

Project Description

Warriorship in Frontier Societies – Weapons Graves of the 4th–7th Century on the Byzantine Danube Frontier

The northern border of the Byzantine Empire along the Danube was not only important protection against attacks from the Barbaricum but also a zone of close cultural contacts and constant exchange, which brought about a direct and continuous clash of different cultural influences, norms, and values. In that context, it is not surprising that a process of change can be observed within this transcultural-shaped border milieu between the 4th and 7th centuries, which can be archaeologically studied in particular on the basis of the burial customs. While weapons were not part of the usual burial equipment both north and south of the Danube in this period, numerous "warrior graves"¹ equipped with weapons can be identified within the border zone. Following the common narrative that titles these centuries as the Migration Period, researchers have so far associated these "warrior graves" with immigrant "barbarians". However, the fact that these "warrior graves" appeared almost simultaneously north and south of the Danube and cannot be traced back to any models from Barbaricum casts doubt on this explanatory approach. Rather, the sources speak for the emergence of a military border society, which was distinguished and delimited by its own characteristics and in which self-representation as a warrior in burial was apparently of particular importance².

This dissertation project aims to analyse the formation of this border society and thereby examine in detail a central concept of the Research Training Group 2304, transculturality, over several centuries. This raises questions about how the border society was constituted and how this process affected the foreland and hinterland of the Danube border. With these questions, the project takes up topics that have so far only been examined in rudimentary form for the western provinces, while research in this regard on the northern border of the Byzantine Empire has been completely lacking.

To answer these questions, it is first necessary to compile a complete list of all burials with weapon grave goods within the border zone. Evaluating these burials with regard to their chronological order, location, furnishings, and spatial relationships to Byzantine border fortifications should already provide initial contributions to understanding the complex processes within the border zone. The synthesis of the results should finally give answers to the raised questions and at the same time contribute to an understanding of the close cultural interconnections along the Danube border, the processes initiated by them, and the everyday life of the soldiers who were stationed within the border milieu.

¹ It should be noted at this point that the designation as warrior graves is made with the awareness that the furnishings initially only demonstrate the status during the burial.

² For the theoretical model of border societies see C. R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: a social and economic study* (Baltimore 1994).