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WEAPONS AND HARNESS ITEMS FROM THE TIME OF THE DACIAN KINGDOM, DISCOVERED AT BULBUC, COMM. CERU-BĂCĂINȚI, ALBA COUNTY. PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS[*]

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Abstract. The following study, regarded solely as a necessary prologue to a more extensive research, has been committed to the presentation of some recent finds -remarkable both due to their features and to the manner they became part of museum heritage. These were five curved *sica* daggers, three 'Thracian type' horse bits and six spearheads, representing the content of five pit deposits, belonging to the Dacian Kingdom period. Other finds of similarly associated artefacts were labelled as fitting the cultural group Padea–Panagjurski Kolonii[1], initially located in present-day north-western Bulgaria, beginning with

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[1] The 4th-2nd cs. BC were the chronological scene of some very important social and spiritual transformations occurred in the area of northern Balkans. One of the most representative was the emergence in this space of certain typical associations of artefacts and funerary practices, interpreted as belonging to a new cultural identity, conventionally named *Padea – Panaghiurski Kolonii* group/*facies*/horizon, taking the name from two sites, from Romania and Bulgaria. These associations were interpreted as belonging to a mix of different ethnic groups of various origins (mainly Thracian and Celtic, but not only), acting under the hegemony of some warrior clans that had common interest, strategies and tactics, materialized in specific identity expressions. Even if initially they used weapons specific to each ethnic component, these were finally mixed into something particular to the discussed group. Without being a completely accepted phenomenon by the modern Romanian and Bulgarian historiography, recent researches have imposed this name as being, for now, the single acceptable one. The concentration of discoveries on a relatively small geographic space and chronologic interval supported the hypothesis of a unitary culture. Even if this label does not reflect anymore the entire

the 3rd c. BC, and later, starting with the next century, in Oltenia and western Muntenia, finally in south-eastern Transylvania, and further towards the Dacian Kingdom periphery. These types of associations were assigned to certain warrior Celtic-Thracian clans, amassed under the authority of the Dacian aristocracy, who apparently used them until the Roman conquest.

Starting from these discoveries, the study tackled the delicate issue of metal detection by non-archaeologists, an activity with an ever more increased social appeal, difficult to control and, in a substantial amount, harmful for the archaeological heritage.

Introduction

Archaeological traces which reveal, in a way or another, data regarding associations of weapons and equipment specific to the military elites of the Dacian Kingdom, or components/fragments which may be related to this kind of deposits were documented in many instances in the North-Danube area. The amount of data known by scientists has been constantly increasing, especially in the last decade. Novel contexts have occurred; new artefacts have been revealed, others have been rediscovered in museums' deposits. Amongst the many ways of discovering these types of artefacts, metal detection stands out, especially as a result of the last year discoveries made by hobbyists, situated more or less at the edge of legality[2].

A significant number of artefacts have recently became museum heritage, being brought to specialists' attention, extending thus the knowledge about the arsenal and status of the Dacian military elites that once ruled over the middle Mureș valley, an important commercial route of the Kingdom.

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complexity of all the issues related to this type of finds (ethnic, historic and civilisation implications), it remained in use, in order to avoid terminological confusions.

[2] Regarded as suspicious by the scientific community, the soil investigation with metal detectors by individuals without official training in archaeological or heritage research has become lately, in Romania as well, a phenomenon of wide scope, that lead to the discovery of numerous artefacts belonging to various epochs, beginning with the Bronze Age. A significant part of the discovered objects and sites belonged to the Dacian period.

Discovery context[3]

Without holding on details regarding metal detection activities practiced by private persons in general, a phenomenon worthy of a bigger and more distinctive discussion[4], I will only take into consideration for now a specific category of its hobbyists.

In the beginning of this year, on some online forums specialized in metal detection activities, a news stated that a certain member of the online community had made a discovery of a curved *sica* dagger, a 'Thracian type' horse bit, a spur, a broken spearhead, an iron spike and of other metallic remains. The discovery belonged to Tudor Ponoran, from Zlatna (county of Alba)[5]. He eventually donated the items to the National Museum of Union from Alba Iulia. Thrilled by the results, the discoverer made a second detection in the same site, shortly after his first, occasion on which he dug out, at short distance from the initial discoveries, four

[3] The metal detection phenomenon in Romania has taken great proportions, especially due to some legal deficiencies. A more precise regulation policy would be desirable, especially since this hobby has become so much more visible due to its implications in archaeological looting activities. Otherwise, metal detection can be structured in several distinct directions. The first is unauthorized detection, the archaeological looting more precisely, a wide scope phenomenon with some of the most unfortunate consequences for historical heritage. I will only make special case here of the famous discovery – the Dacian gold bracelets, found in the Orăștie Mountains, to which we can add numberless metallic artefacts of a smaller economic value, but equally significant from a historical perspective. Another direction would be assignable to the detection performed outside authorized areas, the results of which remain as well lost, being partially smuggled. The third is detection practiced outside archaeological sites, the found items being given, according to the law, to local administrations or, lately, to museums. All these types of activities stand as extremely destructive, because they do not focus on the understanding and recovering of the archaeological context, the main interest of the discoverer being just to extract the metallic items from their matrix as soon as possible.

[4]Following the events related to an increasingly growing phenomenon in Romania, during the last year, a working group was assembled, mainly of historians, in order to debate the issue and search for convenient solutions, not only for the largest part of the specialists, but also to allow the practicing of this very socially attractive hobby, in a regulated context though. The resulting set of proposals were published in a document - *Proposal for the regulation of metal searching activities of a heritage related interest*, which was sent to the Ministry of Culture; it has remained without effect for the moment. The document can be found online here:
http://www.esteo.ro/pdf/PROPUNERI_vers2.pdf.

[5]Only the dagger, spearhead, horse bit and spur were found in the initial context, the other smaller items being discovered in the surrounding area, on the metal detection occasion, without any direct connection to the weapons.

similar deposits, all containing items regularly framed into the model assigned to the Padea–Panagjurski Kolonii inventories. These last four sets were as well donated to the same museum. All the items are now in full process of conservation and cataloguing. The area was immediately declared archaeological site, blocking thus any legal possibility to survey it by metal detectors.

Historical and geographical background

From an administrative point of view, the discovery was done on the territory of the Ceru-Băcăinți municipality in the Alba County (Fig. 1/a-b). The items were found on the saddle located between the limestone hilly peaks Piatra Mare and Piatra Mică (Fig. 1/c-d), on the southern border of Bulbuc village. The area was previously identified in the dedicated literature as having archaeological potential, without being however recorded in the National Archaeological Registry. Various items had been discovered here (silex, pottery, iron) belonging to prehistoric cultures Coțofeni and Wietenberg and also to the Dacian and Roman periods[6].

The site has to be related with one of the main access routes, connecting the Mureș valley with the gold deposits' area in the Apuseni Mountains[7], being located, during Dacian period, between the fortresses Piatra Craivii and Ardeu (Fig. 2/a). These discoveries add up to the scarce information regarding settlements and habitation available for the right Mureș river bank, in the area between the two large up-mentioned fortifications, a situation previously noted by specialists[8], even if in this stage, they cannot be exactly linked with any specific adjacent settlement. This settlement should have existed, as the core value of the iron items, either funerary linked or meant for votive purposes, wasn't regularly accessible to just any warriors, unrelated to a significant residential centre.

The discovery conditions and the items' historic meaning highlight in equal fashion the need for future archaeological researches.

[6] Goronea *et alii* 2012, p. 14.
[7] Glodariu 1982, p. 33.
[8] Plantos; Popa 2004, p. 76; p. 80.

The archaeological file

The discoveries from Bulbuc were weapons and harness fittings, associated in a typical mix of the warrior elites who controlled the outer and inner Carpathian space, beginning with the 2nd c. BC. In this instance, we have dealt with curved *sica* daggers, 'Thracian type' horse bits, spurs and spearheads. Unlike other contexts, at Bulbuc there weren't found any straight 'Celtic' swords or other weapons and pieces of military equipment.

The items had been deposited underground, at a depth ranging between 40 and 50cm. Until the beginning of a detailed archaeological investigation, we cannot know for sure the original shape of these cavities, the pits excavated by the finder being dug approximately circular with a diameter of 30-40cm. The majority of daggers had been bent, as had been the spearheads. The horse bits appeared to be unaltered, excepting some slight deformations of the bridles.

Initially, the items were brought to the museum in bulk, excepting the first set, which was delivered earlier (Fig. 2/b-c). Thus, one of the main tasks was to recompose the initial sets of deposited items and, if possible, of their contexts. With this purpose, as soon as the weather allowed, certain efforts to reconstruct the discovery settings were done[9]. On the occasion, besides the items' clustering on contexts, we charted the pits' location in the field, made measurements and recovered information regarding the positioning and affiliation of each item to its original pit. In addition, we identified several ceramic fragments and collected soil probes. The objects' charting and grouping were done according to the discoverer's statements; therefore they should not be regarded as 100% sure. It is not impossible that due to the joy of discovery, some details (exact position of some artefacts, their orientation etc.) to be wrongly remembered, especially considering that no photographs were done during the detection or finds' removal from their contexts. Despite these possible errors, the repeated subsequent discussions with the discoverer did not brought significant changes to the initial statements, thus we

[9]The reconstruction was done in the presence of PhD. G. Rustoiu, director of the National Museum of Union, inspector PhD. M. Ciută, the Heritage Police Chief of Alba County, D. Anghel, curator at the National Museum of Union, the discoverer, T. Ponoran and the undersigned. Due to harsh meteorological conditions, the reconstruction couldn't be done earlier than approximately 3 months after the reporting, the route to the site, being extremely difficult, even for SUVs.

believe that there are no major doubts regarding his declarations. Nevertheless, because some doubts concerning the affiliation to a certain context exist, our discourse will not focus on archaeological features (used exclusively for items' sequencing), but on the items themselves.

Feature 1

The first discovery, identified as Feature 1, is the only one about which there are no doubts concerning the association of artefacts. The feature contained a curved dagger, a spearhead, a spur and a 'Thracian type' horse bit (Fig. 3/a), all made of iron. The dagger, with a triangular section, was found bent, with a small missing portion from its handle. The blade, decorated and fitted with a channel for blood flowing, was separated from the handle by a decorated guarding collar. The blade was ornamented with the frequently encountered motif of two affronted birds (eagles or water birds?). One of the attachment rivets of the handle, with its finial incised with a chisel, was found preserved (Ø 3.5 mm; length = 1.8 cm). Its general preservation state was good. Weapon dimensions: total length= 32 cm; blade length= 27 cm; blade maximal width = 2.5 cm; handle length= 3.6 cm; handle width = 2 cm, guarding collar width = 1.2cm (Fig. 3/b).

The iron spur has the opening of its arms measuring 8.2 cm, the conical spine of 2.1 cm and depth between arms of 3.3 cm. (Fig. 3/d). These arms were ended with two hemi-spherical buttons, with a base diameter of 1.4 cm. Very well preserved and carefully made, this spur belongs to the type I a (spurs with conical long spine)[10].

The horse bit was found complete and in a good preservation state, except one of its missing rings shaped as *omega* (Werner var. 1) and another one just partially preserved. The item's width is 13 cm and unfolded length of approximately 19 cm, among which the proper bridle has 13.5 cm (Fig. 3/c). On the mobile axis were placed four cross - shaped rings, with heads decorated by chisel. The element ensuring the connection with the rein strap was preserved at one of the bridles. Less well preserved was found to be the median torsade shaped bar, which was in part altered by the micro cracks caused by the tension that modified the metal's inner structure, favouring thus its corrosion during the interaction with the local soil. The 'Thracian type' bits are currently morphologically framed as belonging to a distinct group of such joints (type XVI[11]). Those

[10] Dima 2005, p. 180.
[11] Werner 1988, p. 81-101.

discovered at Bulbuc present however some particularities. In the case of the bit from Feature 1, the closest analogy, geographically and morphologically speaking, is the bit from Blandiana[12]. The single major difference resides in the shape of the bridles, in our case composite, at Blandiana being rigid. Cross-shaped rings, relatively spread along with this type of bits, were used as well at the bit from Cugir, even if in that case they are more profiled[13].

The last item to be discussed from Feature 1 set will be the spearhead (Fig. 3/e). It was found altered as a result of its bending, practically fractured in the area where it had been folded. It seems probable to consider that the breaking in two happened at the moment of its removal from the original context. Nevertheless, the item was quite damaged in the area where it had been folded as a result of its underground deposition. The current length of the weapon is 27 cm, from which the apex measures 17 cm and fitting tube 10.4cm, with a diameter of 1.6 cm. The blade, having the width in its largest sector of 3.4 cm, was fitted with a median profiled rib and was covered (now only partially preserved) with a red chemical compound, fact that suggests that the spearhead had been coloured in Antiquity.

Feature 1 was identified to be the most southern deposit of those discussed here. Apparently, in the beginning, the spearhead and probable the spur were laid on the bottom of the pit. On top of them were then deposited the bit and the dagger. The items were covered afterwards with local soil and limestone rocks. Following the discussions with the discoverer it resulted that he hadn't noticed any traces of burnt soil or charcoal, neither bones or ceramic.

Feature2

This deposit, the most modest of all, contained a curved dagger, a fragment of its scabbard and a spearhead, all made of iron (Fig. 5/a).

The dagger has a bent tip, with a very small section missing, a guard and ending collar, both incised with perimetral lines. The blade was decorated, ritually bent in the middle and superior third sector. It was found in a good general preservation state.

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[12] Ciugudean 1980, p. 429, fig. 3/a-b.

[13] This detailed was observed during the documentation, the item being kept in the collection of the National Museum of Union, Alba Iulia (D 4649).

Dimensions: total length = 39 cm; blade length = 28 cm; blade maximal width = 2.8 cm; handle length = 11 cm; blade edge thickness = 0.6 cm; collar width = (guard) = 1.5 cm (ending) = 1.5 cm (Fig. 5/c).

Only the inferior part of the scabbard was preserved, on a length of 9 cm (Fig. 5/b). The spearhead measures 51.5 cm, maximal width is 5.4 cm, length of the fitting tube 14 cm, exterior diameter 1.8 cm and interior one 1.4 cm (Fig. 5/d).

Excepting the pit's depth (about 43 cm), we do not know any other details regarding the shape of the pit or filling. These elements should be explored only by opening a future archaeological excavation.

Feature3

The inventory deposited here may be regarded as spectacular: a wonderful curved dagger with its scabbard, a 'Thracian type' bit and two spearheads, all found in a good preservation state (Fig. 7/a).

The dagger, made of iron, has guard and ending collar. Its decorated blade has a triangular section and was fitted with a channel for blood flow. The entire complicated metallic ensemble of the handle and its attachment rivets survived. The rivets have a wide head, decorated with star-shaped incisions; linked between them by a metallic, twisted wire. The tip was found broken with a missing part of approximately 2 cm (Fig. 7/b). The dagger is extremely elaborate, the fabrication method of the handle being particularly exquisite. Dimensions: total length = 40.5 cm; blade length = 29.5 cm; blade maximal width = 2.6 cm; handle length = 10.8 cm; blade edge thickness = 0.6 cm; collar width = (guard) = 1.2 cm (ending) = 1.4 cm.

The iron scabbard, preserved almost complete, was decorated on the entrance lip with fine, parallel, winded and straight lines. Its total length is 26.5 cm (Fig. 7/d).

The two spearheads present different morphologies: one is long, with a missing part of the tip, weakened and broken as a result of its bending (total length 34 cm, maximal width 3.5 cm, fitting tube exterior diameter 2.2 cm) and was covered with a red pigment (**Fig. 7/f**); the second is more robust (45.3 cm long, with a fitting tube measuring 11.5 cm, maximal width of 5.4 cm), bended in the middle and covered extendedly with red pigment (Fig. 7/e).

The horse bit (Werner, var. 1) found in this feature has a slender figure, with rigid bridles, measuring 22 cm in length. The item width is 14 cm. Four iron rings were fitted on the mobile axis. The rigid bar that

entered under the horse's chin was fitted in the bridles' holes. These orifices, three on each side, apparently had the role to adjust or position the entire ensemble according to the size and shape of the animal's head. Quite interestingly, at this bit the bar wasn't fixed in symmetrical holes, but in one bridle at the first and the other bridle on the middle orifice. Another particularity is that the rings with which the bit was positioned on the animal's head were not identical, one was omega-shaped, the other closed (Werner, var. 3) – an aspect that suggests an improvisation or reparation (Fig. 5/c). As analogies we may select the bits from Sofronyevo and from another unknown site in Oltenia[14]. Bits fitted with disks were rather numerous in the Padea–Panagjurski Kolonii area.

Not lacked of importance is the fact that, together with these items, in the pit there were deposited a series of ceramic fragments belonging to 4/5 vessels worked by hand **(**Fig. 9)[15]. The vessels, special curved dagger and two spearheads highlight the distinct status of their owner or at least a higher economic status.

The most expressive item of the set, the curved dagger, attracts attention especially because of its handle, fabricated through a remarkable mix of art and craftsmanship (Fig. 10/a). The decoration, considered to be of a Celtic origin, represent, based on analogies with the Corcova dagger (Mehedinți County) the result of blending Scordisci and Thracian traditions[16] (Fig. 10/b). The relatively large distance between the two discoveries is filled in by other analogies that complicate even further the known relations between the two areas, respectively the Danube Gorge and the middle Mureș valley – the finds from Piatra Craivii (Alba County)[17]and Ajmana (Mala Vrbitsa, the Republic of Serbia)[18].

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[14] Werner 1988, Taf. 41/278; Taf. 42/280.

[15] The identification of fragments and the conservation of the entire lot were made by Dan Anghel, curator at the National Union Museum in Alba Iulia, to whom I thank for his availability and variety of undertaken analyses, so generously shared. I take the opportunity to thank as well to the illustrator, Adam Călin, from the sale institution, for his availability, promptitude and professionalism.

[16] Sîrbu *et alii* 1999, p. 220. Verifications of data bases revealed the existence of a third item, almost similar (Fig.10/c), looted and exhibited on a web page specialized in selling antiquities, from which those originated from south-eastern Europe occupy a significant amount (http://www.hermann-historica-archiv.de/auktion/ hhm61.pl?db= kat61_a.txt&f=ZAEHLER&c=55&t=temartic_A_D&co=1), on 05.06.2014. The morphological similarities between these three items, rather distinct for the given space and time, highlight the existence of a specialized forge or of an artisan (itinerant?).

[17] Rustoiu 2007, p. 83-97.

Feature 4

This deposit contained a curved dagger with scabbard, a horse bit and a spearhead. Apparently the spearhead was deposited first, followed by the folded spearhead, horse bit and then by the dagger placed into its scabbard (Fig. 11/a).

The dagger was the single unbent item of the set. It was fitted with a channel for blood flow, has a triangular section and was decorated. The handle rivets were preserved (Ø 3.5 mm; length = the first near guard = 2.1 cm; middle = 2.4 cm; last = 2.3 cm). These rivets have one head wider and decorated with crossed incisions. The dagger has as well collars, one for guard and the other at its end. Dimensions: total length = 34.5 cm; length blade = 22.5 cm; blade maximal width = 3.1cm; handle length = 12.3 cm; handle spine length = 2 cm; blade edge thickness = 0.5 cm; guard width = 2.2 cm; 2 (end) = 2.3 cm (Fig. 11/c).

The scabbard, particularized due to the fact that the dagger had been placed inside – fact that partially explains why the weapon had not been bent like the others items, was found preserved on a length of 14 cm **(**Fig. 11/d). Inside the scabbard one can still observe the abrasions made by the repeated inserting of the weapon.

The horse bit is massive, with rigid bridles, having a rhombic profile and 21.5 cm in length, 14 cm width. The mobile axis was made out of two different elements, one square in section (0.7 cm), the other round in section (Ø 0.5) - inconsistency suggesting a subsequent intervention. The rigid bar was coated/protected with an iron plate, rolled in the shape of a tube (Fig. 11/e). The two lateral rings, among which only one was found well preserved, are rather large, measuring over 8 cm in diameter. They have analogies in the later dated bits (Werner XVII)[19].

The spearhead is the largest of all found here, with its length measuring 52 cm, fitting tube of 13 cm, and a maximal width of 5.3 cm (Fig. 11/b).

Feature 5

The inventory of this deposit is the most modest among all, from here being collected only a curved dagger and a spearhead both made of iron. At first, the folded spearhead had been laid in the pit, in its folding being placed the dagger (Fig. 13/a).

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[18] Stalio 1986, p. 34.
[19] Werner 1988, Taf. 58/349.

The dagger, slightly bent in the middle has guard, ending collar and decorated blade. The tip was found broken with a fragment of approximately 2-3 cm missing. Its conservation state was good. A channel for blood flow was incised on the blade which is triangular in section. A very fine winding line, made up of small dots, may be observed on the blade, positioned lower than channel (Fig. 13/b, 14) Dimensions: total length = 32 cm; blade length = 20 cm; maximal width = 3.3 cm; handle length = 12.1 cm; edge thickness = 0.4 cm; equally wide collars = 1.6 cm.

The spearhead is massive, 50 cm long, the fitting tube measures 12 cm, maximal width 5.8 cm and 2.1 cm in diameter (Fig. 13/c).

Discussions

The ensemble of matters concerning similar associations of items, were partially analysed in the specialized literature[20], being approached in many contexts and from various perspectives, influenced by the moment of writing and by the nature of the discoveries. The specific conditions of entering the scientific network drastically narrowed the possibilities of interpreting the contexts, upon which there is no 100% certainty, excepting the site's geography and morphological characteristics of the items.

As we highlighted in the beginning, the deposits were found on a narrow saddle, along a mountain ridge route, connecting the Mureș valley with the valley of Ampoi, and from there, even further, with the gold–bearing area from Apuseni Mountains. Although there were expressed opinions against the Dacian exploitation of gold in the area between Zlatna, Săcărâmb, Baia de Arieș and Roșia Montană – it appears as improbable that the entire quantity of precious metals taken as war booty by the Romans was exclusively the result of alluvial exploitation. In this framework, the fortresses from Ardeu and Piatra Craivii must have had a well-established role in controlling major routes linking the Dacian capital with the gold resources in Apuseni. It appears therefore as rather reasonable, from a strategic point of view, that secondary routes with control points were operated, especially since the communication corridor through this small gorge was one of the shortest. Of course, the observation point could as well oversee its southern surroundings,

[20] Woźniak 1974, p.74-138; Rustoiu 2008, p. 153-163; Borangic 2009, p. 22-74.

respectively a significant part of the Mureș valley. If the weapons' owners were members of the local garrison remains difficult to discern, as a settlement, rich enough to be related with these warriors' status, hasn't yet been identified.

Both the field reconstruction and the subsequent analyses undertaken until now, revealed some very interesting aspects. Even if, in the beginning, it appeared that the items were deposited in funerary contexts, assertion made based on the similarity of finds, their state and arrangement, no traces of burnt wood or bones or other elements regularly associated with funerary rituals of the discussed military elites were identified. Neither the discoverer nor the specialists, during the reconstruction, noticed any traces of incineration. The weapons weren't burnt like it was documented for other similar contexts[21].

It seems that they belonged to ritual deposits – even if the warrior tradition related almost exclusively the weapons' destruction with the death of their last owner[22], or, perhaps to votive offerings – possibility quite difficult to document though.

The cremation of warriors accompanied by their weapons is considered to be an essential feature of the Padea–Panagjurski Kolonii group. The custom to bury the equipment, sometimes complete, with its owner, initially appeared in north-western Thrace, during the 3rd c. BC, from where it spread, on the occasion of the up-mentioned group migration, north of the Danube[23]. The Thracian contribution to this *condominium* – mainly composed out of an ethnic mixture of Scordisci, Triballi and Dacian warriors were some weapons and particular equipment: *sica* daggers and 'Thracian type' horse bits. D. Măndescu brought into discussion the Celtic tradition of this ritual, a circumstance explicable through the substantial contribution of Celtic people to the initial heterogeneous military brotherhood, although, weapons had been destroyed and buried in the North-Danube space since the 6th c. BC (Ferigile, Enisala)[24].

[21] Teleac, Blandiana, Tărtăria, Cugir, Călan, Hunedoara to take in consideration only the neighbouring finds, even if the practice of cremating the deceased with his weapons was generalized in the area of the discussed ethnic-military group. Not cremated weapons were found– like the items discovered in the area of Dubova, Mehedinți County (Spânu 2001-2003 (2004), p. 86).
[22] Măndescu 2012, p. 343-345.
[23] Domaradzki 1986, p. 227-228
[24] Măndescu 2012, p. 348.

Likewise, weapons or only certain types, could be part of structured sets required in rituals, either funerary or of a different nature. For example, curved daggers and spearheads remained those items regularly found in Padea–Panagjurski Kolonii graves, even long after its homogenization. The absence of swords from the deposits found alongside the Mureș valley appears to be an obvious reality, not at all accidental. Exceptions, from one or another of these situations are few: the tumulus grave from Călan[25], the flat grave from Hunedoara[26], the mounds from Cugir[27] and the swords from Piatra Craivii[28] or the hypothetical sword find at Tărtăria[29]. It is possible that swords were not linked to those specific rituals performed there, either funerary or of another nature, or that they were simply too expensive to make and abandon; their absence could also be explained by the warriors'social status. They were found in those cases related with important fortresses or special burials. It is therefore reasonable to consider this type of weapon deposits as revealing a hierarchy of warriors, organisation reflected as well in the distance between the grave (property) and the regional power centre.

Coming back to Bulbuc finds, even if there weren't identified any elements linkable to funerary practices, these cannot be completely ruled out. We could speak in this case of cenotaphs belonging to warriors who had died far from their original settlements, the bodies of whom couldn't had been recovered or transported on large distances. The role of these empty graves could be to complete a cycle, without which it would have been impossible for the warrior to reach its afterlife, in the eyes of the community. Equally tempting appears to be the possibility to consider that the cremation remains were deposited separately from the inventory. Both scenarios require further archaeological investigations, in order to clear things out.

The curved daggers from Bulbuc, which increase to 11 the number of such items found in the area of Alba County, appear to be masterfully

[25] Rustoiu *et alii*, 2001-2002 , p. 112, fig. 6 a-b.
[26] The existence of a fortification on the Sânpetru Hill remains an open possibility for the moment According to. Sîrbu *et alii* 2007, p. 146.
[27] Crişan 1980, 1980, p. 81-87.
[28] Popa 2008, p. 359.
[29] Ciugudean; Ciugudean, p. 77, fig. 1/2.

crafted weapons[30]. Their presence in such a large number in this area, situation to which we may add the nearby finds from Hunedoara County, should be related with the resources found along the middle Mureș valley, the direct ones, offered by the fertile meadows, but also with its no less significant role of major route between the centre from Sarmizegetusa and the salt and precious metal ores from the east and north. The fortresses from Căpâlna, Cugir, Piatra Craivii, Ardeu, the aristocratic graves from Călan, Hunedoara, Tărtăria, Blandiana, Teleac, the hoard from Sărăcsău and Lupu as the many monetary finds, complete the image of a well voiced, extremely prosperous power structure. It is thus no wonder that this society was ruled by a large number of warlords, directly interested in the valley'sresources and control. The absence of these deposits in the area of the capital cannot be anymore explained by state of research, but should be linked with the role of these warrior elites, especially toward the end of the Dacian Kingdom, when it could be possible to speak about a reorganisation of the Dacian aristocracy in a court one with administrative attributions and a countryside one, mainly military empowered.

The weapons from Bulbuc, together with other similar, growing in number, finds represent a proof of the military and economic power of these warlords, as the items were carefully crafted and visibly invested in, in matters of materials, technology and efforts. It appears as rather clear that these elites were backed up by a developed metallurgical tradition, which ensured a certain degree of complexity in the organisation and outfitting of their armies. This system required relatively unitary technologies and models, fact that speaks about a certain degree of standardization existent at the level of military/aristocratic ranks and about an extended series production. In this context, metal artisans, regarded as a distinct structure in the craftsmen's corporation, contributed decisively to the territorial projection of the aristocracy power and authority.

The superior quality of all these finds seems to be the result of employing advanced forging technologies. Preliminary analyses have shown the fact that the carbon percentage the used steel (0.8%C – heavy steel) is an indicator of applying the thermic treatment of lengthy

[30]In general, they belong, according to the previously proposed typology, to type II according to Borangic 2009, p. 29-33.

decarbonisation – procedure terminated before the weapon would become brittle[31].

Bending weapons was, for sure, a difficult procedure, as they are extremely tough even now, particularly considering that they were subjected to repeated baking (as it was the case for other weapons discovered on funerary pyres). Detailed decoration of daggers and scabbards was a general practice among these warriors, related to their intentions of customizing equipment and thus emphasize identity, revealing in the same time the magical and religious value with which weapons were invested.

The entire lot revealed, indirectly though, something else regarding the fabrication method. As it was noticed before, there is no possibility for the moment to relate the group of finds from Bulbuc with a neighbouring important centre or settlement, even if this must have been the reality of the epoch. All the components exhibit complex technological details, the fabrication of which required a variety of tools and distinctive professional abilities. There is no data to sustain that rural workshops, admitting there were some in the area, controlled by these warriors, could have mastered the necessary technology. The closest known workshops were those from Ardeu and Piatra Craivii, facilities found in any residential centre. If the workshop from Ardeu seems rather modest, the workshops from Piatra Craivii could have had the necessary human and technological capacities to produce such equipment, fact that would explain, at least partially, the relation between these warriors and the impressive residential centre.

Not of a lesser significance is that what seemed initially to be the result of a contamination with oxides found in the soil, proved to be the outcome of employing another refined technological process. The red colour preserved on some spearheads represents, in fact, an enamel or glaze, applied with the double purpose of protecting and decorating the metal. The exceptional preservation state of the majority of finds could be the consequence of these exact antique treatments, but also of the neutral

[31] The probes were analysed by ICP-AES (*Inductively coupled plasma atomic emission spectroscopy*), ICP-MS (*Inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry*) and TOC (*Total organic carbon*). Analyses were done by Monica Ursu, Claudiu Tănăseila (*Research institute for analytical instrumentation*, Cluj-Napoca), in collaboration with *National Museum of Union*, Alba Iulia, to whom I thank for the shared information. Complete and detailed analyses will become the subject of another future study.

PH of the local soil (having values close to 7). These elements will make the subject of further analyses and studies.

The spur and 'Thracian type' horse bits identify as horsemen at least three of the warriors. Altogether, the complicated mechanism of these bits, especially severe with the animal, and the sharp spurs, were meant to strictly control all the horse's movements. Only a very experienced rider might have simultaneously mastered his firmness and still fight – ability developable only by rigorous training by both rider and horse[32]. Unlike daggers and spearheads, these elements could have been made in less important workshops, fact that could explain their many inconsistencies and modifications.

The spearheads belong to the fighting spears' type. Their bulkiness made them fearful weapons, either for hunting, or for direct combat. Their profiled, tall median rib and the leaf shape represent common features for all the finds. Fitting tubes are long and have orifices for the anchorage nail. A constant of the North-Danube elites' deposits of weapons (found though also south of the river), the spears from Bulbuc appear by their size as some of the largest offensive weapons of their kind.

The date of the discussed features, if regarded from the point of view of horse bits finds remains problematic, due to their extended use interval. W. Werner proposed a period between the 3rd -1stcs. BC[33], while A. Rustoiu shortened the time for the territory of nowadays Romania to the middle 2nd – end of the 1st cs. BC, based on the *situla* from Cugir and horse bit from Șeușa[34]. Considering the association of these horse bits, in close contexts, with *fibulae* having large number of spirals (type Gura Padinei, Jarak or with nodes) and by establishing analogies with some items from Italy, D. Spânu acknowledged a similar chronology, beginning it, though, from the end of the 2nd c. BC[35]. The find of a horse bit (F. 4) with elements that may be dated later (Werner XVII) and proofs for subsequent reparations allow the assumption that these assemblages were used along all the 1st c. BC.

Neither the *sica* type daggers, existent in the North Danube area, offer precise dating elements, as they are usually related to a large

[32] Borangic; Barbu 2013, p. 39.
[33] Werner 1988, 99-101.
[34] Rustoiu 2002, p. 53.
[35] Spânu 2001-2003 (2004), p. 115.

chronological interval, comprised between the 2nd c. BC and the 1st c. AD. Spanning in time from the earliest examples of such weapons (Silivaș, Zimnicea, Padea or Slatina) to the end of the Roman-Dacian wars (one such dagger was represented in the suicide scene of king Decebal), the curved daggers pinpoint almost all the North Danube area, apart from Moldavia. The discovery conditions do not help either to a limitation of their chronology. However, the analogy with Corcova, better chronologically framed, establishes, at least, the lower chronological threshold, which cannot be earlier than the end of the 2nd c. BC. Anyhow, the geographical positioning and the association with horse bits supports their assignment towards the end of the interval, thus is to the 1st c. BC.

A last observation should note the spatial organisation of discussed deposits (Fig. 15). The fact that they were placed in alignments (three on one row and two on another) argues for the existence of a certain relation between those inventories since Antiquity. They were either contemporaneous, the deposits being made in the same time or after short time intervals, as the place of previous deposits were still visible in the field, or they bore a sort of exterior marker which allowed the subsequent pinpointing of the associated pit. Even in this case, the chronological span between the deposits couldn't be too large.

Conclusions

Even though the manner in which the martial items from Bulbuc have entered the scientific milieu was not the most appropriate, their discovery could represent a substantial contribution to the overall information available for these types of weapons, supporting thus a better representation of the military elite who fashioned them. Not of a lesser significance should be considered their input to the awareness regarding the role played by those warriors' groups who once ruled the Mureș valley, during the times of the Dacian Kingdom. The number of discoveries originating from this valley points to its major significance as backbone of the Dacian Kingdom's economy, through which important food resources, salt or precious metals were supplied to the centre located in Orăștiei Mountains. In addition to all these, the most noteworthy resource was embodied by the very human factor in itself, as the valley was the basis of exceptional warriors and first hand artisans.

Apart from their undeniable historical value, these discoveries advance a real issue of contemporary Romanian archaeology. Although

these vestiges get ultimately to be known to the scientific public, as the Bulbuc case was not singular, the main problem resides in the use of metal detectors by people without archaeological training, even if this activity occurs outside the archaeological protected areas[36].

English Translation by Magdalena Ștefan

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[36] A modification of the corresponding law is imperatively necessary, in order to regulate more carefully detection activities and raise the standards for documentation conditions of the identified deposits. This should allow a superior scientific understanding of discoveries made by metal detectors, without derogating any civilian liberties. The current case represents a precedent regarding relations established between specialists and those institutions responsible for the heritage management and protection on one side, and the metal detector users on the other. This, so called collaboration, was visible in the artefacts and context recovery and we expect the present study to influence other people involved in the metal detecting in a positive way.

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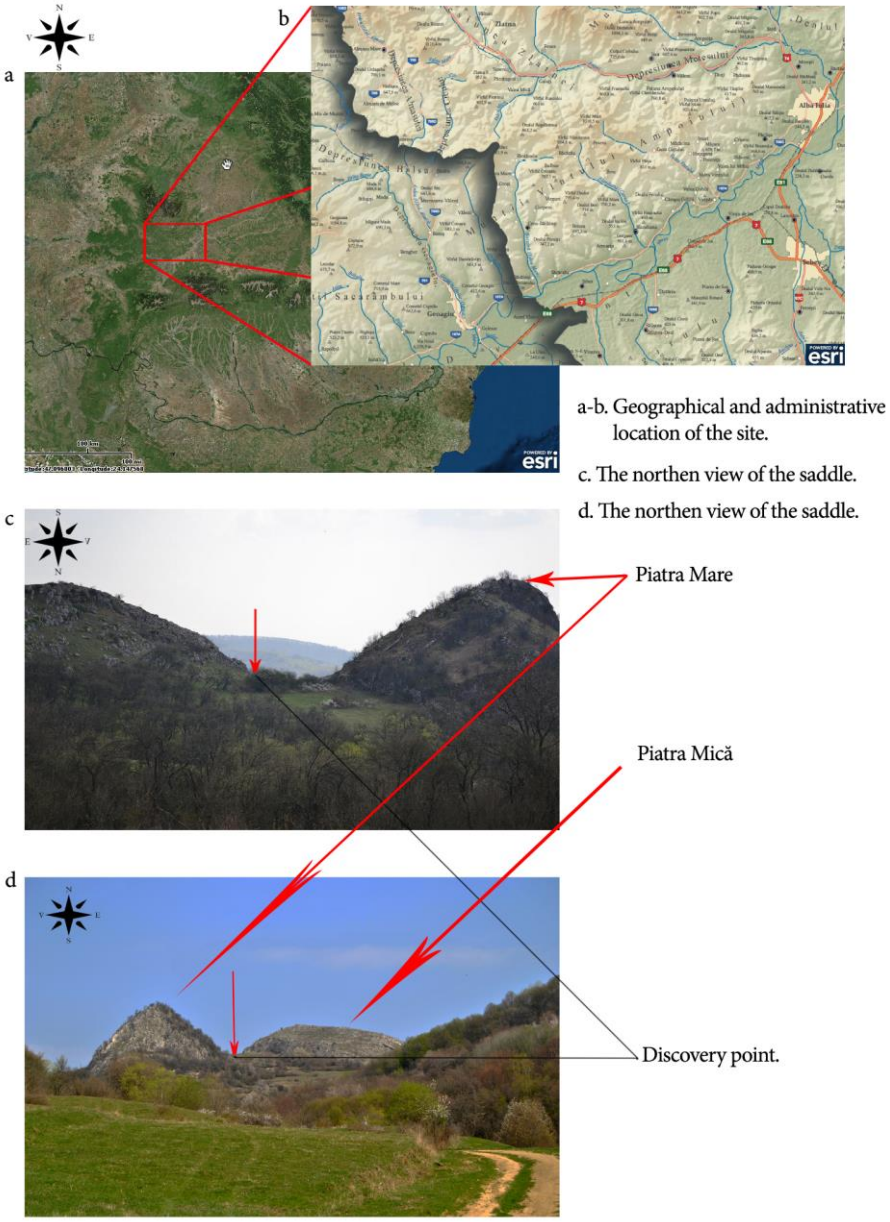
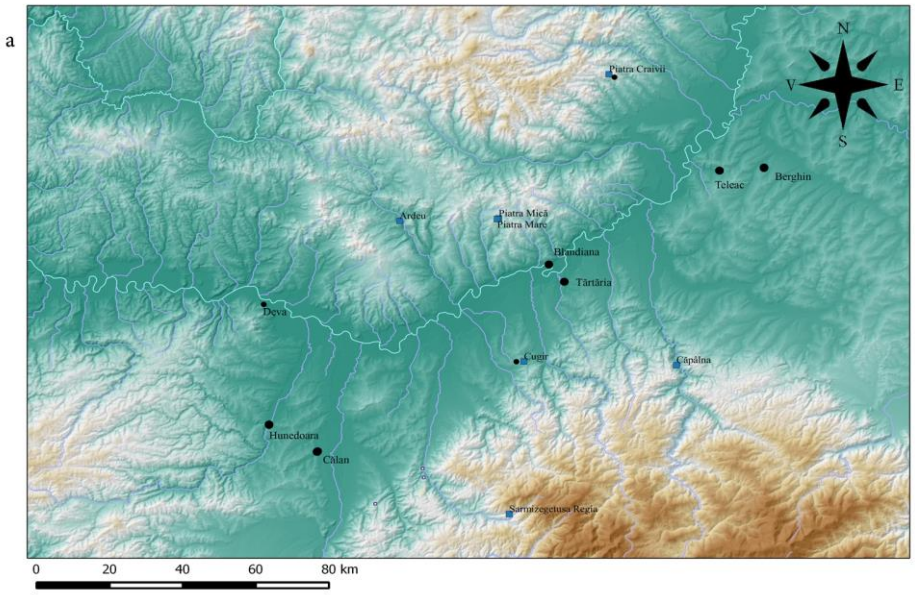


a-b. Geographical and administrative location of the site.

c. The northen view of the saddle.

d. The northen view of the saddle.

Fig. 1



a. Map featuring main fortifications identified on the middle Mureș valley and other discoveries belonging to Padea-Panagjurski Kolonii group.

b. First lot of discoveries.

c. Second lot of discoveries.

Fig. 2

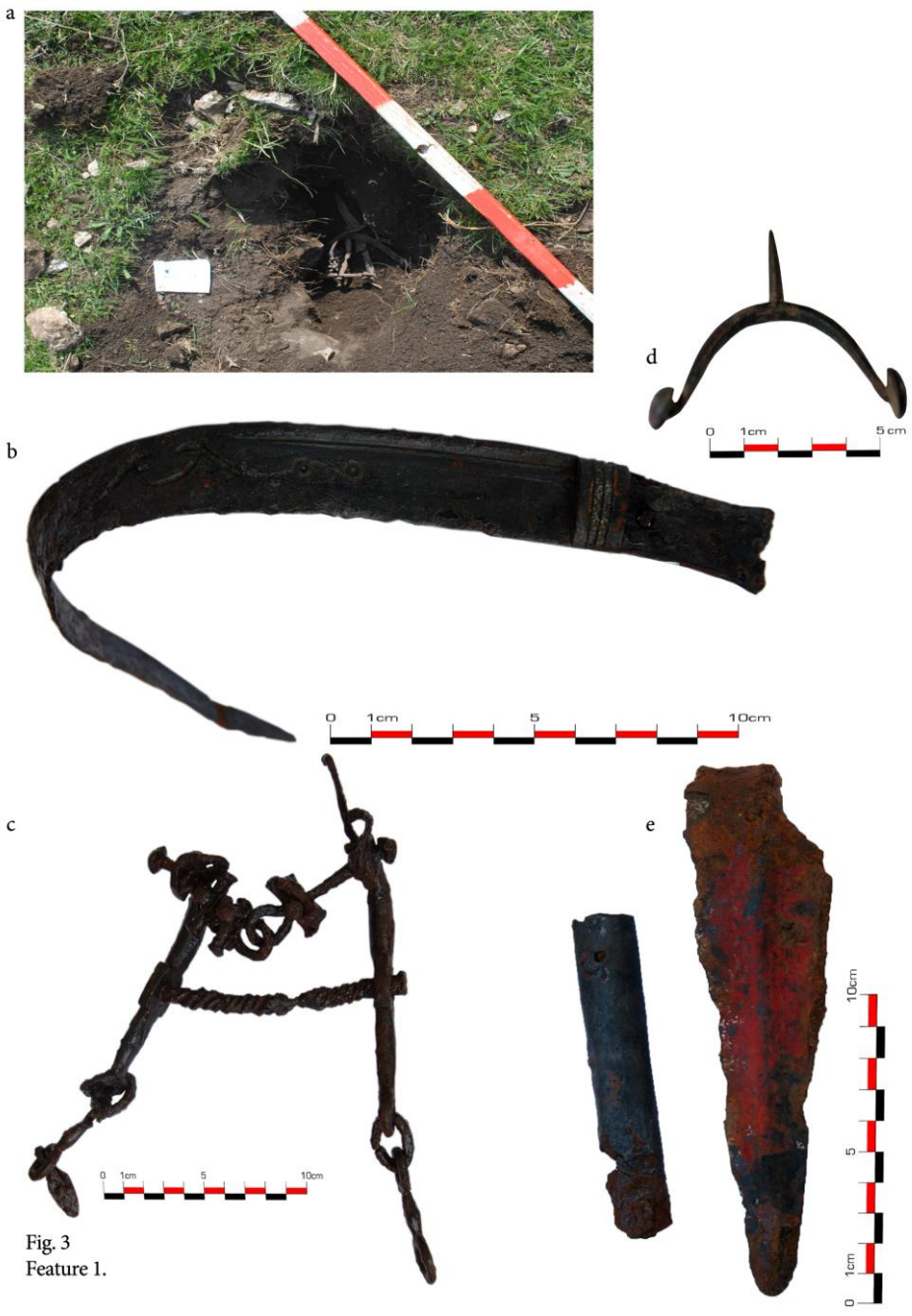


Fig. 3
Feature 1.

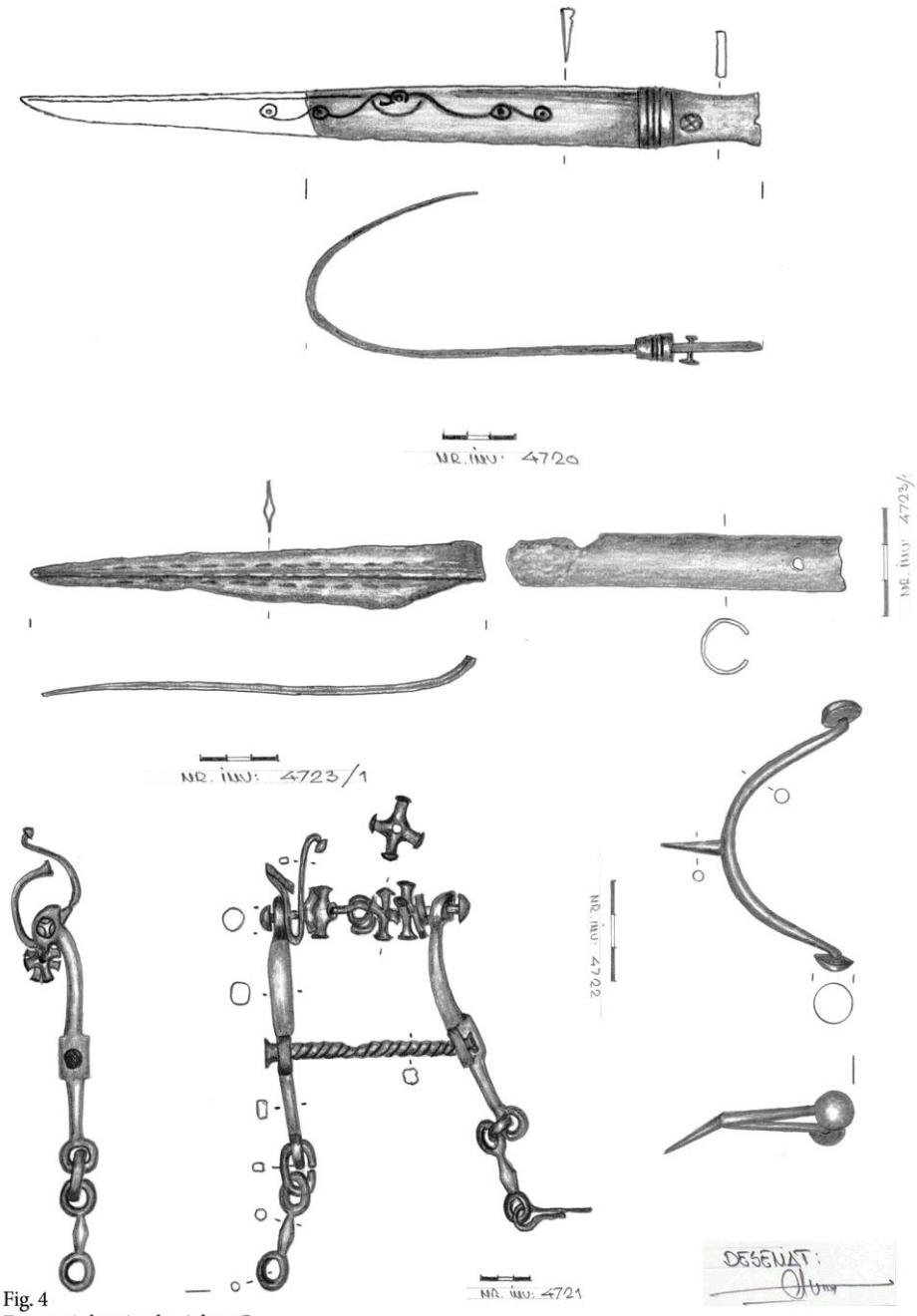


Fig. 4
Feature 1 drawing by Adam C.

Fig. 5
Feature 2

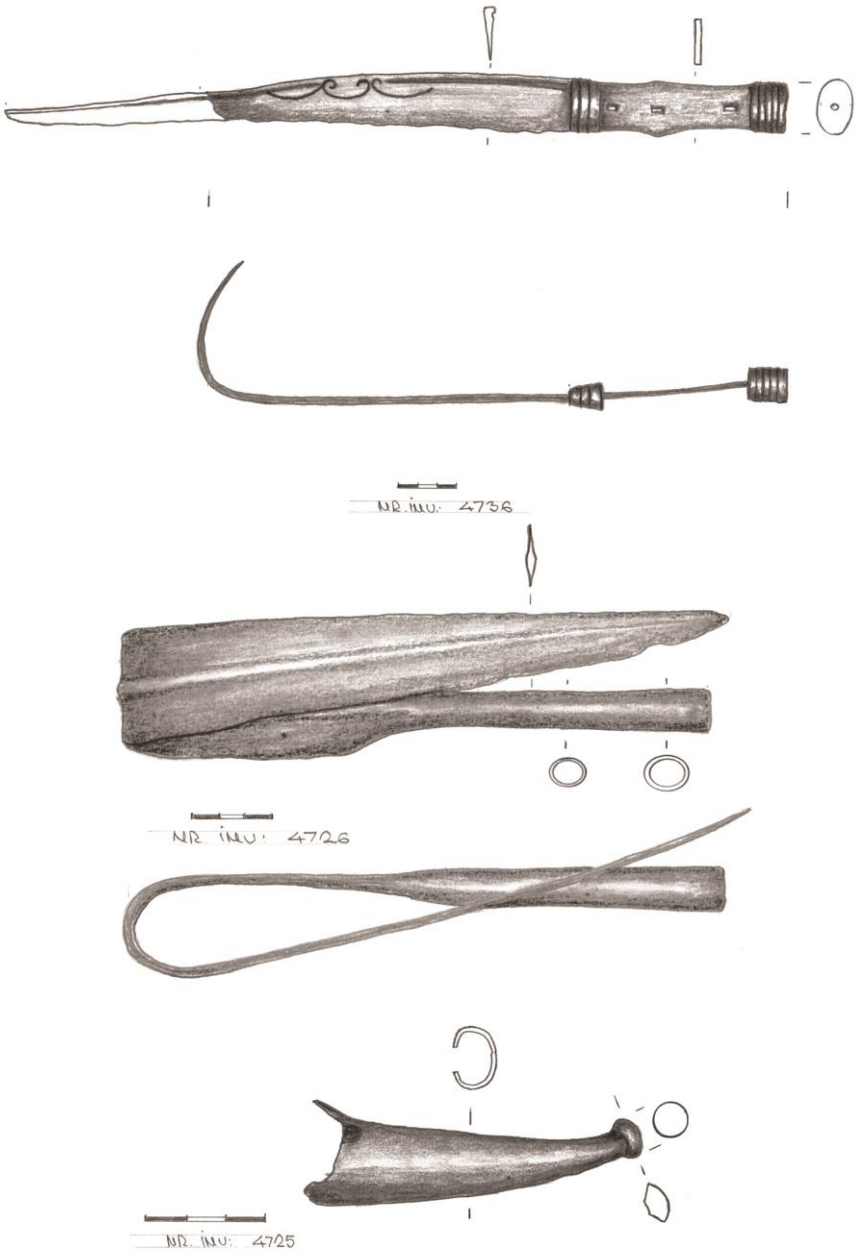


Fig. 6
Feature 2 drawing by Adam C.

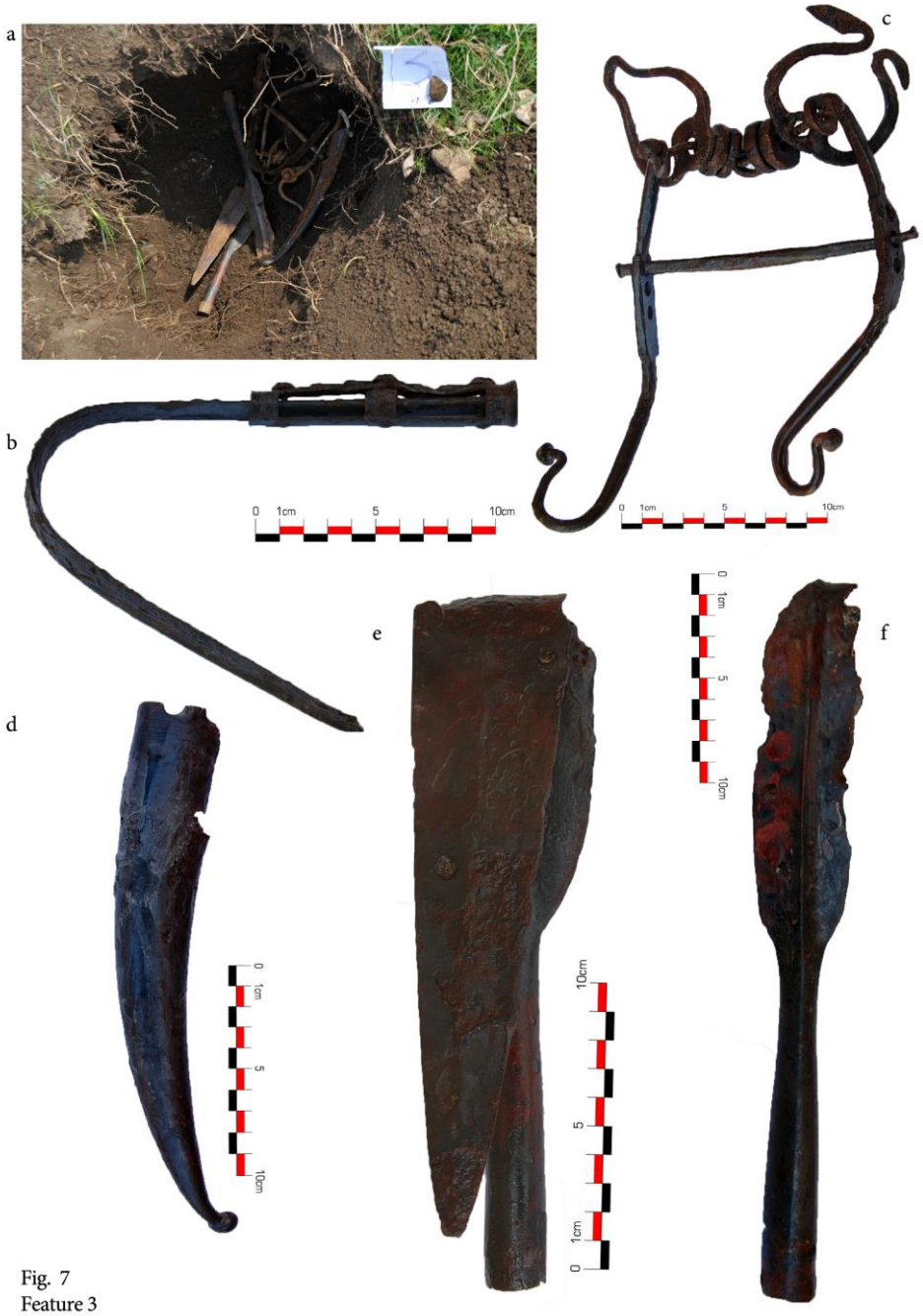


Fig. 7
Feature 3

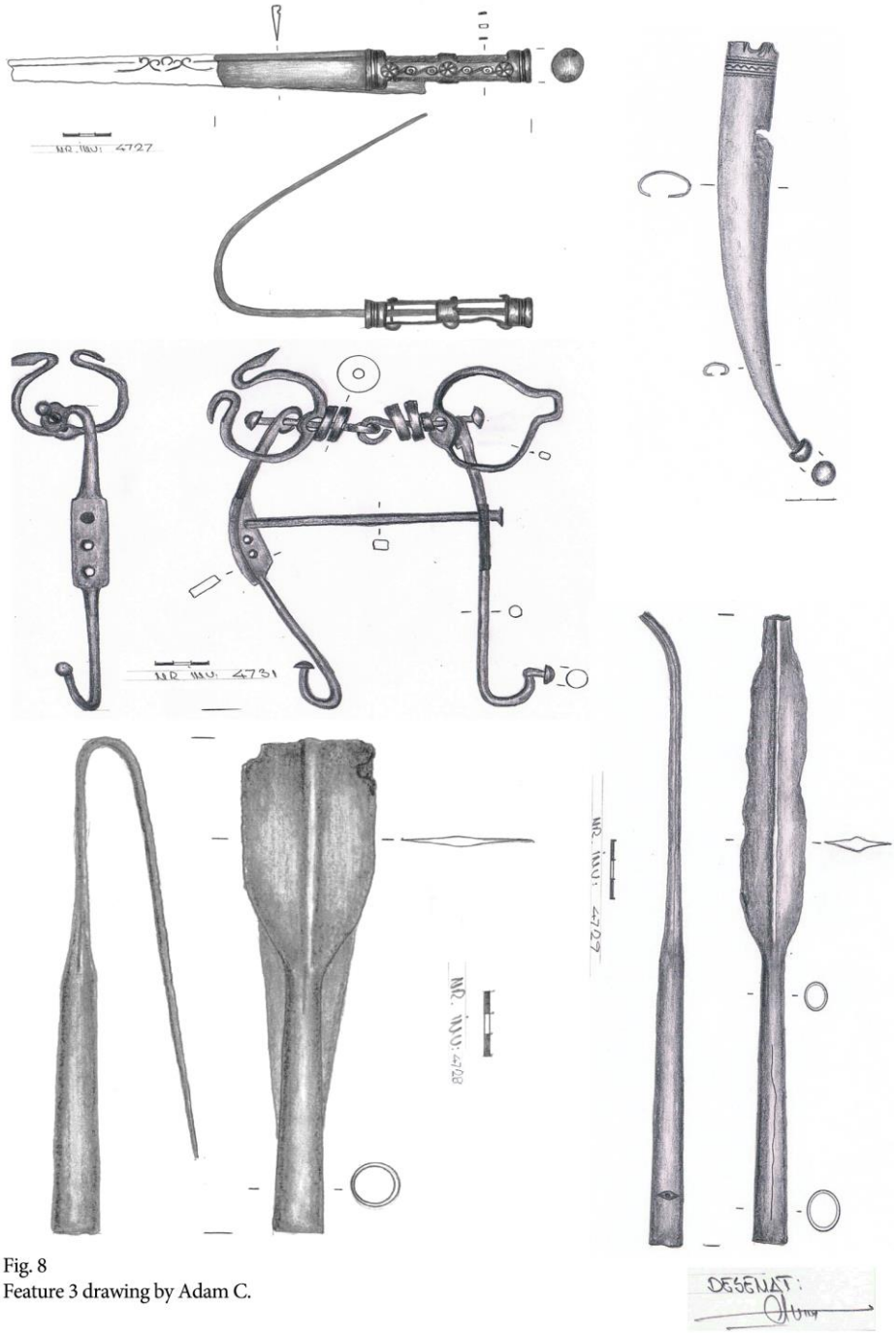


Fig. 8
Feature 3 drawing by Adam C.

Fig. 9
Pottery fragments found in Feature 3

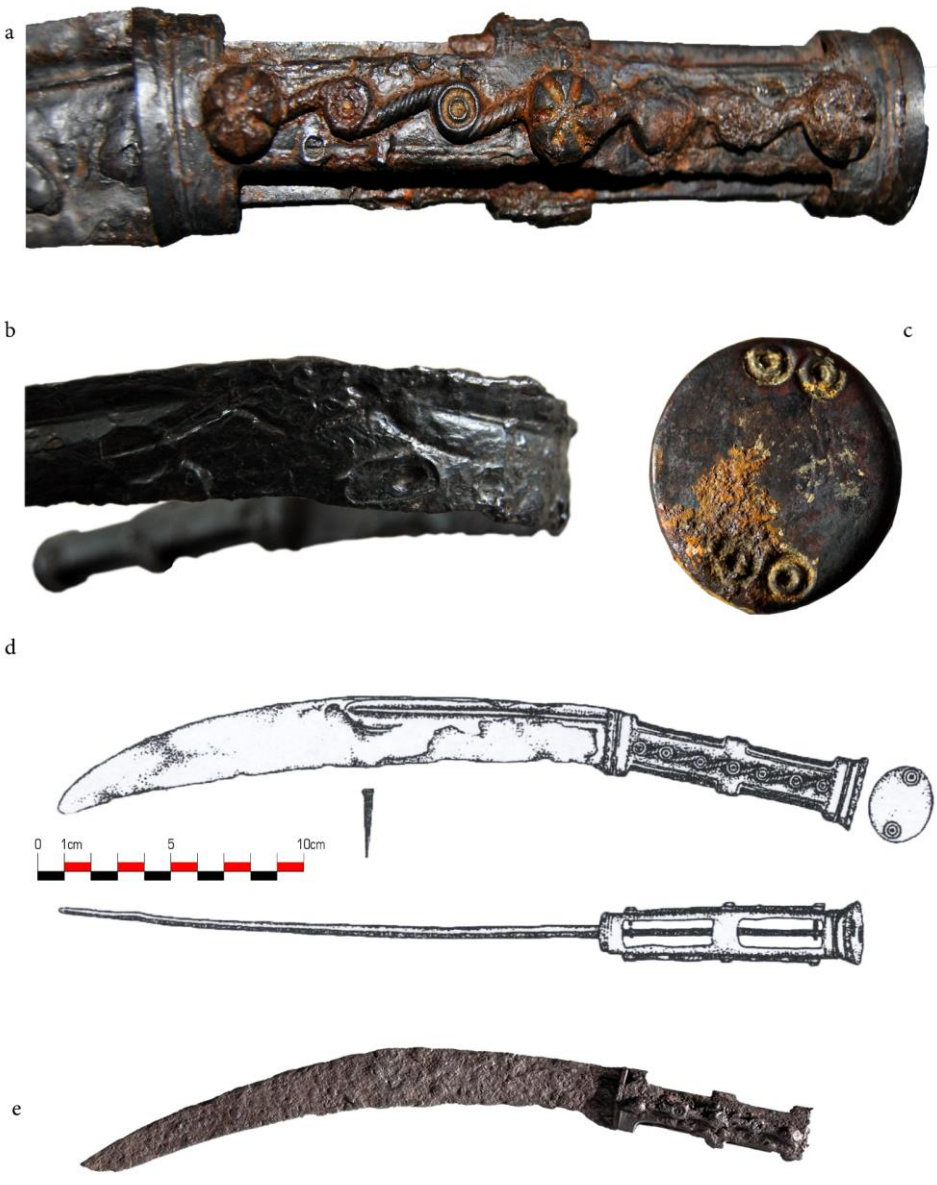


Fig. 10
Handle of curved dagger found in Feature 3 and its analogies
(d. - after Sîrbu *et alii* 1999, p. 226, fig. 2)

Fig. 11
Feature 4

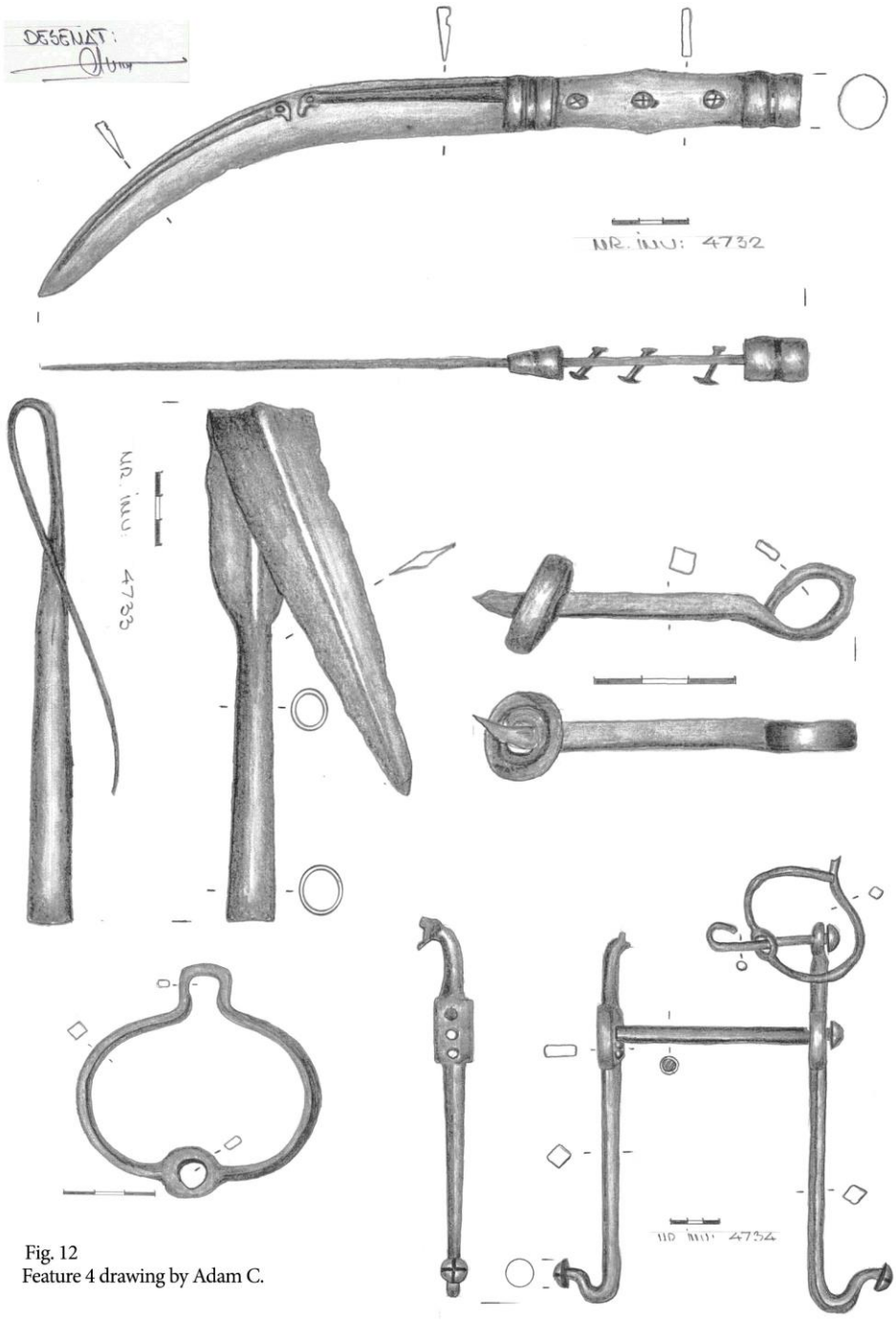


Fig. 12
Feature 4 drawing by Adam C.

Fig. 13
Feature 5

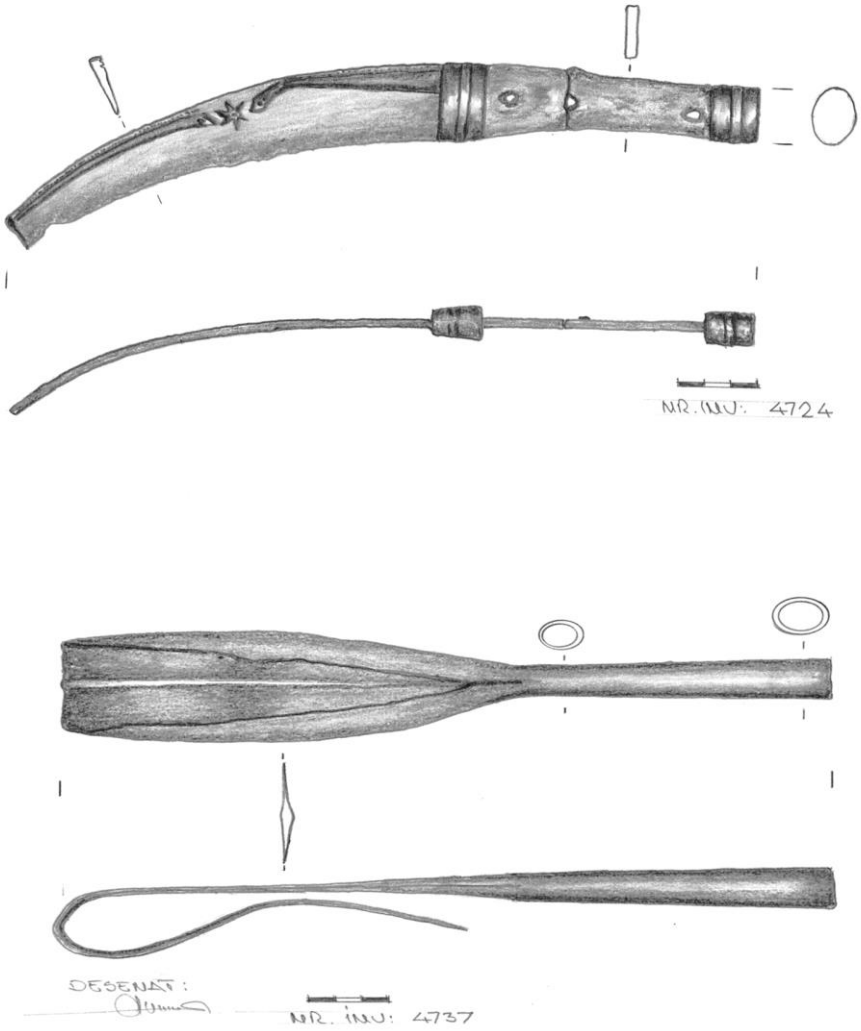


Fig. 14
Feature 5 drawing by Adam C.

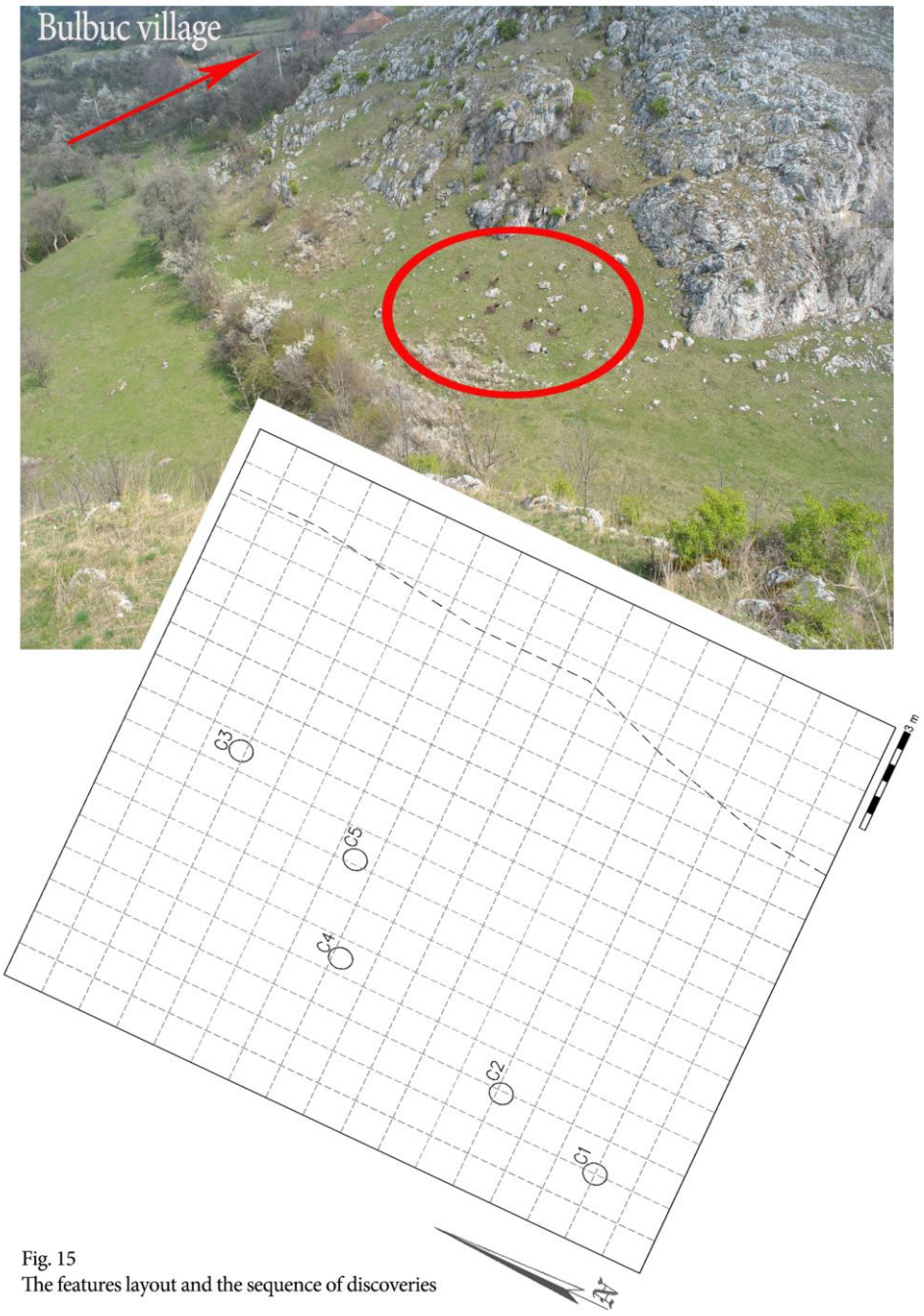


Fig. 15
The features layout and the sequence of discoveries