

A MULTIPLE BURIAL IN THE WIETENBERG SETTLEMENT AT ȘOIMUȘ-LÂNGĂ SAT, HUNEDOARA COUNTY

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Abstract: *The archaeological site at Șoimuș-Lângă Sat was discovered following the archaeological diagnosis conducted within the Motorway 2011 project. The preventive investigations revealed here a succession of habitations, from the Copper Age to the medieval period.*

The research conducted in the Middle Bronze Age settlement, although limited to its southern part, yielded very interesting features and artefacts. The present article is focused on an unusual funerary context, namely a collective grave comprising four individuals.

The pit was identified inside a slightly dug dwelling structure, close to one of its side, and it was a component of the internal arrangement of the house. On the bottom of the shallow pit, towards the edge, a ceramic bowl with four lobes was found, with a kantharos vessel carefully positioned inside. The bodies of four mature individuals were placed inside it. The filling of the funerary pit contained only a few pottery fragments. However, numerous pottery fragments were recovered from inside the dwelling structure, representing storage

vessels, small amphorae, shallow bowls (some with four lobes), and large bowls. A complete reconstruction was only possible for a bowl with one handle. According to the shapes and decoration elements of ceramic ware, the feature can be assigned to phases II-III of the Wietenberg culture. Elements characteristic to second phase are predominant, while the third phase is represented by a bowl with four lobes, decorated with meandered bands, filled with simultaneous stitches (Zahnstampelung).

The observations gathered during the archaeological investigations indicated that the individuals were successively discarded inside the pit, without any special care regarding the position of their bodies. The skeletal remains belonged to two male young adults and two male older adults. The young adults were found in the central part of the grave, almost entirely overlapped, while the older individuals were closer to the western side of the pit, only partially overlapped. Regarding grave goods, a small stone pendant was found on one of the bodies and several bronze saltaleoni on another one. The preliminary anthropological examination of the skeletons did not reveal any traces of physical trauma. However, a violent demise cannot be excluded, possibly provoked by strangulation, suffocation, poison, virulent diseases, etc.

Considering the traditional Wietenberg funerary practices - burial of cremated remains deposited inside funerary urns, in flat, open-air cemeteries - the multiple grave from Șoimuș-Lângă Sat acquires an exceptional character. A few individual inhumation graves inside settlements are known, but in such rare cases a special care towards the position of the bodies was noticed. The discovery from Voivodeni-La Școală remains our closest analogy. However, in the latter case, seven individuals of different genders and ages were carefully arranged before inhumation, while the associated archaeological finds indicate a later phase of the Wietenberg culture. On a broader view, collective burials were found in sites attributed to neighbouring contemporaneous cultures - Otomani and Monteoru - but even in these cases, the differences are substantial in comparison to the grave from Șoimuș.

All possible interpretations regarding this discovery are, for now, difficult and uncertain. For this reason, we limit ourselves, at the moment, to present only the facts derived directly from field investigations. Hypothetically, the four individuals were the victims of a short violent event and were hastily discarded inside the pit. Their burial inside a dwelling structure is still puzzling and raises obvious questions regarding the abandonment of the house before or after the event. Also on a hypothetical level, this event can be connected to the end of the Wietenberg habitation.

Rezumat: Situl arheologic de la Șoimuș-Lângă Sat a fost descoperit în urma diagnozei din cadrul proiectului Autostrada 2011. Cercetarea arheologică preventivă a pus în evidență aici o succesiune de locuiri, începând din eneolitic, până în evul mediu.

Dezvelirea așezării din perioada mijlocie a epocii bronzului, deși limitată doar la marginea ei sudică, a furnizat contexte și materiale deosebit de interesante. În expunerea de față vom prezenta un complex funerar atipic, mai precis un mormânt colectiv, ce a cuprins patru defuncții.

Groapa a fost identificată în interiorul unei locuințe puțin adâncite, într-o margine a acesteia și a făcut parte din amenajarea interioară. Adâncimea ei a fost redusă, iar pe fund, spre o margine, s-a aflat așezat un castron cu patru lobi, iar în interiorul acestuia, un kantharos. În această groapă au fost aruncate corpurile a patru indivizi maturi. În umplutura gropii s-au mai aflat doar câteva fragmente ceramice.

Fragmentele ceramice recuperate din restul locuinței sunt numeroase și provin de la câteva vase de provizii, amforete, castroane, unele cu patru lobi și boluri. Dintre acestea, un singur vas este întregibil - un bol cu toartă. După formele și decorul ceramicii, complexul poate fi încadrat în intervalul fazelor II-III ale culturii Wietenberg, predominante fiind elementele fazei II, doar fragmentele unui castron cu patru lobi, decorat cu benzi meandrate, umplute cu împunsături simultane (zahnstampelung), fiind caracteristice ornamentației olăriei fazei III.

Observațiile din timpul săpăturii au indicat depunerea succesivă a celor patru defuncții în poziții diferite, fără a se acorda vreă grijă corpurilor acestora. Este vorba de doi bărbați tineri și alți doi mai în vârstă. Cei tineri s-au aflat în zona centrală a gropii, aproape unul peste celălalt, iar cei mai în vârstă, la marginea de vest a gropii, doar parțial suprapuși. Asupra unuia s-a descoperit un mic pandantiv din piatră, iar asupra altuia, mai mulți saltaleoni. Analiza antropologică preliminară nu a pus în evidență urme care să indice moartea violentă a acestor indivizi.

Având în vedere că ritul predominant de înmormântare documentat pe cuprinsul culturii Wietenberg este incinerarea, descoperirea de față capătă un caracter excepțional. Sunt cunoscute descoperiri

de morminte individuale de înhumare în aşezări, dar şi acestea sunt rare, iar în aceste cazuri s-a constatat respectarea unor anumite norme privitoare la poziţia corpului decedatului. Cea mai apropiată analogie a descoperirii prezentate aici rămâne cea de la Voivodeni–La Şcoală, cu deosebirea că acolo au fost înhumate corpurile a şapte indivizi, de vârste şi sexe diferite, aşezate cu grijă, iar materialul arheologic indică o etapă târzie a culturii în cauză. La o privire mai largă, putem identifica morminte colective şi în situri ale unor culturi contemporane vecine – cultura Otomani şi cultura Monteoru, dar în cazurile menţionate, diferenţele sunt semnificative faţă de cel de la Şoimuş.

Interpretarea complexului funerar de la Şoimuş este dificilă şi nesigură, astfel că suntem nevoiţi să ne rezumăm, deocamdată, doar la constatările directe făcute asupra contextului arheologic. Probabil cei patru indivizi au căzut victime unui eveniment violent, cu desfăşurare rapidă, dorindu-se dispensarea grabnică de cadavre. Rămâne însă greu de explicat motivul îngropării lor în acea locuinţă şi dacă aceasta a fost abandonată doar ulterior acestui eveniment. Tot ipotetic, se poate lega acest eveniment de întreruperea locuirii Wietenberg din acest sit.

Keywords: Mureş Valley, Middle Bronze Age, Wietenberg Culture, settlement, mortuary, collective grave, saltaleoni.

Cuvinte cheie: Valea Mureşului, Perioada mijlocie a epocii bronzului, cultura Wietenberg, aşezare, mortuar, mormânt colectiv, saltaleoni.

INTRODUCTION

The archaeological site from Şoimuş–Lângă Sat (Şoimuş II) was discovered during the diagnostic investigations conducted within the research project the Motorway 2011, on the segment between Deva and Orăştie, in Hunedoara County¹. The site is located in south-western Transylvania, near the western extremity of the Orăştie Corridor formed by the Mureş Valley, on top of a high terrace which advances well towards the river (Fig. 2).

The preventive archaeological investigations at this site revealed a succession of habitations². The oldest habitation sequence was dated to the middle Copper Age and was attributed to the Tiszapolgár culture, followed by habitations dated to late Copper Age – Early Bronze Age (Coţofeni Culture), Middle Bronze Age (Wietenberg culture), Late Bronze Age, Early and Late Iron Age, and finally, migration and medieval periods.

Only the southern part of the Middle Bronze Age habitation was investigated, part overlapped by the route of the future motorway. Based on the landscape and the configuration and distribution of archaeological features, there are indications that the Middle Bronze Age settlement expands further towards the north and north-east, on a surface at least equal to the one investigated (Fig. 3). As well, the cemetery associated to this habitation should also be located nearby, although it was not identified in the field yet.

Most of the archaeological features were represented by pits of different sizes and shapes, with various functions within the household, such as storage pits or refuse pits. Ritual features were also discovered. Only a few dwelling structures were identified, more or less deepened into the ancient soil. One of these structures captured our attention in particular, as it contained a pit with four human skeletons, discovery which is, in fact, the subject of this article. No other funerary features were discovered inside the settlement.

¹ Damian et al. 2012, 279. As another archaeological site was previously identified in the area, at *Teleghi*, the names Şoimuş I (*Teleghi*) and Şoimuş II (*Lângă sat*) were proposed, in order to clearly separate the two sites. The toponym *Lângă sat* was conventionally established, as a further effort to avoid any potential confusion between the two sites.

² Țuțuianu et al. 2012, 292.

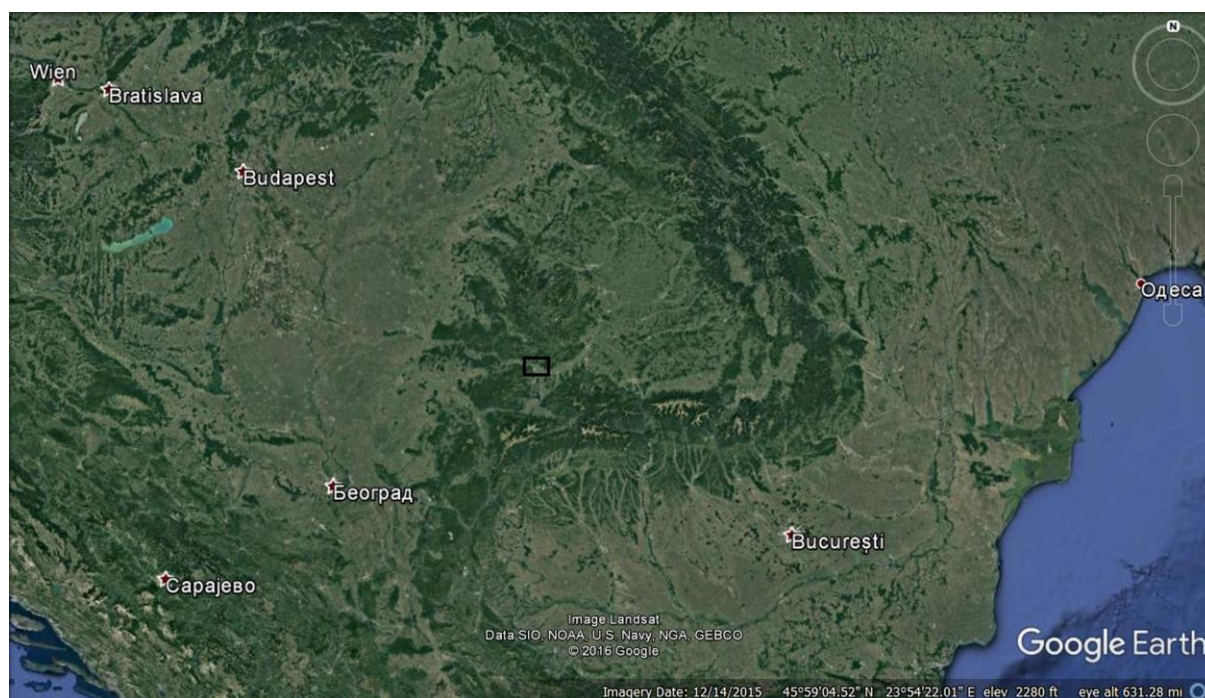
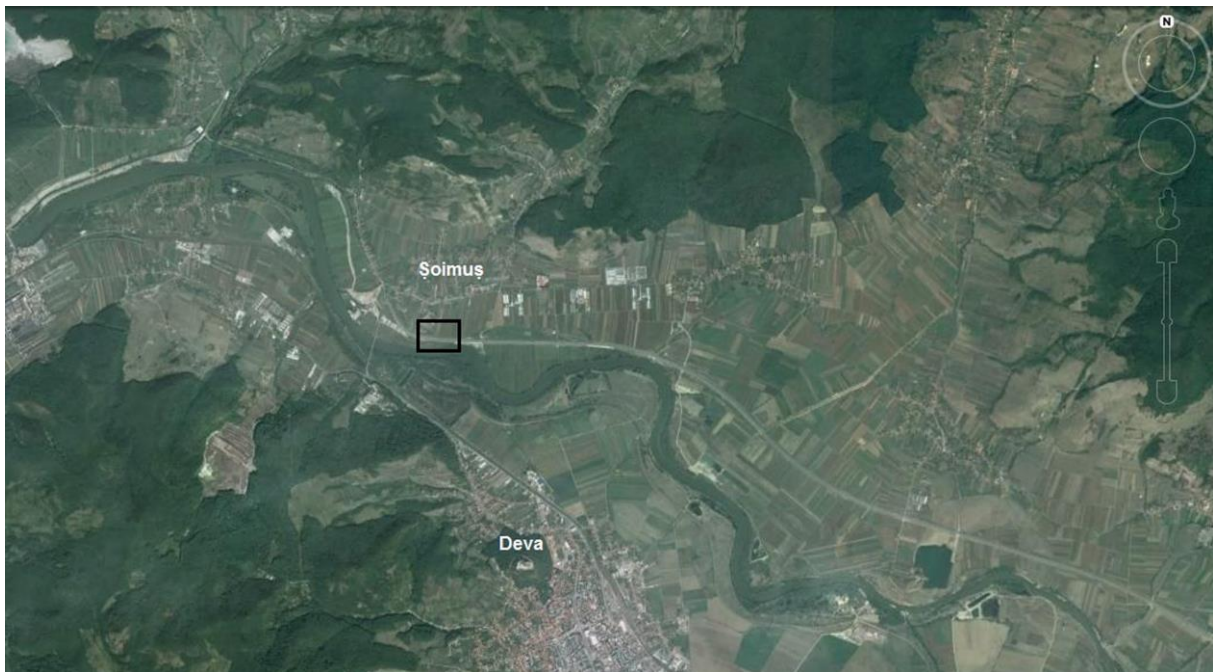


Fig. 1. Perspective over the Middle Danube course (Carpathian Basin), with the location of the site from Soimuș (inside the black rectangle).

DESCRIPTION OF THE FEATURE

The discussed feature, noted as Cx 38, was located in the north-eastern part of the investigated area, close to the edge of the settlement (Fig. 3). The western corner of the structure was partially cut by an early medieval house. At the moment of its discovery, the feature had an approximately rectangular shape, with irregular sides and dimensions of circa 3.5×1.5 m (Pl. 1/1). Inside this structure – which, based on its dimensions, probably functioned as a domestic annex rather than a house – a shallow pit was dug in the eastern side. A bowl with four lobes was discovered on the bottom of the pit, close to the edge, with a *kantharos* placed inside (Pl. 3/1). The bodies of four individuals were also discarded in this pit.

The filling of the entire structure/annex was significantly pigmented with adobe and charcoal inclusions, originating most likely from the collapsed walls and roof. Numerous pottery fragments and large pieces of adobe were found inside, as well as several animal bones, a stone smasher, a fragmentary ceramic lid, and a fragmentary miniature cart wheel. The pottery fragments came from storage vessels, pots, and different types of bowls (one of them, entirely reconstructed, had one handle). Although the filling of the pit was similar to the filling in the rest of the structure (which proves that the pit was not a later intervention), only a few coarse pottery fragments were found in the pit area, close to the human remains (Fig. 4).



1



2

Fig. 2. Area of the site (1) and detail of the perimeter investigated during the preventive research (2).

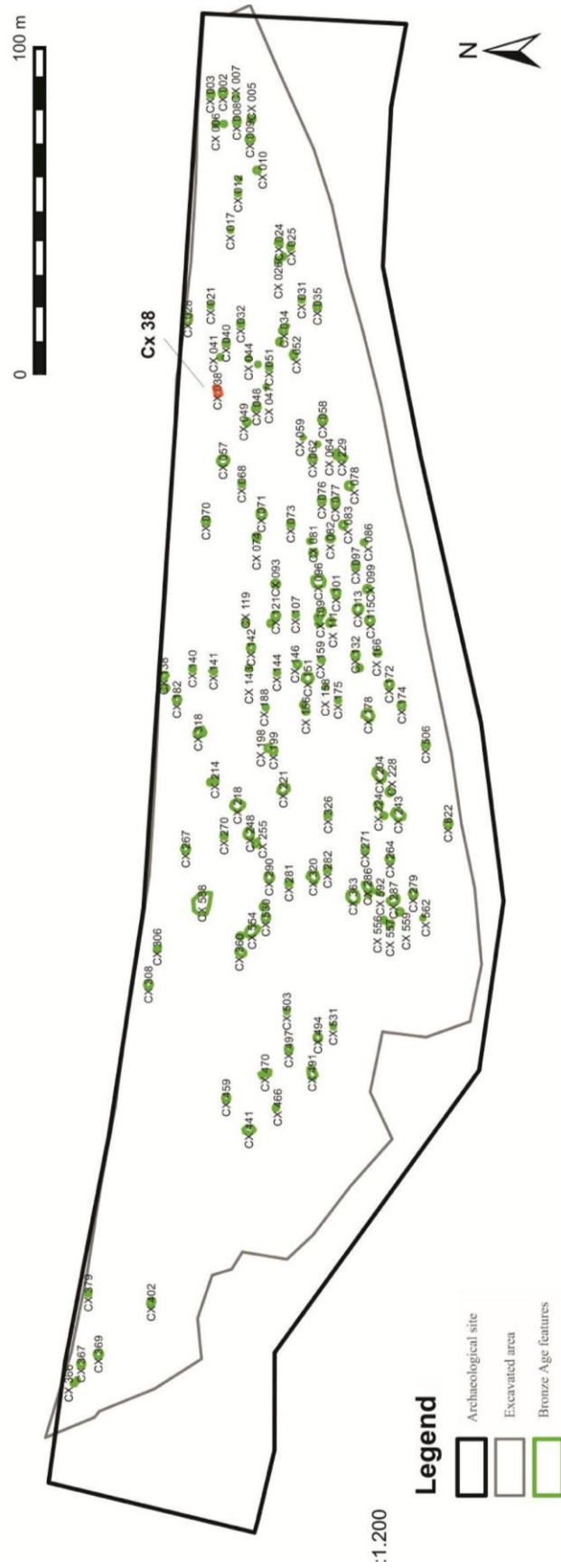


Fig. 3. Distribution of Bronze Age features in the investigated area, with the location of Cx 38.

With the exception of the above-mentioned bowl, all other ceramic vessels were extremely fragmented and incomplete. In some cases, only small parts were reconstructed, while other vessels were represented by only one pottery fragment. Most of the vessels show signs of secondary firing. From a quantitative point of view, vessels made out of coarse and semi-fine paste were equally represented. However, fine pottery was rare. In the first category (coarse wares) we can mention several bag-shaped vessels and a pot (Pl. 4). The bag-shaped vessels are usually decorated on the rim or just below the rim with a slightly raised band decorated with notches or impressions, and are fitted with horizontally elongated protuberances designed for grabbing or holding the vessel, also decorated with one or two impressions. In one case, the external knob had an internal correspondent, intended to facilitate a good grip or to support a potential lid (Pl. 4/7). Only in one instance, the band applied on the exterior of the rim was not decorated with the above-mentioned elements (Pl. 4/4). The pot in question has a biconical shape, with a flared rim. On the shoulder, the vessel was ornamented with a series of short, slanted incisions, followed by another series of incised circles below (Pl. 4/9). The clay used for these vessels is rather sandy, including many small pebbles. Their surface is coarse, while the firing was conducted in an oxidizing atmosphere.



CX 38
N-W Profile

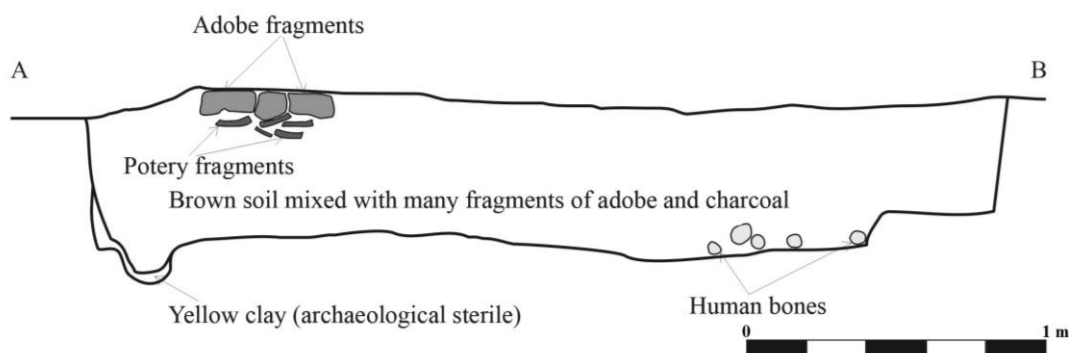


Fig. 4. Feature Cx 38. Photo of the south-eastern side and drawing of the north-western profile.

The second category is represented by medium-sized pots and various types of bowls, such as simple, lobed, or fitted with handles (Pl. 5-6). The pots have round bodies, straight rims and are fitted with two diametrically opposed handles, located right under the rim. The simple bowls, as well as those with four lobes, have splayed rims, sometimes slanted towards the interior. In some cases, these bowls are not decorated. The decorated bowls display series of notches on the rim or right below the rim, alternating with parallel applied bands, covered with X shaped hatchings. The shallow bowls are decorated on the maximum diameter with slanted grooves, while the rims display the same type of notches. The deep bowls have wider slanted grooves on their maximum diameter area (Pl. 6/1). The surface of these vessels was polished in most cases, while the firing was conducted both in the presence and the absence of oxygen. The fragmentary lid (Pl. 7/1), as well as the partial miniature cart wheel (Pl. 7/2) were modelled using a semi-fine paste.

The fine category includes several fragmentary items. Two of them are represented only by single pottery sherds, both originating from small bowls. The first one is decorated with slanted incisions on the exterior of the rim, a series of square impressions on the neck, and slanted grooves on the maximum diameter (Pl. 5/7), while the second one is decorated with a horizontal band of hatchings on the base of the neck (Pl. 5/11). Another item, either a small bowl or a cup, from which a few fragments of its lower part were preserved, was decorated on the maximum diameter area with chained spiralled grooves, delimited by rows of triangular incisions (Pl. 5/8). Approximately a quarter of another bowl was discovered. The bowl had four raised lobes, arched towards the interior, while the flattened rim had an exterior fringe. The decoration was executed in friezes, comprising bands with meanders and triangles, filled with simultaneous stitches (*Zahnstampelung*). The edge of the rim was decorated with a series of angular stitches (Pl. 6/5).

The two vessels found inside the funerary pit, although broken in several pieces, were the only complete ones (Pl. 3/1). The items were made of semi-fine paste and fired in different settings. The surface was smoothed and slightly polished, displaying also some traces of secondary burns. The bowl, placed on the bottom of the pit with its mouth up, has a straight base and four symmetrical lobes, vaguely curbed towards the interior. The rim was slanted on both sides, resulting in a central ridge. The bowl was undecorated (Pl. 7/6). The *kantharos* was placed inside the bowl, also with its mouth up. The vessel has a slightly oblate bitronconic body and straight base, while the neck was arched towards the interior. The edge of the rim was rounded. The two diametrically opposed handles start from the rim and rest on the neck. The decoration comprises very wide diagonal grooves disposed along the maximum diameter of the body. A horizontal band was executed above the grooves, comprising two parallel incised lines, with a series of stitches in between (Pl. 7/5).

DESCRIPTION OF THE GRAVE

The pit in which the four skeletons were found had a round shape and it was just slightly deeper than the dwelling/ annex. The bodies were discarded on top of each other, with no specific care regarding their position (Pl. 1-2). During the excavation and documentation process, it was possible to establish the order in which the bodies were thrown in the pit (the numbers assigned to each individual during the photographing stage does not correspond to this order) (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. The four skeletons *in situ* (photo and drawing) and sketches with the position of each individual.

Individual no. 4 was laid in the pit first. He was placed in the centre, with his head towards the north, left arm stretched further away from the body, right arm slightly flexed and raised to the level of the shoulder, and legs bent to the right, with his knees towards the chest. The back of his right hand was resting on the lobed bowl. The second one was individual no. 2, laid near the southern side of the pit. His body was placed on its right side, with his head towards the east (close to the pelvis of individual no. 4), left arm flexed along the body, right arm flexed and raised above his head, and legs bent and raised to the level of his pelvis. The third one was individual no. 1, located on the western side of the pit. His body was also placed on its right side, but his head was oriented towards the south. His arms were bent on his chest, while his legs were strongly flexed and raised to the level of his pelvic area. His left arm was located above the ankles of individual no. 2. The last one was individual no. 3, placed to the left of individual no. 4, partially overlapping him. The body was placed facing down, with his head towards the south. His left arm was entirely caught under his body, while his right arm was flexed along the torso, only with the hand beneath the abdomen. His left leg was strongly flexed, with its heel close to the pelvis. His right leg was only slightly bent and raised to the level of the pelvis, overlapping the legs of individual no. 4.

In an attempt to recreate the way in which the four bodies ended up in the pit, we concluded that individual no. 4 was the first one to be discarded. He was grabbed by his hands and feet and placed in the centre of the pit. His legs were repositioned (arranged closer to his chest), while his arms were left as they were. As a result, his right hand fell over the two ceramic vessels, placed therefore in the pit prior to the body. The next individual (no. 2) was moved in a similar manner and placed near the feet of individual no. 4 (possible reason for bending the latter's feet). His right arm was left raised above his torso, while his left arm and legs were oriented towards the centre of the pit. Individual no. 1 was brought to the edge of the pit and simply rolled inside. His neck overlapped the ceramic vessels, while his legs were bent in order to fit inside the pit. The fact that his left arm was wrapped around the ankles of individual no. 2 might be an indication that he was still alive (probably semi-conscious) when he was tossed inside the pit. The last one to be discarded was individual no. 3. Apparently, he was placed as well on the edge of the pit with his legs inside, and pushed in the pit from behind, falling face down.

Considering the random position of their arms and legs, we can consider that the four individuals were placed inside the pit immediately after their deaths (or even before), as the state of *rigor mortis* had not occurred yet.

Regarding the grave goods, although the only items in a direct connection with the four individuals, the lobed bowl and the *kantharos* were placed on the bottom of the pit before the mortuary event occurred. It can be easily noticed that the vessels were carefully arranged, as the handles of the *kantharos* were oriented symmetrically with the lobes of the bowl (Fig. 6). We can assume that the vessels were placed in this area, which probably functioned as a small compartment of the dwelling/annex, for safekeeping. Considering their shape and quality, we can infer that the items were only used occasionally. Based on these characteristics, one might assume that the vessels had a ritual function. However, their connection to the funerary feature could be only coincidental in this case. Furthermore, the manner in which the vessels were carefully arranged contrasts with the random position of the bodies, giving the impression of a hasty event, which led to the demise and quick disposal of the four individuals.



Fig. 6. The position of the first individual placed inside the pit, with his hand fallen over the bowl, and the two vessels reconstructed



Fig. 7. Detail with individual no. 3 and the cluster of *saltaleoni* found near his arm (*in situ* and collected).

Other items found inside the pit were a small stone polisher/pendant (Pl. 7/4) and several spiralled bronze wires – *saltaleoni*, rare discoveries for this period (Pl. 7/3). The polisher - which probably also functioned as an amulet - has a prismatic, rectangular shape and was made of a fine sandstone. One end was slightly smaller and delimited by a transversal channel carved on all its sides, designed to allow its attachment to a string (in order to be worn around the neck - similar to a pendant - or tied around the wrist during use). A similar item was also discovered in a funerary context, inside the urn-burial 20 in the Wietenberg cemetery at Luduș–Fabrica de Cânepă³. The stone polisher/pendant was found under individual no. 1. A cluster of *saltaleoni*

³ Berecki 2016, 56, pl. 13/7.

was found close to the left arm of individual no. 3 (Fig. 7), another cluster close to its chest, while other small fragments were scattered under and around his body.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL SUMMARY⁴

The anthropological analysis indicated that the bodies found inside the pit belonged to four male individuals with similar heights, two of them younger and the other two older. The age of the males ranged as it follows: individual no. 1 - between 45 and 60 years old; individual no. 2 – between 50 and 60 years old (and approximate height of 1.76-1.80 m); individual no. 3 – between 20 and 25 years old (and approximate height of 1.73-1.78 m); and individual no. 4 – between 20 and 35 years old. Due to the poor preservation of long bones, the stature of the individuals no. 1 and no. 4 could not be estimated within an acceptable margin of error. During the preliminary observations, no evidence of major deadly trauma (contusions, fractures, or cuts) was found. Additionally, all traces of prior injuries showed signs of healing. Likewise, no other critical afflictions traceable on bones or teeth were noticed. Therefore, the causes which led to their death left no marks on the skeletal remains. We can assume that the four individuals died intoxicated (poisoned) or, more likely, asphyxiated (strangled). It is also very likely that they were all killed in a single event (roughly at the same time). A potential kinship relation between the victims is not excluded, but a definite answer could be provided only after conducting a DNA test.

CULTURAL AND CHRONOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Based on the characteristics of the pottery found within the Bronze Age features, the settlement was assigned to phases II and III of the Wietenberg culture. Therefore, the habitation functioned during these two chronological stages. However, due to an incomplete vertical stratigraphic sequence, it is impossible to determine if the habitation was uninterrupted or if there ever was a hiatus (a phase of abandonment, followed by another habitation phase). The situation is similar to other neighbouring Wietenberg sites⁵, settlements located on the south-western frontier of the territory covered in the Middle Bronze Age by this cultural style.

Regarding the feature discussed here, and implicitly the multiple burial within it, its cultural assignment can be based, as well, solely on the ceramic style of the pottery. Naturally, the decoration techniques and ornamental elements are essential in this regard. Further additions concerning the absolute chronology will be made after the ¹⁴C samples collected from the four skeletons will be analysed.

The fine and semi-fine pottery, represented by vessels used for drinking and serving food, does not display a great variety of ornaments, while some of the vessels in this category are simply undecorated, such as the lobed bowl found inside the burial pit. Nevertheless, the most frequent decoration elements are bands of wide, slanted grooves, placed around the maximum diameter of the vessel. They are delimited at the base of the neck by one or two incised lines. In the latter case, the space in between the lines is filled by series of triangular or

⁴ This information was presented in the preliminary anthropological report, written by Anna Osterholtz and Andrei Gonciar: *Analysis of Remains recovered from Șoimuș. Context and Individual Analyses*, Archaeotek, Canada, 2013 (mss).

⁵ Țuțuianu et al. 2012, 292; Bodó et al. 2012, 293-294; Schuster et al. 2012, 292; Barbu 2012, 34.

square impressions. Another frequent motif is represented by bands filled with small and slanted incised lines, arranged either parallel or intersected. This ornamental motif is located on the rim or, in the case of lobed bowls, in the upper part of the vessel. These ornaments are specific to the second phase of the Wietenberg culture, but naturally, were used in the third phase as well⁶. Two sets of ornaments are rather particular: one present on the body of a small drinking vessel (wide, spiralled grooves, delimited by triangular impressions) and one on a pot (a series of short, slanted lines on the shoulder, and a row of circular impressions beneath). The spiralled grooves are widely encountered, especially on the shoulder of large cooking vessels, but also on the body of drinking vessels⁷. As analogies, we mention a small fragmentary pot discovered in grave 20 in the cemetery at Luduș–*Fabrica de Cânepă*⁸ and a *kantharos* from Alba Iulia–*Viile Maier*⁹, noting that in our case the impressions are framed by two parallel lines. The second decorative set is rather uncommon. The closest analogies identified so far are represented by two pottery fragments, one found at Bistrița–*Chighir*¹⁰ and one at Meseșeni de Sus–*Osoiu Măcăului*¹¹, but in these cases a dot, respectively a short-slanted line were made in the centre of each circle.

Regarding the two vessels found inside the burial pit, bowls with four raised lobes curved towards the interior are a typical shape for the Wietenberg pottery, present from phase II and up to the end of phase III. Such vessels are encountered in every Wietenberg settlement. On the other hand, the *kantharos* is a more uncommon shape in this cultural medium. The specimen found inside the burial pit is very similar to the one from Alba Iulia, as mentioned above, noting, however, different decoration elements.

Based on the ceramic shapes and decorations mentioned above, Cx 38 should be assigned to an earlier stage of the Wietenberg culture. This statement is supported by the features of the four-lobed bowls (with lobes which are less raised and only slightly curved) which, according to N. Boroffka, are classified within sub-types TE1a and TE1c. The style of the *kantharos* (sub-type TA4g) and the simple and limited palette of decoration elements suggest a similar conclusion¹². However, the fragments of the four-lobed bowl decorated with meanders and simultaneous stitches are specific to phase III¹³. Likewise, according to I. Andrițoiu, the wide slanted and spiralled grooves are also characteristic to this latter phase¹⁴.

Until the absolute chronology data will be available, we assume that the mortuary event which led to the multiple burial occurred within the chronological frame corresponding to the limit between the second and the third phase of the Wietenberg culture. Traditionally, the second phase is placed in the first half of the 2nd millennium BC., corresponding to the 19th - 17th centuries, while the third phase corresponds to the 17th-15th

⁶ Andrițoiu 1992, 40-43, 50-51; Boroffka 1994, 249-250.

⁷ Boroffka 1994, Typentaf. 22/10-14

⁸ Berecki 2016, pl. 13/8.

⁹ Andrițoiu 1992, pl. 25/8; Boroffka 1994, Taf. 1/9.

¹⁰ Boroffka 1994, Taf. 12/4

¹¹ Bejinariu 2015, 52, pl. 20/1.

¹² Boroffka 1994, 249-250, Typentaf. 2/1, 4/1,3.

¹³ Chidioșan 1980, 79; Andrițoiu 1992, 52; Boroffka 1994, 250; Bejinariu 2015, 65; Németh 2015, 184.

¹⁴ Andrițoiu 1992, 43.

centuries¹⁵. Therefore, hypothetically, the multiple burial would be assigned to the 17th century BC.

ANALOGIES AND DISCUSSIONS

As shown in a recent study¹⁶, according to the archaeological discoveries, including the most recent ones, the main funerary expression of the Wietenberg communities is represented by flat incineration burial, with cemeteries located at a certain distance from its corresponding settlement. After incineration, the cremated human remains were placed in funerary urns and buried. These graves had, most likely, some sort of visible markers. This funerary practice is considered the norm for the discussed chronological interval. In several cases, considered unusual, urns containing human remains were buried within the inhabited area. Another uncommon practice was represented by inhumation graves (assigned to children and adults of both genders, buried in a crouched position), also found inside settlements. The reasons behind such unusual practices are, for the moment, still unknown. According to all recent studies dedicated to this subject and based on the multitude of funerary discoveries, the practices mentioned above describe the funerary behaviour exhibited by the Wietenberg communities¹⁷. As these aspects were extensively argued in other occasions, we will limit the present discussion to our multiple burial and to the only other known comparable case, recently discovered in the settlement from Voivodeni–*La Școală*, Mureș county¹⁸.

The discovery from Voivodeni is, to a certain extent, similar to the one from Șoimuș, yet dated to the final stage of the Wietenberg culture. Here also, the funerary pit was found inside the settlement, containing multiple human skeletal remains¹⁹. However, a few notable differences ought to be mentioned. In Voivodeni, the grave pit was a distinct feature, unrelated to other contemporaneous structures. The depth was more appropriate to the purpose, while the shape of the pit was roughly rectangular at the level of the skeletons. The seven bodies were also placed inside successively, but they all had the same orientation, with their heads towards south-west. More care was also given to the final position of the bodies. Three of them had a crouched position, while the other four had only their legs flexed. One of the bodies was facing down. The human remains belonged to individuals of both genders and of different ages (adults and children). The filling of the pit contained a rather small number of pottery fragments.

Therefore, when compared to the traditional funerary behaviour displayed by Wietenberg communities (burial of cremated remains deposited in funerary urns in cemeteries located outside of the settlement), the discoveries from Șoimuș and Voievodeni are unusual occurrences. Even if there are several documented cases of

¹⁵ Berecki 2016, 134-135, cu literatura.

¹⁶ Marc 2016, 65-66.

¹⁷ Motzoi-Chicideanu 2011, 526-546; Bălan 2014a, 101-105; Palincaș 2014; Berecki 2016, 44-52, 59-66.

¹⁸ Németh 2015, 179-181; Marc 2016, 64 (only five skeletons were mentioned in the study, as the available information regarding the funerary discovery from Voievodeni was limited at that time, information found on the web page of the Mureș County Museum -http://www.muzeumures.ro/main.php?gallery_id=60. We took this opportunity to correct the error).

¹⁹ Németh 2016, description in the present volume.

inhumations inside settlements, these are all individual burials²⁰. The funerary pit was located either near dwelling structures, or between other pits with different functions (Daia Română–Troian²¹, Derşida–Dealul lui Balotă²², Păuleni-Ciuc–Dâmbul Cetăţii²³, Uroi–Sighetii²⁴). In most cases, regardless of gender or age, the bodies were arranged in a flexed/foetal position. In a few situations, grave goods were placed near the body (Bernadea–Dâmbău²⁵, Deva–Micro 15²⁶, Miceşti–Cigaş²⁷, Obreja–Cânepi²⁸). These aspects indicate a certain degree of consideration towards the deceased (the arrangement of the body in a specific position, the presence of grave goods, etc). However, none of these aspects were encountered in the multiple burial from Şoimuş.

There are a few inhumation burials in which the position of the body and the filling of the pit are unusual. These are commonly categorised as *deviant burials*, a funerary custom influenced by factors relating to the deceased, as well as to the community members²⁹. As an example, we mention a discovery from Miceşti–Cigaş, a site already mentioned, discovery which was dated, however, to the late phase of the Wietenberg culture. Here, in a pit (C.7/2009) located apparently outside the settlement, the skeleton of an adult female was found³⁰. The body was placed in a supine position, with her right arm bent across her chest and left arm brought to her chin. Her legs were bent upwards (lifted knees), subsequently falling inwards, with her femurs almost overlapped. Next to the human remains, on the bottom of the pit and in a central position, there was a small heap of burnt soil mixed with ashes, charcoal, pottery fragments and animal bones. The pit was filled with soil mixed with a lot of ashes. Even if this burial does not fit the norm of inhumation graves, the position of the skeleton suggests that some yet unexplained funerary custom was respected, and that the body was not simply discarded in the pit, as it is the case in Şoimuş.

Another distinct funerary case within the Wietenberg medium is the one from Oarţa de Sus–Ghiile Botii. Here, in an area associated with ritual manifestations, dismembered human parts were found in several pits, accompanied by whole or dismembered animals, ceramic vessels broken on site, and other clay, antler or stone artefacts³¹. Again, the situation described above is not comparable to the one from Şoimuş.

For this period, but outside the Wietenberg area, multiple burials were discovered in sites assigned to the neighbouring Otomani culture, which covered the territory located north-west and west of the Wietenberg area. Intense connections were documented between the two neighbouring cultures. In the Otomani site from Sălacea–Dealul Vida, in a marginal area of the settlement, four human skeletons were discovered in a pit, without any associated

²⁰ Marc 2016, 63.

²¹ Andriţoiu 1994, 153.

²² Chidioşan 1980, 23.

²³ Kavruc et al. 2010, 183-184.

²⁴ Marc 2016, 64, fig. 5.

²⁵ Vlassa et al. 1995, 579-580.

²⁶ Andriţoiu 1994, 153.

²⁷ Bălan 2014b, 96-97.

²⁸ Soroceanu 1973, 495-497.

²⁹ Németh 2015, 181, with associated literature.

³⁰ Bălan 2014b, 96.

³¹ Kacsó 2004, 58-62; Kacsó 2005, 127-128.

grave goods³². The bodies belonged to two adult individuals (male and female), an adolescent girl, and a female toddler. According to the published drawing³³, the first one to be laid in the pit was the man, resting in the central area in a supine position, with its right arm stretched along the torso, the left arm flexed (hand on the abdomen), and legs bent towards the right. He was followed by the teen girl. She was placed on one side, near the feet of the male (facing them), with her arms crossed, right leg strongly flexed (knee brought to her chest), and left leg only slightly bent. The infant was placed under her left thigh. The last one was the woman, crouched over the legs of the male, in a prone position, with her head turned to one side. Considering the wider context of its discovery – in a fortified, small mound settlement, which also contained the remains of a so-called temple (with the remains of a child buried at its entrance) – this peripheral multiple burial has obvious unusual traits. The find was assigned to the second Otomani phase, which is relatively contemporaneous to the same Wietenberg phase.

To this category of unusual funerary features, we can add a discovery made within the Monteoru culture (south-east of the Wietenberg area), in the settlement from Năeni–Zănoaga³⁴. The bodies of three individuals were found in a pit, laid with the same orientation in a flexed position. The human remains belonged to two adults (male and female) and an adolescent male. A stone axe and a few whole ceramic vessels were placed besides them. A whole *askos* vessel, pottery fragments from large vessels, burned daub, hearth fragments, animal bones, and stones were also found in the filling of the pit. The feature was located, as well, in a marginal area of the site, in a perimeter which contained other two pits (one had a filling very similar to the grave), forming apparently a ritual space associated to the burial event. Chronologically, this discovery is dated later than the ones from Sălacea și Șoimuș.

When dealing with cases of multiple burials, the temptation to assume some sort of kinship between the deceased is very high, especially when there are two adults of both genders accompanied by children. However, until further analyses, we can only safely assume that their demise occurred simultaneously or over a short period of time, integrated in a single event or incident. Although the possibility of a violent death is very likely in the cases mentioned above, no traces were left on the bones. An accidental intoxication or a virulent disease is plausible. However, a possible intentional intoxication or asphyxiation (which would leave no mark on the skeletal remains) is not excluded. The marginal location of these funerary pits in relation to the settlements suggests the existence of a mortuary *language*, with a powerful meaning for the community members, a *language* which seems to highlight the isolation of the deceased from the rest of the community. This isolation might have been a consequence of an unnatural death and occurred, therefore, after death. Still, it is also possible that the isolation was in effect long before and their demise was only the final stage in a process intended to eliminate them from the community.

³² Ordentlich 1972, 79; Nicolaescu-Plopșor, Wolsky 1975, 118-120, 123-131; Bader 1978, 40; Motzoi-Chicideanu 2011, 145, 458-459.

³³ Nicolaescu-Plopșor, Wolsky 1975, 120, fig. 5.

³⁴ Motzoi-Chicideanu, Șandor-Chicideanu 1994-1995, 19-28; Motzoi-Chicideanu, Șandor-Chicideanu 1999, 90-91, fig. 21; Motzoi-Chicideanu 2011, 128, 373, 411-412 and note 389, pl. 212.

CONCLUSION

Returning to the mortuary feature from Şoimuş, we will limit our comments to the information collected during the archaeological investigation until further data (including DNA analysis) is made available. The burial did not respect the common funerary practice specific to the Wietenberg culture. Based on observations made during the excavation, the four individuals were discarded successively inside the pit, without any regard to their final position. There was no interest in recovering the good quality ceramic vessels which were already in the pit and, as well, no intention to appropriate the artefacts found near the bodies (the small stone polisher and the *saltaleoni*), aspects which might suggest haste in discarding the bodies. Hypothetically, this haste could be explained by their cause of death, which was most likely strangulation. It is difficult to explain why the four individuals were buried inside a dwelling/annex structure, which was abandoned only after this event. The filling of the pit also points towards a swift episode, as the bodies were covered after the walls were burned down, using debris resulted from the collapse of the structure. Once more, hypothetically, the event might be connected to the abandonment of the entire Wietenberg habitation. In this regard, more data will be presented only after all the information recovered from this site will be properly processed, taking into consideration the general context.

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1



2

Pl. 1. Feature Cx 38 at the moment of its discovery (1) and after its partial excavation, with the skeletons exposed (2).



1



2

Pl. 2. The multiple burial, with details from its partial (1) and complete excavation (2).



1



2

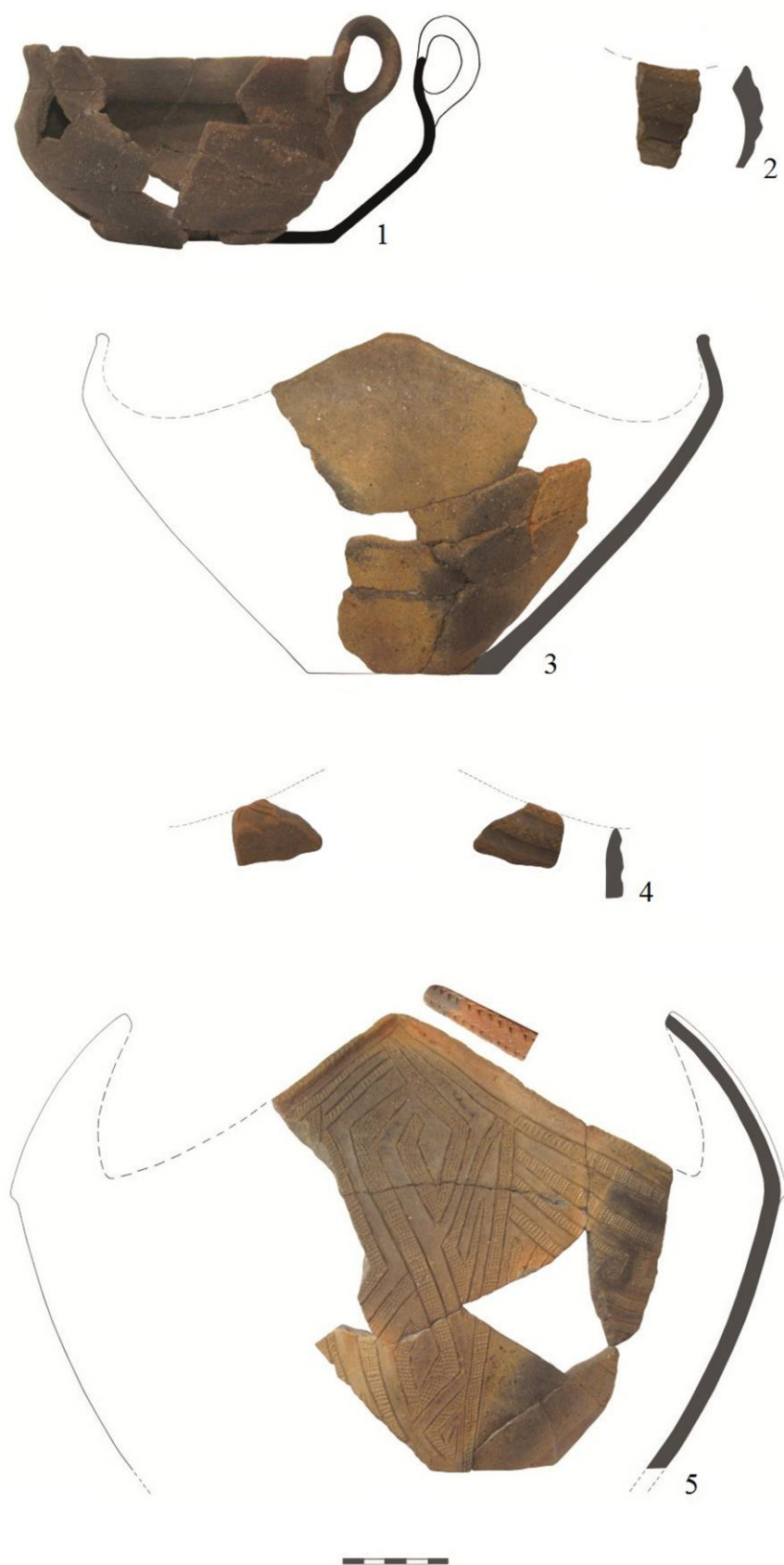
Pl. 3. Details with the skeletons overlapping the bowl and the *kantharos* (1) and the pit after its complete excavation (2).



Pl. 4. Coarse ware fragments found in Cx 38.



Pl. 5. Fine and semi-fine ware fragments found in Cx 38.



Pl. 6. Fully reconstructed vessel (1) and fragments of four-lobed bowls (2-5), found in Cx 38.



Pl. 7. Fragmentary lid (1) and cart wheel (2), found in Cx 38, *saltaleoni* (3), the stone pendant/polisher (4) and the whole vessels found in the multiple burial (5-6).