

ZIRIDAVA  
STUDIA ARCHAEOLOGICA

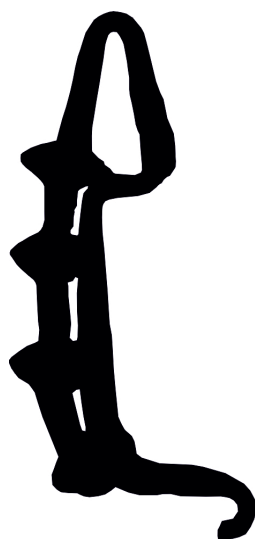
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MUSEUM ARAD

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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 late La Tène cremation grave in stone mound from Milova – *Cioaca Milovei* (Arad County)

**Ioan Cristian Cireap, Angela Simalcsik, Alexandru Hegyi**

**Abstract:** A relatively recent find has yielded novel data on the burial behaviour of the humans living during the second period of the Iron Age in the Lower Mureş valley area. It is a cremation underneath a stone mantle mound, whose grave goods contained dress and adornment items datable by late 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. The paleoanthropological analysis has revealed that the cremation remains belong to a young female, while the performed geomagnetic measurements offered a detailed image of the find area.

**Keywords:** La Tène burial customs; Dacian burial customs; cremation; stone mound; La Tène knob brooches; La Tène gold adornments; Lower Mureş basin; paleoanthropology; geomagnetism.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Discovery of the site

In March 2020, Emil Sabău, authorised owner of a metal detector, identified several artefacts in the undeveloped area of Milova village, Conop commune of Arad county. Once the legal circuit had been completed, the items reached the Arad Museum Complex<sup>1</sup>.

At first sight, we were able to conclude these were made in gold, silver and iron, dating to Iron Age II.

As it shall be detailed below, together with the discoverer we agreed to meet at a later date so he could lead us to the find spot and show where he found the different items.

### 1.2. Aim of the article

The aim here is to introduce the find and subsequent results of both the intrusive research we carried out and the interdisciplinary approach, into scientific circulation.

We believe the find important for the study of the burial behaviour specific to the above mentioned chronological period; furthermore, it is rather significant at microregional level by its uniqueness (so far) in the geographic area circumscribed by the Lower Mureş basin.

As it shall be seen, the article discusses all aspects of the find, starting from how it occurred, its location, the description of the sondage we performed, accompanied by a catalogue of the items and framing of the newly acquired information into a wider context.

## 2. Location

### 2.1. Site location

Given the rather special nature of the find, we contacted the discoverer and agreed to meet in order to learn all related details.

The archaeological find is located on the southern extremity of Milova Hill (*Cioaca Milovei*), at 170 m elevation, on an approximately 40 × 50 m sized plateau, spanning the top of this highland.

Milova Hill, in parallel to *Cioaca Dosu/Capu Dealului*, in the form of two peaks divided by the Milova stream valley, runs southwards the general line of the southern frame of Zărand Mountains (Fig. 1).

This extremity of Milova Hill is delimited by DC70 and the Milova stream valley to the east, respectively DN7, south-westwards, the northern hill crest gradually ascending to the junction with the main crest of Zărand Mountains. Access to the plateau is possible on foot, following a track that starts from the junction between DN7 and DC70.

<sup>1</sup> The items entered the custody of the Arad Museum Complex pursuant to the delivery protocol 481 of 06.04.2020.

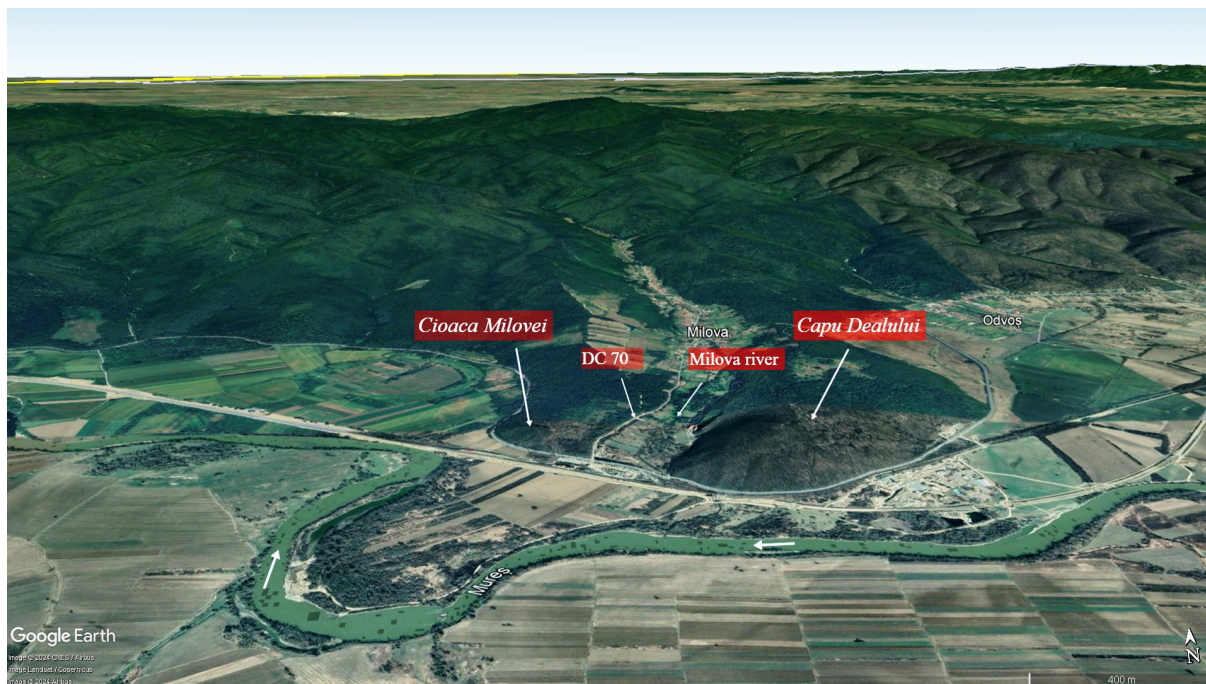


Fig. 1. The finds area, with the indication of the geographical landmarks mentioned in the text (image source: Google Earth).

At the time of our visit, the plateau was covered by young oak woodland. Had not this tall vegetation existed, owing to the elevation difference by which it dominates the surrounding area (ca 35 m), the plateau would have offered a good view of the Mureș river valley, which today flows at a distance of 700 m southwards.

## 2.2. Location of the finds yielded by metal detector

On site, the discoverer mentioned three places on the plateau where he discovered the artefacts, namely<sup>2</sup>:

A. At a location where a much flattened mound lay, the following were identified:

- two golden items, deformed, worked in the *au repoussé* technique, with conical projections in relief (subchapter 3.3, pt. a, b/Pl. 2, fig. 1, 2);
- two brooches with four knobs each, one also with three intermediary knobs, fragmentary, in silver (subchapter 3.3, pt. c, f/Pl. 2, fig. 7, 10);
- iron bit, jointed, the bars entering the horse's mouth being twisted, with a ring attached by each of the ends (subchapter 3.3, pt. p/Pl. 3, fig. 1); nearby, there lay a slightly larger ring (subchapter 3.3, pt. r/Pl. 3, fig. 3).

According to the discoverer, he found the bit on top of some stones after having excavated to a certain depth; once he removed a few stones, he discovered two golden items between the edge of a large slab and a stone. Lifting the slab, he found the two brooch fragments; nearby, he noted what seemed to be charred bones.

B. At a distance of 1-2 m east-south-eastwards, he discovered still on top some stones another iron bit, jointed, with twisted bars and smaller rings by the ends (subchapter 3.3, pt. q/Pl. 3, fig. 2).

C. At a somewhat distance from the location of the first finds, on east-north-east direction (approximately central to the plateau), there were identified:

- A Roman Republican denarius, likely a silver alloy (subchapter 3.3, pt. w/Pl. 3, fig. 7a/7b);
- a silver brooch fragment, preserving its foot, provided with two knobs (subchapter 3.3, pt. x/Pl. 3, fig. 6).

The field survey of the plateau that we conducted during the travel together with the individual who made the finds led to the identification of other few uneven surfaces, with the appearance of flattened

<sup>2</sup> These shall be described in detail below, together with the items discovered during the excavation of the testpit.

mounds. Also visible were traces of human interference in the form of pits, not very deep, with a few meters in diameter. One seems to have disturbed a stone structure, which are noticeable by the base and edges of this hollowing in the ground. There and in the vicinity, we noted brick and mortar fragments on the surface; once the fallen leaves were removed, we found numerous small adobe fragments. The coin and brooch fragment were found at two-three meters east-north-east from this location.

### 3. Archaeological excavations

We believed that the find was important for the study of Iron Age II in the Lower Mureş area, so we took the necessary steps in order to perform an archaeological testpit at *Cioaca Milovei*. This occurred over the course of two campaigns<sup>3</sup>, in 2020-2021, conducted by specialists with the Arad Museum Complex<sup>4</sup>.

#### 3.1. The 2020 excavation campaign

In the 2020 campaign, we excavated a testpit<sup>5</sup>, termed S1. By location, NE-SW orientation and 1 × 4 m size, the sondage was aimed pinpoint the spot where the precious metal adornments were discovered.

Once the vegetation was removed, we proceeded to excavate reaching a depth of -0.10-0.15 m, where we identified a cluster of boulders of different sizes. On the spot where the discoverer had



Fig. 2. The square excavated on the north-eastern side of S1, where we outlined the deposition of charred bones (the black-gray stain).

<sup>3</sup> Sava *et al.* 2021; Sava *et al.* 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Victor Sava (archaeological site supervisor), Ioan Cristian Cireap, Daniel Preda (both campaigns); Florin Mărginean, Norbert Kapcsos (the 2020 campaign); Luminița Andreica-Szilagyi (the 2021 campaign); Marinela Gorgan (Archaeology student, Faculty of History and Philosophy with UBB Cluj) also participated in the 2021 campaign. Friends Mihai Apetrii and Darius Hotăran were of great help with the clearing works of the abundant vegetation prior to the commencement of the 2021 campaign.

<sup>5</sup> Based on the archaeological diagnostic permit 257/01.07.2020 issued by the Ministry of Culture.

excavated, there were two slabs of larger sizes. In the space in-between, we noted fragments of fired clay and charcoal.

Subsequently, we removed the boulders and the earth down to a depth of -0.30-0.35 m. We found ash deposition, fragments of charred bones, small pieces of yellow clay and burnt clay under the two large slabs. The area of this deposition yielded the fragmentary spring of a brooch and its pin (subchapter 3.3, pt. d/Pl. 2, fig. 8), a fragment of a spiralled adornment of type *saltaleone* (subchapter 3.3, pt. l/Pl. 2, fig. 12), all in silver, yet also pottery fragments of a small vessel, handmade, dark-gray (subchapter 3.3, pt. m/Pl. 4, fig. 2).

In order to fully delimit Cx1, we excavated a square on the north-eastern side of S1, measuring 1 m in length and 0.50 m in width. At -0.20 m deep, we identified the boulders which covered the deposition of the cremation remains. After their removal, we were able to delineate this deposition (Fig. 2).

Next, we began to collect and gradually document the deposition components. Over the course of this process, among the ash remains and charred bones other three fragmentary springs of silver brooches (subchapter 3.3, pt. e, g, h/Pl. 2, fig. 9, 11, 6), numerous other fragments of a spiralled adornment object (subchapter 3.3, pt. l/Pl. 2, fig. 12), a bronze stud (subchapter 3.3, pt. j/Pl. 2, fig. 4), four greenish-blue glass beads (subchapter 3.3, pt. n) and four small metal objects, deformed by fire (subchapter 3.3, pt. o)<sup>6</sup> were also discovered.

Lastly, we observed that the deposition was placed in a shallow deepening into the ground with an approximately circular outline, excavated in the yellowish-brown soil, with a maximum depth of 0.08 m and a diameter of 0.50 m.

After all boulders were removed, the archaeologically sterile earth emerged at a depth of -0.55-0.60 m.

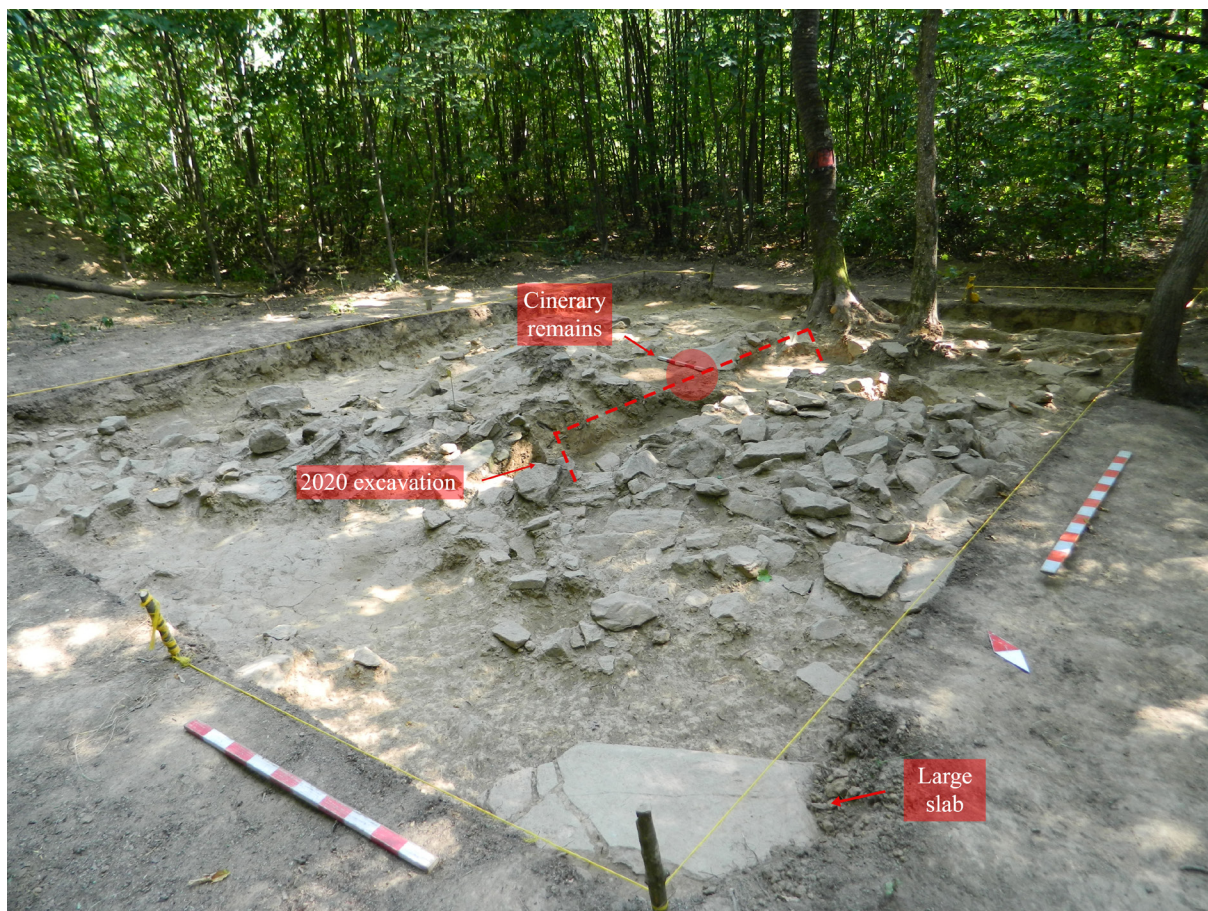


Fig. 3. The stone structure identified in the area excavated in 2021.

<sup>6</sup> During the paleoanthropologic analysis, among the cremation remains were also found other fragments of the spiralled jewellery, yet also three clay beads, deformed by fire (subchapter 3.3, pt. k/Pl. II, fig. 5).

### 3.2. The 2021 excavation campaign

Our goal in the 2021 campaign was to firstly delimit the stone structure which we identified in the previous year. For this purpose, we extended the testpit of the first campaign on all its four sides<sup>7</sup>. In the end, the excavated area measured 8 × 6 m. (Fig. 3 and Pl. 1). In terms of method, we chose to excavate down to the level of the stone set-up, and where missing, down to the yellow clay identified in the preceding year excavation as the archaeological sterile. Once recorded, each stone was dislodged, systematically, in order to detect possible new burial depositions or isolate items.

Another deposition of cremation remains was not found, while the discovered items are not many. These include two harness links, in iron: one (subchapter 3.3, pt. s/Pl. 3, fig. 4) at a distance of 1.8 m south-west the cremation remains identified a year before, the other (subchapter 3.3, pt. t/Pl. 3, fig. 5) at 1.6 m south of it. Another bronze stud (subchapter 3.3, pt. i/Pl. 2, fig. 3) was found where the cremation remains deposition lay. Scattered among the boulders emerged a few pottery fragments; one is decorated with two belts in relief, with alveoli (subchapter 3.3, pt. v/Pl. 4, fig. 3). Around a large size slab (118 × 60 cm, unearthed in the southern corner, for whose removal it was necessary to excavate a 1 × 1 m square – see Pl. 1) were discovered many fragments of a “tazza” type vessel (subchapter 3.3, pt. u/Pl. 4, fig. 1).

Several brick fragments were found in-between, yet also beneath the boulders – see Pl. 1.

The dispersal of the boulders within the excavated area (Pl. 1) did not follow a recognisable pattern, clearly indicative of the limits of a structure. There was an obvious clustering of the boulders in the central-eastern part of the excavated area, which seemed to continue outside it. Boulders were also present in larger numbers towards the western corner as well.

### 3.3. Catalogue of the discovered artefacts

As previously mentioned, artefacts made of gold, silver, bronze or iron were discovered by metal detecting in several spots on the Milova plateau. The intrusive investigations carried out subsequently yielded more artefacts made of silver, bronze and iron. The finds inventory is completed with pottery material.

We shall present below the entire lot of finds.

#### *Inventory of items discovered together with the cremation remains*

a) Pl. 2, fig. 1.

Golden adornment, fragmentary, intentionally twisted. It was worked in the *au repoussé* technique and exhibits several projections in relief set on four parallel lines. The surviving extremity seems to taper and a few geometric patterns in the form of lines and dots are vaguely visible on its surface. Sizes: 7.5 × 3 cm. Weight: 6.7 g. Inv. no. CMA: 17983.

b) Pl. 2, fig. 2.

Golden adornment, intentionally destroyed by plying. A small piercing made by a sharp tool is also visible. It was worked in the *au repoussé* technique, displaying several conical projections in relief set on four parallel lines. The visible extremity seems to taper, while on its surface are vaguely visible decorations in the form of lines. Sizes: 5.5 × 3.5 cm. Weight: 12.2 g. Inv. no. CMA: 17983<sup>8</sup>.

c) Pl. 2, fig. 7.

Silver brooch, fragmentary. Preserving the brooch foot, decorated with four knobs, its spring and catchplate. The item exhibits burning traces. Sizes: length 8.8 cm. Weight: 50.2 g. Inv. no. CMA: 17984.

d) Pl. 2, fig. 8.

Half the spring and pin of a silver brooch. The spring fragment preserves seven coils and its chord. It exhibits traces of fire. Discovered separate, they were attached during restoration. Sizes: length 7.5 cm, spring length 2.6 cm. Weight: 15.6 g. Inv. no. CMA: 17991.

e) Pl. 2, fig. 9.

Fragment of a silver brooch spring. The spring fragment preserves six coils and the chord. It displays burning traces. Sizes: length 2.5 cm. Weight: 8.6 g. Inv. no. CMA: 17994<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> The second campaign unfold in accordance with the archaeological diagnostic permit no. 239/14.05.2021 issued by the Ministry of Culture.

<sup>8</sup> Originally, we supposed that both golden items are fragments of the same object, so these were ascribed the same inventory number.

<sup>9</sup> We believe that items presented under letters c, d and e (Pl. II, fig. 7-9) are the fragments of a single brooch, because when

f) Pl. 2, fig. 10.

Silver brooch, fragmentary. Preserving the brooch foot, decorated with four large knobs and other three intermediary knobs, smaller, and part of the brooch spring. Sizes: length 7 cm. Weight: 37.7 g. Inv. no. CMA: 17985.

g) Pl. 2, fig. 11.

Fragment of a silver brooch spring, the chord preserving its original length. The spring fragment has twelve coils. Sizes: length 5.5 cm (chord). Weight: 10 g. Inv. no. CMA: 17993<sup>10</sup>.

h) Pl. 2, fig. 6.

Fragment of a silver brooch spring, preserving twelve coils. It exhibits burning traces. Sizes: length 3.8 cm. Weight: 9.8 g. Inv. no. CMA: 17992.

i) Pl. 2, fig. 3.

Stud with bronze head and iron foot. Sizes: length 1.4 cm, head diameter 1.6 cm. Weight: 3.2 g. Inv. no. CMA: 17999.

j) Pl. 2, fig. 4.

Stud with bronze head and iron foot. Sizes: length 2.2 cm, head diameter 1.2 cm. Weight: 4.2 g. Inv. no. CMA: 17996.

k) Pl. 2, fig. 5.

Three clay beads, deformed by fire, two of which were attached one to the other. Sizes of the unattached bead: height 1.2 cm, diameter 1.7 cm. Total weight: 7.1 g.

l) Pl. 2, fig. 12.

Numerous fragments of a silver adornment of type *saltaleone*. It displays fire traces. Total weight: 11.1 g. Inv. no. CMA: 17995.

m) Pl. 4, fig. 2.

Cup surviving fragmentarily, made of fabric tempered with sand of average granulation, light-brown. Bulging midway, it tapers towards the neck extending with an outplayed rim. On the vessel shoulder is noticeable an ornament in the form of a small knob made directly out of the fabric. Mouth diameter of vessel: 8 cm. Wall thickness: 0.55 cm.

n) Four glass beads, greenish-blue, of small sizes and brittle, their recovery being impossible.

o) Four objects/small metal fragments, highly deformed by fire, impossible to ascribe to an artefact class.

#### *Inventory of the items discovered in-between the mound stones*

p) Pl. 3, fig. 1.

Iron bit, assembled, twisted bars, each with a ring by the ends. One of the segments entering the horse mouth is still attached to the ring. Ring diameters: 6/6.8 cm. Inv. no. CMA: 17988.

q) Pl. 3, fig. 2.

Iron bit, with a ring by each end, assembled, the bar entering the horse mouth being twisted, with a link by each of the ends. The bar segments soldered owing to oxidation. Ring diameters: 4 cm. Inv. no. CMA: 17986.

r) Pl. 3, fig. 3.

Iron ring with a diameter of 6.8 cm. Inv. no. CMA: 17987.

s) Pl. 3, fig. 4.

Iron ring with a diameter of 7.4 cm. inv. no. CMA: 17997

t) Pl. 3, fig. 5.

Iron ring, with a diameter of 4.5 cm. Inv. no. CMA: 17998.

u) Pl. 4, fig. 1.

Tall-footed vessel (*tazza*), surviving fragmentarily. Made of a fabric tempered with fine sand, orange-brown. The rim is wide and slightly everted. Vessel walls were not burnished, a procedure often found with this pottery form. Diameter: 46 cm. Rim width: 4.9 cm. Wall thickness: 1 cm.

v) Pl. 4, fig. 3.

Pottery fragment of a vessel decorated with two belts in relief, with alveoli. It was made of clay tempered with large granulation sand. Orange-brown. Wall thickness: 1.15 cm.

In-between the stones of the burial mound there were also discovered a few atypical shards, the great majority orange-brown, originating from diverse pottery wares.

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reconstructed by joining, these matched almost perfectly. In this case, the brooch weight would be of 74.4 g.

<sup>10</sup> We take into consideration the possibility that the spring presented here belonged to the item described under letter f.

*Other items discovered on the Cioaca Milovei plateau*

w) Pl. 3, fig. 7a/7b.

Denarius L RVBRI DOSSENI. Damaged, worn.

Obv. Laureate head of Jupiter right, sceptre over the shoulder. Left down, [DOSSEN]. Pearled circle.

Rv. Triumphal quadriga right, side-panel decorated with thunderbolt; above, wreathed Victoria; in exergue [L RV]BR[I]. Pearled circle. Slightly decentred flan. Reverse axis: 4.

Crawford 348/1 (Rome, 87 BC)<sup>11</sup>.

Diameter 1.75 × 1.57 cm. Weight: 2.7 g. Inv. no. CMA: 17990.

x) Pl. 3, fig. 6.

Fragment of silver brooch, preserving a foot fragment decorated with two knobs. Sizes: fragment length is of 4.84 cm. Weight: 26.4 g. Inv. no. CMA: 17989.

### **3.4. Palaeoanthropological data**

The analysis of the cremation remains excavated in Milova is crucial for enhancing interpretative accuracy. The results of the palaeoanthropological analysis are presented below.

*The phases of the palaeoanthropological analysis include* cleaning of the material from impurities (utilising the dry or humid method), classification of the material according to anatomical regions (skull, spine, shoulder girdle, pelvic girdle, upper limbs, lower limbs, unidentifiable), weighing and numbering, estimation of biological age at death, determination of anthropological sex, documentation of burning characteristics (cremation degree, bone texture, fissure/fracturing pattern of the compact bone tissue, presence/absence of the “white plating” phenomenon, presence/absence of contraction and deformation); assessment of bone condition at the time of cremation (“green” or “dry”), and presence/absence of antemortem traumas.

*Minimum number of individuals:* 1.

*Degree of fragmentation:* moderate to high, exhibiting relative homogeneity (Fig. 4.1).

*State of preservation:* moderate to satisfactory.

*Estimation of biological age at death and anthropological sex:* young adult (20-35 years); female. Sex determination was based on the degree of skeletal gracility (pronounced), muscle attachment (minimal), and diminutive dimensions of the proximal epiphyses. The biometric features utilised were thickness of the parietal bone in proximity to the sagittal suture and thickness of the compact wall of the humerus and radius diaphyses. Biological age at death was estimated based on the morphology of the extant cranial sutures and two radicular remnants.

*Total weight:* 334 g of cremated skeletal remains and 1000 g of ash, soil particles, charcoal, and other extraneous matter.

*Number and dimensions of fragments:* several thousand fragments; the predominant remains were of moderate dimensions (between 5 and 10 mm), followed by those of larger size (> 10 mm), small size (between 2 and 5 mm), and very small size (< 2 mm). In comparison to the dimensions of an intact adult bone, those from Milova were moderate to large, which is consistent with instances of incomplete cremation.

*Presence of skeletal elements:* incomplete skeleton, partially represented; fragments of all anatomical regions from both the axial segment (skull and vertebral column) and appendicular segment (scapular and pelvic girdle, upper and lower limbs) were identified.

*Cranial segment.* The components of the frontal, parietal, temporal, occipital, and mandibular bones were identified. The largest cranial fragment, derived from the occipital, measured 40 × 27 mm, with a thickness of 6 mm near the suture. An additional fragment with substantial dimensions originated in the mandible (Fig. 4/6).

*Postcranial segment.* Fragments of all segments were identified. The largest postcranial fragment measured 45 mm × 29 mm × 20 mm and originated from the coxal bone. The majority, however, of various sizes originate from long limb bone diaphyses. The largest diaphysis fragment was from a radius, measuring 72 mm × 14 mm and 4 mm in thickness. Another substantial diaphysis fragment, also from a radius, measured 89 × 11 mm, 4 mm in thickness, and preserved the tuberosity region (Fig. 5/2). The humerus diaphysis fragments are small, with an approximate wall thickness of 5-6 mm.

<sup>11</sup> Coin determination provided by Professor Radu Ardevan, to whom we express our gratitude.

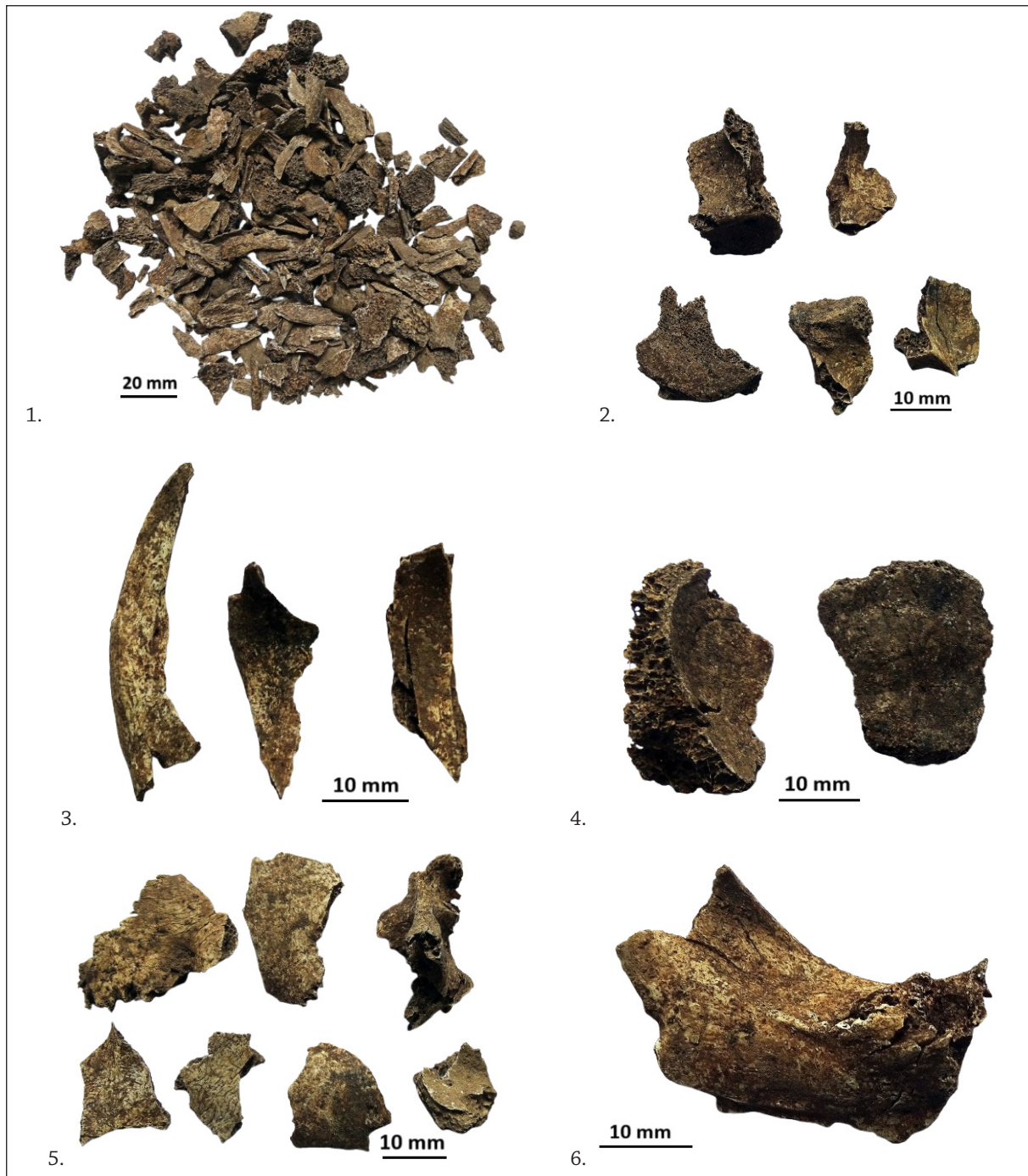


Fig. 4. 1. Osteological sample; 2. Fragments of vertebrae; 3. Contorted fragments; 4. Parts of the articular surfaces; 5. Cranial fragments; 6. Fragment of the mandible, left half (Photo by A. Simalcsik).

*Dentition:* represented by two radicular fragments of monoradicular teeth (potentially incisors, canines, or premolars). The radicular regions were fully developed and exhibited completely closed apices.

*The fissure/fracturing patterns of the bone wall* are specific to bones exposed to average and high temperatures, in a “green/fresh” condition at the time of cremation. On skull fragments, deep fissures with a reticular pattern may be observed on both internal and external surfaces (Fig. 4/5). Postcranial fragments also exhibit deep fissures or fractures, both longitudinally and superficial (along the bone axis direction) and more predominantly transversally. Transversal fissures are deep, curvilinear, and most often complete, resulting in bone fractures. This fissure/fracture pattern is particularly evident in the skeletal parts, indicative of high burning temperatures, such as the arm and forearm bone diaphyses and those of the hip and leg (Fig. 5/3). Deep fissures and fractures were also present in the coxal fragments. In contrast to diaphyses, which are more compact, the epiphyses of limb bones exhibit



fissures similar to the external cranial surface, namely, according to a reticular pattern (Fig. 4/4), whereas the metaphyseal regions of the postcranial bones display more or less jagged fissures.

The combustion temperature (Fig. 6/3), according to the R.G.B. scale, varies within relatively narrow limits, between a minimum of 400°C (brown remains with beige-gray iridescence) and a maximum of 600°C (beige remains with bluish-gray iridescence). No remains were found under the charred condition, indicating that the pyre temperature exceeded 300-350°C. The cranial remains and those derived from the long bone diaphyses suggest a combustion temperature of approximately 600°C. Lower values, ranging between 400-500°C, were observed for the remains of the lower and upper limb extremity bones and spine (Fig. 4/2). In the pelvic region and bone extremities inserted at the belts (such as the proximal epiphyses of the humerus and femur), the pyre temperature reached a maximum of 400-500°C. According to the colour scale used for teeth, the dental radicular fragments present in the sample indicate a temperature of approximately 600°C (Fig. 5/1).



Fig. 5. 1. Dental remains (roots); 2. Incomplete radii; 3. Fragments of diaphyses; 4. Adhesions to the periosteum; 5. Skull fragments with cobalt pigments (Photo by A. Simalcsik).

*The condition of the osseous material at the time of cremation.* Certain fragments exhibit “white plating” – a transitional burning phase occurring exclusively in the case of cremated bones in a “green/fresh” state. All sample fragments produced a metallic sound upon impact. Contraction, twisting, and deformation phenomena were also observed (Fig. 4/3). All analysed fragments possessed sharp edges, indicating that fracturing of the bone wall occurred during the cremation process rather than the perimortem or prior to cremation, thus excluding the possibility of violent death. The collective assemblage of morphoscopic features described above is indicative of a relatively homogeneous cremation, incomplete, of moderate intensity, and brief duration, with bones in a “green” condition at the time of cremation, specifically covered by soft tissue and containing the medullary cavity.

*Taphonomy.* A small skeletal remnant of the skull, which is one of the few charred remains, exhibits bluish pigmentation, most likely resulting from contact (probably after cremation) with an object containing cobalt in its composition (Fig. 5/5). Numerous remains exhibited pyre adherences (ash, charcoal, and ceramic granules, Fig. 5/4), which indicates that the cremation temperature did not significantly exceed the 400-500°C threshold.

*Additional observations.* Among the human cremation remains, several artefacts (Fig. 6/1) were identified that had been interred with the deceased, including two fragments of a cervidae antler (burnt) (Fig. 6/2).

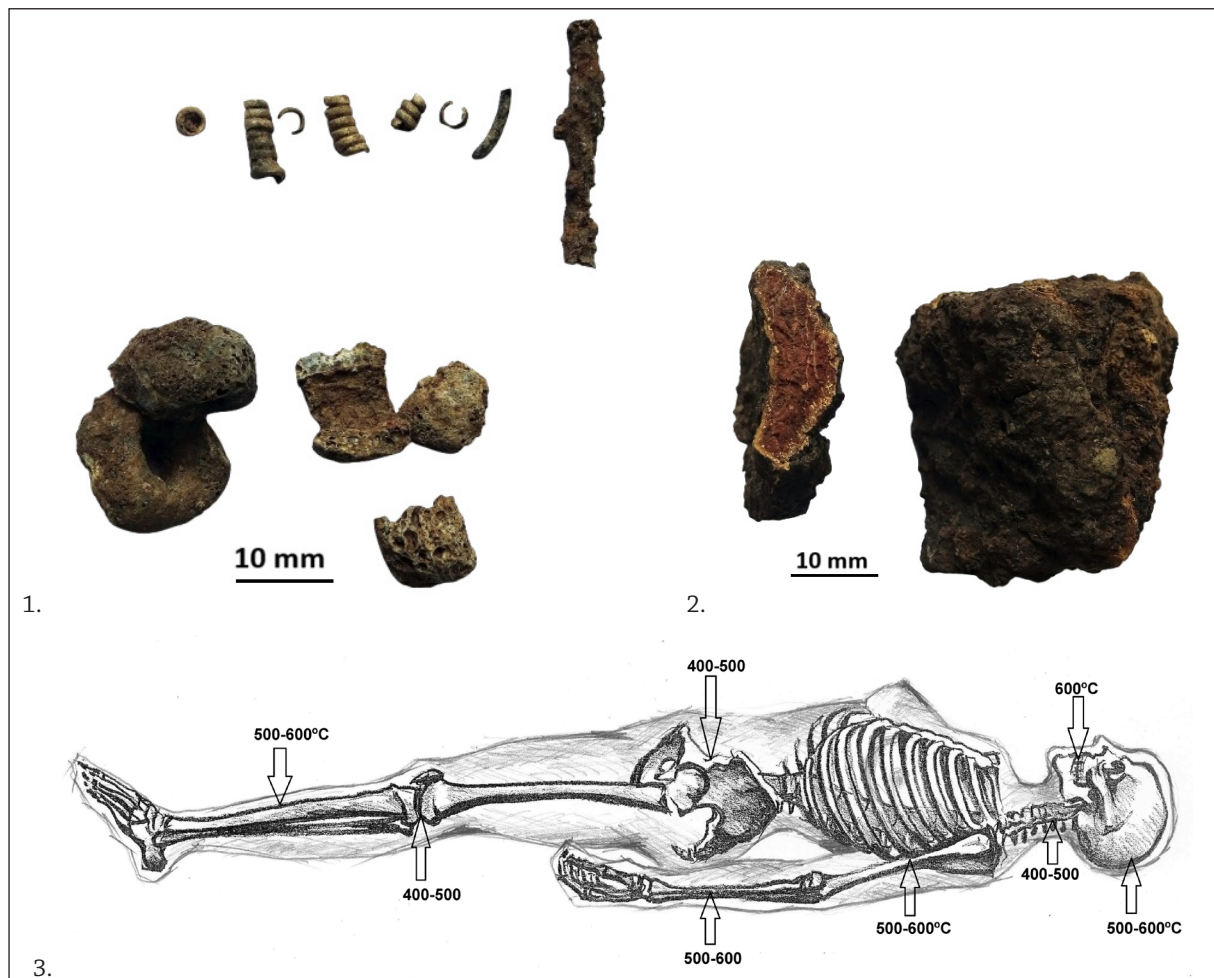


Fig. 6. 1. Objects identified among human osteological remains; 2. Remains of a burnt cervidae antler; 3. Maximum temperature reached by skeletal components (Photo and drawing by A. Simalcsik).

### 3.5. Geomagnetic measurements

In order to obtain more information, the Cioaca Milovei plateau was investigated by geophysics (magnetic survey).

These were accomplished with the aid of a total field precession Geometrics G858G cesium vapour magnetometer within six grids sized 10 × 10 m. Data acquisition occurred along 1 m equidistant parallel traverses. Sensors were set on a 0.5 m separation horizontal configuration.

The results of the measurements evidenced two structures (Fig. 7, yellow circles) characterised by a series of negative anomalies forming quasicircular structures. These anomalies may be generated by rocks with lower susceptibility than the soil, used in the construction of the small mounds placed on the plateau, possibly cremations.

Archaeologically interesting may also be a series of concurrently positive and negative anomalies, circular, small in size.

Isolated positive circular anomalies (Fig. 7) may represent pits where material of higher susceptibility than soil was deposited, or which were gradually filled with more susceptible organic material.

Even more interesting are the small negative circular anomalies, which may also represent excavated pits, filled with the displaced earth just after excavation. Soil displacement from the geological layers of the terrace by excavation, of a lower magnetic susceptibility than the topsoil, would explain these extant anomalies (Fig. 7).

The geomagnetic map also shows a series of dipolar anomalies, located centrally in the investigated area. The oscillating magnetic values in respective area are indicative of thermoremanent magnetisation, which is by no means accidental considering that several burnt brick fragments were identified on the surface there; the layout of these anomalies seems to render the foundation of a building located in the plateau centre (Fig. 7, red rectangle).

Beside this building, a series of magnetic anomalies were generated by iron and ferromagnetic materials that may be related to the existence there of two machine gun “nests”. Two of the pits that we identified during our first visit to the plateau could be interpreted as such.

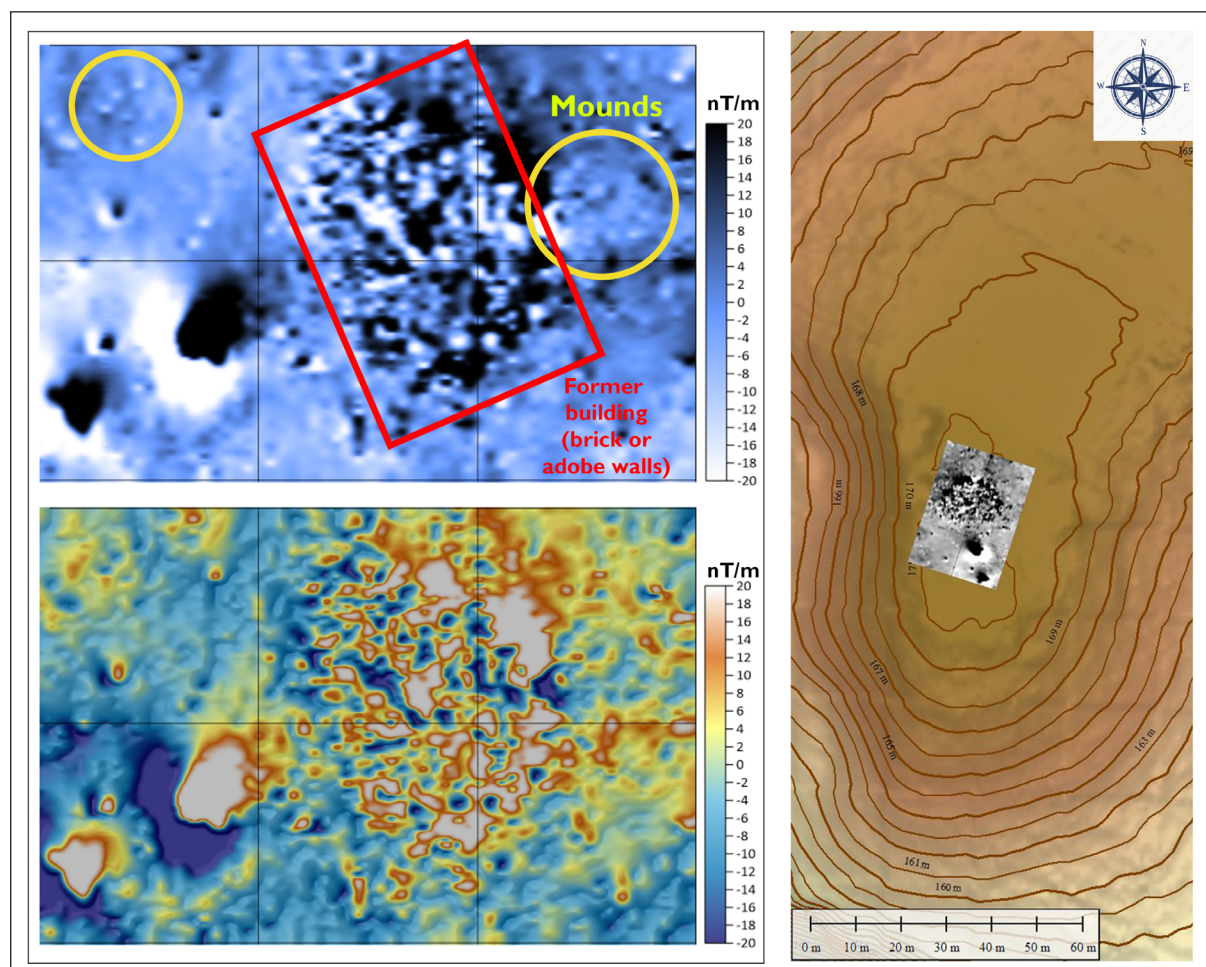


Figure 7. Illustration of the geomagnetic survey results.

Interpretation of both anomalies composing the quasicircular structures and those circular, small sized, negative or positive should be made starting from the yielded finds. Hence, we believe that at least part of these anomalies may represent burial structures, similar to the one discussed here. Evidently, the remaining may be pits of different use. Although reliant on field observations and magnetometric measurements results, these remain mere suppositions.

#### 4. Conclusions, parallels

The chance find of a number of artefacts has led us to the identification and investigation of a unique archaeological feature for the Lower Mureş valley, at least until present. It is a barrow cremation, with a deposition of the cremation remains in a pit together with adornment objects and dress accessories. As we shall see, according to the rite and grave goods, the burial may be dated by late 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.

The performed paleoanthropological analysis of the cremation remains has supplied rather interesting and important data. Accordingly, at Milova was deposited the remains of a young woman, aged between 20 and 35 years, cremated very quickly after death. The bone fragments, originating from all body parts, did not exhibit traces of violence. The maximum temperatures during the cremation reached 600 °C near the bones.

The woman was cremated at an unidentified location, with only part of the cremation remains deposited in the hollowing excavated in the ground, procedure noted in the case of many burial finds contemporary with Milova<sup>12</sup>. The cremation remains were accompanied by the grave goods, as detailed above. Subsequently, these were covered with a flat slab and stones of various shapes, on top of which a stone mound was built. Various local rock types were used, like granite, limestone, sandstone, gneiss and quartzite, some from a riverbed, very likely, that of the nearby Mureş river<sup>13</sup>.

The discovered pottery vessels and their position document the practice of a burial ceremonial associated with the cremation act. The cup (fragmentary) lay precisely by the edge of the shallow hole where the ash was deposited; furthermore, the sample preparation process for the performance of the paleoanthropological analysis distinguished a few deer antler fragments cremated together with the deceased, interpreted as offering. Another interpreting of the present deer antler is that according to which these were part of a ceremonial dress, cremated once with the deceased.

The fragments of which part of a “tazza” could be restored lay (we believe not accidentally) precisely near the large slab discovered outside the mound (see Fig. 1). This slab, by sizes and flat surface, might have served as a surface for placing certain vessels during the burial ceremonial. One must mention here that the tall-footed vessels – “tazza”<sup>14</sup> count amongst the most frequent pottery wares discovered in Dacian barrows.

We believe that the mound set up at Milova had a certain height and circular outline, however noticeably, the structure did not exhibit such specificities in the unearthed area. This might have been caused by the levelling of the mound in a subsequent period, as suggested by the brick fragments identified in-between the mound stones. In fact, the geomagnetic map shows the existence of a rectangular building covering the plateau centre, where numerous brick fragments were present on the surface. A possible levelling/re-development of the plateau at *Cioaca Milovei* could be framed to the time when the construction of respective building took place. We are obviously aware that these are mere hypotheses, however, we believed it necessary to infer.

We wondered whether the plateau on *Cioaca Milovei* accommodated an isolate grave or if we were indeed dealing with a cemetery; as early as our first visit to the site, we could see a few relatively circular small bumps. A consistent response was provided by the results of the geomagnetic measurements. These document several anomalies, two of which could be possibly interpreted as stone structures with a relatively circular delineation; thus, one may soundly argue there are other two burial mounds on the plateau. Of interest are also the anomalies interpreted as soil intrusions, in the form of quasicircular pits, some backfilled just after excavation, other only gradually. These might even be flat graves, yet

<sup>12</sup> Sirbu 1993, 23-24.

<sup>13</sup> Determination of rock types was carried out by professor Petru Urdea with the West University of Timișoara, to whom we express our gratitude here as well.

<sup>14</sup> Sirbu, Rustoiu 2002, 51.

also pits excavated for other reasons. Evidently, they may belong to periods other than discussed here. The presence of other features contemporary with the investigated mound is also suggested by the find of the brooch foot half, yet also of the Roman denarius.

Such burial structures, barrows/mounds with ash deposited in a pit are encountered for the 2<sup>nd</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> century BC especially in Muntenia, in northern Oltenia and south-western Transylvania<sup>15</sup>, therefore outside the geographical area of our find, however it must be noted that the Lower Mureş valley is one of the main access pathways towards and from south-western Transylvania.

In the attempt to identify the settlement contemporary with the cremation, we carried out several field surveys around Milova, yet without results; neither the examination of available Lidar scans for the entire area could be of use in this case. For now, we may only observe that in some cases, burial finds were yielded by areas in the vicinity of fortified or open settlements<sup>16</sup>. Compared to Milova, the closest known settlement is that of Cladova<sup>17</sup>, yet one may also consider the Dacian level identified at Şoimoş<sup>18</sup>.

The choice of the *Cioaca Milovei* plateau as burial site must not have been fortuitous; it must have had a special significance for the human population of the period.

Because of the impossibility to correlate the burial to a settlement, any reconstruction of the archaeological landscape is difficult. One may still argue that the location is by the entry into the passage excavated by the Milova valley, one of the widest from the southern slope of Zărand Mountains. Moreover, we have reasons to believe that in Antiquity, this hill extremity was, unless permanently, at least periodically bordered by waters on the western, southern and eastern sides respectively; on the map drawn up by the Austrian administration by late 18<sup>th</sup> century, one may still notice that Milova stream flew into a tributary of the Mureş, both bordering said sides of this Milova hill extremity (see Fig. 8).

The cremation remains may be ascribed based on the rather rich grave goods, to an individual in the social/religious elite. In fact, the burial custom to deposit the cremation remains of leading members of the communities (warriors, political/military elites, individuals who played a certain role in the development of religious manifestation) underneath barrows/mounds is recorded in the case of the majority of finds insofar, noting that such behaviour migrated from the south-Danubian area northwards<sup>19</sup>.

The main items included among the grave goods have good parallels in the neighbouring areas.

The two golden items (or just one ?; unfortunately, owing to the high destruction degree, it is impossible to establish if we are dealing with two distinct exemplars or just one, broken into two halves) resemble items discovered at Cugir, Veşel and



Fig. 8. Southern extremity of Milova Hill by late 18<sup>th</sup> century, with Milova stream flowing into one of the Mureş river tributaries. Red dot: location of the burial finds. Josephinian survey (*Josephinische Landesaufnahme*), accomplished by the Austrian administration between 1782-1785.

Map source: [www.mapire.eu](http://www.mapire.eu).

<sup>15</sup> Rustoiu 1994, 34; Sirbu, Rustoiu 2002, 53.

<sup>16</sup> Babeş 1988, 4; Sirbu, Rustoiu 2002, 42.

<sup>17</sup> Hügel, Hurezan 1999, 55-59.

<sup>18</sup> Medeleţ 2021, 305.

<sup>19</sup> Sirbu 1993, 23.

(likely) Békéscsaba (Fig. 9). These date to late 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC – first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and were interpreted, according to some paintings on grave walls from today's Bulgaria, as ornaments embellishing horse harnesses in the forehead area, the so-called *prometopidia*<sup>20</sup>. One must also note the resemblance with the bracelet ornament discovered at Mala Kopanya; notably, the excavator and article author believes the Cugir item still an ornament covering a bracelet<sup>21</sup>. On the Cugir, respectively Mala Kopanya item, available information states these originate from burial contexts<sup>22</sup>. The difference is that in all quoted cases, ornaments were not destroyed, as the case here.

The find of harness items (bits, rings) likely of two horses, tilts the balance to their interpreting of the two golden items as separate pieces, appliques embellishing harness belts, alike discussed above. Nevertheless, for the lack of additional indications in this respect, one must present such hypothesis with somewhat caution.

Regarding the material of which these items were made, we were told<sup>23</sup> that given their pale hue, it could be electrum/*electron*, the natural alloy of gold and silver.

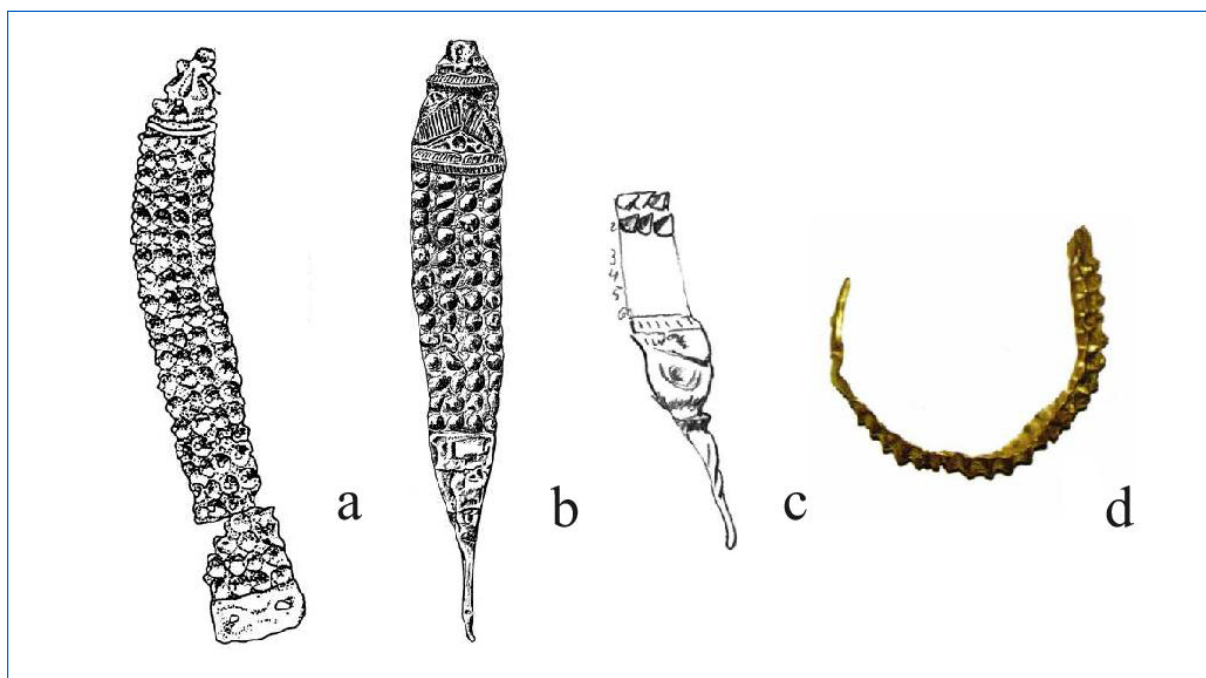


Fig. 9. Graphic representations of the parallels for the golden items of Milova: a. Cugir; b. Békéscsaba (?); c. Vețel; d. Mala Kopanya (after Rustoiu 2015 – a, b, c and Kotigoroško 2009 - d). Different scales.

The silver brooches belong, according to the typology proposed by Rustoiu, to types 1c – with foot decorated with four knobs, respectively 1d – with foot decorated with four knobs and additional three intermediary knobs, of smaller sizes, chronologically framed to the last quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC – until the half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC<sup>24</sup>. To type 1c belongs one of the brooches placed with the cremation remains and the brooch foot fragment discovered isolate on the Milova plateau, while to type 2, the other brooch discovered together with the ash. Finds of such brooches were mainly yielded by hoards, rarely by workshops, settlements or graves and cluster in Crișana and Transylvania; their identification in large numbers yet also in a jeweller's workshop suggests these were produced in northern Crișana and Sălaj<sup>25</sup>.

The brooches, including this type, have been discussed in the context of ritual or magical occurrences. Starting from some of the finds, it was believed that such brooches were worn exclusively

<sup>20</sup> Rustoiu 2015, 51-60.

<sup>21</sup> Kotigoroško 2009, 18, 123/f.40/10.

<sup>22</sup> Crișan 1980, 82-83; Kotigoroško 2009, 16-18.

<sup>23</sup> We thank dr. habil. Aurel Rustoiu.

<sup>24</sup> Rustoiu 1997, 31-33.

<sup>25</sup> Rustoiu 1997, 31-32.

by individuals who completed ritual/magical ceremonies (priestesses), while in other cases, these were offered to one/several deities together with food offerings, after having been previously destroyed intentionally and burnt<sup>26</sup>. The Lupu treasure (Alba county) is conclusive in this respect; beside the two knobbed brooches of type 1d, it contained several silver phalera, some rendering the image of an anthropomorphic figure, interpreted as a winged goddess, figure who wears two knobbed brooches<sup>27</sup>.

The brooches discovered in the burial context of Milova, although asymmetrical in terms of sizes, may be deemed a pair; similarly, in most hoards comprising brooches as well, these were in group of two, constituting a pair<sup>28</sup>.

Another common element with many of the finds that represent parallels for Milova is the intentional destruction of the brooches and/or of the other dress/jewellery items<sup>29</sup>. In Milova's case, the two brooches in the grave are missing the part which aided their attachment to the apparel, namely the spring and pin. In the case of brooch 1c, it could be restored after the identification of the other fragments in the ash, the pin being detached from the spring, while the latter, was broken in half; it is possible that one of the other spring fragments found in the ash had belonged to brooch 1d. Concerning the foot fragment of a brooch 1c, discovered isolate on the plateau, it seems cut with the aid of a chisel. We mention that the same destructive treatment also occurred on the golden items, one being folded, the other broken.

One also bids the question if the grave goods were cremated once with the deceased or were placed later in her ashes. Except the golden items, all exhibit different degrees of fire traces, the least damaged being the two brooches feet. Alternately, as mentioned, small metal pieces, apparently silver, deformed/melted following combustion were discovered in the ash. One of the explanations could be that the jewellery and accessories, after having been damaged, were placed in the still hot ash, a few even deforming, other only acquiring those burning traces.

The presence of the two bits (one precisely in the proximity of the cremation remains deposition) and the harness rings may seem unusual in the context of a woman's grave. This is nonetheless not unique among burial finds datable to the late La Tène. An association of weapons (in respective case) and jewellery, which led Dinu V. Rosetti to the idea of Geto-Dacian "amazons", was also identified at Cetățeni (Argeș county)<sup>30</sup>.

The relation of these items originating from the harness of two horses with the grave goods of the young woman is difficult to establish. According to the discoverer, one of the bits and one ring were found on top of a stone pile covering the golden items and fragmentary brooches. The other bit and rest of the rings lay at a relatively small distance, in-between the mound stones. If one agrees that the mound was levelled, then the latter might have been displaced from their original location. Otherwise, these items were placed apparently randomly, in-between the stones. As specified, the sondage could not identify other deposition of cremation remains to which the harness items might have been ascribed, nonetheless, it is not excluded that such deposition exists in the mound part which remained un-investigated.

Regardless the case, the deposition of the harness items may be interpreted as an offering of type *pars pro toto* for the lack of horse remains.

According to a typology suggested by Vlad Zirra, the Milova bits belong to type 1, worked by hammering, with the two segments entering the horse mouth twisted; this type was identified in Celtic burial contexts, in association with grave goods ascribable to warriors, occasionally beside chariot items, dated no later than La Tène C<sup>31</sup>. Parallels may be found in Transylvania and Crișana at Bratei-Ațel (Mureș county)<sup>32</sup>, Apahida (Cluj county)<sup>33</sup> and Curtuișeni (Bihor county)<sup>34</sup>.

The Roman Republican denarius minted in 87 BC, although impossible to ascribe to a feature, confirms the use of the *Cioaca Milovei* plateau during the period following its issue.

<sup>26</sup> Rustoiu 1997, 86-90.

<sup>27</sup> Spânu 2000, 102.

<sup>28</sup> Rustoiu 1997, 80.

<sup>29</sup> Spânu 2000, 99-104.

<sup>30</sup> Rosetti 1969, 91-92. Babeș 1988, 5.

<sup>31</sup> Zirra 1974, 144.

<sup>32</sup> Zirra 1974, 144, 158/fig. 5.

<sup>33</sup> Crișan 1971, 46, 67/pl. XIV, fig. 8.

<sup>34</sup> Zirra 1974, 144, 158/fig. 5.

Therefore, the Milova site appears as important for the knowledge of the Dacian burial rites and rituals. Although only a small part has been archaeologically investigated, the obtained information is plenty and perfectly correlates with what has been known on this subject so far.

### Acknowledgements

We wish to thank dr. Aurel Rustoiu for his guidance and dr. Petru Urdea and dr. Radu Ardevan for the determinations. The field research would have not been possible without the consistent input of all involved members, mentioned in footnote 4.

### Outcome

We must agree that the cremation discovered at Milova and its unfolding “story” as we received the data interpreting or as we found a parallel or another, was fascinating to us. However, beside this subjective detail, the entire find is of a real importance for the knowledge of Iron Age II in the Lower Mureş valley.



Fig. 10. Idealised reconstruction of the cremation scene at Milova – *Cioaca Milovei*. Photo: the authors.



This article's preparation overlapped the period when the new Archaeology exhibition of the Arad Museum Complex was designed, implemented and opened<sup>35</sup>. We believed the reconstruction of the cremation scene, wherein a manikin wears replicas of some of the dress and jewellery items discovered at Milova (Fig. 10) would be auspicious for the new exhibition. Nearby, in a small box, the original items are exhibited.

The entire plateau of Cioaca Milovei was registered as archaeological site in the National Archaeological Repertory under code 10499.03<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> The opening of the new archaeology exhibition of the Arad Museum Complex took place on October 4, 2024.

<sup>36</sup> <https://ran.cimec.ro/sel.asp?descript=milova-conop-arad-necropola-la-tene-de-la-milova-cioaca-milovei-cod-sit-ran-10499.03>, accessed on October 31st, 2024.

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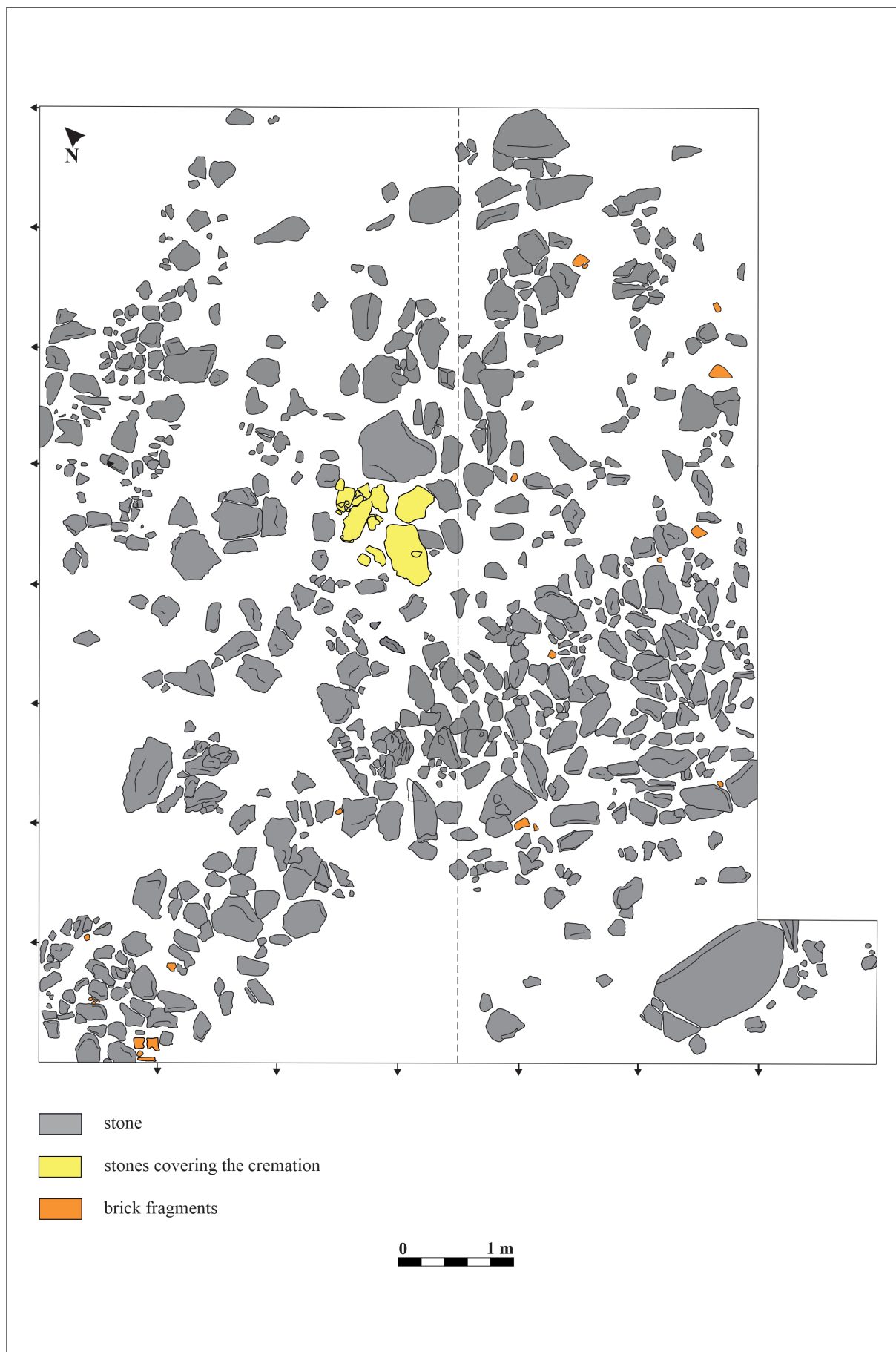


Plate 1. Excavated area at Milova during the 2020 and 2021 campaigns and the identified stone structure.  
Drawing: Daniel Preda

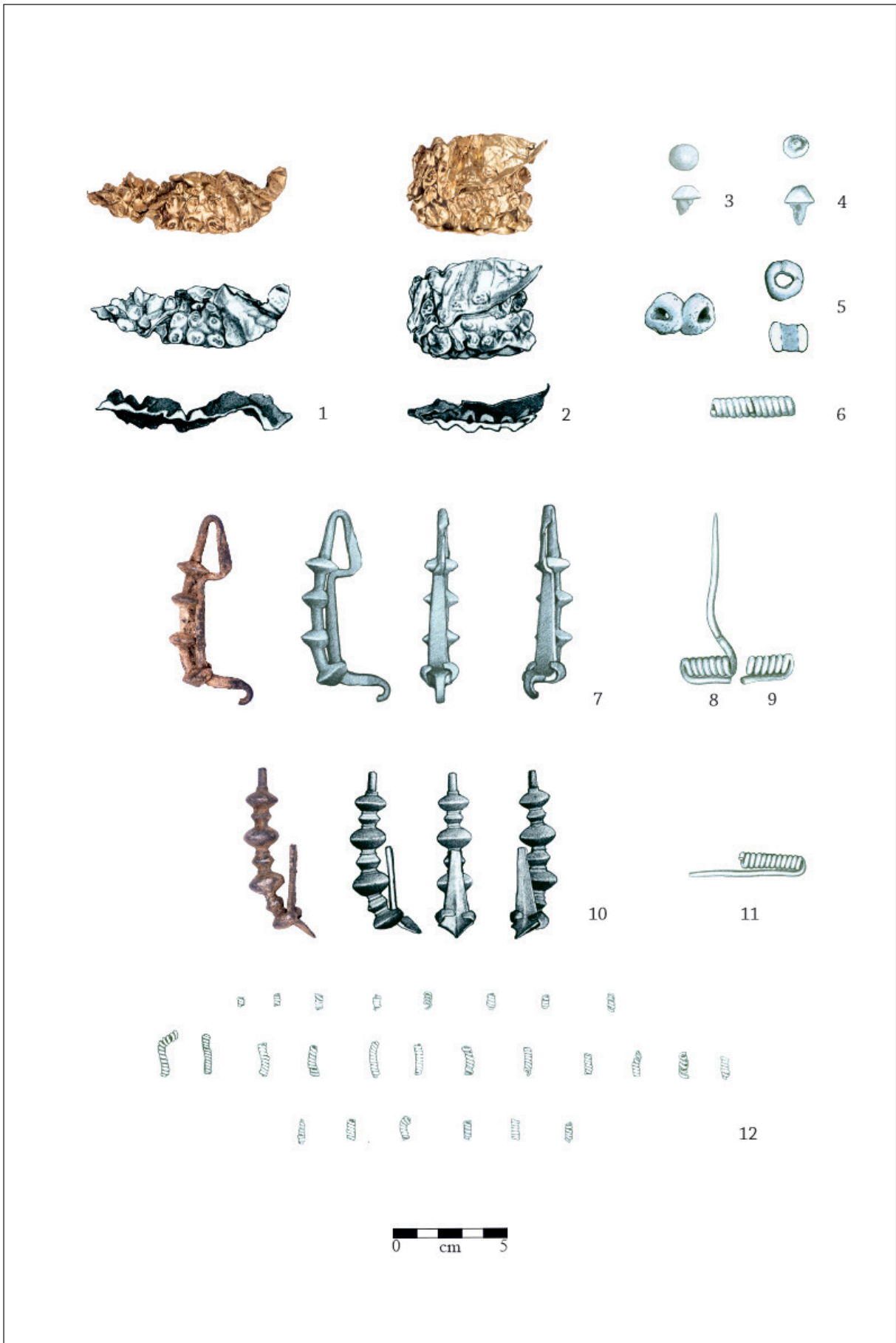


Plate 2. Graphic rendering of the items discovered together with the cremation remains.  
Photographs: Nelu Scripciuc; drawing: Daniel Preda.

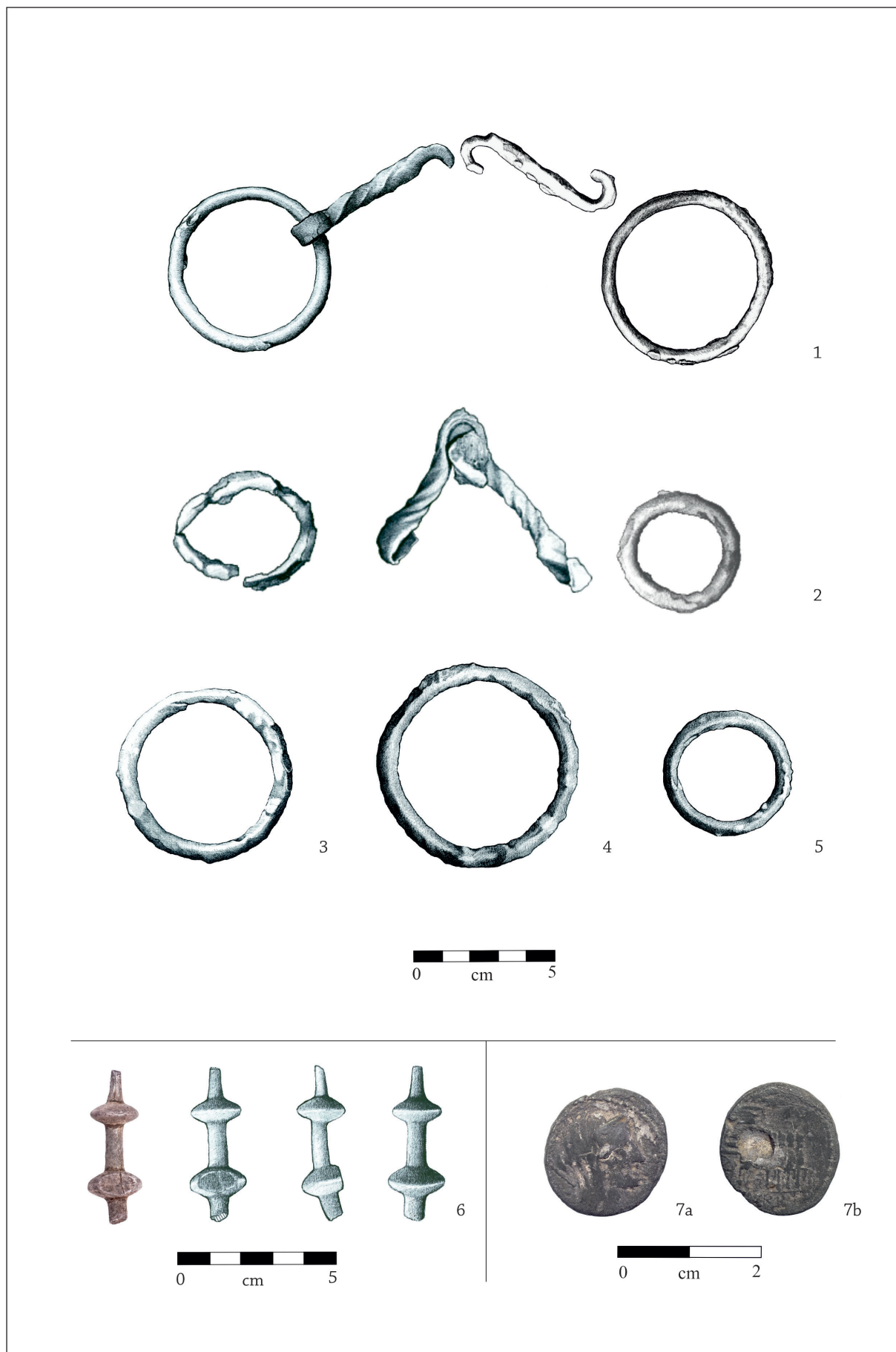


Plate 3. Graphic rendering of the harness items and objects discovered isolate on the Cioaca Milovei plateau.  
Photographs: Nelu Scripciuc; drawing: Daniel Preda.

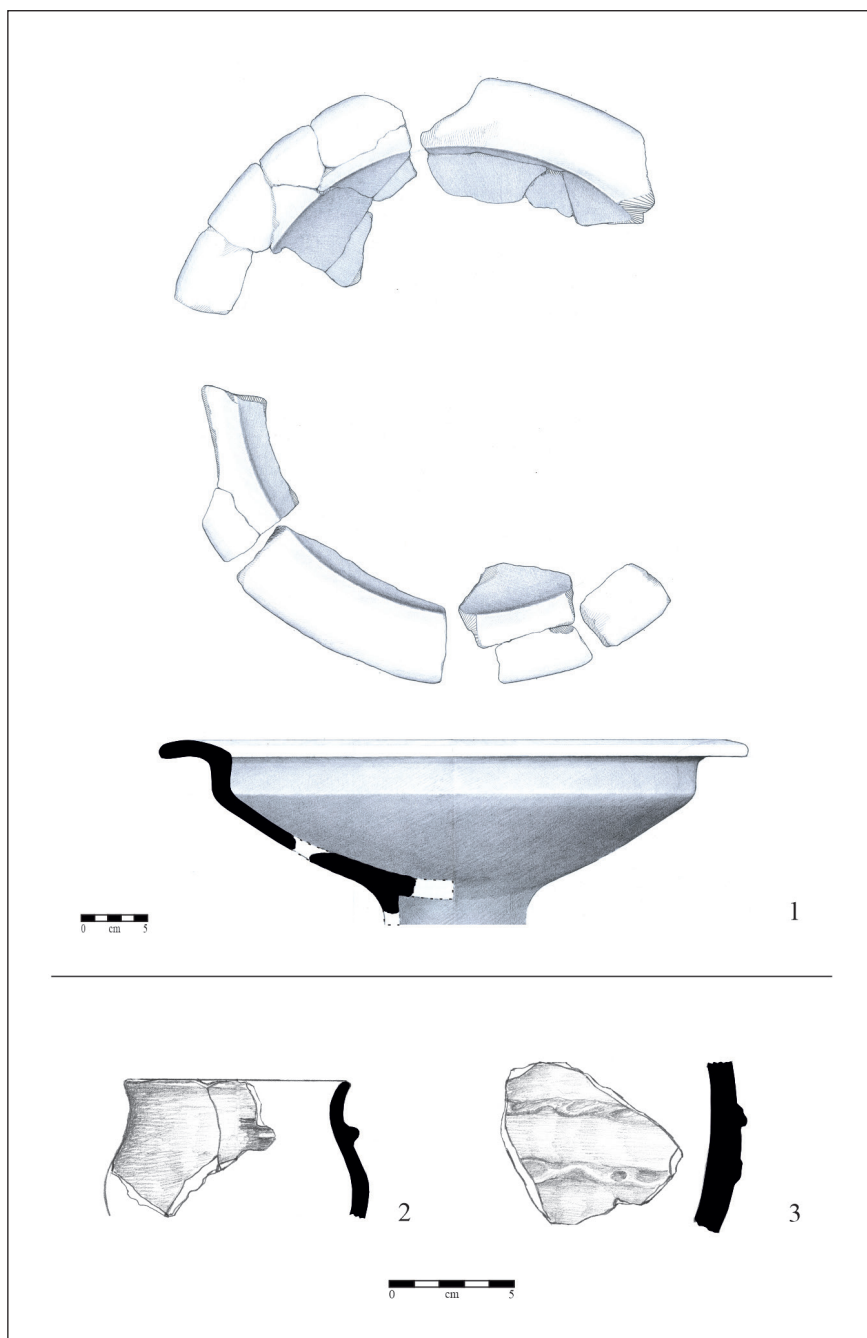


Plate 4. Pottery material discovered at Milova – Cioaca Milovei.  
Drawings: Daniel Preda (1), Roberto Tănăsache (2, 3)