

# **The Study of the Bony Fragments Coming from Animal Offers in the Celtic Incineration Cemetery from Fântânele (Matei Village, Bistrița County)**

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The Celtic necropolis is placed near the Fântânele village and the origin of the spring Meleş, flowing to the north, in Someșu Mare, near Beclean. This area belongs to the north-eastern part of the so-called Transylvania field, in fact a plateau of 400 – 500 meters high, where there still remained spots of falling leaves forests although the area bears the marks of human activity.

The Celts may have passed the water balance between the Mureș to Someș Rivers, from the first one to the Someșul Mare as in the inferior course of the river Someș there are not Celtic sites<sup>1</sup>, this providing that they are not coming directly from west.

It is known that starting of the 4<sup>th</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC, the Celts in their expansion toward east, reached the centre of Transylvania but regarding their setting in the middle of the province there are no written but only archaeological proofs to support this.

It is also known that they had a civilisation superior to the one of the local Dacians whom they strongly influenced. It seems they haven't eliminated them but mingled with.

Based on the ones mentioned above I decided to publish the results of our investigation as there are no other data concerning the animal offers they used to put in the necropolis of the Celts that used to live on the Romanian territory<sup>2</sup>.

From a first group of 53 incineration graves (noted from 1-53) in 28 (52.83%) there have been

found, among others, animal offers represented by meat offers.

These are specifically distributed on each grave as it follows: a number of 21 (75%) contains animal fragments belonging to only one species, so they are unique, simple graves and 7 (25%) have fragments coming from more than one species, let's say a secondary one, and called double graves.

The ones characterized by oneness contain in 19 (90.50%) remains of *Sus scrofa* and in 2 (9.50%) of them remains of *Caprovinae*, almost certainly *Ovis aries*. For the 7 double ones the first species is also *Sus scrofa* and the second species is *Gallus domestica* in 6 graves (85.71%) and *Bos taurus* in only one grave (14.29%). We mention that there is only a small fragment (a M3) belonging to *Bos taurus* that may have got there by chance, together with the soil in the cemetery that covered the initial grave, so its presence is rather problematic and random.

If we consider the fragments of every species in a grave as an unit, statistically, we have the following situation: a total of 35 units among which *Sus scrofa*: 26 (74, 29), *Gallus domestica*: 6 (17, 15), *Ovis aries*: 2 (5, 71), *Bos taurus*: 1 (2, 85), the last one may be ignored also due to its little frequency.

We should mention that the bony material coming from the graves is in a very bad preservation due to the abiotic factors, especially the soil (the edafic factor) with an acid Ph and his improvement together with its contact with the atmosphere. This proves that it wasn't put in an urn but directly on the ground. The presence of four bony fragments coming from three different graves with brown rust spots supports this theory proving that they may have stayed next to iron

<sup>1</sup> See the map drawn by M. Babeș 2001, 582.

<sup>2</sup> The Fântânele necropolis was studied by the regretted archaeologist I.H.Crișan, who sent us a first series of animal fragments founded in the graves. He continued diggings but unfortunately died before letting us know some important data for an easy and more complete circumscription of our study.

artefacts (works of art). No green spots have been observed specific to malachite to attest the presence of bronze objects.

Only two fragments, a humerus and a tibia belonging to a pig, each of them from different graves have burning marks, so we conclude that the meat offers were put uncooked (raw).

The precarious state of the material is also due to an intricate factor, the fragments belonging to rather young individuals, so their bones are quite fragile and the epiphysis of the long bones are apart from the diaphysis. But there is a benefic reverse: due to the lacteal dentition, its replacement with the permanent one and after the closing of the growing disks, we may establish, almost exactly the individual sacrificial age.

For *Sus scrofa*, there were put down in the graves both pieces of meat from the legs, sometimes including the extremities, meaning the hoof, so bony fragments without meat called “dry bones”, and more often fragments of the head – skull and jaws, also considered “dry bones”. There are no parts of the trunk and neck, vertebrae and ribs being quite rare.

For the 2 *Ovinae*, only a leg or a pair of legs was found.

For *Gallus domestica* either anterior (the wing) or posterior fragments, sometimes both and rarely to the phalanges have been found but the skull and the cervical vertebrae are totally missing and the ribs are only 3.

The M<sub>3</sub> fragment belongs to an individual of *Bos taurus* of 6 –7 years old its length being of only 28 mm, so it's a relatively low sized individual, all of these supporting the idea that the fragment was there, in the grave no 6 only by chance.

According to the characteristics of the material at disposal, for many of the fragments belonging to *Sus scrofa* both the sacrificial age and the sex could be settled. The ages are relatively approximated and included in the table below:

### *Sacrificial age for Sus scrofa*

| Age            | No. of individuals | %  |
|----------------|--------------------|----|
| Under 6 months | 2                  | 10 |
| 6–12 months    | 5                  | 25 |
| 12–18 months   | 9                  | 45 |
| 18–24 months   | 4                  | 20 |
| Total          | 20                 |    |

A prevalence of the young individuals to the adults may be observed. As regarding the sex, we have 3 females and 6 males, as we expected as the site population were already willing to get rid of the young males.

One of the 2 *Ovinae* is one year old and it surely belongs to the *Ovis* genus, the other one being of 2.5-3 years old and almost certain belongs to *Ovis* genus too. The first one was put into the grave in spring.

*Gallus domestica*, being a small bird, offers a small quantity of meat although it was once a rich offer. It has a secondary character as volume in comparison with the *Sus scrofa*. There were 3 females and only 1 male coming from young and adults of at most 1 year individuals.

We should mention that we found fragments belonging to 2 individuals of the same species in some graves, as in the simple grave no. 2 where there were fragments coming from 2 pigs, one very young and the other one of about a year, the simple grave no. 43 where there were fragments coming from pigs, one of 1.5 years old and only a skull from a pig of over 2 years old; in the grave no. 46, a double one, there were found not only pigs but also Gallus, many fragments belonging to a male and a female a cock and a hen) upon which some measurements were made.

Let us identify some cutting techniques used to prepare those offers. It is rather difficult to make distinction between a bony braking due to natural factors or human action.

On a humerus fragment belonging to a pig, we can see a cut made with a relatively blunted tool, unable to break the bone at the respective level.

The best testified is, for the pig, the head cutting on the medio-sagittal line (maybe for brain removing?), and in some graves we may find only half of the skull with the respective jaw.

On the basis of the not too numerous biometrical measurements and especially somatoscopical ones we may offer some details regarding species typology, many of them for *Sus scrofa*. We may say that *Sus scrofa domesticus*, the pig, is represented by a quite primitive type with an elongated snout and a rectangular tear bone, long and a little high; it also has a strong backward supraoccipital, resulting in a high slope going far from the *foramen magnum* plan. The measurements indicate a medium size and a height on spine of 64 centimetres, calculated only for 2 individuals. In the grave 14 there were fragments coming from a 1.5 years individuals, so almost an adult, with a calculated height on spine of 79 centimetres, supposed to be a *Sus scrofa ferus* female, but as the jaws with the teeth are missing we cannot say it for sure.

The *Ovis aries* individuals are of a medium size, one of them being mature. We cannot offer any typological detail as any horns and significant skull fragments are available.

*Gallus domesticus* individuals are of little size but their body is very well proportioned. As many individuals are rather young we cannot offer other details.

Let us think about the cultural importance of the 3 studied species.

*Ovis aries* individuals had a very low frequency, so we don't believe that they had any cultural importance. They might have been offered just because of the temporary pig shortage. Maybe the graves 34 and 39 with *ovinae* belonged the some local people (if they practised incineration too) or to people coming from mixed families.

*Sus scrofa* and *Gallus* are typical animals for Celtic cults. It is enough to say La Tène, the famous Celtic wild boar found in Transylvania<sup>3</sup>, and the Gallic cock which, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in full "Celtic" period, was represented

on the avers of the gold coins during the 3<sup>rd</sup> French Republic.

Without knowing the sex and age of the incinerated individuals (a good anthropologist can sometimes do it on burned material), it is very difficult to specify the proportion, the type and quantity of animal fragments used as offers. One thing is very clear. On choosing and using offers, the religious aspect is dominant with the Celts, the economic aspect being reduced to minimum and sometimes ignored.

They used to offer meat of the best quality and not bony fragments with no meat, in order to be eaten at the funerary banquet.

As regarding *Gallus domestica* we think that the Celts were responsible for its use as aliment by Dacians in La Tène and then being used more and more frequently.

(Translated by Monica Popa)

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<sup>3</sup> See the figure of a wild boar found in the site of Lunca, in "Istoria românilor", volume I, București, Pl. 57, fig. 2, p. 861.

