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ARCHAEOLOGY

OLD FINDS, NEW INTERPRETATIONS. ABOUT A POSSIBLE HELLENISTIC TYPE BED IN THE LA TÈNE DATE SETTLEMENT AT CRAIVA - PIATRA CRAIVII (ALBA COUNTY)

Abstract: Among the materials yielded by the archaeological excavations conducted during the '60s of the last century in the late La Tène site of Craiva – *Piatra Craivii* (Alba County) also counts a bronze pedestal, surviving fragmentarily, interpreted almost two decades ago as likely a figurine base. Upon a more careful examination, we noted that discussed item exhibits elements specific to a component part of a Hellenistic type bed leg.

Keywords: *Craiva – Piatra Craivii, pre-Roman Dacia, imports, Hellenistic type bed, elites, recycling bronze items.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The late La Tène site of Craiva – *Piatra Craivii* is located on the south-eastern side of the Apuseni Mountains, in the Trascău Mountains sub-unit, atop of a limestone klippe of a maximum elevation of 1078 m that provides a wider view over a significant sector of the middle Mureş river basin and of secondary areas in the Metaliferi Mountains, the Ampoi Valley, and, to the south, of the Secaş Plateau and the Şureanu Mountains. As a fixed landmark, it lies approximately at 17 km in a straight line from the location of the later Roman fortress of Apulum (modern-day Alba Iulia) (Fig. 1-2).

The archaeological finds yielded during various archaeological excavation phases (1960–1971; 1988; 2005–present day), illustrate a key landmark of the Iron Age II civilization in Transylvania¹. The recovered archaeological materials, extremely rich and diverse, include, beside those specific to the local material culture, a remarkable variety of objects with features and origins from other contemporary cultural environments².

In 2007, during the publishing of an exhibition catalogue addressing the cultural interferences in pre-Roman Dacia, we introduced into scientific circulation, among other, an item yielded by previous excavations conducted in the aforementioned settlement, an artefact that we hypothesised at the

¹ BERCIU/POPA/DAICOVICIU 1965, 155-166; MOGA 1981, 103-116; MOGA 2000, 113-116; MOGA *et alii* 2006, 142-143; MOGA *et alii* 2007, 140-142; MOGA *et alii* 2008, 126-127; MOGA *et alii* 2009, 106-109; PLANTOS 2007, 7-34.

² In synthesis see PLANTOS 2016.

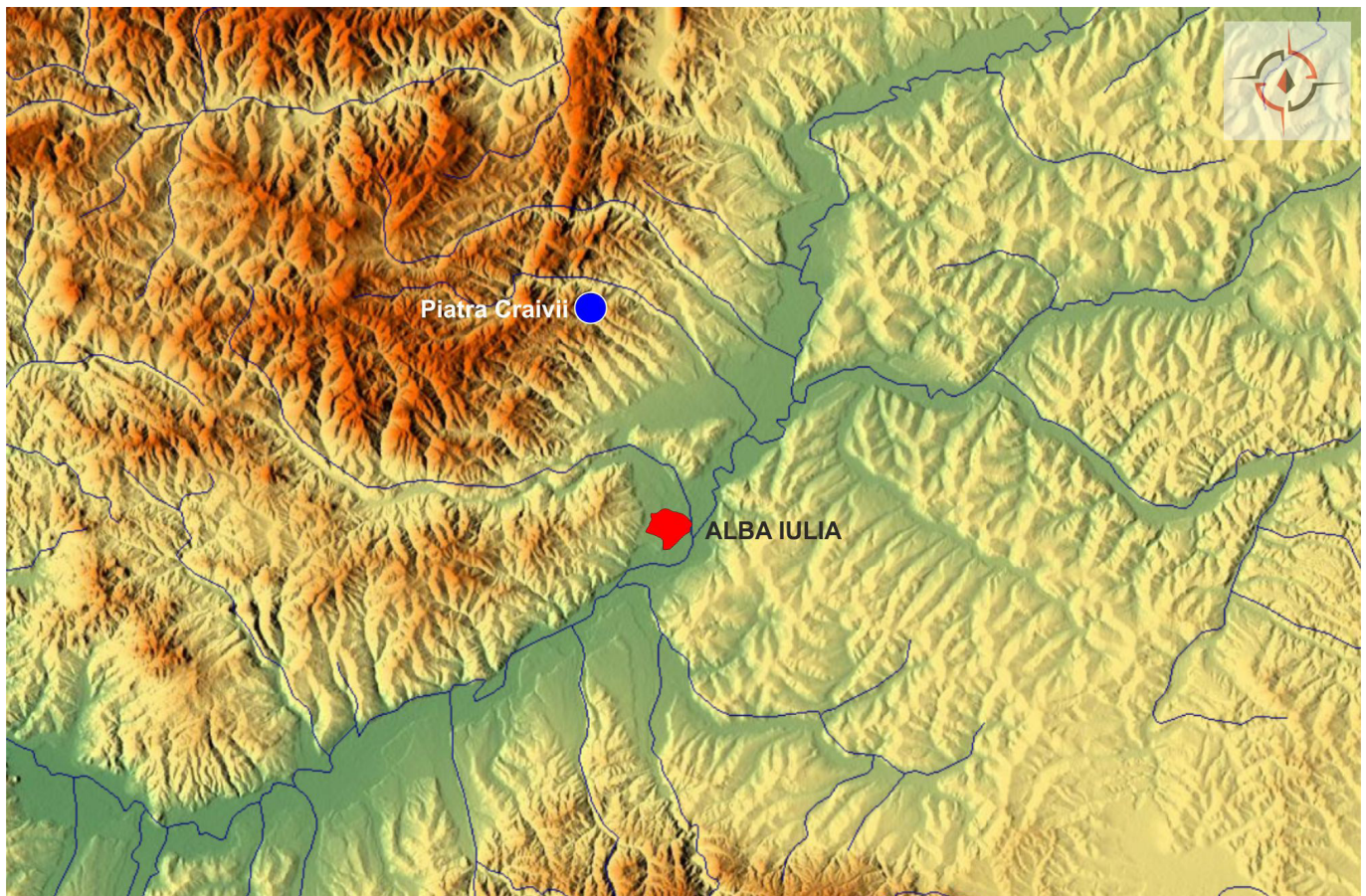


Fig. 1. Geographic location of the Craiva – Piatra Craivii site.



Fig. 2. Overall view, from the south, of the Craiva – Piatra Craivii site, with the marking of “Terrace V” (possible place of origin of the analyzed artifact).

time as a figurine base³. Subsequently, upon closer analysis of

³ MOGA/PLANTOS 2007, 26, no. 32.

the item subject herein, it was concluded that the discussed artefact must have served a different purpose. Therefore, we propose here a brief note on the significance of this object.

2. ITEM DESCRIPTION

Bronze pedestal, preserved fragmentarily, consisting of three registers, namely a rectangular base, followed by a circular register in the middle and a frustum-shaped (truncated cone) upper section. Each register is divided from the next by a rib (Fig. 3-4).

Sizes:

L: 7 cm

l: 7 cm

H (surviving): 4 cm.

Material and making technique: bronze/casting/finishing⁴.



Fig. 3. Bronze pedestal from Craiva – Piatra Craivii site (photos).

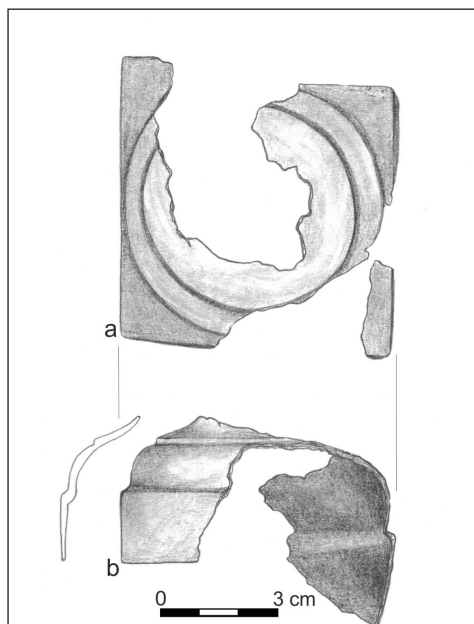


Fig. 4. Bronze pedestal from Craiva – Piatra Craivii site (drawing).

⁴ The metallographic analysis, performed more than two decades ago, in the chemical laboratory of the Cugir Mechanical Plant, have provided the following reference values for the discussed item: **Cu:** 76.38%, **Pb:** 4.46%, **Sn:** 7.84%, **Ni:** 1.62%, **Fe:** 1.41%, **Zn:** 2.32%. The analysis was completed

Find circumstances: yielded by the excavations conducted between 1960–1971, without specified archaeological context (likely the so-called “Terrace V”).

Storage and inventory number: National Museum of the Union, Alba Iulia / D.148

3. REINTERPRETING, DATING AND PARALLELS

Following the initial report, a more careful examination of the discussed object has led us to the hypothesis that it met the criteria of a rather component part of a Hellenistic-type bed leg⁵.

In essence, this is the lower section of a bed or reclining couch leg (*kline*)⁶, a piece of furniture widely diffused in the Greco-Roman world and beyond, recorded by written⁷, iconographic⁸ and material sources⁹ alike. The latter are the result of investigations carried out in Hellenistic, Republican or early imperial sites, retrieved from ruins, graves and shipwrecks¹⁰ or acquired by museal collections through donations and purchases.

Unlike burial beds, well-documented archaeologically¹¹, household beds remained less known for a long time. This has changed primarily subsequent to the find of sunken ancient vessel cargoes, such as the one discovered in the coastal waters of Tunisia, near the modern-day city of Mahdia¹² or that in Golfe-Juan¹³ near Cannes, finds that have also allowed the reinterpreting of pieces dispersed in various collections¹⁴.

Thus, it has been possible to rather accurately reconstruct the manufacturing process of such furniture items, primarily built on a wooden frame to which bronze or depending on the case, silver and iron elements were added¹⁵.

Beds or reclining couches of the type had their legs made of separate elements, in bronze, mould-cast and finished on a lathe (Fig. 6/2), subsequently assembled and fitted with an internal wooden or metal rod through the middle for stability¹⁶ (Fig. 7/1). Depending on workshops or the

by Eng. Marina Panait, Eng. Corina Moldovan, Eng. Cerciuc Nicoleta, Eng. Constantin Bârsan, whom we thank here too.

⁵ PLANTOS 2016, 102, pl. XLIII/3-4.

⁶ BOUBE-PICCOT 1975, 14; ANDRIANOU 2006, 232.

⁷ BOUBET-PICCOT 1975, 8-9; ANDRIANOU 2010, 595-596.

⁸ ANDRIANOU 2006, 222.

⁹ ANDRIANOU 2006, 236-238; MOLS 2007-2008, 152-153;

¹⁰ BOUBET-PICCOT 1975, 7-25, 69-90, 117-139, 259-262; BOUCHER 1982, 171-193; BAUDOIN/LIOU/LONG 1994, 5-143; DELBARRE-BÄRTSCHI/FISCHBACHER/KRIEG 2009, 7-58; PALAIOKRASSA 2012, 116-131;

¹¹ BIANCHI 2010, 39-106.

¹² BOUBE-PICCOT 1975, 14-15.

¹³ BAUDOIN/LIOU/LONG 1994, 9-143.

¹⁴ For instance, like those originating from Bourgoiun-Jallieu or Canosa, in southern Italy, today in the collections of the Gallo-Roman Museum of Lyon, respectively the Walters Art Museum of Baltimore, Maryland, USA, (see BOUCHER 1982, 171-193; KENT HILL 1952-1953, 48-61).

¹⁵ BOUBE-PICCOT, 7-8; ZINGG 2012, 161-96 *sqv*; DELBARRE-BÄRTSCHI *et alii* 2015, 69, 71-74.

¹⁶ BOUBE-PICCOT 1972, 15-16; BOUCHER 1982, 184; DELBARRE-BÄRTSCHI/DUVAUCHELLE/KRIEG, 2009, 24; DELBARRE-BÄRTSCHI *et alii* 2015, Fig. 5.

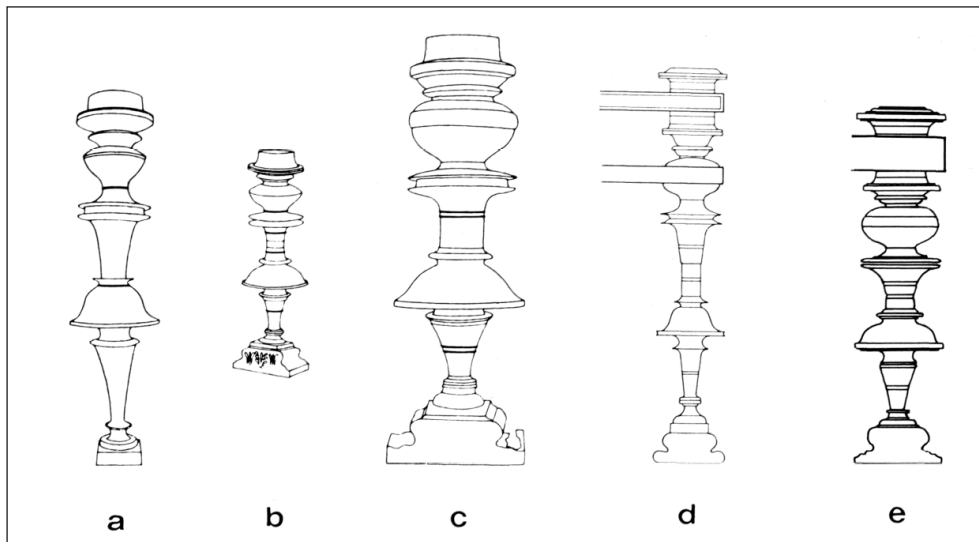


Fig. 5. Different silhouettes of “delian” type bed legs: a. Mahdia; b. Pompeii; c. Morocco; d. Canosa; e. Bourgoin-Jallieu (after BOUCHER 1982).

period when these were made, such legs illustrate a relatively diverse repertoire of shapes and profiles¹⁷ (Fig. 5).

In summary, the components of such a bed or reclining couch leg consisted of a simple or decorated base, into which a wooden front bottom or side rail could be assembled for connection with the opposite parallel leg¹⁸. Then followed a pedestal, typically square at the bottom, which became slightly frustum-shaped in the upper part¹⁹, also known as a “*Tuscan base d'ordre*”²⁰, on top of which lay a frustum-shaped piece, flared in the upper end. Elevation then continued with other segments, of different shapes (truncated cone or reversed dome etc.), while at the end part of the leg, after the junction with the proper bed frame, lay a slightly conical element, flattened in the upper part²¹ similarly to a cap mounted on the ornate headboard²² (*fulcra*) (Fig. 6/1-3).

This type of bed/reclining couch was primarily produced in Greek workshops, as suggested by the presence of Greek letters inscribed on the metal components of the bed in several finds²³, a hypothesis also supported by ancient literary mentions. The workshops are presumed to have existed in Asia Minor, Greece²⁴ or southern Italy²⁵, and possibly

even in North Africa²⁶. The most renowned production centre appears to have been Delos, famous for its bronze, as implied by Pliny the Elder (*N.H.* XXX, 51; XXXIV, 9)²⁷. Nevertheless, given the lack of copper resources on the island, it may be more likely defined as a major site for the production of specific components²⁸ and final assembly, using materials imported from other areas as well²⁹. Furthermore, the established expression “*lecti Deliaca specie*” may be understood as defining for a specific style or a stylistic and structural peculiarity in the making of these furniture objects³⁰.

Regarding the dating of the so-called “Delian” beds based on clear archaeological contexts and epigraphic evidence, it may be argued these were produced particularly between mid-2nd century BC and the first half of the 1st century BC³¹, remaining in use, under various forms, until later³².

The item of *Piatra Craivii* meets all specificities to be considered the secondary plinth³³ of a Hellenistic-type bed leg, as illustrated by numerous parallels spread across a wide area, particularly in the Mediterranean basin, of which we mention those from the *Fourmigue C shipwreck*³⁴ in Golfe-Juan (today's France), Antikythera³⁵ (Greece), various locations from Northern Africa³⁶, to which add those in Asia Minor³⁷ or western Europe³⁸. In addition to the similar profile, we note that the sizes of the item here (7 cm x 7 cm by the base) are identical or very similar to some of the parallels above mentioned. For instance, the items of Bourgoin-Jallieu, held in Lyon, have exactly the same sizes as that of *Piatra Craivii*³⁹, the exemplars recovered from the *Fourmigue C* shipwreck have values ranging between 7.6 cm

¹⁷ BOUCHER 1982, 182, Fig. 20.

¹⁸ It seems to be a distinct piece, cast separately, yet there are cases when it was cast together with the square-shaped base, that followed in the leg elevation (ZINGG 2012, 168). In the case of simple, rectangular plinths, the connection structure with the other leg, wooden-made, was set below this base.

¹⁹ See the comment above.

²⁰ BOUBE-PICCOT 1975, 69-70; BAUDOIN/LIOU/LONG 1994, 31; ZINGG 2012, 168, Fig. 13-14.

²¹ BOUCHER 1982, 175-181, Fig. 6-19; BAUDOIN/LIOU/LONG 1994, 31-34, Fig. 13-15; DELBARRE-BÄRTSCHI/FISCHBACHER/KRIEG 2009, 15-19, Fig. 8-11.

²² BOUCHER 1982, Fig. 23; BAUDOIN/LIOU/LONG 1994, 45-60, Fig. 23-46 *sqv*; DELBARRE-BÄRTSCHI/FISCHBACHER/KRIEG 2009, Fig. 19-20; FERENCZ/RUSTOIU/MICLE 2018, Fig. 6.

²³ BOUCHER 1982, 187-188; BAUDOIN, LIOU, LONG 1994, 34-37; DELBARRE-BÄRTSCHI/FISCHBACHER/KRIEG 2009, 25-27; ZINGG 2012, 174-176; DELBARRE-BÄRTSCHI *et alii* 2015, 73-74.

²⁴ ANDRIANOU 2006, 234.

²⁵ KENT HILL 1952-1953, 61; BOUCHER 1982, 189;

²⁶ BOUBBE-PICCOT 1975, 25.

²⁷ Examined edition PLINY THE ELDER, *Naturalis historia. Enciclopedia cunoștințelor din Antichitate. Volumul I – Cosmologia. Geografia* (translation Ioana Costa and Tudor Dinu), Polirom Press, Iași 2001.

²⁸ As proven by the existing moulds for casting component parts of bed legs (see SIEBERT 1973, 583, Fig. 31; Fig. 33; ANDRIANOU 2009, 50 and Fig. 7).

²⁹ ANDRIANOU 2006, 234.

³⁰ ANDRIANOU 2010, 596.

³¹ BOUBE-PICCOT 1975, 14-16; BOUCHER 1982, 188-189; DELBARRE-BÄRTSCHI/FISCHBACHER/KRIEG 2009, 28-32, with the synthesis of main finds of products of the type; ZINGG 2012, 161-188, *sqv*; DELBARRE-BÄRTSCHI *et alii* 2015, 74-75.

³² DELBARRE-BÄRTSCHI *et alii* 2015, 75.

³³ Without yet excluding the possibility this was the primary plinth, as suggested by a leg version originating from the Mahdia shipwreck (see BOUCHER 1982, Fig. 20/a).

³⁴ BAUDOIN/LIOU/LONG 1994, Fig. 13, 14/c, 18.

³⁵ PALAIOKRASSA 2012, 125-126, no. 73, Fig. 74.

³⁶ BOUBE-PICCOT 1975, 69, 117-120 *sqv*; Pl. 2-4, Pl. 41-45.

³⁷ ZINGG 2012, Fig. 14.

³⁸ BOUCHER 1982, 176, Fig. 6, Fig. 6 bis/b, Fig. 8; DELBARRE-BÄRTSCHI *et alii* 2015, Fig. 8/1; Fig. 32.

³⁹ BOUCHER 1982, 191.

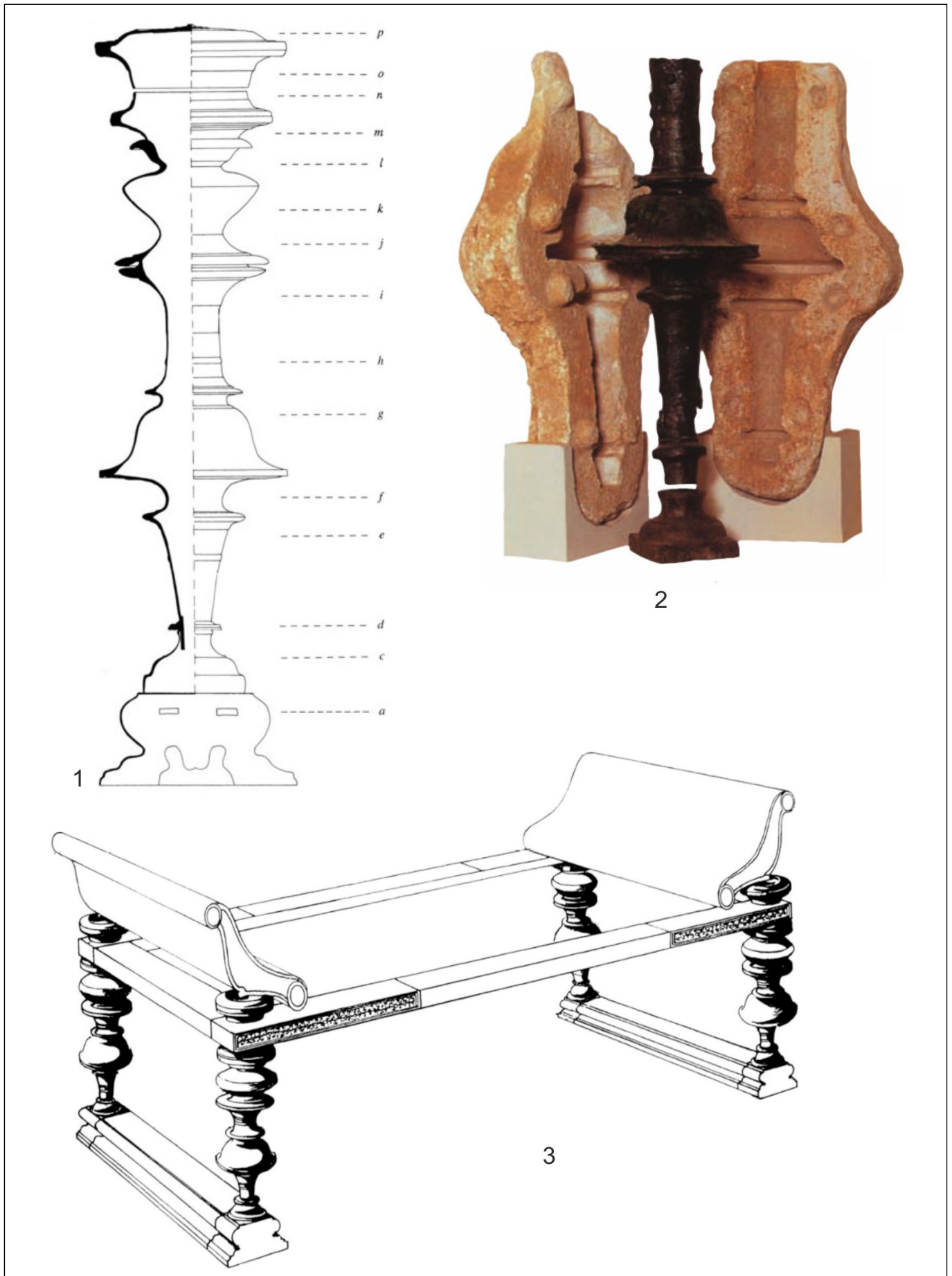


Fig. 6. The main components of a “Delian” type bed leg from Bourgoin-Bourgoin-Jallieu (1) with the proposal for the reconstruction of the bed (3), namely the casting mold and bronze leg from the island of Delos (2) (1, 3 - after BOUCHER 1982; 2 - after ANDRIANOU 2009).

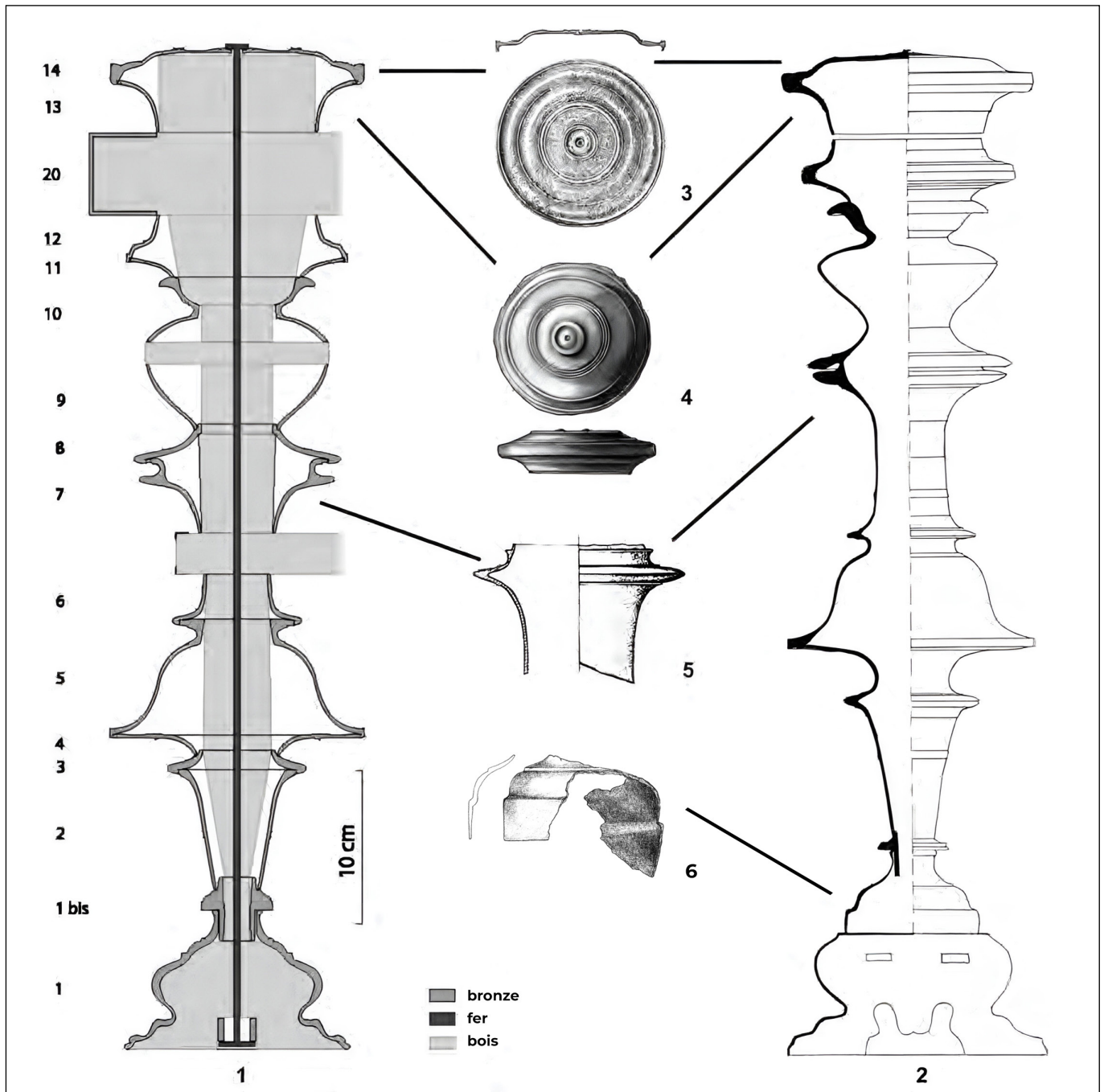


Fig. 7. Representative profiles of some “delian” type bed legs (1. Avenches; 2. Fourmigue C shipwreck), respectively component parts of such pieces from pre-Roman Dacia (3. Piatra Roşie; 4. Unip; 5. Costeşti – Cetăţuie; 6. Craiva – Piatra Craivii), (after FERENCZ/RUSTOIU/MICLE 2018 with additions).

and 8.7 cm⁴⁰, while a slightly smaller size (5.2 cm x 5.4 cm) is found on the silver plinth of *Gaziura*⁴¹ (modern-day Turhal, Turkey) (Fig. 8).

Another argument that favours the reinterpretation herein is provided by the comparison of the physicochemical analysis results performed on such artefacts. In general, it has been noted that the various metal components of these beds were made of an alloy that consisted primarily of copper and tin, with lead also present, albeit in lower percentages⁴².

When referring to analyses conducted on components (pedestals) similar to that of *Piatra Craivii*, we notice that the alloy exhibits a relatively similar composition, like for instance in one of the items of Bourgoin-Jallieu, which consists of a mixture of copper (84%), tin (10%), and lead (5.8%)⁴³, while the pedestals recovered from the shipwreck near the Island of Antikythera were made of copper (81.91%), tin (13.35%), lead (0.60%) and iron (0.60%), respectively with nickel, zinc and silver present in insignificant quantities⁴⁴.

⁴⁰ BAUDOIN/LIOU/LONG 1994, 38, table IV.

⁴¹ ZINGG 2012, 163.

⁴² KENT HILL 1952-1953, 62; BOUCHER 1982, 192-193; SCHWAB *et alii*

2008, 19, table 3; DELBARRE-BÄRTSCHI *et alii* 2015, 72.

⁴³ BOUCHER 1982, 192. The author related the high lead concentration to a possible replacement of respective item with one made of common bronze.

⁴⁴ PALAIOKRASSA 2012, 116 and note 11.

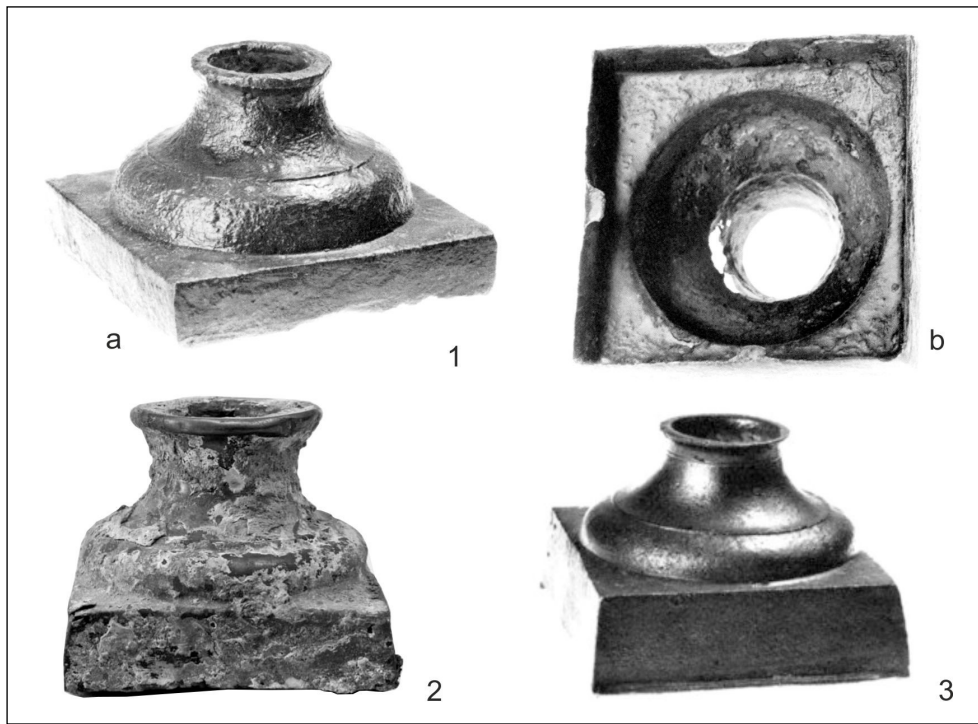


Fig. 8. “Tuscan-type” plinths from the Fourmigue C shipwreck (1, 3 – after BAUDOIN/LIOU/LONG 1994) and from Gaziura/Turhal (2 – after ZINGG 2012).

that supported the bed frame has been identified still in the area of the Dacian Kingdom’s capital (though lacking a specific context), featuring an incised letter group that had a number value⁴⁶, which was also found in other similar finds from the Greco-Roman world⁴⁷. A bronze cap that closed the upper part of such a bed leg was discovered in the same region, namely in the Piatra Roşie fortress (Fig. 7/3). It was yielded by early excavations performed in a building dated after the second half of the 1st century BC, its function being recently reinterpreted in this regard⁴⁸. Lastly, a final item, representing still the upper part of such a leg, placed above the wooden frame as a “cap”, has been yielded by

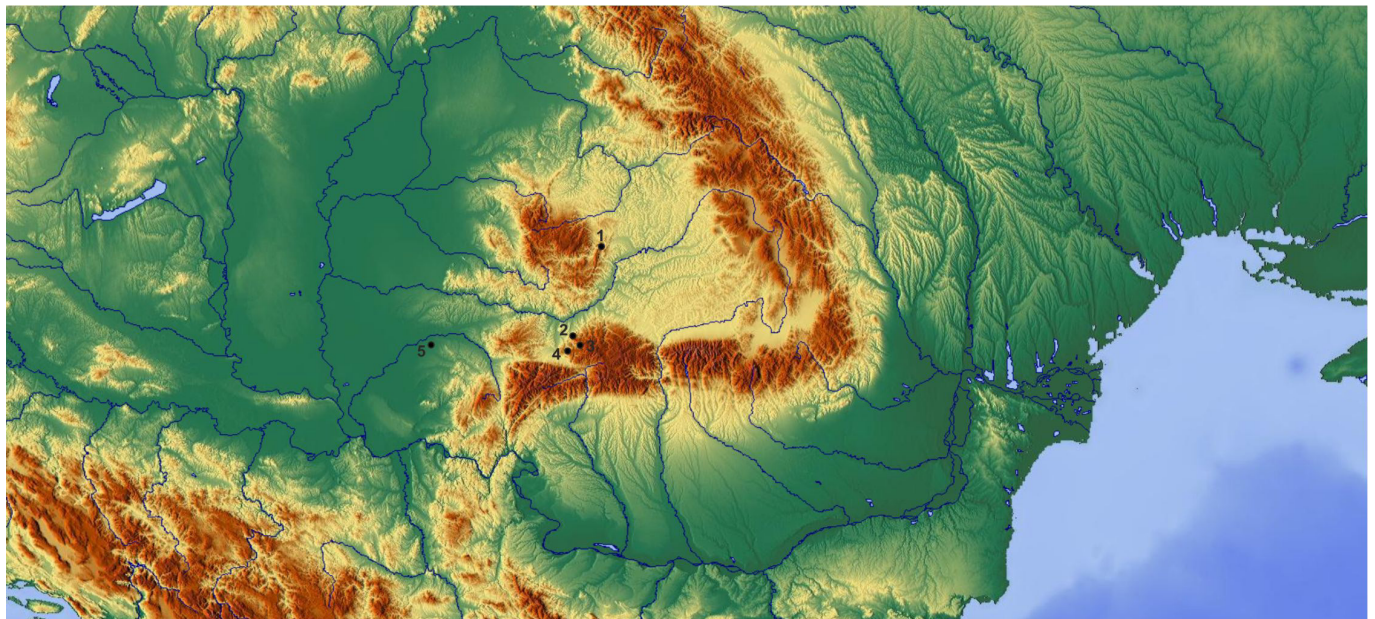


Fig. 9. Spatial distribution of the discoveries of component pieces of some Hellenistic-type beds from pre-Roman Dacia (1. Craiva – Piatra Craivii; 2. Costeşti – Cetăţuie; 3. Orăştiei Mountains; 4. Piatra Roşie (Boşorod commune); 5. Unip – Cetăţuica).

*

Metal elements of Hellenistic-type beds are present at other sites from pre-Roman Dacia as well, the topic having been analysed relatively recently. For instance, at Costeşti-Cetăţuie (Hunedoara County), two fragmentary tubular pieces have been found, likely originating from the middle section of bed legs⁴⁵ (Fig. 7/5). Furthermore, a bronze sleeve

the archaeological investigations carried out in the La Tène date settlement of Unip – Dealul Cetăţuica (Timiş County)⁴⁹. The item benefits of a clear archaeological context, having been found in a pit-type feature dated between late 2nd century BC – first century BC⁵⁰ (Fig. 7/4). Viewed in context, the find was interpreted as possible reuse within the local

⁴⁵ Based on parallels, the authors identify these as a third piece, starting from the base of the leg in elevation (HENŢ/GHEORGHIU 2018, 55-56 and Fig. 1)

⁴⁶ HENŢ/GHEORGHIU 2018, 56-57, Fig. 2-3.

⁴⁷ HENŢ/GHEORGHIU 2018, 57.

⁴⁸ FERENCZ/RUSTOIU/MICLE 2018, 116 and Fig.7/3.

⁴⁹ FERENCZ/RUSTOIU/MICLE 2018, 114, 116-117, Fig. 5.

⁵⁰ FERENCZ/RUSTOIU/MICLE 2018, 112-114.

community, where the item might have served as a recipient (bowl/basin)⁵¹.

In summary, viewed as a whole, the finds from pre-Roman Dacia illustrate various metal parts of “Delian” type beds, originating namely from their legs and illustrating the middle and upper sections⁵² (Fig. 9). Through the piece of Craiva, the “repertoire” is now completed by a segment from the lower part, namely that of a secondary plinth (Fig. 7/6).

The significance of these artefacts’ presence north of the Danube carries a wide spectrum of interpretations, ranging from prestige goods of the local aristocracy to scrap material intended for recycling by melting and production of new objects in local workshops⁵³. In the site discussed here, neither of these two possibilities excludes the other. This is particularly relevant as the site was home to an elite that manifested its status through the “import” by various means, of Mediterranean products⁵⁴, the site being also a major metallurgical and manufacturing centre as evidenced by present installations, workshops and tools necessary for working both ferrous and non-ferrous metals, whose archaeological expression is represented by the impressive number of finished or half-finished products made in iron, bronze and silver⁵⁵.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Reinterpretation of the bronze item discovered at Craiva – *Piatra Craivii* allows for its identification as the secondary plinth of a Hellenistic-type bed leg (*kline*). According to its morphological features, typological parallels and available technological data, it may be presumed that it is a product of the Hellenistic workshops from the Eastern Mediterranean. In fact, other products originating from this region have also been documented in the mentioned site⁵⁶.

In the absence of a specific context and given its fragmentary condition, the dating of this item may be established, in general terms, by analogy with similar, previously mentioned finds most likely during the 1st century BC.

The presence of such an object in a pre-Roman Dacia context mirrors the diffusion of prestige goods and material forms associated with the Greco-Roman cultural milieu into regions outside the Mediterranean core, in communities that adopted and “adapted” external cultural elements that served as an expression of the “cosmopolitan” nature of the elites in control of territories, resources and people during the late phase of the Iron Age II in the region north of the Lower Danube.

⁵¹ FERENCZ/RUSTOIU/MICLE 2018, 117; FERENCZ/MICLE/STAVILĂ 2019, 56.

⁵² FERENCZ/RUSTOIU/MICLE 2018, Fig. 7.

⁵³ FERENCZ/RUSTOIU/MICLE 2018, 116.

⁵⁴ GLODARIU 1974, 29, 43, 57, 192, 212, 236, 281; PLANTOS 2005, 449-455, *sqv*; RUSTOIU 2005, 53, 55, 67-68; PLANTOS 2006, 145-150; MOGA/PLANTOS 2007, 22-32.

⁵⁵ WOLLMANN 1971, 282-292; MOGA 1979, 514-517; RUSTOIU 1996, 59, 67, 70-71, 73; MOGA/RUSTOIU 1997, 57-65.

⁵⁶ PLANTOS 2006, 145-146, Pl. 1; MOGA/PLANTOS 2007, 29.

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