

THE BRONZE HOARDS FROM THE SOUTH-WEST OF ROMANIA AND FROM THE NEIGHBOURING, SOUTH-DANUBE AREAS (I)

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Abstract: The most important thing in discussing about the bronze hoards is that related to the signification and the interpretation of the depositing. For this purpose we believe that it is necessary to enumerate the main interpretations regarding this phenomenon, seen in its general reading. After studying the disposition on the map of the hoards, it results the fact already noticed in the placement of some types of bronze items: on one side, we can observe their concentration in the Danube area, before the entering in the Clisura Dunării and in the Clisura area, and, on the other side, the relative big number of sites in Banat, especially around the town Vârșeț (Vrșac). We shall present below the list of the hoards from the south-west of Romania and the neighbouring areas and also their placement on the map.

Keywords: Bronze Age deposits, beginning of the Iron Age, south-west Romania, Danube area.

Up till now, there have been ample discussions referring to the significations implied by the metal objects hoards. The most frequent attempt of classifying was to divide them into profane hoards (utilitarian) and sacred (ritual) hoards.

The profane character of the hoards was offered after understanding that their depositing was done as a sequence of some inter-tribal conflicts or invasions¹. Those that had a small number of objects were considered as belonging to the haberdashers and the hoards with pieces that grew of use or had moulding defects were considered foundries-hoards. Generally speaking, the

¹ M. Rusu, “Die Verbreitung der Bronzhortfunde in Transsilvanien vom Ende der Bronzezeit bis in die mittlere Hallstattzeit”, *Dacia, Nouvelle Série*. 7, 1963, p. 183; idem, in *Omagiu lui Constantin Daicoviciu*, București, 1960, p. 490; M. Petrescu Dîmbovița, *Depozitele Depozitele de bronzuri din România*, București, Editura Academiei RSR, 1977, p. 26.

profane hoards were considered those that offered the possibility of ulterior chance to get them back.

The sacred hoards were those related to different ritual practices, called this way either by analogy with the ethnographic information, or in connection with historical sources².

The trying to offer an explaining model for the bronze hoards in the prehistoric period was more and more based in the last decades on ethnographic sources. Following this line, it was thought that the distinction between the “utilitarian” and “votive” hoards it can’t always be considered as definitive in the primitive societies. The American sociologist Marchall Sahlins advanced, in his economic anthropology studies³, ideas such that of “domestic way of production” or the varying regarding the “reciprocity” relations in different levels of the social group, ideas that proved to be fructuous in understanding the role that the objects played in the different transactions (the same type of object being able to have different functions).

Richard Bradley, in an article from 1985⁴, shows that the two types of hoards (utilitarian and sacred) resulted after different types of transactions (as a sequence of the reciprocity relationships), where some objects could be either usual goods or gifts and these different functions should be reflected in three different fields, archeologically observable. The first could refer to the context of the depositing, the second to the situation of the objects (the metallographic analyses being able to indicate whether the object had been recycled several times, whether it had been considered a “good”, being brought into discussion especially the ingots and the objects with standardized weight) and, finally, the spatial model concerning the distribution of the hoards.

His opinion is that some hoards, believed to have a utilitarian character are actually the result of some transactions that took place outside the social group, during the periods of competitions (*potlach*) and rapid exchange. The author relays on the model proposed by Ian Hodder who suggests that, in the periods of “stress” or “competition”, the material culture can be used to underline the differences between the social groups. These differences, hardly seen in the Neolithic period, became, during the Bronze Age, more and more accentuated, developing, in the Late Bronze Age and in the Iron Age (the UFZ period) a stabile system in the regional groups in which the common interest is preponderant, competitive in symbolizing the maintaining of the territorial

² The historical sources are unfortunately for the later periods: Herodotus, Tacitus (for Celts), Pausanias etc.

³ M. Sahlins, *Age de pierre, age d'abondance*, Paris, Editure Gallimard, 1976 (the first edition appeared in 1972 in Chicago with the title *Stone Age Economic*).

⁴ R. Bradley, “Exchange and social distance: the structure of bronze artefact distributions”, in *Man*, 20, 1985, pp. 629-704.

rights⁵. From here, results that the studying regarding the distribution of objects can lead us to the identification of some borders marked by specialized hoards. For the Bronze Age, in England, we can notice the fact that the area of distribution of the specialized hoards and of the individual discoveries is surrounded by a circle of apparently utilitarian hoards.

In the book *The Passage of Arms*⁶, Bradley approaches again the problems anterior discussed and analyses the custom regarding the hoards from the north-west of Europe. With this opportunity, he accentuates the need to distinguish between two different types of deposits. Some of them represent sacrifices that are predominant in this area during the Neolithic and Bronze Age and others, constituted as offerings, are frequent during the Bronze Age. The author emphasizes that the Late Bronze, as a period when the bronze hoards knew their maximum development is also a period of great stability regarding the political power, in opposition with the Iron Age, when the hoards cease and in the socio-political plan can be seen a fragmentation of the power and an accentuation of the conflicts⁷. We can easily notice that this pattern of analysis can also be applied for the central and south-eastern Europe, where the UFZ period can be considered a greater stage in the development of the bronze metallurgy but also one of relative stability.

At the beginning of the Bronze Age, the south-east of Europe and implicitly the Carpathian Basin, situated in the outskirts of the urban culture of the Orient (Mesopotamia, Anatolia) takes part to the spreading of certain techniques of casting or types of weapons or tools, such are the axes with a transversal gap for the handle from the beginning of the Bronze Age⁸, constituting themselves in connection with the rest of Europe as a centre for the spreading of the metallurgic impulses towards the centre and the north of the continent.

In the second millennium, and especially in its second half, the development of the bronze metallurgy and the perfecting of the techniques led to the intensifying of the exchanges and to the socio-economic restructuration of the society. And a proof for this are the discoveries such the hoard from Drajna de Jos (that contains the fragment from a sword blade of Mycenaean type, along with a Reutlingen type sword and a sceptre⁹), the treasure Rădeni and that from Vălcitrăn (that also contains golden vessels)¹⁰, the treasures from Perșinari (12

⁵ R. Bradley, I. Hodder, "British prehistory: an integrated view", in *Man*, 14, 1979, pp. 93-94.

⁶ R. Bradley, *The Passage of Arms*, Oxford, Oxbow Books, 1998 (2nd edition).

⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 198-202.

⁸ A. Vulpe, in *Istoria Românilor*, I, București, Editura Enciclopedică, 2001, p. 240.

⁹ M. Petrescu-Dîmbovița, *cited work*, pl. 91-93.

¹⁰ A. Vulpe, V. Mihăilescu Bârliba, "Tezaurul de la Rădeni-Neamț", in *Memoria Antiquitatis*, 12-14, 1980-1982, (1986), Piatra Neamț, p. 41-63.

halberds, a short sword, 4 silver axes)¹¹, Țufalău (4 golden axes)¹², Țigănași and Hinova, Mehedinți county (golden adornments)¹³.

All these discoveries can be attributed to the existence of a group of people, for whom the precious metal objects, as those enumerated above, bear a well-defined signification. There are prestige items that suggest in the same time the fact that they have the capacity to develop relations with distant areas such is Mycenae that, along with the Hittite Empire, represented the most important political power from that period.

The connection between the Mediterranean space and the western area of the Black Sea can be suggestively illustrated by the recent discovery made in Tekirdağ and the load belonging to the wrecked ship from Uluburun¹⁴. The hoard from Tekirdağ¹⁵ own two swords, from which one is Mycenaean, a “Canaanite” type dagger, a spear head with a split handle that is frequent for the Aegean space, 3 double edged axes considered “Cretan-Mycenaean directing fossil” that can also be found in the Balkan and Danube area. The two flanged axes (types that, made of bronze, are present in Central Anatolia and in the south and north Danube region, but made of iron), were found together with a celt and many hooked sickles, frequent in Thrace and near the Danube area, bronze vessels and a Keftiu type ingot. As the author of the article notice,

all the elements of the hoard from Tekirdağ are dated at the end of the 15th century or at the beginning of the 13th century B.C. Its importance is due to the fact that this hoard brings together – as rarely had been seen before in a similar discovery – in such a surprising manner, products from different metallurgic workshops, illustrating remarkably the long distance connections from those times¹⁶.

From the same perspective we can interpret the discovery of the load from the Uluburun ship that “might be interpreted as a gifts sending, accompanied by a court official on his way from Egypt towards one of the Aegean space palaces. In this way, the load should be examined from the perspective of the distance trade,

¹¹ A. Vulpe, “Tezaurul de la Perșinari. O nouă prezentare”, in *Cercetări și Civilizație la Dunărea de Jos*, Călărași, 15, 1997, pp. 265-301.

¹² A. Mozolies, “Goldfunde des Depotfundhorizont von Hajdusamson”, in *Bericht der Römisch-Germanischen Kommission des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts*, Frankfurt am Main, 46-47, 1965-1966, pp. 1-67.

¹³ M. Davidescu, “Un tezaur de podoabe tracice descoperit la Hinova, jud. Mehedinți”, in *Thraco-Dacica*, 2, 1981, pp. 7-22.

¹⁴ H-G. Buchholz, “Ein aussergewöhnliches Steinzepter im östlichen Mittelmeer”, in *Prähistorische Zeitschrift*, 74, 1999, 1, p. 68-78; A. Vulpe, *Istoria Românilor*, I, 2001, p. 358.

¹⁵ S. Hansen, “Noi cercetări asupra metalurgiei epocii bronzului în sud-estul Europei”, in *Descoperiri de bronzuri din Romania*, (ed. T. Soroceanu), 2nd vol, Bistrița-Cluj-Napoca, 2005, p. 304.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 304.

controlled by the masters of the palaces from the region and made as a gifts exchanging”¹⁷. The wreck of the ship contained copper ingots of 10 t and tin ingots of 1 tone (from which could result 11 t of bronze), along with different other items. It is interesting for us the sceptre with a curved blade and semi-spherical back side, made of black volcanic rock, for which there is an analogy in the Drajna de Jos hoard¹⁸. Similar items had been discovered at Lozova II, in Basarabia¹⁹, at Ljulin²⁰ and in the southern Danube, a fragment from Dodona, in Epirus²¹ and another item at Pobit Kamāk, in Bulgaria²². Must be mentioned that the hoard from Muntenia also contains a Mycenaean type spade, reused and modified²³.

How much do the influence directions that we have discussed before and the intercommunity relations that they imply affect the different behaviour of the communities from the studied area, might be determined after studying the character of few discoveries. Thus, in the hoard from Ovča Mogila²⁴, the explicit joining of two elements of attitude towards the metal pieces might offer some suggestions. On one hand, was deposited the apparently complete equipment, made of prestige items of a warrior under the influence of the Mycenaean palatial impact that they tried to imitate. On the other hand, the 32 celts, all of them of eastern type, can be interpreted, first of all, as an “accumulation of the metal’s value”. In the first case we are dealing with a southern (Mycenaean) behaviour and in the second case with an attitude towards a more likely European continental type metals. This confers to the discovery a special signification because it reflects very well the interference of two types of behaviour.

It seems that between the function that involves the representation of the social statute and that of intrinsic value of the material of which the object was made (value that can be considered as monetary or not), there is a tight connection²⁵. If the Early Bronze, in the Central Europe area, the main metal items considered as representatives for the social statute were the halberd, the

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 305.

¹⁸ M. Petrescu Dîmbovița, *cited work*.

¹⁹ V. Dergačev, “Die äneolithische und bronzezeit Metallfunde aus Moldavien”, in *Prähistorische Bronzefunde*, München, Stuttgart, XX, 9, 2002, Stuttgart, 37, nr.113, p. 35, 19.

²⁰ H.-G. Buchholz, “Ein außergewöhnliches Steinszepteraus...”, 74, 76, fig. 6a.

²¹ N. K. Sandars, *North and South at the of The Mycenaean Age: Aspect of an Old Problem. Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 2, 1983, 56, fig. 12b.

²² B. Hänsel, *Beiträge zur Regionalen und Chronologischen Gliederung der älteren Hallstattzeit an der unteren Donau*, Bonn, 1976, pl. 1, 1-2.

²³ T. Bader, “Die Schwerter in Rumänien”, in *Prähistorische Bronzefunde*, IV, 8, 1991, Stuttgart.

²⁴ R. Krauss, “Der Depotfund von Ovča Mogila, Kreis Svištov (Bulgarien): Zur Datierung der Bronzehorte von der unteren Donau über mykenische Schwerter” in B. Horejs, R. Jung, E. Kaiser, B. Teržan (eds), *Interpretationsraum Bronzezeit Bernhard Hänsel von seinen Schülern gewidmet*, Bonn, 2005, pp. 199-210.

²⁵ A. Vulpe, “Tezaurul de la Perșinari...”, pp. 265-301.

triangular daggers, the flat daggers with prominent edge (*Randbeile*) and the necklaces, in our space, a similar role it seems to have been played by the axe with the transversal hole for the handle (*Schaftlochaxt*). Later, in the UFZ period, in the western and central Europe, the forms in which the prestige was represented became diverse, this function being taken by the bronze spade, the spear, the fighting chariots.

It is interesting to notice the fact that in the areas where we have a funerary inventory, rich in deposits of spades and spear heads, such is the area between the Rhine and the northern Trans-Danube zone, the bronze hoards are extremely poor represented. On the other hand, in areas where there are small concentrations of hoards with spades, these items are missing from the tombs' inventory²⁶.

It is obvious that the bronze items hadn't been chosen by chance for the depositing into the ground, but they had been treated differently, according to certain rules characteristic to particular zones and had particular functions that were known and accepted by those communities.

After this assertion, partly theoretical, must be concluded the fact that the bronze deposits discoveries, either those from the hoards or the individual ones (especially the spades), don't represent an exception for the studied area. They reflect the social and the economic interrelations and, not at last, the ideological ones, specific to the communities of which material culture we have presented above.

Truly important, thanks to the great number and the variety of metal pieces, are the hoards that in the Late Bronze and Early Hallstatt increased their number, both in the Central and South-Eastern Europe. Referring to this respect, Svend Hansen, in a study on the metallurgy from this part of Europe, underlines that

the discoveries transmit to us in an impressive manner the creative capacity of the metallurgic workshops from the Carpathian region, products that reached the western part of the Central Europe and the northern Europe, stimulating in those areas the imitation of the Carpathian products. The hoards were the main sources of transmitting the bronze objects in the Carpathian Basin. This holds good especially for the Late Bronze, period when the number and the size of the hoards reached values that haven't been excelled yet (...). There are attested for the period of the 14th century until the 10th century approximately 1000 hoards. To this are added the numerous bronze objects discovered in rivers and other running waters or passes that must be considered, because of the special place where they had been discovered, as isolated deposited objects²⁷.

²⁶ S. Hansen, "Depozite ca ofrandă: o contribuție la interpretarea descoperirilor de depozite din perioada timpurie UFZ", în *Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche și Arheologie*, 43, 1992, 4, p. 372.

²⁷ S. Hansen, "Noi cercetări...", p. 301; S. Hansen, "Neue Forschungen zur Metallurgie der Bronzezeit in Südosteuropa", in *Anatolian Metal III. Der Anschnitt Beiheft* 18, (Bochum 2005), pp. 89-103.

In the present paper I've classified 104 sites that correspond to the notion of bronze "hoard" (the map no. 1); such are the deposits of minimum 2 items²⁸, from which 62 are undoubtedly situated in the limited studied area. Among these, 52 belong to the mixed hoards series, of middle and large size, containing complete or fragmentary pieces with different functions (weapons, tools, adornments, pieces of unprocessed material). Ten hoards are mixed or small sized (maximum five different items). To all these are added the hoards that we called them monotypic, meaning that they are made entirely or almost entirely of pieces with the same function (the map no. 2): 12 deposits made of bracelets, nine celts deposits, two of celts and sickles, one of celts and spare heads. About eight hoards no information regarding their composition is available.

After studying the disposing on the map of the hoards, it results the fact already noticed in the placement of some types of bronze items: on one side, we can observe their concentration in the Danube area, before the entering in the Clisura Dunarii and in the Clisura area, and, on the other side, the relative big number of sites in Banat, especially around the town Vârșeț (Vršac). These assertions could be connected with the more intense archaeological activity of the museographs from Vârșeț (starting with Bodrog Milleker) and the intense researches made on the occasion of the works at the electric central from the Iron Gates during 1950-1960. Yet, it is plausible that this fact could also reflect a certain reality, sustained by the types of bronze items characteristic fro this area. From the chorological perspective, this area is closer to the hoards from the Carpathian Basin, as this notion is understood in the Central-European archaeology. On the other side, a role that we shouldn't neglect must have had the copper deposits from Bor-Majdanpek, exploited since the Eneolithic period²⁹.

We shall present below the list of the hoards from the south-west of Romania and the neighbouring areas and also their placement on the map.

²⁸ Here, we take into consideration this definition, although we are aware that from the theoretical point of view any kind of deposit, including the isolated deposited items, can be interpreted as a collective deposit.

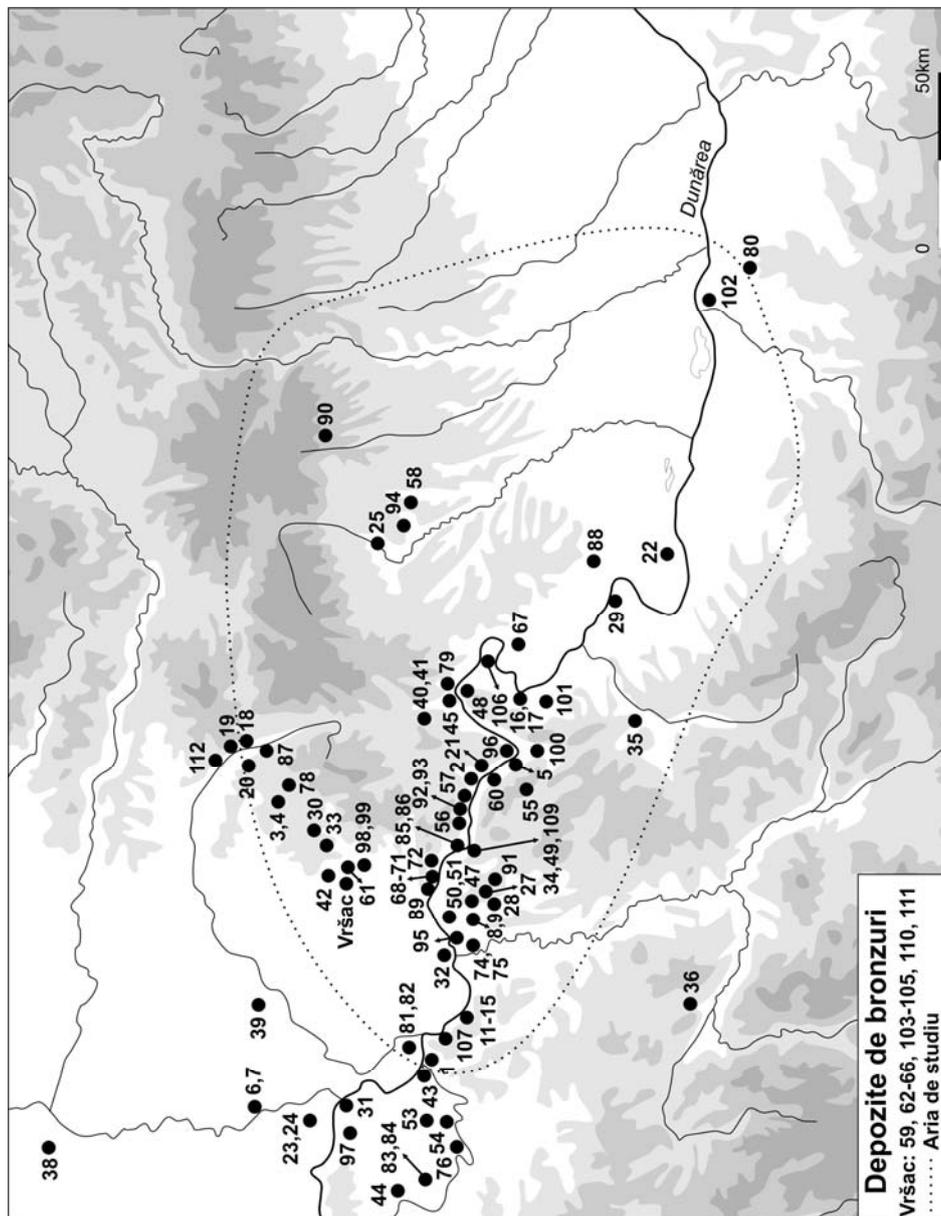
²⁹ B. Jovanović, *Rudna Glava. Najstarije rudarstvo bakra na centralnom Balkanu*, Bor-Beograd, 1982.

List of deposits (Map no.2)

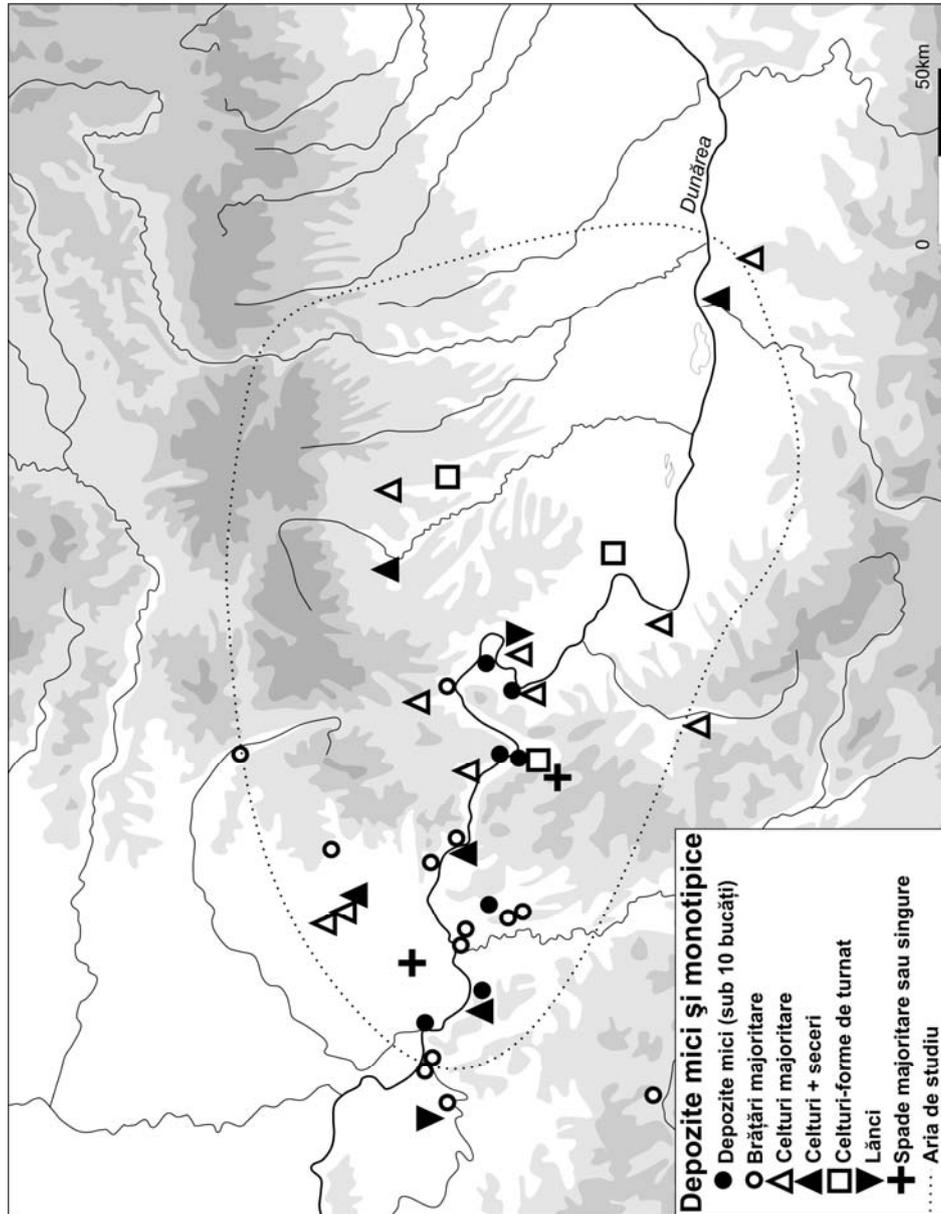
1. Beograd-Autokomanda, S.
2. Berzasca, Caraş Severin district, R.
3. Bocşa Montană, Caraş Severin district, R.
4. Bocşa Română, Caraş Severin district, R.
5. Boljetin, S.
6. Borjas I Cetate, Novi-Becej, S.
7. Borjas II, Novi-Becej, S.
8. Bradarac I, Pozarevac, S.
9. Bradarac II, Pozarevac, S.
10. Brajkovic, S.
11. Brestovik I, Grocka, S.
12. Brestovik II, Grocka, S.
13. Brestovik III, Grocka, S.
14. Brestovik IV, Grocka, S.
15. Brestovik V, Grocka, S.
16. Brza Palanka I, Kladovo, S
17. Brza Palanka II, Kladovo, S
18. Buchin, Caraş Severin district, R.
19. Caransebeş, Caraş Severin district, R.
20. Cornuţel, Păltiniş commune, Caraş Severin district, R.
21. Cozla, Caraş Severin district, R.
22. Desa, Dolj district, R.
23. Donji Petrovci I, Ruma, Pecinci, S
24. Donji Petrovci II, Ruma, Pecinci, S
25. Drăguteşti, Gorj district, R.
26. Drenkova, S (nu s-a cartat).
27. Drmno, Pozarevac, S.
28. Dubravica, S.
29. Florentin, Mihajlovgrad, B.
30. Fizeş, Caraş Severin district, R.
31. Futog, Novi Sad, S.
32. Gaj, Kovin, S.
33. Giurgiova, Goruia commune, Caraş Severin district, R.
34. Golubac, S.
35. Gornja Bela Reka, Bela Reka, S.
36. Gornji Milanovic, S.
37. Gorsko Kosovo, Velico Tărnovo, B.
38. Hajdukovo, Subotica, S.
39. Hetin, Zitiste, S.
40. Iablaniţa I, Caraş Severin district, R.
41. Iablaniţa II, Caraş Severin district, R.

42. Iam, Caraş Severin district, R.
43. Jakovo, Beograd Zemun, S.
44. Jarak I, Hrtovci, Sremska Mitrovica, S.
45. Jupalnic, commune of Orşova town, Mehedinţi district, R.
46. Kamenovo, S.
47. Kasidol Pozarevac, Pozarevac, S.
48. Kladovo, Kjuc, S
49. Klenje, Golubac, S.
50. Kličevac I, Požarevac, S.
51. Kličevac II, Požarevac, S.
52. Krčedin I, Srem, S.
53. Krčedin II, Srem, S.
54. Kupinovo, Srem, S.
55. Leskovo, Majdanpek, S.
56. Liborajdea, Sicheviţa commune, Caraş Severin district, R.
57. Liubcova Ţiglărie, Berzasca commune, Caraş Severin district, R.
58. Logreşti, Moşteni, Gorj district, R.
59. Mali Zam, Vršac, S.
60. Male Livadice, S
61. Malo Središte, S.
62. Markovac-Grunjac, Vršac, S.
63. Markovac-Leskovica, Vršac, S.
64. Markovac-Urvina, Vršac, S.
65. Mesic-Čikovac, Vršac, S.
66. Mesic-Supaja, Vršac, S
67. Mileni, actualul sat Bistreţ, Deveselu commune, Mehedinţi district, R.
68. Moldova Veche I, locality of Moldova Nouă city, Caraş Severin district, R.
69. Moldova Veche II, locality of Moldova Nouă city, Caraş Severin district, R.
70. Moldova Veche III, locality of Moldova Nouă city, Caraş Severin district, R.
71. Moldova Veche IV, locality of Moldova Nouă city, Caraş Severin district, R.
72. Moldoviţa, former Carlsdorf, Moldova Nouă city, Caraş Severin district, R.
73. Novgrad, Ruse, B
74. Novi Kostolac, Požarevac, S.
75. Novi Kostolac II, Požarevac, S
76. Obrež, S
77. Obručište, Stara Zagora, B
78. Ocna de Fier, suburban community of Bocşa city, Caraş Severin district, R.
79. Orşova, Mehedinţi district, R.
80. Ovča Mogila, Pleven, B.
81. Pancevo I, S.

82. Pancevo II, S.
83. Pečinci, Sremska Mitrovica, S.
84. Pečinci II, Sremska Mitrovica, S.
85. Pescari (Coronini) II, Caraș Severin district, R.
86. Pescari (Coronini) I, Caraș Severin district, R.
87. Petroșnița, Bucoșnița commune, Caraș Severin district, R.
88. Plenița, Dolj district, R.
89. Pojejena, Caraș Severin district, R.
90. Sacoți, Milostea village, Slatioara commune, Vâlcea district, R.
91. Salakovac, Požarevac, S.
92. Sichevița I, Caraș Severin district, R.
93. Sichevița II, Caraș Severin district, R.
94. Socu, Bărbătești commune, Gorj district, R.
95. Stari Kostolac, Požarevac, S.
96. Svinița, Mehedinți district, R.
97. Sviloš, Novi Sad, S.
98. Tigvanu Mare, Caraș Severin district, R.
99. Tigvanu Mare, Caraș Severin district, R.
100. Topolnica, Majdanpek, S.
101. Urovica, S.
102. Vărbica, Pleven, B.
103. Veliki Gaj, S.
104. Veliko-Središte II, Vršac, S.
105. Veliko-Središte III, Vršac, S.
106. Velika Vrbica, Kladovo, S.
107. Vinča I, Beograd, S.
108. Vinča II, Beograd, S.
109. Vojilovo, Golubac, S.
110. Vršac, Majdan, S.
111. Vršac-Kozluk, S.
112. Zăgumeni, Constantin Daicoviciu commune, Caraș Severin district, R.



Sketch 1: Map with the bronze hoards



Sketch 2: Map with deposits types