
PONTICA

XLVIII-XLIX

2015 - 2016

MUZEUL DE ISTORIE NAȚIONALĂ ȘI ARHEOLOGIE
CONSTANȚA

CLAY CONTAINERS IN CONTEXT: THE BOIAN "SANCTUARY" AT CĂSCIOARELE - OSTROVEL, SOUTHERN ROMANIA*

Radu-Alexandru DRAGOMAN**

Cuvinte-cheie. „Sanctuar”; recipiente; conținere; circulație a substanțelor; Căscioarele-Ostrovel; tell; tradiția Boian; eneolitic; România.

Keywords. “Sanctuary”; containers; containment; circulation of substances; Căscioarele-Ostrovel; tell; Boian tradition; Eneolithic; Romania.

Rezumat. În textul de față, împreună cu datele deja cunoscute, prezint o serie de materiale inedite provenite din „sanctuarul” Boian din tell-ul de la Căscioarele-Ostrovel, sudul României (cca. 4800-4550 BC; faza Spanțov). Pe baza acestor materiale, am analizat critic interpretările anterioare, mutând accentul dinspre discursurile dominante referitoare la funcționalitatea construcției (e.g. „sanctuar”, „templu”, „locuință”), spre noțiuni pe care le consider a fi centrale pentru înțelegerea lumii eneolitice – și anume cele de recipient, conținere și circulație a substanțelor.

Abstract. In this text I present a series of unpublished materials from the Boian “sanctuary” in the tell-site of Căscioarele-Ostrovel, southern Romania (c. 4800-4550 BC; Spanțov phase), along already known data. Based on these materials, I have critically analysed the previous interpretations, by shifting the emphasis from the dominant discourses referring to the function of the building (e.g. “sanctuary”, “temple”, “dwelling”), to principles I consider to be central for the understanding of the Eneolithic world – namely those of container, containment, and circulation of substances.

* This text is a revised and extended version of a paper presented at the round-table “Neo-Eneolithic pottery at the Lower Danube”, organized by Valentina Voinea, Radu-Alexandru Dragoman and Cristian Eduard Ștefan within the *Pontica* International Conference, Constanța Museum of National History and Archaeology, 2-3 October 2014. Earlier versions have been presented in 2014 to colleagues (Maramureș County Museum of History and Archaeology, Baia Mare), people interested in archaeology (Satu Mare County Museum, Satu Mare), and archaeology students (Constanța Museum of National History and Archaeology).

** Radu-Alexandru DRAGOMAN: Vasile Pârvan Institute of Archaeology of Romanian Academy, str. Henri Coandă 11, Sector 1, 010667, Bucharest; al_dragoman@yahoo.com.

Introduction

Since its publication, the Boian “sanctuary” discovered in 1968 on the Căscioarele-Ostrovel tell (Călărași county), in southern Romania (**Fig. 1**), and dated *c.* 4800-4550 BC (Spanțov phase), became well-known in the archaeological literature dedicated to the Eneolithic of the Balkans, generally, and of Romania, in particular.¹ However, a series of architectural elements and most of the related inventory remained unpublished until today. For example, among the containers present in the “sanctuary”, only a single fragment belonging to a storage vessel was published.² Therefore, based on the materials identified in the storerooms of Vasile Pârvan Institute of Archaeology – Bucharest, in the storerooms of Lower Danube Museum – Călărași, and in the collection from Călărași under the management of Mr Florin Rădulescu, as well as based on the field notes from 1968, this paper discusses the “sanctuary” and the clay containers found in it. I mention from the beginning that, following Jean-Pierre Warnier, the term “containers” used in the present study does not refer only to vessels themselves, which may contain substances, but also to all those objects aimed at channelling the substances on a certain route, objects which have a surface and one or several openings linking an interior and an exterior.³

The context

The “sanctuary” (or burnt house 12/1968), located in the centre of the settlement (**Fig. 2**), had a rectangular form, was oriented East-West and is supposed to have had about 16 m in length and 10 m in width; however, regarding its sizes, as the author of the research himself warns us, we must take into account that the part towards ESE and the SSE corner were not excavated⁴ (**Fig. 3**). The “sanctuary” had solid wattle-and-daub walls (**Fig. 4**) and thick wooden pillars – some fragments were over 15-20 cm thick and bore imprints of such pillars. Inside, under the collapsed walls, in certain parts, the existence of a floor made of clay was noticed⁵ (**Fig. 5**).

The “sanctuary’s” interior space was divided into two areas through a partition wall, indicated by a row of six wooden pillars fixed in the ground (**Fig. 6**). The space towards WNW, called room no. 1, was almost entirely investigated, while the space towards ESE, called room no. 2, was excavated only to a little extent.⁶ Although the entrance was not identified, Vl. Dumitrescu considers that in order to enter room 1, one had to pass first through room 2.⁷ According to Vl.

¹ DUMITRESCU 1970; GIMBUTAS 1974, p. 71, 88; DUMITRESCU *et alii* 1983, p. 78; WHITTLE 1996, p. 94-95; MONAH 1997, p. 33-34; MONAH 2001, p. 174, 186; CHAPMAN 2005, p. 284; LAZAROVICI & LAZAROVICI 2006, p. 534-540; LICHTER 2014. For the absolute dating see REINGRUBER 2015, p. 306.

² DUMITRESCU 1970, p. 9.

³ WARNIER 2006.

⁴ DUMITRESCU 1970, p. 9.

⁵ DUMITRESCU 1970, p. 9.

⁶ DUMITRESCU 1970, p. 9.

⁷ DUMITRESCU 1970, p. 21.

Dumitrescu, in terms of architecture, the essential difference between the two rooms is that fragments of painted walls (on the inside) were collected only from the perimeter of room 1 (Fig. 7), while in the perimeter of room 2, as far as it has been excavated, fragments of wall had smooth external and internal surface, but no traces of paint.⁸ The interior side of the walls in room 1 was well smoothed, red painted and decorated with yellowish-white linear, spiral and circular patterns (Fig. 8). On some of the fragments it can be noted that the paint was restored twice, each time with a different design⁹ (Fig. 9). A 30-40 cm high clayey ground bench, located in the southern part of room 1, was painted in the same manner as some of the wall fragments.¹⁰

In the category of (unpublished) fixed elements are included also two fragmentary clay triangles, white painted on both sides (Fig. 10); the triangles seemed to have been fixed vertically on a stand, possibly a bench, on one of the sides. The triangles were probably positioned so that they could be seen from both sides.

Also included amongst the (unpublished) fixed elements are three pieces in the shape of houses, with animal necks and heads (Fig. 11), which, judging by the basis of two of them, were attached to one or several stands; one of the pieces is almost complete and unpainted and the other two are fragmentary and white painted.

Last but not least, it must be mentioned that under the debris of the collapsed southern wall, but under the house level, a child skeleton was found¹¹ (Fig. 12).

Objects from the "sanctuary"¹²

In room 1 several objects were discovered. Part of them, such as a circular clay "medallion", two so-called clay columns, a grinder and a fragment of a large ceramic container were mentioned in the article published by Vl. Dumitrescu¹³, while the other objects, such as a series of vessels and sherds remained unpublished so far.

"Medallion"

The above mentioned "medallion" was found in the proximity of the "sanctuary's" WNW corner and, probably, it garnished the interior of the West wall (Fig. 13). The medallion had a diameter of roughly 20 cm, 3-4 cm thickness

⁸ DUMITRESCU 1970, p. 9.

⁹ DUMITRESCU 1970, p. 10.

¹⁰ DUMITRESCU 1970, p. 18, 20.

¹¹ DUMITRESCU 1970, p. 14 and Fig. 8 (p. 20).

¹² It is possible that further objects from the "sanctuary" still exist in the storerooms, but I could not identify them so far.

¹³ DUMITRESCU 1970.

and was painted in three colours on one of the sides, with red and white on brown background.¹⁴

Columns

The first of the columns, 1.90 m long, empty inside, was found near the southern wall of room 1, deformed and partially damaged (**Fig. 14**). If complete, it would have been up to 2 m long and an oval shape, with a diameter of 43 and 41 cm, and with 9-10 cm thick walls. The extremities were not preserved, and no existence of a base was noted. The column was successively painted three times, with yellowish-white linear and geometric patterns on a red background, and each layer of paint had a different design as in the case of the walls (**Fig. 15**). The first layer of paint consists of curve lines, probably spirals; the second layer of paint – of yellowish-white and red alternating vertical lines; and the third layer – of yellowish-white affronted lines and triangles as well as red spirals. A copy of the original was made and it was considered as being extremely accurate (exhibited in the Lower Danube Museum, Călărași; **Fig. 16: 1**). In the immediate vicinity of the column there were two roughly parallel rows of four and, respectively, three pillar holes, not connected to any wall and which, according to the author of the excavations, were probably derived from a canopy or a shield for the column.¹⁵

The second column, of reduced sizes, had 2 m in length, about 10 cm in diameter and was painted with yellowish-white patterns on a brown-red background (**Fig. 16: 2**). The small column, also empty on the inside, was found in a fragmentary status, in the vicinity of the row of pillars separating room 1 from room 2¹⁶ (**Fig. 17**).

Ceramics

In the “sanctuary” no groups of complete vessels were found; there were only vessel fragments stemming from containers probably already out of use by the time the “sanctuary” was destroyed by fire (**Fig. 18**). The image offered by the pottery inside the “sanctuary” contrasts with the “frozen” image of ceramic inventories from the other two Boian houses excavated at Căscioarele-Ostrovel – Houses nos 10 and 11. This difference seems to indicate either that the containers used in the “sanctuary” were removed before its destruction or that in the “sanctuary” containers were not present on a permanent basis, but were rather brought on the occasion of certain events and removed afterwards.

Anyway, among the containers found in the sanctuary there are vessels that can contain substances, stand-vessels, and a lid. The first category includes closed shapes such as vessels of large sizes, with nearly 2 cm thick walls, burnished inside and outside, decorated with grooved and excised motifs¹⁷ (**Fig. 19: 1, 3**). As

¹⁴ DUMITRESCU 1970, p. 10.

¹⁵ DUMITRESCU 1970, p. 10, 14-18.

¹⁶ DUMITRESCU 1970, p. 18 and 20.

¹⁷ DUMITRESCU 1968, p. 38, 39-40, 60.

open shapes, in the first category are included: a large size vessel with burnished exterior and interior surface, decorated with grooved and excised motifs (**Fig. 19: 2**); a dish of 17.3 cm in diameter, with burnished exterior surface and the inside painted with white spirals on red-brown background (**Fig. 20: 1**); a dish of 40 cm diameter, with very well smoothed exterior and interior surface (**Fig. 20: 2**); a bowl of 25 cm diameter, smoothed on exterior and interior (**Fig. 20: 3**); and a leg fragment from a large size vessel, of 42 cm diameter, burnished and painted in white and brown on red background (**Fig. 21: 1**). The field notes from 1968 also mention "a fragment of a dish with horizontal channellings",¹⁸ not yet identified in the storerooms. The second category is represented by an undecorated fragment from a stand-vessel of 40 cm diameter (**Fig. 22: 1**), and a painted vessel with three holes in the upper part (**Fig. 22: 2**). The lid has a diameter of 14.6-16 cm and burnished exterior surface (**Fig. 21: 2**).

A particular case is represented by a complete plate, of small sizes, burnished and painted with white on the inside, which was sealed with a piece of clay/daub moulded on the vessel's shape, and painted on both sides with white paste (**Fig. 23**).

Last but not least, one must note that after the destruction of the sanctuary vessels were deposited over the rubble: Vl. Dumitrescu mentions the existence of some "groups" or "stack of potsherds" coming from "vessels broken *in situ*".¹⁹

Other objects

Among the objects found in the "sanctuary" there are also mentioned a grinder²⁰ and "a fragment (broken in two) of a copper tool (needle?)".²¹

Interpretations

Based on the architectural elements and some of the inventory elements, in particular the columns, House 12/1968 was classified by Vl. Dumitrescu as a sanctuary dedicated to a "column cult".²² The absence of a similar construction in the contemporary settlement at Radovanu-La Muscalu was considered by him as an argument in favour of interpreting the "sanctuary" at Căscioarele-Ostrovel as a "cult centre" where members belonging to several communities from the same area were gathered for certain magical and religious practices.²³ Following Mircea Eliade, Vl. Dumitrescu claimed that the two columns "would have ensured the communication with the sky".²⁴ According to Vl. Dumitrescu, the column's cult, related to the sky, would have been different from the fertility cult, related to the land and represented by the anthropomorphic female figurines, commonly

¹⁸ DUMITRESCU 1968, p. 39.

¹⁹ DUMITRESCU 1968, p. 59, 64, 74.

²⁰ DUMITRESCU 1970, p. 20.

²¹ DUMITRESCU 1968, p. 45.

²² DUMITRESCU 1970, p. 16.

²³ DUMITRESCU *et alii* 1983, p. 78.

²⁴ Mircea Eliade quoted in DUMITRESCU 1970, p. 21.

occurring in the (E)Neolithic sites from south of Romania, but absent in the three Boian constructions at Căscioarele-Ostrovel.²⁵

In its turn, Marija Gimbutas called House 12/1968 a “temple” or a “community sanctuary” given its central position.²⁶ The columns from Căscioarele were linked by M. Gimbutas with those from the Minoan and Mycenaean palaces, and interpreted as being “a reincarnation of the Great Goddess as the source of life force”.²⁷

Despite the significant changes in the field of archaeology of ritual and religion since the beginning of the 1980s²⁸, thanks to the advent of post-processual approaches, in Romanian archaeology the interpretations of the “sanctuary” at Căscioarele-Ostrovel have remained almost the same as those proposed by Vl. Dumitrescu and M. Gimbutas. In several texts, House 12/1968 was interpreted as a “community sanctuary” with a “ceremony hall” and a “tribute hall”.²⁹ The seven pillars around the large column and the seven rows of painted triangles on the same column were considered evidences of a “sacred numerology”; it is said that seven is a common number in the Neolithic contexts, as well as in the Babylonian mythology or in the Christianity.³⁰ The two columns would represent an “*axis mundi*”, “the link between Earth and Sky, the symbol of sacred link”, the column being present as a sacred symbol, in various forms, in the Neolithic “sanctuaries” from Southeast Europe and Middle East, but also on Akkadian seals or in Egyptian patterns.³¹ The seven pillars separating room 1 from room 2 were also linked to “sacred numerology”.³² House 12/1968 was also included in the category of “constructions with special arrangements, specially dedicated to cult ceremonies, having an inventory distinct from the usual house structures”, and which would “suppose also the existence of certain persons with uncontested authority, at least spiritual, towards the other community members; these persons worshiped such places of worship and performed the magical and religious rituals”.³³ By contrast, in some texts, the same construction was considered an usual house. For example, Eugen Comșa doesn’t include House 12/1968 in the category of “sanctuaries” and considers that the two columns “served probably for supporting the bridge”.³⁴ E. Comșa seems to have based his interpretation on the presence of certain material elements, such as the bench, supposed to be linked to the daily life and not to religious practices.³⁵

²⁵ DUMITRESCU 1970, p. 21.

²⁶ GIMBUTAS 1974, p. 71, 88.

²⁷ GIMBUTAS 1974, p. 80.

²⁸ See, for instance, INSOLL 2011.

²⁹ LAZAROVICI & LAZAROVICI 2006, p. 534-540.

³⁰ LAZAROVICI & LAZAROVICI 2006, p. 539-540; LAZAROVICI & LAZAROVICI 2007, p. 82.

³¹ LAZAROVICI & LAZAROVICI 2006, p. 537-538; LAZAROVICI & LAZAROVICI 2007, p. 83.

³² LAZAROVICI & LAZAROVICI 2006, p. 539.

³³ URSULESCU & TENCARIU 2006, p. 74.

³⁴ COMSA 1987, p. 139.

³⁵ COMȘA 1990, p. 81.

The main issue with these interpretations is the fact that they are not based on the objects' materiality, but are constructed both by analogies with much later historical periods and far geographical areas, as well as by imports from other research fields, such as M. Eliade's papers on the history of religions. In other words, the objects are isolated from their context, are reduced to the status of universal religious symbols, their significance being attached to any context in which similar objects were found. For example, in House 6 in the Precucuteni settlement at Isaiia-Balta Popii a clay column fragment was found, but this was not hollow, it had a slightly truncated cone shape, 11.5 cm in diameter, and a six centimetres thick core, covered by two successive clay layers; despite the morphologic difference with the columns from Căscioarele, the only interpretation offered is still that of a "link [...] between the Earth and the Sky".³⁶

Sometimes, the manner of interpretation is circular: for example, the grinder, because it was found in a "sanctuary", was considered "related to the sacred grinding, an operation connected to the tribute of grain crops, to the fertility cult within the large range of agricultural tributes practiced in sanctuaries",³⁷ as if the grinding from constructions that are not "sanctuaries" would not have a sacred meaning; the columns are raised as an argument to define House 12/1968 as a "sanctuary" dedicated to the "column cult" but, at the same time, this definition determines the grinder's interpretation as being linked to the "sacred grinding".

All the aforementioned interpretations are influenced by a modernist thinking that separates the sacred from the profane, as they suggest that House 12/1968 was either used as a "sanctuary" (*i.e.* a building dedicated exclusively to religious practices), or it was just an usual house. Such interpretations underlie on a functionalist research philosophy, according to which the utility objects would reflect household activities, while the objects which do not fall within this sphere would reflect religious activities. It is not taken into consideration that religion may structure all aspects of life.³⁸ Religious ceremonies may be performed not only in "sanctuaries", but also in "ordinary" houses.³⁹ In the case of Căscioarele, the micro-morphological data about the floors would have been extremely important so as to determine the possible actions that took place inside the houses, but in the 1960s such analyses were not included in the Romanian archaeological practice. For example, in the tell-site of Çatalhöyük (Turkey), well-known for the Neolithic "sanctuaries" dug by James Mellaart in 1960s, the micro-morphological analyses performed within the new researches showed that even the "domestic" houses with the dirtiest floors could contain objects that seem to be intentional deposits of foundation or abandonment,⁴⁰ and that all the houses, irrespective of their symbolic load, were also used as domestic houses.⁴¹

The central position of House 12/1968 cannot be considered an indicator of the construction's special status as long as the tell's surrounding area could not be

³⁶ URSULESCU & TENCARIU 2006, p. 69.

³⁷ LAZAROVICI & LAZAROVICI 2006, p. 540-541.

³⁸ INSOLL 2004.

³⁹ See LICHTER 2014.

⁴⁰ HODDER 2010, p. 16.

⁴¹ HODDER & PELS 2010, p. 163.

investigated; therefore, as resulted from the investigations carried out in other tells from Southeast Europe, such as Pietrele-Măgura Gorgana⁴² or Polgár-Csőszhalom⁴³, it is possible that the anthropogenic deposits exceed the mound's limits. Nor the sizes are an argument: the other Boian constructions investigated at Căscioarele-Ostrovel (Houses nos 10 and 11) have also large sizes.

Moreover, painting the interior of the constructions is a regular practice in the (E)Neolithic of Southeast Europe.⁴⁴ A salient example is that of certain constructions at Ovčarovo, re-plastered not less than 47 times.⁴⁵ Constructions with painted walls and decorated benches are found also in other Boian-Gumelnița sites. For example, House 2 from the 3rd level from Radovanu-La Muscalu (with a bench and an oven) had the walls painted initially in dark red, but after a while the walls were plastered again, painted in red, and over the red background white geometrical motifs or spirals were drawn⁴⁶; in a surface construction in the tell-site of Petru Rareș there was a bench renewed twice: it was initially covered in red and painted with white geometrical motifs, and further redecorated in the same manner, but with different motifs.⁴⁷

Neither can the internal division of House 12/1968 – in particular the distinction between the painted room, which contained the columns, and the unpainted room – be considered an argument for the purpose of interpreting the construction as a “sanctuary”. The difference between the two areas may be typical also for a regular residential house. An ethnographic example that urges caution regarding the definition of House 12/1968 as a “sanctuary” based on the difference between the two rooms is that of Sámi houses of Norway. The interior space of Sámi houses was divided into two parts – the front part and back part located beyond the hearth, called *baossu*, which was considered sacred and where sacred objects and hunting weapons were deposited;⁴⁸ according to the archaeological and ethnological data, the limit between the two areas was marked by a string of whale bones, by two wooden logs or by two parallel rows of stones.⁴⁹

Another problematic aspect is that the interpretations regarding the “sanctuary” at Căscioarele-Ostrovel seem to explain with certainty all objects found in a way which implies that the archaeologists have almost fully understood the intentions, motivations and way of thinking of those prehistoric people. The same false clarity is found also in the reconstructions of (E)Neolithic “sanctuaries” and houses exposed in Romanian museums of archaeology (**Figs. 24-25**): unrealistic tidiness; objects always complete/restored; functional illustration of activities (sleeping, cooking, weaving, hunting, praying, etc.) with the help of arrangements and the objects included; all become forms of ordering

⁴² E.g. HANSEN 2015.

⁴³ E.g. RACZKY & SEBŐK 2014.

⁴⁴ LICHTER 1993, p. 48-49; LICHTER 2014.

⁴⁵ TODOROVA 1978, p. 52.

⁴⁶ COMȘA 1990, p. 81.

⁴⁷ COMȘA 1974, p. 158.

⁴⁸ MYRVOLL 2011, p. 88.

⁴⁹ MYRVOLL 2011, p. 84-87, 88.

and domestication of the past. Such interpretations and expositions contrast with the disorder of (E)Neolithic ruins, with the fragmentary and even distorted state of the materials, with the totally "foreign" appearance of some objects and with the subjective and objective limits of archaeological research. Such interpretations and exhibitions are totalitarian in spirit as they imply that the universe of (E)Neolithic people can be fully integrated into our conceptual schemes.⁵⁰

Epilogue: on containers, containment, and circulation of substances

Within the narratives regarding the Boian "sanctuary" at Căscioarele-Ostrovel and the existence of a so-called "cult column", the architectural elements and objects were treated as passive, useful only to determine the function of the building. Their roles and meanings were subsumed to the special attention given to the columns and, therefore, to their privileged interpretation. In contrast with these essentialist and abstract narratives, I propose to move beyond the meta-narratives about the "spiritual life" of (E)Neolithic communities and to turn to the objects themselves.

First, it is important to take into account the observation that the columns had no architectural role. Also, the fact that no charcoal had been found inside them indicates that the columns had been deliberately modelled to be hollow. From this perspective, the hollow columns can be linked to a certain category of clay containers, namely that of the tube-vessels, such as the vessel from Măgura Gumelnița (Oltenița), which is crossed by a tube⁵¹ (Fig. 26: 1), or the container with several inlets from Sava⁵² (Fig. 26: 2). The role of tube-vessels seems to be that of directing the substances, as suggested by the existence of the so-called "communicating vessels"⁵³ (Fig. 27): the tubes allow the circulation of substances from one place to another. Starting from the analogy with the tube-vessels, the two columns may be considered tubes indicating a certain route, instruments for the substances circulation. If we accept such an interpretation, then, the columns should be related with other types of containers found in the "sanctuary". The closed-shaped vessels would have been used for keeping some substances, while the open-shaped vessels would have been involved in the distribution and consumption of substances. The large size of some containers seems to suggest collective actions. In short, in House 12/1968, different types of containers, from storage vessels, to dishes and bowls, to columns, played their role in the circulation of material and immaterial substances.

Secondly, taken together, the small painted plate and the daub "lid" found in the "sanctuary" form a single object. By associating the vessel with the painted daub, the object suggests the existence of a relation between containers and constructions. Furthermore, the relation between the "sanctuary" and containers is also illustrated by the use of the same colours on some vessels, columns, walls, the bench and on two of the house models with animals heads. It is not excluded

⁵⁰ See THOMAS 2004.

⁵¹ ȘERBĂNESCU, no year, no. 40.

⁵² TODOROVA *et alii* 1981, p. 194, no. 216.

⁵³ VOINEA 2005; see also BOGHIAN 2012 for Cucuteni examples.

that the containers (or some of them) and the constructions were perceived in an analogous manner. In support of this interpretation are the Gumelnița lids with house-shaped handles, such as the ones from Pietrele-Măgura Gorgana tell⁵⁴ (Fig. 28: 1), or the *kerpiç*-like vessel found in House 1 in the Precucuteni site at Isaiia-Balta Popii, which contained representations of people and miniature furniture⁵⁵ (Fig. 28: 2). One could further recall the house-vessels found in the Cucuteni site at Ghelăiești-Nedeia, in which several figurines were deposited;⁵⁶ the house-vessel has a hollow pedestal which communicates with the interior (Fig. 28: 3). At the same time, the filling of the painted plate with the so-called daub “lid” could be interpreted as an act of incorporating the container in the “sanctuary’s” structure. Similarly, re-plastering and redecorating the walls and the large column could be also interpreted as an act of incorporation – the old decoration is becoming contained in the renewed object. Thus, the House 12/1968 would have been understood as a container which protects other containers and their related substances.

In conclusion, I believe that instead of reflecting the function of the building, the architectural elements and objects related to House 12/1968 are rather one of the many and diverse material actors in a world structured by the principles of container, containment, and circulation of substances.*

REFERENCES

- BAILEY 2000 – D.W. Bailey, *Balkan prehistory: exclusion, incorporation and identity*, London and New York, 2000.
- BOGHIAN 2012 – D. D. Boghian, *Unele observații cu privire la vasele cucuteniene de tip kernos/pseudo-kernos*, *Memoria Antiquitatis* 28 (2012), p. 39-63.
- CHAPMAN 2005 – J. Chapman, *Contextual archaeology and burnt house assemblages: categorical analysis of pottery from Late Neolithic Căscioarele, Romania*, in: *In honorem Silvia Marinescu-Bîlcu – 70 de ani*, *Cultură și Civilizație la Dunărea de Jos* 22 (2005), p. 377-382.
- CUCOȘ 1993 – Șt. Cucuș, *Complexele rituale cucuteniene de la Ghelăiești, jud. Neamț*, *SCIVA* 44 (1993), 1, p. 59-80.
- DUMITRESCU 1968 – Vl. Dumitrescu, *Căscioarele. A șaptea campanie de cercetări*. 1968, field notes.
- DUMITRESCU 1970 – Vl. Dumitrescu, *Édifice destiné au culte découvert dans la couche Boian-Spanțov de la station-tell de Căscioarele*, *Dacia N.S.* 14 (1970), p. 5-24.
- DUMITRESCU *et alii* 1983 – Vl. Dumitrescu, Al. Bolomey & F. Mogoșanu, *Esquisse d'une préhistoire de la Roumanie jusqu'à la fin de l'âge du bronze*, București, 1983.

⁵⁴ E.g. HANSEN *et alii* 2005, S. 359, Abb.20/7.

⁵⁵ URSULESCU & TENCARIU 2006, Pl. V.

⁵⁶ CUCOȘ 1993.

* I would like to express my gratitude to the following persons: Silvia Marinescu-Bîlcu, for making available the material and documentations, for her permanent support and discussions; Argeș Epure, Cornelia Lungu, Tiberiu Vasilescu and Valentina Voinea, for helping with the illustration, but also for discussions; Florin Rădulescu, for his support in the documentation of one of the vessels in his custody; Alexandra Ion, Sorin Oanță-Marghitu and Nona Palincaș, for comments; Valentina Albu, for the English translation.

GIMBUTAS 1974 – M. Gimbutas, *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe*, London, 1974.

HANSEN 2015 – S. Hansen, *Pietrele – a lakeside settlement 5200-4250 BC*, in: S. Hansen, P. Raczky, A. Anders, A. Reingruber (eds.), *Neolithic and Copper Age between the Carpathians and the Aegean Sea. Chronologies and technologies from the 6th to 4th millennium BC*, International Workshop Budapest 2012, *Archäologie in Eurasien* 31 (2015), Bonn, p. 273-293.

HANSEN *et alii* 2005 – S. Hansen, Al. Dragoman, A. Reingruber, I. Gatsov, J. Görzdorf, P. Nedelcheva, S. Oanță-Marghitu & B. Song *Der kupferzeitliche Siedlungshügel Pietrele an der Unteren Donau. Bericht über die Ausgrabungen im Sommer 2004*, *Eurasia Antiqua* 11 (2005), p. 341-393.

HODDER 2010 – I. Hodder, *Probing religion at Çatalhöyük: an interdisciplinary experiment*, in: I. Hodder (ed.), *Religion in the emergence of civilization: Çatalhöyük as a case study*, Cambridge – New York – Melbourne *et aliae*, 2010, p. 1-31.

HODDER & PELS 2010 – I. Hodder & P. Pels, *History houses: a new interpretation of architectural elaboration at Çatalhöyük*, in: I. Hodder (ed.), *Religion in the emergence of civilization: Çatalhöyük as a case study*, Cambridge – New York – Melbourne *et aliae*, 2010, p. 163-186.

INSOLL 2004 – T. Insoll, *Archaeology, ritual, religion*, London, 2004.

INSOLL 2011 – T. Insoll (ed.), *Oxford handbook of the archaeology of ritual and religion*, Oxford, 2011.

LAZAROVICI & LAZAROVICI 2006 – C. M. Lazarovici & Gh. Lazarovici, *Arhitectura neoliticului și epocii cuprului în România I. Neoliticul*, Iași, 2006.

LAZAROVICI & LAZAROVICI 2007 – Gh. Lazarovici & C.-M. Lazarovici, *Despre construcțiile de cult neo-eneolitice din sud-estul Europei: tehnici de construire, organizare spațială, scurte interpretări. Partea I-a*, in: N. Ursulescu (coord.), *Dimensiunea europeană a civilizației eneolitice est-carpatică*, Iași, 2007, p. 63-102.

LICHTER 1993 – C. Lichter, *Untersuchungen zu den Bauten des südosteuropäischen Neolithikums und Chalkolithikums*, *Internationale Archäologie* 18 (1993), Buch am Erlbach.

LICHTER 2014 – C. Lichter, "Temples" in the Neolithic and Copper Age in Southeast Europe?, *Documenta Praehistorica* 41 (2014), p. 119-136.

MONAH 1997 – D. Monah, *Plastica antropomorfă a culturii Cucuteni-Tripolie*, *Bibliotheca Memoriae Antiquitatis* 3 (1997), Piatra Neamț.

MONAH 2001 – D. Monah, *Organizarea socială, religia și arta în epoca neo-eneolitică*, in: M. Petrescu-Dîmbovița, A. Vulpe (coord.), *Istoria românilor. Moștenirea timpurilor îndepărtate* (vol. 1), București, 2001, p. 169-209.

MYRVOLL 2011 – E.R. Myrvoll, *Excavation of Iron Age sites*, in: B. Olsen, P. Urbančzyk & C. Amundsen (eds.), *Hybrid spaces. Medieval Finnmark and the archaeology of multi-room houses*, Oslo, 2011, p. 83-92.

RACZKY *et alii* 2014 – P. Raczky & K. Sebők, *The outset of Polgár-Csöszhalom tell and the archaeological context of a special central building*, in: *Arheovest III. In honorem Gheorghe Lazarovici. Interdisciplinaritate în arheologie*, Szeged, 2014, p. 51-100.

REINGRUBER 2015 – A. Reingruber, *Absolute and relative chronologies in the Lower Danube area during the 5th millennium BC*, in: S. Hansen, P. Raczky, A. Anders and A. Reingruber (eds.), *Neolithic and Copper Age between the Carpathians and the Aegean Sea. Chronologies and technologies from the 6th to the 4th millennium BCE*, International Workshop Budapest 2012, *Archäologie in Eurasien* 31 (2015), Bonn, p. 301-324.

ȘERBĂNESCU no date – D. Șerbănescu, *Oltenița. Muzeul civilizației Gumelnița, Oltenița*.

TODOROVA *et alii* 1981 – H. Todorova, M. Tschochadshiew & I. Vaisow, *Katalog*, in: *Jungsteinzeit in Bulgarien (Neolithikum und Äneolithikum)*, Sofia, 1981.

URSULESCU & TENCARIU 2006 – N. Ursulescu & F.A. Tencariu, *Religie și magie la est de Carpați acum 7000 de ani. Tezaurul cu obiecte de cult de la Isaiia*, *Archaeologia Interdisciplinaris* 2 (2006), Iași.

VOINEA 2005 – V. Voinea, *Ceramica complexului cultural Gumelnița–Karanovo VI. Fazele A1 și A2*, Constanța, 2005.

WARNIER 2006 – J.-P. Warnier, *Inside and outside: surfaces and containers*, in: C. Tilley, W. Keane, S. Küchler, M. Rowlands & P. Spyer (eds.), *Handbook of material culture*, Londra – Thousand Oaks – New Delhi, 2006, p. 186-195.

WHITTLE 1996 – A. Whittle, *Europe in the Neolithic: the creation of new worlds*, Cambridge, 1996.

WULLSCHLEGER 2008 – M. Wulschleger, with J. Chamay and F. van der Wielen-van Ommeren (eds.), *Neolithic art in Romania*, Naples, 2008.

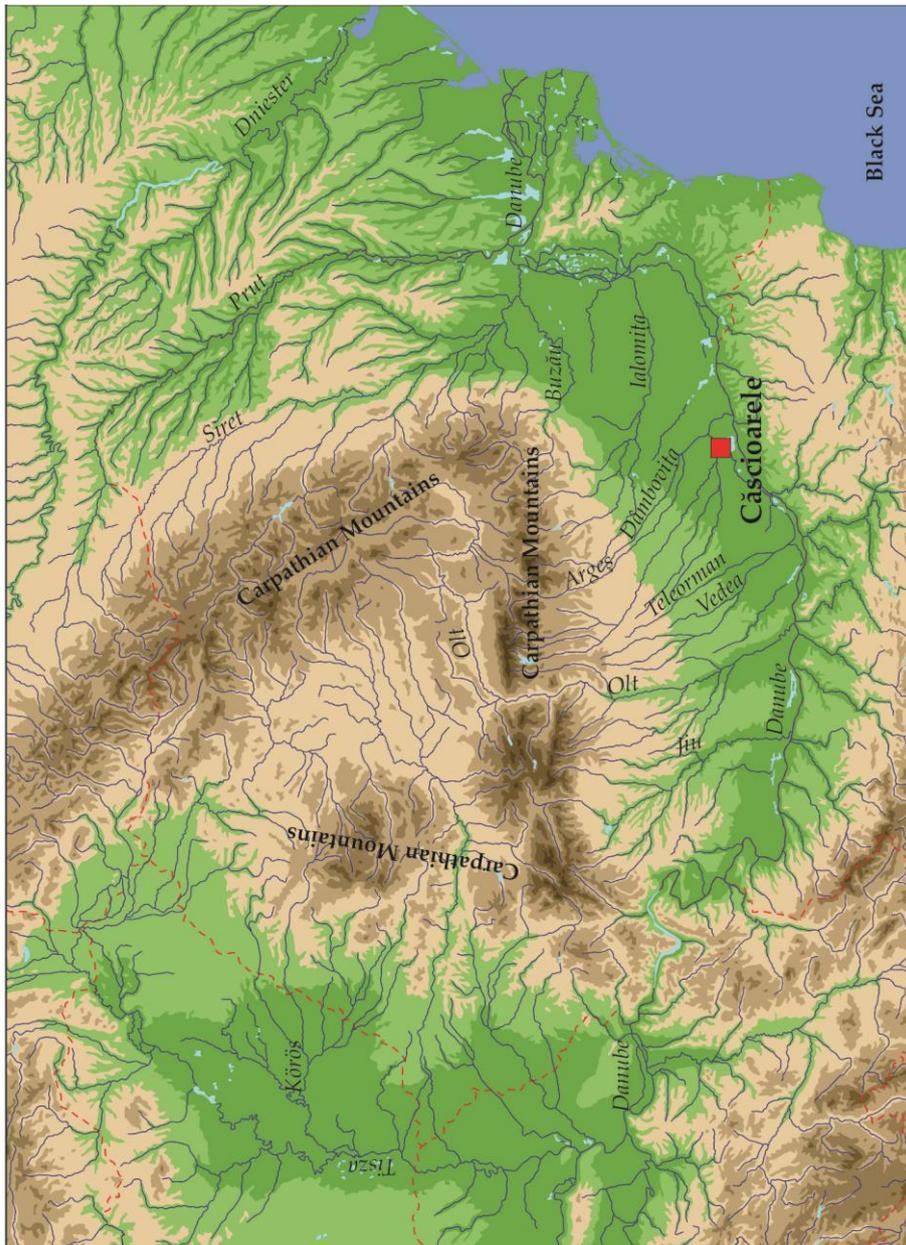


Fig. 1 - Site location.

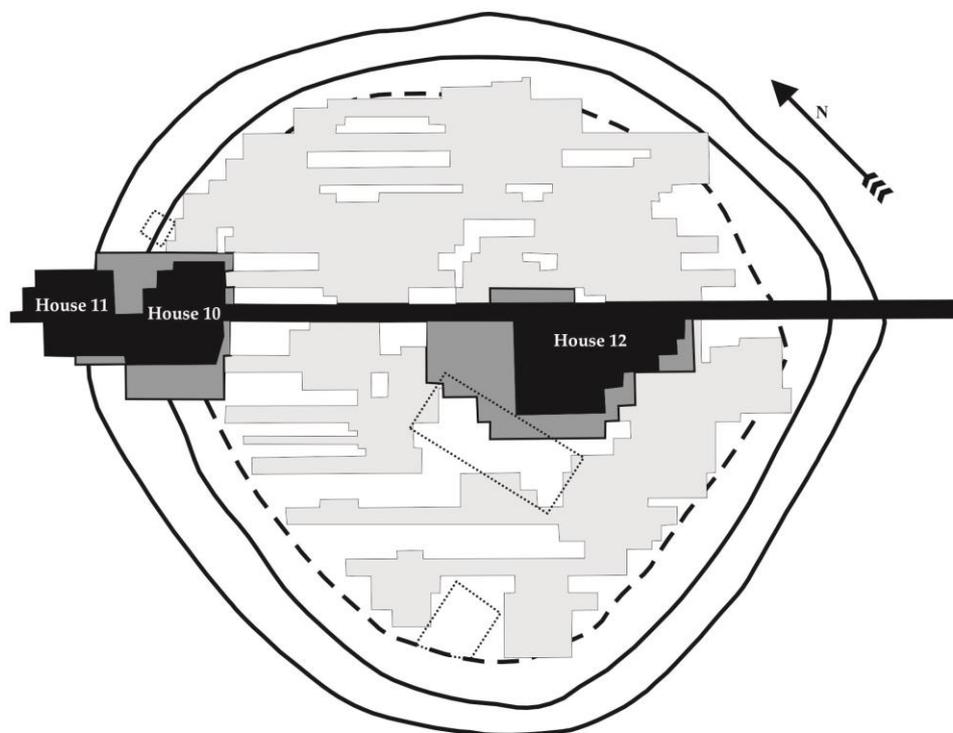


Fig. 2 –Căscioarele-Ostrovel: the excavated trenches with the Boian occupation (marked in black; after Dumitrescu 1970, Fig. 1).

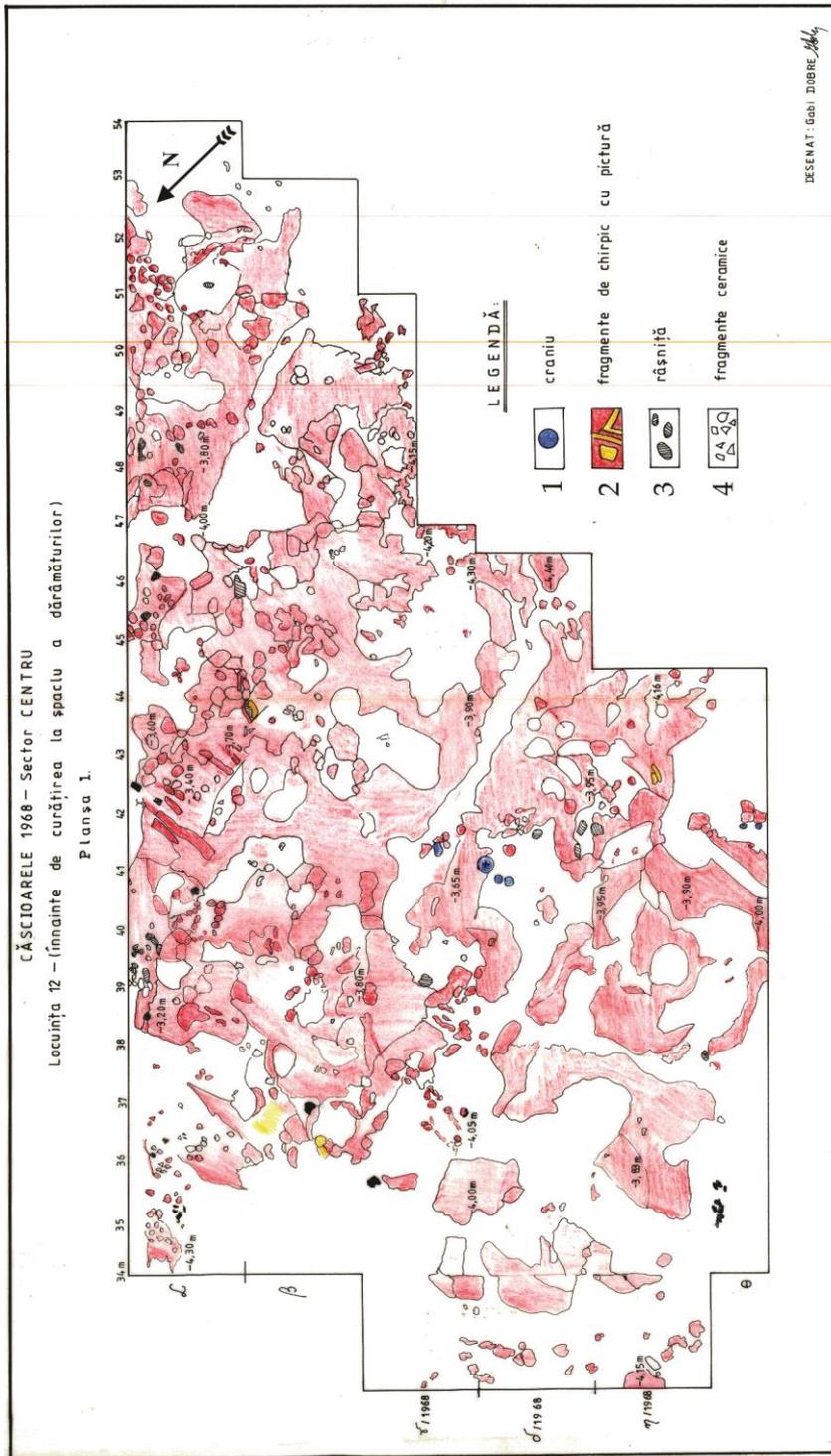


Fig. 3 - House 12/1968 before the cleaning of the destruction level.
(1) Skull; (2) painted daub fragments; (3) grinding stone; (4) sherds.



Fig. 4 - House 12/1968: daub *in situ* (after Dumitrescu 1970, p. 8, Fig. 2/2) .



Fig. 5 - House 12/1968: wall fragment and floor *in situ*.

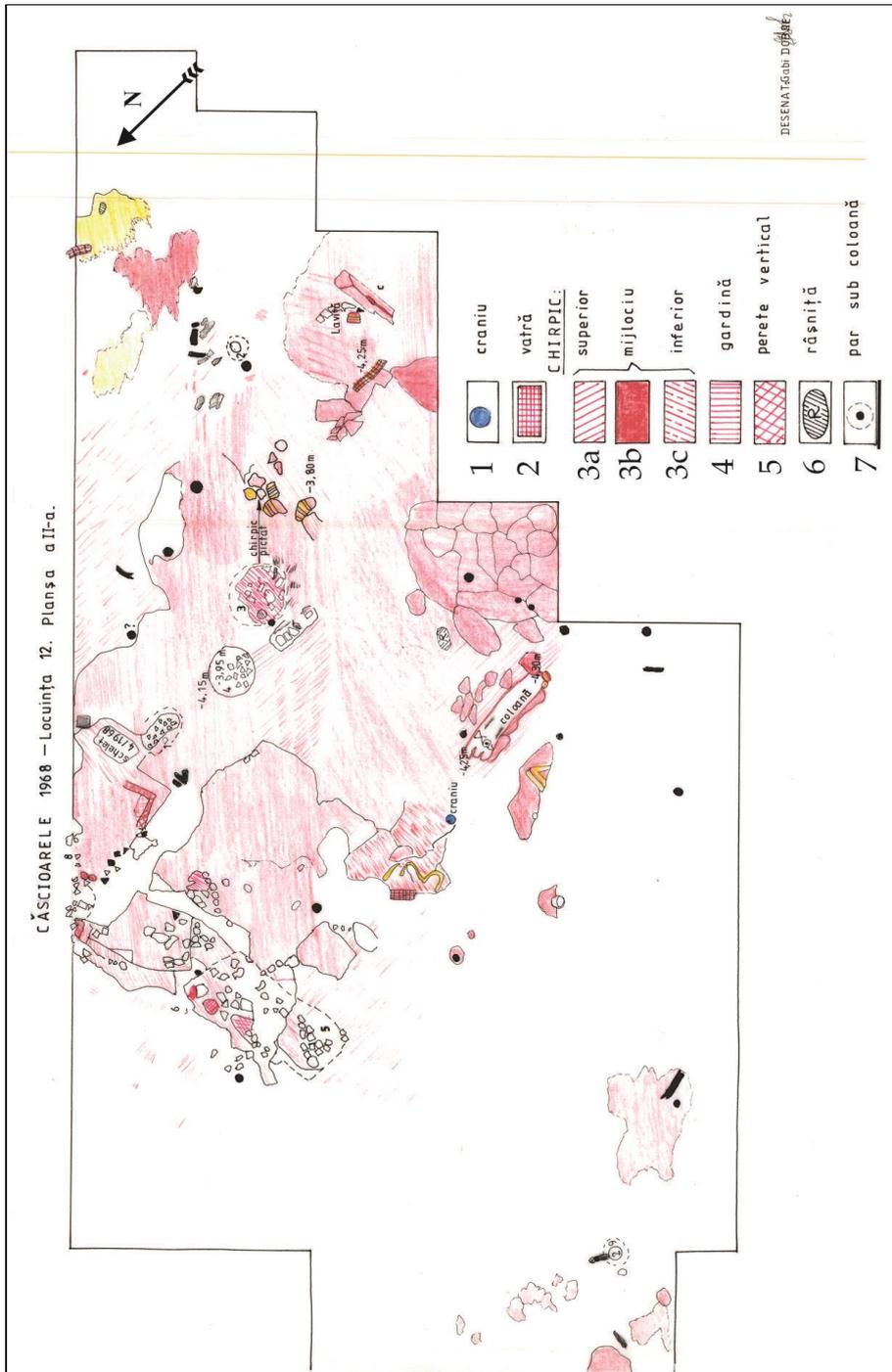


Fig. 6 - House 12/1968: under the destruction level.
 (1) Skull; (2) hearth; (3a) burnt clay - upper layer; (3b) burnt clay - middle layer; (3c) burnt clay - lower layer;
 (4) kerb; (5) vertical wall; (6) grinding stone; (7) post-hole under the column.



Fig. 7 - House 12/1968: painted walls *in situ*.



Fig. 8 – a. House 12/1968: drawings of some painted wall fragments.



Fig. 8 – b. House 12/1968: drawings of some painted wall fragments.

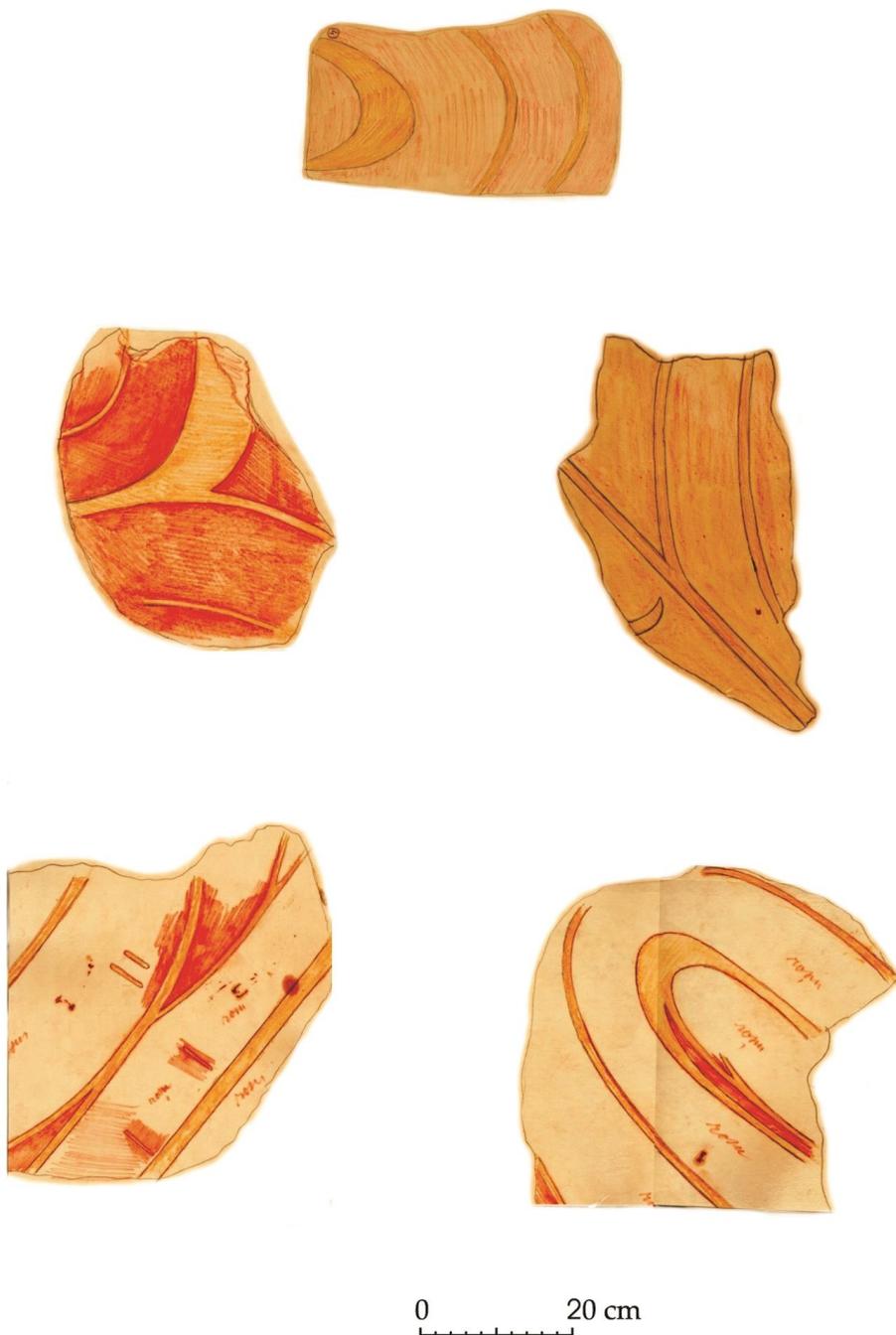


Fig. 8 – c. House 12/1968: drawings of some painted wall fragments.



Fig. 8 – d. House 12/1968: drawings of some painted wall fragments.



Fig. 9 - House 12/1968: decoration layers of a painted wall fragment.

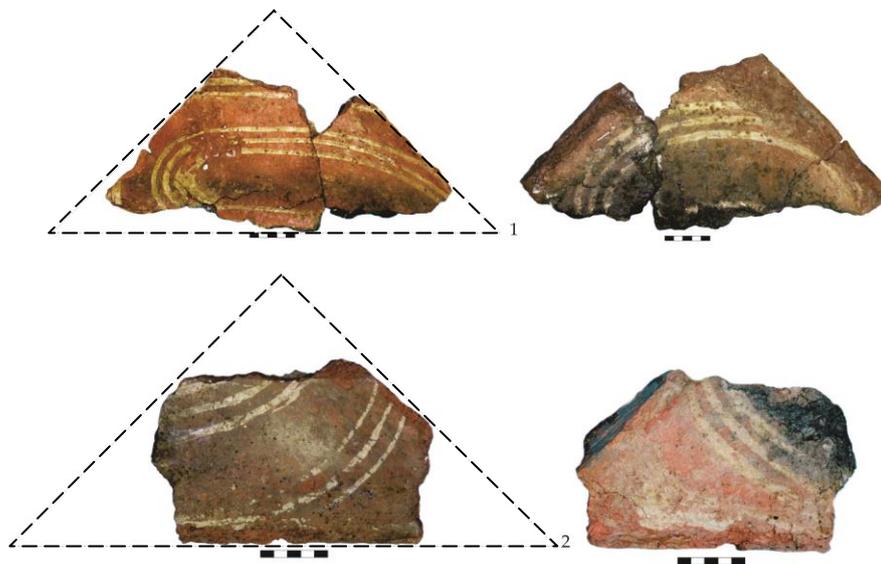


Fig. 10 - House 12/1968: triangles painted on both sides.

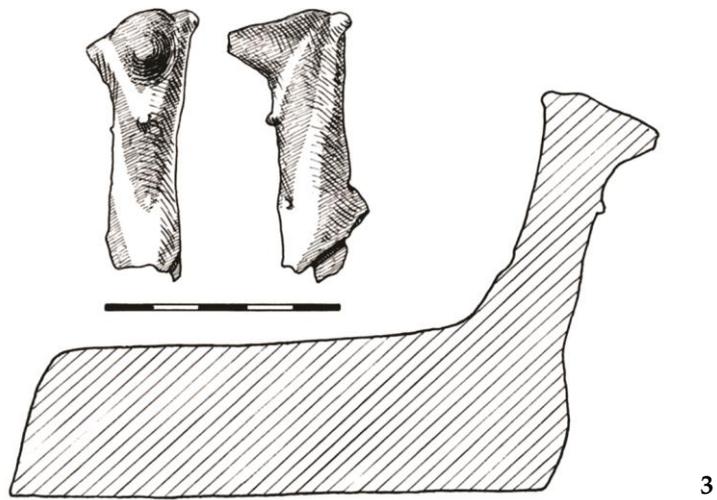
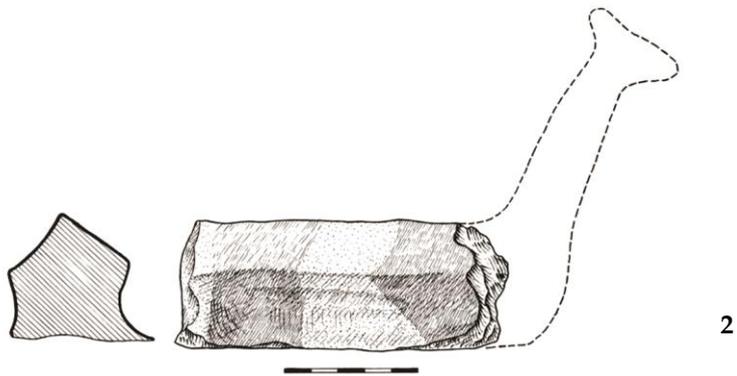
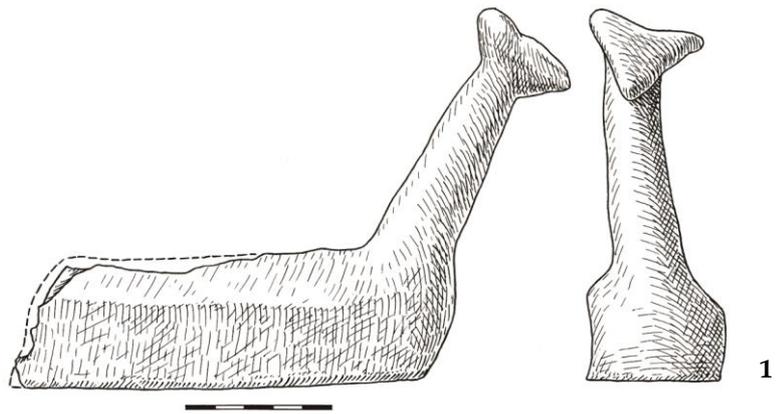


Fig. 11 - House 12/1968: house models with animal heads;
(1) unpainted, (2-3) painted.



Fig. 12 - House 12/1968: grave under the floor (after Dumitrescu 1970, p. 19, Fig. 7/2).

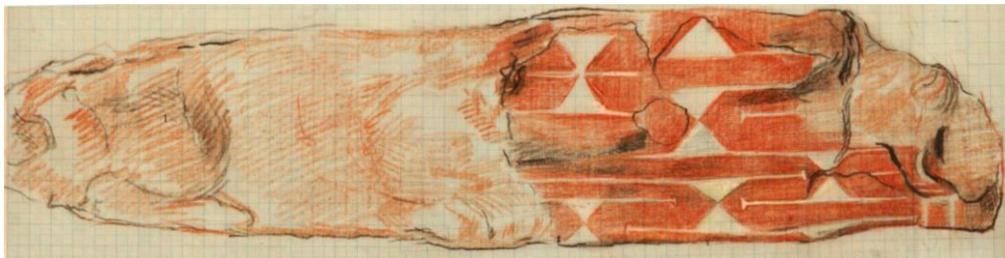


1



2

Fig. 13 - House 12/1968: "medallion"; (1) drawing, (2) photo.



1



2

Fig. 14 - House 12/1968: the large column; (1) drawing, (2) photo.

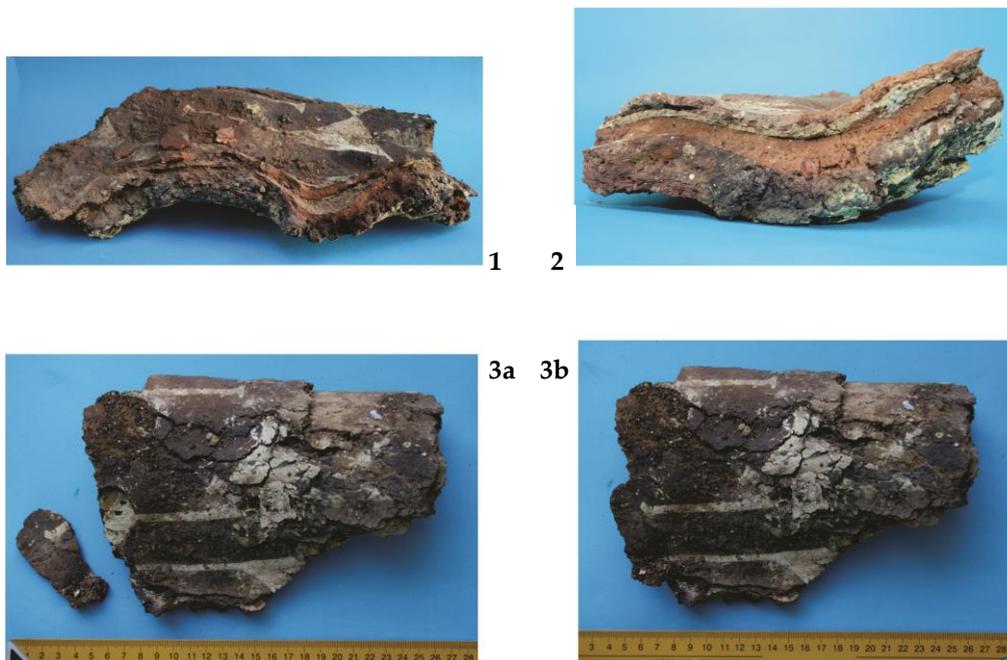


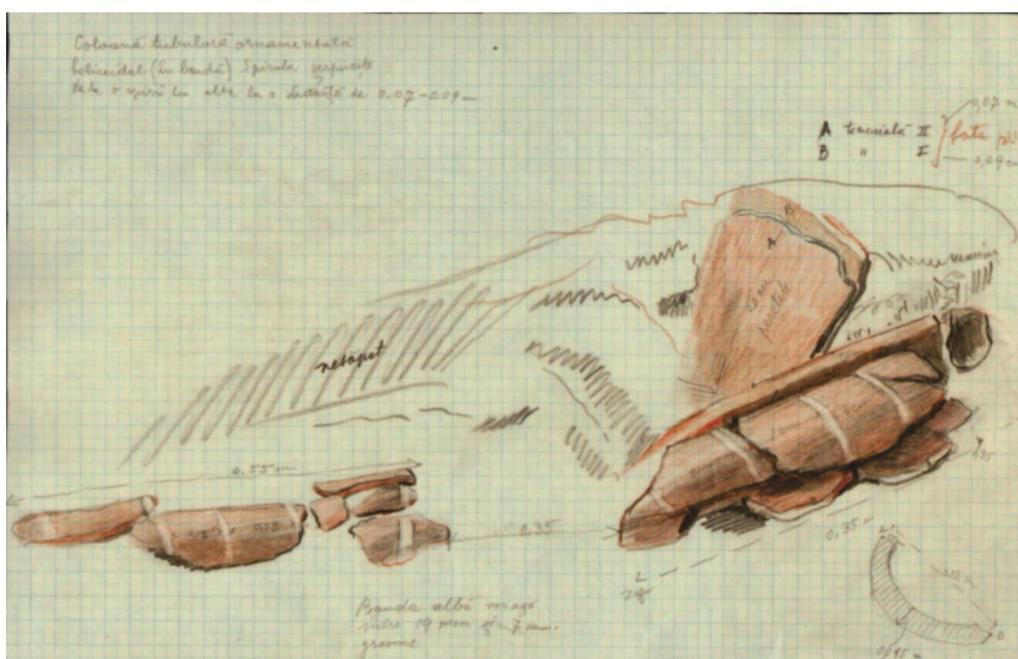
Fig. 15 - House 12/1968: decoration layers of the large column.



Fig. 16 - House 12/1968: (1) the large column (reconstruction in the Lower Danube Museum, Călărași); (2) the small column.



1



2

Fig. 17 - House 12/1968: the small column;
 (1) photo (after Dumitrescu 1970, p. 16, Fig. 6/2), (2) drawing.

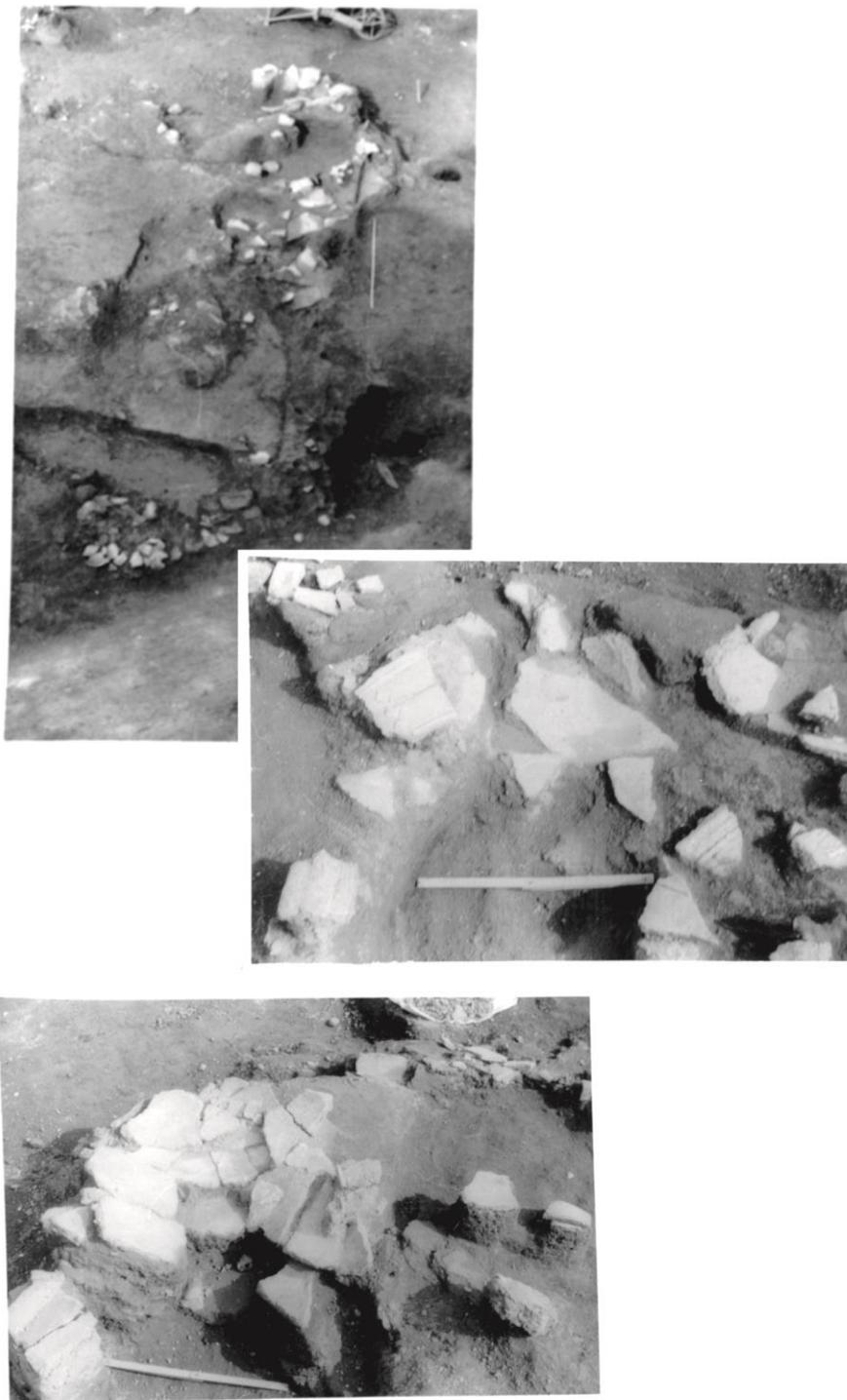


Fig. 18 - House 12/1968: vessel fragments *in situ*.

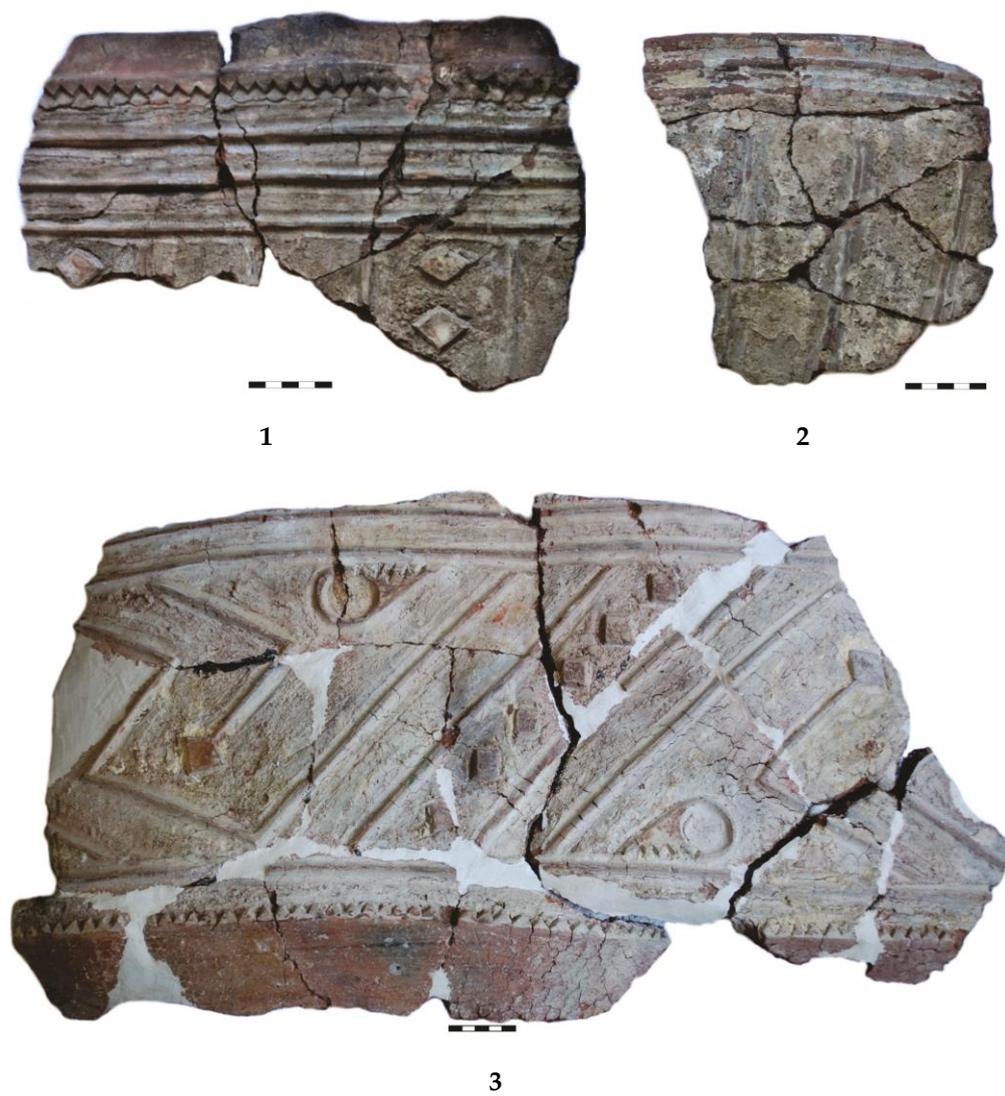


Fig. 19 - House 12/1968: fragments of large size vessels.

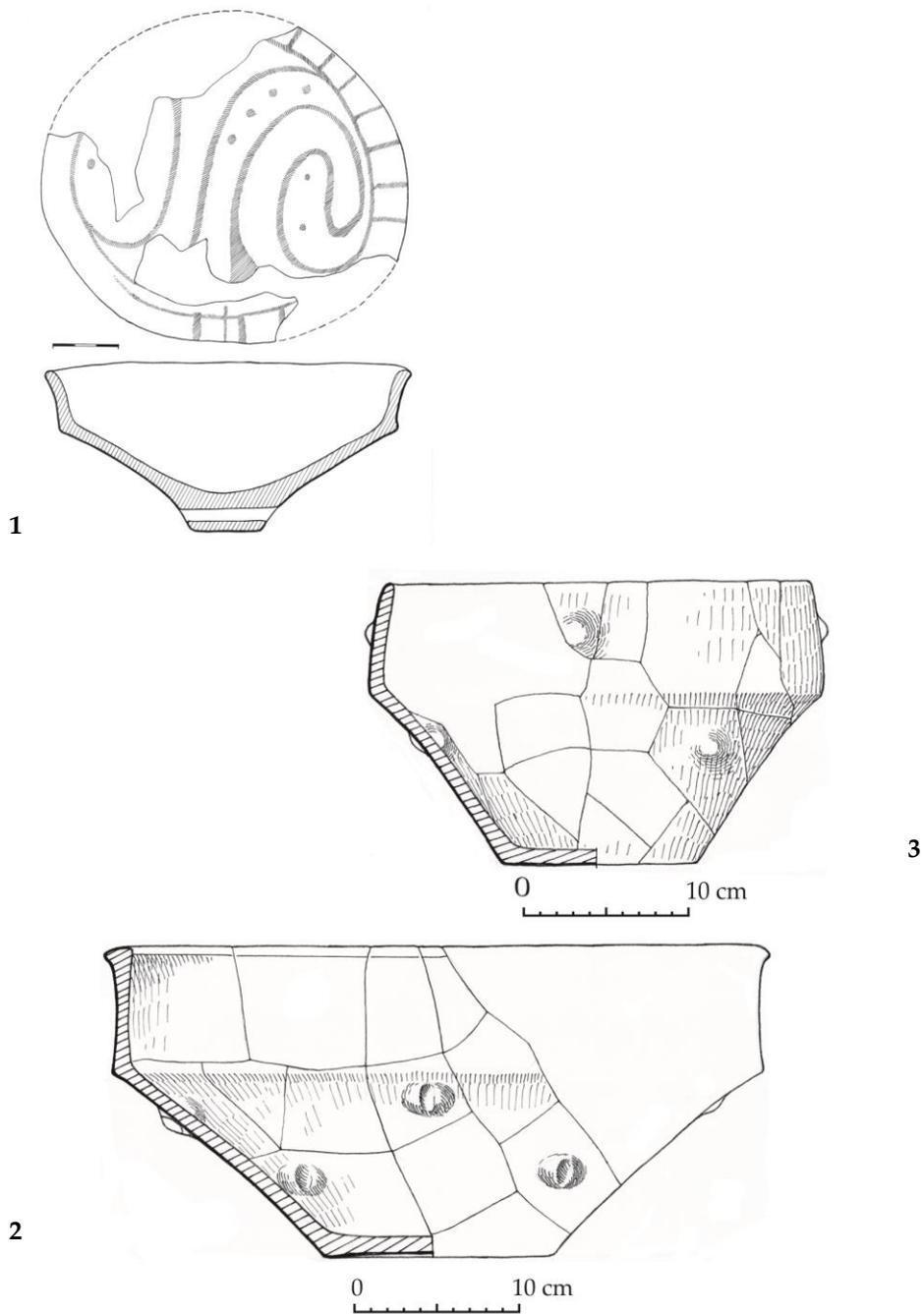


Fig. 20 - House 12/1968: (1, 2) dishes; (3) bowl.

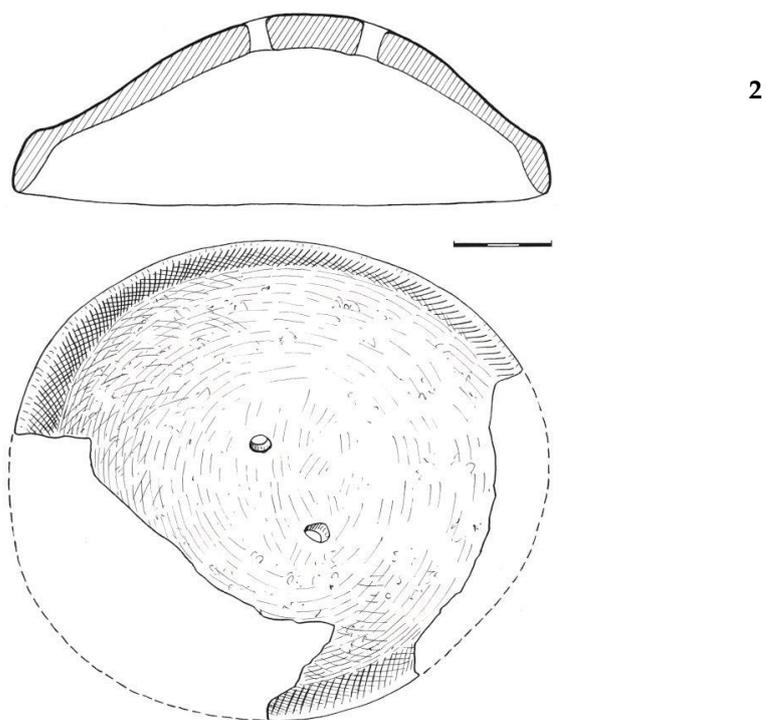
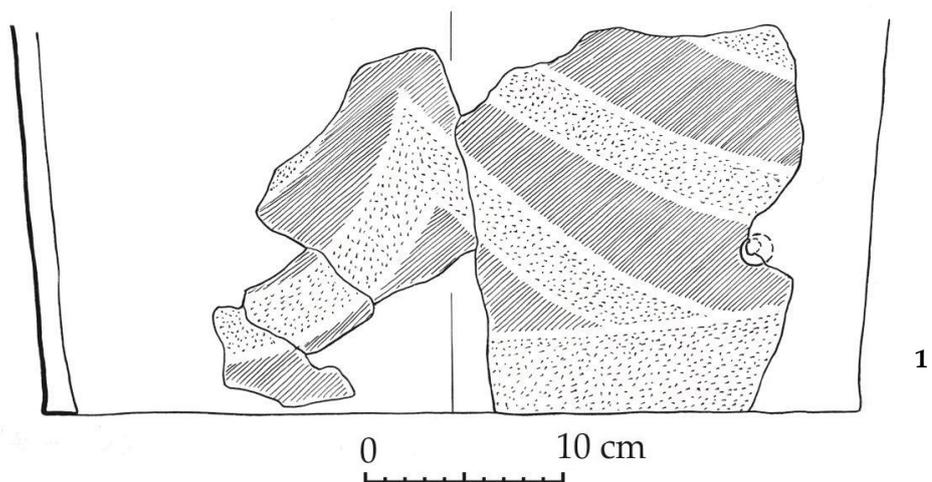


Fig. 21 - House 12/1968: (1) leg fragment; (2) lid.

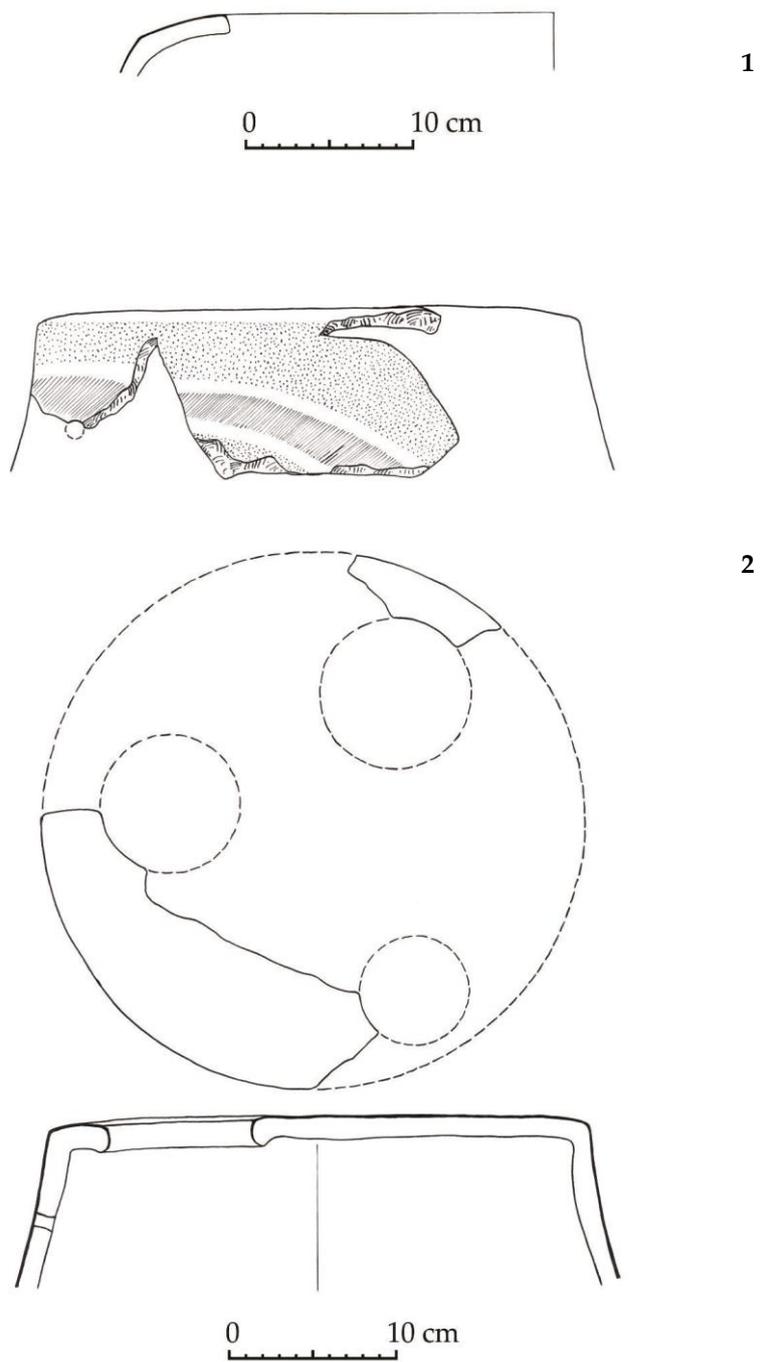


Fig. 22 - House 12/1968: fragments of stand-vessels.



Fig. 23 - House 12/1968: painted plate covered with a daub "lid" painted on both sides.

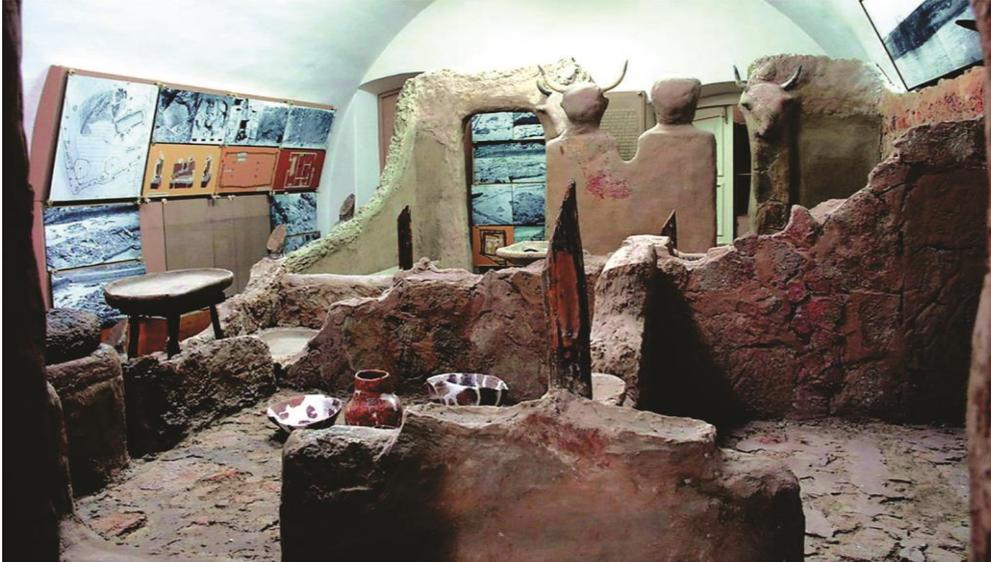


1

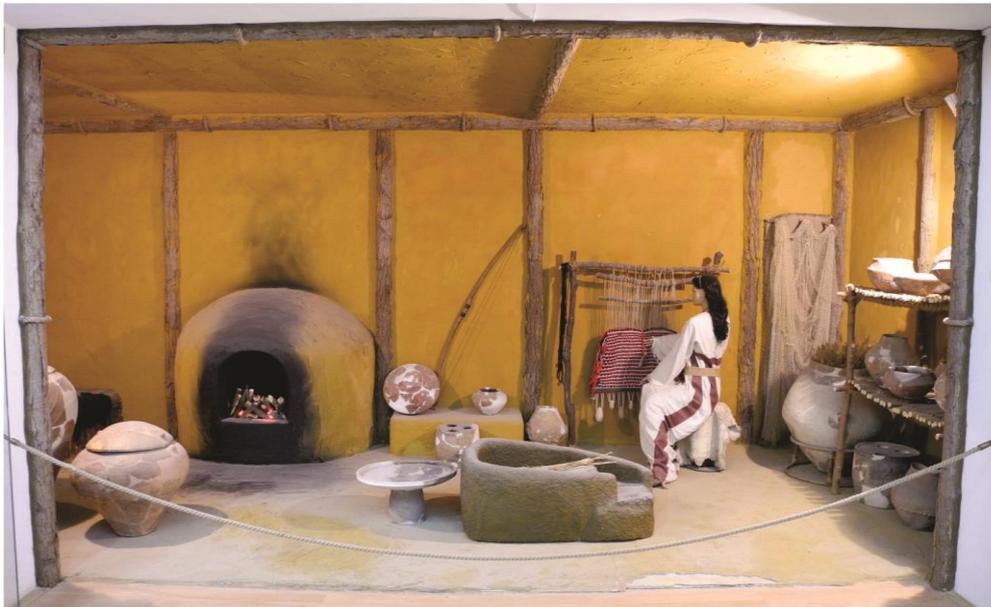


2

Fig. 24 - Cucuteni (1) "sanctuary" and (2) house reconstructed in the History and Archaeology Museum of Piatra Neamț. Photos: the author.



1



2

Fig. 25 - (1) The Neolithic "sanctuary" from Parța reconstructed in the Banat Museum, Timișoara; (2) an Eneolithic house reconstructed in the Museum of National History and Archaeology, Constanța.

Photos: (1) <http://radiotimisoara.ro/2016/02/16/noutate-la-muzeul-banatului-sanctuarul-neolitic-de-la-parta-poate-fi-vizitat-insa-numai-la-cerere/>; (2) the author.



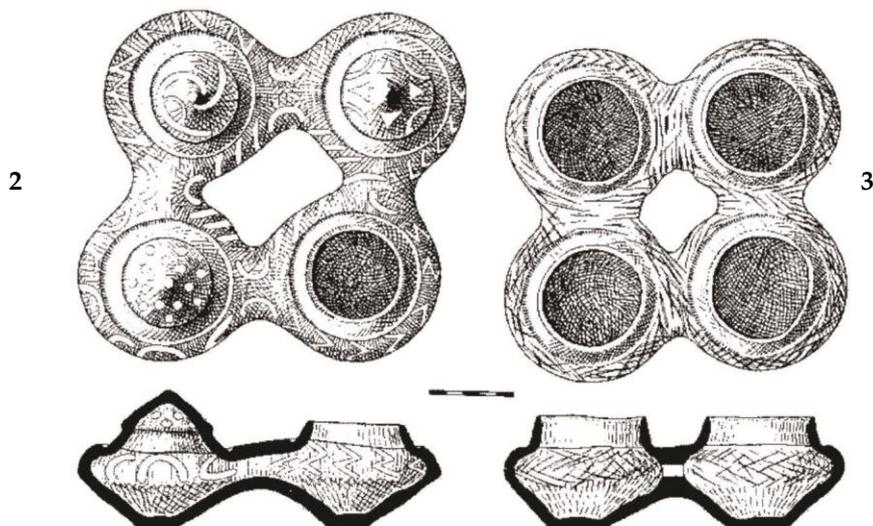
1

2

Fig. 26 - Vessels with tubes from (1) Oltenița (after Șerbănescu, no year, no. 40) and (2) Sava (after Todorova *et alii* 1981, p. 194, no. 216).



1



2

3

Fig. 27 - "Communicating vessels" from (1) Vitănești (after Wullschleger 2008, p. 107, no. 55) and (2, 3) Gumelnița (after Voinea 2005, Pl. 96).



1



2



3

Fig. 28 - Relations between pots and houses: (1) Gumelnița lid with house-shaped handle from Pietrele-Măgura Gorgana tell (after Hansen *et alii* 2005, 359, Abb. 20/7); (2) Cucuteni *kerpiç*-like vessel from Isaiia-Balta Popii (after Ursulescu and Tencariu 2006, Pl. V); (3) Cucuteni house-shaped vessel from Ghelăiești-Nedeia (after Wullschleger 2008, 91, no. 38).