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STUDIA ARCHAEOLOGICA

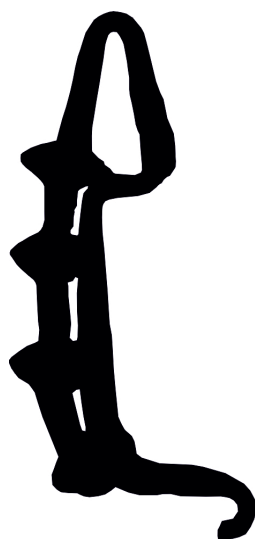
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*This volume is dedicated to Tudor Soroceanu at 80 years*

*Acest volum este dedicat lui Tudor Soroceanu cu ocazia împlinirii a 80 de ani*





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# The archaeological excavations at Susani – Grămurada de la Jupani. Report on the 2024 field campaign

**Dragoș Diaconescu, Ionuț Marteniuc, Sofia Berteau, Victor Bunoiu,  
Bogdan Calotă, Răzvan Ioan Pinca, Robin DiPasquale (Quataert)**

**Abstract:** The 2024 excavation of this Late Bronze Age barrow targeted the first sector (SIIA) of its northern half. There was no post-construction intervention identified on the funerary monument. The base of the barrow displayed the same pattern as the southern half, with a few minor differences. The segment of Fence 1 uncovered in SIIA excavation unit reveals two phases of construction, the latter of which was continued to the south. Two cremation depositions were recorded in the northern area of the excavation unit (C.79 - in layer deposition and C.80 – in layer and alveola deposition). Based on the stratigraphic evidence, we can argue that C.79 was placed later than C.80. Having demonstrated that the C.80 feature was contemporary with the ash layers belonging to Structure 1 of the southern half of the barrow, it was possible to conclude that C.79 represents an intermediate stage between phases IIa and IIb as defined on the stratigraphic matrix developed for the prehistoric funerary monument.

**Keywords:** Late Bronze Age; barrow; cremation; wood-structures; funerary depositions.

## Introduction

The completion of the southern half of the barrow called *Grămurada de la Jupani* located in Susani (Traian Vuia commune, Timis County), coincided with the outline of a phased excavation plan for the northern half. While the southern sector required five excavation campaigns (2019 - 2023), due to the complexity of the stratigraphic situations encountered, caused by the post-construction interventions, for the northern part of the barrow, almost unaffected by subsequent interventions, the excavation was planned to be carried out in three campaigns (2024-2026).

The 2024 excavation campaign was carried out from July 1<sup>st</sup> to August 3<sup>rd</sup> and the team consisted of six archaeologists (one expert, three specialists and two junior archaeologists), one drawer, one MA student, three BA History students from the West University of Timișoara and one BA student of the Archaeology Department of the Karl-Eberhardt University Tübingen (Germany). The main goal was to investigate the western sector of the northern half of the mound (Fig. 1), corresponding to the lines of squares 13 - 19 (in N-S direction) of the S1/2017-2018 trench.

## The description of the excavation

The research unit named SIIA had the shape of a circle sector with widths (on the east-west axis) varying between 12 and 4 meters, and a maximum length (on the north-south axis) of 18 meters (Fig. 1). The lines of squares were labelled with numbers from 13 to 19 in width (from east to west) and with capital letters from A to I (from south to north). The SIIA research unit was uncovered and excavated mechanized, in four successive horizontal plans. Each horizontal plan obtained was cleaned by hand scraping. Given the concentric trails created by the construction layers of the barrow in each of the documented horizontal plans, we were assured that in this sector of the barrow we did not come across any post-construction feature.

Clearing S1/2017-2018's western segment of the soil used to re-fill this unit allowed us to stop the mechanized excavation about 40-50 cm above the base of the barrow as defined by the presence of 10a and 10 layers.

During the mechanized excavation of plan No. 4, a cluster of sherds was discovered in the area of the 15H square, referred to as Sherd Cluster No. 1/2024. This cluster, previously documented (mapped,





Fig. 1. Drone photography of the *Grămurada de la Jupani* barrow with the opened SIIA/2024 excavation unit (north is according to the position of the photo).

photographed - including photogrammetry) and collected together, were situated within the *grundriss* at the limit between the intense reddish-brown, smoothly dense layer (layer 1) and the spotted-brown layer (layer 6) further towards the centre of the barrow (i.e. slightly below level 1, from a stratigraphic perspective). The removal of the reddish-brown soil from this ceramic cluster led to the conclusion that it was arranged on a slightly inclined surface towards the outside of the barrow, which indicated that cluster no. 1/2024 was placed on the upper part of level 6.

After finishing the mechanized excavation and cleaning by scraping plan no. 4, the manual excavation was carried out using spade; following the excavation of the first level by this method, which led to the preparation of plan no. 5, two areas of baked soil resulting from not very intense burning, arranged in a superficial alveolus, were identified in squares 16G and 17E, respectively, and named Fire Place 1/2024 and Fire Place 2/2024; these features were placed stratigraphically in the same context as Sherd Cluster 1/2024, being documented by drawing and photography.



Plan no. 6 corresponded with the level of 10 and 10a layers being approached by removing the upper soil package and vacuuming (in the case of level 10) and by carefully scraping and light trowelling (in the case of level 10a). These actions basically resulted in the cleaning of the upper part of the platform raised at the base of the barrow<sup>1</sup>. Twenty-six postholes were recorded at this level, of which 24 were arranged in an alignment with the slightly curved conduit to the east, the other two being slightly eccentric to the west (Fig. 2). This row of 24 pits was positioned in the extension of what was called Fence 1<sup>2</sup>.

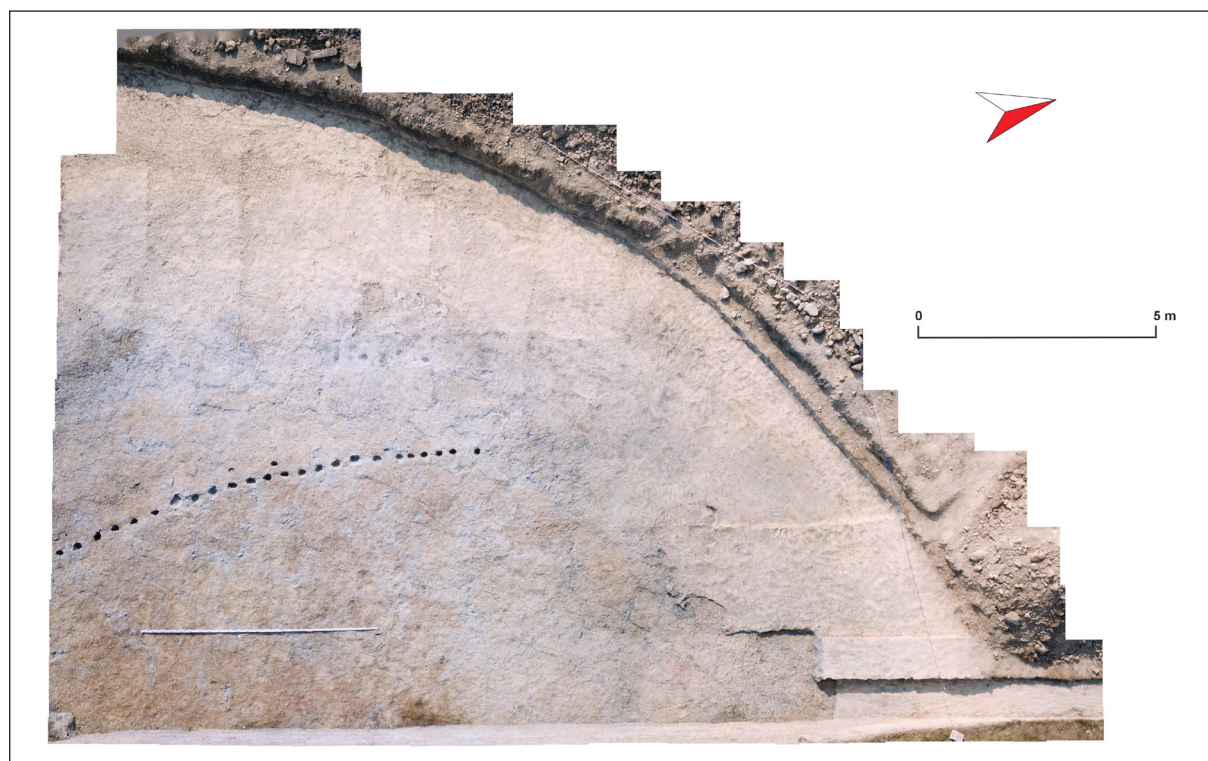


Fig. 2. Plan excavation no. 6 photogrammetry. Level 10 and the last phase of the northern sector of Fence 1 are visible as a reddish-brown spot.

An alveolus with a width of about 1.2 m of the level 10 was noted roughly in the demarcation area of the lines of the F and G squares (in the east-south-east - west-north-west direction) and on the lines of the 13<sup>th</sup> and partially 14<sup>th</sup> squares.

An assemblage of cinerary remains (charcoal, fragments of cremated bones, fragments of bronze objects and faience/glass beads), referred to as feature C.79, was identified in the eastern half of the 13G (northern end) and especially 13H squares, overlapped by the eastern profile of the SIIA, on the upper part of level 10a, basically in a stratigraphic position corresponding (at first sight) to level 10, but outside its area; this stratigraphic situation and overall layout of C.79 are similar to those of features C.2<sup>3</sup> and C.56<sup>4</sup>.

In order to verify the possibility of the occurrence of cremation urn graves implemented in layer 10a, the excavation continued by manually excavating 15 cm of the upper part of this layer (plan no. 7), starting from the southern area of the sector, from the line of squares A. This approach led to an especially noteworthy discovery concerning Fence 1, namely that almost the entire length of this fence identified in the excavation plan no. 6, within the SIIA excavation unit, was doubled slightly to the west by a row of 20 postholes (Fig. 3). A further highly noteworthy remark, in besides the fact that only two of these postholes could be identified within level 10 (suggesting that most of them were no longer standing at the

<sup>1</sup> Diaconescu *et al.* 2021, 272.

<sup>2</sup> Diaconescu *et al.* 2023, 367 and n. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Diaconescu *et al.* 2018, 131.

<sup>4</sup> Diaconescu *et al.* 2023, 367.





Fig. 3. Excavation plan no. 7 photogrammetry. Both phases of the northern sector of Fence 1 are distinguishable.

time of construction of level 10), is that all these postholes had, in addition to the post negatives, also post implementation pits (Fig. 4). The other 24 pits, mentioned above, visible during the cleaning of level 10 actually consisted only of the negatives of the posts, suggesting that they had been beaten down and not implemented in previously dug pits. These details indicate, for the northern segment of Fence 1, the existence of two construction phases, the first one, the older one, was abandoned shortly afterwards, and different in construction/building technique; these remarks allow us to assert that the construction of Fence 1 started from north to south.

Further excavations were carried out, using the trowel, in the area of the alveolus noticed on level 10, and a thin clay layer was found below; beneath this, another cluster of cinerary remains was uncovered, lying on the upper part of level 10a, on the 13F (northern half), 13G (southern half), 14F (northeastern quarter) and 14G (southeastern area) squares, overlaid by the eastern profile of



Fig. 4. The northern sector of Fence 1 (detail) distinguishable in excavation plan no. 7.

the SIIA. The above-mentioned alveolus, visible on the surface of level 10, derives from a similar but slightly more pronounced dent filled with ash, which defines feature C.80 (Fig. 7, its lower limit being marked by a yellow, dotted line). We are unable to explain at this stage the nature of this level 10a alveolus; an answer to this question can be expected during the 2025 campaign. However, we can clearly establish that C.80 is located in a stratigraphically similar position to that of the ash layer within the area surrounding Structure 1 as well as the pit-graves filled with cinerary remains identified within this structure from the SIB<sup>5</sup>, SIC<sup>6</sup> and SID<sup>7</sup> excavation units.

In order to record the ditch that encircles the barrow (Ditch 1), a 10 x 1 m trench, SIIA/1 was excavated in a roughly north-south axis, along the profile, a 10 x 1 m trench SIIA/1 was excavated, along the eastern profile of the SIIA, its southern edge being marked by the boundary between the H and I square lines. Ditch 1 became visible at a depth of 0.30 m (elevation referenced to the level of the topsoil in the barrow outer space), with a slightly looser fill, much finer grained than the soil outside it, and a greyish-yellow colour, ranging in width from 1.90-2.10 m. Its northern edge was situated 3.30 m (on the western profile of SIIA/1) and 2.70 m (on the eastern profile of SIIA/1) from the north boundary of SIIA/1.

After the SIIA excavation was completed, the desire of understanding the stratigraphic relationship between level 10a and the space outside the barrow led to the excavation of trench SIIA/2 on the eastern half of squares 13H, 13I and partially 13J, measuring 5 x 1 m, thus partially overlapping (squares 13I and half of 13J) and extending SIIA/1 to the south (square 13H), the southern limit being the demarcation line between the lines of squares G and H. An artificial excavation level of 0.20 m was carried out. By cleaning the eastern profile of the trench, it was demonstrated that the entire stratigraphic package, which we named as layer 10a, was arranged/deposited in a rather large alveolus (we cannot explain the nature of its formation), the base thus created being slightly higher (maximum 5 cm) than the space outside the alveolus itself; the boundary between level 10a and the external geological soil is marked, both on the profile and on the *grundriss*, by a white dotted line (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Northern sector of the SIIA excavation unit profile, in the SIIA/2 trench area (white dotted line marks the northern boundary of level 10a on the profile and on the *grundriss*).

## Conclusions

The stratigraphic structure of the mound and some constructive details are the most significant insights provided by the first campaign on the northern half of the Susani barrow.

<sup>5</sup> Diaconescu *et al.* 2021, 273

<sup>6</sup> Diaconescu *et al.* 2022, 352.

<sup>7</sup> Diaconescu *et al.* 2024b, 372.



In its northern section, Fence 1 consists of a segment that was built by implementing the posts in pits specially dug for this purpose. The cross-sections of the posts are mainly triangular in shape, suggesting a longitudinal splitting of tree trunks. Of great importance, but difficult to explain at this point, is the fact that this segment has been abandoned and replaced by another, parallel but disposed slightly to the east, which continues into the southern half of the barrow in a continuous string. This new segment is also composed of posts, mostly triangular in cross-section, although they are implemented by driving and not in previously dug pits.

As previously stated, C.79 represents an assemblage of cinerary remains deposited on top of level 10a, however outside the stratigraphic marker of level 10, as well as the C.2 and C.56 features, having probably a stratigraphical position equivalent to level 10. We can conclude, based on the observations made on the eastern profile of SIIA (mediated by the close juxtaposition of the overlapping profile on sections of C.79 and C.80), that the timing of C.79 deposition matches stratigraphically the thin clay layer which seals the ash deposits surrounding Structure 1 and the pits/graves protected by it, including here C.80 (see Fig. 7, this layer is marked with white dashed line). Layer 10 overlays this thin clay layer. Thus, we can actually state that the deposition process of the cinerary remains situated in the layer represented by the C.79, C.2 and C.56 features, which coincides with the sealing with a clay layer of variable thickness of the ash deposits related to Structure 1, is considered as an intermediate stage between phases IIa and IIb of the Susani barrow, according to the currently determined stratigraphy<sup>8</sup>. The C.80 feature corresponds, as already mentioned, to the ashes deposited around Structure 1, as well as to those found in the pits/graves located inside the assemblage (IIa phase of the barrow), thus suggesting a continuation in the northern half of the funerary structure. In addition, this correspondence may also be inferred from the types of adornments that occur in the contents of the cinerary deposition in C.80, compared to C.79.



Fig. 6. SIIA excavation unit eastern profile photogrammetry.

<sup>8</sup> See the Harris matrix from Diaconescu et al. 2024a, Fig. 5.

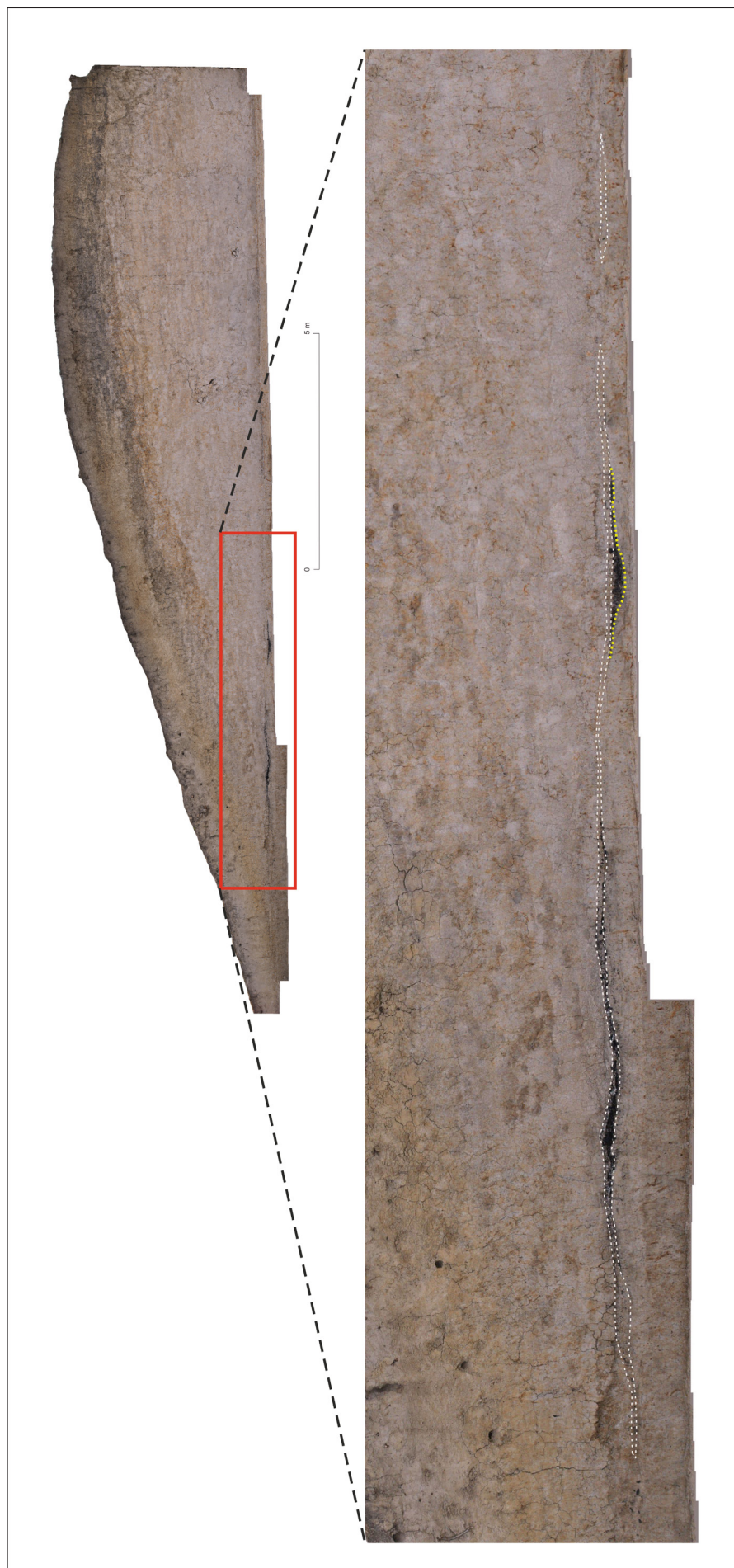


Fig. 7. Photogrammetry detail of the eastern profile of the SIIA excavation unit, showing the area of the C.79 and C.80 features (the white dotted line marks C.79 and the thin clay level between level 10 and 10a, and the yellow dotted line marks the lower limit of C.80).

The overlapping of the stratigraphic marker of layer 10 by the layer package no. 9 (phase III of the barrow)<sup>9</sup> is also noticeable, providing a strong contextual argument for supporting a very short time span between the creation of layer 10 (phase IIb) and the edification of the layer package no. 9. A significant element in dating phase IV of the barrow was the discovery of small charred twigs in direct association with the Sherds Cluster no. 1/2024, located on the upper part of layer 6 and superimposed by layer 1; these twigs are excellent short-lived type of sample for the absolute chronology of this assemblage and, therefore, for the construction moment of stratigraphic/constructive layer 1. This is of the outmost importance since, at this time, no strong arguments are available concerning the secure inclusion of layer 1 in the construction phase of the barrow structure (final stage of phase IV) that integrated/protected Structure 1<sup>10</sup>.

A darker coloured area with a higher density of constitutive soil lenses, bordered by two micro-fractures of the layers (the northern one more evident than the southern one), was visible on the eastern profile of SIIA and was documented in the layer package 9 by scale drawing but also visible on photogrammetry (Fig. 6). We currently have no explanation for this feature, but hope to have an answer during the 2025 campaign.

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<sup>9</sup> See Diaconescu et al. 2024a, 393.

<sup>10</sup> See Diaconescu et al. 2024a, 393.



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