

# QUESTIONING IDENTITY LANDMARK: ARCHEOLOGY, ARCHITECTURE AND METHODOLOGY

## BISTREȚ-IȘALNIȚA TYPE DISCOVERIES IN OLTENIA<sup>♦</sup>

Simona LAZĂR\*

**Abstract:** The end of the Bronze Age in Oltenia, I. Chicideanu defined a cultural group that he named Bistreț-Ișalnița and he chronologically placed between 13<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. Its content is different in a certain extent from what Hänsel named the Ișalnița group. The ceramics of this group is presented in the Danube's meadow, from Clisură to the Olt's river mouth and could have represented the last manifestation of the Bronze Age in this area, being contemporary with the phase Cruceni-Belegiș II and preceding the group Vârtop.

**Keywords:** necropolis, Bistreț-Ișalnița cultural group, grooved ceramics, Oltenia.

In the 1980, on the occasion of the digs made in the area Bistreț – Cârna, Ion Motzoi Chicideanu identified a cultural group that the author chronologically placed it during the interval of the 13<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. and that he called *Bistreț – Ișalnița*<sup>1</sup>, encompassing some discoveries analog to the two eponymous sites. At a closer examination, one can notice differences that shouldn't be neglected and they predicted from the start how complex would be the problems emerged in this context. That group was thought to occupy the Danube's meadow, from

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\* **Address for correspondence:** Dr. Simona Lazăr, researcher, Romanian Academy, "C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor" Institute for Studies in Social Sciences and Humanities, Department of Archeology and History 68 Unirii, Craiova 200 329, Romania. E-mail: simonalazar@ymail.com.

<sup>1</sup> I. Chicideanu, "Die Frühthrakische Kultur. Zur Bronzezeit in Sudwest Rumänien", în *Dacia*, NS, 30, 1986, pp. 7-47.

the Clisură to the river Olt's mouth and would represent the last manifestation of the Bronze Age in that area, being contemporary, in Banat, with the second phase of the cultural group Cruceni-Belegiș and preceding the appearance of the Vârtope type grooved ceramics<sup>2</sup>. The mentioned author considered that this ceramic group appeared after grafting some western influences of Cruceni-Belegiș type on the Gârla Mare local cultural fond. Ion Chicideanu reunited then in the Bistreț-Ișalnița group a series of discoveries in which appeared ceramic forms, similar to those from the eponymous stations<sup>3</sup>.

Later, Monica Șandor-Chicideanu added to the list from 1986 other discoveries considered to belong to this cultural group<sup>4</sup>. Thus, in Bulgaria the most famous discoveries added to this type are the three cremation tombs from Makreš Grobiščeto<sup>5</sup> and the site from Gradešnica<sup>6</sup>, and in Serbia, the tombs from Vajuga (Korbovo-Pesak)<sup>7</sup> and Usije-“Grad”<sup>8</sup>. It is interesting to notice the fact that, most of the times, the funerary discoveries of Bistreț-Ișalnița type are situated in the same places where there were before Gârla Mare type necropolises.

Examining now the discoveries attributed to the Bistreț-Ișalnița type, we can notice major differences, both as regarding the forms and the decoration of the pottery and the quality of the information that refers to the analyzed sites. If this last objection reflects only the actual stage of the research and the publishing of the material, for the repertoire of forms and decoration must be done a distinction starting from the eponymous discoveries. Thus, unlike the vessels from the Ișalnița funerary complex, discovered by accident<sup>9</sup>, at Bistreț were attributed to this group a series of large vessels similar in form to the Cruceni type urns, salt cellar vessels, pedestalled porringers with the lobate edge and square shaped cups. Only

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 40-47.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 44 next; notice on the map from fig. 36 the author's hesitations as regarding the assigning of some sites, especially those from Vâlcea County, to this cultural group.

<sup>4</sup> M. Șandor-Chicideanu, *Cultura Zuto-Brdo Gârla Mare. Contribuții la cunoașterea epocii bronzului la Dunărea mijlocie și inferioară*, Cluj, Editura Nereamia Napocae, 2003, p. 30 sq.

<sup>5</sup> G. Aleksandrov, *Izvestija na Muzeite v Severozapadna Bălgarija*, 6, 1981, p. 19-45.

<sup>6</sup> G. Georgiev, “Die Erforschung der Brozezeit in Nordwestbulgarien”, in (ed. B. Hänsel) *Südosteuropa zwischen 1600 und 1000 v. Chr.*, PAS, 1, 1982, p. 187-202.

<sup>7</sup> D. Kristić, *Derdapske Sveske*, 3, 1986, p. 148-151; M. Șandor-Chicideanu, *Cultura Zuto-Brdo*, p. 256 sq.

<sup>8</sup> M. Kosorić, J. Todorović, “Grad naselie jutobrdske kulturne grupe”, in *Starinar* NS. 13-14, 1962-63 (1965), pp. 267-274.

<sup>9</sup> Gh. Popilian, «Un nouvel aspect de la fin de l'âge du bronze en Olténie», in *Actes du VII<sup>e</sup> Congrès International UISPP*, Prague 21-27 août 1966 (1970), pp. 733-735, fig. 1.

this last type of vessel is present in the both discoveries. The pedestalled vessels, with cylindrical neck and with a square-shaped body from Işalniţa are decorated with geometrical motives that remind the ornaments of the Verbicioara ceramics and the two kantharoi, also with the square-shaped body, are similar with some cups discovered at Cârna. A vessel discovered isolate at Călăraşi, Dolj County<sup>10</sup>, a locality near the Danube, in a certain extent similar in shape with the vessels from Işalniţa, is decorated with grooved garlands and it is attributed to this group.

We should notice that the Işalniţa site, near Craiova, being at a great distance from the Danube's course, might eventually explain formal differences between the two discoveries, but the differences in decoration, are the main reason for which existed different points of view as regarding the cultural attribution: either of a final phase of the Verbicioara culture<sup>11</sup>, or a singular group that came later after the Gârla Mare culture<sup>12</sup>. B. Hänsel considered that the discovery from Işalniţa represents the eponymous discovery of the group with the same name, presenting traditions of the Gârla Mare style and also of the Govora group (defined like this in order to replace the phases IV and V of the Verbicioara culture). Chronologically, it may be considered to be situated between this last one and the Vârtop group or even partially parallel with this last one<sup>13</sup>.

Later, Bistreţ-Işalniţa type ceramics was considered only partially contemporary with the Govora type one but also with that characteristic to the second phase of the necropolises from Cruceni and Beograd-“Karaburma”<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> S. Morintz, *Contribuţii arheologice la istoria tracilor timpurii*, I, 1978, p. 65, fig. 19/4.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 22 next and 61 next; B. Hänsel, *Beiträge zur Regionalen und Chronologischen Gliederung der älteren Hallstattzeit an der unteren Donau*, Bonn, 1976, p. 101 sq.

<sup>12</sup> I. Chicideanu, “Die Frühthrakische Kultur”, p. 40 next, followed then by most of the researchers (cf. and A. László, in *IR*<sup>2</sup>, I, 2010, p. 313).

<sup>13</sup> B. Hänsel, *Beiträge zur Regionalen und Chronologischen Gliederung der älteren Hallstattzeit an der unteren Donau*, Bonn, 1976, p. 101 sq.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*; B. Hänsel in his work, considers the group Işalniţa contemporary with the phase Babadag I, having certain affinities with the group Vârtop and following after the group Govora. As regarding the position that the mentioned group would have, the author presents two hypotheses: the first is that according to which this group would constitute an intermediary horizon between the group Govora and the grooved pottery of Vârtop type. The second would be that the groups Govora and Vârtop had been contemporary and belonged to the autochthon communities and the Işalniţa type grooved pottery would have arrived from the external area, on the Danube's course.

Still, what can we consider as being certain after studying the actual documentation? First of all, we believe that we should start from the funerary discoveries, realized through systematic researches, from the area of the Bistreț lake, to which we must grant the proper importance. The situation from Ișalnița should be approached from another perspective. The discoveries from Cârna-“Ostrovogania” and also the new ones from the nearby area, at Plosca, constitute now *the only* certain situations that can be regarded a starting point. Here, in the perimeter of the both Žuto Brdo-Gârla Mare type necropolises, was identified for each a small group of tombs of which ceramic inventory presented specific forms different from those met in the majority tombs (at Cârna-“Ostrovogania”, 9 from 69 tombs) and that, in few cases, superposed stratigraphically the Gârla Mare type tombs<sup>15</sup>.

Similar situations are attested in Serbia, along the Danube, in the Clisură area (Korbovo-“Pesak” and Vajuga-“Pesak”) and Bulgaria (Orsoja) but they are only mentioned and little or at all illustrated (maybe it will be more appropriate to name all these discoveries of “Bistreț type”, avoiding the name Ișalnița, in order not to create confusions).

No matter how much we take into account the influences that came from the western side (we are referring here to the group Cruceni-Belegiș), it is obvious that the mentioned discoveries constitute the organic evolution in the forms of the Gârla Mare culture and, implicitly, of the funerary practices specific for those communities (the cremation remains the exclusively practiced rite). We should also notice that the number of Bistreț-(Ișalnița) type tombs from the cited necropolises is much more reduced as confronted to the one from the Gârla Mare period tombs. This fact might suggest a short period of time when this group developed, but such a conclusion is not mandatory<sup>16</sup>. In the same time, the fact that it isn't yet known any necropolis that can be attributed certainly *only* to the Bistreț-Ișalnița group, this type being always discovered in the area of the Gârla Mare necropolises (even if, in some cases, are disposed in separate group, as in the circumstances from Beograd

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<sup>15</sup> M. Șandor-Chicideanu, *Cultura Zuto-Brdo Gârla Mare. Contribuții la cunoașterea epocii bronzului la Dunărea mijlocie și inferioară*, p. 223 and especially p. 262-297; the researches from Plosca-“Cabana de metal” have been only partially published (*Ibid*, pp. 298-318).

<sup>16</sup> I. Chicideanu, “Die Frühthrakische Kultur”, p. 43 and M. Șandor-Chicideanu, *Cultura Zuto-Brdo Gârla Mare*, p. 209 sq. appreciates its duration to about a century (the 13<sup>th</sup> century at I. Chicideanu and about 1250/1200-1100 B.C. at M. Șandor-Chicideanu).

-“Karaburma”)<sup>17</sup>, it proves more likely the tight connection, undoubtedly, with the Gârla Mare culture necropolises and the further on practicing, by the same communities, of the anterior funerary customs.

As mentioned before, to the ceramics from the Bistreț-Ișalnița cultural group were attributed as characteristic a certain repertoire of forms that includes bitronconic amphorae (large vessels), bowls of which shape in the part of the maximum diameter is square, two lugged cups, also with a square form, double vessels (salt cellar), semispherical cups with overdimensioned lug, the ornaments being realized especially narrowed and oblique, placed on its body, garland-shaped, on the vessel’s neck<sup>18</sup>.

Unfortunately, most of the materials that are illustrated in literature come, either from isolated discoveries or vessels, most kept in fragments. Until the publishing of the complete context from the Cârna - “Ostrovogania” and Ploșca - “Cabana de metal” tombs, all that is known about the Bistreț aspect of this cultural group, are the data discussed above.

Taking into account these data, Ion Chicideanu, placed along the Bistreț-(Ișalnița) group the flat necropolis from Balta Verde and some discoveries published by Dumitru Berciu as coming from Vârtop. On the situation of the materials taken from this last station we shall talk later on, but as regarding the small necropolis from Balta Verde we draw the attention about the fact that few elements would justify such a cultural and chronological placing. The vessels discovered in the 22 tombs identified after the digs present only vague analogies with the ones from Bistreț; we are referring here to the large vessels, a generalized form at the end of the Bronze Age that became common in most of the discoveries from the beginning of the Iron Age, so it may be considered characteristic only for the Bistreț-Ișalnița group. But, the porringers with the edge bended in the exterior, ornamented with grooves disposed in garland, aren’t present at Bistreț. On the other side, at Balta Verde, the porringers with the lobate edge that characterize indeed the Bistreț type discoveries are lacking.

After all, the only element that pleads for the relation with the situations from Bistreț, is the presence of the urns field from Balta Verde on the same area with that of the Gârla Mare type necropolis

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<sup>17</sup> J. Todorović, *Praistoriska Karaburma II. – nekropola bronzanog doba*, Beograd, 1977.

<sup>18</sup> I. Chicideanu, *Die Frühthrakische*.

from the same locality: the point “*La morminți*” (in the graves area). Unfortunately, there isn't a plan of the digs and from the report made by Berciu doesn't clearly result the superposing of the two necropolises' positions; the mentioned author declared only the fact that: “in the same point (...) where it was the urn field from the Bronze Age (...), existed a necropolis, *on a larger area* (our mention) that also included tombs with funerary urns”. And he added below: “the urns field from the First Iron Age included the entire part of the urn field from the Bronze Age, stretching also beyond its limits”<sup>19</sup>.

If we examine the inventories of the 18 tombs from the same necropolis, considered as being of Gârla Mare type, we notice that some vessels discovered in the tombs 16-18 lack the specific decoration and can be related with the Bistreț aspect<sup>20</sup>. In conclusion we have good reasons to consider the situation exemplified through the small necropolises from Balta Verde as suggestive in order to illustrate the process of evolution of the funerary practices in this part of the Dunării de Jos<sup>21</sup>: during the stage with Gârla Mare ceramics (the tombs 1-15) appear elements with ceramics similar to the Bistreț type (in the tomb no. 16 and in the double tomb 17-18) and then was adopted the ceramics predominantly decorated with grooves (the 22 tombs from the necropolis attributed to the First Iron Age). This last discovery is probably, in our opinion, partially contemporary with the necropolis from Hinova and that from Ticvanu Mare, Caraș-Severin County and some sites with Vârtop type ceramics.

The confusions that result concerning the attribution of some dispersed and ununitary materials from the formal point of view, to the Bistreț-Ișalnița cultural group, also appear due to the unpublishing of the entire material found here, but also due to the unilateral character of the discoveries, most of them of funerary type. The only sites that had the characteristics of a settlement in which it seems that could be noticed this evolution of the material culture are those from Balej (four successive deposits) and Ghidici (the

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<sup>19</sup> D. Berciu, E. Comșa, “Săpăturile de la Balta-Verde și Gogoșu” in *Materiale*, 2, 1956, p. 307 sq.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p. 301 sq, fig. 35; 36.

<sup>21</sup> These conclusions are similar with those drawn 50 years earlier by D. Berciu as regarding the continuing of the cultural evolution in this area crossed by the Danube, Oltenia (*Ibid*, p. 308).

dwelling no. 2 and 9 were attributed to the cultural aspect that we discuss here). But we must bring forward the fact that the discovery from Bulgaria, because the lack of details in the preliminary reports, remains still uncertain.

We believe that these apparent lacks in our information are explained through an objective situation: as A. Vulpe noticed, at the end of the Bronze Age is seen a tendency as regarding the reducing in number of the burials that can be archaeologically identified and, at the beginning of the Iron Age until the Basarabi period and including it, they disappeared in some areas<sup>22</sup>. In other words, in the lack of some necropolises rich in inventory (especially pottery) the image of the archaeological discoveries reveals an apparent “impoverishment” of the proofs of dwelling that is actually a lack of the objective information, of registering some cultural transformations that, with the actual methods the archaeological researching can’t detect. This reduction of the archaeological material doesn’t necessary reflect other structural modifications of the quotidian life in that communities.

For the completion of the image from this controversial period are of great help the discoveries from Banat that we shall bring forward below, in our paper. The situation from Balta Verde, mentioned before, presents similarities with that seen in the great necropolis of Cruceni- Belegiš type from Beograd -“Karaburma”, remarkably analyzed by I. Chicideanu<sup>23</sup>. The horizon of Dubovac – Žuto Brdo type tombs (partial contemporary with the Gârla Mare culture) is followed, apparently immediate, by a horizon with urns of which vessels are decorated mostly with grooves, similar to the Cruceni – Belegiš type. The superposing of the two horizons of discoveries is only partial, the urns are ornamented with grooves being found especially in the eastern side.

This succession was interpreted by the mentioned author as a succession after the acquiring in the communities that used the incrustrated pottery of Žuto Brdo – Gârla Mare type of the influences exercised by the Cruceni – Belegiš group, of influences that are seen

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<sup>22</sup> A. Vulpe, in *Istoria Românilor*, I, 2010, p. 366 sq; A. Vulpe, “Zu den Grabsitten der älteren Hallstattzeit in Rumänien”, in (ed. F. Verse, B. Koche *et alii*) *Durch die Zeiten...Festschrift für Albrecht Jockenhövel zum 65. Geburtstag*, Rahden/Westf., 2008, pp. 269-273.

<sup>23</sup> I. Chicideanu, “Die Frühthrakische Kultur”, p. 30 sq. The necropolis was published by Jovan Todorović: *Praistorijska Karaburma II*.

also in the genesis of the Bistreț-Ișalnița group. Of course, these influences can't be denied, but more important would be that their signification to be fully appreciated. We consider that the actual stage of the information allow us to draw conclusions that involve the history in order to explain this phenomenon.

In Banat, the group Cruceni-Belegiș (the second phase) is followed by the horizon represented by the necropolis from Bobda<sup>24</sup> and illustrated by the rich ceramic material discovered in the Susani tumulus<sup>25</sup>. This last one would constitute the finishing of the evolutive process that started in the 1<sup>st</sup> stage of the Cruceni-Belegiș type necropolises, phenomenon also seen by K. Horedt and reconsidered by A. Vulpe. It is yet appropriate to mention the fact that in Banat the entire process is illustrated only by funerary discoveries. The tumulus from Susani is, up until now, singular, its importance coming also after the complete publishing of its rich ceramic inventory<sup>26</sup>.

It is therefore obvious that a step forward made in the attempt to explain the phenomenon of passing from the period with incrustrated pottery of Gârla Mare, Žuto Brdo, Szeremle etc. type to that where the grooved pottery becomes the main category of fine ceramics, can't be made without knowing the forms of dwelling and their material content. Neither in Banat nor in Oltenia this isn't possible to be done in the actual stage of information. The evolution of the material culture specific for this period from Banat and Danube's meadow, presents characteristics different from the sub-Carpathian regions.

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<sup>24</sup> N. Boroffka, "Probleme der jungbronzezeitlichen Keramik in Ostungarn und Westrumänien", in (ed. H. Ciugudean, N. Boroffka) *The Early Hallstatt Period (1200-700) in South-Eastern Europa. Proceedings of the International Symposium from Alba Iulia*, June, 1993, Alba Iulia, 1994, p. 10, fig. 1.

<sup>25</sup> I. Stratan, A. Vulpe, *Der Hügel von Susani*, PZ 52, 1, 1977, pp. 28-60.

<sup>26</sup> Although the publishing of a dig is a duty of its authors, we notice that in Banat the situation of archaeological documentation presents great lacunas: at the large necropolis from Cruceni aren't known but the few tombs dug by Ortansa Radu ("Cu privire la necropola de la Cruceni jud. Timiș", *SCIV* 24, 1973, 3, p. 503-520); the one from Bobda is, excepting few illustrated vessels, apart from their context, N. Boroffka ("Probleme...", supra, p. 10, fig. 1), totally new, and in the The Museum of Banat from Timișoara there is an important amount of material, still in a rough state, coming from the hundreds of tombs of the necropolises that belong to the same periods (Timișoara-"Pădurea Verde", Peciu Nou etc.).

# AN ARCHITECTURAL VARIETY SPECIFIC TO OLTENIA. THE *CULA* (OLD BOYARS' HOUSE)♦

Anca CEAUȘESCU\*

**Abstract:** The cula type edifices, which represent the tower-shaped buildings, appeared out of the necessity of refuge and defending. They are met in our country, in the southern territories, between the Carpathians, the Danube and the rivet Olt, with a prolonging to the river Argeș. From the architectonic point of view, the elements specific for the cula type edifices existed as starting with the 17<sup>th</sup> century at the boyars' houses. But, in the most well-known and better preserved forms, they appeared in the Phanariot period. They had been built by the small and middle boyars from the countryside. The cula type edifices from Oltenia fulfilled different functions, dividing them in three categories: refuge and defending cula or temporary house; watching, signaling and alarm cula; permanent dwelling-cula.

**Keywords:** the cula, Oltenia, reinforced housing, arhitecture.

Along the princely houses, the boyars' houses and mansions, the old boyars' residences (called *cula* at singular) are constructions that belong to the category of the civil buildings that have been lasting since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in a less or more advanced stage of degradation. If in Transylvania, for the purpose of defending, had been built rural fortresses and in Moldova monasteries with strong walls, in Wallachia, had been built the *cula*. As a real fortresses, with thick walls, stroke through by ramparts, the *cula* is constituting in a type of construction representative in the Romanian architecture. These houses stand for the pages from the history of Oltenia's territory that bring eloquent proofs about the fight carried on by the people of this territory against the invaders from the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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\* **Address for correspondence:** Dr. Anca Ceaușescu, researcher, Romanian Academy, "C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor" Institute for Studies in Social Sciences and Humanities, Department of Ethnology, Philology and Philosophy, 68 Unirii, Craiova 200329, Romania. E-mail: ancaceausescu@yahoo.com.

