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Postal address (materials sent for reviewing purposes and other correspondence):

*Universitatea “Al. I. Cuza”, Facultatea de Istorie, Bulevardul Carol I, nr. 11, 700506 – Iași, Romania.*

Tel.: +(04) 0232 201 615; Fax.: +(4) 0232 201 201, +(4) 0232 201 156;

Website: [saa.uaic.ro](http://saa.uaic.ro); Email: [saa.uaic.ro@gmail.com](mailto:saa.uaic.ro@gmail.com), [blucretiu@yahoo.com](mailto:blucretiu@yahoo.com).

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## A Drajna type bronze axe (*Nackenknaufäxte*) from Eastern Romania

Vasile DIACONU<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The author presents in this article an exceptional bronze piece, accidentally discovered on the territory of Țibucani village, Neamț County. It is an axe belonging to the Drajna type, whose usual area of spatial distribution corresponds to the northwestern part of Romania and the northeastern Hungary. In order to create an overview all the analogies from the Romanian territory are presented. From a chronological point of view, Drajna type axes are specific to the Late Bronze Age (Bz D) and appear mainly in metal hoards.

The specimen from Țibucani distinguishes by the meandering decoration from its edge, which finds good analogies on other bronze axes, or on some bone and antler objects, discovered mainly in the area of Noua culture.

As its features indicate, the axe that we discussed constitutes an object of prestige, that reached the area east of the Carpathian Mountains as a result of inter-community contacts.

**Rezumat.** Autorul prezintă în cadrul acestui articol o piesă de bronz excepțională, descoperită întâmplător pe teritoriul localității Țibucani, din județul Neamț. Este vorba despre un topor de tip Drajna, al cărui areal obișnuit de răspândire corespunde zonei de nord-vest a României și nord-estului Ungariei. Pentru o imagine de ansamblu sunt prezentate toate analogiile din spațiul românesc. Din punct de vedere cronologic, topoarele de tip Drajna sunt specifice Bronzului târziu și apar, cu precădere, în componența depozitelor metalice.

Exemplarul de la Țibucani se remarcă prin decorul meandric de pe muchie, care își găsește bune analogii pe alte topoare de bronz, sau pe unele obiecte din os și corn, întâlnite, cu precădere, în arealul culturii Noua.

După cum indică trăsăturile sale, toporul discutat de noi este un obiect de prestigiu, care a ajuns la răsărit de Carpați ca urmare a contactelor intercomunitare.

**Keywords:** Late Bronze Age, bronze-axe, Eastern Romania, social symbol, cultural contacts

### Introduction

The current reliable grasp of the Bronze Age metallurgy does not exclude various discoveries, which often bring valuable additions, either for the meaning of prehistorical technology or concerning the typology of artefacts or the circulation of such merchandise.

In some cases, foreign metal items specific to a certain territory or cultural setting are likely to acquire particular connotations within historical interpretations. Along with many other such situations within archaeological literature, I underline a recent “discovery” of a bronze axe in a rural museum collection within Neamț County (in eastern Romania).

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<sup>1</sup>History and Ethnography Museum of Târgu Neamț, diavas\_n82@yahoo.com.

The item featured in the following lines pertains to the category of exotic merchandise circulating during the Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age east from the Carpathians, scientifically highlighted in the last decade<sup>2</sup>.

Though there is no concrete information concerning the archaeological context of the axe analysed here, I believe it is necessary to present it because it is a rare item, the origins of which are more likely specific to another geographical space.

The artefact was identified in the rural museum collection within the Tibucani commune, Neamț County, in 2019, but Florea Munteanu had discovered it several decades prior (Fig. 1). The first mention of this axe is in a paper recently published by the author of these lines, where I discussed several artefacts specific to the Bronze Age found in the area of Tibucani<sup>3</sup>.

### **The bronze axe**

The artifact is made of bronze, cast in a bivalve mould, with an elongated and narrow body (Fig. 2). The axe has a slightly curved longitudinal profile, and it features a transverse tube. The edge is small, rectangular in cross-section, and it ends in a semi-spherical looped button, decorated with a meandric motif. The extremities of the fixing tube are well-profiled; on the sides, there are two little wings, slightly in relief. The blade is elongated and hexagonal in cross-section. An even dark-green patina covers the item. The incised decoration on the edge features a light-green patina (Fig. 3).

The decorative element on the semi-spherical button was executed using the incision technique, following the moulding of the item.

Sizes: length – 20.5 cm; blade width – 4.3 cm; tube length – 5.4 cm; tube diameter – 3.5 cm; edge diameter – 3.8 cm; weight - 598 gr.

Its morphological characteristics include it in the category of axes with globular edge (*Nackenknaufäxte*). This item belongs to the Drajna type, as the Romanian archaeological literature has defined it almost four decades prior<sup>4</sup>.

### **Finds attributed to Bronze Age in the area of Tibucani**

To understand the presence of a special item attributed to the Bronze Age in the Tibucani locality, I think it is necessary to outline briefly the data available thus far concerning the chronological timeframe mentioned above.

The commune of Tibucani is located at the junction between the sub-Carpathian area and the Moldova River corridor, in a geographical setting dominated by low hills and terraces, which provided favourable habitation conditions for the prehistorical human communities. The diverse archaeological remains identified via field surveys, systematic excavations or

<sup>2</sup>LÁSZLÓ 2013; TENCARIU et al. 2014, 115-132.

<sup>3</sup>DIACONU 2019, 41-56.

<sup>4</sup>VULPE 1970, 99-100.

fortuitous finds have confirmed that this area recorded intense circulation during the Bronze Age.

Hence, the first information on various bronze items discovered at Țibucani is found in a work penned by M. P. Dîmboviță<sup>5</sup> seven decades ago. Subsequently, the research conducted in the settlement dated to the second half of the first millennium AD at Davideni revealed the presence of more archaeological materials specific to Late Bronze Age, metal specimens included.<sup>6</sup>

In the eighth decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, several studies published highlighted information about sites and metal items attributed to the Middle and Late Bronze Age;<sup>7</sup> some of them were even reprised within zonal archaeological repertoires.<sup>8</sup>

In order to complete the existing database, various field surveys have been carried out in the area of the Țibucani commune, which led to the identification of new sites attributed to Late Bronze Age (the Noua culture).<sup>9</sup>

All these finds represent a reliable argument that during Bronze Age there was a significant density of settlements in this geographical space<sup>10</sup>, most likely stimulated by general and particular conditions of habitation (in the last case, I note the presence of great salt resources around 10 km westwards).

### **Analogy and discussions**

The Drajna type bronze axes, though defined following on a find from Muntenia, were mostly used in northern and north-western Romania, in eastern Hungary and in trans-Carpathian Ukraine. C. Kacsó (2003) made a rather recent inventory of these items, but additional ones have been found in the meantime. Hence, I chose to mention all the analogies known in the Romanian space (Fig. 4).

Whether part of deposits or as isolated finds, Drajna type axes have been mentioned in the following localities: Bicaz I<sup>11</sup> (Maramureș County) (Fig. 5/2), Bicaz II<sup>12</sup> (Maramureș County) (Fig. 5/10), Cernavodă<sup>13</sup> (Constanța County) (Fig. 5/8), Ciceu-Corabia<sup>14</sup> (Bistrița-Năsăud County)

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<sup>5</sup>PETRESCU-DÎMBOVIȚĂ 1953, 465.

<sup>6</sup>MITREA 2001, 28-32; DIACONU 2014, 150-152.

<sup>7</sup>CUCOȘ 1977, 34; CUCOȘ 1985, 492-493; VULPE, ZAMOSTEANU 1982; DUMITROAIA 1985, 466-468.

<sup>8</sup>CUCOȘ 1992, 55, 56; DUMITROAIA 1992, 137-138.

<sup>9</sup>DIACONU 2014, 421.

<sup>10</sup>DIACONU 2016, 71-72.

<sup>11</sup>KACSÓ 1980, 296; KACSÓ 2003, 278.

<sup>12</sup>KACSÓ 1980, 293; KACSÓ 2003, 278.

<sup>13</sup>SOROCLEANU et al. 2019, 192, fig. 9-10.

<sup>14</sup>VULPE 1970, 100, nr. 569a; KACSÓ 1977, 57, nr. 1; BADER 1996, note 47.

(Fig. 5/4), Drajna de Jos<sup>15</sup> (Prahova County) (Fig. 5/5; Fig. 6/1), Gîlgău Almașului<sup>16</sup> (Sălaj County), Jabenița<sup>17</sup> (Mureș County) (Fig. 6/3), Lăpuș<sup>18</sup> (Maramureș County), Oarța de Sus<sup>19</sup> (Maramureș County), Perișor<sup>20</sup> (Bistrița-Năsăud County). Sighetu Marmației<sup>21</sup> (Maramureș County) (Fig. 5/7), Târgu Lăpuș I<sup>22</sup> (Maramureș County) (Fig. 5/6), Târșolț<sup>23</sup> (Satu Mare County) (Fig. 5/3) and Ungureni<sup>24</sup> (Maramureș County) (Fig. 5/1), to which one must add further specimens within museum collections (however, their place of origin has not been determined)<sup>25</sup>.

Such items are specific to the Uriu-Ópály hoard type from the region of Upper Tisa and Someș, dated to the Bz D period.

In a study concerning various bronze finds from north-western Romania, T. Bader divides the Drajna axes into three distinct variants: Târșolț, Prelipce and Oarța<sup>26</sup>. If we consider themorphological characteristics of the item found at Țibucani, it may be included in the Oarța variant of the B3 type, which would make it the first such axe found east from the Carpathians.

It is well-known that, during Bronze Age, the metal items were widely spread; in the Carpathian space, intercommunity “transfers” were often documented. From this perspective, some metal items (not part of the typological repertory of certain cultural settings) may be considered imports. The axe of Țibucani belongs to this category; it was most likely manufacturedwithin a Late Bronze Age culture in north-western Romania (perhaps the Suciu de Sus culture), but in a certain context, it ended up beyond the Carpathians, due to the direct or indirect contacts with the members of the Noua culture<sup>27</sup>.

A relevant detail for this discussion is represented by the decoration featured on the edge of the axe. Furthermore, some of the Drajna bronze items have various ornaments on the

<sup>15</sup>ANDRIEȘESCU 1925, 368, fig. 3/16-18, fig. 4/3-5; NESTOR 1933, 128, fig. 16/7-8, 19; VULPE 1970, 99, nr. 563-565, fig. 41/563-565; KACSÓ 1977, 57, nr. 3-5; PETRESCU-DÎMBOVIȚA 1977, 78, fig. 91/1-3; PETRESCU-DÎMBOVIȚA 1978, fig. 72/75-77; BADER 1996, note 47; KACSÓ 2003, 278.

<sup>16</sup>LAKÓ, 1983, 76, pl. V/3.

<sup>17</sup>SOROCEANU, RETEGAN 1981, 210, note 72; KACSÓ 2003, 278.

<sup>18</sup>KACSÓ 1975, note 27; KACSÓ 1977, 59, nr. 9; BADER 1996, note 47; KACSÓ 2003, 278.

<sup>19</sup>KACSÓ 1977, 57, fig. 1; BADER 1996, note 47; KACSÓ 2003, 278.

<sup>20</sup>KACSÓ 1977, 59, nr. 14; SOROCEANU, RETEGAN 1981, 208, nr. 17, fig. 28/1, fig. 31/3.

<sup>21</sup>KACSÓ 1977, 59, nr. 11; KACSÓ 1995, 17, fig. 3/1, BADER 1996, note 47; KACSÓ 2003, 279; KACSÓ 2016, pl. 17/1.

<sup>22</sup>NESTOR 1933, 128; VULPE 1970, 99, nr. 567, fig. 41/567; 100, nr. 569, fig. 41/569; PETRESCU-DÎMBOVIȚA 1977, 70, fig. 66/7-8; PETRESCU-DÎMBOVIȚA 1978, 107, nr. 78, fig. 48C/1, 2; KACSÓ 1977, 59, nr. 16; BADER 1996, nota 47; KACSÓ 2001, 35-36, fig. 1/1, 2; KACSÓ 2007, 10, Abb. 3/3, 4.

<sup>23</sup>BADER 1996, 269, fig. 11/3; KACSÓ 2003, 279.

<sup>24</sup>KACSÓ 2003, 267-300.

<sup>25</sup>KACSÓ 2003, 279.

<sup>26</sup>BADER 1996, fig. 18.

<sup>27</sup>LÁSZLÓ 2006; LÁSZLÓ 2007.

upper extremity, represented by levels of lines, meanders or curved lines (perhaps even representations of metal sickles) (Fig. 6/1-4).

The meandric decoration featured on the edge of the Țibucani axe has the best analogies with the sceptre-axe from Lozova II (the Republic of Moldova)<sup>28</sup>(Fig. 6/2) and with the specimen from Malye Geevcy (Ukraine)<sup>29</sup> (Fig. 6/4). The symbolism of this ornament is complex, given that it is featured on various categories of items. If we correlate it only to the Late Bronze Age east from the Carpathians, meanders are also featured on bone and antler items, such as the buttons from Crasnaleuca (Botoșani County)<sup>30</sup>, Bărboasa (Bacău County)<sup>31</sup> and Pererâta (the Republic of Moldova)<sup>32</sup>(Fig. 6/5) or the cheek-pieces from Poienești (Vaslui County)<sup>33</sup> (Fig. 6/6) and Floreni (Vaslui County)<sup>34</sup>.

## Conclusions

The axe of Țibucani represents a rare find for Late Bronze Age east from the Carpathians; it must have been an imported piece of merchandise. For that chronological level, only a few such artefacts are known to have been brought from the west; all the items have a low typological occurrence. The item from Prelipce (Ukraine)<sup>35</sup>, the one from Țibucani, the two similar items from the Drajna de Jos hoard and the item found recently at Cernavodă are all isolated finds, far away from the place where such axes (or at least their prototypes) were manufactured. In the context of this discussion, I also feature several disk-butted axes found in the eastern Carpathian areas in Ukraine and Romania, such as the ones of Prelipce (Ukraine)<sup>36</sup>, Korovia (Ukraine)<sup>37</sup> and Răducăneni (Iași County)<sup>38</sup>. It is also worth adding here a bronze dagger (a fortuitous find within the middle basin area of the Moldova River, but specific to the cultural settings of eastern Hungary)<sup>39</sup>. The finds mentioned earlier suggest the existence of circulation/penetration routes through the Carpathian passes<sup>40</sup> for special items during Late Bronze Age. Indirectly, they confirm the existence of local elites who owned them at a certain point.

<sup>28</sup>DERGAČEV 2002, 37, Taf. 35/19.

<sup>29</sup>KOBAL' 2000, Taf. A5.

<sup>30</sup>DASCĂLU 2007, 180-182; DIACONU, SÎRBU 2014, 126, fig. 2/1.

<sup>31</sup>FLORESCU 1991, 30, fig. 153/4; DIACONU, SÎRBU 2014, 126, fig. 2/2.

<sup>32</sup>SAVA 2002, 32, fig. 36/3; SÎRBU 2011, 214, fig. 9/6; DIACONU, SÎRBU 2014, 126, fig. 3.

<sup>33</sup>BOROFFKA 1998, 92-93, fig. 6/10; LAZAROVICI, BOROFFKA 2010, 276, fig. 2/5.

<sup>34</sup>UDREȘCU 1973-1974, 37, fig. 10/7; FLORESCU 1991, 66, fig. 151/3; BOROFFKA 1998, 91, fig. 6/7.

<sup>35</sup>VULPE 1970, 100, fig. 89/A1; IGNAT 2000, 98, fig. 29.

<sup>36</sup>VULPE 1970, 100, fig. 89/A4, 5; IGNAT 2000, 98, fig. 29.

<sup>37</sup>IL'KIV 2008, 27, fig. 1/1; PIVOVAROV, IL'KIV 2009, 89, fig. 1/1.

<sup>38</sup>LÁSZLÓ et al. 2013.

<sup>39</sup>DIACONU, BRAȘOVEANU 2020.

<sup>40</sup>LÁSZLÓ et al. 2013, 219; IL'KIV 2012.

Either parade weapons or items with a social value, Drajna type axes represent valuable landmarks for the intercultural contacts specific to the Late Bronze Age period. Considering that, outside the Carpathian arc, such items are featured in bronze hoards, it may be admitted that the axe of Țibucani was part of a metal complex or that it represented more likely a singular deposit (*Einzeldeponierung*).

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A Drajna type bronze axe (*Nackenknaufäxte*) from Eastern Romania

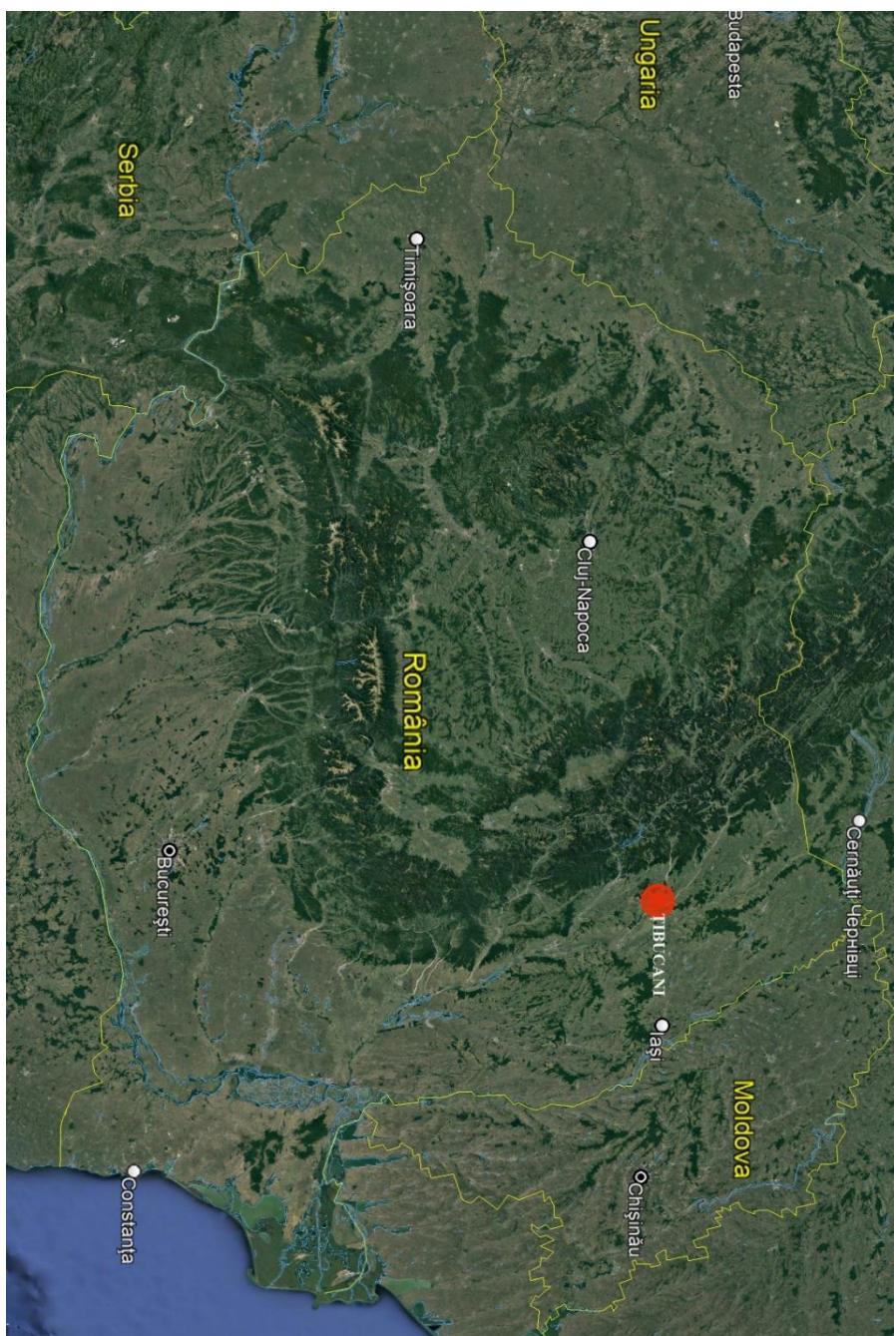
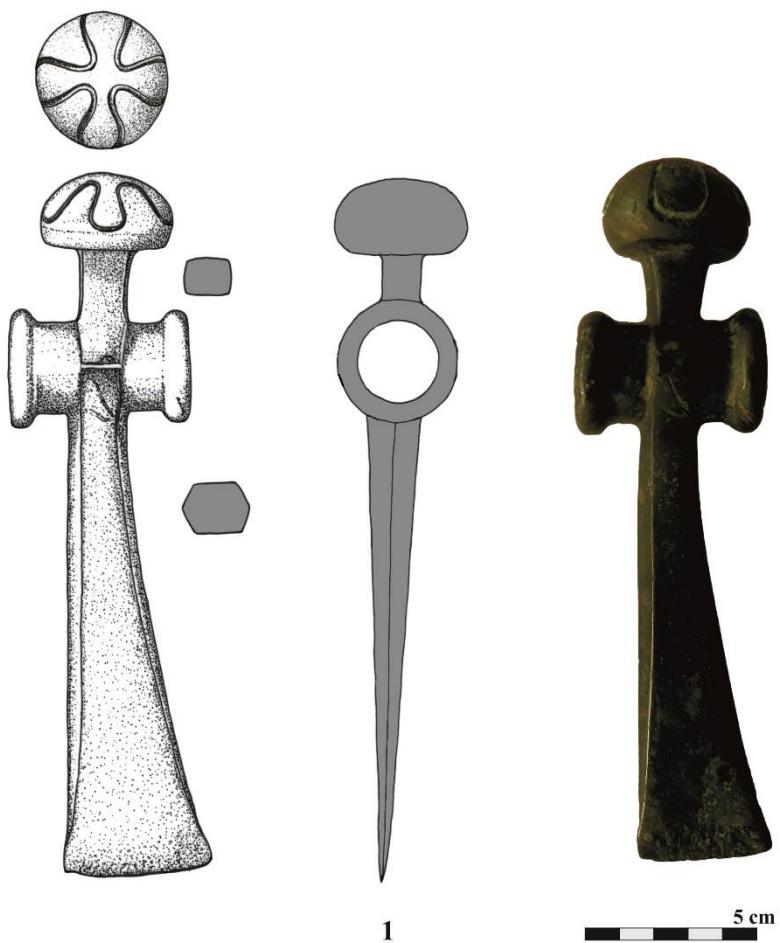


Fig. 1. Area of discovery of the bronze axe (red mark)



**Fig. 2.** The bronze axe from Tibucani

A Drajna type bronze axe (*Nackenknaufäxte*) from Eastern Romania



Fig. 3. Details of the bronze axe from Tibucani

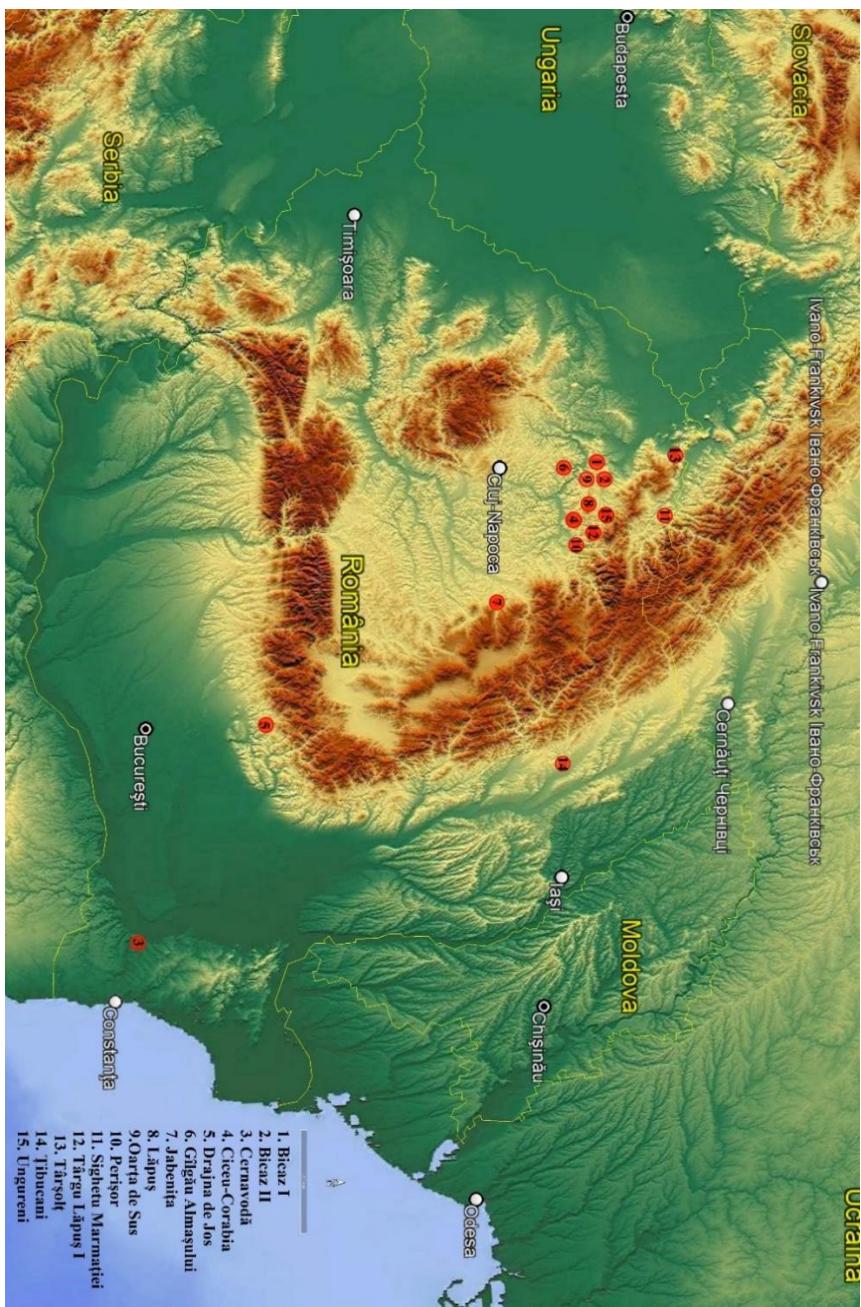
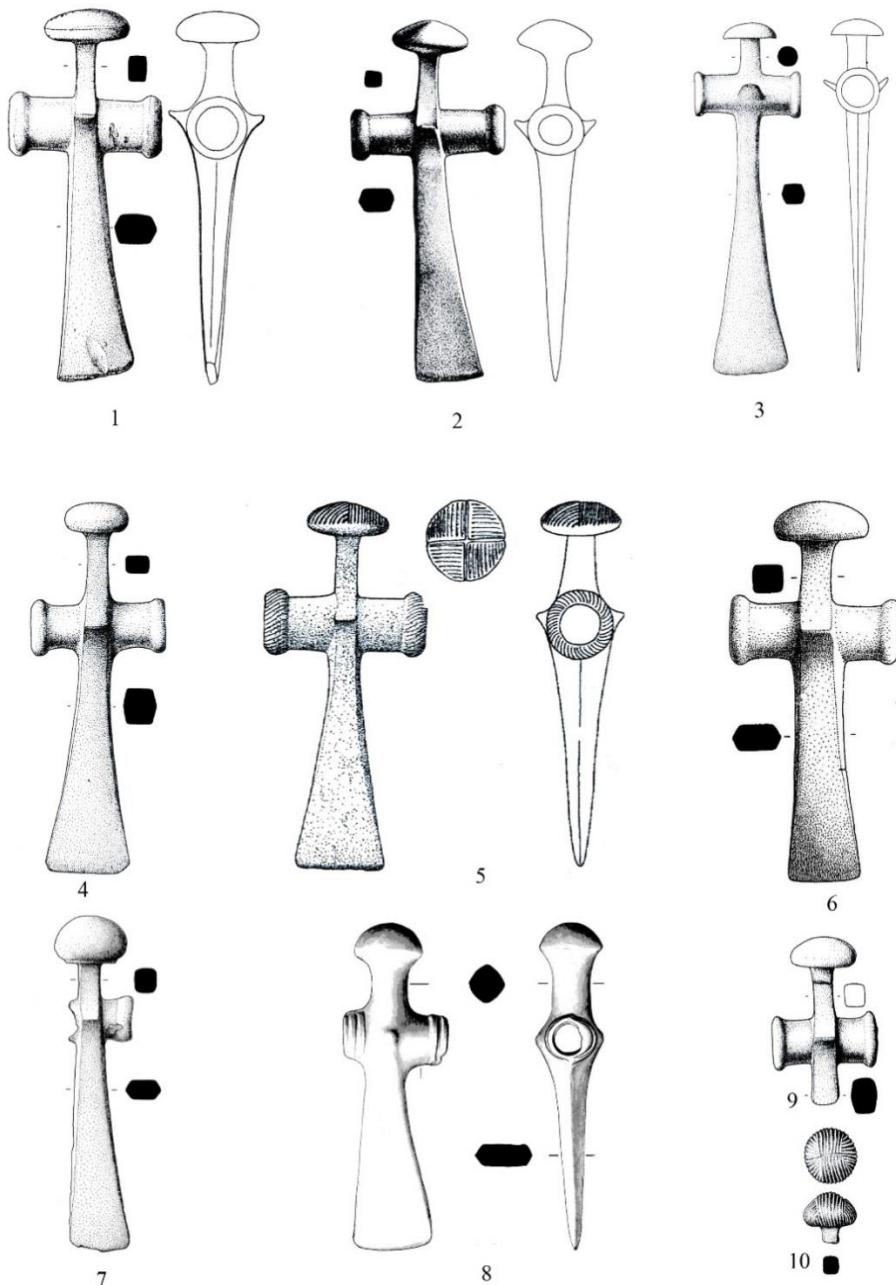
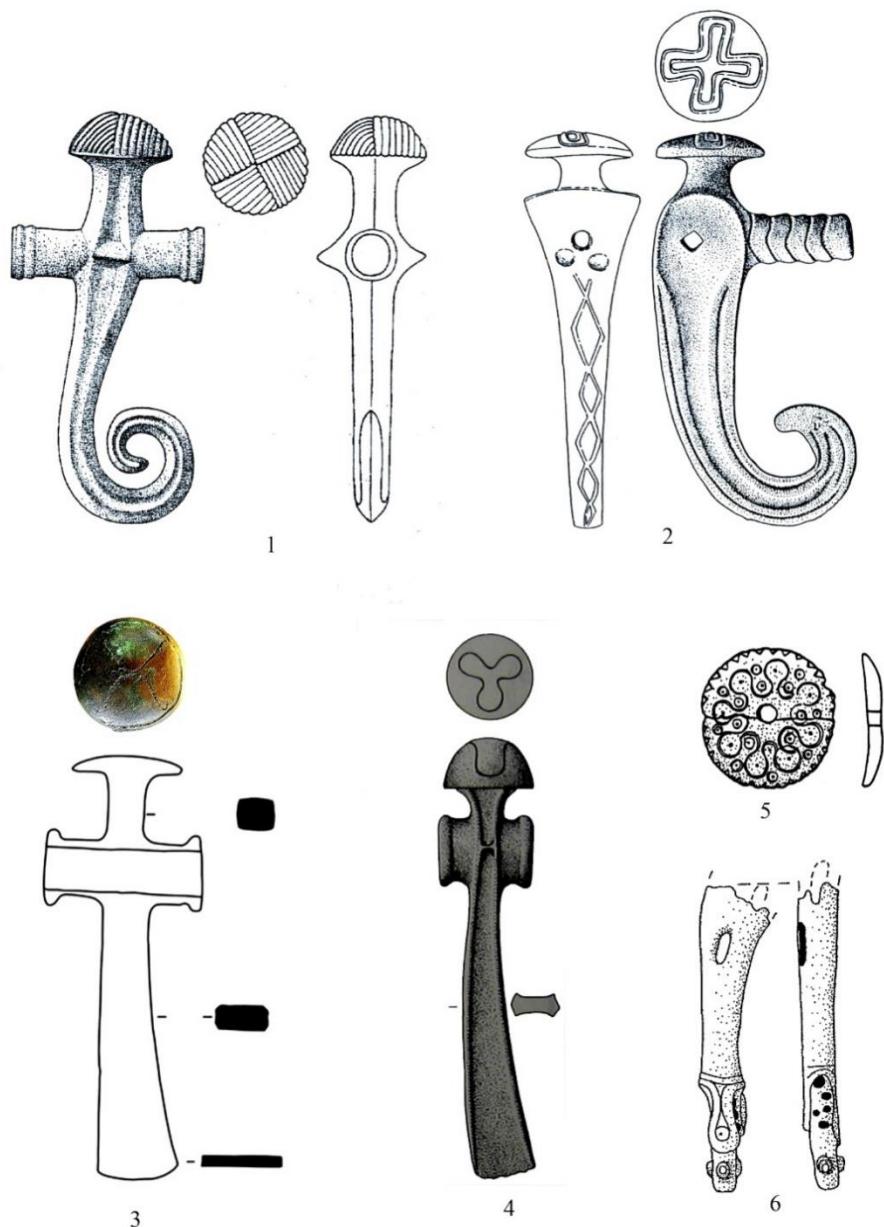


Fig. 4. The spreading of the Drâna type axes in Romania

A Drajna type bronze axe (*Nackenknaufäxte*) from Eastern Romania



**Fig. 5.** Drajna type bronze axes from Romania: 1, Ungureni; 2, Bicaz I; 3, Târșolt; 4, Ciceu-Corabia; 5, Drajna de Jos; 6, Târgu Lăpuș; 7, Sighetu Marmației; 8, Cernavodă; 9, unknown place; 10, Bicaz II (1-4, 9, 10 after KACSÓ 2003; 5, after VULPE 1970; 6, after KACSÓ 2001; 7, after KACSÓ 1995; 8, after SOROCEANU *et alii*, 2019)



**Fig.6.** Bronze and antler objects: 1, Drajna de Jos; 2, Lozova; 3, Jabenită; 4, Malye Geevcy; 5, Pererâtă; 6, Poieneşti (1, after VULPE 1970; 2, after DERGAČEV 2002; 3, after SOROCEANU *et alii* 2019; 4, after KOBAL' 2000; 5, after SAVA 2002; 6, after Boroffka 1998).