

GERMANIC PEOPLES IN THE CIUC REGION

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Previously there was little knowledge about the history of the headwaters region of the Olt River during the Migration Period. In the wake of the archaeological research from recent years we are now able to outline the settlement history of the region in the 4th century. In the period following the fall of the Roman Empire the traces of the Germanic Goths – the Sântana de Mureş-Chernyakhov culture – can be detected, and they performed intensive ironwork in this area.

Due to the lack of previous research there was a rather unclear understanding of the conditions of the settlement history during the Migration Period in the Ciuc (Csík) Basin, which stretches along the headwaters of the Olt River in the Eastern Carpathians.¹ After all, during the time of the intensely nationalistic communist dictatorship this period was on the “black list”, since the relics of the various migrating peoples as well as the Kingdom of Hungary that was being established stood out as aberrations within the official ideology of Dacian-Romanian continuity. Thus, in the official historiography the so-called nomadic peoples that can be verified in the written sources and identified through archaeology as well – to the extent that they were mentioned at all – were placed in the category of “also rans”, who merely added color to the otherwise uniform, continuous, indigenous – that is Romanian – presence in the area. The minorities whose identities were violated through this rejection of their historical memory, in our case the Hungarians, developed a strong aversion that lasts to this day against the “official” Romanian position. This exists to such an extent that even today, decades after the fall of the regime, the locals dread the possible discovery of Dacian finds at excavation sites. On the other hand, a surprisingly broad range of people have adopted the comforting myths purporting that their communities have a Hunnish-Avar origin. Historians and archaeologists are essentially unable to do anything to correct the stubborn historical viewpoints based on emotion, since

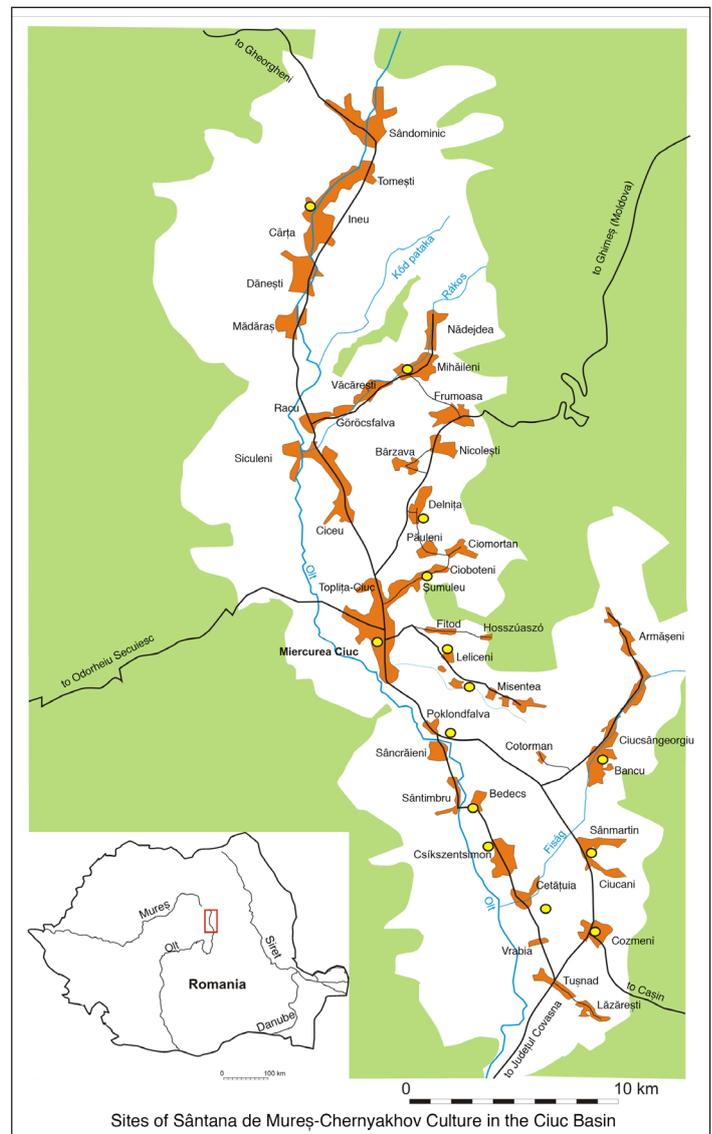


Fig. 1: The 4th century archaeological sites in the Ciuc Basin

¹ Bóna, István: “Forest people”: the Goths in Transylvania. In: *History of Transylvania*. Vol. 1. *From the Beginnings to 1606*, ed. Béla Köpeczy et al. (Budapest-Boulder, Col.: Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences-Hungarian Research Institute of Canada, 2001), 139–178.

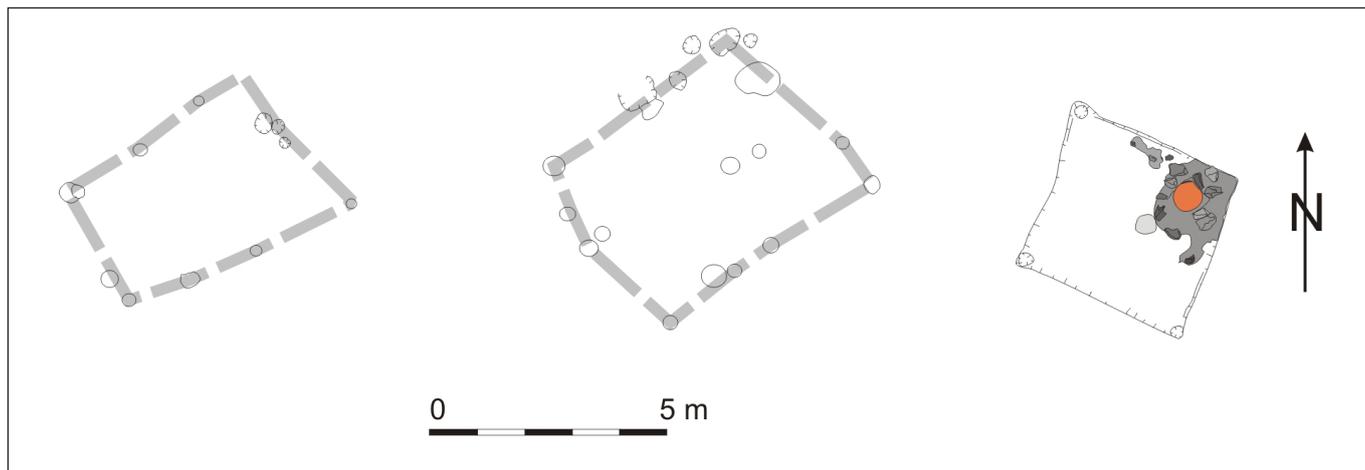


Fig. 2: 4th century surface and semi-subterranean dwellings (Şumuleu Ciuc-Fodor-kert 2011)

even the complete lack of Hun or Avar finds throughout eastern Transylvania cannot sway the believers. Despite all of this, or precisely due to this, it is the responsibility of science to share its findings in a form that is understandable and accessible to the public, trusting in the fact that sooner or later reason (also), and not (just) the heart will win out in these issues. With this thought in mind I will summarize in the following the most recent findings related to the Early Migration Period in the Ciuc region.

Two elements of the historical antecedents to the Migration Period must be highlighted. One is the rather significant Dacian presence, which is primarily shown by the fortresses of the period (Mihăileni, several in Jigodin, Racu and Tuşnad Sat). The second is that the development of the Roman province of Dacia, in all likelihood during the construction and pacification of the limes that stretch outside this area, put an end to the presence of the Dacian ruling class that controlled these fortresses situated in the Barbaricum. We have no knowledge of what effect the Roman presence – which can be traced from the beginning of the 2nd century in the neighbor regions just above the mountains already inside of Dacia province – and then the abandonment of the province at the middle to the end of the 3rd century had on the life of the lower classes of the previous Dacian population. In any case, at the Gothic sites mentioned below no or only occasional finds have been discovered so far that can be linked to the Dacians. Due to this, scholarship now suspects that the disappearance of the ruling class in the Roman period, which is indicated by the abandonment of the fortresses, may have been accompanied by a similar process for the entire Dacian population. In other words, the majority of the Dacian subjects fell during Trajan's Dacian Wars, or they moved to safer areas beyond the limes.

The presence of the Goths in Transylvania has been placed by experts to the middle of the 3rd century, which I also have accepted since there are no local chronological reference points. The time of the occupation may be cleared up in the future by the discovery of objects that can be dated through coinage or through scientific examinations (¹⁴C dating or perhaps dendrochronology) that will be performed on samples that can be linked to the early period of the Gothic settlement horizon.

However, on the basis of the research from recent years, we can get a certain idea of the kinds



Fig. 3: 4th century dwelling (Şumuleu Ciuc-Fodor-kert 2011, object 32)



Figs 4–5: 4th century pot fragments from Șumuleu Ciuc (features No. 12/2011 and 11/2014)



of settlement relationships that developed in the Ciuc Basin in the 3rd–4th centuries.² The contemporary archaeological sites cover a rather large area, and not only on the terrace of the Olt's flood plain (Miercurea Ciuc, Sânsimion, Sântimbru, etc.), but also appear on the upper sections of its tributary streams below the mountains (Cozmeni, Mihăileni, Șumuleu Ciuc, etc.; Fig. 1). These sites can be characterized as containing rather abundant finds, meaning they were continuously and densely populated villages. On the basis of the Șumuleu Ciuc excavation, we can establish with certainty that at least two types of houses were in use during this period (Fig. 2). Both houses built on the surface with a post structure, as well as smaller semi-subterranean dwellings appear. While the furnishings for heating have disappeared without a trace in the former houses, the stone furnaces of the semi-subterranean houses can be identified through archaeological methods (Fig. 3). Around the houses we find many holes and storage pits of various sizes. The shapes of these storage pits are reminiscent of an upturned bell, and in some cases they are more than two meters deep. Together with the excavated structures, the fragments of simple, handmade, poorly fired pots were found, as well as in smaller numbers wheel-thrown, burnished red or black bowls and storage vessels (Figs 4–5).



Fig. 6: 4th century slag piles from Mihăileni

² Botár, István: [A Maroszentanna-Csernyahov kultúra régészeti emlékei a Csiki-medencében I](#) (The Archaeological Relics of the Sântana de Mureș-Chernyakhov Culture in the Ciuc Basin I). In: *Erdély és kapcsolatai a kora népvándorlás korában* (Transylvania and Its Relationships in the Early Migration Period), ed. Körösfői, Zsolt (Cristuru Secuiesc: Molnár István Museum, 2011), 15–38.

The common characteristic of the archaeological sites of the period is that the traces of iron smelting, such as slag piles and bits of raw metal, appear everywhere in great numbers (*Fig. 6*). The products of these iron smelting workshops most certainly were not (only) to supply local demand, so it seems quite likely that in this basin there was a group that was particularly specialized in this and was moved here (*Fig. 7*). This is also indicated by the fact that the traces of iron smelting are not only in the areas along the floodplain rich in bog iron, but also can be found alongside the iron ore deposits that are near the surface in the Upper Ciuc region. The examination of local ironworking (raw materials, types of smelters and technology), the tracing of the products, the identification of the market(s) and the clarification of the social/organizational background certainly deserve further research.

It is curious that the cemeteries connected to the settlements still have not been discovered. Alongside several other questions, the identification of the cemeteries may provide an answer to when the Goths moved out of the area.

According to the traditional view this is in a relationship of cause and effect with the attacks of the Huns after 375, in other words the Visigoths of Transylvania fled in panic at the news of the defeat of the Ostrogoths. However, more recently many have suggested that a portion of the population may have remained. The excavators of the Gothic settlement in Odorheiu Secuiesc have also supported this position on the basis of the observations from the Lok site, according to which the inhabitants systematically evacuated the houses. In the case of the Ciuc region, we still do not have any concrete observations of this kind. However, on the basis of our present knowledge we can suspect that a change in the population was behind the break in the intensity and continuity of iron working here as well.

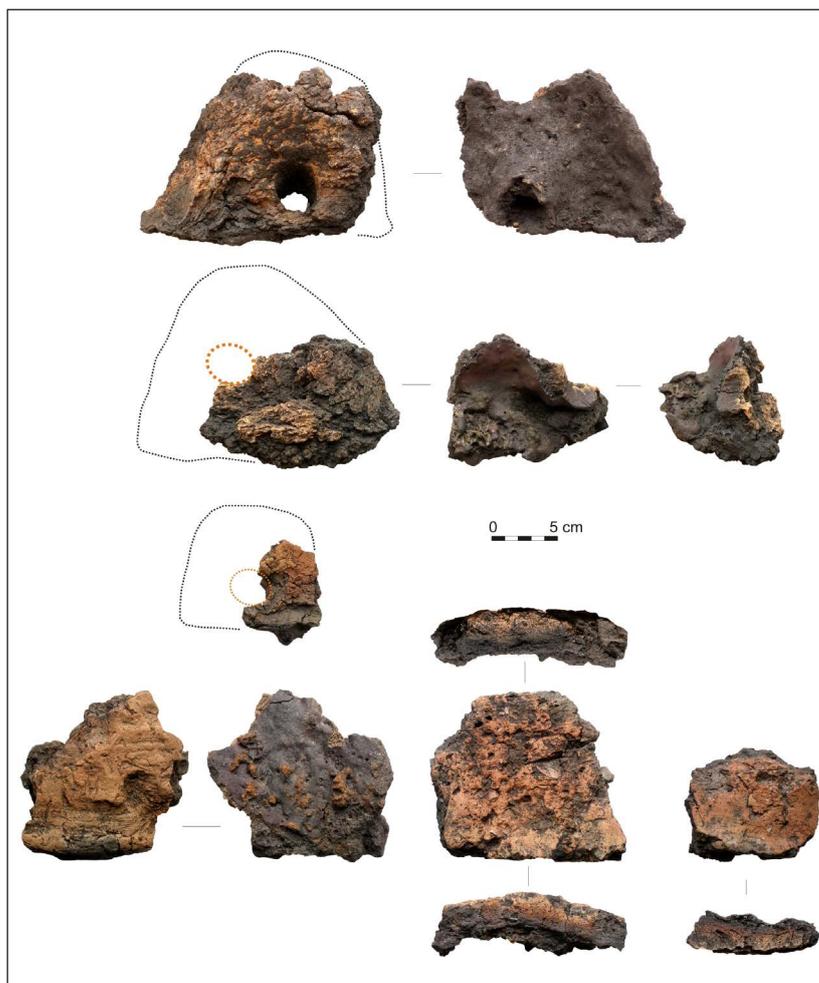


Fig. 7: Pieces of the forge from the funnel-shaped smelter built on the surface from the Șumuleu Ciuc-Arvaház site

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