

Reconstructing elites in late Hallstatt Ferigile group

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Abstract

The paper tries to answer the question of whether elites existed and how these expressed themselves in the communities of the archeological group Ferigile, to identify the clues that would allow their detection and individualization. The Ferigile group evolved south of the Carpathians in the late stage of the Early Iron Age (the 7th-5th centuries BC). These communities, whose economy was based on livestock farming rather than cultivating the land, so with a high degree of mobility, have not left stable settlements, fortifications or other habitat centers that eventually reflect the internal organization of society and the existence of some hierarchical relationships. The elements that are at hand in this matter are exclusively those in the field of funerary domain. The necropolises of the group are made up of cremation graves under small mounds of stones and earth. These are characterized by an apparent uniformity, by a democratization of the mound as a funerary symbol of status. Four special tombs were selected from four necropolises (Ferigile barrow 69, Valea Stânilor barrow 4, Cepari barrow 5 and Tigveni barrow 15), which follow each other in time covering the entire existence of the group and were analyzed under the aspects related to the funerary ritual (funerary arrangement, position in the field occupied within the necropolis, grave goods, etc.). The conclusions reached show that these communities had their elites, who chose to express their special status in the afterlife, but the differences from the upper half of society (expressed by the middle and rich tombs from the perspective of the grave goods) are not so consistent. The differentiation is given rather by certain component elements of funerary inventory encompassing symbolic values.

Keywords: Ferigile group, late Hallstatt period, barrows, grave goods, elites

A Marxist preamble as introduction: searching for elites in an egalitarian (at least in death) society

The emergence of the idea of tumulus in the early Bronze Age Europe was closely linked to the founding of a new ideology of the elites. The tumulus, ultimately seen as a result of the most often immense collective effort to raise it (an effort usually reserved for the upper-class elements of society), must be considered a well-defined symbol of prestige, social status and power of the deceased (Sirbu, Schuster 2012). This kind of funerary setting dominant by size and magnitude stores a certain message of power and authority, as a political statement (Carstens 2016) emanating not necessarily from one person exclusively but sometimes also witnessing for a whole family or even for a clan kinship (Parker Pearson 2009, 114-115). The tumulus' function as landmark of memory and territorial marker

(Ljustina, Dimitrovic 2009, 93, 96; Sirbu et al. 2021, 133-159) is just another facet of the statement of deceased's supremacy, even in death, over the land seen as a storage of vital resources for his community and his descendants.

The data provided by the funerary contexts of a particular society are essential for the reconstitution of elites (Babić, Palavestra 1999; Schumann 2015; Fernández-Götz, Arnold 2017; Deicke 2020; Dimitrovic, Ljustina 2020, etc.). Beyond a probable self-proclaimed exclusive, bright and privileged ancestry, more difficult to capture archaeologically, the elites are defined by a coherent set of clues, starting from the adoption of the same superregional fashion patterns (whether it be a suit, trimmings or a set of weapons, perceptible in the funerary inventory – Soós 2021, 49 ff., or even funerary architecture – Tsetschladze 1998; Stoyanova 2015; Sirbu et al. 2021, 160 ff.), up to the exclusive exploit of “its economic prerogative of redistribution” (Babić 2002, 77). That is why, in order to gain a plus of understanding of the overall picture obtained from the details provided locally, this privileged class must always be viewed in terms of its connection to a well-defined network of long-distance routes, involving an elaborate system of trade and exchange (Trefný 2017; van der Vaart-Verschof, Schumann 2020). Towards a relevant territorial highlight, these grids have already been modeled based on network analysis type principles borrowed from social anthropology (Deicke 2020) or statistics (Soós 2021, 47-49, figs. 3, 8, 10).

During the Iron Age, throughout Europe there are significant fluctuations in funerary behavior, alternating between large necropolises vs. the tumuli tombs which have been given a character of uniqueness. Followed by well-defined geographical areas, such as the Lower Danube, the mutations that reflect this phenomenon especially in the Late Iron Age are eloquent: from the large necropolises of the 4th-3rd centuries BC, with hundreds of tombs (Zimnicea, Stelnică, Enisală, Murighiol, etc.), starting with the 2nd century BC the so-called “discreet burial rites” enter the scene: the cemeteries of the ordinary population are not known anymore, and the funerary landscape is populated only by the tumuli containing graves belonging to some members of the ruling elite and of warlords, erected near the settlements from which they once exercised their authority (Popești, Cugir, Brad, Poiana, etc.) (Babeș 1988).

If we shall extend our optics upon wider spaces, we will find an even more vibrant image, even if more puzzle-ized. At European level, too, there is a decrease in the phenomenon of burials under tumuli as the Late Iron Age approaches. For Hallstatt period, the number of burials under tumuli is staggering (only in southern Germany can be counted about 20000 Early Iron Age mounds grouped in 1900 cemeteries – Müller-Scheeßel 2018, 15, fig. 1; a high concentration of tumuli necropolises is also noticed for northwestern Hungary



and western Slovakia – Czajlik 2021), but this image will not be maintained in the Late Iron Age. Likewise, after about 150 years of continuous burials, during which time it has accumulated hundreds or even thousands of mounds, the crowded necropolis Kleinklein (Burgstall) in Styria, which is probably to be seen as an expression of a dynastic continuity, gradually ceases to exist towards 600 BC (Egg 2009).

As this type of funerary behavior became obsolete with the passage from the Early to the Late Iron Age in Central Europe, the landscape will now begin to be dominated by individual mounds, usually having impressive dimensions, with diameters between 50-100 m and heights of 6-13 m, destined for the heads of emerging Celtic society, such as Glauberg, Hochdorf, Kleinaspergle, Hochmichele and especially Magdalenenberg (Spindler 2004; Hansen 2017). However, even these mounds may appear as small ones compared to Scythian kurgans, often over 20 m high, such as Čertomlyk and Oguz, which will appear-emerge more and more pregnant a little bit later, during the 5th-4th centuries BC north of the Black Sea (Alekseev et al. 1991).

In between these manifestations of the prestige of early Keltenfürsten in the West and Scythian masters in the East, in some parts of the east and south-east of the continent there is a preference for necropolises made up of much smaller mounds. This is also the case of the Ferigile group, which defines the final stage of the Early Iron Age south of the Carpathians. Here the barrows that only exceptionally exceed 10-12 m in diameter (Măndescu 2016, 167, fig. 5) crowd together in necropolises, the largest of which is the eponymous one, with 149 mounds (Vulpe 1967). The funerary rite practiced is the cremation only, the incineration being performed elsewhere and not on the spot of the burial. The idea of a large, imposing mound, which stored the effort of the whole community required for its building, was shattered into tens and hundreds of small replicas, grouped together, in which certain clusters of families or clans can sometimes be recognized (Vulpe 2020, 131). The mound was no longer reserved for chieftains, but became accessible to the entire community. This democratization of the mound, as a funerary expression, is not only a peculiarity on the Lower Danube (see also other such necropolises, contemporary with the Ferigile group, in Bârsești and Telița), but it is a phenomenon that manifests itself in Early Iron Age over large areas, from one end of the Balkan Peninsula to the other, from its western extremity (Dular 2003; Tecco Hvala 2012) to eastern Thrace (Yildirim 2016, 361, fig. 5).

But this shift in the collective mindset, from “a mound for the chieftain (and we don’t care about the rest of the people)” to “a mound for everyone” comes with the price of losing the foregoing greatness, since the necropolises in small

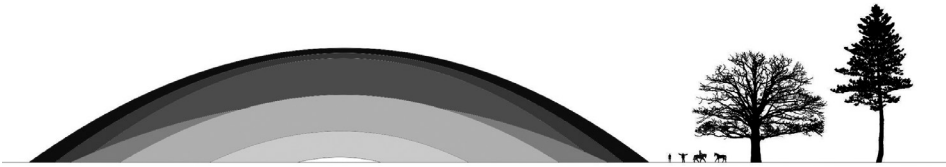


Fig. 1. Comparison between some of the largest tumuli in the Scythian and Celtic worlds and the largest mound in the Ferigile group. From black (Chertomlyk – 120 m diameter, 22 m height) to white (Tigveni, barrow 17 – 16 m diameter, 1 m height), through different shades of gray in gradients (Oguz – 110 m diameter, 21 m height; Solocha – 100 m diameter, 20 m height; Magdalenenberg – 104 m diameter, 12 m height; Hochmichele – 85 m diameter, 13 m height; Glauberg – 50 m diameter, 6 m height).

mounds leave the impression not only of standardization, but also of modesty and lack of vanity and ostentation. It is more than relevant in this respect to compare the largest mound in the Ferigile group (barrow 17 from Tigveni – “Babe”, 16 m in diameter, 1 m high) with the largest mound in the Celtic world (Magdalenenberg, 104 m in diameter, 12 m high). And this in order to compare two relatively contemporaneous monuments, both setting up around 600 BC; going further, if we compare Ferigile group’s barrows with the kurgans of the North-Pontic Scythian world, raised a little later, the result would be even more unbalanced (Fig. 1).

Therefore, may elites or peaks of social hierarchies still be identified in this seemingly amorphous mass of graves? We have no reason to doubt that in Ferigile group the status of the deceased in the community and also crumbs of social hierarchy could be captured in elements of funerary ritual, such as funerary arrangement and grave goods (Vulpe 2020, 131). Of course, the size of the grave is a variable that cannot be left out in the process of detecting social hierarchies (Yu et al. 2019), especially since the mound itself must be seen as an expression of the collective effort of the family, or maybe of the whole community, and which reflects the status and prestige of the deceased (Eggert 1988; Soós 2018). The concordance between the richness of the funerary inventory, the precious objects or desirable goods deposited in the tomb and the large dimensions of the mound / monumental construction has often been emphasized (Ljustina, Dimitrovic 2010, 128-131; Dimitrovic, Ljustina 2020, 105-106).

In order to identify the elites, the high hierarchical standings of the communities belonging to Ferigile group, the graves are the only ones available to



us, as long as the group's settlements with their habitat structures continue to remain unidentified. These communities, whose economy will have been based on livestock farming rather than cultivating the land, so with a higher degree of mobility, have left behind few and inconclusive traces of habitation (Măndescu 2021b, 62). The poor evidence of settlements for this period south of the Carpathians is not a singular situation. This archaeological reality has also been reported in other areas of the Balkans, such as today Central Serbia, for example (Ljustina, Dimitrovic 2009, 94-95). Therefore, in the following pages, investigating the data provided exclusively by the funerary discoveries, I will try to capture the outline of a "business card" of the elites of Ferigile group, a seemingly "egalitarian" society judging from the perspective of its necropolises.

The selection of the graves

I sought to identify and select for this purpose graves that fit as well as possible the idea of "Prunkgrab" (within the limits allowed by the Ferigile group's elements of funerary ritual), with a rich and representative inventory, but also with above-average size of funerary construction. Given the rather long evolution of the group, which spans more than two centuries along the successive horizons Ferigile-South (mainly the middle and the second half of the 7th century BC), Ferigile-North (the 6th century BC) and Ferigile III (at least the first half of the 5th century BC) (Vulpe 1977), it was necessary that the condition of representativeness for the whole duration of the group be respected, so that the chronological positions of the selected graves to form an ensemble that covers the entire group's evolution in time. Thus, four graves were chosen from four different necropolises (Fig. 2), none of the three stages of the Ferigile group's evolution being ignored: Ferigile barrow 69 (Ferigile-South), Valea Stânii barrow 4 (transition from Ferigile-South to Ferigile-North), Ceparî barrow 5 (Ferigile-North) and Tigveni barrow 15 (Ferigile III).

The main grave in barrow 69 is considered to be as one of the oldest in the whole cemetery from Ferigile. From the seriation of the sealed contexts from Ferigile it follows that barrow 69 is one of the defining features for the beginnings of the necropolis. The funerary assemblage of the main grave was considered an illustrative one for combinatory type 2 – Ferigile-South horizon (Vulpe 1977, 83-84, 87-88, figs. 4, 8/1-3, a-k; Vulpe 1990, 124), and the richly decorated pottery from the grave is also illustrative for "ceramic group A" (Teleaga, Sârbu 2016, 23, 27, appendix 2). From the point of view of absolute chronology, the most expressive grave goods artifacts (the fibula with the octagonal bow section and the catch plate reconstituted in the form of a Beotian shield,

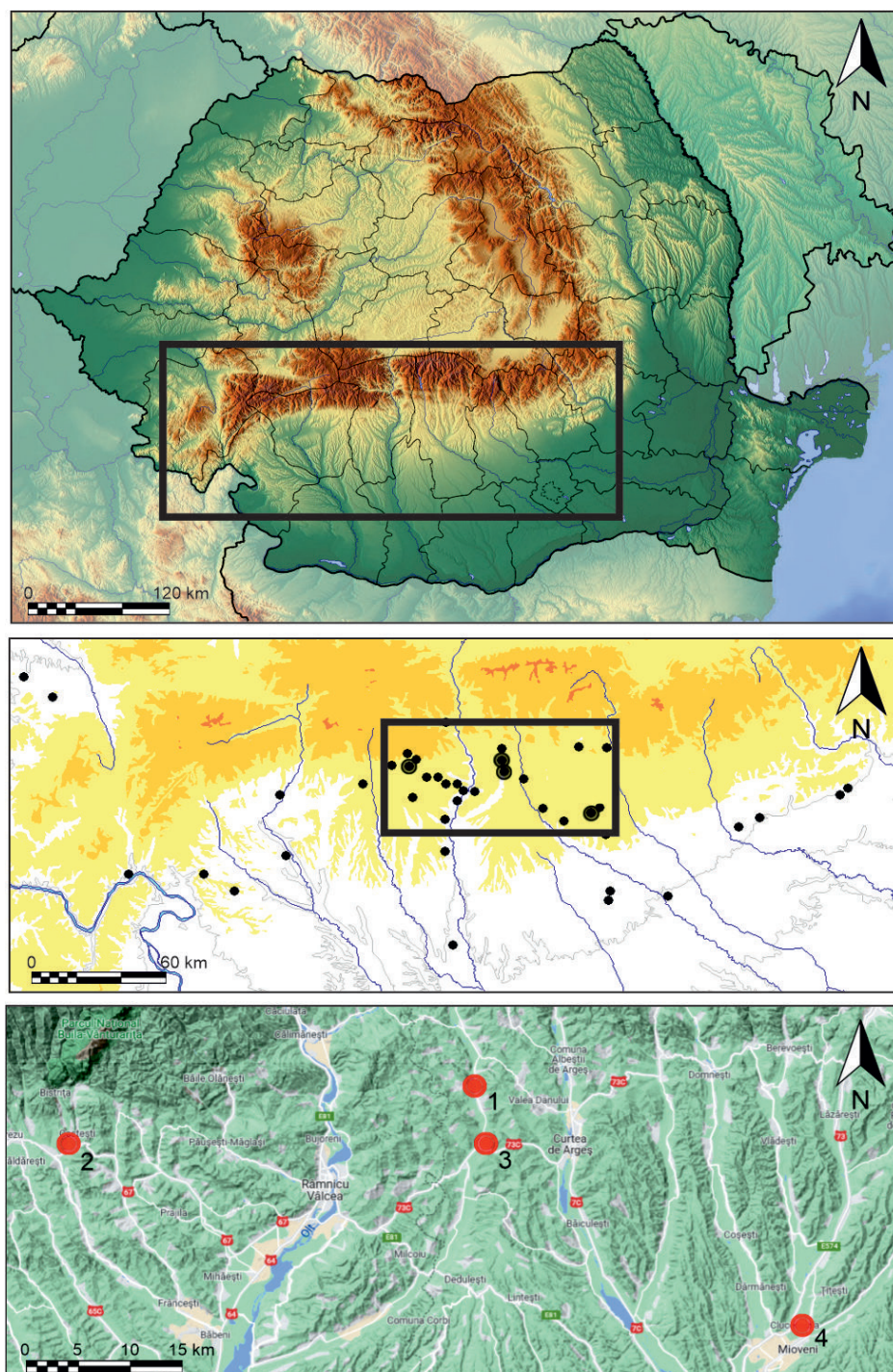


Fig. 2. Map showing the distribution area of Ferigile group with the emphasis of the four necropolises: 1 Cepari, 2 Ferigile, 3 Tigveni, 4 Valea Stânii.



the horse bit and the pottery with strong Basarabi fashion affinities) urge for a dating in the second half of the 7th century BC at the latest (Lang 1980, 232; Kull, Stîngă 1997, 560, note 34; Metzner-Nebelsick 2002, 293; Hellmuth 2010, 207-207, fig. 231), although radiocarbon dating does not seem to confirm, it indicating a later date (Măndescu 2020a, 181-182, fig. 6). In order to frame the chronology of tumulus 4 from Valea Stânii, we are at hand the typology of the grave goods corresponding to the Ferigile-North phase but mainly the diversity of the ceramic shapes and the rich ornamentation on pottery which indicate rather to a stage corresponding to the transition from the Ferigile-South phase to Ferigile-North. There are also two absolute radiocarbon data obtained from samples from this tomb. Even though they are quite different, both falling in the “Hallstattian plateau”, the most likely chronology should be searched in the time span of two centuries suggested by their overlap, between the mid-8th century BC and the mid-6th century BC (Măndescu 2021a, 78). Based on the association of the representative inventory artifacts followed by reporting of these associations to the evolutionary scheme of the Ferigile group (Vulpe 1977), it was concluded that barrow 5 from Cepari, containing a set of weapons of Scythian tradition, is to be placed at the end of the Ferigile-North phase (end of the 6th century BC), and the main grave in barrow 15 at Tigveni, containing a local hand-modelled imitation of a Greek lekane, is later (hence the latest of the sealed contexts discussed here), dating from the beginning of the Ferigile III phase (first half of the 5th century BC) (Popescu, Vulpe 1982, 112).

In conclusion, the chronology of the four selected graves covers the entire period of evolution of the Ferigile group, illustrating each of the three stages of the group's internal chronology: barrow 69 from Ferigile is representative for the first phase, Ferigile-South, barrow 4 from Valea Stânii illustrates the transition from the first to the second phase (Ferigile-South to Ferigile-North), barrow 5 from Cepari, with its strong Scythian influence in terms of weaponry, is typical for the Ferigile-North horizon, and barrow 15 from Tigveni, containing indigenous hand-modelled pottery imitated after wheel-thrown Greek prototypes, can be placed with certainty in the last horizon of the group, namely in Frigile III.

The cemeteries' landscape and proportions

All four necropolises are located in the typical hilly landscape for the Ferigile group (Fig. 2), on a maximum 73 km distance from each other (between Ferigile and Valea Stânii, the extreme spots on the west-northwest–east-south-east direction), at altitudes varying within 120 m: Cepari – 445 m, Ferigile –

420 m, Tigveni – 406 m and Valea Stânii – 325 m. Also, all these necropolises are located in direct connection with watercourses, on the low (but flood safe) river terraces, which may represent the indication of a predetermined funerary behavior of these communities, decisive in choosing the places for “the cities of the dead” (Măndescu 2016, 156-157, 166, Fig. 4). The barrows of the necropolis from Ferigile line up on the right (western) terrace of the Costești brook, close to the confluence with Bistrița, the point where the two courses join their waters being 1 km away south of the necropolis. The area of the necropolis from Valea Stânii is located on the right (northern) terrace of the Argeșel River, close to the place where it flows into the Târgului River, the confluence point being about 3.5 km away from the necropolis, to the southwest. The necropolises of Cepari and Tigveni are close to each other, 5.3 km away on a north-south direction, both located on the left (eastern) terrace of Topolog, on the middle sector of this river. The distance between the necropolis and the current riverbeds varies between less than 100 m (Cepari) and about 400 m (Tigveni). The watercourses were always easily discernible from the necropolises’ area, in direct visual contact with the places of cemeteries (Măndescu 2020c, 303, fig. 2/2).

The clear relationship between rivers and the choice of consecrated burial sites was also observed for other areas (West Morava region – Ljustina, Dimitrovic 2009, 94, 97; South Pannonia – Soós 2021, 45, 55-56, fig. 8) or times (Bronze Age in Tisza Basin – Duffy 2020). In all these cases, watercourses were considered rather from an economic and social perspective, from their posture of waterways and communication routes, facilitating the movement and arrivals of desirable goods usually from considerable distances. Regarding the group Ferigile, I believe that rivers should be understood here primarily from a spiritual, ritual perspective – the compulsory path to the realm of death, as an essential element of the triad that makes up the mythical landscape, together with the forest and the stones (Măndescu 2020c, 303-304).

The necropolis from Ferigile consisted of 149 barrows containing almost 200 graves. It was fully researched by Alexandru Vulpe during six years excavations program (1956-1958 and 1960-1962) (Vulpe 1967). The cemetery from Tigveni, identified by the micro toponym “Babe”, to be differentiated from the one in the spot “Pietroasa” (group of five mounds 1.5 km away to north) was originally composed, according to estimates, of about 40 mounds, many destroyed or overlapped by modern housing and thus inaccessible to archaeological research. From this necropolis only 17 mounds were explored by Alexandru Vulpe in collaboration with Eugenia Popescu, during eight campaigns, between 1965-1970, then in 1977 and 1980 (Vulpe, Popescu 1972; Pope-



scu, Vulpe 1982). At Cepari, where the necropolis was estimated at about 18 mounds, 11 mounds have been identified with certainty. Of these, only nine were excavated by Eugenia Popescu and Alexandru Vulpe between 1974-1977 (Popescu, Vulpe 1982). The research of the necropolis from Valea Stânii started under my leadership in 2014 and is still ongoing (Măndescu 2016; Măndescu 2020b). Of the estimated 40 barrows (mark today by agglomerations of scattered stones on the current soil surface), have been investigated 24 by 2021.

The place occupied in the necropolis' area

If we look for the exceptional tombs in the central area of the necropolises of Ferigile group, the result will be more than likely negative. Each of the four tombs discussed here is located not in the middle area of the necropolis, but somehow towards its edge, in an uncrowded, "airy" place (Fig. 3). This relative isolation from the rest of the cemetery should perhaps be understood as a permanent concern to counteract a possible threat of impurity. This also raises the issue of grave markings, which certainly originally existed (made in wood or timber maybe) and remained standing for at least the entire operation of the necropolis, and were thus assumed and recognized by the entire community.

As I have noticed on another occasion (Măndescu 2020a, 180, fig. 4), the barrow 69 from Ferigile occupies a place that remains free from all-around, isolated from the rest of the graves until the end of burials in that cemetery. They are no less than 10 m free in all directions around the barrow 69 from Ferigile, a reserved space, given that the plan of the cemetery often shows situations of agglomeration and overlaps between mounds (Vulpe 1967, extra plate). This mound is not part of a cluster of graves and does not intersect with other mounds.

The barrow 4 from Valea Stânii is located at the northeastern margin of the necropolis. Although it seems to be part of a cluster of tombs, it remains somehow delimited by them, except for the southwestern part, where it is partially overlapped by a more recent mound (Măndescu et al. 2019, 304, fig. 2). But further northeast of mound 4 the ground remains empty. Indeed, barrow 4 seems to be part of the mounds that mark the extremities of this necropolis, its maximum extension in the field.

The same marginal situation in the field was documented at Cepari, where the barrow 5 is not centrally placed on the land intended for burials. This barrow 5 is located in the eastern half of the mound group, but due to the limited terrain available for excavations, things are not very clear. In this burial place the land was occupied almost entirely, giving even the impression of "overfilling" (Popescu, Vulpe 1982, 79, fig. 2). There is no free space, and the

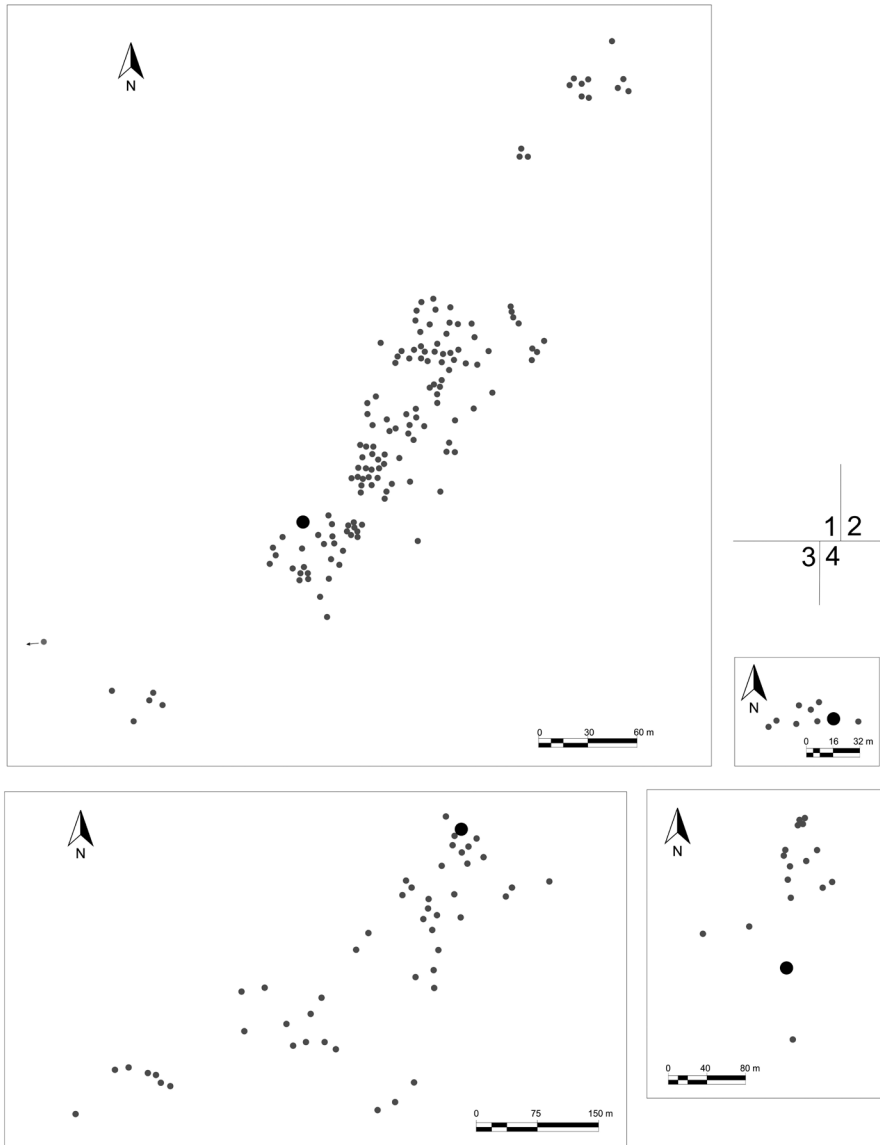


Fig. 3. Location of the selected barrows in the necropolises: 1 Ferigile barrow 69; 2 Cepari barrow 5; 3 Valea Stâinii barrow 4; 4 Tigveni barrow 15.

mounds seem slightly crowded. The possibility of extending the necropolis to the west and southwest was nil, any extension being blocked by Topolog river-bed. It should be noted that barrow 1 is the latest in the Cepari group of graves, and when the burial took place, around 500 BC, for the setting of the mound



was occupied the only available place, namely that between the barrows 4 and 9 (structures erected at least a generation earlier – Popescu, Vulpe 1982, 112).

Even in Tigveni, where an important part of the necropolis area has been severely affected by recent constructions and, most likely, the proportion in which it was researched (accessible barrows only) is far from exhaustive, the barrow 15 looks like an isolated one (Popescu, Vulpe 1982, 92, fig. 13). It is not part of a cluster of mounds, but is located on land that was vacant at the time of burial and remained completely free from its surroundings also after the barrow was raised. The buffer zone is really generous in this case: the distance to the nearest mound (barrow 14, to the northwest) is almost 50 m. Note that this mound from the northwest (barrow 14) is later than barrow 15 (Popescu, Vulpe 1982, 112), so that the distance required to keep untouched the free zone around barrow 15 was respected by the Ferigile group's community from Tigveni. In their turn, the members of the family or clan who accomplished the burial of the couple in barrow 15 sometime in the first half of the 5th century BC, they chose a free and isolated place relative to the barrows already existing in the necropolis: among the older mounds, the closest to barrow 15 is barrow 17, about 60 m away to the south.

For the period of time towards the end of the Early Iron Age, the separation of "aristocratic" graves from the rest of the necropolis, their isolation from ordinary tombs, and their privileged placement on the necropolis' ground was also emphasized in the case of the Chotin necropolis (Kozubová 2008, 77). Moreover, even if the data related to the conditions of the discovery are precarious, it seems that the same situation is illustrated by the graves from Beremend, in southern Pannonia, at a chronological horizon close to the one discussed here, around 500 BC (Jerem 1973, 72, Abb. 2). At a slightly earlier chronological horizon, the chieftains' burials in the Kleinklein sector occupied a well-differentiated area on the rest of the huge graveyard on the foot of Burgstallkogel hill, a few hundred meters away to the east (Egg 2019). But this tendency to separate elites in a reserved burial area seems to be noticeable since the Bronze Age at European scale, as shown by the Middle and late Helladic East Cemetery in Asine (Voutsaki et al. 2012).

The size of the funerary structure

Contrary to what is commonly, honestly and reasonably understood by the concept of "barrow" or much more imposing "tumulus", the image left today by these Ferigile type funerary features is distressing, demonstrating how inappropriate the used archaeological terminology might be in relation to the reality of

terrain. Dismantled, scattered and leveled most often by modern urban interventions or agricultural works, the barrows of the Ferigile group, most likely modest in size from the very beginning, are today almost imperceptible in the landscape. A photo published in the monograph of the eponymous necropolis (Vulpe 1967, 16, fig. 4/1) is notable. That picture showed a fence at the edge of a road overlapping a small stony bulge in the ground, which was, in fact, the flattened mantle of a mound (barrow 56 from Ferigile). Where agriculture was intensively practiced, the barrows are no longer visible at all, the land once occupied by the cemetery being completely flat, as in Valea Stâinii case (Măndescu 2020b, 291, fig. 1). The barrows seem to have been better preserved at Tigveni, although modern agricultural works did not bypass the necropolis area. In the case of barrow 15, better preserved and unaffected by plowing, further observations could be made: a ring of large boulders surrounded the central area of the tomb, after that covered by the mantle consisting of five rows of river stones; the original height of the barrow was estimated at just over 1 m (Popescu, Vulpe 1982, 92).

This was a happy situation, because in general the heights of the mounds can no longer be reconstructed. At the time of the research, in 1975, barrow 5 from Cepari was not higher than 0.3 m, its mantle still keeping two or three layers of stones (Popescu, Vulpe 1982, 88). The mantle of barrow 69 from Ferigile was made of stones arranged in two layers, in this necropolis the mound usually being covered by a single layer of stones, rarely by two and sometimes by three layers (Vulpe 1967, 15, 144). Also, two or three layers of stones were in the mantle of the barrow 4 from Valea Stâinii (Măndescu et al. 2019, 304). In the attempt to reconstruct the heights of the barrows, the layer of earth that initially covered the river stones in the mantle must also be considered. Today this layer enveloping the barrow is no longer perceptible, because it drained with the flattening of the mounds and mixed with the current topsoil, but it is not excluded that in some cases it was 0.5 m thick (Vulpe 1967, 17-19). Therefore, the height of the mounds, completely lost today, is a variable that can no longer be useful as an indication of the status and hierarchical position of the deceased. However, we still have at hand the other variable that we can use in this type of approach, namely the diameter of the barrow, usually reliably caught even if sometimes no more than a “footprint” of the mound.

At the level of Ferigile group in its entirety the diameters of the barrows vary greatly. The extreme values are given by barrow 22 from Ferigile (0.95 m), respectively by barrow 17 from Tigveni-“Babe” (16 m). Between these two extremes are crowded almost 180 barrows documented and recorded with clearly definite dimensions, from nine cemeteries. An average value of the diameters of the barrows of the Ferigile group is only 5.17 m (Măndescu

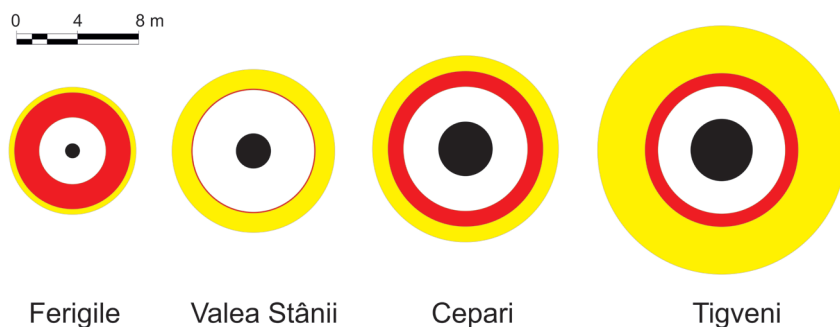


Fig. 4. Variability of barrow diameters in the discussed Ferigile type necropolises: yellow – maximum diameter; black – minimum diameter; white – the average value of the diameters; red – the diameter of the barrow discussed in the paper.

2016, 167, fig. 5/3). Most likely, the collective effort required to raise them was generally minor, comparable to that documented for the ordinary barrows in Bârsești cemetery, the eastern neighbors of the Ferigile group: the work of a family at the end of a few working days (Teleaga 2020, 115- 116).

The diameters of the mounds covering the graves selected for discussion here, measuring between 7.5 m and 10.65 m, are well above the group's average, but, as will be seen below, they are not the largest in the respective necropolises (Fig. 4). The barrow 69 from Ferigile had a diameter of 7.5 m, in the conditions in which the diameters of the mounds here evolved between 0.95 m (barrow 22) and 8.2 m (barrow 139) (the average diameter is 4.3 m). The barrow 4 from Valea Stânii had a diameter of 8 m, very close to the average of the necropolis, which is 7.85 m. The diameters of the 24 barrows archaeologically explored so far at Valea Stânii vary between 2.25 m (barrow 23) and 10.5 m (barrow 20). The barrows from Cepari show, in general, a similar evolution of diameters with Valea Stânii necropolis, between 3.5 m (barrow 8) and 12 m (barrow 9), with an average diameter of 8 m. In this series, the diameter of the barrow 5 from Cepari was 10 m. Finally, the diameter of the barrow 15 from Tigveni measured 10.75 x 9 m. The average diameter in the necropolis from Tigveni is 8.2 m, this necropolis having mounds slightly larger than the other cemeteries of the group, with diameters between 4 m (barrow 4) and 16 m (barrow 17). The latter diameter is also the maximum value recorded at the whole group's scale. Therefore, the mounds of the four tombs discussed here did not necessarily have the largest diameters in relation to the necropolises they belonged to, but they were, without a doubt, among the most imposing.

The burial rite and the bone remains

All the selected graves are of cremation, as are without exception all the graves of the Ferigile group. To each of these graves the funeral pyre (which was the key place of the funeral ceremony) remained unknown. But despite this uniformity of the rite, the elements of the funerary ritual that involve the burnt bones fluctuate substantially. First of all, regarding the quantity of calcined bones collected from the pyre (no selection trend was observed) and brought to the grave to be ultimately deposited in it: there are both graves with a small (barrow 69 from Ferigile), even almost negligible (barrow 5 from Cepari) quantity of bones, but also graves with an unusually large quantity for a Ferigile type necropolis, in barrow 15 from Tigveni and in barrow 4 from Valea Stânii – in both of these cases we are dealing with double burials (Popescu, Vulpe 1982, 92, 114; M. Constantinescu, in Măndescu et al. 2019, 304-305). Then, the manner the calcined bones were deposited in the ultimate resting place in the grave: either placed directly on the ancient ground (Cepari and Valea Stânii), or deposited in an urn laid on the ancient ground and then covered by the mantle of stones (Ferigile, Tigveni). Placing the bones (or the urn containing them) in a pit is not at all attested in the case of the graves discussed here. Interesting is a detail observed in the case of calcined bones from barrow 4 from Valea Stânii implying additional mechanical fragmentation (crushing) of calcined bones taken from the pyre, before being laid in the grave (M. Constantinescu, in Măndescu et al. 2017, 23-25, table 1).

The owners of the graves and the grave goods

The barrow 69 from Ferigile is one of the most spectacular and most important of the necropolis. The main grave (tomb no. 1, our point of interest here), for which the barrow was raised, had as grave goods not only a complete weapon set (two spearheads, a double edged ax, a combat knife, four arrowheads) and a horse bit, but also a whetstone, which is also a marker for the warrior graves, whose origin must be sought, according to some opinions, either in the Basarabi local cultural background, or considered as an eastern influence, of Scythian origin (Metzner-Nebelsick 2002, 399; Burghardt 2012, 91-93, pl. 31/B). The inventory of the grave was completed by a few small artifacts in iron and bronze (two fragmentary fibulae, a knife, two rings), a small bone cylinder fragment of what appears to be the rest of a whip (Fig. 5/3) – a unique symbol of authority attested so far in Ferigile cultural milieu (Măndescu 2020a, 175-177, fig. 1) –, and three hand-shaped bowls typical for local pottery, one of these serving as urn for some of the calcined bones of the deceased (Vulpe 1967, 144-145, pl.

2/13, 20; 20/7-8; 21/3; 23/2; 26/14; 27/9; 34; Vulpe 1977, 84, fig. 8/1-3, a-k). Very intriguing, this grave was attributed by the anthropological study applied on the preserved calcined bones (53 fragments) to an *infans I* to *infans II* individual (Nicolaescu-Plopșor, Wolski 1975, 38), which from the archaeologist's point of view or expectations does not seem entirely implausible (Vulpe 1972, 271).

The grave under barrow 4 from Valea Stâinii contained a double burial. The anthropological determinations carried out on a rather large quantity of calcined bones deposited in the grave (over 1 kg in total – an unusually large quantity not only for the general features of the necropolis from Valea Stâinii, but also for any of the Ferigile necropolises) led to the identification of an adult woman and a subadult individual (M. Constantinescu, in Măndescu et al. 2019, 304-305, fig. 3). The barrow did not contain another grave, so it's self-evident that it was raised for the double burial and at the same time as it occurred, and the funerary inventory belonged to this double burial. The funerary inventory considered as personal belongings of the two deceased individuals is quite rich, but not excessive: adornments (pin, bracelet, shell pendants, a large number of beads in glass, iron but especially kaolin – Măndescu et al. 2017), weapons (arrowheads, axe, combat knife, spearhead), utensils (small knives, ceramic andiron) and rank items, which show the high status in society at least of the young individual who wore them: 16 imitations of red deer canines made in deer antler (Măndescu et al. 2019). But the abundance of pottery under the mantle was quite extraordinary, in the great mass of sherds being identified parts from more than 46 ceramic vessels: six bowls, nine dishes, nine jugs, 13 cups, one big bellied pot, at least eight different jars (Fig. 5/4). These illustrate one of the greatest funeral feasts encountered in the necropolises of the Ferigile group, exceeding even the needs of an average community such as the one from Valea Stâinii (Măndescu 2021a). The relationship between the large amount of pottery and the graves belonging to rulers or chieftains usually containing several burials, has also been highlighted in other contexts, such as Kröllkogel tumulus at Kleinklein, in the Eastern Hallstatt culture (Egg 2019, 343, fig. 8).

The barrow 5 from Cepari covered a single grave in which only a few calcined bones fragments of the deceased were laid (usually common in the case of the graves of Ferigile group, in general). The anthropological study (remained unpublished in detail, but taken over in its essential information by the archaeologists – Popescu, Vulpe 1982, 88, 113-114) revealed that the bone remains belonged to an adult individual. The quantity of ceramic inventory in this mound is appreciable. More or less complete parts of at least 24 vessels were found (maybe about 30 vessels in all): two big bellied pots, five dishes with inverted rim, five bowls (of which four with everted rim and decorated



Fig. 5. Expressions of elite status in the funerary ritual of the group Ferigile: 1 Cepari barrow 5 – complete set of panoply and horse harness parts (reconstitution proposal by Radu Oltean); 2 Tigveni barrow 15 – exquisite horse harness parts, detail of the horse bit's cheek piece in bronze; 3 Ferigile barrow 69 – part of the bone trimming of a whip; 4 Valea Stânii barrow 4 – schematic display of the ceramic set (approximate proportions, not to scale).



with grooves), five mugs, two cups, five jar pots, many sherds from other vessels. To these is added a small oval, shallow shale rock, container made of that is probably not intended for food storage or consumption, but for mixing color pigments for the preparation of make-up and skin coloring / tattoo – a unique artifact within the group and which unfortunately has not been preserved, in order to be able to be subjected for future analyzes (Popescu, Vulpe 1982, 107-108, footnote 47, fig. 11/j). But what is quite remarkable is the complete panoply deposited in the tomb (sword akinakes, spearhead, two-edged axe, combat knife – all made of iron), along with a complete set of harness for the horse's head (a complete bridle composed by an iron horse bit, two conical buttons in bronze, another discoidal button, one bronze triangular applique and four iron links). Finally, an adornment (iron bracelet) and a utensil (iron knife) completed the funerary inventory of this tomb. This is a tomb that defines *par excellence* the warrior identity of the deceased (Fig. 5/1), in all its components, including the items of bodily ornamentation (Treherne 1995, 108-109).

The main grave under the barrow 15 from Tigveni was placed in the center of the large stone ring designed at the base of the mantle. As in the case of barrow 4 from Valea Stânii, it is a double burial. Cremated bones from a mature man, a mature woman, and also from a horse were deposited in four neighboring vessels (Popescu, Vulpe 1982, 92, 113). Some of the animal's cremated bones were scattered nearby. The funerary inventory was varied but not extremely rich, containing weapons (a sword and the tip of a combat knife) and an item of military equipment (bronze applique), horse harness pieces (horse bit with iron mouthpiece and bronze cheek bar decorated in ornithomorphic style, bronze frontlet, iron buckle), some adornments (colored glass beads) and utensils (three knives). Some of these artifacts are unique in Ferigile milieu, such as the sword (in this grave found stuck in the ancient ground, a depositional custom attested also in other necropolises of the group, for example at Curtea de Argeș – Măndescu 2004, 149, fig. 6/2) and the composite horse bit with strong analogies in the North-Pontic Scythian cultural milieu (Fig. 5/2). This horse bit's exquisite bronze cheek piece (Popescu, Vulpe 1982, 110, fig. 18/f) represents one of the earliest examples of ornithomorphic figurative motifs in Thracian art north of the Danube (Teleaga 2015, 23, 42). The pottery is not as plentiful as we would have expected given that it is a double tomb. From this tomb come only 11 vessels, including the four vessels used as urns: two everted rim bowls, an inverted rim dish, four cups, two jars, an imitation of Greek lekane and a big bellied pot.

The barrows discussed here do not present unitary features regarding the secondary burials performed in their mantle. Two of the four mounds (barrow

5 from Cepari and barrow 4 from Valea Stânii) did not contain other burials than the ones for which they were set up. The other two barrows contained secondary graves (burials subsequent to the initial grave of the barrow, belonging to the same community), but in unequal quantities: one or two secondary graves in barrow 69 from Ferigile and four or even five secondary graves in barrow 15 from Tigveni. Therefore, if the dead buried in the selected mounds could be viewed in terms of their status as “illustrious ancestors” for their families or clans, then this perspective would not be functional: non-existent in the case of the barrows at Cepari and Valea Stânii, it could only be to a small extent proven at Ferigile and truly demonstrable only in the case of barrow 15 from Tigveni, with its four or even five secondary burials (a high standard reported even at the level of the whole Ferigile group’s necropolises).

Some conclusions that can be drawn at the end of this discussion regarding the possibilities of identifying the elites of the late period of the Early Iron Age south of the Carpathians through funerary expressiveness are especially related to the quantitative, qualitative and symbolic aspects of the funerary inventory. Most likely, these communities at the end of prehistory did not lack elites, despite the apparent uniformity of their necropolises. But these elites are elusive, relatively difficult to capture archaeologically and differentiate from other members of the community who enjoyed above-average status. The differences between the graves selected here and those belonging to individuals in the upper half of society (expressed by the average graves and the rich ones from the perspective of the grave goods) are not so consistent. The differentiation is given rather by the artifacts having symbolic valences, like the ones part of the funerary inventory in the tombs approached here. The way in which these peaks of society choose to express their status in the afterlife, through funerary behavior (the only field we can explore archaeologically in the absence of settlements), relates to the nature and selection of the funerary inventory (Fig. 5): complete sets of weapons (Cepari, Ferigile), exquisite metallic and ceramic items (Tigveni), rank and prestige pieces such as the whip (Ferigile) or imitations of red deer canines (Valea Stânii) and last but not least the opulence of the pottery set used at the mourner’s banquet, part of the funeral ceremony (Valea Stânii). Moreover, the presence of horse bits and other horse harness parts (at Tigveni is attested even the physical presence of the horse in the grave by the animal’s cremated bones) in three of the four cases analyzed (except for barrow 4 from Valea Stânii) is a proof that we have to deal with individuals belonging to the mounted warriors’ category. Going further, it could be said that this peculiarity significantly narrows the range of elite’s extraction and nature, since the proportion of



riders in all Ferigile group's warriors can be set to somewhere around 1:3 (Vulpe, Zahariade 1987, 59; Vulpe 2020, 261; Măndescu 2020a, 174).

Along with these, a certain role, although not defining, can be played by the appearance and proportions of the tumulus. Even if the barrows analyzed were not the largest of the necropolises they belonged to (we are talking primarily about their diameter, as the height of the mantle is almost impossible to reconstruct today), these funerary structures were certainly among the most imposing in those necropolises. The place reserved for the elites in the whole cemetery never seems to have been in the graveyard's central zone, surrounded by the multitude of mounds, but somehow eccentric, in a freer, uncrowded area, delimited by the rest of the mounds by a more or less generous "isolating" territory. This feature observed in all four situations, if not only the fruit of chance, can express a consciousness and an assumption of the higher status of the deceased, but also a certain intention of separation, avoidance of mingling with the others (probably seen as a potential threat of impurity contamination), delimitation between elites and the rest of the community also in death as it was in life. Elite membership does not depend on age or gender. Adults, not only men but also women (Valea Stâinii and Tigveni) had elaborate funerals. But such exquisite burials were not denied nor to small children (Ferigile) or young people who were still immature (Valea Stâinii). We must not forget that in two of the four cases analyzed here the burials are double (Valea Stâinii and Tigveni, in the latter case the horse is added to the deceased couple, a completely unusual aspect), which may signal another peculiarity of the funerary expression of the elites of the Ferigile group.

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Reconstruind elitele grupului hallstattian târziu Ferigile

Rezumat

Articolul încearcă să răspundă la întrebarea dacă au existat și cum s-au exprimat elitele în comunitățile grupului arheologic Ferigile, să identifice indiciile care ar putea facilita decelarea și individualizarea acestora. Grupul Ferigile a evoluat la sud de Carpați în perioada târzie a primei epoci a fierului (sec. 7-5 a.Chr.). Aceste comunități, a căror economie se va fi întemeiat pe creșterea animalelor mai degrabă decât cultivarea pământului, așadar cu un grad sporit de mobilitate, nu au lăsat așezări stabile, fortificații sau alte centre de habitat care să reflecte organizarea internă a societății și existența unor relații ierarhice. Elementele care ne stau la îndemână în această problemă sunt exclusiv cele din domeniul funerar. Necropolele grupului sunt alcătuite din morminte de incinerare sub mici movile din pietre și pământ. Acestea se remarcă printr-o aparentă uniformitate, printr-o democratizare a tumulului ca simbol funerar al statusului. Au fost selectate patru morminte deosebite din patru necropole (Ferigile tumulul 69, Valea Stânii tumulul 4, Cepari tumulul 5 și Tigveni tumulul 15), care se succed acoperind întreaga durată de existență a grupului și au fost analizate sub aspectele ce țin de ritualul funerar (amenajarea funerară, poziția ocupată în cadrul necropolei, inventarul funerar etc.). Concluziile la care s-a ajuns arată că aceste comunități au avut elitele lor, care au ales să-și exprime stausul special în viața de apoi, însă diferențele față de jumătatea superioară a societății (exprimată de mormintele medii și de cele bogate din perspectiva inventarului funerar) nu sunt atât de consistente. Diferențierea este dată mai degrabă de piesele de inventar funerar cu valențe simbolice.

Cuvinte cheie: grupul Ferigile, perioada târzie a primei epoci a fierului, movile funerare, inventar funerar, elite

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