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FUNERARY PRACTICES OF THE SCYTHIANS FROM TRANSYLVANIA.
CASE STUDY: THE SÂNCRAI NECROPOLIS (ALBA COUNTY)

ABSTRACT

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Funerary Practices of the Scythians from Transylvania.

Case Study: The Sâncrai Necropolis (Alba County)

Key words: early Iron Age, Scythian necropolises, Agathyrsi, funerary practices in Transylvania, 7th century - 5th centuries BC

The reason for researching this aspect of Scythian burial practices in Transylvania was the size of the find and the unpublished material resulting from the archaeological investigation of the site. The overall research of these burial practices requires a thorough investigation of the phenomena belonging to this ethno-cultural group, their genetic links, their area of spread and their chronological relationships. Each of the aspects and phenomena of the Late Hallstatt has its own importance for understanding this era and its subsequent development. Detailed information on the chronology and the study of the ritual and funerary rites practised by the Scythian group in Transylvania will enable us to broaden our knowledge of the Late Hallstatt in this area.

The study of this necropolis was carried out using classical archaeological research methods, to which interdisciplinary methods were added, leading to results of particular relevance in the final study of the find. The research was carried out in the summer of 2016 on the occasion of the construction works of the Sebeş-Turda motorway, Lot 2, in Sâncrai, called Sit 9. The infrastructure works carried out throughout our country in the last period have brought to light numerous points with archaeological discoveries of significant importance that have led to the strengthening or development of ideas or aspects related to the historical past of the populations that settled in the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic area during several historical eras. In this context, the research of the necropolis of Sâncrai plays an important role in the overall knowledge of the Scythian horizon in Transylvania.

For a more thorough analysis of the materials resulting from the necropolis research, interdisciplinary studies were used. Thus, for the bone material from the animal offering, zooarchaeological analyses were carried out (Institute of Archaeology and History of Art Cluj-Napoca) which provided data on the species and age of the animals preferred for the meat offering that was deposited with the deceased. In this context, human bones were also analysed through an anthropological study (History Museum of Tg. Mureş), the results of which provided a more comprehensive and accurate picture of the age, height, sex and pathology of

the individuals buried in the necropolis of Sâncraia, belonging to the Scythian horizon. For the metallic material (iron, bronze, gold) samples were taken and several types of analyses were carried out (Valahia University of Târgoviște), namely optical microscopy (OM), scanning electron microscopy (SEM-EDS), X-ray spectrometry (ATR FTIR), inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (ICP-MS). Through these analyses, it was possible to observe the quality of the metal used, the percentages of the alloy elements, the hardness of the tools/weapons/jewellery. Samples of bone material were also taken for C14 analysis and analysed in different laboratories (Poznan University - Poland, Debrecen Institute of Atomic Physics - Hungary, Mannheim University - Germany). These analyses provided precise data on the absolute chronology of the necropolis.

The present PhD thesis has been structured in six chapters plus the Annexes containing the List of Abbreviations, List of Plates, Legend, Bibliography and Plates.

The first chapter "Introduction", in addition to the sub-chapters discussing the argument and methodology followed in writing the thesis, covers two other sub-chapters dealing with the history of research and the origin of the Scythians. The sub-chapter History of research presents the main contributions of Romanian archaeology to the research of Scythian sites in Transylvania. Most finds belonging to this group or groups of populations of Eurasian origin are concentrated mainly in the area occupied by the middle basin of the Mureș river, but also in the basin of the two Târnavă rivers. The problems raised by these discoveries are also reflected in the terminology used in the literature in relation to this population. It goes from the Scythian cultural facies, as interpreted by V. Pârvan the discoveries in Transylvania, to the Scythian issue developed by N. Iorga, to then discuss the group of burial tombs in Transylvania or the intrusive group of Scythian-Iranian origin as interpreted by V. Vasiliev. Of course, after the discovery and research of the Ciunbrud necropolis by Șt. Ferenczi, a term is defined that becomes representative of this type of discovery, namely the *Ciunbrud cultural group*. This term has been accepted and taken up also by foreign researchers who have reported findings belonging to these groups of Iranian origin, especially from the Pannonian area, to the situation found in the Ciunbrud necropolis. The subject of the origin of the Scythian population that appeared in the North Pontic area at the beginning of the 7th century was discussed by researchers from abroad as well as from Romania, following two directions, namely the interpretation of ancient written sources and the interpretation of information from archaeological finds. The written sources referring to the Scythians are few and very diverse, but their disadvantage is that they do not belong to the Scythians. The Scythians are mentioned in various writings belonging to the Assyrians, Persians, ancient Greeks and Arabs. All these

sources speak of fragments of Scythian history when this population comes into contact with these peoples who relate their own history in writing. The sources containing the most detailed information on the Scythians are the Greek sources from Herodotus, Strabo, Hekataios of Miletus, Thukydides and Hippocrates.

Chapter two, "Funerary practices of the Scythians in Transylvania" comprises four sub-chapters in which topics related to funerary ritual and rite, necropolises and isolated graves, funerary inventory and the chronology of the Scythian horizon in Transylvania were treated. The presence of the Scythian group on the territory of Transylvania is known to us mainly from information derived from research on necropolises and isolated graves, such as the necropolises of Ciumbrud, Aiud, Băița, Batoș, Blaj, Bratei, Cipău, Cristești, Ozd, Tg. Mureș, Simeria, Teiuș. The funerary practices captured by the archaeological research show some of their own features such as: in the majority of them, the elements of funerary ritual and rite have an archaic character; the number of burial mounds is very low (this is probably also due to incidental destruction); the predominance of tombs made in rectangular pits with the deceased placed directly on the ground; the lack of human sacrifice, this element not being found in any of the cases investigated in the entire intra-Carpathian territory; the relatively modest funerary inventory of the tombs; the lack of tombs with horses. This Scythian group is distinguished, in terms of funerary rite, by the use of burial, which differs from the autochthonous population that exclusively practised cremation, and in terms of funerary ritual, there are specific elements such as the deposition of animal offerings and natural dyes (ochre, realgar). In terms of funerary inventory, the main element found in Scythian burial and cremation graves is pottery (bitronconic vessels, bowls, cups with raised handle), to which are added weapons (*akinakes* daggers, bronze arrowheads, spearheads, axe), jewellery (glass beads, amber, kaolin, *kauri* shells, *saltaleoni* bracelets, gold trefoil appliques) and harness parts (quiver appliques, rings, phalerae, bit elements). Chronologically, at the end of the 8th century and especially in the 7th century BC, fortified settlements throughout the Carpathian Basin suffered destruction due to the penetration of Iranian populations from the northern Black Sea. These penetrations are reflected in the discovery of numerous elements foreign to the local background, in particular weapons indicating the presence of Scythian warriors (bronze arrowheads with two or three fins). In Transylvania, these manifestations have been found in Hallstattian fortified settlements in the Mureș valley (Aiud-Cetățuie, Teleac, Chendu, Ghirbom) or in the Someș Mic valley (Gheorgheni-Valea Mare, Vlaha-Pad) and confirm the existence of forms typical of the Scythian horizon. The aggressive character of these Scythian penetrations, infiltrations, into the central European territory around the second half of the 7th century BC is underlined also

by similar episodes in the Caucasian settlements (Urartu, Karmir-Blur), where traces of destruction have been observed, with bronze arrowheads with two Scythian-looking fins found in the walls of the fortifications.

Chapter three, "The Sâncrai Necropolis" comprises eight sub-chapters in which topics relating to the location of the necropolis are discussed; the catalogue of finds including the description of the 95 graves (inhumation, cremation, biritual, cenotaph) and 12 chronologically unmarked complexes; the characteristics of the necropolis related to funerary ritual and rite; funerary inventory. The interdisciplinary studies (anthropological, zooarchaeological, metallographic) applied complement important information resulting from laboratory analyses of samples taken from the artefacts and archaeological materials found in the graves. According to the anthropological analyses, a series of statistics were obtained concerning the ratio of individuals who were buried in the necropolis of Sâncrai, the distribution by age groups, and pathologies of the individuals. Thus, it was found that the number of female individuals is almost double that of male individuals (i.e. 40 females, 22 males) plus 18 non-adults and 5 adults whose sex could not be identified. It was also observed that in general, the community of Sâncrai has experienced nutritional problems since childhood. Dental diseases are the most common but also some pathologies related to the lifestyle that the individual had. These observations show us that the population that used the burial space at Sâncrai is one with a predominantly pastoral habit, which shows us their generally peaceful lifestyle. No traces have been observed involving this population in major armed conflicts, with the exception of one case of Parry fracture. Analysis of the osteological remains of the meat offering, in terms of the breed of the animal sacrificed, shows that 88 animal bones were recovered at Sâncrai, of which 63 belong to cattle, 24 to sheep and one to rabbit. The necropolis at Sâncrai reveals a different behaviour of the Scythian community, which may have developed by cattle breeding probably also due to the environmental conditions in the area. Thus, the community's animal economy reflects a pastoral character. In order to carry out the archaeometric analyses, a number of 16 metal samples were selected from burial graves with different purposes and characteristics. Analyses on the selected material were carried out by three methods: optical microscopy (OM), field emission scanning electron microscopy coupled with energy dispersive X-ray spectrometry (FE-SEM-EDS), attenuated total reflection - Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (ATR-FTIR). Overall, the analytical and statistical analyses show that the metal samples can be grouped into three groups according to their content: iron, gold-silver and copper-tin alloy. The last group can be divided into two classes: one with Cu as the major constituent and the other with Sn as the major constituent. According to scientific literature, Cu-Sn alloy with tin content of 12-22% by weight

is considered bronze. Within all these groups, the samples show a strong correlation, supporting the hypothesis that they were obtained using the same or similar minerals. In terms of manufacturing technology, although the thin sections of these samples have not yet been studied, the regular structures characteristic of smelting samples can be clearly observed. In addition, it is clear from the data presented here that the samples taken from the gold pieces were created by successive heating and beating processes. The last sub-chapter deals with a topic concerning horse and dog burials in the Scythian environment. In the Carpathian Basin, as well as in the immediate vicinity, the earliest attested finds of horse burials are in the sphere of the Szentes-Vekerzug pseudo-Scythian horizon. In the earlier period of this horizon, in the areas mentioned, only depositions of bits and harness parts were found in human graves. Horses were rarely buried. In the later period of the Carpathian Hallstatt, i.e. the Scythian period, there are graves of horses that were buried with the harness. This custom hints at the changing relationship between man and horse in the Scythian period. In the early period of the Northpotic Scythian horizon, it is observed that horse graves are located under the mounds of the deceased. In contrast to the situation in the North Pontic area, in the Carpathian Basin, horses were buried separately from the deceased or grouped together in necropolises. In the case identified at Sâncrai, the horse discovered was in grave M.26, which is situated among other burial graves and located somewhat towards the centre of the necropolis. Faunal analyses of the skeleton revealed a young age of the horse, between 2-2.5/3 years, based on dental eruptions. It was also found that the height of this horse is quite small, somewhere around 1.36m. The young age of the animal when it was buried suggests that it was probably sacrificed likely due to pathological problems observed on the skeletal bones and not as a result of a ritual performed specifically for offerings dedicated to some cult or ritual manifestation. The bones of a dog (incomplete skeleton) were collected from grave M. 91. Until recently it was believed that cynophagy (dog eating) was characteristic only of the Celts and not of the Scythians. However, the discovery of dog bones with cut marks at Nagytarcsa, Ludanyhalaszi-Soderbanya, suggests occasional consumption of them in Scythian communities as well. The tradition of burying dogs in graves also occurs in the surrounding populations, the Southern Thracians (Mumdjilar, Breyovo, Sboryanovo, Ginina Moghila, Kralevo) and Illyrians (Atenica). In the case identified at Sâncrai, the dog was buried (M.91) in the same grave as the female individual, where a secondary burial ritual of reburial was observed. A dog skeleton was identified above the human skeleton, which was placed over the remains of the human skeleton after its dismemberment. Among the bones belonging to the dog, an ovine-caprine joint bone was also identified, which was interpreted as an amulet tied around the dog's neck. The Sâncrai specimen is among the smallest dogs (45.36 cm) found at Scythian sites. Small

specimens appear throughout the 7th-6th century BC as pets. The specimen found at Sâncrai also suggests the idea of a pet, but also the possibility of its use as a guard animal for cattle or sheep.

Chapter four, "Absolute and relative chronology of the Sâncrai necropolis" comprises two sub-chapters, namely "C14 data - elements of absolute chronology" and "Analogies, synchronisms based on the funerary inventory". Thus, 7 samples were taken for radiocarbon analysis, 4 of which were taken from human bones from the 95 burial tombs, and 3 samples, one from the horse tomb (M.26) and two from M.91, respectively from the meat offering (beef) and from the ritual deposition with magical significance (dog). The six burial graves are in the following position:

a) grave M.25, belonging to a mature female individual, is located somewhere in the centre of the investigated necropolis. The date resulting from the radiocarbon analysis is Poz-95023: 2465±35 BP;

b) grave M.53, belonging to a mature female individual is located on the north-eastern boundary of the investigated necropolis. The date resulting from the radiocarbon analysis is Poz-95024: 2515±35 BP;

c) grave M.68, belonging to an adult male individual is located on the eastern boundary of the investigated necropolis. The date resulting from the radiocarbon analysis is Poz-95064: 2505±35 BP;

d) grave M.32, belonging to an adult male individual, is located on the north-west side, on the boundary of the investigated necropolis. The date resulting from the radiocarbon analysis is MAMS-35024: 2531±19 BP;

e) tomb M.26, a horse grave, which is located between human burial tombs in the western half of the necropolis. The date resulting from the radiocarbon analysis is DeA-17515: 2186±33 BP;

f) grave M.91, a female grave located in the central area of the necropolis. The analysis was carried out on samples from the animal offering represented by a cow and from the ritual deposition of magical significance, represented by a dog. The date resulting from the radiocarbon analysis for the cow offering is DeA-17507: 2560±24 BP. As for the chronological dating of the dog, date resulting from the radiocarbon analysis is DeA-17506: 2523±25 BP.

The elements of absolute chronology, found in the necropolis of Sâncrai, attest to an early dating of the penetration of this group in the intra-Carpathian space and its establishment on a terrace of the middle basin of the Mureş, towards the end of the 8th century - beginning of the 7th century BC. According to radiocarbon analysis data from a horse grave M.26, we can estimate the end date of this Scythian necropolis operation to be sometime after the second half

of the 4th century BC-but no later than the end of the 3rd century/beginning of the 2nd century BC.

The archaic character of the Scythian enclave on the territory of Transylvania was well represented by the funerary finds of the early Late Hallstatt period. Early Scythian groups are considered to have appeared in the North Pontic area at the end of the 7th century-beginning of the 6th century BC. Characteristic elements of this phase have also been captured in the necropolis at Sâncrai. These include, first and foremost, the type of flat, simple tombs with meagre inventory, the crouched position of the deceased, the practice of ritual killing and the inventory elements representing the harness parts (phalerae, rings, basket-type pendants), considered symbolic representations of the horse. Other elements of the inventory categories also argue for an early dating of the beginning of the necropolis at Sâncrai, such as vessels without protrusions and those with elongated protrusions, which have analogies in the Transylvanian *Hallstatt C*, miniature vessels, weapons including *akinakes* daggers and arrowheads in their archaic versions, loop rings with conical ends, *nomad* mirrors, *kauri* shells and kaolin beads. The debate remains as to the duration of the Sâncrai necropolis and its final limit. The evolution of this group can be observed primarily in terms of funerary rites and rituals. Thus, the 11 cremation tombs discovered, by the post-archaic character of the funerary inventory, the classical phase of the Northpontic Scythian culture, do not go beyond the middle of the 5th century BC. This aspect is also reflected in the funerary ritual, as no cremation graves have been found at Sâncrai with the remains of the ashes deposited in an urn, a ritual that has been found in the Pannonian Plain since the beginning of the 5th century BC. Another chronological landmark is the miniature slow-wheel vessel found in grave M.101, an inhumation grave. Vessels of this type are found in significant numbers in the Pannonian Plain, in necropolises dated to the late 6th-5th century BC. This type of ceramic vessel worked on a slow wheel could bring back into question a possible contact, as K. Horedt and I.H. Crişan supposed, of the Scythian group from Transylvania with the enclaves located in the Pannonian Plain during the 5th century BC. The Sâncrai necropolis, on the basis of the archaeological material analysed, makes it possible to establish the penetration of this foreign group of Scythian-Iranian origin and the occupation of the upper terrace of the Mureş at the point *Dâlma lui Candin/Darvaş*, loc. Sâncrai (Alba county) towards the end of the 8th century/beginning of the 7th century BC. The final limit of the use of this funerary space by the Scythians or of the so-called Scythian "remains" can be placed somewhere towards the end of the 4th century BC - no more than the end of the 3rd century/beginning of the 2nd century BC, according to the dating of the M.26 (horse) grave, in which the main dating element is the bit with S-shaped psalias, which circulated in the Carpathian area from the 4th century BC.

Chapter five, "The place and role of the Sâncrai necropolis in the framework of funerary discoveries in the Scythian world of Transylvania" discusses topographical data, size, funerary rite, orientation of graves, complementary ritual elements, funerary inventory, anthropological analyses, zooarchaeological analyses, metallographic analyses, radiocarbon analyses, social status. In the Middle Mureş Basin, the density of the spaces occupied by necropolises is relevant, where four necropolises belonging to the Scythian horizon have been identified, all positioned on the high terraces of the Mureş. It should be noted that in the four necropolises (Aiud, Ciumbrud, Gâmbaş, Teiuş) a total of 54 graves attributed to this foreign group of Scythian-Iranian origin were discovered. The Sâncrai necropolis completes this picture, being located on the same left bank of the Mureş River as those at Gâmbaş, Ciumbrud and Teiuş. The exception is the necropolis of Aiud, which is located on the right side of the Mureş. Thus, the necropolis of Sâncrai is located at ca. 6 km south of the Ciumbrud necropolis, about 7 km east of the Aiud necropolis, 15 km north of the Teiuş necropolis and 11 km south of the Gâmbaş necropolis. The Sâncrai necropolis occupies an important place in this picture, especially in terms of the size and number of graves discovered. Thus said, the burial space known at this time occupies an area of 12,641 m². As previously reported, the necropolis has not been exhausted from the point of view of research, but further interventions will be necessary in the future on the western side, on the sloping side, towards the village hearth of Sâncrai, where systematic archaeological research carried out in 2020, 2021 has shown that the necropolis is expanding, with tombs belonging to the Scythian horizon. At the moment, the necropolis at Sâncrai occupies the largest area in relation to the other known necropolises in Transylvania. Also, in terms of the number of graves discovered, the necropolis of Sâncrai is by far the most relevant with 95 known graves at the present stage of research. The necropolis at Sâncrai is a biritual one. The research carried out has revealed the practice of both funerary rites, both burial and cremation. In addition to these, symbolic cenotaph-type tombs account for a significant 12%, higher than the 10% of cremation tombs. Burial graves account for the majority of 78%. In the plan of the necropolis, it can be seen that the cremation graves are somewhat concentrated on the south-west side of the necropolis, located between the burial graves. The cenotaph tombs are scattered over the entire area of the necropolis among the burial tombs. As far as the numerical ratio of the Sâncrai community is concerned, it can be seen that the number of graves intended for females represents 41%, males 23%, non-adults 18% and cenotaph graves 12%. It is worth noting that at Sâncrai, post-burial interventions were identified at the level of the burial rite, whereby the skeleton was dismembered following a secondary ritual. These post-burial interventions on graves are only applied when the world of the living is

perceived to be disturbed by "actions" coming from the dead. In the necropolis of Sâncrai, in addition to the practice of burial and cremation rites, the practice of symbolic burials represented by cenotaph tombs, unique at this time for the Scythian cultural horizon in Transylvania, has been identified. On the other hand, within the early Scythian groups in the Middle Dnieper and Pannonian area, within the Szentes-Vekerzug group, the cenotaph phenomenon is well represented by burial pits lacking skeletons or remains of cremation but containing structures and remains of funerary burnings, funerary inventory usually represented by ceramic vessels. In terms of funerary inventory, a diverse register of ceramic vessels, weapons and jewellery was discovered in the necropolis graves at Sâncrai. Ceramics, by far, represents the category of inventory found in almost all burial, cremation and cenotaph tombs. Three main forms have been identified as being consistently associated with graves, represented by the bitronconic vessel, the inverted rim bowl and the raised handle cup. These specific ceramic vessels found in Scythian graves in Transylvania are considered traditional forms of the indigenous culture that were taken over by the intrusive population of Iranian origin. Elements of Lusatian material culture, of Villanovan or Gáva-type culture in the 7th century BC are found in the Scythian pottery. Towards the east, these elements reach the area of the Middle Dnepr, an area occupied by the so-called, "agrarian Scythia". This finding may shed some light on the genesis of Scythian pottery in Transylvania. The inventory elements considered specific to the foreign Scythian group that entered Transylvania are represented by weapons and jewellery. Among the panoply of weapons, the most common are bronze arrowheads, in their different variants (with/without thorn, three-edged, double-edged, pyramidal), *akinakes* daggers, spearheads and an axe. The individuals in whose graves the weapons were found are considered to be warriors, with a total of 14 individuals in the entire necropolis. The category of these warriors also includes women, who are identified in two graves (M. 10-burial, M.114-cremation). In both graves whose owners were female individuals, arrowheads are found in the burial inventory. In the case of grave M.10, an *akinakes* dagger was also discovered in addition to arrowheads.

Anthropological analyses carried out on the samples from Sâncrai provide important data on the ratio at the level of individuals, the life expectancy of the community. Thus, it was found that women died between 25-35 years and men between 25-50 years. Regarding the height of the population using the burial space at Sâncrai, it was found that this community is medium-height (men-1.72 m, women-1.59 m). The comparative archaeozoological study carried out on the samples from Sâncrai revealed that in this

community the meat offering came from cattle (71.59%), sheep (27.27%) and game (rabbit-1.14%).

The "Conclusions" in Chapter six reflect the results of the final analysis and the problems raised by this foreign group of Iranian origin that entered Transylvania. The necropolis at Sâncrai stands out for the fact that the practice of both funerary rites, burial and cremation, was captured here. The biritualism practised by the Scythian group would place the evolution of the necropolis at Sâncrai up to a horizon of the classical phase of manifestation of this group. However, as observed in the analysis of the cremation graves, the material from the funerary inventory of the cremation graves fits the characteristics of the inventory identified in the burial graves. For this reason and also because the cremation graves are not delimited in a separate area from the burial graves, as in the situation observed in the Băița necropolis, they were discovered in the south-western part of the necropolis, among the burial tombs, we consider that the group that used the burial space at Sâncrai practised cremation at an early date, as a perpetuation of the burial rites and rituals practised by the Scythian population of the northern Black Sea and the Caucasus area. Even though the percentage of cremation in this North Pontic area is low, it shows that either some elements of the Scythian groups were practising this rite in the 7th-6th century BC, or some elements of the indigenous populations were assimilated during the westward movement by the Scythian group or groups. Another indicator of the early cremation practice of the Sâncrai group is the pottery found in the graves, which is found in the early register of Hallstatt D, with Gáva influences, and has a range as early as the 7th century BC, reaching as far east as the Middle Dnieper area, where it came into contact with the Scythian populations penetrating the area between the Don River to the east, the Dniester River to the west and the northern shores of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov to the south.

The funerary inventory discovered in some burial tombs, such as the ceramic vessels with archaic forms taken from the Hallstatt C and the crouched position of the skeleton, which in conjunction with the results of *C14* radiocarbon analysis, suggest the penetration of the Scythian group at Sâncrai in an early period, as early as the end of the 8th century- early 7th century BC. The long-standing use of the burial space by this enclave, or so-called "remains" of it, is captured by the burial of a horse, whose *C14* dating places it in the second half of the 4th century - end of the 3rd century/beginning of the 2nd century BC. As for the ethnic Scythian population that penetrated the territory of Transylvania, the question remains open, although most scholars consider the enclave as belonging to the Agathyrsian population, whom Herodotus places in the Mureș valley. They are thought to represent the first wave of Scythians to enter Transylvania from Moldavia across the Carpathians, a nomadic population whose

customs are close to those of the Thracians. Al. Vulpe speaks of an Agathyrsian cultural circle or rather a Thraco-Agathyrsian one whose common characteristic is the metal inventory. On the other hand, Șt. Ferenzi considers that there cannot be such a cultural circle from the middle of the 6th century - until after 500 BC in the territorial area between the Pannonian Plain with the Szentes-Vekerzug group, Podolia with the Kušťanovice group and Transylvania with the Scythian Ciumbrud group. Regardless of the position for or against the nomination as Agathyrsian, the Scythian essence of the Transylvanian group cannot be disputed, which is also reflected in the study of the Sâncrai necropolis. It is possible that the separation of the Scythian groups from the large mass of the North Pontic area, depending on when it occurred, may have partially involved or dislocated certain local communities that mixed with the group of Iranian origin that entered Transylvania. We believe that this mixed coexistence, from an ethnic point of view, is captured at Sâncrai, where the predominant element is, however, the Scythian ethnic group, which is quite homogeneous and which preserves its rites and burial rituals throughout its existence in Transylvania. Thus, the assimilation of the Sâncrai group would have been much easier, as a large part of it would have dissolved into the mass of the native population of Thraco-Dacian origin. It is possible that some elements of this group of Scythian origin may have retreated to the northpotic area sometime after the second half of the 5th century BC. Thus, the so-called “remnants” of this group continued to use the funerary space of the necropolis at Sâncrai for various rituals also after the middle of the 4th century BC.

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