

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE PREFEUDAL GRAVES OF INCINERATION (THE 8th CENTURY) FROM ALBA IULIA – „THE AMBULANCE STATION“

(SUMMARY)

The archaeological diggings out in the spring of 1980 in the west part of the „Ambulance Station“ uncovered 186 Roman graves and about 358 funeral complexes from the 8th – 11th centuries. The early stage of the cemetery is illustrated only by three cinerary urns, uncovered in the north side of the block of flats B 13, Victoria Avenue.

The funerary graves dug out at a small depth (0.20 - 0.40 m) have their outlines unprecised (M 256), oval (M 256), with the dimension of 0.60 x 0.70 m, or circular (M 522), with a diameter of about 0.40 m. Each grave contains the remains of a cinerary urn. In the grave 256, the urn represented only the inferior third restorable part and it was laid with the opening upward. The urn was only half filled with 376 bony calcinated remains having the size of small splinters (300), medium size (50) and big ones (26). The neurocranium comprising 26 fragments and the postcranial skeleton are proved by 20 large remains, resulting from the diaphysis the thighbones and shinbones, 52 splinters of humerus, radius and cubitus and a fragment from a vertebral piece.

The general aspect of the ossious pieces and the closed sagital suture ascribe them to a forty or fifty-year old grown-up male.

In the second grave (M 456), the urn, broken at the funeral pyre, is ascertained by only 19 fragments resulting from lateral interior parts. The funeral inventory is made up of the offering of ceramic fragments, 58 splinters resulting from calcinated human bones and a small heap of 220 snail shells.

The anthropological study of the bones has determined two large fragments, six medium pieces and twenty small splinters. The cephalic part is not represented, but a diaphysal fragment of the thighbone and some splinters from diaphysis of the bones of humerus and shinbone belong to the postcranial skeleton of a six or seven-year-old child (*infans I*).

The grave 522 contains fragments of two vases broken at the place of incineration, a small heap of bones and pieces of coal. The bones contain very strongly calcinated remains of small size (100), medium (30) and big ones (21). The neurocranium is illustrated by 11 fragments of the occipital and parental bones and the postcranial skeleton comprises diaphysal parts of thighbone (5) and shinbone (4) as well as 29 small splinters from the diaphysis of the humerus, radius and cubitus bones. The bones belonged to a teenager (*juvencus*) probably a male.

The bones selected from the funeral pyre were laid in earthen pots fragmentarily or incompletely preserved. The pots moulded on the potter's wheel (M 256 and 522 a) both slow or rapid, are exhibiting grooves on the inside walls (M 456 and 522 b) and are made of sandy, rough paste degreased with sifted, sand, rare quartz, grains with spangles of mica. The incomplete oxidating burning imprinted the black colour inside the vase and brown-brick-red outside (M 256 and 456) or tricolour (black middle, brown-grey inside and brown brick-red outside). The vessels from the first two graves have both faces covered with a firm.

The pots with concave bottom (M 256 and 456) present a tall bitruncated cone body with a relatively enlarged womb in the upper part near the opening short neck with the brim loosen by curving. Beside the urn (a) there was laid a brim from a vessel of offering with a short body and an ovoid womb (b).

The ornament consists of continuous horizontal strips disposed in spiral form in the lower part of the vessel (M 256), bands of horizontal strips, and a band of sinuous incisions made on the shoulder and respectively on the rim of the opening (M 522 a) and lines of oblic impressions overlaping the horizontal grooves (M 522 b).

The alimentary offering is attested by M 456 and consists of a small pile of gastropod shells disposed in semicircle, beside the urn on the bottom of sepulchral graves. According to the shape of the shells there were identified *Cepaea dacica* molusca – Grossu and Bădărău and *Helix lutescens* (Zgl.) Rossmässler. The two pulmonary species cohabited in the same geographical areas and it is possible for the gastropods to have served as food to the local population within the wickered climate (see Alexandru V. Grossu and assistant in *From the History of Roman Europe*, Oradea, 1995, pgs. 275-284).

The absence of the inventory items having clear dating power, the chronological framing of those three graves of incineration is ensured by the types of the funeral complexes and by the fragmentary vessels deposited on the bottom of sepulchral graves in cemetery.

The first grave uses, as an urn, the lower part of a pot torn from remote times; the second has its offer made up of ceramic fragments, and the last one contains the remains of an urn having an incomplete body and the rim taken from another vessel. Both vessels were broken at the place of the corpse's incineration. The pieces were not all picked up and laid on the small heap funeral remains. The both types of graves have their conclusive analogies in the area of biritual cemeteries from Bratei, Târnava and Berghin dated in the 7th – 8th centuries and they belong to the "category of *ustrinum* with *sepulcrum* or pyre with grave" that is the funerary complex has its burning place (pyre) "different from that of the grave" (see note 36).

According to their technological and typological characteristics, the four vessels fragmentarily attested in the graves of incineration are dated in the first half of the 8th century. Some technical elements (manufacturing on the wheel, incomplete oxidated burning, the ornament with horizontal incisions, curled line and impressions made by means of a comb), then the rite of incineration, the food offering of molusca etc., are components of ancestral tradition or Dacian – Roman ones and they plead for assigning the graves to the community of the prefeudal settlement identified in the neighbourhood, at the northern outskirts of the Alba Iulia municipality.

Consequently, the archaeological and anthropological study of the funerary complexes near the "Ambulance Station" supplies original contributions to the prefeudal habitat (the 8th century) in the central area of the River Mureș.

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Fig. 1 - The map of spreading of the prefeudal biritual cemeteries (the 7th – 8th centuries) in the central and south-east Transylvania: 1. Alba Iulia; 2. Berghin; 3. Boarta; 4. Bratei; 5. Ciunga; 6. Ghirbom; 7. Gușterița; 8. Mediaș; 9. Oena Sibiului; 10. Petrisat; 11. Sâncel; 12. Târnava; 13. Turdaș

Fig. 2 - Alba Iulia - "The Ambulance Station". The plan of the incineration graves (the 8th centurs): 1. incineration graves with urns; 2. incineration grave with ceramic offering. The topographic mapping made by Daniel Popa - subengineer.

Fig. 3 - Alba Iulia - "The Ambulance Station". The grave 256. Incineration urn. Fotographer Lăcrima Rădulescu.

Fig. 4 - Alba Iulia - "The Ambulance Station". The grave 256. Incineration urn. Drawing.

Fig. 5 - Alba Iulia - "The Ambulance Station". The grave 456: a) *Cepaea dacica* Grossu and Bădărău; b) *Helix lutescens* (Zgl.) Rossmässler. Fotographer Doru Sabău - teacher.

Fig. 6 - Alba Iulia - "The Ambulance Station". Grave 522: a) Incineration urn; b) Brim of offering vessel. Graphic reconstitution made by M. Blăjan