

DISCUSSIONS ON A BONE TOOL FROM IPOTEȘTI, OLT COUNTY

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*“Vasile Pârvan” Institute of Archaeology, Bucharest; e-mail: arheologiemedievala@yahoo.com***Keywords:** Ipotești, Knotenlöser, cultural links, Avars, Gepids**Abstract:** *The paper discusses a specific type of deer antler artefacts suggesting its association with the artefacts known as Knotenlöser, which were specific to a certain cultural environment, namely the Avars. Its unusual presence at one of the eponymous settlements of the Ipotești-Cândești culture at the Lower Danube, is discussed on several plans. The paper suggests the item was an import from the cultural environment of the Middle Danube. The author doubts the possibility that the characteristics and expressiveness of this artefact category observed in the Avaric environment were preserved, maintained and embodied by the artefact found in another cultural environment, that of the Lower Danube.***Cuvinte-cheie:** Ipotești, Knotenlöser, relații culturale, avari, gepizi**Rezumat:** *Lucrarea tratează un obiect din corn de cerb, pentru care se propune apartenența la grupa de artefacte cunoscute drept Knotenlöser. Ineditul apariției acestei piese specifică unui anumit mediu cultural, respectiv cel avar, la Dunărea de Jos într-una dintre așezările eponime ale culturii Ipotești-Cândești, este discutat pe mai multe planuri. Lucrarea propune interpretarea piesei ca reprezentând un import din mediul cultural al Dunării Mijlocii. Autorul păstrează rezerve în ceea ce privește posibilitatea ca acele caracteristici și expresivități ale piesei observate în mediul „avar” să se fi conservat și să fie exprimate de piesa analizată și în alt mediu cultural, cel al Dunării de Jos.*

STARTING POINT

The middle of the 20th century represented a turning point in the way of approaching Early Medieval archaeology in Romania. It was then that Early Medieval Age was considered to be the moment of the ethnogenesis of the Romanians.

Starting with 1955, the *Commission for the Study of the formation of the Romanian language and people* carried on archaeological investigations across the national Romanian territory in order to gather solid arguments for a comprehensive academic work: *The History of Romania*.

In this respect, in 1959, Petre Roman made a survey along the banks of the Olt River and identified certain artefacts, dated by Ion Nestor to the 6th–7th centuries. Later in the same year, a small excavation was carried out at Ipotești (Olt County), uncovering partially three sunken buildings as well as other artefacts found in the surrounding area of these archaeological features¹. However, although this excavation would have provided sufficient information, and, in fact, attributed the name of the village to the newly identified archaeological culture, almost 20 years had passed until the information was published.

This latter publication² mentioned in illustration only, a bone artefact that passed unremarked. Although its drawing was correct and detailed, with a cross-section

along the short axis (the object's width), the artefact remained unnoticed and undiscussed till today.

The item is fragmentary (Fig. 7) and, from above, it has a rectangular longitudinal section, a semilunar cross-section, and a rounded end. On the main axis it is slightly curved, also. The entire exterior is richly decorated with geometric motives incised with a very sharp tool. The object was burnt and polished before being engraved. It has thus acquired a black metallic colour, yielding the necessary contrast for the yellow-white lines of the engraved decoration (which remained in the natural colour of the antler). The inner side was also polished. At the broken end, a circular perforation is visible.

Given its curvature, it is impossible to interpret the artefact as a possible knife handle or as any other tool, although the existing perforation may suggest this idea.

So, the basic question is: what type of item does our fragment originate from?

There are no other similar objects in the area south of the Carpathian Mountains, but there is a find in the eastern region of Romania. In the late 1960's, the excavations carried out at the village of Udești (Suceava County) yielded an artefact (Fig. 8) that caught my attention. Published a long time ago by M. D. Matei and A. Rădulescu³, and mentioned several times by D. Gh. Teodor in his overviews of the Moldavian Early Middle Age antiquities⁴, the item from Udești is almost identical in its

¹ Dolinescu-Ferche, Roman 1978, p. 73–74.

² Dolinescu-Ferche, Roman 1978, fig. 9/1a-b.

³ Matei, Rădulescu 1973, p. 277; Teodor 1996, fig. 30/3.

⁴ Teodor 1996, p. 45, Fig. 30/3.