

"SCEPTRES" OF THE BRONZE AGE DISCOVERED WITHIN THE MOSTISTEA VALLEY

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During the last quarter of the century archaeological research in our country has been highlighting a certain category of polished stone objects certainly belonging to the Coslogeni Culture named *sceptres*¹ or *bludgeon-sceptres*². In some conditions these objects are seen as symbols of the social power.

Lately through the collections of the Archaeological Museum from Oltenița three pieces of this type have been received. Two of them namely the *sceptre* from Coțofana village, Gurbănești and the *sceptre* from Vlădiceasca village, the Argova Valley are known.

The piece from Vlădiceasca was pointed out and illustrated in 1978³ and in the same year the piece from Vlădiceasca and the other one from Coțofana were mentioned and illustrated by Sebastian Morintz⁴. Many years ago archaeological diggings discovered the third piece in Vlădiceasca village the Argova Valley on an island in the middle of the Frăsinet Lake, named *Ostrov*⁵ by natives.

Since the first two pieces have not been described and the third one is quite brand new, it is important to take advantage of this opportunity to depict the technical data.

The piece from Coțofana, Gurbănești was given the archaeological staff who used to take diggings for salvation in the Mostiștea Valley⁶ by the headmistress of the local school in 1974 in order to be exhibited at the Archaeological Museum from Oltenița.

The *sceptre* was accidentally discovered at the surface of the ground on the left bank of the Mostiștea in the south of the village. In the neighbourhood of the place where the discovery was made there is an extensive settlement which is a type of stone with big strength coefficient, green-pigmented coloured and wholly polished the *sceptre* has a long tronconical body which ends with a buttoned prominence (Pl.I/1).

Characteristics: height = 23 cm, base diametre = 7,2 cm, maximum diametre = 7,7 cm, diametre of the buttoned end = 5cm.

From the typological point of view the piece from Coțofana looks like those sceptres discovered at Parcheș⁹, Băiești-Aldeni¹⁰, Vînători¹¹, and Țepu¹² and it is of the same category with the third type in the classification made by Eugen Sava from Kishinev¹³.

The piece from Vlădiceasca, the Argova Valley was bought by the Museum from Oltenița in 1974. This piece was discovered by chance on the terrace from the neighbourhood of *Ostrov* which was mentioned above. Both at *Ostrov* and on the opposite bank of the Frăsinet Lake in the southern edge of Captain's Valley Village there is abundance of traces of the Coslogeni Culture¹⁴. Carved in andezyt that is a type of stone with variable strength, grey-green coloured and pigmented by pieces of crystallized limestone, the *sceptre* is totally polished and it is of long tronconical shape. It is bounded mushroom-like shaped tip (Pl.I/2).

Characteristics: height = 22,4 cm, base diametre = 7,4 cm, diametre of the buttoned end = 6,2 cm.

From the typological point of view the piece is of the same share with the second type of the mentioned researcher's classification¹⁵.

The third piece was revealed by archaeological diggings in 1982¹⁶ at *Ostrov* which is situated at almost 1 km in the south of Vlădiceasca village, the Argova Valley.

It was discovered into a domestic pit together with ceramic stuff belonging to the Coslogeni Culture. This piece is made of serpentinit of black colour and it is highly polished (PLI/3). From the typological point of view it ranges within the third type. The buttoned end has been diminished from ancient times. On the horizontal part there is a profound incision. These damages are considered to occur because of the probable usage of the piece for crushing.

Characteristics: height = 9.7 cm, base diametre = 4,5 cm, diametre of the buttoned end = 3.8 cm. It is the smallest object of this type which has been known up to now in the west of the Prute. In the north of the Black Sea there were found even smaller pieces¹⁷.

In our country there are 19 pieces of this type which have been known up to now and out of which three pieces have been revealed by methodical diggings. Two pieces were discovered in archaeological complexes belonging to the Coslogeni Culture. They are the fragmental piece from Dorobanțu¹⁸ and the above mentioned piece from Vlădiceasca *Ostrov*. The third piece was discovered at Capidava within a hovel from late medieval age when it was reused¹⁹ in all likelihood. The piece also belongs to the Coslogeni Culture in fact the only culture of the Late Bronze Age which has been known up to now to have been developed within the territory expanded between the Danube and the sea.

The *sceptres* from Vlădiceasca, the other one which was discovered on the terrace and that one from Coțofana were attributed to the Coslogeni Culture²⁰ and at the same time a resembling fragmental piece which is decorated with buttons recently discovered on the bank of the Gălățui Lake in the neighbourhood of Alexandru Odobescu village in the district of Călărași is also attributed to the Coslogeni Culture. The piece was accidentally discovered while leveling a hillock and it belongs to the collection of the Museum from Călărași²¹ now.

The *sceptres* which were discovered in Dobruđa at Măcin and Parcheș²² belong to the Coslogeni Culture too. The *sceptres* discovered at Aldeni-Buzău and Fitionești were attributed to the Monteoru Culture, the second stage b²³ and of the nominalization of the three pieces discovered at Voinești²⁴ is disputed because at Voinești there are traces of the Monteoru Culture, the second stage b and of the Noua²⁵ Culture too. At Davidieni village, Tîmbucani, in the district of Neamț, a fragmental *sceptre*²⁶ was discovered by chance within a settlement with ash-pits belonging to the Noua-Culture.

The fact that the piece from Davidieni and the others from Voinești were attributed to the Noua Culture must not surprise us specially after revealing the discoveries from Ghindești, Basarabia²⁷. Unfortunately there is not enough data to nominalize the *sceptres* which were discovered at Huși²⁸, Găiceana the district of Bacău²⁹, Țepu³⁰, Vînători³¹, and Galați³².

The spreading of this type of *sceptres* is expanded over a wide area. It is limited in the east by the discovery from Curcium³³ the Central Asia and in the west by the discovery from Ruse³⁴ on the right bank of the Danube. Most of the discoveries are gathered in between the Dnieper and the Mostiștea where there are 44 known pieces and all of them belong to the huge Noua-Sabatinovka-Coslogeni Cultural Complex which includes the epoch from the end of the bronze age. In the west of the Mostiștea a fragmental *sceptre* was discovered within the well-known neolithic tomb from Ruse into a stratum of culture with archaeological deposits from the middle Bronze Age up to the early hallstattian period³⁷. From all these comments it

results that these pieces which are typical of the Noua-Sabatinovka- Coslogeni Cultural Complex spread throughout the contact zone of the neighbouring contemporary cultures.

As regards the dating and the nominalization of the pieces from the cultural point of view there is a certain agreement in opinions³⁸ but as regards the usage of these pieces there are several different points of view. The first piece shown in our country which is decorated with buttons and facets was presented as resembling to same pieces of the treasure from Borodino and to the weapons made of bronze and stone from Butimanu, the Tei Lake and Gîndesti because of their common button-decoration. It was considered a *sceptre* or a *bludgeon-sceptre*³⁹ undoubtedly representing a symbol of the social power to the author. Ioan Mitrea considered these pieces as *sceptres* - symbolic signs of power- which belonged to some chiefs of tribes or union of tribes⁴⁰. Some doubts as regards the explanation of the social significance of these pieces were expressed by Sebastian Mortintz and Irina Cios⁴¹. The archaeological context within the *sceptres* were found did not allow to the Romanian archaeologists to say anything about the complex usage of these pieces. The discoveries from the north of the Black Sea were more illustrating thus it was possible to state the usage of these pieces more precisely. Within the deposits of pieces made of bronze discovered at Voloskoe and Novoselovka which were attributed to the Sebatinovka Culture there were discovered patterns for stone *sceptres* in the same place with bronze pieces. Stone patterns together with *sceptres* were found within settlements belonging of the same culture at Cikalokva and Vernhetarasovka. At Podgorovka a *sceptre* together with bronze ingots⁴² were discovered.

By other discoveries these *sceptres* are associated to stone mortars which are small pieces (diametre of 8-10 cm) with a cup which is not very deep⁴³. Beyond the Ural Mountains on the bank of the Tobol within the number II hovel from Alekseevka belonging to the Andronov Culture there was found a *sceptre* together with a stone mortar. Similar discoveries were made at the sanctuary from Kamisnoe and within the settlement belonging to the late bronze age from Pivdeni which is located on the west bank of the Dnieser Liman. Stone mortars and *sceptres* were found within the departament of Kurcium from the east of Kazahstan⁴⁶. At Ghindești from Basarabia and also at the workshop for casting bronze from Voloskoe there were found stone *sceptres* associated to pestles of small size⁴⁷.

The presence of stone mortars was shown within the deposit of bronze from Kozorezovo and also within the settlements which were specialized on the processing bronze from Mosolovskoe and Usovo-ozero⁴⁸. Association in these discoveries proves that both the *sceptres* and the mortars were linked from the functional point of view as regards the activity of producing metals.

The analysis of waste which remained into those mortars showed that into those stone cups people used to mix up organic red ochre with small amounts of ore. The *sceptres* show traces of usage in turn or even damages sometimes at both ends because they were used to crush ochre and ore into stone mortars. All these data stress the idea that the *sceptres* we are talking about were functionally in connection with mortars since they were used as pestles for metal processing activity. *Sceptres* and mortars were things for worship and they were used for the rite which would precede and accompany the activity of bronze smelting and casting.

It is known the fact that in ancient times the smelter had a special status. Ethnographical analogies showed that the smelter used to be considered the master of fire. He used fire to operate on matter which changed from a status to an other. The smelting-casting activity was

preceeded and accompanied by rites which implied purity, fast, meditation and worship. The smelter was a poet, a sorcerer and a wizard⁴⁹ at the same time while his art together with his tools rose him at the rank of a priest. Besides all these, the pieces we are talking about were used as prestles within metallurgy namely within the rite which accompanied that process and they had a social significance at the same time since they were used as sceptres to stress the special status which the smelter had within society .

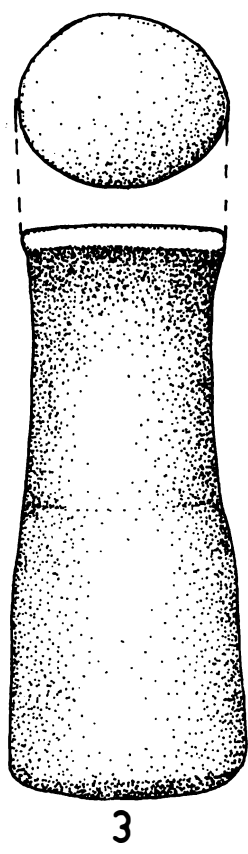
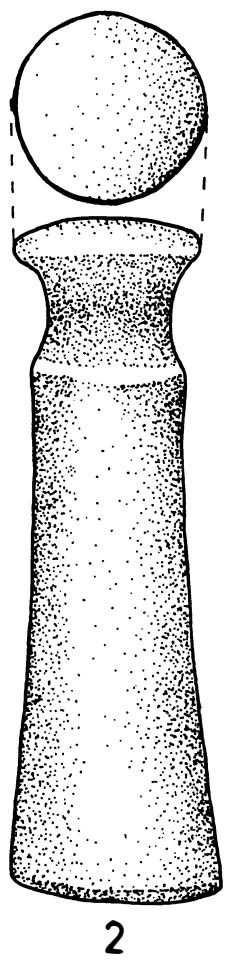
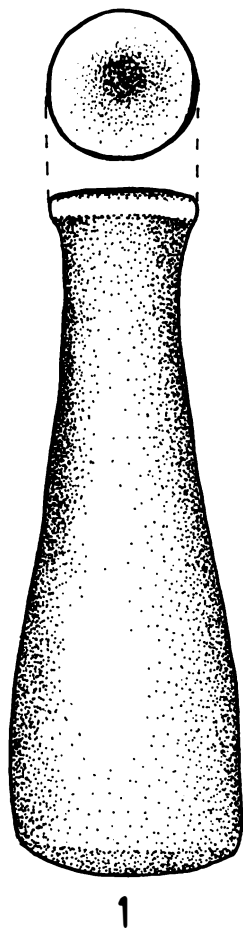
This is also demonstrated by the special quality of the rocks, by the punctilions aspect and sometimes by the abundance and significance of their ornaments⁵⁰.

Since the title of *sceptre* given to this type of piece results from one side of its functionality namely the social one which is not very accurate because it suggests that the piece was destined to a chief of tribes or union of tribes and not to a smelter who used to be a poet, a sorcerer and a wizard at the same time it is necessary to give up this title. The title of *sceptre-pestle* which was suggested and motivated by Mr. Eugen Sava from Kishinev seems to be the best-fitted. The sceptre pestle embodies the profession and the social status which the smelter had at that time.

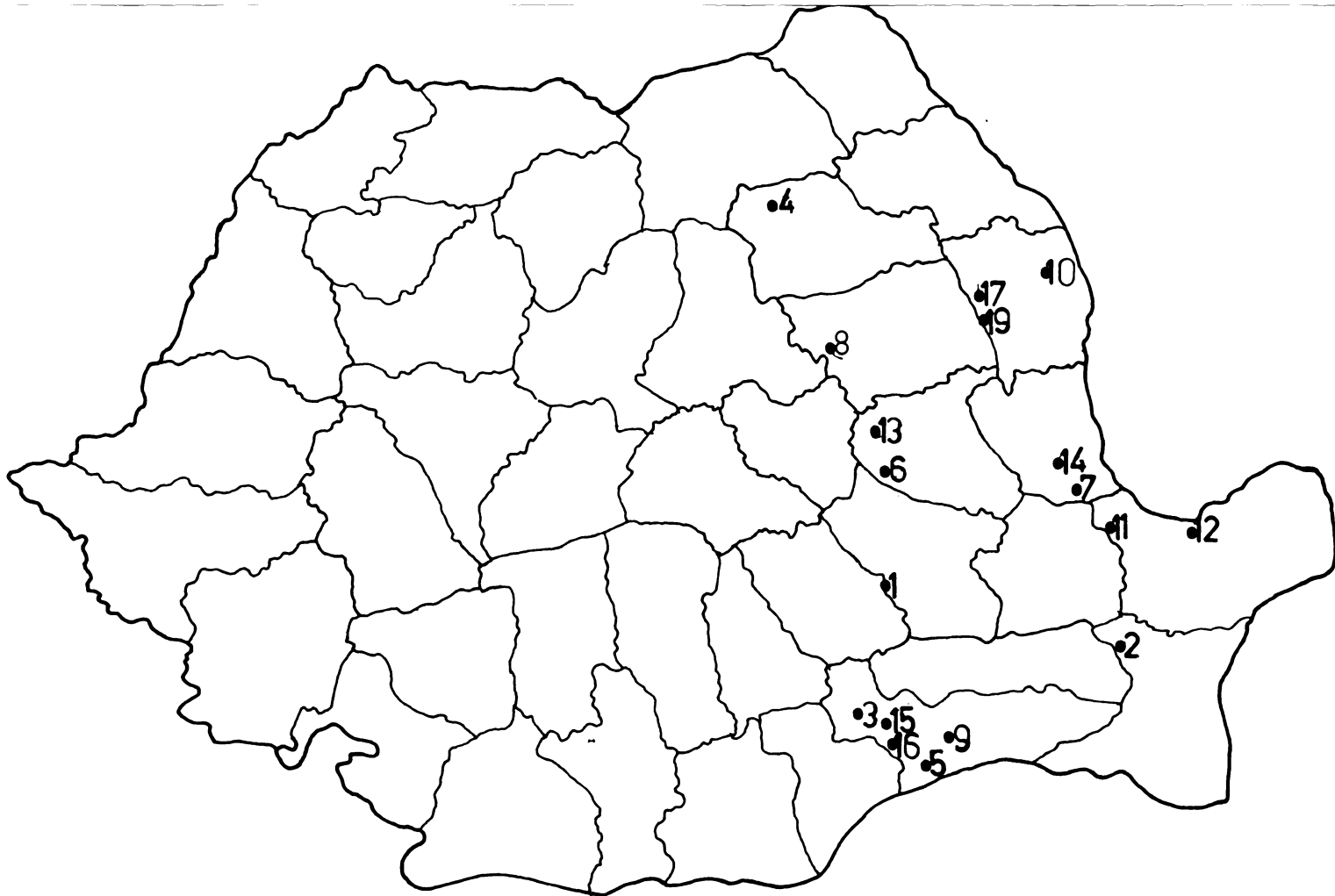
NOTES

1. Ioan Mitrea, *Memoria Antiquitatis*, 1, 1969, p.311-317; Sebastian Morintz, *Archaeological Contributions to Early Thracian History*, 1, Bucharest, 1978, p.147-148.
2. I.T. Dragomir, *Danubius*, 1, Galati, 1978, p.181, picture no.2/1.
3. Done Serbanescu and George Trohani, *Ilfov-Pages of History*, 1, Bucharest, 1978, p.32, picture no.9/1.
4. Sebastian Morintz, *op.cit.*, p.12, picture no.67/1-2.
5. The archaeological diggings for salvation were led by our late fellow Corneliu Halcescu.
6. Head - Sebastian Morintz (see Dacia, N.S., 19, 1975, p.303-304)
7. Done Serbanescu, George Trohani, *op.cit.*, p.34, # 63.
8. The ascertainment of the rocks for the described pieces was made in macroscopic analysis at the Mineralogy Laboratory from the Faculty of Geography-Geology, the University of Bucharest.
9. Elena Lazurca, *Pontica*, 10, Constanta, 1977, p.303-304, P11/4
10. Sebastian Morintz, *op.cit.*, p.147 and p.129/picture no.67/4
11. M.Brudiu, *Materials*, 9, 1970, p.513 and 515, picture no.4/5
12. I.Basoc, *Danubius*, 10, Galati, 1980, p.24 and 29, picture no.3/3
13. Eugen Sava, *Izvestiia Akademii nauk Moldavskoi S.S.R.Seria obschestvenni nauk*, 1, 1987, p.66. Such a classification of these pieces was made by I.T. Cerniakov too, *Severo-zapadnoe Pricernomore vo vtoroi polovine II tis. do n.e.*, Kiev, 1985, p.91
14. Done Serbanescu and George Trohani, *op.cit.*, p.28, #38 and #39
15. Eugen Sava, *op.cit.*
16. See note 5
17. I.T.Cerniakov, *op.cit.*, p.91.
18. Sebastian Morintz, *op.cit.*, p.147 and 129, picture no 67/3.
19. Irina Cios, *Pontica*, 19, Constanta, 1986, p.239-242
20. Sebastian Morintz, *op.cit.*, p.147-148; Done Serbanescu and George Trohani, *op.cit.*
21. Information - Marian Neagu, the manager of the Museum of the Lower Danube, Calarasi.
22. Elena Lazurca, *op.cit.*, p.301-305.
23. Sebastian Morintz, *op.cit.*, p.148; Ioan Mitrea, *op.cit.*, p.314 note 6
24. Ioan Mitrea, *op.cit.*; for the discovery of other two pieces at Voinesti, out of which one is a fragmental piece, see E.Lazurca, *op.cit.*, p.303-304, note 23 (note 17 from p.303 is an inadvertence).

25. Adrian Florescu, *Culture and Civilization on the Lower Danube*, 9, Calarasi, 1991, p.141. The author states that the *scopre* was found within a settlement belonging to the Noua Culture.
26. The piece can be seen at the base exhibition of the Museum from Piatra Neamt. We thank for this piece of information to Gh.Dimitroaia.
To explain the Noua Culture at Davidieni see Adrian C.Florescu, *op.cit.*, p.58.
27. Eugen Sava, *op.cit.*, p.66, picture no.1/23
28. Elena Lazarca, *op.cit.*, p.304; The fragmental piece can be seen at the Museum from Husi, the district of Vaslui.
29. *Ibidem*; I.Basoc, *op.cit.*, p.24; Adrian C.Florescu, *op.cit.*, p.67 The author reminds us of a settlement belonging to the Noua Culture in this locality.
30. I.Basoc, *op.cit.*
31. M.Brudiu, *op.cit.*; Adrian Florescu, *op.cit.*, p.143 There is an accidental discovery of the fragmental *scopre* within a settlement which was attributed to the Noua Culture by Adrian Florescu. M.Brudiu mentioned that the settlement belongs to the Coslogeni Culture since the southern limit of the Noua Culture is in the north of Vinatori. The same about the piece which was discovered at Galati.
32. I.T. Dragomir, *op.cit.*
33. Eugen Sava, *op.cit.*, p.66, picture no-4; I.N.Sharafutdinova, *Stepnoe Podneprov'ie v epohu podznel bronzi*, Kiev, 1982, p.134.
34. Gheorghii Gheorghiev i Nikola Angelov, *Izvestia*, 21, Sofia 1957, p.51, picture no.13.
35. La Kamisnoe and Alekseevka I.T.Cerniakov, *op.cit.*, p.92; Eugen Sava, *op.cit.*, p.66.
36. Eugen Sava, *op.cit.*, p.67. Pieces were discovered at Novo-Kizganovo over the Volga River, in the neighbourhood of the Ural Mountains.
37. Gheorghii Gheorghiev i Nikola Angelov, *op.cit.*; Sebastian Morintz, *op.cit.*, p.19; 52-55.
38. I.T.Cerniakov attributes some pieces to the Culture of multi-belted Ceramic, to Late Yamnaia burials, to burials into catacombs or even to the Belozerka Culture.
39. I.T.Dragomir, *op.cit.*, p.181.
40. Ioan Mitrea, *op.cit.*, p.316
41. Sebastian Morintz, *op.cit.*, p.148; Irina Cios, *op.cit.*
42. Eugen Sava, *op.cit.*, p.68; I.T.Cerniakov, *op.cit.*, p.91-92
43. I.T.Cerniakov, *op.cit.*, p.92 and the next one.
44. Eugen Sava, *op.cit.*, p.68; I.N.Sarafutdinova, *op.cit.*, p.133-134.
45. I.T.Cerniakov, *op.cit.*, page 92 and the next one.
46. Eugen Sava, *op.cit.*, p.92 and the next one.
47. I.N.Sarafutdinova, *op.cit.*, p.135, picture 54/3; Eugen Sava, *op.cit.*, p.68.
48. Eugen Sava, *op.cit.*; I.T.Cerniakov, *op.cit.*, p.92 and next one.
49. Mircea Eliade, *The History of Beliefs and Religious Ideas*, 1, Bucharest, 1991, p.60-63.
50. Extended motivation and references to Eugen Sava, *op.cit.*, p.68-70



P.I. The Coslogeni Culture. Sceptres which were discovered on the Mostiștea Valley (size 1/2):
1. Coțofanca. 2. Vlădiceasca terrace. 3. Vlădiceasca Ostrov.



P.II. The map of stone *sceptres* spreading in Romania:

1. Băiești-Aldeni; 2. Capidava; 3. Coțofanca; 4. Davidieni; 5. Dorobanțu; 6. Fitionești;
 7. Galați; 8. Găiceanca; 9. Gălățui 10. Huși; 11. Măcin; 12. Parcheș; 13. Țepu; 14. Vinători;
 15.-16. Vlăceasca 17.-19. Voinesti

