

SOME REMARKS ON THE TRANSITION OF THE BOIAN-GUMELNIȚA HOUSEHOLDS – ARCHITECTURE AND POTTERY ASSEMBLAGES

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Abstract: *This paper presents the characteristics of several houses from three sites in the Lower Danube area – the tell settlements at Ruse, Tangâru and Căscioarele – Ostrovel. These houses are considered among the earliest documented structures dated during the transition from the Late Boian to the Gumelnița Culture. Comparing their geographical, cultural, chronological and architectural aspects, this paper traces changes occurring in the household tradition and possible settlement interactions. The architectural details and the house inventories show similarities that differ from those of the Late Gumelnița structures. Some of these have been previously interpreted as “temples” due to their rich painted and plastic interior decoration. Since the structures from the Romanian sites are well-known, the Ruse houses and their inventories are described in greater detail. Special attention is given to pottery as a main cultural and chronological landmark, but also as evidence for the range of everyday activities and their manifestation during the entire KGK VI period.*

Rezumat: *Această lucrare prezintă caracteristicile mai multor locuințe din trei situri din zona Dunării de Jos - așezările de la Ruse, Tangâru și Căscioarele - Ostrovel. Aceste locuințe sunt considerate printre cele mai vechi structuri documentate, datate în timpul tranziției de la cultura Boian târzie la cultura Gumelnița. Comparând aspectele lor geografice, culturale, cronologice și arhitecturale, această lucrare urmărește schimbările care apar în tradiția gospodăriei și posibilele interacțiuni din așezare. Detaliile arhitecturale și inventarele locuințelor arată asemănări care diferă de cele ale structurilor târzii din cultura Gumelnița. Unele dintre acestea au fost anterior interpretate ca „temple” datorită bogatelor lor decorații interioare plastice și pictate. Fiindcă structurile descoperite în siturile din România sunt mai bine cunoscute, locuințele de la Ruse și inventarele lor sunt descrise mai detaliat. O atenție deosebită este acordată ceramicii ca reper cultural și cronologic principal, dar și ca dovadă pentru gama de activități cotidiene și manifestarea lor pe întreaga perioadă a KGK VI.*

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Introduction

The significance of the Lower Danube area during the Chalcolithic period has been acknowledged since the first official excavations on important sites such as Gumelnița¹, Căscioarele², Pietrele³, Ruse⁴ and Hotnitsa⁵. Thanks to these and to other well-documented tell settlements on both banks of the river, it has been ascertained that the local Chalcolithic societies enjoyed a long, flourishing and uninterrupted development during the second half of 5th millennium BC⁶.

The transition

The culture that developed in the middle of the 5th millennium BC, known as the Kodzadermen-Gumelnița-Karanovo VI, emerged following the gradual consolidation of several previous cultures on the territory of Romania and Bulgaria— Maritsa in the south of this area⁷, Polyanitsa⁸ and Boian in the north⁹, all of them with four developmental phases. The latter phase marks the period when local cultural differences slowly disappeared and the area merged into one uniform culture. This transition was so imperceptible that archaeologists experience difficulty in determining whether a structure should be dated to the Maritsa/Polyanitsa/Boian IV phase or to the first stage of the KGK VI Culture. As a result, they were attributed either to the very end of the Boian/Maritsa IV, the very beginning of the Gumelnița Culture¹⁰ or the Ia phase of the Gumelnița Culture¹¹. The similarities in the ceramic shapes and the graphite decoration between the Boian and the Early Gumelnița pottery are the reason a larger phenomenon should be suggested – namely, the Boian-Gumelnița Culture. In fact, all three earlier cultures mentioned above lost their own local characteristics during the first phase of the KGK VI, so it is unclear whether any of them had a leading role in this process.

According to the accepted prehistoric chronology of the region, this transition occurred, according to certain scholars, during the short timespan from 4600/4550 to 4500/4400 BC¹², while recent studies reveal slightly different and not so clearly fixed dates. On the basis of some samples from Căscioarele – Ostrovel and Radovanu, the Boian-Spanțov phase is dated to a wider time range spanning the 4900-4500 BC interval, but ending no earlier than 4600 BC. The A1 phase of the Gumelnița Culture falls between c. 4470 and 4360 BC¹³. Another paper groups the existing ¹⁴C dates from the entire territory of the KGK VI and sets the Boian Spanțov and Polyanitsa IV phases into the timeframe of 4700-4600 BC and all the KGK VI in 4600-4250 BC interval¹⁴.

¹ Dumitrescu 1925; Dumitrescu 1966.

² Ștefan 1925; Dumitrescu 1965; Dumitrescu 1970.

³ Berciu 1956.

⁴ Георгиев, Ангелов 1952; Георгиев, Ангелов 1957.

⁵ Ангелов 1959.

⁶ Berciu 1961, p. 416; Тодорова 1986, p. 222.

⁷ Тодорова 1986, p. 102; Petrova 2016, p. 324.

⁸ Тодорова 1986, p. 107.

⁹ Berciu 1935, p. 40; Berciu 1961, p. 59; Comșa 1987, p. 44.

¹⁰ Попов 1993, p. 22; Petrova 2016, p. 234.

¹¹ Berciu 1959, 67.

¹² Boyadzhiev 1995, Table 4.

¹³ Bem 1998-2000, p. 340.

¹⁴ Reingruber 2016, p. 314.

Since the matter concerns a process and not a sudden event, it is not completely clear if this transition happened at the same time in all three regions. Hopefully, the quick development of the dating methods and possible new samples will specify and clarify the matter in the future.

One of the major questions is whether something special occurred at the middle of the 5th millennium or whether the change was due to natural consequences of social development. Using the ‘burnt horizon’ factor as a landmark for some tell settlements in northeast Bulgaria as evidence for probable warfare, Henrieta Todorova assumed that there was an inner conflict among different groups during this period, perhaps due to increasing population density and need for new territory¹⁵. However, the ‘burning’ itself cannot serve as sufficient proof for indicating a change, as the motives behind the fire might be diverse. Deliberate house burning as a social practice is well-demonstrated in neighbouring areas and is regarded as having been widespread in Central and Eastern European prehistory¹⁶. Setting fire to the whole settlement at tell sites, such as Căscioarele – Ostrovel, is also considered a ritual or intentional repeated action rather than evidence of warfare. The idea would have been to set the memory of the place into a durable material – such as ceramics – and transform it into a visible monument in the landscape¹⁷. There are also opponents of the deliberate burning theory who emphasise the many details which were not taken into consideration by its supporters, stating that such social practice did not exist in Southeast European prehistory¹⁸.

Since there are various cases of burnt houses – with different chronologies, cultural affiliations, locations (at tell sites or open settlements), number of inventory items, sometimes even with human remains in between debris¹⁹ – a certain pattern cannot be defined. It would therefore be too simple to state that all of them are consequences of the same cause (ritual, accidental, sanitary, battle, etc.). What is important is the fact that Balkan prehistory is full of examples indicating that burnt houses were a common phenomenon during the Neolithic and the Chalcolithic periods. For instance, at the Ruse tell settlement, more than thirty burnt houses were identified, dating from the very beginning of the KGK VI Culture until its end²⁰. A significant consequence of this is that the well-preserved structures were sealed by fire – including their architectural details, inventories and ceramic assemblages – which provide the best opportunity for observing the differences between various chronological, territorial and cultural groups.

Unfortunately, this opportunity has never been sufficiently used, as only a few houses have been properly published for the entire KGK VI period and the later part of the earlier period. These are mainly buildings with extraordinary elements²¹ and rich

¹⁵ Тодорова 1986, p. 222.

¹⁶ Stevanović 1997; Chapman 1999; Tringham 2005.

¹⁷ Gheorghiu 2007, p. 271, p. 281.

¹⁸ Lichter 2016.

¹⁹ Ангелов 1958; Мацанова 2000.

²⁰ Yordanova 2019.

²¹ Bem 2001; Dumitrescu 1970a, 1970b; Dragoman 2016; Ангелов 1959; Попов 1993.

inventories²²; on the other hand, the complete number of houses from particular sites have been published only in exceptional cases²³.

Inventories and interpretation

Interpretation is both the strongest and the weakest feature of contemporary archaeology. For prehistory, a lot has been written about everyday life, cult practices, funerary customs and social development, with papers contradicting one another or supporting each other at times, but all aiming to interpret the present data in the best possible way. Reaching a conclusion is influenced by many factors, but the context, insofar as it is attainable, must first be taken into consideration. Artefacts from houses are indicative of everyday activities and were seen as complete assemblages, the way tools associated with a certain group of people at a specific moment (usually the time of the fire) form our perception about their lives and thus their entire society.

To achieve that, however, there are many details in need of exploring. Starting from a large-scale and moving to a small-scale standpoint, we should treat the house as an item first integrated to a larger system –e.g. within its cultural and regional place, then as part of a certain settlement (its location, probable relations with coexisting structures, etc.), and finally as a micro-context. For the latter elements, significant features can also be the house dimensions, the architectural specifications (building techniques, horizontal and vertical plans, plastic and paint decoration) and, of course, its inventory.

The inventory includes all the artefacts found in between the house walls: furniture items (though very rare), tools made of any material, adornments, floral and faunal remains and, most importantly, ceramic assemblages. Other than being a chronological and cultural landmark, pottery fragments found in the same context can also serve as evidence of function. One of the most obvious correlations is that between the number of vessel types and the number of the different activities taking place within the house. The more diverse the range of vessels appearing in a structure, the more varied the household activities, and vice-versa: the more homogenous their types were, the more specialised their production was²⁴.

This, however, raises the question as to their function and how this could be defined, especially regarding vessel shapes. Usually, the main functional categories – defined based on the vessels' dimensions – are storage, cooking and transportation²⁵. Some authors distinguished a fourth category, i.e. those of the vessels in graves²⁶. The ability to determine function lies in precise field documentation, comparison between different contexts, and observations on the correlations among the vessels within the same complex²⁷. Such examples are already known from Pietrele²⁸ and Sultana²⁹.

²² Berciu 1956; 1961; Dumitrescu 1966; Dumitrescu, Marinescu-Bîlcu 2001; Reingruber 2010, Reingruber 2012; Ignat et al. 2012; Попов 1987; Попов, Венелинова 2004.

²³ Радунчева 1976.

²⁴ Orton, Hughes 2013, p. 147.

²⁵ Rye 1981, p. 26-27; Rice 1987, p. 207-209.

²⁶ Orton, Hughes 2013, p. 247.

²⁷ Orton, Hughes 2013, p. 261.

²⁸ Reingruber 2012, fig. 11.

²⁹ Ignat et alii 2013, Pl. VI.

Sites and boundaries

For the period spanning the end of Middle Chalcolithic period³⁰ to the very beginning of the Gumelnița Culture, there are three relatively well-preserved and documented buildings – House 2 from Tangârû, House 12 from Căscioarele – Ostrovel and the so-called ‘temple’ from Ruse (House 2). Their chronology is based mostly on the specifics of their ceramic assemblages, but a few absolute dates were obtained from the earliest layers in Căscioarele – Ostrovel³¹. Other than the fact that they are the only published structures for the discussed period of time³², they are suitable for comparative analysis for several reasons.

The sites (fig. 1) were occupied for almost the entire 5th millennium BC with a few gaps. The stratigraphic profile of Tangârû shows continuous activity on the tell from the very first phase of the Boian to the very end of the Gumelnița Culture³³. In Căscioarele – Ostrovel, the earliest layers belong to the Boian-Spanțov phase, and the upper ones to the last two phases of the Gumelnița Culture³⁴. It is possible that earlier phases of the Boian Culture are represented there as well, but the rising waters of the Danube did not allow for further excavations.

Although Ruse is situated south of the river and should be associated with the Polyanitsa Culture, pottery there reveals tight connections with the culture on the opposite bank. These similarities are observed at other sites in the valleys of Rusenski Lom River (the Vodna cave)³⁵ and Yantra river (Petko Karavelovo tell site)³⁶, which raises the question as to whether prehistoric settlements in these regions of Bulgaria should better be considered as part of the Boian community. The earliest settlement on the Ruse tell also dates from the second phase of the Boian Culture; the site was later abandoned for a while and resettled again during the Middle Chalcolithic, with uninterrupted occupation until the last phase of K GK VI³⁷.

Bearing in mind that the rivers represent natural paths of population, products, and idea dispersion, the location of the three tell sites also plays an important role in tracing possible transformation. Ruse and Căscioarele – Ostrovel are located directly on the banks of the main water road in the region – the Danube—thus exploiting the benefits of its nutritional, strategic, trade and cultural advantages. Tangârû is nowadays situated further away from the river but still close (a couple of hours walking distance). Although there is no true scientific evidence that the tell was part of the large lake settlement system already located to the east³⁸, it can be suggested that the then-villages were part of a small settlement system, reachable by water (sailing?) or on foot (walking), all existing within one cultural unit during a short chronological period.

³⁰ According to the accepted Bulgarian periodisation.

³¹ Bem 1998-2000.

³² Dumitrescu 1970a, 1970b; Berciu 1956; 1961; Dragoman 2016; Попов 1993.

³³ Berciu 1959, p. 60-67.

³⁴ Dumitrescu 1970a, p. 75; Voinea 2005, p. 124.

³⁵ Naydenova 2010, p. 75.

³⁶ Chohadzhiev, in print.

³⁷ Попов 1996, p. 42.

³⁸ Hansen *et alii* 2015, p. 101, Abb. 15.

The structures from the Ruse tell settlement

The Ruse tell site is one of the many sites whose potential has not been fully exploited. Much has been done over the years since the first excavations took place³⁹, mostly on empirical material and its chronology, but quantitative and qualitative analyses of the features uncovered have not been conducted. Most of the topmost houses were initially published with their inventories, including all complete and restored vessels⁴⁰ which, however, never went beyond a mere description, although a large number of features were uncovered as a result of this contribution. Unfortunately, the situation in the lower levels is very different. Not even one actual house, either burnt or unburnt, was identified during the excavations, despite the few references to their existence⁴¹. In order to re-identify what was not properly documented, a new approach has been attempted which led to 19 ‘newly’ discovered burnt structures⁴². During the last two excavation seasons, the last four burnt houses were uncovered, one of them being interpreted as a temple⁴³.

The published data about the latter building is sparse. What is surely known is its location – in the central zone of the settlement (fig. 2.2), developing further into both the eastern and western sectors which were separated by the main stratigraphic profile. As a result, a full cross-section of the house exists. The part located in the eastern sector, and an area with a width of 0.20 m from the debris in the western sector, had seemingly been excavated during the 1988 season but without any published information. Further field work during the following two years documented only building foundations and the rest of the debris⁴⁴. **House 2**, as it was later numbered, had a rectangular shape, 8-10 m in length, and judging by the plan, was oriented northeast-southwest⁴⁵. Some of the preserved wall fragments were decorated with white and red paint. The floor was uneven and dug into the ground in the southern part of the house.

The location of the house allows us to observe not only the horizontal plan, but its stratigraphy as well (fig.2.1). According to the director of the excavations, a thin layer of ash and charcoal (6 cm) separated the debris into two levels, suggesting a two-storey building⁴⁶. This was entirely excavated in 1990, together with the last preserved part of the site – the central profile.

Besides the wall decoration suggesting the building was a temple are the fragments from a large clay relief found scattered over a clay bench and three vessels, all found in the southern sector. Although broken, the clay relief represents the frontal view of a pregnant woman, whose abdomen and thighs were covered with red and white meander motifs, restored three times. The face was covered with a thin white layer, the eyes were encrusted with blueish river shells and the eyebrows, the nose and the mouth were formed through sculptural techniques. The carving was meant to be placed

³⁹ Шкорпил 1914, p. 59-61.

⁴⁰ Георгиев, Ангелов 1952; 1957.

⁴¹ Кънчев и др. 1987, p. 28.

⁴² Yordanova 2019.

⁴³ Попов 1993.

⁴⁴ Попов 1996, p. 40.

⁴⁵ Попов 1996, p. 40, обр. 8.

⁴⁶ Попов 1993, p. 20; 1996, p. 40.

vertically, since its back preserves the imprint of wooden planks⁴⁷. The inventory of House 2 consists of three vessels, a flint hoard found inside one of the pots, and stone tools. Except for the aforementioned pottery from the profile, the general absence of ceramics in the entire building⁴⁸ is striking. Unfortunately, there is not enough information on the other three houses attributed to the same phase.

The existing information tells of the existence of a large area of burnt debris, located (on the basis of the scarce data from field diaries from the 1988 campaign) in the western sector of the tell; this area was labelled for convenience as Structure 17⁴⁹. Later, after revision of the data and the ceramic assemblages, it was clarified that it represented two overlapping burnt houses, the upper one attributed to the second phase of the KGK VI Culture (re-labelled Structure 15), and the lower to the end of the Middle Chalcolithic period (re-labelled Structure 20). The recorded measurements of **Structure 20** indicate 6 m in length and 5 m in width, oriented northeast-southwest (fig. 2.3). Although the architectural details and inventory remain unknown, the ceramic assemblage shows similarities with House 2 and could perhaps be assigned to the same phase.

In order to follow the natural development of the household ceramic inventories, two more buildings will be presented, dated to the first phase of the KGK VI Culture. **Structure 19** belongs to the upper habitation level, if we trust the profile plan overlapping the ruins of House 2 (fig. 2.1). Its debris covers a large area in the western sector, measuring 10 x 10 m, and continues into the profile (fig. 2.3). Despite its large size, only seven complete vessels were found there.

Another contemporary burnt house existed north of Structure 19 and was labelled **Structure 16**. Part of it fell within the old soundings in the western sector of the tell (fig. 2.3), with the preserved dimensions of c. 8 x 7 m. Seven vessels and two lids were found in the 0.65 m-thick burnt debris.

Although there is much information missing about the structures from Ruse, they convey some of the required elements for our analysis, especially concerning the everyday activities connected to pottery. The preservation of successive features, evidenced in the profile as well, was very fortunate, allowing for their comparison with later burnt house inventories (from the second and the third phase of the KGK VI). The latter, unfortunately, are impossible to compare with those of other contemporary sites, given the current state of publication.

The architectural specifics

The location upon which prehistoric people chose to erect a building is considered as an important act with practical and symbolic meaning. Usually, the large central houses seem to be part of the public life of the settlement and are used either as storage areas for the pottery vessels and grains of the entire village⁵⁰, or as temples such as at Parța and a few Cucuteni sites⁵¹.

⁴⁷ Попов 1993, p. 20-21.

⁴⁸ Попов 1996, p. 40.

⁴⁹ Yordanova 2019, fig. 7-8.

⁵⁰ Тодорова 1986, p. 167.

⁵¹ Lichter 2014, p. 125.

The latter function seems to be the case of the so-called sanctuary at Căscioarele – Ostrovel. Although there are only three (published) houses from the same occupation phase, all located along a northwest-southeast line according to the existing soundings, it was stated that the temple was placed at the centre of the settlement⁵². At Ruse there is a similar situation, as the house with the anthropomorphic relief falls under the central stratigraphic profile. However, since there are only a few concurrent buildings excavated and we do not know if the centre of the mound was the centre of the village, any postulation regarding their location is debatable.

House dimensions most probably also played a role in household organisation or even differentiation. The Căscioarele – Ostrovel building was c. 16 m long and 10 m wide⁵³ and those in Tangâru reached 13.50 m in length⁵⁴. Although not as large, the Ruse structures also exceeded 8-10 m in the case of the house in the lower level. Radovanu and Petru Rareş provide a different image with a few houses with lengths of 6 m⁵⁵. There was apparently a normal variety of house sizes, such as in the next occupation levels, but still some of them seem extremely large. Their internal space is organised differently, by separation in two rooms connected through a door like in Căscioarele – Ostrovel⁵⁶ or by constructing two floors, which is the case in Ruse⁵⁷. In addition, the walls in both houses were likely partially covered with red and white painted motifs.

However, what is really distinctive in the Boian-Spanţov structures is the presence of finely decorated plastic architectural details. The famous columns from Căscioarele – Ostrovel, found in room 1, were hollow inside, with lengths of c. 2 m and diameters of 10 cm and 41-43 cm, respectively. They showed traces of linear and geometric yellowish-white patterns, and had been restored and repainted with different motifs at least three times⁵⁸. Another specific plastic decoration is constituted by the female clay reliefs, fragments of which were found both in Ruse (House 2) and Tangâru (House 2)⁵⁹. In Ruse they were preserved well enough for a partial reconstruction (fig. 3). In both cases a common feature is the plank imprint on their backs, indicating they were placed vertically adjacent to a wall. The presence of such plastic elements in the interior of the buildings is the reason they were interpreted as sanctuaries. An exception is House 2 in Tangâru, where the large amount of inventory items did not allow it to be defined as a cultic building.

To see why some buildings were considered sanctuaries, while others – simple residential houses even though they had similar architectural characteristics, we should also note the other objects in the buildings and how they correlate with the whole complex.

⁵² Dumitrescu 1970b, p. 6, fig. 1.

⁵³ Dumitrescu 1970, p. 6; Dragoman 2016, p. 100.

⁵⁴ Berciu 1959, p. 67.

⁵⁵ Comşa 1984, fig. 61-63.

⁵⁶ Dumitrescu 1970b, p. 21.

⁵⁷ Попов 1993, p. 20.

⁵⁸ Dumitrescu 1970a, p. 76; Dumitrescu 1970b, p. 18-20; Dragoman 2016, p. 102.

⁵⁹ Berciu 1959, p. 68.

House inventories

As expected, the pottery represents most of the house inventories. Complete assemblages, together with other small finds, are known from House 2 in Ruse and House 12 from Căscioarele – Ostrovel. The rest could be presented only with the complete vessels which give partial but nevertheless informative views on the used pottery types.

House 12 (Căscioarele – Ostrovel). The inventory items were mostly fragmented and they consisted of a storage vessel, a fine plate, two big coarse bowls, a fine lid and two stands. The coarse ware is decorated with the typical excised and white-encrusted motifs, or with knobs, as well as with fine graphite patterns (covering the inside of a plate). There were also a grinding stone, a painted clay medallion and one small copper tool broken in two⁶⁰.

House 2 (Ruse). The structure yielded a large vessel, a plate and a bowl, all decorated with the same shallow, horizontal cannelures on their middle or upper part (fig. 3). Thin, positive graphite motifs, though poorly preserved, covered the inside of the wide-open plate. Small finds were represented by flint and stone tools only.

Structure 20 (Ruse). The similar set of a fine plate, two fine bowls, and a large fine vessel like that in House 2 appeared in the contemporary Structure 20 (fig. 4). In this case, however, the structure yielded also two fine pots, a cup, a stand and a miniature vessel. The coarse ware is represented by a large vessel and a pot. The horizontal cannelures again represented the main fine ware motifs, covering more than half of the vessels, but graphite was also used, in the case of a pot. Barbotine appeared as vertical lines, e.g. forming a concentric curved pattern.

Structure 19 (Ruse). The ceramic assemblage (fig. 5) is represented by coarse ware vessels – two wide trays (one with a spout), two large biconical vessels - almost identical, a similar one with a polished upper part, a bowl and a cup. The only decoration is the unorganized and vertical barbotine, sometimes with knobs, and oblique plastic ribs.

Structure 16 (Ruse). The complete vessels (fig. 6) form a homogenous group, including five bowls and a lid from the group of fine ware and a large vessel, a pot and a coarse lid from the coarse pottery. The bowls are decorated either with cannelures or with graphite. The coarse ware shapes are decorated with barbotine or shallow incisions.

House 2 (Tangâru) yielded the richest published assemblage of all for this period⁶¹. It included both fine and coarse ware shapes – two storage vessels, large bowls (both fine and coarse), two fine and one coarse pot, five coarse trays, twelve fine plates, fifteen fine and one coarse bowl, four fine cups, a sieve-vessel and four stands. In what decoration is concerned, graphite appears mostly on the inside of plates, sometimes on bowls and pots. Cannelures are used on the upper part of bowls, plates and pots. Excised patterns are few, covering the middle part of a large vessel, the collar of the corresponding lid and huge areas on a storage vessel. The usual barbotine appears only organized vertically.

The fewest types actually appear in the so-called *temple of Ruse*, where only three vessels were found on a clay platform, and in *Structure 19* which overlaps it. The

⁶⁰ Dragoman 2016, p. 102-103.

⁶¹ Berciu 1961, fig. 199-223.

former is the only structure with fine pottery. On the contrary, the assemblage from the upper structure consists of extremely coarse vessels. All the other structures contain both fine and coarse wares in different ratios.

Of course, the amount of complete vessels in the structures do not provide reliable information, due to them only representing a portion of all the un-restored vessels. Their morphological characteristics, however, can be used as markers of a preferred house ceramic inventory during a certain period, especially if followed by a comparison with the succeeding structures. For this purpose, sealed later features were taken into consideration (Table I): – six from Ruse, eight from Pietrele⁶², two from Sultana⁶³, and one each from Omurtag⁶⁴, Smyadovo⁶⁵, Hotnitsa⁶⁶, Blejești⁶⁷, Căscioarele – Ostrovel⁶⁸, and Gumelnița⁶⁹.

The most persistent types in the earliest houses are large, coarse vessels, pots, fine plates and lids, with storage vessels, trays, cups, closed vessels and stands not as well-represented. When found in a house, the coarse and fine bowls are the most numerous. Storage vessels appear in two of the structures – at Căscioarele – Ostrovel and Tangâr – showing the need for large vessels for storing food for the community. The same type appears at the Ruse tell as well, but not in house contexts. The most common large open vessels probably served as cooking pots for the household⁷⁰ so their presence is not surprising. The ordinary assemblages also include plates and bowls, but the rich graphite decoration inside them raises some questions about their actual use. The low representation of cups and coarse pots is interesting, as these types are otherwise the most numerous in the late stages. The stands, characteristic for the previous culture (Boian), also appear in a satisfying number in the features rich in finds.

Concerning their typological categories, there is little variation. The plates are always of the same type – wide-open, with a strongly everted upper part; the bowls are of cylindrical-conical or slightly open/closed shapes, decorated with horizontal canelures, but rarely with graphite. Fine pots appear in two types – with convex middle part and relatively long neck, all covered with graphite, canelures or impressed motifs, and with a straight middle part with horizontal canelures. The large variety of shapes, dimensions, volumes and decoration techniques and motifs, typical for the developed Gumelnița Culture, do not occur yet in their full potential.

Discussion

Despite being few, these buildings represent the initial step in the formation of the Gumelnița Culture as a large, uniform and flourishing phenomenon. They emerged

⁶² Berciu 1956; Reingruber 2010; 2012.

⁶³ Ignat *et alii* 2012; Ignat *et alii* 2013; Ignat 2018.

⁶⁴ Gaydarska *et alii* 2004.

⁶⁵ Попов, Венелинова 2004.

⁶⁶ Ангелов 1959.

⁶⁷ Berciu 1956.

⁶⁸ Voinea 2005.

⁶⁹ Dumitrescu 1966; Dumitrescu, Marinescu-Bîlcu 2001.

⁷⁰ Reingruber 2012, fig. 11.

following a pit-house period⁷¹ with extremely fragmented ceramic inventories, so these are the first well-documented and published structures.

Though the inventories differ from those of the Late Gumelnița stages, they show a certain standardisation of the household assemblages. The usual combination includes large vessels, plates, bowls, lids, sometimes stands, of course with a wider variety in the richer structures. For the later stages, the presence of other types such as cups, different sized pots, special shapes such as strainers and storage vessels, etc., increase. On the other hand, some types such as trays with a wavy rim obviously appear for a short time at very few sites – such as in Ruse and Tangâru. Closed, small vessels were typical only for Ruse, as well. Among the structures discussed above, only two differ by a few yet very fine vessels – House 2 from Ruse and House 4 from Hotnitsa. Most of the other assemblages consist of different pottery items, thus suggesting various household activities. Therefore, as far as it can be observed, there was a slow transformation from a relatively monotonous assemblage with similar shapes and decoration in several sites to another one, with varied and typologically distinctive pottery types with painted and plastic motifs.

The significant feature for the period, however, is the presence of large buildings with rich interior plastic elements. The existence of such edifices at the three discussed sites allow us to speculate that, at this time, a particular type of public buildings of communal importance existed in the Lower Danube area, perhaps mainly at central, contemporary settlements. Their purpose is debatable due to the lack of information, the scarce number of small finds and the apparently heterogeneous household inventories, similar to contemporary structures without those peculiarities. Besides, the specific architectural elements, with no analogies both in the previous and the later local traditions, suggest that they were not designed to fulfil the role of a household of smaller size, but to serve the specific needs of a larger group of people – a community. The large, anthropomorphic reliefs also resemble the masks from the Varna cemetery, with the dimensions of the latter similar to those of Ruse⁷². Since their chronologies almost coincide⁷³, it appears that the anthropomorphism (and not only the figurines) had a strong, but not as persistent, manifestation in the area. Probably the river and the easy navigation access to such sites also contributed to the quick exchange of ideas, beliefs and to their regional manifestation. All these details define the beginning of the KGK VI and the importance of the Lower Danube and of the Black Sea coast during the Chalcolithic period.

⁷¹ Comșa 1974, p. 143-159.

⁷² Попов 1993, p. 22-23

⁷³ Higham *et alii* 2007, p. 646, fig. 3; Krauß *et alii* 2017, p. 297

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Figure 4. Structure 20 – inventory.

Figura 4. Structura 20 – inventar.

Figure 5. Structure 19 – inventory.

Figura 5. Structura 19 – inventar.

Figure 6. Structure 16 – inventory.

Figura 6. Structura 16 – inventar.

Complex	Vessels (no.)	Chronology	Storage	Large vessels (coarse)	Trays (coarse)	Bowls (coarse)	Pots (coarse)	Cups (coarse)	Lids (coarse)	Special shapes	Large vessels (fine)	Plates (fine)	Bowls (fine)	Pots (fine)	Closed vessels	Cups (fine)	Lids (fine)	Stands
Cascioarele H12	5	Boian-Spanțov	x	x								x					x	x
Ruse H2	3	End of Middle Chalcolithic									x	x	x					
Ruse S20	11	End of Middle Chalcolithic		x			x				x	x	x	x	x	x		x
Tangăru H2	50	Gumelnița A1a	x		x	x	x			x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
Ruse S19	8	1st phase KGK VI		x	x	x		x										
Ruse S16	9	1st phase KGK VI		x		x	x						x				x	
Ruse S9	16	End of 1st-2nd phase KGK VI		x	x	x	x	x	x			x					x	
Omurtag	22	End of 1st-2nd phase KGK VI				x	x	x	x	x			x			x		
Ruse H15	9	2nd phase KGK VI		x			x	x	x	x		x			x	x	x	
Ruse H16	29	2nd phase KGK VI	x	x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	
Ruse S11	13	2nd phase KGK VI			x		x	x						x		x	x	
Sultana H5	12	Gumelnița A2		x			x		x			x	x	x			x	
Blejești	18	Gumelnița A2					x					x				x		
Cascioarele H1	14	Gumelnița A2	x							x		x		x		x		
Smyadovo H2	64	2nd-3rd phase of KGK VI					x		x			x				x	x	
Ruse H5	19	3rd phase KGK VI	x						x			x	x	x		x	x	
Ruse H10	27	3rd phase KGK VI	x						x		x	x	x	x		x	x	
Hotnița H4	5	3rd phase KGK VI							x		x	x	x	x		x		
Gumelnița	41	3rd phase KGK VI				x	x	x	x			x				x	x	
Sultana H2	39	3rd phase KGK VI	x	x			x		x	x		x		x		x		
Pietrele H1	50	3rd phase KGK VI		x			x	x	x	x		x	x	x		x	x	
Pietrele B-CBH	170	3rd phase KGK VI		x		x	x	x	x	x		x				x	x	
Pietrele B-EBH	83	3rd phase KGK VI	x	x		x	x	x	x		x	x		x		x	x	
Pietrele B-WBH	19	3rd phase KGK VI	x				x	x	x			x		x		x	x	
Pietrele B-EUH	23	3rd phase KGK VI					x	x	x		x	x				x	x	
Pietrele B-WUH	13	3rd phase KGK VI							x			x	x			x	x	
Pietrele J-BH	37	3rd phase KGK VI	x	x		x	x					x	x	x			x	
Pietrele M-BH	15	3rd phase KGK VI						x				x					x	

Table 1. Pottery inventories from the KGK VI houses

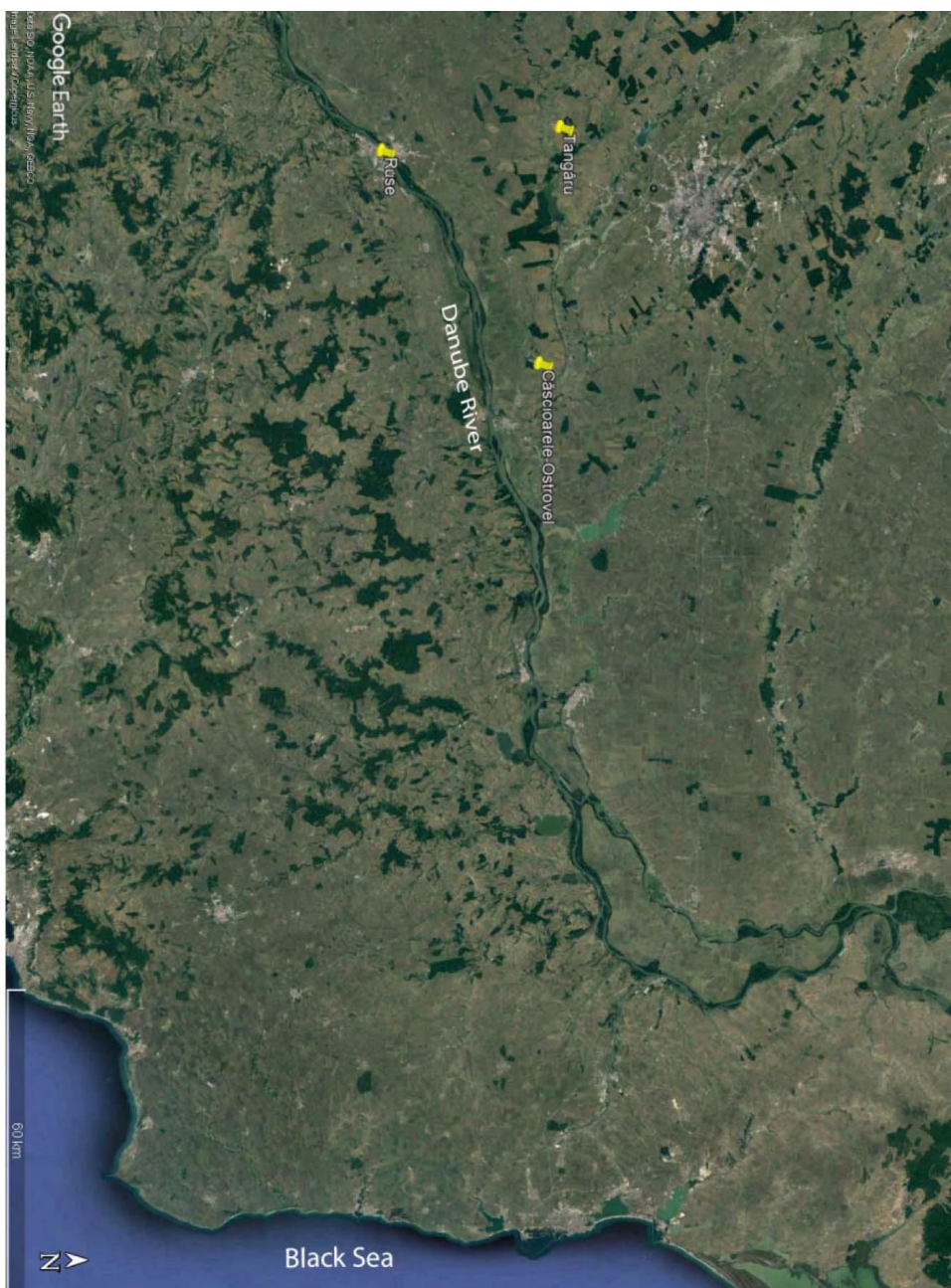


Fig. 1. Location of the main sites mentioned in the text.

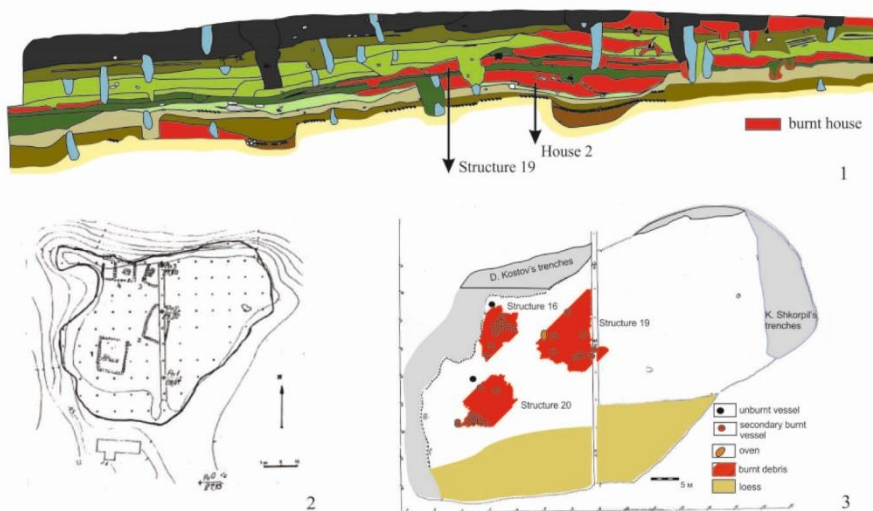


Fig. 2. Burnt structures from the Ruse tell:

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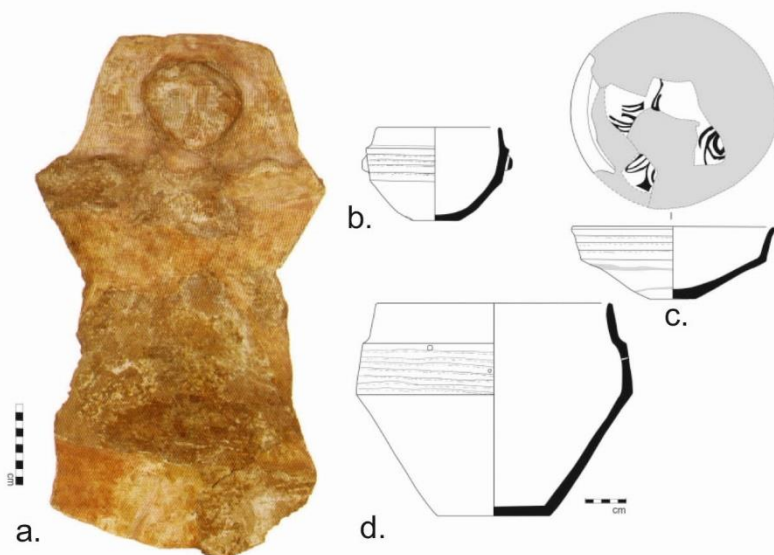


Fig. 3. House 2 – inventory (after Чернаков 2009, p. 65; the author).

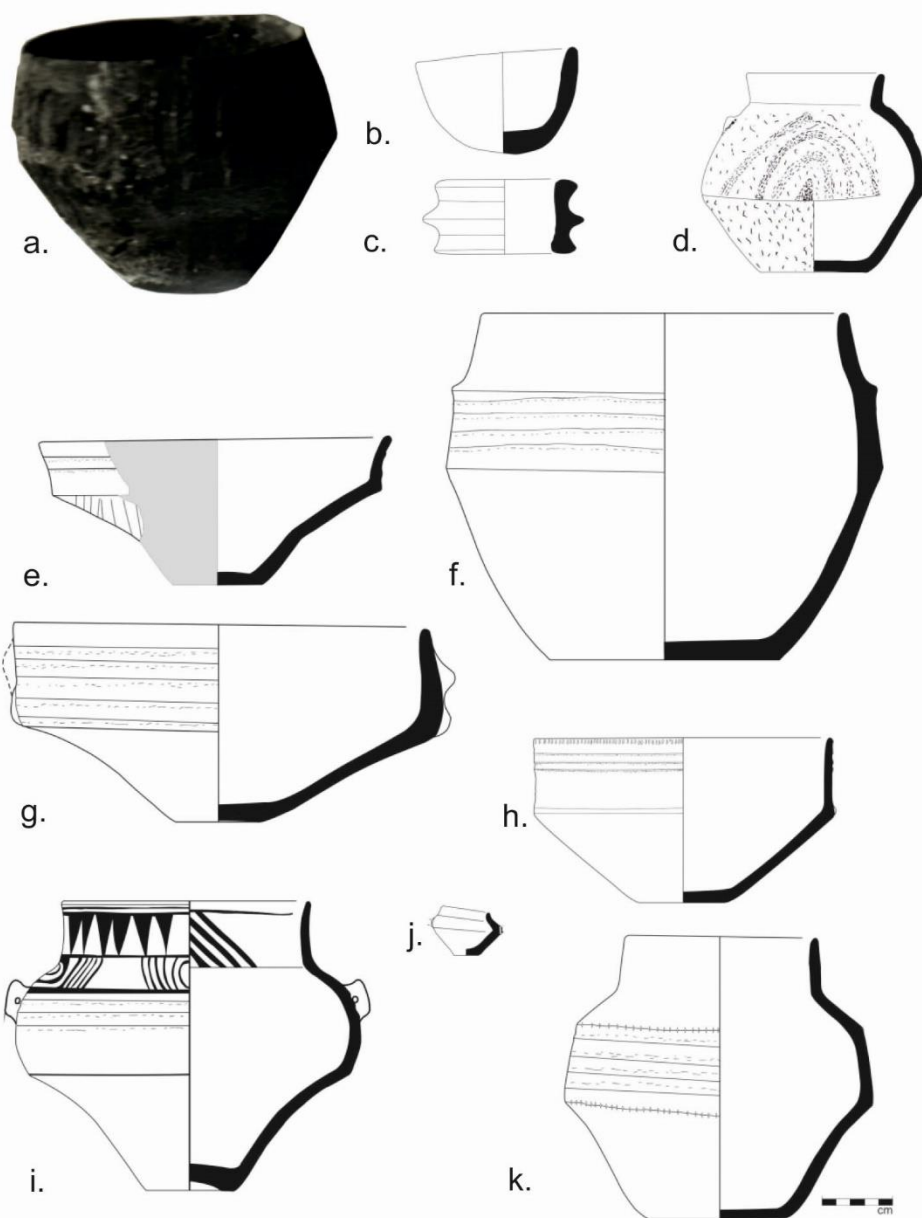


Fig. 4. Structure 20 – inventory.

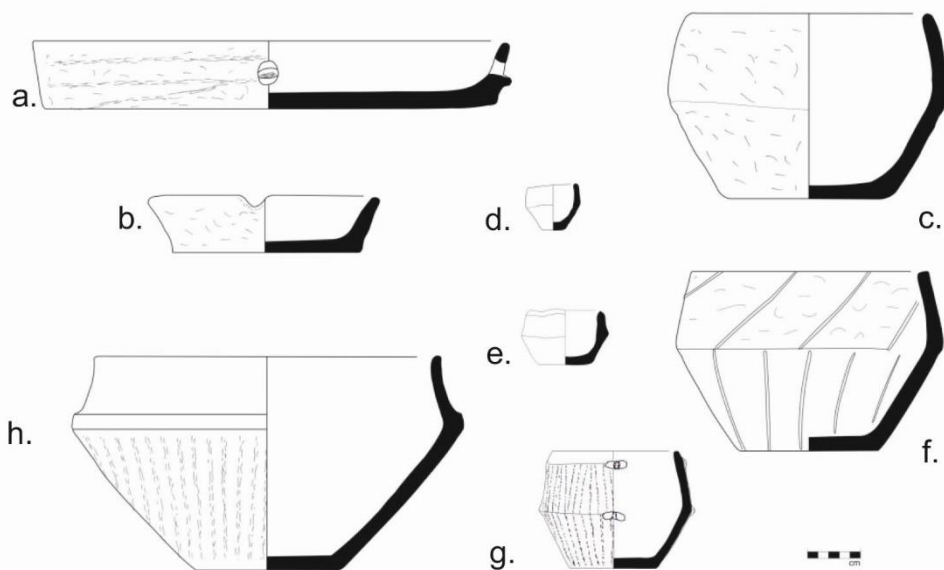


Fig. 5. Structure 19 – inventory.

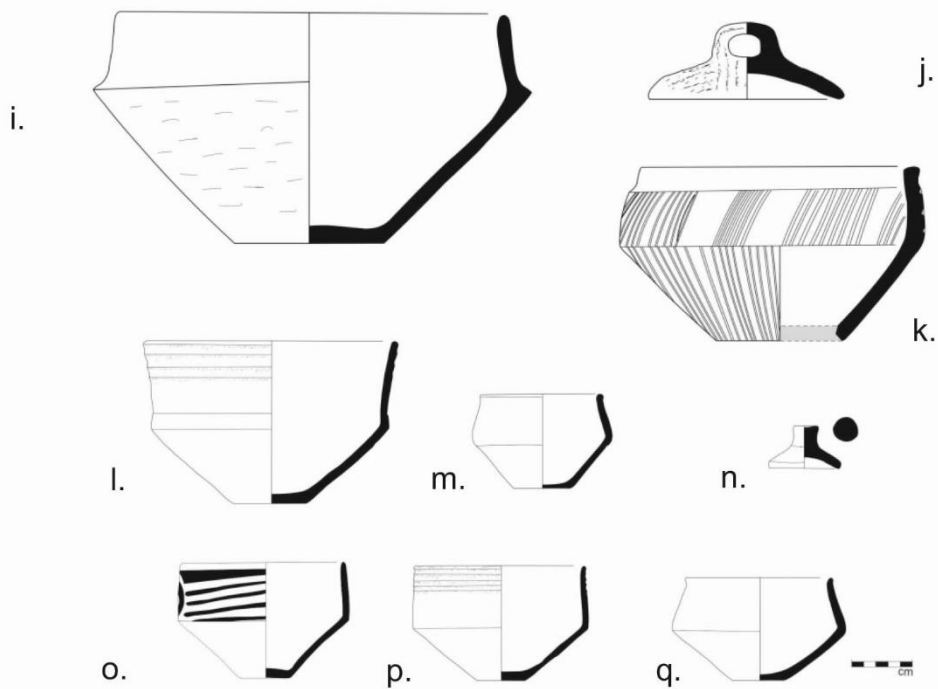


Fig. 6. Structure 16 – inventory.