

ETHNOGRAPHY AND ARCHEOLOGY: IRON AGE, TRADITIONAL SPACE, RITUAL ELEMENTS AND FOLKLORE

THE BEGINNING OF THE IRON AGE IN NORTHEAST OLTENIA*

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Abstract: The process of assimilating the grooved decoration is vaguer in the sub-Carpathian area and is more difficult to examine than in the southern Oltenia and Banat. The only areal where this process can be studied further more is the Râmnicu Vâlcea basin. Besides some discoveries with pottery grooved, similar with the Vârtope type, apparently isolated, to the beginning period of the First Iron Age was attributed a series of sites identified in the the piedmont hills and of the sub-Carpathian area, from which is distinguished the urn cremation necropolis from Râureni I. We might talk about the existence of some different elements that characterize the discoveries from the Danube's meadow, as comparing with those from the south-Carpathian regions. The Early Hallstatt from Oltenia has a first stage characterized by the grooved ceramics; it might be dated, in the absolute chronology, roughly, in the 12th–11th centuries B.C., respectively Ha. A.

Keywords: The Early Hallstatt, pottery grooved, Oltenia, the sub-Carpathian area.

The attempt to analyze the discoveries that belong to the Late Bronze and to the Early Hallstatt from Oltenia, start, predictably, from the data offered by the actual stage of the researches. The difficulties in defining and studying, as precise as possible, the interval of time considered, most of the time as a “passing period” from one historical period to another, come both from the study of the existent documentation and, especially, from the modalities and criteria of interpreting these documentations.

The chronology of the Early Hallstatt from Oltenia has a first stage characterized by the grooved ceramics; it might be dated, in the absolute

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chronology, roughly, in the 12th – 11th centuries B.C. The second stage, with imprinted ceramics of Insula Banului – Gornea – Kalakača type is dated in the 10th–9th centuries B.C.

From the material that we already have can be noticed that Oltenia is regarded, on the whole, according to the evolution that the western part of our country generally knows. Thus, the cultural aspects of the Late Bronze: the end of the Gârla Mare culture, the group Govora (Verbicioara IV and V a, according to D. Berciu)¹, the cultural aspect Bistreț Ișalnița², it is followed almost uniform in this region, the grooved ceramics. It is attested in the necropolises from Hinova³, Balta Verde⁴ and Bistreț⁵ in the Vârtop type discoveries and in the area around Râmnicu Vâlcea, in the settlement from Ghidici to give only few examples. This horizon was called “the Vârtop cultural group”. We might eventually talk about the existence of some different elements that characterize the discoveries from the Danube’s meadow, as comparing with those from the south-Carpathian regions.

In these areas, that of the piedmont hills and of the sub-Carpathian one, we can remark that the Verbicioara type ceramics, in its classical form – the phases I–III – was weaker represented. At some point appears the pottery called initially “the late Verbicioara” (the phases IV–V of the Verbicioara culture), materials which were then considered part of the group Govora.

Unlike the south of Oltenia, where the progressive adopting of the grooved ceramics illustrates the process of an local organic evolution, in the centre and in the north of Oltenia, the end of the Bronze Age is represented by the Verbicioara IV-V type discoveries, according to the classification made by D. Berciu⁶ or of Govora Type, phenomenon that, after the considering of its content that is exclusively ceramic, leaves the impression of a discontinuity in the cultural aspect.

The process of assimilating the grooved decoration is vaguer in the sub-Carpathian area and is more difficult to examine than in the southern Oltenia and Banat. The only areal where this process can be studied further more is the Râmnicu Vâlcea basin, a micro-region that we shall next approach in detail.

In the north-east of Oltenia, the Vârtop type materials that we had were those obtained especially after accidental discoveries and, in some cases, the Verbicioara

¹ D. Berciu, *Die Verbicioara Kultur*, “Dacia”, NS, 5, 1961, pp. 123–161.

² I. Chicideanu, *Die Frühthrakische Kultur. Zur Bronzezeit in Sudwest Rumänien*, in “Dacia”, NS, 30/1986, 1–2, pp. 40–47.

³ M. Davidescu, *Un tezaur de podoabe tracice descoperite la Hinova – Mehedinți*, in “Thracodacica”, 2/1981, pp. 7–22; Idem, *Necropola tracică de la Hinova, județul Mehedinți*, in “Symposia Thracologica”, 1/1984, p. 11; M. Davidescu, A. Vulpe, *Necropola de incineratie de la Hinova, jud. Mehedinți*, “Drobeta”, XX, 2010, pp. 117–179.

⁴ D. Berciu, E. Comșa, *Săpăturile de la Balta Verde și Gogoșu (1949 și 1950)*, in “Materiale și cercetări de arheologie” 2/1956, pp. 251–490.

⁵ I. Chicideanu, *O descoperire de la începutul primei epoci a fierului de la Cârna*, in “SCIVA”, 43, 1, 1992, pp. 39–45.

⁶ D. Berciu, *Die Verbicioara Kultur*, “Dacia”, NS, V, 1961, pp. 123–161.

IV–V type pottery – according to Berciu (Govora group) appears mingled with the grooved pottery. Unfortunately, even there where there were made soundings and reduced digs, the materials are seldom presented undifferentiated from the stratigraphic point of view. The pottery presents the same general characteristics that we have discussed before.

Referring to the forms we can mention the tureen with the edge arched to the inside and flat bottom, the pedestalled cup, the truncated porringer, bitruncated vessels with two handles on the upper side and the cups with one or two over-raised⁷, the tureen with the upper side and the edge bended to the inside or turned-up and the bitruncated tureen, the pedestalled cup, the oven-vessel. These are decorated only with the shape of a cable-moulding and garland, sometimes with alveolated girdles and have prominences on the body⁸. Most of the material from here presents of course some similarities with the Vârtop type materials. Yet, from here are missing the bitruncated vessels with oblique groove on the body and the prominences specific for the Vârtop type discoveries.

In Râmnicu Vâlcea was discovered an urn cremation tomb⁹ and at Ocnele Mari¹⁰ an inhumation tomb; this is disposed, according to those related by the author of the discovery, near an ash-place settlement in which were identified several ceramic fragments, some of them having analogies with Vârtop and other with the Govora group. Another tomb, this time of inhumation, was found at Căzănești¹¹, having on the left omoplate a semispherical porringer with the edge arched to the inside. The author of the dig considers that the type of dwelling from here would belong to the Verbicioara culture but if it is to compare the ceramic fragments with that of Vârtop type, we would incline to an analogy with the last one. The presence of two rites in a small territory, raise a problem that, because of the extremely reduced documentation that exists now, we can't yet explain it.

Another discovery where also appeared grooved ceramics is that near Râmnicu Vâlcea, more precisely at Căzănești – “Săveasca” (Sketches nos. I, III), where there were found, unfortunately not in some clear conditions, as we shall

⁷ Gh. Petre-Govora, *Un orizont hallstattian timpuriu în nord-vestul Olteniei* in “Thracodacica”, 4, 1–2, 1983, pp. 85–95; Idem, *O preistorie a nord-estului Olteniei*, Râmnicu Vâlcea, Petras Publishing, 1995, pp. 43–54, pl. 1/9–12, 2/4, 4/7, 6/4, 5, 7, 8, 11–13, 7/1, 3, 5–7, 9, 10; 11, 12/1–12; 13.

⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 85–95; Idem, in the works cited above.

⁹ I. Chicideanu, *Cu privire la descoperirile funerare ale grupei Verbicioara*, in “Oltenia. Studii și comunicări”, 15, 2004, p. 10.

¹⁰ D. Berciu, *Noi date privind sfârșitul culturii Verbicioara*, in “SCIVA”, 27, 2, 1976, pp. 176–177, pl. 1, 7/2, 3; S. Morintz, *Contribuții arheologice la istoria tracilor timpurii*, 1978, p. 68; Petre Govora, *Contributions à l'étude de la fin du Bronze et du commencement du Hallstatt dans le nord-est de l'Oltenie*, in “Actes du II-e Congrès International de Thracologie”, Bucharest, 1976 (Bucharest, 1980), I, pp. 138–142; Idem, *Un orizont hallstattian timpuriu în nord-estul Olteniei*, in “Thracodacica” 4, 1983, p. 85.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 85–89, fig. 5 and 6/1–4, 6; Idem, *O preistorie a nord-estului Olteniei*, Râmnicu Vâlcea, Petras Publishing, 1995, p. 54, fig. 4/15; 5; 6/1–4,6.

show below, few vessels of which decoration can be related to the grooved horizon of Vârtop-Susani type. In his presentation, Petre-Govora said that these materials appeared in a lair of Verbicioara IV-V pottery¹². These discoveries aren't in the position to clear if we can talk about the adopting of the grooved pottery style in this area too. The presence, around the salt mines from Ocnele Mari, Vâlcea County, of some discoveries of pottery with forms and decoration that presented a mixture of Vârtop-Susani with different cultural traditions, might be explained through the salt commerce, extremely necessary element in the economy of the communities from the field areas.

Besides some discoveries with pottery similar with the Vârtop type, apparently isolated (see above Căzânești – “Săveasca”, Vâlcea County), to the beginning period of the First Iron Age was attributed a series of sites identified in the Râmnicu Vâlcea area, from which is distinguished the urn cremation necropolis from Râureni. On the tall bank of the river Olt had been dug, by Emil Moscalu, two necropolises, one of urn cremation attributed to the Early Hallstatt and another, tumular, that belongs to the Ferigile group from the Late Hallstatt. The cremation necropolis (Râureni I) included 100 individual (urn) tombs, disposed along the river Olt, each urn containing a great quantity of burned bones. This so-called “urns field” is partially superposed by the tumular necropolis mentioned before.

The author of the dig considered that there were two different necropolises: Râureni I, from the beginning of the Iron Age and Râureni II, from the Ferigile period, without an evolutive organic connection between them. About these two necropolises were published only short preliminary reports, along with few illustrations. No data are available about the exact number of tombs, neither details about their type or the connection between the earlier tombs and the Ferigile tumuli¹³.

Materials similar to those from the Râureni I necropolis¹⁴ (Sketches no. IV), had also been discovered in the Râmnicu Vâlcea area¹⁵, at Brezoi – “Podul lui Lazăr”¹⁶, Teiuș¹⁷, Țeica (Ocnele Mari)¹⁸, all in Vâlcea County and at Tigveni,

¹² Gh. Petre-Govora, *Un orizont hallstattian timpuriu în nord-vestul Olteniei*, in “Thracodacia”, 4, pp. 91 and next.

¹³ E. Moscalu, *Probleme ale culturii traco-geto-dacice din Oltenia*, in “Oltenia. Studii și Comunicări”, Craiova, 3, 1981, p. 17; Idem, *Problèmes concernant la culture thraco-gète d'Oltenie*, “Dacia” NS. 25, 1981, pp. 343 and next, where are illustrated four vessels from the necropolis. As regarding the number of the tombs from the so-called flat necropolis, Moscalu notes once “approximately” 90 and then about 100 (also see Idem, *Ceramica traco-getică*, Bucharest, 1983, p. 246).

¹⁴ Simona Lazăr, *Începutul epocii fierului în zona Râmnicu Vâlcea*, in “SCIVA”, 61, 1–2, 2010, pp. 49–71.

¹⁵ A. Vulpe, E. Popescu, *Contributions à la connaissance des débuts de la culture géto-dacique dans la zone subcarpatique Vâlcea-Argeș (La nécropole tumulaire de Tigveni)*, in “Dacia”, NS. 16, 1972, p. 85.

¹⁶ Simona Lazăr, *Sfârșitul epocii bronzului și începutul epocii fierului în sud-vestul României*, Craiova, Universitaria Publishing, 2011, p. 68.

¹⁷ Gh. Petre-Govora, *Descoperiri arheologice din epoca fierului în jud. Vâlcea*, in “Materiale și cercetări de arheologie”, 9, 1970, p. 471, fig. 2/4; Idem, *O preistorie a nord-estului Olteniei*, Râmnicu Vâlcea, Petras Publishing, 1995, p. 63.

Argeş County¹⁹. In the actual stage of the research it is obvious that we are dealing with a group of exclusively funerary discoveries, with specific ceramics, of which spreading is limited by Topolog Valley in east and south, by Ocnele Mari and Otăsău Valley in west and in north by the confluence of the rivers Olt with Lotru, at Brezoi.

Taking into account that at Râureni are almost 100 graves, it is hard to believe that they all belong to a singular phase. Of course, it can't be appreciated how much evolved in time the necropolis from Râureni I. Its dating through a single element, the bronze knife, indicates only that it is possible that it might have lasted between the interval Br D – Ha B, most probably the knife being from the period Ha A. This interval occupies, according to the absolute chronology data, general accepted in the actual stage, a period of approximately 200–300 years. We consider that in this interval can appear around 10 generations, resulting a number of 9–10 tombs per generation.

It can be noticed the extremely fragmentary state for the majority of the vessels considered to be urns and the frequent presence of a perforation on the bottom of the vessel, the so-called “soul window”. Some forms of pots, excepting the square-shaped vessels, find similarities in the ceramics from the tumuli 3 and 4 from Tigveni, including the presence of the “soul window”, as in the case of the urns.

Another analogy can be made with the small group of tombs from “Podul lui Lazăr”, point situated on the Lotru Vallet, near the city Brezoi. Thus, at many vessels is noticed the accentuation of the turned-up edge and the presence of the grooves on the body and another draw the attention through special characteristics, being a cylindrical glass, with proliferated bottom and straight edge. About these vessels of which exact number isn't identified, we know that they functioned as urns, containing calcined bones and that they were situated in boxes made from stone plates.

The square-shaped vessels²⁰ represent a form that appear in the Gârla Mare culture and it is considered characteristic then for the Bistreţ Işalniţa group. We observe that the analogy of the square-shaped vessels from Râureni is singular, other forms couldn't be found in the Bistreţ Işalniţa type pottery. This analogy it doesn't necessary have a chronological parallel, but it can be, more likely, an element that belongs to a certain “tradition”. We believe that wouldn't be hazardous to assume that the presence of this type of vessel might mark the existence of some earlier tombs from the entire existence of the necropolis.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 60, fig. 3.

¹⁹ A. Vulpe, E. Popescu, *Contributions à la connaissance des débuts de la culture géto-dacique dans la zone subcarpatique Vâlcea-Argeş (La nécropole tumulaire de Tigveni)*, in “Dacia”, NS. 16, 1972, p. 85.

²⁰ Simona Lazăr, *Începutul epocii fierului în zona Râmnicu Vâlcea*, in “SCIVA”, 61, 1–2, 2010, pp. 57–58.

We have few analogies for the Râureni ceramics, in the Romanian space, except for the materials from the Râmnicu Vâlcea area that we have mentioned here. The entire group appears as an isolated aspect in the Carpathian-Danube Early Hallstatt context. We are referring both to the ceramic forms and to the type of burial, in a period when the general tendency is the radical reproduction of the burials number and even the disappearance of the necropolises. This is the main reason for which, initially, Alexandru Vulpe and Eugenia Popescu thought, when it was presented the group from Tigveni, at parallels with late ages. On the other side, Ion Chicideanu, looking for analogies for the Bistreț-Ișalnița group, considered that the vessels with the almost square shape from Râureni might be an argument for the placing of the Râureni necropolis in the assemblage of the Bistreț-Ișalnița type discoveries²¹.

We meet square-shaped vessels in the tumulus from Meri, Teleorman County that was dated through analogy with the Vârtop type ceramics, in Ha A²². In the tomb of the tumulus from Meri was found a similar form of vessel, along with pottery decorated with grooves and an iron knife and a bronze item plated with gold. The large vessel with incised garland decoration and four wide prominences placed on the body resembles quite well with the type 2 vessel from Râureni. E. Moscalu dated the discovery from Meri in the Hallstatt A period. We consider that this dating is completely justified and represents, altogether, an argument for the dating of the Râureni I necropolis in the same period. We can find analogies for few forms of tureens and for the pedestalled vessel in the Râmnicu Vâlcea area and at Căzănești-Săveasca²³. Some forms of vessels that seem similar are met in the inter-Carpathian area at Teleac²⁴, in the levels I and II.

Along with the grooved pottery of Vârtop type, also appears the Verbicioara IV–V (Govora group) ceramics. Excepting the cremation necropolises of Râureni-Tigveni type, the rest of the material comes from the field researches, of which contextual verification is uncertain. Although we shouldn't ignore the chronological differences, it is plausible the hypothesis according to which this concentration of discoveries, some apparently without clear analogies in other zones (this is the case of some ceramic forms from Râureni), would be due to the importance that the salt deposits had in the economy of that period. Analog situations were also noticed in another saline type sites: Lunca-Vânători, Neamț County²⁵, Loeva, the Ivan – Frankovsk zone, the sub-Carpathian Ukraine²⁶ or the Ocna Mureș zone, with their rich discoveries of bronzes hoards (Uioara de Sus,

²¹ I. Chicideanu, *Die Frühthrakische Kultur. Zur Bronzezeit in Südwest Rumänien*, in "Dacia", NS, 30, 1986, 1–2, p. 45.

²² E. Moscalu, *Die Frühhallstattzeitlichen Gräber von Meri (Gem. Vedeia Kr. Teleorman)*, in "Thraco-Dacica" 1, 1976, pp. 77–86.

²³ G. Petre Govora, *op. cit.*, fig. 9/1,7,8.

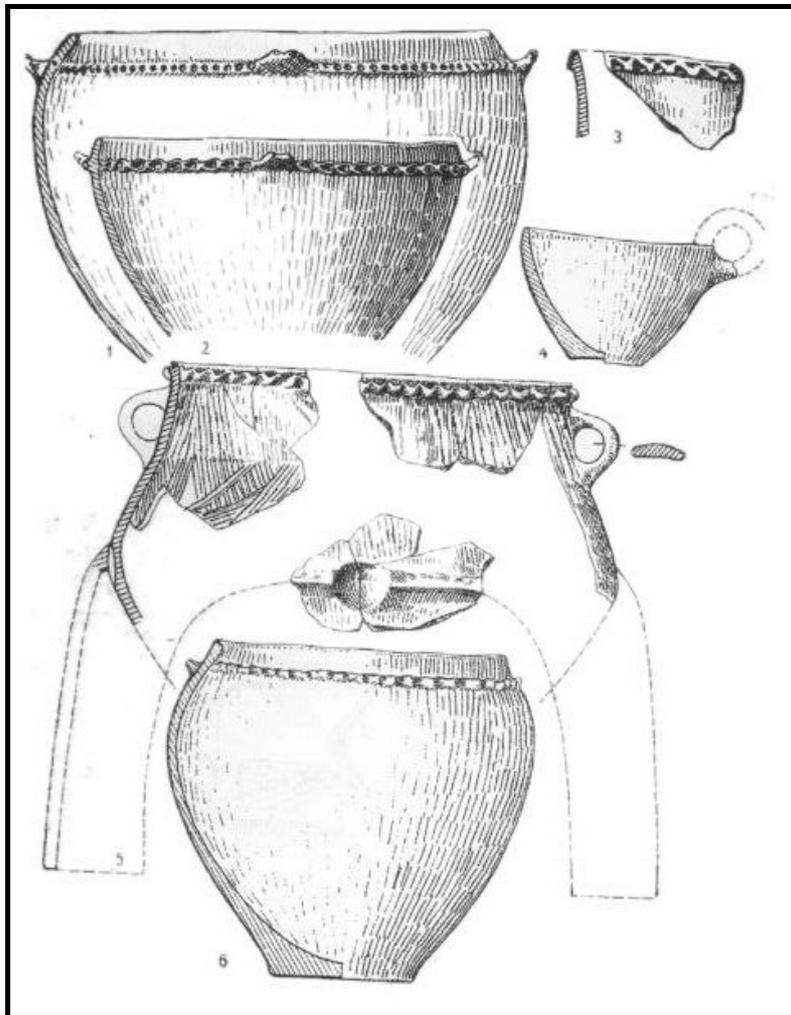
²⁴ V. Vasiliev, I. A. Aldea, H. Ciugudean, *Civilizația dacică timpurie în aria intracarpatică a României. Contribuții arheologice*, Cluj, 1991, fig. 29–30.

²⁵ Gh. Dumitroaia, *Comunități preistorice din nord-estul României. De la cultura Cucuteni până în bronzul mijlociu*, Piatra Neamț, 2000, pp. 141 and next.

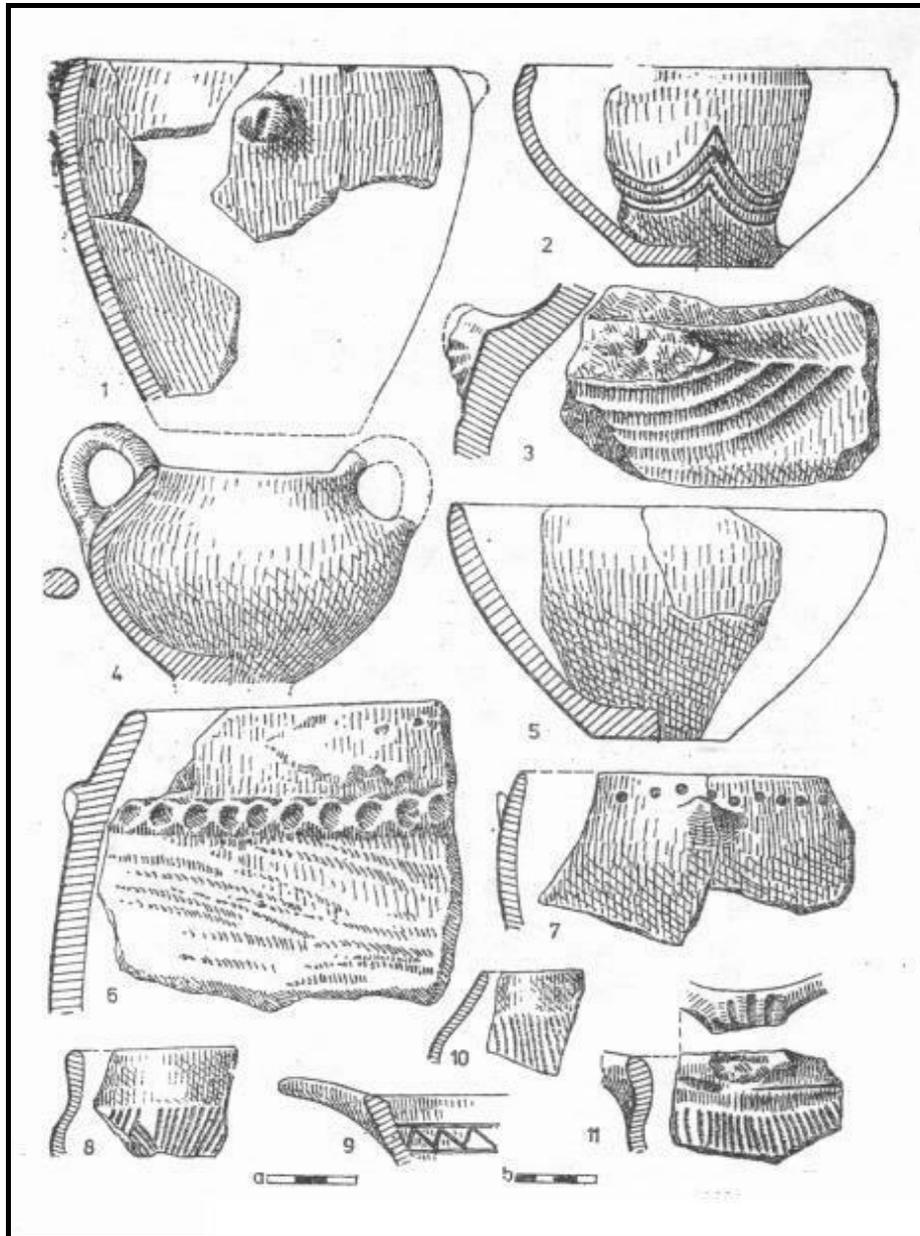
²⁶ L. I. Krušelnicka, *Vostočnokarpatskij v region bronzom i v mačale železnogo vetrov*, in "Materialy po Arkheologij Severnogo Pričernomoja", Odessa, 1991, p. 42.

Spălnaca, Aiud). To obtain the salt were made appreciable efforts, the moving on long distances and especially material goods exchanges. These actions were indispensable, especially for the societies with a predominant pastoral economy and those that practiced the moving of the flocks. It is plausible that this situation to be present in the Govora type communities.

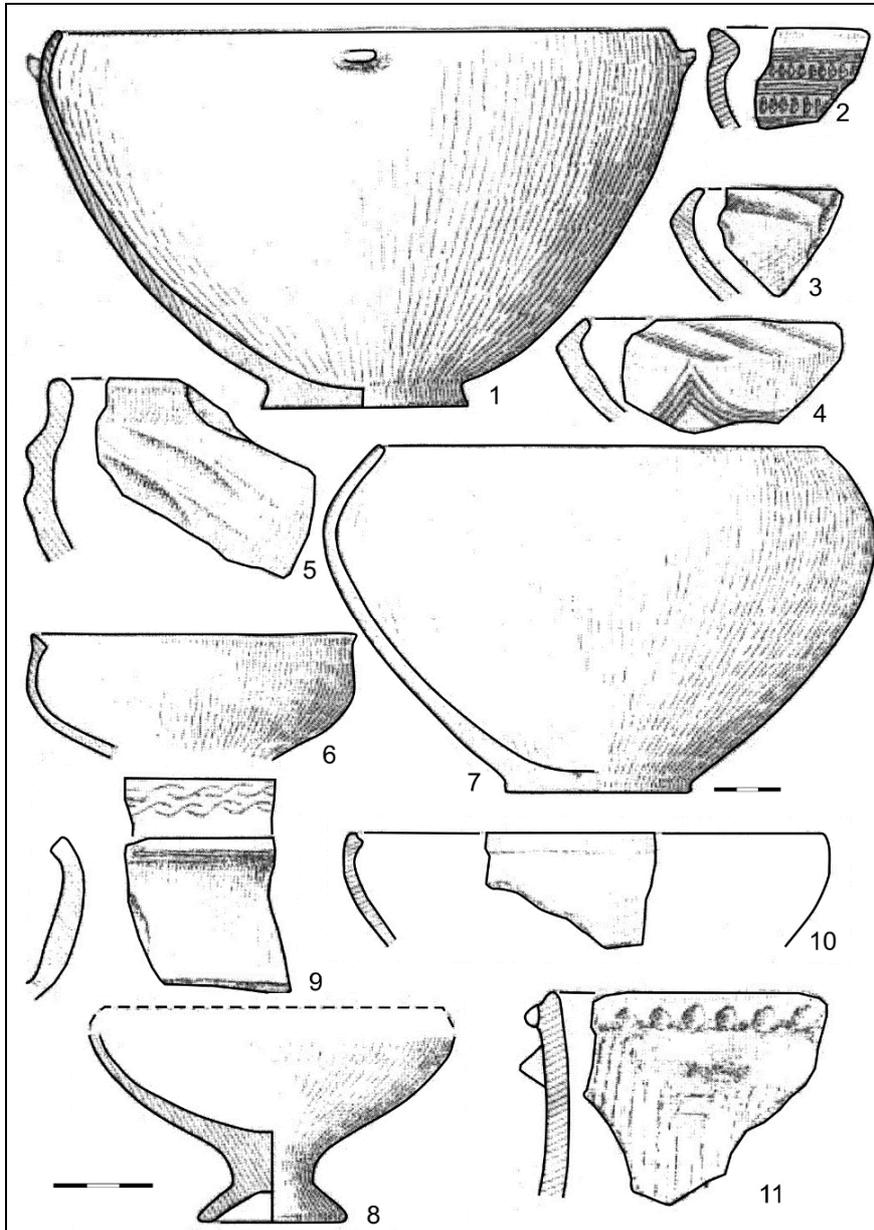
The material culture elements, in our case, the ceramic vessels, belong to the social practice system. As manifestations of some symbolic practices, they are the bearers of certain significations for which's understanding it is important to analyze the statute of this ceramics in the funerary space but also in the space of living and the relations that exist between the two fields.



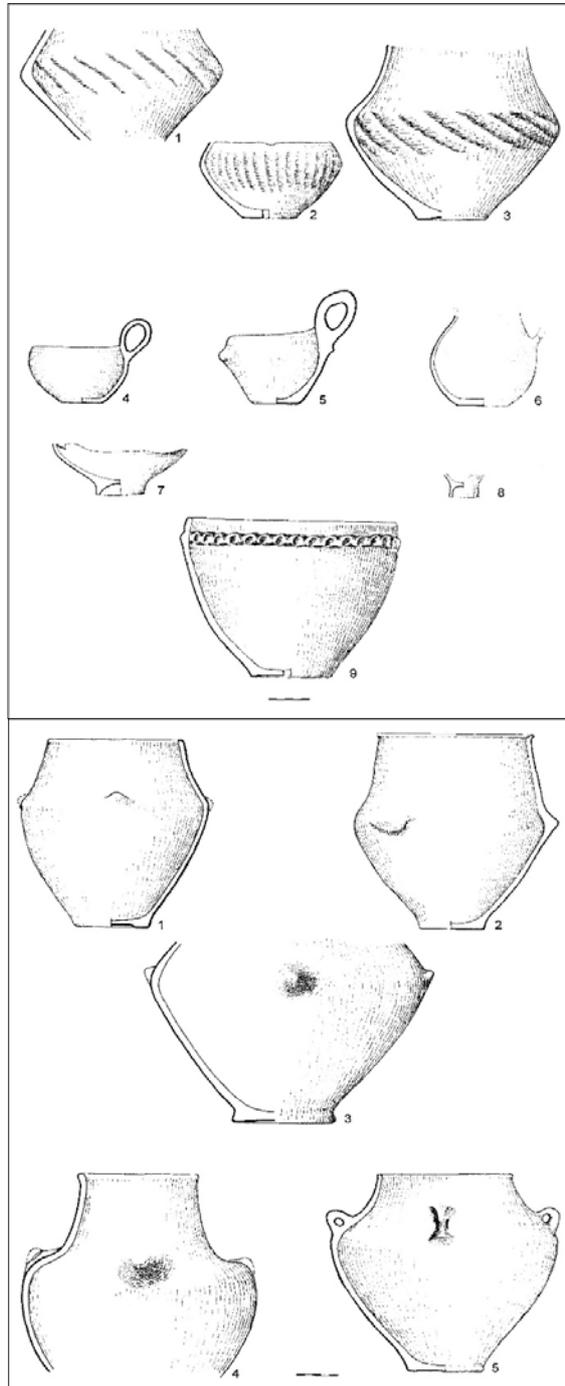
Sketches no. I. 1–4,6 Căzănești Săveasca; 5 Ocnele Mari (after Petre Govora).



Sketches no. II. Ocnele Mari (after Petre Govora).



Sketches no. III. Căzănești Săveasca (after Petre Govora)



Sketches no. IV. Răureni (after Moscalu).