

## SOME CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING ROCK-CUT MONASTERIES AND SPREADING OF THE CHRISTIANITY IN EASTERN MOLDOVA DURING THE LATE ROMAN PERIOD AND EARLY MIDDLE AGE

One of less researched aspects of the history of the Carpathian-Dniestr area is that connected with spreading the early Christianity. The absence of written source and poor results of archaeological investigations impede to understand the process of appearance and spreading of Christianity. One special issue linked with early Christianity is rock cut architecture. The investigations made in the grottos and caves in the along the Dniestr rocks and Pruth and its tributaries allow us to ascertain that some of them have been used as shelters since the pre-Christian period. We find out about this not only from archaeological material (Кетрапу 1966, 120-127; Кетрап 1973; Борзияк, Рябой 1985, 180-188; Высоцкий 1988), but also from inscriptions on the walls of some rooms (Гросу, Василяки 1984, 61-69; Grosu, Vasilachi 1997, 76-81). Thus, the cave cultic accommodations from Brânzeni I and Brânzeni V, Buzdujeni, Trinca I and Trinca II (Edineț), Butești (Glodeni), Duruitoarea (Râșcani), Ofatinți (Râbnița), and Rogojeni (Șoldănești), were inhabited in the Paleolithic and Mesolithic epoch; those from Brânzeni I and Duruitoarea were inhabited in the Eneolithic epoch. The materials from Hallstatt period and Getic epoch (4-3 BC) were found at Țâpova (Rezina) and Duruitoarea. There have been also collected materials concerning the Sântana de Mureș-Černjahov culture at Duruitoarea and some Middle Age period materials from Brânzeni I, Duruitoarea, Trinca and Țâpova (5-11, 12-14, 15 and 16-17 centuries) (Кетрапу 1966, 120-127; Борзияк, Рябой 1985, 180-188).

In accordance with some specialists' opinion, a great part of cavernous cultural accommodation from the Black Sea and Mediterranean regions has been used by first Christians since the beginning of Christianity (Zeiller 1918; Lozovan 1962, 146-165; Dagron 1970, 229-276; Năsturel 1984, 234-240; Teodor 1991, 55-56; Popescu 1994; Brown 2002, 112-129; Tenace 2005, 155-170). They were especially used in the period of persecution of Christian communities in 4<sup>th</sup> c. Then many followers of Christian proselytism from different regions of Roman Empire had to flee into Pontic and Mediterranean regions in order to manifest their protest against imperial persecutions.

Accepting the idea of the cave cultic accommodations usage by early Christians, we should analyze the phenomenon which had led to the appearance of some Christian communities in the East-Carpathian space, especially in that between the Pruth and the Dniestr. To this aid it is necessary to reconstruct the ethno-demographic frame in the region under investigation. The archaeological materials and written sources allow us to ascertain at the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> century the Germanic population penetrated in the Eastern-Carpathian space, where Sântana de Mureș-Černjachov culture appears at the beginning of 4<sup>th</sup> century (Ioniță 1982, 89-98). There were identified about a thousand of settlements dated by 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> c. in the space between the Prut and Dniestr rivers (Рикман 1975). In few of them have been conducted archaeological investigations, where some elements of funeral ritual, certain components of the inventory from the settlements and cemeteries indicate that the practices connected with early Christianity were not alien for some individuals and communities (Рикман 1975, 278-281; Сымонович 1978, 116; Ioniță 1982, 106).

An imperative problem for historians is the reconstruction of the stages and the way the Christianization took place. Christianity appeared in the Northern of Danube regions together with the colonists and Roman soldiers and was preached by apostle Andrew, who probably reached the region of Scythia Mayor (the North of the Black Sea) or (Minor Dobrogea) in the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. The recent searches put in doubt the credibility of such a missionary activity (Zugravu 1994, 215-238). The supporters of the view-point about the appearance of some Christian communities in the North of Danube in the apostolic period (Norocel 1986, 19-46; Păcurariu 1993, 19-22) bring as an argument the information from some literary sources, which seem to have an apologetic and uncertain character (Zugravu 1992, 25).

The study of the appearance of the first cave cultic accommodations in the East-Carpathian space, their dating can't be done without making records of the early Christian traces in the area. From an archaeological point of view the earliest Christian traces in the North of the Lower Danube are represented rather scarcely; for the first centuries of our era it is some exact requirements concerning the shape of buildings, accessories and Christian symbols.

The historic context of the first centuries in the Carpathian-Dniestr space and the information from some sources of that time makes credible the supposition that besides Christianity existing in Arian forms and some sects of Audias, there were also present adherents of "true" faith-the orthodox. Generally speaking, first Christian manifestations in the East-Carpathian space seem to have the limits between the middle and the second part of 3<sup>rd</sup> c. (Sanie, Dragomir 1978, 117-122; Zugravu 1992, 27-28, 31-32; Zugravu 1994, 215-238).

There is no doubt the Goths inhabited this area. They had accepted Christianity separately or together with the natives in the 4<sup>th</sup> c. (Рикман 1975; Ioniță 1982: 112). It seems probable that the bishop of the Goths, Theophilus who took part in

the ecumenical Synod at Niceea in 325, was from the region we investigate (Pârvan 1992, 161; Popescu 1987, 73-81).

The earliest information, concerning the existence of cultic accommodations for monks in the Northern Danube region, comes to us with the history of the activity of Audias from Edessa. He was exiled to Scythia Minor for his schismatic conceptions on the order of Constantius II (337-361) (Epiphanius 14, 5; 15.2). The corroboration of the written passage with archaeological data from Northern of Danube regions and an attempt to localize the zones where Audias sect probably activated, have been made by E. Popescu. In accordance with his assumption "the place where with the greatest probability Audias had founded monasteries, is located near Buzau" (Popescu 1994, 223). Bringing a range of very valuable evidence in order to support the proposed hypothesis – the existence of a net of cultic cave accommodations with the Christian symbols on the walls; many settlements related to that epoch, etc.), the Romanian researcher set out from the premise of Goths country (Gothia) situated in Audias time, on the territory of Southern of Moldova and Bessarabia and also in the North-East of Muntenia regions. The fact that leaves some reservations concerning E. Popescu's hypothesis is Epiphanius mention which states that Audias "had penetrated deeply in the interior of Goths country...". We do not know in what measure the term "deeply" can reflect a distance over 100 km, probably, the course of the Buzău river is the way which Audias and his followers had taken from Scythia to Goth's country.

The archaeological researches also detect in 4<sup>th</sup> c. an intense inhabitation of other regions of the Northern of the Lower Danube; as an example we can take the Middle course of the Dniestr River. A dense network of settlements was discovered there in the time under study, but the archaeological investigations have been made just in some of them. Moreover, the recent investigations made in the settlement of Sobari (Soroca district, R. Moldova) allow us to attribute the discovered stone building to the so-called "churches without apse", and also to put forward a hypothesis concerning the existence of some Christian communities there. There was also discovered a lamp, which had a carved cross sign (Рикман 1975, 205-213, рис. 29/19).

Comparing this unique phenomenon from the European Barbaricum (much as we appreciate the complex from Sobari) with a great number of settlements of the Sântana de Mureș-Cerneachov Culture of the region, we can admit that the researched area belonging to the so-called "Goths country". In this case it seems to be logical to assume that Audias area of activity, "deeply" penetrated in the Goths country was the Middle course of Dniestr, where we have already detected a range of cave cultic accommodations. Many of them have been used since earlier periods of Christianity consolidation. The way of access it was the road along the river mentioned by Ammianus Marcellinus (Ammianus Marcellinus XXI, 3,5).

Taking into consideration the above mentioned, we can admit as a working hypothesis, which reflects our vision at the present stage of investigation, that

one of the possible areas, where Audias supporters have penetrated “deeply” in the Goths country can be the Middle course of the Dniestr. The area is included in the territories possessed by the Goths; we also have here identifications of many cultic accommodations that can be classified as small secluded monasteries, or paleo-Christian monasteries. In the same region we also admit in the second half of 4<sup>th</sup> c. the presence of some Christian communities.

Ulfila, as Philostorgios wrote, “has been appointed as the bishop for all Christians from the Getic country” (Philostorgios II, 5). Auxentius communicates that Ulfila had preached in Gothic, Greek and Latin (Auxeni Durostorensis, *Epistula de fide, vita et obitu Ulfilae*). After the Constantinopol Synod of 369 he became an Arian. Philostorgios wrote further, that “when Vallerianus and Gallienus were ruling, one part of Scythians (Goths) from the other side of the Istros have penetrated into the Roman territory and devastated... a considerable part of the European territories. Then while passing to Asia they had rushed in Galatia and Cappadocia, where they have taken a great number of prisoners, there were also clerics among them. These prisoners and peevish men living together with the barbarians had converted many of them to the true faith and convinced them to join religion instead of the heathen faith” (Philostorgios II, 5). Taking into consideration the fact that in this period in Galatia and Cappadocia Christian and monks communities were rather strong (Kostof 1989), we can think that some of those clerics who were made prisoners and were taken to the lands to the Northern of Lower Danube settled there, cutting and adapting some of the natural cave, not only in the Carpathian regions, but in some regions between the Dniestr and the Răut rivers too.

With a lack of certain datable materials, it is difficult at the actual stage of investigation, to determine exactly the early phase of establishing these cultic accommodations, the stages of intensification or restraining the monk life or missionary activity in the region. There have been made endeavors to date the cave cultic accommodations in the Pruth-Dniestr space and to distinguish some stages in the evolution of these cave cultic accommodations (Bâzgu 1996, 99). Still we have to state that all the efforts of chronological framing will give minim results until the exhaustive drawing and publication of all architectural and constructive plans of the rock cut chambers. These will allow emphasizing the evolution phases of construction shape.

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The ground researches made it possible to classify the rock cut caves into three categories. **The first category** includes grottos and natural caves in the rocks of the Dniestr, the Prut and their tributaries, which have not suffered any change and have not been modified by man, which would lead to essential changes of the cultic accommodations shape. Some grottos and caves in Brănești, Duruitoarea, Fetești (Hrițcu cave), etc. could be included in this category. **The second category** embraces natural grottos and caves, which were “adapted” to the needs of the hu-

man communities, the entry being changed radically. We have to mention here the cultic accommodations in Saharna-Schit, Molovata-Roghi, some cells in Țâpova, Socola, etc. The cave cultic accommodations cut particularly in the Dniestr and the Răut rocks belong to the **third category** as well. An example can serve those from Butuceni, Țâpova, Saharna and Socola.

The mapping of the majority of natural grottos and rock cut caves distinguish **five conventional areas** with a certain concentration, some of which were utilized by the early Christians (See fig. 1).

Starting from North to South they form the following groups:

**The first**, is situated in the area of the left tributaries of the Pruth-Lopatna, Draghiște, Camencuța, Racovăț and Ciuhur, including the grottos and the natural caverns from Brânzeni, Butești, Buzdujeni, Corjeuți, Duruitoarea, Proscureni, and Trinca. **The second** includes those on the Dniester in Bichir-Soroca, Cosăuți, Holoșnița, Verejeni-Curătura and Naslavcea. **The third** group is also situated on the Dniestr and includes the cultic accommodations of Japca, Bursuc, Socola, Stroiești, Holercani-Mateuți, Saharna-Schit and Ofatinți. **The fourth** is located on the Dniestr banks and those of its tributary Răut and it is formed of the complexes in Butuceni, Bulăiești, Cruglic, Jeloboc, Molovata-Roghi, Pohrebni and Țâpova. The last, **fifth** group includes caves of Delacău and Roșcani. The cave in Cetatea Albă (Belgorod Dnestrovskij, Ukraine) occupies an entirely separate place.

**The first group** of cultic accommodations was best archaeologically researched by virtue of discovering here of the traces of inhabiting from Paleolithic. The materials of this period were discovered at Brânzeni I and Brânzeni V, Buzdujeni, Duruitoarea, Trinca I and Trinca II (Керпач 1973, 16, 49-53, 69-74). There were not discovered certain materials in these rooms till the present day that would be able to confirm their utilization by paleo-Christian communities. Besides all these at Mălăiești (Râșcani) in the neighborhood of the mentioned group there has been investigated a cemetery of 4<sup>th</sup> c., which contained some material elements of funeral ritual determined as Christian (Федоров 1960; СЫМОНОВИЧ 1961, 49-60; СЫМОНОВИЧ 1978, 105-115; Рикман 1975, 280-281). Different artifacts have been discovered in the grottos Trinca I, Brânzeni and Duruitoarea from the Early Middle Ages (Керпач 1973, 51-53; Борзняк, Рябой 1985, 180-188).

**The second group** has been exposed to only a surface investigation. They have studied a settlement of Sântana de Mureș-Černjahov culture and "a church without apse" from Sobari (Popa 1997, 119-131) where a lamp was discovered with a cross sign on it (Рикман 1975, рис. 29/19; Popa 1997, 126, fig. 2/1), in the neighborhood of this group of cave cultic accommodations (Naslavcea, Verejeni-Curătura (Lencăuți), Holoșnița, Cosăuți and Bichir-Soroca).

Some sites referring to **the third group** of cave remains (Burcuc, Japca, Holercani-Mateuți, Ofatinți, Saharna-Schit, Socola, Stroiești and Rogojeni) had a benefit of some archaeological investigations (Керпач 1973, 21-22, 60). The rudimentary shapes of the cultic accommodations from Saharna-Schit and Socola seem

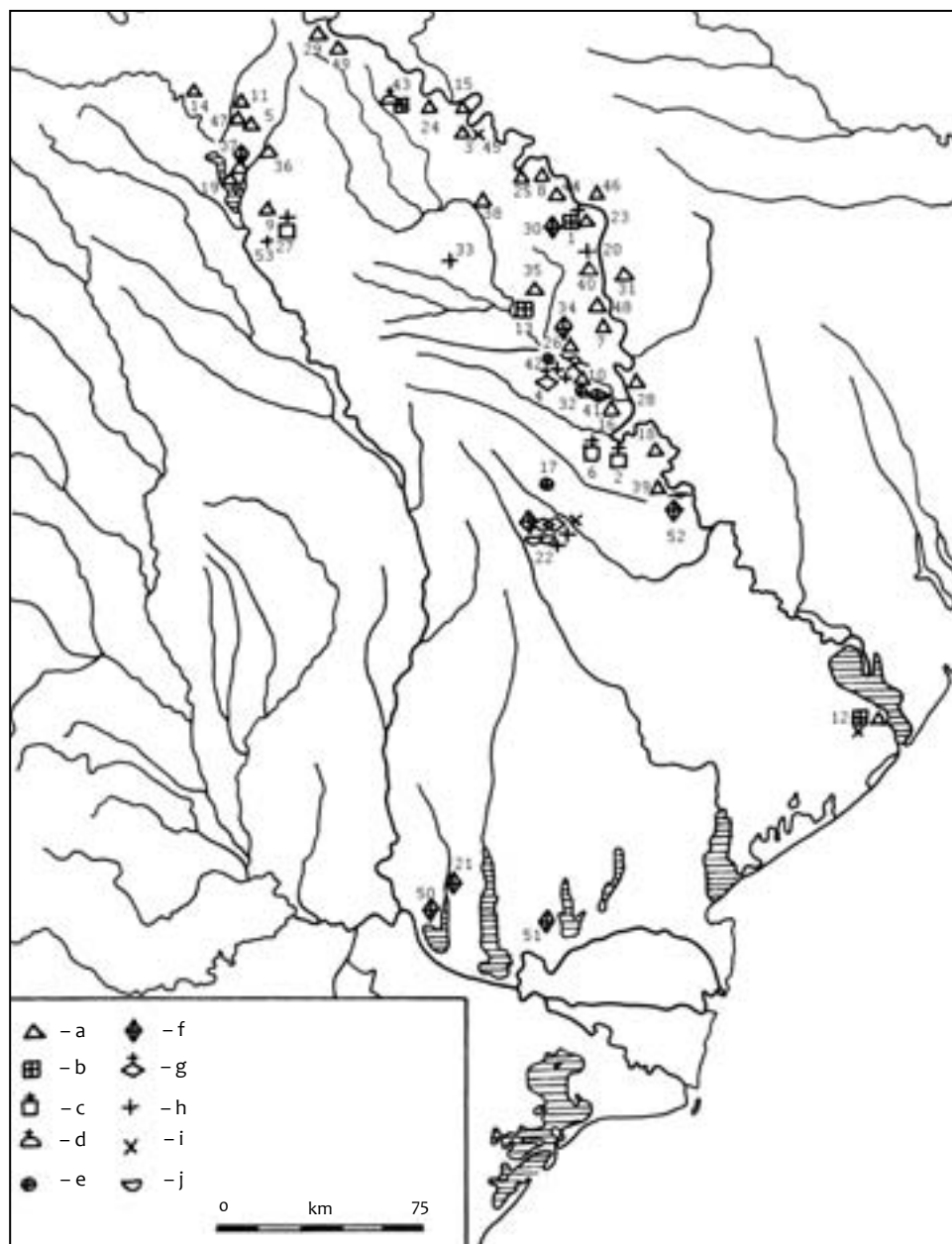


Fig. 1. Map of carved-stone remains and main paleo-Christian and Christian discoveries from the 4th-13th centuries from Prut-Dniester space: a - grottoes, caves and carved stone complexes; b - cruciform signs on vessels (4th-5th centuries); c - necropolises with Christian elements of funerary rite and ritual (4th-5th centuries); d - structure from Sobari from the 4th century; e - cruciform signs from the 6th-8th centuries; f - cruciform signs from the 9th-13th centuries; g - Christian necropolises from the 10th-11th and 11th-13th centuries; h - simple pectoral crosses;

i - reliquary double crosses; j - simple crosses founding form: 1 - Alcedar III (com. Alcedar, r-nul Soldanești); 2 - Balțata (Criuleni); 3 - Bichir-Soroca; 4 - Brănești (Orhei); 5 - Brânzeni (Edineț); 6 - Budești (Criuleni); 7 - Bulăești (Orhei); 8 - Bursuc (com. Japca, Camenca); 9 - Butești (com. Camenca, Glodeni); 10 - Butuceni (Orhei); 11 - Buzdujeni (Edineț); 12 - Cetatea Albă (= Belgorod Dnestrovskij, reg. Odesa); 13 - Ciocâlteni (Orhei); 14 - Corjeuți (com. Caracușenii Vechi (Edineț); 15 - Cosăuți (Soroca); 16 - Cruglic (Nisporeni); 17 - Dănceni (Ialoveni); 18 - Delacău (Anenii Noi); 19 - Duruitoarea Veche (com. Duruitoarea, Râșcani); 20 - Echimăuți (Rezina); 21 - Etulia (Vulcănești); 22 - Hansca (Ialoveni); 23 - Holercani (com. Mateuți, Rezina); 24 - Holoșnița (Soroca); 25 - Japca (Camenca); 26 - Jeloboc (com. Piatra, Orhei); 27 - Mălăești (Galașeni, Râșcani); 28 - Molovata - Roghi (com. Molovata, Dubăsari); 29 - Naslavcea (Ocnița); 30 - Odaia (com. Alcedar, Șoldanești); 31 - Ofatiști (Râbnîța); 32 - Orheiul Vechi (= Butuceni, com. Trebujeni, Orhei); 33 - Pepeni (Sângerei); 34 - Pohorniceni-Petruha (com. Pohorniceni, Orhei); 35 - Pohrebni (Orhei); 36 - Proscureni (com. Duruitoarea, Râșcani); 37 - Proscureni-Troșcea (com. Duruitoarea, Râșcani); 38 - Rogojeni (Șoldănești); 39 - Roșcani (Anenii Noi); 40 - Saharna-Schit (com. Saharna Nouă, Rezina); 41 - Scoc (com. Trebujeni, Orhei); 42 - Seliște (Orhei); 43 - Sobari (com. Cremen-ciug, Soroca); 44 - Socola (com. Vadul-Rașcov, Șoldănești); 45 - Soroca; 46 - Stroești (Râbnîța); 47 - Trinca (Edineț); 48 - Țâpova (com. Lalova, Rezina); 49 - Verejeni-Curătura (com. Lencăuți, Ocnița); 50 - Krigany II (r-nul Reni, reg. Odesa); 51 - Safiany (Ismail, reg. Odesa); 52 - Calfa (Anenii Noi); 53 - Stâncăuți (com. Galașeni, Râșcani).

to confirm the hypothesis about their erection in the early epoch of Christian monarchism. The archaeological researches of the settlement from Alcedar III, which is situated in the neighborhood of this group, resulted in the discovery in the archaeological layers of 4<sup>th</sup> c. - the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> of communion bread in the shape of cross. G.B. Fedorov makes it understandable that it can be dated by 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> c. or even later (Федоров 1960, 262, 280-283, рис. 65/3). The presence in this place of a consistent cultural layer from 4<sup>th</sup> c. led D.Gh. Teodor to attribute the artifacts to 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> c. (Teodor 1991, 80, see reference 2).

**The fourth group** (Bulăiești, Butuceni, Cruglic, Jeloboc, Molovata-Roghi, Pohrebni and Țâpova) has drawn a great attention on the part of specialists. The existence of some Christian signs on the walls of the cave cultic accommodations in Butuceni and Țâpova makes very plausible the idea of their inhabitation beginning with the first centuries AD (Гросу, Василяки 1984, 61-69). These cultic accommodations also from the view point of their utilization by the monk communities to the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> c. present a special interest (Ciocanu 2008, 141-162). In Orheiul Vechi there was discovered a cross-pendant made of mother-of-pearl very similar to the piece from Barboși (Galați) (Sanie 1981, 219-221). It is dated by the middle - the second part of 3<sup>rd</sup> c. There was also discovered a cross sign on the bottom of the pot, carved before burning.

**The fifth group.** Two cemeteries of 4<sup>th</sup> c. were searched at a small distance from the cave accommodations in Delacău and Roșcani. From E. Rikman's and I. Ioniță's point of view the sepulchral rite used here give us a possibility to make the conclusion that the Christian elements are present in the region. The overwhelming majority of cemetery graves in Budești, were orientated West to East (Рикман 1975, 281).

Theophanes Confessor mentions that in the period when Proto-Bulgarians passed through the region, earlier they have been under Christians influence (Theophanes Confessor, Anno 6171 (679). The fact is related to 679, when the above mentioned tribes occupied the Oglu (Onglos) situated between the Dniestr and the Pruth. The second chronological period (6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> c.) presents many difficulties for research. It is very badly represented by Christian pieces of archeological nature. It seems that due to the heathen population influx, there took place a restraint of monk activity, the communities retreated to the less accessible zones. Nevertheless, the documents, narrative and archaeological materials make us assume the survival of some isolated Christian communities in the area of the middle course of the Dniestr and the Răut after the Goths withdrawal to the Southern of the Danube. Some signs, which can be interpreted as Christian, were discovered on the spinning equipment at Dănceni I (Рафалович, Гольцева 1981, 131, рис. 4/8, 10), on a clay disk at Seliște (Orhei) (Рафалович 1974, 133, рис. 11/6), on a bone comb from Scoc (Тельнов, Рабинович 1990, 201, рис. 4/10) and on a clay pot from Orheiul Vechi (Musteață 2005, fig. 68). The mass liquidation of churches and monasteries in Byzantium began in 8<sup>th</sup> c. The iconoclastic movement started in the time of Leon III (717-741). It was continued by Constantine V (741-775). This movement had also lead to the monk refuge to the West, to South Italy; to the eastern regions of the Empire; to South of Asia Minor, Cyprus, Syria and Palestine, and judging by the information from "The Life of Stephen the Newer" (Василевский 1912, II, 324-325), to the South of the Pontus Euxinus. We notice that in that period in the Crimea there appears a dense network of rock cut cave monasteries (Кулаковский 1914, 74-75, Якобсон 1970, 13-25, 177-181). The written sources allow us to identify their increase in the Eastern regions of the Carpathians, but the existence of a certain tradition of monk life makes probable their presence in the area of the middle Dniestr, at Țâpova, Japca and Butuceni.

Since the 9<sup>th</sup> c. the number of Christian artifacts grows and diversifies. The archaeological investigations from Alcedar and Echimăuți revealed some copper and bronze crosses dated by 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> c. (Федоров 1974, 125). At Alcedar, on many ceramic pots, have been applied before burning Cross shape Stamps, simple or framed in a circle or a square, made on the wheel, they were using brown-red-dish clay. A cross with symmetric hands arms with bold ends was made on the bottom of the pot from Pohârniceni-Petruha (Хынку 1971, 152, рис. 55/5). The same sign appears at Odaia (Rezina) on a spindle holder (Рафалович 1971, 113, рис. 22/13). There was discovered a lead cross at Pepeni (Sângerei) dated by 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> c. (Tentiuc, Melnikova 1996, 104-113). The monuments, where the mentioned pieces have been discovered, are located in the region of the third and the fourth groups of cave accommodations. It seems that the monk communities from Saharna-Schit resumed their activity at the end of 9<sup>th</sup> c. The last complex presents a real town of rock cut cells (Сластихина 1987, 859-861).



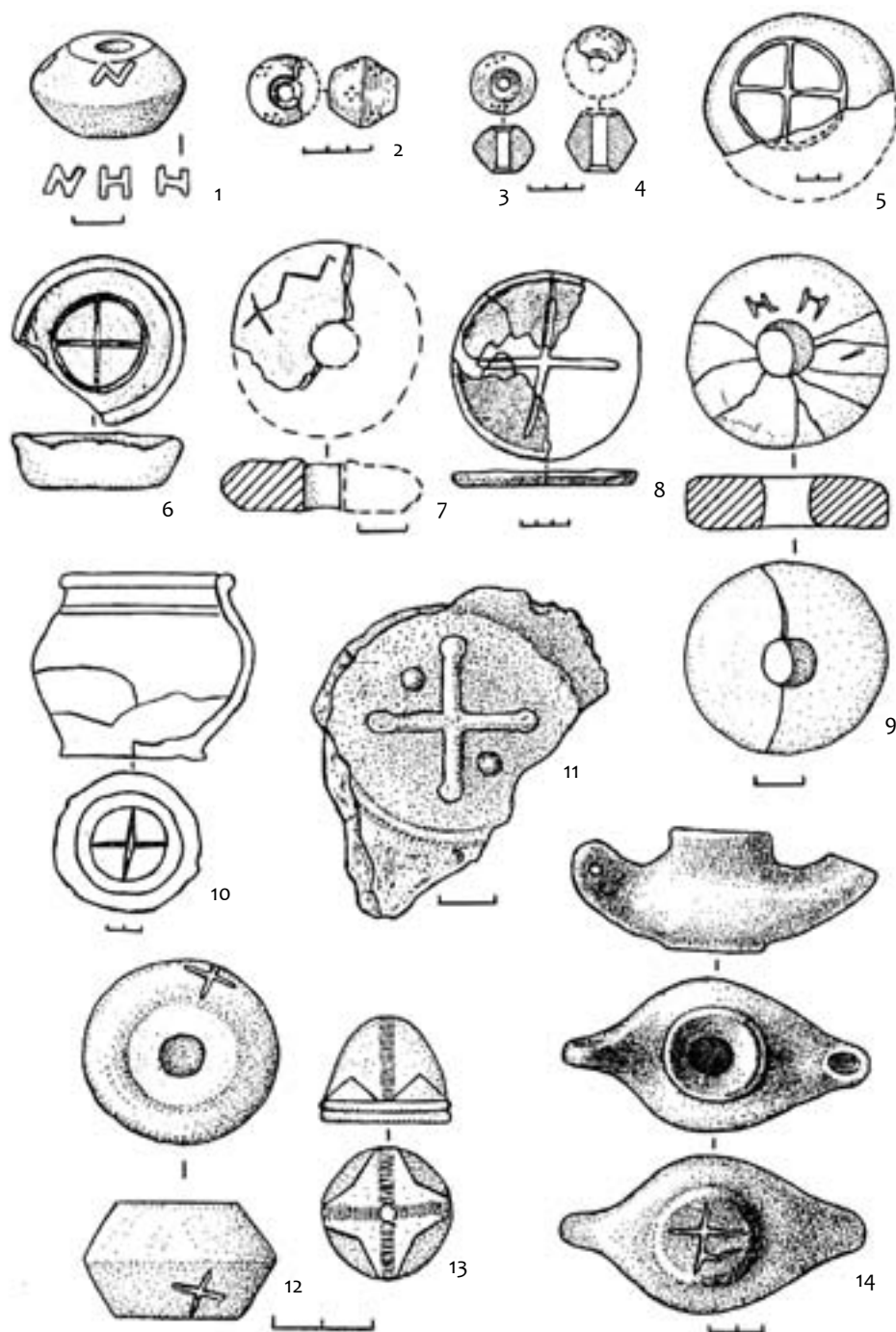


Fig. 2. Cruciform signs and inscriptions on spindles (1-4, 7, 9, 12), bottoms of vessels (5, 10, 14), clay disc (8), bronze bell (13) and clay mold (6) discovered at Alcedar III (6), Calfa (5), Ciocâlteni (10), Dănceni I (2-4), Hansca (1, 9, 11), Pohorniceni-Petruha (12-13), Seliște (8), Scoc (7) and Sobari (14).

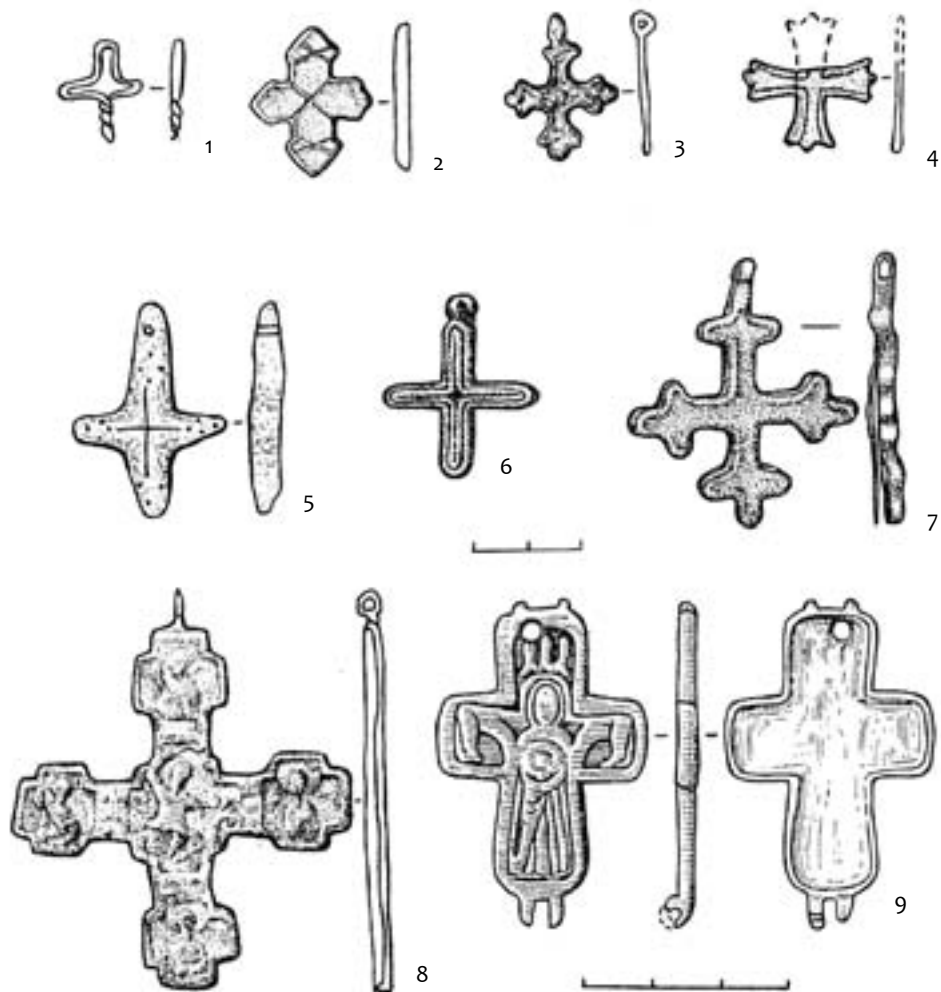


Fig. 3. Simple pectoral crosses (1, 3-6), double reliquary (7-9) and cross-pendant (2) from pearl (2), silver (4), bronze (3, 6-9), lead (5) and iron (1) discovered at Alcedar (6), Hansca (1, 9), Orheiul Vechi (2-3, 7-8), Pepeni (5) and Stâncăuți (4).

We should mention the cemetery in Brănești for the period of 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> c. Some scholars consider that it was left by a Christian population (Федоров 1984, 57-58). In Pohârnicieni-Petruha was discovered a bronze bell with a carved cross sign (Хынку 1971, 140, рис. 35/34). There was also discovered a spindle holder with a cross sign imprint on it before burning (Тельнов 1983, 106-107, рис. 4/3). All these are found in the region of the third group of cave cultic accommodations.

We also attested that at Hansca was discovered a spindle holder with the inscription "HXN" (Постикэ 1985, 163, рис. 1/12). There were discovered simple

crosses applied on the ceramic pots too (Хынку 1968, рис. 3/12; Хынку 1973, 178, рис. 21/3; Хынку 1974, 182, рис. 6/1, 4).

The presence of Christian artifacts in 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> c. becomes clear and undoubted. The objects discovered in the fourth group area are characterized by a special manner. Thus, there were discovered some simple crosses and encolpion, dated by 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> c. at Orheiul Vechi. This fact means the existence of a strong Christian community. Some cultic signs from the walls of the cultic accommodations from Butuceni prove their utilization during 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> c.

The Christian rite of dead burying was used in both cemeteries from Hansca (Хынку 1970, 64-67; Хынку 1973, 61-62). During the process of investigation of Early Middle Age settlement were discovered there some pectoral crosses from copper, bronze and wire and an encolpion and several ancient - crosses of old-Russian type. They were discovered in unknown localities in the Eastern Moldova, and are stored in the National Museum of Archaeology and History in Chișinău (Ghimpu 1997, 161-165). Two matrixes made of stone for malign crosses, found at Hansca confirm the fact that they were made in the local area. There was discovered a book clasp at Hansca too. From the specialists point of view it belongs to some church books copied in the Northern of the Lower Danube in the first centuries of 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium (Vornicescu 1984, 98; Spinei 1994, 132; Tentiuc 1996, 151). Two fragments of manuscripts from "Nomocanon" and "Octoih" are kept at the "Saltycov-Scedrin" library in Moscow. They are dated by 13<sup>th</sup> c. and proceed from Țârova (Сводный каталог 1984, 489). Some caves from Țârova (Rezina) and the small cave monasteries from Cosăuți, Bichir (Soroca) and Socola (Camenca) can be considered as the earliest ones among the cave accommodations in the zone of Middle Dniestr. These ones might be inhabited since the period of 4<sup>th</sup> century. Mapping of the cave cultic accommodations shows that they are included perfectly into the net of Christian cultic accommodations of the Mediterranean region. They were detected in the Crimea, the Caucasus, on the Dniepr, in the Northern Bukovina and Dobrogea, and in the North-Eastern Bulgaria.

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