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STUDIA ARCHAEOLOGICA

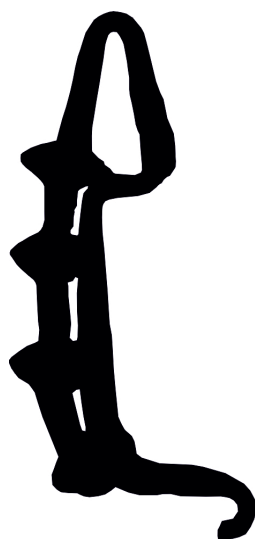
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### ZIRIDAVA STUDIA ARCHAEOLOGICA

Any correspondence will be sent to the editor:  
Museum Arad  
Piata George Enescu 1, 310131 Arad, RO  
e-mail: ziridava2012@gmail.com

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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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# Contributions to the knowledge of the medieval liturgical objects of the Sylvanian Basin: a *Corpus Christi* discovered at Pericei, street Góc, no. 668 (Sălaj county)

**Dan Băcuet-Crișan, Timea Keresztes**

**Abstract:** The archaeological site on *street Góc, no. 668* lies on a hill located north the Crasna river (the right river side), by the exit from the Pericei village, left to the road running to Periceiul Mic village. All research conducted there (during 2017, 2020, 2021 and 2022) were of a rescue nature compelled by the local administration's aim to build a funeral chapel, an access road and the development of additional green spaces. Among all investigated and identified archaeological structures, the most important is the medieval church wall print (archaeological site C. 1/2017) destroyed during the Ottoman invasions of 1658 and 1660. The bronze crucifix was discovered during the excavations conducted in 2020. According to its formal/stylistic parallels, the *Corpus Christi* discovered at Pericei may be chronologically dated to the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

**Key words:** liturgical objects; medieval; *Corpus Christi*; crucifix; Sylvanian Basin.

## a. Site data and the find circumstances

The place of Pericei (Pericei commune) is located in the Sylvanian Basin (Pl. 1), on the Crasna river course, being recorded for the first time in 1259 as *terra Perchen*<sup>1</sup>. The archaeological site on *street Góc, no. 668* lies on a hill northward the Crasna river (on the right riverside), by the exit from Pericei, to the left of the road running to Periceiul Mic village (Fig. 1-2).



Fig. 1. The place of Pericei on the first Austrian military survey. Location of the site at Pericei street Góc, no. 668 (marked X).

<sup>1</sup> Suci 1967, 34.



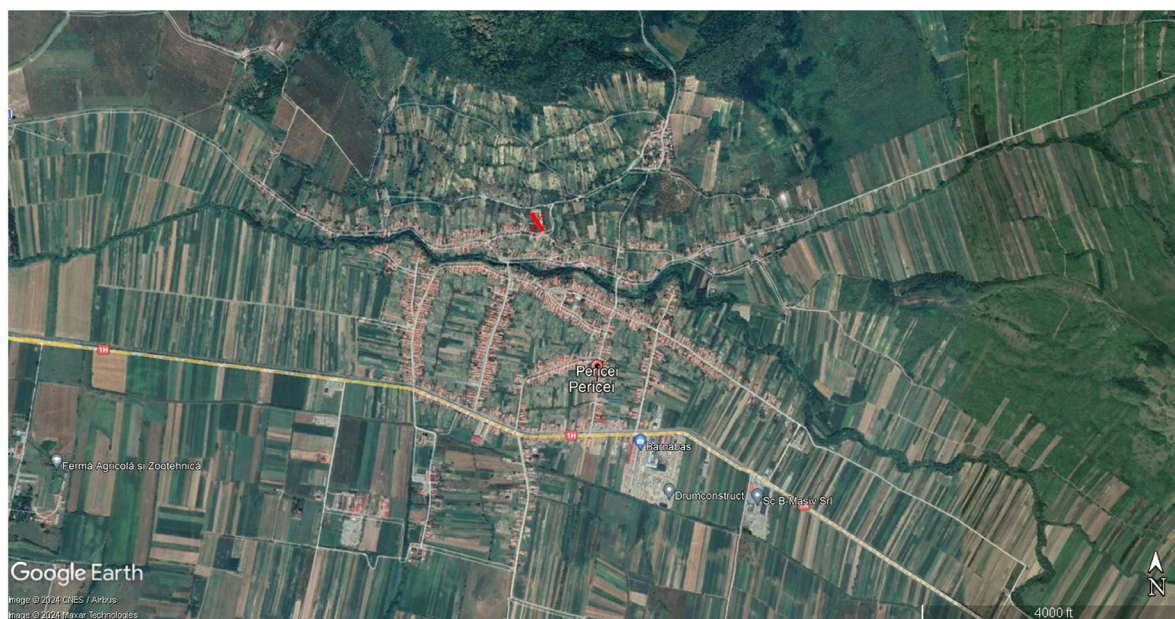


Fig. 2. Location of the site at Pericei street Góc, no. 668 (Google Earth satellite image).

All research conducted there (during 2017, 2020, 2021 and 2022) were of a rescue nature subsequent to the local administration's goal to build a funeral chapel, an access road and to develop additional green spaces<sup>2</sup>.

Among all identified and examined remains of archaeological structures, the most important is the medieval church wall print (archaeological feature C. 1/2017), destroyed during the Ottoman invasions of 1658 and 1660<sup>3</sup> (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Pericei street Góc, no. 668. The 2020 archaeological research. Image with the medieval church print and the find location of the *Corpus Christi*, marked X (photo archive of the Zalău History and Art County Museum).

### **b. The archaeological context. The artefact's technical and formal features**

The artefact was discovered during the archaeological excavations conducted in 2020 in the area of the medieval church sacristy (archaeological feature C. 1/2017), in a levelling layer exhibiting many interferences (owed to the building stone spoils) of a date subsequent to the ecclesiastic monument's operation (Fig. 3).

The *Corpus Christi* of Pericei<sup>4</sup> (Fig. 4, Pl. 2) is in bronze and was obtained by mould casting. Only the front side details of the body of Jesus Christ were carved, the back of the figurine remaining flat, without anatomical details. Unfortunately, the item did not survive intact, missing its arms (broken almost at shoulder level) and legs (broken from knee down), the artefact's current (surviving) size being of 8.5 cm.

<sup>2</sup> Pop *et al.* 2018, 211-214.

<sup>3</sup> Băcuet-Crișan, Keresztes 2021, 203-213; Băcuet-Crișan *et al.* 2021, 466.

<sup>4</sup> Stored in the collections of the Zalău History and Art County Museum under inventory number CC. 798/2020.

The statuettes/figurines of the type composed the liturgical inventory of churches/monasteries and were attached (riveted) to various supports: crosses (of various uses)<sup>5</sup>, reliquaries or crosiers<sup>6</sup>.



Fig. 4. Pericei street Góç, no. 668. *Corpus Christi* (photo archive of the Zalău History and Art County Museum).

### c. Stylistic and chronological framing

We do not intend to discuss the emergence and stylistic/chronological development of this type of artefact since in academic literature, medieval date *Corpus Christi* exemplars are rather well known<sup>7</sup>. Beyond the stylistic developments and the rendering accuracy of Christ's anatomical details, the examples surviving/identified in Europe are notable by two distinct/clear portrayals: Christ as *Imperator triumphans* and Christ deceased<sup>8</sup>.

As specified above, such figurines were attached to respective supports by rivets inserted through the holes made in palms and feet, similarly to the actual crucifixion. The surviving specimens evidence two means of attachment: with four rivets (Christ rendered in the crucifixion stance, with legs one beside the other) and three rivets (Christ portrayed in the crucifixion posture, with feet atop one another)<sup>9</sup>. A series of exemplars are coloured with enamel, others are silvered, gilded or even gold made<sup>10</sup>. Based on the manner in which Christ's body was rendered, even though missing his arms and legs, it may be argued that the Pericei exemplar is part of the class of crucifixes attached on their support by three rivets, Christ being depicted dead.

In Transylvania, research performed in various ecclesiastic medieval sites yielded such artefacts in different locations. Geographically, closest finds of crucifixes originate from the fortress of Oradea<sup>11</sup>, nonetheless they are entirely different formally and stylistically from the exemplar we discovered at

<sup>5</sup> Rusu 2008, 55

<sup>6</sup> Fogg 2021, 61-111; Caldwell *et al.* 2023, 53, Fig. 13.

<sup>7</sup> For exemplars discovered in Transylvania, see for instance Rusu 2008, 53-67 and Benkő 1992, 39 tábla/10.

<sup>8</sup> Wixom 2005, 10-11.

<sup>9</sup> Brennan 2001, 36-36, Fig. 78; Campbell *et al.* 2019, 298 and subseq.

<sup>10</sup> A few examples in: Vučić 2020, 161-170; Wiczorek, Hinz 2000 25, 361; Fogg 2021, 61-111.

<sup>11</sup> Rusu 2002, Pl. LVIII/1; Rusu 2006, 63, Fig. 1; Marta 2013, Pl. XXIX/1-2.



Pericei. Amongst the examples from Transylvania counts a *Corpus Christi* originating from Cristuru Secuiesc<sup>12</sup> (Fig. 5/B) that which drew our attention by its similar stylistic/formal specificities with the specimen of Pericei, in particular the manner in which facial features were rendered (round head, large eyes). Nevertheless, the *perizonium* folds are depicted differently. Also from Transylvania, a *Corpus Christi* with folds from the *perizonium* somewhat similar (to those from Pericei), comes from Dăbâca<sup>13</sup> (Fig. 5/C). The items of Cristuru Secuiesc and Dăbâca were chronologically framed to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, which may also be valid for the dating of the Pericei item.

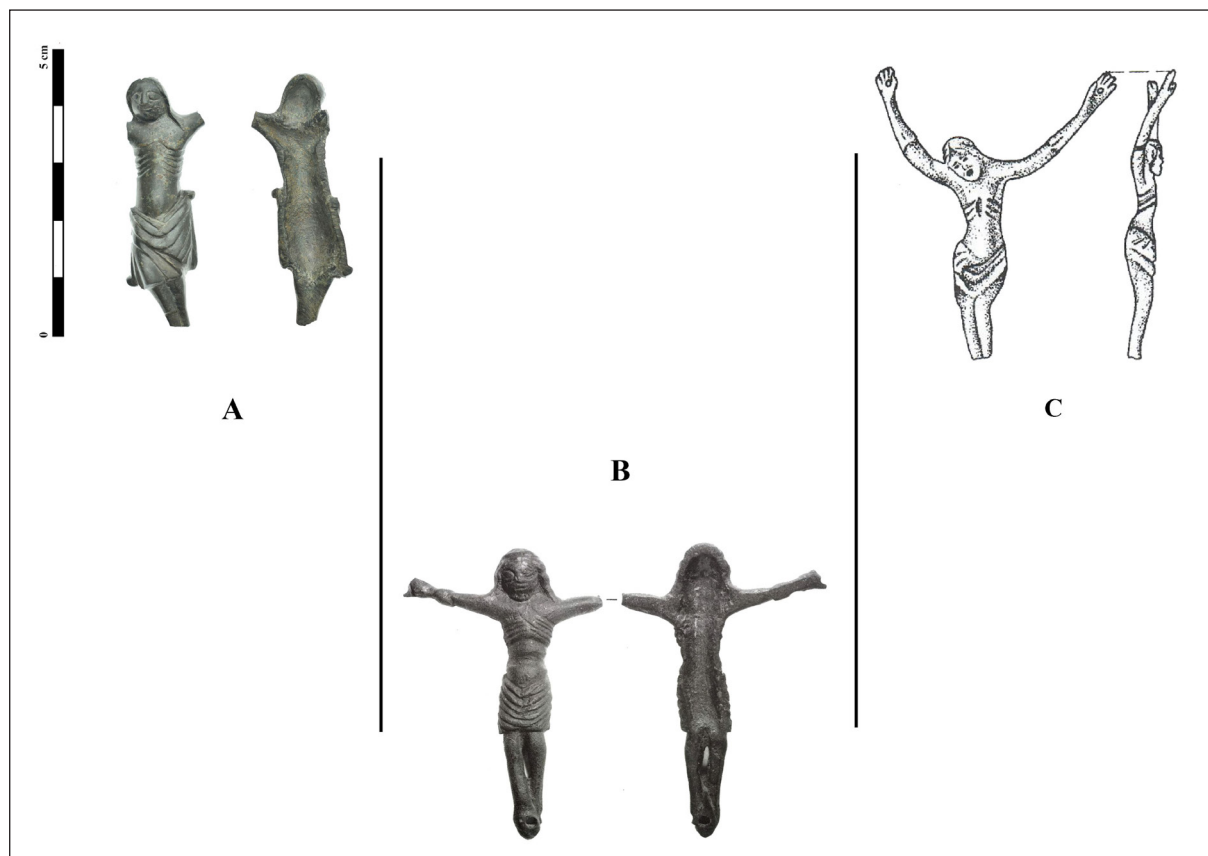


Fig. 5. Examples of *Corpus Christi*: (A) Pericei street Góc, no. 668; (B) Cristuru Secuiesc (after Benkő 1992); (C) Dăbâca (after Iambor 2005).

In fact, the archaeological site of Pericei street Góc, no. 668 yielded in 2017 other artefacts datable to the 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>14</sup> as well. Furthermore, the 2022 archaeological investigations identified wall prints that belonged to a previous church, therefore it is expected that the church discovered in 2017 (archaeological feature C. 1/2017) underwent several layout and structural evolution/development phases.

On the territory of Hungary, a series of *Corpus Christi* datable in the 14<sup>th</sup> century are known, some of them presenting stylistic/formal elements similar to the specimen discovered at Pericei. Even if they belong to the same chronological stage (14<sup>th</sup> century), all these examples of *Corpus Christi* do not have a unified formal realization. So, not being identical, they vary in terms of the way of rendering the position, the anatomical features and the “clothing” (*perizonium*) of the Savior<sup>15</sup>.

Considering the chronology of the analogies (stylistic and formal) identified (14<sup>th</sup> century), as well as the presence at Pericei street Góc, no. 668 of artifacts dating to the same period, we can assume that

<sup>12</sup> Benkő 1992, 39 tábla/10.

<sup>13</sup> Rusu 2008, Fig. 3/c; Iambor 2005, Pl. LXIII.

<sup>14</sup> Pop *et al.* 2018, 212-213; Băcuet-Crișan, Keresztes 2021, 207.

<sup>15</sup> For example in: Lovag 1999, 166-167, catalog no./Fig. 84-90.

the specimen of *Corpus Christi* discovered in 2020 was part of the liturgical inventory of a church from the century. XIV, being for now the only discovery of this kind from the Sylvania Basin.

**Dan Băcuetz-Crișan**

Zalău History and Art County Museum  
Zalău, RO  
bacuetz@yahoo.com

**Timea Keresztes**

Zalău History and Art County Museum  
Zalău, RO  
keresztes.timea@yahoo.com

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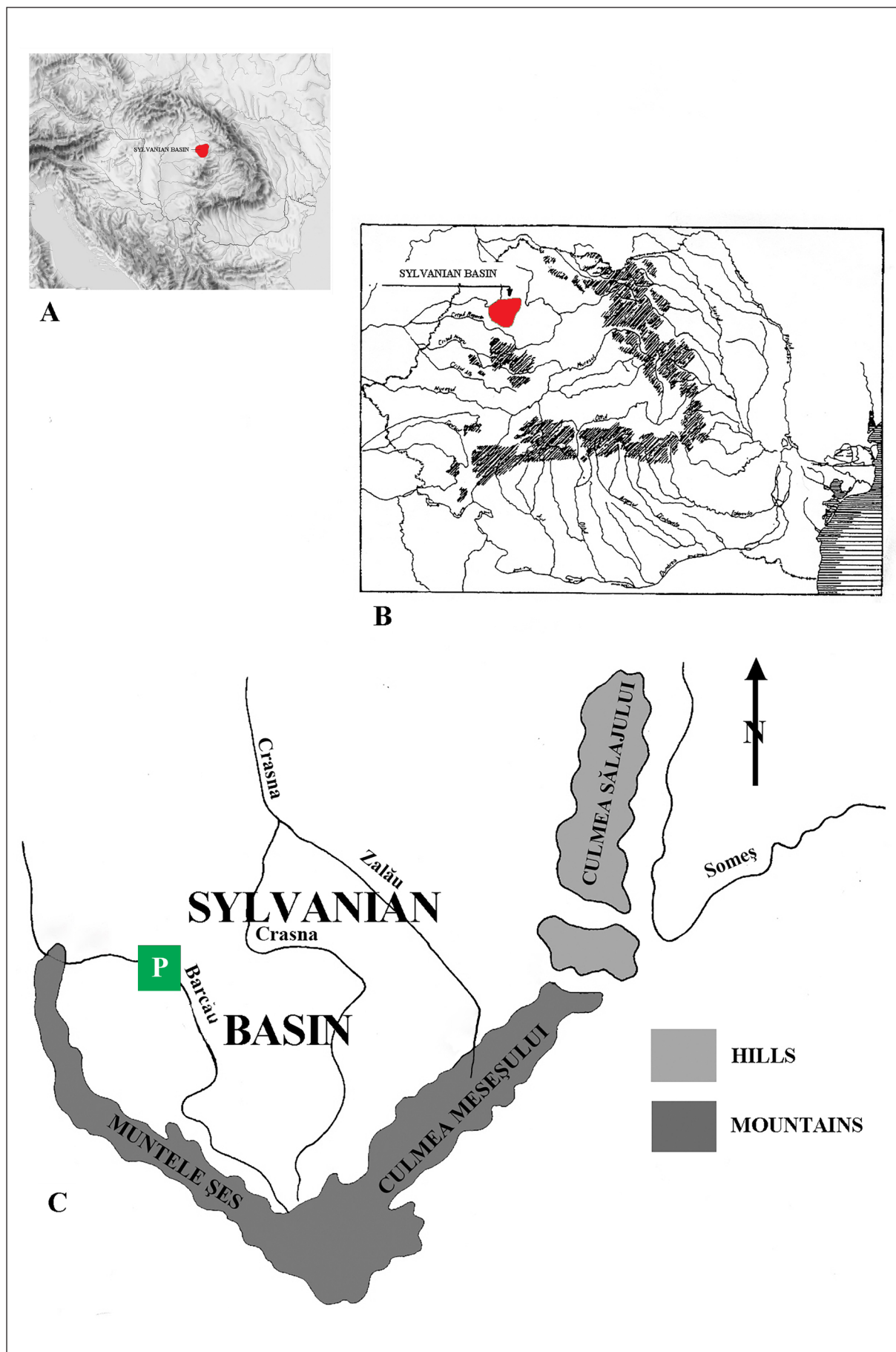


Plate 1. Location of the Sylvania Basin: in the Carpathian Basin (A), on the territory of Romania (B). Location of the Pericei village (marked with P) in the Sylvania Basin (C).

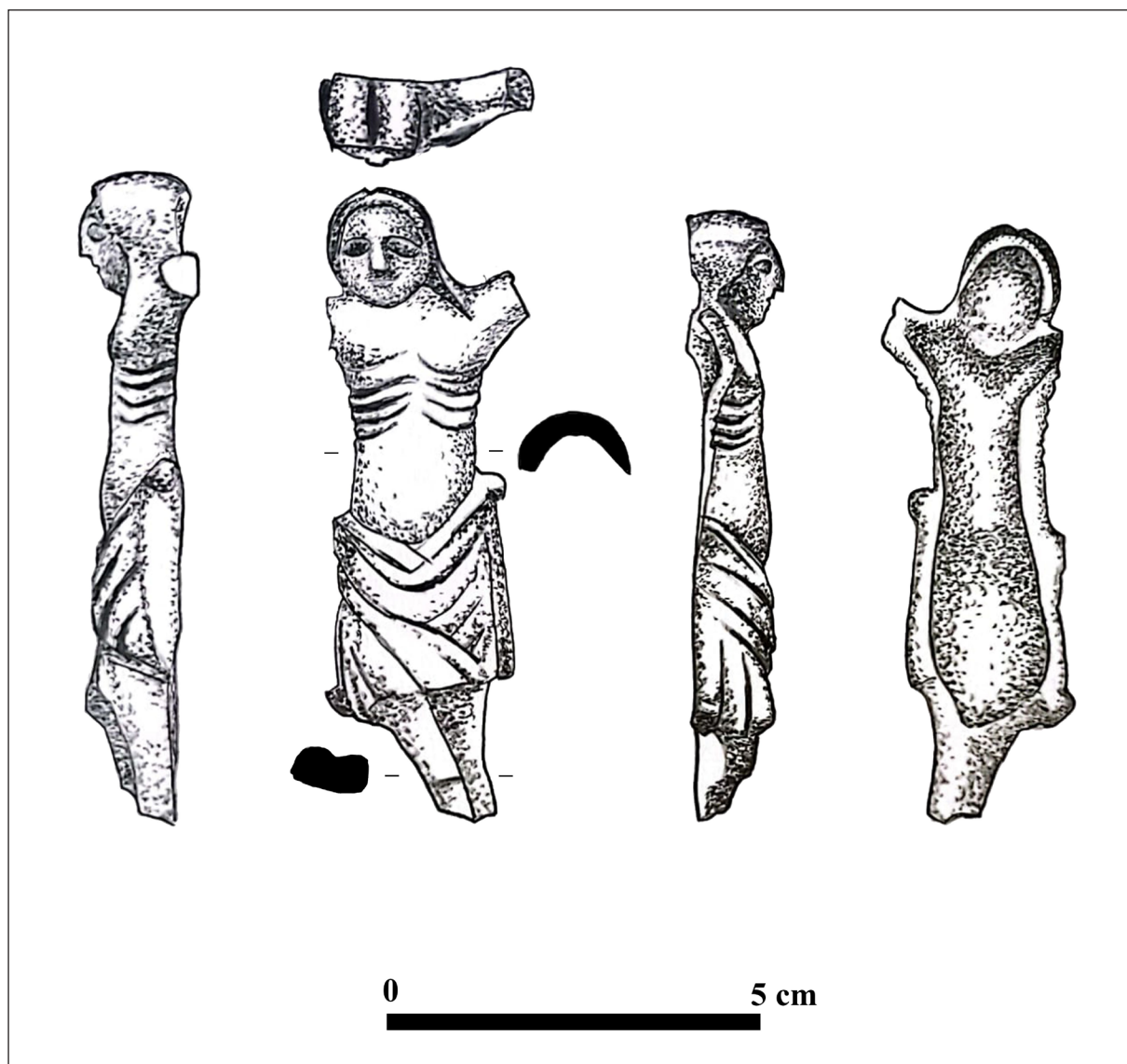


Plate 2. Pericei street G6c, no. 668. Bronze *Corpus Christi*.