

## A REEVALUATION OF THE DISCOVERIES FROM IPOTEȘTI, OLT COUNTY

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**Cuvinte-cheie:** *așezare, ceramică, piese din os, cerceț, capăt de curea, cultura Ipotești-Cândești, secolele VI–VII.*

**Abstract:** *The discoveries from the settlement at Ipotești ("La conac" site), Olt County, broadly attributed to the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries, have significantly influenced the archaeological interpretation of the period for the area between the Carpathians and the Danube. Archaeological research has provided a collection of ceramic material considered significant enough for the site to become one of the eponymous stations of the Ipotești-Cândești culture. By correlating information identified in field notebooks with published data and materials from deposits, clarifications are made regarding the location and dimensions of the site, and a re-evaluation of the discoveries is proposed, considering that the results of the old archaeological research can still offer new data concerning the chronology of the station and beyond.*

**Rezumat:** *Descoperirile din așezarea de la Ipotești (punctul „La conac”), jud. Olt, atribuite larg secolelor VI–VII, au marcat interpretarea arheologică asupra perioadei, pentru zona dintre Carpați și Dunăre. Cercetările arheologice au furnizat un lot de material ceramic considerat semnificativ pentru ca situl să devină una dintre stațiunile eponime ale culturii Ipotești-Cândești. Coroborând informații identificate în carnetele de șantier de date editate și materiale din depozite, se fac precizări privind localizarea și dimensiunile sitului, respectiv se propune o reevaluare a descoperirilor, considerându-se că rezultatele vechilor cercetări arheologice pot oferi, încă, elemente noi referitoare la cronologia stațiunii și nu numai.*

The discoveries from the site at Ipotești, Olt County, broadly attributed to the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries, have significantly influenced the archaeological interpretation of this period for the area between the Carpathians and the Danube. The settlement investigated at the "La conac" site between 1959 and 1960 provided at that time a collection of ceramic material considered significant enough for the site to become one of the eponymous stations of the Ipotești-Cândești culture. Although published 50 years ago, the results of the archaeological research can still offer new data concerning the chronology of the station and beyond.

Two brief reports on the research at Ipotești and its results were published by

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E. Comşa in 1962 and 1973<sup>1</sup>, focused on prehistoric discoveries, and an article by P. Roman and Suzana Dolinescu-Ferche in 1978<sup>2</sup>, dedicated exclusively to the discoveries from the early medieval period. Additionally, there is a study by D. Măndescu<sup>3</sup>, dedicated to a collection of Hallstattian pots in the museum collections in Piteşti.

## Research history

The three archaeological campaigns took place in the years 1959–1961. Initially, in 1959, two excavation sites were opened, coordinated by E. Comşa and P. Roman. Subsequently, the research continued in only one site, in the area where the remains published in 1978 were identified.

The article, published in the journal *Studii și cercetări de istorie veche și arheologie* (SCIIVA), was strictly based on the excavation documentation prepared by P. Roman<sup>4</sup>. Access to the documentation from the archives of “Vasile Pârvan” Institute of Archaeology provided us with the opportunity to complement the published data with new information<sup>5</sup>, identified in the excavation notebooks completed by E. Comşa for the archaeological campaigns of 1959 and 1960. For the following year’s research, mentioned by V. Teodorescu<sup>6</sup>, the information is missing. D. Măndescu also does not mention anything about possible excavations conducted by Marinel Popescu in 1961.

In this text, I will briefly present relevant information identified in Eugen Comşa’s notebooks. He noted that on Wednesday, May 13, 1959, he left Bucharest for Ipotești, Olt County, with the objective of conducting a rescue excavation in the area of a Boian settlement, reported by Professor I. Moroșan from Slatina. Professor Moroșan had come to the Institute of Archaeology in Bucharest in 1958 and then again in the spring of 1959 to show the ceramic fragments he had discovered.

On May 18, 1959, Petre Roman also arrived at Ipotești, sent by Ion Nestor<sup>7</sup> “to retrieve the rest of the early feudal materials (6<sup>th</sup> century)”<sup>8</sup>. Later, Marinel D. Popescu<sup>9</sup> joined him as well.

Eugen Comşa recorded in his journal the opening of a trench, labelled A, 10 m long and 2.5 m wide, positioned perpendicular to the contour lines and slightly oblique to the direction of the Olt Riverbank. The research from the first days, both through the excavation in trench A and through fieldwalking in the investigated area, identified the presence of a Neolithic settlement (Vădastra II and Sălcuța<sup>10</sup>),

<sup>1</sup> COMȘA 1962; COMȘA 1973.

<sup>2</sup> ROMAN, FERCHE 1978.

<sup>3</sup> MĂNDESCU 2004.

<sup>4</sup> ROMAN, FERCHE 1978, p. 74, note 1.

<sup>5</sup> Thank you to Mrs. Roxana Dobrescu for facilitating access to E. Comşa’s excavation notebooks.

<sup>6</sup> TEODORESCU 1971, p. 121, note 49, where it is stated that in the years 1960–1961, M. D. Popescu dug alone, P. Roman not being mentioned.

<sup>7</sup> The action takes place within the activity of the *Commission for the study of the formation of the Romanian language and people to gather information necessary for the drafting of the Treaty on the History of Romania*.

<sup>8</sup> COMȘA 1959, notebook p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> ROMAN, FERCHE 1978, p. 74.

<sup>10</sup> COMȘA 1959, notebook p. 12.

overlain by a late Roman habitation from the 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the eastern part of the trench, the discovery of a fibula with the foot turned underneath was noted<sup>11</sup>.

On May 19, 1959, the archaeological excavation was expanded with a trapezoidal area to fully investigate a pit identified in trench A<sup>12</sup>. A day later, area B was laid out<sup>13</sup>, 30 m south of trench A, located on "the highest bank"<sup>14</sup>. Trench B included the area opened by P. Roman and aimed to investigate a pit with pre-feudal materials, identified during a surface survey<sup>15</sup>.

The excavations at the Ipotești "La conac" site continued in 1960, with the campaign beginning on August 19<sup>th</sup>. Marinel Popescu, from the museum in Pitești, was also included in the team. Several trenches and research areas were opened on this occasion. A Neolithic settlement was identified; Hallstattian pottery fragments<sup>16</sup> and, sporadically, La Tène period materials were found; a medieval habitation was identified, along with traces of habitation from the 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> centuries, dated by a fibula with the foot turned underneath<sup>17</sup>. E. Comșa also recorded the presence of materials attributed to the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries, but "without there being a proper layer from that time"<sup>18</sup>.

### The location of the site

The descriptive mentions included in the excavation notebooks and published texts are extremely useful given the absence of cartographic references for the area. The area is illustrated only with a panoramic photograph in the article published in 1962 (**Fig. 1**). In the 1959 excavation notebook, E. Comșa specifies that the site is located "West of the village, on the high terrace of the Olt, in the place called 'La conac' (named after a manor of the Brâncoveanu family, destroyed in 1916) "<sup>19</sup>. The terrace edge is situated 15 m above the Olt River. A significant part of the settlement was eroded and destroyed by the river's waters<sup>20</sup>, particularly the part with more intense habitation<sup>21</sup>.

When revisiting the study of the prehistoric materials discovered at Ipotești, Cristian Ștefan<sup>22</sup> and Cătălin Pătroi<sup>23</sup> proposed locating the site as a perimeter circumscribed within a circle, with very small differences in placement (**Fig. 2**). Likely influenced by the location in the National Archaeological Repertoire (RAN code 127581.03<sup>24</sup>), the two colleagues overlooked the details provided by E. Comșa

<sup>11</sup> COMȘA 1959, notebook p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> COMȘA 1959, notebook p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> COMȘA 1959, notebook p. 18.

<sup>14</sup> COMȘA 1959, notebook p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> COMȘA 1959, notebook p. 19.

<sup>16</sup> COMȘA 1960, notebook p. 36–37, probably those published in MĂNDESCU 2004, p. 33–37.

<sup>17</sup> COMȘA 1960, notebook p. 25.

<sup>18</sup> COMȘA 1960, notebook p. 28; COMȘA 1973, p. 33.

<sup>19</sup> COMȘA 1959, notebook p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> COMȘA 1962, p. 214.

<sup>21</sup> COMȘA 1973, p. 36.

<sup>22</sup> ȘTEFAN 2014.

<sup>23</sup> PĂTROI 2018.

<sup>24</sup> <https://ran.cimec.ro/sel.asp?codran=127581.03>.

regarding the morphological characteristics of the terrain, complemented by the photographic perspective published in the 1962 report.

For a more accurate location of the site, I correlated the details mentioned by the authors of the archaeological excavation with the cartographic information provided by historical maps, satellite photographs from the 1960s (sourced from the Corona satellite), and more recent images made publicly available by Google Earth.

The rectification of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century plan (Franzische Landesaufnahme)<sup>25</sup>, which also served as the basis for the Charta României Meridionale created by Carol Popp de Szathmari in 1864<sup>26</sup>, indicates the location of the noble estate on the terrace north of the area marked as the site by colleagues C. Ștefan and C. Pătroi. The noble estate no longer appears on the Planul Director de Tragere<sup>27</sup>, which could suggest that it was demolished before 1916<sup>28</sup>. Additionally, the rectification of the Corona satellite photographs<sup>29</sup> illustrates the terrain configuration during the 1959 and 1960 research periods, allowing for the first time a fairly precise location of the area where the archaeological excavations were conducted. Furthermore, on the image provided by Google Earth<sup>30</sup>, the terrain's alveolar shape is distinguished, which was interpreted as a possible defensive ditch by E. Comșa<sup>31</sup> (**Fig. 3**). These data highlight the localization error present in the RAN and perpetuated by C. Pătroi and C. Ștefan, who placed the site on a flat, low-lying area, rather than on a terrace eroded and raised 15 m above the Olt, as indicated by the description and the published photograph.

As a result, based on the arguments presented, it can be considered that the accurate location of the "La conac" site is found north of the area depicted in the RAN and by the aforementioned colleagues, within a triangular zone, with the tip facing west and the base towards the current village (**Fig. 5**).

## Site dimension

At the time of the archaeological investigations, it was estimated, based on fieldwalking and the two areas investigated as rescue operations, that the site was preserved over a length of 100 m and a maximum width of 20 m<sup>32</sup>. The orientation (NW-SE) and the length of the sections (with a maximum of 26.50 m) carried out by E. Comșa and P. Roman in the two research areas suggest that the site was preserved as a strip-oriented east-west along the northern edge of the promontory. However, the note in the journal that there were research sectors located to the north and south, as well as the distance of over 30 m between them, indicates a much larger site, at least at the time of the excavations.

Estimating the extent of the destroyed area is a difficult task that we attempted to undertake, considering it necessary for the current understanding of the archaeological site. To determine the degree of destruction, we relied on cartographic data

<sup>25</sup> <https://maps.arcanum.com>.

<sup>26</sup> <http://charta1864.gis-it.ro/>.

<sup>27</sup> <https://geo-spatial.org/vechi/download/planurile-directoare-de-tragere>.

<sup>28</sup> Sheet 3342 "Brâncoveni" was erected on the ground in 1910.

<sup>29</sup> <https://corona.cast.uark.edu/atlas>.

<sup>30</sup> <https://earth.google.com>.

<sup>31</sup> COMȘA 1973, p. 36.

<sup>32</sup> COMȘA 1962, p. 214.

and available satellite photographs. These documents show a succession of changes to the terrace, especially in the northern area, from a promontory with a wide edge in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the current promontory with a very sharp tip (Figs. 6–7). What stands out, beyond the intense and aggressive erosion over a relatively short period, is the complete disappearance of the area investigated by E. Comșa and P. Roman. This likely occurred due to the construction of a hydropower in the 1980s. In a photograph from 1985, although unclear, the promontory where the excavations took place still appears to have maintained the configuration from 1966, as captured by the Corona satellite. Since the 1985 aerial photograph already shows work beginning on the construction of the banks of the future reservoir, we can conclude that the northern part of the site was destroyed on this occasion (Fig. 8).

As a result, what E. Comșa and P. Roman saw and described has disappeared. How much of the archaeological site has been preserved after the brutal intervention of the area's development? An analysis of a photographic image provided by Google Earth in 2021 allows for the identification on the ground of the alveolar feature that Comșa considered a defensive ditch (Fig. 3). The same alveolar feature appears in a recent aerial photograph (June 2024). If our hypothesis is proven correct through further research, it is possible that at least the prehistoric settlements located south of the investigated area have survived the destruction.

During a recent visit (June 2024) to the site, I observed what appeared to be the trace of a filled trench, with straight banks and a horizontal base measuring 1.50 m in width. Initially hypothetically attributed to the excavations conducted by P. Roman and/or M.D. Popescu, the "trench" is located approximately 350 m from the northern terrace edge of the 1959–1960 period, not 30 m as indicated in the excavation notebooks. As a result, what is visible today on the steep edge of the terrace represents the natural "sectioning" of a pit, through collapse (Fig. 4).

If these observations are correct, then the dimensions of the site are much larger than previously reported. On the promontory overlooking the Olt River, a series of settlements succeeded each other. In addition to the prehistoric settlement, possibly fortified with a ditch<sup>33</sup>(?), there is a fairly extensive early medieval settlement (or settlements?) to the south (Fig. 5).

In light of these observations, I consider E.S. Teodor's statement that "a part of the site still exists and theoretically a new excavation is possible"<sup>34</sup> to be correct, especially for the southern area, while the northern area is unfortunately compromised.

## Observations regarding the dating

At the time of writing the first report published in the journal *Materiale și cercetări arheologice*, the author of the 1959 research, E. Comșa, mentions materials datable to the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>35</sup>. In the publication of the next report, he refines the dating, narrowing it down to the 6th century<sup>36</sup>. The extended publication of the

<sup>33</sup> The observed alveolation extends in an arc, enclosing the promontory, with a currently observable length of 110 m.

<sup>34</sup> TEODOR 2001, note 11 ([https://www.esteo.ro/TTW/Vol\\_1/v1\\_s3/6\\_1Ipo.htm](https://www.esteo.ro/TTW/Vol_1/v1_s3/6_1Ipo.htm)).

<sup>35</sup> COMȘA 1962, p. 214.

<sup>36</sup> COMȘA 1973, p. 30.

research results from Ipotești introduces a new proposal for dating the “pre-feudal” materials, specifically the 5<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>37</sup>, although the article title refers only to the limits of the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

At the time of writing his doctoral thesis, Eugen Silviu Teodor stated that “regarding the inventory of the dwellings – it contains only pottery and lacks classic dating elements, neither relative nor absolute”<sup>38</sup>. Based on this type of findings, represented only by pottery, E.S. Teodor agrees with P. Roman and S. Dolinescu-Ferche on a dating “probably at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century or the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century”.

In 2001, Florin Curta’s work on the archaeology of the Lower Danube in the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries was published. Based on the discovery of a coin issued by Emperor Nerva, F. Curta suggests a dating of the Ipotești site to the Roman era, arguing that no artefacts datable to the 6<sup>th</sup> century were discovered<sup>39</sup> and, therefore, the site was incorrectly dated and cannot be used in arguing the dating of the Ipotești-Cândești culture prior to the arrival of the Slavs.

However, in the article publishing the excavation results, several artefacts, made of bone or pottery, are illustrated, which, from our point of view, have chronological significance for the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries and have been overlooked by both the publication’s authors (perhaps intentionally?<sup>40</sup>) and by researchers of the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries up until now (**Fig. 9**).

## Bone pieces

In the monographic article from 1978, a bone artefact<sup>41</sup> was illustrated and interpreted at that time as a handle<sup>42</sup>. Recently, I re-analyzed<sup>43</sup> this artefact and provided arguments for interpreting it as a fragment of a *knotenlöser*. Based on analogies, this piece is datable to the 7<sup>th</sup> century and belongs to an “Avar” cultural milieu (**Fig. 11**).

Among the materials resulting from the archaeological excavation and currently held in the collections of “Vasile Pârvan” Institute of Archaeology, there is also a fragment of a bilateral comb. The presence of a hole intended for a bronze rivet indicates that the fragment most likely belonged to a comb made of three plates, with the preserved fragment being part of the middle, active plate, which had finer and denser teeth on one side and thicker and sparser teeth on the other side.

Such bilateral combs do not appear in the settlements of the Lower Danube,

<sup>37</sup> ROMAN, FERCHE 1978, p. 73 and especially p. 90 “the earliest stage of the Ipotești-Ciurel-Cândești culture, which is chronologically placed at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD”.

<sup>38</sup> TEODOR 2001, p. 103 ([https://www.esteo.ro/TTW/Vol\\_1/v1\\_s3/6\\_1Ipo.htm](https://www.esteo.ro/TTW/Vol_1/v1_s3/6_1Ipo.htm)).

<sup>39</sup> CURTA 2001, p. 231–232 “but no artefacts clearly dated to the sixth century”.

<sup>40</sup> The article begins with a “mission” assigned to P. Roman by I. Nestor, specifically from the *Commission for the Study of the Formation of the Romanian Language and People*. It is possible that, in this context, some of the results from the Ipotești excavations that might have been non-Romanic were overlooked. However, the illustration of some of these items, even with erroneous dating (3<sup>rd</sup> century – stamped decoration pottery) or without comments in the text (the *knotenlöser* fragment), we believe was not accidental.

<sup>41</sup> In reality, a cervid antler, according to a preliminary identification by our archaeozoologist colleague, Dr. Adrian Bălășescu, to whom we extend our thanks.

<sup>42</sup> ROMAN, FERCHE 1978, fig. 9/1a–b.

<sup>43</sup> MĂGUREANU 2019.

being more commonly found in the Middle Danube region, especially in the Gepidic environment<sup>44</sup>, constituting one of the artefacts with sufficient significance to establish chronologies for settlements from the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>45</sup>.

## About pottery

In the context of the current study, the discussion regarding the pottery discovered at Ipotești is limited to the reanalysis of a vessel published in the 1978 article<sup>46</sup>. This concerns a small bowl, dated by the publication's authors to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD and attributed to the settlement of the free Dacians<sup>47</sup>.

The decoration of the vessel is striking, as it does not belong to the known repertoire of gray, wheel-made vessels from the Chilia-Militari culture. The identification of the vessel in the repository of "Vasile Pârvan" Institute of Archaeology allowed for further observations. The body is covered with a polished, greyish-black slip, and near the base, a post-firing "X" mark was scratched.

The combination of stamped "triangle" decoration, metallic greyish-black polished slip, and the "X" mark does not represent known characteristics of the pottery repertoire of the free Dacians and cannot be considered a 3<sup>rd</sup>-century AD vessel. The same decoration also appears on another unpublished ceramic fragment discovered at Ipotești, which, according to the marking, was found in the fill of complex B2 from 1959. The similarity of the decoration on these ceramic vessels highlights the need for a comprehensive analysis of the pottery discovered at Ipotești, Olt County.

Following this type of decoration, both the geographical area and the chronological range expand. Vessels with similar characteristics are found in the Middle Danube region, both in Transylvania and in the Tisza area (**Fig. 10**). The geographically closest discoveries are from Sighișoara<sup>48</sup>, Morești, Porumbenii Mici, Bratei<sup>49</sup>, as well as further afield from Stupini<sup>50</sup> and Bistrița<sup>51</sup>. Based on these, it can be proposed to redate the respective vessel to the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century<sup>52</sup>, a chronology accepted for this stamped decoration<sup>53</sup>.

It is interesting to note that this type of stamped decoration is attributed to the Germanic milieu, especially Gepid and Lombard, while it is no longer found on stamped pottery from the Avar environment<sup>54</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> CURTA 2001, p. 201, p. 242.

<sup>45</sup> CURTA 2001, fig. 35; the chronology of this type of comb ends around the 560/570 period, according to MASEK 2016, fig. 17.

<sup>46</sup> ROMAN, FERCHE 1978, fig. 2/1.

<sup>47</sup> ROMAN, FERCHE 1978, p. 74.

<sup>48</sup> HARHOIU, BALTAG 2007, taf. 147/5.

<sup>49</sup> BĂRZU 2010, taf. 44/6.

<sup>50</sup> GAIU 2002, fig. 24/12.

<sup>51</sup> GAIU 1992, fig. 4/12.

<sup>52</sup> MĂGUREANU 2017.

<sup>53</sup> At Sirmium, the ceramic batch that includes a fragment decorated like the one from Ipotești is broadly dated between the late 4<sup>th</sup> century and the 6<sup>th</sup> century (DAVIDOVIĆ 2017, p. 133). A more restricted dating is also proposed, covering the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century and the entire 6<sup>th</sup> century (BUGARSKI, IVANIŠEVIĆ 2019, p. 282).

<sup>54</sup> For a quick overview, see VIDA 1999 and HAJNAL 2013 for "Avar" period pottery, and BARBOCZ 2021 for "Germanic" pottery.

### About an earring...

The first mention of the discovery of an earring at Ipotești appears in a 1966 note, when Victor Teodorescu reports finding a specimen with "pendentifs-colonnettes"<sup>55</sup>. Without illustrating the piece, Teodorescu refers to an analogy from Sadovetz and considers this earring as an argument for dating the end of phase II and the beginning of phase III of the Ipotești-Cândești culture, thus towards the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century<sup>56</sup>.

In another article from 1971, V. Teodorescu again mentions the "bronze earring with spiral wire pendentifs-colonnettes", discovered by Marcel D. Popescu in 1961<sup>57</sup>. The piece is not illustrated this time either. Later, in a 1972 article, Victor Teodorescu compiles a corpus of ornaments and clothing accessories in an extensive footnote. On this occasion, he mentions the association in group b between "digitated fibulae and earrings with a twisted disc-shaped end". Such earrings were reportedly discovered by M. D. Popescu in complex B1/1960 at Ipotești<sup>58</sup>. In this publication, V. Teodorescu no longer mentions the earring with pendentifs-colonnettes and notes a different year of discovery. The fact that B1/1960 was published without mentioning any type of earring suggests the possibility of an error in the 1972 note.

There are no further references to the earring discovered at Ipotești in the literature. The piece has remained unpublished and is probably lost<sup>59</sup>. However, given the description and the clear reference to the analogy from Sadovetz<sup>60</sup>, we believe there is sufficient data to discuss the chronological argument suggested by this earring.

The earring published by I. Welkow is alongside items characteristic of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Good analogies regarding the hoop and the attachment system of the pendentifs can be mentioned from the finds at Üç Tepe<sup>61</sup>, Kisarabad<sup>62</sup>, or northern Abkhazia<sup>63</sup>. At Kisarabad, the dating is secured by a lightly minted solidus of Maurice, and the 7<sup>th</sup> century is also proposed for the dating of the grave in the necropolis at Chapka in Abkhazia<sup>64</sup>. Therefore, this type of earring can be broadly dated to the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries, depending on the discovery context, as part of a group of Byzantine-style antiquities<sup>65</sup>.

<sup>55</sup> TEODORESCU 1966, p. 98.

<sup>56</sup> The chronology proposed by V. Teodorescu for what was considered the Ipotești-Cândești culture was as follows: Phase I – in the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century and the first quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> century; Phase II – in the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century; Phase III – from the last third of the 6<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century; Phase IV – in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, with the caveat that it probably does not extend until the end of the century (TEODORESCU 1971, p. 112).

<sup>57</sup> TEODORESCU 1971, p. 107–108 and note 39.

<sup>58</sup> TEODORESCU 1972, p. 89, note 42.

<sup>59</sup> The piece could not be identified in the Pitești Museum's repository. Information provided by Dragoș Mândescu, to whom I also extend my thanks.

<sup>60</sup> WELKOV 1935, taf. 17/11.

<sup>61</sup> BÁLINT 1992, p. 316.

<sup>62</sup> BÁLINT 1992, p. 316, taf. 1/1, 4.

<sup>63</sup> VORONOV, YOUCHINE 1973, ris. 14/10–11.

<sup>64</sup> VORONOV, YOUCHINE 1973, p. 191.

<sup>65</sup> BÁLINT 1992, p. 316.

## Belt end?

Among the items discovered during the first campaign in 1959, there is a fragmentary piece made of two bronze "plates", decorated with *au repoussé* and fastened together with bronze rivets that "clearly ... plated an object made of leather". Eugen Comșa expressed hope that it might "help in dating the early feudal complex"<sup>66</sup>. The description of the piece, unpublished and not yet identified in the archaeological deposits of the Institute of Archaeology or the Museum in Pitești, suggests a belt end made through pressing.

Artefacts from the 6<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries made through pressing are extremely rare in the area between the Carpathians and the Danube, being characteristic of the Middle Danube region. From Muntenia, only two discoveries from Budureasca can be cited, datable to the late 6<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, based on clear analogies from the "Avar" milieu between the Danube and the Tisza<sup>67</sup>, as well as a discovery from Sărata Monteoru<sup>68</sup>.

We hypothesize whether the mentioned piece from the excavation notebook might also be an artefact from the late 6<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, potentially contributing, as hoped, to the "dating of the early feudal complex".

## Conclusions

Although investigated as a rescue excavation, with seemingly modest results (only three complexes explored), the settlement at Ipotești, Olt County, still holds surprises for the study of the early medieval period. The reanalysis of some of the published artefacts, complemented by information from excavation notebooks or collateral mentions of analogies, enriches and at the same time complicates the picture of the settlement, expanding the discussions on its chronology and the presence of ceramic or horn artefacts characteristic of another region, the Middle Danube area.

Thus, the habitation at Ipotești can no longer be confined solely to the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, as there are sufficient arguments for dating it into the 7<sup>th</sup> century as well. Additionally, the chronological framework and the basin of analogies suggest characteristics of possible different nuclei of complexes. The "Gepid" ceramics associated with bone combs and the cruciform mark are specific to one such nucleus. Another nucleus is "defined" by items such as the *knotenlöser* and the *au repoussé*-decorated belt end.

The presence of "Gepid" or "Avar" elements at Ipotești is not surprising, given its location along the Olt River, one of the most frequently used communication routes on the north-south axis between the Lower and Middle Danube.

In this context of the connections between the settlement at Ipotești and the Transylvanian/Pannonian region of the Middle Danube, based on the ceramics and the bone comb, it is worth mentioning the Gepid involved in the conflicts between Priscus and the Sclaveni at the Lower Danube. Additionally, the horn artefact, with analogies almost exclusively in the Avar environment of Pannonia, might bring to mind the punitive incursion of the Avars against the Sclaveni, also at the Lower

<sup>66</sup> COMȘA 1959, notebook, p. 20.

<sup>67</sup> MĂGUREANU 2005; MĂGUREANU 2012.

<sup>68</sup> NESTOR 1969, p. 24, fig. 1.

Danube. However, based on the discussion of just a few artefacts, a historicizing explanation may be only a "colourful touch" added to the issue of the Ipotești settlement, and caution is necessary until the complete publication of the discovered material.

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1

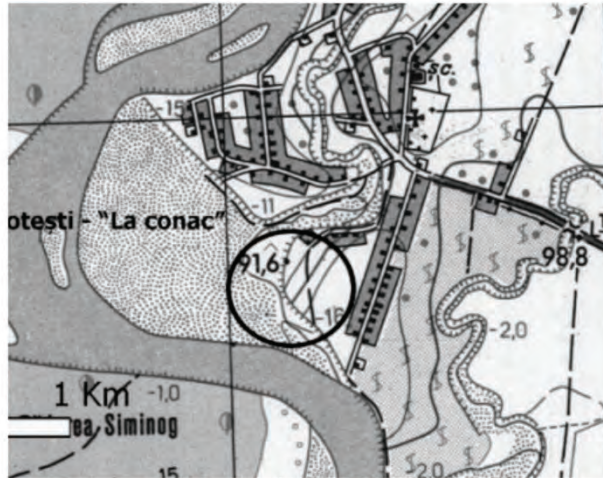
1959 (After Comşa 1962, fig. 1)



2

2024

Fig. 1. Comparative images of the steep bank of the promontory on which is located the Ipotești site, Olt County.



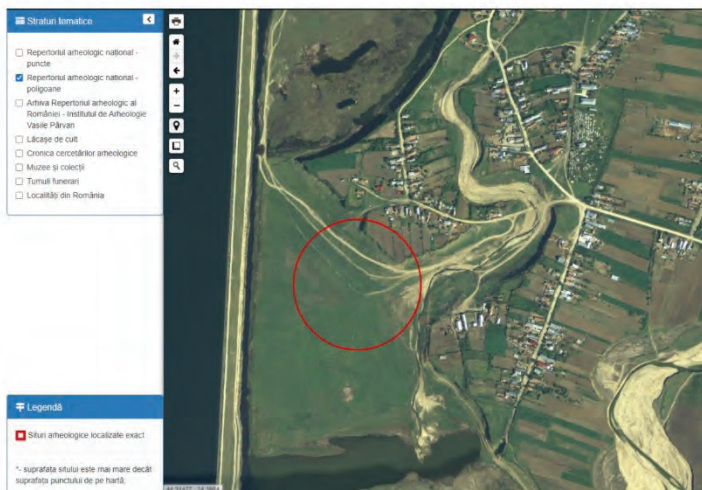
1 (After Ștefan 2014, pl. 2/1)



2 (After Pătroi 2018, fig. 61)



3 (After Pătroi 2018, fig. 62)



4 (<https://map.cimec.ro/Mapserver/?layer=ran&cod=127581.01#>)

Fig. 2. Different proposals for locating the site in Ipotești, Olt County.



Fig. 3. Depiction of the "whitening" on the Google Earth image (1) and in the 2024 photograph (2).



1



2



3

Fig. 4. The location of the "sectioned" pit that can be seen in the break of the bank (June 2024).



**Fig. 5.** Location of the site from Ipotești, Olt County (with solid line the site defined by E. Comșa and P. Roman; with dotted line possible extension).

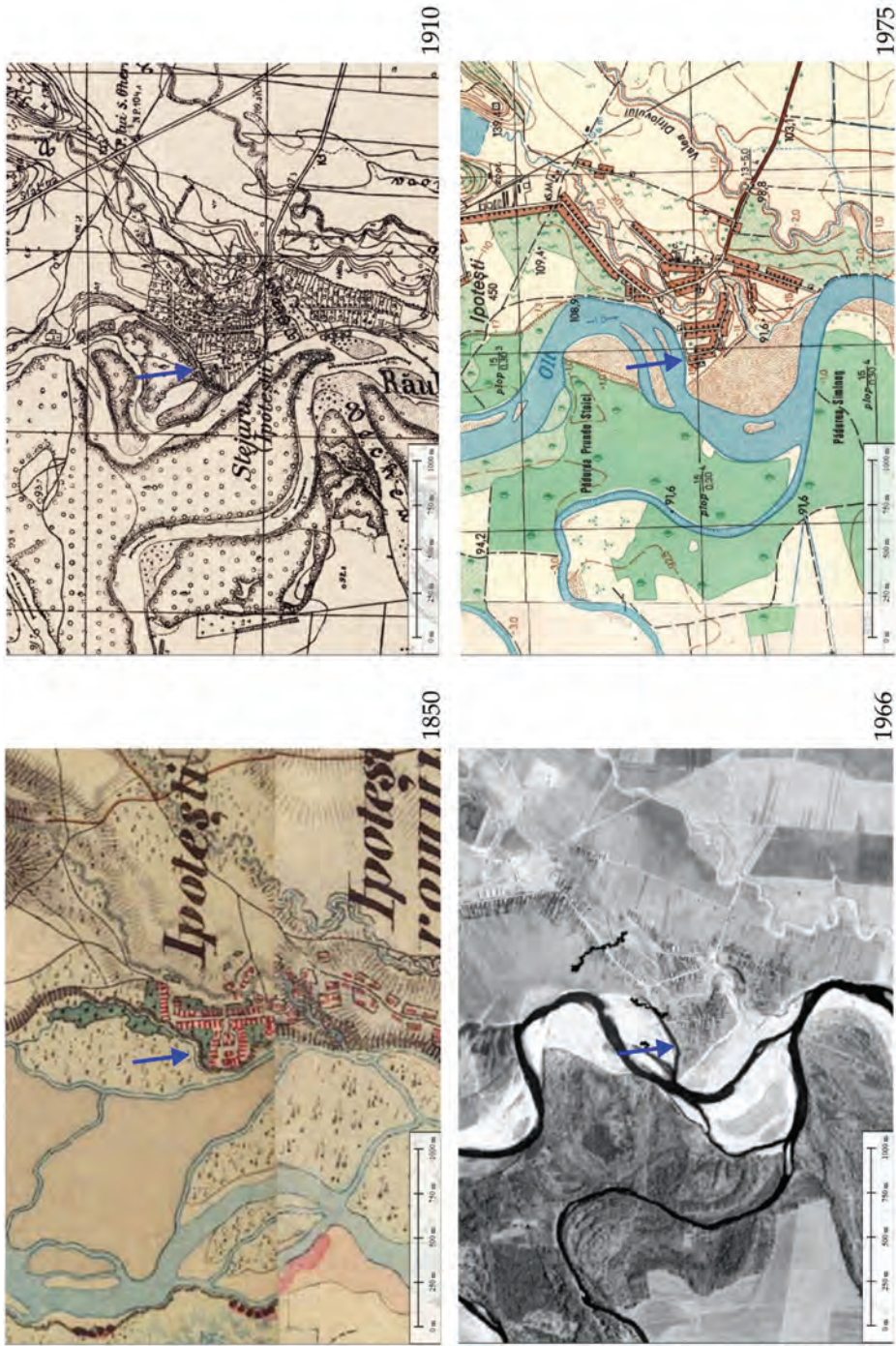
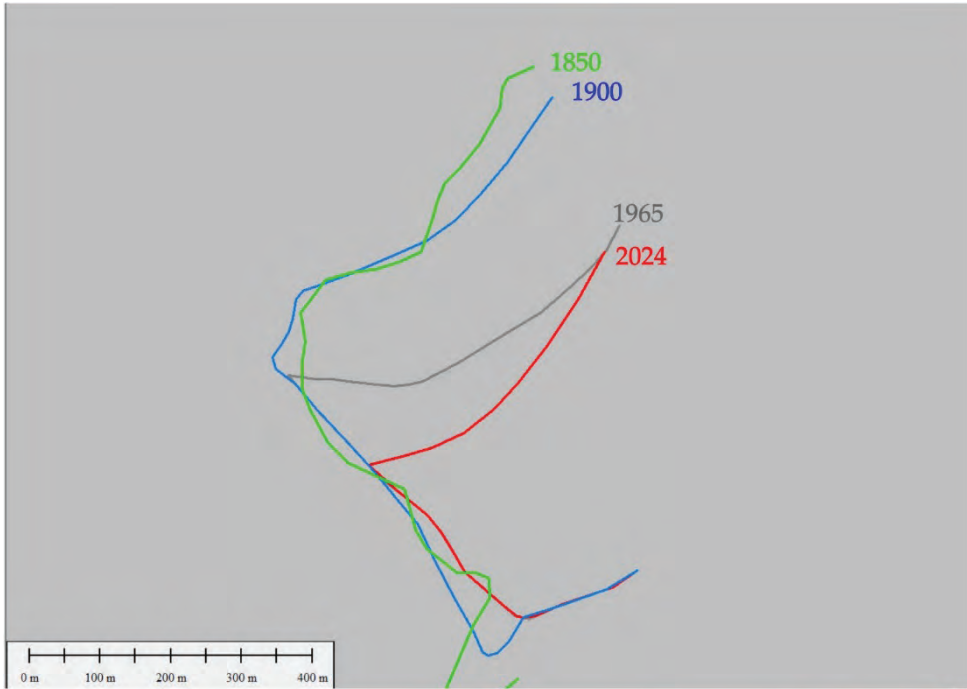


Fig. 6. The evolution of the promontory on which the Ipotești site is located, Olt County.



Fig. 7. The evolution of the promontory on which the Ipotești site is located, Olt County; 1985 – the limits of the future reservoir (1).



1



2

Fig. 8. The evolution of the promontory on which the Ipotești site is located, Olt County.

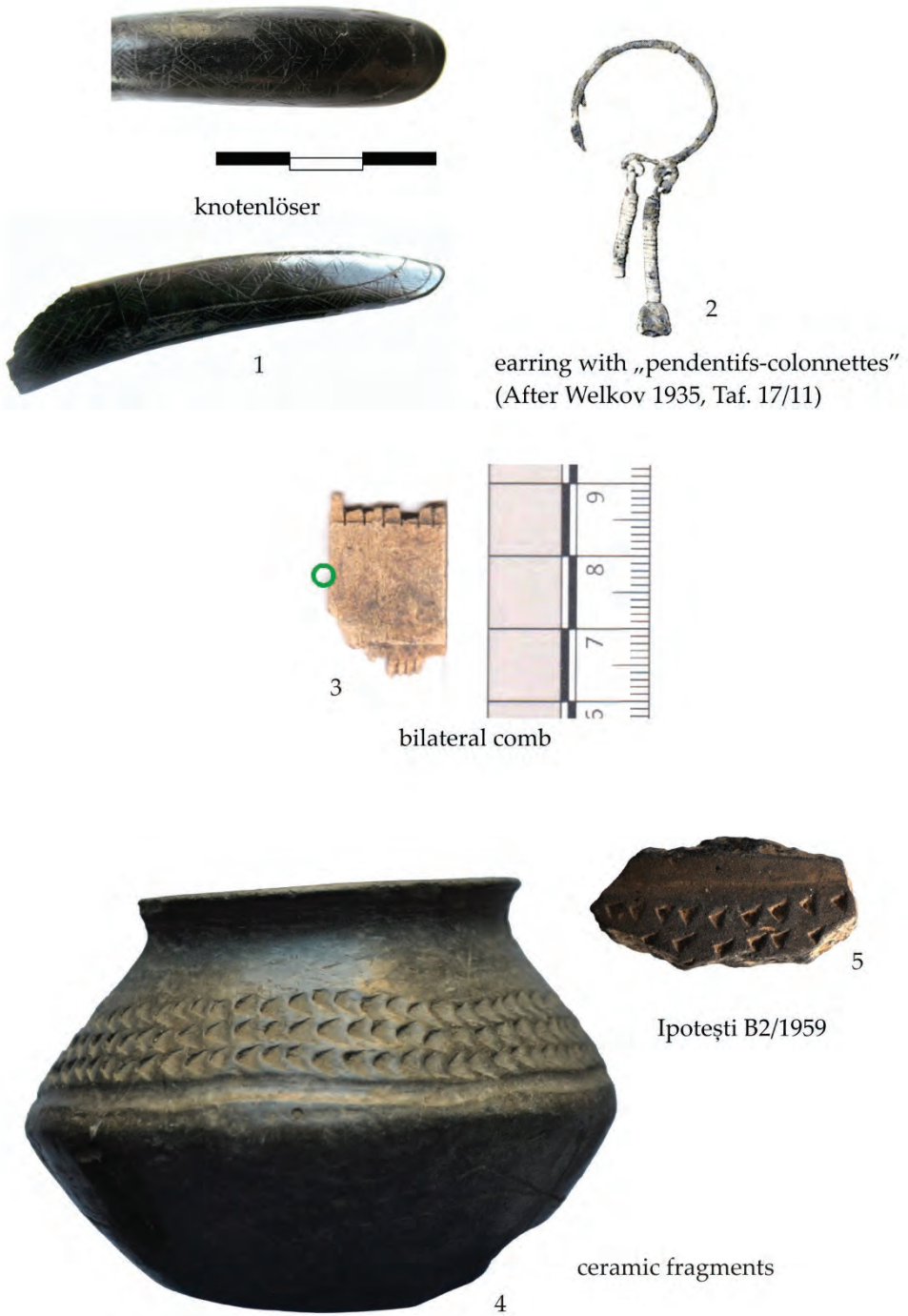


Fig. 9. Pieces discovered in Ipotești, Olt County, and earring analogy (1 bone artefact; 2 earring with pendant; 3 bilateral comb; 4-5 ceramic fragments).



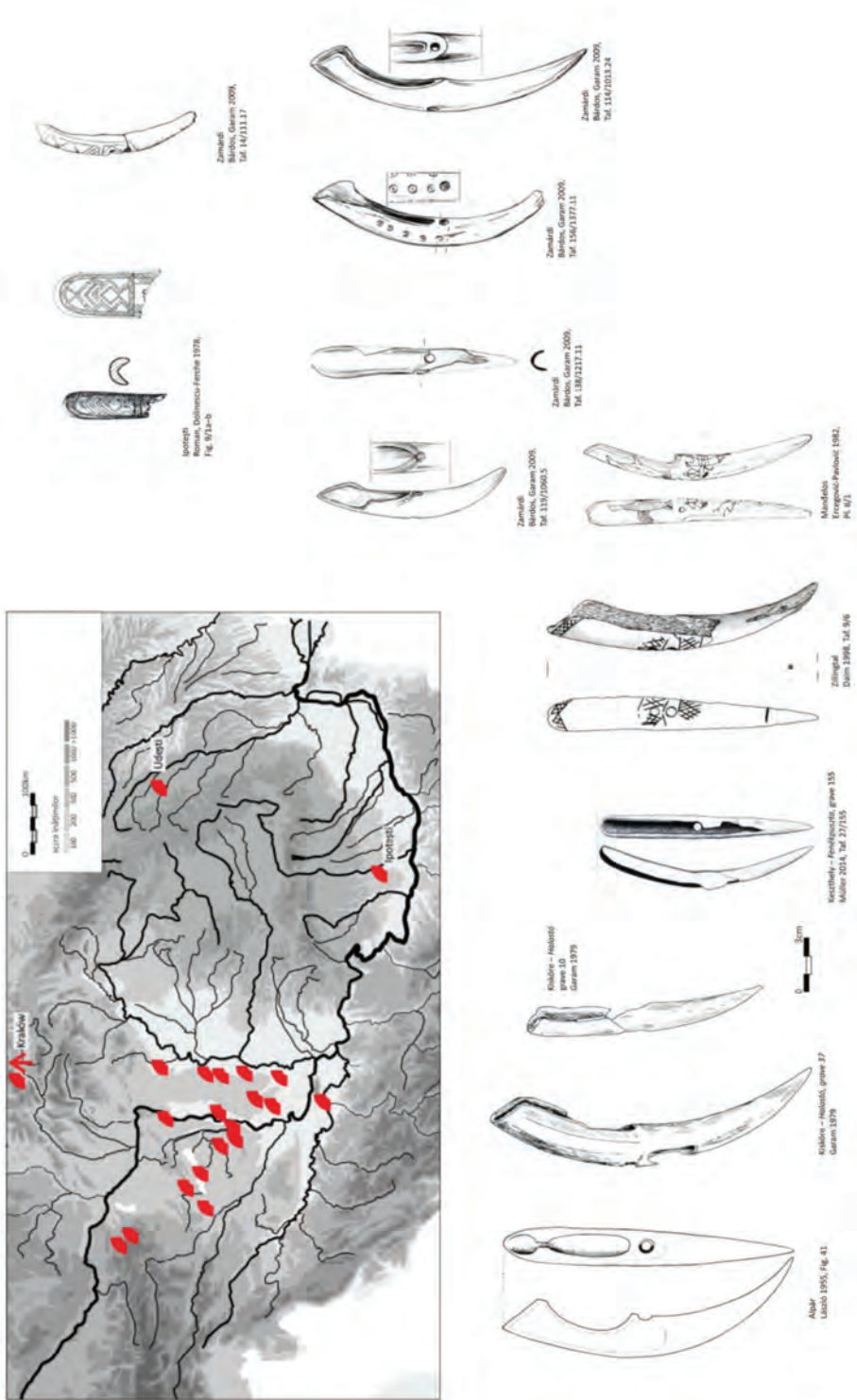


Fig. 11. Analogies for the *knutenlöser* type bone piece discovered in Ipotesti, Olt County (scale of heights).