

A STONE AXE FROM MUNTENIA (ROMANIA). AN IMITATION OF A BRONZE AGE METAL AXE ?

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The Bronze Age lithic industry has left valuable testimonies in the realm of archeology.

Although, unlike the Aeneolithic, the stone objects' inventory goes through modifications, in particular of typology, however, some categories of objects will achieve a high technological level. We refer here to stone axes, which in many cases can not be regarded merely as tools, but become real weapons or even social symbols. This is also the case of the hereby presented artefact, found somewhere in Muntenia, and being part of the collections of the "Vasile Pârvan" Museum in Bârlad (inventory no. 3720). Although we do not know precisely the place where the stone ax was discovered, we chose to introduce it in the scientific circuit due to its exquisite appearance. In addition, certain morphological features indicate a possible imitation of metal artefacts, and this detail requires special attention.

The description of the object

Medium sized ax, made from volcanic rock, greenish-brown color. The piece has an elongated body and a straight profile. The blade is very stretched and arched, and the cylindrical edge ends in a hemispherical button, well highlighted. The perforation is slightly tapered and placed on the upper half of the ax, near the edge. On the upper side, in the hole area, the ax presents a pseudo - sleeve. The entire surface of the artifact is carefully polished.

Dimensions: Length - 14.5 cm; blade width - 4.6 cm; diameter of the rim - 4 x 3.8 cm; diameter of the hole - 2cm.

Analogies

Not being a serial product, finding the perfect analogy is not possible. However, we recall some stone axes that show obvious similarities with the artifact discussed in this paper. Because we do not know the place of discovery, therefore we lack the possibility of a correct chronological and cultural framing, we considered useful searching for typological correspondences with other similar pieces.

Thus, axes similar in their general appearance are known at Soloneț (Suceava county)¹, Botoșana (Suceava county)², Anghelești (Vrancea county)³, Turdaș (Hunedoara county)⁴,

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¹ B. Niculică, V. Budui, I. Mareș, *Considerații privind unele topoare de piatră, din epoca bronzului, descoperite în Podișul Sucevei*, în „Suceava”, XXIX-XXX, 2002-2003, p. 282, fig. 1/3.

² *Ibidem*, p. 273, fig. 5/5.

³ V. Bobi, A. E. Apostu, *Contribuții la întocmirea catalogului topoarelor-ciocan cu gaură de înmănușare, descoperite în zona de curbură a Carpaților*, în „Vrancea. Studii și comunicări”, XI, 1997, fig. 4/9.

⁴ I. Andrițoiu, *Civilizația tracilor din sud-vestul Transilvaniei în epoca bronzului*, Bibl. Thrac, II, București,

Ghirișu de Criș (Bihor county)⁵, Ozd-Telek (Cluj county)⁶, Bistrița Năsăud county⁷, Ulmu (Călărași county)⁸, Tăvădărești (Bacău county)⁹, Chintinici (Neamț county)¹⁰, Bărcănești (Neamț county)¹¹, Oșlobeni (Neamț county)¹², Poiana (Galați county)¹³. Certain morphological similarities can be identified with the Saratov- or Groznej-type axes of the Northern Black Sea and Caucasian area¹⁴, but such stone products are spread to the southern Urals¹⁵.

We must not omit any analogies with some bronze axes, such as the one found in Larga (Maramureș county)¹⁶ and a similar specimen from western Ukraine¹⁷.

Of course, the artifact published by us has some similarities with some bronze axes, especially due to the shape of the edge, that mimics, most likely, the button of the metal specimens (*Nackenknäufäxte*) type B3 (after Nestor)¹⁸ or type Drajna (after Vulpe)¹⁹. We also believe that the pseudo-sleeve seen on the stone artifact from Muntenia is designed to mimic the tube or fixing sleeve found on some bronze axes.

From a chronological point of view, without having the possibility to connect the artifact to a specific archaeological site, we believe it belongs to the Bronze Age. Besides, the stone axes provided with an edge finished with a button are emerging in the Middle Bronze Age, but they continue their evolution in the Late Bronze Age. So it is quite likely that the ax presented by us belongs to one of the two periods, perhaps even the final stage of the Bronze Age, if we consider the obvious similarities with the metal artifacts mentioned above.

Short considerations

After these typological discussions, we should analyze the possibility that the stone ax found in Muntenia imitates, to some extent, a certain type of metal axes.

In a study published some time ago, one of the authors of this article discussed the question of the existence of prototypes and imitation in the Bronze Age lithic industry, with special focus on the axes²⁰. We will not resume the entire subject, we will only recall that the tendency to imitate certain objects was based on social, and maybe even economic factors²¹.

1992, fig. 39/26.

⁵ C. Ghemiș, *Toporul de piatră de la Ghirișul de Criș, jud. Bihor, în Adevărul omeneste posibil*, Oradea, 2001, p. 663-670.

⁶ J.-G. Nagy, *The Wietenberg site from Florești-Poligon (Cluj County). A study of settlement archaeology*, in S. Berecki, R. Németh, B. Rezi (eds.), *Bronze Age communities in the Carpathian Basin. Proceedings of the international colloquium from Târgu Mureș, 24-26 October 2008*, Cluj-Napoca, 2009, fig. 9/2.

⁷ The piece is in the collection of the Baia Mare Museum (inventory no. 331). Our thanks to Dr. Carol Kacsó for the provided information.

⁸ A. C. Florescu, *Repertoriul culturii Noua-Coslogeni. Așezări și necropole*, CCDJ, X, 1991, fig. 159/3.

⁹ *Ibidem*, fig. 159/2.

¹⁰ Gh. Dumitroaia, *Cercetările arheologice din județul Neamț (1996)*, în „MemAntiq”, XXI, 1997, p. 433, fig. 3/1; E. R. Munteanu, *Alte descoperiri*, în V. Căvruș, Gh. Dumitroaia (coord.), *Cultura Costișa în contextul epocii bronzului din România*, Piatra Neamț, 2001, p. 51-52, pl. 63/4.

¹¹ Gh. Dumitroaia, *op. cit.*, p. 433, fig. 3/2; E. R. Munteanu, *op. cit.*, p. 51-52, pl. 63/3.

¹² Unique piece from the collection of the Museum of History and Archaeology Piatra Neamț, Romania.

¹³ E. Dunăreanu-Vulpe, *La nécropole de l'âge du bronze de Poiana*, în „Dacia”, 5-6, 1935-1936, p. 161, fig. 10-11.

¹⁴ E. Kaiser, *Der Hort von Borodino. Kritische Anmerkungen zu einem berühmten bronzezeitlichen Schatzfund aus dem nordwestlichen Schwarzmeergebiet*, UPA, Band 44, Bonn, 1997, fig. 26/10; fig. 27/1-6.

¹⁵ L. Koryakova, A. Epimakhov, *The Urals and Western Siberia in the Bronze and Iron Age*, Cambridge, 2007, p. 149, fig. 3.4.

¹⁶ Al. Vulpe, *Die Äxte und Beile in Rumänien*, I, PBF, IX, 2, München, 1970, p. 101, fig. 41/570.

¹⁷ V. I. Kločko, *Ozbroennja ta vije'kova sprava Davn'ogo naceleennja Ukraini (5000-900 pp. do P.X.)*, Kiev, 2006, fig. 58/17.

¹⁸ I. Nestor, *Der Stand der Vorgeschichtsforschung in Rumänien*, 22, Bericht der RGK, 1932 (1933), p. 128.

¹⁹ Al. Vulpe, *op. cit.*, p. 13-25.

²⁰ V. Diaconu, *Despre posibilitatea existenței prototipurilor și a imitațiilor în industria litică. Discuții pe baza unor topoare de piatră din epoca bronzului*, în „Zargidava”, IX, 2010, p. 17-28.

²¹ A se vedea și P. F. Biehl, Y. Ya. Rassamakin, *Import and Imitation in Archaeology. An Introduction*, în P. F.

For example, the inter-communities exchange, which facilitates the transfer of goods, ideas, technologies, could contribute to the spread of prototypes, which later were imitated, especially if they were objects made of precious materials or had a certain importance and social significance²².

The imitations were intended to highlight the particular value of the prototypes. Copying a model also had the role to transfer, symbolically, its' value. On the other hand, in intercommunitary trades, the imitations of metal pieces were probably considered equivalent to prototypes. We think it is not a coincidence that most stone axes that imitate bronze axes, are made of volcanic rocks. This could be a sign that not only a „copy” of the shape of the prototype was sought, but also an „approach” to the value of the material from which it was made; bronze, like volcanic rocks, was quite difficult to obtain and to process, which was not within everyone's reach and required special training.

Based on the foregoing, we emphasize that the stone ax discussed by us might be an imitation of a special metal artifact. In addition to the morphological details, the careful polish of the artifact and the obvious shine are other features that bring closer this artifact to bronze axes. In the context of this discussion, we recall the stone imitations of some bronze sceptre-axes (the Drajna de Jos-Lozova-Pobit Kamăk series)²³, with spiral blade, found in northwestern Pontic areas, such as at Ljulin (Bulgaria)²⁴, Haskovo (Bulgaria)²⁵, Pantelimon de Sus (Constanța county)²⁶ and Mediaș (Sibiu county)²⁷.

Although, from a functional perspective, the artifact found in Muntenia may fall within the category of so-called battle axes²⁸, its' general appearance, careful processing and lack of wear may indicate the role of social endorsement of this stone ax.

The publication of this artifact is intended to put into circulation informations especially related to the typology of stone axes from the Bronze Age. The special shape of this object was discussed in the context of other similar findings, but there could not be presented concrete dating elements. However, some morphological characteristics indicate the Medium or Late Bronze Age period.

Biehl, Y. Ya. Rassamakin (eds.), *Import and Imitation in Archaeology*, Langenweißbach, 2008, p. 3-4.

²² A. M. Choyke, *Shifting meaning and value through imitation in the European late neolithic*, in P. F. Biehl, Y. Ya. Rassamakin (eds.), *Import and Imitation in Archaeology*, Langenweißbach, 2008, p. 5-15.

²³ A. László, *Drajna de Jos-Lozova-Pobit Kamăk-Uluburun. Sur les relations a longue distance dans l'age tardif du bronze*, în SAA, XII, 2006, p. 43-55.

²⁴ H. G. Buchholz, *Ein aussergewöhnliches Steinzepter im östlichen Mittelmeer*, în PZ, 74, 1999, p. 70, fig. 6/a.

²⁵ V. J. Lichardus, R. Echt, I. Kiliev, C. J. Christov, *Die Spätbronzezeit an der unteren Tundža und die ostägäischen Verbindungen in Südostbulgarien*, în „Eurasia Antiqua”, 8, 2002, fig. 16; A. László, *Über die Beziehungen, die kulturelle und chronologische Lage der Bronzefunde vom typ Ópály-Urii-Drajna de Jos-Lozova-Pobit Kamăk*, în *Bronzezeitliche Depotfunde – Problem der Interpretation. Materialien der Festkonferenz für Tivodor Lehoczy zum 175. Geburtstag.*, Ushhorod, 5-6 Oktober 2005, Ujgorod, 2006, fig. 3, fig. 5.

²⁶ M. Irimia, *Sceptre de piatră inedite din județul Constanța și unele considerații privind legăturile zonei vest-pontice cu spațiul egeean în bronzul târziu*, în „Pontica”, 41, 2008, p. 80, fig. 2; idem, *Unele aspecte privind raporturile dintre spațiul egeean și regiunile vest-pontice în bronzul târziu*, în „Zargidava”, VIII, 2009, p. 37, fig. 8.

²⁷ E. Stoicovici, M. Blăjan, *Unelte și arme de piatră descoperite în împrejurimile Mediașului (jud. Sibiu)*, în „Apulum”, XVII, 1979, p. 46, fig. 5/8.

²⁸ Vezi discuții la V. Diaconu, *Considerații privind topoarele de luptă din piatră specifice epocii bronzului din regiunile est-carpatice ale României*, în RA, s.n., V, 1, 2010, p. 5-21.

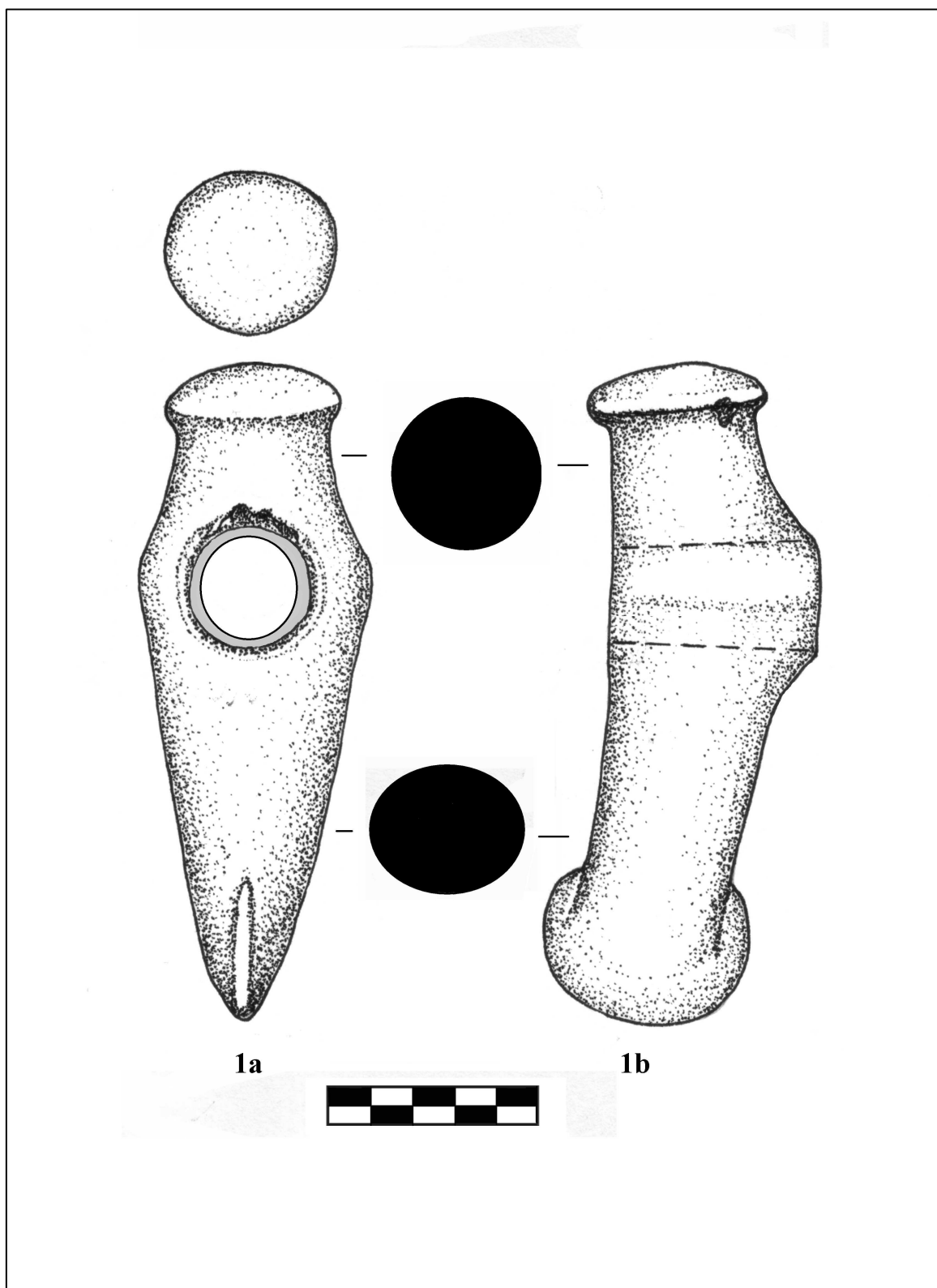


Fig. 1. Stone Axe (drawing - V. D.).



Fig. 2. Stone Axe (photo - M.O.).

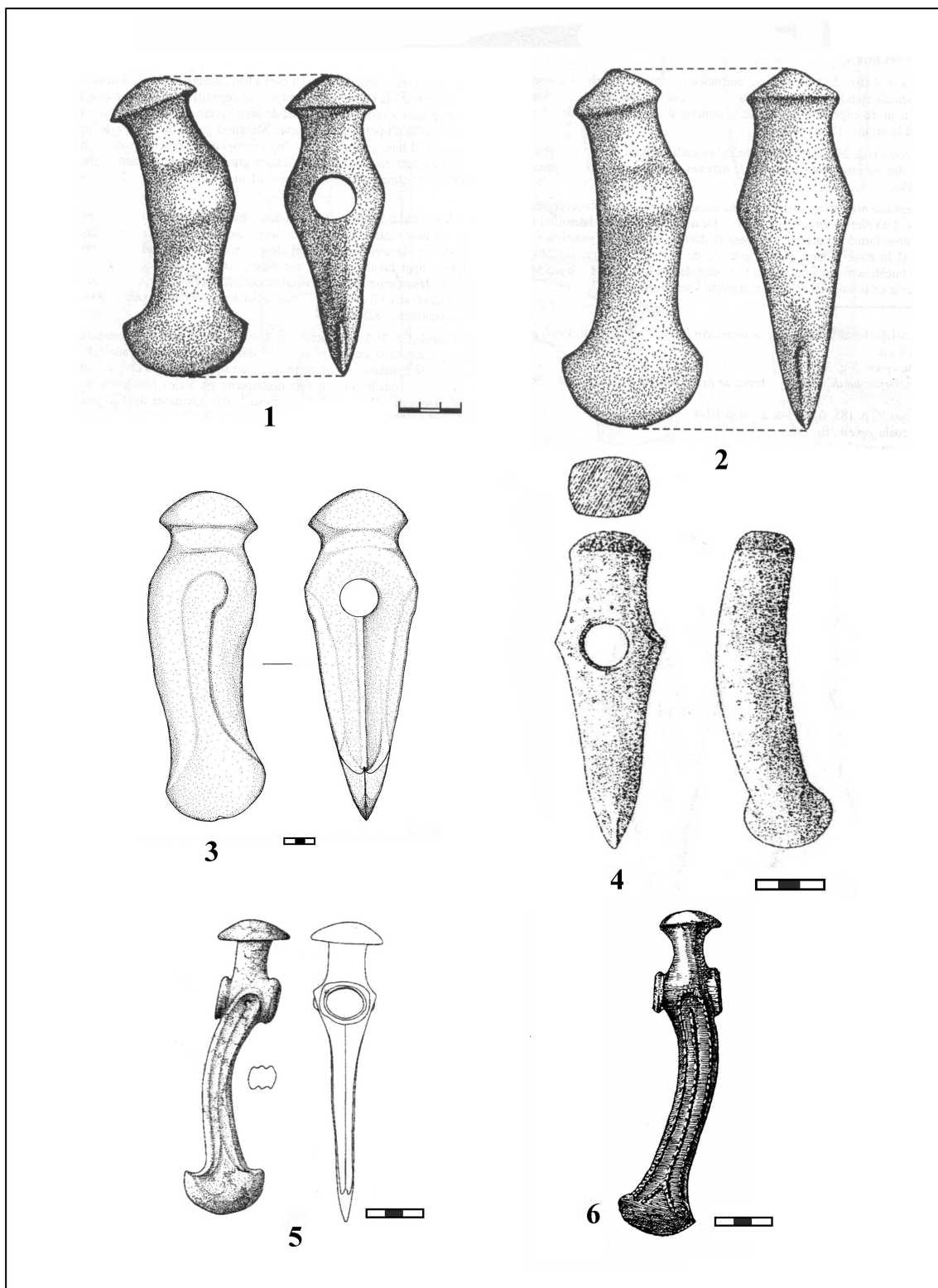


Fig. 3 - Stone and metal axes:

1, Chintinici; 2, Bărcănești; 3, Ghirișu de Criș; 4, Soloneț; 5, Larga; 6, western Ukraine
 (1, 2, after Gh. Dumitroaia 1997; 3, after C. Ghemiș 2001; 4, after B. Niculică *et al.* 2002-2003;
 5, after Al. Vulpe 1970; 6, after V. I. Klochko 2006).