New Considerations on the Grave Discovered in the Sânpetru German G.A.S. (Arad County)*

In memoriam Egon Dörner

Florin MĂRGINEAN**

Keywords: grave, funerary inventory, lower Mureş Valley, Sânpetru German, Arad County.

Abstract

Through the following article I wish to publish the entire inventory of a grave discovered in 1962 at the Sânpetru German G. A. S., by the late archaeologist Egon Dörner. Although this discovery has already been mentioned in the specialty literature, the material itself remained unpublished until today, and as such, our approach aims to be one of use, and at the same time one of repair for those studying this segment of chronology.

.

Funerary discoveries dating from the X-XI centuries, from the county of Arad and especially on the lower Mureş have increased steadily since the late XIX century. Unfortunately, even if the number of discoveries dating from this period has increased, few have benefited from a recovery by all the required standards in the field¹. The reasons are the most diverse and I will not dwell on them now. For this reason, any overview of the period mentioned above has always suffered, especially since the lower Mureş valley area is separated by an artificial border. This situation led to a clear discrepancy between the recovery of discoveries made in Hungary and ones made on the present territory of Romania, which have always been only partially published. Lack of access to such material, the not very accurate, if any publishing of findings by the authors, has led mostly to confusion in data collected from the field. Such is the situation of the tomb described in this study.

Through this article, we want to bring additions to the initial published data and present the entire inventory of the tomb, discovered in 1962 in the Sânpetru German $G.A.S.^2$, by the late archaeologist Egon Dörner of Arad.

Site and geographic location of the area

The tomb was discovered in 1962 on the former state farm land, after digging for a pool, in a point at approx. 2 km SSE from the village center (see pl. I, 1). The place is

Studia Universitatis Cibiniensis. Series Historica, vol. 10-2013, p. 99-110

^{*} Research performed during the POSDRU/6/1.5/S/26 project, cofinanced out of the European Social Fund through the Sectorial Operational Program for the Development of Human Resources 2007-2013.

^{**} Complexul Muzeal Județean Arad (finnlands@yahoo.com).

¹ We are referring here to the dig itself, registration of context and the publication in specialty literature.

² G.A.S. = State Farm.

located before entering the German Sânpetru halt on the left side of the railway Arad - Sânnicolau Mare, where today only ruins of the ex state farm can be seen.

The site is located on the second terrace of the piedmont plain of Vinga. Arguable as typical terraces, they are actually steps of piedmont cones, arranged in a fan towards the southwest³. As with other funerary discoveries, we can notice a good choice of place of burial, in a hidden place, especially in this case regarding the annual flooding of the Mureş. The average altitude of the Vinga piedmont plain is between 130 and 140 m, dropping slightly to 100 m towards Secusigiu. The relief is characterized by the meadow appearance given by the Mures valley.

Unfortunately we have no analysis that would allow us to rebuild the landscape in the period the inhumation was performed. But the landscape certainly looked different than today, even if we would only take into account the fact that the Mureş bed was not adjusted and floods produced many changes in the landscape. It can be assumed that a large part of its territory was covered by forests, thickets and reeds. Non floodable areas represented by high terraces, side valleys and hills were a safe place of refuge, compared to lower areas where usually swamps were formed. However there were many banks in the swampy areas that have been carefully chosen as living spaces or burial spaces (like in the findings from Arad "Ceala", Zimandu Nou "Feldioara", Curtici etc. v. pl. I, 2).

General stratigraphy of the sector

The published article and museum documentation held in the Arad archive, the stratigraphy structure of the sector in which the tomb was discovered, was not apparent. Only an inventory plan of the disposal in the grave was kept, unfortunately not very accurate, because it does not specify which type of applications (as decoration) have been discovered around the head and which ones around the legs. Subsequently, in 1963, two sections have been drawn in the immediate vicinity of the tomb discovered the year before, which have not led to the discovery of other graves, but not even additional data about the stratigraphy of the area⁴.

Brief historical and historiographical insight

The end of the first millennium is still a sensitive subject in literature. Most times, the lack of written sources is competing with the lack of reliable information offered by archeology, especially in terms of interpretation, the chronology and ethnic attribution. In what follows I will try to frame the German Sânpetru discovery in the historic landscape at the end of the first millennium, when, as is well known, political, religious, economic and social changes occurred, and have marked the further development of this practice space.

I will not dwell here on some issues that sometimes became matters of political dispute, about who ruled these territories and we will try a direct approach of the topic proposed. In a brief view of the findings repertoire, things become quite clear, at least for the end of the first millennium (pl. I, 2). From the outset it must be said that the grave of

³ G. Posea, Câmpia de vest a României (Câmpia Banato-Crisană) (Bucuresti, 1997), 365.

⁴ E. Dörner, "Cercetări și săpături arheologice în județul Arad," MCA, 9 (1970), 457.

German Sânpetru is part of a broader political phenomena occurring during the Xth century. The appearance of the Hungarians in the European landscape towards the end of the XIXth century is a fact confirmed by written sources and archaeological discoveries. In this, as witness stands Constantin Porphirogenetul, who tells us that in the midst of the Xth century, the Hungarian presence in the area bounded by mountains, Mureş, Tisa and Danube was already an accomplished fact. Numerous archaeological discoveries dating from this period come to acknowledge and even complete written sources.

The grave found at German Sânpetru is part of a series of symbolic funerals with a horse (I/1a group), classified more than 40 years ago by Cs. Bálint⁵, a study to whom E. Gall⁶ brought new additions. Based on the stored inventory it seems that we are dealing with the grave of a middle-class woman. Of particular note in the inventory, are the harness pieces and ornaments, the clothing ornaments and accessories of the deceased are few and worthless and lack symbolic message. However, the Saltovo type pair of earrings (pl. II, / 1-2) both allow a relative dating of this discovery and a possible ethnicity determination. A comprehensive study on this type of jewelry was made by L. Révész more than three decades ago7. This type of ornament seems to have entered the Carpathian Basin in the late IXth century, probably brought by the Hungarians and their satellite populations. The duration of use of this space was estimated as between the end of the late IXth and Xth century (about 890/900-1000), afterwards this type of earrings seem to disappear from the funerary inventories. This was attributed to the gradual disappearance of the middle class during the XIth century. Ranked in Group B after Révész, Saltovo type earrings seem to be a good indicator for the reconstruction of the territory in which the Hungarians have occupied at a certain time. Yet such findings are not known in the Transylvanian space, the author is putting this on account of deficiencies in research. Other ornaments (beads⁸, pl. II, 6-9) and clothing accessories (cast buttons, pl. II, 3-5) are commonly found in the funerary inventories. Cast button have several circular forms, lenticular or dome-headed shaped. These types of cast buttons are widespread in relatively close areas, such as: Nădlac⁹, Pecica – Şanţul Mare¹⁰, Siclău - Gropoaie¹¹, Orăștie - Dealul Pemilor/X₂¹², Timișoara - Ciornei¹³, Hajdúszoboszló - Árkoshalom¹⁴ etc.

⁵ Cs. Bálint, "A honfoglalás kori lovastemetkezések néháni kérdése," MFMÉ, 1 (1969), 107-114.

⁶ E. Gáll, "Burial Customs in the 10th – 11th Centuries in Transylvania, Crişana and Banat," *Dacia*, Serie nouă, XLVIII-XLIX (2004-2005), 375-385.

⁷ L. Révész, "Gömbsorcsüngős fülbevalók a Kárpát-medencében," *HOMÉ*, XXV-XXVI (1988), 141-155.

⁸ Two of the beads (pl. II, 6-7) do not own an inventory number, being discovered among the whole inventory of German Sânpetru. It is possible that they were not enumerated due to their precarious conservational state, just as it was the case of small fragments from the ornamental platelets.

⁹ F. Mărginean, P. Huszarik, "Cimitirul medieval timpuriu de la Nădlac "Lutărie" (jud. Arad)," *ArhMed* VI (Reșita 2007).

¹⁰ F. Mărginean, "Cercetări privind necropola medieval timpurie de la Pecica – Şanţul Mare (sec. X/XI-XIII)," *AB*, XIX (2011), 244, pl. VII, 14-18.

¹¹ M. Rusu, E. Dörner, "Săpătura de salvare de la Şiclău," MCA, 8 (1962).

¹² S. A. Luca, Z. K. Pinter, *Der Böhmerberg bei Broos/Orăștie. Eine archäologische Monographie* (Sibiu, 2001).

The three semicircular shaped plates, made of an alloy could be clothing ornaments (pl. II, 10-12). Unfortunately, given their fragmentary state, the garment mounting holes are not observed. Harness parts and ornaments (pl. II, 13-15, pl. III - IV) find their analogues in relatively close geographic sites: Pecica, Arad-Ceala, Siclău, Ártánd, Hencida¹⁵ etc.

This allows a Sânpetru German grave dating in the first half of the Xth century, probably contemporary with the discoveries of Arad-Ceala.

Moving from the historic in the historiographical plane this situation is practically the same. Since the first publication and subsequently in other studies, the data spread about the discovery was only partially presented and finally analyzed. As we already said, the author of the finds published in an article several finds as a result of archaeological research in Arad. Among them, this find was introduced, but the description is limited to being very technical, with the context of discovery and enumeration of parts from the inventory, accompanied only by a drawing of the deceased¹⁶. I will not dwell here on the possible causes of failure to publish the material in full, which could only be suspected, especially if we consider the timeframe of the study was published¹⁷. Later, however, this discovery was mentioned in various studies, based on the article published by Dörner, but without a full analysis of the inventory found¹⁸. This eventually led to a series of misunderstandings that were generalized in the literature, both related to the discovery timeframe, but even more on the inventory stored in the grave.

After its publication by E. Dörner, the find is mentioned in a study published by M. Rusu¹⁹. The first trying a more thorough analysis of the inventory found here was Cs. Bálint in the frame of his PhD thesis²⁰. He later partially published data on the grave of German Sânpetru in the volume based on the discovery in southern Hungary. Basically the author lists the inventory, from which he only publishes two pieces (one harness ornament and one earring, out of the two discovered), indicating 1968 as the year in which the find was made 21. The two pieces presented in the volume could indicate that the author has seen only a fraction of the material or did not have access to all information.

In a study published after our discovery, but unfortunately for the same author anterior it's publication by E. Dörner, a first consistent classification of the graves with harnesses

¹³ A. Rădulescu, E. Gáll, "Das landnahmezeittliche gräberfeld von Temesvár – Csókaerdő," AAASH, 52 (2001), 169.

¹⁴ Nepper M. Ibolya, *Hajdú-Bihar megye 10-11. századi sírleletei*, I-II (Budapest-Debrecen, 2002), 71; E. Istvánovits, A Rétköz honfoglalás és Árpád-kori emlékanyaga (Nyíregyháza, 2003), 298-300.

¹⁵ I. Fodor (ed.), The Ancient Hungarians (Budapest 1996), 211, 233-234.

 ¹⁶ E. Dörner, "Cercetări şi săpături arheologice în județul Arad," *MCA*, 9 (1970), 457, fig. 12.
¹⁷ The digs from Şiclău-*Gropoaie*, Arad-*Ceala*, Pecica-*Şanţul Mare* etc. can be placed in the same situation, the findings were presetted in very short articles or not at all.

¹⁸ Two causes ca be assumed, one would relate to the inaccesibility of the material, the second to the comfort of not checking the information directly from the source, which would be the archive and deposit of the Arad

¹⁹ S. Ota, Orizonturi funerare din Banatul istoric (Sibiu, 2008), 280.

²⁰ L. Révész, "Gömbsorcsüngős fülbevalók a Kárpát-medencében," *HOMÉ*, XXV-XXVI (1988), 144.

²¹ Cs. Bálint, "Südungarn im 10. Jahrhundert," StudArch, Budapest, 11 (1991), 233, 243.

in the frame of symbolic funerals with a horse²², in which he unfortunately could not introduce it. Since then, the analysis and findings here have always been used and presented incomplete, the reasons are basically the same (see note 7).

The discovery is mentioned in studies published in the '90s, without, however, a closer analysis of the material²³. We could say that these findings were pursued by a curse! I say this because in 2002, in error, parts of the inventory of the German Sânpetru grave were awarded by C. Cosma to grave nine (9) in Şiclău²⁴. I. Crişan takes the same information without a closer look, though curiously in the reference list he points out E. Dörner's article!, but not the point in the findings repertoire. It is probably simply because I Crişan's analysis stops somewhere north of the Mureş line²⁵. In an analysis made on the burial customs of the X-XI centuries in Transylvania, Crişana and Banat, E. Gáll comes with new data about the grave of German Sânpetru²⁶, but not with full information about the discovery, and we could think at the same reasons as for other authors. The last to raise these findings in question is S. Oţa, in a large volume on historical Banat burial horizons. Unfortunately, information is incomplete in this one as well, probably due to the same perpetuated time gaps²⁷.

Description of the grave

In the drawn box $(1.5 \times 1 \text{ m})$ the remains of a skeleton oriented west-east at 1.20 m beneath the walking level were uncovered. It was placed in the sepulchral pit supine, with the arms resting on the body and legs parallel.

The inventory which accompanied the deceased was composed of several parts, largely bronze ornaments but also iron parts of the harness deposited in the ritual. Thus, on the right side of the head, a iron bit with sidebars was placed while in the leg area two saddle stirrups and a buckle²⁸, all of iron, were placed. Other 38 harness ornaments completed the kept inventory, of which, four round ones and one rectangular were applied over the right shoulder, two rectangular harness ornaments were applied on the right collarbone and two round ones, over the left shoulder. Another big round harness ornament and 15 small round ones were kept along the right arm, another 13 small round harness ornaments were on the chest, left arm wrist and on the legs of the skeleton. On the chest, two bronze clips? (Actually Saltovo type earrings) connected through a cloth wire on which three impure silver little globes were strung (of which only one was preserved), along with three other bronze cast buttons. Also on the chest, there were two

²² Cs. Bálint, "A honfoglalás kori lovastemetkezések néháni kérdése," MFMÉ, 1 (1969), 107-114.

²³ R. Heitel, "Der Archäologie der ersten und zweiten Phase des Eindringens Ungarn in das innerkarpatische Transilvanien," *Dacia*, 38-39 (1994-1995), 401, 402, 406, 413; A. Madgearu, "Gesta Hungarorum" despre prima pătrundere a ungurilor în Banat," *RI*, Seria nouă, tomul 7, 1-2 (1996), 15, 16.

²⁴ C. Cosma, Vestul și nord-vestul României în secolele VIII – X d.Hr. (Cluj-Napoca, 2002), 230, pl. 246, 1-19.

²⁵ I. Crişan, Aşezări rurale medievale din Crişana (secolele X-XIII) (Oradea 2006), 310, pl. XX/21, 24-26.

²⁶ Gáll, "Burial Customs in the 10th – 11th Centuries in Transylvania, Crişana and Banat," 378-380, pl. 22.

²⁷ Ota, Orizonturi funerare din Banatul istoric, 280.

²⁸ Unfortunately the buckle is the only part that was not kept intact, probably due to its high coroded state.

beads, one made of green paste and one yellow, and several metal plates out of a thin white metal²⁹.

Pieces that made up the grave inventory were registered in the same year (1962); they are marked in the inventory register of the museum with numbers between 13,901 and 13,949.

Catalogue discovered the funerary inventory

The catalog of the parts includes the inventory of the grave discovered in 1962 in German Sânpetru G.A.S. It was structured by the piece functionality criterion. Description was performed as follows: 1. Current number; 2. Item Name: 3. the material that it is made of, 4. the technique it has been made in, 5. Part description (including its dimensions, expressed in centimeters: L = length, $L_t = total\ length$, l = width, $l_{max.} = maximum\ width$, l = height, $l = total\ length$, $l = total\ leng$

Ornaments

- 1. *Earring*; bronze; casting; made out of a bronze wire in the shape of the prolonged letter"C", with a small protrusion that ends in one lobe, and at the bottom, a slot for the attachment of a wire or a fabric string to which little silver foil beads were attached ($L=2.8~\rm cm, 1=1~cm, g_{\rm wire}=0.15~\rm cm$); German Sânpetru *G. A. S.* grave; C. M. A.; inv. nr. 13.945; pl. II/1.
- 2. Earring; bronze; casting; torn in two pieces, made out of a bronze wire in the shape of the prolonged letter "C", with a small protrusion that ends in one lobe, and at the bottom, a slot for the attachment of a wire or a fabric string to which little silver foil beads were attached (L = 3 cm, l = 0.9 cm, $g_{wire} = 0.1$ cm). On this piece a little perforated plate was kept, probably applied in order to avoid the loss of the little bead; German Sânpetru G. A. S. grave; C. M. A.; inv. nr. 13.944; pl. II/2.
- 3. Bead; glass; casting; circular ($\emptyset_{max} = 0.9$ cm), slightly flattened on one side, centrally perforated ($\emptyset = 0.3$ cm), light green in color; German Sânpetru G. A. S. grave; C. M. A.; inv. nr. 13.946; pl. II/8.
- 4. *Bead*; ceramic; hand modeled; oval shaped, slightly flattened on one side $(\emptyset_{max} = 1,6 \text{ cm})$, approximately centrally perforated $(\emptyset = 0,5 \text{ cm})$, German Sânpetru *G. A. S.* grave; C. M. A.; inv. nr. 13.946; pl. II/9.
- 5. Bead; glass; casting; oval shaped (L = 1 cm), perforated (\emptyset = 0,15 cm), light green in color; German Sânpetru G. A. S. grave; C. M. A.; inv. nr.; pl. II/6.
- 6. Bead; glass; casting; tube shaped (L = 0.6 cm), perforated ($\emptyset = 0.2$ cm), with a light white relief, dark green in color; German Sânpetru G. A. S. grave; C. M. A.?; without inv. nr.; pl. II/7.

Clothing accessories.

_

²⁹ The description respects what was published so far, in the documentation kept in the museum there are only drawings and a primary inventory of the discovered parts.

- 1. Cast button; alloy?; casting; lenticular shape, with little retractions (L = 1,4 cm, $\emptyset_{\text{button}} = 0.9$ cm), full, with a circular clasp; German Sânpetru G. A. S. grave; C. M. A.; inv. nr 13.942; pl. II/3.
- 2. Cast button; alloy?; casting; dome-headed shape (L = 1,1 cm, $\emptyset_{\text{button}} = 0.9$ cm), full, with clasp; German Sânpetru G. A. S. grave; C. M. A.; inv. nr. 13.941; pl. II/4.
- 3. *Cast button*; alloy?; casting; dome-headed shape (L = 0,9 cm, Ø_{button} = 0,9 cm), full, with clasp; German Sânpetru *G. A. S.* grave; C. M. A.; inv. nr. 13.943; pl. II/5. *Clothing ornaments*.
- 1. Platelet; alloy?; beating; very thin tin strip, fragmentary kept, cut approximately circular (L = 4.5 cm, l = 0.6 cm, g = 0.01 cm); German Sânpetru G. A. S. grave; C. M. A.; inv. nr. 13.948; pl. II/10.
- 2. Platelet; alloy?; beating; very thin tin strip, fragmentary kept, cut approximately circular (L = 3.6 cm, l = 1.6 cm, g = 0.01 cm); German Sânpetru G. A. S. grave; C. M. A.; inv. nr. 13.949; pl. II/11.
- 3. *Platelet*; alloy?; beating; very thin tin strip, fragmentary kept, cut approximately circular (L = 4.8 cm, l = 0.7 cm, g = 0.01 cm); German Sânpetru *G. A. S.* grave; C. M. A.; inv. nr.; pl. II/12.

Harness items

- 1. Iron bit with sidebars; iron; forging; crafted out of two iron bars that end in two simple loops, in the part that combines, and double loops in the extremities ($L_t = 19,5$ cm), which sustained links for the straps towards the exterior ($\emptyset_{max} = 4$ cm) and an iron rod (sidebars) with protuberant heads ($L_{sidebars} = 14$ cm), disposed in the inside loop; German Sânpetru G. A. S. grave; C. M. A.; inv. nr. 13.901; pl. II/13.
- 2. Saddle stirrup; iron; forging; pear shaped (h = 12,7 cm, l_{max} = 10,1 cm), crafted out of a rod with an almost oval section, with a trapeze shaped clasp in the upper part, whereas in the lower part it has a wide sole (l_{max} = 3 cm) which is lightly arched towards the exterior (partially deteriorated), with two longitudinal grooves on the exterior part that start from where the sole starts to get wider; German Sânpetru G. A. S. grave; C. M. A.; inv. nr. 13.902; pl. II/14.
- 3. Saddle stirrup; iron; forging; pear shaped (h = 13 cm, l_{max} = 10,4 cm), crafted out of a rod with an almost oval section, with a trapeze shaped clasp (broken), in the upper part, whereas in the lower part it has a wide sole (l_{max} = 3,1 cm) which is lightly arched towards the exterior, with two longitudinal grooves on the exterior part that start from where the sole starts to get wider; German Sânpetru *G. A. S.* grave; C. M. A.; inv. nr. 13.903; pl. II/15.

Harness ornaments

1. Harness ornament; alloy?; casting; circular shape, slightly concave ($\emptyset = 3.7$ cm), towards the inside with four clamping thorns, of which three are provided with square platelets, probably to avoid detachment. The part has a decoration consisting of six circles in a row connected by two relief bands each, disposed on the side, which frame a three petal flower, with a concave protuberant part in the middle, circled by a rosette composed of more relief points; German Sânpetru G. A. S. grave; C. M. A.; inv. nr. 13.905; pl. III/1.

- 2-4. Harness ornaments (possible belt ends/strips); alloy? casting; shaped as a rectangular "blazon" with two of the ends slightly rounded ($L=3,1\,\mathrm{cm},\,l=2,2\,\mathrm{cm},\,g=0,2\,\mathrm{cm}$), with three clamping thorns. The parts have decorations that consist of four lengthy petals around a semi spherical protuberance, all framed in a relief contour given by the shape of the part; German Sânpetru G. A. S. grave; C. M. A.; inv. nr. 13.906-13.908; pl. III/2-4.
- 5-22. Harness ornaments; alloy?; casting; circular shape, slightly concave ($\emptyset = 2,4$ cm, g = 0,1 cm), with three clamping thorns (in some parts square platelets fixed on a thorn to avoid detachment were kept) and decoration consisting of four lengthy lobes disposed in a cross around a semi spherical protuberance disposed centrally. The edge of the part is slightly reliefed; German Sânpetru G. A. S. grave; C. M. A.; inv. nr. 13.909-13.925, one of the numberless parts of the inv.; pl. III/5-22.
- 23-38. Harness ornaments; alloy?; casting; circular shape, slightly concave ($\emptyset = 2,1$ cm; g = 0,1 cm), with three clamping thorns (in some parts square platelets fixed on a thorn to avoid detachment were kept)) and decoration consisting of a rosette of eight lengthy lobes disposed concentrically around a strongly reliefed protuberance. The edge of the part is slightly reliefed; German Sânpetru G. A. S. grave; C. M. A.; inv. nr. 13.926-13.940, one of the pieces with no inv. nr.; pl. III/23-38.

Conclusions

Through this study we hope to have made additions and clarifications necessary to the knowledge of an aspect of an old discovery, about which there are only few data in the literature. In the present state of knowledge, we can only say that the exhaustive publication of the old research could bring additional and complete information on the knowledge of funeral realities in a historical period that still remains cloudy. This would give greater credibility to the repertoires, which are often incomplete or even wrong, exactly because of lack of checked and correctly published information.

Illustration list

- **Plate I.** 1. Localization of the Sânpetru German *G. A. S.* according to an administrative map of Arad county and a satellite map (after *Google Earth*); 2. The geographical distribution of discoveries datable in the X-XI centuries in Arad county.
- **Plate II**. Grave plan (after E. Dörner). Grave inventory items: earrings (1-2), cast buttons (3-5), beads (6-9), metallic bands (10-12), bits (13), saddle stirrups (14-15).
 - **Plate III**. Grave inventory items: harness ornaments (1-22).
 - Plate IV. Grave inventory items: harness ornaments (23-38).

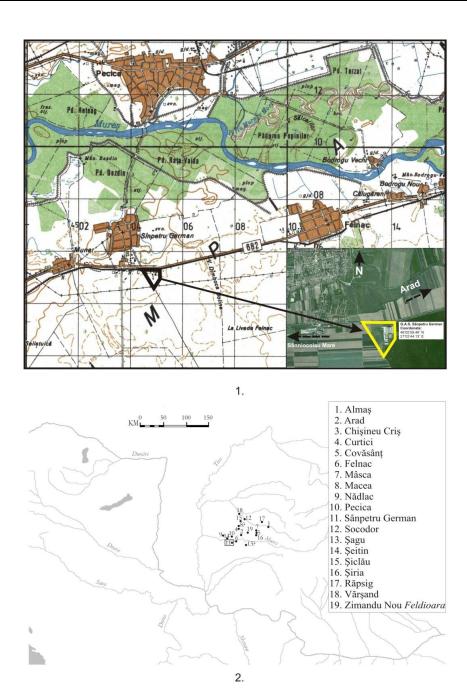


Plate I. 1. Localization of the Sânpetru German *G. A. S.* according to an administrative map of Arad county and a satellite map (after *Google Earth*); 2. The geographical distribution of discoveries datable in the X-XI centuries in Arad county.

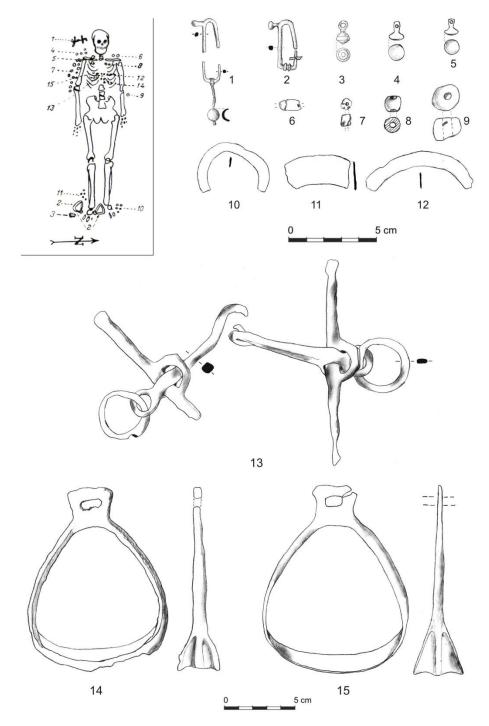


Plate II. Grave plan (after E. Dörner). Grave inventory items: earrings (1-2), cast buttons (3-5), beads (6-9), metallic bands (10-12), bits (13), saddle stirrups (14-15).

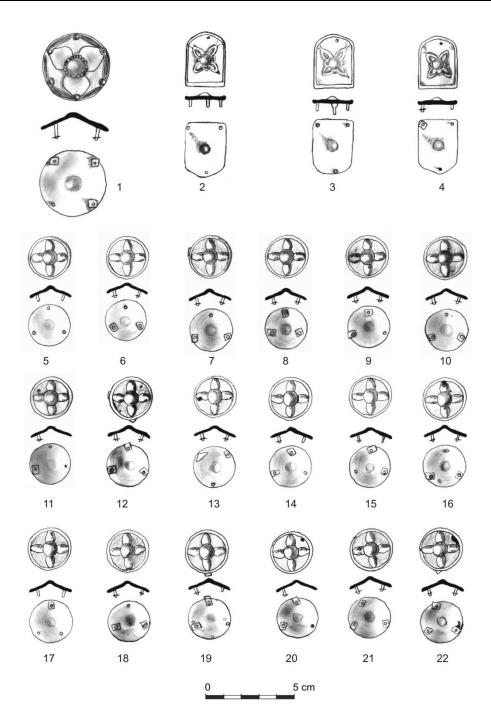


Plate III. Grave inventory items: harness ornaments (1-22).

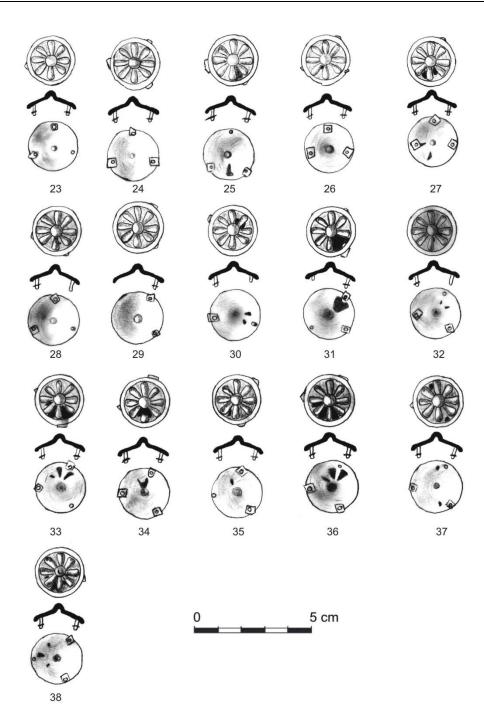


Plate IV. Grave inventory items: harness ornaments (23-38).