

SPOLIA-MADE SARCOPHAGI IN DACIA

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A group of Roman graves was uncovered in 2006 in an area belonging to the South-Eastern cemetery of the ancient town of Potaissa during the archaeological researches for the construction of Transylvania Highway (Pl. I/1). Four of them are brick sarcophagi, while the other four are stone-made; one should also mention the fact that three other graves belonging to the Reihengräber cultural group (horizon) of the Early Migration Age were found in the same area. Despite the fact that the grave-goods were missing, due to the looting of the graves since Antiquity, those inside the brick and stone sarcophagi are dated to the Roman Era.¹ The three graves in rows contained as grave goods two swords (of the Schmalsax type), two silver belt buckles and several arrow heads, which are dated to the second half of the fifth century – first half of the sixth century A.D.²

Graves 2, 7 and 8 were graves in stone sarcophagi with an *arca* and *operculum* with *acroteria*. Grave 4 (Pl. I/2, II/1), built from *spolia*, is an exception. For the construction of the *arca* its builders used one fragment from an older monument (a profiled funerary stela?), with a frame decorated with a vegetal ornament. Instead of an *operculum* with *acroteria*, they used a limestone slab. According with the main trends in the specialized literature of the topic in Romania, this sarcophagus was dated at the end of the third century and during the fourth century A.D., after the Roman withdrawal from Dacia.³

Before tackling the issue of this small group of eleven graves from the South-Eastern cemetery, I have to explain why the sarcophagus of grave no. 4 is dated to the fourth century A.D. and not to the Roman Era, like the other six graves in sarcophagi, or to the fifth-sixth century A.D. like the three graves belonging to the Reihengräberkreis horizon.

A fourth-century funerary horizon in the former province of Dacia?

The dating of the *spolia*-made sarcophagi from Dacia to the Late Roman Age is quite an old idea, shaped by the ideological development of Romanian historiography that is usually called «the theory of the Dacian-Roman continuity».⁴ Investigating the problem of the presence of Christian symbols in Roman Dacia, C. Daicoviciu analyzed a grave in sarcophagus made from *spolia* found in Cluj (ancient Napoca) in 1927, on Petöfi Street (currently Avram Iancu Street, no. 30). The *arca* is sculpted from a funerary altar (a so-called *cippus*) and for assembling the

¹ Pişlaru 2007, p. 339–354.

² Nemeti 2008, p. 333–338.

³ Pişlaru 2007, p. 341–342.

⁴ Protase 2001.

sarcophagus the masters used other three fragments of funerary monuments. Even looted, the graves preserved four hair pins, dated by Daicoviciu to the fourth century⁵ (a dating contested, for example, by A. Alföldi⁶). I. I. Russu provided a different interpretation when publishing a group of graves from the Southern cemetery of Potaissa. The site revealed a group of stone sarcophagi (of the common type, with *arca* and *operculus* with acroteria) and brick sarcophagi. One small sarcophagus (0.91 × 0.42 × 0.25 m) had been sculpted from an old monument having a frame decorated with vegetal motifs (Pl. II/2). Russu stated that the graves' inventory indicated the fact that the inhumations were performed during the last decades of the province's existence and added that sarcophagus no. 4 could indicate a «later period», but no later than the end of the Roman province.⁷

The synthesis study of funerary discoveries from Dacia written by O. Floca before the Second World War follows the same idea of the existence, in the former urban cemeteries, of some late inhumations in sarcophagi made of stone and brick. Proofs for such a phenomenon are the graves uncovered in 1933 on Plugarilor Street in Cluj, where sarcophagi made of stone (including those from assembled stone slabs), bricks, and tiles are found together (Pl. III). O. Floca believed that the sarcophagi belonging to his group A (with a stone slab for *operculus*) and group C (with the *arca* and *operculus* made of stone slabs) are to be dated to the «age after the Roman withdrawal».⁸

Three decades after the publication of the graves from Plugarilor Street, a Polish scholar, Wanda Wolski, took up the task of proving their later dating. She supported with new arguments the ideas previously expressed by C. Daicoviciu and O. Floca. She compared the tile sarcophagus, the trapezium-shaped *arca*, and the sarcophagus assembled from stone slabs with the burials in Late Antique and Merovingian cemeteries (especially the one from Saint-Andéol, in Gaul⁹). Also taking into account the West–East orientation of the graves, their position in rows, and the lack of grave goods, Wanda Wolski compared this small group of graves with Christian cemeteries or with Merovingian cemeteries with the graves placed into rows,¹⁰ but she dated it «very probable at the beginning of the fourth century A.D.».¹¹ Wanda Wolski's contribution defined a new topic, a new field of studies, namely that of Late Roman graves in cemeteries dated after the Roman withdrawal, in the end of the third century and during the fourth century A.D. Several ideas should be stressed: several types of graves are found in such cases mixed together – *spolia*-made sarcophagi, those with a trapezium-shaped *arca*, sarcophagi made of bricks and tiles and some graves dated by Late Roman artifacts.¹² All of the authors dealing with the issue, with no exception, saw this as the late funerary manifestation of

⁵ Daicoviciu 1936, p. 198–200, 204–206; Daicoviciu 1945, p. 234–236.

⁶ Alföldi 1940, p. 62–63: «Osserviamo incidentalmente che le analogie (fig. 6) degli spilli riprodotti dal Daicoviciu sono del periodo 150–250 d. Cr., cfr. I. Sellye, *Les bronzes émaillés de la Pannonie romaine*, Diss. Pann. II. 8, pp. 89 e sgg., dove J. Exner ci dà la datazione degli smalti renani rinvenuti con gli spilli del Daicoviciu.»

⁷ Russu 1941, p. 335–336, fig. 12, p. 340.

⁸ Floca 1941, p. 13–19, 47–48 (graves from Plugarilor Street), 63–63 (typology, groups A–C), 89 (dating).

⁹ Barruol, Barruol 1963, p. 94–108.

¹⁰ Wolski 1971, p. 585–597.

¹¹ Wolski 1971, p. 597: «Tout une série d'arguments d'autre ordre convergent en échange pour les assigner à la période qui a suivi la retraite aurélienne, très probablement au début du IV^e siècle. Les données existantes ne permettent pas de dater ces tombes d'une période antérieure, par exemple des deux premières décennies de la seconde moitié du III^e siècle, car ce serait attribuer à la Dacie, au cours des dernières années de son existence, une évolution qui anticiperait tout ce que l'on relève à la même époque dans d'autres régions de l'empire. Une datation postérieure au IV^e siècle ne peut non plus se soutenir, compte tenu de la disparition de certaines formes et de modifications subies par l'aspect des nécropoles au cours de siècles suivants».

¹² Hica Câmpeanu 1977, p. 221–237; Hica Câmpeanu 1979, p. 159–161; Horedt 1982, p. 89–96.

the former provincials living among the ruins, in the margins of the former towns, and using the cemeteries of their ancestors.¹³

Some of these graves are to be found in the areas of the former urban cemeteries (in Napoca, Potaissa and Apulum) or among the ruins of some Roman buildings (houses or *villae*, in Apulum, Porolissum, Sarmizegetusa). The largest part of the graves in stone or brick sarcophagi uncovered in Transylvania contains no grave goods. This kind of graves has been dated to a late period starting from similar cases in known Late Roman cemeteries from the Roman Empire. The clues for the late dating were the following: the use of *spolia* – i. e. parts of older monuments (Napoca¹⁴ – «Petöfi Street», «Plugarilor Street», Potaissa – the South-Eastern cemetery¹⁵), the layers of lime in the graves (Apulum «Podei»,¹⁶ Napoca «Plugarilor Street»¹⁷), the trapezium-shaped sarcophagi (Napoca «Plugarilor Street»,¹⁸ Potaissa – the South-Eastern cemetery¹⁹), the lack of inventory and the location of graves in parallel rows (Napoca «Plugarilor Street»²⁰), and the presence of such graves in abandoned buildings (Apulum – the *praetorium* baths,²¹ Porolissum,²² Sarmizegetusa – *villa suburbana*²³). Certain Late Roman artifacts were sometimes, in rare cases, found in the graves: gold earrings (Napoca – «Petöfi Street»,²⁴ Potaissa – «via Bardocz»²⁵), hair pins (Napoca – «Petöfi Street»²⁶), brooches with onion-shaped knobs (Apulum – the *praetorium* baths²⁷, Potaissa²⁸), bronze bracelets with snake head endings (Apulum – the *praetorium* baths²⁹), and pendants in the shape of Hercules' club (Potaissa – South-Eastern cemetery³⁰). Coins issued by Constantinus I and Constantius II³¹ were also found in the graves uncovered in Apulum.

Leaving aside the fact that the view of a post-provincial population living among the ruins, in the garbage of a post-collapse world,³² with building houses and graves made from scraps is quite difficult to imagine, I have to observe a methodological error. The authors mentioned above have put together different types of graves in order to define a «funerary phenomenon

¹³ Daicoviciu 1945, p. 234–236; Floca 1941, p. 89–90; Protase 2000, p. 43; Wolski 1971, p. 585–597; Chirilă, Gudea 1982, p. 132, 136; Diaconescu, Opreanu 1988–1989, p. 574; Nemeti 2000, p. 20–22.

¹⁴ Hica 1999, p. 97–104; Benea, Hica 2004, p. 112–141, pl. I–XII; Protase 2000, p. 131–134; Hica 2008, p. 255–272.

¹⁵ Russu 1941, p. 335–336, fig. 12.

¹⁶ Horedt 1982, p. 204 (Apulum Podei, Grab 113–115); a different interpretation – Protase 1974, p. 135–136.

¹⁷ Wolski 1971, p. 594.

¹⁸ Floca 1941, p. 14–15, fig. 7.

¹⁹ Luca, Hopârtean 1980, p. 118 (M. 14), fig. 3/1–2; dating – Bărbulescu 1980, p. 178.

²⁰ Wolski 1971, p. 594–596.

²¹ Horedt 1958, p. 49–68; Protase 1966, p. 104–105.

²² Buday 1915, p. 51–95, fig. 2, 5, 9–12; Floca 1941, p. 51–54, fig. 34; Daicoviciu 1945, p. 234; Protase 1966, p. 119; Protase 2000, p. 159–162; Horedt 1979, p. 214, mentions the existence of ten coins issued during the twelfth–fourteenth centuries A.D. and dates the tile graves to the Early Middle Ages; recent archaeological reserches have led to the discovery of new graves, one dated by a coin issued by the Hungarian king Steven III in the twelfth century A.D. – <http://cronica.cimec.ro/detalii.asp?k=4335&d=Jac-Creaca-Salaj-Dealul-Ursoies-2009>.

²³ Daicoviciu 1924, p. 234–238; Floca 1941, p. 51–52.

²⁴ Covaciu 1929, p. 220, no. 5–6; Floca 1941, p. 17–18, no. 9; Hica Câmpeanu 1977, p. 224–226, fig. 2/1 (the earrings found in the sarcophagus no. IN 215, according to István Kovács' excavation report).

²⁵ Winkler, Hopârtean 1973, p. 46–47, fig. 11; the earrings are asociated with a hair pin and a coind issued by Commodus.

²⁶ Hica Câmpeanu 1977, p. 228.

²⁷ Horedt 1958, p. 49–68.

²⁸ Mitrofan 1969, p. 521.

²⁹ Pop 1998, p. 255–266.

³⁰ Bărbulescu 1980, p. 179–183, fig. 5 (with the bibliography).

³¹ Protase 2000, p. 110–113.

³² The determinant factor for the collapse of the provincial society in Dacia was political: the withdrawal of Roman administration and the Roman army starting with 271 A.D. See the symptoms of a collapsed complex society in Nistor 1996, p. 8–11.

/ horizon» (the existence of which they presumed *a priori* from the general understanding of the historical processes). It seems that the idea was that if no Late Roman cemeteries existed in the former province of Dacia, they should be invented. Disparate pieces of evidence were mixed together. Some of these graves were probably in use during the provincial era, before the withdrawal, some are dated by artifacts to the fourth century (but one cannot exclude their possible dating to the second half of the third century A. D.). Other graves that include repurposed Roman materials (bricks, tiles or parts of stone monuments) could belong to the Merovingian period or even to the Early Middle Ages.

The main analogy for the graves with repurposed Roman monuments from the former province of Dacia is the cemetery from Saint-Andéol. In this case, the excavated part of the cemetery contains 23 graves aligned in two parallel rows. The graves are classified according to four types: 1. with monolithic *arca* and *operculus* (one grave), 2. with sarcophagi made of tiles (three graves), 3. simple grave (without sarcophagus) (one case) and 4. with repurposed Roman materials and monuments (18 graves). Based on the recovered inventory the authors have dated the graves made of tiles in the second half of the third century – the end of the fourth century A.D. and those with repurposed Roman monuments in the second half of the fourth century A.D.³³

In Gaul we can find these types of inhumation graves even later, in the Merovingian Era. For example, in the cemetery from Bulles (Oise) from 832 graves, 39 are with stone sarcophagi. The first type is with sarcophagi built with repurposed Roman monuments (*blocs de récupération*) and the second with a trapezium-shaped monolithic *arca*. The first type is dated from the beginning of the sixth century A.D., while the trapezium-shaped sarcophagi were used and re-used mainly in the seventh century A.D.³⁴

In the South-Eastern cemetery from Intercisa one can find many stone sarcophagi with re-used Roman monuments and the suggested dating is during the fourth century. The graves' inventory indicates the use of the cemetery from the end of the third century until the beginning of the fifth century A. D.³⁵ But, in the fourth century Intercisa belonged to the province of Valeria, part of the Roman Empire, where the stone sarcophagi were built by recycled old funerary monuments, in use several decades earlier.

Therefore, in our opinion, there are several arguments against the dating of grave no. 4 from Turda – Transylvania Highway during the fourth century A.D. It most probably belongs to the group of stone sarcophagi dated during the Roman Era (having the same alignment and orientation). In the grave group excavated in 2006 one finds pottery and artifacts belonging to just two chronological horizons: 1) second-third centuries A.D. (i. e. the era of the Roman province) and 2) second half of the fifth century and the sixth century A.D. (the time of the so-called Kingdom of the Gepids). The superposition of the complexes from these two chronological horizons in the same spot is due to hazard or could have other explanations that are beyond the reach of archaeological analysis.

Repertory of *spolia*-made sarcophagi

Cluj-Napoca (Napoca), Cluj County.

1. Ștefan cel Mare Square (Trencin). Three graves with sarcophagi made of reused funerary monuments, discovered in the end of the nineteenth century. No inventory. CIL III 7667; Crișan et al., p. 136, no. 49; Benea, Hica 2004, p. 129, no. 1.

³³ Barruol, Barruol 1963, p. 104–105.

³⁴ Legoux 2011, p. 30–31, fig. 29, 30, 32–34, 36–37.

³⁵ Vágó, Bóna 1976, p. 134, 140, 207–209.

2. Petöfi (Avram Iancu) Street, no. 30. Sarcophagus made of repurposed funerary monuments (one with a Christian symbols added), discovered in 1927. Inventory: four hair pins. Daicoviciu 1930, p. 311; Daicoviciu 1936, p. 198–200, 204–206; Daicoviciu 1945, p. 234–236; Floca 1941, 11–12; Hica Câmpeanu 1977, p. 226–228; Daicoviciu 1977, p. 947, pl. V; Benea, Hica 2004, p. 129–130, no. 2, pl. VI/1–2, I/4.
3. Petöfi (Avram Iancu) Street, no. 42. Sarcophagus made of reused funerary monuments, discovered in 1927. No inventory. Covaciu 1929, p. 220, no. 6, fig. 3; Floca 1941, p. 68–69; Hica Câmpeanu 1977, p. 221–226, fig. 2/1, 5/1–1a; Benea, Hica 2004, p. 130, no. 3, pl. V/1–3.
4. Kogălniceanu Street, no. 12. One sarcophagus made of reused funerary monuments, discovered in 1974, together with other Roman graves. Inventory: several small iron nails. Hica Câmpeanu 1977, 230–231, fig. 6/3, 3a; Benea, Hica 2004, p. 129–130, no. 2, pl. VI/1–2, I/4.
5. C. Brâncuși Boulevard (Oășanu – Casianu streets). Fifteen Roman graves discovered in the end of the nineteenth century. One sarcophagus has a fragment of funerary stela as *operculus*. No inventory. Torma 1879, p. 97–98. No. 25; CIL III 7669; Ardevan, Hica Câmpeanu 1985–1986, p. 550; Benea, Hica 2004, p. 130, no. 5.
6. Plugarilor Street (the area of C. Brâncuși Boulevard, N. Titulescu / Pata – Plugarilor and Muncitorilor streets). The whole excavated part of the cemetery was uncovered during the rescue excavations from 1974–1975, 1985–1990 and contains 135 graves (134 inhumation graves, one incineration grave). Out of these 135 tombs, 17 graves (nos. 7, 22, 23, 28, 34, 38, 42, 59, 66, X, V R, 77, 80, 93, XVII, 99, 100) were made of repurposed funerary monuments. Inventory: two wheel-made pottery fragments (grave 7), a wheel-made red bowl (grave 22), two wheel-made pottery items (grave 34), red wheel-made pottery fragments (grave 38), a bronze coin and a fragmentary lead mirror frame (grave 66), red and grey wheel-made pottery fragments (grave 80), and pottery fragments (graves 99, 100). Floca 1941, p. 13–19, 47–48; Wolski 197, p. 583–597; Daicoviciu 1977, p. 948; Ardevan, Hica Câmpeanu 1985–1986, p. 544, 546, fig. 3, p. 548–549, fig. 5; Ardevan, Hica 2000, p. 243–245, fig. 1 a-b, 245–246, fig. 2 a-b, 247–248, fig. 4 a-b, 246–247, fig. 3 a-b; Hica 1999, p. 97–104; Benea, Hica 2004, p. 131–139, no. 11–22, pl. VI/3–4, I/2–3, VII/1–4, I/5–6, VII/5–7, IX/1–2, XI/3–4, IV/1, X/1, II/8–9, III/2–3, X/4, X/2, VIII/1–4, XII/3, XII/4, XI/1–2, IV/3, X/3, XI/3–4, XII/1–2; Hica 2008, p. 255–272.

Turda (Potaissa), Cluj County

1. South-Eastern cemetery (Mihai Viteazu caserne). In 1936–1937 archaeologists discovered 19 graves in sarcophagi (11 made of limestone, eight made of bricks). A small child sarcophagus was sculpted from reused monuments with vegetal ornaments. Russu 1941, p. 335–336, fig. 12; Floca 1941, 27–28, fig. 14; Hica Câmpeanu 1977, p. 236; Benea, Hica 2004, p. 140, no. 25, pl. II/1.
2. South-Eastern cemetery (Transylvania Highway). Eleven graves found in 2006 (four in stone sarcophagi, four in brick sarcophagi, three Merovingian graves). One of the graves in stone sarcophagi has an *arca* built from a reused monument with vegetal ornaments. Pislaru 2007, p. 341–342.

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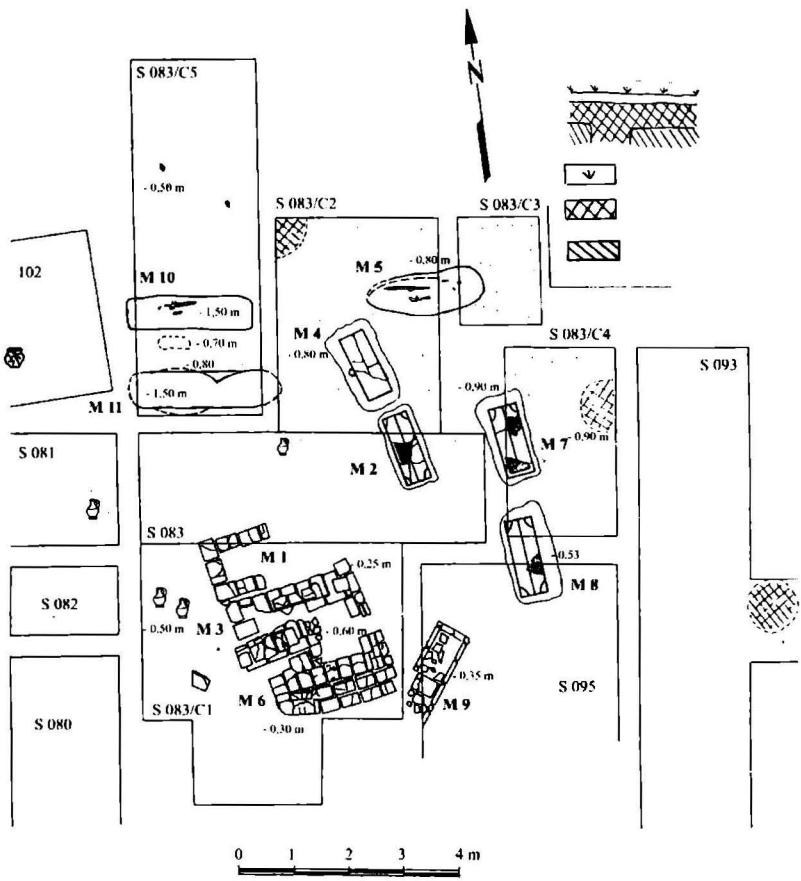
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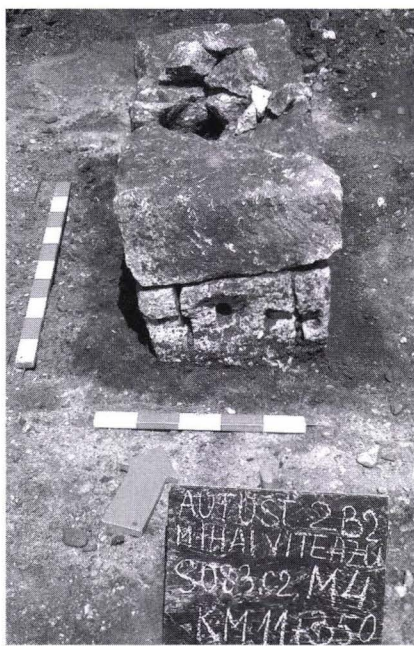
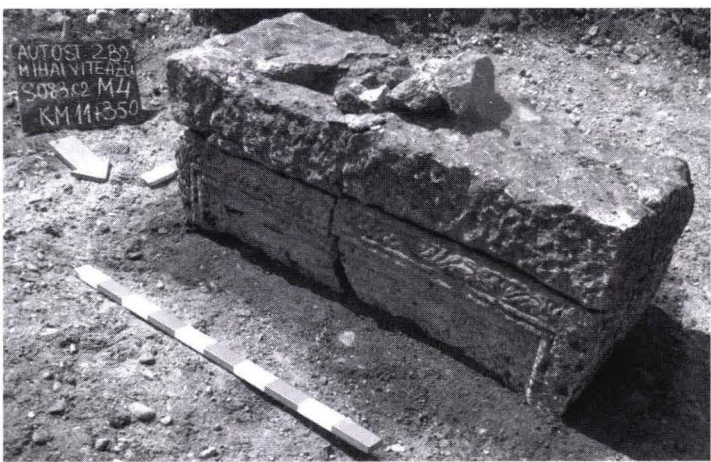
SARCOFAGE DIN SPOLIA ÎN DACIA

Rezumat

Un sarcofag confecționat din plăci de calcar, folosind și un monument funerar reutilizat, a fost descoperit în necropola de sud-est a orașului Potaissa, cu ocazia săpăturilor de salvare pentru construirea autostrăzii Transilvania în anul 2006. În acord cu opiniile exprimate în literatura de specialitate privind cronologia și încadrarea culturală a acestui tip de descoperiri, sarcofagul a fost datat în secolul al IV-lea p. Chr. Se rediscută situațiile din cimitirele orașelor Napoca și Potaissa unde apar astfel de înmormântări și se pune sub semnul întrebării existența unui orizont funerar databil în secolul IV p. Chr. din fosta provincie Dacia atribuit populației post-provinciale. Analiza în context a sarcofagelor din *spolia* indică, mai degrabă, o datare în timpul existenței provinciei, în ultimele decenii de stăpânire romană în Dacia.

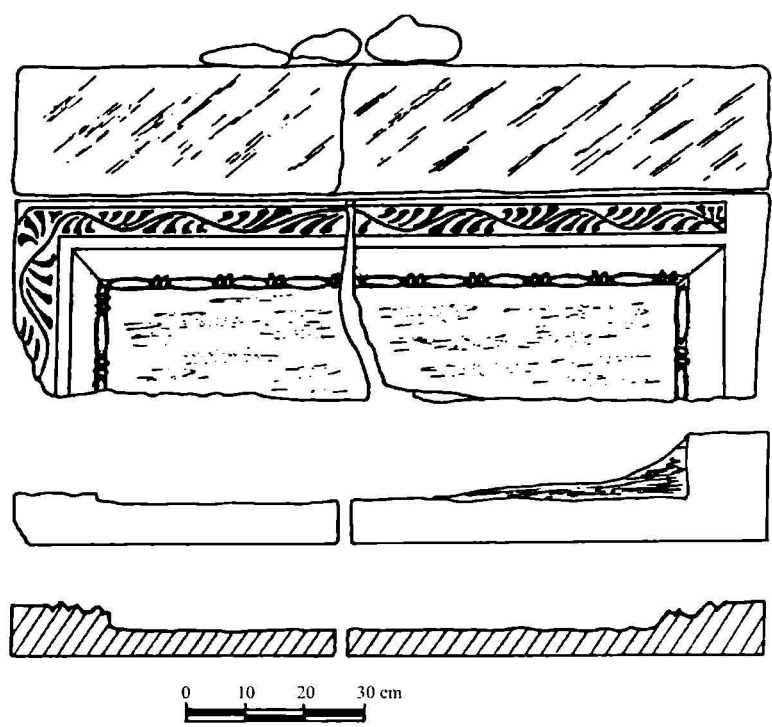


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Pl. I. Potaissa. 1. Graves from 2006 (Transylvania Highway). 2. Grave 4 (photo).

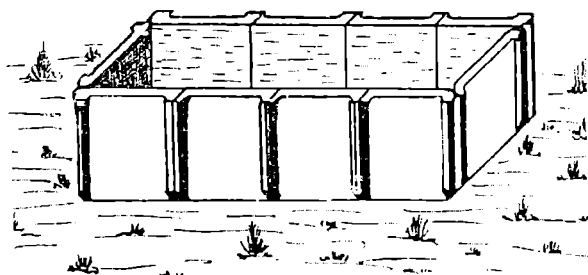
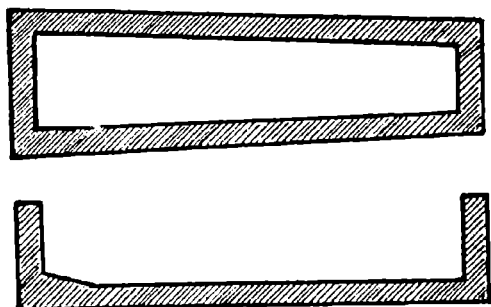
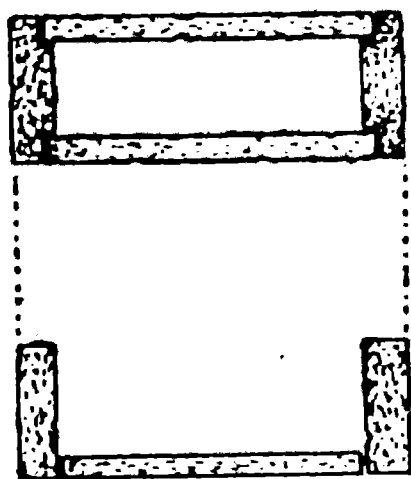
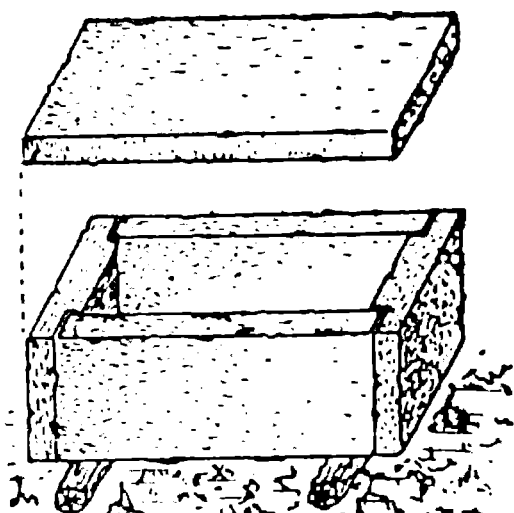
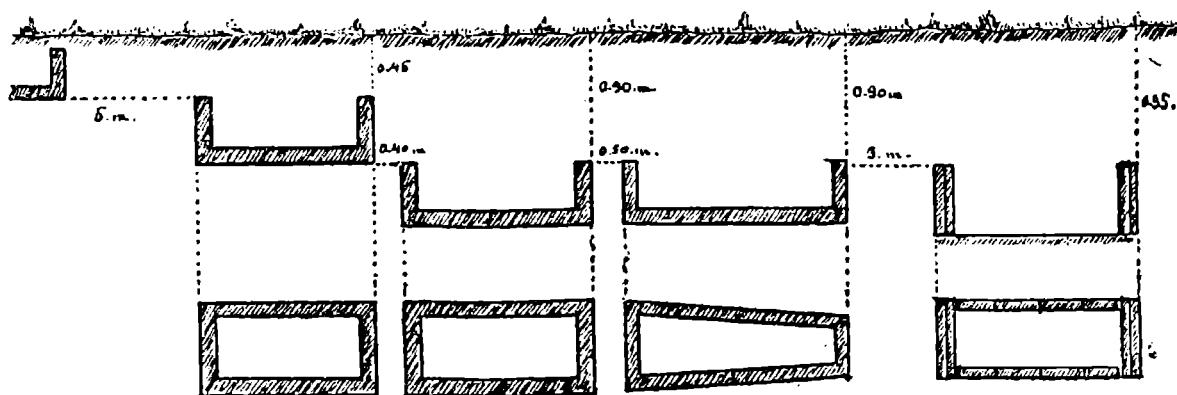


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Pl. II. Potaissa. 1. Grave 4 (drawing). 2. Sarcophagus found by I. I. Russu.



Pl. III. Plugarilor street. Graves from 1933.