

## A clay wagon model from Racoș (Alsórákos, Brașov County)

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**Cuvinte-cheie:** *Racoș-Piatra Detunată (Alsórákos-Durdulya), cultura Wietenberg, car și roți din lut ars în miniatură, obiecte de cult.*

**Rezumat:** *În ultimele decenii au apărut o serie de studii despre cărucioarele și roțile de lut, din eneoliticul târziu și din epoca bronzului, descoperite în Bazinul Carpatic sau în spațiul est-central european. Inventarul complet al cărucioarelor de lut din epoca bronzului mijlociu din România a fost publicat de Nicolauss Boroffka, în monografia sa. După aceasta, Cristian Schuster a realizat o sinteză a acestor piese miniaturale, în care a adăugat și alte obiecte de cult. Până în prezent, din sud-estul Transilvaniei sunt cunoscute trei cărucioare miniaturale de lut<sup>1</sup>. În cadrul acestui studiu, vom prezenta unul nou, descoperit la Piatra Detunată/Durdulya de la Racoș/Alsórákos, județul Brașov.*

**Keywords:** *Racoș-Piatra Detunată (Alsórákos-Durdulya), Wietenberg culture, clay wagon model, clay wheels, cult objects.*

**Abstract:** *In recent decades, papers about clay wagon models and clay wheels of the Late Copper Age and Bronze Age<sup>2</sup> in the Carpathian Basin and in the area of Central Europe had been published. The complete inventory of the Romanian middle Bronze Age clay wagon models had been published by Nikolaus Boroffka in his monography<sup>3</sup>. Subsequently, Cristian Schuster has published a synthesis, in which he also added other objects<sup>4</sup>. In South-Eastern Transylvania, three clay wagon models were known so far. In the present study, a clay wagon model, that was discovered at Piatra Detunată/ Durdulya from Racoș/Alsórákos, Brașov County is presented.*

Between Augustin and Racoș, at the entrance in the defile of Olt from the basin of Baraolt, when we look to the South, the following peaks align with their fortresses: Tipia Racoșului, or Tepely, Tipia Ormenișului, on the top of which, in the past, existed a fortress of the Laténe time (Dacian), with prior traces of the Early Iron Age. On the rock from *Piatra Detunată* it was also a

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<sup>1</sup> Székely 1988, p. 189-196.

<sup>2</sup> Bóna 1960, p. 83-111.

<sup>3</sup> Boroffka 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Schuster 1996, p. 117-137.

prehistoric fortress, while the so-called fortress of Michael belongs to the Arpadian epoch, of the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.

On the *Piatra Detunată*-rock – according to Orbán Balázs „*Turdoja*” (Hasadtű) - the systematic archaeological excavations had been initiated by the staff of the Braşov County Historical Museum, coordinated by Florea Costea, in 1995 (pl. I/1). The primary aim of the investigation was the exploration of the Dacian fortress of the Late Iron Age (pl. I/2). During the many years of research, it turned out that this objective was a Middle Bronze Age one, belonging to the Wietenberg culture, instead of an Iron Age one. During the late period of that time, on the South-Western side of the mountains, terraces were created and surrounded by stonewalls and defensive ditches.

Much of the unearthed material comes from the Middle Bronze Age. Stratigraphically, the three material cultures cannot be separated, as between the 0,05 m and 0,30 m thick humus layer existing on the cliff; the very thin cultural layer is completely mixed.

About the defensive system - if there was any in the Bronze Age - we must note that, this was completely destroyed in the Late Iron Age. The settlement shows many similarities to the Turia castle<sup>5</sup>. The Bronze Age material is very rich and varied, and it can be divided into three groups: pottery, tools and weapons. The latter ones are made of stone. So far, only one metal object had been discovered during the excavations of 2008, a bronze fishing hook. The vast majority of these finds belong to the middle and last stage of the Wietenberg culture, except a few vessel fragments of the Schneckenberg culture.

The pottery, based on ceramic fragments, and considering their paste content, can be parted into two groups: the first one comprises the clay pots mixed with grained sand, while the second contains those with very fine sand, mixed with feldspar and crushed clay pots, some of them being covered with slip.

Among the tools, we can mention bone and stone knives, or *Krummessen*. Some of these are intact, while others are fragmentary. More volcanic tuff, sandstone or grindstones were also unearthed, their cultural affiliation, however, being uncertain. From the lower meadow of *Piatra Detunată* at Racoş, out of the unearthed finds, it was also found a material from a separate group, with fine paste, polished surface, coated on both sides, represented by fragmentary home altars, which are related to the religious beliefs of the human communities living there<sup>6</sup>.

In the summer of 2011, on the *Piatra Detunată*-rock, among the rich middle Bronze Age pottery belonging to the Wietenberg culture, after 17 years of excavations, a fragmentary clay wagon had been discovered, for the first time.

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<sup>5</sup> Székely 1999, p. 109-126.

<sup>6</sup> Costea 1998, p. 59-76.

The four pieces of the wagon were burnt to the black colour and finely polished. The fragments had shown us that it had a rectangular shape and was decorated with vertical incised hatched stripes. A knob had been placed on the upper part of each corner of the wagon. On the lower part of the box there were other cylindrical knobs with horizontal perforations, which were destined to serve for fixing the axle of the wheels (pl. II/1, 3). Dimensions: length: 11,3 cm, height: 6 cm.

A fragmentary wheel with muff was also discovered, and was radially decorated with hatched stripes (pl. II/2).

The way the wheels had been assembled to the miniature wagons of the Wietenberg culture from Transylvania were most probably very similar to the one used in the Otomani culture, and resembled those from Slovakia (Nižná Myšľa)<sup>7</sup>.

The unearthed clay wagon found on the lower meadow of *Piatra Detunată* is the fourth one discovered in South-Eastern Transylvania. The first one, the Cuculata piece, is part of the Schneckenberg culture<sup>8</sup>. The second wagon is from the Wietenberger culture in Sighișoara<sup>9</sup>, while the third is the Baraolt fragment<sup>10</sup>, which also belongs to the Wietenberg culture<sup>11</sup>.

Each unique piece of these handmade objects, calls for an almost desperate search for exact analogies, but there are also different details of expression.

The wagon model discovered on the lower meadow of the *Piatra Detunată*, in the classification made by Mária Bondár, for the category of the Wietenberg culture, belongs to the decorated specimens, which are much more common than the undecorated ones. In order to sustain the axle of the models belonging to the Wietenberg culture, it was used a perforated, or round-headed knob, resembling a handle, which was always placed underneath the wagon. Therefore, the axle didn't penetrate the box of the wagon, or didn't perforate it, as we could find in the case of some models belonging to the Otomani culture<sup>12</sup>.

In the archaeological record, the question is still open about the designation of the clay wagons: - were a child's toy, or a cultic object? On the lower meadow of the *Piatra Detunată*, the fine polished and richly decorated ceramics dominates the category of the cultic objects, with a large number of mobile home altars<sup>13</sup>. Quite common are the clay decorated wagon wheels (pl. II/2). In percentages, the decorated Bronze Age artefacts reach 80%, and only the remaining 20% being to the common use pottery. On this basis, we conclude that the fortress on the *Piatra Detunată* was only seldom used by the Middle

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<sup>7</sup> Furmánek 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Bichir 1964, p. 67–86.

<sup>9</sup> Horedt 1960, p. 107–137.

<sup>10</sup> Székely 1988.

<sup>11</sup> Boroffka 2004, p. 347–354.

<sup>12</sup> Bondár 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Costea, Székely 2011, p. 107–113.

Bronze Age communities, in cases of emergency, when being attacked by the enemies, or for religious ceremonies. The clay model wagon can be referred to as being also used for cultic purposes, because of the large number of cultic objects discovered there. However, it is also strange that, while the so-called „*home altars*” discovered after 17 years of excavation had been found in such a large number, only one wagon clay model had been found there. During the fieldwork, in the Olt Valley, near the *Piatra Detunată*, several terraced settlements had been identified. There, the composition of the pottery is exactly the reverse: approximately 20% of it is decorated and belongs to the fine ware, while the rest is all made of coarse paste, for an everyday use.

The role of the knobs from the wagon corners is also controversial: where they cultic vessels or idols were placed upon them?

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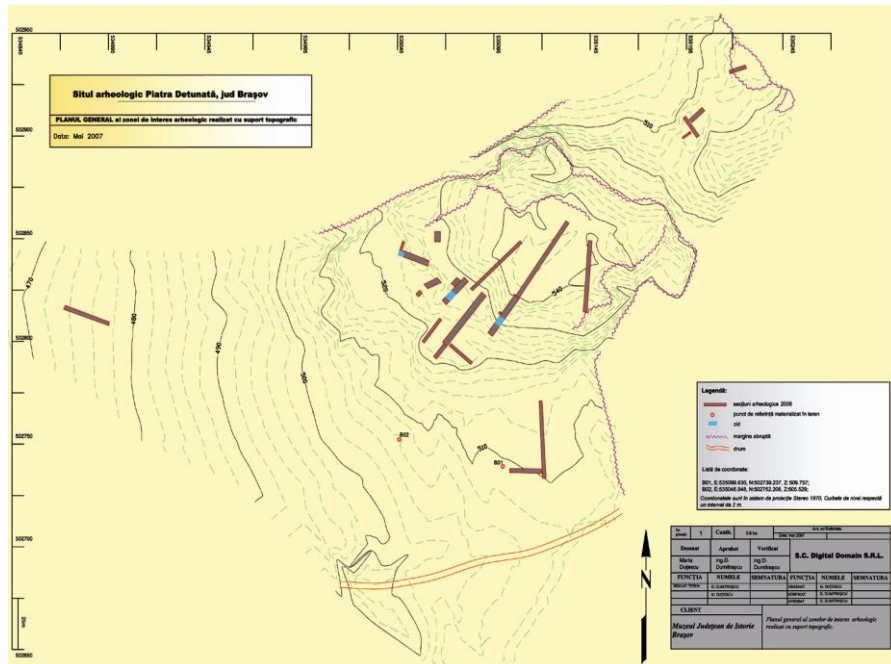
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**Pl. I. 1** = View of *Piatra Detunată/Durdulya* from Racoş/Alsórákos, **2** = Plan of excavations.



**Pl. II.** Racoș. 1, 3 = The clay wagon model, 2 = clay wheel model.