

BODY AND MATTER TRANSFORMATIONS. BURIALS IN KILNS AND OVENS DURING THE LATE IRON AGE*

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Abstract: The article is discussing two unusual archaeological contexts containing human remains from two different sites in the Lower Danube region which belong to the Late Iron Age. The first archaeological context comes from the vicinity of Krivina, Ruse District, in north-eastern Bulgaria, and consists of a burial in a large pottery kiln. The kiln was used during the 1st century BC or not later than the early 1st century AD, and it was still largely undamaged when it was turned into a burial structure containing the complete skeleton of a woman. Archaeological evidence seems to indicate that the deceased was connected, in one way or another, with the pottery production. The kiln in which she was buried was more likely perceived as symbolically belonging to her persona while alive. At the same time, the device was perhaps also considered an appropriate means of “transferring” her into the otherworld. The second archaeological context comes from the cemetery at Poienestii, Vaslui County, in eastern Romania, and consists of a late 5th-4th century BC burial in an oven. It was previously identified either as a failed cremation or as an unusual funerary chamber. However, its scope seems to have been different – namely to literally “prepare” the deceased for the encounter with divine beings. The main motivation of this practice seems to arise from the idea that the human sacrifice is one of the most efficacious means of restoring or legitimizing the social order by appealing to gods or ancestors, especially in socially challenging situations. Both archaeological contexts could be considered particular expressions of the social interplaying between the embodied individual identity and the spatial perception of the community as a physical and social body. On the other hand, they stand apart as material illustrations of the perception of fire as a powerful transformative force, both physically and symbolically, among two different communities.

Rezumat: Articolul discută două contexte arheologice neobișnuite care conțin rămășițe umane și care provin din două situri din zona Dunării de Jos, datate în cea de a doua epocă a fierului. Primul context provine din vecinătatea localității Krivina, districtul Ruse, în nord-estul Bulgariei și constă dintr-o înmormântare într-un cuptor ceramic de mari dimensiuni. Acest cuptor a fost utilizat pe parcursul sec. I a.Chr. sau nu mai târziu de începutul sec. I p.Chr., fiind aproape intact atunci când a fost transformat într-o structură funerară ce conținea scheletul complet al unei femei. Datele arheologice par să indice faptul că defuncta a fost legată într-un fel sau altul cu producția ceramică. Cuptorul în care a fost înmormântată a fost foarte probabil perceput ca aparținând în mod simbolic personalității sale când era în viață. În același timp, instalația a fost poate considerată un mijloc potrivit pentru a o „transfera” în lumea de dincolo. Al doilea context arheologic provine din necropola de la Poienestii, județul Vaslui, în estul României, constând dintr-un mormânt în cuptor datat între sfârșitul sec. V și

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sec. IV a.Chr. Acesta a fost anterior identificat fie ca o incinerare ratată, fie ca un tip neobișnuit de cameră funerară. Cu toate acestea, scopul său pare să fi fost diferit – literalmente să „prepare” defunctul pentru întâlnirea cu divinitățile. Motivația principală a acestei practici pare să provină din conceptul sacrificiului uman ca unul dintre cele mai eficiente mijloace de a restaura sau legitima ordinea socială prin apelul la zei sau strămoși, în special în situații dificile din punct de vedere social. Ambele contexte arheologice pot fi considerate expresii particulare ale interacțiunilor dintre expresia materială a identității individuale și percepția spațială a comunității ca entitate fizică și socială. Pe de altă parte, acestea se remarcă și ca materializări ale percepțiilor legate de foc ca forță transformatoare, fizică și simbolică, în cadrul celor două comunități.

Keywords: Late Iron Age, Lower Danube, unusual burial, fire installations.

Cuvinte cheie: perioada târzie a epocii fierului, Dunărea de Jos, înmormântări neobișnuite, instalații pentru foc.

INTRODUCTION

The article is discussing two particular archaeological contexts containing human remains from two different sites in the Lower Danube region which belong to the Late Iron Age. At the time of first publication, both were considered unusual burials due to the nature of the structures in which the deceased were laid to rest¹. Such funerary contexts are commonly listed in archaeological literature under different labels – “irregular”, “exceptional” (“Sonderbestattung” in German-language literature) or “deviant”² – mostly because they depart in one way or another from the mortuary patterns that seem to characterize a community, region or period of time. In most cases, what stands apart is the manner of treating the body or the burial place, or both. However, it was already noted that the funerary rites and rituals encountered within each community are far more diverse than usually presumed, being influenced by a series of factors: social and economic status and function, age, gender, ethnicity, religion etc. Furthermore, exceptional events and circumstances (social or military conflicts, illness, forced or voluntary migration, natural calamities etc) also have an impact on the choice of mortuary practices. Accordingly, some recent studies influenced by post-processualism and using ethnographic evidence for comparisons³ brought into discussion the motivations behind the occurrence of unusual burials, indicating that the life and identity of each individual and their perception within the community at the time of death shaped the choice of a particular type of funerary treatment.

These unusual funerary contexts could potentially shed light on various social-political, spiritual and even economic dynamics both within the community that had to deal with the respective deceased and at wider regional or even pan-regional level. At the same time, they could offer new insights into the ways in which the personhood and its relation with the physical body are acknowledged by a community.

KRIVINA – ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

The first archaeological context comes from the vicinity of Krivina, Ruse District, in north-eastern Bulgaria, and consists of a burial in a large Late Iron Age pottery kiln. The

¹ Vagalinski 2011, 219-222, Fig. 3-4; Vulpe 1953, 312-315, Fig. 97-99.

² Aspöck 2008, 29-30; Milella et al. 2015. See also the studies included in a recent volume dedicated to this kind of burials (Murphy 2008).

³ Aspöck 2008, with further bibliography.

site was initially identified in the late 1990s and in 2000 through field and geophysical survey, and was subsequently excavated, first in 2002 and then in 2005-2006 by Lyudmil Vagalinski from the Institute of Archaeology Sofia and his team⁴. Among various finds, a single large pottery kiln was also unearthed (Fig. 1), though no archaeological traces of other features related to pottery production were identified. The kiln's structure was extremely well preserved, aside from the top of the dome⁵. Morphologically, it belongs to a type that is commonly encountered in both Late Iron Age and Roman production sites, including sunken kilns with two chambers and a permanent open-topped superstructure; its perforated grate (or oven-floor) is supported by a median clay base, also known as a tongue⁶. Archaeological evidence indicates that the kiln was used during the 1st century BC or not later than the early 1st century AD⁷ to fire both hand-made and wheel-made pottery, being repaired at least twice⁸.

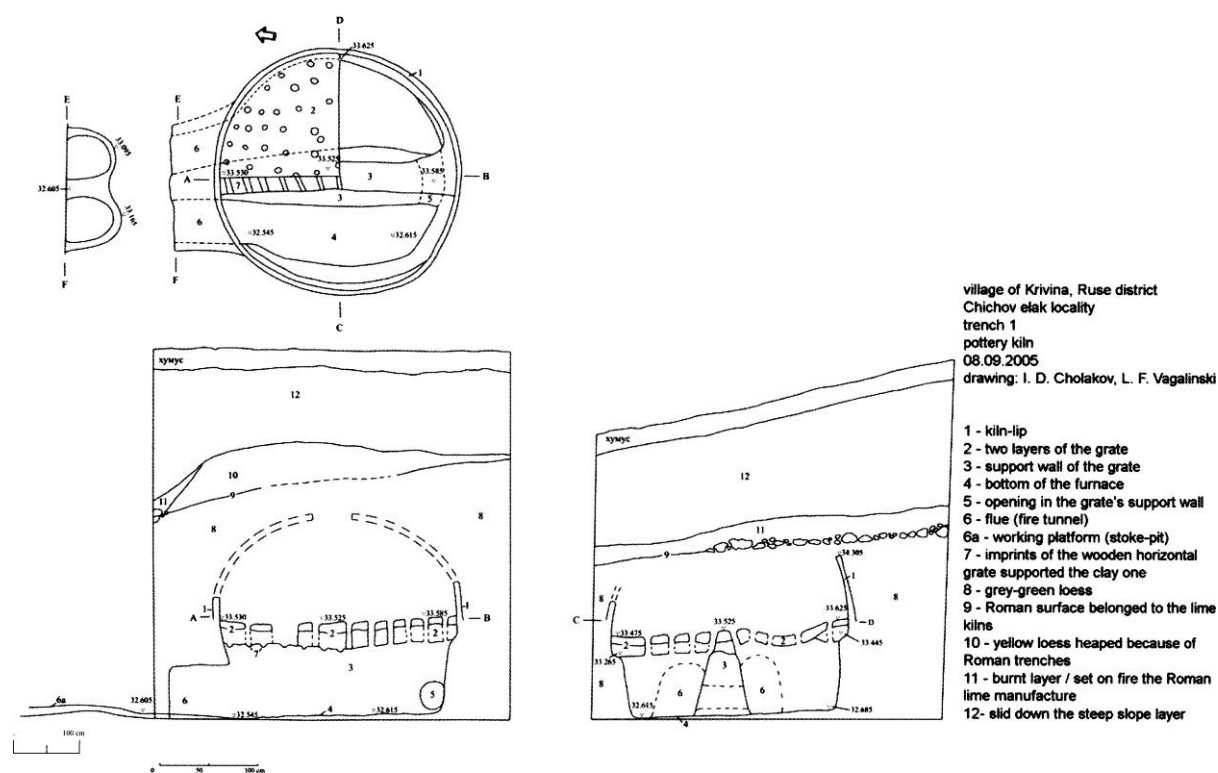


Fig. 1. The pottery kiln from Krivina, north-eastern Bulgaria (Vagalinski 2011).

⁴ Vagalinski 2011.

⁵ Vagalinski 2011, 219-222, Fig. 3-4.

⁶ See, for example, the kiln typologies proposed for Late Iron Age and Roman Britain (Swan 1984), Gaul (Dufay 1996) or pre-Roman Dacia (Matei 2007).

⁷ One amphora handle found in the abandonment fill was used as *terminus ante quem* for the kiln (Vagalinski 2011, 222, Fig. 5/4), but it was wrongly identified as belonging to the Dyczek 1 type (Dressel 2-4, see Dyczek 2001, 52-63) which was dated to ca. 30 BC – AD 150. Instead, the handle more likely belongs to a Knidian type amphora (also known as Pompeii 38) which was dated between the 1st century BC and the early 2nd century AD, see Martin-Kilcher 1994, 440, Fig. 198/1; Bezeczky 1998, 233.

⁸ Vagalinski 2011, 224-225, Fig. 5-7.

It was still largely undamaged when it was turned into a burial structure. At this stage, the complete skeleton of a woman who was about 35-40 years old was laid in supine position on the right half of the grate (Fig. 2)⁹. Her left leg is slightly bent against the firing chamber's wall, which may suggest that the corpse was introduced into the kiln through the open top, legs first, and the mourners might have struggled to lay her in the desired position due to the restricted access. The bones bear no traces of fire or of any other type of corpse processing. The author also noted that no funerary inventory was found together with the skeleton, so he assumed that is not a proper burial, the corpse being more likely discarded into the disused kiln.



Fig. 2. The female skeleton found in the pottery kiln at Krivina (photo Lyudmil Vagalinski).

Still, one hand-made jar with knobs and one so-called Dacian cup were found smashed on the grate (Fig. 3/1-2)¹⁰; they were considered debris from pottery loads previously fired into the kiln. However, they stand apart from the ceramic debris found in the combustion chamber, flue and stocking pit, which consists of small fragments of various vessels, because both could be completely reconstructed from the recovered fragments which were found on the grate (apart from a few small bits that had fallen through the grate openings into the combustion chamber).

⁹ Vagalinski 2011, 225-226, Fig. 4.

¹⁰ Vagalinski 2011, Fig. 5/1-2; Fig. 6.

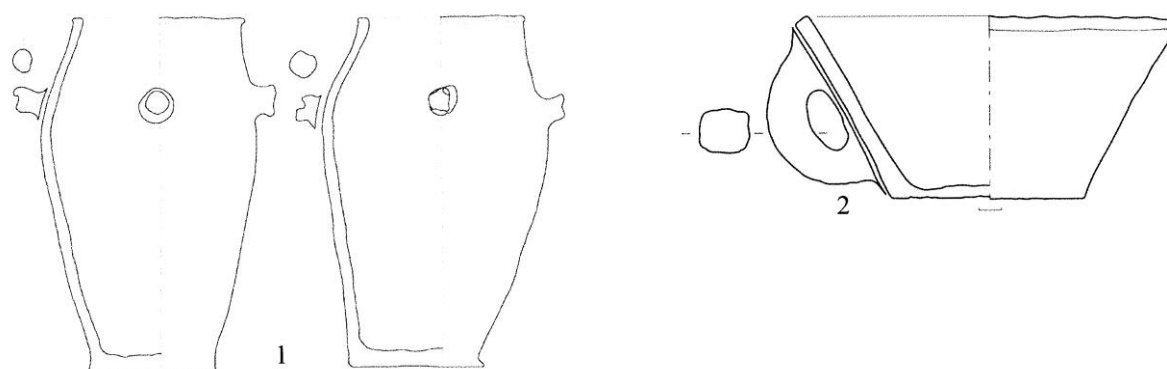


Fig. 3. Ceramic vessels used as grave-goods in the kiln burial at Krivina (Vagalinski 2011).

Thus, the burial in question could be interpreted as an inhumation, albeit using an unusual funerary structure. So far, no other similar burials have been identified in the Late Iron Age Lower Danube region or in the Carpathian Basin. Furthermore, it belongs to a period in which the practice of interring human remains in properly set up burials was largely abandoned in these regions. Only skeleton parts, cremated or not, were discovered in a variety of contexts dated to the LT C2 and LT D sub-phases¹¹, the great majority lacking the usual characteristics of a proper burial: the careful placing of human remains in a purposefully set up burial structure, accompanied by material evidence of the funerary rituals and other related practices (the so-called “*gestes funéraires*”)¹²; in one word, they are lacking the intentionality¹³. This absence was commonly interpreted as a consequence of some radical changes in the religious structures and concepts of the local communities¹⁴. However, the way in which the corpse is regarded and treated within each community, both concretely and symbolically, is directly related to the way in which the personhood and its relation with the physical body is acknowledged locally. Furthermore, the existence of different concepts of personhood may explain the variability noted in the mortuary treatment of different individuals and social groups within certain communities, defined by gender, age, economic or religious status¹⁵.

Thus, the question is why the community or the mourners from Krivina chose a pottery kiln as burial place? The answer could lay in the assumed identity and the social function and status of the deceased while alive and in the way in which her persona was perceived within the local community. Archaeological evidence seems to offer several hints related to these aspects.

First, the anthropological analysis indicates that the deceased was a woman, at least biologically¹⁶. Second, archaeological evidence seems to indicate that she was connected, in one way or another, with the pottery production. Although direct archaeological evidence

¹¹ See, for example, the article of Rustoiu in this volume.

¹² Leclerc 1990.

¹³ For the current debate concerning the concept of “grave” and the difficulties in identifying and interpreting the archaeological traces of funerary practices, see Kaliff, Oestigaard 2004.

¹⁴ Krämer 1985, 34-38; Babeş 1988, 23-29; Morris 1992, 47-48.

¹⁵ Fowler 2004, 44-55; Robb 2007; Popa 2014; Egri 2012, 507-509.

¹⁶ For the problem of gender identity in archaeological contexts, see for example Arnold 1995; Díaz-Andreu 2005.

attesting the activity of female potters is rather scarce¹⁷, several ethnographic studies indicate that they were commonly involved in this craft in many traditional societies¹⁸. Even in the case of specialized, large scale ceramic production centres, women still performed at least certain tasks (clay harvesting, moulding, finishing etc.). More often than not the entire family was involved, with a kin-based transfer of specific knowledge from one generation to another requiring several years of apprenticeship. The connection between women and pottery making was also symbolically charged, since the moulding of clay was often considered analogous to the creation or development of human beings¹⁹. As a consequence, several rules and taboos governed all aspects of the potters' activity, aiming to protect their persona, the working place and its output from outside interferences.

At the same time, the potters were often associated socially and symbolically with other "masters of fire", like the smelters and the smiths²⁰. These individuals were capable to control a force which was both useful and menacing, and transform the primordial matter into something radically different. Their association is thus related to the transformative nature of their crafts, which was perceived not only at the material level, but also at the physiological or mythical ones. In many cases these artisans were also acknowledged as "masters of the sacred" – shamans or healers; female potters often acted as midwives or matchmakers²¹. All of them were sought after due to their particular skills, yet the rest of the community often feared them because of their mysterious powers. In some societies, these artisans enjoyed a high social status, and some were even members of the elite, while in others they have a low status or were even treated as outcasts.

Another important observation is that the identity of these skilled individuals was commonly expressed in funerary contexts through practices and objects directly related to their craft. Among the illustrative examples can be cited numerous burials containing specific tools and even fragments of raw materials²². Such grave goods were chosen because they were perceived as intrinsic parts of the owner's identity. Ethnographic evidence also indicates that not only the tools were seen as such, but the entire workshop and its installations were considered part of the craftsman's persona in many societies²³. Among these, the kiln (or the furnace) was the symbolical central part of the workshop, intimately connected with the people who built and used it as a sort of primordial "womb" giving birth to complex things out of earth, air and fire. It has to be noted that bloomeries, forges and pottery kilns were usually located away from the living area of the community, for practical reasons but also because of the aforementioned perceived ambivalence of these craftsmen and of their activity.

On the basis of available archaeological evidence and the aforementioned ethnographic observations, it can be presumed that the woman from Krivina either belonged to a family specialized in ceramic craftsmanship or a proper potter herself. While she was alive, the kiln and every other object connected with her craft were more likely perceived as part of her

¹⁷ See some examples in London 2008, 159-160; Szpakowska 2012, 30.

¹⁸ Skibo, Schiffer 1995; Costin 1996; Armstrong et al. 2008, 520-523; Gosselain 2010, 206-210.

¹⁹ Gosselain 1999, 212-214; 2010; Haaland 2006, 82; Armstrong et al. 2008, 520.

²⁰ Eliade 1996, 78-85; Haaland et al. 2004, 157-161.

²¹ Eliade 1996, 78-82; Gosselain 1999, 207.

²² For examples from the Late Iron Age Carpathian Basin, see Rustoiu 2009 and Ramsel 2014 with further bibliography.

²³ Haaland et al. 2004; Haaland 2006; Armstrong et al. 2008, 520-523.

identity. When she died, the device was perhaps considered an appropriate means of symbolically transforming her persona into a different entity which was able to reach the otherworld, basically in the same way in which earth (clay) was turned into vessels able to enter the domestic world. The practice seems unusual, unless we consider that the entire period in question is characterised by a wide variety in what concerns the treatment of the corpse. A recent comprehensive study of the mortuary practices from the eastern Carpathian Basin and the northern Balkans during the final part of the Late Iron Age has shown that this variation is mostly determined by gender, age, social, economic or religious status, although other local aspects and influences can also be taken into consideration²⁴.

POIENEȘTI – ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

The second archaeological context comes from the cemetery at Poienеști, Vaslui County, in eastern Romania, and consists of a late 5th–4th century BC burial in an oven, which was excavated in 1949 by a team led by Radu Vulpe (Fig. 4)²⁵. When first published in 1953, it was considered that the large circular oven with a hemispherical vault was purposefully built to cremate the deceased, although the process had failed for unknown reasons. Inside the oven was found the skeleton of a man laid in supine position, accompanied by an iron sword and 14 bronze arrowheads. The skeleton bears some traces of fire, but the temperature was apparently insufficient to cremate the bones properly and they remained in anatomical connection.

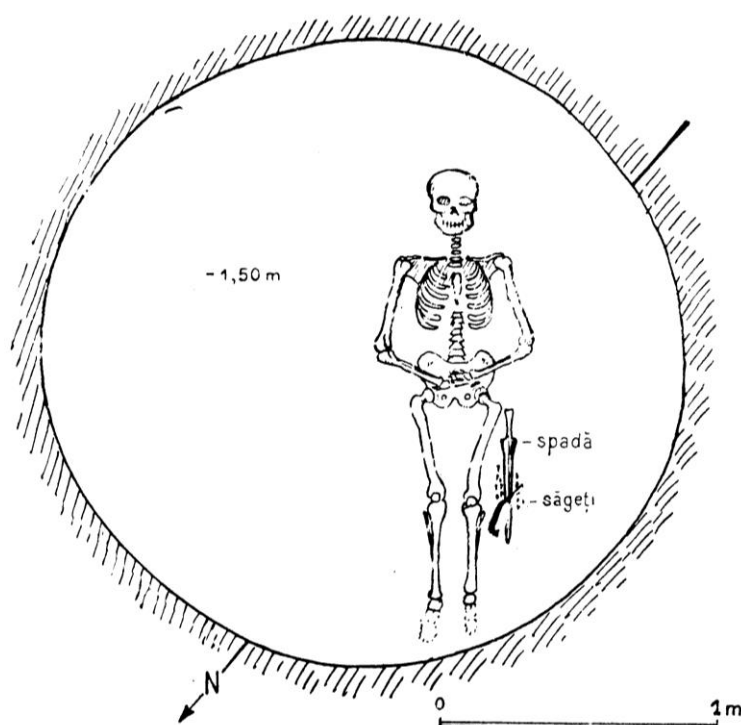


Fig. 4. The oven burial at Poienеști, Eastern Romania (Vulpe 1953).

²⁴ Popa 2014.

²⁵ Vulpe 1953, 312-315, Fig. 97-99.

More recently, Mircea Babeş rejected the interpretation of the oven as a cremation device and considered that it is an unusual form of funerary chamber²⁶. However, one would expect the funerary chamber to be covered by a mound²⁷ which, according to the archaeological report, did not exist in this case. Furthermore, funerary structures identified in flat graves from the Lower Danube region are all rectangular during this period²⁸. Still, Prof. Babeş is right when writing that the structure in question was not built to cremate a corpse. Instead, it seems that the scope was different – namely to literally prepare the deceased for the encounter with divine beings.

Returning to the oven in question, archaeological evidence indeed suggests that it was purposefully made for a single use, since the burnt traces inside it are not very strong²⁹. Aside from that, the oven is morphologically and technologically similar to many other vaulted fire installations used for cooking during the Late Iron Age³⁰. Only its size is unusual, since the diameter is of 2.30 m, almost twice as large as the average diameter of a regular oven. Scarce traces of charcoal and ash were found on the oven's hearth, which is consistent with the way in which such installations are normally used. They are usually heated up by burning a quantity of wood inside it, and once the interior is hot enough, the cinders and ash are removed and food is placed on the hearth to be cooked, either directly as in the case of bread or in various types of vessels.

Radu Vulpe suggested a failed cremation, but choosing an oven to cremate the deceased seems rather strange because such installations cannot develop or sustain a sufficiently high temperature to completely cremate a human corpse³¹. There are numerous contemporaneous funerary contexts, including at Poienestî, which indicate that open-air pyres were commonly used and this method never failed to consummate the human remains properly³². The skeleton in question bears only some burnt traces, indicating that the corpse was more likely placed inside the hot oven after removing the cinders and ash. There is no other archaeological evidence of a similar practice in the Lower Danube region or the Carpathian Basin during the Late Iron Age. The question is why this body was treated in this unusual way?

An important observation is that the oven is located on the western limit of the cemetery and at a certain distance from all other burials³³, suggesting an intentional separation (Fig. 5). However, the deceased doesn't seem to have been perceived as an outcast that had to be interred away from the consecrated burial plot since his weapons, an important indicator of identity and status, were carefully laid next to him. One other option would be that he was a foreigner, but this is less likely given the accompanying grave-goods and the fact that the use of ovens as burial structures is not attested in any of the

²⁶ Babeş, Miriţoiu 2011, 106; see also 2012, 140.

²⁷ See, for example, the burials from Enisala in northern Dobrogea (Simion 2003) or Thrace (Stoyanov, Stoyanova 2016), which belong to the same period.

²⁸ See some examples in Babeş, Miriţoiu 2011, Fig. 11-12; Sîrbu et al. 2008.

²⁹ Vulpe 1953, 312-313; Babeş, Miriţoiu 2011, 106.

³⁰ Rustoiu 1997, with many examples from different Late Iron Age sites.

³¹ For the technical and anthropological aspects of human cremation, see McKinley 1989; Oestigaard 2000, 45; Rebay-Salisbury 2010, 65.

³² Babeş, Miriţoiu 2011.

³³ Babeş, Miriţoiu 2011, 106, Fig. 11.

neighbouring communities or in the more distant ones. Consequently, it has to be assumed that the oven and its location were purposefully chosen due to some unusual circumstances.

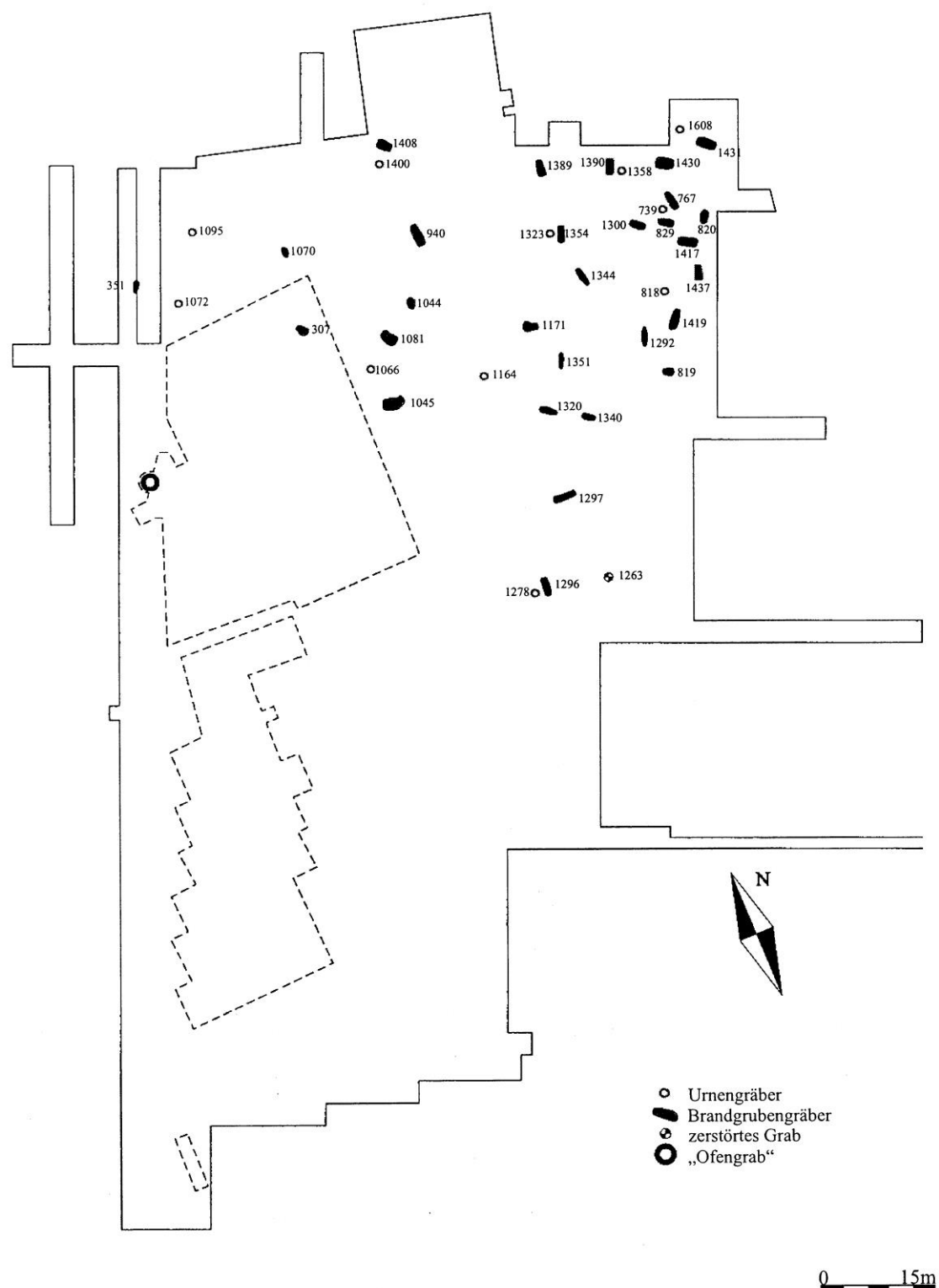


Fig. 5. Plan of the cemetery from Poieniști with the oven burial located on the western limit (Babeș, Mirițoiu 2012).

To find the motivation behind these choices, we have to turn to other spaces, this time to Late Iron Age Scandinavia. Here a series of funerary contexts seem to suggest that certain deceased were symbolically gifted as valuable meals to gods and/or ancestors³⁴. Several preparation techniques were identified, some involving defleshing, followed by the placing of cooked or uncooked human flesh and bones in different containers in the grave. The mourners used sunken hearths or cooking pits with hot stones, widespread in Scandinavia, to prepare the bodies before offering them to gods. The bones bearing specific cut-marks were occasionally wrapped in bark, textiles or animal pelts and then placed in a so-called “Vestland cauldron”. Sometimes the hearth or cooking pit was set up close to the grave, while in other situations the preparation probably took place within the household, so the cracked and burnt stones had to be removed and brought to the burial place because they were polluted by death.

Echoes of a similar practice are also present in Irish mythology, for example in the legend of Branwen, the daughter of Llyr, whose husband King Matholwch had a magic cauldron in which he cooked his dead warriors every night so they were reborn ready for battle³⁵. The episode seems to be also illustrated on one of the Gundestrup cauldron’s plates, where a large character is dipping a warrior in a vessel, though some specialists tend to interpret the scene as the depiction of a human sacrifice³⁶.

The main motivation of this practice seems to arise from the idea that the human sacrifice is one of the most efficacious means of restoring or legitimizing the social order by appealing to gods or ancestors, especially in socially challenging situations³⁷. The death of any member of the community was one such challenging event, threatening the internal structure and the often-complicated network of relationships established between its members and with other social entities. The social stress must have been even stronger when the leader of the community died. For that reason, each community developed an array of funerary and commemorative practices which sought to restore both the internal group structure and the related networks of relationships. One central practice was the “consumption”, literally or symbolically by fire, mutilation, drowning etc, of more-or-less large quantities of various offerings, or the ritual destruction of personal belongings of the deceased or of the gifts brought by mourners. Such ceremonies having both expiatory and propitiatory functions were usually organised in specially-designed places in which the offerings were displayed and “consumed” in one way or another³⁸.

In this context, it has to be noted the widespread symbolic connection between food consumption and mortuary practices among different communities. In some cases, lavish food offerings usually including meat were accompanying the deceased into the afterlife. Funerary feasts were organized to restore the social cohesion disturbed by death by facilitating the reincorporation of the mourners into the social body and at the same time the safe transition of the deceased from the world of the living into the otherworld. These are also a form of mnemonic practice, involving sensorial and emotional experiences, which

³⁴ Oestigaard 2000; see also Back Danielsson 2008, 318.

³⁵ Green 1997, 58.

³⁶ A summary of these hypotheses in Kaul 2006, 856.

³⁷ Oestigaard 2000, 42-44; human sacrifices could also have other motivations, see a summary in Aldhouse Green 2006, 163-176.

³⁸ Egri 2012, 508-509, with further bibliography.

contributes to the construction, reiteration and manipulation of collective memory and identity. According to Hamilakis, “mortuary feasting [...] is a mode of generalised consumption where food, bodies, persons and memories are consumed”³⁹.

Returning to Late Iron Age Scandinavia, it has been presumed that at least some of the individuals whose body was prepared in the aforementioned manner could have been community leaders, so their cooking and serving helped reiterating the communion between their people and their gods and ancestors through an exceptional feast⁴⁰. As worthy individuals, whose death was highly valorised, they played the central role in this feast, restoring and legitimizing the social order and, at the same time, affirming the status of their family or clan.

One other aspect which may help interpreting the funerary context in question concerns the symbolism of the hearth. Anthropological evidence indicates that the hearth was considered the focal point of the household by all communities, holding together the house and its inhabitants both practically and symbolically through a variety of sensorial and affective experiences⁴¹. Accordingly, there are numerous hearth-centred rituals and beliefs, some connected with the funerary domain. Thus an oven or a cooking pit that helped transforming the deceased leader into divine nourishment could have also been regarded as means of connecting his people with the land they occupied, maybe even legitimizing territorial claims.

Archaeological evidence seems to indicate that the oven burial from Poienești is a result of this kind of exceptional practice, in which a deceased of significant status was symbolically sacrificed to gods or ancestors through cooking. The associated inventory including a sword and arrowheads indicates that he was a warrior, or at least had a social status which allowed him to bear weapons. He was sacrificed on the consecrated burial plot, yet the exact location was kept apart due to its particular meaning and scope; he could have even been the founding father of the community. It is worth mentioning that the same community used to handle the remains of certain individuals in different ways during successive funerary practices⁴². Some could have been commemorative practices carried out at certain chronological intervals, being perhaps related to the cult of ancestors.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of these two archaeological contexts points to the fact that such funerary practices, though unusual, could shed light on particular social and ideological dynamics that were determined by the perception of personhood and its relation with the physical body within a given community. Thus, in the case of the female potter from Krivina, her persona seems to have been perceived as a sum of actions and concepts resulting both from her social status and function and the way in which the community perceived her symbolic bond with the craftsmanship, which together apparently kept her at the fringes of the local community. When she died, the device was perhaps considered an appropriate means of symbolically transforming her persona into a different entity which was able to reach the

³⁹ Hamilakis 1998, 117.

⁴⁰ Oestigaard 2000, 49-55.

⁴¹ Haaland 1997, 381; Bowes 2015, 213.

⁴² Babeș, Mirițoiu 2011; Babeș, Mirițoiu 2012.

otherworld, basically in the same way in which earth (clay) was turned into vessels able to enter the domestic world.

In the case of the warrior from Poienеști, his persona was also perceived as a sum of actions and attitudes resulting from his social status and function, but in this case the deceased was not only part of the community, but perhaps one of its leaders. Either his death or the moment when he died must have been exceptional, triggering the need of the community to offer him as a highly valuable gift to gods or ancestors. The manner in which his corpse was prepared alludes to a multi-sensorial experience of sharing and communicating which transcended spiritual boundaries.

The two funerary contexts discussed above share a common characteristic – the use of a fire installation to transform symbolically the human body into a different entity which was able to travel from the world of the living into the otherworld. Archaeological and ethnographic studies have shown that both the pottery kiln and the hearth have not only practical but also symbolic functions related to the transformation of matter.

In conclusion, both archaeological contexts discussed above could be considered particular expressions of the social interplaying between the embodied individual identity and the spatial perception of the community as a physical and social body. On the other hand, they stand apart as material illustrations of the perception of fire as a powerful transformative force, both physically and symbolically, among two different communities, each belonging to a different phase of the Late Iron Age.

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