

MOMENTS IN THE BIOGRAPHY OF THE NEOLITHIC VESSELS OF VĂDASTRA TRADITION AT THE LOWER DANUBE¹

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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 căuși 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; Găță, Mateescu 1987), which grew in number following the socio-political changes that occurred in Romania in 1989 (Găță, Mateescu 1992a; 1992b; 1999–2001; Găță, 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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