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**“THE RITUAL CONSECRATION” OF THE FIRST NEOLITHIC  
COLONISATION FROM ROMANIA  
THE PIT HOLES SANCTUARY FROM CRISTIAN I, SIBIU COUNTY  
PART III. THE ABANDONMENT**

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**Cuvinte cheie:** *prima neolitizare din Europa Centrală și de Sud-Est, Starčevo-Criș IA, sanctuar format din gropi rituale, „Locuința morților”.*

**Rezumat:** *Descoperit pe traseul Autostrăzii Orăștie-Sibiu, în situl Cristian I (km 76+450 – 76+900), sanctuarul format din gropi rituale datat în vremea complexului cultural Starčevo-Criș, faza IA, arată atitudinea primilor neolitici în fața teritoriului și populațiilor întâlnite la fața locului. „Locuința morților” este construită o dată cu părăsirea sanctuarului și pentru încetarea funcționării sale.*

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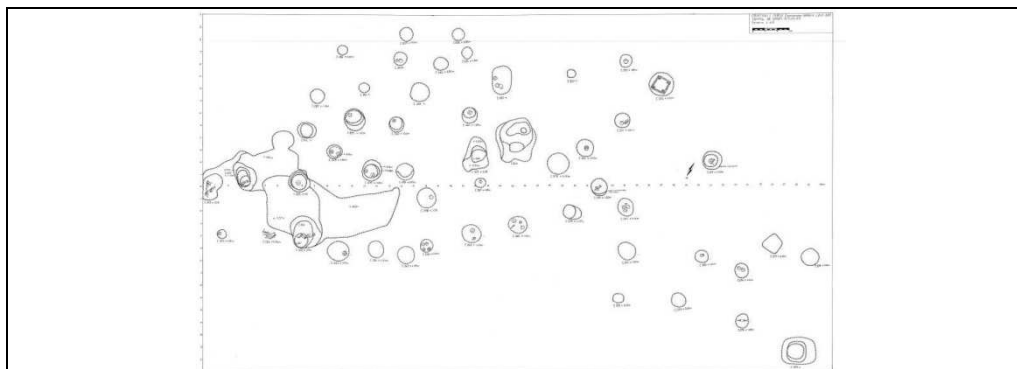
**Key words:** *first Neolithisation from Central and South-Eastern Europe, Starčevo-Criș IA, sanctuary formed by ritual pits*

**Abstract:** *Discovered on the future layout of Orăștie-Sibiu Highway, in the archeological site of Cristian I (km 76+450 – 76+900), the sanctuary formed by ritual pits, dated during Starčevo-Criș culture, IA phase, shows the attitude of the first Neolithic people towards the territory and the communities found here. “The house of the dead” was built in the same time with the abandonment of the sanctuary, having as a purpose the ending of its functionality.*

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In a previous article (Luca *et al* 2013) we were discussing the discovery, inside Cistian I (Sibiu County, Romania) archeological site, of a sanctuary made of ritual pits (Luca *et al* 2012, 56). This discovery – made on Orăștie-Sibiu highway, Sector IV – was summary published, along with other sites, in to a preliminary report (Luca *et al* 2012, 55-102).

During the field analysis of the ritual construction (CM) it was noticed that a pit, with several graves inside, was positioned on the Eastern side of the sanctuary. “The House” (CM) in discussion was cutting/putting to an end to the functioning of the ritual pits group, named by us *a sanctuary formed by ritual pits*, that was built up afterwards and cutting the archeological features that were composing the ritual pits sanctuary. The idea of sanctuary pits is not a new one. It was already used by Vassil Nikolov (Nikolov 2009; Nikolov 2011). The position of the archeological feature discussed here can be visualized on Plan 1.

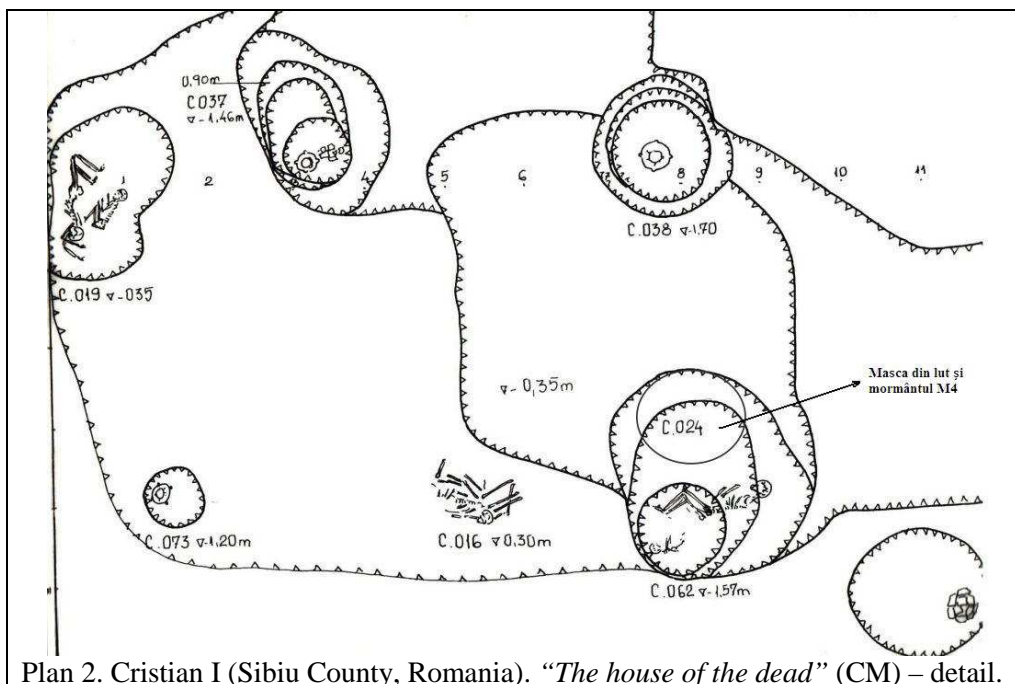


Plan 1. Cristian I (Sibiu County, Romania). General view of the ritual pits sanctuary. In the left side is “*The house of the dead*” (CM).

The feature (CM) located in the North-Eastern side of the surface, contains significant inventory elements and it was built “above” the ritual pits sanctuary. We are talking about a part from a partially depth dwelling, rectangular shaped, slightly elongated, with the maximum dimensions of approximately 7 x 11 meters. Knowing the dimensions of the dwellings belonging to this period (Starčevo-Criș I-II), by studying the dimensions of the archeological sites from Miercurea Sibiului-Petriș (Luca *et al* 2013a; Luca *et al* 2013b), Miercurea Sibiului II (Luca *et al* 2013a; Luca *et al* 2013b) and even Cristian I (Luca *et al* 2012, 55-102; Luca *et al* 2013c), we can conclude – right from the start – that the utility of a daily dwelling-house for the hut studied here can’t be admitted. Its artifacts and ritual composition made us believe that it is a “house of the dead” (CM) (Naumov 2009), which signifies the “sealing” of the abandonment of the pits sanctuary, which is being partially cut by the construction (C<sub>37-38</sub>, C<sub>62</sub> și C<sub>73</sub>). On the other hand this custom, in not an unusual one for the Starčevo-Criș communities. It is true that latter, but still during Starčevo-Criș culture, there was noticed the existence of group burials or burials inside ovens – this time at Alsónyék-Bétarzék (Bánffy *et al* 2010, fig. 9-10).

In order to define and in-depth this idea we will analyze the archeological feature (CM) in the following paragraphs.

“*The house of the dead*” has in its composition other seven human skeletons, grouped by two in the features named by us as C<sub>016</sub> and C<sub>019</sub>, displayed in the Western and North-Western side.



Plan 2. Cristian I (Sibiu County, Romania). "The house of the dead" (CM) – detail.

In what concerns the graves from C<sub>019</sub> (Plan 2, left, up; Luca *et al* 2012, photo 25) these are absorbing the remains of two dead (M<sub>1</sub>), from which one, having the bones in a better preserved condition, grown-up, is possible to be a male and one, in a poor preservation condition, possible female. Both are being positioned in a crouched position, the man has the arms above the head and the woman is being positioned in his back. Near him are being kept several river stones with relatively large dimensions. Traces of red ochre (mineral) and little ceramic fragments were found around them.

C<sub>016</sub> (Plan 2, down, center; Luca *et al* 2012, photo 18) represents a inhumation grave (M<sub>2</sub>) which includes two skeletons in crouched position, on above the other, backward oriented, one at others feet's, kept in a fragmentary condition. One of was preserved in a larger proportion, being visible both inferior and superior members among with the spine. The other one was preserved in a poorer condition, being though visible a part from the head. Small pieces of red ochre (mineral), ceramic fragments were found around them and river stones.

In the North-Western corner of "The house of the dead" two skeletons were discovered (Plan 2, down, right); child and an adult – M<sub>3</sub>, in crouched position. The adult is being placed with the head facing south, and the child with the head facing

north. Traces of red ochre were found around the skeletons. The skeletons were found in the same archeological context with an agglomeration of large sized animal bones (cattle), a weight, a zoomorphic idol, pottery, river stones, flint cores and blades and obsidian fragments. As it has been already noticed for the very Early Neolithic graves, the defunct are in association with a layer made of archeological remains, intentionally deposited.

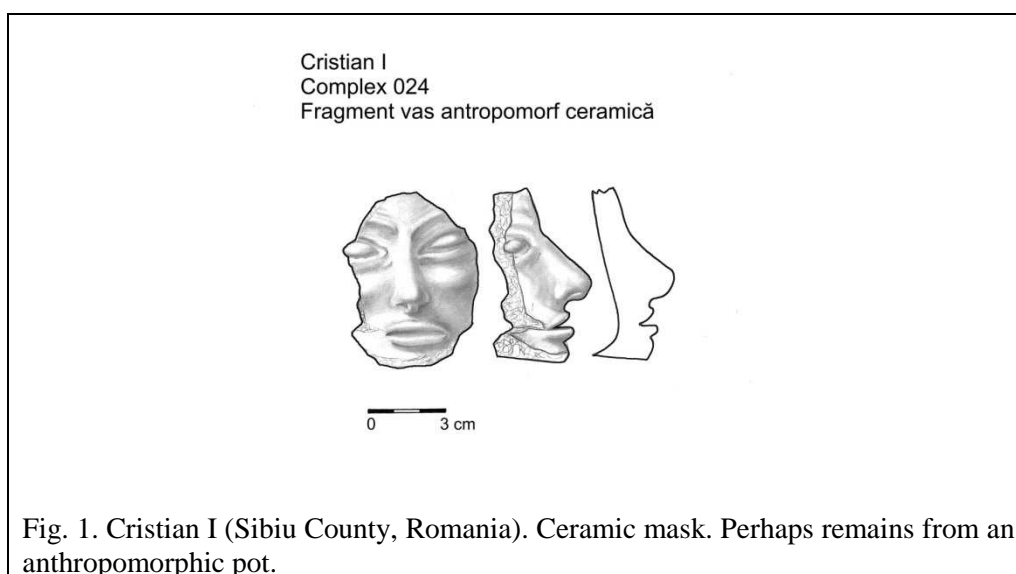
The final consecration of the mortuary deposits was made by posing the remains of some large sized animals, remains of human bones, without any anatomical connection – right in the middle of the feature, at an approximately equal distance from the dead, toward South, at the edge of the hole (M<sub>3</sub>; Plan 2, right, down – (Luca *et al* 2012, photo 27; M<sub>4</sub>?), of an anthropomorphic pot fragment, a human mask having its features extremely realistically represented (Luca *et al* 2012, photo 43) and a large ledger made of grit stone (a burial sign?). M<sub>4</sub> it is part of the same deposit with M<sub>3</sub>. Though, we prefer to treat it separately due to the special deposit that is in connection with M<sub>4</sub>, the ceramic mask (Plan 2, right, down; the circle from the superior part of C<sub>24</sub>).

#### Description

The mask is a miniature one, with very fine details, closed to the real model, very well proportioned. The red engobe is being kept only partially, but the entire mask was covered with paint in ancient period. The general dimensions of this piece are: height – 64.90 mm and breadth – 31.17 mm. The mouth is being half-opened, having perfectly modeled lips (length – 24.5 mm), which are imprinting the idea of movement. The nose was correctly modeled (length – 29.22 mm, maximal breadth – 16.57 mm), having the nostrils represented by fine incisions (length – 6.14 mm). The eyes are elongated (length – 18.57 mm, breadth – 6.21 mm), preserved only partially, with a tridimensional eye globe. The face was extremely well designed; reproducing every single fold (the cheek bones were emphasized, the wrinkles from the forehead are almost imperceptible – the red colour that persists on this area was preserved in the dents). This kind of piece is a unique one in Romania for the chronological horizon discussed here. It should have some analogies in Greece and in Asia Minor zone, for the first Neolithic “wave” (Karagats Magoula, Soufli Magoula, Koutsaki Magoula, Domokos, Achilleion, Jericho, Mureybet, Gilgal, Gobleki Tepe, Jarmo, Tell Songor A, Čatal Höyük, etc.). This type of naturalistic representation, which presents the unique characteristics, is usually being connected with important characters from the community’s life. Seldom, the faces have apotropaic characteristics emphasized by the painted décor, as it is known (here are some examples: Todorova, Vajsov 1993,16 – fig. 7; 29 – fig. 27; 77 – fig. 67/5; 96 – fig. 82 (also on the cover); 187; 214 – fig. 202-203; 204 – fig.

204; (Naumov 2009, fig. 34.4-7). The closest analogy – but not an identical one – is with the piece published in Greece (Orphalidis 1990; [http://www.neolithic.gr/index\\_en.html](http://www.neolithic.gr/index_en.html), The Theory of Repetition, 8/14). Following the chronology of the analogies proposed for this type of expression one can notice that in most of the cases there is a connection with very old sites for Neolithic in many cases also connected with the relation with Mesolithic communities (Ierihon, Čatal Höyük, Eynan, Lepenski Vir, Nea Nicomedeia, Gradesnitza, Madjari, Kazanlk, Rakitovo, Grivac, Vinkovci).

“*The house of the dead*” destroys partially by super positioning four pits with deposits inside the ritual pits sanctuary: C<sub>37-38</sub>, C<sub>62</sub> and C<sub>73</sub> from the older Starčevo-Criș horizon, IA phase, Monochrome. The most obvious intersection is the one of C<sub>62</sub> pit, which lays over grave M<sub>3</sub>.



The statistical analysis of the pottery from “*The house of the dead*”



## 1. Category

From the area discussed here a lot made of 665 fragments was studied. The highest present belongs to semifine category (42%), followed by rough (38%), while 20% is represented by fine pottery.

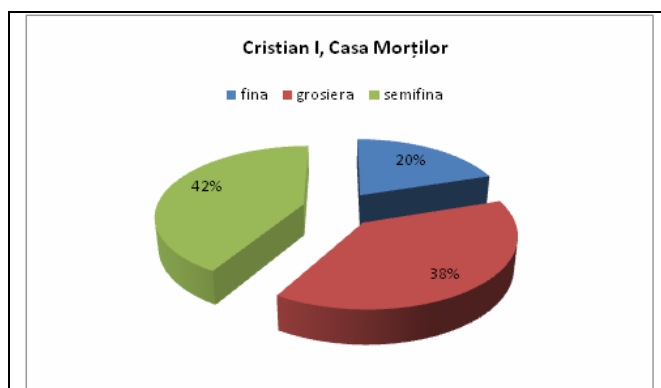


Fig. 2 – Chart presenting pottery category.

## 2. Colour

As we have already pointed out in other studies concerning Early Neolithic pottery (Luca, Tudorie 2012, 23; Luca, Tudorie 2013, 8; Luca *et al* 2012a, 9) the colours that are being predominant are the lighted ones. This fact is being confirmed once again by the pottery collected from "*The house of the dead*", as it can be observed also in Fig. 3 and 4.

For exterior colour of the pottery, light-brown represents 40%, followed by brown with 26% and hoary-brown 10%. Smaller percentages are represented by: brown with burning spots 6%, dark-brown 6%, reddish-brown 4%, coffee-brown 2% and one percent titian, orange and red.

For the inner colour of the pots the situation is not so different from the one described above, but in this case, the colour register is a more limited one: only 9 colours, while the exterior surface was represented by 12 colours. Light-brown is the most frequently identified (41%), brown with 22%, coffee-brown 11%, dark-brown 11%. In the case of dark brown we have to mention that the percentage for this colour is higher, almost in all situations analyzed, for the inner part of the pot. Other colours are: grey (5%), greyish-black (4%), brown with burning spots (3%), brick-coloured (2%) and reddish-brown (1%).

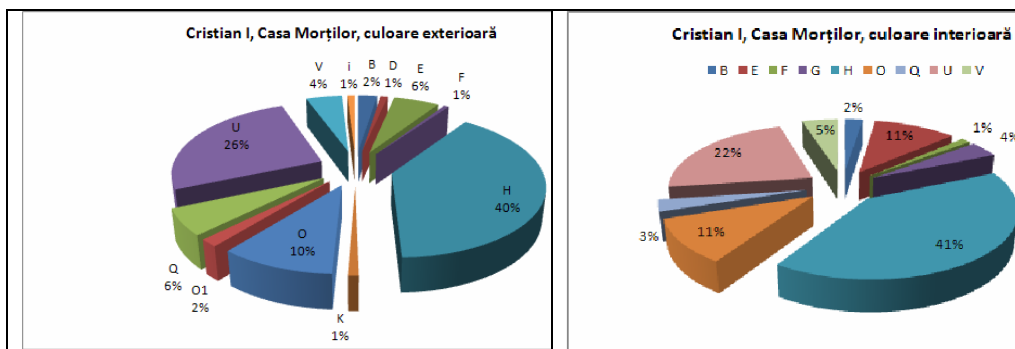


Fig. 3 – Chart presenting the exterior colour of the pottery.

Fig. 4 – Chart presenting the interior colour of the pottery.

### 3. Temper

Confirming once again the specific for Starčevo-Criș pottery, the analysis made on temper indicates an obvious predominance of chaff and sand (40%). The “surprise” element was the presence, in quite high quantity, of chaff combined with large grained sand (32%). Less represented are the following categories: large grained sand and chaff (6%), large grained sand, chaff and gravel (6%), sand and chaff (4%), chaff, sand and gravel (3%), large grained sand, chaff and potshards (2%), chaff, slit and gravel (1%), slit and chaff (1%), large grained sand (1%), chaff, sand and ochre (mineral)(1%), large grained sand, mica and chaff (1%), large grained sand, mica and ochre (mineral)(1%). Although there is a large variety of codes, it can be easily noticed the frequent presence, it is true that in different combinations, of large grained sand. If we sum up all the percentages where large grained sand is represented, we would notice a total amount of 49%!

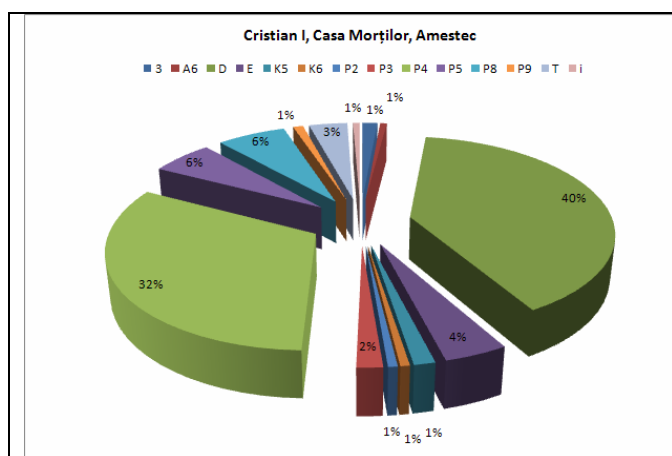


Fig. 4. Chart representing the temper used.

4. Surface treatment

58% of the pottery from “The house of the dead” was well smoothed, while 19% presents a coarse surface. From the entire lot, 8% of the pottery presents polished slip, 6% has a

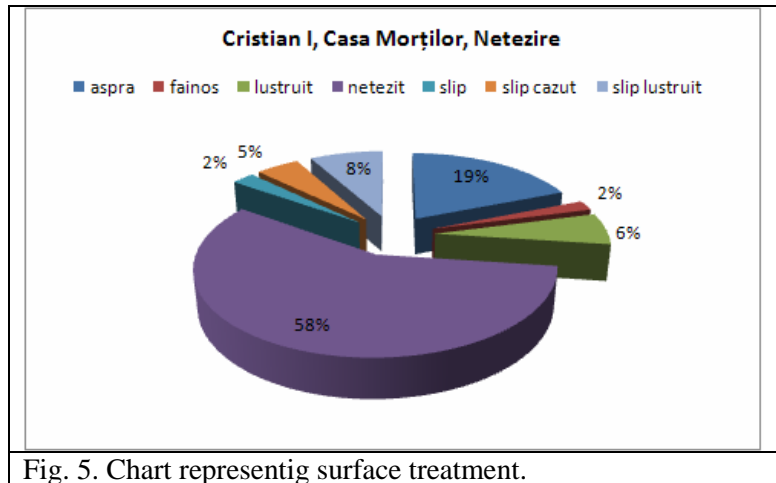


Fig. 5. Chart representing surface treatment.

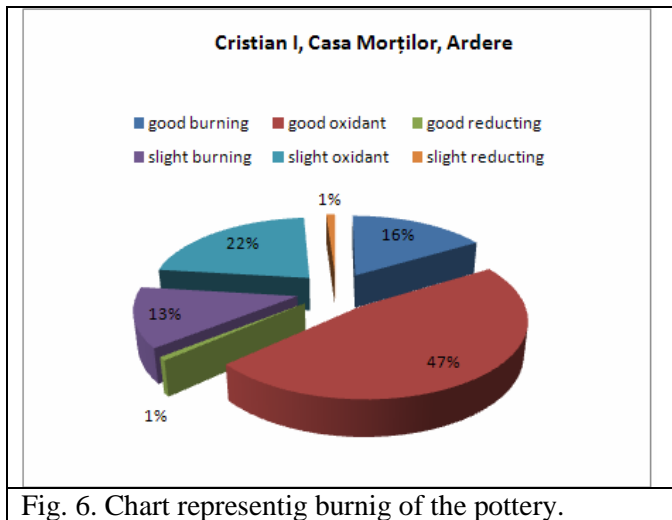


Fig. 6. Chart representing burning of the pottery.

polished surface, 5% presents peeled off slip, 2% presents slip and 2% has a floury aspect.

5. Burning

The pottery was oxidating well burned in proportion of 47%, 22% oxidating slight, 16% was well burned, 13% slight burned and 1% reductig well and 1% reductig slight.

The analysis of the archeological materials resulted after the research of the archeological feature called “The house of the dead” indicates the existence of some individual characteristics that doesn’t allow us to credit it as a dwelling – even being reused for burials (or a domestic pit uses for this purpose: Lazăr 2006-2007, 44-45). Comparing the statistics made on pottery we can notice that quantitatively and qualitatively this it is the result of a “selection”. The same thing can be noticed while studying the plastic (altars or zoomorphic cattle) or the remains of the

“materials used for constructing the roof”, the pieces of burned river stone, *en violon* shaped. All this appeared to be “selected”, as types, and intentionality deposited on the dwelling surface. On the other hand, this kind of observation – with the imposed particularities, was also made at Galovo (Minichreiter, Botić 2010). Other older examples are in Eynan (Todorova, Vajsov 1993, 21, fig. 13 – burials in less used pits, funeral signs and *en violon* pieces).

The deposit of seven defunct grouped in four tombs (M<sub>1</sub> – adult and child; M<sub>2</sub> – adult and teenager; M<sub>3</sub> – adults and M<sub>4</sub> – adult in association with ceramic mask) reveals an abandonment ritual that can be the result of some conflicts with the local Mesolithic community (or the taking over of some funeral customs (Lenneis 2007) (1); for some specialists, the deposits of red ochre represent the existence of hunters), the use up of resources or raw materials in which the community was specialized (2), or maybe an epidemic disease for which the new colonist weren't immune to (3). Do to the fact that the analysis made on skeletons are in progress, the last idea is still a supposition.

Towards South-East – in the middle of the sanctuary made of ritual pits – there are other two pits without any connection with the sanctuary. Their filling and the construction method, made us connect them too with the abandonment of the sanctuary horizon, contemporary with CM. These pits will be analyzed once the monograph of this site is published.

The analysis of the ritual pit sanctuary and its abandonment ritual posed us in front of barely known reality.

The excellent study made by Michael Budja (Budja 2010) can be continued by us in the moment we receive the <sup>14</sup>C and anthropologic data from Cristian I, Sibiu County, Romania.

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| BAR      | <i>British Archaeological Reports. International Series</i> , Oxford                 |
| BB       | <i>Bibliotheca Brukenthal</i> , Muzeul Național Brukenthal, Sibiu                    |
| BrukAM   | <i>Brukenthal. Acta Musei</i> , Muzeul Național Brukenthal, Sibiu                    |
| CCDJ     | <i>Cultură și civilizație la Dunărea de Jos</i> , Muzeul Județean Călărași, Călărași |
| DocPrae  | <i>Documenta Praehistorica</i> , Ljubljana   |
| Litua    | <i>Litua</i> , Muzeul Județean Târgu-Jiu   |
| StComSM  | <i>Studii și comunicări. Satu Mare</i> , Muzeul Județean Satu Mare, Satu Mare        |
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