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An Early Eneolithic isolated non-adult burial from Alba Iulia – *Lumea Nouă* (Romania)

Ana Fetcu¹, Alina Bințișan, Mihai Gligor

Abstract: This paper presents the recent discovery of a non-adult burial at the Eneolithic site from Alba Iulia *Lumea-Nouă*. For the past 15 years, multiple funerary discoveries stood out from other investigations for this timeframe in the nowadays Romanian territory throughout the elaborate mortuary behaviour observed.

Keywords: Transylvania; Alba Iulia-*Lumea Nouă*; Early Eneolithic; non-adult human remains; inhumation.

Introduction

Studying non-adult human remains provide a wealth of information concerning past societies and can offer important insights into the social, cultural attitudes and the role of children and adolescents within the group². The manner of how an infant was treated, considered and addressed within its community is a recurrent topic in archaeology, anthropology and bioanthropology. Childhood is broadly defined as a period of biological, psychological, social and cultural development, and although is a relatively new concept, it represents an important marker into the growth of an individual³. For prehistoric times the data concerning the aforementioned is still rather scarce due to numerous factors⁴, thus at this point researching the meaning behind the notions of childhood and children is still intensively looked into.

Archaeological context

Discovered in 1942, the Neolithic and Eneolithic site from *Lumea-Nouă* is located within the city of Alba Iulia (Romania) and is constantly being the subject of rescue excavations due to developing residential projects in the area⁵. Researches over the past 15 years exposed various funerary discoveries that stood out from other such findings from the actual Romanian territory, enabling scholars to observe diverse mortuary behaviours varying from the multiple disposals of the deceased in mass graves to secondary depositions and individual inhumations. Moreover, perimortem blunt force trauma was observed on the skull caps of both adults and non-adults, on both sexes, indicating some type of a violence associated event⁶.

During 24th of May and 26th of June 2018, a rescue excavation (Trench II/2018) was set out in the northern limit of the site (Pl. 1). The entire surface that was the object of archaeological researches encompassed a surface measuring 7 × 8.25 metres, and it was divided into two squares (A and B), each one measuring 7.5 × 3 m.

The general stratigraphy was recorded as follows: 0.00-0.40m – vegetal, loose layer, black in colour; 0.40-0.90 (1.00)m – grey in colour layer with archaeological materials identified as belonging to the Foeni group; 1.00m – geological soil, yellow in colour, mostly sandy in texture.

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² Lewis 2007, 1–2; Lewis 2011, 1, 3; Lewis 2017, 1–2, 12.

³ Norozi, Moen 2016, 77–78; Lewis 2007, 4.

⁴ Lewis 2011, 3–4.

⁵ Gligor 2009, 25–58, Pl. I-III.

⁶ Gligor 2006, 16–21; Panaitescu *et al.* 2008, 261–268; Gligor 2009, 21, 31–32, 36–39, 117–132, Pl. VIII-XII, CCII-CCXI; Gligor *et al.* 2012, 57–70; Gligor, McLeod 2014, 63–64, 84, fig. 2/a-d; Gligor, McLeod 2015, 25–41; Lundberg, Gligor 2015, 71–103, 73–76, fig. 3/a-d, 4/a-d, 5/a-b; Gligor *et al.* 2018, 30–31, 33, 37–40, 55–76, fig. 2, 4–5, tab. 1, 4–8, Pl. I-XX; Fetcu *et al.* 2020, Pl. IV/1–4.

In square A, at the depth of 0.75m, a rectangular with rounded corners pit (Cx001) measuring 0.75 × 0.45m, displayed the highly disturbed and scattered human remains of a non-adult individual, labelled as M1 (Pl. 2/1–3). The skeletal fragments had an orientation towards NV-SE. Non-human remains, a small number of common pottery shards and adobe fragments were recovered as well within the context, but we do not consider any of these as expressions of a funerary ritual (Pl. 3/1–2). The burial was discovered in the proximity of a Foeni group attributed pit house, marked as B1 (Pl. 3/3).

Radiocarbon data

AMS 14C data investigations were performed on skeletal remains (R parietal fragment) that were retrieved from M1. The result is the following: Poz-118947 – 5705±35 BP (Fig. 1). It is believed that the human remains belonging to M1/□A (Trench II/2018) were deposited around the timeframe 4586 – 4491 cal BC (68.2%)⁷.

In previous funerary discoveries from the Alba Iulia-*Lumea Nouă* mass graves⁸, the modelled dates indicate a similar time frame: Trench II/2003⁹: *Start* 4782–4471 BC (95.4%), mean 4594 BC; *End* 4556–4285 BC (95.4%), mean 4456 BC; Trench III/2005¹⁰: *Start* 4766–4510 BC (95.4%), mean 4621 BC; *End* 4590–4346 BC (95.4%), mean 4483 BC; Trench I/2011¹¹: *Start* 4576–4456 BC (95.4%), mean 4504 BC; *End* 4526–4389 BC (95.4%), mean 4461 BC; Trench II/2015¹²: *Start* 4691–4372 BC (95.4%), mean 4512 BC; *End* 4456–4186 BC (95.4%), mean 4353 BC.

A recently published result of 14C AMS data comes another funerary context, a secondary deposition of a non-adult skull discovered in a Foeni pit which gave the following timeframe: 4427 – 4370 cal BC (68.2%) (Poz-118948: 5585±35 BP)¹³.

Sample	Archaeological context	1σ (%)	cal. BC	2σ (%)	cal. BC
ALN#39	□A, M1, ▼0.75m	68.2	4586 – 4491	95.4	4619 – 4458

Fig. 1. Radiocarbon data from Trench II/2018, Alba Iulia – *Lumea Nouă*.

Anthropological data/Archaeothanatological observations

The skeletal remains of the non-adult individual are frail, highly fragmented and only parts from the skeleton were recovered. This could be a result of animal burrowing activity that was archaeologically observed in the area of the burial pit (Pl. 2/3). We must also note that the abnormal bundling, displacement and detachment of the bones could be due to post-depositional disturbances such as extensive agricultural works done in the area, water flow in the soil and constant sediment movement¹⁴.

Archaeothanatological observations made when excavating the remains, strengthened by the remarks done during the anthropological investigations, allowed us to consider this as a primary inhumation. Anatomical connection was observed *in situ* at the arm region, upon removing the fragmented skull cap. Several parts from the axial skeleton – rib fragments and a fragment from the sacrum were recovered from the soil that was moved due to the animal habitation and movement.

The anthropological analysis was performed by applying the general methods on assessing the age at death of the individual, respectively by using dental developmental indicators and fusion markers on the long bones¹⁵. Age of death was established at 7.5 years old. No health-related indicators or traumatic lesions were observed on the skeleton discovered.

⁷ The calibration was made with the OxCal software (OxCal v4.4.) <https://c14.arch.ox.ac.uk/oxcal.html>

⁸ Gligor 2014, 92, Tab. 1, Fig. 2.

⁹ Gligor and McLeod 2014, 25, Fig. 4/a-b.

¹⁰ Gligor *et al.* 2018, 41–43, Tab. 10, Fig. 6–8/a-b.

¹¹ Gligor, McLeod 2015, 66–68, Fig. 9a–9b.

¹² Lundberg, Gligor 2015, 81, Tab. 1, Fig. 8–9, 10/a-b.

¹³ Fetcu *et al.* 2020, Tab. 1, Pl. II-III.

¹⁴ Duda 2009, 28, 30, 40–44.

¹⁵ Scheuer, Black 2004; Schaefer *et al.* 2009; AlQahtani *et al.* 2010.

Discussion

In the Romanian territory, non-adult human remains are noted as finds in both necropolises such as Iclod (Cluj County), Cernavodă (Constanța County), Cernica (Ilfov County), Sultana-*Valea Orbului*, Sultana-*Malu Roșu*, *Vărăști-Grădiștea Ulmilor* (Călărași County), and as isolated discoveries inside or outside of dwellings/habitual spaces within the settlements¹⁶. Bi-ritual funerary practices have been observed on both adults and non-adults¹⁷.

At Iclod, from 133 individuals, the scientific data is divided between the discoveries from Cemetery A and B as follows: Cemetery A – for the age groups between 0 to 14 years old at death the percentage is 12.14, two cases are present for 7 to 14 years representing 9,75%; for Cemetery B, 7,3% represents the age group of 0 to 14 years and 7,3% for 14–20¹⁸. In recent rescue excavations from Iclod (2015–2017) 24 more inhumation burials were discovered. Nine non-adult individuals were recorded within this sample¹⁹.

Archaeological investigations performed at the Hamangia necropolis from Cernavodă established that from the total of 500 graves, 45 are belonging to non-adults²⁰.

At Cernica (Boian culture), from 302 analysed skeletons, 37 of them are identified as being less than 20 years of age²¹.

The necropolis from Sultana-*Valea Orbului* (Boian culture) exposed 240 individuals; 53 of them are represented by non-adults and for the age groups from 0 to 14 years old age at death – the child mortality rates being expressed by 24,5%²². Finds from the Eneolithic necropolis of Sultana-*Malu Roșu* (Boian and Gumelnița) note 16 burials associated with non-adult individuals²³.

In the Gumelnița necropolis from *Vărăști-Grădiștea Ulmilor*, 118 burials were analysed and 30% of these being identified as non-adults²⁴.

The recent archaeological investigated necropolis from Pecica-*Est* revealed 278 inhumation graves belonging to Eneolithic period, but no anthropological and 14C data are available so far²⁵.

Three non-adult individuals are recorded at the Neolithic settlement from Gura Baciului (Cluj County). The burials were discovered within the settlement, in the habitual space, near dwellings²⁶.

In Alba County, at Limba-*Vărăria* the crouched skeleton of a non-adult individual aged between seven and eight years old at death was found beneath the remains of a dwelling²⁷. Radiocarbon data placed the discovery upon the B phases of Vinča culture²⁸.

At the Middle Neolithic settlement from Zău de Câmpie, in Mureș County, the skeletal remains of three non-adults were found in close relationship to dwellings and hearths²⁹.

The Late Neolithic/Early Eneolithic settlement from Porț *Corău* (Sălaj County), displayed the cremated remains of three non-adult individuals³⁰.

The Eneolithic cremation necropolis identified at Dealul *Lupului*, Zalău, also in Sălaj County, provided the cremains of a non-adult, aged between five and 14 years old at death³¹.

¹⁶ Kogălniceanu 2008, 101–110, fig. 12.1, tab. 12.1–12.2; Gligor, Băcuet-Crișan 2014, 38–43.

¹⁷ Lazarovici, Maxim 1995, 189–190; Băcuet-Crișan 2008, 25–26, 178, pl. 78; Lazăr, Băcuet-Crișan 2011, 5–13, 42–48, 59–60, fig. 2, 3a, 61, fig. 4, 63–64, fig. 6–7; Gligor, Băcuet-Crișan 2014, 38, 50–52; Băcuet-Crișan, Constantinescu 2019, 11–15.

¹⁸ Georgescu, Georgescu 1999, 357–359; Lazarovici, Bulbuc 1983, 161–166; Lazarovici 1991; Maxim 1999, 88–89; Maxim *et al.* 2003, 146–147.

¹⁹ Fetcu 2018, 32, 37, pl. I/1.

²⁰ Necrasov *et al.* 1990, 173–224;

²¹ Comșa, Cantacuzino 2001, 207; Necrasov *et al.* 1990, 185–189.

²² Cristescu, Botezatu 1992, 3–10; Șerbănescu, Soficaru 2004, 321–322; Șerbănescu, Soficaru 2005, 364–365; Șerbănescu, Soficaru 2006, 343–347; Șerbănescu, Soficaru 2007, 351–352;

²³ Lazăr *et al.* 2017, 61–62, fig. 5.2, tab. 5.1.

²⁴ Comșa 1995, 107–108, 123.

²⁵ Sava *et al.* 2017, 55–59, 66, fig. 1, 3–4, 6; Mihail, Sava 2019, 9, 21, fig. 2, 20–26.

²⁶ Lazarovici, Maxim 1995, 183.

²⁷ Roșu, Gligor 2011, 345–347, 350.

²⁸ Gligor 2016, 30–32, tab. 1, fig. 1–2.

²⁹ Bodea 1997, 737–739, fig. 1–2.

³⁰ Băcuet-Crișan 2008, 26, 63, 178, pl. 78; Lazăr, Băcuet-Crișan 2011, 6–8, 29–30, 63, fig. 6; Băcuet-Crișan 2015, 17–30, 35–38, pl. VII–X; Băcuet-Crișan, Constantinescu 2019, 11–12, 14–15.

³¹ Lazăr, Băcuet-Crișan 2011, 6, 9–12, 23, 64, fig. 7; Băcuet-Crișan 2011, 6, 9–12, 23–25, 30, 35, 39, 42, 44–47, 64, fig. 7; Băcuet-Crișan, Constantinescu 2019, 13.

Conclusion

In the past human communities, infant and children mortality rates are considered as being high due to associated decreased nutritional measures, poor sanitation or social aspects such as violence and accidents³². The fact that the skeletal remains of M1 do not present any macroscopic defects, does not necessarily mean that this individual was at the age of his death in good health. In this case, it can be applied the concept behind the osteological paradox which is concerned with the heterogeneity in disease risk, selective mortality, and demographic nonstationarity. It states that for a disease to progress to the point of affecting the skeletal system, an individual would have had to survive with it for a substantial period. Therefore, the rest of the population with seemingly “healthy” skeletal remains potentially are the individuals who died from the particular disease early enough where it would not have been developed on the bone. Thus, making the latter the weaker and more susceptible to disease individuals³³.

Skeletal remains of non-adult individuals from Alba Iulia – *Lumea Nouă* are recorded as finds in both mass graves or as secondary depositions³⁴. The isolated non-adult burial (M1) was discovered towards the known Northern limit of the Neolithic and Eneolithic site and nearby, approximately 300–400 m in a straight line, from the mass graves (Pl. 1). The burial could be related to the habitation area discovered in proximity, a large pit house, labelled as B1, attributed also to the Foeni group (Pl. 3/3).

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³² Volk, Atkinson 2013, 182, 187–188.

³³ Wood *et al.* 1992, 344–349, 352–353.

³⁴ Panaitescu *et al.* 2008, 266–267, fig. 9–10; Gligor *et al.* 2012, 59, 62–63, fig. 18–20; Gligor, McLeod 2014, 69–71, table 1; Gligor, McLeod 2015, 27, 29, 35, table 6–7; Lundberg, Gligor 2015, 83–88, table 2, fig. 3–7; 98, 103; Fetcu *et al.* 2020, Pl. II/1–4.

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Plate 1. Google Maps capture showing the geographical location of Trench II/2018, Alba Iulia- Lumea Nouă archaeological site.



Plate 2. M1 (Cx001) from Trench II/2018 during the researches. 1. The position of Cx001(square A); 2. Detail of the funerary complex Cx001, with bundled human remains (M1); 3. View of the funerary discovery with distinctive (light brown and sandy textured soil) animal burrowing; 4. The burial pit Cx001 upon dismantling the human remains of M1.



Plate 3. M1 (Cx001) details and aerial view of square A (Trench II/2018). 1. Cx001 detail of the M1 burial; 2. Cx001 detail with the human remains (green – skull cap fragments; yellow – human rib fragments; blue – long bone fragments; red – non-human bone fragments; brown – pottery and adobe fragments); 3. Aerial view of square A: the pit house B1 and M1 burial location (Călin Şuteu).



Plate 4. Human remains of M1 in anatomical position.

Abbreviations

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.

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.