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CONTEXTUAL ARCHAEOLOGY AND BURNT HOUSE ASSEMBLAGES: CATEGORICAL ANALYSIS OF POTTERY FROM LATE NEOLITHIC CĂSCIOARELE, ROMANIA

Abstract: The islet site of Căscioarele, in the lower Danube valley, Romania, provides a classic example of deposition of unusual and unique finds, as well as good examples of pottery groups found inside deliberately burnt houses. Analysis of these pottery groups, as well as the pottery phase assemblages from the two Gumelnița horizons – is attempted using categorical analysis. This method has been successfully used in examining diachronic change in Bulgarian Neolithic and Chalcolithic pottery assemblages and consists of an integrated analysis of both shape and decoration. One salient issue at Căscioarele is the source of the ceramics in the burnt house groups – whether the reflections of “living assemblages” from the house itself or gifts brought in from other houses or indeed from other, “mainland” communities, to be deposited inside the houses for burning. The evidence of other types of deposit at Căscioarele is used to clarify this issue, as well as the changing spatial scale of ritual practices through the different site occupations.

Keywords: eneolithic, Gumelnița culture, burnt houses, pottery, categorical analysis.

Dedication

It was on a bright sunny day in early October 1996 that I paid my first (but hopefully not the last) visit to the islet site of Căscioarele, in the company of Silvia Marinescu-Bîlcu, Cornelia Catuna and Dragoș Gheorghiu. Cornelia had driven us from București, via the Oltenița Museum, and we arrive at the hamlet of Căscioarele, opposite Ostrovel. As no boats were to be found, we looked around the shore and came upon two half-oil-drums which proved serviceable craft. We borrowed four oars and set off on the strangest Oxford – Cambridge Boat Race ever to take place in Romania – a race to the islet site. The half-oil-drums responded as much to changes in steering and the increased pace of rowing as a donkey in a pasture on a hot day. As I recall, Silvia and Dragoș beat Cornelia and me by a short head (though Cornelia may dispute this result). Our audience of villagers applauded wildly until we started our return sail (after a careful inspection of the site!). The same result! More tumultuous applause!!! As ever, Silvia showed grace in victory, even secretly appearing to enjoy such boat races. She was in great form for the rest of the day and we returned to București as good friends. It is with the fondest of memories of that and other splendid days in her company that I dedicate this chapter to Silvia.

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Introduction

Material culture is a record not only of prehistoric lifeways but also of the categorisation principles used by prehistoric people to create and sustain their cognitive frameworks. Two of the categorisation principles in common use in everyday social relations are: (1) strong oppositions between categories (e.g., the Indian caste system) and (2) overlapping categories (social democratic systems). The changing tension between these two principles can be traced through time, using *categorical analysis* of a sequence of pottery assemblages from prehistoric settlements.

If the institution of the past in things is an evident accomplishment of objects, the incorporation of present modes of categorisation is another. Positing that material forms are part of the central order of cultural construction, Miller maintains that the necessary property of categories is variability, which allows the maintenance of structure in the face of heterogeneous contexts and practices (Miller 1985: 202, 205). Artifacts embody the principles of several forms of human categorisation processes:

- boundaries between asocial groups and the natural world
- structure of pottery assemblages directly related to divisions between people within society
- NB things can serve as both a means of individual differentiation and as a means of collective integration or indeed both
- relations between material order and mental processes

A correlation between enhanced differentiation and increased order between material and mental realms is found in the East Coast region of China but not in the North West of China (Keightley 1987). Three main changes are identified:- the emergence of two new concepts of cultural order; the addition of lips, spouts, handles, lids and lugs to basic ceramic forms introduces constraints on pottery use, leading to choices between appropriate and incorrect behaviour; and the production of carefully fitting lids and legs of exactly the same dimensions leads to a more mathematical view of the world, in which specifications are followed more precisely than before.

The huge range of variability found in the ceramic assemblages of the Balkan Neolithic and Chalcolithic means that they should be susceptible to a categorical analysis based upon the investigation of some of the principles of material and cultural order addressed by Keightley. Many researchers have studied the form and decoration of Neolithic pottery under separate headings. A good example is Gh. Lazarovici and Z. Maxim's book on the Early Neolithic of Gura Baciului (Lazarovici, Maxim 1995). Here, I attempt a conjoint consideration of the structure of both the vessel form and its decoration in terms of the divisions, contrasts and oppositions which are inscribed on the surface of the pots. It is the relationship between form and decoration which provides the most complete analogy for the human categorisation processes which underlie social structure. Hence, in contrast with authors such as Hodder (1982) and Washburn (1983), I maintain that there is no direct relationship between ceramic variability and social structure but that this relationship is mediated by human categorisation processes as well as by depositional strategies.

Six principal dimensions of variability were considered:

- Shape categories (the major variants in shape, as defined by overall morphology; particular attention was paid to the number of vertical divisions per pot, as well as to the occurrence of vessels which were potentially manufactured in two or more parts)
- Decoration categories (single, or combinations of, decoration techniques, in relation to shape categories)
- Decorational structure (the frequency of zonally-structured decoration, whether vertical, horizontal or both)
- Zonal re-inforcements (the re-inforcement of shape division in one of the following ways:- decorational re-inforcement, matt-gloss contrast, colour contrast and decorational style contrast)
- Measures of re-inforcement (the calculation of indices measuring the intensity of re-inforcement of shape divisions by different kinds of zonal re-inforcement)
- Decorational intensity (the variety of decorative motifs, zonal effects, and forms of zonal reinforcement)

It is believed that long-term variations in site ceramic assemblages will provide a valuable comparative picture of changing ceramic complexity and lead to important insights into related variations in human categorisation processes. The extent of reinforcement between divisions in pottery form and decoration is used as an indicator of the dominant categorisation principles used by the potters and, therefore, validated by the society. The analysis requires specific combinations of samples from two or more sites in one region of South East Europe. A potential sample should optimally contain a large (n = minimum of 100) sample of complete vessels or restorable profiles from a single occupation horizon, preferably with contextual data.

A published example of categorical analysis concerns the Late Neolithic Karanovo IV sample from Nova Zagora-Hlebozavoda and the Early Chalcolithic Karanovo V sample from Azmaska mogila. Both samples comprised largely complete vessels or restorable profiles because of the contexts of deposition in burnt houses (Chapman 2004). The biggest change in both Copper Age assemblages in comparison with the two Neolithic assemblages was the increased tension between the two fundamental principles of ceramic and social categorisation - integration in the face of division and diversity. The clearest analogy of this tension is found at Azmaska mogila, where the emphasis on the total, 3-dimensional surface of the pot, lids and bases included, as the operative design field allowed the representation of increasing divisions and zonal reinforcements in the contents of that total field. This effect was managed through the use of cross-cutting differences rather than the imposition of rigid oppositional rules. The other major change from the Neolithic assemblages was the dramatic differentiation of Chalcolithic vessel form, which begins in the Karanovo V assemblage from Azmaska mogila and reaches an apogee with the Karanovo VI assemblage from Dolnoslav (Raduntcheva 1996). The added emphasis on shape divisions, often reinforced in multiple ways, especially through decorational contrasts, indicates the importance of the categorisation of difference through oppositional means. But this aim pales into insignificance besides the emphasis on cross-cutting definitions through multiple recombination. There must be a strong presumption that Chalcolithic individuals established their identities not through

exclusive association with one traditional communal group or another – households and lineages being the most obvious choices – but rather through multiple membership of a range of different groups, whether religious sodalities, women's clubs, warrior bands or exchange associations, in addition to consanguineous and residence groupings. The difficulty of recognising any clear principle of hierarchical differentiation in such a tangled and complex pattern of ceramic production makes it hard to support the emergence of such a development in social categorisation.



Fig.1. Location map of sites mentioned in the text: 1 – Căscioarele; 2 – Gumelnița; 3 – Hlebozavoda; 4 – Asmaska mogila; 5 – Dolnoslav.

However, because of the nature of the museum storage of the Hlebozavoda and Asmaska mogila collections, it was not feasible to develop a contextually sensitive categorical analysis, for example using pottery groups from different houses. By contrast, this approach was possible for Căscioarele, thanks to the kindness of Silvia Marinescu-Bîlcu in allowing me unfettered access to Professor Vladimir Dumitrescu's contextually-recorded house groups. Before discussing burnt house groups and examining their pottery assemblages, it will be helpful to describe the Dumitrescu's excavations on the islet, so as to set the study in its archaeological context.

Islet sites

Islets are a distinctive form of place, whose small size means that many, if not most, of the social practices of the community using the islet cannot be carried out

on the islet itself. Reaching across this liminal space involves a distinct kind of movement – a departure from the shore, a boat trip and an arrival on the islet. The shoreline provides an ideal vantage point for all three stages of the voyage, especially the arrival on the distant islet. Weather conditions and the time of day could all be used to invoke mystery and suspense in such a voyage (cf. Ergodu 2003). Rowing the boat from the shore to the islet is also a metaphorical statement, involving both human labour and space/time separation. In all of these ways, islets provide an analogy to artificial enclosures, although they constitute a distinctive form of natural bounded space.

There is a wide variety of islands in the lower Danube valley, below the Iron Gates gorge, ranging from Ostrovul Corbului, covering an area of 20 km², to islets such as Ostrovel, near the modern village of Căscioarele, (Fig.1), which is 80m in diameter and whose lower flanks are seasonally flooded. Before occupation in the Later Neolithic (Boian) period, the islet formed a low, rather rocky hill in the middle of the Cătălui inlet, set back from the main course of the Danube, and overlooked on three sides by high terraces. What kind of social practices characterised Căscioarele and in what sense could it be considered a special site? In addition, to what extent was ritual life conducted on a domestic, household basis or on the community level, in the public domain?

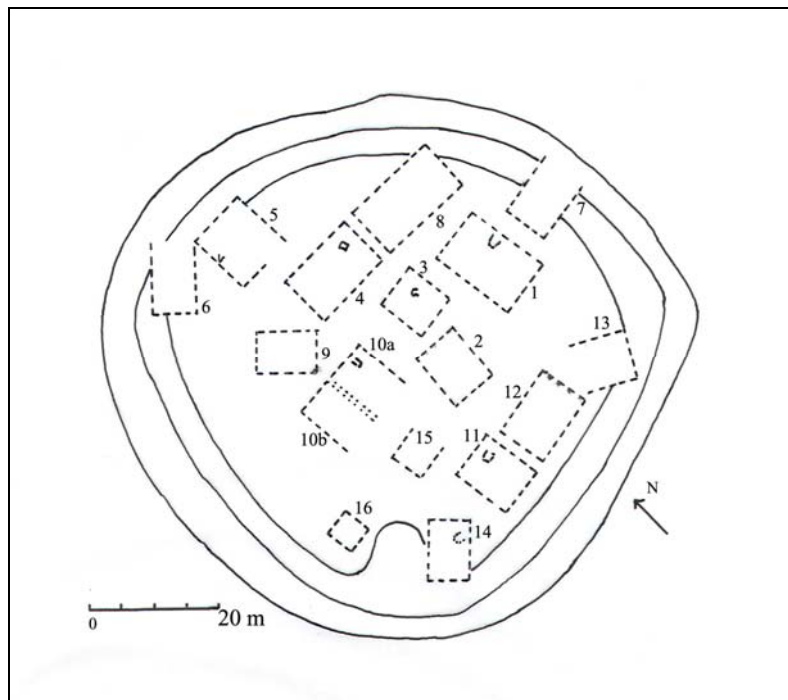


Fig.2 Plan of the Gumelnița B village at Căscioarele (adapted from Dumitrescu, VI. 1965: figure on p. 37).

The islet was used over a period of perhaps 500 years in the Late Boian and Gumelnița periods (4600 – 4100 Cal BC), resulting in a vertical build-up of over 3.6 m of deposits. Much of this consisted of the destruction deposits of the final burnt

occupation, in which all of the material inside the structures was re-fired and the shapes of many vessels distorted in the intense heat (Fig.2). Although no section through the site's deposits has been published, the bulk of the deposits derived from structural remains (p.c., S. Marinescu-Bîlcu). There can thus be no doubt that the site was at least partly used as a dwelling place for a succession of small communities, each of which extended the place-biography of earlier occupations to create an accumulated place-value for the islet. Despite the excavator Vl. Dumitrescu's (1965: 40) claim for "an easy quiet life ... because of ... the defensive position on the islet", the site could have easily been attacked from the shore, which lies only 120m away. The narrow, shallow ditch and low bank around the later (Gumelnița) occupation was hardly an insuperable obstacle to a co-ordinated attack – so a defensive function for the site is inherently improbable. The bank and ditch emphasised the separation of the islet from the "mainland", rather than its defensive nature.

Although the excavators and other commentators have emphasised the latter rather than the former, there is abundant evidence for both everyday dwelling activities and special depositional practices at Căscioarele (Dumitrescu 1968; Dumitrescu 1965a; Dumitrescu, Bănățeanu 1965). Most of the structures in both phases have one or more hearths, a pottery assemblage consistent with domestic use, querns for the grinding of grain, many fired clay loom-weights and everyday lithic and bone discard. There are many antler harpoons in the later phase, consistent with the vertebrae of large and small Danube fish found in pits. The main function of House 2 of the Gumelnița phase was a flint workshop, with 60 lumps of unused flint, 13 cores, four hammerstones and 14 flint axes (Dumitrescu 1965a).

The unusual deposits consisted of special finds, a burial deposit and a unique structure. The unique structure is the only special structure so far published relating to the Late Boian phase (Dumitrescu 1968) and consists of a 16m x 10m, two-roomed building with cream on red painted decoration on the walls, on two 2-m-high pillars and on a 0.4m-high bench. Near one of the pillars was a crouched inhumation; the finds included a life-size bucrania, an altar screen, large askoi, storage jars with excised decoration and other painted pottery. The building was the largest of all the Boian structures and was located in the middle of the Boian site. While the crouched burial was probably associated with the abandonment of the building, the pillars are a well-known feature of Balkan Neolithic and Copper Age ritual structures (cf. Beograd-Banjica, Jakovo-Kormadin and Parța: Todorović, Cermanović 1961; Jovanović, Glišić 1960; Lazarovici et al. 2001).

Although no such "ritual structures" were found in the Gumelnița occupation, there were many other distinctive features that suggest special depositional practices continued in this phase. At a general level, the overwhelming dietary preference for venison (over 60% of the bone numbers derived from red deer: Bolomey 1965) is most unusual for Gumelnița sites and suggests special feasting practices following on from "mainland" butchery of red deer. The deposition of an antler ard-point in House 8 suggests more than the possession of a farmer used for tilling the soils on the mainland terraces, since no other ard-point has ever been found in a Gumelnița house (indeed in any Gumelnița context !: Dumitrescu, Bănățeanu 1965). The large quantity and diversity of figurines makes the site distinctive, as does the high percentage deposited in houses (Andreescu 2002: 98). Unusual characteristics include a large number of pot-lids with anthropomorphic

handles – taken as a sign of domestic ritual - and figurines with special incised-circle decoration on the legs – perhaps made by a single person (Andreescu 2002: 105-106). The discovery of a fired clay figurine pair – a male and a female – unique in the Gumelnița repertoire also indicates special rituals. But this is underlined by the most spectacular find – a shrine model measuring 1.5 m in length and 0.8 m in height, deposited outside a large Gumelnița house. Another find class that is most unusual in domestic settings is the group of fired clay copies of *Spondylus* and gold pendants found in Gumelnița houses. The burial of two human skulls under the clay floor of another Gumelnița house, directly above the place where the oven was constructed, is a further indication of special depositional practices. Finally, the burning of all of the houses in the last Gumelnița occupation, together with a suite of ceramic assemblages, suggests the final ritual destruction of the site rather than an armed attack (cf. Stevanović 1997; Chapman 1998).

If any of these Gumelnița finds occurred singly on a tell site, the interpretation of a domestic ritual would probably be favoured. But such a concentration of special or, indeed, unique, finds suggests that Căscioarele was more than just a settlement site in the Gumelnița phase, as indeed it seems to have been with its Late Boian “pillar shrine”. Two complementary ritual aspects may be emphasised: the strong association between the Căscioarele houses and mortuary ritual, whether through the direct invocation of the ancestors (the skull burials), the presencing of exotic cemetery rituals (the pendant copies) or the final “death” of the settlement; and the significance of ceremonies for the living, whether characterised by feasting, outdoor rites using the shrine model and special figurines or even ritual ploughing with the ard-point. However, we cannot ignore the everyday finds that make Căscioarele similar to many other Gumelnița settlements.

Pottery comprising “house groups”

One of the commonest social practices in the Balkan later Neolithic and Chalcolithic is the deliberate burning of a house together with often large sets of objects placed inside the structure (Stefanović 1997; Chapman 1998, 2000). While Stefanović focussed on the evidence for deliberate burning (fire temperature, quantity of fuel necessary, fire path, etc.), Chapman discussed the social significance of the accumulation of these “sets” of material culture, maintaining that the assemblages in many houses were too large for a “normal”, “living pottery assemblage” as used by the former occupants of the burnt house. The implication was that it was difficult to identify the origins of the finds in a burnt house assemblage, since an unknown proportion may well have belonged to the “living assemblage” with the remainder brought in from outside.

This issue forms part of a wider problematic made famous by Binford’s (1981) attack on Schiffer’s so-called “Pompeii premise” – the notion that, unless any post-depositional disturbance could be demonstrated, the artifacts deposited in a settlement were reflections of an undisturbed living assemblage – hence Pompeii! Without going into any detail on the successive phases of this debate, it can simply be stated that it can now be demonstrated that the Pompeii Premise does not hold good even at Pompeii ! (Allison 1992; Bon 1997). But much of Schiffer’s subsequent research has demonstrated that so-called intact house assemblages have been generated through a series of enormously complex transformations,

including removal of objects from abandoned houses as much as post-abandonment additions to the assemblage. This has proved to be a major setback for the spatial analysis of "activity areas". In this context, Hayden and Cannon (1983) observed that "artifact distributions in sedentary contexts provide the least reliable, most ambiguous indicators of specific activity areas, but are nevertheless the indicators most widely used." Moreover, as Hally (1983: 179) summarised the implications of Murray's (1980) research on discard, "These findings imply that the distribution of trash on a site may bear little relationship to the distribution of activities that produced it". Where does this leave the artifact distributions at Căscioarele ?

The Gumelnița pottery recovered from Căscioarele has been restored to three types of vessel completeness: complete vessels, restored profiles with reconstruction of missing parts, and "orphan" sherds – sherds that could not be re-fitted to any other on-site sherds. The Gumelnița vessels derived from houses, most if not all burnt down deliberately. The majority of Gumelnița vessels (n = 102) have suffered little or no damage from house burning, although there is not a single house group from the Gumelnița levels without at least one re-fired vessel (Table 1):

| Level | House | Not re-fired | Re-fired | Assemblage Total |
|-------|---------------|--------------|----------|------------------|
| A2 | House 1 | 13 | 9 | 22 |
| B | 1962/House 1 | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| B | 1962/House 4 | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| B | 1963/House 8 | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| B | 1963/House 14 | 1 | 6 | 7 |

Table 1 Re-fired and un-re-fired vessels from burnt Gumelnița houses

The undamaged vessels in burnt houses must have been deposited in parts of the house far from the initial fire and the subsequent fire-path. There were two main effects on the 41 vessels exposed to secondary burning:

- the reddening of the surface, obscuring part or all of the surface treatment, original colour and/or decoration;
- the distortion of the vessel shape under particularly high temperatures.

While secondary burning is doubtless frustrating for the ceramic analyst, the effect of this practice is to "kill" the vessel, obliterating many if not most aspects of its identity, prioritising the colour *red* over all other colours and blending the vessel into the background of the brick-red burnt structural elements. This practice is thus a destruction of social memory, mimicking the physical death that can accompany the burning of a house.

The wide variation in the size of the burnt house groups suggests that different processes led to their independent formation. Ethno-archaeological studies of household pottery assemblages provide useful comparative information for social groups of broadly comparable size: a total assemblage size of 10 – 15 vessels was the most frequently found (Longacre 1984; Nelson 1991). Thus, it may be hypothesised that the Gumelnița A2 House 1 assemblage may have been a living assemblage from a well-provisioned house or that, alternatively, vessels were added to the living assemblage by other householders. By contrast, the small burnt

house assemblages from the Gumelnița B level raise the possibility that vessels had been removed for further use from the "living assemblage". Although there has been no clear proof at Căscioarele of the addition to, or removal of, vessels from house assemblages about to be consumed by fire, there is a presumption from the variation in "burnt house assemblage" size that such practices were likely. Other objects whose primary use must have been elsewhere include the antler and fragment from House 8 and the antler harpoons.

The methodological issue is how to deal with this uncertainty in the relationship between dead and living house assemblages. The question can be reformulated as the extent to which the vessels in each house were placed there as part of an integrated strategy of deposition, with their overall meaning stemming from the juxtaposition of individual vessel meanings. It is the proposition of this chapter that this question can be investigated using categorical analysis of each house assemblage in comparison with the analysis of the assemblage from each entire level. The aim of this form of categorical analysis is the definition of "local" rules for each house assemblage as compared to the "global" rules of the entire phase assemblage. The distinctiveness of the "local" rules would indicate the likelihood of an integral house pottery group. This approach resembles the establishment of global and local rules for mortuary practices (e.g., Chapman 2000a). However, a further complication arises. Given the undeniable existence of social relations between those living on the islet and those on the "mainland" (see further Chapman and Gaydarska, in press), a further possibility is that some vessels in the burnt houses were brought onto the islet from the shoreline communities, as part of their enchainment relations with the special, liminal centre. This possibility adds a further uncertainty to the interpretation of the house groups and requires ceramic provenancing research for resolution.

The categorical analysis

There are two types of pottery group for the categorical analysis:- (1) all the available complete and reconstructed vessels from each of the three occupation levels, yielding an insight into global categorisation principles by period; and (2) all of the complete and reconstructed vessels from each house with a minimum of 5 vessels (1 example from the Gumelnița A2 level; 4 examples from the Gumelnița B level), giving an idea of local categorisation principles.

By way of general background, most of the Late Boian assemblage from the houses had been re-fired, while most of the pottery from outside the houses lacked traces of secondary burning. The group as a whole is dominated by storage jars with excised decoration, bowls with painted decoration and necked carinated bowls with channelling. In terms of reinforcements, the group has a wide range of shape breaks (1 - 4 breaks). Decorational reinforcement of shape was normally amplified by matt/gloss contrasts, sometimes with colour in the excision. A particular feature was the way in which potters formed a contrast between the lower burnished or smoothed part of a vessel and a roughened base (henceforth "basal roughening"). Resembling surface barbotine decoration, this roughening of the base must have been deliberately produced at the leather-hard stage of production. It may be thought that such a contrast is unimportant, since it is invisible when the vessel is standing on a level surface. However, this relies on a static assumption of "pottery-as-still-life". Instead, people picked up vessels, turning them around and touching their surface, both seeing and feeling the basal surface

difference. It is also noteworthy that, in the Karanovo VI pottery assemblage from Dolnoslav, Bulgaria, potters conceived of the vessels in the round, sometimes decorating the base as well as the lid to produce a 360° visual effect.

The vessel sample from the Gumelnița A2 level ($n = 29$ vessels) shows two of the characteristics of the earlier assemblage – the importance of bowl forms and the emphasis on combinations of decorational and matt/gloss reinforcement (Fig.3). However, there are many more differences than similarities, not least in the number of pottery types and their diversification in sub-types, the wider range of decorative styles and the preference for carinated bowls and plastic over barbotine decoration. Impressed and graphite painted decoration was found only on bowls, while channelled and incised decoration was found only on amphorae. However, the high proportion of bowls (80%) that were undecorated means that the summary complexity statistic was low (0.4). The dominance of both undecorated vessels with no contrasts over undecorated vessels with basal contrast and vessels with no breaks over those with a single break indicate the essential characteristics of this assemblage. This is the level with the highest incidence of basal roughening on all shapes of vessels (45%). About one in seven vessels display no reinforcement of shape differentials but rather decorational more than matt/gloss contrasts. A combination of decorational and matt/gloss reinforcement occurs in all those vessels with shape reinforcement.

The slightly larger vessel sample from the Gumelnița B level ($n = 32$ vessels) (Fig.4) closely resembles the earlier Gumelnița level in terms of the number of pottery types and sub-types, as well as the number of decorational styles. Moreover, both phases share the dominance of undecorated vessels with no contrasts, the prevalence of vessels with one break, the preference for decorational contrasts which do not reinforce shape divisions and the preference for combined decorational and matt/gloss contrasts to reinforce shape divisions. However, the dominant decorational style has changed from plastic to barbotine decoration, with channelled decoration in second place, while incised decoration is now found on only lids, impressed motifs on only jars and channelled decoration on both bowls and amphorae. With the emphasis on multiple reinforcements of shape divisions and the first use of colour reinforcement, the summary complexity statistic increased to 0.6. In addition, the proportion of vessels with basal roughening declined to about 31% from the A2 peak.

The three pottery assemblages from Căscioarele show no signs of radical discontinuity but rather a series of minor changes in categorisation strategies. But each assemblage shows a variety of means to reinforce shape divisions. I now turn to the various house groups to compare their categorisation signatures with those of the phase assemblages.

The only Gumelnița A2 house with a reasonable sample size ($n = 22$) is 1964/House 1. Many of the traits in this group are found in the phase assemblage: the domination of bowls, as well as plastic and barbotine decoration, the restriction of graphite painted ware to bowls and channelling on amphorae, the prevalence of undecorated vessels with no other contrasts, the dominance of vessels with one break and, most importantly, the shared use of decorational and matt/gloss contrasts to reinforce shape divisions. The summary complexity statistic of the house group (0.3) is also very similar to that of the phase assemblage (0.4), as is the proportion of vessels with basal roughening (36% cf. 45%). Although these similarities are a partial reflection of common vessels in both groups, there is a 50% difference in the group composition. This is sufficient to be confident that the similarities in principles of categorisation between 1964/House 1 and the A2 phase assemblage are meaningful.

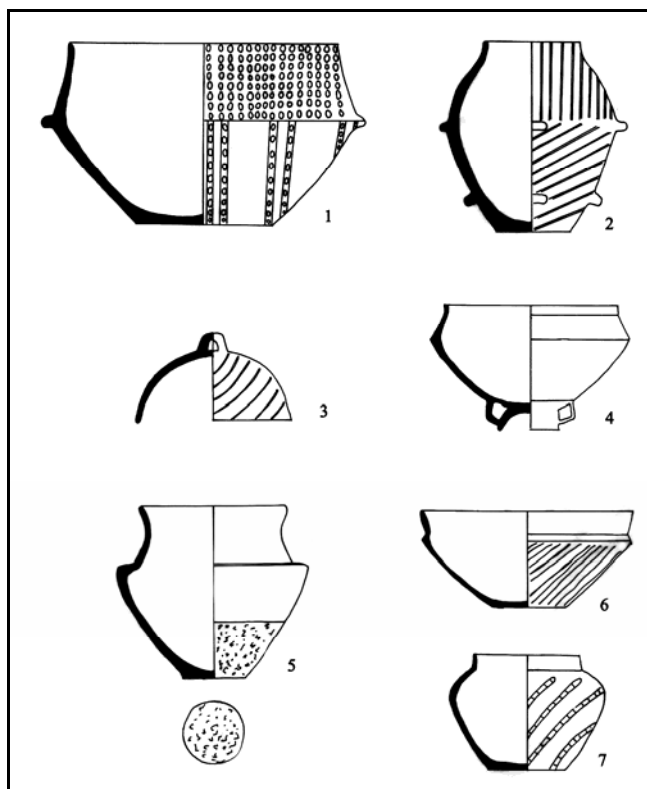


Fig.3 Căscioarele. Pottery from the Gumelnița A2 phase: 1. 1964/House 3: red coarse ware carinated bowl: one shape division, vertically reinforced with two different styles of Impressed decoration – vertical finger-tip rows above carination; finger-tip on vertical plastic cordons below carination; below carination, horizontal contrast between cordons and undecorated zones. 2. 1964/House 1: orange coarse ware rounded bowl with no shape divisions; vertical contrasts in Plastic decoration – vertical ribs above belly; oblique ribs below belly. 3. 1964/House 1: lid with prominent handle, re-fired to red, with distorted shape; one shape division between handle and lid reinforced by undecorated (handle) and decorated lid (oblique plastic ribs). 4. 1965/depth of 1.55 – 1.80m: grey burnished ware necked carinated footed bowl; pedestal supported by anthropomorphic "hands"; four shape divisions; undecorated, so no reinforcements. 5. 1964/House 1: shouldered amphora, re-fired to red in secondary burning: no reinforcement of the single shape division; vertical matt/gloss contrast between upper smooth burnished zone and lower (base) roughened, unburnished barbotine zone; roughened base cf. barbotine zone. 6. 1964/House 1: necked carinated dish, re-fired to red after secondary burning and with distorted shape: two shape divisions, the lower reinforced by decorative and matt/gloss contrasts (burnished and undecorated above carination, roughened and with oblique linear barbotine below carination). 7. 1965/depth 0.80 – 1.05m: brown burnished ware necked amphora with one shape division, reinforced by decorative and matt/gloss contrast (burnished and undecorated on neck, smoothed and decorated on body), with horizontal contrast (Plastic ribs between undecorated zones).

Turning to the four Gumelnița B house groups, the house group from 1962/House 1 mostly comprises undecorated vessels with no other contrasts, with no breaks or only one break, such that there are no reinforcements of the few shape divisions at all. This selection of vessels created the lowest complexity statistic of any house at Căscioarele (0.0) but 2 out of 5 vessels displayed basal roughening. The choice of this combination of vessels provides a contrast to the phase assemblage in terms of reduced categorisational complexity.

The 1962/House 4 group has a rather higher summary complexity statistic (0.3) but this figure is far lower than that of the phase assemblage. Many traits of the house group resemble those of the phase assemblage: the prevalence of undecorated vessels with no contrasts, the importance of vessels with one break, the incidence of combinations of decorative and matt/gloss reinforcements and the incidence of vessels with basal roughening (25%). The local principles for 1962/House 4 would appear to be very similar to those defining the phase assemblage.

The pottery group from 1963/House 8 is the only group with more vessels with shape divisions reinforced by decoration than undecorated vessels. There is also a wider range of the number of shape breaks, up to 3 breaks. The prevalence of amphorae, as well as the dominance of graphite painted decoration, are also distinctive features, although the use of incised spirals on lids is common to both groups. The summary complexity statistic is higher than for any other house (1.0) as well as higher than the value for the phase assemblage (0.6). The proportion of vessels with basal roughening is lower than in all of the other houses. These differences indicate a contrast between this house group and the phase assemblage in terms of greater categorisational complexity.

The final house group under analysis derives from 1963/House 14. Many similarities are found with the phase assemblage: the prevalence of undecorated vessels with no other contrasts, the high incidence of vessels with 1 or 2 breaks and the combined decorative and matt/gloss contrasts reinforcing shape divisions. Incised decoration, however, appears on different vessel forms. The most striking aspects of the similarity are the identical summary complexity statistic (0.6) and very similar proportions of vessels with basal contrast (29% cf. 31%). As with 1962/House 4, the local principles for 1963/House 14 would appear to be very similar to those defining the phase assemblage.

In contrast to the Gumelnița A2 phase, where the categorisation principles for the phase assemblage and the single house group were identical, the four houses of the B phase reveal two different patterns. The principles represented by the pottery selected for Houses 4 and 14 are very similar to those of the phase assemblage, while those of Houses 1 and 8 show strong, if opposite, divergences from the phase assemblage. The categorisational complexity found in House 1 is far lower than for the total assemblage, that in House 8 far higher. How can these variations between the phase and house assemblages be interpreted?

Interpretation and discussion

The first general point that is shared by all of the ceramic groups is the tension between oppositional organisation and cross-cutting structures. The oppositional mode is represented by those vessels where shape contrasts are reinforced by both decorative and matt/gloss contrasts (see Figs.3/x and 4/x). The contrast

between burnished, undecorated surfaces and roughened, decorated surfaces was frequent in all phases at Căscioarele; this oppositional structure was also common on undecorated vessels with basal roughening. But the alternative organisational structure of cross-cutting contrasts was also frequently expressed, as in the vessels with decorative contrasts that did not reinforce shape divisions (Figs.3/x and 4/x). The proportion of this vessel type almost doubled from the A2 to the B level, suggesting a growing importance of the cross-cutting structure. This overlapping principle was also expressed in the lack of exclusive relationships between vessel shapes and decoration. In the A2 phase, plastic decoration was found on bowls, amphorae and flasks, while barbotine motifs occurred on amphorae and jars. A similar pattern was found in the B phase, with plastic motifs on bowls and jars and barbotine on bowls, dishes and amphorae. This is in strong contrast to the Late Neolithic Hlebozavoda III assemblage, in which channelled decoration was strongly focussed on bowls, amphorae and lids, while all of the incised, excised and impressed + relief motifs occurred on dishes, cups and jars (Chapman 2004). Nowhere in the Căscioarele assemblages was there such a strong expression of cross-cutting reinforcement as in the Final Chalcolithic assemblage from Dolnoslav, where recombination and differentiation of vessel shapes, decorative styles and modes of reinforcement reached particularly high levels (Chapman, Gaydarska, in press a).

The argument has been made that an assemblage dominated by binary oppositional modes of ceramic reinforcement indicates a social structure where vertical, hierarchical divisions were given prominence, whereas the cross-cutting mode of reinforcement suggested, rather, a society whose members' identities were formed by a plurality of associations with different groups, whether household or corporate (Chapman 2004). In the Bulgarian examples, the Late Neolithic Hlebozavoda III assemblage exemplifies a strong reliance on the oppositional mode, whereas the Early Chalcolithic Asmaska mogila pottery indicates the moderate development of cross-cutting principles of differentiation. The Final Chalcolithic Dolnoslav assemblage goes much further along the path of overlapping modes of reinforcement with its highly differentiated pottery, much of it deliberately deposited in burnt houses or middens.

The Căscioarele study suggests a community whose principles of categorisation were in flux, in transition from a more hierarchical structure towards a more complex mode, where the establishment of identities relied more on cross-cutting categorisation. Such increasing complexity could have been related to the growing significance of the place in the Lower Danube social network, as a wider range of people from outside Căscioarele visited the islet for ritual or exchange purposes. This principle would have depended on the well-attested notion that the wider the range of persons developing links with the local community, the more complex the forms of relationships structuring such networks (Turner 1984).

One hypothetical scenario is the following. At the foundation time of the site, in the Late Boian period, ritual was a key differentiating principle among the islet community. The Late Boian ceramic assemblage – especially that associated with the shrine – was heavily dependent upon binary oppositional categorisation, connoting the existence of different social groups – perhaps ritual leaders and other residents. The rituals at this time were focussed on the main pillar shrine, with its rich array of deposited objects. In the Gumelnița period, the focus of ritual may have changed from an indoor shrine to outdoor ceremonies, given the deposition

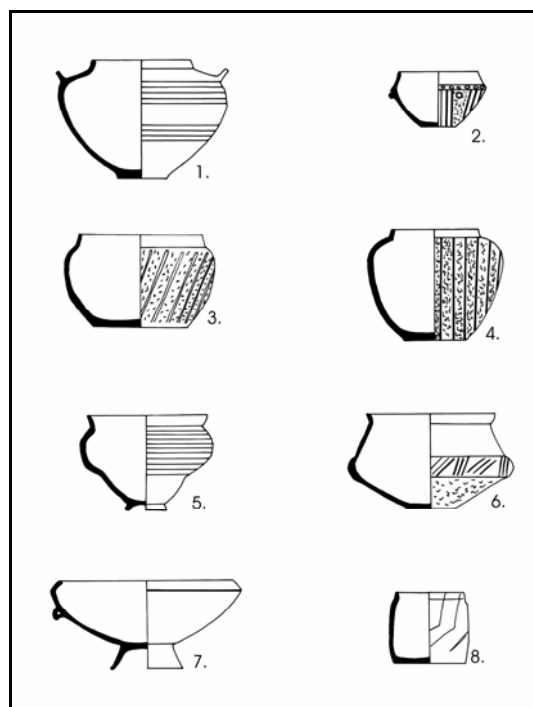


Fig.4 Căscioarele. Pottery from the Gumelnița B phase: 1. 1962/depth 0.40m: red medium ware necked carinated amphora; two shape divisions, the lower reinforced by decorated / undecorated contrast (alternating vertical bands of channelled and undecorated areas). 2. 1963/House 13: red burnished ware carinated bowl; one shape division reinforced by decorative and matt/gloss contrasts (burnished undecorated neck, roughened area and plastic ribs on body – i.e. horizontal contrasts on body); contrast between roughened surface of lower body and smoothed base. 3. 1963/House 13: red medium ware necked jar; one shape division, reinforced by decorative and matt/gloss contrasts (smoothed and undecorated neck, roughened area between oblique relief lines on body – i.e. horizontal contrasts between undecorated areas and decorated lines on body); 4. 1963/House 8: necked jar, with brown burnished ware neck and matt/gloss + undecorated/decorated contrasts below neck (brown coarse ware with vertical linear barbotine lines with roughened areas between them). 5. 1963/House 6: grey to light brown burnished ware necked footed bowl; two shape divisions, the upper one reinforced by undecorated – decorated contrast (undecorated neck, decorated belly, undecorated lower body). 6. 1963/House 8: graphite painted ware necked carinated bellied amphora, partially re-fired to red from secondary burning; three shape divisions, the second and third reinforced by undecorated – decorated and matt/gloss contrasts (undecorated and burnished below neck, belly decorated with graphite painting, undecorated, roughened lower body). 7. 1963/House 12: light brown burnished ware pedestalled carinated bowl; two shape divisions, neither reinforced since no decoration. 8. 1962/House 1: brown coarse ware necked flask; one shape division, not reinforced; vertical contrast between decorated – undecorated zones (decorated upper body, undecorated lower body); matt/gloss contrast between rough lower body and smoothed base.

of the "shrine model" 2 m from (i.e., outside) a large Gumelnița A2 house. Given the range of special objects placed inside this and other houses-to-be-burnt, it is unusual that the model was not placed in a house; nonetheless, this cannot be used as definitive evidence for the relocation of the ritual focus to outdoors. However, in the larger Gumelnița B village, there were no unusual structures or models clearly associated with ritual deposition, although the deposition of special objects – especially fired clay figurines - continued in many of the burnt houses. It seems that the initial importance of the islet as a ritual centre stimulated the development of a wider range of enchaind social practices, cemented through the deposition of more specialised artifacts. This placed increasing stress upon the former, more hierarchical relationship between ritual leaders and the other members of the islet community, some of whom had developed close exchange relations with those visiting the islet. These enchaind exchanges developed partly out of, and partly in parallel to, the pre-existing ritual network, which, in any case, had changed by the Gumelnița phase into a more dispersed structure. It may not be an exaggeration to say that the focus of deposition in the Boian period was a central place, with central ritual leaders, while, in the Gumelnița period, the focus of deposition broadened out into a household-based, multi-focal structure. The unusually high frequency of fired clay figurines may have represented the continuing high density, but also the dispersal, of ceremonies across the islet. Another way of looking at these changes is to suggest that, in the Boian period, the islet stood for the ritual centre as its central role, while, in the later period, the islet stood for many households, each making their own distinctive contribution to the islet's history.

Five examples may be cited of exchanges leading to deposition by a wider range of households:

- (a) the discovery, in Phase B houses on the islet, of ceramic pendants imitating the *Spondylus* and gold forms deposited in "mainland" tells such as Gumelnița itself (see above, p. xx);
- (b) the antler ard from Phase B House 8, which could be the gift of a mainland farmer to a Căscioarele household rather than a tool used by an islet inhabitant farming mainland fields;
- (c) the exchange of probably North Bulgarian flint from across the Danube for the workshop in House 2;
- (d) the consumption by many households, of large quantities of venison, brought by visitors and/or hunted by residents;
- (e) the consumption, by many households, of Danube fish caught by visitors and/or residents.

This development created a more complex web of relations, betokening the growth of cross-cutting relations between those living on the islet and between residents and visitors. It also suggests a reason for the differentiation of household pottery groups, since different households may well have wished to underline specific aspects of their own identities vis-à-vis their neighbours and visitors.

The similarities between the local categorisation principles of the Gumelnița A2 1964/House 1 and the global rules for the whole assemblage suggest consolidation of the household identity with strict reference to the overall principles for the formation of group identity as manifested in the phase ceramic assemblage.

However, a picture of household differentiation in Phase B is supported by the variable relations between the categorisation principles of the house groups and the whole phase assemblage. As a cautionary point, one should stress that the small size of all of the Gumelnița B house groups - each is much smaller than that of the A2 1964/House 1 - may have contributed to part of the variations from the phase assemblage. Nonetheless, the reason for two Phase B houses selecting vessels whose categorisation principles resemble those of the whole community may well relate to an attachment to traditional modes of identity formation, while the differences in structural principles in the other two Phase B houses may well indicate a selection of pottery emphasising the individuality of the household within an overall framework of community ceramic production. At present, we have no way of distinguishing between pottery from outside the islet and locally-used pottery as components of the household selections.

Conclusions

The categorical analysis of Balkan Neolithic and Eneolithic pottery assemblages has been used to investigate the Boian and Gumelnița materials from the islet site of Căscioarele, with particular emphasis on the later assemblages. The analysis showed that there is a tension between the two classic forms of structural principles - binary opposition and cross-cutting forms of identity formation, with some evidence that the latter principle was increasing in importance in the later occupations. Comparison between the categorical principles of the Gumelnița A2 and B phase assemblages and individual house groups of these phases indicated a close similarity between the A2 house group and the phase assemblage but variation in relations between house groups and the Phase B assemblage.

The overall sequence of occupation on this special liminal place, with its seasonal flooding, is considered in terms of an initial ritual focus on a single Late Boian central shrine, with a gradual de-centering of ritual towards a multi-focal structure with ritual practices of deposition in many households by Gumelnița Phase B. It is proposed that one of the main stimuli of this dispersed network within the islet community was the development of forms of enchained exchange relations that acted as alternatives to the main ritual practices of the post-Boian occupation. These alternative practices helped to create a sense of individual identity for households that was in dialectic relationship to the overall community identity. This development stimulated the selection of pottery in Phase B burnt house deposition that sometimes emphasised the household identity, sometimes the community identity. This interpretation is supported by a wide range of other depositional practices on the islet in Phase B, including a wide range of figurines, an antler ard, fired clay pendants, red deer and fish bones.

In this chapter, I have sought to use the published information about the spectacular site of Căscioarele and, thanks to Silvia Marinescu-Bâlcu, part of its unpublished pottery assemblage to develop an interpretation of the site - a narrative dedicated to Silvia. A close reading of the depositional history of the site and the selection of vessels placed in houses-to-be-burnt indicate the dynamic and changing biography of this special place, whose place-value as a ritual centre may well have maintained its social significance even though the previously centralised ritual was dispersed throughout the Gumelnița B village. The problem of the source

of the pottery deposited at Căscioarele deserves future attention in the form of a provenancing programme of scientific analysis.

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