

A PREVIOUSLY UNKNOWN STONE MORTAR AND SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON SIMILAR ARTEFACTS ATTRIBUTED TO THE BRONZE AGE IN EASTERN ROMANIA

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Abstract: *The authors present a stone mortar, specific to the Bronze Age, discovered on the territory of Bucharest, in a dwelling attributed to the Tei culture (Middle Bronze Age). The artefact is small sized and was worked from a sedimentary rock. Similar artifacts are known at Hârtoape (Iași County), but also in Costișa (Neamț County), from contexts attributed to the Middle Bronze Age. Most likely, these objects were used for crushing organic substances, for obtaining mixtures or in different practices related to metallurgical activities.*

Rezumat: *Autorii publică un mojar de piatră specific epocii bronzului, descoperit pe teritoriul municipiului București, într-o locuință atribuită culturii Tei (Bronzul Mijlociu). Exemplarul are dimensiuni reduse și a fost lucrat dintr-o rocă sedimentară. În spațiul estic al României artefacte similare sunt cunoscute la Hârtoape (jud. Iași), dar și la Costișa (jud. Neamț), în contexte atribuite tot Bronzului Mijlociu. Cel mai probabil, aceste obiecte erau utilizate pentru zdrobirea substanțelor organice, pentru obținerea unor mixturi sau în diverse practici legate de activitățile metalurgice.*

Traditionally, the Bronze Age has among its defining elements, a series of features related to the metallurgical production which had begun to intensify during this period. Also, the lithic industry continues to produce a consistent amount of artifacts, whose functionality was closely linked to the economic or social structure of the human communities of those times.

In this considerable ensemble of stone artefacts, which share certain typological features over a large geographical area, objects with a particular morphology are also encountered. Such archaeological artefacts are to be found in various archaeological assemblages but are generally ignored, precisely because it is difficult to establish their utility.

Such a rather rare artifact, previously unpublished, is part of the collections of the Bucharest Municipality Museum and will be discussed here within a wider context, including some other similar objects discovered in Romania.

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The stone mortar that we discuss in this note was discovered at Bucharest - Lacul Tei. The location and other precise details related to the archaeological context remain unknown.

The General Inventory Register of Bucharest the Municipality Museum (inv. nos. 15754, 1373 and 2136/957), mentions that the stone mortar was found inside a dwelling of the Tei culture (dwelling 45).

The specimen is made of a hard rock of gray-brown color. It has a short and well profiled body, flattened base, the upper edge slightly blunt. The cavity is of truncated shaped, with wear traces. The outer surface of the mortar is carefully smoothed.

Dimensions: maximum height - 6.2 cm; maximum diameter - 10.2 cm; base diameter - 6.5 cm; cavity depth - 3.3 cm.

The first excavations at Bucharest - Lacul Tei site were carried out between 1928 and 1930 by I. Nestor¹ and Dinu V. Rosetti. The results of the archaeological research, including some Tei culture remains, were subsequently published by Dinu V. Rosetti², without mentioning the mortar brought in question.

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Recent archaeological literature points to the existence of stone mortars in archeological contexts specific to the Bronze Age in the northwestern Pontic area but in Romania, such artefacts were not reported until recently.

The few stone mortars published recently originated in archaeological investigations or accidental discoveries made in the eastern part of Romania.

Therefore, we mentioned here the stone mortar from the territory of the Hârtoape village (Vânători, Iași County), dated to the Middle or Late period of the Bronze Age, given the fact that in the vicinity were identified sites and vestiges belonging to the same periods. The specimen is of medium size, of a short cylindrical shape, with a maximum diameter of 7 cm and a height of 5.8 cm. The cavity is slightly conical, and on the median area there is a horizontal groove³.

Also, at the archaeological site of Costișa (Neamț County), in a Monteoru layer, two other stone mortars were discovered. The pieces are small sized and made of limestone, the cavity is shallow. One of the specimens is of truncated shape and the other one is conical. According to the authors, there was also an elongated stone pestle in the same assemblage, fitting very well the cavity of the mortar⁴.

According to the Bronze Age stone mortars typology suggested by one of the authors of this note (Vasile Diaconu), for the northwestern Pontic area the specimens mentioned above fall into types II and III⁵.

The mortar from Bucharest - Lacul Tei was recovered from inside a dwelling, this making a good argument for its use in domestic activities. Although the idea of stone mortars having been used in metallurgical activities⁶ was often advanced in the

¹ In his paper is mentioned for the first time the “Tei culture” term; Nestor 1933, p. 101.

² D.V. Rosetti 1929, p. 3-16; Idem 1935, p. 155-176.

³ Diaconu *et alii*, 2016, p. 160.

⁴ Boroneaș, Popescu 2017, p. 69.

⁵ Sirbu, Diaconu 2018, p. 23.

⁶ Sava 1987, p. 68; Sirbu 2013, p. 175.

archaeological literature, we believe that considering their size, the mortar in question was not suitable for such practices, but rather used for processing organic materials (plants, seeds, roots), ochre, preparing mixtures or, according to others, as props in ritual manifestations related to metallurgy⁷.

Even if there are few stone mortars specific to the Bronze Age in the eastern part of Romania such artifacts belonged to different cultural communities. Although we find them in contexts attributed to the Middle Bronze Age, it seems that the highest frequency of these artifacts was noted during the Late Bronze Age, a fact mainly supported by the discoveries in the Noua-Sabatinovka-Coslogeni sites.

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⁷ Swadling 2013, p. 82.

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Figura 1. Mojarul de piatră de la București - Lacul Tei.

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Figura 2. Mojarale de piatră de la Costișa (1) și Hârtoape (2) (1. după Boroneanț, Popescu 2017; 2. după Diaconu *et alii*, 2016).

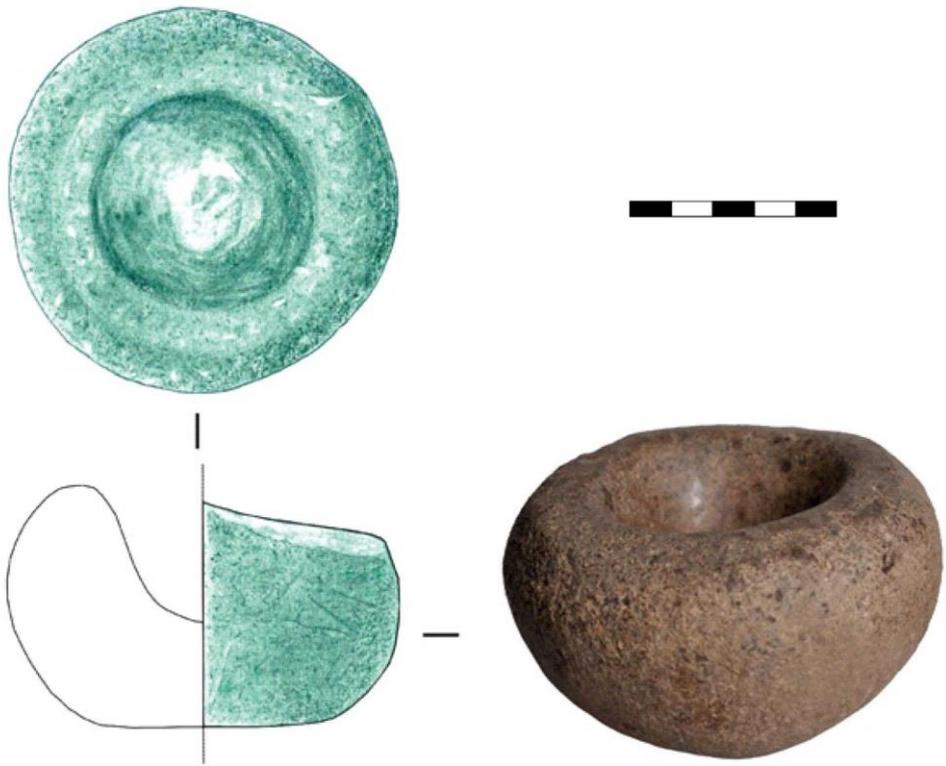


Figure 1. Stone mortar from Bucharest - Lacul Tei.

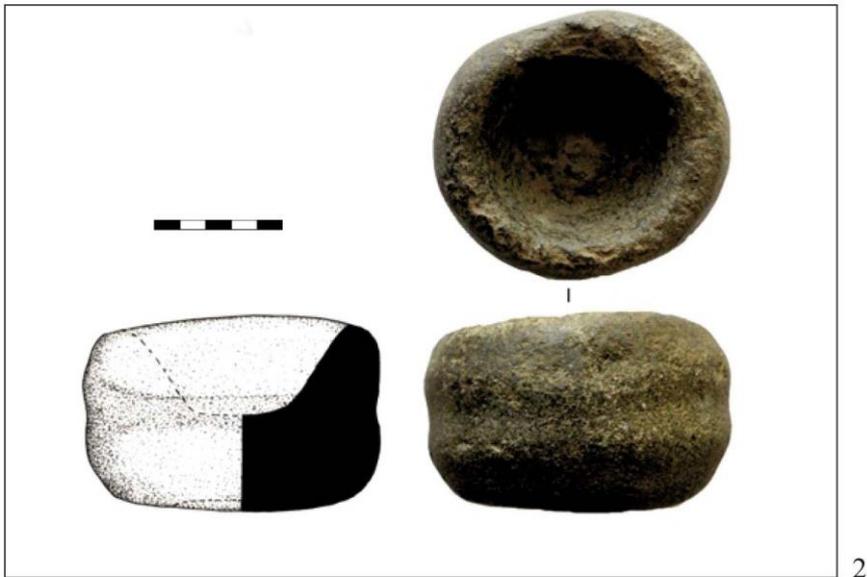


Figure 2. Stone mortars from Costișa (1) and Hârtoape (2) (1. after Boroneanț, Popescu 2017; 2. after Diaconu *et alii*, 2016).