

## DACIAN HUMAN PRONE DEPOSITION FROM MICEȘTI-CIGAȘ (ALBA COUNTY, ROMANIA)

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**Abstract:** The site from Cigaș, where 50 years before D. Berciu made researches (Alba Iulia-Ijac), was rediscovered at the end of the last century by students from the Alba Iulia University. In 1999, in the Southern part of the site, towards Mureș River, few trial trenches were opened. Starting with 2007, on the former farming land corresponding to Micești village, a new neighborhood has been developing. As a consequence, several archaeological rescue excavations were conducted in this area, as they were needed for the construction of houses or for implementing the utilities.

As a result of the archaeological research, the presence of settlements and funerary areas belonging to different periods could be determined: Copper Age (Coțofeni culture), Early Bronze Age (Gornea-Foeni group), Middle Bronze Age (Wietenberg culture), Late Bronze Age (Cugir-Band group), Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age (Gáva culture), Early Iron Age (Basarabi culture), Classical Dacian period (1<sup>st</sup> century BC–1<sup>st</sup> century AD) and Early Middle Ages (9–10<sup>th</sup> centuries). All the structures belonging to these historical periods are deepened into the ground from the only archaeological deposit that preserves artifacts corresponding to all of them.

Among other Dacian discoveries from Cigaș we mention feature C. 64/2009, which is consistent with the prone deposition of a deceased in the settlement. For a better understanding of such a deposition we are going to present the context of the discovery and the analysis of the skeleton. At the same time, we presented some theoretical aspects that can help to interpret this feature, in order to determine whether we are dealing with an inhumation, a deposition that is related to another type of ritual or with a simple act of discarding.

**Rezumat:** Situl din punctul Cigaș de la Micești a fost redescoperit la finalul secolului trecut de studenții Universității 1 Decembrie 1918 din Alba Iulia. Săpături arheologice fuseseră întreprinse cu aproximativ 50 de ani înainte de Berciu (punctul Alba Iulia-Ijac). Sondaje de verificare a sitului au fost efectuate în anul 1999, în partea de sud, dinspre râul Mureș. Începând cu anul 2007, pe fostul teren agricol de lângă satul Micești se construiește un cartier de case. Numeroase săpături arheologice preventive au fost determinate de punerea în aplicare de proiecte de construcție: fundații de case și șanțuri pentru rețele.

Cercetările arheologice au evidențiat prezența unor așezări și zone funerare din epoci diferite: eneolitic final (cultura Coțofeni), bronz timpuriu (Gornea-Foeni group), bronz mijlociu (cultura Wietenberg), bronz târziu (grupul Cugir-Band), bronz târziu/fier timpuriu (cultura Gáva), fier mijlociu (cultura Basarabi), epoca dacică (sec. I a.Chr.–I p.Chr.) și epoca medievală timpurie (sec. IX–X).

Din așezarea dacică nu se păstrează un nivel distinct. În singurul nivel arheologic atestat în situl de la Micești se găsesc amestecate materiale arheologice din toate epocile, păstrându-se doar complexe de tip adâncit. Printre complexe dacice descoperite în punctul Cigaș se află și o groapă în care a fost descoperit un schelet așezat cu fața în jos (C. 64/2009).

Pentru înțelegerea unei astfel de depuneri am prezentat atât contextul descoperirii împreună cu analiza asupra scheletului, cât și un cadru mai larg în care este plasat acest tip de depunere. În același timp, am dezbătut unele probleme teoretice care pot fi aduse în discuție în cazul interpretării unui asemenea context, pentru a

*determina dacă putem vorbi despre o înmormântare, despre o depunere care ține de un alt ritual sau de un simplu act de debarasare a cadavrului.*

**Keywords:** *Dacian settlement, pit, inhumation, deposition, prone.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *așezare dacică, groapă, înmormântare, depunere cu fața în jos.*

## INTRODUCTION

Micești-Cigaș site was discovered at the end of the last century by students from Alba Iulia University. In 1999, in the Southern part of the site, towards River Mureș, a survey consisting of few trial trenches was carried out. Since 2007, on the former farming land corresponding to Micești village, a new house neighborhood has been developing and, as a consequence, several rescue excavations were conducted in this area.

The archaeological site at Micești-Cigaș (Alba Iulia) is situated on a terrace of Ampoi River, at 500-850 m W from the watercourse. Ampoi River flows into Mureș at 4.5 km SE from the site, positioned in the western part of Alba-Turda Depression which is crossed from N to S by Mureș, creating a natural border between the Transylvanian Plateau (towards E) and the Apuseni Mountains (towards W) (Fig. 1/1–2).

On an 11 ha surface, elongated in the NNW-SSE direction, along the Ampoi terrace, slightly higher than the floodplain, several archaeological remains and artefacts from different periods were discovered: Copper Age (Coțofeni culture); Early Bronze Age (Gornea-Foeni group); Middle Bronze Age (Wietenberg culture); Late Bronze Age (Cugir-Band group); Early Iron Age (Gáva and Basarabi cultures); Classical Dacian period (1<sup>st</sup> century BC–1<sup>st</sup> century AD); Early Middle Ages (9–10<sup>th</sup> centuries). In the site at Micești there was found only one archaeological deposit of a dark-brown color and of 0.15-0.35 m thickness, overlapped by the lighter brown color arable soil, of 0.10-0.20 m thickness. This is the deposit in which artifacts were discovered from the different ages identified at Micești. An overlapping of levels is excluded, as each habitation period was followed by an abandonment one. The features were identified on the base of horizontal stratigraphy. The archaeologically sterile soil was identified starting with 0.30-0.55 m depth<sup>1</sup>.

The rescue archaeological excavations from 2009, 2012 and 2015 at Micești lead to the discovery of 8 features from the Classical Dacian period: a deepened dwelling, storage pits and other pits probably with ritual meaning (Fig. 1/3). As the excavations were random, there are long distances between these features, the most Northern being at 310 m NNW from the most Southern one.

Pit C. 64, which is the subject of our discussion, was investigated in 2009, in the context of implementing utilities in the new neighborhood.

### FEATURE C. 64

The pit has a circular shape in planum, identified at 1.02 m depth. It overlaps a deepened feature dated to Gáva culture (C. 25-09) (Fig. 2/1–2). At the base of the pit, at 1.50 m depth, in the S-SE edge a human skeleton placed face-down was discovered (Fig. 2/3). Near the skull a bronze lock ring was found (Fig. 3/6). The fill of the pit contained handmade and wheel made potsherds and a rotating grinder fragment (Fig. 3/7). The ceramic material from the

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<sup>1</sup> Bălan, Ota 2012, 41-45.

Micești site belongs to the Classical Dacian period<sup>2</sup> and we assume that the human bone remains are contemporary to it (Fig. 4).

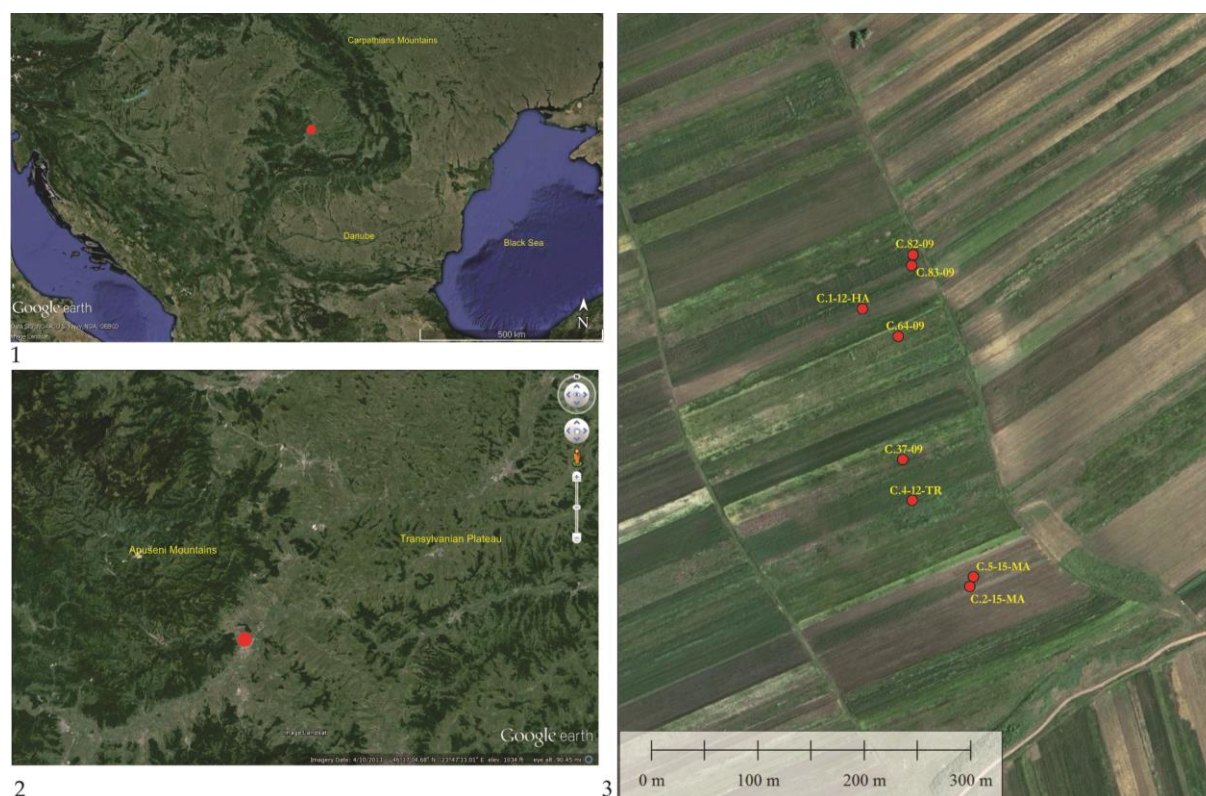


Fig. 1. 1. Location of the site in the Carpathian Basin (Google Earth image); 2. Location of the site in Alba Iulia-Turda Depression (Google Earth image); 3. Dacian features from the site at Mincești on an orthophotoplan.

The skeleton was discovered in extended position, facing down, with the right arm's elbow flexed in the thoracic cavity area and the palm placed under the forehead, while the left arm also has the elbow flexed with the palm placed in the pelvic area. The knees are slightly flexed (Fig. 3/1, 5).

### THE OSTEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS<sup>3</sup> AND INTERPRETATION

The osteological analysis determined that the skeleton belongs to a possible 38-44 years old woman and it did not reveal any peri-mortem injuries that could represent the cause of death. The anthropological observations pointed out certain pathologies that gave us an insight about the activities and life of the woman. The skeleton C. 64 presents patellar tufting, caused by ossification of the *m. quadratus femoris*. Olecranon tufting is also noted and is caused by ossification of the *m. triceps brachii* tendon<sup>4</sup>. The left and right calcanei present

<sup>2</sup> Crișan 1969, 151-233.

<sup>3</sup> Osteological analysis was made by Danilelle Hill (Cambridge Archaeological Unit, University of Cambridge).

<sup>4</sup> van der Merwe et al. 2012.

calcaneal spurs. Osteophyte growth is seen on all vertebral bodies specifically on the lumbar vertebrae including bone ankylosing. Minimal osteophytic growth can be seen on all joint surfaces. Although C. 64 does not present eburnation on the present bones, the osteophyte formation is likely osteoarthritis which is a very common joint disease and involves breakdown of the articular cartilage causing sclerosis, eburnation, and eventually osteophyte formation<sup>5</sup>.

The presence of the Schmorl's nodes was noticed, which are known as inter-vertebral disc hernias and occur due to degeneration of the inter-vertebral disc<sup>6</sup> (Fig. 3/2). This causes a depression on the inferior and superior surfaces of the vertebral body. The presence of dental abscesses is another health problem observed on the skeleton (Fig. 3/4). Dental abscesses form from infection of the dental pulp which is usually preceded by dental caries. There are two forms of dental abscess; acute and chronic, of which acute is the most common. An acute abscess occurs when pus from an already infected tooth tracks through the bone to form a circular hole of less than 3 mm in diameter. With chronic infections, the abscess becomes much larger, forming a fistula in the surrounding bone<sup>7</sup>. There are 3 acute abscesses seen in C. 64 above the upper left canine, first premolar, and second premolar. Dental caries was noted in these teeth which are most likely the cause of the abscesses, which lead to the presence of periodontal disease<sup>8</sup>. Unintentional, also known as occupational tooth mutilation is the sever abrasions that occur from occupations such as stripping reeds<sup>9</sup>. In what concerns the healed rib fracture (Fig. 3/3), this is common in the archaeological record and it could occur both as a result of an accident or violence<sup>10</sup>.

## THEORETICAL ASPECTS

One of the main problems in interpreting the discoveries of such type relates to the question if we are dealing with an inhumation or with some type of deposition that is related to a non-funerary practice. This is why it is important to firstly establish the terminological aspects and to determine what is understood by inhumation, burial and deposition.

Inhumation can be perceived as an intentional deposition of a deceased in a place specially built for it and accompanied by a funerary ritual. The ritual is a repetitive action which has a symbolic or religious meaning<sup>11</sup>. Rituals are symbolic performances which unite members of a category of people in a shared pursuit that speaks of, and to their basic values or that creates or confirms a world of meanings shared by all of them alike<sup>12</sup>. The term burial is synonymous to the act of disposing the corpse in western society<sup>13</sup>.

There are studies that discuss the differences between depositions, burials and inhumations. The deposition is intentional, but not necessarily an inhumation, it can be part of a ritual, but not a funerary one, which means that it can be neither a burial nor an

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<sup>5</sup> Ortner 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Aufderheide, Rodriguez-Martin 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Waldron, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> White, Folkens 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Aufderheide, Rodriguez-Martin 2008.

<sup>10</sup> van Staa et al. 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Renfrew 2007, 9.

<sup>12</sup> Baumann 1992, 98.

<sup>13</sup> Parker Pearson 1995, 5.

inhumation<sup>14</sup>. It can also mean the ritual placing into the ground of the corpse, of the cinerary remains, usually together with grave goods, according to the funerary practices of the community<sup>15</sup>. Burial is the act of placing artifacts or ecofacts in the ground and it might not have a spiritual significance. It can be the result of sacred or profane practices at the same time<sup>16</sup>. It can represent the discard act of the corpse outside the funerary and sacrificial space as a prophylactic measure of the community and not a ritual practice that comes from a certain funerary or sacrificial ideology<sup>17</sup>. Inhumation is the ritual of deposition and the treatment of the deceased's body according to certain norms<sup>18</sup> or the ceremony of placing the corpse in the grave or of the cinerary remains, when the rituals imposed by the funerary ideology are completed. In extension, also the grave goods in a cenotaph can be considered inhumation<sup>19</sup>. Burial and funerary treatment are not synonyms. Firstly, the deceased's body is seen as rubbish that needs to be discarded of, and for this, it needs certain treatments, some of them accelerating the process of decomposition, such as exposing or cutting it into pieces<sup>20</sup>.

The funerary rite represents the actual way in which the community deals with the deceased, and it is the practical representation of a religious expression through which humans define their conceptions about divinities and the other world, outlining the desire to integrate in the universe. The corpse can be: incinerated, inhumed, exposed/decomposed and then inhumed, thrown away/ abandoned<sup>21</sup>. We can discuss in this case whether we are dealing with a symbolic or practical act, or whether there can be a connection between the two.

Irregular/ deviant burials are those inhumations that differ from the normal funerary rite from a certain period, region or cemetery. Deviant burials are generally associated with bizarre burials such as decapitations or the deposition of the body in strange or unusual positions, the differences can be spotted in the position of the body or the treatment upon it, the location or the construction of the grave or the type of the used grave goods<sup>22</sup>.

The studies on unusual burials<sup>23</sup> start from G. Wilke, who is the first to interpret this type of treatment upon the body of the deceased<sup>24</sup>. Together with examples from different periods, the La Tène discovery from Erfurt is presented. The author argues that this type of burial is an intentional practice. After this article the studies on inhumations that are considered to be different from the norm were interpreted as a special behaviour towards a certain category of people<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> Boulestin, Baray 2010, 18.

<sup>15</sup> Sîrbu 2003, 16.

<sup>16</sup> Boulestin, Baray 2010, 18.

<sup>17</sup> Sîrbu 2003, 18.

<sup>18</sup> Boulestin, Baray 2010, 18.

<sup>19</sup> Sîrbu 2003, 19.

<sup>20</sup> Boulestin 2010, 150.

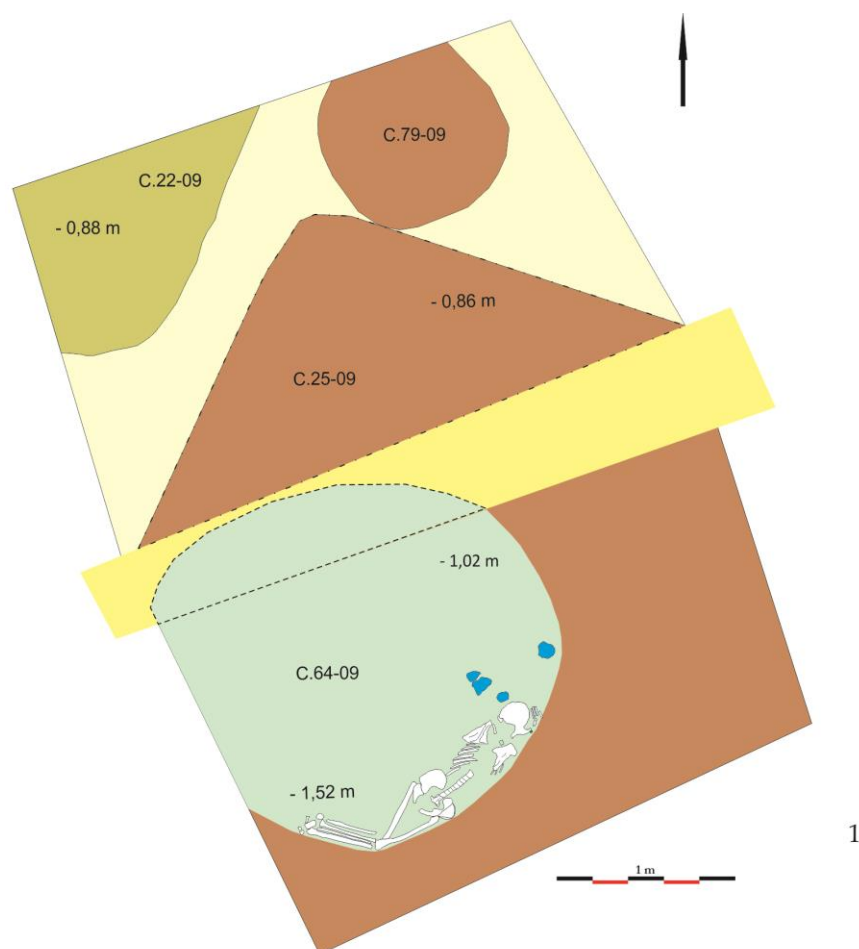
<sup>21</sup> Sîrbu 2003, 24.

<sup>22</sup> Aspöck 2008, 17.

<sup>23</sup> We used the term *burials* because this is the word used by the author.

<sup>24</sup> Wilke 1931, 1933.

<sup>25</sup> In the same period, G. Childe 1930, mentions the fact that there are certain burials which are different from the ones of the majority because they belong to foreign persons.



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Fig. 2. 1. Drawing of feature C. 64-09 and features C.25-09, C.79-09 (Gáva culture) and C.22-09 (without dating elements); 2. Photography of features C.64-09, C.25-09, C.79-09; 3. Human skeleton from C. 64-09.

The unusual position of the body and the presence of the skeleton in the settlement, which is not the normal funerary space, are considered markers of irregular burials. Cemetery/necropolis is a notion that defines the funerary space, which has an intern unity and structure which delimits it from other types of burials (in settlements or sanctuaries).



The cemetery is a circumscribed space, even if its limits are not always archaeologically detected. Burials inside the settlement are considered to be related to the urbanization phases of certain populations and at the same time to the exceptional role played by certain members of the society<sup>26</sup>. The most concise presentation of the theory concerning deviant burials is rendered by R. Meyer-Orlac in a diagram of behaviour, in which the cases that could lead to these practices are analyzed. She discusses both life and death events that can determine deposition of the body different from the norm. The explanations given for the presence of face-down depositions are as follows: they are burials of alien persons; they were persons who died in violent circumstances; they are the result of certain events from the life of the deceased; or the fear of the dead<sup>27</sup>. Another explanation refers to the desire of the community to humiliate the deceased<sup>28</sup>. A deviant burial can be recognized observing the post mortem treatment, which is different from the one performed on the majority. It can be a consequence of life or death events<sup>29</sup> that are important for shaping the individual's identity among the rest of the members of the community<sup>30</sup>. In order to better understand an unusual burial, we have to try to find clues both in the pit and in the anthropological analysis to identify information about the nature of life, status and manner of death of an individual: like the evidence of trauma, disease and/or deformity in the skeleton may offer an insight into an individual's deviant treatment<sup>31</sup>.

## PRONE DEPOSITIONS

There are cases in which the deceased were deposited in a different manner from the rest of the community members as a result of certain social or religious practices or their remains are preserved inside the settlement<sup>32</sup>. One of these situations is the prone deposition, signalled by C. Arcini, who publishes in 2009 a catalogue of such cases discovered by that time all over the world<sup>33</sup>. There are also several articles that discuss particular situations from different periods and places. In what concerns the ancient Egypt we can encounter these kinds of irregularities in burials as prone, tying parts of the body or placing stones, for the deceased not to come back, because it was feared of. These practices being attested in written sources<sup>34</sup>. The same discussion has been brought up for cases of prone depositions from other periods, such as the Late Bronze Age or the Roman Italy<sup>35</sup>. They are considered to be a characteristic of marginality and social exclusion. In Early Iron Age Austria, a pit with prone deposition was identified at Leonding<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Sîrbu 2003, 16.

<sup>27</sup> Meyer-Orlac 1997, 10.

<sup>28</sup> Toplak 2015, 79.

<sup>29</sup> Aspöck 2008, 27.

<sup>30</sup> Saxe 1970.

<sup>31</sup> Tsaliki 2008, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Perrin 2007, 107.

<sup>33</sup> Arcini 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Kohse 2013, 87.

<sup>35</sup> Costantini 2013, 114-116.

<sup>36</sup> Trebsche 2013, 396, 397.

The explanations which were offered for prone depositions are usually related to *fear of the dead*<sup>37</sup>. A. Tsaliki introduces alongside necrophobia the notion of “*archaeology of fear*” and she associated it to different practices, defining the main aspects through which unusual burials can be distinguished: primary or secondary burials in unusual positions – comparing them with the ones that usually appear in a community in a certain period –, skeletons discovered in wells, pits or kilns, or deposited face-down, collective burials, isolated incineration burials in inhumation cemeteries and vice-versa, or isolated, sometimes associated to ritual activities<sup>38</sup>. Some hypotheses which were formulated for the presence of necrophobia were also related to different pathologies that the deceased could suffer from or a violent death<sup>39</sup>. This practice was used to forbid the soul to leave the body or to return to it<sup>40</sup> or to protect the living people from the evil eye<sup>41</sup>. Fear of the death needs a cultural and a religious response<sup>42</sup>. L. Pauli suggests that the increased number of burials in strange positions is the result of profound changes in religious, cultural and political spheres. He categorized two groups who received different treatment at death: *mors immatura* (children and unmarried women) and dangerous dead (people who are different during life: shamans, witches, medicine men or whose death circumstances are different)<sup>43</sup>.

According to several scholars, the face-down or prone deposition represents a clue for the deviant/irregular burials<sup>44</sup>.

## DACIAN HUMAN DEPOSITIONS

During the Classical Dacian period many human skeletons were discovered placed in unusual positions, in settlement structures or in isolated pits. They were interpreted in the same manner because a standardized practice was not observed. There are few articles to indicate the importance of this in Romanian literature, this may be due to the lack of examples in Romania or the fact that inhumations in settlements is a relatively recent subject.

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<sup>37</sup> Aspöck 2008, 22; Gardela 2015, 99-123: discussing about the prone burials during Early Middle Age Poland gives all the explanations that he could find for the deposition of certain individuals in face-down, considering ethnographic sources: the wish of the deceased, the association with the idea of the „evil eye” which could bring misfortune, fear of something coming out of the body or entering the body, a result of a clumsy or fast funeral, the attempt to condemn the dead, a practice designated for foreign people, a marker of the fact that the person was buried alive.

<sup>38</sup> Tsaliki 2008, 3.

<sup>39</sup> Ucko 1969.

<sup>40</sup> Wilke 1933, 460.

<sup>41</sup> Wilke 1933, 457.

<sup>42</sup> Moore Williamson, 2008, 5.

<sup>43</sup> Aspöck 2008, 20.

<sup>44</sup> The literature concerning the depositions inside the settlement and in strange positions was developed starting with G. Wilke, and then with the mentions of G. Childe. The first interpretations were referring to them as deviant burials or *sonderbestattung*: Meyer-Orlac 1997; Murphy 2008; Reynolds 2009, but, due to the debate on the negative connotation of the terms, lately there was preferred a more neutral term: irregular burial: Müller-Scheeßel 2013, 1; Weiss-Krejci 2013, 285.





Fig. 3. 1, 5. Photo details of the skeleton in C.64; 2. Schmorl's nodes on a lumbar vertebra; 3. Healed rib fracture; 4. Dental abscess and mutilation; 6. Stone grinder found in the pit; 7. Lock ring worn by the deceased.

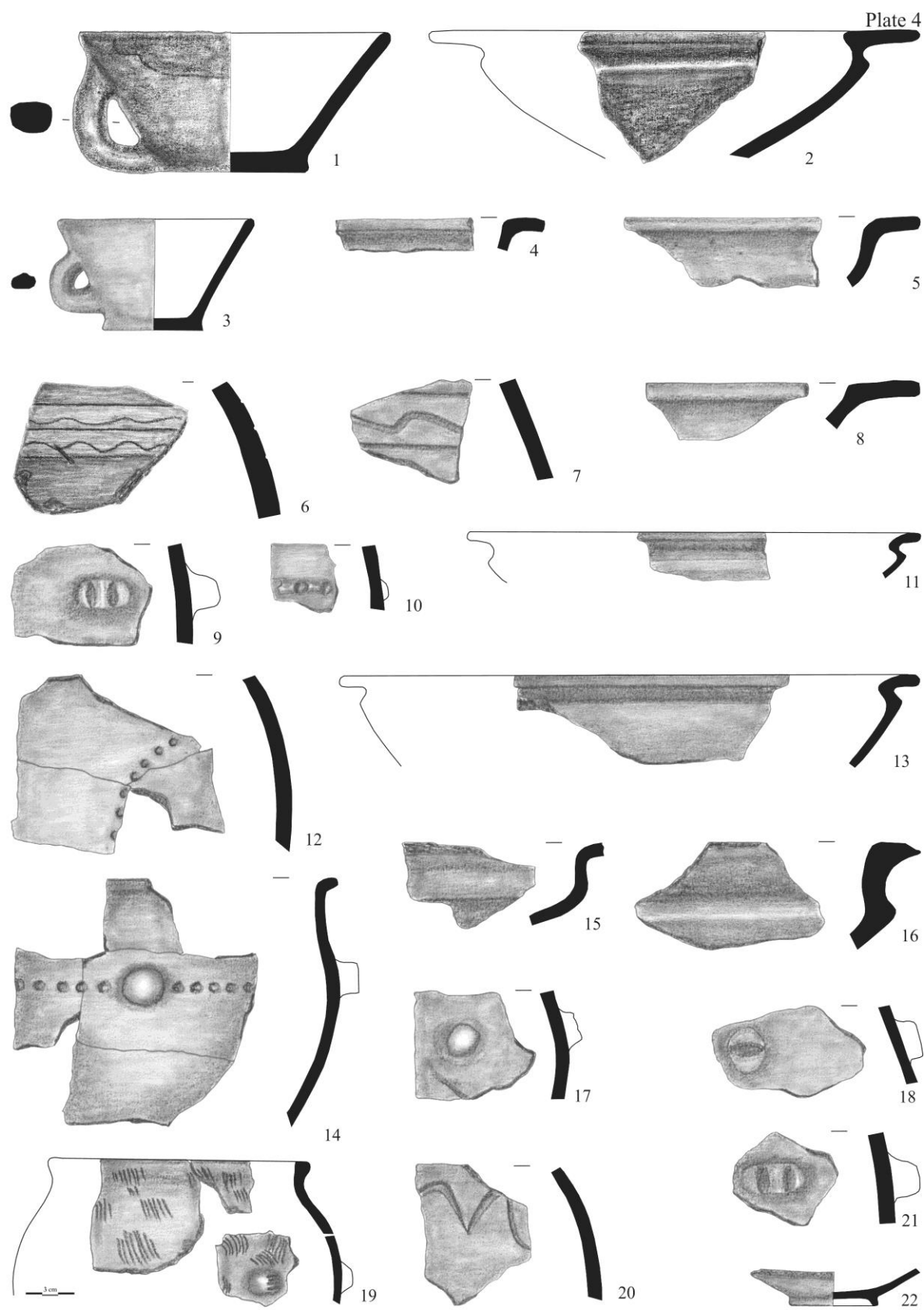


Fig. 4. 1-22. Pottery fragments discovered in the Dacian features from Micești.

In what concerns inhumations during the Dacian period, the most complete study is the one written by Valeriu Sîrbu<sup>45</sup>. He does not discuss in particular about the prone depositions, as all the cases he published are of skeletons placed in strange positions, situation considered a normal practice for Dacian inhumations. He observes a small number of burials between the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. He identifies 150 cases during this time frame. The decreasing number of Dacian burials starts from the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, to reach its peak during the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. The few inhumation burials from this period, of complete skeletons, that can be found in settlements, are characterized by the diverse positions in which they were deposited: crouched, almost vertical, prone at Bordușani (Ialomița), Brad (Bacău), Budești (Călărași), Celei (Dolj), Poiana (Galați), Sighișoara (Mureș)<sup>46</sup>, to which we add the discovery at Micești-Cigaș. At the same time, he classifies the human bone remains in the Dacian period as follows: skeletons, parts of skeletons and isolated human bones in non-funerary contexts<sup>47</sup>. The discoveries at Hunedoara-Grădina Castelului, where a large area with such depositions was identified, were interpreted as inhumations, exposure or decomposing of the body and cases of handling human bones<sup>48</sup>.

In the following sites depositions of prone burials from the Classical Dacian period were discovered. At Bordușani (Ialomița county), at the entrance of a surface dwelling the skeleton of a 12-13 years old child was found, strongly flexed, with the head towards SE and the knees raised towards the chin, the body placed on one side and slightly turned face-down. On the skull and shoulders there was placed half of a handmade fruit bowl and on the pelvic area a big stone<sup>49</sup>.

In pit 36 (diameter of 1.75m, depth of 0.75m) from Brad (Negri district, Bacău county) the skeleton of a 35-40 years old woman was found, flexed on the right side, oriented N-S. It had as inventory two bronze earrings, discovered on the chest, and on the pelvic area a stone-grinder and a bone handle<sup>50</sup>.

At Budești (Călărași county) two pits with human skeletons were discovered in 1989. Pit 7 was cylindrical (diameter of 1.76m, depth of 0.40m), it had a flat base and it contained the human bones of two individuals. Skeleton nr. 1 belongs to an adult, placed on the right side, with the head towards E, with the face down and the body slightly curved. The left hand was a little further from the body, the palm bent and brought near the chest and the right palm to the left shoulder. The pelvic area and the legs were detached and placed on the back. Inside the pit some sherds from two handmade jars and a cup, fragments from another cup, wheel made vessel and a bone from a big animal were found<sup>51</sup>.

At Celei (Dolj county) under the rampart of the fortified settlement, excavated in 1983, three child skeletons were found in an oval pit, at the same depth. Skeleton 2 is of a 12-14 years old child placed in prone position, oriented SE-NW, with the arms placed under the body, without any grave goods<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> Sîrbu 1993.

<sup>46</sup> Sîrbu 1993.

<sup>47</sup> Sîrbu 2003, 21-22.

<sup>48</sup> Sîrbu, Luca 2007, 10.

<sup>49</sup> Sîrbu, 1993 86.

<sup>50</sup> Sîrbu 1993 87.

<sup>51</sup> Sîrbu 1993, 87.

<sup>52</sup> Sîrbu 1993, 88.

At Poiana, com. Nicorești, (jud. Galați) a child skeleton placed face-down was found<sup>53</sup>.

At Sighișoara–*Wietenberg* (Mureș county), in an area where there were no habitation traces, human remains were found in 8 pits. In pit 2, there were three skeletons: skeleton 2 was of a 15-16 year-old girl, placed in flexed position, with the right hand near the body, and the left one near the face<sup>54</sup>.

At Sighișoara–*Albești* (Mureș county), in a conical pit a child with the skull placed face-down and the rest of the bones scattered was found. As inventory it had a lock-ring and an iron bar, and above this deposition a slab was placed on which another deceased was deposited in extended position facing up<sup>55</sup>.

On the basis of the above-mentioned examples we noticed that the number of prone depositions is a reduced one. This position appears in individual, double, as well as in collective graves. The persons placed in this manner are children and women, except the case of Budești, where the gender is not mentioned. At Bordușani, as well as at Brad and Sighișoara–*Albești* there are heavy objects (fruit bowl, grinder and slab) placed on the back of the deceased. Another aspect observed by V. Sîrbu is that in these situations a funerary inventory is either not observed or a very poor one, compared to the funerary inventory of the burials in cemeteries. This is an indication of a possible standardization in placing the corpses inside the settlement. The lock-ring discovered at Micești is an artefact directly associated with the skeleton, as well as the jewellery discovered in the other cases. At the same time it is not an object about which we can say that it was placed during a funerary ritual, while the few potsherds from the pits at Budești and Micești seem to have gotten there by accident.

## TYPES OF PITS

Another subject that deserves to be taken into account is the context of the discovery. We can observe that all the prone depositions are in circular pits, which are imitations of storage pits. There are ethnographic examples that render graves which copy storage pits or houses: the graves from Batammaliba, Togo and Benin. The grave is covered with a round stone, which in everyday life separates the ground floor and the first floor - the separation of the living from the dead<sup>56</sup>. During Iron Age we can encounter such depositions in the pits from the settlement from Danebury Hillfort (England)<sup>57</sup>, or in Alsace (France)<sup>58</sup>. What V. Sîrbu also observes for the Dacians is that human depositions inside settlements were discovered in circular pits, while in cemeteries the pits are rectangular<sup>59</sup>. There have been identified three types of pits in which human bone remains were deposited in settlements: storage pits, rubbish pits or circular shaped pits, dug for the purpose of placing the deceased, which implies a standardization of the human depositions inside the settlements during La Tène period<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> Sîrbu 1993,91.

<sup>54</sup> Sîrbu 1993, 98.

<sup>55</sup> Sîrbu 1993,98.

<sup>56</sup> Parker Pearson 1999, 5.

<sup>57</sup> Parker Pearson 1999, 5.

<sup>58</sup> Jeunesse 2010, 167.

<sup>59</sup> Sîrbu 1993, 71.

<sup>60</sup> Jeunesse 2010,168.

These cases can be also found in France and Great Britain, which means that the situations encountered in Classical Dacian period are not exceptional. So, it is possible that a funerary rite which is performed for a certain category of people exists and is materialized through their deposition in domestic structures. This act can have an economic or offering role for crops, in the case of depositions in storage pits, religious or social meaning, through the wish of the deceased to be buried in the same place where he lived in order to be able to be close to the living<sup>61</sup>. In this situation, the idea that the dead person is not just a corpse and its role is not finished yet stands out<sup>62</sup>.

Death is a social act and funerary practices are symbolic productions to explain the relationship between the living and the dead<sup>63</sup>. The discarding of rubbish and the human body, are both made in a space designated to serve for these situations<sup>64</sup>. If we are to see the differences between these two we can state that the context of death is one of ritual action and communication<sup>65</sup>, while the rubbish pit has no symbolic significance.

## CONCLUSIONS

Anthropological and archaeological evidence show that people use different practices in depositing their deceased, which were often catalogued in terms of normal and deviant<sup>66</sup>. *Irregulare/sonderbestattung* is usually discussed in comparison with the analysis of burials in contemporary cemeteries<sup>67</sup>, but in our case, we do not have that, so we can consider the deposition inside the settlement a norm. In a period when the mortuary deposition variability is considerable it is hard to tell which practices are irregular and which are normative<sup>68</sup>. The discoveries of skeletons in settlement pits during La Tène can be considered a usual practice for this period, resulted from a funerary practice, from ritual manifestations or from certain practical or social considerations. In each region, we encounter funerary gestures which represent the norm, other ones which are exterior to it, or more norms could be practiced at the same time<sup>69</sup>. If inhumation requires in the first place a space specially built for the deposition of the deceased, in the case of these discoveries inside settlements or isolated ones we consider that there can be observed an intentionality of creating these pits for the corpse and thus it becomes a funerary space, and we can discuss about inhumation.

Through the preservation of the body inside the settlement a relationship is created between the world of the living and the world of the dead. There should be a reason for which the body is kept inside and not sent outside the living community. Maybe they did not accomplish their role yet, or the living people still need to maintain the connections with their ancestors, to keep them part of everyday activities. The household is connected to

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<sup>61</sup> Boulestin 2010, 110.

<sup>62</sup> Villes 2010, 142.

<sup>63</sup> Bettencourt 2008, 99.

<sup>64</sup> Moore 2006, 75.

<sup>65</sup> Parker Pearson 2006, 100.

<sup>66</sup> Aspöck 2013, 25.

<sup>67</sup> Veit 2013, 15.

<sup>68</sup> Aspöck 2013, 31.

<sup>69</sup> Boulestin 2010, 139-140.

women in terms of gender, because it is the space where in general women held most of their activities, mainly domestic ones<sup>70</sup>.

The problems of burial, ritual or non-ritual deposition in classical Dacian period still persist due to the lack of comparative examples. In spite of this problem, we observe a certain patterning of this type of deposition that could represent a norm performed for a certain category of people.

Through a close contextual analysis of the deposition at Micești and of the other human remains in relation to their depositional context, we can observe some rules that characterize human prone depositions in the settlements of the Classical Dacian period. These patterns are: the round pits which imitate storage pits, the reuse of other pit structures, the lack of grave goods and at the same time the deposition of stones or heavy objects on the backs of the deceased. These situations can be viewed as an act of symbolic storage of the dead for the means of keeping humans connected with the material world<sup>71</sup>.

Talking about other human depositions in the settlement pits, all these features show that they were not used for profane purposes, namely digging out clay, depositing food reserves or discarding household garbage<sup>72</sup>. The ones consisting with the Classical Dacian period present similarities but also differences, from the 8 identified, there are 7 women and children and 1 for which the biological gender could not be determined. Their age is variable: from children to 38-44 year olds. The objects that were discovered together with them are goods that the deceased was probably wearing at the time of death or burial and they have things placed on their back. All these cases come from settlements. Prone burials appear in single depositions, double or multiple and only in circular pits from settlements or isolated.

The meaning of prone depositions can be probably related to the special conditions of the woman's death. The fact that she was kept inside the settlement after death can be because of her domestic occupation, proved by the grinder and the circular pit which imitates the storage pits, together with the osteological analysis that lead to the fact that she had agricultural occupation. The unintentional teeth mutilation comes from cutting vegetal fibers. The lack of material inside the pit is an indicator that the pit was dug for the purpose of this human deposition. The stone grinder could have been placed there in order to forbid the deceased to come back from the grave, even if it is not clear whether it was placed intentionally or it was just thrown there, but there are other cases signalled with the presence of stones in prone burials which have been given this interpretation.

In a case like this, for a period of time described by depositions in settlements, in other isolated places and for which we do not know any cemeteries or a funerary norm, we can consider this practice a norm. On the basis of the skeletal material discovered in the Classical Dacian period and together with the theoretical aspects we discussed above, we can assume the existence of a funerary norm that is described by the prone deposition in settlements of certain persons.

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<sup>70</sup> Bruck 2005, 145.

<sup>71</sup> Renfrew 1998, 1.

<sup>72</sup> Sîrbu, Dăvîncă 2014, 295.



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