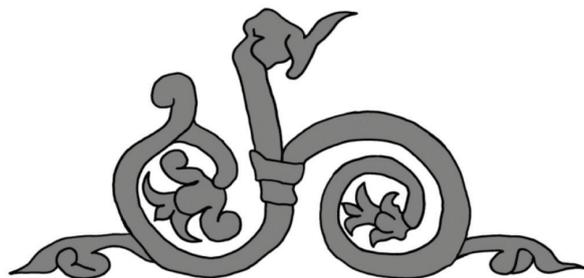


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This volume is dedicated to the memory of George Pascu Hurezan (1949–2016)

Late Roman Period Cremation Burials in the Eastern Periphery of the Trans Tisa Region – The Lower Mureş Valley*

Norbert Kapcsos

Abstract: The study summarizes a chapter about the results – including preliminary ones – from my PhD dissertation, referring to the reinterpretation of the Late Roman period cremation burials from the Lower Mureş Valley. By analysing the literature and the archaeological material, I've noticed some controversial information regarding these burials that couldn't be ignored. Therefore, I intended to clarify the chronology of the burials and also their broader connections within the Carpathian Basin. It seems quite certain that the cremation burials can be dated between the second half of the 3rd century – end of 4th – beginning of the 5th centuries, and some of the urnes show connections with burial places from the Transylvanian Basin. Referring to their burial rite, it can't be derived from Late La Tène burial customs from the Lower Mureş Valley as previously assumed, but they reflect several connections in the burial rite with the burial places from the Transylvanian Basin from the same period. The scarce data doesn't permit to draw some definite conclusions, but it left room for some potential explanations on hypothetical levels, like a possible migration of several communities from the Transylvanian Basin to the Trans Tisa region along the Mureş valley – maybe in several waves – starting from the second half of the 3rd century.

Keywords: Late Roman period; cremation burials, chronology, migration, Transylvanian Basin, Lower Mureş Valley.

Late Roman Period cremation burials in the Lower Mureş Valley. The research of the topic

The cremation burials known from the Lower Mureş valley were found – without exception – accidentally in the period between the 1950s and the 1970s. Due to the accidental character of the finds and due to the lack of the documented observations, we possess only a slight amount of information regarding the archaeological material and burial rite. The first three cremation burials unearthed in Sântana were published by Egon Dörner in 1960¹. Despite the fact that he noticed the connections and similarities of the finds with the cremation burials from Cipău “Gîrle”, Poieneşti and Vârteşcoiu², he interpreted the cremation burials, largely dated to the 2-3rd centuries³, as archaeological items of a local autochthonous “free-Dacian” group⁴. (It is worth returning to this aspect/question a bit later). Several years later, Mihai Blăjan was the next to publish a cremation burial from Şeitin-Nimaş, largely dated to the 2-4th centuries, in 1975⁵, and in the same year Florian Dudaş also published another burial from Arad-Grădişte dated to the end of 3rd – beginning of the 4th century⁶. Connecting the two burials to the others found at Sântana, they have interpreted them the same way as belonging to “free-Dacians.” Maybe based upon the analogies of Egon Dörner, Mihai Blăjan also connected the burial from Şeitin to the burials from Cipău “Gîrle”⁷. Even if another cremation burial was found in

* Translated by: Norbert Kapcsos.

¹ Dörner 1960.

² Dörner 1960, 158.

³ It is quite possible that the dating of the cremation burials found in 1951 was influenced by the terra sigillata find from the settlement next to the burial place researched through archaeological excavations in 1954 (see: Dörner 1960, 159.)

⁴ Dörner 1968, 17.

⁵ Blăjan 1975.

⁶ Dudaş 1975.

⁷ Blăjan 1975, 73.

Arad in 1969, Egon Dörner only mentioned it in a short report in 1970⁸. This burial also appears in the repertory of the Lower Mureş Valley without any specifications, dated to the 4th century⁹, as well as the burial from Olari “Via Mare” dated to the 2-3rd centuries¹⁰. The repertory of the Lower Mureş Valley mentions three further cremation burials from Sântana “La Vi”¹¹ and the only problem with these “burials” is the fact that they were not cremation burials, but display characteristics of features in which body parts are thrown into pits, so I excluded them from the present analysis¹².

Site/Grave	Circumstances	Lid	Ceramic type	Brooch	Knife	Buckle	Bracelet	Dating	Bibliography
Arad-Grădişte Str Lucreţiei G1	stray find	0	Jug	1	1	1	0	3–4 th c.	Dudaş 1975, 13–18.
Arad-Moise Nicoara G1	stray find	0	Jug	1	1	0	0	4 th c.	RepArch Arad, 34.
Olari-Via Mare	stray find	1	Urn	0	0	0	0	2–3 rd c.	RepArch Arad, 89.
Sântana-Gară 1	stray find	0	Pot?	0	1	0	0	2–3 rd c.	Dörner 1960, 155.
Sântana-Gară 2	stray find	1?	Pot	0	1	0	0	2–3 rd c.	Dörner 1960, 155.
Sântana-Gară 3	stray find	0	Storage pot	1	0	0	0	2–3 rd c.	Dörner 1960, 156.
Şeitin-Imaş/ Nimaş	stray find	1	Urn	0	0	0	1?	2–4 th c.	Blăjan 1975, 74.

Table no.1. Cremation burials from the Lower Mureş Valley

Regarding the enumerated cremation burials, in the archaeological literature the idea of “free Dacian” groups settling in the territory of the former province of Dacia in the 4th century from the western vicinity of the province has grown into a topos¹³. This theory, embedded so strongly in the historical discourse¹⁴, that even nowadays researches count with the possibility of a migration wave from the lowland territories of the Lower Mureş Valley¹⁵. This multi-problematic theory is based upon the presumed similarities of the three cremation burials from Sântana with the five cremation burials from Cipău “Gîrle”, as well as the similarities of the ceramic material of the settlements associated with the two burial places¹⁶. On the one hand, the relation between the burials and the settlement from Cipău “Gîrle” needs more research, as well as the relation between the burials and the settlement from Sântana. On the other hand, the burials from Cipău “Gîrle” could be similar to the ones from Sântana based only on their burial rite, and partly from the technology of the vessels used as urns¹⁷.

⁸ Dörner 1970, 509, nr. 107.

⁹ RepAr 1999, 34.

¹⁰ RepAr, 89.

¹¹ RepAr, 114.

¹² Barbu, Dörner 1980, 133–134. The description of the features does not mention their character as burials, while in the description of the photo illustrations they feature as burials. The shape of the pits and their inventory show the traits of usual settlement features, in which human remains were found. (For further information see: Masek 2015, 381–386). Maybe the – presumed – presence of human bones (some fragments from the pelvis) and the remains of burning (Barbu, Dörner 1980, 133–134.) were misleading to the authors of the repertory, so they associated the common settlement features with cremation burials (RepAr, 114.).

¹³ Mitrea 1960, 464; Vlassa 1965; Dörner 1974, 99. This theory was elaborated widely by Nicolae Vlassa in 1965, although one cannot find references in it to the earlier work of Bucur Mitrea from 1960 (Vlassa 1965, 513–515).

¹⁴ Protase 2001, 573.

¹⁵ Dumitraşcu, Sfrengeu 2006, 197; Lăzărescu 2015, 80.

¹⁶ Vlassa 1965, 513. The two burial places were found approximately simultaneously in the 1950s.

¹⁷ The comparison of the shapes of the vessels from Cipău “Gîrle” used as urns and lids does not reveal similarities with the ones from Sântana “Gară” (Vlassa 1965, 507, fig. 7). In turn, very similar urn shapes are known from the burial place of Poienişti (Bichir 1973, 277. Pl. LXI/) and the use of semispherical bowls as lids is also known from the burial place of Pădureni (Bichir 1973, 306. Pl. XC/5;9). On the other hand Nicolae Vlassa talks about the similarities between the two sites from Sântana and Cipău in a broader sense when he refers to the Crişana Region (Vlassa 1965, 513.). Still, his observations regarding the parallel between the burial rites in the two places are undisputable. See below.

It is difficult to decide who the author of this theory was and due to several scholars quasi circum-referencing (Fig. 1) the Sântana – Cipău “Girle” connection remained unquestionable until nowadays¹⁸, despite the fact that both of the burial places have more precise analogies from their closer vicinity than with each other.

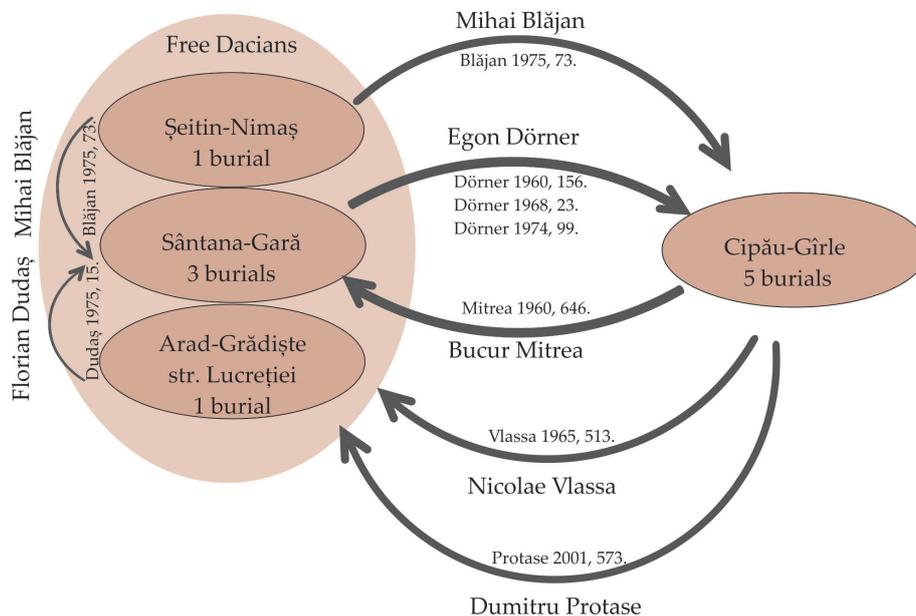


Fig. 1. Circum-referencing between the four burial places

For a long period, neither archaeologists, nor historians could evaluate precisely this presumed local “cultural facies”¹⁹ of the free Dacians²⁰ from the Lower Mureş valley. Some scholars, according to the 1970–1980s scientific paradigm, issued within an ideological captivity, treated these burials as the archaeological proof of a local/autochthonous “free Dacian” community, with late La Tène traditions²¹. Others came to approximately the same conclusion, but with particular nuances. This could be due to the uncertain dating of the burials²² and the traditional interpretations from earlier works embedded strongly in the literature, though one should mention that they noticed that some of the finds had a “Roman” character which led them to presume the existence of a “Romanized” Daco-roman community²³. In the 1990s Coriolan Opreanu reconsidered this statement pointing out that the settlements hallmarked with the burials from Sântana cannot be linked directly to the archaeological materials of the Dacian settlements from the Late La Tène Period²⁴. As a work hypothesis based on the written sources, he linked these burials, that are largely dated to the 2-3rd centuries, to communities migrating

¹⁸ Körösfői 2015, 138.

¹⁹ Dörner 1974, 96. (For explanations referring to the tradition of using the concept of regional aspects of a culture considered homogenous, in the context of the history of research from Poieneşti, see: Spănu 2011, 160)

²⁰ Historiographical concept formulated during the 1920s–1960s envisaging the Dacian communities from outside the borders of Roman Dacia following the model of the opposite-pair of “Germania capta” – “Germania libera”. For further explications, see: Opreanu 1998, 59; Spănu 2011, 164.

²¹ Dörner 1968 16–17; Crişan 1968, 250; Macrea 1968, 180; Dudaş 1975, 15; While Egon Dörner and Mihai Blăjan made remarkable observations regarding the connections between the cremation burials from the Lower Mureş Valley, Florian Dudaş was the one who managed to date almost correctly the one from Arad-Grădişte. Referring to their interpretations, they followed the “mainstream trends” and the interpretational framework of their period hallmarked by the “theory of continuity”, so I saw no need to insist further on its ideological background. For more information in this topic, see: Popa 2015, 341–346; Henţ 2018.

²² Their traditional dating from the second century, after the Dacian Wars, until the fourth century indeed suggested the possibility of continuity (See table No. 1.; See also Brather 2006, 40–42 about the difficulties in using of the concept of continuity).

²³ Hügel, Barbu 1997, 571; Istvánovits, Kulcsár 2018, 331.

²⁴ Opreanu 1998, 71–72. Unfortunately the relation between the cremation burials and the settlements (for example Sântana, Cicir) traditionally linked to them is uncertain so far. First of all, there seems to be a minor chronological delay between them, as the cremation burials seem to belong to a later period, at least some of them (see below).

southwards from the region of the Upper Tisa, right after the period of the Marcomannic Wars²⁵. This theory apparently found support independently from other scholars from Hungary. The archaeological researches from Hungary also envisage the emergence of Dacian communities from the Upper Tisa Region during and/or after the Marcomannic Wars, this time based on some ceramic finds from settlements²⁶, although excitingly they also count with the possibility that some Dacian communities arrived there in the end of the 4th century²⁷.

The dating of the archaeological finds and their broader connections

One of the main problems regarding the archaeological and/or historical interpretation of the cremation burials from the Lower Mureş valley was caused by the dating of the finds to a wider period. As one can observe, the majority of the burials were dated to 200, sometimes 300 year-long periods (table no. 1), so this way they could support any of the archaeological hypotheses or historical narratives formulated so far. Therefore the dating of the finds and the identification of their connections should be the first step above all others, before the interpretation of the burial places.

Sântana-Gară – G1, G2, G3

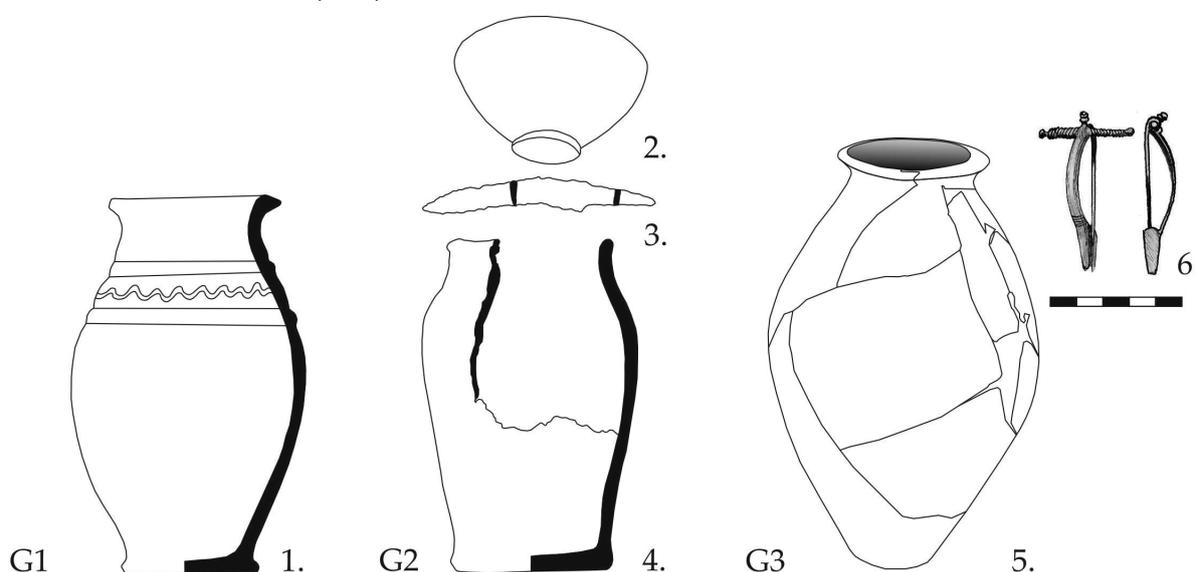


Fig. 2. Sântana “Gară” G1, G2, G3 (1–5. adapted after Dörner 1960. Without scale; 6. drawn by Egon Dörner)

Bronze brooch (G3) – This type of brooch (Fig. 2/6.) made from two pieces with head knob and sideways turned legs can be found mainly in the central part of the Lower Mureş Valley and in the confluence of the Mureş with Tisa River, if we analyse this micro-region alone. Brooches of this type are known from site Makó “Innenső-jágor 3”²⁸; Makó “Mikócsa-dűlő”²⁹; Kiszombor B graves 119³⁰ and 209,³¹ from Klárafalva “Községháza” grave 1³²; Deszk “Újmajor”³³; and from Szeged “Öthalom” grave 19³⁴. This type of brooch³⁵ is frequent in the cemeteries from the Late Sarmatian Period of

²⁵ Opreanu 1998, 77.

²⁶ Vaday 2003, 270.

²⁷ Vaday 2003, 270.

²⁸ Sóskuti 2012, 307.

²⁹ Pópity 2014, 178. 8. kép, 10.

³⁰ Párducz 1950, Taf. XLVIII/ 1

³¹ Párducz 1950, Taf. XLIX/2a-b

³² Párducz 1951, XI tábla/1a-b

³³ Párducz 1945, III. Tábla./3. – Fol. Arch 5.

³⁴ Párducz 1960, 94. XXVIII. Tábla/5.

³⁵ Type IX according to Lavinia Grumeza’s typology based on items from the region of Banat. See: Grumeza 2014, 76.

this region and the burials containing them are mainly dated to the end of the 3rd century – the 4th century³⁶.

Ceramic vessel (G3) – Without knowing the exact dimensions of the storagepot (Fig. 2/5) from G3, it is hard to draw any precise conclusions with chronological relevance. Although regarding the shape of it, this is a common storagepot type from settlements dated between the 2nd century and the beginning of the 5th from the Sarmatian Barbaricum. A perfect analogy from this micro-region is known from the settlement of Cicir³⁷. Having a specific function, they occur very rarely as funerary items. In this context, a relatively precise analogy is known from the Lower Mureş valley only from G2 part of the cemetery of Szeged “Tápé”³⁸, dated to the end of the 3rd – 4th centuries³⁹, although the oval-shaped iron buckle of this grave suggests it can be dated to the end of the 4th century⁴⁰. In this case, one can obviously talk about a secondary function of the storage pot, used as an urn, and thus no parallel can be drawn with the item from Szeged “Tápé”, though it could be a hint for its dating largely to the 3rd–4th centuries.

Iron knife (G2) – the curve-shaped iron knife (Fig. 2/3) with a handle in the middle belongs to the common type of iron knives found in the cemeteries from Klárafalva “Vasútállomás”, Szeged “Tápé”, and Óföldaék “Ürmös”, all dated to the Late Sarmatian Period⁴¹.

Unfortunately there are only a few objects with chronological relevance in Sântana “Gară”, but based on closer analogies from the micro-region of the Lower Mureş valley this cremation burial place could be included in the Late Sarmatian Period. Regarding the brooch from G3 and maybe the iron knife from G2 as a plausibly more precise dating one could accept the end of the 3rd century – the 4th century, but the lack of other finds and the relative character of the integrity of the preserved/published ones doesn’t allow any further conclusions.

Olari “Via Mare”

Other examples of this type of ceramic vessel used as funerary urn (Fig. 3) – this time having the specific function of storing cremated human remains – are unknown from the region of the Lower Mureş valley. A possible explanation could be formulated based on the dominant funerary rite of this region, i.e. inhumation. All the other vessels used as urns in the known cremation burials have different shapes. To place this find into a relatively correct chronological period/framework one should also take into account other cremation burials from a wider geographical region. As one can observe the urn from Olari shows similarities with some urns from the burialplace of Soporul de Câmpie⁴² (Fig. 4).

Despite the fact that they are spherical or, sometimes, prolonged spherical in shape, and that the one from Olari has the maximum diameter at shoulder level, one can observe that they belong to the same type (but represent different variants), i.e. fast wheel-turned, with oxidation firing, spherical in shape, with a lid – described as „Roman” by Dumitru Protase⁴³.



Fig. 3. The urn from Olari

³⁶ Sós-kuti 2012, 302; Grumeza 2014, 217; Grumeza 2014, 218.

³⁷ Crişan 1968, 248. Fig. 4/2

³⁸ Vörös 1996, 141. 7. Kép, 1.

³⁹ Vörös 1996, 133.

⁴⁰ See the analogies from Apátfalva “Nagyút-dűlő” and Óföldaék “Ürmös” where this type of buckles is dated started with the end of 4th century (Gulyás 2014, 53). See: Kujáni 2015, 125, 13. tábla/5; Gulyás 2014, 75. III. tábla/3.

⁴¹ For example: Klárafalva “Vasútállomás” (Párducz 1951, XII. Tábla/9); Szeged “Tápé” G24 (Vörös 1996, 166, 32, Kép, 6); Óföldaék “Ürmös” G201 (Gulyás 2014, 96. XXIV tábla/2).

⁴² Protase 1976, Pl. XLVI; XLVII.

⁴³ Protase 1976, Pl. XLVI. This statement can be easily accepted. Recent researches count with the presence of barbarian communities (identified with the Carpi) even from the existence of the Province of Dacia (Lăzărescu 2015, 78). Under

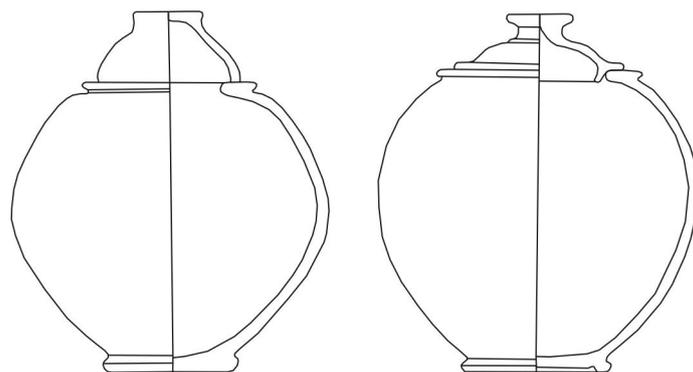


Fig. 4. Urns from Soporul de Câmpie (after Protase 1976, Pl XLVIII, 1, 3).

Dumitru Protase dated the cemetery from Soporul de Câmpie to the 2-3rd century⁴⁴, although recent researches have pointed out that some of the burials could be dated also to the 4th century⁴⁵. The exact dating of the burials in which this type of urns occurs is complicated. A hint that might support a dating that includes the second half of the 3rd century is the brooch from Grave 46⁴⁶ which is associated with an urn similar to the one from Olari. Subsequent researches are needed.

Arad “Moise Nicoară”

G1. Fortunately the brooch (Fig. 5/1) from the unpublished – only mentioned – cremation burial from Arad has a quite precise chronological value despite the fact that it represents a quite uncommon type for the Lower Mureş valley. No perfect analogy is known so far in this region, but based on the shape of its leg and arc, it could be related to the brooch from G1 from the burial place of Sándorfalva “Eperjes”⁴⁷ dated to the end of the 4th century – the first third of the 5th century. The fast wheel-turned grayish jug (Fig. 5/2) is of a relatively common type. A geographically closer analogy is known from the necropolis of Şeitn-Imaş/Nimaş dated approximately to the last 3rd of the 4th century – the first two decades of the 5th century⁴⁸, where one incidentally knows of another cremation burial. Such jugs are also frequent in Late Sarmatian Period settlements, such as the one in Rákóczfalva “Bagi-földek”⁴⁹.

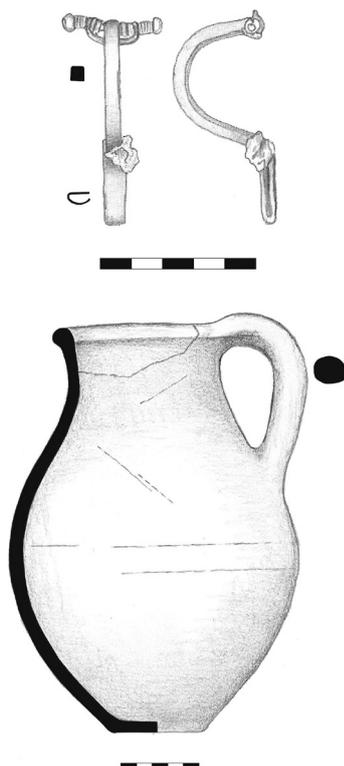


Fig. 5. Arad – Moise Nicoară G1.

According to the analogies of the items from G1, one could date the feature approximately to the second half, maybe to the last third of the 4th century – first quarter of the 5th century, but certainly to the Late Sarmatian Period.

G2(?). Another find was reported from the same site, but from an unknown context, apparently from the same period. The origin of the brooch (Fig. 6) from another burial is quite problematic, but one cannot ignore its chronological value. An item included in the same variant of a

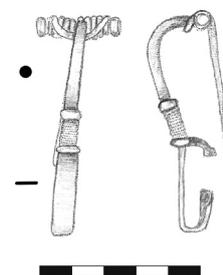


Fig. 6. Arad – Moise Nicoară G2(?)

this respect, the local craftsmen could have also adapted their products to the needs and taste of the newly arrived populations and vice-versa, but this supposition obviously needs further analysis.

⁴⁴ Protase 1976, 87.

⁴⁵ Lăzărescu 2015, 78. This statement can be confirmed, if one takes into account that some brooches were used also during the fourth century: Protase 1976, Pl. XXXVIII/4 and Protase 1976, Pl. XXX./7.

⁴⁶ Protase 1976, Pl. XXXVIII./1.

⁴⁷ Vörös 1985, I. tábla/1.

⁴⁸ Kapcsos 2018, 147.Fig. 8.

⁴⁹ Masek 2012, 53. 10. ábra. 1–3.

crossbow brooch is known from the region of Banat, found in the Late Sarmatian Period cemetery of Pancevo – Voilovica (Srb.).

It can be included in type VII.4 according to Lavinia Grumeza's typology, who dated this type to the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 5th century⁵⁰. According to Sofija Petković who labeled it as the "Gothic type" because of its frequency in the territories inhabited by the communities that carried the Sântana de Mureş – Cernyachov Culture it can be dated to the 4th century, but more precisely to the second half of the century⁵¹. Taking into consideration that this type occurs in Târgşor⁵² and Archiud⁵³, the dating in the middle of the 4th century – the turn between the 4th and the 5th century maybe a plausible in this case⁵⁴.

Even though, in the case of conclusions, the origin of the second brooch should be treated carefully, it seems that the cremation burial (G1) from Arad "Moise Nicoară" could be dated to the second half or to last third of the 4th century – the first quarter of the 5th century.

Arad – Grădişte "Str. Lucreţiei"

The iron brooch (Fig. 7/3) made of two pieces with head knob and side way turned legs is fairly frequent in necropolises from the Late Sarmatian Period in the Lower Mureş valley. There are known examples from Klárafalva B G12⁵⁵, Apátfalva "Nagyútdűlő" G179⁵⁶, and Szeged "Algyó" G67. The latter was dated to the end of 4th century – first half of 5th century⁵⁷, while the other brooch from Apátfalva is from a necropolis dated to the middle of the 4th century – first third of the 5th century⁵⁸. The "D"-shaped iron belt buckle (Fig. 7/2) has several analogies from Apátfalva⁵⁹ and also from Óföldreák "Ürmös"⁶⁰. It is of a type commonly used during the second half of the 4th century – the first third part of the 5th century. Unfortunately the rim of the fastwheel-thrown jug (Fig. 7/4) is missing – but it seems to have been slightly flared –, so further chronological conclusions couldn't be made. Based on the first two items this burial could be dated approximately to the middle of the 4th century – the beginning of the 5th century.

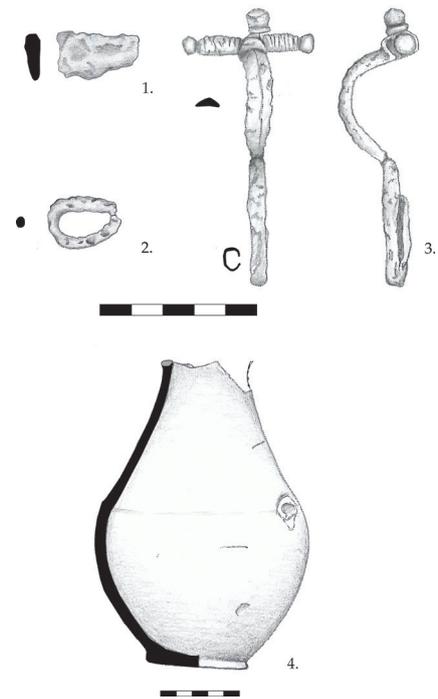


Fig. 7. Arad – Grădişte, Str. Lucreţiei

Şeitin "Nimaş/Imaş"

Mihai Blăjan initially dated the burial from Şeitin largely to the 2nd–4th centuries, but in 1981 he somehow narrowed this period to the 2nd–3rd centuries, pointing out very well the similarities of the urns (Fig. 8/3) with the ones from Obreja⁶¹. Indeed it belongs to the same type of urns (Fig. 9) with tronconic necks joint stepwise to the articulated shoulder, like the ones from Grave 145⁶²; Grave

⁵⁰ Grumeza 2014, 77.

⁵¹ Petković 2010, 316.

⁵² Diaconu 1965, 170, Pl. XX/4

⁵³ Gaiu 1999, 301. FIG. XIV,3

⁵⁴ One knows of a bit later variant similar to the one from Arad "Moise Nicoară" in the necropolis of Tápé "Malajdok" dated to the end of the 4th century – the turn between the fourth and the 5th centuries: G 29 See: Párducz, Korek 1946–1948, Taff. LV/4.

⁵⁵ Párducz 1950, Taf. L/1a-b.

⁵⁶ Kujáni 2014, 39. 1. ábra, 3.

⁵⁷ Kóhegyi, Vörös 1992, 102.

⁵⁸ Kujáni 2014, 115.

⁵⁹ Kujáni 2015, 115. 3. tábla 131/1.

⁶⁰ Gulyás 2014, 92. XX. tábla/ 7.

⁶¹ Blăjan, Botezatu 1981, 124–125.

⁶² Protase 2002, 341. PlansaLXXXIX./145

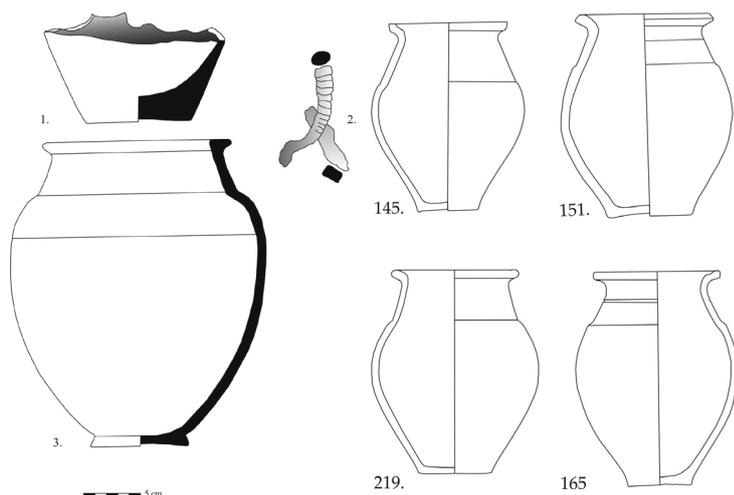


Fig. 8. Şeitın – Imaş/Nimaş (after Blăjan 1975); 2. Without scale.

Fig. 9. Urns from Obreja (after Protase 2002).

151⁶³; Grave 165⁶⁴; Grave 219⁶⁵. Based on the descriptions of the burials, this type of pots/urns belongs to the Second Group, which is more frequent during the 3rd century and was also in use during the subsequent century⁶⁶. Unfortunately the lack of items with a more specific chronological relevance from these urns doesn't allow for a much more precise dating. These types of vessels are not specific to the Lower Mureş valley, neither to the Sarmatian Barbaricum. Therefore in the case of Şeitın one should consider dating it to around the middle of the 3rd – middle of the 4th century, however to a later period than Mihai Blăjan had suggested.

As one can observe all the burials/burial places can be placed, based upon analogies, to a later period than previously suggested; i.e. to the so-called Late Sarmatian Period, or approximately to the end of the 3th century – the beginning of the 5th century. Unfortunately, so far it is not clear if there is a chronological difference between the burial places from Sântana – Olari and the ones from Arad, although it seems that the first two are maybe earlier than the ones from Arad. Maybe the seriation of the finds from the Lower Mureş valley could confirm this presumption. Referring to the connections between these burials it seems revealing that some of the funerary items have quite precise analogies from their narrow micro-region, which could indicate that they were local products of a regional workshop, while the ones with analogies from much more distant regions cannot be treated as simple import goods a presumption which is supported by the practiced burial rite⁶⁷. It is not clear so far if they are the direct results of migration, or indirectly that they were produced locally following distant archetypes indicated by their shapes.

About the funerary rite of the burials

The predominant burial rite in the Lower Mureş valley, during the Sarmatian Period, is inhumation. In this context, how can one interpret the appearance of cremation burials in this period in the Lower Mureş valley? Could they belong to a late La Tène tradition?

Recent researches have pointed out that no burial finds are known in the Lower Mureş valley dated to the late La Tène period, or more precisely from the period between the 2nd century BC and the 1st century AD, except for a possible elite burial form Dombegyháza from the 2nd century BC⁶⁸. Still, there are several rural and fortified settlements documented from this region⁶⁹. So what could be the explanation of this contradiction? To understand this apparently peculiar situation one should take account that this is an ordinary, or a general phenomenon of the 1st century BC – 1st century AD period in the territory inside the Carpathian Arc. The – very likely – cremation-based burial rite practiced during this period by the communities identified with the Dacians has not left any archaeological traces⁷⁰. Very briefly: the consolidation of the Dacian Kingdom during this period presumably led to some social and religious changes. These changes in the social life and in religious beliefs also reflected in the burial rite,

⁶³ Protase 2002, 347. PlansaXCV./151

⁶⁴ Protase 2002, 347. PlansaXC./165

⁶⁵ Protase 2002, 351. PlansaXCIX./219

⁶⁶ Protase 2002, 190–191. Dumitru Protase also mentions that this type of urn can be found in Soporul de Câmpie, although all oval shaped vessels with bitronconic necks have two handles. See: Protase 1976, PL. XV./8

⁶⁷ See below.

⁶⁸ Berzovan 2017, 290–291.

⁶⁹ Berzovan 2017. See the map in the end of the volume.

⁷⁰ Popa 2010, 403; Pupeza 2014, 67.

so that a burial rite that does not leave any archaeological traces became predominant⁷¹. All the other cases in this period, when cremation burials in urns are known, should be considered exceptions, and treated as anomalies⁷². As to these conclusions, if one presumes local late La Tène traditions in the burial rite⁷³, in the Lower Mureş valley, after a period of ca. 300 years from the Roman-Dacian Wars, the burials from the proximity of Sântana and Arad should have been followed a some kind of „deviant burial rite”, that is not known so far, from the 1st century BC – 1st century AD⁷⁴. But what about the relatively near and accessible regions during the same period, i.e. the end of the 3rd century – the 4th century, where the deposition of the cremated remains in urns was a general custom in the burial rite?

One of these regions that are directly linked by the Mureş River to the territory under discussion (the Lower Mureş) is the Transylvanian Basin⁷⁵. There are at least five burial places⁷⁶ in the Transylvanian Basin dated to the period of approximately between the middle of the 3rd century – first half of the 4th century where cremation remains deposited in urns covered or not with lids represent the predominant burial rite – beside cremation remains deposited in pits⁷⁷. One of the traditional directions in archaeology uses the term „Carpî”⁷⁸ to identify these communities⁷⁹, however some aspects in the cemeteries burial rite and some of the funerary items (ceramics and accessories) indeed reflect significant similarities with the necropolises in the East Carpathian regions⁸⁰, known as the Poiana-Vârteşcoiu type⁸¹. The cremation burials from Arad, Şeitin, Sântana and Olari, show, through their burial rite (cremation, remains deposited in urns, urns covered with lids – three cases out of seven), remarkable similarities with the ones from Obreja and Soporul de Câmpie, and also Cipău “Gîrle”⁸². Beside the practice of cremation, the use of lids also should be considered clearly as an element of the burial rite. In the three cases, one can distinguish three different types of covering. The one from Olari is a clear case when a specially manufactured urn was covered with its own lid. Similar cases

⁷¹ Popa 2010, 405–406; Pupeza 2014, 66.

⁷² Popa 2010, 403.

⁷³ Crişan 1968.

⁷⁴ It is very difficult to formulate a scientifically correct statement regarding the survival of communities from the 1st century BC – 1st century AD in a later period in circumstances when their burial rite left no clear archaeological traces. An indirect hint that maybe could support such a presumption is the technological continuity in pottery production, where some „fruit-bowl” types from ca. 2nd century settlements show some traits that could be derived from local pottery production tradition of the the Late La Tène period. For example see the sites from Szegvár “Oromdűlő” (Istvánovits, Lőrinczy, Pintye 2005, 79. See also: Istvánovits, Lőrinczy, Pintye 2005, 31. Kép); Bugac “Bimbó” (Sóskuti 2018). Obviously this aspect needs further analysis.

⁷⁵ I have intentionally avoided to analyses the connection of the cremation burials from the Lower Mureş valley with the ones from Medieşul Aurit because the cremation burials from the latter cemetery were not published until recently (Gindele 2011, 206), though according to the presumed but uncertain chronology of the settlement and necropolis around the 3rd century – the beginning of the 4th century (Dumitraşcu, Bader 1967, 132) they could be contemporaneous. Although they were partially published, unfortunately too much accent was placed upon the ethnical interpretation of the burials (Dumitraşcu 1993, 106–108) and too little upon an analysis from the perspective of a possible migration and acculturation, despite the fact that Przeworsk featured materials also have been found among the funerary items (Horedt 1973, 92–93). Even if several elements of funerary rite are similar with the ones from the Lower Mureş valley, they are also similar to the ones from the Transylvanian Basin mentioned before (cremation remains deposited in urns, covered with special/improvised lids), so the majority of the data was uncertain and deficient for a comparative analysis. Although, beside these similarities, other indirect hints from the descriptions like black polished pottery with oxidant fracture-surface (Dumitraşcu 1993, 105) show connections with the pottery production technology from the Transylvanian Basin (Masek 2011, 266). This connection is also supported by previous results regarding the pottery production of this region, i.e. from the second half of the 3rd century the local production of a new, so-called “Porolissum type” stamped pottery appeared in the region (Gindele, Istvánovits 2009, 91; Gindele 2015, 3–4) from the territory of the province Dacia. Obviously these correlations should be carefully analyzed in the future and the nature of the “connections” should be also defined before one could formulate any conclusions.

⁷⁶ Lăzărescu 2015, 77. Medias, Obreja, Sigişoara, Soporul de Cîmpie, Şopteriu.

⁷⁷ Lăzărescu 2015, 77.

⁷⁸ Bóna 1989,63; Lăzărescu 2015, 76.

⁷⁹ Earlier studies have also identified these communities with local Daco-Roman communities (Protase 2002). It is also worth mentioning that even nowadays there are three predominant trends in the interpretation of these burial places from the Transylvanian Basin, mostly from an ethnical point of view, without promoting any other possibilities (see the summary of the problem: Spănu 2014–2015, 44).

⁸⁰ Opreanu 1998, 102–104.

⁸¹ Spănu, Harhoiu, Gáll 2010, 25–27.

⁸² Just as Egon Dörner and Mihai Blăjan pointed out in their publications.

are known from Soporul de Câmpie⁸³. The situation from Șeitin shows that the lid had special importance in some cases, when the urn was covered in an improvised manner with the bottom of another vessel, certainly the gesture of covering was what counted. In the case of burial G2 in Sântana, the urn was covered with a locally manufactured bowl. This tradition can be also noticed in Cipău “Gârle”, but also in the Poienești-Vârteșcoiu type cemeteries, East of the Carpathians, for example: Pădureni, Poiana “Dulcești” and Butnărești⁸⁴. As one can observe, there are quite spectacular parallels (under three aspects of the burial rite: incineration, remains deposited in urns, covering with lids) between the burials from the Lower Mureș valley and the Transylvanian Basin, or even with burial places from the east of the Carpathians known as Poienești-Vârteșcoiu types. These observations encourage one to formulate the idea that, according to the similarities in the burial rite, the burials from the Lower Mureș valley originate from the Transylvanian Basin and the phenomenon of migration might be a possibility to take in account.

Do we get aid from the written sources? The mobility of peoples

Identifying of peoples/gens from written sources with communities reflected in the archaeological finds is a very problematic issue of archaeology and history⁸⁵, since we are trying to compare two different theoretical constructions: the one of the gens which is a historiographical construction of ancient authors⁸⁶, and the one of the archaeological culture which is a modern concept created by archaeologists to categorize the archaeological material from a certain region, and from a certain period, presuming its uniformity⁸⁷ and synchronous change⁸⁸. Regarding this statement, I will try only to identify the mobility of communities/populations during the second half of the 3rd century – beginning of the 4th century, based on written sources, without linking any of the events directly to the archaeological finds.

Referring to the events from the end of the 3rd century, starting with the reign of Aurelianus⁸⁹, several written sources mention the colonization/displacement of the Carpi on the territory of the Roman Empire⁹⁰. Based on the studies of Péter Kovács the colonization/displacement of the Carpi was performed in several stages during the reign of Aurelianus, followed by another, during the reign of Diocletianus, and the last in ca. 303–304, under Galerius⁹¹. Péter Kovács has also pointed out the relation between the fragment from Ammianus Marcellinus mentioning the Carpi settled in Pannonia by Diocletianus⁹² and the lines of Lactantius who reflects upon the cause of the dislocation of the Carpi from their territories: the attack of the Goths⁹³, which was also the cause of the military conflicts between the Carpi and the Romans during the reign of Galerius. This long-drawn-out military conflict

⁸³ Protase 1976, PL. XLVIII.

⁸⁴ Bichir 1973, 306. Pl. XC – 307. Pl. XCI.

⁸⁵ Brather 2006, 24; Goetz 2003, 3–4; Pohl 1991, 47.

⁸⁶ Most of the ancient authors preferred using ethnic terms for the different barbarian societies/communities (Pohl 2015, 255). This historiographical tradition derives from their two-fold conception of the organization of different societies, so they made difference between “populus romanus” and the barbarian “gens” (Geary 2014, 71; Referring to this dichotomous perception see also: Pohl 1991, 40; Pohl 2015, 255). While the first was perceived as a constitutional model, with the members of the community organized and linked by common laws (Geary 2014, 68.), the latter was known and presented in the historical sources according to an ethnical model. Ancient authors presumed that the basic organizational principles of these communities were common origin, traditions, language, and a given geographical region (Geary 2014, 72). According to this view, the different “gens” from the written sources should be considered as homogenous groups categorized according to some objectively presumed external traits by ancient authors (Geary 2014, 63 – 64), where this representation of a gens by ancient authors overlaps very rarely with their true identity (Pohl 2015, 255.). One cannot be thus sure that they were truly organized following these principles. Even if it can be considered as a representation of reality, it should be considered a historiographic construction. For an example regarding this dichotomous perception and a possibly closer image referring to the organization of peoples see Pricus of Panium who met a Greek speaking person in Attilas mansion, who lived according to the “Schythian laws” (FHA 2014, 31–37).

⁸⁷ Brather 2006, 24.

⁸⁸ Brather 2006, 36.

⁸⁹ Aurelius Victor 39.43.

⁹⁰ Hieronymus 226b; Orosius VII 15.12; Ammianus Marcellinus XXVIII 1.5.

⁹¹ Kovács 2011, 35.

⁹² Ammianus Marcellinus XXVIII 1.5

⁹³ Lactantius 38.6

illustrated with the sixth *Carpicus Maximus cognomen ex virtute* of Galerius ended with the displacement of the Carpi on Roman fields⁹⁴. Unfortunately the written sources do not mention the former territories of the Carpi in the context of their military conflicts with the Goths and the Romans, but surely their lands had to be located in the vicinity of the lower Danubian Limes and the territories controlled by the Goths⁹⁵. It remains unclear if these military conflicts between the Carpi and the Goths, mentioned by Ammianus Marcellinus and Lactantius, have anything to do with the violent events between barbarian gentes mentioned by Mammertinus in 291⁹⁶. It is interesting because these power rearrangements recorded by the written sources approximately coincide with the military conflicts between the Sarmatians and the Romans during the period of the Tetrarchy near Pannonia⁹⁷, which were caused, according to the majority of scholars, rather by some power-struggles in the Barbaricum than by some ordinary robbery campaigns of the Sarmatians⁹⁸. In the same time, according to Péter Kovács, the Mammertinus pangyrici from 291 include a reference to these tetrarchy-period Roman-Sarmatian conflicts⁹⁹, and although there is no any explicit mention of any the connection between these barbarian power-struggles and Sarmatian-Roman wars, their before-mentioned contemporaneity points in this direction.

Very briefly: several military conflicts have been recorded at the end of the 3rd century and turn between the 3rd and the 4th centuries in the vicinity of the Roman limes, caused by the power-struggles in this region. The sources do not mention the exact location of these conflicts, but one must consider that they were subsequent to the abandonment of the province of Dacia. It remains unclear if the Carpi were unable to fill the power-void left by the Romans behind in Dacia and if this caused these struggles. Although due to these conflicts, groups of Carpi were dislocated from their (home) lands – wherever these were located – by the Goths, who pressed against the Roman limes, causing the Roman-Carpi battles. The Roman authors do not mention the groups of the Carpi that were not driven away by the Goths and the ones that fled to other directions than to the Roman limes. A possible cause of the Roman-Sarmatian Wars also could be these conflicts between the Goths and the Carpi, where the latter pressed the Sarmatians, who assaulted the Pannonian limes. The contemporaneity of the events seems to support this supposition even if one cannot prove the clear causality between them. Could this pressure have been made applied along the Mureş Valley? There are very few clues for this idea, but it cannot be rejected as a work hypothesis or as a simple presumption. However it seems to be certain that, based upon this information, the end of 3rd and the turn between the 3rd and the 4th centuries was a period during which the mobility of various communities had intensified, and there could also have been several dislocations of communities/peoples “invisible” for the Roman written sources.

Careful conclusions. Some thoughts to be considered

As I tried to point out, there are too many difficulties for one to correctly evaluate the cremation burials from the Lower Mureş valley. Maybe one of the reasons is the accidental character of the finds and the relativity of the information regarding the burial customs, the structure of the burial places, the relation of the burial places with the settlements signaled near to them, and the integrity of the finds. First of all with more or less luck I have tried to solve the problems regarding to the chronology of the burial places. There are slight hints that the ones from Sântana – Olari, and maybe Şeitin, are earlier than the ones from Arad (Fig. 10). As I have mentioned before, currently the seriation of the funerary finds from the Lower Mureş valley could support or reject this presumption, but their dating to the Late Sarmatian Period seems to be certain.

⁹⁴ Kovács 2011, 35.

⁹⁵ Zozimos I.31.

⁹⁶ Mamertinus XVI. 1.

⁹⁷ Illustrated by Diocletian's residence in Sirmium. See: Kovács 2011, 17–20.

⁹⁸ Istvánovits–Kulcsár 2018, 319; Mócsy 1972, 98; Prohászka 2008, 55.

⁹⁹ Kovács 2011, 6.

migration¹⁰² cannot be specified without knowing the approximate size of these burial places and the social structure of this society. The apparent chronological delay between the burials from the vicinity of Sântana and Arad can equally support the theory of two separate migration waves to this region during two¹⁰³ distinct periods (from the second half of the 3rd century and from the last decades of the 4th century) if one analyses the geographical distribution of the burial places – or they may indicate several migration waves or a gradual migration. So it still remains a question if the communities from the vicinity of Arad survived until the middle of the 4th century – the beginning of the 5th century or they have migrated in the region in this period (Fig. 12).

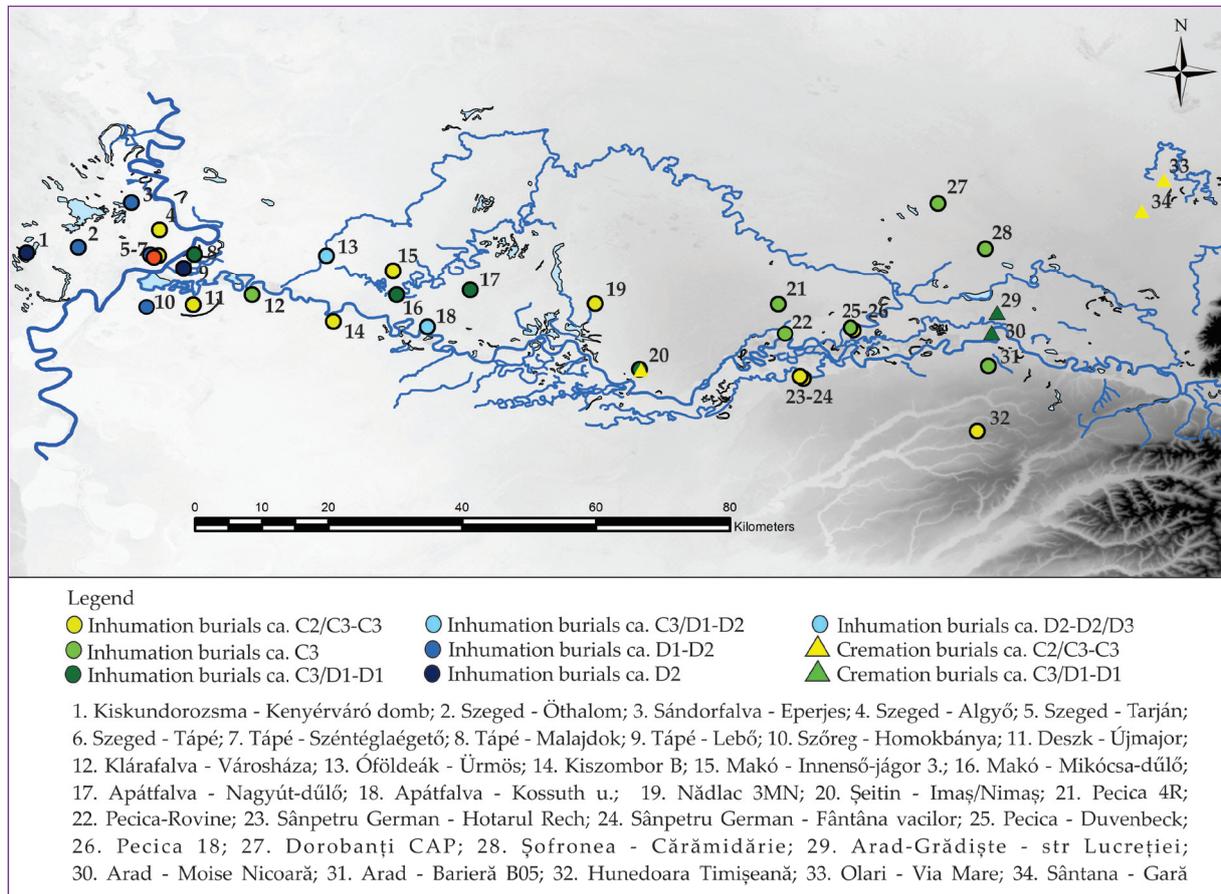


Fig. 12. Distribution map of burial places from the Late Sarmatian Period in the Lower Mureş valley.

The analogies of some of the funerary items found in this micro-region support the observation that they might be products of local workshops or craftsmen. The long distance analogies of some finds (the urns from Olari and Şeitin, the brooch from G2(?) Arad “Moise Nicoară”) could reflect the circulation of these objects due to the mobility of communities and a possible technological transfer at the same time, indicated by the shape and style of the objects. Obviously these presumptions should be carefully verified in the future. The idea of several communities migrating from the Transylvanian

¹⁰² Burmeister 2000, 540.

¹⁰³ Unfortunately the coin hoard from Neudorf (Arad county, Roumania) ending with coins of Aurelianus (Barbu-Hügel 1993, 69–70) has not been analyzed separately. In other cases it was integrated into a too large interpretational context (Domocoş 2014, 134–135) to decide if it was an isolated hoard or it can be linked to a coin hoard horizon from the period after the end of the 3rd century together with the ones from Diosig (Domocoş 2014, 204) and Sălăcea (Domocoş 2014, 214) ending with the coins of Gallienus. Apparently it does not belong to any of other coin hoard horizons from the lowland parts of the Carpathian Basin. Their distribution on the eastern periphery of the Trans Tisa region at the end of the 3rd century, when several military conflicts are reported in the written sources, should also be taken into consideration if one tries to connect them to a possible emergence of new communities in this region. It seems certain though that the coin hoard from Neudorf marks an (violent?) event, though further research is needed in deciding if it is an isolated case in the Lower Mureş valley.

Basin is also supported by the historical data, where I have intentionally avoided to identify the archaeological remnants of the communities from the Lower Mureş valley with the Carpi. Although the high level of mobility of peoples at the end of the 3rd century is supported by so many arguments that one cannot ignore the emergence of some communities from the former Carpiian power-structure in the first phase, without using any ethnical connotations but there are only indirect pieces of evidence to support this presumption¹⁰⁴. Also, there are fortunate cases where the written sources are more explicitly supporting this statement, like in the case of Pannonia¹⁰⁵.

Taking into account the above-mentioned observations, one may assume the necessity of reconsidering the use of the concept “Cipău – Gîrle Group” with its current theoretical content. These burials presumed connection with the burials from the Lower Mureş valley could be questionable in their originally formulated way: i.e. groups settling in the territory of the former province of Dacia in the 4th century from the western vicinity of the province. Maybe a more fortunate solution would be the analysis of the burials from Cipău “Gîrle” in their micro-regional context, and right after that in a broader view. Although the observations regarding the role of the former Roman infrastructure – Roman roads – in the distribution of the cremation rite burial places from Cipău “Gîrle”¹⁰⁶, Obreja, and Soporul de Câmpie¹⁰⁷ is to be considered. From this perspective it is quite interesting to decide if these former Roman roads could have played any role in the mobility of communities after the abandonment of Dacia, maybe also along a westward direction?

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¹⁰⁴ Worth noting that a great part of the 4th century cremation burials from the Transilvanian Basin have been attributed traditionally – sometimes based on the written sources – to the Carpi/Dacians/Free Dacians, despite the fact that the Sântana de Mureş – Cerniachov type burial places from east of the Carpatians are biritual (Körösfői 2015, 136). Until the clarification of this problem, even if it would be plausible and convenient from the chronological viewpoint one can not link the two cremation burial places from the vicinity of Arad without a doubt to the latter cultural-group.

¹⁰⁵ Tóth 2005; Tóth 2011.

¹⁰⁶ Lăzărescu 2015, 82–83.

¹⁰⁷ Lăzărescu 2015, 77.

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Abbreviations

AAASH	Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae, Budapesta.
AAC	Acta Archaeologica Carpathica, Cracovia.
Alba Regia	Alba Regia. Annales Musei Stephani regis, Székesfehérvár.
Angvstia	Angvstia. Sfântu Gheorghe.
Arabona	Győri Xántus János Múzeum, Győr.
ArchÉrt	Archaeologiai Értesítő, Budapesta.
ArchHung	Archaeologia Hungarica, Series Nova, Budapest.
ArhMold	Arheologia Moldovei. Iași.
Arheologija/Archeologiya	Arheologija/ Archeologiya. Sofia.
Apulum	Acta Musei Apulensis – Apulum. Alba-Iulia.
AMN	Acta Musei Napocensis, Cluj-Napoca.
AMP	Acta Musei Porolissensis, Zalău.
BAM	Brvkenthal Acta Mvsei. Sibiu.
BHAB	(Museum Banaticum Temesiense) Bibliotheca Historica et Archaeologica Banatica.
BMMK	A Békés Megyei Múzeumok Közleményei. Békéscsaba.
BMA	Bibliotheca Memoriae Antiquitatis, Piatra Neamț.
BMN	Bibliotheca Musei Napocensis.
BudRég	Budapest Régiségei. Budapest.
CCA	Cronica Cercetărilor Arheologice din România, București.
CRSCRCR	Coins from Roman sites and collections of Roman coins from Romania.
Dacia N.S.	Dacia. Revue d'archéologie et d'histoire ancienne. Nouvelle serie. București.
EphNap	Ephemeris Napocensis. Cluj-Napoca.
Ethnographia	Ethnographia. A Magyar Néprajzi Társaság Folyóirata. Budapest.
FADDP/GMADP	Führer zu archäologischen Denkmälern in Dacia Porolissensis/Ghid al monumentelor arheologice din Dacia Porolissensis
FolArch	Folia Archaeologica. Budapest.
Hesperia	Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. Athens.
MCA	Materiale și Cercetări Arheologice. Bucharest.
MFME	A Móra Ferenc Múz. Évkönyve. Szeged.
MFME SE	Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve: Studia Ethnographica. Szeged.
MFME-StudArch	A Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve, Studia Archaeologica. Szeged.
MGT SZ	Magyar Gazdaságtörténeti Szemle. Budapest.
MMA	Monumenta Avarorum Archaeologica, Budapest.
Mousaios	Mousaios. Buletin Științific al Muzeului Județean Buzău, Buzău.
NyJAMÉ	Jósa András Múzeum Évkönyve. Nyiregyháza.
OM	Orbis Mediaevalis, Arad.
PAT	Patrimonium Archaeologicum Transylvanicum. Cluj Napoca.
PBF	Praehistorische Bronzefunde. Berlin.
PeuceS.N	PEUCE. Studii și cercetări de istorie și arheologie. Serie nouă. Tulcea.
RI, SN	Revista Istorică, Serie Nouă. București.
RMM-MIA	Revista Muzeelor și Monumentelor. seria Monumente istorice și de artă. București.
SA	Sovietskaia Arheologija. Moscova.
SCIV(A)	Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche. București.
SlovArch	Slovenská Archeológia. Nitra.
SPMA	Studies in Post-Medieval Archaeology. Prague.

StudArchMed

TRÉT

WMMM

ZSA

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