

# RETRIEVING MATERIAL AND SPIRITUAL CULTURE

## ASPECTS ON VĂDRASTA CULTURE. THE POTTERY DISCOVERED AT “LA TURN” STATION\*

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**Abstract:** Archaeological research carried out over time in the reference sites belonging to the Vădastra civilization in Oltenia led to the discovery of a significant number of artifacts, mainly ceramics. Among these, the stratigraphic survey carried out by Dumitru Berciu in 1963 in Hotărani, at the point called “La Turn”, was very important. Based on this survey, Dumitru Berciu tried to outline a periodization of the Vădastra culture in four phases of evolution. The pottery discovered at Hotărani, “La Turn” station, were more numerous and diverse typologically than the ones published initially by D. Berciu, in 1966. From the analysis of the unique ceramic materials, discovered in the mentioned point, it seems that a periodization of the Vădastra culture can be outlined in two phases of evolution, but this analysis must be confirmed by stratigraphic verifications.

**Keywords:** Stratigraphy, periodization, phases, pottery, artifacts.

In the period of the Early Eneolithic (5,000–4,500 BC) there was spread, on a relatively broad area, encompassing the south-east of Oltenia, the west of Muntenia and the neighbouring region from the south of Danube, Vădastra civilisation. It was given this denomination by Ion Nestor, from the name of the eponymic settlement, the commune of Vădastra, Olt County<sup>1</sup>, where the first digs were made, in the station called “Magura Fetrelor”.

The archaeological research carried out on the reference sites for Vădastra culture, from our research area, led to the discovery of a large amount of pottery, and had been initially carried out only in the eponymic settlement, for later to be extended to other sites too. Marin Nica, the researcher who made the most significant digs in the region of Oltenia, was on the opinion that it evolved here

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\* This article is part of the research project *Neo-Eneoliticul în Oltenia. Origine și evoluție*, included in the research program of the Institute of Socio-Human Research „C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor” of the Romanian Academy: *Comunități umane și structuri de putere. Descoperiri arheologice în Oltenia*.

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<sup>1</sup> I. Nestor, *Der Stand der Vorgeschichtsforschung in Rumänien*, in Ber. RGK, 22, 1933, pp. 56.

within a cultural complex, called Dudești-Vădastra, in which the settlements belonging to this culture overlap those of the previous culture, Dudești<sup>2</sup> (Map 1).

Preoccupations for the elucidation of the origin, the evolution and the periodisation of Vădastra culture had existed since the beginning of the research. Thus, based on both the stratigraphic studies and the stylistic-typological analysis of the pottery, there were shaped several periodisation systems of the mentioned culture, the most famous being the one proposed by Corneliu Mateescu<sup>3</sup> with 2 evolutive phases, and the one with 4, later 5 evolutive phases, formulated by Dumitru Berciu<sup>4</sup>.

In the present article, there is to be both presented and analysed the new pottery discovered in a clear archaeological context at Hotărani in “*La Turn*” station (section I, square 5, –0.85m–1.05m / 16.09.1963), within the examination made by Dumitru Berciu and Marin Nica.

After the analysis made on the pottery discovered at Hotărani in *La Turn* station, as there has been mentioned in a recently published article<sup>5</sup>, it is revealed the fact that Dumitru Berciu valorised only a small part of it, just one sketch including six fragments with excised décor<sup>6</sup>. A significant part of the discovered pottery, most of it new, was used by us in 2020, and it should also be mentioned the fact that, 34 fragments were analysed, the base-leg of a fruit-dish, and even a completed dish<sup>7</sup>. The analysed pottery came from two sections, called S1 and S2. From the stratigraphic point of view, the mentioned pottery could not be disposed on different layers and in different pits, shaping the two levels of Vădastra culture. On addressing the pottery categories, there was represented both the common and the fine one, and, in terms of décor, there can be remarked: the excision, the incision and the groove. From the stylistic and typological analysis of the above mentioned pottery, there was concluded that it could be divided into two evolutive phases<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> M. Nica, *Unitate și diversitate în culturile neolitice de la Dunărea de Jos*, in “Pontica”, XXX, 1997, p. 106.

<sup>3</sup> C. Mateescu, *Săpături de salvare și cercetări arheologice la Vădastra și în împrejurimi*, in SCIV, VI, 3–4, 1955, pp. 447–455; Idem, *Săpături arheologice la Vădastra*, in MCA, V, 1959, pp. 61–73; Idem, *Săpături arheologice la Vădastra*, in MCA, VI, 1959, pp. 107–115; Idem, *Săpături arheologice la Vădastra (1960–1966)*, in MCA, IX, 1970, pp. 67–75; Idem, *Săpături arheologice la Vădastra (1970)*, in MCA, X, 1973, pp. 19–23; Idem, *Contribution to the study of the Neolithic dwellings in Romania: a dwelling of the second phase of Vădastra Culture (Middle Neolithic)*, in Dacia, N.S. 22, 1978, pp. 13–18.

<sup>4</sup> D. Berciu, *Contribuții la problemele neoliticului în România în lumina noilor cercetări*, Bucharest, Academy Publishing House, 1961, p. 37; Idem, *Zorile istoriei în Carpați și la Dunăre*, Bucharest, Scientific Publishing House, 1966, pp. 96–98.

<sup>5</sup> S. Popovici, S. Lazăr, *Despre periodizarea culturii Vădastra. Considerații (I)*, in “Oltenia. Studii și comunicări”, XXVII, 2020, pp. 88–104.

<sup>6</sup> D. Berciu, *Zorile istoriei în Carpați și la Dunăre*, Bucharest, Scientific Publishing House, 1966, pl. VI.

<sup>7</sup> S. Popovici, S. Lazăr, *op. cit.*, pl. 5–10.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 92.

Shortly after the valorisation, from the scientific point of view, of the mentioned pottery<sup>9</sup>, there were also identified, in the museum deposit, in a less accessible spot, 28 new pottery fragments, discovered at Hotărani, in *La Turn* station, in 1963. Among these, 25 were inventoried in the register of Romanați Museum, at numbers: 4398, 4400, 4401, 4403, 4405, 4406, 4407, 4412, 4414, 4415, 4417, 4419, 4421, 4422, 4423, 4424, 4427, 4428, 4438, 4439, 4437, 4440, 4441, 4444, 4815.

Broadly, the pottery belongs to the same categories as the 34 items published previously. The pottery items were found in section I, on a depth of 0.85m – 1.05m. There can be observed the fact that they are present both in the common usage category, and fine pottery. The décor is most of the times excised (Sk.1/1–6, Sk. 2/1–4, Sk. 3/1–4), but there are other elements of décor too: the groove (Sk. 4/3–5), Vinča type incision, where the spaces are filled with dots (Sk. 4/1, 2), the line-shaped incision, on different sides of the potter fragments (Sk. 3/3, 4) and the pottery fragments decorated in slips (Sk. 5/1–6).

From the presentation of the new pottery discovered at Hotărani, *La Turn*, Section I, square 5, –0.85m–1.05m/16.09.1963, it can be noticed the diversity of it, in relation to six excised fragments, published by Dumitru Berciu<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, similarly to the previous analysis<sup>11</sup>, based on the new-discovered pottery, there can be found defining elements of the two phases of Vădastra culture, the slightly excised pottery (Sk. 1/1–6), and the firmly excised one (Sk. 2/3, Pl. 3/2, 3).

On the Neolithic pottery, it is well-known the fact that it was discovered in large quantities in all the settlements, and it sometimes represents the only element that helps the defining of some cultures. From this perspective, the typological-morphological study is essential, which considers the form, the décor and its functionality.

Vădastra culture pottery, along with the Cucuteni one, is considered the highest expression of the decorative pottery art, from the entire European Neoeolithic, and it represents the peak of the excised ornamentation of it<sup>12</sup>. Thus, the décor techniques of Vădastra culture are: the excision, the incision, the slipping, the relief technique. The one that individualise Vădastra culture pottery is the excision. Unfortunately, it has not yet been published a synthesis study on Vădastra culture pottery in Oltenia, the referring on it being made just in few articles, obviously along other artefact categories<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 88–104.

<sup>10</sup> D. Berciu *op. cit.*, pl. VI.

<sup>11</sup> S. Popovici, S. Lazăr, *op. cit.* p. 92.

<sup>12</sup> V. Dumitrescu *Arta preistorică în România*, Bucharest, Meridiane Publishing House, 1974, pp. 54–55.

<sup>13</sup> C. Mateescu, *Săpăturile arheologice de la Crușovu*, in MCA, III, 1957, pp. 103–113; Idem, *Săpături arheologice la Vădastra*, in MCA, VI, 1959 pp. 107–115; Idem, *Săpături arheologice la Vădastra (1960–1966)*, MCA, IX, 1970, pp. 67–75; M. Nica, *Evoluția culturii Vădastra pe baza descoperirilor de la Hotărani-Fărcașele (Jud.Olt)*, in "Historica" I, pp. 31–51; M. Nica, *Evoluția culturii Vădastra pe baza descoperirilor de la Hotărani-Fărcașele (Jud.Olt)*, in "Historica" II, pp. 5–33.

If the incipient incision is considered to represent, besides the elements of décor, the early level of Vădastra culture (Sk. 1/ 1, 2, 6), the prominent one is that distinguished for the late level of the same culture (Sk.1/ 2, 3; 2 /1–4, 3 /1–4). In the technique of the incision, the essential motifs, especially the spirals and the meanders, as well with the presence of the triangles, the successions of rhombuses and squares, and, rather seldom, the chess-board, the excision being sometimes slightly deep, and other times combined with the incision. The motifs are disposed in metopes, sometimes covering the entire surface of the vessels. The polychromic effect increases the ornamental value of the vessels, and it is made through the contrast between the black or brown surface, and the glazed layer of the metopes, or the other uncovered parts, and the white inlay. On this white inlay, it can be said the fact that it had the role to evidence the motifs of the décor, through the contrast created with the black or the brown surface.

The slip décor can be met on a series of vessels, as some high-necked bitronconic ones. The technique of the relief is attested by the presence of the groove and the folds on several vessels that belong to Vădastra culture, such as the glasses, the bowls, the tall-necked bitronconic vessels<sup>14</sup>. Besides the excised décor, it ought to be mentioned the incised one (Sk. 3/5, 6), the Vinča patter incised one (Sk. 4/ 1) and that with impressions.

As it has been mentioned above, Vădastra culture pottery has been known for the excised type of décor especially. Some of the vessels decorated in the cited technique are considered genuine masterpieces. Among them, there are: the fruit dishes, the big vessels for storage, the lids, the bowls etc. Among the fruit dishes, two of them are more special, the first discovered at Hotărani and the other at Slatina. The first, the one discovered at Hotărani, *La Turn* point, has a tall leg, a bitronconic cup and erected rim, slightly arched towards the exterior side. Its mouth is wide. The paste from which it is shaped is fine and brown. The décor, firmly excised and inlaid with white paste, grouped in metopes, is made of grooves, rows of horizontal, vertical, oblique lines and rhombuses. On its body, there can be observed eight conical buttons. The second fruit dish, discovered at Slatina, has a shorter leg. The cup is slightly rounded, semi-spherical, with a wide mouth. The rim is erected and slightly arched towards the exterior. The décor, grouped in four metopes, is made of spiral and groove incisions. In this case, the mouth of the mentioned vessel is wide. On its leg, along the spiral-groove décor, there are also met rows of triangles<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> C. Mateescu *Săpăturile arheologice de la Crușovu*, MCA, III, 1957, pp. 103–113; Idem, *Săpături arheologice la Vădastra*, MCA, VI, 1959, pp. 107–115; Idem, *Săpături arheologice la Vădastra (1960–1966)*, MCA, IX, 1970, pp. 67–77; M. Nica, *Asupra originii și dezvoltării culturii Vădastra de la Fărcașele (jud. Olt)*, in “Historica” I, 1970, pp. 31–51; Idem, *Evoluția culturii Vădastra pe baza descoperirilor de la Hotărani-Fărcașele (Jud. Olt)*, in “Historica” II, 1971, pp. 5–32; M. Nica, I. Ciucă *Așezările neolitice de la Piatra-Sat, jud. Olt*, in “Arhivele Olteniei”, 6, 1989, pp. 17–41.

<sup>15</sup> R. A. Dragoman, *O bibliografie a ceramicii neolitice de la Vădastra*, Bucharest, Academy Publishing House, 2013, fig. 5.8.

A special vessel was also discovered at Slatina. It has a bitronconic shape, a tall neck, it is cylindrical, with the rim turned-over towards the exterior, and the flat bottom. Besides its form, what makes it special is the firmly excised décor, with shapes of rhombuses, and inlaid with white paste, which is spread on the entire surface of the vessel. Below its mouth, and on the basis of the neck, there can be observed horizontal rows of triangles, also called wolf-teeth. A similar vessel to this, but larger, so it can be considered to have had a storage purpose, was discovered at Hotărani – *La Turn*. Its body is bitronconic, with the inferior right side slightly bulging. Its neck is tall, cylindrical, the rim is slightly arched towards the interior, and its mouth is wide. The décor made through the technique of incision and excision combines the spiral and the groove, and spreads on the entire surface of the vessel. Below the rim of the vessel, there can be seen rows of horizontal triangles.

The lids, despite the fact that there is not an impressive number of them discovered, are exquisitely made. A lid discovered at Hotărani is cylindrical, with a conical calotte and the inferior side slightly arched towards the exterior. The paste from which it was made is a fine one. Its décor, inlaid with white paste, is made of rows of incised oblique lines, delimited both on the inferior and the superior side by wolf-teeth. These rows of teeth can also be observed on the calotte, delimitating an extremely stylised element of décor. Another lid that presents interest was discovered in the same settlement from Hotărani – *La Turn*. Its calotte is rounded, having two handles in the superior side, this feature making it a unique item for Vădrasta culture. The décor is made of incised lines, placed parallelly to the rows of wolf-teeth, which basically cover the entire surface of the vessel.

Some of the bowls can be considered exceptional creations. Thus, a bowl discovered at Slatina, with a tronconic shape, has a tall and straight rim. Its décor, grouped in metopes, is made through the technique of incision and excision. Among the elements of the décor, the wolf-teeth are noticeable, disposed parallelly, below the rim of the vessel. On its body, there can be observed parallel rows of incised lines, wolf-teeth rows, V-shaped, that delimit a décor that mixes the spirals and the grooves. At Hotărani, it was found a troncocic vessel, slightly rounded, with a straight and tall rim. The décor is made using the incision and excision technique. Below the rim of the vessel, there can be seen three parallel wolf-teeth rows, and on its body, there are parallel incised lines, disposed in groups of six, and wolf-teeth, grouped in three, separated by an undecorated space. Two of the bowls discovered in the eponymic settlement, at Vădrasta, can also be enumerated among the special items. Both of them have a semi-spheric shape, with the rim arched towards the exterior. The first of them has a décor made of rows of rhombuses, inlaid with white paste. Below the row of rhombuses, situated below the rim of the vessel, there can be noticed, in the median area, a décor that consists of six vertical incisions, parallel and also inlaid with white paste. They are ended, on the inferior side, with an incision parallel to the rim of the vessel. The vessel is supported by a flat bottom. The second one has a spiral and groove décor, inlaid with white paste.

Among the elements of the décor, there can be mentioned: the spiral and the rows of rhombuses. The bottom of the vessel is flat, as well.

The observations made on some pottery fragments, discovered at Vădastra and Crușovu, revealed the fact that, to this activity, both men and women participated, a fact proved by the fingerprints subjected to analysis, discovered on the mentioned pottery, but also by the ethnographic examples<sup>16</sup>. It seems that the potters used raw materials from the nearby areas<sup>17</sup>. The analyses carried out on samples taken from the bed of Obârșia stream, indicated that the sources for supplying the local clay are used for pottering, in most of the cases. Alexandru Dragoman interpreted the fact that the potters preferred the local clay sources, especially those from bottom of Obârșia stream, also owing to the signification the water was implying in prehistory, a living element that contributed to the regeneration of life<sup>18</sup>.

It ought to be mentioned that the white paste, the calcareous mix used for inlaying, has local origin as well, while the red ochre is obtained from several sources, among which those from the central and southern parts of Oltenia, and probably Muntenia. The white décor is related to the level Vădastra I pottery. The use of the ochre has a well-known signification, the colour intensifying during the burning<sup>19</sup>. It seems that all the vessels had been degreased with vegetal material, and the quartz granules and the pounded shells come from the clay sources. From the analyses carried out by the above-mentioned researcher, there can be noticed the fact that the craftsmen from the settlement of Vădastra paid a special attention to the cleaning of the incised and excised vessels, being considered more important in the human's life than those from other categories<sup>20</sup>.

In the opinion of the researchers Gheorghe Găță and Alexandru Dragoman, the vessels from Vădastra culture were burnt in open spaces (pits) with a temperature that varied between 400°C and 555°C<sup>21</sup>. On the burning installations, the author of the systematic research from the eponymic settlement, Corneliu Mateescu notes that, at Vădastra, there was discovered a kiln and several pits for burning the pots, in the level Vădastra II. They were just simple pits, dug in the ground, with only one room, where there were put both the vessels and the fuel. The kiln had the shape of a frustrum of a cone in its section, and it was close to one of the fireplaces<sup>22</sup>. Referring to the disposal of the burning installations, within the dug surfaces, the mentioned authors specify that there cannot be seen an area especially dedicated to the burning of the pottery, they were found both inside and

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 49.

<sup>17</sup> C. Mateescu, *Săpături arheologice la Vădastra (1960–1966)*, in MCA, IX, 1970, pp. 70–71.

<sup>18</sup> R. A. Dragoman *op. cit.*, pp. 51–52.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 55–58.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 53–54.

<sup>21</sup> Ghe. Găță, A. Dragoman, "The Neolithic pottery from Vădastra: a technological study", in AMN 41–42, I, 2004–2005, p. 24.

<sup>22</sup> C. Mateescu, *Săpături arheologice la Vădastra*, in MCA, V, 1959, pp. 68–69.

outside the settlement. A kiln for burning the pottery was also discovered by Marin Nica at Hotărani – *La Turn*. Unfortunately, it did not preserve well. It was categorised by the discoverer as belonging to the phase III of Vădrasta culture. From the typological point of view, it belongs to the first type, with an either round or oval shape, having the fireplace of a 0.65m–1m in diameter. This type of kiln was made of only one room, tronconic in its vertical section. They do not usually have a specific orifice for fire. Through a simple opening, there were introduced both the fuel and the vessels, which had direct contact with the fire. Assumingly, in this type of kiln, there were burnt more vessels for the common use<sup>23</sup>.

At the end of the present study, there can be concluded that the pottery discovered at Hotărani, *La Turn* station, were more numerous and diverse typologically than the ones published initially by D. Berciu, in 1966. Moreover, the analysis carried out on the 28 fragments of new pottery, presented in this article (Sk. 1–5), completes our previous examination, made on a batch of 34 pottery fragments, found in the same location, which were analysed in 2020<sup>24</sup>.

#### List of illustrations

Harta 1. Sites belonging to the Dudești and Vădrasta archeological cultures from the eastern of Oltenia: Caracal, Celei, Crușovu, Drăgănești-Olt Fărcașele, Hotărani, Ipotești, Piatra-Sat, Slatina, Vlădila (S. Popovici, S. Lazăr, 2020).

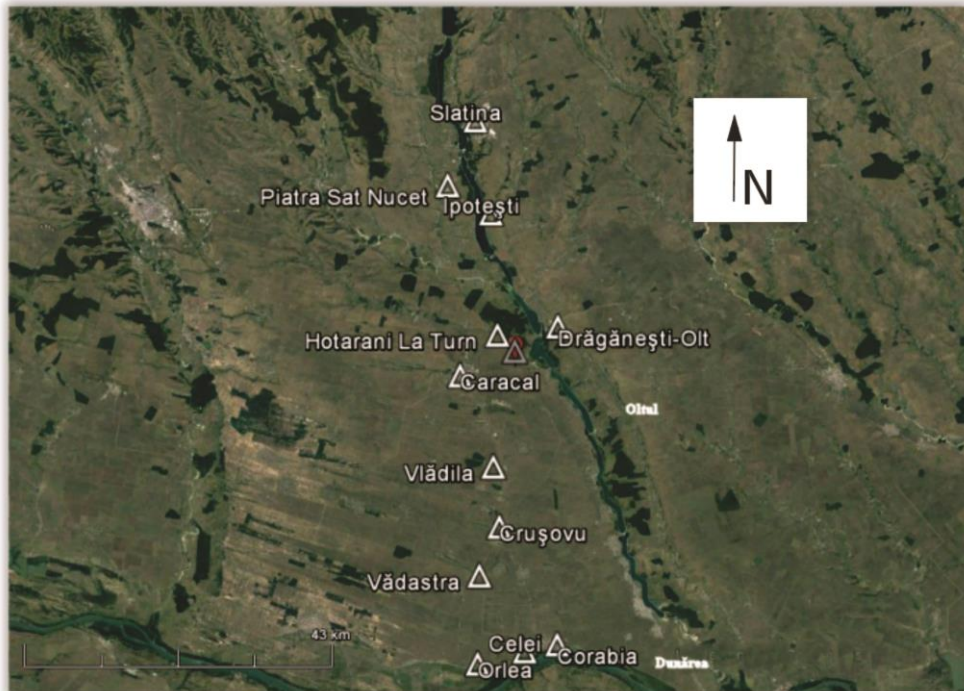
- Pl. 1. Vădrasta pottery discovered at “La Turn”
- Pl. 2. Vădrasta pottery discovered at “La Turn”
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#### Abbreviations

Ber. RGK	Bericht der Römisch Germanischen Kommission des Deutschen Archäologischer Instituts Frankfurt am Main.
Dacia	Dacia. Recherches et découvertes archéologiques en Roumanie, București.
Dacia NS	Dacia, Revue d'Archéologie et d'Histoire Ancienne, Nouvelle Série, București.
MCA	Materiale și Cercetări Arheologice, București.

<sup>23</sup> M. Nica *Cuptoare de olărie din epoca neolitică descoperite în Oltenia*, in “Drobeta” 3, 1978, pp. 18–30, fig. 2/4.

<sup>24</sup> Sabin Popovici, Simona Lazăr, *Despre periodizarea culturii Vădrasta. Considerații (I)*, in “Oltenia Studii și comunicări”, XXVII, 2020, pp. 88–104.



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Pl. 1. Vadastra pottery discovered at “La Turn”



Pl. 2. Vadastra pottery discovered at "La Turn"



Pl. 3. Vadastra pottery discovered at “La Turn”



Pl. 4. Vadastra pottery discovered at "La Turn"



Pl. 5. Vadastra pottery discovered at “La Turn”