

STUDIA ARCHAEOLOGICA ET HISTORIAE MEDII AEVI PROFESSORI
ZENO-KARL PINTER DEDICATA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS / CUPRINS

Tabula Gratulatoria	7
Professor Zeno-Karl Pinter: list of scholarly publications.....	11
Ioan Marian Țiplic, <i>Zeno-Karl Pinter at 65: the Scholar, The Professor, The Archaeologist! ...</i>	19
Ioan Marian Țiplic, <i>Zeno-Karl Pinter la 65 ani: Omul de știință, Profesorul, Arheologul !</i>	23

Church Archaeology

Maria Crîngaci Țiplic, Ioan Marian Țiplic, Oana Daniela Calancea, Alexandru Răzvan Petre, <i>The results of the radiocarbon dating of two medieval graves discovered in the gothic choir of St Mary's Church in Sibiu</i>	27
Daniela Marcu Istrate, <i>Telling the story of a demolition: the western part of the evangelical parish church in Sibiu</i>	39

Medieval Weapons and Equipments

Erwin Gáll, <i>The Hunnic Empire on the Romanian Plain. The Hunnic Ordu near Buzău in the first half of the 5th Century</i>	57
Valery Yotov, <i>Examples of medieval weaponry and equipment - errors and corrections</i>	69
Călin Cosma, <i>Transylvanian arrowheads of the 7th-8th centuries</i>	91
Florin Mărginean, <i>Rowel spurs discovered at Cladova - Dealul Carierei (Arad County)</i>	103
Stoyan Popov, <i>Concerning a decorated mace from the territory of Bulgaria</i>	113
Claudia Urduzia, <i>Weapons and military accessories found at Turnul Spart (Sibiu County, Romania)</i>	119
Anca Nițoi, <i>On the chronology of medieval halberds in Transylvania (14th – 17th centuries)</i>	141
Arkadiusz Michalak, <i>"To curry Fauvel (favour)"? Late medieval horse grooming implements from two motte castles in Tylewice and Trzciel, Western Poland</i>	159

Roman, Post-Roman and Early Medieval Archaeology

Ioan Carol Opriș, Mihai Duca, <i>Disk-shaped lids for large storage vessels discovered in the Early Byzantine fort at Capidava</i>	173
Florin Curta, <i>Soldier on: living conditions in a garrison of the Imperial Frontier</i>	181
Răzvan C. Pop, <i>Cartographic contributions to the history of Capidava fortress. Two new cartographic information found in the Library of Congress of the United States of America</i>	197
Alessandro Teatini, <i>The Extra Muros basilica in Histria: a new analysis of the archaeological record</i>	209
Gabriel Fusek, <i>Einige Bemerkungen zur umstrittenen Bijelo Brdo-Kultur</i>	227
Dan Băcuet-Crișan, Horațiu Cociș, <i>Recent archaeological research in the early medieval settlement at Cuceu Valea Bochiei (Sălaj County). New data on the structure and extent of the settlement</i>	235

Medieval Elites, Castles and Personalities

Suzana Simon, <i>Castles and noble residences in the late medieval county of Zagreb</i>	251
Adrian Ioniță, <i>Neue Entdeckungen in der Festung von Poenari (Kreis Arges)</i>	265
Adrian N. Șovrea, <i>The Saxon rebellion in Transylvania from 1324</i>	283

Ioan-Aurel Pop, Alexandru Simon, <i>The subjects of Ladislas of Anjou during the Hungarian royal crisis of 1403: A Florentine perspective</i>	299
Adrian Magina, <i>A dispute over the district Bel (Timiș County) in early 15th century</i>	307
Alexandru Simon, <i>Discordant German views on John Hunyadi</i>	315
Adrian Stoia, <i>The Adoration of the Magi depicted in South Transylvanian medieval painting (14th -16th centuries)</i>	323
Liviu Cîmpeanu, <i>Political and military alliances between the Nobles, the Szeklers, and the Saxons of Transylvania in the 15th and 16th centuries</i>	337
Raluca Frîncu, Simona Malearov, <i>Saxon neighborhoods in urban versus rural context: a preliminary study</i>	347

Varia Archaeologica

Svend Hansen, <i>Răspândirea cunoștințelor tehnice în mileniile 5 și 4 a. Chr.</i>	357
Marius-Mihai Ciută, Beatrice Ciută, <i>A fragmentary alabaster vessel, discovered at Limba-Oarda de Jos (Alba County)</i>	369
Nikolaus Boroffka, <i>Gathered around the cauldron on the riverbank ... Chinese, Greek and Scytho-Saka interactions in Antiquity</i>	375
Ioana Rusu, Cristina Mircea, Cătălin Dobrinescu, Vitalie Bodolică, Octavian Popescu, Beatrice Kelemen, <i>Bioarchaeological characterization of the human remains from the Early Bronze Age barrow at Mireasa, Romania</i>	399

THE HUNNIC EMPIRE ON THE ROMANIAN PLAIN. THE HUNNIC *ORDU* NEAR BUZĂU IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 5TH CENTURY

Erwin GÁLL*

Abstract: The northeastern corner of the Romanian Great Plain has a clear strategic importance in Eurasia, from the geopolitical, military, and economic communication point of view. The archaeological findings indicating the Hun (period) “peak elite” clearly outline the Buzău microregion as the centre of the “war machine” of the Hunnic Empire. According to István Bóna, this centre was perhaps moved to the Hungarian Great Plain during the time of Attila, which could be confirmed by the greatest sacrificial find of the Central European Huns so far, the finds of the family of the “great kings” (Szeged-Nagyszéksós).

However, the graves and scattered finds classified by the literature in the so-called D2 chronological time band, may indicate that these two central power centres could have operated in parallel: one in the Hungarian Great Plain, the other in the Romanian Great Plain.

In light of Attila’s southeastern and western Hun geopolitical strategy, this seems (more) reasonable.

Keywords: Hunnic Empire, nomads, Romanian Plain, Ordu, Buzău, 5th Century.

Geographical aspects

The geographical name *Câmpia Română* refers to the southern part of two historical political units with different names (in the east, the region called Greater Wallachia and Oltenia in the west), which from a geomorphological perspective, however, are the same, and its sub-units are the westernmost extensions of the Eurasian steppe. The most important of these is the most extensive loess plain, a former grassy, monotonous steppe, the Bărăgan. In the northern vicinity of the Romanian Great Plain lies the plateau called *Podișul Getic*, to the north of these areas, the Getic Sub-Carpathians (*Subcarpații Getici*) and the Curvature Sub-Carpathians (*Subcarpații de Curbură*) are located. Several rivers cross these regions in the north-south and northwest-southeast directions, starting from the Curvature Sub-Carpathians to the Mehedinți Plateau (e.g. the rivers Argeș, Buzău, Dâmbovița, Ialomița, Jiu, Mostiștea, Neajlov, Olt, Vedea), and one can cross to Transylvania through many straits and passages in the north.¹ (**Figure 1**)

On this plain stretching before the Balkan Peninsula and divided by the Danube, many ethnic groups and macro-groups from the East settled before the great changes of the Hunnic era and prior to their conquest of the Carpathian Basin, *Bayan’s* Avars, the Bulgarians of Asparukh, not to mention the Pechenegs, the Cumans, the Oghuz Turks, and Mongol clans that arrived later here, whose archaeological remains have been unearthed in increasing quantities in the recent years.²

Imperial structures of the steppe, “nomadic rivalry”, and the problem of nomadic group identity

The most significant obstacle in the research of the nomadic world of the thousand-kilometre steppe of Eurasia, is the fact that the narrative sources about them were not written for the purpose of analysis, and primarily reflect the worldview and socio-political view of the peoples of the steppe of

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¹ “*Geografia României IV. Regiunile pericarpatică: Dealurile și Câmpia Banatului și Crișanei, Podișul Mehedinți, Subcarpații, Piemontul Getic, Podișul Moldovei*”, eds. Lucian Badea, Dragoș Bugă, Ion Zăvoianu (București: Editura Academiei Române, 1992), 159-302, 345-420.

² See for example Adrian Ioniță, “Observations sur les necropoles planes dans la region comprise entre le Bas-Danube, les Carpates et le Dniestr aux Xe–XIIIe siècles,” *Banatica* 23 (2013): 203-222; Victor Spinei, *The great migrations in the east and south east of Europe from the ninth to the thirteenth century* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 2006).

the “high” cultures with written tradition. In the light of these sources, we could approach the political systems, identities, and cultural traditions of the illiterate nomadic societies, as well as the legal, ethical, and moral standards that existed within these frameworks.³

Referring to power phenomena, exactly two decades ago, Walter Pohl used the terms of “steppe state” and “steppe empire” to refer to the power structures that emerged in the context of the nomadic way of life, geographical opportunities, and contexts that arose on the steppes in Asia in the early Middle Ages.⁴ In the case of these steppe empires, authority was not organized from the bottom up, but from the top down (in opposition to the modern nation-state’s and modern nation’s concepts created on the basis of the principle of popular sovereignty), meaning that, legitimacy did not come from the people, but from a sacred source.⁵ In the early Middle Ages, in the power structures of large “barbarian” groups, the sense of identity was organized around the leader (be it the khagan, the king etc.), i.e. not only was power itself considered sacred, but also, the sense of identity of the population – on a micro- and also, a macrogroup level – was closely linked to the sanctity of this power. We might even say that *the leader or the elite had people, and not the people, a leader*. In historical time, we are still very far from the 18th–19th-century modern state constructions based on the principle of popular sovereignty that can be traced back to Rousseau.

These structures organized the steppe state by creating *a vertical-character horizontal sense of identity resembling a macrogroup*.⁶ The disappearance of power – due to various reasons – (the death of the leader) often, but not necessarily directly, led to the disintegration of the power structure, or to the loss or disappearance of the given sense of identity. This political phenomenon also explains the frequency of population names that succeed each other quickly in the sources. The principle of social organization was also quite different, as cultural anthropology research outlined a new and thought-provoking model about *nomadism* – the management method of these political structures –, which is closely related to the concept of the steppe empire.⁷ According to these observations, there was a model of social organization that can be called a “dynamic-conical clan system”,⁸ the essence of which is the existence of a main clan, and below this, from a social point of view, a network of various “brother-in-law clans”;⁹ their social competition was based on their pursuit to get to a higher level in the conical system. According to Dávid Somfai-Kara, several “clans” can be distinguished relating to just one individual: his own (patrilinear) clan, his mother’s clan, his wife’s clan, the clan of his married daughter, and the clan of his brother-in-law.

It is obvious that the clan system created a complex network system, in which, however, the identities created by modern times, such as the same language (not to mention the concept of an official language), still played a completely secondary role.

This vertical system is the exact opposite of modern society, which is characterized by a horizontal identity and a sense of belonging that has developed—or is still developing—in the age of capitalist structures and the rise of the modern nation-state.¹⁰ Thus, all these realities encompassed cultural,

³ Erwin Gáll, Gergely Szenthe, “The ‘Migration’ Period,” in *Constitutional History of Transylvania*, ed. Emőd Veress (Studies in the History of Law and Justice, 25) (Cham: Springer Nature, 2023), 59–63, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-22166-8_2.

⁴ Walter Pohl, “A Non-Roman Empire in Central Europe: the Avars = Regna and Gentes,” in *The Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World*, eds. Hans-Werner Goetz, Jörg Jarnut, Walter Pohl (Leiden–Boston: Brill Academic Publisher, 2003), 571–574. See also: Thomas Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China, 221 BC to AD 1757* (Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1989).

⁵ “In the barbarian kingdoms God was understood to be the ultimate source of royal authority. This notion, which was widely prevalent in the sixth century, became focused into the formula that such a ruler was ‘king by the grace of God’ (*rex dei gratia*) — that he ruled by God’s favor. This formulation became fundamental to medieval conceptions of kingship and was the distant ancestor of early modern divine right monarchy” (Joseph Canning, *A History of Medieval Political Thought: 300–1450* (London – New York: Routledge, 2003), 17).

⁶ Walter Pohl could have thought of a similar phenomenon: “*The Avars were a vertically organized macrofederation*” (Walter Pohl, *The Avars. A Steppe Empire in Central Europe, 567–822* (Ithaca–London: Cornell U. P., 2018), 12).

⁷ Dávid Somfai-Kara, “Modern török nyelvű etnoszok kialakulása Közép- és Belső-Ázsiában,” in *Döntemogor I. Tanulmányok a korai magyar történelemről*, szerk. Balázs Sudár (Budapest: MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont, 2017), 343–355.

⁸ The concept of “conical clan” initially appears in the literature in the first half of the 20th century, used by the anthropologist Paul Kirchhoff, “‘The principles of clanship’ in human society”, *Davidson Journal of Anthropology* 1 (1955): 1–10. See also Lawrence M. Friedmann, *The Horizontal Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

⁹ Somfai-Kara, “Modern török nyelvű etnoszok,” 344. However, a similar approach is presented by Jenő Szűcs too. See: Jenő Szűcs, *A magyar nemzeti tudat kialakulása* (Budapest: Osiris, 1997), 75–97.

¹⁰ Friedmann, *The Horizontal Society*, 11–12. On the nationalism, see for example Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

political-military frameworks in which the acceptance of political loyalty and various origins and kinships – within the framework of these complicated and malleable system(s) – at a given level and in a given political space could lead to the creation of a power structure.

Perhaps the most accurate example of this nomadic steppe-empire based on a “dynamic-conical clan system” is the Hunnic Empire, whose armies made their entrance in 376 and attracted the attention of the contemporary Roman scribes (Ammianus Marcellinus, Eunapios, Orosius).

The political and cultural antecedents of the Hun *Ordu*¹¹ of Wallachia

The first type of the aforementioned “barbarian” political-military power model of the era before the Hun conquest was represented by the Germanic power structures integrated by the Mediterranean Greek-Roman power structures.¹² In this age, the territory of Wallachia and Moldavia could be classified in the structure of Athanaric Guthiuda/Gothia, well known from the 4th-century written sources. The data of Wulfila’s Bible, even if just partially, depict the 4th-century *Guthiuda/Gothia* society.¹³

The archaeological literature usually identifies the ruling system of the Athanaric Guthiuda/Gothia mentioned in the written sources with the Sântana de Mureş/Czernyahov archaeological culture (consisting of burial sites and settlements), which can be traced from the region of Someşul Mic all the way to the Dnieper (mainly the typical burial sites) (**Figure 2**).¹⁴ In the past, it was interpreted even more strikingly as the culture of the *Gothic* ethnicity, however, nowadays it is interpreted as a cultural synthesis showing uniformity, formed in a vast area, fundamentally determined by the contact with the 4th-century Roman Empire, which was showing signs of a deep crisis. At first glance, the cultural synthesis that can be traced from today’s Kyiv to Cluj-Napoca and to the Lower-Danube line indeed shows signs of uniformity, but in fact, it is a colourful network of the populations of various barbarian gens, which from a political point of view, was controlled by the power structures of the Visigothic and the Ostrogothic elites, both of two Scandinavian-origin *gens*.¹⁵

Upon a more critical look at the archaeological findings of Wallachia from the second half of the 4th century, the uniformity mentioned above – which is rooted in a 19th-century view from the era of national romanticism – needs to be significantly revised. Several sites that can be dated to the second half of the 4th century have been documented, which do not fit into the general picture propagated by the literature. I.e., the burial customs registered in these burial sites differ in many respects from those registered in the burial sites of the above-mentioned Sântana de Mureş / Marosszentanna - Czernyahov culture (for example, the deceased are not placed in the grave pits in a north-south direction, but the other way around, which is also characteristic to the populations of the earlier Sarmatian period!), and the weapons that were missing from the burial rites of the previous period also appear in the context of their rites (see also in the Pietroasele-No. 2 burial site, Drăgăneşti-Olt, Târgşor burial site: the often mentioned grave 444 and the group of graves next to it, Ciorani).¹⁶ According to Radu Harhoiu, all of this can be interpreted as a kind of “prelude” of the Hunnic conquest and migration,¹⁷ and in his opinion, eastern, a pre-Hunnic group or groups may have appeared in the Wallachia area, and this migration would be symbolized mainly by the T-shaped daggers (also known from the two above-mentioned sites). I myself would not necessarily interpret all of this as signs of migration(s) from east to west (since T-shaped daggers are also known from earlier site finds), but rather the other way around: the fact that by the 4th century, the council and assembly (*gamainths*) of the villages (under the rule of the Athanaric) only had a formal role – according to the *Passio Sabae* – , clearly indicates that as a result of social competition, the older power structures had become irrelevant, and this social competition even resulted in a vertical stratification that is archeologically

Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London–New York: VERSO, 2006).

¹¹ More on this term: István Bóna, *Hunok és a nagykirályaik* (Budapest: Corvina, 1993), 54.

¹² Pohl, “A Non-Roman Empire,” 571-574.

¹³ Herwig Wolfram, *History of the Goths* (Berkeley–Los Angeles–London: University of California Press, 1990).

¹⁴ Ioan Ioniţă, “Sântana-de-Mureş-Černjachov-Kultur,” in *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, 26/2 (Berlin–New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 445-455.

¹⁵ For the history of the Gothic people see: Wolfram, *History of the Goths*.

¹⁶ The literature of the sites: Radu Harhoiu, *Huni şi goţi hunici la Dunărea de Jos* (Târgovişte: Cetatea de Scaun, 2020).

¹⁷ See the title of chapter II in Radu Harhoiu’s book (*Huni şi goţi*), relevant in this regard: “*Huni înainte de huni*,” i.e. “*Huns before the Huns*.”

perceptible. In my opinion, the graves with weapons associated with the Sântana de Mureș / Marosszentanna-Czernyahov culture dated to the second half of the 4th century should be interpreted in this context.

The use of several burial sites from Wallachia and Moldavia could not have come to an end around 380, as the literature suggests (according to the written sources, Athanaric fled with his entourage to the Roman Empire in 376, and the abandonment of the burial sites was connected to his leaving), but continued much later, in the 420s.¹⁸ In other words, the period when these cemeteries were abandoned may not mark the beginning of the Hun migration, but rather the initial period of the formation and foundation of the Hunnic Ordu in Wallachia. This will be discussed in the following.

The Hunnic steppe empire

In the last quarter of the 4th century, the Germanic-type power structure of the Gothic Athanaric was shaped in the shadow of the Roman Empire, and the steppe empire of the nomadic Huns put an end to, which emerged basically out of nowhere in the second half of the 4th century.¹⁹ In the summer of 376, Athanaric's Gothic army was defeated, and this was a kind of introduction of more than seven decades of Hun rule in our region, which can be called the structural political integration of the Huns. Sources inform us that the nomadic way of life, as noted by the ancient authors (Aristotle, Thucydides), was perfectly matched with the military lifestyle, in conclusion, these nomadic communities were obviously closely linked to the participation in the continuous military campaign. Based on this, the Hunnic society can accurately be called a "warrior society".

The power structure based on the Gothic social system was subdued by the Hun system of Steppe origin. The Hun power structure was far more organized militarily, which is why it was able to subjugate various political-military structures, such as the Alans and Ostrogoths, including the Visigoths and the Sarmatians of today's Great Hungarian Plain. This resulted in their control over a vast steppe area, which suited their open and nomadic way of life, stretching from the Lower Danube to the Urals, now firmly under their authority. This control was maintained through their ability to manage the flow of information, one of the main virtues of nomadic structures.²⁰

The political foundation of the supreme leader's power was divine origins – this was clearly rooted in Asian traditions.²¹ Starting with the appearance of the Huns in Eastern Europe and ending with Attila's death in 453, the character of this political power retained its authority (see e.g. the envoys sent to Attila's court).

The way how the steppe empire of the Huns was controlled cannot be understood through modern concepts. Coherence depended on the relationship between the supreme ruler (king) and the second prince (a dual power system), on the connections and interests of the elites of the subjugated populations, and – often times – also on dynastic marriages. We are probably not much mistaken if we see the Hun Empire as a network of families, dynasties and elites (of different origins) manipulated by a central power (from the beginning of the Hun period to the time of Attila getting

¹⁸ Vlad-Andrei Lăzărescu, *Locuirea în Transilvania din ultimele decenii ale provinciei Dacia și până la prăbușirea „imperiului” hunic* (Cluj-Napoca: Academia Română, Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2015), 125, Figs. 67-68.

¹⁹ About the ancestors of the Huns: Bóna, *Hunok*. For their archaeogenetic analysis, see: Zoltán Maróti, Endre Neparácski, Oszkár Schütz, Kitti Maár, Gergely I.B. Varga, Bence Kovács, Tibor Kalmár, Emil Nyerki, István Nagy, Dóra Latinovics, Balázs Tihanyi, Antónia Marcsik, György Pálfi, Zsolt Bernert, Zsolt Gallina, Ciprián Horváth, Sándor Varga, László Költő, István Raskó, Péter L. Nagy, Csilla Balogh, Albert Zink, Frank Maixner, Anders Götherström, Robert George, Csaba Szalontai, Gergely Szenthe, Erwin Gáll, Attila P. Kiss, Bence Gulyás, Bernadett Ny. Kovacsóczy, Szilárd Sándor Gál, Péter Tomka, Tibor Török, "The genetic origin of Huns, Avars, and conquering Hungarians," *Current Biology* (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2022.04.093>.

²⁰ The news of the destruction of the Kingdom of Hungary in Karakoram by the Mongols, reached the Great Khan very quickly (approx. 12,000 km). For the communication mail system of the Mongols, see: Márton Gergő Vér, "A Mongol Birodalom postahálózata és VIP-kártyája: a paiza," *Határtalan Régészet* 1 (2020): 48-50.

²¹ The concept of the "great king" in the Hungarian literature is probably inherited from the technical language of Romanticizing historiography. In European historiography – and with a characteristically European interpretive focus – it has been also suggested that the concept on the divine origin of power is copying the imperial legitimacy of Roman emperors. The concept of universal power appears, however, also in an Asian context, among the steppe people (Turks, Mongols), yet, it is not a "steppe" characteristic. On the broader context of sacral legitimacy coupled with total power – as "cultural universalism" see Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth, Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton: De Gruyter, 1993).

more and more powerful).²² The leaders of conquered peoples were occasionally replaced by members of the ruling dynasty, but sometimes their leadership was approved, or the Huns appointed new leaders instead of the representatives of the dynasty whose authority had been lost (structural integration). Settlements, villages of the defeated ethnic groups were tolerated even in the vicinity of political centers, their cultural separation was respected, except when they attempted to exceed their predestined status assigned to them within a militarized social structure. As we have seen, the steppe-state, called the Hun Empire, had an extremely complex, multilayered and multi-component structure.²³

Hunnic-period archaeological finds in the Romanian Plain

Based on the 150-year research history of the archaeology of the migration period, the main characteristics of the archaeological finds from the Hun period can now be outlined quite precisely, and several social archaeological, but also (indirect) political-military and geopolitical conclusions can be drawn from this. Material culture from two main groups of sources, deposits, sacrificial finds and burials, as along with the rituals observed during the excavations, connect the communities across vast areas like a chain, and these are archaeological phenomena that clearly indicate the extent of the Hun power structure, as well as its cultural and mental effects that lasted a long time even after the disintegration of the Hun steppe empire.²⁴

The finds that the research clearly evaluates as a symbol of the *Hunnic period* come from the two aforementioned groups: cast copper cauldrons, female graves with diadems, and male graves with arms and horses from the Hunnic period.²⁵ All of these three groups of archaeological sources were documented in the Romanian Plain (**Figure 3**), the first discovery of this kind was made about one hundred years ago. Let's examine them!

1. The large, cast Hun cauldrons, which could be used for feasts serving groups of up to 50-100 people, are (from this period onwards) separate – also geographically – from assemblages associated with single individuals of the highest 'imperial' elite (e.g. Szeged-Nagyszéksós, Pannonhalma, Pécs-Üszögpuszta, Bátaszék, and Șimleu Silvaniei).²⁶ Due to their small number, and to the fact that we do not know whom they belonged to, their spatial distribution is unfortunately not illustrative of any social or legal category describing the society of the Huns. In the entire area of Eurasia, the largest number of cast cauldrons, considered a symbol of the Asian Hun migration, is known from the Romanian Plain: a total of ten or eleven cauldrons or cauldron fragments were unearthed in ten sites, compared to seven finds from the central areas of the Carpathian Basin.²⁷

This evidently clarifies the significance of the Romanian Plain in the imperial structure of the Steppe Huns. Studying the finding place of the cauldrons, it is easy to notice that some of them

²² Whether Attila's father Ruga was a relative to other Hun leaders known from earlier (e.g. Uldin), there is no information. Uldin was probably not yet a monarch. See Bóna, *Hunok*, 44-52.

²³ Interpreting the Hunnic Empire as a loose configuration of tribes would be – in our opinion – too simplistic. See Tibor Schäfer, "A hun birodalom felbomlása," in *Nomád népvándorlások, magyar honfoglalás*, eds. Szabolcs Felföldi, Béla Sinkovics (Magyar Őstörténeti Könyvtár, 15) (Budapest, 2001), 27.

²⁴ Michael Kazanski, Patrick Périn, "La Tombe de Childéric: un tumulus oriental?," in *Mélanges Jean-Pierre Sodini*, eds. F. Baratte, V. Déroche, C. Jolivet-Lévy, B. Pitarakis (Travaux et Mémoires, 15) (Paris: Association des Amis du Centre d'Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance, 2005), 287-298.

²⁵ A remarkable synthesis on the partial horse burials of the Hun Period (D1-D2): Attila P. Kiss, "A szarmaták és a gepidák között. A hun/nomád emléktárgyak azonosításának problémái a részleges lovastemetkezések példáján keresztül," in *Mítosz és történelem II. Tanulmányok Hoppál Mihály 80. születésnapjára. Első kötet*, eds. Bulcsú Hoppál, György Szabados (Budapest: Európai Folklor Intézet – Magyar Vallástudományi Társaság, 2022), 267-291.

²⁶ For a summary on this view see Gergely Szenthe, "Social power, identity and the ritual deposits," in *Attila's Europe? Structural Transformation and Strategies of Success in the European Hun Period. Extended, Annotated Proceedings of the International Conference Organised by the Hungarian National Museum and the Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, June 6 - 8, 2019*, eds. Zsófia Rácz, Gergely Szenthe (Budapest: Hungarian National Museum, 2021), 563-579; Gergely Szenthe, Viktória Mozgai, Eszter Horváth, Bernadett Bajnóczi, "Hun kori áldozati leletegyüttes Telki határából. Előzetes jelentés," *Magyar Régészet-Online magazin* (2019): 9-19.

²⁷ Zsófia Masek, "A fresh look at Hunnic cauldrons in the light of a new find from Hungary," *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 68 (2017): 75-135. At the same time, fragments found in Intercisa and Iža-Celemantia are also known from Roman fortresses / can also be connected to Roman fortresses, however, in the Pannonia region, we have no information indicating that there was a military conflict between the Romans and the Huns in the region.

- (six out of ten or eleven cases) were found right next to the Danube, and in two cases, in a destroyed Roman fort. The era of the termination of these fortresses – in the light of archaeological excavations – is precisely the Hun era, i.e. the first decades of the 5th century, which allows us to consider that the armies of the Hun Empire, which destroyed the fortifications on the Danube line, *presented communal sacrifices after their successful battles!*
2. The very rich female grave goods, decorated with a 3–5 cm wide gold diadem (made of sheet gold), as typical pieces of steppe raiment, have a prominent place among the archaeological evidence of the Hunnic people's movement. Similar to the Hun cauldrons, compared from a central regional point of view, **most of the Hun diadem finds from female graves are similarly known from the Romanian Plain**, starting from the Urals to Poland.²⁸
 3. Among the numerous graves with weaponry (or allusions to this) from the Hun era, only the horse grave found in Concești, in the northern part of Moldavia, could be considered princely. However, several modest graves with weapons and richer scattered finds point to the region's prominence in this aspect, but the most important one was obviously the excavation before the construction of the A7 highway, where a large burial pit was discovered, and the grave goods are unparalleled in quantity in the archaeology of the Hun era (jewellery, weapons, utility tools, harness).²⁹ This find can only be compared to the largest Hunnic-period find in the Carpathian Basin to date, the sacrificial find from Szeged-Nagyszéksós, which can be linked to the family of the "great kings".³⁰ An exhaustive, interdisciplinary examination of this burial will certainly enrich our knowledge of the Romanian Great Plain during the Hunnic period with a lot of new data, linking these areas more closely with the Hungarian Great Plain and the Eurasian steppe zone.
 4. A group of graves from Mizil (?)³¹ and other scattered grave finds of Hunnic origin (see **Figures 4-5: Buzău, Poșta Călnău**) indicate that these finds come from the graves of individuals belonging to different layers of society. So, as we can see, overall, merely a few sites are known; however, this is not specific to the region, but one of the main archaeological features of the Hun era, which is clearly related to the **demographic catastrophe** of the era. The visible population decline in Wallachia and Oltenia in the 5th century cannot be linked to the appearance of the Hun power either, but rather to the disintegrating structures of the Roman Empire and the consequences of the demographic and economic crisis.³² **We might even say that the crisis of the ancient world created the Hun Empire!**

Summary and questions

The north-eastern corner of the Romanian Great Plain has a clear strategic importance in Eurasia, from the geopolitical, military, and economic communication point of view. In the direction of the Eurasian steppe, the intersection of the west-east steppe road and the north-south roads (from Transylvania to the Balkans and the Black Sea) is precisely in the vicinity of Buzău. As for its antecedents, it is enough to mention the 3rd-century Roman fortress in the area of Pietroasele, not far from the city.

Within a 30-35 kilometre radius of Buzău, a series of archaeological discoveries may be attributed to

²⁸ Ilona Kovrig, "Das Diadem von Csorna," *Folia Archaeologica* 36 (1985): 107-145.

²⁹ Silviu Ene, "Descoperire arheologică impresionantă pe lotul Ploiești-Buzău al A7. Pentru proiectul de infrastructură Autostrada A7, Ploiești-Buzău, Compania Națională de Administrare a Infrastructurii Rutiere," <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=3586405688255434>; <https://kronikaonline.ro/szines/nepvan-dorlas-kori-velhetoen-hun-uralom-alatt-elt-vezer-sirjat-tartak-fel-a-karpatokon-tul>; <https://www.livescience.com/princely-tomb-hun-warrior-romania> (last access: 25 January 2025); Silviu Ene, Alin Diaconu, Ștefan Mariș, Talida Radu, "Descoperiri arheologice pe traseul autostrăzii A7 Ploiești-Buzău: Cercetarea preventivă a sitului Conduratu 1 (km 19+350 – 20+750). Campaniile 2022-2023, in: *Metodă, teorie și practică în arheologia contemporană*. In memoriam Eugen Nicolae. Sesiunea anuală a Institutului de Arheologie „Vasile Pârvan”, organizată în colaborare cu Biblioteca Academiei Române – Cabinetul Numismatic și Muzeul Municipiului București 26-28 marti 2024," in: *Cronica Sesiunii. SCIVA* 76 (2025) (under press).

³⁰ See the note 21.

³¹ <https://ran.cimec.ro/sel.asp?descript=mizil-oras-mizil-prahova-necropola-postromana-de-la-mizil-str-tepes-voda-cod-sit-ran-131416.04> (last access: 25 January 2025).

³² About the topic: Tibor Grüll, "A globalizáció és multikulturalizmus kérdései a Római Birodalomban," *Korall Társadalomtörténeti Folyóirat* 63 (2016): 69-83; Brian Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 138-142.

the 5th-century Hun imperial elite: the grave of a female with artificial cranial deformation and adorned with a diadem at Gherăseni; the female grave with a diadem at Bălteni; the unparalleled richness of the burial at Conduratu; scattered finds indicating very rich graves at Poșta Călnău and Buzău, and the cast copper cauldrons or their fragments from Boldești, Gherăseni, and Lunca Frumoasă (Figures 4-5).

The fact that artefacts of other populations with different cultural habitus have also been found in the area to a significant extent, is also of great importance. The social system based on *gens* and group norms, which probably existed among the Germanic and Alan populations, must have suffered damage during this period. Certainly, the finds of these are known in the Pietroasele burial sites, some of them are male armed graves with simple annexes (free warriors?). Not far from here, but already in the hilly area of the road to Transylvania, finds indicating an Eastern or even Germanic elite (the grave in Chiojdu with a brooch) suggest that a political symbiosis was established between the Eastern conquerors and the conquered people, and the result was the *structural political integration* of the latter's social layers – according to the model discussed already.

Their spatial concentration in a strategic communication hub – the Hun cauldrons as an element that displays the common identity of nomadic communities, the princely grave found in their area, and the rich female burials as signs of the pinnacle of the social elite – confirm this statement. The world-famous treasure found in Pietroasele³³ is closely linked to this, but it also complicates the issue at first glance. As a result, the Buzău area has been interpreted as a centre of Germanic power until now – mainly based on the bracelet found in the treasure preserving Germanic writing.

It is not excluded, and even obviously accepting the Germanic power component, I consider that we have to admit the existence of a Hun *Ordu*, in the frames of which Germanic elites were also included, as the rhetorician Priscus so colourfully presents.³⁴

And one last question: two main parallel Hunnic *Ordus* or a succession of Romanian and Hungarian plain centres?

The archaeological findings indicating the Hun (period) “peak elite” we presented above clearly outline the Buzău microregion as the centre of the “war machine” of the Hunnic Empire. It was the place where extremely important decisions were made regarding the foreign policy of the Hunnic Empire in the first half of the 5th century. According to István Bóna, this centre was perhaps moved to the Hungarian Great Plain during the time of Attila, which could be confirmed by the greatest sacrificial find of the Central European Huns so far, the finds of the family of the “great” kings (Szeged-Nagyszéksós).

The finds from Conduratu and Gherăseni, as well as the other finds classified by the literature in the so-called D2 chronological time band,³⁵ may indicate that these two central power centres could have operated in parallel: one in the Hungarian Great Plain, the other in the Romanian Great Plain.³⁶ In light of Attila's south-eastern and western Hun geopolitical strategy, this seems (more) reasonable.

We know very little about the kingdom, its structures, and organization led by Ardaric, who partially won the succession war following Attila's death in 453. From the Wallachia area, we only know Gepid archaeological finds and graves along the Olt to Sucidava-Celei in the south.³⁷ This is explained by the fact that the most important communication network between the Transylvanian Basin, Oltenia, and Wallachia has been, ever since the prehistoric times to the present day, the Olt River flowing toward the Romanian Great Plain, through the Turnu Roșu Pass.³⁸

³³ A masterful analysis: Radu Harhoiu, *Die frühe Völkerwanderungszeit in Rumänien* (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 1997), 41-44.

³⁴ R. C. Blockley, *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire. Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchus* (Classical and Medieval Texts, Papers and Monographs, 6) (Cambridge: Francis Cairns, 2009), 281.

³⁵ Harhoiu, *Die frühe*, 41-44.

³⁶ Based on Bóna's map, I concluded that at least 4 simultaneous regional centers of power can be presumed in the central regions of the Carpathian Basin during the first half of the 5th century. Bóna, *Hunok*, 1. térkép.

³⁷ Dorel Bondoc, Mirela Cojoc, “German discoveries at Sucidava-Celei in the 6th century,” *Studia Academica Șumenensia* 1 (2014): 39-50.

³⁸ In this respect, see the so-called *Gepid* funerary sites in southern Transylvania (like Bratei, Miercurea Sibiului): Sabin Adrian Luca, Zeno Karl Pinter, Ioan Marian Țiplic, Adrian Georgescu, Dragoș Diaconescu, “Descoperiri gepide la Miercurea Sibiului-Petriș (jud. Sibiu),” in *Relații interetnice în Transilvania. Secolele VI-XIII*, Bibliotheca Septemcastrensis XII, coord.: Zeno Karl Pinter, Ioan Marian Țiplic, Maria Emilia Țiplic (București: Editura Economică, 2005), 17-26.

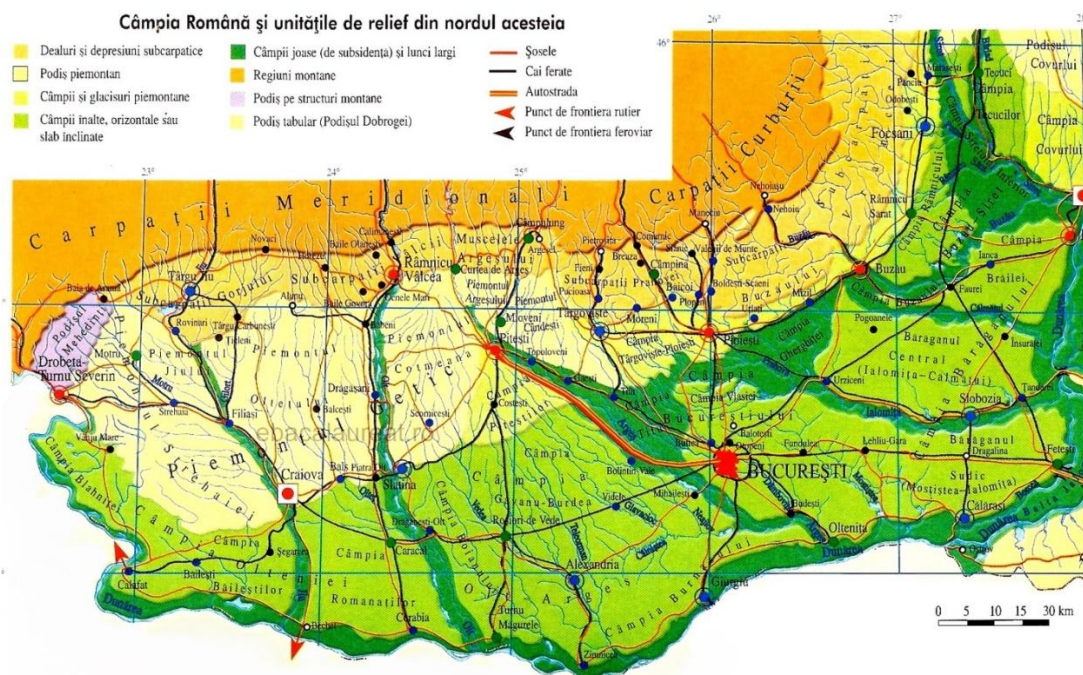


Figure 1. The Romanian Plain (after <https://www.ebacalaureat.ro/bac/suport/geografie/campia-romana.jpg>)

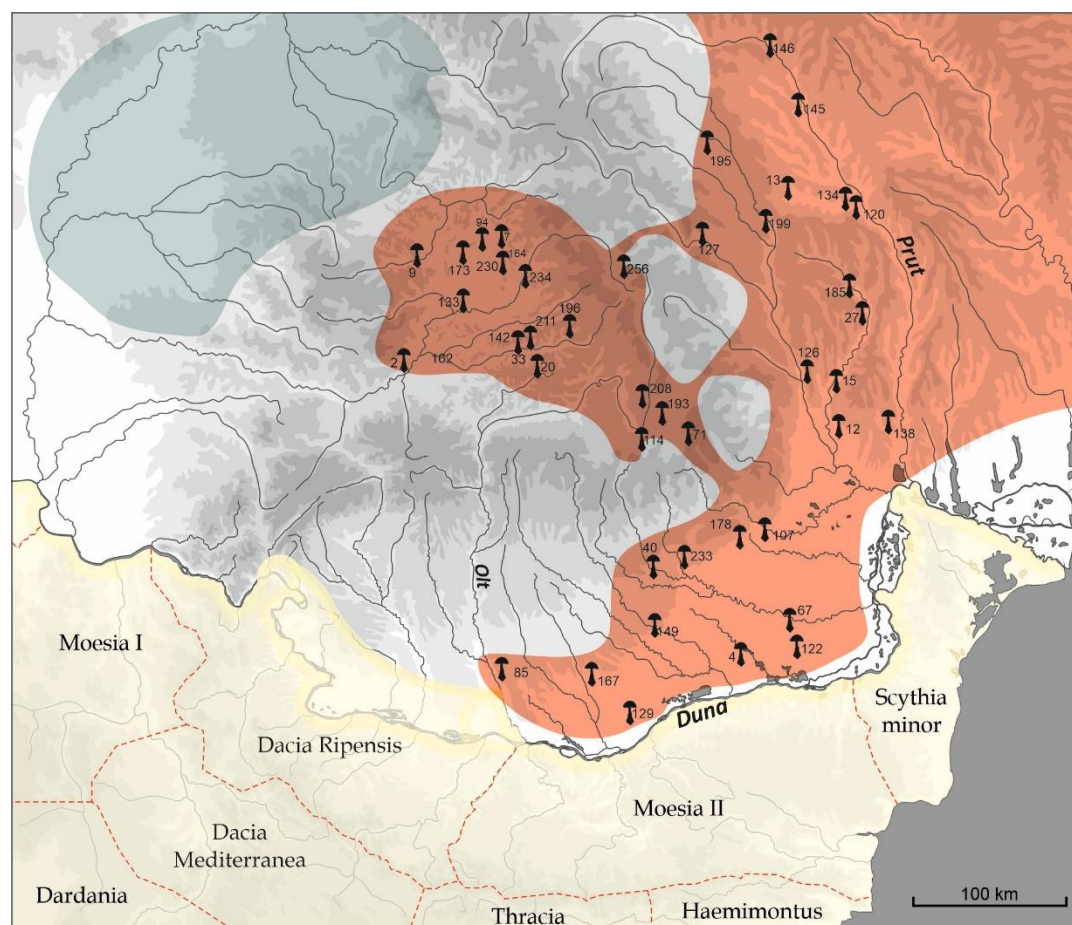
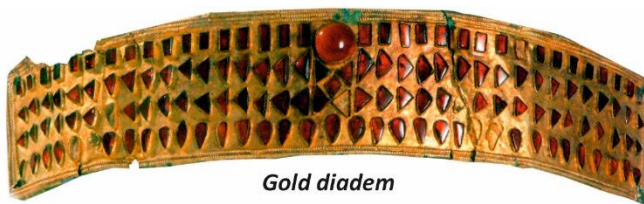


Figure. 2: The burial sites of the Sântana de Mureș-Czernyahov archaeological culture spread over the territory of Muntenia, Moldavia, and Transylvania (after Radu Harhoiu, Daniel Spânu, Erwin Gáll, *Barbari la Dunăre* [Cluj-Napoca, 2011] Fig. 6)



Deformed cranium



Gold diadem

Gherăseni



Bronze mirror



Poșta Câlnău



Chiojdu



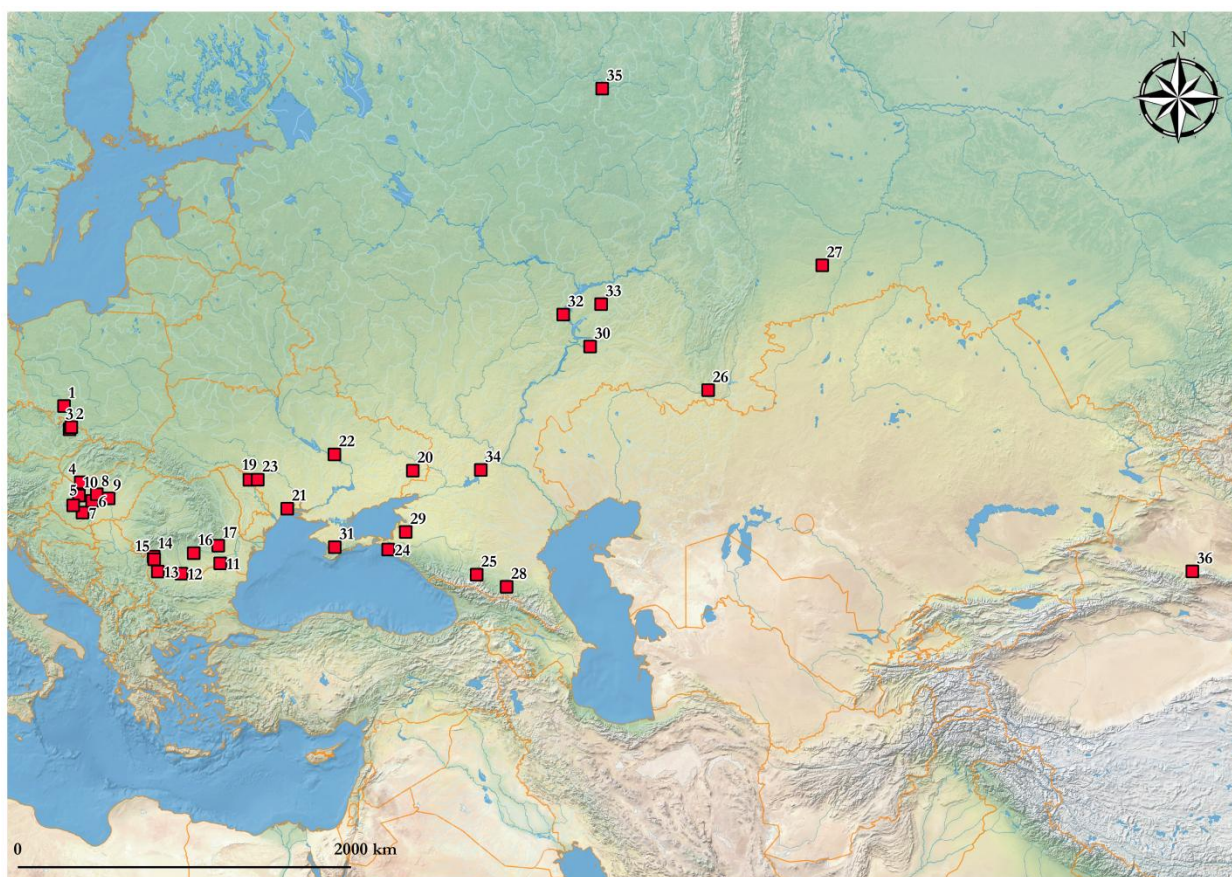
Desa



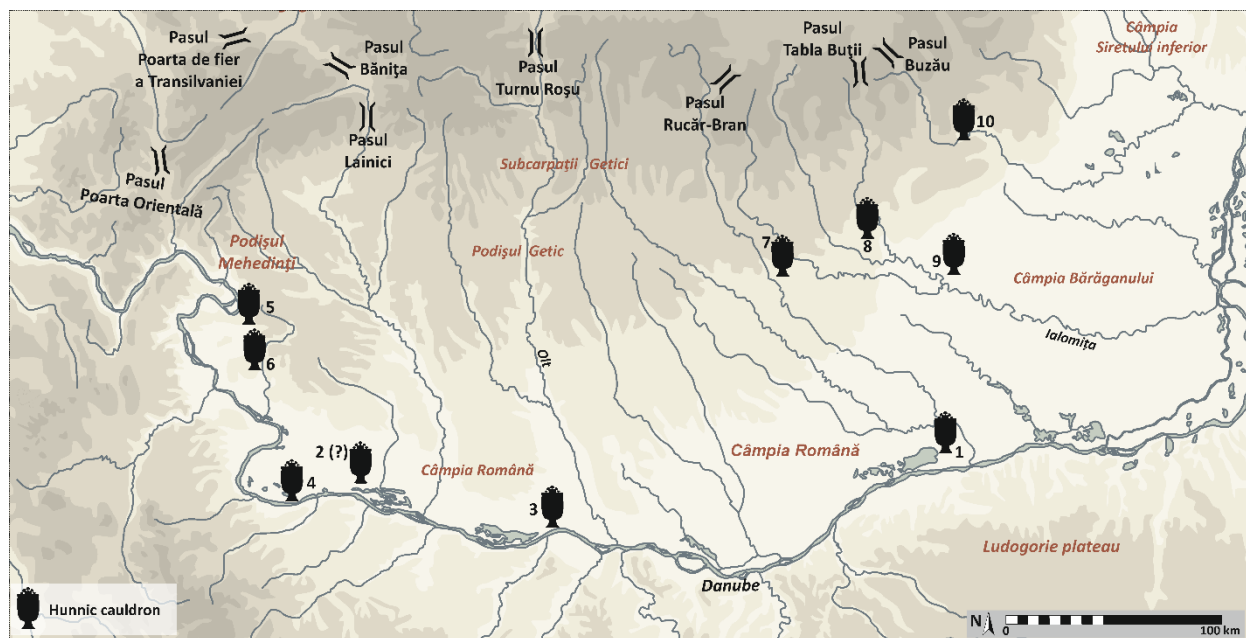
Pietrosele



Figure 3. Archaeological finds from the Hun period documented in Wallachia and Oltenia (edited by the author, based on Radu Harhoiu, Daniel Spănu, Erwin Gáll, *Barbari la Dunăre* (Cluj-Napoca, 2011), Figs. 21/1, 4–5, 8, 12, fig. 25/1, 5)



A



B

Figure 4.A-B: Distribution of Hun-period cauldrons in Eurasia (the numbering of the sites: Masek, “A fresh look at Hunnic cauldrons,” 120), respectively in the Romanian Plain (actualised by the author): 1. Boșneagu; 2 (?). Oltenia/malul Dunării; 3. Sucidava-Celei I; 4. Desa-Ciuperceni; 5. Hinova; 6. Hotărani; 7. Ionești; 8. Târgșorul Vechi (unpublished); 9. Boldești Grădiște (Prahova) (unpublished); 10. Lunca Frumoasa (unpublished) (drawn by Erwin Gáll based on data from R. Harhoiu, *Huni și goți*)

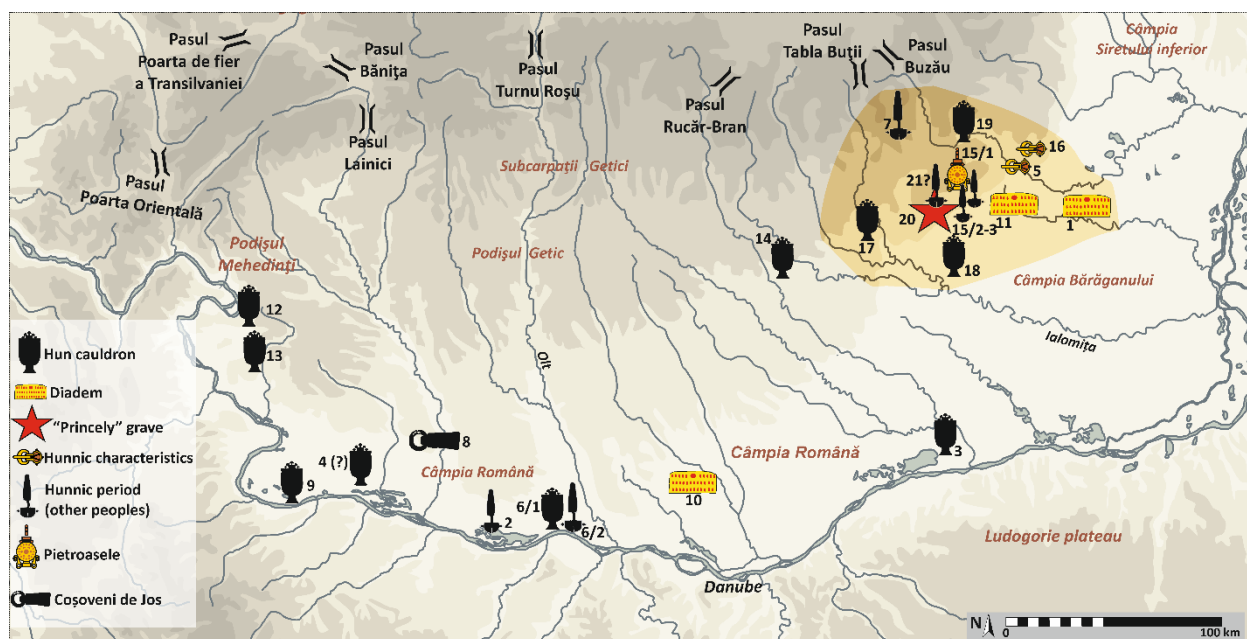


Figure 5. Archaeological finds from the Hunnic period documented in the area of Wallachia and Oltenia and sites around Buzău indicating the Hunnic Ordu: 1. Bălteni; 2. Bistreț; 3. Boșneagu; 4. Oltenia/malul Dunării; 5. Buzău; 6. Sucidava-Celei I; 7. Chiojdu; 8. Coșovenii de Jos; 9. Desa-Ciuperceni; 10. Dulceanca; 11. Gherăseni; 12. Hinova; 13. Hotărani; 14. Ionești; 15. Pietroasele (15/1: treasure find, 15/2-3: burial sites); 16. Poșta Câlnău; 17. Târgșorul Vechi (17/1: Hun cauldron, 17/2: Hunnic-period graves); 18. Boldești Grădiște (Prahova); 19. Lunca Frumoasa; 20. Condratu A7 highway (mun. Baba Ana); 21. Mizil-str. Țepeș Vodă street (?).³⁹ (drawn by Erwin Gáll based on data from R. Harhoiu, *Huni și goți* and S. Ene et al., *Descoperiri arheologice*)

³⁹ <https://ran.cimec.ro/sel.asp?descript=mizil-oras-mizil-prahova-necropola-postromana-de-la-mizil-str-tepes-voda-cod-sit-ran-131416.04>.

