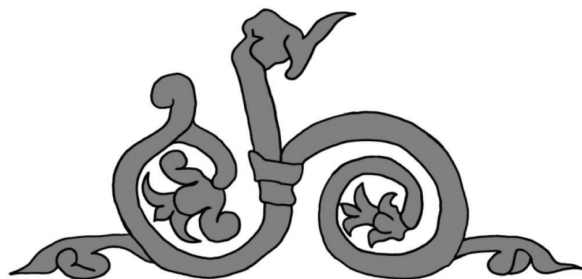


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Old and New Archeological Researches Regarding the Early Medieval Habitat in Sylvanian Basin^{*}

Dan Băcuet-Crișan, Sanda Băcuet-Crișan

Abstract: Through the present paper we wish to stress, yet again, the importance of ground researches in the identification of new archaeological objectives but mainly the need to repeat such researches in areas with archaeological potential known from specialized literature. Among all types of archaeological investigations, ground research is and still remains the easiest (including from a financial perspective) method of archaeological research. By intensely employing this method in a geographic micro-area one can considerably enrich the scientific data on human habitation during various historical stages.

Keywords: archaeological researches, early medieval habitat, Sylvanian Basin, ground researches, artifacts.

Introduction

The goal of the present paper is to introduce to the scientific circuit an archaeological objective recently identified through ground researches and certain artifacts recently discovered on archaeological spots already known from specialized literature, but also to discuss again an older discovery that has not been scientifically valorized until now.

Ground research in the fortification from Zalău “Valea Răchișorii/Pálvár”

(Pl. 1/c, no. 1)

The site in Zalău “Valea Răchișorii/Pálvár” is located on the territory of the city of Zalău at the feet of Meseș Mountains, at the end of Crasna St., in the precinct of the former military tank shooting range, towards the village of Aghireș. As one knows, this archaeological objective includes three distinct elements: an inhumation cemetery, a settlement and a fortification. Several archaeological research campaigns have been performed there, in 1989, 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003¹.



Fig. 1. The site in Zalău “Valea Răchișorii/Pálvár” (taken from Băcuet-Crișan 2015).

^{*} English translation: Ana M. Gruia.

¹ Băcuet-Crișan 2014, 38, 49–50.

In the summer of 2015 we have performed new ground researches in the precinct of the early medieval fortification that have led to the discovery of early medieval pottery fragments (Pl. 2/1). The items were found in the southern part of the fortification, near the access road into the fortification, an area that had been partially excavated during the 2003 research campaign².

The shards are part of the same pot (Pl. 2/2), i.e. the upper part of a large handleless cooking pot (diameter of the mouth 28 cm), grayish black in color, almost black. The pot has been modeled on the slow potters' wheel from fabric containing sand with small pebbles and mica flakes as temper materials. The pot's rim is flared, faceted and with the edges slightly rounded. The neck and shoulder are strongly arched. The decoration was made through incision in the soft fabric and consists of straps of wide straight lines, horizontal, traced almost parallel to each other, in a careless manner.

Though several ground researches and two archaeological excavation campaigns have been performed during 2002–2003, so far only a few pottery fragments were found³. The best formal analogies for this pot can be noted in the cemetery from Alba Iulia "Str. Brândușei" – from the phase dated to the 10th century⁴. Taking into consideration the low number of artifacts discovered so far in this fortification, the discovery of these pottery fragments brings extra data on the possible chronological determination of the objective. Naturally, their presence does not solve the chronology of the fortification but, as previously stated, one cannot exclude the possibility that the three monuments (the settlement, the cemetery and the fortification) were contemporary⁵.



Fig. 2. The site in Zalău "Valea Răchișorii/Pălvăr". Satellite view (taken from Băcuet-Crișan 2015).

Ground researches in the perimeter of the tumular incineration necropolis in Nușfalău (municipality of Nușfalău) (Pl. 1/c, no. 2)

The tumular incineration necropolis from Nușfalău is located on the second terrace of River Barcău (on its left bank), on the spot called "Vulpiște/Halmakpataka". This archaeological objective is very well known in specialized literature and several stages of archaeological researches were performed there: in 1878 Mattyasovszky researched a tumulus, in 1879 K. Torma researched another tumulus, in 1880 J. Hampel researched one of the large tumuli and in 1958 M. Comșa researched three more tumuli⁶. From an ethnic perspective the incineration tumular necropolis from Nușfalău has been connected to the arrival of a group of Western Slavs⁷ with Avar influences. At that time, the necropolis was dated

² Băcuet-Crișan 2014, 50.

³ Băcuet-Crișan 2014, 50.

⁴ Dragotă *et al.* 2009, Pl. 17/3.

⁵ Băcuet-Crișan 2015, 17–19.

⁶ Comșa 1961, 519–528.

⁷ Comșa 1961, 527.

to the 8th century – beginning of the 9th century, chronologically later than the one in Someșeni, dated around year 800⁸.

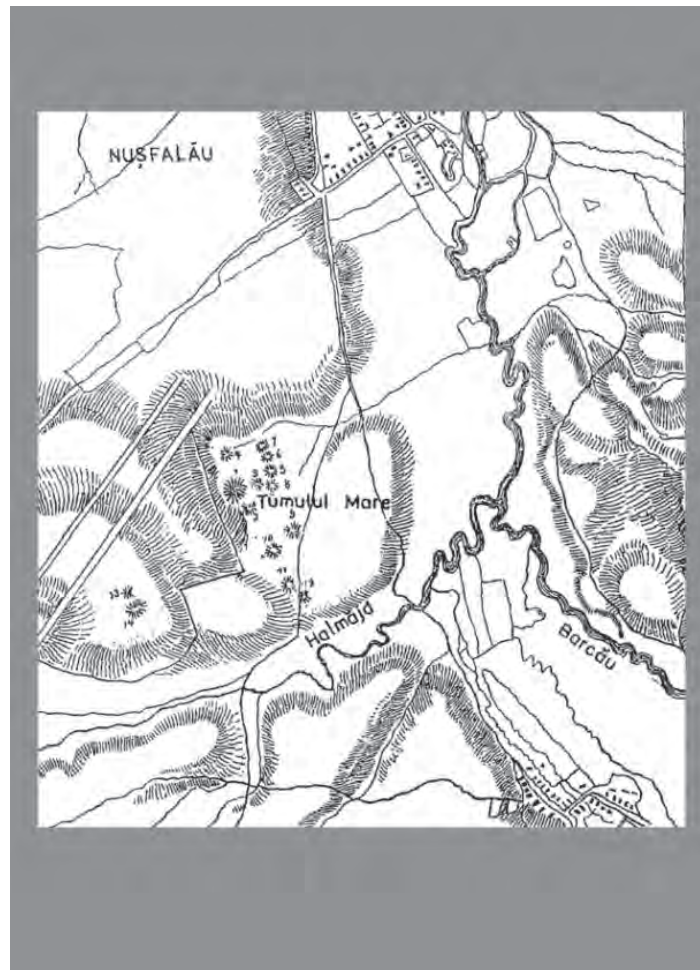


Fig. 3. Nușfalău “Vulpiște/Halmakpataka”. Ground plan of the tumular necropolis by J. Hampel (taken from Hampel 1881 and Cosma 2002).

In a 1999 study I. Stanciu suggested that this necropolis should be dated to the first half of the 8th century⁹ arguing in support of the idea the fact that a group of Eastern Slavs was present. Ever since the researches in Someșeni, M. Macrea has noted in these tumuli ritual practices that have analogies in the Eastern Slavic environment¹⁰.

In 2014 and 2015 we have performed ground researches in order to recover possible artifacts revealed by the agricultural works performed on the fields where the tumular necropolis is located. From the plowing layer we have recovered several early medieval small pottery fragments, brick-reddish brown, pieces of adobe and three highly corroded iron artifacts:

- Iron buckle, rectangular in shape, rectangular in section (Pl. 4/1a–1b).
- Fragment from an iron artifact with a perforation (Pl. 4/2).
- Fragment from an iron artifact (Pl. 4/3). Probably from the metal edges of a knife scabbard (?).

During the ground research we have also identified three other small tumuli (flattened by the agricultural works) that are located on the left side of the Nușfalău-Plopiș road (Pl. 3/2). These tumuli are practically unpublished as following the ground plan of the tumular cemetery created by J. Hampel one notes that out of the 14 tumuli that he saw at that time 13 tumuli are located on the right side of the Nușfalău-Plopiș road and only 1 on the left side of the road (Pl. 3/1). Even if her researches are more recent, Maria Comșa did not observe other tumuli in other areas either. This can be due to the

⁸ Macrea 1959, 515.

⁹ Stanciu 1999, 257–258, 261–262. See also discussions in Cosma 2001, 334.

¹⁰ Macrea 1959, 520.

characteristics of the terrain, their marginal position in relation to the necropolis and the existence of trees recently removed from the plots in question that have been recently introduced to the agricultural circuit.

In conclusion, this discovery strengthens the presumption that the initial number of tumuli was greater and the surface initially covered by the necropolis was wider. Naturally, we do not exclude the possible existence of other tumuli located in the margins of the necropolis that now can hardly be identified on site.

Ground researches inside the borders of the village of Bozieș (municipality of Boghiș) (Pl. 1/c, no. 3)

Early medieval vestiges have also been discovered inside the borders of the village of Bozieș. These were identified through ground researches that we performed in 1998–1999¹¹. Our 2014 and 2015 researches envisaged a terrace on the right side of Creek Drighiu that flows into River Barcău.



Fig. 4. Bozieș (municipality of Boghiș). Location of the early medieval site (X).

On the surface of the plowed soil we have noted blackish spots (some rectangular in shape) that contained archaeological material mixed with mica-schist blocks and river rocks from the fire installations destroyed by the agricultural works.

From these archaeological contexts we have recovered several pottery fragments from handles cooking pots and small trays. The handleless cooking pots have been modeled on the slow or fast potters' wheel and are brick-red brown, blackish brown and brick-red yellow in color. Their fabric was tempered with sand and pebbles mixed with mica. The few tray fragments were modeled by hand from fabric tempered with sand and mica flakes. They are yellowish brick-red in color. Several fragments of handleless cooking pots modeled on the slow or fast potters' wheel are decorated through incision in the soft fabric with wavy lines and straps consisting of straight lines. The technological and formal characteristics of the pottery fragments discovered on this spot indicate that the habitation can be dated to the eighth-ninth century.

¹¹ Băcuet-Crișan 2000, 522–523; Băcuet-Crișan 2007, 54–55; Băcuet-Crișan 2014, 121–122.

Older discoveries from the border of the village of Popeni (municipality of Mirșid) (Pl. 1/c, no. 4)

The results of archaeological researches performed in the settlement from Popeni “Pe pogor” (municipality of Mirșid) have been presented in the specialized literature on various occasions¹². The first archaeological researches on this site have been performed by the late archaeologist Al. V. Matei (of History and Art County Museum-Zalău) in 1978–1979¹³. These were followed by the rescue archaeological excavations (performed in 1999) determined by the works for the introduction of the gas pipeline between Jibou and Zalău¹⁴.



Fig. 5. Location of the site in Popeni “Pe pogor” (taken from Băcuet-Crișan 2006).

Despite the fact that the archaeological material discovered there has been presented in several scientific publications, one bone artifact has not enjoyed sufficient attention.

The artifact in question was discovered in 1979 in the area of some archaeological complexes destroyed by agricultural works. The artifact is a flat animal bone (shoulder bone) that is, on closer inspection, decorated on one side (Pl. 5). The decoration has been incised with a sharp object and consists of a strap made of two parallel straight lines that flank small oblique incisions that somewhat suggest a torsade (Pl. 5). Unfortunately the item has been broken of old and thus one does not know how the complete ornament looked like or what the original shape of the item was; it is thus difficult to determine its function.

Such artifacts are extremely rare. The artifact from Popeni “Pe pogor” is the second¹⁵ decorated bone item dated to the early medieval period discovered in Sylvanian Basin. To the best of our knowledge, no such early medieval discoveries have been made in the north-western part of Romania.

Bone processing in early medieval settlements is attested by the various categories of tools made of animal bones and antlers. Some of these artifacts are also decorated through incision with various decorative elements. Such items have been signaled in varied cultural and geographic environments. We mention those discovered in the Avar Age cemeteries from Vác-Kavicsbánya¹⁶, Budapest¹⁷, Orosháza¹⁸ or in the Carolingian Age cemetery from Sopronkőhida¹⁹. An item similar to the one from

¹² Matei 1979, 483–484; Stanciu, Matei 1994, 135–163; Băcuet-Crișan 2006, 9–27.

¹³ Matei 1979, 483–484; Stanciu, Matei 1994, 135–163.

¹⁴ Băcuet-Crișan 2006, 9–27.

¹⁵ Băcuet-Crișan *et al.* 2009, Pl. 191/8.

¹⁶ Tettamanti 2000, Taf. 11/228/3;

¹⁷ Nagy 1998, Taf. 97/A/1, Taf. 123/25/9.

¹⁸ Juhász 1995, Taf. XIX/97/1.

¹⁹ Török 1973, Pl. 11/1–2.

Popeni (regarding the decorative element) is the animal horn discovered in the Avar Age cemetery in Szarvas-Grexa-Téglagyár FO 68, decorated with a torsade motif consisting of scales²⁰. From the territory of Romania we should mention the decorated bone artifacts found in Alba Iulia²¹, Sucidava²², Epureni²³, Dănești²⁴ etc.

Conclusions

Among all types of archaeological investigations, ground research is and remains the easiest (the financial perspective included) manner of archaeological research. By intensely using this method in a geographic micro-region one can considerably enrich the set of scientific data on human habitations during various historical stages. We wish to stress the importance of performing ground researches in order to identify new archaeological objectives, but especially their repetition in area with archaeological potential already known from specialized literature.

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²⁰ Juhász 2004, Taf. XIX/156/1.

²¹ Ciugudean 2006, 111/68–69.

²² Teodor 1996, Fig. 29.

²³ Teodor 1996, Fig. 30/1–5.

²⁴ Teodor 1996, Fig. 30/11.

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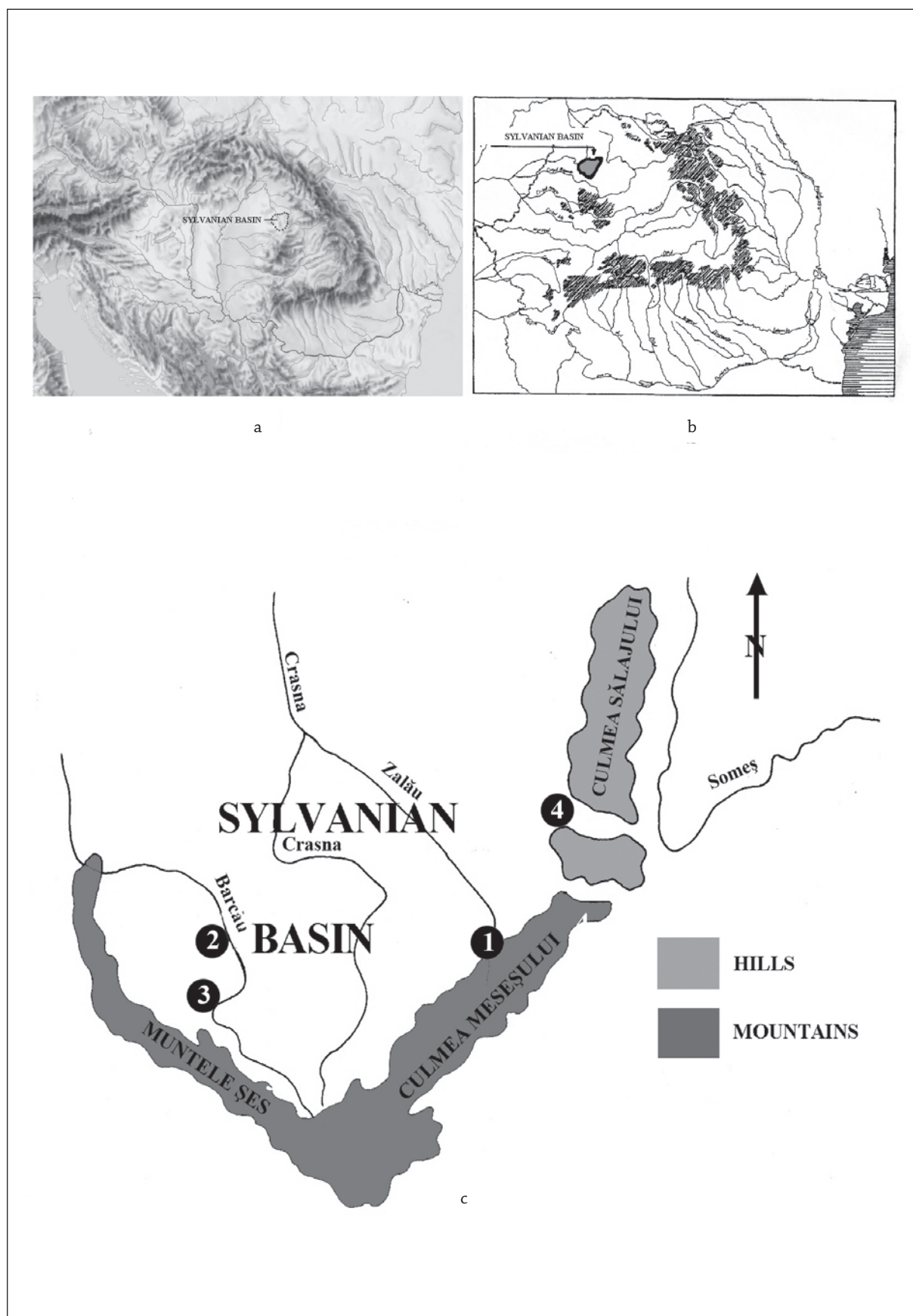


Plate. 1. Sylvanian Basin. Localization.

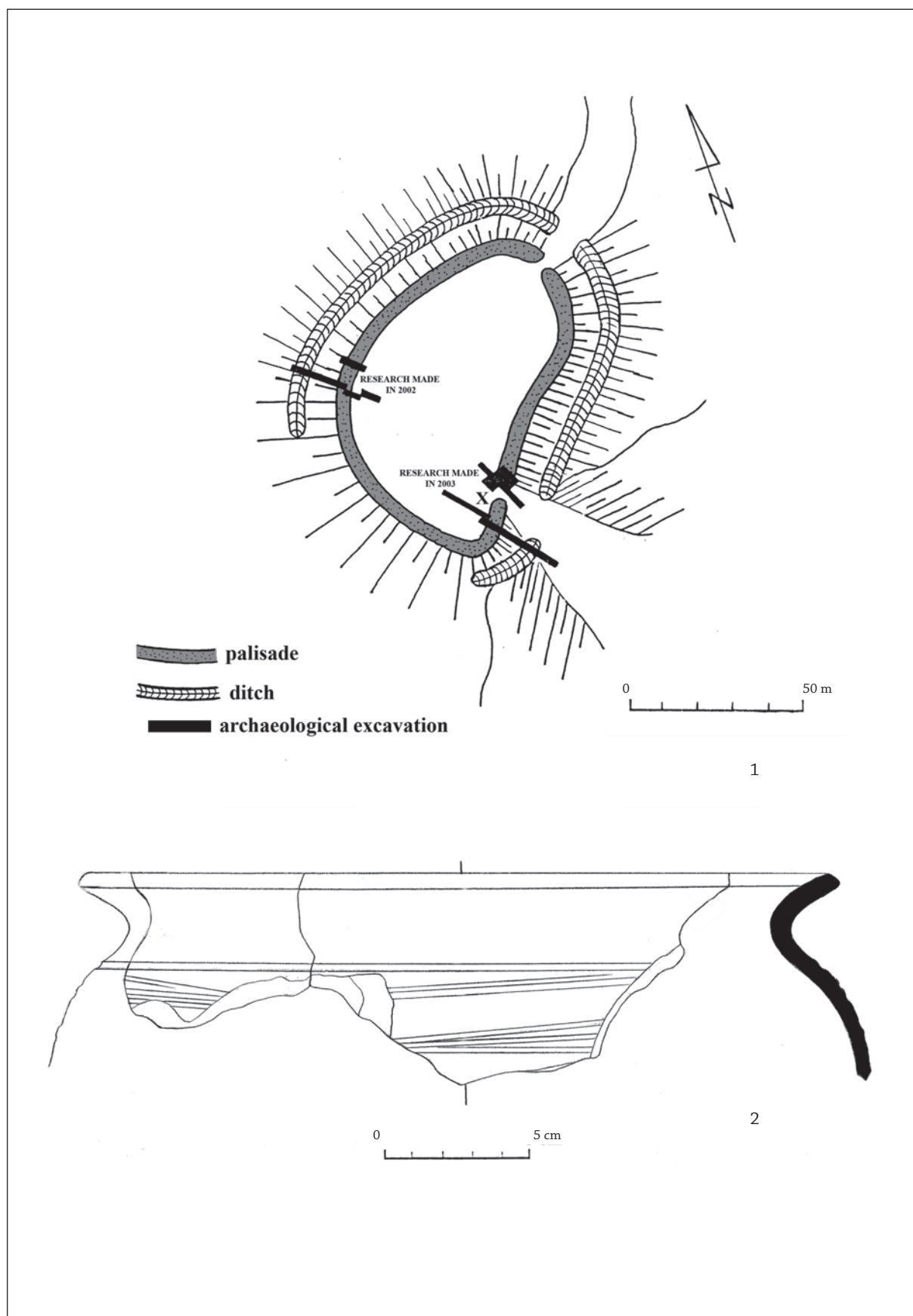
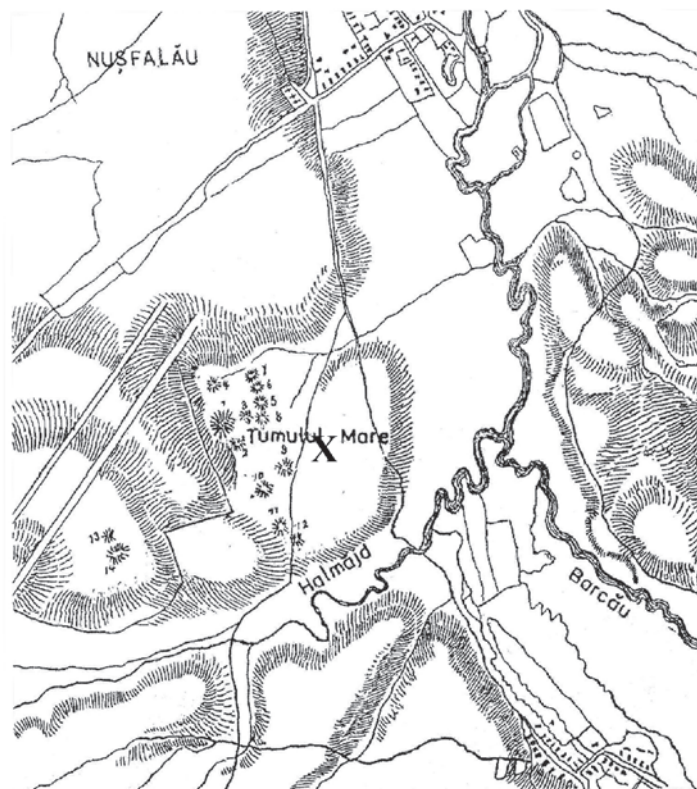


Plate 2. Zalău "Valea Răchișorii/Pălvar". (1) Ground plan of the early medieval fortification (taken from Băcșeș-Crișan 2014) with the location of the discovery (X); (2) Pottery.



1



2

Plate 3. Nușfalău “Vulpiște/Halmak pataka”. (1) Ground plan of the tumular necropolis by J. Hampel (taken from Hampel 1881 and Cosma 2002) with the area of the recently discovered tumuli (X); Satellite image with the location of the three recently discovered tumuli (T1, T2, T3).

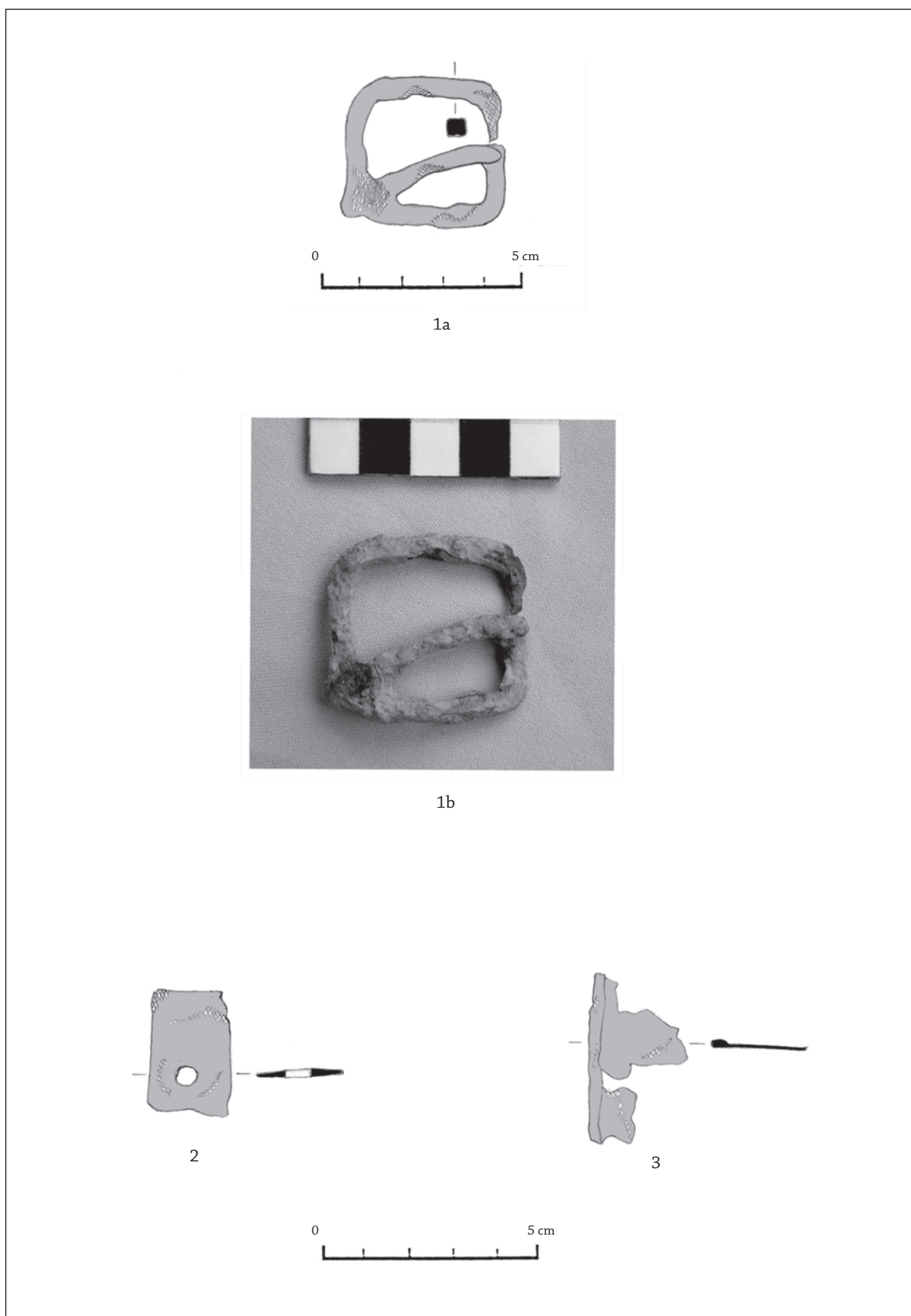
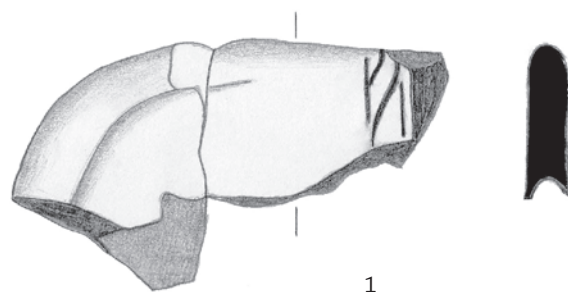


Plate 4. Nușfalău “Vulpiște/Halmak pataka”. (1a–1b) Iron buckle; (2–3) Iron artifacts.



2a



2b

Plate 5. Popeni "Pe pogor". Bone artifact with incised decoration (1. drawing; 2a–2b. photo).

Abbreviations

Acta Ant et Arch Suppl	Acta Antiqua et Archaeologica Supplementum. Szeged.
AAC	Acta Archaeologica Carpathica. Krakow.
ACMIT	Anuarul Comisiunii monumentelor istorice. Secția pentru Transilvania. Cluj.
ActaArchHung	ActaArchHung Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae. Budapest.
AEM	Archäologische Epigraphische Mitteilungen aus Österreich-Ungarn.
AIIA Cluj	Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie. Cluj.
AMP	Acta Musei Porolissensis. Zalău.
ATF	Acta Terrae Fogarasiensis. Făgăraș.
ATS	Acta Terrae Septemcastrenses. Sibiu.
Agria	Agria. Annales Musei Agriensis. Az egri Dobó István Vármúzeum évkönyve. Eger.
AnB S.N.	Analele Banatului. Timișoara.
ArchÉrt	Archaeologiai Értesítő. A Magyar Régészeti és Művészettörténeti Társulat tudományos folyóirata. Budapest.
ArchJug	Archaeologia Iugoslavica
Arh. Pregled	Arheološki Pregled. Arheološko Društvo Jugoslavije. Beograd.
AM	Arheologia Moldovei. Iași.
AMN	Acta Musei Napocensis. Cluj-Napoca.
ArchRozhl	Archeologické Rozhledy. Praga.
ASMB	Arheologia Satului Medieval din Banat. Reșița 1996.
BAM	Brvkenthal Acta Mvsei. Sibiu.
BAR Int. Ser.	British Archaeological Reports. International Series. Oxford.
BCMI	Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice.
BerRGK	Bericht der RömischGermanischen Kommission, Frankfurt a. Main.
BHAB	Bibliotheca Historica et Archaeologica Banatica. Timișoara.
BMB. SH	Biblioteca Muzeului Bistrița. Seria Historica. Bistrița Năsăud.
BMÉ	Bihari Múzeum Évkönyve
BMI	Buletinul Monumentelor Istorice, București.
BMN	Bibliotheca Musei Napocensis. Cluj-Napoca.
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BMMN	Buletinul Muzeului Militar Național, București.
BThr	Bibliotheca Thracologica. Institutul Român de Tracologie, București.
CAH	Communicationes Archaeologicae Hungariae. Budapest.
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FolArch	Folia Archaeologica. Budapest.
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GSAD	Glasnik Srpskog Arheološkog Društva. Beograd.
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HTRTÉ	Hunyadvármegye Történelmi és Régészeti Társulat Évkönyve
JAMÉ	A nyíregyházi Jósza András Múzeum Évkönyve. Nyíregyháza.
JahrbuchRGZM	Jahrbuch des RömischGermanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz.
Lohanul	Lohanul. Revistă cultural științifică. Huși.
MCA	Materiale și Cercetări Arheologice. București.
MCA-S.N.	Materiale și Cercetări Arheologice-Serie Nouă. București.
MA	Memoria Antiquitatis. Complexul Muzeal Județean Neamț. Piatra Neamț.
MFME	A Móra Ferenc Múz. Évkönyve. Szeged.
MFME StudArch	A Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve, Studia Archaeologica. Szeged.
MN	Muzeul Național. București.
Opuscula Hungarica	Opuscula Hungarica. Budapest.
OTÉ	Orvos- Természettudományi Értesítő, a Kolozsvári Orvos-Természettudományi Társulat és az Erdélyi Múzeum-Egylet Természettudományi Szakosztálya.
Palaeohistorica	Acta et Communicationes Instituti Archaeologici Universitatis Groninganae.
PamArch	Památky Archeologické. Praha.
Past and Present	Past and Present. Oxford.
PIKS/PISC	Die Publikationen des Institutes für klassische Studien/ Publicațiile Institutului de studii clasice. Cluj-Napoca.
PBF	Praehistorische Bronzefunde. Berlin.
PMÉ	Acta Musei Papensis – Pápai Múzeumi Értesítő.
PZ	Prähistorische Zeitschrift. Berlin.
Rev. Muz.	Revista Muzeelor, București.
RIR	Revista Istorică Română.
RMM-MIA	Revista Muzeelor și Monumentelor. seria Monumente istorice și de artă. București.
RMMN	Revista Muzeului Militar Național. București.
Ruralia	Ruralia. Památky Archeologické – Supplementum. Praha.
RVM	Rad Vojvodjanskih Muzeja, Novi Sad.
SCIV(A)	Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche. București.
SCN	Studii și Cercetări Numismatice. București.
SlovArch	Slovenská Archeológia. Nitra.
SIA	Studii de Istoria Artei. Cluj Napoca.
SIB	Studii de istorie a Banatului. Timișoara.
SKMÉ	A Szántó Kovács János Múzeum Évkönyve, Orosháza.
SMIM	Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie. București.
SMMA	Szolnok Megyei Múzeumi Adattár. Szolnok.
SMMIM	Studii și Materiale de Muzeografie și Istorie Militară. București.
Starinar	Starinar. Arheološki Institut. Beograd.
StCl	Studii Clasice, București.
StComBrukenthal	Studii și comunicări. Sibiu.
StudArch	Studia Archaeologica. Budapest.
StudCom	Studia Comitatus. Szentendre.
StudUnivCib	Studia Universitatis Cibiniensis. Sibiu.
StudCom – Vrancea	Studii și Comunicări. Muzeul Județean de Istorie și Etnografie Vrancea. Focșani.
StudŽvest	Študijne Zvesti Arheologického Ústavu Slovenskej Akadémie Vied. Nitra.
Symp. Thrac.	Symposia Thracologica. București.
Tempora Obscura	Tempora Obscura. Békéscsaba 2012.
Tibiscus	Tibiscus. Timișoara.
VAH	Varia Archaeologica Hungarica. Budapest.

VMÉ
Ziridava
ZM
ZSA

A Vas megyei Múzeumok Értesítője
Ziridava. Arad.
A Vas megyei Múzeumok Értesítője
Ziridava Studia Archaeologica. Arad.