

## EARLY IRON AGE COMPLEXES WITH HUMAN REMAINS FROM THE BABADAG SETTLEMENT

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**Rezumat:** Cercetările arheologice din așezarea de la Babadag (jud. Tulcea) au evidențiat existența unui număr de 12 complexe care conțineau oseminte umane. Prezentul studiu include un catalog amănunțit al acestor descoperiri și o analiză de ansamblu a fenomenului, ținând cont de descoperiri similare documentate în așezările culturii Babadag și în medii culturale contemporane, pe un spațiu extins.

Analizând totalitatea descoperirilor cu caracter funerar din zona Dunării Inferioare, o primă concluzie ar fi aceea a existenței, în linii mari, a cel puțin două modalități de tratament aplicat defuncțiilor. Prima dintre ele ar fi reprezentată de complexe cu aspect macabru din așezări iar cea de a doua s-ar putea referi la organizarea unui spațiu funerar în afara habitatului, așa cum sunt necropolele descoperite la Foltești și Sboryanovo.

Dintr-o privire de ansamblu asupra complexelor cu oseminte umane din așezări se poate observa că nu au fost observate reguli în ceea ce privește numărul de indivizi depuși într-un complex, starea lor de integritate anatomică, poziția depunerii, orientarea, excepții referitoare la sex și vârstă sau prezența unor malformații sau anomalii la acești indivizi.

Aceste informații, în majoritatea lor inedite, care provin din arhiva Sebastian Morintz aflată la Institutul de Arheologie „Vasile Pârvan”, din publicații dar și din descoperiri recente, nu fac decât să aducă o imagine nouă asupra fenomenului depunerii defuncțiilor în spațiul locuit.

**Cuvinte cheie:** Babadag, prima epocă a fierului, cultura Babadag, complexe cu oseminte umane în așezări.

**Key words:** Babadag, First Iron Age, Babadag culture, complexes with human remains from settlements.

### Introduction

The Early Iron Age settlement is situated about 2.5 km NE from the Babadag town, Tulcea County, on the shore of the Babadag Lake, approximately 30 m left from the Tabana brook mouth. The prehistoric settlement laid on a promontory which offered a perfect visibility over the lake and the dry land, the latest currently occupied by the modern town. This strategic position was consolidated by the presence of the valley – most probably flooded in the past – which permitted access to the settlement only from NW. The access was even more restricted by the fortification, consisting of a ditch and an earthen structure. The settlement from Babadag became the eponym site of the Early Iron Age culture in Dobroudja, for which the chronological frame and territorial limits were established in 1964 by Sebastian Morintz. The same author published a series of reports and studies<sup>1</sup> considered as guiding marks for studying the Early Iron Age in SE Romania up to present day.

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<sup>1</sup> Morintz 1964, 101-118; Morintz 1971, 19-25; Morintz 1982, 58-64; Morintz 1987, 39-72; Morintz 1989, 262-264; Morintz 1990, 99-115; Morintz *et alii* 1995, 222-235; Morintz, Jugănar, u 1995, 177-202.

## Historical Background

Although the research on the Early Iron Age sites has become more ample since the '60s, the study of the funerary practice of the Hallstatt communities in the area of Lower Danube represents a relatively new concern for the Romanian archaeologists. But it should be emphasized that such manifestations are rarely observed during the archaeological research in the SE Europe. The cemeteries and isolated burials found outside the Urnfield area are rare and rather atypical for the communities from this area and present a varied repertory, as it can be seen from the finds from: Foltești<sup>2</sup>, Hansca<sup>3</sup>, Saharna I, Saharna II, Alcedar, Climăuții de Jos and Poiana (Saharna–Solonceni culture)<sup>4</sup>, Sboryanovo<sup>5</sup> and the megalithic monuments from the Rhodopi Mountains<sup>6</sup>. These necropoleis are practically isolated, one exception being the finds from Saharna–Solonceni culture area and Rhodopi Mountains. This phenomenon overlaps a relatively unitary cultural situation, at least from the point of view of the ceramics: the so-called „cultural horizons with incised, later stamped, pottery”.

The image of the funerary practice was partially improved lately, through the publishing of another category of finds, namely the complexes with human remains found in the settlements. These finds seem to concentrate inside the limits of the Babadag culture, but some can be met also outside this area.

The „non-funerary” character of these finds led to a prudent and even discreet attitude of the archaeologists towards this phenomenon until recently. The first mentions come from S. Morintz who, discussing the excavations conducted on the settlement from Babadag, wrote: „our information regarding the funerary rites practiced by the Babadag people presents today too many gaps” and limits himself to make a short list of such finds from the above mentioned site<sup>7</sup>. This information precedes some others, even more summarily presented, for the finds from the Cernavodă–Dealul Sofia settlement<sup>8</sup> and Capidava–*Necropola tumulară*<sup>9</sup>. The discovery at Rasova–*Malul Roșu* of two graves situated at the periphery of the Early Iron Age settlement found on the plateau encourages M. Irimia to consider them as dating from the Hallstatt period; but with serious question marks, due to the fact that neither grave produced any grave good, and the only known analogy at that time was the necropolis from Stoicani<sup>10</sup>.

The archaeological excavations at the settlement from Satu Nou–*Valea lui Voicu* brought to light two depositional levels dated to the Early Iron Age, concentrated inside a ravine, probably artificially created. In the upper level, the archaeologists found stone agglomerations, animal bones in anatomical connection, and pottery. On this surface there were also human bones (skulls), and several pits containing human and animal complete and fragmentary skeletons<sup>11</sup>. These finds offered the opportunity for a first attempt to present a

<sup>2</sup> László 1986, 67-68, fig. 1, 11; László 2006, 105-116.

<sup>3</sup> Levițki 1994, 222-223, fig. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Kašuba 2000, 270 *sqq.*

<sup>5</sup> Stoyanov 1997.

<sup>6</sup> Delev 1982, 125-129; Delev 1984, 17-46; Gotzev 1994, 266-274; Gotzev 1998, 247-254; Fol 1982.

<sup>7</sup> Morintz 1987, 68.

<sup>8</sup> Berciu *et alii* 1962, 52, fig. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Cheluță–Georgescu 1980, 179-180.

<sup>10</sup> Irimia 1974, 124 -125.

<sup>11</sup> Irimia, Conovici 1993, 53.

synthesis. Considering that these disposals are not characteristic for a special funerary rite, the authors concluded that they “seem to have belonged to individuals that were not supposed to be treated according to the current rites and rituals, probably due to some rites and rituals, religious or of other nature, eventually even ritual human sacrifices”<sup>12</sup>.

The excavations conducted, in 1988, at the settlement from Niculițel–Cornet lead to the discovery of four other such complexes, first published as a separate study. The researchers noticed that the skeletons were laying on the bottom of the pits, but in three of four cases the bones were on a layer of pottery sherds from which no vessel could be restored. They rule out the re-inhumation as a possibility, because some skeletons or parts of the skeletons were still in anatomical connection<sup>13</sup>.

The first synthesis on this subject is presented by V. Sîrbu who, observing some similarities with the situation during the Late Iron Age, is analyzing this category of finds<sup>14</sup>. The author analyses the complexes known at that moment, concluding that there are serious arguments in favour of the opinion that they can't be considered normal graves, but only the archaeological expression of ceremonies and rites with diverse significations. He proposes three explanations for this situation: a) norms that imposed the inhumation of certain individuals outside the necropolis; b) practices connected to the exposure/decomposition of the dead; c) human sacrifices; underlying the fact that only future researches, archaeological and anthropological, will show if and in what degree these explanations are valid<sup>15</sup>.

Later, the subject was resumed again when new finds appeared, like those from Revărsarea–Cotul Tichilești, Niculițel–Cornet (campaign 2000)<sup>16</sup>, or Jurilovca–Argamum<sup>17</sup>. The complex from Jurilovca–Argamum was only partially preserved, being destroyed in ancient times by the building of a wall. This is the biggest complex found so far for the Babadag culture, containing the bones of 15 individuals, being also the first to have an anthropological analysis<sup>18</sup>.

New funerary finds were made by chance at Izvoarele, Constanța County, and determined M. Irimia to discuss again the question of the funerary rite and ritual for the Babadag communities<sup>19</sup>. The author presents a catalogue of known finds and considers that they can be divided into several types: a) inhumation graves; b) complexes with human remains in anatomical connection; c) complexes with fragmentary skeletons; d) complexes with human skulls and jaws; e) complexes with human remains totally or partially cremated<sup>20</sup>.

The publication of the first volume from the series dedicated to the Babadag culture gives to G. Jugănaru the opportunity to present also all these finds in a special chapter<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Irimia, Conovici 1993, 63.

<sup>13</sup> Jugănaru, Topoleanu 1994, 204.

<sup>14</sup> Sîrbu 1994, 83-120; Sîrbu 1997, 193-221.

<sup>15</sup> Sîrbu 1994, 84-90.

<sup>16</sup> Ailincăi, Topoleanu 2003, 45-50.

<sup>17</sup> Ailincăi *et alii* 2003, 307-324.

<sup>18</sup> Ailincăi *et alii* 2003, 307-324.

<sup>19</sup> Irimia 2003, 251-268.

<sup>20</sup> Irimia 2003, 262.

<sup>21</sup> Jugănaru 2005, 32-41.

## Catalogue of finds<sup>22</sup>

In our opinion, the research of this phenomenon is made more difficult by the incorrect publication or even the lack of published information. Quite a lot of such finds come from the Early Iron Age settlement from Babadag, but unfortunately they are not mentioned in the articles dedicated to this site. In the following pages we try to present a catalogue as complete as possible for the finds from the Babadag settlement, based on the already published information, the recent finds, and also a series of documents from the Sebastian Morintz archive at the Institute of Archaeology „Vasile Pârvan” Bucharest. These information, the majority of which unpublished, bring a new and more complete image of the disposal of the dead inside the settlement.

1. During the first archaeological excavations at Babadag (1962-1963) a complex with human remains was found: a pit in Section I (Fig. 1). Based on the information offered by the drawing and the excavations diary it seems that another small square section (noted A) was dug up in order to complete the research on the complex. Initially it is signalled the presence of the lower part of a human skeleton in the filling of the pit. The bones were in anatomical connection and presented strong traces of burning. The archaeologists considered that the bones belonged to an individual from the *maturus* class of age. The alignment of the found lower body was N-S (feet to the south). After removing the pottery sherds other human bones were found, this time from the upper part of a skeleton, “less burned than the previous ones”, and considered by the excavators as belonging to “a different skeleton, that of a child”<sup>23</sup>. From the profile of the pit, presented in the drawings, it seems that the pit was dug up from the upper occupational level, considered to belong to the Babadag III phase.

2. During excavations conducted in order to verify the stratigraphical situation on the plateau NW from the settlement, at a depth of 1 m some sherds and cremated bones were found under a Hallstatt dish put upside down. The find was considered as chronologically belonging to Babadag III<sup>24</sup>. Due to the fact that no anthropological analysis was conducted on the cremated bones, and no ulterior similar finds appeared, there are serious question marks connected to considering this find as funerary. During 2002, the archaeological team from Babadag conducted a verification excavation in that area, which showed that the occupation from the settlement extended also there during the third phase of the Babadag culture.

3. During the 1963 archaeological campaign, in Section A III, Pit 25 a human skeleton was found (Fig. 2/1). The body was articulated, in a flexed position, deposited on the right side. In the drawing, the pit is presented circular in form<sup>25</sup>. Except for the drawing of the complex at a small scale no other information was found on the estimated date and stratigraphical situation of this find<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> For the presentation of this chapter, the authors tried to conform to the terminology proposed by Sprague 2005.

<sup>23</sup> Information from the excavations diary from Babadag (1962-1963) held by S. Morintz and E. Moscalu, where the complex is called Grave 2. The complex is also shortly mentioned by Morintz 1987, 68.

<sup>24</sup> Morintz 1987, 68.

<sup>25</sup> S. Morintz Archive.

<sup>26</sup> The pages with information on Section III were absent from the archaeological diary.

4. In 1965, in S I (Section I), Pit 16b another human skeleton in anatomical connection was found (Fig. 2/2). The body was articulated; deposition: semi-flexed on the back; position: the knees flexed and collapsed; alignment: NW–SE. The skull and right upper arm were destroyed by later Pits 16 and 16a. The skeleton was not on the bottom of the pit, but in the filling. Traces of burning were detected, especially in the deeper part of the pit, where a layer of ash could be noticed. A complete cup was found near the pelvis, and in the filling of the pit many fragments of clay walls, presently burned (clay with reed and rods impressions), and “human or animal” burned bones. The pit was dug up from the level 1, so it can be attributed to the third phase of the culture<sup>27</sup>.

5. During the same campaign, in S I, Sq. 36, Pit 22 a fragmentary human skeleton was found, in partial articulation (Fig. 3/1). The body was not on the bottom of the pit but in the filling, approximately 35 cm above the bottom. The drawing seems to indicate that there were present the skull with the mandible, a part of the chest, the vertebral column and the long bones. On the bottom of the pit there were traces of burning<sup>28</sup>.

6. During the 1990 campaign, in Sq. X, a pit with 3 human skeletons, differently aligned, was discovered (Fig. 3/2). The pit was trapezoidal in profile, perfectly circular in form, the bottom slightly hollowed. A black substance covered the bottom of the pit. The bones were in good condition and belonged to 3 adults. The body in the middle was laying with the head between the others’ two pelvises, that is with the legs to the others’ heads.

The skeleton no. 1 was in the middle, flexed on the left side, hands to the head, facing skeleton no. 2. The body belonged to a mature woman (45-50 years old), over-medium height (1.60 m). The anthropological analysis revealed a medium artrosis for the vertebral column, lombar and sacrum bones, and also a incipient coxartrosis<sup>29</sup>. The skeleton no. 2 was facing skeleton no. 1, and belonged to an adult woman (24-25 years old); over-medium height (1.58 m); semi-flexed on the back; head turned right; right hand to the head, left hand to the pelvis; knees flexed and collapsed. On the left humerus a badly healed fracture was visible, which caused an artrosis of the area, with the result of a very probable disability of the left arm. Another blow was noticed on the left parietal bone, with no mention if this could have been the cause of death<sup>30</sup>. The skeleton no. 3 is somehow separated from the rest, being disposed a little separately and having at his head a jug (which contained the same black substance like that on the bottom of the pit). Well-preserved, this skeleton belonged to a man from the *maturus* III category (55-60 years old), under-medium height (1.63 m). The skeleton was deposited on the back; head to the right; left hand on the pelvis; right hand to the head; knees flexed and collapsed on the skull of the skeleton no. 1. It presented an artrosis of the lombar and sacrum bones, a slight sacral osteoporosis, an affection of the distal end of the left humerus and a double parietal depression. The complex was dated to the third phase of the Babadag culture<sup>31</sup>. The anthropological analysis showed no *perimortem* violence, and the author considered that the displacement of the bones took place during excavation<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> S. Morintz Archive.

<sup>28</sup> S. Morintz Archive.

<sup>29</sup> Perianu 1993, 164.

<sup>30</sup> Perianu 1993, 165.

<sup>31</sup> Perianu 1993, 163 *sqq.*

<sup>32</sup> Perianu 1993, 168.

7. During the 1992 campaign, another complex was partially uncovered (Fig. 4/1-2). Inside a pit, trapezoidal in profile, at -1.90 m below the surface, a human skeleton was found. It was deposited on the back, arms along the sides and knees slightly flexed (most probably collapsed, right foot to the right and left foot to the left); alignment S-N (head to the north). Interesting was the fact that a massive stone slab was put on the skull. On the left side of the pelvis it was a small ceramic vessel with three stems, made of a brick-colored clay. The vessel had inside strong traces of burning<sup>33</sup>. The authors don't mention the level from which the pit was dug up, which makes more difficult dating the complex. The majority of the finds in 1992 indicate that a level from the second phase of the culture was subject to excavation at that moment. This observation, corroborated to the fact that in the filling of the pit a pottery sherd characteristic to this phase was found, determines us to consider this complex, with some degree of uncertainty, as Babadag II. The anthropological analysis showed that the skeleton belonged to a woman, *adultus* II (30-40 years old), height 1.472 m<sup>34</sup>.

8. In 1996, the excavations inside the settlement, on the cliff, gave another find (Fig. 5). In Sq. IV, level II of the Babadag III phase, at a depth of -0.90 m, on a yellow clay surface, strongly hollowed, it was noticed a circular spot, 1.45 m in diameter. It proved to be the mouth of a bell-shaped pit, with a depth of 0.85 m. Stratigraphically, in the upper part of the pit, on 0.40 m, it was a "lid" made of black polished sherds, followed by a layer of burned earth mixed with ashes.

On the bottom of the pit it was a skeleton oriented to N (head to the north). It was in a flexed position; on the left side; hands under the head; knees flexed. On the chest and legs the skeleton was covered with a layer of stone slabs and sherds from a polished black vessel. On the pelvis a burned reddish clay object was found, a fragmentary valve from a mould. The vessel was big, polished, black and made from a good quality clay, with the maximum diameter on the belly. On this area two pairs of small conical prominences with their tips turned upside were applied opposite to each other, as well as a small handle. The vessel was decorated only on the maximum diameter with a row of motives in the form of a horizontal S<sup>35</sup>.

9. An interesting situation was noticed during the 2003 campaign, for Pit 3 from section S VI which was dug up perpendicular on the fortification structure of the Babadag settlement<sup>36</sup> (Fig. 4/3-4). The complex was sectioned like all the others on an alignment NE-SW. The pit was trapezoidal in profile and approximately circular in plan. The diameter of the opening was 0.75 m and that of the bottom 1.20 m. The filling of the pit consisted in brown earth, probably loess mixed with ashes. At half a distance between the mouth and the bottom of the pit 3 human skulls were found. One of them (on the NE side) was upside down, facing NE, while the other two, grouped towards the opposite side of the pit, facing SW. No jaw was present, and for the two grouped skulls the upper maxilla were almost completely destroyed<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> Morintz, Jugănaru 1995, 182, fig. 18.

<sup>34</sup> The anthropological report following the analysis was presented by N. Mirițoiu and A. Soficaru, from The Institute of Anthropology „F.I. Rainer” Bucharest.

<sup>35</sup> Jugănaru 2005, 33, fig. 8/1, 2/3, 26/4.

<sup>36</sup> The section was partially excavated by S. Morintz and was enlarged and deepened during the 2001-2003 campaigns.

<sup>37</sup> Jugănaru, Ailincăi 2003, 49, fig. 1, 3.

The skull no. 1, without jaw, generally well-preserved, but also presenting some ancient, as well as present, damages. Very important is a damage noticed on the lateral of the upper orbital bone, where a blow, most probably on green bone, produced a fissure of the upper side of the orbit and broke the zygomatic apophysis of the frontal and the apophysis of the zygomatic bone. The lack of *postfractum* reaction leads rather to the possibility of *perimortem* violence. The skull belonged to a woman, young adult (around 25 years old).

The skull no. 2 has the cranial cap well-preserved, with recent damage only on the left part of the coronary region, and belonged to a young adult female.

The skull no. 3 has no jaw, and it is well-preserved but with ancient damages. The left half of the facial massive is missing, probably as the result of a violent action which broke the nasal area, the ascending apophysis of the maxilla, the palate, and the pterigoid process of the sphenoid and the zygomatic apophysis of the temporal bone. In the same time, there can be observed damages on the basal part of the skull, on both mastoids, occipital condyles and the superior part of the basioccipital. The skull belonged to a woman, with age difficult to be determined: based on dentition and cranial sutures the *maturus* category (or even a more advanced age) can be advanced as a strong possibility<sup>38</sup>.

During the 2004 campaign, the collapse of the profile because of heavy rains and flooding of the section conducted to the discovery of a fourth skull in the same pit. This was not anthropologically analyzed yet. The complex was dug up in the earthen structure of the fortification system, which was erected during the third phase of the culture. Based on this fact, the complex could belong to the VIII–VII centuries B.C.

10. During the 2004 campaign, in level 3, Sq. 5, Pit 1, together with a lot of sherds a human jaw was also identified. The complex is attributed stratigraphically to the third phase of the Babadag culture<sup>39</sup>.

11. In the same year, in level 2, Sq. 8, in the filling of Pit 1 human remains were found from at least two individuals (Fig. 6, 7). The complex had a circular opening with the diameter of 0.60 m, a depth of 0.55 m, and an irregular trapezoidal profile, with a diameter of 1.50 m at the bottom<sup>40</sup>. The bones were on the bottom of the pit, together with a fragment from a big mammal's jaw and the fragments of a big pot (Fig. 6), with maximum diameter below the rim, where it also had a conical prominence with the tip turned up. In the filling there were also many animal bones and a great number of sherds, which came from: three dishes with the rim curved to the interior (Fig. 7/2, 4, 5), one cup with the lower body decorated with vertical grooves and prominences on the maximum diameter, and two pots from the kitchenware category (Fig. 7/2-3). This complex is considered as belonging to the third phase of the Babadag culture, based on the level from which the pit was dug up.

12. During the same campaign, another pit with human remains was found in S X1, in the eastern side of the site, at the base of the promontory (Fig. 8, 9). On the bottom of the pit there was a skeleton deposited on the back; knees flexed and collapsed on the right; head turned

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<sup>38</sup> The anthropological report following the analysis was presented by N. Mirițoiu and A. Soficaru, from The Institute of Anthropology „F.I. Rainer” Bucharest.

<sup>39</sup> Jugănaru 2005, 59.

<sup>40</sup> Jugănaru 2005, 59.

to the right; aligned NW–SE (head to the NW)<sup>41</sup>. The pit was circular in plan and trapezoidal in profile. The left femur (drawn dotted on the plan) was found in the filling of the pit (Fig. 8/1-2). Near the skeleton, in the northern part of the pit, it was found a fragmentary vessel, kitchenware category (Fig. 9/1). In the filling there were a lot of sherds and animal bones. The sherds come from kitchenware with alveolar girdle or prominences below the rim (Fig. 9/4-5), dishes (Fig. 9/3, 7-9) and vessels with maximum diameter on the belly (Fig. 9/2, 6). Other finds: one disc-shaped clay object, perforated in the centre (Fig. 9/11); two clay objects of irregular conical shape (Fig. 9/12-13) and a lid (Fig. 9/10). The complex is later than the fortification wall, so it is proposed a date at the end of the third phase of the culture.

13. During the 2006 excavations, in C VII-VIII, Sq. 2E, on the floor of a house a fragmentary human jaw was found. The complex is part of level 5 of the settlement, as a result the find being attributed to the third phase of the Babadag culture.

### **Deficiencies of publication and research**

As it could be noticed so far, the preoccupations with the disposal of the dead during the Early Iron Age in the Lower Danube area are relatively recent. Although the first complexes with human remains were found at the beginning of the excavations at the site from Babadag (1962-1963), they were only summarily mentioned in writing in 1987<sup>42</sup>.

The analysis of this category of finds is also made more difficult by the un-proper publication of some of them, the main problem being the lack of drawings and plans, or the fact that these are incomplete. In many cases it can be observed an un-adequate research and registration of data, especially the lack of stratigraphical profiles for the complexes and the selective publication of the material found inside these pits. The deficiencies are noticed also when the orientation and alignment of the skeletons are presented. Many complete skeletons or bones “got lost” after discovery, situation that made impossible the anthropological analysis, which led to further implications like the impossibility of establishing conclusions on the age, sex, pathology and cause of death for those individuals.

### **Uncertain finds**

The existence of some uncertain finds, for which exist mostly suppositions, increases the confusion inside this domain of research. A „classical” example for the Babadag culture area is the find from Cernavodă–*Dealul Sofia*. The authors mention summarily the excavation of a cremation grave „with 11 vessels as inventory ... the grave was covered with quite big stones”<sup>43</sup>. As illustration are present photos showing two completed cups and four fragments from vessels decorated through stamping. There are no specifications regarding the disposition of the pottery or cremated bones. More, with the occasion of the session of archaeological communications Pontica 2003, P. Roman, as witness for this find, declared that no bones were found on the spot. The question arises if there is a possibility for D. Berciu to have been influenced more than necessary by his excavations conducted at the cremation necropoleis from Oltenia.

<sup>41</sup> Jugănaru *et alii* 2005, 60.

<sup>42</sup> Morintz 1987, 68, no. 118.

<sup>43</sup> Berciu *et alii* 1961, 52, fig. 3/1-6.



Same question marks appear connected to one find from Babadag, considered by S. Morintz as cremation grave (our Cat. No. 2). The lack of an anthropological expertise on the nature of these bones (they could be as well animal bones) determines us to exclude also this find from the category of complexes discussed in the present paper.

### The interpretation of finds in the context of the Babadag culture

During more than 40 years of excavations at sites attributed to the Babadag culture, no proper necropoleis were discovered, the complexes with human remains coming from settlements. The only exceptions so far are the uncertain mentions for Capidava–*Necropola tumulară romană*<sup>44</sup> and Izvoarele–*Biserica satului*<sup>45</sup>.

From the chronological point of view, these complexes with human remains cover the entire evolution of the Babadag culture. At the present, only the finds from Garvăn–*Mlăjițul Florilor*<sup>46</sup> and Siliștea–*Conac*<sup>47</sup> can be assigned to the first phase of the culture (Babadag I). A lot more finds are dated to the second phase of the culture: Babadag<sup>48</sup>; Brăilița<sup>49</sup>; Bucu<sup>50</sup>; Capidava–*Necropola tumulară romană*<sup>51</sup>; Capidava–*La Bursuci*<sup>52</sup>; Garvăn–*Mlăjițul Florilor*<sup>53</sup>; Jijila–*Cetățuie*<sup>54</sup>; Jurilovca–*Argamum*<sup>55</sup>; Niculițel–*Cornet*<sup>56</sup>; Revărsarea–*Dealul Tichilești*<sup>57</sup>; Satu Nou–*Valea lui Voicu*<sup>58</sup>; Suceveni–*Stoborâni*<sup>59</sup>. From the third phase of the culture there are also a number of finds: the majority of the complexes from Babadag (with the exception of Cat. No. 7, uncertainly attributed to the second phase, and Cat. Nos. 3-4 which lack sufficient information for establishing a certain phase); Enisala–*Palanca*<sup>60</sup>; Izvoarele–*Biserica satului*<sup>61</sup>; Novosel'skoe–*Teraphont*<sup>62</sup>; Orlovka–*Cartal*<sup>63</sup>; Rasova–*Malul Roșu*<sup>64</sup>; Revărsarea–*Cotul Tichilești*<sup>65</sup>.

There are some observations to be made while analyzing these finds. First of all, four categories can be established depending on the preservation state of the bodies: a) complexes with complete skeletons in anatomical connection (articulated); b) complexes with disarticulated

<sup>44</sup> Cheluță–Georgescu 1980, 180.

<sup>45</sup> Irimia 2003, 254-255, fig. 1.

<sup>46</sup> Jugănar 1997, 104, fig. 1.

<sup>47</sup> Sîrbu, Pandrea 1994, 31.

<sup>48</sup> Morintz, Jugănar 1995, 182, fig. 18.

<sup>49</sup> Harțuche 2002, 143, fig. 109/1-2.

<sup>50</sup> Information most kindly offered by Mrs. Elena Rența, to whom the authors express their thanks.

<sup>51</sup> Cheluță–Georgescu 1980, 180.

<sup>52</sup> Dobrinescu *et alii* 2005, 100.

<sup>53</sup> Jugănar 2005, 34.

<sup>54</sup> Sîrbu, Ailincăi 2005, 202-203.

<sup>55</sup> Ailincăi *et alii* 2003, 307-324.

<sup>56</sup> Jugănar, Topoleanu 1994, 71-81; Topoleanu, Jugănar 1995, 203-230; Ailincăi, Topoleanu 2003, 45-50.

<sup>57</sup> Simion 2003, 102; Haimovici 2003, 481.

<sup>58</sup> Irimia, Conovici 1993, 52-65, 89-97, fig. 10/8, 9.

<sup>59</sup> Dragomir 1996, 365-372.

<sup>60</sup> Jugănar *et alii* 2004, 119.

<sup>61</sup> Irimia 2003, 254-255, fig. 1.

<sup>62</sup> Bruiako, Novițkii 1997, 117-121.

<sup>63</sup> Vančugov *et alii* 1999, 137 *sqq.*, fig. 9/1, 25/5, 27, 28/1-3.

<sup>64</sup> Irimia 1974, 124-125.

<sup>65</sup> Baumann 1995, 231, fig. 23.

skeletons; c) complexes with isolated bones (fragmentary from the individuality point of view), like skulls, fragments of skulls, jaws, limbs; d) mixed complexes (combinations of a-c).

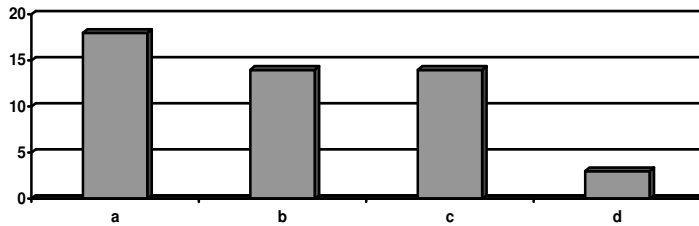


Table 1. The comparative situation of the complexes with human remains from the Babadag culture sites depending on the preservation state of the bodies

The situation presented in Table 1 shows that the majority of complexes contain skeletons in anatomical connection (18 complexes), but it must be noticed that no less than 31 complexes contain fragmentary skeletons, with or without anatomical connection and single bones from other individuals. The registered situation seems to lead to the conclusion that there is no single rule regarding the disposal of the dead. If for the skeletons in anatomical connection it can be supposed that the dead were disposed inside the pits in a state of incipient reduction process, for the other categories the signs lead to the idea of the exposure of the bodies in special places, with the result of the reduction. The lack of marks which would attest a mechanical process of reduction (like for example cutting marks on the bones) rather shows the fact that the bodies were most probably left in open air for a while and recovered later to be placed inside the pits. The fragmentary state of some skeletons or the missing parts could be also the result of ulterior involuntary interventions, like is the case for the complex from Jurilovca, where some of the skeletons were destroyed by the fortification wall of the Greek city of *Orgame / Argamum*, or the destruction of the upper part of the skeleton in Pit 4 from Babadag by the digging of a later pit.

One of the major issues of the funerary archaeology is represented by the understanding of the space where the burial took place. It is hard to believe that the choice of the funerary space was random, even if the rules guiding the communities in establishing this are still not very well known<sup>66</sup>.

Although up to present the idea of some „funerary spaces” inside the settlements was discussed<sup>67</sup>, this theory is impossible to be verified because of the research deficiencies connected in the first place to the topographical registration of all known complexes. In what concerns the chosen place for disposal it can be noticed that the majority of the human remains were found in pits of different sizes, mostly circular in plan and trapezoidal in profile or bell-shaped, similar to those named by the archaeologists „storage pits” or even „garbage pits”. Some pits were oval or rectangular, probably dug up especially for receiving the dead, like

<sup>66</sup> Chicideanu 2000, 109.

<sup>67</sup> Perianu 1993, 163; Morintz, Jugănaru 1995, 182.

could be the case with the finds from Brăilița, Novosel'skoe, Rasova and Silișteea. Interesting are the mentions regarding the discovery of two skulls and one jaw on the floor of a house from the settlement of Garvăn–*Mlăjitul Florilor*, or of a greater number of human skulls in the ravine from Satu Nou–*Valea lui Voicu*, found together with a lot of animal – especially dog and pig – bones. If in the case of the pit with human skulls found in the fortification structure at Babadag there are some doubts concerning the association between these two complexes, at the base of the second earthen fortification structure from Jijila a pit containing a skull and a femur was also found, with better chances of association. For the complexes from Capidava–*La Bursuci* and Rasova (Grave 2) there are no mentions regarding the existence of pits, but it can be supposed that they were destroyed as the result of landslides or agricultural activities.

A special place because its disposal area – outside the settlement – is occupied by the complex from Capidava–*Necropola tumulară romană*. The author of the excavations says that the tumulus contained four graves: „the main inhumation grave, dated to the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.” and other three graves dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup>, respectively the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>68</sup>. The grave considered to be Early Iron Age was observed in Section B. The pit was rectangular and was dug up, „directly in the clay layer”; it was an inhumation burial; the skeleton was aligned E-W; orientated to W (head to the W); deposited on the right side; hands in front of the face; the left leg over the right leg. Near the skull it was a vessel dated to Babadag II. Over the pit a mantle of stones was identified, 0.70 high<sup>69</sup>. This find, associated to the absence of any signs of an Early Iron Age settlement overlapped by the Roman necropolis, would have represented a case of inhumation beyond doubt for the Babadag culture area. Unfortunately, the information comes without any illustration of the complex or the inventory. The position and the alignment of the body which are not characteristic for the Roman period, and the inventory consisting of a vessel probably decorated through stamping make us consider with prudence this complex as belonging to the Babadag culture. A further problem is arisen by the existence of the mound over the grave.

The burials from Izvoarele put similar problems. The fact that they were found by chance limited a lot the information gathered from the place. The only element which can offer a probable chronological frame and the cultural affiliation consists in the two small vessels with analogies in the upper level of the settlement from Satu Nou–*Valea lui Voicu*<sup>70</sup>.

As already mentioned, there are no signs so far regarding the existence of a special disposal area for the dead inside the settlements. The site from Babadag provides at present more information than the others, with 13 complexes, mostly found in the levels of the third phase of the culture, when the fortification was erected and the settlement extended on the entire promontory. Although the exact location of the complexes is not known, the majority come from the inhabited area, with the exception of Cat. Nos. 9 and 12, placed in the fortification area (out of use close to the end of the settlement).

Another site which provided information on this aspect is Niculițel–*Cornet*. The two preventive archaeological campaigns on this site offered a number of 8 complexes with human remains. Unfortunately, the lack of a clear topographical situation doesn't make things easier, being more difficult to identify a possible pattern in the disposal area.

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<sup>68</sup> Cheluță-Georgescu 1979, 179.

<sup>69</sup> Cheluță-Georgescu 1979, 180.

<sup>70</sup> Irimia 2003, 254-255, fig. 1.

A special situation is considered the site from Satu Nou–*Valea lui Voicu*. The Early Iron Age complexes were excavated during 1991-1992, 2001, 2002 and form two levels in a sector called „the ravine”. This sector is aligned approximately N–S and has a width of 2-4 m, the layers being more consistent on a length of 30-32 m. To the upper level there are attributed 5 pits, 3 of them with human remains. To the inferior level there are attributed a hut (?), a hearth and a pit. The situation observed here puts some problems. First of all, the area where the finds come from is restricted, being called by the authors „ravine”; secondly, the fact that the huge quantity of human and animal bones deposited here made the habitation impossible. A further argument is the absence of the dwelling places, the hut from Level II being put under question by the excavators themselves; in fact, the size of 3 × 1.1 m is not exactly fit for a dwelling place. In our opinion, these finds could be rather a deposition area for residues or a place for intentional disposal of human and animal bones for exposure, idea further confirmed by the presence of many skeletons in anatomical connection.

In many cases, strongly connected to the burial process are also the grave’s features and the grave goods. Their characteristics vary depending on the communities, areas and periods. Many times these elements are the only ones that can still be noticed from the whole funerary practice. Observing and analyzing the modalities of arranging the funerary space and the grave goods lead often to important conclusions regarding the organization of the necropolis, the social organization, the status differentiation or the chronology. Of course, for the archaeologists it is easier when these rituals are reflected or end up in observable standards. Unfortunately, at the present state of our knowledge on the disposal of the dead for the Babadag culture communities, this can’t be said about the finds from the area of this culture. There can’t be drawn any conclusions yet on what should be considered typical in this case, no matter if it is to consider the space, form of disposal, individuality, position, orientation, alignment, features, grave goods etc.

Sometimes some special ways of action can be noticed. Like for example at Jurilovca, where a layer of ashes – containing sherds from around 80 vessels, animal bones, a human humerus and coxal bone – was noticed over the bodies, and also objects placed at the skeletons’ level. This case is not singular. Four of the eight pits from Niculițel–*Cornet* present a „bed” of ceramic fragments on which the bodies were laid<sup>71</sup>. On the same site, during the campaign of year 2000, in such a pit it was noticed a layer of ashes and sherds over a part of the bones. On the bottom of the same pit were found a cup with two handles, an ox shoulder blade and an antler object, probably a tool for planting<sup>72</sup>. Only the complex from Babadag contained a single skeleton (Cat. No. 6), covered with stone slabs and a layer of sherds<sup>73</sup>. Layers of ashes and sherds covering the human remains are signaled also for the Pits 41, 43, 44, and 46 from Satu Nou–*Valea lui Voicu*<sup>74</sup>.

The signs of burning noticed for some of the complexes imply the use of fire, sometimes inside the pit (Cat. Nos. 1, 5), sometimes outside, like is the case with the strongly burned human bones from the filling of the pit from Jurilovca–*Argamum*. For this last example it should be mentioned that the sherds forming a compact layer over the skeletons show also traces of secondary burning, after the breaking of the pottery.

<sup>71</sup> Jugănar, Topoleanu 1995, 71-72; Topoleanu, Jugănar 1994, 204-205.

<sup>72</sup> Ailincăi, Topoleanu 2003, 45, fig. 2.

<sup>73</sup> Jugănar 2005, 33.

<sup>74</sup> Irimia, Conovici 1991, 53, 89, 91, 94.

Another situation to be remembered concerns the fact that in many cases the human remains were not placed on the bottom of the pits, but in the filling. This observation raises the question of the initial purpose or use of these pits, which seem to have been used only secondary as places for the disposal of the dead.

Also, two of the complexes with human skulls found in connection with the fortification structure at Babadag and Jijila could suggest that they were „foundation deposits”.

### Similar contemporary situations

On a smaller scale the phenomenon of the „complexes with human remains” inside settlements is present sporadically in the SE Europe. The earliest and closest example is that of Pit 2 from Tămăoani, where a human inferior limb in anatomical connection was found. A. László puts this find in connection with the *pars pro toto* concept, and the presence in the same complex of a bronze knife, a spindle-whirl, two vessels and two small lids deposited successively makes him think of a possible ritual pit<sup>75</sup>. Also to the Tămăoani cultural group were attributed the finds from the necropolis of Foltești. The excavations conducted in the years 1972-1973 and 1975 led to the discovery of 9 graves (in the first phase only Grave 9, found during the last campaign, was published)<sup>76</sup>. The necropolis from Foltești consists of plain inhumation graves, found at a distance of 6-7 m from each other. The main characteristic is the presence of skeletons without anatomical connection and of parts of skeletons. The absence of the anatomical connection in some cases and the absence of some of the bones in other cases reflect the manipulation of the bodies. There is only one exception, the individual from Grave 8 was found in anatomical connection. As for the grave goods, these consist in pottery, especially dishes and cups, but also bronze objects, like in the case of Grave 8. A similar, but isolated, find comes from Hansca, a grave attributed to the Hansca–Holercani cultural group<sup>77</sup>.

In Transilvania, there were published three finds from the Reci–Mediaș culture area: the pit from Baci (Cluj county), with two children found in the filling<sup>78</sup>; two pits with human remains from the settlement of Teleac (Ciugud, Alba county)<sup>79</sup>.

For the southern part of Romania are known the finds from Ostrovul Corbului (Hinova, Mehedinți county), where a pit with three children was excavated<sup>80</sup>, and from Locusteni (Daneți, Dolj county), where two skeletons came from the fortification ditch of the settlement<sup>81</sup>.

From the same category of finds come the two pits with human remains and the „zólniki” (ash surface) from Hlinjeni (Rep. of Moldova)<sup>82</sup>, in the area of the Saharna–Solonceni culture. Here, the presence of such finds in an area which provides numerous data concerning the burial inside necropolis raises the problem of the nature of this kind of disposal of the dead, clearly different from the usual (?) graves.

<sup>75</sup> László 1986, 68.

<sup>76</sup> László 1986, 67; László 2006, 105-106.

<sup>77</sup> Levițki 1985, 125-128; Levițki 1994, 222-223.

<sup>78</sup> Kalmar 1987, 166 *sqq.*

<sup>79</sup> Vasiliev *et alii* 1991, 42-43.

<sup>80</sup> Roman *et alii* 1993, 101-107.

<sup>81</sup> Sîrbu 1994, 89.

<sup>82</sup> Gol'ceva 1992, 183-189; Gol'ceva, Kašuba 1995, 19; these pits are attributed by the authors to the Saharna–Solonceni level.

A spectacular situation is known for Serbia, where in the settlement from Gomolava two such complexes were excavated. One pit contained 32, the other 78 individuals<sup>83</sup>. Chronologically these finds belong to the Bosut III a horizon and are attributed to the Kalakača culture (1050–750 B.C.)<sup>84</sup>. Based on the date proposed for the bronze objects from Grave II, the two finds were included in the last phase of this culture (the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.).

Outside this area, it is already consecrated in the archaeological literature the settlement from Stillfried an der March, Austria, where in 1976 it was excavated a pit with 7 human skeletons. The pit was considered by the authors as a former storage pit. The anthropological data evidenced the presence of 3 adults (a 30 years old male and two 40, respectively 45, years old females) and 4 children (a girl of 9 and 3 boys of 8, 6 and 3 years old). Their haphazard position suggest that they were thrown inside the pit. The importance of the anthropological analysis is enhanced by the fact that it was possible to establish the kin relation between the individuals. This find was even stranger for an area where the customary form of disposal was cremation. The complex was interpreted as a consequence of a „bloody succession to the throne” (?), an eventual influence on the funerary practice from the northern Balkan area or the burial of a family of „foreigners” for which different funerary standards were adopted<sup>85</sup>. At the same settlement from Stillfried appeared in some pits from the same period isolated human skulls (10), one of them still preserving breakage marks, probably made in order to extract the brain<sup>86</sup>.

Some similarities can be noticed also between the situation from the Early Iron Age Lower Danube area and the British Islands for the local Late Bronze Age (1000–550 B.C.). The archaeological excavations showed that during that period the tradition of the urn fields, characteristic for the Middle Bronze Age, disappeared almost completely. Instead, human remains were found at 99 sites, 2/3 coming from un-funerary contexts. The majority of these finds consists in disarticulated human bones, unburned or in fragmentary condition, but there are also cases with „complete burials”, with the cremation or inhumation of the bodies<sup>87</sup>.

Beside the finds from the settlements, another custom which put some problems is the disposal of human bones in rivers, lakes or marshes, many times in association with bronzes. This form of disposal of the dead in watery places takes proportions during the Late Bronze Age and seems to replace the earlier funerary practices. On the whole the majority of the bones coming from such contexts are disarticulated and mixed, suggesting a secondary disposal probably linked to the tradition of bronze hoarding. The same significance is possible for the deposits of disarticulated human bones from caves, found together with bronze objects, pottery, animal bones etc.<sup>88</sup>

The examples presented so far give emphasis to the fact that the manipulation of the human bones represents a widely encountered phenomenon, in different areas and cultures, co-existing or not with the cemeteries.

<sup>83</sup> Tasić 1972, 27-37; Medović 1978.

<sup>84</sup> Medović 1988, 443-453; on Gornea- Kalakača it is also important the study of Gumă 1981, 43-66.

<sup>85</sup> Heiling-Schmoll 1987, 43-46.

<sup>86</sup> Heiling-Schmoll 1987, 43-46; Eibner 1976, 70; Eibner 1980, 107.

<sup>87</sup> Brück 1995, 245-248.

<sup>88</sup> Brück 1995, 250-251.

### Similar situations from other periods

Many of the practices discussed until now have a long existence and they are not a characteristic only for the Iron Age. Such finds are in great number associated with the Neolithic cultures. Complexes with human remains inside settlements are a common feature for well-known sites from Near East, like Jerichon, Mureybet, Ain Ghazal, Tell Ramad, Çatalhöyük etc. The same situation is known for the Neolithic and Copper Age cultures from SE Europe, like Starčevo–Criș, Vinča, Boian, Gumelnița, Cucuteni–Tripolje etc., where the finds were often interpreted as sacrifices connected with making the inhabited space sacred<sup>89</sup>.

Although characterized by a lower intensity<sup>90</sup>, this practice is also noticed for the Bronze Age in the area between the Carpathians and Danube, as it is the case with the finds from Bogdănești, Sălacea, Otomani, Spisky Stvrto, Ganovče, considered by some archaeologists as the result of human sacrifices<sup>91</sup>.

An „explosion” of this phenomenon is registered during the Late Iron Age. In the context of the classical Geto-Dacian culture this type of disposal becomes a custom, substituting in great part the earlier funerary practices. The situation recorded for the Early Iron Age is similar in many ways with that from the classical Dacian period, for which such disposals of the dead were interpreted as human sacrifices. It was stated that these finds, associated with the change of the funerary practices for the Dacian population, could be put on „a radical modification of the religious domain”<sup>92</sup>.

### Instead of conclusions

The treatment of the dead has an important place in the life of all cultures and societies. The appearance of the first burials beginning with the Middle Paleolithic can be considered as a sign of an essential change in the evolution of human psychic. It is presumed that the first funerary features had the purpose of protecting the dead against predators and scavengers, as a result of the respect shown to the dead<sup>93</sup>. From Paleolithic to present day there were recorded numberless ways for the human communities of expressing their customs applied to the deceased. The burials as final stage of these rituals probably represent one of the most important sources for evidence of the prehistoric populations, offering information on the social organization, health, status, social roles etc.<sup>94</sup>

As a definition, the grave is the place arranged with the purpose of disposing the body, being an assemblage constituted from the human remains and the grave goods or inventory. Its construction is completed during a complex ceremony – the burial, through which it is understood the disposal of a deceased in a rigorous environment, in a place especially selected, activity marked by piety. In its turn, the burial represented the final stage in a complex ceremony from which the only trace that can be archaeologically recorded is the grave<sup>95</sup>.

<sup>89</sup> Voinea 2001, 35-41; Nikolova 2002, 53-67.

<sup>90</sup> Or just less visible in the archaeological record !

<sup>91</sup> Comșa, Schuster 1995, 279-288.

<sup>92</sup> Sîrbu 1986, 89 *sqq.*; Sîrbu 1986, 91 *sqq.*; Babeș 1988, 3-32.

<sup>93</sup> Vandermeersch 1995, 17.

<sup>94</sup> Härke 1997, 19.

<sup>95</sup> Chicideanu 2000, 108.

There are many modalities of classifying the disposal of the dead, the human body being the subject of different treatments like cannibalism, exposure (on the ground, platforms, rocks, trees, caves etc.), disposal inside houses, inhumation, cremation etc.<sup>96</sup> It must be also emphasized that the human being is the most important factor influencing the preservation state of the dead, while he is the only one determining who, when, how and where will be disposed<sup>97</sup>. The form of disposal can be classified into: simple disposal, when the deceased are not subject to further interventions (primary inhumation/burial, aquatic disposal, surface disposal); and compound disposal, which implies a series of actions leading to the reduction process (burial/late disinterment, exposure to air, fermentation in pots, exposure to animals, mechanical defleshing, cremation, chemical decomposition)<sup>98</sup>. One conclusion is at hand: not any kind of disposal of the dead leaves traces in the archaeological record, the exposure in trees or to air being only two examples<sup>99</sup>. A minimal condition for interpreting the disposal of the dead is the intentionality of the action<sup>100</sup> (as a counterexample is *Otzi the iceman*, found in the Alps, which counts for an accidental death and not a burial)<sup>101</sup>. Further more the archaeologists discuss the nature of the ritual for the individuals sacrificed on the occasion of another person's burial, like is the case for the 12 young Trojans killed at Patroklos funerals<sup>102</sup>, or the story of the slave woman sacrificed at the funeral of a Viking king narrated by the Arab chronicler Ibn Fahdlan in 921 A.D.<sup>103</sup>.

As a conclusion, it is considered that from the archaeological point of view the funerary finds should be those finds of human remains placed in distinct arrangements based on which it could be deduced the intentional disposal as main purpose and the special character of the arrangements<sup>104</sup>.

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Analyzing the total amount of the funerary finds from the Lower Danube area, a first conclusion would be that there are at least two ways of disposing the dead. The first could be represented by the complexes with human remains found inside the settlements, and the second could refer to the organization of an extra-mural funerary space, like is the case with the necropoleis from Foltești and Sboryanovo.

An overlook on the complexes with human remains from settlements brings to the conclusion that can't be observed rules concerning the number of individuals placed in one complex, the degree of anatomical connection, the position, the deposition, the orientation and alignment, the sex and age, or the existence of special characteristics (like for example malformations or physical anomalies).

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<sup>96</sup> Sprague 2005, 2 *sqq.*

<sup>97</sup> Henderson 1987, 49 *sqq.*

<sup>98</sup> Sprague 2005, 28, 59.

<sup>99</sup> Chapman, Randsborg 1981, 12.

<sup>100</sup> Crubézy *et alii* 1995, 13; Duday 1995, 33.

<sup>101</sup> Parker Pearson 1999, 3-4; Spindler 2002, 142-168.

<sup>102</sup> Chicideanu 2003, 68.

<sup>103</sup> Parker Pearson 1999, 1 *sqq.*

<sup>104</sup> Chicideanu 2003, 69.



On the whole, some hypotheses can be presented with regard to the proceedings followed by the communities in order to arrange the disposal of the dead inside the settlements.

First of all, not one of the fragmentary skeletons or disparate bones, anthropologically analyzed, shows signs of mechanical defleshing, conducted with cutting tools. Also, there are no signs of animal activity, like gnawing of the bones. Therefore, the state of the human remains seems to be rather the result of prolonged exposure to air, in special places, which led to the degradation of the soft tissues, and the drying and rigidity of the ligaments, the fragmentation intervening only with the following manipulation of the bodies. The lack of traces showing the intervention of predators reflect the fact that the place chosen for exposure was protected through the covering of the bodies or their placing on platforms, and why not inside the inhabited space (special structures or dwelling places). Such a place could have been the ravine excavated inside the settlement from Satu Nou–*Valea lui Voicu*, mentioned before.

The degree of articulation, in other words the choice of only some parts of the skeleton, is, we believe, intentional, the rest of the body most probably being subject to a different treatment (perhaps it was cremated, buried in a different place, kept inside dwelling places or even just abandoned). This way there could be explained the finds consisting of isolated bones or parts of bodies, especially skulls and limbs.

The disposal of isolated bones certainly represents the result of a reduction process, implying complicated methods with two or more stages of activity. In his manual of physical anthropology for the use of the archaeologists, D. H. Ubelaker presents conclusive examples of such situations, ethnographically observed and archaeologically verified, for communities of Native Americans, like *Choktaw* and *Huron*. The descriptions of the Jesuit missionary Jean de Brebeuf, from 1663, emphasize the existence of complex funerary practices implying the exposure of the bodies in special selected places (in the forest) on platforms, the removal of the soft tissues after a while, and the placing of the remains in real ossuaries (very much the same with the situation noticed at Jurilovca–*Argamum*). Archaeologically the information were verified only for the last stage of the funerary practice<sup>105</sup>. Other complex modalities of treating the deceased were noticed for the Maya civilization, where can be observed arrangements under the floor, crypts, cists, votive placing of human bodies, compound disposals etc.<sup>106</sup> At the *Pueblo* pre-Columbian communities often appear disarticulated, smashed, cut into pieces, sometimes burned skeletons, situations which were explained as results of cannibalism, sorcery, war, ritual disarticulation etc.<sup>107</sup>

Turning back to the complexes found inside the settlements of the Lower Danube area, it can be important the observation of some signs of *perimortem* violence in some cases: skeletons 5 (adolescent/female) and 6 (adult/male) from Jurilovca–*Argamum*; skull no. 1 (adult/female) from the complex Cat. No. 9 from Babadag. All three show the smashing and fracture of the facial region (maxilla and mandible) as the result of applying blows with blunt objects. The absence of any *post-fractum* reaction of the affected bones indicates the fact that the individuals didn't survive the violence exerted towards them.

Outside this, like already mentioned, the anthropological examination didn't bring any evidence of infirmities, malformations or anomalies of the bones. As well, there can't be

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<sup>105</sup> Ubelaker 1978, 19 *sqq.*

<sup>106</sup> Kunen *et alii* 2002, 198 *sqq.*

<sup>107</sup> Martin 1997, 47.

determined any criteria for the selection of those individuals (sex, age, social status, cause of death). Also, the large range of time during which this way of disposing the dead is practiced normally would exclude the possibility that we face the result of an epidemic.

Although the variations in the treatment of the deceased – inhumation shortly after the moment of death, the prolonged exposure and the subsequent placement inside the pits of only parts of skeletons or isolated bones – can't be so far explained and motivated, they still suggest the existence of a coherent assemble of practices, with stages observed together or separately for this category of finds. Following this line of argumentation, the burials from the necropolis of Foltești could be also a stage in this funerary practice, with the majority of the deceased disposed without anatomical connection, as a result of the manipulation of the bones.

In the Lower Danube area, this phenomenon can be noticed starting with the 11<sup>th</sup> century B.C., and reaching a special intensity during the 10<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C., period that coincides, at least in the above mentioned area, with a clear drawback of the funerary complexes organized in cemeteries. For some zones, it looks like the two modalities used in the disposal of the dead are used at the same time, a case being noticed for the Saharna–Solonceni culture.

If the ritual observed for the necropolis from Foltești presents similarities with what is known about the complexes found inside settlements, the necropolis from Sboryanovo detaches itself, being more closely related to the tumulus from Meri<sup>108</sup> and the graves from the Saharna–Solonceni culture. Further more, the presence in this case of some cremation burials and grooved pottery sends rather to the funerary practices from the western part of Romania, the area of Banat and Oltenia.

At the same time, we need to notice that, while the majority of the excavated settlements produced such finds, namely complexes with human remains, the „normal” graves are represented by two sites, with a rather eccentric position, and two isolated finds (Capidava and Izvoarele), with uncertain chronological and cultural determination. In such a situation, one question arises: which of the two manifestations reflects the funerary conception of the Early Iron Age communities from the Lower Danube area? The data at our hand at this moment clearly represent only a small part of what is needed in order to answer to this question. This leaves us with the hope that the future finds will finally enable us to throw some light to this essential part of the life of past societies.

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<sup>108</sup> Moscalu 1976, 77-78.

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