

ALPÁR DOBOS, Plunder or Ritual? The Phenomenon of Grave Reopening in the Row-Grave Cemeteries from Transylvania (6th-7th Centuries)

Abstract: Grave reopening represents one of the most common phenomena in the cemeteries dated to the Migration and Early Medieval Period. This activity was interpreted in several ways in the archaeological literature: the prevalent theories explain it either as grave plundering or ritual grave reopening. The row-grave cemeteries in Transylvania, which represent the easternmost area of the Merovingian culture, were disturbed in a very high degree. Despite of this fact, the phenomenon of the grave reopening was scarcely ever discussed in the Romanian archaeological literature.

The present paper attempts to analyze this issue based on the published data in order to draw conclusions regarding the frequency of the disturbed graves, the methods used during this activity, the objects taken out and the ones left behind, and the moment when the reopening took place. However, such research is seriously hindered by the insufficiency of information, mainly in the case of the old excavations; therefore, part of the results can only be hypothetical.

Keywords: grave reopening, Transylvania, row-grave cemeteries, plunder, ritual

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