

# A DISK MIRROR RECENTLY DISCOVERED SOUTH THE LOWER MUREȘ<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The object of this study is the analysis of the disk mirror discovered in 2010 during the rescue archaeological excavations carried out in occasion of the construction of the Arad-Timișoara motorway, respectively the Arad-Seceani sector. The mirror was found at ca. 1 m north grave 1 in site B0\_6, where beside other two cremation graves, poorly preserved, other 129 archaeological features were also investigated.

Though not exhaustively, we attempt herein to present the origin, distribution of this mirror type in the Sarmatian world and the chronological interval of their use within said environment.

The author notes that these disk mirror types from the funerary Sarmatian features of the Great Hungarian Plain count amongst the most numerous, being found within funerary contexts on the entire duration of the Sarmatian inhabitancy of this geographical area. Further, the author notes that mirrors of the type are widely spread on broad geographical areas, hence the establishment of any production centres is highly difficult, but also that very likely, they were produced in various cultural environments over several centuries. Their high numbers in the Sarmatian world proves it is possible they made them, although there is no certain substantiating evidence. The author does not exclude either the possibility of the presence of travelling artisans in the Sarmatian environment making certain item categories upon order, mirrors of the type included.

In terms of the dating of G 1 at Arad (site B\_06), where the mirror most definitely originates, the author concludes that together with the other two graves (G 2 and G 3) are contemporary and date sometime to the end of the 2nd century – early decades of the 3rd century AD.

**Keywords:** *mirrors, graves, the Sarmatians, the north and north-west Pontic area, the Great Hungarian Plain*

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**I**n the summer of 2010, during the rescue archaeological excavations for the construction of the Arad-Timișoara motorway, respectively the Arad-Seceani<sup>2</sup> sector, several archaeological sites were investigated. Among these sites also counts the site coded B0\_6<sup>3</sup> (Fig. 1-2). The region where it lies is south the Lower Mureș<sup>4</sup> (Fig. 1-2).

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<sup>2</sup> The aim of the rescue archaeological excavations was to recover as many historical data and information as possible regarding the partially affected sites by the project of the Arad-Timișoara motorway, the Arad-Seceani sector.

<sup>3</sup> The site was discovered within the municipality of Arad, on the path of the Arad-Timișoara motorway, by kilometres 15+490-15+780. For further details related to the identification of the site and the finds there see BÂRCĂ et alii 2011a, 239-242.

<sup>4</sup> The site lies on a high terrace near Tisa Nouă valley, oriented north-south on long axis. The terrace is located at ca. 5-6 km south (in straight line on the north-south direction) the Mureș, ca.

Following the research carried out in site coded B0\_6 **132** archaeological features were discovered and investigated, three being cremation graves, poorly preserved.

The Sarmatian graves were identified central to the project surface, by kilometres 15+660-15+670 of the motorway. The three graves are isolated from the **106** features discovered and examined in the northern side of the investigated surface but also from the **23** lying to the south. Preliminary investigations evidence that in the northern part of the project surface (km 15+500-15+640) we are dealing with a horizon of Dacian inhabitancy during the Roman period (2nd – 3rd centuries AD), which continues that of the late La Tène period extant on western Romanian territories. Concerning the archaeological features found south the three Sarmatian graves, it may be argued that the archaeological material discovered there belongs to another chronological and cultural level (the 4th century AD), different than that in the northern side.

The bronze mirror object herein was found at ca. 1 m north grave 1. The grave, largely destroyed by farming works, was discovered at 0.27 m deep from the current surface, in the brownish-black layer. The outline of the gravepit could not be identified since the burial was made in the brownish-black farming layer.

The skeleton damaged to a 90% proportion lay on the back with head towards NNE. It preserved small skull and pelvis fragments, as well as the right foot tibia remains. The analysis of the bone remains established that the head (female) was aged 20-25<sup>5</sup>.

The very well preserved mirror is of the type with flat round disk. Its diameter is of 6.9 cm, while its thickness is of 0.12 cm (Fig. 3/1-2).

The specimens of the analysed type have a disk shape and are the simplest mirror type of the Sarmatian world. Their diameter varies between 5 and 24 cm, while the thickness from 0.1 to 0.3 cm<sup>6</sup>. Subsequent to the analysis of a large numbers of such mirrors from the Sarmatian environment, some scholars divided them into two variants<sup>7</sup>.

Disk mirrors, like the specimen found near G 1 at Arad (site B0\_6), frequently had a wooden frame<sup>8</sup>. Wooden frames

2.2 km east (in straight line) the road E671 linking Arad to Timișoara and at ca. 3.5 km north-west the Tisa Nouă village. The settlement is delimited by the base of the southern side by Tisa Nouă valley.

<sup>5</sup> The anthropological analysis of the bone remains from the Sarmatian graves at Arad site B0\_6) was made by Gál Szilárd Sándor (County Museum of Mureș), to whom we express our thanks this way too.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. KHAZANOV 1963, 62, 64, Fig. 1/VI; MOSHKOVA 1963, 41, group I, type I, Pl. 27/1-9; SKRIPKIN 1990, 93, type 1.0, Fig. 34/1-10; MARCHENKO 1996, 19-20, type V.

<sup>7</sup> A. M. Hazanov included in the first variant (A) mirrors with a diameter of up to 20 cm and in the second variant (B) those with a diameter no greater than 6-7 cm (KHAZANOV 1963, 64). A. S. Skripkin, based on the analysis of a lot of 96 mirrors from the Sarmatian graves of the 3rd century BC – 1st century AD from the area east of Don, divided them into two variants; 1. mirrors with a diameter between 5 and 9 cm, 2. mirrors with a diameter varying from 10 to 24 cm (SKRIPKIN 1990, 93). I. I. Marchenko divided the mirrors of the type found in the Sarmatian graves of the Kuban region depending on their making into two variants; 1. mirrors made by casting, 2. mirrors made of bronze sheet (MARCHENKO 1996, 19-20).

<sup>8</sup> For such finds in the north and north-west Pontic area see LEVIŢKII/MANZURA/DEMCENKO 1996, 41, 90, Fig. 26/2; SIMONENKO 1997, 397, Fig. 3/5-6; BUBULICH/KHAKHEU 2002, 139-140, Fig. 16; BĂRCĂ 2006, 148-149, 323, 355, Fig. 69/1, 114/2, 185/5; BĂRCĂ 2006a, 94, 218, Fig. 39/3, 62/6; BĂRCĂ/SYMONENKO 2009, 171, 172, Fig. 62/3.

also had certain rectangular mirrors from the Sarmatian graves<sup>9</sup>, but also those discovered within the Roman empire, either rectangular or circular<sup>10</sup>. Occasionally, some specimens of simple disk mirrors have two orifices placed symmetrically, serving for their attachment to a wooden or leather<sup>11</sup> piece. There are specimens of such mirrors, especially small-sized, with only one orifice, in this case, hanging on either a support or even by the neck.

In the Sarmatian graves on the entire territory they inhabited, mirrors of the given type are found on a rather expanse time period being predominant, depending on region, during various chronological intervals.

This type of mirror is found with the Sauromatians during the 6th – 5th centuries BC<sup>12</sup>, and then with the early Sarmatians from the entire space they inhabited<sup>13</sup>. Most frequent though, mirrors of the type are found in the north-Pontic Sarmatian environment and that in areas east of the Don and the Volga during the 1st century BC – 1st century AD<sup>14</sup>, mainly in the latter<sup>15</sup>. By the end of the 1st century AD, the domination period of these mirrors in the Sarmatian world east of the Don ceases, while by early 1st century AD they are found only sporadically<sup>16</sup>.

In the north and north-west Pontic region, mirrors of the type are frequent in the graves of the 1st century AD, mainly from its second half. In the same area, simple disk mirrors are rare in a series of graves of the early/first half of the 2nd century AD. Although in not such large numbers, round flat disk mirrors are also found in other cultural environments like the Bosporan<sup>17</sup>, Scythian<sup>18</sup>, Late Scythian<sup>19</sup>, Meotian<sup>20</sup> or Geto-Dacian<sup>21</sup> worlds.

In the Sarmatian funerary features of the Great Hungarian Plain these disk mirror types count amongst the

<sup>9</sup> Cf. BĂRCĂ 2014b with complete bibliography and finds.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. LLOYD-MORGAN 1977, 233; LLOYD-MORGAN 1981a, 3; BUYUKLIEV 1986, 37.

<sup>11</sup> KHAZANOV 1963, 64.

<sup>12</sup> SMIRNOV 1964, 156, type VI; see also MAKSIMENKO 1983, 96-97, Fig. 58/8-10.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. MOSHKOVA 1963, 41, Pl. 27/1-9; KHAZANOV 1963, 62; MAKSIMENKO 1983, 96-97, Fig. 16-17, 19; SKRIPKIN 1990, 150; SKRIPKIN/KLEPIKOV 2004, 99, Fig. 4/31-35; MARCHENKO 1996, 19-20; BĂRCĂ 2006a, 93-95; BĂRCĂ/SYMONENKO 2009, 74-75; SIMONENKO 1993, 28; SIMONENKO 2004, 139.

<sup>14</sup> KHAZANOV 1963, 64.

<sup>15</sup> SKRIPKIN 1990, 153; see for finds of mirrors of the type during the 1st century AD ABRAMOVA 1971, 121-132; GROSU 1990; SIMONENKO/LOBAJ 1991, 57; KOSTENKO 1993, 106, 113; DZIGOVSKIY 1993, 57; SIMONENKO 1993, 85; MARCHENKO 1996, 19-20; BĂRCĂ 2006, 148-150; BĂRCĂ 2006a, 93-95; BĂRCĂ/SYMONENKO 2009, 74-75, 171-172; GLUKHOV 2003; SIMONENKO 2004, 139, 144.

<sup>16</sup> HAZANOV 1963, 64; SKRIPKIN 1990, 153, Fig. 44. A. A. Glukhov believes that in the Don-Volga interfluvium, the upper limit of the use of round disk mirrors may be placed most likely by mid 1st century AD, however does not exclude that some specimens were in use also in its second half (GLUKHOV 2003, 91).

<sup>17</sup> KORPUSOVA 1983, 109-111, Pl. I/2, IV/4, V/9.

<sup>18</sup> KUZNETSOVA 1987, 39.

<sup>19</sup> VYAZ'MITINA 1972, 13, 31, 38, 51, 56, 62, 87, 135, Fig. 3/3, 12/1, 14/1, 21/8, 25/2, 28/6, 39/5; SYMONOVICH 1983, 97, Pl. XLI1-11, 16; ARKHEOLOGIYA SSSR 1989, Pl. 55/42; DASHEVSKAYA 1991, Pl. 73/4-5, 9; PUZDROVSKIY 2007, 153, Fig. 27/5, 34/22, 127/3-4, 6, 7, 9, 128/1, 144/21.

<sup>20</sup> ANFIMOV 1951, 186.

<sup>21</sup> GLODARIU 1974, 84-85, 249-250; CRIȘAN 1978, Pl. 123/14; LUPU 1989, Pl. 27/14-17; CĂPITANU 1989, 103; URSACHI 1995, 243-244, Pl. 209/27-32, 34-37, 332/27-30; SÎRBU 1996, 36, Fig. 122/14-15; RUSTOIU 1996, 169, Fig. 107/1-3, 5-9; TEODOR/NICU/ȚĂU 1999, 30, Fig. 17, 18/1, 3-5, 7-8; CRIȘAN 2000, 141, Pl. 111/16-18.

most numerous<sup>22</sup>, being found in funerary contexts of their entire inhabitancy duration of this geographical area<sup>23</sup>. Most mirrors of the type in the Sarmatian graves of the Great Hungarian Plain were found complete<sup>24</sup>. Simple disk mirrors are not lacking either from the Sarmatian graves of the 3rd – 4th centuries AD in the area comprised between the Lower Mureş, Tisza and the Danube<sup>25</sup>.

Mirrors of the type are frequent and diffused on broad geographical areas, so the establishment of the production centres is extremely difficult. Their making did not require a complex technology and as such, were made in various cultural environments over several centuries. Their high numbers in the Sarmatian world may evidence that they were likely made by the Sarmatians themselves, although evidence to this effect is missing.

Given that in the Sarmatian environment of the mentioned area mirrors of the type are found for a long time (from the second half/end of the 1st century until the 4th century AD), while in the north and north-west Pontic area they disappear after mid 2nd century AD it may be concluded that the specimens in the early Sarmatian graves of the Great Hungarian Plain (ex. Füzesabony-Kastély *dűlő* I (G 150)<sup>26</sup>, Tarnaméra-Urak *dűlője* (G 4)<sup>27</sup>) were likely brought from the north-west Pontic region. In terms of the specimens from the 2nd – 4th century features it is difficult to say if they were produced by the Sarmatians or were imported. Nevertheless, there might have been some Sarmatian artisans who learnt the mirror making technique. We may not either exclude the possibility that travelling artisans were present in the Sarmatian environment, making certain categories of items upon order, included also the mirrors of the type.

In terms of the dating of G 1 at Arad (*site B\_06*), from which the mirror under analysis herein most definitely comes, it is worth mentioning that together with the other two graves with which it forms a group (G 2 and G 3), they are contemporary and date sometime to the end of the 2nd century – first decades of the 3rd century AD. Confirmation of such dating is supported by the presence within G 3 of a knee brooch with spring inserted into a semi-roll (type Cociş 19a6a1b<sup>28</sup>), whose use was placed in the interval comprised between the seventh decade of the 2nd century and the first decades of the 3rd century AD<sup>29</sup>.

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Subsequent to the analysis of the mirrors recorded in the Sarmatian environment of the Great Hungarian Plain it was concluded that the majority reached the grave

already broken<sup>30</sup>. In the study dedicated to the mirrors from the Sarmatian funerary complexes of the Great Hungarian Plain, V. Kulcsár and E. Istvánovits noted that in graves were placed mirror fragments, damaged mirrors, mirrors broken on purpose and complete mirrors<sup>31</sup>. Subsequent to the mapping of the complete and broken mirrors, it was concluded that graves whose inventories included mirrors broken purposefully or damaged (from Antiquity) spread on the entire Great Hungarian Plain, while graves with complete mirrors are specific mainly to the Danube – Tisza interfluvium, significantly clustering in the Kecskemét and Kiskunfélegyháza<sup>32</sup> areas.

In terms of the mirrors broken on purpose, V. Kulcsár believed that in their case, we are dealing with a ritual break of the reflective side<sup>33</sup>.

Scholars believe that the habit of the purposeful damage of the mirror after the death of the owner was designed to release the soul of the dead<sup>34</sup>. At a simple analysis of mirror finds in the Sarmatian graves from the entire territory they inhabited, it may though be noted that the number of mirrors broken on purpose is not very high. Furthermore, the graves containing such mirrors date to different chronological intervals. Often, these mirrors were damaged in different ways, which requires a different approach of the causes leading to the break<sup>35</sup>. Subsequent to a careful analysis of the conditions and state of the mirrors at the time of discovery it was noted that most mirrors are found complete, while those broken either come from damaged or looted graves or are part of graves where mirrors were placed complete (found *in situ*), yet which were damaged due to corrosion and under soil pressure<sup>36</sup>. An argument in the favour of the above is the presence within the same grave of both complete and damaged mirrors, as well as the existence of two or even three mirrors. An example to this effect is G 114 in the cemetery at Madaras-Halmok, whose furniture contained three simple disk mirrors<sup>37</sup>.

It is believed that the purposeful break of the mirror is not related to the cult of the dead, but was the result of the magic influence on the living humans via the object replacing the person and which reflected both the owner and, most likely, represented “a space for the soul” of the latter<sup>38</sup>. Only the mirrors purposefully broken may be explained as magical actions against the living humans, via the blows to the reflective side<sup>39</sup>. To these may be added also the mirrors broken and spread within the graves<sup>40</sup>. Nevertheless, it must be mentioned that the damage to the reflective side of the mirror did not always relate to magic, as evidenced by the specimens pierced for hanging. Regarding the presence of fragmentary mirrors in the Sarmatian graves, we believe they may be explained firstly as the mirror symbol, and

<sup>22</sup> Cf. ISTVÁNOVITS/KULCSÁR 1993, 12-13, type 2, Pl. I/2, Fig. 1/B; KULCSÁR 1998, 62, type 2.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. PÁRDUCZ 1944, Pl. XXXVII/3, XXXIX/3; PÁRDUCZ 1950, Pl. XVI/1; PÁRDUCZ 1958-1959, Pl. XXVI/4; KŐHEGYI 1984, 326, Pl. XIII/2; ISTVÁNOVITS/KULCSÁR 1993, 12-13, type 2; GARAM/VADAY 1990, Fig. 5/4; KULCSÁR 1998, 62, type 2; FARKAS 1998, 71-72, 74, Pl. I/6, II/5; DINNYÉS 2001, Pl. 2/2; ÁCS/VADAY 2004, Fig. 6/2; FODOR/VADAY 2005, 57, Fig. 14/1; KŐHEGY/VÖRÖS 2011, 318-319, Fig. 282, Pl. 11/5, 22/1, 26/1-3, 47/1, 59/2; HULLÁM 2012, 356, Pl. 9/1; PÓPITY 2014, 166, Fig. 7/2, 10/2.

<sup>24</sup> ISTVÁNOVITS/KULCSÁR 1993, 55, 57.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. GRUMEZA 2014, 106, Fig. 36/1-3.

<sup>26</sup> FARKAS 1998, 74, Pl. II/5.

<sup>27</sup> KŐHEGYI 1984, 326, Pl. XIII/2.

<sup>28</sup> COCIŞ 2004, 94.

<sup>29</sup> COCIŞ 2004, 95-96.

<sup>30</sup> ISTVÁNOVITS/KULCSÁR 1993, 16, 55, 57; KULCSÁR 1998, 63, 98, 114.

<sup>31</sup> ISTVÁNOVITS/KULCSÁR 1993, 16, 55, 57; KULCSÁR 1998, 63, 98, 114.

<sup>32</sup> ISTVÁNOVITS/KULCSÁR 1993, 16, 56, 58; KULCSÁR 1998, 64, 98, 114.

<sup>33</sup> KULCSÁR 1998, 63, 98, 114.

<sup>34</sup> KHAZANOV 1964, 91, 94.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. KUZNETSOVA 1988, 57-58.

<sup>36</sup> KUZNETSOVA 1988, 54-56, tab. 5; similar circumstances are also found in the Sarmatian graves of the area east the Carpathians and that north-Pontic.

<sup>37</sup> KŐHEGY/VÖRÖS 2011, 54, 318-319, Fig. 282, Pl. 26/1-3.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. KUZNETSOVA 1988, 58-59.

<sup>39</sup> TOKAREV 1964, 80-95.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. KUZNETSOVA 1988, 56, 59, tab. 6.

secondly, as evidence of its value even though fragmentary.

It is certain that, although in terms of the existence or inexistence of the mirrors in the Sarmatian graves several hypotheses were issued, the mirror was no mandatory object within the funerary ritual of the Sarmatians. Furthermore, it is difficult to explain their presence within the graves all the more since we do not know the principles underlying the choice for funerary goods. What we know for sure, based on the archaeological finds, is that mirrors are present in Sarmatian graves from the entire space they inhabited over several centuries, especially in female graves. The not very large number of graves where they were identified is firstly due to the fact they were rather expensive and not affordable to everyone. Taking into consideration the role of the mirror and its importance for the individual who owned it<sup>41</sup>, but also the circumstances in the entire Sarmatian world, we believe that they mostly reached in the graves of their first owners, especially when they had a special meaning for the owner. Evidence to the effect is G. Lloyd-Morgan's note, upon the analysis of Roman mirrors north the borders of the Roman empire that they were placed in the graves of their first owners and were not passed on to their successors<sup>42</sup>. The same may be noted also in Bosphorus, where mirrors were mainly discovered in graves dating to their production period<sup>43</sup>. Similar circumstances may be noted also for the majority of the mirror types in the Sarmatian environment from the entire space they inhabited<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> See to this effect KUZNETSOVA 1988, 52-61 with complete bibliography.

<sup>42</sup> LLOYD-MORGAN 1980, 98, 103, 104.

<sup>43</sup> SOROKINA/TREJSTER 1983, 144-148; TREJSTER 1991, 90-103.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. KHAZANOV 1963, 58-71; SMIRNOV 1964, 152-160, Fig. 72; ABRAMOVA 1971, 121-132; VINOGRADOV/PETRENKO 1976, 44-49; ARKHEOLOGIYA SSSR 1989, 167, 187-188, 200; GROSU 1990; SKRIPKIN 1990, 142-156; SIMONENKO 1993, 28, 85-86, 103; KOSTENKO 1993; DZIGOVSKIJ 1993, 57-59.

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Fig. 1. Location of Arad site B\_06.

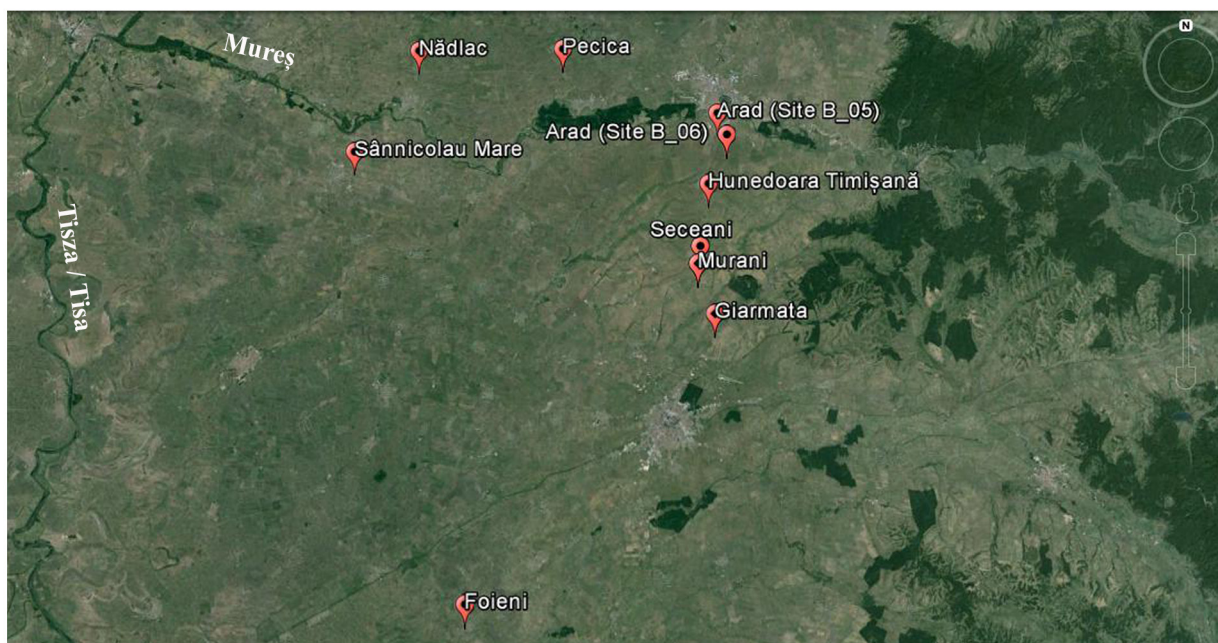


Fig. 2. Map of recent Sarmatian graves and cemetery finds in the area south and north Mureș Inferior river.

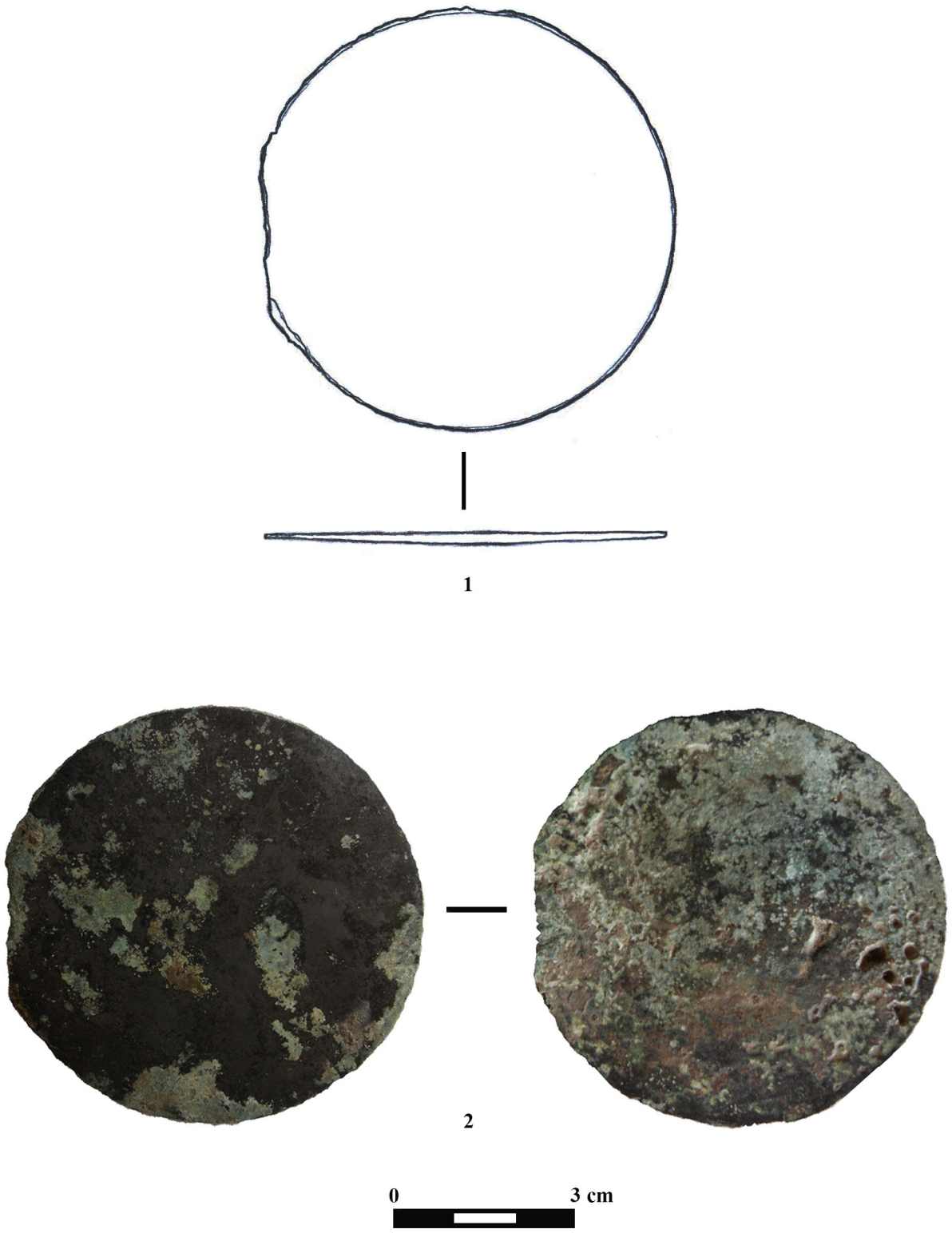


Fig. 3. Mirror found near grave 1 in site B\_06 at Arad.