

ZIRIDAVA  
STUDIA ARCHAEOLOGICA

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MUSEUM ARAD

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# The Bronze Age Shaft-hole Axe Discovered in Loranta, the Municipality of Brusturi, Bihor County\*

Călin Ghemiș

**Abstract:** This brief note aims to present a recently discovered copper axe discovered in 21.10.2019 in the village of Loranta. The spot was verified in 27.10.2019 but unfortunately no other archaeological material was uncovered during the field research. Based on its morphological-typological characteristics, the axe belongs to the Dumbrăvioara type, the development of which has been dated to the second part of the Early Bronze Age. Taking into account the analogies from the cave in Izbucu Topliței, the axe from Loranta can be connected to the Roșia-type discoveries. The study focuses on a single item deposit that can be connected to the intense traffic along the Criș Valley that links Transylvania to the Hungarian Plain.

**Keywords:** Early Bronze Age; metallurgy; Dumbrăvioara-type axes; Roșia-type discoveries.

The village of Loranta is located inside the administrative borders of the municipality of Brusturi, attested in the written sources in 1360 as "*locus sessionalis Tatarpatak*"<sup>1</sup>. From an archaeological perspective, no finds were made in this territory until 2019<sup>2</sup>.

The settlement of Loranta is located on the southern border of Plopișului Hills. The area is drained by Ghepeșului Valley (Gepiș or Fânațelor Valley, that is, besides Peștișului Valley, one of the main right-side effluents of River Crișul Repede, but with an insignificant contribution to the main collector, River Criș).<sup>3</sup>

The location of the settlement in the wide corridor of River Crișul Repede has favored the settlement of human communities here ever since the earliest periods. Though few, the stray finds point to a historical development between prehistory and today.

Due to the scarcity of discoveries dated to the Early Bronze Age, I have chosen to present this item before all other finds because its introduction in the scientific environment is highly important for the contribution it brings to benchmarking the development of the Early Bronze Age in Crișana.

## Context of discovery

The item was discovered through metal detecting east of the settlement and ca. 500 meters south of the former Zichy/Mateescu manor house in Poiana Florilor, currently the Orthodox hermitage of nuns, in a forested area<sup>4</sup>. The artifact was handed over to the Department for Culture and National Heritage of Bihor County, from where it was subsequently placed in the custody of the Țării Crișurilor Museum.

The place of discovery is located on a terrace bordered to the east by a forest road and a valley with a seasonal water course (Fig. 1a-b).

Once on site I have noted that the item had been discovered at the depth of ca. – 0.25 m in a very acid yellowish soil. The soil excavated from the pit contained no pigments or other indications of a possible archaeological feature.

\* English translation: Ana M. Gruia.

<sup>1</sup> According to Țărău 2009, 128.

<sup>2</sup> Among the new discoveries that speak of the prehistory and history of this area I shall mention here a silver imperial denarius, a bronze celt discovered in different spots around the village, but also other materials identified by Preda and Tudor Balaiban who are passionate about the history of these picturesque parts.

<sup>3</sup> Podoleanu 2008, 11.

<sup>4</sup> The discovery was made during metal detecting. The spot of discovery was verified on 27.10.2019 together with Tudor Balaiban, the author of the discovery.



Besides, the ground research of the entire terrace in question did not lead to the discovery of any pottery fragments or other data that might lead to the discovery of a human settlement contemporary to the metal item.

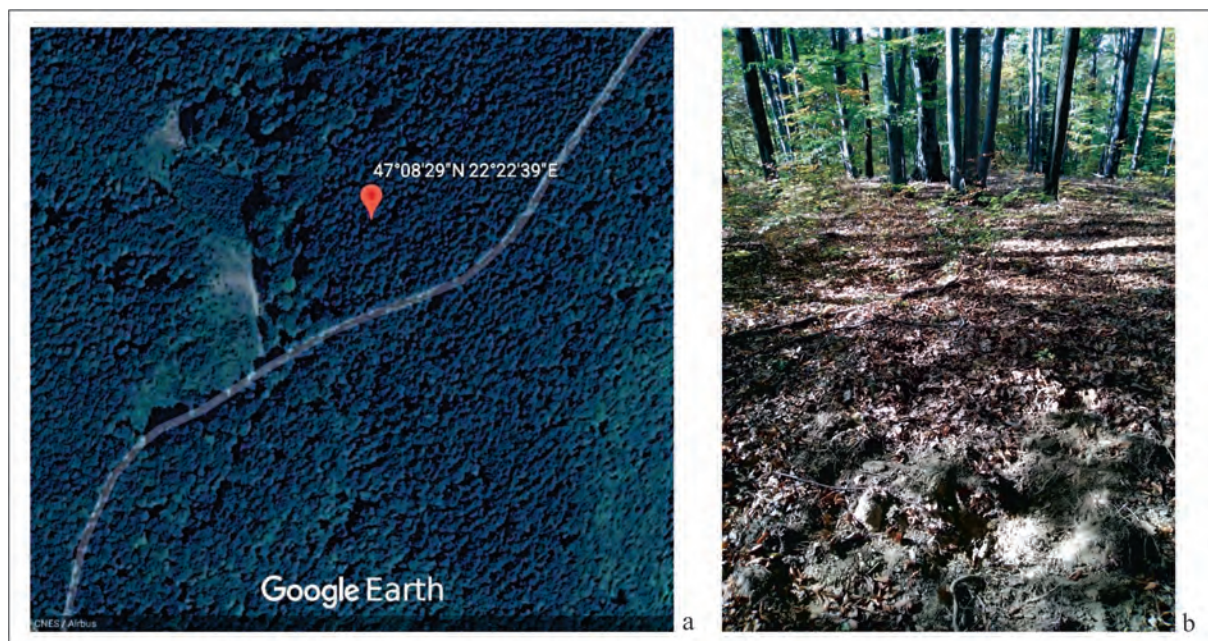


Fig. 1. a. The area where the axe from Loranta was discovered – marked in red (taken from Google Earth), b. The findspot of the item, in the foreground.

### Description of the item

Axe with transversal socketing mouth, made of copper cast in a bivalve mold. The body of the axe has a straight upper edge and an oblique lower edge, flattening towards the blade. The blade is curve, with the curve more stresses towards the upper edge (Fig. 2 a-c, Fig. 3).

The collar of the socket is cylindrical and on its poll one notes a mold mark. The blade section is irregular, with a straight upper side and a slightly concave lower side. Seen from above, the section of the axe head looks ponderous, especially due to a surplus of material in the area of the collar.

The item is covered in active greenish patina, with a ragged outlook, flaked over almost the entire surface of the item.

The outer surfaces of the axe display casting traces, small dots and traces of air bubbles that left tiny holes as the metal cooled down, especially on the edges of the socketing collar.

The analysis of the blade indicates that the item displays no traces of use, so that it is rather obvious that it ended up in the ground without being actually used.

Dimensions: length: 9.9 cm; diameter of socketing mouth: 2.0 × 2.3 cm, blade width: 4.5 cm, blade width, between the edges: 3.5 cm, weight: 344.98 gr.

### Discussion of the item

From a morphological-typological perspective, the general ponderous outlook of the item, the upper edge placed straight as compared to the lower edge that is obliquely placed, the edge of the blade widened in the lower end, the cylindrical socket, slightly oblong in the lower part, are argument supporting its inclusion in the larger series of Dumbrăvioara-type axes.

A. Vulpe<sup>5</sup> has defined this type of items and several typological variants (Dumbrăvioara-Kozarac-Komlod or more recently Dumbrăvioara/Saromberke), that have been discussed on various occasions in the context of discussions connected to the beginnings of bronze metallurgy and issues

<sup>5</sup> Vulpe 1970, 31 sq. Taf. 4.



related to the chronology of the Early Bronze Age<sup>6</sup>.

The shape of the blade section of the item found in Loranta is different from that of the basic typology and from the shape of the item from Dumbrăvioara. Still, almost all known items display typological variations.

The dimensions of the item, the straight upper edge and especially the curved shape of the blade are similar to those of an axe discovered in Sebeș<sup>7</sup> that is made of bronze, probably arsenical bronze. Regarding the latter item, I believe it should not be included among the Baniabic-type axes that Szevereny, V. has recently done. The shape of the axe and its typological-morphological characteristics made the item in Sebeș markedly different from the Baniabic type<sup>8</sup>.

Another item typologically close to the one discovered in Loranta was found in the settlement from Pianu de Jos „Cleje”. The shape of the blade of the axe discovered in Pianu nevertheless marks the difference between the two items, i.e. the latter is arched<sup>9</sup>.

An axe found in Sântimbru is closer in dimensions and especially in shape to the item from Loranta. The axe from Sântimbru was discovered in the proximity of a settlement the stratigraphy of which also includes a habitation layer from the Early Bronze Age<sup>10</sup>.

Poor archaeological data are available on this type of items, and clear contexts of discovery are only known for several items. For the area of Crișana the closest and best known/preserved such context is the one in Izbuca Topliței Cave<sup>11</sup>.

The funerary context of the discovery made in this case is well known in the archaeological literature. Further details regarding this significant archaeological



Fig. 2. The axe from Loranta, a- side view, b- the upper edge, c- the lower edge.



Fig. 3. The axe from Loranta (drawing).

<sup>6</sup> Besides the work mentioned above, one must mention several more recent studies that also discuss the issues related to this type: Denes, Szabó 1998; Dani 2013; Gogăltan 2015.

<sup>7</sup> The item from Sebeș measures 10.4 cm. in length, its blade measures 4.5 cm. in width, according to Luca 1995 24, cat. Nr.18, Fig.2 nr.18, the axe in Sebeș differs from the one in Loranta through the shape of its head and through the shape of the lower edge that is strongly curved.

<sup>8</sup> Szevereny 2013, at the same time the lowering of the dating of Baniabic-type axes development and use to the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC is not sufficiently supported by arguments from the perspective of the radiometric datings.

<sup>9</sup> Ciugudean 1996, 124, pl. 78, 11.

<sup>10</sup> Aldea, Ciugudean 1988, the items discovered in Pianu de Jos and Sântimbru are taken up again by Ciugudean, in Ciugudean 1996, 123, pl. 78, nr.11 și, pl. 87, nr.15., that the author attributes to the Șoimuș Group.

<sup>11</sup> Researches were resumed in this cave in 2018. For the older researches see: Molnar, Ghemiș 2003.

discovery are forthcoming<sup>12</sup>. Two Dumbrăvioara-type were found in this case, associate with pottery, gold items, and bone pendants.

From a cultural perspective, the discoveries made here have been included in the category of Roșia-type discoveries and were dated, in the absence of radiometric data, to the second phase of the Early Bronze. In fact, this discovery can be a key to understanding the first period of the Bronze Age.

Returning to the item from Loranta and the context in which it was found, namely the absence of a clear archaeological context, this is most likely an isolated find or a deposit/deposition consisting of a single item. The case is far from singular<sup>13</sup> during the period under discussion<sup>14</sup>.

This is not the place to discuss the different opinions expressed regarding the chronology, the existence or inexistence of certain cultural groups of cultures. I nevertheless believe, with the caution of analyzing in more detail the issues related to the development of the first stages of the Early Bronze, that items of this type were used and circulated by Roșia-type communities that evolved in this area.

For the time being, the item from Loranta is, besides the two axes of the Fajsz-type from Vadu Crișului<sup>15</sup>, one of the rare discoveries dated to the Early Bronze in this area. Their presence can be foremost connected to the use of the Crișul Repede Valley – a true prehistoric highway – as main route between Transylvania and the western plain areas.

The presented item is to be added to the 21 items that Dani Janos has repertoried in his valuable study published in 2013<sup>16</sup>. The dating of the period when these axes were used throughout the Early Bronze II is a certain fact, that shall be detailed when this discovery will be discussed again in a wider context of redefining the Roșia-type discoveries in the light of more recent archaeological materials<sup>17</sup>.

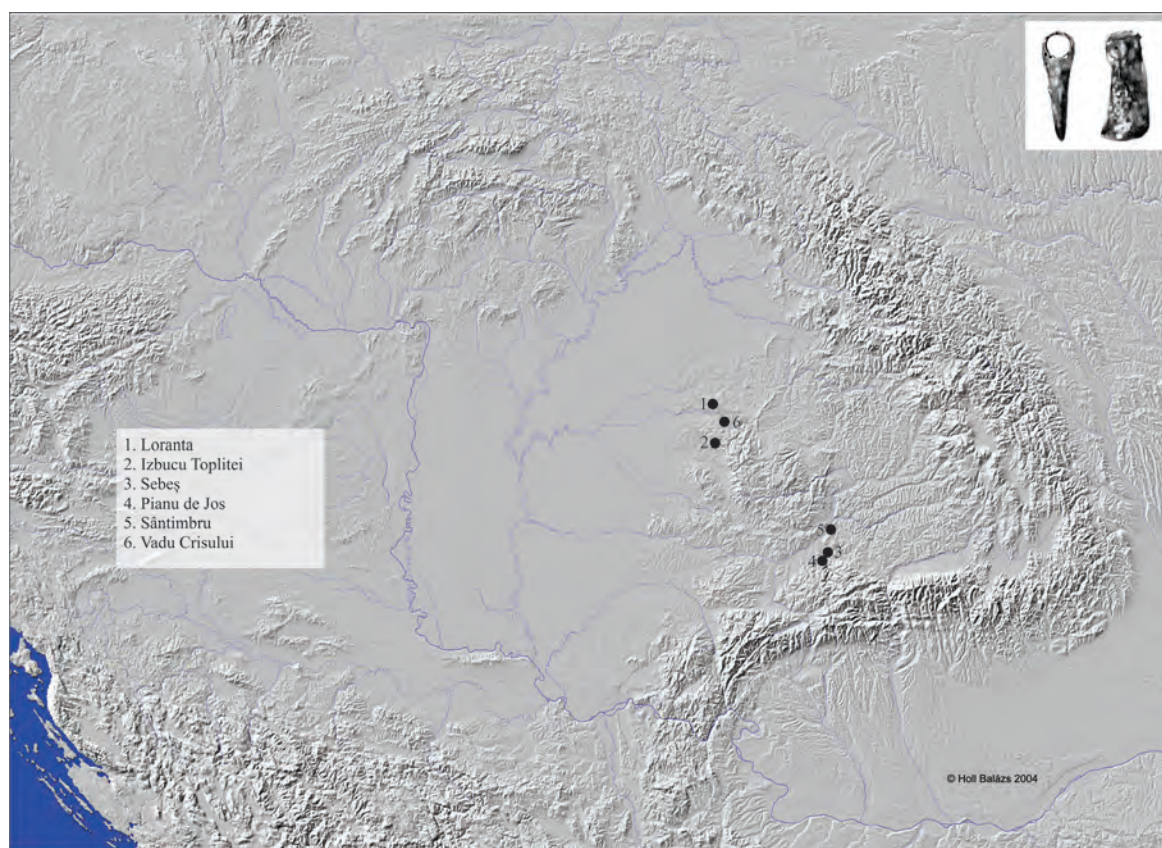


Fig. 4. Dumbrăvioara-type axe finds mentioned in the text.

<sup>12</sup> The resumed researches inside the cave have led to initial preliminary observations connected to the state of conservation and the integrity of this unique feature among the finds made in caves from Romania. The publication of these observations is forthcoming.

<sup>13</sup> In his analysis of the Baniabic type Hungarian archaeologist Szevereny, V. reveals the fact that ca. 25% of all discoveries were isolated finds and the other 75% were part of deposits, according to Szevereny 2013, 666, Fig. 4.

<sup>14</sup> C. Rîșcuța has recently published such a find, though belonging to the Fajsz type, see Rîșcuța 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Roska 1956, 43.

<sup>16</sup> Dani 2013.

<sup>17</sup> I envisage here the discoveries made in Meziad, Vacii, and Osoi caves, but also to other older discoveries.



The intention behind this brief note is to introduce the item to the scientific environment. I shall only mention the fact that no spectral analyses have been yet performed, but it obvious that the item is made of copper. The area of origin of this type of axes has also been left out of the present discussion, as Dani Janos has analyzed the issue in his above-mentioned study, stressing the southern origin of this type of items.

The discovery in Loranta is a peripheral spot on the map of Dumbrăvioara-type discoveries from the Carpathian Basin (Fig. 4). This also one of the reasons why I believe that its publication in a brief archaeological note is useful.

### Acknowledgements

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Vulpe 1970

A. Vulpe, *Die Axte und Beile in Rumanien*. Munchen 1970.

# 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.
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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.
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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.
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