

# MOMENTS IN THE BIOGRAPHY OF THE NEOLITHIC VESSELS OF VĂDASTRA TRADITION AT THE LOWER DANUBE<sup>1</sup>

Radu-Alexandru DRAGOMAN<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> "Vasile Pârvan" Institute of Archaeology, Romanian Academy, Bucharest; e-mail: al\_dragoman@yahoo.com

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**Abstract:** With few exceptions, many earlier and more recent approaches to Neolithic ceramics in Romania have unfortunately been informed by the modernist dichotomies between the sacred and the profane, the functional and the symbolic, something that became the subject of much criticism in post-processual archaeologies as of the 1980s. In contrast with a modernist perspective, in this text I have chosen to apply a biographical approach, which, in my opinion, has the merit of unifying all of the aspects – technological, functional, symbolic, etc. – that until now have been treated distinctly. The subject of this article is a series of Neolithic vessels attributed to the Vădastra tradition of southern Romania and north-western Bulgaria dated to ca. 5200–4900 BC. With the exception of one vessel from Slatina, two vessels from Hotărani and two so-called Vădastra-type "imports" from Hungary, all of the vessels discussed here originate from the Vădastra – Măgura Fetelor/Dealul Cișmelei settlement located in southern Oltenia, Romania. While Neolithic ceramics from Vădastra as a whole have already been the subject of a previous biographical study, on this occasion the analysis takes place at the level of the individual objects. While in no way claiming to have provided complete biographies or to have exhausted the repertoire of existing and possible biographies, the examples discussed here are illustrative of a series of key moments in the biography of the Vădastra vessels and thus help us achieve a better understanding of the relationships between prehistoric and modern peoples, on the one hand, and Neolithic vessels, on the other.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** Recipiente, neolitic, tradiția Vădastra, biografii, Vădastra – Măgura Fetelor/Dealul Cișmelei, Hotărani, România, Ungaria

**Rezumat:** Cu puține excepții, multe dintre demersurile mai vechi sau mai noi dedicate ceramicii neolitice din România sunt structurate de dihotomiile moderniste dintre sacru și profan, funcțional și simbolic, îndelung criticate în arheologiile postprocesualiste începând cu anii 1980. În opoziție cu o perspectivă modernistă, în textul de față am adoptat un demers biografic, care, în opinia mea, are meritul de a unifica toate aspectele păstrate până acum separate – tehnologic, funcțional, simbolic etc. Subiectul acestui articol îl constituie o serie de recipiente neolitice atribuite tradiției Vădastra, răspândită în sudul României și nord-vestul Bulgariei și datată cca 5200–4900 BC. Exceptând un vas de la Slatina, două vase de la Hotărani și două așa-zise "importuri" de tip Vădastra din Ungaria, toate recipientele provin din așezarea de la Vădastra-Măgura Fetelor/Dealul Cișmelei din sudul Olteniei, România. Ceramica neolitică de la Vădastra în ansamblul ei a mai fost obiectul unei abordări biografice, însă, de data aceasta, nivelul analizei este cel al obiectului individual. Exemplele alese nu au cătuși de puțin pretenția de a prezenta biografii complete și nici de a epuiza repertoriul de biografii existente sau posibile, dar sunt ilustrative pentru o serie de momente importante din biografia recipientelor Vădastra și contribuie la o mai bună înțelegere a relației dintre oamenii preistorici și cei moderni, pe de o parte, și vasele neolitice, pe de altă parte.

## INTRODUCTION: A BIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH

For a long time, beginning with the founding of modern Romanian archaeology and continuing even today, the study of Neolithic ceramics in Romania has been dominated by a culture-historical research philosophy that sought to classify ceramic material in cultural and chronological terms, an endeavour in which the vessels and their decoration became reduced to the status of "directing fossils". An exception to this was given by technological studies (Ellis 1984; Gâță, Mateescu 1987), which grew in number following the socio-political changes that occurred in Romania in 1989 (Gâță, Mateescu 1992a; 1992b; 1999–2001; Gâță, Dragoman 2004–2005; Spataro 2006; 2008; 2013; Opreș et alii 2017), a trend in which an important contribution was also made by international research projects (van As et alii 2004; 2005; 2006; Burens et alii 2010; Thissen 2012; 2013; 2014). After 1989, the culture-

historical approach was surpassed not only in terms of the attention archaeologists began to pay to technological aspects, but also by the adoption of themes that had previously been ignored, such as the functionality of the vessels in question (e.g. Ignat et alii 2012; 2013). However, with few exceptions (e.g. Dragoman 2009b; 2013), earlier and more recent endeavours have unfortunately been informed by the modernist dichotomies between the sacred and the profane, the functional and the symbolic, something that became the subject of much criticism in post-processual archaeologies as of the 1980s. Usually the significance of a vessel is reduced to that of its function, while "special" pots and lids are separated from the "ordinary" ceramics; even when symbolic aspects of the pottery are considered, the interpretations are not based on the materiality of the pots themselves and their archaeological contexts, but are ready-made imported from other historical, anthropological or archaeological

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contexts (e.g. Ștefan 2018). In other words, the studies of Neolithic ceramics from Romania display what Colin Richards in 1993 called “a tendency in interpretation towards ideas of ‘common sense’ and ‘practicality’” (Richards 1996, p. 171). As has previously been noted (Dragoman, Oanță-Marghitu 2007; Dragoman 2009a), the danger posed by the use of these modernist dichotomies is that they paint a picture of the prehistoric past in the image of the present, an intellectual act that comprises a form of colonisation of the distant past, a form of symbolic violence – only for, in an example of circular logic, this colonised past later to be used to legitimate the ideologies of the present. In contrast, in this text I have chosen to apply a biographical approach, which, in my opinion, has the merit of unifying all of the aspects – technological, functional, symbolic, etc. – that until now have been treated distinctly.

Starting with the founding article published in 1986 by Igor Kopytoff – in which he suggests that questions similar to those asked of human lives also be asked of objects (Kopytoff 1986) – the biographical approach has already developed a long tradition, within both processual and interpretative archaeologies, and also anthropology (for a short history, see Joy 2009). In this, the archaeologists and anthropologists have focused on a diversity of objects, from bronze deposits (e.g. Fonteijn 2002; Dietrich 2014) to houses (e.g. Thomasson 2004), monuments (e.g. Holtorf 2001–2007) and fragments of monuments (e.g. Hamilakis 1999), as well as on landscapes (e.g. Kolen *et alii* 2015) or foods (e.g. O’Conner 2013), all dating from different historical periods, including the recent and contemporary past (e.g. Saunders 2002; Hanganu 2004; Jeffries 2009). Their studies have looked at both single objects (e.g. Oras *et alii* 2017) and categories of objects (e.g. Wentink *et alii* 2011). Recently, archaeologists started to include in their work biographies or histories of natural materials, such as pebbles (Tilley 2017) or ballast (Burström 2017). In terms of ceramics, these studies have focused on ceramic assemblages (e.g. Tilley 1996; Dragoman 2013), single fragments (e.g. Holtorf 2002) and so-called “imports” (e.g. Găță, Dragoman 2010–2011).

As Jody Joy has shown, there is an important distinction between the concept of “life history” and “biography”: “the majority of life-history studies operate on the macro-scale and seek to explain long-term changes to artefacts and technology. The relationships between people and objects are examined but they are sought to account for changes in technology or artefact form”; “Biographical studies, on the other hand, often examine single artefacts or distinct geographical and chronological assemblages” with the purpose of revealing the relationships between people and objects “from the dynamic perspective of objects actively involved in social relations” (Joy 2009, p. 542).

Recently, the term “biographies” has been criticised for being an anthropocentric projection onto objects. For example, according to Ewa Domanska,

“...concepts of orientalism, paternalism, and communalism, respectively, denote attitudes of mastery, stewardship, and equality between humans and things. Thus, under orientalism, things are mere tools, whereas under paternalism, they take on human qualities; she suggests that the biographical approach to objects is one of the latest and most popular manifestations of this paternalism, anthropomorphizing objects in terms of human life cycles. The idea of a communalist materiality draws on Latour and the notion of symmetry with the swapping of properties between humans and things rather than things solely taking on human attributes.” (Lucas 2012, p. 161–162)

Some authors have proposed alternative terms, such as “itinerary”; however, as an entire swathe of studies suggest, the biographical approach remains an extremely useful instrument in a reflexive endeavour to discover the roles objects play in people’s lives (see Boschung *et alii* 2015).

Moreover, one of the concepts that complements that of “biography” is that of “afterlife”. According to Michael Brian Schiffer,

“An *afterlife artefact* is one made during the afterlife that represents, mimics, commemorates, alludes to, or incorporates part of the original entity. Afterlife artefacts are a material means by which ‘memories’ of people from Jesus to Elvis as well as of artefacts and other entities are created and perpetuated.” (Schiffer 2013, p. 247)

The aspect of the afterlife of objects that concerns us here is that of their reuse for purposes other than their original function, as well as the “material memories” of objects which today no longer exist or can no longer be found.

The subject of this article is a series of Neolithic vessels attributed to the Vădastra tradition of southern Romania and north-western Bulgaria dated to *ca.* 5200–4900 BC (Fig. 1). With the exception of one vessel from Slatina, two vessels from Hotărani and two so-called Vădastra-type “imports” from Hungary, whose area of origin has not been determined, all of the vessels discussed here come from the Vădastra – *Măgura Fetelor/Dealul Cișmelei* settlement located in southern Oltenia, Romania, and in particular from the earlier research conducted by Corneliu N. Mateescu between 1946 and 1974 (with some interruptions), as well as from a survey conducted in 2011 (all of which can be found today in the collections of the “Vasile Pârvan” Institute of Archaeology of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest = IAB, the National Museum of Romanian History in Bucharest = MNIR, the Museum of Oltenia in Craiova = MO, and Olt County Museum in Slatina). While Neolithic ceramics from Vădastra as a whole have already been the subject of a previous biographical study (Dragoman 2013),



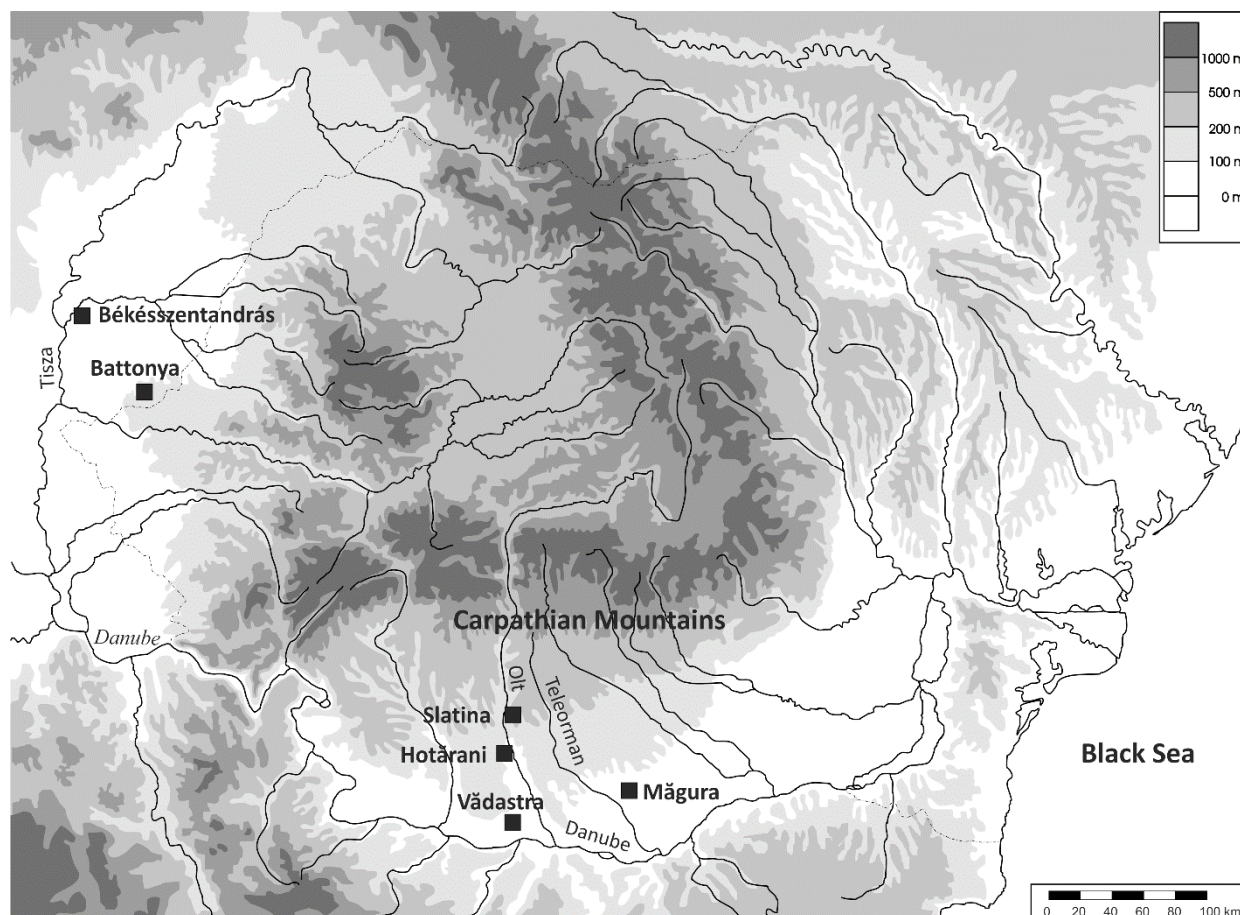


Figure 1. Sites with Vădastra materials mentioned in the text.

on this occasion the analysis takes place at the level of the individual objects. The research focuses on traces found on the body of the vessels, various technological aspects and (where possible) the depositional contexts.

Unfortunately, given the quality of the available information, it was/is not possible to conduct a sophisticated study similar to those we find, for example, in North American archaeological literature (e.g. LaMotta, Schiffer 2001). Nonetheless, while in no way claiming to have provided complete biographies or to have exhausted the repertoire of existing and possible biographies, the examples discussed here are illustrative of a series of key moments in the biography of the Vădastra vessels and thus help us achieve a better understanding of the relationships between prehistoric and modern peoples, on the one hand, and Neolithic vessels, on the other.

## DEPOSITIONS

### A jar

The containers originating from Vădastra – Măgura Fetelor/Dealul Cișmelei include a small, light brown vessel (Fig. 2/a) with highly smoothed exterior and interior surfaces belonging to the so-called category of surface-

roughened or common ceramics (H = 10 cm; rim diam. = 6.00 cm; width = 10.5 cm; base diam. = 5.2 cm). Adopting the term used for a type of similarly shaped vessel from late Antiquity (Vroom 2008, p. 300, Fig. 14), we can describe it as being a “closed cooking jar”. In the absence of any analysis of the contents, we are currently not able to say what could have been cooked in this vessel; however, in order to whet the imagination, and not as a direct analogy, we may note that cooking jars from late Antiquity “could have been used for the cooking, storage and short-distance transfer of small quantities of food, or for the drawing of water from wells” (Vroom 2008, p. 301). The smoothed interior surface rather suggests of solid or semi-solid contents, as opposed to liquid, for which a burnished surface would have been more suitable. At any rate, the vessel from Vădastra was used for cooking over an open fire, as evidenced by the reddish burn marks on its exterior and the coloured patches resulting from boiling found on the inside of the neck. The vessel appears to have been used either intensively or for a relatively long time, with the rim being strongly eroded (Fig. 2/b–c). Moreover, on the inside of the neck we can see a series of marks probably resulting from the action of extracting the contents with the aid of an implement (Fig. 2/d).

This vessel was discovered during archaeological research conducted by Corneliu N. Mateescu at Vădastra

in 1956, in the Vădastra II layer, which, according to the author of the excavation, superposes the Vădastra I layer. After its discovery, the cooking jar became an object of scientific interest. A drawing of the vessel was included in the excavation report in order to illustrate the ceramic categories found in the Vădastra II layer (Mateescu 1959, p. 69, fig. 5/1); the same drawing was also included in an article dedicated to the technology of the Vădastra surface-roughened pottery (Gâță, Mateescu 1992a).



Figure 2. Cooking jar from Vădastra (IAB).

Unfortunately, the exact context of the discovery is mentioned neither in the excavation report (Mateescu 1959) nor on the vessel itself. However, the fact that it was discovered intact, and not broken, may indicate one of the

pits studied in 1956 as the depositional context. At any rate, it is relevant that the vessel was deposited intact, *i.e.* when it was still completely functional. The abandoning of a functioning vessel cannot be explained in utilitarian terms. A possible explanation, however, may be found by taking a closer look at the general context of the vessel's deposition. Whether deposited in a pit or "in a layer", the vessel was included among previous generations of objects belonging to the ancestors who lived previously in Vădastra, with disarticulated human bones sometimes found among these remains. We can therefore say that there exists a connection between the fact that the vessel was still functional at the moment it was deposited and its inclusion among the material world of the ancestors. The vessel (and possibly also its contents) would have been offered up to the ancestors, being incorporated into the material memory of the settlement. This interpretation is supported by various ethnographic examples. For instance,

"[...] in some historic Pueblo societies in the American Southwest, spaces below the ground serve as conduits to the supernatural and natural realms [...]. People alter the behavior of supernatural entities, or of natural phenomena such as rain clouds and game animals, by sending artifacts through this conduit (*i.e.* by modifying linkage factors with activities involving supernaturals and forces of nature). The Hopi, for example, bury prayer sticks, clay figurines or vessels of water, sending them as offerings to influence the activities of rain-cloud spirits (*katsinam*) and other (super)natural forces. [...] In these and many other cross-cultural examples, depositional behaviors modify the linkage factors tying human activities to 'otherworldly' activities of natural and supernatural actors." (LaMotta, Schiffer 2001, p. 44)

From this perspective, the depositing of the cooking vessel from Vădastra does not mean it was taken out of use, but, rather, given a new use, possibly as a means of communication with the world of the ancestors.

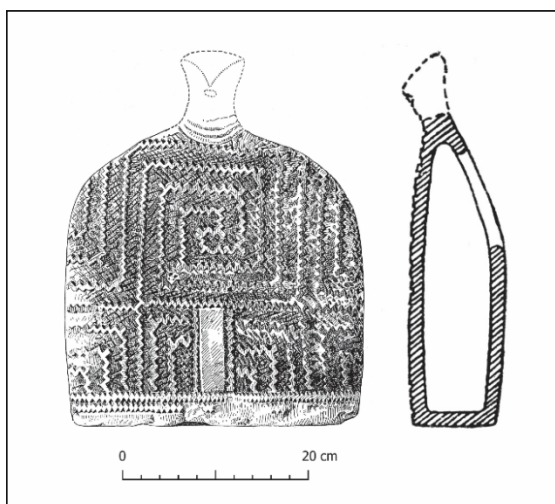
#### An anthropomorphic vessel

My second example is one of the best-known Vădastra containers: an anthropomorphic vessel, whose neck and head were missing when deposited (H = 40 cm; width = 31.5 cm) (Fig. 3). Although reconstructed and published correctly, based on other fragments found at Vădastra originating from similar vessels (Fig. 4), the head of the vessel was later on incorrectly restored (Fig. 5). The frontal part of the recipient was burnished, decorated with spiral motifs excised and encrusted with white; the neck and head (missing) were not decorated but instead burnished and painted in red ochre; the rear side, which



features a wide orifice, was merely smoothed without being decorated<sup>2</sup>. The recipient is of considerable size, and would have been difficult to handle, especially when

full. Given its shape and size, it may have been used to store various substances.



**Figure 3.** Anthropomorphic vessel from Vădastra: initial reconstruction (after Mateescu 1970, p. 283, Fig. 2, with modifications).



**Figure 4.** Fragment of an anthropomorphic vessel from Vădastra (IAB).



**Figure 5.** The anthropomorphic vessel from Vădastra today (MNIR; Inv. no. 15908).

<sup>2</sup> We encounter the same surface treatment in the case of the so-called “basket vessels” with two heads and an anthropomorphic appearance (Dragoman 2013, p. 103).



Excavated in 1946, the vessel became an object of academic study, being interpreted as a representation of a divinity (e.g. Chirica 1995) or an example of “Neolithic art” (e.g. Dumitrescu 1974)<sup>3</sup>. After initially belonging to the collection of the Institute of Archaeology in Bucharest, ownership of the vessel changed hands with the creation of the Museum of the History of the Socialist Republic of Romania, in Bucharest, at the start of the 1970s, renamed after 1989 the National Museum of Romanian History. As part of the new institution, the vessel was used as an exhibit in support of certain archaeological narratives. For example, in 2008, as part of the events held during the opening of an extensive exhibition on “Neolithic art” in Romania (Wullschleger *et alii* 2008), alongside many other objects the anthropomorphic vessel from Vădastra was used to provide the visual decoration for a Eurocentric political narrative without saying anything about its original (Neolithic) context of meaning (for a critique, see Dragoman 2009a, p. 180) (Fig. 6); however, despite the official archaeological/political discourse, the objects themselves had their own effect upon the visitors, who were fascinated by their encounter with the Neolithic. Moreover, it should be added that, like other ceramic items from Vădastra, this type of vessel has become a source of inspiration for contemporary ceramic artists such as Ionel Cococi from the village of Vădastra (Fig. 7), thereby giving rise to a new category – that of the reproductions of the original, which are sold to interested parties as works of art and displayed in exhibitions held both in Romania and abroad.



**Figure 6.** The anthropomorphic vessel from Vădastra in the exhibition “A l’aube de la civilisation. Le néolithique en Roumanie”, National Museum of Romanian History, Bucharest, 2008.



**Figure 7.** Replicas of the anthropomorphic vessel from Vădastra made by the ceramic artist Ionel Cococi, Vădastra village.

Both the reconstructed orientation of the face and the surface treatment appear to suggest an intended orientation of the anthropomorphic container – with the elaborately decorated part facing the viewer. The two manners of surface treatment can be related with the two main Vădastra pottery categories: the burnished ware and the surface-roughened ware. This association on the same object could indicate that despite the differences, the

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion on this vessel see also Dragoman 2013, p. 102, 115–116.

burnished and surface-roughened ceramic categories are based on a unifying principle.

Depending on the angle from which it is viewed, the vessel appears to change shape: viewed from the front, it resembles an anthropomorphic figurine; while from the rear, given the smoothed surface and wide orifice, it resembles the so-called “holemouth pots” used for cooking. These two different perspectives correspond to two different tactile sensations as a result of the different treatment of the surfaces – burnishing and smoothing, respectively. The fact that the anthropomorphic vessel can “change shape” in relation to the person viewing or handling it may be indicative of the vitality of the object (on vitality, see also Hodder 2016) and/or – to borrow a term used in respect of the biomorphic vessels from Argentina (Alberti, Marshall 2009; Alberti 2014) – the versatility of the material from which it was fashioned.

The vessel is an eloquent example of the connection between the human body, on the one hand, and vessels, on the other: both are containers with orifices through which substances enter in or flow out (Tilley 1996, p. 318; Warnier 2006). Generally speaking, we also encounter the same excised decoration, white paste incrustation and the application of red ochre in various Vădastra anthropomorphic figurines. Moreover, in the southeastern European Neolithic, red and white colours are also present together in graves and hoards where ochre is associated with human bones (e.g. Lazăr 2012; Raczy 1994). Thus, we might say that, like people, the anthropomorphic vessel is made of blood/flesh and bones (Dragoman 2009b, p. 102; 2013, p. 99). In addition to the anthropomorphic shape and the use of red and white colours, the excised decoration is clearly suggestive of an item of clothing that ends in the area of the neck. Viewed from the front, the anthropomorphic vessel thus appears to be “clothed”, just like a person. Metaphorically speaking, the excised frontal decoration represents the clothing, while the smoothed and undecorated rear surface represents the “skin” of the vessel.

The deposition context clearly shows that the Neolithic peoples from Vădastra took special care of the vessel. From the *in situ* photographs of the vessel excavated by Corneliu N. Mateescu in 1946, it is visible that the vessel was deposited lying inside another container with an excised decoration of which only a few fragments are still visible (Fig. 8). The same special care shown towards broken anthropomorphic objects is also found in other archaeological contexts, such as at the Vădastra settlement of Hotărani, where “the fragments, heads and pieces of bodies from larger statuettes were intentionally buried in a pit with a diameter of 0.75 m” (Nica 1980, p. 27). The manner of deposition reinforces the idea that the anthropomorphic vessel was perceived and treated as a person. The post-deterioration handling of the head and body of the anthropomorphic vessels is similar to that given to human bodies after death, with a common practice being the disarticulation of the bodies and the separate deposition of the (parts of) human skulls, as in the case of

Hotărani (Nica 1980, p. 53), or the deposition of human bones within settlements (Lazăr 2012). The example of the vessel in question shows that a number of acts performed by the Neolithic people of Vădastra – such as clothing, the application of red ochre paint and the handling and deposition of fragments – are common to both containers and human bodies, which could suggest an ontological connection between the vessels and the people.

It is also important to note that, while still functional, the vessel was deposited in the ground after the neck and head had been snapped off. Damaged, albeit still intact from a functional point of view, the vessel may have continued to be used until broken, with some fragments even being used after that, as is the case in many traditional societies (Fig. 9).



Figure 8. Vădastra: the anthropomorphic vessel in situ (C.N. Mateescu archive, IAB).



Figure 9. Damaged replica of a Vădastra pot reused in his own household by the ceramic artist from the village of Vădastra, Ionel Cococi.



A first interpretation I would propose to the reader for contemplation is that the anthropomorphic vessel was deposited in the ground *as a consequence* of the snapping off of the head. The head may be considered the central feature of the vessel, as indicated by the painting with red ochre. The vitality or magic of the red ochre is indicated by its properties, *i.e.* the modification/intensification of its colour by firing (Dragoman 2009b, p. 101), and, as already mentioned, by association with the human body in some graves and hoards. From this perspective, once the head is broken off, the anthropomorphic vessel loses its vitality and “dies”, at which point it is carefully deposited in the ground. In conclusion, the snapping off of the head (either intentionally, as part of the act of deposition, or accidentally) may have represented the event that determined the fate of the vessel.

Another interpretation is that between the moment the head was broken off and that of the deposition, the vessel in fact continued to be used, with the decision to bury it while still functional being taken on different grounds. Once separated, the head and the vessel were treated as two separate objects, with their biographies being perceived either as different or as belonging to the same object. However, unlike the first interpretation, in this case we are not dealing with the “death” of the object, but with a continuation of its biography by means of the division of the object into different parts and the separate utilisation thereof. The breaking off of the head would thus merely have been the moment that caused a change in what had been the biography of the anthropomorphic vessel up to that point.

### A large vessel

After the breakage of the vessels, a large part of the sherds ended up in pits, such as the case, for instance, of a large size vessel, with a smoothed and plain exterior surface, found in 2011, in Pit 3 (excavated by a Romanian-French team), together with various other materials – animal bones, flint and bone tools, fragments of grinding stones, charcoal fragments, but mostly pottery sherds (Dobrescu *et alii* 2012, p. 166–167). Given the size, the form and the burnished interior surface, the vessel might have been used for storage (Fig. 10). Interestingly, the pit’s southwestern corner preserved traces of burning (Dobrescu *et alii* 2012, p. 166), while the margins of this pit were marked by the depositing of animal horns and bones (Fig. 11), thus creating a certain depositional aesthetic and a certain degree of formalisation, which seem to indicate a socially significant depositional act (Dragoman 2017). This is not the place to discuss the meanings of the Vădastra pits (for a recent example see Bailey 2018); suffice to say that after breakage the pottery sherds were not considered “rubbish”, as they might have been classified from a modernist perspective, but were involved in new important social actions – *i.e.* the digging and filling of the pits (Dragoman 2013, p. 118).



Figure 10. Vădastra: large vessel found in Pit 3/2011 (IAB).



Figure 11. Vădastra: Pit 3/2011.

## TRANSFORMATIONS

### Assemblages

During the 1969 excavations at the Vădastra site in Hotărani, in Pit 2 from Trench IV, square 6, a pedestaled vessel was found (H = 23 cm; rim diam. = 28.7 cm; base diam. = 12.5 cm), which, according to the classification sheet, contained a human skull (Fig. 12). The vessel has a hollow pedestal and an orifice at the joint of the pedestal with the body of the vessel – the body of the vessel communicates with the pedestal.

In the archaeological publications, both the morphology of the vessel and its archaeological context have been ignored. It seems that only the decoration of the vessel has been considered of relevance: The vessel was included in cultural-historical/evolutionist narratives to exemplify the content of the level IIIA at Hotărani (Nica 1971, p. 20, fig. 7/1), considered to represent the “baroque” phase of the Vădastra culture, “when the ornamentation in the technique of excision and incrustation reaches maximum perfection” (Nica 1971, p. 19), or was converted into an “art object” within archaeological exhibitions (*e.g.* Wulschleger *et alii* 2008).

(Fig. 13)<sup>4</sup>. Similar vessels were also produced by the contemporary ceramic artist from Vădastra, Ionel Cococi, with the significant difference that the modern replicas were no longer hollow (see Fig. 7).



**Figure 12.** Pedestaled vessel from Hotărani (MO; Inv. no. I 8278).



**Figure 13.** The pedestaled vessel from Hotărani in the exhibition “A l’aube de la civilisation. Le néolithique en Roumanie”, National Museum of Romanian History, Bucharest, 2008.

Given its morphology, the vessel could have been used to pour substances through its body into the earth which contained the bones and the objects of the ancestors. Thus, the vessel might have functioned as a mediator in the circulation of substances from the world of the living to the other world (for an Eneolithic example see Rubakov 1965, p. 16; for an African example see Insoll 2004, p. 110–111). However, what is of interest here is that, together, the vessel and the human skull resemble the anthropomorphic figurines with inner pipe (Voinescu, Mateescu 1980) and the goblets with human figures and hollow foot (Dragoman 2009b, 109, Fig. 2/1), suggesting that upon assembly they form a new body, possibly a new person which in modernist terms might be considered a hybrid. This example seems to indicate that Vădastra vessels have no fixed identity, and their identity could change when combined with other objects in specific assemblages.

### Repainting

A specific category of Vădastra vessels is that of pots and lids with human faces, found for example at Vădastra-Măgura Fetelor/Dealul Cișmelei, Hotărani or Măgura-Budureasca (Dragoman 2013, p. 95–96; Nica 1980, p. 42–43; Mirea 2009, p. 289–290). At Hotărani, among the fragments of goblets with human faces, usually painted with white, there is also a case in which, according to the excavator, Marin Nica, “the human face painted in red was later on covered with white paste” (Nica 1980, p. 42) (Fig. 14). For Marin Nica, the association of the red and white colours – especially in the case of the representations of human faces – is not at all random, the two colours being symbolically related with the realm of life and death respectively (Nica 1980, p. 42), an interpretation that seems to be supported by the

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion on this type of vessels, see also Dragoman 2009b, p. 101; 2013, p. 98–99.



association of the ochre (red) and human bones (white) in graves or hoards (e.g. Lazăr 2012; Raczky 1994). According to Marin Nica, the goblets with human faces painted with white could have been used “for certain religious practices relating, perhaps, to the disappearance of a family or tribe member”, for “funerary processions”, the face representing “the mortuary mask” or “the symbolic mask” of the vanished one (Nica 1980, p. 42–43 and 53).



**Figure 14.** Fragment of a face-pot from Hotărani (after Nica 1980, p. 44, Fig. 10/2a).

In the sense of the symbolic association between the human face and the dead, one might bring into discussion the mask-like human face cut from the skull of a (probably) 15–16 years old girl, deposited on the bottom of a pit in the Early Neolithic site of Cârcea-Viaduct, belonging to the Criș tradition (Nica, Nicolăescu-Plopșor 1975), or the clay masks from the symbolic graves in the Copper Age cemetery of Varna, belonging to Gumelnița-Karanovo VI tradition (Slavchev 2010). Also, a series of ethnographic examples show us that Marin Nica’s interpretation might be possible: for instance,

“The Yungur of northeastern Nigeria make anthropomorphic ceramic vessels, called *wiiso*, to contain ancestral spirits. That each is intentionally modeled to contain the spirit of a once-living male Yungur leader or of a man eligible to have become one broadly qualifies *wiiso* to be called ‘portraits’ [...]” (Berns 1990, p. 50)

However, it should be taken into account that among many populations from sub-Saharan Africa, not only specially made vessels, but also “daily use pottery often become receptacles for the spirits of the dead” (Gosselain 1999, p. 214). For instance, in the Banda Area, west-central Ghana,

“Cooking vessels, water storage, water coolers and ritual pots all have similar decorative grammars, in spite of their different functions and different visibility within and outside the homestead. Most of the vessels are only given a distinctive function by the user, thus the relation function/form/decoration is not determined during production. Some vessels have symbolic meanings and functions; however, it is the role that they play in

rituals that gives them their symbolic role. Indeed, potters and consumers maintained when interviewed that any pot could be used for ritual purposes, since only after being used would it acquire its symbolic meaning. A single pot, the *wile*, was made to be a ritual pot used in funerals [...]. Moreover, in spite of its specific ritual function, both the form and the decorative treatment of *wile* are similar to those of utilitarian vessels, differing only in the fact that *wile* vessels have a perforated body [...]” (Cruz 2011, p. 347)

Thus, in Vădastra tradition, not only the anthropomorphic pots but also other types of vessels might have been used in funerary rituals: for example, also at Hotărani, among the remains of a house, Marin Nica found a goblet which contained the occipital of a person (Nica 1980, p. 53).

Instead of a general interpretation of the meaning of the face-pots, I propose to pay attention to the fragment under discussion in itself. The human face, the excised decoration and the use of the red and white colours are all material elements which connect the face-pot with other anthropomorphic containers, with anthropomorphic figurines and with the human body, indicating that the vessel might have been perceived as a pot-person. Also, Marin Nica’s observations about the symbolic significance of the colour association and the change in the object appearance are of great relevance. If red ochre is a life-giving substance (hence its presence on or nearby human bones during the Neolithic and Copper Age), the white paste has the power to trigger death. Thus, the covering of the face, initially painted in red, with white is a transformative act which changes not only its appearance but also its status. The white painting provoked the “death” of the vessel and marked the transfer of the vessel from the realm of life to the realm of death. For the object to follow this path, people acted upon it. Once more, the goblet with human face discussed here shows that, like people, the Vădastra vessels have their own lives, they “die” at a certain moment, and go into another world.

### Morphological changes

Some Vădastra vessels underwent a series of major transformations during their lives, as in the case of the vessel discovered in Vădastra in 1962 in Square 42, at a depth of 1.20 m, in the Vădastra II layer, and described by Corneliu N. Mateescu in his excavation notes as “dish V2” (C. N. Mateescu archive, 1962 folder, sheet 52) (H = 4.6 cm; rim diam. = 14.1 cm). This vessel is burnished inside and outside, and decorated by incisions/excisions that were initially encrusted with white paste, and painted on its undecorated sections in red ochre (Fig. 15/a–b). The way the red ochre is applied to the body of the vessel (Fig. 15/c), i.e. on those parts that come into contact with the



human body during the handling (the lips and hands), suggests that the painting in ochre was done less for the benefit of the visual sense and more for the tactile sense of the intended user (Dragoman 2013). In this respect, it should be remembered that in the case of the type of anthropomorphic containers discussed above, the red ochre has been applied not on the decorated body (on the “clothes”) but on the neck and the face of the pot (on the “skin”). These observations can be viewed in relation to the spiritual significance of the ochre pigment (as evidenced by its uses on graves) or its healing properties, given that it might have also been used for medical purposes (Velo 1984). For example, among the Aborigines in Australia, apart from its use “as a magic charm” or “for decorating ritual objects used in ceremonies and the bodies of the performers themselves”, “red ochre was

used medically, in the form of an ointment to be applied to wounds, bruises and swellings” (Jones 1984, p. 6).

On closer inspection, it can be observed that the recipient was not originally a dish, with the vessel initially having a leg (Fig. 15/d). Indeed, given the shape and treatment of the interior surface, this item may have been used for the consumption of both liquid and solid substances. At some point during its biography, the leg broke off, after which the base was smoothed and the vessel transformed into a dish. As in the case of the cooking jar and the anthropomorphic container discussed previously, the new dish was deposited in the earth while still functional, with the visible signs of restoration owing to the damage incurred during excavation, as mentioned in the excavation notes (C. N. Mateescu archive, 1962 folder, sheet 52).



Figure 15. Dish from Vădastra (IAB).

### Recycling

For some vessels, their breakage does not represent the final transformation during the Neolithic period – some fragments underwent further modification. For example, the fragment of one vessel was perforated and transformed into a “weight” (Fig. 16). In another instance, a fragment of a burnished vessel was reused as a polishing tool, as indicated by the presence of grooves on one side (Fig. 17). After having been used for burnishing, the fragment – alongside other ceramic fragments, including a Linear Pottery “import”, a handful of animal bones and a human bone – ended up in “Pit i” of the Vădastra I layer (excavated by Corneliu N. Mateescu in 1946). Similarly, an incised sherd

was also reused in the process of surface treatment, namely as a tool for applying the red ochre (Fig. 18). Finally, another example of recycling is that of a surface-roughened fragment transformed into a “token” (Fig. 19), before also ending up, together with various other ceramic fragments, in Pit 3/2011 mentioned above. It is worth considering to what extent the reused ceramic fragments can be considered continuations of the biographies of the vessels from which they originated (their afterlives) or whether or not, as a result of their recycling, entirely new objects were created, not just in terms of having a radically different function from the original vessels, but also new biographies.



**Figure 16.** Vădastra: pot sherd perforated and transformed into a “weight” (IAB).



**Figure 19.** Vădastra: pot sherd transformed into a “token” (IAB).

### Restorations

There is one aspect rarely taken into consideration that should be included in the category of transformations (but see Dooijes, Nieuwenhuyse 2007, p. 21; 2009, p. 11). After breaking, the vessels ended up in the earth, only to be discovered thousands of years later by archaeologists. This discovery brought about a further change in the materiality of some of the vessels: the replacement of the missing sections with plaster. In some cases, the new material changes consisted not only in the replacement of the missing parts with plaster, but also in the sticking back together of the fragments (Fig. 20).



**Figure 17.** Vădastra: pot sherd reused as a polishing tool (IAB).



**Figure 18.** Vădastra: pot sherd reused as a tool for applying the red ochre (IAB).



**Figure 20.** Restored vessel from Vădastra (MNIR).

It is this restoration process that marks the change in the status of the object, its transformation into an archaeological artefact, into a heritage object. To this stage one could add other material traces on the body of the vessels, such as labels with the archaeological context and/or inventory numbers. Together with the materials used by archaeologists to transport and store the objects (wooden boxes, newspapers, paper bags, etc.), together with the archive material and the published articles and books, they all preserve the memory of different episodes in the history of the archaeological research.

### ANCIENT REPAIRS

Many ceramic fragments show signs of repairs carried out to consolidate the integrity of the containers in question. The method is simple: “Holes are drilled along the breakages, probably using a flint or obsidian tool. The

sherds are then tied together by stringing leather, rope or another organic material through the holes” (Dooijes, Nieuwenhuyse 2007, p. 18). The fragments originate from vessels belonging to different categories of ceramics, *i.e.* burnished and decorated, plain burnished, surface-roughened (Fig. 21), which would indicate it was not only the elaborately decorated vessels that underwent such repairs. As noted by Renske Dooijes and Olivier Peter Nieuwenhuyse for the Near Eastern Neolithic, the repairs are highly visible due to the fact “that technological constraints prevented the restorations from being less conspicuous” or because “people simply did not bother to cover up the repairs” (Dooijes, Nieuwenhuyse 2009, p. 11). The repairs had a functional role, they demonstrate the care and attention paid to some Vădastra vessels, but it is also possible that “the visible presence of a repair even contributed to the prestige value of the object” (Dooijes, Nieuwenhuyse 2009, p. 11).



**Figure 21.** Vădastra: pot sherds showing signs of repairs. (1–5) excised pottery; (6) plain burnished pottery; (7) “Vinča style” pottery; (8) surface-roughened pottery (IAB).



### RE-CONTEXTUALISATIONS

From the excavation sites the Vădastra materials were transported to the institutions which archaeologists belonged to, and stored, very often in the same room with materials from other sites – for example, at present, in the House of Academy in Bucharest, the archaeological materials from Vădastra are stored with the finds from the tell site at Pietrele (Gumelnița tradition).

Sometimes, some of the complete or restored vessels were not left in the storerooms but moved into the archaeologist's office. To permanently keep in the office pots which have been studied is not something unusual among the Romanian archaeologists. For example, the cooking jar and the dish discussed above were taken out of the storeroom and integrated in a contemporary assemblage composed of a variety of objects, old and new (Fig. 22). With their distinctive archaeological presence, the Vădastra pots personalise the office, create an atmosphere of familiarity, and give the office a special aura.



**Figure 22.** Vădastra pots in my office, House of Academy (Bucharest, 2019).

Alongside materials from other sites and periods, other Vădastra pots became part of both permanent and temporary archaeological exhibitions, such as the case of an elaborately decorated storage vessel (H = 43 cm; rim diam. = 22 cm; base diam. = 14 cm) found in a burnt structure at Slatina and exhibited in the Olt County Museum, Slatina (Fig. 23) (see Iosifaru, Fântâneau 2004, no. 158).



a

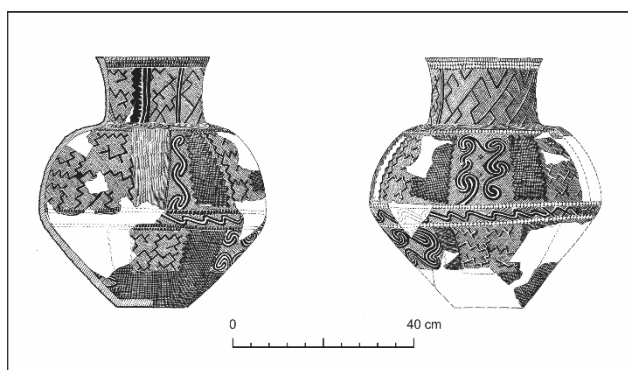


b

**Figure 23.** Showcases with prehistoric materials in the Olt County Museum exhibition, Slatina: (a) Vădastra storage vessel from Slatina (Inv. no. 8745); (b) Vădastra and Sălcuța vessels.

## DISAPPEARANCES

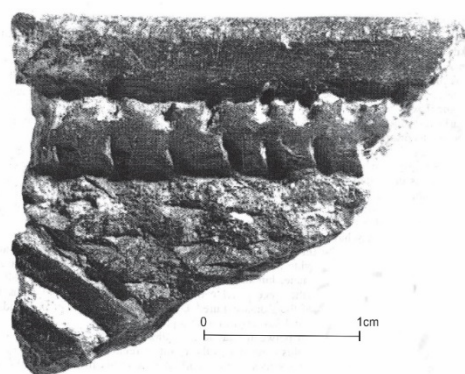
Among the materials relating to the ceramics found in Vădastra, there also exists a series of drawings of complete or restored vessels that today no longer physically exist or can no longer be found. At some point, these vessels would have been part of the collection of the “Vasile Pârvan” Institute of Archaeology in Bucharest, they would have been viewed, measured, and drawn (Fig. 24). The only remaining information about the objects in question relates to their shapes, decoration and (in some cases) dimensions. They comprise a distinct collection of vessels that no longer have a material correspondent, a collection that differs significantly from that containing vessels that still exist as clay objects and that can be touched. Their drawings constitute the material expression of a new biographical stage – the afterlife.



**Figure 24.** Drawing of a restored vessel from Vădastra that today no longer exists physically or can no longer be found (after Mateescu 1970, p. 286, Fig. 5).

## JOURNEYS

The biography of some of the Vădastra vessels is not restricted to the space of the settlement in which they were fashioned, for they also travelled beyond the borders of their familiar area (*i.e.* the space of the settlement and neighbouring areas), even beyond the area occupied by other communities, and far away to the world of the “strangers” with whom they had very little contact (see Neustupný 1998). In the latter area, on account of their very different appearance – hence their identification by archaeologists as “imports” – they represent material memories of distant regions and the journey they undertook. For example, a fragment of a Vădastra-type vessel with an excised decoration<sup>5</sup> was found at the Békésszentandrás-Furugy site in south-eastern Hungary in a context containing typical Szakálhát material (Makkay 1993; 2002) (Fig. 25).



**Figure 25.** Vădastra-type pot sherd found at the Békésszentandrás-Furugy site in south-eastern Hungary (after Makkay 2002, p. 60, Pl. I/1).

Another fragment with Vădastra decoration was found in Hungary, at Battonya (Szénászký 1976; *apud* Chapman 2000, p. 65). Clearly, it cannot be ruled out that the vessels were made locally by potters originating from the region of the Vădastra tradition. In this case, even if we cannot speak of a journey, we are still dealing with objects that remind us of a distant, foreign land from which the potters hailed.

## CONCLUSIONS

From the examples discussed here, it clearly transpires that the biographies of the Vădastra vessels are neither linear nor follow the same path. Whether we can talk about the biography of one single object all along from the Neolithic contexts to the modern ones is open to debate. As Cornelius Holtorf has noted,

“an object whose meaning is transformed from a piece of wood to a mask immersed in religious traditions to an acquired art object to an archived museum piece to an exchange collector’s item to an auctioned artefact associated with Captain Cook to a showpiece of Native American art [...] is probably far better understood as multiple things than as a single thing.” (Holtorf 2008, p. 421–422)

During their prehistoric lives, the vessels acquired new functions and roles: they were used in cooking, for consumption, for storage, and to pour substances into the earth; they served as messengers to “the next world”; combined with other elements of material culture they formed new objects, with new identities; they die and travel from one world to another; they change their form; they

<sup>5</sup> The fragment was later published as being of the Boian-Giulești type (Makkay 2002).

could give rise to new objects; or they could preserve the memory of long distance journeys or distant places of origin.

After their discovery by archaeologists the pots became part of a new context, that of the academic system: they were classified and stored; some of the pots have traces which evoke the memory of the archaeologist who excavated them, for example Corneliu N. Mateescu's hand writing, or traces left by institutional practices, such as restorations or inventory numbers; in storerooms, archaeologists' offices and in exhibitions, the pots were included in new assemblages of objects from different periods; they were involved in different archaeological narratives about the Neolithic – cultural-historical (e.g. Nica 1971), technological (e.g. Găță, Mateescu 1992a), interpretative (e.g. Dragoman 2013 and the present text), or even political propaganda (e.g. Wullschleger *et alii* 2008; for a critique, see Dragoman 2009a, p. 180); their memory was sometimes preserved in new material forms, such as drawings, photographs, or replicas.

Some biographies offer information as to the way people in the distant or near past related to these objects. In the Vădastra Neolithic tradition they were perceived and treated as persons; they had no fixed identities; people changed their lives by acting upon them; they were treated with special care and attention; and the materials out of which they were fashioned (clay, ochre, white paste) were thought to possess vitality or magic properties and powers. In the modern era, Vădastra pots are valuable heritage objects, used for scientific studies and exhibitions for the public, but also a source of fascination for archaeologists, ceramic artists, ethnographers, collectors and the "large public" alike.

Moreover, "Since the nineteenth century, mass production, consumerism, and thus cycles of material replacement have accelerated; increasingly larger amounts of things are, with increasing rapidity, victimized and made redundant" (Olsen 2010, p. 168). This modern behaviour differs radically from the way in which the people living during the Neolithic period related to objects. Even after the breakage of the Vădastra pots, sherds continued to be considered meaningful and were involved in new social action, such as, for instance, the digging and filling of pits (for the prehistoric significance of pot sherds see Chapman 2000).

Viewed from a biographical perspective, the culture-historical or functionalist classifications that dominate Neolithic archaeology in Romania can be regarded as both rigid and overly simplistic. Similarly, the biographies discussed here contradict the modern dichotomies found in many studies of Neolithic ceramics in Romania, especially those between the functional and the symbolic. They also question our modern classifications of different

types of materials – pots/sherds, skulls/human bones, etc. Last but not least, the very durability of the Vădastra pots contradicts the concept of an abstract linear time and the separation of a past long gone from the present. The Neolithic past is still present through its material memories – the archaeological vestiges –, and, therefore, the present is a palimpsest which Vădastra pots are a part of (see, for instance, excellent discussions in Olivier 2008 and Olsen 2010).

Pots also facilitate reflection on the human condition. Whole or broken, covered with earth or crust, damaged by use or post-depositional factors, pots remind us of the finitude, fragility, vulnerability and the changing nature of our human lives. But they also endure more than the people who made and used them or the archaeologists who excavated and/or studied them. Deposited in the ground or forgotten on a shelf in the storeroom, the pots may have an independent existence from the lives of humans, thus questioning our anthropocentric perspective and relationship with the rest of creation, including material things (see, for instance, Olsen 2010).

As already mentioned in the introduction, the examples discussed here are far from being comprehensive. Many biographical aspects remain unknown or little known, such as the contents of the Vădastra vessels or the relationships that existed between the biographies of the containers and those of other categories of objects. On the one hand, this is in part the expression of the socio-political context: official politics which have a negative impact on the archaeological field; poor financial resources; lack of know-how and technology; domination of culture-history or functionalist research philosophies; poor quality of excavations and recording and storage of materials, etc. Much effort is needed to overcome at least some of these aspects.

On the other hand, the understanding of the Vădastra vessels (and objects in general) seems impossible to be fixed or exhausted. This apophaticism (*cf.* e.g. Yannaras 2009) should not be viewed merely as a problem to overcome, but also (in fact, especially so) a plea for modesty, for an awareness of one's own conceptual limits, and respect for and wonder in front of the infinite complexity of the Neolithic world of Vădastra, of the objects of that world, and of the people who used them. However, despite all the limitations, and despite the recent critique brought by the advocates of an object-oriented ontology to what they call "a never-ending urge to intellectualize the past", *i.e.* "a constant search for a deeper meaning, something beyond what can be sensed" (Olsen 2010, p. 86), I still believe that archaeology should be an interpretative exercise, that "we need to

imaginatively engage with the past to produce an interpretative account, relevant to the present and not produce a dry-as-dust inventory of factual information" (Tilley 2017, p. 83). We should also be aware that any interpretative exercise is "fragile, provisional and open to change" (Tilley 2017, p. 83). Therefore, to use the words of Olivier Gosselain (2018, p. 3), all the interpretations I have ever proposed about the Vădastra pots, including those in this text, are hypotheses advanced for reflection, discussion, criticism, improvement or rejection.

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## ABREVIERI / ABRÉVIATIONS / ABBREVIATIONS

AAC – Acta Archaeologica Carpatica, Kraków  
AAS – Archaeological and Anthropological Sciences  
ACMI – Anuarul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice, București  
ActaArchHung – Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae, Budapest  
ActaMB – Brukenthal. Acta Musei, Sibiu  
ActaMM (Brno) – Acta Musei Moraviae, Scientiae Sociales, Brno  
ActaMN – Acta Musei Napocensis, Cluj  
ActaMP – Acta Musei Porolissensis, Zalău  
ActaTS – Acta Terrae Septemcastrensis, Universitatea Lucian Blaga, Sibiu  
AHB - The Ancient History Bulletin (digital version only: <http://ancienthistorybulletin.org/>)  
AIGR – Anuarul Institutului Geologic al României, București  
AISC – Anuarul Institutului de Studii Clasice, Cluj-Napoca  
AJPA – American Journal of Physical Anthropology  
Alba Regia – Alba Regia. Annales Musei Stephani regis, Székesfehérvár  
Aluta – Aluta. Revista Muzeului Național Secuiesc Sfântu Gheorghe  
l'Anthropologie (Paris) – l'Anthropologie, Paris  
AnB – Analele Banatului, Muzeul Banatului, Timișoara  
AnUA-SH – Annales Universitatis Apulensis, Series Historica, Alba Iulia  
AnUCDC – Analele Universității Creștine "Dimitrie Cantemir", București  
AnUVT – Annales d'Université "Valahia" Târgoviște, Section d'Archéologie et d'Histoire  
Antiquity – Antiquity. A Review of World Archaeology, Durham, UK  
AO – Arhivele Olteniei, Craiova  
Apulum – Acta Musei Apulensis. Muzeul Național al Unirii, Alba Iulia  
ARA – Annuaire Roumain d'Anthropologie  
ArchBulg – Archaeologia Bulgarica, Sofia  
ArchÉrt – Archaeológiai Értesítő, Budapest  
ArheologijaSSSR – Arheologija SSSR. Svod Archeologičeskikh Istočnikov, Moscova  
ArchHist – Archeologia Historica, Brno  
Argesis – Argesis. Muzeul Județean Argeș. Pitești  
ArhMold – Arheologia Moldovei, Iași  
BA – Biblioteca de Arheologie, București  
BAI – Bibliotheca Archaeologica Iassiensis, Iași  
BARIntSer – British Archaeological Reports. International Series, Oxford  
Be-JA – Bulgarian e-Journal of Archaeology  
BHAUT – Bibliotheca Historica et Archaeologica Universitatis Timisiensis, Timișoara  
BiblEphemNap – Bibliotheca Ephemeris Napocensis, Cluj-Napoca  
BiblMemAnt – Bibliotheca Memoriae Antiquitatis, Piatra Neamț  
BiblMusAp – Bibliotheca Musei Apulensis, Alba Iulia  
BiblThrac – Bibliotheca Thracologica, București  
BMJT – Buletinul Muzeului Județean Teleorman, Alexandria  
BSNR - Buletinul Societății Numismatice Române, București  
București.MIM – Materiale de Istorie și Muzeografie, București  
CAB – Cercetări arheologice în București  
CAJ – Cambridge Archaeological Journal  
Carpica – Carpica. Complexul Muzeal „Iulian Antonescu” Bacău, Bacău  
CCA – Cronica Cercetărilor Arheologice din România, București  
CCDJ – Cultură și Civilizație la Dunărea de Jos, Călărași  
CMNH-SA – Catalogi Musei Nationalis Hungarici, Series Archaeologica, Budapest  
CN – Cercetări numismatice, București  
CsSzME – Csíki Székely Múzeum Évkönyve, Miercurea Ciuc

- Dacia – Dacia (Nouvelle Série). Revue d'archéologie et d'histoire ancienne. Académie Roumaine. Institut d'archéologie  
« V. Pârvan », Bucarest
- DolCluj – Dolgozatok az Erdélyi Nemzeti Múzeum Érem- és Régiségtárából, Kolozsvár
- EJA – European Journal of Archaeology
- EphemNap – Ephemeris Napocensis. Academia Română, Institutul de Arheologie și Istoria Artei, Cluj-Napoca
- ERAUL – Études et Recherches archéologiques de l'Université de Liège
- EurAnt – Eurasia Antiqua. Deutsche Archäologisches Institut, Berlin
- FolArch – Folia Archaeologica, Budapest
- IJO – International Journal of Osteoarchaeology
- Janat – Journal of Anatomy
- JAS – Journal of Archaeological Science
- JDAI. AA – Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Archäologischer Anzeiger, Berlin
- JFS – Journal of Forensic Sciences
- JHE – Journal of Human Evolution
- JMC – Journal of Material Culture, University College London
- KVHAA Konferenser – Kungl. Vitterbets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien Konferenser, Stockholm
- LPS – Leiden Journal of Pottery Studies, Leiden University
- Lucr.Inst.Speol./ Trav.Inst.Spéol. – Lucrările Institutului "Emil Racoviță", București / Travaux de l'Institut de Spéologie  
« Emile Racovita », Bucarest
- MAA – Monumenta Avarorum Archaeologica
- Marisia – Marisia. Studii și materiale. Arheologie – Istorie – Etnografie. Târgu Mureș
- MCA – Materiale și Cercetări Arheologice, București
- MEFR – Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome
- MEFRM – Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Moyen Âge
- MFMÉ-StudArch – A Móra Ferenc Múzeum Évkönyve, Szeged
- MIA – Materialy i issledovanija po arheologii SSSR, Moscova-Leningrad (St. Petersburg)
- Mousaios – Mousaios. Buletinul Științific al Muzeului Județean Buzău
- MuzNaț – Muzeul Național, București
- Oltenia – Oltenia. Studii și Comunicări, Craiova
- PA – Patrimonium Apulense, Alba Iulia
- PBF – Prähistorische Bronzefunde, Stuttgart
- Peuce – Peuce, Studii și cercetări de istorie și arheologie, Institutul de Cercetări Eco-Muzeale, Tulcea
- PhTRS – Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society
- Pontica – Pontica. Studii și materiale de istorie, arheologie și muzeografie, Muzeul de Istorie Națională și Arheologie Constanța
- Probleme Küstenforsch. süd. Nordseegebiet – Probleme der Küstenforschung im südlichen Nordseegebiet, Oldenburg
- Quartär – International Yearbook for Ice Age and Stone Age Research
- Quaternaire – Quaternaire. Revue de l'Association Française pour l'Étude du Quaternaire, Paris
- Quaternary International – Quaternary International. The Journal of the International Union for Quaternary Research
- Radiocarbon – An International Journal of Cosmogenic Isotope Research, Cambridge
- RAN – Revue archéologique de Narbonnaise, Montpellier
- REL – Revue des Études Latines, Paris
- RevMuz – Revista Muzeelor, București
- RMM.MIA – Revista Muzeelor și Monumentelor, seria Monumente Istorice și de Artă, București
- RossArh – Rossijskaya Arheologiya. Institut arheologii Rossijskoj akademii nauk, Moskva
- Sargetia – Sargetia, Buletinul Muzeului județean Hunedoara, Deva
- SCA – Studii și Cercetări de Antropologie, București
- SCIA – Studii și Cercetări de Istoria Artei
- SCIV(A) – Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche (și Arheologie), București
- SCN – Studii și Cercetări de Numismatică, București
- SP – Studii de Preistorie, București
- SlovArch – Slovenská Archeológia, Nitra
- SovArch – Sovetskaja Arheologija, Moscova
- StCl – Studii Clasice, București
- SympThrac – Symposia Thracologica
- Terra Sebus – Terra Sebus. Acta Musei Sabesiensis, Anuarul Muzeului Municipal „Ioan Raica”, Sebeș
- Ziridava – Ziridava. Studia Archaeologica, Arad
- ZPE – Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik, Köln