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A glimpse of the Eneolithic afterlife. Burial M30 from Urziceni-*Vamă*, Romania

Un aperçu de l'au-delà énéolithique. L'inhumation M30 d'Urziceni-Vamă, Roumanie

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Abstract: The present study focuses on the analysis of a quiver made from elk antler discovered in 2005 in one of the burials of the Eneolithic necropolis at Urziceni-*Vamă*, in north-western Romania. Located close to the Romanian-Hungarian border, it is the necropolis with the largest number of Bodrogkeresztúr burials in Romania. The respective quiver was found in burial known as M30 containing the remains of a male skeleton lying crouched on the right side. Grave goods included artefacts such as copper wire, obsidian blades and arrowheads, ceramic vessels, a worked boar tusk, an elk antler quiver and a red deer antler tine. We discuss here the quiver from a technological point of view, we look for analogue artefacts and draw on the possible link between the quiver and the social status of its bearer.
Keywords: Quiver, Eneolithic, Bodrogkeresztúr culture, *Alces alces* L., necropolis, hunter, Urziceni.

Résumé : L'étude porte sur l'analyse d'un carquois en bois d'élan découvert en 2005 dans l'une des sépultures de la nécropole énéolithique d'Urziceni-*Vamă*, dans le nord-ouest de la Roumanie. Située à proximité de la frontière avec la Hongrie, il s'agit de la nécropole roumaine qui compte le plus grand nombre de sépultures de la culture de Bodrogkeresztúr.
Le carquois en question a été trouvé dans la sépulture M30, contenant les restes d'un squelette masculin accroupi sur le côté droit. L'inventaire funéraire comprenait des artefacts tels que du fil de cuivre, des lames et des pointes de flèches en obsidienne, des récipients en céramique, une défense de sanglier travaillée, un carquois en bois d'élan et un en andouiller de bois de cerf. Nous étudierons ici le carquois d'un point de vue technologique, rechercherons des artefacts analogues et évoquerons le possible lien entre le carquois et le statut social de son porteur.
Mots-clés : carquois, énéolithique, culture Bodrogkeresztúr, *Alces alces* L., nécropole, chasseur, Urziceni.

INTRODUCTION

The Eneolithic necropolis of Urziceni is located in the present-day free area of the Romanian-Hungarian border at Urziceni-*Vamă* (north-western Romania) on a sand dune in the marshy valley of the Negru Stream (fig. 1).

The necropolis was discovered in 2003 (Virag, 2004) and after 20 excavation seasons, research is still ongoing. A hundred and thirty-two burials were investigated until 2025. Grave goods and ^{14}C dates indicate that the necropolis was in use during the Bodrogkeresztúr culture of the Middle Eneolithic, more specifically between 4300 and 4000 BC.

Bodrogkeresztúr was defined as a cultural phenomenon of the Tisza Plain (Patay, 2008), extending into the intra-Carpathian area along the Mureș Valley and occupying the area between the Danube and the Carpathians (Luca, 1999, p. 11).

The cemeteries consist on inhumations graves, with male individuals laid crouched on their right side and women on their left side. The study of the grave goods in the Urziceni necropolis is indicative of a gender-based

Fig. 1 – Location of the Urziceni-*Vamă* cemetery.
***Fig. 1** – Localisation de la nécropole d'Urziceni-Vamă.*

cultural pattern, where males were buried with specific weapons and tools, while female grave goods consisted mostly of pottery vessels and adornments.

Male burials had in general one vessel positioned near the head of the individual and a second one near the feet. Below or on the skull a flint knife was usually placed. Other common grave goods included stone (arrowheads, knives, scrapers and points) and copper implements.

Female skeletons were surrounded by five to seven vessels, usually with strings of shell and copper beads in the pelvic area. The head area yielded hairpins (made probably of wood) with golden heads. From around the feet were retrieved animal bones, perhaps food offerings for the passage to the afterlife.

The graves were aligned in rows, with no overlapping or intersections, suggestive of the fact that they were dug during a relatively short period of time and that their location was perhaps marked.

The burial known as M30 (Virag et al., 2006) contained the remains of a male individual, crouched on the right side, oriented along the east-west direction (with the head pointing east). The burial had been disturbed in the upper part of the body and only the pelvic bones and the lower limbs were still articulated. Grave goods comprised three pottery vessels, two fragments of copper wire, two antler artefacts and one boar tusk scraper (Mărgărit et al., 2020) and 14 lithic pieces (obsidian arrowheads, blades and retouched implements; fig. 2).

1. FUNERAL INVENTORY

1.1. Pottery

Bowl with everted rim, slightly pronounced shoulder, arched walls and rounded bottom. The body of the vessel is ornamented with oblique grooves that begin from the shoulder of the vessel and end at the bottom of the vessel (fig. 2.3). The pot was found in the tibia area.

Pot of "milk jug" type, dark grey in colour, with a high cylindrical neck, massive, strongly curved body, rounded bottom and two perforated handles under the rim (fig. 2.4). The pot was placed near the heel of the deceased.

Bowl, preserved fragmentary, dark brown in colour, with slightly inverted rim, slightly arched walls, flat bottom and two perforated handles placed under the rim (fig. 2.5). The pot was placed in the area of the basin.

These types of vessels appeared in the classical phase of the Bodrogkeresztúr culture and continued into the next period (Bodrogkeresztúr A-A/B) as the site of Tiszavalk-*Kenderföld* can be dated to a later horizon, namely Bodrogkeresztúr B. The vessels with strongly curved bodies as well as the bowls with everted rim represent late characteristics (Patay, 2008, pp. 21–48), leading us to date grave M30 from Urziceni in the Bodrogkeresztúr B horizon. This aspect is strengthened by the presence of the grooved ornament on the bowl (fig. 2.3), a decoration found occasionally at the Bodrogkeresztúr B/Herculane II horizon and which signifies the Hunyadihalom/Herculane III horizon. Analogies have been found at Băile Herculane–*Peștera Hoților*, Ostrovu Corbului–*Botul Piscului*, Pecica–*Șanțul Mare*, Cheile Turzii (Roman, 1971, pp. 31–170; Brummack and Diaconescu, 2015, pp. 101–118).

1.2. Metal pieces

Piece made of copper wire, located in the heel area; the tip is deliberately chiselled (fig. 2.1).

Copper needle, thin, sharp at both ends, located in the basin area (fig. 2.2).

The two pieces of copper found in the grave inventory do not have chronological value.

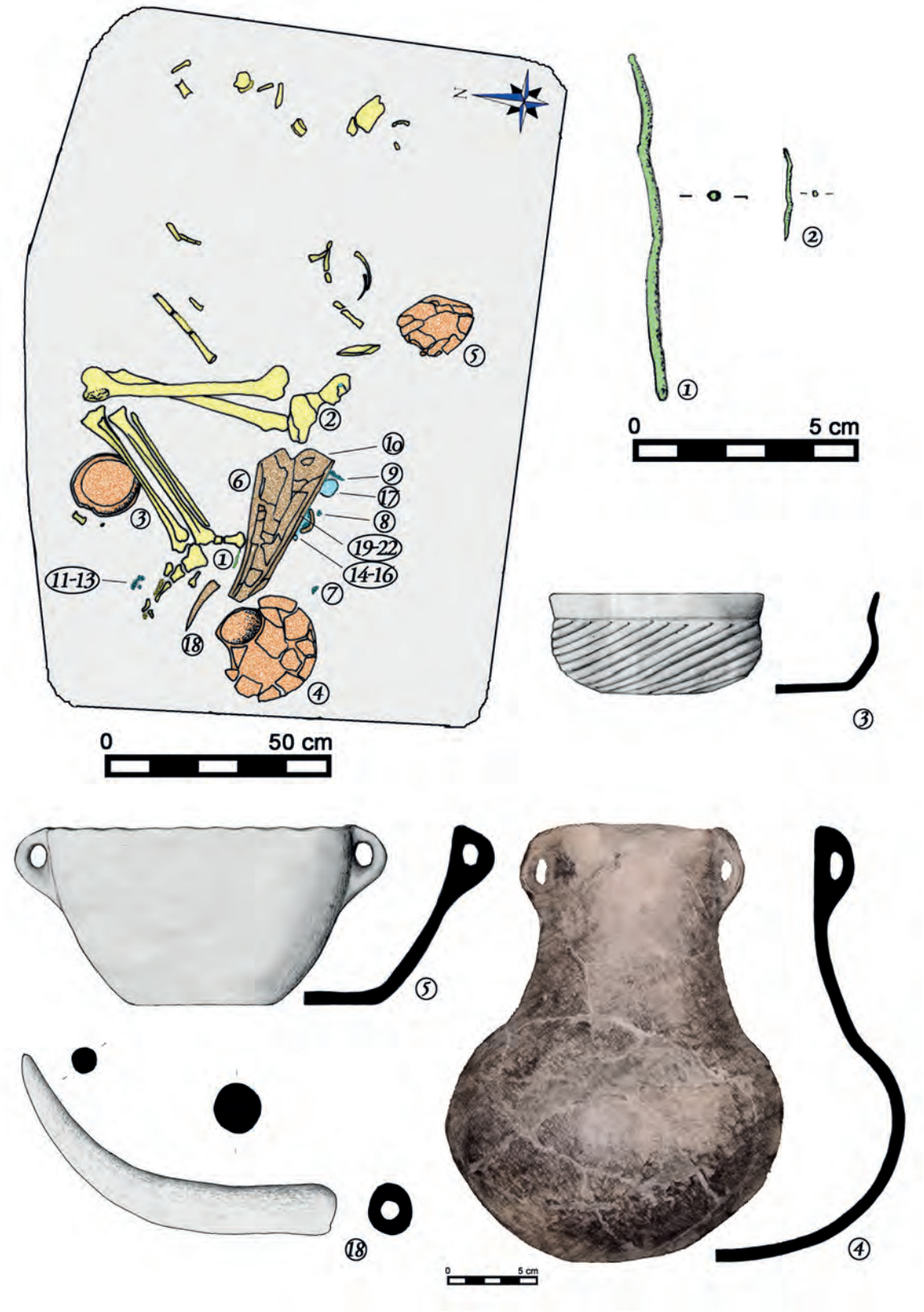

Fig. 2 – Plan of burial M30 and details of the grave goods, Urziceni-Vamă, Satu Mare County. 1) Piece made of copper wire (dimensions: l. 1.7 cm, diam. 3 mm); 2) Copper needle (dimensions: l. 2.1 cm, diam. 1 mm); 3) Bowl with everted rim (dimensions: diam. rim 14.2 cm, diam. base 7 cm, h 6.5 cm); 4) Pot of "milk jug" type (dimensions: diam. rim 9 cm, diam. base 6 cm, h 24.4 cm); 5) Bowl (dimensions: diam. rim 17.3 cm, diam. base 8 cm, h 10 cm); 6) Quiver.

***Fig. 2** – Relevé de la sépulture M30 et détail des offrandes funéraires, Urziceni-Vamă, département de Satu Mare. 1) Pièce en fil de cuivre (dimensions: 1.7 cm, diam. 3 mm); 2) aiguille en cuivre (dimensions: l. 2.1 cm, diam. 1 mm); 3) Bowl with everted rim (dimensions: diam. rim 14.2 cm, diam. base 7 cm, h 6.5 cm); 4) pot de type « pot à lait » (dimensions: diam. rim 9 cm, diam. base 6 cm, h 24.4 cm); 5) bol (dimensions: diam. rim 17.3 cm, diam. base 8 cm, h 10 cm); 6) carquois.*

1.3. Lithics

Fourteen Chipped stone pieces were found in the grave, most of them in direct relation with the quiver. Lithic pieces (fig. 2: inventory number 8-10, 14-17, 19-22) were discovered in the quiver or on the edge of the quiver, on the southern side of the piece, in a crack, flattened under the pressure of the earth, which indicates that they were inside at the time of the deceased's burial.

All the lithics are made of obsidian. Based on pXRF analyses conducted on of the pieces, the source of the obsidian is the Slovakian (Carpathian 1) source (Boroneanț et al., 2018, pp. 13–24). These 14 pieces are: three bifacial subtriangular arrowheads, four cores for blades, six flakes and one blade (table 1).

1.4. Boar scraper

Scraper made of a boar tusk (*Sus scrofa*) obtained through longitudinal bipartition by percussion. On the activ part (the concave face) can be observed traces of repeated resharpening made by scraping. The piece was found near the quiver (fig. 2.18). studies show that this type of piece was used for woodworking (Mărgărit and Virag, 2015-2016, p. 27).

1.5. Preform antler

The first antler artefact is a preform. It was found near the feet (fig. 2.17). The preform was obtained from a secondary tine of a deer antler (*Cervus elaphus*). The debitage was made through segmentation by percussion. At the proximal end, where the debitage was made, there is a longitudinal perforation made most probably through rotation. We cannot be sure about the function of this piece but given the perforation from the proximal end, we can assume that it may have been a handle.

Such preforms with unclear function were discovered also in disturbed graves at the Eneolithic necropolis from Basatanya (Tiszapolgár-Bodrogkeresztúr culture) in Hungary (Bognár-Kutzián, 1963).

1.6. The quiver

The second antler artefact was identified as a quiver (fig. 2.6) and was in a very poor state of preservation. It was carefully collected in a block of soil and subjected to restauration in the laboratory of the Satu Mare County Museum. The quiver was placed between the pelvis and the heel of the deceased. Pieces of obsidian (see description of the pieces above) and a boar scraper that was most likely originally inserted into the quiver were found in the cracks of the quiver.

Given its fragility, the quiver was subsequently restored by filling in the cracks and certain small missing areas. Thus, its study (including measurements), took place following restoration. The fragility of the piece is mainly due to the soils present in the western part of the Ier Plain, where the Urziceni necropolis is located. This area is characterized by halomorphic soil types represented mainly by solonetz (Karácsonyi, 1995, p. 15). Solonetz soil types have a dense layer rich in clay with accumulations of sodium salts and ions, which can have degenerative effects on organic remains (vegetal and animal)[1]; Basarabă, 2022, p. 111).

The quiver was made from the un-palmate part of an antler of a young European elk (*Alces alces L.*; Coroliuc, 2011, pp. 310, 314; Gustafson, 2015, p. 39, fig. 39A, 40; here fig. 3). It is conical in shape, tapering towards the distal end where it shows two openings, triggered by the natural shape of the antler. The following measurements were taken after restoration: maximum length is 380 mm, width (at mid-length) is 91 mm, width and circumference of the proximal ends are 52 mm, respectively 117 mm.

Bifacial arrowhead, obsidian (inv. 7.):	*l.* 26 mm,	*w* 17.1 mm,	*t.* 3.5 mm
Bifacial arrowhead, obsidian, half-product (inv. 8.):	*l.* 23.4 mm,	*w* 16.2 mm,	*t.* 4.5 mm
Obsidian flake (inv. 9.):	*l.* 88.7 mm,	*w* 15.7 mm,	*t.* 11.8 mm
Obsidian blade (inv. 10.):	*l.* 34.7 mm,	*w* 9.4 mm,	*t.* 4.0 mm
Obsidian bladelet-core (inv. 11.):	*l.* 10.3 mm,	*w* 18.0 mm,	*h* 34.7 mm
Obsidian bladelet-core (inv. 12.):	*l.* 17.1 mm,	*w* 24.8 mm,	*h* 36.1 mm
Obsidian flake (inv. 13.):	*l.* 32.3 mm,	*w* 33.4 mm,	*t.* 10.4 mm
Obsidian bladelet-core (inv. 14.):	*l.* 12.3 mm,	*w* 15.3 mm,	*h* 26.0 mm
Obsidian bladelet-core (inv. 15.):	*l.* 13.8 mm,	*w* 15.1 mm,	*h* 26.9 mm
Obsidian flake (inv. 16.):	*l.* 23.4 mm,	*w* 24.4 mm,	*t.* 8.0 mm
Bifacial arrowhead, obsidian (inv. 19.):	*l.* 21.9 mm,	*w* 18.4 mm,	*t.* 5.2 mm
Obsidian flake (inv. 20.):	*l.* 23.3 mm,	*w* 22.8 mm,	*t.* 5.1 mm.
Obsidian flake (inv. 21.):	*l.* 25.0 mm,	*w* 16.9 mm,	*t.* 8.9 mm
Obsidian flake (inv. 22.):	l. 15.0 mm,	w. 14.7 mm,	t. 8.4 mm

Table 1 – Dimensions of the lithic pieces from burial M30 from Urziceni- *Vamă*.
***Tabl. 1** – Dimensions des pièces lithiques de la sépulture M30 d'Urziceni-*Vamă

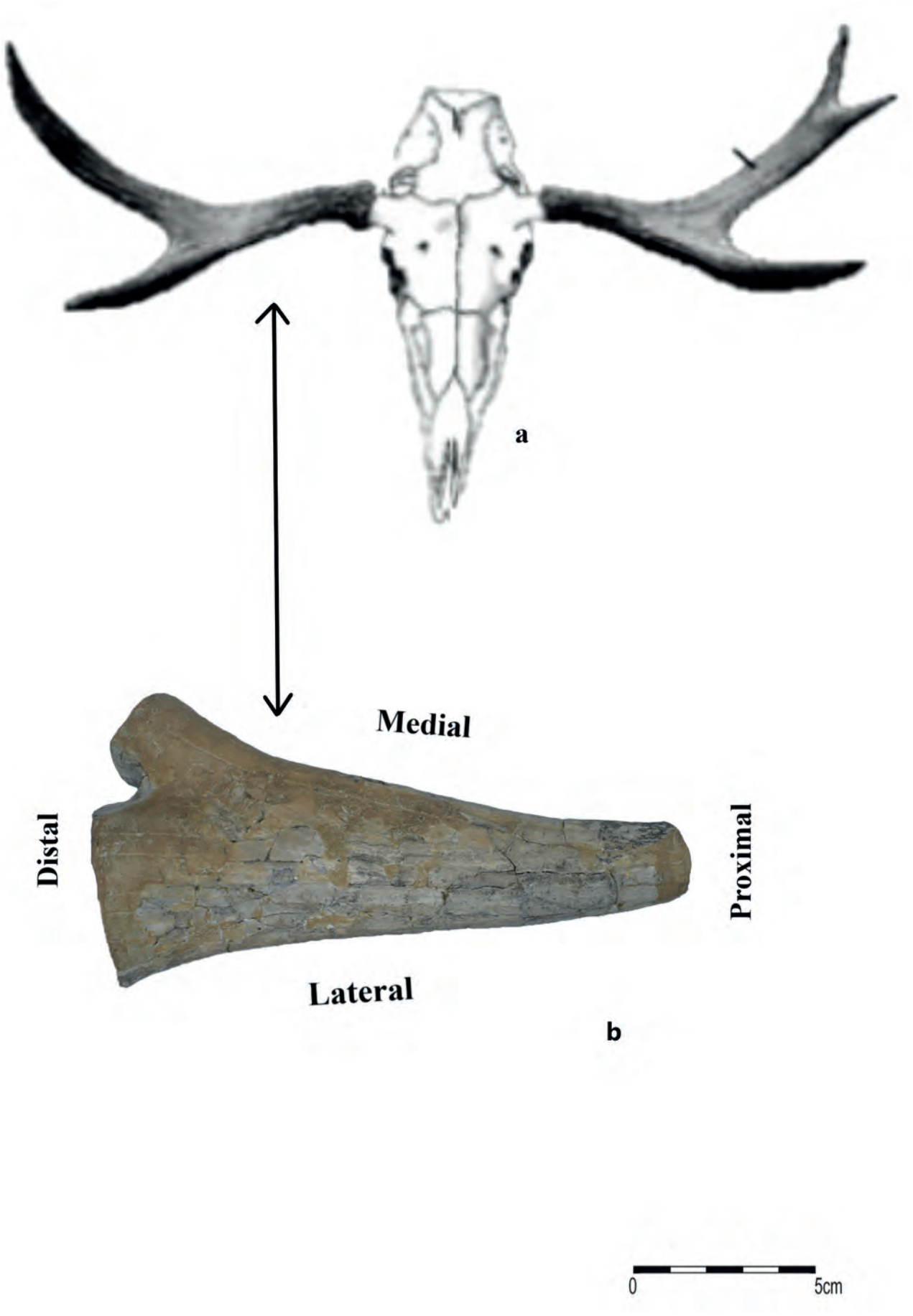

Fig. 3 – a. Skull and antlers of a young elk (Gustafson 2015, fig. 39A); b. The elk antler quiver from Urziceni-*Vamă.*
***Fig. 3** – a. Crâne et bois d'un jeune élan (Gustafson 2015, fig. 39A); b: le carquois en bois d'élan d'Urziceni-*Vamă.

At the distal end, the larger tine is 100 mm thick and has a circumference of ca. 325 mm while the thinner tine is 63 mm thick and has 205 mm in circumference. The distance between them is ca. 22 mm.

Partly because of its preservation state, the artefact showed minimum evidence in what the manufacturing techniques and methods as well as usewear are concerned. The quiver, made on a single axis, preserves the anatomical volume of the antler. The debitage was done through segmentation by sawing (at both ends) applied around the entire circumference. The spongy tissue inside the quiver was most likely hollowed out by scraping (fig. 4a) and both lateral sides of the quiver and its distal extremity show cutting planes from hacking (fig. 4b and fig. 4c). The removal of the pearly coating from the surface of the quiver was done by longitudinal scraping (fig. 5).

2. DISCUSSION

2.1. The elk during the Holocene

The elk (European moose) is a wild mammal in the cervid family (Cervidaeae) and is generally distinguished from other species in the same family by the large palmate antlers of the males. Elk is known over a large area in Central Europe (Schmölcke and Zachos, 2005), preferring deciduous and mixed forests and areas with lakes and swamps as biotopes (Haimovici, 1968, p. 79). Faunal remains indicate that the species was fairly common in the Carpathian Basin during the Pleistocene, becoming largely extinct by the end of this period (Németh et al., 2016, pp. 44–45). Elks occur sporadically among Holocene faunal remains from prehistoric and Roman sites, disappearing completely from the landscape sometime around the 17th century.

In Romania, elk remains have been discovered mainly at Neolithic and Eneolithic sites in Moldova at Andrieșeni (Coroliuc, 2011, p. 310), Cucuteni, Târpești (Haimovici, 1968. p. 79), Dumești (Haimovici, 1987-1989, p. 87), Poduri-*Dealul Ghindaru* (Bejenaru and Stanc, 2012, p. 106), Trușești-*Țuguieta* (Haimovici, 2011, p. 317) and at Bronze Age sites such as Mîndrișca and Bogdănești (Haimovici, 1966, p. 132; Haimovici, 1980, p. 198). In Banat, elk remains were found at Cuina Turcului in the framework of the Romanello-Azilian culture (Bolomey, 1970, p. 38) and at Liubcova, site belonging to Vinča-Turdaș cultural complex (Necrasov et al., 1977, p. 12). In northern Romania, elk presence was noted at Ocna Șugatag in the Maramureș region (Czier, 1988, pp. 697–700), in the Avenul lui Avrămuț in the Someșul Cald Gorges in the Apuseni Mountains (Czier and Jurcsák, 1978, pp. 611–614), at Poiana Ampoiului (Eneolithic - Coțofeni culture) and at Derșida (Bronze Age-Wietenberg culture; Bindea, 2008, p. 200).

In north-western Romania, in Carei and the Lower Someș Plain, Pleistocene moose remains have been discovered at Apa-*Balastieră* (Cristea, 1972, pp. 366–369). The Bronze Age sites of Mediești Aurit-*Potău* (Bader, 1978, p. 111) and Carei-*Bobald* (El Susi and Molnár, 2023, p. 36) yielded also faunal remains. None of these remains showed any signs of human intervention, with the exception of the quiver from Urziceni.

2.2. Elk bone and antler artefacts

Elk antler is a rare raw material that was obtained either by hunting or collecting. Morphometrically, elk antler is heavier and more robust then deer antler and therefore more difficult to process. The bones of the species are generally larger than those of deer.

Artefacts made from antler and/or elk bones are rare, and we know of only a few pieces in Central Europe. The earliest artifacts (Palaeolithic) come from the ochre mine at Lovas and from the Jankovics cave in Hungary. The material from Lovas consists of several awls/points made from elk metapodials and 12 antler fragments with traces of working (Dobosi and Vörös, 1979, pp. 16–20). Jankovics cave yielded an awl/point, also made from an elk metapodial (Dobosi and Vörös, 1979, p. 20).

Another find comes from the Eneolithic/Early Bronze Age settlement with Vučedol type pottery from Ig, in the Ljubljana Marsh, Slovenia (Drobne, 1973, p. 218): three preforms (one perforated, one marked for perforation and a third split to expose the inner part of the antler; Bartosiewicz, 2005, pp. 343–345).

Two axes made from elk antler were found in the Hallstatt sites of Innsbruck-Hötting and Hochkapelle-Brixlegg in Austria. In both cases, the palmate shape of the crown with the transverse arrangement of a hole for gripping was preserved (Bartosiewicz, 2005, p. 347).

2.3. The quiver, the hunter and the community

The quiver in M30 from Urziceni is a unique piece for this period, not only because of its funerary context but also because of the raw material it was made of.

A typologically similar artefact in prehistoric Europe, from a different context and period, comes from the Schnidejoch pass in the Bernese Alps (Switzerland). A bow container made of birch bark was discovered by some hikers in 2003. It was dated to the Neolithic and presumed to be the fragment of a quiver (Junkmanns et al., 2021, p. 5). A quiver made of roe deer and bovid hide (O'Sullivan et al., 2016, p. 6) is documented near Tisenjoch, Ötztal Alps (South Tyrol, Italy) and belongs to the famous Ötzi the Ice Man.

Quiver representations are known from Late Neolithic megalithic tombs; engravings show them to be rectangular, tubular or conical (Göhlitzsch, Saxony-Anhalt in Germany, Klady, Krasnador in Russia; Junkmanns et al., 2021, pp. 15–16). Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age trapezoidal or conical representations are known from the Near East (Junkmanns et al., 2021, p. 17, tab. 1).

This funerary inventory represents specific hunting objects, which may also suggest the occupation of the individual during his lifetime, namely that of hunter.

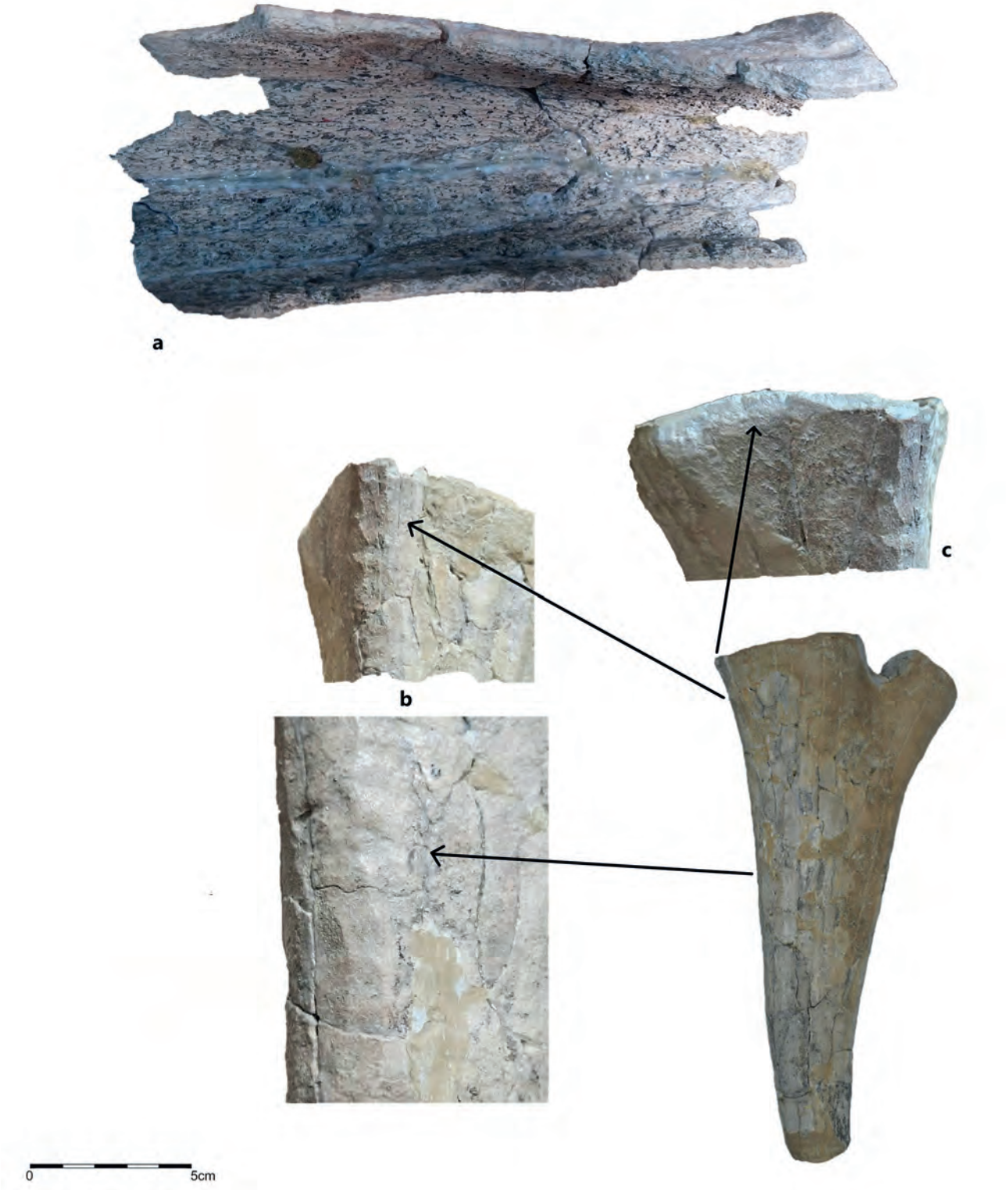

Fig. 4 – The elk (*Alces alces L.*) antler quiver: a. Spongy tissue was probably hollowed out by scraping; b.-c. Detail of the cutting planes left from hacking.

Fig. 4 *– Carquois en bois d'élan (*Alces alces L.*): a. tissu spongieux évidé par grattage ; b.-c. détail des pans de coupe laissé par l'entaillage.*

Fig. 5 – Scraping marks on the surface of the quiver.
Fig. 5 *– Traces de raclage à la surface du carquois.*

The fact that the quiver and other items were buried with the hunter suggests that the social status he had during his lifetime continues into the afterlife, which may also reflect to some extent the beliefs of the Bodrogkeresztúr community.

A similar case in terms of grave goods types is burial M79 in the same necropolis. The individual in M79 was a 40-50 years old male, crouched on the left, having as funerary inventory (besides lithics and pottery vessels), scrapers made of wild boar tusks (*Sus sp.*), points made of red deer antler and bone respectively, and a blank made also of wild boar tusk (Mărgărit and Virag, 2015-2016, pp. 25–26). The grave goods in M79 also pertain to the hunting domain, suggesting the individual buried in it had been a hunter also, similar to the one in M30.

2.4. Final Considerations

The hunter's quiver from burial No. 30 at Urziceni-*Vamă* is a special and unique piece of prehistoric art. The rarity of its raw material adds to its unicity. The quiver is conical in shape and was made from the un-palmate antler of a young European elk (*Alces alces L.*). It was worked by cutting and polishing and does not have any gripping system.

The uniqueness of the artifact speaks of the special role played by its owner in the Eneolithic community from Urziceni-*Vamă*.

Comparative analysis of the composition of the funerary inventory in the Bodrogkeresztúr culture specific tombs shows a gender-profiled social pattern.

NOTE

1. See A. Basarabă, "Pedologie" [Curs didactic], Bucureşti, Universitatea Bucureşti, Facultatea de Horticultură, 2024, 124 p.

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