

# SOCIAL STATUS AND GENDER RELATIONS IN LATE BRONZE AGE POPEȘTI.

## A PLEA FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF NEW APPROACHES IN ROMANIAN ARCHAEOLOGY\*

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It is not my intention to provide a systematic summary of either older or more recent approaches in western archaeology. For this the reader can be referred to some general works,<sup>1</sup> which are most useful in the sense that none of the developments after 1962<sup>2</sup> exist in Romanian archaeology to any considerable degree. Almost all Romanian archaeologists focus on a single direction: culture-history, in its traditional sense. More recent years, however, have seen a (local) debate on the usefulness of theoretical archaeology, and, more precisely, its applicability to the interpretation of particular archaeological material. In this context, I intend to present a case study on how interpretation can be viewed in a non-traditional way, with the ultimate aim of showing that Romanian archaeology can also become richer and considerably more relevant for past and present than it has been hitherto.

To this end I have structured this essay to parallel interpretations of the same archaeological data, the core of which came from excavations at the settlement at Popești.

**1. A traditional, culture-historical interpretation (based on modern social theory).** I shall begin by summarizing the image most of my colleagues share of the Late Bronze Age in the Lower Danube:

- West of the Olt river, the Verbicioara culture and – on a narrow strip of land along the Danube – the Gârla Mare culture;<sup>3</sup>
- East of the Olt, and also in parts of northern Bulgaria, the Tei culture, with its five phases, subdivided into sub-phases etc., all of which are characterized by uni-stratified settlements, a small number of tombs, large amounts of decorated pottery, a few bronze objects, and a miscellaneous inventory of flint, bone and antler. Questions of interest included whether this culture extends up to the beginning of the early Iron Age (to the so-called Hallstatt period, in local terminology); whether its periodization should be refined and, above all, what relations did it have with the cultures of Verbicioara, Gârla Mare, and Noua-Sabatinovka-Coslogeni.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I. Hodder, *Archaeological Theory in Europe*, Routledge, London, 1991; idem, *Archaeological Theory Today*, Polity, Cambridge, Oxford (UK); Malden (MA), 2000 (further *Archaeological Theory Today*); R. Bernbeck, *Theorien in der Archäologie*, Tübingen and Basel: A. Franke Verlag, 1997; M. K. H. Eggert, U. Veit (eds.) *Theorie in der Archäologie: Zur englischsprachigen Diskussion*, Münster, New York, München, Berlin: Waxmann, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> I take 1962 – the year L. Binford published “Archaeology as Anthropology”, *AmAnt* 28/2, p. 217–225 – as a landmark in the evolution of archaeology, marking the beginning of processualism, i.e. theoretically the end of traditional culture-history.

<sup>3</sup> S. Morintz, *Contribuții arheologice la istoria tracilor timpurii*, I, BA XXXIV, București: Ed. Academiei, 1978, p. 22–27, 28–40, 47–51, 61–83.

<sup>4</sup> V. Leahu, *Cultura Tei*, Muzeul de Istorie al Orașului București (n.d.) [further: *Cultura Tei*, n.d.]; idem, *CAMNI* 9, 1992, p. 62 – 72; idem, *Cultura Tei. Grupul cultural Fundenii Doamnei. Probleme ale epocii bronzului în Muntenia* [further *Cultura Tei* 2003], Giurgiu: BThr XXXVIII, Valvila Edinf SRL, 2003, p. 190–206; Chr. F. Schuster, T. Popa, *Buletin Giurgiu* 1, 1995, p. 45; idem, *Mogoșești. Studiu monografic*, Giurgiu: Bibliotheca Musei Giurgiuvensis. Seria Monografii 1, 2000, p. 126–130.

DACIA, N.S., tomes XLVIII–XLIX, Bucarest, 2004–2005, p. 39–53

As an archaeologist, I cannot claim that we don't need this kind of information. As an ordinary person, I think we could equally do without it; it represents the product of a certain archaeology, which simply exists because archaeologists exist. As both an ordinary person and an archaeologist, I believe excessive efforts are made "counting the cats in Zanzibar"<sup>5</sup> in this archaeology that does nothing but record and compare artifacts, instead of involving itself in understanding the role of materiality in social life.

What would a different approach achieve? Let's begin with Popești. At the beginning of the Late Bronze Age, the site was inhabited by people using – and probably also producing – a highly decorated pottery, whose characteristics are to be found over an area of at least twice the size, compared with that of the preceding pottery repertoire: this is what I have called the Fundeni-Govora pottery.<sup>6</sup> According to radiocarbon dating of samples stemming from Popești, this pottery was in use before 1400 BC.<sup>7</sup> It was followed by a pottery repertoire with similar shapes, but different in its almost total lack of decoration, and spread over an even larger area, similar vessels also being found on the island of Thasos.<sup>8</sup> Its stratigraphical position in Popești,<sup>9</sup> cross-dating,<sup>10</sup> as well as science-based-dating (s. Kamenska Čuka in Bulgaria)<sup>11</sup> places it in the 14<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. This is the so-called Zimnicea-Plovdiv (Čerkovna) pottery, which closes what we conventionally call the Bronze Age in the Lower Danube<sup>12</sup>.

Since the discrepancies concerning the distribution areas of Late Bronze Age pottery can be seen as nothing more than the outcome of different typologies, up to this point all the elements are compatible with traditional archaeology. But as soon as we try to explain the change in area, we already find dramatically divergent views.

**According to the traditional view**, a certain culture *reflects* a certain type of society: by socialization people are taught how to make things; as a consequence, material culture *reflects* a set of ideal norms specific to each and every society. Changes occur under the influence of other societies, i.e. other norms.<sup>13</sup> This would mean the Fundeni-Govora pottery is the result of the influence of the Verbicioara, Gârla Mare, Zimnicea-Plovdiv, and other cultures on the Tei culture.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. A non-traditional view (based on postmodern sociology).

**a) First, a Cartesian interpretation**, that is an interpretation which preserves the line between subject/analyst, on one the hand, and the object that is to be analyzed on the other, based on the premise that, in order to understand things, our mind needs only to analyze them and the relations between them.<sup>15</sup>

In recent decades, sociology has come to the conclusion that *society* is a concept without analytical value. It is nothing more than an artifact of the modern era, the era of nationalism,<sup>16</sup> in which intellectuals

<sup>5</sup> Thoreau (*non vidi*), *apud* C. Geertz, "The interpretation of cultures", in C. Geertz, *The interpretation of cultures. Selected essays*<sup>6</sup>, New York: Basic books, 2000 [1973], p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> N. Palincaș, "Valorificarea arheologică a probelor 14C din fortificația aparținând Bronzului târziu de la Popești (jud. Giurgiu)", SCIVA 47, 1996, 3, p. 242, 251–258, fig. 10, 13–15.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 242–267, 281, 284.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 242–243, 267–281, fig. 5–7, 20.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, 242–243, 267–281, fig. 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 278: The main parallels come from Kastanas, stratum 14b (A. Hochstetter, *Kastanas. Ausgrabungen in einem Siedlungshügel der Bronze- und Eisenzeit Makedoniens 1975–1979. Die handgemachte Keramik. Schichten 19 bis I*, Berlin: Verlag Volker Spiess, 1984, p. 277, pl. 39/10, pl. 50/1–2).

<sup>11</sup> M. Stefanovich, H. A. Bankoff, "Kamenska Čuka 1993–1995. Preliminary report", in M. Stefanovich, H. Todorova, H. Hauptmann (eds.), *James Harvey Gaul – In memoriam*, Sofia: The Games Harvey Gaul Foundation 1998, p. 279. The archaeomagnetic dating of the same layer: 1230–1160 BC (N. Jordanova, M. Kovačeva, "Dating the Fire in Kamenska Čuka by the Archaeomagnetic Method", in Stefanovich, Todorova, Hauptmann [eds.], *op. cit.*, p. 339–347).

<sup>12</sup> Palincaș, *op. cit.* (n. 6), p. 270.

<sup>13</sup> The most important authors in this respect are G. Kossina and V. G. Childe. For further discussion, see M. Shanks, Chr. Tilley, *Re-Constructing Archaeology. Theory and Practice*, Cambridge, London, New York, New Rochelle, Melbourne, Sydney: CUP 1987, p. 117; R. Bernbeck, *op. cit.*, p. 26–31.

<sup>14</sup> Leahu, *Cultura Tei* 2003, p. 190, 194; Morintz, *op. cit.*, p. 79–82; Chr. F. Schuster, T. Popa, *Buletin Giurgiu* 1, 1995, p. 45.

<sup>15</sup> From the extensive literature on this topic, see J. Thomas, *Time, culture and identity. An interpretive archaeology*, London, New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 11–30.

<sup>16</sup> Sociology "translated the 'rationalization spurt', the disciplinary practices, the uniforming ambitions of modernity from a normative project into the analytical framework for making sense of reality [...]. It drew its cognitive horizons with the leg of the compass placed firmly in the very spot from which the leveling, uniforming,

were convinced, and also tried to persuade others, of the *natural* character of *societies*, i.e. *nations*, understood as large-scale communities characterized by a specific culture. In order to achieve the most propitious living standards, societies/nations should also have the same political leadership.<sup>17</sup> In the meantime, sociologists concluded that things were the other way round: while the tendency of political power is to produce common culture, the general tendency of human beings is to distinguish themselves from the others.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, analysis of social relations should be based not on the concept of *society*, but on *sociality*.<sup>19</sup>

this is “a framework of knowledge about the way in which people impinge upon one another. [Sociality] makes relationship[s] visible in their culturally constituted form and also informs these relationships normatively. Thus it bears a double relationship to social action through the social and moral constitution of relatedness.”<sup>20</sup>

In other words, the analysis has glided from the general level of society to that of the *individual in relation with the others around him*. By interacting, individuals do not simply obey social rules; they also use them actively. For postmodernism, material culture is no longer the mere *reflection* of common standards and ideas; it is a means of action, used in accomplishing goals.<sup>21</sup> In so far as there is uniformity in the material culture of the Late Bronze Age in the Lower Danube, this must be due to a conscious human action geared towards standardization. The question is: who would have had the power to change things?

The most important clues come in the form of a couple of weapons (fig. 1): a halberd blade, four rapiers of Mycenaean inspiration (one of gold, three of bronze),<sup>22</sup> four bronze ceremonial scepters,<sup>23</sup> several swords of a type spread widely from Norway to Egypt (the so-called Reutlingen type),<sup>24</sup> circular

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proselytizing tendencies of modern times emanated – and thus identified ‘society’, the largest analytical totality meant to incorporate and accommodate all analysis – with the nation state.” (Z. Bauman, *Intimations of postmodernity*, London, New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 54).

<sup>17</sup> Z. Bauman, *op. cit.*, p. 6–10, 104 etc.

<sup>18</sup> F. Barth, “Introduction”, in F. Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The social organisation of culture difference*, Bergen, Oslo and London: Univ. Vorlaget, G. Allen & Unwin, 1969, p. 9–10, 34–35. For a case study see: C. L. Costin and T. Earle, “Status Distinction and Legitimation of Power as Reflected in Changing Patterns of Consumption in Late Prehispanic Peru”, in T. Earle, *Bronze Age economics. The beginnings of political economies*, Boulder and Oxford: Vestview 2002, p. 255–283. See also A. Gell, “Newcomers to the world of goods: consumption among the Muria Gonds”, in A. Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: commodities in cultural perspective*, Cambridge (Cambridgeshire), New York: CUP, 1987, p. 110–138, for a study of conformism in consumption patterns and “the paranoia about belonging” (p. 122).

<sup>19</sup> “A sociology geared to the conditions of postmodernity ought to replace the category of *society* with that of *sociality*; a category that tries to convey the processual modality of social reality, the dialectical play of randomness and pattern (or, from the agent’s point of view, of freedom and dependence); and a category that refuses to take the structured character of the process for granted – which treats instead all found structures as emergent accomplishments” (Z. Bauman, *op. cit.*, p. 190).

<sup>20</sup> R. Fardon, “Sociability and secrecy: two problems of Chamba knowledge”, in R. Fardon (ed.), *Power and Knowledge: Anthropological and Sociological Approaches*, Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985, p. 134, *non vidi*, *apud* M. Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift. Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia*, Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press 1988 (further *The Gender of the Gift*), p. 357, note 20. The original term – sociability – was replaced by M. Strathern (*loc. cit.*).

<sup>21</sup> The study of agency is a main theme in postprocessual archaeology (cf. I. Hodder, *Reading the past. Current approaches to interpretation in archaeology*, Cambridge, New York, Port Chester, Melbourne, Sydney: CUP, 1991, p. 6–10, 27–28; J. C. Barrett, “Agency, the Duality of Structure and the Problem of the Archaeological Record”, in Hodder [ed.], *Archaeological Theory Today*, p. 141–164, with a relevant discussion on Child’s sociological conception).

<sup>22</sup> Perșinari (golden), Roșiori(i) de Vede, Drajna de Jos, București - Tei (T. Bader, *Die Schwerter in Rumänien*, PBF IV/8, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1991, p. 17–33).

<sup>23</sup> Three pieces at Drajna de Jos (A. Vulpe, *Äxte und Beile in Rumänien I*, PBF IX, 2, München: C. H. Beck, 1970, p. 99–100, pl. 41/563–565), one mould at Pobit Kamăk (B. Hänsel, *Beiträge zur Chronologie der älteren Hallstattzeit an der unteren Donau [Beiträge zur ur- und frühgeschichtlichen Archäologie des Mittelmeer-Kulturräume]* Bonn: Dr. Habelt, 1976, p. 35, pl. 1/1–2). H. G. Buchholtz, „Ein außergewöhnliches Steinzepter im östlichen Mittelmeer”, *PZ* 74/1, 1999, fig. 4.

<sup>24</sup> For southern Romania, see: Bader, *op. cit.*, p. 87–100; E. Alexandrescu, Al. Avram, “O spadă de tip Reutlingen descoperită la Giurgiu”, *Buletin Giurgiu* 5–6, 1999–2000, p. 271–272; V. Marinoiu, G. Calotoiu, O. Bratu, “Spada de bronz de la Gruji, județul Gorj”, *Litua* 7, 1997, p. 50–54. For Bulgaria: I. Kilian-Dirlmeier, *Schwerter in Griechenland (außerhalb der Peloponnes), Bulgarien und Albanien*, PBF IV/12, 1993, p. 94–105.

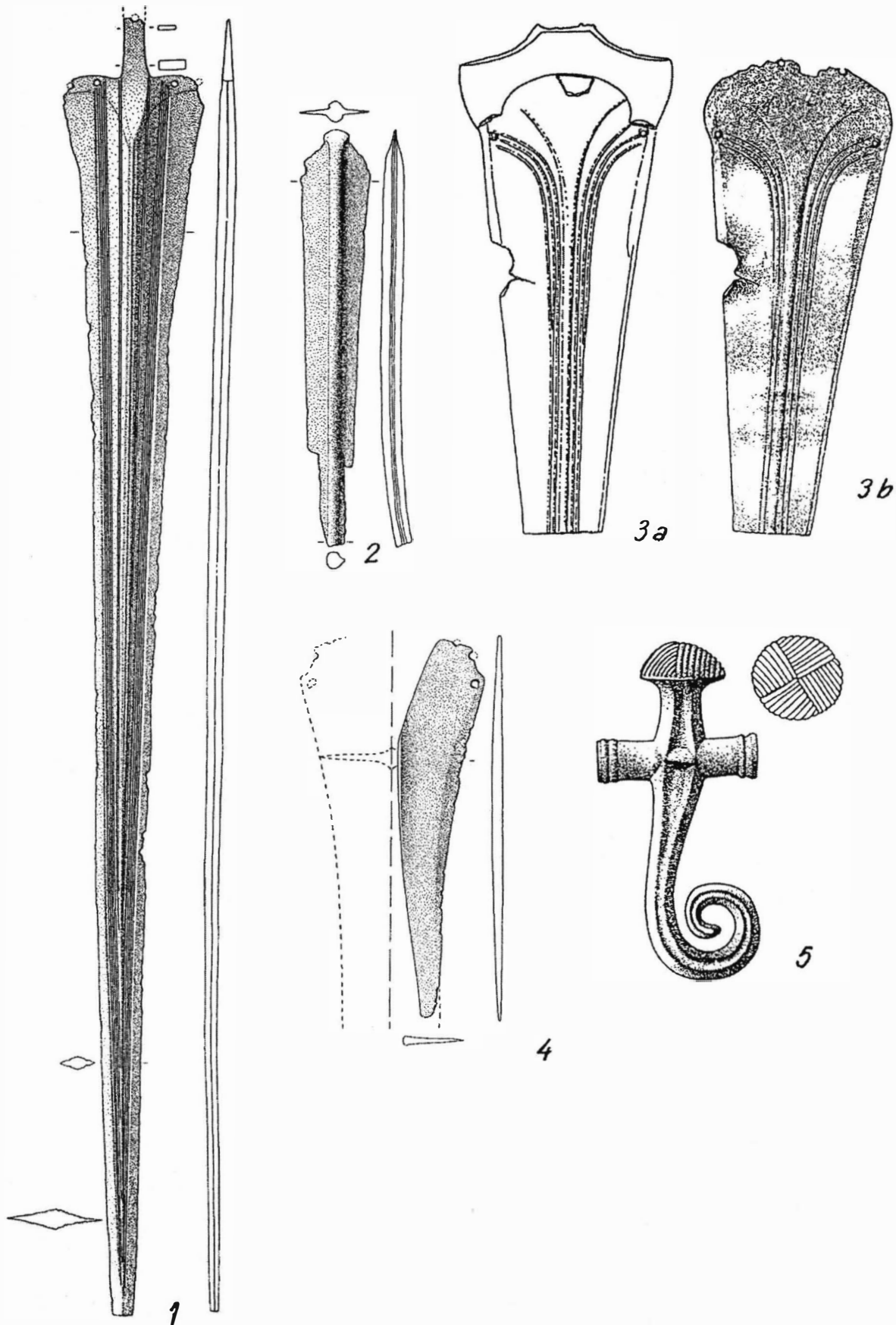


Fig. 1. Swords believed to be of Mycenaean inspiration: 1. Roșiori(i) de Vede; 2. Drajna de Jos; 3a. Perșinari; 4. București – Tei. Halberdblade: 3b. Perșinari (incorporated in 3a). Scepter from the hoard from Drajna de Jos: 5. (bronze: 1 – 2, 4 – 5; gold: 3) (1 – 2, 4 after T. Bader; 3, 5 after A. Vulpe) (scale 1/3).

cheek pieces,<sup>25</sup> as well as the golden vessels from Vălcițrăn.<sup>26</sup> Considered in their larger material context, these objects of value can only be linked with a wealth-financed ranked society (a *chieftaincy*).<sup>27</sup> A more complex social organization would need a more complex material culture.<sup>28</sup>

The golden sword from Perșinari is the oldest of these prestige objects. From Prof. Alexandru Vulpe's study we know that initially it was a halberd blade (datable anytime between 2400/2300 and 1600 BC). Signs of wear certify that for a while it was used for its primary purpose; afterwards the blade was given a hilt of Mycenaean inspiration and thus the halberd (fig. 1-3b) became a Mycenaean sword (fig. 1-3a).<sup>29</sup> By taking into consideration the date of the Aegean rapier (the one found in Circle B, Grave Delta, in Mycenae),<sup>30</sup> we know this transformation must have occurred not long after 1600 BC.<sup>31</sup> The study of chiefdoms – which still existed at the time when they stirred intellectual interest – revealed that eligible chiefs only came from a restricted group, and that in order to gain power they had to prove that their personal abilities were superior to those of their rivals. One widespread way of doing this was by demonstrating an ability to engage in and maintain connections with remote regions.<sup>32</sup> Personally, I believe this may explain the existence of the sword from Perșinari: an individual who, probably among others, had the right to take on power, as certified by the right to take over the halberd, demonstrated his<sup>33</sup> political abilities by transforming the halberd into a Mycenaean sword – that is, into an object of prestige with origins in the most important polity of the time, Mycenae. The biography of the leading family is closely connected to the biography of the sword, but the sword does *not only reflect* the history of the

<sup>25</sup> Al. Oancea, "Branches de mors au corps en forme de disque", *Thraco-Dacica* 1, 1976, p. 60-67, 71-75; N. Boroffka, "Bronze- und früheisenzeitliche Geweihtrensenknebel aus Rumänien und ihre Beziehungen. Alte Funde aus dem Museum für Geschichte Aiud. Teil II", *Eurasia Antiqua* 4, 1998, p. 109, 123, fig. 17.

<sup>26</sup> V. Mikov, *Slatnoto sākrovište ot Vălcițrăn*, Sofia: Izdanie na Bălgarskata Akademiia na Naukite, 1958; V. Pingel, "Zum Schatzfund von Vălcițrăn in Nordbulgarien", in B. Hänsel (ed.), *Südosteuropa zwischen 1600 und 1000 v. Chr.*, PAS, 1, 1982, p. 173-186.

<sup>27</sup> Since "The use of prestige goods is common in human societies" (Earle, *op. cit.*, p. 323), and "All societies have objects of value [...], but only in some situations can potential leaders control the manufacture and exchange of those objects" (*Ibidem*, p. 313), the Late Bronze Age society in the Lower Danube can be assigned to a *chieftaincy* only if it can be demonstrated that there was an autonomous system of redistribution of surplus (*Ibidem*, p. 82-84). This is a difficult task given that the neglect of social theory in Romanian archaeology determined a certain way of collecting data during excavations, with the consequence that there is not enough archaeological information for the social interpretation of archaeological remains. Nevertheless, there are a couple of valuable clues: the existence of a two-tiered settlement system (fortified as at Popești, and simple hamlets), the expansion over an ever larger area of a similar pottery (see above p. 66), economic specialization between settlements (as suggested by tools of restrained distribution: notched shoulder blades at Otopeni [Leahu, *Cultura Tei* 2003, pl. 64/7], Fundenii Doamnei [idem, *Cultura Tei* n.d., fig. 7/3], moulds for bronze casting at Cernica [Leahu, *SCIVA* 39, 1988, 3, fig. 7] and Frătești [*Ibidem*, fig. 6] etc.). The find I consider most relevant for the link between specialized production and social ranking is the mould hoard from Pobit Kamāk: here moulds used for casting of a couple of prestige goods – among which a scepter and a kantharos pot (B. Hänsel, *op. cit.*, pl. 1/1-2; 2/1) are associated with a large number of other moulds destined for casting rather ordinary bronze objects (*Ibidem*, pl. 1/6, 8-10, 12-14; 3/3-8). If indeed the scepter functioned as a prestige object, then its production should have been under control in order to prevent unwanted multiplication. The association of moulds for production of prestige goods with others for production of bronzes of ordinary use might indicate the existence of chiefly control over production of bronze objects in general (provided that the owners of the moulds did not come from very different places and from very different social groups – a situation I cannot rule out, at least for the time being).

<sup>28</sup> P. Wason, *The Archaeology of Rank*, Cambridge (UK), New York: CUP, 1994, p. 45-51.

<sup>29</sup> A. Vulpe, "Tezaurul de la Perșinari. O nouă interpretare", *CCDJ*, 15, 1997, p. 276.

<sup>30</sup> M. Gimbutas, *Bronze Age cultures in central and eastern Europe*, The Hague: Mouton, 1965, p. 56; G. Mylonas, *O taphikos kyklos B ton Mykenon*, En Athenais, 1972-1973, pl. 67/β, 68/α; Bader, *op. cit.*, p. 30-33, pl. 4/20; Vulpe, *CCDJ*, 15, 1997, 270-271.

<sup>31</sup> For commentary on the various datings of the golden sword from Perșinari, see N. Palincăș, "Contacts with the Aegean and their social impact in the late Bronze Age in the Lower Danube" *Aegeum* 26, 2005 (in press).

<sup>32</sup> Wason, *op. cit.*, p. 46-47, 55; Earle, *op. cit.*, p. 66 etc.

<sup>33</sup> To the question "Why not *her* political abilities?" see below, p. 48-49.

family; it also *contributes actively* to its destiny:<sup>34</sup> not inheriting the symbols of prestige meant having no access to power; not being able to adapt them to the new forms of prestige meant losing power. *The social life*<sup>35</sup> of the sword from Perșinari – the materialization of an inherited tradition to which the descendants added their personal achievements – is also representative for the social life of the other Late Bronze Age prestige goods known from the Lower Danube:

- The bronze hoard from Draşna de Jos (fig. 1/2, 5)<sup>36</sup> contains objects made between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries BC: an old, worn out sword of Mycenaean type (16<sup>th</sup> century?)<sup>37</sup> laid together with three scepters in good condition of a later date (around 1400, with possible origins in Persia and with a good parallel to that found on the shipwreck of Uluburun in the south of Turkey),<sup>38</sup> as well as some even more recent, but broken swords<sup>39</sup> (Reutlingen type, dated around 1200 BC); there are also spearheads and an impressive number of sickles (198 or 199)<sup>40</sup>.
- The treasure of Vălcitrân includes, besides some golden kantharoi with typical Late Bronze Age shapes, several cups with high handles that cannot be older than the beginning of the Early Iron Age.<sup>41</sup>

The Mycenaean swords are roughly contemporary with the use of Fundeni-Govora pottery and the emergence, at Popeşti, of the first fortified settlement in the area for hundreds of years (fig. 2). The bronze scepters can be correlated with the use of Zimnicea-Plovdiv pottery, i.e. also the period of strengthening the fortification at Popeşti (fig. 3). The other settlements in this area seem to maintain the same scale as before.

Given that during the whole of the Late Bronze Age fine pottery as well as bronze and golden objects underwent significant changes in style, while settlements changed at a much slower pace, how deep then was the change in people's lives? Martin Wobst, a leading author on matters of style, observes:

“where there is material change, there is not necessarily change in what is being communicated! Change is necessary simply to communicate the same message. [...] Thus, quite often in material interference, the more things change, the more they stay the same.”<sup>42</sup>

This seems to be the case for the period we are dealing with: the insignia of power change in form, but their handing down, from generation to generation, as well as the general picture of the remains of human activity, indicates that social organization and everyday life barely changes during the Late Bronze Age. By contrast, the transition from the Middle Bronze Age to the Late Bronze Age appears to have been more dramatic: along with the *Mycenaean/Aegean influence* in the region, the distribution area of pottery changes radically. Within this area a new category appears, that of the gynomorphic vessels (figs. 4; 5/1–3). I have given this name to the vessels on which female breasts are represented (there are eight pieces – one not illustrated here – from the Fundeni-Govora repertoire at Popeşti, and two more – one at Govora,<sup>43</sup> one at Cârcea<sup>44</sup> – from the Fundeni-Govora area). In the Zimnicea-Plovdiv ceramics such representations are even more frequent, albeit more difficult to recognize (fig. 5/4–7; 6). What could this mean?

<sup>34</sup> Among others see I. Hodder, *Reading the past: current approaches to interpretation in archaeology*, Cambridge, New York, Port Chester, Melbourne, Sydney: CUP, 1991 [1986], p. 6–10.

<sup>35</sup> On the notions of “cultural biography” and “social life of things”, see A. Appadurai (ed.), *op. cit.*, and there in the first place, V. Kopytoff, “The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process”, in Appadurai, *op. cit.*, p. 64–91.

<sup>36</sup> M. Petrescu-Dâmboviţa, *Depozitele de bronzuri din România*, Bucureşti: Ed. Academiei, 1977, p. 78–79, pl. 89–93.

<sup>37</sup> Bader, *op. cit.*, p. 31–33, fig. 1/10.

<sup>38</sup> Buchholz, *op. cit.*, p. 72, 75–77.

<sup>39</sup> Bader, *op. cit.*, p. 88, 99–100.

<sup>40</sup> I. Andreeşescu, „Nouvelle contribution sur l'âge du bronze en Roumanie” *Dacia* 2, 1925, p. 345–384.

<sup>41</sup> A. D. Alexandrescu, “Sépultures du premier Age du Fer à Zimnicea”, *Dacia* NS 22, 1978, p. 119.

<sup>42</sup> M. Wobst, “Style in Archeology or Archaeologists in Style”, in E. S. Chilton (ed.), *Material Meanings. Critical Approaches to the Interpretation of Material Culture*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1999, p. 131.

<sup>43</sup> Hänsel, *op. cit.*, pl. 4/2.

<sup>44</sup> M. Nica, “Date noi cu privire la geneza şi evoluţia culturii Verbicioara”, *Drobeta* 7, 1996, fig.12/1a–b.

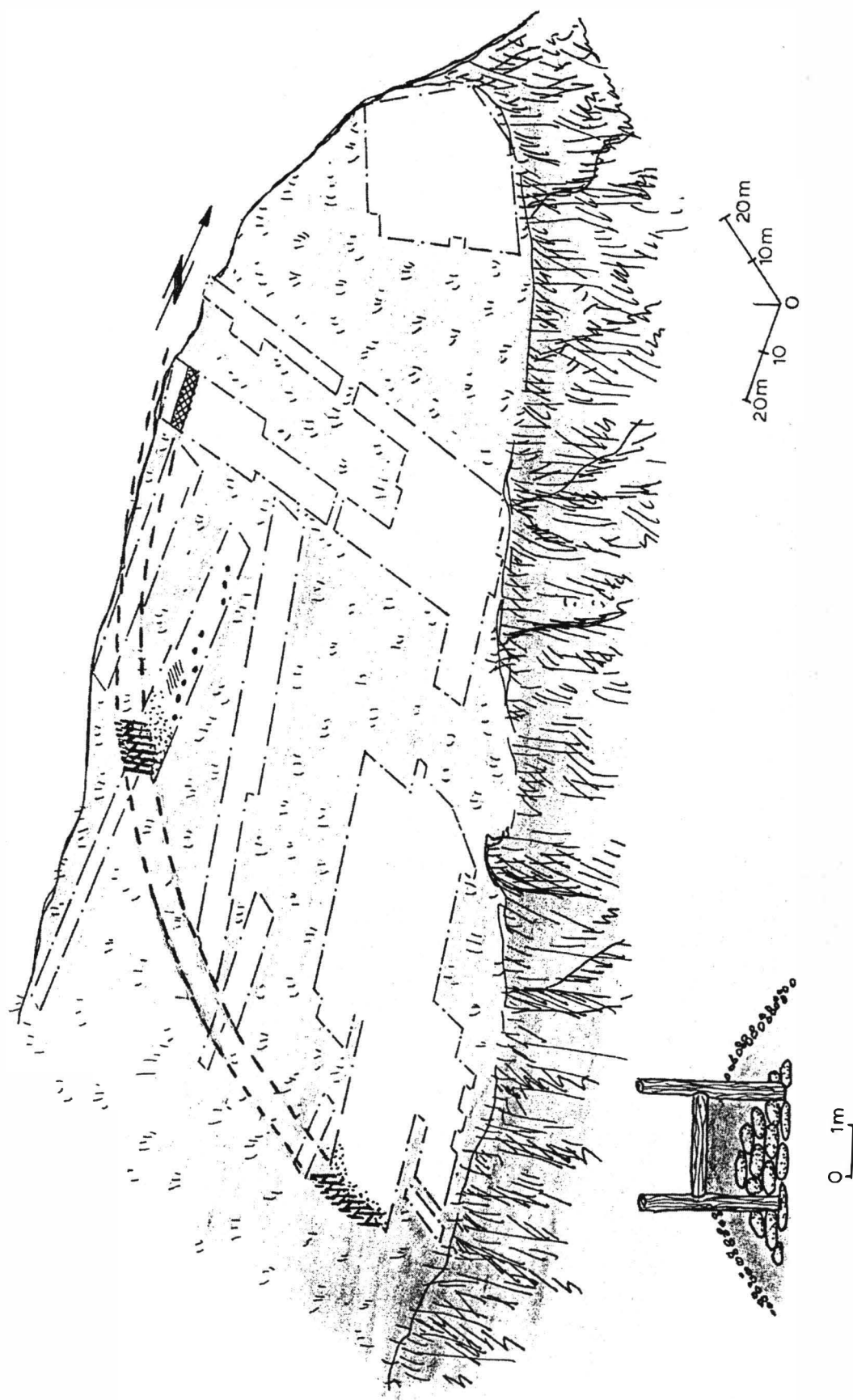


Fig. 2. Popești. Fundeni – Govora fortification with wall of wood and brick (tentative reconstruction).

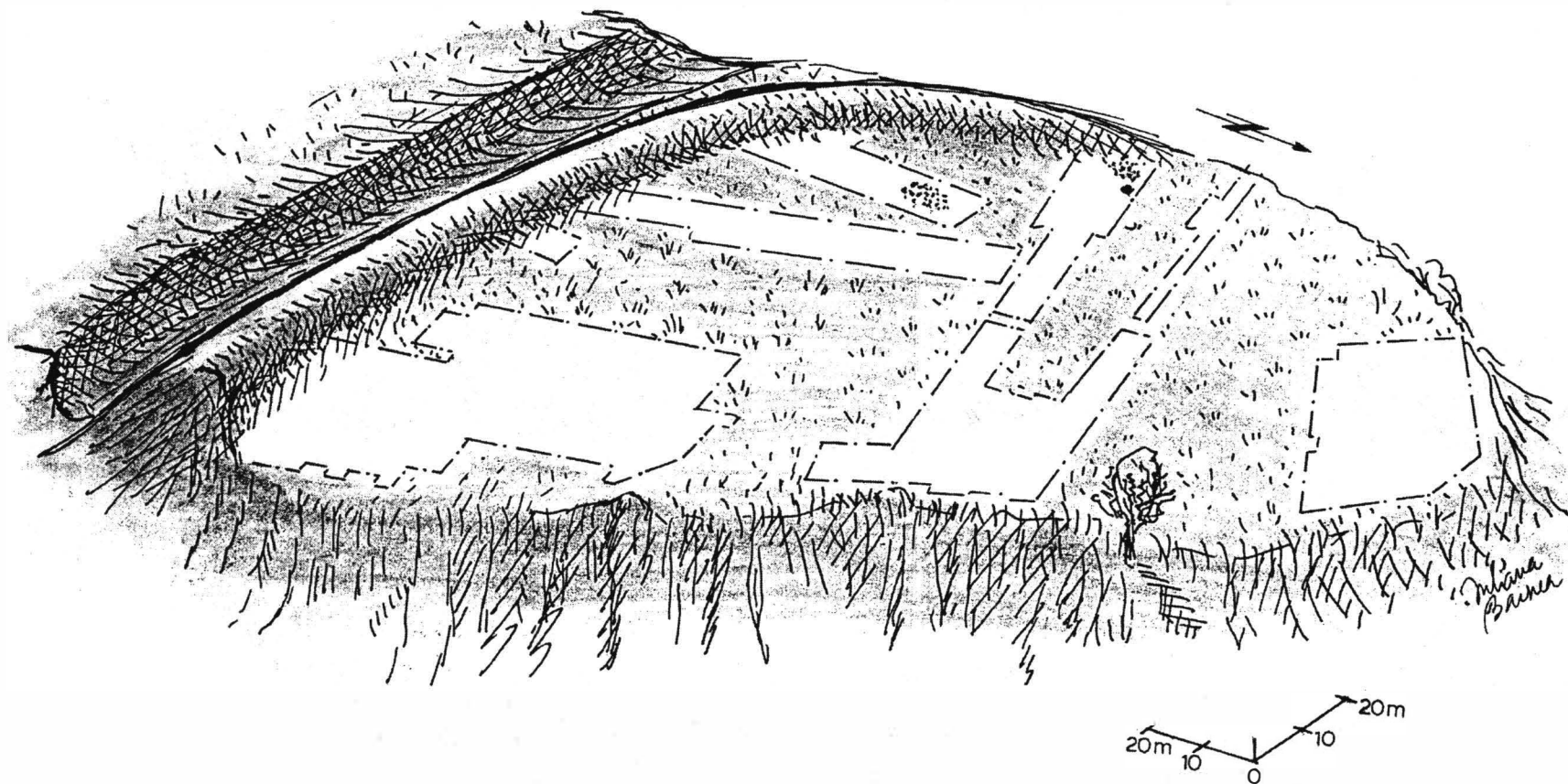


Fig. 3. Popești. Zimnicea - Plovdiv fortification with earthen wall and ditch (tentative reconstruction).



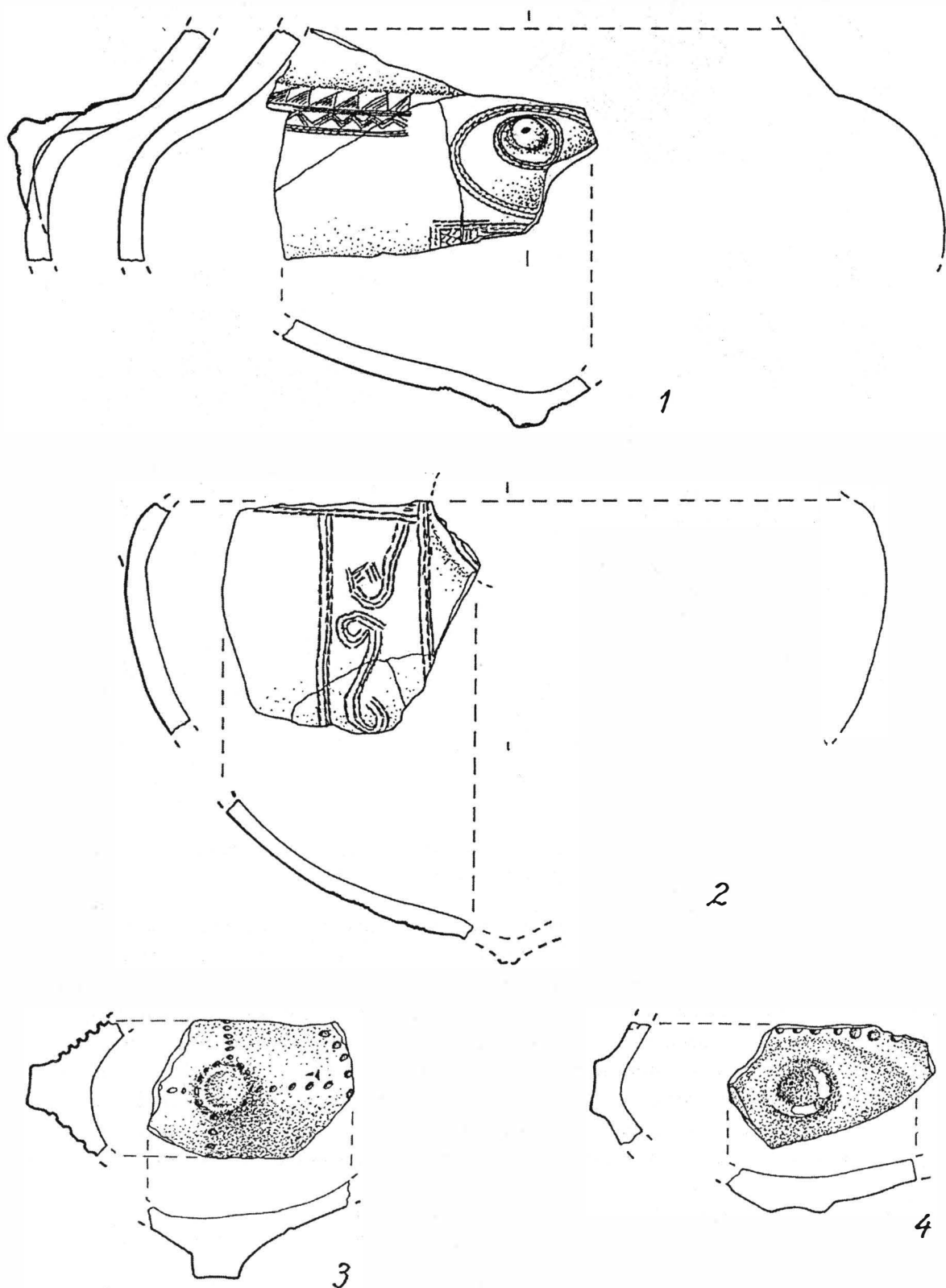


Fig. 4. Popești. Fundeni – Govora gynomorphic sherds: 1 – 3. in layer; 4. dislocated (1 – 2: scale  $\frac{1}{4}$ ; 3 – 4: scale  $\frac{1}{2}$ ).

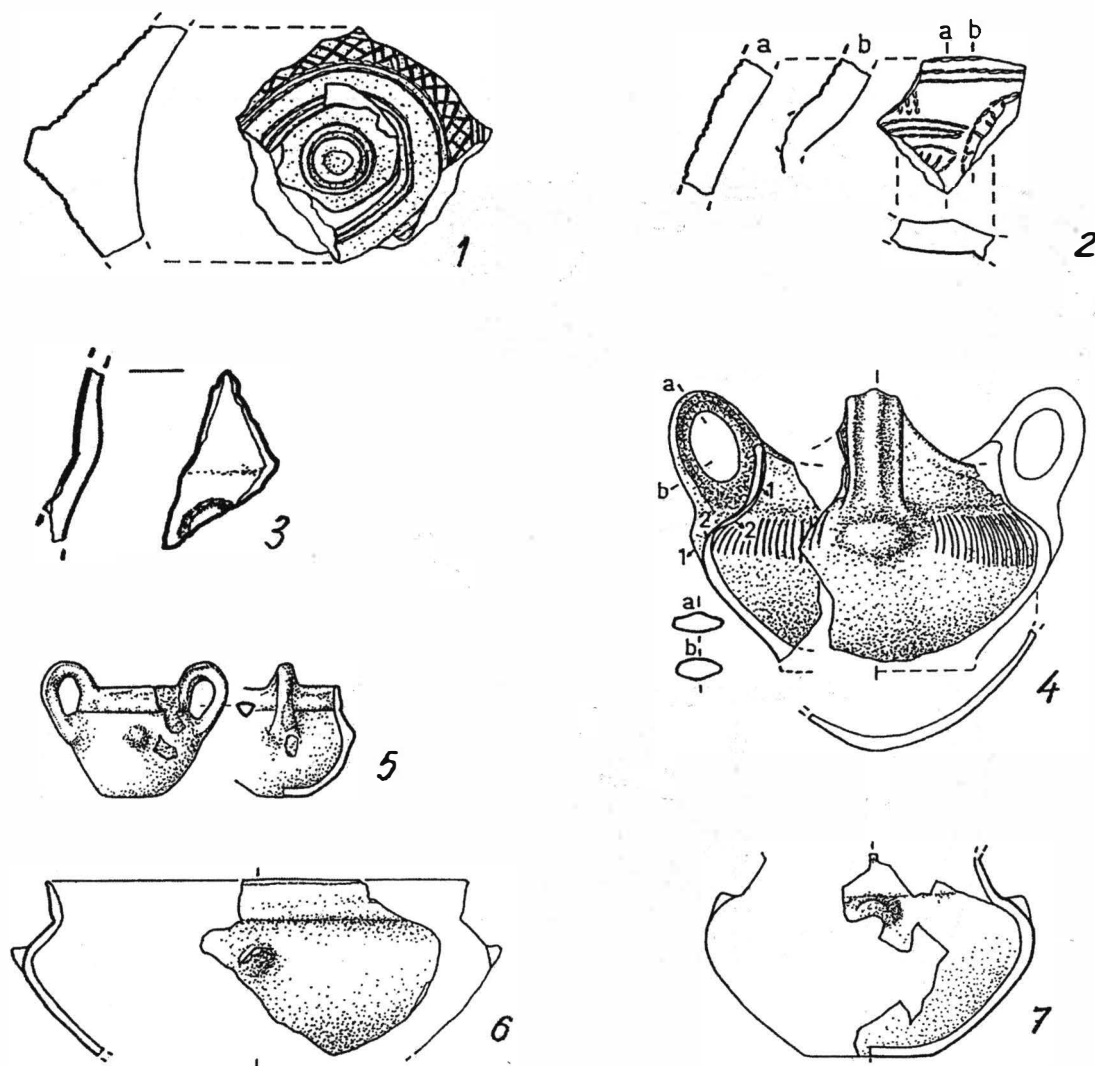


Fig. 5. Popești. Gynomorphic sherds: 1 – 3. type Fundeni – Govora; 4 – 7. type Zimnicea – Plovdiv. 1 – 2. dislocated; 3 – 7. in corresponding layer (1 – 3: scale  $\frac{1}{2}$ ; 4 – 7: scale  $\frac{1}{4}$ ).

This kind of vessel appears in two contexts: vessel deposits (ceramics at Govora, golden vessels at Vălcițrân) and settlements (Cârcea, Popești). There are no naturalistic representations of the male body (at least up to this moment). In exceptional cases, birds and quadrupeds appear on vessels.<sup>45</sup> The representations of the female body are never associated with weapons. A possible interpretation, therefore, could be that the separation of weapon deposits from vessel deposits might indicate the nature of leadership: a military and administrative (possibly also commercial) elite, together with a religious elite.<sup>46</sup> The presence of the female breast on ritual paraphernalia may indicate the intention to assert – in a direct, visible and unequivocal manner – the recent access of women to religious functions.<sup>47</sup> It may also be regarded as a sign of female authority striving to impose itself in the presence of a male authority –

<sup>45</sup> D. Berciu, "Date noi privind sfârșitul culturii Verbicioara", SCIVA 27, 1976, 2, fig. 4/3–4.

<sup>46</sup> For various functions of the social elite, see among others: Wason, *op. cit.*, p. 53–55, 57, 141 etc.; Earle, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

<sup>47</sup> For women in high religious positions, see S. Pollock, "Women in a Men's World: Images of Sumerian Women", in J. M. Gero and M. W. Conkey (eds.), *Engendering Archaeology*, Oxford (UK), Cambridge (MA): Basil Blackwell, 1991, p. 368–371. For the (lower) status of religious activities as social and symbolic capital, P. Bourdieu, *Dominația masculină*, București: Editura Meridiane, 2003 (translated by Bogdan Ghiu after *La domination masculine*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1998), p. 42–47.

itself not represented precisely because it has always been there. Anthropology has studied cases of deep transformation in trade, gift exchange, and political changes that led to dramatic changes in relations between age and gender categories in society.<sup>48</sup> It is very probable that this sudden assertion of the female element in the Late Bronze Age in the Lower Danube was due to a radical change in the economy, as a consequence of relations with the surrounding regions, primarily with the Aegean;<sup>49</sup> however, I am unable to specify the exact nature of this change and am in no position to widen the investigation, since there are only a few studies on local Bronze Age economy – archaeozoology, archaeobotanics, and palynology are almost absent from our archaeological research (not to mention other, more demanding methods, such as isotopic analysis<sup>50</sup> in reconstructing diet).<sup>51</sup>

**b). A non-Cartesian interpretation,**<sup>52</sup> that is an interpretation that goes beyond the subject-object divide, based on the principle that the ideas of the subject/author of the analysis do not derive directly from the analyzed object, but basically from the society/culture to which the subject belongs.<sup>53</sup> A meticulous, rational contemplation, together with an observation of the connections between things, is not enough to gain knowledge. The first step in any analysis is to perceive its object by means of the subject's categories, which are different from those pertaining to the object (society in the case of anthropology/archaeology). The source of all classification systems is society.<sup>54</sup> In Foucault's words:

"Cet a priori, c'est ce qui, à une époque donnée, découpe dans l'expérience un champ de savoir possible, définit le mode d'être des objets qui y apparaissent, arme le regard quotidien de pouvoirs théoriques, et définit les conditions dans lesquelles on peut tenir sur les choses un discours reconnu pour vrais."<sup>55</sup>

<sup>48</sup> L. Sharp, "Steel Axes for Stone-Age Australians", in M. Freilich (ed.), *The pleasures of anthropology*, New York and Scarborough, Ontario: A Mentor Book. New American Library. Times Mirror 1983, p. 249–264 (reprinted after HO 11, 1952, p. 7–22); I. Hodder, "Social organization and human interaction: The development of some tentative hypotheses in terms of material culture", in I. Hodder (ed.), *The Spatial Organisation of Culture*, London: Duckworth, 1978, p. 256–258; E. M. Brumfiel, "Weaving and Cooking: Women's Production in Aztec Mexico", in Gero and Conkey, *op. cit.*, p. 224–251; Earle about improvement in female status as a consequence of men being frequently involved in external warfare (*op. cit.*, p. 388, note 3 to cap. 12: "The Bronze Age Economy of Thy: Finance in a Networked Chiefdom").

<sup>49</sup> For a discussion of this correlation see Palincăș, *op. cit.* (n. 31).

<sup>50</sup> Just to quote some examples: R. J. Schulting and M. P. Richards, "The wet, the wild and the domesticated: the Mesolithic-Neolithic transition on the west coast of Scotland", *EJA*, 5/2, 2002, p. 147–189; M. Balasse, H. Bocherens, A. Mariotti, "Intra-bone Variability of Collagen and Apatite Isotopic Composition Used as Evidence of a Change of Diet", *JArS*, 26, 1999, p. 593–598.

<sup>51</sup> C. L. Costin and T. Earle, "Status Distinction and Legitimation of Power as Reflected in Changing Patterns of Consumption in Late Prehispanic Peru", in Earle, *op. cit.*, p. 269–270; C. Hastorf, "Gender, Space, and Food in Prehistory", in Gero and Conkey (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 132–159.

<sup>52</sup> This is a difficult endeavor in all disciplines: "The great success of Cartesian method and the Cartesian view of nature is in part a result of a historical path of least resistance. Those problems that yield to the attack are pursued most vigorously, precisely because the method works there. Other problems and other phenomena are left behind, walled off from understanding by the commitment to Cartesianism. The hard problems are not tackled, if for no other reason than that brilliant scientific careers are not built on persistent failure": see R. Levings and R. Lewontin, *The Dialectical Biologist*, pp. 2f. ('Cartesianism' here means the same as reductionism.) This observation applies to many fields, the quantum theory among them" (P. Feyerabend, *Farewell to Reason*, London, New York: Verso, 1996 [1987], p. 157. This remark obviously applies to culture-history as well.

<sup>53</sup> Reference material too vast to be quoted here. For criticism of Cartesian epistemology applied in archaeology, see Shanks and Tilley, *op. cit.*, especially p. 7–67, 104–115; Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 31–91.

<sup>54</sup> This idea was expressed for the first time by E. Durkheim and M. Mauss, "De quelques formes primitives de classification. Contribution à l'étude des représentations collectives", in M. Mauss, *Oeuvres*, 2, Paris, 1968 [1903]: 13–89, and has been generally accepted ever since (R. Ellen, "Introductory Essay" in R. F. Ellen and D. Reason [eds.], *Classifications in Their Social Context*, London, New York, San Francisco: Academic Press, 1979, p. 3). See also the refining remark of V. Kopytoff (*op. cit.*, p. 90).

<sup>55</sup> M. Foucault, *Les mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1966, p. 171.

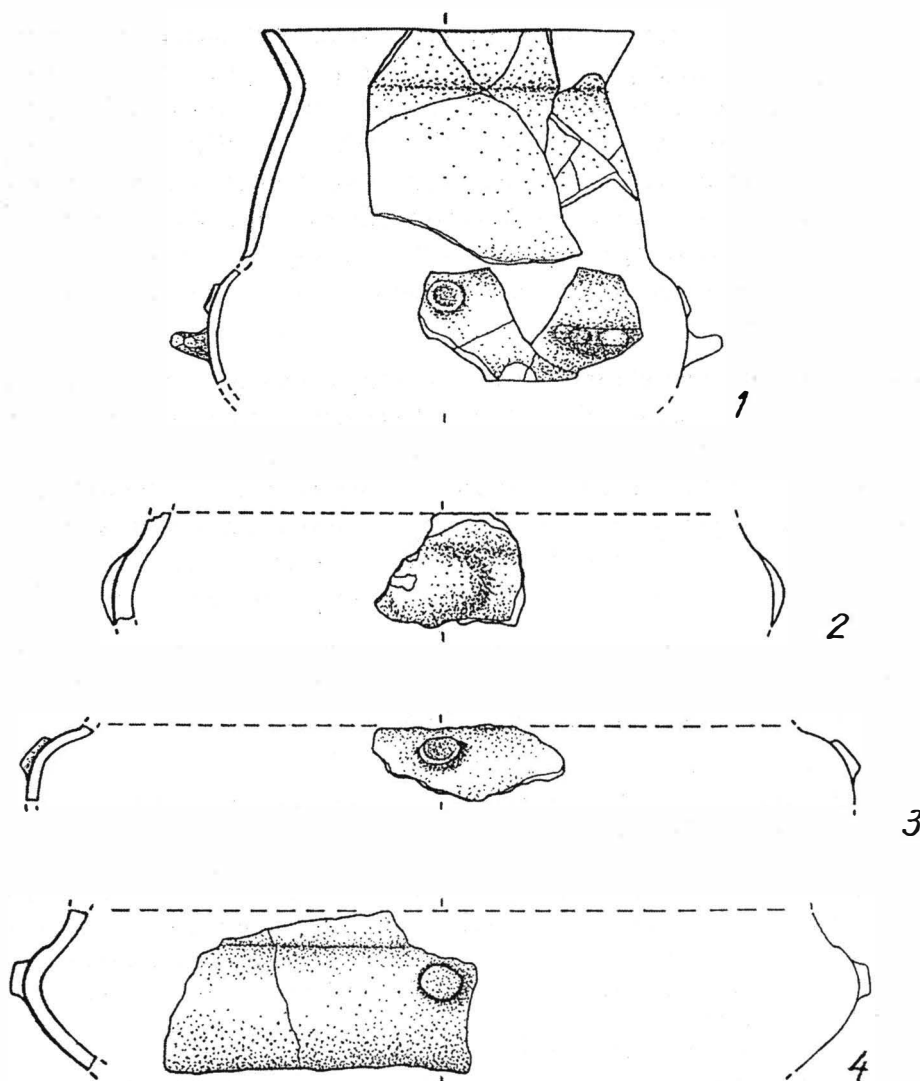


Fig. 6. Popești. Zimnicea – Plovdiv gynomorphic sherds: 1, 4. dislocated; 2 – 3. in layer (scale  $\frac{1}{4}$ ).

Through interpretation we instantly transfer the categories and conventions of our logic to the past.<sup>56</sup> Likewise, for Popești, I have based my interpretation on the idea that the female breast represents women, one way or another, and nothing more. However gender anthropology claims that our modern perception of the feminine and the masculine has two main coordinates: a certain conception concerning possession (viewed as something which, at a certain moment belongs *exclusively* to a person or, for that matter, a group), and our idea about nature as something *given and preexistent* to human society.<sup>57</sup> This conception emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, not out of some “rational contemplation” of reality, but from the ideological conflicts generated by dissatisfaction with absolute monarchy. Scholars of the period brought to the forefront the idea that at the origins of human society lays a social contract between individuals, who previously lived in a “natural” state. Nature is the birth-place of human beings, who are later integrated into society, only becoming full-members thereof by means of an indispensable process of education. It therefore becomes a residual category, that which is left after removing all the artifices created by social life; it is a reality that is subjected to action, integrated into society, transformed by action, albeit within certain limits. In both present common and scholarly perception, genital proprieties

<sup>56</sup> For relevant examples of this type of transfer, see M. Strathern, “No nature no culture: The Hagen case”, in C. MacCormack and M. Strathern, *Nature, Culture and Gender*, Cambridge (UK), New York: CUP, 1980 [2001], p. 174–222; idem, *The Gender of the Gift*, *passim*.

<sup>57</sup> C. MacCormack, “Nature, Culture and Gender: a critique”, in MacCormack and Strathern (eds.), *op.cit.*; M. Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift*, especially p. 103–107.

are associated with a series of physical and intellectual capacities, along with temperamental features, with a strength particular to common-sense, which makes things appear to be natural. A person born with genital properties of a certain type has also the afferent masculine or feminine intellectual and psychological characteristics, and, consequently, afferent social roles.<sup>58</sup> How could it be otherwise? In fact, there are many other possibilities.<sup>59</sup>

From rich and complex reference materials I have chosen one of Marilyn Strathern's examples. The Hagen, a population that lives in the highlands of Papua-New Guinea, perceives the realities that approximately define our *nature* and *culture* as two notions of the same logical level: neither integrates with the other; relations between them are negotiated (whoever cuts trees in the wood, must in return offer sacrifices to the spirits of the forest). Humanity is characterized by its fundamental capacity to exist according to social relations, by its *sociability*. A child comes to life directly in society; it is not introduced into society by education, but grows within it by feeding. In terms of genitalia, some children are boys, others are girls. In terms of their families, children are androgynous: brother and sister are alike, since they are the product of the same parents, i.e. of the same social relations, of one and the same genealogy. However, to form a family requires different individuals – not only genitally different, but also from different families. For this reason, male and female elements need to be separated. This is what ritual homosexuality does: through ritual men give birth to other men (whereas women give birth to people).<sup>60</sup> In other words, a man cannot leave his parents in order to be with his wife and become a whole. A man remains forever a part of the family he was born in, but at a certain moment he also becomes part of another family. As with property relations, it is unconceivable that something can belong *exclusively* to somebody. Similarly, the masculine and feminine conditions are only momentary, transitory states, depending on the social action a person is involved in.<sup>61</sup> It is by means of this logic that it is possible for the breast to represent – from a certain point of view – a mother's brother.<sup>62</sup>

Coming back to our gynomorphic vessels, we may think that in this world where "Houses rot, villages are moved, empires fall, [...] the great faith is that the lineage, including the 'real' company of ancestors, will endure forever".<sup>63</sup> If ritual is strategy – as argued by Bourdieu<sup>64</sup> – then we can see the representation of the breast as an attempt to ensure the continuity of lineage by means of ritual action, asserting at the same time the role of women in this matter. From this perspective, vessel hoards are opposite to metal hoards – the latter being more connected to the end of a lineage, to the absence of legitimate heirs to the power insignia. However, if, like Roy Rappaport, in seeing "substance as visible or material sign of the invisible",<sup>65</sup> we enquire as to the contents of the vessel used in ritual (as in Govora), then we find that no answer is possible, since we have no means and no specialists to analyze prehistoric food remains.

If in considering the fundamental role of metaphors in acquiring knowledge<sup>66</sup> we approach vessel decoration as a text,<sup>67</sup> we can suggest the following interpretation: the sun is to the continuity of natural life what the breast is to the continuity of human life.

<sup>58</sup> Résumé of C. MacCormack, *op. cit.*; M. Bloch and J. H. Bloch, "Women and the dialectics of nature in eighteenth-century French thought"; L. J. Jordanova, "Natural facts: a historical perspective on science and sexuality", all in MacCormack and Strathern (eds), *op. cit.*

<sup>59</sup> For an example different from that which follows in the text, see Th. Laqueur, *Making Sex: body and gender from Greeks to Freud*, Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 1992 (*Corpul și sexul de la greci până la Freud*, trans. by N. Zărescu, București: Humanitas, 1998); throughout the period discussed in the book, it was generally accepted that there was only *one sex* with two degrees of accomplishment: superior, i.e. men, and inferior, i.e. women.

<sup>60</sup> Résumé of Strathern, in Mac Cormack and Strathern (eds.), *op. cit.*, and idem, *The Gender of the Gift*.

<sup>61</sup> Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift*, p. xi, 128, 131, and *passim*.

<sup>62</sup> The idea is relatively common in anthropological literature. I quoted it here from the title of a colloquium organized by Bernard Juillerat, "The Mother's Brother is the Breast: Ritual and Meaning in the West Sepik" (n.d.), *non vidi*, *apud* Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift*, p. 375, note 14.

<sup>63</sup> MacCormack, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>64</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique*, Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1983, p. 138, 146–165, 395.

<sup>65</sup> R. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, Cambridge (UK), New York: CUP, 1999, p. 152–155.

<sup>66</sup> From vast reference material, see V. Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: symbolic action in human society*, Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1974, p. 23–33; Rappaport, *op. cit.*, especially p. 147–150.

Many other interpretations are also possible. Their number can only be restricted by acquiring more consistent archaeological information and an appropriate social theory for integrating material culture into human action – into sociality.

### 3. An interpretation from the point of view of the sociology of the body.

“After poststructuralism and constructivism had melted everything that was solid into air, it was perhaps time that we noticed once again the sensuous immediacy of the objects we live, work and converse with, in which we routinely place our trust, which we love and hate, which bind us as much as we bind them. [...] Perhaps the most intriguing feature of this new constellation is our (re)discovery of the multiple new ways in which social and material relations are entangled together.”<sup>68</sup>

Interpretations 1 and 2 ignore the basic difference between text and object. Written text and speech communicate one idea after another, in a linear way. Material artifacts, on the other hand, transmit their message simultaneously, appealing not only to reason, but also to the senses, the human body, sensitive and motion experience: they release emotions, pleasure or disgust, and so on.<sup>69</sup> The meanings of prestige weaponry or gynomorphic vessels cannot be understood without taking into consideration the *direct contact* with them, their *materiality*. From this perspective, the experience of *mimesis* and *vertigo*, as used by Kendall R. Phillips in an analysis of Batman and Barbie dolls, suggests a possible interpretation. To play with Batman requires knowing Batman’s story: his materiality is *textual*; it means to imitate him; it implies *mimesis*. Children are modeled by Batman. Batman is the character that is always in control and, like any hero, puts things in order. In terms of power, it is he who imposes strategy. Barbie, however, is the opposite. She has no story, instead she has various clothes and kits, meaning that a child can handle the doll as he or she likes; playing with this doll means experiencing *vertigo*. Her basic characteristic is flexibility, adaptability to situations created by others. Her *behavior* is a *tactic*, adjustment to an already settled strategy.<sup>70</sup>

Similarly, it is plausible that there existed a story about power and glory which transformed such an apparently useless object as an old, worn out Mycenaean rapier into an object handed down from generation to generation for close to 350 years, until its final burial in the ground (at Draşna de Jos). The opposite of this textual materiality is the gynomorphic vessel, at least its clay variant: found both inside and outside settlements, in daily and ritual use, passed from hand to hand and then, once broken, ending its social life as any other useless sherds. Lacking textual materiality, it was for the user to decide its purpose. The role of objects is crucial in building the dominant masculine and the submissive feminine. *Objects have socializing effects.*<sup>71</sup>

\*

I shall not continue the list of possible interpretations, nor shall I specify which might better suit the material under discussion, since the aim of this essay is not primarily to argue in favor of a certain image of the Late Bronze Age in the Lower Danube; its purpose is rather to present the potential of different approaches in archaeology. The sites and artifacts referred to here were mentioned only to provide the

<sup>67</sup> Again, from extensive literature, see I. Hodder, “Material Culture Texts and Social Change: A Theoretical Discussion and some Archaeological Examples”, PPS 54, 1988, p. 67–77; Chr. Tilley, *Material culture and text: the art of ambiguity*, London, New York: Routledge, 1991.

<sup>68</sup> D. Pels, K. Hetherington and F. Vandenbergh, “The Status of the Object. Performances, Mediations, and Techniques”, *Theory, Culture and Society*, 19 (5/6), 2002, p. 1.

<sup>69</sup> I. Hodder, “Material culture in time”, in Hodder, M. Shanks, A. Alexandri, V. Buchli, J. Carman, J. Last, G. Lucas (eds.), *Interpreting archaeology. Finding meaning in the past*, London, New York: Routledge, 1995, p. 165–168; R. Fletcher, “The messages of material behaviour: a preliminary discussion of non-verbal meaning”, in I. Hodder (ed.), *The meanings of things*, London, Boston, Sydney, Wellington: Unwin Hyman, 1989, p. 33–40; Chr. Tilley, “Interpreting material culture”, in *Ibidem*, p. 186–194; Pels *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>70</sup> K.R. Phillips, “Textual Strategies, Plastic Tactics. Reading Batman and Barbie”, *Journal of Material Culture*, 7/2, 2002, p. 123–136.

<sup>71</sup> Pels *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 2. For an example of the role of play for adult humans, see V. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre. The Human Seriousness of Play*, New York: PAJ Publications, 1982.

*materiality* necessary to understanding. Faced with such an undertaking, the Romanian archaeologist can express nothing but exasperation:

- deposits and documentation are in disorder;
- there is a lack of laboratories, even for routine analysis;
- the processing of archaeological material and documentation is in a disastrous state;
- there is no specialized faculty for archaeologists at Romanian universities;
- there is no funding available to attend international conferences or purchase necessary literature;
- in an era when excavation techniques are becoming increasingly more sophisticated from one day to the next, there is insufficient money to fund decent old-fashioned excavations, and sometimes no excavation is possible at all.

The list of deficiencies does not stop there. This is the context within which I plead for a different type of archaeology, which requires that the path initiated by Al. I. Cuza – who separated the natural and human sciences by dividing the National Museum of Antiquities and Natural Science – should now be followed in the opposite direction, but also widened by using sociology, the visual arts and whatever else is necessary, since we no longer have a fixed prescription for what we are expected to know or think as archaeologists.

What will we get in exchange for this effort?

We can gain a more profound knowledge, not only of the past, but also of ourselves, and, most importantly, “At stake here are ways to create the conditions for new thoughts.”<sup>72</sup> Since archaeology forces us into dialogue, its object ceases to be a past closed up somewhere in the time we’ve left behind,<sup>73</sup> studied only out of curiosity – a luxury in such times of urgent need. Can we afford to ignore this expensive type of knowledge, particularly when we already have psychology, psychoanalysis, anthropology, sociology etc.? Definitely not: because to be human means to produce and use objects. Objects modified the hominids’ environment, compelling them to a far more rapid adaptation than was ever imposed by nature.<sup>74</sup> The process grew so complicated in time that today scientists are asking whether we can still distinguish people from objects, the human from the non-human.<sup>75</sup> In the world of gifts exchange, objects are perceived as persons; in a world of goods exchange, persons are treated like objects;<sup>76</sup> in a world of electronic communication, virtual objects determine relations among people; the more virtual the objects, the more intense their reality.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, we *conceive* the world through objects: human institutions turn into realities by *reification*, by perceiving them as real, tangible things; material things inflict human actions upon us, by means of *fetishism*, by treating them as people.<sup>78</sup> Objects stabilize social life by conveying coherence to individual action, and they also ensure society’s transformation.<sup>79</sup> Sociology can at the most try and analyze them in the contemporary world. It is archaeology’s task to research their role in past and present, to understand material culture, this secret hero of human evolution.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>72</sup> M. Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift*, p. 20.

<sup>73</sup> Shanks and Tilley, *op. cit.*, p. 9–22.

<sup>74</sup> C. Geertz, “The Growth of Culture and the Evolution of Mind”, in C. Geertz, *op. cit.*, especially p. 70–83.

<sup>75</sup> Pels *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>76</sup> *loc. cit.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10, 15.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 4.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 2, 8.

<sup>80</sup> This role of material culture is generally agreed on by post-processualists.