

# A TRAVEL BACK IN TIME. THE BABADAG-ENISALA AREA AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 1<sup>ST</sup> MILLENNIUM BC

**Sorin-Cristian AILINCĂI**

"Gavrilă Simion" Eco-Museum Research Institute Tulcea  
32 Progresului, Tulcea 820009, Romania  
sailincai@gmail.com

**Alexandra ȚÂRLEA**

Faculty of History, University of Bucharest, Romania  
alexandra.tarlea@istorie.unibuc.ro

**Adrian ADAMESCU**

"Paul Păltănea" Museum of History, Galați, Romania  
adrian.adamescu1979@gmail.com

**Florian MIHAIL**

"Gavrilă Simion" Eco-Museum Research Institute Tulcea, Romania  
florianhamangia@yahoo.com

**Aurel-Daniel Stănică**

"Gavrilă Simion" Eco-Museum Research Institute Tulcea, Romania  
aurelstanica@gmail.com

**Abstract:** In the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, the territory between the Danube and the Black Sea witnessed a new period of intensive human inhabitation, coming to Dobruja after a sparse presence of archaeological remains belonging to the end of the Bronze Age. The new settlements were assigned to the Babadag culture, a cultural manifestation corresponding to the beginning of the Early Iron Age in South-Eastern Romania. These communities had a marked preference for settling close to important rivers, such as the Danube and its tributaries, but also on the lakeshores in the vicinity of the Black Sea.

The area around Babadag Lake undoubtedly offered a favourable environment to human communities from the beginning of the first millennium BC. On a surface of approximately 200 km<sup>2</sup>, no fewer than nine settlements characterised by Babadag type pottery were identified. From a chronological point of view, these sites cover the 10<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. The only site with an existence covering this entire period is the settlement from Babadag–*Cetățuie*. A complex stratigraphy with over 2 m of archaeological depositions was identified here, as well as the only ample fortification works. Such investments necessitated, without doubt, coordination as well as an important mobilisation of the entire community. The unique character of the site from Babadag proves its importance in the studied area, situation indicating the probability of its functioning as a centre around which the other settlements were founded and to which the exploitation of this territory can be connected for approximately two centuries.

**Keywords:** Romania, Lower Danube, Babadag, Enisala, Early Iron Age, landscape, archaeology.

## INTRODUCTION

The territory between Danube and the Black Sea is characterised by a new period of intense habitation at the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, after a stark decrease in the archaeological record corresponding to the Late Bronze Age. The new settlements were attributed to the Babadag culture<sup>1</sup>, corresponding to the beginning of the Early Iron Age in the south-eastern part of Romania.

As it can be noticed on the map showing the spreading of the sites characterised by Babadag type pottery, these communities had a preference for inhabiting lands close to large bodies of water, such as Danube and its tributaries, but also the lake area in the vicinity of Black Sea (Fig. 1). The archaeological research in

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<sup>1</sup> Morintz 1964; Morintz 1987; Jugănaru 2005; Ailincăi 2013; Ailincăi 2016.

the eponym site was conducted almost without interruptions between 1962 and 2010. The archaeological layers reaching more than 2 m in depth point towards a prolonged habitation of this site which probably occupied an important strategic position in the region. The exceptional status of the settlement from Babadag (Tulcea county) is also emphasised by the impressive defensive ditch, which had in some areas an opening reaching 19 m and a depth of more than 4 m.<sup>2</sup>

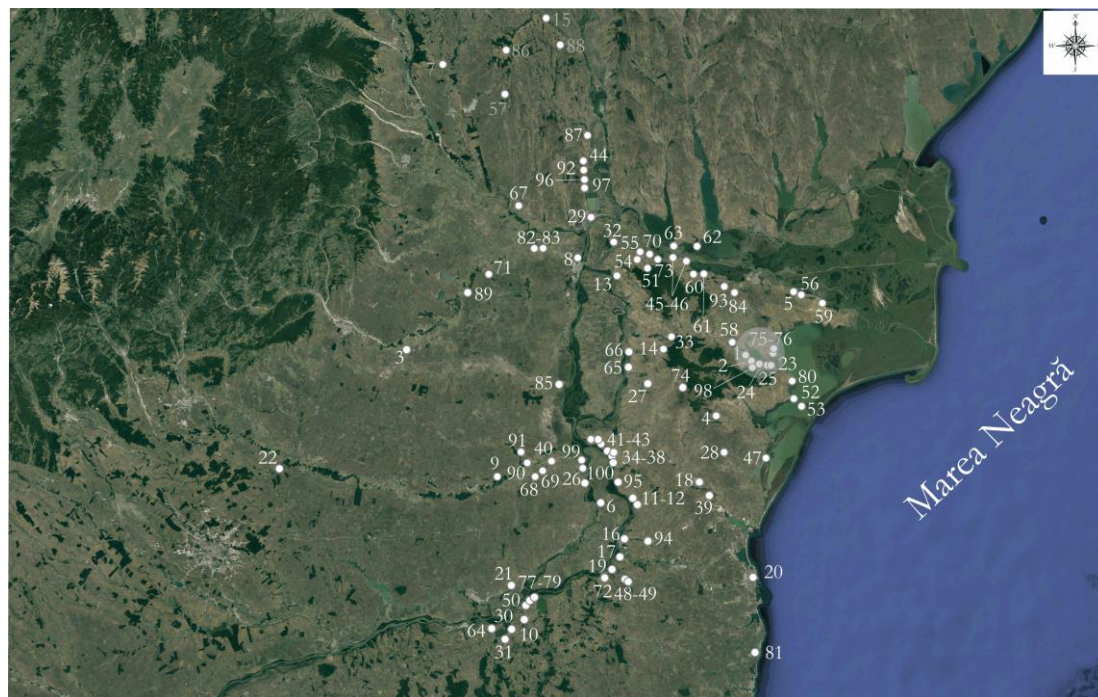


Fig. 1. Archaeological sites attributed to the Babadag culture: 1. Babadag–*Cetățuie*; 2. Babadag–*Rățârie*; 3. Bălteni; 4. Beidaud; 5. Beștepe; 6. Bordușani; 7. Brăhășești; 8. Brăila; 9. Bucu; 10. Canlia; 11. Capidava–*La bursuci*; 12. Capidava–*necropola tumulară romană*; 13. Carcaliu; 14. Cârjelari; 15. Cavadinești; 16. Cernavodă–*Dealul Sofia*; 17. Cernavodă–*la 10 km S de oraș*; 18. Cheia; 19. Cochirleni; 20. Constanța; 21. Coslogeni; 22. Dridu; 23. Enisala–*Cetatea Medievală*; 24. Enisala–*Fermă*; 25. Enisala–*Palanca*; 26. Făcăieni; 27. Făgărașu Nou; 28. Fântânele; 29. Galați; 30. Galița; 31. Gârlița; 32. Garvăn; 33. General Praporgescu; 34. Ghindărești–*Dealul Celea Mare*; 35. Ghindărești–*La Far*; 36. Ghindărești–*la S de sat*; 37. Ghindărești–*locul de încălzire al șlepurilor*; 38. Ghindărești–*Valea Cichirgeanui*; 39. Gura Dobrogei; 40. Hagieni; 41. Hârșova–*La lac*; 42. Hârșova–*Rasim*; 43. Hârșova–*Tell-ul gumelnișean*; 44. Ijdileni; 45. Isaccea–*Cetatea Noviodunum*; 46. Isaccea–*strada Subat*; 47. Istria–*Cetatea Histria*; 48. Ivrinezu Mic–*marginea de V a satului*; 49. Ivrinezu Mic–*pe malul lacului Cochirleni*; 50. Izvoarele; 51. Jijila; 52. Jurilovca–*Cetatea Orgame*; 53. Jurilovca–*Insula Biserișca*; 54. Luncavița–*Tell-ul gumelnișean*; 55. Luncavița–*Valea Joitei*; 56. Mahmudia; 57. Mândrești; 58. Mihai Bravu; 59. Murighiol; 60. Niculițel–*Cornet*; 61. Niculițel–*Mănăstirea Saon*; 62. Novoselskoe II; 63. Orlovka II; 64. Ostrov–*canabae Aeliae*; 65. Ostrov–*Cetatea Beroe*; 66. Peceneaga–*Piscul Sărat*; 67. Piscu; 68. Platonești–*La Cramă*; 69. Platonești–*Valea Babii*; 70. Rachelu; 71. Râmnicele; 72. Rasova; 73. Revărsarea; 74. Sâmbăta Nouă; 75. Sarichioi–*La grădină*; 76. Sarichioi–*La bursuci*; 77. Satu Nou–*Colțul Pietrii*; 78. Satu Nou–*la N de dealul Cetății*; 79. Satu Nou–*Valea lui Voicu*; 80. Sălcioara; 81. Schitu; 82. Siliștea–*Conac*; 83. Siliștea–*Popină*; 84. Somova; 85. Spiru Haret; 86. Stiețești; 87. Stoicani; 88. Suceveni; 89. Șutești; 90. Țândărei–*La spita*; 91. Țândărei–*Lacul Strachina*; 92. Țătarca–*cimitirul actual*; 93. Telița; 94. Țibrinu; 95. Topalu; 96. Tulucești; 97. Vânători; 98. Visterna; 99. Vlădeni–*La vii*; 100. Vlădeni–*Popina Blagodeasca*.

The archaeological research in the region evidenced the fact that this site, unique in its way for the Lower Danube, had in its vicinity a series of other settlements. This situation raises questions concerning the dynamic of the human communities at the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, the type of economy, as well as the existence of strategies for the exploitation of the territory.

<sup>2</sup> Morintz 1964; Morintz 1986; Morintz 1987; Morintz, Jugănar 1995; Morintz, Jugănar, Munteanu 1995; Jugănar 2005; Jugănar, Ailincăi 2003; Ailincăi et al. 2006; Ailincăi 2013; 2016a.

## EARLY IRON AGE SITES IN THE AREA OF THE BABADAG LAKE

### State of research

The Early Iron Age settlement from Babadag was identified in the fall of 1953 by a part of the archaeological team from Istros/Histria (Constanța county). This is the moment when the first information regarding the location and characteristics of the site are published, the members of the expedition discovering at the surface *a few Roman shards and old ceramic fragments of Hallstatt type*. Noticing in the collapsed area of the lakeshore an archaeological layer with the thickness of approximately 1 m, the archaeologists considered that *the site is promising rich results in the eventuality of an archaeological excavation*, especially in the context of the scarcity of Early Iron Age sites in the area.<sup>3</sup> Recognising the potential of the site, a team coordinated by Radu Vulpe comes back to Babadag the next year (1954). The finds consisting of a richly decorated ceramic material determined this well-known researcher to state that *the site situated on the shore of the Babadag lake, both through its problematic ...and its remarkable size, represents so far an "unicum" in Dobroudja. This is why it is imperative to become the focus of systematic excavations*.<sup>4</sup> The archaeological research will begin in 1962, under the coordination of Sebastian Morintz, continuing with only small interruptions until 2010.

Also during the 60s, Morintz undertakes the first small-scale excavations at Enisala – *Palanca*, the results being published only partially.<sup>5</sup> Later, in 1979, due to the destruction of the site as a result of vine cultivation and mechanical exploitation of the yellow clay found in the area, there were conducted preventive excavations coordinated by Gheorghe Mănușu-Adameșteanu and Elena Lăzurcă, which materialised as a 80 × 2 m section.<sup>6</sup> In 1986, the site was also researched by Silvia Baraschi; unfortunately, there was no publication of the results. Noticing the deplorable state of the site, the team from Babadag solicited starting with 2003 the authorisation for rescue excavations around a surface destroyed by a clay exploitation. In the interval 2003-2006, the team managed to research the endangered area. Later, in 2010 and 2013, the site was researched on a large scale, covering a surface of more than 6,000 m<sup>2</sup>, as part of preventive excavations with the occasion of investments implementation in the region.<sup>7</sup>

The first Early Iron Age finds from *Dealul Gras* at Enisala, the place of the well-known medieval fortress, were made by Ion T. Dragomir.<sup>8</sup> The archaeological research on this site had a systematic character, and started in 1939 under the coordination of G. Avakian, followed by new campaigns during 1963-1964 under the coordination of Ion Barnea and Ion T. Dragomir.<sup>9</sup> The project focused on the renovation of the medieval fortress determined new research starting with 1976. The new excavations were conducted by Silvia Baraschi and Gheorghe I. Cantacuzino<sup>10</sup> and continued with interruptions for 10 years. In the interval between 1991 and 1999 the research was taken over by Raluca and Sergiu Iosipescu, once the restoration project was implemented.<sup>11</sup>

In the same context should be mentioned the archaeological research conducted south from Sarichioi, on the shore of Razim lake, in the locations of *La Grădini* and *La Bursuci*. The first observations in the area were made in 1976, and followed by small scale excavations in 1976-1978, 1988 and 1996.<sup>12</sup>

Of equal importance for the present discussion proved to be the surveys in the area, conducted by the researchers of the "Gavrilă Simion" Eco-Museum Research Institute (especially during 2017), which allowed further identification of other Early Iron Age sites.

<sup>3</sup> Ștefan et al. 1954, 108.

<sup>4</sup> Vulpe 1955, 550-551.

<sup>5</sup> Morintz, Anghelescu 1970, 403; Ailincăi et al. 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Lăzurcă, Mănușu-Adameșteanu 1980, 146.

<sup>7</sup> Ailincăi et al. 2013; Ailincăi et al. 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Dragomir 1974.

<sup>9</sup> Dragomir 1973, 29-30; Dragomir 1974, 132.

<sup>10</sup> Baraschi, Cantacuzino 1980, 459 sqq.

<sup>11</sup> Iosipescu, Iosipescu 2004, 309.

<sup>12</sup> Oberländer-Târnoveanu, Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1979, 59; Lungu, Mănușu-Adameșteanu 1995, 344 sqq; Ailincăi, Micu 2006.

## Catalogue of finds

### 1. Babadag–Cetățuie

**Location:** on the shore of the Babadag lake, close to the junction of the Tabana river with the lake; the settlement was placed on a promontory offering a good strategic position and visibility.

**Archaeological research:** systematic research (1962-1968, 1970-1971, 1973, 1976-1994, 1996-1997, 1999, 2001-2004, 2006, 2008 and 2010).

**Data regarding the stratigraphy:** from the point of view of the consistency of the archaeological depositions, there are three distinct areas (Fig. 2/1), clearly noticeable in the main stratigraphical profiles in sections I, II, VIII, IX and XVI (Fig. 2/2). The first zone is close to the lake and is characterised by a layer with a thickness reaching in some places more than 1.50 m (Fig. 2/3), and decreasing towards the exterior until completely disappearing. It is present as a prominence, on a surface of approximately 15 m x 20 m, due to the collapse of the promontory into the lake (Fig. 2/4-5). The second zone is characterised by the almost complete absence of archaeological depositions, on a length up to 10 m around zone I, the only finds being pits dug directly in loess. Zone III is represented by the fortification consisting of a ditch surrounding the inhabited area. There were differentiated 6 habitation levels.

**Habitation structures:** the most frequent complexes on the site are the pits; unfortunately, in many cases there is not enough information regarding their position or corresponding level. Although their number cannot be estimated, on the existing plans there can be noticed impressive clusters. They vary greatly in size, shape, and content, but the reduced quantity of data makes impossible a statistical analysis. Still, it can be noticed that most pits have oblique walls, giving them a bell-shaped appearance. Morintz mentioned the existence of dugouts, attributed to the earlier phases of the settlement. In the few cases when such buildings were completely excavated, it can be noticed that they are in general oval, only in one case rectangular (pit no. 280), with average dimensions of 4 m x 3 m. The structures which were sectioned show that they were dug at a depth of 0.60 – 1.10 m, fact indicating that they had a superstructure high enough to allow a person to stand inside. The plans and journal do not contain any mention of postholes. Sebastian Morintz also mentioned the existence of above-ground structures, marked mainly by the presence of floors, with the observation that he could record only partially and only in the upper levels the contour of such houses.<sup>13</sup> Although on a reduced area, the research conducted by us in Cas. 1-9 had as purpose also the identification of such complexes. It was noticed that while the clayed floors found in levels 1 and 2 were mainly fragmented, suggesting distinct arrangements, in the case of levels 3-5 these were relatively compact, except their deterioration due to the pits dug from the superior levels. The situation became clearer after the excavation of level 5 in Cas. 5-8, where there were found three alignments of postholes, probably from a large building with rectangular shape, and recorded length of 12 m and width of 4 m (Fig. 2/6).

**The defensive system.** The archaeological literature on this subject presents the Early Iron Age fortification from Babadag as a combination of ditch and earth wall, forming a semicircle. It was partially or integrally researched by the excavation of a series of sections: I, II, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, XIII, XV and XVI (Fig. 2/2). The available data indicate that the ditch was dug at the exterior limit of zone II, and had an opening between 15 and 19 m, and a depth of approximately 4 m. In profile the ditch had the shape of a trapeze with the large base up, and abrupt walls. In our opinion, the earth structure situated at the exterior was created by the level difference created by the excavation of the ditch (Fig. 2/1). Still, it is possible that the fortification was also affected by landslides and later human interventions. In some cases, there could be noticed an attempt of improving the structure by adding stone slabs.

**Archaeological record:** during the 38 archaeological campaigns a huge quantity of archaeological material was discovered; although a lot of material was processed, the degree of publication is still reduced; the best represented category is the pottery, covering the entire range of shapes known in the Babadag culture (Fig. 2/7-47); the other categories are poorly represented, but of great importance are the bronze objects (Fig. 2/51-60) and the iron objects (Fig. 2/48-50).

**Bibliography:** Morintz 1964; 1986; 1987; Morintz, Jugănaru 1995; Morintz, Jugănaru, Munteanu 1995; Jugănaru 2005; Jugănaru, Ailincăi 2003; Jugănaru, Ailincăi, Țarlea 2004; Ailincăi et al. 2006; Ailincăi 2011; 2013; 2015; 2016a.

<sup>13</sup> Morintz 1987, 45. The information is not confirmed by drawings and excavation journal. It seems rather strange, especially since such floors appear to be quite homogeneously placed in his drawings.





## 2. Babadag–Răţările

**Location:** 3.20 km south-east from the site at Cetăţuie, on the shore of the Babadag lake; habitation remains identified on a terrace with a height of 4-5 m, the eastern and south-eastern limits being marked by an abrupt valley (Fig. 3).

**Archaeological research:** small-scale excavation in the 70s, conducted by Andrei Opaî, the results being unpublished; during surveys in 2017 were identified numerous pottery shards dated to the Roman times and Early Iron Age.

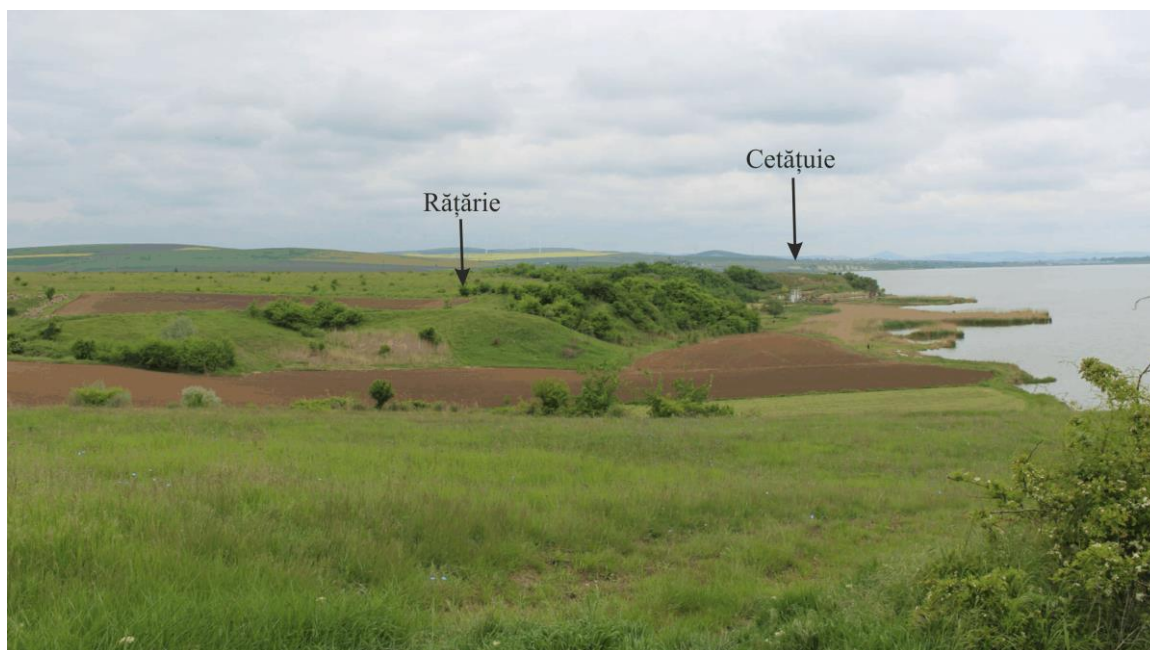


Fig. 3. View from the east on the settlement from Babadag-Răţările.

## 3. Enisala–Cetatea medievală

**Location:** the settlement is situated on a limestone hill named Gras, approximately 1 km north-east from Enisala, in the same place where are the ruins of the medieval fortress; the promontory is extremely abrupt, the access being difficult from all directions; very close to the lakes Razim and Babadag (Fig. 4/1-2, 5).

**Archaeological research:** systematic research for the medieval fortress (1939, 1963-1964, 1976-1986, 1991-1999).

**Date regarding the stratigraphy:** The Early Iron Age archaeological layer is present between 0.20 m and 0.40 m, rarely between 0.70 m and 0.90 m, superposing sometimes directly the bedrock; it contains pottery fragments, burned wattle, charcoal and ashes.

**Habitation structures:** in sections I, IV and Surface A were found the remains of two above-ground houses; more details are available for house L I (almost rectangular in shape, with dimensions of 3.5 x 5 m, floor made of yellow clay beaten directly on the bedrock, rectangular hearth of approximately 1 m<sup>2</sup> on the east-north-east side of the building (Fig. 4/3-4).

**Archaeological record:** rather a small number of finds, but typologically representative (bi-truncated vessels, cups, bowls, kitchenware); bronze button, stone and bone objects, spindle-whorl (Fig. 5).

**Bibliography:** Dragomir 1972-1973; 1974, 133.

## 4. Enisala–Fermă

**Location:** on the shore of the Babadag lake, 2 km north-west from the western limit of the village of Enisala, where a farm functions in the place of older agricultural structures from the communist period (Fig. 7/3).

**Archaeological research:** survey conducted in 2017.

**Archaeological record:** Roman and Early Iron Age pottery fragments at the surface; polished atypical shards, fragments of bowls, bi-truncated vessels and cups, and also a polisher (Fig. 6).



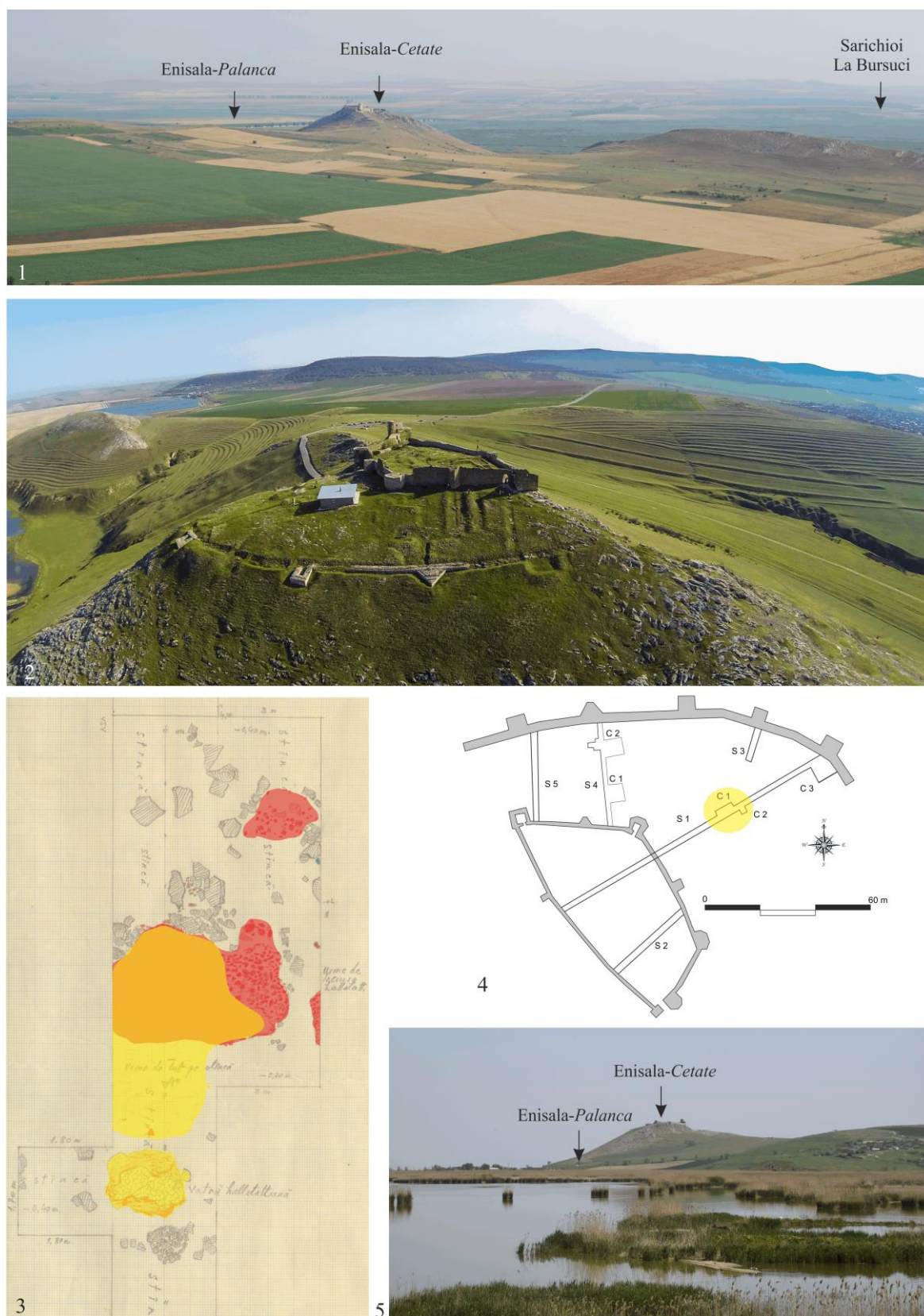


Fig. 4. Enisala-Cetatea medievală. 1. View from the south; 2. View from north-west; 3. The partial plan of the archaeological excavations during 1964; 4. The plan of the medieval fortification; 5. View from the west (from the site Enisala-Fermă).

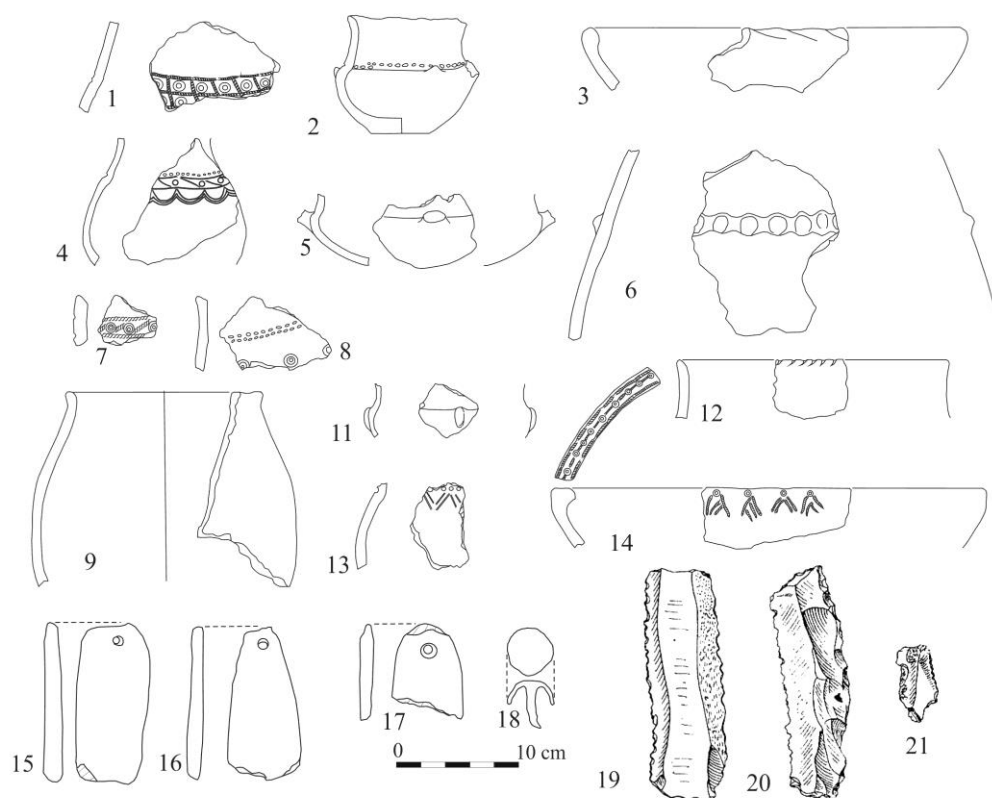


Fig. 5. Enisala–*Cetatea medievală*. Archaeological finds attributed to the Babadag culture.

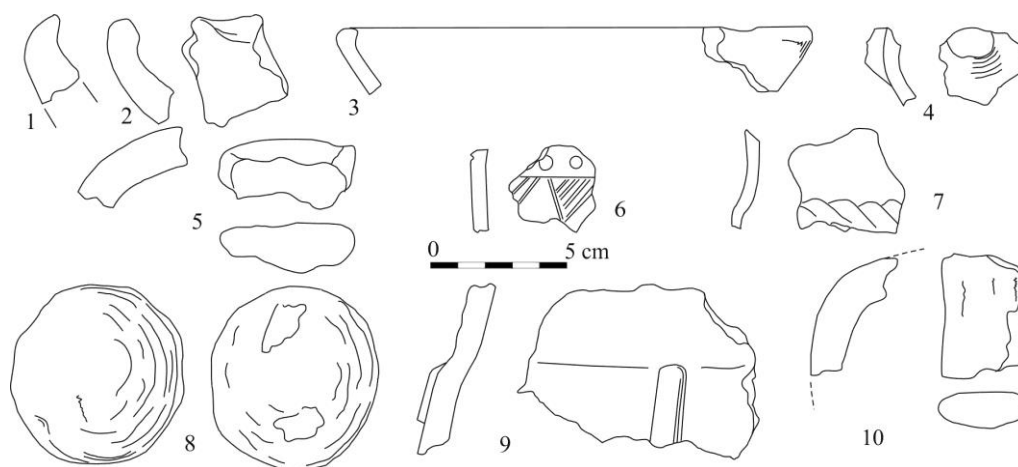


Fig. 6. Enisala–*Fermă*. Archaeological finds attributed to the Babadag culture.

##### 5. Enisala–Palanca

**Location:** the site is located on the western side of the medieval fortress, on a terrace situated in the contact area of the Razim and Babadag lakes, 1.5 km north-east from the modern village.

**Archaeological research:** mostly preventive excavations (1969, 1979, 1986, 2003-2006, 2010 and 2013); excavated a surface of more than 7000 m<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 7/1-2).

**Habitation structures:** the site from Palanca is one of the most extensively researched, being recorded a large number of dugouts and pits (Fig. 7/2).

**Archaeological record:** mostly pottery; the material, almost completely published, is typical for the Babadag culture; there are also numerous stone tools, spindle-whorls, and a bronze brooch (Fig. 8).

**Bibliography:** Lăzurcă, Mănuclu-Adameşteanu 1980; Ailincăi et al. 2011; Ailincăi et al. 2013; Ailincăi, Constantinescu 2008; Ailincăi, Constantinescu 2015.



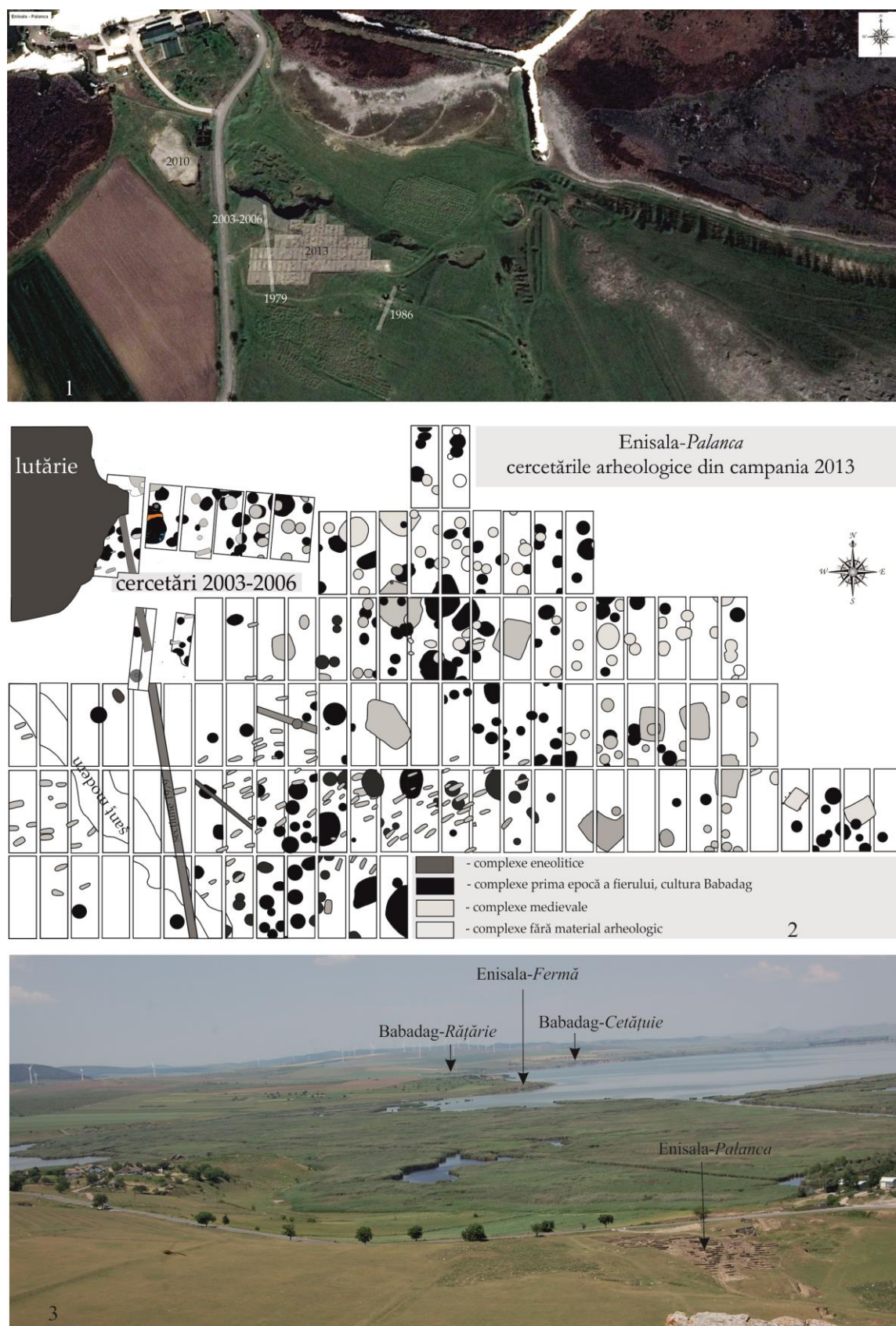


Fig. 7. Enisala-Palanca. 1. General view of the site; 2. The plan of the archaeological research from 2013; 3. View from the east; 4. View of the archaeological research during the 2013 campaign.

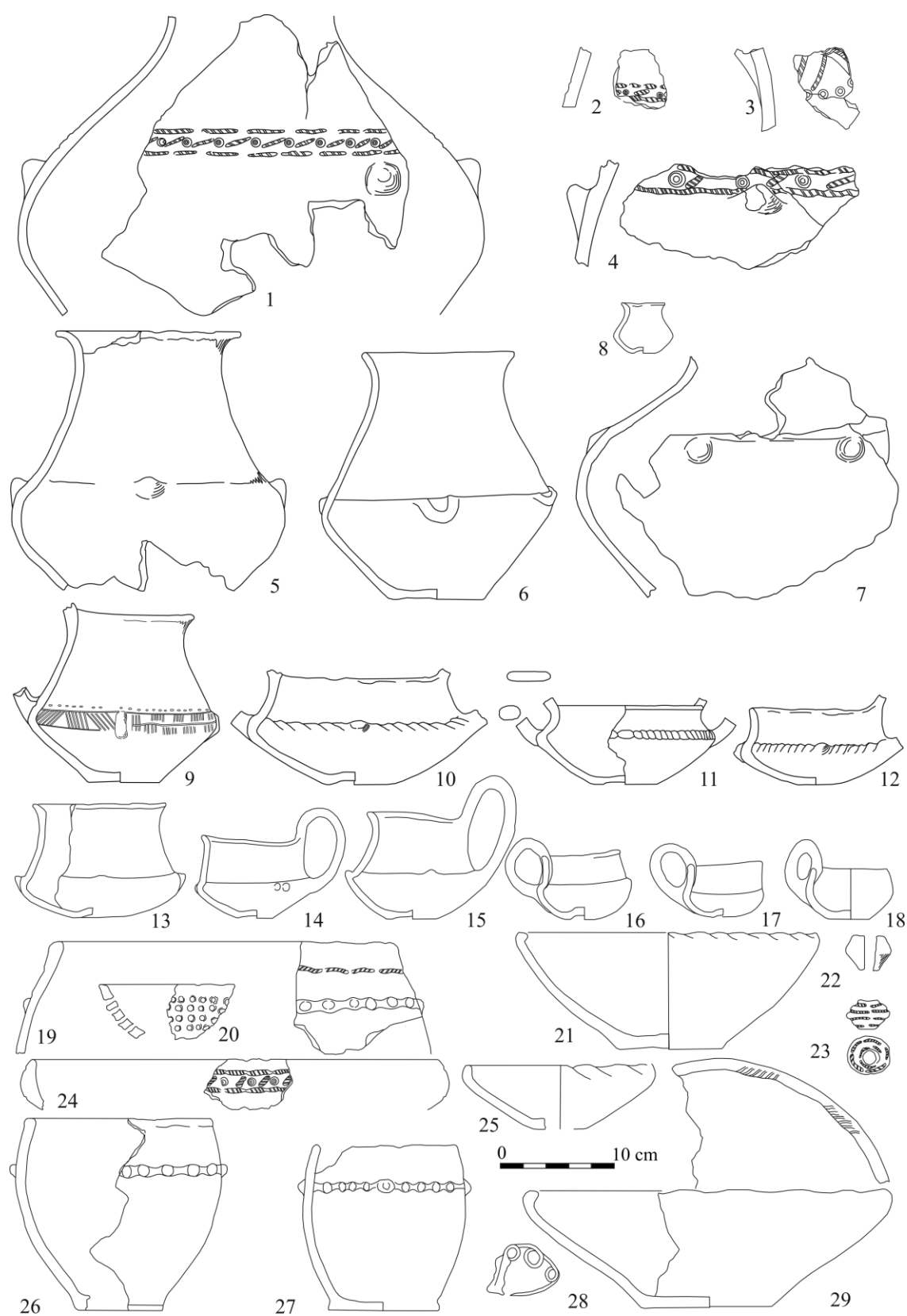


Fig. 8. Enisala-Palanca. 1-21, 24-27, 29. Pottery; 22-23. Spindle-whorls; 28. Brooch.

## 6. Sarichioi–*La Bursuci*

**Location:** the place *La Bursuci* is approximately 2.5 km south from Sarichioi village, on a peninsula delimited by the lakes Razim and Babadag.

**Archaeological research:** several archaeological campaigns were conducted on the site from Bursuci (1976, 1978 and 1996). The archaeological layer had a thickness of 1.20-1.40 m, consisting of two habitation levels attributed to the transition phase between Boian and Gumelnița cultures, superposed by a necropolis dated to the beginning of the Bronze Age.

**Archaeological record:** there were recorded two pits with materials dated to the Early Iron Age; although reduced in number, the ceramic fragments are typical for the Babadag culture, consisting of bi-truncated vessels, cups and bowls (Fig. 9).

**Bibliography:** Oberländer-Târnoveanu, Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1979; Oberländer-Târnoveanu, Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1980; Lungu, Mănușu-Adameșteanu 1995; Ailincăi, Micu 2006.

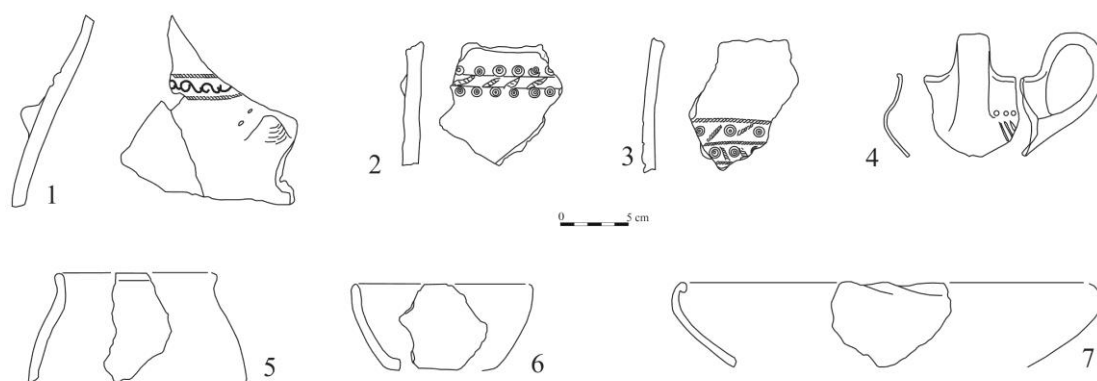


Fig. 9. Babadag type pottery from the site Sarichioi–*La Bursuci*.

## 7. Sarichioi–*La Grădini*

**Location:** south from the Sarichioi village, on the shore of the Razim lake, at a distance of approximately 2.5 km were identified the remains of several prehistoric habitations.

**Archaeological research:** in the place called *La Grădini*, situated on the southern limit of the village, as the result of a survey and small scale excavations conducted between 1976 and 1978, and in 1988, were identified remains attributed by the researchers to the Noua and Babadag cultures and to the Hellenistic period.

**Archaeological record:** pottery shards attributed to the Babadag culture in secondary contexts (shards belonging to cups with handles arching higher than the rim and bi-truncated vessels).

**Bibliography:** Oberländer-Târnoveanu, Oberländer-Târnoveanu 1980; Mănușu-Adameșteanu, Lungu 1995.

## 8. Sălcioara–Călugăra

**Location:** approximately 6 km south-east from the medieval fortress from Enisala, on a terrace situated on the shore of the lake Razim.

**Archaeological record:** the site was identified in 2010, and a small-scale archaeological excavation followed in 2012, conducted by Vasilica Lungu and Alexandre Baralis.

**Bibliography:** Unpublished.

## 9. Visterna

**Location:** terrace, north from Visterna village (Fig. 10/1).

**Archaeological record:** the site was identified in 2010 by Haralambie Avram. Here were found pottery shards and a spindle-whorl which can be attributed to the Babadag culture (Fig. 10/2-7).

**Bibliography:** Ailincăi et al. 2013.



Fig. 10. The settlement from the Early Iron Age from Visterna. 1. View from north-east; 2-6. Pottery shards; 7. Spindle-whorl.

Recently, a series of  $^{14}\text{C}$  data became available, both for the site from Babadag, and the site from *Palanca* (Fig. 11). A first range of data correspond to the earliest habitation level from Babadag<sup>14</sup>, sampled from Sector Cas. 5-9, pits 42, 44, and 45. Taking into consideration the results, the beginning of the habitation at Babadag can be placed, with 95.4% probability, between 1054 and 854 BC. Still, calculating the limits indicated by the three measurements, the most precise averages are 999 BC (for the beginning) and 924 BC (for the end). These show that the earliest habitation phase of the Babadag settlement can be placed without much doubt during the 10<sup>th</sup> c. BC. Two other data are based on samples from later levels at Babadag (Babadag 1977, Area R, pit 501 and Babadag 1987, Area C, pit 14), indicating with 95.4% probability the interval 895-797 BC, and 830-791 BC, respectively. Based on these measurements, sustained also by other known chronological elements, the existence of the Babadag settlement can be considered as spreading along the 10<sup>th</sup> -9<sup>th</sup> c. BC. For the site from Enisala–*Palanca* two more analyses were conducted (Enisala 2013, A9-4 and B14-11). These indicate with 95.4% probability an interval between 930 and 812 BC, and 913-810 BC, respectively, representing an intermediary chronological sequence in comparison to the dating from Babadag (Fig. 11).

<sup>14</sup> Ailincăi, Târlea, Carozza 2022.



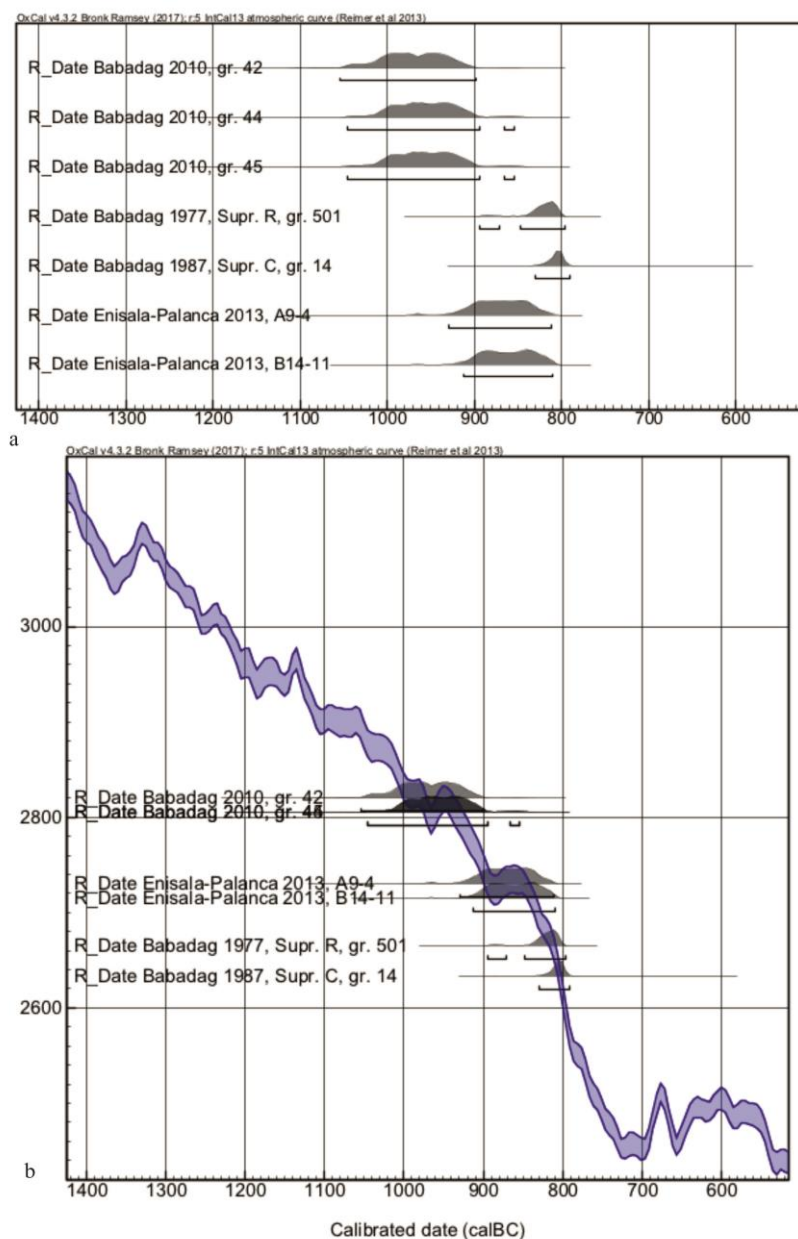


Fig. 11. The modelling of the  $^{14}\text{C}$  data from Babadag and Enisala.

In conclusion, even in the absence of relevant data from all the analysed sites, it can be supposed that these evolved in general lines in the interval covered by the 10<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. It is probable that the only complete chronological sequence can be found in the settlement from Babadag–*Cetățuie*. If the habitation at Enisala–*Palanca* can be considered contemporary with levels 4-1 from Babadag, in the case of the other settlements is at this moment impossible to determine a more precise chronology.

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The area studied in this paper was undoubtedly a territory offering advantageous life conditions to the human communities from the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, as on approximately 200 km<sup>2</sup> were identified no less than nine settlements with Babadag type pottery (Fig. 12). Excepting the site from Visterna, these settlements are situated on terraces found near the present-day Babadag and Razim lakes. This exceptional density, as well as their positioning on the littoral, raises a series of questions regarding not only the exploitation of the resources during this chronological framework, but also the role of these communities in important events and phenomena, such as the diffusion of iron metallurgy in the North Balkans area or

the political and demographical situation of the Western Black Sea coast on the threshold of the Greek colonisation.



Fig. 12. Sites from the Early Iron Age in the area of the Babadag Lake.

From a chronological perspective, these settlements were active during the 10<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. The only site existing uninterruptedly during the entire period is that from Babadag–*Cetățuie*. Its complex stratigraphy, more than 2 m deep, as well as the only ample fortification structures give a unique character to this settlement. Such a fortification system would have no doubt needed coordination of efforts and a vast mobilisation of the community. The unique character of the site from Babadag is a proof of its importance in the region, as most probably represented the centre around which the other settlements were created and which played a preeminent role in the exploitation of this territory for two centuries.

The geological research conducted in the Danube Delta and the Razim-Sinoe lagoon complex shows that the landscape went through important modifications over time (Fig. 13).<sup>15</sup> All these transformations of the environment no doubt also affected the numerous human communities living in the area.<sup>16</sup> The formation of the *lagoon complex Razim-Sinoe* is connected directly to the genesis and evolution of the Danube Delta, as a result of the interaction between the Black Sea oscillations and Danube's alluviums. More precisely, during the last 8.000 years, the region evolved from the valley of the Telița and Taița rivers to a marshy area with freshwater lakes and then to a sea gulf, which was bit by bit closed by the coast barriers associated to the delta lobes, becoming an open and then a closed lagoon. Possibly during the Early Bronze Age, on the background of a stabilisation of the Black Sea level and of the beginning of a rapid sedimentation, towards south, of the alluviums of the lobe Sfântu Gheorghe,<sup>17</sup> it begins the blocking of the gulf. This process was already developing at the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC. This is the reason why it can be considered that the settlements from Babadag, Enisala, Sarichioi, but also those contemporary with them, such as Capul Dolojman (*Orgame–Argamum*)<sup>18</sup> or *Istros* were situated at that moment on the shore of an open lagoon at the Black Sea.

<sup>15</sup> See for example Vespremeanu-Stroe et al. 2017, with bibliography.

<sup>16</sup> Carozza et al. 2012; Micu et al. 2012; Micu et al. 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Preoteasa et al. 2018 (2019).

<sup>18</sup> Ailincăi, Mirițoiu, Soficaru 2003.

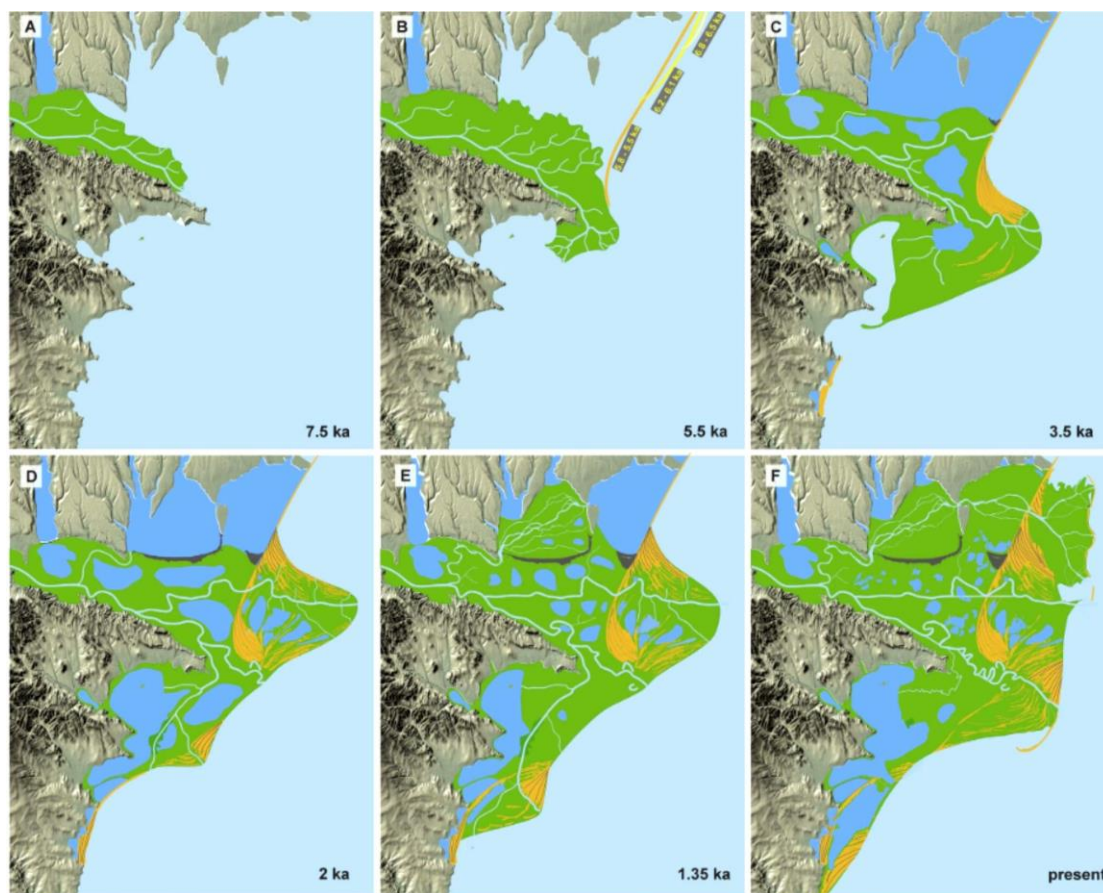


Fig. 13. The succession of the phases of evolution for the Danube Delta (after Vespremeanu-Stroe et al. 2017).

This situation made some researchers to conclude that these communities were linked to maritime commercial networks. The available data seem to contradict up to some point such hypotheses. Thus, in the conclusions of an article dedicated to the beginning of iron metallurgy on the Romanian territory, N. Boroffka proposed as a working hypothesis the possibility of a route for the introduction of iron which started in Greece, took the maritime route alongside Black Sea coast, through Dobruja and further towards Transylvania.<sup>19</sup> The only iron objects known so far in the studied area were found in the settlement from Babadag. Although a part of the information regarding the find context is lost, it seems that the iron objects from Babadag were found exclusively in the upper levels of the settlement, and as a result are to be dated most probably to the 9<sup>th</sup> c. BC. Such a dating goes at the moment against the hypothesis proposed by the German researcher, even more so if it is taken into consideration the fact that other finds, such as those from Sboryanovo, seem to be earlier.<sup>20</sup>

Another much discussed scenario is that of the autochthonous population during the Greek colonisation. A contact between the two civilisations is not demonstrated at present. The new <sup>14</sup>C data indicate the end of the Babadag culture most probably already at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> c. BC or the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> c. BC. The finds of type Babadag or contemporary with this culture from several Greek colonies, such as *Orgame*,<sup>21</sup> *Istros*<sup>22</sup> or *Mesambria*<sup>23</sup> are indicative of a pre-colonial habitation level of communities with stamped pottery. The context of the end of this habitation in the area is still unclear, but it is certain that at the moment of the arrival of the Greek colonists, at the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> c. BC, on the littoral and in the interior of Dobrudja there is no documented habitation anymore.

<sup>19</sup> Boroffka 1987, 61

<sup>20</sup> Stoyanov 1997.

<sup>21</sup> Ailincăi, Mirițoiu, Soficaru 2003.

<sup>22</sup> The possibility to see Babadag type pottery shards from Histria was offered years ago by late dr. Catrinel Domăneanțu.

<sup>23</sup> Alexandrescu, Morintz 1982, 47 sqq.



The discussion around the appearance and disappearance of these communities remains open. They appeared in the studied region most probably at the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> c. BC in an environment preserving very few traces of the previous inhabitation. The information presented here shows quite clearly that for a better exploitation of resources around the settlement from Babadag was created a network of other settlements. This situation indicates the existence of a hierarchy and a certain degree of organisation. Despite the vicinity of the Black Sea, there are no data regarding the exploitation of marine resources or the use of maritime routes. The habitation traces of these communities can be observed until the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> c. BC, and until the arrival of the first Greek colonists there is a new period with scarce human presence, at least from an archaeological perspective.

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