

Dacian fortifications in Crişana

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Oradea

In northwestern Dacia, probably between the Mureș river to the south and the Someș river or the upper course of the Tisa river, Ptolemy mentions four localities: *Ziridava*, *Ulpianum*, *Docidava* and *Rucconium*¹. *Ziridava* and *Docidava* are the only place names of Dacian resonance. *Rucconium*, considered by the reputed archaeologist and historian, V. Pârvan² “the most northwestern town of Dacia”, is a Celtic name and according to him corresponds “exactly to the extreme northwestern settlement of the Anart Celts”.

In 1969, N. Gostar³ situated *Ulpianum*, name of Latin origin, at Bologa on the Crișu Repede river in Roman Dacia. *Ziridava* was identified by I. H. Crișan⁴ with the Dacian settlement Pecica on the Mureș river. *Docidava* was tentatively situated at Șimleul Silvaniei⁵ on the Crasna river, where Dacian traces were discovered in the course of time⁶. The “Geographer of Alexandria”⁷ also mentions some names of tribes and clans that inhabited Dacia from the north to the south, from the east to the west.

To these historical-geographical investigations, little or nothing at all can be added. For this reason, the modern Romanian historical research work commenced by Gr. Tocilescu⁸ on the *history of the Dacians in Crișana* has remained at the same point where V. Pârvan left it.

In *Getica*⁹, which is a vast and unparalleled historical, linguistic and ethnological commentary, Pârvan brought all the archaeological proofs which Romanian and European researches could provide at that time to support his arguments. For the first time in historiography, V. Pârvan succeeded in framing all Dacian discoveries in Crișana in the history of the Pre-Roman Dacia.

Before World War II, D. Popescu after studying the Dacian treasure of silver jewels,¹⁰ also included the discoveries made in the western part of the Apuseni mountains. The same archaeologist published shortly afterwards a study on the treasure of Dacian silver coins found at Tulgheș-Mireșu Mare¹¹, discovery which is of interest for the old history of Crișana and Maramureș.

¹ Ptolemy, *Geogr.*, III, 8, 4.

² V. Pârvan, *Getica*, București, 1926, p. 256.

³ N. Gostar, Ulpianus (Ptolemy, *Geogr.*, III, 8, 4), AUI, III, 15, 1969, 2, p. 171–176.

⁴ I. H. Crișan, *Apulum*, 5, 1964, p. 127–137.

⁵ S. Dumitrașcu, *Crisia*, 1, 1971, p. 39–46.

⁶ S. Dumitrașcu, I. Căbuz, *Lucrări Științifice*, (Istorie), 1971, p. 25–30.

⁷ Ptolemy, *Geogr.*, III, 8, 3

⁸ Gr. Tocilescu, *Dacia înainte de romani*, București, 1880, p. 429.

⁹ V. Pârvan, *op. cit.*, p. 536, 559, 613, 785 (*Gura Văii*, jud. Arad), p. 538, 545, 559, 615, 623, 785 (*Marca*, jud. Sălaj), p. 559, 611 (*Moroda*, jud. Arad), p. 536–537, 538, 548, 555, fig. 371 (*Oradea*, jud. Bihor); cf. F. Rómer, *ArchÉrt.*, 6, 1886, p. 204–207 and 385–392; idem, *Biharmegyei régészeti és történelmi egylet Évkönyve*, Oradea, 1888, p. 1–4.

¹⁰ D. Popescu, *Dacia*, 7–8, 1937–1940, p. 183–202.

¹¹ Idem, *Dacia*, 9–10, 1941–1944, p. 201–202; A. Kerényi, *NumKözl.*, 43, 1944, p. 9–14; cf. I. Winkler, *ActaMN*, 6, 1969, p. 88.

After World War II, new discoveries were made and older discoveries kept in museums were studied. The discoveries made at *Cadea*,¹² *Oradea II*,¹³ *Oradea III*,¹⁴ *Sărmăşag*,¹⁵ *Săcălăşău Nou*¹⁶ and the Dacian silver coins from *Almaş*,¹⁷ *Feniş*,¹⁸ *Şilindia*,¹⁹ *Sînnicolau Român*²⁰ were added to the old and known Dacian hoards. The new discoveries from *Dieci*,²¹ *Talpe*²² and *Tăşad*²³ were added to the treasures of Roman Republican coins and the Greek coins of the Dyrhachium and Apollonia type. The history of the Dacians in Crişana begins to be frequently mentioned in the new monographs dedicated to Pre-Roman Dacia.²⁴

The ancient historical information and the casual archaeological discoveries are now strengthened by systematic research and excavations. The first large systematic excavations in Crişana were made during the last 20 years. Their purpose was the study of the history of Dacia from the coming of the Celts in these regions till the Roman conquest.

These systematic archaeological researches and excavations led to the discovery of *Dacian settlements and fortifications in Crişana*. The results obtained so far, also permit to synchronize the history of the Dacians in Crişana with that of the remaining Dacia and to point out their system of relations with the Greek towns on the Adriatic shore and with the Romans. The major historical events that affected the territory of the Western Dacians are generally considered as being *the coming of the Celts*²⁵, *the wars in Burebista's time*²⁶, *the battles against the Romans in Augustus' time*²⁷ and *the wars for the conquest of Dacia*²⁸. The researches of our archaeologists have been confirmed by the researches and excavations made by Hungarian²⁹ and Czechoslovakian³⁰ scientists in recent years.

In the following, we intend to examine some results of the excavations undertaken in Crişana in Dacian settlements of the following types:

A. *Fortifications* consolidated with clay and wood.

B. *Settlements* situated on promontories and heights, with or without clay and wood, which no longer preserve visible traces of fortifications.

C. *Rural settlements* (villages) situated in plains. This last category is mentioned only in view of underlining the existence of fortifications and settlements in mountains and hills.

We would like to mention that our classification is not a rigid one. Some small fortifications in the mountains might have had pastoral uses too. Meanwhile, some settlements situated on heights might have been real fortifications. Many were either boroughs or villages, with usual everyday life, which were fortified in case of danger.

A. 1. *Clit*, village of Hăşmaş, the Arad district. It is the first Dacian fortification investigated in the western part of the Apuseni mountains. It is situated on the hillock Gureţul Negrilor in the woods of Clit, just near the peak called Pleş in the Moma-Codru massive³¹. This fortification is of *dam-like* type and uses the steep slopes of the hillock. Inside the fortress, tools, weapons, jewelry and traditional Dacian pottery were found. The fine pottery worked in *grey* and *brick-red* or *red* paste is to be mentioned. The discovery of two Roman

¹² N. Fettich, in *ActaArchHung*, 3, 1953, p. 161.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 160.

¹⁴ N. Chidioşan, I. Ordentlich, *Crisia*, 3, 1973, p. 97—105.

¹⁵ I. Glodariu, *ActaMN*, 5, 1968, p. 409—417.

¹⁶ S. Dumitraşcu, E. Molnar, *Crisia*, 5, 1975, p. 65—80.

¹⁷ E. Chirilă, N. Chidioşan, *ActaMN*, 2, 1965, p. 111—118.

¹⁸ E. Chirilă, I. Ordentlich, N. Chidioşan, *Tezaurul de monede dace de la Feniş*, Oradea, 1967.

¹⁹ E. Chirilă, N. Chidioşan, I. Ordentlich, N. Kiss, *Der Münzhort von Şilindia*, Oradea, 1972.

²⁰ Ţara Crişurilor Museum, Oradea, *unpublished*.

²¹ Ţara Crişurilor Museum, Oradea, *unpublished*.

²² M. Chiţescu, *S C N*, 5, 1968, p. 355—362.

²³ Ţara Crişurilor Museum, Oradea, *unpublished*.

²⁴ H. Daicovicu, *Dacia de la Burebista la cucerirea*

romană, Cluj, 1972; K. Horedt, *Dacia*, 17, 1973, p. 127—167; C. Preda, *Monedele geto-dacilor*, Bucureşti, 1973; I. Glodariu, *Relaţii comerciale ale Daciei cu lumea elenistică şi romană*, Cluj-Napoca, 1974; I. H. Crişan, *Burebista şi epoca sa*, Bucureşti, 1975.

²⁵ Vl. Zirra, *Un cimitir celtic în nord-vestul României*, Baia Mare, 1967.

²⁶ M. Macrea, *SCIV*, 7, 1956, 1—2, p. 119 and following pages.

²⁷ E. Chirilă, *ActaMN*, 1, 1964, p. 125—136.

²⁸ H. Daicovicu, *o p. c i t.*, p. 285.

²⁹ M. Párducz, *EvkSzeged*, 1965, p. 15—30; Z. Visy, *EvkSzeged*, 1970, p. 5—29.

³⁰ A. Točík, *ArchRozhl*, 11, 1959, 6, p. 841—874.

³¹ S. Dumitraşcu, *Lucrări ştiinţifice (Istorie)*, 4, 1970, p. 147—160; idem in *Východoslovenský Pravck*, 2, Košice, 1971, p. 31—49.

Republican dinarii ³² can be used to approximately date this fortress and suggests the economic relations with the Roman Empire. The whole material discovered permits the dating of the fortress sometime between the 1st c. B.C. and the 1st c. A.D. The destruction of the fortress should be sought towards the end of the 1st c. A.D. and the beginning of the 2nd century, as suggested by some traces of burning.

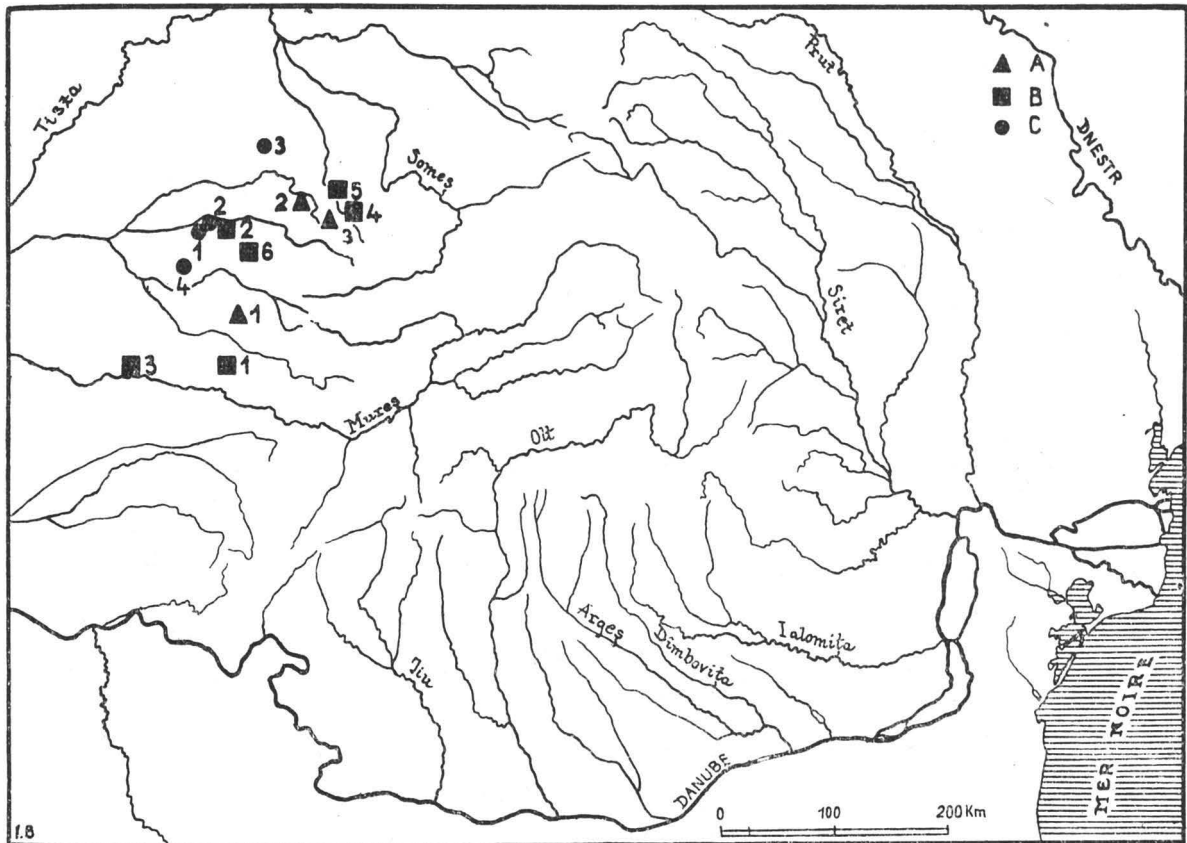


Fig. 1. Map of the Dacian discoveries in Crișana. **A** Fortresses: 1. Clit, Hășmaș village, Arad district; 2. Marca, Sălaj district; 3. Săcălășău Nou, Bihor district; 4. Tusa, Sig village, Sălaj district; **B** Fortified settlements: 1. Berindia, Buteni village, Arad district; 2. Oradea; 3. Pecica, Arad district; 4. Stîrciu, Horoată Crașnei village, Sălaj district; 5. Șimleul Silvaniei, Sălaj district; 6. Tășad, Drăgești village, Bihor district; **C** Villages: 1. Girișul de Criș, Bihor district; 2. Oradea-Salcă; 3. Tarcea, Bihor district; 4. Salonta, Bihor district.

2. *Marca*, the Sălaj district ³³. The fortress of *Marca* is also situated on a hillock called *Cetate* ³⁴. This hillock lies at the gorges of *Barcău*, a tributary to the *Crișu Repede* river. The saddle which linked the plateau with other heights was cut by two moats and two walls. In order to fortify the fortress a terrace was dug all around it and most probably fortified with a *wooden palisade*.

On the northwestern side, where the hillock is less steep, two terraces were cut and a small wall was built towards south-east.

Inside the fortress, iron tools, weapons and jewels were found. The pottery is traditional, hand-worked and by wheel. Mention is to be made of the hand-worked pottery having

³² E. Chirilă, S. Dumitrașcu, D. Mălăescu, *Apulum*, 9, 1971, p. 171.

³³ S. Dumitrașcu, V. Lucăcel, *Cetatea dacică de la*

Marca, Cluj-Napoca, 1974, p. 3–36.

³⁴ S. Dumitrașcu, *Crisia*, 2, 1972, p. 136–137.

certain Hallstattian elements and of the wheel-worked pottery which includes some Celtic influences. Remains of figures and a statuette made of burnt clay were found.

All this permits us to date the Dacian fortress of Marca approximately between the second half of the 2nd c. B.C. and the 1st c. A.D. The discovery of a Roman *as* supports this dating, as the coin was made about the year 5 B.C. (P. Lurius Agrippa). It seems that the same events of the 2nd c. A.D. put an end to this fortress.

3. *Săcălăsău Nou*, village of Derna, the Bihor district. This fortress is situated in the Plopişul mountains, Corbeni valley, on a promontory called Dealul cu Bani³⁵. The promontory has 3 steep slopes and the linking saddle is cut by a moat in order to bar the entrance. The Dacian fortress is on the plateau and was probably fortified with a wooden palisade. Inside the fortress, hand and wheel-worked pottery, as well as a treasure of silver jewels and coins were discovered. The material excavated permits one to date the fortress in the 1st c. B.C., although some types of ceramics seem to belong to a later period. This does not exclude its dating in the 1st c. A.D.

4. *Tusa*, the Sălaj district.³⁶ This is the most daring clay fortress known in the mountainous part of Crişana. It is situated in the forest of the Tusa village on a hillock with steep slopes. So far no research was carried on it. In view of its appearance it seems to belong to the earth type fortress situated on a promontory, having a saddle cut by walls and moats. The saddle is cut at 7 points by short cuts in order to bar the entrance to the fortress.

The inside of the fortress is surrounded by ditches and earth walls. There are no clear traces of intense habitation. It seems that it was a *refuge fortress*.

B. 1. *Berindia*, Buteni village, the Arad district. The Dacian settlement is situated on a hill called Şindrioara, close to the village. This hill dominates the eastern part of Țara Zărandului and at the same time bars the entrance to the Brad Depression. The hill has steep slopes which can be hardly climbed and this confirms the suggestion that the position of the settlement on the top of this hill is not accidental. It can be assumed that the edges of the plateau of the hill, that is the inside settlement, were fortified with a palisade. For all these considerations, the settlement could be dated between the 2nd and the 1st c. B.C.

2. *Oradea*, the Oradea district.³⁷ The settlement is situated on the hill Dealul Viilor. It seems that the settlement had two levels. The first can be dated between the 1st c. B.C. and the 1st c. A.D.: the second level includes Roman traces. It seems that it has been built for defensive purposes.

3. *Pecica*, the Arad district.³⁸ This Dacian settlement is separated by an enormous moat from the remaining part of the upper terrace of the Mureş river. The description made by I. H. Crişan "the promontory with its steep slopes and with a ditch surrounding it, constituted an excellent natural fortification", shows its defensive purposes. It is obvious that this settlement had a defensive role too for the acropolis. Inside the settlement two Dacian sanctuaries and a jewelry workshop in which coins were also made, were excavated. The dating of the settlement, according to the material found and to coins, is between the 2nd c. B.C. and the Roman conquest. It is an oppidan settlement of proto-urban type.³⁹

4. *Stîrciu*, village of Horoatul Crasnei, the Sălaj district.⁴⁰ It is situated at Cetatea, on a hill, and consists of a system of earth fortifications, the date of construction being unknown. The pottery discovered is similar to that of Marca. Further research work will elucidate the situation of the fortified settlement of Stîrciu.

5. *Şimleul Silvaniei*, the Sălaj district.⁴¹ Under the medieval ruins, a Dacian settlement is situated on Măgura Şimleului, a height which dominates the present-day town and the Crasna valley. The settlement could be dated from the 2nd c. B.C. to the 1st c. A.D. The promontory on which it is situated is separated from the remaining heights by a wide cutting

³⁵ S. Dumitraşcu, V. Lucăcel, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

³⁶ S. Dumitraşcu, I. Ordentlich, *Crişia*, 3, 1973, p. 47-95.

³⁷ T. L. Roşu, *Crişia*, 2, 1972, p. 115-119.

³⁸ I. H. Crişan, *Burebista şi epoca sa*, Bucureşti, 1975,

p. 289.

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰ S. Dumitraşcu, V. Lucăcel, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁴¹ S. Dumitraşcu, I. Căbuz, *op. cit.*, p. 26-30.

that suggests a moat. The mediaeval and modern constructions have changed the settlement a great deal. A final conclusion on this settlement or fortress could be drawn only after systematic excavations.

6. *Tășad*, Drăgești village, the Bihor district⁴². A Hallstattian settlement was discovered on the promontory called Cetățeaua. It includes a Dacian level which could be dated in the 1st c. B.C.⁴³. The wall and the moat which separate the settlement is of Hallstattian type.⁴⁴ The Dacian settlement is situated on a foot-hill on the west side of Pădurea Craiului Mountains.

C. 1. *Girișu de Criș*⁴⁵, the Bihor district. A Dacian settlement is situated in Cimpia Vestică, in the flooded area of Crișu Repede. The traces were found at the point called Pietroasa. It can be dated between the 1st c. B.C. and the 1st c. A.D. It is a typical settlement of this kind.

2. *Oradea-Salca*⁴⁶, the Bihor district. The Dacian discoveries consist of a cemetery and a settlement with 2 levels dating respectively from the Pre-Roman and Roman epochs.

3. *Tarcea*⁴⁷, the Bihor district. Near this village a settlement and Dacian ceramics dating from the 1st c. B.C. — 1st c. A.D. were discovered. The settlement is situated in Cimpia Vestică, on the Ier river, a tributary to the Barcău river.

4. *Salonta*⁴⁸, the Bihor district. This settlement is also situated in Cimpia Vestică, in the basin of the Crișu Negru river. In the town area, pottery was discovered; the approximate date is the 1st c. B.C.

Conclusions

In the western part of Munții Apuseni, the Dacians lived in plains, hills and mountains. Their *villages* (*Girișu de Criș*, *Tarcea*, *Salonta*), their *settlements* (*Berindia*, *Oradea-Salca* and *Pecica*) and their *fortresses* made of clay and wood (*Clit*, *Marca*, *Săcălăsău Nou*) were spread all over Crișana. The spreading and the dating of some of these settlements (having levels of habitation dating from the 2nd c. B.C.) proves that even by the end of the 3rd c. B.C. and more probably in the 2nd c. B.C. the Dacians were no longer under Celtic domination. Mention should be made that in the mountain settlements (*Berindia*, *Marca*, *Stirciu*), the traditional Hallstattian elements (archaic Dacian elements) persisted a longer period. In the settlements situated further to the west, many Celtic influences were preserved. Worth mentioning besides the coin treasures (*Dieci*, *Talpe*) are the Greek imports of pottery (*Berindia*, *Oradea-Dealul Viilor*) which indicate the road from the Adriatic, through Banat and Morava or the Timoc valleys towards the western Dacia.

The flourishing of the Dacian settlements (*Berindia*, *Marca*) is to be noticed in the 1st c. B.C., that is Burebista's epoch and the later kings. This suggests the fact that the Dacians from the west participated to the policy of this great king. It seems, however, that the liberation from the Celts happened before his battles in Central Europe.

The Dacian fortresses in Crișana are made only of earth and wood. This represents the traditional archaic Hallstattian type. The Dacians in Crișana build neither (as far as discoveries indicate) stone fortresses of the Hellenistic-Etrusc-Roman type nor fortresses of Celtic type. They rose above the Hallstattian stage by terracing the hillock and by combining the natural conditions with wooden and earth walls, moats and palisades.

⁴² S. Dumitrașcu, *Crisia*, 2, 1972, p. 129, n. 40.

⁴³ Information from N. Chidioșan, *Oradea*.

⁴⁴ Information from N. Chidioșan, *Oradea*.

⁴⁵ S. Dumitrașcu, *L. Mărghitan, Sargetia*, 8, 1971,

⁴⁶ M. Roșu, V. Spoială, L. Galamb, *Materiale* 8, 1961, p. 159—163.

⁴⁷ Țara Crișurilor Museum, *Oradea*, unpublished.

⁴⁸ Țara Crișurilor Museum, *Oradea*, unpublished.

It is not clear for us whether these fortresses were built and consolidated against Augustus⁴⁹ when the Empire organized Pannonia as a Roman Province⁵⁰. The only discovery which could have faced a hypothetic Roman attack is *Berindia*⁵¹ which seems to have disappeared at the beginning of the 1st c. A.D. However, it is known that some Dacian fortresses in Crișana — Clit and Marca — survived even in the 1st c. A.D. The archaeological proofs discovered there permit us to date them in the 1st c. A.D. as well.

The fact that all the important fortresses and settlements situated on heights ceased to exist at the beginning of the 2nd c. A.D. suggests that the West Dacians belonging to Decebalus' kingdom took part in the wars against the Romans.⁵² Like all over Dacia, the fortresses and the fortified settlements were conquered by Romans.

After this date, traces of Dacian habitation in the fortresses of Crișana no longer exist. The Dacian settlements continued to exist and to increase, in number, in the plains⁵³ when the free Dacians continued to live in their rural settlements under Roman supervision (this territory was not part of the Roman Dacia).

Up to the present settlements of free Dacians in mountains and hills have not been discovered in Crișana.

A proof of the Roman supervision may be considered the building of a wall in Țara Zărandului⁵⁴ in order to stop the penetration of enemies through the Crișu Alb valley to the gold mines of Brad. The same role may be assigned to the Roman fortifications in the western part of the fortress of Bologna⁵⁵.

The Dacians of Crișana, as it appears from the archaeological discoveries less than from ancient literary sources⁵⁶, took part in all the great events of the Geto-Dacians from the coming of the Celts in Eastern Europe till the Roman conquest of Pannonia, Moesia and Dacia.

⁴⁹ A. Premerstein, JÖAI, 7, 1904, p. 232–235; idem, JÖAI, 28, 1933, p. 159–162; C. Patsch, *Beiträge zur Völkerkunde von Südosteneuropa*, V/1, Wien-Leipzig, 1932, p. 107; Fr. Miltner, Klio, 30, p. 209–214; J. Dobias, *Eunomia*, I/1, 1939, p. 69; A. Alföldi, *Zur Geschichte des Karpatenbeckens im 1. Jahrhundert v. Chr.*, Budapest, 1942, p. 38–39; E. Chirilă, ActaMN, 1, 1964, p. 125–136.

⁵⁰ W. Reidinger, *Die Statthalter des ungeteilten Pannoniens und Oberpanoniens von Augustus bis Diokletian*, Bonn, 1956, p. 23–25.

⁵¹ S. Dumitrașcu, I. Ordentlich, *op. cit.* p. 70–72.

⁵² H. Daicoviciu, *Dacia de la Burebista la cucerirea romană*, Cluj, 1972, p. 285.

⁵³ S. Dumitrașcu, *Lucrări științifice*, 2, 1968, p. 239–256, fig. 1.

⁵⁴ Idem, ActaMN, 6, 1969, p. 483–491.

⁵⁵ I. Ferenczy, SCIV, 10, 1959, 2, p. 347.

⁵⁶ Sabatino Moscati, *Lumea fenicienilor*, București, 1975, p. 148.