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## MORE PRECIOUS THAN GAS? AN UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY IN THE NORTHEASTERN FUNERARY AREA OF NOVIODUNUM

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**Abstract:** *The paper analyses several archaeological features discovered during an excavation performed on the outskirts of Isaccea, during the summer of 2018, in the easternmost part of the Noviodunum archaeological site. Of the three documented features, two are funerary structures: one is a pit in which cremation remains and grave goods were deposited, while the other is either a ‘deviant’ burial, or a secondary burial of a part of the skeleton. The last feature offered inconclusive results. The grave goods discovered are numerous and diverse: different types of pottery, as well as metal artefacts. Thus, the following information completes the repertoire of funerary discoveries from Noviodunum and the northern part of the Roman province of Moesia Inferior.*

**Rezumat:** *Prezentul articol analizează o serie de complexe arheologice descoperite în urma cercetării preventive realizate în extravilanul oraşului Isaccea, în estul perimetrului sitului arheologic Noviodunum, în vara anului 2018. Dintre cele trei complexe cercetate, două sunt structuri funerare: unul reprezintă groapa în care au fost depuse obiecte alături de resturile unei incinerări, iar celălalt este fie o înmormântare „deviantă”, fie o reînhumare a unei părți dintr-un schelet. Ultimul complex este incert. Piese de inventar funerar recuperate sunt numeroase și diverse: mai multe tipuri de vase ceramice, precum și obiecte din metal. Astfel, informațiile prezentate vin să completeze repertoriul descoperirilor funerare de la Noviodunum și din nordul provinciei romane Moesia Inferior.*

**Keywords:** Moesia Inferior, Noviodunum, cremation, funerary structures, centurion, balteus

**Cuvinte cheie:** Moesia Inferior, Noviodunum, incinerare, structuri funerare, centurion, balteus

## INTRODUCTION

The archaeological excavation undertaken between July and August 2018 was a joint effort between the “Gavrilă Simion” Eco-Museum Research Institute (henceforth ICEM)<sup>1</sup> and the commercial entity S.C. TOTAL BUSINESS LAND S.R.L. (henceforth TBL)<sup>2</sup>, the former being part of a civil archaeology contract<sup>3</sup> with the Romanian National Company for the Transportation of Natural Gas (henceforth TRANSGAZ). This venture was necessary because the proposed expansion of the natural gas transport infrastructure was to be made in the easternmost part of an archaeological site (“Situl arheologic de la Isaccea–Noviodunum–La Pontonul Vechi”, RAN code 159696.05, LMI code TL-I-s-A-05804)<sup>4</sup>.

### Historical and topographical context

The excavated area is situated 1100 m, as the crow flies, SE from the fortress of *Noviodunum*; approx. 1100 m from the more recently researched Roman funerary structures, at the *Orchard* point, in the summer of 2020<sup>5</sup>; 375 m NE from a *tumulus* excavated<sup>6</sup> by Gavrilă Simion (the “Groapa cailor” point); 350 m NE from a small Ottoman “Tabya” fortification<sup>7</sup> (also the “Groapa cailor” point).

The closest archaeologically known area should have been the funerary space dated to the Early Iron Age, composed of 27 inhumation graves<sup>8</sup>, researched by Ioan Vasiliu and Florin Topoleanu<sup>9</sup> (and published by G. Simion<sup>10</sup>), however, the exact

<sup>1</sup> The ICEM team was composed of: Sorin-Cristian Ailincăi, Florian Mihail, Marian Mocanu, Aurel-Daniel Stănică, and Florin Ciulavu.

<sup>2</sup> The TBL team was represented by: Cristinel Plantos, Adrian Gligor, Ion Bălțean.

<sup>3</sup> The project, entitled “Interconectarea Sistemului național de transport cu sistemul internațional și *reverse flow* la Isaccea: Interconectarea Isaccea, jud. Tulcea, România”, featured an expansion of the natural gas transport infrastructure, stemming from the nearby transport hub.

<sup>4</sup> The site can be found in the national database at <http://ran.cimec.ro/?codran=159696.05>.

<sup>5</sup> Mocanu, Stănică, Stănescu 2021.

<sup>6</sup> The results of this campaign were never completely published by G. Simion. In his journal (ICEM archive) we find that First World War installations/interventions severely disturbed the tumulus. Nevertheless, in his 2008 study on Roman sarcophagi, he mentions two discovered here, see Simion 2008, 258-259.

<sup>7</sup> Stănică 2016, 215; Fig. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Simion 2003, 113-116.

<sup>9</sup> Vasiliu, Topoleanu 1989.

<sup>10</sup> Simion 2003.

location of the excavation trenches was lost. Thus, it was thought that the presented excavation would overlap it, even if only partially.



Fig. 1. Map of relevant funerary finds at *Noviodunum*.

The *Noviodunum* archaeological site encompasses a significant surface, up to 630 ha documented so far. It can be divided into both functional and chronological “sectors”: on the one hand, we can find the Late Roman/Byzantine fortification, the Roman civilian

settlement, funerary spaces, and several Ottoman fortifications; on the other, La Tène, Early Roman, Late Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman period discoveries have been made so far.

### Excavation summary<sup>11</sup>

The excavated area was approx. 3000 m<sup>2</sup>, divided into two open-area surfaces (labelled “S1” and “S2”), and yielded several dozen features in the soil, out of which only three were ancient (Fig. 2). Furthermore, over the last century, the area was strongly altered by various human interventions such as an extension of the nearby almond orchard, two earthen roads used for agricultural access, and industrial-type interventions done by TRANSGAZ (concrete platforms, pipes, wires etc.). As such, many observed features were chromatic and micro-morphologic anomalies.

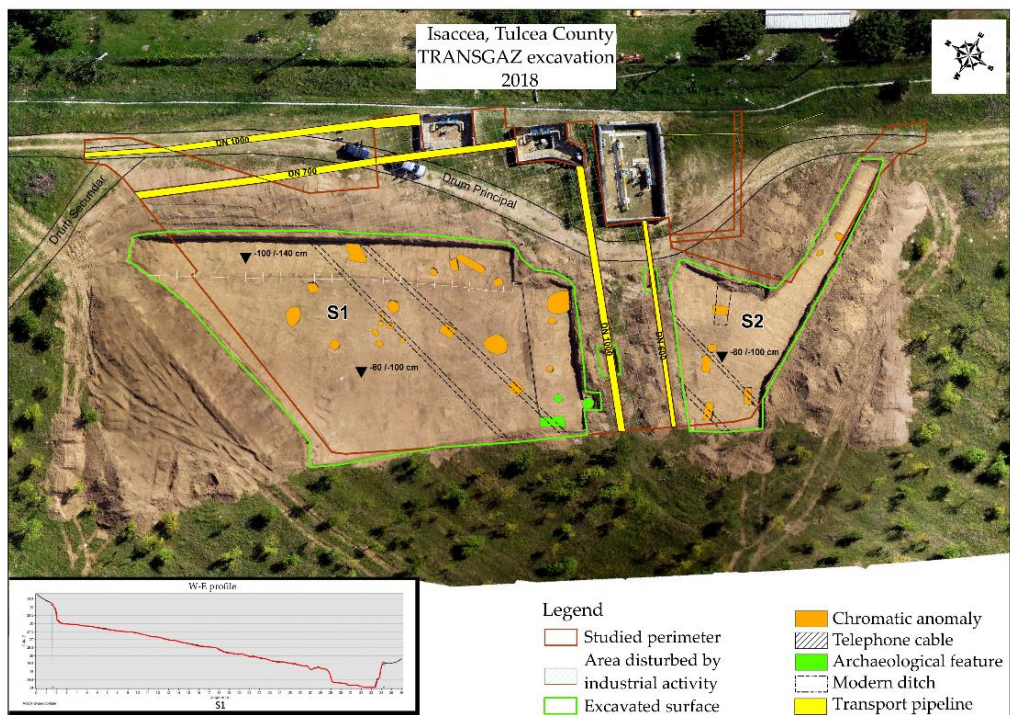


Fig. 2. Excavation plan.

The stratigraphy of the excavated surfaces consists of only three layers, as follows:

- First layer (or topsoil), documented between 0 and 30 cm in depth, represented by an olive grey soil;

<sup>11</sup> As described in the archaeological report found in the ICEM archive.

- Second layer, documented between 30 and 80 cm in depth, consists of mixed topsoil and loess-like deposits, of greyish-yellow colour;
- Third layer, documented between 80 and 140 cm in depth, based on the slope of the surface, represents the loess deposit untouched by anthropic activity.

### Archaeological features and materials

The three documented archaeological features, labelled “C2”, “C5”, and “C7” have been found in the SW corner of the excavated area S1. They are dated to the Early Roman period, based on chrono-typological comparisons of the objects found within. The major disadvantage was that the excavation could not be extended due to the proximity to the already existing pipeline and its special protection area. Therefore, the information gathered so far could be considered incomplete, as future research in the area seems impossible. Nevertheless, the discoveries are important for better understanding the Early Roman period at *Noviodunum*.

Firstly, a shallow, hemispherical pit was discovered and named C2. The feature was filled with greyish-brown soil, without soot traces or other interventions. It measured 55 cm in diameter and had a documented depth of 18 cm (Fig. 3). It contained poorly preserved skeletal remains (several fragments from a femur and one from a tibia). Unfortunately, the conservation state and the small number of bones do not allow sex determination. All that could be said is that the person’s age was between 10 and 20 years<sup>12</sup>.

Alongside the skeletal remains, four pottery vessels were discovered: two thin-walled mugs (cat. nos. 1 and 2), one oenochoe-type jug with a trefoil rim (cat. no. 3), and an ovoid-bodied ceramic *unguentarium* (cat. no. 4). The jug and the *unguentarium* were positioned on their side (one next to the other), while the mugs were positioned vertically, almost on their bases. One of the mugs and the jug were partially affected by the weight of the soil.

The discovered pottery (Fig. 4) can be split into two functional groups: the vessels used for drinking and pouring liquids, and vessels for storing oil (even scented oils). The thin-walled mugs, with short, flat bases are a very frequent find in both domestic and funerary contexts of the Early Roman period. However, the two examples exhibit slight morphological differences. While cat. no. 1 has an almost spherical body and a ridge that marks the joint between the body and rim, cat. no. 2 is more ellipsoidal, with sharply curved walls and an offset rim. Furthermore, the fabric (at least on the exterior) is different, as well as the surviving slip colour, suggesting two different production centres.

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<sup>12</sup> Buikstra, Ubelaker 1994.

The oenochoe-type, trefoil-rimmed jug is also a recurrent find among funerary structures. Cat. no. 3 is characterized by a sleek, spindle-shaped body that has two parallel grooves on its shoulder, above the point where the overhead handle is attached to the body. Traces of reddish paint are still visible on the upper part of the body.

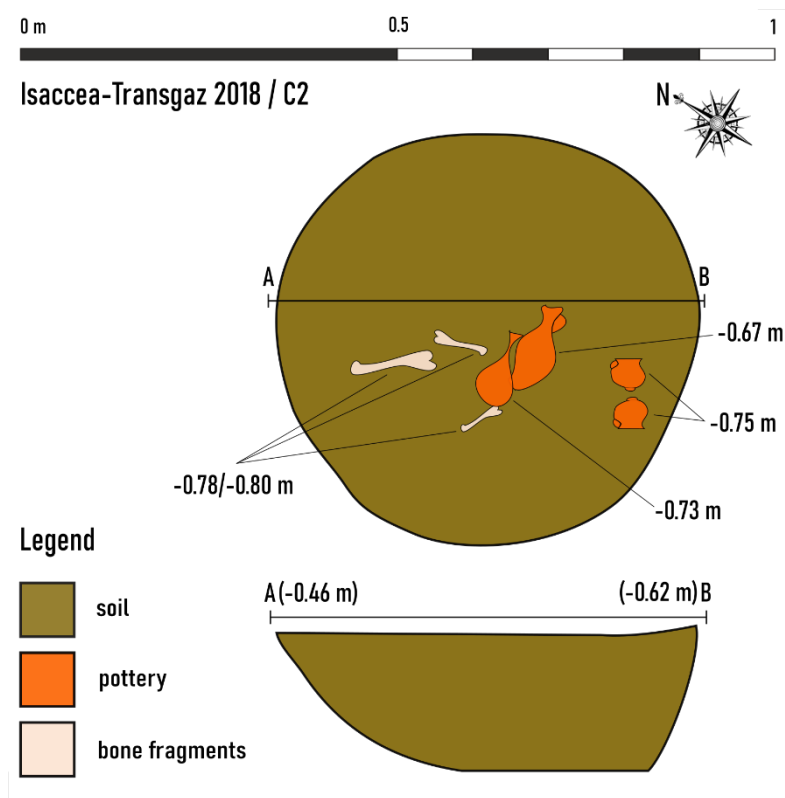


Fig. 3. Plan of feature C2.

Pottery oil/balm flasks (*unguentaria*) are present in both cremation and inhumation funerary structures, as they represent a category of goods that are usually found in the Hellenistic and Early Roman (1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD) graves<sup>13</sup>. For a time circulating in parallel with their glass counterparts, ceramic *unguentaria* seem to be used mainly during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD<sup>14</sup>, completely disappearing in the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, when they are replaced by the former. This is most likely a regional perspective, since

<sup>13</sup> Anderson-Stojanović 1987, 105.

<sup>14</sup> As seen in the study of the Roman necropolis of *Scupi*, in *Moesia Superior* (Кузманоски 2017).



in other parts of the Roman Empire clay *unguentaria* can be found in funerary contexts as late as the 5<sup>th</sup> c. AD<sup>15</sup>.

The *unguentarium* found in C2 (cat. no. 4) is one of the largest examples discovered in *Moesia Inferior*, classified as a Shape 2 bulbous “giant”<sup>16</sup>. An analogy for the shape and size is found in the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum<sup>17</sup>, J.W. Hayes arguing for a Palestinian<sup>18</sup> origin of that artefact.

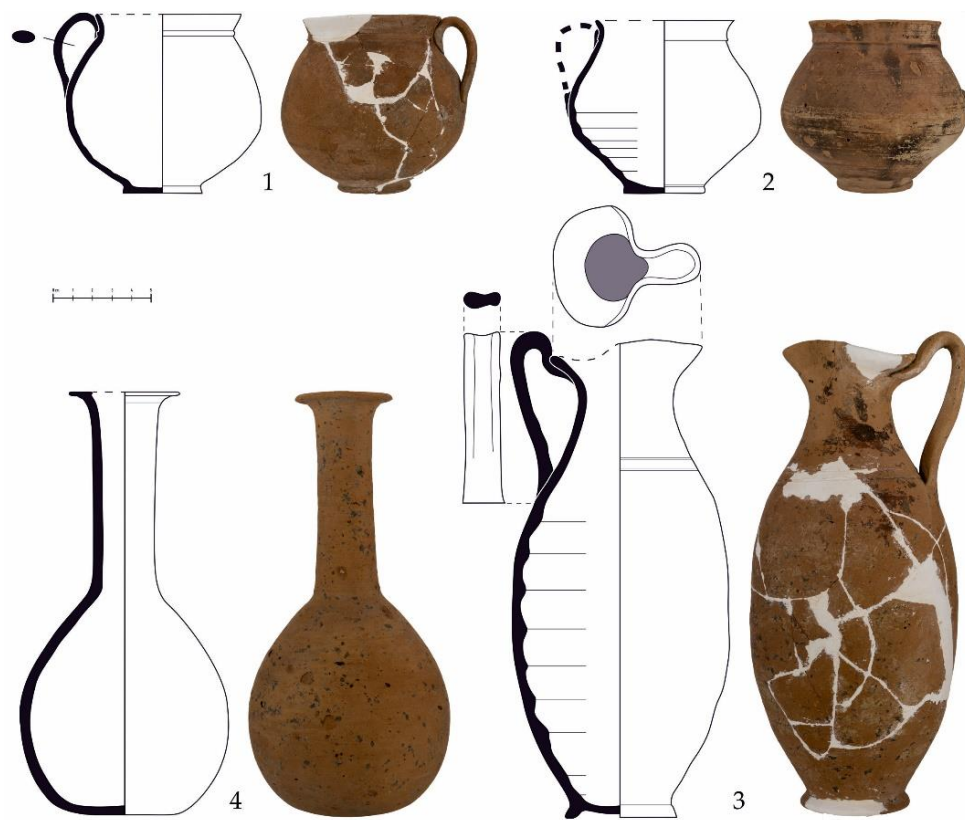


Fig. 4. Pottery discovered in C2.

<sup>15</sup> Lafli, Şahin 2013, 356.

<sup>16</sup> Anderson-Stojanović 1987, 106.

<sup>17</sup> Hayes 1976, 62, cat. no. 336.

<sup>18</sup> A Palestinian origin for contents of this type of containers is also attested in ancient sources, for example, the poet Statius: “[...] every unguent of the Arabs and Cilicians [...] incense snatched away from Palestinian temples...” (Stat. Silv. 5.1.208-216).

However, considering the state of art regarding *unguentaria*, we cannot be certain about the origin of the discovered vessel (cat. no. 4). Scholars note a wide variety of technical aspects of published artefacts: from objects carefully wheel-thrown, with smoothed and painted surfaces, to carelessly made, mass-produced, inexpensive ones. This leads to the conclusion that there were many workshops producing these types of containers to be filled with imported substances from farther away<sup>19</sup>. So far, at *Noviodunum* we do not have proof of workshops that made *unguentaria* (let alone evidence of perfume/scented oil production), and the presence of this type of vessels are indicators of regional/provincial trade.

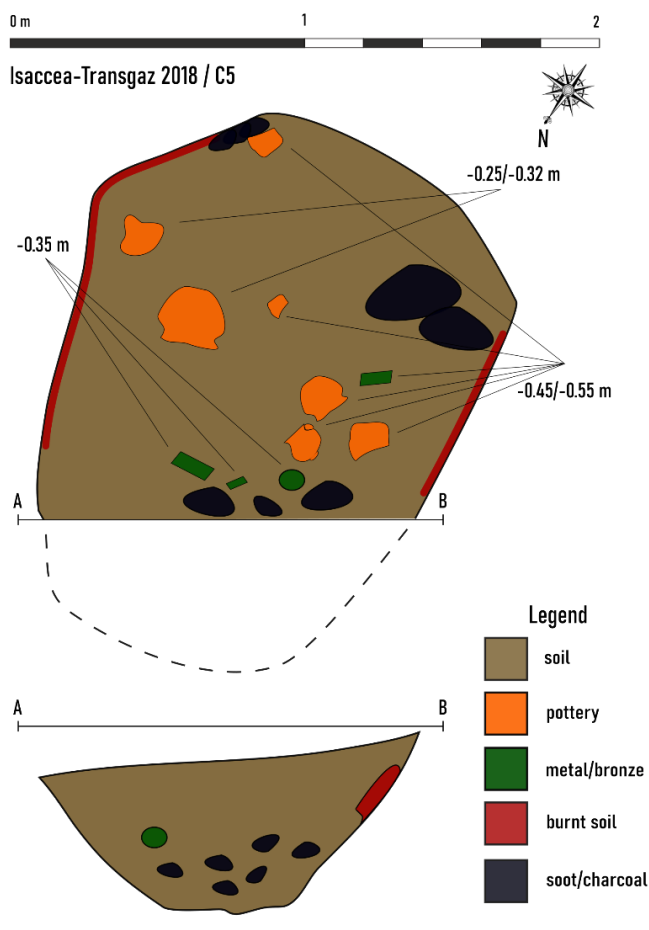


Fig. 5. Plan of feature C5.

<sup>19</sup> Anderson-Stojanović 1987, 115.





Fig. 6. Grave goods discovered in C5.

Considering the observations made on-site and the analysis of its contents, we argue that pit C2 could be a 'deviant' burial<sup>20</sup> dated during the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD. While there are no post-depositional reasons to explain the finding of a partial burial, nonetheless, we did not find a complete skeleton, only a few leg bones<sup>21</sup>. Another hypothesis is that this discovery represents a secondary burial of some human remains. Nevertheless, without expanding the research area to the E and SE, there is no certainty that there could or could not be more funerary structures, with different chronological or other types of relations to each other.

Secondly, the feature named C5 had an asymmetrically elongated shape and partially burnt walls. Preserved dimensions are 140 × 137±7 cm, 55 cm internal depth (Fig. 5). The composition of the filling, as well as the artefacts discovered there, convince us that it is a funerary structure in which the remains of a cremation were interred. Soot patches are distributed unevenly throughout the feature, between the fill soil and grave goods.

Approximately 272 g<sup>22</sup> of cremated bones were recovered and analysed. Firstly, the majority of the fragments belong to bones of the lower body, with only a few skull, right cubitus and radius remains. Secondly, the bones exhibit different grades of combustion, indicating temperatures between 400 and 700° C<sup>23</sup>. The sex of the deceased is most likely male, based on the dimensions of a femoral diaphysis, and the age is estimated between 20 and 50 years. Lastly, among the human skeletal remains there was an unburned *Bos taurus* adult 1<sup>st</sup> phalanx.

The discovered grave goods are numerous: two thin-walled mugs<sup>24</sup> (only one could be drawn and analysed, cat. no. 5), one *oenochoe*-type jug with trefoil rim (cat. no. 6), two one-handed pots (can. nos. 7 and 8), several metal<sup>25</sup> parts from a belt (cat. nos. 9-15), a cylindrical bronze *pyxis*<sup>26</sup> (cat. no. 16) separated from its lid (cat. no. 17), and a coin (cat. no. 18). Moreover, fragments from three iron nails, most likely from the

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<sup>20</sup> For a broader discussion regarding the term, see Chapman 2010, 32.

<sup>21</sup> The small number of bones could imply a connection with the Roman practice of *os resectum*, see Toynbee 1996, 49.

<sup>22</sup> Below the average weight of cremation remains from the Roman Period, see Wahl 2008, 152, Table 9.2.

<sup>23</sup> Wahl 2008, 150, Table 9.1.

<sup>24</sup> Small sherds from a second mug were recovered as well, but could not form a useful profile.

<sup>25</sup> The analysis on metal objects was made in the National Institute for Research and Development of Isotopic and Molecular Technologies of Cluj-Napoca (INCDTIM), using the Energy Dispersive X-ray (EDX) method, carried out by Associate Professor Lucian Barbu Tudoran, to whom we are thus grateful. A more in-depth study on the technological aspects of metal artefacts from *Noviodunum* is being prepared.

<sup>26</sup> Sometimes referred to as "inkwells". However, without content analysis there is no certainty, therefore we opted for a more generic term for the cylindrical container.



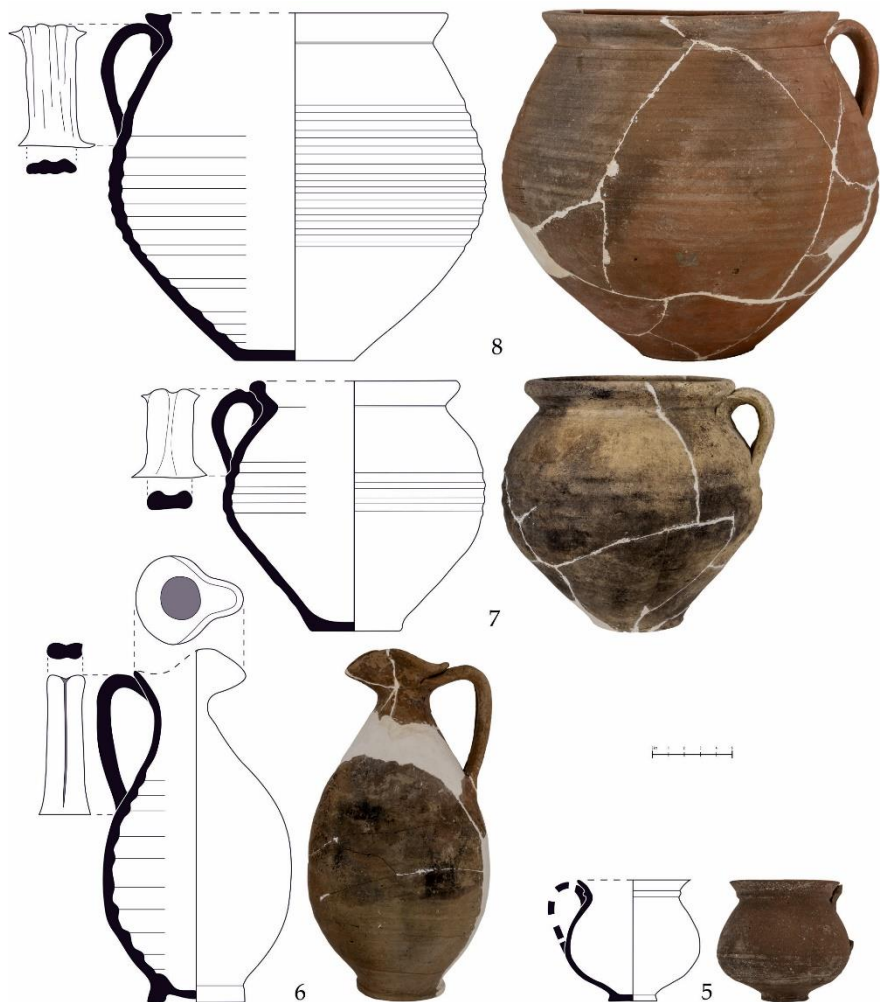


Fig. 8. Pottery discovered in C5.

The second group consists of two pots (*ollae*) with similar morphology: a globular upper body and conical lower body (with shallow grooves), and a flat base. However, the rim, diameter, and fabric differ. Using Honcu's typology, both of them are provincial pots, cat. no. 7 belonging to *type I*<sup>28</sup> while cat. no. 8 can be attributed to *type IV*<sup>29</sup>. One-handled

<sup>28</sup> Honcu 2017, 43-44.

<sup>29</sup> Honcu 2017, 53.

pots similar to cat. no. 7 were discovered in the Roman necropoleis of *Romula*<sup>30</sup>, *Beroe*<sup>31</sup>, while at *Noviodunum* we know of only one<sup>32</sup>. Except for one thin-walled mug, all the vessels were found in a very fragmentary state, possibly implying ritual breaking.

Alongside pottery, several metal objects were recovered: one *pyxis* (including its lid) and seven belt elements – four made from a silver alloy (cat. nos. 9-12) and three from a copper alloy (cat. nos. 13-15).

The cylindrical *pyxis* (cat. no. 16, Fig. 9) is made from a copper alloy, more precisely brass (80-87% Cu, 12-16% Zn<sup>33</sup>). Its lid (cat. no. 17, Fig. 10), made from the same material, was discovered some distance apart and it shows signs of deformation caused by the weight of the soil. Unfortunately, the lid handle/knob is missing, therefore we cannot determine what type it could have been<sup>34</sup>. The only type of decoration present on the *pyxis* body, base and lid, are shallow, incised lines<sup>35</sup> (1 mm). This simple decoration method is well known on similar cylindrical vessels made from wood, bone, or precious metals.

Without knowing what kind of residue it contained, if any, its exact content and functionality eludes us. Among discoveries made throughout the Roman Empire, some *pyxides* were found alongside writing instruments<sup>36</sup>, leading scholars to assume they were inkwells, while others were found together with medical utensils<sup>37</sup>, therefore it is safe to assume that they served as containers for a different kind of substance. Finally, an assemblage housed in the Louvre collection<sup>38</sup> is composed of a cylindrical bronze *pyxis* connected by chain with a pair of *strigiles*, implying it served as a container for scented oils.

This artefact exhibits surprisingly similar characteristics to a previous discovery made at *Noviodunum*: between 1980 and 1982 (finalized in 1990), G. Simion researched a *tumulus*<sup>39</sup> named “Tumulus XXX” (or “Movila Popii”). One of the funerary

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<sup>30</sup> Popilian 1976, 182-183, cat. nos. 370-381.

<sup>31</sup> Petre 1987, Pl. 11/14b; Pl. 13B/16d1.

<sup>32</sup> Simion 2007, Fig. 11/5.

<sup>33</sup> The composition varies slightly in different parts of the object, hence the percentage intervals mentioned.

<sup>34</sup> While showing similarities with other examples of lids with a so-called “keyhole” cutout in the middle, any other elements to imply a hinged lid/knob were not preserved.

<sup>35</sup> Possibly with the use of a lathe and a very fine chisel, see Mustață 2017, 79-81.

<sup>36</sup> For example, a grave discovered in Obuda-Testvérhegy (Budapest) and another discovery from *Intercissa*, see Fünfschilling 2012, 172.

<sup>37</sup> For example, a “doctor’s grave” discovered in Bürgelstein cemetery, Salzburg, see Fünfschilling 2012, 173-174.

<sup>38</sup> Ridder 1915, 32, cat. no. 1584.

<sup>39</sup> Simion 1994-1995.

structures<sup>40</sup>, named “T 1”, contained a copper alloy *pyxis*<sup>41</sup> with an anthropomorphic knob (representing a Maenad?), and a decorative pattern similar to the one found in C5. The author considers it a product of an Italic workshop<sup>42</sup>, without further explanations. Nevertheless, there is no clear proof to support this statement. As we will see onward, the similarities between the two funerary structures do not end here.

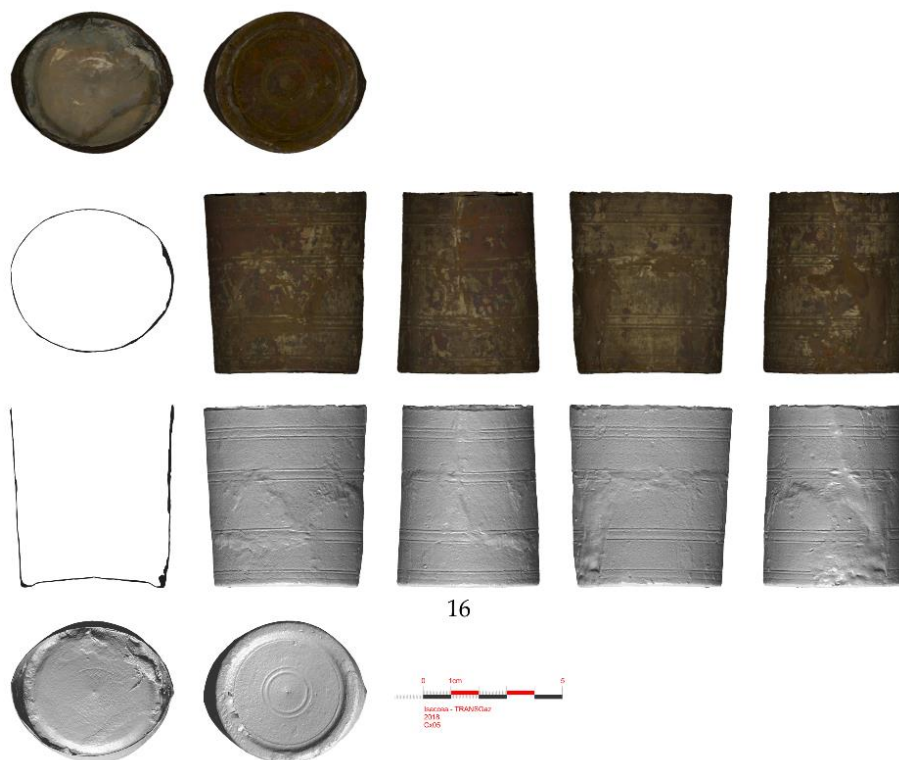


Fig. 9. *Pyxis* discovered in C5 (©Arheosib Consulting SRL<sup>43</sup>).

<sup>40</sup> Simion 1994-1995, 124-125. The author describes a funerary structure composed of a stepped-pit (or a succession of two pits) with burnt walls, the lower pit being sealed with a roof-like structure made from Roman *tegulae*.

<sup>41</sup> Simion 1994-1995, 147, Fig. 13/b. For another opinion regarding similar artefacts, see Oța 2013, 238-239.

<sup>42</sup> Simion 1994-1995, 132.

<sup>43</sup> We wish to thank PhD Călin Șuteu (SC Gigapixel Art SRL) for his assistance in 3D scanning some of the artefacts.





Fig. 10. *Pyxis* lid discovered in C5 (©Arheosib Consulting SRL).



Fig. 11. Comparison: a. *Pyxis* discovered in C5; b. *Pyxis* discovered in T 1 (*Tumulus* XXX).

The next group<sup>44</sup> of metal objects was crafted from a silver alloy (95.8-97.4% Ag, 2.6-4.2% Cu). Firstly, we identified a pair of belt-mounts (cat. nos. 9 and 10, Fig. 12), fixed to the belt with studs (98.6% Ag, 1.4% Cu). However, while having the same simplified vegetative design, their dimensions differ by approx. 10% overall – this implies they were cast in different moulds or different faces of the same mould. They seem to represent spiral vine/ivy twigs, mirrored along a main, straight twig, each spiral housing a stud orifice at its centre.

Searching for analogies for such small plates led us back to the grave T 1 (Tumulus XXX), where an almost complete assemblage of buckle- and belt-plates was discovered<sup>45</sup>. There, the presence of two buckles, as well as the different decoration styles, indicate two different belt sets. The material and style used in crafting the plates from C5 and T 1<sup>46</sup> are evident, however, the pattern differs: the plates from T 1 are composed of four spiral vines each, positioned distinctly (*h*, *i* and *l* share the same pattern, four spirals in the shape of the number “2” are oriented 90° in a clockwise direction each; *j* and *k* are vertically mirrored pairs of offset vines at approx. 30°); the inside end of the spirals (where the stud orifices are situated), in the case of the plates from C5, are joined to the vine, whereas in the case of those from T 1, they do not touch/are loose<sup>47</sup>. Unfortunately, at this moment we cannot determine the origin of these artefacts, only that the mould in which they were cast exhibits the same decoration style. A second belt set<sup>48</sup> was discovered in the necropolis of ancient *Viminacium*, exhibiting very similar characteristics (but not identical!) to the one discovered at *Noviodunum* and published by G. Simion.

Secondly, cat. no. 11 is an object which resembles a strap binding, probably from a dagger sheath. It is made from a folded silver strip, with a U-shaped cross-section, and on one edge has a pelta-motif mount, facing the interior (opening) of the binding, meant to be secured with a stud. However, J. Oldenstein<sup>49</sup> argues that the few similar artefacts (although with a complete tubular frame) studied on the *Limes* belong to a *balteus*, serving as “balteus suspensions” (*Balteusaufhängungen*).

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<sup>44</sup> We would like to extend our deepest appreciation to PhD Liviu Petculescu (National Museum of Romanian History) for his valuable advice and for sharing supplementary bibliography with us, and PhD Alexandra Dolea (Independent researcher) for her observations and constructive criticism.

<sup>45</sup> Simion 1994-1995, 141, Fig. 7/a-m. The author describes them as “motifs géométriques composés de lignes droites et de spirales”.

<sup>46</sup> Simion 1994-1995, 141, Fig. 7/h-m.

<sup>47</sup> This technical decision could have been chosen in order to more securely fasten the plates to the belt, since there are two stud orifices vs. four.

<sup>48</sup> Redžić 2013, 62, cat. no 89a-g and T. XII/89a-g.

<sup>49</sup> Oldenstein 1977, 211.

Third, we have an incomplete strap terminal – a hanger/strip without its pendant (cat. no. 12). It is made from an asymmetrical, folded silver strip, secured with a silver stud. The decoration is composed of short longitudinal incisions at its wider end. This type of strap terminal is frequently encountered in the Roman military milieu of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD.

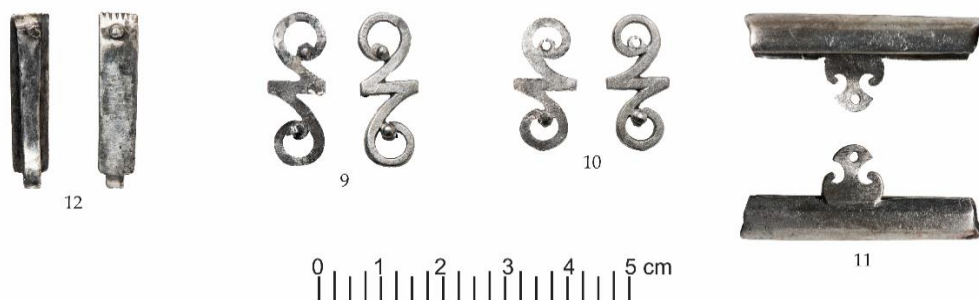


Fig. 12. Silver objects discovered in C5 (©Arheosib Consulting SRL).

The belt assemblage discovered is completed by three plates made from a Cu-Sn alloy<sup>50</sup>. These openwork appliquéés (Fig. 13) feature vegetative friezes, bordered by a strongly profiled rectangle, organizing the space in which the undulating decoration unfolds, with split-pelta motifs on both sides (in the case of cat. no. 14, only on one side; this aspect might explain the possible use as a buckle-plate if the object is incomplete). As the frieze is shorter in the case of the applique with a loop and lugs (used to secure a narrow strap), symmetrical vines flank a single heart-shaped (ivy) leaf (or a bunch of grapes?) pointing downward, with the help of the main vine of inverted U-shape; in the case of the other two, the symmetry is achieved by a central, sinusoidal vine that travels horizontally. The artisan's intention seems to have been to produce the illusion of naturalism, even if it is difficult to admire it due to its size. The only analogy for the decoration is an object from a private collection (the discovery location is unknown)<sup>51</sup>.

Between the Late Republic and 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD, vegetative motifs are often strewn across different types of surfaces (bowls, cups, kratera, jewellery, stone, etc.) in what is known as a “naturalistic” style<sup>52</sup>. However, this naturalism can be challenged when considering the choice of the artisan to apply a surface treatment<sup>53</sup> to the appliquéés, therefore changing the colours of vines and leaves (the “noble” patina of copper and copper

<sup>50</sup> However, cat. no. 13 had a surviving “posterior” sheet (Fig. 13), made from a Cu-Zn alloy (86% Cu, 10.8% Zn, 3.3% O).

<sup>51</sup> Hoss 2014, Taf. 46/B.1008.

<sup>52</sup> Swift 2009, 108.

<sup>53</sup> The EDX analysis showed inconclusive results, with high percentages of O and C, alongside Cu and Sn.

alloys being green). Tinning is a common practice for copper alloy objects that were to be used for activities that would have brought them in contact with foodstuffs or liquids<sup>54</sup> (pots, casseroles, jugs, etc.). In the case of clothing and adorning objects, it would provide better corrosion protection when in contact with liquids or humid weather. At the same time, this hypothesis does not hold water very well because of the openwork design itself, which could allow the unintended passage of water to non-treated surfaces inside the plates.

Some scholars argue that during the Antonine period begins a preference for belt designs that play with the effect of bronze openwork plates with the leather visible through them<sup>55</sup>, as well as for stylised forms of tendrils<sup>56</sup>. In this case, the “silver” surface treatment of a copper alloy decoration could indicate the imitation of a true silver decoration, especially if kept in good condition.

An additional element that can help us better determine the source and/or dating is a stylistic comparison. The most complete silverware set discovered to date is the “Chaourse Hoard” (on display in the British Museum), composed of 39 objects, dated between 150 and 270 AD. Among them are three bowls with projecting collars, decorated with animals and vegetative motifs. Of special interest to us is Museum no. 1890,0923.3<sup>57</sup>, due to its chiselled acanthus scroll (with vines), resembling the undulating pattern found on the belt-plates discovered in C5.

Nonetheless, given the relatively small number of early Roman silver vessels extant, these incipient trends can best be explored further by examining the fine pottery, which imitates silver<sup>58</sup>. Vegetative motifs (spirals, vines, leaves) are found on Arretine<sup>59</sup> and North Italic terra sigillata cups<sup>60</sup>, and plates<sup>61</sup>, starting with the Augustan era until the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD.

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<sup>54</sup> Mustață 2017, 81.

<sup>55</sup> Hoss 2017, 96.

<sup>56</sup> Hoss 2017, 104.

<sup>57</sup> [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G\\_1890-0923-3](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1890-0923-3) (last accessed on 18.08.2023)

<sup>58</sup> Swift 2009, 109 and footnote 27.

<sup>59</sup> Pucci 1985, 395, Forma XXXV and Tav. CXXXI/3.

<sup>60</sup> Mazzeo Saracino 1985, 197, Forma 12 and Tav. LVIII/ 5; Mazzeo Saracino 1985, 199, Forma 15 and Tav. LIX/11-12, 20; LX/1-2; Mazzeo Saracino 1985, 207, Forma 31 and Tav. LXVI/5, 7, 12; Mazzeo Saracino 1985, 221, Forma 13D and Tav. LXXVII/1.

<sup>61</sup> Mazzeo Saracino 1985, 200, Forma 16 and Tav. LX/9-10; Mazzeo Saracino 1985, 202-203, Forma 20 and Tav. LXII/8, 13-14; Mazzeo Saracino 1985, 208, Forma 32 and Tav. LXVII/1-2.

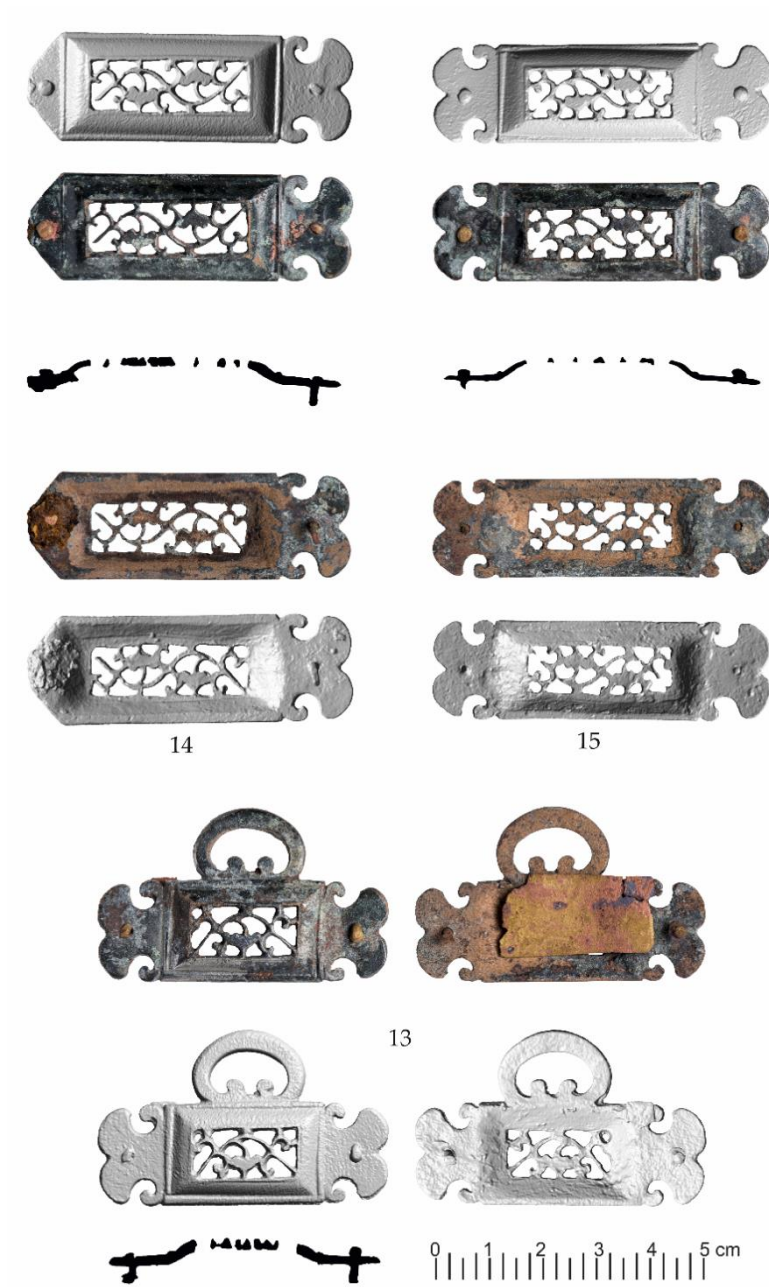


Fig. 13. Copper alloy objects discovered in C5 (©Arheosib Consulting SRL).

On a regional level, we find a similar artistic taste. The barbotine decoration from the territory south of the Danube is represented mainly by floral motifs – ivy scrolls, vine twigs with grapes, cone-shaped ornaments, etc. While ivy leaves and twigs originate from ancient Greek painted pottery, however, it is not until the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD that vessels decorated in this manner are produced in Varbovski Livadi near Pavlikeni, and later, at Butovo<sup>62</sup>.

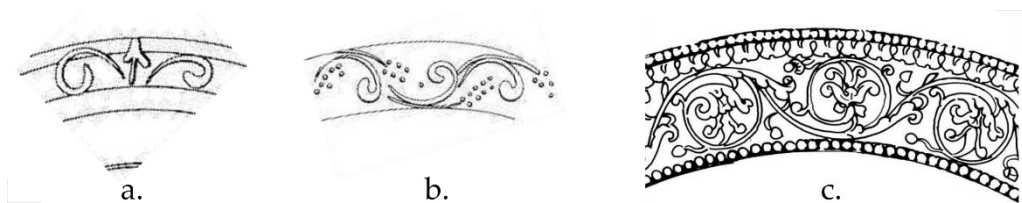


Fig. 14. Decoration comparison: a. Mazzeo Saracino 1985, Tav. LXVII/2; b. Pucci 1985, Tav. CXXXI/3; c. Chaourse Hoard, no. 1890,0923.3.

The list of grave goods ends with a coin<sup>63</sup> (AS) from emperor Claudius<sup>64</sup> (Fig. 15), dated 50 – 54 AD. Only part of the obverse is visible: the head of Claudius, bare, facing left, [TI CLA]VDIVS CAE[SAR A]VG P M [TR P IMP P P]. However, it is known that coins alone offer us a *terminus post quem*. Interesting to note is that, when comparing again C5 with T 1 (Tumulus XXX), in the latter two bronze coins were discovered, only one of which identifiable: an AS from Caligula<sup>65</sup>, therefore exhibiting a possible third chronological connection between the two funerary structures.

The third feature, C7, represents the remnants of a pit, containing a few skeletal remains, several pottery fragments (the photo archive shows sherds from a transport amphora and one fragment from a tableware vessel<sup>66</sup>) at a depth between 52 and 56 cm, as well as an iron projectile tip (cat. no. 19, Fig. 16) from a *catapulta* bolt. Unfortunately, the trench that housed a telephone line, excavated sometime post-1960, disturbed the majority of the feature's surface, while agricultural intervention disrupted the upper strata, thus not allowing us to document it properly. The 18 small bone fragments recovered seem to have been from the pelvis of an individual, indeterminable sex, 10-50 years old.

<sup>62</sup> Ivanov 2022, 80.

<sup>63</sup> EDX showed 88-89% Cu, 11-12% O.

<sup>64</sup> We are grateful to PhD student Anca Dumitru (National Museum of Romanian History) for the identification, and PhD Cristian Găzdac (Institute of Archaeology and Art History, Cluj-Napoca) for double-checking.

<sup>65</sup> Simion 1994-1995, 146, Fig.12/i.

<sup>66</sup> Only photographic evidence survived.



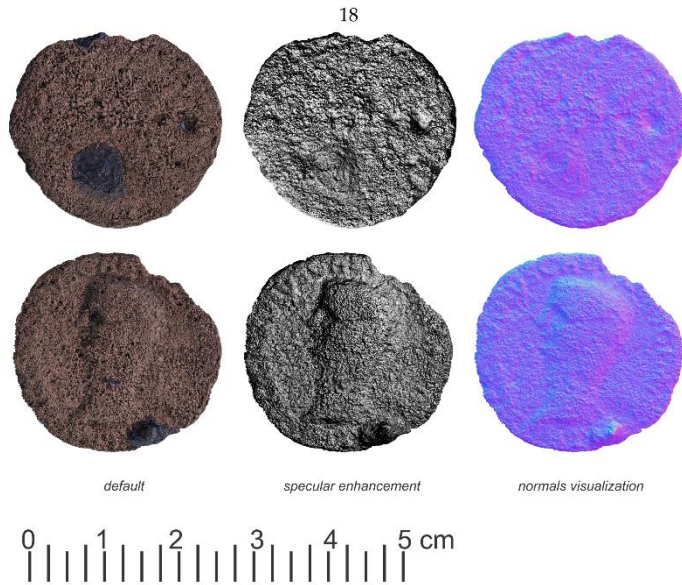


Fig. 15. Coin discovered in C5 (©Arheosib Consulting SRL).

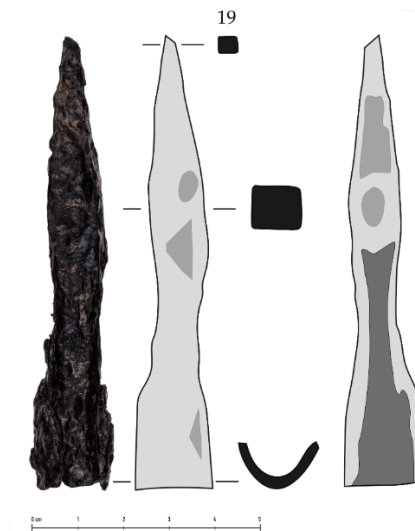


Fig. 16. Bolt-head discovered in C7.

Components and projectiles from torsion artillery (either stone-throwers – *ballistae*, or bolt-shooters – *catapultae*) are occasionally found on Roman sites with a military

presence<sup>67</sup>, *Noviodunum* being no exception, since it was the headquarters of *Classis Flavia Moesica*, and later, of the *Legio I Iovia Scythica*. We cannot precisely determine either the dating (Early or Late Roman), or the type of thrower the bolt belongs to (the larger, Domitianic model or the more mobile, Trajanic form<sup>68</sup>). Nevertheless, the presence of this artefact in a funerary space is unusual.

The feature is situated farther from C5 than C2 (almost 2 m, towards the SW edge of the excavated area). By analysing its contents, as well as the degree of interventions, we are unable to determine if the human bones were a secondary deposit or not. Thus, all that can be said of C7 is that it was a pit with few fragmentary Roman artefacts and several human bone fragments.

### CATALOGUE<sup>69</sup>

1. Thin-walled mug, restored, ellipsoidal body, short and flat base, everted, rounded rim. Fig. 4/1.

Context: C2, -75 cm.

Inv. No.: 55143.

Dimensions: PH= 91 mm; MPD= 97 mm; BD= 40 mm; RD= 73 mm; d= 90 mm; Whandle= 12 × 6 mm; Hhandle= 45 mm; Th= 2 mm; WGT= 118 g.

Colour: MUNSELL 5YR 6/4 "light reddish brown" (fabric), MUNSELL 5YR 6/6 "reddish yellow" (slip).

Inclusions: muscovite flakes and quartzite observed.

Analogies: ALEXANDRESCU 1966, 208, cat. no. XXIV 7 and Pl. 99; BOUNEGRU 2017, Pl. XL/8; HAYES 1983, 128, cat. no. 118 and Fig. 10/118; HAYES 1991, 63, cat. no. 17 and Fig. XXII/17; MĂNUCU-ADAMEȘTEANU 1984, Pl. IV/1-2; PETRE 1987, Pl. 12/15c; PETRE 1987, Pl. 19/26d; POPILIAN 1976, 197, cat. no. 588, and Pl. LIII/ 588; POPILIAN 1976, 197, cat. no. 596, and Pl. LIV/ 596; SIMION 1994-1995, Fig. 8/a; SIMION 2007, Fig. 11/8; SUCEVEANU 2000, 104, cat. no. 33 and Pl. 43/33.

2. Thin-walled mug, complete except for the handle, ellipsoidal body (more steeply arched at the middle), slightly short and flat base, everted, rounded rim. Fig. 4/2.

Context: C2, -74 cm.

Inv. No.: 55144.

<sup>67</sup> Bishop, Coulston 2009, 89-90.

<sup>68</sup> Bishop, Coulston 2009, 88.

<sup>69</sup> The abbreviations used are: RD= rim diameter; MPD= maximum preserved diameter; BD= base diameter; BH= base height; FD= foot diameter; KD= knob diameter; Dint= interior diameter; PH= preserved height; Th= thickness; HTh= handle thickness; Hhandle= handle height; L= length; W= width; Whandle= handle width; WGT= weight; d= depth; NH= neck height; ND= neck diameter; LD= loop diameter; HD= hoop diameter (for the hanger and buckle); WBR= width of base ring (for the pyxis); HSD= handle-slot diameter (for the pyxis lid); D= diameter (for the coin); PTD= preserved tip diameter; Tlength= tip length; Flength= fitting length (for the projectile tip).

Dimensions: PH= 87 mm; MPD= 96 mm; BD= 41 mm; RD= 69 mm; d= 78 mm; Whandle= 13 × 6 mm; Hhandle= 45 mm; Th= 3 mm; WGT= 168 g.

Colour: MUNSELL 5YR 6/4 "light reddish brown" (fabric), MUNSELL 5YR 3/3 "dark reddish brown" (slip).

Inclusions: rare muscovite flakes observed.

Analogies: HAYES 1983, 128, cat. no. 118 and Fig. 10/118; HAYES 1991, 63, cat. no. 17 and Fig. XXII/17; PETRE 1987, Pl. 15/19c; PETRE 1987, Pl. 17/22b; POPILIAN 1976, 195, cat. no. 559, and Pl. LII/ 559; SIMION 2007, Fig. 11/10; SUCEVEANU 2000, 102, cat. no. 15 and Pl. 42/15.

3. Jug, restored, trefoil rim, spindle-shaped body, overhead handle attached to rim and shoulder, short ring base. Decoration consists of two parallel grooves above where the handle attaches to the body. Fig. 4/3.

Context: C2, -67 cm.

Inv. No.: 55142.

Dimensions: PH= 250 mm; MPD= 105 mm; BD= 58 mm; BH= 8 mm; RD= 39 mm; d= 215 mm; Whandle= 18 × 8 mm; Hhandle= 82 mm; Th= 4 mm; WGT= 399 g.

Colour: MUNSELL 5YR 6/6 "reddish yellow" (fabric), slip varies from MUNSELL 5YR 3/3 "dark reddish brown" to 10R 5/8 "red".

Inclusions: muscovite flakes and limestone particles observed.

Analogies: SIMION 1984, Pl. XIII/5; SIMION 1994-1995, Fig. 8/c; SIMION 2007, Fig. 10/2; SUCEVEANU 2000, 155-156, cat. no. 8 and Pl. 73/8.

4. *Unguentarium*, intact, ovoid body, flat base, cylindrical neck (its height equal to that of the body), disc-shaped, slightly flaring, rounded rim. A few soot spots are still visible on the body. Fig. 4/4.

Context: C2, -73 cm.

Inv. No.: 55141.

Dimensions: H= 218 mm; MPD= 102 mm; RD= 50 mm; BD= 56 mm; Th= 3 mm; NH= 104 mm; ND= 31 mm; d= 215 mm; WGT= 261 g.

Colour: MUNSELL 5YR 6/6 reddish yellow (exterior).

Inclusions: fine muscovite flakes and limestone particles observed.

Analogies: HAYES 1976, 62, cat. no. 336 and Pl. 37/336; SIMION 1984, Pl. XV/8 (smaller size).

5. Thin-walled mug, complete except for the handle, ellipsoidal body (more steeply arched at the middle), short and flat base, everted, rounded rim. Fig. 8/5.

Context: C5, -43 cm.

Inv. No.: 55145.

Dimensions: PH= 75 mm; MPD= 84 mm; BD= 30 mm; RD= 68 mm; d= 70 mm; Whandle= 7 × 5 mm; Hhandle= 44 mm; Th= 3 mm; WGT= 108 g.

Colour: MUNSELL 5YR 6/4 "light reddish brown" (fabric), MUNSELL 5YR 4/2 "dark reddish grey" (slip).

Inclusions: golden mica flakes and quartzite observed.

Analogies: ALEXANDRESCU 1966, 222, cat. no. XXV.2.1 and Pl. 101; HAYES 1983, 128, cat. no. 118 and Fig. 10/118; HAYES 1991, 63, cat. no. 17 and Fig. XXII/17; PETRE 1987, Pl. 18/24b; PETRE 1987, Pl. 22/31e; POPILIAN 1976, 197, cat. no. 588, and Pl. LIII/588; POPILIAN 1976,

196, cat. no. 595, and Pl. LIV/595; SIMION 1994-1995, Fig. 8/b; SUCEVEANU 2000, 104, cat. no. 32 and Pl. 43/32; ILIESCU, BOTIȘ 2018, 203, Fig. 7/7.

6. Jug, restored, trefoil rim, ovoid body, handle attached to rim and shoulder, ring base. Fig. 8/6.  
Context: C5.  
Inv. No.: 55148.  
Dimensions: PH= 220 mm; MPD= 110 mm; BD= 60 mm; BH= 7 mm; RD= 65 × 58 mm; d= 210 mm; Whandle= 21 × 9 mm; Hhandle= 81 mm; Th= 4 mm; WGT= 574 g.  
Colour: MUNSELL 7.5YR 6/4 "light brown" (fabric), MUNSELL 2.5YR 5/8 "red" (slip).  
Inclusions: muscovite flakes and limestone particles observed.  
Analogies: PETRE 1987, Pl. 34/45e; SIMION 1984, Pl. XIII/6; SIMION 1994-1995, Fig. 8/c; SIMION 2007, Fig. 10/1-2; SIMION 2008, Fig. 3.
7. Pot, restored, one-handed, globular upper-body and conical lower-body, round lid-seating on the inside, flat, round base. Fig. 8/7.  
Context: C5, -50/-55 cm.  
Inv. No.: 55146.  
Dimensions: PH= 158 mm; MPD= 157 mm; BD= 59 mm; RD= 133 mm; d= 149 mm; Whandle= 27 × 10 mm; Hhandle= 59 mm; WGT= 715 g.  
Colour: MUNSELL 10YR 6/3 "pale brown" (exterior).  
Inclusions: limestone, quartzite particles, and iron oxide grains observed.  
Analogies: HONCU 2017, 47, cat. no. 15 and Pl. II/14; PETRE 1987, Pl. 11/14b; PETRE 1987, Pl. 13B/16d1; POPILIAN 1976, 182, cat. no. 371 and Pl. XXXVII/371; SIMION 2007, Fig. 11/5.
8. Pot, restored, one-handed, globular upper-body and conical lower-body, superficial lid-seating on top of the rim, flat, round base. Decorated with grooves (on the upper part they are weathered and poorly visible). Superficial soot traces on the side. Fig. 8/8.  
Context: C5.  
Inv. No.: 55147.  
Dimensions: PH= 220 mm; MPD= 225 mm; BD= 76 mm; RD= 189 mm; d= 210 mm; Whandle= 31 × 10 mm; Hhandle= 71 mm; WGT= 1769 g.  
Colour: MUNSELL 2.5YR 5/8 "red" (exterior).  
Inclusions: muscovite flakes and quartzite observed.  
Analogies: SUCEVEANU 2000, 120, cat. no. 4 and Pl. 52/4; HONCU 2017, 56, cat. nos. 50-51 and Pl. V/47-48.
9. Belt-mount, restored, secured with two silver studs (both present). Geometric/stylised vegetative design. Fig. 12/9.  
Context: C5, -55 cm.  
Inv. No.: 53437.  
Dimensions: L= 25 mm; W= 10 mm; LD= 9 mm; Th= 0.76 mm; WGT= 0.8 g.  
Material: silver alloy.  
Analogies: SIMION 1994-1995, Fig. 7/I; REDŽIĆ 2013, 62, cat. no 89a-g and T. XII/89c.
10. Belt-mount, secured with two silver studs (one missing). Geometric/stylised vegetative design. Fig. 12/10.

Context: C5, -65 cm.

Inv. No.: 53438.

Dimensions: L= 22 mm; W= 11 mm; LD= 8 mm; Th= 0.8 mm; WGT= 0.74 g.

Material: silver alloy.

Analogies: SIMION 1994-1995, Fig. 7/I; REDŽIĆ 2013, 62, cat. no 89a-g and T. XII/89c.

11. Binding made from a folded silver strip, with a U-shaped cross-section, on one edge having a variant of a pelta-shaped mount/fitting, secured with one stud (missing). Fig. 12/11.

Context: C5, -62 cm.

Inv. No.: 53439.

Dimensions: L= 39 mm; W= 16 mm; LD= 7 mm; Th= 0.6 mm; WGT= 3.8 g.

Material: silver alloy.

Analogies: ALLASON-JONES, MIKET 1984, 252, cat. nos. 1062-1063 (bronze); BOUNEGRU 2017, Pl. XLIV/22 (iron); OLDENSTEIN 1977, Taf. 73/969.

12. Strap terminal (strip/hanger) made from a folded silver strip, secured with a silver stud (present). Short, longitudinal incisions made at its wider end. Fig. 12/12.

Context: C5, -65 cm.

Inv. No.: 55152.

Dimensions: L= 28 mm; W= 7 mm; HD= 2.6 mm; Th= 0.6 mm; WGT= 1.4 g.

Material: silver alloy.

Analogies: ALLASON-JONES, MIKET 1984, 207, cat. no. 703 (bronze); CHAPMAN 2005, 157, cat. no. Wn07 (bronze); HOSS 2014, Taf. 76/H.1; PETCULESCU 1995, 124, cat. no. 4 and Pl. 1/4 (bronze); REDŽIĆ 2013, 326, cat. no. 806 and T.LXX/806.

13. Openwork belt-plate. Rectangular plate with stepped front, two lugs, and a D-shaped loop (pelta-shaped cut). Secured with two copper alloy studs. Split pelta-motif on both ends. Lattice of interlocking vines and a singular heart-shaped leaf in the bottom-centre. Fig. 13/13.

Context: C5, -37 cm.

Inv. No.: 55149.

Dimensions: L= 54 mm; W= 32 mm; HD= 21 × 13 mm; d= 5 mm; Th= 1.6 mm; WGT= 15 g.

Material: copper alloy core, surface treatment (tinning/silver-plating) on the front, copper alloy studs.

Analogies: HOSS 2014, 146, cat. no. B.1008 and Taf. 46/B.1008 (for decoration); HOSS 2014, 155, B.1116 and Taf. 49/B.1116 (for frame and ends); PETCULESCU 1998, Fig. 1/2 (functional analogy); REDŽIĆ 2013, 197, cat. no. 435 and T.XLVII/435 (for frame and ends).

14. Openwork belt-plate (possible buckle-plate). Rectangular plate with stepped front and one split pelta end, while the other is a simple trapezium. Secured with two copper alloy studs. Lattice of interlocking vines and two heart-shaped leaves in the centre. Fig. 13/14.

Context: C5, -48 cm.

Inv. No.: 55151.

Dimensions: L= 60 mm; W= 20 mm; d= 5 mm; Th= 1.3 mm; WGT= 13 g.

Material: copper alloy core, surface treatment (tinning/silver-plating) on the front, copper alloy studs.

Analogies: HOSS 2014, 146, cat. no. B.1008 and Taf. 46/B.1008 (for decoration); HOSS 2014, 155, B.1116 and Taf. 49/B.1116 (for frame and ends); REDŽIĆ 2013, 197, cat. no. 435 and T.XLVII/435 (for frame and ends).

15. Openwork belt-plate. Rectangular plate with stepped front and split pelta-motif on each end. Secured with two copper alloy studs. Lattice of interlocking vines and two heart-shaped leaves in the centre. Fig. 13/15.

Context: C5, -37 cm.

Inv. No.: 55150.

Dimensions: L= 69 mm; W= 20 mm; d= 5 mm; Th= 1.3 mm; WGT= 13 g.

Material: copper alloy core, surface treatment (tinning/silver-plating) on the front, copper alloy studs.

Analogies: HOSS 2014, 146, cat. no. B.1008 and Taf. 46/B.1008 (for decoration); HOSS 2014, 155, B.1116 and Taf. 49/B.1116 (for frame and ends); REDŽIĆ 2013, 197, cat. no. 435 and T.XLVII/435 (for frame and ends).

16. *Pyxis*, restored, cylindrical body, deformed. Fig. 9/16.

Context: C5.

Inv. No.: 55153.

Dimensions: PH= 65 mm; MPD= 51 mm; Th= 0.3 mm; d= 64 mm; BD= 51 mm; RD= 51 mm; WBR= 5 mm; WGT= 31 g.

Material: copper alloy.

Analogies: BILKEI 1980, 79, cat. no. 69 and Taf. III/69; SIMION 1994-1995, Fig. 13/b (its dimensions are ca. 15% smaller); Louvre Collection, Br5706 at (last accessed on 18.08.2023).

17. *Pyxis* lid, incomplete and deformed. Fig. 10/17.

Context: C5, -34 cm.

Inv. No.: 53436.

Dimensions: PH= 4 mm; MPD= 60 mm; Th= 0.3 mm; HSD= 19 mm; WGT= 3 g.

Material: copper alloy.

Analogies: BILKEI 1980, 79, cat. no. 65 and Taf. III/65 (lid); FÜNFSCILLING 2012, 174, Abb. 10/1; FÜNFSCILLING 2012, 172, Abb. 7 (lid); SIMION 1994-1995, Fig. 13/b (its dimensions are ca. 15% smaller).

18. Coin, AS from Claudius (50 – 54 p. Chr.). Fig. 15/18.

Obverse: [TI CLA]VDIVS CAE[SAR A]VG P M [TR P IMP P P]. Head of Claudius, bare, left.

Reverse: unintelligible.

Context: C5.

Dimensions: D= 23 × 26 mm; WGT= 6.51 g.

Material: copper.

Analogy: RIC I, 116.

19. Bolt-head, almost complete. Octahedron head, circular neck, and socket. Fig. 16/19.

Context: C7.

Inv. No.: 55154.



Dimensions: L= 98 mm; W= 17 mm; Th= 2 mm; FD= 12 mm; MPD= 12 × 9 mm; PTD= 4.2 mm; Tlength= 55 mm; Flength= 43 mm; WGT= 33g.

Material: iron.

Analogies: BISHOP, COULSTON 2009, Fig. 47/3 (for the Early Principate period); BISHOP, COULSTON 2009, Fig. 82/4 (for the Antonine Period); CHAPMAN 2005, 55, cat. no. Ja10.

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The discoveries made in 2018 allow us to retrace part of the *funus*<sup>70</sup>. The Roman approach to disposing of the dead, seen as a necessity, in the Republican era and the Early Empire was determined in part by diverse cultural/religious beliefs in respect of two important components: the continued existence of the soul after death and the concept of the “pollution of death”<sup>71</sup>. The latter is of special interest to us, because the cultural view of death as an unclean element strongly influenced the treatment of the dead (as well as the objects connected to the dead) throughout the Empire: the vessels used in the customary pouring of wine, alongside the casting of a small quantity of soil over the remaining ashes from the cremation (*iniectio glebae*)<sup>72</sup> would have been deposited in C5 to prevent contaminating the living members of the family and friends. The only missing piece of this funeral puzzle is the location (*ustrinum*) of the pyre (*rogus*)<sup>73</sup>, which should have been in the vicinity. Moreover, the presence of a *Bos taurus* bone signals the presence of a food offering left by the mourners near the pyre<sup>74</sup> (even if it was not close enough to be burned by the flames of the pyre, the animal bone was contained with and subsequently deposited with the cremated bones).

After interring, in C5, the cremated remains, a funeral meal (*silicernium*) was eaten at the grave, and food and drink were left for the deceased<sup>75</sup>, as evident from the pots, jug, and mugs discovered. As mentioned earlier, except for one mug, the state of the remaining pottery could imply a ritual breaking.

The bronze coin could have been placed in the mouth of the deceased as a fee for the boatman Charon in exchange for transport<sup>76</sup>, a testament to the combination of traditions<sup>77</sup>: the Roman cult of the dead with the Greek scenario of an underworld (Hades’ realm). An interesting observation was made by G. Simion, after researching

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<sup>70</sup> Toynbee 1996, 43.

<sup>71</sup> Retief, Cilliers 2006, 128; Toynbee 1996, 43.

<sup>72</sup> Retief, Cilliers 2006, 135-136.

<sup>73</sup> Toynbee 1996, 49.

<sup>74</sup> King 2020, 135.

<sup>75</sup> Retief, Cilliers 2006, 141.

<sup>76</sup> Toynbee 1996, 49.

<sup>77</sup> King 2020, 138.

several tumular complexes in the area surrounding *Noviodunum*: the presence of coins is ubiquitous; very rarely they are missing from Roman funerary structures, and then only where cremations were performed<sup>78</sup>.

In the case of C2, the discovery of the *unguentarium* is similar to finds in the *Scupi* necropolis<sup>79</sup>: these vessels are found at the base level of the grave, next to the skeletal remains, around the legs (in our case study, the discovered bone fragments, next to the pottery, belong to a femur and tibia), in combination with jugs and cups (in our case study, mugs). The presence of a jug next to the *unguentarium* further sustains the hypothesis that it contained a different type of substance<sup>80</sup>: aromatic oils instead of wine.

However, these practices were not always standardized. The presence of certain funeral equipment (the goods used specifically in connection with the funeral rites and rituals) is indirectly transmitted to us: wine, oil/perfume, and foodstuffs, without excluding others that left no trace, such as incenses<sup>81</sup>.

Dress in Roman culture was particularly important as a means of asserting identity and status, and items were frequently used to signify official status<sup>82</sup>. In addition to clothes, jewellery, or rather the material from which they were made (gold, silver, bronze), also indicated a person's rank<sup>83</sup>.

Since personal possessions were cremated along with the deceased<sup>84</sup>, we hypothesize that such is the case of the belt pieces<sup>85</sup> discovered in C5, belonging to an individual of a certain military rank. Scholars argue that the *cingulum militare* conveyed additional messages, beyond simply "I am a soldier!": among them is the wealth and rank of the soldier, signalled by the value of the metal chosen for the mounts, with silver being reserved for the centurions<sup>86</sup>. This idea is supported by D'Amato when mentioning centurions portrayed in the Fayoum paintings<sup>87</sup>.

<sup>78</sup> Simion 1994, 94. This statement is contradicted by Oța 2013, 219: only 25 graves contained coins, of which 17 were "burnt pit" funerary structures. The total number of funerary structures published until 2013 is 124, see Oța 2013, 286; Oța 2017, 51.

<sup>79</sup> Кузманоски 2017, 80.

<sup>80</sup> Anderson-Stojanović 1987, 116.

<sup>81</sup> King 2020, 146-147. Author cites Propertius (*Elegiae* 2.10.24), in which incense is known as a "pauper's offering".

<sup>82</sup> Swift 2009, 140.

<sup>83</sup> Hoss 2017, 99.

<sup>84</sup> Retief, Cilliers 2006, 135; Toynbee 1996, 50.

<sup>85</sup> Toynbee 1996, 52.

<sup>86</sup> Hoss 2017, 104.

<sup>87</sup> D'Amato 2012, 33. The author mentions that, during the Early Roman period, the swords, scabbards, as well as sword baldrics of centurions were highly decorated with silver and bronze fittings and plates.

The soldier's everyday costume, when not in a campaign, was reduced to a belted tunic, a cloak (*sagum*), nailed sandals (*caligae*), and the main weapon (the sword), with the frequent supplement of a dagger<sup>88</sup>, explaining the discovery of the numerous hobnails, mounts, and plates, as well as the silver binding. However, the presence of two different materials used for the belt-plates/-mounts can indicate the following scenarios: either the plates/mounts pertain to two different clothing pieces (i.e., a belt and a scabbard or a sword baldric), or some items required replacing, but the only readily available material was copper/silver.

All things considered, the discoveries made in 2018 in the NE part of the *Noviodunum* archaeological site are important for a number of reasons: firstly, the identification of two funerary structures – a pit in which the cremation remains were interred, and a possible 'deviant' burial (or a secondary reburial of some human remains) – at the easternmost point of the known funerary space. Scholars considered, for some time, the Roman necropolis of *Noviodunum* as being almost exclusively tumular<sup>89</sup>, however the argument stands only because of the unevenly published material and the 'speculative' excavation pattern of research<sup>90</sup>. More recent discoveries<sup>91</sup> on the outskirts of Isaccea revealed an increasing number of Roman funerary structures that do not pertain to *tumuli*. The majority<sup>92</sup> of "burnt pit" funerary structures have been discovered inside *tumuli*. Only one other example has been documented<sup>93</sup> outside a *tumulus*. Therefore, feature C5 discussed in the current paper is, chronologically, the second discovery of its type at *Noviodunum* (with two later discoveries made in 2020<sup>94</sup> and 2021<sup>95</sup>). Furthermore, all of the documented simple pit inhumation graves pertain<sup>96</sup> to *tumuli*, and the discovery of C2, albeit an unusual funerary structure, comes as new information. We do not have sufficient information regarding C7 to attribute it to an inhumation grave.

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<sup>88</sup> Hoss 2017, 102.

<sup>89</sup> Oța 2017, 51.

<sup>90</sup> Here we address the available manpower and other resources, as well as the willingness of the state institutions to permit and/or invest into researching highly visible archaeological features, during the Communist Regime in Romania.

<sup>91</sup> Mocanu, Stănică, Stănescu 2021; Stănică *et alii* 2023.

<sup>92</sup> Oța 2017, 59: 63 out of a total of 83.

<sup>93</sup> Oța 2017, 59. However, we do not know if it is a "stepped-pit" or a simple pit.

<sup>94</sup> Mocanu, Stănică, Stănescu 2021, 223-226.

<sup>95</sup> Stănică *et alii* 2023, 810-811. The funerary structure named "CX2" is smaller, but otherwise has similar characteristics, including grave goods, to C5. It is generally dated 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD.

<sup>96</sup> Oța 2017, 58.

Secondly, by carefully observing the discovered artefacts we managed to partially retrace the funerary ritual. Moreover, we argue, based on the identified grave goods, that one of the graves (C5) belongs to a Roman military officer – a centurion.

Lastly, in C5, the *in situ* discovery of a diverse assemblage of Roman military artefacts from the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD is very important for dating similar small finds more precisely, as well as better understanding the association of grave goods.

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