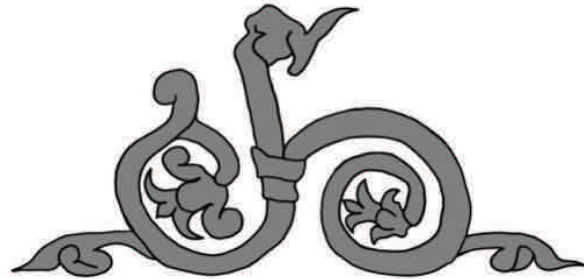


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Between *sacred and profane* – a discovery belonging to the Coțofeni Culture inside “Stanu Cerbului” cave (Bihor County)*

Călin Ghemis, Tudor Rus, Robert Kovacs¹

Homage to Emödi János

Abstract: This brief paper presents a recent ceramic find, discovered inside “Stanu Cerbului” Cave in Vida Valley. One can remark a pattern which is specific to the Coțofeni Culture, in its third stage of evolution. The other three situations in which vessels were discovered in caves: Igrîța, Izbândiș and Moanei, seem to prove a special religious behavior regarding a subterranean deity. These discoveries prove the fact that ritual places were often used in the last stage of the Coțofeni Culture, under others cultural influences, and, as we know from the literature, they are specific to the Pădurea Craiului Mountains.

Keywords: Copper Age, Caves, deposit, ritual, archaeology.

Emödi János, “Jáncsi bacsi” for those close to him, is one of the prominent figures of cave archaeology in Bihor. Passionate about the archaeology of the “world beyond” – of the caves in the Apuseni Mountains and other areas – “Jáncsi bácsi” took care of tenaciously and professionally recovering materials that would have been otherwise lost and he especially took care that these materials saw the light of print, in various publications². In fact, no research of the endokarst of the Apuseni can be made without making reference to the work, comprising more than 40 titles, of the archaeologist from Oradea. The numerous hardships he endured during the period of the “great accomplishments of Socialism”, the difficulty of performing some researches, such as those in Izbucul Topliței Cave, did not make him give up his passion.

Transylvanian archaeology owes him the definition of new cultural horizons, extremely important for the knowledge of prehistory in this area, i.e. the Roșia and Igrîța groups, the discovery of the settlement in Tășad, and the recovery of a significant part of the deposit in Cioclovina; these are but a few of the accomplishments of a man passionate about the archaeology and history of the place, that we wish to bring homage to through this contribution to the knowledge of the archaeology of caves.

Coțofeni Culture is one of the most representative cultures of the Transylvanian Copper Age; discoveries attributed to it cover an enormous geographical area, illustrated by the 1500³ spots with discoveries, among which 686 are in the area of Transylvania⁴.

The spirituality⁵ of this culture is a special one, with extremely diverse manifestations and, at the same time, manifestations typical to certain areas.

* English translation: Ana M. Gruia.

¹ The authors wish to thank their colleagues: Dr. Florin Gogâltan, for some suggestions, Dr. Victor Sava and Gruia Fazecaș for some bibliographic indications.

² Emödi 1978; Emödi 1980; Emödi 1980; Emödi 1982; Emödi 1984; Halasi, Emödi 1985; Emödi 1985; Emödi 1988; Emödi 1992; Emödi 1995; Emödi 1995; Emödi 1997; Emödi 2001; Emödi 2003a; Emödi 2003b; Dénes, Emödi 2003.

³ Popa 2009, 3.

⁴ One must make certain observations on the repertory of discoveries in H. Ciugudean’s synthesis work entitled *Eneoliticul final în Transilvania și Banat: cultura Coțofeni (Ciugudean 2000)*: on p. 63, no. 42, Aștileu is erroneously repertoried (town of Aleșd, Bihor County); “Peștera Igric” (correct Igrîța), at no. 440, Peștere (town of Aleșd, Bihor County), at no. 599. Șuncuiuș, “Igrîța” Cave, the reputed researcher certainly made reference to the discoveries in: Igrîța Cave, village of Peștera, municipality of Aștileu, Bihor County. Thus, his repertory, published in 2000, features three spots with Coțofeni discoveries, when in fact it is just one: Igrîța Cave.

⁵ Popa 2009, 672–864, the author discusses all the aspects related to the spiritual life of the Coțofeni Culture communities. A few corrections are needed in connection to the discoveries in caves located in Pădurea Craiului Mountains. The

The literature connected to cave archaeology indicates that there are few cultic depositions attributed to this culture. The more than 54 caves with Coțofeni materials analyzed by S. M. Petrescu were included in the wider category of seasonal shelters⁶. Besides, in the sixth chapter of this work, the above mentioned researcher distinguishes four type of functionality of caves in the area under discussion for the endokarst from Banat⁷.

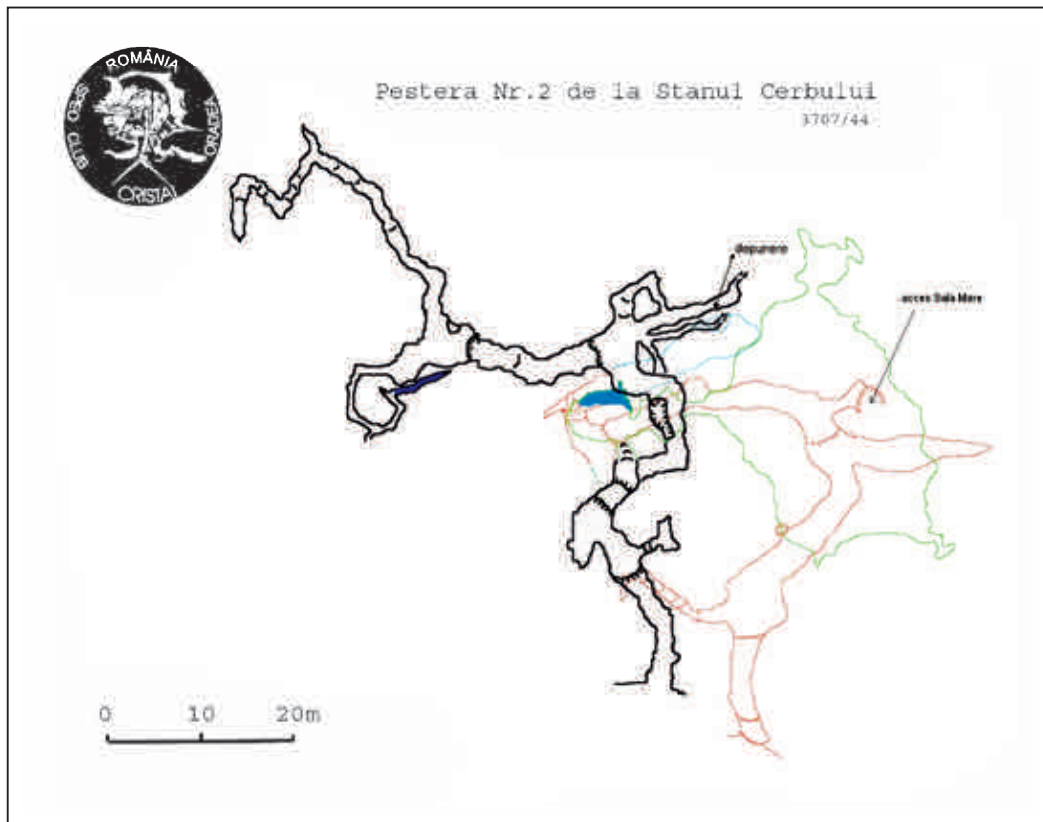


Fig. 1. Ground plan of the “Stanu Cerbului” karstic system.

The situation seems to be similar to south-western Transylvania, where C. Roman, identified no less than nine types of functionalities of the endokarst, but for the Copper Age only seasonal habitations are known⁸.

The majority of the discoveries mentioned above are concentrated in the areas inside the portals of the cavities that most often provided certain and easy-to use shelters.

During a visit in “Stanu Cerbului” Cave, a spot with materials belonging to the Coțofeni Culture was identified (Fig. 1–4)⁹. The on-site verification of this discovery, but also of the cave, has led to the identification of materials belonging to different eras¹⁰.

“Stanu Cerbului” Cave is located in the basin of the Vida Valley, approximately at the middle of it, on the right slope. This cave is part of a wider system, consisting of three caves that open in an extremely large abri. The mapping of the subterraneous voids there was performed by members of the “Cristal” speleology club, coordinated by Victor Ursu. Out of the three galleries, the middle one,

materials mentioned by colleague C. I. Popa, taken from Emödi 1984, 405, are in fact materials published by Ghemiș, Sava 2004; in Șuncuiș, there is no Mișid Cave, but there is a Mișidului Valley, with a series of caves with prehistoric discoveries, some yet unpublished.

⁶ Petrescu 2000, 85.

⁷ Petrescu 2000, 75–83.

⁸ Roman C. C. 2008, 223–229.

⁹ The discovery was announced on 23.03.2014 by Tudor Rus; the team also included: Kovacs Robert, Cozma Lavinia, Frentiu Lucian, Lolea Camelia, Țucudean Rodica, Olah Radu, Rus Tudor (Speodava- Ștei) and Posmoșanu Andrei (The Romanian Speleology Federation).

¹⁰ On 22. 06. 2014 we have checked the discovery together with Alina Pitic, Dan Pitic, and Dezideriu Szabo, whom we thank for their support during the field researches.

known in speleological literature as “cave no. 2 in Stanu Cerbului”, code: 3707/44¹¹, is the subject of the present article (Fig. 1).

The research of the cave has led to the identification of two areas with on-surface archaeological materials, outside the gallery where the prehistoric deposition was discovered.

The first is located in the area of the cave entrance, where strongly rolled fragments of pottery were found, while the second is located ca. 15 meters apart, in a diverticulum on the left wall. One cannot exclude the possibility that the pottery fragments at the entrance were rolled on this spot during strong freshets inside the cave.



Fig. 2. The gallery with the Coțofeni deposition.



Fig. 3. The Coțofeni deposition.



Fig. 4. Detail the Coțofeni deposition.



Fig. 5. Detail the Coțofeni deposition.

Conditions of discovery

After following the route of the main gallery the cave branches to the left, after a threshold followed by a very tilted step and a chimney, on the right-hand side as one enters the gallery. From a geo-morphological perspective, the gallery is a fossil, suspended gallery. A vessel was deposited in the final part of the gallery, in a small niche, near a bovine hoof. The vessel was not covered with clay or rocks, but simply deposited on the gallery floor¹². In time it broke and some of the fragments show, in some areas, significant depositions of calcite. The deposition was not marked at the time it was made, or if it was, the materials employed were organic and have not been preserved. On the gallery floor one can note small fragments of coal, but also the bones of small animals.

¹¹ Goran 1982, 258.

¹² In a few cases, the vessels were deposited or broken during ceremonies performed outside the caves; besides the examples discussed in the text, we shall mention the discovery of a vessel belonging to the Roșia group discovered in the Meziad cave and a cup discovered in Peștera Roșie in Șuncuiș.

Description of the material

Average-size jug, with bulging walls, arched neck, and slightly flared rim, with rounded edge. The handle is high, strap-like, ornamented on the outer surface. The vessel was made of semi-fine fabric, dark-brown – blackish in color, the walls are unevenly smoothed, with black spots caused by secondary firing. The entire decoration of the item was made in the incision technique.

V-shaped stripes were incised on the handle, filled with dotted lines; a row of vertical lines feature at the base of the neck; the body of the item is decorated with V-shaped stripes, placed with the tip downwards, towards the bottom overlapped/intersected by oblique short lines. Dimensions: height: 22 cm, mouth diameter: 7.5 cm, maximum diameter: 19.9 cm, bottom diameter: 6.8 cm.



Fig. 6. Reconstructed jug (photo).

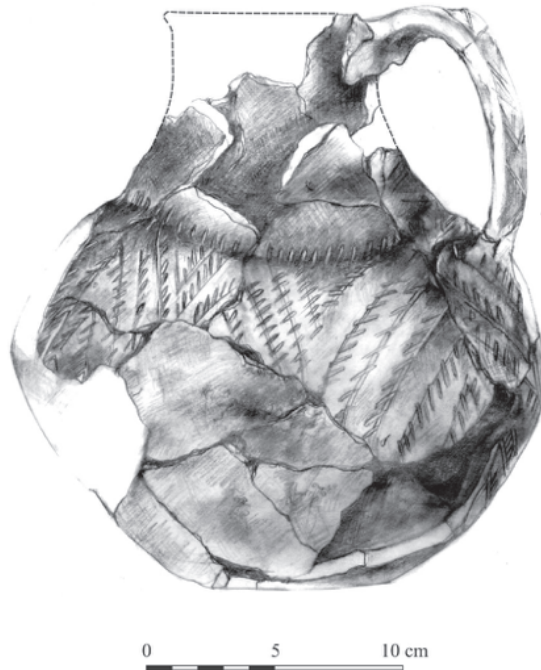


Fig. 7. Reconstructed jug (drawing).

Analogies

From the beginning we must mention that the majority of the analogies place the discovery in the cave under discussion during the third stage of evolution of the Coțofeni Culture.

According to P. Roman's 1976 typology, the jug discovered in "Stanu Cerbului" Cave belongs to Type X, variant 3, represented by jugs with arched walls, slightly flared and rounded rims, and strap handles.

Such vessels feature among discoveries from caves, for example in Igrîța Cave¹³, where an almost identical item was found, dated by Emodi during the third stage of the culture¹⁴.

Discussions

As proven by a series of discoveries from Transylvania and not only, caves were not only a certain shelter against harsh weather or a place of retreat during times of crisis.

The subterranean voids, through their sometimes supra-sized development, impressed people throughout prehistory. This led to the onset of an initial behavior with religious character. In the intimacy of the darkness and of the primordial silence, our ancestors have completed a dialogue between sacred and profane, or, according to I. Ghinoiu, between "the world here and the world beyond"¹⁵.

¹³ Emodi 1984, Fig. 2, no. 3; Fig. 5, no. 24.

¹⁴ Emodi 1984, 408.

¹⁵ Ghinoiu 1990, *passim*.

For prehistory, the archaeological documents are the most relevant sources, but they do not always provide data for the reconstruction of some profane or religious behaviors. We will never know the details of a funerary procession or of a process of founding new dwellings¹⁶, either Neolithic or from other eras.

Besides, this “immaterial archaeology” is in its beginning, not only in Transylvania, but in Romania in general, and the reconstruction of a ritual behavior is difficult in the absence of more in-depth researches¹⁷. It was through chance that the discoveries of the Coțofeni Culture enjoyed more attention from prehistory researchers and thus its monuments are much better known than those of other cultures¹⁸.

Before discussing the elements of ritual connected to this type of discovery, we will present a few discoveries that contribute substantially to the creation of an image on this type of deposition.

Izbîndiș Cave is located in Izbândișului Valley (municipality of Șuncuiuș, Bihor County), above the intermittent spring bearing the same name; one can access the cavity with difficulty. During some archaeological researches, J. Emődi recovered among the boulders of the first room, fragments of an amphora and other, atypical pottery fragments¹⁹.

Igrița Cave is located in a dominant area on the left slope, inside the boundaries of the village of Peștera, municipality of Aștileu, Bihor County. From here, the same J. Emodi recovered a series of artefacts belonging to the Copper Age and the end of the Bronze Age. For the issues hereby discussed, the discovery made in the entrance to the “Long Gallery” of the cave is extremely important. Fragments from an amphora and two cups were recovered from the floor of the cavity, that the discoverer included in the thirds stage of the Coțofeni Culture²⁰.

Moanei Cave is located in the end of Mișidului Valley (municipality of Șuncuiuș, Bihor County), in the vicinity of Lesiana Cave. During an exploration expedition in August 1980, a team under the leadership of T. Borodan discovered a deposition on a bench located eight meters high and 70 m away from the entrance of the cave; the deposition contained three vessels, of which one entirely preserved²¹. The discovery has been dated to the third stage of development of the Coțofeni Culture²².

As the conditions of the discovery in “Stanu Cerbului” Cave – Valea Vida (village of Luncasprie, municipality of Dobrești, Bihor County) have already been discussed above, we will just stress the fact that access to the area of deposition is difficult in this case as well, and for people of the Copper Age it was much harder to reach the area.

The above descriptions indicate the fact that in all the cases the vessels were deposited in isolated areas of the caves, some hard to access. A common trait of these discoveries is the fact that in the majority of cases the deposited vessels are items for the storage of foodstuffs or liquids (amphorae, jugs, cups) and in a single case drinking vessels (mugs).

Another observation that must be made is that the vessels deposited in caves are common wares, not vessels with special function or those created to be used during ceremonies/rituals and thus with a restricted period of use. In almost all cases, traces of ash or coal fragments were also identified in the areas with discoveries.

The areas where these depositions were identified are improper to habitation and this indicates that the mentioned complexes should be interpreted rather as discoveries belonging to the spiritual life of the Copper Age people. This interpretation has been accepted by the majority of researchers who have dwelled upon the vestiges of this culture²³.

The discovery of these areas with depositions in the deep areas of the caves opens up the possibility of wider discussions on what F. Gogâltan labeled ten years ago as the “archaeology of ritual”²⁴.

¹⁶ Ciută 2010.

¹⁷ Among the synthesis works connected to the subject, somewhat hidden, of theoretical archaeology in Romania, we mention here the synthesis work published by in M. Anghelinu 2014 (Anghelinu 2014).

¹⁸ Gogâltan, Molnar 2009 or Popa 2009, with the old literature.

¹⁹ Emodi 1984, 407.

²⁰ Emodi 1984.

²¹ Ghemiș, Sava 2004, 19–31.

²² Ghemiș, Sava 2004, 21.

²³ Among the expressed opinions we will remind C. I. Popa's; he lists all references made to the discoveries in caves, especially those connected to Igrița Cave in the Crișul Repede Gorge, according to Popa 2009, *passim*.

²⁴ Gogâltan 2004.

The resorts that determined the Coțofeni Culture communities to perform such depositions remain in the intimacy of the Copper Age people; our duty is to try and explain these depositions/offerings.

The majority of researchers of Transylvanian prehistory agree that the third stage of the Coțofeni Culture marks its peak territorial expansion. At the same time, a natural phenomenon of acculturation took place in some areas and this led to the formation of new cultural aspects/groups.

The regionalization of the culture²⁵ during this stage causes the onset of new phenomena connected to the “special” character manifestations, i.e. ritual ones.

The fact that no such manifestations existed or at least that no depositions that can be connected to the spiritual life of people part of the Coțofeni Culture were found in the caves from Transylvania²⁶ or Banat²⁷ can be an indication in interpreting such discoveries as specific to a certain group or, better said, to a certain group of Coțofeni population, to the definition of which one can add this component of the habit of making offerings inside caves. On the other hand, this aspect can reflect a stage of research and a lack of more detailed explorations of the endokarst in the above mentioned areas.

The presence of special places²⁸, of consecrated areas, or better said of places endowed with spiritual load, the existence of patterns in the organization of a these depositions marks the beginning of a tradition that was to survive over several generation and that would lead, in our opinion, to the onset on necropolises inside caves²⁹.

There is, naturally, a possibility, adopted by numerous specialists in prehistory, to interpret all discoveries made inside caves through the perspective of ritual depositions. We believe that discoveries must be analyzed carefully and especially with caution.

It is impossible to establish the place of the individual in this dialogue between the visible and invisible worlds, but the patterns noted on the occasion of the analysis of the discovery under discussion are obvious and they lead to the idea of a subterranean deity, whose attributes remain unknown but whose importance for a certain group of the Coțofeni Culture is hereby underlined. Future researches may bring new contributions to what our colleague C. Roman labeled under the wider notion of “sacred geography”³⁰; this phenomenon is not impossible and its existence will have to be proven through new approaches of discoveries from caves and especially, from mountainous areas.

The discovery of such depositions indicates the fact that this group preferred the area of the Apuseni Mountains and more specifically that of the Pădurea Craiului Mountains; it is nevertheless not excluded that such discoveries will be made also in other areas with an endokarst just as spectacular as the one in the western region of the Carpathians.

Without pretending to have settled the so very attractive issue of prehistoric depositions inside caves, to which we shall return, we will end, instead of a conclusion, with a paraphrase of J. P. Bayard after M. Random: *“la porte étroite était pour nous ancêtres, celle qui conduisait au lieu le plus sacré de la caverne. La communion avec les dieux devait se mériter par une progression difficile, symbole de la mutation de l’homme, e sa régénération nécessaire à l’approche du sacré”*³¹.

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²⁵ Among the contributions of recent years we mention those of Sava 2008, a final discussion connected to the final stage of the Coțofeni Culture and its relations to neighboring cultures in: Popa, Fazecaș 2013.

²⁶ Roman 2008, *passim*, with the older bibliography connected to the archaeology of caves in the studied area.

²⁷ Petrescu 2000, *passim*.

²⁸ On some cult places in prehistoric Europe: Kacsó 1999.

²⁹ This fact is argued by the recent discovery in the portal of the Meziad Cave, where a ring of rocks located inside the portal, marked since prehistory by a boulder of impressive size, of a human skull with traces of perimortem blows; several pottery fragments and animal bones, among which one with obvious traces of secondary firing, were also discovered beside the skull. The entire complex can be date don the basis of the pottery fragments to thee third stage of the Coțofeni Culture.

³⁰ Roman 2008, 225.

³¹ Bayard 2009.

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Abbreviations

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ActaHist	Acta Historica. Szeged.
Acta Siculica	Acta Siculica. Sfântu Gheorghe.
Aluta	Aluta. Revista Muzeului Național Secuiesc Sfântu Gheorghe.
Alba Regia	Alba Regia. Annales Musei Stephani Regis. Székesfehérvár.
AMN	Acta Musei Napocensis. Cluj-Napoca.
AMP	Acta Musei Porolissensis. Muzeul Județean de Istorie și Artă Zalău. Zalău.
ATS	Acta Terrae Septemcastrensis. Sibiu.
AISC	Anuarul Institutului de studii clasice Cluj Napoca. Cluj-Napoca.
AnB S.N.	Analele Banatului – serie nouă. Timișoara.
Apulum	Apulum. Alba-Iulia.
AÉ	Archaeologiai Értesítő. Budapest.
Areopolisz	Areopolisz. Történelmi- és társadalomtudományi tanulmányok Odorheiu Secuiesc / Székelyudvarhely.
ArhMed	Arheologia Medievală. Iași.
ArchRozhl	Archeologické Rozhledy. Praga.
ArhVest	Arheološki Vestnik. Ljubljana.
Banatica	Banatica. Muzeul Banatului Montan. Reșița.
BHAUT	Bibliotheca Historica et Archaeologica Universitatis Timisiensis.
BAR International Series	British Archaeological Reports, International Series. Oxford.
BAM	Brukenthal Acta Musei. Sibiu.
BMMK	A Békés Megyei múzeumok közleményei, Békéscsába.
CAH	Communicationes Archaeologicae Hungariae. Budapest.
Cerc. Arh.	Cercetări Arheologice. București.
CIL	Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum.
CIMRM	Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae.
CCA	Cronica Cercetărilor arheologice din România. București.
Crisia	Crisia, Muzeul Țării Crișurilor. Oradea.
Dacia N.S.	Dacia. Recherches et Découvertes Archéologiques en Roumanie, București; seria nouă (N.S.): Dacia. Revue d'Archéologie et d'Histoire Ancienne. București.
DissArch	Dissertationis Archaeologicae (Budapest).
Dolg	Dolgozatok. Szeged.
EphNap	Ephemeris Napocensis. Cluj-Napoca.
EL	Erdővidéki Lapok. Barót/Baraolt.
EM	Erdélyi Múzeum. Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca.
Isis	Isis. Erdélyi Magyar Restaurátor Füzetek. Cluj-Napoca / Kolozsvár.
JbRGZM	Jahrbuch des Römisch- Germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz. Mainz.
Marisia	Marisia. Studii și materiale. Arheologie – Istorie – Etnografie. Târgu-Mureș.
MCA	Materiale și Cercetări Arheologice. București.

MFMÉ StudArch	A Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve. <i>Studia Archaeologica</i> . Szeged.
MFMÉ MonArch	A Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve. <i>Monumenta Archeologica</i> . Szeged.
OpArch	<i>Opuscula Archaeologica</i> . Zagreb.
OpHung	<i>Opuscula Hungarica</i> . Budapest.
Pontica	<i>Pontica</i> , Constanța.
PZ	<i>Prähistorische Zeitschrift</i> . Berlin.
RMM-MIA	<i>Revista Muzeelor și Monumentelor – seria Monumente Istorice și de Artă</i> . București.
Sargeția NS	<i>Sargeția NS. Deva</i> .
SlovArch	<i>Slovenská Archeológia. Nitra</i> .
Soproni Szemle	<i>Soproni Szemle kulturtörténeti folyóirat</i> . Sopron.
StudCom	<i>Studia Comitatus</i> . Tanulmányok Pest megye múzeumaiból. Szentendre.
ŠtudZvesti	<i>Študijne Zvesti Arheologického Ústavu Slovenskej Akadémie Vied</i> . Nitra.
Stud. și Cerc. Num.	<i>Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche și Arheologie</i> . București.
SCIVA	<i>Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche (și Arheologie)</i> . București.
StComSatuMare	<i>Studii și Comunicări. Satu Mare</i> .
Thrac-Dacica	<i>Thrac-Dacica</i> . București.
VMMK	<i>A Veszprém megyei Múzeumok Közleményei. Veszprém</i> .
VTT	<i>Veszprémi Történelmi Tár. Veszprém</i> .
Ziridava	<i>Ziridava, Complexul Muzeal Arad. Arad</i> .