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SETTLEMENT AND LAND-USE PATTERNS IN THE SURROUNDINGS OF THE IRON AGE CEMETERIES AT SÂNCRAI - DARVAS (ALBA COUNTY)

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Cuvinte cheie: epoca fierului, perioada provincială romană, valea Mureșului, organizarea așezărilor, utilizarea terenului, arheologia mediului înconjurător

Key words: Iron Age, Roman provincial period, Mureș valley, settlement organization, land-use patterns, landscape archaeology

1. Introduction

The systematic survey of the surroundings of the Iron Age cemeteries at Sâncrai - Darvas, on the middle Mureș valley, stems from the research objectives of two complementary archaeological projects that are developed by a team of the Institute of Archaeology and Art History of the Romanian Academy Cluj Branch and its collaborators. The much larger *Lived Lands Project*¹ aims to investigate the ways in which different communities from the middle Mureș valley interacted with the environment, creating, using and manipulating specific landscapes from the Iron Age to the Roman period. Their means and actions were shaped by highly localized social, economic, cultural and ecological factors, which have to be identified and compared across time and space using a multidisciplinary approach in order to assess the land-use patterns and the evolution of local social dynamics from the landscape perspective. In this context, the archaeological site at Sâncrai - Darvas and its surroundings represent a key micro-region.

¹ Project supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research, CNCS–UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P4-ID-PCE-2020-0566, within PNCDI III.

The second project, *Iron Age Cemeteries at Sâncrai-Darvas*², is developed by the same team in collaboration with the National Museum of Unification Alba Iulia and aims to understand not only the funerary practices of different Iron Age communities that used the same burial ground, but also the emergence and transformation of the local ritual landscape and its connections with the local settlements and their land-use patterns.

The Iron Age cemeteries at Sâncrai - Darvas were first identified in 2015, before the construction of the new Sebeş - Turda motorway. Rescue archaeological investigations were conducted in 2016, unearthing two cemeteries, one dated to the *Scythian* horizon and another to the LT C2. A total number of 93 graves belonging to the earlier cemetery were excavated, as well as eight others belonging to the later one. Since the burial ground extends westward, outside the area affected by the motorway, a new archaeological project was initiated in 2020 to continue the systematic, multidisciplinary investigation of the two cemeteries. Over the last three archaeological campaigns, 21 other graves were identified and thoroughly studied, 20 belonging to the *Scythian* horizon and one dated to the LT horizon³.

Older archaeological evidence from the surroundings of these two cemeteries is rather scarce. Finds belonging to different chronological horizons, including the Iron Age and the Roman provincial period, from the territory of Sâncrai village are only summarily listed in the Archaeological Repertory of Alba County⁴ and none of the presumed sites was systematically investigated. Far more is known about the Iron Age discoveries from the territory of modern Aiud⁵, located at around 3 km to the north-west of the aforementioned cemeteries, which include settlements and funerary contexts, as well as some chance discoveries, the surroundings of Rădeşti, located at around 3 km to the south-west⁶, or Ciumbrud⁷, located at around 2.4 km to the north-east.

Aerial surveys conducted between 2009 and 2016⁸ mostly focused in this micro-region on the areas of Aiud and Rădeşti, though they also provided important information regarding the geomorphologic characteristics of this section of the middle Mureş valley, which influenced the establishment of

² Project financed by the Alba County Council through the National Museum of Unification Alba Iulia.

³ Rustoiu *et alii* 2017; Rustoiu *et alii* 2021; Rustoiu *et alii* 2022; Rustoiu *et alii* 2023; see also El Susi 2018; El Susi 2021, p. 166-169; Rustoiu 2019, p. 54-70; Balteş 2020; Gál *et alii* 2021, p. 142, Tab. 8-12; Rustoiu, Drăgan 2022, for some preliminary studies.

⁴ Repertoriu Alba, p. 174-175; see also the online archaeological repertoire managed by CIMEC (<http://ran.cimec.ro/sel.asp>).

⁵ Vulpe 1984; Berecki 2015.

⁶ Ciugudean *et alii* 2001; El Susi 2021, p. 168-169.

⁷ Vasiliev 1980, p. 144; Vulpe 1984, p. 47, with previous bibliography.

⁸ Czajlik *et alii* 2014.

settlements and land-use patterns during different chronological horizons. The acquired images confirmed the results of previous hydrological and geomorphologic studies which indicated the significant horizontal dynamics of the river through time, with frequently shifting meanders, channels and sandbar islets, as well as a rather wide riverbed which determined the appearance of higher floodplains and alluvial fan terraces which were appropriate for human habitation⁹. The existence of fossil meanders and higher floodplains can be observed as cropmarks and ridges even on regular Google Earth images (**Fig. 1**) on both sides of the river between the villages of Sâncrai and Rădești, the cemeteries in question being located on a high alluvial terrace on the eastern side of one such floodplain.

2. Research methodology

These preliminary observations and the current state of research in the respective micro-region contributed to the decision to organize a campaign of intensive field surveys in the surroundings of the cemeteries in question. A total number of 15 areas were selected for surveys, of which 11 produced relevant results (**Figs. 1 and 2; Annex 1**). Three of these areas are located eastward the motorway, on an area having an average elevation of 265 m, while the remaining eight are located westward between the Mureș River and the motorway. Of the latter areas, four are located closer to the actual course of the river, on a lower part of the floodplain having an average elevation of 237 m, while the other four are located on the higher part of the floodplain having an average elevation of 243 m. Traces of at least one fossil meander can be observed in this latter area and between the village's southern limits and the area of the Iron Age cemeteries.

Most of the arable land from this micro-region is characterized by the presence of numerous small privately owned plots that usually host a variety of crops or are used as hay meadows/pastures; some are not cultivated at all, making them unsuitable for intensive field surveys. Therefore, only recently harvested and/or ploughed plots were selected. The field surveys were conducted during early October 2022 by a team of 11 people¹⁰. Each plot was first georeferenced and then divided in a variable number of 2 m wide transects on its length, each transect being systematically surveyed by one team member. All anthropogenic finds were collected and georeferenced using a dGPS. Ceramic building materials (CBM) were recorded by weight. Pottery was identified by

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 464-465; Andó 1995; Pandi, Horváth 2012; Urdea *et alii* 2012, p. 20-31.

¹⁰ Besides the authors of this article, the field team also included doctoral students from the Doctoral School of History and Archaeology of the Romanian Academy (Bogdan Lăpușan, Bernadett Kovács, Diandra Pall-Both) and master students from the Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca (Emilia Tănasă, Sorin Lăcraru, Boglárka Munteanu).

period (Neolithic, Early Iron Age, Late Iron Age, Roman, Medieval and Modern), counted, and weighed; diagnostic fragments were drawn. All other finds (metal, glass, stone, and bone) were treated individually. The quantitative and spatial analysis and the typo-chronological interpretation of the collected ceramic fragments and other artefacts reveal details about the potential location and chronology of some new settlements in this micro-region and their possible land-use patterns.

As a general observation, the continuous cultivation of the floodplain and terraces through time, and in particular the use of heavy machinery and regular deep ploughing after the 1950s, as well as the method of targeted field survey conducted by the team, influenced the spatial distribution of archaeological material. Furthermore, close to 80% of the recovered pottery and CBM are very fragmented, making their typo-chronological identification quite difficult; the same can be said about the few glass artefacts that were discovered. The highest concentration of finds has been identified on the higher part of the floodplain on the left bank of the Mureş, where the four surveyed zones (nos. 5 – 8) produced the largest number of finds belonging to the Early Iron Age, Roman provincial period and late medieval period. Together, these four zones occupy an area measuring around 0.56 x 0.70 km. Zones 7 and 8 seem to belong to the same nucleus of habitation during both the Early Iron Age and the Roman provincial period, though the earlier chronological horizon is better represented in zone 8, while the latter horizon is better represented in zone 7, especially on its western half.

Modern (18th – 20th century) finds were also recovered from some of the surveyed zones, their presence and nature most likely indicating the regular use of manure mixed with household waste on cultivated fields.

3. The Early Iron Age finds

Of the eleven surveyed zones which produced relevant results, only six included finds that can be dated to the Early Iron Age (see **Annex 1**). The largest number of pottery fragments of this kind was recovered from zones 6, 7 and 8.

The earliest dated ones belong to the Gáva culture and come from zone 8 (**Fig. 4**). Among them is a fragmentary handmade vessel having a globular shape (Cat. 8/1), which was made of a semi-fine ceramic fabric, burnished black on the outside and orange on the inside. Its body is decorated on the outside with grooved garlands. The vessel is specific to the Gáva culture, being encountered both in the first two phases of the large fortified settlement at Teleac¹¹, dated to the Ha A-B, and in the rural settlements from its hinterland¹². Among them is the

¹¹ Vasiliev *et alii* 1991, Fig. 46; Ciugudean 2012.

¹² Bălan, Ota 2012; Rustoiu *et alii* 2020.

recently investigated settlement from Gâmbaş¹³, which is located at around 6.5 km to the north-west of Sâncrai.

Another fragmentary handmade vessel which was made of a coarse light brown ceramic fabric most likely belongs to the same chronological horizon of the Early Iron Age (Cat. 8/2). The presence of soot indicates that it was probably used for cooking.

Zone 8 produced a large amount of handmade coarse pottery fragments that most likely belong to the Early Iron Age (**Annex 1**). Their association with identifiable pottery fragments specific to the Gáva culture could indicate that they belong to the same horizon. A total number of 64 fragments were fired in an oxidant atmosphere, while 29 others were fired in a reducing atmosphere. Around two thirds of the total number of fragments bears burning traces and soot deposits indicating their function as cooking vessels.

As previously mentioned, zone 7 was most likely part of the same Gáva site and this is indicated not only by its proximity to zone 8, but also by the recovered handmade coarse pottery fragments that have similar characteristics to those found nearby, even if their number is significantly lower.

Zone 6 also produced a quite large number of ceramic fragments that can be ascribed to the Early Iron Age (**Fig. 3**). Three of them (Cat. 6/1, 6/7 and 6/9) are rim fragments of handmade vessels with almost vertical walls, made of coarse ceramic fabric, most likely used for cooking. Another fragment belongs to a large bitronconical pot with flat wing-shaped handles. Similar vessels were already encountered in phase 3 at Teleac (late Gáva – early Basarabi)¹⁴, but they were also present during the *Scythian* horizon¹⁵, ending their evolution during the Late Iron Age (La Tène B1-C1)¹⁶. Sporadically, they also appeared during the *Dacian* horizon¹⁷. Since no fragments of vessels specific to the Basarabi culture or the LT horizon were discovered in zone 6, the vessels in question could belong to the final phase of the Early Iron Age, being contemporaneous with the „Scythian” horizon and the respective cemetery from Sâncrai-Darvas. Nevertheless, this hypothesis needs to be verified by further field investigations in this area.

Two other ceramic fragments (not illustrated) from the same zone 6, made of a semi-fine ceramic fabric that is black on the outside and reddish on the inside, most probably belong to the Gáva horizon. Their presence is unsurprising since zone 8, which produced many fragments of this kind, is located at less than 500 m to the south-west.

¹³ Bălan *et alii* 2015.

¹⁴ Vasiliev *et alii* 1991, Fig. 46.

¹⁵ Vasiliev 1980, Pl. 6-7.

¹⁶ Némethi 1988, p. 95-96; Ferencz 2007, Pl. 56-57.

¹⁷ Andrițoiu, Rustoiu 1997, Fig. 77, 98/2.

Statistically, a total number of 43 ceramic fragments belonging to the Early Iron Age were recovered from zone 6 (**Annex 1**). All of them are handmade of coarse or semi-fine, mostly oxidant-fired fabrics, and may belong to any phase of the Early Iron Age. Since vessels belonging to either the Gáva culture or the end of the Early Iron Age were already identified, there is a great probability that also these fragments belong to one or another of two these horizons.

4. The Roman provincial finds

Of the eleven surveyed zones which produced relevant results, 9 included finds that can be dated to the Roman provincial period, though there is a significant quantitative difference between the zones located on the lower floodplain or the terrace and those located on the higher part of the floodplain (**Figs. 1 and 2; Annex 1**).

The largest number of finds comes from zone 5, with the highest density in the northern half, perhaps indicating the most likely location of the site. The majority of the ceramic fragments are wheel-made of fine or semi-fine oxidant-fired fabrics (**Fig. 7**). These include one dish/bowl with a wide rectangular reverted rim that imitates the Tardo-Padana sigillata form Consp. 45.1¹⁸ (Cat. 5/4). Similar imitations were produced in workshop B at Apulum in the second half of the 2nd century AD¹⁹. Some flagons having rounded reverted rims, grooved on the outside, and wide necks (Cat. 5/1, 5/2 and 5/6), one lid with a rounded grooved rim (Cat. 5/5), and one unidentifiable vessel painted with thick parallel red lines on its body (Cat. 5/7) were also recovered.

Besides the ceramic vessels, other artefacts were also recovered from zone 5 (**Fig. 10/1-3**). These include two fragments of the rectangular undecorated base of a terracotta figurine (Cat. 5/10), one cobalt blue glass pearl (Cat. 5/9) and one iron awl (Cat. 5/8).

The shape of the glass pearl (**Fig. 10/2**) indicates two different manufacturing stages. First a rounded bead was made from a translucent cobalt blue glass. The manufacturing technique implied the winding of molten glass on a metal rod rotating at a constant speed in an alternative clockwise and counter-clockwise motion. The bead is preserved in the centre of the piece. Its matrix indicates the precise manner of execution with uniform circular layers. Afterwards, on the bead still attached to the metal rod, another layer of translucent cobalt blue glass was applied using the same technique, but in a careless manner which produced an irregularly shaped surface, almost spherical.

¹⁸ Consp. 45.1; the original form was produced from the Flavian times to the first half of the 2nd century AD.

¹⁹ Ciușescu 2005, p. 328, no. 70; Egri 2018, p. 122-123, fig. 10/70.

This may be the result of an imprecise, slow rotation of the rod. At the same time, the addition of molten glass covered one end of the perforation, creating the shape of a pearl or pendant. At some point during the last manufacturing stage the metal rod broke and was accidentally covered with a small drop of molten glass that remained attached to the fragmentary metal tip after cooling.

The differences in execution of the two manufacturing stages suggest the possibility that the piece may be a reject abandoned during the manufacturing process. At the same time it may indicate the intention of transforming what was at first a simple monochrome rounded bead into a pendant, a hairpin finial or an earring. During these actions, the narrow tip of the metal rod broke due to the heat stress produced by molten glass and also probably due to the mechanical stress produced by repeated rotations.

The colour of the matrix present in both overlapping pieces is a usual occurrence in glass artefacts from the La Tène period up to the Roman times. The observable shape of the inner bead and its diameter of 6 mm suggest the presence of simple monochrome spherical bead, most likely of Venclová 117²⁰ or Riha 11.11²¹ type. In Roman Dacia, similar beads were produced at Tibiscum²² and Porolissum²³. These beads are one of the most common finds on Late Iron Age and Roman provincial sites across temperate Europe. The specimens measuring between 6 mm and 11 mm diameter were dated to the LT B, with some also occurring in LT D contexts²⁴, while the Roman provincial ones have a wider dating between the 1st and early 4th centuries AD²⁵. Since no other LT finds are known from zone 5, the piece in question most likely belong to the Roman provincial period.

The completely preserved iron awl (**Fig. 10/1**) has a handle with a rectangular cross-section and a rounded butt, while the blade is gradually tapering to a partially broken point. It belongs to the Humphreys 3 type²⁶ that is commonly encountered in Roman provincial contexts, having a wider dating between the 1st and 3rd centuries AD. The tool could have been used in leatherworking or woodworking as a bradawl, perforator or scribe. Such tools must have also existed in Roman Dacia, but their often poor preservation makes the identification rather difficult, see for example the few pieces from Porolissum which were published as headless iron nails²⁷.

²⁰ Venclová 1990, p. 49-50.

²¹ Riha 1990, p. 86, blue spherical beads being the most common at Augst.

²² Benea 2004, p. 195-202, type V.

²³ Gudea, Bajusz 1982, type 1.1.

²⁴ Venclová 1990, p. 49.

²⁵ Riha 1990, p. 86.

²⁶ Humphreys 2021, p. 187.

²⁷ Gudea 1989, p. 574-576, pl. CLXIII/17, CLXIV/32, 34, 37.

Zone 7 also produced a significant number of finds belonging to the Roman provincial period. Again, the majority of the ceramic fragments are wheel-made of fine or semi-fine oxidant-fired fabrics (**Annex 1; Fig. 9**). These include flagons with wide mouths (Cat. 7/2-3), jars with thick triangular rims (Cat. 7/1), and one small beaker with a thin rounded rim (Cat. 7/4).

Three typologically unidentifiable fragments of a ceramic vessel with thick walls, perhaps an amphora, bear capital letters or numbers incised after firing with a sharp tool (**Fig. 9/7; Cat. 7/7**). Fragment 7a bears the letter V, N, M or A, fragment 7b bears the letter or number X and an oblique *hasta* of a letter V, N, M or A, while fragment 7c bears the letter A or V. None of the fragments can be joined, so some other letters or numbers could be missing, making any kind of possible reading rather difficult. Ceramic vessels, including storage and transporting containers, quite frequently bore post-firing graffiti, which had different purposes: to mark ownership, for taxation, or to label their contents, volume, weight or destination²⁸.

Besides the ceramic vessels, other artefacts were also recovered (**Fig. 10/4-7**). These include one fragmentary iron bell clapper (Cat. 7/8), one ceramic firing spacer (Cat. 7/9) and two fragmentary glass vessels (Cat. 7/10-11).

The fragmentary bell clapper (**Fig. 10/4**) was made of an iron rod; the broken top end was flattened and perforated, while the lower end was bent into a swirl. Most of the existing typologies are based on the shape of the body, though it was already noted that Roman iron bells always have a rectangular body made of a single piece of iron sheet which was hammered and soldered or riveted²⁹. There is just one typology of the clappers, which is based on Roman finds from Central Europe³⁰; the type having the lower end bent into a swirl is not included, though some of the clappers with a club head could have been made in a similar way. One has to note that the bronze bells benefited from an increased attention due to their use in magical or cult-related practices, while the iron bells, which are usually larger and quite roughly made, being most likely used for grazing farm animals, were less studied. Based on the preserved length of the clapper (58.5 mm), it can be presumed that the complete bell must have had a length of at least 70 – 80 mm, not including the suspension loop, which is corresponding to the average dimension of an iron bell worn by grazing farm animals.

The handmade ceramic spacer (**Fig. 10/7**) has an almost hemispherical shape with a slightly concave base and a rather porous, partially blackened surface. Firing spacers having a more-or-less hemispherical or disk shape were commonly used in Classical, Hellenistic and Roman times to stack open vessels

²⁸ See, for example, Galsterer 1983; Egri 2007.

²⁹ Pomberger 2018, fig. 13.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

in kilns in a way which prevented them from adhering to one another while also facilitating the circulation of hot air in the firing chamber³¹. Their shape was always adapted to that of the vessels they were meant to support, so the ring-shaped bases of the vessels often produced grooves or shallow cavities on the spacers.

Two fragments belonging to two different glass vessels were also identified in zone 7 (**Fig. 10/5-6**). One is most likely part of a mould-blown vessel with a rectangular body, made of transparent glass with a yellowish hue. The other is a fragment of a free-blown vessel, probably with a globular body, made of transparent blue glass.

Zone 8 produced a quite large number of ceramic fragments that can be dated to the Roman provincial period, the majority of them being wheel-made of fine or semi-fine oxidant-fired fabrics (**Annex 1**). Besides pottery, two fragmentary yellowish sandstone slabs (not illustrated) were also discovered. They were most likely part of a floor inside a building of an unknown type. As previously mentioned, zones 7 and 8 were probably part of the same Roman provincial site, and this hypothesis seems to be confirmed by the spatial density of the ceramic finds and their morphological and technological characteristics.

Zone 6 produced a wider variety of fragmentary ceramic vessels belonging to the Roman provincial period, including both oxidant and reducing fired fabrics of different qualities (**Annex 1; Fig. 8**). These include a bowl with thin walls, an inverted rounded rim and a hemispherical body (Cat. 6/3), which imitates central Italic or southern Gallic thin-walled cups/bowls of the Atlante 2/214 type³². Similar imitations were produced in workshop B at Apulum in the second half of the 2nd century AD³³. A two-handled pitcher with a vertical rim (Cat. 6/2), a large flagon with a triangular reverted rim (Cat. 6/4), another one with a reverted grooved rim (Cat. 6/5), and a vessel decorated with a partially preserved applied motif consisting of two parallel curved lines (Cat. 6/6) were also recovered. One fragment of a ceramic wall decoration (not illustrated) was identified in the same zone.

The five remaining zones produced a far smaller number of Roman provincial finds consisting exclusively of fragmentary ceramic vessels, as well as a fragmentary amphora (**Annex 1; Fig. 6/1-3, 5-6**). Among the vessels are two fragmentary beakers or *kantharoi* (Cat. 1/1-2) from zone 1, while zone 3 produced a bowl/dish with a slightly inverted rounded rim (Cat. 3/1). An unidentifiable vessel with a hemispherical body, decorated with a horizontal

³¹ Papadopoulos 1992, p. 215-216, fig. 8; Bergamini, Gaggiotti 2011, p. 354-356, fig. 6; Lipovac Vrkljan, Konestra 2018, p. 605-606, fig. 3/2-6 (some published as polishers).

³² Atlante, p. 287, pl. XCII/4.

³³ Ciușescu 2005, p. 328, no. 73; Egri 2018, p. 122-123, fig. 10/73.

groove and a partially preserved incised motif consisting of two parallel lines, came from zone 4 (Cat. 4/2). The fragmentary rim of a Kapitän II amphora was also recovered from zone 4. This type was produced from the end of the 2nd century to the 4th century AD and was distributed widely, especially in the eastern Mediterranean. Their contents are less certain, but generally assumed to have been wine. In Dacia, they have often been linked to military sites³⁴.

5. The late medieval finds

Only three zones (nos. 3, 5 and 11) produced late medieval (15th – 16th centuries AD) ceramic fragments, though the total number in each of them is small (**Annex 1; Fig. 6/4**). The finds include jars with a flat base and ovoid or almost vertical bodies (Cat. 3/2) and bowls of unidentifiable types, all wheel-made of coarse or semi-fine light brown or reddish-brown ceramic fabrics, sometimes with a grey core. Many fragments bear thick soot deposits indicating that the vessels in question were used for cooking.

The very small number of late medieval finds in each of the otherwise well surveyed zones mentioned above, as well as the prevalence of heavily used cooking ware may suggest that the ceramic fragments in question were actually part of the household waste that was mixed with manure and scattered on cultivated fields, thus not necessarily indicating the presence of contemporaneous sites.

6. Concluding remarks

The pottery belonging to the Early Iron Age which was mainly discovered in zones 6, 7 and 8 raise different interpretative questions from one chronological horizon to another.

The vessels specific to the Gáva culture, mainly present in zone 8, though some were also identified in zone 6, attest the existence of a quite large rural settlement located on the higher part of the floodplain on the left bank of the Mureş River. The environmental data, which will be discussed below, indicate the nearby presence of wetlands including swamps and stagnant water until quite recently, despite some drainage works conducted in the 18th and 19th century. Only the large-scale works conducted after the catastrophic floods of the 1970s completely drained the wetlands, the very fertile floodplain being then intensively cultivated. The presence of wetlands and perhaps also the occurrence of seasonal floods may explain the preference of Iron Age communities for the higher parts of the floodplain and the nearby terraces.

The settlement in question seems to cover a wider area of nearly 6 ha (**Figs. 1 and 2**). Typical settlements of the Gáva culture, covering a wider area,

³⁴ Negru *et alii* 2003.

were also identified in other locations on the Mureş valley³⁵. These include the sites at Alba Iulia – Recea (Monolit)³⁶, Miceşti - Ciğaşe³⁷ and Gâmbaş³⁸ where areas of intensive habitation surrounded by isolated farmsteads were identified, with the territory occupied by dwelling structures covering several hectares³⁹. Taking into consideration the size of the area from which ceramic finds of the Gáva type were recovered, it might be possible that the newly identified settlement from Sâncrai had a similar spatial organization, with the main habitation in zone 8 and a series of farmsteads in the surroundings, for example in zone 6.

A major fortified settlement covering an area of ca. 30 ha, dated to the same period, is located at ca. 20 km downstream, at Teleac⁴⁰. This was a centre of power having complex functions, which controlled the economic resources on a large sector of the middle Mureş valley for more than four centuries, between ca. 1100 and 700/650 BC. The rural settlement at Sâncrai was located in the hinterland of the centre of power from Teleac, so its economic role should be discussed from this perspective.

Regarding the settlement of the middle/late phase of the Early Iron Age which was identified in zone 6, on the border of the higher floodplain, its presence is relevant for the manner in which both the profane and ritual landscape was organized during this period.

The *Scythian* horizon (ca. 700-450/350 BC) in Transylvania was defined by a cultural orientation of the communities towards the northern Pontic regions. This situation was determined by the arrival inside the Carpathians range of some groups originating from the steppe and silvo-steppe of the mentioned regions. The newcomers brought over new social and cultural models. Unlike in the previous period, when no cemeteries were attested and the manner of treating the deceased became archaeologically invisible, numerous flat cemeteries with inhumation burials appeared in Transylvania. Many burials contained weaponry and costume accessories specific to the northern Black Sea regions. At the same time, the rural settlements specific to the Gáva or Basarabi cultures disappeared almost completely. The absence of habitation structures was linked to the transhumant or nomad-pastoralist lifestyle of these communities⁴¹, which largely implied the use of temporary shelters.

³⁵ Uhnér *et alii* 2017, p. 232-233, Figs. 18-19; Uhnér *et alii* 2019, p. 194-196, Fig. 18.

³⁶ Ciugudean 2011; Ciugudean 2012.

³⁷ Bălan, Ota 2012.

³⁸ Uhnér *et alii* 2017, p. 232-233.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, Figs. 20-21.

⁴⁰ Vasiliev *et alii* 1991; Uhnér *et alii* 2017; Uhnér *et alii* 2019.

⁴¹ Vasiliev 1980.

Still, a number of isolated discoveries suggest that some communities continued to have a rather sedentary way of life⁴². Recently, a rural settlement that could belong to the *Scythian* horizon was identified on a secondary valley of the Mureş, at around 300 m to the north of the fortified settlement at Teleac⁴³.

The existence of other similar rural communities which coexisted with the nomad-pastoralist ones is also indicated by a number of proxies. For example, the *Scythian* cemetery at Sâncrai-Darvas, where over 120 graves were unearthed so far, is far larger than any other similar cemetery identified in Transylvania (each including not more than 20-30 burials)⁴⁴, suggesting a process of sedentarisation of the local community, due to its size and duration.

Furthermore, the biochemical analysis of dental tartar sampled from some of the skeletons unearthed in this cemetery points in some cases to a diet largely based on cereals⁴⁵. Palynological analyses confirmed the cultivation of cereals in the vicinity, as well as that of some garden plants like fava beans⁴⁶, thus indicating the existence of more sedentary communities in this area.

The same pollen analyses of the soil sampled from funerary contexts offered relevant data for the reconstruction of local landscape and the impact of human activities. The surrounding landscape was dominated by pastures with a wide variety of herbaceous plants. The presence of hazel, dog rose and birch indicates that the area of Sâncrai experienced significant deforestations during the period in question. Black alder is also present, indicating the proximity of wetlands, which is also attested by freshwater algae which were identified in many samples. The high frequency of coprophilous fungi is a relevant indicator of the importance of animal husbandry for this community. The identification of roundworm and tapeworm eggs in soil samples from the pelvic area of some skeletons most likely indicates the practice of manuring the crops with human and/or animal faeces⁴⁷, besides the poor health and hygiene of the respective individuals.

Lastly, the palynological analysis of sedimentary cores retrieved from the peat bog at Băgău, in the surroundings of Sâncrai, also indicates that the areas covered by pastures increased significantly during the expansion of the Basarabi culture and again during the *Scythian* horizon, which also witnessed an increase in the cultivated lands.

⁴² Ciugudean 1996.

⁴³ Uhnér *et alii* 2018a, p. 302; Uhnér *et alii* 2018b, p. 380-383, Fig. 13-17.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Rustoiu 2019, p. 54-70; Rustoiu *et alii* 2017; Rustoiu *et alii* 2021; Rustoiu *et alii* 2022; Rustoiu, Drăgan 2022.

⁴⁵ Gál *et alii* 2021.

⁴⁶ Palynological analyses were conducted by Roxana Grindean (Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca) and will be published in a separate article.

⁴⁷ Mitchell 2017, p. 51-52.

Regarding the connection between the location of the cemetery and that of the identified settlement, the manner of organizing the landscape resembles the one encountered later, during the *Celtic* horizon in Transylvania, which was also characterized by the presence of largely heterarchic rural societies. More precisely, the cemetery is located on a higher river terrace, being visible from the settlement and the nearby areas⁴⁸. Taking into consideration these principles governing the organization of the habitat and the funerary space, one cannot exclude that the respective cemeteries visually signalled the ownership rights of each community over a certain area on the basis of ancestral ties or traditions⁴⁹.

It can be therefore noted that the settlement identified on the higher area of the Mureş floodplain at Sâncrai, which can be dated to the end of the Early Iron Age, brings again into discussion the question regarding the relationships between the nomad-pastoralist lifestyle of the *Scythian* communities and the rural sedentary lifestyle of the local communities with whom they got in contact.

Like in the case of the Early Iron Age, the Roman provincial discoveries are also concentrated on the higher area of the floodplain on the left bank of the Mureş River, in surveyed zones 5-8. A preference for this kind of locations was already observed in other parts of the middle Mureş valley during the Roman period⁵⁰. Based on the spatial distribution and density of the recovered artefacts and the typo-chronological characteristics of the pottery, it can be presumed that zones 7 and 8 are actually part of a single rural settlement in which at least one pottery workshop could have functioned. The glass waster (Cat. 5/9) from zone 5 could also potentially indicate the presence of another rural workshop producing glass ornaments.

However, it is difficult to say whether zones 5 and 6 represent two other rural settlements or are actually part of the larger zone 7-8 settlement from their close vicinity. Together, they occupy an area of a little over 15 ha, an estimation based on the spatial distribution of the finds which is, as previously mentioned, strongly affected by agricultural works. By comparison, two recently investigated rural settlements from the same middle Mureş valley – Sibişeni⁵¹ and Şibot - În Obrej⁵² – occupy an area of around 9 ha and respectively 6 ha, while a few others that were properly identified and/or investigated are even smaller⁵³. On the other hand, the so-called „small towns” which functioned as central places having more diverse functions, including manufacturing, mining or trade, without reaching an urban status, could have had this size and some

⁴⁸ Berecki 2015; Rustoiu, Berecki 2018.

⁴⁹ Rustoiu, Berecki 2018.

⁵⁰ Czajlik *et alii* 2014, p. 465.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 464, fig. 14.

⁵² Băltăc *et alii* 2016, p. 50, pl. III.

⁵³ Oltean 2007, p. 145-150.

were even bigger⁵⁴. One such *small town* was assumed to have existed at Aiud, being identified as ancient *Brvcla* mentioned on *Tabula Peutingeriana*, which is located at only 3 km to the north-west, thus making the existence of another centre of this kind in its close vicinity rather improbable.

Moreover, if zones 7 and 8 are considered a single settlement, this is occupying an area of around 1.8 ha, which seems to be a regular size for a Roman period village on the middle Mureş valley. In this case, zones 5 and 6 could indicate the presence of individual farmsteads, which are also attested archaeologically (though poorly investigated) in this region⁵⁵. The sites identified in the surveyed zones 1, 3 and 4 could also be individual farmsteads, but located on the lower part of the floodplain. At the same time, it is worth mentioning that zone 2 produced only fragmentary tiles and bricks, as well as fired daub fragments, which may suggest the presence of a brickyard that was conveniently located next to the river. On the other hand, zones 10-11 could be part of a single rural settlement located on the higher river terrace and occupying an area of around 1.3 ha.

Such a density of rural settlements and farmsteads on a quite small area on the middle Mureş valley is unsurprising. As previously mentioned, the floodplain of the river and the nearby higher terraces are very fertile, being already settled and cultivated well before the establishment of the Roman province. An already 15 years old map⁵⁶ shows that the hinterland of the major urban centres and *small towns* on the middle Mureş valley also tended to concentrate a higher number of rural settlements and farmsteads. This pattern could partially be the result of the previous prevalent interest in Romanian archaeology for these *more important/interesting* urban sites, but the results of recent preventive archaeological investigations along the Sebeş - Turda motorway seem to confirm the mentioned trend. A preliminary statistical analysis of the sites from the hinterland of Aiud⁵⁷ indicates the presence of at least 37 rural sites (*villae*, villages and farmsteads) on an area having a 15 km radius, or of 15 rural sites if an area only having a 5 km radius is taken into consideration.

Therefore, further statistical and spatial analyses are needed to better understand the land-use patterns in the hinterland of Aiud/*Brvcla* during the Roman provincial period, as well as the functions of this small central place in the local and regional networks of communication and exchange.

⁵⁴ Oltean 2007, p. 150-155, with previous bibliography.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 143, fig. 5.2.

⁵⁶ Oltean, Hanson 2007, fig. 5.

⁵⁷ Lived Lands Project site database, unpublished.

7. Catalogue of finds

Zone 1

1. Description: beaker or kantharos with a vertical rounded rim and a tall cylindrical neck decorated with two horizontal grooves

Dimensions: D = 116 mm; Hp = 48 mm

Fabric: fine, light orange-brown, well fired

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: wheel-made

Use traces: no

Dating: Roman

2. Description: beaker or kantharos with a triangular, grooved rim and a tall cylindrical neck

Dimensions: D = 130 mm; Hp = 40 mm

Fabric: fine, light orange, well fired (Apulum production)

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: wheel-made

Use traces: no

Dating: Roman

Zone 3

1. Description: bowl or dish with a slightly inverted rounded rim and a hemispherical body

Dimensions: D = 150 mm; Hp = 33 mm

Fabric: fine, dark red, well fired

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: wheel-made

Use traces: no

Dating: Roman

2. Description: jar with a flat base and an almost vertical body

Dimensions: Db = 134 mm; Hp = 28 mm

Fabric: semi-fine, light brown with black core, well fired

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: wheel-made

Use traces: soot deposit

Dating: late medieval

Zone 4

1. Description: Kapitän II amphora with a vertical rounded rim and a cylindrical neck delimited by two horizontal grooves

Dimensions: D = 120 mm; Hp = 40 mm

Fabric: semi-fine, brownish-orange

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: wheel-made

Use traces: no

Dating: Roman

2. Description: vessel with a hemispherical body, decorated with a horizontal groove and an incised motif, partially preserved, consisting of two parallel lines

Dimensions: Hp = 38 mm

Fabric: fine, orange with an off-white slip, well fired

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: wheel-made

Use traces: no

Dating: Roman

Zone 5

1. Description: flagon with a rounded reverted rim and a deep horizontal groove on the outside, and a wide cylindrical neck delimited by a thin horizontal nervure

Dimensions: D = 150 mm; Hp = 30 mm

Fabric: semi-fine, orange, well fired

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: wheel-made

Use traces: no

Dating: Roman

2. Description: flagon with a rounded reverted rim and two thin horizontal grooves on the outside, and a wide cylindrical neck

Dimensions: D = 180 mm; Hp = 24 mm

Fabric: semi-fine, reddish-orange, well fired

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: wheel-made

Use traces: no

Dating: Roman

3. Description: vessel with a ring-shaped base

Dimensions: Db = 70 mm; Hp = 22 mm

Fabric: fine, light brownish-orange

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: wheel-made

Use traces: no

Dating: Roman

4. Description: dish/bowl with a wide rectangular reverted rim and a thin horizontal groove on the outside

Dimensions: D = 220 mm; Hp = 28 mm

Fabric: fine, orange, well fired

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: wheel-made

Use traces: no

Dating: Roman

5. Description: lid with a thicker rounded rim marked by a thin groove and a hemispherical body

Dimensions: D = 146 mm; Hp = 28 mm

Fabric: fine, orange, well fired

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: wheel-made

Use traces: no

Dating: Roman

6. Description: flagon with a slightly reverted rounded rim and a wide horizontal groove on the outside, and a wide cylindrical neck

Dimensions: D = 128 mm; Hp = 26 mm

Fabric: fine, orange, well fired

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: wheel-made

Use traces: no

Dating: Roman

7. Description: four fragments of a vessel painted on the body with thick parallel red lines

Dimensions: Hp = 22 – 48 mm; Wp = 25 – 33 mm

Fabric: fine, yellowish-orange with dark red paint, well fired

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: wheel-made

Use traces: no

Dating: Roman

8. Description: awl made of an iron rod; handle with a rectangular cross-section and a rounded butt, blade gradually tapering to a partially broken point

Dimensions: L = 124.5 mm; Wmax = 11 mm; Th = 8 mm

Fabric: iron, corroded

Preservation: complete

Manufacturing: forge

Use traces: partially broken point

Dating: Roman

9. Description: translucent cobalt blue pearl made from two distinct glass layers, with the fragmentary tip of a metal rod present in the partial perforation. First layer consists of a rounded monochrome bead wound around the metal rod. The second layer with an almost spherical shape was added on the surface of the bead, covering one end of the perforation. A small drop of translucent cobalt blue glass remained attached to the tip of the broken metal rod.

Dimensions: D second layer = 12 mm; D first layer = 6 mm; D perf/D metal rod = 2 mm; H = 10 mm

Fabric: translucent cobalt blue glass and iron

Preservation: complete, probably a reject or part of an earring / hairpin / pendant

Manufacturing: first layer – winding molten on a metal rod; second layer – winding molten glass on the first layer

Use traces: fine chipping / abrasions around the perforation

Dating: middle to late La Tène or Roman

10. Description: two fragments of the rectangular base of a terracotta figurine, undecorated

Dimensions: a) Lp = 18 mm; Wp = 12 mm; Hp = 13 mm; b) Lp = 20 mm; Wp = 16 mm; Hp = 18 mm

Fabric: fine, light orange, well fired

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: mould casting

Use traces: no

Dating: Roman

Zone 6

1. Description: large vessel with a slightly inverted rounded rim and an ovoid body

Dimensions: D = 300 mm; Hp = 56 mm

Fabric: coarse, brownish-black on the outside, light brown-orange on the inside, burnished

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: handmade

Use traces: no

Dating: Early Iron Age

2. Description: pitcher with a vertical rounded rim and a deep horizontal groove on the inside, a cylindrical neck and two strap handles attached to the rim and grooved

Dimensions: D = 130 mm; Hp = 30 mm

Fabric: semi-fine, light brownish-orange

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: wheel-made

Use traces: no

Dating: Roman

3. Description: bowl with an inverted rounded rim and a hemispherical body

Dimensions: D = 150 mm; Hp = 31 mm

Fabric: fine, orange, well fired

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: wheel-made

Use traces: no

Dating: Roman

4. Description: large flagon with a triangular reverted rim and a horizontal groove on the inside, and a wide cylindrical neck

Dimensions: D = 200 mm; Hp = 28 mm

Fabric: fine, orange, well fired

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: wheel-made

Use traces: no

Dating: Roman

5. Description: flagon with a rounded reverted rim

Dimensions: D = 120 mm; Hp = 38 mm

Fabric: semi-fine, red, well fired

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: wheel-made

Use traces: no

Dating: Roman

6. Description: shoulder of a fragmentary vessel decorated with a motif in relief, partially preserved, consisting of two parallel curved lines

Dimensions: Hp = 40 mm; Wp = 32 mm

Fabric: semi-fine, greyish-black, well fired

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: wheel-made with applied decoration

Use traces: no

Dating: Roman

7. Description: vessel with an almost vertical rounded rim

Dimensions: D = 260 mm; Hp = 51 mm

Fabric: coarse, black

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: handmade

Use traces: no

Dating: Early Iron Age

8. Description: vessel with an elongated knob handle

Dimensions: Hp = 33 mm; Wp = 30 mm

Fabric: coarse, brownish-orange with an orange core

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: handmade

Use traces: soot

Dating: Early Iron Age

9. Description: vessel with a vertical rounded rim and a wide horizontal groove

Dimensions: D = 290 mm; Hp = 30 mm

Fabric: coarse, light orange

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: handmade

Use traces: no

Dating: Early Iron Age

Zone 7

1. Description: jar with a triangular oblique rim and a deep internal horizontal groove, and a short neck

Dimensions: D = 190 mm; Hp = 29 mm

Fabric: fine, orange, well fired

Preservation: fragmentary
Manufacturing: wheel-made
Use traces: no
Dating: Roman

2. Description: flagon with a slightly reverted rounded rim and a wide horizontal groove on the outside, and a wide cylindrical neck
Dimensions: D = 160 mm; Hp = 30 mm
Fabric: semi-fine, light brownish-orange with a light grey core
Preservation: fragmentary
Manufacturing: wheel-made
Use traces: no
Dating: Roman

3. Description: flagon with a thin rounded reverted rim having a thin horizontal incision on the inside, and a cylindrical neck delimited by a thin nervure
Dimensions: D = 130 mm; Hp = 32 mm
Fabric: semi-fine, brownish-grey
Preservation: fragmentary
Manufacturing: wheel-made
Use traces: no
Dating: Roman

4. Description: small beaker with a thin rounded reverted rim and a short neck
Dimensions: D = 84 mm; Hp = 33 mm
Fabric: fine, orange, well fired
Preservation: fragmentary
Manufacturing: wheel-made
Use traces: no
Dating: Roman

5. Description: flat base of a vessel, delimited by a rounded horizontal nervure
Dimensions: Db = 70 mm; Hp = 20 mm
Fabric: semi-fine, brownish-orange
Preservation: fragmentary
Manufacturing: wheel-made
Use traces: no
Dating: Roman

6. Description: flat base of a vessel
Dimensions: Db = 100 mm; Hp = 32 mm

Fabric: semi-fine, orange
Preservation: fragmentary
Manufacturing: wheel-made
Use traces: no
Dating: Roman

7. Description: three fragments of the same vessel bearing graffiti incised post-firing

Dimensions: a) Hp = 33 mm; Wp = 35 mm; b) Hp = 30 mm; Wp = 51 mm; c) Hp = 28 mm; Wp = 32 mm

Fabric: semi-fine, red, well fired

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: wheel-made

Use traces: incised letters or numbers – a) V, N, M or A; b) V, N, M or A and X; c) A or V

Dating: Roman

8. Description: bell clapper made of an iron rod; the broken top end was flattened and perforated, while the lower end was bent into a swirl

Dimensions: Lp = 58.5 mm; Wmax = 14 mm; Th = 9 mm

Fabric: iron, corroded

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: forge

Use traces: broken attachment hole

Dating: Roman or medieval

9. Description: almost hemispherical ceramic firing spacer with a slightly concave base and a porous surface

Dimensions: D = 25 mm; H = 18 mm

Fabric: coarse, brownish-orange with black spots

Preservation: complete

Manufacturing: hand-made

Use traces: uneven firing, partially blackened surface

Dating: Roman

10. Description: fragment of a glass vessel, probably with a rectangular body, numerous bubbles

Dimensions: Lp = 18 mm; Wp = 12 mm; Th = 2.2 mm

Fabric: transparent glass with a yellowish hue

Preservation: fragmentary, probably from a bottle

Manufacturing: mould blown

Use traces: no

Dating: Roman or medieval

11. Description: fragment of a glass vessel, fairly numerous bubbles

Dimensions: Lp = 11 mm; Wp = 7 mm; Th = 1.2 mm

Fabric: transparent blue glass

Preservation: fragmentary, probably from a globular vessel

Manufacturing: free blown

Use traces: no

Dating: Roman

Zone 8

1. Description: vessel with a globular body, decorated with wide vertical grooves

Dimensions: Hp = 42 mm

Fabric: semi-fine, black on the outside, orange on the inside

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: handmade

Use traces: no

Dating: Gáva

2. Description: jar with a vertical rounded rim and a short neck

Dimensions: D = 150 mm; Hp = 30 mm

Fabric: coarse, light brown

Preservation: fragmentary

Manufacturing: handmade

Use traces: secondary burning

Dating: Gáva

Annex 1

Zone	Rom ox fine	Rom ox semi-fine	Rom ox coarse	Rom red fine	Rom red semi-fine	Rom red coarse	EIA ox/red semi-fine	EIA ox semi-fine	EIA ox coarse	EIA ox/red coarse	EIA red semi-fine	EIA red coarse	Med ox semi-fine	Burnt daub kg	CBM kg	Other
1	3	2			1										0.65	
2														1.1	13.85	
3	2	1											2			
4	4				1											
5	39		1						2			1	12	1		2 Rom cer base figs; 1 Fe awl; 1 glass bead
6	6	6	6	1	3	7	2	5	27	4	2	3		0.8		1 Rom cer plaque fig
7	9	19	4		2				10	7						1 Rom cer spacer; 2 glass figs; 1 bell clapper
8	12	7	4				1		64			29		1.7		2 sandstone slab figs
10		2			1				2							
11	1	1											4	0.3	0.5	
12									1	2						

**SETTLEMENT AND LAND-USE PATTERNS IN THE SURROUNDINGS OF
THE IRON AGE CEMETERIES AT SÂNCRAI-DARVAS (ALBA COUNTY)**

ABSTRACT

The article discusses the results of a systematic field survey conducted in 2022 in the surroundings of the Iron Age cemeteries at Sâncrai - Darvas (Alba County). The field survey is part of a larger project aiming to investigate the ways in which different communities from the middle Mureş valley interacted with the environment, creating, using and manipulating specific landscapes from the Iron Age to the Roman period. Another more targeted scope is to understand not only the funerary practices of different Iron Age communities that used the same burial ground, but also the emergence and transformation of the local ritual landscape and its connections with the local settlements and their land-use patterns.

The Iron Age cemeteries at Sâncrai-Darvas were first identified in 2015 before the construction of the new Sebeş – Turda motorway. Rescue archaeological investigations were conducted in 2016, unearthing two cemeteries, one dated to the *Scythian* horizon and another to the LT C2. Since the burial ground extends westward, outside the area affected by the motorway, a new archaeological project was initiated in 2020 to continue the systematic, multidisciplinary investigation of the two cemeteries.

A total number of 15 areas were selected for surveys, of which 11 produced relevant results. Only six of them included finds that can be dated to the Early Iron Age. The largest number of pottery fragments of this kind was recovered from zones 6, 7 and 8. The earliest dated ones belong to the Gáva culture, while others belong to the final phase of the Early Iron Age, being contemporaneous with the *Scythian* horizon and the respective cemetery from Sâncrai - Darvas.

Of the 11 surveyed zones which produced relevant results, 9 included finds that can be dated to the Roman provincial period. Like in the case of the Early Iron Age, the Roman provincial discoveries are also concentrated on the higher area of the floodplain on the left bank of the Mureş River, in surveyed zones 5-8. Based on the spatial distribution and density of the recovered artefacts and the typo-chronological characteristics of the pottery, it can be presumed that zones 7 and 8 are actually part of a single rural settlement in which at least one pottery workshop could have functioned. This was part of the agricultural hinterland of Aiud/*Brvcla*, which must have functioned as a small central place during the Roman provincial period.

**MODELE DE ORGANIZARE A AȘEZĂRILOR ȘI DE EXPLOATARE A
TERITORIULUI ÎN AREALUL NECROPOLELOR DIN EPOCA FIERULUI DE
LA SÂNCRAI - DARVAS (JUD. ALBA)**

REZUMAT

Articolul discută rezultatele unei periegheze sistematice organizate în anul 2022, în arealul necropolelor din epoca fierului de la Sâncrai - Darvas (jud. Alba). Periegheza face parte dintr-un proiect mai larg care are ca scop studierea modului în care diferite comunități de pe valea mijlocie a Mureșului au interacționat cu mediul înconjurător, creând, utilizând și transformând o serie de peisaje caracteristice din epoca fierului și până în perioada romană. Un alt scop mai restrâns este de a înțelege nu doar practicile funerare ale diverselor comunități ale epocii fierului care au utilizat același spațiu funerar, dar și apariția și transformarea peisajului ritual local și legăturile acestuia cu așezările din zonă și cu modurile lor de utilizare a teritoriului.

Necropolele din epoca fierului de la Sâncrai - Darvas au fost inițial identificate în anul 2015, înainte de construirea noii autostrăzi Sebeș – Turda. Cercetările arheologice preventive au fost realizate în anul 2016, fiind descoperite două necropole, una datată în orizontul *scitic*, iar cealaltă în perioada LT C2. Deoarece spațiul funerar se extindea spre vest, în afara zonei afectate de construcția autostrăzii, un nou proiect arheologic a fost inițiat în anul 2020, pentru a continua cercetarea sistematică, multi-disciplinară a celor două necropole.

Un număr total de 15 zone au fost selectate pentru periegheze, din care 11 au produs rezultate relevante. Doar șase dintre acestea au inclus descoperiri care pot fi datate în prima epocă a fierului. Cel mai mare număr de fragmente ceramice de acest fel a fost descoperit în zonele 6, 7 și 8. Cele mai timpurii aparțin culturii Gáva, iar altele aparțin fazei finale a primei epoci a fierului, fiind contemporane cu orizontul *scitic* și cu necropola respectivă de la Sâncrai - Darvas.

Dintre cele 11 zone investigate, care au produs rezultate relevante, nouă includ descoperiri care pot fi datate în perioada provincială romană. Ca și în cazul primei epoci a fierului, descoperirile aparținând perioadei provinciale sunt, de asemenea, concentrate în aria mai înaltă a câmpiei inundabile de pe malul stâng al Mureșului, în zonele 5-8. Pe baza distribuției spațiale și a densității artefactelor recuperate, precum și a caracteristicilor tipo-cronologice ale ceramicii, se poate presupune că zonele 7 și 8 fac de fapt parte dintr-o singură așezare rurală în care ar fi putut funcționa cel puțin un atelier ceramic. Această așezare a făcut parte din hinterlandul agricol al micului centru care a existat la Aiud/*Brvecla*, în perioada provincială romană.

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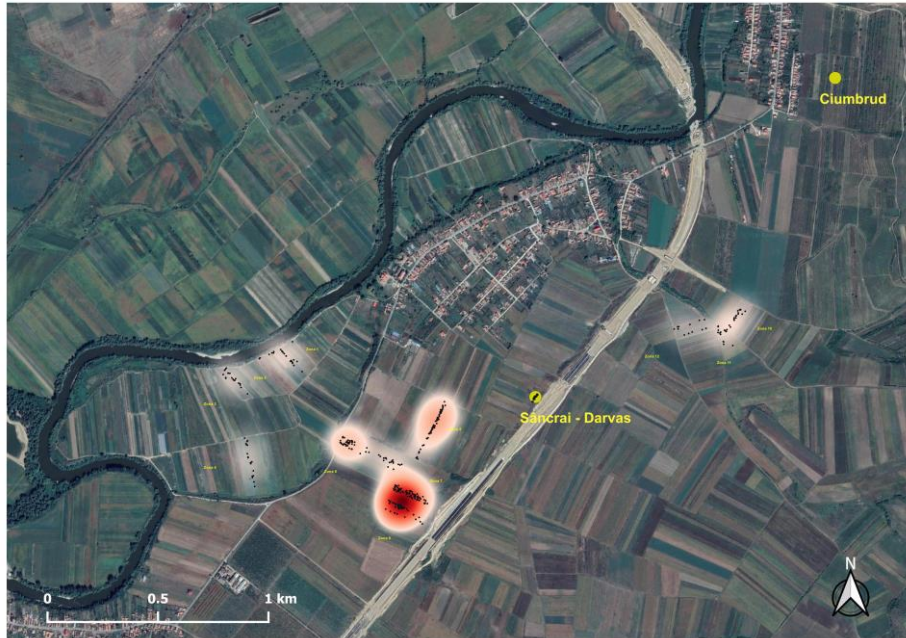


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

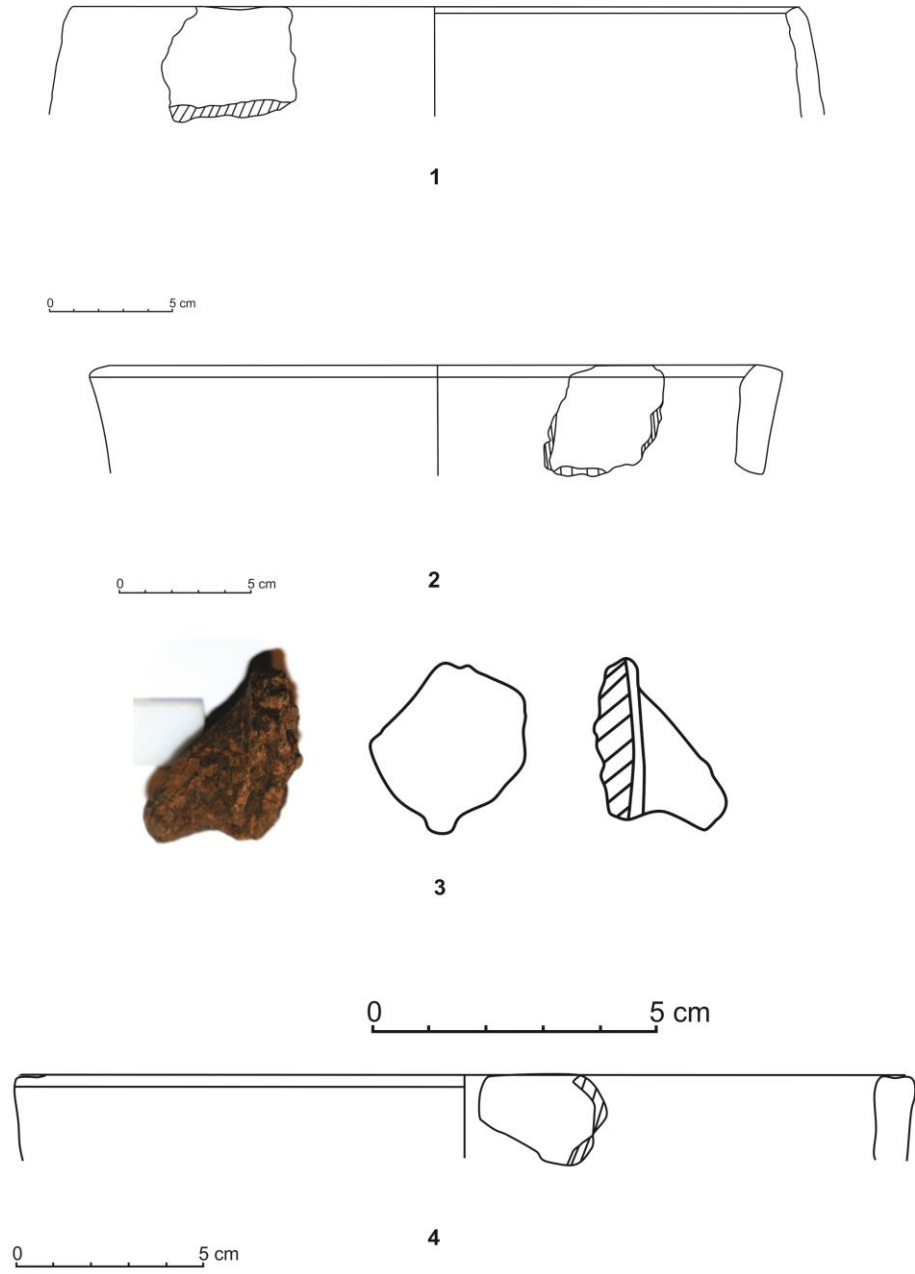


Fig. 3

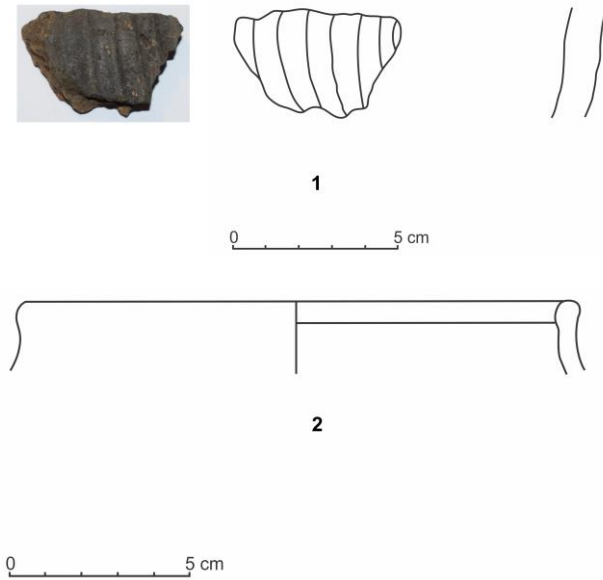


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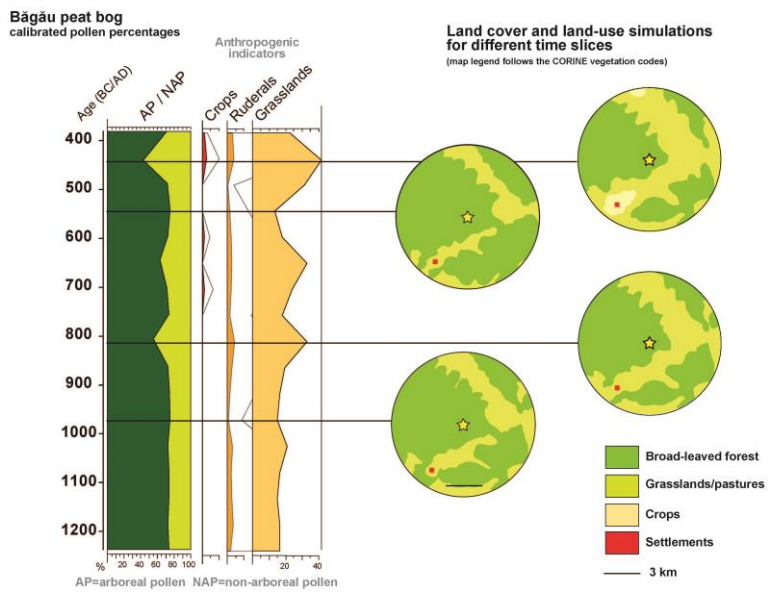


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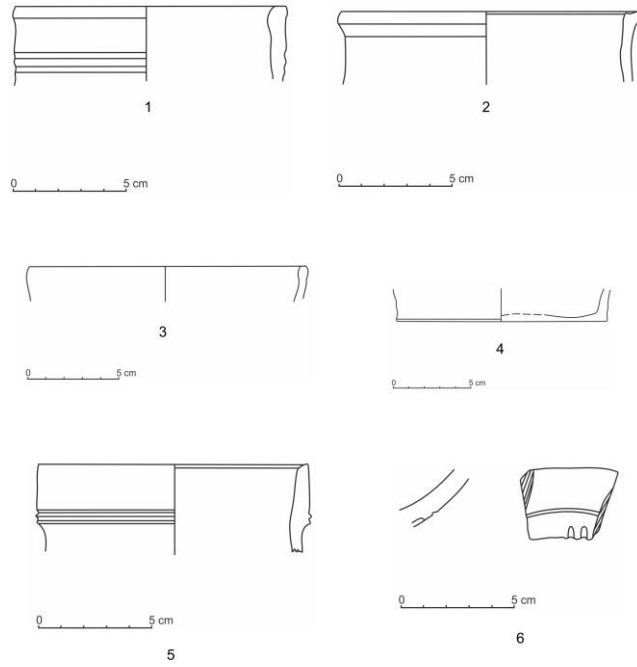
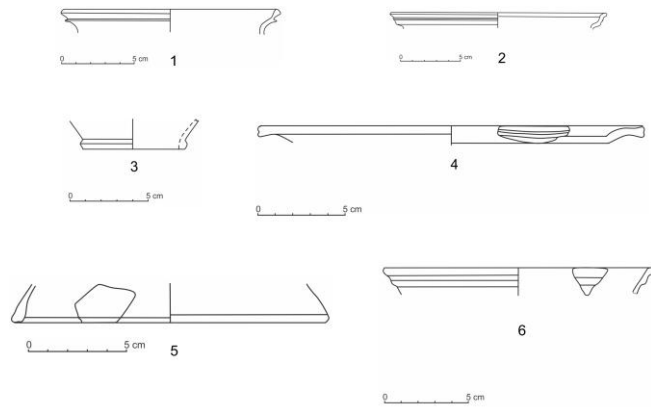


Fig. 6



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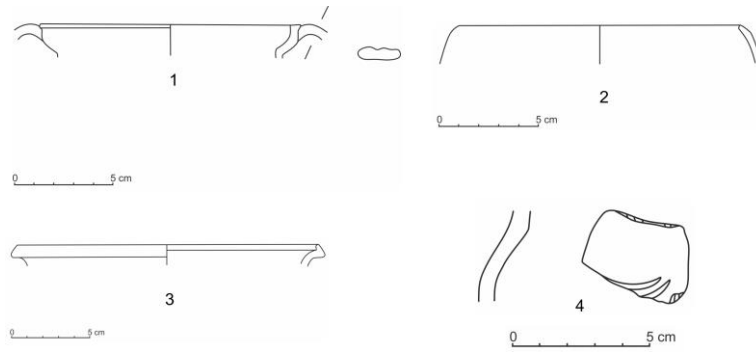


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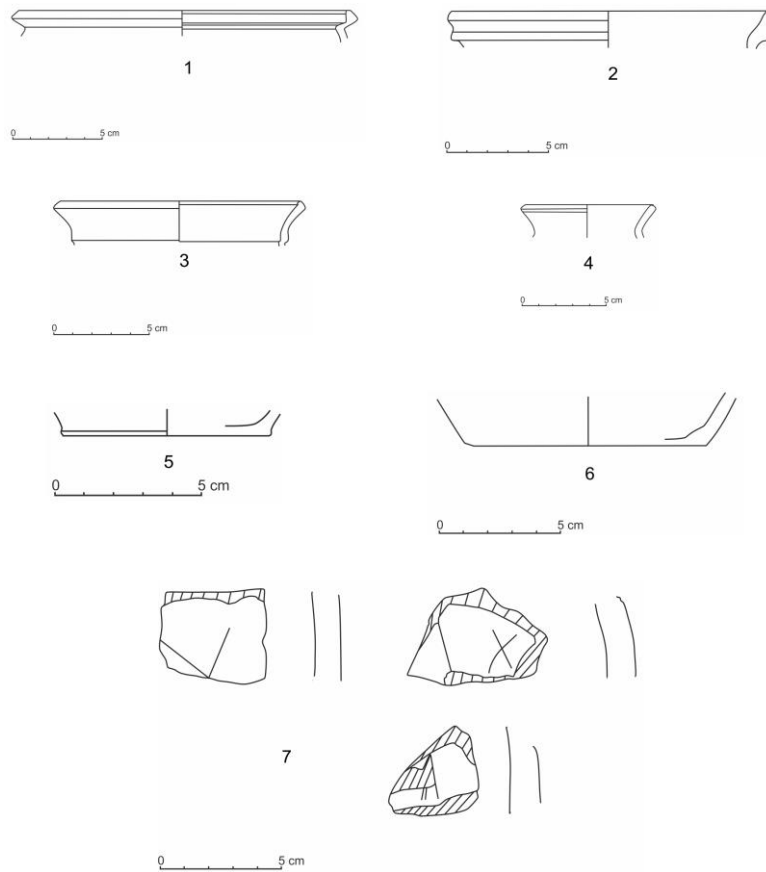


Fig. 9

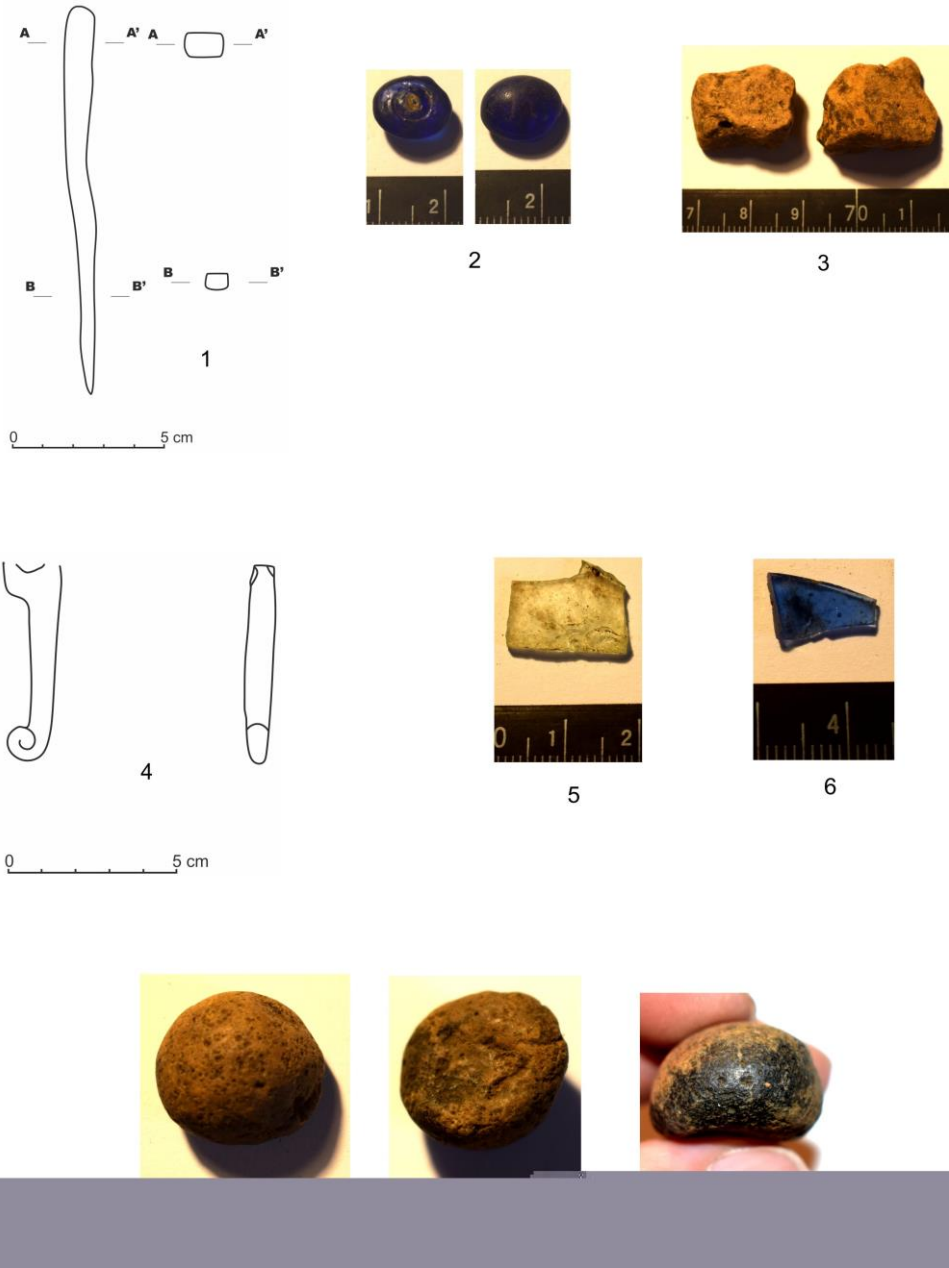


Fig. 10