

A Lost Dagger from Ernei, Mureș County

Botond Rezi

Rezumat: Pumnalul pierdut de la Ernei, jud. Mureș.

Deoarece pumnalul de bronz descoperit în timpul săpăturilor de la Ernei (jud. Mureș) s-a pierdut între timp, o examinare concretă și detaliată a piesei nu se poate face. Totodată situația stratigrafică a piesei este de asemenea incertă. Analogiile citate indică o datare grosso modo între Bronzul Timpuriu și Bronzul Mijlociu. Luând în considerare totuși caracteristicile strict formale, o datare mai strânsă în cea de a doua perioadă pare mai probabilă. Nu prezintă o formă atât de evoluată precum pumnalele din Bronzul Târziu, totodată piesa nu se poate lega nici de cele câteva materiale răzlețe Noua descoperite în timpul săpăturilor. Cele mai bune analogii arată de asemenea o pătrundere a formei dinspre est.

Abstract: A Lost Dagger from Ernei, Mureș County.

Because the dagger discovered during the archaeological excavations from Ernei (Mureș County) disappeared, a detailed examination of the artefact could not be accomplished. At the same time the stratigraphical situation of the bronze item is not secure either. The presented analogies indicate a dating roughly between the Early and Middle Bronze Age. Taking into consideration the rigorous typological characteristics, a more precise dating to the second period seems more plausible. It doesn't have an evolved outline as the Late Bronze Age daggers, and the artefact cannot be linked to the very scarce Noua material either, which was unearthed at the site. The best analogies show a penetration of the form from the east.

Резюме: Втрачений кинджал з Ерней, повіт Муреш.

Оскільки бронзовий кинджал, виявлений під час розкопок в Ерней (повіт Муреш), згодом був втрачений, то провести конкретне і детальне дослідження предмету немає можливості. Також і стратиграфія предмету є невизначена. Аналогічні цитати вказують, по великому рахунку, на період ранньої та середньої бронзи. Беручи до уваги суто формальні характеристики, більші ймовірним є датування другим періодом. Не маючи розвинутої форми, на відміну від кинджалів періоду пізньої бронзи, водночас предмет не може бути пов'язаний з тими кількома відмінними матеріалами Нового відкриття під час розкопок. Найкращі аналогії вказують на проникнення форми зі сходу.

Keywords: eastern dagger, Middle Bronze Age, import.

Cuvinte cheie: pumnal estic, epoca mijlocie a bronzului, import.

Ключові слова: Східний кинджал, епоха середньої бронзи, імпорт.

The following short paper presents a Bronze Age dagger from the settlement researched in Ernei (Mureș County), excavations presented by S. Berecki and R. E. Németh in this same volume.¹

From the upper ploughing layer, beside pottery fragments from the Bronze Age, Early Iron Age and Migration Period, a broken bronze object came to light, which lacks its tip. Unfortunately the artefact was lost right after the excavation, which is the reason we do not have the possibility to perform a detailed documentations, with measuring or cross section drawings. There is one single picture at our disposal, which was made shortly after the excavations (Fig. 1). The artefact had a length of 8 cm, with a maximum width of 2.7 cm. The hypothetical reconstruction of the piece gave us a length closely around 12 cm (Fig. 1). Taking into consideration the general outline of the artefact, we believe that it can be listed within the category of the bronze/copper daggers, with leaf shaped blade, with two cutting edges, lenticular cross section, without a middle strengthening rib, with slightly rounded shoulders and tanged hilt.²

The analogies referenced below, will focus only on those daggers which are lacking the middle strengthening rib on the blade, and the hilt having a tanged ending, rectangular in shape. An early dagger, listed within the *b1d variant* by P. Roman, came to light at Băile Herculane–Peștera Hoților (Caraș-Severin County), and was assigned to the Coțofeni culture, phase III.³ In an inhumation grave, under a

¹ Berecki/Németh 2014, Plate 5/1.

² Regarding the terminology of the daggers see: Băjenaru/Popescu 2012, 365–366, with earlier literature.

³ Roman 1976, 17, Pl. 8/26.

barrow, at Vârghiș-Crăciunești (Harghita County) another similar copper dagger was discovered, which was listed within the category of spearheads, and dated to the middle of the Early Bronze Age.⁴ From typological point of view the artefact from Vârghiș-Crăciunești can be listed within the category of daggers with two edges, and tanged hilt, instead of the spearheads.⁵ In the outer Carpathian Region, at Mihai Viteazu (Constanța County), from a barrow disturbed by ducting works, a leaf shaped copper dagger was unearthed, dated roughly to the transition period to the Bronze Age.⁶ At Odaia Turcului (Dâmbovița County), from a Glina III layer, a fragmented dagger was found, having a flat (double convex) cross section, but with an almost rectangular blade.⁷ The dagger from Târpești (Neamț County) is assigned to the Noua culture, but in the settlement, affected by later earthworks, important Early Bronze Age remains were also noticeable, to which the dagger most probably can be linked.⁸

From the Middle Bronze Age two similar pieces were discovered at Sighișoara-Dealul Turcului (Mureș County), and were initially dated to the beginning of the Bronze Age, being regarded as the transitory shapes from the copper daggers,⁹ later the same artefacts were dated to the Middle Bronze Age.¹⁰ The piece from Căndești (Vrancea County) is characteristic for the Monteoru culture phase Ic3, and has also a similar dimension like the dagger from Ernei.¹¹ At Odobești (Vrancea County), within a Monteoru settlement, a bronze hoard came to light, which contained also a *Griffangeldolch* type copper dagger, with a flange between the hilt and the blade.¹² The vessel of the hoard was dated to the Monteoru Ia or IIa phase.¹³ We can also name the isolated find from Coslogeni (Călărași County), typologically being situated very close to the dagger from Odobești, with leaf shaped blade, and with the hilt widened at the end.¹⁴ An almost identical dagger was discovered at Roșeti (Călărași County), but it is much larger than the one from Ernei.¹⁵ The bronze dagger from Baraolt (Covasna County), assigned to the Wietenberg culture, unfortunately cannot be listed within the analogue finds due to the very superficial publication.¹⁶

From the Late Bronze Age we can hardly find similar artefacts, with short blades missing the middle rib, and the tanged hilt without the flange or ring at the base of the hilt. The dagger from Ulmi-Liteni (Iași County) can be listed here, assigned to the Noua culture, with a leaf shaped blade, and a barely visible strengthening rib on one side of the blade.¹⁷ At Năeni (Buzău County) a similar dagger, with a wider hilt was discovered, in layer 1 at the settlement, beside Late Bronze Age material and scalloped scapulae.¹⁸ From Gârbovăț-Zaharasca (Galați County) comes an early dagger, from the I phase of the Noua culture.¹⁹

Towards west we can find similar but not identical daggers in Hungary at Dunaföldvár,²⁰ Tiszapolgár-Basatanya, Szeged-Bilisics and Aszód²¹ in Bodrogkeresztúr contexts, in Boemia at Slaný, in uncertain find circumstances,²² and in Poland at Strzyżów, from an inhumation grave, dated to the

⁴ Székely 1955, 9–10, Fig. 2/5; Székely 1997, Pl. XCI/7. It has to be mentioned that the dagger from Vârghiș-Crăciunești was sold in 1949 by Adalbert Borbáth to the Szekler National Museum (See Székely 1955, 9). The exact find circumstances are unknown, and the affirmation of Zs. Székely that the piece was recovered from secure stratigraphical conditions cannot be sustained (see: Székely 1997, 67).

⁵ Regarding the general forms of the spearheads characteristic for the Early and Middle Bronze Age see: Bader 2006, Taf. 1 and 2.

⁶ Irímia 1981, 347–348, Fig. 2/2.

⁷ Băjenaru/Popescu 2012, 376/20, fig. 6/8.

⁸ Băjenaru/Popescu 2012, 379/28, 389, fig. 6/9.

⁹ Horedt 1960, 129, Abb. 13/4–5.

¹⁰ Boroffka 1994, 235, places the artefact in the B and C evolution phases of the culture, mentioning that the dagger might be dated to an earlier period as well. See also Andrițoiu/Rustoiu 1997, 32, Fig. 21/1.

¹¹ Florescu 1978, 113, Fig. 10/4, 6.

¹² Soroceanu 2012, 135–137, Taf. 53/4. Like the dagger from Ernei this piece had a similar dark green patina as well, with lighter spots.

¹³ Vulpe 1964, 132, footnote 8.

¹⁴ Culică 1975, 521, fig. 2/3.

¹⁵ Culică 1975, 521, fig. 2/2.

¹⁶ Székely 1962, 329, Fig. 4/3.

¹⁷ Florescu 1960, 120, fig. 4/11.

¹⁸ Băjenaru/Popescu 2012, 389, fig. 9/5.

¹⁹ Florescu 1991, Fig. 109/23.

²⁰ Patay 1938, Taf. 1/12.

²¹ Băjenaru/Popescu 2012, 381.

²² Moucha 2007, Taf. 129/8.

transition period from the Copper to the Bronze Age, with antecedents from the regions of Volga River and Ural Mountains.²³ In a large number similar artefacts came to light east from the Carpathians, out of which we name those from Căușeni and Hlinaia, from the Republic of Moldova.²⁴ They are considered imports from the Volga and Ural regions as well.²⁵

The deficiency of the documentation of the dagger from Ernei is rendered more difficult by the find circumstances. The artefact was discovered in the upper layer of the settlement which was highly affected by ploughing, with mixed Bronze Age, Gáva and Migration Period pottery. Thus linking directly the dagger to the Wietenberg C material²⁶ is not possible. In the Bronze Age layer two artefacts typical for the Noua culture were also unearthed: a handle with a button and a scalloped scapula. The nature of the dagger points towards an eastern origin, thus the presence of the Noua elements is not surprising. But strictly from stratigraphical point of view the dagger from Ernei cannot be linked to the Noua artefacts either, due to the disturbed condition of the upper layer, and due to the fact that Noua elements are missing from this layer.

Based on the analogies presented above, and lacking an appropriate documentation, a narrow dating of the dagger is not possible. Thus the already mentioned dating seem very probable, and namely somewhere around the Middle Bronze Age.²⁷ V. Leahu suggest the end of the Eneolithic Period for the first daggers made of copper from the Lower Danube Basin, and for the more evolved pieces the end of the Middle or even the Late Bronze Age.²⁸ The daggers listed within the *Jamnaja* type are dated to the Early Bronze Age, being linked to the *Jamnaja* type burials, and the *Costișa* type daggers, amongst which we can find the best parallels, are dated roughly to the Middle Bronze Age, being linked to the *Costișa*, *Monteoru Ic3-Ic2*, *Tei* and *Wietenberg* cultures.²⁹ Throughout its simple outline, without the middle strengthening rib of the blade and small dimension, the dagger from Ernei presents a different form than the well formed daggers, with two edges and middle rib, like the ones from *Tiream* (*Otomani II* layer)³⁰ and *Carei* (*Otomani III* layer),³¹ or the ones with ring at the base of the hilt from the Late Bronze Age.³² Even so, regarding its hilt, the curve of the shoulders and the shape of the blade, it shows great similarities with the Middle Bronze Aged daggers from the north-west of Romania. The slightly long and rectangular handle and the well formed shoulder differentiates it from the Early Bronze Age examples, and the lack of the middle rib and ring at the base of the hilt places it in a period prior to the 'classical' *Noua* daggers. The dagger from *Cut*, having a small dimension, like the one from *Ernei*, but with a flange at the bottom of the blade and with a middle rib, it is not synchronized with the



Fig. 1. The dagger from Ernei.

²³ Gedl 1976, 40–41, Taf. 11/70.

²⁴ Dergačev 2002, Taf. 18/J (Căușeni), Taf. 18/U (Hlinaia). Listed within *Variant A*, with two edges, with a leaf shaped or rhombic blade.

²⁵ Dergačev 2002, 101–102. For their eastern connections see also: Băjenaru/Popescu 2012, 399–403.

²⁶ For the detailed description and analysis of the material see: Berecki/Németh 2014, in this same volume.

²⁷ Boroffka 1994, 242, the shape is listed within the *MOI* type; Andrițoiu/Rustoiu 1997, 32; Székely 1997, 67.

²⁸ Leahu 2003, 90–91

²⁹ Băjenaru, Popescu 2012, 390, 395–396. The *Costișa* type is seen as a continuation of the *Jamnaja* type, becoming only larger in size.

³⁰ Bader 1978, LXXXVIII/16.

³¹ Bader 1996, 275, Abb. 4/8.

³² Regarding the problematic of the late eastern daggers with two edges See Popa 1999, 17–28, Fig. 2; Dergačev 2002, 125–131.

Wietenberg III material from the Cut–Fața Dârgului findspot, but it is placed in the following evolution phase, at the horizon of the Noua finds.³³ The many eastern analogies and almost the total lack of similar artefacts from Central and Northern Europe, even more the geographical situation of the settlement from Ernei at the periphery of the distribution area of the type, lets us to see in the dagger from Ernei an eastern import item, most probably in a Wietenberg setting. The very scarce Noua finds from the settlement, the impossibility to link the dagger stratigraphically to these finds, and the earlier form of the dagger as the Late Bronze Age ones assigned to the Noua culture, confirms our believes. Due to the fact that most of the parallels were found within Middle Bronze Age artefacts, we believe that the dagger from Ernei can be dated somewhere at the end of this period, but before the well evolved two edged daggers from the Late Bronze Age, so characteristic for the Noua culture. The relatively high number of such artefacts within burials and settlements, like the one from Ernei, only confirms this assumption, the later ones being present in a significant amount in the structure of bronze hoards.

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Botond Rezi
Mureș County Museum, Târgu Mureș, RO
reziboti@yahoo.com