REMEMBERING THE ANCESTORS. A GRAVE-MARKER FROM THE "SCHYTHIAN" CEMETERY AT SÂNCRAI (ALBA COUNTY)*

Aurel Rustoiu[1], **Andreea Drăgan**[2]

***Abstract**: Mobility, migration, and conquest of endless horizons ... they have all been, since the beginning, essential traits of human existence. That is why the way different identity constructs were transformed or emerged as a consequence of local, regional or long-distance human mobility and migration has been an important research topic for social sciences. The purpose of this article is to see how the memory of the ancestors was reinterpreted and used in the process of reshaping collective identities triggered by the "Celtic" colonisation of Transylvania in the 4th century BC, and to determine the role it played in the interaction with the indigenous "Scythian" populations. Within this framework, the paper also includes a case study about the concrete ways of communicating the memory of the ancestors from one generation to another. In Transylvania, the "Scythian" horizon is represented by cemeteries with flat inhumation burials, and rarely cremations, which were recently dated to the 8th–5th / 4th centuries BC. The evolution of these communities was interrupted after the middle of the 4th century BC by the arrival of "Celtic" groups coming from the west. Their arrival determined a social reconfiguration of many local communities, as well as the appearance of new communities which displayed various degrees of cultural hybridisation. In several cases from the same region, the newcomers reused the funerary grounds which previously belonged to the local communities. Earlier burial grounds more likely became places of memory integrated into the local collective identity as symbolic references to a mythical past, providing a physical connection with the ancestors. Their later reuse reflects the cohabitation of the newcomers with the locals, as well as the will of the former to incorporate identity markers which were relevant in the local environment into the identity constructs of the newly established communities as a means of legitimisation. Grave no. 9/2020 from Sâncrai is one example of the manner in which the memory of the ancestors was passed down over time across generations.*

***Keywords**: "Celts", "Scythians", archaeology of remembrance, Transylvania, cemeteries, funerary rituals, archaeological landscapes*

Introduction

Mobility, migration, and conquest of endless horizons ... they have all been, since the beginning, essential traits of human existence. That is why the way different identity constructs were transformed or emerged as a consequence of local, regional or long-distance human mobility and migration has been an important research topic for social sciences. A number of key studies have argued that identity is a dynamic social construct, which is continually shaped by a wide variety of social-political, cultural, economic, demographic and environmental

* This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P4-ID-PCE–2020-0566, within PNCDI III.

[1] Academia Română, filiala Cluj-Napoca. Institutul de Arheologie și Istoria Artei. Str. M. Kogălniceanu 12–14, 400084 Cluj-Napoca, Romania. E-mail: aurelrustoiu@yahoo.com

[2] Academia Română, filiala Cluj-Napoca. Institutul de Arheologie și Istoria Artei. Str. M. Kogălniceanu 12–14, 400084 Cluj-Napoca, Romania. E-mail: andreea.dragan@yahoo.com

contexts, practices and interactions[3]. Accordingly, the way identity is constructed, expressed and perceived is also a form of social communication within and between different communities and social groups. These constructs are particularly challenged at times of social stress, for example, when indigenous social structures and practices are threatened in one way or another by incoming people. There are cases when the indigenous communities are receptive to the new social structures and norms brought by the newcomers and are integrated relatively easily. In other cases the "colonised" manifested different degrees of resistance to the social organisation enforced by the "colonists". In all cases, however, the interaction between the parties involved in the shaping of new communities leads to a mixed, hybrid material culture, in which both the locals and the newcomers are active agents in the negotiation and forming of new community identities[4].

At the foundation of these constructs is the invention of common traditions, with the ideological purpose of harmonising the sensibilities and expectations of both the locals and the newcomers. N. Roymans observed that the identity of ethnic groups [*or communities – our addition*] is, at a general level, built on the notion of a shared past, from which derives the importance of origin myths in different communities as an essential medium for maintaining group cohesion and justifying ownership over land (these claims are often explained by the way ancestors obtained a territory and transmitted it to descendants)[5]. From this perspective, the way the memory of the ancestors is maintained, reinterpreted and integrated into the new community mythologies plays a crucial role. Building social memory can involve direct connections with the ancestors, but at other times these ancestors are placed in a vague and undefined mythological past, often through the reinterpretation of monuments and ritual landscapes[6]. On this subject, funerary finds are a particularly relevant archaeological source.

The purpose of this article is to see how the memory of the ancestors was reinterpreted and used in the process of reshaping collective identities triggered by the "Celtic" colonisation of Transylvania in the 4th century BC, and to determine the role it played in the interaction with the local "Scythian" populations. Within this framework, the paper also includes a case study about the concrete ways of communicating the memory of the ancestors from one generation to another.

"Scythians" and "Celts" in Transylvania. Burial grounds as places of collective memory

In Transylvania, the "Scythian" horizon (known as either the Agathyrsi or the Cimbrud group) is represented by cemeteries with flat inhumation burials, and rarely cremations, which were previously dated to the 7th–6th centuries BC[7] (Fig. 1). This proposed dating was recently challenged by a series of radiocarbon analyses from the cemetery at Sâncrai on the middle Mureș valley (Alba County). Several analysed samples indicate that the earliest funerary contexts belong to the first half of the 8th century BC. The most recent graves are dated to the end of the 5th century/beginning of the 4th century BC[8]. The connections with populations from the northern Pontic silvo-steppe are attested by the funerary rites and rituals, as well as by certain

[3] E.g. ROYMANS 2004; DÍAZ-ANDREU 2005; INSOLL 2007; GRUEN 2011; FERNÁNDEZ-GÖTZ 2014.

[4] GIVEN 2004; GOSDEN 2004.

[5] ROYMANS 2004, 1–2.

[6] VAN DYKE/ALCOCK 2003, 3. See also WILLIAMS 2003; JONES 2007.

[7] VASILIEV 1980; VULPE 1984.

[8] The analyses were performed by the HEKAL Laboratory of Debrecen, Hungary (unpublished). This chronology matches the general trend of the last two decades towards an earlier presence of "Scythian" cultural aspects in the area north of the Black Sea, Northern Caucasus and Central Asia, following new radiocarbon analyses

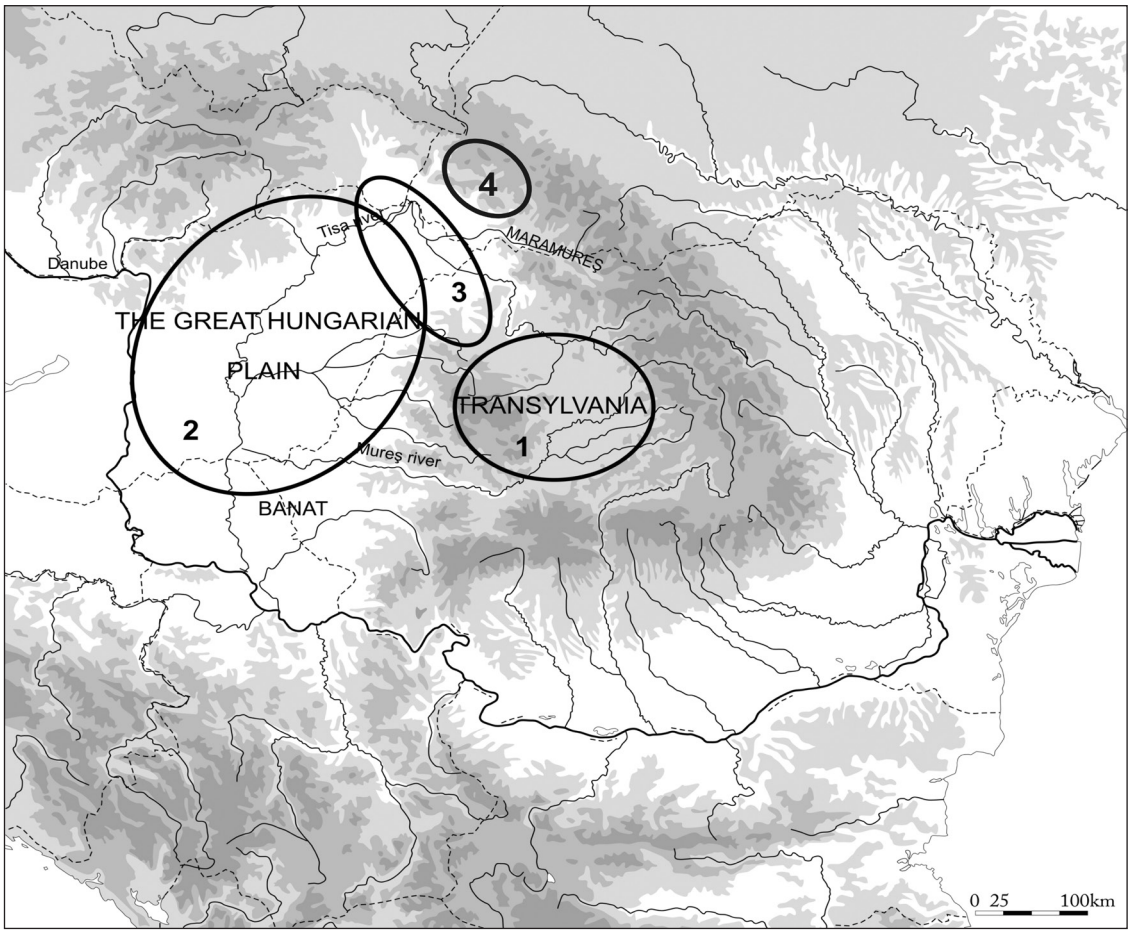

Fig. 1. Map of the main cultural groups of the end of the Early Iron Age in the eastern Carpathian Basin: Ciumbrud or "Agathyrsi" group (1), Vekerzug culture (2), Sanislău-Nir group (3) and Kushtanovica group (4) (after RUSTOIU/EGRI 2020).

grave-goods. In general, the cemeteries are small, some consisting of only a few graves and others of not more than a couple dozens. This has been interpreted as a result of the pastoralist–nomadic lifestyle of these communities[9].

From the large cemetery recently identified at Sâncrai, on the middle Mureş valley, in south-western Transylvania, more than 100 graves have already been unearthed[10]. The size of the Sâncrai cemetery could indicate that some of these communities went through a process of sedentarisation, leading to some changes in their lifestyle. This hypothesis is also supported by a comparative analysis of the diet of individuals buried in cemeteries from eastern Transylvania and that of the deceased from Sâncrai. The analysis of dental tartar sampled from a series of skeletons coming from these two micro-zones indicates that in eastern Transylvania the diet was largely based on meat and dairy, which is specific to the pastoralist populations, while the community from Sâncrai preponderantly consumed cereal-based foods. Nevertheless, these investigations only started recently, and more samples from both micro-zones are waiting to be analysed[11].

and the re-evaluation of historical and archaeological data: see ALEKSEEV ET AL. 2001; ALEKSEEV ET AL. 2002; IVANTCHIK 2005; IVANTCHIK 2010; CUNLIFFE 2019, 103–106.

[9] VASILIEV 1980.

[10] RUSTOIU 2019, 54–70; RUSTOIU ET AL. 2017; RUSTOIU ET AL. 2021; RUSTOIU ET AL. 2022 etc.

[11] Analyses done by Szilárd Sándor Gál.

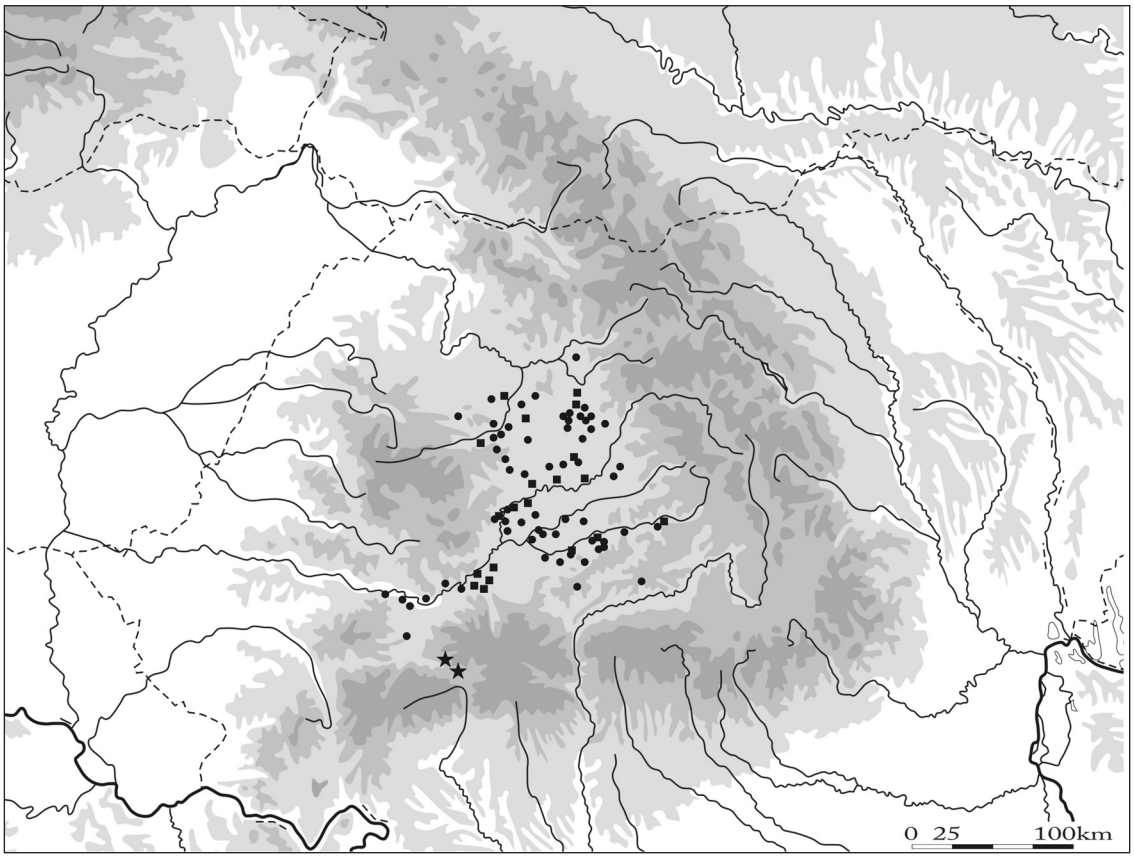

Fig. 2. The distribution of settlements (black squares), funerary discoveries (black dots), and ritual depositions (stars) in Transylvania during LT B1/B2-C1 (map A. Rustoiu after BERECKI 2015).

Accordingly, the archaeological layout of the eastern Carpathian Basin is characterised by a wider cultural diversity during this period, the common point being the existence of a range of connections with the steppe and silvo-steppe areas from the north-western Black Sea and with the Greek Pontic cities (Fig. 1). However, these eastern cultural elements were filtered and adapted to the needs of each of the aforementioned groups[12]. The evolution of these communities was interrupted after the middle of the 4th century BC by the arrival of "Celtic" groups coming from the west.

The process of "Celtic" colonisation proceeded in successive stages during the second half of the 4th century and at the beginning of the 3rd century BC (Fig. 2). Several groups gradually advanced from the west to the east; their movements are documented by a number of cemeteries displaying characteristic elements of the funerary rite, ritual and inventory[13]. Archaeological evidence indicates that it was not a mass migration or an invasion, since the number of colonist burials belonging to the earliest phases of the cemeteries is always small. Recent archaeological investigations focusing on funerary contexts or the internal organisation of settlements have shown that their arrival determined a social reconfiguration of many local communities, as well as the appearance of new communities which displayed various degrees of cultural hybridisation[14]. The majority of the cemeteries from the region in question started to be used at the end of LT B1 and in LT B2.

[12] RUSTOIU/EGRI 2020.

[13] RUSTOIU 2008, 69–70, Fig. 27; RUSTOIU 2012; RUSTOIU 2014.

[14] RUSTOIU 2008; RUSTOIU 2014; RUSTOIU/BERECKI 2016; see also RUSTOIU/EGRI 2021.

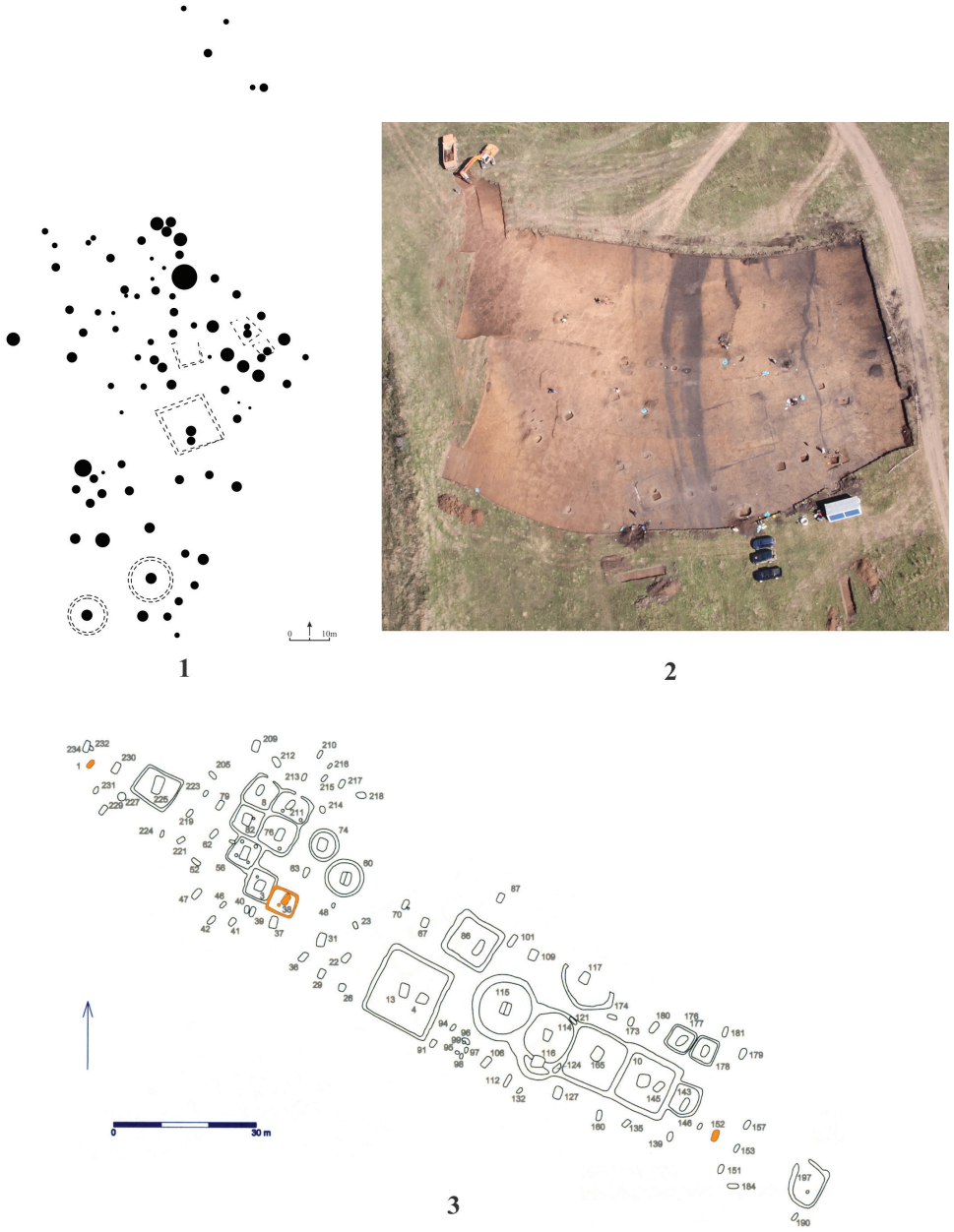

Fig. 3. Cemeteries with rectangular enclosures: 1. Gâmbaş (after BĂLAN ET AL. 2015); 2. Vişţea (photo S. Berecki); 3. Mannersdorf (after RAMSL 2011).

The "Celtic" groups brought in the eastern Carpathian region a series of funerary practices specific to their homelands. This is the case, for example, of the rectangular or circular funerary enclosures (also known in German as *Grabgärten*) which occurred in the LT A and LT B1 in Lower Austria, western Hungary or western Slovakia[15] (Fig. 3/3). Recent archaeological excavations identified similar enclosures also in north-eastern Hungary and Transylvania. Some examples come from the cemetery at Gyöngyös in Hungary, or Vişţea (Fig. 3/2) and Gâmbaş (Fig. 3/1) in Transylvania[16]. The earliest dated graves from these cemeteries belong to the

[15] NEUGEBAUER 1996; RAMSL 2011; VADAY 2006; BUJNA 1989 etc.
[16] TANKÓ ET AL. 2016; RUSTOIU 2016, 240, Pl. 4; BĂLAN ET AL. 2015, Pl. 3.

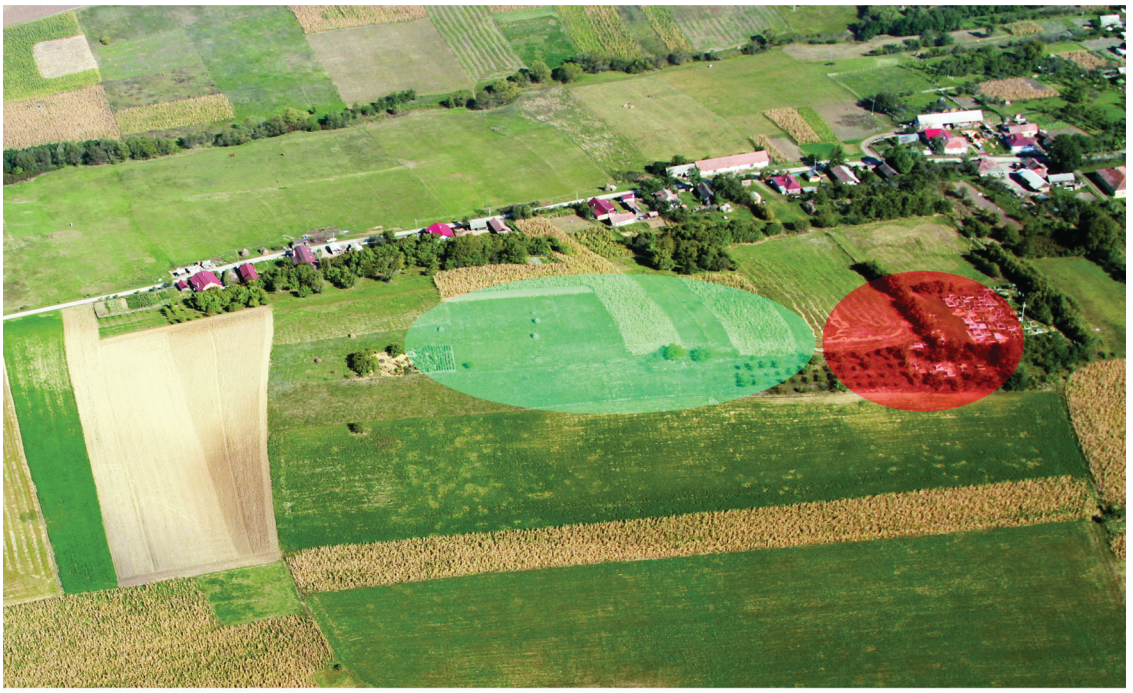

Fig. 4. Fântânele-Dâmbul Popii. Topography of the "Scythian" (red) and "Celtic" (green) cemeteries (after BERECKI 2021).

beginning of the LT B2. Accordingly, the use of funerary enclosures in the eastern Carpathian Basin could indicate the continuation of older funerary practices among some communities established far away from their homeland. Such practices had the role of perpetuating the memory of the ancestors as an element of collective cohesion in a new world which, at least at the beginning, must have been hostile.

In several cases from the same region, the newcomers reused the funerary grounds which previously belonged to the local communities. In Transylvania, the practice was observed, for example, in the cemeteries at Aiud, Gâmbaș (Alba County) or Fântânele-Dâmbul Popii (Fig. 4), and Fântânele-La Gâța (Bistrița-Năsăud County) in eastern Transylvania[17]. Sometimes the chronological gap between the burials of the end of the Early Iron Age and those of the newcomers covers about one century, but this chronology can change or be refined in the future using radiocarbon analyses.

Earlier burial grounds more likely became places of memory integrated into the local collective identity as symbolical references to a mythical past, providing a physical connection with the ancestors. Their later reuse reflects the cohabitation of the newcomers with the locals, as well as the will of the former to incorporate identity markers which were relevant in the local environment into the identity constructs of the newly established communities as a means of legitimisation[18].

The plan of the funerary areas shows that the burials of the newcomers were arranged in the continuation of older burials belonging to the "Scythian" horizon. The burials of the "Celtic" colonists never intersect earlier "Scythian" graves. These observations raise the question of how was this funerary memory perpetuated, especially when a hiatus of several decades or even a century existed between earlier and new burials. Several solutions are suggested by recent discoveries from the cemetery at Sâncrai, of which we will focus on grave no. 9/2020.

[17] RUSTOIU/BERECKI 2018; BERECKI 2021, 43–47.
[18] RUSTOIU/BERECKI 2018.

Grave-markers and memory. Case study: grave no. 9/2020 from Sâncrai

Rescue excavations conducted in 2016 on the new Sebeş–Turda motorway contributed to the identification of a cemetery belonging to the "Scythian" horizon in the vicinity of Sâncrai village, close to Aiud (Alba County). Further systematic excavations have been conducted since 2020 also outside the area affected by the new motorway, in order to investigate the entire cemetery. So far, more than 100 archaeological features have been unearthed[19] (Fig. 5).

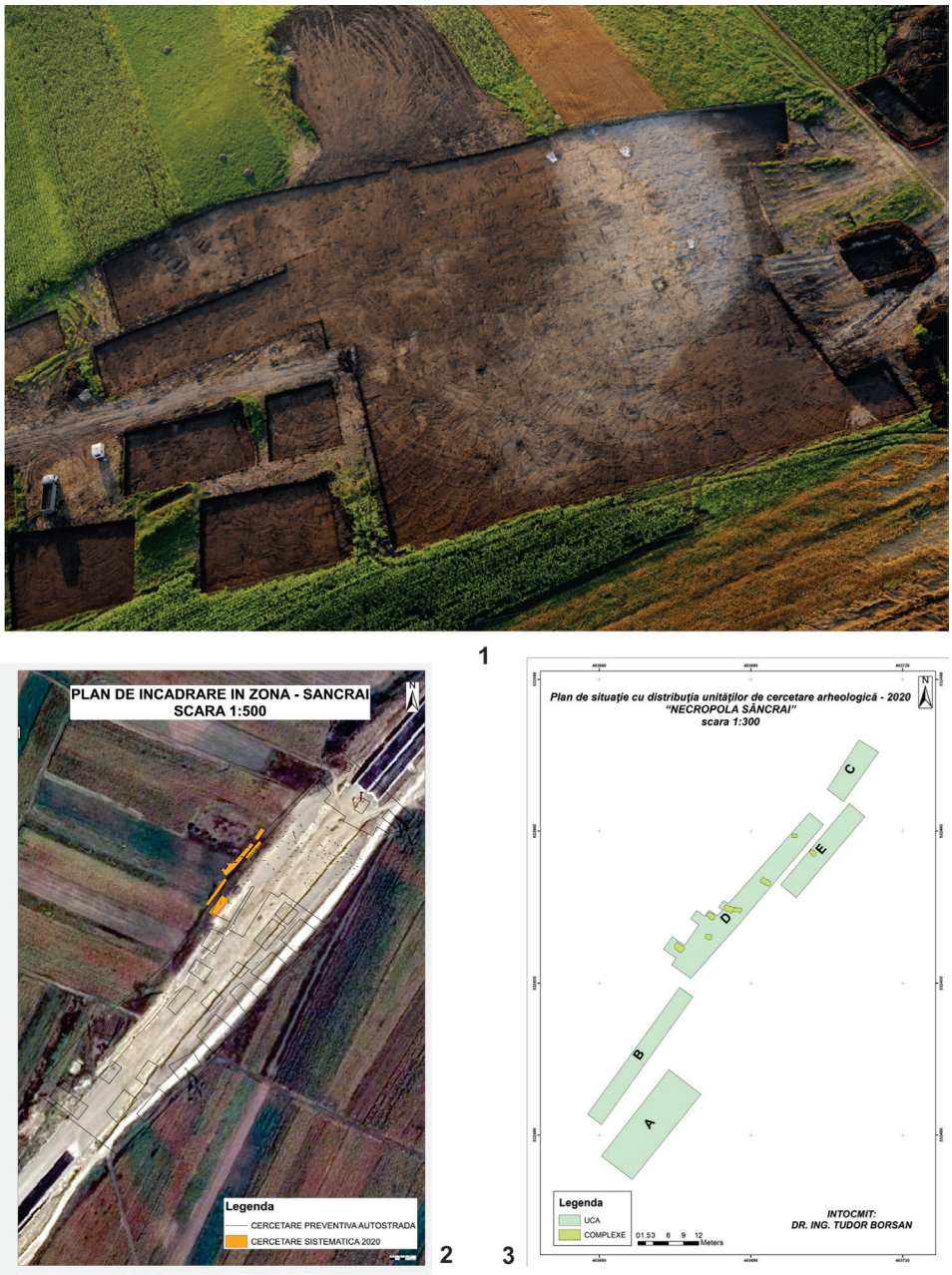

Fig. 5. Sâncrai. 1. Aerial photo of the rescue excavations on the Sebeș–Turda motorway (photo Z. Czajlik); 2. Topographic plan of the rescue and systematic excavations from 2020 (yellow); 3. Plan of the systematic excavations with grave no. 9/2020 in area E.

[19] See RUSTOIU 2019, 54–70; RUSTOIU ET AL. 2017; RUSTOIU ET AL. 2021; RUSTOIU ET AL. 2022 etc.

From the funerary rite perspective, the majority of the graves are inhumations. The deceased were usually laid in the extended supine position, though some were also laid in a one-side flexed or crouched position. There are only a few cremation burials. Previously, these were usually ascribed to the indigenous population[20]. One inhumed horse was also identified.

The deceased were usually buried with meat offerings[21] (frequently associated with iron knives) and sets of ceramic vessels. Most of the graves contain jewellery and costume accessories made of gold, bronze or iron. The finds have analogies in other cemeteries from Transylvania dated to the 7th and 6th centuries, and at the beginning or in the first half of the 5th century BC.

Regarding the weaponry, most of the graves contain arrowheads. In a few cases, these were accompanied by quiver appliqués with zoomorphic decoration. Other graves contain spearheads, hammer-axes and daggers of the akinakes type. Regarding the harness fittings, one iron horse-bit was found in the pit containing the horse skeleton. This belongs to the type with S-shaped cheek pieces. Similar horse-bits are common in the northern Pontic region and also in the northern Balkans in the 5th–4th centuries BC[22].

The "Scythian" cemetery at Sâncrai can be dated to the period between the 8th / 7th and the 5th / 4th centuries BC. The funerary inventories have analogies both in the earlier cemeteries of this horizon and in the later ones, some even exceeding the chronological limits presumed until now in the specialist literature. It is also worth noting that all other "Scythian" cemeteries from Transylvania usually consist of a small number of graves. However, the Sâncrai cemetery, where more than 100 features have been unearthed until now, is by far the largest in Transylvania and one of the larger ones in the entire Carpathian Basin.

Our attention is drawn to a funerary complex from the cemetery which shows evidence of a grave-marker. Grave no. 9 was identified during the systematic archaeological excavations of 2020 in surface E (Fig. 5/3). The grave-pit has a quasi-rectangular shape with rounded corners, oriented west-east. The pit measures 2.20 × 1.20 m, and is 0.70 m deep (Figs. 6–7).

On the bottom of the pit, at the western edge, three ceramic vessels were deposited in a row: a large bitronconical vessel, for which a niche was dug into the wall of the pit, later filled with sandy soil; and two cups – one of the cups was missing the handle, which was found nearby, towards the middle of the pit. The western part of the pit also revealed a human skull, with the mandible found nearby, and several bones (Figs. 6/2, 5; 7/3). Kaolin beads were discovered next to the skull.

The bottom of the pit was covered with a layer of grey-yellow soil, which was 0.22 m thick. On this layer were laid two groups of dismembered human and animal bones found in the northern and, respectively, southern part of the pit, as well as one ceramic cup recovered from the middle of the pit (Figs. 6/1, 3–4; 7/2). During the anthropological analysis, a bracelet with unattached ends which was made of bronze wire was identified among the human bones (Fig. 6/6).

On top of this layer, the pit was filled with a 0.45 m thick layer of compact, yellowish-black soil containing numerous traces and bits of burned soil and charcoal. (Fig. 7/1). The upper part of the grave-pit was covered in certain parts by alternating lenses of burned soil and yellow clay.

In the west, the intermediate profile cutting the pit on the line of the grave-goods revealed a posthole with a tapered lower part penetrating the grave fill of the second phase. The posthole had a top diameter of 0.55 m and a depth of 0.43 m (Fig. 7/1).

---

20 VASILIEV 1980.

21 EL SUSI 2021.

22 WERNER 1988, type IV.

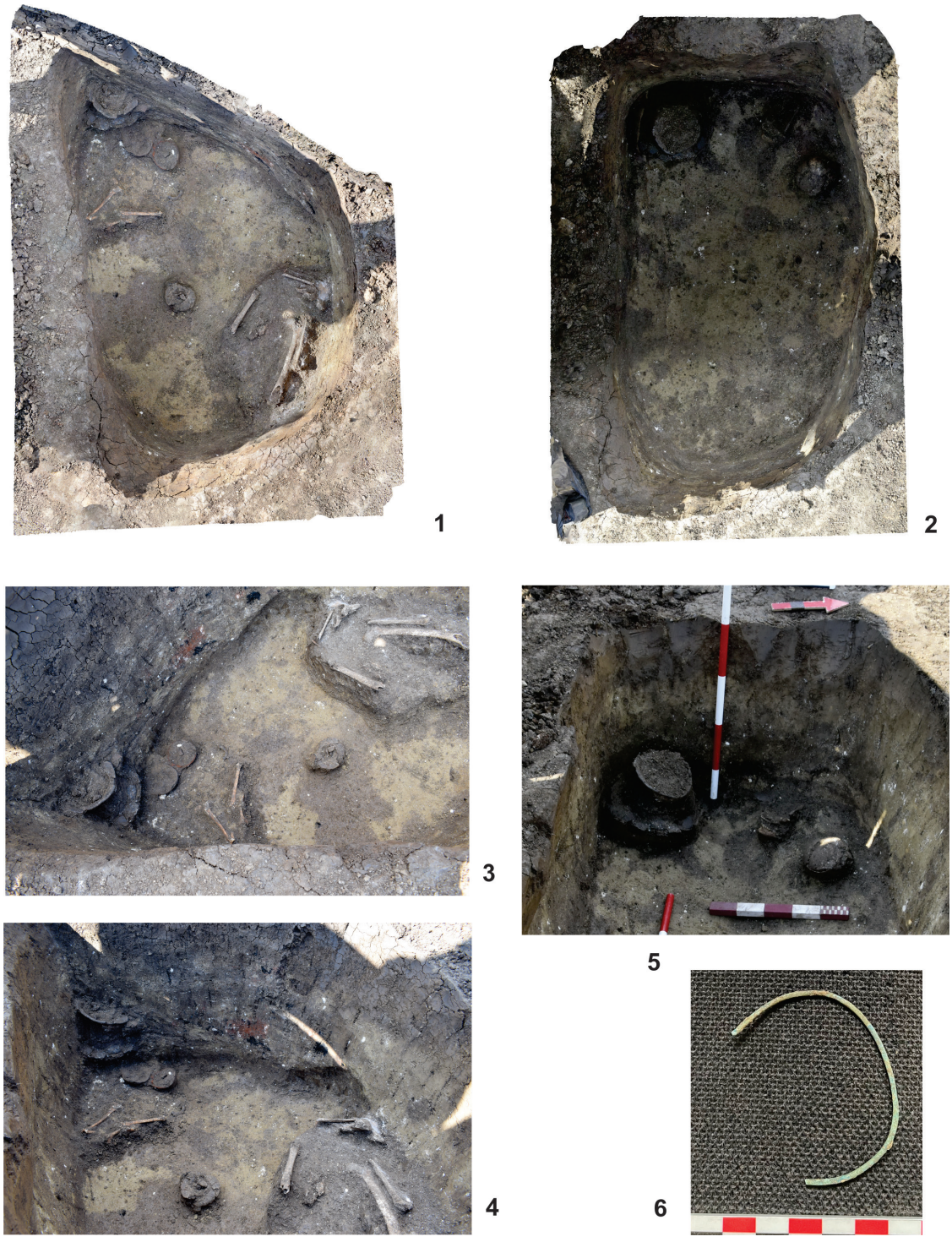

Fig. 6. Grave no. 9/2020. 1, 3–4. Details of the upper part of the burial; 2, 5. Bottom of the grave-pit; 6. Bracelet discovered among the human bones in the southern part of the grave. (1–2 photogrammetry A. Drăgan; 3–5 photos M. Egri; 6 photo S. S. Gál).

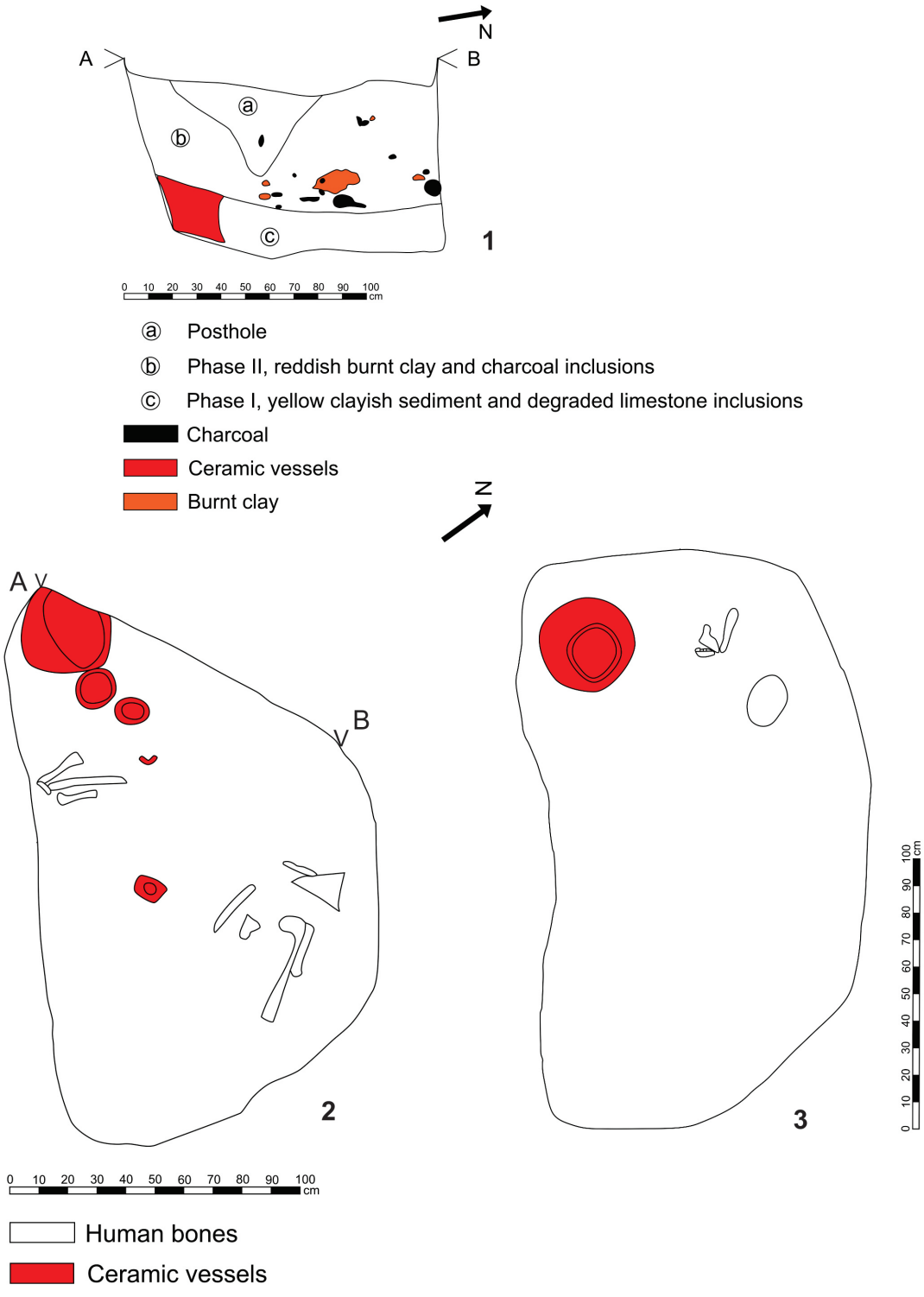

Fig. 7. Grave no. 9/2020. 1. Profile of the grave-pit; 2–3. Plan of the grave and deposits of bone and vessels on the lower (3) and upper (2) part of the pit.

The radiocarbon analysis of charcoal samples from the second phase of grave filling indicates that the grave dates, with a probability of 95.4%, to 810–774 BC (Fig. 8).

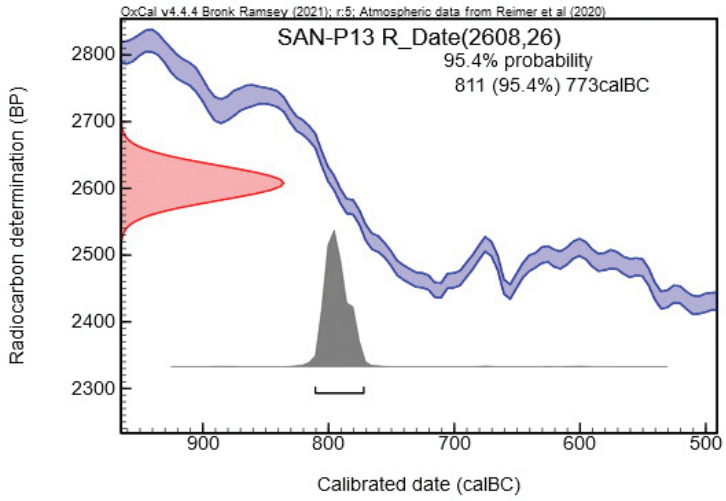

Fig. 8. Radiocarbon dating (BP) of the charcoal samples from grave no. 9/2020

The anthropological analysis concluded that the human bones originate from two individuals[23]. The skull found on the bottom of the pit belongs to a woman. The frontal, parietal, temporal and occipital bones, as well as fragments of the facial bones, could be identified (maxillary and mandible bones with strongly eroded dentition – dentition schema 2–1–2–3). The group of bones from the southern part contained long bones (left femur without the lower part) and fragments from the diaphysis of the upper limbs (radius, humerus and ulna), as well as animal bones (possibly ovicaprids)[24]. The bracelet mentioned above was found with this group of human bones.

The characteristics of the skull found on the bottom of the pit, as well as the postcranial bones from the group found in the southern part of the pit, signal the presence of a woman, yet the size of the left femur shows male characteristics. Except for this one bone, the rest of the human bones belonged to a woman. The presence of the kaolin beads next to the skull and of the metal bracelet next to the upper limbs correlates with this identification. There is insufficient data to determine the height of the person, but the teeth erosion and the bones of the arm indicate an elderly person over 60 years old.

The group of bones from the northern part of the pit probably belonged to a male. The skull fragments originate from the frontal (the metopic suture is visible) and parietal bones. The postcranial fragments include parts of the upper limbs (left humerus without epiphyses, with an enthesopathy on the diaphysis), parts of the diaphysis of the left femur and the right tibia. The left femur found together with the group of bones from the southern part of the pit surely belongs to this individual. His age cannot be determined at this point.

It is clear that none of the two human skeletons is complete. The finds indicate that the deceased were re-inhumed sometime after death and initial burial by partially reburying the human remains. The time between death and re-inhumation was long enough for the bodies to decompose.

[23] The anthropological analysis was done by Szilárd Sándor Gál (Mureș County Museum, Târgu Mureș) and will be published in more detail in the near future.

[24] The archaezoological analysis will be completed by Georgeta El Susi (Institute of Archaeology and Art History Cluj-Napoca).

The palynological analysis of soil samples from the ceramic vessels on the bottom of the pit is equally relevant[25]. The soil retrieved from the two cups found next to the large bitronconical vessel contained pollen of different species of herbs and pasture plants: meadow grass, flowering grass, fireweed, groundsel, alfalfa, yarrow and sorrel. Soil samples collected from the bottom of the pit, next to the human skull on the western part, revealed pollen of hazel and black alder. The analysis of the soil from the large bitronconical vessel only detected spores of mushrooms that grow on cow dung (dung fungi), and freshwater algae, most likely from the meadows of the Mureș river located a few hundred meters to the west, an area that was probably marshy in the past. Finally, the cup found towards the middle of the pit, at a higher level than the rest of the ceramic grave-goods, only contained spruce pollen. The presence of spruce is unusual, given that Sâncrai is located relatively far from the mountainous area where spruce grows. Some possible explanations are explored below.

The results of the palynological analysis are instructive about the landscape around the cemetery. The area was dominated by pastures for grazing cattle. The hazel pollen (as well as dog-rose and birch, detected in other graves) indicates that the area was quite recently deforested. Nearby, the marshy, humid environment of the Mureș meadows was favourable for the growth of algae and black alder. The palynological samples also show that the majority of the identified plants bloom at the beginning of summer. This is also when the re-inhumation probably took place. The hazel pollen, which blooms already in February, probably reached the bottom of the pit with the soil used for the initial filling of the funerary complex.

The exclusive presence of mushroom and algae spores in the large bitronconical vessel suggests that it may have contained water or another type of liquid contaminated by these spores. In the case of the cup from the middle of the pit, the identification of only spruce pollen and nothing else could be explained by a content made from young spruce cones, which could have been (wild) bee honey – although in this case it should have been associated with other types of pollen[26] – or a liquid obtained from boiling, steeping or macerating young spruce cones. Ethnographic studies are attesting the use of this kind of traditional medicine in different European contexts, so its presence in grave can potentially be related to the deceased male whose bones indicate that he suffered from painful ligament disease (enthesopathy or arthritis)[27].

Based on the above data, the possible scenario of the re-inhumation can be outlined. Sometime after the initial burial, when the corpses already reached a sufficiently advanced decomposition phase[28], the deceased were exhumed. One possibility is that the deceased originated from a double burial, although it is equally possible that the deceased came from two separate graves, one of a woman and another of a man. It is also possible that both deceased or at least one of them were exhumed from the initial pit of grave no. 9, later reused for re-inhumation, as the irregular shape of the pit might suggest.

---

[25] The palynological analysis was done by Roxana Grindean (Faculty of Biology and Geology, Department of Geology, "Babeș-Bolyai" University Cluj-Napoca).

[26] RÖSCH 1999, 111.

[27] A recent ethno-medical study about the traditional pharmacological use of conifers in Transylvania determined that spruce needles and cones were used to treat numerous diseases. Some of the therapeutic substances were obtained from young spruce cones boiled in milk or from macerated young spruce cones mixed with honey. These were used to treat diseases such as coughs, dyspnoea, pneumonia, sore throat, kidney diseases, backache, cardiac problems, thyroid glands, cystitis or rheumatism, see PAPP ET AL. 2022.

[28] The decomposing/skeletonization period varies according to the environment in which the corpse is disposed off (open air, water, or underground), the temperature, humidity etc. For example, in central and south-eastern Sweden, where the climate is colder and the decomposing of soft tissues is usually slower, the outdoor complete skeletonization occurs after two years (see ALFSDOTTER/PETAROS 2021). However, based on the outdoor temperature to which the corpse is exposed, the decomposing process can last from a few weeks to a few years (BRENT 2017, 46, with the bibliography).

After the rituals of exhumation and re-inhumation took place, involving – for purposes difficult to determine now – the use of fire, followed by the deposition of ceramic vessels at the western margin of the pit (the large bitronconical vessel probably contained water from the Mureș River, contaminated with algae and dung fungi; the cups were empty), the skull, maxillary and other bones of the female deceased were placed on the bottom of the pit[29], near the vessels. Everything was then covered by a 22 cm thick layer of loose soil. Subsequently, parts of the skeleton of the woman and the skeleton parts of a man were thrown inside the pit. Because only parts of the skeletons were included and the bones were mixed, one of the femurs of the male deceased ended up with the osteological remains of the woman. In between the two groups of bones, a vessel was placed, containing spruce honey or another liquid obtained from young spruce cones. The entire pit was then filled with a compact soil mixed with pieces of burnt soil and charcoal, supposedly obtained from a place nearby, where re-inhumation rituals must have taken place. In the end, a wooden post was inserted into the ground in the western part of the pit, above the line of ceramic grave-goods and the skull, to serve as a grave-marker. According to the palynological results, the re-inhumation ceremony happened around the beginning of the summer.

Accordingly, this grave fits into the category of so-called "deviant burials". The term generally designates unusual burials which do not conform to the ritual norms of a community and are often associated with marginal social groups, outcasts or people who suffered unusual deaths. According to Eileen Murphy, these can be criminals, women who died in childbirth, non-baptised children, disabled or sick people, and generally, people that were perceived as a threat to the community even after death[30].

Some of the graves from the cemetery at Sâncrai are indeed not conforming to the usual ritual norms. For example, seven graves display traces of post-burial interventions in which the funerary pit was reopened and the skeleton was manipulated, the bones being displaced or grouped in a non-anatomical position. These traces indicate an intentional, targeted intervention of the community, or of some members, who wanted to change the way in which the deceased were perceived upon death. The graves were surely not robbed, because the funerary inventories were intact[31]. For example, one of the graves belonged to a woman shaman, who was buried following a particular ritual[32]. Inhumation, exhumation and re-inhumation in this grave are similar in many aspects to the situation observed in grave no. 9/2020.

These rituals, even if not common within the cemetery[33], have contributed precisely due to their special character to the perpetuation of the memory of the deceased long after their

---

[29] The selective depositing of the female skull on the bottom of the pit, separate from the rest of the skeleton, could have had a ritual meaning. The woman could have been the important figure in this re-inhumation. An argument for this idea is that she is the only one buried with personal objects consisting of body ornaments. For similar situations from the cemeteries at Dürrnberg bei Hallein (Austria), in which the skulls were moved or treated in a particular ritual way, see WENDLING 2020, 164.

[30] MURPHY 2008.

[31] The reopening of graves and the treatment of human remains in ways which are different from the initial burials are attested in all historical periods. The reasons for these interventions are very diverse: later accidental disturbances, robbery, post-mortem "punishment" of the deceased carried out by enemies (a kind of *damnatio memoriae*), magical practices against malevolent spirits, reuse of graves (by the families or for secondary burials within older funerary complexes), commemorative rituals for the ancestors etc; see FAHLANDER 2010; DOBOS 2014; BRENT 2017; WENDLING 2020; WEISS-KREJCI/BECKER/SCHWYZER 2022 (with several contributions to this topic).

[32] RUSTOIU 2019, 54–70.

[33] Post-burial or other kinds of interventions have also been detected in other cemeteries, such as the one at Băița (Mureș County) (VASILIEV 1976). The cemetery in question includes five inhumation graves containing inventories specific to the "Scythian" horizon and seven cremations. In the latter cases, the burnt human remains

death, over several generations. The commemoration rituals intermediated the remembering and continuation within the families and the larger community of the identity of those no longer present, who played in this way an important role in reaffirming the identity and status of the descendants.

The mechanisms of remembering include the way that the graves were signalled physically. The aspect of the burials (flat graves in large cemeteries, stone or timber funerary enclosures, burial mounds located in visible places etc) shaped the surrounding anthropic landscape just as much as it shaped the spiritual landscape formed in the collective memory. In these mechanisms of commemoration, grave-markers also played an important role.

In some cases, the grave-markers are stone pillars, such as in the La Tène cemetery at Mannersdorf/Leithagebirge[34], or even anthropomorphic funerary stelae, known both among the "Scythians" and the "Celts". Most of the time, however, grave-markers are made of wooden posts which are more difficult to observe archaeologically, hence the importance of grave no. 9/2020 from Sâncrai, precisely because it substantiates this hypothesis with concrete evidence.

A series of modern ethnographic analogies show that wooden grave-markers, although perishable, can last longer[35]. In some cases, the families, concerned about the continuation of the memory of their ancestors, replace old grave-markers every time these become too degraded. It can happen that, even after their deterioration, grave-markers continue to play a part in the remembering of the deceased long after the burial. For example, the local communities of the Siberian Yakuts still remember the places where shamans are buried, by recognising where these are marked by trees planted at the time of the burial or by long rotten wooden grave-markers, even if the burial took place two or three hundred years ago[36].

Similar mechanisms of remembering allowed the indigenous communities of the end of the Early Iron Age and the beginning of the Late Iron Age from Transylvania to maintain the memory of their ancestors and recognise the consecrated places where they were buried. This way, at the time of the "Celtic" colonisation inside the Carpathians range, the newcomers were able to recover the memory of the consecrated places from the indigenous people with whom they interacted, and reinterpret it according to their own beliefs. The most obvious outcome of this ritual and ideological mutation is the reuse and integration of former "Scythian" cemeteries in the identity constructs of the new communities.

---

and the grave-goods were placed in large rectangular pits resembling those of the inhumation graves. Recently, Mircea Babeş has noted that similar graves, dated to the 5th–3rd centuries BC, are encountered on a wider area from the east of the Carpathians and the lower Danube to the upper Tisza basin. These burials seem to indicate the practice of prolonged funerary rites and rituals in successive stages. More precisely, the deceased were first inhumed; after a while the graves were reopened and the human remains were removed to be cremated; the burnt remains were then laid again in the same funerary pit (BABEŞ/MIRIŢOIU 2011; BABEŞ/MIRIŢOIU 2012). On the plan of the cemetery at Băiţa, the cremated graves are located somewhat eccentrically in comparison with the inhumations, illustrating perhaps a later phase of the cemetery. The appearance of such practices could indicate some changes in the funerary rites and rituals, perhaps leading to burials which are more "discrete" archaeologically. This may also explain the scarcity of graves in the 5th–4th centuries BC.

[34] RAMSL 2012.

[35] For example, in the cemeteries of several villages in Maramureş (north-western Romania), such as Breb and Ieud, some well-preserved wooden crosses are one century old. They were cut from oak timber which withstands better the weather. It is possible that behind the choice of wood there also is a particular past symbolic meaning. The graves are additionally marked in the landscape by specific vegetation (clumps of trees etc) or enclosures. Finally, the graves of several cemeteries used in the 17th century are still visible as mounds, see BÂRCĂ 2011–2014.

[36] CRUBÉZY 2007; CRUBÉZY ET AL. 2017; RUSTOIU 2019, 63.

Conclusions

At the beginning of this article, we highlighted the fact that, during times of social stress caused by the migration of larger or smaller groups of people, the interaction between the indigenous people and the newcomers happened in different ways. Nonetheless, in each case this has led to the reconfiguration of community identity constructs. Archaeologically, in most cases, this is observed as a cultural hybridisation, visible in the way landscape is organised, in the aspect of the settlements, in the control of natural resources, in the organisation and distribution of production, in culinary habits etc.

The ritual aspects had an important role in the reconfiguration of identity structures, where the invention of traditions and new myths of origin, which were meant to ideologically harmonise the aspirations and sensibilities of both the locals and the newcomers, played an essential part. The reuse of consecrated funerary grounds, belonging for centuries to the indigenous communities, represents one of the most visible effects of the cohabitation between the two groups of people. The reuse of these cemeteries, with the new graves arranged topographically in the continuation of older ones, symbolises the integration of the collective memory of the indigenous people into the new community mythologies. At the same time, the newcomers also used it as a symbolic justification for ownership over the land.

The memory of the ancestors and its manipulation by the newcomers, in this case "Celtic" colonists – themselves culturally mixed already before leaving their places of origin –, would not have been possible without the participation of the local elites in the negotiation of the new power relations.

Concrete ways of transmitting the memory of the ancestors over generations are illustrated by one grave from the "Scythian" cemetery at Sâncrai. Archaeologically visible post-burial rituals, such as exhumation, re-inhumation, the use of grave-markers (in stone or wood), or planning of the sacred and funerary areas, were important for the continuation and actualisation of the memory of those no longer physically present. Other commemorative rituals not easily observed archaeologically in cemeteries certainly took place periodically. This type of rituals, which involved collective banquets (at a family or community level) among other things, can be associated, for example, with the pits containing "deposits" of vessels found isolated or inside settlements of the Early Iron Age from south-western Transylvania (Gáva group) and later in the Basarabi group[37]. These finds suggest that the population of this region maintained its ritual practices over a long period of time, even when objects changed typologically from one archaeologically defined group to another. There are no such contexts in the "Scythian" horizon, but commemorative rituals for the ancestors could have taken forms that are "invisible" to the archaeologists. The grave from Sâncrai discussed in this paper is just one example of the way in which the deceased were treated not only during their burial but also afterwards. Of course, by including more graves in the analysis, a larger spectrum of collective and individual rituals of commemoration can be revealed.

Concerning the chronology, grave no. 9/2020 from Sâncrai raises several important issues. Firstly, the radiocarbon results place the grave between 810–774 BC. This chronology correlates with the dates provided by the radiocarbon analyses of the last decades for the earliest graves of the "Scythian" group from the northern Pontic and Central Asian areas, and it proves that populations of the steppe having a pastoralist-nomadic lifestyle came to Transylvania from the beginning, i.e. during the formation of the "Scythian" culture in the east. Secondly, these observations highlight the need to re-evaluate the chronology of the Early Iron Age cultural

[37] E.g. from the functional point of view, the deposit of Gáva-type vessels from the settlement at Teleac (second phase) (VASILIEV/ALDEA/CIUGUDEAN 1991, 150–151) is similar to the one discovered at Alba Iulia-Lumea Nouă (CIUGUDEAN 1976, 13–14) in the hinterland of Teleac, which contains vessels of the Basarabi type.

groups in Transylvania, which have been dated in the archaeological literature later than the results of the radiocarbon analyses, and to discuss again the ways in which the indigenous populations of the Early Iron Age interacted with the nomad groups that arrived in Transylvania that early.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to thank Szilárd Sándor Gál, Georgeta El Susi and Roxana Grindean for their contributions to the interdisciplinary analysis, and to the archaeological team from Sâncrai: Mariana Elena Egri, (Institute of Archaeology and Art History Cluj-Napoca), Gabriel Dan Balteş, Gabriel Tiberiu Rustoiu (National Museum of Unification Alba Iulia), Adrian Cătălin Căsălean (Museum of Dacian and Roman Civilisation Deva), Andrei Valentin Georgescu (National Museum of Banat Timişoara), Elena Beatrice Ciută (1st of December 1918 University Alba Iulia).

REFERENCES

ALEKSEEV ET AL. 2001
A. YU. ALEKSEEV ET AL., A chronology of the Scythian antiquities of Eurasia based on new archaeological and 14C data. Radiocarbon 43, 2B, 2001, 1085–1107.

ALEKSEEV ET AL. 2002
A. YU. ALEKSEEV ET AL., Some problems in the study of the chronology of the ancient nomadic cultures in Eurasia (9th–3rd centuries BC). Geochronometria 21, 2002, 143–150.

ALFSDOTTER/PETAROS 2021
C. ALFSDOTTER/A. PETAROS, Outdoor human decomposition in Sweden: A retrospective quantitative study of forensic-taphonomic changes and postmortem interval in terrestrial and aquatic settings. Journal of Forensic Sciences 66, 2021, 1348–1363. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/1556–4029.14719

BABEŞ/MIRIŢOIU 2011
M. BABEŞ/N. MIRIŢOIU, Practici funerare birituale prelungite în spaţiul carpato-dunărean în secolele V–III a. Chr. Arheologia Moldovei 34, 2011, 103–149.

BABEŞ/MIRIŢOIU 2012
M. BABEŞ/N. MIRIŢOIU, Verlängerte, mehrstufige birituelle Bestattungen im Donau–Karpaten-Raum (5. bis 3. Jh. v. Chr.). In: S. Berecki (ed.), Iron Age Rites and Rituals in the Carpathian Basin. Proceedings of the International Colloquium from Târgu Mureş, 7–9 October 2011 (Târgu Mureş 2012), 139–159.

BĂLAN ET AL. 2015
G. BĂLAN/R. BURLACU-TIMOFTE/R. OTA/T. MUNTEAN/M. RÂZA/O. OARGĂ/D. ANGHEL, Raport preliminar cu privire la săpăturile arheologice preventive întreprinse la Gâmbaş – sit 2. Apulum 52, 2015, 133–179.

BÂRCĂ 2011–2014
A. BÂRCĂ, Cimitirele bisericilor de lemn din Breb și Ieud, jud. Maramureș. Revista Monumentelor Istorice 58, 1–2, 2011–2014, 43–55.

BERECKI 2015
S. BERECKI, Iron Age Settlement Patterns and Funerary Landscapes in Transylvania (4th–2nd centuries BC) (Târgu Mureş 2015).

BERECKI 2021
S. BERECKI, Identity in Landscape. Connectivity and Diversity in Iron Age Transylvania. (Cluj-Napoca 2021).

BRENT 2017
L. BRENT, Disturbed, damaged, and disarticulated: grave reuse in Roman Italy. Theoretical Roman Archaeology Journal 2016, 37–50. Doi: https://doi.org/10.16995/TRAC2016_37_50

BUJNA 1989
J. BUJNA, Das latènezeitliche Gräberfeld bei Dubnik. I. Slovenská Archeológia 37, 2, 1989, 245–347.

CIUGUDEAN 1976
H. CIUGUDEAN, Cultura Basarabi pe teritoriul judeţului Alba. Apulum 14, 1976, 9–22.

CRUBÉZY 2007
E. CRUBÉZY, Chamane Kyys, la jeune fille des glaces. L'Archéologue 90, 2007, 36–39.

CRUBÉZY ET AL. 2017
E. CRUBÉZY/P. GÉRARD/N. KIRIANOV/V. POPOV/D. NIKOLAÏEVA/C. PETIT/ M. PE TIT/L. ROMANOVA/C. KEYSER/B. LUDES/O. MELNITCHOUK/R. BRAVINA/A. AL EXEEV/S. DUCHESNE, The relationship between Archaeology, Genetics, Ethnology and History. Reflections on a 2002–2015 study in Yakutia (1632- 1922). In: J.-M. Blaising/J. Drie ssen/J.-P. Legendre/L. Olivier (eds.), Clashes of time. The contemporary past as a challenge for archaeology (Louvain 2017), 121–138.

CUNLIFFE 2019
B. CUNLIFFE, The Scythians. Nomad warriors of the steppe (Oxford 2019).

DÍAZ-ANDREU 2005
M. DÍAZ-ANDREU, Gender identity. In: M. Díaz-Andreu/S. Lucy/S. Babić/D. Edwards (eds.), The archaeology of identity. Approaches to gender, age, status, ethnicity and religion (Oxford 2005), 13–41.

DOBOS 2014
A. DOBOS, Plunder or ritual? The phenomenon of grave reopening in the row-grave cemeteries from Transylvania (6th–7th centuries). Annales Universitatis Apulensis. Series Historica 18.II, 2014, 135–162.

EL SUSI 2021
G. EL SUSI, Comparative archaeozoological study between sites and complexes from the "Scythian", "Celtic" and "Dacian" horizons by regions and chronological periods. In: A. Rustoiu/M. Egri (eds.), Community dynamics and identity constructs in the eastern Carpathian Basin during the Late Iron Age. The impact of human mobility (Cluj-Napoca 2021), 165–210.

FAHLANDER 2010
F. FAHLANDER, Messing with the dead: post-depositional manipulations of the burials and

bodies in the South Scandinavian Stone Age. Documenta Praehistorica 37, 2010, 23- 31. Doi: https://doi.org/10.4312/dp.37.2

FERNÁNDEZ-GÖTZ 2014
M. FERNÁNDEZ-GÖTZ, Identity and Power: The Transformation of Iron Age Societies in Northeast Gaul (Amsterdam 2014).

GIVEN 2004
M. GIVEN, The Archaeology of the Colonized (London 2004).

GOSDEN 2004
C. Gosden, Archaeology and Colonialism. Cultural Contact from 5000 BC to the Present (Cambridge 2004).

GRUEN 2011
E. S. GRUEN, Cultural identity in the ancient Mediterranean (Los Angeles 2011).

INSOLL 2007
T. INSOLL, The Archaeology of Identities. A Reader (London 2007).

IVANTCHIK 2005
A. IVANTCHIK, La chronologie des cultures Pré-Scythes et Scythes: les données Proche-orientales et Caucasiennes. Iranica Antiqua 40, 2005, 447–460.

IVANTCHIK 2010
A. IVANTCHIK, Un choc des civilisations au VIIe s.: Les invasions des Cimmériens et des Scythes au Proches-Orient et les origines de la culture Scythes. In: R. Etiénne (ed.), La Méditerranée au VIIe s. av. J.-C. (essays d'analyse archéologiques) (Paris 2010), 38–49, 55–57.

JONES 2007
A. JONES, Memory and material culture (Cambridge 2007).

MURPHY 2008
E. M. MURPHY, Introduction. Deviant burial in the archaeological record. In: E. M. Murphy (ed.), Deviant burial in the archaeological record (Oxford 2008).

NEUGEBAUER 1996
J.-W. NEUGEBAUER, Eine frühlatènezeitliche Gräbergruppe in Inzersdorf ob der Treisen, NÖ. In: E. Jerem/A. Kreen-Leeb/J.-W. Neugebauer/O. H. Urban (eds.), Die Kelten in den Alpen und an der Donau, Akten des Internationalen Symposion St. Pölten, 14.–18. Oktober 1992 (Budapest – Wien 1996), 111–178.

PAPP ET AL. 2022
M. PAPP ET AL., The importance of pine species in the ethnomedicine of Transylvania (Romania). Plants 11 (18), 2022, 2331, 1–21. Doi: https://doi.org/10.3390/plants11182331

RAMSL 2011
P. C. RAMSL, Das latènezeitliche Gräberfeld von Mannersdorf am Leithagebirge, Flur Reinthal Süd, Niederösterreich (Wien 2011).

RAMSL 2012
P. C. RAMSL, Two stone stelae from the La Tène cemetery at Mannersdorf am Leithagebirge,

Flur Rheinthal süd. In: P. Anreiter et al. (eds.), Archaeological, cultural and linguistic heritage. Festschrift for Erzsébet Jerem in Honour of her 70th Birthday (Budapest 2012), 499–507.

RÖSCH 1999
M. RÖSCH, Evaluation of honey residues from Iron Age hill-top sites from southwestern Germany: implications for local and regional land use and vegetation dynamics. Vegetation History and Archaeobotany 8, 1999, 105–112.

ROYMANS 2004
N. ROYMANS, Ethnic Identity and Imperial Power: The Batavians in the Early Roman Empire (Amsterdam 2004).

RUSTOIU 2008
A. RUSTOIU, Războinici şi societate în aria celtică transilvăneană. Studii pe marginea mormântului cu coif de la Ciumeşti (Cluj-Napoca 2008).

RUSTOIU 2012
A. RUSTOIU, The Celts and Indigenous Populations from the Southern Carpathian Basin. Intercommunity Communication Strategies. In: Berecki, S. (ed.), Iron Age Rites and Rituals in the Carpathian Basin. Proceedings of the International Colloquium from Târgu Mureş, 7–9 October 2011 (Cluj-Napoca – Târgu Mureş 2012), 357–390.

RUSTOIU 2014
A. RUSTOIU, Indigenous and colonist communities in the Eastern Carpathian Basin at the beginning of the Late Iron Age. The genesis of an Eastern Celtic World. In: C. N. Popa/S. Stoddart (eds.), Fingerprinting the Iron Age. Approaches to Identity in the European Iron Age. Integrating South-Eastern Europe into the Debate (Oxford 2014), 142–156.

RUSTOIU 2016
A. RUSTOIU, Some questions regarding the chronology of La Tène cemeteries from Transylvania. Social and demographic dynamics in the rural communities. In: S. Berecki (ed.), Iron Age Chronology in the Carpathian Basin. Proceedings of the international colloquium from Târgu Mureş 8–10 October 2015 (Cluj-Napoca 2016), 235–264.

RUSTOIU 2019
A. RUSTOIU, Archaeological explorations of magic and witchcraft in Iron Age Transylvania (Cluj-Napoca 2019).

RUSTOIU ET AL. 2017
A. RUSTOIU ET AL. 2017, Sâncrai. Cronica Cercetărilor Arheologice din România – Campania 2016 (Bucureşti 2017), 210–211.

RUSTOIU ET AL. 2021
A. RUSTOIU ET AL. 2021, Sâncrai. Cronica Cercetărilor Arheologice din România – Campania 2020 (Bucureşti – Sibiu 2021), 255–257.

RUSTOIU ET AL. 2022
A. RUSTOIU ET AL. 2022, Sâncrai. Cronica Cercetărilor Arheologice din România – Campania 2021 (Bucureşti – Oradea 2022), 318–320.

RUSTOIU/BERECKI 2016
A. RUSTOIU/S. BERECKI, Cultural encounters and fluid identities in the eastern Carpathian

Basin in the 4th–3rd centuries BC. In: I. Armit et al. (eds.), Cultural Encounters in Iron Age Europe. Arheolingua, Series Minor 38 (Budapest 2016), 285–304.

RUSTOIU/BERECKI 2018
A. RUSTOIU/S. BERECKI, Symbols of status and power in the everyday life of Late Iron Age Transylvania. Shaping the landscape. In: I. V. Ferencz/O. Tutilă/N. C. Rișcuța (eds.), Representations, signs and symbols. Proceedings of the Symposium on Life and Daily Life (Cluj-Napoca 2018), 65–78.

RUSTOIU/EGRI 2020
A. RUSTOIU/M. EGRI, The dynamics of collective identities and cultural encounters in the eastern Carpathian Basin during the Late Iron Age. In: G. Pierrevelcin/J. Kysela/S. Fichtl (eds.), Unité et diversité du monde celtique – Unity and Diversity in the Celtic World, Actes du 42e colloque international de l'AFEAF, Prague, 10–13 mai 2018. Paris-Prague 2020, 449–468.

RUSTOIU/EGRI 2021
A. RUSTOIU/M. EGRI (eds.), Community dynamics and identity constructs in the eastern Carpathian Basin during the Late Iron Age. The impact of human mobility (Cluj-Napoca 2021).

TANKÓ ET AL. 2016
K. TANKÓ/Z. TÓTH/L. RUPNIK/Z. CZAJLIK/S. PUSZTA, Short report on the archaeological research of the Late Iron Age cemetery at Gyöngyös. Dissertationes Archaeologicae ex Instituto Archaeologico Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös Nominatae Ser. 3, 4, 307–324.

VADAY 2006
A. VADAY, The chronological model of the Celtic cemetery of Ménfőcsanak. In: V. Sîrbu/D. L. Vaida (eds.), Thracians and Celts. Proceedings of the International Colloquium from Bistriţa, 18–20 May 2006 (Cluj-Napoca 2006), 279–294.

VAN DYKE/ALCOCK 2003
R. M. VAN DYKE/S. E. ALCOCK, Archaeologies of memory: an introduction. In: R. M. Van Dyke/S. E. Alcock (eds.), Archaeologies of memory (Oxford 2003), 1–14.

VASILIEV 1976
V. VASILIEV, Necropola de la Băiţa şi problema tracizării enclavei scitice din Transilvania. Marisia 6, 1976, 49–87.

VASILIEV 1980
V. VASILIEV, Sciţii agatârşi pe teritoriul României (Cluj-Napoca 1980).

VASILIEV/ALDEA/CIUGUDEAN 1991
V. VASILIEV/I. AL. ALDEA/H. CIUGUDEAN, Civilizația dacică timpurie în aria intracarpatică a României. Contribuții arheologice: așezarea fortificată de la Teleac (Cluj- Napoca 1991).

VULPE 1984
A. VULPE, 1984. Descoperiri hallstattiene din zona Aiudului. Thraco-Dacica 5, 1984, 36–63.

WEISS-KREJCI/BECKER/SCHWYZER 2022
E. WEISS-KREJCI/S. BECKER/PH. SCHWYZER, Interdisciplinary Explorations of Post-mortem Interaction. Dead Bodies, Funerary Objects, and Burial Spaces Through Texts and Time (Cham 2022). Doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/978–3-031-03956-0

WENDLING 2020

H. WENDLING, Iron Age Ancestral Bonds: Consecutive Burials and Manipulated Graves at the Dürrnberg Cemeteries (Austria). In: E. Aspöck/A. Klevnäs/N. Müller- Scheeßel (Eds.), Grave disturbances. The archaeology of post-depositional interactions with the dead. Studies in Funerary Archaeology 14 (Oxford 2020) 157–174.

WERNER 1988

M. WERNER, Eisenzeitliche Trensen an der unteren und mittleren Donau. PBF XVI/4 (München 1988).

WILLIAMS 2003

H. WILLIAMS, Introduction. The Archaeology of Death, Memory and Material Culture. In: H. Williams (ed.), Archaeologies of Remembrance. Death and Memory in Past Societies (New York-Boston-Dordrecht-London-Moscow 2003), 1–24.