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A STICK WITH DOVE HEAD FOUND AT HALMYRIS

Abstract: În depozitul Institutului de Cercetări Eco-Muzeale din Tulcea se păstrează o baghetă fragmentară de bronz, descoperită în cursul săpăturilor arheologice de la Halmyris (nr. inv. 39.645). Ea are lungimea totală de 110 mm și un profil pătrat cu latura de 3 mm. El este ornamentat cu incizii care imită penajul. Se disting ochii și ciocul. Obiecte similare s-au descoperit în mai multe situri din Bulgaria, Serbia, Ungaria, România, Spania și Germania. Cele întregi au la capătul opus o verigă. Deși nu știm nimic despre contextul stratigrafic din care provine acest obiect de la Halmyris, considerăm necesară studiarea lui, din cauza rarității acestor baghete. Până în prezent, în Dobrogea s-a mai descoperit, din câte cunoaștem, doar un singur exemplar în afara celui de la Halmyris, și anume la Ulmetum. Bagheta semnalată la Troesmis de către Octavian Bozu în studiul la care ne vom referi mai jos, conform informațiilor date de Florin Topoleanu, este de fapt cea de la Halmyris.

Keywords: stick, religious, christianity

In the depository of the Institute for Eco-Museal Researches from Tulcea is preserved a fragmentary bronze stick, found during the archaeological excavations at Halmyris (nr. 39.645). The object has a total length of 110 mm and a quadrature section of 3 x 3 mm. The profile becomes rhombic toward the upper part (7 mm diameter). The end of this upper part is decorated with a dove placed on a base high of 8 mm. The length of the stick without the dove is 87 mm. The dove is 18 mm length and 13 mm high, and it is decorated with incisions that represent the plumage. The eyes and the beak are also figured (Fig. 1 and 2).

Similar objects were found in several places from Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary, Romania, Spain, France and Germany. The entire pieces have a link at the opposite end. Although we do not know the stratigraphic context of this object from Halmyris, we consider that it deserves a study, because such pieces are quite rare. In Dobrudja was found only one more stick, at Ulmetum. The piece mentioned at Troesmis by Octavian Bozu in the paper quoted below, according to an oral information provided by Florin Topoleanu, is in fact the same with that from Halmyris.

The first study dedicated to these sticks was written by Hermann Veters, who discussed the seven pieces found at Sadovec during Ivan Velkov's excavations in

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the 1930's¹. He pointed to several analogies in Spain, Germany and Switzerland, reaching the conclusion that the sticks with dove were transported by the Goths from Danube to these regions, and that they represent “the bird of the soul”, a funeral symbol. The symbol of the bird was considered by Vettters an element of Scytho-Sarmatian origin. Most of the sticks known by Vettters are dated in the 6th century.² Some of them have pairs of doves. The sticks were produced by casting in moulds. In Spain, at Cacabelos, was found a mould for sticks (Fig. 3).³

A religious significance was also proposed by Đorđe Janković, who has ascribed the sticks to the believers of the Bonosiac heresy, recorded in large number until the 6th century around Aquis in Dacia Ripensis, an area where many such sticks were found. Janković supposed that these sticks were put on the neck instead of the crosses⁴. This heresy was initiated by the bishop Bonosus of Naissus at the end of the 4th century (he sustained that Mary did not remain always virgin and it seems that he also denied the divine nature of Jesus Christ). The heresy found followers not only in Dacia Mediterranea, but also in other Balkan provinces, as well as in Hispania, Gallia and Burgundy. Bishop Niceta of Remesiana fought against this heresy⁵.

The idea of Janković was assumed by Nelu Zugravu, first in relation with a piece found at Craiova, and next in his book on the heresies spread in the Danubian provinces⁶. I accepted without criticism this interpretations in some previous studies⁷, but now I reject it, because two such sticks (Fig. 4) were discovered in a closed context dated before 245, at Romula, in a building destroyed by the inroad of the Carpi of 245⁸. It is clear that the dove sticks appeared much time before the Bonosiac heresy. Even if they would have a significance related to the Christianity, they could not be considered insignia of the believers of this heresy.

Ovidiu Bozu, who discovered four sticks in the collections of the Timișoara Museum, proposed another significance, following the interpretation of a lot of

¹ I. Welkov, *Eine Gotenfestung bei Sadowetz (Nordbulgarien)*, “Germania”, 19, 1935, p. 154.

² H. Vettters, *Der Vogel auf der Stange, ein Kultzeichen*, “Jahreshefte des Österreichischen Archäologischen Institutes in Wien”, 37, 1948, p. 131-150.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 134, 135, fig. 32/17.

⁴ D. Janković, *Podunavski deo oblasti Akvisa u VI i početkom VII veka (La partie danubienne de la région d'Aquis au VIe siècle et au début du VIIe siècle)*, Beograd, 1981, p. 176-177, 221.

⁵ A. Baudrillart (ed.), *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques*, vol. 9, Paris, 1937, col. 1093, 1094, 1096; M. Mirković, *Die christliche Kirche und das Christentum in den zentralillyrischen Provinzen im 4. und 6. Jahrhundert*, in A. B. Biernacki, P. Pawlak (ed.), *Late Roman and Early Byzantine Cities on the Lower Danube from the 4th to the 6th century AD (International Conference Poznan, 15-17 November 1995)*, Poznan, 1997, p. 50-51, 56; N. Zugravu, *Erezii și schisme la Dunărea Mijlocie și de Jos în mileniul I*, Iași, 1999, p. 80-81.

⁶ N. Zugravu, *Geneza creștinismului popular al românilor*, București, 1997, p. 291, 299, 314 (footnote 140), 319 (nota 229), 423-424; *Idem*, *Erezii...*, p. 81.

⁷ A. Madgearu, *The Spreading of the Christianity in the rural areas of post-Roman Dacia (4th-7th centuries)*, “Archaevs. Études d'histoire des religions”, 8, 2004, 1-4, p. 46; *Idem*, *The 6th Century Lower Danubian Bridgeheads: Location and Mission*, “Ephemeris Napocensis”, 13, 2003 (2005), p. 308.

⁸ Gh. Popilian, *Un quartier artisanal à Romula*, “Dacia”, NS, 20, 1976, p. 243.

similar pieces made of bone found in several early Roman cemeteries and settlements from other provinces, studied by the Swiss archaeologist Gerd G. Könik. He argued that the sticks were in fact distaffs. The link was used to insert the finger. The bone sticks were decorated at the opposite end with a representation of Venus⁹. In Dobrudja, bone sticks with the figure of Venus were found at Dinogetia and Callatis¹⁰. On the other hand, O. Bozu agreed that the dove sticks had a Christian significance, because they were used by Christian women¹¹. In the monograph of the fortifications from Sadovec, Syna Uenze and Joachim Werner were too convinced that these sticks are a kind of Christian amulets¹².

The interpretation proposed by O. Bozu for the use of the sticks seems to be convincing, but we cannot exclude that they were hair pins.

Since in the Roman symbolism, the dove was associated with Venus¹³, its presence on an object used by women before Christianity is normal. The dove was a substitute for the representation of the goddess. After Christianization, the same symbol of the dove was preserved because it was associated with another significance, the Holy Spirit descended to Christ at His baptism by Saint John. The dove was also a symbol of the divine peace (the dove that brought the olive bough to Noah).¹⁴ We consider that this is the explanation of the appearance of the sticks with dove. They were initially variants of the bone sticks, where Venus was replaced with her attribute, the dove. Women continued to use these sticks, but the significance of the dove became different after the free spreading of the Christianity. This is only one case when Greek, Roman and other heathen symbols and customs were Christianized. The dove sticks were not tokens of an Orthodox or Heretic belief, but they bear a Christian symbol. In some cases they are decorated with crosses, or they have small crosses attached with chains¹⁵. An analogy are the Sucidava type buckles decorated with pierced crosses which were not religious tokens. In both cases, one specific for women and other for men, a Christian symbol was applied on an object used for a specific purpose, but this did not transform the objects into tokens that expressed the belonging to Christianity, like did the pectoral crosses that had no other function.

⁹ G. G. Könik, *Die Fingerkunkel aus Grab 156*, in K. Roth-Rubi, H. Rudolf Sennhauser (ed.), *Verenamünster Zurzach. Ausgrabungen und Bauuntersuchung*, vol. 1. *Römische Strasse und Gräber*, Zürich, 1987, p. 129-137.

¹⁰ Gh. Ștefan, *Dinogetia. I. Risultati della prima campagna di scavi*, "Dacia", 7-8, 1937-1940 (1941), p. 414, fig. 22 (p. 417); C. Preda, *Callatis. Necropola romano-bizantină*, București, 1980, p. 63, 159, Pl. 29/1, 3.

¹¹ O. Bozu, *Obiecte creștine inedite de uz casnic. Furcile de tors pentru deget datate în secolele IV-VI e.n.*, "Analele Banatului, SN, Arheologie-Istorie", 2, 1993, p. 208-209.

¹² S. Uenze, *Die spätantiken Befestigungen von Sadovec (Bulgarien). Ergebnisse der deutsch-bulgarisch-österreichische Ausgrabungen (1934-1937)*, I, München, 1992, p. 199, 412.

¹³ H. Biedermann, *Knaurs Lexikon der Symbole*, München, 1998, p. 1084.

¹⁴ F. Cabrol, H. Leclercq (ed.), *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, vol. III/2, Paris, 1914, col. 2203.

¹⁵ V. Ljubenova, *Selišteto ot rimskata i rannovizantijskata epokha*, in J. Čangova (ed.), *Pernik*, vol. I. *Poseliščen život na chālma krakra ot V chil. pr. n.e. do VI v. na n. e.*, Sofia, 1981, p. 192, fig. 133; S. Uenze, *op. cit.*, Taf. 4/9.

The doves sticks presented in the following list were found in the Middle and Lower Danubian regions, sometimes in contexts that are showing that they were produced and used up to the 6th century.

- 1 - Asparukhovo, Varna Region, Bulgaria. Fragment long of 108 mm.¹⁶
- 2 - Bela Voda, Pernik Region, Bulgaria. Five pieces from a lot of metallic objects hidden in the 6th century in the ruins of a *villa rustica* dated on the 3rd-4th centuries, used as raw material for a workshop. The date of the deposit is given by a Sucidava buckle decorated with cross and crescent.¹⁷
- 3 - Bozveliysko, Varna Region, Bulgaria. A fragment long of 86 mm and a dove from another stick.¹⁸
- 4 - Caričin Grad (Justiniana Prima), Jablanica District, Serbia. A fragment long of 72 mm, found in a building near the basilica from the lower town¹⁹.
- 5 - Celei (Sucidava), Corabia, Olt County, Romania. An entire stick without known dimensions, found in the garbage pit 2 / 2000 together with a bronze coin from the 4th or from the 6th century.²⁰
- 6 - Craiova, Dolj County, Romania. An entire stick long of 182 mm, found in the settlement from point Fântâna Obedeauu dated in the 5th and 6th centuries, in the filling earth of dwelling 2.²¹
- 7 - Dăbravino, Varna Region, Bulgaria. A fragment long of 41 mm²².
- 8 - Gamzigrad, Zaječar District, Serbia. Three pieces from the 4th century palace.²³
- 9 - Goleš, Silistra Region, Bulgaria. An entire stick long of 168 mm, found in a fortress dated between the 4th and the 6th century, in a fountain near a tower, with objects from the 4th-5th centuries. From another stick are preserved two fragments with total length of 170 mm.²⁴

¹⁶ L. Lazarov, *Dreven bronz. Katalog (Ancient bronze. Katalog)*, Dălgopol, 2001, p. 50, nr. 95 (p. 152).

¹⁷ V. Ljubenova, *Bronzovi predmeti ot kāsnoantičnata vila pri rudnik "Bela Voda", Pernik (Objets de bronze de la villa de la basse antiquité située près de la mine "Bela Voda", Pernik)*, "Arheologija", Sofia, 37, 1995, 3, p. 13, fig. 12.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 50, nr. 97, 98 (p. 151-152).

¹⁹ V. Kondić, V. Popović, *Caričin Grad. Utvrđeno naselje u vizantijskom Iliriku (Caričin Grad. Site fortifié dans l'Illyricum byzantin)*, Beograd, 1977, p. 399, nr. 59, Pl. XVI/4.

²⁰ P. Gherghe, L. Amon, D. Liciu, F. Bâciu, *Corabia, jud. Olt [Sucidava]*, in *Cronica cercetărilor arheologice. Campania 2000*, Suceava, 2001, nr. 52, p. 75.

²¹ Gh. Popilian, M. Nica, *Așezarea prefeudală de la Craiova (Fântâna Obedeauu)*, "Drobeta", 15, 2005, p. 150-151, 154-155 pl. VI/5.

²² L. Lazarov, *op. cit.*, p. 50, nr. 96 (p. 152).

²³ D. Srejić (ed.), *Gamzigrad. An Imperial Palace of the Late Classical Times. Ausstellungskatalog*, Beograd, 1983, p. 138, nr. 186-188 (apud S. Uenze, *op. cit.*, p. 412, footnote 17).

²⁴ G. Atanasov, *Martyrium et Agiasmon dans le castel basbyzantin près du village de Golech, région de Silistra (communication préliminaire)*, in *Von der Scythia zur Dobrudža*, hrsg. Ch. Choliolčev, R. Pillinger, R. Harreither (Miscellanea Bulgarica, 11), Wien, 1997, p. 127, 128, fig. 5/11, 12 (p. 138); Idem, *De nouveau sur la localisation de la forteresse bas-byzantine St. Cyril en Scythie Mineure*, in *Prinos lui Petre Diaconu la 80 de ani. Volum îngrijit de I. Căndea, V. Sârbu, M. Neagu*, Brăila, 2004, p. 417, fig. 6.

- 10** - Gornea – Căunița de Sus, Caraș-Severin County, Romania. A fragment without dove, long of 175 mm, found in section I in the 4th century *castellum*.²⁵
- 11** - Hărlec (Augusta), Vratza Region, Bulgaria. Several sticks (at least one being decorated with a cross on the dove backside) found in a tower of the fortress, with 6th century objects.²⁶
- 12** - Kjustendil (Pautalia), Kjustendil Region, Bulgaria. A fragment long of 120 mm, decorated on one side with a rosette.²⁷
- 13** - Kladovo-Donje Butorke, Bor District, Serbia. An entire stick long of 193 mm²⁸.
- 14** - Mokranjske Stene, Bor District, Serbia. A fragment long of 100 mm²⁹.
- 15** - Murighiol (Halmyris), Tulcea County, Romania. A fragment long of 110 mm, found in unknown conditions in the Late Roman fortress.
- 16** - Orșova (?), Caraș-Severin County, Romania. Four pieces preserved in the Museum of Timișoara, most probably found at Dierna (Orșova). Two entire sticks are long of 178 and 190 mm, while from other two are preserved only the doves.³⁰
- 17** - Pantelimonul de Sus (Ulmetum), Constanța County, Romania. An entire stick long of 130 mm, found in a tower of the southwestern gate, together with coins from Constantius II and Valens³¹.
- 18** - Pernik, Pernik Region, Bulgaria. Five entire pieces and eight fragments. One of them has a cross attached to the link³².
- 19** - Popina, Silistra Region, Bulgaria. An entire stick long of 170 mm, found in a 4th century grave together with a fibula with onion heads.³³
- 20** - Prahovo, Bor District, Serbia. An entire stick long of 200 mm, two dove fragments and three fragments that preserved the link.³⁴
- 21** - Reșca (Romula), Olt County, Romania. Two fragments long of 122 mm and 53 mm, both decorated with a dove, found in a building destroyed during the attack of the Carpi in 245³⁵.

²⁵ N. Gudea, *Gornea. Așezări de epocă romană și romană târzie*, Reșița, 1977, p. 84, fig. 50/16; O. Bozu, *op. cit.*, p. 206, fig. 1/5.

²⁶ Apud Gh. Popilian, M. Nica, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

²⁷ I. Ivanov, *Kiustendilskijat Hisarlak i negovite starini*, "Izvestija na Arheologičeskija Institut, Sofia", 7, 1920, p. 105, fig. 76.

²⁸ D. Janković, *op. cit.*, p. 252, Pl. XVIII/7.

²⁹ D. Janković, *op. cit.*, p. 252, Pl. XVIII/6.

³⁰ O. Bozu, *op. cit.*, p. 206, fig. 1/1-4.

³¹ Gh. Papuc, C. Băjenaru, Z. Covacef ș.a., *Pantelimonu de Sus, com. Pantelimon, jud. Constanța [Ulmetum]*, in *Cronica cercetărilor arheologice din România. Campania 2006*, Tulcea, 2007, p. 260.

³² V. Ljubenova, *op. cit.*, p. 191-192, fig. 132-133.

³³ Ž. Vážarova, *Slaviano-bălgarskoto selište kraj selo Popina Silistrenko*, Sofia, 1956, p. 27, fig. 18 (p. 27).

³⁴ D. Janković, *op. cit.*, p. 252, Pl. XVIII/1, 3, 4, 8, 11, 12.

³⁵ Gh. Popilian, *Un quartier...*, p. 243, fig. 13/12, 13.

- 22** - Royak, Varna Region, Bulgaria. Two fragments long of 169 mm and 192 mm. One of them has two face to face doves.³⁶
- 23** - Sadovec, Pleven Region, Bulgaria. Two entire sticks long of 210 mm and 195 mm, and 11 fragments (one made of silver, from which only the dove was preserved). Discovered in the fortifications ascribed to the Gothic foederati, Sadovsko Kale and Golemanovo Kale.³⁷
- 24** - Szekszárd, Tolna County, Hungary. An entire stick with unknown dimensions, found in the women grave nr. 79 from an early Avarian cemetery.³⁸



Fig. 1: The stick from Halmyris.

³⁶ L. Lazarov, *op. cit.*, p. 49, nr. 93, 94.

³⁷ S. Uenze, *op. cit.*, p. 528-529, Taf. 4/9, 5/1-6, 6/1-5, 122/10.

³⁸ G. Rosner, *Das awarenzeitliche Gräberfeld im Szekszárd-Bogyszlói Strasse*, Budapest, 1999, p. 19, Taf. 6/79/1 (p. 172).

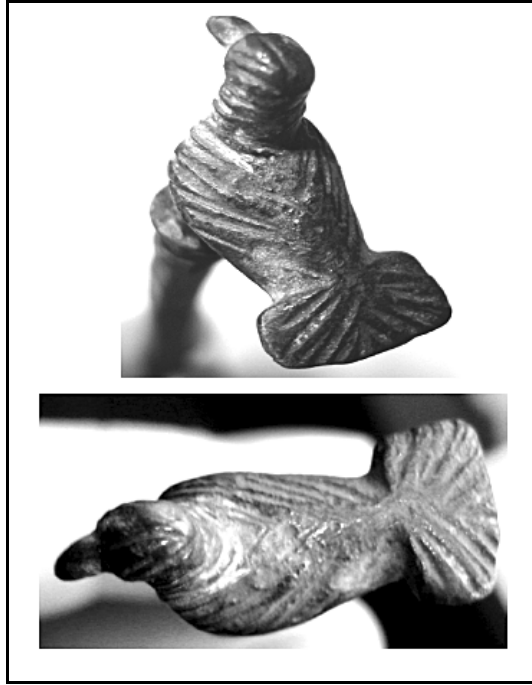


Fig. 2: The dove head of the stick from Halmyris.

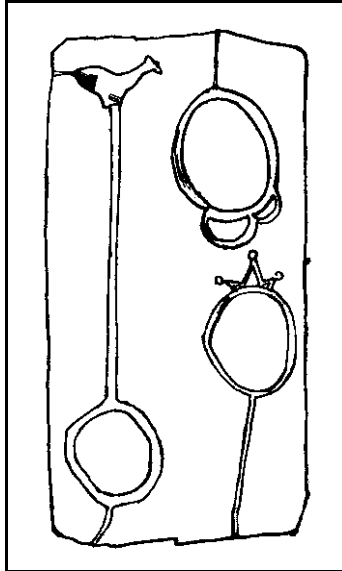


Fig. 3: Moukd for sticks (Cacabelos, Spain), after H. Vettiers, *op. cit.*, fig. 32/17.

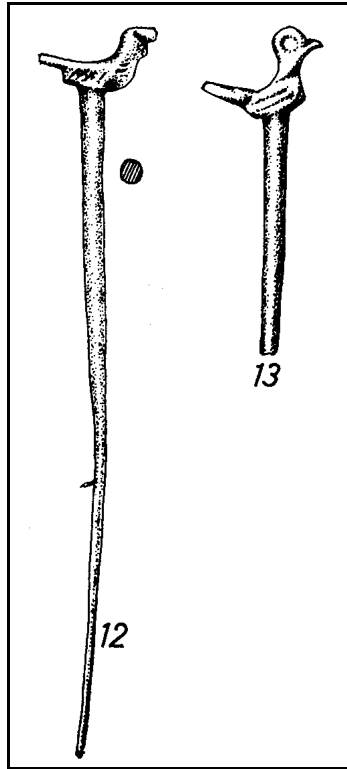


Fig. 4: The sticks from Romula, after Gh. Popilian, *Un quartier...*, p. 243, fig. 13/12, 13.

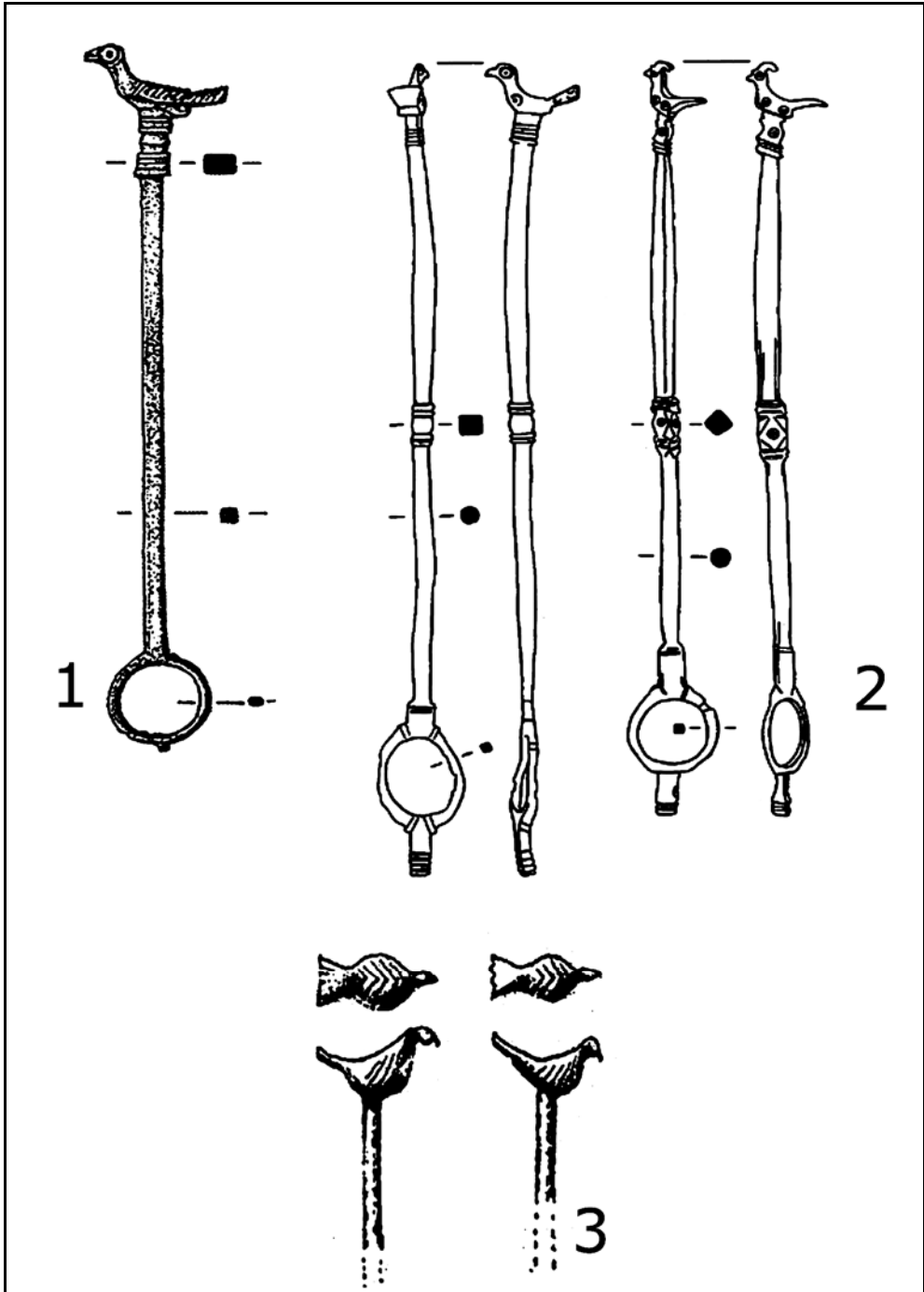


Fig. 5: The sticks from 1- Goleš (after G. Atanasov, *Martyrium...*, fig. 5/11, 12), 2- Sadovec (after S. Uenze, *op. cit.*, Taf. 6/1,2), 3- Orșova (after O. Bozu, *op. cit.*, fig. 1/3-4).

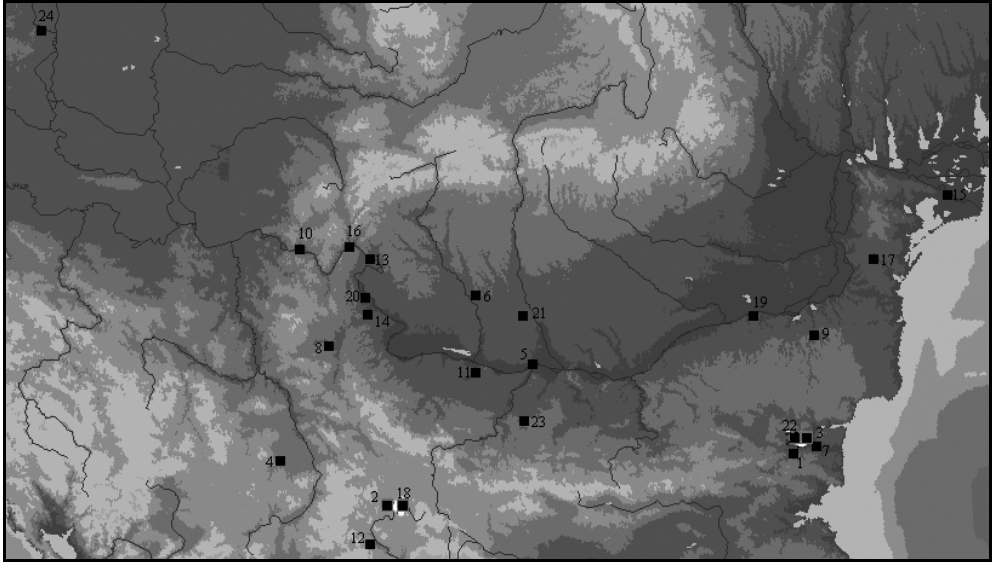


Fig. 6: Map.