

A GERMANIC GRAVE INSIDE THE LATE ROMAN FORTIFICATION OF SUCIDAVA-CELEI

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Abstract. *The issue of this article consists in re-discussing a grave in Sucidava, concerning its origin and chronology. There have occurred some differences in comparison with the date when it was published, a long time ago. Furthermore, its closest analogies have been retaken into consideration (Bistreț, Vădastra, Cioroiu Nou).*

Keywords: *Grave, sword, German.*

The Roman and late Roman archaeological monuments in Sucidava-Celei are impressive. The late Roman fortification (fig. 1), the civilian settlement (fig. 2), the road which ran north on the Valley of the Olt River (fig. 3), the bridge of Constantine the Great (fig. 4), the port facilities and furnishings, the craft workshops, and last but not least, the cemeteries and isolated graves make up a complex picture, rarely met for the region of the north of the Lower Danube¹.

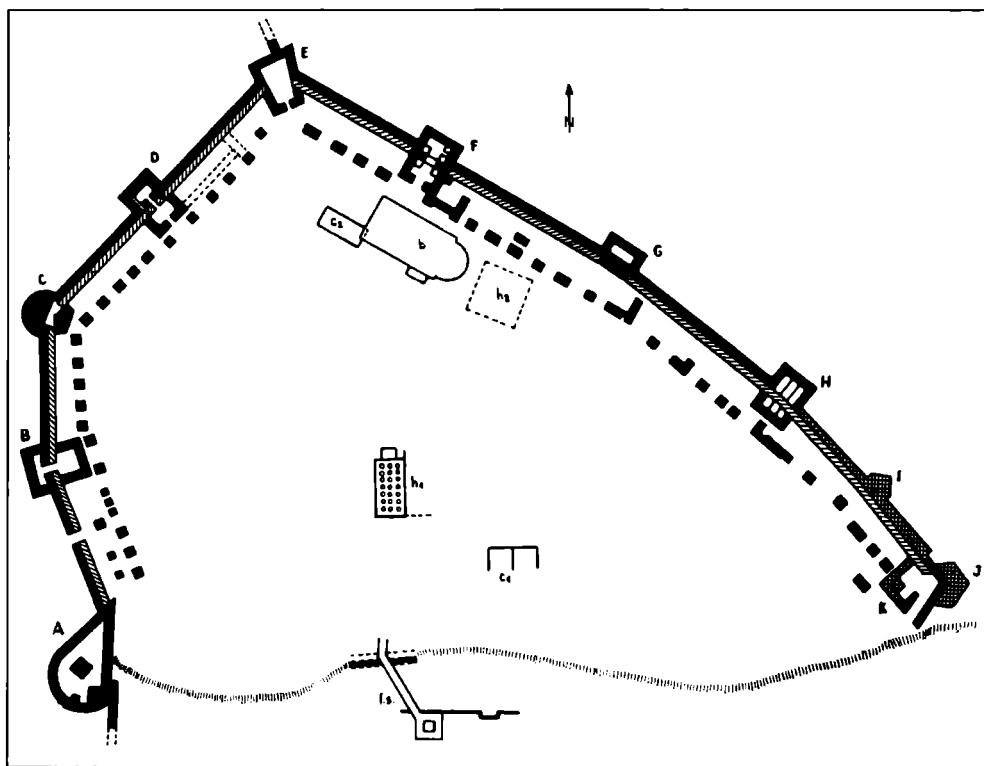


Fig. 1. The late Roman fortification of Sucidava, acc. to O. Toropu.

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¹ For Sucidava-Celei, see D. Tudor, *Sucidava. Une cité daco-romaine et byzantine en Dacie*, Bruxelles, 1965; Idem, *Sucidava*, București, 1966; Idem, *Sucidava*, Craiova, 1974; O. Toropu, C. Tătulea, *Sucidava Celei*, București 1987; Gh. Popilian, D. Bondoc, *The Roman and Late Roman cemetery of Sucidava-Celei. The excavations from 1969-1983*, Craiova 2012.

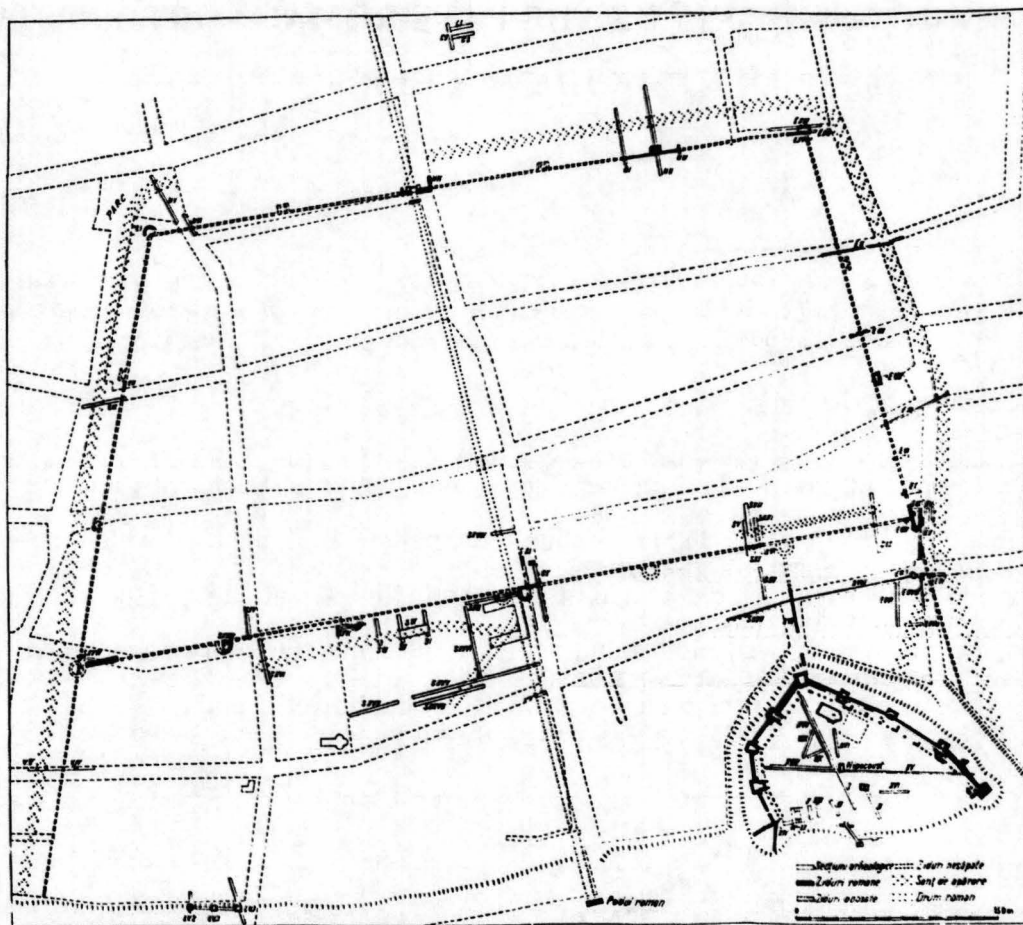


Fig. 2. The civilian settlement of Sucidava, acc. to E. Bujor, D. Tudor.

From all the archaeological discoveries made here over the years, we have to mention inscriptions and sculptural pieces, pottery, isolated coins and hoards, tiles and stamped bricks, lamps, bone objects, iron objects, bronze objects, objects of lead, glass vessels, weapons, pieces of military equipment and clothing accessories, etc.

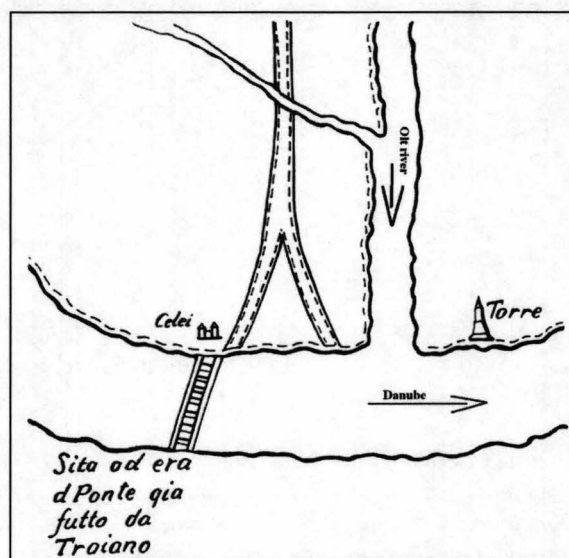


Fig. 3. The Roman road on the Valley of the Olt River, acc. to C. Cantacuzino.

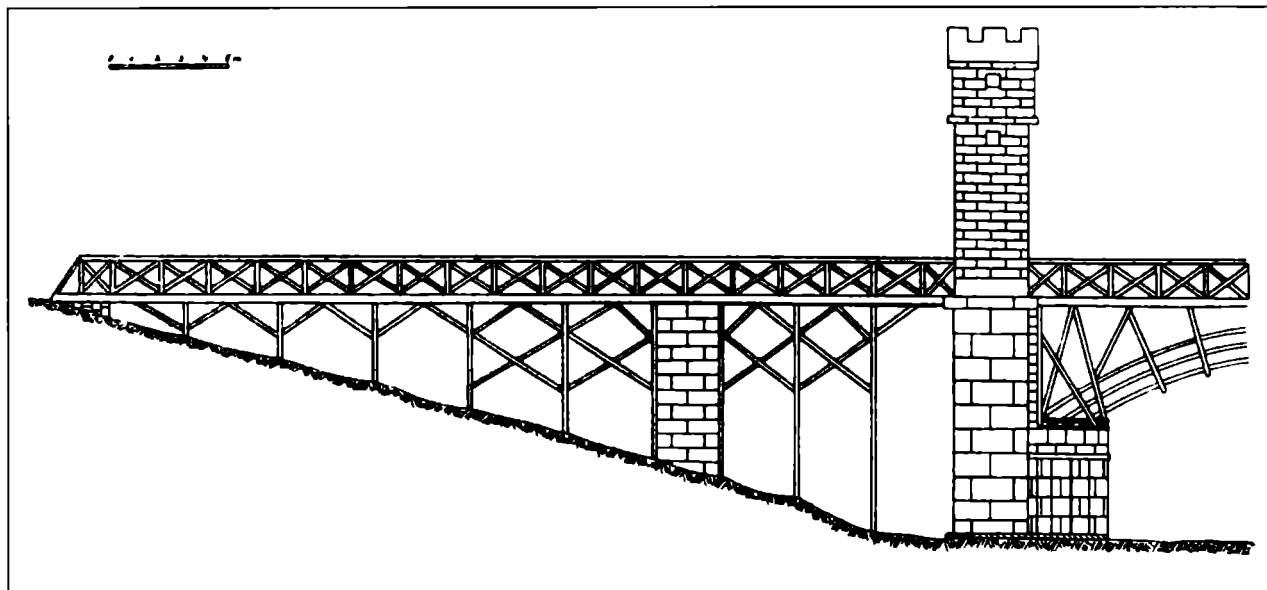


Fig. 4. The bridge of Constantine the Great, acc. to O. Toropu.

Some discoveries and objects are in contrast with those enumerated above, because of their origin and their owners. Given the characteristics of these discoveries and the archaeological context, it is not difficult to appreciate that some of them are of Germanic origin.

Such Germanic artifacts discovered at Sucidava have already been reported in the specialized literature².

In addition to this subject there can be added others, as it follows.

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1. The subject of this article is an inhumation grave (fig. 5), found inside the settlement of the late Roman fortification Sucidava-Celei, during the excavations conducted by Prof. O. Toropu. Here is the context of discovery, as it was surprised by the discoverer:

To the West of the early-Byzantine basilica, there was discovered an isolated inhumation grave. The skeleton, oriented SSE-NNW, belonging to an adult, was buried in a simple pit. The deceased was laid on the back with the legs and arms outstretched. The deceased was buried with a few objects: a shapeless and strongly oxidized piece of iron- at the foot; a bronze coin- near the left palm; an atypical piece of iron, which was "welded" by oxidation, a silver coin-to the eastern side of the skull; a gilded bronze buckle- in the pelvis area; two bronze applied ornaments- on the left side of the pelvis; an iron sword with wooden handle - under the left forearm; a fragmentary dagger (?) of iron - between the backbone and the right forearm. Both coins were passed through fire and cannot be determined³.

² D. Tudor, *Sucidava III. Quatrième (1942), cinquième (1943) et sixième (1945) campagnes de fouilles et recherches archéologiques dans la forteresse de Celei, département de Romanai.* – Dacia. Recherches et découvertes archéologiques en Roumanie, XI-XII (1945-1947), București, 1948, p. 197 and fig. 41/16; O. Toropu, C. Tătulea, *op.cit.*, p. 98-99, fig. 23/1-2.

³ O. Toropu, C. Tătulea, *op.cit.*, p. 94-95.

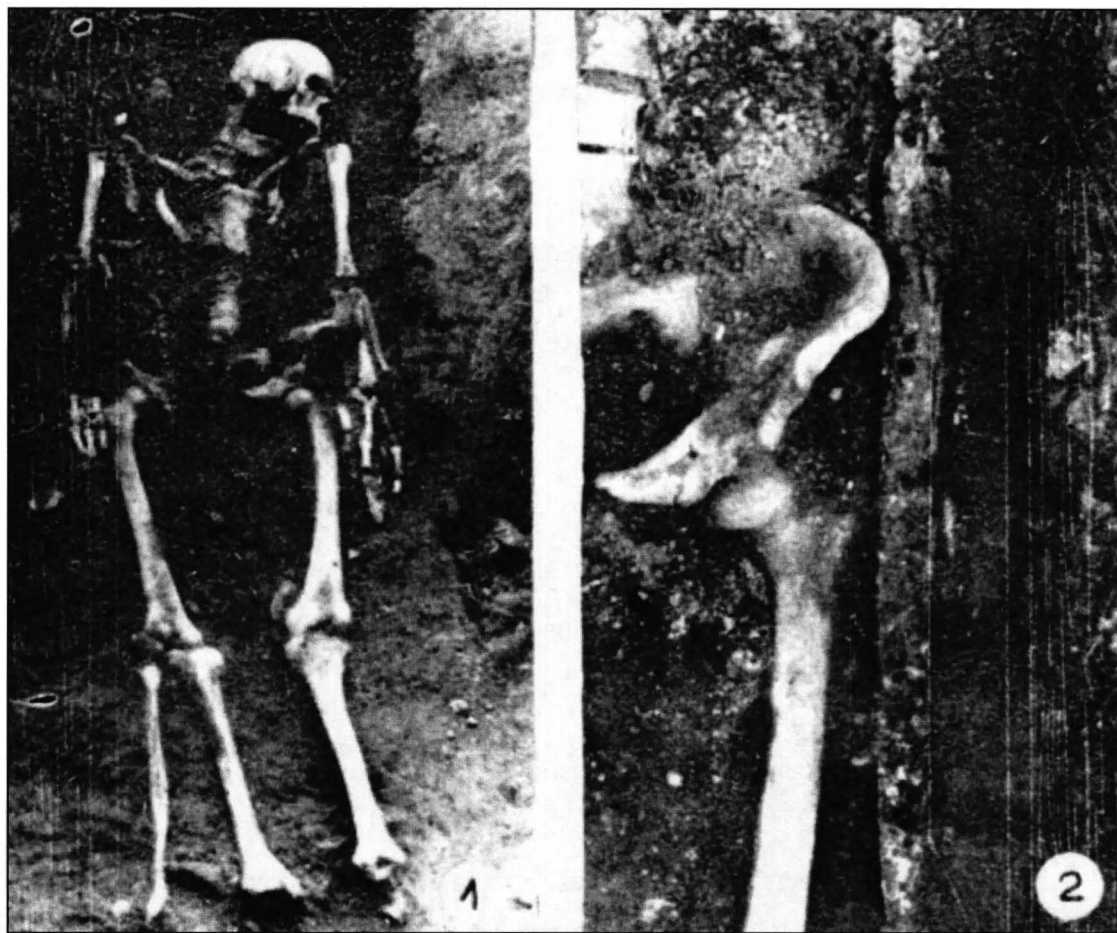


Fig. 5. The Germanic inhumation grave of Sucidava, acc. O. Toropu, C. Tătulea.

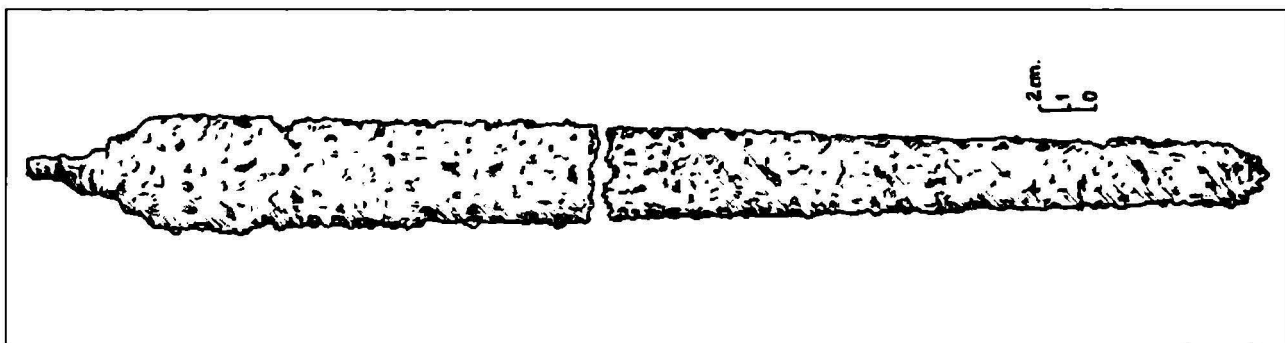


Fig. 6. The iron sword from the Germanic grave of Sucidava, acc. to L. Amon.

Later, the iron sword (fig. 6) was published in a paper dealing with weapons and the military equipment of the Roman period in Oltenia⁴. Despite the poor state of preservation (corroded, damaged, fragmented), it was possible to make a few observations and findings as it follows: the sword had been placed in a wooden sheath covered in metal; the blade is straight, sharpening

⁴ L.D. Amon, *Armamentul și echipamentul armatei romane din dacia sud-carpatică*, Craiova, 2004, p. 179, no. 26 and pl. XVII/2.

gradually to the top; the blade length-44cm, the maximum width- 4cm; the preserved length of the handle- 3cm. The grave was dated in the second half of the fourth century⁵.

From the beginning, the presence of a grave inside a fortification during this period is unusual. Perhaps this would not be a drawback, but rather the laying of weapons in graves was not customary in that period, nor in the Roman graves⁶, and generally⁷, nor in those belonging to Sântana de Mureș-Cerneahov Culture⁸.

Therefore, I will retake here the discussion concerning the ethnic origin and the chronology of this grave.

The skeleton as it was laid and how it was kept does not provide good clues for dating or for determining the ethnic origin. The laying of the dead with outstretched arms and legs, (the head to the left- down in this position !) is common in the Roman and late Roman necropolises.

Only the inventory of the tomb can bring further information. The presence of a sword indicates that it is the grave of a warrior.

The buckle of gilded bronze, the two bronze applied ornaments and the knife have not been published (lost ?), but the atypical piece of iron placed east of the skull could be a flint. In these circumstances, the grave we are presenting here belonged to a Germanic person.

2. The closest and the best analogy for the grave at Sucidava, about which we discussed above, comes also from the line of the Danube, from Bistreț⁹.

It is about an inhumation grave (fig. 7), oriented NNV 6050°/00 – SSE 2850°/00. The preserved inventory (fig. 8) consists of the following items: a sword, a silver buckle, two bronze rivets, an iron knife, a flint and a piece of silex, a fragmentary ring and other iron fragment which cannot be determined.

Unlike the grave at Sucidava, in Bistreț was arranged on the hill *Lazăru*, therefore not within the late Roman fortification here, but a little farther. The inventory of the grave provides a reasonable dating in the second half of the fifth century¹⁰, perhaps by the end of this period¹¹.

⁵ O. Toropu, C. Tătulea, *op.cit.*, p. 95; L. Amon, *op. cit.*, p. 179, no. 26.

⁶ Gh. Popilian, D. Bondoc, *loc. cit.*

⁷ I. Ioniță, *Contribuții cu privire la cultura Sântana de Mureș- Cerneahov pe teritoriul Republicii Socialiste România*, Arheologia Moldovei, IV, 1966, p. 237; O. Toropu, *Romanitatea târzie și străromânii în Dacia traiană sud-carpatică*, Craiova 1976, p. 116; R. Harhoiu, *Tezaurul de la Pietroasa în lumina noilor cercetări*, Alexandru Odobescu. Opere, IV, București 1976 (ed. M. Babeș), p. 1024.

⁸ Exceptions to this rule are two graves in the necropolis of Drăgănești-Olt, according to G. Trohani, G. Zoroliu, *O necropolă din secolul al IV-lea e.n. descoperită la Drăgănești-Olt*, în *Cercetări arheologice*, 6, 1983, p. 210 (grave no. 6) and p. 214 (grave no. 9), if they are not to be susceptible to another dating. Also, some graves of Pietroasa, whose inventory included and swords, according to R. Harhoiu, *op. cit.*, p. 1024, note 164.

⁹ D. Marcu, *Un mormânt de înmormântare descoperit la Bistreț, jud. Dolj*, Studii și cercetări de istorie veche și arheologie, 38, 2, 1987, p. 184-191; R. Harhoiu, *Die frühe Völkerwanderungszeit in Rumänien*, Bukarest 1998, p. 162, no. 9, taf. LXXXIII/A.

¹⁰ R. Harhoiu, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

¹¹ D. Marcu, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

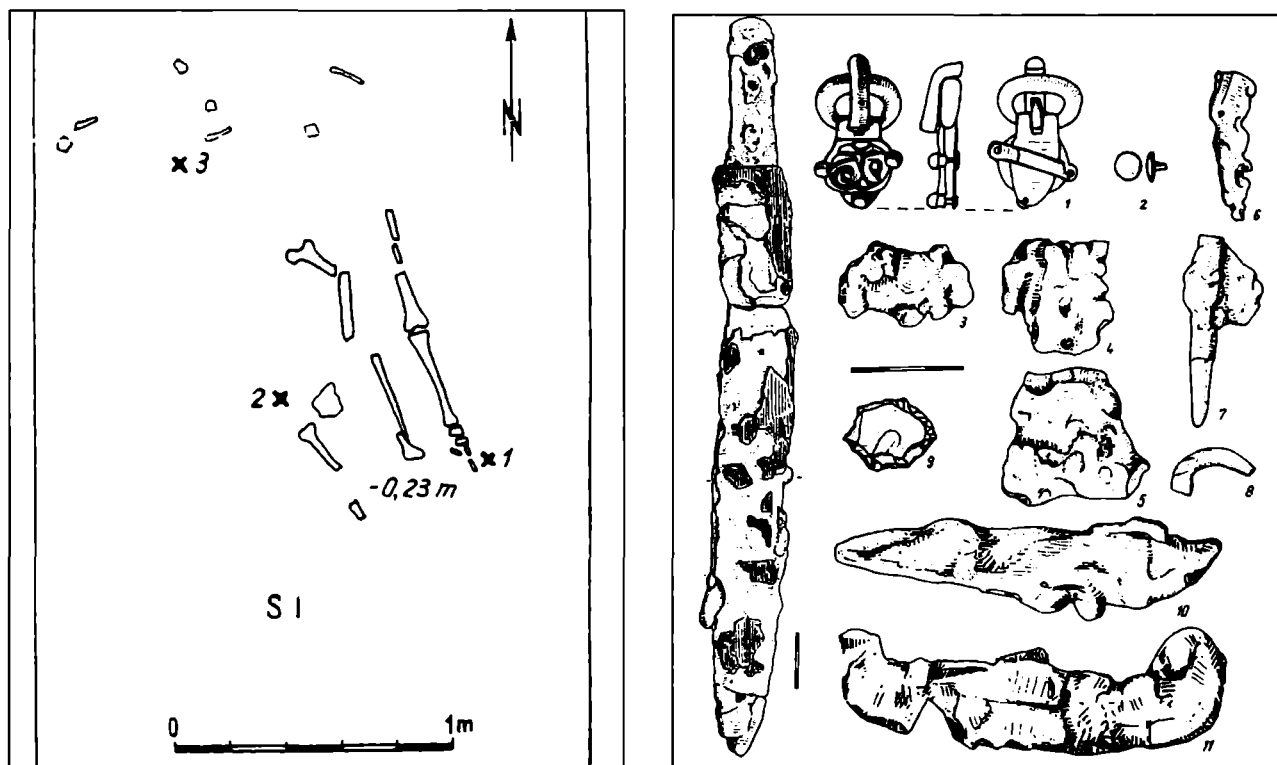


Fig. 7-8. The inhumation grave of Bistreț, acc. to D. Marcu.

3. Another notable analogy in the sense that we are discussing here is the inhumation grave (fig. 9) discovered on the hillock *Cetate* in Vădastra¹², this locality is a little further-approx. 20 km north of the Danube.

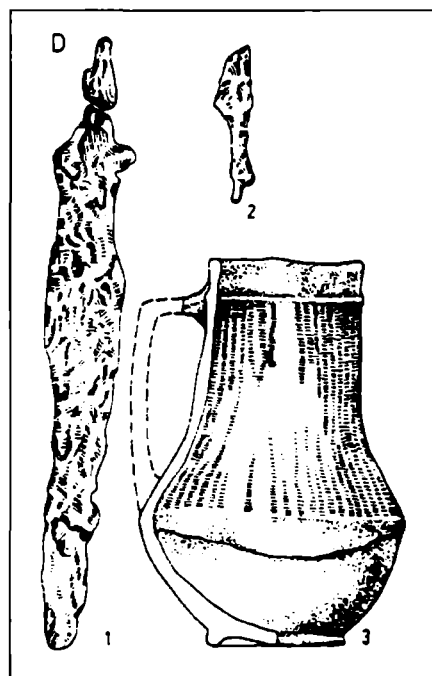
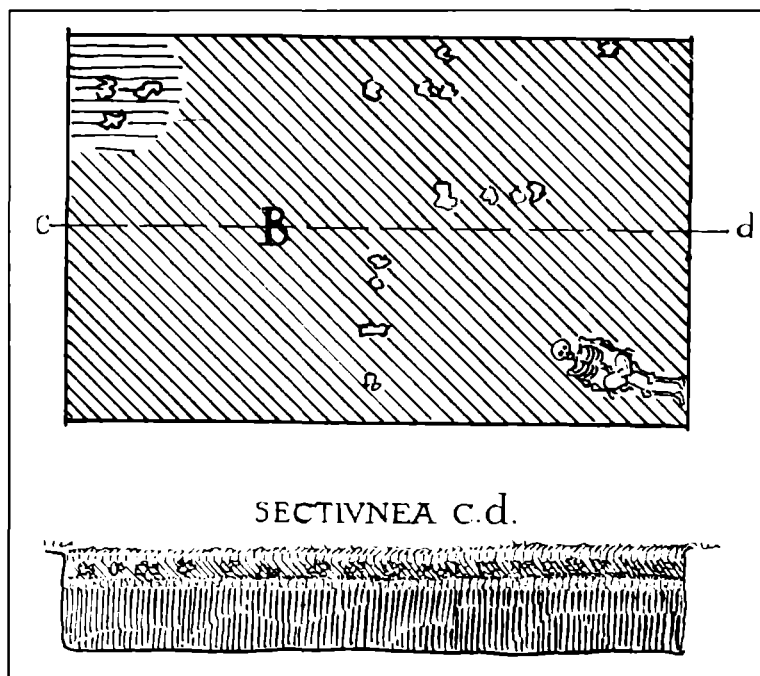


Fig. 9-10. The inhumation grave of Vădastra, acc. to V. Christescu and R. Harhoiu.

¹² V. Christescu, *Les stations préhistoriques de Vădastra, Dacia. Dacia. Recherches et découvertes archéologiques en Roumanie, III-IV* (1927-1932), Bukarest 1933, p. 209; R. Harhoiu, *op. cit.*, p. 193, no. 95.

The grave was oriented W-E and it has an interesting inventory (fig. 10). Besides a sword (similar to those found at Sucidava and Bistreț)¹³, the grave in Vădastra contains a mug¹⁴, a knife¹⁵, a link and a fragment from a bracelet¹⁶, which ensure a reasonable dating in the second half of the 5th century¹⁷.

4. Finally, another contemporary grave with those mentioned here has been discovered at Cioroiu Nou and has been largely dated in the 5th century¹⁸.

It is about a grave of a child, oriented SW-NE. Its dating has been precised after the only inventory item was published- a buckle¹⁹ (fig. 11), from the middle of the 5th century²⁰.

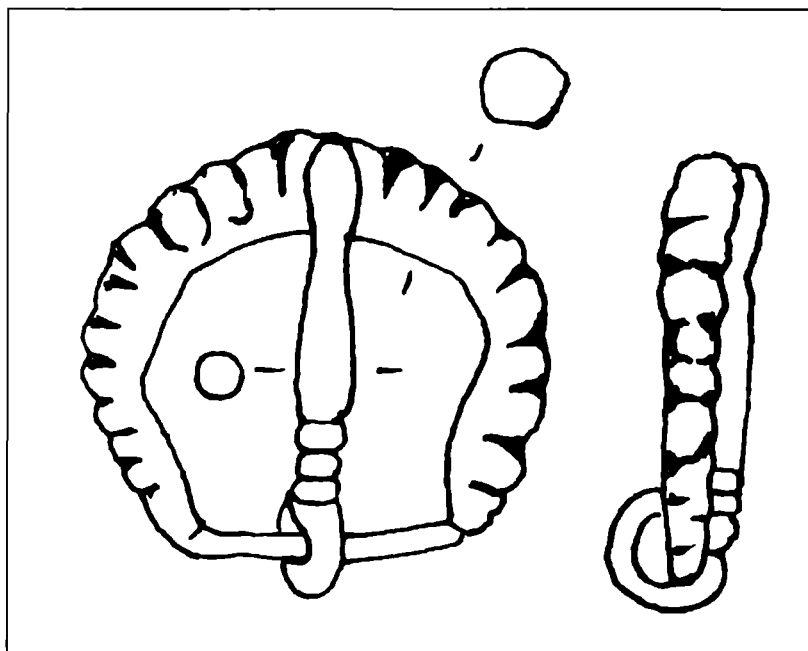


Fig. 11. The buckle from the inhumation grave of Cioroiu Nou, acc. to R. Harhoiu.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL COMMENT

The four graves presented here have a few similar objects in the inventory, as it follows: swords, knives, belt buckles, rings.

The swords were made of iron and they are short-measuring 44cm (Sucidava), 40cm (Bistreț), respectively, 35cm (Vădastra) - therefore they were used for close combat.

All three swords are edged on both sides, so they were weapons designed for stabbing and especially for hitting and cutting.

¹³ V. Christescu, *op. cit.*, p. 224, fig. 65/1; R. Harhoiu, *op. cit.*, taf. LXXXIII/D1.

¹⁴ V. Christescu, *op. cit.*, p. 218, fig. 58/1, p. 220, fig. 60/2; R. Harhoiu, *op. cit.*, taf. LXXXIII/D3.

¹⁵ V. Christescu, *op. cit.*, p. 224, fig. 65/2; R. Harhoiu *op. cit.*, taf. LXXXIII/D2.

¹⁶ V. Christescu *op. cit.*, p. 209.

¹⁷ R. Harhoiu *op. cit.*, p. 85, typ IV.3.1.4.

¹⁸ O. Toropu, *op. cit.*, p. 66, 83, 208.

¹⁹ R. Harhoiu, *op. cit.*, p. 170, no. 27.

²⁰ R. Harhoiu, *op. cit.*, p. 106-107, typ IV.5.2.1.

All of them had wooden handles and sheaths, and were worn on the left hip, suspended from a belt through a ring.

The two bronze rivets tomb at Bistreț seems to have served to fix the diagonal (*balteus*) down on right shoulder²¹. The swords of this type were widely used during the Hunnish period²², and especially in the second half of the fifth century²³. Iron knives were laid in graves at Sucidava, Bistreț and Vădastra. No special features. They probably had wooden handles.

They were worn on the right side, probably suspended from the belt. Buckles (belt or strap or footwear) have been discovered in tombs at Sucidava, Bistreț and Cioroiu Nou.

The graves at Sucidava, Vădastra, Bistreț and Cioroiu Nou and others, represent a separate issue from the late Roman period north of the Danube. The presence of these isolated graves raise the question of the existence of a funerary "horizon"²⁴ characterized by the following traits:

- a. the practice of inhumation in simple pits;
- b. in general, these are graves belonging to warriors (less Cioroiu New, where we are dealing with the grave of a child);
- c. the inventory of the graves contains weapons and military equipment (swords, knives, buckles, rivets).
- d. there is no evidence to suggest that these warriors were horsemen, but rather pedestrians.

This type of graves was found not only near the line of the Danube or in its vicinity. An inhumation grave having as an inventory a sword (L- 38cm) and a glass was discovered at Ghenci, Maramureș County²⁵.

Another similar grave was discovered at Oradea and its inventory consisted only in a sword (L- 34cm)²⁶ and three arrow points.

Most likely, as already stated²⁷, it is about heterogeneous populations that were allied to the Huns, the Ostrogoths and the Alans having a dominant role²⁸.

²¹ For a reconstitution, see J. Oldenstein, *Die spätromische Armee, Attila und die Hunnen*. Herausgegeben vom Historischen Museum der Pfalz Speyer, Stuttgart 2007, p. 198.

²² M. Kazanski, *Archéologie des peuples barbares* (ed. V. Spinei), București-Brăila, 2009, p. 282, fig. 4.

²³ D. Quast, *Auf der Suche nach fremden Männer – Die Herleitung schmalen Langsaxe vor dem Hintergrund der alamannisch- donauländischen Kontakte der zweiten Hälfte des 5. Jahrhunderts*, Germanen Beiderseits des Spätantiken Limes (Herausgeber: T. Fischer, G. Precht, J. Tejral), Köln-Brno, 1999, p. 115-128.

²⁴ D. Marcu, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

²⁵ I. Némethi, *Descoperiri funerare din sec. V e.n. lângă Carei*, SCIV, 2, 1970, p. 505-506.

²⁶ R. Harhoiu, *op. cit.*, p. 183 with the bibliography and taf. XCVI/1-4.

²⁷ O. Toropu, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

²⁸ The presence of the Gepids in Oltenia, could not be documented until now, according to O. Toropu, *op. cit.*, p 118.

The dating in the second half of the fifth century (the middle or the end of this century) is surely a chronological reference point. No doubt, at this time, the Oltenian plain, as well as the entire area north of the Lower Danube, was dominated by these warriors.

Translated by dr. Mihaela Pena

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