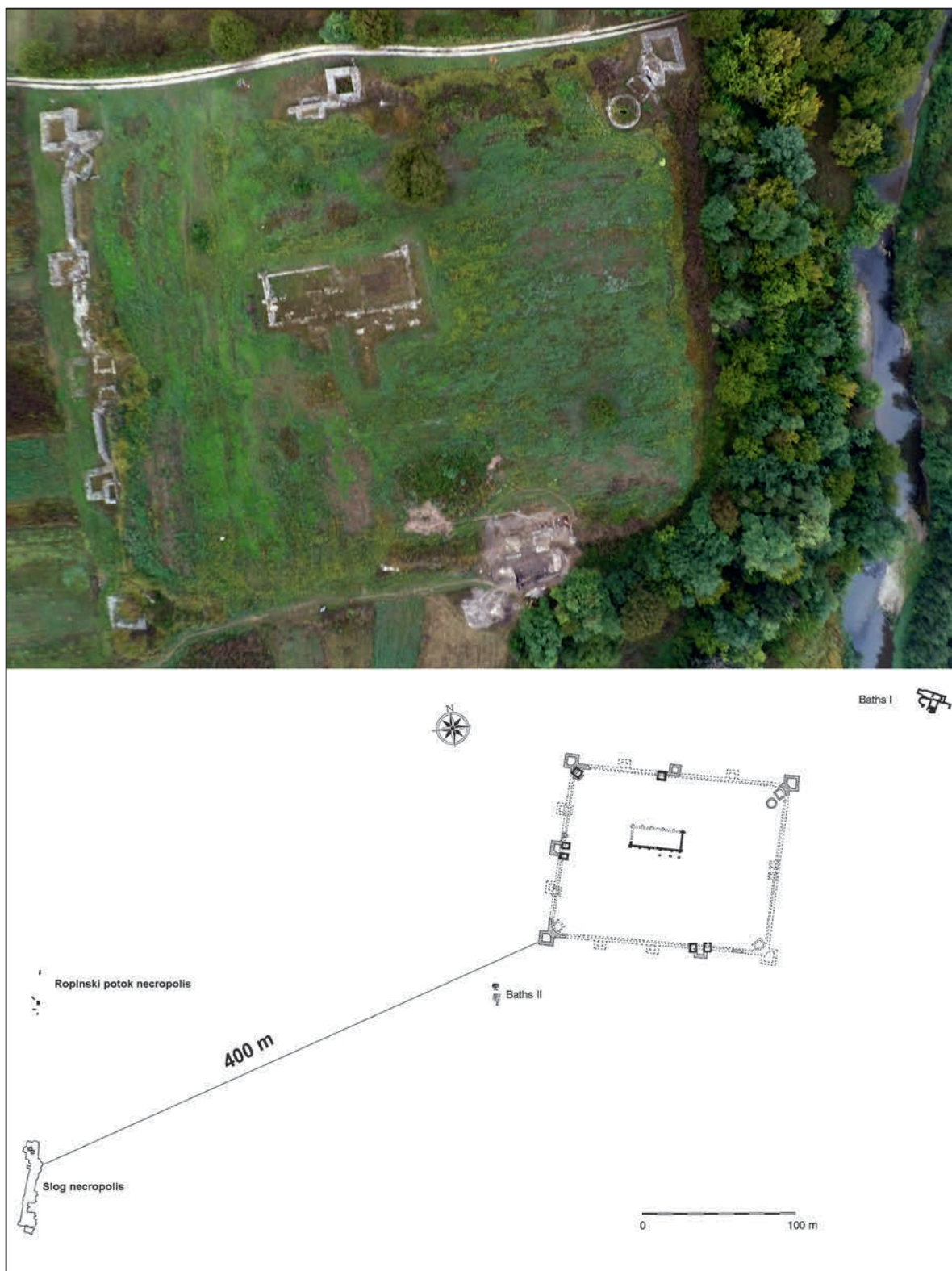


Fig. 2. Aerial view of the Timacum Minus fortification (2019) and the plan of the fortification and explored parts of the necropolis of Slog and Ropinski potok

Сл. 2. Аероснимак ујврђења Тимачум Минус (2019. године) и план ујврђења и истражених делова некропола Слој и Ројински поток

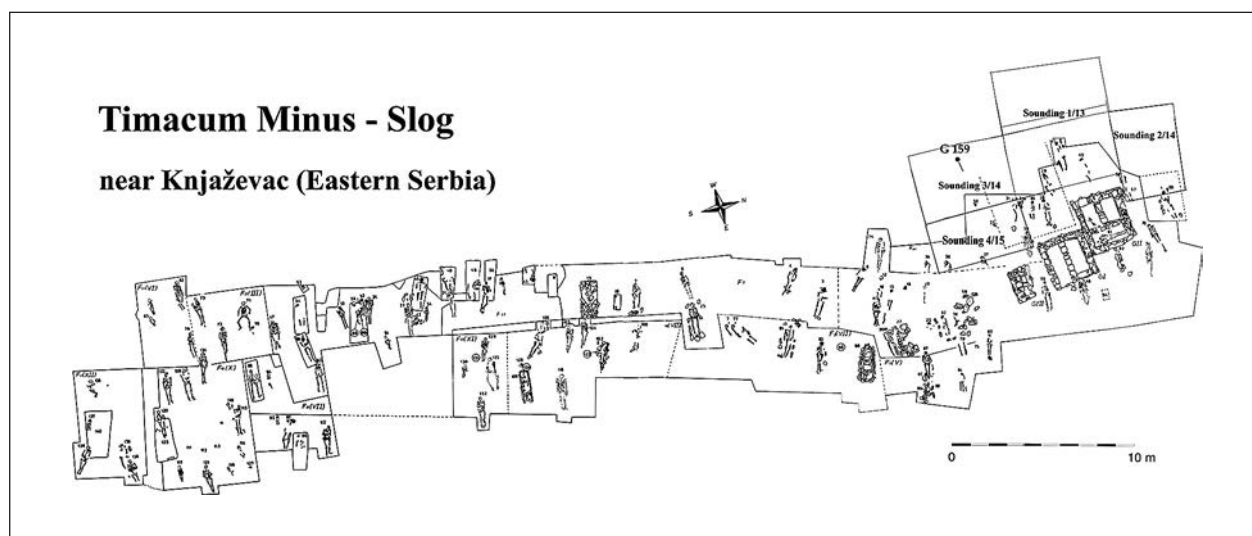


Fig. 3. Plan of the Slog necropolis, researched in 1994–1996 and 2013–2015

Сл. 3. План некрополе Слој, истраживања из 1994–1996. и 2013–2015. године

Traces of a civil settlement were confirmed by prospecting and test trenching in the area to the south of the fortification, where the buildings from the period of the 2nd–4th centuries had been investigated.⁶

Also, to the northeast of the fortification, on the bank of the Timok river, the baths (*thermae I*) built in the 2nd century and abandoned in the 4th century were completely excavated. Next to the south-western corner of the fortification, the structure of composite plan with a hypocaustum heating system (*thermae II*) was partially explored. The existence of temples within the civil settlement dedicated to Jupiter Dolichenus and Diana was established, based on the finds of altars and fragments of stone sculptures, while a temple dedicated to Mars was most probably within the fortification itself.⁷

So far, traces of the medieval settlement have not been detected at the site of Kuline, or in the surroundings of fortification, although there have been sporadic finds of medieval pottery, dated to the 10th–11th centuries, in the surface layers at the site.

The best evidence about the population of *Timacum Minus* is the necropolis, which extends to the north and west of the site of Kuline. The area it occupies is limited to the west at the summit of Slog Hill. On the fairly steep eastern slope of the hill and at its foot, a rescue excavation from 1994 to 1996 unearthed part of a Late Roman necropolis from the second half of the 4th and the early 5th century and an Early Medieval

necropolis dated to the 9th–10th centuries. On the occasion of these archaeological investigations, a total of 140 graves and three masonry tombs were discovered (Fig. 3).

Protective excavations of the necropolis continued in 2013–2015, when another 53 Late Roman and Early Medieval graves were discovered. In addition to confirming the earlier research results, recent excavations have identified an earlier phase of the medieval necropolis, which could be dated, according to the grave-goods, to the period of the 8th–9th centuries. This is a very important discovery, testifying the continuity of burials in the necropolis and life in today's Ravna during the Late Roman and the Early Medieval period (Fig. 3).

The funeral ritual at the medieval necropolis was characterised by inhumations in simple grave-pits, sometimes with the sides reinforced with large stones or pebbles. The graves were mostly oriented in an west-east direction, with the exception of some graves of the earlier phase of the necropolis. The deceased were laid in a supine position with their arms extended

⁶ Петковић, Илијић 2013.

⁷ Petković *et al.* 2005, 16–17. In the campaign of 2019, a limestone capitol of a pillar with a votive inscription dedicated to Jupiter was discovered in the interior of the Late Roman tower in front of the southern gate (tower S₄).

along the body or with their arms bent or crossed with the hands placed on the pelvis. Grave finds consisted of pieces of garments of the deceased, such as jewellery, belt-buckles, shoe-pegs, and, rarely, ceramic vessels. It was concluded that the funeral ritual of the medieval necropolis was generally Christian, which dated the necropolis from the end of the 9th century.⁸ On the other hand, some of the graves, dated to the earlier horizon of the necropolis, had rich grave-goods, consisting of pottery, mostly pots, hand-made or manufactured on a slow potter's wheel, amphorae, a wooden bucket, iron tools and weapons, etc.⁹ The hand-made pots or those made on a potter's wheel had analogies in ceramic from the Late Avar period (680–820 AD).¹⁰

Also, there is an interesting ritual of laying snakes in the graves – obviously dead reptiles were placed around the neck or waist of deceased young women (G 11, G 24, G 73 and G 120) and in a stretched out position in a child's grave (G 37).¹¹ In a different form, this ritual was also ascertained in graves of the Late Roman necropolis at Slog.¹² Apart from snake skeletons, fragments of animal bones (pig and poultry) were found in grave G 133, belonging to an earlier phase of the medieval necropolis.¹³ In our opinion, there was a strong pagan influence on the funeral ritual of the earlier phase of the medieval necropolis at Slog, which is basically Christian. In the period of the 8th–9th centuries, this could be assumed as the usual funeral practice of the Central Balkans.

The medieval population buried at Slog is significantly different from the one that used this necropolis in the Late Roman period. In addition to a different physiognomy, the medieval population is marked by a sharp fall in living standards reflected in a very high rate of child mortality, which number c. 50% of the excavated individuals. Furthermore, a higher incidence of blood and metabolic disorders and badly treated traumas is evident in the medieval period, indicating meagre living conditions and a lack of quality food and poor medical practice.

Grave G 159

To the early phase of the medieval necropolis at Slog belongs an interesting funeral of an adult woman, buried in grave G. 159 (Fig. 3–4).

The female individual was buried in a simple, oval grave-pit, in a supine position with arms extended along the body. It seems that the left hand was placed below the left pelvic bone. The grave was oriented

west-east, with a deviation of less than 5° to the south. The upper bones of the left arm are missing and the lower bones of the right arm are displaced, but the hand is in place. Also, the bones of the left side of the chest are missing or dislocated. The whole skeleton is poorly preserved and the skull is fragmented.

The most interesting detail of this burial was the discovery of the skeleton of a canine west of the head of the deceased, laid in a bent supine position, so that the animal's head was leaning against the left side of the head of the woman. Below the animal's skeleton, a small, olive-green enamelled, ceramic jug (oinochoe) was discovered. This jug could be dated from the last third of the 4th until the end of the 6th century and was probably secondarily used (Fig. 4).¹⁴

The grave was damaged in its north-western part by an oval pit, with a diameter of about 0.90 m, which destroyed the left side of the woman's skeleton in the chest area and a part of the animal skeleton. Also, the hand bones of the deceased female were dislocated. It could not be determined whether this was as a result of burial looting or recent earthworks.

The deceased was buried with jewellery. She had seven bronze earrings, of which six were loop-earrings of an unusual type, decorated with three biconical beads made of bronze sheet and spirally wound bronze strips, imitating bronze wire, and one small loop-earring with two cast oval beads. The earrings were found around the skull of the deceased, so they were probably attached to a band or a cap. The buried woman had a necklace of glass beads of different shapes and colours. Also, she had a bronze ring with an oval plate head engraved with a motif of an eagle, on a finger of the right hand (Fig. 4).

The six earrings have no analogies, as far as we are aware. Similar earrings with four beads derive from the same necropolis at Slog, from graves of an earlier phase (G 8 and G 138).¹⁵ Also, they are similar

⁸ Petković *et al.* 2005, 234–237.

⁹ Petković *et al.* 2005; 2014.

¹⁰ Herold 2014, 220–223, Fig. 3, Group 1–3, Fig. 4, Group 3.

¹¹ Petković *et al.* 2016, 69, Pl. VI.

¹² Petković *et al.* 2016, 60–65.

¹³ Petković *et al.* 2005, 235, Pl. XIII.

¹⁴ Кузманов 1985, 35–36, К 59, К 60, К 69; Цвијетићанин 2006, 72–73, КАГ 111, фото 6.

Fiedler 1992, 222–224.

¹⁵ Petković *et al.* 2005, 211, type VIII A; Bikić 2010, 46–47, sl. 18, 4–5.

to the unique type of loop earrings with three beads, again found in a medieval grave of an earlier phase at the Slog necropolis (G 39).¹⁶ These types of earrings were generally dated to the 9th–10th centuries, but, considering other grave finds from the earlier phase of medieval necropolis, especially pottery made by hand or on a slow (hand) potter's wheel, we assume

that they are earlier, probably dating to the 8th–9th centuries. It should be noted that the manufacture of the earrings from G 159 was specific – the beads were made of bronze sheet, formed into a cylinder and pressed on both ends to form a biconical shape. Also, it is rather unusual to coil a thin strip of bronze sheet around the loop of the earring between the beads. Finally,



Fig. 4. Grave G 159, probe 3/2014, Slog necropolis

Сл. 4. Гроб G 159, сонга 3/2014. године, некројола Слої

three beads positioned at the loop in an asymmetrical way have no analogies. Probably, the bead at the end of the loop had a decorative significance, as the hook at the other end of the earring had a functional role to attach it to the band or to the cap.

A small loop earring with two oval beads is usual jewellery of the Early Medieval period, deriving from the Avar culture and later accepted by Slavs and Bulgars, dated to the 8th–9th centuries.¹⁷

Glass beads of various shapes and colours are not chronologically sensitive finds, except two cylindrical specimens decorated with spirally applied glass string. One is brown with yellow string and another is black with white string. They were manufactured in south-eastern Europe in the Byzantine tradition and could be dated from the 7th to the 9th century.¹⁸

The finger ring with oval plate head engraved with the representation of an eagle belongs to the same group of jewellery. It has a Byzantine origin and was favoured through the entire medieval period. It is interesting that such seal rings, with engraved eagles, were discovered only in women's graves in the medieval necropolis at Slog (G 78, G 109, G 115 and G 159).¹⁹

The jewellery from grave G 159 could be dated from the 8th–10th century, but, based on the archaeological context, it belongs to the 8th–9th centuries.

In this grave, at the pelvis, remnants of an iron knife were also discovered. The knife was probably attached to a belt. This type of women's costume is characteristic of the Early Medieval period in the Balkans.²⁰

Anthropological Analysis

The human skeleton discovered in the grave underwent detailed anthropological analysis which included: determining the degree of preservation of the skeletal material, sex and age determination, paleopathological and dental analysis, and the recording of markers of occupational stress and epigenetic characteristics and metrics.

The preservation degree of the skeletal material is determined on the basis of the descriptive scheme proposed by Ž. Mikić. This scheme consists of five categories: I – complete, well preserved skeleton; II – incomplete, well preserved skeleton, III – moderately preserved skeleton; IV – partially preserved skeleton; V – poorly preserved skeleton.²¹

Sex determination of this individual was made by combining morphological and metrical methods.

Using the methodology proposed by Ferembach et al.,²² and Buikstra and Ubelaker,²³ during the analysis, particular attention was paid to the morphological features of the preserved fragments of the skull (*glabella*, *processus mastoideus*, *planum nuchale*, *arcus superciliaris* and *protuberantia occipitalis externa*), mandible (*corpus mandibulae*, *ramus mandibulae* and *angulus mandibulae*) and pelvic bones (*sulcus preauricularis*, *incisura ichiadic major*, *arc compose*, *crista iliaca* and *fossa iliaca*). Metric elements relevant for sex determination were monitored on the scapulae, clavicles and the long bones of the upper and lower limbs.²⁴

The individual age of the deceased was determined based on: obliteration of the cranial sutures, attrition of the occlusal surfaces on the maxillary teeth and morphological changes on the joint surface of the pubic symphysis and sacroiliac region.²⁵

Based on the acquired metrical values, indices for the left and the right side of the body were calculated and are presented in table 1.

Twenty-six epigenetic variations on the cranial and 11 on the postcranial part of the skeleton were observed.²⁶

The stature of this individual was calculated based on the formulae established by Trotter and Gleser.²⁷

In the grave, the partially preserved skeletal remains of a female adult individual, aged 40–45, were discovered.²⁸ The body height of this individual was 160 ± 4 cm.

¹⁶ Petković et al. 2005, 210–211, Pl. IV; Bikić 2010, 70, sl. 45, 3.

¹⁷ Григоров 1999, 22, тип I F.

¹⁸ Fiedler 1992, 190–191, Abb. 42, 19–21, Taf. 114, 22; Јанковић 2007, 199–201.

¹⁹ Petković et al. 2005, 217–218, Fig. 16, 1–3, Pl. VIII, Pl. X; Bikić 2010, 93–94, 120, sl. 63, sl. 91, 1.

²⁰ Fiedler 1992, 224.

²¹ Mikić 1978.

²² Ferembach et al. 1980.

²³ Buikstra, Ubelaker 1994.

²⁴ Miladinović 2006.

²⁵ Todd 1920; 1921a; 1921b; Vallois 1937; Brothwell 1981; Lovejoy 1985; Lovejoy et al. 1985; Bass 1995.

²⁶ Hauser, De Stefano 1989; Ђурић-Срејић 1995.

²⁷ Trotter, Gleser 1952.

²⁸ Degree of bone preservation: a skeleton is partially present in the grave; bones are very brittle and cannot be easily lifted, packed and transported. – Mikić 1978.

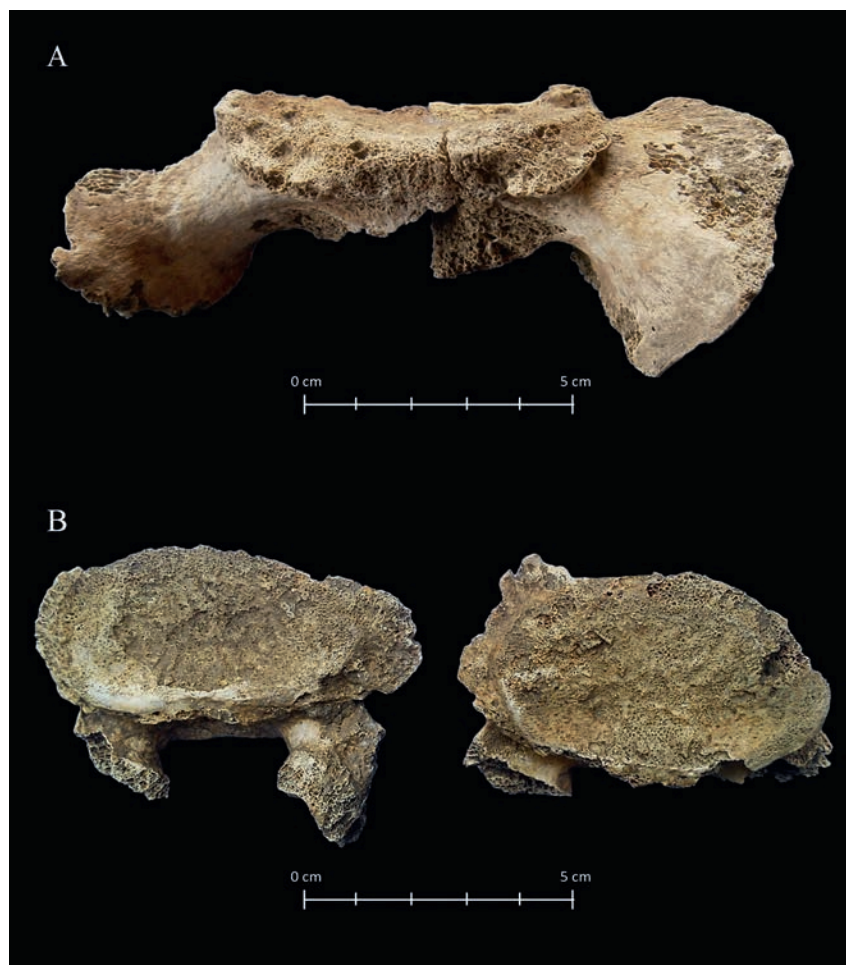


Fig. 5. Paleopathological changes in the osteological material of the person buried in G 159

Сл. 5. Палеопатолошке промене на остеоолошком материјалу особе сахрањене у G 159

Noticeable paleopathological changes are degenerative lesions, which are the result of osteoarthritis. They are visible on: the glenoid cavities (the right is more degenerated), vertebrae L4 and L5, sacral bone and tarsals (tali and calcanei) (Fig. 5). The 1st and the 2nd segments of the sacral bone failed to fuse. On the right femur, one additional nutrient foramen was noted.

Markers of occupational stress in the form of hypertrophy are visible on the muscle attachment points of the right and left clavicles (*m. deltoideus*), right scapula (*m. triceps brachii – C. longum*), ribs (*Mm. levatores costarum*), pelvis (*m. rectus femoris, m. quadratus femoris, m. biceps femoris – C. longum, m. semitendinosus*), right and left humeri (*m. subscapularis, m. latissimus dorsi, m. deltoideus, m. brachioradialis, m. extensor carpi radialis longus, m. extensor carpi radialis brevis, m. extensor digitorum, m. extensor digiti minimi, m. supinator, m. brachialis*), right and left radii (*m. biceps brachii*), right and left ulnae (*m. brachialis*), right and left femur (*m. gluteus medius,*

m. gluteus minimus, m. iliopsoas, m. vastus lateralis, m. gastrocnemius – C. mediale, m. gastrocnemius – C. laterale), and right and left tibiae (*m. soleus*). Markers of occupational stress in the form of hypertrophy were also noted on the ligament attachment points of the pelvis (*lig. iliofemorale*) and right and left femur (*lig. capitis femoris, lig. pubofemorale, lig. iliofemorale, lig. cruciatum anterius, lig. cruciatum posterius*). Markers of occupational stress and osteoarthritic changes on the bones of this individual are a clear indication of performing heavy physical activities during her lifetime.²⁹ In this case, however, these cannot be linked with any specific profession.

Dental analysis indicated the presence of the following teeth in the jaws: 13, 15, 16, 26 and 27. Teeth 23, 24 and all the mandibular teeth were lost *ante-mortem* (Fig. 6). Teeth 22 and 25 were lost *post-mortem*.

²⁹ Миладиновић-Радмиловић 2008.



Fig. 6. Mandible of the person buried in G 159

Сл. 6. Мандибула особе сахрањене у G 159

Abrasion of the 1st degree (in enamel) was noted on tooth 27, of the 2nd degree (exposed dentin) on teeth 16 and 13, of the 3rd degree (to the bottom of the fissure) on tooth 15, and of the 4th degree (pulp exposure) on tooth 26. Caries was noted on teeth 15 (mesial, carious stain, 0.20 cm in diameter) and 16 (mesial, 0.65 cm in diameter). No other paleopathological traces on the maxilla and maxillary teeth were observed. The occlusion type could not be determined.

The *ante-mortem* loss of all the mandibular teeth in this individual represents a very interesting and, as yet, unsolved problem that needs to be approached from different perspectives. Alternatively, it could be interpreted as a result of conditions such as periodontal disease.³⁰ However, this condition is not noted on the maxilla. It may also be the result of mutilation, although this hypothesis should be taken with a degree of caution, due to the fact that we still have no adequate analogy for this kind of practice.³¹

Archaeozoological Analysis

The animal skeleton discovered in grave 159 belongs to a fox, based on its morphological characteristics³² (Fig. 7). The fox was laid on its left side with its

head oriented towards the north (Fig. 4), and, given its position in relation to the deceased, it can be assumed that it was deliberately placed in the grave (Fig. 4).

The fox skeleton was subjected to detailed archaeozoological analysis. The bones were sorted, classified and examined. Age and sex determination was conducted by comparison, utilising the morphometric characteristics of modern samples of red foxes.³³ Measurements were taken following the methodology of Driesch.³⁴ For the calculation of the withers height, the factors suggested by Harcourt³⁵ were used. Traces of taphonomic processes (if present) in the fox remains were also recorded.

The fox skeleton is almost completely preserved (Fig. 8). The unpreserved parts, some vertebrae, ribs,

³⁰ Hillson 1996.

³¹ Pinchi *et al.* 2015, 3–6.

³² Schmid 1972; Larivière, Positschniak-Arts 1996.

³³ Ginsberg, Macdonald 1990; Roulichova, Andera 2007; Beuković, Popović 2014.

³⁴ Driesch 1976.

³⁵ Harcourt 1974.



Fig. 7. Fox bones from grave G 159:
a) skull – right lateral view, b) right mandible, c) right humerus, d) radius right, e) right ulna

Сл. 7. Косћи лисице из гроба G159 :

а) лобања – десна латерална пројекција, б) десна мандибула, с) десни хумерус, д) десни радијус, е) десна улна

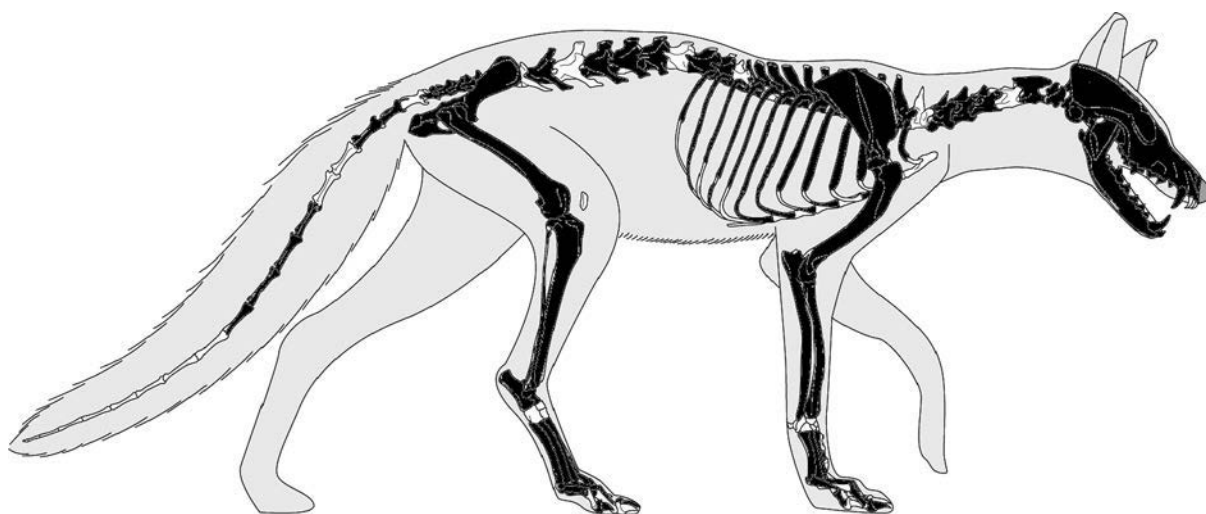


Fig. 8. Preserved parts of the fox skeleton from grave G 159

Сл. 8. Очувани делови скелета лисице из гроба G 159

and carpal and tarsal bones, could be explained as being the result of taphonomic factors, such as excavation methodology and bone recovery (which is less likely, given that a dry sieving was conducted on the soil from the grave), or the already mentioned pit digging in the north-western part of the grave, which is probably the main reason why some bones are missing. Plant root traces can be observed in the surface of the bones, while butchery, gnawing and burning marks are not evident at all. There are no traces on bones that would indicate the cause of death, but it can be presumed that the animal was killed for a purpose, and it retained a special relationship with the deceased in the afterlife. The absence of gnawing and weathering marks indicate that the fox was buried shortly after death, and, taking into account its position in relation to the deceased, it can be concluded that the fox burial was simultaneous. Pathological changes in the skeleton are not present. The first right lower premolar was lost *ante-mortem*; its alveolus is completely closed.

All teeth are erupted and epiphyses are fused, indicating that this was a fully grown, adult fox. More precisely, based on the degree of the first, upper molar wear,³⁶ it is estimated that the fox was most likely between two and four years of age. The fox's withers height was calculated for three whole long bones (humerus GL = 129.6 mm, radius GL = 122.2 mm, ulna GL = 146);³⁷ the average withers height was estimated at around 41.3 cm, which falls in the upper range of fox size,³⁸ and it can be presumed that the skeleton belongs to a male fox.

What was the nature of the relationship between the woman and the fox? What was the role and meaning of the fox in the funerary ritual at the necropolis? These are difficult questions to answer, especially the second, given this is a unique case in the whole necropolis. Placing the whole fox in the grave and its position in relation to the deceased definitely imply the existence of a special connection between them.

Discussion

Placing whole animals in human graves is a common practice worldwide, known from prehistory. However, more frequently, domestic animals are involved in funerary rituals.³⁹ The earliest human-fox burial was discovered at the 'Uyun al-Hammam, Pre-Natufian (15,250–12,200 cal BC) cemetery in Jordan, where the whole fox was first placed in one grave and, later, when the grave was re-opened and

the human skulls were moved and placed in another grave, the same was done with the fox skull, indicating its special treatment.⁴⁰ At the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B mega-site of Motza (7600–6000 BC), in central Israel, a human double burial (an adult male over 60 years old, and an unsexed adolescent) with two foxes was discovered. The fox bones were dismembered, except for one found in articulation, and scattered among the human remains.⁴¹ At the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B ritual site of Kfar Hahores, in Israel, human skulls were also found with numerous fox mandibles, while partly articulated fox bones were excavated from two child burials.⁴² Additionally, two skulls and a large number of skeletal bones belonging to a minimum of five adult foxes were discovered together with human remains in burial chamber M4 of the Van-Yoncatepe necropolis, in eastern Anatolia, dated to the beginning of the first millennium BC.⁴³

The discovery of four foxes and a large number of dogs at the Early-Middle Bronze Age (the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC) site of Can Roqueta (one fox) and Minferri (three foxes) in the northeast of the Iberian Peninsula also stands out among exceptional and generally rare examples of placing foxes in human graves.⁴⁴ The foxes at both sites represent fully articulated skeletons.⁴⁵ The Can Roqueta skeleton belongs to an old female fox with a broken leg; its fracture was still healing and showed signs of having been immobilised by humans.⁴⁶ A female and a male, between two and four years of age, were placed next to a woman in one burial at the site of Minferri, while a third, 18-month-old male fox was placed next to the isolated femurs of a woman.⁴⁷ The isotopic signature of the Minferri foxes shows that they consumed various types of food. One of these foxes, a female, exhibited signs of the consumption of

³⁶ Habermehl 1985; Roulichova, Andera 2007, 57–58.

³⁷ According to Harcourt 1974.

³⁸ Ginsberg, Macdonald 1990; Onar *et al.* 2005; Beuković, Popović 2014.

³⁹ Morris 2011; Russell 2012.

⁴⁰ Maher *et al.* 2011.

⁴¹ Reshef *et al.* 2019.

⁴² Horowitz, Goring-Morris 2004, 176.

⁴³ Onar *et al.* 2005, 252, 257.

⁴⁴ Grandal-d'Anglade *et al.* 2019.

⁴⁵ Grandal-d'Anglade *et al.* 2019.

⁴⁶ Grandal-d'Anglade *et al.* 2019.

⁴⁷ Grandal-d'Anglade *et al.* 2019.

a more carnivorous diet. However, in all three cases, they cluster together with human females and dogs.⁴⁸ The old fox at Can Roqueta revealed a diet with an important input of vegetal protein, similar to that of the dogs and closer to two puppies and a young dog. According to the researchers, this raises the possibility that the fox could have been fed by humans (most likely women) for a period before its death at old age.⁴⁹

The motives behind these early (aforementioned) burials are subject to various interpretations, but it seems reasonable to speculate that the decision to bury the animal with the person implies an awareness of a special relationship between these individuals during their lives.⁵⁰ The idea that past communities may have kept tamed wild animals as pets is entirely consistent with the observed behaviour of more recent societies. According to numerous reports by explorers and anthropologist, pet keeping among hunter-gatherers and subsistence horticulturalist is (or was) the norm rather than the exception.⁵¹ These pets are typically captured as young animals, and then adopted and cared for, especially by women and children.⁵² These animals are the objects of intense emotional attachments, they are well cared for during their life, and sometimes mourned and buried formally when they die.⁵³

At the Slog necropolis there are no other burials with animals or animal burials ascertained. Although the human and fox burials are practically unknown at necropolises of historical periods in Europe and Asia, there is a close analogy of such a funeral ritual in the necropolis of the Early Avar period (the First Khaganate) in Bečej, northern Serbia (Vojvodina). In a disturbed grave (grave 16) of an adult woman (?), a whole skeleton of a fox was discovered,⁵⁴ together with some other finds, such as two fragments of an antler comb, a glass bead, some fragments of decorated bronze plating and two fragments of an iron item.⁵⁵ Generally, this grave is dated from the end of the 6th to the beginning of the 7th century (until 626 AD). Our grave from Slog necropolis in Ravna is about a hundred years later. The burials from the earlier phase of the medieval necropolis at Slog could have begun at the end of the 7th century, but most of the graves belong to the 8th and the 9th centuries. The only connection with these two burials of a woman and a fox are the Early Medieval nomadic cultures from the Central Asian steppes, whether Hunnic (Kutriguri and Utiguri), Avar or Bulgar. In these cultures shamanism was practiced by men and women. Every shaman had an animal allie

which accompanied him/her on celestial or underworld journeys (a reindeer, a horse, a wolf, a bear, a hawk, a falcon or an owl, etc.).⁵⁶ These beliefs could explain the strong connection between the woman and fox buried together in grave G 159. It should also be mentioned that Bulgars buried their dead with “sacred animals”.⁵⁷

Conclusion

Considering all the gathered data, archaeological, anthropological and archaeozoological, regarding the Early Medieval burial in grave G 159 at Slog, in Ravna, eastern Serbia, we could make some general conclusions:

- A middle-aged woman, who had a prominent position in the society of the Early Medieval settlement in Ravna, which is ascertained by her jewellery, especially the seal ring, was buried in this grave;
- This woman had an uncommon pathological condition of *ante-mortem* loss of all the mandibular teeth, which could have been the result of mutilation, but still with no adequate analogy for this kind of practice;
- The deceased was buried with a grown male fox in good health, except that its first right lower premolar was lost *ante-mortem*;
- The deceased woman had a special relationship with the fox, the interpretation of which is uncertain and vague;
- The fox was probably killed in order to be buried simultaneously with the deceased woman as a part of a funeral ritual;
- The only analogy of such a burial comes from the Avar necropolis of Pionirska Ulica, in Bečej, northern Serbia, which indicates the possible in-

⁴⁸ Grandal-d’Anglade *et al.* 2019.

⁴⁹ Grandal-d’Anglade *et al.* 2019.

⁵⁰ Serpell 2015.

⁵¹ Serpell 2015.

⁵² Serpell 2015; Ståhlberg, Svanberg 2011, 365.

⁵³ Serpell 2015.

⁵⁴ There are no informations about the method and author of anthropological analysis at the necropolis Pionirska ulica – Bečej (Микић-Антонић 2012, 79–80).

⁵⁵ Микић-Антонић 2012, 14–15, 44, Pl. VIII.

⁵⁶ Golden 1992, 250; Fiedler 2008, 208; Sophoulis 2011, 86–88.

⁵⁷ Fiedler 2008, 157; Sophoulis 2011, 67.

- fluence of the steppe-nomadic cultures of the 6th–10th centuries on this funeral ritual;
- The woman and fox burial could be connected to shamanism, practiced in the above mentioned cultures;
 - The most probable cultural attribution of the burial in G 159, considering the position, stratigraphy and chronology of the medieval necropolis at Slog, is Bulgar.

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РАНОСРЕДЊОВЕКОВНА САХРАНА ЖЕНЕ И ЛИСИЦЕ НА НЕКРОПОЛИ СЛОГ У РАВНИ (*TIMACUM MINUS*) У ИСТОЧНОЈ СРБИЈИ

Кључне речи. – раносредњовековни период, некропола, сахрана жене и лисице, физичка антропологија, археозоологија

На источним падинама брда Слог у Равни, око 400 m западно од римског утврђења *Timacum Minus*, у периоду између 1994. и 1996. и између 2013. и 2015. године, на вишеслојној некрополи спроведена су археолошка истраживања. Два главна хоризонта коришћења некрополе хронолошки су опредељена у касноримски и раносредњовековни период. Касноримска некропола са три фазе датована је у период од средине 4. до средине 5. века, док је за раносредњовековну некрополу, на основу нових археолошких ископавања, утврђено да је имала две фазе: ранију – датовану у период 8–9. века, и каснију – од краја 9. до почетка 11. века.

Током ископавања 2014. године, у старијем раносредњовековном хоризонту некрополе откривен је један занимљив гроб (G 159), који представља јединствен налаз на читавој некрополи. Жена у овом гробу (G 159) била је сахрањена у једноставној овалној раки, на леђима и с рукама испруженим поред тела. Гроб је био оријентисан у правцу запад–исток, са девијацијом мањом од 5° ка југу. Цео скелет жене био је слабо очуван – неке кости су биле дислоциране, а неке су недостајале. Посебно занимљив налаз јесте скелет животиње који је пронађен западно од женине главе, у савијеном положају, тако што је глава животиње била наслоњена на леву страну главе жене. Жена је била сахрањена са бројним гробним прилозима, на основу којих је та сахрана опредељена у период 8–9. века. Антрополошка анализа је показала да је жена у тренутку смрти имала између 40 и 45 година. Уочене патолошке промене на њеним костима сведоче да је патила од остеоартритиса. Те остеоартричне лезије, заједно са наглашеним припојима мишића, упућују на то да се током живота бавила тешким физичким активностима. *Ante-mortem* губитак свих зуба из њене доње вилице представља веома занимљиву и још

увек неразјашњену појаву. С једне стране, могуће је да је то стање последица неког денталног обољења, док је, с друге, можда и резултат мутилације – намерног сакаћења покојнице. Међутим, ово тумачење треба узети са дозом резерве будући да адекватне аналогије такве праксе још нису пронађене.

Археозоолошка анализа је показала да скелет животиње сахрањене у гробу са женом припада одраслој лисици, старој између две и четири године. Будући да се израчуната висина гребена ове јединке од 41,3 cm налази у горњем опсегу висина гребена лисица, може се претпоставити да скелет припада мужјаку лисице, а непостојање трагова глодања и распадања на скелетним остацима указује на то да је животиња похрањена брзо после смрти. Ако се има у виду положај лисице и њено место у гробу у односу на сахрањену жену, може се закључити да се ради о истовременом догађају, то јест сахрани.

На основу свих података као и детаљне археолошке, антрополошке и археозоолошке анализе гроба 159 (G 159) на некрополи Слог у Равни, може се закључити следеће: да је ова средовечна жена била истакнутог друштвеног статуса у раносредњовековном насељу у Равни, да је имала *ante-mortem* губитак свих зуба из доње вилице (мутилација ?), да је била сахрањена са одраслим мужјаком лисице, с којим је вероватно имала неку посебну врсту везе, и да се ова погребна пракса можда може повезати са шаманизмом. Једина аналогија за такву погребну праксу код нас до сада је забележена на аварској некрополи Пионирска улица – Бечеј (гроб 16) у Војводини и датује се у раноаварски период. Сахрана у гробу 159 са некрополе Слог млађа је једно столеће и указује на могуће утицаје степско-номадских заједница, пре свега Бугара.