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# 'DEVIANT' BURIALS AS MARKERS OF PARTICULAR SOCIAL IDENTITIES[1]

## Some Examples from the 'Scythian' Cemetery at Sâncrai-Darvas (Transylvania)

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The article analyses three recently unearthed burials from the 'Scythian' cemetery at Sâncrai-Darvas in Transylvania that broke the common funerary norms of this chronological and cultural horizon. In the first case, a double re-inhumation illustrates the practice of prolonged funerals which is also attested in a few other cases from the same cemetery. The second grave, belonging to a female shaman, is another case of a post-burial intervention, this time determined by communal fear. The last grave belongs to another person whose social status and function determined the community to choose less common funerary rituals. In all of these cases, the funerary rituals were part of either the liminal or the post-liminal stage of the funerary ceremonies, being connected either with the physical and symbolic treatment of the corpse or with the integration of the deceased into the otherworld, concomitantly with the restoration of the social and spiritual equilibrium of the family or the community.

## INTRODUCTION

As a rite of passage, the funerary ceremony has three main stages, each with its own ritualized gestures and meanings. The first (pre-liminal) stage comprises rituals that are meant to help separate the deceased from the world of the living, while also defending the community against the threatening impact of death. The second (liminal) stage mainly deals with the physical and ontological transformation of the corpse. The third (post-liminal) stage comprises the rituals which allow the integration of the deceased into the otherworld and the restoration of the social equilibrium of the respective community (*Fowler 2004*, 44, 45; *van Gennep 1998*, 131–146). A significant part of the rituals practised during each of these three stages, particularly those concerning the last two, when the deceased is laid into the burial pit and then reaches the otherworld, while the mourners are gradually reintegrated into the local social body, could be reconstructed based on archaeological evidence, often with the support of other interdisciplinary analyses.

On the other hand, the burials were also public social events in which at least some, if not all, of the community usually participated. The performed rituals and the ways in which grave-goods were assembled were part of an entire social strategy through which the mourners attempted to preserve the memory of the deceased while also perpetuating certain elements which defined their own real or desired social status and identity (*Wells 2007*, 472–474; *Williams 2003*, 10). That is why the funerary discoveries play such an important role in the identification of individual or collective identities from the past.

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From the funerary perspective, collective identities are characterized by a certain degree of ritual repetitiveness across an entire cemetery belonging to a single community. Therefore, when the common funerary pattern is broken by some unusual practices, the burials in question are interpreted as 'deviant'. The term generally designates unusual burials which do not conform to the ritual norms of a community and are often associated with marginal social groups, outcasts or people who suffered unusual deaths (Fig. 1). They could be criminals, women who died in childbirth, infants, disabled or sick individuals, and generally, people who were perceived as a threat to the community even after death (*Murphy 2008*). As a consequence, in the symbolic topography of a communal cemetery, which could mirror or not the real topography of the burial ground, their burials occupied a marginal position.

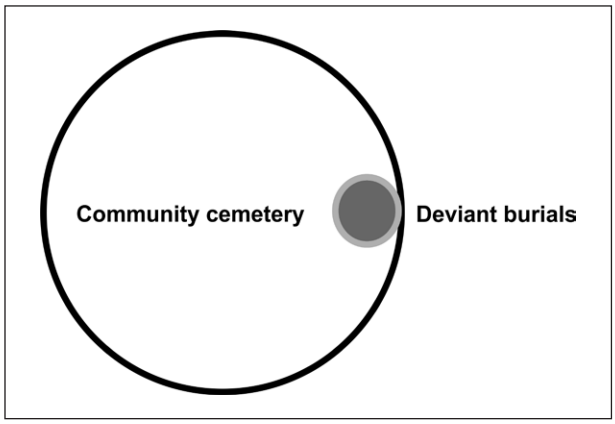


Fig. 1. Theoretical positioning of the 'deviant' burials in the symbolic topography of a cemetery (drawing A. Rustoiu).

Based on these observations, the main scope of this article is to analyse a few burials from the 'Scythian' cemetery at Sâncrai-Darvas (Alba County) in Transylvania,[2] whose particular ritual features are different from those commonly encountered in this cemetery, so they could be potentially interpreted as 'deviant'. The analysis will seek to understand the reasons for the different ritual treatment of these people and whether the chosen funerary practices are related to some particular social identities.

## THE 'SCYTHIAN' CEMETERY AT SÂNCRAI-DARVAS (ALBA COUNTY), IN TRANSYLVANIA (ROMANIA)

Rescue excavations conducted in 2016 on the new Sebeş-Turda motorway contributed to the identification of a new cemetery belonging to the 'Scythian' horizon in the vicinity of Sâncrai village, close to Aiud (Alba County). Further systematic excavations have been conducted since 2020 also outside the area affected by the motorway, in order to investigate the entire cemetery (Fig. 2). So far, 114 archaeological features have been unearthed (*Rustoiu 2019*, 54–70; *Rustoiu et al. 2017*; *2021*; *2022*).

[2] Chronologically, the last stage of the Early Iron Age and the Late Iron Age in Transylvania cover three distinct cultural horizons: 1. the 'Scythian' horizon (ca. 700–450/350 BC); 2. the 'Celtic' horizon (ca. 350–200/175 BC); 3. the 'Dacian' horizon (ca. 200/175 BC–106 AD). The term 'horizon' is preferred instead of the traditional archaeological periodization, because it is more clearly defining the gradual and often diffuse changes experienced by various communities from the perspective of cultural identities. At the same time, the term 'horizon' is more appropriate for the interpretation of certain archaeological contexts in which older and newer elements or those having different origins are intermingled (see *Rustoiu 2021*). The 'Scythian' horizon was marked by a cultural orientation towards the Northern Pontic region. This situation was largely determined by the arrival of some groups coming from the steppe and silvo-steppe of the Northern Pontic regions. They came through the passes of the Northern Carpathians in successive stages, bringing over new cultural and identity models. On the Great Hungarian Plain, archaeological discoveries are pointing to a mixture of locals and newcomers living together (*Chochorowski 1985*; *Kemenczei 2009*; *Párducz 1973*, etc.). This cultural mixture is mostly visible in the funerary rites and rituals. Contemporaneous settlements from the Great Hungarian Plain have a rural character, occupying a limited area, while the dwellings consist mainly of sunken huts having a rectangular or oval shape (*Scholtz 2010*). Some flat inhumation cemeteries have been discovered in Transylvania, many graves containing weaponry typical of the Northern Pontic region. Until recently, no settlements have been found in this region, their absence being connected to the transhumant way of life (*Vasiliev 1980*). However, one potentially belonging to this horizon was identified not far from the fortified settlement at Teleac (*Uhnér et al. 2018a*, 302; *2018b*, 380–383, fig. 13–17), while another was identified through field surveys in the surroundings of the cemetery at Sâncrai-Darvas (*Egri et al. 2023*, 167, 168). In general, the so-called 'Scythian age' included a diversity of cultural aspects reflecting the amalgamation of the local communities with the warlike groups which came from various parts of the Northern Pontic region starting with the first half of the 7th century BC. The evolution of these mixed groups, having connections mostly with the eastern regions and/or the Northern Balkans, was interrupted after the middle of the 4th century BC by the arrival from the west of the Celtic communities.

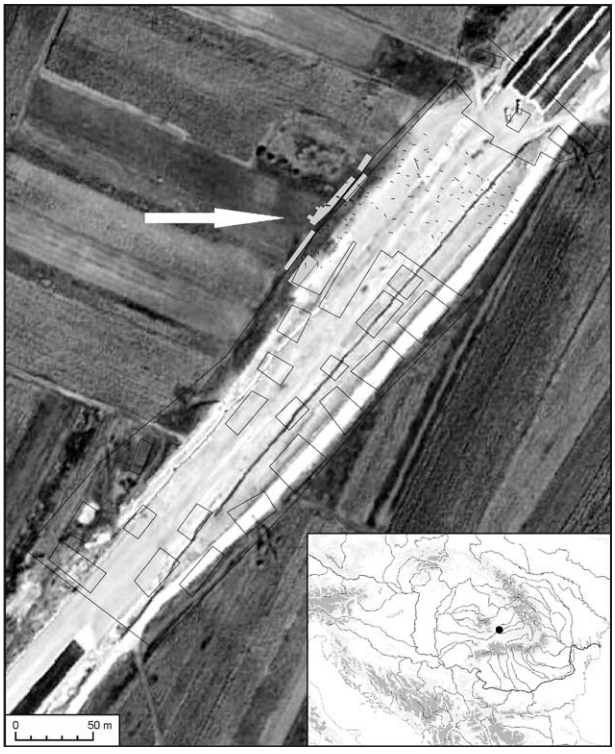


Fig. 2. Sâncrai-Darvas.Topographic plan of the 2016 rescue (black squares) and 2020 systematic archaeological excavations (white arrow pointing on grey areas; drawing A. Drăgan).

The majority of the unearthed graves are inhumations (Fig. 3: 1). The deceased were usually laid in the extended supine position, though some were also laid in a one-side flexed or crouched position. There are only a few cremation burials (Fig. 3: 3). Previously, these were usually ascribed to the indigenous population (*Vasiliev 1980*). One horse burial was also identified (Fig. 3: 2).

The deceased were usually buried with meat offerings (*El Susi 2021a*) frequently associated with iron knives and sets of ceramic vessels. Most of the graves contain jewellery and costume accessories made of gold, bronze or iron (Fig. 4: 1–4, 6, 7). The finds have analogies in other cemeteries from Transylvania dated to the 7$^{th}$ and 6$^{th}$ centuries, and at the beginning or in the first half of the 5$^{th}$ century BC.

Regarding the weaponry, most of the graves contain arrowheads (Fig. 4: 8). In a few cases, these were accompanied by quiver appliqués with zoomorphic decoration (Fig. 4: 5). Other graves contain spearheads, hammer-axes and daggers of the akinakes type (Fig. 4: 9). Regarding the harness fittings, one iron horse-bit was found in the pit containing the horse skeleton. This belongs to the type with

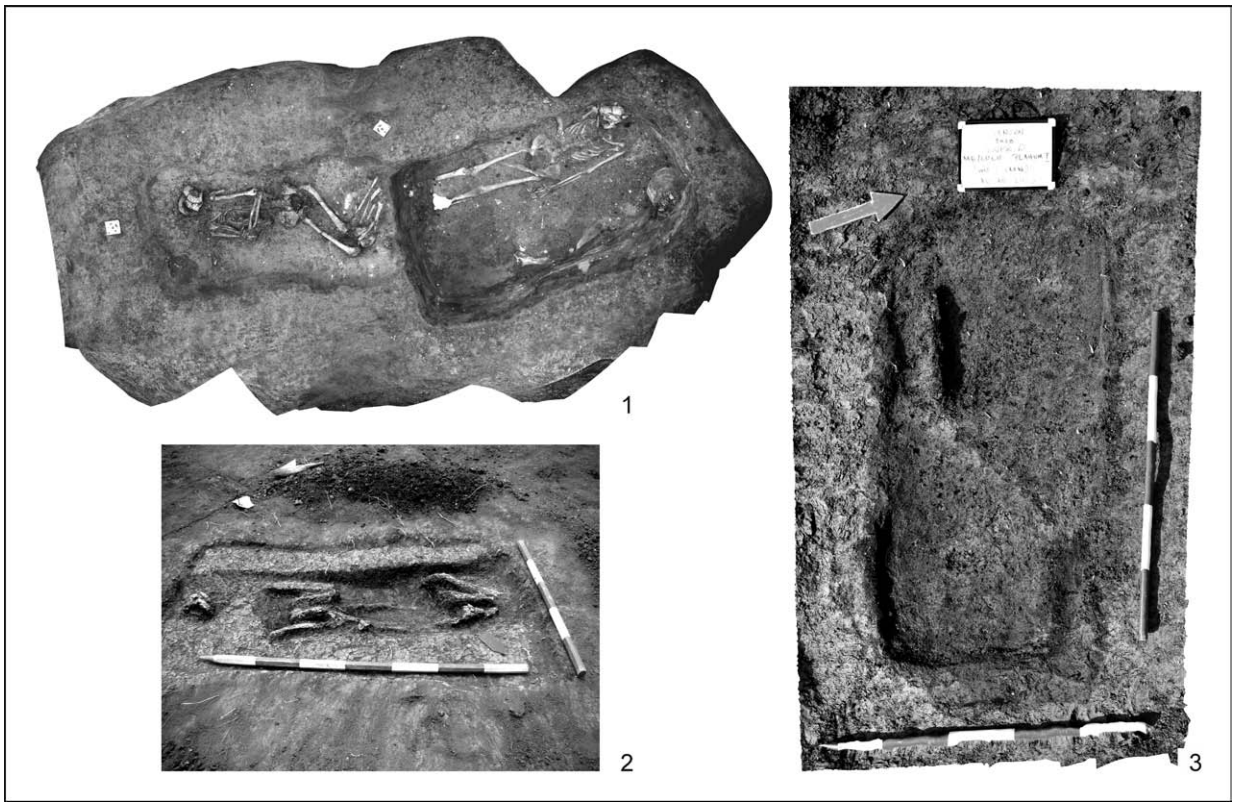


Fig. 3. Sâncrai-Darvas. 1 – photogrammetry of the inhumation graves Nos. 3/2020 and 4/2020 (photo A. Drăgan); 2 – horse burial (photo G. Balteș); 3 – cremation grave No. 6/2020 (photo M. Egri).

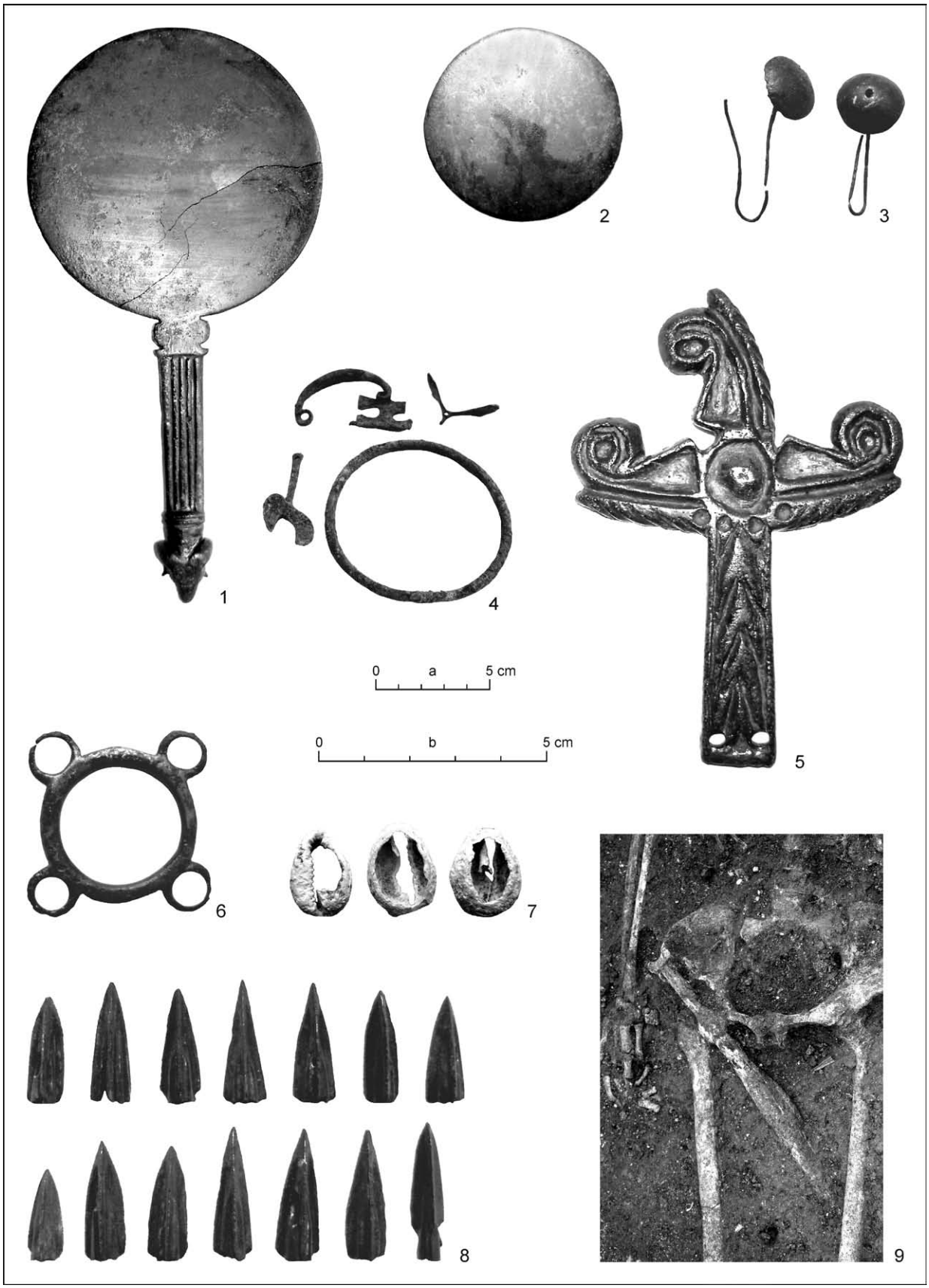


Fig. 4. Sâncrai-Darvas grave-goods. 1–6, 8 – bronze; 7 – shells; 9 – iron akinakes *in situ* (photos A. Rustoiu and M. Egri). Scale: a – 1–3; b – 5–8; without scale – 4, 9.

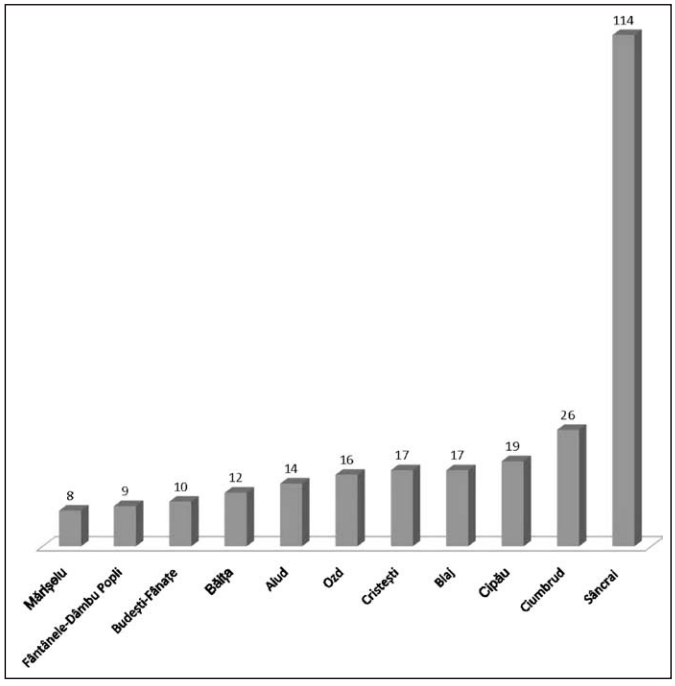


Fig. 5. Size of the 'Scythian' cemeteries in Transylvania based on the number of graves (graph A. Rustoiu).

S-shaped cheek pieces. Similar horse-bits are common in the Northern Pontic region and also in the Northern Balkans in the 5th–4th centuries BC (*Werner 1988*, type IV).

The 'Scythian' cemetery at Sâncrai-Darvas can be dated to the period between the 8th/7th and the 5th/4th centuries BC.[3] The funerary inventories have analogies both in the earlier cemeteries of this horizon and in the later ones, some even exceeding the chronological limits presumed until now in the specialist literature. It is also worth noting that all other 'Scythian' cemeteries from Transylvania usually consist of a small number of graves. However, the Sâncrai cemetery, where 114 features have been unearthed until now, is by far the largest in Transylvania and one of the larger ones in the entire Carpathian Basin (Fig. 5).

Some of the graves from the cemetery at Sâncrai-Darvas are not conforming to the usual ritual norms, and can be included in the category of the so-called 'deviant' burials.

For example, seven graves display traces of post-burial interventions in which the funerary pit was reopened and the skeleton was manipulated, the bones being displaced or grouped in a non-anatomical position. These traces indicate an intentional, targeted intervention of the community, or of some members, who wanted to change the way in which the deceased were perceived upon death. The graves were surely not robbed, because the funerary inventories were intact.[4] Some of the most relevant cases are graves Nos. 7/2020, 9/2020 and 91/2016.

**Grave No. 9/2020**

Grave No. 9/2020 was identified during the systematic archaeological excavations conducted in area E. The funerary pit has an almost rectangular shape with rounded corners, oriented W – E, and the dimensions of 2.20 × 1.20 m and a depth of 0.70 m (Fig. 6; 7).

On the bottom of the pit, three ceramic vessels were deposited in a row along the western edge – a large bitronconical vessel, for which a niche was dug into the wall of the pit, later filled with sandy soil, and two cups (the broken handle of one of these cups was found towards the middle of the pit). A human skull, with the detached mandible found nearby, and some smaller bones were also recovered from the western side. Some kaolin beads were discovered next to the skull.

The bottom of the pit was covered with a layer of greyish-yellow soil which was 0.22 m thick. Two groups of dismembered human and animal bones were found on top of this layer in the northern and, respectively, southern side of the pit, together with one ceramic cup which was recovered from the middle of the pit. During the anthropological analysis, a bracelet with unattached ends which was made of bronze wire was identified among the human bones.

[3] For other cemeteries discovered in the same area, at Aiud, Gâmbaș and Ciumbrud, and for their chronology see *Vulpe 1984*. For other early 'Scythian' discoveries (8th–7thcenturies BC) in Transylvania see also *Boroffka 1998*.

[4] The reopening of graves and the treatment of human remains in ways which are different from the initial burials are attested in all historical periods. The reasons for these interventions are very diverse: later accidental disturbances, robbery, post-mortem 'punishment' of the deceased carried out by enemies (a kind of *damnatio memoriae*), magical practices against malevolent spirits, reuse of graves (by the families or for secondary burials within older funerary complexes), commemorative rituals for the ancestors, etc. (see *Brent 2017*; *Dobos 2014*; *Fahlander 2010*; *Weiss-Krejci/Becker/Schwyzer 2022*, with several contributions to this topic; *Wendling 2020*).

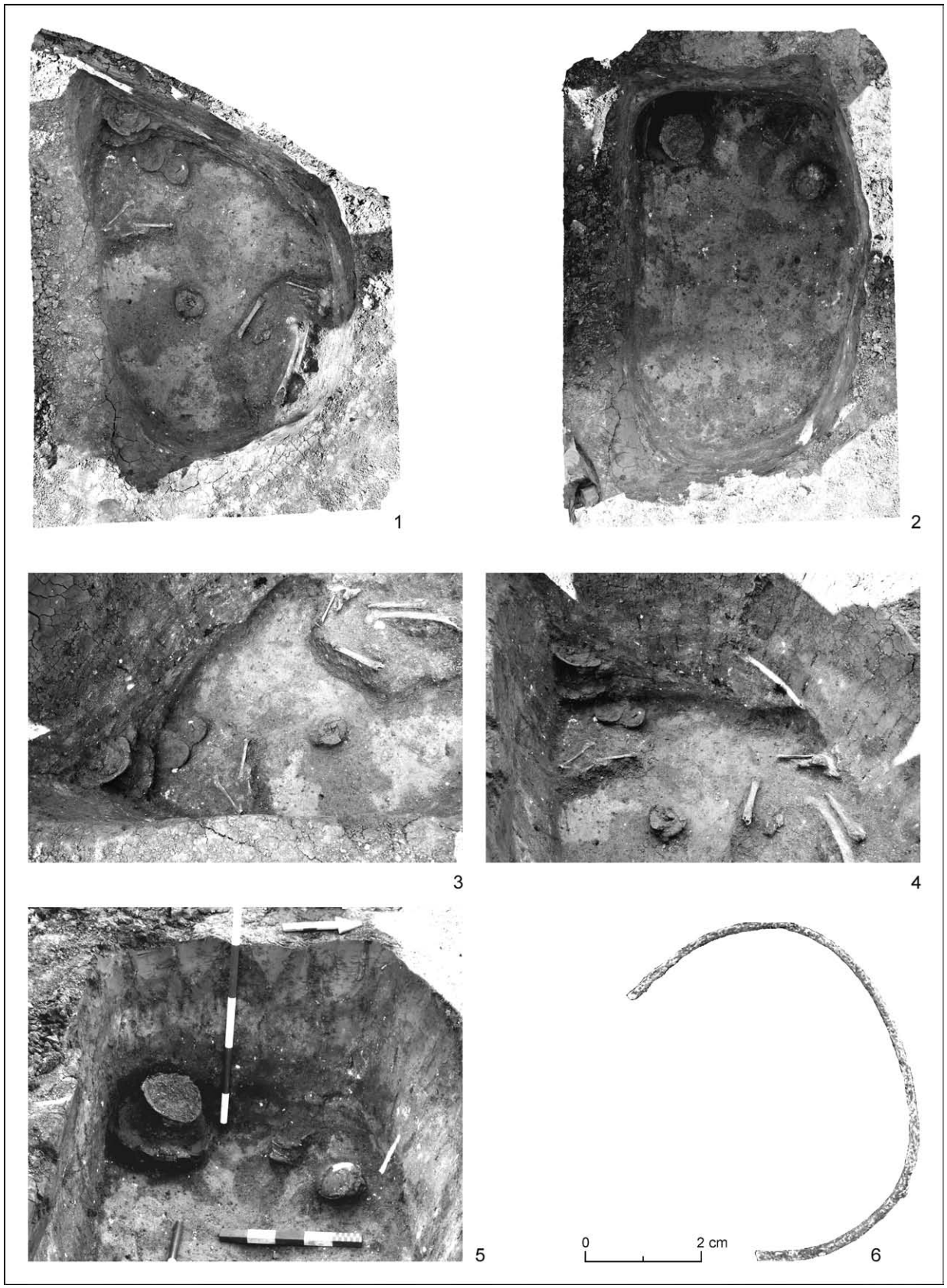


Fig. 6. Sâncrai-Darvas grave No. 9/2020. 1, 3, 4 – details of the upper part of the burial; 2, 5 – bottom of the funerary pit; 6 – bracelet discovered among the human bones in the southern part of the grave (1, 2 – photogrammetry A. Drăgan; 3–5 – photos M. Egri; 6 – photo Sz. S. Gál).

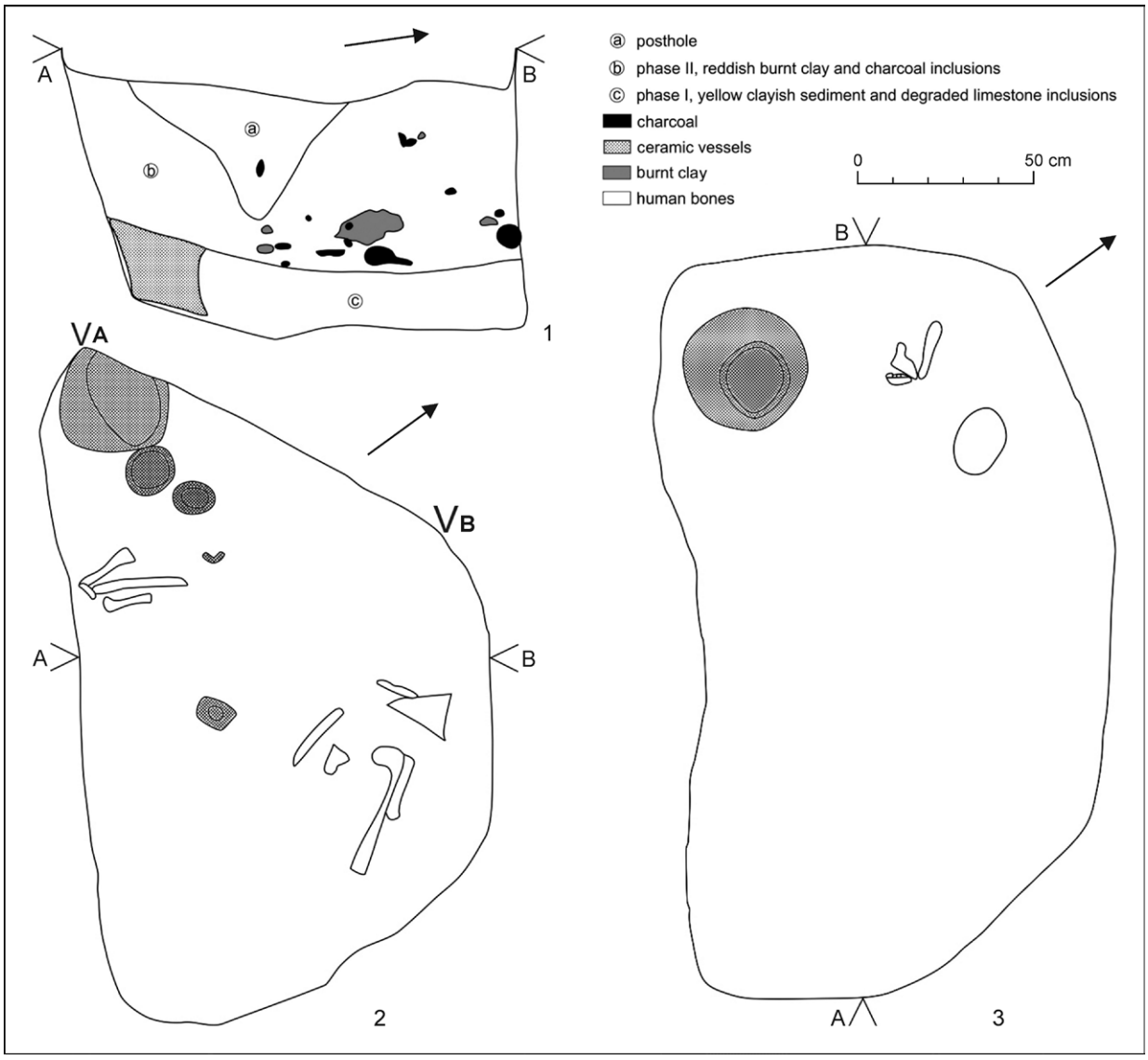


Fig. 7. Sâncrai-Darvas grave No. 9/2020. 1 – cross-section of the funerary pit; 2, 3 – plan of the grave and deposits of bone and vessels on the upper (2) and lower (3) part of the pit (drawings M. Musteață).

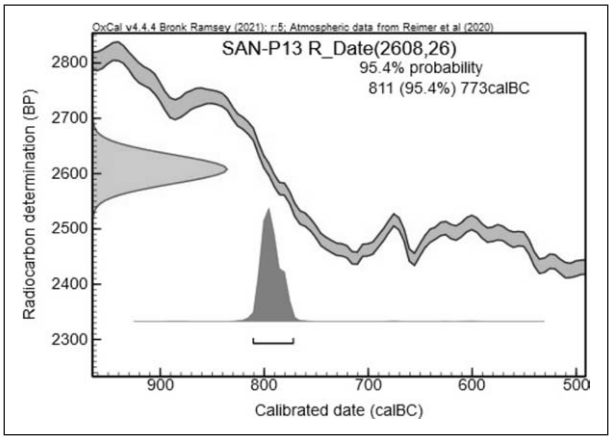


Fig. 8. Radiocarbon dating (BP) of the charcoal samples from grave No. 9/2020.

On top of this layer, the pit was filled with a 0.45 m thick layer of compact yellowish-black soil containing numerous fragments of burned clay and charcoal. Some of the upper part of the pit was then covered by alternating layers of burned soil and yellow clay.

On the western side, the intermediate profile cutting across the pit on the line of the grave goods revealed a posthole with a tapered lower end penetrating the grave fill of the second phase. The posthole had a top diameter of 0.55 m and a depth of 0.43 m.

The radiocarbon analysis of the charcoal samples recovered from the grave fill of the second phase indicates that the grave can be dated with a probability of 95.4% to 810–774 BC (Fig. 8; HEKAL Report I/2924 cf. *Molnár et al. 2013*).

The anthropological analysis concluded that the human bones belong to two individuals.[5] The skull found on the bottom of the pit belongs to a woman. The frontal, parietal, temporal and occipital bones, as well as fragments of the facial bones, could be identified (maxillary and mandible bones with strongly eroded teeth – dentition schema 2-1-2-3). The group of remains from the southern side above the greyish-yellow layer contained human long bones (left femur without the lower part) and fragments from the diaphysis of the upper limbs (radius, humerus and ulna), as well as animal bones (possibly ovicaprids).[6] The bronze bracelet mentioned above was found with this group of human bones.

The characteristics of the skull found on the bottom of the pit, as well as the postcranial bones from the group found on the southern side of the pit above the greyish-yellow layer, signal the presence of a woman, though the size of the left femur shows male characteristics. Except for this one bone, the rest of the human remains belonged to a woman. The presence of the kaolin beads next to the skull and the bronze bracelet next to the upper limbs seems to confirm this identification. There is insufficient data to determine the height of the person, but the teeth erosion and the bones of the arm indicate an elderly person over 60 years old.

The group of bones from the northern side of the pit above the greyish-yellow layer probably belonged to a male. The skull fragments come from the frontal (the metopic suture is visible) and parietal bones. The postcranial fragments include parts of the upper limbs (left humerus without epiphyses, with enthesopathy on the diaphysis), parts of the diaphysis of the left femur and the right tibia. The left femur found together with the group of bones from the southern part of the pit surely belongs to this individual. His age cannot be determined at this point.

It is important to note that none of the two human skeletons is complete. The contexts of discovery, including the stratigraphy of the funerary pit and the state of human remains, suggest that the grave was reopened sometime after the initial burial, the skeletons were manipulated in one way or another, and only some of the bones were then reburied. The time between their death and inhumation and their subsequent re-inhumation was long enough for the bodies to decompose.

The palynological analysis of the soil samples retrieved from the ceramic vessels found on the bottom of the pit is equally relevant (*Grindean et al. 2023*). The soil from the two cups found next to the large bitronconical vessel contained pollen of different species of herbs and pasture plants: meadow grass, flowering grass, fireweed, groundsel, alfalfa, yarrow and sorrel. Soil samples collected from the bottom of the pit, next to the human skull on the western side, revealed pollen of hazel and black alder. The analysis of the soil from the large bitronconical vessel only detected spores of mushrooms that grow on cow dung (dung fungi), and freshwater algae, most likely from the floodplain of the Mureș River which on that time was located a few hundred meters to the west. Finally, the cup found towards the middle of the pit, above the greyish-yellow layer, only contained spruce pollen. The presence of spruce is rather unusual, given that Sâncrai is located relatively far from the mountainous area where spruce normally grows. Some possible explanations are explored below.

The results of the palynological analysis are relevant for the landscape around the cemetery. The area was apparently dominated by pastures for grazing cattle. The presence of hazel pollen (as well as dog-rose and birch, detected in other graves) indicates that the area was quite recently deforested. Nearby, the marshy, humid environment of the Mureș River's floodplain was favourable for the growth of algae and black alder. The palynological samples also show that the majority of the identified plants bloom at the beginning of summer. This is also when the re-inhumation probably took place. The hazel pollen, which blooms already in February, probably reached the bottom of the pit with the soil used for the initial filling of the grave, unless it was introduced with the human remains.

The exclusive presence of dung fungi and algae spores in the large bitronconical vessel suggests that it may have contained water or another type of liquid contaminated by these spores. In the case of the cup from the middle of the pit, the identification of only spruce pollen and nothing else could be explained by a content made from young spruce cones, which could have been (wild) bee honey – although in this case it should have been associated with other types of pollen (*Rösch 1999*, 111) – or a liquid obtained from steeping or macerating young spruce cones. Ethnographic studies are attesting the use of this kind of traditional medicine in different European contexts, so its presence in grave can potentially be related

[5] The anthropological analysis was done by Szilárd Sándor Gál (Mureș County Museum, Târgu Mureș) and will be published in a separate study.

[6] A detailed archaeozoological analysis by Georgeta El Susi (Institute of Archaeology and Art History Cluj-Napoca) is in progress.

to the deceased male whose bones indicate that he suffered from painful joint disease (enthesopathy or arthritis),[7] though another ritual function cannot be excluded.

Based on the above data, the possible scenario of the re-inhumation can be outlined. Sometime after the initial burial, when the corpses already reached a sufficiently advanced decomposition phase,[8] the two deceased were exhumed. One possibility is that both originated from a double burial, although it is equally possible that each of them came from a separate grave. It is also possible that both of the deceased or at least one of them were exhumed from grave No. 9/2020, which was later reused for re-inhumation, as its irregular shape seems to suggest.

The presence of burned soil and charcoal fragments suggests that fire was used during the exhumation and/or re-inhumation, though the recovered bones show no traces of burning and the pit itself or the grave goods were also not burned. Likewise, no hearths or other fire installations, nor any traces of open fire were identified in the surroundings of this grave. The initial use of the funerary pit for a cremation burial can be excluded since no burned bones were found. One possible explanation could be the setting of a fire on top of the initial burial before it was opened, perhaps as a kind of purification, though the precise scope and meaning of this ritual will likely remain unknown. The soil containing burned fragments was later used to fill up the funerary pit.

The re-inhumation involved the deposition of three ceramic vessels on the western margin of the pit (the large bitronconical vessel probably contained water from the Mureș River, contaminated with algae and dung fungi; the cups were apparently empty), while the skull, maxillary and other bones of the female deceased were placed on the bottom of the pit,[9] near the vessels. Everything was then covered by a 22 cm thick layer of loose greyish-yellow soil. Subsequently, other parts of the female postcranial skeleton and some of the male skeleton were thrown inside the pit in two distinct groups. Because only parts of the skeletons were included and the bones were partially mixed, one of the femurs of the male deceased ended up with the remains of the woman, which were also mixed with some animal bones probably resulting from a meat offering. One ceramic cup containing spruce honey or a liquid obtained from processed young spruce cones was placed between the two groups of bones. The pit was then filled up with a compact soil mixed with fragments of burnt clay and charcoal. Finally, a wooden post was inserted into the ground in the western part of the pit, above the line of ceramic grave-goods and the female skull, to serve as a grave-marker. According to the palynological results, the re-inhumation ceremony most likely happened around the beginning of the summer.

### Grave No. 91/2016

Grave No. 91/2016 was identified during the initial rescue excavations in 2016 (Fig. 9; 10). The NW – SE oriented funerary pit has a rectangular shape measuring 1.72 × 0.95 m and a depth of 1.24 m. The scattered bones of a female skeleton were found on the bottom of the pit. The skull was placed in the middle of the southern side of the pit (Fig. 9: 1, 2; 10: 1). The skeleton of a dog laid on the right side in anatomic connection was found on top of the human bones (Fig. 9: 3; 10: 1). One perforated knucklebone of a sheep or goat (L = 30 mm; W = 15 mm; Th = 14 mm) was found among the dog bones. This was most likely worn as a pendant by the dog (Fig. 10: 2). The right femur of the deceased was leaning upright against one large bitronconical jar which was found on the eastern side of the pit. Two one-handled cups were found under the human remains, in the middle of the pit. One was placed on the bottom of the pit and the other was found overturned on the side (see *Rustoiu 2019*, 54–68).

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[7] A recent ethno-medical study about the traditional pharmacological use of conifers in Transylvania determined that spruce needles and cones were used to treat numerous diseases. Some of the therapeutic substances were obtained from young spruce cones boiled in milk or from macerated young spruce cones mixed with honey. These were used to treat diseases such as coughs, dyspnoea, pneumonia, sore throat, kidney diseases, backache, cardiac problems, thyroid glands, cystitis or rheumatism (see *Papp et al. 2022*).

[8] The decomposing/skeletonization period varies according to the environment in which the corpse is disposed off (open air, water, or underground), the temperature, humidity etc. For example, in Central and Southeastern Sweden, where the climate is colder and the decomposing of soft tissues is usually slower, the outdoor complete skeletonization occurs after two years (see *Alfsdotter/Petaros 2021*). However, based on the outdoor temperature to which the corpse is exposed, the decomposing process can last from a few weeks to a few years (*Brent 2017*, 46, with references).

[9] The selective depositing of the female skull on the bottom of the pit, separate from the rest of the skeleton, could have had a ritual meaning. The woman could have been the important figure in this re-inhumation. An argument for this idea is that she is the only one buried with personal objects consisting of body ornaments. For similar situations from the cemeteries at Dürrnberg bei Hallein (Austria), in which the skulls were moved or treated in a particular ritual way, see *Wendling 2020*, 164.

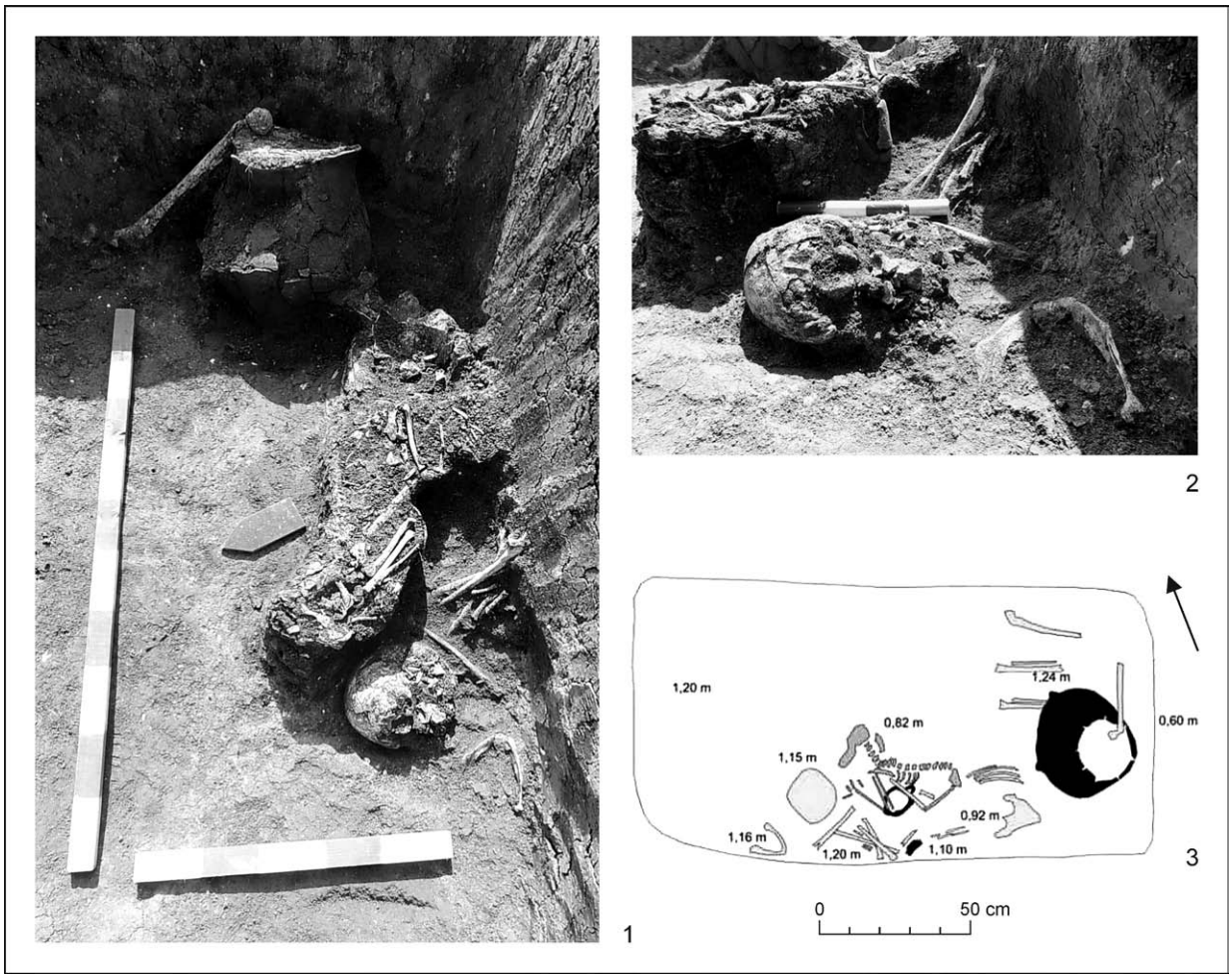


Fig. 9. Sâncrai-Darvas grave No. 91/2016 (after *Rustoiu 2019*).

Again, the archaeological context suggests that the grave was reopened and the human remains were manipulated before being reburied. Based on the aforementioned observations, the funerary ritual and the post-burial intervention can be reconstructed. Initially, the deceased was laid into the funerary pit in a position which cannot be properly identified. Sometime later, after the soft tissues of the corpse decomposed, maybe a few years later, the funerary pit was reopened and the skeleton was manipulated in an unknown manner, the bones being subsequently thrown back into the pit rather carelessly. Right before that, three ceramic vessels were placed into the pit – two one-handled cups and one large bitronconical jar.

Either during the reburial or sometime later, the corpse of a dog wearing a knucklebone pendant was placed on top of the human remains. According to the archaeozoological analysis, it was a small dog, unlike the more common dogs of the 'Scythian' horizon or of the Late Iron Age, who had an average height of 50–60 cm (*El Susi 2021b*).

The anthropological analysis of the human remains (*Gál/Vaida/Marinescu 2021*, 142, table 8; *Rustoiu 2019*, 60) is relevant in this case. The skeleton belonged to a woman with a height of 1.53 m, who was over 60 years old when she died. The biochemical analysis of the dental calculus indicates a diet rich in carbohydrates, which was based mainly on cereals and far less on meat and dairy, as it would have been expected for a member of a nomad-pastoralist population. Lastly, the detailed analysis of the skull has shown that the deceased suffered from epilepsy. This illness could explain, up to a point, the post-burial interventions.

The epilepsy was associated with shamanic trance among many past and present populations. It was often seen as a way of communicating with the spirits or other supernatural beings, as attested by written sources from Sumer to Classical Greece (*Collins 2008*, 33–41).

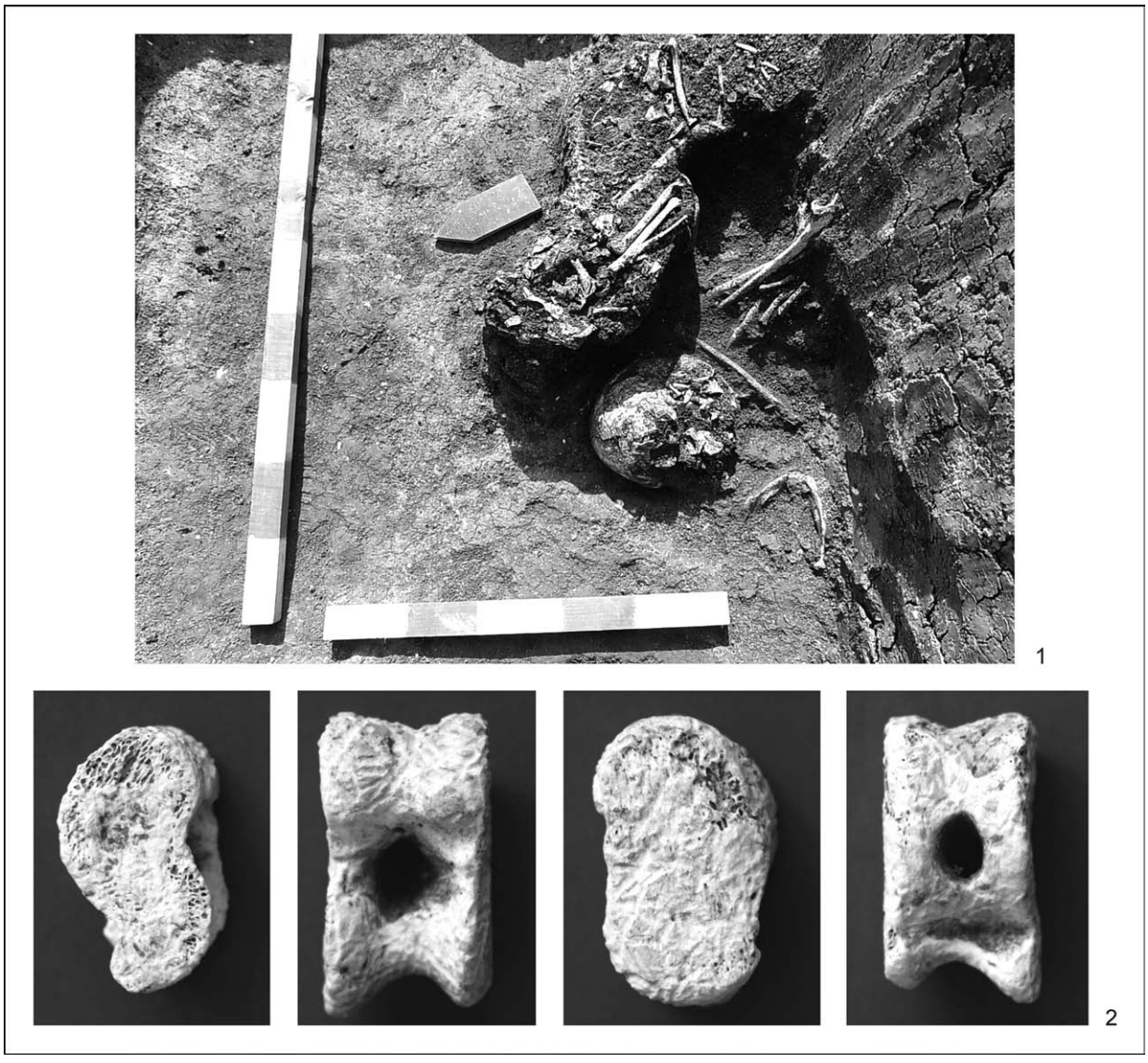


Fig. 10. Sâncrai-Darvas grave No. 91/2016. 1 – detail of the inhumed dog; 2 – sheep/goat knucklebone (after *Rustoiu 2019*).

The shaman enters a trance (self-induced, sometimes by ingesting psychotropic substances, or due to an illness[10]) and communicates with the supernatural beings in order to obtain information that can heal other members of the community or solve other life problems they may face. Despite their perceived ability to communicate with the otherworld, the epileptics often experienced difficulties in adapting to the societal norms due to widespread mistrust or medical ignorance. That is why the shamans whose trance is induced by epileptic seizures, as well as other people experiencing ecstatic episodes induced through other means, were feared by their communities even after death (*Kaplan 2006*, 5, 6; *Rustoiu 2019*, 61, 62).

The case of a young shaman from Central Yakutia is relevant. She died at the end of the 18th century and was buried in an isolated place. Fearing her return from death, the people from her community dug an unusually deep pit for her grave, while her hands were immobilised by sewing the cuffs of her garment and the body was tied up with a cord (*Crubézy 2007*; *Crubézy et al. 2017*).

[10] Similarly to Sâncrai, anthropological analysis offered relevant data in other situations of the same kind. For example, the recent re-examination of a skeleton from a Mesolithic grave discovered in the interwar period at Bad Dürrenberg has shown that it belonged to a female shaman: *'... this burial indeed has to be interpreted as a shaman's burial on the basis of the anatomical variations that can be observed in the cranio-vertebral junction of the adult skeleton. The consequent neurological distortions caused the experience of variations of altered states of consciousness in the woman, which were interpreted in terms of shamanistic abilities and ultimately led to the extraordinary social significance of her life and death*' (*Porr/Alt 2006*, 404, 405).

Another similar situation was encountered far away, in Central America, in the Maya Mountains from Southern Belize. The grave of a shaman was discovered in a small cave up in the mountains, away from any prehistoric settlement. His occupation while alive was indicated by the unusual burial (in a cave, far from the world of the living), as well as by the grave-goods which were symbolically connected with the otherworld. Again, fearing his return from death, the people performing the funerals decapitated the corpse and bricked up the entrance to the grave (*Prufer/Dunham 2009*).

Lastly, a post-burial intervention observed in a Late Iron Age grave from Dürrnberg consisted of an unusual rearrangement of the human bones after the decomposing of the corpse. *'These manipulations together with the innominate bones which had been placed on top of the chest, and a wooden beam put across the remains may represent magic action against an undead revenant'* (*Wendling 2020*, 165, fig. 8.6, with references).

Returning to the aforementioned grave from Sâncrai, it can be presumed that the post-burial intervention reflects the fears of the living people, the family or the community facing the perceived powers of the deceased. Unlike the other graves in which post-burial interventions have been observed, this grave illustrates a singular type of ritual that has not been documented elsewhere. The corpse of a dog was placed on top of the re-deposited human remains. This gesture has a powerful ritual and symbolic meaning. Symbolically, the dog was often linked to the otherworld. In the Greek mythology, as well as in that of other Indo-European populations, the dogs played an important role in three main moments of the humans' relation with death: the passage from life to death; the time spent by the soul in the otherworld; the return of the spirit into the world of the living (*De Grossi Mazzorin/Minniti 2006*, 62; *Menache 1997*, 27, 28).

Due to this perception, the dogs were invested with various practical and symbolic qualities (*De Grossi Mazzorin/Minniti 2006*, 62–64; *Gourevitch 1968*; *Luce 2008*; *Menache 1997*, 27 etc; see also *Ștefan 2021*). In the grave of the female shaman from Sâncrai, the psychopomp function of the dogs should be considered. The interring of the dog in the same grave sometime after the initial interring of the deceased woman was perhaps performed to guide her soul back to the otherworld, probably because she was haunting the living people.[11] The same ritual could have also had the scope to purify or exorcise. The magical

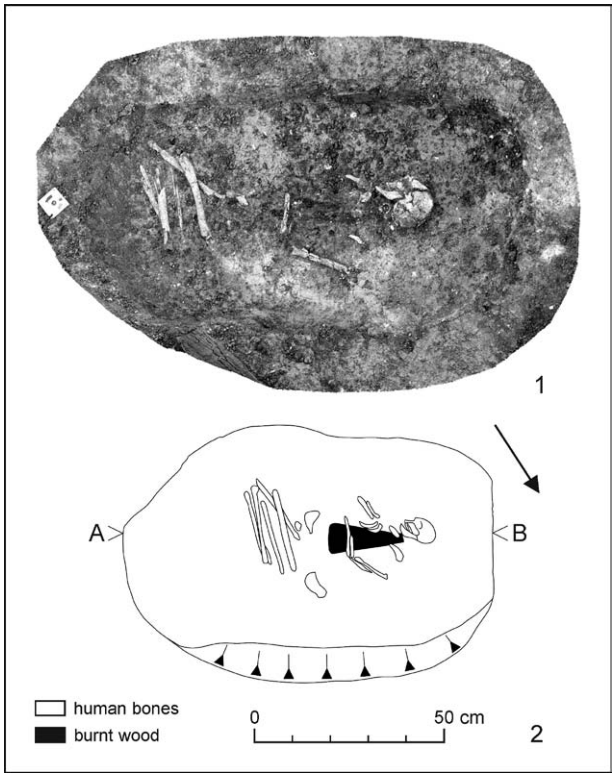


Fig. 11. Sâncrai-Darvas grave No. 7/2020. Female skeleton with tightly flexed legs and holding a carbonized object to the chest (1 – photogrammetry A. Drăgan; 2 – drawings M. Musteață).

[11] In a local cemetery from Crimea, belonging to the Roman period (2nd–4th centuries AD), it was noted that a series of rituals involving the inhumation of dogs were later practised in some robbed graves. The dogs were laid over the pits excavated by the robbers. It has been considered that the practice was meant to appease the spirits of the deceased and to protect the robbers against their actions. On the other hand, the dogs interred after reopening the graves could have played the role of guardians of the border between the world of the living and the otherworld. Similar rituals have also been observed in Kazakhstan during the Early Iron Age (see further in *Polit 2019*, 156–159). Still, the meaning of these discoveries could also be interpreted in the way suggested for grave No. 91/2016 discovered at Sâncrai. In Transylvania, dog bones are also attested in two other graves belonging to the 'Scythian' horizon. One example is the cremation grave No. 9 from the cemetery at Băița, in which dog (or wolf?) metacarpal bones were discovered alongside bird bones and ceramic vessels (*Vasiliev 1976*, 55). In this case, the dog remains could have been part of the meat offering. The second example is grave No. II from Cipău-Gară, which contained one human skeleton and another one belonging to a dog. Unfortunately, the latter was removed from the funerary pit by workers before an archaeologist was able to examine the discovery. Thus it is impossible to say whether the dog was interred alongside the deceased or the bones were part of the meat offering, like in the case of the burial at Băița. The published description is also not mentioning whether the dog skeleton was complete or not, since no anthropological or archaeozoological analyses were performed (*Vlasa 1961*).

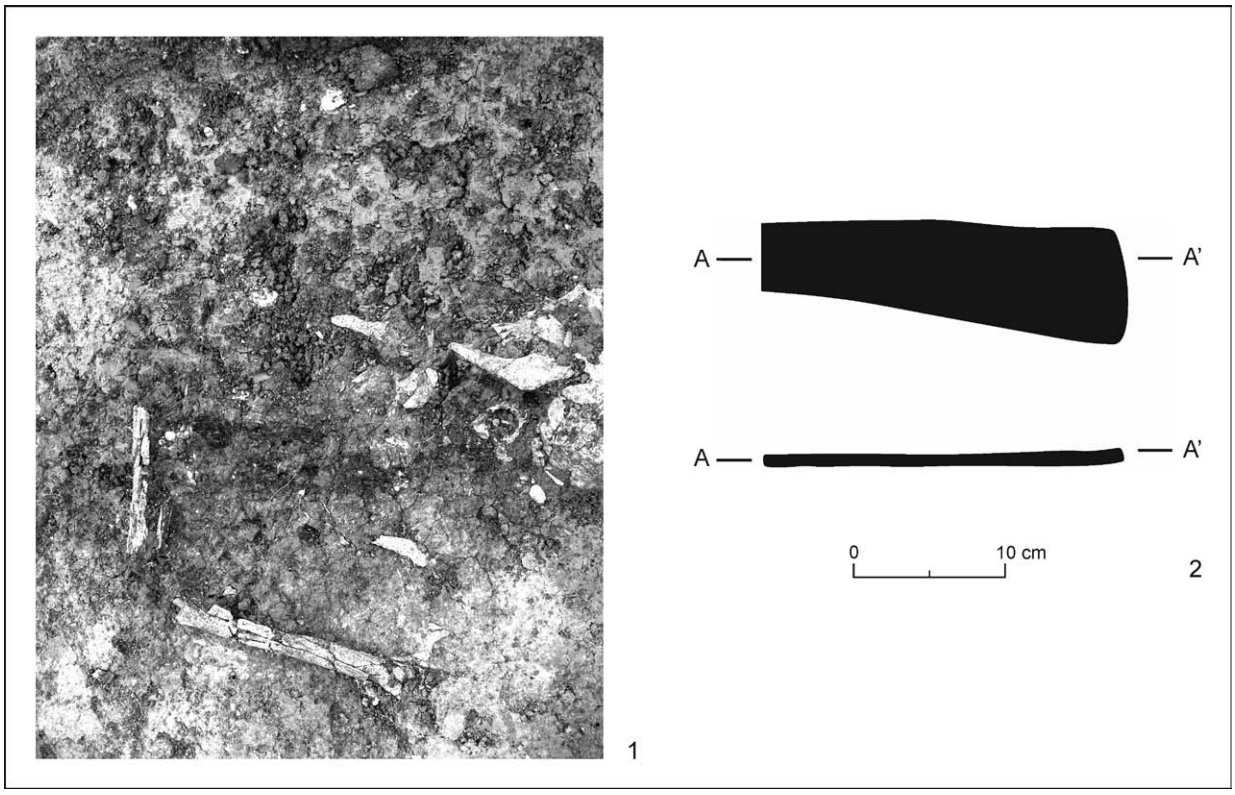


Fig. 12. Sâncrai-Darvas grave No. 7/2020. Details of the carbonized object (1 – photo M. Egri; 2 – drawing A. Rustoiu).

function of the dog from grave No. 91/2016 at Sâncrai-Darvas is also suggested by the sheep/goat knucklebone pendant which was probably hanged around its neck (see *Rustoiu 2019*, 65–68, with references).

**Grave No. 7/2020**

Another grave from the same cemetery that can be classified among the 'deviant' ones has been unearthed in the 2020 archaeological campaign (Fig. 11; 12). This is an inhumation involving the skeleton of a woman.[12] The deceased was apparently laid crouched on the right side, but the tightly flexed position of the leg bones seems to suggest that actually she might have been buried in a right side-sitting position with her legs to the left side and the skeleton subsequently fell during the decomposing process (Fig. 11). One wooden object, which was set on fire right before the grave was closed, has been discovered carbonized, tightly held to her chest with the arms (Fig. 12). The fire was strong enough to cremate most of the chest and upper spine bones of the skeleton. The grave contained no other grave goods.

The carbonized wooden object, whose very friable remains could not be recovered in one piece, has a slender trapezoidal shape with the height of 24 cm, the slightly curved lower side being 8 cm wide and the top side being 4.5 cm wide. Its thickness varies between 1 cm at the top and 1.8 cm at the base, which is slightly raised (Fig. 12: 2). Samples of carbonized wood were retrieved for radiocarbon and anthracological analyses, though the results are not yet available.

The most likely function of this object is difficult to ascertain due to its very poor preservation, with basically just an imprint of it being clearly visible upon excavation. The almost complete cremation of the chest and upper spine bones suggests that the object most likely consisted of many other pieces made of highly combustible organic materials which were not preserved, besides the carbonized trapezoidal piece. In this context, it is worth noting that a number of older or more recent discoveries are attesting the frequent presence of many wooden objects (vessels, weaponry, tools, toiletry, body or costume ornaments etc.) in several Scythian burials from Central Asia or the Northern Pontic region (e.g. *Bokovenko 2006*, 873, 874; *Daragan et al. 2022*; *Fialko 2017*, 34).

[12] The anthropological analysis was done by Szilárd Sándor Gál (Mureş County Museum, Târgu Mureş).

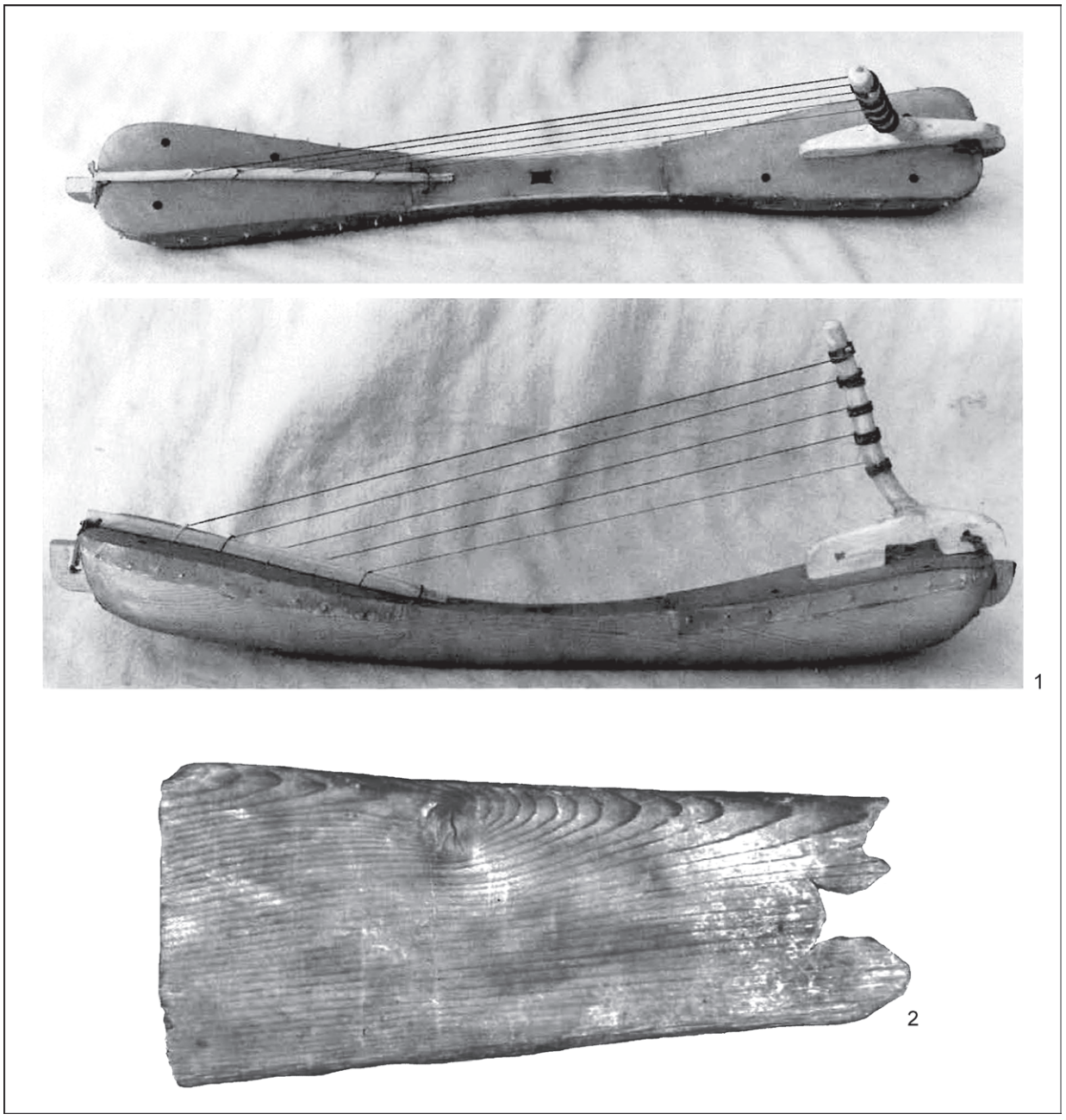


Fig. 13. Pazyryk. 1 – reconstructed harp; 2 – fragmentary wooden soundboard of the extant harp (after *Lawergren 1990*).

The slender trapezoidal shape seems to exclude its identification as a wooden tray or plate for food offerings, since these are always circular, oval or rectangular and often have thick, slightly raised rims (see *Bokovenko 2006*, fig. 12: 1–4). The same can be said about its potential identification as an element of a wooden box or chest (see the examples in *Daragan et al. 2022*, fig. 6; 7), which usually is rectangular. On the other hand, the shape may suggest its use as a strengthening piece of a dagger sheath, though the absence of the dagger, the width and mostly the upside down position in grave make this identification rather unlikely.

Based on the shape and the way in which the object was held by the deceased, the carbonized wooden plaque could potentially be associated with a particular type of soundboard of the so-called steppe harps of Central Asia.[13] A fragmentary wooden plaque that is relatively similar was discovered together with

[13] String instruments, harps or lyres, from the Eastern Hallstatt environment were inspired from similar instruments from the Mediterranean region and their form differed from the Asian harps (see *Lochner 2011*, 8–16; *Pomberger 2020*).

other wood and leather pieces of a harp in tumulus II at Pazyryk, being dated to the beginning of the 4th century BC (Fig. 13; *Lawergren 1990*, 114, pl. 59: 1). Together with a drum, the harp belonged to a tattooed man having Central Asian facial features. The man, who was buried alongside a woman, was considered to be a high-ranking individual or someone having important social and ritual functions in the community (*Fialko 2013*; *Lawergren 1990*; *Lisovoi/Alpatova 2016*, 27–30). Similar harps are also known from tumulus II at Bashadar in Kazakhstan, dated to the late 6th century BC, from some graves in Northwestern China, dated to the 5th–3rd centuries BC, and from one grave at Olbia, dated to the late 5th century BC (*Lawergren 2003a*; *2008*). However, the soundboards of this kind normally have at least one sound hole, just like the harp from Pazyryk, but none is visible on the carbonized plaque from Sâncrai-Darvas.

Fig. 14. Statuette of a girl playing a guqin, Eastern Han Dynasty. Toulon Asian Art Museum (after *Rault 2000*).

On the other hand, its shape could also suggest another type of ancient musical instrument that is still present in modern forms among the traditional instruments from Central and Eastern Asia – a plucked zither consisting of a more-or-less curved board with several strings and moveable bridges made of wood or bone. Among the traditional instruments belonging to this category are the jetigen from Kazakhstan, the yatgha from Mongolia or the se, zheng and guqin from China; all of them emerged in the 6th–5th century BC and were influenced by the steppe harp (Fig. 14; *Lawergren 1993*; *2000*; *2003a*; *2003b*; *2007*). The only issue is that the few extant ancient instruments of this kind tend to be much larger than the object from Sâncrai, unless this is just one poorly preserved part of a larger instrument which was almost completely destroyed by fire.

Accordingly, the woman buried in a rather unusual way at Sâncrai could have been a musician. One has to note that music was often associated with various social practices and rituals in ancient societies. It was included in shamanic rituals, or had an important mnemonic role in the oral transmission of traditions, or in punctuating the rhythm of ritual practices, and so on. Musicians were often respected, but they were sometimes also feared due to their abilities and supposed influence over someone's senses and feelings, which were associated with their techniques (see the ways in which the supposed supernatural powers of Orpheus' music were described by ancient authors; *Semenzato 2016*). Therefore, they often occupied a marginal social position in the community.

This could also explain the unusual funerary treatment of the deceased woman from Sâncrai-Darvas. The setting on fire of her instrument could have been related to a perceived symbolic power of its sound, which required its destruction upon the owner's death, a practice which is also encountered in the case of other objects associated with ritual or magical powers that have to be destroyed to prevent an illicit use by untrained individuals. For example among the indigenous people of Siberia, the drums used by shamans became part of their persona, so they had to be destroyed upon their owners' death (*Devlet 2001*, 47–50).

## CONCLUSIONS

The three 'deviant' burials discussed above are illustrating three different ritual-related situations.

In the first case, a double re-inhumation illustrates the practice of prolonged funerals which is also attested in a few other cases from the same cemetery at Sâncrai-Darvas. The handling of the skeletonised human remains was careful, despite the apparently random disposal and mixing, most likely because

the people performing the ritual had to follow certain prescriptions. So, the skull of the female deceased was clearly deposited separately on the bottom of the funerary pit and was further physically separated not only from the male deceased but also from the rest of her own bones by a layer of soil. This distinct layer created a new surface, or maybe a separate funerary space, on which parts of the headless female skeleton and of the male skeleton were laid in two distinct groups, albeit the male femur accidentally landed in the wrong pile. The separation of the two groups of human remains was also marked by the depositing of a cup containing some substance obtained from processing young spruce cones. According to the anthropological analysis, the male deceased suffered from a painful disease of the joints, so the substance could have been deposited to help him in the otherworld, though other ritual reasons for this offering could also be possible. Lastly, a more common ritual – the depositing of three ceramic vessels probably containing offerings on the western side of the pit – was performed. After filling up the pit, the grave was marked with a wooden post, a practice that was important for maintaining the memory of the ancestors and their identity. Therefore, these post-burial interventions which implied the re-inhumation of some individuals most likely were important rituals for the descendants and the wider community.

Post-burial interventions are not unusual.[14] They are encountered in many historical periods, but are not generally performed for all of the deceased buried in a cemetery. These rituals are only performed in those cases in which the relations between the living people and the deceased are perceived as disturbed. The aforementioned example underline the fact that the second inhumation required the repeating of many rituals performed during the first inhumation.

Grave No. 91/2016 of the female shaman was already extensively discussed (see *Rustoiu 2019*, 54–69). However, in the context of the present analysis, it is worth mentioning that it is another case of a post-burial intervention. Unlike in the case of grave 9/2020, the exhumation and re-inhumation were most likely carried out because the community was afraid of the haunting spirit of the female deceased and her perceived powers while alive. This fear made them to perform a number of protective rituals, the depositing of the dog during the re-inhumation of the shaman being a relevant argument for this hypothesis. Moreover, the analogies from different cultural environments and historical periods indicate that the shamans were frequently feared due to their ability to move between the world of the living and the otherworld. That is why their funerary treatment included numerous ritual precautions and restrictions. As a result, their burials often display 'deviant' features in comparison with those of the general funerary norms of the respective community, reflecting their particular social status and identity.

The third grave from Sâncrai-Darvas, which is also characterized by a number of particular rituals and means of treating the corpse, indicates, like in the case of the aforementioned grave of the shaman, a social identity and function that was markedly different from that of the regular members of the community. The most likely placing of the corpse in a side-seated position and holding the instrument like the deceased was still singing was not only meant to indicate her social function and identity while alive, but also the manner in which she was still perceived after death. The destruction by fire of the instrument right before closing the burial could indicate that it was perceived as an important part of her social persona and that its power, and the power of its owner, was perhaps also feared. Its destruction not only prevented an illicit use by untrained people, but also broke the powerful spiritual bond between the owner and its bewitching tool.

Lastly, it is important to note that in all of these cases the funerary rituals were part of either the liminal or the post-liminal stage of the funerary ceremonies, being connected either with the physical and symbolic treatment of the corpse or with the integration of the deceased into the otherworld, concomitantly with the restoration of the social and spiritual equilibrium of the family or the community.

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[14] Ethnographic accounts attest the existence of post-burial interventions among different Romanian communities up to the modern times. For example, Romulus Vulcănescu describes the following post-burial ritual: *'... decapitation was carried out after seven years, during ritual exhumations mostly in the autumn... and only on Saturdays, after lunchtime, before the sunset. The exhumation was public, the deceased's relatives and the village's priests participated, and sometimes also the nosy villagers. The exhumation could be incomplete, when only the skull was dug out, or complete, when the entire skeleton was exhumed... The skull detached from the skeleton or together with the complete skeleton was cleaned of dirt and washed with red wine... It was then wrapped up in an ornate handkerchief and laid under the Virgin Mary icon in the church... Here, during the night between Saturday and Sunday, the relatives held a wake and mourned the deceased. The mass of the second burial was performed after the Sunday liturgy using the same ritual as in the case of the first burial. If the skull belonged to a man who was considered wicked while alive, it was buried with the face down, but if it belonged to a man seen as good, it was buried with the face up. In the latter case, the required offering rituals were performed over the grave: a living rooster, a living lamb etc. and on the grave a bowl with fruits, an offering tree with soul birds (a kind of cakes hung on branches), a bread roll, fruits and wine*' (*Vulcănescu 1987*, 306–308, with figures).

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# „Deviantné" hroby ako ukazovatele zvláštnych sociálnych identít

## Niekoľko príkladov zo „skýtskeho" pohrebiska v Sâncrai-Darvas (Transylvánia)

Aurel Rustoiu – Mariana Egri – Andreea Drăgan – Adrian Cătălin Căsălean

Súhrn

Článok analyzuje tri nedávno objavené hroby zo „skýtskeho" pohrebiska na lokalite Sâncrai-Darvas v Sedmohradsku, ktoré sa z rôznych dôvodov vymykajú bežným pohrebným normám tohto chronologického a kultúrneho horizontu. V dôsledku toho ich možno interpretovať ako „deviantné" (neštandardné) pohreby. Týmto termínom sa vo všeobecnosti označujú neobvyklé pohreby, ktoré nezodpovedajú rituálnym normám spoločenstva a často sa spájajú s marginálnymi sociálnymi skupinami, s vyvrheľmi alebo s ľuďmi, ktorí zomreli za neobvyklých okolností.

V prvom prípade ide o dvojnásobnú reinhumáciu, ktorá ilustruje prax predĺžených pohrebov. Tá je doložená aj v niekoľkých ďalších prípadoch z toho istého pohrebiska. Antropologická analýza dospela k záveru, že ľudské pozostatky patria dvom osobám, mužovi a žene. Kontext nálezu vrátane stratigrafie pohrebnej jamy a stavu zachovania ľudských pozostatkov naznačujú, že hrob bol niekedy po prvom pohrebe znovu otvorený, s kostrami sa rôzne manipulovalo a len časť kostí bola potom znovu pochovaná. Palynologická analýza vzoriek zeminy získaných z hrobu a keramických nádob naznačuje, že obrad sa musel uskutočniť na začiatku leta. Do hrobu boli uložené aj nové prídavky vrátane liečivej látky z mladých smrekových šišiek.

Druhý hrob, patriaci žene šamanke, je ďalším prípadom zásahu po primárnom pohrebe, tentoraz podmieneného strachom komunity. Niekedy po prvom pohrebe bola pohrebná jama znovu otvorená a s kostrou sa manipulovalo neznámym spôsobom, pričom kosti boli následne pomerne nešetrne hodené späť do jamy. Tesne predtým boli do jamy vložené tri keramické nádoby. Buď počas opätovného pochovávania, alebo niekedy neskôr bola na ľudské pozostatky položená mŕtvola psa, ktorý mal na sebe závesok z kĺbovej kosti ovce/kozy. Toto gesto má silný rituálny a symbolický význam, pretože pes sa často spájal so záhrobím. Uloženie psa do toho istého hrobu niekedy po prvotnom uložení zosnulej ženy malo možno za cieľ odviesť jej dušu späť na onen svet, pravdepodobne preto, že prenasledovala živých ľudí.

Posledný hrob patril jedincovi, ktorého spoločenské postavenie a funkcia rozhodli o tom, že komunita zvolila menej obvyklé pohrebné rituály. Nachádza sa v ňom kostra ženy, ktorá bola zrejme pochovaná v polohe v sede otočená vpravo s nohami otočenými doľava a kostra sa následne počas procesu dekompozície prevalila na pravú stranu. Zuhoľnatený drevený predmet, ktorý bol zapálený tesne pred uzavretím hrobu, žena pevne zvierala rukami na hrudi. Oheň bol dostatočne silný nato, aby spálil väčšinu kostí hrudníka a hornej časti chrbtice kostry. Najpravdepodobnejšiu funkciu dreveného predmetu je ťažké určiť vzhľadom na jeho veľmi zlé zachovanie – pri výskume bol v podstate rozpoznateľný len jeho odtlačok. S najväčšou pravdepodobnosťou sa okrem zuhoľnateného lichobežníkového kusa skladal z mnohých ďalších častí vyrobených z vysoko horľavých organických materiálov, ktoré sa nezachovali. Na základe tvaru predmetu a spôsobu, akým ho držala zosnulá žena, by karbonizovaná drevená doska mohla byť súčasťou niektorého typu strunového hudobného nástroja špecifického pre Strednú Áziu – žena teda mohla byť hudobníčka. Zapálenie nástroja mohlo súvisieť s vnímanou symbolickou silou jeho zvuku, ktorá si vyžadovala zničenie nástroja po smrti majiteľa. S takýmto postupom sa stretávame aj v prípade iných predmetov, ktorým sa pripisovala rituálna alebo magická moc a ktoré sa museli zničiť, aby sa zabránilo ich nedovolenému/„neodbornému" používaniu nepoučenými osobami.

Vo všetkých týchto prípadoch boli pohrebné rituály súčasťou buď liminálnej, alebo postliminálnej fázy pohrebných obradov, pričom boli spojené buď s fyzickým a symbolickým zaobchádzaním s mŕtvolou, alebo so začlenením zosnulého do iného sveta a zároveň s obnovením sociálnej a duchovnej rovnováhy rodiny alebo komunity.

Obr. 1. Teoretické umiestnenie „deviantných" hrobov v symbolickej topografii pohrebiska (kresba A. Rustoiu).

Obr. 2. Sâncrai-Darvas. Plán záchranného archeologického výskumu z roku 2016 (čierne líniové obrysy) a systematického archeologického výskumu v roku 2020 (biela šípka označujúca sivé plochy; kresba A. Drăgan).

Obr. 3. Sâncrai-Darvas. 1 – fotogrametria kostrových hrobov 3 a 4 (foto A. Drăgan); 2 – hrob koňa (foto G. Balteș); 3 – žiarový hrob (foto M. Egri).

Obr. 4. Sâncrai-Darvas, hrobové prídavky. 1–6, 8 – bronz; 7 – mušle; 9 – železný akinakes *in situ* (foto A. Rustoiu a M. Egri). Mierka: a – 1–3; b – 5–8; bez mierky – 4, 9.

Obr. 5. Veľkosť „skýtskych" pohrebísk v Transylvánii na základe počtu hrobov (graf A. Rustoiu).

Obr. 6. Sâncrai-Darvas, hrob 9/2020. 1, 3, 4 – detail hornej úrovne hrobu; 2, 5 – dno hrobovej jamy; 6 – náramok objavený medzi ľudskými kosťami v južnej časti hrobu (1, 2 – fotogrametria A. Drăgan; 3–5 – foto M. Egri; 6 – foto Sz. S. Gál).

Obr. 7. Sâncrai-Darvas, hrob 9/2020. 1 – profil hrobovej jamy; 2, 3 – plán hrobu a uloženie kostí a nádob v hornej (2) a spodnej (3) úrovni jamy (kresba M. Musteață).
Obr. 8. Rádiouhlíkové datovanie (BP) vzoriek uhlíkov z hrobu 9/2020.
Obr. 9. Sâncrai-Darvas, hrob 91/2016 (podľa *Rustoiu 2019*).
Obr. 10. Sâncrai-Darvas, hrob 91/2016. 1 – detail kostrového pohrebu psa; 2 – kĺbová kosť ovce/kozy (podľa *Rustoiu 2019*).
Obr. 11. Sâncrai-Darvas, hrob 7/2020. Kostra ženy so silno skrčenými nohami; pochovaná zviera na prsiach zuhoľnatený predmet (1 – fotogrametria A. Drăgan; 2 – kresba M. Musteață).
Obr. 12. Sâncrai-Darvas, hrob 7/2020. Detail zuhoľnateného predmetu (1 – foto M. Egri; 2 – kresba A. Rustoiu).
Obr. 13. Pazyryk. 1 – rekonštruovaná harfa; 2 – fragment drevenej rezonančnej dosky zo zachovanej harfy (podľa *Lawergren 1990*).
Obr. 14. Plastika dievčaťa hrajúceho na *guqin*, východná dynastia Chan. Múzeum ázijského umenia v Toulon (podľa *Rault 2000*).

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