

Funerary Rite and Ritual of the Noua Culture in Transylvania

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The present paper will present the elements of the funerary rite and ritual from Noua Culture from Transylvania. For this, we propose a separate approach towards the rite of burial and the ritual attached to this. Through this twofold analysis of the both aspects of corpse treatment, one can easier see the constitutive elements of the funerary ritual, and thus some historical conclusions can be inferred.

The Rite

As almost all Carpathian cultures, the bearers of the Noua culture practised the burying in a crouched position¹. According to the statistical research performed by L. Dascălu concerning the necropolis from Moldavia, the percentage of the corpses buried in a crouched position is 97,7%². Besides these, there are also cremation burials, which are rare in both Moldavia and Transylvania. In Transylvania, this type of burials was discovered at: Archiud³, Band⁴, Apahida⁵, Cașolț⁶. The exceptional character of this type of burial request a special attention.

The Noua necropolises are generally flat. The several burials in tumulus are exceptional. There were only two barrow burials unfolded in Transylvania, at Cașolț⁷ and at Brăduț⁸.

According to the available information, the eight burials from Cașolț, and the one from Brăduț are secondary burials performed in the mantle of tumulus dating, probably, from the Early Bronze Age. Apparently, the Cașolț burials could indicate an early intruder group. The presence of the grooved protuberances on Noua pottery might be an influence of Western influence from post-Otomani and/or Suciul or Lăpuș⁹. The pottery discovered here could be dated as a developed phase of the culture, presenting analogies in other necropolis: Archiud, Cluj-Banatului Str., Teiuș, Săbed¹⁰ etc¹¹. The special characteristic of the above-mentioned burials comes from the fact that they are cist burials.

The cist burials represent a different type of burial, used in certain cases. I. Andrițoiu and V. Vasiliev propose four types of cist burials¹²: burials with one skeleton (Miercurea-Ciuc¹³, Morești¹⁴); double or multiple burials (Cașolț-“Trei Mormini”¹⁵, Comlod¹⁶); bi-ritual cist (Rotbav¹⁷); cremation in urns and cist (Archiud¹⁸). These burials, either simple or multiple, are but exception in the area of Noua culture. The reasons for practising this type of burial cannot be surely determined, but they have no link with Early Bronze Age traditions¹⁹. There

¹ Florescu 1964, 143 - 216.

² Dascălu 1993, 143.

³ Marinescu 1986, 46 - 47; 1993, 5; Andrițoiu, Vasiliev 1993, 122 - 146.

⁴ Kovacs 1913, 265 - 273; Horedt 1953, 806; Soroceanu 1973, 498, no 4; Soroceanu, Lazarovici 1977, 58; Boroffka 1994, 19, no 44.

⁵ Pârvan 1982, 372; Horedt 1960, 110; Crișan, Dănilă 1961, 147; Soroceanu 1973, 498; Florescu 1991, Rep. 26, no 17; Andrițoiu, Vasiliev 1993, 122 - 146.

⁶ Andrițoiu, Vasiliev 1993, 127.

⁷ Macrea, Dobroiu, Lupu 1959, 411 - 412; Andrițoiu, Vasiliev 1993, 126 - 127.

⁸ Szekely 1997, 147 - 156.

⁹ Kacso 1983, 116; Rotea 1994, 45 - 46.

¹⁰ Florescu 1991, no 472.

¹¹ Andrițoiu, Vasiliev 1993, 127 - 128.

¹² Andrițoiu, Vasiliev 1993, 127.

¹³ Information from V. Crișan. The material is hold by the Museum of Harghita County.

¹⁴ Horedt 1954, 209, 213, fig. 6/1 - 6; 1955, 643 - 685.

¹⁵ Macrea 1957, 136, fig. 12.

¹⁶ Information from C. Gaiu. The material is hold by the Museum of Bistrita County.

¹⁷ Szekely 1970, 310; 1976 - 1977, 27; Andrițoiu, Vasiliev 1993, 127.

¹⁸ Marinescu 1986, 46 - 47; 1993, 5.

¹⁹ Andrițoiu, Vasiliev 1993, 127.

is possible they refer to an accidental death, or to the special status of the dead within the community. Nevertheless, no chronological framework can be asserted on the basis of the cist burials²⁰.

As mentioned above, there are incineration burials in the Noua culture area, also with an exceptional character. Unlike those from Moldavia, where the urn was deposited in a simple pit²¹, in Transylvania the urn is deposited in a cist. Unfortunately, the information about the flat crematory cemetery from Apahida²² is scarce. There it is possible that some cremation burials belong to an early age of Noua culture in the inter-carpathic space, which corresponds to the final stage of Wietenberg culture²³. The necropolises from Apahida and Band might also belong to this phase.

The two cremation burials in cist from Archiud might be burials with a special significance. The main argument is their isolated position, 50 m away from the main necropolis that includes 46 burials. There it is possible that the positioning of the burials and the different funerary rite is due to the special status of the dead within the community, as foreigners, ill persons, magicians, sorcerers, leaders and so on.

Out of 373 Noua discoveries in Transylvania, 66 are necropolises or isolated burials. Unfortunately, in the majority of funerary discoveries no systematic excavations were performed. However, where excavations were performed, the discoveries consisted in large or middle-sized necropolises. For Transylvania, the largest necropolises were discovered in Cluj, Banatului Str., with 53 burials, Archiud, with 46 burials, Morești with 25, Teiuș-“Cetățuie” with 12.

All these necropolises are situated in places protected from weather hardship, floods and so on. They were organised carefully. For instance, in the necropolis from Teiuș-“Cetățuie” the

burials are almost aligned²⁴. It is worth mentioning that the majority of burials were orientated East-West, with minor deviations.

Besides the burials in necropolises, one can also find isolated burials, as the one from Iclod²⁵. Even if the researched surface was extended, no other burials were found. These isolated burials might represent exceptions to the rule of organised necropolises.

One has to highlight that the large necropolis contradicts the image we have on the Noua settlement. Generally, these settlements are small, made up of groups of several dwellings²⁶. There it is well known that there is a structural relationship between the settlement and the corresponding necropolis²⁷. Probably there were necropolis deserving several settlements, corresponding to a tribe or a community. For instance, in the case of the necropolis from Cluj - Banatului Str., there are three settlements signalled near-by: Muzeul Satului (on the Southern side of Văii Nadășului), 2 km further; the entrance in Cheile Baciului, 3 km further; Commune Baci-“Blocuri”, 3 km further.

The Ritual

If the funerary rite is well defined, this cannot be said for the funerary ritual of Noua culture bearers. Theoretically, the ritual is “symbolic, non-technical, formal, precise, structured, and repetitive”²⁸. This supposes three levels: pre-funerary activities, the burial itself, and the post-funerary activities. In the case of Noua culture, one can identify some elements from each level of the ritual.

As it was mentioned above, in Noua culture it was practised the crouched, one side recumbent burial. Regarding the position of dead, E. Sava, who investigated many necropolises in the

²⁰ Andrițoiu, Vasiliev 1993, 128.

²¹ Dascălu 1993, 144.

²² Boroffka 1994, 15 - 16, no 24.

²³ Kovacs 1913, 265 - 273; Boroffka 1994, 19, no 44.

²⁴ Horedt 1953, 798 - 800; Berciu, Popa 1965, 547 - 549.

²⁵ G. Lazarovici, Z. Kalmar, excavation report, 1992. Anthropological analysis made by Alexandra Comșa, The Romanian Institute of Thracology, Bucharest.

²⁶ Florescu 1964, 146; Florescu, Florescu 1974, 49 - 62; Wittenberger 1994a, 367 - 376.

²⁷ Bruk 1999, 333.

²⁸ Bartelheim, Heyd 1998, 82; Bruk 1999, 314.

Republic of the Moldavia, proposed a dating following the degree of body's crouching. According to him, the smaller the degree of crouching, the more advanced the cultural phase²⁹. Another explanation linked the positioning on the left or right side of the crouched body, with the gender of the dead. In my opinion, the actual level of information on Noua culture does not sustain these arguments. Moreover, there is no clear statistics about skeleton position. L. Dascălu, who researched some necropolises from Moldavia, argues that there is no link on one hand, between the degree of crouch and the dating within the culture, and on the other hand, between the position and the sex of the buried³⁰.

The careful depositing of the dead supposes a certain pre-funerary activity. The bodies were crouched before the bodies became rigid. Certainly this custom was linked with the fear that the dead might come back as a malefic element³¹. Another possible explanation refers to the idea of the initial position of the foetus³². In this first phase of the ritual it was prepared the pottery to be deposited in the burials. The role of the pottery from burials was to bear the offering.

The typical funerary pottery was the recipient with two over-boasted ears, with a ridge or knobs. This type has many variants, and it has as counterparts in the late Minoan age the recipient for libations – the *kantharos*³³. Beside this, other types are present, as the jar-type, dishes, recipients with horizontal ears, miniature-recipients and so on.

Beside pottery, in the burials are to be found wild boar fangs, (Cluj - Banatului Str., M18), needles with protuberances (Cluj - Banatului Str., M13, M18), rings with loops (Cluj - Banatului Str., M19). All these are jewellery and clothing elements, and they do not have a direct link with the funerary ritual. The richer auxiliary inventory

can indicate a higher social position within the community.

For the second phase of the burial ritual, two certain moments can be archaeologically attested. The first moment is the depositing of the defuncts in the grave. They were deposited directly on the ground, in graves with rounded corners, 60-80 cm depth, as in the case of the graves from Cluj - Banatului Str.³⁴. The second moment was the depositing of the offerings, either in recipients (Cluj, Banatului Str.) or outside recipients (Cașolț).

When the offering was deposited in recipients, these were placed next to the skulls. As it is the case for other Indo-European peoples, this custom might be linked with the belief that the dead should not endure hunger and thirst in the next world³⁵. There are graves with more recipients, as: M3, M4 (fig. 2/1, 2), M7, M10, M13, and M16 from the necropolis from Cluj - Banatului Str.). In this case, the recipient closest to the skull was usually a *kantharos* type. Beside this one, some recipients were deposited next to the legs³⁶. As the discoveries from the necropolis Cluj- Banatului Str. show, these recipients could be recipients with over-boasted ears (Cluj – Banatului Str.: M3, M4, M5, M7, M13, M25), cups (Cluj, Banatului Str.: M42, M51), pots (Cluj - Banatului Str.: M6 (fig. 2/3), M7, M10), bi-tronconic recipients (Cluj - Banatului Str.: M16) or recipients with horizontal ears (Cluj - Banatului Str.: M3, M22, M27). There is an hypothesis that the recipients placed at the level of the skull contained, in the moment of offering, a liquid. Those placed at the lower limbs certainly contained alimentary products. The proofs are the discoveries of animal bones in the graves from Archiud³⁷ and Cluj - Banatului Str. In M3 from Cluj - Banatului Str., there was discovered a recipient with carbonised wheat seeds – *Triticum monococum*.

²⁹ Sava 1992, 85.

³⁰ Dascălu 1999.

³¹ Niculaescu - Plopșor, Wolski 1973, 118 - 130.

³² Eliade 1980, 183 - 185; Wilson 1981, 144 - 145.

³³ Catling, Catling, Smyth 1979, 1 - 80.

³⁴ Rusu, Șerban, Motioc, Fărcaș 1958, 61 - 131.

³⁵ Kun, 1960, 127 - 153; Coumont 1966, 29 - 31; Bărbulescu 1982, 198 - 200.

³⁶ Horedt 1953, 798 - 810.

³⁷ Marinescu 1986, 46 - 47; Marinescu 1993, 5.

Regarding the cereal offering it is worth highlighting that the historiography accredited the idea that the bearers of Noua culture were a semi-nomad and animal-breeding population³⁸. Nevertheless, the presence of the cereal offerings in the grave attests that a main occupation was agriculture, since this custom is attributed to agricultural populations³⁹. Another argument for considering the Noua population as an agricultural one is constituted by the discoveries from M53, Cluj - Banatului Str. (fig. 1). In this grave was deposited the skeleton of a female, approx. 20-22 years⁴⁰, dead because of spine fracture. The fracture was caused by an advanced stage of osteoporosis⁴¹. Or, there is well known that, due to the specific food, the shepherd populations suffer from this disease only exceptionally.

In some graves there were found fragments of pottery, broken in antiquity. Ritually broken recipients were found at Archiud and Trușești⁴². Probably, they attest elements of a post-funerary ritual. The breaking of recipients used for the funerary banquet is a common custom even nowadays⁴³.

The majority of graves were orientated East-West. This suggests the presence of solar elements in the burying ritual. There it is also possible that grave was marked with a distinctive sign within the ritual, after the depositing in the grave. This marking could explain why Noua graves are not superposed or criss-crossed, but relatively aligned. In Trușești necropolis the graves were aligned in four approximately parallel lines⁴⁴.

A feature of Noua culture is the exceptional uniformity of the necropolises, from the East

Moldavia to West Transylvania. This uniformity strongly contrasts with the diversity of settlements inventory⁴⁵. While more than 90% of graves inventory is represented by the recipient with over-boasted ears, in the settlements the kantharos-type recipients are scarce and of a better quality (Zoltan⁴⁶, Buza⁴⁷, and Mera⁴⁸). Some pieces present elements borrowed from other cultural environments. An argument of this borrowing is the grooved or atrophied protuberances and the grooved ears.

Conclusions

For the actual stage of knowledge, one can affirm the bearers of Noua culture, in their movement from East to the West⁴⁹ assimilated cultural elements from the populations they encountered, as Monteoru⁵⁰, Tei⁵¹, post-Otomani⁵² and Wietenberg. It worth mentioning that in Transylvania there is no settlement that does not contained elements, which do not belong to Noua culture. On the other side, the necropolises present only Noua inventory, with some exceptions. Therefore, one can assert that the funerary rite and ritual were the results of a clearly structured cultic thinking or structure. A further argument is the abandonment of the cremation. The fourth level of Wietenberg culture, when Noua bearers were already in Transylvania⁵³ does not know any cremation grave, excepting those from Band, and, maybe, Apahida.

The study of necropolises cannot furnish an idea about the end of the Noua culture. Yet, on

³⁸ Bader 1978, 118; Morintz 1978, 151 - 158; Morkovici, 1982, 82; Kuzmina 1994; Leahu 1973, fig. 24/3; Leahu, 1983, 175 - 196; Munteanu 1996.

³⁹ Lips 1956, 218; Kottak 1978, 181 - 193.

⁴⁰ Anthropological analyses performed by A. Comșa, The Romanian Institute of Thracology, Bucharest.

⁴¹ Radiological analyses performed at MNIT. The Medical data were supplied by IML Cluj.

⁴² Petrescu - Dîmbovița, Florescu, Florescu 1999, 600 - 601.

⁴³ Marian 1995, *passim*.

⁴⁴ Petrescu - Dîmbovița, Florescu, Florescu 1999, 584.

⁴⁵ Rotea 1994, 45 - 46; Wittenberger 1998; Rotea 1999, 13 - 19.

⁴⁶ Szekely 1976 - 1977, 26; Căvruc 1999, 89.

⁴⁷ Wittenberger 1994b, 151 - 172.

⁴⁸ Excavations held in 1999, by M. Rotea, M. Wittenberger, M. Bodea.

⁴⁹ Rotea, Wittenberger, Rotea 1997, 91 - 92; Wittenberger 1998a, 276 - 279; Wittenberger 1998b, 115 - 116.

⁵⁰ Florescu 1964, *passim*; Florescu, Florescu 1974, *passim*.

⁵¹ Leahu 1966, 47; Schuster 1997, 133.

⁵² Tibor 1970, 27 - 45; Rotea 1994, *passim*.

⁵³ Horedt 1968; Soroceanu, Istrate 1975, 21 - 34; Florescu 1991, 97, pl. 18 - 19; Andrițoiu 1992, 62, 68; Rotea 1999, 111 - 112.

the grounds of the available data, the events can be reconstructed. In almost the same historical moment there happened two convergent population movements to Transylvania, from the East and from the West. Probably, in Transylvania occurred a cultural synthesis⁵⁴, an inter-cultural phenomenon. The encountering of different cultural currents led to a fading of Noua features, thus leaving the place for a new cultural and spiritual horizon, directly linked with early Hallstatt elements. I think that the abandonment of the interment rite can be attributed to the new cultural synthesis, superior to the late culture of the Bronze Age.

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⁵⁴ Rotea, Wittenberger 1997, 91 - 92.

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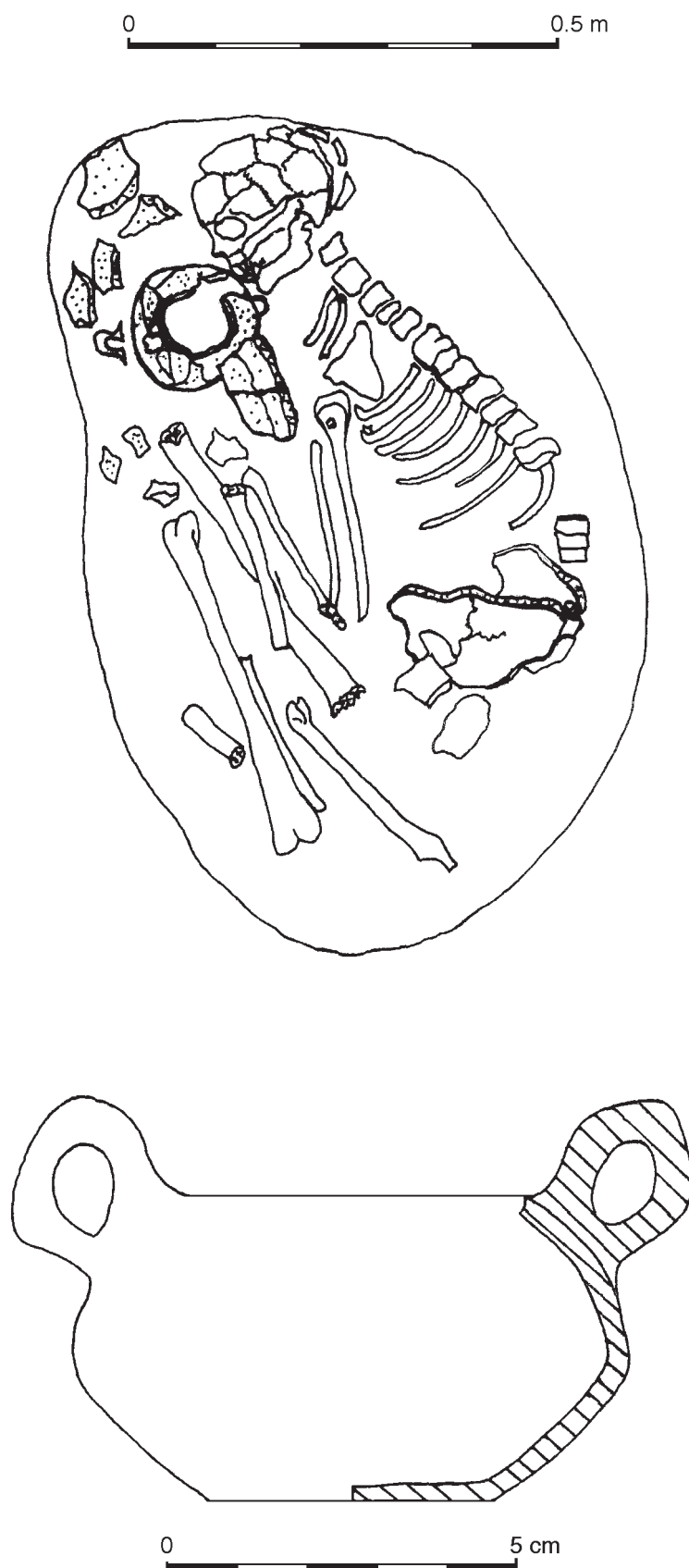


Fig. 1. Cluj-Napoca, "Banatului St.", M 53.

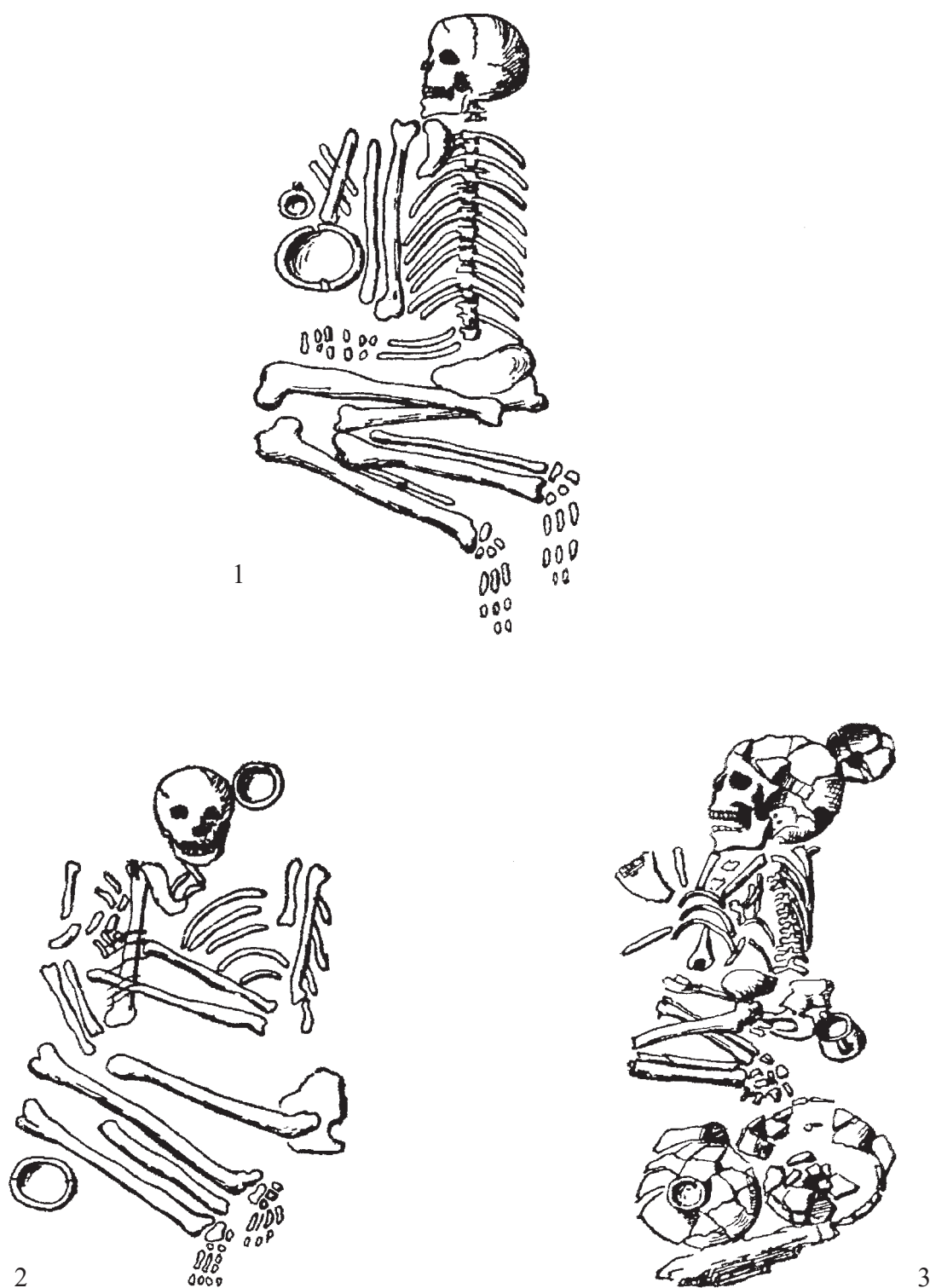
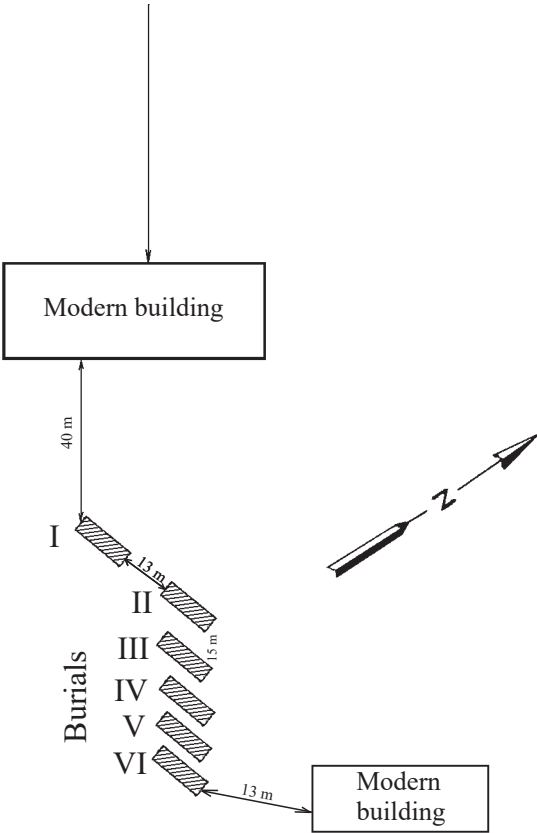
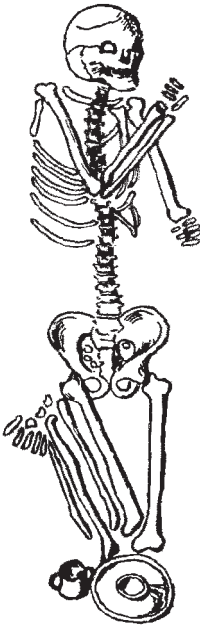


Fig. 2. Teiu!, "Sub Drum": 1 - M3; 2 - M4; 3 - M6.



1



2

Fig. 3. 1: Excavated area; 2: Tomb with offering deposited next to the legs.