

# EPHEMERIS NAPOCENSIS

XXXI  
2021



EDITURA ACADEMIEI ROMÂNE

# EPHEMERIS NAPOCENSIS

XXXI

2021

**ROMANIAN ACADEMY**  
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## ANALYSIS OF A DOG SKELETON DEPOSITED IN A SCYTHIAN TOMB-91/2016 FROM SÂNCRAI (ALBA COUNTY)\*

Georgeta El Susi<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *The article presents the results of the analysis of a dog skeleton found over a human skeleton, in the Scythian tomb, 91/2016 in Sâncrai, Alba county. The dog was completely deposited on its right side, over the human corpse. Over time, the animal bones deteriorated, becoming crumbly, so that few complete pieces could be recovered. According to measurements, the animal is 43.5 cm tall with thin limbs. The proximal segment of the legs provided a slightly higher waist (45.4 cm) than the distal one, (39.8 cm). The animal is slightly smaller compared to those from the Scythian world, with sizes over 50 cm. During the re-inhumation process, the human bones were mixed with those of the meat offering which was laid into the pit during the initial funerals. The meat offering consisted of a part from the left limb of a cattle, slaughtered towards 2 years.*

**Keywords:** *Sâncrai, Scythian tomb, dog bones, ritual deposition, offerings*

The village of Sâncrai is located on the left side of the Mureş River, on the outskirts of Aiud and about 30 km north of Alba Iulia city (Fig. 1). Rescue excavations performed in the site no. 9, lot 2 of the Sebeş-Turda highway, on the left high terrace of the Mureş river, at the periphery of Sâncrai, brought to light two necropolises from the Iron Age<sup>2</sup>. One of the cemeteries belongs to the *Transylvanian Scythian horizon*, dated between the 7<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. Albeit the cemetery has not been fully investigated, 95 funeral contexts were found, of which 71 were inhumation graves, 11 were cremations, two bi-ritual, ten were cenotaphs, and one pit contained a horse's skeleton<sup>3</sup>.

A special attention was paid to tomb 91/2016 which individualizes from the others by its inventory and the aroused discussions. It contained a human skeleton and a dog skeleton put on its right side, over the human corpse (Fig. 2). The bones of a female were spread on the bottom of the pit, her skull was found in the middle of the southern side of the complex. The deceased was laid into the pit in a position which cannot be surely restored. At a certain moment, either during re-inhumation or sometime later, the corpse of a dog was placed above the human skeleton<sup>4</sup>. A perforated talus of an ovicaprid was found among the dog bones<sup>5</sup>.

Over time, the animal bones deteriorated, becoming crumbly, so not many complete pieces could be recuperated. The skull is destroyed, only the upper teeth and the right jaw bone

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<sup>2</sup> RUSTOIU *et al* 2017, 211.

<sup>3</sup> RUSTOIU 2019, 54.

<sup>4</sup> Detailed information about the tomb and related issues, RUSTOIU 2019, 57–59.

<sup>5</sup> RUSTOIU 2019, fig. 8, 57.

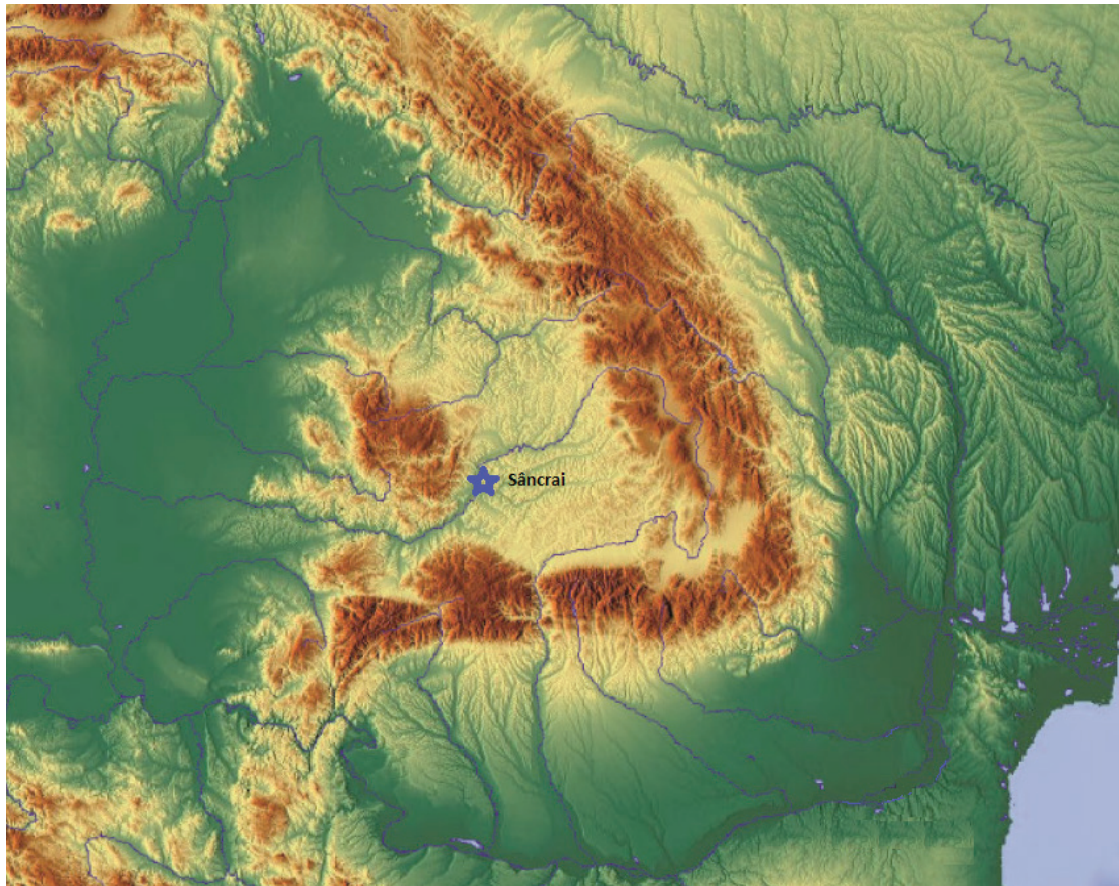


Fig. 1: Location of Sâncrai necropolis.

preserved. The left shoulder blade is missing from the appendicular skeleton, many vertebrae from the spine have been damaged (Fig. 3). No signs of disarticulation or cutting marks were observed on preserved bones. According to measurements dentition is small; exemplifying, a Dahr length of 130 was calculated on the lower teeth row (P1-M3=60 mm), suggesting a *palustris* specimen. The animal died (was killed?) over 18–24 months old, all the bones being completely fused<sup>6</sup>. Dog' teeth not being very worn, probably the individual no longer survived at an advanced age. The proximal segment of the limbs (humerus, radius) provided a slightly higher waist (45.4 cm) than the distal one (radius, 39.8 cm). In total a stature of 43.5 cm was estimated. The slenderness index of the legs varies from 5.7 to 6.5, suggesting a gracile specimen. Dog at Sâncrai could be rated to be one of the smallest Scythian example, checking to literature accessible to us. So far, medium-sized animals have been found in Scythian sites. Exemplifying, the bones of an individual of 50.87 cm tall were found in a well at Békéscsaba<sup>7</sup>, bones of an animal of 53.7 cm at Salgótarján<sup>8</sup>, 55.4 cm at Ludányhalászi<sup>9</sup> and 56,6 at Hernádvécse – site 3<sup>10</sup>. As well, comparing to dogs from the Dacian settlements, it was a dwarf specimen. The individual at Seuşa stood 60.2 cm tall<sup>11</sup>; medium and large-sized specimens (52–58 cm) were also

<sup>6</sup> SILVER 1963, 252–253.

<sup>7</sup> BÓKA/TUGYA 2007, 155.

<sup>8</sup> BARTOSIEWICZ, GÁL 2010, 118

<sup>9</sup> BARTOSIEWICZ, GÁL 2010, 118

<sup>10</sup> DARÓCZI-SZABÓ 2008, 108.

<sup>11</sup> EL SUSI 2004, 277.



Fig. 2: Tomb 91/2016 from Sâncrai; foto G. Balteș.

discovered at Șimleu – Cetate<sup>12</sup>, Racoș – Tipia Ormenișului<sup>13</sup>. Obviously, the large specimens had a utilitarian purpose, guarding herds, houses, hunting; instead, the specimen from Sâncrai could be a pet, not excluding its domestic use<sup>14</sup>.

Information is rare about dogs deposited in Scythian tombs, and even less (if not missing) about dogs superimposing human deaths; in the first case of a woman's grave (warrior) in kurgan no. 5 from the Mamay – Gora cemetery (north-Pontic area), with a dog found at the entrance to the mortuary room<sup>15</sup>. For the second case we do not know examples.

During the re-inhumation process, the human bones from the tomb 91/2016 mixed with those of the meat offering which were laid into the pit during the initial funerals<sup>16</sup>. The meat offering consists of a part cut up from the left leg of a bovine, the subsequent bones being identified: tibia, astragalus, calcaneus, and acetabulum (Fig. 4). Note that, the bones of the acetabulum were fused somewhat recently, calcaneus was not fused and tibia begins distal fusion. All those elements suggest an individual slaughtered towards 24 months, maybe a little earlier<sup>17</sup>. The length of tibia with both ends (found among bones) is 255 mm, meaning about 88 cm in stature. As for the withers' heights of cattle at Sâncrai<sup>18</sup>, a range size of 96.25–124.5 cm (M=110.13 cm; n=8) was assessed<sup>19</sup>. The height of the cows vary between 96.25–110.7 cm

<sup>12</sup> EL SUSI 2000, 202.

<sup>13</sup> EL SUSI 2006, 273.

<sup>14</sup> RUSTOIU 2019, 57–58.

<sup>15</sup> FIALKO 2017, 38.

<sup>16</sup> RUSTOIU 2019, 57.

<sup>17</sup> UDRESCU *at al.* 1999, tab. 5, 60.

<sup>18</sup> It is about the bone remains of the necropolis.

<sup>19</sup> EL SUSI 2018, 47.

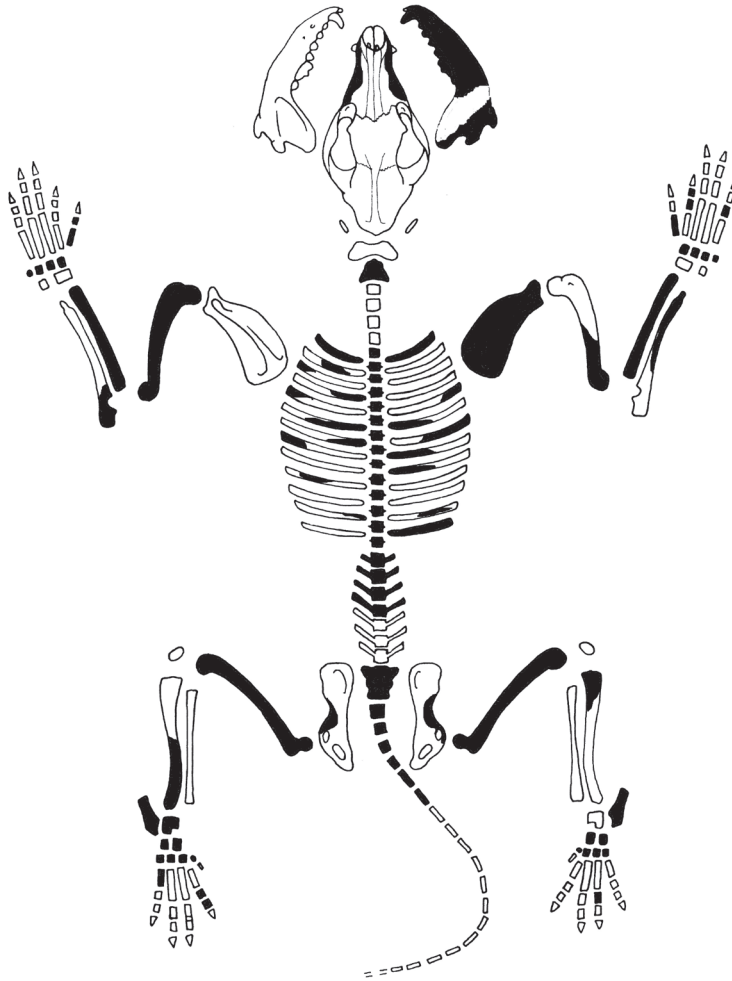


Fig. 3: Anatomical distribution of dog bones.

( $M=104.65$  cm) and that of the bulls between 123–124.5 cm. A pronounced sexual dimorphism was observed, the difference between males and females being about 10 cm at the withers. Usually, cattle were not large, probably is a characteristic of the Scythian type. For example, a variation of 84–110 cm ( $M=98.3$  cm) established at Salgótarján (Hungary)<sup>20</sup>; as well, values of 107 and 113/114 cm (Tălkın 1960) were estimated at Nagytarcsa-Urasági-dűlő<sup>21</sup>. More likely, cattle exploited in the Scythian features from Pannonia and Transylvania were small and slender.

So far, the study of the animal offerings of Scythian necropolises from Transylvania has revealed the use of bovine and small ruminants, with a single case of a hare at Sâncrai. Related to the meat offering from M. 91/2016, it has the same features as the other Scythian graves from Sâncrai: **1.** The prevalent use of bovines for deposition, found in a proportion of 58.06% in the other graves of the necropolis. **2.** The distribution of bony elements shows a large share of the tibia (25.4%), close frequencies having the pelvis (23.8%), talus (22.2%) and calcaneus (20.6%); the elements of the autopodium (astragalus, calcaneus, centrotarsal) are poorly represented. **3.** Frequently, the chosen parts for deposition originate in the left limb of the specimen. **4.** The bones of the bovines come from individuals, of that 25% were juveniles, 12.5%

<sup>20</sup> BARTOSIEWICZ, GÁL 2010, 119, tab. 9.3.

<sup>21</sup> TUGYA 2017, 284.

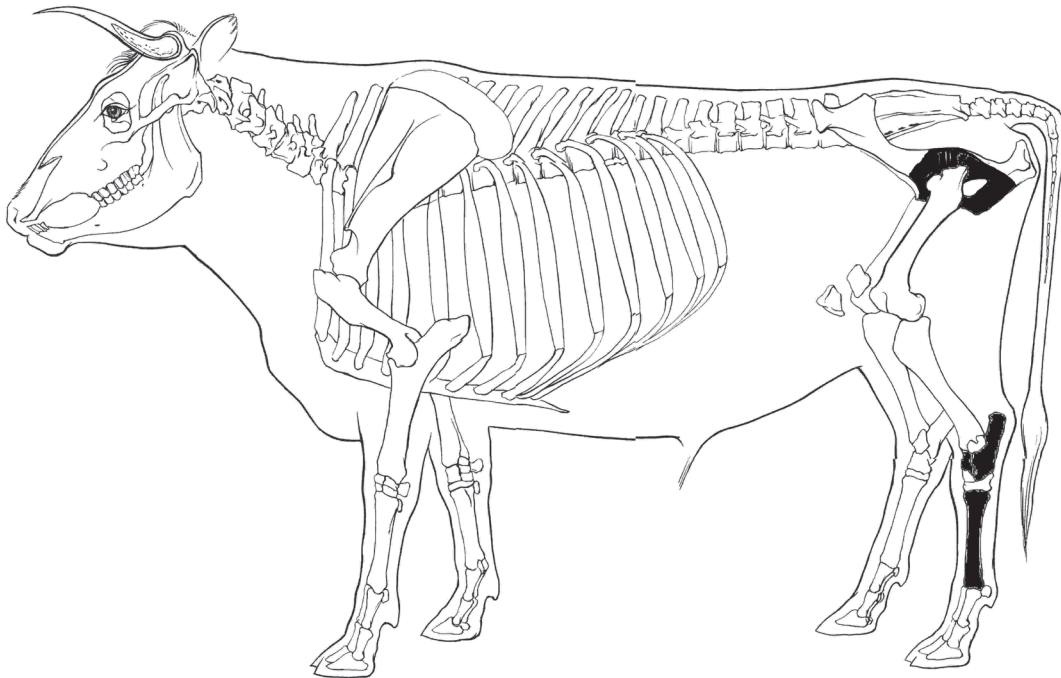


Fig. 4: Anatomical distribution of offering cattle bones.

subadults and 62.5% adults. However, the maximum age for slaughtering does not exceed five years. At Sâncrai, based on beef prevalence as meat offering, one could assume a flourished economy based on cattle breeding, supported by favorable environments.

By now, horse deposits in Scythian tombs are numerous and well documented, e.g. the tombs from Sâncrai, Rădești, Căpleni (Transilvania)<sup>22</sup>, the classic Szentes-Vecsezug<sup>23</sup> example; even a cattle deposition is mentioned at Orosháza-Gyopáros<sup>24</sup>, but about the dog deposits, data are scanty. Maybe new findings will likely shed light on this topic.

Tab. 1. Measurements of the dog bones, cf. A. Von den Driesch 1976.

Maxilla	LP4	GBP4	Mandibula	P1-M3	M1-M3	M1
L+R	12,5	9	Right	60	25	15,5

Humerus	Gl	SD	BT	Bd	Dd	I. diaf.	Height
Left	141	8,3	16,5	21,5	16	5,88	45,71
Right			16,5	21,5	16		

Radius	Gl	Bp	Dp	SD	Bd	Dd	I. diaf.	Height
Left	131,2	11	7,5	8,5	14,5	7,5	6,48	<b>39,8</b>
Right		11	7,5					

Ulna	DPA	SDO	Scapula	SLC	GLP	LG
Left	14,2	12	R	18	18,1	16,5

<sup>22</sup> G. El Susi, personal data.

<sup>23</sup> BÖKÖNYI 1952, 174–177.

<sup>24</sup> KOZUBOVÁ 2019, 243.

Femur	Gl	Bp	SD	Bd	I. diaf.	Height
Left		26,5		22,5		
Right	147,5	28	8,5	22,3	5,76	45,02

Talus	GL	Calcaneus	GL	Gb	Axis-BFcr
Left	19,5	Left; Right	33,5	11,2	20

Tibia	Bp	Bd	Dd	Pelvis	LA
Left		16	11	Left	17,5
Right	24			Right	17,5

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Acta Ethnographica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae (Budapesta)	= Acta Ethnogr Acad Scien Hungaricae
Analele Academiei Române. Memoriile secțiunii istorice	= An. Acad. Române. Mem. Sec. Istor.
Analele Banatului (Timișoara)	= An. Banatului
Analele Dobrogei (Constanța)	= An. Dobrogei
Muzeulul Județean Vaslui (Vaslui)	= Acta Moldaviae Meridionalis
Muzeul "Vasile Pârvan" (Bârlad)	= Acta Musei Tutovensis
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Analele Universității Iași	= An. Univ. Iași
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Annales: économies, sociétés, civilisations (Paris)	= Ann. Écon. Soc. Civil.
Arheologia Moldovei, Institutul de Arheologie (Iași)	= ArhMold
Arkheologiya, Natsional'na akademiya nauk Ukraini. Institut Arkheologii (Kyiv)	= Arkheologiya
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Annali di scienze religiose, Milano	= Annali di scienze religiose
Anuarul Institutului pentru Studii Politice, de Apărare și Istorie Militară	= Anu. Instit. Stud. Pol. Apăr. și Istor. Milit.
Archaeologisch-epigraphische Mitteilungen aus Österreich (-Ungarn), Wien	= AEM
Archiv des Vereines für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde, Hermannstadt – Kronstadt (Sibiu – Brașov)	= AVSL
Archaeologia Baltica Polonia = Peregrinatio Gotica (Łódź)	= Arh Baltica
Arheologia Medievală (Iași)	= Arh. Medievală
Antigüedad, religiones y sociedades, Huelva	= ARYS
Az alsóféhérmegyei történelmi régészeti és természettudomány évkönyve (Alba Iulia)	= AlsóTermÉvkönyve
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A Herman Ottó Múzeum Évkönyve (Miskolc)	= HOMÉ
Hrvatski arheološki godišnjak (Zagreb)	= Hrv. Arh. God.
Historica. Historia Antigua (Salamanca)	= Stud. Hist. Hist. Antigua
Il Mar Nero Annali di archeologia e storia (Roma)	= Il Mar Nero
Izvestija Russkogo Arheologičeskogo Instituta v Konstantinopole	= Izv. Ross. Arch. Inst. Konstantinopole
Jahreshefte des Österreichischen Archäologischen Instituts in Wien	= ÖJh
Journal of Ancient History and Archaeology,	
Institute of Archaeology and History of Art Cluj-Napoca	= JAHA
Jósa András Múzeum Évkönyve (Nyíregyháza)	= JAMÉ
Journal of Indo-European Studies (Washington DC)	= JIES
Journal of the Society for Ancient Numismatists	= Journal Soc. Ancient Numism.
Könyv és könyvtár, Budapest	= Könyv és könyvtár
Labeo Rassegna di Diritto Romano (Napoli)	= Labeo
Lateinisch-Deutsch Schulwörterbuch (Leipzig 1891)	= Lateinisch-Deutsch 1891
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Litua. Studii și comunicări. Muzeul Județean Gorj, Târgu Jiu	= Litua
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Materialy po arkheologii, istorii i etnografii Tavrii.	= MAIET
Krymskoe otdelenie Instituta vostokovedeniya NAN Ukrainy (Simferopol')	
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Muzeul Național de Istorie a României (București)	= Muzeul Național
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O Arqueólogo Português, Lisboa	= Arque. Português
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Patrimonium Apulense, Alba Iulia	= Patrim. Apulense
Rossijskaya Arkheologiya. Institut arkheologii Rossijskoj akademii nauk (Moskva).	= RA
Rad Muzeja Vojvodine (Novi Sad)	= Rad Muz. Voj.
RepArAb Repertoriul arheologic al județului Alba, Alba Iulia, 1995 [= Bibliotheca Musei Apulensis, II]	= RepArAb
Res Antiquae (Bruxelles)	= Res Antiquae
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Articles in journals:

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R. O. FINK, *Hunt's pridianum: British Museum Papyrus 2851*, *Journal of Roman Studies* 48, 1958, 102–116.

For two or more authors:

VÁGÓ/BÓNA 1976

E. B. VÁGÓ/I. BÓNA, *Die Gräberfelder von Intercisa* (Budapest 1976).

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DVORSKI 1996, 217–220

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