

Some data about an early neolithic worship place

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Abstract: *In this article we will partially analyze the place of worship consisting of 7 structures discovered following preventive research on the A1 highway, Sibiu – Pitești sector, Part 5, Curtea de Argeș-Pitești. The discoveries are part from site 2, surface 1¹.*

Keywords: *radiocarbon dating, place of worship, early neolithic, west, Muntenia, Romania*

On the current territory of Vâlcelele village, Merișani commune, Argeș County, in the area of a future intersection of the A1 highway with the road that connecting Pitești with Curtea de Argeș (map 1), the previous diagnostic researches showed existence of a possible archaeological site, existing, from place to place, ceramic fragments and tools specific to the prehistoric period. Due to this fact, the preventive integral research of the area was decided². On the south side, in surface 1, an old Neolithic site has been identified and to the north, surface 2 contains a field with pits belonging to the Bronze age.

It is necessary to specify the fact that the discovered archaeological site is located in the flooded area of the Argeș river, an area flooded, apparently, until the 20th century. Due to this fact, a deposit formed from sand and pebbles was formed at a depth of approximately -1,60 m, most often found on the bottom of smooth or stagnant waters. The site is surrounded by swamps, on the west side.

Surface 1. In this surface it was clear that on the deposit formed by sand and pebbles (man made ?) are very low hills. It is clear, in our opinion, that the moment of using the hills area is very short and due to a time in which the puddled surface decreased in such a way that it gave way to human use for a very short time. This agglomeration of archaeological features represents the remains of some constructions from the old neolithic period (plan 1).

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¹ We must thank to the colleagues from the National Commission of Archaeology, from the Ministry of Culture for approving the report dedicated to the archaeological research of this site.

² We would like to thank to the research team formed by: Sabin Adrian Luca, Adrian Georgescu, Gheorghe Natea, Vasile Palaghie, Sergiu Chideșă, Răzvan Mareș and Răzvan Malanca, employees of the Brukenthal National Museum. Dr. Gheorghe Natea was in charge for this site.

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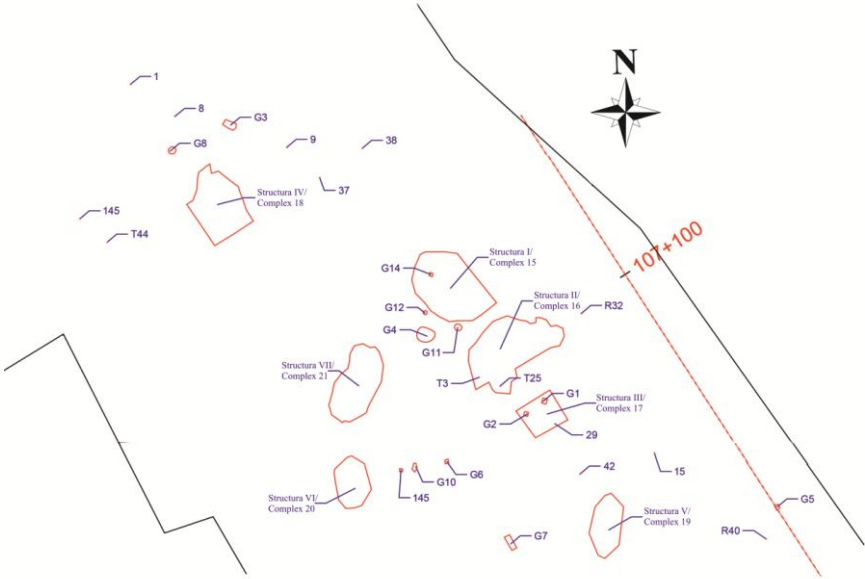
Moreover, the way they lived is difficult to explain compared to what we know until today because in these structures¹ it was not possible to identify the essential elements for the good development of life such as the cooking/heating oven. The same ideas are suggested to us by the extremely little ceramic fragments in the perimeter of the structures.

In this article we will make a brief analysis of two of these structures, VI and VII, in order to have answers in terms of absolute radiocarbon data obtained. Many more details will be published shortly, in the book dedicated to this place of worship/sanctuary.



Map 1. Vâlcelele village, Merișani commune, Argeș County, Romania.

¹ This name was given by the research team.



Plan 1. General plan with surface 1 and Structures I-VII.



Photo 1. Surface 1. General view.

Structure VI

Structure VI (plan 1, plates 1-2, photo 2-7, fig. 1) is located in south of structure VII. It was contoured at a depth of -0,70-0,80 m from the current level and is oriented nord-east – south-west. It have medium size, with a lenght of 5,80 m and a width of 4,70 m. When structure was made, a large amount of small and medium sized river stone was used. The pottery within structure VI is fragmentary, exfoliated and has poor firing. The lithic material is not very rich in quantity, being identified a crusher (?) with brown color and circular shape but also a large grinder (?) /pedestal, made of whitish-gray qurtzite.



Plate 1. Structure VI. Ceramic material. (Photo by Florentin Perianu)



Plate 2. Structure VI. Lithic material (crusher). (Photo by Florentin Perianu)

Structure VII

Structure VII (plan 1, plate 3-4, photo 8-13, fig. 2) is located in north-east of structure VI. It was contoured at a depth of -0,70-0,80 m from the current level and is oriented in the north-east – south-west direction. The structure VII has the following dimensions: length of 5,50 m and width of 4,80 m. The pottery is fragmentary and exfoliated and shows poor firing. The lithic material from this structure consists of axes, yellowish flint blades with whitish dots and a large grinder (?)/pedestal. Medium sized river stones and fragments of a quartz piece, broken into several fragments, without a clear use, were also identified.



Plate 3. Structure VII. Ceramic material. (Photo by Florentin Perianu)

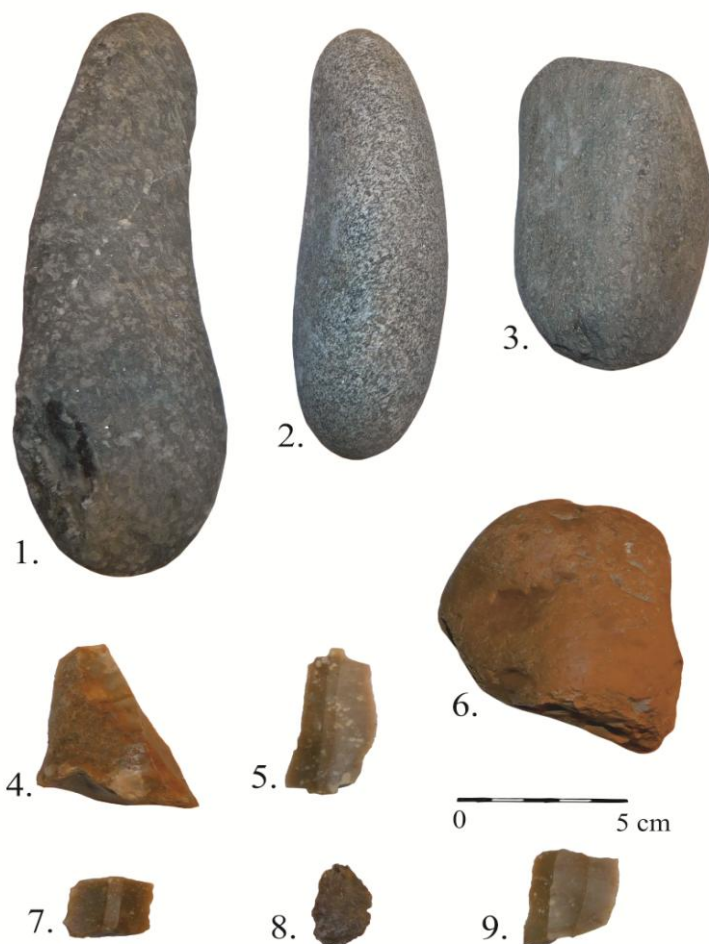


Plate 4. Structure VII. Lithic material. (Photo by Florentin Perianu)

Brief description of the ceramic material. It should be noted, from the start, that the ceramic material present in the entire place of worship/sanctuary consisting of 7 structures (plan 1) appears in a small amount (few fragments, with non-restorable shapes). Also, the forms of the pottery are very rare and related to the vessels, we can barely list a few cases on the entire extent of the place of worship (these vessels will be published in the future book dedicated to the entire place of worship/sanctuary). The ceramic material present above, for structure VI and structure VII (plate 1, 3) respects the features of the early neolithic period, respectively the Starčevo-Criș culture, phase III. If radiocarbon data published

below not exists, the ceramic fragments have been extremely difficult to classify in one of the phases of the Starčevo-Criș culture, as it is defined in Romania².

Towards phase III, in this case, the ceramic fragment from plate 1, down, right would take us. We can see the end of the incision, but this incisions can be seen also in other structures that will be published in synthesis work, which is being drafted. Although the ceramic material is very fragmentary and exfoliated, we could still identify some fragments belonging to the bottom, handle but also the short incision specified above. The shapes are rounded and curved. The color of the ceramic material is largely yellowish, brown or whitish-brown and rarely darker. The pottery has a floury texture and the firing is poorly done. No crushed shards were identified in the composition of the paste.

Generally speaking, there is only one ceramic category, depending on the usual terminology, the semi-fine one. The existence of polishing was not observed on any ceramic fragment. All the other details related to ceramic material will be read in the lines of the book dedicated to this archaeological complex used for rituals.

Brief description of the lithic material. The lithic material, like the ceramic one, has characteristics that are found in the early neolithic. The color of the flint blades is yellowish with whitish dots³ (the raw material seems to be from the pre-Balkan and Balkan area). Some blades also have retouches⁴ (plate 4/5, 7-8). Along with blades, a crusher was also identified (plate 2) but also axes (plate 4/1-2). The axes are made of light colored rocks, with typical shapes for the archaeological features of the early neolithic⁵.

Moreover, some of them have traces of use in the edge area, but they do not reflect a serious prolonged use. Their typology is limited and we will observe this more closely through the general study of all the pieces in the ritual/sanctuary complex. Along with these, a grinder (?)/pedestal was discovered in each structure (VI and VII). We used the "grinder" term given by the oval-elongated shape of these two objects. The additional questions start when we see that the pieces are made of a very hard rock, quartzite, with well contoured crystals and the basic boulder is cut perfectly in two, at a right angle. And today it is very difficult to cut a boulder like this, perfectly straight. Moreover, any attempt to grind grain is doomed to failure on such a support. The fact that there is no trace of bleaching of these "grinders" lead us to the same idea, namely that it was not used for grinding.

² Gheorghe Lazarovici, *Neoliticul Banatului*, Bibliotheca Musei Napocensis, IV (Cluj-Napoca: Muzeul de Istorie al Transilvaniei, 1979), 15-56; 47.

³ Gheorghe Lazarovici, Zoia Maxim, *Gura Baciului. Monografie arheologică*, în *Bibliotheca Musei Napocensis*, XI (Editura Muzeului Național de Istorie a Transilvaniei, Cluj-Napoca, 1995), Fig. 15/10-26.

⁴ Lazarovici, Maxim, *Gura Baciului*, Fig. 16/1-16.

⁵ Lazarovici, *Neoliticul Banatului*, 30.

The direct observation shows us that the piece was not used for sharpening or shaping tools from polished stone or bone, there are no traces of use specific to this activity. At this point we can think that it is a pedestal/sculptural piece.

The sculptural piece from structure VI (photo 2-7) is oval elongated. It is made of a whitish-gray quartzite. It has a height of 0,42 m, a maximum width of 0,17 m and a maximum thickness of 0,16 m. The piece is triangular in section, with two sides almost perfectly straight and the third with a slightly curved shape. We notice that it was split transversely, cutting the straight cut part, in the first phase. After this moment, the smooth part of the piece was broken in turn into two fragments with proportion of 2/3 and 1/3. However, the small alveolar part was protected from these actions, perhaps due to its significance. The other part of the piece, like the one in structure VII is smooth, without traces of bleaching or processing of objects on it.

The sculptural piece from structure VII (photo 8-13) is also oval elongated, like the one from structure VI and is made of a whitish quartzite. It has a height of 0,52 m, a maximum width of 0,24 m and a maximum thickness of 0,15 m. The piece is triangular in section with a perfectly straight side and the other two slightly curved sides. On the side with which he "looked", we could notice a small alveolar shape, like that of the piece present in structure VI.

Returning to the interpretations, one of the simplest ideas related to the use of the pieces, is the one after which the piece was active when sitting on the straight cut side and the rounding part of the boulder would have been the one that reflected a ritual meaning , a "look" at heights. Significant from this point of view is the part present in photo 9, where the presence of a small alveolar part is observed. At the same time, we specify that the time of use of these pieces is not long, but at this moment, we leave the interpretations to the reader.

Absolute dating of the two features. From the two structures, a sample of coal was collected. They were given for analysis by the Beta Analytic Testing Laboratory⁶. Sample 1, from structure VI, has the site code CAGS2S1S6 and has the following development after analysis:

Laboratory number	BP dating	Cal BC dating	Cal BP dating	Material
Beta - 601113	6540±30	(95,4% probability): - 86.3% - 5563 - 5471 - 5.0% - 5613 - 5591 - 4.1% - 5431 - 5410	(95,4% probability): - 86.3% - 7512 - 7420 - 5.0% - 7562 - 7540 - 4.1% - 7380 - 7359	Coal

⁶ We thank to President Ronald E. Hatfield for the prompt response and data on these samples.

The second sample was collected from structure VII, has the site code CAGS2S1S7 and has the following development after analysis:

Laboratory number	BP dating	Cal BC dating	Cal BP dating	Material
Beta - 601114	6660±30	(95,4% probability): - 93.9% - 5634 - 5524 - 1.5% - 5493 - 5485	(95,4% probability): - 93.9% - 7583 - 7473 - 1.5% - 7442 - 7434	Coal

Conclusions. In view of the above, we now find, in a first stage, that the connection between Anatolia and Danube area, or rather the neolithic migration/colonization, is extended over a long period of time and takes place in distinct stages, many of which they come into contact with the previous colonizations that are already beginning their particular evolutions in the north of the Danube area⁷. An attempt to evaluate these things, we did in a recent article⁸. In this case, in our opinion, we are at the moment of one of the last waves coming to the Danube area, communities that come from Anatolia, moment showed with radiocarbon date from this article, but also by data from the archaeological site from Lepenski Vir, phase Ie⁹. In last years, we have discovered the correlation between elements of this last contact with Starčevo-Criș settlements that have already reached phase III of their evolution, as local evolution. We enumerate the settlement from Cristian III, where in the early neolithic fortification, a sanctuary with sculptural stone elements¹⁰ was discovered, but also flint tools, special compared to the already local ones¹¹. Sculptural stone pieces also made through the system of grinding and progressive polishing of face were recently discovered on

⁷ Adina Boroneanț, Clive Bonsall, *The 1965-1968 excavations at Schela Cladovei (România) Revised in Unconformism Archaeology. Papers in honour of Paolo Biagi*, British Archaeological Reports IS 2528 (2013).

⁸ Sabin Adrian Luca, *Data about the vessels decorated with painting in the discoveries of the early neolithic from Cristian I, Sibiu County, Romania...and some "mesolithic legacies and traditions" on the Danube line and north of it*, în *Annales d'Université Valahia*, XXII (2020), 19-46.

⁹ Dusan Borić, *Adaptation and Transformations of the Danube Gorges Foragers (c. 13.000 – 5.500 BC): An overview*, în *Beginnings – New research in the Appearance of the Neolithic between Northwest Anatolia and the Carpathian Basin*, Istanbul, 2009, 196, point 82-84, Building IX, Building 51, Building XXXII; Adina Boroneanț, *Aspecte ale tranziției de la mezolitic la neoliticul timpuriu în zona Porțile de Fier*, în *Bibliotheca Historica et Archaeologica Banatica*, LIII (Editura Mega, Cluj-Napoca) (2012), 225, House 51.

¹⁰ Sabin Adrian Luca, Adrian Georgescu, Anamaria Tudorie, Florentina Marțiș, *Cristian III. Realități cronologice și culturale preistorice dovedite prin cercetările preventive* (Editura Karl A. Romstorfer, Suceava, 2017), 42; 213-218; Foto 243-245.

¹¹ Luca, Georgescu, Tudorie, Marțiș, *Cristian III*, p. 49-50; Foto 46-47.

the A10 highway, also in the context of Starčevo-Criș III¹². Of course, such pieces made by carving/polishing are also on the horizon of Lepenski Vir Ie¹³. We notice that after the arrival of the Vinča wave, which arrived here in various ways also from the Middle East, we can no longer document these rituals and – consequently – the mentioned pieces do not appear either. All these happens not long after the chronological horizon discussed by us here¹⁴.

¹² Sabin Adrian Luca, *Piese sculpturale din piatră, preistorice, descoperite pe lotul 1 (Alba Iulia), situl 2, al autostrăzii A10 Sebeș-Alba – Turda*, în *Arheovest VIII. În Onoarea Adrian Rădulescu. Interdisciplinaritate în Arheologie și Istorie* (Editura Jate Press, Szeged), 23-44.

¹³ Vezi concluzii la Sabin Adrian Luca, Adrian Georgescu, Anamaria Tudorie, Florentina Marțiș, Cristian III. *Realități cronologice și culturale preistorice dovedite prin cercetările preventive* (Editura Karl A. Romstorfer, Suceava, 2017), 216-218.

¹⁴ R. W. Yerkes, A. Gyucha, W. Parkinson, *A Multiscalar approach to Modeling the end of the Neolithic on the Great Hungarian Plain using Calibrated Radiovarbon dates*, in *Radiocarbon*, 51, 3 (2009), 1071-1109.

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Fig. 2. Structure VII. Sample CAGS2S1S7. (Florentin Perianu)

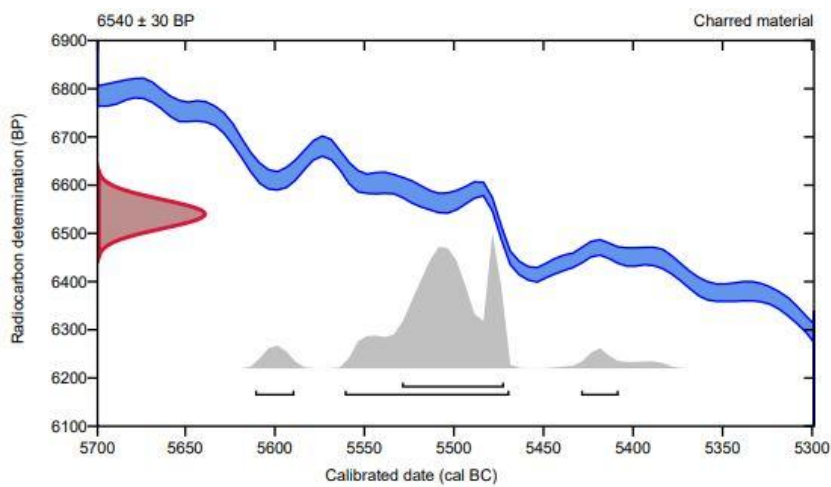


Fig. 1. Structure VI. Sample CAGS2S1S6.

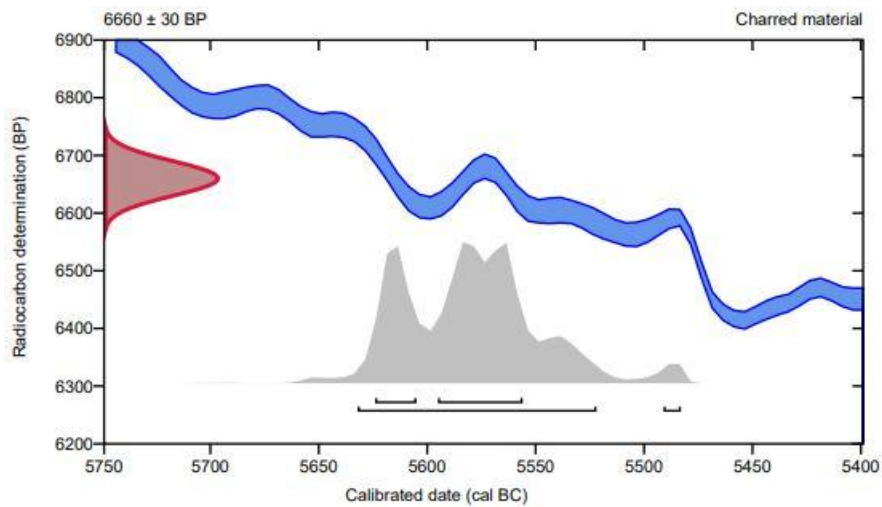


Fig. 2. Structure VII. Sample CAGS2S1S7.



Photo 2. Structure VI. Grinder/Pedestal.
Front view. (Adrian Luca)



Photo 3. Structure VI. Grinder/Pedestal.
Back view. (Adrian Luca)



Photo 4. Structure VI. Grinder/Pedestal. Left
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Photo 5. Structure VI. Grinder/Pedestal.
Right view. (Adrian Luca)



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