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A spearhead discovered at Săvârșin – Cetățuia*

Ioan Cristian Cireap

Abstract: Specialists have become aware of the spot of Săvârșin – Cetățuia ever since the end of the 1960s. Numerous archaeological research campaigns have been performed there until 2010. Besides traces of habitation dated to the Eneolithic (the Coțofeni Culture), archaeologists have identified several layers of La Tène habitation, stretching between the beginning of the 4th century BC and the beginning of the 2nd century AD. Most of the discoveries have not yet been published or have only been briefly presented. Through this note the author wishes to introduce to the scientific environment a spearhead discovered during the 1984 campaign.

Keywords: Săvârșin; La Tène; Dacians; spearhead; javelin.

Geographic location

A promontory stands in the area of the municipality of Săvârșin, bordered by the road to the north and by the railway connecting the cities of Arad and Deva to the south (Fig. 1). Local inhabitants call this feature *Cetățeaua*¹ (oral tradition mentions the existence of a fortification on the hill²) or *Czukor hegy* (Sugar Hill, probably from the highly friable reddish-yellow rock³ that the hill is made of). 700 m. to the south one notes the current riverbed of the Mureș, but during antiquity the river flowed right beside the promontory⁴.

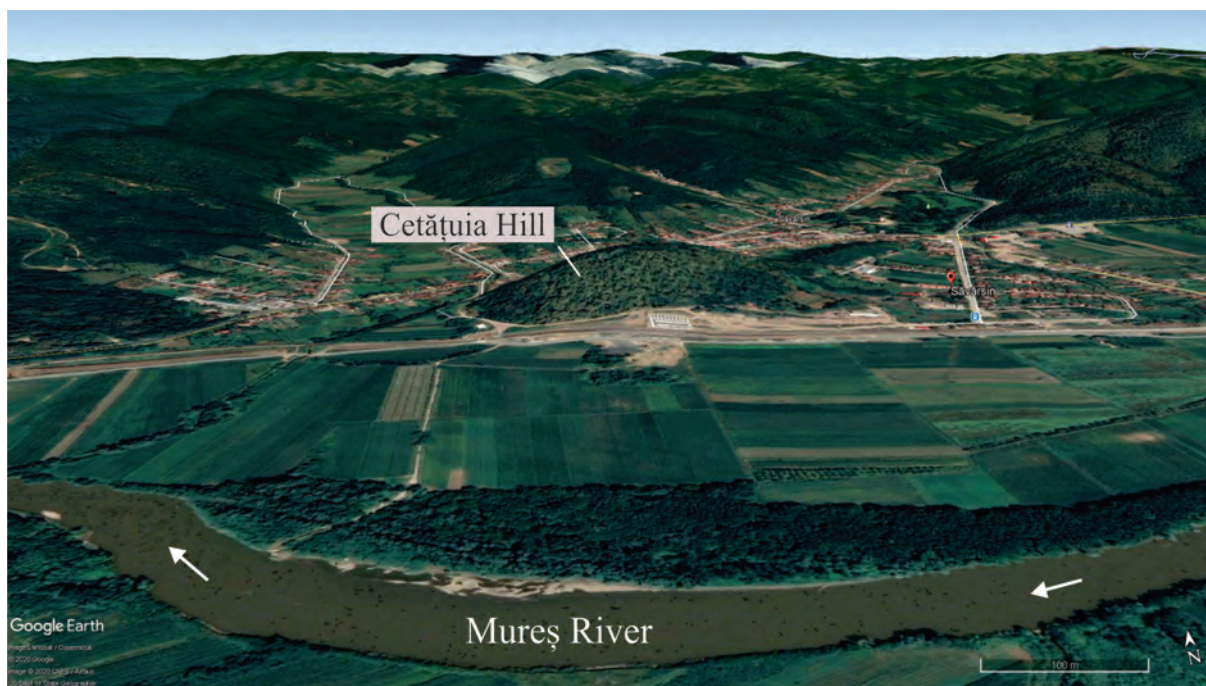


Fig. 1. Săvârșin – Cetățuia. Image from Google Earth.

* English translation: Ana M. Gruia.

¹ Barbu 1980, 101.

² Barbu, Hurezan 1986, mss.

³ Barbu *et al.* 2002, 381.

⁴ Barbu, Hügel 1999, 107.

History of research

Field researches performed in the area have led to the discovery of pottery fragments from the Late Eneolithic⁵, the Dacian Era, and the Early Middle Ages⁶. Numerous pottery fragments and traces of habitation from the Dacian Period were uncovered in the autumn of 1979, during utility systems works on the hill and at its feet⁷. The discovery has triggered rescue excavations⁸.

Systematic researches were initiated in 1980 due to the thickness of the culture layer and the impressive quantity of artifacts. Excavations envisaged both the feet of the hill and the promontory (acropolis)⁹. The campaigns performed, with some discontinuities, until 2010¹⁰, have led to the identification of Coțofeni habitation layers on the plateau and on the terraces of this hill¹¹. Still, the most significant discoveries are those dated to the Second Iron Age and attributed to the Dacian civilization¹².

Thus, at the feet of the hill, archaeologists have identified a settlement that went through several stages of development. It gradually extended in the area at the feet of the hill during an interval between the beginning of the 4th century BC and the beginning of the 2nd century AD¹³. The settlement from the 4th century BC is connected to an incineration necropolis, seven graves of which have been researched¹⁴. To the second phase in the settlement's development one can include two metallurgical workshops in which numerous metal processing traces have been discovered¹⁵. The identified dwellings are both of the pit-house and of the surface type. Some of the latter were built on artificial terraces, on the gentler slopes of the hill¹⁶.

Specialists mention that on the acropolis the settlement was fortified with an earthen rampart and a ditch that prevented access on the eastern side, where the slope was not so steep¹⁷. Still, one must use caution in accepting the existence of these elements of fortification. After the first excavation campaigns, these were only mentioned in preliminary articles or reports. The field documentation revealing such elements has not been preserved. The excavations performed between 2006 and 2010 have not led to the identification of fortification elements¹⁸.

Two layers of Dacian habitation were identified inside the presumed fortification¹⁹. The discovered archaeological material indicates that the fortification should be chronologically included in the period between the 2nd century BC and the beginning of the 2nd century AD²⁰. A coin was discovered in one of the researched dwellings. It is an imitation of a coin issued in Dyrrachium and can be dated between the end of the 2nd century BC and the beginning of the 1st century BC²¹.

⁵ Barbu 1980, 102; Sava 2015b, 163; in the article published in 1980, the pottery fragments dated to the Late Eneolithic (the Coțofeni Culture) were attributed to the Bronze Age.

⁶ Barbu 1980, 102; field researches performed in 1969 by Mircea Barbu and Mircea Zdroba (both from the Arad County Museum) and primary school teacher Iosif Dohangie from Săvârșin, who signaled the presence of the artifacts. Field researches continued in 1976 and 1979, coordinated by István Ferenczi (The Museum for the History of Transylvania in Cluj), M. Barbu and I. Dohangie.

⁷ Barbu 1980, 102.

⁸ Barbu 1980, 102; excavations performed in October 1979 by Mircea Barbu and Egon Dörner (Arad County Museum).

⁹ Barbu, Hurezan 1982, 50; Barbu 1996, 48; in their 1982 article, the authors erroneously mentioned that the systematic excavations started in 1979; the information was subsequently corrected, in their article published in 1996.

¹⁰ Hügel et al. 2011, 125; over the years, the research team has also included, besides those mentioned above, George Pascu Hurezan, Peter Hügel, Florin Mărginean, Victor Sava (Arad Museum Complex), Valeriu Sirbu (Museum of Brăila), and Cristina Bodó (Museum of Dacian and Roman Civilization in Deva).

¹¹ Hügel et alii 2012, 21, 26; Sava 2015b, 163.

¹² Barbu, Hügel 1999, 107.

¹³ Barbu, Hügel 1999, 107.

¹⁴ Barbu, Hügel 1999, 108–109; Barbu et al. 2002, 381.

¹⁵ Barbu, Hurezan 1982, 51–52; Barbu 1996, 50; Barbu, Hügel 1999, 107; Barbu et al. 1999, 102; Barbu et al. 2002, 382.

¹⁶ Barbu et al. 1995, 81; Barbu, Hügel 1999, 108.

¹⁷ Barbu 1980, 106; Barbu, Hurezan 1982, 55; Barbu, Hügel 1999, 107.

¹⁸ Data provided by Victor Sava, member of the research team of the last campaigns in Săvârșin, and I thank him for kindly provided them.

¹⁹ Barbu, Hurezan 1982, 51; Barbu 1996, 49; Barbu, Hügel 1999, 107.

²⁰ Barbu, Hügel 1999, 107.

²¹ Chirilă, Barbu 1980, 127–131.

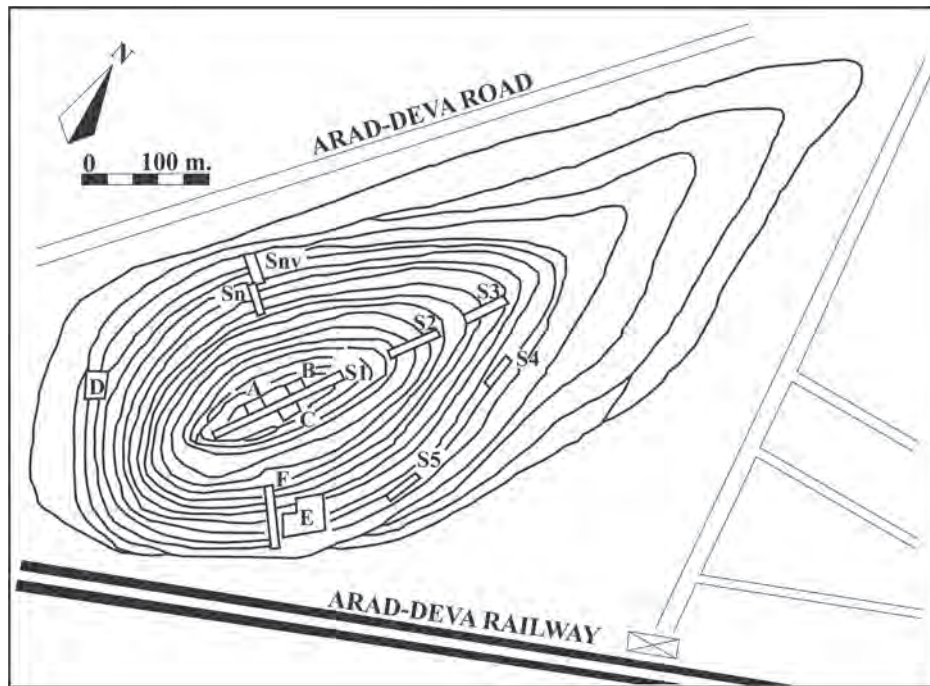


Fig. 2. Săvârșin – Cetățuia. General ground plan of the 1983–1993 excavations (taken from Barbu 1996).

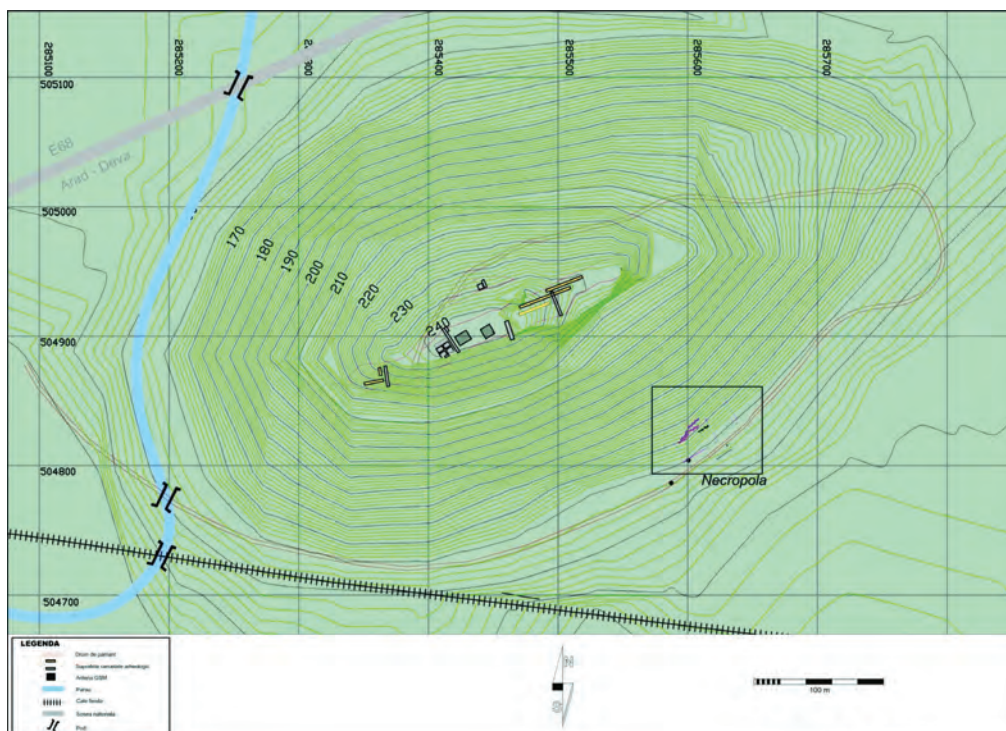


Fig. 3. Săvârșin – Cetățuia. General ground plan of the excavations (taken from Sava 2015b).

Description of the item and its context of discovery

The discovered archaeological material consists of pottery, both handmade (especially during the early stages) and wheel-thrown. The team also found hand mills, clay weights, polishers, as well as metal items: dress accessories, various items, tools, and weapons²².

²² Barbu 1980, 101–116; Barbu, Hurezan 1982, 49–66; Barbu 1984 mss; Barbu 1985 mss; Barbu, Hurezan 1986 mss; Barbu 1987 mss; Barbu *et al.* 1995, 81; Barbu 1996, 48–51; Barbu *et al.* 1996, 106; Barbu *et al.* 1997, 91–92; Barbu *et al.* 1999, 102; Barbu, Hügel 1999, 106–109; Barbu *et al.* 2002, 381–382; Hügel *et al.* 2007, 310–311; Hügel *et al.* 2008, 272–274; Hügel *et al.* 2009, 192–193; Hügel *et al.* 2010, 169–170; Hügel *et al.* 2011, 125.

Regarding the excavations of the 1980s, one must state that the artifacts and the contexts were recorded parsimoniously. The majority of the items remain unpublished. For this reason, the present note aims at introducing to the scientific environment a weapon identified in the storage rooms of the Arad Museum Complex (inv. no. 16549).

The item consists of a spearhead made of hammered iron. It is almost entirely preserved, with just a piece of the socketing tube missing. The blade has the shape of an oblong leaf, with a central rib only towards the tube. It measures 12.2 cm in total length, the diameter of the socketing tube measures 1.5 cm, while the width of the blade measures 2.5 cm.

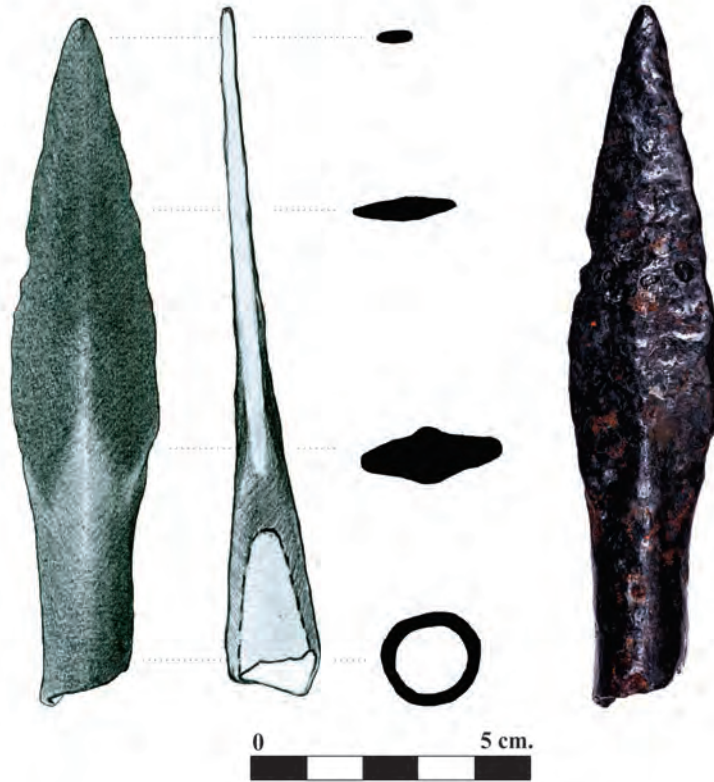


Figure 4. Spearhead discovered in Săvârșin – Cetățuia.
Drawing: Daniel Preda. Photograph: Nelu Scripciuc.

The context of the discovery is somewhat unclear. In the inventory ledger, the item is recorded next to other items; the document notes the year of discovery for those items: 1984. According to this document, the item was discovered at Săvârșin during excavations performed on the acropolis²³. Based on these pieces of information, one can thus assume that the year when the item was discovered is 1984.

The preliminary report of that year²⁴ mentions that a section was opened both on the slope and on the terrace and it has revealed Dacian materials. Boulders, fragments of cut stone blocks and a spearhead with lenticular blade profile were found in the area of meters 1–10, where the land descended into a slope. One can presume that the boulders and the block fragments were once part of a wall that once stood there but was subsequently destroyed; the lithic material was also found further down the slope, in section S4²⁵. The data was adopted in an

article published subsequently. The study completes the information with the note that a ditch was found at the depth of 1 m at the end of the slope, with a rampart measuring 1 m in height behind it²⁶. Again, one must mention that the profile of the section was not published.

This is the only mention of a spearhead in the 1984 report. It mentions the blade's lenticular profile, identical to the profile of the item identified in the storage rooms of the Arad Museum Complex. One can thus presume that the report actually mentions the item under discussion here.

The spearhead must have been made in the workshop of a specialized smith. It is possible that it belonged to one of the individuals who defended Săvârșin. Starting from this hypothesis, one can take into account the possibility that it was produced in one of the two metallurgical workshops identified on the site²⁷.

²³ Inventory ledger, vol. II, p. 1530, nr. crt. 15291.

²⁴ Barbu 1984 mss.

²⁵ Barbu 1984 mss; starting from these pieces of information, I believe the item was discovered in section S2, S3, or S5 (see fig. 2).

²⁶ Barbu 1996, 49.

²⁷ Barbu, Hurezan 1982, 51–52; Barbu 1996, 50; Barbu, Hügel 1999, 107; Barbu *et al.* 1999, 102; Barbu *et al.* 2002, 382.

Analogies and conclusions

According to the characteristics described above, the spearhead can be included in type II according to Ioan Glodariu's classification²⁸. This type is characterized by small dimensions and the lenticular profile of the blade. Glodariu illustrates items found in Costești and Grădiștea Muncelului that can be dated to the 1st century AD²⁹. He also mentions analogies from both the Celtic and the Roman environments³⁰.

Few such discoveries were made (or published) from the Lower Mureș Basin. Two items were found in Neudorf – *Pârâul Roșia*, a spearhead and a javelinhead³¹. They are chronologically similar to the item under discussion, but they belong to different types. The same is true for a spearhead discovered in Pecica – *Șanțul Mare*.³² Analogies can be made for two spearheads discovered on the spot called Măderat – *La Cioacă*³³. As compared to the item under analysis, these two items do not have ribs and their blades are slightly longer. Still, they are similar in size and their blades are lenticular in profile.

Spears with heads provided with ribs absorbed shock better and were stronger, thus fit for pushing³⁴. Those without ribs, on the other hand, were used for throwing, as they were weaker, in case they did not reach their target the head bent and thus the weapons could not be reused by the enemy³⁵. Naturally, in the latter case, spears can be considered javelins³⁶. In the case of the item presented here, one can only speak of a small rib at the base of the blade, towards the socketing shaft. This characteristic can place the item in the transition area between spear and javelin.

In a relatively recent classification of La Tène-type spearheads from the south-eastern area of Hungary and the northern part of the Balkans, our item is more similar to subtype 2.5³⁷. The above-mentioned study provides analogies for it in the eastern part of Croatia³⁸. It can be dated to La Tène D³⁹ (the second half of the 2nd century BC – the 1st century BC), thus earlier than the dating reached based on the classification presented above.

The fact that the spearhead was found in association with what seems to have been the remains of a stone wall might be the starting point of an interesting hypothesis. Still, the lack of solid evidence imposes us to show caution. The existence of a ditch with rampart or of a stone wall remains debated. New excavations at Săvârşin – *Cetățuia* are needed in order for specialists to reach answers.

Despite all these drawbacks, the present study includes in the scientific environment a weapon item that is of interest to the research of the classical period of pre-Roman Dacia in the lower area of the Mureș Valley.

To the present note have contributed, with advice and coordination, my colleague Dr. Victor Sava and my MA professor Dr. Iosif Vasile Ferencz; I am grateful and I thank them.

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²⁸ Glodariu, Iaroslavschi 1979, 133; the author mentions that these heads could have also been attached to arrows.

²⁹ Glodariu, Iaroslavschi 1979, 133, fig. 70 (10–11, 13, 16–18, 21, 23, 28–29).

³⁰ Glodariu, Iaroslavschi 1979, 133.

³¹ Pădurean 2006, 224, pl VII/233; Sirbu, Hurezan 2011, 15, il. 1 (3)/23, 8 (3)/30; Berzovan 2017, 66–68, 289, pl. 85 (4, 7)/425.

³² Crișan 1978, 143, pl. 128 (3).

³³ Berzovan 2017, 98–99, 289, pl. 85 (5, 6)/425; their origin remains nevertheless rather uncertain, as they were recovered from treasure hunters.

³⁴ Rapin 1999, 48; Drnić 2015, 113.

³⁵ Rapin 1999, 48; Drnić 2015, 113.

³⁶ Rapin 1999, 48.

³⁷ Drnić 2015, 116–117/fig. 4 (12, 13).

³⁸ Drnić 2015, 117 (analogies in Stari Mikanovci and Orolik).

³⁹ Drnić 2015, 123/fig. 11.

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Abbreviations

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|-------------------------|---|
| ActaArchHung | Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae. |
| AAC | Acta Archaeologica Carpathica, Cracow. |
| ActaMN | Acta Musei Napocensis, Cluj-Napoca. |
| ActaMP | Acta Musei Porolissensis, Zalău |
| AnArchRessoviensia | Analecta Archaeologica Ressoviensia, Rzeszów. |
| AAS at CEU | Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU, Budapest. |
| Apulum | Acta Musei Apulensis – Apulum, Alba-Iulia. |
| Alba Regia | Alba Regia, Székesfehérvár. |
| Antaeus | Antaeus, Budapest. |
| Arrabona | Arrabona, Győr. |
| ArhMed | Arheologia Medievală, Cluj-Napoca, Brăila, Reșița. |
| ArchBaltica | Archaeologia Baltica, Vilnius. |
| Arch.Inf | Archäologische Informationen. |
| ATS | Acta Terrae Septemcastrensis, Sibiu. |
| ArchÉrt | Archaeologiai Értesítő, Budapest. |
| Banatica | Banatica, Reșița. |
| BBMÉ | A Béni Balogh Ádám Múzeum Évkönyve, Szekszárd. |
| BUFM | Beiträge zur Ur- und Frühgeschichte Mitteleuropas. |
| BCMI | Buletinul Comisiei Naționale a Monumentelor, ansambluri situri istorice. București. |
| CommArchHung | Communicationes Archaeologicae Hungaricae, Budapest. |
| CCA | Cronica Cercetărilor Arheologice, Comisia Națională de Arheologie, București. |
| CIL | Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum, Berlin. |
| CMA | Complexul Muzeal Arad. |
| Dolgozatok | Dolgozatok az Erdélyi Múzeum érem- és régiségtárából, Cluj. |
| Dolg. | Dolgozatok a Magyar Királyi Ferencz József Tudományegyetem Archaeologiai Intézetéből, Szeged. |
| Dolg. ÚS | Dolgozatok az Erdélyi Múzeum Érem- és Régiségtárából, Új Sorozat. Cluj-Napoca / Kolozsvár. |
| EphNap | Ephemeris Napocensis, Cluj-Napoca. |
| HOMÉ | A Hermann Ottó Múzeum Évkönyve. Miskolc. |
| JAHA | Journal of Ancient History and Archaeology, Cluj-Napoca. |
| JAM | Jósa András Museum, Nyíregyháza. |
| JPMÉ | Janus Pannonius Múzeum Évkönyve. |
| JRGZM | Jahrbuch des Romisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums, Mainz. |
| KRRMK | Kaposvári Rippl Rónai Múzeum Közleményei, Kaposvár. |
| LMI | Lista monumentelor istorice, updated in 2015. |
| MittArchInst | Mitteilungen des Archäologischen Instituts der Ungarischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. |
| MOL | Magyar Olaj- és Gázipari Részvénytársaság / Hungarian Oil and Gas Public Limited Company |
| Marisia | Marisia, Târgu Mureș. |
| NyJAMÉ | A nyíregyházi Jósa András Múzeum Évkönyve, Nyíregyháza. |
| PBF | Praehistorische Bronzefunde. Berlin. |
| Przegląd Archeologiczny | Przegląd Archeologiczny, Wrocław. |
| Rad | Jósa András Museum, Archaeological Archive |
| RégFüz | Régészeti Füzetek, Budapest. |

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| RKM | Régészeti Kutatások Magyarországon/Archaeological Investigations in Hungary, Budapest. |
| RAJ Arad | Repertoriul Arheologic al Mureşului Inferior. Judeţul Arad. Timişoara 1999. |
| RAN | Repertoriul Arheologic Naţional. |
| Sargetia | Sargetia. Acta Musei Devensis, Deva. |
| SCIV(A) | Studii şi Cercetări de Istorie Veche şi Arheologie, Bucureşti. |
| SGB | Studii de Geografie a Banatului, Timişoara. |
| SIB | Studii de Istorie a Banatului, Timişoara. |
| Slavia Antiqua | Slavia Antiqua, Poznań. |
| SlovArch | Slovenská Archeológia, Nitra. |
| SMK | Somogyi Múzeumok Közleményei, Kaposvár. |
| SovArh | Sovetskaja Arheologija, Moskva. |
| SRTM | Shuttle Radar Topography Mission. |
| StudiaUBB Historia | Studia UBB Historia, Cluj-Napoca. |
| SzKMÉ | A Szántó Kovács Múzeum Évkönyve, Pécs. |
| Századok | Századok, Budapest. |
| Terra Sebus | Terra Sebus. Acta Musei Sabesiensis, Sebeş. |
| Tibiscum S. N. | Tibiscum S. N., Caransebeş. |
| TransRev | Transylvanian Review, Cluj-Napoca. |
| ZalaiMúz | Zalai Múzeum, Zalaegerszeg. |
| ZSA | Ziridava. Studia Archaeologica. Arad. |
| Živa Antika | Živa Antika, Skopje. |