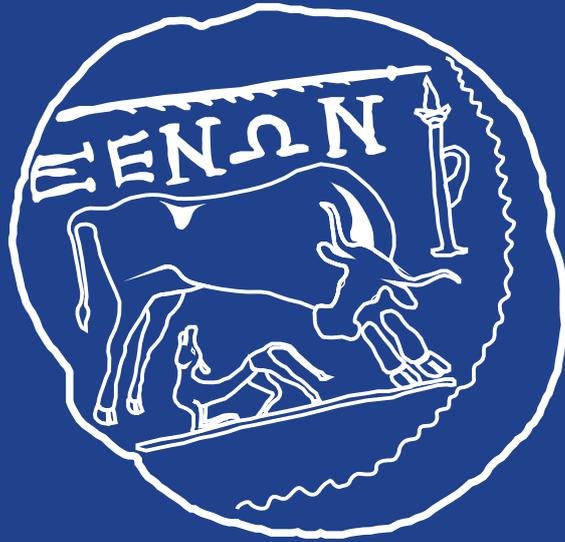


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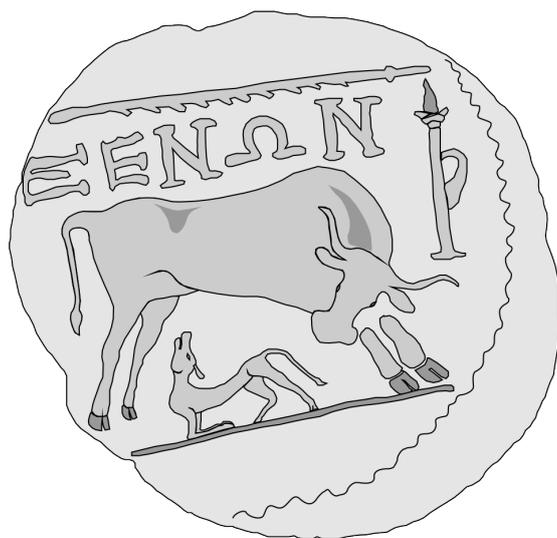
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This volume is dedicated to Florin Draşovean at 70 years

Acest volum este dedicat lui Florin Draşovean cu ocazia împlinirii a 70 de ani



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The Archaeological Excavations at Susani – Grămurada de la Jupani. Report on the 2025 Field Campaign

Sofia Berteza, Victor Bunoiu, Iulian Leonti, Vyara Stancheva, Andrei Georgescu, Răzvan-Ioan Pinca, Bogdan Calotă, Patrik Ostaș, Dragoș Diaconescu, Robin DiPasquale, Ionuț Marteniuc

Abstract: The field campaign of 2025 in the barrow *Grămurada de la Jupani* from Susani village (Traian Vuia rural municipality, Timiș county, Romania), coincides with the partial excavation of the research unit SIIB, situated in the central area of the northern sector of the mound. The main archaeological feature identified, labeled as C.83, was the continuation to the north of the feature C.11, excavated in 2018. The whole archaeological feature C.11/C.83 was, in fact, a sunken structure, rectangular in shape with rounded corners, partitioned in two rooms (room A to the north and room B to the south). Even if two looting pits (C.90 and C.92) have affected in a proportion of ca. 45% the inner part of C.83 (especially in the northern, center and south-eastern sector), the obtained results allow us to propose a double functionality for this "sunken house": room B dedicated to the deposition of the cremated remains of the deceased and room A, with a multilayer, clay decorated floor, for performing ritual activities connected more likely to the honoring of the people laid to rest in the same structure.

Key words: barrow; Late Bronze Age; early Hallstatt; Susani type of pottery; funerary structure; cremation.

Introduction

According to the plan laid out in last year's report¹, this year's research unit was positioned in the middle of the northern half of the mound, more exactly between the square lines 9-12 (in N-S direction) of the S1/2017-2018 trench (see Fig. 1).

The 2025 campaign took place between June 23rd and August 1st with a research team comprising of six archaeologists (one expert, three specialists and two junior archaeologists), one drawer, two MA graduates, one MA student and one BA student from the Archaeology Department of the Karl-Eberhardt University Tübingen (Germany), one BA graduate from West University of Timișoara and one BA student from West University of Timișoara. The goal of this year's campaign was to investigate exhaustively the middle sector from the northern half of the mound but, alas, things did not go as planned.

Description of the excavation

This year's trench – SIIB - had the width of 8 meters and a length of 16,5 meters. The grid followed the same rules as last year's trench so the east-west oriented squares were labelled with numbers from 9 to 12, and the southern-northern ones were labelled with letters from A to J. The first step was the mechanized excavation of four (each measuring ca. 50 cm in thickness) horizontal plans, that were hand-scraped and documented individually, stopping 1.5 m above layer 10. We were expecting that the southern part of this trench will be disturbed by the lootings documented and partially excavated in 2017-2018, and soon it became clear that the middle of the research unit was also disturbed by at least two post-construction features. Two features, namely C. 81 and C. 83 were identified on planum 4, thus the mechanized excavation was halted, and research of the two contexts continued manually. Even if these two features were visible after the hand-scraping of the second plan of mechanized

¹ Diaconescu *et al.* 2024a, 309.



Fig. 1. The position of the research unit SIIB on planum 3 status.



Fig. 2. View of the planum 3 surface, with the image of several contexts that disturbed the inner stratigraphy of the mound (red dotted line sure plunders pits, white dotted lines possible plunders pits, black dotted line the edges of feature C.83).

excavation (Fig. 2), based on the considerable effort that would have been required to remove the soil manually, the project leader (*i.e.* Dragoș Diaconescu), based on the available data/observations made on the northern profile of the western sector of S1/2017-2018, took the decision to carry out two more mechanized excavation plans.

In trench S1/2017-2018, two features were identified: feature C. 10, a wooden plank set diagonally in depth and oriented west-east, and feature C. 11, a pit containing cremated remains (bone fragments, charcoal, faience beads, bronze and gold items)². Both of them were considered part of an archaeological feature that, on the northern profile of S1/2018, was clearly "cutting" through the mound's stratigraphy; therefore, they were interpreted as a later re-use, also in funerary purposes, of the barrow³. This year's feature C. 83 has proven to be the remaining part of feature C. 11 and much more (Fig. 3).

This phase of mound reuse did not consist merely of digging a pit for depositing the cinerary remains; rather, it involved the construction of a complex sunken structure with two rooms, containing

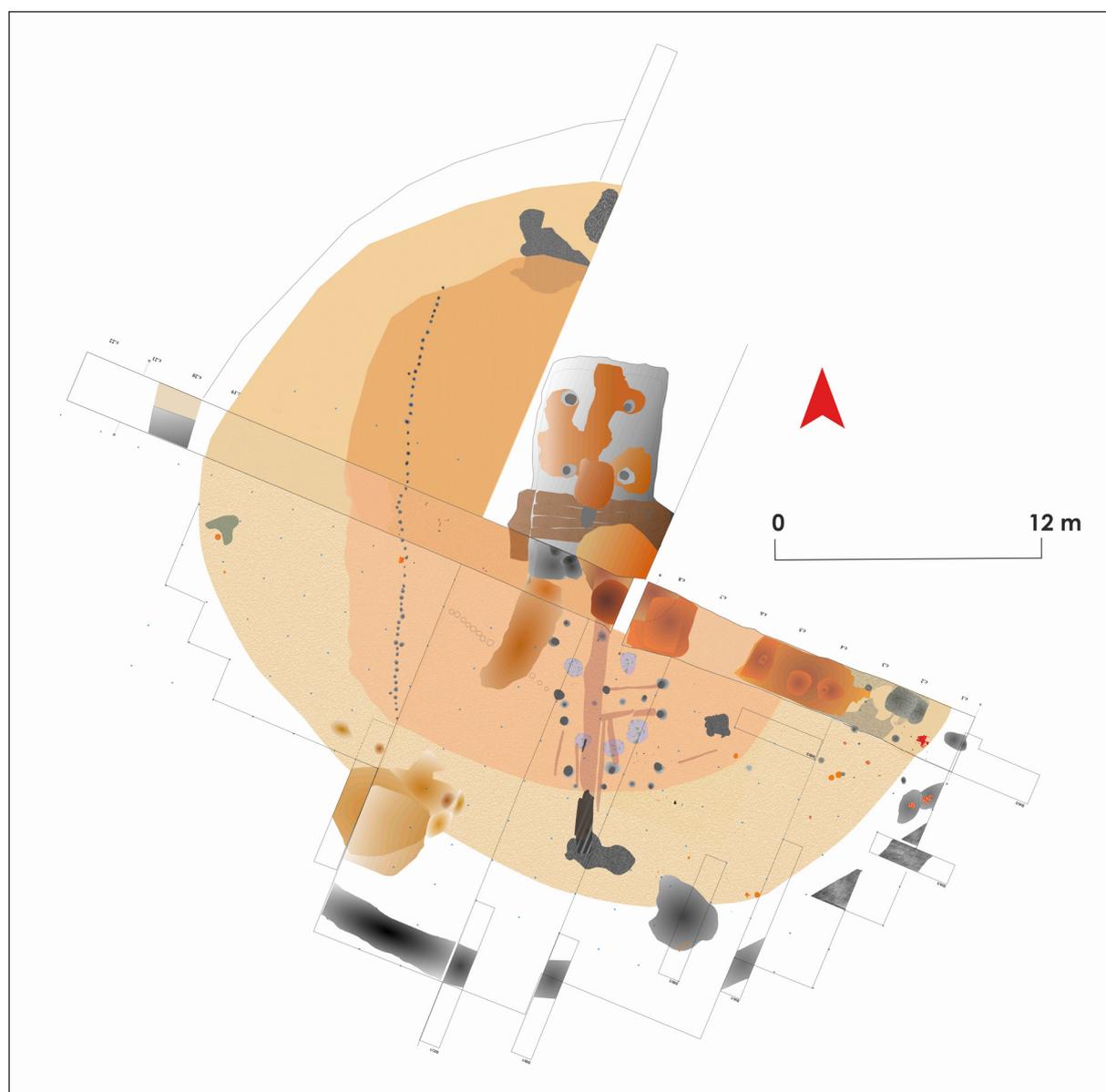


Fig. 3. The general ground plan of the barrow, showing the position of feature C.83, connected to features C.11 and C.10 from 2018 campaign.

² For further details, see Diaconescu *et al.* 2018, 28-29.

³ Diaconescu *et al.* 2018, 28, 29.

layers of ritual deposition of ceramic vessels, bronze dagger offerings, and elaborate decorated floors. The two rooms, designated as Room A (in the northern sector of the feature) and Room B (in the southern sector) (Fig. 4), are briefly described below. The feature had a rectangular shape with rounded corners, measuring 9.8 meters in length along the N-S axis. Room A had a length of 5.4 m on the E-W axis and 5.8 m on the N-S one, while room B had 4 m on N-S axis and 6.8 m on the E-W one⁴.

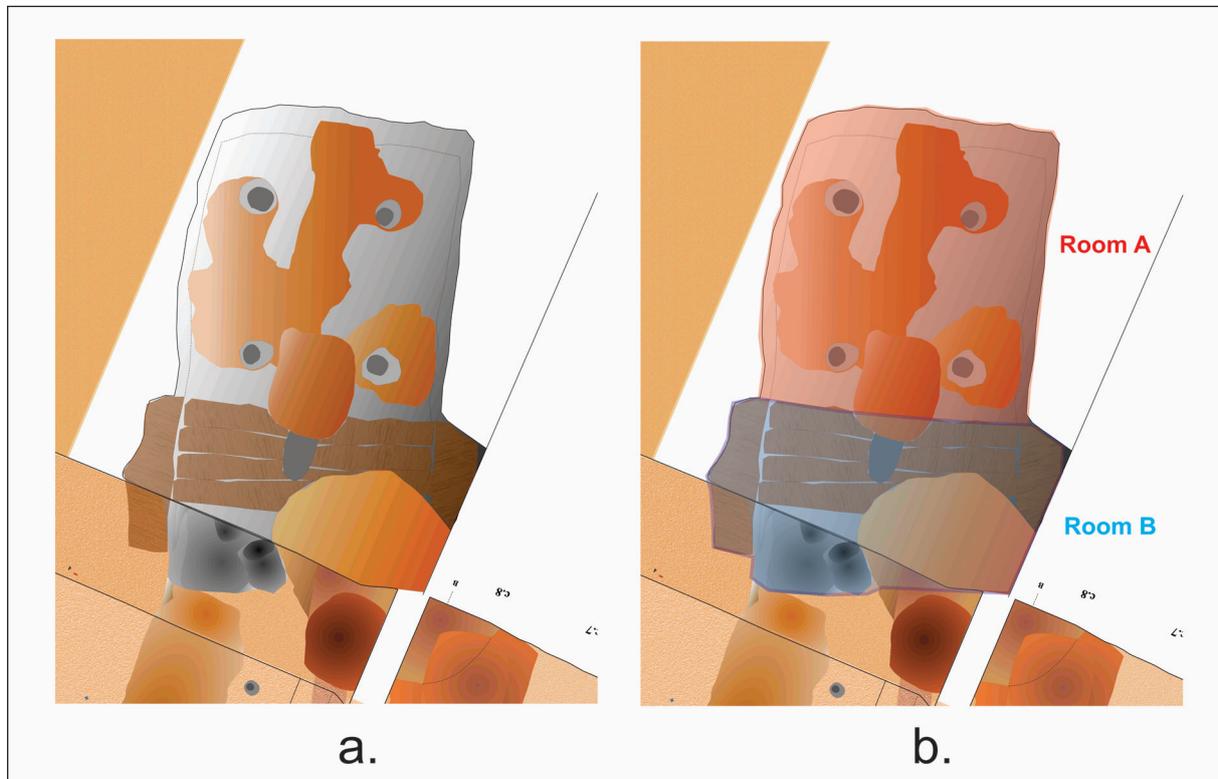


Fig. 4. Feature C.11/C.83 (a. the general aspect of the feature – the brick colored shapes represents the looters pits; b. the position and shape of the two identified chambers of the structure).

Room A presents itself as a space where no cremated remains were identified. One must take into consideration that this area was heavily plundered through the ages, thus the lack of human remains could be a consequence of these actions, or it could be connected to a different purpose of the room. The bottom of the chamber was covered with horizontal wooden planks placed on E-W direction that were then placed on top of a layer of decorated clay floors/friezes. In the south-western corner of the room, underneath the wooden planks were discovered a layer of white clay floor/frieze with embossed, interconnected rhomboids, each formed by a broken meandering line patterns, which also preserved traces of black paint, and that seemed to be attached to wooden planks; on top of the frieze were two bronze daggers: one oriented with the tip pointing north by east (NbE), the other east-north-east (ENE) (see Fig. 5). The southern dagger was covered by a thin wooden plank decorated in black and white, probably part of a sheath or box. Their state of preservation is poor but both seem to belong to the same type of riveted-hilt dagger. On the same layer, a few centimeters to the west, a shallow bowl decorated on the interior with garland and circular motifs was discovered. All of the above-described assemblages rested on a layer of organic material, composed mainly of animal bones in a poor state of preservation. Decorated clay floor/frieze was also found in the north-western corner of room A, but without any associated offerings. A fragment of this decorated floor, on a clay-carved pedestal of ca. 30 cm in thickness, was extracted and deposited in Lugoj museum for future exhibitions.

In the north-eastern corner of the room, we uncovered the largest and best-preserved area, consisting of three layers of black-white decorated clay flooring or frieze. The decoration featured

⁴ The estimation of the N-S axis length for the whole feature was performed together to the dimensions of the southern sector identified in 2018 and labeled at that time as C.11.

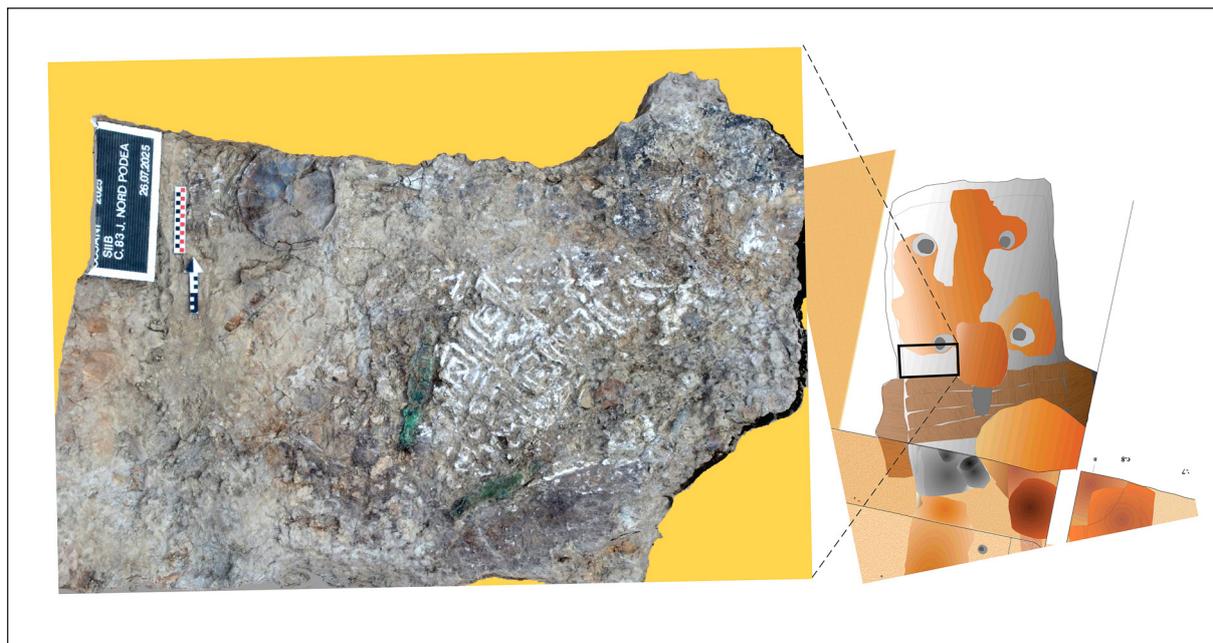


Fig. 5. The south-western patch of undisturbed floor of room A from feature C.11/C.83.

an ornamental motif of interconnected rhomboidal units, each formed by a broken meandering line enclosed within the rhombic frame, and was overlain by wooden planks (Fig. 6).

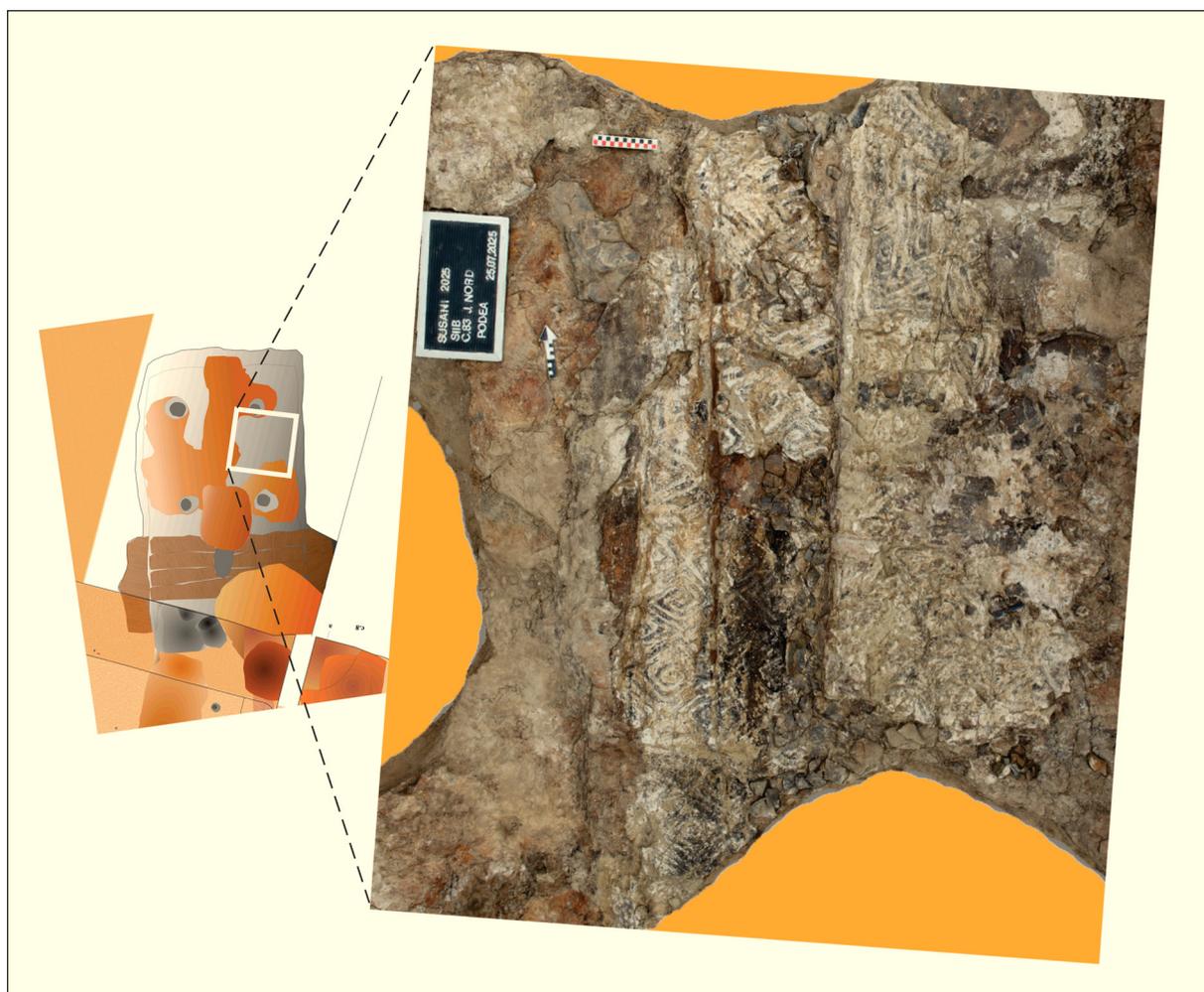


Fig. 6. The north-eastern patch of undisturbed floor of room A from feature C.11/C.83.

Each layer of floor/frieze was attached to a wooden plank underneath it, disposed on N-S direction, while layers 1 and 2 of decorated frieze (counted from newest towards oldest) also partly covered a layer of broken ceramic vessels, lavishly decorated with channels and channels-decorated horn-like knobs, specific for the so-called Susani type of pottery, attributed to Hallstatt A1 phase⁵. Four large postholes were discovered, one in each corner of the chamber, likely used to support a roof (fig. 4a).

Room B was a space that confined multiple layers of east-west oriented wooden planks, tilting towards the southern edge, that were serving as flooring (see Fig. 7). A decorated clay floor was preserved only as a small patch in the north-western corner of the room, in very poor condition. In the south-western quarter of Room B, scattered mammal bones were found on the tilted wooden floor, around and beneath a thin layer of cremated remains belonging to feature C. 11, excavated in the 2018 campaign⁶. At the center of Room B, a fifth posthole was identified, also likely intended to support the roof (see Figs. 4a, 7b).

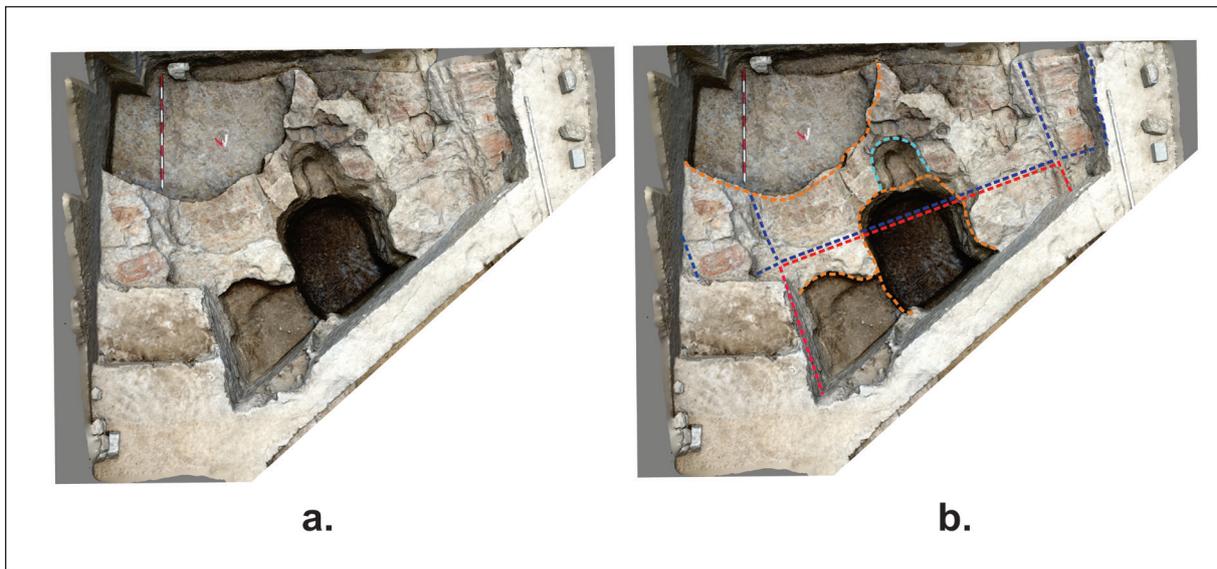


Fig. 7. The general aspect of the room B from feature C.83 (a. the status of the room in the photogrammetry from 17.072025; b. the status of the room B with several dotted lines marking some important aspects: red – the southern edge of room A, dark blue – the edges of room B, light blue – the edges of the posthole from the middle of the room B, orange – the edges of several looters' pits).

In room A, the walls of this structure are, for the first 20 cm (from bottom to top) covered in wood planks in the same way as the floor, then the eastern and western walls were protected by ca. 50 cm wide planks, placed upright on the edge. Between the wooden planks, a layer of compacted clay, arranged in chunks and apparently wrapped in organic material, was documented. Above that they were covered in a woven textile that was partially preserved. The whole feature was excavated by hand using mostly the spatula, with help from the spade sparingly, documented by drawing and photography and multiple samples were taken from all the mineralized remains and the decorated floors.

No other cremation pits were discovered in this ensemble, but this may also be because a big part of chamber B (its south-eastern part, more exactly) was destroyed by the looting pit C.92. In total this year were discovered 8 lootings – features C. 81, C. 84, C. 85, C. 87, C. 88, C. 90, C. 91, C. 92 - and one fox den – C. 86.

C. 81 is a medieval looting pit in which the upper body of a large herbivore was deposited. Feature C. 87 is a medieval looting that was overlapped by C. 81. Features C. 84, C. 85, C. 88, C. 91 and C. 92 are lootings situated at the southern limit of SIIB, that were also observed in the profile in 2018. The

⁵ See the pottery from groups 7 and 8 from Susani – *Grămurada lui Ticu* barrow (Stratan, Vulpe 1977, Taf. 6/93-99, Taf. 14, 16, 18). Mödinger 2013, fig. 4/89 (left drawing) shows, on its inner side, the best analogy for the ornament of the vessel found on the south-western patch of the floor from room A (see Fig. 5 from the present study). For the same vessel see also Stratan, Vulpe 1977, Taf. 14/126; Vulpe 1995, 82, Abb. 1/10; Mörtz 2011, 94, Abb. 1, A).

⁶ Diaconescu *et al* 2018, 28, are considering this layer as the upper ashy layer.

biggest destruction that affected feature C. 83 was determined by the excavation of feature C. 90. This looting pit affected the whole center of the funerary structure, cutting through the decorated floor and ceramic sherds bed and stopping in the northern part in the lowermost layer of the mound construction, layer 10a⁷, and in the southern part going more than one meter and a half deeper. Inside the pit we were able to recover a large number of ceramic sherds that were dislodged by the looters and then thrown back with the soil, as well as some medieval sherds discarded, which leads us to believe that the looting took place in medieval times.

Another goal of this year's campaign was to preserve as much of the archaeobotanical remains as possible for future analysis. To achieve this goal, the rest of the cremation remains in C11 were all taken and soaked in water for two days after which the organic material was floated using 3.2, 1.27 and 0.36 mm geological sieves and the remaining sediment was wet sieved using a 3 mm mesh sieve. All three fractions after sorting look to be containing charcoal, the middle and large fractions as well as the wet sieved material proved to be rich in charred seed remains as well as bone fragments, bronze and faience pieces.

As for the mineralized wood that was found, selective sampling was applied in combination with the pre-set grid. For every identifiable feature containing mineralized wood a sample of 100-200 ml was taken pro grid square (where the features were located in more than one square). In some cases for better preserved material or features of high interest a higher quality of sampling material was taken.

Conclusions

As it was already stated above features C.11 from 2018 and C.83 from 2025 are parts of the same structure. In our documentation it will be referred as feature C.11/C.83. Because the south-eastern sector of the room B was completely destroyed by the looting pit C.92 is impossible to know if the pit filled with cremated remains and the thin layer of cremated remains from above, parts of the C.11/2018, were the only funerary depositions from the whole structure (more exactly room B). The only good thing is that at least this feature (C.11) was able to be excavated, showing that the funerary cremated remains were deposited on the southern edge of the whole structure. A relative chronological position for C.11 was already proposed⁸ and also another one regarding its absolute chronological status⁹, these proposals being valid also for the entire feature C.11/C.83.

Even though we weren't able to reach the original mound's construction layers this campaign, the new information we have regarding the impressive structure that reuses the barrow improves the knowledge we have about funerary practices during the 13th century BC in eastern Banat area. In this year's campaign we didn't finish excavating C. 83, but based on the observations we gathered it can be said that this is a meticulously built place for depositing the dead people, but also for honouring them through multiple ritual practices. Next year's excavation campaign aims to complete the documentation of C.83 and to investigate the areas of the trench that still have the mound's undisturbed stratigraphy.

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⁷ For more details about this layer, see Diaconescu *et al.* 2024b, 390. See also Diaconescu *et al.* 2024a, 313.

⁸ Diaconescu *et al.* 2018, 28-29. At that time, the Hallstatt A₁-A₂ range was proposed, now it is possible to narrow it to the so-called Hallstatt A₁ stage. See also Ciugudean 2010, fig. 4 (the range proposed for Susani group is equivalent to Hallstatt A1); Ciugudean 2012, fig. 14, where the range for Susani and Band-Cugir groups is contemporary to Hallstatt A1; Ciugudean *et al.* 2019, 109, fig. 13 (the range proposed for Susani group is late Bronze D – Hallstatt A1).

⁹ Diaconescu *et al.* 2024b, 395 proposed the absolute chronological time span of ca. 1280-1210 calBC.

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