

THE RITUAL COMPLEX OF INHUMATION BELONGING TO THE EARLY BRONZE AGE FROM COPĂCENI-LA MOARA (CLUJ COUNTY)

In 1990 colleague Gheorghe Lazarovici draw the authors' attention upon a platform belonging to a surface dwelling at Copăceni (Cluj county) (Pl. I a), the place called *La Moara* (Pl. I. b), which he considered to belong to the Bronze Age¹. The next year, inside the perimeter of this site, at about 40 cm East, we noticed human bones in the wall cut for the access road. In order to preserve the archaeological complex which was in danger of being destroyed, parallel to the exploration of the tumular necropolis from Tureni-*La Furci*, in 1991 we dug out two four-sided pits, labelled from East towards West, C1 and C2 (Pl. II a).

From the very beginning we have to clarify that the available archaeological data is still partial, on one hand because of the sliding of the terrain happening at the same time with the segmentation of the site in three sectors, due to small mountain streams, and on the other hand, to the subsequent anthropic interventions (early feudal pits, recent and successive consolidations of the margins of the road). At the same time, the archaeological interventions were not taking place in the best objective conditions possible, but the value of the material discovered by digging out C1 induced us to immediately publish² the results of the investigation that will at some point become systematic. Few details were made public about what was to be named Grave no. 1 (M1)³, discovered through digging out C2. The unusual attributes of this archaeological complex determined us to publish it before the results of the anthropological analyses, conditions that made us insist on the essential archaeological and historical aspects that will not be modified by the results of the analyses⁴. The documentary support of our present enterprise is represented by the observations of Mihai Wittenberger from 1991 and by the notes of both authors from 1995 and 1996, after the re-examination of the sector C of the site (Pl. II a).

Description of Complex M1

The complex referred to as M1 can be found at a depth of about -1.70 from the present level of the earth. It consists of five skeletons, one adult and four children, and of the inferior part of a big size vessel (Pl. III). Part of the complex was lost before the archaeological intervention due to multiple stratigraphical accidents: the above part of the ritual offering vessel and of the adult skeleton, the East and South extremities of the complex.

The brownish vessel (Pl. IV a), deposited on the Eastern extremity of the complex, is made from a sandy paste, with minuscule stones, grind chalk, and organic material. The walls are roughly surfaced, bearing the signs of intense carbonisation inside, burning that has blackened about half of the walls' width. The stratigraphy of the sector (Pl. II b) seems today to be the following: a layer of contemporary humus with a width of 0.25-0.35 cm., three levels of dwelling belonging to Early Bronze Age, with a width of 2.50-3.00 m and

¹ G. Lazarovici, in *Repertoriul arheologic al jud. Cluj*, Cluj-Napoca 1992, 159, nr. 2

² M. Rotea, *Thraco-Dacica*, 15, 1993, 75

³ M. Rotea, *Grupul Copăceni/The Copăceni Group*, in *Comori ale epocii bronzului din România*, Bucharest 1995, 155, 157. The language used at that moment to described the site take in account about the presumed funeral function.

sterile ground. The margins of the complex were to be discerned only partially, because the Eastern and Southern parts were destroyed before the archaeological intervention. Moreover, a pre feudal pit has cut through the superior part of the prehistoric complex and part of the dwelling belonging to the Copăceni group that covered it (Pl. II b).

Subject no. 1:

Adult skeleton, denominated S1, which occupies a central position in the complex, and is deposited in dorsal decubit in a small alveolar cavity of about 0.10-0.15 m. The axis of the body is N-S oriented. The skull is missing, also a part of the left leg and of the right arm. The pelvis was covered with three lime stones with the dimensions of 0.20/0.35-0.15/0.20-0.09 cm. The position of the legs is extremely interesting. Both legs were set apart and flexed, so that the heels reach under the pelvis.

Subject No. 2

Denominated S2. It was well preserved, deposited in dorsal decubit with the lower limbs on the breastbone, between the legs of the adult (exceeding the line of the knees with only 0.25 m), in a small alveolar depression of 0.07-0.09 m. The axis of the body is almost identical to that of the adult (SV-NE), but the skull is towards SE. The bones are in good anatomic junction (small displacements caused by the earth pressure occasioned the breaking of the skull and its sliding towards the body, an almost general phenomenon).

Subject No. 3

Denominated S3, well preserved at about 40 cm on the right (Western) side of the adult. The position is dorsal decubit, specific to children during the prenatal period, and the total length of the body is 0.25 m. The orientation of the body is NV-SE, almost identical with that of the adult, with a slight deviation towards West. In the skull area six river stones are deposited.

Subject No. 4

Denominated S4, was found at a distance of 0.34 m West from the adult, in the area of the lower limbs. It was only partially preserved (part of the skull and breastbone), being almost entirely destroyed by the earth sliding. Its position is presumably identical with that of the other infant subjects. Its orientation could not have been determined with precision.

Subject No. 5

Denominated S5, was discovered at 0.20 m from the left arm of the adult. It was only partially preserved (part of the skull, breastbone, upper and lower limbs), being destroyed on its longer axis by the fall of the earth. Its position is dorsal decubit with the lower limbs on the breastbone. The position seems to be N-S oriented, with a slight turn towards West.

Conclusions

As it was already mentioned, the state of the archaeological complex does not permit firm conclusions. The results of the anthropological analyses are still missing. Nevertheless, some concluding observations are yet possible. The complex M1 presents five almost integral skeletons, mostly in anatomical junction. The position of all

⁴The osteologic material it's under work at Alexandra Comşa, Roumanian Institute of Tracology, Bucharest

subjects is dorsal decubitus. The adult has the legs in a position suggesting a gynaecological one. Such a position could not have been obtained if the stones would not have been deposited or tied on the pelvis before the intervention of rigor mortis. Obviously, the decomposition took place in a medium without air. The gender of the mature skeleton has not been yet the subject of an anthropological analysis, but according to the available data (its position and the position of the infant skeletons) suggests a female adult. The flexion of the lower limbs, clearly obtained on purpose, must be correlated to the presence of children in a prenatal period. Everything points towards a mother and at least one of her children, but the anthropological analyses must confirm this in order to become certain. The immature subjects are children deceased either at birth or in the first days after birth, or could be, as we already suggested, foetuses aborted at the age of six or seven months⁵. Apart from an accident in gestation, two other possibilities may explain their presence: religious sacrifice or natural death. The first hypothesis seems the most plausible one, as it is sustained by the construction of a prehistoric dwelling belonging to the Copăceni group upon or in the immediate vicinity of the complex, conditions in which the function of the whole structure becomes a founding one.

The skeletons do not bear pieces of jewellery. The few ceramic fragments found in the covering soil might have pertain to the digging of the pit. The ritual offering vessel is different. It has traces of cellulose-type material which was burnt⁶, and it was deposited on purpose at the Eastern extremity of the complex.

Upon the chronological placement of the complex there are no doubts. The first argument in favour of placing it in the Early Bronze Age is the ritual offering vessel which is undoubtedly of the Copăceni type. Recently, upon the re-examination of sector C, it was discovered that under this complex there are two other levels of prehistoric dwelling, belonging, as shown by the materials discovered, to the same group. The new investigations established that this complex is placed under the burnt ruins of a surface dwelling, also of the Copăceni type, a fact that was not noticed during the first investigations due to their limitations and to the early feudal pit which crosses the Southern boundary of the dwelling. As a result, sector C of the site, including the analysed complex, belongs to the prehistoric dwelling and not to a necropolis, as it was previously believed.

The collective familiar or community depositions are not a rarity among the ancient discoveries from Romania⁷ or indeed other areas⁸, nor are the human sacrifices having a founding role in the prehistory or protohistory of the humankind⁹. Nevertheless, the ritual complex from Copăceni, because of the position of the adult skeleton and the placement of infant skeletons (Pl. IV b), remains a unique discovery, open to future exhaustive interpretations.

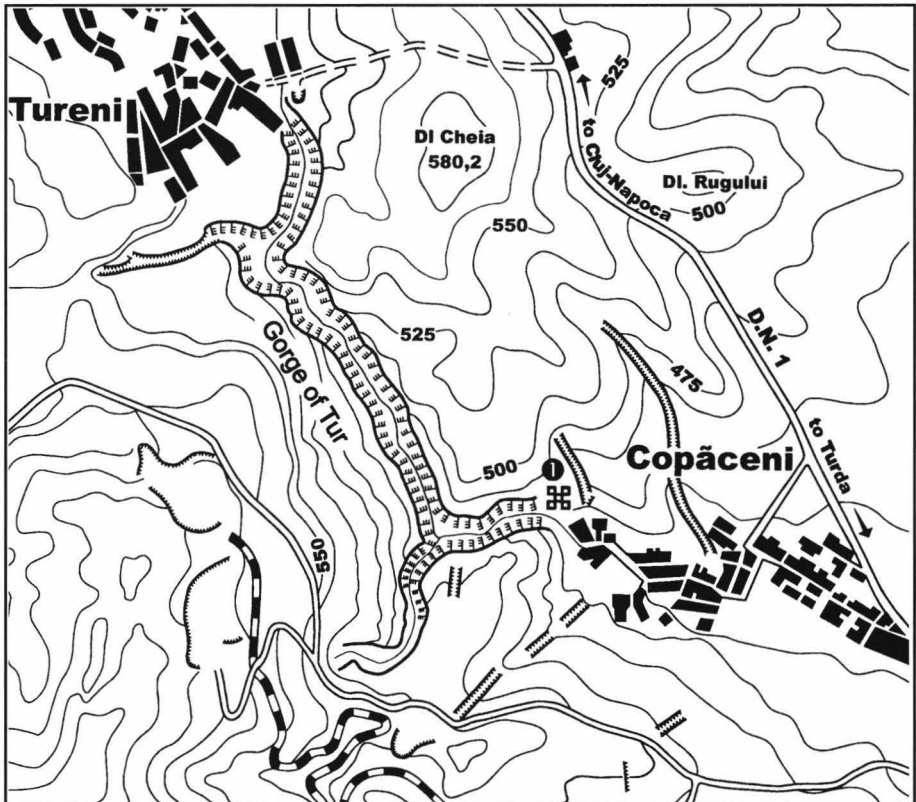
⁵ M. Rotea, *Grupul Copăceni/The Copăceni Group*, in *Comori ale epocii bronzului din România*, București 1995, 155, 157

⁶ Analysis made by D. Igna, National History Museum of Transylvania

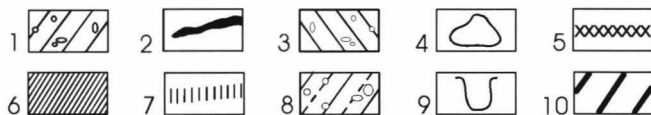
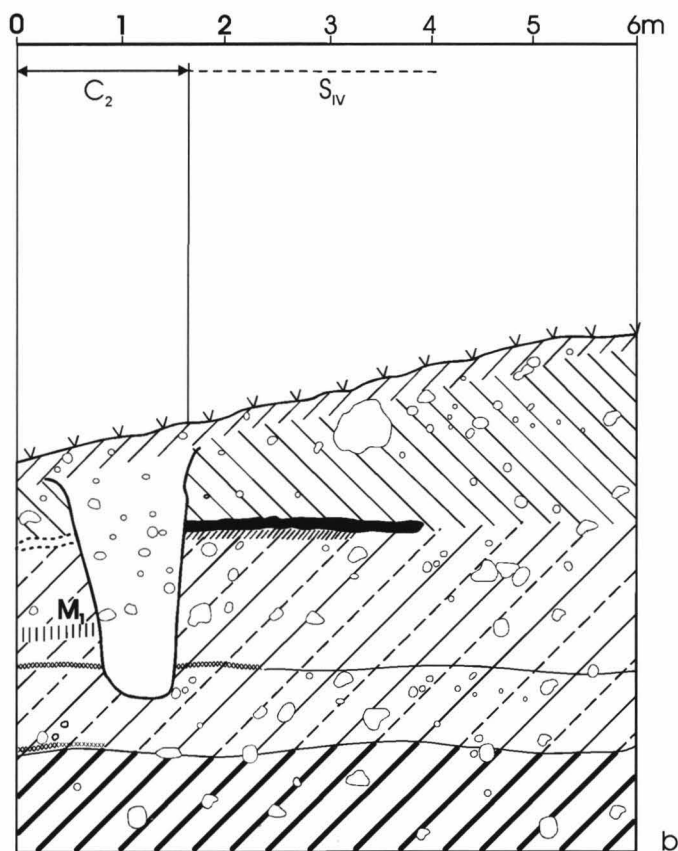
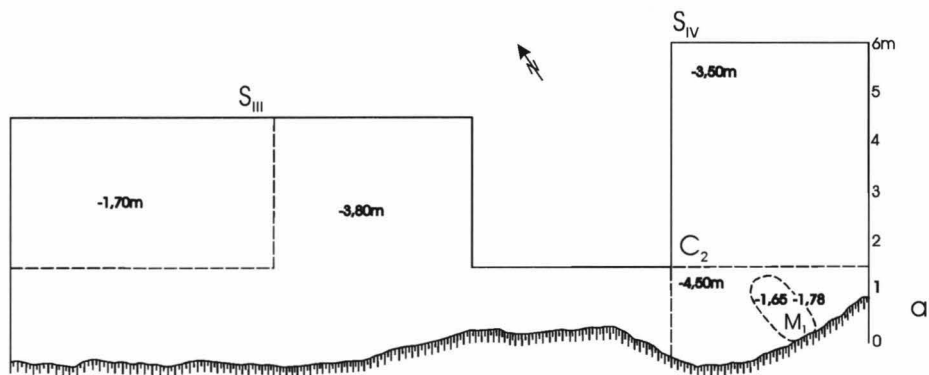
⁷ A. Comșa, C. Schuster, in *AMN*, 32, I, 1995, 279-288; V. Sîrbu, *Credințe și practici funerare, religioase și magice în lumea geto-dacilor*, Galați 1993, 31-36.

⁸ B. Dedet, H. Duda, A-M Tillier, in *Gallia*, 48, 1991, 59-108, with bibliography; A. Comșa, C. Schuster, *op. cit.*, 279-288.

⁹ M. Eliade, *De la Zalmoxis la Genghis Han*, Bucharest 1980, 183-185, with bibliography; C.E. Wilson, *Burials in Southern Britain during the pre-roman Iron Age*, in *Institute of Archaeology Bulletin*, London, 1981, 18, p. 144-145; T. Makiewicz, *On the Question of Sacrifices in the Preroman and Roman Period*, in *Folia Praehistorica Posnaniensis*, 3, Poznań 1987, 181-187, with bibliography; B. Dedet, H. Duda, A-M. Tillier, *op. cit.*, 95-102; A. Comșa, C. Schuster, *op. cit.*, 279-288.



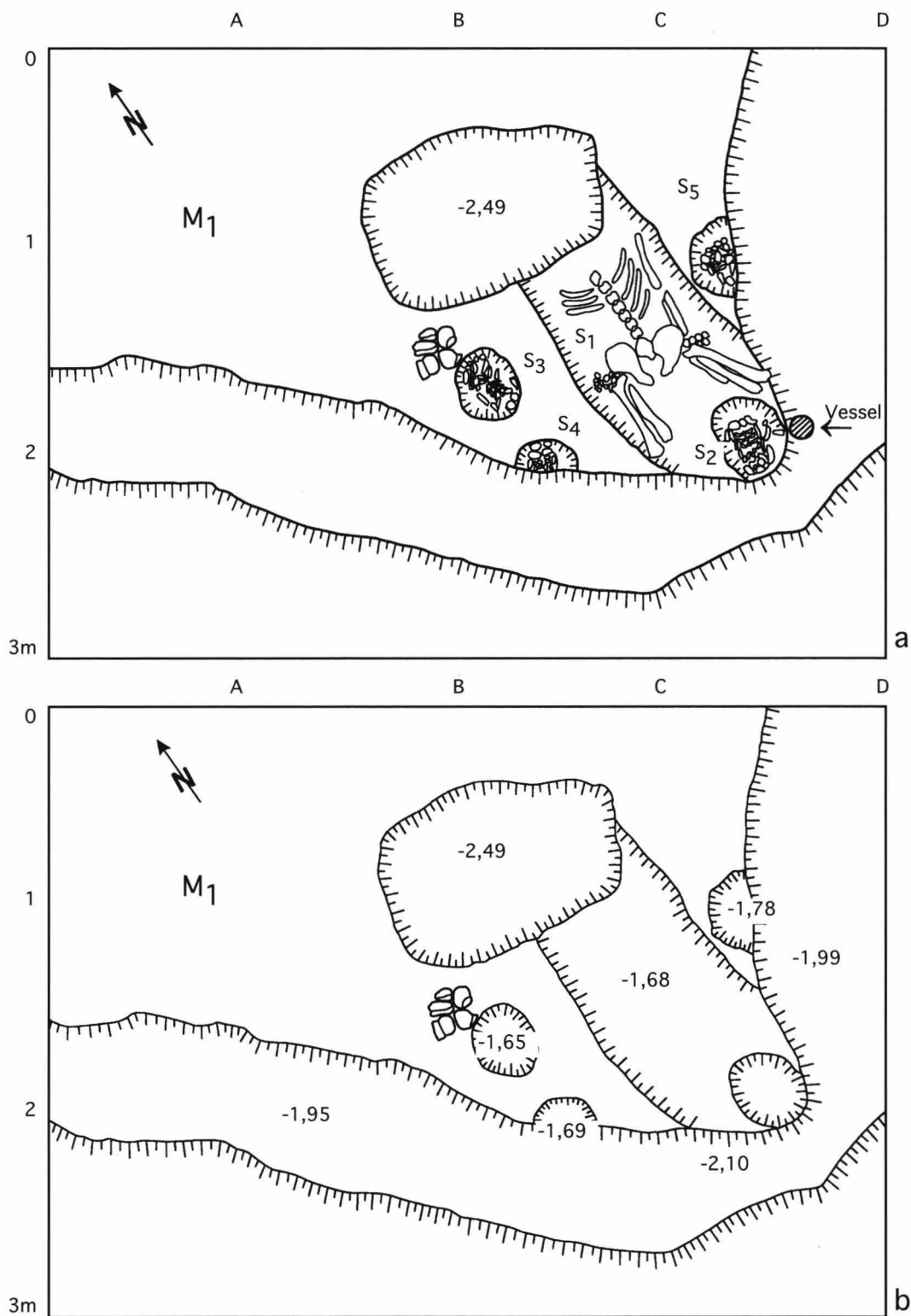
Pl. I. a: Map of Romania. The position of Copăceni site.
 b: Tur Pass – No. 1 Copăceni-La Moara.



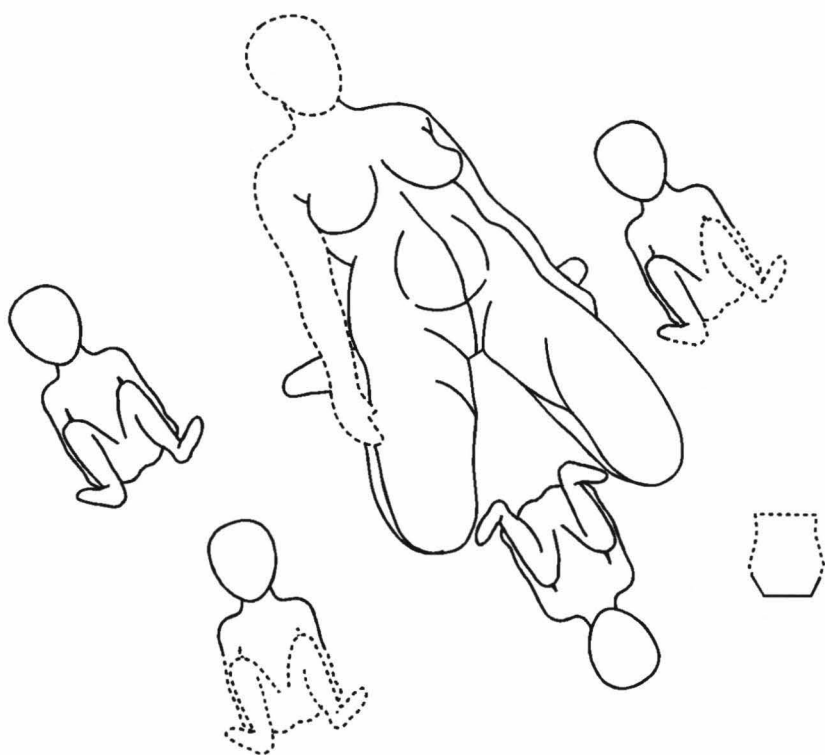
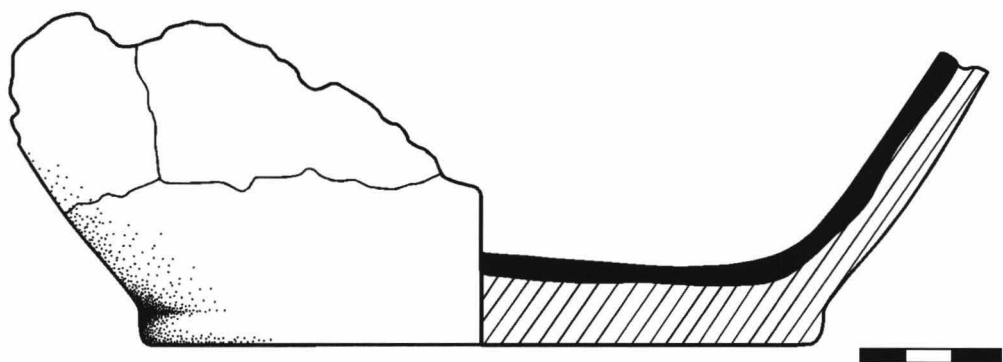
Pl. II a: Copăceni-La Moara, Sector C, general view.

b: Copăceni-La Moara, Sector C, Western profile and profile of C2 and S IV.

1. contemporary humus; 2. remains of dwelling; 3. level of culture belonging to the Copăceni group; 4. Stones; 5. layer of ashes; 6. layer of burn;
7. ritual complex; 8. culture layer belonging to the Copăceni group;
9. pre feudal pit; 10. sterile



Pl. III a: Ritual complex. b: The pits of the ritual complex.



Pl. IV a: Ritual offering vessel. b: The hypothetical representation of the complex.