

CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING THE EARLY NEOLITHIC ARCHITECTURE

Summary

The Neo-Eneolithic periodisation in the Danube area, related to the civilizations' dynamics and their correlation with the neighbouring civilizations has several important phases: the **Early Neolithic** (during this phase the neolithisation process ends); the **Developed Neolithic** (this term is used only for the provinces where the Vinča culture, phase A, is present; these civilizations have a longer life, until Eneolithic) or the **Middle Neolithic** (this term is used for the areas where there are Polychrome horizons, see: Lazarovici 1987-1988; Lazarovici - Nica, 1991); the **Late Neolithic** (the term is used for the areas outside the Vinča area); the **Early Eneolithic**, known as Vinča C (Vinča C1, C2, C3); the **Developed Eneolithic** including Sălcuța, Petrești, Cucuteni (A2-A4) cultures (we do not separate the last phases of these civilizations, although chronologically it would be necessary); the **Late Eneolithic** including the Tiszapolgár, Bodrogkeresztúr, Cucuteni (A-B and B) and culture of pots with double rounded handles (Sălcuța IV – Herculane II- Cheile Turzii – Hunyadi Halom – Vajska). In the territory we intend to present here there are many cultures and local groups with strong features.

While the architectural development is influenced by external factors, internal ones, such as climatic conditions, the specific of the rural economy, community dynamics, the appearance of trade places, fortification systems and cultural centres, determine its evolution.

The Starčevo-Criș culture has four main phases SC I-IV, present in the Romanian territory, except for Dobroudja and Maramureș. The spread of this civilization is gradual. Phases I and II are present only in Banat, Oltenia and Transylvania. Phase III, especially IIIB, with „CBA” (which includes Vinča A and Polychromy) extended in Moldavia, in North and Central Crișana.

Settlements usually develop around a centre as at Gura Baciului; here this type of organization was maintained for the entire Neo-Eneolithic period and causes many superpositions (fig. 1, the first complexes are hachured).

Settlements were located on different relief forms (on low or middle terraces of small or larger rivers) always close to good water sources necessary for daily life. Sometimes the main occupation decides the location of the settlement: suitable areas for animal breeding in the first phases (cattle, sheep-goat and deer at Gura Baciului, Ocna Sibiului, Succag, Moruț, Țaga, Șeușa); areas that provide important raw materials, such as salt or clay (Gura Baciului, Ocna Sibiului, Șeușa, Lunca - Poiana Slatinii, Solca - Slatina mare) good areas for fishing (Cuina Turcului, Gornea, Ostrovu Golu and some settlements in Bessarabia). In some cases, settlements are also situated on

high positions (Leč and Idjoš, Yugoslavian Banat).

There are settlements that swarmed from a central one. They can be interpreted as seasonal or secondary settlements, belonging to small groups of people emerged from the main site, or related to periodical exploitation of raw materials, such as salt.

At Gura Baciului the SC IC-IIA level is represented by pit house 20, with many remains of *ovis ares* and channelled pottery, connected with the second south migration, reflecting a typical phenomenon for this chronological horizon in the Balkans. After this horizon follows an effervescent period with surface houses, good quality hearths built on suspended floors. At the same time level, the painted pottery of the site decays. Houses are built of wood beams and the walls are made of rods. Sometimes a clay plaster is used for the walls; this will be frequently used in the pit houses of the last phase of SC IVB (pit house 27). The superposing of complexes makes it difficult to establish their exact system of construction, but more than 40% of the construction elements have been identified in most cases (postholes from the main structure). This allows the reconstruction from fig. 9, level IIA-IIB, representing the third habitation phase at Gura Baciului.

Phases SC IIIB-IVB represents a period of decline, illustrated by the involution of ceramic (it is mixed with small stones, the fine pottery is missing, a poor firing process; poor decoration inventory, simplicity and scarcity of shapes) and the reappearance of pit houses. The settlement loses its connection to the Balkan civilizations and it is possible to observe only few influences. This leads to the conclusion that Gura Baciului became a secondary type settlement.

The research at Gura Baciului offers information about the organization of the settlement's central area (fig. 1). In the centre there were two pits, without archaeological inventory; in all the development phases of the site the central area was empty. It is possible to assume that here was located the foundation pillar, or totemic pillar, or the pillar named "axis mundi" by M. Eliade (Eliade, 1981, 42, 51). In the site at Glăvăneștii Vechi, houses were organized in four groups, two by two, maybe a model of the family organization or the reflection of two different stages of construction.

It is very difficult to describe the evolution of a site, especially because of the lack of interdisciplinary research. The analysis at Gura Baciului allows us to sketch the evolution of some complexes. Based on comparative and vertical stratigraphy, using a database for more than 16.000 objects (especially pottery) we can conclude that in the first stages of habitation the evolution was always linear. Classification and internal analysis allow us to establish more reconstruction phases as part of a very dynamic process. Sometimes even the same phase has several superposed complexes (fig. 10-11, 14). The closest analogies with Gura Baciului have been found at Donja Branjevina (fig. 19); here the architecture of the developed phases is better preserved. Starting with the early Mesolithic, Epipaleolithic or Protoneolithic horizons, we can

speak of the organization of the central area of a site and of regular disposition of the houses, as at Lepenski Vir (fig. 20).

THE HOUSES

At Gornea – *Locurile lungi* houses were arranged in a diagonal, with the corners facing the dominant winds, which in this area are long lasting and strong (fig. 3). We can conclude that the orientation of the houses is related not only to the geographical aspects but also to the psychology of the communities.

Pit houses. Usually the habitation process begins with the construction of several pit houses during colder seasons and huts during warmer ones. They have different dimensions, some of them 5,4 x 4 x 0,90 m, but some are smaller. One of the largest pit houses was found at Moldova Veche – *Râi* (fig. 21). At Gura Baciului houses are built on a slope and therefore different parts of the same house are situated at different depths. Pit houses as we have already mentioned appear in the first and last phases of the settlement.

Semi-subterranean houses. This is a house partially dug out in the ground, which offers the possibility to use the margin of the pit and presumes the existence of walls (pit houses and huts only have a roof). Pit houses and semi-subterranean houses do not preserve too many traces of pillars from the walls. In the semi-subterranean house discovered at Foeni, the walls were made of pillars and rods and had a light structure (fig. 24-24a). Such complexes with small dimensions did not need big fireplaces, considering that a family had about 3-7 persons judging by the house model from Larissa (fig. 28). The dimensions of semi-subterranean houses vary between 9-80 m².

Surface houses. These houses are rectangular and their dimensions range from 1,5 to 27 m². Generally, they have only one room, with or without fireplaces. At Gornea and Ostrovu Golu (fig. 27 -27a) one side of the house was longer: at Gornea this part was south-oriented and we assume it marked the porch. In Moldavia, at Trestiana some houses from the central part of the site have internal pits with stairs and internal arrangements (fig. 7). Some of these pits were used as cereal storages.

At Ostrovu Golu the floor of a very large house was made of three-four rows of stones and small river stones mixed with sand (fig. 27- 27a), plastered with clay mixed with sand, partially preserved. Big logs supported the roof and the walls. They have about 10-20 cm in diameter, judging by the traces of postholes. This construction had more internal compartments. Fig. 27-27a shows traces of rows of postholes. Some of them belong to a palisade (that continues outside the house) and are associated to a long pit, interpreted as a ditch. Another row, close to the first one, is associated to the floor of the house, made of river stones, in fact a pavement. The second row demonstrates that the second compartment of the house was probably used as a shed. The opposite row has fewer postholes and it belongs to the house structure. We can assume that the house had big, thick, wooden walls, probably plastered with clay. Smaller walls mark the inner compartments of the house.

Inner arrangements and the space usage. Archaeological data regarding this aspect is poor. Some house patterns and sanctuaries (from a later period) help us imagine how small spaces were used. The best example is the house pattern from Larissa.

Griddles. Such pieces are mentioned at Schela Cladovei. S. Luca has recently published three other patterns of griddles (fig. 30). These pieces were made of a mixture of clay, chaff and sand. They allow an economic heating, different cooking proceedings and fruit drying.

Hearths. Compared to Moldavia and Bessarabia, where even houses with several hearths have been found, in Banat and Transylvania not so many hearths have been discovered. Generally, hearths are oval, irregular oval or circular and built directly on the ground, in the middle of the house, or at the margins of the pit house as at Gura Baciului and Perieni. External hearths and an external oven have been discovered at Trestiana, too (fig. 29).

Benches have been discovered at Trestiana. They were dug together with the walls in yellow clay. These spaces were probably used for sheltering pots and other objects necessary for daily life.

Cult constructions

During this period cult places were situated inside the houses and had a mobile inventory. Such situations were noticed at Balș (an anthropomorphic idol inside a rectangular box made of fired stones) and at Săcăreuca (in a niche above the oven, in a clay table-altar was an anthropomorphic idol). More interesting are the discoveries at Trestiana. House C/L3 contains a pit with sheep skulls, a hearth and close to it a clay table-altar with two anthropomorphic idols. In the house area were also discovered anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and conic idols as well as clay table altars. In House C/L6 in a deeper pit, four-zoomorphic idols have been discovered. At Zăuan a cult pit contains the famous "Venus".