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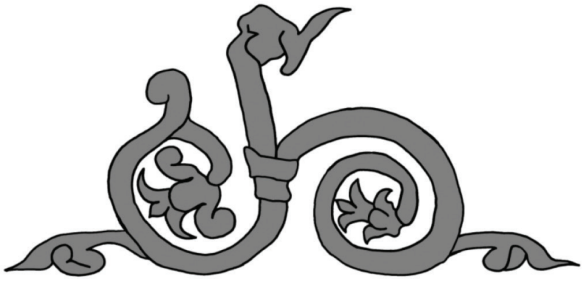

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Contents

This volume is dedicated to the memory of George Pascu Hurezan (1949–2016)

An Aegean type Bronze Age razor in the Eastern Carpathian Basin

Tibor-Tamás Daróczi

Abstract: The present paper aims to reinterpret the functionality of a bronze, curved blade discovered in a grave near Polgár, Hungary. The find was described as a sickle, but the dating and context of the analogies seem to be inadequate. Another similar and important find from Gánovce, Slovakia is suggested as a local analogy, in terms of typology, functionality and context, further highlighting the specialised and rare use of these type of objects. Further analogies from the Aegean Bronze Age are presented in order to argue for the functionality of the blade from Polgár as a razor.

Keywords: Middle and Late Bronze Age, Carpathian Basin, Aegean, sickle, knife, razor

Introduction

The site of Polgár – *Király-ér-part/Lelő*hely 29 is located slightly to the southwest of the modern town of Polgár in Hajdú-Bihar megye, Hungary, on a knoll (Pl. 1)[1]. The burial ground of 22 graves was researched in two stages, both as part of the rescue excavation carried out on the path of the future M3 motorway. In 1997 B. Kriveczky and T. Szalai excavated nine graves, while the rest were researched in 2001 by G. Szabó and J. Dani[2]. Grave 21, originally designated as Obj. 21/Fundort 29, was discovered close to the burial ground, but it is regarded as not being part of the larger group of graves, i.e. a single burial[3]. Furthermore, it was reported that the grave was robbed and the southwest-northeast oriented, left contracted skeleton was disturbed. The only graves goods were a curved, bronze blade and a bronze ring made from a wire, a jug with a single handle and a further sherd[4]. The anthropological determination of its gender is unclear, as K. Zoffmann only published a summary of the analysis of the skeletons, where she concluded that one was a child, four were attributed to men, while a further one was that of a woman[5].

Discussion on the functionality, context and dating of the razor

The curved blade (Pl. 2/1) is 9.5 cm long, 2 cm wide at the broken off tip, 2.8 cm wide at the slightly rounded butt and weighs 50 g. The outer edge is thickened and has a groove running parallel to the top side. The two small rivets are placed in a parallel line with the butt.

M. Sz. Máthé, who published the grave in question, interpreted the curved blade as a sickle, arguing that its traits fit those of a sickle. A few rows later, contradicting herself, she states that the rivets and rivet holes make this object unique, as all other sickles have cast knobs, emulating rivets[6]. In the same place, harvest knifes are mentioned as analogies from Satu Mare, Romania (pl. 2/9)[7] and the Balkans[8]. Moreover, C. Kacsó in his publication of the Satu Mare hoard clearly states, that despite some similarities to sickles, the knife cannot be regarded as one, especially cause of its rivets and blade cross-section, which is typical that of a knife[9]. Lastly, M. Sz. Máthé[10] states that despite all these

1 Daróczi 2015, 156, no. 518.
2 Dani *et al.* 2003, 98 and footnote 16.
3 Sz. Máthé 2000, 184.
4 Sz. Máthé 2000, 184.
5 K. Zoffmann 2007, 34.
6 Sz. Máthé 2000, 187.
7 Kacsó 1998, 11, no. 2, pl. II/2.
8 Govedarica 1989, pls. XXXIX/6, XLVIII/6.
9 Kacsó 1998, 13.
10 Sz. Máthé 2000, 187.

counter arguments, broken or used sickles in the region of the Alps[11] or knifes made from modified sickle blades in Moravia[12] are documented in graves, hence such a funerary practice would not be that uncommon. The later argument disregards the fact, that the curved blade from grave 21 is not a sickle blade modified into knife.

The excavators noted that in the surrounding burial grounds the men were usually placed in graves with their skulls to the south and contracted on the right, while the women to the north with their skulls and contracted on their left[13]. At this point, it is important to note that the skeleton of grave 21 is placed in a gender non-specific position[14], a strong indicator of its otherness. Either a non-local origin or a heightened mobility of the individual can be suggested by the non-gender specific interment of the body and presence of the razor, a type foreign to the Eastern Carpathian Basin (ECB).

Lastly, based on the one-handled jug the grave is considered as evidence of the "Hügelgräberzeit" in the region[15], chronologically placed in the earliest Koszider horizon, i.e. MBA III[16]. M. Sz. Máthé suggested a post-Koszider date, since its traits would already fit those of a sickle and as such would be dated in the LBA I, i.e. synchronous with Forró-Dreveník-Blh-type hoards[17]. Already, at this point the post-Koszider dating is questionable, as the Dereveník hoard horizon partially overlaps with the Koszider one[18], and as such the present grave would be dated to the MBA III. A similar chronological placement is suggested by the dating of the hoard with the mentioned harvest knife analogy from Satu Mare[19]. Lastly, the practice of using broken sickles in the Alps[20] or knifes modified from sickles blades in Moravia[21] as funerary goods, is a practice that is mostly documented in later periods, which would be the equivalent of the LBA II-III[22] of the ECB.

The razor from grave 21 from Polgár – *Király-ér part/Lelőhely 29*

The above discussion highlights the problematic functional interpretation of the find. The razor from Polgár is closely related to another discovery from the north-central Carpathian Basin. In a well, at the site of Gánovce, Slovakia, an iron object (pl. 2/2) with four rivets was discovered in the middle of the last century[23]. It was designated as the broken-off handle of a full-hilted iron knife, though in the same paper it is stated that its shape is rather unique and uncommon[24]. Almost half a century later, the object was reinterpreted as a sickle[25] and it was included in the Bronze Age sickles corpus[26]. No other instances are known, where sickles have rivet wholes or rivets, but in two examples from Veliki Gaj[27] in Serbia and Včelince[28] in Slovakia a hole is documented on the tip of a sickle, just as in the case of Gánovce example. The latter is dated by four radiocarbon dates[29] sampled from the wood lining of the well, all representing *post quem* dates for the discovery. The usage of the well and deposition of the iron object occurred at some point during the earlier two thirds of the second millennium BCE (pl. 3).

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11 Primas 1986, 20, 52–53, 55–57, 63–64, 67–68, 70, 81, 95, 100, 105, 106, 108–109, 119, 129, 138, 139, 186, .nos. 20, 35, 53, 79, 80, 82, 96, 100, 122, 125, 129, 196, 205, 209, 251, 317, 319–322, 324–327, 579, 678, 707, 718, 749, 764, 996–1000, 1091, 1259, 1271, 1958–1959.

12 Říhovský 1989, 96, nos. 634–635, pl. 38/634–635.

13 Dani, V. Szabó 2004, 91, 96; Dani *et al.* 2003, 95.

14 Oriented as a man, but contracted on the side that a woman usually would be.

15 Sz. Máthé 2000, 184.

16 Daróczi 2015, 38–39, pl. 1.

17 Sz. Máthé 2000, 187.

18 e.g. Mozsolics 2000, 17–19, fig. 3.

19 Kacsó 1998, 17.

20 Primas 1986, 63–64, 67–68, 70, 81, 95, 100, 105, 106, 108–109, 119, 129, 138, 139, 186, .nos. 122, 125, 129, 196, 205, 209, 251, 317, 319–322, 324–327, 579, 678, 707, 718, 749, 764, 996–1000, 1091, 1259, 1271, 1958–1959. Only eight examples are more or less synchronous (Primas 1986, 20, 52–53, 55–57, nos. 20, 35, 53, 79, 80, 82, 96, 100.)

21 Říhovský 1989, 66, 96, nos. 300, 634–635.

22 Daróczi 2015, 39–40.

23 Vlček, Hájek 1963.

24 Benkovsky-Pivovarová 2002, 233, pl. VI/C1.

25 Furmánek 2000, 155.

26 Furmánek, Novotná 2006, 9, pl. 1/2.

27 Vasić 1994, 20, pl. 1/3.

28 Furmánek, Marková 1986, 81, fig. 3/3.

29 Linick 1984, 101; Barta 2008, tab. 1; Barta 2001, tab. 1; Coles, Harding 1979, 69; Forenbaher 1993, 244.

Objects of similar shape and of slightly earlier date are documented in the Aegean Bronze Age. These have two rivet holes, their two rivets are in a parallel line to the butt, have a curved blade (pl. 2/3–6) and are catalogued as type V razors[30]. The best analogies come from Crete at Tholos B at Koumasa[31] and Maratonkephalon[32], from the Greek mainland at tomb M. H. 107 at Asine[33] and a fragmentary one from level IIIa at Troy[34]. Just as in the case of the Gánovce razor, where a thin bronze plate is reported[35], the razor from Asine also bares traces of a thin silver foil coating[36]. They are discovered in contexts dated from the Early Minoan I to Middle Minoan I on Crete, Middle Helladic on the mainland and just after the beginning of the second millennium BCE at Troy[37]. A clear pattern of dispersal from south to north emerges, in which the two examples from Polgár and Gánovce perfectly fit in. Both are in contexts that suggest a non-local origin of the individuals and goods associated with them, respectively. Their shapes are very similar to the Aegean counterparts and their functionality must be sought in their typological origins. Razors are quite uncommon in the region[38] and are only documented in two other instances as funerary goods in the entire Bronze Age of the ECB, at Peştere – *Peştera Igriţa* (RO) grave 13 a straight razor (pl. 2/7) and at Cruceni – *Módósi út* (RO) grave 104 a winged razor (pl. 2/8). Their identification in graves is quite difficult and since it is a rare practice, often such interpretations are overlooked.

Conclusions

The analogies from the Aegean are from funerary contexts and their shapes, especially their riveting, is similar to the ones from Polgár and Gánovce. The slightly altered shapes, especially through their cross-sections, suggest glocalisations, that is to say a local production, of Aegean razor types encountered in slightly earlier periods. In terms of functionality, the 10 cm long blades hardly can be regarded as efficient sickles or harvesting knives, where as they would just do fine as razors. The Gánovce example raises some issues due to the rivet and rivet hole at its tip, but being made from iron does further strengthen the unique nature and possibly specialised and restrictive use of the razor. The razor from Polgár falls quite well in line with the analogies presented from the Aegean, both in terms of context and typology. The non-gender specific interment of the body suggest an otherness of the individual, which either might indicate a foreign origin or adopted, non-local habits. An interpretation as a razor against this background would make sense, while the Gánovce example, which is synchronous, creates a local analogy for the razor of Polgár, hence further suggesting a rare and specialised use for both.

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[30] Branigan 1974, 34, 177, nos. 1483–1485, 1492, pl. 16/1483–1485, 1492.
[31] Branigan 1968, 97, fig. 11/6.
[32] Xanthoudides 1918, 20, fig. 6.
[33] Frödin, Person 1938, 228, fig. 182/3.
[34] Blegen 1951, fig. 47, 34. 510.
[35] Benkovsky-Pivovarová 2002, 233.
[36] Frödin, Person 1938, 228.
[37] Branigan 1974, 177, nos. 1482–1485, 1492.
[38] Boroffka 1997.

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Plate 1. Mentioned sites

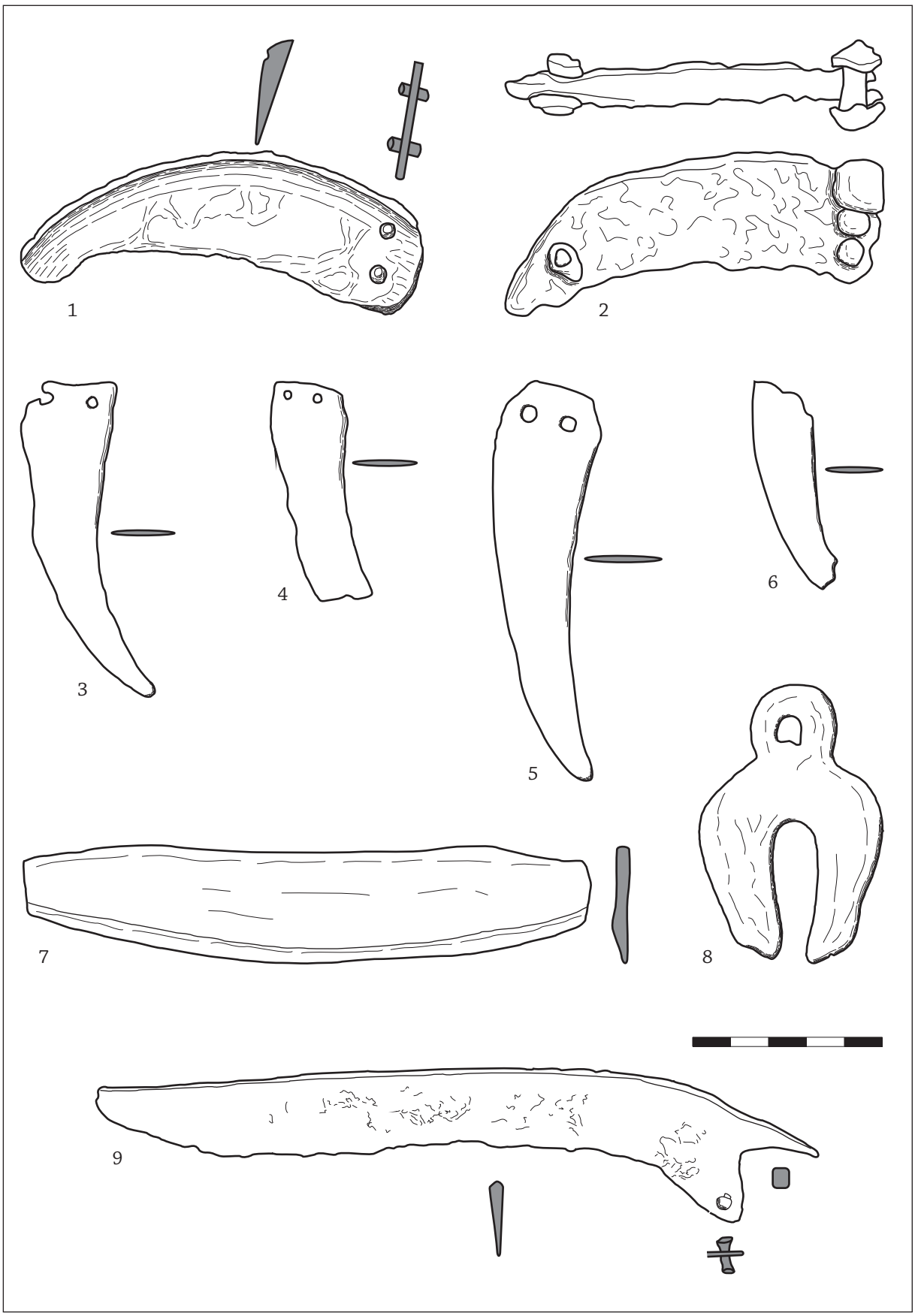

Plate 2. Razors (1-8) and knife (9). 1. Polgár – Király-ér part/Lelőhely 29 grave 21 (HU); 2. Gánovce well (SK); 3. Koumasa tholos B (GR); 4. Maratokephalon (GR); 5. Asine (GR); 6. Troy IIIa (TR); 7. Peștere - Peștera Igrița grave 13 (RO); 8. Cruceni - Módósi út grave 104 (RO); 9. Satu Mare hoard (RO)

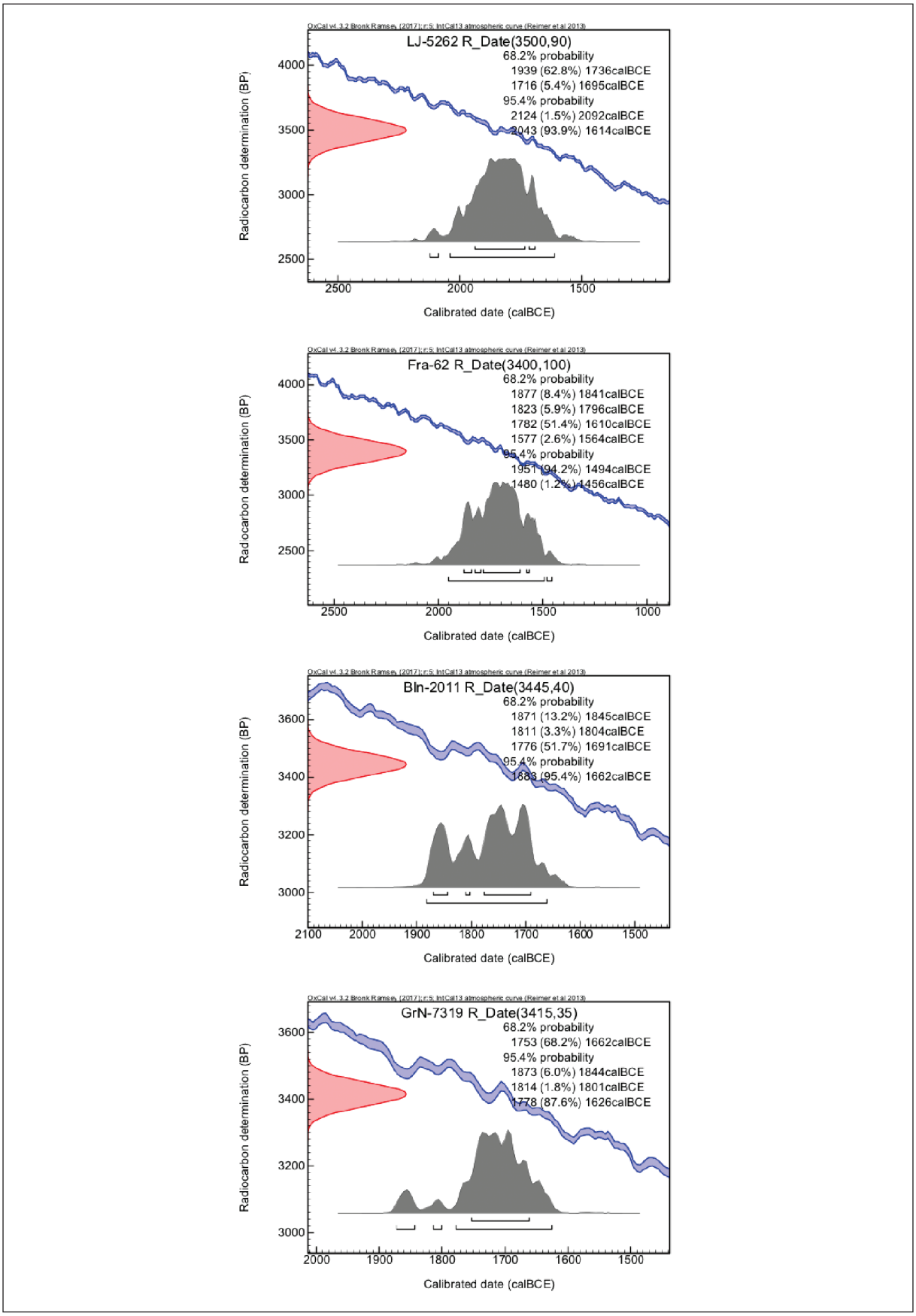

Plate 3. BCE calibrated radiocarbon from the wood lining of the well at Gánovce, Slovakia

Abbreviations

AAASH	Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae, Budapesta.
AAC	Acta Archaeologica Carpathica, Cracovia.
Alba Regia	Alba Regia. Annales Musei Stephani regis, Székesferhérvár.
Angvstia	Angvstia. Sfântu Gheorghe.
Arabona	Győri Xántus János Múzeum, Győr.
ArchÉrt	Archaeologiai Értesitó, Budapesta.
ArchHung	Archaeologia Hungarica, Series Nova, Budapest.
ArhMold	ArheologiaMoldovei. Iași.
Arheologija/Archeologiya	Arheologija/ Archeologiya. Sofia.
Apulum	Acta MuseiApulensis – Apulum. Alba-Iulia.
AMN	Acta Musei Napocensis, Cluj-Napoca.
AMP	Acta Musei Porolissensis, Zalău.
BAM	Brvkenthal Acta Mvsei. Sibiu.
BHAB	(Museum Banaticum Temesiense) Bibliotheca Historica et Archaeologica Banatica.
BMMK	A Békés Megyei Múzeumok Közleményei. Békéscsaba.
BMA	Bibliotheca Memoriae Antiquitatis, Piatra Neamț.
BMN	Bibliotheca Musei Napocensis.
BudRég	Budapest Régiségei. Budapest.
CCA	Cronica Cercetărilor Arheologice din România, București.
CRSCRCR	Coins from Roman sites and collections of Roman coins from Romania.
Dacia N.S.	Dacia. Revue d'archéologie et d'histoire ancienne. Nouvelle serie. București.
EphNap	Ephemeris Napocensis. Cluj-Napoca.
Ethnographia	Ethnographia. A Magyar NéprajziTársaságFolyóirata. Budapest.
FADDP/GMADP	Führer zu archäologischen Denkmälern in Dacia Porolissensis/Ghid al monumentelor arheologice din Dacia Porolissensis
FolArch	Folia Archaeologica. Budapest.
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MMA	Monumenta Avarorum Archaeologica, Budapest.
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NyJAMÉ	Jósa András Múzeum Évkönyve. Nyiregyháza.
OM	Orbis Mediaevalis, Arad.
PAT	Patrimonium Archaeologicum Transylvanicum. Cluj Napoca.
PBF	Praehistorische Bronzefunde. Berlin.
PeuceS.N	PEUCE. Studii și cercetări de istorie și arheologie. Serie nouă. Tulcea.
RI, SN	Revista Istorică, Serie Nouă. București.
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WMMM	Wosinsky Mór Megyei Múzeum, Szekszárd
ZSA	Ziridava. StudiaArchaeologica. Arad.