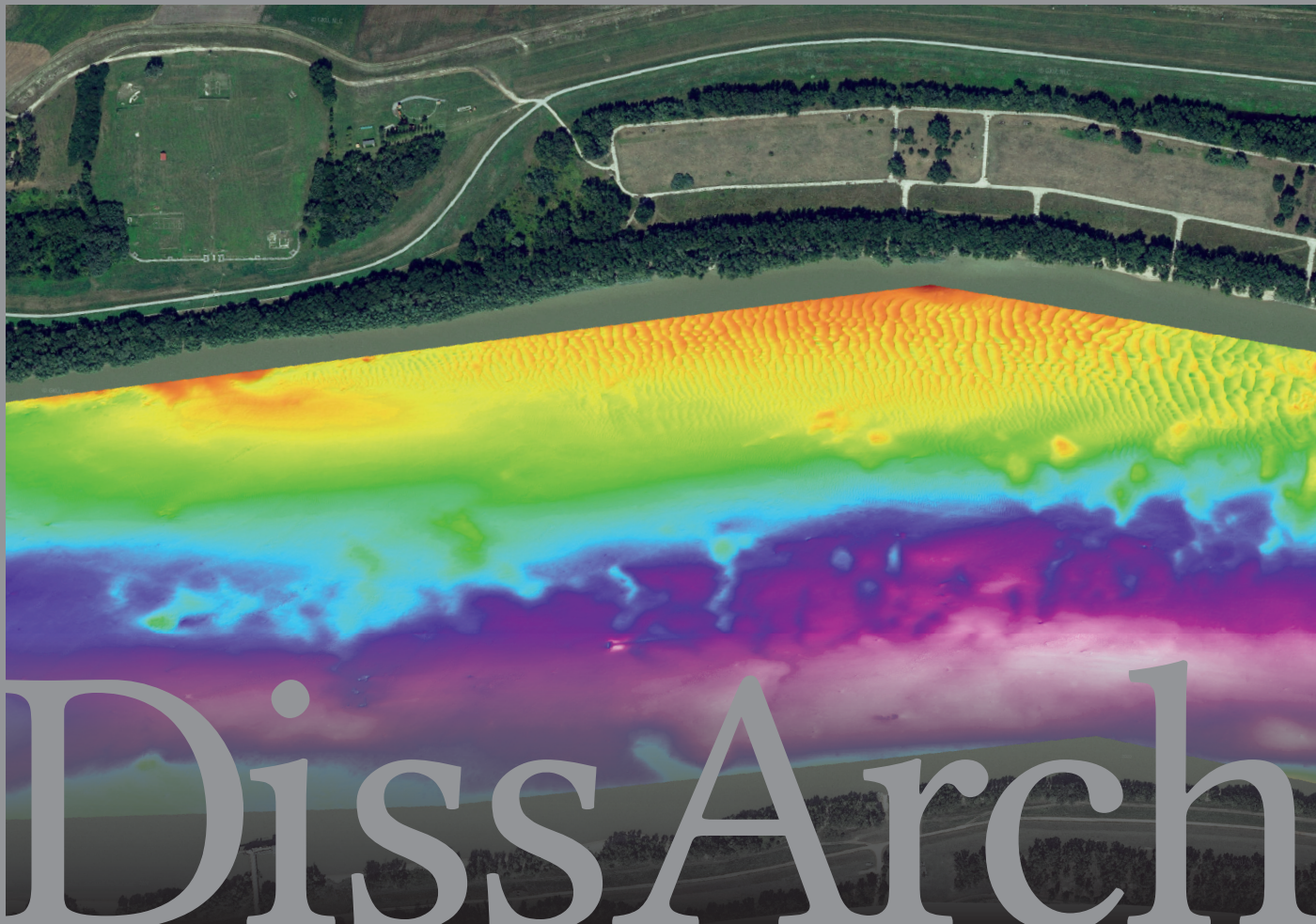


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ex Instituto Archaeologico

Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae



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ex Instituto Archaeologico
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Absolute dating of the Early/Pre-state Medieval date burial features in Muntenia (the 7th–14th century AD)

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Abstract: Our aim here is to firstly address the burial dynamics preceding the establishment of the medieval state south of the Carpathians from the view of absolute dating. In order to achieve this undertaking, we have taken samples from burial features spanning a period of more than seven centuries (the 7th–14th century) and delivered these for investigation with several laboratories. From the ‘Avars’ to ‘proto-Bulgarians’, ‘Pechenegs’ to the ‘Late Cumans’, the ‘Mongols’, absolute dates confirm the development of the burial ritual overlapping and interconnecting with information known from historical and/or archaeological sources. Concurrently, deep into nomad/steppe culture, the emergence of the presumed Christian ritual burials inserting into a well-delimited chronological niche, evidences the presence of this burial conduct during the last third of the 1st millennium in the north area of the Wallachian Plain. We note that in discussed area, this ritual is missing during both the period prior to the 8th century but also after the 10th century, circumstances that may be interpreted and correlated to a series of historical events reported by the written sources of the period. The article wishes to plead for the use of radiocarbon dating in the early medieval period archaeology in Romania as well, which should become in fact not only a necessity but also the rule in the scientific process.

Keywords: the Lower Danube, Muntenia, absolute dating, nomads, steppe culture, Christian ritual (?)

Introduction

The excavation of a large number of prehistory barrows in Prahova County¹ has bolstered a less approached subject in the Romanian research of the last half of the century. The mechanical excavation of such sites has been regarded with reluctance by the archaeologists. To this adds the prevalence of burials lacking grave goods, so that barrows had soon become unattractive sites for museums eager to enrich their heritage and cover, in their basic exhibitions, diachronically, all historical periods.² Thus, Romanian archaeology has been partially deprived of access to an important phenomenon like that of prehistory barrow burials in relation to the evolution of the local archaeological cultures. Also relevant were burials subsequent to this phenomenon, as it is known that these mounds built during prehistory (the 4th–3rd millennia BC) had been used for long periods of time as burial sites, respectively from the middle phase of the Bronze Age until the classical Romanian Middle Ages. Particularly in the second half of the 1st millennium and early the following millennium, in the extra-Carpathian area, barrow graves count among the few archaeological sources connected to the burial ritual of populations passing through the area during the period predating the establishment of the Romanian medieval states (Fig. 1).

Recently, we have published numerous articles/studies discussing prehistory barrow graves investigated in Muntenia.³ Concurrently, together or separately, we have scientifically valued as well the 1st and 2nd millennium burial features discovered in respective barrows.⁴ Noting present ritual differences evidencing developments and cultural dynamics (based on publications and specific parallels/correlations), we believed opportune to accomplish additional investigations that would cover this chronological segment and complete relative chronology. Anthropologic and archaeozoological,

1 FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2023, Tab. 1.

2 FRÎNCULEASA 2021.

3 FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2013; FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2014a; FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2015; FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2017a; FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2017b; FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2017c; FRÎNCULEASA 2019; FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2019a; FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2019b; FRÎNCULEASA 2020a; FRÎNCULEASA 2020b; FRÎNCULEASA 2020c; FRÎNCULEASA 2021; FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2022; FRÎNCULEASA 2023; FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2023.

4 FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2012; FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2013; FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2018; FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2020a.

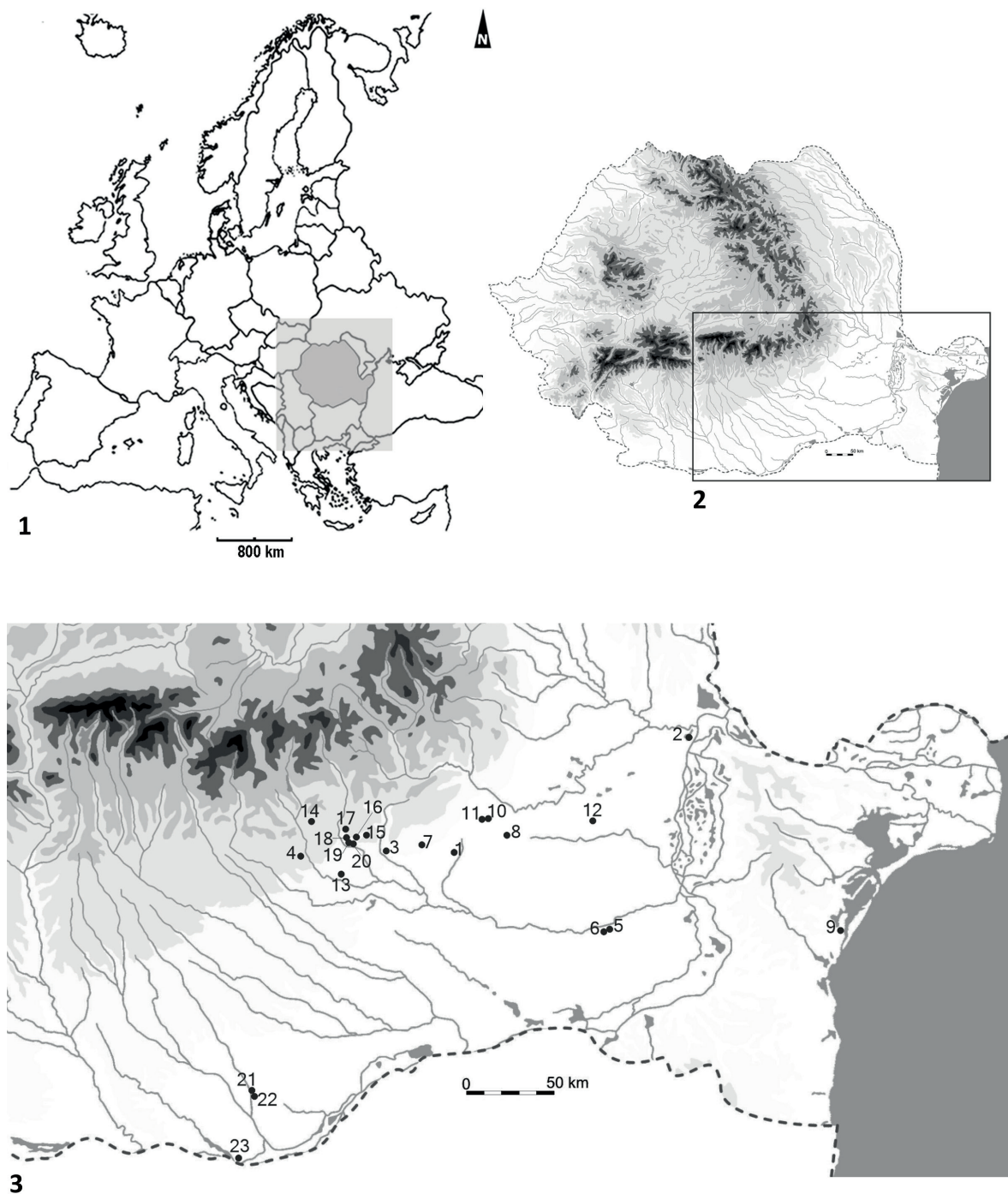


Fig. 1. 1 – location of Romania on map of Europe, 2 – Muntenia area marked on the map of Romania, 3 – location of discoveries of sites investigated. 1 – Boldești, 2 – Brăilița, 3 – Cioceni, 4 – Coadă Izvorului, 5 – Ciulnița Tumulus 1, 6 – Ciulnița Tumulus 2, 7 – Fulga, 8 – Gherăseni, 9 – Histria, 10 – Lipia-Tell, 11 – Lipia-Terasă, 12 – Lunca, 13 – Independența, 14 – Păulești, 15 – Ploiești, 16 – Strejnicu, 17 – Târgșoru Nou Tumulus 1, 18 – Târgșoru Vechi-La Mănăstrie, 19 – Târgșoru Vechi-La Pădure, 20 – Târgșoru Vechi-Balastiera Holcim, 21 – Vitănești Tumulus 1, 22 – Vitănești Tumulus 2, 23 – Zimnicea.

metallographic analyses and CT scans of a number of objects were also included. Furthermore, we have ^{14}C -AMS radiocarbon dated all burial features yielded by the archaeological excavations we conducted, completing this approach with samples from other recently or 20th century investigated sites. Therefore, we were able to correlate, in the case of the studied archaeological features, burial rituals and grave goods with absolute dates. It is a first systematic undertaking on this topic in a

relatively well investigated area, where other contemporary burial features have been discovered (see the Avar grave of Târgșoru Vechi-La Mănăstire,⁵ yet also others from the same site/place⁶ or from Cireșanu,⁷ Vadu Săpat,⁸ Râfov,⁹ Independența¹⁰), some of which were dated according to absolute dates (Tabs 1–2).

Table 1. Synthetic data on discussed archaeological features (The list of the sites on Fig. 1 following this numbering).

No.	Site/ Feature	Specificities	Grave goods	References
1	Boldești, Grave 5	Barrow grave, skeletal remains without skull, stretched on the back, arms at the side, NNW–SSE, F, over 50 years of age	—	FRÎNCULEASA <i>et al.</i> 2020b; BRAUN <i>et al.</i> 2024, Tab. 1
2	Brăilița, Grave 10A	Flat grave, M, 30–45 years of age, 3 ? trepanations	—	CONSTANTINESCU – SOFICARU 2022, 337
3	Cioceni, Grave 2	Secondary burial in tumulus, NNW–SSE	a simple bronze locking	VASILESCU <i>et al.</i> 2025
	Cioceni, Grave 3	Secondary burial in tumulus, W–E	—	VASILESCU <i>et al.</i> 2025
4	Coadă Izvorului, Grave 2	Barrow grave, stretched on the back, arms at the side, NW–SE, M, 35–45 years old	arrowhead, iron loop	FRÎNCULEASA <i>et al.</i> 2018, Pl. 8
5	Ciulnița, Tumulus I, Grave 1/43	Barrow grave, stretched on the back, arms at the side, WSW–ENE, M, 8–10 years	—	MARINESC-BÎLCU <i>et al.</i> 2000, 153; BĂLTEANU 2000, 167
	Ciulnița, Tumulus I, Grave 2/44	Barrow grave, stretched on the back, arms at the side, SW–NE, M, 30–35 years old	partial horse burial, one spearhead, knives and other iron items poorly preserved, indeterminable; vegetal netting below the deceased	MARINESC-BÎLCU <i>et al.</i> 2000, 153, Fig. 9.3; BĂLTEANU 2000, 167–168
6	Ciulnița, Tumulus II, Grave 23	Disturbed grave, W–E, F, 35–50 years old	—	RENȚA 2016; PREDĂ-BĂLĂNICĂ <i>et al.</i> 2023
7	Fulga, Grave 1	Barrow grave, destroyed by ploughing; on the back, NNW–SSE, M, adult	in secondary location, bone object, elongated-rectangular shape, trapezoid in section, decorated on the edge (hatches made by cutting)	Unpublished research (in 2000)
8	Gherăseni, Grave 4	Flat grave, right side crouching (?), head eastwards, F/M?, 43–58/30–50 years of age	—	RADU <i>et al.</i> 2014; TEODORESCU 2014, 26; GARVĂN <i>et al.</i> 2018
9	Histria, Grave 1/2009	Flat grave, stretched on the back, arms at the side, E–W, adult, F, 30–35 years of age	partial horse burial (F), iron bit, single bar	BOTTEZ <i>et al.</i> 2014
10	Lipia, Grave 1	Tell settlement; pit (Grave 3) that has involved a human skull fragment as well; F, 20–35 years of age	—	Unpublished research (in 2018)
11	Lipia, Grave 5	Natural mound, stretched on the back, arms at the side, W–E, M, 45–50 years	—	MUNTEANU <i>et al.</i> 2022, 238
12	Lunca, Grave 1	Barrow, stretched on the back, W–E, arms at the side, M, 25–30 years	partial horse burial, iron flint	FRÎNCULEASA <i>et al.</i> 2020a, 201–205

5 DIACONU – DIACONU 1962.

6 PĂUNESCU 1975; MIHON *et al.* 2023; CIUPERCĂ *et al.* 2024.

7 TEODORESCU *et al.* 1993, 389, Note 2; IONIȚĂ 2004, 461; IONIȚĂ 2005, 123, 196, Fig. 24.3; FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2018, Fig. 2.c.

8 DIACONU 1978.

9 PAVELEȚ 2010, 134, Fig. 4.5.

10 FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2014b.

Absolute dating of the Early/Pre-state Medieval date burial features in Muntenia (the 7th–14th century AD)

No.	Site/ Feature	Specificities	Grave goods	References
13	Independența, Grave 2	Flat grave, stretched on the back, N–S, arms at the side, M, 45–50 years of age	metal items (buckle and 5 iron links)	FRÎNCULEASA <i>et al.</i> 2014, 51, 62
	Independența, Grave 3	Flat grave, stretched on the back, arms at the side, N–S, subadult, 9 years old	—	FRÎNCULEASA <i>et al.</i> 2014b, 51, 62–63
	Independența, Grave 4	Flat grave, double; ind. A, stretched on the back, N–S?, subadult, 2.6 years old	—	FRÎNCULEASA <i>et al.</i> 2014b, 52, 63
	Independența, Grave 6	Flat grave, on the back, W–E, arms on pelvis, M, 20–22 years of age	—	FRÎNCULEASA <i>et al.</i> 2014b, 53, 65
	Independența, Grave 7	Flat grave, stretched on the back, arms at the side, N–S, adult, M	metal item (bronze lyre-type buckle with corroded iron tang)	FRÎNCULEASA <i>et al.</i> 2014b, 52, 64
14	Păulești, Tumulus II (former B) Grave 1	Barrow grave, stretched on the back, W–E, arms at the side, M, 20–22 years, 162.9 cm	partial horse burial, iron items (single bar bit, arrowhead, knife, link, indeterminate)	FRÎNCULEASA <i>et al.</i> 2012
15	Ploiești-Triaj, Tumulus II, Grave 9	Barrow grave, stretched on the back, arms at the side, W–E, M	—	LAZARIDIS <i>et al.</i> 2022, 174
16	Strejnicu, Tumulus I, Ftr.1/ Grave 1	Barrow, lacking human bones (cenotaph)	partial horse burial, iron items (single bar bit, arrowhead, indeterminate)	FRÎNCULEASA <i>et al.</i> 2012
17	Târgșoru Nou Tumulus I, Grave 1	Barrow grave, stretched on the back, arms at the side, W–E, M, 40–50 years of age	partial horse burial, bronze bell	FRÎNCULEASA <i>et al.</i> 2020
18	Târgșoru Vechi- La Mănăstire, Grave 2E/1974	Flat grave, partially destroyed, side-crouching?	—	PĂUNESCU 1975, 231–232
	Târgșoru Vechi- La Mănăstire, Grave 3/1974	Flat grave, partially destroyed, side-crouching?, adult, F?	—	PĂUNESCU 1975, 232
	Târgșoru Vechi- La Mănăstire, Grave 104 bis	Flat grave, stretched on the back, arms at the side, E–W, F, 49–55 years of age	partial horse burial, metal items (bronze buckle, iron buckle), flint, knife, bone pommel, iron harness items (stirrups, buckle, bit)	DIACONU – DIACONU 1962; DIACONU 1965, 12, Pl. 2; GÁLL <i>et al.</i> in press
19	Târgșoru Vechi- La Pădure, Tu- mulus I, Grave 1	Barrow grave, stretched on the back, arms on pelvis, W–E, M, 45–49 years of age	—	FRÎNCULEASA <i>et al.</i> 2017c, 21
	Târgșoru Vechi- La Pădure, Tu- mulus I, Grave 5A	Barrow grave, stretched on the back, arms on pelvis, W–E, M, adult	—	FRÎNCULEASA <i>et al.</i> 2017c, 21
	Târgșoru Vechi- La Pădure, Tu- mulus I, Grave 8	Barrow grave, stretched on the back, arms on pelvis, W–E, adult,	—	FRÎNCULEASA <i>et al.</i> 2017c, 21
	Târgșoru Vechi- La Pădure Tu- mulus I, Grave 11	Barrow grave, stretched on the back, arms on pelvis, W–E, F, adult	—	FRÎNCULEASA <i>et al.</i> 2017c, 22
20	Târgșoru Vechi- Balastiera Hol- cim, Cpl. 29/ Grave 1	Flat grave, stretched on the back, arms on chest, W–E	—	MIHON <i>et al.</i> 2023, 183, Fig. 2.1; CIUPERCĂ <i>et al.</i> 2024, 218
21	Vitânești, Tumulus I, Grave 1	Barrow grave, stretched on the back, arms at the side, W–E, M, 45–50 years of age	partial horse burial, iron items (flint, knife, arrowhead, two stirrups, one buckle), flint piece, sheep bones	LEAHU – TROHANI 1978; LEAHU – TROHANI 1979
22	Vitânești, Tumulus II, Grave 1	Barrow grave, stretched on the back, W–E, M, arms at the side, 55 years of age	partial horse burial and metal items (fabric bag fragments, two small copper handles and a leather lace, axe, iron flint with piece of spunk, knife, buckle and iron bit), flint flake, sheep bones	LEAHU – TROHANI 1978; LEAHU – TROHANI 1979. There are inconsistencies between the two publications, so we preserved analysed grave numbers as marked on investigated bones.
23	Zimnicea, Grave 7	Flat grave	—	TROHANI – PĂUNESCU 2023, 94

Table 2. Absolute dates included in the study (alphabetically ordered).

Lab code	Archaeological context	Sample	BP years date	Cal. years, Sigma 1 68.2%	Cal. years, Sigma 2 95.4%	Mean value
BRAMS-5818	Boldești, Grave 5	Human bone	1093 ± 24	898–993	891–1015	949
PSUAMS-8307	Brăilța, Grave 10A	Human bone	1055 ± 20	992–1021	901–1029	997
RoAMS-1843.105	Coadă Izorului, Grave 2	Human bone	1038 ± 33	990–1031	895–1122	1004
DeA-42299	Cioceni, Grave 2	Human bone	1064 ± 23	978–1022	897–1025	982
DeA-42300	Cioceni, Grave 3	Human bone	958 ± 23	1035–1150	1029–1158	1097
DeA-35744	Ciulnița, Tumulus I, Grave 2/44	Horse bone	905 ± 22	1049–1206	1045–1216	1127
RoAMS-2023.105	Ciulnița, Tumulus I, Grave 2/44	Human bone	1155 ± 32	776–960	773–987	889
BRAMS-5808	Ciulnița, Tumulus I, Grave 23	Human bone	1247 ± 24	690–822	677–877	759
RoAMS-1844.105	Fulga, Grave 1	Human bone	1227 ± 33	707–877	681–887	795
Beta-?	Gherăseni, Grave 4	Human bone	1010 ± 30	993–1113	990–1154	1042
DeA-36411	Histria, Grave 1/2009	Human bone	930 ± 16	1047–1159	1040–1162	1100
RoAMS-?	Lipia, Grave 1	Human bone	1041 ± 28	993–1024	897–1038	1002
RoAMS-2024.105	Lipia, Grave 5	Human bone	1081 ± 31	993–1035	978–1153	1031
RoAMS-1850.105	Lunca, Grave 1	Horse bone	1076 ± 38	898–1020	890–1026	960
RoAMS-1851.105	Lunca, Grave 1	Human bone	1105 ± 34	895–991	776–1021	940
DeA-35742	Independența, Grave 2	Human bone	603 ± 22	1315–1397	1303–1403	1349
RoAMS-1845.105	Independența, Grave 2	Human bone	638 ± 32	1299–1391	1286–1397	1344
RoAMS-1846.105	Independența, Grave 3	Human bone	792 ± 41	1224–1270	1175–1284	1240
RoAMS-2025.105	Independența, Grave 4	Human bone	477 ± 30	1422–1446	1408–1456	1433
RoAMS-1847.105	Independența, Grave 6	Human bone	496 ± 34	1412–1441	1330–1457	1423
DeA-35743	Independența, Grave 7	Human bone	608 ± 21	1309–1396	1302–1400	1348
RoAMS-1848.105	Independența, Grave 7	Human bone	607 ± 33	1307–1397	1299–1406	1350
RoAMS-1840.105	Păulești, Tumulus II, Grave 1	Human bone	921 ± 33	1045–165	1035–1209	1114
RoAMS-1841.105	Păulești, Tumulus II, Grave 1	Horse bone	962 ± 32	1033–1151	1023–1160	1095
PSUAMS-7904	Ploiești, Tumulus II, Grave 9	Human bone	1045 ± 15	1003–1020	991–1025	1007
RoAMS-1842.105	Strejnicu, Tumulus I, Cpl.1/Grave 1	Horse bone	909 ± 33	1047–1206	1040–1215	1124
RoAMS-1672.105	Târgșoru Nou, Tumulus I, Grave 1	Human bone	992 ± 22	997–1147	993–1154	1071
RoAMS-1673.105	Târgșoru Nou, Tumulus I, Grave 1	Horse bone	927 ± 32	1045–1162	1032–1206	1109
DeA-40552	Târgșoru Vechi, Grave 2E/1974	Human bone	1215 ± 19	786–875	709–883	820
RoAMS-2026.105	Târgșoru Vechi, Grave 3/1974	Human bone	1308 ± 33	664–772	656–775	718
DeA-39538	Târgșoru Vechi, M.104 bis, 1960	Human bone	1354 ± 16	654–666	647–677	661
RoAMS-1993.134	Târgșoru Vechi, Tumulus I, Grave 1	Human bone	1235 ± 33	703–875	678–884	784
RoAMS-3521.134	Târgșoru Vechi, Tumulus I, Grave 5A	Human bone	1289 ± 52	688–772	652–877	741
RoAMS-3522.134	Târgșoru Vechi, Tumulus I, Grave 8	Human bone	1247 ± 49	681–871	667–886	775
RoAMS-1992.134	Târgșoru Vechi, Tumulus I, Grave 11	Human bone	1236 ± 35	702–875	677–884	782

► Lab code	Archaeological context	Sample	BP years date	Cal. years, Sigma 1 68.2%	Cal. years, Sigma 2 95.4%	Mean value
RoAMS-1922.134	Târgșoru Vechi, Cpl. 29/Grave 1	Human bone	1256 ± 38	680–821	669–877	758
RoAMS-2018.105	Vitănești, Tumulus I, Grave 1	Human bone	999 ± 33	995–1122	991–1157	1063
RoAMS-2020.105	Vitănești, Tumulus I, Grave 1	Human bone	1055 ± 31	977–1025	895–1033	985
RoAMS-2021.105	Vitănești, Tumulus I, Grave 1	Horse bone	1030 ± 33	991–1033	898–1150	1015
DeA-14667	Zimnicea, Grave 7	Human bone	668 ± 22	1285–1383	1280–1390	1333

Among the archaeological investigations, most numerous burial features were identified in south-west of Prahova county,¹¹ however recently, these also emerged in its south-east area, namely at Boldești,¹² Fulga¹³ or a feature with clay cauldrons at Inotești.¹⁴ We also mention the examination of flat graves with horse offerings, other without horse bones, excavated in abandoned Dridu sunken houses and a mound at Trestienii de Sus, along the A7 motorway.¹⁵ In this area's vicinity, we mention the excavation of a barrow at Adâncata, where steppic burial features have also been discovered¹⁶ or the two flat graves at Cireșanu, oriented N–S.¹⁷ Other flat graves were yielded by excavations conducted at Independența, along the Bucharest–Ploiești motorway or at Târgșoru Vechi-Balastieră Holcim.¹⁸ Nearby this site, in a prehistory barrow, we discovered in 2016 a group of eight presumed Christian ritual graves.¹⁹ In order to widen the analysed space, we sampled and analysed samples from other areas as well (Buzău, Ialomița, Teleorman, Giurgiu) so that our approach spans a relevant area in southern Romania. Furthermore, we re-assessed the research of Ploiești-Triaj²⁰ and included in the analysis a find of Gherăseni,²¹ two sites that yielded graves, but also other materials, features,²² encompassed in the approach here.

The archaeological contexts of the collected samples

If one were to classify the sources underlying the sample collection included in this study, several cases would result (Fig. 1). The first is that of the barrow (Păulești, Strejnicu, Coada Izvorului, Târgșoru Nou, Târgșoru Vechi, Fulga, Boldești, Ploiești-Triaj, Trestieni, Lipia, Lunca) and flat

11 FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2023, Tab. 1.

12 BRAUN *et al.* 2024, Tab. 1.

13 FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2020a.

14 FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2020a, 202

15 See A. Măgureanu, B. Ciupercă, M. Toderaș, V. Cărăbiși: Descoperiri funerare în așezări medievale timpurii, secolele VIII–X p. Chr. / Funerary discoveries in early medieval settlements, 8th–10th centuries AD., paper in the International Session of the Scientific Papers “Arheologia Mileniului I p. Chr.”, XIXth edition, Ploiești, 7–9 September 2023; A. Măgureanu, M. Toderaș, V. Cărăbiși, B. Ciupercă, Considerații privind mormintele cu cal din evul mediu timpuriu din Muntenia pe baza noilor descoperiri (Considerations based on new discoveries in regard to graves with horses from the early middle ages in Wallachia), paper in the International Session of Scientific Papers “Arheologia Mileniului I p. Chr.”, XIXth edition, Ploiești, 7–9 September 2023.

16 SIMION *et al.* 2004; SIMION *et al.* 2006.

17 TEODORESCU *et al.* 1993, 389, Note 2.

18 MIHON *et al.* 2023; CIUPERCĂ *et al.* 2024.

19 FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2017c.

20 LAZARIDIS *et al.* 2022.

21 RADU *et al.* 2014, 300, Note 10.

22 FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2020a, 208.

graves (Independența, Lipia) excavated over the recent years in the Prahova or Buzău counties. A second sample source is represented by previous research conducted in southern Romania during the second half of the 20th century (Vitănești, Ciulnița, Târgșoru Vechi, Zimnicea). Other data included in the study, already published or still unpublished, result from flat graves like those at Gherăseni,²³ Târgșoru Vechi-Balastiera Holcim,²⁴ Târgșoru Vechi-La Mănăstire,²⁵ Brăilița²⁶ or the barrows of Ploiești-Triaj,²⁷ Boldești,²⁸ and Ciulnița.²⁹ The two published dates are for the individuals discovered in barrow La Pădure/Tumulus I at Târgșoru Vechi³⁰ are not correlated with the archaeological features and/or respective barrow.³¹ In the case of Grave 4 of Gherăseni confusion ensuing from previous publications still continues, most likely caused by the features' re-numbering by the succession of archaeologists excavating in respective site.³² The sample from Grave 9 in Tumulus II at Ploiești-Triaj has been included in an ancestral genetics study,³³ however the feature itself has not been published yet (Fig. 4.5), information being recovered subsequent to the study of the documents and photographs archive of Vasile Pârvan Institute of Archaeology.³⁴ For Grave 10A at Brăilița used in the same mentioned study, there is no information aiding specifications on burial ritual in any of

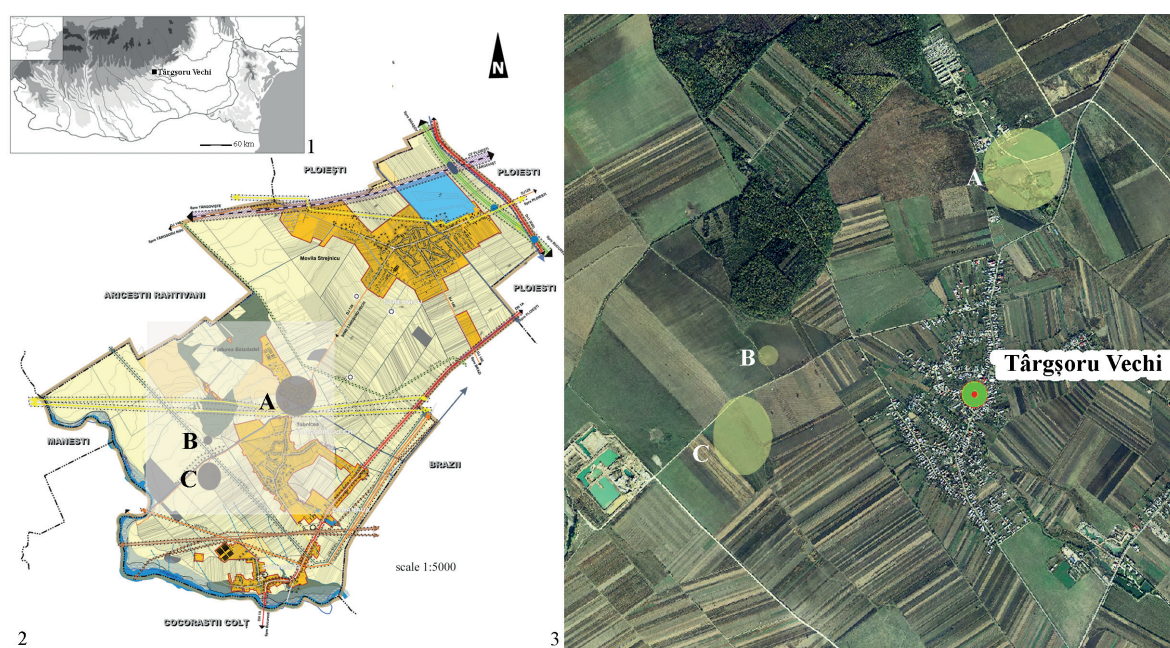


Fig. 2. The area of Târgșoru Vechi with the location of the investigated areas and graves. A – La Mănăstire, B – La Pădure, Tumulus I, C – Balastiera Holcim.

- 23 RADU *et al.* 2014; the same site also yielded a cauldron fragment: FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2020a, 208, Fig. 3.1, Pl. 13.2.
- 24 MIHON *et al.* 2023.
- 25 PĂUNESCU 1975, 231–232.
- 26 LAZARIDIS *et al.* 2022, Tab.
- 27 COMȘA 1989, 181; FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2020a, 210–211.
- 28 FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2020b.
- 29 PREDA-BĂLĂNICĂ *et al.* 2023.
- 30 MIHON *et al.* 2023.
- 31 FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2017c.
- 32 DIACONU 1977; RADU *et al.* 2014, 300; TEODORESCU 2014; GARVĂN *et al.* 2018, 284.
- 33 LAZARIDIS *et al.* 2022, SI, 174.
- 34 A. F. (2012, 2014, 2018), we thank IAB; COMȘA 1989, 181.

the two monographs³⁵ or other publications. Regarding Independența, we have accomplished data also for a Christian ritual grave (Grave 6) (Fig. 8.7) in order to establish the relation between the north–south and west–east oriented graves, emerging in this site in small groups, divided by more than 60 m³⁶ distances. Furthermore, we sent samples to two different laboratories for Grave 2 and Grave 7 and did the same for a Ciulnița grave (Tumulus I, Grave 2/44). Meanwhile, another sample from the latter location (Tumulus II, Grave 23) has been analysed by a third laboratory.³⁷ For two burials excavated in 1974 at Târgșoru Vechi-La Mănăstire³⁸ as well, absolute dates were provided by two laboratories. The Zimnicea sample was collected from the medieval cemetery,³⁹ the same case being also for a small group of burials investigated at Belciug⁴⁰ for which we obtained a ¹⁴C-AMS date (RoAMS-1849.105 = 236 ± 36 AD).⁴¹ A novel date included in this study, however originating from Dobruja, is from Histria, namely, an inhumation, with horse deposition, excavated in 2009.⁴² We specify that many years ago, such a grave was also investigated in the same site.⁴³

Synthetic information on dated archaeological features

The investigated burials discussed here, have two general orientations, respectively N–S and W–E (with more or less marked deviations from axis). With few exceptions, challenging from the view of available information (Gherăseni Grave 4 and Târgșoru Vechi-La Mănăstire Grave 2, Grave 3/1974), all deceased are placed stretched on the back, with hands at the sides or placed on the chest, abdomen, possibly on the pelvis (ocasionally just one arm). Part of the deceased are buried with horse segments (skull, limbs), metal items that are mostly iron-made, yet those in bronze are not missing (Târgșoru Nou, Independența, Târgșoru Vechi-La Mănăstire Grave 104bis). The metal objects are also present in burials without horse depositions (Coadă Izvorului, Cioceni), including in those flat (Independența). Predominate adult male burials, yet female or sub-adult graves are also present. A series of graves from Târgșoru Vechi (Tumulus I and balastiera Holcim) could evidence the presence of the Christian burial ritual by both orientation and arm position (on the abdomen and/or chest) and the lack of grave goods.⁴⁴ There is a type of graves with individuals placed on the back, oriented W–E, yet with arms stretched at the side of the body. Amongst, some include horse offerings, yet also metal items (Păulești Tumulus II, Grave 1, Târgșoru Nou Tumulus I, Grave 1, Strejnicu Tumulus I, Grave 1, Lunca Grave 1). Others do not contain grave goods (Ciulnița Tumulus I, Grave 43, Lipia Grave 5, Ploiești-Triaj, Cioceni Grave 3). We also note the presence of burials with individuals placed on the back, without grave goods or possibly with metal items (Coadă Izvorului, Independența, Fulga), yet which are oriented on the N–S axis. Metal objects in burials without horse offerings

35 HARTUCHE 2002; SÎRBU – SCHUSTER 2022, 33; CONSTANTINESCU – SOFICARU 2022, 337 (ochre pigmented bones, ...of individual 10A (s. n.), male adult). In LAZARIDIS *et al.* 2022, SI, 174, there are only anthropological data on the individual: “The skeleton is a male, 30–45-year-old, with osteoarthritis and three trephinations on the skull.”

36 FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2014b, 50 and subsequent.

37 PREDA-BĂLĂNICĂ *et al.* 2023, Tab. 3.

38 PĂUNESCU 1975, 231–232.

39 TROHANI – PĂUNESCU 2023, 93 and subsequent. We thank Mrs. Angela Simalcsik for the sample offered for analysis.

40 FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2011, 195.

41 The absolute dates included in this study were accomplished by several laboratories, respectively Măgurele – RoAMS, Debrecen – DeA, Bristol – BRAMS, Pennsylvania University – PSUAMS, Beta Analytics Inc. Laboratory, Miami – Beta.

42 BOTTEZ *et al.* 2014.

43 SUCEVEANU 1973.

44 FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2017c; CIUPERCĂ *et al.* 2024.

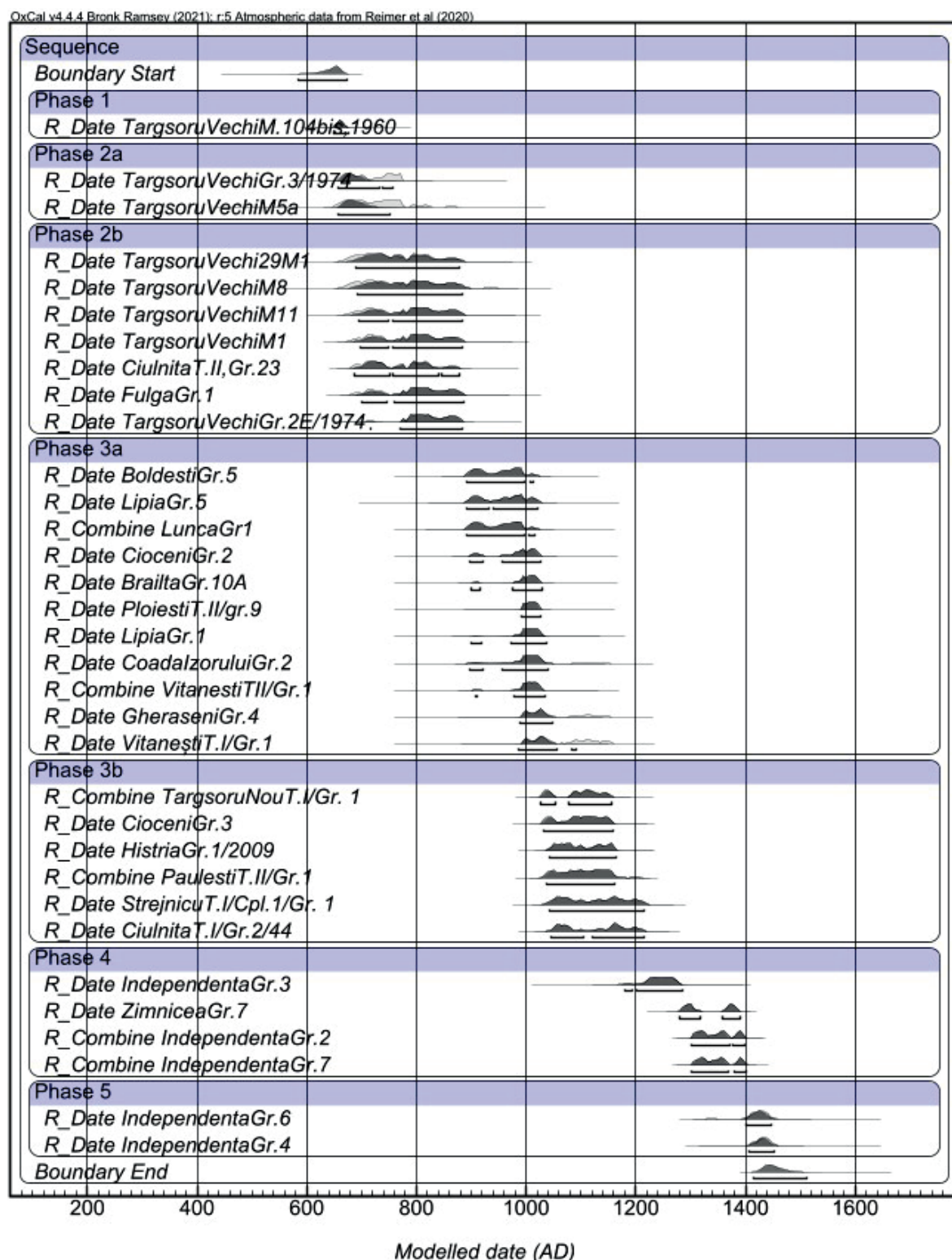


Fig. 3. Bayesian model of the investigated graves the Lower Danube Region from the 7th to 15th centuries, based on available radiocarbon data.

are rather exceptions in the discussed group. Another observation is related to the presence of graves with presumed Christian ritual in the area/within Dridu sites (Târgșoru Vechi-Balastieră Holcium, Târgșoru Vechi—barrow La Pădure Tumulus I, Cioceni, Ploiești-Triaș, Vadu Săpat-Cotu Malului).⁴⁵

⁴⁵ In 2024 we discovered another Dridu site located west that of Cotu Malului.

Comparing absolute and relative dates, we note a few debatable cases, which could be indicative, separately or together, of both issues with the samples/obtained dates and the archaeological interpreting. The finds from Târgșoru Vechi are better suited for an applied discussion. Burial features originating from three sites (Fig. 1), respectively La Mănăstire,⁴⁶ Balastiera Holcim⁴⁷ and barrow La Pădure, Tumulus I⁴⁸ are discussed. Part of the investigated graves in the Blastiera Holcim site at Târgșoru Vechi were excavated inside abandoned Dridu sunken houses (8th–9th centuries), others in an area defined as funerary.⁴⁹ In the case of the graves from Târgșoru Vechi-La Pădure, their filling contained Dridu pottery fragments⁵⁰ in secondary position. Therefore, in both sites/segments of the same settlement, there are similar situations, respectively at least part of the graves are later to a phase in the Dridu settlement development. Furthermore, at Târgșoru Vechi-Balastiera Holcim it was noted that inhabitancy migrated from one side of the river⁵¹ to the other, which may be correlated to the burials in the abandoned sunken houses as well. Likely, both the stratigraphic situations and absolute dates evidence part of the site's dynamics, whereby some sunken houses are abandoned, while other continue to be used or are even newly built. There are cases when absolute dates are conflicting or slightly different in the case of certain graves of which bones, both human and horse were sampled. The most visible is that of Ciulnița Tumulus I, Grave 2/44, where there is a difference of 2.5 centuries, the date achieved from horse bones being more recent. We mention that the investigations were performed by different laboratories. At Târgșoru Nou, in the case of Tumulus I, Grave 1, the difference is acceptable, yet the same trend is noticeable, the horse bone sample being more recent.⁵² At Lunca or Vitănești Tumulus II, Grave 1 too, the same phenomenon occurs (Tab. 2). The single feature that does not frame in this pattern is that of Păulești, where the date accomplished on the human bone is slightly more recent (Tab. 2).

Regarding Grave 2 and Grave 3/1974 in the site of Târgșoru Vechi-La Mănăstire, absolute dates agree neither with the stratigraphic situation as explained/rendered by the scholars nor with the features and/or published material.⁵³ Concurrently, the ¹⁴C-AMS dates are contemporary with those yielded by the graves in tumulul de la Pădure (Tumulus I) in the same village or the Balastiera Holcim settlement (Tab. 2), where, as previously mentioned, Dridu pottery was involved or where some of the graves were excavated inside abandoned Dridu sunken houses. Regarding the graves with horse offerings, we note that male adult graves are oriented W–E (Păulești, Târgșoru Nou, Lunca, Vitănești Tumulus I, Grave 1, Vitănești Tumulus II, Grave 2, possibly Strejnicu), while female graves to E–W, even though dating to different phases (Târgșoru Vechi-La Mănăstire M.104 bis, Histria Grave 1/1996). A separate case is Grave 44 at Ciulnița, approximately oriented S–N.

Regarding the ¹⁴C-AMS dates of Independența compared to the archaeological situation,⁵⁴ these evidence certain dynamics, the group of presumed Christian ritual (Fig. 1.1) represented by Grave 6

46 DIAONU – DIAONU 1962; DIAONU 1965; PĂUNESCU 1975.

47 CIUPERCĂ *et al.* 2024.

48 FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2017c.

49 CIUPERCĂ *et al.* 2024, Pl. 1. Graves excavated in the filling of abandoned sunken houses also come from Vadu Săpat-Cotu Malului (DIAONU 1978) or more recently Trestienii de Sus, see A. Măgureanu, B. Ciupercă, M. Toderăș, V. Cărăbiș, Descoperiri funerare în așezări medievale timpurii, secolele VIII–X p. Chr. (Funerary discoveries in early medieval settlements, 8th–10th centuries AD) oral presentation in the International Session of Scientific Papers “Arheologia Mileniului I p. Chr.”, XIXth edition, Ploiești, 7–9 September 2023.

50 FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2017c, 20–22.

51 CIUPERCĂ *et al.* 2024, 221.

52 FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2020a, Tab. 3.

53 PĂUNESCU 1975; PĂUNESCU 1976. The clay cauldrons would be much earlier.

54 At Independența were discovered three small groups of graves located in the site's southern segment, to the S, NW and NE. Graves in the last two groups have Christian orientation and ritual (see Fig. 8.1).



Fig. 4. Graves discovered at: 1 – Târgșoru Vechi-Tumul Pădure, Grave 1, 2 –Târgșoru Vechi-Tumul Pădure, Grave 11, 3 – Târgșoru Vechi-Balastieră Holcim, Ftr. 29/Grave 1 (after MIHON *et al.* 2023, Fig. 2). Graves with arms at the side of the body discovered at: 4 – Lipia Grave 5, 5 – Ploiești-Triaj Tumulus II, Grave 9, 6 – Ciulnița Tumulus II, Grave 43.

(Fig. 8.7) is more recent than that in the southern part of the site, oriented N–S (Graves 2, 3, and 7). Grave 4, although discovered in the southern group of older graves, is contemporary with those presumed Christian (Tab. 2). The discovered bones ascribed to this double grave belonged to sub-adults aged between 1.6 and 2.6 years,⁵⁵ partially surviving, which did not allow clear observations on ritual elements. In the case of Grave 2 in the same site, investigations were performed by two laboratories, obtained dates being very similar (Tab. 2).

Introduction: the issue of macro-group identification via archaeological materials

Archaeological data mirror in several cases—particularly in the case of burials and sacrifice depositions/offerings—complex rituals. Although the burial rituals of ancient societies are not known in much detail, whilst their reasons, relations and social behaviour may be only partially reconstructed, these are revealed by regular patterns in archaeological evidence and with the aid of cultural and anthropological theoretical models. Today, there is a large quantity of theoretical archaeological literature on the social and cultural dimensions of the issue (rituals that encompass life views, exchanges, cultural identities and traditions, *habitus*), thus creating wider insight frameworks concerning the views of those societies in general on their very heterogeneous group and individual identities (horizontal, vertical).⁵⁶ Because of this, pinpointing the identity of the individuals buried during different periods entails huge dosage of relativity, even the more so if one thinks of their supposed ethnical identity, namely their social solidarity to a human group (macro-group identity).⁵⁷

From this view, we have divided the units (graves) in the burial sites into five groups, which we may date to these centuries based on radiocarbon analyses and typo-chronology classical methods, as in Figure 2. We further used terms well-established in the academic literature—‘Avar,’ ‘early-Bulgarian’ (8th–10th century), ‘Pecheneg,’ ‘Cuman’ or ‘Pecheneg–Cuman,’ ‘the Voivodate of Wallachia period’—, these being only a string of *terminus technicus* used in the structural sense of the burial cultural *habitus* expression of the different populaces integrated in different power centres of the early medieval and medieval periods,⁵⁸ being cultural replicas—very heterogeneous—of these structures. For this reason, instead of the obsolete term of ‘archaeological culture’⁵⁹ we chose the phrase ‘burial horizon,’ as it involves only accurate chronological dating within a specific space (micro- or macro-regional), not forced integration of an archaeological site or even of an artefact as symbol of a human (macro-) group homogeneously identified culturally (ethnicity). Consequently, when using for instance the term of ‘Pecheneg’ or ‘Pecheneg period’ we mark a chronological segment⁶⁰ only, to a period dominated by a political and military structure, without yet making any inference on the supposed ethnicity of the individual from the studied grave. Moreover, where burial specif-

55 FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2017c, 63–64.

56 For instance: BELL 2009; KYRIAKIDIS 2007; ASSMANN 2011; ARCHER 1996.

57 Concerning the evasiveness (*‘hot potato’*) of ‘ethnicity’, which is so fashionable these days, and its difficult almost impossible identification, see MALEŠEVIĆ 2004, 1–3.

58 Noticeably, most structures are oriental, steppe in origin. In connection with these, investigating the early medieval power phenomena, Walter Pohl has distinguished two political-military power structure types: in the case of Eastern structures, the author has used the concept of ‘steppe-state’ emerged in the context of the nomad, steppe lifestyle and in respective geographical context. This power system (concerning the Asian genesis) it was essentially different from the integrated Germanic power structure of the Mediterranean–Greco–Roman system (POHL 2003, 571–574; See also: HALL 2018, 17–37).

59 For its critical analysis and evolution see: BRATHER 2004, 517–567. See also ANGHELINU 2014, 108–111.

60 On the ‘Pecheneg’ archaeology: CURTA 2013, 143–202. See also: SÎMPETRU 1973, 443–468.

icities contradictory to these models emerge (for instance, position of the arms) we shall attempt to very clearly delimit cultural habituses via rituals. Before discussing the topic, we shall make an abstract of the chronology of burial spaces from Muntenia, known in the 7th–15th century.

Chronology of the burial sites in Muntenia and Oltenia during the 7th–15th century

The two historical regions south of the Carpathians (Muntenia and Oltenia) are delimited northwards by the Carpathian Mountains (which separate these from Transylvania), westwards by the Danube and the Carpathians; to the south and east, the Danube delimits them from today's Bulgaria and Dobruja.⁶¹ We have established five chronological groups for the 7th–15th century burial sites, according to the previously mentioned structure.

The repertory of the 7th–15th century burial sites from Muntenia and Oltenia contains an aspect which we addressed in a synthesis study:⁶² thus, in the two regions there is a secure total number of nine burial sites pertaining to a population with a cultural funeral habitus defined by “south-Danubian”⁶³ features. All these sites were recorded yet only along the Danube line, despite the fact that B. Ciupercă, in his doctoral thesis, identified no less than 558 sites ascribed to the 8th–10th/11th century just on the territory of Muntenia, however no burial site in northern and central Muntenia.⁶⁴ The specificity of these sites along the Danube line is represented by the large number of graves, being large cemeteries, flat, with hundreds of features, mirroring an organised and stable habitat, with burial rituals related to contemporary cemeteries from Bulgaria.⁶⁵

In contrast with this burial phenomenon, the spatial expansion of the funeral phenomenon termed ‘Pecheneg,’ ‘Cuman,’ or ‘Pecheneg–Cuman’ is quasi-general specific on the territory of Muntenia, as it may be noted together with recently published sites—the graves of the late nomad horizon diffuse not only in the Danube line area, but also in other areas of Muntenia. It is worth mention that a consistent series of burial finds with similar/identical specificities were yielded by the north and north-east of Muntenia in more recent years, several sites of the period being investigated and published.⁶⁶ These are much different from the 8th–10th burial sites by the Danube line. Thus, the late nomad burial horizon stands out by singular graves, grave groups, many located in prehistory barrows, with a significant percentage of rituals connected to the nomad, steppe Eurasian habitus.⁶⁷ Precisely these very similar specificities make us very cautious when labelling ethnicities: basically, these graves termed ‘Pecheneg’ or ‘Cuman’ are difficult to distinguish even when there are very secure chronological landmarks in place.⁶⁸ An example is the E–W orientation (namely, the reversed W–E) deemed as part of the Cumanic burial habitus,⁶⁹ however, on the territory of Muntenia, this custom was not recorded in the case of features ascribed to respective populaces.

61 On the geographical description, see: HARHOIU *et al.* 2011, 7–18; GĂȘTESCU *et al.* 1976, 25–33.

62 GÁLL *et al.* 2020, 139–170.

63 Undoubtedly, the reference work is that of Uwe Fiedler (FIEDLER 1992), accompanied by other works, especially of late Raso Rashev (RASHEV 2008).

64 CIUPERCĂ 2012, 363.

65 FIEDLER 1992.

66 FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2012, 139–163; FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2017d, 45, note 54, Pl. 74; FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2018, 77–99; FRÎNCULEASA *et al.* 2020a, 199–228; VASILE *et al.* 2024.

67 On the nomad cultural habitus see: SZENTHE – GÁLL 2022, 315–335.

68 This issue emerges also south of the Danube: IVANOV – IVANOV 2015. See also the analyses of HOLEŠČÁK 2022, 365–374.

69 In this respect see SPINEI 1985, 122 with related literature.

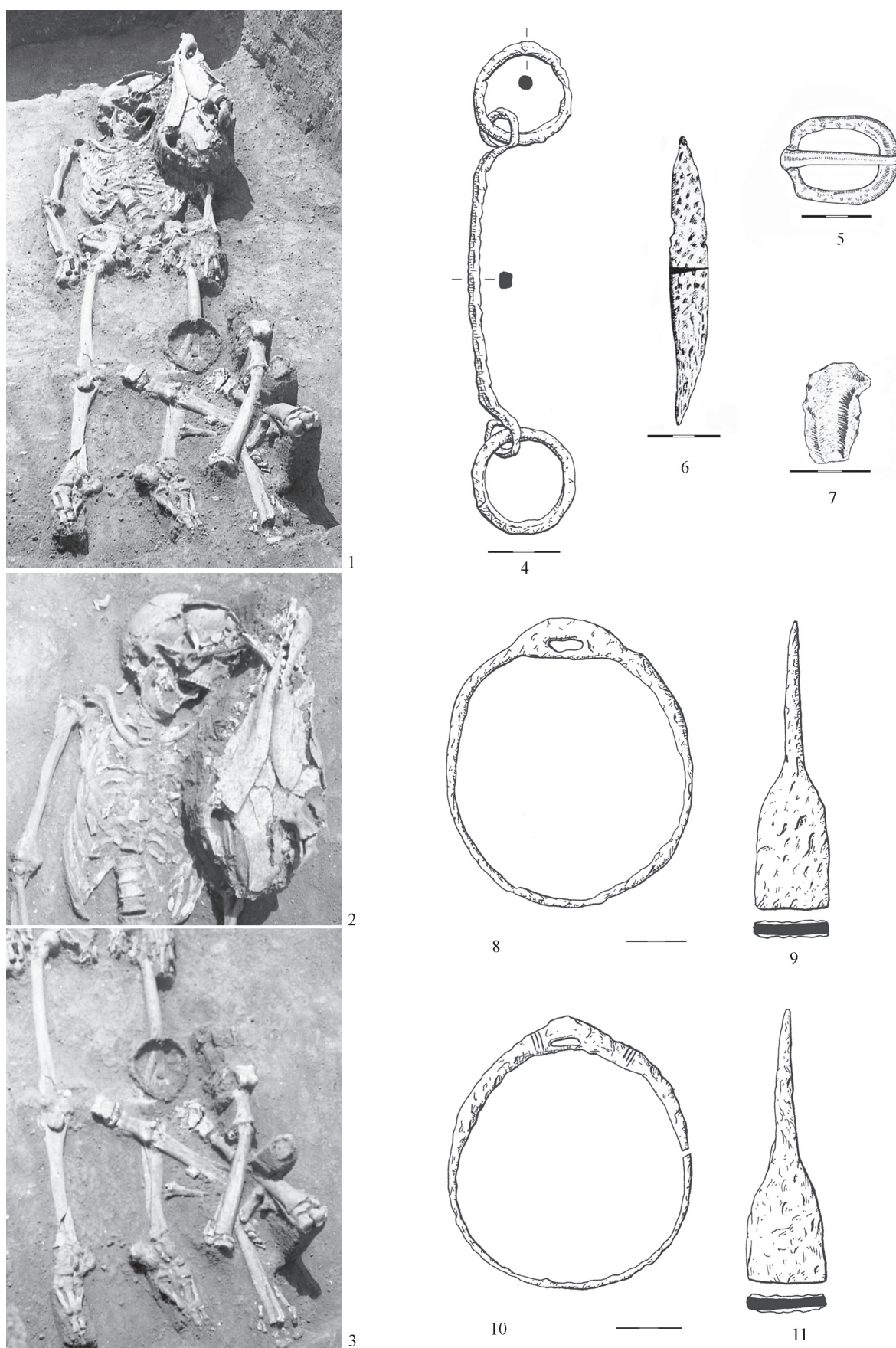


Fig. 5. Grave 1 in Tumulus I at Vitănești (archive images, G. Trohani) (1–3), items among the grave goods (4–11) (after LEAHU – TROHANI 1979).

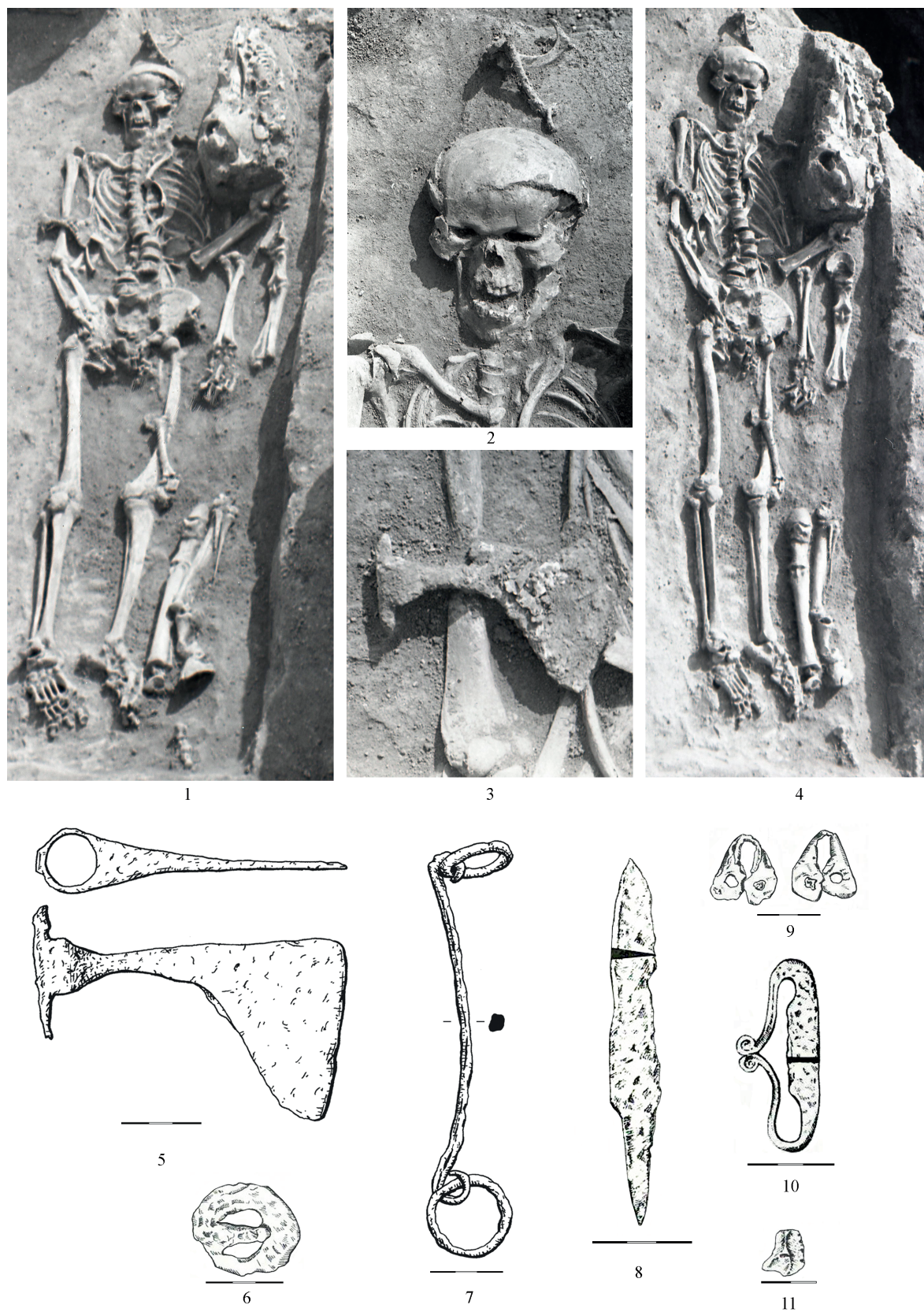


Fig. 6. Grave 1 in Tumulus II at Vitănești (archive images, G. Trohani) (1–4), items among the grave goods (5–11) (after LEAHU – TROHANI 1979).

Thus, one of the research goals of the subsequent period should be that graves generally dated to the second half of the 10th century until the first half of the 13th century to be divided on smaller chronological segments (with the aid of ^{14}C tests), respectively—based on observations east of Muntenia—a more accurate reconstruction of the burial habitat of the 10th–13th century nomad clans.

Even more challenging is to determine the very heterogeneous populations reaching these areas subsequent to the expansion of the Mongolian empire during the second part of the 13th century, although the Mongolian political influence of the second half of the 13th century and in particular of its last decade is not mirrored in the burial customs on the territory of Muntenia.⁷⁰ It is further noted that organised cemeteries (to date, only a few investigated) emerge, clear archaeological evidence of initiated sedentarisation process of the communities.⁷¹

Observations subsequent to ^{14}C analyses

The radiocarbon analyses carried out on a number of 30 graves dated between the 7th–14th century are much enriching because of the information which establishes much more secure chronological landmarks compared to the information offered by the archaeological sources on one hand and on the other, because of the information on the 8th–10th century funeral behaviour in areas from Muntenia where no secure burial sites were known to date, in contrast to the Danube line where cemeteries with even hundreds of graves⁷² were documented (Fig. 2).

Our analysis exploited the possibilities of the OxCal software and Bayesian statistics.⁷³ The radiocarbon dates from burials and the find material from the 7th–15th-century AD Muntenia were considered traces of a heterogeneous historical process; thus cultural/structural interpretation was added to the model—or, translated to the language of OxCal, all data points were rendered to five phases (Tab. 3):

1. We show here, in contrast with the 1960s analysis, that in the grave of Târgșor Vechi-La Mănăstire, Grave 104 bis/1960 (Phase 1), which also contained the partial skeletal remains of a horse and was oriented on the E–W direction, the female (and not male) was buried with an old mare, emphasizing the importance and connections between gender, age, and burial customs.⁷⁴ According to the burial rituals (orientation, partial horse burial), one may infer that the female, buried by mid-7th century, was related, from a cultural standpoint, with both the communities to the east of Tisza⁷⁵ and those found in Eastern European steppes.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, she was most likely an ‘Avar’ woman (in terms of political ethnoses⁷⁷). We used the term ‘Avar’ in this context (in Wallachia other finds may be mentioned, i.e. all of these evidencing ‘Avar’ influences⁷⁸).
2. In the case of graves from Fulga, Ciulnița, and Târgșoru Vechi (Phase 2a–b) several rituals coexist, from the presumed Christian, specific to the Lower Danube regions during the early medieval period (W–E, stretched on the back, arms at the sides)⁷⁹ (Târgșoru Vechi-

70 IONIȚĂ 2005, 114.

71 IONIȚĂ 2005, 111 and the Catalogue of finds; IONIȚĂ 2013, 203–222.

72 GÁLL *et al.* 2020, Fig. 15.

73 BRONK RAMSEY 2009.

74 GÁLL *et al.* in press.

75 LŐRINCZY 1998, 343–372; GÁLL – MĂRGINEAN 2020, 373–407; GULYÁS 2023, 701–756.

76 KOMAR 2006, 7–244; KOMAR *et al.* 2006, 245–374; RASHEV 2007, 178; GULYÁS 2023, 704–714; SOKOLOV – GULYÁS 2006, 29–48.

77 POHL 2018, 17–20, 44–47.

78 CHUPERKĂ 2020, 319–320.

79 In connection with these arm positions in the Lower Danube line see: TAKÁCS 2005, 85–102.

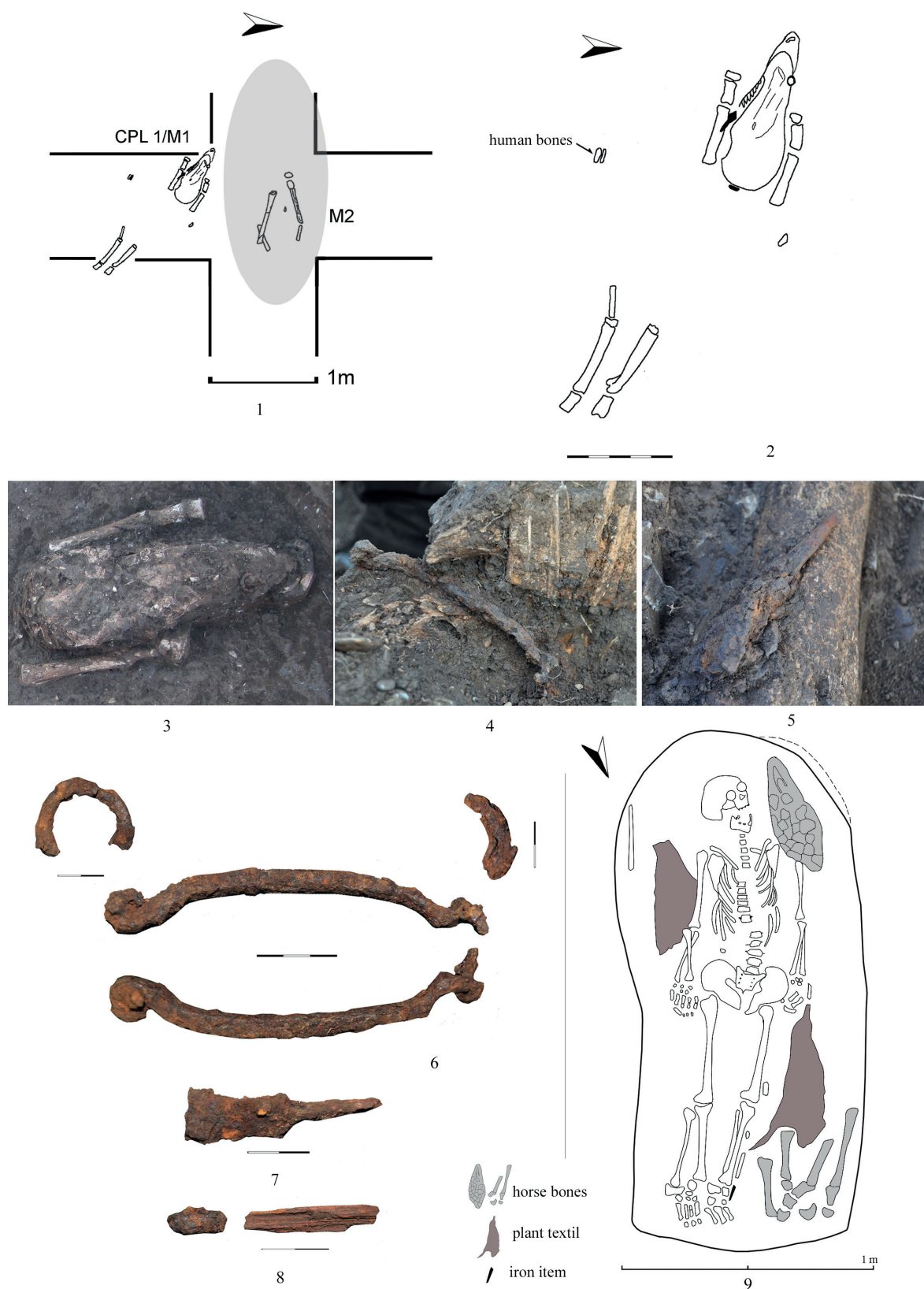


Fig. 7. 1 – Ftr. 1/Grave 1 discovered in Tumulus I at Strejnicu with its location in relation to the surviving bones in Grave 2, 2–5 images with the *in situ* position of the human bones on the horse bones, 6–8 – bit and other iron items discovered in Ftr. 1/Grave 1 at Strejnicu, 9 – Grave 44 in Tumulus II at Ciulnița (re-drawn after [MARINESCU-BÎLCU et al. 2000](#), Fig. 9.3).

Table 3. Chronology systematization based on the radiocarbon measurements.

Phase 1: 'Avar'	647–677 (654–666)	Târgșoru Vechi, Grave 104bis
Phase 2a: 'Early-Bulgarian'	670–750	Târgșoru Vechi, Grave 3/1974; Târgșoru Vechi, Grave M5a
Phase 2b: 'Bulgarian'	700–900	Târgșoru Vechi, 29/Grave 1, Grave 8, Grave 11, Grave 1; Ciulnița Tumulus II, Grave 23; Fulga Tumulus I, Grave 1; Târgșoru Vechi, Grave 2E/74
Phase 3a: 'Pecheneg'	900–1050	Boldești, Grave 5; Lipia, Grave 5; Lunca, Grave 1; Cioceni, Tumulus Grave 2; Brăilița, Grave 10A; Ploiești-Triaj Tumulus II, Grave 9; Lipia, Grave 1; Coadă Izvorului Tumulus I, Grave 2; Vitănești Tumulus II, Grave 1; Gherăseni, Grave 4; Vitănești Tumulus I, Grave 1
Phase 3b: 'Pecheneg/Cuman'	1000–1200	Târgșoru Nou Tumulus I, Grave 1; Cioceni Tumulus, Grave 3; Histria; Păulești Tumulus II, Grave 1; Strejnicu Tumulus I, Grave 1; Ciulnița Tumulus I, Grave 2/44
Phase 4: 'Period of the Voivodate of Wallachia'	1200–1400	Independența, Grave 3, Zimnicea, Grave 7, Independența, Graves 2 and 7
Phase 5: 'Period of the Voivodate of Wallachia'	1400–1470	Independența, Graves 6 and 4

La Pădure and Balastieră Holcim), to another with N–S orientation (Fulga)⁸⁰ or W–E, yet with arms at the side of the body (Ciulnița Tumulus I, Grave 1/43) (Fig. 3.6). For the other graves (Ciulnița Tumulus II, Grave 23, Târgșoru Vechi Grave 2E, Grave 3/1974) information related to the ritual are problematical (side-crouching?) or the bones were no longer in their original location at the time of find/research. Two graves (Târgșoru Vechi Grave 3/1974, Grave 5a) are probably earlier than others.

3. Graves dated between the second half of the 10th century and 13th century stand out by burial habitus which in most cases resembles the Eurasian steppe areas. Thus, horse remains were deposited (together with the harness items: reins and saddle), accompanied by elements of material culture related to the warlike values of the individuals, commonly males. In the analysed lot, these graves are in largest proportion, however owing to their calibration, three sub-groups could be established:
 - 3.1. The first sub-group includes 10 cases, which form a lot that may be dated by 10th century until mid-11th century. Chronologically, they practically diffuse throughout Muntenia. Thus, for the first time in the research history of medieval Muntenia, there is a group of graves, archaeologically outlined, that may be dated not to a very restricted chronological interval, not on three centuries, but to half a century. The earliest nomad grave is Lunca Grave 1 (destroyed grave with horse bone, deposition on the back, W–E, iron strike-a-light). The graves of Vitănești (Figs 5–6) and Coadă Izvorului resemble the steppe burial habitus,⁸¹ the first also containing grave goods with a series of nomad specificities, namely the iron axe.⁸² At the same time, the grave in Tumulus I, Grave 1 at Vitănești (Fig. 5) ex-

80 On the N–S orientation: FIEDLER 1992, Abb. 113; RASHEV 2008, 202, Obr. 75, Tab. 125; SPINEI 2009, 281–283, 290, Fig. 35.2, Fig. 39.1, Fig. 43.6, Fig. 46.21; DONCHEVA-PETKOVA 2007, 647.

81 The ones from Vitănești represents the typology in which the horse's head and lower limbs preserved probably in its skin are placed in the grave, in anatomical order, on the left side of the human. For their analogies, see: PLETNEVA 2003, Рис. 44, Рис. 47; SPINEI 2009, Fig. 44, Fig. 49.17, 19–20; KRUGLOV 2003, Рис. 10.11, Рис. 11.3.

82 LEAHU – TROHANI 1978, 529–534, Figs 1–4; IONIȚĂ 2005, 144. Recently, it was suggested a re-dating of the grave: HOLEŠČÁK 2022, 365–374, the author's conclusion contradicting the radiocarbon results ►

hibits ritual features identical with those termed of late nomad steppe. In this case too, possible dating to the 11th century is the likeliest, as emphasized by the stirrups.⁸³

The grave of Ploiești-Triaj Grave 9 raises the question of identification with the members of a Christian population, given the absence of grave goods and the W–E orientation, yet with arms set at the side of the body.⁸⁴ Grave 5 of Lipia also exhibits the same peculiarities (Fig. 4.4). In the case of Grave 1 of Lipia (human bone in secondary location) and Grave 10B at Brăilița there is no available information concerning the burial ritual. It is worth mentioning though that neither the W–E orientation itself can be catalogued as Christian nor should the lack of grave goods mandatorily determine such interpretation.⁸⁵ The grave from Boldești Grave 5 without grave goods had been N–S axis orientation.⁸⁶ In fact, the W–E orientation is also found in graves with horse bone depositions or those without grave goods, with arms set at body side. If for Lipia Grave 5 there is W–E orientation, back deposition of the deceased with arms at the side of the body, in the case of Gherăseni Grave 4 the situation is confusing, given the existing information on a Neolithic grave, with a side-crouching ritual,⁸⁷ yet which does not correspond to the ¹⁴C date accomplished for a grave supposedly dated to the 3rd–4th/5th century.

3.2. Phase 3b is closely connected chronologically with these graves, yet their calibration evidences a slightly later chronological segment in the case of the three graves, nonetheless in the 11th century. The grave of Ciulnița Tumulus I, Grave 2/44 (dating on human bone, different from that on horse bone), oriented S–N (Fig. 7.9) could be dated to the 11th–12th century.⁸⁸ The chronological sub-group calibrated as the latest in the late nomad termed group, being represented by graves that included also parts of the horses slaughtered during the burial process. The dating of these graves of Târgșoru Nou Tumulus I, Grave 1, Păulești Tumulus II, Grave 1, Histria Grave 1/2009, Strejnicu Tumulus I, Grave 1, Ciulnița Tumulus II, Grave 2/44 (horse bone) spans a much longer chronological segment, thus their connection with the ‘Pecheneg’ or ‘Cuman’ group is uncertain and it would be a methodological error to randomly connect it to a group or another mentioned by the historical sources. It is very important to emphasize, that the snaffle-bits with rigid mouth-pieces are dated in a significant proportion in the twelfth century too.

4. The radiocarbon dates for Independența represent the latest analysed chronological segment (Phases 4–5), raising numerous questions on the population of respective burial site, as burials were oriented N–S and some specificities of the material culture are related to

► presented in this article. After Victor Spinei “A larger group of horseman graves [...] the graves in question are indeed Pecheneg” (SPINEI 2009, 294).

83 Their analogies, see for example: Cărnășeni (SPINEI 2009, Fig. 42.14), Roma (SPINEI 2009, Fig. 53.1), Pavlovca-KI Grave 10 (SPINEI 1985, 115, Fig. 33.1).

84 In grave 2, still from Ploiești-Triaj, hands were placed on the lap, both bent at 90 degrees angle. The questions remains if this grave 2 dates similarly to grave 9, namely by late 10th century and the first half of the 11th century? If so, then we are likely dealing with a Christened population, since in nomad burials arm positions of the type are not recorded (TAKÁCS 2005, 85–102). On the Christianisation of the populations in the Bulgarian Khanate (present-day Bulgaria and Muntenia), more recently see: FIEDLER 2012, 107–137.

85 For instance, in late Avar cemeteries, around 25–30–35% of the graves do not contain grave goods and are oriented W–E, NW–SE. See for instance Nădlac-3 graves, where in a burial site 34% had no grave goods at all: GÁLL 2018, 64, 97–101. In this respect see also: BOLLÓK 2024, 21–46.

86 See Note 80.

87 TEODORESCU 2014, 26.

88 On the S–N orientation, see: SPINEI 2009, 281–283, Fig. 41.1–3, Fig. 43.8.

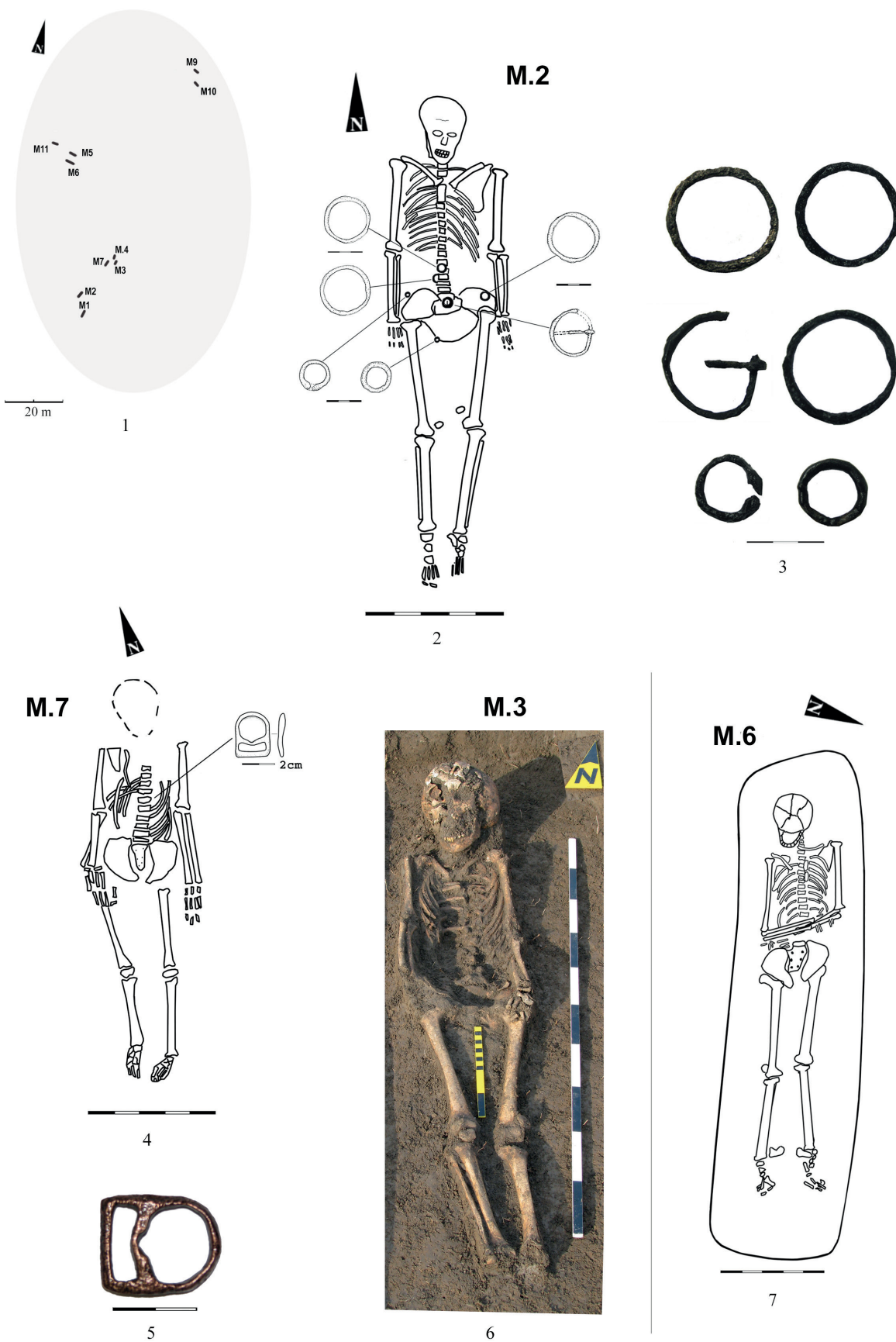


Fig. 8. 1– distribution of the flat graves discovered at Independentența, 2–3 – Grave 2 at Independentența and the iron items among the grave goods, 4–5 – Grave 7 at Independentența and the bronze buckle, 6 – Grave 3 at Independentența, 7 – Grave 6, investigated at Independentența.

previous centuries. Moreover, out of the five graves, one (Grave 2) (Fig. 8.2–3) seems to date to the 13th century and the remaining to the 14th century.

Therefore, it may not be excluded that different period burials occurred on the same spot or that the burial site, functional in both the 13th century and the 14th century, was much larger.

Conclusions and questions

Owing to the presented radiocarbon analyses, the archaeological findings relying on classical dating methods based on the system of parallels have been improved considerably. Thus, the archaeological material resulted subsequent to the investigation of the 7th and 14th century burial sites could be more accurately framed chronologically, a key tool for any type of archaeological (or historical) analysis.

Thus, our analyses shed light on a series of issues which we either did not envisage or impossible to investigate with the methods available at the time.

- From the 7th century until the 10th century practically, except the Danube line and the burial site of Sărata Monteoru, there was no recorded grave dated with certainty to this period.⁸⁹ The new results presented here change this observation. Thus, subsequent to the performed radiocarbon analyses, Ciulnița Tumulus II, Grave 23, Târgșoru Vechi Tumulus I, Grave 1, Grave 11, Ftr. 29/Grave 1, Fulga Tumulus I, Grave 1, Ciulnița Tumulus I, Grave 1/43, and Târgșoru Vechi Grave 2E/74 may be dated to the 8th–9th century, while Ciulnița Tumulus I, Grave 2/44 (human bone sample), Lunca Grave 1, Boldești Grave 5 to the 10th century.
- The grave of Târgșoru Vechi Grave 104bis/1960 was dated on a time segment of ca. 30 years, between AD 647–677 (and most likely between AD 654–666), so that the connection with early-Bulgarian graves must be removed from the academic literature, these being related to the pre-early-Bulgarian period.
- Based on these data, we can cautiously assume the presence of Christian ritual graves north of the Danube area, during the 8th–10th century, yet more importantly, nearby/within Dridu type settlements.⁹⁰ Moreover, in the case of the Târgșoru Vechi site, it may be noted that although the house number is rather high, that of the graves is small, which could mean that few individuals had adopted the Christian cult, the others being buried according to different burial rites that left no traces? Thus, this could be an intrusive group reaching northern Muntenia from the south or the northern limit of the Danube. The discovery over the time of Christian ritual barrow and/or flat graves should become a research topic to be considered.
- For the first time in the archaeological research of early-medieval Muntenia, the dating of a group of graves has been accomplished on a more restricted chronological segment (50–60 years, namely from late 10th century – first part of the 11th century).⁹¹ Moreover, in the case of the Vitănești grave, the chronology of type Fedorov-Davydov DIII stirrup could be adjusted: such harness item types may be dated at least to the first half of the 11th century.⁹²

89 GÁLL *et al.* 2020, Fig. 15.

90 On the Dridu culture see: CIUPERCĂ 2009.

91 Dating issue to wider chronological segments was noted by some scholars. “[...] Most other burial in the Wallachian Plain cannot be dated with more precision than to the eleventh and/or the twelfth century.” (CURTA 2013, 163, Note 89).

92 FEDOROV-DAVYDOV 1966, 16.

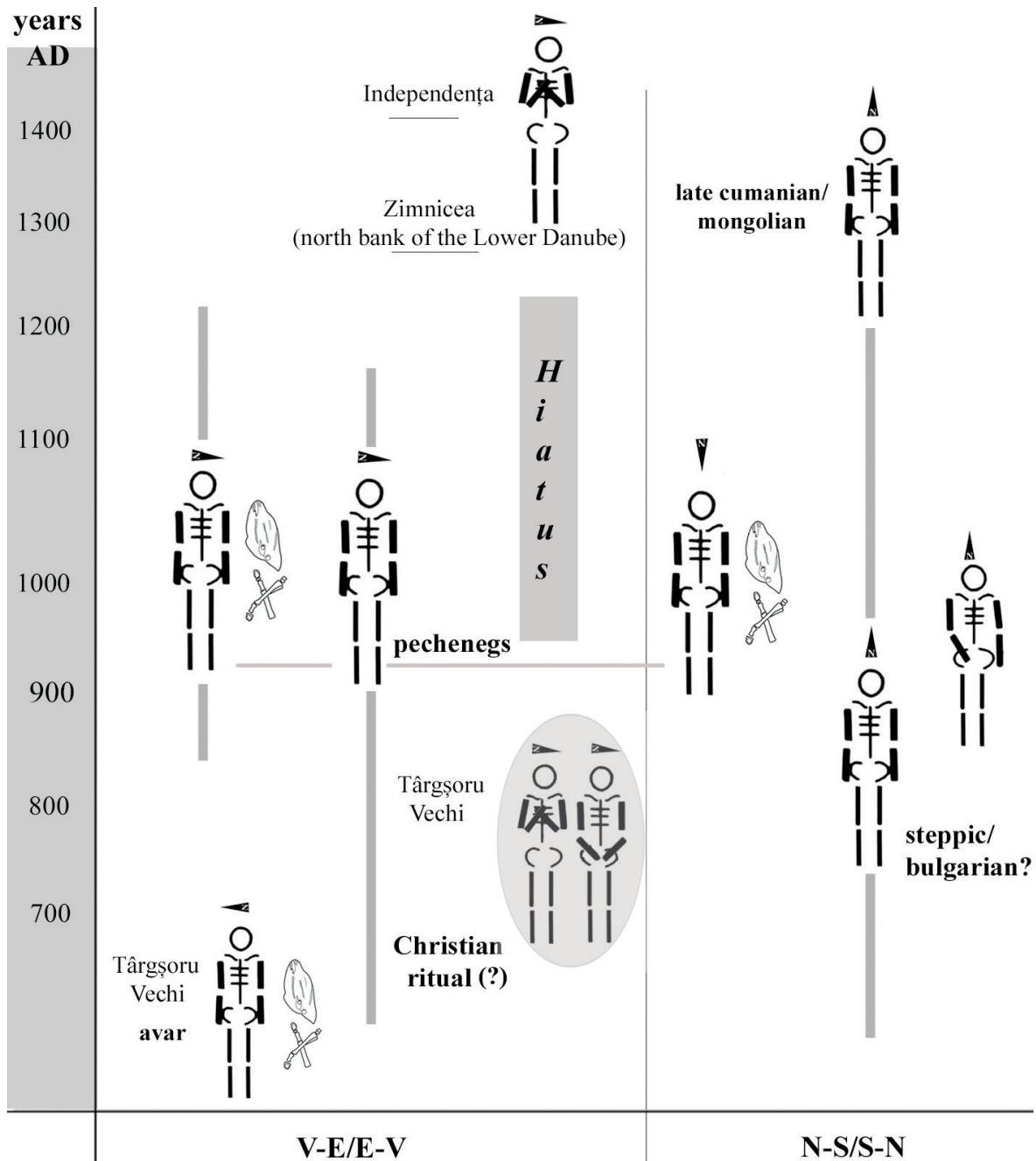


Fig. 9. Ritual dynamics by the Lower Danube in correlation with ^{14}C -AMS dates (approx. AD 650–1400).

- Our analyses also raise serious questions concerning both the beginning of the late nomad horizon and the end of the ‘south-Danubian’ peculiarity cemeteries. For now, it seems, also based on the dating of the Vitănești, Coada Izvorului graves that the late nomad horizon spans a longer period of time. Thus, the first graves may be dated earlier, namely by late 10th century. We believe important to mention that cemeteries along the Danube line remained in use later than mid-10th century.
- The Independența site shows that one cannot exclude the possibility that cemeteries⁹³ mirroring the settling of the population begin to emerge at least from early 13th century or

93 We are not referring to those along the Danube, in the Porțile de Fier area, but in areas north the Danube.

even earlier. The Zimnicea dating confirms the presence of the Christian ritual specific to the Lower Danube during the first half of the 13th century.

And, ultimately, the analysis here clearly shows that archaeological dating of burial features according to parallels of the discovered objects is often highly inaccurate, so the use of radiocarbon dating in the early medieval archaeology from Romania should become not only necessary, but also a rule of the scientific process.

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