

# Social structures in Late Iron Age Transylvania. Archaeological evidence of social competition and hierarchy

**Aurel Rustoiu, Iosif Vasile Ferencz**

## **Abstract**

The scope of this article is to discuss the main components of the social structures which characterized the “Celtic” and the “Dacian” cultural and chronological horizons, and to identify, on the basis of the available archaeological evidence, the means and practices through which social hierarchy and competition was expressed within the communities of each horizon. The rural society specific to the “Celtic” horizon was largely heterarchic, whereas the “Dacian” horizon was characterized by a hierarchic social organization. The differences between these two horizons can be observed in the funerary practices, the organization of the landscape, and the range of visual symbols used in the expression of social status and power by the local elites.

**Keywords:** Transylvania, Late Iron Age, Celts, Dacians, rits and rituals, settlements, cultural identities, social status.

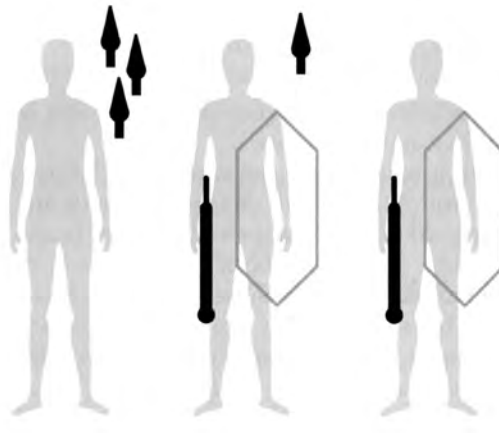
## **Introduction**

In Transylvania, the Late Iron Age was characterized by the succession of two distinct cultural and chronological horizons. The first, known as the “Celtic” horizon, encompasses the period between ca. 350 and 190/175 BC, while the “Dacian” horizon encompasses the period between ca. 190/175 BC and AD 106, ending with the establishment of the Roman province of Dacia. Each of these two cultural and chronological horizons was defined by distinct social structures and their material expression can be observed in a variety of ritual and profane practices of the respective communities.

Therefore, the scope of this article is to discuss the main components of the social structures which characterized the two mentioned horizons and to identify, on the basis of the available archaeological evidence, the means and practices through which social hierarchy and competition was expressed within the communities of each horizon.

## ***Funeraria***

The funerary practices offered a highly visible and influential arena for social competition. These ceremonies were social events in which the heirs sought to reiterate the social status of their family or social group by “informing” the wider community about the social position which they were gaining due to their rela-

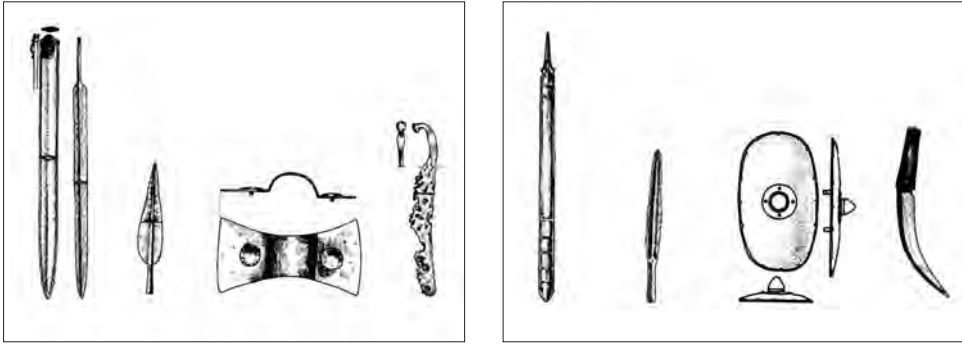


**Fig. 1.** Different types of panoplies (“combat classes”) in graves from Central Europe (after Ramsel 2020).

tion with the deceased. As a consequence, the manner in which funerary inventories were assembled was designed to memorialize the individual persona of the deceased while also highlighting the defining elements of their social identity which were also relevant for the status of their heirs (Williams 2003, 10; Wells 2007, 472-474; Rustoiu 2008, 90-91). From this perspective, the placing of weaponry in graves – either complete panoplies or single relevant items – played an important social role. In both cases, the aim was to display the weaponry in order to be seen by others and to convey precise visual and symbolic messages (Wells 2008): the power that is granted by possessing these weapons; the membership to a (cultural or social) group whose status is defined symbolically by the right and privilege to bear weapons (Rustoiu, Berecki 2015, with bibliography).

The analysis of the funerary inventories indicates that both in the “Celtic” horizon and in the “Dacian” one some graves contained complete panoplies of weapons and others included only certain categories (Fig. 1). These differences could suggest a certain hierarchization of the warriors and also a certain degree of specialization in what concerns the combat techniques (Ramsel 2020, 160; Rustoiu 2021).

A comparison of the standard panoplies of weapons belonging to the “Celtic” and the “Dacian” horizons indicates that they are largely similar from the functional point of view (Fig. 2). The differences are related to the auxiliary elements, the “slashing knife” (*Hiebmesser*) in the first case, and the curved dagger (*sica*) in the second case. As discussed in other previous studies, the slash-



**Fig. 2.** The LT “standard” panoply of weapons of the “Celtic horizon” (left) and of the “Dacian horizon” (right) (after Rustoiu 2016b).

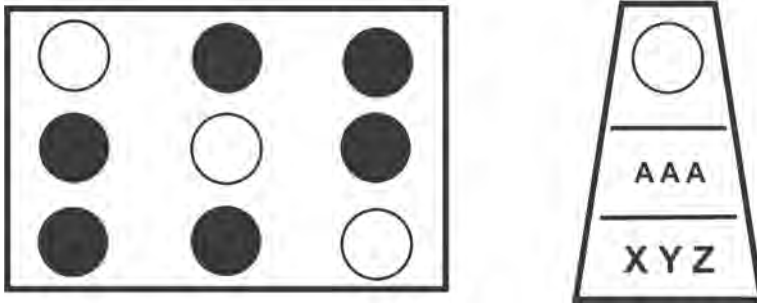
ing knife was actually used to carve the meat during feasts, while the curved dagger had a ritual role, being used as a sacrificial tool (Rustoiu 2016b; 2018). At the same time, it has to be noted that during the “Dacian” horizon the number of harness fittings, especially horse-bits, is higher in burials, indicating that the warlike elites favoured the rider imagery<sup>1</sup>.

However, the fundamental difference between the warriors of the two horizons concerns not the displaying of the panoply of weapons, but the “public” targeted by this visual and symbolic message of a “man in arms”. From this perspective, the analysis of the cemeteries and funerary practices of the respective communities is relevant (Rustoiu 2016b; 2018).

During the early and middle LT, burials associated with the warrior groups are present in cemeteries of the local rural communities<sup>2</sup> alongside those belonging to other social groups (Fig. 3). They can only be differentiated by the presence of weapons, which were meant to symbolize the martial identity of the deceased. In some cemeteries, for example at Vác or Muhi, burials containing weapons are located on the funerary plots of the families or clans to which the deceased belonged. This is indicated by the internal organization of the respective cemeteries, based on burial groups (Hellebrandt 1999; Rustoiu 2008; 2016a). The warriors belonged to the community and came from within, so social competition took place mainly at the community level.

<sup>1</sup> This is the reason for the emergence of visual representations showing male riders during this period, for example on the decorated silver phalerae from the hoard discovered at Lupu, Alba County: Glodariu, Moga 1994. For the manner in which these decorated pieces were assembled to provide a coherent visual message, see Rustoiu 1997, 84-85, Fig. 74.

<sup>2</sup> The cemeteries of the “Celtic horizon” are usually located close to the rural settlements, though on higher grounds than the habitation area: Rustoiu, Berecki 2018; Berecki 2021.



**Fig. 3.** Theoretical model of the location of the burials with weapons in cemeteries and its social significance. Left – “Celtic horizon”; right – “Dacian horizon”. Circles: burials with weapons; black dots: burials without weapons; A ... Z: other social groups whose funerals were different from those of the warlike elites (after Rustoiu 2021).

During the “Dacian” horizon, a number of fundamental social transformations occurred, and these are also visible in the funerary practices. Unlike in the 5<sup>th</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC, when dozens of cemeteries consisting of hundreds or even thousands of graves are known from the lower Danube region and Transylvania, during the “Dacian” horizon the cemeteries are almost non-existent, and when some do appear, they seem to belong exclusively to certain social groups. From the funerary perspective, the corpses of most members of the community were treated in an archaeologically “invisible” manner. However, certain social categories belonging to these communities were treated differently upon death (Egri, Rustoiu 2014; Rustoiu 2016b). Among them were the members of warlike elites (Fig. 3). They were cremated and then laid together with their panoplies of weapons in flat or tumulus graves, close to the settlements over which they ruled.

It can be therefore noted that the comparison of the “standard” panoplies of weapons specific to the “Celtic” and the “Dacian” horizon indicates the existence of both similarities and differences. More precisely, these panoplies are quite similar in what concerns their functional structure. In funerary contexts, these weapons were mainly meant to define symbolically the martial identity of the deceased. However, the ways in which this identity was constructed and expressed within the social environment differed from one horizon to another.

The “Celtic” warrior was closely connected to the community within which he lived, being buried alongside other members of the community, in an area belonging to his clan or family, using all markers of his social status and iden-

tity. On the other hand, the “Dacian” warrior belonged to a hierarchic society that was defined by the emergence of hilltop fortresses surrounded by a dependent rural hinterland.

Therefore, despite the apparent similarities in the functional structure of the panoplies of weapons, the warriors of these two horizons belonged to two very different models of social organization (Rustoiu 2021).

### **Forms of habitation and the organization of the territory**

The “Celtic” horizon was characterized by a rural habitation (Rustoiu, Berecki 2018; Rustoiu et al. 2021). The rural settlements were surrounded by their agricultural hinterland, being located either on river terraces or on fertile floodplains (Fig. 4/1) (Berecki 2015). The mountainous area was not inhabited. Sporadic discoveries from such areas are more likely evidence of some ritual practices that were performed at the limits of the communal territories. This is the case of some ritual offerings discovered in caves or in their close vicinity, in forests (perhaps sacred), or on mountain peaks (Rustoiu, Ferencz 2017; 2018a).

The internal organization of the settlements, each consisting of a reduced number of inhabitants (ca. 15-25), reflects a social structure divided in family groups or clans (Karl 2015, 90; Rustoiu 2016a, 240-244). The dwellings are grouped, with each group located at a certain distance from the others (Zirra 1980; Rustoiu 2013; Karl 2015; Trebsche 2014 etc).

Unlike the settlements, the cemeteries usually occupied higher locations in the settlements’ surroundings: hilltops or slopes, higher river terraces or promontories etc (Fig. 4/1) (Berecki 2015). Accordingly, the cemetery of a community was always visible from the settlement and also from the nearby routes of communication and the neighbouring settlements.

Taking into consideration these norms governing the organization of the habitat and the funerary space, one cannot exclude that the respective cemeteries visually signalled the ownership rights of each community over a certain territory on the basis of ancestral ties or traditions. Along the same lines, it is probably not a coincidence that many “Celtic” cemeteries from Transylvania are located in the same areas in which earlier cemeteries were established at the end of the Early Iron Age (Berecki 2014). The presence of the latter more likely contributed to the construction of new collective identities on the basis of certain myths of origin in the context of “Celtic” colonization in Transylvania.

Summarising these observations, it is quite clear that the manner in which the surrounding landscape was organized must have played an important role in the symbolic reiteration of a rural collective identity of the “pseudo-egalitarian”



Sureanu Mts.

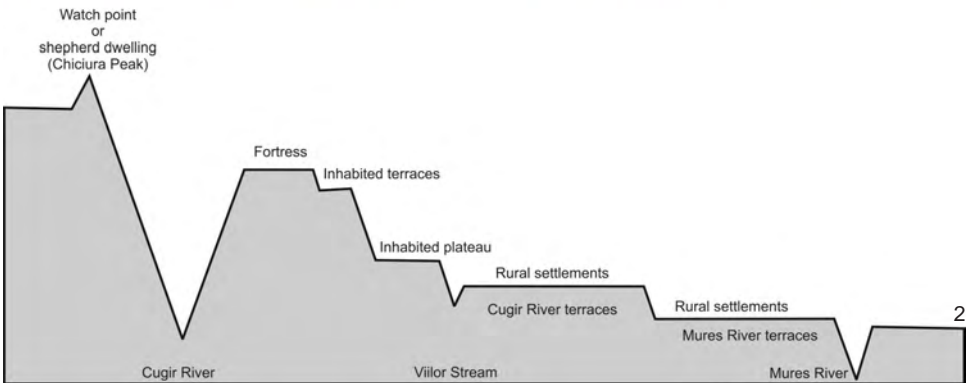


Fig. 4. 1. Topographic distribution of the LT B2-C1 cemeteries and settlements at Blandiana. 2. Above: horizontal organization, from the south to the north, of the social and economic space of the Dacian community from Cugir; red – fortress; yellow – ancillary settlement; white – observation point or shepherd hut; blue – rural settlements (after Rustoiu, Berecki 2018). Below: vertical organization, from the south to the north, of the social and economic space of the Dacian community from Cugir (after Rustoiu 2015).

type, or more precisely of a heterarchic society, according to the definition of C. Crumley (1995). Social competition between various clans took place mostly within the public sphere, during communal gatherings or funerals etc, and not on the basis of an “ostentatious” manipulation of the landscape.

This situation had changed significantly during the following period corresponding to the Dacian horizon. The rural settlements continued to be located in the same areas like the earlier-dated ones, with archaeological evidence sometimes pointing to their stratigraphic succession. One relevant example is provided by the archaeological site at Șeușa (Alba County), where the layer belonging to a rural settlement of the “Celtic” horizon, dated to the LT C1, is superposed by another layer corresponding to the “Dacian” horizon of the LT C2-D1. The inventories of the two settlements are different (Rustoiu, Ferencz 2021, 85; Rustoiu et al. 2021). In general, different types of kitchenware and tableware were used, indicating the changing of culinary and dining practices from one horizon to another (Rustoiu 2005; Rustoiu, Ferencz 2021, 82-83; Rustoiu et al. 2021).

Fortresses located on dominant hilltops and surrounded by a dependent rural hinterland, which supported economically the ruling elites, appeared in the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC (Fig. 4/2). This is the case of the fortresses at Cugir (Alba County) (Rustoiu 2015; Crișan et al. 2020; Căsălean 2020), Pietra Craivii (Alba County) (Berciu et al. 1965) or Costești (Hunedoara County) (Glodariu 1995; Florea 2011, 154). During the initial period, the fortresses had “traditional” defensive elements: earth walls with more-or-less complex palisades<sup>3</sup>. These fortresses were a visual expression of the social hierarchy that incorporated the vertical organization of the landscape (Rustoiu 2015; Rustoiu, Berecki 2018; Rustoiu, Ferencz 2018b, 127-129). They were visible from the rural settlements in the hinterland, symbolically highlighting the prominent social role of the elites (Fig. 4/2). From this point of view, they resemble the medieval fortresses. Moreover, in some cases, for example at Cugir, the family cemetery of the founders was located in the close vicinity of

<sup>3</sup> This model differed from the one identified in Central and Western Europe, where numerous Celtic *oppida* were investigated. Unlike the Dacian settlements whose fortified enclosure was not larger than 1 ha (the ones at Socol, Divici and Pescari have a surface area of 0.6 – 0.8 ha), Celtic *oppida* have a surface area of several dozens, hundreds or even thousands of ha. The fortified enclosures comprised residential and manufacturing quarters and sacred areas. From this point of view, Celtic *oppida* are closer in what concerns their organization to the early medieval towns and marketplaces from temperate Europe. Their organization is more likely the product of a heterarchic social structure, whereas the Dacian society had the characteristics of a hierarchical model; see, for example, Büchsenschütz 1995; Rustoiu, Ferencz 2018, 128, Fig. 4.



the fortress, along the access route to the enclosure (Rustoiu 2015). All of these features indicate that the “Dacian” horizon witnessed the emergence of a hierarchic society that was markedly different from the largely heterarchic society of the previous “Celtic” horizon.

### **Ostentatious symbols of power during the period of the Dacian kingdom**

During the reign of Burebista, new elements of civilian architecture appeared, expressing the social competition in which were engaged the elites from the territory controlled by the dynasts from the capital of the Dacian kingdom, that Sarmizegetusa “τὸ βασιλειον” which was mentioned by ancient authors and then identified in the archaeological site at Grădiștea de Munte, in the Orăștie Mountains, in Hunedoara County.

The first king of the Dacians (and of the Getae)<sup>4</sup> mentioned in ancient written sources was Burebista (also spelled Boerebistas, Byrebistas, Burvista etc)<sup>5</sup>. The chronology of his reign and the deeds of the Dacian king are still subject of controversy<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, all scholars agree that Burebista was a contemporary of C. Julius Caesar. Likewise, the military campaigns carried out to the west, against the Boii and the Taurisci, the plundering expeditions in Macedonia and Illyria, as well as the military operations carried out on the Black Sea coast allowed him to establish, in a quite short period of time, a realm which was large enough to impress some of the ancient writers (e.g. Strabo VII.3.11 C303). The decree honouring Akornion of Dionysopolis (*IGB* I[2] 13), which was dated to 48 BC, mentions that Burebista controlled territories to the north and south of the Danube.

It has to be noted that his relations with the Greeks from the Black Sea shores differed significantly from one city to another. Archaeological and epigraphic data indicate that Burebista’s actions along the western Pontic coast

<sup>4</sup> The analysis of ancient literary sources suggests that during the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and later, the terms “Dacians” and “Getae” referred to populations speaking the same language. The distinction between the two seems to be mainly a geographic one. Strabo (VII.3.12 C304) mentions that the Getae inhabited the territory towards the Pontus and the east, while the Dacians occupied the western parts towards Germania and the source of the Istros. During the Roman imperial period, the term “Dacians” is generally mentioned by Latin writers, while the term “Getae” is used by the ones writing in Greek. It is worth mentioning that the population from Moesia Inferior, known as “Getae” before the Roman conquest, is designated with the term “Dacians” in official documents of the province (Dana, Matei-Popescu 2006, 203-204; Dana 2007, 235-236).

<sup>5</sup> For different spellings of the name Burebista, see Dana 2006, 103.

<sup>6</sup> For a summary of the debate, see Ruscu 2002, 296-297.



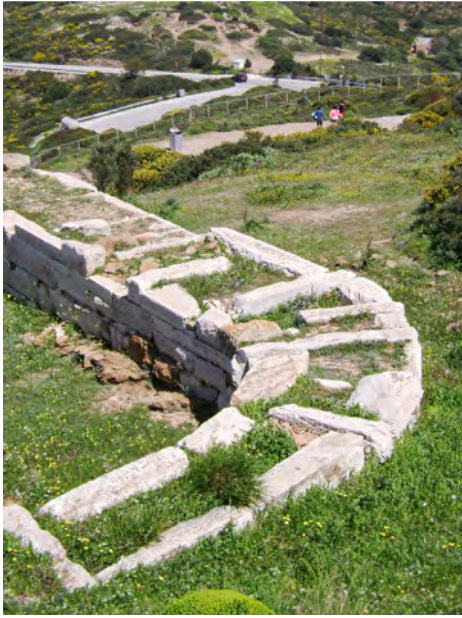
were largely plundering raids against prosperous cities, which cannot be related to any coherent plan which was supposedly aiming to organize and administer the respective territory in order to incorporate it into the Dacian kingdom<sup>7</sup>. However, other Pontic cities went through a different experience. The aforementioned decree honouring Akornion of Dionysopolis attests that the city benefited from royal protection, and Akornion himself was appointed as a sort of personal advisor (designated in the inscription as “*φίλος*”) and ambassador of the king to Pompeius Magnus in the context of the civil war against Julius Caesar.

From the archaeological point of view, Burebista’s Pontic expeditions have left their mark for a long period of time on the layout of the civilian dwellings and religious buildings from the area of the Dacian capital in the Orăştie Mountains. During the reign of Burebista, soon after 50 BC, Greek architects and stonemasons were brought in the mountainous area from south-western Transylvania to build fortifications, civilian buildings and temples using limestone blocks<sup>8</sup>. The construction technique (*opus quadratum*) and the architectural layout of the fortresses and certain buildings have Hellenistic origins (Fig. 5/1) (Glodariu 1983; Florea 2011, 107-159).

The walls had two outer sides consisting of limestone blocks and the space between them filled with crushed stone and compacted earth. They were strengthened with transversal wooden beams, limestone blocks stuck into the

<sup>7</sup> See in this regard Ligia Ruscu’s pertinent comments: Ruscu 2002, 300-307.

<sup>8</sup> During Burebista’s reign, some of the Greek craftsmen were probably either taken prisoners from the plundered Greek cities, or were provided by “friendly” cities. Others could have been hired from the same region in the context of the so-called “commercial mobility”, which was defined as a voluntary movement in search of clients; this kind of movement is already documented, for example, in the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC in Greece or the Levant or in certain communities from the Near East after the collapse of the Bronze Age societies (Zaccagnini 1983, 257-264). Still, the mobility of the craftsmen can also be “reciprocativ”, meaning that specialized craftsmen, dependant to a certain extent, were sent from one “master” to another following the same mechanisms that governed the exchange of gifts (Zaccagnini 1983, 249-256). This type of mobility occurs in societies which are strongly hierarchical and are dominated by an authoritarian aristocracy which relies on an economic and social system based on prestige. It can be therefore presumed that Greek architects and stonemasons could have arrived in Dacia also as part of some exchanges between some Pontic cities and the Dacian kings. These exchanges could have included diplomatic gifts which were meant to confirm the friendly relations established between these parties, or tributes paid to maintain the protection offered by the dynasts from Sarmizegetusa. The craftsmen sent by Domitian as part of the peace treaty concluded with Decebalus more likely followed the same model of mobility. For different types of craftsmen’s mobility in pre-Roman Dacia, see Egri 2014a and Egri 2014b.



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**Fig. 5.** Stone walls built in the *opus quadratum* technique. 1. Cape Sounion/Greece; 2. Dacian fortress at Costești-Cetățuie; 3. Grădiștea de Munte (photos: 1. M. Egri; 2-3. A. Rustoiu).

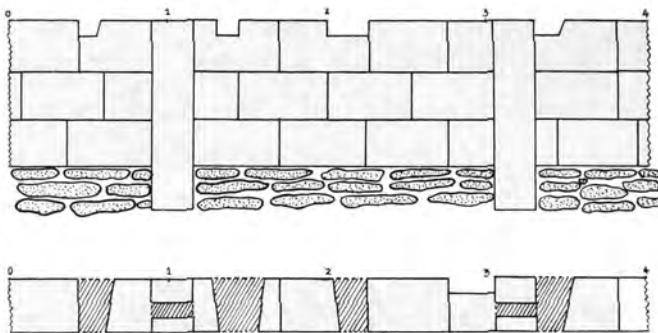
filling, and iron or lead clamps (Fig. 5/2-3) (Glodariu 1983; Antonescu 1984). It was recently noted that in some cases, if not in the majority of them, the outer limestone blocks were laid using mortar (Pușcaș et al. 2019). Lastly, some of the walls were built in different techniques, for example in the fortress at Costești-Blidaru, where the limestone blocks alternate with boxes made of timber and filled with crushed local stone (Glodariu, 1983, Fig. 29/1), or at Piatra Craivii, where the wall sides were supported by vertical stone blocks (Fig. 6/2) (Glodariu 1983, Fig. 26/1), a masonry technique known as *opus africanum* (Fig. 6/1) (Bodó 2001)<sup>9</sup>. These features indicate that the architects and stonemasons who built these structures came from different Mediterranean areas.

Since the Dacians did not use writing, the presence of Greek craftsmen is also documented by numerous examples of stonemason marks, including

<sup>9</sup> Walls built in the same technique are also attested in northern Africa, Sicily and southern Italy; I was able to study the latter on site in 1990 (A.R.).



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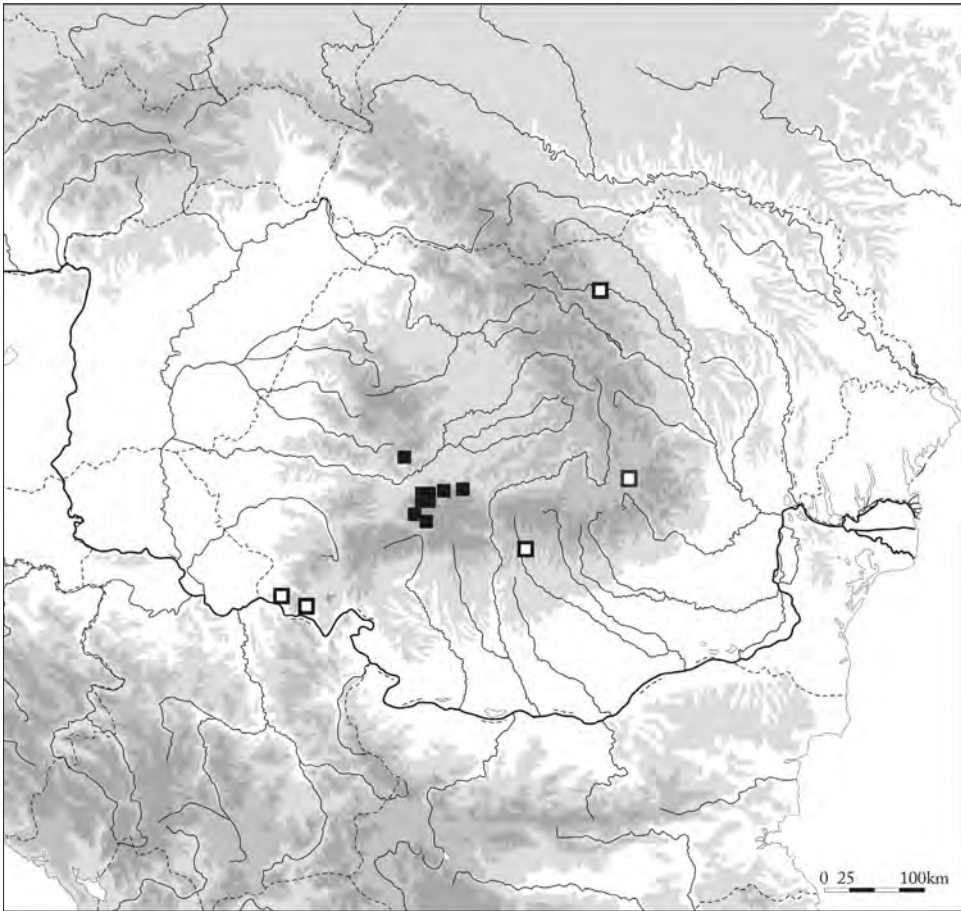
**Fig. 6.** Stone walls built in the opus africanum technique. 1. Egnatia–Forum Boarium/southern Italy (photo A. Rustoiu); 2. Pietra Craivii (after Berciu et al. 1965).



Greek letters, on some limestone blocks, as well as by graffiti incised on everyday objects or tools (Florea 2000; Florea 2001; Florea 2011, 149-151, Fig. 34b; Egri 2014b, 237, Pl. 3/-3.). These artefacts suggest that the foreign construction specialists were accompanied by other categories of craftsmen, like blacksmiths or potters.

Burebista's successors continued and extended this building program, turning to Greek artisans even if they lost direct control of the cities on the Black Sea coast. Furthermore, during the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD and especially in the second half various specialized craftsmen from the Roman Empire were also brought to the region in question (Rustoiu 2002, 77-78). Around the time of the Dacian wars at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century and the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, the region of the Orăștie Mountains comprised a vast network of fortresses and watch towers made of stone, civilian settlements and manufacturing areas, all of them revolving around the large settlement and sacred area at Grădiștea de Munte, which was the capital and the religious centre of the kingdom. During this period, the Dacian dynasts benefited from the services of certain "court artisans", some of them of Greek origin, others arriving from the Roman Empire, in order to acquire the so-called "desirable goods" which were meant to enhance their prominent social status and prestige within the indigenous society (see Egri 2014b; 2019, 119-145).

The distribution area of the structures built in the Hellenistic techniques (Fig. 7) indicates that both the quarries and the circulation of raw materials and specialized craftsmen were strictly controlled by the aforementioned dynasts. As a consequence, the elites from the royal entourage also had access to these materials and craftsmen. Some of the aristocratic residences in south-western Transylvania were fortified with stone walls and had tower dwellings built in the Hellenistic technique. This is the case of the fortresses at Bănița, Căpâlna, Tilișca, Ardeu and Pietra Craivii (Glodariu 1983, with previous bibliography). This monumentalization of the local architecture was meant to highlight both visually and symbolically the social status and power of the respective elites within the social hierarchy of the kingdom. The local chieftains who were not part of the inner circle of power had no access to this kind of resources. This could explain why the Dacian fortress at Cugir, which was located in the same region, is lacking this kind of structures. In this case, the fortification consisting of an earth wall with a palisade continued to be used, while the tower erected on a stone enclosure that bordered the lower terraces of the fortress was made of timber (Crișan et al. 2020; Căsălean 2020). The presence of the tower points to the intention of the local chieftains to imitate the symbols of status and power from the area of the capital and the res-



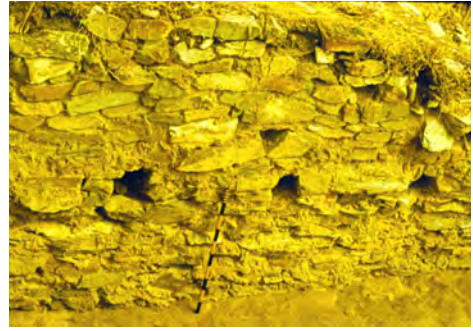
**Fig. 7.** Distribution of rectangular towers built in the Hellenistic technique in the capital area of the Dacian kingdom and the neighbouring regions (black squares) and of the dry stone walls and towers built in the local technique, imitating the structures from the capital area (white squares).

idences of the privileged royal retinue. This situation is further illustrated by other relevant examples.

For example, a series of fortifications and towers made of rough or roughly cut local stone appeared around the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC at the periphery of the Dacian kingdom. This is the case of the fortresses at Liubcova and Divici (Fig. 8) (Mehedinți County) (Rustoiu et al. 2017; Rustoiu, Ferencz 2018b), in the area of the Danube's Iron Gates, Cetățeni (Argeș County) (Chițescu 1976, 156-158, Fig. 2), on the southern slopes of the southern Carpathians, or Piatra



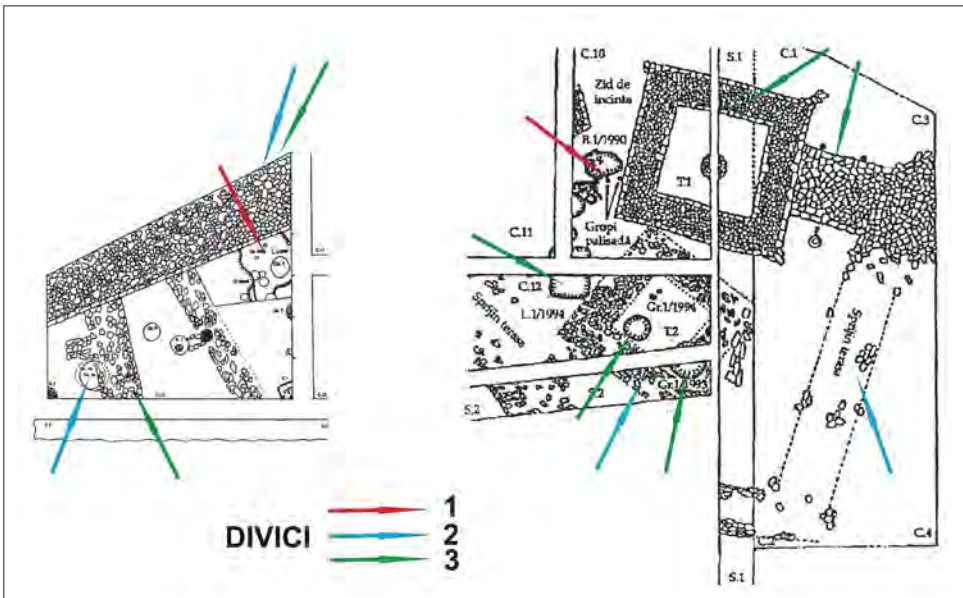
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**Fig. 8.** Divici-Grad: evolution of the elements of fortification from earth ramparts with timber palisades to dry stone walls and towers. 1. Traces of the timber palisade preceding the dry stone precinct. 2-3. The tower from the last phase of the fortress. 4. Different chronological phases (after Rustoiu et al. 2017; Rustoiu, Ferencz 2018).

Neamț-Bâta Doamnei<sup>10</sup>, eastward the Carpathians. While the ashlar walls and towers from the area of Sarmizegetusa Regia and the neighbouring regions could have been made by Greek stonemasons working for the Dacian kings and their close followers, the aforementioned dry stone constructions were perhaps the creation of local stonemasons who either were not familiar with the Hellenistic technique or lacked access to good quality materials. These local craftsmen worked for some chieftains from the periphery of the kingdom, aiming to imitate the monumental structures from the capital area. It has to be mentioned again that these constructions played an important symbolic role in the visual expression of a dominant social status and authority. At the same time, these walls and towers from the periphery indicate the orientation of the local chieftains towards the centre of power of the Dacian kingdom, which served as a social and cultural model.

### **The tower dwelling as a symbol of social status**

Among the characteristic structures of the Dacian kingdom are tower dwellings<sup>11</sup>. They played an important role in the expression of a privileged social status. As previously mentioned, these monumental structures built in the Hellenistic technique appeared in south-western Transylvania, in the area of the capital of the Dacian kingdom during the reign of Burebista, being then imitated in the peripheral areas.

<sup>10</sup> Two phases of fortification have been observed at Bâta Doamnei. The first phase includes a palisade, which was replaced in the second phase by a wall made of local stone blocks which were roughly finished mostly on the outer face (Gostar 1969, 10-14). On the south-eastern side of this fortification, on the inner face “was found an agglomeration of stones which was organically linked to the wall” (Gostar 1969, 13). These traces probably belonged to a curtain wall tower which was perhaps similar to the one from the last phase of the fortress at Divici. Unfortunately, there is no information about the inventory of this structure, which was affected by the subsequent medieval structures. Later excavations raised some doubts about the nature of this wall (curtain wall or retaining wall of a terrace?) and the mere existence of this tower (Mihăilescu-Bîrliba 1984, 23-24; Sanie 2011, 387). Although the summary publication of the results of the archaeological excavations at Bâta Doamnei have caused some confusions, the presence of structures built of roughly cut stone during the later phase of the fortress is certain.

<sup>11</sup> We prefer to use the term “tower dwelling” in this article because it is a neutral one and is suitably describing the aspect and function of these structures. Other specialists described them with the term “palace”, as the residence of the aristocracy or of the fortress “commanders”, for example Glodariu 1983, 26.



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**Fig. 9.** The towers from Costești-Cetățuie: 1 – Tower no. 1; 2 – Tower no. 2 (photos I. V. Ferencz).

The tower dwellings from the area of the Orăștie Mountains and those from the nearby area in south-western Transylvania, at Căpâlna, Tilișca and Ardeu, were almost all<sup>12</sup> built in the Hellenistic technique (Fig. 9). Their foundation and the ground floor had walls consisting of two outer sides made of

<sup>12</sup> One tower from Cugir was made of timber: Crișan et al. 2020; Căsălean 2020. Probably the rulers of this fortress were not part of the royal court retinue, so they lacked access to the resources required to build structures in the Hellenistic technique. The building of the timber tower indicates, like in the peripheral areas, the aim to highlight the privileged social status of the chieftains from the fortress at Cugir by imitating the symbols of status used by the royal court aristocracy.



limestone blocks with the space between them filled with crushed stone and compacted earth. The two outer sides were linked with transversal wooden beams (Glodariu 1983, 26-29, with previous bibliography; Pescaru et al. 2014). It was previously considered that the limestone blocks were bound with clay, but recent geochemical analyses have shown that mortar was used in the tower from the fortress at Ardeu (Pușcaș et al. 2019). The thickness of these walls varied between 1.70 and 3.00 m. The entrance was located on the middle of one side and the doors were made of timber. In some cases, traces of the door mounting system can be observed on the limestone threshold of these entrances (Fig. 10/5). Sometimes the floors were made in *opus signinum*, once again indicating the use of mortar (Pescaru et al. 2014). The upper floor was built either of mudbricks, for example at Costești and Tilișca (Fig. 10/1-3), or timber boxes filled with earth and crushed local stone, for example at Blidaru-Poiana lui Mișu (Fig. 11/3-5) (Pescaru et al. 2014, Pl. 9/2, 10/1). At Ardeu, the upper floor was built of wooden beams daubed with clay (Fig. 11/1-2) (Ferencz, Căstăian 2019, 417). The walls were plastered on the inside and sometimes were also painted (Pescaru et al. 2014, 9). The gable roof was made of ceramic tiles of the Mediterranean type, though in many cases the use of wood shingles<sup>13</sup> or thatch roofing was presumed (Glodariu 1983, 26-29).

The towers from the periphery of the kingdom, like those from Divici<sup>14</sup>, Cetățeni, and perhaps Piatra Neamț-Bâtca Doamnei, had the foundation and the first level made of roughly cut local stone which was bound with clay and earth. At Divici (Fig. 8), at least in the tower of the last phase was observed the use of walls having two outer sides linked with transversal wooden beams, clearly imitating the Hellenistic technique. The upper floor was built of bricks. At Piatra Neamț-Bâtca Doamnei, it was presumed that the walls were made of timber and adobe (Gostar 1969, 13).

The internal area of the tower dwellings from the Orăștie Mountains generally varies between ca. 28 and 102 m<sup>2</sup> (tower no. 1 at Costești-Cetățuie), the majority of them reaching around 50-70 m<sup>2</sup>. The ones from the peripheral areas are somewhat smaller than the average towers from the capital area. For

<sup>13</sup> The roof of tower no. 1 at Tilișca was most likely made of fir shingles (Lupu 1989, 25-26).

<sup>14</sup> Two tower dwellings belonging to two different phases have been found at Divici. One tower having a stone foundation was built during the first phase, around the middle or in the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, inside the fortress, close to the fortification wall made of dry stone. Sometime at the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, the fortress was rebuilt. The earlier-dated tower was dismantled and another tower made of stone, with an upper floor made of bricks, was erected on the enclosure wall (Gumă et al. 1995; Gumă et al. 1997; Rustoiu et al. 2017; Drăgan 2020, 44-46).



1



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3



4

**Fig. 10.** Tower dwelling with the upper floor built of mudbricks. 1-2 – Costești: tower no. 1; 3-4 – Tilișca: tower no. 1; 5 – Tilișca: entrance of the tower with traces of the timber door mounting system on the threshold (photos A. Rustoiu)

example, the tower from the last phase at Divici measured 9.50 x 9.50 m on the outside, with the wall thickness of 2.20 m, and the internal area of 26 m<sup>2</sup>, whereas the earlier-dated tower measured 8 x 8 m on the outside, with the wall thickness of 2 m, and the internal area of 16 m<sup>2</sup> (Gumă et al. 1995, 404-406). At Pietra Neamț-Bâtca Doamnei, the presumed curtain wall tower measured



1



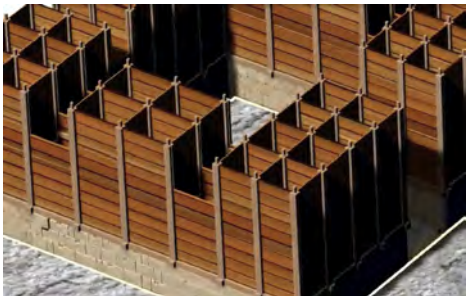
2



3



4



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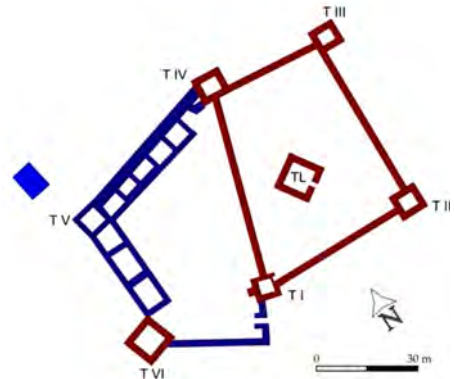
**Fig. 11.** 1-2 – Tower dwelling at Ardeu (photo I. V. Ferencz); 3-5 – Blidaru-Poiana lui Mihu: tower dwelling with the upper floor built of timber-and-earth boxes (after Pescaru et al. 2014).

9 x 9 m (probably on the outside), which indicate an internal area of roughly the same size as the one at Divici. In all cases, taking into consideration the upper floor, the size of the habitable area was double, so the comparison with regular dwellings from the settlements, which were much smaller<sup>15</sup>, points to the

<sup>15</sup> For example, in the rural settlement at Slimnic, Sibiu County, dwellings had areas of 13 to 23 m<sup>2</sup> (Glodariu 1981, 28; see also Ferencz, Căstăian 2019, 410-411).



1



2

**Fig. 12.** Dacian fortress at Blidaru. 1. Aerial photo Z. Czajlik; 2. Plan: red – first phase; blue – second phase (after Pescaru et al. 2014).

significant difference between the residences of the rulers and those of other members of the communities.

The towers were equipped inside with hearths or ovens<sup>16</sup>, and their inventory consisted of objects which are commonly found in dwellings. The presence of storage vessels, kitchenware, and tableware is frequently attested, e.g. at Piatra Roşie (Daicoviciu 1954, 69-72), Blidaru-Poiana lui Mihiu (Pescaru et al. 2014, Pl. 14-15), Tilişca (Lupu 1989, 26-27), Divici (Gumă et al. 1987; 1995) etc. Sometimes household or craftsmanship tools, and even weapons, have been discovered in these towers<sup>17</sup>. In this context, it is worth mentioning the discovery of a fragmentary dagger of the *sica* type in the vicinity of the tower at Blidaru – Poiana lui Mihiu<sup>18</sup>, which is relevant for the identification of the occupants of this structure. As demonstrated in previous studies, these daggers were used as sacrificial instruments by members of the warlike elites, playing an important role in the visual expression of their social identity (Rustoiu 2016b; 2018).

<sup>16</sup> In many cases in which hearths are mentioned, these are more likely ovens. One example is the “hearth” from the tower at Blidaru-La Vămi which belonged to an oven, since the damaged rim of the oven’s vault is still visible in the published illustration (Pescaru et al. 2014, Pl. 7/2).

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, tower B from Piatra Roşie: Daicoviciu 1954, 70, 81.

<sup>18</sup> Pescaru et al. 2014, 8-9: “Also in the vicinity of the tower from Poiana lui Mihiu, a fragmentary iron blade was discovered *s-a aflat o lamă de fier* (sic!), possibly from a *sica* type weapon”. It is difficult to understand the authors’ hesitation, since the illustration (Pl. 18/1) shows clearly the blade of a *sica* with the longitudinal blood channel.

From the perspective of location, there are four possible situations:

1. Towers located inside the fortifications;
2. Towers located on the curtain wall of the fortification;
3. Towers which were initially located outside, but were later included into the walled enclosure;
4. Towers located outside the fortified enclosure.

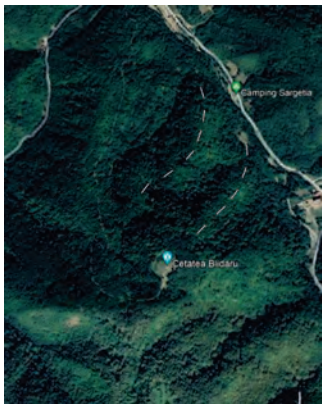
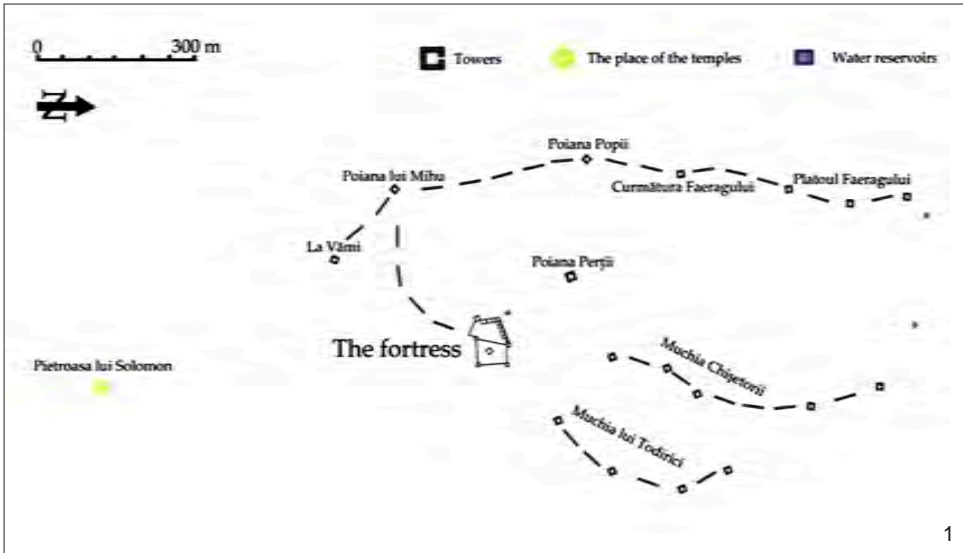
The first two categories of tower dwellings are encountered in the area of the Orăștie Mountains, in south-western Transylvania, as well as in the peripheral areas. The last two categories are specific only to the Orăștie Mountains, and one of the characteristic examples is provided by the tower dwelling at Costești-Blidaru (Fig. 12/1).

In this case, the fortress had two phases of development. In the first phase was built a rectangular fortification having a tower dwelling inside and another outside the enclosure walls. In the second phase, the fortified enclosure was expanded and the external tower dwelling was included into the new defensive system (Fig. 12/2).

At the same time, the mountain paths coming from the valley to the fortress at Blidaru were marked by no less than 17 tower dwellings (Fig. 13). It is not clear whether these were all built or used at the same time, but many of them could have been contemporaneous.

Taking into consideration the aforementioned types of location, it is quite clear that the towers in question had a certain defensive role while also controlling the access to the nearby fortresses. At the same time, these towers were permanently inhabited, as their archaeological inventories are suggesting, so they functioned as residences for the martial elites. In this case, the tower dwellings also had an important symbolic role in the expression of a privileged social status.

Similar situations are also attested in other historical periods. For example, during the Phanariote period of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a particular type of manor house which had a central tower known as *culă* (the term derives from the Turkish *kula* which means tower) appeared in Oltenia and western Wallachia (Fig. 14) (Atanasescu, Grama 1974; Barbu et al 2019). These towers with an upper floor, which were sometimes protected by walled enclosures or other defensive structures, functioned as residences for the boyars while also fulfilling a defensive role. At the same time, they also highlighted the privileged social status and power of their owners. Other structures which were quite similar in what concern their layout and functions are also attested in other areas of the Balkans, for example in Albania, Serbia, or Bulgaria (Mezini, Pojani 2014; Barbu et al 2019 etc).



2



3

**Fig. 13.** Tower dwellings from the surroundings of the fortress at Blidaru. 1 – Location of the towers along the access routes towards the fortress at Blidaru (adapted after Pescaru et al. 2014); 2 – Access routes towards the fortress at Blidaru (drawing A. Rustoiu, base map Google Earth); 3 – Location of some towers on the mountain path towards the fortress at Blidaru (after Pescaru et al. 2014).

Another functional analogy for the tower dwellings from pre-Roman Dacia is offered by similar structures dated to the medieval period from the Svaneti region, in Georgia (Fig. 15). These towers built of stone and having 4-5 floors belonged to some clans grouped within the rural mountainous settlements. Besides their defensive role, these towers also fulfilled a symbolic function “as the *landmark* of the family” (Pavan 2011).



**Fig. 14.** Cula (tower dwelling) Ciobă-Chintescu from Şiacu, Slivileşti commune, Gorj County (photo A. Rustoiu).

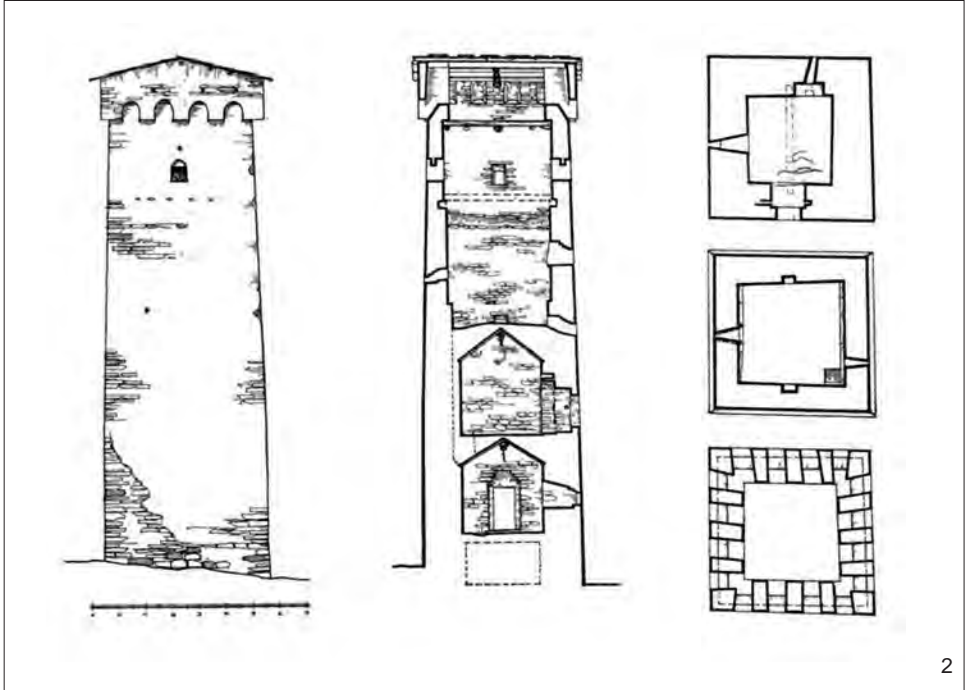
Returning to the tower dwellings from pre-Roman Dacia, it is quite clear that they played an important symbolic role in the expression of social status and power of the martial elites from the central area of the Dacian kingdom. The access to the resources (building materials and specialized craftsmen) required by these structures, which were controlled by the Dacian dynasts, was most likely determined by the nature of the relations between the local elites and the royal power. The archaeological situation from Blidaru points to a complex network of subordinate social relations (perhaps resembling the medieval vassal relations). More precisely, the way in which tower dwellings are located may suggest that the chieftain who controlled the fortress at Blidaru had a network of subordinates who were allowed to build their own tower dwellings close to the fortress and along the routes towards it. At the same time, these visual symbols of status and power were imitated at the periphery of the kingdom, using local resources.

## Conclusions

The rural society specific to the “Celtic” cultural and chronological horizon was largely heterarchic, whereas the “Dacian” horizon was characterized by a



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**Fig. 15.** Tower dwellings from the Svaneti region, Georgia (after Pavan 2011).



hierarchic social organization. The differences between these two horizons can be observed in the funerary practices, the organization of the landscape, and the range of visual symbols used in the expression of social status and power by the local elites.

Regarding the funerary practices, the differences between the warlike elites of the two horizons are not so much in the functional structure of the panoply of weapons, but in the manner in which social status and rank were communicated to other members of the community. More precisely, the “Celtic” warrior was closely connected to the community within which he lived, being buried alongside other members of the community, in an area belonging to his group, clan or family, using all markers of his social status and identity. On the other hand, the “Dacian” warrior, who largely used similar symbolic emblems of status, was treated upon death in a manner which differed significantly from that of other members of the community. In this case, the funerary rituals were meant to underline the social differences among the communities.

Regarding the organization of the habitation and territory, the “Celtic” horizon was characterized by the presence of rural settlements surrounded by their agricultural hinterland and having the communal cemetery in the close vicinity. The latter most likely marked symbolically the limits of the communal territory and the ancestral right to control it. The “Dacian” horizon was defined by the appearance of fortresses located on dominant heights and having a rural hinterland in the close vicinity. This kind of vertical organization of the territory points to the social hierarchization of the communities during the period in question.

During the reign of Burebista and in the following period until the Roman conquest, a number of new, ostentatious means of expressing the social status and power emerged among the local elites engaged in social competition. Among them are the fortresses having stone walls built in the Hellenistic technique by Greek architects and stonemasons, and the tower dwellings built in the same technique, all in the area of the kingdom’s capital from the Orăștie Mountains and the nearby areas in south-western Transylvania. The resources and means of building these structures were largely controlled by the royal power. These were also accessible to the close followers of the king. The fortress at Blidaru and the surrounding network of tower dwellings offer a relevant image of the way in which the internal social hierarchy functioned, based on subordinate relations. At the same time, the elites from the periphery of the kingdom sought to affirm their elite membership by imitating these symbolic emblems of status and power. The result was the appearance of fortresses having stone walls and tower dwellings which were built with local resources and techniques.



It can be therefore noted that archaeological data can offer important information regarding the social structures of different periods, and the means through which the elites competed for a privileged position within the social hierarchy of their communities.

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## **Structuri sociale în Transilvania în a doua epocă a fierului. Mărturii arheologice ale competiției și ierarhiilor sociale**

### **Rezumat**

Scopul articolului de față este de a schița componentele structurilor sociale care au caracterizat orizonturile cultural-cronologice "Celtic" și "Dacic" și de a identifica, pe baza datelor arheologice de care dispunem în prezent, modul de manifestare și natura ierarhiilor comunitare și a competiției sociale din fiecare perioadă în parte. Societatea rurală caracteristică orizontului cultural-cronologic "celtic" a fost una heterarhică, în timp ce orizontul "dacic" a cunoscut o societate ierarhică. Diferențele dintre cele două orizonturi și-au pus amprenta și asupra modului de manifestare funerară, asupra organizării teritoriului și asupra elementelor simbolice, vizuale, de exprimare a autorității sociale a elitelor.

**Cuvinte cheie:** Transilvania, a doua epocă a fierului, Celți, Daci, rituri și ritua-luri funerare, așezări, identități culturale, statut social.

### **Aurel Rustoiu**

Institutul de Arheologie și Istoria Artei, Cluj-Napoca, România

Email: aurelrustoiu@yahoo.com

### **Iosif Vasile Ferencz**

Muzeul Civilizației Dacice și Romane, Deva, România

Email: fiosifvasile@yahoo.com