

## GRAVE ASCRIBED TO THE SÂNTANA DE MUREȘ-CERNEAHOV CULTURE, DISCOVERED IN MITOC – BOTOȘANI COUNTY\*

Ioan IAȚCU\*

In 2014, a fortuitous discovery was made, at 0.90 m depth, in the yard of a certain Avădanei Dumitru, whose household is situated in the inhabited space of the Mitoc locality (Botoșani County). An inhumation grave was discovered, with a funerary inventory from which two fragmentary vessels were recovered; three pottery shards belonged to a third vessel; a bone fragment was also found<sup>1</sup>. This study proposes a thorough analysis of the archaeological inventory and of the human bone material<sup>2</sup>.

**1. Bowl** (inv. no. 23602). Dimensions: height, 9.9 cm; maximum diameter, 15.2 cm; diameter of the base, 9.5 cm; diameter of the mouth, 12.8 cm. Made of fine clay, the vessel was carefully pottered. The grey colour – with yellowish hues – is shiny on the outside. The upper part of this bitronconical vessel is straight; it features a nervure at the limit between the body and the neck. The lower part ends with a ring-shaped support (Fig. 2/1). Judging by the shape, clay and execution technique, the vessels has analogies with the pottery discovered in graves no. 30, 39 and 361 of Mihălășeni<sup>3</sup>.

**2. Jar** (inv. no. 23603). It is broken in the upper part, which only preserves the widened neck area. Dimensions: height, 9 cm; diameter of the mouth, 12.7 cm; diameter of the base, 8.9 cm. It is handmade; executed using coarse, brown/black clay – uneven and predominantly oxidation burning (Fig. 2/2).

**3. Three pottery shards** from a handmade vessel. The coarse clay comprises ground up pottery shards as degreasing agent (Fig. 2/3).

**4. A 7-cm long femur fragment** – belonging to a child aged between 0 and 7 (*infans I* age)<sup>4</sup> – was discovered in the ground above the bowl. On its surface, the femoral orifice is still noticeable, as well as a series of longitudinal fissures. In the bone section, on a limited area, scorching traces are visible (Fig. 2/4). In this case, it can be established that incineration was performed on dry bones, after the decomposition of muscles and teguments<sup>5</sup>. This action occurred at a specific moment, the causes of which cannot be determined precisely. In the absence of a clear archaeological context, I can only assume that a ritual burning occurred in

---

\* A first version of this paper was published in Romanian in the journal *Forum Cultural*, XV, 2, Botoșani, 2015, p. 38-41.

\* “Moldova” National Museum Complex Iași – History Museum of Moldavia; iatcu80@gmail.com

<sup>1</sup> The materials were retrieved by Măriuca-Diana Vornicu, PhD, (scientific researcher, Romanian Academy – Iași Branch, Institute of Archaeology) and kindly offered to me for study; I express my gratitude to her for this opportunity.

<sup>2</sup> The items are hosted by the History Museum of Moldavia, Iași.

<sup>3</sup> O. L. Șovan, *Necropola de tip Sântana de Mureș-Černjacov de la Mihălășeni (județul Botoșani)*, Cetatea de Scaun, Târgoviște, 2005, pl. 21, fig. A/2; pl. 25, fig. B/3; pl. 201, fig. B/1.

<sup>4</sup> I would like to express my sincerely gratitude to Angela Simalcsik, PhD (scientific researcher, Romanian Academy – Iași Branch, Department of Anthropological Research) for this determination and for the bibliographical suggestions.

<sup>5</sup> D. H. Ubelaker, *Human Skeletal Remains: Excavation, Analysis, Interpretation*, Taraxacum Press, Washington D.C., 1989, p. 35-38.

the context of an exhumation followed by re-inhumation.

Based on the scarce information available, it can be stated that the two vessels were placed mouths upward, underneath the skeleton, in the area of the legs. Such inhumation graves with burning and soot traces were discovered at Erbiceni (grave 16) and Pietriș (grave 7)<sup>6</sup>. According to researcher Ion Ioniță, “inhumation graves with burning traces denote the use of fire in the ritual practices of inhumation, too, a reminder of certain older Sarmatian funerary complexes”<sup>7</sup>. In the Sântana de Mureș necropolis of Pietriș – situated on the valley of River Bârlad and better researched –, numerous Sarmatian elements were identified, among which the practice of depositing handmade vessels and the frequency of ash and charcoal traces around the skeleton<sup>8</sup>. In fact, the last one was a ritual practice that the Goths borrowed from the Sarmatians<sup>9</sup>. Fire traces were also attested in certain Carpo-Dacian funerary complexes of the 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD, such as the one of Văleni<sup>10</sup>. Hence, the Mitoc grave could be a Cerneahov type of grave, where we note the presence of Sarmatian handmade vessels and of dry bone incineration traces.

For a better spatial categorisation of this discovery, the two archaeological repertoires of the Botoșani County underscore the existence – in the commune of Mitoc – of several points where finds belonging to the Sântana de Mureș-Cerneahov Culture were discovered, which I describe in the following lines. **1. Pârâul lui Istrate**, where a settlement dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD was discovered 2,300 m south-south-west of the village church, on the Pruth terrace and at its confluence with Pârâul lui Istrate. Sporadic habitation traces were discovered at this location<sup>11</sup>. **2. Valea Izvorului (La Izvor)**, where pottery shards dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD were discovered, which shows the existence of a Sântana de Mureș-Cerneahov settlement. This point is situated 1,300 m southwest of the village church and 150-200 m upstream from the spring that gives the name of the valley<sup>12</sup>. **3. Izvorul Satului (or Izvorul Luncii)**, where pottery shards dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD were discovered on the surface, which attests the existence of a Sântana de Mureș settlement<sup>13</sup>. **4. Cotul Mic (Bâta la Bolovani)**, where a settlement ascribed to this culture is located. The point is situated 3,000 m north-north-west of the village church, on a promontory three-fold bordered by a Pruth meander. In a black/greyish soil, numerous pottery shards dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century were discovered. In addition, a pottery shard dated to the 5<sup>th</sup> century was also found here<sup>14</sup>. **5. Coada Stâncii (near the locality of Horia)**, where – based on the pottery shards dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD – the existence of a Sântana de Mureș-Cerneahov settlement was determined; it is located 1,600 m east-south-east of the village church of Horia<sup>15</sup>.

In conclusion, it can be admitted that in this point of the Mitoc locality there is a necropolis that has to be included within a much broader context, which also comprises the

---

<sup>6</sup> I. Ioniță, *Contribuții cu privire la cultura Sântana de Mureș-Cerneahov pe teritoriul R. S. România*, în *ArhMold*, IV, 1966, p. 255.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*; *idem*, *Noi descoperiri sarmatice pe teritoriul Moldovei*, în *ArhMold*, II-III, 1964, p. 314, 319, 323.

<sup>8</sup> I. Ioniță, *op. cit.*, în *ArhMold*, IV, 1966, p. 241, 245.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 245.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 225.

<sup>11</sup> Al. Păunescu, P. Șadurschi, V. Chirica, *Repertoriul arheologic al județului Botoșani*, I, Bucharest, 1976, p. 189 (hereinafter *Repertoriul Botoșani*, 1976); O. L. Șovan, *Repertoriul arheologic al județului Botoșani*, *Bibliotheca archaeologica “Hieriasus”*. Monographica IV, Botoșani, 2013, p. 310-311 (hereinafter *Repertoriul Botoșani*, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> N. Zaharia, M. Petrescu-Dîmbovița, Em. Zaharia, *Așezări din Moldova. De la paleolitic până în secolul al XVIII-lea*, Bucharest, 1970, p. 276, pl. CCXIX/13; CCXX/1-4, 7, 10 (hereinafter *Așezări din Moldova*, 1970); *Repertoriul Botoșani*, 1976, p. 191; *Repertoriul Botoșani*, 2013, p. 312.

<sup>13</sup> *Așezări din Moldova*, 1970, p. 276, pl. CCXX/16, 16; *Repertoriul Botoșani*, 1976, p. 192.

<sup>14</sup> *Așezări din Moldova*, 1970, p. 277, pl. CXLVII/12; CCXX/12-12; *Repertoriul Botoșani*, 1976, p. 192; *Repertoriul Botoșani*, 2013, p. 313.

<sup>15</sup> *Repertoriul Botoșani*, 1976, p. 193; *Repertoriul Botoșani*, 2013, p. 314.

two great necropolises of Mihălășeni and Miorcani. Future archaeological research will most definitely manage to provide further insight into its size, as well as precious information related to Late Antiquity funerary rites and rituals.

### **UN MORMÂNT APARTINÂND CULTURII SÂNTANA DE MUREȘ-CERNEAHOV DESCOPERIT LA MITOC, JUDEȚUL BOTOȘANI**

În 2014, cu ocazia unei descoperiri fortuite, în vatra localității Mitoc (jud. Botoșani), la adâncimea de 0,90 m, s-a descoperit un mormânt de înhumație, cu inventar funerar din care s-au recuperat două vase fragmentare, trei fragmente ceramice provenind de la un al treilea vas și un fragment de os aparținând unui copil cu vârsta cuprinsă între 0-7 ani (vârsta *infans I*). Pe baza celor câteva informații sumare pe care le deținem, putem afirma că cele două vase au fost așezate cu gura în sus, dedesubtul scheletului, în zona picioarelor. Repertoriile arheologice ale județului Botoșani pun în evidență existența pe teritoriul comunei Mitoc a mai multor puncte cu descoperiri aparținând culturii Sântana de Mureș-Cerneahov. Așadar, putem să admitem că în acest punct din localitatea Mitoc se află o necropolă ce trebuie încadrată într-un context mult mai larg, în care se înscriu și cele două mari necropole de la Mihălășeni și Miorcani.

#### **Lista ilustrațiilor**

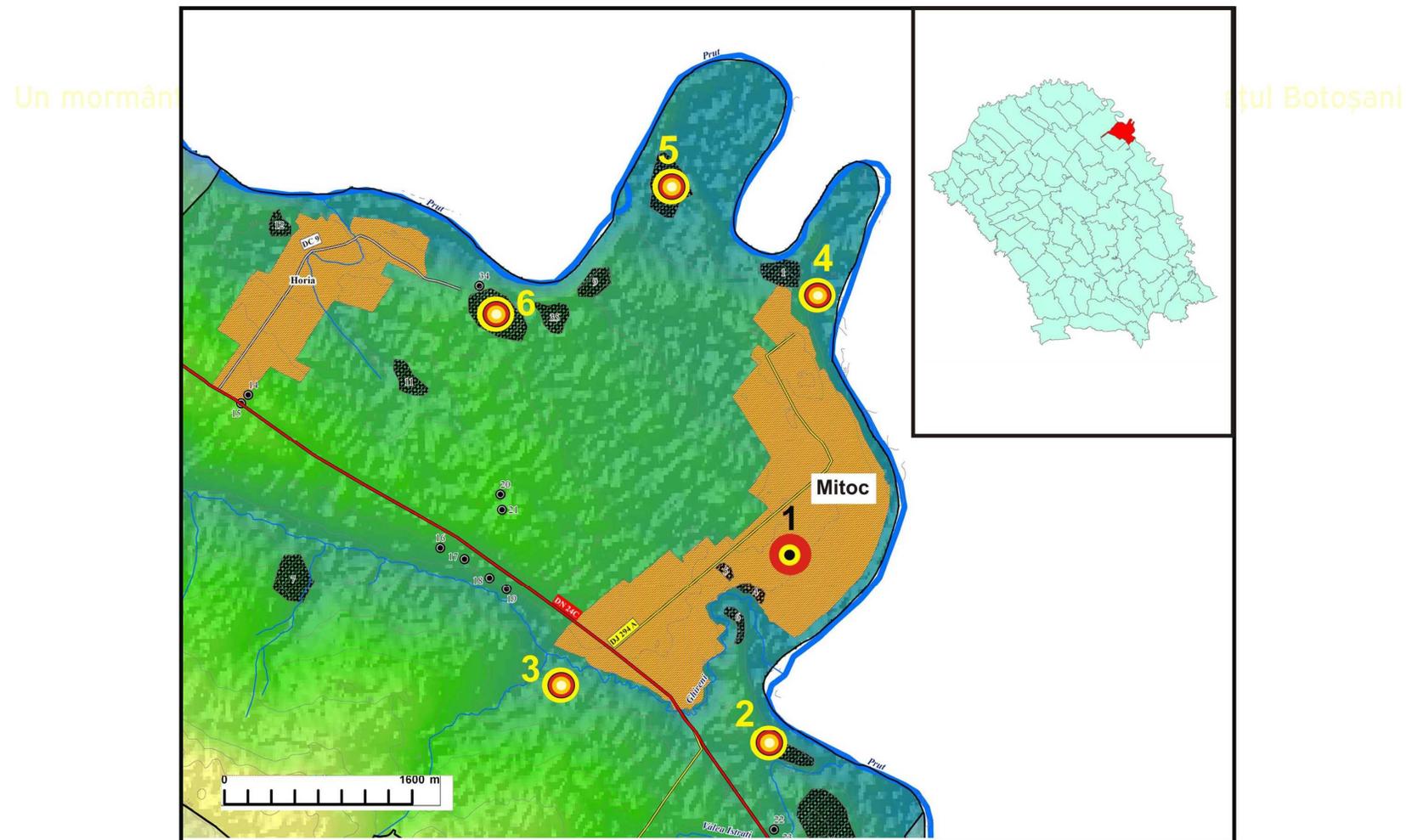
Fig. 1. Descoperiri aparținând culturii Sântana de Mureș pe teritoriul comunei Mitoc (apud *Repertoriul Botoșani*, 2013): 1. Mormânt de înhumație descoperit în vatra satului; 2. Pârâul lui Istrate; 3. Valea Izvorului; 4. Izvorul Satului; 5. Cotul Mic; 6. Coadă Stâncii.

Fig. 2. Castron (1); vas borcan (2); fragmente ceramice (3); fragment de femur (4).

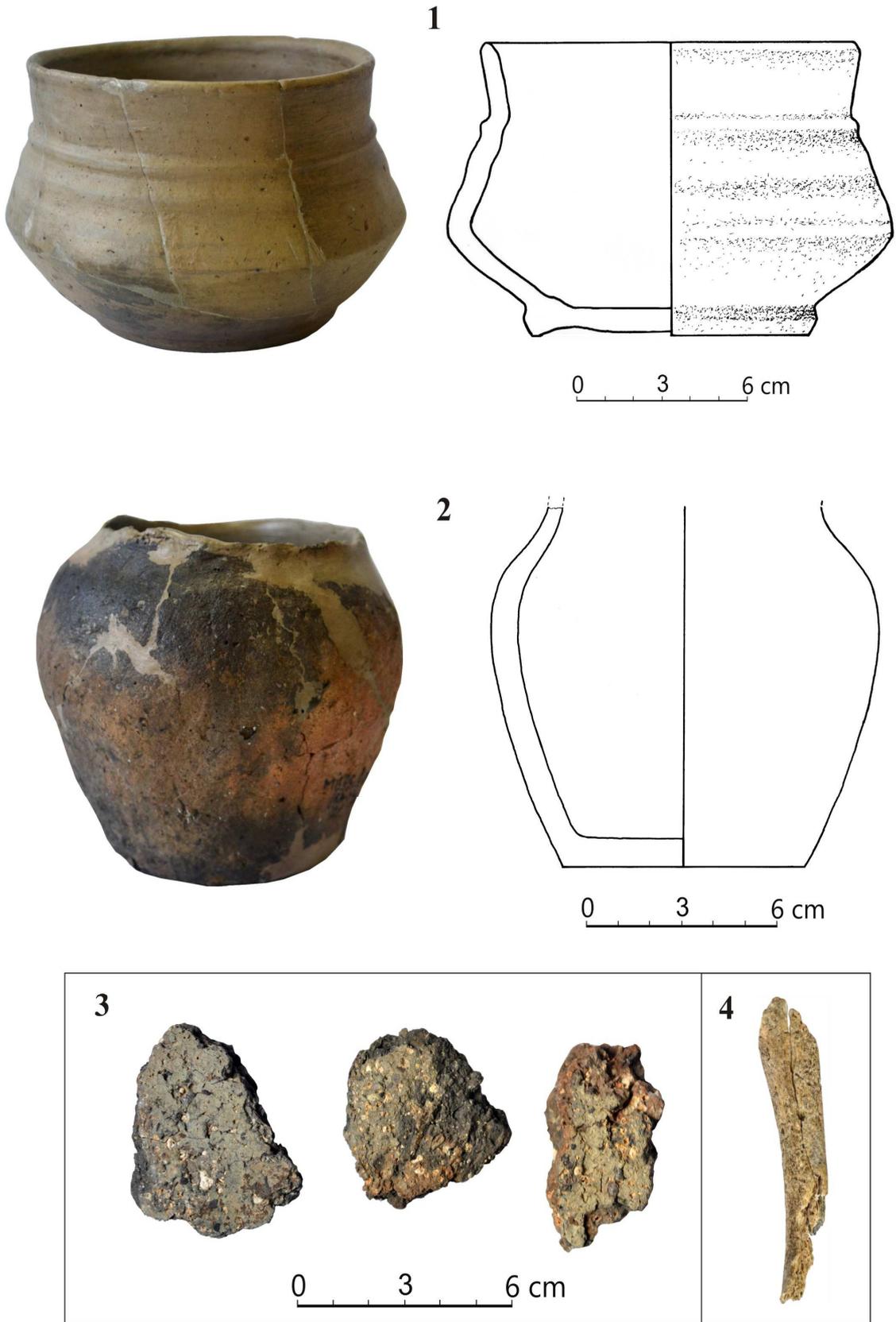
#### **List of illustrations**

Plate 1. Finds belonging to the Sântana de Mureș Culture in the commune of Mitoc (apud *Repertoriul Botoșani*, 2013): 1. Inhumation grave discovered in the inhabited area of the village; 2. Pârâul lui Istrate; 3. Valea Izvorului; 4. Izvorul Satului; 5. Cotul Mic; 6. Coadă Stâncii.

Plate 2. Bowl (1); jar (2); pottery shards (3); femur fragment (4).



**Fig. 1. Finds belonging to the Sântana de Mureș Culture in the commune of Mitoc (apud *Repertoriul Botoșani*, 2013):**  
**1. Inhumation grave discovered in the inhabited area of the village; 2. Pârâul lui Istrate;**  
**3. Valea Izvorului; 4. Izvorul Satului; 5. Cotul Mic; 6. Coadă Stâncii.**



**Fig. 2. Bowl (1); jar (2); pottery shards (3); femur fragment (4).**