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A bronze dagger from the Moldavian Subcarpathians

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Abstract. The authors present some data about a bronze dagger identified in a village museum collection from Neamț County, which, although it was reported in the archaeological literature, did not benefit from a pertinent discussion regarding the typology and chronology. The artefact does not have a known archaeological context, but it comes, most likely, from the Subcarpathian region of Moldavia. The dagger presents a tang and rivets, but also a longitudinal rib, being completely covered by green patina. Although at the first publication it was attributed to the Noua culture (Late Bronze Age), its typological features and analogies from the Füzesabony-Otomani cultural environment lead us to reconsider the original cultural framing and date it to a stage of the Middle Bronze Age. Besides the dagger presented in this note, in the region to the east of the Carpathians we know another specimen, in Țibucani (Neamț County), whose origin is also in the area of Füzesabony-Otomani culture.
Keywords*:* dagger, Bronze Age, Eastern Carpathian region, Füzesabony-Otomani culture.

Un pumnal de bronz din Subcarpații Moldovei. Autorii prezintă câteva date despre un pumnal de bronz identificat într-o colecție muzeală sătească din județul Neamț, care, deși a fost semnalat în literatura arheologică, nu a beneficiat de o discuție pertinentă referitoare la tipologie și cronologie. Artefactul nu are un context arheologic cunoscut, dar provine, cel mai probabil, din zona subcarpatică a Moldovei. Pumnalul este prevăzut cu placă de prindere și nituri, dar și cu nervură longitudinală, fiind acoperit integral de patină verzuie. Deși la prima publicare a fost atribuit culturii Noua (bronzul târziu), trăsăturile sale tipologice și analogiile din mediul Füzesabony-Otomani ne determină să reconsiderăm încadrarea culturală inițială și să îl datăm într-o etapă a bronzului mijlociu. Alături de pumnalul prezentat în nota de față, la răsărit de Carpați mai cunoaștem încă un exemplar, la Țibucani (jud. Neamț), a cărui origine este tot în arealul culturii Füzesabony-Otomani.
Cuvinte-cheie: pumnal, epoca bronzului, spațiul est-carpatic, cultura Füzesabony-Otomani.

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Introduction

Checking small collections of local history can sometimes offer pleasant surprises, precisely because of their inaccessibility to researchers. Among the "discoveries" made in such a collection is a bronze dagger kept in the village museum of Vânători-Neamț (Neamț County, Romania). The object has been included in the scientific circuit for a long time, but because no data were known about the place and conditions of the discovery, the artefact was only briefly mentioned in the literature (Dumitroaia 1997, p. 436, Fig. 2/4).

Taking into consideration that the mentioned object did not benefit from a very detailed presentation, we considered necessary to republish it, trying to provide a more conclusive series of information, both in terms of typology and chronology of this object.

At the time of the initial publication, it was mentioned that it could have come from the Moldavian Valley, but without an argument for this assumption, and from a cultural point of view it was attributed to the Noua culture.

Artefact description

The dagger has an elongated triangular blade with a slight arch of one side, which makes the longitudinal axis slightly deviated. It has a well-highlighted median rib and the tang is rounded and represents the point of maximum width of the object. On the proximal extremity there are three perforations, placed approximately at equal distances, which allowed the weapon to be fixed by rivets, in a handle. Due to the conditions in which the object was stored, two of the perforations are damaged, and the third is intact and keeps inside a metal rivet with flattened ends. Traces of use are observed on the edges of the blade, but also degradations due to corrosion. Also, the entire surface of the object is covered with a green patina, much more intense on the tang.

The object was obtained by casting in a bivalve mould, having a neat appearance.

The blade of the dagger was broken in two, most likely after its discovery.

Dimensions: length - 17.5 cm; width - 3.5 cm; perforation diameter - 0.4 cm; rivet length - 1.2 cm; weight - 46 g (**Fig. 2**).

A few discussions

For the Bronze Age of the eastern area of the Carpathians several metal daggers are known, but most fall into the category of weapons with tanged handle, found in various archaeological contexts (Popa 1999-2000; Băjenaru, Popescu 2012; Popescu *et alii* 2017, p. 117-119). Completely rare and foreign to this space are the objects with tang and fixing rivets, whose presence in this area can be explained by the long-distance connections with cultural entities located beyond the Carpathians.

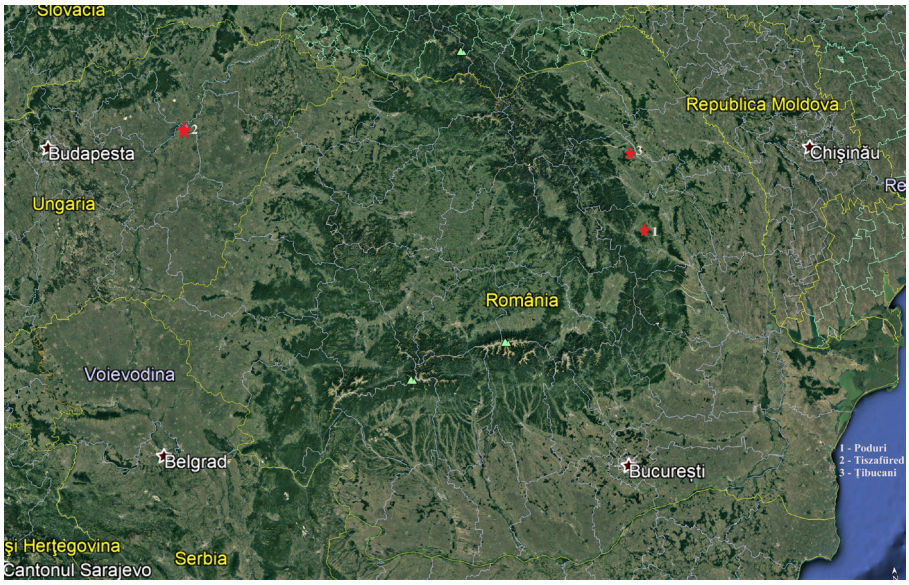


Fig. 1. Distribution map of the mentioned daggers
Fig. 1. Harta răspândirii pumnalelor menționate în text

Daggers with tangs specific to the Bronze Age are known in the eastern part of Romania at Poduri (Munteanu, Dumitroaia 2010; Munteanu, 2010, p. 157, Fig. 85/1) and Țibucani (Vulpe, Zamoșteanu 1982; David 2002, Fig. 87/1; Diaconu 2016, p. 71-72, Fig. 75/1). If the first mentioned specimen can be related to the Jigodin or even Costișa communities, but with typological origins in the intra-Carpathian area, for the Țibucani artefact, through the known analogies, a connection with the Füzesabony-Otomani environment can be proposed (David 2002, p. 383 -393) (**Fig. 2**).

Regarding the object from the collection of Vânători-Neamț, we can say that it belongs to a relatively rare type, especially through the prominent longitudinal rib. A good analogy is known in the Tiszafüred-*Majoroshalom* necropolis (G. B.75), except that the specimen found there was provided with five rivets for fixing the handle (Kemenczei 1988, p. 10-11, Fig. 2/17; David 2002, Fig. 255/1) (**Fig. 3/1**). In the same necropolis, but in another funerary complex (G. D. 293), was discovered a dagger with a median rib, but with three rivets (David 2002, Fig. 270/2). According to the classification made by T. Kemenczei, the mentioned specimens are attributed to variant 1 of the long plate daggers, for which are known several discoveries in the territory of Hungary (Kemenczei 1988, p. 10-11). The fact that in the grave B.75 from Tiszafüred other metal objects, and also ceramics appear, raises some difficulties regarding the relative chronology of this funerary complex. We mention

the presence of an axe of the Apa-Nehoiu type, Țufalău variant (Vulpe 1970, p. 53-56), of a trapezoidal axe with fins, of the Partoș variant (Vulpe 1970, p. 66) and some vessels characteristic to the Otomani environment (III) (Molnár 2014, pl. 174).

Although it comes from the Subcarpathian region of Moldavia, the object discussed in this note must be related to the cultural environments specific to the Bronze Age in Central Europe. Certainly, the presence of such a weapon in the area east of the Carpathians can be explained by possible contacts with communities in the intra-Carpathian area, or perhaps even further away. The fact that in eastern Romania is attested another dagger belonging to the Füzesabony-Otomani area is an argument for the long-distance connections (direct or indirect) with the populations of this culture. On the same note, we mention the discovery in Moldavia of some bone artefacts, decorated, such as those from Mândrișca and Costișa, for which the closest analogies are also found in the cultural area mentioned above (Popescu 2013). To complete the general picture of metal objects with high social value identified in the space between the Carpathians and the Prut, we mention two other objects, which are considered imports from the west, respectively the bronze-axes with disc from Cajvana (Suceava County) (Ignat 1981, p. 137- 139; Ignat 2000, p. 42-44, Fig. 6; Niculică 2015, p. 140, pl. LXVII/2) and Iorcani (Iași county) (Tencariu *et alii* 2014).

The lack of archaeological contexts for the daggers from Vânători-Neamț and Țibucani makes the discussion about their meanings quite limited. Although functionally they can be considered simple weapons, the small number and the distant origin lead us to assume that they could have been rather part of the insignia of rank or warrior status in some local communities in the east of the Carpathians.

Produced in a cultural environment far from the area in which they were identified, the two objects may have been circulated in the eastern part of Romania at a later chronological time than the stage of their realization, but we do not think they have exceeded the limits currently accepted for what the Middle Bronze Age means.

Conclusions

Bronze Age metallurgy, and especially metal products, is an extremely complex subject, not only in terms of the economic value, but especially in terms of the social implications of many of these goods, but also because they are very good chronological landmarks. In the previous lines we presented such an object, which, beyond its function as a weapon, due to the fact that it was found far from its original area, can be considered a good cultural milestone and a vector of intercommunity movement in the Bronze Age. Of course, a complementary and interdisciplinary analysis of several objects of this kind, and from a metallographic perspective, could bring additional clues about their origin.



Fig. 2. The bronze dagger from the museum collection of Vânători-Neamț:
1. Complete object; 2. Details (photo and drawing - V. Diaconu)
Fig. 2. Pumnalul de bronz din colecția muzeală de la Vânători-Neamț:
1. Piesa în ansamblu; 2. Detalii (foto și desen – V. Diaconu)

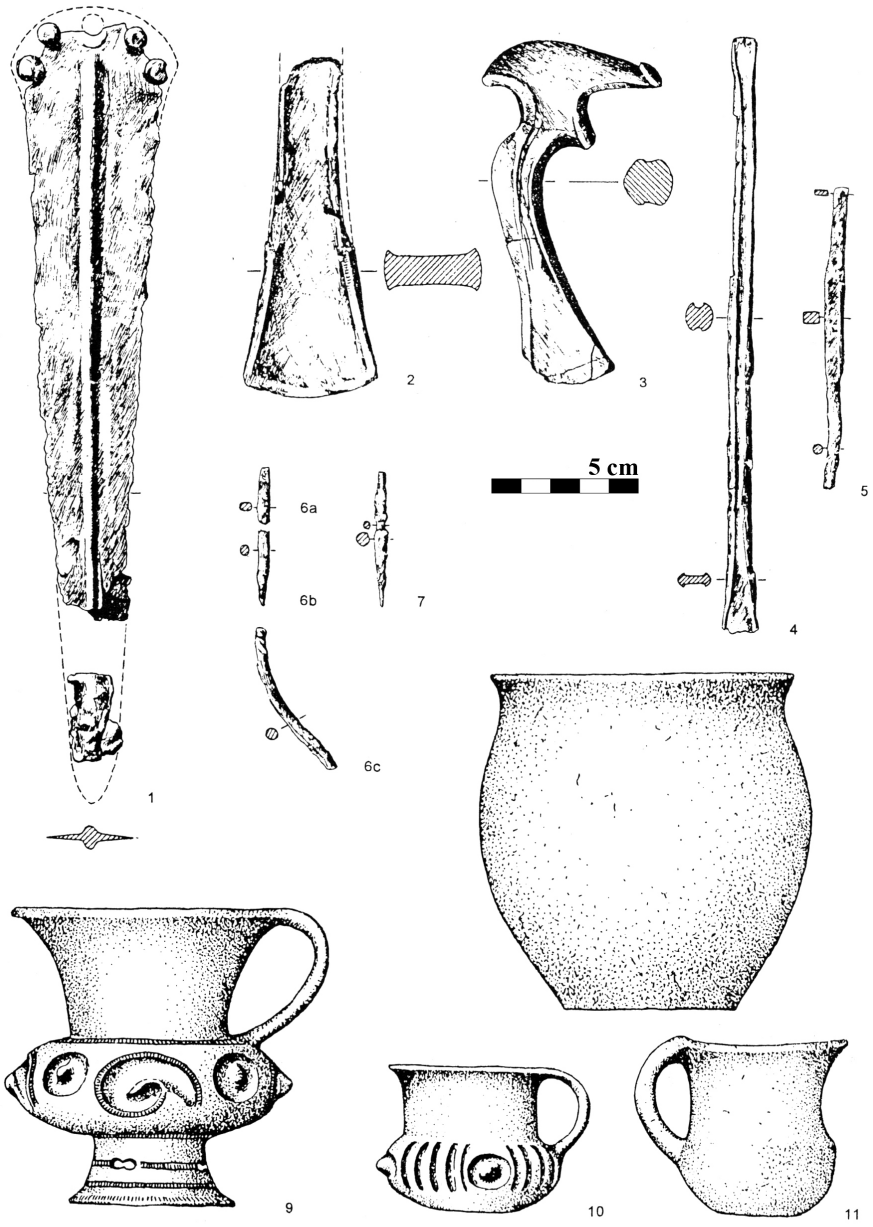


Fig. 3. Inventory of grave B.75 from Tiszafüred (Hungary) (after David 2002)
Fig. 3. Inventarul mormântului B.75 de la Tiszafüred (Ungaria) (după David 2002)

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