

The Basarabi type discoveries. A brief review

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The "Basarabi type" discoveries, due to their number, importance and wide geographical spreading, do represent one of the most representative expressions of the Early Iron Age in Central and Eastern Europe.

They are usually assigned to the middle stage of this age and are also designated either as "culture"¹, "complex"², "phenomenon"³ or even "fashion"⁴, being dated "grosso modo" in the 8th-7th centuries B.C.⁵ Their characteristic and unmistakable mark is given, above all, by the specific pottery, decorated with complex ornamental motifs, stamped, incised, excised or grooved, sometimes encrusted with white substance. Their elaborated combination resulted in a seeming homogeneous whole, from a stylistic and symbolic viewpoint, with multiple aesthetic valences. It justifies to a great extent the opinion that "the decoration of the Basarabi culture pottery is the last valuable achievement of the prehistoric pottery"⁶, from the Carpathian-Danubian space.

Some finds that can be connected with the Basarabi type discoveries have been especially recorded in Romania (Alba Iulia - "Partoș"⁷, Blandiana⁸, Coldău II⁹, Vaidei¹⁰, Bălvănești¹¹ and Desa¹²), eastern Croatia (Šarengrad - "Bašćine"¹³) and Serbia (Adaševci¹⁴ and Novi Banovci¹⁵) since the end of the 19th century - the beginning of the 20th century. These discoveries are exclusively represented by hoards, consisting in bronze, iron or bronze plated iron pieces, but without any associated ceramics.

Other finds of this type were published between 1921 and 1939, burial inventories included, some of them associated with specific ceramics. They came from Gruia, Vânjuleț, Ostrovul Mare, Ostrovul Corbului, Balta Verde, Cârna and Gura Blahniței (in south-western Romania)¹⁶, Košava-Jasen, Arčar, Čarevec and Dăržanica (in north-western Bulgaria)¹⁷, Šabac-Šinošević (in Serbia)¹⁸, Széged-Öthalom and Somló (in Hungary)¹⁹. At that time, they were undifferentiatedly assigned to the Early Iron Age or even Iron Age, as the term "Basarabi culture" was only introduced after the IInd World War.

The synonymous necropolis of this culture, located in south-western Oltenia (Romania), was systematically excavated by Vl. Durnitrescu as far back as 1943²⁰, but it was published only in 1968²¹. At that time, the results of the researches accomplished in the similar necropolis from Balta Verde²² were already introduced in the scientific circulation, and the "Basarabi culture" or "Basarabi type culture" terminology was already applied in the Romanian specialized literature. It was already used in 1957 by R. Vulpe to designate the discoveries of this type from Popești²³ and later took over by D. Berciu in the first treatise on the history of Romania (1960)²⁴.

Since then, the problems raised by these discoveries are dealt with, directly or tangentially, in an impressive number of works. Although they substantially contributed to the outlining of an even more complex image on the type of manifestations, there still remain many unsolved aspects, or embodying divergent solutions.

In 1965, Al. Vulpe published the first monographic study²⁵ on the Basarabi culture, defining the essential characteristics, but also offering some considerations regarding its general chronology and the division into periods of its inner evolution. On this occasion, he placed the entire evolution of the Basarabi culture between the middle of the 8th century and the middle of the 7th century B.C. and divided it into two phases, i.e. phase I (750 - end of the 8th century B.C.) and phase II (end of the 8th century - middle of the 7th century B.C.). As emphasizing the similarities between the Basarabi pottery decoration and that of some of the most representative Bronze Age cultures (Wietenberg, Gârla Mare and Tei), Al. Vulpe also advanced

an opinion favourable to a local (Carpathian-Danubian) genesis of the Basarabi culture. Certain difficulties of chronological and cultural nature opposed to an non reluctant acceptance of such a genetic connection. They were related to the existence in most parts of the subsequent spreading area of the Basarabi type manifestations, of certain so-called Early Hallstatt groups, with an exclusively grooved ceramics and a rather long evolution. At that time, aware of those difficulties, Al. Vulpe resorted to an explanation almost impossible to demonstrate from the archaeological viewpoint, that on the preservation of the main elements of the spiral and meander-line decoration from the Bronze Age on perishable staff (wood, woven material). The impulse that would have had caused the change of the ornamental "fashion" and the re-emergence of the old decorative patterns on the Basarabi type ceramics were considered to be of eastern origin, taking into consideration especially the contribution of the Černoles and Babadag cultures.

In 1966, D.Berciu estimated the Basarabi culture manifestations as a result of the north-Thracian synthesis and continuity and divided its inner evolution into three phases, phase I (800-750 B.C.), phase II (750-700 B.C.) and phase III (700-650 B.C.) respectively²⁶.

A different opinion has been expressed by Vl. Dumitrescu in 1968, by the time of the publishing of the tumular necropolis with inhumation graves from Basarabi²⁷. The resemblance between certain decorative elements of the Basarabi pottery and those of some ceramic and metal artefacts from south-eastern Alps and north-western Balkans made him consider that the Basarabi ornamental patterns had been of western inspiration, Illyrian respectively. The emergence of these elements within the Carpathian-Danubian space would have been resulted from either an ethnic penetration or some cultural influences from the above mentioned regions. He declared himself in the favour of a two-phased inner evolution.

The subsequent increase of the archaeological reference material regarding the pre-Basarabi horizon from the Carpathian-Danubian region and especially the publishing of the Insula Banului discoveries²⁸ caused an approach of the points of view expressed in the Romanian specialised literature on the Basarabi genesis and specific contents. Most of the archaeologists began to declare themselves in favour of a genetic connection between the Insula Banului type group and the Basarabi culture²⁹.

Starting with the seventies, an increasing number of Basarabi type discoveries is recorded within the entire Carpathian-Balkan space. At the same time, one could record in the archaeological literature a significant growth of interest and a revival of the debates on this kind of cultural expressions. As well individualised and even spectacular in the field of ceramic products, these debates are so far disputed in their ethno-cultural significance, chronological limits and inner division into periods. The reason of such an interest must be primarily sought in the leading part which the Basarabi culture held in the distribution of different assets between the central (eastern and south-eastern Alps), south-eastern (Balkan-Aegean) and eastern (northern Black Sea) European regions. On the other hand, the large spreading of the Basarabi type pottery and its presence in the foreign cultural milieus had been used and oftentimes still is, as a chronological guide mark for the last ones.

In the context of our discussion, substantial and important contributions have been made by the Yugoslavian archaeologists.

After the Basarabi type discoveries had been integrated by N. Tasić into the Bosut group³⁰, P. Medović defined more accurately many chronological and cultural aspects of this type of finds in Serbia and Vojvodina, placing them into the Bosut IIIb horizon³¹. In the same time, the pre-Basarabi discoveries of Gornea-Kalakača (or Kalakača-Gornea) type registered in these regions have been published, discussed and included in the Bosut IIIa horizon by the Yugoslavian archaeologists³².

The increasing of the reference materials connected with the Basarabi type of finds in this geographical space, near the "Serbian Danube" and Great Morava Valley particularly, was

realised by a series of important contributions due to D. Popović³³, M. Jevtić³⁴, M. Stojić³⁵, R. Vasić³⁶, P. Popović³⁷ or M. Vukmanović³⁸ and to other specialists who studied in Djerdap, on the Serbian bank of the Iron Gates³⁹.

The partial publishing of the researches made by the German-Serbian team at Feudvar-Mošorin is of a great importance in the same context⁴⁰.

The Basarabi type discoveries registered in southern part of Lower Danube and the problems of the relationships between these and the "Hallstatt" type cultural entities of the Balkan area was broached by B. Hänsel⁴¹, G. Tončeva⁴² and A. Gotzev⁴³. Even if partially, a series of similar finds coming from the same area had been presented by D. Gergova, in her volume dedicated to the Early Iron Age fibulae from Bulgaria⁴⁴.

For the Romanian territory, the publishing of new Basarabi discoveries must be underlined here, in Transylvania⁴⁵, southern Moldavia⁴⁶ and south-western Oltenia (Little Wallachia)⁴⁷ particularly. Those from south-western Romania (Romanian Banat especially), the problems of the immediately pre-Basarabi horizon (of the Insula Banului and Gornea-Kalakača groups respectively), were published and discussed -several times- by us⁴⁸.

One can add here the contributions on the relationships between the Basarabi culture and the pre-Basarabi groups or the others synchronous cultural entities from the East-Carpathian or the northern Black Sea regions⁴⁹. The general problems of the connections between the Basarabi and the Babadag cultures was reanalysed by S. Morintz⁵⁰, while a series of specifications on this type of discoveries registered in southern Oltenia (Little Wallachia) and Muntenia (Wallachia), especially dedicated to the finds from Bujoru⁵¹ and Ostrovul Corbului⁵², are owed to E. Moscalu and C. Beda.

Some other references on the Basarabi-culture belong to V. Vasiliev in his repeated discussions about the Early Iron Age chronology in Transylvania⁵³. The relative recent publications of the *Vinju de Jos* third hoard⁵⁴ and of the researches made in the settlement of Teleac⁵⁵ successfully completed our image, not only on the Basarabi finds, but on the whole Basarabi chronological horizon in Transylvania.

In the same context, must be underlined, too, the repeated broaching of the general Basarabi problems, due to Al. Vulpe, who was -above all- the author of the last synthetical study dedicated to this problem⁵⁶.

The connections between the Basarabi culture and the other synchronous cultural entities from the central-eastern Europe had been registered and discussed in various writings by J. Dular⁵⁷, M. Guštin⁵⁸, T. Kemenczei⁵⁹, G. Kossak⁶⁰, C. Dobiat⁶¹, G. Kossak⁶² and C. Metzner-Nebelsick⁶³. In a very interesting study dedicated to the Early Iron Age chronology in the Central Balkan regions, B. Teržan discussed also some discoveries (grave goods particularly) originated in the Basarabi-culture area⁶⁴.

The last, but not the least, must be mentioned here some very recent papers which discussed - among other issues - a set of problems about the Basarabi culture (peculiarly related with the chronology), on the predilect basis of this type of finds originated in South-western Romania and neighbouring regions.

In a nice volume dedicated to the short swords, daggers and fight knives (Streitmesser) in Romania, Al. Vulpe makes a brief review of the problems connected with "the Middle Hallstatt" period in the Carpathian-Danube area. At the same time, he tries to submit a structural and evolution scheme (analysis) on the Basarabi, Balta Verde, Gogoșu and Gârla Mare necropolises, together with the inhaerent implications for the inner periodisation and general chronology of the Basarabi-culture⁶⁵.

In his greatest synthesis dedicated to the Early Iron Age in Slovenian Styria⁶⁶, beyond calling attention upon new finds which can be connected with the Basarabi type manifestations, B. Teržan makes - in his turn - a combinatory and structural analysis upon the Basarabi cemetery⁶⁷, and reaches to somewhat similar conclusions as Al. Vulpe.

Despite the fact that all have substantially contributed to the outline of a more coherent and precise image of such type of discoveries, there are still many unsolved or controversial issues. Among those could be mentioned: the more exact establishing of the spreading area, of the specific artefacts, of the funeral rite and ritual, of the conceptual definition as "culture", "complex" or "phenomenon", the establishing of the chronological limits and inner periodisation and not at the least its ethnic significance. All these aspects are closely connected, the clearing up for one of them being determined by the progress in knowledge of the others. Without having as goal such clearing ups, we hope that the present volume will be at least a step forward in advancing the research regarding the up mentioned topic.

It is well that existed the will to conceive this book, and here it is!

NOTES

1. Vulpe 1957; 1965, 105 ff.; 1970; 1981; 1986 (with lit.); Berciu 1960.
2. Vulpe 1965, 105; Berciu 1966, 236.
3. Vulpe 1970, 183.
4. Vulpe 1970, 183.
5. Vulpe 1965; 1970; 1986.
6. Dumitrescu 1974, 448.
7. Hampel 1886, 30; 1892, 88-89, pl. XLII/23; Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1977, 161, 363-364 (pl. 380-382), with lit.
8. Téglás 1889, 60; Popa-Berciu 1964, 64; Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1977, 162, 366 (pl. 385-386/1-6), with lit.
9. Goos 1876, 232, 484, 488; Hampel 1892, 73; Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1977, 162, 366-367 (pl. 386/7, 387-388/1-5), with lit.
10. Goos 1876, pl. VII/8; Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1977, 164, 368 (pl. 390), with lit.
11. Bărcăcilă 1916, 170-175; 1924, 295-296; Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1977, 164, 370-372 (pl. 394-398), with lit.
12. Moisil 1911, 84; Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1977, 165, 374 (pl. 402/19-24), with lit.
13. Brunšmid 1900, 59 ff., T.II-III; Vinski-Gasparini 1973, 220, T. 130/B.1-11; T. 131.
14. Ljubić 1889, 74-76, T. X-XI; Vinski-Gasparini 1973, T. 130A; Vasić 1977, 51, pl. 53, with lit.
15. Brunšmid 1902, 73, 84, fig. 40; Vasić 1977, 61, pl. 50, with lit.
16. Pârvan 1924, 37; Berciu 1939, 140 ff., fig. 180, 184, 201-204, 208, 210-211, 212-213.
17. Popov 1921, 161, fig. 150; 1924, 119, fig. 53, E; Mikov 1938, 342-343, fig. 150; Gergova 1987 (S.V. Dăržanica, Košava-Jasen, Čarevec and Arčar).
18. Gallus-Horváth 1939, T. L/2; Vasić 1977, 65, pl. 7 B.
19. Gallus-Horváth 1939, pl. LVI/2, 4; XLVIII.
20. Dumitrescu 1944 a-b.
21. Dumitrescu 1968.
22. Berciu-Comșa 1956.
23. Vulpe 1957.
24. Berciu 1960.
25. Vulpe 1965.
26. Berciu 1966, 236-246.
27. Dumitrescu 1968, 235 ff.
28. Morintz-Roman 1969.
29. Vulpe 1970, 187; Dumitrescu 1974, 446.
30. Tasić 1971 a-b; 1981 a-b; 1988; Brukner-Jovanović-Tasić 1974, 226 ff.
31. Medović 1978; 1988; 1990.
32. Medović 1988, 419 ff.; Tasić 1988, 54 ff.; Gumă 1981; 1993, 194 ff. (with lit.).
33. Popović 1981.

34. Jevtić 1983; 1990; 1993; 1994 a-b.
35. Stojić 1979; 1986; 1990; 1993; 1994 a-b.
36. Vasić 1977; 1987 a-b; 1989.
37. Popović-Vukmanović-Radojčić 1986; Popović 1994.
38. Vukmanović 1990.
39. By the programm Iron Gates I complex researches, especially. See, too, Djerdapske Svezke (Cahier des Portes de Fer), I-IV, Beograd (passim).
40. Hänsel-Medović a.o., 1992; Medović-Hänsel 1989.
41. Hänsel 1976.
42. Tončeva 1980.
43. Gotzev 1994.
44. Gergova 1987.
45. Ciugudean 1976; Gogâltan-Ursuțiu 1994, a.s.o.
46. Brudiu 1980; 1985; 1991.
47. Crăciunescu 1995, with lit.
48. Gună 1993, with cited lit.
49. Levițki 1994, with lit.
50. Morintz 1990.
51. Beda 1976; Moscalu-Beda 1988; 1991.
52. Moscalu 1990.
53. Vasiliev 1983; 1987.
54. Aldea-Ciugudean 1987; 1995.
55. Vasiliev-Aldea-Ciugudean 1991.
56. Vulpe 1986, with lit.
57. Dular 1973.
58. Guštin 1974; 1977.
59. Kemenczei 1988.
60. Kossack 1980.
61. Dobiat 1980; 1981.
62. Metzner-Nebelsick 1992.
63. Teržan 1987.
64. Vulpe 1990.
65. Teržan 1990.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Acta MN =	Acta Musei Napocensis, Cluj-Napoca.
Arch.Jug =	<i>Archaeologia Jugoslavica</i> , Beograd.
BCMI =	Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice, București.
BerRGK =	Bericht der Römisch-Germanischen Kommission des Deutschen archäologischen Instituts, Frankfurt a/M - Berlin.
Die Hallstattkultur =	<i>Die Hallstatkultur</i> - Symposium Steyr 1980, Linz, 1981.
God.N.MSofia =	Godišnik na Narodnija Muzej Sofija, Sofia.
Gomolava Symp. =	<i>Gomolava. Chronologie und Stratygraphie der vorgeschichtlichen un antiken Kulturen der Donauniederung und Südosteuropa</i> , Internationales Symposium Ruma 1986, Novi Sad, 1988.
IBAI =	Izvestija na Bălgărskiya Archeologičeski Institut, Sofia.
Ist.Rom. =	<i>Istoria României</i> (tratată), vol. I, București, 1960.

Materijali SADJ =	Materiali Saveza arheoloških društva Jugoslavije.
MCA =	Materiale și cercetări arheologice, București.
Mem.Antiq. =	Memoria Antiquitatis, Acta Musei Petrodavensis, Piatra Neamț.
PAS =	Prähistorische Archäologie in Südosteuropa.
PBF =	Prähistorische Bronzefunde, München.
PJZ =	Praistorija Jugoslavenskom Zemalja, Sarajevo.
PZ =	Prähistorische Zeitschrift, Berlin.
Rad.Vojv.Muz. =	Rad Vojvodanskih Muzeja, Novi Sad.
Symp.Alba Iulia =	<i>The Early Hallstatt period (1200-700 B.C.) in south-eastern Europe</i> , Symposium Alba Iulia 10-12 June 1993, Bibliotheca Musei Apulensis I, Alba Iulia, 1994.
VHAD =	Vjesnik Havatskoj arheološkog društva, Zagreb.