

Decorative Motifs or Religious Symbols? Attempts to Interpret the Decorations on Dacian Pottery (Part 2)

Cuvinte cheie: Tipia Ormenișului, Racoș, daci, motive decorative, simboluri

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Rezumat

În timpul cercetărilor arheologice sistematice efectuate în Defileul Oltului din Munții Perșani au fost descoperite numeroase artefacte interesante datând din diferite epoci istorice, unele inedite, altele menționate în monografii sau studii speciale. În prezentul studiu vom relua în discuție unul dintre obiectele publicate, un vas-borcan, descoperit în vara anului 2004 pe Tipia Ormenișului, comuna Ormeniș, județul Brașov, în primul nivel de locuire dacică, sub infrastructura sanctuarului cu aliniamente de baze de coloane din calcar alb, și vom pune în circuit științific o piesă inedită, o ceașcă în miniatură, descoperită într-un complex dacic (locuință) din fortificația dacică de pe Piatra Detunată (Durduia) de la Racoșul de Jos, în vara anului 2008. Este vorba despre 2 obiecte pentru care autorii nu cunosc analogii în Dacia pre-romană, iar dacă se ia în considerare numai decorul, fiecare piesă poate fi considerată unicat în domeniu.

Insistența noastră în detaliu asupra „motivei decorative” de pe cele două vase, precum și interpretările pe care le-am propus, își au explicația în unicitatea, până acum, a lor. În nici un caz nu considerăm concluziile la care am ajuns ca unice și infailibile, intenția noastră fiind, în primul rând, aceea de a face cunoscute cele două piese arheologice și istoricilor care se apleacă asupra fascinantei lumi a daco-geților, în cazul de față asupra spiritualității lor.

During the systematic archaeological researches done in the Olt Strait in the Perșani Mountains, many interesting artefacts belonging to different historical ages were found, some of them yet unpublished while others were mentioned in monographs or special papers¹. In this paper, we deal once again with one of the published objects² and at the same time we will bring forward a new archaeological piece.

1. "Jar-vessel"³. This piece was found during the systematic archaeological excavations that took place in the summer of 2004, at the Tipia Ormenișului site, Ormeniș commune, Brașov County⁴; it was discovered in Section I of the upper plateau, in the first Dacian habitation level, under the white limestone pillar based sanctuary infrastructure. A burnt dwelling, with a rich inventory found in situ, consisting mainly of hand-made kitchen pottery, was partially researched. The vessel was made of a coarse paste, the degreasing substances consisting of little white stones, sand, pounded shards and mica spangles; it has a dark-brown colour on the outside, red-brown colour on the inside, while the core of the paste is dark-grey. On the outside it was covered by a slightly polished angoba, showing traces of partial exfoliations and small cracks caused by secondary burnings. These burnings led to the ending of this habitation phase (PL.I).

Judging by its dimensions, this vessel could have been also used for storing alimentary supplies. Unfortunately, only its upper part can be reconstructed, telling us that the vessel had an arched or slender profile; the preserved part has a truncated cone shape. Its rim is thickened towards the inside, obliquely bevelled towards the outside, having a rounded edge.

Its dimensions are: Dm=32cm, Dmax = 41cm, H=22,50cm (the total height could have reached 65-70cm).

The décor of the vessel consists of two categories of elements: a) traditional motives, very often met on Dacian pottery, and b) symbol motives. In the first category we can place eight knobs: four of them are larger (D=42-48mm) each having six elongated alveolus, one of them being placed exactly in the centre; the other four knobs are interpolated among the first four ones, being placed a few mm higher than the horizontal line formed by these; these knobs are round as well, but they are smaller (D=22-23mm, half the dimensions of the larger ones); each of them has four elongated alveolus, placed crosswise. Both rows of knobs form symmetrical pairs placed above the vessel's maximum diameter.

The large number of such knobs, identical to those we described above or at least very similar to them, found on the Dacian pottery

belonging to the 1st century B.C., exempts us from presenting any analogies, suggesting in the same time a possible dating of this vessel.

The other part of the décor is the one that stands out, being, as far as we know, quite unique until now. It belongs to the category of symbolic ornaments. Since one of the three fragments of the vessel on which this décor appears was missing when we first discovered it, we couldn't make out the entire assembly of decorative elements. Thus, at that time, we (incorrectly) stated that "... one of the preserved elements is certainly the symbol of fire" ⁵. Finding later (in the 2005 campaign) other pieces of the vessel and putting them together led us to discovering an image that may be interpreted (Pl.I/a-b).

We assume that we deal with the representation of a vulva, found also on the drawing of the recent Tipia Ormenișului monograph⁶, where we stated, due to the lack of some parts of the assembly, that: *"Being very conscious that it is an ideogram, that is not simple to decipher nor to interpret, we now assume that we might deal with a symbolism out of which some elements cannot miss: expressions of the idea of hearth-sacred fire, the passing of time, or, more likely, the rich symbolism of fecundity – fertility, through a mode of expression that we find rather androgynous than exclusively maternal. We do not exclude the possibility that this could be a symbol of the vulva or of the uterus. We are more than certain that the vessel also had (or only had?) a religious utility"* ⁷. Now it is very clear that we deal with a true and somewhat "naturalist" image of a vulva. Only a few mm above the hair we can see a bird that is flying vertically upwards; its head and neck are longer than its body. Without trying to identify the species of this bird at this moment, since this is not a key element for deciphering this drawing, we do have to mention that it could contribute to the enrichment of its semantic.

About 18 mm left of this image one can notice a phallus, placed vertically, marked by three incised lines; two of them were preserved entirely, while the third, that is closer to the vulva, was partially preserved, on a distance of a few mm in its upper part, and towards the middle; the remaining areas of this line was found on the are of the vessel where the crack occurred. The end of the prepuce is marked by another incision that is easily arched, uniting the other three inci-

sions. These three incisions are 50 mm long and the one in the middle represents the seminal canal.

There are five lines between these two elements that unite them. These were meant to be horizontal lines, but they show imperfections due to the resistance of the degreaser. These are the most difficult to be "read", although judging by the symbolism of numbers their sum may be interpreted in favour of these explanations and the conjunction of the two main composing elements (the phallus and the vulva).

The total length of this composition, on a horizontal direction, is of 85 mm, while its height is of 75 mm. It is certain that it hasn't been reproduced on the vessel, not symmetrically nor otherwise, since there are no other preserved traces of this decoration, while the knobs were all preserved.

The composition was made in the fresh paste, before the clay was burnt.

This statement asks for rigour upon the interpretation of this absolutely original drawing, and above all we have to exclude any pornographic hints and allusions. Neither taken one by one, nor as an assembly, can its components be disparaged.

The phallus, found in a vertical position (in Latin *in erectio*), in a state that is not purely erotic, symbolises, as in any religion whatsoever, the regenerating power "...spring and canal of the kind" ⁸. In our scene it can be compared to a column.

The vulva "...euphemistically called the big and beautiful mother of the Bambara populations" ⁹ bears a symbolist meaning that is found at many populations: "... a spring that swallows virility and throws back life, that unites opposites, or, more precisely turns them one into the other; this is where the mystery of its attraction comes from, being different of the diurnal and solar male sex" ¹⁰. We do have to notice that in our composition the vulva is waiting for intercepting the life giving semen. The moment caught by the composition is the one preceding the erotic accomplishment. Although they have well determined places in the composition, carefully chosen beforehand, they do not elude the erotic act, representing "...the repetition of primordial hierogamy, the embrace between the Sky and the Earth, of which all beings were born of" ¹¹. The fact that the uniting sexual act (the hierogamy) is to take place is proved by the author's insistence to

unite the male and female elements, through the five horizontal lines; we believe that this number wasn't used by chance, that in the Dacian culture as well it represents "a sign of unification, a nuptial number ..., of harmony and balance. It will represent the number of hierogamies, the bonding between the celestial principle (3) and the earthly mother principle (2)"¹². The result of this union will be "the man, a new expression of the Great Triad"¹³.

A very resembling or even identical role, of protecting the „Sky-Earth” union found in our composition, is given to the bird that is placed above the entire scene, more precisely above the vulva. The fact that the bird is found in an upward vertical flying position stresses out once again the symbol of connection for genesis between the Sky and the Earth. "In Greek language the word could have been a synonym for herald and for message of the sky"¹⁴. In the culture of many civilisations the bird was generally the messenger of the gods or the means of communication between the world and the underworld, controlled by the gods as well. The symbolist analysis of each bird species leads us to the conclusion that most of them have attributes that are positive to love, sometimes even identifying themselves with it (the dove, etc.).

The bird that is found in the composition is most probably an eagle, judging by the way it is presented and by the proportions of its body. It seems to play more roles, of which we mention the one of substitute or messenger of the sun: the first one shows that the bird knows very well the scene that he has just seen, he governed it and he is glad for it, while the second one, of messenger, shows us how he engages in a vertical flight towards the sky to announce the news, the right and left directions being malefic (s.n.). The presence of the eagle in the described composition, represented as an arrow, and the direction of its flight mythically pre-established may be interpreted as the corollary of the composition's subject, the auspicious atmosphere of the scene being essential and obvious.

In the culture of more contemporary nations the folk beliefs see in the eagle an immortal being, just as we Romanians do: "Because it enjoys an eternal life, because it overcomes the power of death, the eagle can be a symbol of the soul, of its eternity; we find it frequently in this state on the Dacian funerary monuments and even in the ancient

Thracian-Getian art. (...) In the Romanian folklore we find the function of messenger-bird or guide-bird: it is often used in fairy tales and ballads...some of these ballads (very few of them, n.n.) turn the eagle in an omen messenger"¹⁵.

Concluding upon the above presented aspect, we find some of them more important than others; some are "consistent" with the décor, others are just mentioned here, being associated to the subject: 1 – the composition, incised in the fresh clay of the vessel, before it was burn; it is the first décor with a narrative symbol that is partially deductible found so far on Dacian pottery, in our case on a hand-made vessel. Judging by its stratigraphical position the vessel and the other objects found in the dwelling seem to belong to a period prior to Burebista's reign and prior to the construction of the local white limestone pillar based sanctuary. 2 – in the same room we found another smaller fragmentary hand-made vessel, on which a solar symbol appeared (a wheel with nine spokes), which was as well applied on the fresh clay, before the vessel was burn. 3 – the discovery, in the Tipia Ormenişului site, on the first level of Dacian habitation, of two phallus-shaped amulet-sharpeners made of grit stone¹⁶; these cannot be dissociated by the symbolism or by the practice of initiation acts specific to the sub-adjacent material or visual image-like representations¹⁷. 4 – the composition cannot be associated to the so called pornographic scenes, but it should rather be considered a true religious monument, that is very valuable due to its uniqueness (until now) and its symbolist contents. It goes beyond the significance and importance of the isolated artefact findings that represent the male-female duet, explaining first of all the birth of the human being, as it can be very clearly seen in our "drawing". The significance and the message of this composition cannot be reduced merely to the very often used fertility-fecundity general expression; they seem to us more profound, representing the genesis of the entire living world, the cosmogony, the man being in our case only the means of expression of the entire philosophy that stands behind this composition.

2. The miniature cup¹⁸. It was found in a Dacian complex (dwelling) in the Dacian fortification from Piatra Detunată (Durdăia), Răcoşul de Jos, during the 2008 systematic archaeological campaign. It was found on the

24th of June, in section II, m 7, at a depth of 42 cm. The complex is found inside the defence system, being "embedded" into it. The depth at which the vessel was found belongs to the first level of Dacian habitation, burnt down during an event which took place before 106 A.C., maybe the First Dacian-Roman War. Finding it in the eastern part of the dwelling, nearby the wall, suggests that it was usually kept on the same shelf with other objects, but it was placed among these such as to be differentiated.

We have to mention that the Dacian fortress from Piatra Detunată lays less than a km north-west from the Sacred Mountain found on Tipia Ormenişului.

The vessel was made of a semi-fine paste, having in its composition sand and small pieces of mica. It has a truncated cone-shaped profile, with the large base at the opening. Its bottom is flat, the rim is rounded but not shaped; it has only one handle, with a very carefully smoothed fastening area; the secondary burning made the vessel become entirely red (Pl. II).

Dimensions: Db=25mm; Dm=50mm (exactly the double of the base); H= 31mm, the thickness of the wall=0,50mm; the thickness of the handle=9-10mm, capacity = 18/20millitres.

Décor (Pl. II, Pl. III). The handle: it has six oblique notches up right – down left, made on the maximum curvature. The bottom: it has a cross, incised with the same tool used to make the notches on the handle. On the outer wall of the vessel, beginning from the handle and towards the right of the onlooker, with the cup placed in normal position (with its opening upwards) one can see the following decorative elements: a – two vertical incisions (Pl. II/f), starting at the rim and almost reaching the bottom; b – a stag placed upside down (Pl. II/c-d); c - a "small fir tree" with its top towards the sky, with six branches on both sides (Pl. II/a-b); d – three incisions similar to the first two, found between the "fir tree" and the handle (Pl. II/a). At a careful look one can observe, in the place where the handle is fastened and as well in other areas, small incisions that aren't part of the "planned" décor, but rather are results of the potter's absence of mind. There is no separating sign between the stag and the "small fir tree". Neither on the inside, nor on the outside can we see traces of burnt organic substances; and even if these sub-

stances were ever to be found on this vessel, they were destroyed by the strong secondary burning. The vessel surely had a certain way of handling and purpose; judging by its dimensions the handle wasn't quite necessary. Although it was found among objects with daily use, this vessel is surely a religious one, and this case is not unique¹⁹. Its use in rituals is underlined by some specific elements, of which we can mention the miniature dimensions, the décor and its arrangement on the vessel, which we need to recall: 1 - "the small fir tree", with a very well outlined trunk, its top is facing upwards towards the sky when the vessel is placed in normal position (its height is of 20 mm, the maximum opening of the corolla is of 18 mm). 2 – the stag is placed in a natural position only when the vessel is turned upside-down. Although the potter couldn't do a perfect work, he tried to represent all four legs of the stag; the front right leg is raised to the level of the front left leg's knee. Its head is facing towards the right, just like its entire body, and it is represented by a horizontal incision deeper and wider than the other incisions forming its body; beneath it there is a second and much slender incision, and the eye is marked at their middle area. Three vertical fine lines mark the chin right under the mandible. Its corona is represented by two middle (central) columns, out of which the age ramifications begin; we identified three such ramifications of both sides. Taken separately the latter ones could be interpreted as well as a coniferous tree placed upside down. Under the stag's body, that is marked by two highlighted lines and by the "ribs", one can see some other small fine vertical lines that can only suggest the fur of the animal (four of them can be clearly seen).

Our general impression is that the author ("the artist"?!) wanted to make a complete but sketched representation of the animal, obtaining as a result an imperfect image, characterised by the lack of harmony between the proportions of the body, that is very short compared to its anatomic components, its height overcoming its length (the height is of 30 mm while the length is of only 20 mm).

As it was already said a simple look upon this piece allows us to make a statement right from the beginning: this is not a household vessel, since the above mentioned characteristics differentiate it from this category of

pottery (the miniature dimensions and the décor, the latter being the defining one). The décor is fully made by incisions, a very rarely used technique in Dacian pottery for representing animals; until now we only now three such cases, all outside the Carpathian Arch²⁰. If we consider that the statistics and analysis conducted by our colleague Valeriu Sîrbu is exhaustive, we can say that we find ourselves in front of the first such discovery in the inside area of the Carpathian Arch.

The oneness of the décor so far, as well as the fact that we found the vessel in a dwelling, are enough arguments to sustain that this piece is not a result of a pottery workshop. The decorative motifs are not imprinted (stamped) as it is, for example, the stag from Răcățău, where we are pretty certain that a workshop functioned, although it wasn't yet discovered²¹.

But the décor also has other particularities that need to be discussed. No matter where we begin looking at it, the décor has a key to its understanding that isn't revealed to us. The only certain thing is that once again we find ourselves in front of a "narrated" subject. This is the proof that we do not deal with simple decorative motifs but with clear symbols. Each of the representations, either animal, of vegetable matter or "neutral", must be regarded as being part of a coherent, unitary and explicit language of the community that structurally and artistically worked it out and mythically and religiously accepted it. Analysed separately the signs would undermine or at least diminish the importance of the "narration" (except the stag that is frequently met on daily and religious Dacian pottery). But together their language that remains yet hidden introduces us, even if partially, in a world of coded collocations of "... some Dacian-Getian religious, magical or mythological beliefs and practices"²². As well as in the case of the Dacian painted pottery, "... in the absence of coherent scenes, with an "epic" content that could assembly the zoomorphic images putting together a possible "scenario", the attempts to identify some significations remain in the sphere of mere speculations"²³. Thus, as well as the researcher from Cluj-Napoca, we will "resume to general findings and cautious analogies", placing the highlight on the general symbolism (=universal) of the here discussed signs.

"The small fir tree". It is a motif frequently met on pottery species or on other

generally known artefacts, and thus they are useless to be mentioned here²⁴. It is the sign with one of the most significances and symbolisms; Mircea Eliade mentions at least seven that he considers to be essential. They all lead us towards the conclusion that we find ourselves in front of "A living cosmos, in eternal regeneration". The tree in general is "a symbol of life in continuous evolution, in its ascension towards the sky ...; it has the characteristics of a centre, that turns the World Tree into the World Axis. The trees that don't lose their leaves (the coniferous trees, the laurel, etc.) are symbols of immortality"²⁵. On some of the Dacian artefacts the "small fir tree" is placed upside down, with its roots towards the sky. Its representation is common to many nations, from the Far East to America, and finds its explanation in the belief of the sun's and the light's defining role in the birth and growth of everything that is alive. "The beings draw their vim from above and look for ways to send it downwards ... Life comes from the sky and enters the earth"²⁶.

Gilbert Durand believes that this inversion of the tree is a "symbol of the ascending verticality..., of the cyclical reciprocity scheme"²⁷. From a sexual point of view the tree is bivalent; it is the symbol of the initial androgen. In the Greek culture (see the myth of Attis-Cybele) a relative of the fir, the pine tree, receives a purely masculine aspect (phalus) still keeping the sign of duality, of the Mother (Cybele, mother of the Gods, herself the primordial source of fecundity). The symbolism is also taken over by the Romans, whom on the 22th of March (the beginning of spring according to the calendar) brought a tree on the Palatin to celebrate *The Entering Tree*²⁸.

Even if sometimes it might seem obsessive, the presence of the fir tree on Dacian pottery raises a natural question: why the fir and not another tree or plant?

Without having the claim of being able to give an answer that is valid for the present history of the discussed object, we will further try to outline a possible coherence upon the origin and presence of the fir tree (also) on the Thracian-Dacian-Getian artefacts. In other words, we will try to suggest a connection that is placed apparently far in space but is contemporary to one of the Thracian-Phrygian Gods and to its imagistic correspondent, Attis, whom is frequently substituted by

the image of the fir. The fact that Attis is at the beginning the Phrygian God (thus Thracian) of vegetation and the husband of Cybela seems to us quite important in what regards its relation to other symbols found on Dacian pottery, all being related to the belief in the birth-life-death-resurrection phenomenology. The verisimilitude of Attis as being a Thrace-Phrygian inheritance in the Dacian symbolism (the fir) is partially illustrated by "sheltering" the Great Mother of Gods (as well Phrygian, as a personification of the world's founder) under different vegetation signs²⁹. More than that, Attis' connection to Cybele, whom has since become mistress of water and of war, the ruler of the Universe, might strengthen the supposition that both divinities had a major importance in the beliefs of the Thracians in general, and, implicitly, in those of the Dacians as their inheritors, with a perpetual remember of nature's cyclical regeneration, of the "periodic regeneration of the World"³⁰.

The fact itself, that the consistence and longevity of the "inheritance" (since the Neolithic, since the beginnings of agriculture, as in the case of other populations³¹) are natural in the case of a nation that had as main occupations agriculture and animal breeding, even if the ancient sources do not mention anything about these Gods and their existence in the Dacian culture, probably considering it implied. Still we doubt that a nation whose fields had to be beaten down with spears by the Macedonian warriors and the importance of which fields became so great for the state that under the reign of Decebal a "ministry" of support for the fields was named, had no Gods to protect specifically its agriculture.

In conclusion, the Dacian "small fir tree" cannot be considered a simple spiritual inheritance with a plausible ethnical and historical filiation, local or Micronesian³², but an associated perpetuation of the attributes of the previously mentioned primary Gods. Fundamentally the Attis-Cybele symbiosis is found also on other Dacian artefacts, as for example on the Larissa type coins, where the Mother Goddess holds in her hand a fir branch, and on a "delian" goblet, where the same Goddess dances holding fir branches in her hand³³. The "small fir tree" is, according to Mircea Eliade's conclusions, "the spring of life that is found in this vegetable matter"³⁴. By implicitly and exclusively representing Attis,

the "small fir tree" symbolises the cyclical repetition of the living world in general, and as well the permanence of man's faith (=belief) in immortality, in our case of the Dacian-Getians; we find out from Herodotus that at least their south-Carpathian descendants (the Getians) "in which ways they consider they are immortal"³⁵. The presence of this motif both in the areas rich in coniferous vegetable matter, as well as in the field areas, where forests are generally absent from the scenery, is an indisputable proof that this faith was generally spread among all members of the Getian-Dacian population. Everywhere in Dacia, as well as in the entire region inhabited by Thracians, Attis is one of the Gods that "die and resurrect", just as Osiris and Adonis do according to other religious beliefs³⁶.

In the Romanian symbolism, the "small fir tree" is found on different folk creations up to the Middle Age³⁷, and on woven fabrics even up to modern periods.

The stag. Very rarely found in the animal imagery of the Carpathian-Danube region and absent from the painted Dacian pottery³⁸, but often or very often found in the representations related to the mythology or religion of other populations; there is a large amount of literature written about the stag, thus there are plenty of interpretations regarding this motif. We will only mention part of these interpretations, that we consider to be quite minimal but sufficient to reveal its symbolism, identical or quite close to that of many populations, including the Thracian-Dacian-Getians.

Ending his comments upon the iconography and attributes of Cernunnos in the Celtic religion, Mircea Eliade states: "Yet, the religious symbolism of the stag is extremely complex. On the one hand, in the area that spread in prehistoric times from China to Occidental Europe, the stag, due to the periodical renewal of its horns, is a symbol of perpetual creation and renovatio"³⁹. In the Celtic and German cultures "it was also one of the most important symbols of fecundity, and, in the same time, a funerary animal, guide of the death; as well he was the favourite prey of kings and heroes: the killing, the hunting of the stag had the same significance as the tragic death of a hero"⁴⁰.

"The deer was often compared to the Tree of Life, thanks to its branchy horns that are periodically renewed. It is the symbol of

fecundity, of the rhythms of growth, of resurrection"⁴¹.

The recently mentioned attributes, or others considered main-secondary, are also found among the beliefs of other nations on other continents. Without even suggesting a possible connection or "contamination" between the Thracian-Dacian-Getians and the north-American Indians, phenomena which is historically impossible, we do have to mention as a "far analogy" in space and time a magical and religious practice met in the culture of this latter population, that seems to be an illustration of the motifs found on our vessel. "The dances and cosmogonies of the Indians from North America express this connection between the stag and the Tree of Life"⁴². "The tight connection between the pine and the species of stags (the dances of the stag around a pine tree put up in the square) could belong to the forest imagery; yet, it is not impossible to imagine that on a more profound level it could contain the symbolism that associates the stag not only with the sunrise and the dawn of day, but as well with the beginnings of life that shoved itself when the world was created ... In many Amerindian cosmogonies we find the moose or the roe deer that with its bellowing awakens the created life; in the Indian art, the tree (the pine n.n.) is often represented as growing out the stag's branched horns, just as in the European tradition about the vision of Saint Hubert"⁴³.

Ab originem, the presence of Cervus in the Thracian-Dacian-Getian iconography, very rich in the "golden age" but much poorer in the "classic age" is not due to the direct Scythian, Greek-Roman or Celtic influences. The certain aspects are, in exchange, the native and perennial character of the symbol, both fully demonstrated through researches and correct interpretations undertaken after our historiography freed itself from the omniscient soviet science, beginning with the works of Dumitru Berciu⁴⁴. First of all we take into consideration the six representations of the Capra species found on a burnt clay ceramic fruit-bowl belonging to the Basarabi Culture of the Hallstatt period. But the motif is older and common to the entire Thracian world, both in Europe and in Asia Minor, at the Phrygians established on Trojan lands in the first half of the 12th century B.C.⁴⁵. The Thracians created their own animal style, strongly influenced by the late Iranian art,

and they mediated it, forwarding its Persian components as well towards Central and Western Europe (as for example to the Celts). In Dacia we find its most refined expression takes place in the "Golden Age" of the Getian-Dacian civilization (the 4th-3rd centuries B.C.). Just as in the case of Celts (Cernunnos) or in that of other populations, at the Getian-Dacians the decorative motif or the God with this look are indissolubly related to the art and ideology of the elites, to the leaders, the stag being almost never-failing from the "princely art" pieces⁴⁶. In the "classical" Dacian art, the animals – the stag, the deer – are linearly represented, with conventions of perspective, reminding us of the oriental ones, and with the inner space flat and filled with dots, to reproduce the fine fur of the animals. This stylisation makes us remember the way the animal motifs were used on silver pieces⁴⁷.

Keeping the evidently religious symbolism unaltered, the motif of the stag is found also on other pieces until the Roman conquest, and the most eloquent example is the vessel we are just discussing. From a stylistic point of view we can mention once again that the stag that appears on it breathes a respectable Thracian tradition in age; this stag from Racoș strikingly resembles the bronze statuette found in Bulgaria, nearby Sevljevo⁴⁸, that belongs to the 7th century B.C., being contemporary to the Capra representations of the Basarabi Culture. We do mention that the vessel from Racoș – Piatra Detunată was found in a Dacian fortress, it belonged to a warrior and it dates itself somewhere back in the period of the Roman conquest. Thus we have here the confirmation of the fact that this motive was spread in different layers of society, in our case in the army strata.

As a consequence we consider that the Cervus found on the cup discovered at Racoș – Piatra Detunată is a religious symbol of Thracian-Dacian national tradition, a native motif at its origins but "developed" in time, influenced by the art of all the populations the Thracian-Getians came in contact with, mainly by the Iranian one⁴⁹. Its symbolism has a mythical and religious content that cannot be much different than the one of other populations found on the same level of development; the essential symbols for all these populations are the ones of birth, growth, death, resurrection – rebirth, light.

Its association on the same "support" with a tree with perennial leaves, in our case the fir, may be interpreted as stressing out the essence of the religious idea of the composition: resurrection, cyclical renewal of all that is living, "guaranteed" by the stag, this being the reason it is drawn besides the "small fir tree".

We highlighted in our description that the animal is "stepping" on the ground only when the vessel is turned upside down, moment in which the "small fir tree sticks its roots into the sky". This is the real, a priori wanted position of the vessel, because in the function of the religion the inverted position of the stag is hard to be accepted, position in which the symbolism of the other decorative elements (the vertical incisions or the ones found on the handle) is not affected. This is the state in which the "small fir tree" is found on a large number of Dacian sepulchral or laic vessels, known for a long time and thus only scarcely reminded here (in the fortress from Piatra Detunată only the number of such vessels found in dwellings goes over 20). This specification allows us now to reveal the path of the symbolism of the "overturned tree" that we referred to before; we won't talk about its significance according to which "the Tree of Life can suddenly overturn its polarity, becoming the Tree of Death"⁵⁰, instead we will deal with the belief we found in the culture of more populations according to which "... the beings draw their vim from above and look for ways to send it downwards (...) Life comes from the sky and enters the earth"⁵¹. Its association on the vessel with the "herald of light", symbol of the "rising sun that ascends towards the zenith" as a "mediator between the sky and the earth"⁵² totally excludes the baneful, mortuary significance. On the contrary, the stag-small fir tree tandem cannot have a different significance at the Thracian-Getians, opposite to the one it has in the belief of other populations, some mentioned before, to which we can also add the symbol of hunting.

The "authority and strength" of the archetypal stag (along with the hind) compared to other animals, found in the belief of the Getian-Dacians, is still preserved in the Romanian folklore. "The two creatures thus represent nature's emblematic image, in its savage, primordial state (...) The stag with a cradle between its horns is a symbol of eternal life, of its resurrection, of fecundity and abundance (...) Resurrecting again and

again, expressing the eternal cycles of nature, the stag has to "cross" from a level to another of his existence, from accomplishment to death, from the "black world" to the "white world". Moving the semantic accent in the other pole of its mythical and symbolic complex, the popular belief turns the stag into a funerary animal, that bears and guides – in its cradle – the souls of the wandering (...) The stag and the hind, as they appear in the Romanian folklore, reveal many archaic symbolic connotations; following their thread we go down towards cosmogony myths, towards images of primordial beings, of the creatures that ruled over the energies and secrets of nature, of fertile animals, donors of life and strength, both travellers and guides among different levels of the world (...) They live in and control those spaces that are hard to access, either expressions of the world of elements, or expressions of the world beyond"⁵³.

Other symbols on the vessel

As we stated before, we do not have primary or secondary motifs on the vessel: the signs have to be seen and "read fluently" according to their place in the composition. They were all incised, before the vessel was burn.

The cross. One of these symbols is the cross found on the bottom of the cup that can be seen only when the vessel is inclined or completely turned over. If we interpret the perimeter of the vessel's bottom as being a circle, we can consider that we deal with a wheel. In this case it is possible that the author suggests a symbol dedicated to the creative divinity (the circle) whose existence is guaranteed and temporally ordered by the cross that divides the whole into four fragments; these succeed one another in an inexorable order – the four seasons. The symbol of the cross gives the miniature cups a religious function, especially if they are found in specific complexes, like the ones in the dava from Grădiştea⁵⁴, or even in dwellings⁵⁵.

The vertical incisions. They are grouped two by two or three by three. The first ones are placed in front of the stag, between the stag and the handle; the others are placed between the "small fir tree" and the handle. We mention once again that their number was pre-established such as their message finds place in the idea's narrative flow. Thus,

there could have been any other number of incisions, since the space was enough, and they also could have been replaced with other signs. The one who made them considered important not only the area where he placed them but also the number of incision from a grouping, as well as their total. This is the motive that made us consider the incisions as being numbers, symbols of each number of a group, and not simple decorative signs.

Two. Number two was in prehistory, as well as in classical antiquity, the equivalent of the Female Principle, that of the Mother. It is the number of all bi-valences and dualities; it signifies the duality that sustains any progress. It is the number of the Earth.

Three. It is a fundamental number symbolising and synthesising the triple unity of the living being. It is the number of the Sky. In many cultures it represents the male principle, virility.

We don't know whether for the community that hold this vessel the total of the incisions had a precise significance. In the case in which a positive answer is the correct one, we have to mention that number five is the sign of unity in a nuptial meaning, being also the sign of the centre, of the harmony and balance. It is the sum of the celestial symbol (3) and the chthonian symbol (2). In other words it is the symbol of the creation and perfection of the living world. It is the symbol of man, and as well of the universe; it represents the totality of the sensitive world, order and perfection.

Six. It is the number of the oblique incisions found on the cup's handle. *"It is considered symbol of the creation, the mediator between the Principle and the manifestation (...) it is the virtual completion. At the Greek people number 6 was dedicated to Venera – Aphrodite, the goddess of carnal love"*⁵⁶.

Judging by our statements we made during the description of these vessels one could easily see that we deal with objects that we know no analogies in pre-Roman Dacia; if we only discuss the décor of the vessels each piece could easily be considered unique. What differs the most is the place and the environment in which light was shed upon them: the first one was found on a hill that in the time of Burebista became one of the most important religious and resistance centres of Dacia⁵⁷, and the second one was found in a

fortress with a permanent garrison. Their dating is quite certain, and approximately 18 decades passed between the births of these two pieces: the beginning of Burebista's reign – the Roman conquest. None of the vessels was found in a religious construction or arrangement, on the contrary, they were both found in dwellings: a "civilian" one, from Tipia Ormenișului, and a military one, from Piatra Detunată, in different environments and social surroundings. Both vessels were decorated when the paste was still fresh, before burning: on the first one the creator "cut out" incised motifs belonging to the human anatomy, while on the second one we found symbols of the vegetable matter, as well as animal and neutral symbols, these latter ones being used to complete the first two categories.

In both examples, the symbolist content has as central subject the earthly life, perceived and partially understood by man in a flow that assures the perpetuation of life, as well as the cosmogony life, the fir and the stag being the intermediaries between Sky and Earth, while the man, just as in the culture of other nations, considers himself a synthetic symbol of the macro-cosmos. The "drawing" from the first vessel sends us thinking of the "primordial union, the embrace between Sky and Earth of which all beings were born"⁵⁸, in other words the creation of man and of cosmos.

Neither of the symbols contains malefic messages; on the contrary, they all send positive messages, either by themselves or together, about fertility, fecundity, the inexorable and perfectly ordered flow of time (controlled by the gods), birth-life-death-resurrection of the entire living world, in other words about the immortality that represented the main belief of the Dacian-Getian religion.

It isn't less true that the "decorative motifs" here presented can be interpreted in other ways as well, specific to the human life, the symbols being nothing else but supplications addressed to the gods for having children, plenitude in agriculture and animal breeding, success in hunting etc. In order for these prayers to be fulfilled certain rituals were practised, that we have no information about, but it is certain that these two vessels were used during these performances.

We end our study by mentioning that our insistence for details regarding the "*decorative motifs*" found on the two vessels, as well as the interpretations that we here suggested, find their roots in the oneness of these pieces. We do not consider our conclusions as being unique and infallible; our main inten-

tion was to bring the attention of archaeologists and historians whom research the fascinating world of the Dacian-Getians upon these findings, especially on their spiritual meaning.

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Lucica Savu
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Drawings: Mihaela Cioc
Photos: Florea Costea, Paul Pavel

Note - Notes

1. **Costea 1997**, p. 39-76; **1998**, p. 59-76; **1999**, p. 105-119; **2000**, p. 3-6; **Costea, Bauman 2001**, p. 1-6; **Costea, Bălos 2001**, p. 217-241; **Costea, Bălos, Scurtu 2003**, p. 11-22; **Costea, Crișan 2005 (2006)**, p. 51-75; **Costea, Crișan 2006a**, p. 93-112; **Costea 2005 (2006)**, p. 76-81; **Costea et alii 2006**, passim; **Costea 2007**.
2. **Costea 2007**, p. 76-81
3. Colecția Muzeului Județean de Istorie Brașov, nr. inventar II 6863.
4. Spre regretul nostru, încă o dată trebuie să facem precizări asupra apartenenței terenului. Înainte de publicarea monografiei arheologice a sitului Tipia Ormenișului ne-am informat personal, verbal, la primăriile din Augustin și Ormeniș, fără a solicita și documente. Concluzia la care am ajuns atunci s-a dovedit a fi greșită, consultarea ulterioară a actelor cadastrale demonstrând că terenul a aparținut dintotdeauna comunei Ormeniș, menționarea lui în perioada comunistă ca proprietate a Augustinului fiind o chestiune legată de interese economice momentane (forestiere și pășunat). În prezent, Tipia Ormenișului este posesoriat al Primăriei Ormeniș, înființat încă în deceniul al treilea al secolului XX.
5. Desenul a fost publicat anterior, cu un text în limba română într-o formă ușor diferită, în *Cumidava*, 29, Brașov, 2007, 76-81, sub titlul *Un „motiv decorativ” neîntâlnit până în prezent pe ceramica dacică*, sub semnătura lui Florea Costea.
6. Colecția Muzeului Județean de Istorie Brașov, nr. inventar II 7189.
7. **Costea et alii 2006**, p. 132 și pl. XCVI/7
8. Ibidem
9. Ibidem, p. 226-227, cu nota 258
10. **Chevalier, Gheerbrandt 1995**, p. 36
11. Ibidem, p. 462
12. Ibidem
13. Ibidem, p. 24
14. Ibidem, p. 310
15. Ibidem
16. Ibidem, p. 22
17. **Coman 1996**, p. 194-195, cu bibliografia
18. **Costea et alii 2006**, p. 242 și Pl. CLXI/3-4
19. **Sîrbu 1996**, fig. 12/10
20. **Sîrbu 1996**, p. 69
21. **Căpitanu 1986-1987**, p. 79 și Fig. 2/24
22. **Sîrbu 1993**, p. 67
23. **Florea 1998**, p. 207
24. **Costea 1999**, p. 110 și urm.
25. **Eliade 1964**, p. 125
26. Ibidem, p. 127
27. **Durand 1963**, p. 371, apud **Chevalier, Gheerbrand 1994**, p. 127
28. **Chevalier, Gheerbrand 1994**, p. 130
29. **Costea 1999**, p. 108
30. **Eliade 1992**, p. 40
31. Încă din neolitic, de la începuturile agriculturii, ca și la alte popoare – **Eliade 1992**, p. 40-45
32. **Daicoviciu 1972**, p. 204 și urm; **Crișan 1986**, p. 345 și urm; **Costea, Bălos 2001**, p. 217 și urm; **Costea, Bălos 2003**, p. 23-31
33. **Florescu 1968**, p. 17
34. **Tratat**, p. 176.
35. **Istории**, 93, 94
36. **Eliade, Culianu 1996**, p. 233
37. **Costea, Bălos 2001**, p. 217-241
38. **Florea 1995**, p. 79-82; **1998**, passim
39. **Eliade 1952**, p. 216
40. **Eliade 1970**, p. 146, cf. **Eliade 1986**, p. 145.
41. **Chevalier, Gheerbrand 1994**, p. 290
42. **Chevalier, Gheerbrand 1994**, p. 290
43. **Burr 1962**, p. 55
44. **Berciu 1969**
45. **Berciu 1969**, p. 170 etc.
46. **Berciu 1969**, passim; **Sîrbu, Florea 1997**, fig. 7/2; 11-12; 16/2-3; 2/26; **Sîrbu, Florea 2000**, fig. 4; 6; 12/2-3; 23/2b; **Bouzek 2005**, p. 79-104 și fig. 81-84; 86 etc.
47. **Florescu 1968**, p. 25.
48. cf. **Bouzek 2005**, pl. 8
49. **Berciu 1969**, p. 170 și urm.
50. **Chevalier, Gheerbrandt 1994**, p. 131
51. **Chevalier, Durant 1994**, p. 127
52. Ibidem, p. 291-292
53. **Coman 1996**, p. 133-141
54. **Sîrbu 1996**, p. 48-51 și fig. 12/10; 51/3
55. Ibidem, fig. 12/10 etc.
56. **Lubac 1968**, p. 199, cf. **Chevalier, Gheerbrand 1995**, III, p. 313
57. **Costea et alii 2006**, passim, **Vulpe 2007**
58. **Chevalier, Gheerbrandt 1995**, 2, p. 24

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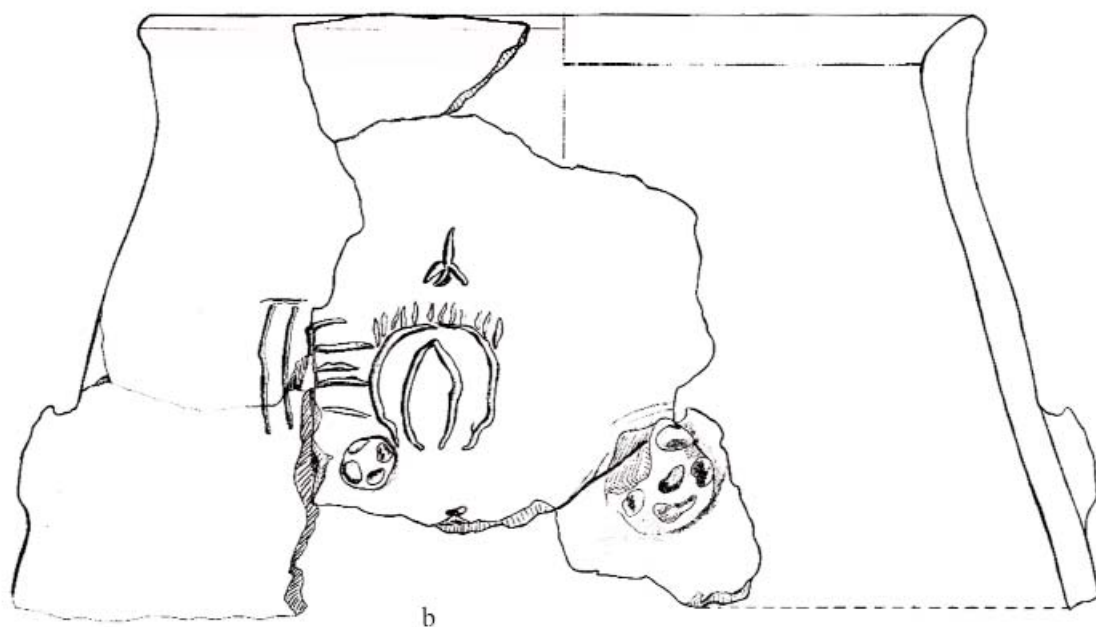


Plate I

The jar-vessel with symbols, Tipia Ormenişului: a) photo; b) drawing.

Planşa I

Vas cu simboluri, Tipia Ormenişului: a) fotografie; b) desen

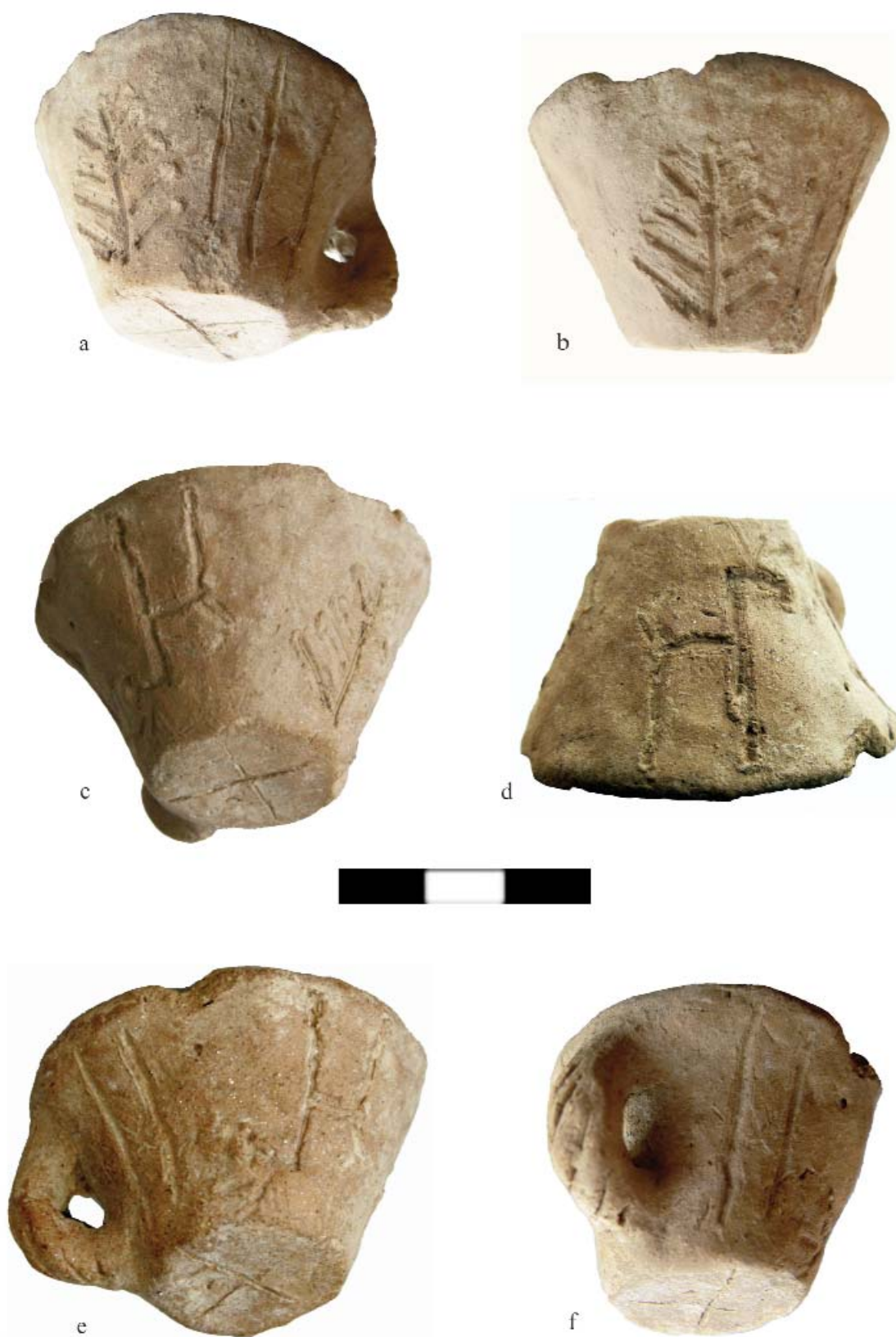


Plate II

The little cup, Piatra Detunată - photo.

Planşa II

Cupa mică, Piatra Detunată - fotografie

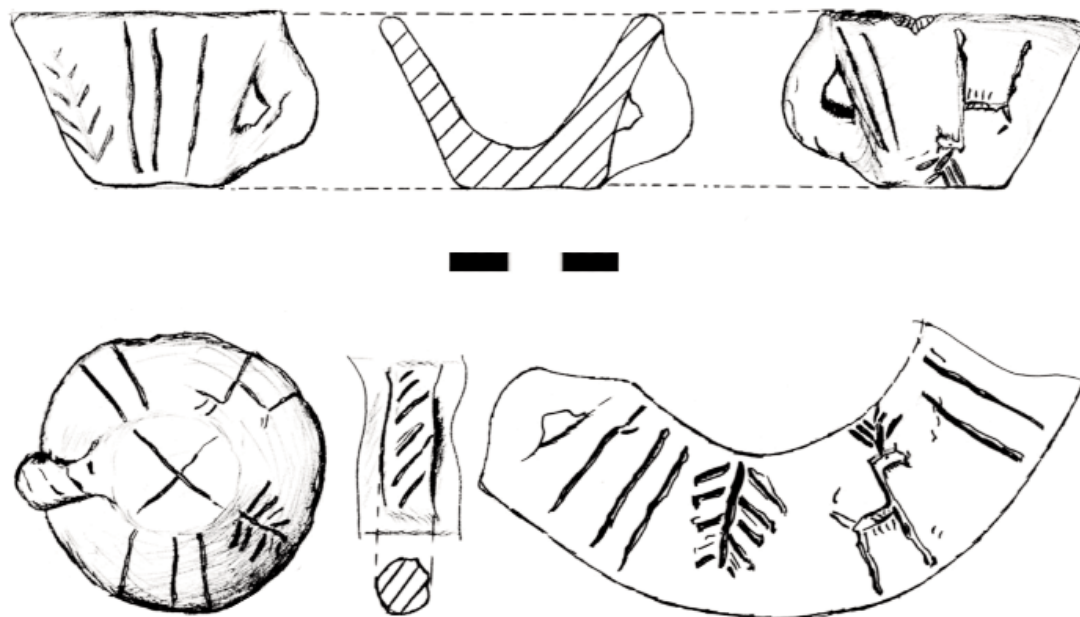


Plate III

The same vessel, unfolded drawing

Planșa III

Același vas, desenul desfășurat

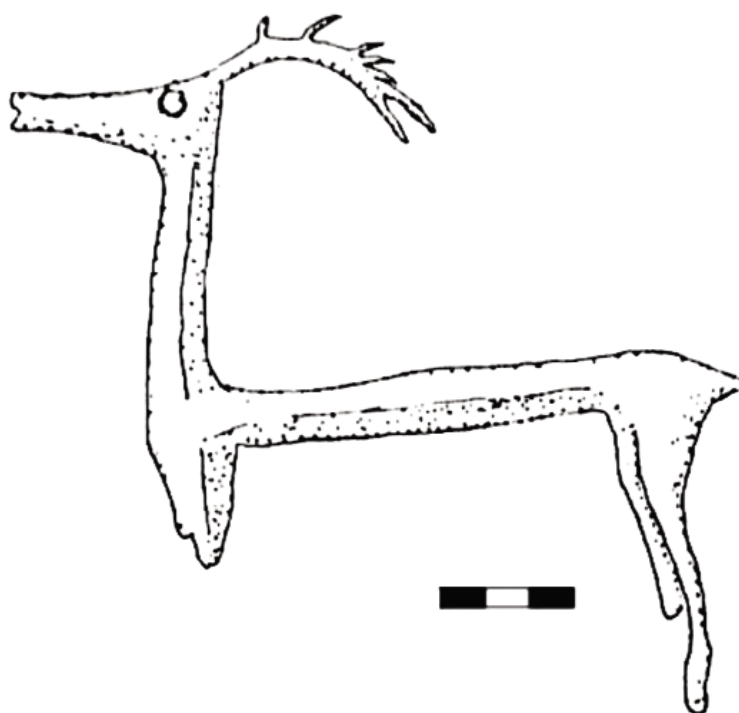


Plate IV

The stag from Sevljevo (according to Jan Bouzek)

Planșa IV

Cerbul din Sevljevo (după Jan Bouzek)

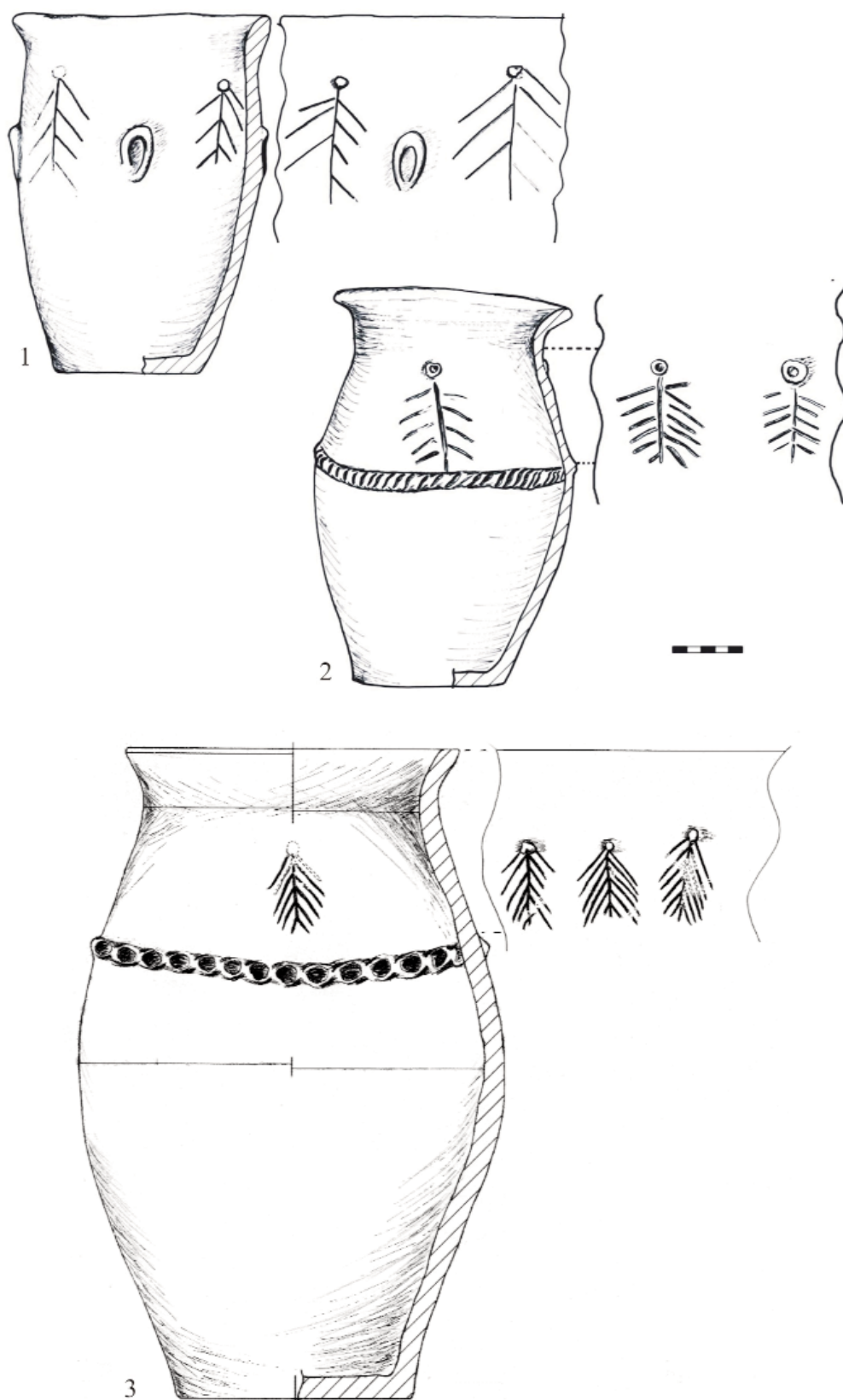


Plate V. A decoration with little fir from the dacian vessels:
 1- Tipia Ormenișului; 2,3 Racoș-Piatra Detunată.
Planșa V. O decorație cu motivul bradului de pe un vas dacic:
 1- Tipia Ormenișului; 2,3 Racoș-Piatra Detunată.

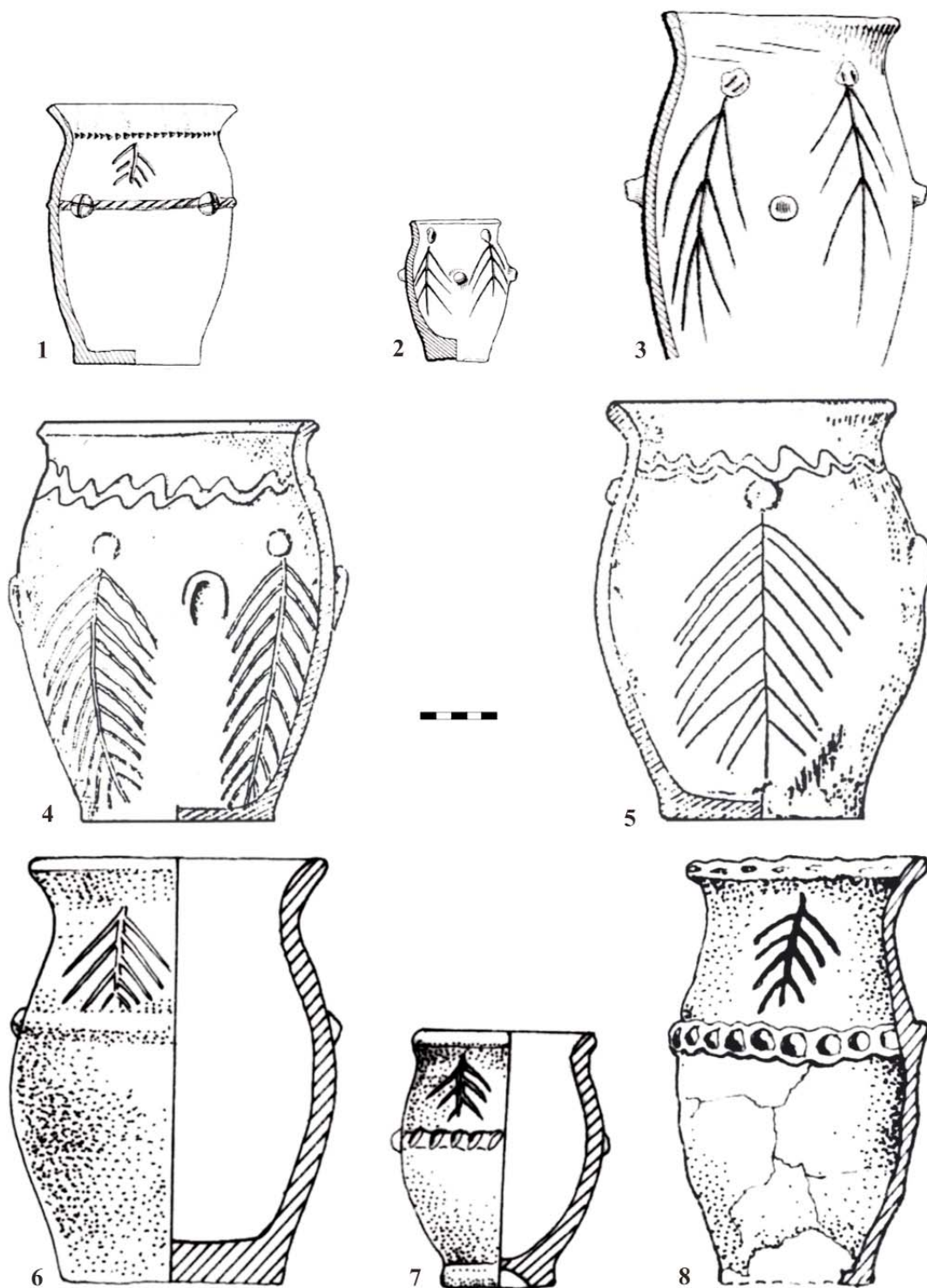


Plate VI

A decoration with little fir from the dacian vessels: 1-3 Sprâncenata (according to C Preda); 4-5 Căpâlna (according to I. Glodariu, V. Moga); 6-7 Ocnița (according to D. Berciu, without a scale); 8. Moigrad (according to M. Macrea, M. Rusu, I. Mitrofan, without a scale).

Planșa VI

O decorație cu motivul bradului de pe vasele dacice: 1-3 Sprâncenata (după C Preda); 4-5 Căpâlna (după I. Glodariu, V. Moga); 6-7 Ocnița (după D. Berciu, fără scară); 8. Moigrad (după M. Macrea, M. Rusu, I. Mitrofan, fără scară).