

TWO MEDIEVAL AXES DISCOVERED AT TULUCEȘTI (GALAȚI COUNTY)

BY

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Abstract

In this short presentation we discuss two iron axes spotted on a school “museum corner”. The artifacts refer to have been discovered accidentally, most probably in isolation, in the Tulucești village area, hence they lack any archaeological context. The only reference point we have concerns their identification in the old village Vorniceni, north from Tulucești, towards Tătarca. They have not been associated with other archaeological material. We do not know whether they were found in the same place.

The first one is an iron hammer-axe with narrow elongated body, a semicircular blade which is edged on both sides, well profiled, spread out almost symmetrically from the body. The second iron axe has a triangular body in longitudinal profile, a narrow blade, asymmetrical for the longitudinal axis, broadens towards the curved cutting edge, executed on both sides.

Keywords: *medieval, archaeological findings, iron axes, fortuitous discoveries, tool, weapon, Tulucești, Prut River, Moldavia.*

The village of Tulucești is situated in the south-east of the Galați County, north of Lake Brateș, on the upper ledge of the Covurlui Plain, which provides it with a good outlook over the wide valley of the river Prut. The generous natural conditions favoured the early habitation of the area, the archaeological finds being outlined both in monographic approaches to the history of the village and in the literature in the field¹.

The deposits of Tulucești are rich in fossils of Pliocene fauna, which belong to several species (*Zygodon borsoni* Hays, *Anancus arvernensis* Cr. et Job., *Archidiskodon meridionalis* Nesti, *Hippotigris stenonis* Cocchi, *Paracamelus alutensis* Stef., *Cervus issidorensis* Croiz.)².

The funeral finds, discovered accidentally behind the train station of Tulucești are particularly interesting. The osteologic material recovered is at this moment part of the collection of the village school (N.B., in the custody of Mr. Amelian Chirilă, who was kind enough to provide us details regarding the circumstances of the discovery). Apparently, they seem to be two interment graves with ochre, Yamna type, the deceased being interred in a crouched position, with no funeral inventory. Chronologically, they are dated to the final transition period from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age (Yamna culture).

The Bronze Age is well represented in the village area, with findings in more sites [Tulucești (*westward from the train station*) and in the depending villages, Tătarca (the present day cemetery) and Șivița (*the present-day cemetery and its surroundings, Petre Ion's garden, unknown site*)]³.

A Geto-Dacian cremation necropolis has been identified on the lower terrace of Lake Brateș, near the Tulucești train station (km 10 + 800). Three urns containing ashes and human osteologic remains have been

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¹ See our argument concerning the monograph of Tulucești, C. Croitoru, *Despre descoperirile arheologice de la Tulucești, județul Galați. Note de lectură (VII)*, in *Studii de Istorie* (eds. C. Bușe, I. Căndea), II, 2013, pp. 589–594.

² S. Athanasiu, *Resturile de mamifere pliocen superioare de la Tulucești, districtul Covurlui*, in *Anuarul Institutului Geologic al României*, 6, 1915, pp. 409–410; T. Simionescu, *Observații asupra faunei de mamifere romaniene și cuaternare din Moldova*, in *Arheologia Moldovei (ArhMold)*, XIII, 1990, p. 166, no. 33.

³ M. Brudiu, *O descoperire hallstättiană în sudul Moldovei*, in *Revista Muzeelor (RM)*, V, no. 4, 1968, pp. 344–345; idem, *Cercetări periegetice în sudul Moldovei*, in *Materiale și Cercetări Arheologice (MCA)*, IX, 1970, p. 516, no. 4; I. T. Dragomir, *Mărturia hallstättiene traco-geto-dacice în regiunea de sud a Moldovei*, in *Istros*, II–III, 1983, p. 88, fig. 11/4; idem, *Noi descoperiri arheologice de obiecte de aramă și de bronz în regiunea de sud a Moldovei*, in *Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche și Arheologie (SCIVA)*, 30, 1979, 4, pp. 598–599, no. 9, fig. 3/3.

discovered here: one Dacian, autochthonous urn and two amphorae, from Thassos and Heraclea Pontica, respectively, the latter bearing a stamp in a circular cartouche: ΓΦ⁴.

Probably the most famous monument in the area is Trajan's Vallum, whose eastern terminal point is in Tulucești⁵. The starting of a research project concerning this Roman line of fortification occasioned the "discovery" of more artifacts in the village school museum. They belong to various historical periods and they have never been historiographically exploited. This paper presents two mediaeval axes in this collection.

The artifacts we refer to have been discovered accidentally, most probably in isolation, in the Tulucești village area, hence they lack any archaeological context. The only reference point we have concerns their identification in the old village Vorniceni, north of Tulucești, towards Tătarca (present-day Satul Nou). They have not been associated with other archaeological material. We do not know whether they were found in the same place.

1. Iron hammer-axe (fig. 1) with narrow elongated body, the semicircular blade is edged on both sides, well profiled, spread out almost symmetrically from the body. The eye for mounting the haft and the poll are simple, with rectangular aspect in the profile area. The elongation of the poll (the hammer) does not show traces of usage (its edges are not deteriorated). It is decorated with three rows of stria placed symmetrically on each head, except for one, which contains a fourth row. The lateral side of the orifice (eye) for mounting the haft is also decorated with slit broken lines and there are hints which suggest that the upper part between eye and poll was also decorated. It was made of one iron piece, by forging and hot-metal working. Size: maximum length = 115 mm, blade width = 85 mm, poll length = 15 mm, poll width = 18 mm, length of the haft eye = 16 mm; judging by size and weight of the piece, the wooden haft was probably between 300 and 400 mm long.

Pieces with a similar morphology are relatively well-known in Moldavia (fig. 3, type A); they have been identified in Iași⁶, Piatra Neamț⁷, Murgeni⁸, and Vaslui⁹. The axe from Mândrești (Galați County)¹⁰ can be added to this list and perhaps the artifact from Bălteni (jud. Vaslui County) belongs to the same typology (fig. 4)¹¹. Hammers-axes of the same type were founded in Poland¹², Russia¹³ or West Europe¹⁴.

The general aspect of these pieces indicates a dual usage – for cutting and chopping as well as for hammering. For the artifact discovered at Tulucești, whereas the blade has a worn-out edge, probably because of usage, the poll was not used as a hammer, for it does not display hammering traces, the slit ornament being well preserved. See, for example, the piece identified at Curcani (Ilfov County) which shows visible traces at the lower end, which resulted from repeated hammering¹⁵.

Another hypothesis propounds the usage this type of axe as a weapon and it is probably the case for the piece presented in this paper. We are of the opinion that the decorations suggest a usage different from that of a tool, without denying its possible use in various everyday activities. In this context, we must recall the special artifact identified in Novgorod, decorated with gilded geometric figures and signs/symbols yet

⁴ I. T. Dragomir, *Trei morminte geto-dacice descoperite la Tulucești (jud. Galați)*, in *RM*, VI, 1969, no. 2, pp. 164–166. See also S. Teodor, *Cu privire la relațiile dintre geții est-carpatici și lumea greco-macedoneană*, in *Acta Musei Meridionalis (AMM)*, V–VI, 1983–1984, p. 165, no. 95, where the presence of five (Greek ?!) amphorae is mentioned; C. Ilie, M. Nicu, *Situri și puncte arheologice din județul Galați*, in *Danubius*, XX, 2002, p. 36, no. 2, who note in regard to the the three funeral urns: "a find which attests the existence of a settlement in the area" (sic!). For dating and analogies, see D. Măndescu, *Cronologia descoperirilor funerare din cea de-a doua epocă a fierului din zona Galațiului*, in *Perspective asupra istoriei locale în viziunea tinerilor cercetători*, (II), *Lucrările Colocviului Științific, Galați, 19 mai 2006*, (eds. Șt. Stanciu, C. Croitoru), Galați, 2006, pp. 37–38, fig. 2/1–3.

⁵ C. Croitoru, *Fortificații liniare romane în stânga Dunării de Jos (secolele I–IV p. Chr.)*, I, Ed. Istros, Galați, 2004, pp. 80–90.

⁶ Em. I. Emandi, *Cercetări privind uneltele de tăiat de pe teritoriul României în perioada secolelor IX–XVII*, in *Istoria civilizației*, II, Sibiu, 1981, p. 37, fig. 8/2; G. Ostuni, *Les outils dans les Balkans du Moyen Âge à nos jours*, II, *Planches*, Édition de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales et Maisonneuve et Larose, 1986, p. 854, fig. c.

⁷ Em. I. Emandi, op. cit. (n. 6), p. 37, fig. 8/3; G. Ostuni, op. cit. (n. 6), p. 854, fig. a.

⁸ Em. I. Emandi, op. cit. (n. 6), p. 37, fig. 8/1; G. Ostuni, op. cit. (n. 6), p. 854, fig. b.

⁹ Em. I. Emandi, op. cit. (n. 6), p. 37, fig. 8/4; G. Ostuni, op. cit. (n. 6), p. 854, fig. d.

¹⁰ C. Croitoru, *Varia memoria antiquitatis et medievalis (I). Informații arheologice într-un document contemporan*, in *Studii de Istorie* (eds. C. Bușe, I. Căndea), I, 2012, p. 132, fig. 4.

¹¹ D. Gh. Teodor, *Meșteșugurile la nordul Dunării de Jos în secolele IV–XI d. Hr.*, Ed. Helios, Iași, 1996, fig. 35/6; G. D. Hânceanu, *Evoluții etno-demografice și culturale în bazinul Bârladului (secolele VI–XI)*, Ed. Demiurg, Iași, 2011, pl. XLIV/4.

¹² M. Głosek, *Późnośredniowieczna broń obuchowa w zbiorach polskich*, Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Warszawa-Lódź, 1992, pl. II–IV.

¹³ B. A. Kolčín, *Drevnjaja Rus': gorod, zamok, selo*, Arheologija SSSR, Nauka, 1985, p. 148, fig. 118.

¹⁴ I. Heindel, *Äxte des 8. bis 14. Jahrhunderts im westslawischen Siedlungsgebiet zwischen Elbe/Saale und Oder/Neisse*, in *Zeitschrift für Archäologie*, 26, 1992, pl. II, IV.

¹⁵ M. Comșa, C. Deculescu, *Un depozit de unelte și arme descoperit la Curcani (jud. Ilfov)*, in *SCIV*, 23, 1972, 3, p. 470, no. 7, fig. 2/2.

unidentified, which was interpreted as a mark of nobility or royal power¹⁶. Of course, we cannot rule out, in the present stage of research, the application of some marks belonging to the workshops which produced such pieces, all the more that a decoration similar to that on the axe found at Tulucești (the signs in the area of the haft hole) has been found on another piece discovered at Gugești (Vrancea County)¹⁷; noteworthy is that the latter piece does not show usage traces at the lower end (hammer) either. Another interesting symbol on the axe discovered at Gugești is the star, made by the intersection of three lines and placed in the median area of the blade, close to the edge, a decoration (?) identical to the one on the artifact discovered in Piatra-Neamț. Last but not least, the piece found in Iași has the same slit decoration on the blade, made of broken lines, in the shape of the letter M.

As far as the dating of these axes is concerned, this is still hypothetical, all the more because they lack any archaeological context, being fortuitous findings. The pieces found in Moldavia have been dated to different centuries: Bălteni (7th–11th centuries), Iași (14th–15th centuries), Mândrești (probably 10th–11th centuries), Murgeni (14th–15th centuries), Piatra-Neamț (12th–13th centuries), Vaslui (13th–14th centuries). The repertory from Curcani, which contains an axe belonging to this type, has been dated to the ninth century. The artifact from Gugești is displayed on a table with iron tools from the 11th–15th centuries, but the identification in the area of pottery fragments from the 9th–11th centuries¹⁸ may suggest a limitation of this chronology.

2. Iron axe (fig. 2) with a triangular body in longitudinal profile; a narrow blade, asymmetrical for the longitudinal axis, broadens towards the curved cutting edge, executed on both sides. The neck is narrow, well profiled; the poll is simple, rectangular. It was made of one iron piece, by forging and hot-metal working. The eye for mounting the haft is oval. Size: maximum length = 156 mm, blade width = 140 mm, poll length = 45 mm, poll width = 37 mm, length of the eye for the haft = 27 mm; judging by size and weight of the tool, the wooden haft was probably 800 to 1000 mm long.

Pieces with a similar morphology are relatively well-known in Moldavia (fig. 3, type B); they have been identified at Baia¹⁹, Belcești²⁰, Câmpulung Moldovenesc²¹, Coșna²², Cozănești²³, Dărmănești²⁴, Fedești²⁵, Lespezi²⁶, Negoiești²⁷, Pâhnești²⁸, Piatra Neamț²⁹, Siret³⁰, Șuletea³¹, Suceava³², Târgu Neamț³³, Târgu Trotuș³⁴, Vatra Dornei³⁵, Vutcani³⁶, etc. (fig. 5). Axes of the same type were founded in Poland³⁷, Russia³⁸, Serbia and Croatia³⁹.

¹⁶ B. A. Kolčín, op. cit. (n. 13), p. 148, fig. 97/17. For discussions related to the assignment of decorated pieces, sometimes with initial letters, to some political or military leaders, see also Em. I. Emandi, op. cit. (n. 6), p. 37.

¹⁷ A. Paragină, *Habitatul medieval la curbura exterioară a Carpaților în secolele X–XV*, Ed. Istros, Brăila, 2002, pl. XX/2.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 117, no. 19.

¹⁹ Eug. Neamțu, V. Neamțu, St. Cheptea, *Orașul medieval Baia în secolele XIV–XVII. II. Cercetările arheologice din anii 1977–1980*, Ed. Junimea, Iași, 1984, p. 126, fig. 45/1.

²⁰ V. Chirica, M. Tanasachi, *Repertoriul arheologic al județului Iași*, II, Iași, 1985, fig. 57/1.

²¹ Em. I. Emandi, op. cit. (n. 6), p. 40, fig. 10/6.

²² *Ibidem*, fig. 10/1.

²³ V. Spinei, *Moldova în secolele XI–XIV*, Ed. Universitas, Chișinău, 1994, fig. 4/6.

²⁴ C. Scorpan, *L'ensemble archéologiques féodal de Bâta Doamnei*, in *Dacia*, N.S., IX, 1965, p. 450, fig. 7/4; V. Spinei, *Unele considerații cu privire la descoperirile arheologice din Moldova din secolul al XII-lea până în prima jumătate a secolului al XIV-lea*, in *SCIVA*, 21, 1970, 4, pp. 612–613, fig. 10/2; V. Spinei, *Contribuții la istoria spațiului est-carpatic din secolul al XI-lea până la invazia mongolă din 1241*, in *Memoria Antiquitatis (MemAntiq)*, VI–VII, 1981, p. 115, fig. 15/2.

²⁵ G. Coman, *Statornicie, continuitate. Repertoriul arheologic al județului Vaslui*, București, 1980, p. 234, fig. 154/5.

²⁶ V. Chirica, M. Tanasachi, op. cit. (n. 20), I, Iași, 1984, fig. 11/5.

²⁷ R. Popovici, *Negoiești, un village de la zone de Neamț dans les XI^e–XVII^e siècles*, in *ArhMold*, XXV, 2004, p. 244, fig. 6/2.

²⁸ G. Coman, op. cit. (n. 25), p. 234, fig. 53/10.

²⁹ Em. I. Emandi, op. cit. (n. 6), p. 40, fig. 11/5.

³⁰ V. Spinei, C. Asăvoaie, *Date preliminare privind rezultatele săpăturilor din 1992 de la Siret*, in *ArhMold*, XVI, 1993, p. 217, fig. 1/9.

³¹ Em. I. Emandi, op. cit. (n. 6), p. 40, fig. 11/4.

³² *Ibidem*, fig. 16/1–2.

³³ A. Bătrâna, Gh. Sion, *Locuința din a doua jumătate a secolului XIV de la Târgu Neamț*, in *SCIVA*, 57, 2006, 1–4, fig. 5, not numbered (4?).

³⁴ Al. Artimon, *Descoperirile arheologice de la Tg. Trotuș din anii 1983–1986*, in *Carpica*, XVIII–XIX, 1987, pp. 329–330; fig. 13/5, 15/4; Al. Artimon, *Civilizația medievală urbană din secolele XIV–XVII (Bacău, Tg. Trotuș, Adjud)*, Bacău, 1998, pp. 118–120; fig. 58/11, 13; 87/5; 88/5.

³⁵ Em. I. Emandi, op. cit. (n. 6), p. 40, fig. 10/5.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, fig. 10/7.

³⁷ M. Rulewicz, *Tymczasowe wyniki badań archeologicznych na Podzamczu w Szczecinie, prowadzonych w latach 1975–1978*, in *Sprawozdania archeologiczne*, 36, 1984, fig. 12/2.

³⁸ V. V. Sedov, *Vostočnye slavjane v VI–XIII vv.*, Moskva, 1982, pp. 183–186, pl. LVII/8.

³⁹ B. M. Vrdoljak, *Starokršćanska bazilika i ranosrednjovjekovna nekropola na Rešetarici kod Livna*, in *Starohrvatska prosvjeta*, III, 18, Split, 1988 [1990], pp. 153–154, pl. XXII/12.

The general aspect of these artifacts and their relatively frequent discovery in the inventory of some dwellings suggest everyday usage. Most probably, the axes of this type played a secondary part in military actions. The piece from Tulucești has a rounded poll without usage traces, while other axes have traces on that part that attest to their dual usage, cutting/chopping and hammering.

Most of the specialists interested in the typology of these tools consider that they belong to the 13th–14th centuries, but some of the artifacts have been identified in dwellings dated to the 15th century, judging by their inventory⁴⁰.

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Fig. 1. Hammer-axe found at Tulucești (photo and drawing).

Fig. 2. Axe found at Tulucești (photo and drawing).

Fig. 3. Places with finds in Moldavia: Type A. hammer-axes: Bălteni, Iași, Piatra Neamț, Mândrești, Murgeni, Tulucești, Vaslui; Type B. axes: Câmpulung, Coșna, Cozânești, Dărmănești, Piatra Neamț, Suceava, Șuletea, Vatra Dornei, Vutcani.

Fig. 4. Hammer-axes of type A: 1. Bălteni, 2. Curcani, 3. Gugești, 4. Murgeni, 5. Mândrești, 6. Iași, 7. Piatra Neamț, 8. Tulucești, 9. Vaslui.

Fig. 5. Axes of type B: 1. Câmpulung, 2. Coșna, 3. Cozânești, 4. Dărmănești, 5. Piatra Neamț, 6. Suceava, 7. Șuletea, 8. Vatra Dornei, 9. Vutcani.

⁴⁰ P. Diaconu, S. Baraschi, *Păciul lui Soare. II. Așezarea medievală*, Ed. Academiei R.S.R., București, 1977, pp. 138; Eug. Neamțu, V. Neamțu, St. Cheptea, op. cit. (n. 19), I, Ed. Junimea, Iași, 1980, pp. 85–86; *Ibidem*, II, 1984, p. 126; V. Spinei, C. Asăvoaie, op. cit. (n. 27), p. 217; Em. I. Emandi, op. cit. (n. 6), p. 40.

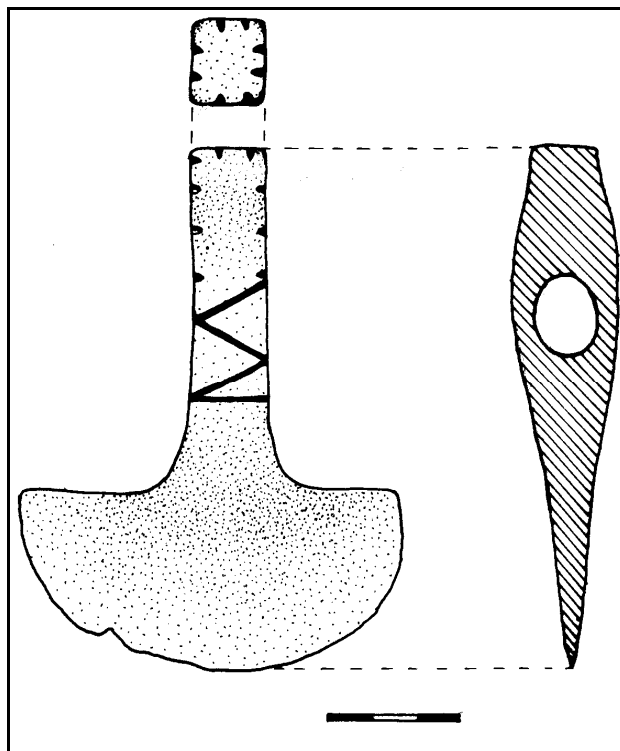


Fig. 1. Axe-hammer found in Tulucești (photo and drawing).

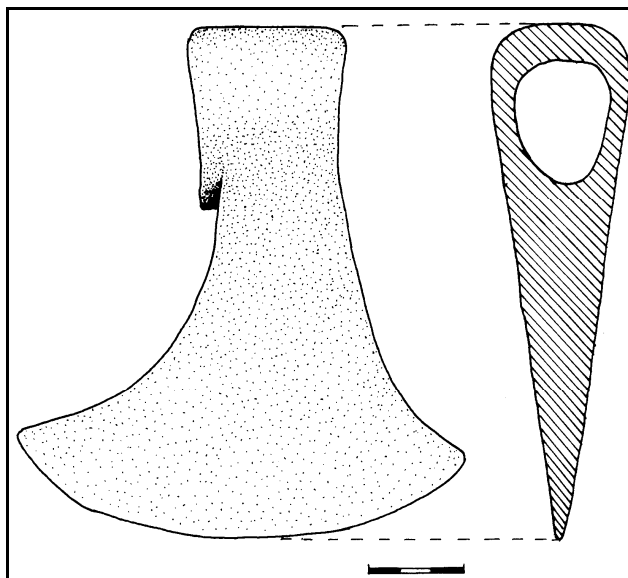


Fig. 2. Axe found in Tulucești (photo and drawing).

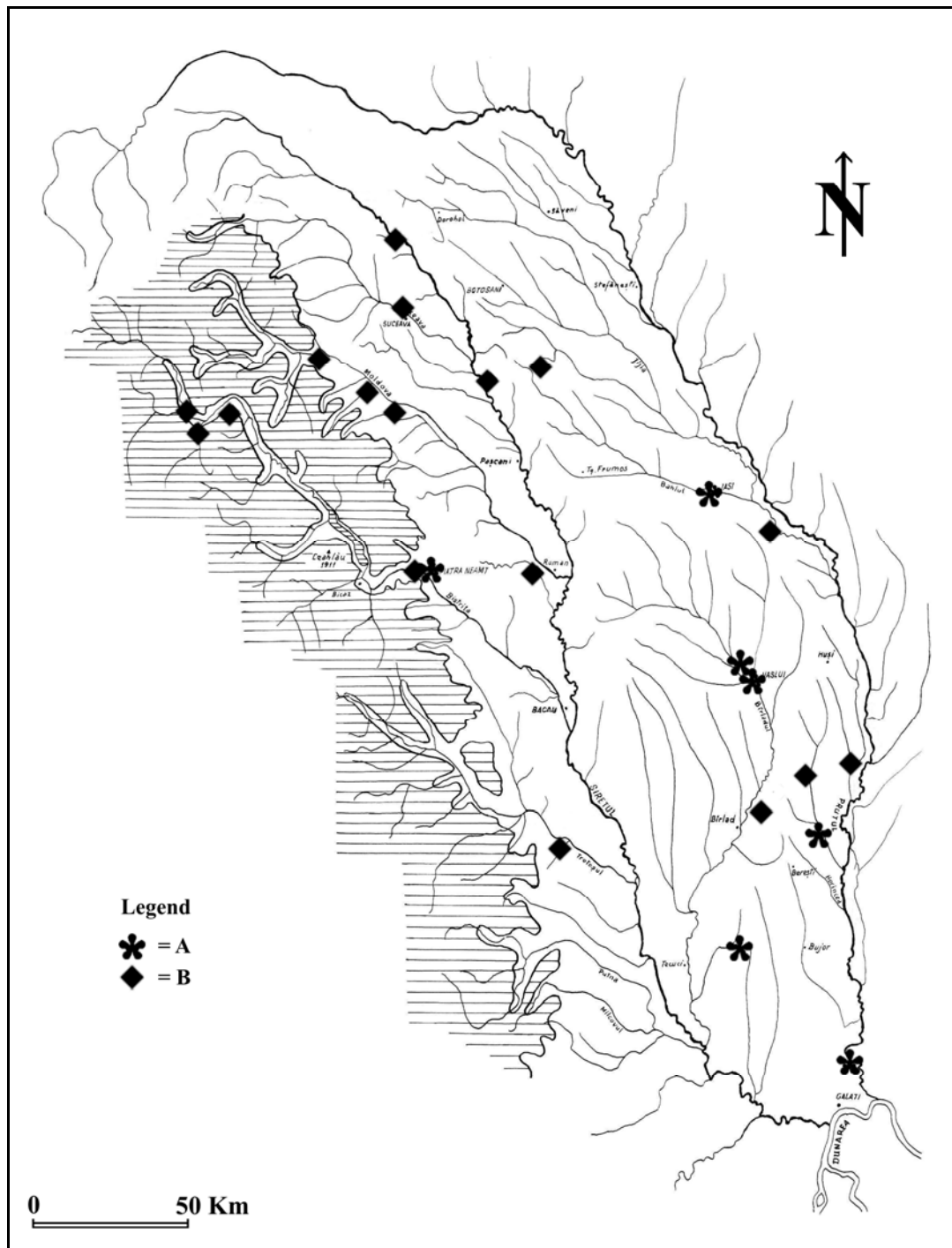


Fig. 3. Places with finds in Moldavia: Type A. hammer-axes: Bălteni, Iași, Piatra Neamț, Mândrești, Murgeni, Tulucești, Vaslui. Type B. axes: Câmpulung, Coșna, Cozânești, Dărmănești, Piatra Neamț, Suceava, Șuletea, Vatra Dornei, Vutcani.

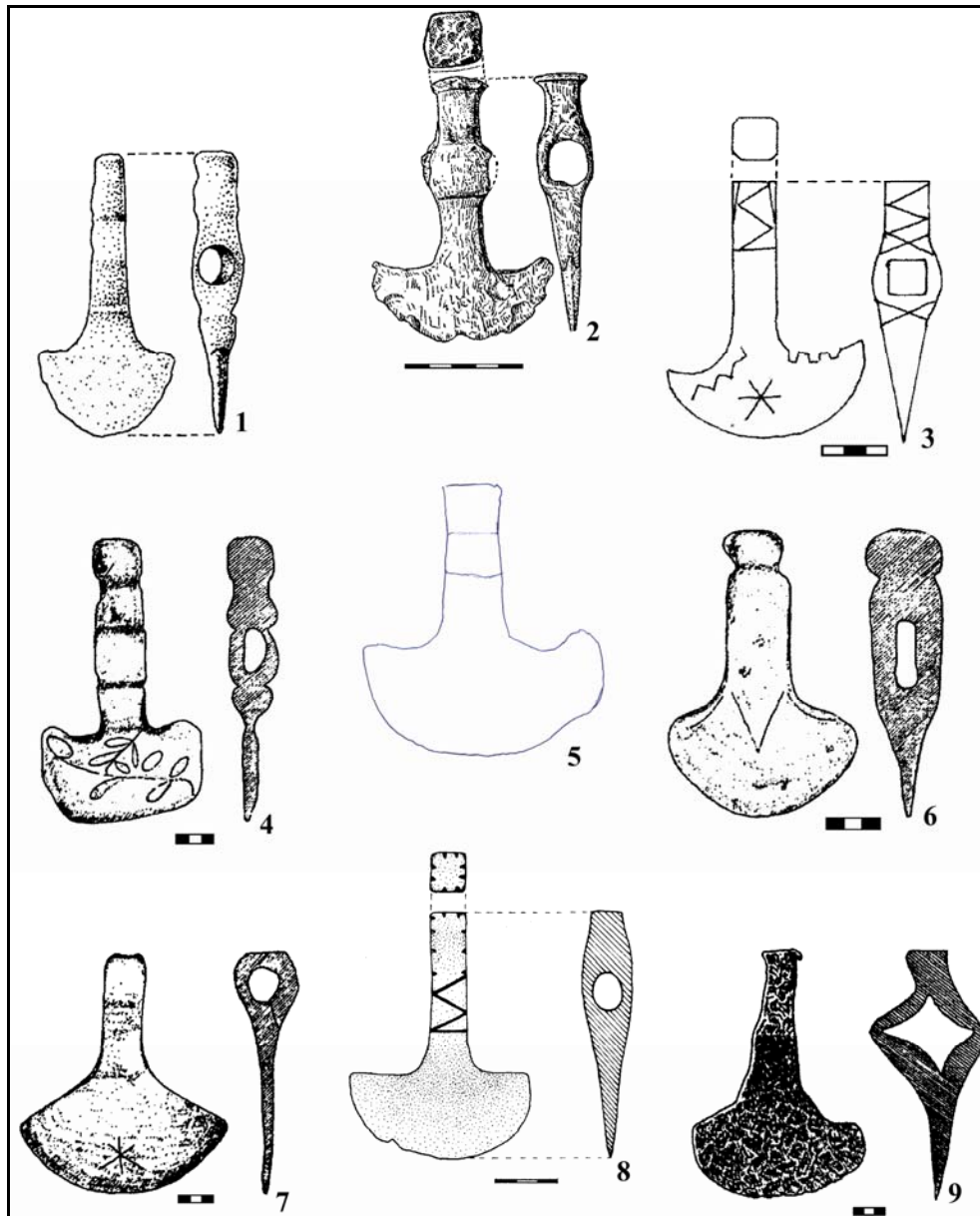


Fig. 4. Hammer-axes of type A: 1. Bălteni (after D. Gh. Teodor), 2. Curcani (after M. Comșa, C. Deculescu), 3. Gugești (after A. Paragină), 4. Murgeni (after Em. I. Emandi), 5. Mândrești (after C. Croitoru), 6. Iași (after Em. I. Emandi), 7. Piatra Neamț (after Em. I. Emandi), 8. Tulucești (after C. Croitoru), 9. Vaslui (after Em. I. Emandi).

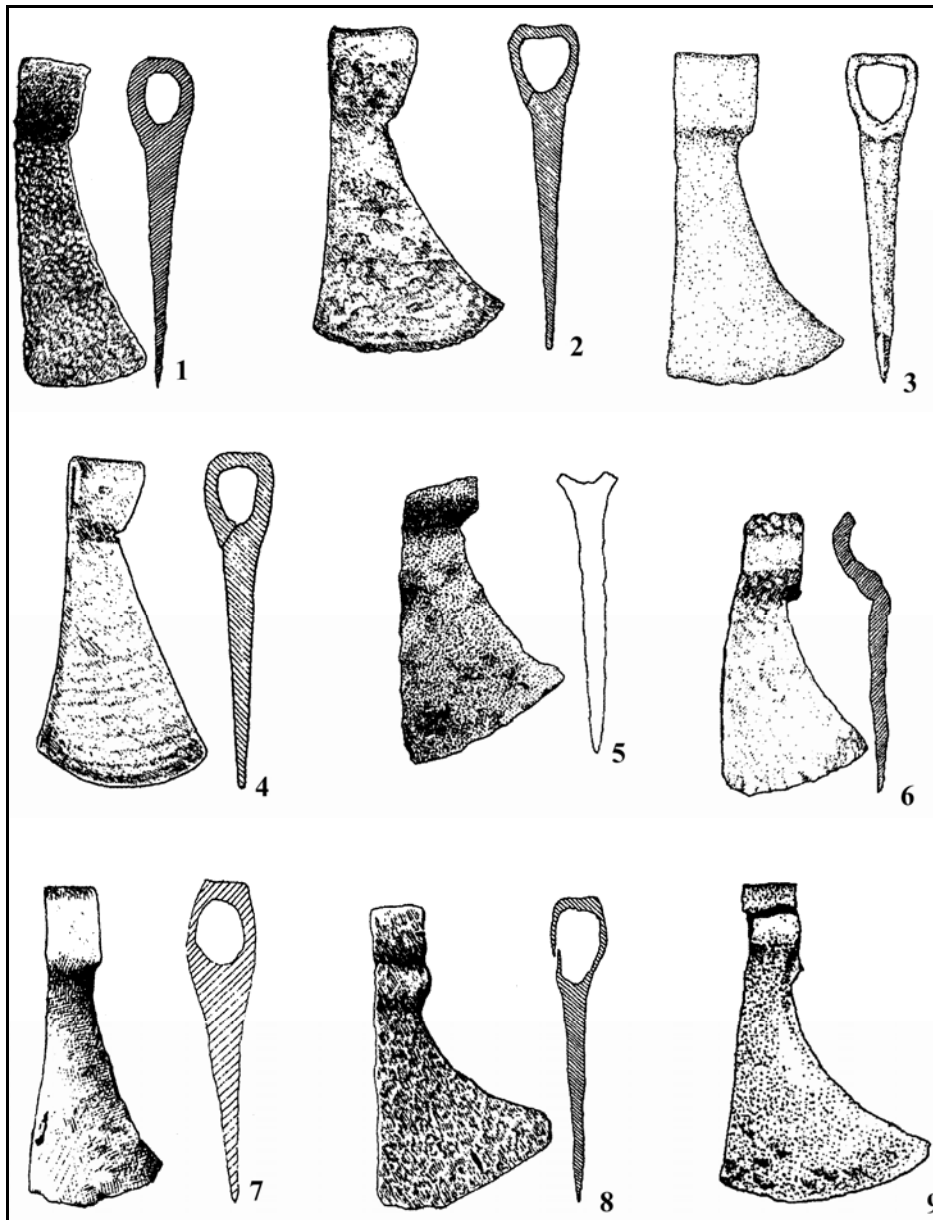


Fig. 5. Axes of type B: 1. Câmpulung, 2. Coșna (after Em. I. Emandi), 3. Cozănești (after V. Spinei), 4. Dărmănești (after C. Scorpan), 5. Piatra Neamț, 6. Suceava, 7. Șuletea, 8. Vatra Dornei, 9. Vutcani (after Em. I. Emandi).

