

AN INCISED FRAGMENT OF THE EARLY NEOLITHIC FROM MIERCUREA SIBIULUI – VALEA GÂRBOVEI

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ABSTRACT: *In the C25 feature, belonging to the Early Neolithic settlement, from Miercurea Sibiului – Valea Gârbovei there was found an incised ceramic fragment with linear and clear signs that have analogies in what is called Danube Script. The article is stressing about the context of the discovery and the chronological moment of the ceramic fragment.*

KEYWORDS: *Early Neolithic, Starčevo-Criș, Miercurea Sibiului, Danube Script*

REZUMAT: *În complexul neolitic timpuriu C25 de la Miercurea Sibiului – Valea Gârbovei a fost descoperit un fragment incizat, cu semne liniare ordonate, care are analogii în ceea ce este cunoscut ca și Scrierea Danubiană. Studiul analizează contextul și momentul cronologic la care se situează această descoperire.*

CUVINTE-CHEIE: *Neolitic timpuriu, Starčevo-Criș, Miercurea Sibiului, Scrierea Danubiană*

INTRODUCTION

The site at Miercurea Sibiului – Valea Gârbovei is located north of Miercurea Sibiu, immediately after the Sibiu- Vințu de Jos railway lines (Fig. 1) near the Gârbovei riverbed and in the lower part of it, which is tributary to the Secaș. This meadow area has a small slope; the deepening of the Secaș riverbed leads to increased erosion of the lower level of the Gârbova, while a rise of the Secaș levels results in the creation of a sedimentation zone on the lower Gârbova. The area was considered a flood plain and no archaeological materials were found here. The site was sectioned, and in some time periods, overlapped by the Gârbova river bed and maybe Secaș. During the diagnostics of the highway, our MNIR colleagues identified Hallstatt materials in a control section. The section cut the C14 complex, which is a deepened Gáva pit.

During the preventive excavations of 2012 we identified a prehistoric bank where we excavated complexes from the Neolithic, Middle Neolithic, Eneolithic, the Iron Age and the Middle Age (Fig. 2, 3). Authorization no. 29/2012, for preventive archaeological research- with a team consisting of Florentina Marțiș, Anca Sorina Nițoi, Florina Maria Nițu, Maria Raluca Teodorescu and Anamaria Tudorie, was issued by Ministry of Culture. Present on the site excavation were only doctoral student Florentina Marțiș and myself. She received for research and publication all of the harvested lithic material for doctoral processing. Anamaria Tudorie handled the post excavation cleaning of the material. The client was the Romanian National Company of Motorways and National Roads SA and the archaeological work was sponsored by Impregilo S.p.A. Milan – Sibiu Branch.

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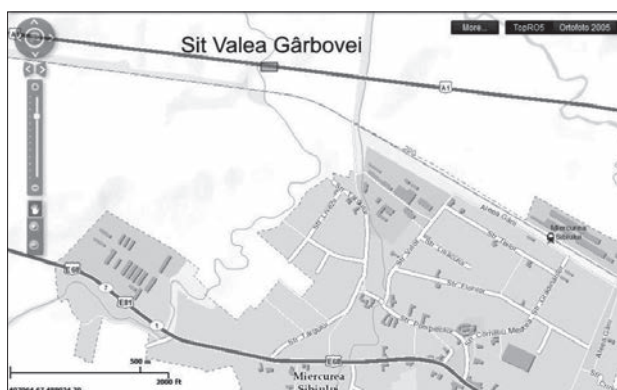


Fig. 01. Map of Miercurea Sibiului town with the exact location of the Miercurea Sibiului-Valea Gârbovei site.
<http://geoportal.ancpi.ro/geoportal/viewer/index.html> credit

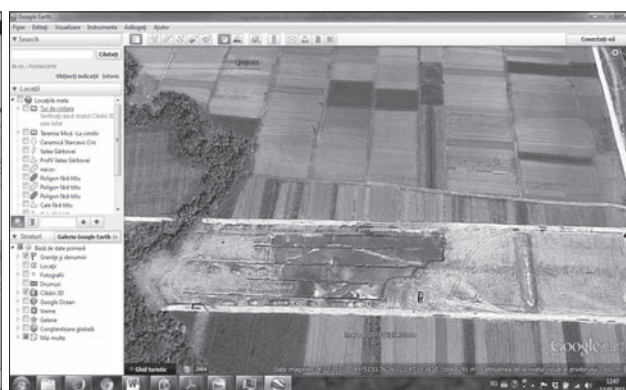


Fig.02. Ortofotoplan (22.04.2012) of the site Miercurea Sibiului – Valea Gârbovei, Google Earth 2015 credit.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INCISED CERAMIC FRAGMENT AND CONTEXT OF THE DISCOVERY¹

The oldest Neolithic structure of this site – C25 (Fig. 3–13), was discovered in the northern part. The house belongs to the Starčevo-Criș culture and it is large, measured a depth of 1.5 m in the western area and over 2.2 m depth in the eastern zone. It is located in the northern part of the bank and was covered by successive layers of silt. The filling is black and clayey, with ceramic pigments and presenting yellow intrusions at the bottom. It was not fully revealed because it goes on into northern profile of the highway, outside the discharge area. The length of the dwelling is 20.37m, with a 13.17 m width. The house follows the level curve of the bank and goes down with a slow slope from south to north, but also west to east. The house is partially deepened and is in the shape of a semi-sphere (egg shell) which has contributed to the preservation of the material. After abandonment, the house was covered by layers of silt which sealed in and preserved well the archaeological material. The treading levels around the house weren't preserved, as repeated floods washed it away. Profiling showed levels of stone, pottery fragments, hearth fragments, restorable pottery and whole vessels scattered west to east (fragments of the same vessels were found in this direction, along with hearth fragments). This level is poorly preserved in the northern and western area. Under this level we have irregular spherical holes and pillar holes with ceramic materials identical to those on the treading level. The difference between the stone and ceramic levels and the bottom of the feature is between 0.10–0.4 m. The pottery is of a very high quality, with whole vessels and many restorable others, with a high proportion of ceramics with dark red engobe. There are many designs of white lines on a red

¹ The ceramic fragment was presented in a press conference at Brukenthal National Museum in 2012 and was considered at that time a *great discovery*. The National Brukenthal Museum put it at the end of 2012 in an exhibition named *Message, Magic, Myth* with the manager of the museum as a curator, but nothing about the official coordinator of the site, who is legally having the research rights of the material. The fragment was presented in a catalog edited by Brukenthal National Museum with the researches from the Sibiu-Sebeș highway too, without any description of the archaeological context. The site has a general view in an article linked to statistical analyses (Luca *et al.* 2013) where I sent the text connected with the site general description.

Unfortunately, the description of the C25 dwelling, identical with the one from my research *Report* (Suciu 2012, 15–16 – submitted by me at the end of the work) was published in a Romanian journal (Luca 2013) without even mentioning the original research *Report* in the references notes, practically taking all the credit of the excavation and research. This is a non-academic behavior and I am deeply regretting that a person that I know could use his position as a manager (he is not even the member of the research team of this particular site) to gain possession of something he is not entitled for. Not to mention that the image he used was connected with some Hallstatt features, rather than the C25 complex – that is saying everything about the degree of his knowledge in this topic.

background, but rarely with large dots or smaller, more traditional, dots. A zoomorphic figurine and a wide variety of small altar legs are also present.

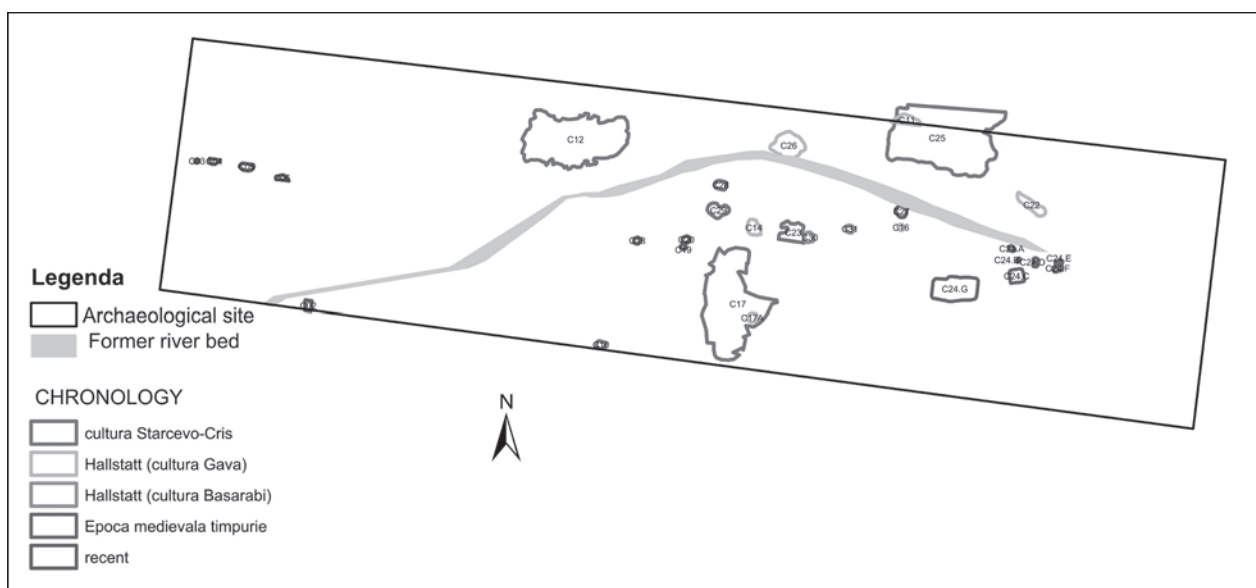


Fig. 03. General plan of the Miercurea Sibiului – Valea Gârbovei (features) (Suciu 2012, harta 8).

We have two large ovens in the west side of the building. Oven 1 (zone D), in the north part of the building, is very well preserved and at the time of the abandonment of the dwelling, ceramic fragments from the west of the house were moved, covering the lower region in the east of the dwelling. The ceramic fragments are in a smaller quantity as they are in the western part of the building.

The incised ceramic fragment in question comes from the area east of Oven 1, at the border between the area D and E. The composition of the pottery is characteristic to the Early Neolithic, with organic material (chaff) inside the paste.



Fig. 04. Northern part of C25, seen from the West, with the zones of the building (archive of the excavation).



Fig. 05. Northern part of C25, zone E, seen from the south (archive of excavation). On the west the unexcavated zone D (Oven No. 1) (archive of the excavation).



Fig. 06. Northern part of C25, seen from the east, The E area – on the bottom (archive of the excavation). The D area is not excavated (with the Owen No.1) (archive of the excavation).

RESULTS – DESCRIPTION OF THE INCISED FRAGMENT

The incised fragment (Fig. 7–9) is associated (in close proximity) with ceramic materials with dark red engobe, with fragments painted with white lines, impresso pottery but also with ceramics decorated with incised lines (networked) (Fig. 10–13).

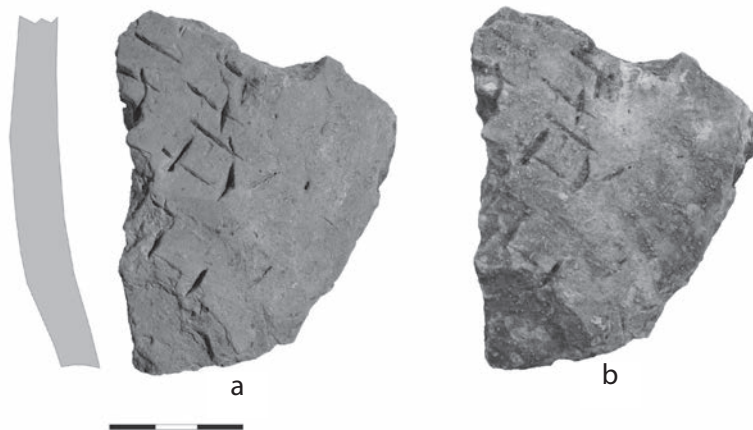


Fig. 7. The incised ceramic fragment from C25, area E (a. After cleaning, b. On the field, after the moment of recovery, in 9.05.2012) (archive of the excavation).

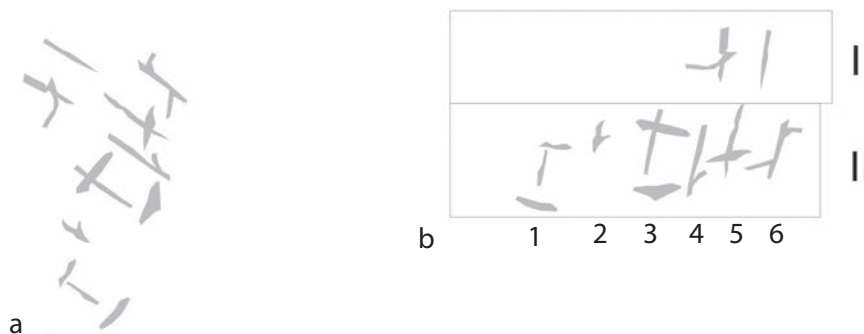


Fig. 8. Drawing of the incised signs (a. As it is; b. Horizontal with two lines – I, II and six columns 1–6).

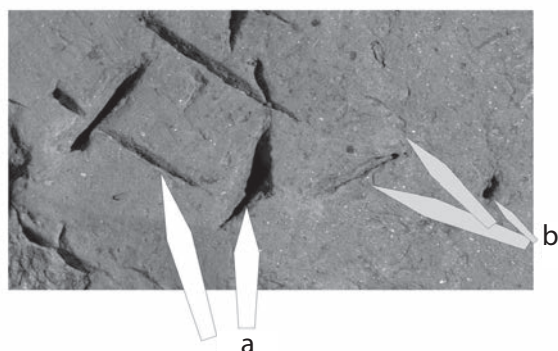


Fig. 9. Example of intentional incisions (a) and signs who come from the husk patterns (b) (archive of the excavation).

The incised fragment is 80 mm long, 66 mm wide and 11 mm thick (Fig. 7). It has the inventory mark A11162 at the Brukenthal National Museum. It is comprised of two registries of parallel marks, logically and neatly grouped. Each mark has 1 or 2 short incisions with a length between 8.34 and 13.4 mm (Fig. 8). It is black-gray on the inside and scarlet-red on the outside. The fragment is smooth, a sign of good, reductive firing. A clear difference can be observed between the incisions made by hand with a sharp object and the irregular ones, due to the presence of husk residues originating from the clay mixture (Fig. 9). The incisions are clear, linear and among the most stylized, at this chronological moment. There are clearly delimited spaced between the marks. The incised marks were made for sure before the burning of the ceramic pot.

The one who made these marks used a sharp object to create the incisions, pushing harder at the top for the vertical lines and keeping the horizontal ones relatively uniform.



Fig. 10. Materials associated, near the incised ceramic fragment. A zoomorphic calf ceramic miniature. (Archive of the excavation, left: photo Cosmin Suci, right: drawing: Florentina Martiş).



Fig. 11. Materials associated, near the incised ceramic fragment. White on red painted pottery near the incised sherd (left – interior, middle – reconstruction of the painting, right – actual status of the exterior sherd).



Fig. 12. Materials near the incised ceramic fragment. White on red painted pottery near the incised sherd (left – interior, middle – reconstruction of the painting, right – actual status of the exterior sherd).

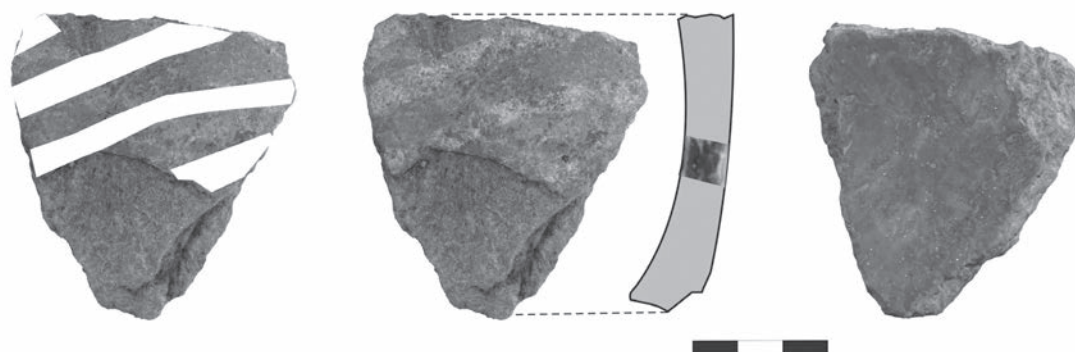


Fig.13. White on red painted pottery near the incised ceramic fragment (left – interior, middle – reconstruction of the painting, right – actual status of the exterior sherd).

CHRONOLOGICAL MARKERS

In the preliminary report, we've dated the C25 feature based mostly on the white paint, the great concentrations of red and dark red engobe types at a Starčevo-Criș I level (Suciu 2012; Suciu *et al* 2013; Luca *et al* 2013). But after analyzing the entire lot of ceramics, we have a community deeply rooted in ancient traditions but with clear Starčevo-Criș II elements².

The C25 dwelling is dated to a time when the tradition of white painted pottery is still present, but black painting and the *barbotine* style are missing.

Chronologically, based on C14 data, it is a moment belonging to Starčevo-Criș II. Three samples were taken from the C25 dwelling and taken to the AMS laboratory in Poznan (a charcoal sample, a horn fragment and a piece from a skull cap) and whose R_Combine gives us a (6858, 27) BP, an agreement of 99.5%, a mean 5738 BC, a median 5735 BC and a 5765–5712 BC interval (68.2% probability) (Fig. 14).

For greater accuracy, we eliminated the charcoal sample and got a R_Combine (based on two short-lived samples) of (6842, 32) BP, 99.7% agreement, a mean 5721 BC, a median 5722 BC and a 5745–5702 BC interval (53.3% probability) (Fig.15). The charcoal sample was collected from area H, 0.15 cm under the ceramic fragments level and probably is a little bit older, maybe from the moment of house construction (the radiocarbon data will be detailed in another study) or is a long lived sample effect. Still, if it is used, the agreement is 99,5 % and the model is working.

² How are presented at Lazarovici 1984.

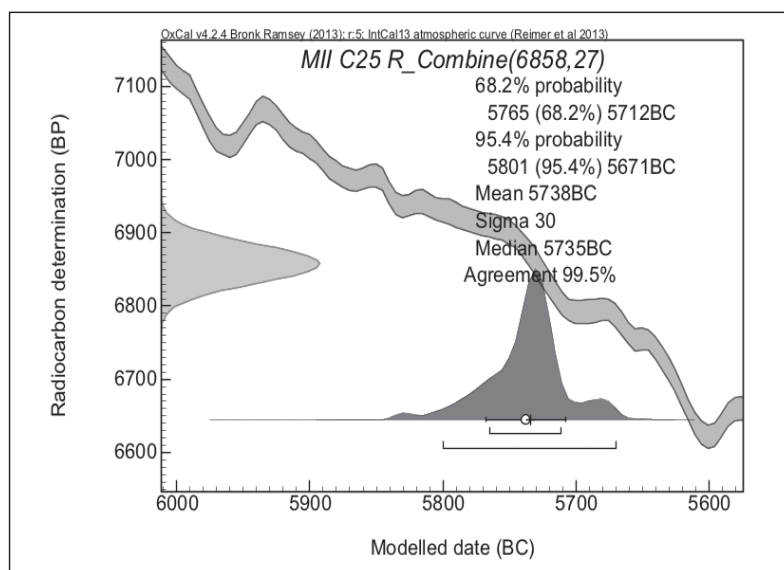


Fig. 14. R_combine (3 radiocarbon data: 2 short-lived samples +one long-lived sample -charcoal)- C25.

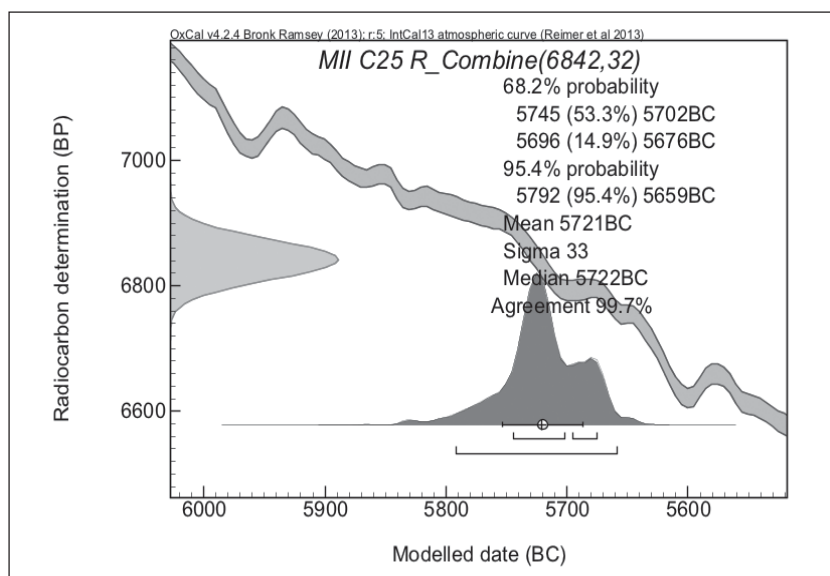


Fig. 15. R_combine (two radiocarbon short-lived samples)-C25.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Beyond the discussion of whether or not it is writing – where we cannot say at this moment, having no philological studies – we can only present the temporal and spatial context of the pottery fragment and its possible comparisons. It is beyond the scope of this article to review all the hypotheses that have been advanced to interpret Neolithic and Eneolithic signs from the pottery.

The discovery of the incised fragment is not isolated, because the appearance of these marks is well documented for the Early Neolithic in this area, with 384 items; of which nearly 30% are on pots or ceramic fragments³. M. Merlini calls this moment *the formative phase of the Danube script*. The inscription on the fragment from Ribnjak-Bečević⁴ and the one from Glăvăneștii Vechi⁵ are the analogies for this moment.

³ Merlini 2009, p. 13.

⁴ *Ibidem*, Fig. 9.12

⁵ *Ibidem*, Fig. 9.15.

Similar to this is the later fragment of wood with neat marks from the Dispilio registry, which was radiocarbon dated at a (6270, 38) BP moment, about 5299–5224 BC⁶.

The most probable those signs represent something more advanced than so called *tally sticks* symbols, not fitting as well into the syntax of an oral language.

In conclusion, we can say that the fragment comes from an archaeological context of the Early Neolithic, has clear, neat incisions with parallels at this chronological level.

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⁶ Facorellis *et al.* 2014, Fig.5.