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### DEBUNKING A MYTH: THE DACIAN CURVED SWORD BETWEEN HISTORIOGRAPHICAL DISCOURSE AND THE ARHEOLOGICAL REALITIES

**Abstract:** In the first part of this paper, we will try to review the main discourses elaborated so far in the Romanian historiography regarding a certain type of weapon, namely the curved sword, known from the ancient sources as *falx* (plural *falces*). For almost a century and a half of Romanian history and archaeology, there was an increased interest of scholars for this type of weapon and for curved weapons in general. In a perfect cultural-historical manner, an entire identity discourse was shaped, the curved swords being an element for the identification of the Dacian population. In the second part of this paper, the accent will shift towards archaeology, and we will present, in particular, the curved swords discovered over time at Grădiștea de Munte – Sarmizegetusa Regia (Hunedoara County, Romania). In contrast with most papers that start from iconographical representations and ancient textual sources, we would rather let archaeology tell us the story of these weapons.

**Keywords:** *Late Iron Age, Dacians, weapons, historiography, archaeology.*

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The last century, marked by the terrible horrors caused by the two world wars that ultimately shaped the history of humanity, imposed, as expected, a pacifying discourse over the remote past. The same cannot be said for the beginnings of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As a recent paper shows, the academic trend is completely different nowadays<sup>1</sup>. The traces of conflicts and war, in all their dimensions – from physical to mental – have come to the attention of different scholars. Archaeology also enrolled in this game, a fact noticeable by the increasing number of papers and international conferences<sup>2</sup>, or even by the appearance of a journal dedicated to “conflict archaeology” – *Journal of Conflict Archaeology*. A possible explanation for this epistemological turn or paradigm shift can be found in the introduction of the journal’s first volume, where the authors clearly emphasize that the basis of past human relations was conflict, and it is worth exploring it in all its dimensions<sup>3</sup>. More recently, a part of the Romanian archaeology – the archaeological school from Cluj – has also joined the western historiographical directives and tried to explore through international colloquia and publications the belligerent nature of the human past<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> ARMIT *et alii* 2006, 1; See also here HARDING 2020, 122-143; VENCL 1984.

<sup>2</sup> SHARPLES 1991; KEELEY 1996; GUILAINE/ZAMMIT 2005; PARKER PEARSON/THORPE 2005; JAMES 2018.

<sup>3</sup> POLLARD/BANKS 2005, vi.

<sup>4</sup> Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Historia 54(1-2), 2009, Special no. *Armament și armata în*

For a contemporary society in which conflicts or wars on a large scale no longer take place and they can be reduced to a few moments and outbreaks (the terrorist attacks that shocked the European continent and the United States of America, the endless fights from Middle East or Africa), and warriors and weapons happily are not an everyday presence, it is not surprisingly that some scholars try to trace them among the “residues from the past”. From a particular point of view, this approach seems justified, since the world we live in today is the result of such events: individuals against individuals, groups against groups, communities against communities, societies against societies, nations against nations, or in order to use Marx’s and Engels’ famous dictum “The History of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles”<sup>5</sup>.

In this context, which undoubtedly leaves its mark on archaeological discourse as well, we must also (re)consider the increasing number of studies from the Romanian historiography which focus on the problem of conflicts, wars or weaponry from Late Iron Age period.

In our opinion, the sudden emergence of this historiographical approach can be explained, in a short analysis, in different ways. A first point of view is strictly related to the archaeological and historiographical field. The studies of weaponry or pieces of military equipment from Late Iron Age were almost missing from the Romanian archaeological literature. This type of material record was rather treated in a simple descriptive manner – typology, chronology, dimensions – in different papers or site monographs. Secondly, we have to mention here Zoe Petre’s book, *Practica nemuririi* (2004)<sup>6</sup>, which, in our opinion, is the “main responsible” for the more recent historiographical turn regarding the issues of warriors and weapons from Late Iron Age period. In a first phase, Zoe Petre undertakes a just and extensive investigation of the ancient textual sources regarding the northern Balkan space, “demolishing” many of the Romanian historiographical myths<sup>7</sup>. Subsequently, her demonstration of the Late Iron Age social structures and warrior character of Dacian society<sup>8</sup> – the comparison between the Dacian *kometai/capillati* (mentioned by Jordanes who is following Dios Chrysostom or Petrus Patricius’ summary on Cassius Dio’s work) and Nordic *berserkers* is more than speculative. This idea follows Dumézil’s<sup>9</sup> and Eliade’s<sup>10</sup> logic of the trifunctional hypothesis on Proto-Indo-European mythology and society, and only continues a mythologizing perspective on the Dacian past<sup>11</sup>.

On different occasions, G. Florea noticed that after the fall of the Romanian Communist regime in the winter of 1989, the dialectical and historical materialism became obsolete, and this led to the total abandonment of issues

*Dacia preromană și romană / Weaponry and army in Pre-Roman and Roman Dacia* – Florea, G./Cristescu, C. (eds.); NEMETH 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Marx, Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1847-48). In: MARX/ENGELS (vol. 6) 1976, 482.

<sup>6</sup> PETRE 2004a.

<sup>7</sup> NEMETH 2004, 5

<sup>8</sup> PETRE 2004a, 249-260; PETRE 2004b.

<sup>9</sup> DUMÉZIL 1986.

<sup>10</sup> ELIADE 1959; ELIADE 1995, 11-29; See also here DANA 2000; DANA 2008, 271.

<sup>11</sup> See also here DANA 2011, 43-44, note 3.

regarding social structures, land tenure or the genesis of social formations in the Late Iron Age<sup>12</sup>. Since anthropological, sociological or even political science methods and theories are almost missing from Romanian archaeological literature, the more recent historiographical discourse continues the old-fashioned cultural-historical approach by making a clear distinction between *us* (Dacians) and the *others* (Romans, Greeks, Celts, Germanic-speaking groups, Thracians, etc). The possible relations between these socio-political entities are placed in the patterns of political and military conflicts rather than those of cultural influences<sup>13</sup>. This idea expressed above would be another point of view, but the increasing number of studies on warriors and weaponry is directly proportional to the development of a phenomenon that moves beyond archaeological boundaries, and enters the “socio-cultural” sphere, namely the historical re-enactment<sup>14</sup>.

Taking into account the aforementioned ideas we do not intend to follow and discuss the whole issue of warriors and weaponry from the Late Iron Age period on the Romanian territory. However, we want to resume the discussion regarding a specific type of weapon, more precisely the curved sword, known in both ancient and modern historiography as *falx* (plural *falces*). As it is well-known, the name comes from a rather ambiguous phrase used in the middle of the second century AD by the Roman rhetor Marcus Cornelius Fronto. Writing to Lucius Verus around AD 165, Fronto mentioned, that: “He [Trajan] set out for the war with tried soldiers who held the Parthian enemy in contempt, making light of the impact of their arrows compared with the gaping wounds inflicted by the scythes of the Dacians”<sup>15</sup>. Earlier, in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, the Roman poet Publius Papinius Statius also wrote that: “I learnt how the Paeonians whirl and fling their darts and the Macetae their javelins, with how fierce a rush the Sarmatian plies his pike and the Getan his falchion how the Gelonian draws his bow, and how the Balearic wielder of the pliant thong keeps the missile swinging round with balanced motion, and as he swings it marks out a circle in the air”<sup>16</sup>. However, the curved sword will be better known from the artistic representations that belong to the Roman figurative art. The scenes of Trajan’s Column, the metopes of the monument from Adamclisi (Constanța County, Romania) or other minor reliefs (the limestone blocks from Grădiștea de Munte – *Sarmizegetusa Regia*<sup>17</sup> or those from

<sup>12</sup> FLOREA 2007, 103; FLOREA 2020, 425-426.

<sup>13</sup> The last two books written in the Romanian archaeology on war and warfare in the Late Iron Age – SÎRBU/BORANGIC 2016 and BORANGIC 2017 – are following a single idea. Covered with a cultural-historical cloak, the Dacian past is full of *warriors* in the abovementioned books, starting from the second part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE until the Roman conquest from AD106.

<sup>14</sup> For a perspective on historical re-enactment, see AGNEW 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Fronto, *Principia Historiae* 9. In: Marcus Cornelius Fronto, *Correspondence* vol. II (Loeb Classical Library No. 113, translated by C. R. Haines), 1920, 204-205: “...in bellum profectus est cum cognitis militibus hostem Parthum contemnentibus, sagittarum ictus post ingentia Dacorum falcibus inlata volnera despicatui habentibus”.

<sup>16</sup> Statius *Achilleid* 2. 417-422. In: Statius, *Thebaid V-XII, Achilleid* vol. II (Loeb Classical Library No. 207, translated by J. H. Mozley), 1928, 590-593: “...quo Paeones arma rotatu, quo Macetae sua gaesa citent, quo turbine contum Sauromates falcemque Getes arcumque Gelonus tenderet et flexae Balearicus actor habenae quo suspensa trahens libaret volnera tortu inclusumque suo distingueret aera gyro”.

<sup>17</sup> GLODARIU 1965, 128-129, Fig 2.

Britannia<sup>18</sup>) would set in the ancient but also in the modern social imaginary a symbol that would define a particular population situated on at the edges of the classical world.

In a first phase, our point of view will be a historiographical one, we will try to review the main discourses elaborated so far in the Romanian historiography regarding this type of weapon. Later, the accent will shift towards archaeology, presenting, in particular, the curved swords discovered over time at Grădiștea de Munte – *Sarmizegetusa Regia*. In contrast with most papers that start from iconographical representations and ancient textual sources, we would rather let archaeology tell us the story of these weapons.

### FROM A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL POINT OF VIEW...

For almost a century and a half of Romanian history and archaeology, there was an increased interest of scholars for this type of weapon and for curved weapons in general. In a perfect cultural-historical manner, an entire identity discourse was shaped, the curved swords being an element of the identification of Dacian population. To the best of our knowledge, the first scholar who discussed the curved sword was G. Tocilescu. In his well-known book, *Dacia înainte de romani* (1880), Tocilescu also provided a first description: the curved sword is a non-Greek and a non-Roman weapon, specific to Parthians, Persians and Dacians, and the latter ones had made it their national weapon<sup>19</sup>. For A. D. Xenopol, the situation is somewhat similar, the category of cutting weapons also comprising “the curved sword... the national weapon of the Geto-Dacians”<sup>20</sup>. In V. Pârvan’s work “the characteristic Dacian weapon in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD [is] a kind of «yatagan» with a gradually narrow tip, possibly a kind of «sickle» with a long wooden handle and «a single edge»”<sup>21</sup>.

As it can be clearly observed, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the image of the curved sword together with the entire historiographical discourse are copied from ancient sources, both iconographical and written, yet unsupported by sufficient archaeological discoveries. At least up to the time of V. Pârvan, only one curved sword was known on the present territory of Romania: the piece discovered in the 1890s at Viscri (at that time Deutsch-Weißkirch, region of Braşov), which was also included by Pârvan in his work<sup>22</sup>. After all, the entire public image of the Dacians was the one taken from ancient textual sources and/or iconographical representations, while the archaeological researches undertaken by the Vulpe spouses at Tinosu<sup>23</sup> (Prahova County) or Poiana<sup>24</sup> (Galaţi County), or the excavations carried out by D. M. Teodorescu in the area of the Orăştiei Mountains,<sup>25</sup> did not have an immediate impact on historiography<sup>26</sup>.

The entire perspective would change after World War II when large-scale archaeological excavations started in the Orăştiei Mountains. Supervised by C. Daicoviciu, these researches brought to light a complex system of settlements, fortifications, and civil or cult constructions. From this moment on, the Late Iron Age communities from the northern Balkan space will no longer be seen as a “culture of wood”<sup>27</sup> but as an original and grandiose civilisation. Furthermore, the discoveries made throughout Romania and dated in this chronological interval would often be compared with those from the Orăştiei Mountains<sup>28</sup>. C. Daicoviciu is also responsible for the use of the word *falx* for designating the curved sword<sup>29</sup>, although on the occasion of the first discovery of such a weapon at Grădiștea de Munte – *Sarmizegetusa Regia*, the same author defined it as a “short curved sword”<sup>30</sup>.

The studies concerning this type of weapon would see an exponential increase starting with the second half of the 2000s, the main promoter being C. Borangic<sup>31</sup>. In a first phase, the aforementioned author tries to gather all the artefacts of this type, describing them and making a series of pertinent observations. Later, however, with phrases such as “one of the most famous curved weapons used in antiquity”, “specialized military elites”, “professional warriors, specially trained to fight with this type of weapon” or “the psychological impact of the Dacian curved weapon/weapons”<sup>32</sup>, only continues the mythologizing image of the *ancestors* and slips into a nationalistic discourse over the Dacian past<sup>33</sup>. Basically, the reading proposed by C. Borangic starts from a rather poor understanding of ancient textual sources and iconographical representations, without taking into account archaeological discoveries or more importantly, the main aspect of archaeology, namely the context of discovery.

In fact, we intend to point out that the interpretations and discussions in the recent historiography on this topic started from ancient sources, written and iconographical, largely ignoring archaeological discoveries. Although they seem closer to the events and facts mentioned, the ancient written sources need to be evaluated with much greater thoughtfulness than before. The information extracted from these ancient sources must contain both references to the communities of the “barbarian” temperate Europe and to their authors, as well as the contexts in which they wrote their work. Moreover, the manner in which they gathered the information and also the implicit or explicit message they wanted to express are of the utmost relevance in terms of the degree of trust they present<sup>34</sup>. At least in the case of the Romanian historiography, Zoe Petre convincingly argued that the northern Balkan space was seen in classical sources

<sup>18</sup> WILMOTT 2001, Fig. 3/1-2; MIHĂILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2009, 156, Fig.29-30.

<sup>19</sup> TOCILESCU 1880, 377.

<sup>20</sup> XENOPOL 1888, 113.

<sup>21</sup> PÂRVAN 1926, 506.

<sup>22</sup> PÂRVAN 1926, 498, Fig. 342.

<sup>23</sup> VULPE/VULPE 1924.

<sup>24</sup> VULPE/VULPE 1927-1933.

<sup>25</sup> TEODORESCU 1929; TEODORESCU 1930-1931.

<sup>26</sup> See especially IORGA 1936, 29-40 and 99-129; GIURESCU 1946, 89-115.

<sup>27</sup> PÂRVAN 1926, 138-141.

<sup>28</sup> See also here FLOREA 2020.

<sup>29</sup> DAICOVICIU 1960, 322; See also GLODARIU/IAROSLAVSCHI 1979, 137.

<sup>30</sup> DAICOVICIU *et alii* 1953, 169.

<sup>31</sup> BORANGIC 2006, BORANGIC 2008; BORANGIC 2009; BORANGIC 2013; BORANGIC 2015, 174-200; BORANGIC 2017, 185-188.

<sup>32</sup> BORANGIC 2006, 50, 101; BORANGIC 2009, 43, 47-48; BORANGIC 2015, 174-175.

<sup>33</sup> The Post-Communist Dacianism was analysed by GRANCEA 2007.

<sup>34</sup> CHAMPION 1996, 86; WELLS 2001, 14.

in a semi-mythological framework<sup>35</sup>. The same things can be said about the iconographical sources, monuments with an obvious propagandistic message<sup>36</sup>. The portraits of the barbarians on such monuments are based on a rather limited repertoire of stereotypes and images: the barbarian warrior; the captive woman as a sign of victory and conquest; the man trampled by a Roman horseman; handcuffed pair as a war trophy etc. In a more recent study regarding the Roman imperial iconography in Trajan's time, I. Ferris remarked that these images provide more information about the "creators" of these monuments than about their "subjects"<sup>37</sup>.

Precisely from the aforementioned points of view, the reconstruction and description or even the classification of such weapons<sup>38</sup>, starting mainly from the Roman imperial representations, implies a high degree of inaccuracy and amateurism and the interpretations can be quite subjective. Moreover, the transposition of a poetic license, namely the expression used by the Roman poet Ovid "*falcatus ensis*"<sup>39</sup>, in the archaeological reality, by using the term "curved sword of the curved gladius type", is quite difficult to be accepted. As far as we know, it is not possible to speak of "curved gladius"<sup>40</sup>, even if among the first models of the Roman sword *gladius hispaniensis* seems to have its origins in a slightly curved weapon, respectively the Iberian *falcata*<sup>41</sup>.

In other words, the reconstitution attempts have their role, since they bring a series of quite important pieces of information about this type of weapon, about the way it looked, and how it was used or the possible morphological characteristics<sup>42</sup>. However, the specimens closest to reality can be considered only the models made after the original artefacts and less those based on iconographic representations<sup>43</sup>.

Analysing most of the existing resources and taking into account the rather high degree of uncertainty they present, A. Rustoiu, in an article published more than ten years ago, drew a series of relevant conclusions in this

respect<sup>44</sup>. Rustoiu pointed out that the term "national" weapon seems to be justified, if we consider the frequency of representations of curved weapons in the Roman art when referring to the Dacians. Moreover, Rustoiu concluded also that their differentiation (curved knives of the *sica*-type and curved swords – *falx*) for each iconographical representation is an almost impossible task. Equally important is the clarification proposed by Rustoiu concerning the use of the terms *sica* for curved knives, respectively *falx* for curved swords, in order to avoid possible further confusion. However, his conclusion regarding the appearance of curved swords during the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD is not supported from an archaeological point of view, as most of the artefacts, as shown below, can be dated in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century or early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.

However, we find it difficult to accept that both curved swords and the individuals who used them had special qualities as it has been often suggested in the Romanian historiography. In fact, the whole discourse around these weapons, and their efficiency was not initiated by local scholars, as we would have expected, but by the western literature, through the voice of the well-known British archaeologist Sir I. A. Richmond<sup>45</sup>. Using the scenes of Trajan's Column and the metopes of the monument from Adamclisi, Richmond concluded that the Roman army adopted a series of changes in their defensive equipment in response to these curved weapons: strengthening the helmet cap by adding two transversal bars or the use of an arm-guard – *manica*. Subsequently, this statement was accepted as such by both western<sup>46</sup> and Romanian authors<sup>47</sup>.

More recent interpretations show that these changes in the defensive system of the Roman military equipment seem to occur earlier, in the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD and must be considered separately from the problem of Trajan's wars with the Dacians. A first proof is brought by the funerary monuments of Sex. Valerius Severus and G. Annius Salutus, both soldiers in the Legio XXII Primigenia from Mainz (Germany). Dated approximately in Nero's time, the tombstones appear to represent possible arm-guards<sup>48</sup>. Moreover, the discovery in a series of Roman camps from Great Britain (Carlisle, Newstead, Vindolanda) of this type of arm-guard shows that they were used on a larger scale by both cavalry and infantry<sup>49</sup>.

Regarding the reinforcement of helmets, the subject remains open. It is true that the discoveries of such pieces – Weissenau-type helmets – are extremely rare<sup>50</sup>, and some of them were discovered in Roman Dacia<sup>51</sup>, but this does not

<sup>35</sup> PETRE 2004, 37. For the representation of "otherness" in the classical world, see HALL 1991; CARTLEDGE 1993; NIPPEL 2002; BONFANTE 2011.

<sup>36</sup> In 1935, Sir I. A. Richmond had a brilliant remark regarding the scenes depicted on Trajan's Column: „The victories are portrayed, but always in company with the grinding toil which made them possible; while, pervading the composition, amid the blood and sweat of the labouring host, looms the figure of the Emperor as responsible commander-in-chief” – RICHMOND 1935, 2.

<sup>37</sup> FERRIS 2003; See also here ALEXANDRESCU VIANU 2006.

<sup>38</sup> BORANGIC 2006, 52-90; BORANGIC 2009, 143-145; BORANGIC 2015, 98-110; BORANGIC 2017, 185-188.

<sup>39</sup> In fact, the Roman poet Ovid mentions several times in his work *Metamorphoses* the phrase "*falcato ... ense*" – Book 1, 717; Book 4, 727 (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, vol. 1, Book 1-8, Loeb Classical Library, No. 42 – translated by Frank Justus Miller), 1971. The phrase was translated in Romanian historiography through the uninspired combination of words "curved gladius". Taking into account the mytho-historical framework of Ovid's work, we consider that this phrase is unlikely to capture some physical realities; For some clarifications regarding the mythological and historical character of *Metamorphoses* – WILLIAMS 2009.

<sup>40</sup> BORANGIC 2006, 126; BORANGIC 2015, 193-194; SĂCĂRIN/BERZOVAN/BORANGIC 2013, 62.

<sup>41</sup> BISHOP/COULSTON 2006, 54-56.

<sup>42</sup> BORANGIC 2007-2008, 44-62; BORANGIC 2015, 228-236.

<sup>43</sup> See the case of David Sim who reconstructs and tests such curved weapons after those depicted on the metopes of the monument from Adamclisi (Constanța County) – SIM 2000.

<sup>44</sup> RUSTOIU 2007.

<sup>45</sup> RICHMOND 1935, 17; RICHMOND 1967, 34-35.

<sup>46</sup> RUSSELL ROBINSON 1975, 85; SIM 2001-2002.

<sup>47</sup> PETCULESCU 2006, 447-448; BORANGIC 2006, 47-48; BORANGIC 2015, 242.

<sup>48</sup> BISHOP 2002, 68; BISHOP/COULSTON 2006, 98, HENȚ 2014, 111, Fig. VII/1.

<sup>49</sup> CURL 1991, Pl. XXIII; McCARTHY/BISHOP/RICHARDSON 2001, 507-508; SIM/KAMINSKI 139-140, Fig. 104.

<sup>50</sup> We should mention here the discoveries dated at the middle or even in the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD from Hebron (Palestinian territories) and Teilenhofen (Germany) – WEINBERG 1979, 82-83, Pl. 23-24; PETCULESCU 2006, 447.

<sup>51</sup> The helmet from Berzovia (Caraș-Severin County) was dated in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD – PROTASE/PETCULESCU 1975, 85-89; The helmet from

certify that they were especially modified to counteract the blows of the Dacian curved swords. It is very likely that these helmets were not mass-produced, while the reinforcement would bear the mark of its wearer or craftsman, some authors even talking about a decorative role of these crossbars<sup>52</sup>. Certainly, even in this case, a possible improvement of the Roman military equipment in the context of the wars from the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD should be demonstrated before being accepted as a “historiographical license”.

Therefore, given the abovementioned, the main problem arises when we try to correlate this information with the archaeological discoveries.

### FROM AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW...

Until now, the number of curved swords is extremely modest in the archaeological finds. Moreover, in some cases, the archaeological repertoire has been “enriched” by including highly questionable objects. Here we can mention the five pieces of metal “assembled” in the form of a curved sword<sup>53</sup>, the implement from Cristești<sup>54</sup> (Mureș County), as well as the tip discovered in the settlement of Tilișca<sup>55</sup> (Sibiu County). The objects from Alba Iulia<sup>56</sup> (Alba County) – signalled in a flea market and the one from the settlement of Divici<sup>57</sup> (Caraș-Severin County) can be included in another category.

Another curved sword was discovered by chance in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in the outskirts of Viscri village (Brașov County). Discovered in a tumular grave, the inventory consisted, besides the curved sword, of another sword, an iron vessel and several ceramic fragments<sup>58</sup>. Due to the conditions of discovery and the lack of further systematic archaeological research, it is difficult to establish a relationship between the pieces of inventory that have enjoyed a special attention in the Romanian archaeological literature<sup>59</sup>. Although during the Roman administration in Dacia no such funerary rite (tumular grave) is known, the whole complex was dated in the first part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD based on analogies with the iconographical representations of Roman provincial art – especially the metopes from Adamclisi. More recently, some archaeological voices<sup>60</sup> are placing the discoveries from Viscri in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or even in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, thus eliminating any chronological and cultural link between the curved weapon and the Late Iron Age period.

Vinerea (Alba County) – still unpublished – was discovered together with other weapons and tools, probably in a deposit.

<sup>52</sup> CONNOLLY 1998, 230-231.

<sup>53</sup> PĂDUREAN 2001, 155-156 and 160, Pl. I.

<sup>54</sup> LAZĂR 1995, 105; BORANGIC 2006, 74-75, Fig. 79; BORANGIC 2009, 49, 57, Fig. 2/1; BORANGIC 2015, 191-192, Pl. XLV; BORANGIC 2017, 186, Fig. 2.a;

<sup>55</sup> LUPU 1989, 74, Pl. 18/12.

<sup>56</sup> BORANGIC 2006, 38, Fig. 39; BORANGIC 49, 57, Fig. 2/1; BORANGIC 2015, 185-186, Pl. XLVIII.

<sup>57</sup> SĂCĂRIN/BERZOVAN/BORANGIC 2013, 64-65, Fig. 7; Even if the authors of the study mention that this object was discovered inside the dwelling tower no. 1, at the anniversary archaeological symposium organised by the County Museum of History and Art Zalău (Sălaj County) in 2016, a wide debate started regarding the find spot of this artefact.

<sup>58</sup> MÜLLER 1898, 144-145.

<sup>59</sup> PĂRVAN 1926, 507, Fig. 342; HOREDȚ 1958, 14-16, Fig. 2/4; PROTASE 1971, 54-55; PINTER 2007, 44, 185, Pl. 19/a-b.

<sup>60</sup> SONOC 2014, 43-44, note 5.

More recently, another curved sword was introduced in the archaeological literature<sup>61</sup>. In addition, we make reference of two burials discovered at Káloz (Hungary) and dated around or even after Marcus Aurelius' campaign against Germanic-speaking groups. One of the graves contained a curved sword, an umbo from a shield and an axe<sup>62</sup>. The author of the study, I. Bóna, mentions in a first phase very clearly that there is no connection between the curved sword and the Dacian origin<sup>63</sup>, but later concludes in a perfectly cultural-historical manner that the burial could have belonged to a Germanic or to a Dacian warrior from present-day Slovakia<sup>64</sup>. The long-awaited clarifications regarding the discoveries from Káloz were brought by M. P. Speidel, who undoubtedly attributed them to the Germanic cultural milieu<sup>65</sup>.

More information is known regarding the artefacts discovered in the area of the Orăștiei Mountains: a curved sword and a possible tip of such a weapon come from Ursici<sup>66</sup> (Hunedoara County). Finally, two artefacts as well as another fragment from Grădiștea de Munte - Sarmizegetusa Regia have been published.

The first curved sword (Fig. 1/1a-b, 2) was initially published by I. Glodariu and E. Iaroslavschi in *Civilizația fierului la daci*<sup>67</sup>. In their book from 1979, the piece was assigned the group of workshops situated on the 8<sup>th</sup> terrace, near the sanctuary from Grădiștea de Munte - Sarmizegetusa Regia<sup>68</sup>. The authors indicated as bibliographical reference the archaeological research carried out by the team of C. Daicoviciu from 1953<sup>69</sup>. In a short archaeological note published just a few years ago,<sup>70</sup> the discovery context of this weapon has been restored. The item is currently preserved in the collections of the National Museum of Transylvanian History, Cluj-Napoca (inv. no. V 18532). By simply comparing the two drawings, the one from 1979, respectively the drawing from the archaeological report from 1953<sup>71</sup>, it turned out that we were dealing with two different artefacts: the object in question and the one presented below.

As a matter of fact, in the archaeological report from 1957 C. Daicoviciu stated that some weapons were found in the large rectangular construction on the 3<sup>rd</sup> terrace (Fig. 1/3) belonging to the “Plateau with six terraces” (western civilian settlement from Grădiștea de Munte - Sarmizegetusa Regia), among which a slightly curved sword<sup>72</sup>. Based on the available information, today we may certainly conclude that our object is the curved sword mentioned in that archaeological report.

<sup>61</sup> FERENCZ/BODÓ/BĂLOS 2016, 229-230.

<sup>62</sup> BÓNA 1955.

<sup>63</sup> BÓNA 1955, 76: “der dakische Ursprung auch bei dem Exemplar von Káloz fast ausser Frage gestellt”.

<sup>64</sup> BÓNA 77-76 ,1955: „Im anderen Grab wurde ein im Bündnis mit den Langobarden in Pannoniën eingedrungener quadischer oder dakischer Krieger bestattet, der früher irgendwo auf dem Gebiete der Slowakei gelebt hatte”.

<sup>65</sup> SPEIDEL 2004, 151-152, Fig. 18.4.

<sup>66</sup> FERENCZ/BODÓ/BĂLOS 2016, 225-230, Pl. III, V.

<sup>67</sup> GLODARIU/IAROSLAVSCHI 1979, 147-139, Fig. 71/1.

<sup>68</sup> For the sanctuary, see MATEESCU 2012.

<sup>69</sup> DAICOVICIU *et alii* 1953, 169.

<sup>70</sup> HENȚ 2014.

<sup>71</sup> DAICOVICIU *et alii* 1953, 173, fig. 22/a.

<sup>72</sup> DAICOVICIU/GOSTAR/CRÎȘAN 1957, 259

Establishing the context of discovery has a special significance, because this is the only object discovered in a closed feature – a dwelling or an annex – clearly dated at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. The rectangular construction (Fig. 1/3) is located near the polygonal building in which the ceramic fragments stamped with DECEBALVS PER SCORILLO were discovered. Regarding this last building, C. Daicoviciu, writing in the spirit of 1950s<sup>73</sup> mentioned that: “its owner must have been one of the leaders of the Dacian slave-owning state”, and later stated that “although the inventory of the construction... pleads for a dwelling, it is not excluded to find ourselves in the presence of a public or cult edifice”<sup>74</sup>. However, given the proximity to the polygonal construction, as well as its inventory, it would not be implausible to presume that the rectangular construction in which the curved sword was found, belonged to a member of the upper echelon of the Dacian society, or, why not, to be one of the annexes of the polygonal building.

We will not insist too much on the dimensions of the sword, they have already been published in the archaeological literature. However, we would like to mention the doubling of the blade’s edge on the convex side, in the tip area, on a length of approximately 4.5 cm<sup>75</sup>. This doubling of the edge is also found on other curved swords discovered in the area of the Orăștiei Mountains<sup>76</sup>. The incised mark on both sides of the blade – at a distance of approximately 5 cm from its tip, in the shape of a point inscribed in a circle (Fig. 1/1b), also appears on a sword tip from Ursici<sup>77</sup>, a chisel from Grădiștea de Munte – *Sarmizegetusa Regia*<sup>78</sup>, and on a series of implements from Lunca – Piatra Roșie<sup>79</sup>. Most likely, this incision is not a solar symbol, as has often been suggested, but is a mark of the artisan<sup>80</sup>, or even of a workshop<sup>81</sup>.

Therefore, the second curved sword (Fig. 2/1) from Grădiștea de Munte - *Sarmizegetusa Regia* was discovered in the group of metallurgical workshops situated on the 8<sup>th</sup> terrace (Fig. 2/4) and appears for the first time published in the archaeological report from 1953<sup>82</sup>. As we could find out, in the late 1960s or in the early 1970s, the sword was moved from Cluj to Bucharest, most probably when the National Museum of Romanian History was structured<sup>83</sup>. More recently, in an exhibition catalogue dedicated to the anniversary of 1900 years since the foundation of Roman Dacia (*Dacia Avgvsti Provincia*, 2006), a curved sword was published (Fig. 2/2), apparently discovered at Grădiștea de Munte – *Sarmizegetusa Regia*<sup>84</sup>. The morphological similarities between the two objects, the curvature of the blade and the fairly close dimensions, would point to the

fact that it is one and the same sword, which at some point during its transportation between different institutions would have lost its handle (Fig. 2/3). The difference of 6 cm (from 48 cm in the archaeological report from 1953, to 42 cm in the exhibition catalogue), could be explained precisely by this minor “accident”.

The chronology proposed for the metallurgical workshops from the 8<sup>th</sup> terrace is in the late 1<sup>st</sup> century or at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD<sup>85</sup>. Moreover, the fragment of a curved sword – or, more likely, an iron knife (Fig. 3/1-3) discovered more recently in the area where the bronze hollow matrix was found<sup>86</sup>, can be placed in the same chronological period.

The last curved sword (Fig. 4/1-2), never published in the archaeological literature, was discovered in the western part of the civilian settlement in the early 2000s by metal detectorists. The object was found in an iron deposit that also contained implements and other weapons. The curved sword has a total length of 68 cm, while the handle measures 18 cm. The width of the blade is of maximum 3 cm and has a triangular section. The association of a curved sword with a series of iron tools (agricultural or metallurgical) and the lack of a clear discovery context raises many questions about its interpretation. It is possible that the entire inventory belonged to a metallurgical workshop (as in the case of the one from the 8<sup>th</sup> terrace), which was hidden in the context of the wars, or the deposition is related to a practice that transcends historical interpretations. More exactly, we refer to the well-known phenomenon of the deposition of weapons, tools or iron bars from the Late Iron Age, which is not an isolated regional phenomenon, but manifested itself over a wider area of temperate Europe<sup>87</sup>.

## CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER DIRECTIONS

Based on their shape, the curved swords discovered in the site of Grădiștea de Munte – *Sarmizegetusa Regia* or in its immediate surroundings belong to a single type: with a curved blade, sharpened on the concave side (except for the tip area), with a handle tongue, and dimensions between 50-70 cm (without taking into account the wooden handle). The lack of standardization can be explained by the fact that these weapons were produced in different workshops, without any compulsory “standard” dimensions as found in the case of regular armies. We would like to mention here another very important aspect. At least in the case of the objects kept in the collections of the National History Museum of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca, their weight varied between 300 and 400 gr<sup>88</sup>. This preserved weight of the weapons raises many questions regarding their functionality and accuracy of subsequent reconstructions, especially if we consider that some of the pieces almost preserve their original shape.

As shown above, the curved swords discovered so far at *Sarmizegetusa Regia* are scarce finds. This fact was explained in

<sup>73</sup> For a contextual approach on Romanian Late Iron Age archaeology in the “Communist” period – see HENȚ 2020.

<sup>74</sup> DAICOVICIU *et alii* 1955, 202.

<sup>75</sup> HENȚ 2014, 111.

<sup>76</sup> FERENCZ/BODÓ/BÁLOS 2016, 227-228.

<sup>77</sup> FERENCZ/BODÓ/BÁLOS 2016, 225, 227, Pl. V/3.

<sup>78</sup> IAROSLAVSCHI 1983, 373, Pl. I/1.

<sup>79</sup> SÎRBU/CERIȘER/IOAN 2005, 10-12, no. 2-4, 6-8.

<sup>80</sup> FLOREA 2011, 137.

<sup>81</sup> CRISTESCU (forthcoming).

<sup>82</sup> DAICOVICIU *et alii* 1953, 173, Fig. 22/a.

<sup>83</sup> A copy of the original piece discovered on the 8<sup>th</sup> terrace from Grădiștea de Munte – *Sarmizegetusa Regia* is kept at the “King Ferdinand I” National Military Museum from Bucharest.

<sup>84</sup> BOCAN 2006, 124, cat. no. 65.

<sup>85</sup> GLODARIU/IAROSLAVSCHI 1979, 39.

<sup>86</sup> FLOREA *et alii* 2015, 18, Fig. 15/17.

<sup>87</sup> BATAILLE/GUILLAUMET 2006.

<sup>88</sup> A similar situation was observed in the case of the curved sword from Ursici which has an approximate weight of 460 gr. – FERENCZ/BODÓ/BÁLOS 2016, 230.

the archaeological literature in different ways: these weapons were confiscated as a spoil of war, destruction, lack of burials, or even by the rather limited nature of archaeological researches. We do not believe that all the above-mentioned ideas can be accepted in the present state of research. At least in the area of the Orăștie Mountains, the systematic archaeological researches have been carried out, with minor interruptions, for almost 100 years, and in the deposits discovered by metal detectorists and published in the archaeological literature such objects are almost missing<sup>89</sup>.

Most, probably, the small number of curved swords in archaeological discoveries reflects an objective reality. In his well-known work, *Getica* (1926), V. Pârvan mentioned that “the Getae army [was] more a periodic mass uprising of the population”, and “The Dacians appear on the Trajan Column ... armed «ad hoc», and not as a professional army”<sup>90</sup> (our translation). With different nuances, similar ideas have been also expressed in contemporary archaeological literature. Taking into account the variety of life strategies and the diversity of occupations that people had in the past, it would not be surprising to find that the warrior status was fairly rare in the Late Iron Age period. A number of scholars have argued that people of pre-capitalist times were actors who divided their social lives into several occupations and that most of the communities from the past functioned as a kind of combined social, agricultural, and military structures, in which individuals changed their behaviour depending on immediate circumstances<sup>91</sup>. In other words, these communities were not made up of well-defined professional categories, such as farmer, artisan, merchant or warrior, but, most likely, were combinations of farmer-warrior, artisan-warrior, merchant-artisan etc.

Consequently, our point of view is clearly stated in this present study: Romanian Late Iron Age research has to abandon the cultural-historical approach (in which the past is a permanent confrontation between *ours* – Dacians – and *theirs* – Romans, Celts, Germanic-speaking groups), and the ideology of nationalism (*ours* were the bravest and the cruellest). Romanian Late Iron Age archaeology urgently needs to import and filter anthropological, sociological and political science ideas, methods and theories, and most importantly, to return to archaeology and its most relevant element – the discovery context. In most of the cases, archaeology provides us with a story, but it depends on us how we further spread the word.

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<sup>89</sup> IAROSLAVSCHI/BOZU 2001; BODÓ/FERENCZ 2004.

<sup>90</sup> PÂRVAN 1926, 150.

<sup>91</sup> HILL 2006, 179-180; KÄHLER HOLST 2014, 180-181; MIHAJLOVIĆ 2018, 52-53.

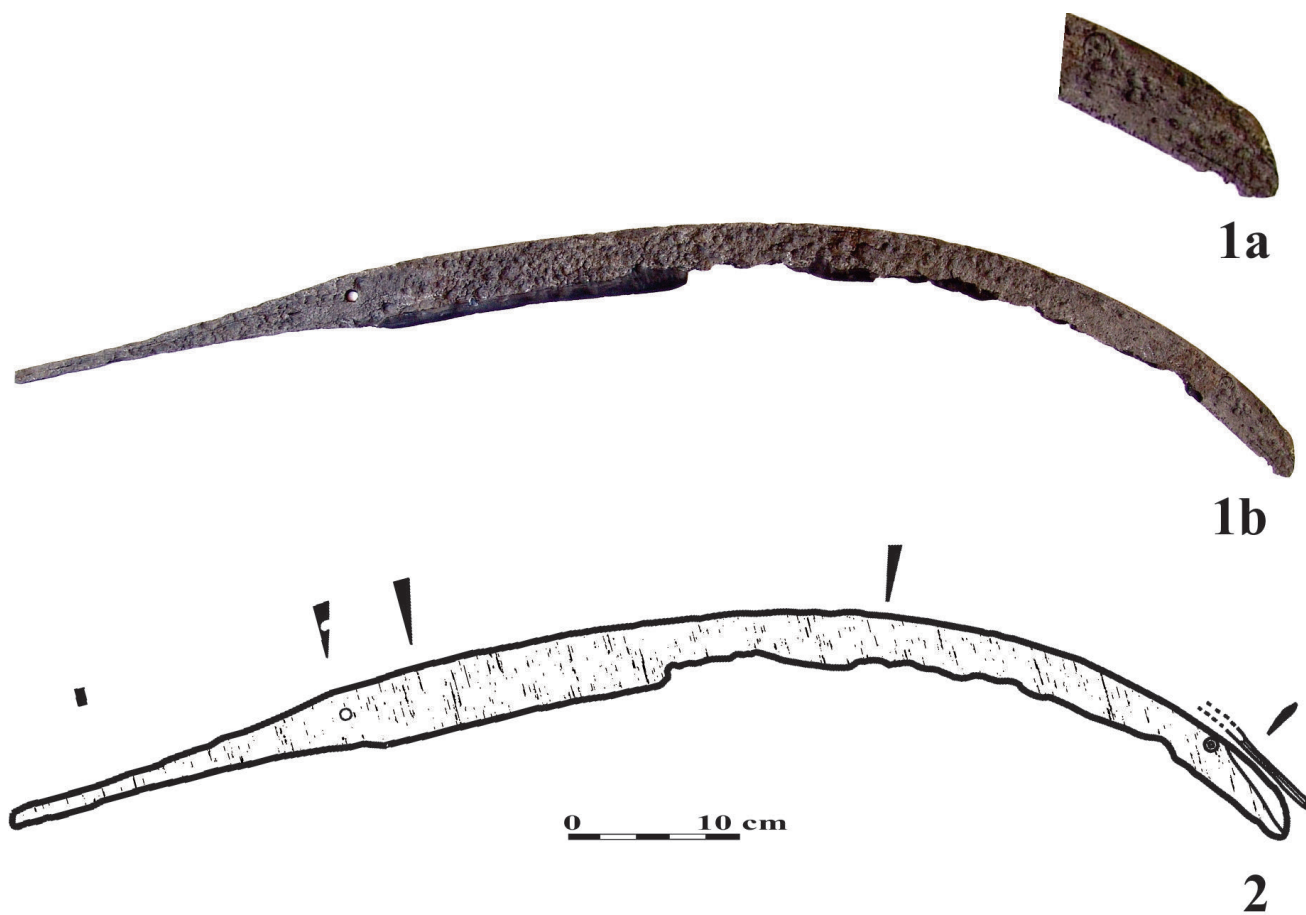
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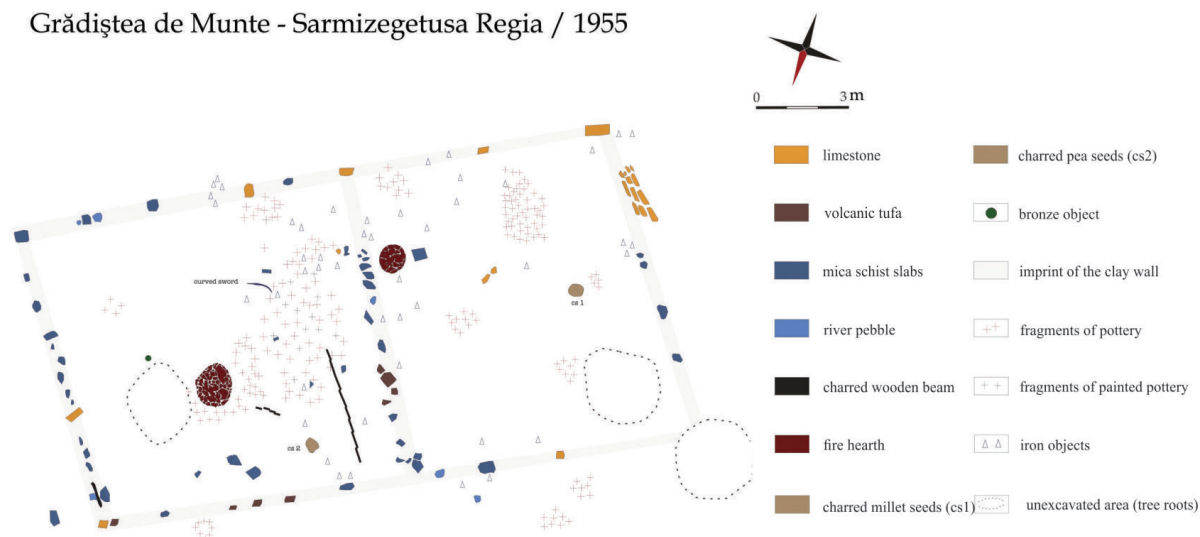
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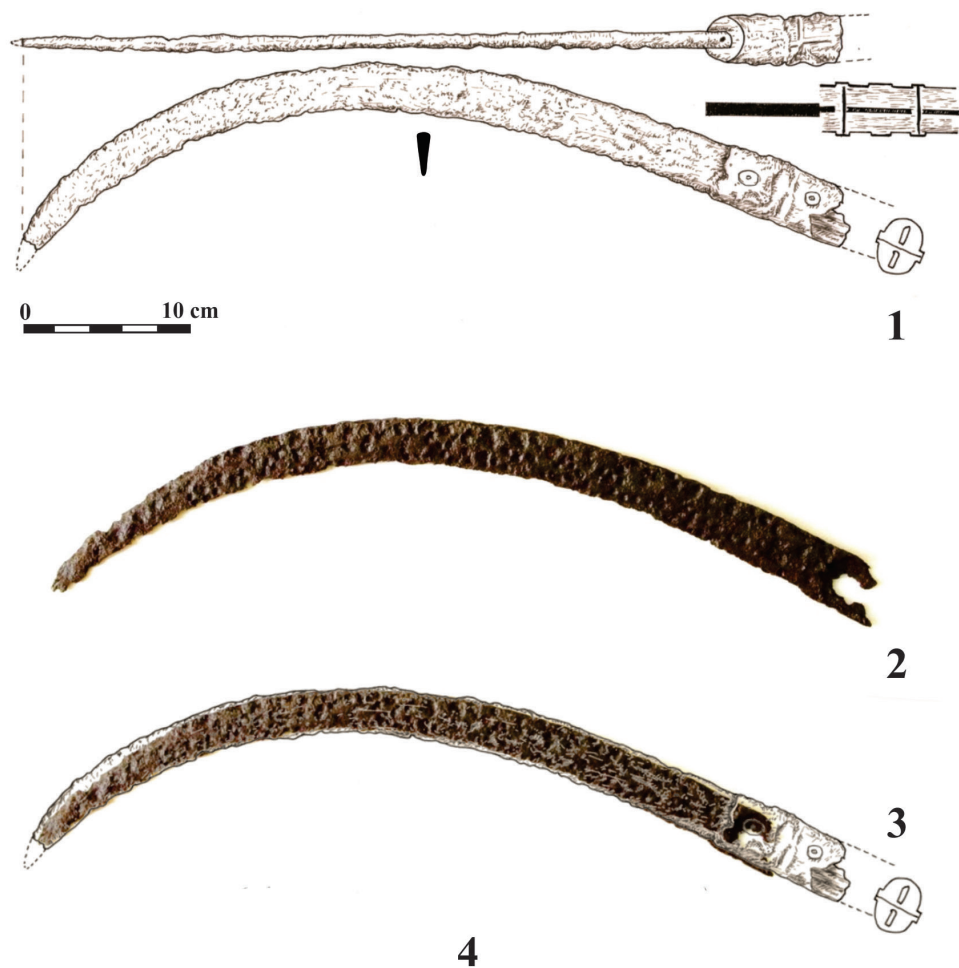


Grădiștea de Munte - Sarmizegetusa Regia / 1955

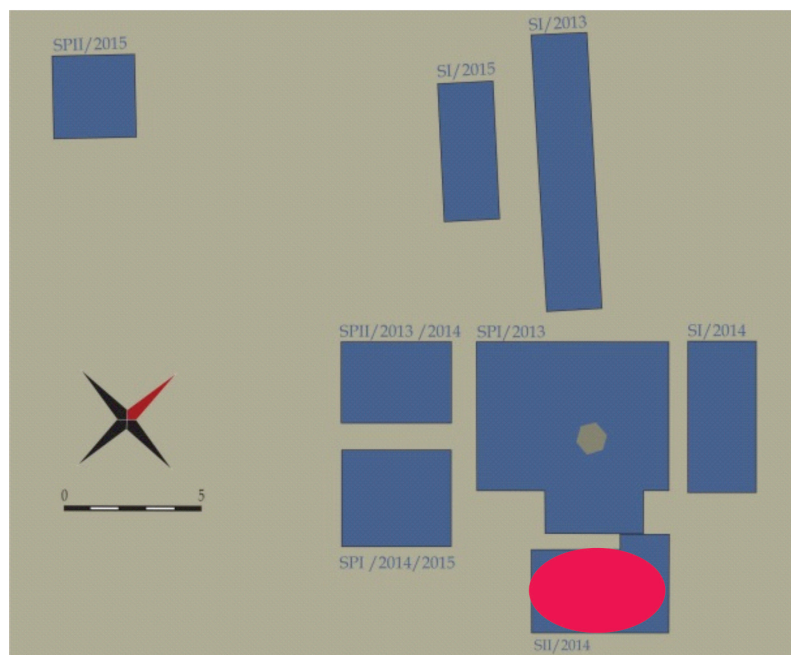
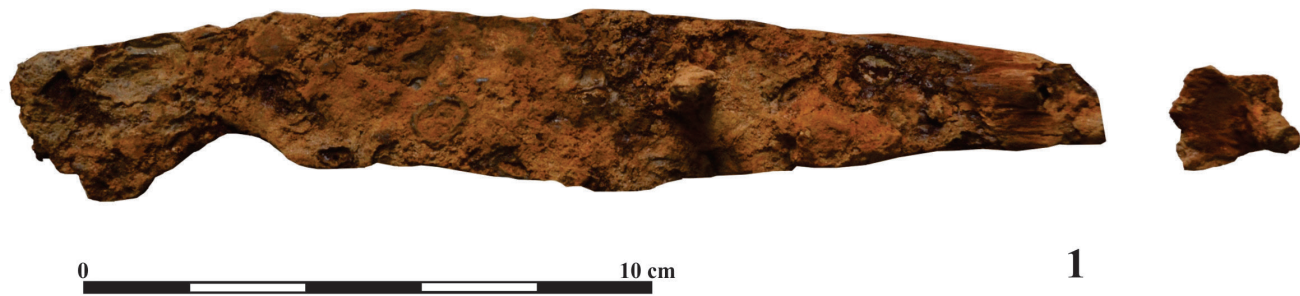


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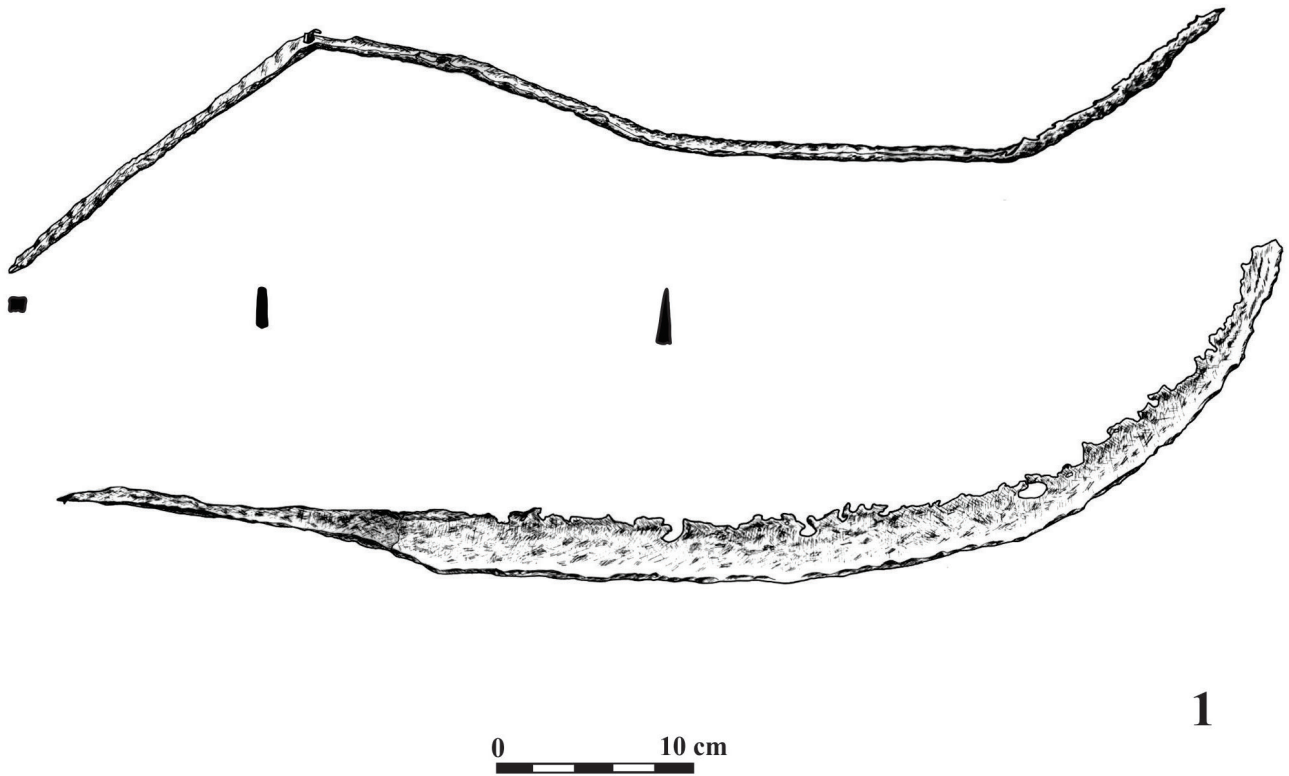
**Fig. 1.** The curved sword discovered in the dwelling from 3<sup>rd</sup> terrace belonging to the “Plateau with six terraces” (western civilian settlement); 1a-b. Photo and detail of the curved sword (R. Mateescu); 2. The drawing of the artefact (D. Cioată); 3. The plan of the rectangular building from the 3<sup>rd</sup> terrace (R. Mateescu).



**Fig. 2.** The curved sword discovered in the metallurgical workshop from the 8<sup>th</sup> terrace; 1. The drawing of the curved sword (after DAICOVICIU *et alii* 1953, 171, Fig. 22a); 2. The artefact kept in the collections of the National History Museum of Romania, Bucharest (Photo Sorin Cleşiu); 3. The two objects overlapped; 4. Iron objects discovered on the 8<sup>th</sup> terrace (The archive of the archaeological site “The Dacian fortresses from the Orăştiei Mountains”).



**Fig. 3.** The fragment of a curved sword or curved knife found below the southern gate of the fortress; 1. Photo of the fragment (R. Mateescu); 2. The plan of the archaeological excavations in 2015; 3. The moment when the artefact was found (The archive of the archaeological site “The Dacian fortresses from the Orăștiei Mountains”).



**Fig. 4:** The curved sword discovered by metal detectorists in the open settlement; 1. Drawing (L. D. Gheorghe Șerban); 2. Photo (R. Mateescu).