CONNECTED PERIPHERIES – NORTH DANUBE THRACE IN THE 4TH-3RD CENTURIES B.C. EXPLORING SETTLEMENT PATTERNS IN THE ENVIRONS OF THE OSTENTATIOUS GRAVE OF PERETU

Maria-Magdalena Ștefan*, Dan Ștefan**

***Abstract**: The following analysis emerged as an attempt to explain and contextualize a very rich grave, already historiographically notorious, with analogies equally famous, traditionally dated around the middle of the 4th c. BC, discovered in 1970, at Peretu, Romania, 40 km north of the Danube. The main objective of the study was to explore how (and if) this ostentatious display of authority, consumed in the symbolic domain, was linked with other processes of rising collective identities in North Danube Thrace, as suggested to had taken place by a series of neighbouring fortified sites dated approximately in the same period with the grave. These sites stand out through their particular technique of building defences based on using burnt clays in the construction of their enclosure walls. The interpretations will be partially based on recent interdisciplinary investigations (geophysical & aerial) undertaken in several fortified sites of the Teleorman region. In the two-three decades before the Macedonian rule, these fortified sites were already focusing the attention of regional communities around a cultic component, several of them developing into residential central places, beginning with the last quarter of the 4th c. BC. In a broader framework, the study examines the processes of social growth, authority centralization and emergence of collective identities occurred during the early Hellenistic period in peripheral territories of the Macedonian rule. North Danube Thrace exhibited, after the wars of Philip II and especially during those of Alexander's Successors, a particular vivid demographic development. It is stated that this development, including the wealth visible in several graves, was triggered by the Macedonian coin and political interests of the Diadochi that used North-Eastern Thrace as a secondary stage in their power competition through proxy.*

***Rezumat:** Analiza următoare a demarat ca o încercare de contextualizare regională a mormântului tumular cu inventar prețios de la Peretu, datat în mod tradițional către mijlocul sec. IV a.Chr., o descoperire veche de la nord de Dunăre, de notorietate istoriografică, cu analogii la fel de renumite din zona balcanică. Obiectivele cercetării au fost de a explora cum (și dacă) această expunere ostentativă de autoritate, exprimată în domeniul simbolic al practicilor funerare, era parte a unor procese mai largi de formare a unor identități colective în Tracia de la nord de Dunăre, așa cum sunt acestea sugerate a se fi petrecut, de descoperirile unor situri întărite, aflate în apropierea mormântului și datate în aproximativ aceeași perioadă. Aceste situri se evidențiază prin particularitatea tehnicilor de construcție a incintelor care presupuneau utilizarea solurilor arse. Interpretările propuse se bazează parțial pe rezultatele unor investigații interdisciplinare recente (geofizice și de teledetecție) întreprinse în câteva situri din zona județului Teleorman. Cu două-trei decenii înainte de cucerirea macedoneană a Traciei, aceste situri delimitate de incinte, atrăgeau deja atenția unor comunități regionale, în jurul unei componente cultice,*

* National Museum of Eastern Carpathians; Institute of Archaeology 'Vasile Pârvan' Bucharest; e-mail: m_magdalena.stefan@yahoo.com

** National Museum of Eastern Carpathians; Institute of Archaeology 'Vasile Pârvan' Bucharest; e-mail: m_magdalena.stefan@yahoo.com

câteva dintre acestea ajungând să se dezvolte în centre rezidențiale mai ales începând cu ultimul sfert al sec. IV a.Chr. Într-un cadru mai larg, acest studiu examinează procesele de creștere socială, centralizare a autorității și apariție a identităților colective petrecute la începutul epocii elenistice în teritoriile periferice ale stăpânirii macedonene. Tracia de la nord de Dunăre se caracterizează după războaiele lui Filip al II lea, dar mai ales în timpul celor duse de succesorii lui Alexandru cel Mare, printr-o creștere demografică deosebită. Se va argumenta că această dezvoltare, inclusiv bogăția ostentativă vizibilă în câteva morminte, a fost declanșată de interesele politice ale Diadochilor (alimentate prin monedă macedoneană și apariția rețelelor militare) ce au folosit Tracia de Nord-Est ca scenă secundară a desfășurării, prin intermediari, a competiției lor globale pentru putere.

Keywords: *social complexity, collective identities, hillforts, power centralization, vitrified walls, early Hellenistic fortifications, princely graves, settlement patterns, ritual pits.*

Cuvinte cheie: *complexitate socială, identități colective, centre fortificate, centralizare, valuri vitrificate, fortificații elenistice timpurii, morminte ‚princiare', gropi rituale, modele de habitat.*

INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the Macedonian Kingdom rise to power, after the middle 4th century BC, the northern peripheries of their political sphere of influence displayed a vivid and sudden increase in their archaeological expression. New settlements were founded, while others were reinforced in locations relevant as potential trading posts and controllers of major routes crossing over the Danube. The lakes and wetlands on the northern shore of the Danube, in particular, attracted the most numerous communities, dispersed in rural territories, and the presence of Greek wares, especially of amphorae, testifies for the establishment of steady local markets. Prestige goods of a southern origin (fine pottery, armour, metal vessels, wine containers) travelled further north from the river and in increased quantities than in preceding centuries. In those sites where enough data were available for study, like in the case of Căscioarele – Greaca area (Giurgiu County)[1], we observe that these open settlements appeared around already functioning fortified power/symbolic spots which thus acted as central places of regional significance. The end of the 4th c. BC, above all, brought the first implements, north of the Danube, of building technologies for defences with construction materials inspired by southern models (mud-bricks, stone paraments), as well as the earliest buildings that were related to the collective practice of cults in dedicated spaces (temples). In the same period and geographic area, the occurrence of several tumuli graves (with weapons and *symposium paraphernalia*) and also of hoards of staters points to the participation of the North Thracian elites into wider interregional military networks. This 'spring' of the material culture in North-Danube

[1] Sîrbu *et alii* 1996.

Thrace lasted, at most, half a century. Already in the second quarter of the 3rd c. BC, the majority of the central places were deserted and the power lines, their ideology and symbols of collective reference went through a significant reconfiguration. The current study is a reflection, developed by using archaeological facts, on the idea that the military and political networks forged during the wars of Philip II, Alexander the Great and especially those during his Successors, had a major impact upon the social organization and material development of the local communities inhabiting the most northern territories of Thrace. These networks, functioning all at once very intensely and at extensive scale, ensured increased access to new wealth and unified the models of expressing high-ranked status between individuals of various geographic origin, and allowed the establishment of local markets, encouraging therefore the settling of people in organized places.

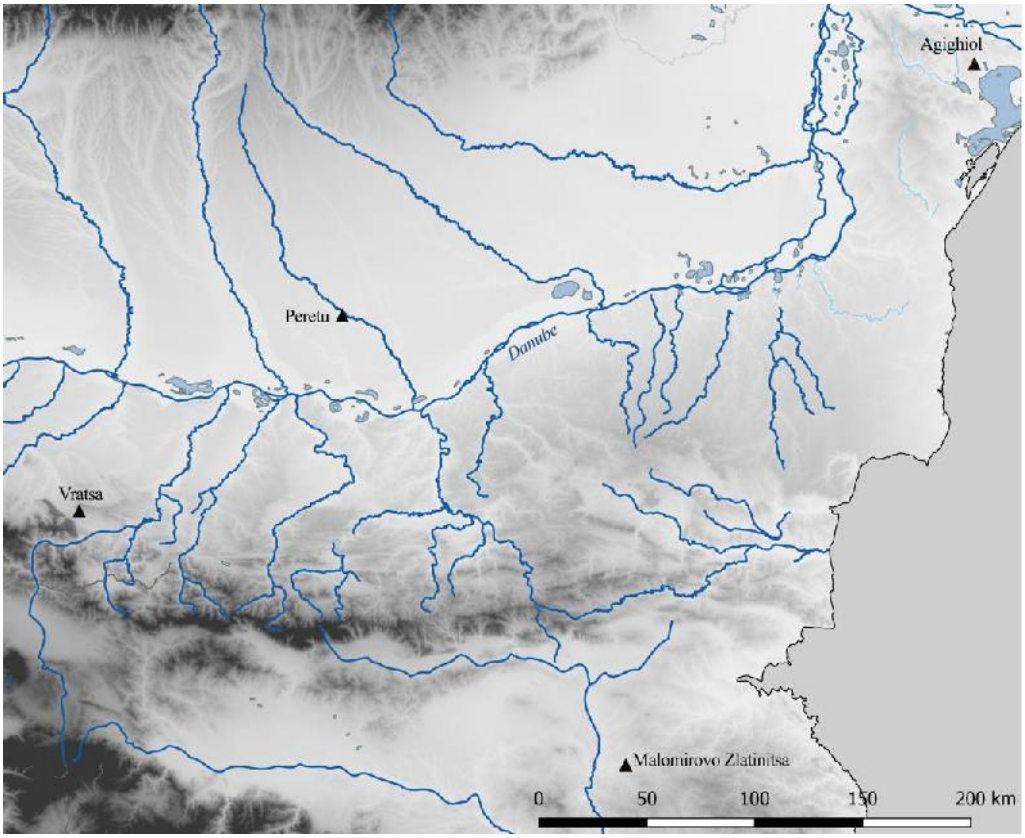

Fig. 1. The rich graves discussed in text.

PERETU TOMB

This analysis is focused on the archaeological environs of an exceptionally rich tomb located less than 40 km north of the Danube, generally dated around the middle of 4th c. BC. Our aim is to assess if the high-elite status implied by this famous ensemble of goods discovered under the tumulus, at Peretu, known since the 1970s, had any correspondences in the picture reflected by the situation of the closest, theoretically contemporaneous, settlements (Fig. 9), while searching for the potential indicators of increased regional social complexity and coherent political expression. We are interested in assessing the durability of authority centralization processes as they develop between indigenous factors and contacts to early Hellenistic models of leadership, authority and cult practice. Was it a momentous, imported, development? Was it based on a longer and more complex local evolution? What was the size of the networks in which communities in North-Danube Thrace participated? Was Danube functioning as a border for a political-cultural world with a southern focus?

The most impressive and already historiographic notorious funerary context of early Hellenistic period located north of the Danube is the tumulus of Peretu (Teleorman County, Romania)[2]. The tomb was discovered and researched during 1970-1971 by the Romanian archaeologist Emil Moscalu[3], following accidental destructions caused by agricultural works. The mound was said to have measured 30 m in diameter and about 2 m in height. Its stratigraphy, as published, was simple (Fig. 2), consisting of three soil layers covering uniformly the terrain on which the funerary ritual took place. On the ancient walking level a pyre was built, the remains of which were found scattered on a rounded area, measuring 6 m in diameter. The pyre became the centre of the subsequent tumulus. After the fire was consumed, on its ashes, the unburnt remains of an individual and parts of a horse (its head and long bones) were arranged stretched on their backs, one parallel to the other, with their heads to the east (Fig. 2). Alongside the deceased, on its right side, a spear was found (Fig. 7/4) with the tip facing down, near the deceased's head[4]. An iron buckle (Fig. 7/7) laid in the area of the knees and a small knife (Fig. 7/9) near the right tibia. A hand-made jug (Fig. 7/2) was found on the pyre, unburnt, at some distance from the feet. Several pits were excavated from this initial level (probably after the fire had died) and various offerings were laid inside: pottery (a jug in pit 1 – Fig. 7/3), parts of a cow (Pit 5) and the remains of a wagon (Pit 4) which was burnt very probably on the pyre[5]. Three dogs were killed on the occasion

2 Moscalu 1989.

3 Aided in 1971 by George Trohani.

4 Only the teeth remained, the skull was not preserved (Moscalu 1989, 135).

5 The remains of the wagon were placed in the single pit that was excavated exactly in the pyre area.

and laid entire on the ground, to the west and north of the pyre, together with knives (Fig. 7/5; 7/8) used at their sacrificing and fragments of pottery (Fig. 7/1). All these offerings were spread in a disorganized manner on a 5-6 m radius around the pyre.

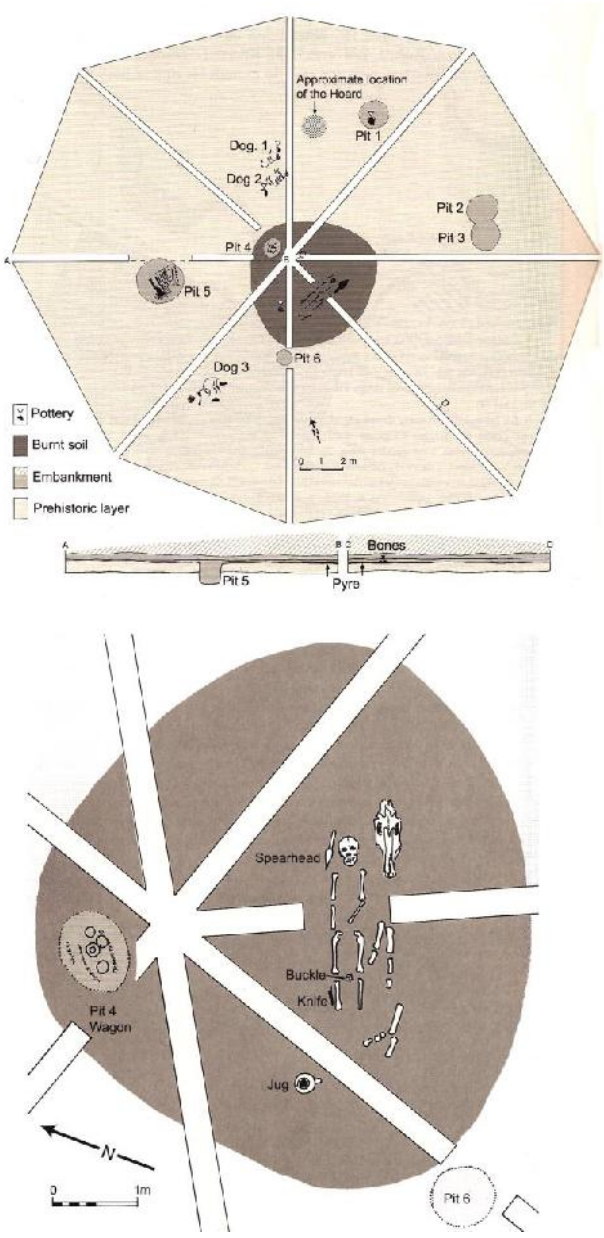

Fig. 2 Peretu tomb plan (after Moscalu 1989, 134, 136, fig. 2-3).

Fig. 3. Peretu, the gilded silver helmet (1-2) and human head (2); photographs taken in 2004 by Dan Ștefan of the items kept in the National History Museum of Romania, for a study project of Valeriu Sîrbu.

In the upper level of the mound, 7 m to NW, not clear in what context, perhaps in a pit, a group of silver items were found deposited in a bronze cauldron (*lebes*) (Fig. 4/1) covered with a bronze tray (Fig. 4/6): two sets of silver harnesses with partially burnt elements, three silver *phiale*, one silver *aryballos* (Fig. 4/8), fragments of a silver strainer (fig. 4/4), a fragment of a silver tube (Fig. 4/5), a gilded silver helmet (Fig 3/1-2) and a gilded silver human head (Fig. 3/3), a possible part of a composite statue[6]. Fragments of three different bridles with 'S' shaped *psaliae*, two in silver (one decorated – Fig. 5/5), one in iron (Fig. 7/12) (other iron elements found on the pyre could belong to the same bridle – Fig. 7/13) suggest the participation in the ritual of three horses. 49 silver appliques of various types were found in total, together with a silver trapping buckle (Fig. 7/11) and silver elements used to decorate the leather straps. Considering the existence of two types of strap decoration, one with three (Fig. 5/25) and the other with two grooves and larger diameter (Fig. 6/8), we can assume that the deposit contained, initially, two different pairs of decorated straps which were subsequently published in a single mixed restored version as a necklace. One harness set had as iconographic theme the gryphon (Fig. 5) depicted on gilded head and cheek pieces, also on one *psalia*, while the other had the fantastic horse (Fig. 6). Two of the undecorated, round, appliques were burnt, and

[6] Like the acrolithic statues in which only the visible flesh parts (head, hands) were made in durable material, the rest being in wood and cloth (Marconi 2008).

only half of the face decoration of the *Gryphon* set harness was found. The 19 undecorated appliques belonged most probably to the *Gryphon* set[7].

The tomb with silver hoard at Peretu remains, even 48 years later, an iconic archaeological discovery for the Late Iron Age in the Balkan Peninsula. Its varied and ostentatious array of grave goods, including metallic banquet vessels, parade armour and a wagon, places this funerary ensemble in a selected list of high-ranked funerary complexes dated traditionally around the middle 4th century BC, distributed on the territory generally labelled as Thrace (Fig. 1). The graves from Peretu, Vratsa-Mogilanskata Mogila[8], Malomirovo Zlatinitsa[9] and Agighiol[10] stick together despite their consistent geographic spread. For example, between Agighiol and Vratsa there are roughly 450 km, while between Peretu and Zlatinitsa there are 250 km, the river Danube and the Stara Planina mountain range. These are all tumuli graves, containing, with the exception of Peretu, multiple burials, in which the individuals were buried with weapons, armour, luxurious metal vessels for *symposium*, being accompanied by horses and their rich harness decoration. In two cases (Peretu and Vratsa) a wagon was found, while in Agighiol the remains of three horses (suggesting also the use of a wagon) were buried in a separate stone structure. It is not necessary the access to Greek goods, nor the funerary architecture that singles them out (in fact, it seems that the lack of true masonry is quite typical for the group), but the occurrence of certain items of toreutics (helmets, greaves, byconical *rhyta*) decorated in a personalized and coherent iconographic style, which, even without doubt of local production, hints to certain stylistic and symbolic models of Iranian and North-Pontic descend. The human head crafted in gilded silver found in Peretu, despite its unicity can be best paired with the ceramic head, of a female person, similarly decorated with a beads necklace, found in Mogilanskata Mogila Tomb 2[11]. This connection reinforces the idea of them being parts of composite representation of divine beings after Greek models, the rest of which were rendered in perishable materials. The significance of these funerary inventories (to which a number of other hoards or finds of a non-funerary origin may be added) and their iconography as proof of an ideological framework characterizing a 'Thracian elite' were much discussed and so was the idea of a 'Thracian art' served by common itinerant artisans[12].

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7 In Malomirovo Zlatinitsa the round pieces were paired with the Lion themed harness set; the grave had also elements of a second set themed as fantastic horse (Agre 2011, 118, fig. IV-16).

8 Torbov 2005.

9 Agre 2011.

10 Berciu 1969.

11 Torbov 2005, 181, pl. 15/1.

12 Berciu 1969; Venedikov, Gerasimov 1973; Alexandrescu 1984; Marazov 1998; Sîrbu, Florea 2000; Măndescu 2010a, 377-418.

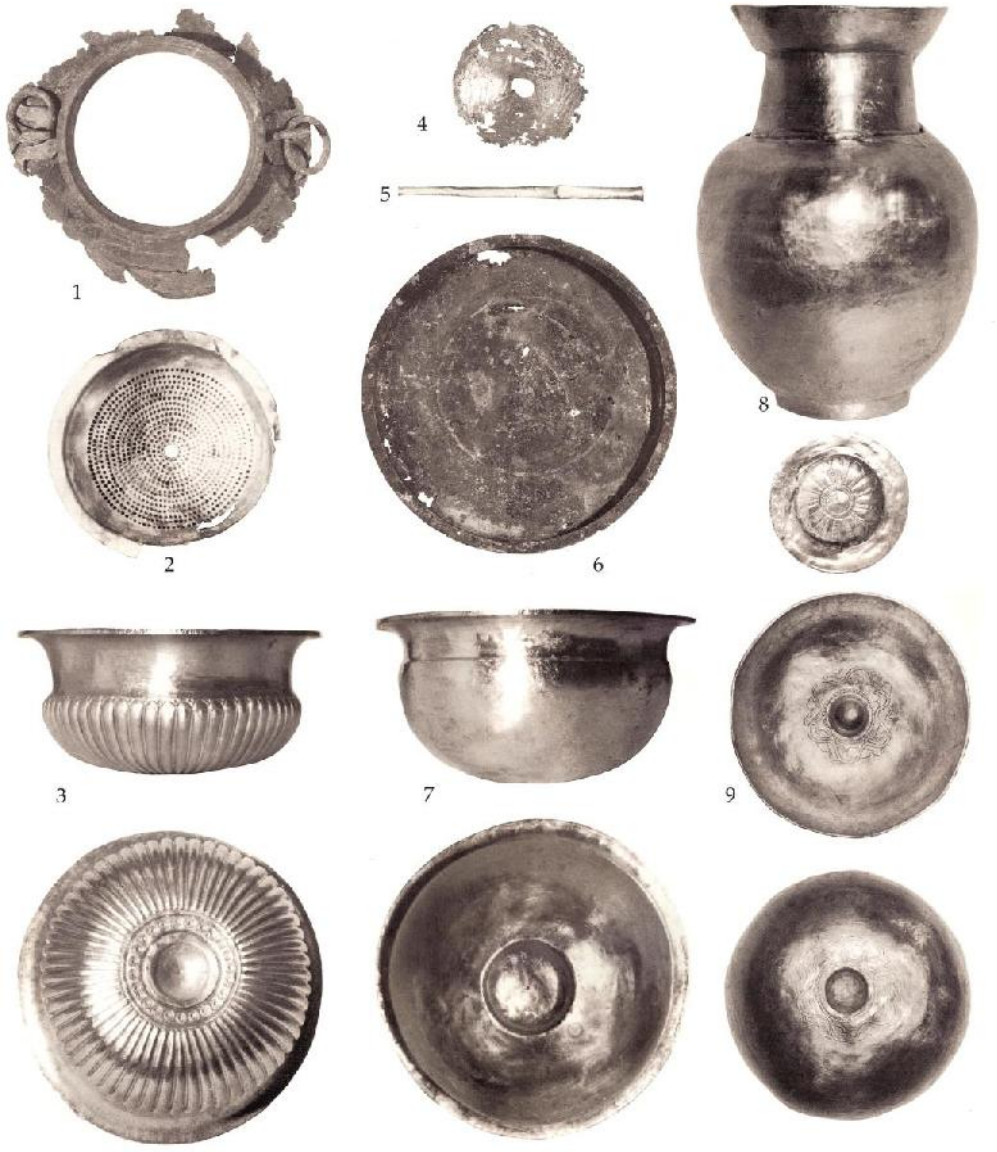

Fig. 4. Peretu, silver and bronze (1, 6) symposium vessels, various scales (after Moscalu 1989, 198-203, pl. 48-53).

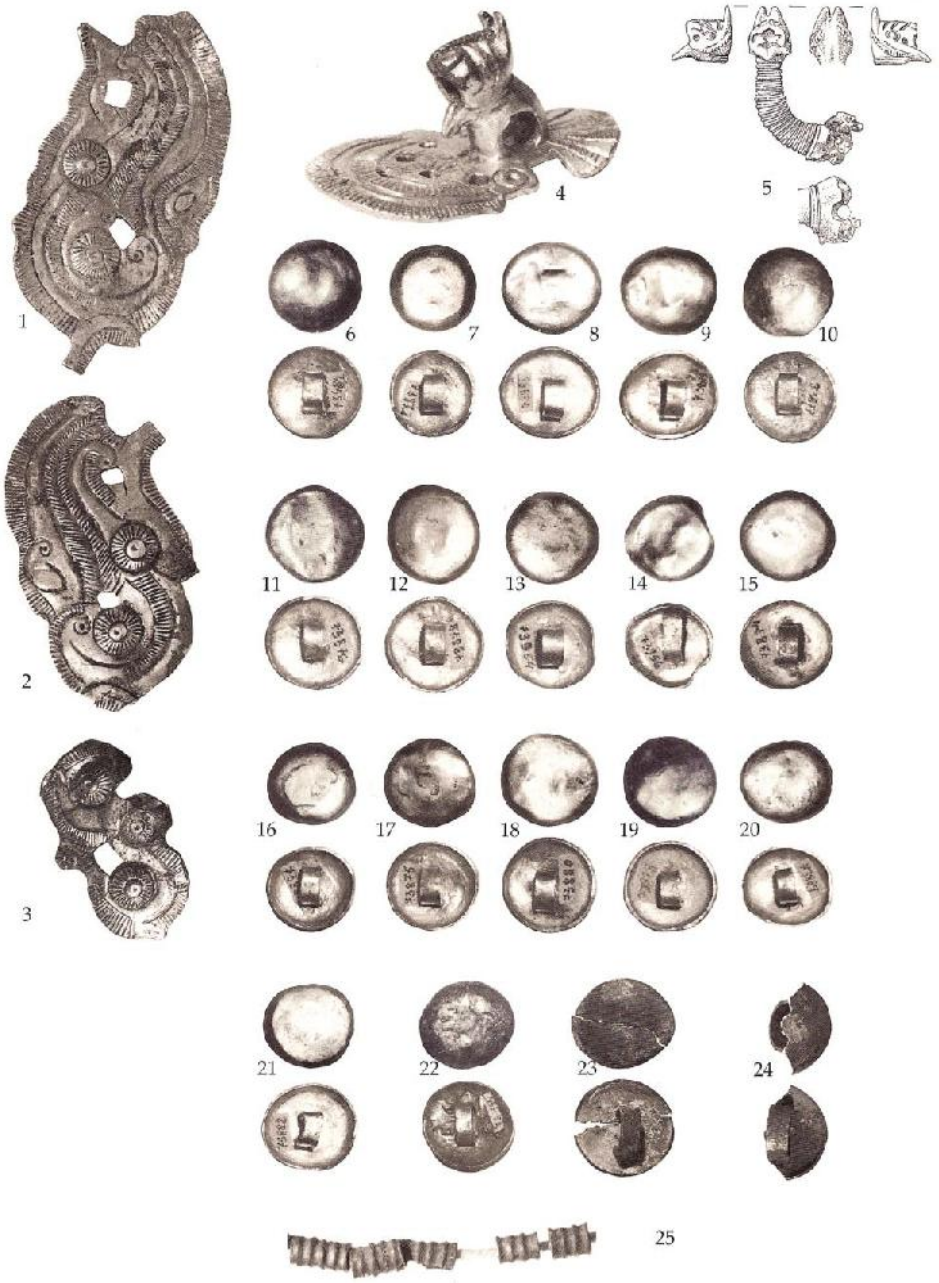

Fig. 5. Peretu, horse trappings, silver, 1-4. gilded; the Gryphon set, various scales (the appliques are presented in correct ratio between them) (after Moscalu 1989, 146, 204-205, 210-211, fig. 10, pl. 54-55, 60-61).

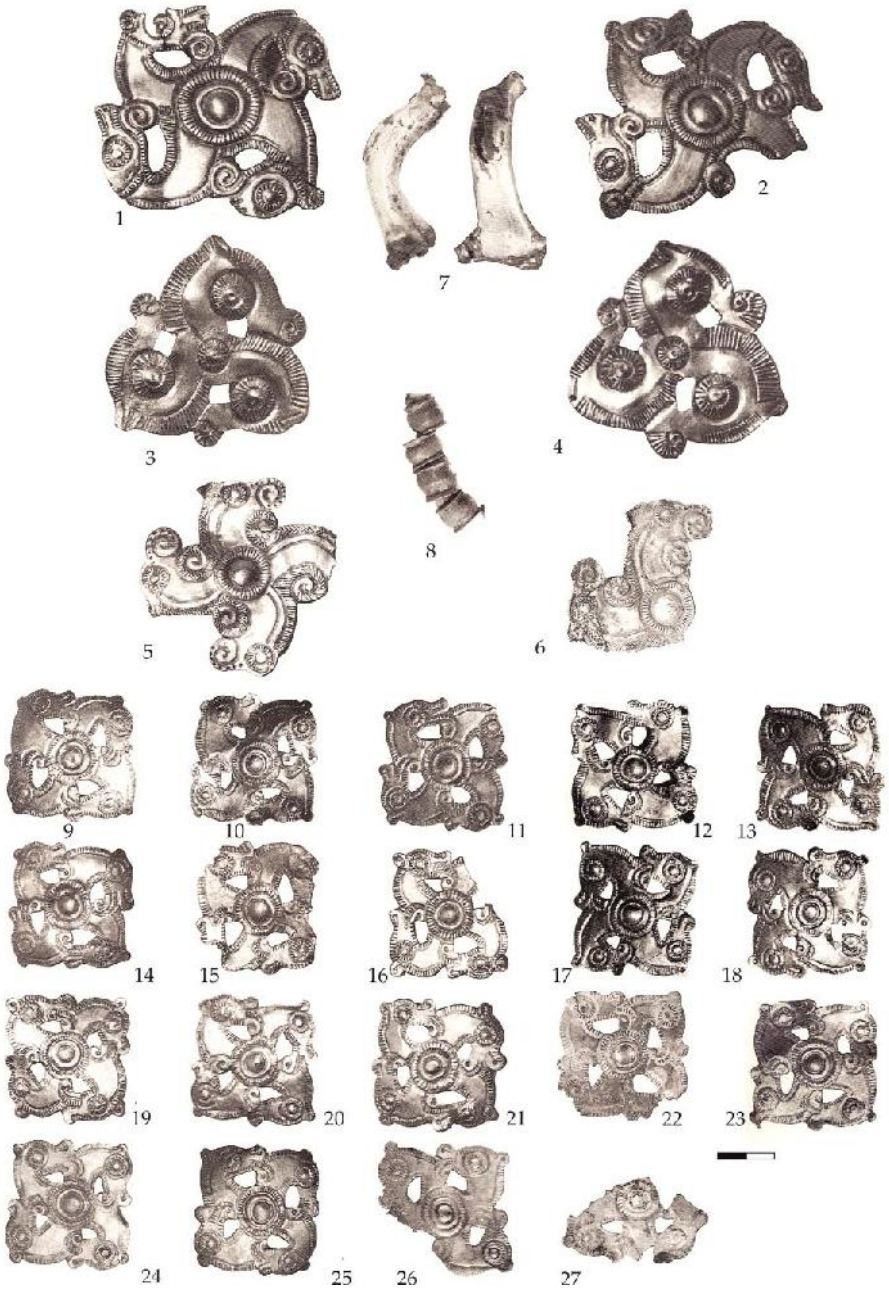

Fig. 6. Peretu, horse trappings, the Fantastic horse set, different scales (the appliques are proportional between them) (after Moscalu 1989, 204, 206-209, 211, pl. 54, 56-59, 61).

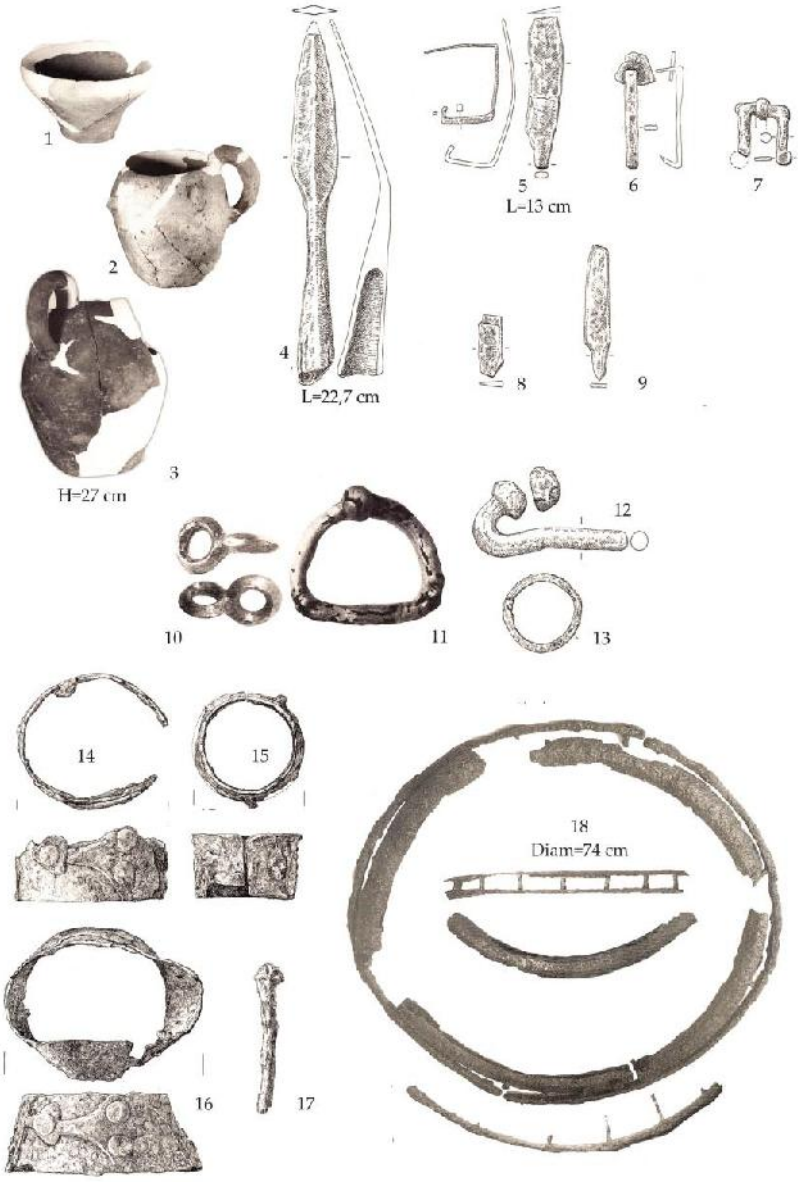

Fig. 7. Peretu, various finds, different scales (after Moscalu 1989, 139-140, 211, 213-214, fig. 3-4; pl. 61, 63-64): 1-3. Handmade pottery; 1. Between dogs 2 and 3; 2. At the deceased feet; 3. In Pit 1; 4-9. Iron; 5. Iron with traces of gold; 10. Bronze, part of the mouthpiece of a bit; 11. Iron covered in silver – trappings ring, could belong to any of the two horse sets; 12. Iron, part of a psalia; 13. Iron, part of a bit; 14-18. Iron, elements of the 4 wheeled wagon; the diameter of the small wheels was 74 cm and of the back larger wheels 88 cm.

More recently the ethnic homogeneity of this group was put under scrutiny by the revaluating of the Agighiol tomb, as the idea of mixed elites (Thracian-Scythian) based on marriage alliances was advanced[13]. None of these interesting and difficult research directions are however followed in the current contribution. We will use the incidence of this group of high-ranked graves, which we date, as we will detail further, in a short chronological framework and slightly later than traditionally accepted, as a premise and pretext to investigate the general social and political background which surround their manifestation, mainly as proof for the membership of the individual buried in Peretu to an extended political-cultural network. Peretu case may be significant for how a marginal space would react to external pressure coming from a political core. We will explore how this tomb richness and interconnectivity with distant players it implies, fits with the other features of the surrounding archaeological landscape. Was the manifestation of authority and social hierarchisation as played out at Peretu Tomb consistent with the image revealed by the neighbouring and contemporaneous dated settlements?

LIVING IN WETLANDS

The area which will be analysed more in depth is organized on an average of 40 km radius around the tumulus of Peretu, corresponding with much of the current Romanian administrative unit of Teleorman, in the Romanian Plane, for which Danube represents the southern border. This configuration is not arbitrary, but dictated by the existence of five fortified sites with shared features (Albești[14], Orbeasca de Sus[15], Trivalea Moșteni[16], Râca[17]), dated largely during 4th-3rd centuries BC, consistently grouped along the inferior valleys of Vedea and Teleorman rivers, in what appears to be a regional group (Fig. 9, 30). Their main common feature[18] is their delimitation by walls built with burnt clays, traditionally known in the Romanian literature as 'vitrified ramparts'[19]. To these we must add the ensemble of finds from the early Hellenistic period at Zimnicea[20], on the Danube, 40 km to the south from Peretu. This study case, comprising the closest located settlements to Peretu, will be,

13 Teleaga 2014.

14 Moscalu 1979, 339-344.

15 Moscalu, Beda 1979, 364-366, 368-370.

16 Moscalu, Beda 1979, 361-363, 368.

17 Măndescu 2010a, pl. 229A; 2007.

18 Orbeasca de Sus delivered materials which can be dated 4th c. BC, but its vitrified rampart is not clearly dated.

19 About the topic see Moscalu 1979; Babeș 1997; Zirra 2012.

20 Ștefan 2009 with references to previous bibliography; Spânu 2014.

nevertheless, an occasion to refer to other significant early second Iron Age[21] centres in the Romanian Plane for comparisons and chronological links, establishing thus the grounds to propose broader interpretations.

Fig. 8. The Danube lakes on the left bank between Călmățui and Vedea mouths, where Zimnicea is located (2nd Austrian Survey, 19th c).

Among the dominant features of the studied environment we have to underline, first of all, the presence of extensive wetlands: the lakes of the Danube, but also the swamps formed around the inferior valleys of the majority of the rivers crossing the Romanian Plane, in this particular case Vedea, Burdea, Teleorman, Urlui, Călmățui. The majority of these wetlands were desiccated during the Communist Regime, altering the way in which we are now able to perceive the sites in relation with their surroundings. The historic cartographic materials, even if still pretty recent (in good quality not before the end of the 18th century)[22], give a comprehensive image of the former environment, revealing the strong connection of the 4th-3rd centuries BC sites with surrounding wetlands. Quite relevant is here the case of Zimnicea settlement which now stands 1 km inland, but which functioned initially right above the water (Fig. 8), having direct connection with the Danube through a lake[23]. All the other

[21] The period of the 4th-first quarter of the 3rd c. BC has various labels in the literature: 'early second Iron Age', 'early Latene', 'early geto-dacian', 'late Classical and early Hellenistic'.

[22] *Lesser and Greater Wallachia Austrian Map* (Specht Map, 1790) available at mapire.eu.

[23] Ștefan 2009.

fortified settlements discussed here occupied promontories of river terraces elevated above wetlands. This proximity translates, in our opinion, as increased access to several vital categories of resources (fish, good lands for agriculture, wood for constructions, game), but also into a certain degree of community isolation, pairedthough, with natural protection. The practice of a kind of water transportation should be taken in consideration, corresponding nevertheless with difficulties in crossing the land routes on a west-east direction, as the majority of the hydrographic network flows south or south-east, towards the Danube. Therefore, even if circulation in flat lands would appear at first sight the easiest, not necessary needing dedicated pathways, the presence of numerous wetlands and probably of forests, made the existence of fords to be equally valued like in higher terrain.

DANUBE – A BORDER WITH GATES: CONTACTS AND ELITES BEFORE 4TH CENTURY BC

The second significant feature of the environment that influenced the spatial organisation of habitation, layout of roads and, in fact, the shape and size of emerging power centres during all prehistory and protohistory in the Romanian Plane, is the existence of Danube fords. The reality of past circulation from one side of the Danube to another is indirectly evidenced by the vestiges of anthropic activities amassed in what can be considered crossing over key-points. For the Late Iron Age, we can say, as general observations, that the earliest southern imports (Bălănoaia), the richest settlements (e.g. Căscioarele–*D'aia parte*, Zimnicea) or the longest lived ones (Zimnicea) were those sites placed in the immediate vicinity of the Danube fords. The sites discussed here (Albești, Orbeasca de Sus, Trivalea Moșteni and Râca hillforts), including the tomb at Peretu, have to be linked with the Danube ford of Svishtov-Zimnicea, which, from a geographic point of view, allows the shortest access north of the Danube if coming directly from south[24]. In this view it seems not a surprise that the earliest wheel-made grey pottery identified north of the Danube was found in three pits, at Alexandria-Vii[25], 35 km directly north of Zimnicea ford and just 15 km SE of Peretu. Its chronology was much debated[26], ranging from late 7th c. BC to the early 4th c. BC.

[24] Simply because it is the most southern land part of the North Danube Thrace.

[25] Preda 1959; Preda 1960.

[26] Condurachi 1965; Moscalu 1983, 244-245; Măndescu 2010b.

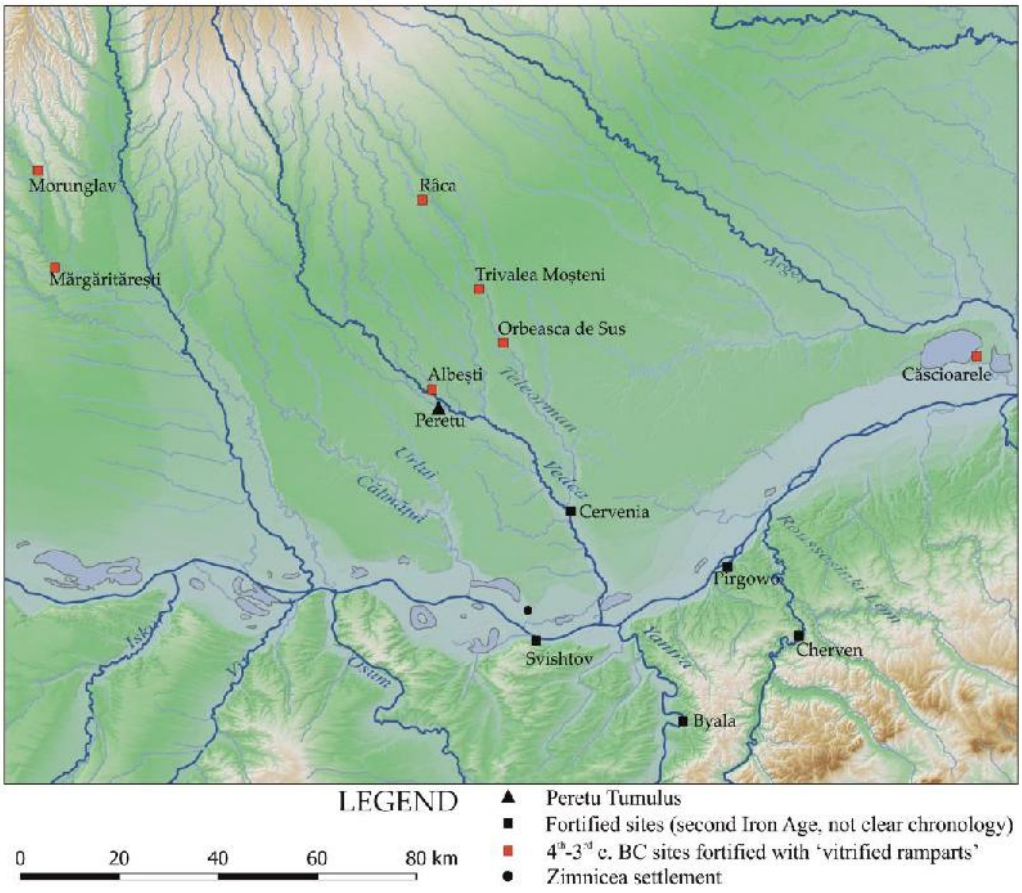

Fig. 9. Fortified sites (4th-3rd c. BC and others, less clearly dated[27]) located in the vicinity of Peretu Tomb.

[27] A more precise chronology for Cervenia was not available being a recent discovery (Mirea 2014). A short surface survey proved the site appears rather to deliver material which can be better framed as last part of Late Iron Age, than early Hellenistic. In what regards any systematic study of settlement patterns in the second Iron Age for the North-Balkan area, the results of Bulgarian archaeology remain difficult to integrate. Iron Age settlements and fortifications as topic in general raised too little interest (with the exception of Sboryanovo). In addition, their usual presentations (Conrad 2006; Popov 2015) approach the chronology indiscriminately as Late Iron Age (6th-1st c. BC) or second part of the 1st millennium BC. For Byala and Pirgowo (Conrad 2006, 315, fig. 4), for Cherven (Popov 2015, 118), for Svishtov *Kaleto* see discussion in Ștefan 2009. A more recent detailed study of settlement patterns during the early Hellenistic period in Stoyanov 2000; Stoyanov 2015, 391-448.

The combination of wheel-made vessels, especially the table amphora imitations, with Glasinac type fibulae and hand-made pottery is however typical for sites in Northern Dobrogea, dated based on Greek amphorae around 500 BC – early 5th c. BC, for example Celic Dere[28]. The site at Alexandria–*Vii* remains however an exception for the late Hallstatt in the Romanian plane. Beginning with the 7th c. BC, the archaeological finds framed in what is known as 'Ferigile group'[29] were characterized by being mainly funerary contexts and by their geographic spread confined to the hilly and sub-mountainous regions of the Carpathians (Fig. 10). Their southern limit, not once heavily occupied, did not crossed the line Teiu-Odobești, 100 km north of the Danube[30]. Meanwhile, the southern plains remained mainly invisible in the archaeological record, at least since the second half of the 7th c. BC. A group of funerary finds in tumuli, from which one at Ciulnița, on the Ialomița valley, exhibited a ritual with clear analogies in the Lower Dniestr region, dated by a Samian amphora in the first half of the 6th c. BC[31], might give some clues about the eastern Romanian Plane space as being raided or traversed towards the Danube by groups of people coming from north-east and traveling large distances[32]. Towards the end of the 6th c. BC and in the beginning of the 5th c. BC, during the later phase of the Ferigile group's existence (Ferigile III), a certain tendency of spreading outside the main occupation nucleus, paired with the growth in the number of sites, including the reoccurrence of settlements alongside graves, can be observed[33]. Only in the second half, but more probably towards the end of the 5th c. BC, we can see the first, even if still scarce, signs of material visibility of the communities in the Danube plains, in the context of southern contacts (Fig. 11).

With the exception of the grey wheel-made pottery, datable around 500 BC, at Alexandria, in the area under scrutiny here (between Zimnicea and Peretu), after the middle 7th c. BC (moment until when sites like Zimnicea, Trivalea Moșteni and Peretu were occupied by communities using the pottery labelled as Basarabi) no clear habitation traces were identifiable until the 4th c. BC. The three pits with grey wheel-made wares and fragments of portable fireplaces at Alexandria–*Vii*, remain for the

28 Sîrbu *et alii* 2019 forthcoming.

29 Vulpe 1967; Vulpe 1979.

30 Măndescu 2005; Măndescu 2013.

31 Marinescu-Bîlcu *et alii* 2000, 152, note 18, 163, fig. 10.

32 The Samian amphora in the Ferigile III settlement at Vadu Săpat–Budureasca, at the foothills of the south-eastern Carpathians, where also a bone *psalia* with zoomorphic finials was found (Lichiardopol *et alii* 2009, 228-229 Măndescu 2010a, 196), may also show that the Greek wine containers around 500 BC arrived with groups of people coming from North Pontic areas.

33 Măndescu 2013.

moment difficult to relate to a coherent demographic horizon, but they show that the region in which the tomb of Peretu will be later built had a previous history of southern contacts through Zimnicea-Svishtov ford. It is also of note to say that the emerging authorities of the second Iron Age recycled places with a previous history of use along the Early Iron Age.

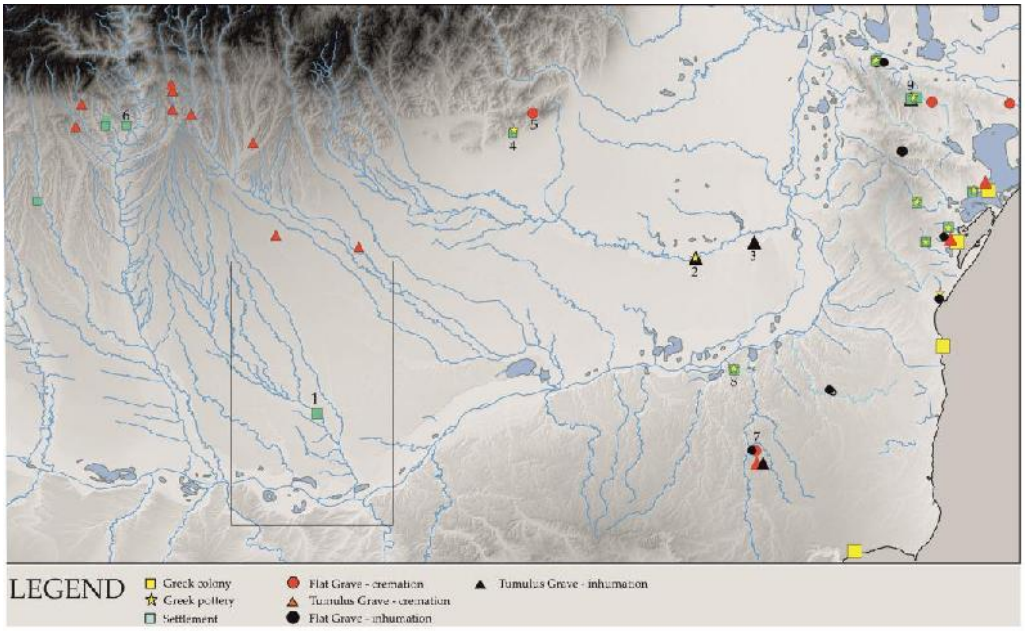

Fig. 10. Sites late 6th-early 5th c. BC: 1. Alexandria–*Vii*; 2. Ciulnița; 3. Platonești; 4. Budureasca; 5. Năieni; 6. Ocnele Mari Cărpiniș; 7. Kragulevo; 8. Gura Canliei; 9. Celic Dere.

An analysis of the archaeological map of the Romanian Plane a century before the tomb of Peretu was built, reveals that during the second half of the 5th c. BC, Zimnicea-Svishtov was not a significant ford (Fig. 11). In terms of political contacts and elite emergence, the area between Giurgiu-Ruse and Oltenița-Tutrakan had the more sparkling archaeological reflection. The earliest items of Greek origin found in inland North Thrace, stake out 'a corridor of elites'. An alignment of rich funerary finds (or of isolated objects which could originate from lost funerary contexts), found on both shores of the Danube, links the north-eastern peripheries of Thrace with the mountain gate of Shumen (opened towards southern Thrace) and the region of Odessos, through the ford Giurgiu-Ruse. The tombs at Svetlen[34], Ruets[35], Obretenik[36],

[34] Velkov 1928-1929, 50-53.

[35] Velkov 1928-1929, 37-50.

Koprivets[37], Brestovitsa[38] and the finds at Bălănoaia[39] and Gurbănești[40] describe an elite group made up of women and men that referred to both the newly Odrysian elite fashion of participating in *symposia, but also to* the Hallstatt D models of North-Pontic warriorship (using, for example, *akinakai*). It might be the existence of these political poles, the North Pontic authorities, Scythians according to ancient sources[41] (or a more nuanced mixed elite of Scythian-Thracian descend, or in cases/moments just Thracian, but behaving under the power codes and symbols of Scythian-Iranian fashion/ reference) and the south-eastern Thracian kingdoms, that could had placed more weight on the eastern Danube fords. These close political relations between the south-eastern Romanian Plane, especially of the Giurgiu-Ruse region with the north-eastern Thrace partners, located south of the Danube, apparently persisted during the Classical and Early Hellenistic periods, too, as we will discuss further the case of Căscioarele fortified settlement which displays close analogies with the early Hellenistic city of Sboryanovo[42].

A group of late 5th c. BC sites, including a ritual pit with fragments of portable fireplaces, and thirty vessels, some wheel-made[43], a settlement[44] and an isolated find of an Illyrian helmet[45], on the inferior Olt valley, point also towards the use in this period of the fords located west from Zimnicea, which gave access inland along the Olt valley. By contrast, the 'emptiness' of the Vedea valley during the early Classical period and its framing by sites indicating transit activity and connection with the south may be seen not as a demographic void, but as lack of material visibility due to absence of social cohesion maybe as a result of the area having a boundary status between neighbouring authorities or spheres of political influence.

36 Dimova 1966.
37 Milchev, Draganov 1992; Stanchev 1994, 173-174; Stanchev 2004, 149-159.
38 Vârbanov, Madzharov 2016.
39 Pârvan 1926, 17-19, fig. 8-9.
40 Rosetti 1959, 795-796, fig. 5-7.
41 Tucidide II, 97, 1; Braund 2015.
42 Stoyanov 2015.
43 Bălănești-Olt (Popescu 1968; Vulpe 2001, 456-471).
44 Ipotești, Olt (Comșa 1973, 34).
45 Gostavățu (Teleaga 2008, 25, pl. 147/1-4).

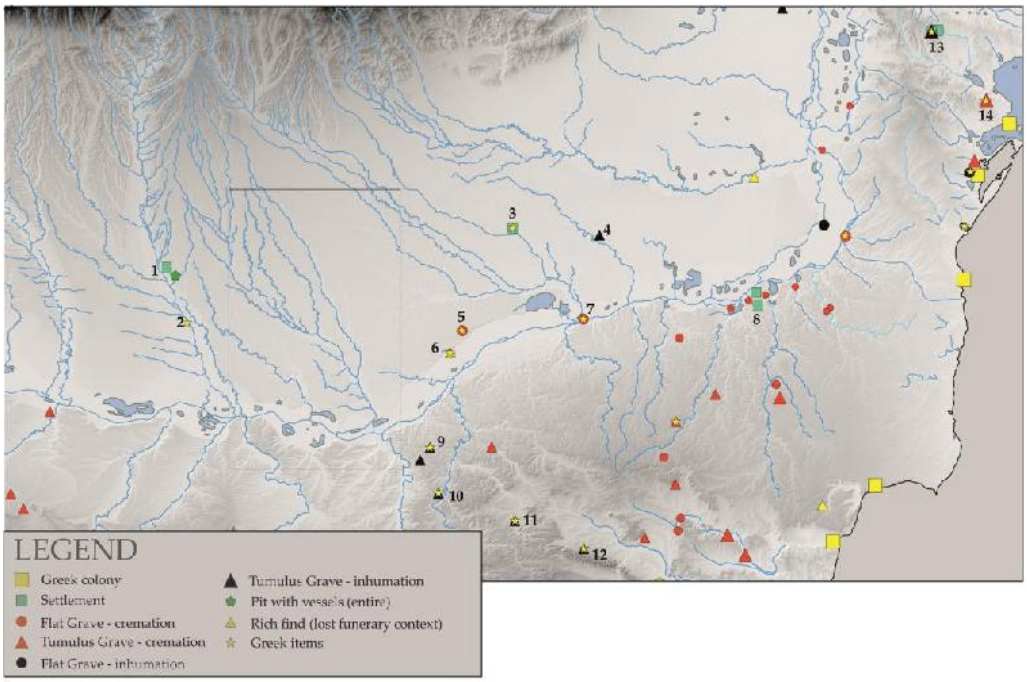

Fig. 11. Sites of the second half – end of 5th c. BC: 1. Bălănești; 2. Gostavățu; 3. Cernica; 4. Gurbănești; 5. Daia; 6. Bălănoaia; 7. Oltenița; 8. Gura Canliei; 9. Obretenik; 10. Korprivets; 11. Svetlen; 12. Ruets; 13. Celic Dere; 14. Enisala.

A CONSECRATED SPACE

The tumulus with wagon and silver hoard was found in the eastern margin of the village of Peretu, on a fertile river terrace elevated with 4 m above a large wetland (Fig. 12). Through this 2 km wide wetland, like through a corridor, streams from NW to SE Vedea and its tributaries Barîcea and Begul. On the other side of these waters and surrounding swamps, at 4 km towards NW from Peretu tomb, the fortified settlement from Albești–*Dealul lui Panait* was investigated by the same archaeologist as in Peretu, Emil Moscalu, during the late 1960s. Due to the fact that it was the closest located known fortification dated 4th c. BC to the rich tomb, the two sites were automatically linked as contemporaneous variants of expressing the same authority, despite the lack of a clear geomorphological connection between them. Not only the distance, but the need to cross, not one, but two river courses, remained unexplained. As we will detail further, the contemporaneity between the two sites is not certain. Moscalu briefly states in Peretu Tomb's monographic publication that on the occasion of the rich tomb excavation, he investigated, as well, another, neighbouring mound, 50 m to the south, 60 cm high, which revealed no traces of burial, only pits with bones of

horses and Basarabi pottery that he dated as middle 7th c. BC and also some 4th c. BC material[46]. It seems he dated this second mound in the 4th c. BC[47] (probably covering an old Basarabi settlement?) without any supplementary explanations or support materials detailed.

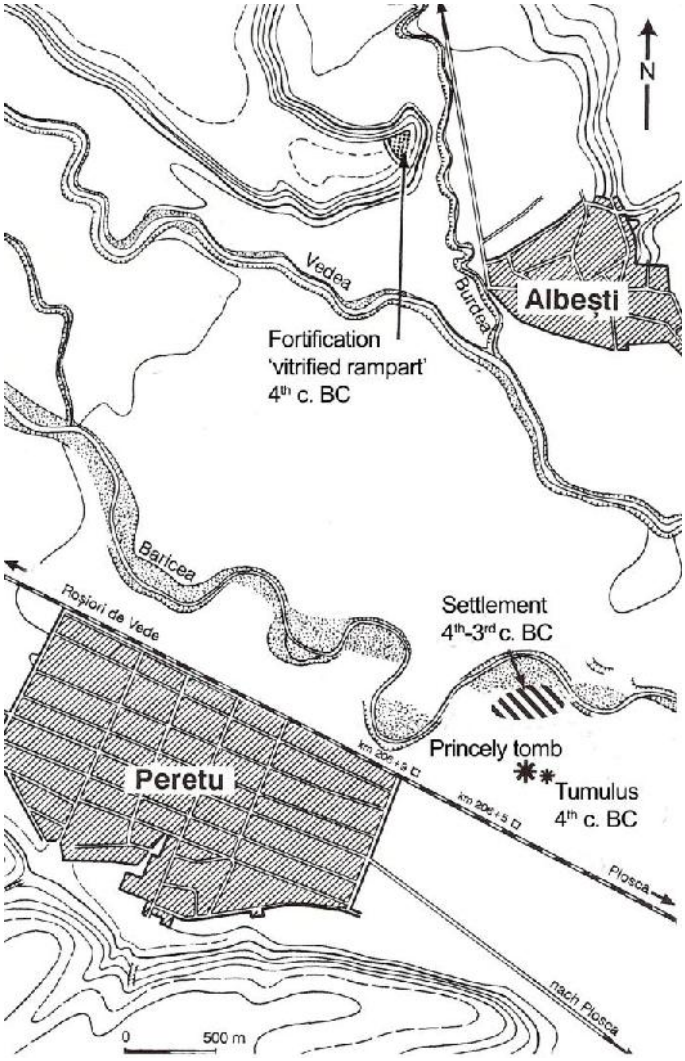

Fig. 12. After Moscalu 1989,132, fig. 1.

[46] Moscalu 1989, 133. In Moscalu (1986, 60) the tumulus was reported as measuring 70 cm in height and was dated as Basarabi.

[47] Moscalu 1989, 132, fig. 1.

Fig. 13. 1. Detail of the 1952 Romanian Military Map; the arrows highlight the representation of raised circular anomalies; 2. Aerial image of the Peretu tumulus towards north.

The idea for the Peretu Tomb as part of a larger tumuli area, maybe containing also Early Iron Age monuments, is likewise sustained by the Romanian Military Map from 1952 (Fig. 13/1) that drew on both sides of Peretu village several oval relief anomalies. Some were rendered as shallow depressions (very probably caused by gleisation) while for others small heights were indicated suggesting the existence of a larger area occupied by mounds. The Austrian Map from the late 18th c. and the Map of Southern Romania/*Charta* (1864) (Fig. 14) depicts a former road in the place of the actual railway, going parallel with the river. The area has been for years heavily affected by machine working, especially levelling, irrigation and agriculture (Fig. 13/2). Even in 1988, when Moscalu visited the site, the mounds he himself researched were already gone. What he noticed then was the existence of 'a 4th-3rd c. BC settlement' right near the tumulus[48]. Some Late Iron Age shards can still be observed on the surface through the gardens.

Even if the nature of this alleged settlement is still unclear, we underline the fact that the tomb at Peretu can be associated with the existence of a traditional road following the terrace line on a NW-SE line, also with a ford traversing Barîcea and, and with a funerary area, most probably connected with a different settlement than the hillfort at Albești.

THE FORTIFIED SITE AT ALBEȘTI

The hillfort at Albești[49], 9 km east of Roșiorii de Vede, is located on an interfluve, at 800 m north of the place where River Burdea flows into Vedea. The place, taken in large, marks by all means a limit, a border between geomorphological units. There are no palynologic studies to allow a reconstruction of the vegetation during the Iron Age, however, a macro analysis of soils (Fig. 15-down) indicates that from this line of latitude to the north and northeast, Luvisoil is found, while to the south, Phaeozem and Chernozem. Can this be taken as an indication of a separation between steppe and forest steppe? The difference between forested areas and grassy fields was valid at least at the end of the 18th c. as depicted by the Specht Map (Fig. 15-up). In this view, the hillforts with walls built with burnt clays, on the valleys of Vedea and Teleorman, would had been surrounded by large forested areas. If for the moment this is just a hypothesis in need for further research, a clearer separation appears to be, instead, the one concerning the relief fragmentation. Commencing with Albești-Peretu towards south, the hydrographic network which descends towards the Danube simplifies, the many and

[48] Moscalu 1989, 132-133, fig. 1.

[49] The site was identified as either *Dealul lui Panait* (Moscalu 1979) or *Dealul Cornet* (The Military Map 1/25000 from 1970s) or *Dealul Cetății* (Specht Map, 1790).

narrow valleys being collected into fewer and larger corridors. This corresponds to the relief south of this line to be less fragmented, thus easier to cross, paired obviously with a more complicated circulation north of it, especially along west-east corridors.

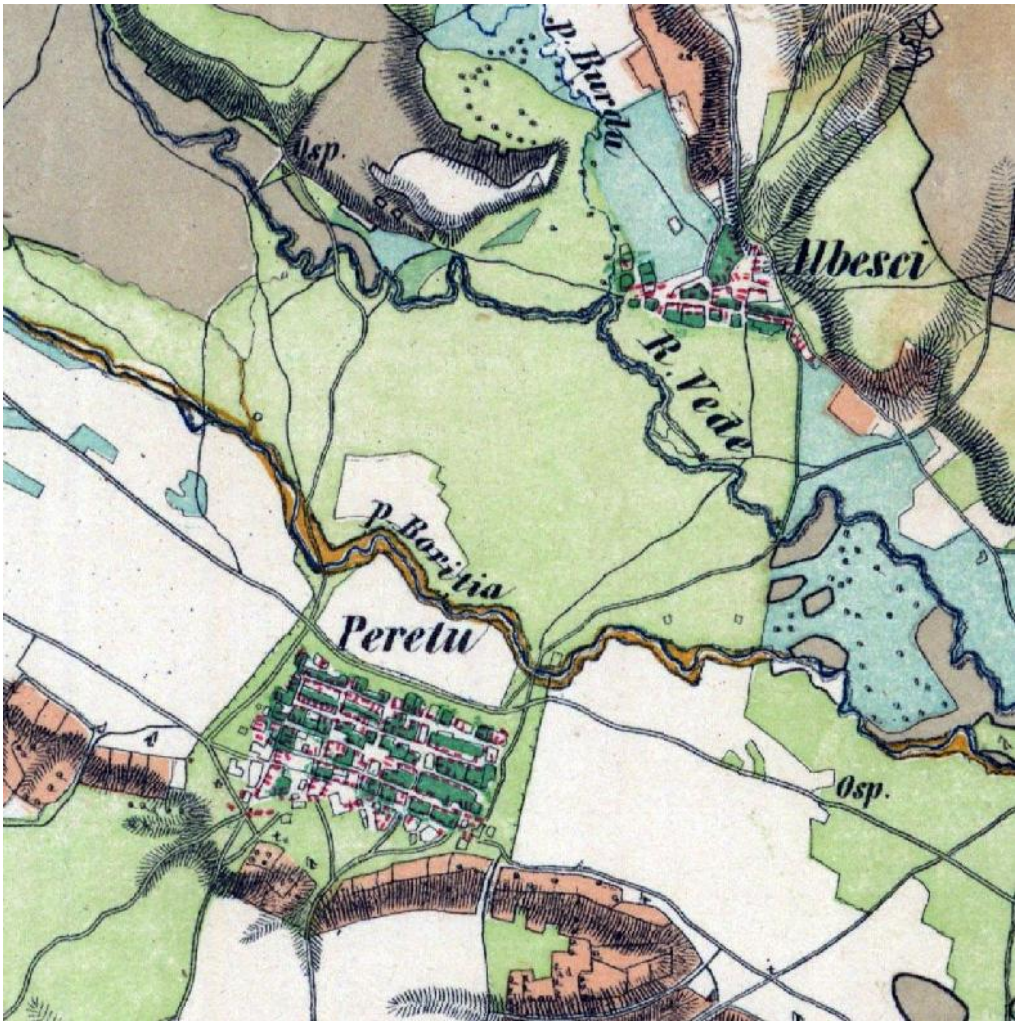

Fig. 14. Detail of the *Charta 1864*.

The idea of the discussed area as having the significance of a passing point, border of geomorphological units, an intersection of roads and fords, might be supported as well

by the existence of fortified sites around Roșiorii de Vede along various periods[50]. The protruding segment of the high river terrace, where archaeological remains were found, has a trapezoidal shape and is orientated east-west, being surrounded on three sides by wetlands (Fig. 14, 16). This extremity, elevated with 23 m above the surrounding valleys, was enclosed on the single side, which was not naturally protected, with a wall, along a 165 m long arched outline[51], built at 140 m west from the nowadays plateau's margin. The surface enclosed by the wall measures 1.15 ha. The wall resembles today a *vallum*/rampart spread by the agricultural works on a varying width, between 16 and 23 m, partially filling the exterior ditch. The ditch measures (on the DSM) 8 to 13 m width (Fig. 17). The elevation difference between bottom of the ditch and top of the rampart is maximum 60 cm[52]. Fragments of baked clay, red, orange or white, in large irregular chunks, but also centimetre sized burnt clay debris, are visible scattered on the ground on a large surface, making the fortification clearly distinguishable from above (Fig. 16).

The site was excavated during 1967-1968 by D. Berciu and Emil Moscalu through 5 trenches outlined perpendicular on the fortification. The plan of the excavation was published[53], the only one in fact among all the hillforts researched by Moscalu in the area. The first sketch of the rampart can be considered Polonic's drawing from 1898, republished by Berciu and Moscalu in 1972[54]. In the 1/20000 Romanian topographical map from 1952, the ditch is represented as a ravine (Fig. 18). This map identifies the place as 'Cetatea' (*The Fortress*). The excavations revealed the existence of two habitation layers, the first dated in Hallstatt B, before Basarabi, (two pits) and the second from the 4th c. BC[55] (5 dug-outs and 6 pits) while the scarce and dispersed materials found on the surface suggest an even older presence belonging to the Bronze Age Glina group[56]. The fortification was built over the Hallstatt B layer. The habitation of the 4th c. BC was described as brief and the result of a onetime occupation. Initially Moscalu framed it as datable after the middle of the 4th c. BC, taking in consideration fragments of unstamped amphorae identified as coming from Thasos and Chios, considering the rest of the found material inexpressive, without other clear chronological markers[57].

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50 A Roman fort is supposed here, on *Limes Transalutanus*; a large circular fortification of unknown date at *Cetatea Cazacilor*.

51 Measured on the DEM; Moscalu (1979, 339) declared 180 m.

52 In the late 60s was still preserved in the northern segment on a 1.10 m height (Moscalu 1979, 339).

53 Moscalu 1979, 340, fig. 1.

54 Berciu, Moscalu 1972, 634, fig. 1.

55 Moscalu labels it as early Latène (Moscalu 1979, 343) while Mirea and Pătrașcu (2006) refer to the period as early geto-dacian.

56 Berciu, Moscalu 1972, 634.

57 Moscalu 1979, 343.

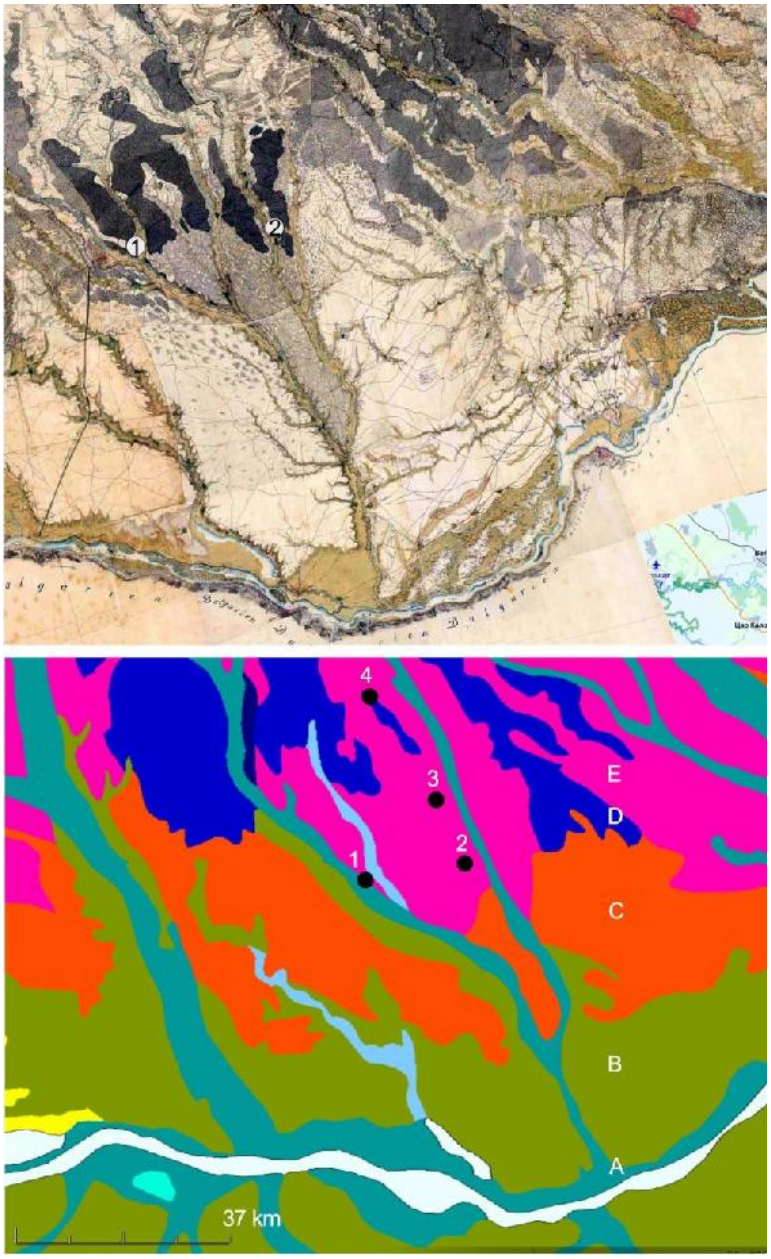

Fig. 15. Up – detail of the Lesser and Greater Wallachia Austrian Map (1790); down – detail from the Major Euorpean Soils FAO90LV1 Map: Soil Major Group 1990 FAO; 1. Albești; 2. Orbeasca de Sus; 3. Trivalea Moșteni; 4. Râca; A. Fluvisol; B. Chernozem; C. Phaeozem; D. Vertisol; E. Luvisoil.

Fig. 16. Aerial images of Albești site: up – from north; down – top view; the lighter coloured semicircle ground anomaly is the burnt clay wall.

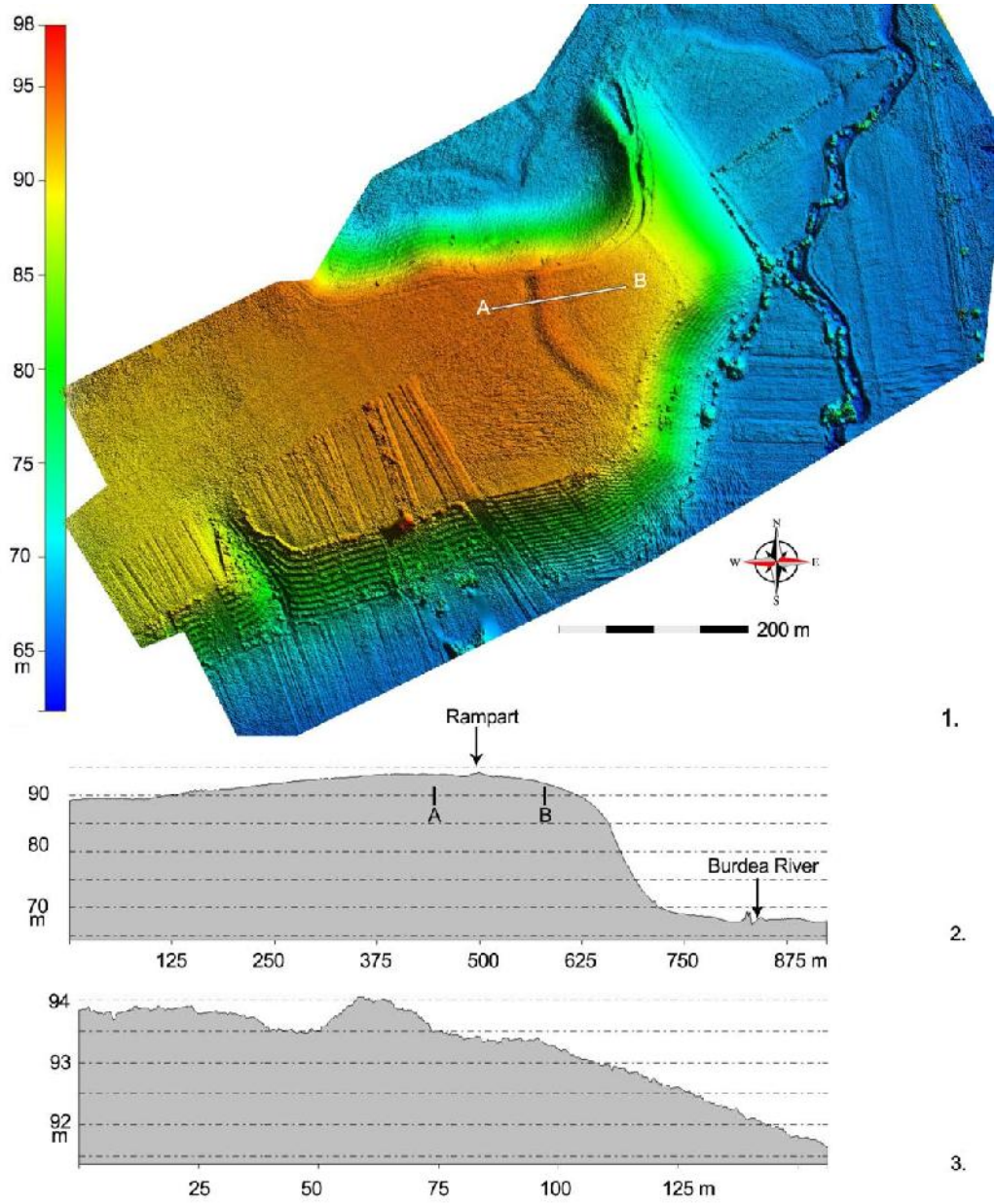

Fig. 17. Albești: 1. Digital Model of the terrain (DSM type) obtained through photogrammetric algorithms on aerial images collected with an UAV, resolution 30 cm/pixel; 2. General elevation profile along the terrain WSW–ENE; 3. Elevation profile detailing the morphology of the fortification elements (elevation profile A-B).

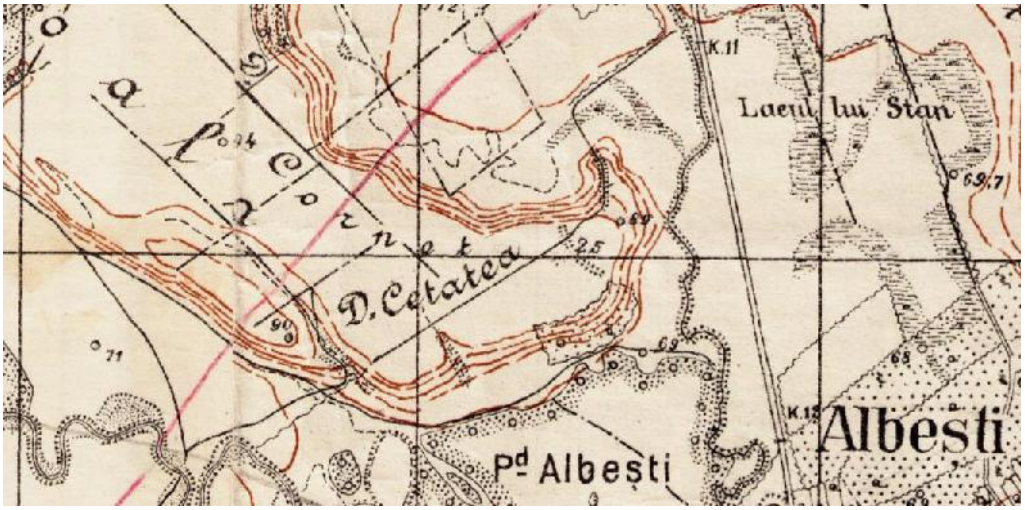

Fig. 18. Romanian Military Map 1952 – detail.

The habitation layers were described as destroyed by a vineyard plantation[58]. The small number of discovered features considering the length of some of the trenches (100 m) is relevant when assessing the intensity of occupation. Nothing was communicated in particular about the types or sizes of these features. A single pit, about 2 m wide and 30 cm deep appears drawn on the single published profile (Trench 1) right behind the fortification, labelled as Dug-out 1 (Fig. 19/1). The interpretation of it as habitation structure is not argued. Only the content of a single pit (Pit 6) can be reconstructed (Fig. 20)[59]. It contained entire and partially entire vessels: a hand-made cooking pot (fig. 20/1), a wheel-made bowl with inward rim (Fig, 20/4), a small handmade cup with elevated handle of an earlier tradition (Fig. 20/2), a small bitronconic handmade bowl (fig. 20/3) and a wheel-made grey imitation of an *aryballos* (Fig. 20/5), after a metallic prototype, and a Thracian fibula (Fig. 20/8) with an archaic aspect[60], ensemble of goods which overall suggest a chronology in the first half of the 4th c. BC.

58 Berciu, Moscalu 1972, 634.

59 Berciu, Moscalu 1972; Măndescu 2010a, pl. 5A.

60 Măndescu 2010a, Pl 5A/8.

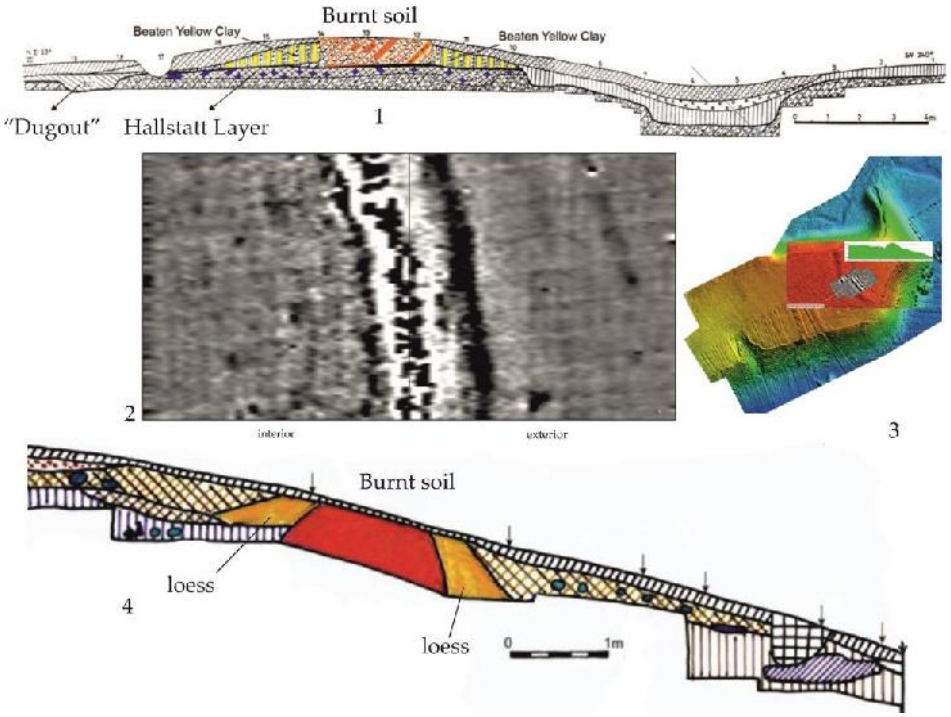

Fig. 19. Albești: 1. Profile of the fortification after Moscalu 1979, 342, fig. 2); 2. Magnetic map (40 × 80 m) with black for highly magnetic and white for highly non-magnetic; 3. Position of the area surveyed with geophysical instruments (Bartington Grad 601-2.); 4. Căscioarele–*D'aia parte* vitrified wall phase 1 (after Sîrbu, Damian 2017, 159, fig. 5).

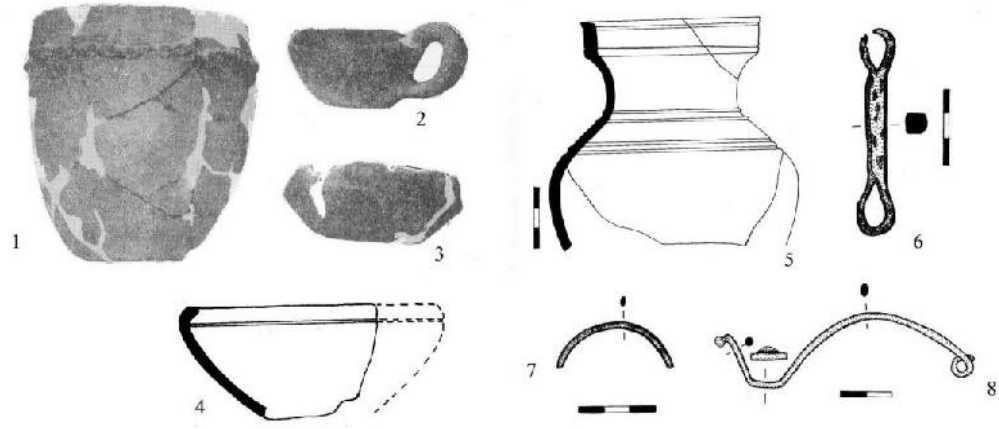

Fig. 20. Pit 6 (after Măndescu 2010a, pl. 5A).

The vitrified rampart or the burnt palisade, as described initially by Moscalu, was in fact, taking in consideration the enlightening published stratigraphic profile[61], a wall – built in a technique replicating the model based on the paraments – emplecton pair (Fig. 19/1). Its maximum width was reported to be 5.60 m (Trench III) in the northern sector. The paraments were two parallel ramparts of crude yellow clay, material probably taken out during the ditch excavation, well-beaten, reinforced with another kind of fine clay, brought from a different source, which turns hard when dried; they had a straight, vertical side, the inner one, and an oblique, slightly rounded exterior margin; they were named by Moscalu 'contraforts' and were seen as means to reinforce the main fortification – the wood and soil palisade. These contraforts showed no traces of firing. Inside the space delimited by them, fragments of well burnt clay were found, mainly of small dimensions, some vitrified, assembling a thick reddish layer with granular aspect. In trench III a succession of layers of burnt clay and ash was observed[62]. Some of the fired clay fragments bared traces of wood beams. Moscalu considered the discovered structure a wood palisade filled with soil which was burnt accidentally, not as an intentional construction technique. He finds however difficult to explain why the 'contraforts' remained untouched by fire because he did not see the logic of having a palisade burnt, afterwards cleaned and cut to vertical lines and then covered and reinforced with clay. The verticality of the separation line between the burnt soil layer and the paraments, paired with the fact that these paraments were unfired and were built at the same time with the ditch, can be explained only if we accept that the space between the two 'contraforts' was filled with a soil which was burnt and grinded in another place. No traces of pits for posts were found. From the given description it results that the wall was built on a previously prepared surface which 'clearly distinguishes itself from the soil on which it was laid'[63]. On the profile of trench I a thin layer of 'black fired soil' was drawn under the wall. This trace of firing activity is however too thin and localized to be related to the firing of the wall in situ, not considering that it was partially covered by the interior yellow clay parament. It may indicate the performance of a different activity involving fire consumed before the wall was raised. Traces of fire accompanied by the remnants of large collective feasts were found under the brick walls at Bâzdâna–*La Cetate*[64]. The ditch had a maximum depth of 1 m, an almost flat bottom and a maximum opening of 4.20-5.5 m.

The magnetic survey undertaken in 2015 tested a 40 × 80 m surface on and around the fortification (Fig. 19/2). A wall with extremely magnetic core and non-

61 Moscalu 1979, 342, fig. 2.

62 Moscalu 1979, 340.

63 Moscalu 1979, 341.

64 Zirra, Dumitrașcu 2013.

magnetic lateral sides is clearly distinguishable as is the ditch, partially filled with burnt material.

A GROUP OF SITES WITH VITRIFIED WALLS (ORBEASCA DE SUS, TRIVALEA MOȘTENI, RÂCA)

The type of wall described at Albești, with yellow clay paraments and emplecton made of granular burnt soil, was said to have been identified also in the neighbouring sites Orbeasca de Sus and Trivalea Moșteni[65], in the first case being dated in Hallstatt A and in the second in the early second Iron Age. Moscalu did not provide however any supporting materials (plans, profiles, maps, images) while, in general, his descriptions for the two excavations remain disappointingly short and flat.

Between the nowadays villages **Orbeasca de Sus** and Olteni, on the right side of Teleorman valley, an elongated plateau of the high river terrace, was repeatedly occupied and fortified along two millennia (Fig. 21-22). If we take in consideration the consistent archaeological deposit (in places until 1.30 m[66]), its recurrent use during six different periods, from Bronze Age till Late Iron Age[67], and the existence of fortification elements (a ditch assigned to Glina group, built in the beginning of the Bronze Age, and a rampart built with bricks, doubled by a ditch referred to as from Hallstatt A), the site at Orbeasca de Sus–*Cetate* should be considered significant. It was excavated by Moscalu and Beda during 1969-1972 and 1975 through 11 trenches. On the western and southern side of a plateau measuring 220 × 100 m (2.5 ha), they identified a burnt rampart, stretched along 300 m. It was reported as measuring 7.75-11.75 m in width and a height of 35-60 cm, while about the southern sector they registered a width varying between 3.60-10.50 m and a height ranging between 60 and 100 cm. The western side of this rampart was doubled with a 20 m wide ditch, 1.5 m deep, which was said to cut the 'Glina ditch'. Moscalu and Beda publication did not include the arguments based on which they assigned these dates to the mentioned fortification elements. Only their statement that the rampart contained bricks, some with central orifices, similar to the burnt clay lumps found in the site at Popești, which at that moment were considered Hallstatt A[68], can give a possible contextual explanation. Later it was proved that in Popești the rampart, in the core of which piles of burnt clay lumps with orifices were found, was dated with radiocarbon

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65 Moscalu 1979, 343.

66 1.30 m near the rampart in its southern sector; 1.10 m near the rampart in the western sector, while at 25 m east of the rampart the deposit measured only 40 cm (Moscalu, Beda 1979, 369). A survey on the site surface shows an unequal distribution of the artefacts; its northern margin has an increased presence of Bronze Age material.

67 Glina, Tei, Zimnicea-Coslogeni, Hallstatt A, Basarabi, early second Iron Age (Moscalu, Beda 1979, 369).

68 Vulpe 1957, 241; Vulpe 1965, 109.

during 1500-1400 BC and linked with a new cultural aspect of the late Bronze Age[69]. We consider the chronology of Orbeasca de Sus 'vitrified rampart' as far from clear. The structure, despite its minimalistic and rather imprecise depiction, seem to exhibit particularities which set it apart from the Hellenistic known cases in the Romanian Plane: the enclosure of the plateau on two sides, its consistent width, the existence of a so called 'highly burnt floor of beaten clay'[70] on the inner side of the rampart, under which wooden beams were placed along the length of the fortification, the existence of bricks with orifices placed in the inner structure of the rampart – these last two features bearing, apparently, strong similarities to the Late Bronze Age wall at Popești. Also the sequence of Bronze Age cultural groups in Orbeasca de Sus corresponds with what was found at Popești. However, this hypothesis is undermined by other details: lack of documentation, the existence on the site surface in the area of the vitrified rampart of a consistent quantity of burnt soil of granular dimensions[71], pink, red and orange in colour, mixed with Hellenistic materials, including amphorae and roof tiles, plus the enigmatic reference to 'clues indicating a second Iron Age palisade'[72]; to this we have to add the reference to 'bricks of large dimensions'[73] some with orifices like the 'clay lumps/'clay cakes' found at Popești. This difference in terminology may imply a difference in shape. Also we notice a difference in their reported arrangement. At least a part of the bricks in Orbeasca de Sus were reported found in the middle of the rampart – fallen as if they were initially assembled in a built wall. The existence of a Hellenistic wall built with burnt soil and/or bricks, in Orbeasca de Sus, remains a possibility. Newer excavations and radiocarbon dating might help elucidating these questions.

The magnetic investigation of the B rampart, the one excavated by Moscalu and Beda (Fig. 23/3), shows a similar fingerprint to the results obtained for Albești, implying the existence of a burnt core between two lateral areas of unburnt material. In addition it discloses the existence towards west of three parallel ditches to this wall (one of them must be the 'Glina ditch' identified by Moscalu and Beda). An interruption of the wall is clearly visible in its northern sector, but without additional excavation is hard to say if this situation is the result of an archaeological intervention or the remains of a 'gate'. The interior areas of the site appear to concentrate a higher amount of magnetic anomalies, some of which appear aligned to the wall. The novelty brought by the remote sensing study is the documentation of a second line of fortifications (rampart A in Fig. 21-23), with

[69] Palincaș 1997; Palincaș 2000.

[70] Moscalu, Beda 1979, 369.

[71] As noticed by us on the field survey. Even Moscalu and Beda agreed that what was left of the fortification was just the highly burnt soil (Moscalu, Beda 1979, 369).

[72] Moscalu, Beda 1979, 270.

[73] Moscalu, Beda 1979, 369.

a 30 m width. The elevation difference between the huge ditch (100 m wide) which doubles this second rampart to the west, and top of preserved dyke is 5 m. The ditch continues towards NE till it reaches the Teleorman valley. The entire southern slope of the plateau, which is partially modernly terraced, is covered in artefacts. Rampart A delimitates a surface of about 4.7 ha, while rampart B encloses around 1.5 ha. By the look of rampart A in satellite images it might also contain burnt clays. An extension of the magnetic investigation is obviously needed. The site is huge and repeatedly enclosed.

Fig. 21. Orbeasca de Sus, satellite image and magnetic plot. A. Rampart, after the remote sensing fingerprint it might be also made of burnt elements; B. The rampart investigated by Moscalu and Beda (1979); C. The connection between A and B (?), here, in the field, the soil is light colored and full of materials, heavy affected by terracing activities and agriculture; D. other spots of yellow clay visible in the field and from above.

It is not clear how consistent the last occupational level was, the one dated in the early second Iron Age. The original publication did not mention any features or structures. The later commentary by Pătrașcu[74] who studied the 4th-3rd c. BC materials excavated by Moscalu in Orbeasca de Sus–*Cetate* and stored in the County Museum of Teleorman in Alexandria, appreciated them as few. The content of a single pit could be reconstructed

[74] Pătrașcu 2011, 179.

(Fig 25). As in Albești Pit 6, this was also a deposit of entire vessels, 5 in this case, amongst which a Chian amphora (Fig. 25/5), with straight neck and conical body with conical hollow toe, stands out. Dated initially in the end of the 4th c. BC-first half of the 3rd c. BC[75], chronology accepted as well by Pătrașcu[76], it should be rather considered a much earlier indicator, as Măndescu has already pointed out[77]. Taking in consideration its proportional body, not asymmetrical elongated in its lower part, as exhibited by the early 3rd c. BC items, and the shortness of the toe tip, its chronology cannot be more recent than the first two or three decades of the 4th c. BC[78]. From the locally produced vessels found in the same pit we mention a wheel-made krater with almost straight walls, short neck and horse shoe shaped handles under the rim and a hand-made 'table amphora' with handles, large straight neck without rim, swollen body marked with grapping buttons on its maximal diameter following early models in Tumulus 9 Grave 6 of the late Hallstatt D cemetery of Tigveni–*Babe*[79], the particular type being fashionable also later, in the Zimnicea cemetery, after the middle 4th c. BC[80]. From Orbeasca de Sus there is also mentioned an englyphic stamp branding the name *Λύκων*. This magistrate was included by Katz in the Heraclea Pontica[81] chronological group III, dated in the 60s and 50s of the 4th c. BC[82]. According to Monakhov[83], amphorae with englyphic stamps constitute between 25 and 45% of the finds in this class of vessels in the main Greek colonies on the northern and north-western coast of the Black Sea in the first half of the 4th c. BC. Five bronze arrow heads with three blades with or without socket were found, three spearheads, three knives, two fragmentary bronze bracelets, as well as fragments of black glazed Greek vessels[84]. A significant type of find in Orbeasca de Sus are the fragments of tile roofs (Fig 24, 25/6-10), a unique find North of the Danube for the Classical and Hellenistic period, very probably imported[85]. The fragments come from both rounded inbrices and flat square pieces with turned rim found in the area of the wall debris (rampart B).

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75 Moscalu, Beda 1979, 369.

76 Pătrașcu 2011, 182, 183, note 13.

77 Măndescu 2010a, 199, note 664.

78 Okan Et Al. 2015, 262; Lawall 2005: 43, fig. 3/c-d; Bylkova 2005.

79 Vulpe, Popescu 1972, 100, fig. 10/9.

80 Graves C3M5; C9M2; C2M16 (see Alexandrescu 1980).

81 More recently Balabanov (2010) proposes a convincing hypothesis regarding Apollonia Pontica as the main production centre for amphorae with englyphic stamps. The regional market of Apollonia Pontica falls down after Philip II conquest of Thrace, being replaced by Heraclea Pontica.

82 Katz 2003, 267, 269, 276, fig. 1.

83 Monachov 1999.

84 Pătrașcu 2011, 180-191.

85 Pătrașcu 2011, 189, pl. V.

Fig. 22. Orbeasca de Sus–*Cetate* site, aerial views: 1. From east; 2. From south; A and B label the two observed fortification lines.

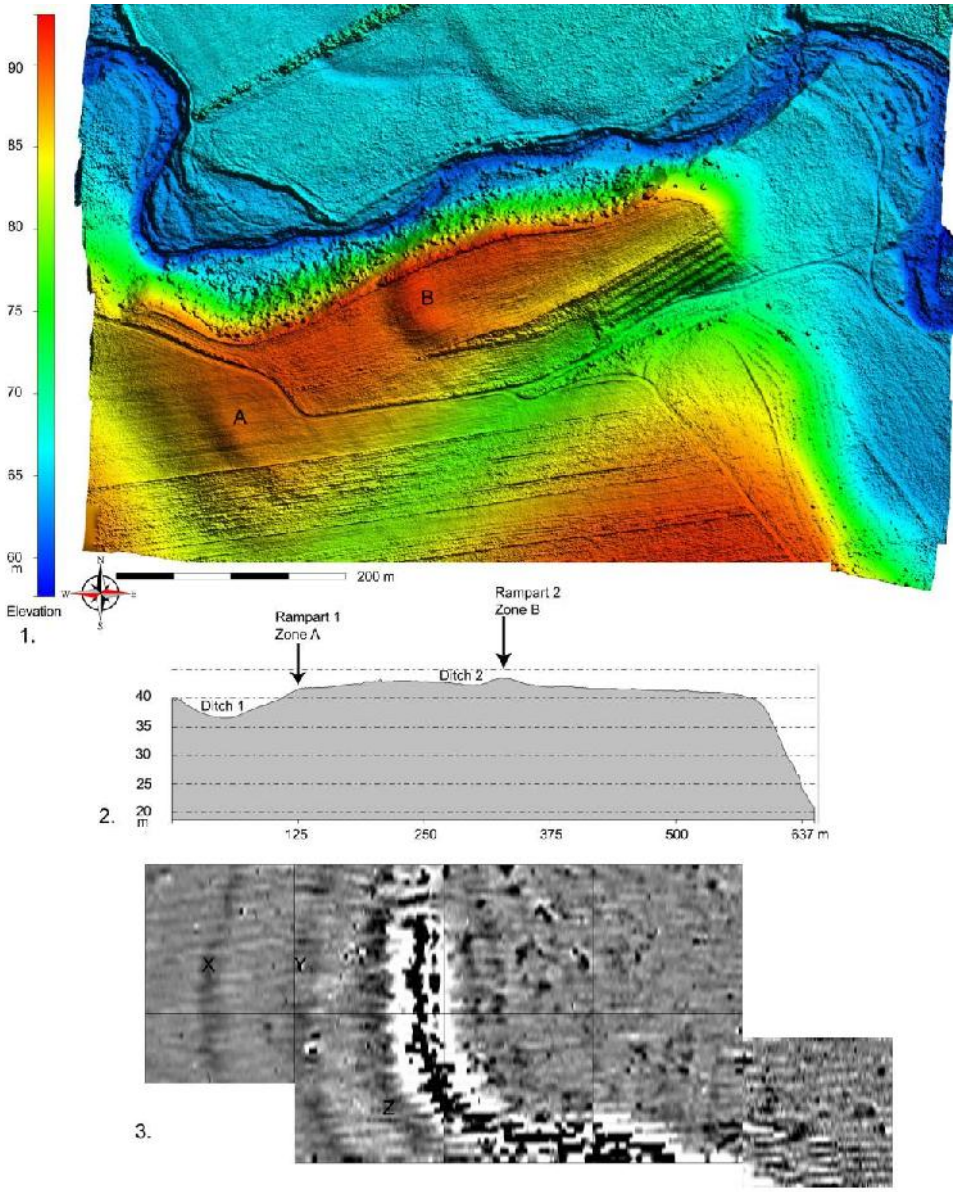

Fig. 23. Orbeasca de Sus–*Cetate*: 1. Digital model of the terrain (DSM type) 30 cm/pixel resolution created through photogrammetric algorithms applied to aerial images recorded with UAVs; 2. Elevation profile on DSM through its fortification elements; 3. Magnetic map (a square measures 30×30 m); black stands for highly magnetic and white for highly non-magnetic; X, Y, Z – magnetic, circular anomalies are very probably fortification ditches.

Fig. 24. Orbeasca de Sus–*Cetate*, materials found on the surface of fortification B: left – burnt soil; right – fragments of tiles.

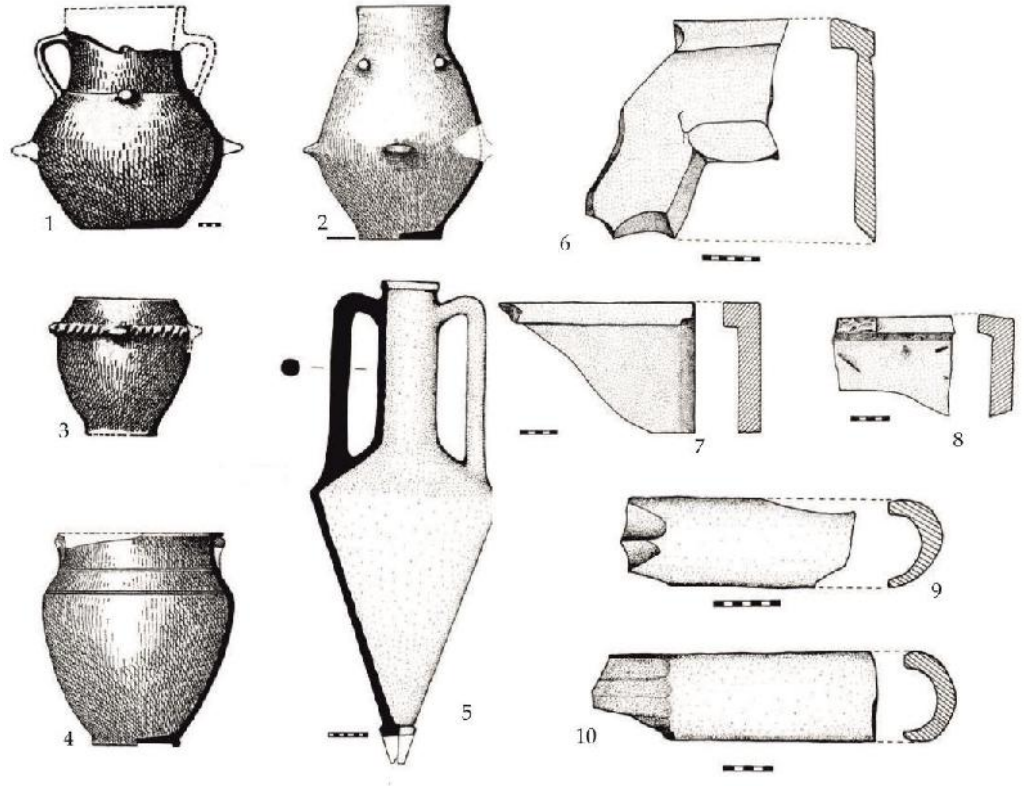

Fig. 25. Orbeasca de Sus–*Cetate*: 1-5 materials in Pit 19; 6-10 fragments of tiles (after Pătrașcu 2011, 187, 189, pl. III).

The site at **Trivalea**[86] is located on the high terrace of Teleorman river, at 1.2 km west from the county road 504 which passes through the village. The promontory on which anthropic vestiges were found has the shape of an hourglass, being partially separated from the main terrace by an old secondary course of the river. The north-eastern half has the shape of a three corner star, being separated through a narrow saddle from the south-western half which is more rounded. It raises with a maximum 28 m above the surrounding wetlands. Moscalu and Beda excavated on the eastern end of this star-shaped promontory, named *La Palancă*. Here, according to them, a system of a double burnt rampart-ditch structure delimited a 1 ha surface. They verified it through two trenches, one measuring 181.5 × 1 m and the other 90 × 1 m. The ramparts are partially visible on the satellite images (Fig. 26). Two stratigraphic deposits were reported: the first containing Coțofeni and Glina artefacts and the second with scarce Basarabi and 4th-3rd centuries BC[87] elements, including fragments of amphorae. The habitation was described as sporadic. Just two pits were identified, one with Basarabi and the other with early second Iron Age artefacts, without other details given. Some uncontextualized finds seem to suggest that the area was briefly occupied during the last part of Late Iron Age, too. The eastern rampart, outlined on an arched path, measuring about 110 m in length, was said to be made of 'burnt and unburnt soil and fragments of adobe with traces of wooden beams'; the burnt soil deposit measured 'on the profile' 4.5 m in width and no more than 40 cm in height. The ditch measured 4 m in width and 1.70 m in depth. The second rampart contained also 'adobe fragments' with traces of beams, had a significantly arched outline forming 'a bastion for the first rampart'. It measured 4 m in width, 50-60 cm in height. The satellite images disclose its location which was not reported in Moscalu and Beda's article. These images show that the exterior smaller rampart was connected with the larger one in its middle, doubling its southern sector.

This configuration suggests their contemporaneity as they are not overlapped. The second ditch measured 2 m in width and 1.10 m in depth. In the area where the two ramparts met, and the centre of plateau, as Moscalu said the trench II showed, the stratigraphic layers differentiate into one from Early Iron Age and another from the early Late Iron Age, with the fortification built above and cutting the Basarabi layer. This stratigraphic detail and the fact that a fragment of a grey wheel-made vessel was found at the base of the burnt soil sustain the assignment of the wall to the early Late Iron Age. The recent remote-sensing study identified on the digital model of the terrain

[86] Moscalu, Beda 1979.

[87] The initial proposed chronology was 5th-3rd centuries BC – the traditional framing for the early second Iron Age in Romanian literature. No chronological markers for the 5th c. BC were found.

a second line of fortifications (apparently another double ditch-rampart structure) which closed the entire star in its most sensitive point, where it connects with the rest of the terrace (Fig. 27/2). The nature and date of this is for the moment unknown.

Fig. 26. Trivalea Moșteni, satellite images (1 – 2018, 2 – 2012); A. *Palancă* site; B. second fortification line.

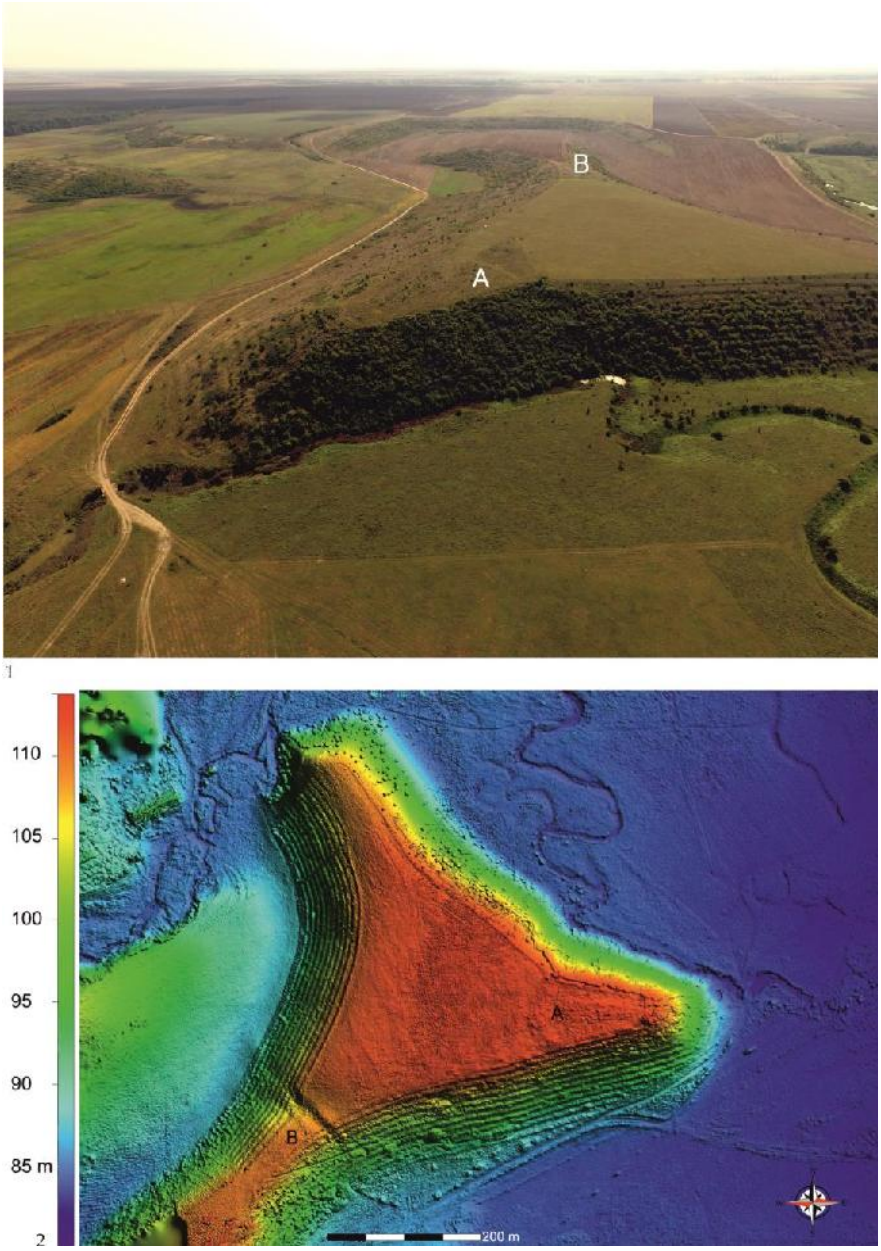

Fig. 27. Trivalea Moșteni: 1. Aerial image, view towards SE; 2. Digital Model of the terrain (DSM type, 30 cm/pixel resolution) obtained through photogrammetric algorithms applied to aerial images recorded with UAV.

Information about another fortified site, in which burnt clays were discovered in the structure of its rampart, is offered by **Râca–*Tudoria*** (Argeș county)[88] located on a promontory of the right terrace of Bucov, 20 km north of Trivalea Moșteni. The site was briefly trial trenched in 2006. The only notable result is that the archaeological deposit measured maximum 20 cm in thickness, contained scarce artefacts datable 4th–3rd centuries BC (handmade and wheel-made pottery fragments, a spearhead, a spindlewhorl) and no archaeological features were found. Fragments, small and large, of burnt clay 'from the palisade' considered burnt during an attack, were reported as visible scattered on the ground on large surfaces. The trench outlined on the western side of the site measured 5 m in width and 1.3 m in depth. The palisade 'of tree trunks bint with clay' measured 2 m in width and a height of 60 cm.

VITRIFIED RAMPARTS – A LONG STORY IN SHORT

The issue of fortifications with 'vitrified/burnt ramparts' found in southern Romania has been for a century at the heart of a scientific debate[89]. The main case study examined by various contributors to the dispute was that of the Coțofenii din Dos–*Cetatea Jidovilor* hillfort, Dolj County (4th-3rd c. BC) where a wall built with paraments of fired bricks and emplecton of granular burnt soil was found, while other portions of the wall were documented as having a different aspect, using unburnt materials. The German archaeologist Karl Schuhhardt, considering the alternation of burnt and unburnt sections of the wall as systematic and planned, proposed in 1930 the theory of intentional firing of sun-dried bricks, consumed in situ, as a technological improvement of the wall[90]. A similar explanation was given in 1957 by Radu Vulpe for the situation he documented in Popești – a defence structure interpreted as a clay rampart with a core made of a mass of burnt soil, in some sectors mixed with clay lumps with orifices, burnt in situ with varying intensity; initially dated as Late Iron Age[91], then Hallstatt A[92], finally by radiocarbon in the Late Bronze Age[93]. He placed the discovery within a larger, European context, of vitrified fortifications[94]. A variant of this hypothesis, going for intentionality, but considering the building elements (bricks, emplecton) as fired in a different place than the wall setting, in dedicated installations, was advanced by V. Zirra following his excavations in the same

88 Măndescu 2010a, pl. 229A; Măndescu 2007.

89 Reviews of the topic with excavation details and bibliography in Babeș 1997 and Zirra 2012.

90 Schuhhardt 1930, 186-188; Schuhhardt 1931, 143-144.

91 R. Vulpe 1955, 246-247, fig. 7-8.

92 R. Vulpe 1957, 241; A. Vulpe 1965, 109.

93 1500-1400 BC (after Tei, before Zimnicea-Plovdiv); Palincaș 1997; Palincaș 2000.

94 Vulpe 1957, 235-240.

Coțofenii din Dos site[95]. The theory was further embraced by V. V. Zirra for his results in the late 4th-early 3rd c. BC site at Bâzdâna–*La Cetate*[96], where the wall was also built in the technique seen in Coțofenii din Dos. Both Zirra archaeologists brought as proofs for the firing out of situ hypothesis archaeometric data, which even if performed in different techniques and times and by different people, indicated recurrently a considerable difference in the firing temperatures between the bricks and the emplecton, an argument thus for firing in different places of the two materials[97].

The main critique to this hypothesis came from influential archaeologist Mircea Babeș who considered the wall of Coțofenii din Dos as initially and exclusively built of sun-dried bricks, which during a destructive fire became partially burnt/baked[98]. His main arguments for supporting this interpretation were the existence in the composition of some sections of the walls of a mixture of fired bricks, not so well fired bricks and sun-dried bricks[99], an entire section being built of unburnt material (even if the chronological succession of this sector was not entirely clear in relation with the fired bricks sections), and also the observation that a fortification made of pre-burnt materials was not backed by any other contemporaneous model known in the Antique world. In particular, the production of emplecton by firing clays was considered improbable due to its supposed immense energy expenditure and technical difficulties involved[100]. Less well-argued, but mainly because he also considered irrational (inefficient and unnecessary difficult) the need to produce pre-fired materials for fortifications' building, Emil Moscalu, grounding his opinions on his excavations in Albești, Trivalea Moșteni

95 Zirra *et alii* 1993, 91-97.

96 Zirra 2012.

97 Resumed in Zirra 2012, 196-199.

98 Babeș 1997.

99 Zirra (*et alii* 1993, 94-95) advanced an amount of 10% of the total bricks to have been found in the construction as unburnt or not so well burnt, the situation being explained as subsequent reparations to the fired brick wall. Babeș (1997, 203, note 11) considered the percent to have been significantly greater. Even if he couldn't exactly say how much greater. He also observed (correctly) that at least in two cases, where the crude bricks were found at the bottom of the wall, they could not be the result of repairing. However, in this position, they could not be the result of accidental firing neither, as the rows of bricks were neatly separated (for example in SXI, 4 unburnt overlapped were followed in elevation by 11 burnt). In Bâzdâna–*La Cetate*, unbaked bricks were also identified in the lower part of the wall made of fired bricks (Zirra, Dumitrașcu 2013, 163, fig. 6); Could the unburnt bricks indicate, especially through their lower position, the existence of an earlier phase of sun-dried mudbricks, replaced subsequently by baked ones? A replacement section by section of an old box-wall using wood beams and earth with a new sun-dried brick one was, for example, documented in the 6th c. BC Celtic oppidum of Heuneburg (Fernández-Götz, Krausse 2016, 269).

100 Babeș 1997, 203.

and Orbeasca de Sus hillforts, was also a supporter of the vitrified ramparts as being the result of firing with destructive purpose of wood and earth palisades[101], even if he, himself, could not explain how and why the two lateral beaten yellow clay 'contraforts' in Albești had no traces of firing, despite being placed over the burnt granular core which had perfectly vertical sides! He admits that such a situation implied a building in phases of the fortification, with the careful collecting of the burnt debris after the fire and arranging it in the core before the 'contraforts' were built (which were contemporaneous with the ditch, and thus with the wall) and then eventually further arranged between the two paraments, but in the end he dismissed this explanation as highly improbable due to the lack of usefulness in such a building approach[102].

A HYPOTHESIS CONCERNING THE TECHNOLOGICAL AND CHRONOLOGICAL VARIATION OF LATE IRON AGE WALLS USING BURNT CLAYS

We consider that the key-site which may allow a revaluation of data regarding the subject of vitrified walls may be the hillfort of Căscioarele–*D'aia parte* (Călărași), 110 km east of Albești, which have been recently enhanced with a comprehensive publication of its fortification system[103]. Here, on the banks of the Danube wetlands, a 1.9 ha plateau, was repeatedly fortified in the interval of about one century, each time by using different building techniques and materials. Benefiting from a more consistent excavation than what was done and published for other discussed settlements of the Classical and early Hellenistic period in the Romanian Plane, the results appear more complex and might help in discriminate, technologically and chronologically, between the various building techniques. In the first wall erected in Căscioarele–*D'aia parte* (Fig. 19/3) we recognize the model known from Albești: made up of two unburnt, beaten yellow clay paraments, filled with highly burnt granular clay materials. The interior sides of the clay paraments were not burnt and the emplecton did not show traces of firing debris, nor dispersed traces of the fire around and underneath the vitrified clay area[104]. This gives us further ground to consider the burnt clays for emplecton as being prepared (technologically burnt) in a different

[101] Moscalu 1979, 346.

[102] Moscalu 1979, 343.

[103] Sîrbu, Damian 2017.

[104] Sîrbu, Damian 2017, 159-160, fig. 5. This situation was documented on the eastern side of the plateau, while in the northern sector this early wall had slightly different features (no clear clay paraments for example while the emplecton was laid out in layers, alternating burnt granular clay with layers of ash, without charcoals or traces of dispersed heat underneath.

place than the construction on the wall site. Thus, the argument of Babeș[105] that the technique of burning emplecton in a different place had no other known instances (when discussing Coțofenii din Dos case) drops, as at least two other cases are clearly proven (Căscioarele and Albești) to which we can add very probable also the case of Brăhășești[106].

The first wall in Căscioarele measured 4 m in width on the northern side, and 6-7 m on the eastern side, where the clay paraments were additionally covered on their exterior in limestone bits. The second phase consisted of a wall with paraments of sun-dried mudbricks, 2.50 m wide in total (Fig. 28/6) while in the latest phase, a true wall (3 m wide) with paraments of dressed stones (Fig. 28/4) was set on top of the older defences. A series of 16 amphora stamps pinpoint the existence of this fortified centre between 380-275 BC. No definite chronological anchors for the wall phases were presented, but it is assumed by the excavators, based on the site's general lifespan, that its earliest variant should be dated between the second quarter of the 4th c. BC till sometime after its middle[107]. It is a similar chronology to what the materials in Pit 6 from Albești indicate and also those in Pit 19 in Orbeasca de Sus. The site at Mărgărităresti (Olt), in the fortification structure of which a mass of burnt clay was recorded[108], was also dated in the first half of the 4th c. BC[109]. This might mean that in the two-three decades before the Macedonian conquest of Thrace, North Thracian communities on the Danube left bank were already in a process of increased social hierarchisation, concentrating collective forces and craftsmen to build enclosures in what appears to be an indigenous technological development with a regional spread.

In addition to the chronological hint, the walls' building sequence observed in Căscioarele–*D'aia parte* reflects also the increased complexity of the political networks occurred after the middle of the 4th c. BC, with the inclusion of left bank-Danubian partners. The last two building phases documented in Căscioarele–*D'aia parte* follow clear technological models of southern/Greek-Macedonian origin. Even the stone for the latest wall must have been brought from the southern shore, as there is no geological source of limestone on the northern one. They are, for the moment, the earliest implements of these types identified in North Danubian Thrace. The fortified power centre at Căscioarele–*D'aia parte* registers yet another record that supports the idea of intensification of collective mobilisation of local groups under direct southern contacts – the earliest Hellenistic edifices attested on the left Danube bank which can be linked

105 Babeș 1997, 203.
106 Brudiu, Păltănea 1972.
107 Sîrbu, Damian 2017, 173.
108 Preda 1986, 103, fig. 10.
109 Măndescu 2010a, 207.

with communal participation in cultic activities. A large rectangular structure built in wood and adobe was researched in the most elevated spot of the site plateau, in its last habitation level[110]. Its plan was not clear due to topsoil erosion. Three fireplaces could be linked with it, one with concave surface for retaining liquids. The building had an older phase with three fireplaces, one decorated (an *eschara* – Fig. 28/7), all overlapped by the later fireplaces, thick and well burnt, attesting repeated use of the firing instalations Both buildings were destroyed by fire. Two deposits of entire hand-made ceramic vessels were found in the building perimeter, linked with its first phase. The published types[111] allude to their use in libation and drinking practices. The closest parallel is the ritual context researched at *Demir Baba Teke*[112] near the Hellenistic native city of Sboryanovo: a 12 × 6 m rectangular adobe building, furnished with two large oval clay altars (diam. 1 m), beaten clay floor, and two other rectangular platforms of clay surrounded by rows of stones (1.5 m length) functioned, according to amphora stamps, beginning with the end of the 4th c. BC until sometime in the first quarter of the 3rd c. BC. The building was destroyed by fire and reconstructed only later, after the middle of the 3rd c. BC. Ritual activities on the spot continued until the 1st c. BC, while the site, which benefits from a special natural setting (a striking looking rock formation where a spring emerges) continues to bare a sacred aura as the tomb of a medieval Muslim leader is still honoured there.

A second, very valuable, chronological marker, one also relevant for the symbolic function of these fortifications, originates from the western group of hillforts in the Romanian Plane, in which burnt clays were used as building materials in their defence walls. There are at least 10 sites of this kind, researched and published in variable extents, located in the western Romanian Plane, in the region of Oltenia. At Bâzdâna–*La Cetate*[113], in the construction of the 2.8-3 m wide fortification wall, an original combination of technologies, both indigenous and of southern influence, were implemented: the traditional technique of preparing emplecton by burning clays in a different location, was mixed with the innovative use of fired mudbricks for paraments (Fig. 29). Under the entire wall width and partly inside the site, a single deposit was identified in a 100 sqm. excavated area.

110 Sîrbu 2006, 23-24.

111 Sîrbu, Damian 2017, 177, fig. 14.

112 Balkanska 1988, 176; Balkanska 2006.

113 Zirra, Dumitrașcu 2013; Zirra 2012.

Fig. 28. Căscioarele–*D'aia parte*: 1. Aerial image of the site from NE by Dan Ștefan; 2. Detail of the Specht Map (1790); 3, 5. Burnt core of the wall in phase 1; 6. Sundried mud bricks (phase 2); 4. Stone parament (phase 3); 7. Decorated fireplace; 3-7. after (Sîrbu, Damian 2017: 156, 158, 167, 170, 176, fig. 2, 3, 9, 12, 13).

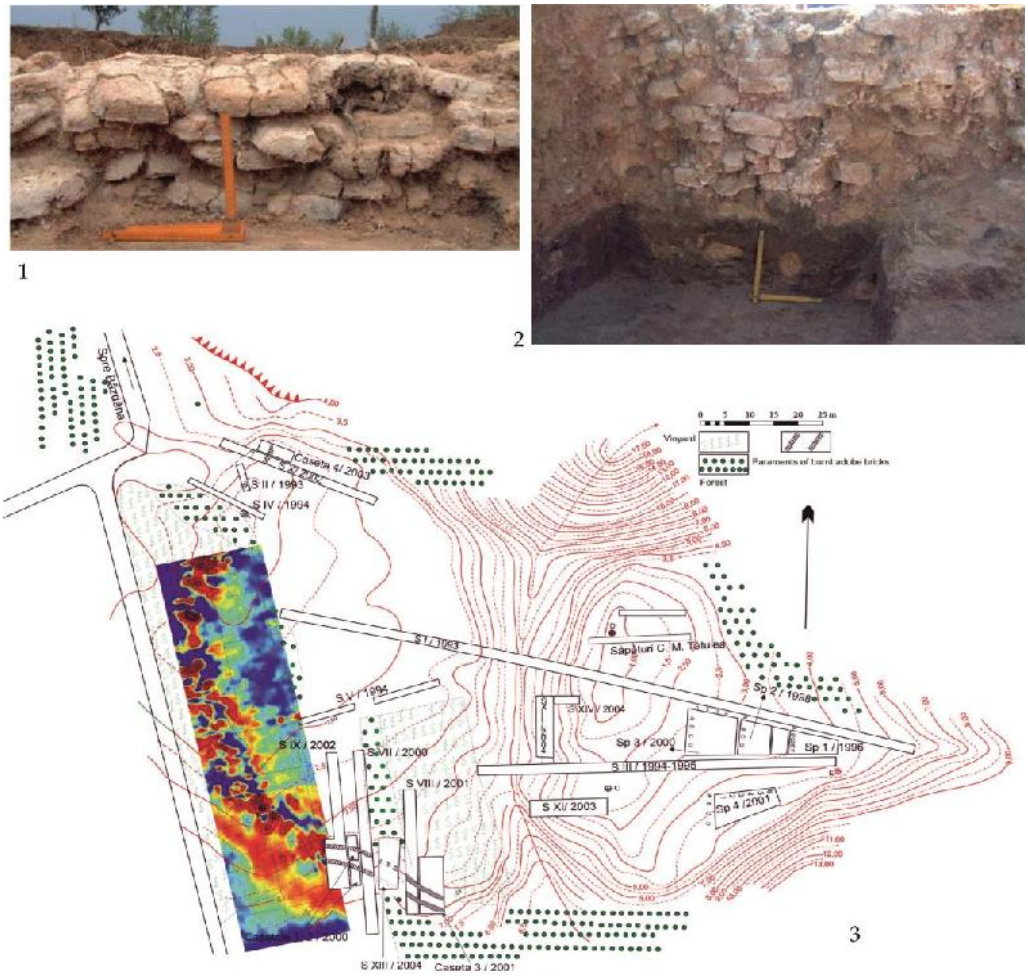

Fig. 29. Bâzdâna–*La Cetate* (after Zirra, Dumitrașcu 2013, 161-162, fig. 1-3): 1-2. Views of the interior parament built with fired bricks; 3. Site plan and magnetic plot (red probably represent highly magnetic and blue the non-magnetic materials).

It consisted of the debris of a ritual feasting (numerous vessels broken *in situ*, traces of fire, ash, parts of animals and fireplaces) superimposed in a certain spot by human bones (parts of an individual around 6 years old) which the authors reasonably interpret as a foundation deposit. The material found in this rich layer can be generally dated in the second half of the 4th c. BC and beginning of the 3rd c. BC. A narrowing of this interval comes from the fact that already by the end of the 4th c. BC the wall must had been dismantled because parts of it were found incorporated as debris in another defence embankment of the same hillfort built on a neighbouring

terrace (under which also a foundation deposit was identified, containing, among other things, a Thracian type bronze fibula from the end of the 4th c. BC and a *skyphos* of the second half of the 4th c. BC)[114].

BETWEEN LOCAL DEVELOPMENTS AND FOREIGN INFLUENCES

The technique of building fortifications with sun-dried mudbricks appears to be dated in Northern Thrace, considering the results at Căscioarele–*D'aia parte* and Bâzdâna–*La Cetate*, after the middle of the 4th c. BC, more probably in the last quarter of the century, while the preparation of burnt clays for emplecton was put in use a few decades earlier, being paired, at least in several, more clear cases, with crude clay paraments. The earliest technique was used on a rather extensive geographic space, but always in similar contexts, related to raising walls for delimiting spaces bearing apparently a special functionality in which the most visible one is the depositional one – suggesting the circulation of both authority models and craftsmen inside a network of local chieftains and their courts. The building of paraments with sun-dried mudbricks was adopted, very probably, as an inspiration from the Greco-Macedonian environment, where it had been in use since the Classical period, once the participation of North-Danubian elites in larger political networks intensified. We can see it implemented in an unaltered form in Căscioarele, a site that by the end of the 4th c. BC was integrated in the sphere of influence of a southern political partner. Traces of earlier phases of building with sun-dried mudbricks can be supposed in Coțofenii din Dos and observed in Bâzdâna–*La Cetate*[115]. However, when this imported technique was met by local builders who already had significant experience in burning clays for emplecton at very high temperature, most probably out of situ, the technique based on mudbricks could get adjusted in an innovative way. Considering the available data, it can be proposed that the use of fired bricks was developed and applied predominantly in the western group of hillforts on the north of the Danube. The finds of bricks in secondary positions in Albești and Orbeasca are too few and scattered to be allow their coherent interpretation.

Fired bricks are known to have been used in southern Thrace (in Seuthopolis tombs[116], stray finds in non-funerary contexts in Adjiyska Vodenitsa city and in Olynthos[117]), in the same period with the brick walls in northern Thrace (end of 4th c. BC), that is why it seems hard to imagine a lack of connection between the artisans in the two regions. On the other hand, the purpose of their implementation is different,

114 Zirra, Dumitarașcu 2013, 165, fig. 12-13.

115 Zirra, Dumitrașcu 2013, 163, fig. 6.

116 Dimitrov, Chichikova 1978, 23, 55.

117 Archibald 2014, 300, note 7.

therefore the direction of the influence is not easy to establish. Not necessary all the innovations visible in a peripheral culture should be read as foreign influences. If in the case of fired bricks, it was all the way around? A technological development is not necessary in all cases a linear and gradual diffusion, from artisan to artisan, a continuous improvement of a recipe. The use of fired bricks in Antiquity seems to be exactly one of these cases[118]. The fact that the technology appears already mature in the sites north of the Danube could be explained by the fact that the local builders already had experience in burning clays for construction purposes and they adjusted the later, imported technique based on sun-dried mudbricks, to their habits; it also implies that the burnt building material (or the burning as a process) could have more than just a practical value. It is true that a well-fired clay has some advantages compared to its sun-dried counterpart. It has greater strength and is resistant to intense heat. More important, though, it is durable and, unlike a simple clay and wood wall, it does not disintegrate when exposed to moisture. In all regions where these techniques flourished, local stone sources lack. These qualities are however acceptable for the baked bricks, but for the emplecton, the practical value is less clear. Such approach to building materials is more expensive and technologically more complicated to obtain and cannot be chosen as a quick solution to fortify against an imminent, approaching danger.

In addition to the burnt emplecton and fired bricks recorded north of the Danube, there is a third situation in which fired clay was used in the structure of enclosure walls, documented in two sites south of the Danube. In Sboryanovo urban centre, in the last quarter of the 4th c. BC, it was noted as 'categorical' observation, that in several sectors of its main fortification wall the clay binding between the stones used for the wall faces was fired 'to brick', supposedly for stability and waterproofing, after adding each row of stones[119] – a technique documented as well to have been used

[118] No direct connection can be established, for example, between the earliest use of fired bricks by the Romans in the 20s of the 1st c. BC, in the tomb of Caecilia Metella near Rome, and their immediate predecessors, the late 4th c. BC – early 3rd c. BC chamber tombs under tumuli, also built with fired bricks, in southern Thrace. Because of that, opinions were expressed that fired bricks were introduced as the customized solution to particular architectural problems. For example, Gerding (2006, 357) theorized that in Seuthopolis area, where bricks of various shapes were modelled such as to enable the building of the vaults covering the circular funerary chambers, they were an adjustment of an architectural model which was previously built in stone, in order to support better the new decorative style of the period – the frescoes and plasters. He took in account the results of tests carried out at the Lund Institute of Technology that demonstrated the greater absorption capacity of fired bricks which doubles the adhesive strength of plaster as well as its longevity.

[119] Stoyanov 2015, 81; Stoyanov 2000-2001, 209.

for at least one other building in the city[120]. The same particular technique was observed in Satu Nou–*Valea lui Voicu* fortification wall of the early 3rd c. BC settlement (between every second row of stones)[121].

FORTIFICATIONS AS SYMBOLIC CAPITAL. EPHEMERAL LINES OF AUTHORITY. COLLECTIVE IDENTITIES EXPRESED THROUGH CULT ACTIVITIES IN DEDICATED SPACES

In addition to their supposed defensive functionalities, the symbolic role of these walls, as catalysts of collective identity of the various groups is noticeable. There are known, until now, at least 14 hillforts in the southern and south-western parts of Romania, dated in the interval of about a century, or even less, that display fortification elements in which highly burnt clays were identified (Fig. 30). We believe it's not hazardous to recognize in this more than just the effect of violence, accident and conflict[122], but a cultural phenomenon, a technological model that served to implement a certain pattern of authority, a symbolic enabler for smaller groups to adhere to regional networks. Their building process implied a certain degree of work specialisation, forces mobilisation and an organised approach of the whole process (supplying clays, wood for combustion, baking in dedicated installations, mixing, moulding, and assembling) which cannot be attained without a coordinating authority and resources. We identify precisely in the surpassing of the technical difficulties considered irrational by Moscalu and Babeș, the source of symbolic power obtained by the participating communities. The communal feasting possibly associated with a human sacrifice as seen in Bâzdâna–*La Cetate* suggest that a consistent social investment was placed in their setting. Thus, we may suppose that these walls represented both the community and the individual authority. But if power hierarchisation and centralisation as incipient processes amongst various groups inhabiting the North Danube Thrace seem like a certitude, as already happening in certain points two decades before Macedonians reached the area, as expressed by the defences in Albești and the earliest in Căscioarele, what can we say about the scale of these groups coming together? For the region of Vedea and Teleorman valleys, an analysis of the local authority lines' extent in time and space, of the fortified hilltops' function and of the size of the groups entering larger networks, reveals the existence of several models. The hillforts at Albești, Trivalea Moșteni and in some extent (no clear

120 Stoyanov 2000-2001, 214.

121 Conovici, Irimia 1999.

122 The construction of defenses with mudbricks is highly widespread in the Mediterranean basin since Prehistory. It might be the topic of a future study to investigate in what ways the remains of these walls destroyed during conflict (like the walls of the sacked Sardes, during the 6th c. BC) resemble or differentiate from the sites located in the Romanian Plane.

data about the chronology of the burnt rampart) the one at Orbeasca de Sus represent a consistent category. The sizes of their enclosed areas, relief morphology, natural environment, lack of surrounding open settlements, thin habitation layer and the mention of burnt and unburnt clays in the structure of their ramparts/walls – reflect similar parameters. For Albești and Orbeasca de Sus their existence in the first half of the 4th c. BC is ensured by the same type of archaeological context – deposits of vessels in pits, which might bear a ritual, depositional function as attested in other cases of the same period in Thrace[123]. It is not clear how long were these fortified places actually used during the 4th -3rd c. BC interval. The situations documented in Bâzdâna–*La Cetate* and Căscioarele–*D'aia parte* suggest that walls might have had, in fact, quite a short life and needed repeated reparations. At Căscioarele we see them built three times in about 100 years. Almost nothing is known about Trivalea Moșteni, except that it had a double vitrified wall with yellow clay paraments and scarce material generally dated 4th-3rd c. BC. The three sites are linked by only one day travel between each two of them[124]. This shows the fragmented state and discrete size of the social nucleation. We cannot identify a hierarchy between the sites so therefore we should suppose each of them represented a small and separate community, even if all referred to a similar model of authority expression and collective identification. The same applies to Râca, located at 21 km north of Trivalea Moșteni.

The delimited areas (regularly under 2 ha) seem small[125], but compared to the *dava* sites of the Classical period they are double the size. The main difference is actually the lack of traces indicating concentrated activity and multi-functionality of the space use. Interpretations were proposed that they served as short lived fortified settlements or refuge fortifications[126]. But, as we detailed previously, there is much more than just defence purposes encapsulated in these walls. If the aristocratic residence function cannot be for the moment proven (5 dug-outs were mentioned for Albești, without details), their interpretation as places for regular collective meetings, which included a cultic component can be better, even if still indirectly, sustained. None of these 4th c. BC settings choose a barren location, but reinvested places that were already bearers of a symbolic memory. A representative instance of this behaviour can be observed in a site not part of the analysed regional group, however still in the Romanian Plane, at Popești–*Dealul Nucetului* (Giurgiu), where pits with

123 Sîrbu, Florea 2000, 89-90; Tonkova 2003; Georgieva 2015; Vârbanov 2014.

124 12 km in straight line between Trivalea Moșteni and Orbeasca de Sus, 17 km between Orbeasca de Sus and Albești and 21 km between Trivalea and Albești.

125 For example, the enclosed area in Seuthopolis measured 5 ha while in Sboryanovo 10 ha, with suburbs and adjacent habitation spread on other 20 ha around.

126 Moscalu 1979.

offerings (entire vessels, grinders, entire sacrificed animals) and series of overlapped fireplaces-altars were built in Basarabi period, in the 4th c. BC and then during the Classical second Iron Age, in the 2nd-1st c. BC – period when they were accompanied also by large buildings with a public character, suggesting both aristocratic residential character attached during the later, more developed periods, to the cultic component[127]. This sequence of reinterpretations of the cultic significance as seen in Popești, which in its latest use period acted a central place (production and economic centre, neighbouring elite graves), can illuminate, in a reversed perspective, the earlier, less visible manifestations, in the same way the Roman era sanctuaries built over previous Celtic sacred spaces[128] do. It is also an argument for a theory already proposed for the west-European proto-urban development that at the core of certain *oppida* stood earlier sanctuaries attracting around them people, craft and authority manifestations[129]. Hence we can notice for the fortified sites of the first half of the 4th c. BC in the Romanian plane, a recurrent manifestation of connection between place and community expressed in a ritual behaviour, paired, though, with interruptions in the use interval. We interpret these disruptions as changes in the authority lines, despite a persistence, on a general level, of the community presence, eve if not necessary all the time visible as material remains. The building of sophisticated defences imply a certain manifestation of coordinating authorities which found their justification in controlling the sanctuary-like places. This does not imply that the sites at Albești, Orbeasca de Sus, Trivalea Moșteni or Popești were sanctuaries; only that they included, during the late Classical, early Hellenistic period, a collective cultic component, which in some places was again reactivated after the middle 2nd c. BC[130].

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[127] Vulpe 1957, 232, fig. 5 (early Iron age deposit); 233, fig. 6-7 (second Iron Age); Vulpe (2005, 22): „Though hearths and pits with typical inventory were identified in all three Hallstatt layers, remains of buildings – most probable dwelling houses – were found only in the Basarabi layer. To this latter layer also belongs what I consider to be a cult place – an altar hearth (i.e. a sizeable decorated hearth), close to which abundant and richly decorated ceramics was found.''

[128] Like in Titelberg (Fernández-Götz 2014).

[129] Haselgrove (2000, 106): 'Several territorial *oppida* potentially originated as sacred locations used periodically as meeting places by widely dispersed populations, with little or no permanent occupation […]. This role as a neutral place where otherwise separate groups came together under the auspices of the gods –for instance to elect a war leader–encouraged further development of their communal functions […]. What had begun as a neutral meeting place thus gradually evolved into the recognized focus of the wider social grouping, whose identity it came to symbolize…'.

[130] Popești, Cârlomănești and Pietroasa Mică–*Gruiu Dării* – important Classical Dacian period *dava* sites had all earlier traces of 4th-3rd c. BC scarce activity on their most elevated positions, some with a certain a depositional character, while in the case of Gruiu Dării, the idea of an enclosure for a symbolic place was rendered during the 1st c. BC in stone (Sîrbu, Matei 2015).

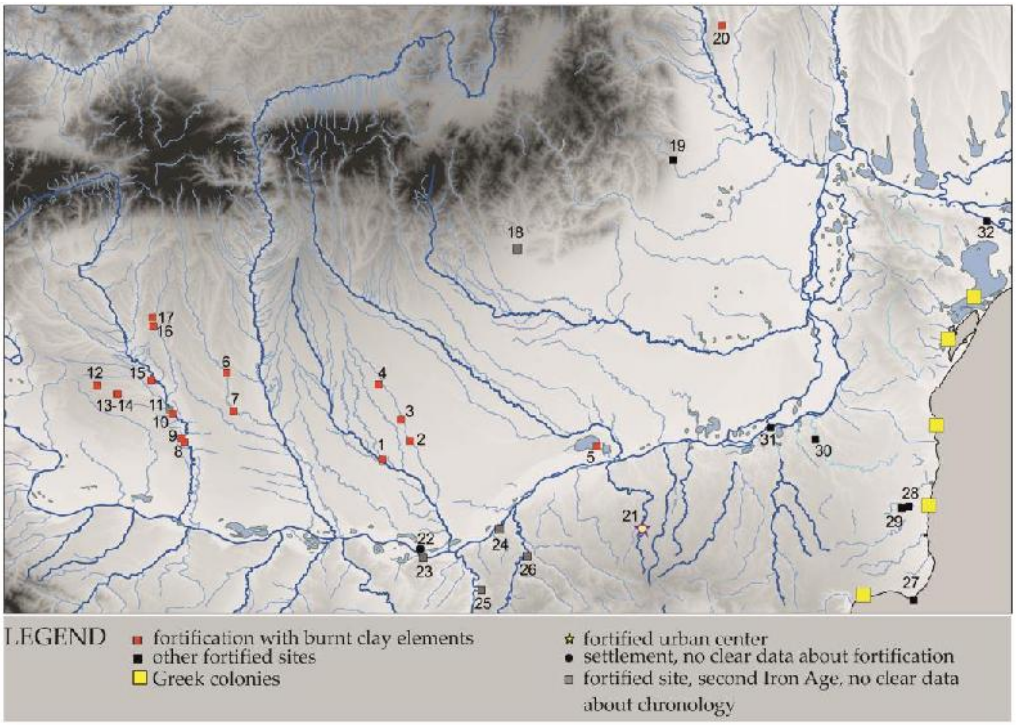

Fig. 30. Fortified sites (4th-3rd c. BC): 1. Albești; 2. Orbeasca de Sus; 3. Trivalea Moșteni; 4. Râca Tudoria; 5. Căscioarele–*D'aia parte*; 6. Morunglav; 7. Mărgăritărești; 8. Bâzdâna–*La Cetate*; 9. Bâzdâna Cucuioava–*Între Vii*; 10. Cârligei; 11. Bucovăț; 12. Botoșești; 13. Voița; 14. Brabova; 15. Coțofenii din Dos Cetatea Jidovilor; 16. Stoina; 17. Căpreni; 18. Plopeni–*Cetatea Fetei*; 19. Oratea; 20. Brăhășești; 21. Sboryanovo; 22. Zimnicea; 23. Svishtov Kaleto; 24. Pirgowo; 25. Byala; 26. Cherven; 27. Kaliakra Cape; 28. Albești (CT); 29. Coroana; 30. Adâncata; 31. Satu Nou–*Valea lui Voicu*; 32. Beștepe[131].

[131] Specifications: The map is obviously incomplete. With the exception of Sboryanovo, the available data regarding settlement life and fortifications during the second Iron Age on the territory of North Thrace — south of the Danube, in modern day Bulgaria, is scarce and unsystematically presented (the situation is especially poor for the north-western territories). For the North-Eastern Bulgaria second Iron Age sites more data in Stoyanov 2000; Stoyanov 2015, 391-448; Conrad 2006; Popov 2015. For the Northern Danube shore, which is our interest here, we ruled out those sites where the fortifications elements couldn't be certainly dated during the early Hellenistic period, like Țicleni, Căciulătești, Corabia, Dârvari, none bearing burnt clay elements (see Cărăbiși 2015 for catalogue and bibliography) Some exceptions: Bucovăț was mapped because it is usually highly cited in works regarding the vitrified ramparts topic. Considering similarities with Popești, its rampart containing burnt clay elements could be nevertheless dated in an earlier period (Bronze Age, Early Iron Age).

A development of the model applied in the fortified sites located around Peretu tomb appears to be Căscioarele–*D'aia parte* – not part of the discussed regional group, but representative for its understanding in a reversed mirror. Starting simultaneously with Albești and Orbeasca de Sus and employing initially the same type of fortification, it develops consistently towards the end of the 4th c. BC and in the beginning of the 3rd. The novel methods of building walls, occurrence of cult edifices (paired with pits with entire vessels), decorated fireplaces and increased access to Greek amphorae, display vibrant ties within south-orientated networks, like the one in which Sboryanovo[132] exceled – the only known early Hellenistic city in Northern Thrace, funded at the end of the 4th c. BC. The habitation concentration in Căscioarele is more consistent, being organized on three levels. Even if only a small part of the site was researched, over 100 archaeological structures were identified: pits, dwellings and fireplaces. Starting with the end of the 4th c. BC a plethora of open settlements emerge in the immediate surroundings of the fortified area[133], suggesting the hilltop was evolving into a central place for a larger community. In fact, after the fortification ceased to function, these open settlements continued to survive long into the 2nd c. BC[134]. This is an indication that only the highest authority lines were interrupted, those that referred directly to southern peers. In addition to open settlements several graves were found, but none in the immediate vicinity of the fortified site. The tumulus grave in Chirnogi[135], dated in the beginning of the 3rd c. BC (an inhumation with a golden applique and *askos*) was located at 10 km to the east. It could disclose a hierarchisation of power and wealth, with second level chieftains that owned properties in the surroundings of the main residential centre, the one which was occupied by the higher ranked individuals.

Oratea is well dated in the 4th-3rd c. BC, but it was not excavated, therefore we do not have clear data regarding its defence system. At Plopeni, during a visit in the site of the authors in 2004, burnt granular soil was observed in the structure of the rampart. Future investigations are necessary. Zimnicea was included, even if we do not have enough data regarding its fortification system because it has all the features of a residential centre of the period worthy of proper defences.

132 Stoyanov 2015.

133 Sîrbu *et alii* 1996: 178, fig. 1.

134 Sîrbu *et alii* 1996; Sîrbu, Damian 2017, 181, 182, fig. 16-17.

135 Şerbănescu 1999, 231-244.

Fig. 31. Aerial view of Zimnicea, from SW: A. *Cetate*; B. *Câmpul Morților*; the arrows highlight a possible ditch, undiscussed before.

In the regional group analysed here, the only ensemble that makes a distinct note seems to be Zimnicea. Its strong ties with the south as a trading hub and its later chronology, with a start not before the middle 4th c. BC, may justify this differentiation. It has an almost continuous sequence of habitation till the first half of the 1st c. BC and was surrounded by a large cemetery. This site, including its necropolis, exhibit the longest sequence of second Iron Age vestiges, without major interruptions, in the Romanian plane. Despite its long research history, little relevant data was actually published about the settlement[136]. What we know is that for the period comprising the second half of the 4th c. to the end of the 3rd c. BC there were three habitation layers[137] with a total thickness of maximum 1.4 m meters[138], comprising rich vestiges, including of large buildings with bases made of stone[139]. A short disruption was observed, between the second and third layer, sometime in the

136 A review with bibliography in Ștefan 2009; Spânu 2014.

137 Alexandrescu 1974, 56.

138 Babeş *et alii* 2002; Spânu, Pătraşcu 2005, 416.

139 Spânu, Pătraşcu 2005, 416-7; Nestor 1949, 118.

beginning of the 3rd c. BC, marked *in situ* by sand levelling[140]. The site was considered reinforced[141] in this early Hellenistic period, on two sides, with a rampart, doubled to the north with a ditch, the outline of which was guessed by observing the ravine followed by the modern road. The latest excavations did not support however the existence of a rampart in the northern side of the plateau *Cetate*[142], while the actual ravine is so deep that can hardly be related to any anthropic intent. In fact we know almost nothing about the site fortifications. Did it had any? Considering the nature of archaeological finds and the existence of the tumuli necropolis, it certainly had. The significant medieval disturbances of the site (a layer of almost 2 m deep, with pits) and problematic publication overall, corroborated with a very active relief morphology affected constantly by erosion and land sliding, may just mean that important data about its fortification system was just lost (Figs. 31-33). In addition, the different approach of the local community to treating the funerary space in Zimnicea, suggest that their sense of group identity could be based more on referencing to ancestors than on fortifications. The settlement was surrounded by a large cemetery (hundreds of graves) organized around several initial tumuli with rich main graves, dated in the second half of the 4th c. BC, representing, perhaps, members, both men and women, of important families. The use of large rectangular pits lined with stones on the interior walls (like primitive chambers) for cremation graves and the presence of decorated fireplaces in graves find their best analogies in the cemetery at Sboryanovo[143]. The group identity based on reference to ancestors' graves remained in function for a long period as community members continued to burry themselves in and around these early tumuli even during the late Hellenistic period.

[140] Alexandrescu 1974, 56; Nestor 1949, 120; Babeş *et alii* 2002.

[141] One of the most discussed aspects connected with this fortification is the assumption by some (Pârvan 1926, 46; Alexandrescu 1974, 56), that the second Iron Age from Zimnicea was the 'poorly fortified settlement' encountered by Alexander in 335 BC when he crossed over the Danube, during a military campaign against the triballi (*Arrian*, I, 3-5). Recent interpretation proved that this crossing over should be placed more to the west on the Danube, in the area of triballi power centre and that the notoriety of Zimnicea excavations lead to this connection (Vulpe 2001, 457-459).

[142] Spânu 2004, 381.

[143] Gergova 2016.

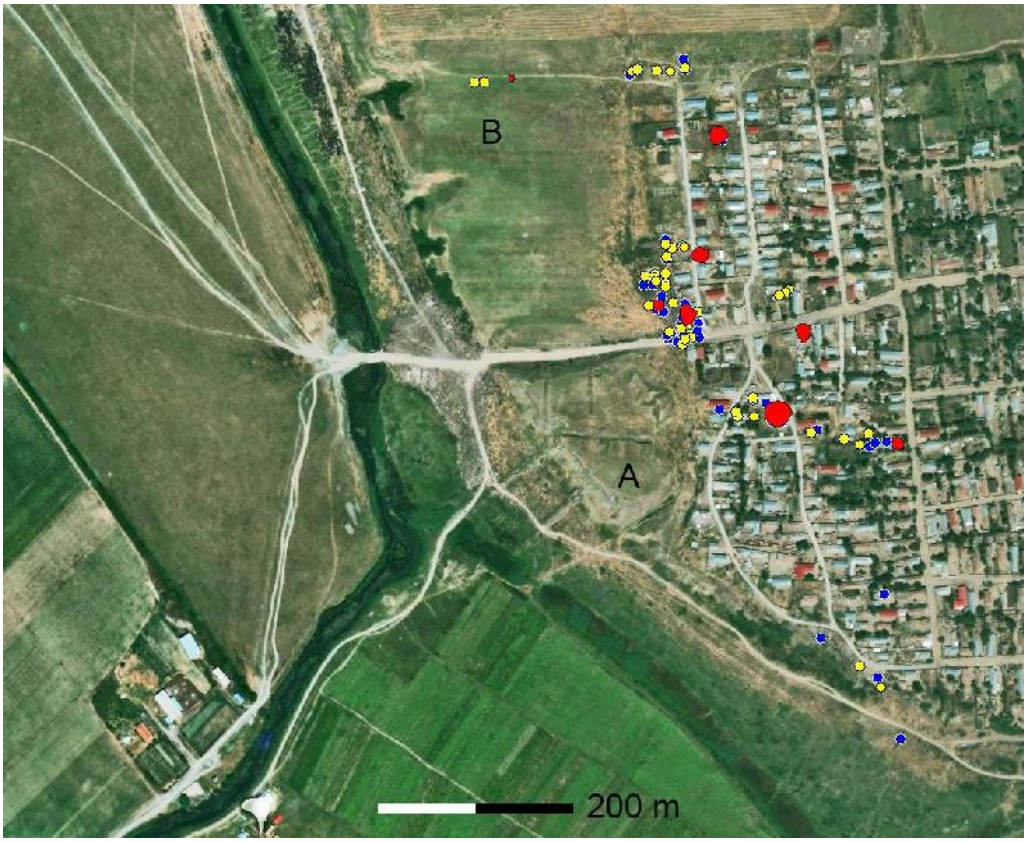

Fig. 32. Zimnicea, satellite image: A. Settlement; B. Cemetery area (*Câmpul Morților*): red – mounds with rich graves second half of the 4th c. BC; blue – graves 3rd c. BC; yellow – graves 2nd-1st c. BC (excavation of A. Alexandrescu).

INTERCONNECTIVITY. LARGE SCALE NETWORKS. A SOURCE OF NEW WEALTH

Two staters were recently discovered in the family inheritance of a native from Trivalea-Moșteni: a posthumous Alexander type gold coin, from a rare series assigned to Pella, having as symbol a bee on the reverse left field, and a barbarous imitation in gold of a Philip III Arrhidaeus stater, having more probable a Tarsus prototype[144]. The two coins can be dated in the last two decades of the 4th c. BC. Considering that their original owner, 100 years ago, was not a collector and did not travel, there is a strong possibility for the two coins to originate indeed from the surroundings of the site at

[144] Petac, Niculescu 2018.

Trivalea-Moșteni hillfort. The numismatic evidence coming from Trivalea area is consistent with other isolated finds or small hoards of gold coins found in the southern and south-eastern lowlands of North-Danube Thrace (Fig. 34), numerous enough to consider them a horizon[145].

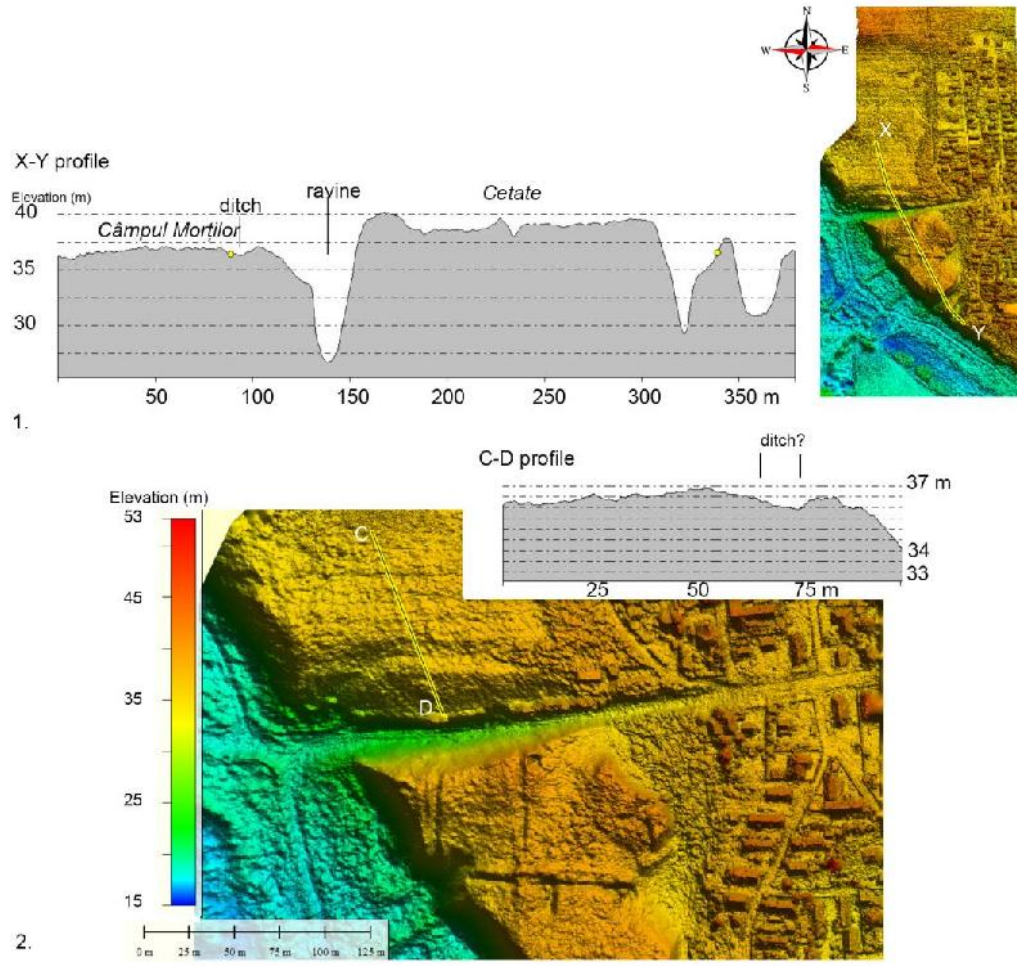

Fig. 33. Zimnicea, digital model of the terrain (DSM type), photogrammetric result from aerial images. A lowered anomaly in the terrain, north of the ravine appears to resemble an ancient ditch.

[145] Vîlcu 2015, 195.

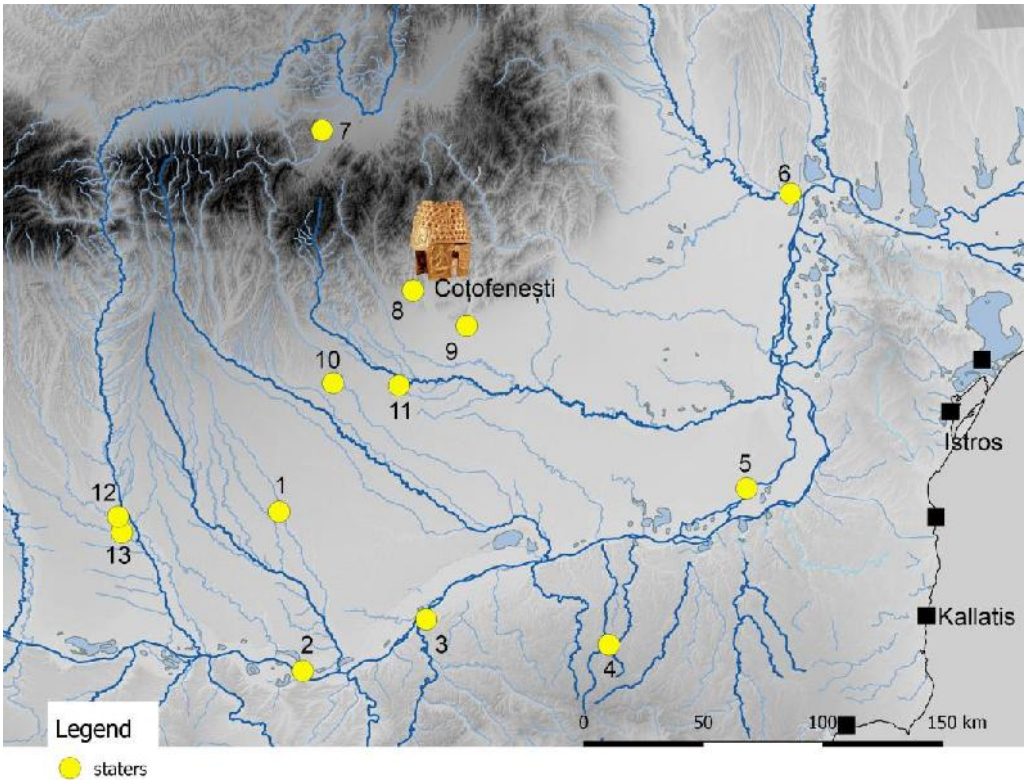

Fig. 34. Staters distribution: 1. Trivalea Moșteni; 2. Zimnicea; 3. Ruse; 4. Todorovo; 5. Gâldău; 6. Galați; 7. Codlea; 8. Cocorăștii Mislii; 9. Albești Muru; 10. Cătunu; 11. Cojasca; 12. Cioroiu; 13. Reșca.

Gold coins are generally interpreted as payment for military services or diplomatic alliances. The heavier hoards can also represent political payment, such as the tribute of a Greek city towards local dynasts in order to ensure peace and/or protection[146]. Petac and Guțică (2018) proposed, based on this horizon of coins solid short chronology, especially after 320 BC, and minting predominantly in workshops originating from territories in Asia Minor controlled by Antigonos Monophtalmos, that they reflect a significant involvement of North-Danubian Thracian mercenaries in the Diadochi conflicts, particularly in their Second War (319-315 BC), possibly suggesting a direct participation of some groups into the 'Thracian cavalry contingents' described by Diodorus (XIX, 29, 4) as members of the Antigonid army in

[146] Vîlcu (2015, 194-195) proposes such an interpretation for the hoard found at Lărguța (Rep. Moldavia) containing 21 staters in a gold jug weighting the equivalent of 30 staters.

the battles of Paraetacene (317 BC), in northern Iran[147]. Another series of events that triggered a consistent influx of hoarded coin on the territories of Northern-Eastern Thrace tribes were the Lysimachus wars against the rebellious West-Pontus cities which were aided substantially, including with coin, by Antigonos Monophtalmos. A large regional network of alliances with local dynasts was crafted at the end of the 4th c. BC, beginning of the 3rd c. BC, and fuelled with payments in precious metals through the mediation of cities like Istros and Kallatis. Echoes of this politics reached the ancient sources[148]. The hoard of 10 staters at Gâldău could be paired with the 313-311 BC Kallatis uprising against Lysimachus[149], while the composite hoard of Todorovo, near Sboryanovo, with its latest of the 8 staters dated in the last years of the 4th c. BC, associated with silver drachmas minted in Istros, highlights the war efforts of Macedonians contenders to power, in the beginning of the 4th War of the Diadochi, to secure alliances and mercenaries, but also to sabotage their pears similar efforts. Some staters in Todorovo are of Antigonid origin and can be matched as political interest with the Istrian drachmas in the hoard, but the latest gold coin appears to suggest a connection with a Kasandros supervised minting centre[150]. Such associations in the same hoard of coins minted by Macedonian opponents with interest in Northern Thrace and in the western Black Sea cities, simply divulge the effervescence of political and military environment, the dynamic evolution of relations and the increase in access to wealth and power structures. It was this interest of Macedonians, and indirectly of the Greek cities, that could have powered exponentially the development of elites and power centres in Northern Thrace in the last two decades of the 4th c. BC and in the first quarter of the 3rd c. BC. In this context we can also explain the mention of Menecharmos, son of Poseidonis, most probably an Istrian considering the prosophographical analysis[151], in an inscription found at the southern gate of Sboryanovo wall, mentioning the goddess Posphoros, which is associated with the patronage of poleis, fortifications and the military[152]. This Istrian citizen appears to had been involved in the reconstruction of the wall of the Thracian city of Sboryanovo, very probably as the result of a war alliance between Istros and the resident Thracian dynast[153].

147 Petac, Guțică 2018, 168.
148 Diodorus, XIX, 73-78.
149 Vîlcu 2015, 196.
150 Petac, Niculescu 2018, 141.
151 Chichikova 2015, 59-74.
152 Stoyanov 2015, 397.
153 The writing style was considered typical for the 3rd c. BC (Chichikova 2015, 61).

The staters minted in the last two decades of the 4th c. BC found at Zimnicea, Ruse and Gâldău highlight the Danube line, while those of Reșca and Cioroiu, on Olt valley, originate from the same communities that had built at some point earlier the hillfort in Mărgărițești (with vitrified wall)[154]. An important agglomeration of isolated gold numismatic finds (Albești–*Muru*, Cocorăștii–*Mislii*, Cojasca, Cătunu)[155] can be observed quite far from the Danube, in the sub-mountainous regions of Dâmbovița and Prahova counties, giving away the large extent of military and diplomatic relations connecting Thracian, Macedonian and west Pontic cities parties at the end of the 4th c. BC. Moreover, gold coins are known from an old find in Brașov county[156] indicating that around 300 BC there were contacts between communities located on both sides of Carpathians, through mountain routes like the ones bordering the Teleajen valley. The stater from Cocorăștii Mislii, was found at less than 5 km north from the hillfort at Plopeni–*Cetatea Fetei*, where a vitrified wall is also supposed[157]. 7 km north from Cocorăștii Mislii, on the hills above Coțofenesti, a ceremonial helmet made in gold sheet, roughly of the Calcydian type, but structured and decorated in the style of Thracian items, was found in unclear circumstances[158]. The chronology of this stray find was debated, ranging from the late 5th c. BC to 3rd c. BC; however its similarities with the helmets in Agighiol and Peretu is striking. Can the use of gold instead of silver might be linked with the influx of staters in the northern peripheries of Thrace at the very end of the 4th c. BC? To the same period (last quarter of the 4th c. BC first quarter of the 3rd c. BC) belong, in fact, the majority of hoards containing metal vessels or jewellery made out of gold found in the North Thracian space[159].

A recent analysis of Milena Tonkova (2013), concerning the early Hellenistic gold wreaths in Thrace, proposes a slightly later chronology than previously accepted (generally middle 4th c. BC) for the ostentatious funerary ensembles of Malomirovo Zlatinitsa[160] and Vratsa Mogilanskata Mogila Tomb 2[161] (main analogies for Peretu

[154] Preda 1986, 100-109.

[155] Petac, Guțică 2018, 168; Vîlcu 2015.

[156] Codlea, Brașov county: 6 staters Alexander the Great posthumous (final emission date 320 BC) minted in Amphipolis and Lampsacos (Vîlcu 2015, 197).

[157] Babeș 2000. There no excavations or known artefacts to sustain the chronology. The authors of this study had seen burnt soil in the structure of the rampart (cut by a forest road) during a site visit in 2004.

[158] Berciu 1969, 77-82, fig. 55-61.

[159] Lărguța, Băiceni, Kralevo, Bunești.

[160] Agre 2011; The apparent contradictory earlier date for the amphorae can be explained if we regard it as aged wine, always more precious and appreciated.

Tomb), in the last two quarters of the 4th c. BC. Tonkova identifies the existence in Thrace of a horizon of rich graves with gold wreaths, dated in the end of 4th c. BC - beginning of the 3rd c. BC. This fashion, documented as well in rich graves of the same period in Greece, Central Macedonia, Asia Minor, Southern Italy and the Black Sea area, reflected the new aristocratic and religious ideologies flourishing after the reigns of Philip II, Alexander III and his successors on ever wider spaces. Golden laurel wreaths were also represented symbolically on the helmets from Agighiol and Peretu.

The chronology for the tomb at Peretu is generally accepted to be the middle 4th c. BC[162]. In this version, it would be the earliest of the series of rich aristocratic tombs in Thrace exhibiting items of ceremonial armour. Rich graves can be more difficult to date as they usually display a lengthy accumulation of wealth or include symbolic heirlooms. However, there are several clues and extended analogies that bring Peretu very well into the last third of the 4th c. BC, placing it in line with its counterparts. The preference for exclusive metal drinking vessels in the grave inventories, paired with the absence of Greek fine wares is a trend that appears in both Macedonian[163] and Thracian rich graves[164] of the late 4th c. BC. The dating for the rare funerary complexes containing chariots in Thrace points also to a late 4th c. BC early 3rd c. BC chronology[165]. The fragmentary *lebes* at Peretu has good analogies, especially in what regards the handles, in the items found in Tomb Z and Tomb B at Derveni, both dated late 4th c. BC. In tomb Z, a pair of gold boat rings similar to those in Mogilanskata Mogila Tomb 2 were found, while Tomb B contained a pair of bronze greaves, a neck collar protection, a board game and medical utensils[166]. The combination of strainer, paired with bronze cauldron and tray is found also in Malomirovo Zlatinitsa tomb, while the silver strainer is a frequent find in the Thessaloniki area funerary tombs dated after 330 BC. The presence of two sets of decorated harness with different symbolic animal thematic is also a constant feature of the Thracian group of high status tombs.

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161 Torbov 2005, pl. XXII3; for a date of the wreath in Vratsa Tomb 2 in the last third of the 4th c. BC opts also Măndescu (2010a, 395) by highlighting its analogy 'to perfection' with an item in Bodrum dated in the beginning of the last quarter of the 4th c. BC.

162 Măndescu 2010a, 84; Moscalu (1989) proposing initially the 2nd and 3rd quarters of the 4th c. BC.

163 Themelis, Touratsoglou 1997, 210-213

164 Maltepe Mezek (Filov 1937, 20-75), Rozovets (Theodossiev 2005, 679-682; Tonkova 2013, 415-417), Golyamata Kosmatka, Shipka, (Dimitrova 2015)

165 Vratsa (Mogilanskata Mogila Tomb 2) Torbov 2005, 71-72; Zhaba Mogila (Archibald 1998, 288-289).

166 Seen by the authors in Thessaloniki Archaeology Museum.

CONCLUDING NOTES

The often referred to period of the 4th-3rd centuries BC in which sites in the Romanian Plane were included broadly, appears as a generalizing label umbrella under which a variety of social phenomena and political/economical evolutions with considerably shorter durations were pushed under. Starting with the second decade of the 4th c. BC towards its middle, thus before the Macedonian conquest of Thrace, some communities already started to aggregate around places with a strong and earlier (Bronze Age, Early Iron Age) cultic significance. These were sites located in close proximity to rivers and wetlands, with a coherent group hidden in the forested hills located 50 km north of the Danube. This movement of collective growth was capacitated, in the two or three decades before the middle 4th c. BC by certain authorities (rulers) expressing themselves by being able to coordinate the building of enclosures with complicated technologies based on the use of firing clays. These rulers did not have in this period an individual expression marked by graves. The value of the enclosures with burnt clay elements seems to be, above all else, a symbolic one – of social catalyst; however, the rather dense spatial distribution of such sites suggest they served small sized communities – connected nevertheless in regional networks in which cultural and technological models circulated. The clearest type of structure found in these fortified sites with thin occupation layers (like Albești, Orbeasca de Sus) are the pits with deposits of entire vessels, very probably with a cultic significance. The practice of cults in/around settlements or in dedicated places involving the digging of pits in which parts of human remains or animals were found, together with certain categories of inventory with increased incidence (like entire vessels, weight looms, fireplace fragments, miniature vessels, grinders, flints) is part of a phenomenon with a wide geographic span in the Balkan peninsula during the Iron Age. On the Lower Danube valley and north of it, these practices become especially rich in material manifestation (comparable with the Classical and early Hellenistic period south of the Balkans) only during the 2nd c. BC – 1st c. AD. In some of these places, the cultic significance was maintained even during the Roman times, like in Ruse, where a temple dedicated to Apollo was built on top of a pit complex (in which scarce indications for use during the 4th-3rd c. BC are also known)[167]. The thinner deposits and small number of such pits in the sites dated in the early Hellenistic period, north of the Danube, could suggest the discontinuous use of the space or rather its periodical visitation in those times when the exterior political factors favored the growth of the social hierarchies.

For the area of Vedea and Olt valleys, the clearest signs of social investment and collective representation that can be dated before 400 BC are scarce, however they

[167] Vârbanov 2014.

may be also relatable to the cultic domain (pits with offerings of vessels and portable fireplaces in Bălănești, Govora Poieni and very possible also in Alexandria Vii). The later development of the Vedea-Teleorman sector in terms of social cohesion and authority rising might be caused by its status as border area of other, more active, possible aggressive authorities, like the one circulating through Giurgiu or Tutrakan fords, which included graves with a North-Pontic component.

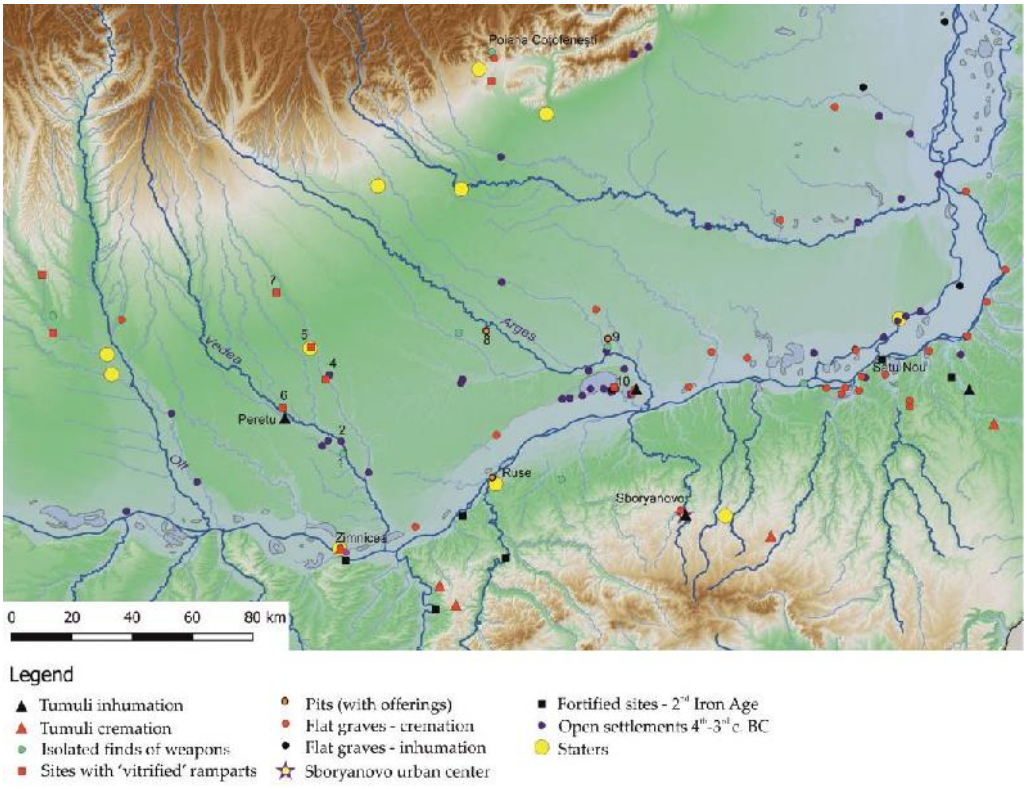

Fig. 35. Sites (4th–3rd c. BC): 1. Poroschia–*Vii*; 2. Alexandria–*Pod*; 3. Orbeasca de Sus–*Cetate*; 4. Olteni; 5. Trivalea Moșteni; 6. Albești; 7. Râca; 8. Popești; 9. Budești; 10. Căscioarele.

In the last two decades of the 4th c. BC some of these incipient collective significant places, especially those located in the vicinity of the Danube (Căscioarele), developed considerably, acquiring residential and economic functions, establishing themselves as trading hubs and becoming poles of attraction for larger rural territories, while for others, more distant to the Danube, an existence past the third quarter of the 4th c. BC cannot be argued with certainty (Albești, Orbeasca de Sus, Râca). In this second phase, other settlements were funded directly as central places in the vicinity of the Danube

(Zimnicea), while the most visible social and symbolic emphasis of this period is on funerary expression and reference to ancestors. The growth in individual expression, display of wealth and emergence of social structuring processes on the left Danube bank can be linked with the increased access of local leaders and their armies to the military power structures of the Macedonian war-parties, politically and financially active in the area during the various wars of the Diadochi.

The horizon of rich graves, like Peretu, and the influx of gold coin to the North of the Danube fit with the second phase, coinciding with the maximum of the habitation spread, occurrence of buildings for cult practices and building of enclosure walls inspired after southern techniques. Despite the larger geographic span of the North-Danube Thrace communities involved in military networks with southern partners as suggested by the staters' distribution, the bulk of the North Thracian open habitation, the occurrence of central places and manifestation of social hierarchies organized in relation with a territory, remain features poignant especially for the Danube lakes' area, as a reflection of a southern source of wealth. It is not clear what the entire occupation sequence for the hillforts from Albești, Trivalea and Orbeasca was. They all can be placed with some certainty in the period between the second and third quarters of the 4th c. BC; however, based on available data, they cannot, for the moment, be placed also in the later, wealthier interval. As the spatial discontinuity also suggests, it appears more opportune to consider that there wasn't a chronological overlap between the grave at Peretu and the hillfort of Albești. They may be successive and different forms of expressing wealth and status of local developing communities with changing lines of authority in the course of two or three decades, with a stronger focus on ancestors in the later, a trend that can be well observed in the cemetery of Zimnicea, too.

At Căscioarele we see the end of the *D'aia parte* central place in the first quarter of the 3rd c. BC (before the end of the urban city of Sboryanovo, the closest source of centralised authority), while the rural settlements continue their life into the next century or in part relocate in close vicinity, starting with the end of the 3rd c. BC and continuing into the 1st c. BC. This occupation pattern together with the proofs of symbolically and later politically reinvesting, after the middle 2nd c. BC, of sites where earlier traces of cultic activities were attested, like for example in Popești, allow us to take in consideration for the Romanian Plane the model of a discrete, rural and dispersed population with stable spatial symbols of reference and ritual practices, at least at the scale of the Iron Age period, but with ephemeral authority lines which succeeded to initiate coherent centralisation processes and establishment of aggregated settlement life only when the supraregional political arena became enough large to include in its military agenda the leaders of the northern peripheries (like the Diadochi Wars and later the Macedonian Wars or the Mithridatic Wars).

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