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A SET OF MINIATURE MUGS FROM POIENEȘTI (ROMANIA): ATYPICAL DEPOSITION IN THE PERIPHERY OF A 2nd—3rd CENTURY AD NECROPOLIS

At the Roman-period site of Poienești-Măgură (Vaslui County, Romania), an unusual ceramic deposit (pit 1759a) was found, consisting of five small mugs. Unlike typical funerary contexts, this deposit — located at the southern boundary of the Poienești-Vârteșcoiu necropolis — lacks human remains, suggesting a non-funerary yet deliberate function. The vessels, carefully arranged and technologically refined, reflect influences from Greco-Roman and «barbarian» traditions, and may represent votive or foundation offerings marking the sacral limits of the cemetery. A second nearby pit (1759b), containing handmade pottery, further supports the hypothesis of intentional ritual deposition. Comparative evidence from Dacian, Sarmatian, and Roman provincial contexts suggests that these features exemplify cultural hybridity and religious transformation in frontier zones, where cosmopolitan models were reinterpreted within local symbolic frameworks.

Keyword: *Poienești-Măgură necropolis, Poienești-Vârteșcoiu culture, miniature mugs, ritual deposition, East-Carpathians.*

Pit 1759a at Poienești: an analysis of the archaeological context. Among the Roman-period discoveries yet to be published at the Poienești-Măgură site (Vaslui County, Romania) is a non-funerary deposit comprising five small mugs. This assemblage is located at the southern periphery of the Poienești necropolis, which dates to the 2nd—3rd centuries AD (fig. 1)¹. As will

be demonstrated in the following sections, there are notable and surprising connections between this deposit and the necropolis itself.

Feature 1759a—b (fig. 2) was discovered on the 14th of August 1999 during systematic excavations led by Mircea Babeș at the south-eastern extremity of the site (section 99, square 10). In this area, the stratigraphy is not particularly expressive. The topsoil is overlaid by an agricultural layer (ranging from 0.25/0.30 to 0.50/0.60 m) comprising materials from the 2nd—4th centuries AD (Poienești—Vârteșcoiu and Sântana de Mureș—Chernyakhiv cultures). However, at the base of this layer, materials from the Eneolithic (Cucuteni culture) and Late Bronze Age (Noua culture) have also been identified. Unlike the central areas of the site, where stratigraphy is clearly expressed, the south-eastern boundary section did not reveal any distinguishable layers.

The discovery was made on a slope of the site, where a combination of natural processes and human activity has gradually eroded the archaeological remains. Mechanized ploughing has affected the soil to a depth of ca. 0.25/0.30 m, leading to the dispersal of numerous ceramic fragments. After the removal of the topsoil, various assemblages of pottery, animal bone, and stone were identified at depths between 0.25 and 0.45 m. A thorough examination revealed that the material in question does not originate from the ancient

1. The necropolis is part of the «Poienești—Vârteșcoiu» group. This name refers to a regional group of burial places discovered between the Carpathian Mountains and the Prut river and framed in the 2nd—3rd centuries AD (a synthetic approach in: Spânu 2019,

p. 93—96, 110—112, with a repertoire of discoveries on p. 167—170). The settlements synchronous to these burial places can be integrated into the same group. In Romanian historiography, these discoveries have been attributed either to the «Carp» (e. g. Bichir 1973) or to the «Free Dacians» (e. g. Ioniță 1982). A critique of these ethnic determinations in Spânu 2019, p. 27—28, 99—100, 115—116.

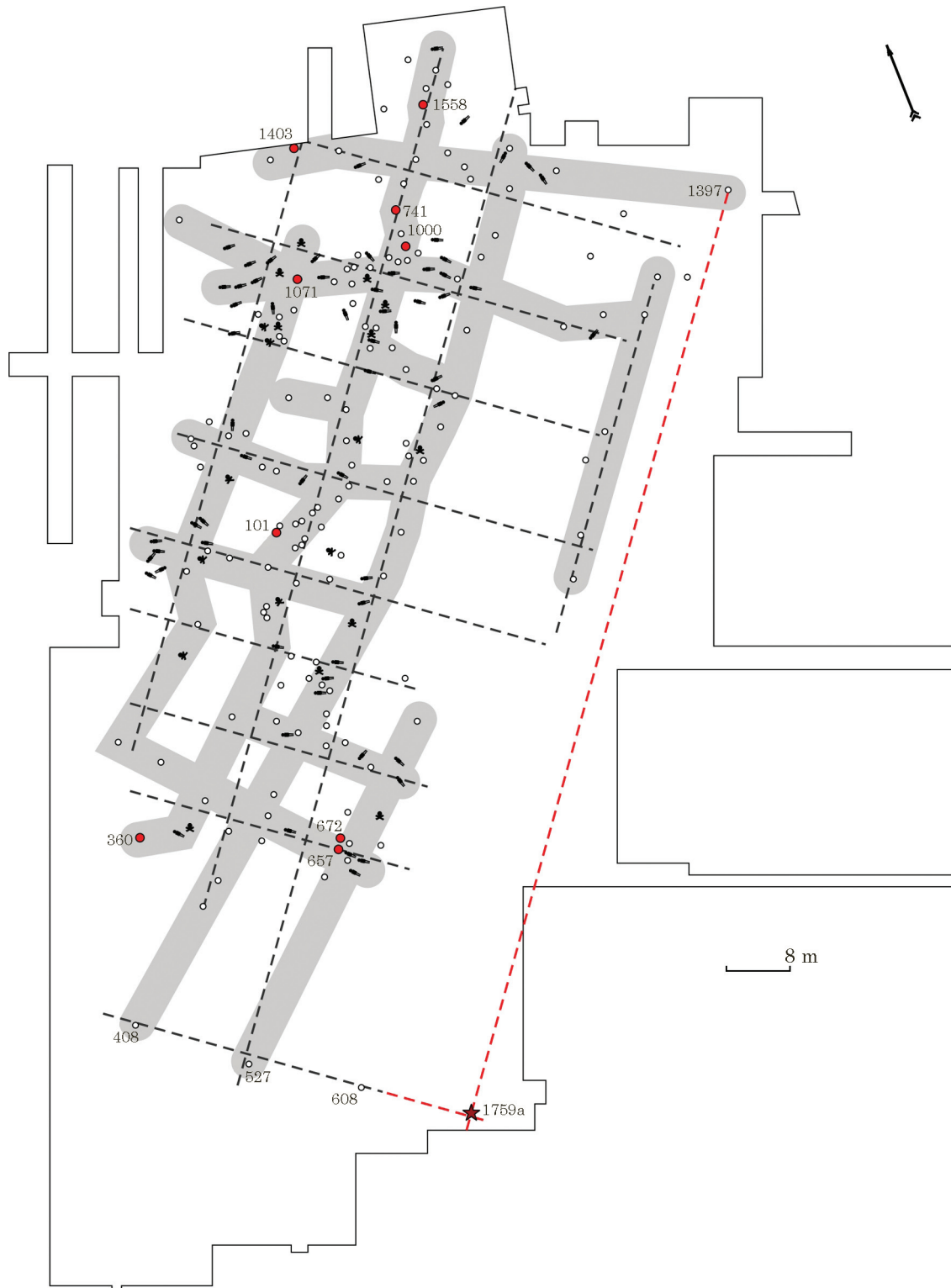


Fig. 1. Layout of the 2nd–3rd century necropolis at Poieniști and distribution of small cups in the grave (circle) and in pit 1759a (star). Necropolis plot after Spânu 2019

Рис. 1. План некрополя II—III ст. н. е. у Поєнешть і розподіл малих куклів в могилі (коло) та в ямі 1759а (зірка). План некрополя за Spânu 2019

occupation surface. The predominant materials identified (1759a and 1759b) correspond to the lowermost strata of the fills of pits that were excavated into the ancient topsoil. The level from which pits 1759a and 1759b were excavated, along with the upper parts of their fills, has been

destroyed by modern agricultural works. The two pits were not dug down to sterile soil (fig. 2). However, no tangible evidence of a dwelling structure was found, only a few stones dislodged by ploughing were identified in the agricultural layer.

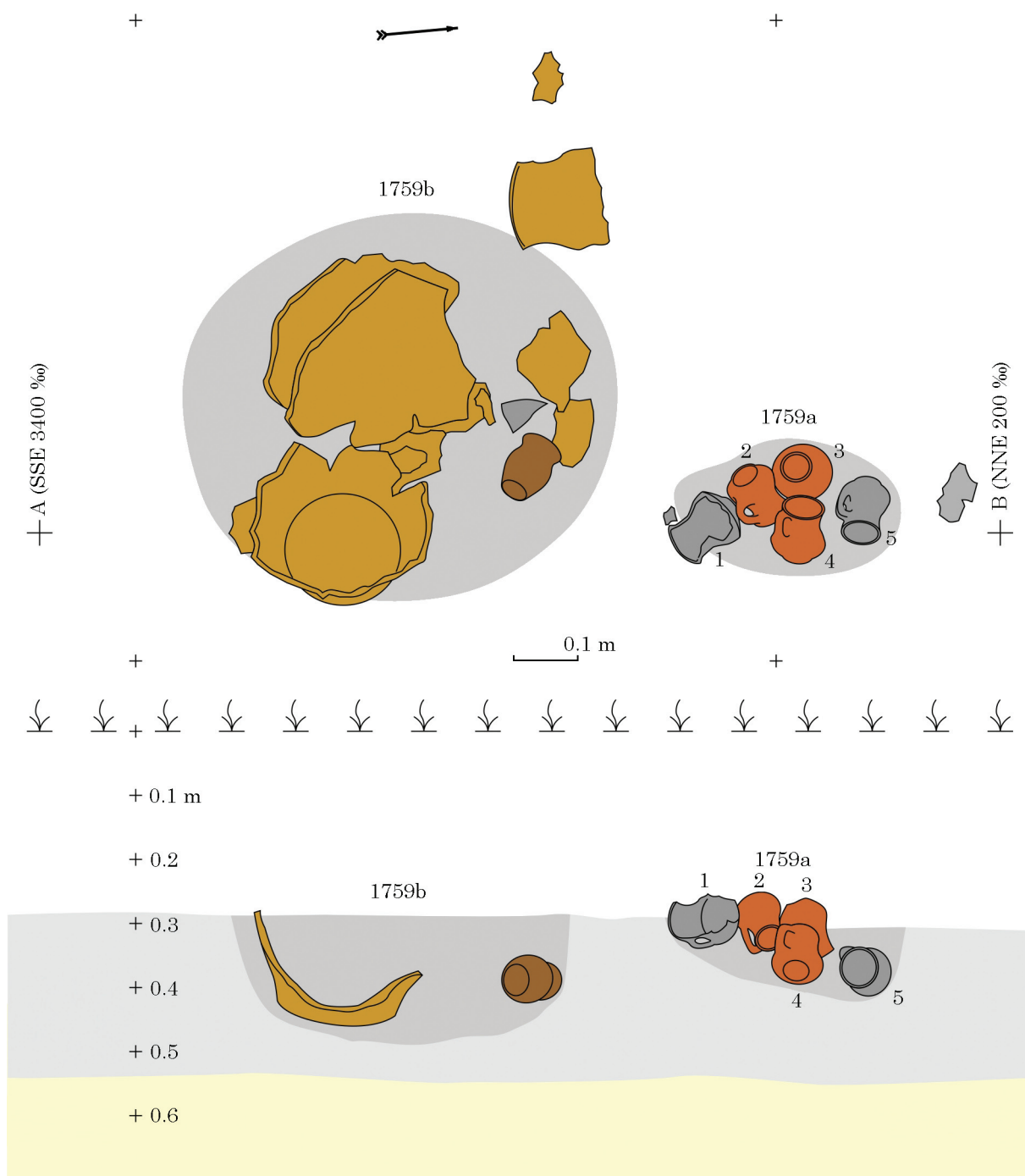


Fig. 2. Pits 1759a and 1759b. Processing of terrain surveys: Daniel Spânu (august 1999)
Рис. 2. Ями 1759a та 1759b. Обробка топографічних даних Daniel Spânu (серпень 1999)

The inventory of the feature 1759a consists of five mugs. Upon dismantling the structure, it was observed that the vessels were positioned on a thin brown-black layer (the base of the pit fill). A brown-black stain was also defined in feature 1759b, which was found to be an oval pit containing pottery sherds. Consequently, the materials in clusters 1759a and 1759b are the inventories of two distinct pits and form primary archaeological complexes features. The material located outside of clusters 1759a and 1759b (previously designated «groups 1759c—h» in the initial docu-

mentation) was identified as secondary fill in the culture layer and appears to have been randomly dispersed by ploughing.

The five mugs from pit 1759a (figs. 2 and 3) were placed with relative care, one next to the other, at the bottom of the pit. Their deposition was therefore deliberate. The red vessels (nos. 2—4) were deposited centrally, and the two grey mugs were placed sideways: one to the south (no. 1), and the other to the north (no. 5). The mugs were not found in an upright (normal) position. The second and third ones were inverted. Vessel no. 4

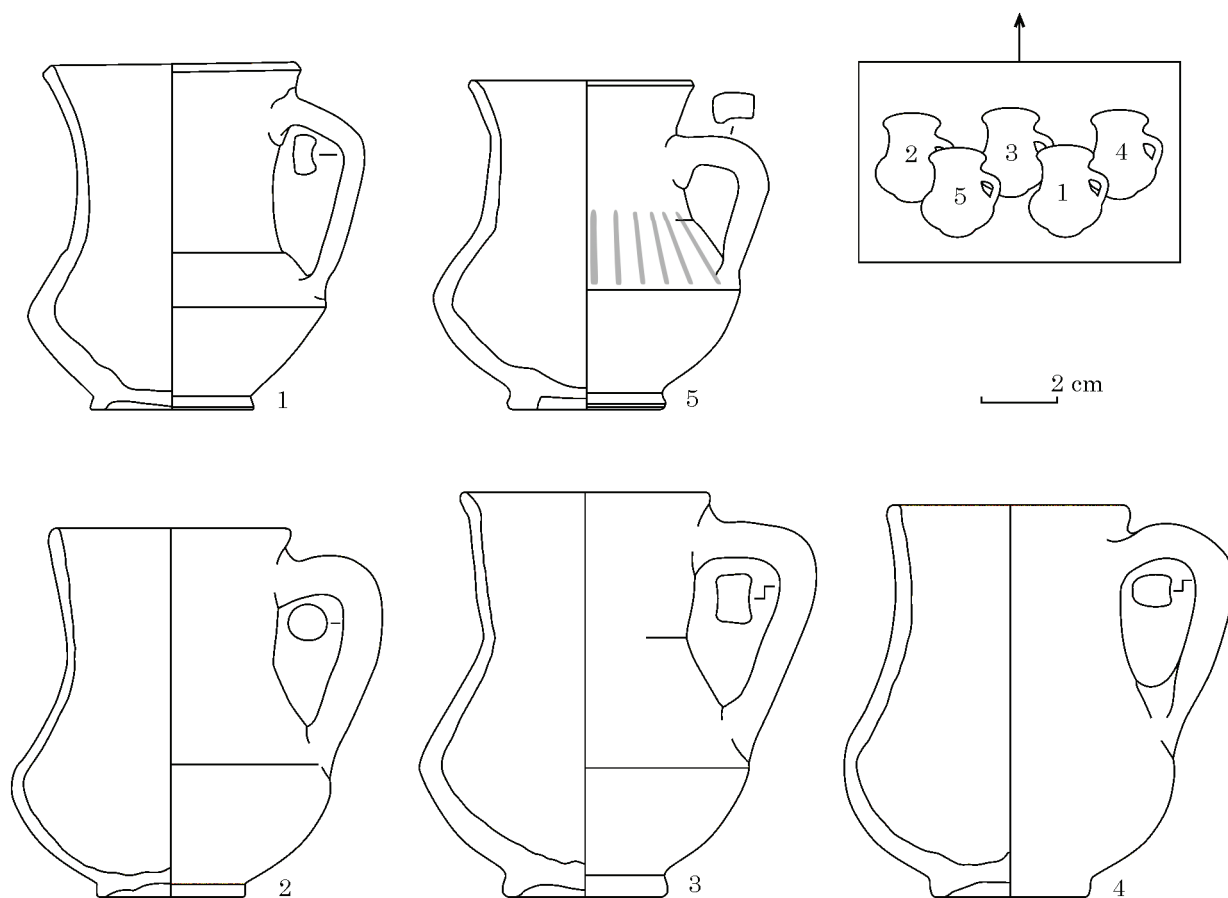


Fig. 3. Mugs from 1759a (photo Daniel Spânu, may 2025; digital processing of drawings made by Cristina Georgescu, february 2000)

Рис. 3. Кухлі з 1759а (фото Daniel Spânu, травень 2025; цифрова обробка малюнків виконана Cristina Georgescu, лютий 2000)

was discovered on the barrel, with the mouth to the west and partially overlapped by nos. 2 and 3. Mug no. 1 was found oriented with its mouth facing southeast and showed signs of partial damage caused by ploughing. Mug no. 5 was lying in a prone position, with the mouth oriented toward the east. Mug no. 1 was buried at the shallowest depth, at approximately 0.32 m, while no. 5 was at the greatest depth, at 0.43 m². The bottom of the pit was not horizontal. A clean yellow soil was observed inside the mugs. No inhumed or incinerated human bones were identified; therefore, a funerary character of the deposition is not explicit and can be excluded. Following their discovery, the mugs were restored in the Ceramic Conservation and Restoration Laboratory of the Institute of Archaeology in Bucharest and drawn by restorer Cristina Georgescu.

The outline of pit 1759b could be clearly delineated on the 0.32 m excavation level. In this instance, the fill of the pit (a blackish-brown soil) could be distinguished from the yellowish-brown cultural layer. The pit is oval in shape (diameters: 60—68 cm). Its maximum depth is 0.50 m. In the centre of the pit and in the south-eastern part, fragments of a handmade pot made of reddish coarse fabric were identified. The walls of this pot have collapsed over an area of 50 cm and lie at the bottom of the pit, at depths between 0.41 and 0.50 m. Significant parts of the large pot (especially fragments of the neck and rim) were displaced by ploughing to the west, beyond the limits of the pit. Also recovered in this area were a base fragment of a smaller hand-made vessel, made from reddish-brown fabric, and a wall fragment of a wheel-thrown vessel made from greyish fabric. In the northeast part of the feature, a complete, hand-made jug was found lying on its side. It was made of thick, coarse, greyish-brown fabric, and was oriented with its mouth facing west.

In the cultural layer surrounding the two pits (1759a—b), numerous animal bones³, ceramic fragments from hand-made vessels, a fragment of slag and heavily oxidised fragments from a small knife were identified. Despite meticulous observation, it was not impossible to achieve stratigraphic separation between the material dislodged by the modern plough and the material abandoned in the cultural layer during pre-modern times⁴.

Technical description of the mugs.

1. Wheel-thrown mug, fired in a reducing atmosphere; parts of the neck and belly were disturbed

2. All depths are measured from the contemporary occupation surface.

3. A pig mandible, a canine mandible oriented towards the north, a bovid clavicle, other smaller animal bones (preliminary determinations by Mircea Babeş).

4. With the exception of the hand-made cup (fig. 4: 6), all the materials from the stratum and from pit 1759b are preserved in the Ştefan cel Mare History Museum in Vaslui.

by ploughing; the mug has a faceted handle with a square cross-section; height: 9.2 cm; maximum diameter: 7.9 cm; rim diameter: 6.8 cm; fig. 3: 1.

2. Wheel-thrown mug, oxidizing firing; red slip on the exterior; handle with a rounded cross-section; height: 9.76 cm; maximum diameter: 8.4 cm; rim diameter: 6.4 cm; fig. 3: 2.

3. Wheel-thrown mug, oxidizing firing; red slip on the exterior; faceted handle with a square cross-section; height: 10.7 cm; maximum diameter: 8.7 cm; rim diameter: 6.6 cm; fig. 3: 3.

4. Wheel-thrown mug, oxidizing firing; red slip on the exterior; faceted handle with a square cross-section; height: 10.7 cm; maximum diameter: 8.7 cm; rim diameter: 6.4 cm; fig. 3: 4.

5. Wheel-thrown mug, fired in a reducing atmosphere; traces of burnishing on the belly; faceted handle with a square cross-section; height: 10.4 cm; maximum diameter: 8.1 cm; rim diameter: 5.9 cm; fig. 3: 5.

The importance of mugs deposit in the context of the Poienestî remains. The Poienestî-Măgură site has received significant attention in the literature east of the Carpathians due to the presence of two major and distinct archaeological assemblages. The first is the necropolis of the Poienestî-Vârteşcoiu type, dating from the 2nd—3rd centuries AD. The second assemblage is the settlement attributed to the Sântana de Mureş—Chernyakhiv culture, dating from the 3rd—4th centuries. The order in which the two communities emerged has been a subject of historiographical debate⁵, and has only been recently clarified in the literature (Babeş et al. 1980; Babeş 2000, p. 340; Spânu 2012, p. 176—180; Spânu et al. 2019, p. 38—41, fig. 8). Furthermore, the hypothesis of Sarmatian funerary practices — specifically, the intentional modification of the crania (Morintz 1959, p. 465, 468; 1961, p. 411; Nestor 1960, p. 678—679) — was ultimately refuted (Ignat 1999, p. 20). Interpreted with bias as evidence of the continuity of the autochthonous population (Vulpe 1953, p. 498, 501—505; Ioniţă 1982, p. 68; Ioniţă 2001, p. 428—430), the necropolis dated to the 2nd—3rd centuries reveals a series of funerary rituals that reflect the influence of rural Roman provincial culture beyond the Empire's military frontiers (Spânu 2019, p. 90—93).

In this regard, several elements are particularly revealing: age-differentiated burial practices (such as the inhumation of children and incineration of adults), the organization of the necropolis into family plots arranged along a relatively regular rectangular grid, and the distinct funerary representation of both the child and the family unit. None of these characteristics have

5. Vulpe 1953 dated the necropolis after the settlement; cf. Morintz 1959, p. 468; 1961, p. 411; Mitrea 1960, p. 639; Nestor 1960, p. 678; Bichir 1961, p. 263—271; 1973, p. 38—42; 1984, p. 198—200; Ioniţă 1982, p. 64—69.

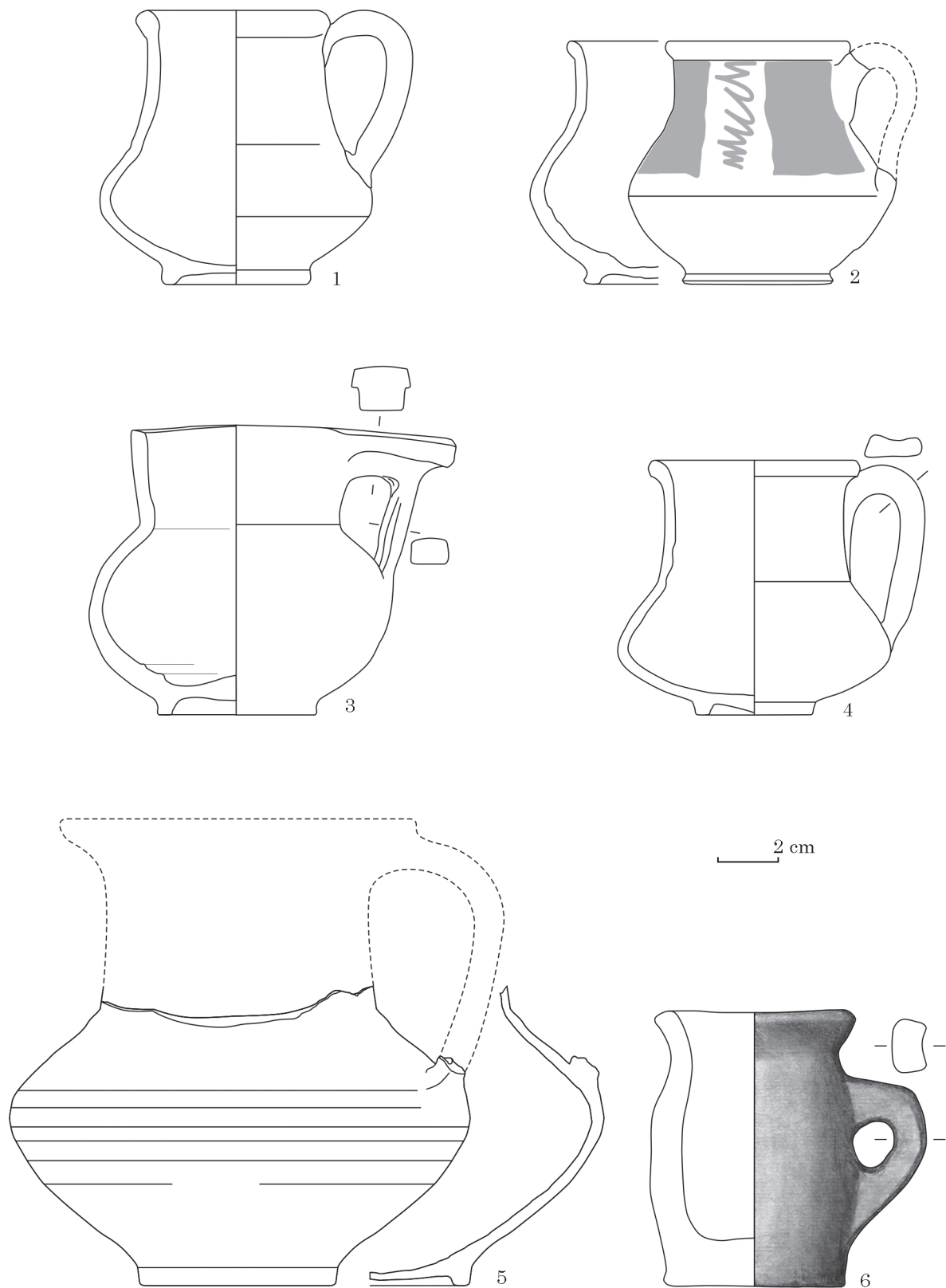


Fig. 4. Small cups from Poieniști: 1–5 — cups from the graves 101, 657, 672, 1403, and 1558; 6 — cup from pit 1759b. 1, 3, 4 — oxidized fired cups, wheel-made; 2, 5 — reduced fired cups, wheel-made; 6 — cup made of brown-gray clay, hand-made (drawings: 1–5 — after the originals by Daniel Spânu; 6 — by Cristina Georgescu)

Рис. 4. Маленькі кувлі з Поенешть: 1–5 — кувлі з могил 101, 657, 672, 1403 та 1558; 6 — кувль з ями 1759b. 1, 3–4 — кружалні, з покращеним випалом; 2, 5 — кружалні, з повільним випалом; 6 — ліпний, сіро глиняний (малюнки: 1–5 — Daniel Spânu з оригіналу; 6 — Cristina Georgescu)

precedents in local cultural traditions prior to the Roman conquest of Dacia (before 106 AD). They should be understood as expressions of a radical transformation in funerary practices in the East-Carpathian *Barbaricum*, shaped by the influence of Roman provincial traditions (Spânu 2012, p. 178—185; 2019, p. 92).

In this context, it is not surprising that numerous Roman imports can be identified in the funerary inventories from the 2nd—3rd centuries AD necropolis. Despite the emphasis placed on the cosmopolitan character of the rituals at Poienеști (Spânu 2019, p. 90—93), there are certain lines of research that remain to be fully explored. The discourse surrounding the mugs from pit 1759a and their analogies in the same necropolis and beyond presents a valuable opportunity for further insights and research perspectives.

Analogies in the necropolis at Poienеști. As demonstrated in fig. 4, small cups of a comparable shape to those found in pit 1759a were also identified in graves 101, 657, 672, 1403 and 1558. It can be proposed that they are related to the destroyed or lost mugs from graves 360, 741, 1000 and 1071. The artefacts from graves 657 and 1558 exhibit a greyish slip, while those from graves 101, 672, and 1403 display a red one and evidence of polishing. The small cups were not employed as urns, but rather as secondary «offering vessels». The mugs from graves 657, 672, 741 and 1403 were found inside the urns above the cremated bones. The larger mug from grave 1558 (fig. 4: 5) was used to cover the urn (thus acting as a lid).

The burial ritual involved the depositing of a single cup in the grave. The mugs found in urn cremation graves at Poienеști attributable to adults are exclusively of a funeral purpose. It is noteworthy that such mugs are never found in the burial graves of prematurely deceased individuals, particularly children and adolescents. The relatively limited number of mugs in the collection does not permit a clear correlation between their ritual burial and the gender of the deceased. As established by the anthropologists Nicolae Mirițoiu and Mihaela Culea (cf. Spânu 2019, p. 145—163), features 101 and 657 are male, while 360 and 1558 are female. The gender of the deceased in graves 672 and 1403 remains undetermined.

The chronological framework. The chronological framing of pit 1759a is determined by the analogies with the mugs from graves 657 and 1403 (figs. 4: 2 and 4). Grave 657 contains a strongly profiled fibula (fig. 5, above), while 1403 — a fibula with enamel inlaid alveoli (fig. 5, bottom).

Technically, the strongly profiled fibulae from Poienеști match to the Jobst 5 / Almgren 74—84 type (with a spring developed from the bow)⁶. The

6. For this typological group see: Jobst 1975, p. 40—41; cf. Gabler 1981, p. 328—329, fig. 40: 5; Dąbrowska

majority of Jobst 5 variants were widely used during the B2a—B2b periods. In terms of absolute chronology, their employment predates and overlaps with the Marcomanic Wars. Subsequently, their production ceased, their use declined and they fell out of favour. Therefore, grave 657 can be dated to the early phase of the Poienеști necropolis.

The fibula from grave 1403 consists of a conical plate surrounded by six discoidal niches with polychrome enamel. A product of provincial workshops, this shape corresponds to the Riha 7.11.2 type and has numerous analogies in western and Danubian Roman provinces, as well as in Sarmatian finds from Hungary or in Slovakia⁷. Specimens of this type are dated to a wide range, i. e. between the middle of the 1st and early 3rd century AD (Riha 1994, p. 159—160; cf. Leifeld 2007, p. 243)⁸. However, the majority of such fibulae found north of the Black Sea are dated in the late phase of this timeframe (late 2nd — early 3rd century; Hellström 2018, p. 123; Variante VII.4h). A close analogy for the 1403 (grave) — fibula is provided by a specimen from Kaiseraugst, dated to the latter half of the 2nd century and the beginning of the following one (Riha 1979, p. 43, p. 186—187). From this perspective, the fibula from grave 1403 can be regarded as one of the later chronological marker of the Poienеști necropolis.

The graves cited indicate that the use of small cups in funerary rituals persisted throughout the entire period of the Poienеști necropolis. Simultaneously, the import of provincial fibulae can be chronologically aligned with the appearance of polished miniature mugs.

The spatial correlation with the necropolis. Spatial analysis of the 2nd—3rd century necropolis at Poienеști has revealed a possible rectangular grid underlying the distribution of grave groups (Spânu 2012, p. 178—179, fig. 12; Spânu 2019, p. 83—89, fig. 32). Can the position of pit 1759a be correlated with this spatial organization? Notably, pit 1759a is located at a considerable distance — approximately 14 m — from the nearest grave at the southern end of the necropolis. However, it is important to note that pit 1759a appears to be collinear with the southernmost row of graves, suggesting a possible adherence to the broader spatial logic of the necropolis despite its relative isolation. Furthermore, it is evident that pit 1759a and three of the graves (408, 527 and 608) are situated at a comparable distance from one another (see fig. 1). The 1759a feature and the easternmost grave of the necropolis (1397, lo-

1994, p. 29. The chronological framing proposed by Bichir 1973, p. 100 for the «Carpic-type» fibulae is inaccurate.

7. For this typological group see: Selye 1939, pl. XX: 4, 9; Patek 1942, p. 122; Kolnik 1965, p. 185, fig. 2.

8. Ettlinger 1973, p. 130 accepts a dating of the Swiss items in the early to mid 2nd century AD; cf. Cociș 2004, p. 123.

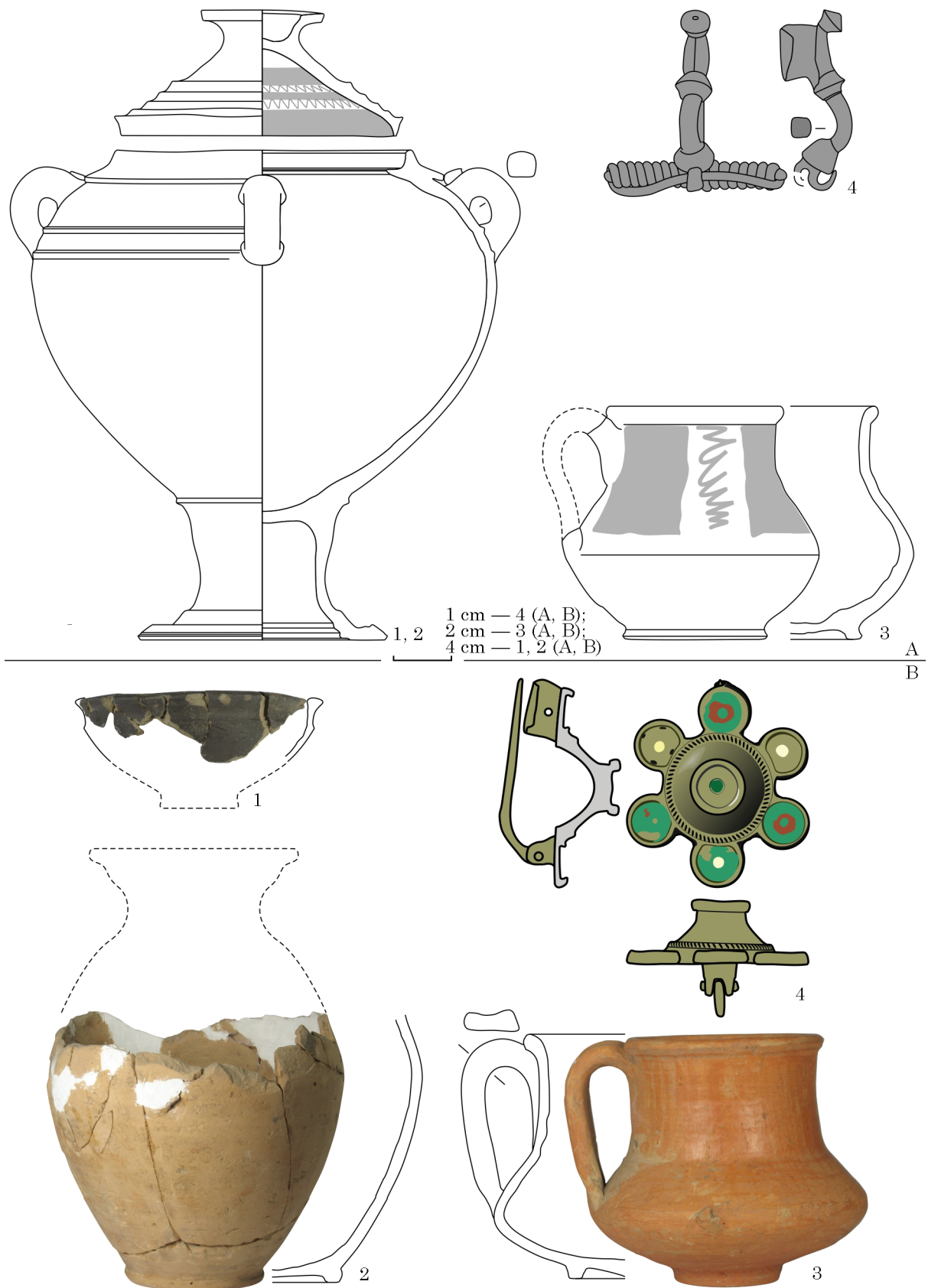


Fig. 5. Inventories of graves 657 (A) and 1403 (B) from Poienestî. Drawings and photos: Daniel Spânu
Рис. 5. Начиння могил 657 (A) та 1403 (B) з Поенешть. Малюнки і фото Daniel Spânu

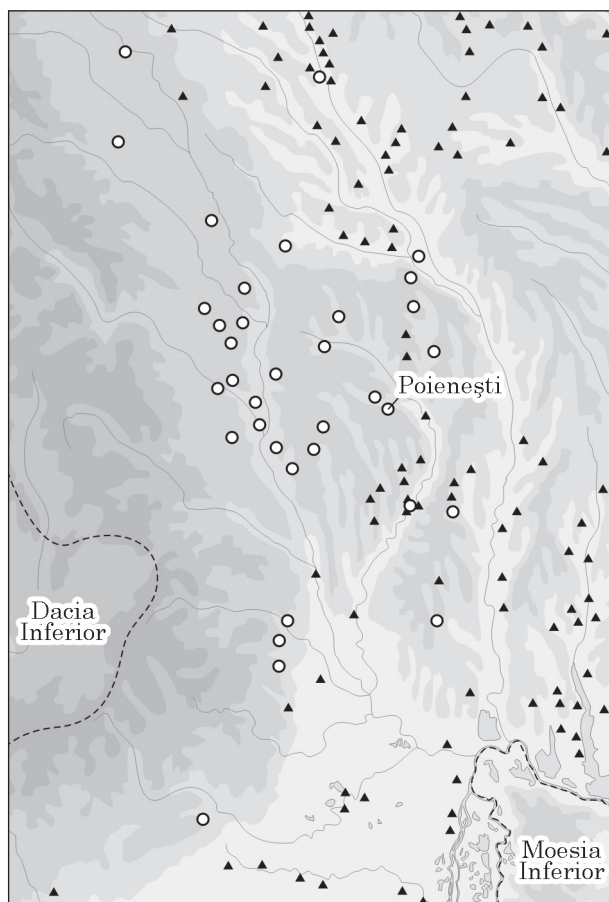


Fig. 6. The East Carpathian area in the 2nd–3rd centuries AD. Circles — Poienesti-Vârtescoiu type necropolises; triangles — Sarmatian burials (graphics: Daniel Spânu)

Рис. 6. Східно-карпатський регіон у II—III ст. н. е. Коло — некрополі типу Поенешть-Виртешкої; трикутники — сарматські поховання (малюнок Daniel Spânu)

cated in the northeast of the area surveyed) form an axis parallel to the main axes of the necropolis (see fig. 1). The two axes (1397–1759a and 408–1759a) are found to be relatively perpendicular to each other. It is implausible that these spatial relationships are merely coincidental.

Consequently, the location of pit 1759a does not appear to be coincidental and can be correlated with the rectangular layout of the necropolis. The question of whether the deposition in pit 1759a was related to the procedures and plotting of the cemetery's layout in the 2nd–3rd centuries is a subject that may be raised. If this hypothesis is valid, the deposit of mugs could be interpreted as a founding offering for the Poienesti necropolis. This hypothesis is not contradicted by the possibility of dating the small mugs to the early phase of the necropolis, as suggested by the inventory of grave 657.

The impact of a cosmopolitan model: vessel analogies in neighbouring environments. The miniature mugs from pit 1759a follow the long-standing tradition of Greek oenochoe vessels

(Richter, Milne 1935, p. 18–19; Schiering 1983, p. 146, 152–153; Clarc et al. 2002, p. 118–119). This tradition was perpetuated in the Roman world in both ceramic and toreutic production⁹. Determining the precise origin of the Poienesti mugs would require a more extensive investigation than can be provided in this contribution. However, it is important to emphasise certain specific characteristics: the quality of the fabric, the accuracy of the modelling, the surface treatment, and the high-quality firing (whether oxidising or reducing) are indicative of specialised manufacture. A number of suggestive factors may be invoked to assist in the unravelling of the provenance of these mugs.

In the inventory of the potter's kiln investigated at Poienesti in the years 1989–1992¹⁰, no replicas of similar mugs were identified. At the present stage of research one can only question whether this absence is due to a hypothetical but possible chronological gap. On the other hand, the handworked mug discovered in pit 1759b (fig. 4: 6) could illustrate autochthonous replicas. Its rudimentary appearance suggests that it is a product of local household pottery (it is implausible that this mug was produced by a specialist potter). Despite the absence of explicit imitation, the handmade mug from pit 1759b (fig. 4: 6) exhibits a substantial similarity in size and capacity to the mugs from pit 1759a (fig. 3). Their burial in very close pits (fig. 2) is likely not an incidental occurrence. In any case, the vessel from pit 1759b reflects the influence of cosmopolitan provincial and Pontic (?) environments in *Barbaricum*.

In the area of the Poienesti–Vârtescoiu group (fig. 6), with the exception of the few graves from Poienesti mentioned above and a grave from Pădureni (Bichir 1973, 343, pl. CXXVII: 4, grave 34), small mugs are more frequently found in settlements (especially at Poiana-Dulcești, but also at Țifești and Butnărești; Bichir 1973, p. 82–84, type d, p. 339–348, pl. CXXIII–CXXXII; cf. Ioniță 1982, fig. 25: 1–8).

The dimensions and the particular context of the two shortest vessels from the pottery centre of Butnărești have not been sufficiently analysed in the literature (Bichir 1973, 345, pl. CXXIX: 1, 2). The mugs from the Pruteni pottery centre (Vornic et al. 2007, p. 101, type 1, fig. 10: 8; 36: 18; 66: 6; 71: 3; 74: 4) cannot be considered close formal analogies for the specimens from pit 1759a, as they are significantly larger (with belly diameters exceeding 10–12 cm). The relatively small number of miniature mugs, along with the high quality of their craftsmanship, casts a particular

9. For example in the toreutics of the Republican era: Boube 1991 (especially Ornavasso, Kjaerumgard, and Kelheim mug types).

10. Mircea Babeș excavations; study in progress; unpublished material at the Vaslui Museum. The inventory of another kiln also discovered at Poienesti (Bichir 1973, p. 58; Comșa 1985) has been lost.

light on the question of their provenance. If they were produced in provincial workshops, these miniature mugs could be interpreted as Roman imports into the Poieniști-Vârteșcoiu cultural group. However, if it could be demonstrated that they were made in East-Carpathian pottery centres, this would provide compelling evidence for the transmission of Roman pottery technology into the *Barbaricum*.

In the present-day territory of Romania, mugs similar to those in pit 1759a have been found in contexts traditionally attributed to the Dacian and Sarmatian culture. Miniature forms not very different from a typological point of view come from terrace V at Grădiștea de Munte (Hunedoara County). Here, in a dwelling, a wooden medical kit was discovered, containing a pair of bronze tweezers (*vulsella*), a scalpel (*scalpellus*), a volcanic plate of Mediterranean origin and five small vessels (fig. 7: 1, 2)¹¹. Closely related forms have also been identified in other Dacian settlements, such as Piscul Crăsani or Tinosul, and are interpreted as «ritual vessels», «toys» or «jars» for storing substances used in medicine¹².

The kit from Grădiștea de Munte and the analogies in the Dacian environment have been dated to the late 1st century — early 2nd century AD (Daicoviciu et al. 1957, p. 262; Rustoiu 2019, p. 133). The question arises as to whether this kit could be regarded as an indicator of direct Roman presence at Grădiștea de Munte in the context of the military conquest of Dacia. Given that the medical utensils, the box in which they were stored, and the volcanic stone are all imported objects in the Dacian context of the Orăștiei Mountains, it is plausible that the five miniature vessels — possibly associated with the storage of medicinal products — were also of Greco-Roman origin.

Small-sized cups (measuring between 8 and 10 cm in height) are frequently found in Sarmatian graves across the East-Carpathian region. These vessels represent a recurrent element of funerary practice and serve as cultural markers of nomadic ritual traditions. The most numerous and typologically diverse examples are those fired in a reductive atmosphere. Comparable ceramic series to the grey vessels uncovered in pit 1759a

originate from the Sarmatian necropolises at Livieni-Lutărie and Vlăsinești—Iazul Nou (Botoșani County; fig. 7: 6—11). Both necropolises are dated to the period between the 2nd century and the first half of the 3rd century AD (Diaconescu 2013, p. 9; Ciucălău 2018, p. 18—19). The custom of depositing small cups in Sarmatian burials can be traced further eastward, throughout the North Pontic region, reaching as far as the Kuban area¹³.

On the other hand, mugs made of fine fabric, fired in an oxidizing environment and coated with slip, are attested much less frequently. A nearly identical parallel to the red vessels from feature 1759a comes from the Sarmatian grave at Chiscani-sat (Brăila County; Oța, Sîrbu 2009, p. 119, fig. 2: 5). This jar (fig. 7: 3), made of red fabric, measures 9.7 cm in height¹⁴ — comparable in size to the specimens from Poieniști. The partially recovered funerary inventory from Chiscani (fig. 6: 3—5) included, in addition to the vessel, a mirror-pendant, an earring, and a fibula with headknob, external chord and vertical catchplate (*Fibel mit hohem Nadelhalter* / Almgren Group VII, Series I). This assemblage dates to the second half of the 2nd century — first half of the 3rd century AD, corresponding to the late C1a — early C1b phase (Bârcă 2022, p. 149; cf. Cociș, Bârcă 2020, p. 148; Bârcă, Cociș 2022, p. 254, fig. 3: 11; Bârcă, Cociș 2023, p. 36, 44, fig. 3: 11).

Vitalie Bârcă's assertion that similar vessels, both oxidising and reductive, cannot be attributed exclusively to a specific ethnic tradition is well-founded. Instead, these vessels are more likely to be attributed to a blend of cultural influences. The quality of the fabric and the painting of the Chiscani mug indicate that its production was either the result of a «barbarian» craftsman operating in contact with the Roman environment of the Lower Danube, or a craftsman of Roman origin who was active in the area of interaction on the *limes*, where trade between the Romans and the non-Romans was frequent (Bârcă 2022, p. 149). Moreover, the fluidity of the *limes* and the circulation of provincial ceramic forms in the East-Carpathian area are also indicated by other Roman varieties, such as slender pots with or without handles (Spânu 2020, p. 101—104, fig. 24).

11. Daicoviciu et al. 1957, p. 260, fig. 2; see more recently Rustoiu 2019, p. 133.

12. Vulpe, Vulpe 1924, p. 206—207, fig. 36, with the observation: «Il est difficile de trouver l'emploi de ces miniatures. M. Andricșescu en étudiant celles de Piscul-Crăsani paraît donner à ces vases un caractère rituel en rapport avec les tombes et d'un autre côté entrevoyait la possibilité de les considérer comme des jouets. La première hypothèse nous paraît plus certaine. En effet, presque toujours ces miniatures se trouvent ou auprès ou dans les tombes. Peut-être remplaçaient-elles, en les imitant, — pour les gens pauvres qui trouvaient ainsi le moyen de contenter les exigences rituelles — les urnes funéraires ou les autres vases sacrés». Cf. Daicoviciu et al. 1957, p. 261.

13. E. g. Simonenko et al. 2008, p. 373—374, cat. nr. 179, pl. 187: 8 (necropolis from «Starokorsunskoe-settlement 3», grave 470) and cat. nr. 186, pl. 194: 6 (necropolis from «Elizavetskoe-settlement 2», grave 11).

14. This grave was recently reanalyzed by V. Bârcă; the author described the vessel as: «small, wheel-thrown cup found in feet area. Its body is biconical, lip has rounded and slightly everted edge, vertical and cylindrical neck, well-marked shoulders and ring foot. The cup is of fine, yellowish-orange fabric with orange-red slip; H: 9.7 cm; Dr: 6.7 cm, Db: 5.7 cm» (Bârcă 2022, p. 140).

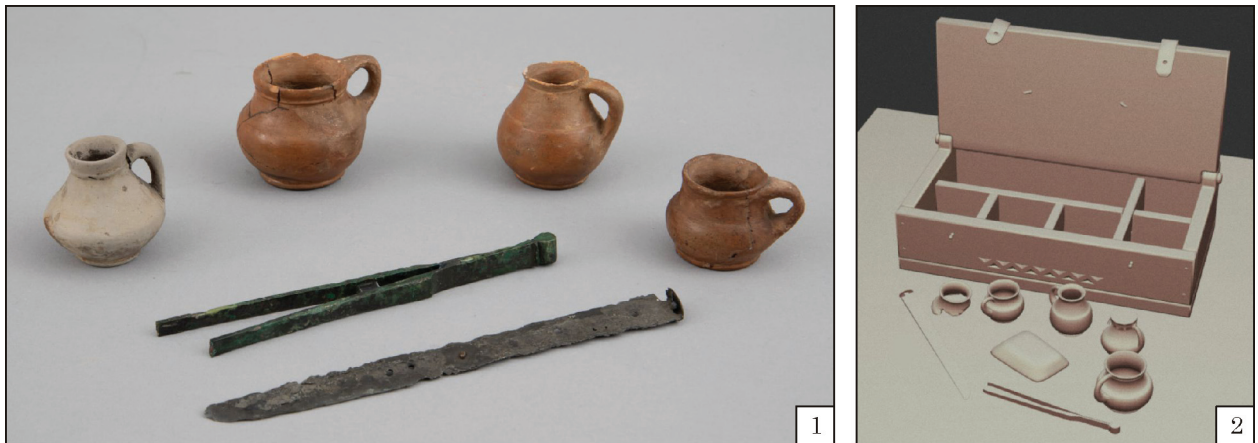


Fig. 7. Analogies: 1, 2 — medical kit from Sarmizegetusa-Regia; 3—5 — Chiscani-village; 6, 7 — Liveni-Lutărie; 8—11 — Vlăsinești-Iazul Nou (1, 2 — <https://dacians.romaniadevis.ro/blog/37>; 3—5 — Oța, Sîrbu 2009; Bărcă 2022; 8—11 — Botoșani County Museum, photos and drawings: Lavinia Grumeza)

Рис. 7. Аналогії: 1, 2 — медичний набір з Сарміцегетузи-Регії; 3—5 — Кицкань; 6, 7 — Лівень-Лутеріє; 8—11 — Влєсінешть-Язул Ной (1, 2 — <https://dacians.romaniadevis.ro/blog/37>; 3—5 — Оța, Sîrbu 2009; Bărcă 2022; 8—11 — Botoșani County Museum, photos and drawings: Lavinia Grumeza)

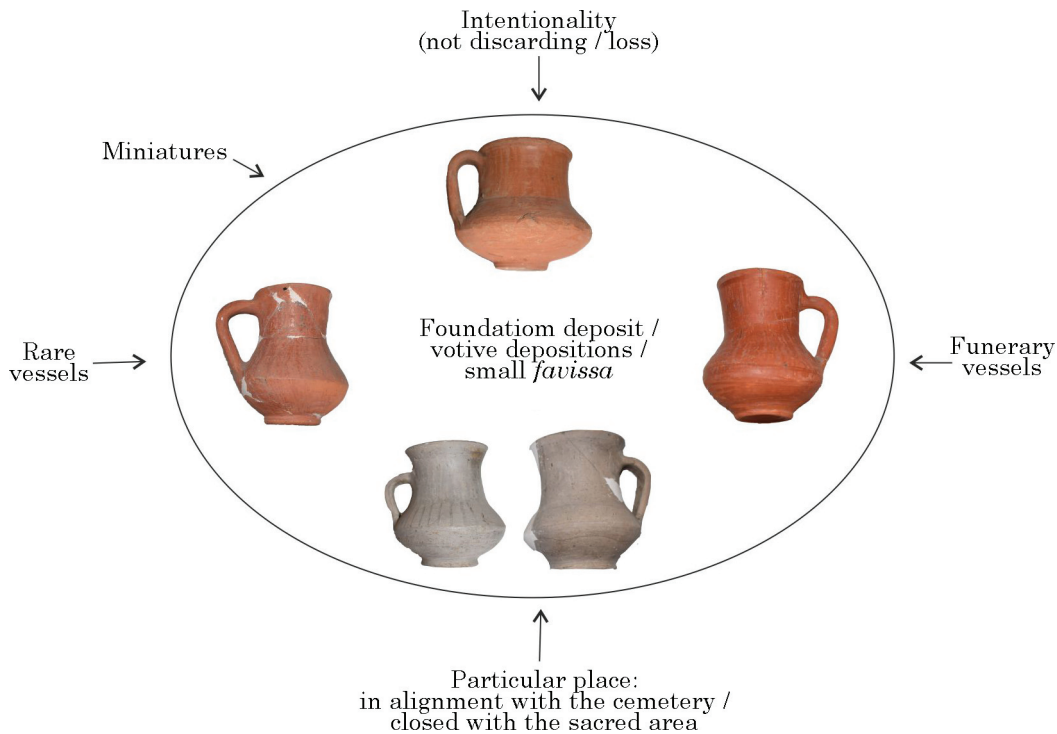


Fig. 8. Possible interpretations of the functionality of pit 1759a

Рис. 8. Вірогідна інтерпретація функціонування ями 1759а

Miniature vessels are not an unusual feature in Roman provincial funerary practices, and they are frequently found in children's graves. For instance, at Viminacium (Moesia Superior), small jugs characteristic of the 2nd to mid-3rd centuries AD have been interpreted either as toys (when they appear in infant graves) or as containers for sauces and condiments (in the case of miniature bowls in adult graves; Nikolić et al. 2023, p. 182). The small vessels therefore probably had a symbolic role in the funerary context. They either contained ritual food for the afterlife (in a form of *pars pro toto*) or they were used to store medicinal / valuable substances, which were stored in small vessels due to the rarity and small quantities available.

Conclusion. The deposition of the five mugs in pit 1759a (and possibly also in 1759b) is a noteworthy discovery, both for its atypical nature and for the composition of the ceramic assemblage. The vessels were clearly arranged deliberately, yet the absence of any osteological or funerary remains rules out the conventional interpretation of a grave. Instead, this context suggests an intentional offering with symbolic significance: the vessels were not accidentally discarded, but purposefully deposited as part of a ritual act.

The location of pits 1759a—b at the southern boundary of the necropolis appears intentional rather than coincidental. The positioning respects the geometry of the cemetery organization, being aligned with the axes and groups of graves, which supports the hypothesis of an intentional correlation with the layout plan of the necropolis.

lis. Within this framework, the ceramic features can be interpreted as a possible founding offering, associated with the initiation, land division and sacralization of the cemetery in the 2nd century AD.

From a typological and technological perspective, the mugs exhibit multiple influences, suggesting either the work of a local craftsman in contact with the Roman environment, or the presence of a Roman or Pontic craftsman in a border area. It is further possible that he created new ceramic types with funerary/ritual function, drawing from both his own background¹⁵ and local ceramic preferences in *Barbaricum*. The vessels are part of the tradition of pottery with ritual function in the areas of interaction between nomads and sedentary people. Typological parallels from sites attributed to Sarmatic and Dacian cultures indicate a circulation of these types of vessels between the late 1st and early 3rd century AD. The function of these vessels is likely to have been symbolic in funerary or cultic contexts, suggesting their use for the storage of rare substances, including food, medicine, sacred items, or miniature representations of offerings (*pars pro toto*).

Moreover, sacred areas in the Greco-Roman world were complex structures that included temples along with their surrounding spaces, as well as mausoleums, *aediculae*, ritual pits, and even

15. Small vessels (7—10 cm high), carefully crafted, fired in either a reducing or oxidizing atmosphere, and painted, appear almost exclusively in funerary, ritual, or medicinal contexts.

graves. Ceramic deposits are well documented in sacred areas of the ancient world, appearing as *favissae*, *bothroi*, foundation offerings, or in aquatic context (springs, and other consecrated waters). For instance, in the two sanctuaries of Emporio (island of Chios), various deposits of miniature objects have been discovered (Osborne 2010, p. 4). In the Athenian sanctuary, these miniatures appear in the form of *kalathoi* (incense vessels), small shields, bowls and kettles. In contrast, the sanctuary in the harbour concentrates on Eastern-influenced offerings, jewellery and miniatures associated with corporeality and status transitions, such as marriage or initiation (Osborne 2010, p. 4). Miniature objects function in a dual capacity, serving as symbolic substitutes and as material vehicles of ideology and negotiation with divine power¹⁶.

From this perspective, the features 1759a and 1759b can be interpreted as small local *favissae*, in which the consecrated vessels were not thrown away but deposited in a ritualized space. As illustrated in fig. 8, the hypothesis that the five small vessels were deposited in alignment with the cemetery and within a defined sacred space suggests a ritualized and intentional function. These containers are clearly not random discards; rather, they appear to serve as votive deposits. It can be suggested that the assemblage functioned either as a foundation offering or as a symbolic demarcation of the boundaries of the funerary realm, thus ritually enclosing the sacred space. The use of miniature and less common forms supports an interpretation of symbolic value, ritual specialization, and controlled deposition practices, in line with parallels documented in Mediterranean sanctuaries.

In conclusion, the small pits at Poieniști reflect the integration of cosmopolitan models into a «barbarian» context, as well as significant transformations in the religious and funerary mentality of East-Carpathian communities in contact with the Roman world. Feature 1759a (and potentially 1759b) thus functions as an archaeological indicator of the cultural and symbolic reconfiguration processes taking place in the contact zones along the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire.

16. See especially the observation in Osborne 2010, p. 4: «Many votive deposits share one or other of these distinctive features — religious imagery, precious or exotic material, distinctive architectural context and concentration of non-functional items (...) however, votive deposits can take very different forms».

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НАБІР МІНІАТЮРНИХ ЧАШОК З ПОЄНЕШТЬ (РУМУНІЯ): НЕЗВИЧАЙНИЙ ДЕПОЗИТ НА ПЕРІФЕРІЇ НЕКРОПОЛЯ II—III ст. н. е.

На пам'ятці римського періоду Поєнешть-Магура (повіт Васлуй, Румунія) було знайдено незвичайний керамічний депозит (яма 1759a), що складається з п'яти невеликих куклів. На відміну від типових поховальних, цей депозит, розташований на південній межі некрополя Поєнешть-Виртешкої, не містить людських останків, що свідчить про не поховальне, а жертвне призначення. Посудини, ретельно підібрані та технологічно досконалі, відображають вплив греко-римських та «варварських» традицій і можуть розглядатися як вотивні або жертвні підношення, що позначають сакральні межі некрополя. Друга сусідня яма (1759b), що містить ліпну кераміку, додатково підтверджує гіпотезу про спеціальний ритуальний депозит. Порівняння з дакійським, сарматським та римським провінційними контекстами свідчить про те, що ці особливості є прикладом культурної гібридності та релігійної трансформації в прикордонних зонах, де космополітичні моделі переосмислювалися в межах місцевих символічних рамок.

Ключові слова: некрополь Поєнешть-Магура, культура Поєнешть—Виртешкої, мініатюрні кукли, ритуальне поховання, Східні Карпати.

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