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FUNERARY CERAMICS OF THE ČIERNA TYPE FROM THE NECROPOLIS OF ALBA IULIA – *STAȚIA DE SALVARE*

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Cuvinte-cheie: Alba Iulia, Orăștie, Saltovo–Mayaki, tip Čierna, Hajdúsámson, ceramică funerară
Key words: Alba Iulia, Orăștie, Saltovo–Mayaki, Čierna-type, Hajdúsámson, funerary ceramic

During the salvage excavations conducted at Alba Iulia – *Stația de Salvare* between 1980 and 1985, four specimens of the Čierna ceramic type were identified among the funerary assemblage, all of which were handlesless. In a posthumous publication attributed to the archaeologist R. R. Heitel, the presence of a miniature Čierna-type vessel within the funerary ceramics from Alba Iulia was also documented. The ceramic vessel in question is reported to have been discovered in one of the stone coated graves of the third necropolis from Alba Iulia – *Stația de Salvare*. Within this context, the aforementioned author underlines the vessel's Eastern origin, while noting that the trajectory of its development within the Carpathian Basin remains insufficiently clarified[1].

I. Funerary Complexes: Description and Analysis

Grave 407 (Depth = 70 cm; Orientation = WNW–ESE; Skeleton length = 170 cm)

The skeleton (**Pl. I/1**), likely that of a mature female, was positioned in dorsal decubitus with both arms extended alongside the body and the right hand resting palm-down on the coxal region. The skeletal remains are in a poor state of preservation. A small ceramic vessel was placed on the left side of the skull,

[1] Heitel 1994-1995, p. 418.

near the calvarium, with its rim facing upwards and slightly tilted towards the southeast.

Funerary inventory: Small wheel-thrown ceramic vessel, made on a slow wheel, with a biconical body, very short neck, and an obliquely flaring rim featuring a horizontally bevelled and interiorly grooved lip. The paste is fine, sandy, and well-levigated, brownish-black in colour, with orange patches on the shoulder. The interior bears wide grooves. The truncated-conical neck is decorated in relief with three parallel rings separated by narrow grooves. The shoulder and upper body are ornamented with a band of horizontal striations, continued below the belly by widely spaced simple lines. The base bears a stamped relief with a central dot surrounded by four irregular ovals, all enclosed by a raised ring 3.5 mm wide. The ceramic vessel (h = 8.2 cm; D_{base} = 5.2 cm; D_{max} = 8.5 cm; D_{rim} = 6.7 cm; MNUAI F. 6600; **Pl. I/3**) was found on the left side of the skull.

Grave 612 (Depth = 105 cm; Orientation = E–W; Skeleton length = 170 cm)

The burial consisted of a rectangular pit (220 × 70 cm) with rounded corners, housing the skeleton of a robust adult-mature male (**Pl. I/2**). The bones were well preserved. The individual was positioned in dorsal decubitus, with the skull tilted to the left. The left arm was extended alongside the body, the palm resting on the femur at the joint, while the right arm was bent at the elbow, with the palm placed on the abdomen. At the feet, the burial was protected by two sandstone slabs set on edge in the NW corner, accompanied by a spherical stone positioned near the right knee. The skeleton presented robust long bones confirming the individual's sturdy build.

Funerary inventory: The burial included a wheel-thrown ceramic vessel, notable for interior grooves and concentric circular incisions on the inner lip and walls. A potter's mark, consisting in a circled cruciform motif, survives only partially—roughly half of the design is preserved, while the remainder was destroyed in antiquity. The ceramic vessel has a short body with an oval maximum diameter, a short neck, and a tall, obliquely flaring rim shaped like a collar, interiorly grooved, with a thinned and rounded lip. The shoulder and body are adorned with fine incised spiral bands, ranging from two to six lines, while the exterior and rim feature four grooved lines arranged in a band running from the base of the neck toward the lip (h = 10 cm; D_{base} = 7 cm; D_{max} = 9.6 cm; D_{rim} = 7.6 cm, th. = 0.5 cm; **Pl. I/4**). It was found near the right foot of the skeleton.

Section I/Grave 41 (Depth = 0.90 m; Grave shaft= rectangular, 2.06 x 0.52 m; Orientation: SW-NE; Skeleton length = 1.58 m)

A cist-type inhumation burial, featuring a lithic and *tegula* (Roman brick) revetment (**Pl. II/1**). The osteological remains correspond to an adult individual and the feature is recorded as undisturbed. The individual was

positioned in dorsal decubitus, fully extended, and the osteological remains were well preserved (**Pl. II/2**).

Funerary inventory: A fine sandy-tempered ceramic vessel with a dark brown to black surface, placed adjacent to the left femur. The neck is conical, grooved, and the body is decorated with widely spaced linear incisions (h = 13.5 cm; D_{rim} = 8.2 cm; D_{max} = 11 cm; D_{base} = 6.7 cm; MNUAI F. 8915; **Pl. III/2-2a**).

Unspecified grave

This ceramic vessel has a cylindrical, fluted neck and is made from fine sandy-tempered fabric. Its surface is brown with darkened patches. An incised undulating band decorates the shoulder, with the steep flank oriented to the left. At the point of maximum girth, this band overlaps a register of fine, densely spaced linear incisions (h = 10.3 cm; D_{base}= 7.5 cm; D_{rim} = 7.8 cm; D_{max} = 9.7 cm, MNUAI F. 8860; **Pl. III/1-1a**)

From Transylvania, only one other Čierna-type vessel is currently known to exist. This example, which has two handles, was discovered at Orăștie – *Dealul Pemilor* (**Pl. IV/1**), context X2/G.51[2]. It was placed to the right of the individual's skull and was associated in the funerary inventory with two bracelets—one plain and one with zoomorphic terminals—as well as a string of beads[3].

Comparable two-handled vessels have been found at Biel/Bely[4], Čierna nad Tisou[5], Galanta /Matúškovo sector[6], Hajdúsámson[7], Sreda nad Bodrogom (grave 1/1937)[8], Tarpa[9], Tiszacsege, near Újtelep[10], Przemyśl /grave 1[11], Hajdúszoboszló- 49 Bercsényi street[12].

With one exception, all three vessels from Alba Iulia come from well-documented contexts and can be placed within the group of handleless vessels dating to the second half of the 10th century. Of the four known pieces, only the example from S.I/M.41 exceeds a height of 10.3 cm; the others fall within the usual size range of the miniature vessels characteristic of Horizon II at the *Stația*

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[2] Țiplic, Pinter 2007, p. 271, Pl. 9; Țiplic 2013, p. 233, Fig. 7.
[3] Țiplic 2022, 52, Pl. 33/A, fig. 38/5.
[4] Eisner 1966, p. 166, Tab. 5/1; Fodor 1996, p. 136, Fig. 1; Nevizánsky, Košta 2009, p. 327, tab. VIII: 4.
[5] Pastor 1952, Obr. 249; Fodor 1996, p. 129, Fig. 1; Eisner 1966, p. 166, Tab. 5/3; Nevizánsky, Košta 2009, p. 327, tabl. VIII: 2; Nevizánsky 2012, p. 77, 84, obr. 3/4, 6/5.
[6] Točik 1992, p. 156, obr. 97: 9.
[7] Mesterházy 1975, p. 101, ábra 1.
[8] Eisner 1966, p. 166, Tab. 5/2; Nevizánsky, Košta 2009, p. 307, 326, tab. VIII:1a-c.
[9] Jakab 2014, p. 83; Merva 2014, Fig. 21/2O.
[10] Mesterházy 1975, p. 107, ábra 8.
[11] Koperski, Parczewski 1978a, p. 216, Abb. 7-8; Koperski, Parczewski 1978b, p. 155, obr. 4, 5; Koperski 1996, p. 441, 448, Fig. 7/3; Fodor 1996, p. 448, Fig. 3; Świętosławski 2006, p. 67, Ryc. 11.
[12] Fodor 1996, p. 232, Fig. 1.

de Salvare site in Alba Iulia. Two vessels also bear base stamps: one consists in a central dot framed by four irregular ovals (G.407), while the other features a circle with an inscribed cross motif (G.612). Szabina Merva places vessels with cylindrical, fluted necks in subtype III/2[13], a category that includes five known examples from northeastern Pannonia: Tiszacsoma (Csamo) – *Szipahát*, Miskolc – *Repülőtér*, Kálmánháza – *Vitézsorok*, Nagyhegyes – *Jónatanya*, and Tiszabura – *Szőlőskert dűlő.*

The understanding of these discoveries is further enhanced by the specimen recovered from Šarovce/G. 19, Levice District, Malé Šarovce site (Šarovce II). This handleless ceramic vessel has a grooved neck (h = 10.2–10.4 cm), incised motifs on the body, and a star shaped potter's mark on the base[14].

Handleless ceramic vessels with cylindrical or conical necks are attested in funerary contexts dated to the 10th–11th centuries at Majs-udvari rétek[15] and Tiszabura[16]. The specimen from Alba Iulia – *Stația de Salvare*, although recovered from an uncertain archaeological context, exhibits close typological and decorative affinities with the vessel from Szob-Vendelin, Grave 25, deposited in a burial at the end of the 10th century[17]. Comparable features are also observed in the vessel from Halimba-Cseres, Grave 149, found approximately 10 cm from the skeleton's foot. The vessel is decorated with two parallel wavy lines executed on the shoulder, superimposed over a set of shallow horizontal incisions. A cross-shaped stamp is impressed on the base. Measurements: height = 12.5 cm; rim diameter (D_{rim}) = 7.6 cm; base diameter (Db) = 9.2 cm; maximum diameter (Dp) = 12.5 cm. Inventory number: 55.1.195.A[18].

Over time, several scholarly views have rightly argued for a genetic connection between these vessel types and the ceramics characteristic of the Saltovo–Mayaki cultural horizon[19].

Within the funerary ceramic context belonging to this chronological horizon at Alba Iulia, only a single vessel is attested, deposited in the area of the skull, the thorax/pelvis, or the lower limbs. Another noteworthy observation concerns the tendency toward the miniaturization of funerary ceramics, a feature also documented among Čierna-type vessels.

[13] Merva 2014, p. 215, Fig. 10.
[14] Nevizánsky 2006, p. 293, tabl. IX: 3.
[15] Kiss 1983, p. 82, abra 66/67.
[16] Horváth 1934, p. 143, 104 kép. 2; Fodor 1996, p. 287, Fig. 1.
[17] Török 1956, p. 132, 36. ábra, 4; Eisner 1966, p. 166.
[18] Török 1962, p. 148, Abb.10/149, Pl. LXIX/149; Eisner 1966, p. 166; Szigeti 2016, p. 82-84, 7. kép 3, 8. Kép.
[19] Eisner 1966, p. 166; Mesterházy 1975, p. 109.

On the other hand, the presence of features built with reused stone and Roman tiles constitutes another reliable dating criterion, as this practice is characteristic of the funerary landscape at Alba Iulia during the 10th century. The classic vessel discovered at Orăștie – *Dealul Pemilor*, X2/Grave 51, can likewise be assigned to the same chronological horizon.

II. Conclusions

At the current stage of research, approximately 52 graves belonging to Hungarian warriors have been documented in the necropolis at Alba Iulia – *Stația de Salvare*, and the presence of these vessels of eastern origin should not be regarded as unexpected. With the exception of the handled specimen from Orăștie–Dealul Pemilor X2/Grave 51, all ceramic vessels from Alba Iulia – *Stația de Salvare* are handleless.

Although Čierna-type vessels typically originate from Hungarian warrior graves, the specimens from Transylvania have been identified in both female and male burial pits. Such proto-Hungarian ceramic finds are extremely rare within the Transylvanian funerary milieu and are dated to the second half of the 10th century. Their morphology most likely represents a lingering tradition rooted in the Saltovo–Mayaki cultural sphere.

ABSTRACT

Salvage excavations carried out between 1980 and 1985 at Alba Iulia – *Stația de Salvare* brought to light four Čierna-type ceramic vessels, all handleless and associated with 10th century funerary contexts. A further miniature specimen, mentioned posthumously by R. R. Heitel, is attributed to a stone-lined grave belonging to the site's third necropolis. Three vessels derive from secure archaeological contexts, found near the skull, pelvis, or lower limbs of the deceased. Their main morphological traits—short or biconical bodies, cylindrical or conical necks, incised or grooved decoration, and fine sandy fabrics—align with the known characteristics of Čierna-type ceramics. Two pieces also preserve potter's marks, consisting of a circled cross or a central dot framed by ovals.

Typological and decorative parallels connect these items to a wider distribution across the Carpathian Basin and Eastern Central Europe, including finds from Szob – *Vendelin*, Halimba – *Cseres*, Slovakia, Hungary, and southern Poland. These affinities support longstanding hypotheses linking Čierna-type ceramics to the Saltovo–Mayaki cultural sphere. The reduced size of the Alba Iulia vessels reflects a broader trend toward miniature funerary ceramics documented in Horizon II at Stația de Salvare.

Within Transylvania, Čierna-type vessels are exceedingly rare: aside from Alba Iulia-*Stația de Salvare*, only one two-handled specimen from Orăștie – *Dealul Pemilo*r is known, also dated to the second half of the 10th century. Considering the approximately 52 Hungarian warrior graves identified at Alba Iulia – *Stația de Salvare*, the presence of

eastern-derived ceramic types is not unexpected. Nevertheless, their scarcity, typological consistency, and distribution suggest that these vessels represent a residual tradition rooted in Saltovo–Mayaki cultural influences, preserved within the funerary practices of the proto-Hungarian communities settled in Transylvania during the later 10th century.

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Pl. II. 1: Grave 41, general view: 2: Grave 41.
Pl. III. 1: Ceramic vessel from the unspecified grave; 1a: Ceramic vessel from the unspecified grave, photo; 2: Ceramic vessel from grave 41; 2a: Ceramic vessel from grave 41, photo.
Pl. IV. 1: Ceramic vessel from Orăștie – *Dealul Pemilor*/ Grave 51; 2: Ceramic vessel from grave 51, photo (after Țiplic 2022).

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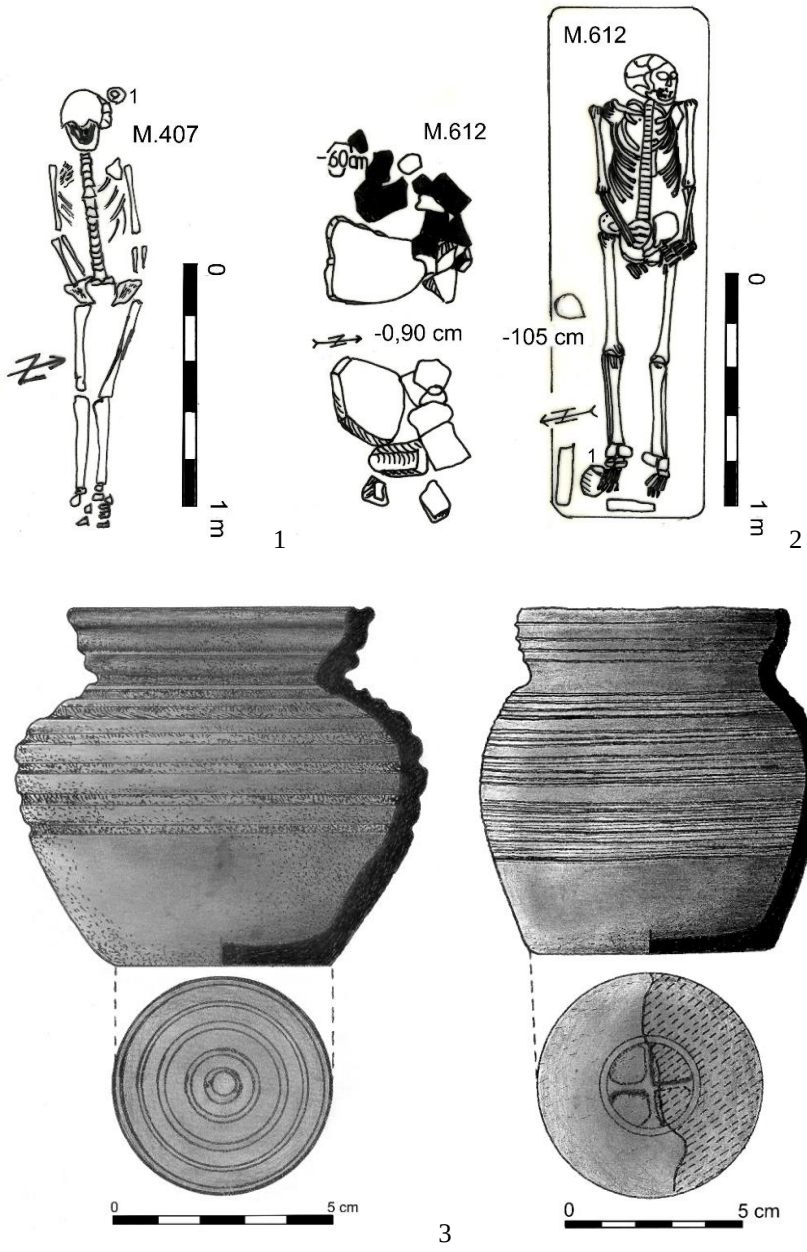
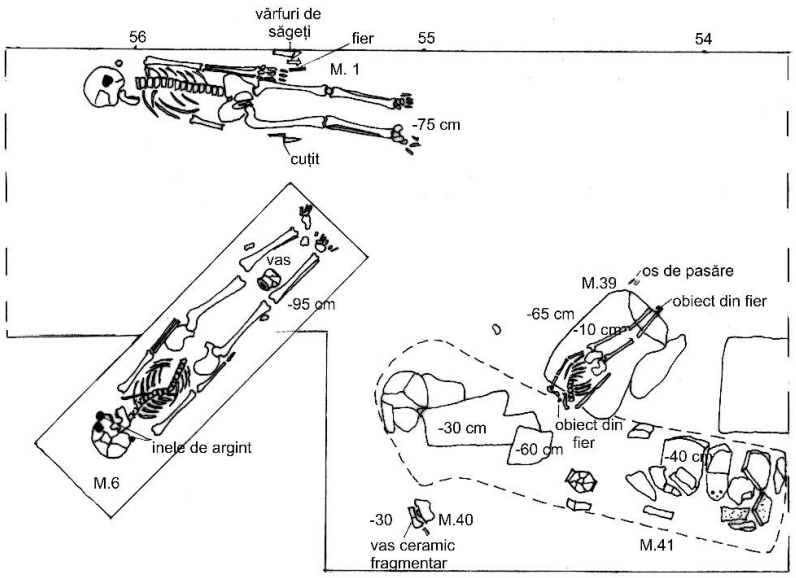


Pl. I. 1: Skeleton from grave 407; 2: Skeleton from grave 612; 3: Ceramic vessel from grave 407; 4: Ceramic vessel from grave 612.



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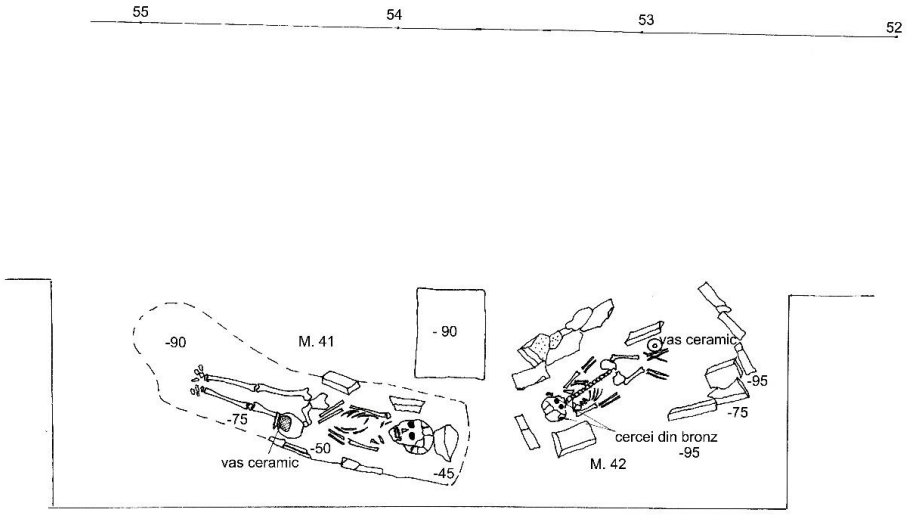

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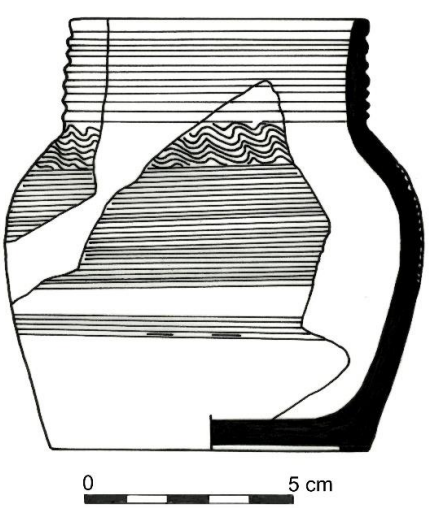
Pl. II. 1: Grave 41, general view: 2: Grave 41.



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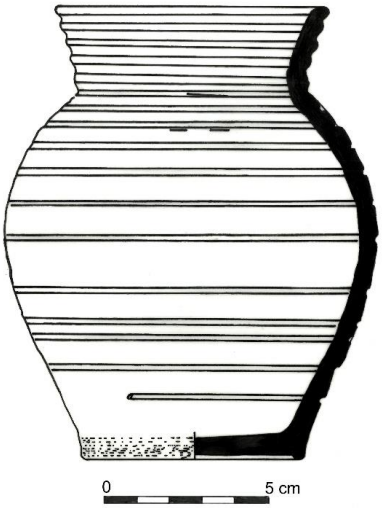


2

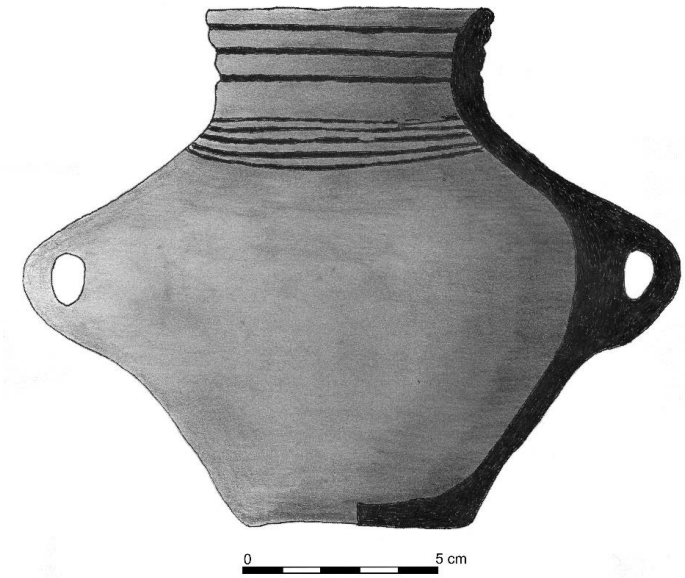


1a



2a

Pl. III. 1: Ceramic vessel from the unspecified grave; 1a: Ceramic vessel from the unspecified grave, photo; 2: Ceramic vessel from grave 41; 2a: Ceramic vessel from grave 41, photo.



1



2

Pl. IV. 1: Ceramic vessel from Orăștie – *Dealul Pemilor*/ Grave 51; 2: Ceramic vessel from grave 51, photo (after Țiplic 2022).