

THE ENEOLITHIC SETTLEMENT OF BISTREȚ, MEHEDINȚI COUNTY

Gabriel Crăciunescu

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Rescue research was undertaken in the years 1984 and 1985 in the village of Bistreț (Deveselu commune, Mehedinți county), due to the fact that the local site had been disturbed by agricultural work.

The archaeological station is situated in the East of the village, in the place called *La punți* (*At the footbridges*), situated by *Mutu's Stream*, a small tributary of the Blahnița river. The research undertaken during the first year focused on an area 50 meters away from the stream and revealed the existence of Bronze Age and Roman habitations¹.

In 1985, due to the situation of crop cultures in the area, we began research on a surface situated several hundreds of meters from the first one, east of the above-mentioned stream and next to a large spring.

The trenches that were opened allowed us to uncover three dwellings covered with a mass of well-burned adobe, situated at the depth of 0.30 m (Pl. I). The three dwellings had the following dimensions: Dwelling no. 1 was 4.70 x 3.10 m; Dwelling no. 2 was 4.90 x 3.40 m; Dwelling no. 3 was 5.30 x 3.50 m. It must be mentioned that on the south-west side of Dwelling no. 1, in the square excavation made in order to uncover it completely, the charred remains of another dwelling appeared. The lack of workforce that we were confronted with during this excavation prevented us from extending our research. It is impossible to know how many more dwellings may have been discovered, probably charred as well due to the fact that they were located close to one another. Dwelling no. 1 was cut by the pit of an early Feudal pit house, whose base lay at a depth of 1.30 m, in comparison with the dwellings whose base was at the depth of 0.30 m. None of the three dwellings had a specially constructed floor, no postholes were found, and the location of the hearths could not be established.

Besides the pottery sherds we also found two clay weights, two flint tools and one made of obsidian, as well as several hand-mills made of river stone. Due to the intense fire that destroyed the dwellings, almost all the hand-mills were broken into several pieces, which had remained in place, unscattered. Such an item, located outside Dwelling no. 1, was preserved intact and had dimensions of 0.63 x 0.30 m.

There is a possibility that the fire may have spread from the west, as we found 10 broken vessels grouped in Dwelling no. 3, the westernmost one, as well as three more vessels whose sherds were scattered. In the following dwelling, No.1, there were three grouped vessels, as well as six other more or less complete vessels, and in Dwelling no.2, on the east side, we found one vessel only.

In what follows, the ceramic material in each dwelling will be presented, preserving the same west to east order.

In Dwelling no. 3 the following vessels were found:

1. Biconical vessel (Pl. II/1) with conical neck, supported by four legs. On the widest portion of the vessel there are four vertical handles. The dimensions of the item are the following: height (H) – 15.5 cm; rim diameter (RD) – 7.5 cm; maximum diameter (MD) – 18 cm.
2. Biconical vessel (Pl. II/2) with slightly flared neck and flat base. It has two handles which extend from the rim to the shoulder of the vessel. Each handle is framed by four applied bosses, and the base of the handles is linked by a line obtained by the impression of an oval-tipped tool. On the widest portion of the vessel, on each side, between the handles, there is a boss radially surrounded by impressions similar to those which form the above-mentioned circular line. The dimensions of the item are the following: H – 12.5 cm; RD – 16.5 cm; base diameter (BD) – 8 cm.
3. Biconical vessel (Pl. II/3) with slightly conical neck. Under the rim there is a finger-tipped cordon. The vessel has two vertical handles between which, at the same distance, there are two applied bosses. The base of the vessel is flat.
4. Rectangular vessel with rounded corners (Pl. II/5). The body has a biconical shape and the rim is decorated with finger-tip impressions. On the body there are four vertical bands that are

decorated with marked finger-tip impressions, and two horizontal handles. The dimensions of the item are the following: H – 13 cm; D – 31 cm.

5. Spherical vessel (Pl. II/4) with flat base and short conical neck. The whole body is covered in decoration consisting of lines made up by impressed dots combined with oblique fluting. Due to the fact that part of the body of the vessel is missing, we do not have a precise image of the initial decoration. The dimensions of the item are the following: H – 12 cm; RD – 8 cm; MD – 17 cm; BD – 7 cm.
6. Cup with a hollow flared stem (Pl. III/1). It has a biconical body with a slightly incurved upper part, and two downward curving ledge handles. The rim is slightly incurved. The dimensions of the item are the following: H – 16 cm; RD – 24 cm.
7. Spherical vessel with a flat base (Pl. III/2) with the rim missing. It has the following dimensions: H – 13 cm; MD – 28 cm; BD – 7 cm.
8. Conical vessel (Pl. III/3) with a flat base and a vertical band with marked finger-tip impressions on its body. The rim of this type of vessel is as a rule turned outward at a right angle.
9. Conical vessel (Pl. V/3), similar to the previous item, having the following dimensions: H – 12 cm; RD – 16 cm; BD – 8.5 cm.
10. Conical vessel (Pl. V/2), of a similar shape as the previous item, having the following dimensions: H – 11.5 cm; RD – 15.5 cm; BD – 9.5 cm.
11. Conical vessel (Pl. V/1) of the same shape as the previous item, having the following dimensions: H – 11 cm; RD – 15.5 cm. The base is missing.
12. Conical vessel (Pl. V/4) of the same shape as the previous items, with excised decoration on its body. It has the following dimensions: H – 11.5 cm; RD – 15 cm; BD – 9 cm.
13. Large vessel which could not be pieced together. It had finger-tip impressions on the upper part of the rim, while below the rim, around the neck, there was a line resulted from the impression of a tool with a semi-rounded tip (Pl. VI/1). Half-way down the neck there are two more lines similar to the one above.

In **Dwelling no. 1** the following vessels were found:

1. Conical hollow-stemmed cup with ledge handles (Pl. IV/1). The body of the cup had four ledge handles whose tips were oriented downwards. The dimensions of the item: H – 11 cm; RD – 20 cm.
2. Flat-based conical vessel (Pl. IV/2). It is similar to vessels of the same type found in Dwelling no. 3. It has the following dimensions: H – 12.5 cm; BD – 8.5 cm.
3. Bowl with two vertical handles (Pl. IV/3a-b). From under the rim to the base of the handles there is decoration in the shape of upward-pointing triangles whose outline is obtained by the deep impression of an instrument having an approximately triangular tip. The inside of the triangles is hatched with incised lines. The rest of the vessel's body is decorated with fine circularly-arranged incisions, which leave uncovered a wide band that links the two handles, as well as two other segments which start from this band in different places and finish below the place where the handles rejoin the body. Over this decoration other elements were traced, zigzagging lines which often intersect each other, obtained by applying strong pressure with a sharp tool, just as the triangles above.
4. Vessel with a spherical body (Pl. III/4), with two vertical handles which descend from under the rim up to the shoulder. It is decorated with a line which surrounds it at the level of the lower end of the handles, obtained by pressing a wide-tipped instrument into the soft paste. Below this line, on either side, on the widest portion of the vessel, there is an applied boss placed halfway between the handles. The dimensions of the item are the following: H – 14 cm; RD – 19 cm; MD – 22.5 cm.
5. Biconical flat-based vessel (Pl. V/5) with a square-cut rim and four vertical handles. Out of the handles, which are situated mid-way on the body of the vessel, only two diametrically opposed ones are pierced. The vessel has the following dimensions: H – 11.5 cm; RD – 12.5 cm; MD – 15 cm; BD – 9 cm.
6. Conical vessel of which only the bottom half is preserved, and which has the dimensions: H – 16 cm; BD – 10.5 cm.

7. Lid (Pl. V/7) with two handles on the upper part, fairly well preserved. It has the following dimensions: H – 3 cm; RD – 9.5 cm.
8. Fragment of a cup (Pl. V/6). Only the middle part is preserved.
9. Fragment of a biconical vessel (Pl. VI/5) whose body was decorated with slanting, then horizontal fluting. Some of the fluting was circular in shape. The vessel had small vertically pierced handles.

In Dwelling no. 2, only one vessel that could be pieced together was found (Pl. IV/4). It has the following dimensions: H– 8 cm; RD – 15.8 cm; MD – 17 cm; BD – 6 cm.

Apart from the items presented, several other groups of ceramic sherds were found, out of which no vessel could be pieced together, but about which some elements are worth mentioning.

In Dwelling no. 3, among various pottery sherds, we found a horseshoe-shaped handle, (Pl. VI/4) with finger-tip impressions on the outer side. Handles that are similar in shape also appear later, in the Coțofeni² and Verbicioara³ cultures. In the Cernavodă III culture, these horseshoe-shaped appliqués are positioned with the opening upwards or laterally, having mostly a decorative function⁴. A handle from a large vessel was also preserved (Pl. VI/2); it bent in a square angle and ended, at the upper end, in two pointed lugs which later broke off.

In Dwelling no. 1 was found the only vessel that was made of good quality paste and is finished with red engobe. Only two fragments of the vessel's neck were found. The latter was short and probably continued with a spherical body. It was covered by five lines parallel with the rim, impressed with the aid of a tool with an elongated tip. On the body there is incised angular decoration (Pl. VI/3). This type of decoration on the body of the vessel is also encountered in the Cernavodă III culture⁵. In the Coțofeni culture, the use of red engobe on the inside of vessels becomes almost general, as well as pottery decoration similar to the one mentioned here⁶. The vessel with fluted decoration found in this dwelling (Pl. VI/5) is similar to finds belonging to the Sălcuța culture in Banat⁷, with the mention that in the case of our vessel the handle is situated a little lower on the wall of the vessel. Stem cups (Pl. III/1, IV/1), although rare, are also encountered in the Sălcuța culture⁸.

The closest analogies to our materials are to be found in the pottery discovered in the Eneolithic cemetery at Ostrovul Corbului⁹, where forms very similar to our own finds at Bistreț, as well as very similarly decorated vessels, were unearthed¹⁰. Both our finds and those of Ostrovul Corbului are of the Bodrogkeresztur type.

As it has already been mentioned, such finds have been made at Ostrovul Corbului¹¹, about 11 km away from our station, but also in Banat at Ilidia, Cenad, Sânpetru German and Pecica¹². Similar discoveries exist in Hungary and on the territory of the former Yugoslavia.

Besides the already mentioned line decoration, it must be said that stem vessels as the one in Dwelling no. 3 (Pl. II/1) are to be found both in the Sălcuța culture and in the Coțofeni¹³ and Verbicioara¹⁴ cultures. The use of bosses in the decoration of vessel bodies (Pl. II/2, 3) is encountered in the Coțofeni, Glina and Verbicioara cultures, if we are to refer only to a limited period of time.

This brief presentation of our research at Bistreț aims first of all to draw attention upon some general elements of decoration and shape in vessels that are found within several different cultures. It is also meant to inform about Bodrogkeresztur type material discovered in another location in Western Oltenia besides Ostrovul Corbului, which will allow a more precise evaluation of the Bodrogkeresztur phenomenon in South-West Romania.

Gabriel Crăciunescu
Muzeul Porților de Fier
Str. Independenței nr. 2
RO – 220171 Drobeta Tr. Severin

NOTES

1. These materials have been published in *Tibiscum*, Caransebeș, 2003.
2. Roman P., 1976, Pl. 106/9; 117/11; Crăciunescu G., 2002, Pl. XII/1; XXII/2.
3. Crăciunescu G., 2004, Pl. LXXI/3; LXXII/4; LXXIV/3.
4. Tasić N., 1995, Pl. 5; XIV/2.
5. Tasić N., 1995, Pl. XIV/2.4.
6. Roman P., 1976, Pl. 54/2, 77/6, 95/6, 103/1.
7. Radu A., 2002, Pl. 57/10.
8. Berciu D., 1961b, fig. 109/1,2; 127/4.

9. Roman D., 1978, 219.
10. Roman P., Dodd-Oprișescu A., 1989, fig. 13/2a,2b.
11. Roman P., 1996.
12. Lazarovici Gh., 1985, 84-85.
13. Manea C., 2003, Pl. II.
14. Berciu D., 1961a, Pl. III/4; Crăciunescu G., 2000, Pl. XXI/1.

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