
TWO ROMAN DICE FROM THE MOLDAVIAN PLAIN

Abstract: The article presents two Roman long dice discovered in the carpic settlements from Botosani-Dealul Căramidăriei and Botosani-Groapa lui Ichim Their presence attests to the diversity of the relations between the free Dacians from the Plain of Moldavia and the Roman world of the 3rd century.

Keywords: long dice, games of chance, rituals of divination, free Dacians

The artifacts presented in this article were discovered in two Carpic settlements identified near the town of Botoșani and dated to the IInd and IIIrd centuries C.E. It's about Dealul Căramidăriei¹, where it was also identified a necropolis of culture Sântana de Mureș-Cernjachov and Groapa lui Ichim². The two points are very close to each other (see the Map). The objects were mentioned in excavation reports, without making further clarifications on their usefulness. In the first case, the authors wrote about “a piece of bone of prismatic shape decorated with central circles printed”³ (photo 1). Regarding the second object discovered in a pit of worship (?) along with other artifacts, Paul Șadurschi has indicated at least “two objects of rectangular shape, made of a long bone”⁴ (photo 2). The presence of a Roman amphora neck (photo 3 A) has allowed the author to date the complex in the III century C.E.

The dice represent “small objects (polyhedrons) used as implements for gambling and the playing of social games. The most common form of dice is the cube, with each side marked with from one to six small dots (spots)”⁵. In Antiquity, like today, they were used a large variety of dice, as the ones in brick shape, having marks only on the long sides. Such artifacts were first identified in the *oppidum* from Stradonice (Bohemia), but have also been found in other parts of the continent as the settlements from Nalliers -France (Vendee), Barzan (Charente-Maritime), Beruge, Naintre (Vienne), and the shrine from Puy de Corent (Puy-de-Dome)⁶. The two stick-shaped objects from Botoșani area represent a special form of these rectangular dice. The closest correlation we were able to identify is a dice discovered in Mainz, in the Roman camp (Fig. 3)⁷. Similar pieces were also reported in Bulgaria, Lebanon⁸ or even in Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia⁹ but information from websites are not very detailed as regards the conditions of discovery.

Having signs only on four of their sides is very possible that rectangular

Daniel Ciucălău

Botoșani County Museum
dan_ciucalau@yahoo.com

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1 ZAHARIA/ZAHARIA/RAȚĂ 1958, 461-470.

2 ȘADURSCHI/UNGUREANU 1997, 37-48.

3 ZAHARIA/ZAHARIA/RAȚĂ 1958, 469.

4 ȘADURSCHI/UNGUREANU 1997, 40.

5 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/dice>, accessed on 15.05.2017.

6 MANNIEZ 2010, 18-22.

7 MIKLER 1997, 32.

8 http://averweij.web.cern.ch/averweij/an_rec_i.htm, accessed on 15.05.2017.

9 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Long_dice#/media/File:Prehistoric_Times_of_Bohemia,_Moravia_and_Slovakia_-_NM_Prague_30.JPG, accessed on 15.05.2017.

dice are reminiscences of processed astragals¹⁰ which have been used since Neolithic for playing and for divination. "These games of chance", as Richard Holmgren stated, „combines the human playing instinct with the desire of knowledge of her destiny. It is in this way games with dice hold a natural link to the powers of imagination and religious actions. The game is not only an interaction between participants; it also devotes itself to the powers that cannot control and to the supernatural forces”¹¹.

In the Roman world, even if dice games were forbidden (Hor., Carm. III.24.58, Ovid., Trist., II.470, 491), being allowed only during Saturnalia¹², they were practiced by the emperors (Augustus, Claudius, Caligula, Nero, Commodus and Domitianus)¹³, and by soldiers or civilians. In Dacia dice were discovered in urban centers: Apulum (Alba Iulia), Sarmizaghetusa Ulpia Traiana (Sarmizegetusa) Potaiasa (Turda), Porolissum, and military camps: Feldioara Răcari¹⁴. At the Lower Danube were identified such objects at Noviodunum, Beroe, Callatis Oescus, Novae Nicopolis ad Istrum, Augusta Traiana¹⁵. Favorite games were *Ludus latruncularum*, a game of military tactics, in which the player must capture the opponent's pieces, *Ludus Duodecim Scriptorum*, in which the pieces were moved using three dice, or the Mill game¹⁶.

Although the relations between the Free Dacian communities and Roman world were quite intense, as can be seen in the large number of vessels and other import objects found in all settlements and cemeteries dating from the II-III centuries researched, game pieces are very rarely identified in the Moldavian Plain. In the specialized literature there is no mention than the glass pawns with hemispherical shape discovered at Cucorani, Băiceni¹⁷ and Botoșani- Dealul Cărămădăriei¹⁸, dated to IInd-IIIrd centuries. Only in the fourth century cemetery from the Barcea (Galati County), in a child's grave (M 139) were discovered two dice, and the 27 glass counters¹⁹.

The usefulness of these kinds of dice is difficult to determine. Given that quite a lot of these rectangular dice were found in cultic contexts, such as the sanctuaries from Puy de Corant, in Bessines or Agris (France), some authors have underlined their role in performing rituals of divination²⁰. Moreover, the dice from Dealul Cărămădăriei was found in a context that could be considered ritually. It was discovered in a pit filled with ceramic fragments of vessels imported or handmade, near a pile of grains. It was deposited in a Dacian cup (photo 3 B) with secondary burning traces, together with at least two other similar objects and with 22 cattle astragals²¹. Such pieces have also been discovered in funerary contexts, such as the tomb 51 of the Roman cemetery at Lankhills, where it was a set of

pieces, consisting of 1 coral stick and 15 black glass counters, 11 white glass counters, 1 ivory dice and 1 semicircular glass piece²². The closest analogy of this game set was identified in the Lullingstone mausoleum (Kent), where several bone objects were found probably the equivalent to the coral stick²³.

On the European continent there are also some traditional games that use this kind of dice. One is practiced in Denmark and Norway. It is called *daldøs* or *daldøsa* (photo 4) and uses a rectangular dice, with the ends in the form of low pyramids. The pieces are moved according to the indications of the dice and can be captured²⁴.

In England there is *Lang Lawrence*, a long dice with eight or four sides. The game is popular around Christmas and can be played by more people. The rules consist of raising or lowering different objects on the table depending on how the dice stops²⁵.

The Roman civilization did not manifest itself in the Carpathian territories only at the level of the economic and political-military relations, but also at the level of the interhuman ludic ones. The presence of these dice, and the glass counters from Cucorani and Dealul Cărămădăriei, underlines that there were people in the Free Dacian communities in northern Moldavia who learned the secrets of the game and used the dice for both leisure and, why not, for divination.

CATALOGUE

1. L. 74 mm
W. 7/6 mm
4-1-6-2
Context: Botoșani- *Groapa lui Ichim*
Bibliography : ȘADURSCHI/UNGUREANU 1997 37-48.
Botoșani County Museum , no.14586
Long dice, rectangular, well made, decorated with concentric circles with a dot in the middle.(Fig. 3)
2. L. 70mm
W. 8/7 mm
11-12-1
Context: Botoșani- *Dealul Cărămădăriei*
Bibliography: ZAHARIA/ZAHARIA/RAȚĂ 1958, 461-470.
Botoșani County Museum Long dice, rectangular, under processing, decorated with circles in the middle, careless placed. (Fig. 2)

10 BIRO 1994, 661.

11 HOLMGREN 2002, 214.

12 BIRO 1994, 61.

13 VASS/PANCZEL 2009, 563.

14 VASS/PANCZEL 2009, 561-572.

15 NIȚU/BOȚAN 2009, 145-156.

16 PAKI/COCIȘ 1993, 149-161.

17 IONIȚĂ 1982, 62.

18 IONIȚĂ/ȘOVAN, 2014, 146.

19 IONIȚĂ/MAMALAUCA/VORNIC 2009, 122.

20 MANNIEZ 2010, 19.

21 ȘADURSCHI/UNGUREANU 1997, 40.

22 CLARKE 1979, 252.

23 CLARKE 1979, 252.

24 *The player with the striped men move from left to right into the middle row at the flat end of the board. When a man has travelled to the end of the middle row it moves into the opponent's home row and through it. Then it re-enters the middle row and from then on continues to move in the middle row and the opponent's home row, never to return to his own home row. (...).*

A player is not allowed to jump over his own men, but he can jump over the men belonging to the opponent. If a throw enables a player to land his man in a hole occupied by one of the opponent's men, the latter is dead and taken off the board and cannot be brought back into play. The strategy is for a player deftly to combine his moves in order always to stand behind any activated men belonging to the opponent. (ØSTERGAARD/GASTON 2001, 20).

25 GOMME 1894, 326.

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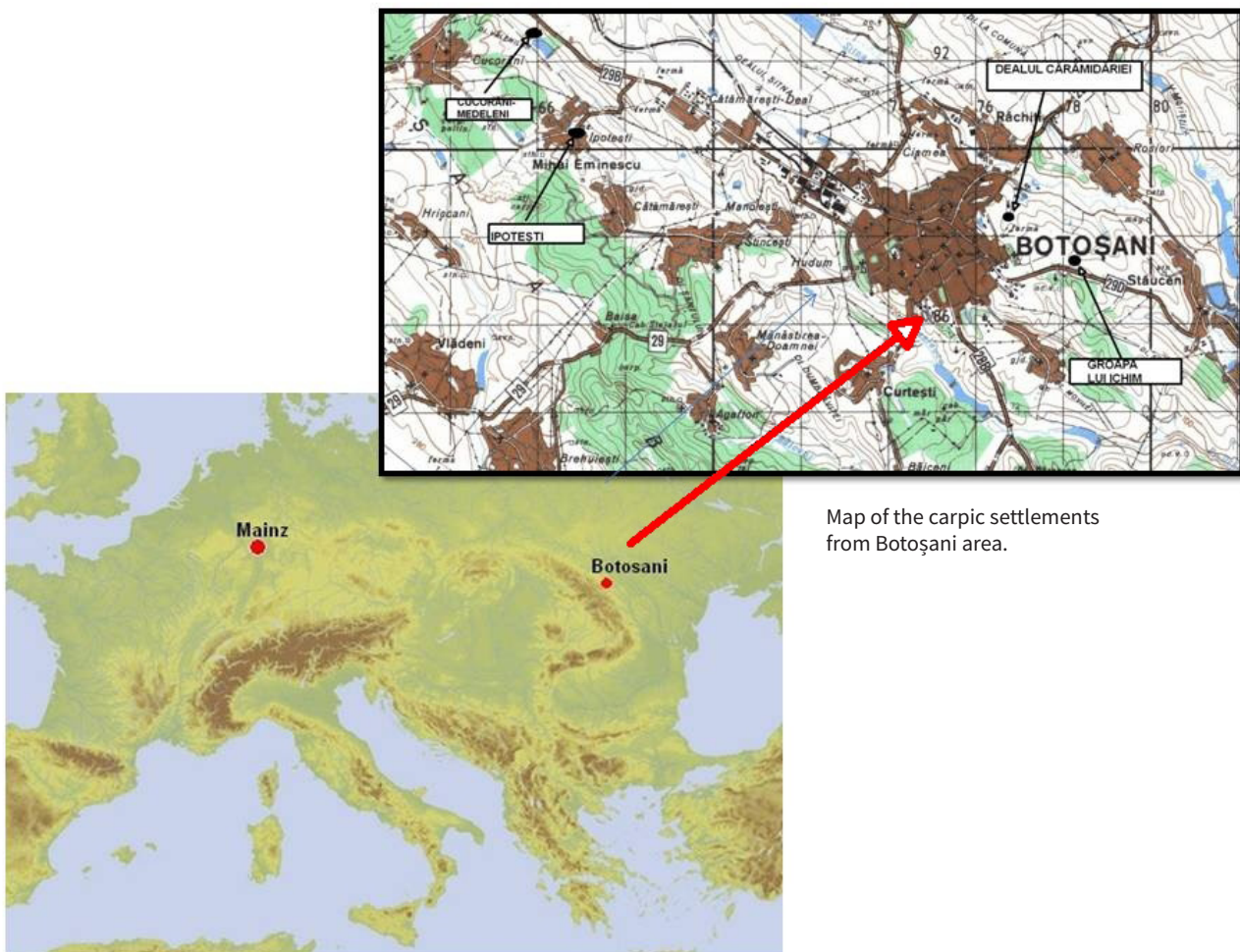
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Map of the carpic settlements from Botoșani area.



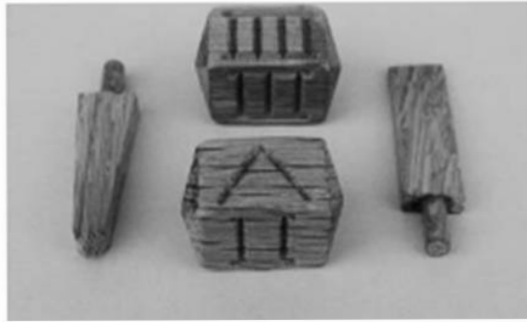
Photo 1: Dice from Botoșani- Dealul Căramidăriei



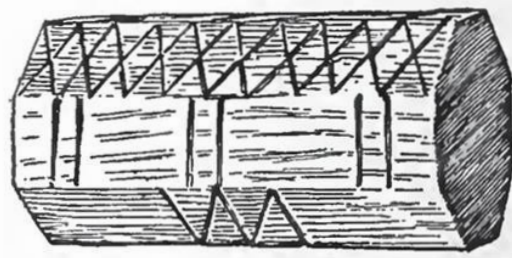
Photo 2: Dice from Botoșani – Groapa lui Ichim



Photo 3: Amphora neck (A) and Dacian cup (B) from pit no. 3, Botoșani – *Groapa lui Ichim*



A. Daldosa dice



B. Lang Lawrence

Photo 4: Daldøsa dice (A) and Lang Lawrence dice (B)

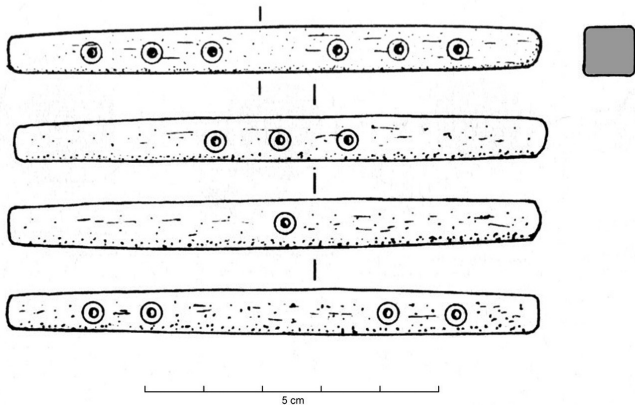


Figure 1: Dice from Mainz (MIKLER 1997, Taf. 20, 24)

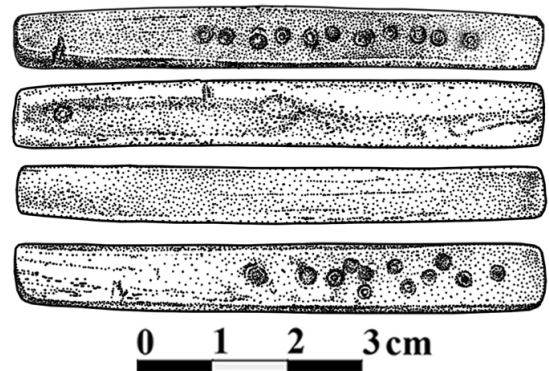


Figure 2: Dice from Botoșani - Dealul Căramidăriei (drawn by Sebastian Ciupu, MJB)

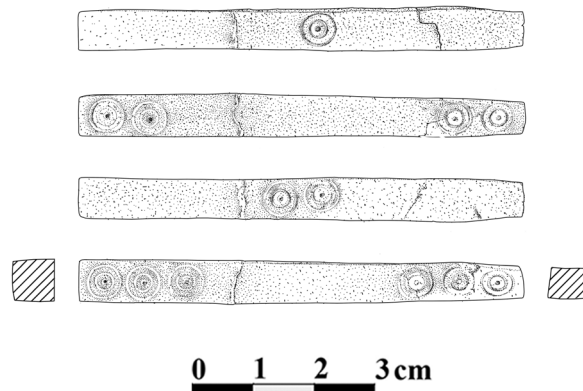


Figure 3: Dice from Botoșani - Groapa lui Ichim (drawn by Sebastian Ciupu, MJB)