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Note about A Bronze Age hoard from the north of the Republic of Moldova and some considerations about the winged axes to the East of the Carpathians

Vasile Diaconu^{1*}, Mariana Sîrbu²

Abstract. Starting from an old archaeological discovery from the north of the Republic of Moldova, the authors resume the discussion concerning a bronze hoard, from which only a winged axe has been preserved. Although it was attributed to the Bronze Age, in fact the metal accumulation is specific to the Early Iron Age. In this context, the authors discuss other discoveries of winged axes from the area between the Eastern Carpathians and the Dniester, such as those from Mîndreşti, “Suceava” and Ruginoasa. These artefacts are specific to Central Europe, at the east of the Carpathians being found very rarely and only among the contents of bronze hoards.

Keywords: hoard, Early Iron Age, winged axes, East-Carpathian area

Notă despre un depozit de bronzuri din nordul Republicii Moldova și câteva considerații despre topoarele cu aripioare de la est de Carpați. Pornind de la o veche descoperire arheologică din nordul Republicii Moldova, autorii reiau discuția despre un depozit de bronzuri, din care s-a păstrat doar un topor cu aripioare. Deși a fost atribuită epocii bronzului, în realitate, acumularea metalică este specifică perioadei timpurii a Epocii fierului. Autorii discută, în acest context, și alte descoperiri de topoare cu aripioare în spațiul de la răsărit de Carpați, așa cum sunt cele de la Mîndrești, „Suceava” și Ruginoasa. Astfel de piese sunt specifice Europei Centrale, iar la răsărit de Carpați se întâlnesc foarte rar și doar în componența unor depozite de bronzuri.

Cuvinte-cheie: depozit, epoca timpurie a fierului, topoare cu aripioare, spațiul est-carpatic

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In the second decade of the last century, near the Tețcani village (Briceni district, Republic of Moldova) was discovered a small bronze hoard, considered to be the first of its kind in the northern part of Bessarabia. A few years later, the collection was published in a small article, but the information was quite brief because some of the pieces had been lost in the meantime (Moroșan 1936).

It is interesting to mention that in the composition of the hoard were found two winged axes, extremely rare pieces for the area to the east of the Carpathians, but only one has been preserved. We considered necessary to repeat the information about this discovery in a broader context, in which we included other similar pieces from the space between the Carpathians and the Dniester. Even in the context of the first publication, not enough morphological details were known for the axe from Tețcani, and until now there was even the suspicion that it was lost. Its identification in the collections of the National Museum of History of Moldova requires a new discussion of this type of axes in the area to the east of the Carpathians.

The discovery of the Tețcani hoard

According to the information published, during 1927-1928 a small deposit of metal objects was discovered on the left bank of the Velia stream (a tributary of the Prut river), as a result of some limestone mining works. The hoard, consisting of two winged axes and a bronze spearhead, was discovered at a depth of 1-1.5 m, in a loamy level, which overlapped the layer of limestone. The recorded data indicate that the parts of the hoard were placed next to each other. After the discovery, the artefacts were taken to the local blacksmith, who destroyed some of them, most likely to reuse the metal. One of the axes was completely damaged, and the spearhead was processed, its blade was cut, and the fixing tube, with an approximate length of 10-13 cm, was used as a “walking stick handle”. The blade of the second axe was broken (Pl. 1/1, 2). However, the mentioned object was recovered by the village forester who donated it to the Museum of Natural History in Chișinău (Moroșan 1936; Dergacev 2002, p. 39, Fig. 37/B).

Description of the artefact

As it was mentioned, only one piece of the small hoard has been preserved. It was a flat axe, approximately rectangular, with well-highlighted side wings, faceted on the outside, slightly curved inwards and placed approximately in the middle of the piece. Between the two wings, on both sides, there is a threshold that marks the beginning of the blade. Because the blade of the axe was destroyed after the discovery, we cannot determine with certainty what it looked like, but based on the morphological features of the lower half of the piece we can assume that it was

slightly widened. The edge of the piece is slightly concave. The axe is covered with a uniform, dark green patina. Also, on the surface of the object, especially on the upper half, there are traces of beating. From the point of view of morphological features, the axe can be identified as belonging to the *Uriu* type, according to Al. Vulpe's typology (Vulpe 1970, p. 73-75).

Dimensions: preserved length – 19.5 cm; maximum width – 3.8 cm; thickness – 1.5 cm; thickness in the area of the wings – 3.3 cm; weight – 714 g (**Pl. 1/3; Pl. 2/1**).

The winged axes to the east of the Carpathians

Currently, only a few winged axes are known to the east of the Carpathians, all coming from the bronze hoards. Apart from the discovery from Tețcani, in the space between the Prut and the Dniester, there was another bronze hoard containing, among other items, a winged axe. It was found near Mîndrești village (Telenești district) in 1968, but, unfortunately, was lost later (**Fig. 1; Pl. 2/2**).

Besides the winged axe, there were four socketed axes, a flat axe, a fragmentary sickle, a fragmentary dagger and a sword, as well as some bracelets (Dergacev 1975, Fig. 3/13-22; 2002, p. 38, Fig. 37/A). The winged axe, having a length of 14 cm, a thickness of 3.3 cm and a weight of 287 g, also belongs to the *Uriu* type according to Al. Vulpe's typology (Vulpe 1970, p. 73-75).

On the right bank of the Prut river, up to the Carpathians, there are two other bronze hoards with winged axes. These have been recently unearthed, one in the vicinity of Suceava (Suceava County) (**Pl. 2/3**) and the other from Ruginoasa (Neamț County) (**Pl. 2/4**).

Regarding the pieces from Suceava (**Pl. 2/3**), neither the conditions of the discovery, nor the composition of the hoard are certainly known. What is certain is that the metal collection was discovered at the beginning of the 20th century on the lands owned by the noble Aritonovici family. Later, its descendants left for Germany, on which occasion they took the objects from the hoard, which, only two decades ago, arrived in the collections of the museum in Berlin. That collection includes 19 bronze artefacts, structured as follows: eight whole and fragmentary bracelets, two rings, a fragment of a necklace, a piece of the bronze band, a metal sleeve, two spearheads, a chisel, a socketed axe and a winged axe (Hänsel 2005). The latter belongs to the *Sighet* type (Vulpe 1970, p. 76, 77), having a length of 18 cm and a weight of 633 g.

Finally, the fourth deposit that contains of a winged axe is the one discovered relatively recently in Ruginoasa (Neamț County), as a result of the metal detecting. The collection consisted of two socketed axes, two sickles (of which only one is intact) and a winged axe (Dumitroaia 2014, p. 455-457, pl. IX; Sechelariu *et alii*, 2015, p. 68, 69, C). According to the classification proposed by Al. Vulpe, the specimen from Ruginoasa also belongs to the *Sighet* type (Vulpe 1970, p. 76, 77).



Fig. 1. The hoard from Mîndrești
 Fig. 1. Depozitul de la Mîndrești
 (https://www.flickr.com/photos/ion_chibzii/50108232703/)

Discussion

From the data presented above, it can be easily observed that in our workspace the winged axes appear only as part of some hoards. Another detail is the one according to which these discoveries are placed in the northern part of the area between the Carpathians and the Dniester (Pl. 3).

Regarding the structure of the deposits where such axes appear, it can be seen that they have a mixed composition. Except for the situation in Tețcani, in the other cases, along with the winged axes, tools, weapons and ornaments were deposited. Moreover, this situation is confirmed in the Transylvanian region, where the number of winged axes is much higher, such objects being identified in the deposits belonging to the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age (Vulpe 1970, p. 73-77; Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1977, Fig. 144/16; Fig. 149/15, 16; Fig. 150/1-5; Fig. 196/1-5; Fig. 221/2-4, 6, 7; Fig. 222/1-10; Fig. 294/4, 5; Fig. 364/5).

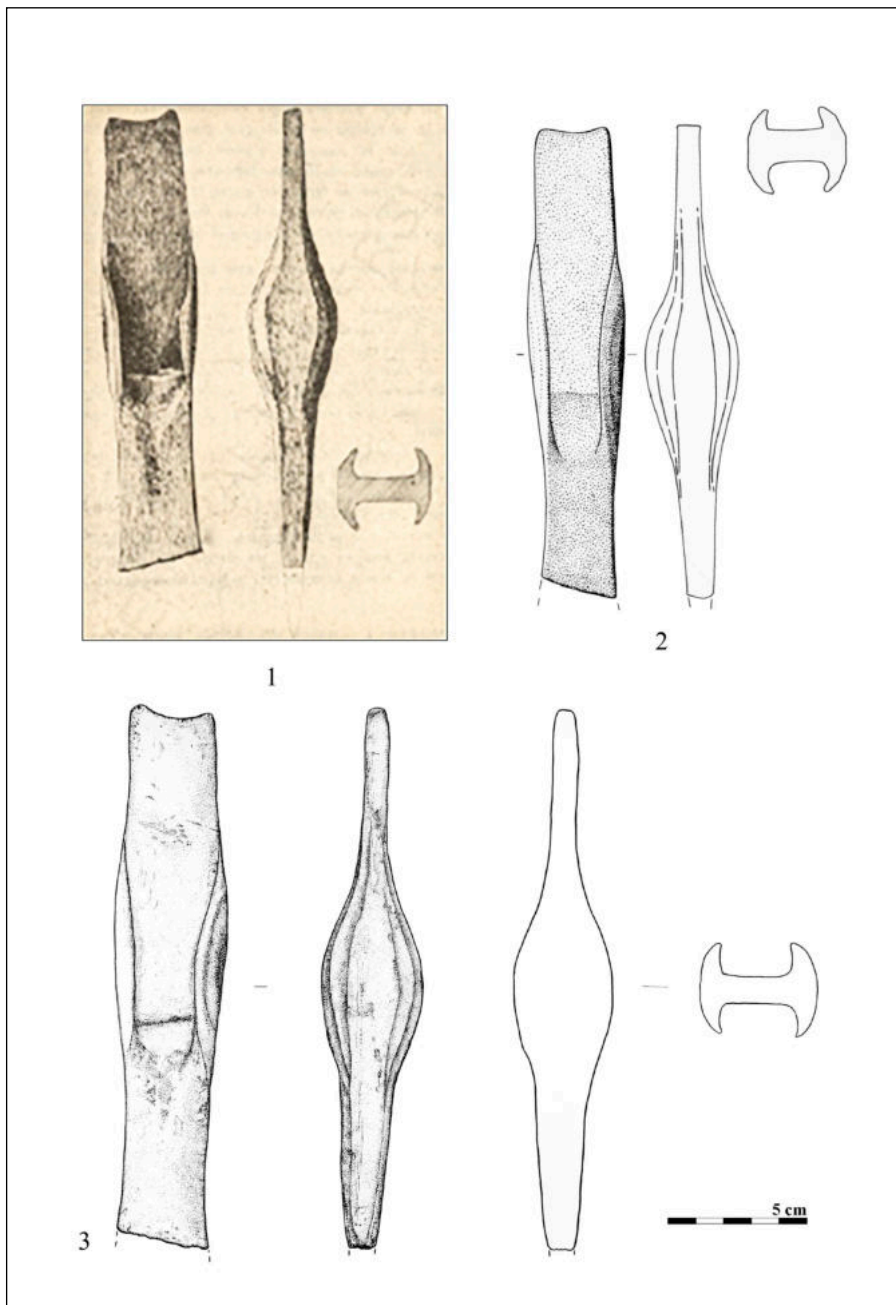
Although for the accumulation of metal objects from Tețcani it was assumed, at the time of publication, that it belonged to the Bronze Age, the small hoard can be attributed to HaA, according to the presence of winged axes, which appeared to the east of the Carpathians at a time after the Late Bronze Age. An analysis of the archaeological discoveries in the perimeter of the mentioned locality did not reveal the existence of any site from the beginning of the Iron Age, which could be related to the bronze objects from the limestone quarry. In fact, the other bronze hoards (Mîndrești, Suceava and Ruginoasa) are also part of HaA period.

Conclusions

We considered it necessary to resume the discussion about the small hoard from Tețcani because it is a less known discovery, but which is important since it was the first hoard in the Eastern Carpathians that contained a bronze winged axe. The fact that later some similar discoveries appeared allowed us an overall discussion about a category of objects that can be considered imports, these being typical for Central Europe and the Carpathian Basin.

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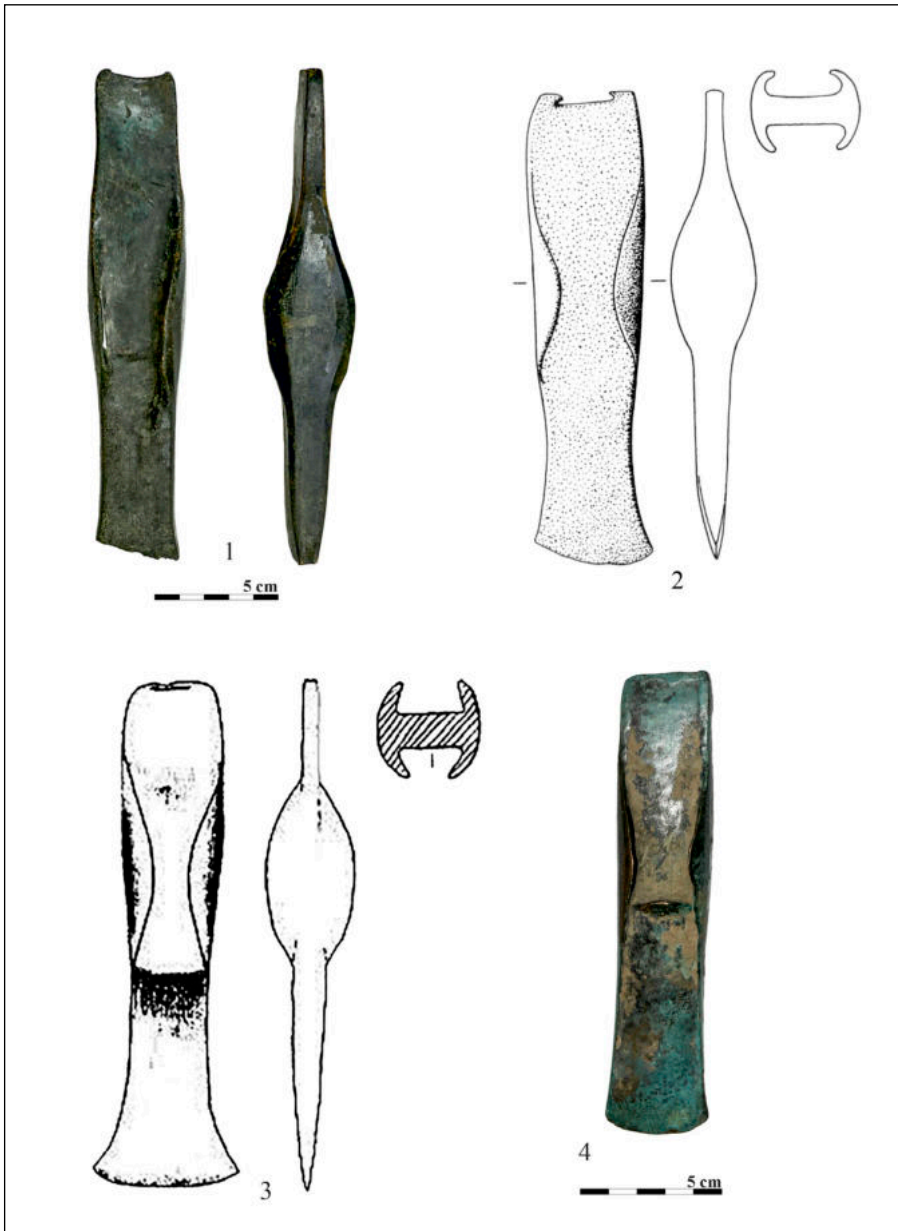


Pl. 1. The axe from Tețcani hoard.

1. After Moroșan 1936; 2. After Dergacev 2002; 3. Drawing by D. Stroici

Pl. 1. Toporul din depozitul de la Tețcani.

1. După Moroșan 1936; 2. După Dergacev 2002; 3. Desen de D. Stroici

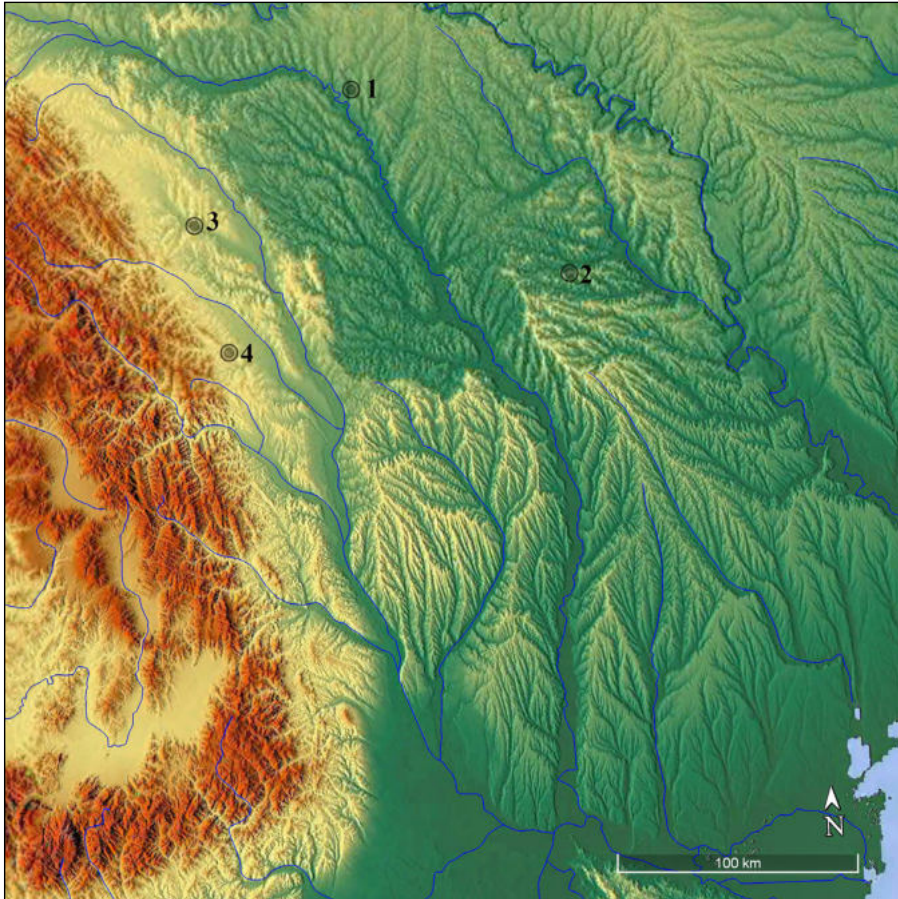


Pl. 2. The winged axes from the East Carpathian space.

1. Tețcani (photo D. Topal); 2. Mîndrești (after Dergacev 2002);
3. "Suceava" (after Hănsel 2005); 4. Ruginoasa (photo Al. Gafincu)

Pl. 2. Topoare cu aripioare din spațiul est-carpatic.

1. Tețcani (fotografie de D. Topal); 2. Mîndrești (după Dergacev 2002);
3. "Suceava" (după Hănsel 2005); 4. Ruginoasa (fotografie de Al. Gafincu)



Pl. 3. The spread of the winged axes from the East Carpathian space.

1. Tețcani; 2. Mîndrești; 3. "Suceava"; 4. Ruginoasa

Pl. 3. Răspândirea topoarelor cu aripioare în spațiul est-carpatic.

1. Tețcani; 2. Mîndrești; 3. "Suceava"; 4. Ruginoasa