

VIEWS CONCERNING BARREL-SHAPED VESSELS IN THE SARMATIAN IAZYGES ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract: Barrel-shaped pots are typical Sarmatian items, of different origin than those Roman; some of the authors believe they originate in the East, namely, the Pontic region.

This pot category is usually formed of three parts, small vessels' sides being generally asymmetrical. Asymmetrical barrel-shaped pots, with uneven weight distribution, were definitely hanged. The edges of the side ends or the side collar were used for tying the rope. The uneven weight distribution is indicative of the fact that cylinder pots were not only hanged. Most likely, the long rope was tightly tied thus letting the pot loose, spinning in circles. Because of the uneven weight distribution, spinning lasted longer.

Their use means may only be supposed: it is possible that large pots were used for storing butter and cheese products; smaller ones were likely used for storing alcoholic fermented beverages.

Barrel-shaped vessels are a type unknown to the Dacian, Daco-Roman and provincial Roman pottery, being specific to the Nomad environment, the specimens discovered in Banat and Bačka being dated to the late Sarmatian period.

Keywords: Sarmatian period; pottery; Danube - Tisa environment; 4th-5th century AD.

Rezumat: Vasele butoi sarmatice au o origine diferită față de cele romane, unii autori considerând că acest tip ceramic este originar din est, din regiunea pontică.

Acest tip de vase sunt formate, de regulă, din trei părți, la piesele de mici dimensiuni părțile laterale fiind, în general, asimetrice. Vasele asimetrice, cu împărțirea inegală a greutateii, au fost cu siguranță agățate. Marginea capetelor laterale sau gulerul lateral au folosit la fixarea frânghiei. Împărțirea inegală a greutateii indică faptul că vasele cilindrice nu au fost doar agățate. Este imaginabil că frânghia lungă a fost strâns răsucită, lăsându-se apoi vasul liber, care se rotea în cerc. Din cauza împărțirii inegale a greutateii se mărea timpul de răsucire.

Modul de utilizare a acestor vase poate fi presupus: piesele de dimensiuni mari este posibil să fi fost folosite pentru păstrarea untului și a brânzeturilor; piesele de mici dimensiuni erau utilizate pentru păstrarea băuturilor alcoolice fermentate.

Vasele în formă de butoi reprezintă un tip necunoscut în ceramica dacică, daco-romană și romană provincială din Dacia, fiind specifice mediului nomad, piesele din spațiul Banatului și Bačka fiind datate în perioada sarmatică târzie.

Cuvinte cheie: perioada sarmatică; ceramică; arealul Dunăre - Tisa; secolele IV-V p. Chr.

Barrel-shaped vessels or cylinder-shaped pots represent a pottery category specific to the Sarmatians. Most of barrel-shaped pots finds are generally found in settlements, with the exception of the Sarmatian graves at Deszk (Hungary) and Saravale (Timiș County, Romania).

From the manufacturing point of view, the Sarmatian pots in this category usually consist of three parts: the central bulging part, provided with an orifice in upper

position and the sides exhibiting grooves designed to attach the closed ends. The rims and neck are made separately, being glued subsequent to the assembly of the other two parts, in a technique resembling that of producing food storage pots. The weight distribution ratio between the two parts, different in shape, is uneven (Pl. I/1-3). Although rare, there are cases when the rim is hand-made (and not wheel-thrown).

This pottery type is usually found in the archaeological material identified in settlements, in numbers considerably higher than published, as it is impossible to determine with certainty, based on shards, whether they actually belong to a cylinder pot (in the shape of a barrel), differentiation from storage vessels being made only according to the rim in the upper part and the two closed side ends.

The first scholar to draw attention to barrel-shaped pots in the Sarmatian environment was L. Marton, who, based on shape, related clay barrels to skin hoses¹.

Referring to the evolution of the said pottery category, M. Párducz believed that these shapes had been developed in Pannonia, Sarmatian origin barrel-shaped pots being different from those Roman. The pots are indeed known, however not only in Pannonia, but also all over the Roman empire. The simplest shape of the type is the legged-barrel with an open part forming the pot mouth². In what Pannonian items are concerned, É. Bónis underlined that cylinder pots appeared in various shapes, from specimens with red firnis to *terra nigra* specimens. The author dated the Pannonian finds to the 2nd century AD, while for the western provinces she mentions specimens from the period between the 2nd and 4th centuries AD. Hungarian contemporary authors concluded that Roman cylinder pots may not be taken as model for those Sarmatian, positioned horizontally, and that there are only a few similarities³ between the two types.

There are specimens with three mouths, but also pots with one mouth only. In the latter, imitation of the circle specific to wooden pots is noticeable. Roman pots placed horizontally are provided with one or several smaller legs and the mouth is supplied with two small handles. Sarmatian cylinder pots were never provided with handles or legs for support, thus they could not rest on the bulging part in the lower part.

The two side parts may be either incised or simple and it was possible that one of the parts was vertically cut and the other rounded, or both sides rounded or slightly conical⁴. A part of the cylinder pot unornamented, however pots with smooth or polished surfaces were also identified. In these cases, the smooth part stretches between the two ends of the sides, hence upright (wheel-thrown). Barrel-shaped pots with polished surfaces are specific to archaeological finds dating to the late Sarmatian period and the Hunnic period. Shape deviations in Roman or Sarmatian barrel-shaped pots point to their different use.

A. Mócsy highlighted the eastern origin of the Sarmatian barrels⁵. M. Párducz deduced their origin from Roman pottery art and quoted a cylinder pot found at

¹ Marton 1909, 154-158.

² Párducz 1945, 77.

³ Bónis 1942, 16.

⁴ Vaday 1989, 159, Pl. 45/1-2.

⁵ Mócsy 1965, 107.

Poiana⁶. Sz. K. Póczy sought the origin of this pottery type (in relation to the cylinder Sarmatian pot discovered at Intercisa) in the East, in the Pontic region⁷. In the Minusinsk Basin, cylinder clay and wooden pots were confirmed archaeologically, yet these pot types are present even in the Alani environment of the Altai-Saian region. Cylinder wooden pots correspond, in terms of shape, to those clay-made. These specimens are provided with both the two side collars and the flared rim used for hanging. Cylinder type pots that could have been hanged come from rather early archaeological layers and differentiate by their use only: Troia I and Goldberger (in Ries region)⁸.

A. Mócsy argued these pots served for making fermented drinks⁹. In this case, one cannot explain shape through function. Asymmetrical pots, with the uneven weight distribution, were definitely hanged. The edges of the side ends or the side collar were used for tying rope. The uneven weight distribution is indicative of the fact that cylinder pots were not only hanged. It is likely that the long rope was tightly tied to the pot only to let the pot loose, spinning in circles. The spinning time increased due to the uneven weight distribution. Though chewing was used in fermentation, in A. H. Vaday's view, it is more likely that these pots were used by the Sarmatians to make butter and cheese¹⁰. Based on the specimen found at Intercisa, one can presume that the finished product was transported from abroad, as merchandise. A number of quite large specimens emerge among the cylinder pots of the late Sarmatian and Hunnic periods. There, one may observe size increases based on similarities with other household pots. We believe that A. H. Vaday's presumption is valid only in the case of larger pots, since smaller ones cannot be used for cheese products, but more likely for drinks.

Currently, most cylinder pots come from central and south regions of the Hungarian Plain. Besides the small pot found in a grave at Deszk-“Ujmajor”¹¹, cylinder pots from Nagykert, Gyoma, Hódmezővásárhely-“Fehértopárt”, Hódmezővásárhely-“Kopáncs”, Hódmezővásárhely-“Solt-Palé”, Orosháza-“Pusztaszentetornya” and Szeged-“Óthalom”¹², Tiszafüred-“Tiszaörvény” (Pl. I/4), Tiszasas (Pl. II/1)¹³ may also be mentioned. To these add the small pots from Doboz-“Óvár” (Pl. II/2)¹⁴, Banatski Karlovac-“Ciglana-stari iskop” (Pl. III/1)¹⁵, Baranda-“Ciglana” (Pl. III/2)¹⁶, from a Sarmatian grave at Saravale (Pl. IV/1 a-c)¹⁷, the finds in Serbia being dated to the 4th century AD.

⁶ Párducz 1952, 39.

⁷ Póczy 1957, 80.

⁸ Istvánovits 1981, 119-121.

⁹ Mócsy 1965, 107.

¹⁰ Vaday 1989, 159.

¹¹ Párducz 1945, Pl. XI/15.

¹² Párducz 1943, 165-167; Párducz 1950, 50; Mócsy 1965, Fig. 3.

¹³ Vaday 1989, 274, no. 332; 277, no. 353.

¹⁴ Párducz 1950, 50, Pl. CXXX/39.

¹⁵ Trifunović 2000, 89, T.V.

¹⁶ Trifunović 2000, 86, T. II. 15; Trifunović 2001, in <http://curug.rastko.net/nezavisni-prilozi/objavljeni-radovi-pdf-html/2-strifunoviclimiganti.html> (21.06.2012).

¹⁷ Micle 1996, 68-74, Fig. 1 a-c.

Seeds of *Impatiens noli-tangere* (in Romanian: "Slăbănog"), a decorative plant in the *Balsaminaceae* family, were found inside the pot from Saravale (Pl. IV/1 a-c), which, according to some of the Romanian researchers, gives the pot a ritual function, related to a vegetation rebirth cult¹⁸. The *Impatiens noli-tangere* seeds may be though linked to something more practical, like medicine. From ancient times it is known that *Impatiens noli-tangere* seeds held in a fermented hard drink were used to cure dysentery¹⁹. Thus, the hypothesis that the pots were used for preparing or keeping alcoholic drinks seems more appropriate. Numerous cylinder potshards were identified in occasion of the survey works in the Békés County (Hungary), but unfortunately they have remained unpublished. Recent excavations yielded large cylinder pots, like those at Tiszaföldvár-"Téglagyár", Gorsza, Örménykút, Orosháza-"Szentetornya-Székácsmajor", the item in the latter site reaching 50 cm long, 7 cm wide and 31 cm in height (Pl. II/3)²⁰. In the northern part of the Great Hungarian Plain, *similar pieces were identified at Tiszavasvári-"Keresztfal"*²¹. Large pots have been dated to the end of the 4th century and early 5th century AD.

We believe that barrel-shaped pots may be included in the pottery category specific to the Sarmatian Iazyges from the Great Hungarian Plain, Banat and Bačka. Their use means may be presumed: large specimens were likely used for storing butter and cheese products, as A. H. Vaday argued, without any further evidence; as for the smaller items, we agree with the Serbian researchers' hypothesis - storing fermented alcoholic drinks. In support of the latter assumption comes the discovery of *Impatiens noli-tangere* seeds in the pot at Saravale, which also adds to ancient literary sources recording the use of plants for medicinal purposes by the Sarmatians inhabiting the region between Danube and Tisa. We believe that the reduced number of such barrel-shaped pots compared to other pottery categories is due to the parallel use by the Sarmatians of similar pots made of wood, which did not preserve. Barrel-shaped vessels are a type unknown to the Dacian, Daco-Roman and provincial Roman pottery, being specific to the Nomad environment, the specimens discovered in Banat and Bačka being dated to the late Sarmatian period.

The publishing of the recent specimens identified in the Sarmatian archaeological sites from Hungary may provide new relevant data in terms of use, spatial distribution as well as ratio in the Sarmatian pottery of these barrel-shaped pots.

¹⁸ Benea, Bejan 1988, 256, note 43; Micle 1996, 69, note 11.

¹⁹ *Impatiens noli-tangere* is a well known traditional medicinal plant. The former is used in Asia for a variety of ailments such as for contusion, painful inflammation, joint pains, dysmenorrhea, carbuncles, lumbago, eczema, warts, itches and snake bites, while the latter species is used in Europe as an antiseptic, diuretic, emetic, laxative and vulnerary, in <http://www.medicultau.com/plante-medicinale/plante-medicinale/slabanog.php>. (21.06.2012); Sonoc 2006, 92-93.

²⁰ Havassy 1998, 168-169, no. 150; 169, no. 151.

²¹ Vaday 1989, pp. 159-160.

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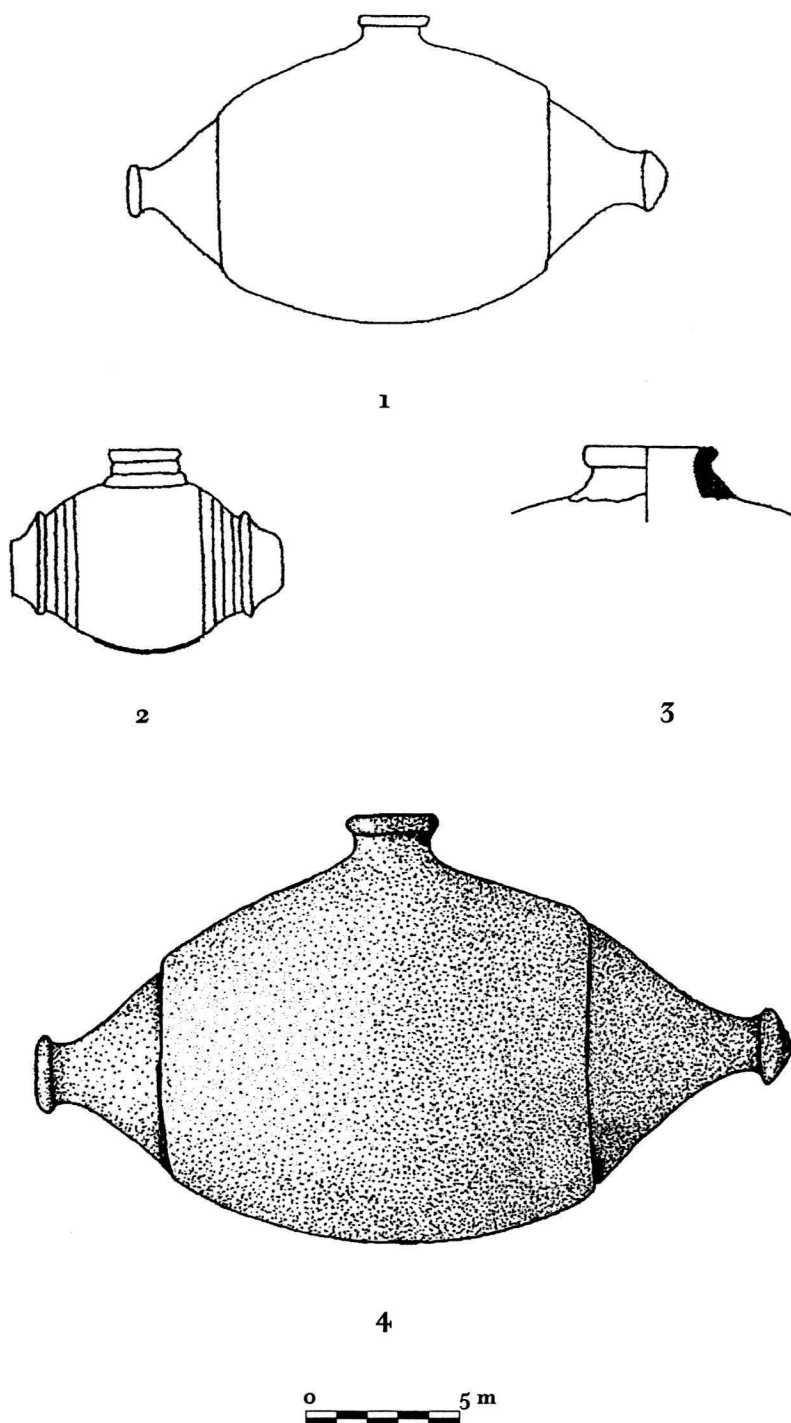
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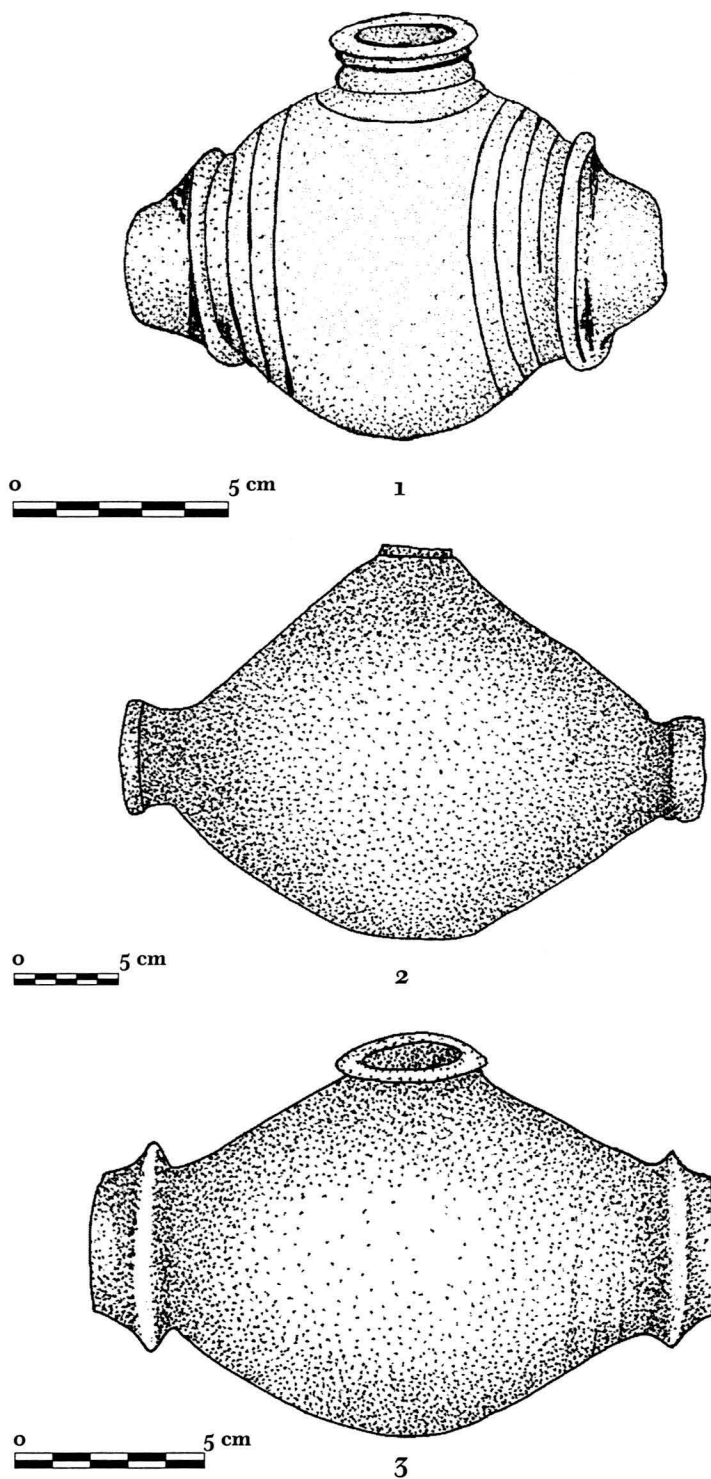
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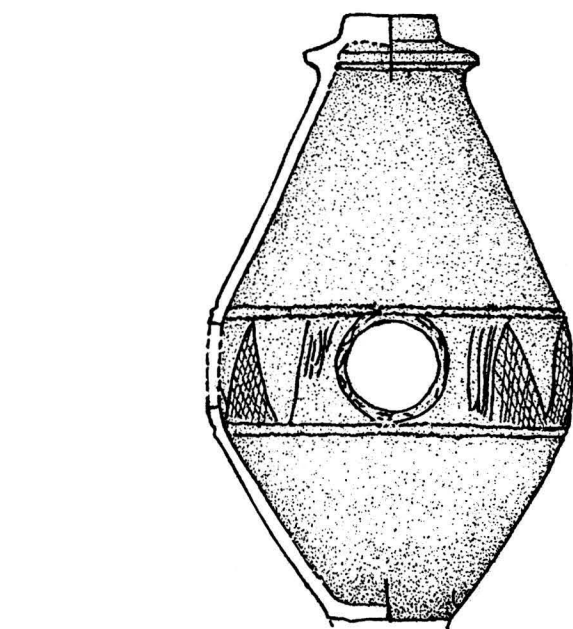
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Pl. I. 1-3. Types of barrel-shaped vessels (after Vaday 1989, Tab. 45/1-3); 4. Barrel-shaped vessel discovered at Tiszafüred-“Tiszaörvény”, Hungary (after Vaday 1989, Pl. 332).

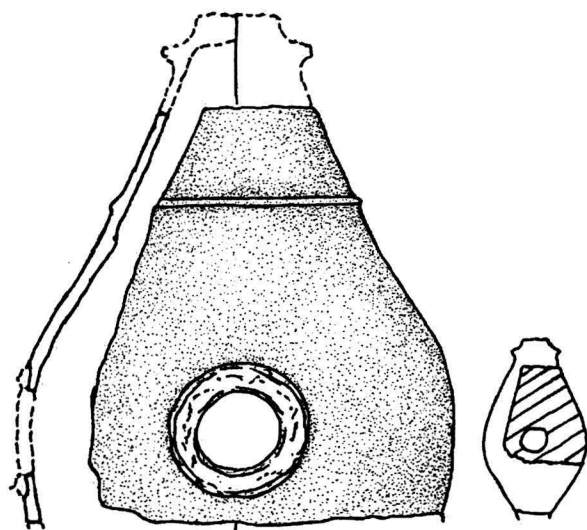


Pl. II. 1. Barrel-shaped vessel discovered at Tiszasas, Hungary (after Vaday 1989, Pl. 353); 2. Barrel-shaped vessel found at Doboz-“Óvár”, Hungary (after Párducz 1950, Pl. CXXX/39); 3. Barrel-shaped vessel discovered in Békés County, Hungary (after Havassy 1998, 169, no. 151, Jósa András Múzeum Nyíregyháza, inv. no. 55.211.1).



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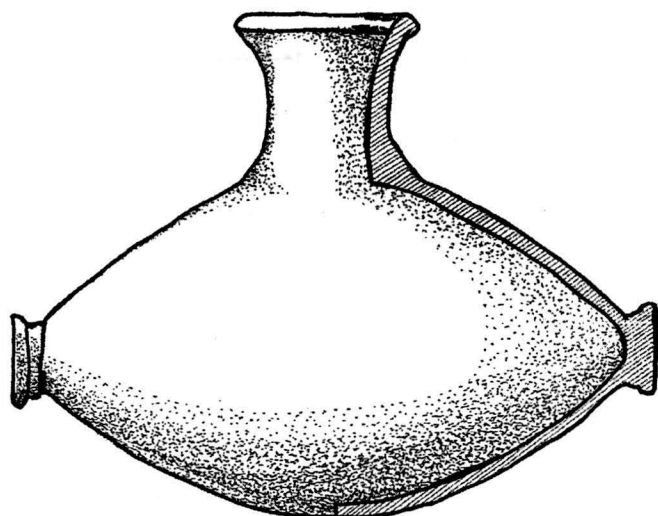
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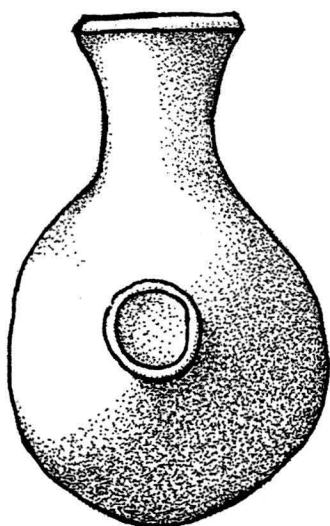
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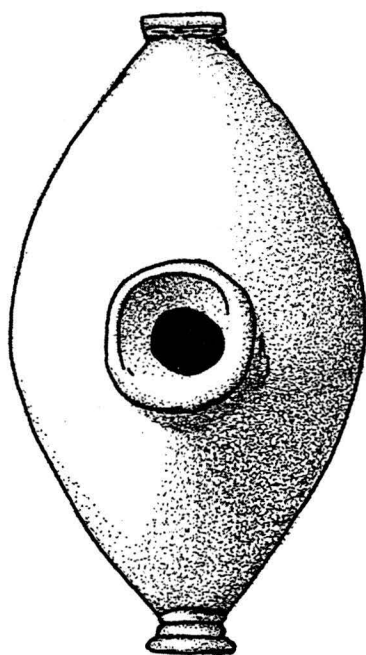
Pl. III. 1. Barrel-shaped vessel discovered at Banatski Karlovac- "Ciglana-stari iskop", Serbia (after Trifunović 2000, Fig. 5); 2. Barrel-shaped vessel discovered at Baranda-"Ciglana", Serbia (after Trifunović 2000, Fig. 2/15)



a



b

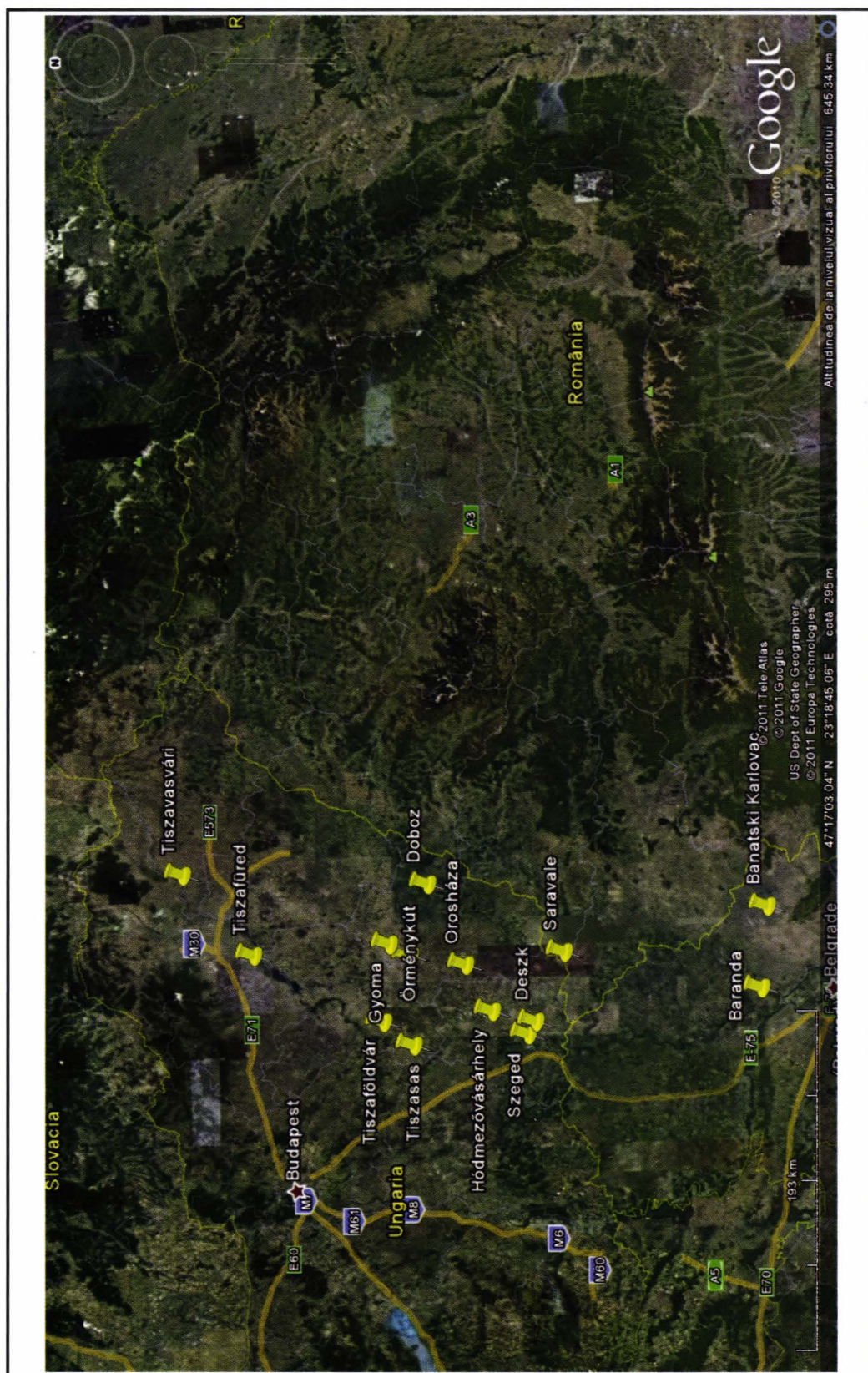


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Pl. IV. 1a-b. Barrel-shaped vessel found in the Sarmatian grave at Saravale, Timiș County (after Micle 1996, Fig. 1).



Pl. V. Map of barrel-shaped finds in the Sarmatian environment.