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On the Two-Room Dwelling from Precinct IV of the Early Medieval Fortification in Dăbâca (Cluj County) and the Chronology of the First Stage of Fortification*

Dan Băcuet-Crișan

Abstract: The early medieval fortification from Dăbâca has been researched through systematic excavations during the Communist Era, since 1964. Although the research started very well, its final publication has been disappointing. The most interesting point has been the chronological classification of the oldest phase of fortification dated, at that time, to the ninth – tenth centuries.

This short presentation takes into consideration the two-room surface dwelling (measuring 8 × 8 m) discovered in precinct IV. Beginning with its first mentioning in 1968, none of those studying the issue of fortifications has escalated the problem of this two-room surface dwelling.

The analogies for this surface dwelling in the Moravian environment – dated between the ninth and mid-tenth century – clearly show that the Moravian model has been used in Dăbâca and can be interpreted as a manifestation of kindred links between the two geographical areas.

Keywords: early medieval, dwelling, fortification, chronology, elites.

Introduction. Reasons

The early medieval fortification in Dăbâca has been researched through systematic excavations since 1964¹. Though research on the site started and was performed vigorously, its completion through the publication of the results has been and still is lacking in quality.

One knows that the study of this important site, characterized by a great stratigraphic and chronological complexity, remains, to this day, incomplete. Unfortunately, the only available data that one can use is that in the archaeological report published in 1968².

Romanian (but also foreign) researchers who have also tackled the issue of the introduction and development of early medieval fortifications in Transylvania have come across the lack of actual data on the site under discussion here. Naturally, almost all the discoveries made in Dăbâca have raised debates, but the most interesting aspect was the chronological identification of the earliest stage of fortification – precincts I, III, and IV (Pl. 1) – dated, at that time, to the ninth-tenth century³.

It is also interesting to note that although the new generation of archaeologists researching the fortifications strongly criticizes the dating and way of publication of the results from Dăbâca, no one has yet initiated a serious project of reinterpreting and re-analyzing all the elements of this site: its stratigraphy, archaeological complexes, and artefacts!

Erwin Gáll has recently started an analysis (debatable as well!) of one of the cemeteries identified in Dăbâca⁴, but the cemeteries are but one aspect of this site and their analysis independent from the entire archaeological complex might render the understanding of the inner development of the site even more difficult!

Discussions on the chronological identification of the fortification in general and of the first stage of fortification in particular, have made reference to the stratigraphic situation, planimetry, construction technique of the defensive elements and have envisaged certain discovered artifacts. The present

* The Romanian variant of this text has been prepared for AMP, XXXV, 2013. English translation: Ana M. Gruia and Cătălina Opreș-Crișan.

¹ Pascu *et al.* 1968, 53.

² Pascu *et al.* 1968, 53–202.

³ Pascu *et al.* 1968, 169.

⁴ Gáll 2010, 9–49.

article mainly focuses on the two-room dwelling, but also on certain elements discovered in precincts I and IV that have been considered part of the first stage of fortification. Referring to the two-room construction, one must note the fact that none of the specialists studying the issue of the fortifications have insisted upon it ever since its first mention, in 1968!

The two-room dwelling. Analogies and chronological considerations

Inside precinct IV archaeologists have found a surface dwelling with the sides measuring 8×8 m, having two rooms. The construction was built on timber sills, leaning from place to place on stone slabs. On the eastern side the dwelling had a porch⁵. For the time being, the two-room dwelling from Dăbâca is the only such building discovered in an early medieval fortification in Transylvania.

Unfortunately, the ground plan of the dwelling remains unpublished and thus one does not know how it looked like and one faces difficulties in attempting its graphic reconstruction and in finding the best associations with buildings of the same type from other areas and cultural contexts. Nevertheless, using the descriptive data published in 1968⁶ for the large-size dwelling in Dăbâca I found excellent analogies in Ducové, Slovakia, where two-room constructions were discovered inside the fortified precinct attributed to the elites⁷. The two constructions had the following characteristics: *Construction 1* (Pl. 4/1) – surface building on timber sills measuring 12.84×5.00 m, with two rooms⁸; *Construction 2* (Pl. 4/2) – surface building measuring 4.4×3.85 m, with a porch⁹. Both constructions have been dated to the period between the ninth century and the middle of the tenth century¹⁰.

Another analogy, from the Moravian area as well, might be the large construction inside the fortification in Břeclav-Pohansko, built during the Carolingian-Ottonian stage¹¹. The series of examples of this type can be continued with the fortification in Gars-Thunau (Austria) where the large buildings have also been attributed to the elites (*herrenhaus*) and dated after the middle of the ninth century¹².

In Ducové, Břeclav-Pohansko, and Gars-Thunau the situation is clear; the large constructions indicate the existence of the elites, of local potentates and power centers. Starting from the archaeological situation in Ducové I believe that the two-room construction discovered in Dăbâca can be attributed to the leading elite¹³, a fact that has been also mentioned in 1968¹⁴.

Conclusions

The team who published the research report in 1968 has also suggested the existence of a power center in Dăbâca¹⁵. Recently, in a book focusing on early medieval fortifications in Transylvania, my colleague M. Țiplic admitted the existence of a lord's court (with a corresponding settlement) in Dăbâca during the first stage of fortification (that he labeled Dăbâca 1); he dated the court during the tenth century¹⁶, maybe also during the first years of the eleventh century¹⁷.

⁵ Pascu *et al.* 1968, 168.

⁶ Pascu *et al.* 1968, 168.

⁷ Ruttikay 2005, 231.

⁸ Ruttikay 2005, 232, Pl. 13.

⁹ Ruttikay 2005, 233.

¹⁰ Ruttikay 2005, 234.

¹¹ Macháček 2001, Abb. 5, Abb. 8, 286.

¹² Herold 2007, 83, Abb. 3.5.5.

¹³ Recently, in an attempt to re-interpret the inventory and archaeological contexts identified in Dăbâca, Erwin Gáll stated that the large, surface dwelling “can hardly be considered the home of an elite person” (Gáll 2013, 187). Taking into consideration this statement, I wonder:

a. according to Erwin Gáll, how should the house of an elite person look like?

b. is Erwin Gáll aware of the analogies I have mentioned above, which are not the only discoveries of the kind?

c. how familiar is Erwin Gáll with the characteristics of the constructions identified in early medieval settlements in Transylvania and elsewhere?

Independent of the possible answers to these questions, archaeological reality remains the same and such constructions are extremely rare, and thus they must have enjoyed special status!

¹⁴ Pascu *et al.* 1968, 168.

¹⁵ Pascu *et al.* 1968, 161.

¹⁶ Țiplic 2007, 129.

¹⁷ Țiplic 2007, 132.

In theory, the analogies from Ducové, Břeclav-Pohansko, and Gars-Thunau mentioned above could indicate a chronological moment identical to the fortification stage in Dăbâca when the two-room building was also in use. On the other hand, the analogies noted in the Moravian context – dated to the period between the ninth century and the middle of the tenth century – clearly indicate that the building model used there was also employed in Dăbâca, and one could understand/interpret this transfer as an expression of certain complex connections between the two geographic areas.

Returning to the beginning of the first stage of fortification in Dăbâca, the way in which the results of the excavations have been published represents, unfortunately, a significant drawback to chronological interpretation. In 1968 this fortification stage was dated to the ninth-tenth century, but the artefacts discovered there indicate a shorter chronological interval for this stage of use. Some of the artefacts discovered in Dăbâca have analogies dated to the ninth century, but a much better argument and a deeper analysis of the entire archaeological inventory discovered there is needed in order to support such a dating.

Pottery found on early medieval sites is an extremely important element for establishing the chronological frame of those sites, and thus pottery discovered inside precincts I and IV in Dăbâca can contribute to their dating. Unfortunately, the report published in 1968 does not include detailed descriptions of the forms and decoration of such pottery finds and the graphic illustration (plates with drawings of pottery fragments) is extremely scarce.

Available data indicate that hand-modeled pottery fragments and ceramic fragments made on the fast wheel were discovered besides fragments made on the slow wheel inside precinct I, on the wall walk¹⁸. The presence of vessels made on the slow potter's wheel in the fortification of Dăbâca is not out of the ordinary, since this pottery category predominated during the period between the eighth and tenth centuries, maybe even between the eleventh and the twelfth/thirteenth century. Nevertheless, one must pay greater attention to vessels made by hand or on the fast potter's wheel.

The pottery categories in Transylvania dated between the seventh and the tenth century underwent certain development and changes during this period, so that pottery made on the slow wheel is mostly dated to the eighth-ninth century, pottery made on the fast wheel was found in smaller quantity throughout this chronological interval, while hand-made pottery decreases in quantity until its almost complete disappearance, except for the small trays that continue to be produced during the subsequent chronological stages¹⁹.

Going from the general to the particular, I have noted the same phenomenon over a smaller geographical area. My studies on the pottery found in Sylvania Depression (between the second half of the seventh century and the first half of the tenth century) clearly indicate that, until circa the first half of the tenth century, hand modeled pottery goes through a drastic process of quantitative regression and disappears; the majority, in terms of quantity, is held by pottery made on the slow wheel, while pottery made on the fast wheel spreads and ends up growing in quantity²⁰.

Therefore, the existence of pottery vessels modeled by hand during the first stage of fortification in Dăbâca can be understood either as the perpetuation of an archaic technique or as an element that suggests an earlier dating. As for the pottery made on the fast wheel, it can be explained through the perpetuation of a modeling technique of clear ancient origin.

Four gilded silver pendants/buttons (Pl. 2) were also discovered inside precinct I, on the wall walk (at ancient ground level), on or around the two hearths²¹. Specialized literature includes previous discussions on their dating. The items were initially dated to the ninth century²², but another chronological interval has been recently suggested, on the basis of analogies that can be dated to the final third of the tenth century and the beginning of the eleventh century²³. The pendants from Dăbâca are part of a wider category of jewelry items produced under Byzantine influence (pendants, earrings, finger rings), decorated with small granules/drops placed according to different models. Globular

¹⁸ Pascu *et al.* 1968, 159.

¹⁹ Stanciu, Matei 1994, 142, 145, 311.

²⁰ Băcuet-Crișan 2005, 94; Băcuet-Crișan 2006, 831.

²¹ Pascu *et al.* 1968, 159.

²² Pascu *et al.* 1968, 177.

²³ Țiplic 2007, 130.

pendants decorated with granules feature in Bohemia during the chronological interval 900–950²⁴, while in the region of Dalmatia (Croatia) such items were dated to the middle of the ninth century²⁵.

Two extremely important artefacts were also discovered inside precinct IV: two gold-plated iron spurs (Pl. 3/A-B)²⁶. My colleague C. Cosma analyzes the two golden spurs discovered in Dăbâca in a recent study that focuses on early medieval spurs (seventh-tenth century) from Transylvania and suggests that they should be dated to the tenth century and the first decades of the eleventh century²⁷. Presenting the two spurs, C. Cosma states that they were discovered inside the two-room dwelling²⁸ and makes reference to the archaeological report on the research in Dăbâca published in 1968²⁹. Going again through the 1968 report I noted that, in fact, C. Cosma mixed up the complexes. The authors of the research in Dăbâca have clearly stated that the two gilded spurs were discovered in one of the surface dwellings inside precinct IV³⁰ and not in the large dwelling with two rooms (also located in precinct IV) as my colleague C. Cosma has erroneously understood³¹!

The dating of the two spurs suggested by C. Cosma is based on Z. Hilczerówna typological classification of the discoveries from Poland³². The long-neck spur (Pl. 3/B) belongs to Type I³³ and since the neck is circular in section it can be included in variant I, Type I, dated to the tenth century-beginning of the eleventh century³⁴. Making also reference to A. Nadolski's classification of Polish weapons during the tenth-twelfth century, the long-neck spur from Dăbâca can be included in Type I, dated to the tenth century³⁵. This type of spur also features in the Moravian area, for example in the fortification of Břeclav-Pohansko where it was dated to the tenth century³⁶.

According to my opinion, there is as yet no clear data on the basis of which one can place the beginning of the fortifications during the ninth century, and in case such data come to light they might suggest/support the chronological framing after the middle of the ninth century, i.e. during the second half of the ninth century/end of the ninth century. Taking into consideration the analogies and situations noted on other sites and the arguments mentioned above, I believe that, at the present stage of research, the first elements of fortification were built in the beginning of the tenth century. Therefore, the first stage of fortification seems to have been in use during the first half of the tenth century and its end might have been caused by the first Magyar incursions in Transylvania.

Until all discoveries made in Dăbâca are published, the issue of this site's chronology remains open for debate. Still, one must note that special artefacts and archaeological situations were found there, indicating the presence of certain social/political elites. Naturally, one does not know if Dăbâca was Gelu's power center, but if the dating I have suggested above is correct, one might accept the existence of a local potentate who had his "headquarters" here, a power center in use before the first Magyar incursions in Transylvania. The chronology of the first stage of fortification in Dăbâca is connected to the possibility of arguing for the existence of one or several elites and of power centers in Transylvania; this also involves a certain social structure (stratification) developed before the first Magyar incursions, a structure that changed after the organization imposed by the Hungarian Kingdom.

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²⁴ Tomková 2011, Abb. 3.

²⁵ Jarak 2002, 255.

²⁶ Pascu *et al.* 1968, 169, 177, Fig. 5/4–5.

²⁷ Cosma 2004–2005, 192–193.

²⁸ Cosma 2004–2005, 191.

²⁹ Cosma 2004–2005, footnote 89.

³⁰ Pascu *et al.* 1968, 177.

³¹ Cosma 2004–2005, 191.

³² Cosma 2004–2005, 192.

³³ Cosma 2004–2005, 192.

³⁴ Hilczerówna 1956, 139.

³⁵ Nadolski 1954, 82, Pl. XXXV.

³⁶ Dostál 1970, Fig. 7/8.

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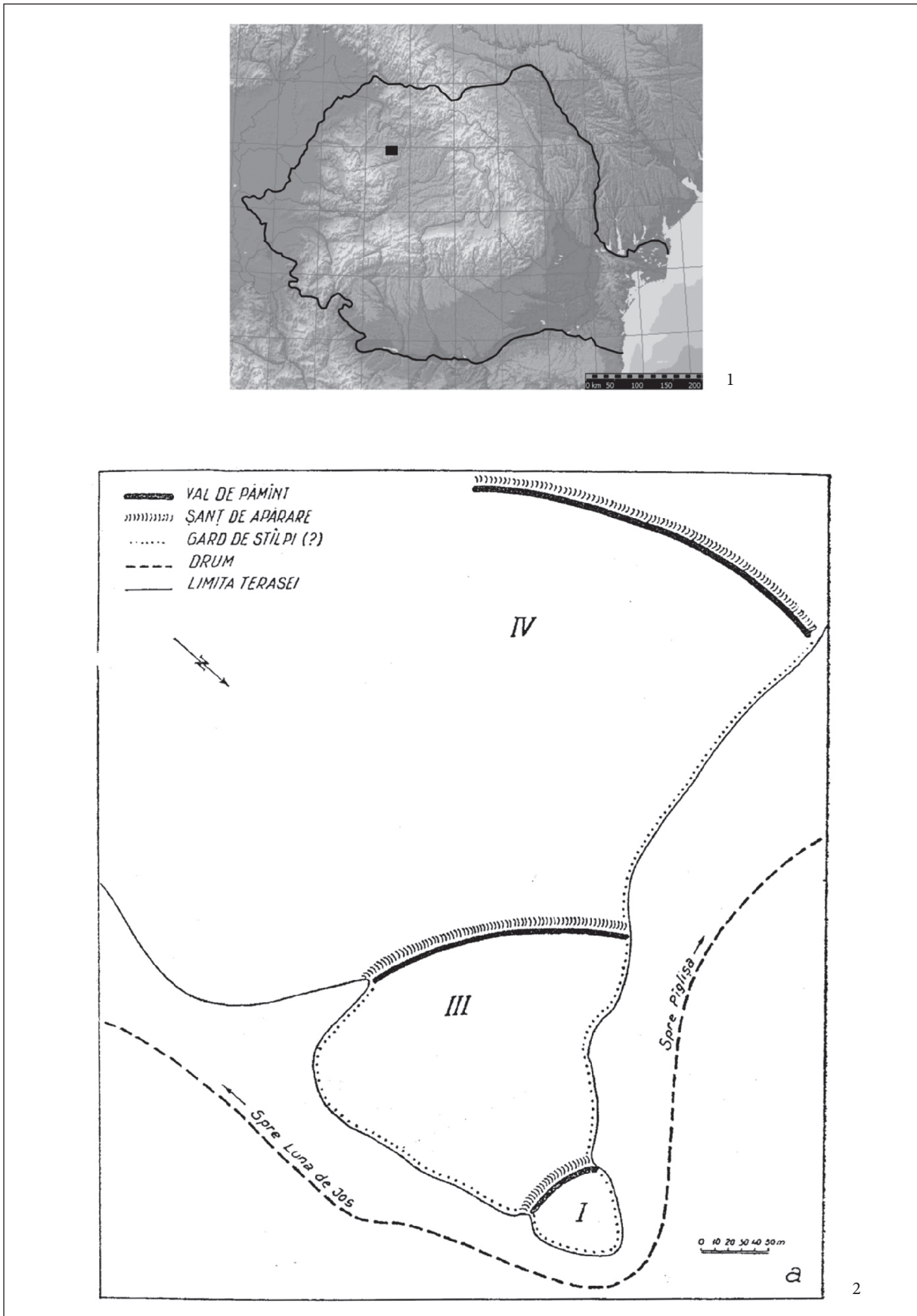


Plate 1. 1. Location map of Dăbâca village on the Romanian territory; 2. First phase of fortification from Dăbâca (after Pascu *et al.* 1968).

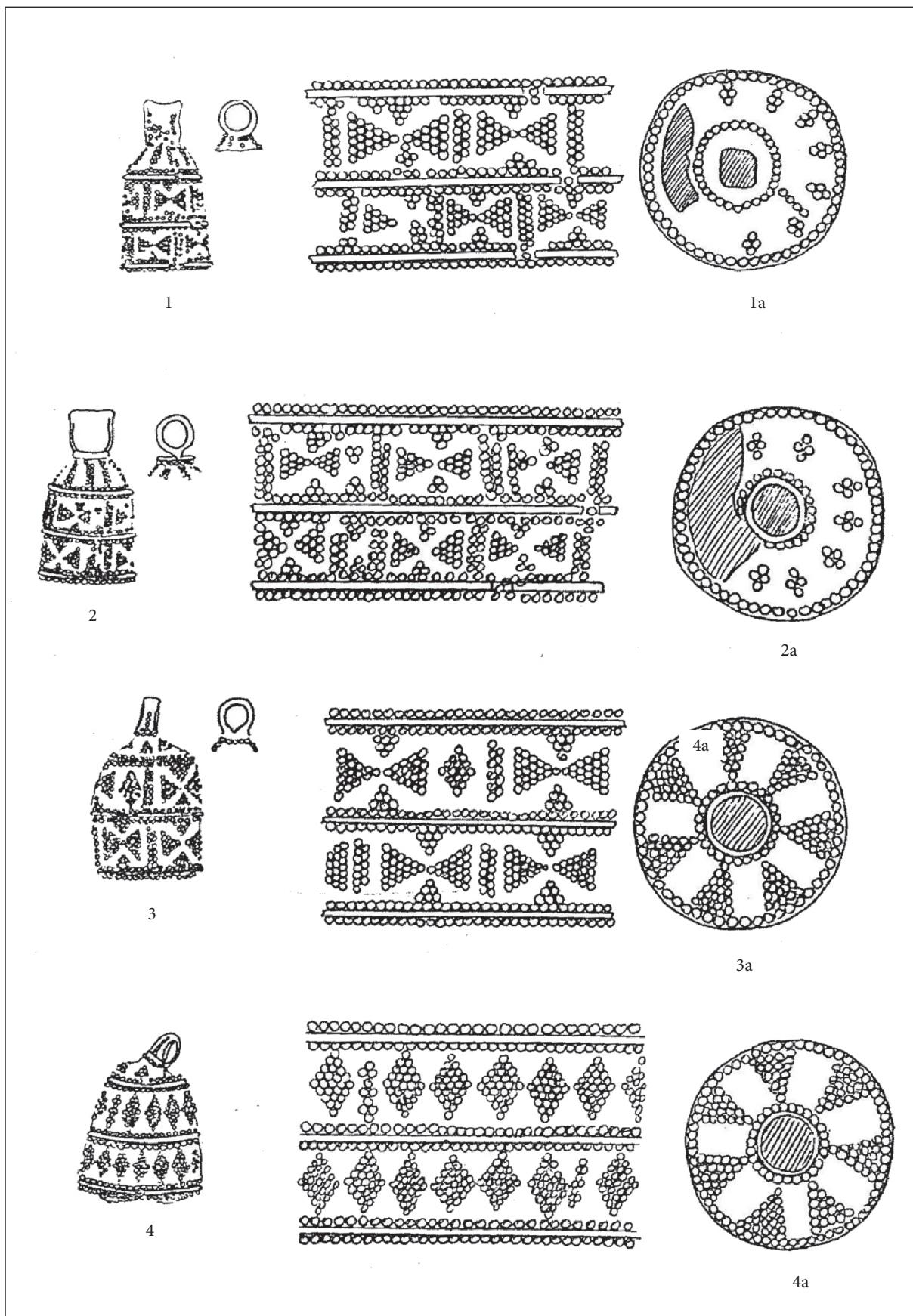


Plate 2. Dăbâca. Gold-plated silver pendants (after Pascu *et al.* 1968).

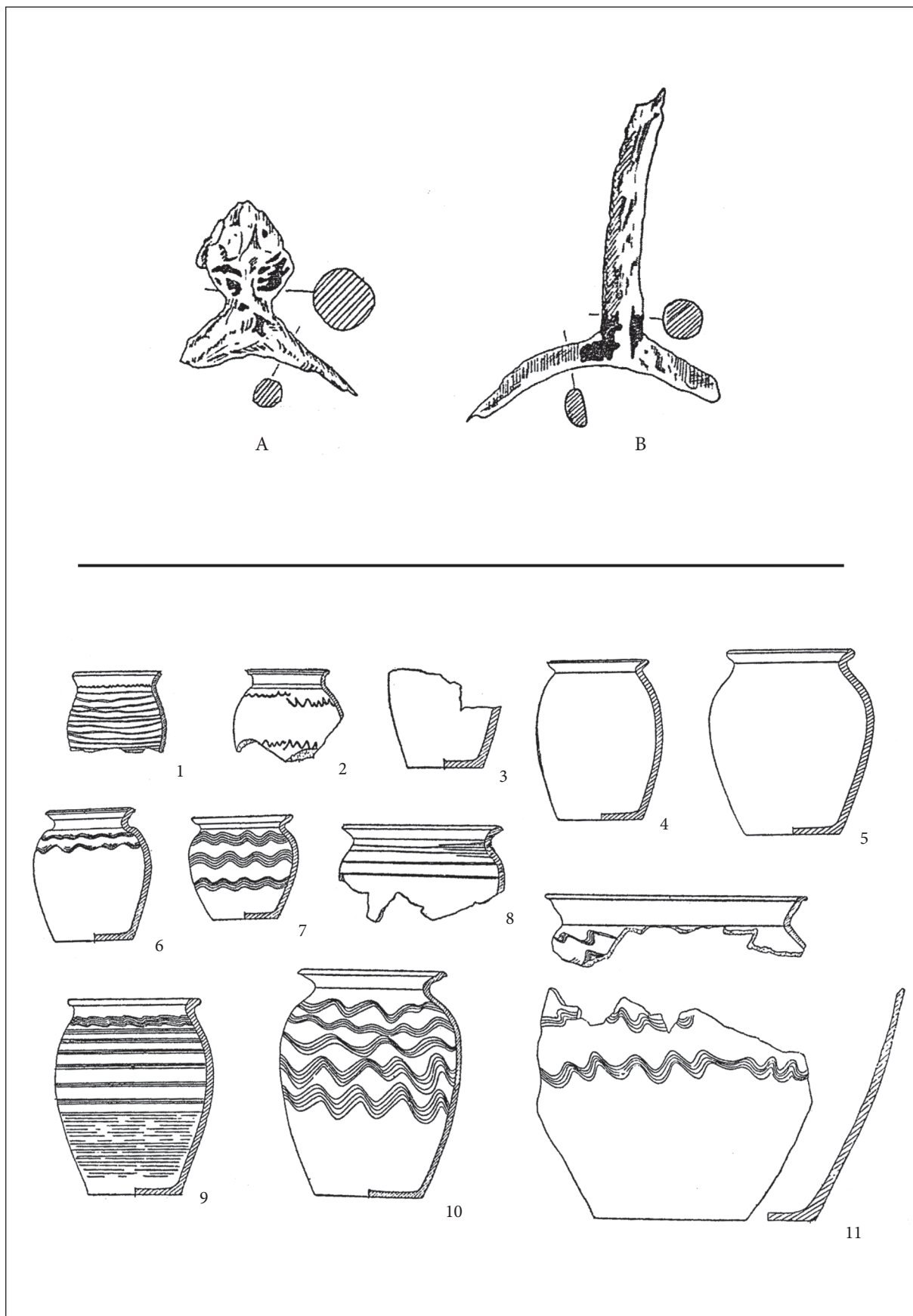
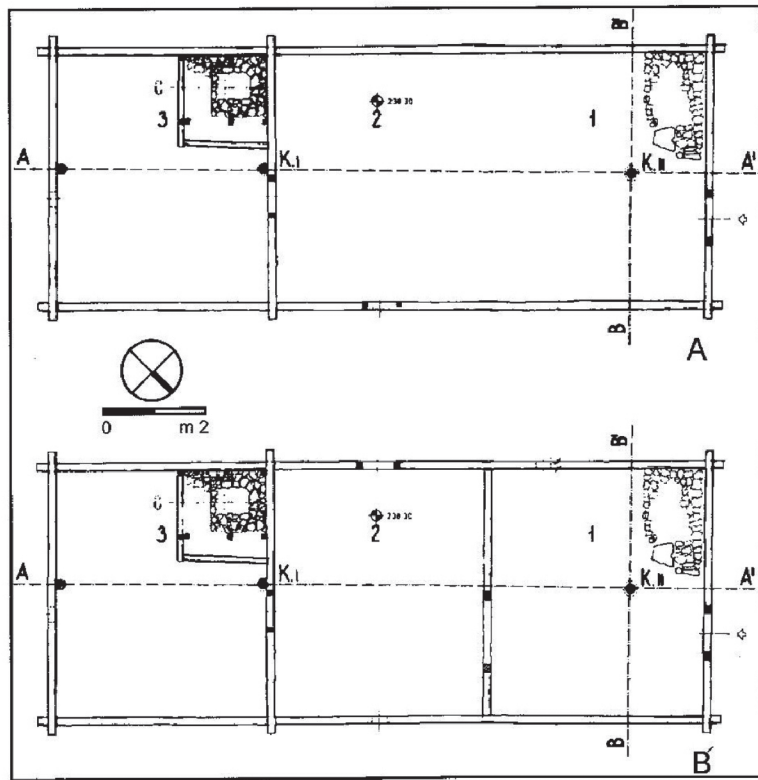
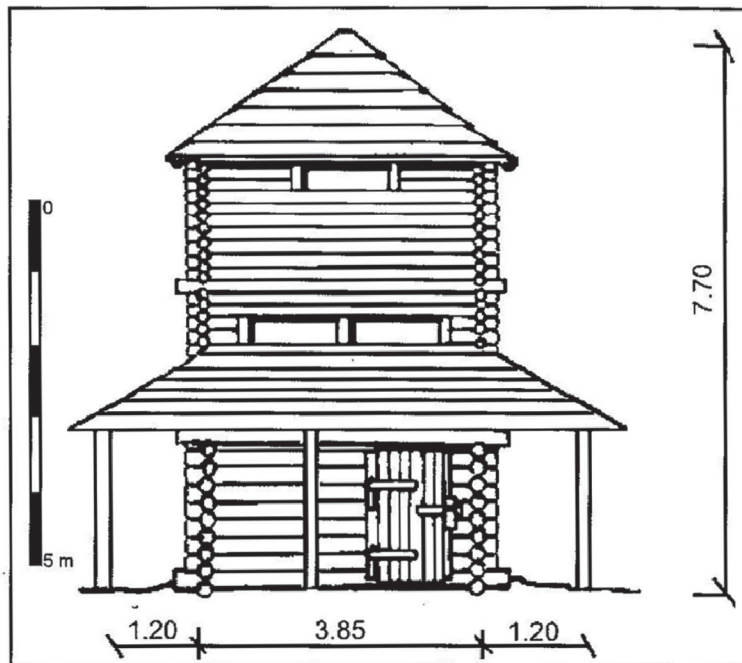


Plate 3. A-B. Dăbâca. Gold-plated iron spurs discovered in Enclosure IV (after Pascu *et al.* 1968);
1-11. Early mediaeval pottery discovered in Enclosure I (after Pascu *et al.* 1968).



1



2

Plate 4. 1. Ducové, Building 1 (after Ruttkay 2005, reconstitution H. Albrecht-A. Ruttkay);
2. Building 2 (after Ruttkay 2005, reconstitution H. Albrecht-A. Ruttkay).

Abbreviations

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| ActaArchHung | Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae. Budapest. |
| ActaHist | Acta Historica. Szeged. |
| Acta Siculica | Acta Siculica. Sfântu Gheorghe. |
| Aluta | Aluta. Revista Muzeului Național Secuiesc Sfântu Gheorghe. |
| Alba Regia | Alba Regia. Annales Musei Stephani Regis. Székesfehérvár. |
| AMN | Acta Musei Napocensis. Cluj-Napoca. |
| AMP | Acta Musei Porolissensis. Muzeul Județean de Istorie și Artă Zalău. Zalău. |
| ATS | Acta Terrae Septemcastrensis. Sibiu. |
| AISC | Anuarul Institutului de studii clasice Cluj Napoca. Cluj-Napoca. |
| AnB S.N. | Analele Banatului – serie nouă. Timișoara. |
| Apulum | Apulum. Alba-Iulia. |
| AÉ | Archaeologiai Értesítő. Budapest. |
| Areopolisz | Areopolisz. Történelmi- és társadalomtudományi tanulmányok Odorheiu Secuiesc / Székelyudvarhely. |
| ArhMed | Arheologia Medievală. Iași. |
| ArchRozhl | Archeologické Rozhledy. Praga. |
| ArhVest | Arheološki Vestnik. Ljubljana. |
| Banatica | Banatica. Muzeul Banatului Montan. Reșița. |
| BHAUT | Bibliotheca Historica et Archaeologica Universitatis Timisiensis. |
| BAR International Series | British Archaeological Reports, International Series. Oxford. |
| BAM | Brukenthal Acta Musei. Sibiu. |
| BMMK | A Békés Megyei múzeumok közleményei, Békéscsába. |
| CAH | Communicationes Archaeologicae Hungariae. Budapest. |
| Cerc. Arh. | Cercetări Arheologice. București. |
| CIL | Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum. |
| CIMRM | Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae. |
| CCA | Cronica Cercetărilor arheologice din România. București. |
| Crisia | Crisia, Muzeul Țării Crișurilor. Oradea. |
| Dacia N.S. | Dacia. Recherches et Découvertes Archéologiques en Roumanie, București; seria nouă (N.S.): Dacia. Revue d'Archéologie et d'Histoire Ancienne. București. |
| DissArch | Dissertationis Archaeologicae (Budapest). |
| Dolg | Dolgozatok. Szeged. |
| EphNap | Ephemeris Napocensis. Cluj-Napoca. |
| EL | Erdővidéki Lapok. Barót/Baraolt. |
| EM | Erdélyi Múzeum. Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca. |
| Isis | Isis. Erdélyi Magyar Restaurátor Füzetek. Cluj-Napoca / Kolozsvár. |
| JbRGZM | Jahrbuch des Römisch- Germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz. Mainz. |
| Marisia | Marisia. Studii și materiale. Arheologie – Istorie – Etnografie. Târgu-Mureș. |
| MCA | Materiale și Cercetări Arheologice. București. |

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| MFMÉ StudArch | A Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve. <i>Studia Archaeologica</i> . Szeged. |
| MFMÉ MonArch | A Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve. <i>Monumenta Archeologica</i> . Szeged. |
| OpArch | <i>Opuscula Archaeologica</i> . Zagreb. |
| OpHung | <i>Opuscula Hungarica</i> . Budapest. |
| Pontica | <i>Pontica</i> , Constanța. |
| PZ | <i>Prähistorische Zeitschrift</i> . Berlin. |
| RMM-MIA | <i>Revista Muzeelor și Monumentelor – seria Monumente Istorice și de Artă</i> . București. |
| Sargeția NS | <i>Sargeția NS. Deva</i> . |
| SlovArch | <i>Slovenská Archeológia. Nitra</i> . |
| Soproni Szemle | Soproni Szemle kulturtörténeti folyóirat. Sopron. |
| StudCom | <i>Studia Comitatus</i> . Tanulmányok Pest megye múzeumaiból. Szentendre. |
| ŠtudZvesti | <i>Študijne Zvesti Arheologického Ústavu Slovenskej Akademie Vied</i> . Nitra. |
| Stud. și Cerc. Num. | <i>Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche și Arheologie</i> . București. |
| SCIVA | <i>Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche (și Arheologie)</i> . București. |
| StComSatuMare | <i>Studii și Comunicări. Satu Mare</i> . |
| Thrac-Dacica | <i>Thrac-Dacica</i> . București. |
| VMMK | <i>A Veszprém megyei Múzeumok Közleményei. Veszprém</i> . |
| VTT | <i>Veszprémi Történelmi Tár. Veszprém</i> . |
| Ziridava | <i>Ziridava, Complexul Muzeal Arad. Arad</i> . |