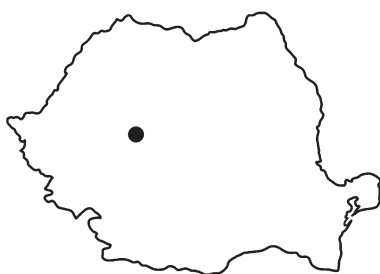


## ALONG THE BORDER BETWEEN PAGANISM AND CHRISTIANITY

## Graves with Ritual Fire Hearths Discovered in the Necropolis of Alba Iulia-‘Izvorul Împăratului’ During the Archaeological Campaigns of 2006–2007

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Three graves were discovered during the archaeological excavations (2006, 2007) in the cemetery of Alba Iulia-‘Izvorul Împăratului’ (Alba county, Romania). All three presented a fire hearth on the side of the burial pit. The graves share some common features, including the male sex of the deceased, the orientation on the W – E axis (grave 86; 155), except grave 168 (WSW – ENE) and the stone edging of the grave pits. The grave inventory consists of pottery (ritually broken in grave 86; 155; 168), a sickle (grave 86), steel, flint (grave 155), an arrowhead, a sabre- sword (Säbelschwert) and remains of a wooden sheath with traces of textiles (grave 168). It may not be by chance that such a ritual hearth was also set up for the leader of Gyula’s military entourage (grave 168). The role of these unique findings, appearing at the borderline between paganism and Christianity, can be correlated with the purification of the deceased before passing into the afterlife. All the elements of funerary rites and rituals allow us to place all of these burial findings in the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> c.

## HISTORY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

The site ‘Izvorul Împăratului/Crăcuta’ (Fig. 1) is located on the second terrace of the Mureş River in the southwestern part of Alba Iulia. The spring with the same name emerges from the edge of this terrace to the right of DJ 107 A Alba Iulia-Pîclişa. The investigations from 2001 onwards, intermittently until 2014, led to the discovery of 223 burial graves from the early Middle Ages (10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> c.). The research carried out in 2006 led to the discovery of 80 burial graves and 30 household disposal and supply pits (Fig. 2) from various historical periods (Wittenberg culture, Hallstatt, Roman era, 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> c.). The grave inventory was quite diversified and consisted of household items (clay spindles, amphorae, flint, knives), adornments (Cypraea moneta, beads, necklaces, rhombic appliques), pottery, a double cross reliquary and a crucifix. The main customs recorded were the setting up of burial pits, the crouching of the dead (grave 69, 124), and the deposition of bird’s eggs, hen and horse skeletons/skulls and limbs (grave 78). There was also one single case (grave 86) whose burial pit had a ritual hearth on the south side, in which there were indications of burning, river stones and fragments of broken pottery (Blăjan 2007, 56). During the 2007 research, most Hungarian warrior graves in the necropolis had been identified: grave 133, 143, 144, 165, 168, 173, 177, 184, 208 and 210 (Dragotă 2018; Dragotă/Blăjan 2018). The traditions that have been identified to a greater or lesser extent in previous research include the edging of pits with lithic material (grave 132, 134–141), the offering of eggs (grave 136, 142, 149, 154, 156, 161, 163, 165, 178), remains of a horse (grave 165) and two graves with ritual fire hearths (grave 155, 168). In the course of the research carried out in the autumn of 2007 (Fig. 3), several archaeological complexes were uncovered, as follows: an early Bronze Age cremation grave, two household disposal pits and a surface-dwelling from Hallstatt B, a Roman-era household pit, two pre-feudal (5<sup>th</sup> c.) pits and six early medieval graves (grave 202–204, 208–210). Apart from the skeletons of grave 202 and 209, deposited in a simple pit, the others

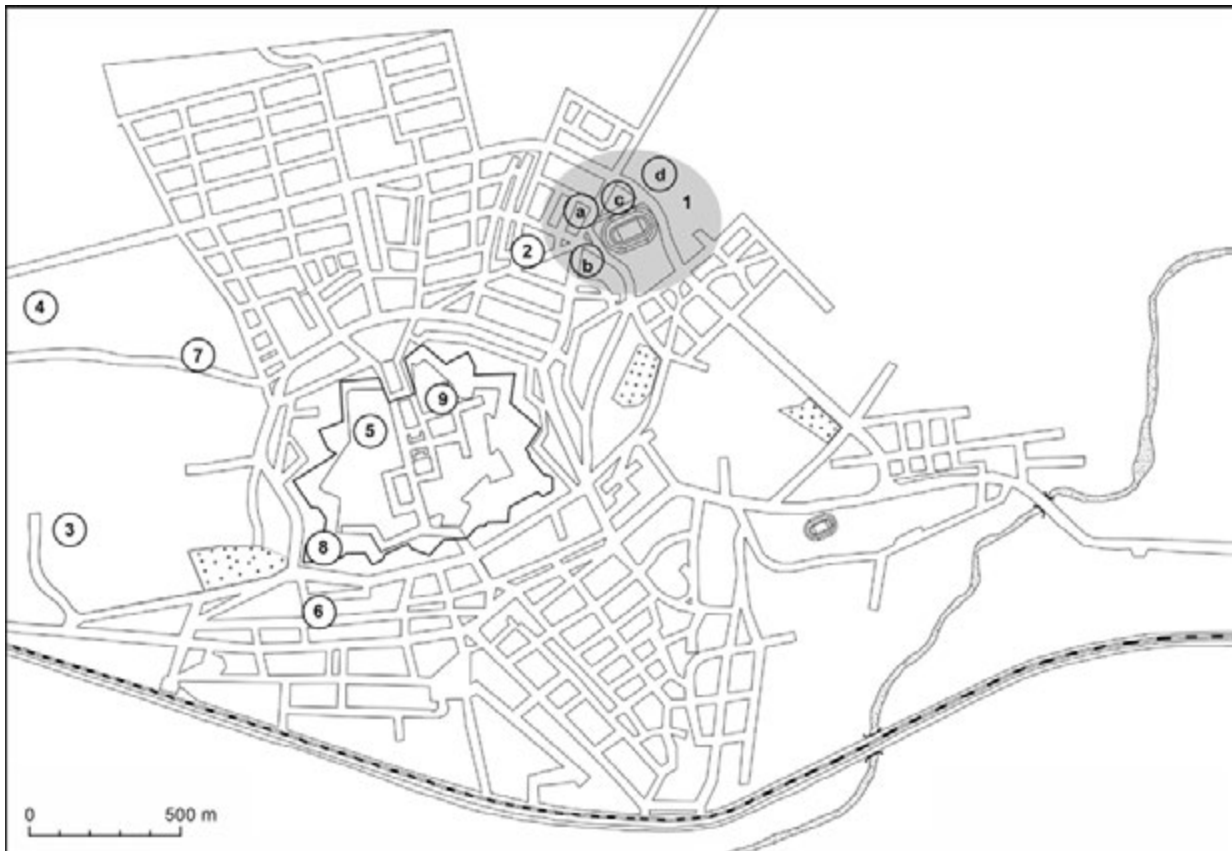


Fig. 1. Alba Iulia area. The layout of the Early Middle Age cemeteries. 1 (grey raster) – Emergency Station (Ambulance Station); a – Canton C.F.R.; b – veterinary hospital; c – OMV; d – Profi; 2 – Vinătorilor St.; 3 – Orange Transmission Station; 4 – King’s Spring; 5 – Catholic Cathedral; 6 – Roman Bath/Governors Palace; 7 – Brîndușei St.; 8 – the Ravelin of St. Francisc de Paola; 9 – former Military Hospital – Museikon.

had the lower part edged and coated with lithic material (river boulders, limestone, fragmented Roman tegulae) and the upper part covered with a layer of medium-sized stones. Given that the archaeological excavations at this burial site took place in two phases (2001–2006 and 2007), for reasons that are beyond our knowledge, the two plans were never linked. We shall proceed in the following by describing the funerary complexes presented with ritual fire hearths based on the existing records in the archive of the archaeologist M. Blăjan.

## DESCRIPTION OF BURIAL COMPLEXES

### Grave 86/T. VII<sup>1</sup>

Depth – 51–59 cm, orientation – W – E. To completely uncover the grave, the northern side of the section (80–155 × 320 cm) was excavated (Fig. 2). A well-preserved adult male skeleton (148 cm) was lying in a square-shaped burial pit (96 × 226 cm). The deceased’s skull was tilted to the left, and the chin of the mandible was resting on the chest. The forearms were bent and laid flat, with the hands on the abdomen (the left) and the pelvis area (the right). The right leg bones were drooping in continuation of the tibia, and the left leg bones towards the right, in the extension of the tibia (Fig. 4: 1, 2). An oblique brick and a medium-sized limestone marked the western end towards the SW corner. A fragment of ancient millstone, three medium-sized limestones and a boulder occupied the eastern third of the south side, from

<sup>1</sup> Abbreviations: h. – height; D. – diameter; Dr – dim diameter; Dm – maximal diameter; Db – bottom diameter; thk. – thickness; wdt. – width; inv. – inventory number; T. – trench.

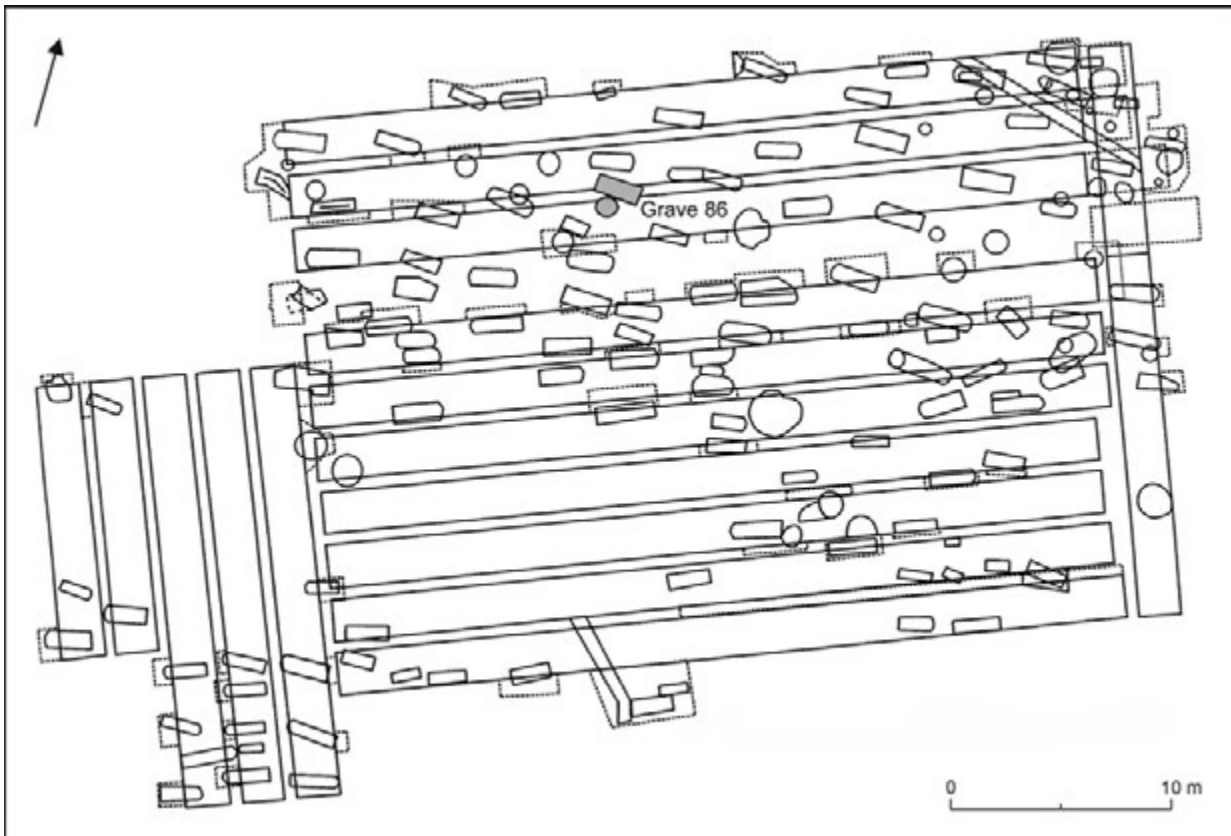


Fig. 2. General plan with the graves discovered during the archaeological research of 2001–2006. Location of grave 86 and the ritual fire hearth. Drawing M. Blăjan, A. Mătiș.

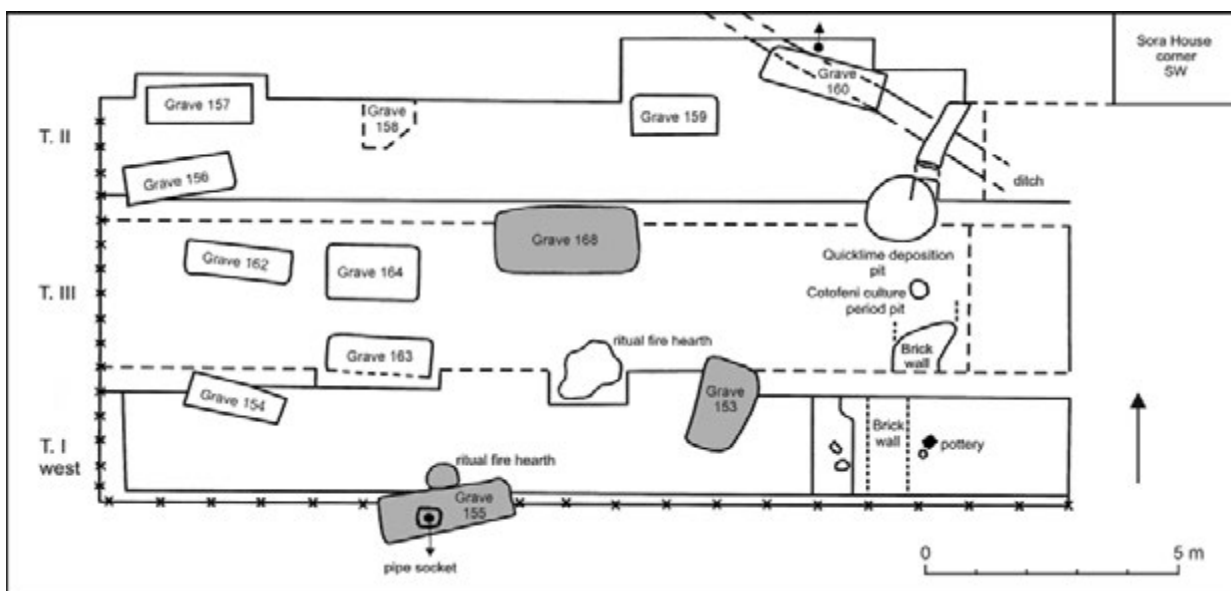


Fig. 3. General plan with the graves discovered during the archaeological research of 2007. Grave 155 and 168 with the corresponding ritual fire hearths. Drawing M. Blăjan, A. Mătiș, A. Dragotă.

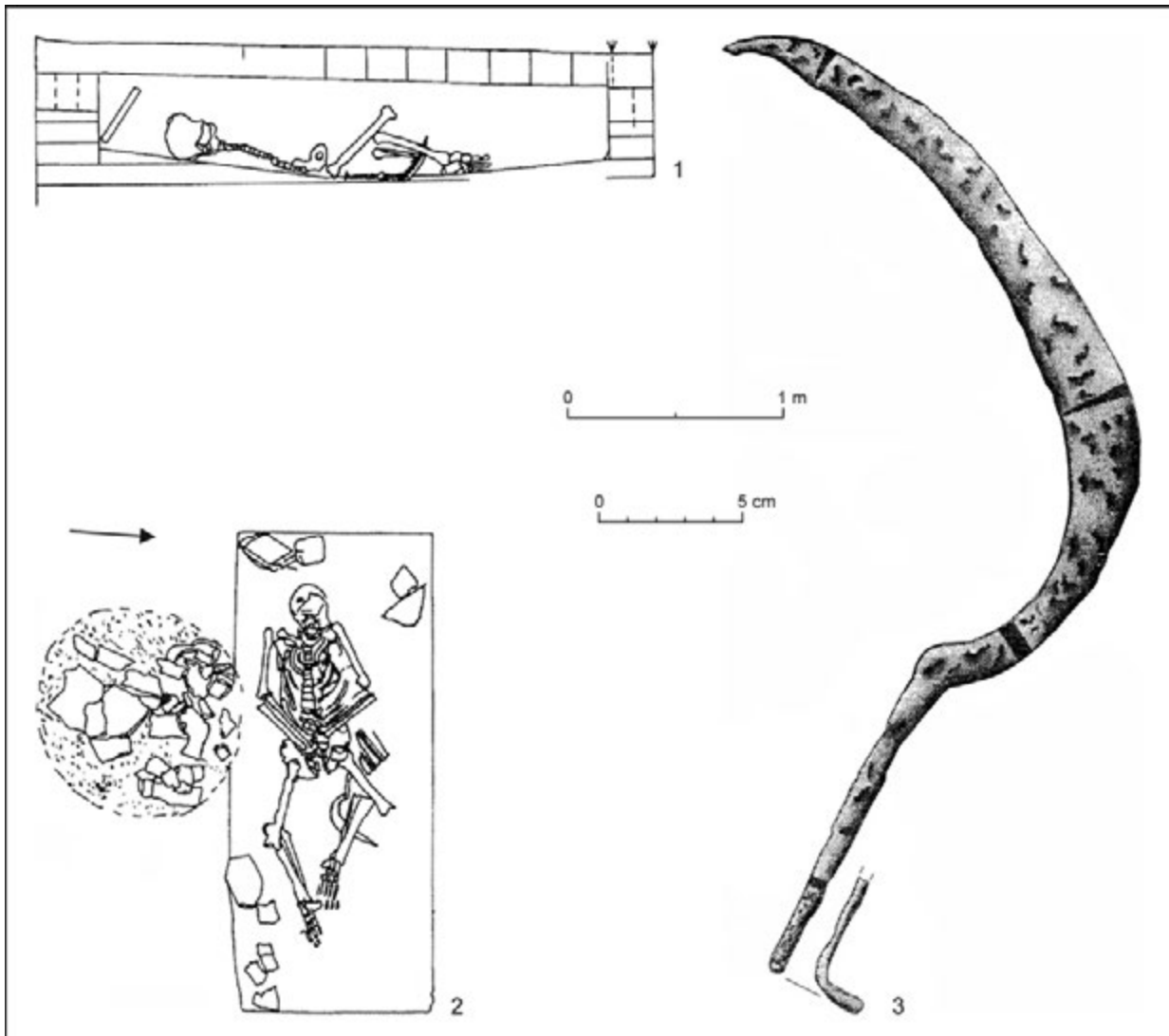


Fig. 4. 1, 2 – grave 86 with ritual fire hearth (drawing M. Blăjan); 3 – Sickle from grave 86. Drawing M. Blăjan, V. Deleanu.

the corner to the middle of the surface. A fragment of a ritually broken vessel with charcoal debris lay in the middle of the north side of the pit (Fig. 5). Lying on top of the deceased's skull, over a 7 cm layer of charcoal, the bottom half of the same vessel was deposited face down. From observations made during the research, the broken vessel contained charcoal remains. The funerary inventory of this grave is completed by an iron sickle, lying on its side, which had its tip facing NNE and its grip handle facing W (Fig. 4: 3). A ritual fire hearth<sup>2</sup> with a circular outline



Fig. 5. Grave 86 with fragments of the ritually broken ceramic pot. Foto L. Rădulescu.

<sup>2</sup> Up to the point of research, we do not know of any other similar findings and we have never encountered similar situations in the Romanian geographical area.





Fig. 6. Grave 86 with ritual fire hearth. Foto L. Rădulescu.

(90 cm) excavated to a depth of 30 cm was crossed in the middle of the north side (Fig. 6). In the white-concave pit, there was a layer of charcoal mixed with greyish-white scorched earth pigments, which was 7 cm thick in the central area and thinned towards the edge. Inside the hearth, there was a layer of sandstone and medium-sized limestones covered with earth, occupying a space of approximately 80 × 82 cm. A fragment of the vessel wall, broken and thrown overhead, lay between these lithic materials. (14–15 October 2006).

#### Grave 155/T. I

Depth – 27–62 cm, orientation – W – E. The grave pit was trapezoid-shaped (80–90 × 266 cm). The grave was identified along the southern fence of the enclosure of the house built by engineer Dan Sora on the southwest side of section I, i.e. in the northern area of the necropolis (Fig. 3; 7). The burial structure was square (270 × 90 cm) and had rounded corners. The skeleton was covered with two layers of overlapping lithic material (Fig. 8). The lower level, placed above the deceased at a depth of 31–43 cm, was made up of 33 pieces, including 29 medium sized limestones, three river stones and a fragment of ancient tile. Another compact layer identified in the central area contained a large limestone. At the southern sides and in the NE and SW corners, there was a large limestone placed on the edge (W) and top (E). The top layer covering the opening of the grave was composed of 16 pieces, consisting of six medium-sized stones, three river boulders of various shapes, and seven fragments of ancient tiles. The skeleton belonged to a robust, adult-mature male lying in a dorsal decubitus position. The lower walls of the pit were coated with broken pieces of limestone (Fig. 9: 1, 2). The skull, dislocated from its anatomical position, was pushed towards the central area of the burial pit and was overturned on its right side, with the occipital upwards. The right humerus had the epiphysis obliquely displaced towards the vertebral column, and the ulna was twisted on the left shoulder. The diaphysis of the humerus and shattered and destroyed remains of the ulna, radius and palm bones were preserved from the left hand. The right coxal bone was fragmented, and disarticulated cervical segments were recovered from the spine. The ribs were also disarticulated towards the thorax, shoulder and left humerus. Several ribs and the right clavicle were scraped between the femurs (Fig. 9: 3). The bedding soil above the pelvis, the thorax and around the lower limbs contained isolated charcoal debris and compacted lenses from a ritual fire hearth, identified at 20 cm



Fig. 7. Grave 155 with ritual fire hearth. Foto L. Rădulescu.

depth on the north side of the grave pit. This oval-shaped fire hearth (40 × 50 cm), arranged along its long axis in the WSV – ENE direction, was located in a pit dug in a layer of yellowish clay. A layer of charcoal, a chisel and several (3) fragments of sandstone with brownish stains due to burning were discovered in the central area of the pit. Undoubtedly, the hearth attached to the edge of the grave had a ritual purpose, being used at the time of the deceased's burial. The funerary inventory included a broken ceramic pot deposited near the left knee (Fig. 9: 6), a steel and a flint (Fig. 9: 4, 5) found under the left coxal bone (21 May 2007).

### Grave 168/T. III

Was one of several important graves in the necropolis that we attributed to the leader Gyula's military entourage. The warrior (172 cm) lay in a trapezoidal pit (106–110 × 250 cm) with rounded corners. Depth – 72–85 cm, orientation – WSW – ENE. The skeleton was poorly preserved. The grave pit was edged by medium-sized stones. The upper part of the pit was covered with a massive lithic cover composed of three successive layers (Fig. 10). The area occupied by the stones is 143 × 254 cm and totals 81 pieces, laid at a depth of 15–43 cm (50 pieces of calcareous sandstone, 30 river boulders and



Fig. 8. Grave 155 with burial pit fitted with stone and skeletal remains. Foto L. Rădulescu.



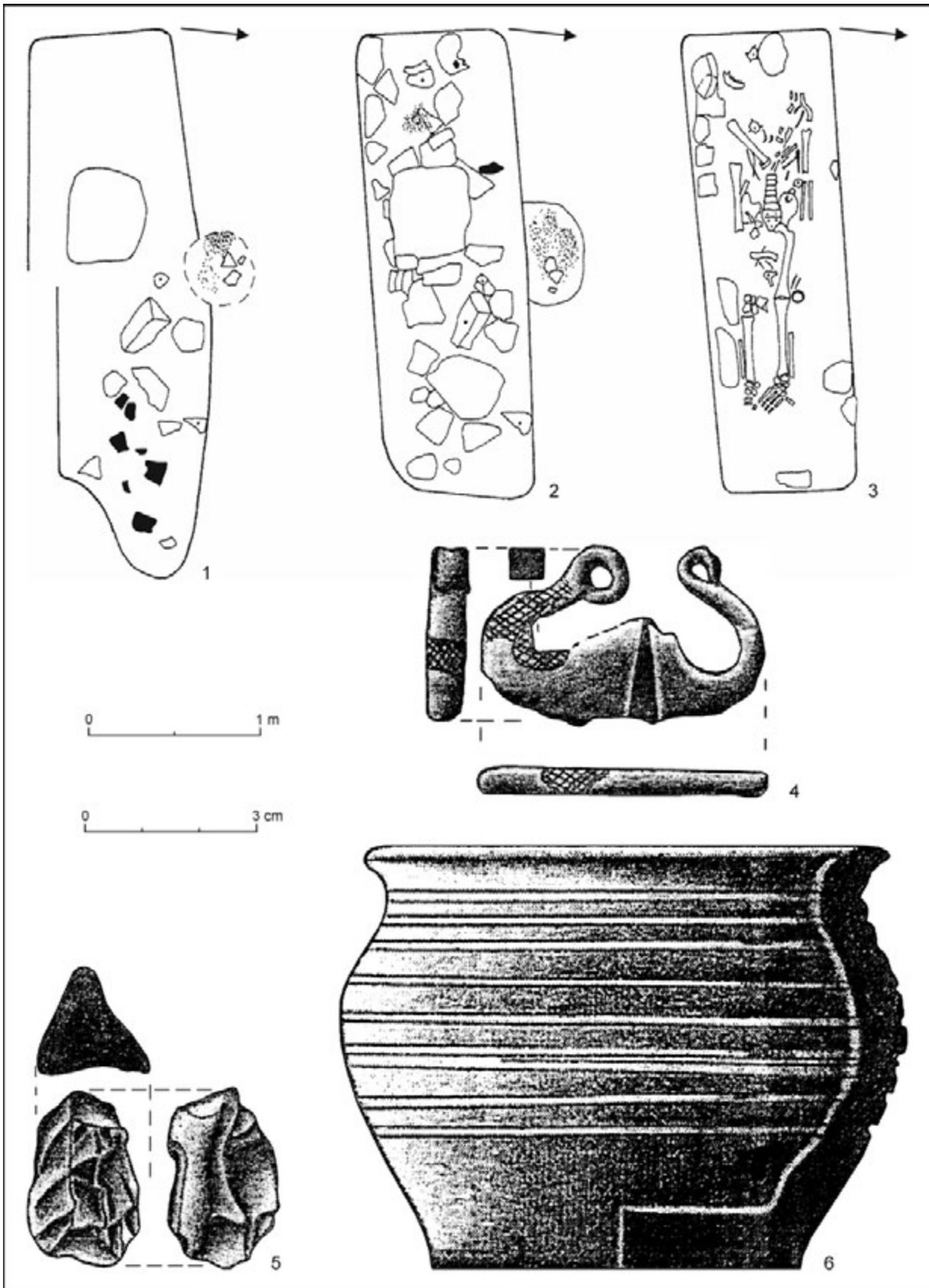


Fig. 9. 1-3 – grave 155 with ritual fire hearth (drawing M. Blăjan); 4 – steel; 5 – flint; 6 – ceramic vessel from grave 155 (drawing M. Blăjan, V. Deleanu).



Fig. 10. Grave 168, upper part fitted with stone. Foto L. Rădulescu.



Fig. 11. Grave 168 edged with stone and grave goods (sabre/sword and ceramic pot). Foto L. Rădulescu.

a fragment of tegulae). The stones are embedded on the longitudinal and transverse sides and in the eastern half of the burial construction (Fig. 11; 12: 1–3). An arrowhead with a rhombic blade was recovered from the filling soil (Fig. 12: 5) and a ceramic vessel with its mouth facing upwards was deposited at the left heel. An iron sabre-sword (Säbelschwert, Fig. 11; 12: 7), provided with a rotten wooden sheath with traces of textile remains (Fig. 12: 6), was found between the left humerus and the knee. A supporting iron element was placed on it, and a knife with its blade inserted into a 16 cm wooden sheath was placed on the upper third of the left femur. No further comments and details about the inventory of this grave will be given, for all the information has been published over the past year (Dragotă 2018; Dragotă/Blăjan 2018). A ritual hearth with a polygonal outline (114 × 129 cm) and rounded corners were identified about 130 cm west of the southern edge of the grave (Fig. 13; 14). This construction, excavated to a depth of 40 cm, had a long axis running NE – SW. A 1 cm thick crust of burnt reddish-brown earth stood out on the north, north-west and south sides. The southwest and southeast corners had a coal seam at the edge. Remains of a charred piece of wood (7 × 36 cm) lay obliquely disposed at the end of the southwest side layer composed of lithic material. The excavation of the pit required the removal of the earth and charcoal debris along with the filling composed of 44 stones, a fragment of ancient tile and two ceramic fragments from the Coțofeni culture. After removing the stones, a layer of charcoal and ash (3 cm) was revealed on the bottom of the hearth (Fig. 15). The charcoal layer was contoured to the base of the indentation and presented as ash patches. The concave surface of the pit was also observed to be covered with charcoal. Intense burning and traces of charcoal-brown colour were also visible on the western side and on the boundary line between the northern and eastern edges. The fully excavated pit had the shape of a basin, with inwardly arched walls and a concave bottom (Fig. 12: 1–4).



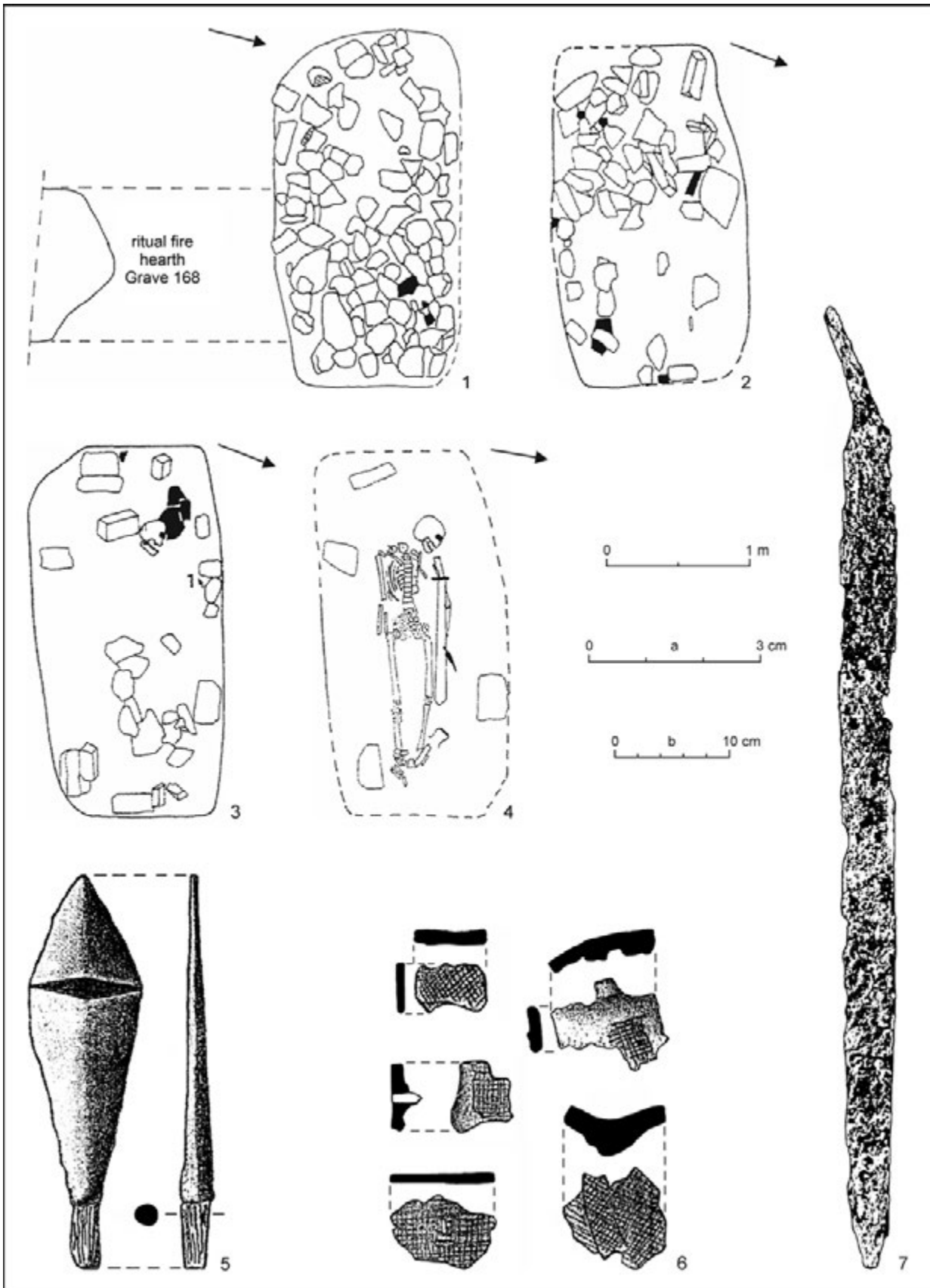


Fig. 12. 1–4 – grave 168 with stone setting (drawing M. Blăjan); 5 – arrowhead; 6 – fragments with textile remains; 7 – Sabre-sword (Säbelschwert) from grave 168 (drawing M. Blăjan, V. Deleanu). Scale: a – 5, 6; b – 7.

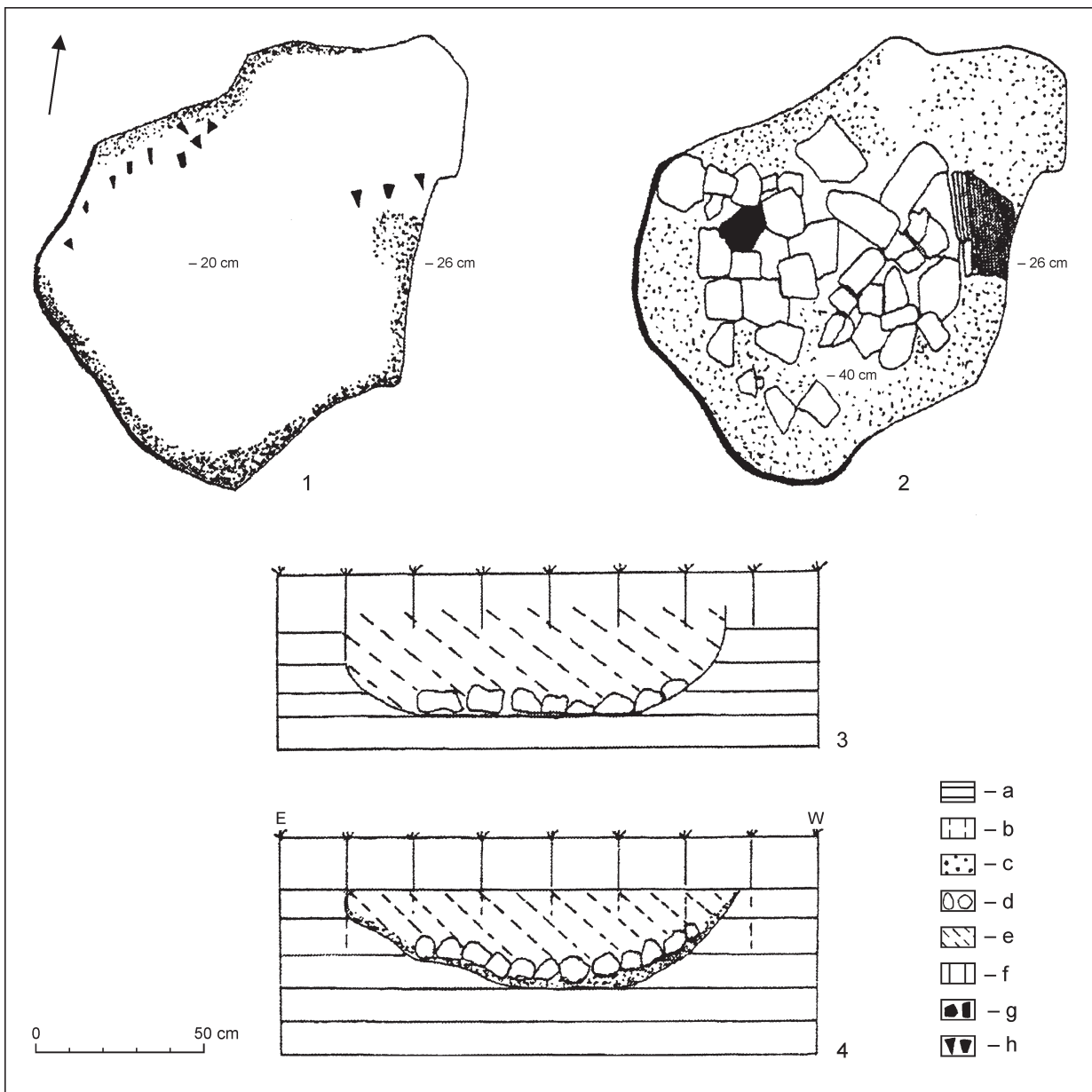


Fig. 13. Grave 168/T. III-west. Ritual hearth. Legend: a – yellow clay; b – 3 cm thick layer of charcoal; c – ash and charcoal filling of the pit; d – row of stones (45); e – brown-black layer (1 cm); f – humus; g – fragment of ancient tegulae and charred wood; h – brown burnt earth pigments. Drawing M. Blăjan.

### FUNERARY INVENTORY OF GRAVES

The sabre-sword (Säbelschwert) from grave 168, originally preserved in a wooden sheath, bears good analogies in the findings from the Hungarian context: Abony (Kovács 1990, fig. 2: B1), Kiskundorozsma-Vöröshomok (Bakay 1965, 10, fig. 10; 1967, 127, 128; Bálint 1963, 93, fig. 3; pl. XIV: 1), Mohács-Téglagyár/grave 1 and 4 (Bakay 1965, 10, fig. 26: 3, 4, 4a; 1967, 129, fig. 14: 3, 4; pl. VIII: 1, 2), Rakamaz-Strázsahalom/Strázsadomb (Kiss 1985, 247; *The Ancient Hungarians* 1996, 119, fig. 12), Szentbékálla (Bakay 1965, 14, fig. 26: 2, 2a; 1967, 135, fig. 14: 2; pl. VIII: 4; Kovács 1990, fig. 2: B: 9), Bodrogvécs/Somotor, part Véc (Bakay 1965, 16, fig. 18; 1967, 140; Hampel 1905, II, 460, fig. E; Kovács 1989, 21; 1990, 40) and Szeged-Csongrádi ut 1

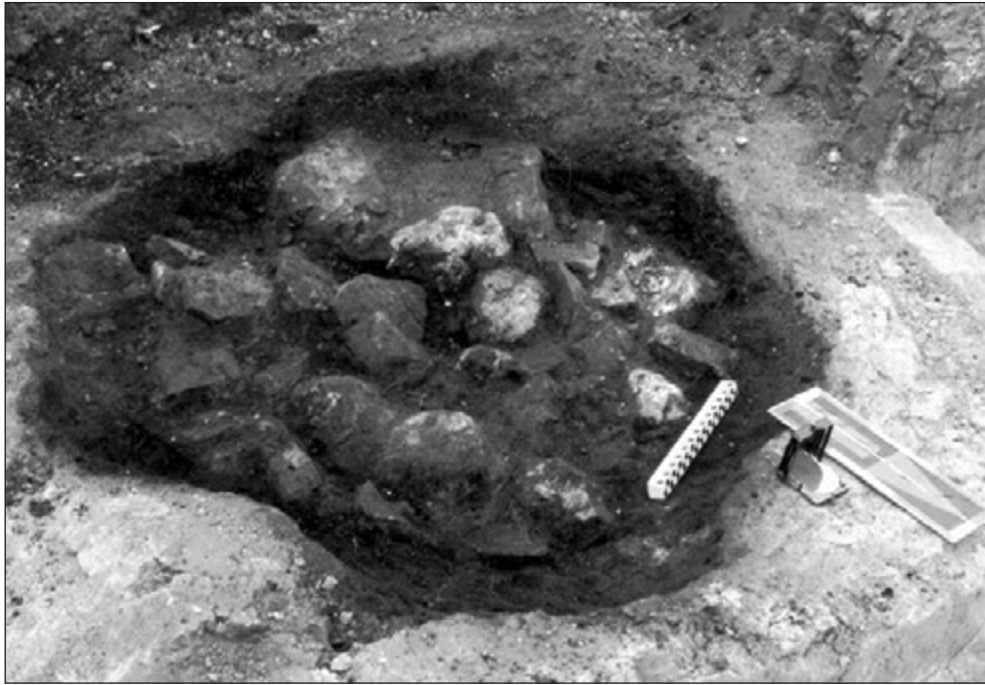


Fig. 14. Grave 168 ritual fire hearth, the upper part fitted with stone. Foto La. Rădulescu.



Fig. 15. Grave 168 ritual fire hearth after the removal of stones and coal debris. Foto L. Rădulescu.





Fig. 16. Grave 86 with the sickle deposited between the deceased's legs. Foto L. Rădulescu.

(Kovács 1989, 61; 1990, 40). All these discoveries can be dated to the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> c. The rhombic arrowhead identified in this grave can be placed in the same chronological time frame (Dragotă/Blăjan 2018, 288, 290, fig. 11: 1, 23: 7). This dating is supported by other grave goods discovered at Somotor, part Věč and Szeged-Csongrádi ut 1. At both sites, the sickle is associated with coins, respectively a dirheim and a coin issued by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus/Romanos II (948–959). According to L. Kovács, the dirheims are placed around 960, and the Byzantine and West European coin issues are a direct result of the belligerent political context of 954/955 (Kovács 1990, 40).

The sickle from grave 86 had a four-sided iron bar grip, thinned at the top and bent to secure the wooden handle (Fig. 16). There was a wide transition to the blade itself, and from the shoulder of the thorn, it gradually widened to its maximum width in the middle (2.5 cm), then gradually narrowed towards the sharp tip. The edge line has a concave shape, and the thickened back reached 0.42 cm ( $h = 28.5$  cm,  $h_{\text{thorn}} = 11.8$  cm,  $th_{\text{thorn}} = 0.5$  cm,  $h_{\text{bended thorn}} = 2.1$  cm). Comparing the dimensions of our specimen with the values established by K. Reichenbach (2004, 552, 555, fig. 4)<sup>3</sup>, the specimen can be placed in the chronological group specific to the 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> c. As far as the typology of the grave 86 sickle is concerned, it can be placed in the H1/H2 Henning type (Henning 1987, 89, fig. 43) or the I Beranová type (Beranová 1957, 103, fig. 1), spread over a fairly wide chronological range, between the 6<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> c. The aperture of the grave 86 sickle, the length of the handle (11.5 cm), and the maximum width (2.5 cm) fall within the values set for this horizon. The sickle from grave 86 has parallels among the specimens found in the graves of children and adults (women, men) in 10<sup>th</sup> c. cemeteries in Europe, including specimens from Červeník/grave 4 (Borzová 2006, 212, 225; Točík 1968, 18, pl. IX/13; 1987, 200, fig. 11: 3), Malé Kosihy/grave 35 (infans III, second horizon; Borzová 2006, 226; Hanuliak 1994, 118, tab. VI: A: 2), Trnovec nad Váhom/grav 421 (Borzová 2006, 229; Točík 1971, 171, pl. XXXIX: 11), Visonta-Felsőréti/grave 75 (Révész 2008, 357, fig. 260, 261; pl. 93: 2), Nové Zámky/grave 54 (Borzová 2006, 226, 227; Rejholcová 1974, 439, pl. IV) and Vozokany (Točík 1968, 63, pl. LIII: 20). The sickles from Bešeňov I-Papföld/grave 66 (infans; Borzová 2006, 220, 221; Kraskovská 1958, 426, tab. VII: 27), grave 80 (Borzová 2006, 221; Kraskovská 1958, 427, fig. 5; tab. VI: 12) and grave 139 (Borzová 2006, 221; Kraskovská 1958, 431, fig. 10; tab. VII: 25) have been identified in the area of the skull, the right lower limb and between the femurs, dated to the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> c. The speci-

<sup>3</sup> The analysis of the 13 graves with sickles from Slovakia, falling within this horizon, shows a rather interesting ratio (six women, three children, and four undetermined remains). In addition to the W – E orientation of these graves, there is a decrease in the number of male graves with sickle deposition, a trend observable since the Moravian period.

mens from Zemné/grave 52 (female; *Borzová 2006*, 221; *Kraskovská 1958*, 431, fig. 10; tab. VII: 25; *Rejholcová 1979*, 413, tab. VII: 9) and Rovinka/grave 3 (child; *Němejcová-Pavůvková 1962*, 657, fig. 225: 3), deposited in the area of the left femur and near the right elbow, were also placed in this chronological horizon. It has been suggested that the Bučany/grave 32 (female), found in a transverse position on the pelvis of the deceased (*Borzová 2006*, 223; *Hanuliak 1993*, 88, fig. 16: 11), was dated to the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> c. The analysis undertaken by Z. Borzová on the sickle deposits from graves in Slovakia (7<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> c.) allowed her to establish the use of this artefact also in a later period when a change of function was also possible (it was missing from the burial inventories in the 11<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> c.). Based on the expert studies, Z. Borzová has established three groups of opinions on the interpretation of grave sickles:

1. agricultural attribute, tool related to soil, agricultural and economic activity (J. Eisner, B. Dostál, L. Kraskovská, M. Beranová, B. Chropovský, M. Hanuliak), with a possible relation to the occupation of the deceased;
2. an attribute of war (with predilection in warrior communities, such as the Avars and Hungarians); weapon buried with the deceased;
3. object linked to certain magico-ritual practices (protection against evil spirits); “iron superstitions” (*Borzová 2006*, 209). J. Henning excludes the connection of the sickle with the occupation of the deceased and implicit economic status, opting for a link with the pre-Christian pagan period (*Borzová 2006*, 211).

While in some regions (Transylvania, Banat), placing a sickle on the deceased’s chest is meant to ward off evil spirits, in the traditional concept, this object symbolizes death. This insignia or symbol of death, if placed at the feet of the deceased in the coffin, signifies the wish that the dead are protected from the death of the soul (*Aga 2005*, 342).

An analysis of the anatomical deposition positions allowed Z. Borzová to list and observe five locations: near the skull, chest area, pelvis or abdominal area, on the upper or lower limb and at the end of the legs (*Borzová 2006*, 214, fig. 4: A–F). In the case of the Slovak sickles, Z. Slivenska indicates a higher proportion of complete deposition on the body of the deceased (88, 4%). The anatomical areas of deposition were different (near the skull, chest and pelvis area, lower limbs, including the extremities). They underwent changes in the Moravian and post-Moravian horizons compared to the Avar period. The pelvic and abdominal area was the preferred deposition area during the Avar Khaganate. The situation changed later when the lower limbs or upper torso area was preferred. Regardless of certain aspects (sex, age, status), a preference for the lower limbs and pelvis area is admitted.

The sickles were deposited in male and female graves, and the percentages were fairly close, even if some changes were noted between the Avar Khaganate period and the Moravian or post-Moravian horizon. In terms of orientation, the sickle was placed on the right, left and towards the middle of the body of the deceased (*Slivenska 2004*, 8).

The Alba Iulia-‘Izvorul Împăratului’s sickle shows the characteristics of type I Beranová, spread over a fairly wide chronological range between the 6<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> c. (*Beranová 1957*, 103, fig. 1). S. Tettamanti attributes protective roles to the sickle, designed to ward off evil. It was perceived as a tool if it was deposited on the right side of the hand in the graves of the wealthier classes (*Tettamanti 1975*, 110). As K. Reichenbach rightly observes, grave markers and burial inventories provide us with a picture or perspective of human communities at the border between life and death. From the perspective of the significance of the sickle in the graves, she admits three interpretations:

- a) the sickle as a weapon or part of military and horsemen’s equipment, particularly in earlier historiography;
- b) a tool in the property of the deceased, related to the activity in the world of the living;
- c) magical functions, of protection against evil spirits (*Reichenbach 2004*, 549).

The existence of iron sickles in funerary contexts has a strong ethnographic value. Generally speaking, placing sickles in burial pits is considered an atypical funerary practice. The burying of the deceased with sickles dates back to the early Middle Ages. Numerous burials of this kind can be observed from the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> c. to the 11<sup>th</sup> c. in the Carpathian Basin and the Danube area of Slovakia, in Hungary, in the lower part of Austria and in western Romania. It has been suggested that this custom may have been adopted by the Slavs and spread by them with their migrations to the W and NW (*Polcyn/Gajda 2015*, 1381). As atypical as this phenomenon is, it is quite rare in funerary contexts. A unique example to which we can comparatively relate is provided by the five graves in Drawsko (Wielkopolska), Poland. The five deceased

were buried with sickles of considerable sizes, placed in the neck area, with the edge towards the chin: grave 28/2008, 24/2009, 6/2012, 49/2012 or in the hip area: grave 60/2010 (*Polcyn/Gajda 2015*, 1375–1377; fig. 2–10). Situated quite far apart in relation to the general plan of the cemetery (*Polcyn/Gajda 2015*, 1375, fig. 1), the sepulchral pits also have copper coins and copper headband as funerary inventory. The Transylvanian example is clearly different from the Polish one on many levels, but there are some ethnographic aspects that fold into these atypical burials in the generalized context. Correlating all the grave furnishings and the information provided by the current state of research, we believe that the presence of iron sickles in the graves is related to the attempt by members of the community at the time to isolate the deceased. This isolation at grave level could have been a measure to prevent the soul of the deceased from tormenting those who remained alive, or it could just as well have been a measure to protect the souls of the deceased from evil spirits from the afterlife. Moreover, considering that the mowers are made of iron and that iron has been considered since ancient times a material that can be purified by fire, we believe that their presence may also be linked to a ritual of purification of the deceased, of facilitating the process of transition to the afterlife.

The pottery from grave 86 was ritually broken, and fragments were identified on the ritual hearth, on the skull and to the left of the skeleton on the edge of the pit. Even if we have not identified the fragments in the National Museum of the Unification in Alba Iulia, in the archived photographs, it can be seen that the shape is of a jar type made of brownish paste decorated with bands of horizontal incisions. The decoration with incised bands is found on pottery from grave 159 in this cemetery and on specimens identified in Alba Iulia-‘Antena Orange/Dealul Furcilor’ (*Cosma 2011*, 160, pl. 40/208) and ‘Str. Brîndușei’/grave 28 (*Dragotă/Rustoiu 2007*, 234, fig. 7: a) and grave 46 (adult; *Dragotă et al. 2009*, 28, 29, pl. 17). The specimen also confirms the presence of this decoration on pottery from the 10<sup>th</sup> c. from Alba Iulia-‘Stația de Salvare’ (S. IX/grave 3), identified in a warrior’s grave decorated with lithic material, which also had in its funerary inventory an arrowhead, bone plates from a bow and a horse offering (skull and limbs; *Ciugudean 2007*, 257, annex 1; *Cosma 2011*, 156, pl. 40/173.). The ceramic vessel from grave 155, deposited near the left knee, was made of blackish-brown paste with open brown spots and was decorated from the shoulder to the lower part with close parallel, wider incisions, superficially traced on the surface (h – 75, 76 mm, D<sub>r</sub> – 94, 28 mm, D<sub>b</sub> – 68, 54 mm, D<sub>m</sub> – 98, 16 mm; National Museum of the Union in Alba Iulia, inv. F. 9899). By contrast, the ceramic vessel in grave 168 was placed near the left heel of the deceased. Unfortunately, we have not been able to identify this jar vase (as it appears in the photograph) without decoration in the National Museum of Unification collections in Alba Iulia. Vases without decoration of similar dimensions can be found in Alba Iulia-‘Izvorul Împăratului’, grave 62, grave 9/2014 (*Dragotă et al. 2015*, 325, pl. II/1), Canton C. F. R./grave 1 (*Magdan/Dragotă 2018*, 361, 362, fig. 3) and on ‘Str. Brîndușei’/grave 9 (*Dragotă et al. 2009*, 28, 29, pl. 17), all chronologically dated to the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> c. From the perspective of the areas of anatomical deposition of 10<sup>th</sup> c. funerary pottery in Transylvania, C. Cosma established two groups of cemeteries: group I – characteristic for the cemeteries of Alba Iulia, in which the ceramic vessel was deposited in three positions (skull, pelvis and feet), regardless of the sex of the deceased; group II – with frequent deposition of the ceramic vessel in the area of the skull (*Cosma 2011*, 146).

It can be seen that grave 86, 155 and 168 were associated with ritual fire hearths pitched in a niche dug near the long side of the burial pit. All three graves with ritual fire hearths belonged to adult-mature men, whose sepulchral pits were made of lithic material. Moreover, the deceased were oriented in two cases along the W (skull) – E axis (grave 86, 155) and in the last one along the WSW – ENE direction (grave 168). The ritual hearth was 20 cm deep (grave 155), 30 cm (grave 86), 40 cm (grave 168) and oval (grave 155), circular (grave 86) and polygonal with rounded corners (grave 168). Their size varied: 40 × 50 cm (grave 155), 90 cm (grave 86) and 114 × 129 cm (grave 168). The deeper the fire hearth, the more lithic material was present (grave 86, 168). The long axis of the pits was arranged in the WSW – ENE (grave 155) and NE – SW (grave 168) directions. They were located on the south (grave 86) and north (grave 155) sides.

On the other hand, these findings appear associated with pottery; in one case, we can even speak of the leader of Gyula’s military entourage (grave 168). The presence of these findings can be unquestionably linked to the purification of the deceased before passing into the afterlife. After the completion of the ritual act, the coals were thrown into the burial pit, being identified in the filling soil at various depths, and the hearth was covered with stones and earth. Traces of charcoal were noted in numerous graves in the cemetery (grave 163, 165), and in one case, the ceramic vessel containing such remains were ritually broken between the feet of the deceased (grave 164). The breaking of a vessel when the deceased



leaves for the burial place is a custom still found today in Christian communities in Transylvania. The coal symbolizes the body's resurrection and the Holy Baptism because 'with the fire of the Holy Spirit, the sinner washes away the blackness of sin, as coal in the fire loses its blackness' (Aga 2005, 75). In traditional beliefs, fire is seen as the fourth element composing the world, along with water, earth and air. Considered a holy element, fire has the gift of purification and can be symbolized by charcoal or ceramic charcoal pot (Antonescu 1958, 689, 690). This 'gift of God', which must be called 'light' or 'hearth', is said to have been made by Jesus Christ 'with flint and steel'. Moreover, the statements 'God made a fire in the world to consecrate a church' and 'God hides his fire in stone' (Antonescu 1958, 260) are further strengthened by the funerary aspects of the cemetery at Alba Iulia-'Izvorul Împăratului' (Dragotă/Blăjan 2018, 259) whose correlation with the Byzantine church of the same period cannot be doubted.

The corroboration of funerary rites and ritual elements indicates a dating of this unique custom in the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> c. Furthermore, this custom appears only in the cemetery of 'Izvorul Împăratului', where the transition from paganism to Christianity and the coexistence of the two traditions can be seen most clearly in the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> c. The observations we made during the archaeological research indicate that, with the adoption of Christianity by the communities in this area, the purification of the deceased was quickly abandoned. This change is highlighted by the fact that traces of charcoal disappear or are found much less frequently in the burial pits.

The ritual fire hearths identified at the 'Izvorul Împăratului' site are a unique and singular discovery, never seen before in the archaeological landscape of Transylvania and Romania. Surely, they must be linked to the purification of the dead before their transition to the afterlife.

In contrast, the Bronze Age, Hallstattian, Roman and post-Roman household disposal pits are much deeper and contain brick, stone, limestone, osteological remains of animals and ceramic fragments. These archaeological complexes contain no traces of charcoal. On many occasions, 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> c. graves intersect these household disposal pits to a greater or lesser extent (Dragotă et al. 2015, 325, pl. V). In one case (grave 42), a child's skeleton was placed in a household disposal pit where a gastropod offering was deposited.

The cemetery of Alba Iulia-'Izvorul Împăratului' is functional between the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> c. and the first decade of the following c. It relates to two notable events in the area: the baptism of Gyula in Constantinople and the campaign of punishment undertaken by Stephen I in Transylvania (1003). The dating of the three graves with ritual fire hearts in the 10<sup>th</sup> c. is confirmed by several elements: the stone bordering of the graves, the presence of charcoal and the chronological setting of the pieces of funerary inventory (pottery, sabre-sword and sickle). The charcoal, present in smaller or larger pieces, has been identified at the 10<sup>th</sup> c. chronological level (as well as the ritual graves) in all the necropolises of Alba Iulia-'Stația de Salvare', 'Str. Brândușei' and 'Izvorul Împăratului'. The ritual fire hearths have common characteristics: they are relatively shallow (0.14-0.30 m), charcoal appears in a significant proportion, and there are fragments of the broken ceramic pot (grave 86). Pieces of charcoal were found in the ceramic pot in grave 86. Charcoal remains from the ritual hearth were also found on the surface of the entire grave 155, in the area of the chest, pelvis and lower limbs of the deceased. Except for grave 168, where the hearth is close to the grave, the other two (grave 86, 155) present the hearths on the long side of the sepulchral pit. As can be seen in one of the plans, both grave 155 and 168 (belonging to the leader of the military suite) are close to grave 164 and 163. As for grave 163, a large charcoal stain can be seen at the left shoulder of the deceased (adult female). The inventory of this grave consists of a ceramic pot placed between the femurs, near the pelvis, with egg remains nearby and five loop rings in the skull area. grave 164 is noteworthy for its ceramic pot, filled with charcoal and ash, broken between the calves. grave 153 belongs to an adult-mature male, sable-hilted positioned in a crouched position and has no funerary inventory. The analysis of the pottery in terms of shape, size, decoration and position of anatomical deposition strongly indicates a chronological setting in the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> c.

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## Na hranici medzi pohanstvom a kresťanstvom

### Hroby s rituálnymi ohniskami objavené na nekropole Alba Iulia-„Izvorul Împăratului“ počas archeologických výskumov v rokoch 2006–2007

Aurel Dragota – Monica-Elena Popescu

#### Súhrn

Na pohrebisku v Alba Iulia-„Izvorul Împăratului“ (župa Alba, Rumunsko) boli počas archeologických vykopávkov v roku 2006 a 2007 objavené tri hroby, ktoré mali na boku hrobovej jamy ohnisko. Niektoré hroby majú spoločné znaky, a to mužské pohlavie zosnulých, orientácia na osi Z – V (hrob 86, 155), okrem hrobu 168 (ZJZ – VSV), a obloženie hrobových jám kameňom.

Lokalita „Izvorul Împăratului/Crăcuta“ sa nachádza na druhej terase rieky Mureș v juhozápadnej časti Alba Iulia. Prameň s rovnakým názvom vyviera z okraja tejto terasy napravo od DJ 107 A Alba Iulia-Pîclișa. Výskum od roku 2001, s prestávkami až do roku 2014, viedol k objaveniu 223 hrobov z obdobia raného stredoveku (10.–11. stor.). V roku 2006 bolo nájdených 80 hrobov a 30 hospodárskych a zásobných jám z rôznych historických období (wittenberská kultúra, doba halštatská, doba rímska, 10.–11. stor.). Hrobový inventár bol pomerne rôznorodý a pozostával z úžitkových predmetov (hlinené vretená, amfory, kresadlá, nože), ozdôb (cypraea moneta, koráliky, náhrdelníky, kosoštvorcové aplikácie), keramiky, relikviára s dvojkrížom a kríža. Medzi zaznamenané zvyky patrili najmä kopanie hrobových jám, skrčenie zomrelých (hrob 69, 124), ukladanie vtáčích vajec, lebiek a končatín sliepok a koní (hrob 78). Vyskytol sa aj jeden ojedinelý prípad (hrob 86), v ktorom pohrebná jama mala rituálne ohnisko so stopami po spaľovaní, s riečnymi kameňmi a zlomkami rozbitých keramiky (*Blăjan* 2007, 56). Počas výskumu v roku 2007 bola identifikovaná na pohrebisku väčšina staromaďarských bojovníckych hrobov (hrob 133, 143, 144, 165, 168, 173, 177, 184, 208, 210). Vzhľadom na to, že archeologický výskum na tomto pohrebisku prebiehal v dvoch fázach (2001–2006 a 2007), nám z neznámych dôvodov neboli dva plány, vytvorené počas rôznych výskumných fáz, nikdy prepojené. K zvyklostiam, ktoré boli vo väčšej, či menšej miere identifikované v predchádzajúcich výskumoch, patrí ohraničenie jám kameňmi (hrob 132, 134–141), vajcia ako hrobový inventár (hrob 136, 142, 149, 154, 156, 161, 163, 165, 178), pozostatky koňa (hrob 165) a dva hroby s rituálnymi ohniskami (hrob 155, 168). Počas výskumu realizovaného na jeseň 2007 bolo odkrytých niekoľko archeologických komplexov, a to žiarový hrob z mladšej doby bronzovej, dve hospodárske jamy a nadzemné obydlie z HB, hospodárska jama z doby rímskej, dve jamy z 5. stor. a 6 včasnostredovekých hrobov (hrob 202–204, 208–210). Okrem kostier z hrobu 202 a 209, uložených v jednoduchej hrobovej jame, mali ostatné spodnú časť upravenú a pokrytú kamenným materiálom (riečne balvany, vápenec, fragmenty rímskych tegúl) a vrchnú časť pokrytú vrstvou balvanov.

Hrobový inventár pozostával z keramiky (rituálne rozbité v hrobe 86, 155, 168), kosáka (hrob 86), ocele, kremeňa (hrob 155), hrotu šípu, šablového meča (Säbelschwert) a zvyškov drevenej pošvy so stopami textilu (hrob 168). Nie je zrejme náhoda, že takéto rituálne ohnisko bolo zriadené aj pre vodcu Gyulovej vojenskej družiny (hrob 168). Úlohu týchto unikátnych nálezov, objavujúcich sa na pomedzí pohanstva a kresťanstva, možno dať do súvisu s očisťovaním zosnulého pred odchodom do posmrtného života. Všetky prvky pohrebných obradov a rituálov umožňujú zaradiť tieto nálezy do druhej polovice 10. stor.

Obr. 1. Oblasť Alba Iulia. Rozloženie pohrebísk z raného stredoveku. 1 (sivý raster) – stanica rýchlej zdravotnej pomoci (Ambulancia); a – Canton C.F.R.; b – veterinárna nemocnica; c – OMV; d – Profi; 2 – Vînătorilor St.; 3 – vysielací Orange; 4 – Kráľovský prameň; 5 – katolícka katedrála; 6 – Rímske kúpele/Miestodržiteľský palác; 7 – Brîndușei St.; 8 – Ravelin svätého Františka de Paola; 9 – bývalá vojenská nemocnica – Museikon.



- Obr. 2. Celkový plán s hrobmi objavenými počas archeologického výskumu v rokoch 2001–2006. Poloha hrobu 86 a rituálneho ohniska. Kresba M. Blăjan, A. Mătiș.
- Obr. 3. Celkový plán s hrobmi objavenými počas archeologického výskumu v roku 2007. Hrob 155 a hrob 168 s príslušnými rituálnymi ohniskami. Kresba M. Blăjan, A. Mătiș, A. Dragotă.
- Obr. 4. 1, 2 – hrob 86 s rituálnym ohniskom (kresba M. Blăjan); 3 – kosák z hrobu 86. Kresba M. Blăjan, V. Deleanu.
- Obr. 5. Hrob 86 s fragmentmi rituálne rozbitej nádoby. Foto L. Rădulescu.
- Obr. 6. Hrob 86 s rituálnym ohniskom. Foto L. Rădulescu.
- Obr. 7. Hrob 155 s rituálnym ohniskom. Foto L. Rădulescu.
- Obr. 8. Hrob 155 s hrobovou jamou obloženou kameňom a kostrovými pozostatkami. Foto L. Rădulescu.
- Obr. 9. 1–3 – hrob 155 s rituálnym ohniskom (kresba M. Blăjan); 4 – oceľka; 5 – kresací kameň; 6 – nádoba z hrobu 155 (kresba M. Blăjan, V. Deleanu).
- Obr. 10. Hrob 168, horná časť obložená kameňom. Foto L. Rădulescu.
- Obr. 11. Hrob 168 s kamennou obrubou a hrobovou výbavou (šabľa/meč a hrniec). Foto L. Rădulescu.
- Obr. 12. 1–4 – hrob 168 s kamenným obložením (kresba M. Blăjan); 5 – hrot šípu; 6 – fragmenty so zvyškami textilu; 7 – šabľový meč (Säbelschwert) z hrobu 168 (kresba M. Blăjan, V. Deleanu). Mierka: a – 5, 6; b – 7.
- Obr. 13. Hrob 168/T. III-západ. Rituálne ohnisko. Legenda: a – žltá hlina; b – 3 cm hrubá vrstva dreveného uhlia; c – výplň jamy s popolom a dreveným uhlím; d – rad kameňov (45); e – hnedočierna vrstva (1 cm); f – humus; g – fragment starobylej teguly a zuhoľnatené drevo; h – hnedé pigmenty prepálenej hlíny. Kresba M. Blăjan.
- Obr. 14. Hrob 168, rituálne ohnisko, horná časť obložená kameňom. Foto L. Rădulescu.
- Obr. 15. Hrob 168, rituálne ohnisko po odstránení kameňov a zvyškov uhlíkov. Foto L. Rădulescu.
- Obr. 16. Hrob 86 s kosákom uloženým medzi nohami zosnulého. Foto L. Rădulescu.

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