

# Bronze Age in the Iron Gates Region

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Since 1984, working in a team of specialists or alone (Vasile Boroneanț) a series of excavations in the Iron Gates region, was carried on, around the two hydro-electric power stations<sup>1</sup>. The results materialised in over 18 publications, our intentions being their integration into the national and international circuit. However, because of the large amount of resulted information, an important part of it is still unpublished or under press right now<sup>2</sup>. Some of them introduced a new approach to certain matters and caught at once the interest of Romanian and foreign specialists, being introduced into the scientific circuit of ideas.

Obtaining those results would have been impossible without the sustained support of the Museum in Drobeta Turnu-Severin and the colleagues working there. Among the most dedicated of them I would mention Mișu Davidescu, Ion Stângă, Gabriel Crăciunescu, C. Baicu. I would also like to thank the younger researches that got involved into the project in a later stage, after the excavation part was completed.

Among the most important cultures that had (and still have) a great impact on the study of the human society development on both banks of the river is the Kostolac culture, first noticed during the excavations at Cuina Turcului<sup>3</sup>. The conclusions were rapidly published in 1966<sup>4</sup>. Other places in Yugoslavia and Hungary also revealed traces of similar habitations. They were published by Alois Benac, Milutin Garašanin, Nicola Tasić and more others<sup>5</sup>. The problems were debated later by P. Roman<sup>6</sup> and even today they rise interest as their approach is important for the understanding of the genesis and development of several other cultures all over the Romanian territory: Baden, Vučedol, and mainly Coțofeni<sup>7</sup>, partly contemporary to the first two, but which have mutually influenced one another.

The still carried-on archaeological excavations at Cladova, Arad, come to support and confirm the theory of the influence that Coțofeni culture, stretching as far as the West of Transylvania, had on the development of this particular age. The studies about this particular research were completed a long time ago and the drawings drafted but they never got published mainly because of my lack of determination in spite of the demands of our colleague P. Roman, who also gave a hand in drafting them<sup>8</sup>.

A great help in a better insight of the age in the area and in the country was brought by the publication of materials belonging to the Vučedol culture<sup>9</sup>, coming to complete the image created by Vl. Dumitrescu and I. Stratan. The studies<sup>10</sup> were based on the excavations on the terrace in front of Veterani cave and in the shelter under the rock at Cuina Turcului, as well as other sites in the area. We strongly believe that their publication made easier the understanding of all the contemporary cultures in the area: Baden, Coțofeni and other Bronze cultures in this part of the country<sup>11</sup>.

An important impact on the understanding of the first stages of the Bronze Age culture had the excavations at Gornea-Vodneac<sup>12</sup> revealing an aspect so far ignored in the area and which was then identified in other sites in Banat and Oltenia<sup>13</sup>. The publication of the those results influenced positively the understanding of the genesis of Verbicioara and Otomani cultures. All the above mentioned studies brought into light the part that the Baden and Kostolac cultures played in the formation of the Bronze civilization under the impulse of the general transformations in the epoch, pressurized by the influences from the Eastern and Central Europe<sup>14</sup>.

Under these circumstances we can feel nothing but regret for not being able to extend the excavations at Gornea-Vodneac, for not being able to undertake further excavations at Ostrovu Mare, upstream the hydro-electric station Iron Gates II (where field survey revealed a habitation

of the same kind) and for not having the time to identify all the potential materials in various museums. But we did have satisfaction to see our publications stimulating a fever of investigating this particular moment, both in the open-field and in the literature<sup>15</sup>. It is worth underlining the fact that this research was possible owing to the opening we had to the new, taking from our time devoted to the study of Palaeolithic and Mesolithic, the main objects of interest.

The uncovering in 1965 in Climente I cave of a Verbicioara layer<sup>16</sup> opened the possibility of a better perception of the Bronze Age problems. It made us understand the part played by the Iron Gates canyon on one hand, as an area of penetration and connection between the centre of our continent and its south-east and on the other hand as a contact, as a traditional connexion with the Mediterranean area. These are the vecinities that produced, taking advantage of the conditions and the economic potentials, the cultural loans and the new cultural syntheses. The process came natural, the same as the behavioural one. To our regret we see that the ones that had the opportunity to study the area did not understand this fact and did not make any effort to prove that the whole territory of the cultural area had the very same cultural compounds.

In an above mentioned article, referring also to the discoveries at Gornea Pazariste we insisted upon the mutually influences between Vatina and Verbicioara cultures. Our observations were based on the materials from Gornea Pazariste presented on this particular occasion. The influences were also noted by M. Gumă at one of our symposium<sup>17</sup>. I still insist on undertaking excavations in the defense-wall, not excavated area because of lack of time and of a not very careful reading of my field notes. The wall is still visible and the situation can be clarified on the spot. The mere presence of that wall may prove of capital importance in the general perception of the Vatina and Verbicioara cultures.

The presence in the Iron Gates area of Verbicioara culture together with the penetration of Sălcuța II and Cernavoda II are arguments hard to contest. There are a few traces of Gârla Mare culture<sup>18</sup> even further inland than Schela Cladovei, where the past few years brought to light materials belonging to the last mentioned culture. These are justifications for the contacts that undoubtedly existed with Vatina and Crucieni-Belegiș. We hope that our Yugoslav colleagues will bring more light into these matters<sup>19</sup>.

The excavations at Chitila-Ferma, Bucharest<sup>20</sup> rose an important matter concerning the end of the Bronze Age and the beginning and middle of the Iron Age in the Centre of the Romanian Field, implying the existence of Iron Gates area influences. We are talking about a population group who produced pottery specific to the Tei culture - both in quantity and quality but assimilating sometimes the channelled ornaments and the garlands. These decorations cover both the interior and the exterior of the pots, together with ornaments made of successive pricks, filled with white paint, in the best Tei tradition. We find it sometimes on cups with overhoisted handles, ribbon shaped, very similar to the ones found in the Iron Gates region at Mala-Verbica<sup>21</sup>. They share common features with the materials from Susani<sup>22</sup>, in Banat, but appearing to be a little earlier than these. Also similar discoveries were made in Southern Transylvania, Moldavia<sup>23</sup> and even the Moldavian Republic. We don't have the time and space to get into details now, we would just like to remark that we that we may face a culture development covering a territory that links the Moldavian area to the southern regions of Transylvania and even with Basarabia.

The excavations at Chitila Ferma are still in progress, in collaboration with my colleague Ștefania Miu from the Museum of History and Art of Bucharest. We both hope that the results will put some light in the matter, confirming the preliminary theories concerning the connection with the Iron Gates area, as materials here bear resemblances to the ones accompanying the treasure at Hinova<sup>24</sup>.

Connected to the problems of cultural diffusion in the Bronze Age towards the eastern regions of the country, covering the Romanian Field, an interesting matter is the presence of

stone axes, probably linked to the social structure of the population and the social organization of the human communities bearing the Bronze civilization and their religious beliefs. The key element is the axe found by Dinu V. Rosetti, today in the Museum of History and Art of Bucharest (inventory number 15442/1678)<sup>25</sup>. It was found at Ostrovu Mare, when during 1935-1940 Rosetti was carrying on excavations together with Al. Bărcăcilă. It was only marked "Oltenia". It is slightly curved and belongs to the "nave-shaped" type, with the distant end finishing in a button<sup>26</sup>. From the front it brings into mind the shape of a bird. Typologically we can frame it in the same category with the one found (also) by Dinu Rosetti at Butimanu, 27 km north from Bucharest and which could belong to the Tei Culture. It also ends with a button. From the very same place there is another axe with the same features but on the sides, corresponding to the spot where the shaft-hole is, it also bears buttons. This ornamental pattern is similar to the ornaments on the stone mattocks found both at Ostrovu Mare and Butimanu<sup>27</sup>.

Due to its resemblance to a bird head this particular kind of axe was connected to the swan cult, linked at its turn to the Apollo cult and the hyperborean<sup>28</sup>. The presence of the stone sceptre axes with a bird head-like shape follows Appollo's flight in a chariot pulled by swans from the Hyperborean area to his temple in Greece. The chariot is similar to the ones from Gârla Mare and Vatina cultures and the presence of the swan cult was noted in their areas too. Its spreading area will be taken over by the Iron Age populations. The above mentioned discoveries projects us from a world of legend into the archaeological reality of the area<sup>29</sup>, but having as a base the ideological code of religion, of social structures, of languages and shapes of social organization of the Bronze and Iron Ages<sup>30</sup>.

It would be necessary organizing a meeting on this matter in the future, with contributions for all prehistoric ages. To support of this suggestion we can claim the mural art representations at Gaura Chindiei Cave from Pescari-Coronini<sup>31</sup> where there is no doubt that a part of the patterns figured on the walls can be assigned to the Bronze Age, or to the Metal Age, anyway.

A particular problem of the Bronze Age was risen by the presence in the area of metal pieces, copper and bronze. The excavations at Schela Cladovei uncovered several pieces of the copper ore of various dimensions in the Neolithic layer. They were analyzed by a special laboratory in Bern, Switzerland<sup>32</sup>. The question is now the provenience of the ore. As a consequence of the analysis we believed at first that they arrived here by means of exchange from Moldova Veche where ore deposits of the kind are to be found or that they came from Dolni-Milanovac-Maidan Pek on the Serbian bank. The problem seemed to have been solved last year when the Danube waters, washing the gravel at the base of the sediments helped us found a big galet containing CuO agglomerations. Together with other ore pieces found in the layer, they were taken to the lab for determinations. The results will bring new information on first occupations of the inhabitants in the area and the source for obtaining the raw materials necessary for copper extractions. We think these facts important especially as from a nearby place, Dubova, comes a bronze axe with cross-shaped<sup>33</sup> arms of Jaszlandy type, Șincai variant<sup>34</sup>.

Other sites revealed too copper artefacts and various single pieces or bronze treasures. We believed that the Neolithic people from Schela Cladovei culture used small boulders of copper for magic or dye purposes.

We shall be able to issue new theories when the results of the determinations will be ready. However we can conclude that the ore used was of local provenience.

These were our ideas in what concerns the problems of the Bronze Age in the mentioned area and their influences on the neighbouring areas. There are lots of materials that have not been published yet as there were no funds, no time or no laboratory determinations available. The results of this research will be in the attention of the specialists not only in what concerns this particular area but in the whole country or in this part of Europe.

1. C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor, and collab., *Les recherches archéologiques dans la zone des Portes de Fer*, Memorii, Séries "Archéologie dans la zone des Portes de Fer", Craiova, 1968.
2. There were left unpublished the results of the research undertaken in the area between Baziaș and Ostrovu Mare or from the sampling and excavations in the area, e. g. Moldova Nouă, Moldova Veche, Livădița Cave, Pescari-Coronini, Svinița km 1001 and some more others. We regret that some of the materials were lost or misplaced, sometimes intentional, especially when because of the personal interest they were used in published works, like the ones at Svinița km 1001 and Ilișova.
3. *Atlasul Complex Porțile de Fier*, Edit. Acad. 1972; *Comori arheologice în regiunea Porțile de Fier/ Trésors archéologiques dans la Région de "Porțile de Fier"*, Ministerul Culturii, Institutul de Arheologie Belgrad, București, 1978: *Dzerdapske Sveske (Cahiers Portes de Fer)*.
4. V. Boroneanț, *Culture Kostolac de la Cuina Turcului*, SCIV, 17, 2, 1966, p. 345-352.
5. M. Garašanin, *Probleme der Bronzezeit in der Unteren Donauniederung* (in this Volume); M. Stojić, *La céramique de la culture Vatin en Serbie au sud de la Save et de la Danube* (in this Volume); N. Tasić, *Die Entwicklung der Bronzezeit im Raum des Eisernen Tores (Djerdap)* (in this Volume).
6. P. Roman, *Cultura Coțofeni*, București, 1976; idem, *Noțiunea de cultură Kostolac*, SCIVA, 28, 1977, 3, p. 419-429; P. Roman, I. Némethi, *Cultura Baden în România*, București, 1978.
7. See note 6.
8. V. Boroneanț, I. Hurezan, *Noi descoperiri de tip Coțofeni - Baden pe Dealul Carierei (Cetățuia) de la Cladova*, jud. Arad, Thraco-Dacica, under press.
9. V. Boroneanț, *Descoperiri aparținând culturii Vučedol în zona Porților de Fier*, RevMuz, V, 1968, 4, p. 332-335.
10. Vl. Dumitrescu, I. Stratan, *Keramik der Vučedol Kultur aus Moldova Veche im Banat*, Dacia N.S., 1962, p. 411-427.
11. Vl. Dumitrescu, Al. Bolomey, Fl. Mogoșanu, *Esquisse d'une préhistoire de la Roumanie*, București, 1983.
12. V. Boroneanț, *Gornea - Vodneac, Un nou aspect al epocii bronzului*, RevMuz, VIII, 1971, 1, p. 5-12.
13. Gh. Petre - Govora, *O preistorie a nord-estului Olteniei*, Râmnicu Vâlcea, 1995.
14. M. Gumă, C. Săcărin, *Die Vatina - Siedlung bei Stenca - Liubcova* (in this Volume); G. Lazarovici, *Erneut über die chronologische Einstufung der Gornea - Gruppe* (in this Volume); C. Schuster, *Die Glina - Kultur, Ihr Verbreitungsweg aus Muntenien bis zum Eisernen Tor* (in this Volume).
15. Following the publication of the materials and the uncovering by Gh. Petre Govora, *op. cit.* of similar ones at Govora, G. Lazarovici and C. Săcărin tried to find my previous sections. Due to transformation of relief and vegetation they could hardly identify them and from here the rumours among the people involved in the research. It would have been a simpler matter to settle, had they invited me to take part in the excavation, as autor of the former uncoverings. Errors made at the publication of the materials would have been avoided also, and I still keep an open invitation for a collaboration to restore the truth.
16. V. Boroneanț, *Descoperiri aparținând culturii Verbicioara în regiunea Porților de Fier*, Drobeta, II, 1976, p. 14-29.
17. M. Gumă, C. Săcărin, *op. cit.*
18. M. Jevtić, *On the End of Žuto Brdo-Gârla Mare Culture and the Late Bronze Age - Channellend Pottery, in the Iron Gates Region* (in this Volume)
19. M. Garašanin, *op. cit.*; N. Tasić, *op. cit.*
20. V. Boroneanț, *Un aspect cultural al primei epoci a fierului. Date preliminare*, Thraco-Dacica, V, 1984, 1-2, p. 156 - 166; idem, *Contribuții scurte privind începuturile primei epoci a fierului în centrul Câmpiei Române*, Izvoare arheologice bucureștene, 2, 1985, p. 22-29; idem, *Date noi privind aspectul cultural Chitila Fermă de la începutul primei epoci a fierului*, CAB, IV, 1992, p. 109 - 117.
21. Vl. Kondić, *Izlozba narovi Djerdapa, Novi arheološki nalazi*, Dzerdap, II, Narodni Muzei Dzerdap, Beograd, 1982, 4.
22. I. Stratan, Al. Vulpe, in PZ, 52, 1977, 1, p. 28-60.

23. C. Ionomu, M. Tanasachi, *Descoperiri arheologice în necropola hallstattiană timpurie de la Cotu Morii - Iași*, ArhMold, XV, 1992, p. 23-44.
24. M. Davidescu, *Un tezaur de podoabe tracice descoperite în castelul roman târziu de la Hlinova - Mehedinți*, Drobeta, V, 1982, p. 5 - 48. Through the goodwill of our friend M. Davidescu I could study the pottery resulted from the burial area. It marks a local feature of the transition through the advanced Iron Age of Gârla Mare tradition, previous to Velesnica and Chitila moments. The material is prepared by M. Davidescu for publication.
25. V. Boroneanț, C. Boroneanț, *Considerații asupra topoarelor scepere, epoca bronzului, pe baza descoperirilor de la Butimanu*, CAB, IV, 1992, p. 91-108.
26. *Ibidem*, p. 96.
27. *Ibidem*, p. 92.
28. J. Dechelette, *Manuel d'archéologie préhistorique celtique et Gallo Romaine*, Paris, 1913, p. 418-449; H. Müller - Karpe, *L'art de l'Europe préhistorique*, Paris, 1973, p. 110; Ch. Pescheck, *Urnenfelderzeitliches Brandgrab mit Kesselwagen und Sonnenscheiben aus Nordbayern*, *Actes du VIII<sup>e</sup> Congrès International des Sciences Préhistoriques et Protohistoriques*, III, Belgrad, 1973, p. 61 - 66; E. Moscalu, C. Beda, *Bujoru. Un tumul cu car-cazan votiv aparținând culturii Basarabi*, *Thraco - Dacica* XI, 1-2, 1988, p. 30-43.
29. See note 28.
30. Idem; M. Garašanin, *Elemente der Stepen und der pontischen Einflüsse an der Unteren Donau und auf dem Balkan am Übergang von Neolithikum zur frühen Bronzezeit*, *GZM, N.S.*, XV - XVI, 1960 - 1961, p. 5 -26; M. Gimbutas, *The beginning of the Bronze Age in Europe and the Indo - Europeans, 3500 - 2500 BC*, in *JIES*, V, 1973, p. 277 - 338; eadem, *The Three Waves of the Steppe people into East Central Europe*, in *ArchSuissesAnthr*, 43, 1979, p. 113-137; N. Tasić, *Jugoslavensko podunavlje od indo-europenske seobe do prodoraskita*, Novi Sad, Beograd, 1983.
31. V. Boroneanț, *Arta rupestră din Gaura Chindiei de la Pescari*, *RevMuz*, 1, 1977, p. 23-36.
32. V. Boroneanț, *Metalurgia acum opt milenii*, *Magazin Istoric*, 4, 1980, p. 36 - 37.
33. Al. Păunescu, *Cercetările arheologice de la Cuina Turcului - Dubova, județul Mehedinți*, *Tibiscus*, 5, 1978, p. 54 - 55.
34. Al. Vulpe, *Die Äxte und Beile in Rumänien*, II, München, 1975, p. 40.

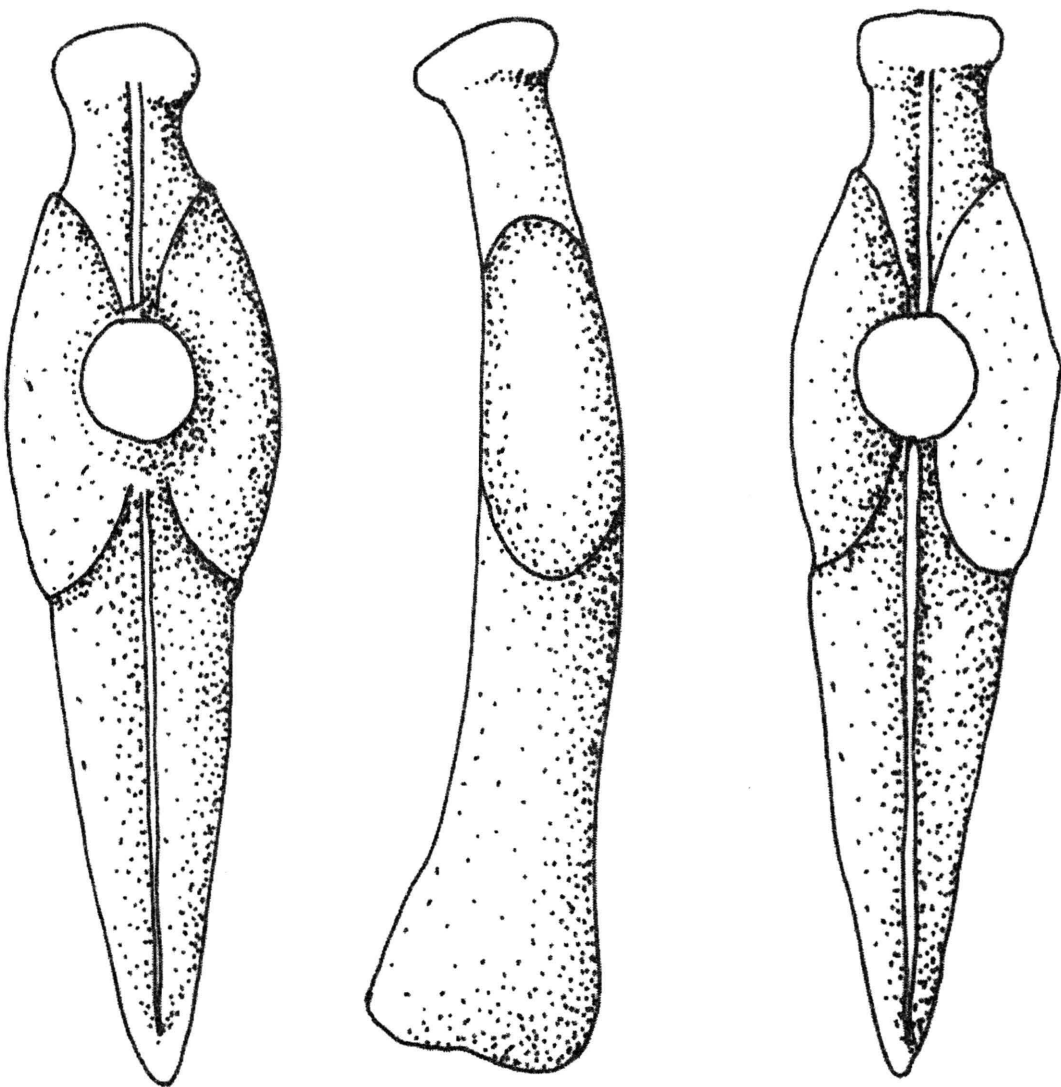


Fig. 1. The sceptre-axe uncovered by Dinu V. Rosetti, probably at Ostrovu Mare, Mehedinți dept. A - front view; B - lateral view; C - rear view.

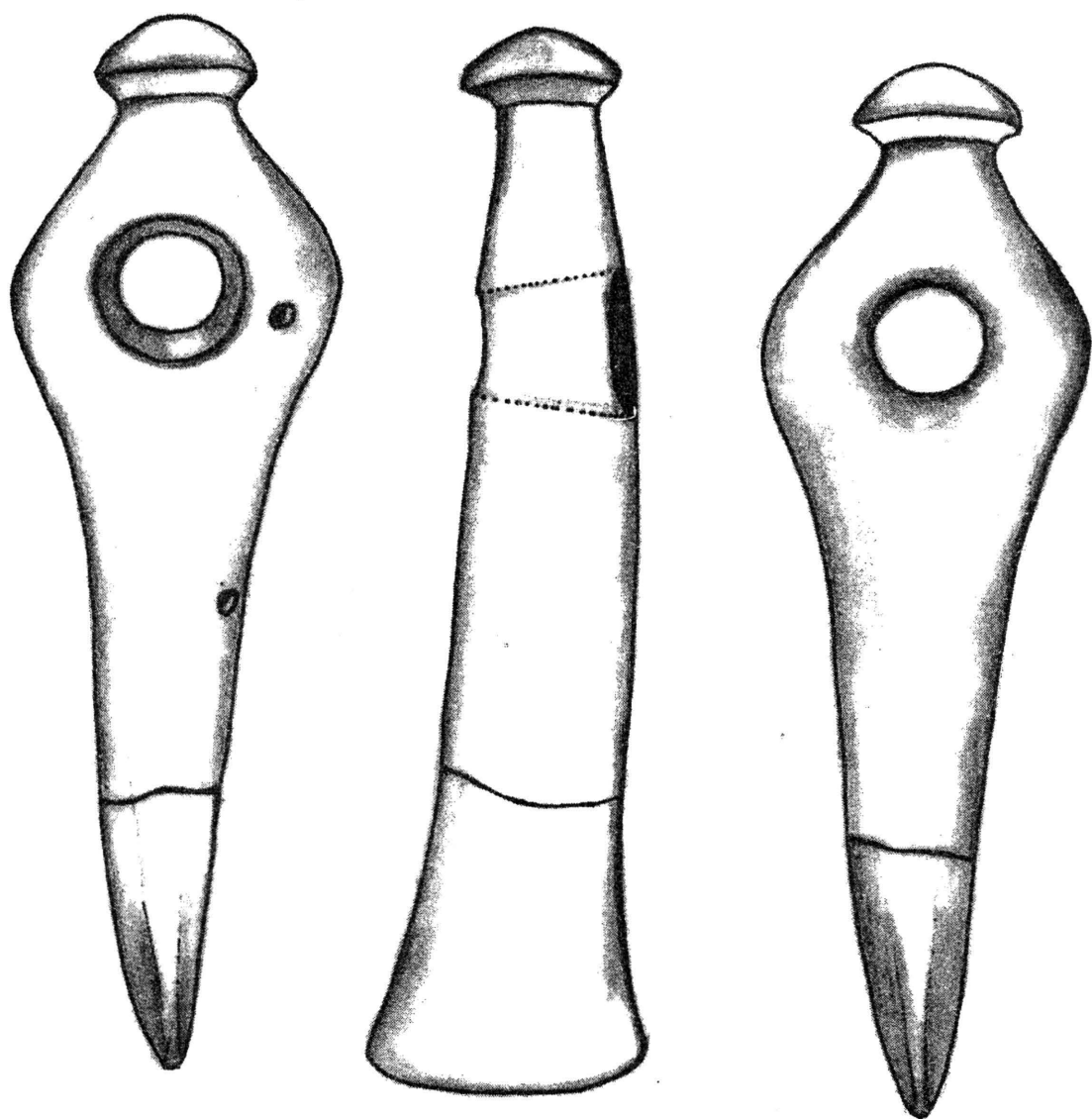


Fig. 2. Sceptre-axe with a button to the distant end found by Dinu V. Rosetti at Butimanu, Dâmbovița dept. A - front view; B - lateral view; C - rear view.

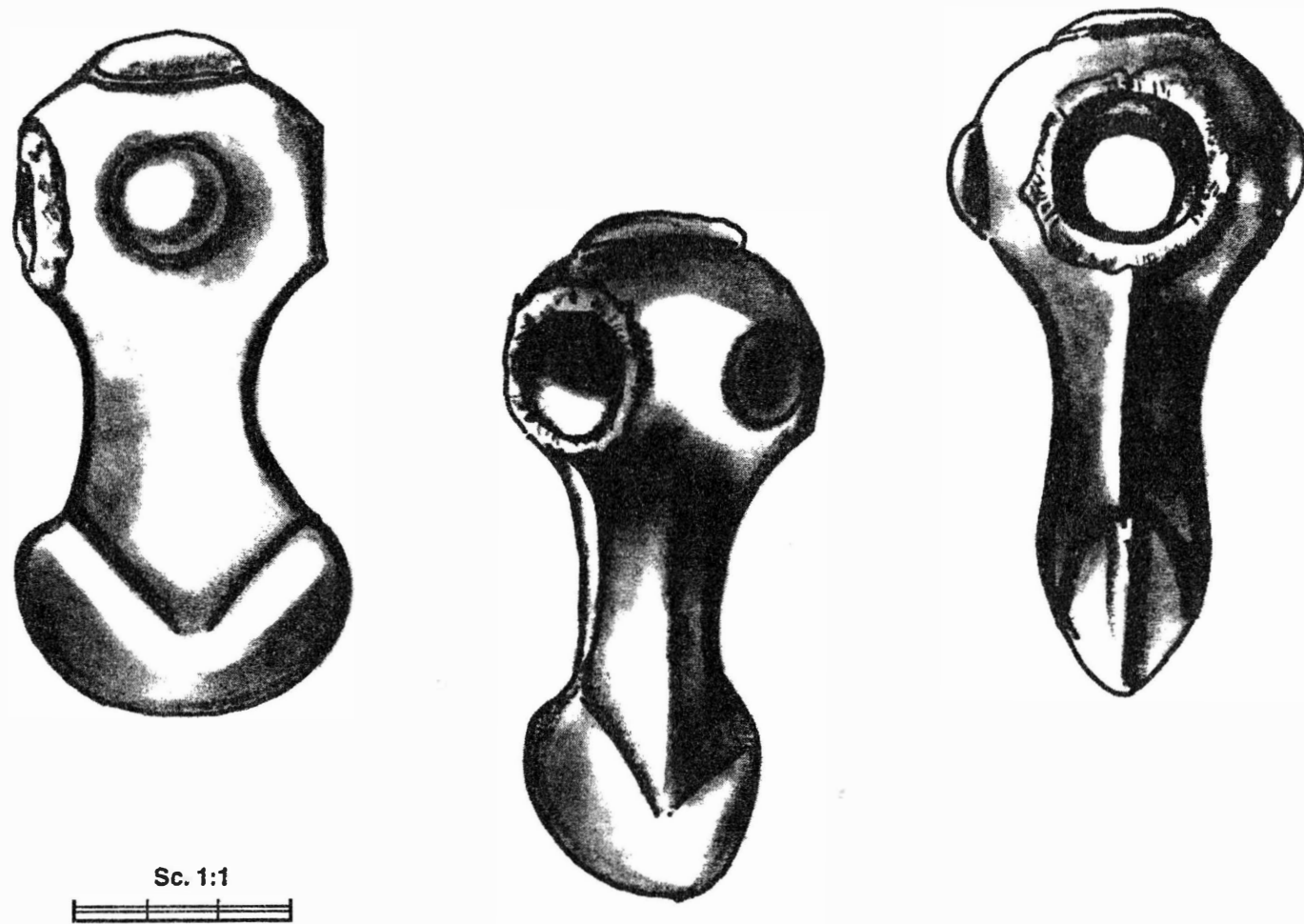


Fig. 3. Swan-head shaped sceptre-axe found at Butimanu. A - Front view; B - lateral view; C - rear view.

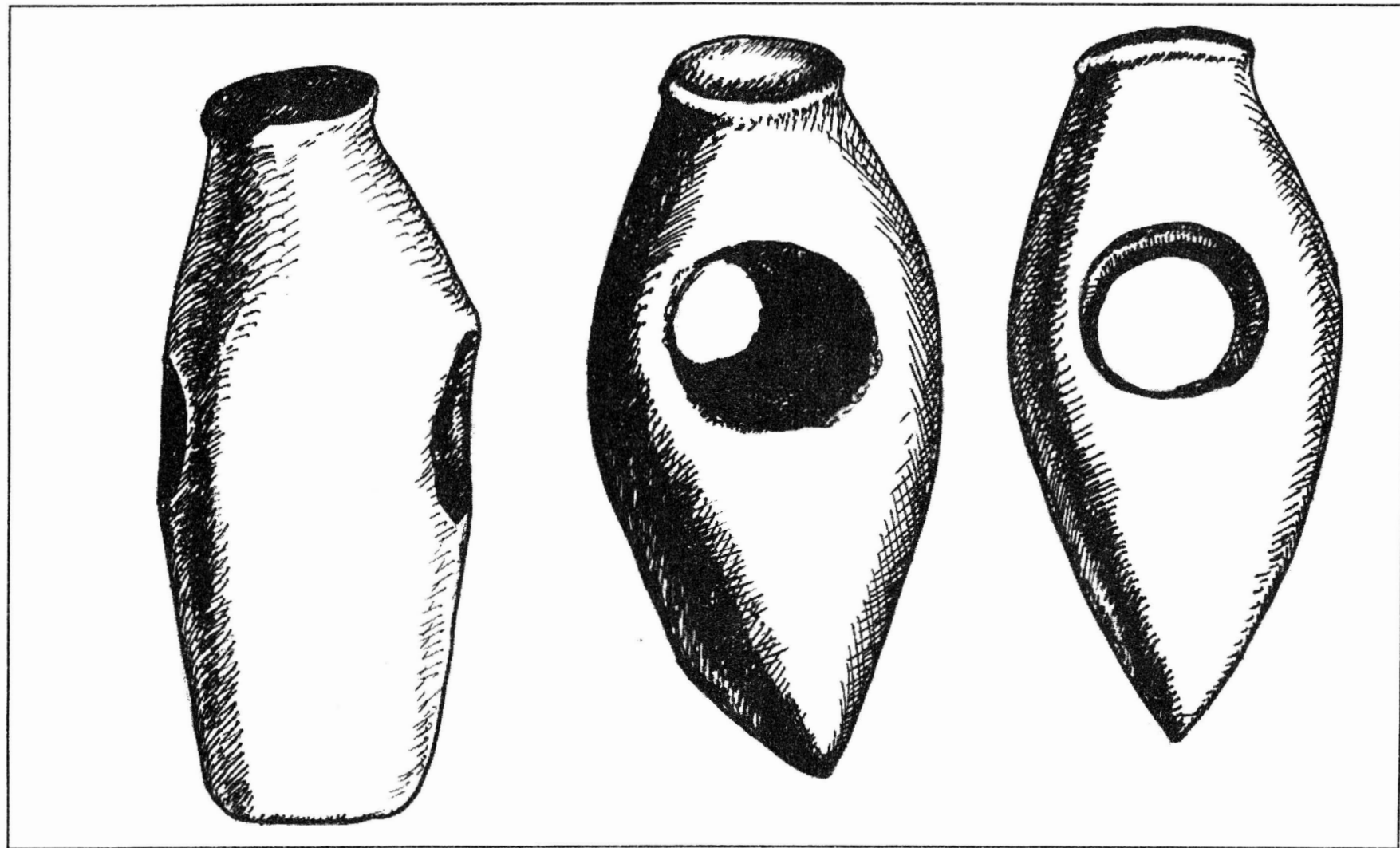


Fig. 4. Sceptre-axe with button to the distant end found at Butimanu. A - front view; B - lateral view; C - rear view.

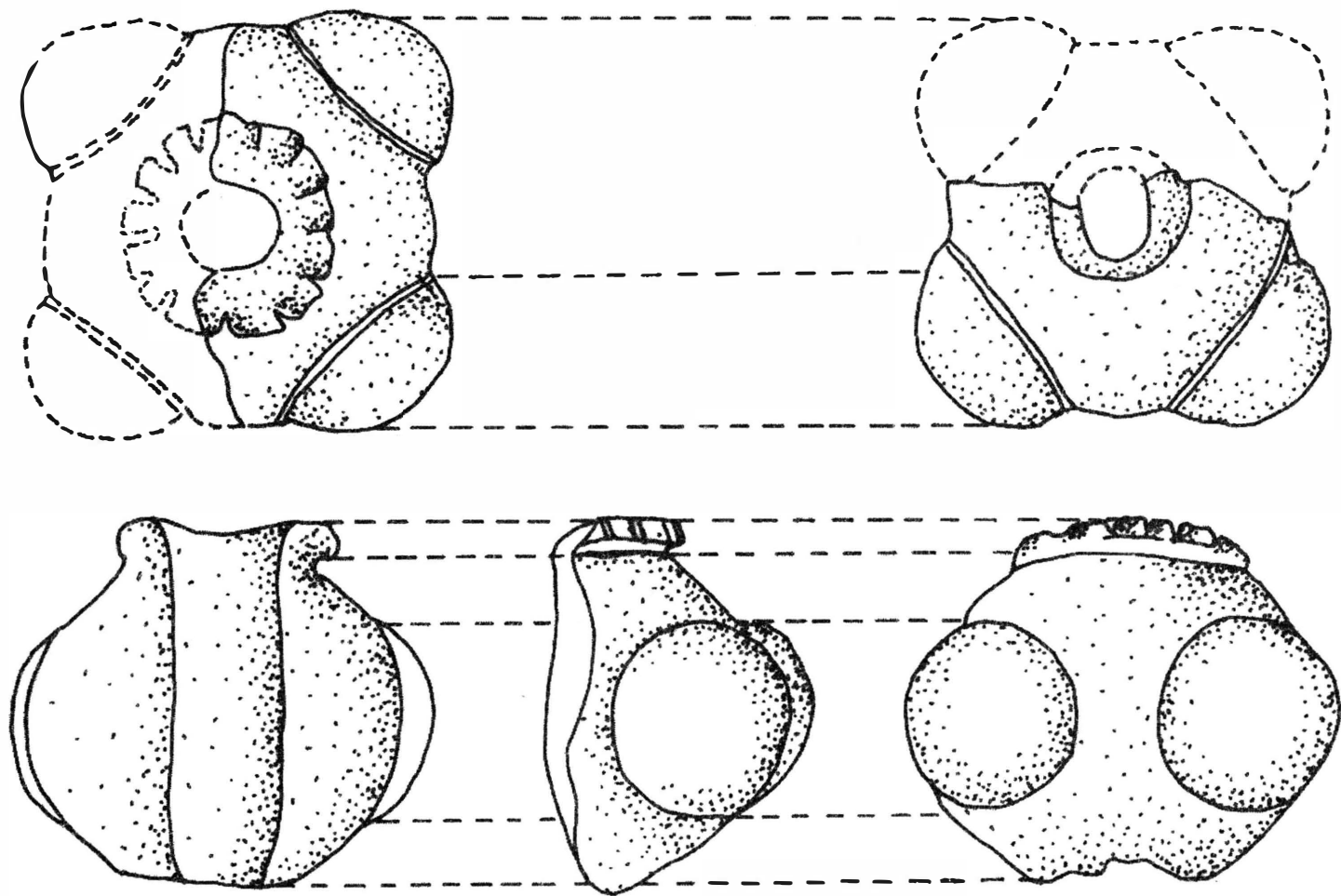


Fig. 5. Fragmented stone mattock found at Butimanu. A - horizontally; B - upper side; C - lower side.