

A ROMAN THIN-CAST BRONZE SAUCEPAN FROM THE DACIAN FORTRESS AT ARDEU (HUNEDOARA COUNTY, ROMANIA)¹

Silvia Mustață

Mureș County Museum, Tîrgu Mureș
silvia_mustata@yahoo.com

Iosif Vasile Ferencz

Museum of Dacian and Roman Civilisation, Deva
fiosifvasile@yahoo.com

Cristian Dima

National History Museum of
Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca
dimav.cristian@yahoo.com

Abstract: The article analyzes a Roman thin-cast bronze saucepan discovered in the Dacian fortress from Ardeu (Hunedoara County, Romania). The authors argue that the object belongs to a small group of similar discoveries which comprises a variant of the thin-cast saucepans belonging to Petrovsky type III. The saucepan was produced between the last two decades of the 1st century BC and the third decade of the 1st century AD in a workshop which can be located in the north-eastern part of the Italic Peninsula, probably at Aquileia. This is the first discovery which attests with certainty the existence of the thin-cast saucepans in the north Danubian territory, element which is important in the context of the trade relations developed along the route connecting Aquileia with the Sava Valley and the Danube during the Augustan Age.

Keywords: pre-Roman Dacia, Ardeu, trade, imports, Roman bronze vessels.

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Newer or older information regarding the Dacian fortress at Ardeu has been constantly presented in the archaeological literature of the last decade². The archaeological site Ardeu – Cetățuie is located on the territory of Ardeu village, commune of Balșa, Hunedoara County (Fig. 1/1) and it comprises the hill with the same name (maximum height from the Black Sea level: 455 m), the plateau situated to the east, the foothills, the terraces positioned towards south and the Ardeu Gorges from the south-western part (Fig. 1/2). The hill with steep slopes is surrounded by Ardeu Valley which forms on the northern and western sides a sector of short and picturesque gorges. All the parts composing the site have been inhabited throughout several historical periods³; nevertheless, the archaeological information published so far is mostly related to the Dacian land use.

The archaeological research of the site started at the end of the 19th century, under the supervision of Téglás Gábor⁴. Subsequently, the Museum

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² FERENCZ/BODÓ 2003; FERENCZ 2003; FERENCZ 2005; FERENCZ 2006; FERENCZ/DIMA 2009; FERENCZ/GURGU-ȚÎRDOIU 2009; FERENCZ 2010a; FERENCZ 2010b; FERENCZ 2010c; FERENCZ 2012a; FERENCZ 2012b; FERENCZ 2013a; FERENCZ 2013b; FERENCZ 2013c; BELDIMAN ET ALII 2013a; BELDIMAN ET ALII 2013b; BELDIMAN ET ALII 2013c; FERENCZ/FLOREA 2013.

³ See: FERENCZ/ROMAN 2010, 173.

⁴ TÉGLAS 1885, 299–307; TÉGLAS 1888, 134–138.

from Deva together with the National History Museum of Romania from Bucharest undertook a small scale excavation in the area as a result of disturbances caused by the opening of a stone quarry which led to the identification of several metallic artefacts⁵. Starting with 2001 the Museum of Dacian and Roman Civilisation from Deva resumed the field research from Ardeu together with various partners: the "1st of December 1918" University (Alba Iulia), the National History Museum of Transylvania (Cluj-Napoca), and the Corvin Castle Museum (Hunedoara)⁶.

In 1971 the museum from Deva acquired a series of metallic objects discovered on the Cetățuie Hill by three employees of the Limestone Quarry from Ardeu. The saucepan analyzed here was discovered among the shrubs covering the slopes of the hill by Simion Pârva from the village of Balșa⁷.

The saucepan⁸ (Fig. 2/1–2, 3/1–3, 4/1–2) is preserved in the collections of the Museum of Dacian and Roman Civilisation from Deva and it is registered with the inventory number: 23382. As mentioned before, it is a stray find, discovered on the eastern slope of the hill, situation which hinders any kind of supposition related to the context in which it might have been used. The object, made of copper based alloy and displaying an irregular patina, ranging from light to dark brown with light to dark green areas, is in a relatively good state of preservation, although it presents parts in which the oxidation process is still active. It is fragmentary, since only the handle (with the end partially broken), part of the rim, and part of the body are preserved, and its dimensions are the following: Diameter (rim): 110 mm; maximum Height: 41 mm; Thickness (body): 0.5–0.8 mm; Length (handle): 157 mm; Width (handle): 17–22 mm; Thickness (handle): 3–4.5 mm; Weight: 115 g. The saucepan was produced from two pieces of metal: the rim and the handle were cast separately and attached subsequently to the body made of a thin cast shape which was, very probably, pressed on a model with the help of the lathe. The area of the joining is visible only on the inner side of the vessel, under the rim, together with other traces of hammering which were not dimmed during the finishing process (Fig. 4/1). From a morphological viewpoint, the saucepan displays a horizontal rim, slightly everted towards the exterior, with a triangular profile. The rim is decorated with a band of ovolo alternated with vertical incisions followed towards the exterior by a band of small, incised circles. The sides of the body are slightly convex and much damaged in the inferior part. The body is decorated under the rim with three incised parallel grooves. The handle of the vessel is not perfectly horizontal, but easily elevated, especially towards its end. It displays a slenderer central part and it ends with a ring, partially preserved, and separated from the rest of the handle by a narrower part, marked with

parallel incised lines. The decoration of the handle consists of stylized snakes with the body arranged in the shape of a spiral forming a vegetal motif, each of them facing right or left in a successive manner (Fig. 2/1, 3/1). Above each animal head, another depiction can be observed, representing, this time, only a head of snake. This detail is visible only for the first four spirals. The body of the snakes is marked with punched circles. Other elements of the decoration, hardly visible, are represented by the oblique lines with circles inside flanking the exterior of the spirals, in the area where they join, and the band of incised circles, visible only on the right side, towards the rim. In general, the decoration was made in a simple manner, by marking with incisions only the exterior contours. The lines are now worn-out and hardly visible, situation which can be explained through the intensive and/or prolonged usage of the object in ancient times. Very likely, the spirals covered, initially, the whole surface of the handle. Currently, only parts of the first five and of the seventh one are visible. The saucepan preserves at the end of the handle the craftsman's stamp which can be observed on a length of 20 mm and on a width of 4.2–4.8 mm. Because of oxidation and, again, of the worn-out lines, the stamp is almost impossible to read. One can suggest, with caution, the presence of the following letters: CNPO[...]SR? (Fig. 4/2).

From a typological point of view, the saucepan⁹ belongs to a group of bronze vessels known in the archaeological literature as: *Blechkasserollen*, corresponding to Radnóti types 5–10¹⁰, to Eggers types 134–136¹¹, and to Petrovsky types III, 1–4¹². The term *Blechkasserollen* is accepted nowadays as

⁹ The terminology used to denominate the variant of the type to which the vessel from Ardeu belongs is not well defined in the literature. The vessels displaying similar characteristics have been published under different names, e.g.: *mestola* (Collection of Profane Museum of Vatican (Italy): RADNÓTI 1937, 55–57, Tav. III/1), *Blechkasserolle* (Vrhnikia (Solvenia): RADNÓTI 1938, 38, Taf. II/9, XVII/30; BREŠČAK 1982, 42, no. 17, T. 2/17; PETROVSZKY 1993, 299 (S.13.01), Taf. 26/S.13.01), *dipper* (Collections of Rijksmuseum G. M. Kam, Nijmegen (Holland): DEN BOESTERD 1956, XXI–XXII, 17, no. 46, Pl. III/46), *casserole légère, à paroi plus mince* (Saône River (France): BARATTE ET ALII 1984, 60, 67, no. 85, Pl. XXXI/85), *attin-gitoio* (Viadana (Italy): BOLLA 1986, 196–198, no. 2, Fig. 4–5). However, the morphological features of the objects which display the highest degree of similarity with the Ardeu vessel (from the Collection of the Profane Museum of Vatican, Saône River, and Viadana) are typical for *Blechkasserollen*: the shape of the body with slightly convex walls (similar to Bolla type A and B: BOLLA 1986, 202, Fig.8/A, B), the presence of a base which is turned on the lathe in some cases (see the vessel from Saône River), and a handle – ending in a ring divided from the rest of the handle – which does not exceed in length 1.5 of the rim diameter. These elements determined us to use the term saucepan, and not dipper, when describing the bronze vessel from Ardeu and to analyze it accordingly. Likewise, type V from M. Bolla's typology including the saucepan from Viadana corresponds to variant 3 of type III in R. Petrovsky's typology (see: PETROVSZKY 1993, 39). The only object known to us presenting a different morphology, produced, very probably, in the same workshop, is the dipper/ladle with spout discovered in the banks of Saône River, at Saint-Germain-du-Plain (France): the body and base are rounded and the handle measures in length more than three times the value of the rim diameter (see: NEMETH 1993, 51–52, no. 49; BONNAMOUR 2000, 15, 127, no. 129). Following slightly different proportions, the same goes, very probably, for the dipper discovered at Pompeii (Italy), in *Casa dei capitelli figurati* (WILLERS 1907, 71, Abb. 41/7–7A), included by M. Bolla in the same type with the Viadana vessel (BOLLA 1986, 205; see also TASSINARI 1993, I: 162, II: 161, K 2491).

¹⁰ RADNÓTI 1938, 25–39, Taf. II/5–9, III/10.

¹¹ EGGERS 1951, 172, Beilage 58: *bronzene Blechkasserollen* (Typ 134–136), Taf. 12/134–136.

¹² PETROVSZKY 1993, 36–39, Taf. 1/III, 1–4b.

⁵ NEMOIANU/ANDRIȚOIU 1975.

⁶ PESCARU ET ALII 2002; FERENCZ ET ALII 2003; FERENCZ ET ALII 2004; FERENCZ ET ALII 2005; FERENCZ ET ALII 2010; FERENCZ ET ALII 2011.

⁷ In the spring of 2014 Iosif Vasile Ferencz had the opportunity of discussing with Simion Pârva who is now more than 80 years old. Even if he does not remember the exact location where he discovered the objects bought by the museum, he indicated without any hesitation that they were all found among the shrubs covering the eastern slope of the hill (see Fig. 1/2) and that they were not found together.

⁸ For a first publication of the object see: GHEORGHIU 2005, 168, 488, Fig. 214.

a convention in the archaeological literature, even if it does not designate the technology used for manufacturing the saucepans belonging to the group. The main characteristic is represented by the very thin walls, despite the fact that the vessels were never produced from bronze sheet, but from a cast shape which was subsequently pressed on a model and finished on the lathe¹³.

For long the scholars did not make a clear distinction between the thin-cast saucepans and the ones with convex body and handle ending in a loop with swan's heads belonging to Eggers types 131–132¹⁴. In A. Radnóti's opinion the latter were cast and produced in the workshops from Capua, while the thin-cast saucepans represent bronze-sheet imitations of the products from Campania, made in the north Italic workshops, probably at Aquileia¹⁵. Subsequently, M. Bolla's attempt of classifying both groups based on the shape of the body and the decoration of the handle proved that there is no clear connection between these elements¹⁶. The first who clarified the technological aspects and drew a clear distinction between the two types was R. Petrovsky. As part of the typology of the Roman bronze vessels with craftsman's stamp, the author classified the saucepans with swan's heads produced in Campania in type II (*Kasserollen mit Schwanenkopfbügel*)¹⁷ and the thin-cast saucepans in type III (*Blechkasserollen*)¹⁸.

The discoveries of thin-cast saucepans are numerous in Northern Italy, Slovenia, Bohemia, Gaul, and the Rhine area. Based on the dates offered by the contexts of the discoveries and on the names attested by the craftsman's stamps, R. Petrovsky sets the production of the type in north-eastern Italy, at Aquileia, between the last two decades of the 1st century BC and the third decade of the 1st century AD¹⁹. The presence in small number of some variants of the type between the finds from Pompeii determined J. Kunow to suggest a production period lasting till the last quarter of the 1st century AD²⁰. Such a hypothesis is unlikely and the thin-cast saucepans from Pompeii should be interpreted as objects used for a long period of time²¹.

It is not easy to integrate the saucepan from Ardeu in the variants of the type which have been defined so far. Such an attempt is made harder by the poor publication of at least part of the finds or by the state of preservation of others. There are more elements which need to be considered in this respect: the horizontal rim decorated with a band of ovolo, the slightly convex walls, and the decorated handle ending in a loop separated by a narrow area. Taking these into consideration, the vessels displaying the same characteristics as the saucepan from Ardeu are not numerous. The best parallels are represented by the saucepan from the assembly of bronze vessels dated during the Augustan age and

discovered at Viadana (Italy) in the 19th century²², another one preserved in the Collections of the Profane Museum of Vatican (Italy)²³ and a saucepan discovered in the Saône River (France)²⁴. The band of ovolo is characteristic for the objects from Viadana and Vatican, the shape of the body is similar in all three cases (with a height varying from 55 to 59 mm), and all the handles are decorated with incisions: rows of hatches and ovolo near the rim (Viadana), a complex interposed decoration in the shape of a "hair braid"²⁵, positioned on half of the handle, near the rim and rows of small circles along the edges (Vatican), and pouched circles forming three floral motifs, flanked along the edges of the handle by a row of small circles (Saône). The handles end with a loop corresponding to Bolla type V in two cases (Viadana, Saône) and with one of Bolla type IV in one (Vatican)²⁶. Because of the strong similarities, one can also mention here the dipper with spout discovered in the bank of the Saône River, near Saint-Germain-du-Plain (France)²⁷ which has a rim decorated with ovolo, a handle decorated with a complex incised vegetal decoration, ending in a loop similar to the one of the saucepan from Ardeu. The band of ovolo on the rim and the end of the handle typical for Bolla type V appear on a fragmentary saucepan from the Collections of Rijksmuseum G. M. Kam, Nijmegen (Holland)²⁸ and the same decoration of the handle end can be observed on a thin-cast saucepan with concave walls, bearing the stamp STAG/*Staglius Philoca (lus ?)*, discovered at Vrhnika (Slovenia)²⁹.

Summarizing the above-mentioned, the saucepans from Ardeu, River Saône, Viadana, and the Collections of the Profane Museum of Vatican represent a distinct variant of the thin-cast saucepans, characterized by a horizontal rim, decorated with a band of ovolo in most of the cases, a small body with slightly convex walls, a flat base, sometimes turned on the lathe, and a handle belonging to Bolla types IV or V, provided with a rich incised decoration. Except for the saucepan from Viadana the objects are stray finds. Because of that there is no possibility of narrowing down the production period. But they were certainly produced between the last two decades of the 1st century BC and the third decade of the 1st century AD, as the rest of the thin-cast saucepans. The saucepan from Ardeu is the only discovery from the group bearing a craftsman's stamp. As long as the letters proposed above have a high degree of uncertainty, due to the preservation state, the attempt of proposing a reading would be too speculative.

²² BOLLA 1986, 196–198, nr. 2, Fig. 4–5; BOLLA 1991, 151–152, Fig. 5/1.

²³ RADNÓTI 1937, 55–57, Tav. III/1; BOLLA 1986, 205, tipo IV, note 36 (with the bibliography).

²⁴ BARATTE ET ALII 1984, 60, 67, no. 85, Pl. XXXI/85.

²⁵ The low quality of the illustration does not allow a good observation of the depiction: ...*sul mezzo è inciso, in direzione della lunghezza, un ornamento intrecciato, somigliante ad una treccia di capelli, di cui si vede particolarmente bene l'estremità. La treccia presenta l'incrocio di due linee ondulate, si restringe verso la metà del manico, quindi improvvisamente termina.* (RADNÓTI 1937, 55).

²⁶ BOLLA 1986, 201, Fig. 7/IV-V.

²⁷ NEMETH 1993, 51–52, no. 49; BONNAMOUR 2000, 15, 127, no. 129.

²⁸ DEN BOESTERD 1956, XXI-XXII, 17, no. 46, Pl. III/46; BOLLA 1986, 205, note 37.

²⁹ RADNÓTI 1938, 38, Taf. II/9, XVII/30; BREŠČAK 1982, 42, no. 17, T. 2/17; BOLLA 1986, 205, note 37; PETROVSKY 1993, 299 (S.13.01), Taf. 26/S.13.01.

¹³ BOLLA 1986, 199; FLÜGEL 1993, 60, note 44; PETROVSKY 1993, 30, 36; KOSTER 1997, 56, no. 65.

¹⁴ EGGERS 1951, 171–172, Beilage 57: *Bronzekasserollen mit Schwanenkopfbügel* (Typ 131–133), Taf. 12/131–32.

¹⁵ RADNÓTI 1938, 19–39; KUNOW 1983, 62–63.

¹⁶ BOLLA 1986, 199–207.

¹⁷ PETROVSKY 1993, 30–35, Taf. 1/II, 1–3.

¹⁸ PETROVSKY 1993, 36–39, Taf. 1/III, 1–4.

¹⁹ PETROVSKY 1993, 36–39.

²⁰ KUNOW 1983, 25.

²¹ PETROVSKY 1993, 38; KOSTER 1997, 57.

The presence of a thin-cast saucepan at Ardeu is of high importance in the context of the discussion regarding the north Italic imports which arrived in pre-Roman Dacia during the Augustan period, after the establishment of the trade route connecting the north-eastern part of the Italic Peninsula with the Sava River and the Danube³⁰. This is the first object which attests with certainty the existence of the type in this territory³¹, especially as long as the two handles, one belonging to a thin-cast saucepan Petrovsky III, 1 and the other to a dipper/strainer Petrovsky X, 2, acquired from Cuzdriroara and preserved in the Collection of the National History Museum of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca do not have an exact place of discovery³².

Even if the context of the discovery is not known, the saucepan from Ardeu was definitely used for a long period of time, fact indicated by the worn-out lines of the handle decoration. The object, as the other thin-cast saucepans, was part of the drinking service and it was used for mixing the wine before serving³³.

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³⁰ For a detailed discussion on the subject see: RUSTOIU 2005, 79–84.

³¹ The identification of the saucepan discovered in the Dacian *dava* from Brad (Romania) with a variant of the type is not certain for the moment. Even if the context of the discovery is placed in the 1st century BC, the quality of the illustration is poor, the vessel was fragmentary and reconstructed in the drawing, thus it needs a detailed examination (for the saucepan form Brad see: URSACHI 1995, 132–133, 406, Pl. 17/3).

³² MUSTAȚĂ 2013, 125–128, no. 1, 139–140, no. 16, Pl. XIII/1, XVIII/16, LVI/1, LXII/16a-b.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ActaTS	Acta Terrae Septemcastrensis (Sibiu).		
BAM	Brukenthal. Acta Musei (Sibiu).	Marisia	européen sur l'artisanat et les productions manufacturées dans l'Antiquité à l'époque moderne (Montagnac).
CercArh	Cercetări Arheologice. Muzeul Național de Istorie a României (București).		Marisia. Studii și Materiale. Arheologie (Târgu Mureș).
CCA	Cronica Cercetărilor Arheologice din România.	Sargetia (S. N.)	Sargetia. Acta Musei Devensis (Serie Nouă) (Deva).
Corviniana	Corviniana. Acta Musei Corviniensis (Hunedoara).	Situla	Situla. Razprave Narodnega Muzeja v Ljubljani – Dissertationes Musei Nationalis Labacensis (Ljubljana).
DissPann	Dissertationes Pannonicae ex Instituto Numismatico et Archaeologico Universitatis de Petro Pázmány nominatae Budapestinensis provenientes (Budapest).	SUBB-Historia	Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai-Historia (Cluj-Napoca).
Drobeta	Drobeta. Muzeul Regiunii Porților de Fier (Drobeta-Turnu Severin).	Terra Sebus	Terra Sebus. Acta Musei Sabesiensis (Sebeș).
Instrumentum	Instrumentum. Bulletin du Groupe de travail	Ziridava	Ziridava. Studia Archaeologica (Arad).

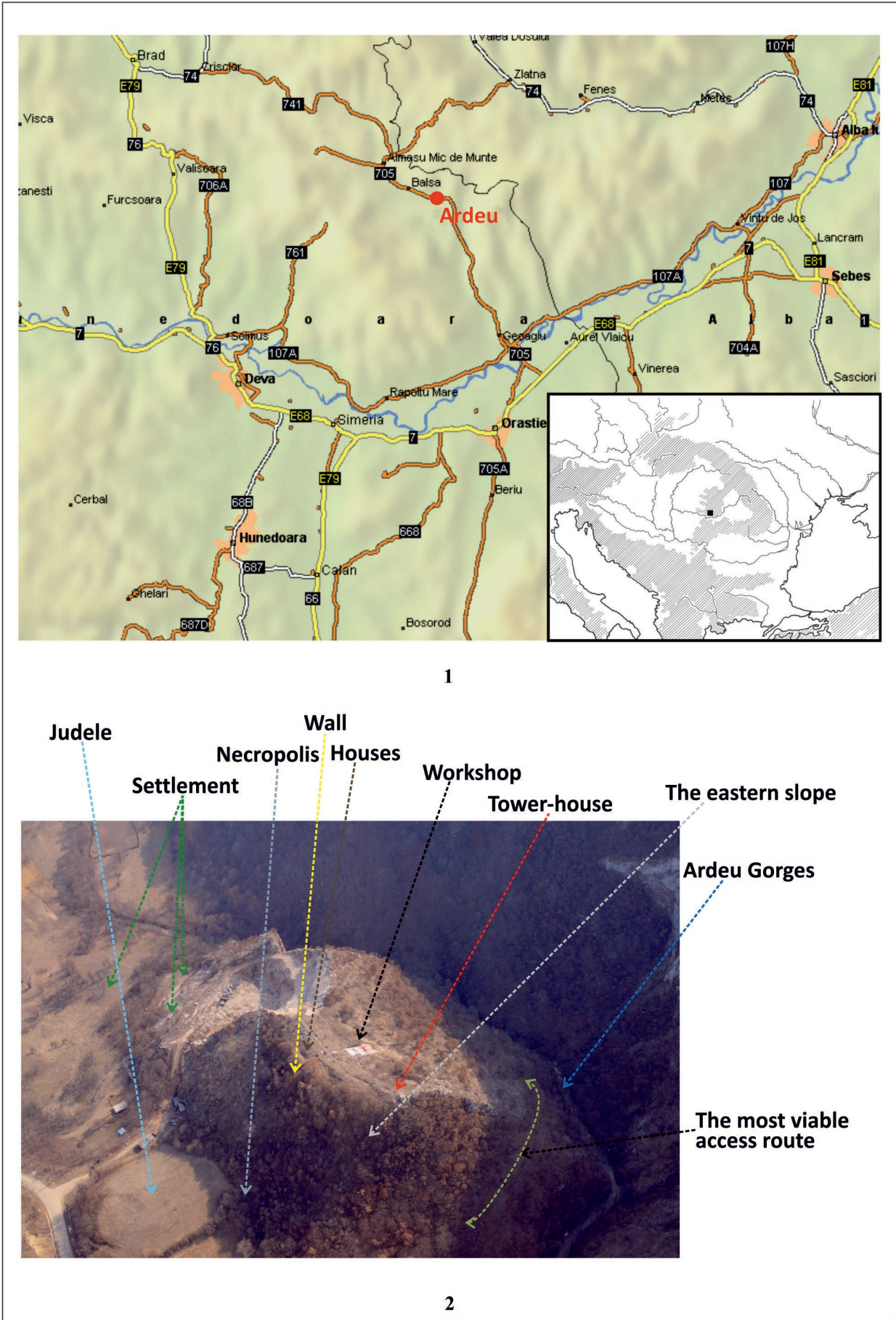


Fig. 1. 1. The location of Ardeu village (after FERENCZ 2010a);
2. The main components of the site (aerial view by Zoltán Czajlik, may 2012).

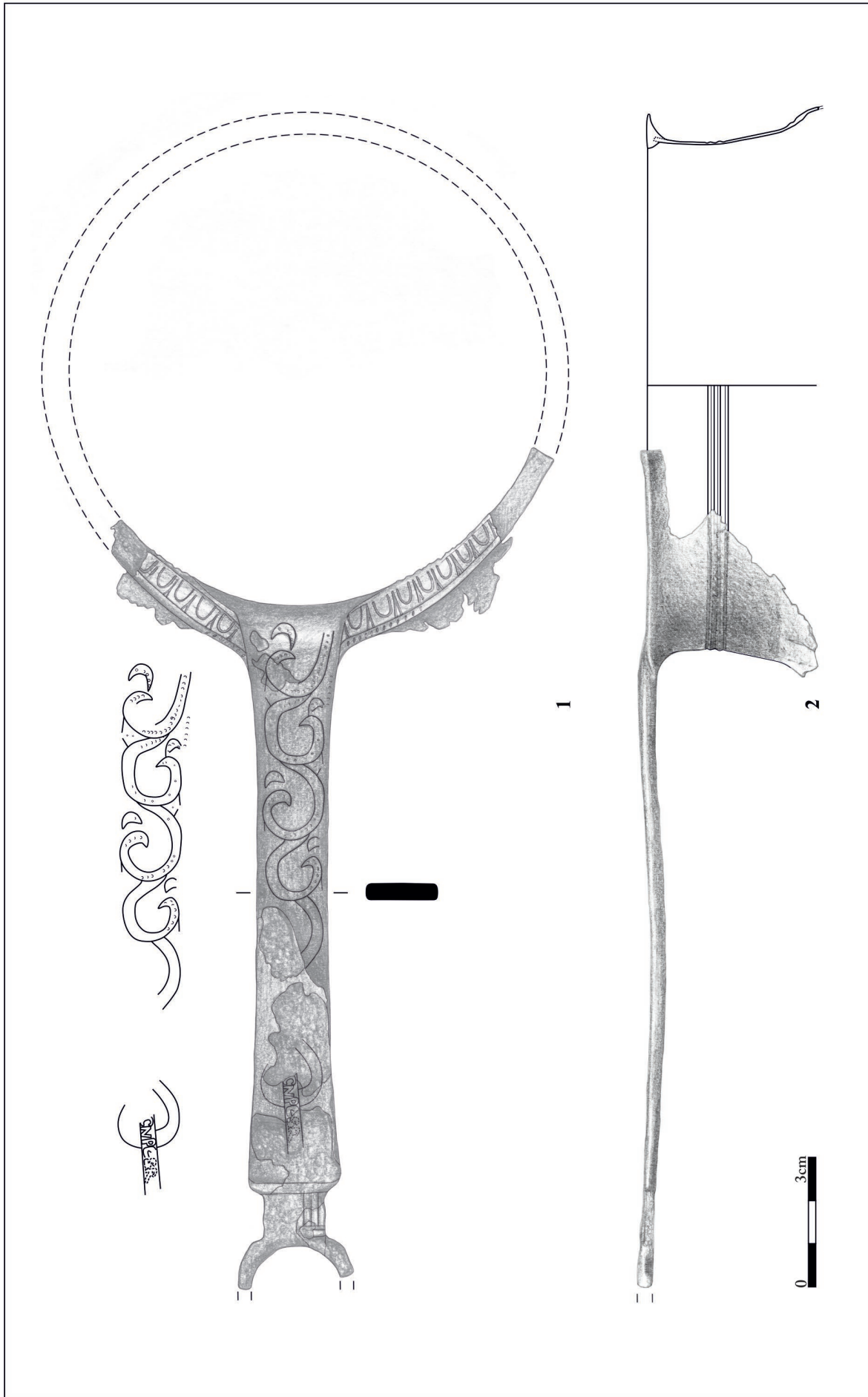


Fig. 2. 1-2. The bronze saucepan from Ardeu (drawn by O. Bocănciu and S. Mustăță).



Fig. 3. 1-3. The bronze saucepan from Ardeu (photos made by: 1-2: S. Mustață; 3: S. Odenie).



Fig. 4. 1-2. The bronze saucepan from Ardeu. Details. 1. The inner side (no scale; photo made by S. Odenie); 2. The stamp (photo and drawing made by S. Mustățã).