

TREASURE AND LANDSCAPE.

Middle Bronze Age settlement patterns in the light of the Cófalva/Țufalău hoard

JÓZSEF PUSKÁS

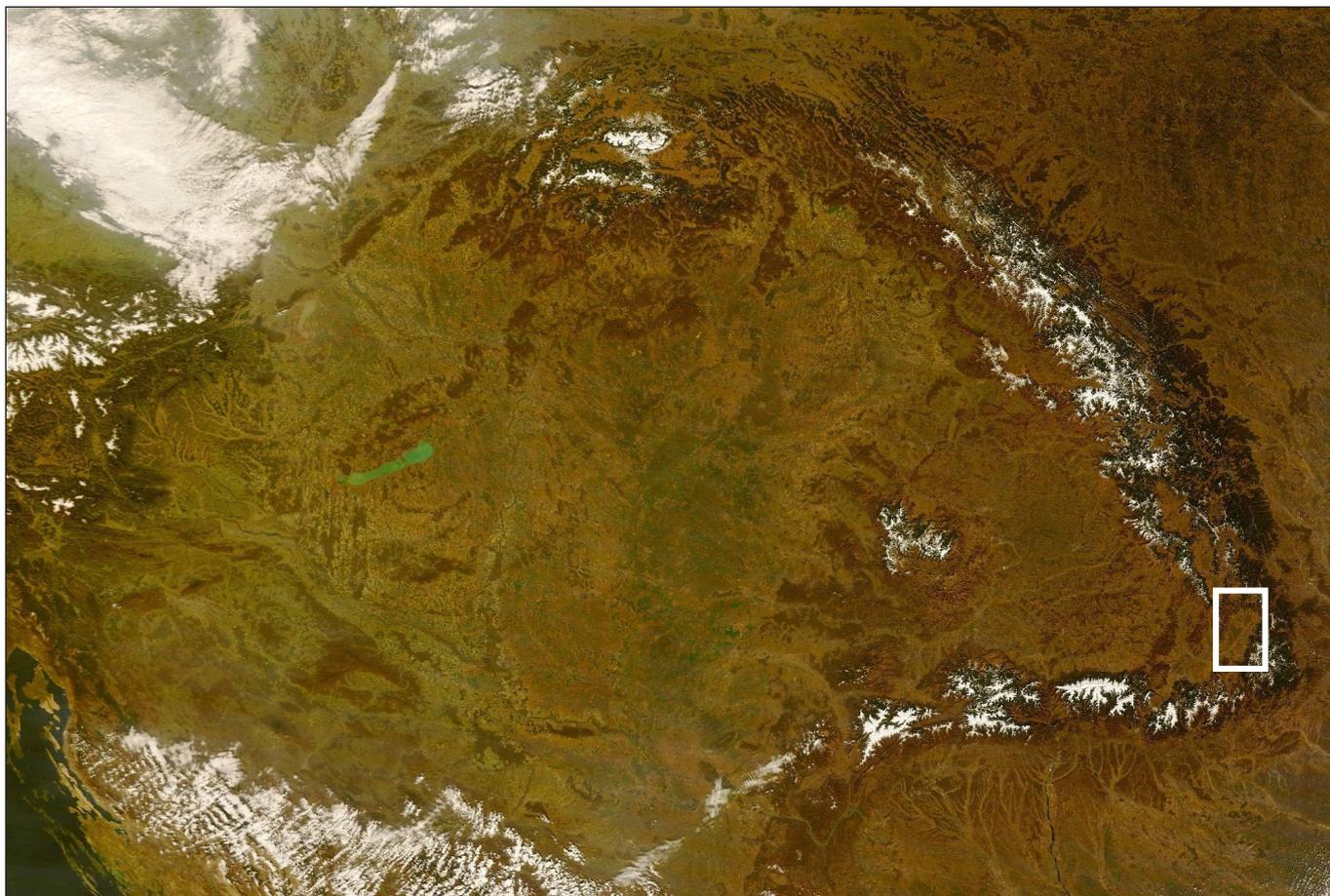


Fig. 1: Satellite image of the Carpathian Basin. The white rectangle marks the Felsőháromszék Depression (Source: Timár et al. 2006)

INTRODUCTION

One of the most famous Bronze Age golden hoards was discovered in the village of Cófalva/Țufalău. Even though many scholars have dealt with the finding, on its relationship with the contemporaneous settlement network, and the “hinterland,” no studies were made. The present paper would like to fill this gap.

In the literature, there are no Middle Bronze Age features around the hoard, so our first step was making field surveys. The research was made in a 2 km radius circle around the possible find spot of the treasure. Field walks resulted in the discovery of three settlements and a cemetery, making possible the placement of the hoard in a Middle Bronze Age settlement network.

In the area, the Middle Bronze Age is represented by the Wietenberg culture, widespread throughout Transylvania. Felsőháromszék is one of the easternmost distribution areas of the Wietenberg ceramic style. Maybe that is why, unlike the central parts of Transylvania, the presence of the Moldavian Monteoru culture is so strongly represented (PUSKÁS 2015: 107-108).

GEOGRAPHICAL ENVIRONMENT

Cófalva (Țufalău in Romanian) is located in Kovászna County, Romania, in the Felsőháromszék Depression, bordered by the mountains of the Eastern Carpathians. The main river of the area, the Feketeügy, crosses the basin in a northeast-southwest direction, with several tributaries. The climate is more moderate compared to the neighboring areas. The fertile soil was attractive for the early settlers, a human presence being documented from the Neolithic. However, other resources like salt, gold, copper, etc., are missing (*Figure 2*).



Fig. 2: Landscape of the Felsőháromszék Depression

For thousands of years the paths leading through this spot were connecting the steppe with the salt and gold deposits of Transylvania and farther regions of the Carpathian Basin. During the Copper and then the Bronze Age, lively contacts are demonstrable on the two sides of the Eastern Carpathians. Later in this part of Transylvania were the eastern limes of the Roman province Dacia. After the Great Migration Period, stability was assured by the formation of the Hungarian Kingdom when the borders were pushed to the Carpathian Mountains. After the establishment of the Szekler administration, contacts with outer regions of the Carpathians remained, mostly with commercial or strategic purposes. The depression is crossed by the main route between Moldavia and Brassó/Braşov city, with the first written mentions going back to the 15th century (BENKŐ–SZÉKELY 2008: 74). The custom of trade is practiced even today, mostly in summer and autumn, when Szekler and Moldavian farmers merchandise their goods, often by exchange.

BRIEFLY ABOUT THE TREASURE: OBJECTS, FINDING PLACE AND CIRCUMSTANCES

In November 1840, on the route between Cófalva/Țufalău and Barátos/Brateş, an unknown number of golden objects were found in a clay vessel, several being lost shortly after its discovery. F. Kállay presented seventeen objects (KÁLLAY 1841: 72-73). Later Gábor Téglás published further information about the finding place (TÉGLÁS 1887: 182). Based on descriptions and using the map of the Second Military Survey of Transylvania (1806-1869), we tried to identify the exact place of the discovered treasure. The road today between Cófalva/Țufalău and Barátos/Brateş is the same as in 1840. Having taken account of Téglás' observations, east of the village we find the possible promontory where the hoard was likely discovered.

Part of the objects, like one axe, three broken phalerae and seven buttons can be found today in the Naturhistorisches Museum of Vienna. In the collection of the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest, two phalerae are known. A further four buttons and four hair rings could belong to the hoard. Most of the objects published by Kállay are missing today (MOZSOLICS 1968: 54-55). The hoard was expertly published first by Amália Mozsolics in 1949, then in 1967 and 1968 (MOZSOLICS 1949: 14-29; 1967: 17-20; 1968: 1-76) (*Figure 3*). Recently Wolfgang David analyzed the objects belonging to this time period. In his typology, the decorated axe (*Figure 3/2*) was included in the A. 3. (Nackenkammäxte) category, type III (Țufalău-Nehoiu-Tiszafüred), while the one existing today (*Figure 3/1*) is placed in the same category, but IIIa Moldoveneşti (Várfalva) variant (DAVID 2002: 429-430).¹ Very likely the objects were made locally

¹ In a later study, David set up a new variant (IIIId) for the decorated axe (David 2013: 97-100).

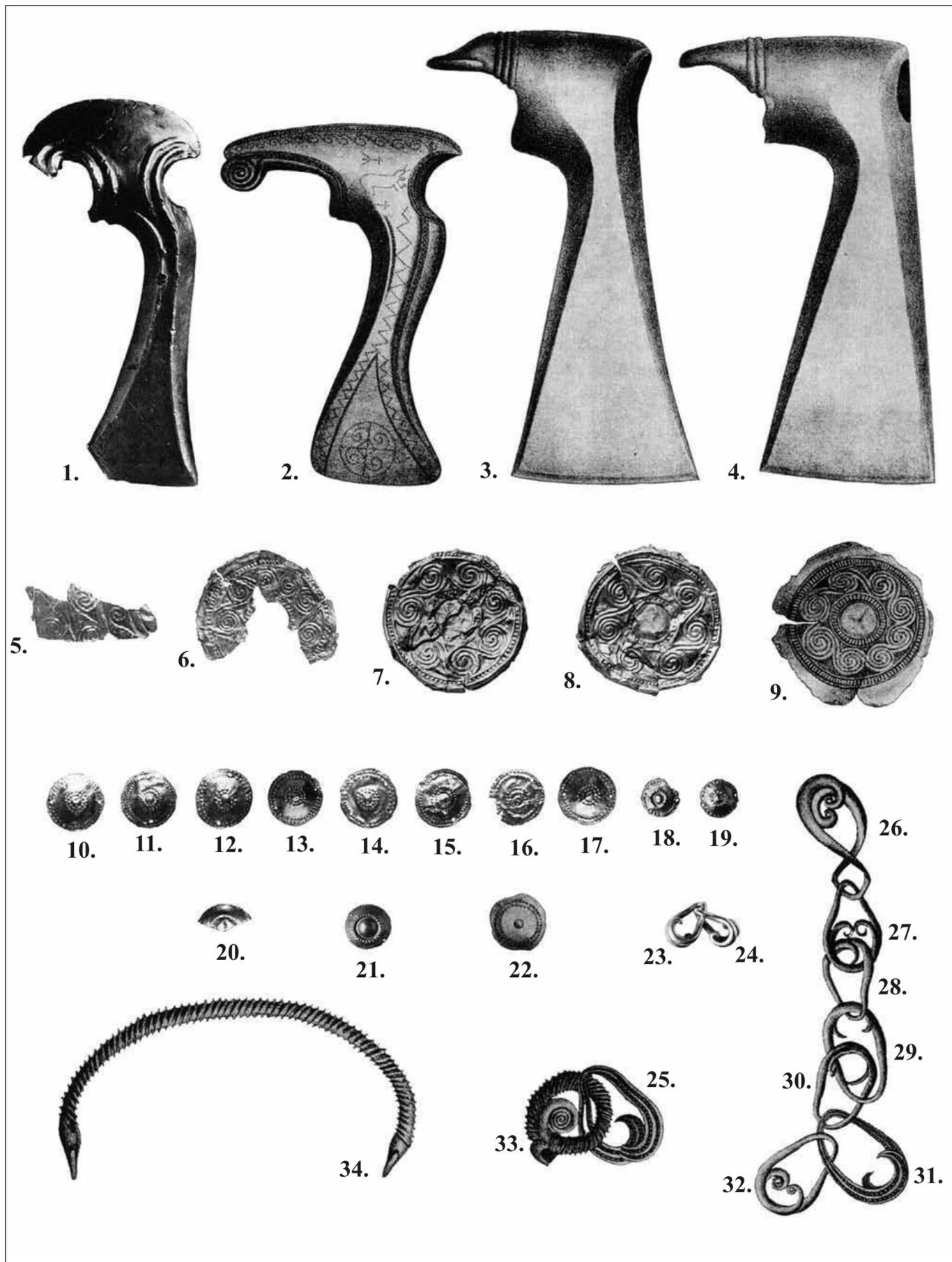


Fig. 3: The known objects of the gold treasure from Cófalva/Ţufalău (Source: Metzner-Nebelsick 2013: 331, Abb. 3)

(in Transylvania) and not imported (MOZSOLICS 1968: 44; HARDING 1984: 195; BADER 1990: 190). This is supported by the local provenience (Metaliferi Mountains) of the raw material (HARTMANN 1968: 72; 1970: 41). A close analogy for the twisted bracelet (*Figure 3/34*) was discovered in a pit at the ritual complex of Felsővárca/Oarța de Sus, along with 17 golden hair rings and other objects made of gold and silver. Beside metal artifacts, a few pits contained significant amounts of animal and human bones, proving the existence of ritual centers where treasures were hidden and ceremonial feasting took place (KACSÓ 2011: 408-413, Fig. 209).

Hiding the Cófalva/Țufalău treasure during the Middle Bronze Age, Hajdusámson horizon seems plausible (MOZSOLICS 1967: 121-123; David 2013: 98-99). In Transylvania this corresponds to the second phase of the Wietenberg culture, roughly 1800-1700 BC.

CONTEXT OF THE HOARD

The exact location of the hoard's discovery is unknown. The road where it was found runs on a flood-free slope. South of the village, the area is used as pasture and hayfields. Satellite images show former meandering watercourses, once resulting in marshy areas. These are confirmed by the military surveys and the toponyms (*Nád To* [Reed Lake] – First Military Survey, *Nadas* [Reed-bed], *Toplica* – Second Military Survey, *Toplicza* – Third Military Survey). On the First Military Survey the area is depicted as a marshy area which hasn't changed much in the subsequent two hundred years. Probably the environment was similar during the Bronze Age too (*Figure 4*).

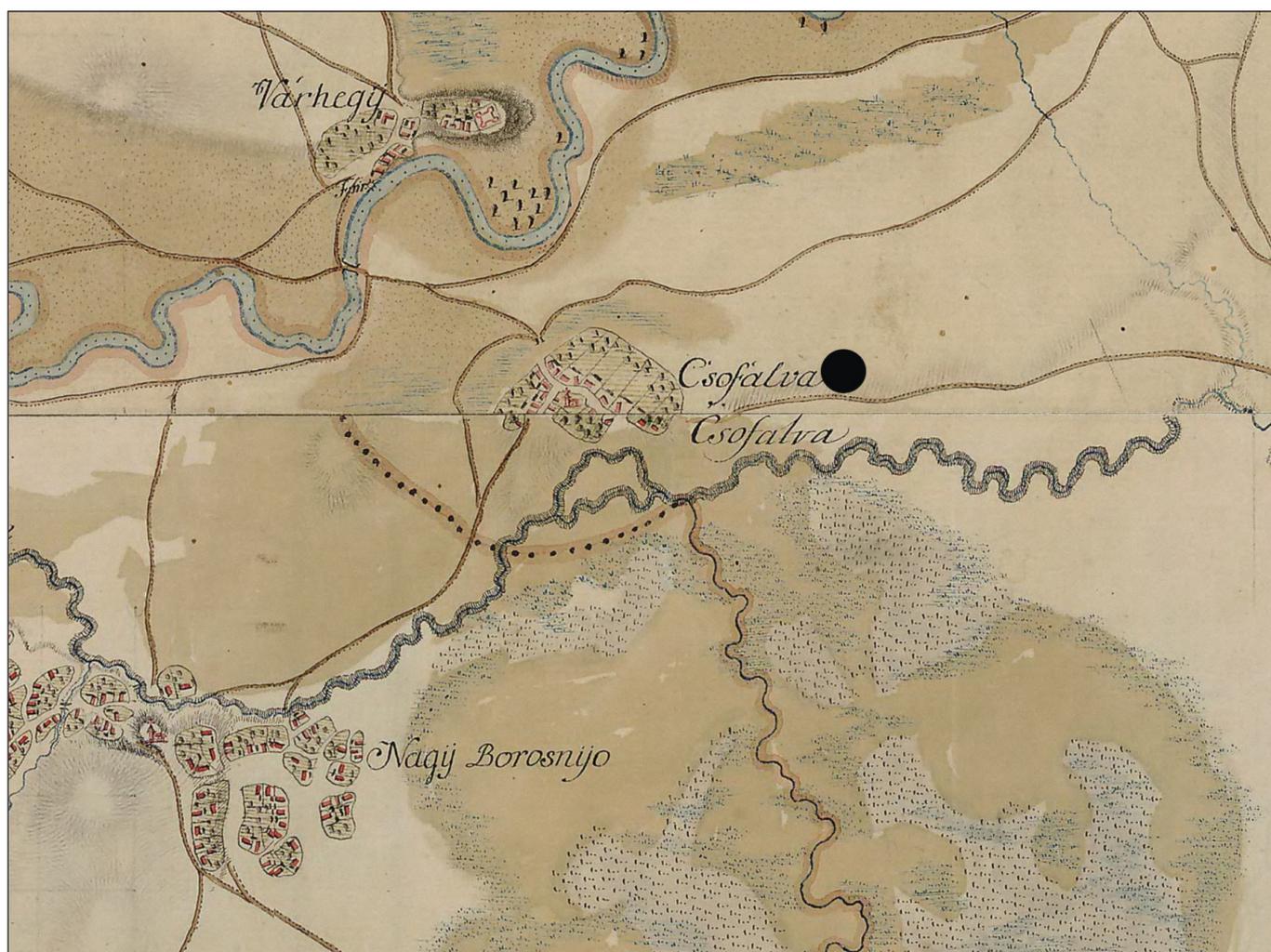


Fig. 4: Cófalva/Țufalău and its neighborhood on the First Military Survey 1769-1773. Black dot marks the possible discovery site of the hoard

In the present state of research, in the immediate vicinity of the hoard there is no contemporaneous settlement. Two km to the northwest rises the Várhegy [Hillfort] promontory (*Figure 5/1*). Here, recently, beside significant Neolithic, Copper Age and Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age settlements, the traces of Middle Bronze Age Wietenberg and Monteoru cultures were identified. The existence of a prehistoric fortification must be considered (PUSKÁS 2015: 99-100; 2017: forthcoming). The discoveries presented

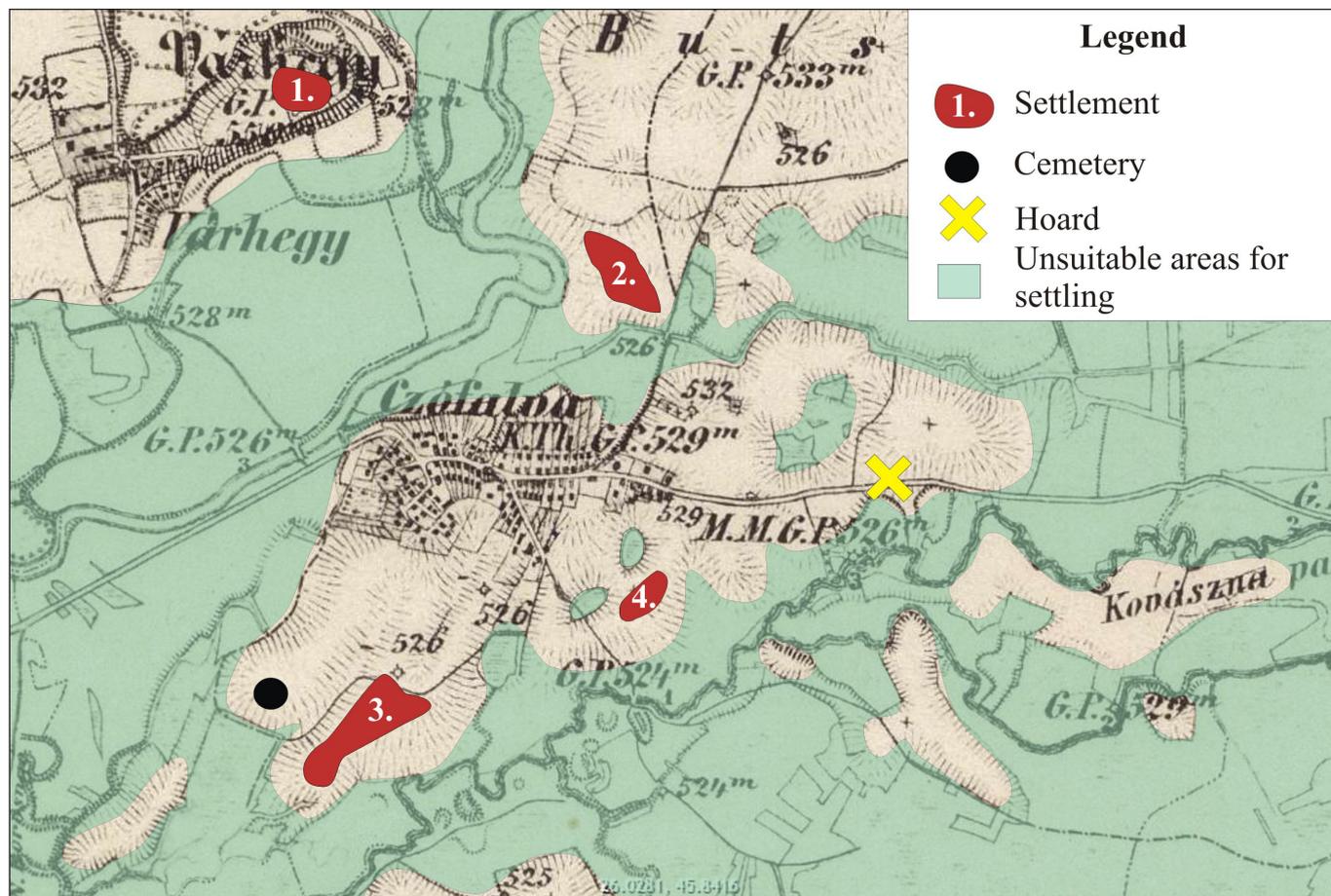


Fig. 5: The possible location of the Cófalva/Țufalău treasure along with the settlements and cemetery discovered in its vicinity. (Basemap: The Second Military Survey 1869-1870.)

below are the results of the authors' field surveys, made at the beginning of 2018. Halfway between the treasure and the above-mentioned site there is the second Wietenberg settlement, on a mildly inclined slope, near the confluence of the Feketeügy and Pap-árka rivers (*Figure 5/2*). Another settlement with the corresponding cemetery was discovered 1,6 km southwest from the treasure (*Figure 5/3*). The cemetery lies 200 m northwest from the settlement, separated by a shallow valley. The urns of the burials had been disturbed by ploughing. The graves were marked by a concentration of ceramic and bones. The importance of the discovery is highlighted by the small number of cemeteries compared to the settlements throughout all Transylvania. About 800 m southwest, the fourth settlement was identified on a low hill (*Figure 5/4*). Based on ceramics, the settlements and the cemetery belong to the second phase of the Wietenberg culture (*Figure 5*).

West of the treasure there isn't any sign of Middle Bronze Age features. In a northeast direction there is an extended dark area, visible on satellite images, comprised of peat-like soil. Until present there is no evidence of any settlement from any of the epochs. Probably during the Bronze Age the area was covered by marshes. The Modern Period toponym *Nagy fenék* [Great [lake]bed] suggest a similar environment. The stream Pap-árka crosses the area.

MIDDLE BRONZE AGE LANDSCAPE OF FELSŐHÁROMSZÉK: HOARDS, BURIALS, SETTLEMENTS (FIGURE 6)

From the nine Middle Bronze Age metal discoveries known today, five are coming from hoards, and another four are stray finds. Four of the five hoards are comprised of bronze, and one of golden objects. Three of the four stray finds are bronze axes and one is a golden hair ring.

By the placement of the hoards, three groups can be distinguished: 1. hoard(s) on hilltop(s) (Csernáton/Cernat–*Hegyes*), 2. hoards on flood-free terraces, slopes (Kézdiszentlélek/Sânzieni; Kovászna/Covasna–*Garden of Vajna Sámuel*; Sepsibesenyő/Pădureni–*Garden of Forró Ferenc*) and 3. hoard(s) on low terrace(s), near waters (Cófalva/Țufalău). The hoards are made of shaft-hole axes (Pădureni, Pătulele and Moldovenești types), with the exception being the treasure from Cófalva/Țufalău, where axes were deposited together with jewelry. The single-piece depositions (Csernáton/Cernat) like the ones with a few dozens of objects are rare (Sepsibesenyő/Pădureni). Hoards containing 3-5 objects are common; this tendency generally occurs in Transylvania.

The main funerary rite of the Wietenberg culture was cremation. Inhumation was practiced only at the beginning and end of the culture. The cemeteries are placed near the settlements in open areas and flood-free terraces. Single graves are known inside the settlements. After cremation, the remains were gathered in a clay vessel and then placed in a shallow pit. The urns were covered with another vessel or stone-slab. Sometimes near the urns, small adjacent vessels or other objects were placed. Around the funerary urn in some cases, stone construction was raised, made of shapeless stones or stone-slabs. In the studied area we know of two or three cemeteries and three graves inside settlements. It seems the world of the dead was well separated from the settlements. For example, at Torja/Turia the extended habitations appear on the right bank of the stream, while the cemeteries appear on the left bank. Scarce traces of settling also appear on the left bank, but distant from the graves. The semicircular position of settlements around cemeteries suggest that memory of ancestors played an important role in the life of Bronze Age people and enhanced the identity of a small community (Figure 7).

The Felsőháromszék Depression is characterized by a dense settlement network. They are situated in the vicinity of flowing waters, flood-free terraces with extension ranging between 0,5-4,5 ha. The fertile soils offered favorable conditions for agriculture, while the marshy, uninhabitable areas could be used for grazing. The thin cultural layers suggest short-lived habitations. Traces of settling also appear near the foot of the mountains, on slopes near present-day forests. Here the soils are of lower quality but exceptional for grazing, even for big herds. These settlements might also mark the limit of Bronze Age forests (Figure 8).

The settlements built on top of the mountains are considered centers, the residences of chieftains. In the present state of research in the studied area, eight sites can be included in the category of fortified/hilltop settlements, but only two have proven Middle Bronze Age fortifications. The other sites were disturbed

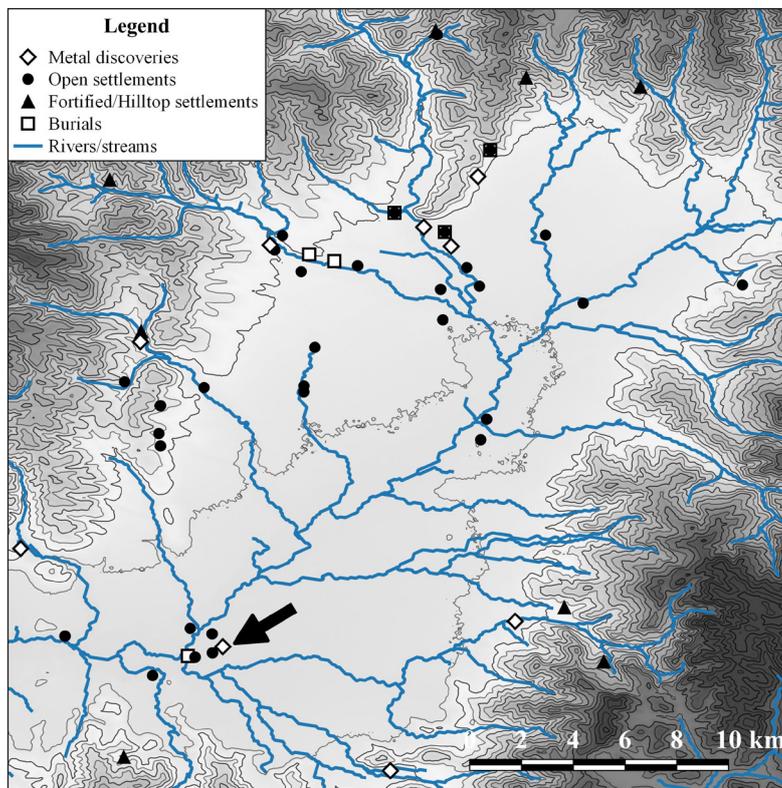


Fig. 6: Distribution of Middle Bronze Age discoveries in the Felsőháromszék Depression



Figure 7: Characteristic vessel forms and decorations of second phase of the Wietenberg culture



Fig. 8: Hilltop settlement from Csernát/Cernat (Photo: Ede Balla)

by later constructions, possibly using the former ditches and ramparts in the new fortification. Without proper researches, based on pottery, we can say only that these mountaintops were inhabited in the Middle Bronze Age too. The two aforementioned hilltop settlements had oval shaped earthen (Torja fortress) and stone (Csuklyán fortress) ramparts, strengthened with respectively one and three ditches. Their extension varied between 0,2-0,45 ha. The archaeological excavations confirmed the existence of a 30-40 cm thick cultural layer, but without any trace of buildings.² Based on analogies (see footnote 2), we must take into consideration the existence of surface constructions. Neither here nor with the Csíkpálfalva/Păuleni findings can one confirm the presence of an elite.

Regarding their placement, they are not situated on the highest peaks, but on lower mountaintops. Therefore higher mountains reduce visibility, which is limited to a 2-3 km wide area. The plain settlements with two exceptions are beyond this line of sight. It looks plausible that hilltop/fortified settlements placed on the edge of the depression were able to control their immediate surroundings, namely the routes going in or out of the basin. For example the fore-mentioned Torja fortress lies at one end of the pass (Torja Pass) leading through the Bodok Mountains. Near the exit of the pass in the valley of the Olt River, there is another fortification called Vápa fortress. The other hilltop settlements are situated in places where crossing the mountains is easier. On the First Military Survey, most of the paths leading through mountains are passing near these hilltop settlements. Certainly this is not a coincidence.

In my opinion the central residences were not situated only on hilltops but also closer to other settlements in the valleys of rivers. Two such places have to be taken into account. The oddity of the settlement from

² This can be attributed to the excavation technique. For example, in the neighboring Csík Depression, the excavations led by Zoltán Székely at the Várdomb site in Csík-pálfalva/Păuleni were made by the narrow trench technique, discovering not a single building. Reopened in 1998, and now employing wide surfaces, this resulted in the discovery of five houses near the inner side of the rampart (Cavruc 2000: 96). Other buildings were identified through geomagnetic surveys (Ștefan et al. 2010: 430).

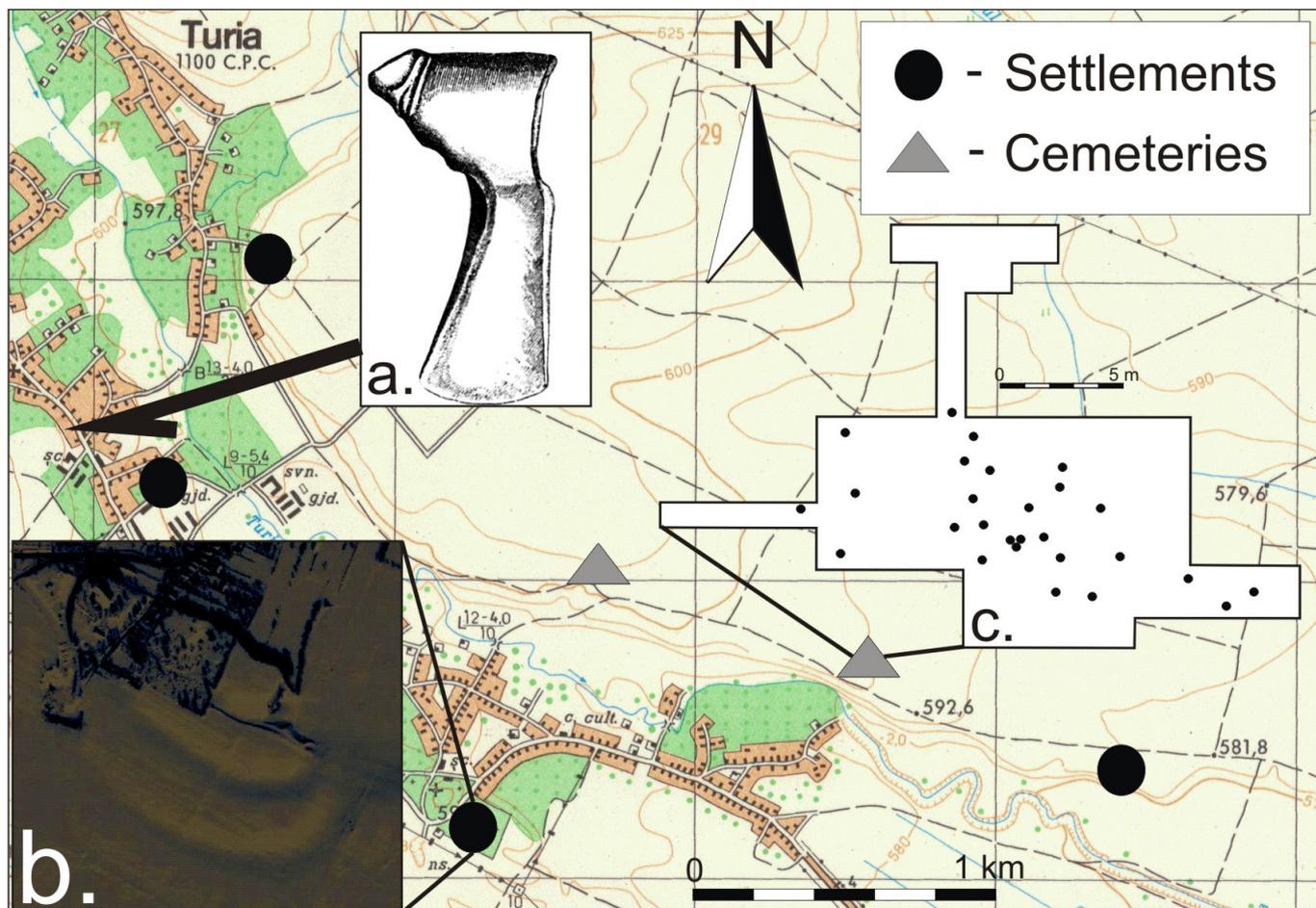


Fig. 9: The relationship between the Middle Bronze Age settlements and cemeteries from Torja/Turia.
The exact finding site of the axe is unknown

Torja/Turia is given by the three ditches visible on aerial photos, which is unique in our area (Figure 9/b). It is true that without proper researches the ditches cannot be dated, but their belonging to the Bronze Age looks plausible. Not far from here, there are two cemeteries and somewhere in the village was found a shaft-hole axe (Figure 9/a, c) (Figure 9). Another residence could be at Várhegy. The aerial photos show a ditch of an unknown period. There is good visibility over the surrounding areas. The golden treasure was hidden nearby, the cemetery being close too. The data presented above could suggest the existence of centers at these two settlements.

CONCLUSIONS

The connections between the settlements were made on routes running along rivers and streams. One of the main routes could go along the Feketeügy river, crossing the basin in a southwest-northeast direction, linking the Ojtoz Pass with the valley of the Olt river. Coming from this route, along small streams the paths lead mostly in east-west direction. Another important route could run in the northern part of the depression, making contact between the Ojtoz Pass and the salt-rich areas of Transylvania. This route, leading through the Torja Pass, the Olt valley and Erdővidék was the shortest between the two areas. Very likely the Felsőháromszék Depression was not the final destination of these paths. Through the Ojtoz Pass, the Black Sea area is easily accessible. To the south, the Balkan Peninsula and to west the rich salt- and gold resources are located. The fortified/hilltop settlements could secure the roads. In the Middle Bronze Age, the depression was a small link of an extended connection system between the north-Pontic steppe, the Carpathian Basin and the Aegean, this link being maintained during the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age.

Even though the depression is lacking important mineral resources, the archaeological material suggests the existence of rich local elite which defined itself with highly prestigious value objects. The deposition of the gold hoard follows a defined pattern, reflecting a deliberate act and an established custom. The deposition can be interpreted as a votive sacrifice, the offering of a local chieftain and/or his relatives (METZNER-NEBELSICK 2013: 340-341). But it could be instead a common deposition of several neighboring clans, as was supposed by Laura Dietrich apropos of the Sepsibesenyő/Pădureni hoard (DIETRICH 2010: 196-197). It looks like the Cófalva/Țufalău hoard was placed in an unsettled area, close to wet, marshy ground. Maybe here was a “sacred zone” or “transition zone” (BALLMER 2010: 199) between habitable and uninhabitable areas, where sacrifice worth performing.

Even if the “Why?” remains hard to answer, by placing the hoard in a contemporaneous settlement network, we managed to answer the question of “Where?” Further research on Middle Bronze Age cemeteries, hoards and fortified settlements will contribute to a better understanding of local elites, clans and territoriality.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BADER, TIBERIU 1990:

Bemerkungen über die Ägäischen Einflüsse auf die alt- und mittelbronzezeitliche Entwicklung im Donau-Karpatenraum, *Orientalisch-Ägäische Einflüsse in der Europäischen Bronzezeit. Ergebnisse eines Kolloquiums. In: Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum. Forschungsinstitut für Vor- und Frühgeschichte. Monographien*, Bd. 15, Bonn, Dr. Rudolf Habelt, 181-205.

BALLMER, ARIANE 2010:

Measuring the Metal – A Quantitative Approach to Mental Landscape Concepts in Prehistory. In: Kiel Graduate School “Human Development in Landscape” (eds.), *Landscapes and Human Development: The Contribution of European Archaeology [Proceedings of the International Workshop “Socio-Environmental Dynamics over the last 12000 Years: The Creation of Landscapes (1st-4th April 2009)”]*, Bonn, 193-202.

BENKŐ ELEK–SZÉKELY ATTILA 2008:

Középkori udvarház és nemesség a Székelyföldön. Budapest, Nap.

CAVRUC, VALERIU 2000:

Noi cercetări în așezarea Păuleni (1999-2000). Raport preliminar. Prezentare generală, *Angvstia* 5, Sfântu Gheorghe, 93-102.

DAVID, WOLFGANG 2002:

Studien zur Ornamentik und Datierung der bronzezeitlichen Depotfundgruppe Hajdúsámson-Apa-Ighiel-Zajta. Alba-Iulia, Altip, (Bibliotheca Mvsei Apvlensis 18).

–2013: Eine mit Spiralhakenranken verzierte altbronzezeitliche Nackenkammmaxt siebenbürgischen Typs aus Südwestböhmen. Wo wurden die Schaftlochhäxte vom Typ Apa-Nehoiu hergestellt? In: Botond, Rezi – Rita, E. Németh – Sándor, Berecki (edt.): *Bronze Age Crafts and Craftsman in the Carpathian Basin. Proceedings of the International Colloquium from Târgu Mureș. 5-7 October 2012*. Târgu Mureș, Mega, 91-138.

DIETRICH, LAURA 2010:

Eliten der frühen und mittleren Bronzezeit im südöstlichen Karpatenbecken, In: *Prähistorische Zeitschrift*, Bd. 85, 191-206.

HARDING, ANTHONY 1984:

The Mycenaeans and Europe. London, Academic.

HARTMANN, AXEL 1968:

Über die spektralanalytische Untersuchung einiger bronzzeitlicher Goldfunde aus dem Donaauraum. In: Mozsolics 1968: 1-76.

–1970: Prähistorische Goldfunde aus Europa. Spektralanalytische Untersuchungen und deren Auswertung. In: Bittel, Kurt–Junghans, Siegfried–Otto, Helmut–Sangmeister, Edward–Schröder, Manfred (Hrsg.): *Studien zu der Anfängen der Metallurgie*, Bd. 3, Berlin, Gebr. Mann.

KACSÓ, CAROL 2011:

Repertoriul Arheologic al județului Maramureș I-II. Baia Mare, Eurotip.

KÁLLAY FERENC 1841:

Kállay Ferencz rt. a' szószeken. *Magyar Academiai Értesítő*, I. év, 2. szám, Budapest, 72-75.

METZNER-NEBELSICK, CAROLA 2013:

Gedanken zur Frage des kulturellen Wandels in der Zeit um 1600 v. Chr. in Nordwest-Rumänien und Nordost-Ungarn. In: Meller, Harald – Bertemes, Françoise – Bork, Hans-Rudolf – Risch, Roberto (eds.), *1600 – Kultureller Umbruch im Schatten des Thera-Ausbruch? 4. Mitteldeutscher Archäologentag vom 14. bis 16. Oktober 2011 in Halle (Saale) / 1600 – Cultural change in the shadow of the Thera-Eruption? 4th Archaeological Conference of Central Germany October 14-16, 2011 in Halle (Saale), Tagungen des Landesmuseums für Vorgeschichte Halle*, 9. Halle, 327-353.

MOZSOLICS AMÁLIA 1949:

A cófalvi (Tufalău) aranyelet. *Antiquitatis Hungarica* 3, Budapest, 14-29.

–1967: *Bronzefunde des Karpatenbeckens. Depotfundhorizonte von Hajdúsámson und Kosziderpadlás*. Budapest, Akadémiai.

–1968: Goldfunde des Depotfundhorizontes Hajdúsámson. *Bericht der Römisch-Germanischen Kommission 1965-1966* 46.-47, Frankfurt am Main, 1-76.

PUSKÁS, JÓZSEF 2015:

Contact Zone: Middle Bronze Age Cultural Connections in the Valley of the Black River (Covasna County, Romania). In: Rita, E. Németh, – Botond, Rezi, (edt.): *Bronze Age Chronology in the Carpathian Basin. Proceedings of the International Colloquium from Târgu Mureș. 2-4 October 2014*. Târgu Mureș, Mega, 97-130.

–2016: Descoperiri funerare din epoca mijlocie a bronzului în valea Râului Negru (jud. Covasna). In: *Materiale și Cercetări Arheologice S. N.* 12. București, Academia Română, 89-103.

–2017: Middle Bronze Age settlement patterns and metal deposits in the valley of the Black River. In: Rita, E. Németh, – Botond, Rezi, (edt.): *Bronze Age Connectivity in the Carpathian Basin. Proceedings of the International Colloquium from Târgu Mureș. 13-15 October 2016*. Târgu Mureș, Mega, (in press).

ȘTEFAN, DAN – ȘTEFAN, MARIA-MAGDALENA – CONSTANTIN, CĂTĂLIN 2010:

Studiul geomagnetic al fortificațiilor din epoca bronzului de la Păuleni Ciuc – Ciomortan “Dâmbul Cetății”, jud. Harghita, *Angustia*, 14, Sfântu Gheorghe, 427-436.

TÉGLÁS GÁBOR 1887:

Az erdélyi medencze őstörténelméhez. V. Oltvidék N.-Szeben környékéig. *Orvosi- és Természettudományi Értesítő*, XII/2. Kolozsvár.

József Puskás • *Treasure and Landscape. Middle Bronze Age settlement patterns in the light of the Cőfalva/Űfalu hoard*

TIMÁR G., FERENCZ CS., LICHTENBERGER J., KERN A., MOLNÁR G., SZÉKELY B., PÁSZTOR SZ. 2006:
MODIS-adatvétele az ELTE műholdvevő állomásán. *Geodézia és Kartográfia* 58(11). Budapest, 11-15.

RECOMMENDED LITERATURE

BOROFFKA, NIKOLAUS G. O. 1994:

Die Wietenberg-Kultur. Ein Beitrag zur Erforschung der Bronzezeit in Südosteuropa. *Universitätsforschungen zur Prähistorischen Archäologie*, Bd. 19, Bonn.

DIETRICH, LAURA 2014:

Die mittlere und späte Bronzezeit und die ältere Eisenzeit in Südosstsiebenbürgen aufgrund der Siedlung von Rotbav. *Universitätsforschungen zur Prähistorischen Archäologie*, Bd. 248, Bonn.