

A Few Observations on the Internal Organization of Gumelnița Communities on Lake Cătălui Islet*

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While trying to make out the life of prehistoric communities, the archaeological research focused on the issue of the internal organization of Neo-Enaeolithic settlements, above all of the rigorous partitioning of the dwelling place, as well as of the corresponding zones used for other needs than the domestic ones. The data obtained corroborated with all the results from study of pottery, stone, bone or/and metal material, the ornaments, the interdisciplinary research elements will be likely to provide an image as complete as possible – maybe true as well – on the day course of the community under research.

However, for that it is necessary to conduct vast excavations and to uncover *in extenso* a village/villages during the studied period.

Unfortunately, the Gumelnița sites on Romania's territory (dramatically different from those south of the Danube) exhaustively are reduced only to the very small ones at Teiu¹, and at the upper layer (B1) at Căscioarele –Ostrovel². It seems that we shall be able to add the settlement of Carcaliu, also small, and with at least two dwelling layers.

In spite of the scarce information available it would be very important that, besides specifying the number and order of the dwellings one should establish the construction details, their interiors, the dwelling – pit direct link (whenever there is one – Gumelnița pits being less than the Cucuteni ones, for instance). Or dwelling/dwellings – domestic zones, both on the basis of its content, and on the stratigraphic one, a research badly in need of the direct participation of the specialists in the field of the interdisciplinary sciences. Obviously, it is necessary to specify at the same time that all the constructions functioned as such or had another destination, but above all whether all were raised according to an established plan and simultaneously. That is unlikely in the case of settlements with a medium or large number of dwellings.

Certainly, if one could specify the line of the streets, the access ways to the entrances to the dwellings, their entrances³, the construction pattern with a certain specific of every settlement, or even of the dwellings or groups of dwellings, the presence or absence of an enclosing/protection system of the dwelling place, delimiting it from the outer world (maybe to a certain extent hostile) the research would be more rigorous.

However, before trying to summarize the results obtained from Căscioarele, we shall present a few characteristics of the dwellings here, most of which are disturbed by Hallstatt pits, and by Cătălui Lake water. Most were large, had whole and partial platforms, and simple flooring/plastering, sometimes reddened by the fire that destroyed the walls (fallen down). Most had had ovens with three to five rows of chime, often 35-40 cm high (both as against the fireplace and the floor) sometimes raised directly on

the dwelling floor, with fireplace remaking, using pebbles. The adobe composition includes mostly straw and dust. That might prove a limited preoccupation with agriculture, although the uncovered coulter⁴, as well as the horn grubbing hoes would plead also for this preoccupation. Nevertheless, the main activity seems to be hunting, given the results obtained by the palaeo-fauna study⁵. Equally, like in Bordusani⁶, fish must have been prepared as winter food (dry and salty), but also for a possible exchange – the hundreds of net weights uncovered on the site prove an intense fishing activity. Besides, the large pear-shaped vessels, with channelling decoration at the upper part are a constant in all the dwellings, and they must have helped keep the bare necessities of the inhabitants of the settlement.

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Considering the land arrangement of the dwellings, we can see that some of those east-west oriented, or north-southwards are set in more or less parallel rows, that is 4, 8 on one side, and 1, 3, 7, 10a - 10b on the other. The latter group are not in a straight line, as the dwellings 4, 8 and 10a - 10b form two pair groups, the same as the dwellings 11-12 of the north-south group seem to be. All the other dwellings might have been arranged randomly, having rather varied orientations. The entrances to the dwellings were located on the opposite side of the fireplace or over, as naturally, but have in their turn rather varied arrangements. In spite of that, between and among the dwellings one may find a kind of small streets and passageways between some of them.

However, also the west zone of the village is interesting, unoccupied by constructions, situated at the limit of the dwellings 6, 9, 10b, 16. It must have had a certain role to play – maybe animal breeding, gathering place and so on. Small free spaces are delimited also by the dwellings 4-5, 8 and 1, 7, 13. (Fig. 1). Therefore, it would be reasonable to affirm that the village on Ostrovel was not raised in accordance with some set rules, and thus the “inner organization” depended on the needs or even fantasy and free choice of the small community here. That in spite of the fact that at least two (even three) constructions will meet certain requirements, as we shall see.

As regards the moments of their raising, although *grosso modo* they are contemporary, differences must have existed (hard to detect), as no community built their houses the very moment they set foot on the chosen place. As already stated, we might admit that the dwellings 5, 6, 9, 2, 14, 15 and 16 were built a little later than the others in order to meet the needs of the demographic growth.

On the other hand, in our opinion, one can establish a rigorous space partitioning, with street drawing, size setting, land planning (rows, groups, simple, concentric or tangent circles etc.) provided a compact community settles in a given zone. The new couples move somewhere else, practically migrating to a few kilometres away from the primary settlement. But also in that case not all the constructions could be raised at the same time.

In spite of our reserves, a certain rigor can be noticed by analyzing the settlement on Ostrovel.

In the first place, we would single out the dwelling no. 8 situated (probably out of hygiene reasons) at the east end of the village (Fig. 1/8). Rectangular (like all the others) of large sizes, it must have had two fireplaces (and two rooms). Near one of them a true deposit of vessels was uncovered, piled on one another (or one in another) of all the kinds and sizes, many of them being large provisions vessels and lids with channelling decoration. Among and under them (under the pottery fragments around as well) there was a huge pile of osteologic remains, that used to fill a small cell in the floor. Among them there were stag antlers (some of them turned into artifacts). According to Alexandra Bolomey's conclusions here must have been the "abattoir" of the settlement. The large number of vessels – over 20 could serve for the chopping and sharing of meat products.

Only inside the same dwelling we uncovered also two large tesalian statuettes, a miniature throne with triangular back and four feet, an *askos* with two feet, decorated rectangular prisms, therefore also a series of "cult" artifacts, a subject we shall resume.

Another dwelling with hunting tendencies/aspirations used to be in the close vicinity of the "abattoir" dwelling.

It is the dwelling 4 (Fig. 1/4) near the large chime of the fireplace where they uncovered (as if laid for drying) over 100 clay weights, both prismatic and oval, all of them having at the base various signs: one or more small holes, spirals, crosses, triangles with or without dots on the inside, others with a cut and pierced tip, etc.

Net weights with various signs (similar to those described above) were found also in other dwellings, but here we may presuppose the household of a/some fisherman/fishermen who used to hunt for the whole community. However, the tools were gathered from all over the village, bearing the "signature" of each owner. We mention the uncovering here of an impressive number of shells. While the pottery fragments were not numerous, instead the dwelling inventory included: the valves of a casting mould for bronze axes, silex tools, statuettes, pig slivers passed through fire (could they come from the neighbouring dwelling – the "abattoir"?)

An important and interesting dwelling stood in the centre of the settlement, this time. We mean the dwelling no. 2 (Fig. 1/2) having itself a special nature, useful for the whole community. While under the wall debris there were not too many broken vessels *in situ* however they uncovered a silex processing workshop⁷ comprising over 130 artifacts, such as: 12 finite axes; one under processing; another one (cut along a core) under repairing; 4 hammer – axes; 15 scrapers; 12 blades (with or without retouches); a knife ; a scraper; 12 cores (one of which is very large); 9 percussion artifacts; 60 slivers of various sizes, many of them prepared in order to be turned into tools. Next to them there were a lot of bone and horn artifacts that must have been used for processing silex, and maybe the other way around. We point out that all the types of silex axes

found in the Gumelnița B1 layer on Ostrovel (with all the variants resulted from the processing and finishing technique) were found often in the workshop of this dwelling. Thus we may maintain without fearing any mistake that the craftsman/craftsmen here worked for the whole community.

But also in this dwelling they uncovered anthropomorphic and zoomorphic statuettes, large clay pearls, bronze awl, “monoxile” pattern, pendant of wild boar defence, weights with various signs at the base, nacre pearls etc. As a matter of fact, we know workshops of various types were uncovered both in the settlements for instance Hotnizta⁸, and outside them, for instance Radovanu⁹.

Obviously, on Ostrovel we find various specific situations also in other dwellings such as that with human skulls under the floor¹⁰, or another one with a possible rebuilding¹¹ etc. However, we do not have in mind a presentation of all the constructions in the Gumelnița village.

Returning to the cult objects, that is the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic vessels, askoi, rytha and even a Cucuteni anthropomorphic vessel found in most dwellings (2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10b, 15) we may wonder (starting from these finds) to what extent for these people the ritual, spiritual life meant something in their everyday life. They might have been intermingled and therefore hard to distinguish. Could it be an optic and apprehending misconception of the researcher because of what he uncovered at the beginning? More exactly because at Parța (for instance) first the shrine was uncovered, it broke with everyday life, and linked to a “sacred zone”. The latter included the weaving loom while the common dwellings had various “cult” objects. On the other hand, as on Ostrovel a quiet rural/hunting population was found, not everything or almost everything can be linked strictly to a common day-to-day life, excluding the possibility of rituals of “holy” days or periods that might have left concrete traces. The multitude of cult objects obviously plead in favour of a rich spiritual life.

However, the fact that in the waste pits or zones there are often anthropomorphic and zoomorphic statuettes proves at least a very modest worship for them (a remark valid in general for the Neo-Aeneolithic cultures). No matter how damaged an icon might be, today no one would throw it to the garbage except for atheists.

On the other hand, the uncovering of some adobe bits in a pit next to the statuettes can hardly be explained, if we mean to assign to it a “cult” role. Unless once the first function is fulfilled, the zone in question transforms, with no restrictions or prejudice, in a domestic pit. However, more often than not, the stratigraphic situation fails to clear up the issue. We consider that all that may constitute at least themes for thinking over.

At the end we should make another specification – in spite of the specific nature of some of the Ostrovel dwellings, all of them have preserved their individual nature, domestic as well as personal belongings (even if they borrowed them for a common usage and marked them for an easy recovery). But as already mentioned, we are not going now to present the situation of the whole Gumelnița village.

* The paper is based on Vi. Dumitrescu's Studies, *Căscioarele , a Late Neolithic Settlement on the Lower Danube*, Archaeology, New-York, 18, 1965, 1, pp. 34-40; idem, *Principalele rezultate ale primelor două campanii de săpătură din aşezarea neolitică târzie de la Căscioarele*, SCIV, 16, 1965, 2, pp. 215-237., as well as the personal observations and the author's drawings..

¹ S. Morintz, *Aşezări şi fortificaţii în cultura Gumelniţa*, SCIV, XII, 1962, 2, pp. 278-280; idem, vocea *Teiu*, in Jan Filip, *Enciclopedie*, Praga, 1969, p. 1441. In the two tells of small sizes - no. 1 of 40 m² with the culture layer 1.50 m thick; no. 2 of 50 m², with a dwelling surface of 30 m² were researched from 1 to 4 dwellings, as also a cult construction was uncovered, assigned by the finder to Gumelniţa III (therefore Gumelniţa B1). We do not know if the dwellings were overlapped or not, how many were uncovered in each tell and above all if the whole layer(s) was/were excavated completely. Meanwhile, no plan was published which might reveal the dwelling arrangement on layers. The only construction that was published was the "cult" one – see I. Nania, *Locuitorii gumelniţeni în lumina cercetărilor de la Teiu*, Studii î articole de istorie, Bucharest, 1967, pp.7-24. But the rather confusing unillustrated description failed to clear up the situation of the settlement.

² Vi. Dumitrescu, *Principalele rezultate ale primelor două campanii de săpătură din aşezarea neolitică târzie de la Căscioarele*, SCIV, 16, 1965, 2, pp. 215-237. The only Gumelniţa settlement in Romania excavated completely.

³ The issue of the access in and from the dwellings is in its turn very important. We could wonder where were the entrances to the dwellings 11a-11b, 12a-12b, 13a-13b, 14a-14b-14c-14d at Poljanica VII (V.H. Todorova, *Kupferzeitliche Siedlungen in Nordostbulgarien*, München, 1982, Fig. 171), as they have no space between them. A similar situation can be found also at Parţa, where every three-four dwellings are bound to one another – for instance, the dwelling block 16, 27, 18, 40-43, as they seem to have had just one entrance (see Gh. Lazarovici et alii, *Parţa. Monografie arheologică*, Timişoara, 2001, vol. I, 1, Fig. 98), and the examples may go on. We do not think that in our temperate zones the entrance was done through the roof. That is proved on the one hand by the Gumelniţa dwellings with gable roof, on the other by the existence of some one-floor dwelling.

⁴ Vi. Dumitrescu, T. Bănăţeanu, *À propos d'un sac de charrue primitive en bois de cerf découvert dans la site néolithique de Căscioarele*, Dacia, N.S., IX, 1965, pp. 59-67.

⁵ Al. Bolomey, *Über der Sägetierfauna der Neolithischen Siedlung von Căscioarele*, Annuaire Roumain d'anthropologie, 5, 1968, p. 19 and next.

⁶ V. Radu, *Archaeozoology. 3.6.1. Pisces*, in S. Marinescu-Bîlcu et alii, *Archaeological researches at Borduşani-Popină*, Cercetări arheologice, X, 1997, pp. 96-107.

⁷ S. Marinescu-Bîlcu, *Un atelier néolithique pour taille de haches en silex*, Archaeologiké Rozhledy, XVII, 1965, 1, pp. 48-53.

⁸ N. Angelov, *Robotilnitsa za ploski Kosteni idoli v selişnata maghila pri s. Hotnitsa, Trnovsko*, Archeologia, III, 1962, 2, p. 34-38.

⁹ E. Comşa, *Complexul neolitic de la Radovanu*, Cultură şi civilizaţie la Dunărea de Jos, VIII, 1990 (1992), p. 70 – talks about a "workshop zone" where just a construction was researched that comprised the "weaving loom". Also outside the settlement also a "mill-dwelling" was uncovered at Medgidia – see N. Harţuche, *Agricultura gumelniţeană la Medgidia*, Paper presented at the Museum Session in Constanţa, 1979.

¹⁰ We deal with the dwelling no. 1 (see VI. Dumitrescu, *Principalele rezultate ale primelor două campanii de săpături din aşezarea neolitică târzie de la Căscioarele, loc. cit., pp. 223-234*) under whose flooring, next to the place where a fireplace was to be built, two human skulls were deposited with a certain magic purpose. For sure we deal with magic practices performed before the dwelling began to be built.

¹¹ That the dwellings were raised in successive stages is proved (among others) by the situation under the dwelling no. 3. For instance, inside it they uncovered a small burn area than that covered by the adobe from the debris of its walls. Here there was a cell of almost the same shape as that of the dwelling, being full of burn and black earth in the central zone where a hand-mill was found. In the south part a large amount of pottery and bones, and from the bottom a large stag antler. In the middle three pits with a diameter of 14-19 cm might have functioned as supporting forks of the gable roof top; in the east corner another pole pit of 15 cm in diameter. If the depth in the middle of the cells was 90-95 cm (as against the point 0), it went down in a totally irregular shape towards 1.25 m. In our opinion it was the first dwelling overlapped (after dismantling) by the dwelling no. 3. We do not think that we deal with a dwelling on pillars of the type of those at Buçşani, as Ostrovel is not slanting, while other sunken dwellings do not exist at Căscioarele. For the Buçşani dwelling – see C. Bem, *A special Type of Aeneolithic Dwelling. Unicum or Deficiency of Conservation*, Studii de Preistorie, 1, 2001/ (2002) Bucureşti, pp. 153-173, Fig. 20

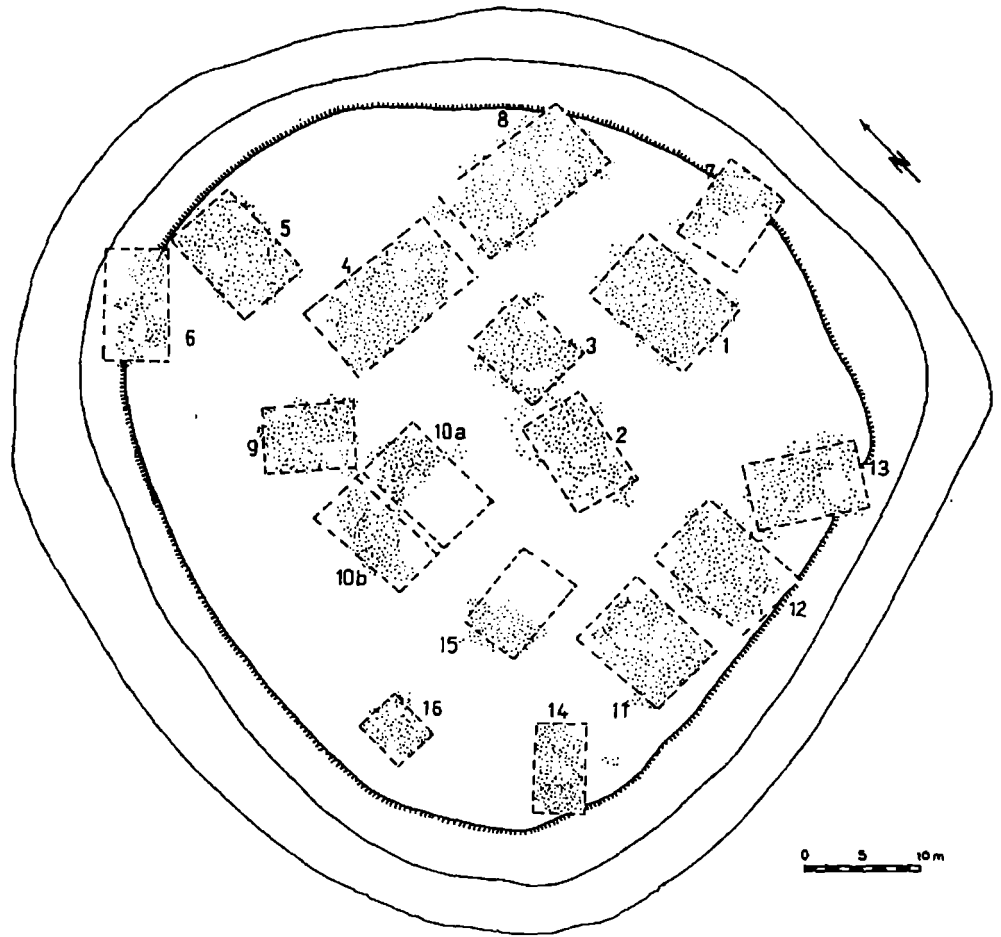


Fig. 1