

RECONSTRUCTION OF THE PRE-ROMAN TUMULUS : “MOVILA CU PIETRE” IN POIANA

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Abstract: The tumulus „Movila cu pietre” („The Tell with Stones”) in Poiana (Nicorești municipality, Galați county, România) has been partially studied between 27-31st August 1928 by Ecaterina Vulpe. The central grave was robbed. Very few materials were discovered: a few fragments of local ceramics and a few fragments of amphorae, as well as a strongly profiled fibula. Ecaterina Vulpe’s detailed drawings allowed the graphical reconstruction of the tumulus. It is highly probable that the mass of stones identified in the southern and in the northern part of the section had formed a massive, circular wall sustained by wooden poles. This structure resembles the „Pfofenschlitzmauer” system (or the *murrus gallicus* type Kelheim) attested in the Celtic fortifications of the late La Tène period.

Rezumat: Tumulul “Movila cu pietre” de la Poiana (com. Nicorești, jud. Galați, România) a fost cercetat parțial în 27-31 august 1928 de către Ecaterina Vulpe. Mormântul central a fost furtuit. Au fost descoperite puține materiale: câteva fragmente ceramice locale, câteva fragmente de amfore și o fibulă puternic profilată. Desenele detaliate ale Ecaterinei Vulpe permit reconstituirea grafică a tumulului. Foarte probabil, aglomerările de bolovani identificate în sudul și nordul secțiunii cercetate au făcut parte dintr-un zid masiv întărit cu stâlpi de lemn. Această structură amintește de sistemul „Pfofenschlitzmauer” (sau *murrus gallicus* de tip Kelheim) atestat în cazul fortificațiilor celtice din perioada târzie a La Tène-ului.

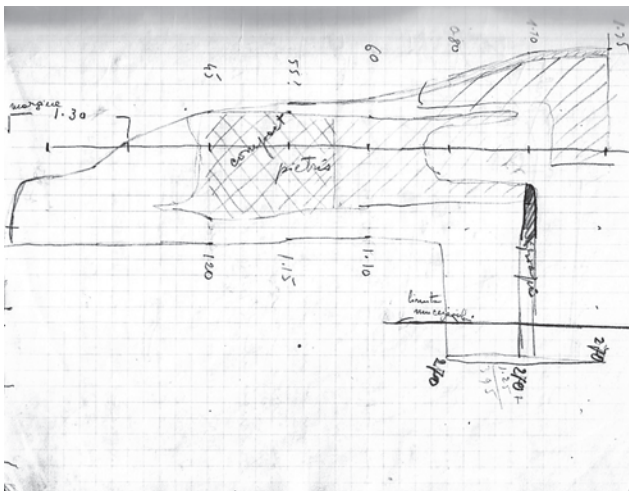


Fig. 1. Northern half of the eastern profile in the section dug in “Movila cu pietre”. Drawing made by Ecaterina Vulpe.

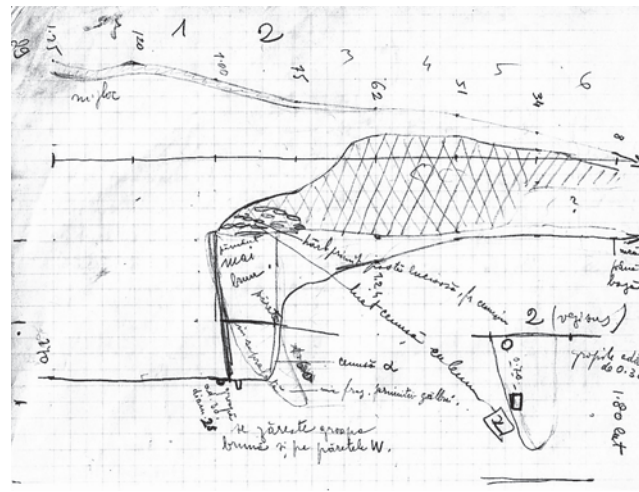


Fig. 2. Southern half of the eastern profile in the section dug in “Movila cu pietre”. Drawing made by Ecaterina Vulpe.

The tumulus “Movila cu pietre” (“The Tell with Stones”) in Poiana (Nicorești municipality, Galați county, România) has been partially studied between 27-31st of August 1928. The excavation journal has been recently acquired for the Archive of the Institute of Archeology in Bucharest.¹ Reexamining the notebook led to the conclusion that it belongs to Ecaterina Vulpe and not to Radu Vulpe, as it had been previously assumed.² The brief daily notes are accompanied by several drawings (for example Figs. 1-2), the processing and interpreting of which (Fig. 3) allow us to reconstruct (Figs. 4-5) an exceptional funeral pre-Roman monument in Southern Moldova.

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² Spânu 2012, pp. 166-167.

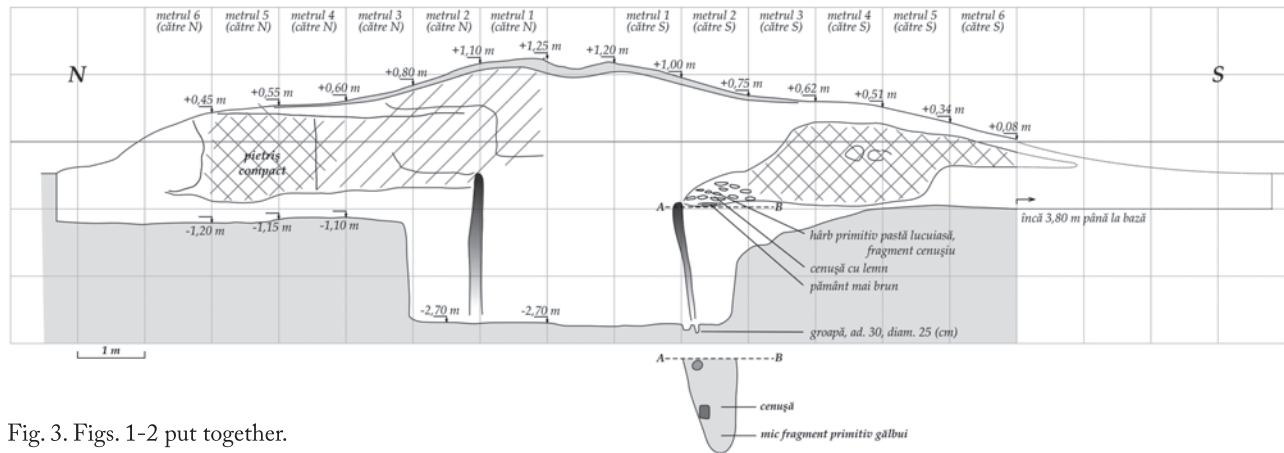


Fig. 3. Figs. 1-2 put together.

The research of this tumulus was firstly recorded in literature by Radu Vulpe.³ A short presentation of the results of the diggings in 1928 is the merit of Alexandru Vulpe.⁴ “Movila cu pietre” is the first of the tumuli identified north of the settlement of the La Tène period in Poiana, on the high terrace of the river Siret. Further tumuli have been also studied here in 1931 and 1936 (diggings by Radu Vulpe),⁵ as well as in the post-war period (archaeological diggings led by Silvia Teodor, Mircea Nicu and Stela Țau).⁶ “Movila cu pietre” had, at the time of the archaeological research, a diameter of over 14 m and was about 2 m high. The study of the tumulus consisted in a section oriented on the north-south axis, 14.5/2.5 m, in which diggings over 3 m deep were made. Drawings of the eastern profile of the sections were made (Figs. 1-2) and several successive archaeological plans. The tumulus was not entirely dug out: large areas in the east and in the west remained unexcavated.

The importance of this tumulus is not given by its inventory, but by its quasi monumental structure. At the very beginning of the study Ecaterina Vulpe observed a previous intervention – a robber’s pit (of uncertain date) had been dug in the centre of the barrow. The large quantity of earth deposited over it indicates that the robbery took place in the ancient time, not in the modern era. The destruction of the central grave explains why there were very few discovered materials: a few fragments of local pottery and a few fragments of amphorae, as well as a fibula.

The fibula was discovered in the wall of the funerary chamber, in an area that had not been affected by the robbery hole. Based on the drawing made by E. Vulpe this piece can be identified as a strongly profiled fibula (*kräftig profilierte Fibel*). Hypothetically, this piece could be identified with the fibula (from an unknown context) published in the monograph dedicated to the materials of the late La Tène settlement in Poiana⁷ (Fig. 6). The inventory number of this piece found in the registers of the Museum in Tecuci (inv. 574) is a three digit number which suggests that it belongs to a lot that has been discovered long ago, before the Second World War. The pieces brought into the inventory later bear four digit numbers. The fibula drawn by Ecaterina Vulpe allows us to say that the tumulus dates back to the second half of the 1st century A.D.

“Movila cu pietre” stands out through its exceptional layout. Detailed drawings made by the author of the diggings (for example Figs. 1-2) allowed the graphical reconstruction of the tumulus (Figs. 3-4). As the name suggests, “The Tell with Stones” was known to the local people because of the numerous stones used for its layout. During her digging Ecaterina Vulpe observed stones set regularly, as well as “large pieces of rock” and “bigger boulders”. The size of these stones is not mentioned, but the drawings suggest they might have

³ Vulpe R. et al. 1952, p. 209.

⁴ Vulpe A. 1976, p. 210, tumulus no. 3.

⁵ Vulpe A. 1976, pp. 209-210; Spănu 2009, pp. 88-90; 2012, 166sqq.

⁶ Sirbu 1994, p. 126.

⁷ Vulpe R., Teodor 2003, p. 225, cat. no. 285, p. 591, Fig. 112/3.

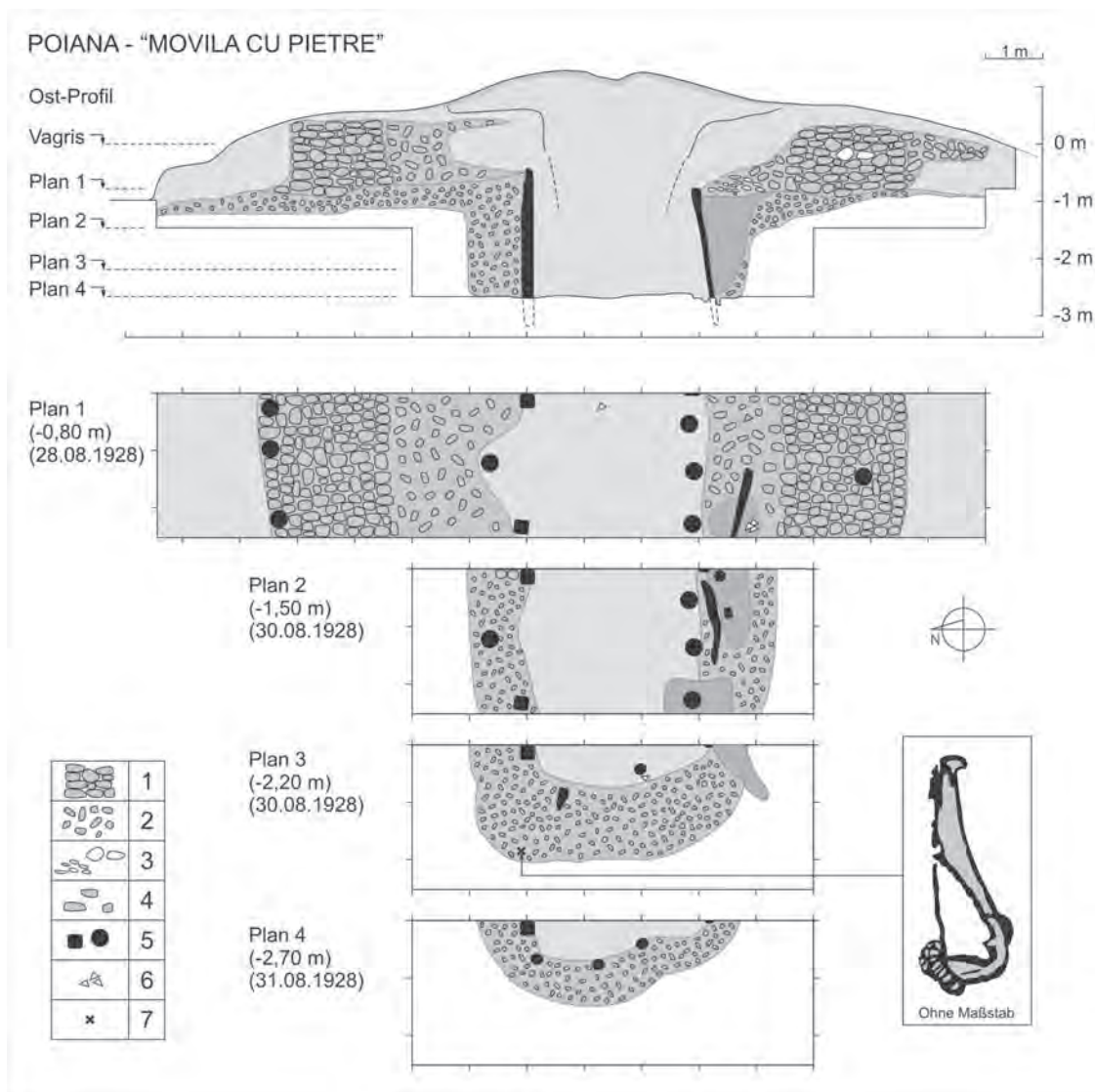


Fig. 4. Interpretation and correlation of all the graphical information in the document. In the legend: 1 – compact gravel/pieces of cliff; 2 – fallen stones; 3 – stones drawn in the original documentation; 4 – stones graphically reconstructed; 5 – poles or beams; 6 – fragments; 7 – fibula.

measured about 20-25 cm on one side. In the southern as well as in the northern part of the section, a dense mass of such stones was identified. They were about 2 m wide and 1 m tall. It is highly probable that this mass had formed a massive, circular safety wall, about 1.2 m tall.

On the northern side, outside the stone mass, traces of three wooden poles were found (Fig. 4/Plan 1). It is very probable that these poles were meant to sustain the circular wall on the outside. Estetically, such poles interrupted the monotony of the stone mass of the safety wall, just like vertical accents do. Their inclusion in the construction resembles the „Pfostenschlitzmauer” system (or the *murrus gallicus* type Kelheim) attested in the Celtic fortifications of the late period of the La Tène.⁸

⁸ Endert 1987, pp. 83-87.

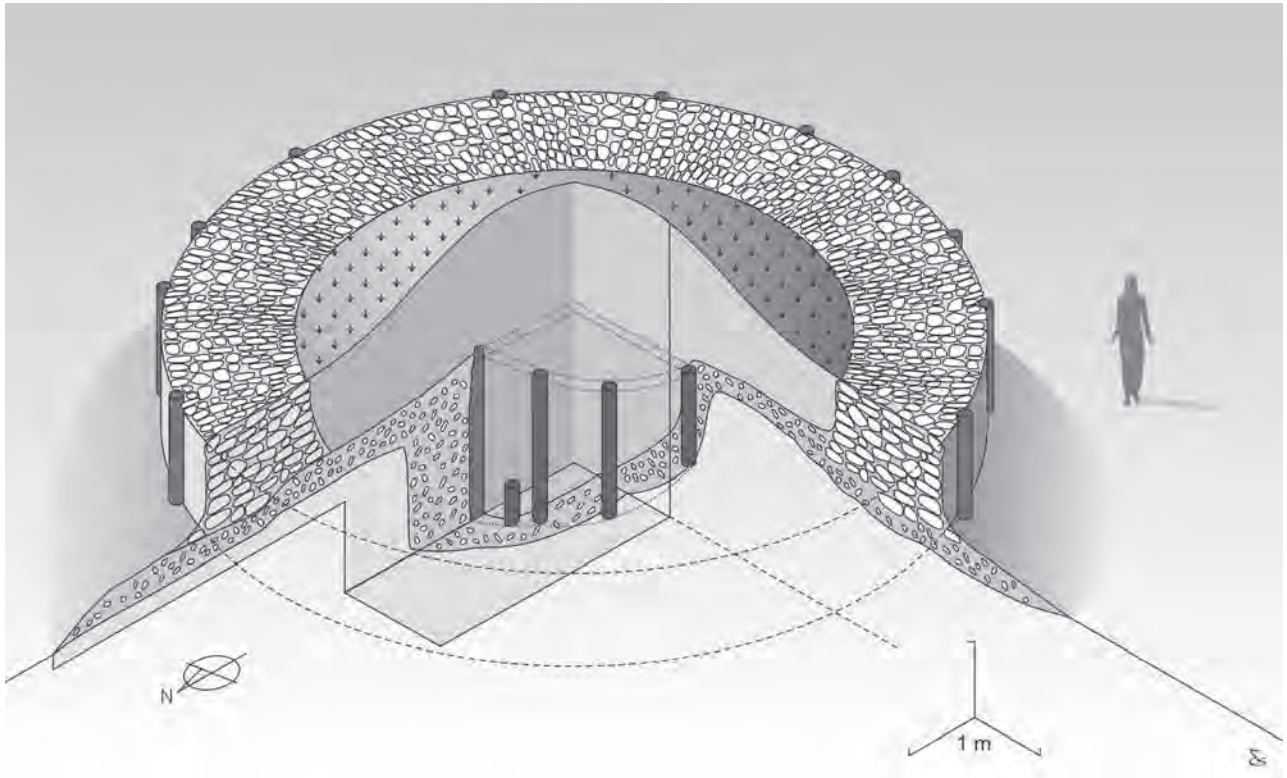


Fig. 5. Three-dimensional reconstruction of “Movila cu pietre”.

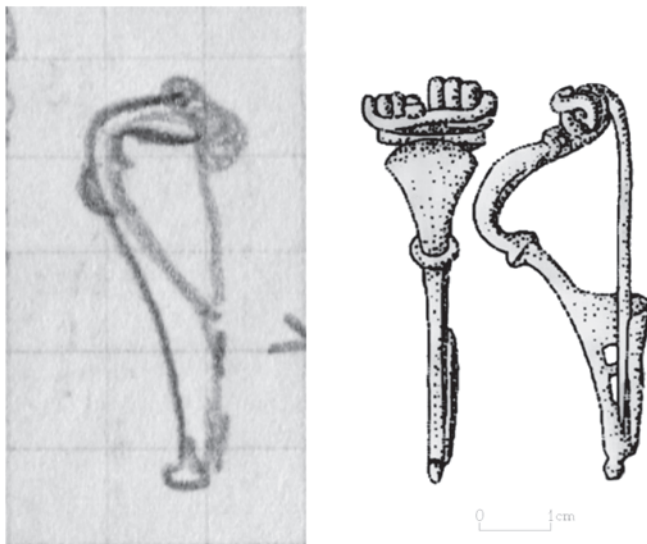


Fig. 6. Left: fibula from “Movila cu pietre”, drawing made by Ecaterina Vulpe; right: fibula from Poiana; reproduction of Vulpe R., Teodor 2003, p. 591, Fig. 112/3.

Inside the circular safety wall, in the approximate centre of the tumulus, a burrying hole was found (a 5 m opening, 2 m deep under the ancient ground level). The walls around the hole are made from earth and gravel and have been fortified on the inner part with slopes and crossbars. The dimensions and the complexity of the set out lead to the conclusion that this was a funeral chamber. Unfortunately, the modest width of the ditch dug in 1928 (2.5 m) does not allow us to determine the exact form and plan of the funeral chamber.

The link between the settlement and the tumulus in Poiana is not the only one of its kind in pre-Roman Dacia. More tumuli have been identified close to the settlements in Popești, Răcătău and Brad. Their set out is not as complex as the set out of “Movila cu pietre”.

The making of such monumentally constructions in pre-Roman Dacia is illustrated in the first place by the architecture of the sanctuaries

in the Orăștie Mountains.⁹ Yet, the use of stones, earth and wooden cross beams to set out funeral monuments is not specific only for “Movila cu pietre”. The tombs in Cetățeni „Colțul Doamnei” have been set out using the same materials. In this case, a rectangular stone platform hosted a grave with military equipment.¹⁰ Both discoveries show the concern for building funeral monuments in Dacia before the Roman conquest.

Vulpe’s drawings reveal that a volume of approximately 12 m³ of stone was found in the researched area. If the safety wall had a perfectly circular plan, the volume of used stone could have reached 72 de m³. Using such a volume of stone requires the efforts of an entire community, not of one family. Implicitly, the person burried in such a monument, must have belonged to the community’s highest class. Unfortunately, this archaeological identity can not be established because the tomb was robbed in ancient times.

Bibliographical abbreviations:

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|------------------------------------|--|
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⁹ Glodariu 1976; *Idem* 1983; Antonescu 1980; Conovici, Mărgineanu-Cârstoiu 1985; Glodariu 2001, pp. 737-745; Gheorghiu 2005, pp. 200-208.

¹⁰ Rosetti 1969; Babeș 1999, pp. 14-19, Fig. 3.

