INCINERATION, INHUMATION AND BIRITUALISM

BY
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Abstract:
As is well known, burial has a most prominent position among the rites of passage, which explains why it also enjoys, alongside other particular domains, special consideration on part of archaeology.
The archaeological research carried out in the ancient cemetery from Branişte–Nemţişor (Neamţ County), attributed to the Carpathian tumuli culture (4th century AD), has revealed a particular case: even though the necropolis is characterised by the use of incineration, it was truly surprising to discover an inhumation tomb alongside an incineration one, both housed by the same barrow.
Tumulus no. 4, first explored in 1992, even though largely eroded by agricultural works, it nevertheless yielded several archaeological complexes. Foremost was a platform of fired earth, corresponding to an incineration pyre. Other notable discoveries were the numerous pits (23) that were in some cases located outside of the area with fire debris, in other cases preceded it, or even ran through it; it can be assumed that some of the pits were used for implanting the poles that supported the pyre.
Outside of the fire-debris area, as well as under the aforementioned pits, right on top of the living floor, a skeleton was discovered, which belonged to a foetus according to the anthropological analysis.
The inhumation of small children has been recorded in Europe as early as the Neolithic period, and continued until much later times, during the age of the Roman Empire, as has also been also documented in Daco-Roman necropoleis of the 2nd – 3rd centuries AD.
The funerary structure, which supported the pyre and the cot on which the deceased lay, was erected right after the burial of the foetus. This was followed by the incineration and the covering of all the remains with a layer of earth, which in time was destroyed by the aforementioned agricultural activity.
From the brief exposition above, it can be stated that the necropolis from Branişte–Nemţişor was of the incineration type. However, this rite does not exclude the use of inhumation, on account of certain customs that often can only by presumed.
We can also mention the controversy regarding the Sarmatian or Dacian inhumations in the cemeteries from Roman and Free Dacia.
Drawing from the considerations concerning the inhumation tomb from Branişte, it can be stated that in this case we have a rare instance of an agreement between the archaeological record, the anthropological analysis and the ancient source.
Keywords: *Carpathian tumuli culture; Branişte – Nemţişor cemetery; incineration; inhumation; foetus.*

Funerals constitute one of the most important rites of passage[1], which explains to a large extent the prominence that archaeology bestows to it. Nonetheless, the specialised studies have often dealt with information that is hard to make sense of, and it is not seldom that the analysis is taken over by supposition. The research efforts, though still lacking, have nevertheless been decisively dynamic.

The archaeological research carried out in the ancient cemetery from Branişte–Nemţişor (Neamţ County), attributed to the Carpathian tumuli culture (4th century AD)[2], has revealed a particular case: even though the necropolis is characterised by the use of incineration, it was truly surprising to discover an inhumation tomb alongside an incineration one, both housed by the same barrow.

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[1] VAN GENNEP 1996: 131-146.

[2] MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 1980: 181-207; MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 1997: 833-878; MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 1999: 313-332.

Tumulus no. 4 (1992) is part of the same cluster of barrows from the central part of the necropolis, and placed more towards the North-West of the first circle of monuments (Pl. I). As in other tumuli, the flattening caused by agricultural works was quite strong, so that its maximum height, at the moment of my field survey, was 0.10 m (!)[3], and the grave's ancient casing was totally destroyed. Moreover, the layer of ploughed dirt (ca. 0.15 m thick) was removed at the start of the archaeological excavations, meaning that the depths from the plan and profile drawings should be adjusted accordingly. The tumulus was roughly hemispherical in shape (diam. = ca. 11 m). The raising of the funerary mound started by setting-up a surface on top of the living soil. No structure meant to mark or protect the monument (circular ditch, stones, etc.) has been identified. Nonetheless, as we shall see, we can speak about the existence of a specially-designed funerary structure.

Stratigraphy

With respect to the stratigraphy, the vegetal soil, of a light grey colour and crumbly, reached – 0.10 m; it was followed at – 0.10 to – 0.21 m by a dense soil, dark-chestnut in colour and with red and black spots, alongside ash, charcoal[4], burnt bones, and ceramic fragments with traces of secondary firing, spread across a portion of the burnt earth. The following layer was the living floor, of a yellow colour and mixed with gravel.

Feature no. 1 comprised an extensive area of burnt earth, of roughly oval shape (diam. = ca. 5×7 m), red in colour and displaying traces of the pyre. The burnt bones discovered in this complex were of both human and animal origin (horse, cattle, juvenile swines, ovicaprids); the unburnt remains of a rodent (mouse) were also found.

Just like in other barrows from Branişte, a great part of the burnt earth, corresponding to the pyre, was found in the eastern part of the mound. The examination of the profiles (Pl. II.C and D) reveals, as already shown, that the casing and intermediary layer between the casing and the level of the funerary complex itself was absent when the archaeological excavations were recommenced in the necropolis. The area covered by complex no. 1 reached ca. 40 sqm.

Pits

The tumulus contained several pits, which were placed outside of the mass of fire debris (under it or towards the exterior), while others, much fewer, perforated it. Another issue raised by the presence of the pits is of chronological nature, since some of them – as I will try to show – preceded the pyre and the firing of the deceased (Pl. II.A).

Pit no. 1 appeared under an area of gravel, at – 0.16 m, under the platform of burnt earth (T4/B). The pit was circular in the plan (diam. = 0.33 m) and cylindrical in the profile, and had a depth of 0.25 m. It was filled with: red burnt earth, ash, charcoal, burnt bones from an ovicaprid[5], and secondary-fired ceramics.

Pit no. 2 was found under the platform of burnt earth, at – 0.22 m. It was circular in the plan (diam. = 0.30 m), cylindrical in the profile, and had a depth of 0.40 m. It was filled with fragments of wall daubing (?)[6], red fire debris, ash, charcoal, burnt bones from an ovicaprid, and secondary-fired ceramics.

Pit no. 3 appeared at – 0.25 m under the platform of burnt earth (T4/A). The pit was circular in the plan (diam. = 0.20 m), cylindrical in the profile, and 0.42 m deep. Filling: fine earth (black and dark-yellow),

[3] It was initially 1 m high.

[4] LUPU, MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2011: 398 and Tab. 2: the analysis of the resulting charcoal led to the identification of several tree species (spruce fir, beech) used for the pyre.

[5] The identification of the human and faunal bone materials collected from this barrow was made by Dr. Maria Ştirbu and Dr. Angela Simalcsik, to whom I am deeply grateful.

[6] BABEŞ, MIRIŢOIU 2011: 110, 115-117 and 121.

black and red fire debris, burnt pebbles, charcoal, burnt bones from ovicaprids and pigs, as well as secondary-fired (until scorifiation) ceramics.

Pit no. 4 appeared at – 0.21 m (T4/A). It was oval in the plan (diam. = 0.30 × 0.35 m), cylindrical in profile, and 0.40 m in depth. Filling: earth and burnt swine bones.

Pit no. 5 appeared at – 0.21 m (T4/B). It was circular in the plan (diam. = 0.38 m), frustoconical in the profile, and 0.43 m in depth. Filling: fine black and yellow earth, red fire debris, pebbles, ash, charcoal, burnt ovicaprid and swine bones, secondary-fired ceramics.

Pit no 6 appeared at – 0.16 m (T4/B). It was circular in the plan (diam. = 0.30 m), frustoconical in the profile, and 0.45 m in depth. Filling: pigmented earth, gravel towards the bottom, petrified ash[7], charcoal, burnt cattle and swine bones, secondary-fired ceramics.

Pit no. 7 was found at – 0.21 m (T4/B). It was circular in the plan (diam. = 0.30 m), cylindrical in the profile, and 0.43 m in depth. The walls and the bottom of the pit were plated with stones and gravel. Filling: pigmented brown earth, red and black fire debris, charcoal, stones.

Pit no. 8 was found at – 0.20 m (T4/B), outside of the firing platform. It was circular in the plan (diam. = 0.30 m), frustoconical in the profile, and with a depth of 0.43 m. The walls and the bottom of the pit were plated with stones and gravel. Filling: pigmented fine black earth, charcoal and secondary-fired ceramics.

Pit no. 9 appeared at – 0.25, outside of the firing platform (T4/D). It was circular in the plan (diam. = 0.40 m), hemispherical in the profile, and 0.25 m in depth. Filling: red fire debris, charcoal, secondary-fired ceramics, and burnt ovicaprid (?) bones.

Pit no. 10 was found at – 0.63 m, near Pit no. 9, outside of the firing platform (T4/C). It was circular in the plane (diam. = 0.29 m), cylindrical in the profile and with a depth of 0.13 m. Filling: dark-yellow earth, pebbles and charcoal.

Pit no. 11 appeared at – 0.41 m, outside of the firing platform (T4/C). It was circular in the plan (diam. = 0.20 m), hemispherical in the profile and 0.18 m in depth. Filling: clayish yellow earth, ash, a large amount of charcoal, secondary-fired ceramics, and the burnt bones of an ovicaprid. Other contents of the pit include a piece of oxidised bronze sheet, a fragmented amphora, and pieces from a quality green-glass vase.

Pit no. 12 was found at – 0.20 m, outside of the firing platform (T4/B). It was circular in the plan (diam. = 0.29 m), cylindrical in the profile and ca. 0.30 m in depth. Filling: pigmented dark-yellow earth, red fire debris, pebbles, and charcoal.

Pit no. 13 was found at – 0.25 m, outside the firing platform (T4/B). It was circular in the plan (diam. = 0.36 m), cylindrical in the profile and 0.31 m in depth. Filling: yellow earth with gravel and charcoal, red and black fire debris.

Pit no. 14 was initially reported as a blotch of fire debris and charcoal (at – 0.70 m), but fully revealed at – 1.0 m, outside of the firing platform (T4/D). It was circular in the plan (diam. = 0.25 m), hemispherical in the profile, and 0.30 m in depth. Filling: clayish yellow earth pigmented with red and black, some charcoal.

Pit no. 15 appeared in a gravel lens at – 0.52 m, outside of the firing platform (T4/B). It was circular in the plan (diam. = 0.30 m), hemispherical in the profile and ~0.14 m in depth. Filling: red and black pigmented earth, secondary-fired ceramics, and burnt human and animal (cattle, swine, ovicaprid) bones.

Pit no. 16 appeared at – 0.40 m, outside of the firing platform (T4/C). It was oval in the plan (diam. = 0.30×0.20 m), hemispherical in the profile, and 0.20 m in depth. Filling: pigmented yellow earth and red fire debris.

Pit no. 17 appeared near Pit no. 11, at – 0.14 m, outside of the firing platform (T4/C). It was circular in the plan (diam. = 0.35 m), hemispherical in profile, and ca. 0.27 m in depth. Filling: yellow earth pigmented with red fire debris and charcoal, secondary-fired ceramics, burnt ovicaprid bones, and the bones of a rodent (mouse?). Most likely, the rodent excavated Pit no. 17 and transported into it a part of the filling of Pit no. 11.

[7] The petrified ash can indicate the forced putting out of the fire by throwing water over it.

Pit no. 18 appeared at – 0.41 m, outside of the firing platform (T4/C). It was circular in the plan (diam. = 0.15 m), cylindrical in the profile and with a depth of 0.12 m. Filling: yellow earth, a great quantity of ash, charcoal, and a piece of unburnt reddish-brown timber.

Pit no. 19 appeared at ca. – 0.10 m, under the platform of burnt earth (T4/A). It was circular in the plan (diam. = 0.35 m), cylindrical in the profile, and 0.25 m deep. Filling: pigmented earth, some charcoal, secondary-fired ceramics, and burnt ovicaprid bones.

Pit no. 20 appeared in sectors B and C, at – 0.10 m, outside of the firing platform. The pit was circular in the plan (diam. = 0.27 m), it was campaniform in the profile, and was 0.25 m deep. Filling: yellow earth pigmented with red and black, some charcoal. The pit was located at the edge of the inhumation tomb.

Pit no. 21 appeared between T4/A and B, near pit no. 5, at ca. – 0.20 m. It too seems to have been an animal burrow, since it contained only the bone remains of a rodent (mouse).

Pit no. 22 appeared between T4/B and C, near Pit no. 20, outside of the firing platform, at ca. – 0.48 m, slightly cutting through the pit of the inhumation tomb. It was circular in the plan (diam. = 0.18 m), cylindrical in the profile, and 0.10 m deep. Filling: pigmented earth, some charcoal, and burnt bones of small dimensions and uncertain provenance.

Pit no. 23 appeared between T4/C and D, at – 0.40 m, slightly oval in the plan (0.40 × 0.34 m), campaniform in the profile, and 0.40 m deep. Filling: pigmented earth (red and black), a large quantity of charcoal and secondary-fired ceramics, fragmentary "local" glass[8], a piece of a antler comb with a bronze rivet, a piece of bronze sheet, and a great quantity of burnt bones from a youth (*juvenis*) or an adult, but also from a swine.

Pit no. 24 is not marked in the plan because it belonged to an individual inhumed on a bed of river stones and gravel, for which it was not possible to distinguish the corresponding pit (Pl. II.B); in any case, pits nos. 20 and 22 overlap the skeleton, the latter found at ca. – 0.58 m, in a supine position and aligned NE–SW, with the arms along the body and the head facing West (to the right). As already mentioned, the skeleton lay on stones and was likewise surrounded by wider stones, revealing the care and intent of those that interred the body. Because the gravel represents in this case the living floor, we can conclude that the deceased was laid here before the other funerary complexes were raised, which, as it can be admitted, destroyed the inhumation pit or, perhaps, it did not even exist and the skeleton was deposited simultaneously with the building of the entire monument. The anthropological analysis showed that the skeleton belonged to a foetus or premature newborn (week 36–37 of the gestation period). Near the skeleton there were also several "pellets" of fired (?) earth, for which no plausible explanation can be advanced at this point.

Above the platform of fired earth of complex no. 1 there were found, laid in the layer deposited after the cremation, various burnt remains of offerings, particularly fragmented ceramics, spread randomly, which in multiple cases was possible to complete those found in the pits. This confirms the simultaneity of the elements of complex no. 1, specifically the burnt surface and the pits (Table), even if the respective pottery was ritualistically broken before or during combustion.

The burnt bones of animals, deposited complete or partially in various places of the tumulus, belonged to domestic species (horse, cattle, young swines, ovicaprids), which is not without relevance, as it can conclusively illustrate the chapter regarding the occupations of the community that owned the cemetery from Branişte.

Another remark again supports the hypothesis about the existence of a building on the spot of the incineration place: 16 pits mark the sides of a quadrilateral: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 18, 20, 22 (Pl. II.A). We cannot also take into consideration Pit no. 14, which was found much further from the firing

[8] In some places there were also small agglomerations of vitreous, whitish and very friable paste – apparently affected by fire, water and soil –, in which shapes are hard to distinguish. Though the respective substance is similar to glass in appearance, it does not possess the regular, known characteristics of it. As the chemical analyses have shown, this type of glass does not have a crystallisation system, but is nonetheless a sodium silicate (ca. 49%), having, it seems, a local origin (Cf. CÎRCIUMARU, CÎRCIUMARU 1980: 221).

surface, nor pits nos. 17 and 21, since they seem to actually be animal burrows containing rodent (mouse) bones, alongside few archaeological materials that seem to have been transported from Pit no. 11 and, respectively, Pit no. 5.

TABLE. The content of the pits from Tumulus no. 4

pit	soil	stones	Fire debris	ash	charcoal	Human bones	cattle bones	Swine bones	ovi-caprid bones	bones of indeterminate origin	wheel-thrown ceramics	impor-ted ware	others
1	●		●	●	●				●		●		
2	●		●	●	●				●		●		
3	●	●	●		●			●	●		●		
4	●							●					
5	●	●	●	●	●			●	●		●		
6	●	●		●	●		●	●			●		
7	●	●	●		●								
8	●	●			●						●		
9	●		●		●				●		●	●	
10	●	●			●								
11	●			●	●				●		●	●	glass; buckle ?
12	●	●	●		●								
13	●	●	●		●								
14	●				●								
15	●					●	●	●	●		●		
16	●		●										
17	●		●						●	rodent	●	●	
18	●			●	●								
19	●				●				●		●		
20	●				●								
21	●		●							rodent			
22	●				●					●			
23	●				●	●		●			●		comb; buckle

An argument in support of the supposed existence of a funerary construction is also brought forward by the eleven pits (nos. 8, 9, 10 ,11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 18, 20, and 22) found outside of the firing surface. The second argument in favour of the above is represented by the four pits (nos. 1, 2, 3, and 19) whose openings were found under the firing platform. The third argument is that two pits (nos. 7 and 8) were entirely (the walls and the bottom) lined with stones, but did not contain any significant remains (bones or ceramics). The fourth argument is the complete absence of bone and ceramic materials from nine pits (nos. 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, and 20). Finally, the fifth argument could be the appearance of faunal remains in ten of the pits (nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 19, and 22). In this sense, relevant is also that burnt human osteological remains were found in only two of the pits (nos. 15 and 23), as well on top of the burnt surface.

Inventory

A. The category of hand-thrown pottery is weakly represented, and does not seem to be conclusive from the cultural point of view: *Fragmentary jar*, hand-worked, bulged and with a flat sole, unearthed in sector A from complex no. 1. The paste is coarse and with grog, unevenly fired, with a brown-black core and splotchy exterior caused by the secondary firing. *Miniaturized (?) pot*, hand-worked, found in sector A; broken in the past, only the lower fragmented part has survived. The paste is coarse, with grog, well fired. The colour is greyish-brown, with hues caused by the secondary firing.

B. The wheel-thrown pottery is preponderant and varied, particularly in terms of shape: 1. Tall *pot* with wide mouth and flat sole, wheel-thrown from a "gritty" paste, with hues caused by secondary firing; the item is decorated with five grooves (Pl. III.1). It was found in a fragmentary state in sectors A and B (complex no. 1), but also in Pit no. 9; 2. Bifrustoconical (bulged) *pot*, wheel-thrown, with a wide mouth and thin walls, found in sectors A and C, but also in pits nos. 3, 5, 11, and 23. The paste is of good quality, of grey colour, with hues caused by secondary firing; it has a round perforation on the neck (Pl. III.2); 3. Large *amphorette*, wheel-thrown, with two handles and flat sole (Pl. III.6). The paste is of good quality, greyish in colour, with hues caused by secondary firing. The fragments originate from sectors A and C (complex no. 1), but also from pits nos. 5, 9, 11, and 23; 4. Tall *mug*, wheel-thrown, with one handle, thin walls, and a flat sole (Pl. III.3). The item was strongly deformed (until scorification) by fire; its fragments were found in sectors A and D (complex no. 1), but also in pits nos. 3, 9, 11, and 23. The paste is fine, of greyish colour, with hue from secondary firing; the item is decorated on the shoulder with incisions; 5. One-handled *jug*, wheel-thrown from a good-quality paste, covered in a yellowish-grey slip with hues from the secondary firing; the item is deformed (Pl. III.5). Its fragments were collected from sectors A and C (complex no. 1), but also from pits nos. 2, 3, 9, and 23; 6. *Bowl* with wide mouth, wheel-thrown from a good-quality paste, grey in colour, with hues from secondary firing (Pl. III.4). Its fragments were collected from sector A (complex no. 1), but also from pits nos. 2, 3, 9, 19, and, 23; 7. Fragmentary *bowl* with a wide mouth, wheel-thrown from a good-quality paste, and grey in colour. It was unearthed in the central part of the burnt surface. The vessel may have been an urn (?), as it does not have traces of secondary firing; 8. Fragmentary *amphora*, possibly fusiform in shape, recovered from sectors A, B and C, and from pits nos. 9, 11 and 17. The paste is coarse ("grainy"), with sand and grog, and brick-like and yellowish-pink in colour[9]. It seems to have not undergone secondary firing.

Other objects, more or less damaged by fire, can also be mentioned: fragmentary bronze *fibula* (*kräftig profilierte Fibeln*)[10], partially melted and deformed; oxidised, of green colour. It was found in the N–S axis, between sectors B and C (complex no. 1). MIPN, N.I. 21930 g. *Bronze tube* of small dimensions. It was found in the N–S axis, between sectors B and C (complex no. 1). Unidentifiable fragment from an *iron sheet*. It was found in sector D from complex no. 1 (contemporary ?). "*Pearls*" or spherical fragments of melted bronze, which cannot be identified; they were found in sectors A, B and C of complex no. 1, but also in Pit no. 23. *Glass handle* (?) from an unidentifiable recipient, deformed by fire, translucid, and greenish in colour (discovered in Pit no. 11). *Plate* of a rectangular bronze buckle, with two parts and the prong affixed onto the body (?), with two perforations, damaged by fire and oxidation (discovered in Pit no. 11). Another rectangular bronze buckle *plate* with two parts and the prong affixed to the body (?), with four perforations, damaged by fire and oxidation (discovered in Pit no. 23). Rounded-D-shaped pronged bronze *buckle*, fired and oxidised (found in Pit no. 23). Fragmentary antler *comb* with bronze rivets (found in Pit no. 23)[11].

[9] OPAIȚ 2017: 213 and Pl. V.19a-b (Shelov F type).

[10] ALMGREN 1897: 44 and Fig. 82; DROBERJAR 1997: Fig. 60.3 (Uherský Brod); DROBERJAR 2016: 497-498 [Liste I, Fig. 1.1 (Nová Ves) and Fig. 1.7 (Camolodunum Gruppe 3)].

[11] All the materials resulting from the archaeological excavation are deposited and registered at the Museum of History in Piatra Neamț.

At the end of this section, it can be said that the inventory yielded by complex no. 1 of the barrow (the firing platform and the pits) falls into the same cultural and chronological data known for the Carpathian tumuli culture.

Reconstruction

The raising of the monument must have commenced with the preparation of the land, by uncovering and excavating down to the necessary depth the living soil, which in this case consisted of sand, river stones and gravel. In the first stage, the body of a premature newborn (*fetus*) was laid on this stone-and-gravel bed. The discovery of the respective inhumed individual is, to my knowledge, unique among Carpathian-tumuli necropoleis. Many explanations can be advanced for this discovery, but only by extending the research it will be possible to provide a working solution.

Speculations on this topic can be plenty, but at the moment only the following warrant attention: 1. The result of a failed pregnancy, the foetus was inhumed because it was not recognised as a member of the community, with full religious and social rights. This practice – sufficiently credible but still somewhat uncertain – has been encountered in many regions of pre- and proto-historical Europe (Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, up to the 3rd century AD), and refers to a precise moment of the death of an infant: between 8 months in the womb and 1-2 months after birth (according to Pliny the Elder, toothless children were not incinerated)[12]. Even though we do not have complete anthropological data, it seems that this custom survived until late (2nd – 3rd centuries AD); revealing in this sense are both of the cemeteries from Văleni, where ca. 18% of the burials were in inhumation graves, all belonging to children. It is clear that inhumation was used by the same population that practiced incineration in this cemetery; this situation is found in most of the Dacian and Daco-Roman necropoleis of the same period[13]; 2. It can also be hypothesised that the foetus was the progeny of a mixed coupling, between a member of the base community and one from a foreign population, a situation that precluded a burial according to the established custom; 3. Another plausible hypothesis is that this newborn represented a sacrifice/offering for the main owner of the barrow grave. In any case, from the data above, we can also assume the relatedness between the foetus and the incinerated individual[14].

The next stage occurred almost immediately, and consisted in the erection of a funerary scaffolding, starting with the digging of pits for implanting the pillars that supported the platform onto which the body of a young male (or female?) was laid. The inflammable materials necessary for combustion were placed under this catafalque, including foremost coniferous timber and beech wood, a species present in almost all the monuments from Branişte that have been investigated[15].

The respective pits, already discussed, numbering 16 (pits nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 16, 18, 20, and 22), defined a rectangular area. Part of the pits delineated the southern and western sides of the quadrilater, with some not containing bone and ceramic remains in their filling (pits nos. 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16, 18, and 20), while others, which formed the northern and southern sides, yielded faunal materials (pits nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, and 22). This situation cannot be explained at this stage of research.

It seems that after the cremation took place, a part of the human bone remains was picked and gathered in two of the pits (nos. 15 and 23).

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[12] BAILLS-TALBI, DASEN 2008: 598-601;TRANOY, BLAIZOT *et alii* 2009: 305-310; LEVIŢKI 2004: 380-388; SÎRBU 2009: 50-62; BABEŞ, MIRIŢOIU 2011: 113 (A similar tomb is mentioned at Grădiştea – Coslogeni as well).

[13] IONIŢĂ, URSACHE 1968: 222-225; IONIŢĂ, URSACHI 1988: 84, 86, 95, and 98; BABEŞ 1971: 27 and 31-32; POPILIAN 1980: 58-73; IONIŢĂ 1982: 62-73; BABEŞ, MIRIŢOIU 2011: 113 (Grădiştea-Coslogeni), 111-112 (Stelnița-Grădiştea Mare) and 113 (Grădiştea-Coslogeni).

[14] TRANOY, BLAIZOT *et alii* 2009: 299-302.

[15] LUPU, MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA 2011: 398 and 400 (tab. 2). On the selection of the tree species for the pyres, as well as on their building, see more information in BEL, BLAIZOT *et alii* 2009: 114-118.

Sometimes, the preparation works were not limited to raising the pyre, but could have also included the raising of other annexes, such as those that protected the structure from strong winds or foul weather in general. With respect to this issue, of particular usefulness would be palynological analyses, from which we could establish the season during which the burial took place.

A last stage was represented by the raising of the barrow itself, on which we unfortunately do not have any other data, since, as mentioned in the opening of this paper, the layers of earth that covered the pyre had been almost entirely removed by the time our excavation took place.

From the above it can be inferred that the incineration rite was employed in the necropolis from Branişte-Nemţişor. However, this finding does not exclude the use of inhumation, on account of certain customs that, often, can only be supposed, as in the present case, when it would have been possible to believe that the respective cemetery is biritual.

A digression concerning the inhumation graves from Dacian necropoleis. In the context of the explanations provided above for inhumations in 2nd – 3rd century cemeteries, we can also mention dispute prompted by the excavation of the Roman-era Dacian cemetery from Poienești[16].

Almost seven decades ago, the 2nd – 3rd century necropolis from Poienești, investigated and published by Professor Radu Vulpe, yielded 138 incineration and 23 inhumation graves, the latter distributed as follow: 17 children graves (two destroyed; six oriented N-S) and six adult graves (one destroyed, three without inventory and two oriented N-S, as at Branişte)[17]. The author assigned the children's graves to the Dacians and, separately, the adult ones to the 4th century[18]. Nevertheless, to the best of my knowledge, the skeletons from the inhumation tombs have not been subjected to detailed anthropological scrutiny[19].

For R. Vulpe, the inhumed individuals belonged to a lower social stratum (slaves, paupers) and did not have the means for being cremated after death; with respect to the children, they were found, on account of their age, in a subordinate position in which incineration was excluded[20].

The discovery from Poienești was followed by a second, similar one, namely the Roman-era Dacian cemetery from Gabăra – Moldoveni (formerly Gabăra – Porcești), where 36 inhumed individuals were brought to light, besides the 62 incineration graves. The occupants were laid on their backs and their orientation varied (two lost)[21].

At the start of the sixth decade of the last century, resuming and developing the thesis of Professor Ion Nestor[22], which argued for a Sarmatian origin of the inhumation tombs from Poienești and Gabăra, Gheorghe Bichir elaborated an entire theoretical scaffolding that, in brief, claimed and attempted to argue for the physical presence of Sarmatians within Dacian tribal communities[23].

Initially some of the researchers accepted the supposition launched by Gh. Bichir, only to reject it later, for reasons I will try to show. For instance, Professor D. Protase agreed in a first stage with the presence of Sarmatians in Dacian necropoleis of the 2nd – 3rd century, but only in the case of children and only for those east of the Carpathians[24], eventually admitting, following new and solid counterarguments, that all children graves from Poienești and Gabăra belonged to Dacians[25].

[16] VULPE 1953: 213-506.

[17] VULPE 1953: 311-418.

[18] VULPE 1953: 497 and 505.

[19] VULPE 1953: 468.

[20] VULPE 1953: 468.

[21] ANTONESCU 1961: 450; URSACHI 1969: 200.

[22] NESTOR 1960: 678-680.

[23] BICHIR 1961: 262 ("The Sarmatian character of the cemetery from Poinesti is also confirmed by the practice of cranial deformation in a number of individuals buried here"); BICHIR 1973: 36-44 and 176.

[24] PROTASE 1971a: 152 and 167-170. I also mention that the Daco-Roman cemetery from Obreja also produced four skeletons of children, two of which with deciduous teeth! (Cf. PROTASE 1971b: 147).

[25] PROTASE 1976: 75-84.

Actually, Gh. Bichir's assertion is hard to prove and admit by those familiar with the history of primitive societies – because of the very social organization, it was difficult or even impossible for an individual to be admitted and integrated into a different gentilic community than the original one[26].

Nonetheless, a radical shift concerning the inhumations from Poienești-type necropoleis occurred after 1968, when I. Ioniță and V. Ursachi, starting from the conclusive discoveries from Văleni and Gabăra, to which the one from Săbăoani was later added, demonstrated that the respective tombs undoubtedly belonged to a Dacian population[27].

At the same time, the argumentation employed by the Dr. I. Ioniță and Dr. V. Ursachi was bolstered by the anthropological analysis of the skeletons from Gabăra, which confirmed that there were no instances of artificial cranial deformation among the interred[28].

Another discovery that should not be omitted is the 1st – 2nd century native cemetery from Enisala (Dobrudja), which produced 37 incineration and nine inhumation graves, eight of which belonging to children not older than one-two (*infans I*)[29].

The same Dacian origin has been ascribed to the inhumation tombs from Roman Dacia, such as the clear case from Locusteni, with its 75 skeletons of children (25.87%), laying on their backs and their hands placed alongside the body, generally oriented N-S, just as at Branište (60.97%)[30].

M. Babeș, in his article about the discovery from Enisala, took another step towards untangling the aforementioned problematics[31], when he referred to the information provided by Pliny the Elder (*Nat. Ist.*, VII, 15, 68): "*Hominem priusquam genito dente cremari mos gentium non est*" (= "It is not a custom to cremate a person who died before his teeth came out")[32]. The same ancient authors adds that "among the Romans, cremation is not an old custom: in the past the dead were interred … And nevertheless many families preserved the old rites …" (VII, 55, 87)[33].

Also noteworthy is another of Pliny's account (*Nat. Hist.*, XI, 63, 166), joining those above, from which it can be drawn that people could be cremated only after reaching the age of seven months, when the deciduous teeth emerged: "While the rest of the animals are born with teeth, in humans they appear in the seventh month"[34].

As previously mentioned, the custom described above was attested since prehistory (Bronze Age, Hallstatt), during which children enjoyed a particular type of inhumation[35], a custom that persisted into the La Tène era among the Dacians, as evidenced by the from Brad[36] and the recent discovery from Hunedoara[37].

Drawing from the considerations concerning the inhumation tomb from Branište, it can be stated that in this case we have a rare instance of an agreement between the archaeological record, the anthropological analysis and the ancient source.

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[26] DURKHEIM 1995: 107 et seq., 143; VAN GENNEP 1996: 34-43.

[27] IONIȚĂ, URSACHE 1968: 213-220; IONIȚĂ, URSACHI 1988: 95 and 98; IONIȚĂ 1982: 63-70; IONIȚĂ 2010: 486; URSACHI 2010: 48, 90-92; SPÂNU 2011: 153-170 (a review of the problematics); SPÂNU 2012: 123 (the respective cemeteries are considered biritual).

[28] NECRASOV, BOTEZATU 1969: 203-205.

[29] BABEȘ 1971: 24-28 and 36-37.

[30] POPILIAN 1980: 103-105.

[31] BABEȘ 1971: 33, note 58.

[32] PLINIUS THE ELDER 2001: 37.

[33] PLINIUS THE ELDER 2001: 58.

[34] PLINIUS THE ELDER 2001: 208.

[35] DEDET 2008: 143-182; BAILLS-TALBI, DASEN 2008: 605; CHMIEL-CHRZANOWSKA 2016: 28-34. Also see the observations on the Tarnobrzeg group (Ha A), where, in the case of the incineration cemetery from Bachórz-Chodorówka, there were also found two inhumation graves, both belonging to children (Cf. GEDL 2001: 336-338); LEVIȚKI 2004: 380-388; RUSTOIU 2016: 314 and 322 (Sighișoara – Wietenberg).

[36] URSACHI 1995: 259, 261-263 (the 1st c. B.C. – the 1st A.D.).

[37] SÎRBU, DĂVÎNCĂ 2013: 200 (in Hunedoara, within the "Castle's Garden" ("Grădina Castelului"), there were discovered 20 inhumed children, all not older than one.

With respect to the inhumation graves of a number of adult individuals, found on rare occasions also in Dacian necropoleis of the 2nd – 3rd century, no viable hypothesis can be advanced at the moment of speaking; the challenge remains to deliver on the promise of returning to this interesting research theme.

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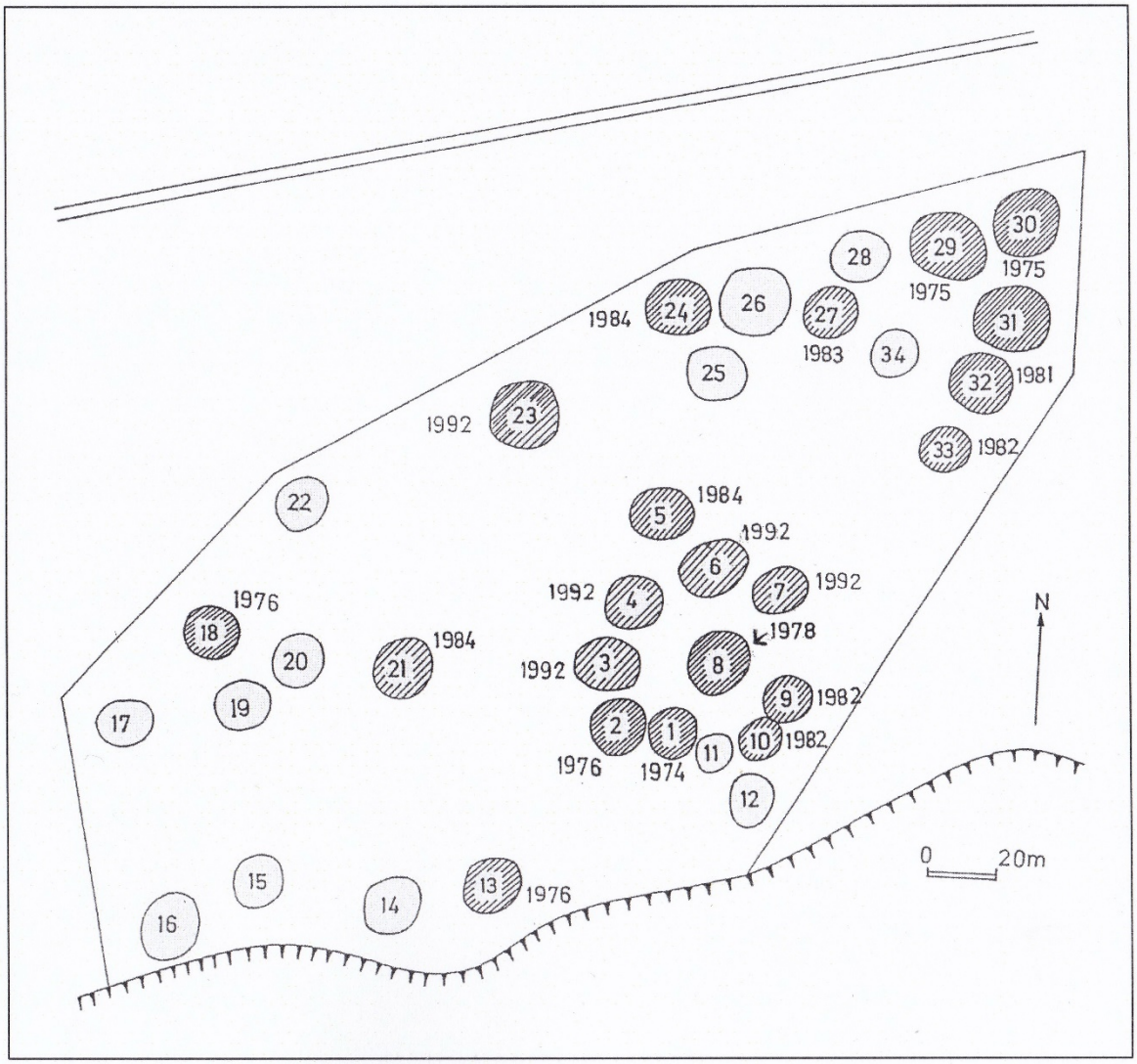
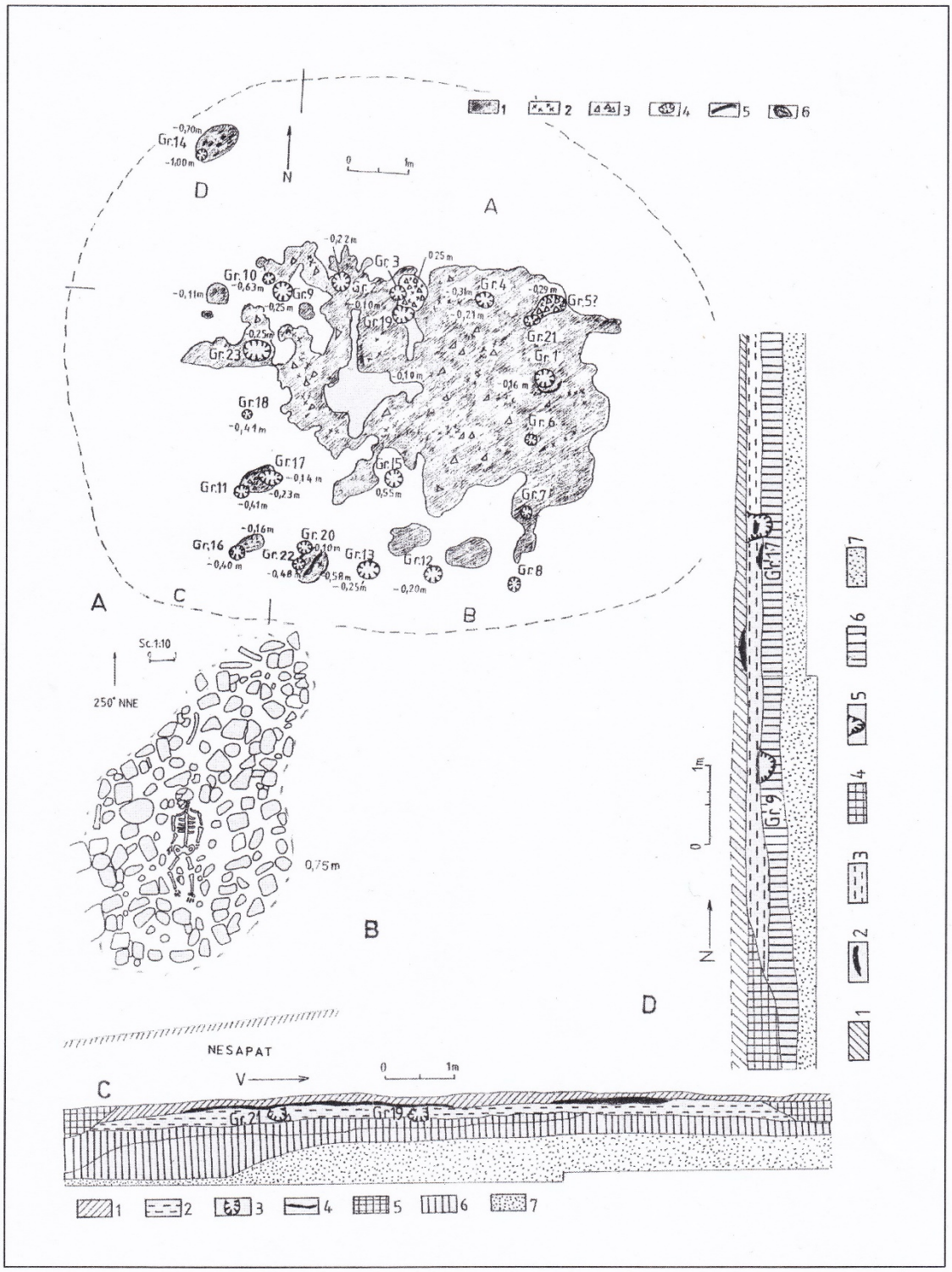
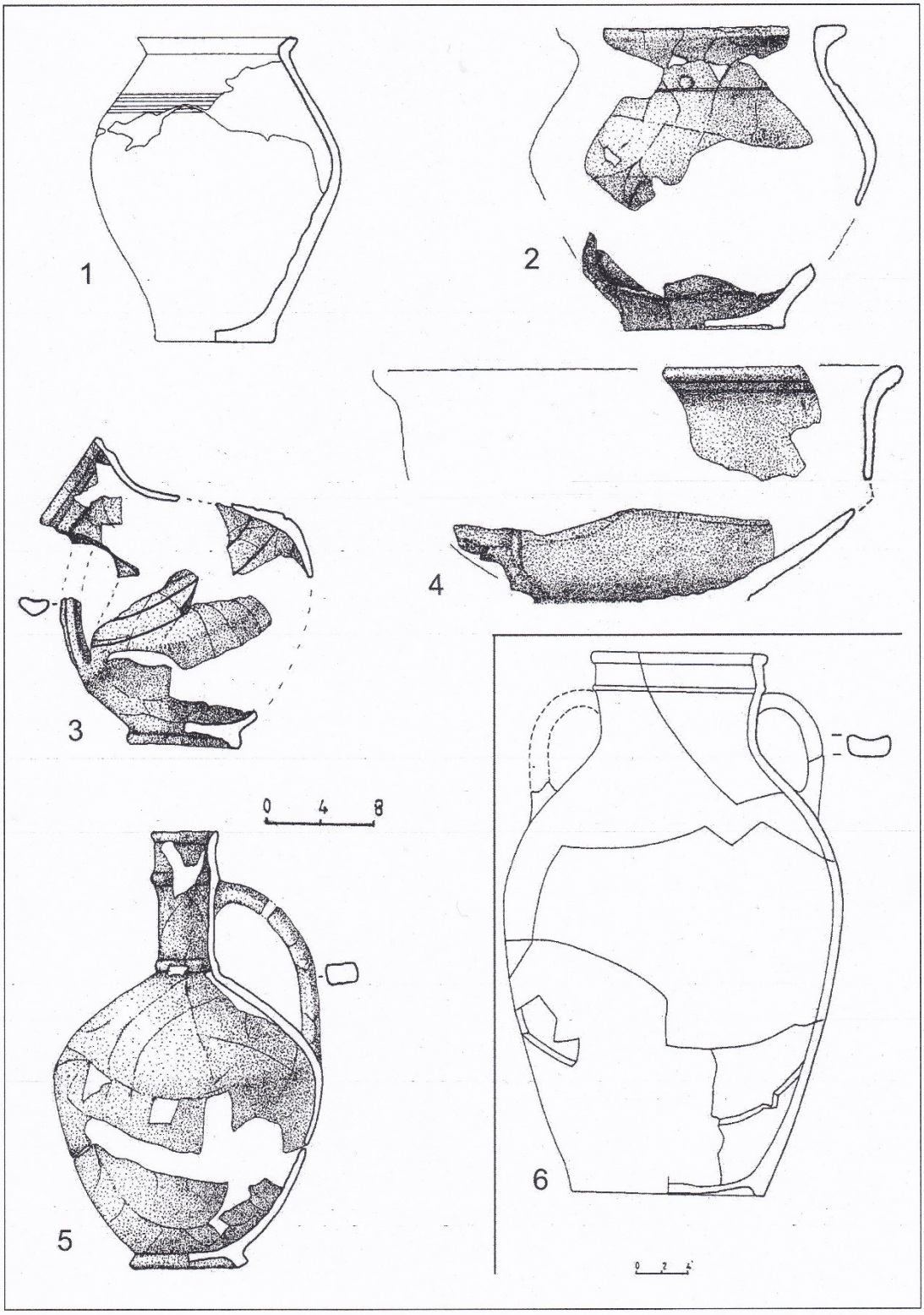


Pl. I. Branište-Nemțișor. The general plan of the necropolis.



Pl. II. Branişte-Nemţişor. *Tumulus no. 4*: **A.** General plan: 1, earth covered with ash and charcoal (feature no. 1); 2, calcined bones; 3, secondary fired ceramics; 4, pit; 5, stripe of black fire debris and charcoal; 6, pit with the inhumation tomb. **B.** Plan of the inhumation tomb; **C.** The southern profile of the E-W axis: 1, arable soil, light grey; 2, dense dark-chestnut soil, with pigments; 3, pit; 4, stripe of black fire remains; 5, dense black soil ("runoff"); 6, dense soil of yellow colour; 7, living soil, of yellow colour and mixed with gravel. **D.** The western profile of the N-S axis: 1, arable soil, light grey, crumbly; 2, stripe of fire debris; 3, dense dark-chestnut soil, with pigments; 4, dense black soil ("runoff"); 5, pit; 6, dense soil of yellow colour; 7, living soil, yellow in colour and mixed with gravel.



PL. III. Branişte-Nemţişor. *Tumulus no. 4*: 1-2, pots; 3, deformed mug; 4, fragmentary bowl; 5, ewer; 6, amphorette. All the ware are wheel-thrown made.