

# THE ANTLER SCEPTRE FROM COȚOFENI SETTLEMENT OF BOARTA (SIBIU COUNTY)

*Cristian I. POPA\**, *Viorel ȘTEFU\*\**

## THE ANTLER SCEPTRE FROM COȚOFENI SETTLEMENT OF BOARTA (SIBIU COUNTY)

### Abstract

The scepter from Boarta-Cețățuie throws a new light on the moment of penetration in the north of the Danube area of this kind of prestige artifacts, described by Homer for the Greek world. Mace-type antler, with plug at one end appear, therefore, during the final phase of the Coțofeni culture, much earlier than it was known until now, through the discoveries from Middle Bronze Age (in the area of Wietenberg and Otomani cultures). A possible link about the perpetuation of such luxury goods in the Carpathian Basin could be the marble scepter with longitudinal and transversal perforation discovered at Girișul de Criș-Alceu between levels 1 and 2, in a ceramic horizon dated at the end of Early Bronze Age.

The scepter from Boarta, underlines, once again, if needed, the important place occupied by the Boarta settlement among Coțofeni sites from Transylvania. It joins a rare discovery here, ritual-related manifestation such as bucranium plaque-type idol<sup>1</sup>, or the two plastic anthropomorphic artifacts, filling in an unexpected way our picture about the spiritual life and social stratification of Coțofeni communities. Here, through this discovery we have one more proof of the fact that among these populations, local leaders have risen over time, with some claims at that time.

**Key words:** Coțofeni settlement, Antler sceptre, Boarta-Cețățuie

### 1. Settlement research history

Prehistoric site from Boarta (Hungarian *Mihályfalvi*; German *Michelsdorf*, commune of Șeica Mare, Sibiu County) is already well known among specialists, being one of the most important sites in Transylvania. The settlement is located at Cețățuia, a hill with a triangular-shaped plateau at the top that dominates the western border of the village, to Vesăud (pl. 1/1-2).

The first marks of the findings from Boarta are known since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, but the first excavations on Cețățuia belonged K. Horedt who, in 1942, has revealed two settlements, one belonging to Coțofeni culture and another to Schneckenberg culture<sup>2</sup>. The research was later resumed by S. Dumitrașcu and L. Meseșan in 1965 and between 1966 – 1967 by S. Dumitrașcu and G. Togan, with new data about prehistoric habitation of the site<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Dumitrașcu, Togan 1971, 423, Pl. VI/4; Ciugudean 2000, 40.

<sup>2</sup> Horedt 1949, 57-66, fig. 9-13; 14/1-5, 7-10; 15.

<sup>3</sup> Dumitrașcu, Togan 1971.

\* Universitatea „1 Decembrie 1918” Alba Iulia, cristi72popa@yahoo.com

\*\* Muzeul Municipal Mediaș, vstef79@yahoo.com

Coțofeni settlement occupies the hill top but its slopes. The most archaeological material belongs to Coțofeni culture. In the Coțofeni level three houses were investigated, four partially sunken dwellings, several pits and hearths. It seems that Coțofeni communities had terraced the hill slopes in many places. The wall and ditch related to Coțofeni settlement are observable on the east side. The pottery artifacts are very numerous with a variety of shapes and decorative motifs and are specific to the Coțofeni III phase. Tools made from stone, bone and horn, spindle-whorls, spoons and weights of baked clay, were found also. It is worth mentioning two fragmented anthropomorphic statuettes and one fragment of an idol-plaque of *bucranium* type<sup>4</sup>.

In addition to Coțofeni culture artifacts, during the archaeological investigation, traces of habitation belonging Petrești culture<sup>5</sup> and to Early Bronze Age<sup>6</sup>, and very sporadic traces of material belonging to Wietenberg culture<sup>7</sup> were found.

In Medias Municipal Museum's collections, where the archaeological material from Boarta-Cetățuie is kept, there is also one unusual artifact which is the subject of this paper. It was inventoried in 1968 as a "spud", with inventory no. 4409, together with other objects of bone and horn found in the site of Boarta.

## 2. The artifact description

The object is made of antler. The bottom part of the horn next to the mantle ring was chosen for processing; one end is much thicker, rounded at the edges after the cutting and removal of the rosette from the horn base. One of the branches from the base was also removed and rounded. This was followed by the circular drilling on vertical plan, to fix in a bracing system like the axes. The opposite end was transversally perforated and the edges, also rounded. At its top part, at about 1 cm from the vertical perforation, to the thicker end, one small horizontal perforation was carried out through the artifact. Another perforation similar in size was carried out about 1 cm from the thin end; a plug was placed in, with a diameter of approx. 3 cm, but not kept.

On the artifact surface, well polished after a long use, it can be seen an ornament made from fine incisions which forms thin bands angularly displayed. Some of these bands are diagonally hachured inside, others are field goals. It is possible that in time some of the decorative elements may have disappeared. The decor was done very carelessly, unhachured bands giving the impression that they were not finished.

Dimensions: length = 19 cm; maximum height = 7.1 cm; minimum height = 5.6 cm; maximum diameter = 5.5 cm; minimum diameter = 5 cm (pl. 2-3).

## 3. The artifact interpretation

From the outset we believe that the attribute of „spud” as the artifact was recorded in the museum inventory, alongside other tools made of bone and horn is wrong and its form was given, similar to spuds. Given the fact that our artifact was inventoried in 1968, when in Romania were still not published similar objects, the old account seems somewhat

<sup>4</sup> We present here the literature about Coțofeni settlement from Boarta-Cetățuie: Schroller 1933, 75, nr. 63; Roska 1941, 71, nr. 196; Roska 1942, 182, nr. 229; Berciu 1944, 7; Daicovicu 1945, 21, nota 1; Horedt 1949, 57-66, fig. 9-13; 14/1-5, 7-10; 15; Crișan, Szuchy 1955-1956, 7; Ferenczi 1964, 116-117; Dumitrașcu 1967, 81, 83, 86, 89, 94-95; Comșa 1970, 11; Dumitrașcu, Togan 1971, 423-437, fig. 1-3; pl. I-VII; Lazăr 1976, 28-30 și nota 13; 32-33, pl. I, nr. 3; Roman 1976, 10, 14-15, 43, 46, 52, 80, pl. 1, nr. 142; 4/2; 9/4, 8; 12/11; 19/16-17; 23/1, 3; 29/5; 34/1; 36/6, 17; 43/13; 51/9, 11; 52/15-16, 18, 20, 35; 82/8, 13-24; 83/1-15; 85-87; Roman 1977, 190, 194, pl. 39/15; 42/4; 45A/1; 50/7, 9; Lazăr 1978, p. 6-7, 9-10, 12, 14-18; Lazăr 1979, 29-31, pl. I/4; II/3; IV/2; X/1; XI/4, 6-8; XII/1-6, 9, 13-14; XIV/1-3, 5-7, 9, 12-14; XV/3, 8-11, 14-25, 49-53; XVI/4, 6-7; Lazăr 1980, 11-29; Florescu 1980, 63; Lazăr 1981-1982, 31-35; Ciugudean 1983, 49; Ciugudean 1986, 72, notele 18, 20; Rotea 1992, 95; Paul 1992, 137, nr. 7; Rotea 1993, 66; Paul 1995, 105; Ciugudean 1996, 22, 39-40, 94-95, 140; Rișcuța 1996, 70, pl. I/4; II/5; Ciugudean 1997, 45; Ciugudean 2000, 10, 16, 18, 25-26, 29-33, 39-40, 50, 55, 65, nr. 79, pl. 3/1; 82/1-13; 83/20; 118/1-2, 9; Vulpe 2001, 229; Ciugudean 2002, 95; Ciugudean 2003, 99; Luca et alii 2003, 56; Beldiman, Sztancs 2005, 57; Popa 2006, 49.

<sup>5</sup> Dumitrașcu, Togan 1971, 423, 426-427, fig. 2-3; pl. I; Paul 1992, 137, nr. 7; Luca et alii 2003, 56; Paul 1995, 105.

<sup>6</sup> Horedt 1949, 64, fig. 14/6; Ciugudean 1996, 39-40.

<sup>7</sup> Inedite materials in Mediaș Museum collection..

natural.

Undoubtedly, in terms of typology and functionality, the artifact from Boarta is part of the same class of objects interpreted as antler scepters, found in prehistoric times, especially during the Bronze Age.

Scepters made of antler appear in the Carpathian Basin since the Neolithic Age; such artifacts are found in settlements from Alba Iulia-*Lumea Nouă*<sup>8</sup> and Limba-*Bordane* (Alba)<sup>9</sup>, but with a different morphology than Boarta artifacts. Belonging to the same chronological horizon noted before, in VB phase from Ilipinar (Turkey) one antler scepter that look like a close copy of the Boarta piece is known, but interpreted as being a hammer<sup>10</sup>.

The best analogy is given by the Bronze Age artifacts interpreted as scepters from Lancrăm<sup>11</sup>, Sibișeni (Vințu the Jos)<sup>12</sup> and Cicău (Alba county)<sup>13</sup>, all found in the Wietenberg culture area. They are contemporary with the scepter from Oradea-*Salca*, Otomani culture area, recently published<sup>14</sup>. Similar artifacts are known in Hungary at Mikebuda<sup>15</sup> or in Anatolia at Beycesultan<sup>16</sup>.

As the analogies would suggest, the Boarta scepter could be considered, at first sight, a product of Wietenberg culture. But to this assigning we oppose some aspects. First, in the *Cetățuia* settlement only 3 or 4 sherds belonging to Wietenberg culture were discovered, indicating a “visit” at the site and not necessarily a habitation. Secondly, the shape of Boarta scepter is different from those known in Wietenberg culture, having a more massive aspect.

Much more obvious are the arguments that support the assignment of Boarta scepter to the Coțofeni culture. The first argument should be the intensive habitation of the plateau during the Coțofeni period and the extraordinary opulence of discovered material dating from this period. Another argument is the scepter decoration. Hachured incisions bands angularly arranged constitute a preferred motif by Coțofeni communities in pottery ornamentation, mostly in II-III stage<sup>17</sup>. Pottery decorated with such décor was also found in the Coțofeni III habitation from Boarta<sup>18</sup>.

The fact that the artifact was inventoried in the register with other Coțofeni artifacts from Boarta, removes any doubt on the place of origin, but raises the question of the context in which it arises. A massive group of bone and antler objects recorded together in 1968, from field survey research, do not convince us. Most of them are unbroken artifacts and it is hard to accept that they were discovered at the site surface. The scepter from Boarta, as much as the materials, like Coțofeni pottery, collected in Mediaș Museum by G. Togan, must have been found in other conditions, which we can only suspect. Probably, the appointed curator continued the excavation on the Boarta site in 1968 too, after the end of S. Dumitrascu research, and found the formula for the special artifacts, that was “field survey research”... Most probable, many of the later found artifacts, including the antler scepter, come from complexes whose meaning and content we’ll never find.

The scepter from Boarta-*Cetățuia* throws a new light on the moment of penetration in the north of the Danube area of this kind of prestige artifacts, described by Homer for the Greek world<sup>19</sup>. Mace-type antler, with plug at one end appear, therefore, during the final phase of the Coțofeni culture, much earlier than it was known until now, through the discoveries from Middle Bronze Age (in the area of Wietenberg and Otomani cultures). A

<sup>8</sup> Vasiliev et alii 1991, 73.

<sup>9</sup> Ciută 2002, 6-7, fig. 18.

<sup>10</sup> Roodenberg 1999, 200, fig. 15-16.

<sup>11</sup> Aldea 1973; Aldea 1974; Popa, Simina 2004, 20, 27-29, pl. 8; foto 1.

<sup>12</sup> Andrițoiu, Popa 1999, 106.

<sup>13</sup> Winkler et alii 1978, 58, fig. 18/2; 19.

<sup>14</sup> Fazecaș 2005, 71-75, pl. II/1-6.

<sup>15</sup> David 1997, 288, pl. 12/1.

<sup>16</sup> David 1997, 288, pl. 13/2.

<sup>17</sup> Roman 1976, 27, pl. 39/8-10, 13; 61/6, 12; 82/9; Ciugudean 2000, 27, 48, pl. 49/3, 6; 50/1, 5; 51/4; 52/5; 54/2; 56/4-6; 57/7.

<sup>18</sup> Roman 1976, pl. 85/2, 6; Ciugudean 2000, pl. 82/12-13.

<sup>19</sup> Popa, Simina 2004, 27-29.

possible link about the perpetuation of such luxury goods in the Carpathian Basin could be the marble scepter with longitudinal and transversal perforation discovered at Girișul de Criș-Alceu between levels 1 and 2, in a ceramic horizon dated at the end of Early Bronze Age<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Dumitrașcu 1989, 123.

<sup>21</sup> Dumitrașcu, Togan 1971, 423, Pl. VI/4; Ciugudean 2000, 40.

<sup>22</sup> Dumitrașcu, Togan 1971, 427, 434, Pl. VI/1 a-1b; 2a-2b; Lazăr 1978, 14; Lazăr 1979, 31, Pl. XVI/4, 6-7; Roman 1976, 30-31, Pl. 51/9, 11; Ciugudean 2000, 39, Pl. 118/1-2.

<sup>23</sup> Since we are preparing a study specifically dedicated to the antler sceptres, we have here confined to a narrower question, things related mainly to this artefact.

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## **UN SCEPTRU DE CORN APARTINĂN CULTURII COȚOFENI DESCOPERIT LA BOARTA (Jud. SIBIU)**

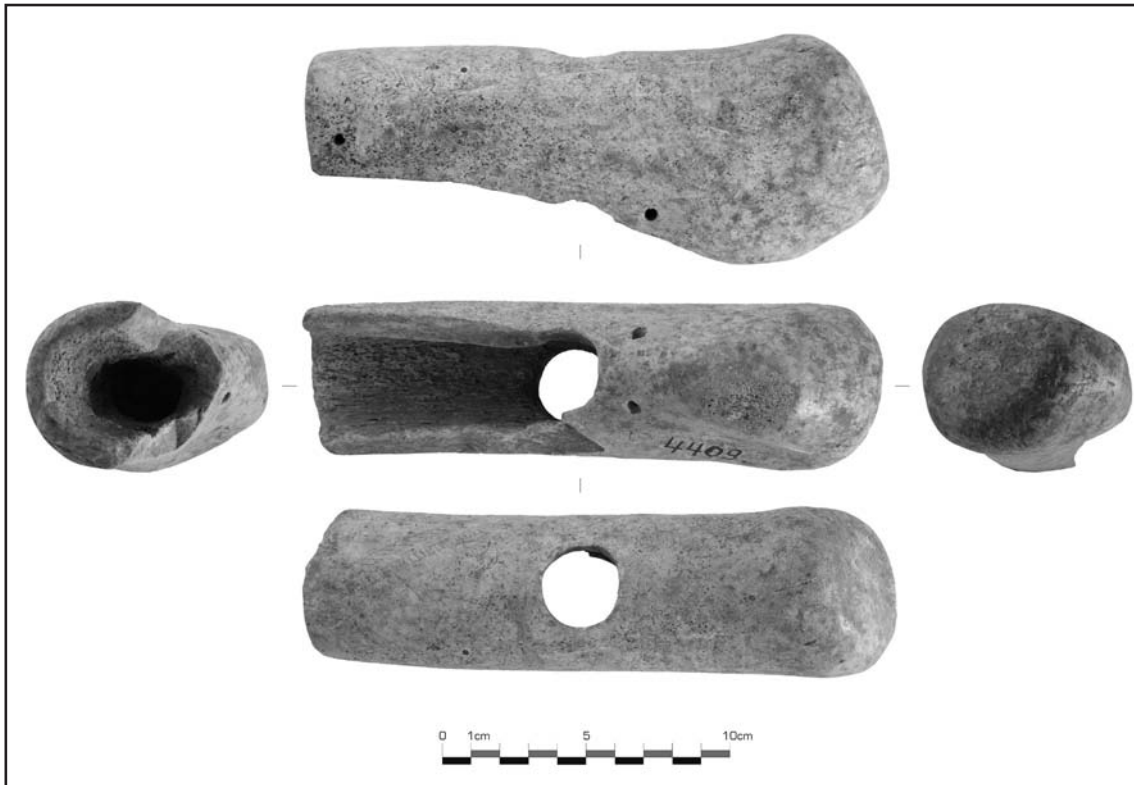
### **Rezumat**

Sceptrul de la Boarta subliniază încă o dată important ocupat de această așezare printre site-urile Coțofeni din Transilvania. Aceasta aduce completări esențiale la ceea ce înseamnă viața spirituală și stratificarea socială a comunităților Coțofeni. Prin această descoperire avem încă o dată dovada existenței unor lideri locali.

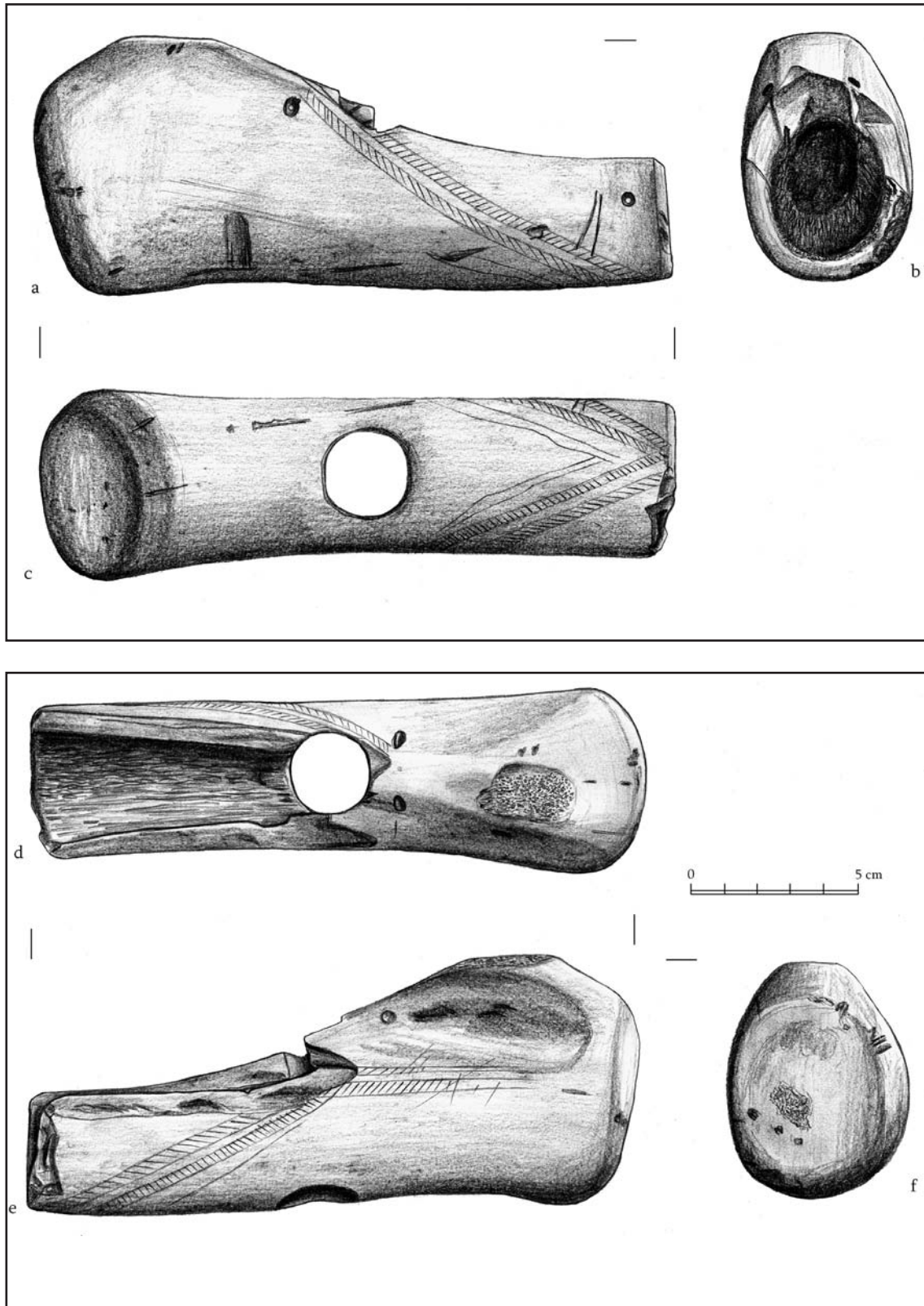


Pl. 1 The Coțofeni settlement from Boarta-Cetățuie





Pl. 2 The antler sceptre from Boarta-Cetățuie (1); decoration details (2-3) (photo Călin Șuteu)



Pl. 3 The antler sceptre from Boarta-Cetățuie (drawing C. I. Popa)