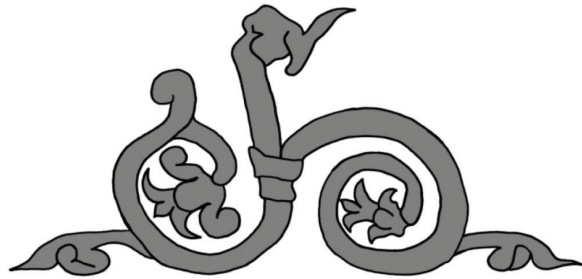


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Prehistoric Vestiges on Highiş Peak in Zarandului Mountains (Municipality of Tîrnova, Arad County)*

Eugen Pădurean, Alexandru Berzovan

Abstract: The present article deals with a series of prehistoric discoveries made on the plateau of the Highiş Peak in Zarandului Mountains. Field researches performed in 1988 by teacher M. Colar from Bîrsa, in 2009 by Eugen Pădureanu and in 2010 by a team led by the late Liviu Măruia have led to the discovery of a small but relevant lot of prehistoric pottery fragments. A ditch was also noted in the south-eastern area of the plateau. Though at the current state of research the character of habitation there cannot be established, the rescued archaeological material can be attributed to the Şoimuş Cultural Group from stage II of the Transylvanian Early Bronze Age.

Keywords: Highiş Peak, Zarandului Mountains, Early Bronze, Şoimuş Cultural Group, prehistoric pottery, precinct.

Introduction

Zarandului Mountains and the surrounding areas, i.e. the valleys of rivers Mureş and Crişul Alb, represent a region of special archaeological potential. The numerous field researches that we have performed in the area of the settlements of Covăsînt, Şiria, Păuliş, Cuvin, Dud, Agrişul Mare, Tauţ, Văsoaia, Corbeşti, Roşia Noua and Troaş have led to significant archaeological discoveries from various historical and prehistoric periods: Final Neolithic, Early Bronze, Hallstatt, the classical period of pre-Roman Dacia etc.

As for the Final Eneolithic and Early Bronze, special discoveries are those made in Covăsînt “Cioaca Tornia”, Cuvin “Măgura”, Dud “Cioaca Chiciora”, Tauţ “Dealul Rujelor”; Rădeşti “Cetăţeaua”, Văsoaia “Ciocul Grădiştii”, Corbeşti “Pîrîul Filimoneşti”, Roşia Nouă “Dealul Comorii”¹. Through the present article we add a new point of archaeological interest for the Early Bronze, i.e. the Highiş Peak in Zarandului Mountains, located on the border of the municipality of Tîrnova.

Geographic context

Highiş Peak and its plateau are part of Zarandului Mountains (Fig. 1). Placed along the east-west direction, these mountains present low altitudes and are considered small in comparison to the neighboring mountain ranges (Codru Moma, Bihor, Metaliferi). The three main peaks reach 841 m (Măgura Ciungani), 836 m (Drocea Peak), and 800 m respectively (Highiş Peak). Through its low average altitude of ca. 500 – 600 m, Zarand should rather be included in the category of hills, its relief units, geologic sub-stratum and vegetation nevertheless maintain it among the mountain units.

Zarandului Mountains display three sectors delimited by depressionary corridors: the western sector between Aradului Plain and the Nadăş – Bîrzava corridors, including the Highiş Peak; the central sector delimited to the east by the Căpruţa – Gurahonţ corridor, dominated by the Drocea Peak; and the eastern sector that ends at the interference area with the Metaliferi Mountains.

The minor hydrography is relatively rich; the mountains are crossed by the valleys of several creeks oriented northwards, towards the valley of River Crişul Alb, such as Valea Almaşului, Valea Mare – with the spring under the Highiş Peak, or southwards, towards Mureşului Valley, such as Valea Cladovei,

* English translation: Ana M. Gruia.

¹ Pădureanu 1982, 35–47; Pădureanu 1985, 32,33,38–40; Pădureanu 1987, 33–36; Pădureanu 1993, 22; RAJ Arad 1999, 51, 60, 64, 67, 82, 103, 107, 126, 132.

Valea Radnei, Valea Șoimoșului and others². Zarandului Mountains are not steep, wavy, lacking major landscape accidents, with gentle crests, crossed by numerous mountain paths and easy access routes; thus they have provided favorable conditions to prehistoric human communities³.



Fig. 1. Location of the discovery: Romania, Arad County, Highiş Peak (modified Google map).



Fig. 2. The plateau of the Highiş Peak (Fragment Map 1:25000 L_34_68_Bc).

² Ardelean, Măndruț 2009, 28–29.

³ Ardelean, Măndruț 2009, 59.



Fig. 3. View of the Highiş Peak from the north (modified Google map).



Fig. 4. The plateau of the Highiş Peak. View from the south-east (Photo E. D. Pădurean).

The Highiş Peak has the geographic coordinates of $46^{\circ} 12' 23''$ N and $21^{\circ} 48' 33''$ E (Fig. 2), holding a dominating position (Fig. 3–4). The plateau is oriented NW – SE, measuring ca. 130 m in total length and 25–30 m in width. The surface is slightly convex so that precipitation waters flow towards the steep slopes without puddling. In the southern part – but also around the plateau – one can note the route of a rather filled-in ditch, no doubt the result of human intervention. The opening of the ditch measures ca. 3.5 m. The presence of large, aligned rock boulders might also suggest human intervention.



Fig. 5. Stations of the Şoimuş cultural group in Zarandului Mountains (modified Google map).

History of the discovery

The Highiş Peak has been repeatedly noted as a spot of archaeological interest. In 1990 teacher Ovidiu Someşan from Buteni related a series of legendary traditions from the villages in the area (Măderat, Agrişul Mare, Arăneag, Drauţ, etc) that mention a Roman observation point on this peak.

Actual data came to light in 1988 when geography teacher Mihai Colar from Bîrsa rescued a modest lot of prehistoric pottery fragments from the plateau⁴. In 2009, Eugen Pădurean, together with three members of the “Venii cu noi” tourist group from Arad – Cecilia Crişan, Alexandru Szentgyörgy (Arad) and Gheorghe Raţiu (Tîrnova) – performed the first field walk on the plateau, observing for the first time the ditch surrounding it. In August 2010 a team consisting of Liviu Măruia, Alexandru Berzovan, Leonard Dorogostaisky, Dan Vlase and Adrian Ardelean performed a new field research, rescuing another lot of pottery fragments.

Archaeological material

We shall hereby discuss two lots of archaeological materials consisting exclusively of pottery fragments. The lot rescued in 2010 consists of several dozen small and very small fragments, made of coarse fabric, brick-red in color, undecorated. No shape can be identified. They were found over the entire surface of the plateau.

On the other hand, the lot rescued by teacher Mihai Colar, though only consisting of four fragments, is much more relevant. Three of the items preserve the profile of the rim and a series of ornaments that allow for typological and chronological determinations. We shall hereby describe the items:

1. The first fragment was part of the upper section of a pot with thinned rim; the fabric displays inclusions of fine sand, traces of mica flakes and minuscule black pebbles. The surface is exfoliated. It belongs to a tronconic bowl with the diameter of the mouth measuring 18 cm (Fig 6/1).

2. The second is a fragment from the upper part of a pot with flared, rounded rim; a horizontally placed rib is placed on the short neck. The fragment is brown in color and also preserves the slip; on the inside it displays darker spots. The fabric seems to contain silt and finely grounded potshards. The diameter of the mouth measures 17.5 cm (Fig 6/2).

3. The third fragment is from the upper part of a pot with slightly flared rim, doubled by a narrow sleeve on the outside (ca. 0.5 cm) under which one notes a cockscomb-type knob, with an alveolus, from which two vertical ribs start downwards. Due to the fragmentation of the pot, only one of the ribs has been preserved. One can also note the brown, polished slip. As inclusions, the fabric shows small fragments of some calcareous substance (possibly snail shells or crushed seashell valves). From a typological perspective, this seems to have been a cooking pot with the diameter of the mouth measuring 17 cm (Fig. 6/3).

4. The final pottery fragment belonged, based on the thickness of the wall, to a large-size pot (ca. 1.5 cm). On the outside it displays a prolonged, horizontal knob, trapeze in shape, from the middle of which a thick rib stars vertically downwards. The inner and outer color is brick-red and the core is black. The slip has been preserved (Fig. 6/4 A, B). Several details of the decoration (a possible incised circle, several poorly preserved incisions on the knob) allow for more detailed discussion.

Overall, the entire rescued archaeological material is very poor. Some fragments display slip, others were strongly corroded. Their color varies from gray brown to brick-red. As inclusions in the fabric one encounters minuscule pebbles, fine sand, crushed potshards and calcareous matter. As for the shapes, one can clearly identify one cooking pot and one bowl. The first might have been of the bitronconic type (Fig. 6/2–3). All decoration is in relief.

An interesting detail can be noted on the fourth pottery fragment (Fig. 6/4 A, B). A shallow circular incision can be observed on the left side, between the horizontal knob and the vertical rib. Another such incision, partly destroyed through corrosion, had been placed on the right. Several incised lines can also be seen, though hardly, on the knob and on the vertical rib. This makes us wonder if the original representation could have been anthropomorphic, though the incised elements might have been the result of unintentional impressions before firing.

⁴ Prof. Ioan Andriţoiu saw the archaeological material in 1989. The lot was donated to the Arad Museum Complex in 2016.

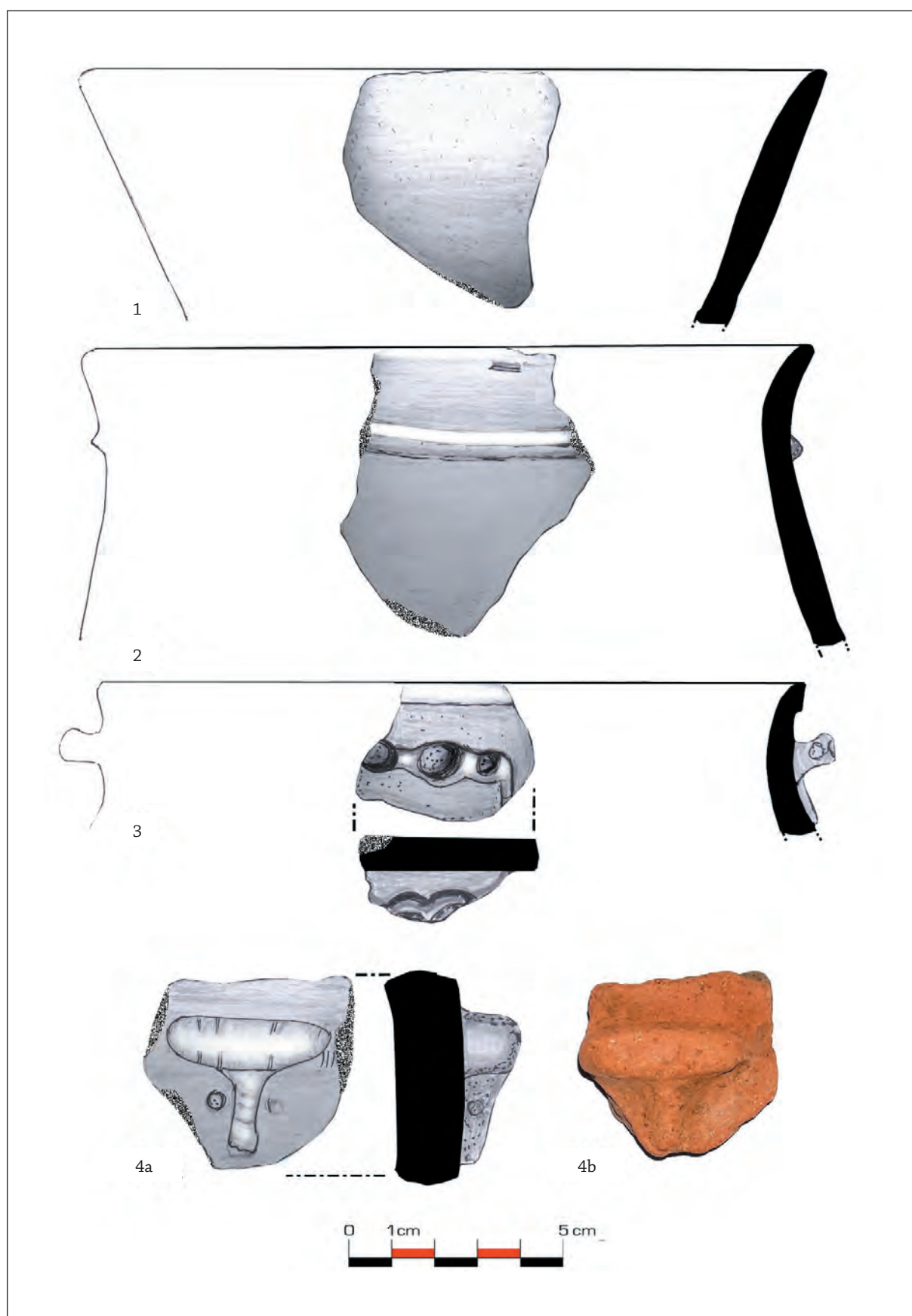


Figure 6. Şoimuş-type pottery discovered on the plateau of the Highiş Peak (drawings and photograph).

Cultural and chronological identification

The restricted character of the archaeological material rescued from the plateau of the Highiş Peak does not prevent us from concluding that prehistoric habitation can be identified on the mentioned spot. The shapes, ornaments and fabric allow for the attribution of the rescued materials to the Şoimuş Cultural Group from the second period of the Early Bronze Age in Transylvania (circa 2500–2300 B.C.)⁵.

Thus, the bowl has analogies in: Temeşesti⁶, Şoimuş⁷, Almaş⁸, Deva “Magna Curia”⁹. The cooking pot has analogies in: Temeşesti¹⁰, Roşia Nouă¹¹, Şoimuş¹², Ţebea¹³, Zlatna¹⁴, Pianu de Jos¹⁵, Alba Iulia¹⁶, Deva “Magna Curia”¹⁷. Cockscomb decorated knobs with alveoli have analogies in Temeşesti¹⁸, Ţebea¹⁹, Şoimuş²⁰, Almaş²¹, Zlatna “Măgura Dudaşului”²², Alba Iulia²³. For the simple horizontal ribone can find analogies in Şoimuş²⁴, Cărpiniş²⁵, Ţebea²⁶. The simple, undecorated sleeve placed under the rim has analogies in Temeşesti²⁷, Şoimuş²⁸, Almaş-Sălişte²⁹, Ţebea³⁰.

The definition of the Şoimuş Cultural Group is connected to the name of Professor Ioan Andriţoiu³¹. After the group was defined, other specialists have also approached the issues of this cultural manifestation: H. Ciugudean, C.I. Popa, N.C. Rîşcuţa, Ch. Schuster. Besides the old excavations initiated by I. Andriţoiu in Şoimuş “Cucuteu”, Boholţ “Ciuta”, Boia “Măgulicea”, Ţebea “Vârful Rustii” or those coordinated by M. Lazăr in Almaş “Sălişte”, new researches have been performed on five sites: Alba Iulia “str. Sinaia”, Poiana Ampoiului “Piatra Corbului”, Zlatna “Măgura Dudaşului”, Aiud “Cetăţuie”, Deva “Magna Curia”. Except for these sites, specialists have also valorized older materials from museums and from reinterpreting older discoveries that had been published, but were incorrectly determined culturally and chronologically³².

Final considerations

Unfortunately, the limited character of the investigation and the scarcity of the materials do not allow for much comment on the length and intensity of habitation. The pottery fragments rescued in 2010 were found over the entire plateau and might suggest a seasonal habitation. The altitude of 800 m and the lack of means of subsistence, the relatively long distance to water sources – the closest is Fîntîna de Sus – but mainly the big difference in altitude until this latter spot might support the idea

⁵ Andriţoiu 1992, 25–26; Gogâltan, Apai 2005, 32–37.

⁶ Gogâltan, Apai 2005, Pl. III/6; V/1; VI/5.

⁷ Andriţoiu 1992, Pl. 5/6.

⁸ Andriţoiu 1992, Pl. 7/1.

⁹ Rîşcuţa 1998, Fig. 6/5.

¹⁰ Gogâltan, Apai 2005, Pl. I/2.

¹¹ Gogâltan, Apai 2005, Pl. IX/4.

¹² Andriţoiu 1992, Pl. 5/1, 13.

¹³ Andriţoiu 1992, Pl. 6/10.

¹⁴ Ciugudean 1996, Fig. 67/4; 68/1, 9; 69/1–2, 4; 70/2.

¹⁵ Ciugudean 1996, Fig. 78/9.

¹⁶ Ciugudean 1996, Fig. 79/10.

¹⁷ Rîşcuţa 1998, Fig. 10/1, 6; 14/2.

¹⁸ Gogâltan, Apai 2005, Pl. VIII/4, 7, 9.

¹⁹ Andriţoiu 1992, Pl. 7/7; 9/13.

²⁰ Andriţoiu 1992, Pl. 5/1; 9/11.

²¹ Andriţoiu 1992, Pl. 5/3.

²² Ciugudean 1996, Fig. 70/2.

²³ Ciugudean 1996, Fig. 79/12.

²⁴ Andriţoiu 1992, Pl. 6/4; Pl. 6/12.

²⁵ Andriţoiu 1992, Pl. 5/12.

²⁶ Andriţoiu 1992, Pl. 6/9.

²⁷ Gogâltan, Apai 2005, Pl. I/1–7; III/5; IV/2–5.

²⁸ Andriţoiu 1992, Pl. 5/10.

²⁹ Andriţoiu 1992, Pl. 13/15.

³⁰ Andriţoiu 1992, Pl. 6/5, 6.

³¹ Andriţoiu 1984, 3; Andriţoiu 1989, 39; Andriţoiu 1992, 19–26.

³² Gogâltan, Apai 2005, 21, 29.

that this was a seasonal settlement. On the other hand, one cannot exclude the possibility that this habitation might have represented a ritual place during Prehistory³³.

Through the present discovery the distribution area of the Şoimuş Cultural Group is extended westwards, as until now it was limited to the settlements in Temeşseşti, Corbeşti and Roşia Noua; it is possible that during the Early Bronze period these tribes of mountain people occupied the entire area of Zarandului Mountains (Fig. 5). Their traces overlap previous habitations of carriers of the Coţofeni III Culture over the same mountainous region³⁴. One must state that several other plateaus in the area, as yet unchecked, might have been inhabited during Prehistory.

Delimiting the exact distribution area of the Şoimuş Cultural Group in Arad County is one of our concerns. We wonder if the Lipovei Hills might be part of the distribution area of this cultural group.³⁵ In the plains of Banat the archaeological discoveries associated to this cultural group are extremely rare³⁶.

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³³ Dorogostaisky 2013, 866, 868, 875–876.

³⁴ See also Sava 2015, 90.

³⁵ Pădureanu 1985, 32, RAJ Arad 1999, 51.

³⁶ Woidich 2008, 123 Abb. 6 – Uivar-Gomilă.

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. Zaláu.
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.
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FADDP/GMADP	Führer zu archäologischen Denkmälern in Dacia Porolissensis/Ghid al monumentelor arheologice din Dacia Porolissensis.

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JahrbuchRGZM	Jahrbuch des RömischGermanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz.
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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.