# ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERY IN THE "IZBUCUL TOPLIȚEI" CAVE

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A recent discovery beyond a sump of a Bronze Age necropolis containing a variety of cult objects, human skeletons, tools and pottery is under research.

The Toplița Spring is placed in the Toplița Valley, Pădurea Craiului Mountains at an altitude of 250 m. The locality of the spring is Cretaceous limestone and it represents the inferior, active level of a group of dry caves. These caves have been known for a long time and have also been mentioned by E m i l R a c o v i ț ă in his work : Enumération des grottes visitées.

In July 1982, T. Borodan, G. Halasi and F. Pantea started the exploration of the spring at the entrance of the cave, using cave diving equipment, and discovered the entrance of an underwater passage. Later, G. Halasi and G. Birtalan succeeded in passing two sumps and reached a diaclase that permitted the access in a room where they found fragments of pottery and human skeletons of the floor. They announced this discovery to the Speological Institute "Emil Racoviță". The speologists and cave divers Cristian Lascu and Șerban Sârbu dived the sumps, found new objects of archaeological interest and made a number of photographs in black and white as well as in colours.

Later, after a summary preparation, I. Emödi dived the sump and made some observations that are presented below.

The narrow access diaclase goes down to the big room of the cave in a steep angle and is completely obturate by limestone blocks, clay, numerous small and big fragments of pottery, bones as well as big pieces of brick-red burned clay. Perhaps these represent the remains of a cult fire place, placed somewhere above, in another room, still inaccessible.

According to all evidence, the access gallery was filled deliberately far back in the antiquity in order to hide the objects placed in the cave.

After these observations were made, the archaeological objects in the big room were examined. Although some of them were displaced by floods, it has been ascertained that they belong to some inhumation graves. Unfortunately only at three of the graves the skeletons were still *in situ* in anatomic connection. At the same time some skeletal fragments — long bones — were found in a niche in a wall where they seem to have been placed deliberately. We consider useless to forward any hypothesis regarding these discoveries and their character, until systematic research is made. Around the skeletons there were about 15 intact ceramic objects, ornamental objects and stone tools. A large amount of ceramic fragments were to be found all over the floor.

Trav. Inst. Spéol. „Emile Racovitza", t. XXIV, p. 105—110, Bucarest, 1985

Two bronze axes of Baniabic type were placed at a small distance from the graves. We noticed that some of the objects were covered with clay and others were transported by water during floods, especially big ceramic pots that could float; an argument is a big intact pot found at a depth of 40 cm in the mud near the underground river.

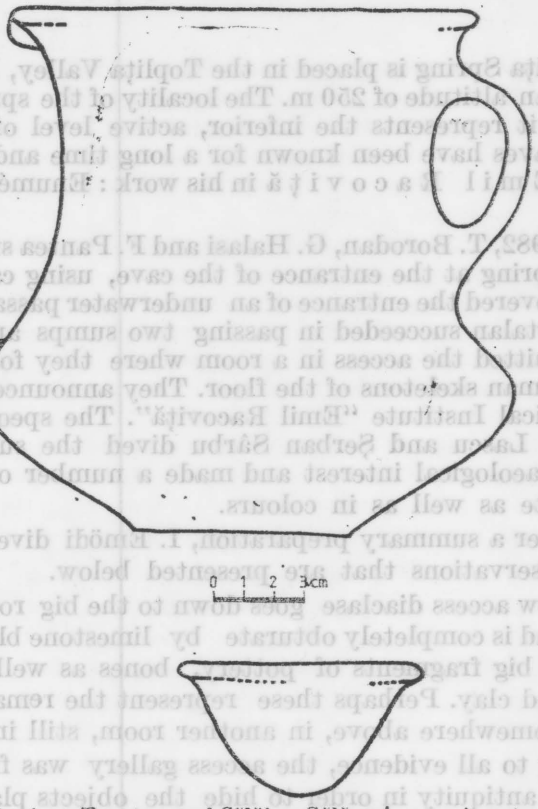


Fig. 1. — Two types of Călăţea-Gălăşeni ceramic pots found in the "Izbucul Topliţei" cave.

The chronological dating of the objects found in the cave can be easily made because many objects of this type as well as traces of funeral customs and similar rituals have been found in several caves in the Bihor area*. Chronologically they are placed at the beginning of the Bronze Age and belong to the early period of the Nagyrev culture. Some specific characteristics confer to it a peculiar feature of regional aspect called by us Călăţea-Gălăşeni.

* E m ö d i, I., *Contribuţii la cunoaşterea începutului epocii bronzului din nord-vestul Transilvaniei* (in print).

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Fig. 2—5. — Aspects of the necropolis in the "Izbucul Topliței" cave.

Finally, we stress that during prehistory the caves were often used as necropoleis, cult places, places for sacrifice. The main difficulty in the study of these vestiges is the fact that they are found disturbed and mixed with materials which belong to other epochs. The discovery in the "Izbucul Topliței" Cave represents one of those happy exceptions where, in spite of the disturbance caused by water, the objects are placed *in situ* or their original position can be easily established; besides, they are not mixed with objects belonging to other epochs. Their careful and profound study can contribute to the knowledge of the funeral rites and rituals practised by our ancestors, four thousand years ago.

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Received 15 February, 1985