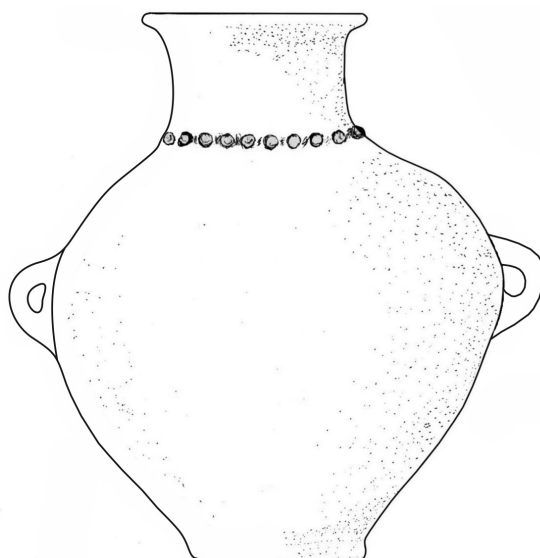


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Report on the 2022 rescue archaeological excavations at Gornea – *Țărmuri* (Sichevița commune, Caraș-Severin county)

Adrian Ardeț, Iulian Leonti, Dimitrie Pavel Negrei, Dacian Rancu

Abstract: The archaeological excavation of 2022 was conducted in the eastern part of the *Țărmuri* site, in Gornea, an archaeological site located on the banks of the Danube. The immediate results of the archaeological investigations, which covered an area of approximately 350 m², recorded the find of a number of sixty-seven inhumations set up in a cemetery organised in linear rows oriented north-south. The deceased were laid in rectangular gravepits, oriented on a west-east direction, with hands' position in different variations, reminiscent of the Christian rite of the early Middle Ages in the Danube area. Moreover, the grave goods, composed of Byzantine tradition jewellery, place the necropolis in a chronological span between late 11th century and mid-13th century at the latest.

Keywords: rescue excavation; Middle Ages; cemetery; funeral rite and ritual.

Introduction

The research unit excavated for the purpose of archaeological discharge is located on a privately owned land plot (registered in the land register under number CF31296) and is located in the incorporated area of Gornea village, Sichevița commune, Caraș-Severin County. The perimeter of the archaeological research lies 60 m south of the DN57 national road (more specifically, by its junction with county road DJ571A, the latter being the access road to Gornea and Sichevița) and at a distance of approximately 20 m north of the Danube¹. Archaeologically, the limits inscribed within above geographical coordinates are part of the site known in the literature as *Țărmuri*², a local toponym of an area conventionally designated by DN 57 (in the north), the Danube in the south and west (with the Camenița River flow into the Danube in the north-west), and to the east by toponym *Locuri Lungi*, the latter known in the archaeological milieu especially for prehistory finds. Geographically, the *Țărmuri* site area lies on a terrace of the Danube in the Liubcovei Depression³, administratively located in the south-eastern extremity of the commune (Pl. 1-2).

Brief documented history of the site

The site was discovered subsequent to a 1960s' survey, the archaeological material collected from the surface evidencing traces of prehistory habitation and medieval pottery. The first trial-trenches

¹ Geographical coordinates of the archaeological excavation limits: (1) X (North):355980.598, Y (East): 251174.452; (2) X: 355976.167, Y: 251186.530; (3) X: 355967.369, Y: 251182.449; (4) X: 355966.436, Y: 251184.839; (5) X: 355953.959, Y: 251179.929; (6) X: 355958.295, Y: 251165.827; Elevation - 71-70 m.

² Site registered in the National Archaeological Repertory (RAN) at entry 53942.02 and listed in the List of National Monuments (LMI) under CS - I - s - B - 10830.

³ The Liubcovei Depression is outlined as a wider sector of the general Danube Gorge, stretching over a length of 18 kilometres, where main valleys (Valea Mare, Camenița, Orevița) have generated a series of erosion and accumulation basins set alongside and in the confluence area with the Danube. At river level, the depression opens after the Coronini gorge and closes at Cozla, on the territory of Berzasca commune. The lowlands near the Danube (which also includes the southern part of the *Țărmuri* area) is today flooded as a result of the construction of the Porțile de Fier hydroelectric dam (Pl. 3.1); for the rest, the gentle slopes and well-defined vertical soil profile have favoured agriculture and development of stable settlements, whose action on the original natural ecosystems is obvious. In the Danube terrace system, the site's microarea falls in the 50 to 80 m range. The region is covered by brown soils, formed on loess deposits and alluvium, very productive for spontaneous and farmed vegetation. (Grigore, Sencu 1987, 408, 411; Manea 2013, 42, 61-62).

(three trenches/S1-S3) excavated in 1969 documented two distinct layers of Bronze Age and Early Iron Age pottery in two trenches, while in the third “pre-feudal and early feudal habitation features were identified”⁴. Subsequently, for a decade, archaeological research continued at the site and yielded notable results that were the subject of or contributed to the development of studies, both for the prehistory⁵ and medieval periods⁶. Thus, until the 2022 excavation, the archaeological documentation is that of the campaigns conducted between 1969 and 1978, which involved the investigation of eighteen trenches located in the northern part of the site, namely the more elevated plots (Pl. 3.2). The published results show that stratigraphic record a succession of prehistory (Neolithic, Eneolithic, Bronze Age and Early Iron Age) and early medieval settlements (Fig. 1)⁷.

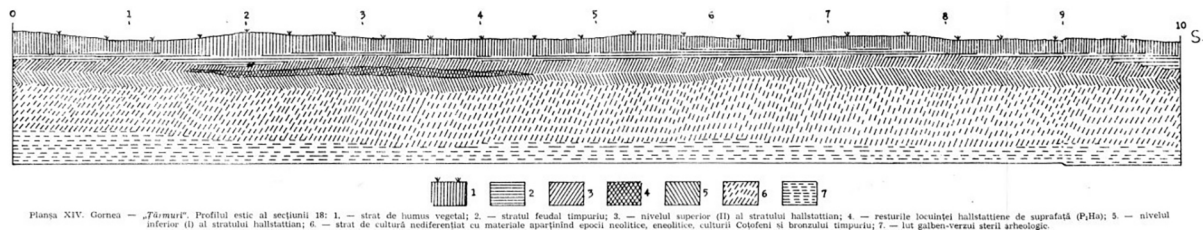


Fig. 1. Eastern profile of Trench 18 (after Guma 1979, Pl. XIV).

If in the case of the first three prehistory periods, the potshards identified in the layer were sporadic and most morphologically atypical⁸, a much clearer picture emerged for the Early Iron Age (in particular, in trenches 17 and 18 from 1978). The stratigraphic deposits for both Early Iron Age levels were about 0.15-0.20 m thick each, the pottery in the lower level (*Țărmuri I* – Plate 4.1) and upper level (*Țărmuri II* – Pl. 4.2) certify anthropogenic occupation of the space both during Ha B2-B3 (Gornea-Kalakača type finds)⁹ and Ha C (Basarabi culture)¹⁰.

The surface medieval level was identified at depths ranging from 0.35 to 0.50 m, the archaeological campaigns (1969-1978) investigating there eight habitation features, with archaeological material dated to the 11th - 13th century (Fig. 2a, b), much to the 12th century¹¹ (Pl. 4.3-4.4). The chance find of an inhumation with the deceased placed in a ventral decubitus position nearby a sunken-feature building with fire hearth and typical early medieval pottery is interesting¹². The published results distinguish the three pithouses which, according to the excavators, were of semi-sunken type, large (5.50 x 4.50 m; 2.30 x 3.80 m; 2.80 x 2 m), two provided with flooring and fire installation, hearth (the pithouse identified in 1969), respectively oven in the case of the pithouse investigated in 1976¹³. It is also

⁴ Uzum *et al.* 1973, 410; Lazarovici 1977, 22.

⁵ Lazarovici 1977; Lazarovici 1979; Lazarovici, Săcărîn 1979; Gumă 1979; Gumă 1983; Gumă 1993; Gumă 1995.

⁶ Uzum, Lazarovici 1974; Uzum 1977; Uzum, Țeicu 1978; Țeicu, Lazarovici 1996; Țeicu 1998.

⁷ At the time when a synthesis of the Early Iron Age settlement in the Gornea area was published, M. Gumă also gave a description of the general stratigraphy at *Țărmuri* according to which “the archaeologically sterile, greenish-yellow is topped by a thick, yellowish-brown culture layer, which contains here and there traces of stratigraphically undifferentiated pottery that belongs to the Neolithic (Starčevo-Criș IVB), the Eneolithic, Coțofeni culture and Early Bronze periods; follows a dark-brown culture layer, in which two layers belonging to the Early Iron Age were differentiated, topped by a layer of brown humus which belongs to an early feudal settlement (the 11th – 13th century); it is lastly followed by the layer of recent, brownish-black vegetal humus” (after Guma 1979, 120).

⁸ With certain reservations, the Neolithic pottery has been framed in the so-called Phase IV of the Starčevo-Criș culture (Lazarovici 1977, 45; Lazarovici 1979, Table 5); owing to the scarce decorated potshards and based only on some shards “of course, porous fabric, brush-decorated in tree-bark style”, these have been widely attributed to the Early Bronze (Lazarovici, Săcărîn, 86). Moreover, we found no reference on the Bronze Age pottery from the site in the synthesis concerning the Bronze Age of the Banat (Gumă 1997).

⁹ Gumă 1993, 196.

¹⁰ Gumă 1993, 213, 219.

¹¹ Uzum 1977 217, 221; Țeicu, Lazarovici 1996, 52-53.

¹² Uzum, Lazarovici 1974, 49, 54, Fig. 3b (most likely due to a typo the explanations in fig. 3b appear in fig. 5 on the next page).

¹³ These are the features discovered in 1969 (L12 see in Țeicu, Lazarovici 1996, 52 and B1, B2; Uzum 1977, 218), 1973 (L 13 see in Țeicu, Lazarovici 1996, 53 and B3 see in Uzum 1977, 218 and Fig. 8) and 1976 (L14 see in Țeicu, Lazarovici 1996, 53). The pottery yielded by the archaeological inventory of the pithouses falls within the limits of the 11th – 13th century.

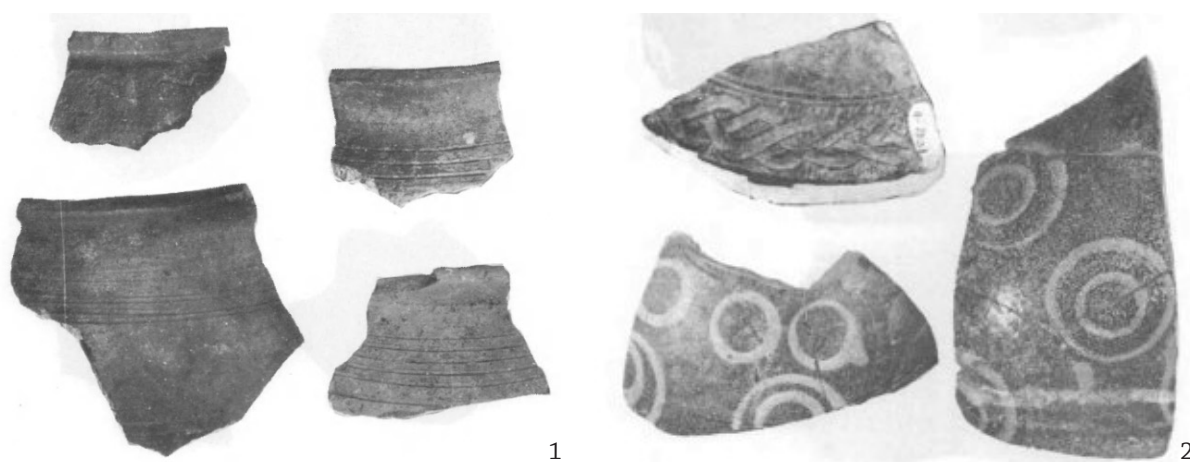


Fig. 2.1. 12th century pottery found in L12 Trench (after Țeicu, Lazarovici 1996, Pl.26); 2.2. 13th century glazed pottery? from L13 Trench (after Țeicu, Lazarovici 1996, Pl. 30).

worth mentioning the find of a pottery kiln, sized 0.90 x 0.80 x 0.70 m in the medieval settlement. It was worked of clay and typologically belongs to two-chamber circular kilns with vertical draught. According to the pottery fragments identified in the firing chamber, the pottery-firing installation dates within the boundaries of the 12th century¹⁴.

Research methodology and presentation of the immediate results of the archaeological excavation

The perimeter subject to the 2022 rescue archaeological investigation is located in the central-eastern part of the site, in an area where the terrain slopes slightly (north-south), the elevation difference between the northern and southern extremities (particularly noticeable in the western profile area) being of approximately one metre (Pl. 6). Due to the considerable size of the investment project area (approximately 350 m²), we chose to completely remove the topsoil, as the successive trenching approach of the research would have hindered the actual excavation works and especially the research of the archaeological features. Originally, we aimed at removing the vegetal (farming) layer which, in some areas reached a depth of 0.35 - 0.40 m, however the discovery of human bones in the mentioned layer required, in some areas, an increase of the removal level and, as far as possible, manual removal¹⁵. In the northern half, the eastern profile of the excavation stopped near the switchboard and power line trench, the latter (dug roughly on the eastern boundary of the land property) having a counterpart to the main power line in the vicinity of national road DN57. A major drawback was that, at the time when the topsoil removal was performed, due to drought, the ground was very dry, so on certain stretches (especially in the southwest quarter), the farming layer broke off in large lumps, which damaged the human skeletons that lie just below or were even part of the topsoil¹⁶. Therefore, the identified bones were collected separately and ascribed to the research squares¹⁷ and if possible, to the rest of the skeleton surviving flat in the area. In some cases where the bones in the topsoil clearly belonged to the deceased located underneath, the area was preserved as such until the grave was cleaned¹⁸. For the human skeletons partially identified in the excavation profiles, squares were

¹⁴ Uzum, Teicu, 1978, 296 and Fig. 2-4, 301; Țeicu, Lazarovici 1996, 97-98.

¹⁵ Prior to the purchase of the land by the current owners, the plot was extensively farmed, the former ploughing considerably disturbing the stratigraphy of the perimeter in the north side. One possible explanation is the land exposure to river flooding over time; according to the native inhabitants, the site's lowlands had been frequently flooded.

¹⁶ The soil in the southern half of the area was much more compact and darker compared to the more elevated stretches of the area. One possible explanation is the land exposure to river flooding over time; according to the local inhabitants, the site's lowlands have been frequently flooded.

¹⁷ From north to south, the squares were numbered with Arabic numerals on the long side and Roman letters on the short side, the first trench 1A lying in the northwest corner of the excavation.

¹⁸ Over the course of the archaeological research, since the first graves outlined on the surface, it was noted that these were difficult to rake after a short period of time. Owing to ground's quick drying, which resulted in a thick crust on the surface, during the brushing of the skeletal remains, the small bones were difficult to reveal, as they easily detached from the ground.

excavated to fully uncover the deceased. Subsequent to the complete examination of the skeletal remains, these were disarticulated upon segments together with the earth lumps, in order to both avoid bone fragmenting and loss of anthropological information.

From the outset, the research strategy has taken into account the location and numbering of former excavations, so that the area excavated in 2022 was termed S19 (Pl. 6.1)¹⁹, thus numerically succeeding past research units. In the documented site plan, S19 it is located east of S1-3, southeast of S4 and south of S15-18.

Immediate results of the archaeological research in S19

Upon the completion of the archaeological investigations in S19 (graves' layout on Pl. 7-8) it can be argued with certainty that the sixty-seven documented graves belong to a flat burial ground, the burial period being within the chronological limits of the early Middle Ages, such relative dating being assured by the jewellery discovered on some skeletal remains. The medieval cemetery cuts both a brown layer, in places with lighter or darker hues (hereafter Layer 2²⁰), ca. 0.15-0.20 m thick, located below the farming layer (Layer 1), as well as the site's archaeological sterile (Layer 3), which is a slightly sandy yellow clay layer with calcareous concretions, yellowish-brown or dark yellow on some stretches. Depending on the excavation area, the latter occurs at depths ranging from 0.25 to 0.50 m. From the base of layer 2 near the eastern profile of the south-eastern quarter of the excavation a pit with prehistory pottery in the filling was outlined and emptied. It was designated as C1 and cut Layer 3²¹.

Graves' description

Except for M55, M56, M 57 and M58 where the position of the deceased in the grave could not be specified, all the deceased were found lying on their backs (supine) and facing east (west-east orientation).

M1 grave

The grave and skull of the deceased (infant) were outlined at a depth of 0.50 m from the eastern profile, the skeletal remains being discovered in squares 5F at a depth of 0.60 m, with the right arm on the abdomen and the left arm on the chest, the head slightly tilted to the south. On the right arm, towards the elbow, were identified two round, dark blue glass bracelets (Fig. 3). The skeleton measured 1.10 m in length (Pl. 9.1).

M2 and M3 graves

The bones of the deceased (infants) from M2 and M3 (Pl. 9.2) were noted upon the raking of the ground subsequent to the mechanical removal of the topsoil, at a depth of 0.30 m relative to the northern profile. They were identified at a distance of 0.60 m (NE-SW) in-between within squares 1C-D, with a maximum depth of 0.40 m.

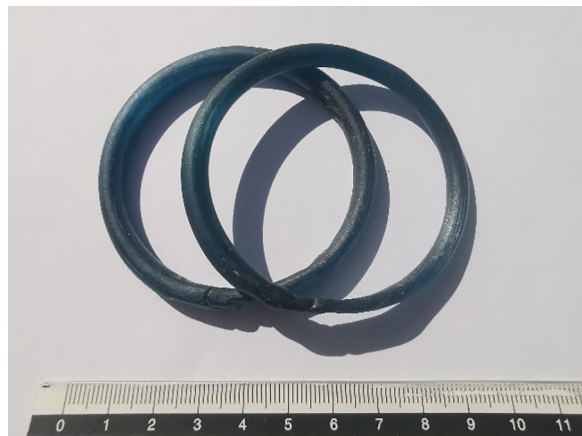


Fig. 3. Dark blue glass bracelets discovered in M1 grave.

Therefore, and given that the entire surface *grundiss* required careful levelling, the archaeological research strategy was based on levelling, outlining, brushing and documenting the graves by small areas, which was also appropriate since under the resulted clay cover, the earth remained easier to work. Thus, burials were recorded depending on the approach of the areas within the research unit called Area 1. For data recording, archaeological features were conventionally termed as C:# and initial M was used for graves. They were documented by photography (outline, details, completion) and GPS coordinates to obtain their layout on the entire surface of the archaeological excavation. Given that the terrain slopes to the south and that in some areas there were hollows, find depths were related to the excavation profiles in the graves' vicinity.

¹⁹ The sizes of the Area sides are as follows: E-27 m; W-24 m; N-13 m (plus trench 1=14 m); S-15.5 m.

²⁰ Prehistory potshards appear in the layer, which is not continuous or is superficially thick, so that in some areas layer 3 also appears at a depth of about 0.25 and 0.30 m (particularly in the S-W quarter) and midway the excavation area.

²¹ The feature was outlined at a depth of 0.50 m, in squares 9-11GH; it was flat oval and sized 2.80 x 1.70 m (only the western side was investigated, the smaller side being computed from the eastern profile of the area). The maximum depth was 0.40 m and the filling was a dense, dark brown clay layer with black fringes.

M2 was discovered in square 1D at a depth of 0.40 m. The bones were in poor condition, the skeleton being disturbed (the mandible was in the area of the right arm) in about 50%. It was 0.80 m flat long. After brushing, it was noted that the right arm was set in the abdomen area. Apart from the area of the arm that lay on the abdomen (similarly to the left arm), the deceased in M3 had a missing right arm and reversed skull (most likely due to ploughing), the length of the skeleton being 0.90m.

M4 grave

The gravepit was outlined at a depth of 0.50 m in squares 3D-E. The skeletal remains lay at 0.70 m deep, measuring 1.77 m in length, with both arms placed on the abdomen (Pl. 10.1).

M5 and M6 graves

These were identified in squares 4-5DE, at a depth of 0.40 m from the eastern profile. Both human skeletons (infants) were 1.10 m long, respectively 1.32 m long, with their arms positioned with palms on the abdomen. In M5, on the right side of the skull, the deceased had a bronze temple ring (Fig. 4). The skull in M6 was tilted to the northeast, the position of the mandible *in situ* indicating further disturbance of the grave; the femoral bones were in poor condition, as were other bones in the skeleton. The gravepits were dug individually, being arranged NE-SW of each other, the remaining filling evidencing values of 1.50 x 0.60 m each (Pl. 9.3).



Fig. 4. Detail photography of the M5 grave.

M7 grave

The gravepit filling (2 x 0.60 m) was outlined below the farming layer, at 0.30 m deep, in squares 3-4C. The partially disturbed skeleton had arms with palms on the abdomen and was 1.70 m long (Pl. 12.1).

M8 grave

The gravepit was outlined to the north of M7, in squares 3B-C, at a depth of 0.40 m. The skeleton, identified at a depth of 0.50 m, measured 1.40 m in length (Pl. 12.2). The deceased had the left arm brought to the abdomen and the radius of the right arm was discovered in an atypical location on the E-W direction, next to a fragment of the pubic symphysis, possibly explained by a present animal hole (on the NE-SW direction) observed during brushing. The grave goods consisted of bronze jewellery discovered in the right temple area.

M9 grave

It was discovered N of M8, the deceased had the arm palms on the abdomen and head tilted to the south. The skeleton measured 1.65 m in length and the depth at which it was deposited was 0.50 m. Both in this case (sizes 2.05 x 0.85 m) and in M7, the gravepits where the deceased were laid were simple with straight edges and slightly rounded corners, and their fillings had a clayish consistency and were dark brown in colour (Pl. 12.3).

M10 grave

The gravepit, measuring 2 x 0.95 m, was outlined N of M9, in squares 2B-C, the filling earth being brown. The skeleton had arms with palms deposited in the abdominal area and measured 1.65 m long in the gravepit (Pl. 12.4). The torso bones were in poor condition, particularly those in the rib area. Near the right arm was found a bronze bracelet circular in shape (with rectangular section - Fig. 5) and on the right arm, a circular black glass bracelet (Pl. 12.6).



Fig. 5. Bronze and glass bracelets discovered in M10 grave.

M11 grave

The human skeleton was discovered at a depth of 0.60 m in squares 1B-C, north of M10. It was 1.70 m long. The skull bones were slightly disturbed, the deceased had the arms with palms on the abdomen (Pl. 12.5).

M12 grave

The infant bones were cleaned of earth at a depth of 0.40 m in square 4AB. Slightly disturbed in the area of the right arm and skull, the skeleton was 1.15 m long (Pl. 10.4).

M13 grave

The grave was outlined in squares 2D-E, at a depth of 0.40 m, below the farming layer. The right arm had the palm on the abdomen and the left arm lay in the pelvis area; the head was tilted to the north. A bronze ring was discovered by the N edge of the gravepit, in the femur area. The gravepit and skeleton sizes (measured part) were 1.30 x 0.75 m (Pl.10.2-3).

M14 grave

The gravepit outlined at a depth of 0.40 m, within squares 2E-F, was 2.10 x 0.60 m long (the northern side of the gravepit was no longer identified when the southern profile of the square excavated in the north-eastern corner of the excavation to check the archaeological blank was straightened). The palms of the deceased were found in the pelvis area, the skeleton being 1.60 m long (Pl. 10.5).

M15 grave

The skeleton of the deceased from M15 was discovered in square 6DE, at a depth of 0.45 m and had a measured length of 1.55 m. The gravepit was observed on a 2 m length and 0.80 m width. Both arms of the individual were placed with palms on the abdomen. The bones were in an advanced state of biodegradation (Pl. 13.1).

M16 grave

The grave was investigated in squares 7C-D, at a depth of 0.50 m, just below the farming layer. The skeleton had the right arm with palm in the pelvis area and left arm on the abdomen; it measured 1.65 m in length (Pl. 13.2). Under the right radius and ulna, a fragment of a twisted bracelet made of bronze wires was found, and in the head area (on the right side), a biconical silver earring (Fig. 6).

M17 grave

The length of the human skeleton measured on the surface was 1.75 m. It was discovered in square 7-E-F, at 0.45 m deep. The individual, most likely an adult, had the palms placed in the pelvic area and the head tilted north (Pl. 13.3).

M18 and M19 graves

In the case of *M18*, the human skeletal remains were noted during the removal of the topsoil, being identified in the lower part of the farming layer at a depth of about 0.20-0.25 m. On raking, two inhumation graves were noted in the area of squares 7DE, set in the W-E direction. The grave of the eastern deceased (*M19*) cuts *M18* (Pl. 13.4), with only the skull and some osteological remains of the arms remaining from the skeleton of the latter. *M19* was investigated in square 7E, south of *M15*, east of *M18* and southeast of *M17*. The human skeleton was 1.70 m long, the filling in the lower part of the pit being identified on a 2 m length and 0.40 m width. Both the position of the right hand (bent from elbow and brought forward with palm to the shoulder or back of the head) and the atypical position of the right femur and fibula bones make the deceased a unique case in the general inventory of graves of



Fig. 6. Earring discovered in M16 grave.

the cemetery. It was discovered at a depth of 0.45 m in relation to the eastern profile of the excavation, with head tilted to the north (Pl. 13.5-6).

M20 and M21 graves

The graves were discovered in squares 8-9 CD, at a depth of 0.40 m. Grave M20 was disturbed to the extent of ca. 50% and had a measured length of the skeleton surviving under the farming layer of 1.35 m (Pl. 14.1). It was deposited at a depth of 0.40 m from the present surface level, bones of the same deceased being also discovered in the farming layer during the topsoil removal. The bones are in poor condition²². M21 (partially disturbed) was discovered south of M20, the skeleton measuring 1.60 m in length. The gravepit limits were also outlined, the maximum sizes of the sides measuring 1.90 x 0.60 m (Pl. 14.2). Because of the marked dryness of the soil and especially bone brittleness, the human skeletal remains were superficially brushed, however it could be noted that the left arm of the deceased was placed with palm on the abdomen.

M22- M25 graves

The bones of the four deceased were noted during the earth removal in the farming layer, within the limits given by squares 5-6BCD. The graves were disturbed by former ploughing (partly M22, M23 and M25 and almost entirely M24), the surface depth at which the bones survived in anatomical position varying from 0.35 m to 0.45 m, values reported to the western profile of the excavation.

The skeleton of the deceased in M22, uncovered in squares 6CD was 1.65 m long, with the left arm at the side of the body and palm in the pelvis area. The same arm was topped by human bones that lay in secondary position (most likely from M23 or M25) next to which (to the west) were found the bones of a skull (likely the skull bones of M22 dislodged by former ploughing). M23 was found near M22 (north, squares 6BC); it was 1.65 m flat long and the palms were placed on the abdomen; except for small fragments, the skull bones were missing. M24 is a group of human bones (0.45 x 0.22 m) found in square 5D, northeast of M23-24 and M25. The bones of a skull, upper part of a humerus and a small part of the chest area could be distinguished; these three elements, at first glance, appear to be *in situ*. Scattered in 80% proportion, M25 measured 1.50 m flat long in squares 5B-C. Apart from the general manner of deposition of the deceased in the cemetery (on their backs with stretched parallel legs), no other observation of funerary ritual could be identified. From measurements of the skeletal remains in M22 and M23, it may be securely argued that bones belonged to adult individuals (Pl. 14.3-5).

M26 grave

The gravepit was outlined at a depth of 0.55 m, within squares 2C-D, west of M13, east of M10, south of M3 and north-east of M9. The remains were deposited at a depth of 0.70 m from the northern profile. The gravepit had straight edges, rounded corners and was sized 2 x 0.70 m. The discovered skeleton measured 1.80 m in length. The arms were bent at elbows and palms rested on the abdomen, while the outstretched, parallel legs were slightly deviated to the southeast compared to the body of the deceased (Pl. 15.1-2). A silver earring was discovered on the right side of the skull.

M27, M28, M29, M30, M31, M32, M33 and M62 graves

The graves recorded under above numbers were outlined in the north-western quarter of the excavated area, in squares 1-4A. Except for M31 and M33, the full investigation of the burial finds required the westward extension of the trench S19 by means of squares in the area of the burials, as the profile directly overlapped the graves in question.

The gravepit and bones of the deceased in M27 were noted on the western profile in square 1A. Only the upper half of the skeletal remains was preserved intact, with leg bone fragments (except for a restorable femur) and part of the pelvis bones were found in a secondary position towards the N-W corner of the S19 excavation unit, at a depth comprised between 0.20 and 0.40 m. The gravepit filling was clearly delineated, having a clayish consistency and being black in colour, cutting the archaeological sterile at a depth of 0.45 m. The upper part of the skeleton was discovered in the pit at a depth of 0.60 m and measured 0.70 m long. After Trench 1 was excavated, it was observed that the skull bones were slightly dislodged, most likely due to previous farming (this is also noticeable in

²² In both cases (M20-M21), parts of the human skeletons surviving under the farming layer were dislodged to a small extent also by the mechanical earth removal in the area of squares 7-12 ABC where owing to the very dry soil, the farming layer was detached in lumps. In the mentioned trenches, we only partially removed the soil layer composed of the former farming layer, its lower part being detached by hand. Under such circumstances, the bones of the deceased were partially affected by this factor as well.

the gravepit filling, which in the upper part is of the same colour as the topsoil, but there is a clear consistency difference).

According to the grave goods and based on the discovered jewellery objects, namely three bracelets (a silver bar bracelet and a bronze twisted wire bracelet, both found on the right hand and a bronze bracelet on the left hand) and a silver biconical earring (Fig. 7) on the right side of the skull, the grave presents the richest grave goods identified within the investigated area of the cemetery (Pl. 15.3-6).

The deceased in *M28* was deposited in the gravepit at a depth of 0.70 m and was discovered in square 2A (Pl. 16.4). After the profile was cleaned, at a depth of 0.50 m, two bone fragments were observed in the filling originally believed to be the gravepit of *M28* (there was no clear differentiation between the two features), which later turned out to belong to the tibiae of another deceased (termed *M62*) overlapping the filling of gravepit *M28*. In order to fully investigate the two graves, Trench 2 was excavated and later extended to completely brush the skeletal remains in *M29* and *M30*. This resulted in a square with a length of 2.70 m and width of 1 m in the northern area and 0.50 m in the southern area. *M28*, *M29*, *M30* and *M62* were documented within this (Pl. 16.5).

The stratigraphic relationship given by *M62* and *M28* represents a singular case in the investigated area (Pl. 16.2). The two deceased were deposited in gravepits, the first having a more marked SW-NE deposition deviation. After the skeletal remains in *M26* were brushed and removed, the remains of a wooden plank, about 3-4 cm thick were found below the deceased (Pl. 16.3). The stratigraphic observations show that the two individuals were not deposited concurrently, instead the gravepit of *M62* was excavated down to a depth of 0.50 m from the current surface level, on the same route of gravepit *M28* (2 x 0.80 m), up to the chest area (inasmuch as identified due to the limit of the western profile of *S19*), the distance between the plank and the bones in *M28* being of 0.15 m. The maximum sizes, measured lengths of the skeletons in the gravepits were of 1.40 m (*M62*) and 1.70 (*M28*). Both deceased were found lying on the backs with arms on abdomens (*M62*), and in the case of *M28*, with the right arm on the abdomen and the left arm stretched at the side of the body. Both the position and condition of the skull in *M62* and the unnatural position of the hand and feet bones in *M28* are the result of bio-disturbance, fact noted during the earth removal from the graves. In the north-west corner of the square and respectively north-west of the skull in *M62*, at 0.25 m depth, two human bones conventionally termed *M67* were identified in secondary position (clearly not related to *M28* and *M62*).

M29 emerged south of *M28* and *M62* in the same square. It was found at a depth between 0.50 and 0.60 m. Both the skull and leg bones were found disrupted in the layer, with the remaining intact skeleton measuring 0.88 m in length. The right arm was brought forward to the abdomen and the right hand bent at elbow was found with the palm on the chest.

Trench 3, sized 1 x 0.50 m was excavated for the complete unearthing of grave *M30*. The maximum depth of the grave was 0.65 m and it was outlined south of *M29* in square 3A. The tibiae were discovered in fragmentary state to the east of the intact skeleton, while part of the femurs (the right broken in two since Antiquity) were damaged during manual raking. The length of the skeleton measured on the surface was 1.30 m. The right arm was found at the side of the body, as was the left humerus; the ulna and radius of the same arm were not found in anatomical position.

A skull fragment found in the layer in the western profile of Area 1 in square 3A at a depth of 0.38 m was designated *M31*.

In square 3A, at a depth of 0.55 m, *M32* was discovered. It was 1.60 m long, measured on the surface, with the bones of the tibia and right fibula found in a fragmentary state. The arms' position indicates that the right hand bent at the elbow was placed with the palm on the abdomen and the palm of the left hand on the chest.



Fig. 7. Earring discovered in *M27* grave.

M33 was discovered in square 4A, southeast of M32. The bones, partially disarticulated, were in poor condition, the skeleton measuring 1.52 m in length and 0.58 m width on site. The left arm was laid with the palm on the abdomen and the right arm was brought forward on the chest.

M34 grave

In square 5F, in the area of the eastern profile of S19, at a depth of 0.55 m, the fibula and tibia bones (0.16 m long) of an individual were discovered in anatomical position, which, by size, appear to have belonged to an infant. During the cleaning of the profile, fragments of femur and rib bones were found here and there, which most likely belonged to the same skeletal remains.

M35, M36, M37, M38, M39, M40, M41 and M42 graves (Fig.8)

The inhumations listed above were outlined in the southeast quarter of S19, within squares 6-9FGH in the area next to the eastern profile. The gravepits were outlined at ca. 0.45 - 0.50 m deep, the skeletal remains of the deceased being found at approximately 0.10 - 0.15 m underneath, depending on the excavated area. The archaeological burial features were numbered from north to south, with all eight deceased discovered lying in a supine position with legs stretched in parallel. Except for M42, the deceased had a west-east orientation, with a minor deviation along the NW-SE line (Pl. 17).



Fig. 8. Photography of the M35, M36, M37, M38, M39, M40, M41, M42 graves.

M35 grave

The human skeleton was 1.70 m long measured on the surface and was found in square 6F-G, with the front part of the skull and the right hand in fragmentary condition (they were removed during the scraping subsequent to the earth removal - under the farming layer). The position of the right hand was bent from at the elbow and brought forward with the palm on the abdomen. The maximum depth was 0.55 m in the torso area.

Both gravepits M 36 and M 37 were outlined south and southeast of M.35, at 0.50 m deep, in squares 6FG and 6-7G-H respectively. They were flat rectangular and 2 x 0.75 m in size. The deceased were discovered lying on their backs, with the right arm on the abdomen and left arm at the side of the body, with the palm brought forward to the pelvis area. The skeletons had lengths measured in the gravepit of 1.86 m (M36) and 1.66 m (M37).

M38 grave is an infant grave discovered northwest of M39 in square 8F, at a depth of 0.50 m, in the north-eastern part of grave M39. The arms lay at the side of the body and had a length of 0.70 m.

The gravepit of M39 was excavated at a depth of 0.50 m in square 8FG. It was 2 m long and 0.65 m wide. The deceased is an adult individual put to rest on the back, hands bent at the elbows, palms

brought forward to his shoulders. According to the deposition manner, it is the only case of its kind in the investigated area. The measured length of the skeleton was 1.72 m.

M40 grave (oriented NW-SE) was outlined south of M39 and west of M42 at a depth of 0.45 m. The skeleton was 1.64 m long and 0.40 m wide, with the gravepit in which it was placed measuring 1.90 x 0.60 m. The deceased had the right arm on the abdomen and the left arm (on which two dark blue bracelets made of glass bar were discovered) was placed with the palm in the pelvis area (Fig. 9). To the left of the skull, a bronze temple ring was found.



Fig. 9. Dark blue bracelets made of glass bar discovered in M40 grave.

M41 grave is a disturbed grave (most likely by former ploughing) located in square 9H at a depth of 0.50 m. Part of the ribcage bones and the right humerus were found in anatomical position. The grave cut the filling of feature 1.

M42 grave was discovered without a skull, at a depth of 0.55 m, east of M40 and measured 1.20 m in length. The discovery of an earring (Fig. 10) above the left shoulder indicates that the skull was dislodged after the deceased was placed in the grave. Concurrently, the right tibia and fibula, as well as the right arm, were in an advanced state of fragmentation; in the legs' lower area we identified a bio disturbance on the east-west direction, which affected respective bones. Moreover, the ribcage bones were also showing marked degradation. The right arm was placed with the palm of the hand in the pelvic area.



Fig. 10. Earring discovered in M42 grave.

M43 grave

The gravepit was excavated at a depth of 0.50 m in square 9DE and measured 2 x 0.70 m. The deceased, laid with his arms on his abdomen, had the head tilted to the north and was 1.66 m long in the gravepit (Pl. 18.1-2).

M44 grave

The skeleton, partially disrupted, had dislocated leg bones (a few fragments were found in the farming layer, during the earth removal phase of the archaeological excavation) and a length of 0.85 m measured in plan. It was found in square 10DE at a depth of 0.35 m, the bones being in poor condition. Also, it could be noted that the arms of the deceased were bent at the elbows and laid on the abdomen.

M45 grave

The grave was excavated at a depth of 0.40 m, the gravepit measuring 2.10 x 0.90 m. The skeleton was 1.56 m long, with the right arm stretched at the side of the body and the left arm bent at the elbow and brought to the abdomen (Pl. 19.1-2). The grave goods consisted of a string of glass beads found in the neck area. Due to their very small size, the soil in the head and neck area was removed for flotation in order to recover all the pieces.

M46 grave

The gravepit was excavated at a depth of 0.40 m in square 6B and had straight edges and sizes of 2.10 x 0.80 m. The skeleton was oriented WS-EN and measured 1.45 m long (Pl. 19.3). It was discovered at a depth of 0.50 m from the western profile of the investigated area. During cleaning, it was noted that the grave had been previously disturbed, especially after the atypical position of the arms and the lack or dislocation of some bones from their anatomical position. The deceased had a bronze temple ring on the right side of the head (Pl. 19.4).

M47, M48, M49, M50, M52, M53 and M54 graves

Above-listed numbers (from north-south) represent human skeletal remains found on lines of squares 5-11AB, between ca. 0.20 - 0.40 m depth. Factors such as the presence of human bones rather up (disturbed by former ploughing), the outline of the intact skeleton at the contact between the topsoil and the archaeologically sterile layer (in some cases, the bones were retrieved from the farming layer), the difficult earth removal conditions given by the very dry and compact soil, led to the damage of the graves in different proportions which we shall present below for each case. Also, the hard soil impeded more extensive cleaning of the skeletal remains, as we risked to disarticulate and completely break these from the surface.

M47 grave was outlined near the western profile of S19 at a depth of 0.35 m. A square measuring 0.80 x 0.70 m was excavated to unearth the entire skeleton. The deceased was deposited with the right arm on the abdomen and the left arm in the pelvic area, the skull was tilted to the south. The feet bones (some parts previously broken) have been partially affected by the topsoil removal. The skeleton was 1.50 m long (Pl. 20.1-2).

The remaining intact skeleton (ca. 30%) of *M48* was found at a depth of 0.40 m in square 6A and was ca. 0.70 x 0.40 m (Pl. 20.3).

Partially affected, the human skeletal remains from *M49* occurred in squares 7AB, at a depth of 0.30 m and had a length measured on plan of 1.65 m. When cleaned, it was observed that the head was tilted to the north and the arms were placed with the palms on the abdomen (Pl. 20.4).

The human skeletal remains from *M50* were found in squares 10AB, 0.60 m long and 0.25 m deep. Fragments of the same skeleton were recovered from the farming layer. What we originally believed to be *M51* (at 0.20 m depth), represented the disarticulated bones from the deceased in *M50*.

The length of the skeleton in *M52* was 1.40 m and it was discovered in square 10B, at a depth of 0.30 m. The remaining skeleton was disrupted by ploughing, yet it could be noted that the right arm was placed with the palm on the abdomen (Pl. 20.5).

M53 was outlined south of *M52* and north of *M54* in square 11B at a depth of 0.30 m. Partially disrupted by ploughing, the skeleton was 1.58 m long (Pl. 20.6).

M54 was identified in square 11B, on a length of 0.56 m.

M55, M56, M57 and *M58* labels were given to the clusters of human skeletal remains found in the farming layer at depths that ranged between 0.10 and 0.20 m, in the last two cases fragments of femur, tibia and fibula bones being found on the surface. They were collected separately and marked with a dot on the general plan of S19. Their arrangement within the squares was as follows:

M55 - south-west corner of excavation, square 12A

M56 - near the eastern profile in square 3G

M57 - near the eastern profile in square 2G

M58 - near the eastern profile in square 1G

M59 grave

It was discovered when the northern profile was cleaned, in square 1F, at a depth of 0.65 m. From observations, the right hand was bent at the elbow and was placed with the palm on the abdomen. The bones that remained in their anatomical position were 0.80 m long (Pl. 21.1).

M60-M61 graves

The skeletal remains in the two graves were found within squares 1C-E, being also partially identified in the northern profile of the investigated area, the depth at which they were discovered being ca. 0.45 m respectively, 0.60 m from the current surface. The skeletons were partially disturbed by ploughing, notes on bone sizes seem to indicate infant ages. The grave goods in *M60* consisted of two pierced Roman coins, including a bronze follis dated between AD 351 and 361



Fig. 11. Roman coins discovered in *M60* grave.

(Constantius II)²³, found on the right side of the skull. The sizes of the skeletons on the surface were 1.30 x 0.30 m and 1.10 x 0.30 m (Pl. 22).

M63 grave

Discovered near the southern profile of S19, in squares 11-12EF, the human skeleton was partially disrupted by ploughing and was 1.54 m long. Its pit was outlined at 0.40 m depth and was 2 m long and 0.65 m wide. The arms of the deceased were laid with palms on the abdomen.

M51 grave

Partially plough-disturbed grave, uncovered on a length of 1.40 m, in square 12H, in the south-east corner of the area. It lay southeast of M63 and south of M64. The rest of the bones were found in the farming layer between 0.10 and 0.25 m (Pl. 21.2).

M64 grave

The grave was outlined at 0.45 m depth, near the western profile of the area, in square 11H. The skeleton measured in the gravepit (sized 1.80 x 0.70 m) was 1.60 m long. Partially missing the skull and arms placed with palms on the abdomen (Pl. 21.3-4).

M65 and M66 graves

Both graves were outlined north of M43, in squares 8DE, at a depth of 0.40 m. Gravepit sizes were in both cases 2 x 0.70 m, with the human skeletons within each 1.60 m long. The gravepit of the deceased in M65 cut in the south-east the gravepit of M66 and a burial depth difference of 0.10 cm between the two graves; M65 was buried at 0.50 m and M66 at 0.60 m, depths being related to the eastern profile of area S19. Both deceased were found in supine position with legs stretched in parallel, left hand placed with palm on the abdomen and right hand stretched at the side of the body (Pl. 18.4-5).

Stratigraphic position and chronology of burial finds

With regard to the stratigraphy in the researched perimeter, it evidences three major phases in the horizontal and vertical development of the site (at least in the area excavated in 2022). Thus, the first phase is related to the excavation of feature C1 in the sterile of the area, the second to the culture layer termed Layer 2²⁴ with prehistory material identified between the archaeological sterile (Layer 3) and the farming layer (Layer 1) and, the third phase is represented by the excavation of the gravepits, which cut Layers 2 and 3. Other evidence in this respect is represented by the prehistory potshards found in the filling of the gravepits from the medieval cemetery.

The grave goods discovered in the burials described above date the flat inhumation cemetery of *Țărmuri* by the early Middle Ages in the Banat, sometime between late 11th century and mid-13th century. The items that frame the cemetery to this time span are the jewellery objects (burial accessories) typical to the said chronological horizon, such as the silver or bronze earrings²⁵, the bracelets made of glass bar²⁶, the twisted wire bracelets with hoops by the ends²⁷ and the silver bar bracelets²⁸, artefacts found in the so-called South Danube burial horizon 2²⁹. Moreover, the corroboration of this information with other relative chronology data (pottery specific to the 12th and 13th century) from the settlement investigated to the west and north of the cemetery suggests that the two archaeological sites are contemporary.

²³ Gudea et alii 1997, 84 and Appendix 1.

²⁴ Regarding Layer 2, it is not homogenous throughout Area 1, entirely missing in the south-western quarter. Moreover, clear relationship between Layer 2 and Feature 1 cannot be established (except from its base and the sterile level - ploughing disturbing the indicated area, the cluster of pottery fragments being identified between 0.20 and the clear outline of the feature at 0.50 m depth), except the fact that it is certain that the feature's pit did not cut mentioned Layer. Basically, observations on profiles and *grundisses* show that layer 2 is a geological deposit that over the course of time had also involved prehistory archaeological material. Its upper part was also affected in some areas by former ploughing.

²⁵ Țeicu 1998, 134, 159-160 (astragal earrings) and Țeicu 1998, 135-136, 162 (biconical silver earrings).

²⁶ After 1000, glassware is present on the current Romanian territory coming from the Byzantine south. These are mostly jewellery items (beads, bracelets, buttons and rings). As in the Dobruđa area, the same types of imported products have, with some exceptions, also reached the cemeteries of Banat. Amongst, at least the bracelets do not seem to have exceeded the 13th century. The bracelet type found in Gr.40, with oval section and widened extremities, was discovered in the area of historical Banat between the 12th century and early following century. (Oța 2008, 103; Rusu 2008, 115-116.)

²⁷ Oța 2006, 251, 258; Oța 2019, 227 and Pl. VI.II.2.

²⁸ Oța 2008, p. 105-106

²⁹ Oța 2005, 214, fig.1; Oța 2008, 178.

Conclusions

The results of the rescue archaeological excavation presented above in conjunction with previous archaeological documentation of the area evidence the extensive anthropization during the Middle Ages of the Liubcova Depression, where the Danube had already played its well-known role. It is possible that the sixty-seven graves recorded in the cemetery of Țărmuri belong to the early medieval settlement investigated in the western and northern part of the site³⁰. Both burial rite and ritual documented during the research place the cemetery in the Christian world at the dawn of the Middle Ages. The deceased, facing west-east with slight deviations, were discovered buried in a supine position. Regarding the hands' position, different types of burial rites have been noted, the most common being the variant with arms bent at the elbows and placed with palms on the abdomen, a similar situation found in other cemeteries in the Danube area and not only, dated to the same historical period.

In fact, in the micro-area where the site in question is located, elements of medieval habitat and graves (including those early) have been discovered in sites such as Căunița de Sus, Zomonița, Păzăriște, Ogașul lui Udrescu, Cotul Tomii³¹. Geographically, mentioned archaeological sites together with that of Țărmuri are linked to each other, a fact underlined in the academic literature, namely that all these finds represent the nucleus of the medieval settlement in the area³².

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³⁰ In the current state of research, there is no certainty about this fact, as currently, there is no direct stratigraphic relationship between the settlement and cemetery. The only evidence that indirectly supports the contemporariness of the two habitat types is given by the relative chronological framing provided by the discovered jewellery, which span a fairly wide time period.

³¹ At present, the area indicated by the toponym is inundated by the Danube, previous medieval finds being made only by archaeological surveys. The toponym indicates the area to the right of the flow of the Camenița River into the Danube, a place that lies south-east the archaeological site of Căunița de Jos - *Cetate*.

³² Țeicu, Lazarovici 1996, 44-48.

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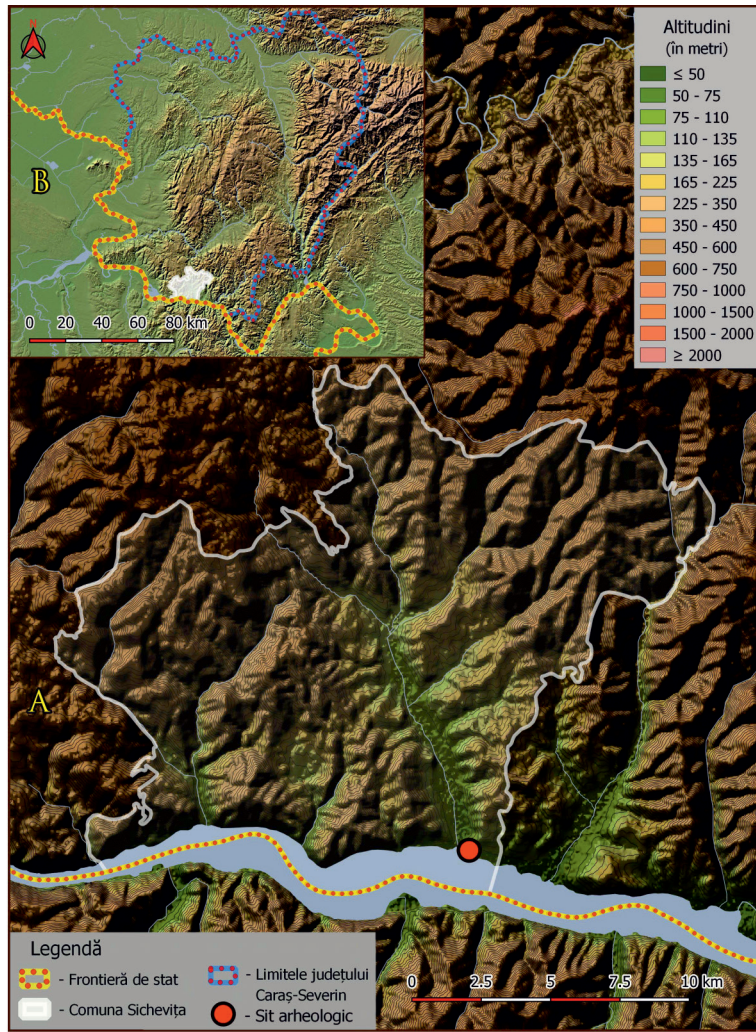


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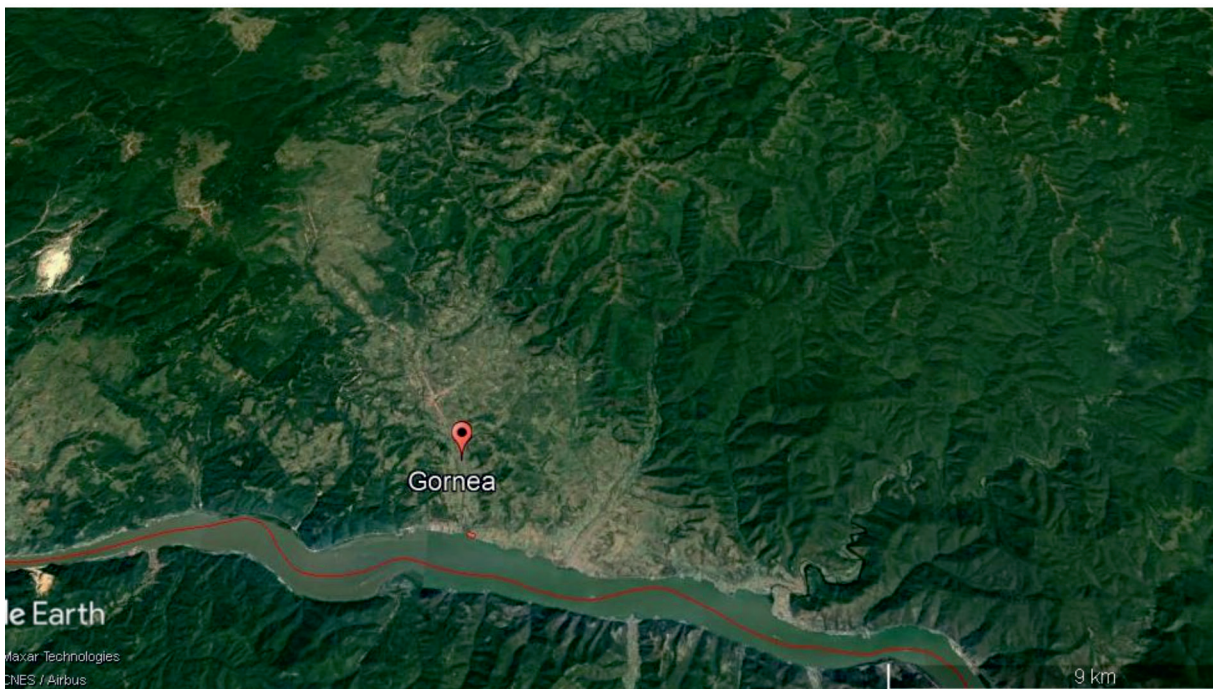


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Plate 1.1. Theoretical delimitation of the site Gornea - Țărmuri;
1.2. Archaeological site - photo from the northeast and the excavation area indicated with black arrow.

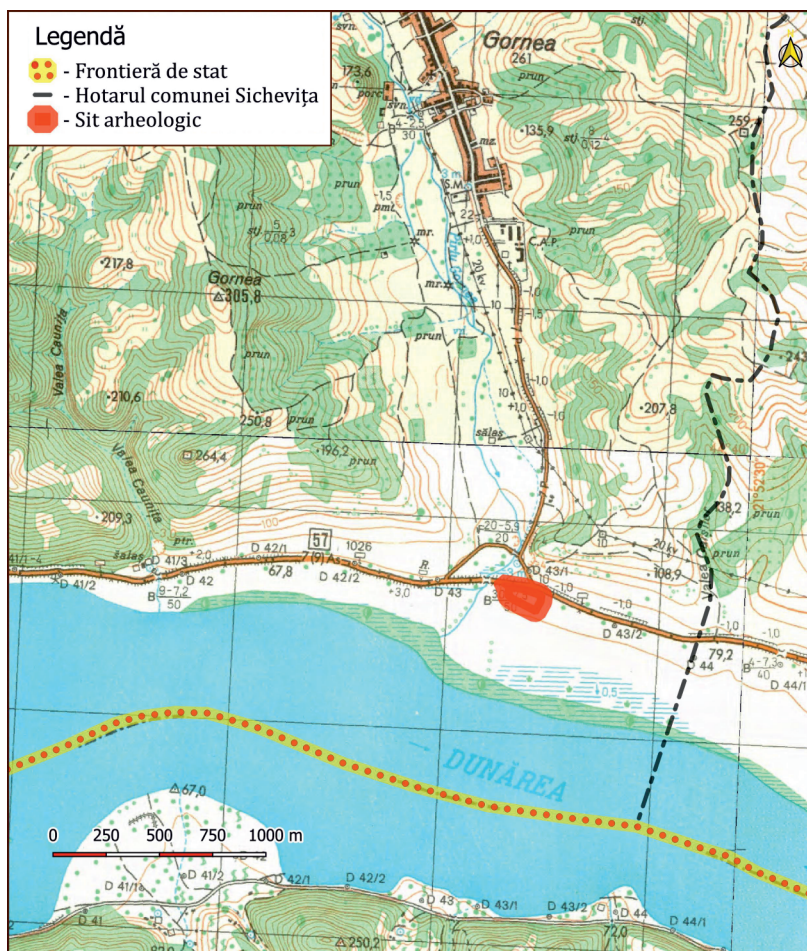


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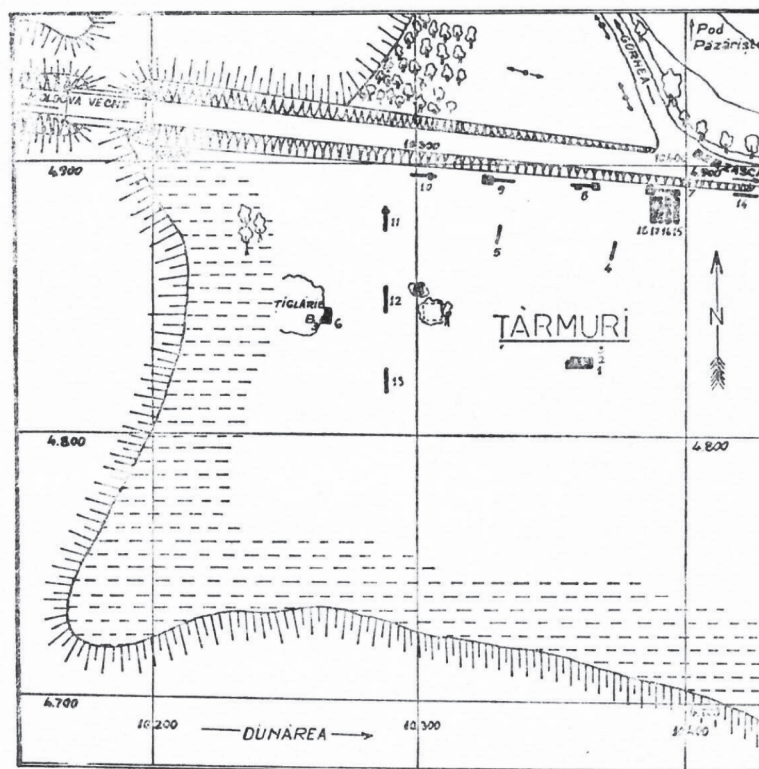


2

Plate 2. The location of the site at Gornea – *Țărmuri* within the commune of Sichevița and the Liubcovei Depression.



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Plate 3.1. The current perimeter of the site shown on a pre-1970 map;
 3.2. Archaeological excavation plan up to 1978 (after Gumă 1979, 149, Pl. XIII).

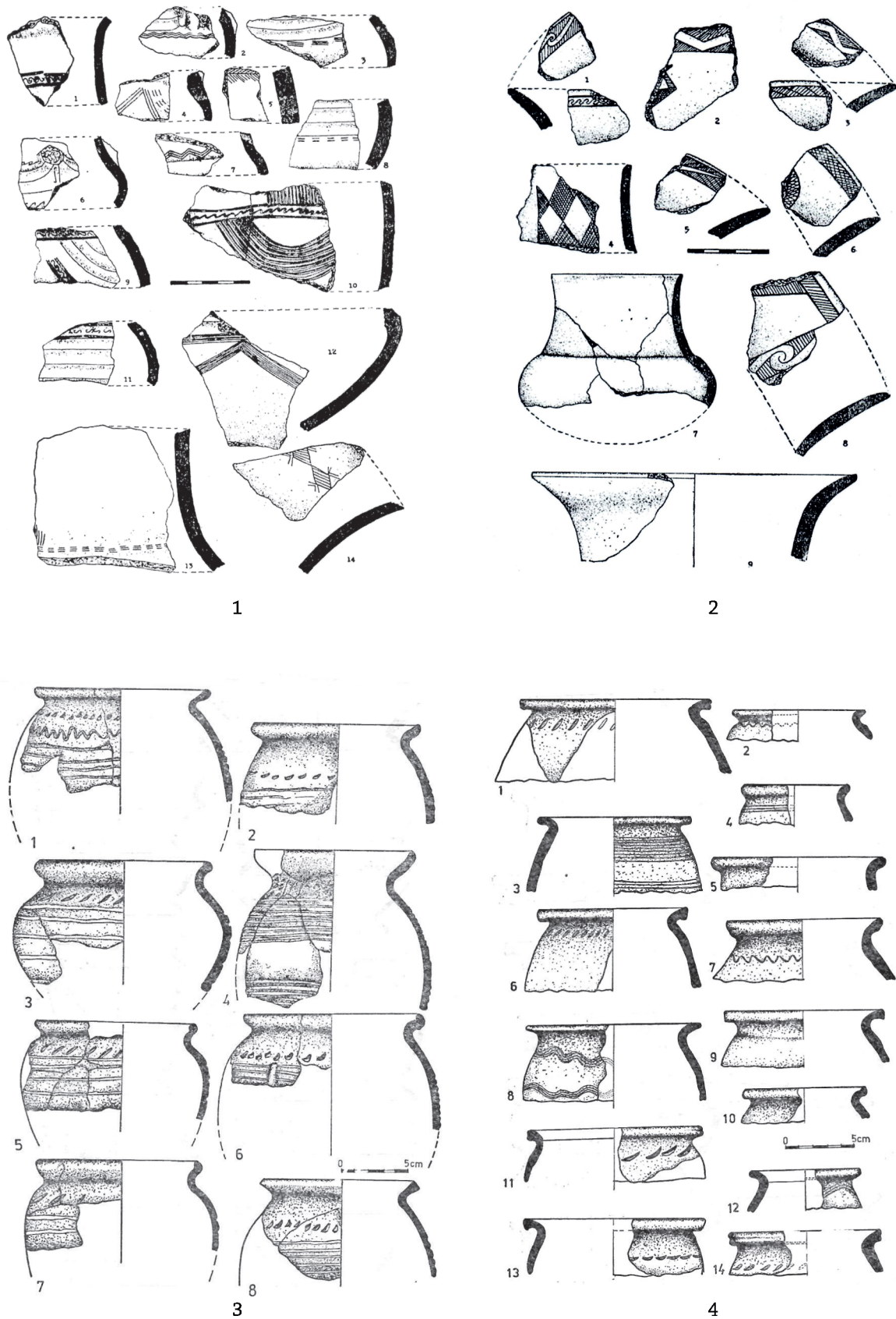
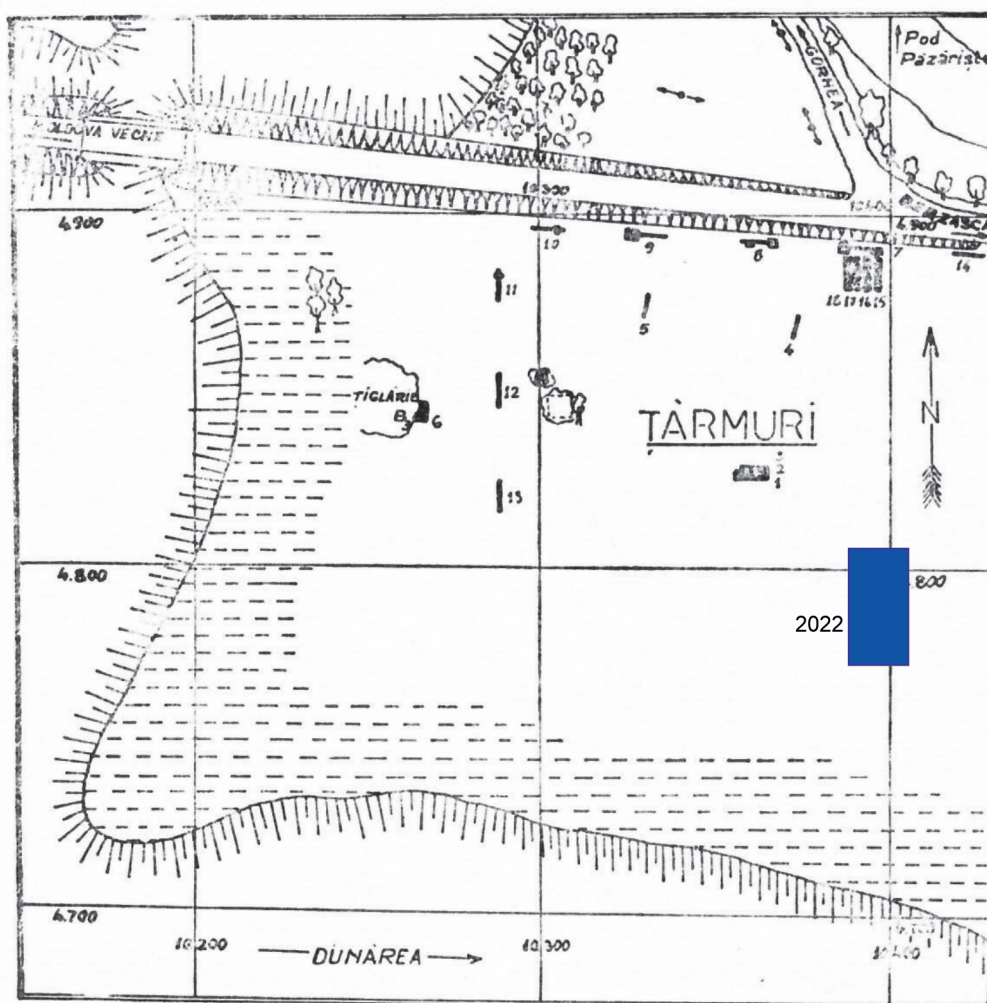


Plate 4.1. Iron Age pottery, Țărmuri level I (after Gumă 1979, 157, Pl. XXII); 4.2. Iron Age pottery, Țărmuri level I (after Gumă 1979, 164, Pl. XXIX); 4.3. 12th century pottery from Gornea – Țărmuri (after Țeicu, Lazarovici 1996, 74, Fig. 42); 4.4. 12th century pottery from Gornea – Țărmuri (after Țeicu, Lazarovici 1996, 76, Fig. 44).

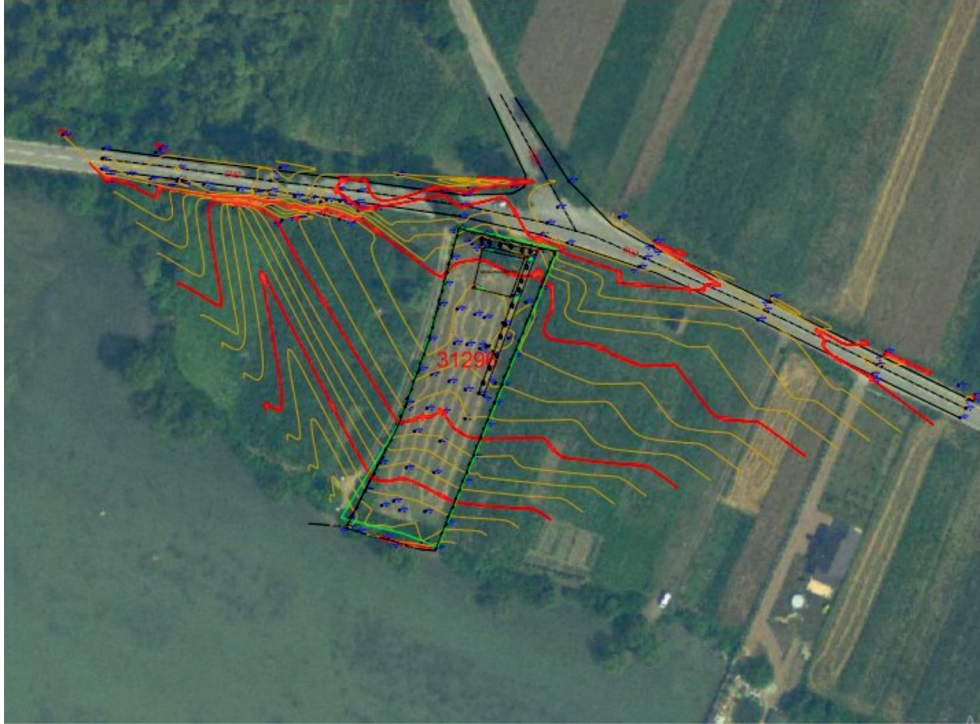


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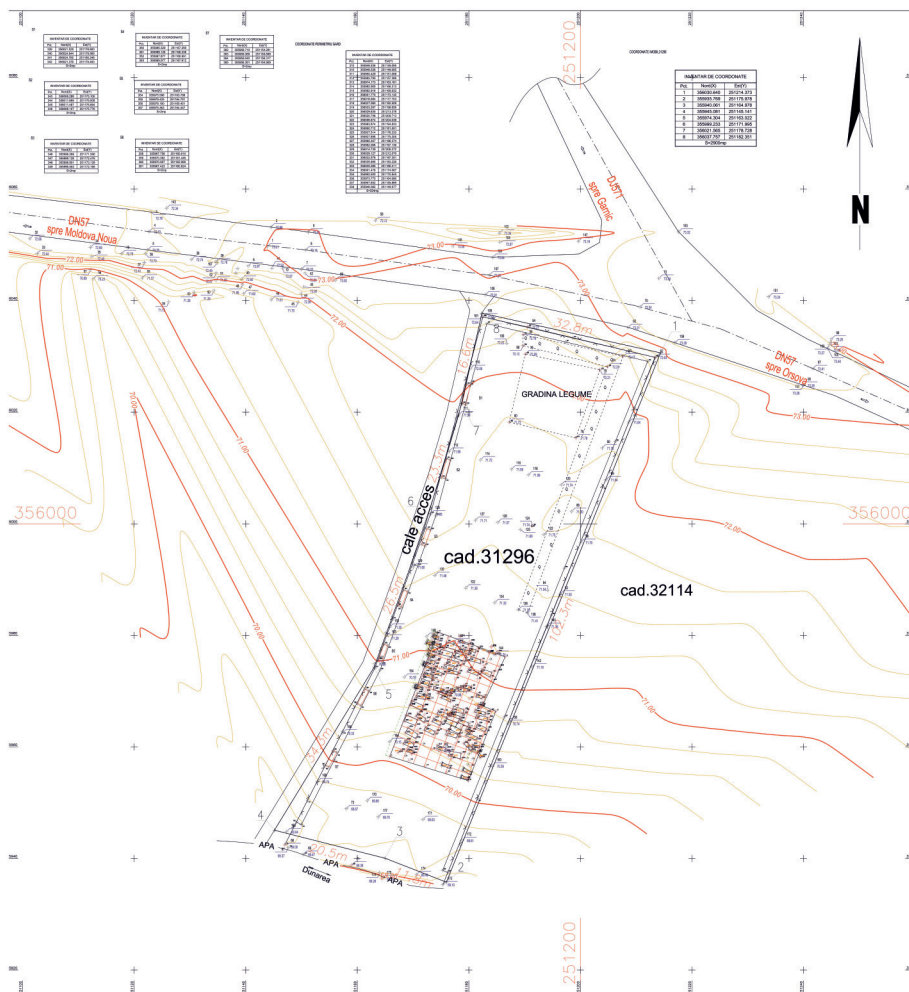


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Plate 5.1. The location of the 2022 archaeological excavation; 5.2. The 2022 archaeological excavation (S19) displayed on the general plan of the site published in 1979.



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Plate 6. The S19 surface within the cadastral area on which the archaeological excavation was carried out.

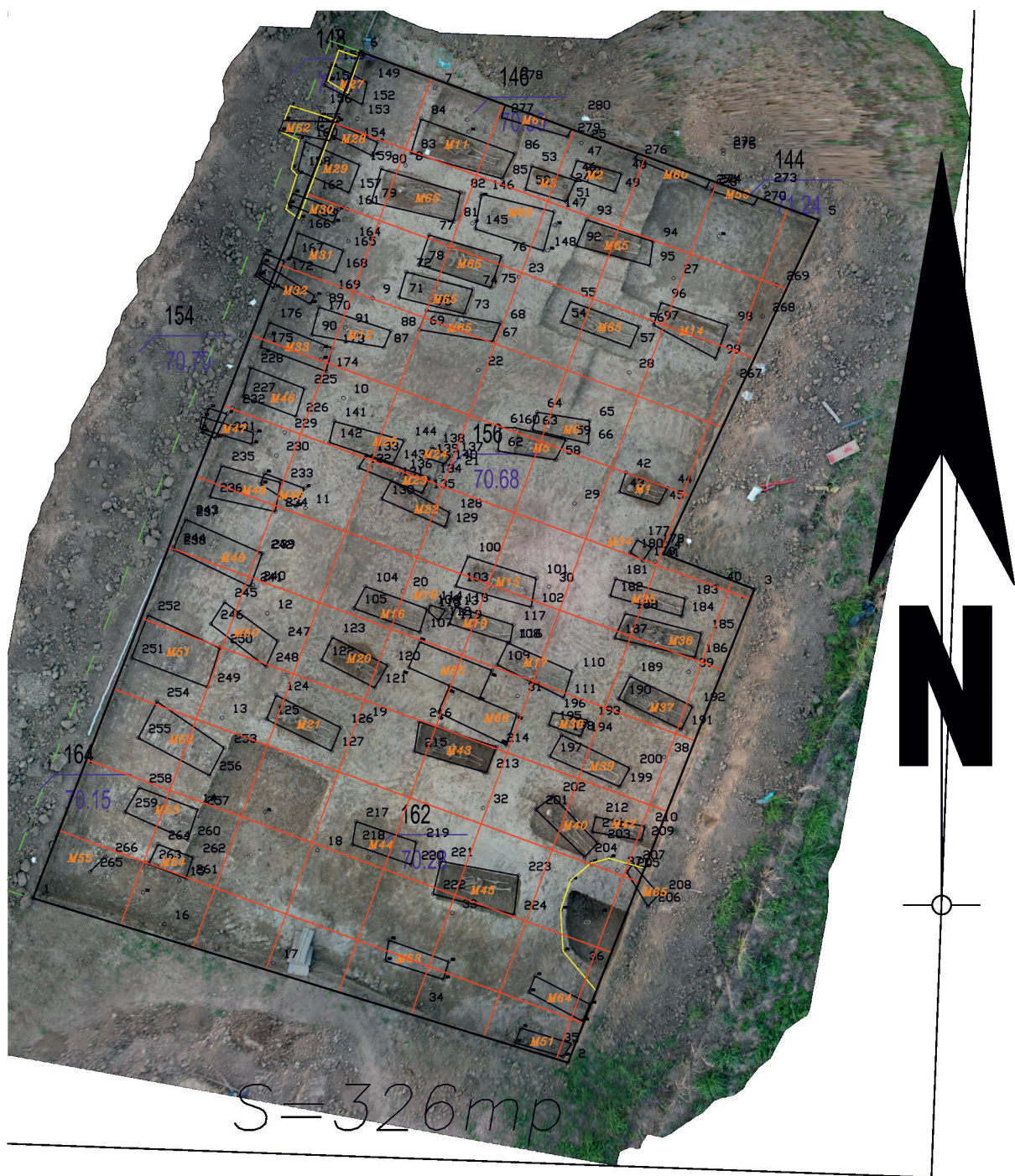


Plate 7. Topographical plan of the excavation.

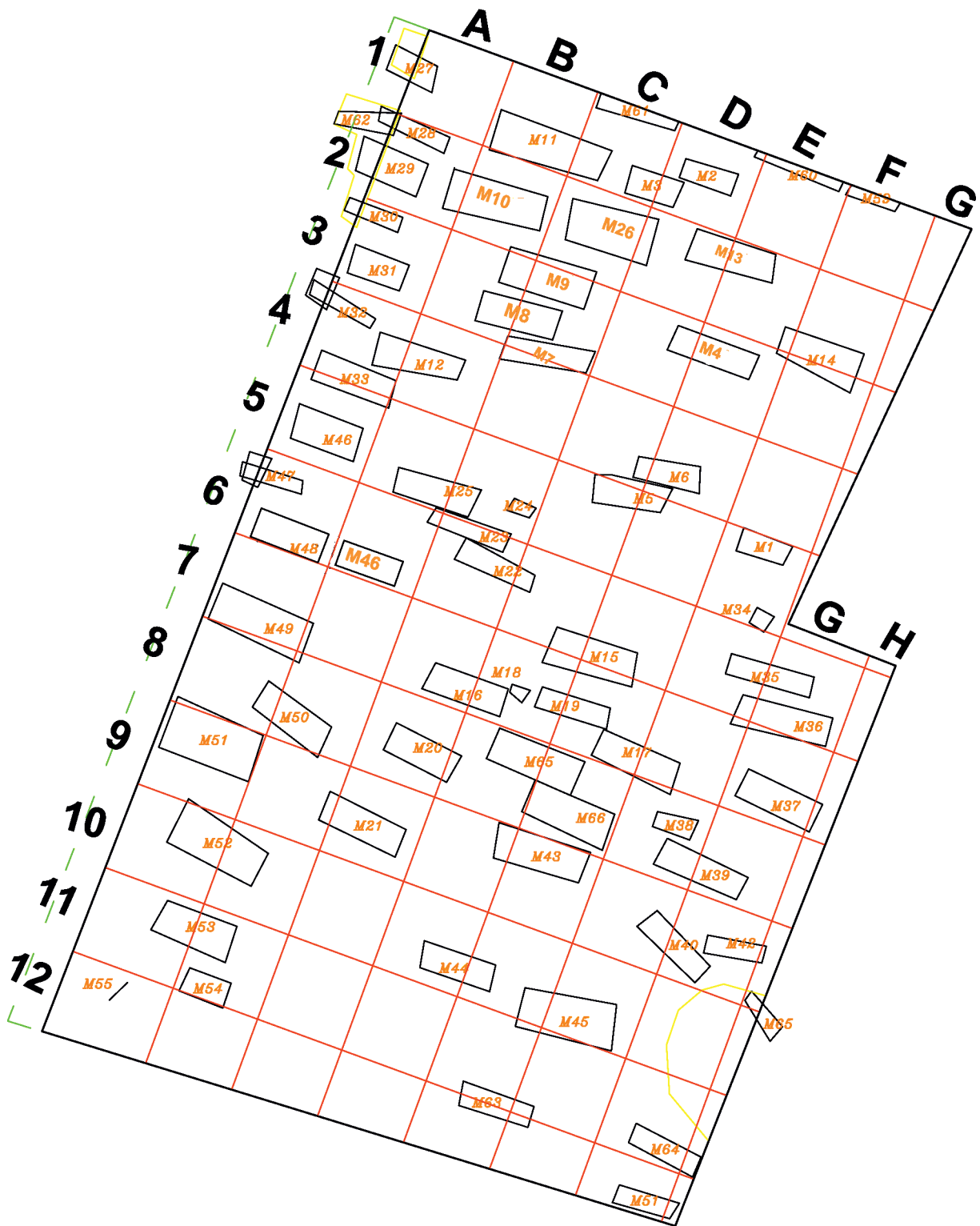


Plate 8. Overall plan of the medieval cemetery.



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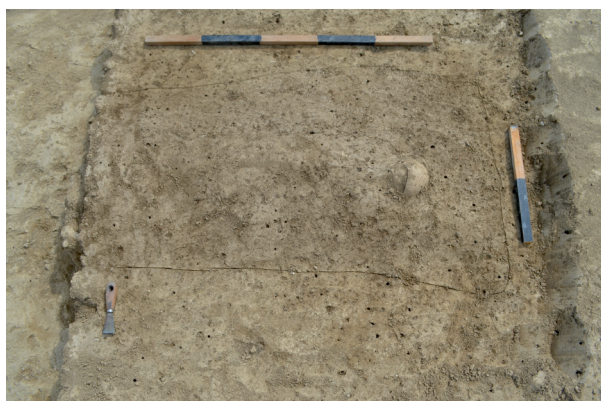


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Plate 9.1. Photograph of the M1 grave; 9.2. Photograph of the M2-M3 graves; 9.3. Photograph of the M5-M6 graves.



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Plate 10.1. Photograph of the M4 grave; 10.2. Photograph of the M13 grave (outline); 10.3. Photograph of the M13 grave; 10.4. Photograph of the M12 grave; 10.5. Photograph of the M14 grave.



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Plate 11. 1-2. Photographs of the M7-M11 graves.



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Plate 12.1. Photograph of the M7 grave; 12.2. Photograph of the M8 grave;
12.3. Photograph of the M9 grave (outline); 12.4. Photograph of the M10 grave; 12.5. Photograph of the M11 grave;
12.6. Photograph of the M10 grave (detail).



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Plate 13.1. Photograph of the M15 grave; 13.2. Photograph of the M16 grave; 13.3. Photograph of the M17 grave; 13.4. Photograph of the M18 and M19 graves; 13.5-13.6. Photographs of the M18 grave.



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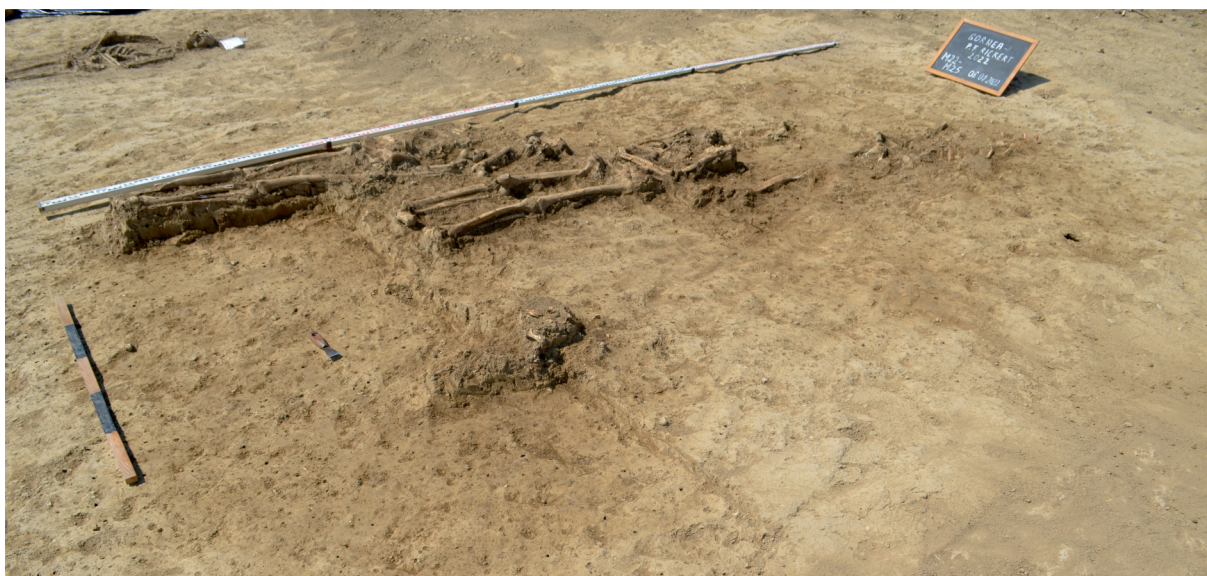
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Plate 14.1. Photograph of the M20 grave; 14.2. Photograph of the M21 grave; 14.3. Photograph of the M22-M23 graves; 14.4-14.5. Photographs of the M22-M25 graves.



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Plate 15.1-15.2. Photographs of the M26 grave; 15.3 - 15.6. Photographs of the M27 grave.



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Plate 16.1. Photograph of the M29, M62 and M28 graves; 16.2. Photograph of the M28 and M62 graves; 16.3. Photographic detail of the M62 grave; 16.4. Photograph of the M28 grave; 16.5. Photograph of the M32, M30 and M28 graves.



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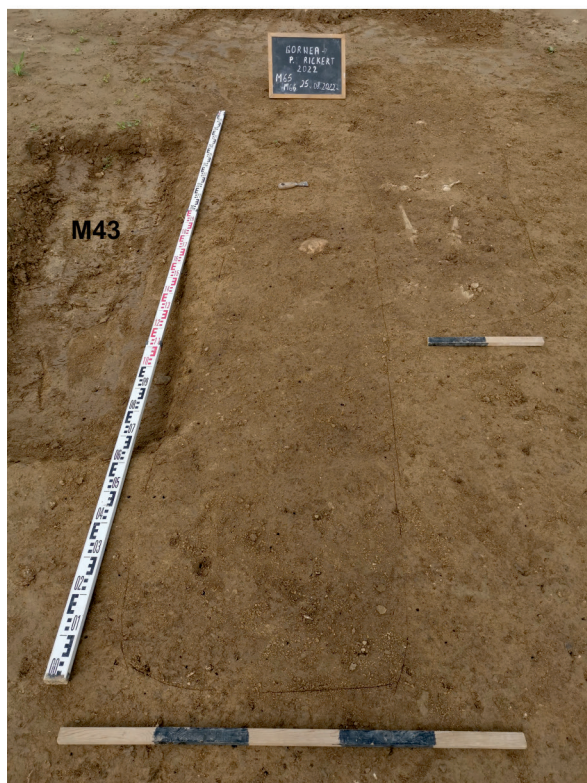
Plate 17.1-17.3. Photographs of the M35-M37 graves; 17.4. Photographs of the M38, M39, M40 and M42 graves; 17.5. Photographs of the M39 grave; 17.6. Photographs of the M40 and M42 graves.



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Plate 18.1. Photograph of the M43 grave (outline); 18.2. Photograph of the M43 grave;
18.3. Photograph of the M65-M66 graves (outline); 18.4. Photograph of the M65-M66 graves.



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Plate 19.1. Photograph of the M45 grave (outline); 19.2. Photograph of the M45 grave; 19.3. Photograph of the M46 grave; 19.4. Photograph of the M46 grave (detail).



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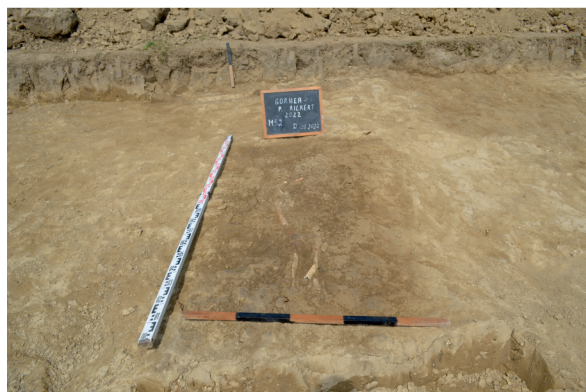
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Plate 20.1-20.2. Photographs of the M47 graves; 20.3. Photograph of the M48 grave; 20.4. Photograph of the M49 grave; 20.5. Photograph of the M52 grave; 20.6. Photograph of the M53 and M54 graves.



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Plate 21.1. Photograph of the M59 grave; 21.2. Photograph of the M51 grave; 21.3-21.4. Photographs of the M64 grave.



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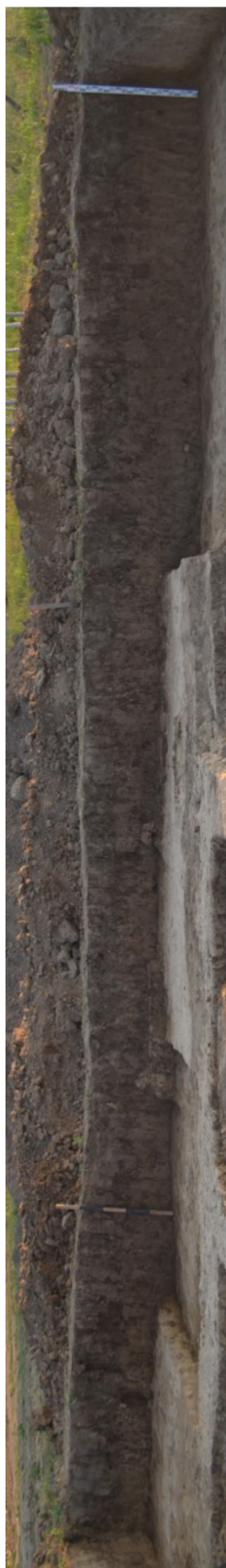


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Plate 22.1. Photograph of the M60-61 graves; 22.2. Photograph of the M60 grave;
22.3. Photograph of the M60 grave (detail).



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Plate 23.1. North profile photograph of the S19 surface; 23.2. Final photograph of the S19 surface (from the north).

