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# RE-EVALUATION OF MEDIEVAL NOMADIC GRAVES FROM VITĂNEȘTI

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## REZUMAT: REEVALUAREA MORMINTELOR NOMADICE MEDIEVALE DIN VITĂNEȘTI

Săpăturile arheologice ale unui complex tumular din satul Vitănești (județul Teleorman) în 1976 au scos la iveală două înmormântări ecevestre. Autorii acestor săpături au datat înmormântările în secolele X-XI, pe baza analizei materialului de inventar și le-au atribuit pecenegilor, mai ales din cauza ritualului de înmormântare și a zăbalelor dintr-o bară dreaptă găsită în interior. Prezentul articol nu își propune să critice autorii săpăturilor, ci să coreleze datarea bazată pe cercetările la zi, care arată că cele două scări de șa rotunde din mormântul 1, cel mai probabil, nu au putut apărea pe teritoriul sudic al României de astăzi înainte de mijlocul secolului al XI-lea. De asemenea, atribuirea etnică fermă a mormintelor pecenegilor nomazi nu poate fi declarată ca singura/o opțiune, mai ales din cauza factorilor politici turbulenți din acest timp și spațiu și a fluidității societăților nomadice și a interacțiunilor lor tribale în general.

## ABSTRACT:

Archaeological excavations of a barrow complex by the village Vitanesti (Teleorman county) in 1976 brought up two equestrian burials. Authors of these excavations dated the burials to the 10<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, based on the analysis of the inventory material and attributed it to Pechenegs, mostly because of the burial rite and two straight one-piece snuffle bars found inside. The present article does not aim to criticize the authors of the excavations, but to correlate the dating based on the up-to-date research, which shows, that the two round stirrups from grave 1 most probably couldn't appear on the territory of today's southern Romania before the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Firm ethnic attribution of the graves to the nomadic Pechenegs also can't be stated as the only option, mostly due to the turbulent political factors in this time and space and the fluidity of the nomadic societies and their tribal interactions in general.

CUVINTE CHEIE: Vitanesti, Dunărea de Jos, Dunărea de Jos, harnașamente pentru cai, pecenegi, cumani

KEY WORDS: Vitanesti, Lower Danube, horse harness, Pechenegs, Cumans

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Archaeological excavations by the village Vitanesti (Teleorman county) in 1976 brought up two burials, secondary buried in older barrows<sup>2</sup>. Both contained human skeletons and remains of horses, most probably only cranium and legs, together with inventory. Grave 1 was deposited in barrow I. A human skeleton preserved in poor conditions was laying on its back with the head pointing towards west. According to the anthropological research, it was an adult male around 45-50 years old. On the left side of the human was a skull and leg bones of a horse, in seemingly anatomical position and with the same orientation as the human burial. The head of the horse was lifted on a small earthen ramp. Also on the left side of the human skeleton lay the tibia of a sheep<sup>3</sup>. The inventory consisted of the following items:

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<sup>1</sup> The article was written with support of grants nr. 2/0159/21 (Military and horse equipment in the Medieval Period) and 2/0088/20 (Ethnic and cultural changes of medieval society [6<sup>th</sup>- 13<sup>th</sup> centuries] in archaeological sources) of VEGA agency.

<sup>2</sup> Leahu and Trohani 1978.

<sup>3</sup> Leahu and Trohani 1978, 529, Fig. 1/1.

a non-preserved iron arrowhead with a leaf-shaped blade and tang, according to the description<sup>4</sup>, an iron knife with elongated leaf-shaped blade and slight tang<sup>5</sup>, the fragment of an oval iron fire striker and flint<sup>6</sup>, two oval stirrups with eyelet positioned in the upper part of the bow, without neck and relatively narrow footrest. One of them was decorated in form of a narrow channels incrustated probably with bronze plating (Fig. 1: 4). The second, without visible ornamentation (Fig. 1/1), had a footrest wrapped in bark<sup>7</sup>. According to the position of the stirrup in the grave, it seems that they have been originally attached to a saddle that was put where should have been the back of a horse. Close to them was found a simple iron buckle. Inside the horse's mouth was an unjoined snaffle with rigid mouthpiece (Fig. 1/2). Grave 2 was deposited in the barrow II. Human skeleton of an adult male around 55 years old was in the similar position than in the grave one, with orientation slightly more towards the south. The horse skeleton was also consisting from the skull and leg extremities, but with head turned upwards. Parts of horse spine were also included, as well as limb bones of a sheep<sup>8</sup>. Inventory consisted of an iron bearded axe (Fig. 1/5), iron leaf-shaped knife with tang<sup>9</sup> and remains of a bag or pouch made of hemp fabric with two bronze attachments<sup>10</sup> in which was probably stored iron lyre-shaped firestriker and flint<sup>11</sup>. As in the grave 1, horse had in its mouth a single bar unjoined snaffle bit (Fig. 1/3).

### Inventory

Lyre-shaped fire striker from the grave 2 is unfortunately very widely datable item and by itself cannot be considered as chronologically sensitive<sup>12</sup>. Analogies come from various sites, closest in the term of ethnical and dating possibility are the finds from Mirnopolje/Friedensfeld<sup>13</sup> accompanied by two probably oval, but highly damaged stirrups. Nearly identical fire striker, also found with textile remains comes from the grave in Lunca<sup>14</sup>. Unfortunately, the grave was heavily damaged by the ploughing, only upper half of the male skeleton laying with head towards the west and horse bones in secondary position were left<sup>15</sup>.

Axe found in the grave 2 has asymmetrical blade with a beard, rounded butt and caps on both sides (Fig. 1/5). Most recent and thorough analysis of axes from territory of Poland describes it as variant IIB.5.20<sup>16</sup>, representing one of the most numerous type in the researched territory, widely known from the Central and Eastern Europe in the wider time span from 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century, usually based mostly on the relative chronology of various layers<sup>17</sup>. What is important, grave finds from the territory of Poland shows that this variant of axes is found mostly in the late 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> century, even occurring up to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. One grave, from the locality Końskie contained a coin of Count Egbert II struck between 1068 and 1090<sup>18</sup>.

Both graves can be connected by the presence of single bar horse bits. Central bar of both exemplars is slightly bent, with rectangular cross-section, terminated by hooks in which were inserted rings with quadratic cross-section (Fig. 1/2, 3). In general, such snaffle bits can be divided in the various types and subtypes, depending of the cross-section and size or shape of the terminal hooks or rings. Unfortunately, very often are these items either damaged, or the publication quality is not enough to establish finer

<sup>4</sup> Leahu and Trohani 1978, 529.

<sup>5</sup> Leahu and Trohani 1978, Fig. 2/4.

<sup>6</sup> Leahu and Trohani 1978, 530, Fig. 2/5.

<sup>7</sup> Leahu and Trohani 1978, 530.

<sup>8</sup> Leahu and Trohani 1978, 530-532, Fig. 1/2.

<sup>9</sup> Leahu and Trohani 1978, Fig. 2/3.

<sup>10</sup> Leahu and Trohani 1978, Fig. 2/2a, b, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Leahu and Trohani 1978, Fig. 2/6.

<sup>12</sup> Ioniță 2013, 130.

<sup>13</sup> Spinei 1985, Fig. 28/5.

<sup>14</sup> Frînculeasa et al. 2020, Pl. 8.

<sup>15</sup> Frînculeasa et al. 2020, 201-202.

<sup>16</sup> Kotowicz 2018, Pl. IX: 7.

<sup>17</sup> Kotowicz 2018, 98-99, here further literature.

<sup>18</sup> Kotowicz 2018, 99.

typology and more precise dating resulting from it. In the traditional scheme of A. N. Kirpichnikov they are named as type VI, found in the settlement layers dated mainly in the 10<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>19</sup>, such settlement find comes from supposedly first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century from Braslav<sup>20</sup>. In the scheme of G. A. Fedorov-Davydov it represents type V.I and according to him can be dated to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, commenting on their absence in the earlier and also later periods<sup>21</sup>. S. Pletneva, even though in earlier works dated single bar snaffles to the 10<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>22</sup>, reconsidered the chronology and took up to Fedorov-Davydov's dating to 12<sup>th</sup> century<sup>23</sup>. They are very common in the area around the river Ros, south of Kiev<sup>24</sup>. Analysis of E. A. Armarchuk puts the dating of these horse bits to the 11<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, commenting on their absence in the 10<sup>th</sup> century<sup>25</sup>. Analogical finds dated in the 12<sup>th</sup> century comes from the kurgans of Southern Urals<sup>26</sup>. Inside the Carpathian Basin, they are sporadically found at the graveyards from the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> – 11 century, namely Orăștie and Alba Iulia<sup>27</sup> or as stray settlement finds<sup>28</sup>. Unjoined snaffles also occurred in Poland, mostly from settlements dated widely from 10<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, sporadically also to the 13<sup>th</sup> century<sup>29</sup>. Their rare occurrence can be seen as far west as nowadays Germany<sup>30</sup> and as far north as nowadays Norway<sup>31</sup>. In the territory of Bulgaria, such items comes from the three sites: Pliska, Odartsi and Skala<sup>32</sup>. Specimen from Pliska was found in the vicinity of the grave with round stirrups<sup>33</sup>. From the territory of today's Romania, thirteen other sites contain this type of snaffle bits<sup>34</sup>. Dating is often a problem, since there are no other chronologically sensitive items, and therefore the graves are in majority attributed to both the phases I and II, spanning from 9<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>35</sup>.

Single bar horse bit is often seen not only as chronological, but also as ethnical marker. V. A. Kriger considers them characteristic for the "Pecheneg-Oghuz" period in Western Kazakhstan<sup>36</sup>. According to G. N. Garustovich and V. A. Ivanov they are typical for the Pecheneg burials<sup>37</sup>, and the tradition persists among some scholars until today<sup>38</sup>. Single bar snaffle bits appear in the territory of Rus only sporadically and they are considered as import from the nomadic Pechenegs in the 10<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, according to the A. N. Kirpichnikov, named as type VI<sup>39</sup>. Rarely single bar horse bits are considered as Cuman ethnic marker<sup>40</sup>. Recent studies are more reserved in this regard<sup>41</sup>. It is very hard to be able to discern any ethnicity from the settlement finds, mostly in the cities from the region of Kievan Rus. Narrative sources of that era speak both about numerous raids of the Pechenegs in 10<sup>th</sup> century and beginning in 11<sup>th</sup> and subsequently the Cumans since the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. During the 12<sup>th</sup> century, tribes of Black Hats, as well as Cumans were widely used during the internecine wars of Rus princes. Thus widely

<sup>19</sup> Kirpichnikov 1976, 17-18.

<sup>20</sup> Alekseev 1966, 236, *Ris.* 69: 2.

<sup>21</sup> Fedorov-Davydov 1966, 19-20.

<sup>22</sup> Pletneva 1958, 156; 1963, 246-247.

<sup>23</sup> Pletneva 1973, 15.

<sup>24</sup> Pletneva 1973, 17.

<sup>25</sup> Armarchuk 2006, 41.

<sup>26</sup> Mazhitov 1981, 157.

<sup>27</sup> Gáll 2013, 191, 466, 471, *Tab.* 81/1, 253/6.

<sup>28</sup> Točík 1964, 68, *Taf.* 39: 8; Jakubčínová 2016, 289-290, *Tab.* I/6; Béreš and Štukovská 1980, 44, *Obr.* 16/6.

<sup>29</sup> Strzyż 2006, 131; Kotowicz 2006, 31.

<sup>30</sup> Goßler 2011, 24, 67.

<sup>31</sup> Petersen 1951, *Abb.* 11.

<sup>32</sup> Yotov 2004, 136.

<sup>33</sup> Zakhariev 1979, *Obr.* 31, 47.

<sup>34</sup> Spinei 2009, 294; Ioniță 2013, 128, *Ref.* 54.

<sup>35</sup> Ioniță 2013, 136, *Ref.* 87.

<sup>36</sup> Kriger 2012, *Ris.* 18.

<sup>37</sup> Garustovich and Ivanov 2001, 85.

<sup>38</sup> Nevizánsky 2013.

<sup>39</sup> Kirpichnikov 1976, 17-18.

<sup>40</sup> Diaconu 1978, 14-21.

<sup>41</sup> Spinei 2009, 294, *Ref.* 573-574.

dated settlement finds cannot without other data bring light to which tribe or ethnos a single item could have belonged. For example, single bar specimen from fortress Skala can be most possibly attributed with the destruction of the fortress caused probably by the Pechenegs in 1036, due to the combination of numismatic finds and historical sources<sup>42</sup>. On the other hand, the two analogical specimen from Braslav can be attributed very widely, as the lands of Polotsk were hit by nomadic armies few times, both by Black Hats and Cumans<sup>43</sup>.

Stirrups from the grave 1 can be divided in two types. Both have round shape, narrow footrest without visible reinforcement, round cross section of arms and eyelet in the upper part of the body without a neck. Difference between them are in the shape of the upper part and construction of the eyelet.

First stirrup has upper part of the body flattened into slightly oval shape and has no decoration (Fig. 1: 1). Stirrups of this shape can be connected with the type DIII of Fedorov-Davydov<sup>44</sup> that the archaeologist dates not earlier than the 12<sup>th</sup> century, commenting on their non-existence in the burial ground of Sarkel-Belaya Vezha<sup>45</sup>. Even though more than five decades passed since Fedorov-Davydov made his analysis, this observance mostly stood the test of time. Easternmost analogies comes from Transbaikal region, barrow 2 at Budulan and grave 4 from Chindat I, both dated to the 10<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>46</sup>. Analogical stirrups can be found in the North-eastern Black Sea area in the 12<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>47</sup>. Analogical stirrup was also found together with helmet with a mask visor by the village Kuybishevo that can be dated to 12<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>48</sup>. Simillar stirrups are found in grave from Tretii Ples, dated to the 13<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>49</sup>. All the Polish specimen of the same shape, characterized by W. Świętosławski as type IV-D can be dated to the 12<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>50</sup>. Simillar item comes from the grave from Tinód in Hungary<sup>51</sup> that can be dated by analogies of two sabers found with it earliest to the late 11<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>52</sup>. Three analogical stirrups were found in the region of southeastern Germany, unfortunately without narrower dating other than 12<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>53</sup>. In the analogical graves found in the lower Danube area that contained stirrups is a problem with the state of their conservation<sup>54</sup>. Only two specimen from these graves can be more or less attributed to the same type, found at Pavlovka and Mereni. Grave from Pavlovka contained also single bar horse bit<sup>55</sup>. Stirrup from Mereni<sup>56</sup> is unfortunately broken, so it's attribution can be only possible, not certain. Both graves are also dated widely to the 9<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>57</sup>. Two partially destroyed stirrups of the similar shape were found in settlement layer at Dinogetia, dated by the author of the excavations to the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century<sup>58</sup>.

The second stirrup is specific by the shape of the upper side of the body, which is slightly pointed and doesn't seem flattened, or is hammered only slightly. Very important are the remnants of decoration in form of grooves filled by a bronze wire (Fig. 1: 4). Other authors usually doesn't consider decorated stirrups of this shape as a singular type, with exception of E. A. Armarchuk, naming it as a type IV-2b<sup>59</sup>. A. N. Kirpichnikov is recognizing decorated subtype IXa, but the form of the described specimen is slightly

<sup>42</sup> Yotov 1998, 137.

<sup>43</sup> Alekseev 1966, 236.

<sup>44</sup> Fedorov-Davydov 1966, Ris. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Fedorov-Davydov 1966, 16.

<sup>46</sup> Aseev, Kirillov and Kovychev 1984, 129-133, Tabl. XXXV/1; XXIX/4.

<sup>47</sup> Armarchuk 2006, 22-23, as type IV-1.

<sup>48</sup> Kravchenko 2003, Ris. 3/6.

<sup>49</sup> Matiushko 2010, Ris. 8/11-12.

<sup>50</sup> Świętosławski 1990, 49-50.

<sup>51</sup> Hatházi 1996, Tab. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Inkova 2013.

<sup>53</sup> Goßler 2013, 213, Abb. 17, catalogue nr. 5-7.

<sup>54</sup> Ioniță 2013, 130, Ref. 61.

<sup>55</sup> Spinei 1981, Fig. 32/12; Fig. 33/1, 2.

<sup>56</sup> Dergacev and Sava 2002, Ris. 3/6.

<sup>57</sup> Ioniță 2013, 136, Ref. 87.

<sup>58</sup> Barnea, Comșa and Comșa 1967, 348, Fig. 40/24, 25.

<sup>59</sup> Armarchuk 2006, 24-26.

different from the exemplar found at Vitanesti<sup>60</sup>, as they in general bear resemblance with the round shaped stirrups with wide, flat upper part of the arch with various floral or geometric ornamentation. Both of these types of stirrups are known from the Prussian barrow mound at Izerkapinis<sup>61</sup>. Fragment of a similarly decorated stirrup comes from settlement at Novogradok, dated from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>62</sup>, as well as in 11<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> century Volga Bulgaria<sup>63</sup> and from Braslav in historical Polotsk region<sup>64</sup>. Important find in this regard is 12<sup>th</sup> century grave 1 from barrow 11 at site “Mryasimovske kurgany”, where the analogical round stirrup comes together with the single bar snaffle bit<sup>65</sup>. Similar situation was at the site “Iuzhnoozerski mogilnik”, where both decorated round stirrup and single bar snaffle bit was found together in one complex, with possible traces of cremation, but unfortunately cannot be attributed to one grave with certainty<sup>66</sup>. Other decorated stirrups come from the Leninakhabylsk burial mound probably from the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century in Kuban region<sup>67</sup> and a pair of stirrups from Grekomaiskii in northeastern Black Sea region<sup>68</sup>. Seemingly a similar stirrup, with indication of incrustation analogical to the stirrup from Vitanesti is in the database A. N. Kirpichnikov, coming from the burial mound Tagancha<sup>69</sup>. However, later analogical works about this kurgan shows only one remaining stirrup, obviously different from that of Kirpichnikov’s publication in shape, width of the footrest and size of the socket. Second stirrup seems to be lost<sup>70</sup>, but the original photography of the find shows, that both stirrups had very wide footrest<sup>71</sup>. Decoration with inlay of a precious metal on a similar stirrups comes from the Cuman votive hoard from the vicinity of the village Kamenka<sup>72</sup>. Very similar specimen comes from the territory of Poland, found at the site Kalisz<sup>73</sup> which unfortunately cannot be dated more closely than in 10<sup>th</sup> -13<sup>th</sup> century. Stirrups of the same shape but lacking the decoration are relatively widely spread from the territories from Altai to the Pontic steppes, with their appearance starting in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, in the western areas in its second half<sup>74</sup>.

Some conclusions of ethnical attribution can be also based on these stirrups. For example, a grave from Tinód, containing an undecorated stirrup similar to the one from Vitanesti is traditionally connected with Pechenegs, due to the literal sources naming them in the area of the find, however in the 13<sup>th</sup> century<sup>75</sup>. Situation with the settlement of Pechenegs in the Hungarian kingdom is a complicated topic, however, literal sources from the 13<sup>th</sup> century naming Pechenegs in Hungary cannot put a straight line with the nomads that began appearing in the region since the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century<sup>76</sup>. On the other hand, presence of Cumans in the Hungarian kingdom is thoroughly explored area<sup>77</sup>. With the combination of chronological dating and the maximum appearance of the stirrups of this type in the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards makes it much more possible to be attributed to Cumans, and the Black Hats, if we agree with the assumption that the barrows from the region of the river Ros are indeed connected mainly with them. Other situation is with the analogical find from Kamenka, where the presence of a specific stone statue can clearly attribute the sacrificial pit in which were the stirrups found to Cumans<sup>78</sup>.

<sup>60</sup> Kirpichnikov 1973, 53-54.

<sup>61</sup> Kulakov 1999, Ris. 11.

<sup>62</sup> Gurevich 1981, 107, Ris. 81/b.

<sup>63</sup> Rudenko 2000, Ris. 14/12.

<sup>64</sup> Alekseev 1966, Ris. 43/11.

<sup>65</sup> Mazhitov 1981, Ris. 75/9-11.

<sup>66</sup> Armarchuk 2006, 41.

<sup>67</sup> Noskova 1999, Ris. 5/16; Ris. 13/11.

<sup>68</sup> Armarchuk 2006, Tab. 10.

<sup>69</sup> Kirpichnikov 1976, Ris. 66/12.

<sup>70</sup> Gawrysiak-Leszczynska and Musianowicz 2002, 310.

<sup>71</sup> Sarnowska 1949, tab. I.

<sup>72</sup> Krasilnikov and Probeigolova 2009, 235, Ris. 8.

<sup>73</sup> Świętosławski 1990, 105, kat. nr. 72.

<sup>74</sup> Armarchuk 2006, 26-27.

<sup>75</sup> Hatházi 1996, 237.

<sup>76</sup> Paroń 2021, 372-383.

<sup>77</sup> For most recent publication with further literature see Lyublyanovics 2017.

<sup>78</sup> Krasilnikov and Probeigolova 2009, 235-236.

## Funeral rite

As mentioned above, both graves included incomplete skeleton of the horse accompanying the deceased. Authors of the excavations at Vitanesti consider the partial burial of a horse to be a sign attributable only to Pechenegs<sup>79</sup>. However, according to Fedorov-Davydov, there is a visible difference in the funeral rite of his chronological group I, attributed to Pechenegs and Uzes, where is prevalence of the burial type B I, with the horse remains above the buried person in the grave<sup>80</sup> and further chronological groups, attributed to Cumans and Golden Horde population, when these type of burials loose prevalence in phase II and disappear in the phase III<sup>81</sup>. Sometimes the horse remains are positioned on a small earthen ledge, characterised as type B III, as can be assumed in the grave 1 from Vitanesti. These statistics are highly influenced by the number of graves found at the region of the river Ros that make the main bulk of the graves with the B II type of burial rite. Traditionally are these barrows attributed to the so-called Chornye Klobuki, or Black Hats, a specific union of the remnants of the Pecheneg, Oghuz, Berendei and other smaller tribes that were settled in the buffer zone of the Kievan Rus<sup>82</sup>. According to the recent reconsiderations, at least some of the monuments have to be dated later and attributed to the Cumans<sup>83</sup>. Only further detailed analysis of the burials in this area can bring better understanding of their ethnic component. It is important to notice that incomplete horse skeleton also occurs in the graves with the human oriented towards the east, characterised by Fedorov-Davydov as a types GI-VI, occurring only after the Cuman arrival to the steppe<sup>84</sup>. Burial with only the skull and extremities of the horse are the most common type among the nomadic graves in the area north of the lower Danube<sup>85</sup>. Without few exceptions, these graves didn't contain chronologically sensitive artefacts. However, one very well dated complex was found at the site close to the village Suvorovo, containing Byzantine coins with terminus post quem at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century<sup>86</sup>. The burial was attributed to Pechenegs because of the funeral rite, assuming that a community of these nomads persisted in the steppes of the North-Western Black Sea region, preserving their traditional identity and lifestyle. This hypothesis unfortunately cannot be supported by solid evidence. Even though the Pechenegs are very sporadically mentioned in the literary sources at this time, it is important not to overemphasize their part in the political structure of the Pontic Steppes ruled then by the Cumans. Giving money to a servant of deceased Cuman lord that was buried with him is also mentioned by the written sources<sup>87</sup>. Still the overall context of dating and ethnical structure of the whole steppe area was complicated and it is not possible to consider a burial with partial horse skeleton as exclusive for either Pechenegs, Oguzes or Cumans<sup>88</sup>.

Both burials also contained remains of ram bones. Authors of the Vitanesti excavations considered it as an influence from Magyars of the Hungarian kingdom on the Pechenegs, that according to them didn't put meat offerings in graves<sup>89</sup>. The presence of food offering for the afterlife which the bones most certainly represent cannot be considered as an ethnical attribute. Ritual of giving the deceased not only weapons and tools to serve him in afterlife, but also some food and drinks occurred in the nomadic societies in general. For example, in Hungarian kingdom, Cumans sometimes put a mutton offering even after a long time of their assimilation process, although in secret<sup>90</sup>. Ram bones, together with stirrups of the similar shape to Vitanesti also occurred in the Transbaikal region but there is no horse skeleton<sup>91</sup>.

<sup>79</sup> Leahu and Trohani 1978, 535.

<sup>80</sup> Fedorov-Davydov 1966, 134-142, Tabl. 14.

<sup>81</sup> Fedorov-Davydov 1966, Tabl. 15-16.

<sup>82</sup> Pletneva 1973, 12-14.

<sup>83</sup> Gołębiowska-Tobiasz 2017.

<sup>84</sup> Fedorov-Davydov 1966, 126.

<sup>85</sup> Ioniță 2013, 125.

<sup>86</sup> Russev and Redina 2015.

<sup>87</sup> Lyublyanovics 2017, 214.

<sup>88</sup> Pálóczi Horváth 1993, 54-58.

<sup>89</sup> Leahu and Trohani 1978, 535.

<sup>90</sup> Lyublyanovics 2017, 221-222.

<sup>91</sup> Aseev, Kirillov and Kovychev 1984, 133.

## Conclusions

Excavations at Vitanesti brought up a unique funeral inventory that, after correlation with newer research in the wider Pontic Steppe region can bring more light on the evolution of the political situation in the Lower Danube area as well as chronology of development of burial rite and specific artefacts. Snaffle bars with rigid mouthpiece, axe or lyre-shaped fire striker allow for only a wide chronological assessment. However, when considering the specific type of stirrups, the lower chronological border must be set at the half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, or towards its ending, as according to the analogies it is not possible to put their appearance before this time. Upper chronological bar can be set somewhere to the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> or even to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, but the situation in this regard is much foggier. According to the well dated grave from Suvorovo, it is obvious that the funeral rite of partial horse burial with the deceased didn't end with the arrival of the Cumans on the scene, but continued to thrive in some regions up until the Mongol invasion, and it is possible that it didn't fully disappeared even after that. In this regard, more thorough studies of other similar burials from the region can help to establish a new narrative of the development of burial rite of medieval nomads and artefacts attributed to them.

It is important to note that the graves from Vitanesti cannot be connected firmly with one nomadic ethnos or another. Tribes, such as Pechenegs, Uzes and Cumans intermingled and fused together, with one or another taking the upper hand. Such could have been the case of these two men from Vitanesti. As the Danube posed as a border between the steppe and the Byzantine Empire, area north of it can be considered as an amalgam of cultures of some kind. It is not possible to assess, how many Pechenegs stayed north of the Danube after Tyrach's migration, happening in the 1040' and presumably moving the bulk of the Pontic Pechenegs into the territory of Byzantium<sup>92</sup>. This article doesn't aim to solve the issue, but a recent work of A. Paroń comprehensibly puts many of the overstatements under scrutiny<sup>93</sup>. Remains of Pechenegs, short time staying Uzes and other unrecorded nomadic tribes could have stayed in the area north of the Danube, being incorporated and maybe assimilated by the incoming Cumans. In this case, due to dating established in this article, it is more correct to attribute the finds from Vitanesti to Cumans, although not in an ethnical, but political point of view.

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<sup>92</sup> Paroń 2021, 325-327.

<sup>93</sup> Paroń 2021, 359-361, 367-383.

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**Lista ilustrațiilor:**

**Fig. 1.** Piese selectate de la Vitănești. 1, 2, 4 – mormântul 1; 3, 5 – mormânt 2 (Redesenat de Ž. Nagyová din Leahu și Trohani 1976, Fig. 2; 3).

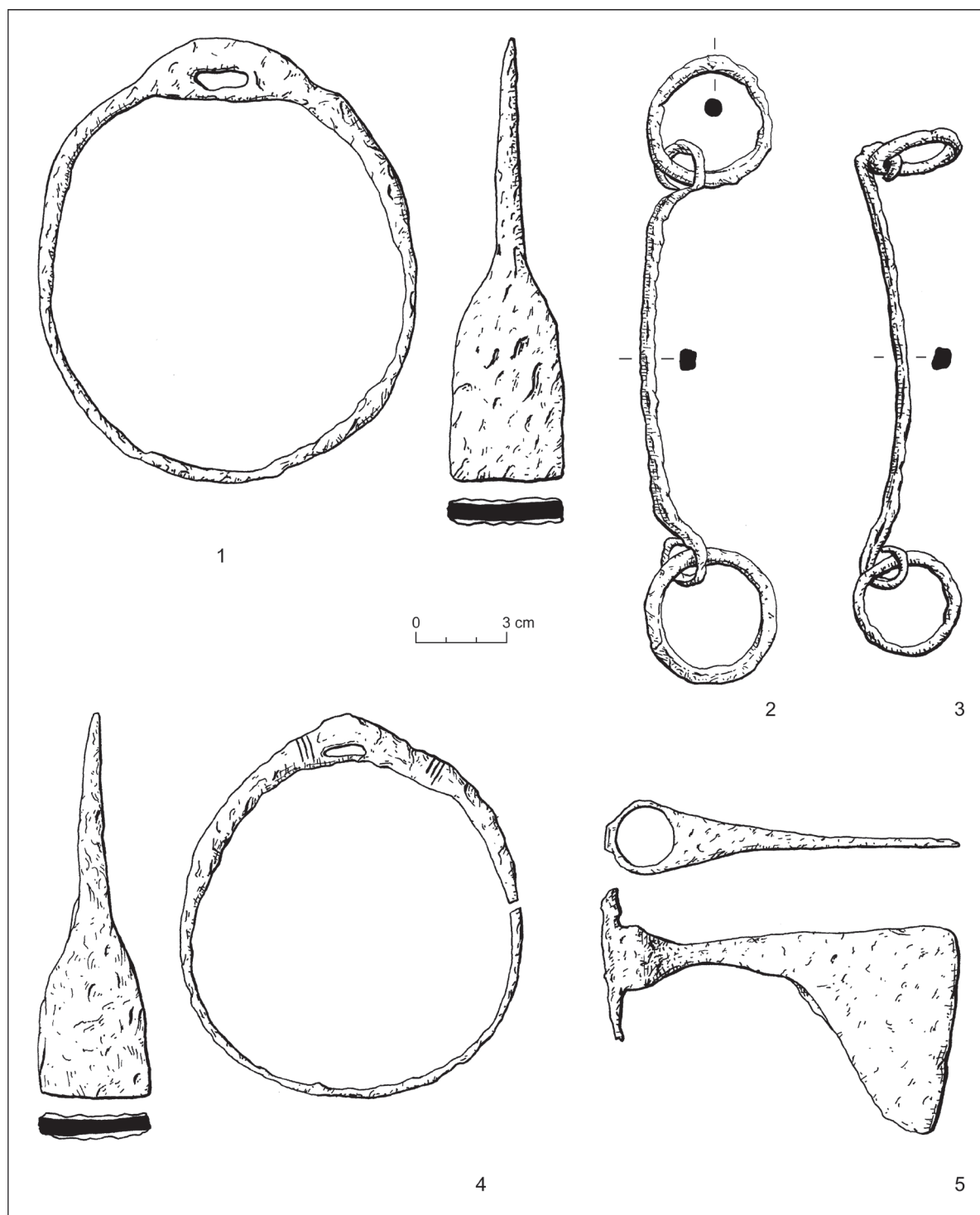


Fig. 1. Selected items from Vitănești. 1, 2, 4 – grave 1; 3, 5 – grave 2 (Redrawn by Ž. Nagyová from Leahu and Trohani 1976, Fig. 2; 3).