

ASPECTS OF THE LATE ENEOLITHIC. SĂLCUȚA CULTURE POTTERY (II)

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Abstract: Starting with the first half of the 20th century, many (sau a lot) archaeological sites have been discovered in the Lower Olt Valley, dated chronologically and culturally in the second half of the 5th millennium BC, in the Late Eneolithic, the Sălcuța culture. Detailed description of the main site, Sălcuța – *Piscul Cornișorului*, are available in the monograph published by Dumitru Berciu in 1961.

Pottery is an element of material culture that is especially useful in establishing chronological and cultural data. Therefore, in this article were analyzed a number of 17 vessels (unpublished or less known) from a technological, morphological and stylistic point of view belonging to the Sălcuța culture. The frequency of the forms and ornamentations within the major pottery form type categories provide additional evidence of a shared ceramic tradition at the large or small settlements in the Oltenia region. That's why, we consider it necessary to present the repertoire of the Sălcuța-type settlements, providing an overview of the research history.

We mention that the analyzed pottery comes from the archaeological collection of the Olt County Museum.

Keywords: Ceramics, characteristics, settlements, Sălcuța, Late Eneolithic.

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INTRODUCTION

Known as the main area of development of the cultures of the early Neolithic, the developed Neolithic, the early and late Eneolithic, the Lower Olt Valley has been researched since the first half of the twentieth century. The cultures specific to the early Eneolithic, Vădastra and Boian, evolved especially in their final phases. Based on their common characteristics, Dumitru Berciu appreciated that these cultures can be classified in a mixed complex called Boian–Vădastra. The same situation was observed for the Sălcuța and Gumelnița cultures, from the late Eneolithic. The results of the archaeological research in the *tell*-type settlement of Brebeni will determine Dumitru Berciu to consider that there was a mixed evolution of Sălcuța–Gumelnița¹. For both cultural aspects appreciated by Dumitru Berciu as mixed, we consider that they were theorized based on the research of his time. Starting from the 70's and until now, new archaeological researches have been carried out on the Lower Olt Valley, which have led to some different results than those obtained by the aforementioned researcher. Two relatively recent syntheses² reanalysed various aspects of this culture in the mentioned space, highlighting the fact that no large-scale archaeological research was carried out during that period. At the same time, in addition to other aspects related to the conservation status of the Sălcuța settlements, the insufficiency of multidisciplinary investigations in the discussed area is also highlighted. Even if the archaeological investigations proved to be limited and short-lived, however, numerous artifacts were discovered, mainly ceramic³.

The study of pottery from a techno-typological and stylistic point of view, corroborated with stratigraphic observations, is of great importance because, sometimes, it is the only source for reconstructing the evolution of human communities⁴.

The purpose of this article is a brief presentation of a number of 17 unique or lesser-known vessels from the Sălcuța culture, which are part of the patrimony of the Olt County Museum⁵. These were discovered during systematic research in the settlements from Brebeni – *Ogașul lui Ioniță Țiganul*, Crâmpoia – *Măgura Rențea*, Drăgănești-Olt – *Corboaica* and Slatina-Strehareț – *Botul calului* from Drăgănești-Olt – *Corboaica*.

¹ D. Berciu, *Contribuții la problemele neoliticului în lumina noilor cercetări*, Bucharest, Academy Press 1961, p. 115.

² R.-R. Andreescu, K. Moldoveanu, S. Popovici, *Neo-eneoliticul în județul Olt. Stadiul cercetărilor arheologice*, in “Muzeul Oltului”, I, Craiova, 2011, pp. 15–34; C. E. Ștefan, *Așezări sălcuțene din stânga Oltului Inferior*, in C. E. Ștefan, M. Florea, S. C. Ailincăi, C. Micu (eds.), *Studii privind preistoria sud-estului Europei*, volume in memory Mihai Șimon, Brăila, 2014, pp. 169–212.

³ Dumitru Berciu, *Arheologia preistorică a Olteniei*, Craiova, 1939, pp. 49–72; Idem, *Contribuții la problemele neoliticului în România în lumina noilor cercetări*, Bucharest, Academy Press, pp. 93–121; Idem, *Zorile istoriei în Carpați și la Dunăre*, Bucharest, Scientific Press, pp. 115–120.

⁴ Idem, *Contribuții la problemele neoliticului în România în lumina noilor cercetări*, Bucharest, Academiei Publishing, pp. 107–115; C. N. Pătroi, *Cultura Sălcuța în Oltenia*, Craiova, 2015, pp. 57–58.

⁵ Expressing gratitude to Mr. Smarandache George, director of the Olt County Museum, for access to the ceramic materials that are the subject of this article.

Recently, the authors have briefly analysed a batch of Sălcuța-type ware from the archaeological collection of the Museum of Romanați Caracal, Olt County, highlighting aspects regarding the ceramics manufacturing technology, typology and ornamental motifs⁶.

CATALOGUE OF DISCOVERIES

As mentioned before, ceramic materials were used for the present analysis (17 pieces from the collection of the Olt County Museum) of which 9 come from Drăgănești-Olt – *Corboaica*, 6 pieces come from Brebeni – *Ogașul lui Ioniță Țiganul*, one comes from Crâmpoia – *Măgura Rențea* and one from Slatina-Strehareț – *Botul calului*.

From a stratigraphic point of view, all the pots come from the culture layer.

1. The vessel has a conical shape, a straight, slightly raised rim, a flat base and two anthropomorphic statuettes with facial modelling *en bec d'oiseau*, applied to the shoulder of the vessel. It is made of semi-fine fabric with visible sand inclusions in the section, and the firing occurred in an oxidizing context resulting in the yellowish-scarlet colour. At the top, under the rim, the piece is finished on the outside with its own finely polished colour-coating.

The decoration, arranged at the top in a single register, is made up of triangles oriented with the tip upwards, alternating with triangles oriented with the tip downwards. Alternatively, triangles are decorated with oblique incised lines, respectively with alveolar belts made by pinching in the soft paste.

Place of discovery: Drăgănești-Olt, point *Corboaica* (Pl. 1/1).

2. The vessel has a biconical shape, a raised neck, a straight rim and a flat base. It is made of semi-fine fabric, with visible sand inclusions in the section, and the firing occurred in an oxidizing context resulting in a yellowish colour with brick-coloured shades. Traces of secondary firing can be seen on the body of the vessel. At the top, the raised neck is finished with its own finely polished colour-coating and does not show any traces of decoration. At the base of the neck, there are two perforated handles, triangular in section, arranged horizontally.

The decoration, arranged at the top in a single register, is made up of alveolar belts made by pinching in the soft paste, arranged horizontally.

Place of discovery: Drăgănești-Olt, point *Corboaica* (Pl. 1/2).

3. The platter is made of semi-fine fabric, skimmed with sand, limestone and mica visible in the section, and the firing occurred in an oxidizing environment resulting in the light yellowish-scarlet colour. The vessel is finished on the outside and inside with its own finely polished colour-coating. The rim, thickened inwards, is chipped since the past.

⁶ I. Răbîncă, S. Popovici, L. Comănescu, V. Voicilă, *Aspecte ale eneoliticului târziu. Ceramica culturii Sălcuța (I)*, in "Terra Alutana", 2, 2024, under print.

The decoration, arranged on the outside, is made up of concentric circles, drawn around the base of the vessel, which are completed by an incised geometric decoration.

Place of discovery: Drăgănești-Olt, point *Corboaica* (Pl. 2/1).

4. The platter is provided with a small handle, arranged vertically under the rim. It is made of semi-fine fabric, with visible sand inclusions in the section, and the firing occurred in an oxidizing context resulting in a light scarlet colour. The vessel is finished with its own colour-coating, finely polished on the outside and inside. Arranged on the outside, the decoration is made up of two registers. The first register is composed of two rows of triangles. While the triangles drawn under the rim of the vessel are numerous, those arranged in the second row are rare and oriented with the tip towards the rim of the platter.

The decoration is completed by wide strips drawn in a semicircle.

Place of discovery: Drăgănești-Olt, point *Corboaica* (Pl. 2/2).

5. The vessel has a biconical shape, a raised neck, a straight rim and a flat base. It is made of semi-fine paste with sand and small pebbles insertion, and the firing occurred in an oxidizing environment resulting in the brownish colour. Traces of secondary firing can be seen on the body of the vessel. At the top, the raised neck is finished with its own finely polished colour-coating and does not show any traces of decoration. Inside, the pot is smoothed relatively evenly.

The decoration, arranged at the top in a single register, is made up of incised lines, parallel, arranged obliquely.

Place of discovery: Drăgănești-Olt, point *Corboaica* (Pl. 3/1).

6. The vessel has a biconical shape, a slightly raised and everted rim, two non-perforated handles and a flat base. The vessel is made of semi-fine fabric, with sand and small pebbles insertions, and the firing occurred in an oxidizing environment resulting in a light yellowish colour. The vessel is finished on the outside with its own colour-coating, finely polished and smoothed on the inside and does not show any traces of decoration.

Place of discovery: Brebeni, point *Ogașul lui Ioniță Țiganul* (Pl. 3/2).

7. The vessel has a globular shape, a straight rim and a concave base. It is made of semi-fine fabric with inclusions of sand and mica, visible in the section, and the firing occurred in an oxidizing context, resulting in the yellowish colour. Traces of secondary firing can be seen on the body of the vessel. At the top, the rim is finished with its own colour-coating, finely polished and does not show any traces of decoration. Inside, the pot is smoothed evenly.

The decoration, arranged at the top in a single register, is made up of several alveolar girdles arranged horizontally.

Place of discovery: Slatina-Strehareț, point *Botul calului* (Pl. 3/3).

8. The vessel has a biconical shape, a raised neck, a straight rim and a flat base. It is made of semi-fine fabric with inclusions of sand and limestone visible in the section, and the firing occurred in an oxidizing context, resulting in the brick colour. At the top, the rim is finished with its own colour-coating, finely polished and does not show any traces of decoration. Inside, the pot is smoothed evenly. A non-perforated handle is applied to the shoulder of the bowl.

The decoration is arranged over the entire surface of the vessel, except for a short portion, under the rim. The composite decoration is made up of incised bands, well polished, arranged obliquely and vertically and alveolar girdles drawn horizontally, vertically and obliquely.

Place of discovery: Brebeni, point *Ogaşul lui Ioniţă Țiganul* (Pl. 3/4).

9. The vessel has a biconical shape, a raised neck, an everted rim, slightly turned outwards, a flat base, two perforated handles, arranged vertically on the shoulder of the vessel, and four knobs applied symmetrically, at equal distances, in the area of the maximum diameter. The vessel is made of semi-fine paste with inclusions of sand and small pebbles, and the firing occurred in an oxidizing environment, giving the ceramic a light yellowish colour with light brick-colour shades. The vessel is finished on the outside with its own colour-coating, finely polished and smoothed on the inside and does not show any traces of decoration.

Place of discovery: Brebeni, point *Ogaşul lui Ioniţă Țiganul* (Pl. 4/1).

10. Mug with a slightly raised handle, arranged vertically and almost concave base. The mug is made of semi-coarse fabric, with inclusions of sand, limestone and pebbles of different sizes visible in the section. The burning occurred in a semi-reducing environment, resulting in a dark brown colour with grey marks. The vessel is unevenly shaped on the outside and smoothed on the inside, with no decoration.

Place of discovery: Brebeni, point *Ogaşul lui Ioniţă Țiganul* (Pl. 4/2).

11. Askos-type vessel, made of semi-fine fabric, without visible inclusions. The firing took place in a semi-reducing environment, giving the vessel a dark, uniform chestnut colour. The vessel is carelessly smoothed on the outside and inside, and has no decoration.

Place of discovery: Drăgăneşti-Olt, point *Corboaică* (Pl. 4/3).

12. Biconical cup with a raised neck, flat base, rim everted outwards, forming a beak on the opposite side to the triangular handle in section. The mug was made of a semi-fine fabric, with inclusions of sand and small pebbles, visible in the paste. The firing occurred in an oxidizing environment, resulting in the dark yellowish colour. At the bottom, large surfaces of secondary firing can be observed. The vessel is finished on the outside with its own colour-coating, finely polished and smoothed on the inside and does not show any traces of decoration.

Place of discovery: Brebeni, point *Ogaşul lui Ioniţă Țiganul* (Pl. 4/4).

13. Conical vessel with two perforated handles, arranged vertically under the rim and flat base. The vessel was made of a semi-fine fabric, with inclusions of sand, limestone and pebbles of different sizes visible in the section. The firing occurred in a semi-reducing environment, giving the vessel a dark brown colour. Traces of secondary firing can be seen on the body of the vessel. The vessel is finished on the outside with its own colour-coating, finely polished and smoothed on the inside and does not show any traces of decoration.

Place of discovery: Drăgănești-Olt, point *Corboaica* (Pl. 5/1).

14. Conical vessel with two perforated handles, arranged vertically under the rim and flat base. The vessel was made of a semi-fine fabric, skimmed with sand, limestone and pebbles of different sizes visible in the section. The firing occurred in a semi-reducing environment, resulting in a dark chestnut colour. Traces of secondary firing can be seen on the body of the vessel. The vessel is finished on the outside with its own colour-coating, finely polished and smoothed on the inside.

The decoration is made up of vertical, deeply incised lines, arranged around the vessel in the area of the maximum diameter.

Place of discovery: Drăgănești-Olt, point *Corboaica* (Pl. 5/2).

15. Conical vessel with two perforated handles, arranged vertically under the rim and concave base. The vessel was made of a semi-fine fabric, with inclusions of sand and small pebbles visible in the section. The firing occurred in an oxidizing environment, giving the vessel a reddish-scarlet colour. The vessel is finished on the outside with its own colour-coating, finely polished and smoothed on the inside and does not show any traces of decoration.

Place of discovery: Brebeni, point *Ogașul lui Ioniță Țiganul* (Pl. 5/3).

16. Conical vessel with two perforated handles, arranged vertically under the rim and concave base. The vessel was made of a semi-fine fabric with inclusions of sand, limestone and pebbles of different sizes visible in the section. The firing occurred in an oxidizing environment, giving the vessel a scarlet colour. The vessel is finished on the outside with its own colour-coating, polished and smoothed on the inside and does not show any traces of decoration.

Place of discovery: Brebeni, point *Ogașul lui Ioniță Țiganul* (Pl. 5/4).

17. Conical vessel with two perforated handles, arranged vertically under the rim and concave base. The vessel was made of a semi-fine fabric, with inclusions of sand and small pebbles, visible in the paste. The firing occurred in an oxidizing medium, giving the vessel a scarlet colour. The vessel is finished on the outside with its own colour-coating, polished and smoothed on the inside and does not show any traces of decoration.

Place of discovery: Brebeni, point *Ogașul lui Ioniță Țiganul* (Pl. 5/5).

REPERTOIRE OF THE SETTLEMENTS OF THE SĂLCUȚA CULTURE ON THE LOWER OLT VALLEY

First, the Sălcuța culture was known as a result of the researches in the eponymous settlement of Sălcuța-*Piscul Cornișorului*⁷. In a study published in 2014, Cristian Eduard Ștefan updates the repertoire of the Sălcuța settlements on the left side of the Lower Olt⁸. While the aforementioned author analyses 9 settlements of the Sălcuța type spread up to the Argeș river, the authors of this article have considered only 4 settlements of Sălcuța spread on the Lower Olt Valley (Brebeni-*Ogașul lui Ioniță Țiganul*, Crâmpoia – *Măgura Rențea*, Drăgănești-Olt – *Corboaică* and Slatina-Strehareț – *Botul calului*) from which the ceramic material under analysis comes.

1. Brebeni (map 1)

Point: *Ogașul lui Ioniță Țiganul* sau *Ogorul lui Ioniță Țiganul* (cf. C. E. Ștefan 2014, p. 70)

Location: tell-type settlement, located on the right bank of the Oboga stream, at the bottom of a once wooded valley.

Research history: digs of M. Butoi (1964–1967).

Stratigraphy: Sălcuța I–III, feudal era.

Complexes: wave and ditch, burnt surface dwellings.

Bibliography: Butoi 1999, pp.13–16; Butoi 1999, pp. 17–22; Nica 1985, p. 37.

2. Crâmpoia (map 1)

Point: *Măgura Rențea* sau *Măgura din islaz* (cf. C. E. Ștefan 2014, p. 170).

Location: in the communal grazing field

History of research: accidental discovery Sabin Popovici, in 1998. The discovery consists of a dwelling identified by the holes of the poles, as well as by a hearth where a zoomorphic figurine was discovered. The results of this danger were recently published⁹.

Bibliography: Mincă, Butoi 1984, p. 10; Andreescu, Moldoveanu, Popovici 2011, p. 22; Ștefan 2014, pp. 172–173; Popovici, Lazăr 2023, pp. 22–31.

⁷ D. Berciu, *Contribuții la problemele neoliticului în România în lumina noilor cercetări*, Bucharest, Romanian Academy Publishing House, 1961, pp. 93–121.

⁸ C. E. Ștefan, *Așezări sălcuțene din stânga Oltului Inferior*, in C. E. Ștefan, M. Florea, S. C. Ailincăi, C. Micu (eds.), *Studii privind preistoria sud-estului Europei*, volume in the memory Mihai Șimon, Brăila, 2014, pp. 169–212.

⁹ S. Popovici, S. Lazăr, *Cercetări de suprafață desfășurate în zona tell-ului neolitic de la Crâmpoia, jud. Olt*, in S. Cercel, A. Ceaușescu, G. Ghionea (coord.), *Realități socio-economice, mentalitate și identitate românească*, Târgoviște, Cetatea de Scaun Publishing House, 2024, pp. 22–31.

3. Drăgănești-Olt (map 1)

Point: *Corboaica*

Location: The multi-layered settlement is located on the western edge of the Băzărani district, of the city of Drăgănești-Olt, on the right bank of the Sîi stream.

History of the research: The *tell* from Drăgănești-Olt was discovered in the 80's, during some surface research in the area of Drăgănești-Olt by the archaeologist Mihail Butoi, director of the Olt County Museum, together with Traian Zorzolui, director of the Boianului Plain Museum in the locality. Subsequently, Mihail Butoi would undertake, between 1982 and 1984 and in 1992, a series of digs, trying to clarify some aspects related to the mentioned *tell*. Thus, its dimensions (diameter of 125 m), the thickness of the culture layer (2.85 m) and details related to the defence wall that surrounded the settlement (height of 1.30 m) were established. With some interruptions, the research was continued until 1997, by the following specialists: Dr. Marin Nica ("C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor" Institute for Research in Social Sciences and Humanities from Craiova), Dr. Cristian Schuster (Institute of Archaeology "Vasile Pârvan" Bucharest), Marian Vasilescu (Museum of Romanati Caracal), Zamfir Floroiu (Olt County Museum), Dr. Cristinel Fântâneau (Alba Iulia), Bogdan Tănăsescu (Craiova).

Stratigraphy: The researches carried out over time have revealed three levels of habitation belonging to the Sălcuța culture and a final level attributed to the Glina culture.

Complexes: On the occasion of the aforementioned researches, surface dwellings, a wave and a defense ditch were discovered.

Bibliography: Butoi 1999, pp. 29–45; Butoi 1999, pp. 14–14; Mincă, Butoi, 1984, pp.10–11; Nica, Schuster, Zorzolui 1995, pp. 9–45; Nica, Zorzolui, Fântâneau, Tănăsescu 1997, pp. 9–19; Nica, Floroiu, Zorzolui, Vasilescu 1998, pp. 5–25; Andreescu, Moldoveanu, Popovici 2011, pp. 20, 23; Ștefan 2014, pp. 170–171.

4. Slatina-Strehareț (map 1)

Point: *Botul calului*

Location: flattened *tell* located 200 m N of the barrier of the city of Slatina, on the right of the Slatina-Curtișoara road. The diameter is about 15m at the base, and the height does not exceed 1m.

History of research: systematic research led by Mihail Butoi in the period 1959–1960.

Stratigraphy: Sălcuța Culture.

Bibliography: Berciu, Butoi, 1960, p. 142; Butoi 1999, p. 24.

Conclusions

Among the archaeological researches carried out on the Lower Olt Valley, there are those from the sites presented above, which bring important data regarding

the Sălcuța culture. At the current stage of research, the pottery resulting from the excavations practiced in the respective settlements is a valuable source of information, reflecting the features and cultural evolution of the Late Eneolithic communities north of the Danube.

The analysis of this batch of pottery highlights the technological methods of manufacture and finishing, along with the morphological and stylistic characteristics, obtained through different techniques, suggesting the importance given by the respective communities to these objects. Presenting a morphological, dimensional, decorative and quantitative diversity, the analysed vessels are proof of a strong Sălcuța habitation on the Lower Olt Valley.

As for the techno-typological characteristics, 9 vessels are conical in shape, 6 are biconical, one vessel is globular in shape and one is quadrilateral in shape (*askos vessel*). The fabric is, in almost all cases, semi-fine with degreasers in the composition. Two situations are an exception: one in which the degreasers are not visible, and the second in which the paste is semi-coarse. Firing occurred in 13 vessels in an oxidizing context, and in the other 4 vessels in a semi-reducing environment. The decoration is present on 9 of the analysed vessels. The decorative techniques present on the vessels are the following: incision, alveolar girdle, plastic application. The technique of decoration by incision predominates. The ceramic materials presented in this article are unique and come from the collection of the Olt County Museum, in Slatina.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS:

Map 1: The settlements belonging to the Salcuta cultures, where the pottery mentioned in the text was discovered: Brebeni – *Ogașul lui Ioniță Țiganul*, Crâmpoia-Măgura Rențea, Drăgănești-Olt – *Corboaița*, Slatina-Strehareț – *Botul calului*.

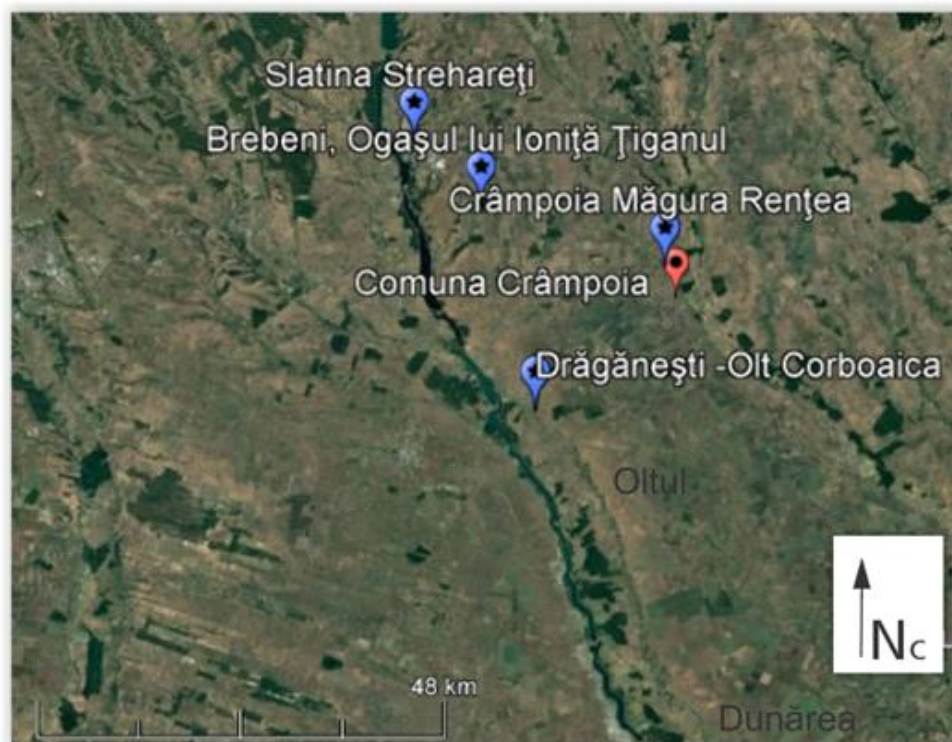
Pl. 1. Sălcuța culture: 1. Truncated-conical vessel with a high lip; 2. Bitronconic vessel with a high lip, discovered at Drăgănești-Olt tell, *Corboaița point*.

Pl. 2. Sălcuța culture: 1–2. Circular plateaus discovered at Drăgănești-Olt tell, *Corboaița point*.

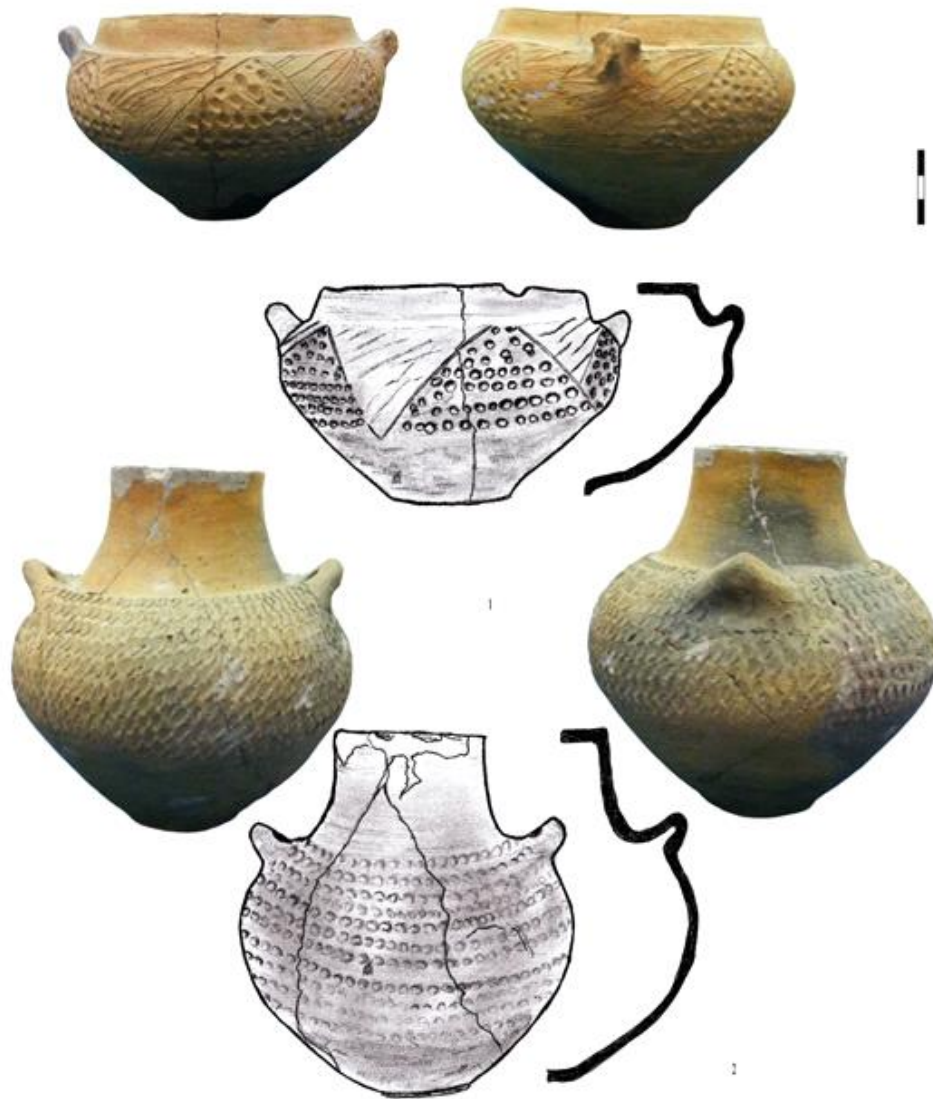
Pl. 3. Sălcuța culture: 1. Drăgănești-Olt – *Corboaița*: bitronconic vessel with high lip; 2–5. Brebeni – *Ogașul lui Ioniță Țiganul*: Bitronconic vessel with a high lip; 3. Slatina-Strehareț – *Botul calului*: Globular vessel, Brebeni – *Ogașul lui Ioniță Țiganul*: bitronconical vessel with high lip.

Pl. 4. Salcuta culture: Brebeni – *Ogașul lui Ioniță Țiganul*: 1. Bitronconic vessel with a high lip and two side handles; 2, 4. Truncated cups with a high lip and a handle; 3. Drăgănești Olt – *Corboaița*: askos-type vessel.

Pl. 5. Salcuta culture: Truncated conical vessels with a high lip and two side handles: 1–2. Drăgănești tell, *Corboaița point*, 3–5. Brebeni – *Ogașul lui Ioniță Țiganul*.



Map 1: The settlements belonging to the Salcuta cultures, where the pottery mentioned in the text was discovered: Brebeni – *Ogașul lui Ioniță Țiganul*, Crâmpoia – *Măgura Rențea*, Drăgănești-Olt – *Corboaica*, Slatina-Strehareț – *Botul calului*.



Pl. 1. Sălcuța culture: 1. Truncated-conical vessel with a high lip;
2. Bitronconic vessel with a high lip, discovered at Drăgănești-Olt tell, *Corboaică* point.

Source: Collection of the Olt County Museum, in Slatina



Pl. 2. Sălcuța culture: 1–2. Circular plateaus discovered at Drăgănești-Olt tell, *Corboaica point*.

Source: collection of the Olt County Museum, in Slatina



Pl. 3. Sălcuța culture: 1. Drăgănești-Olt – *Corboaica*: bitronconic vessel with high lip; 2–5. Brebeni-*Ogașul lui Ioniță Țiganul*: Bitronconic vessel with a high lip; 3. Slatina-Strehareț – *Botul calului*: Globular vessel, Brebeni – *Ogașul lui Ioniță Țiganul*: bitronconical vessel with high lip.

Source: collection of the Olt County Museum, in Slatina



Pl. 4. Salcuța culture: Brebeni-*Ogașul lui Ioniță Țiganul*: 1. Bitronconic vessel with a high lip and two side handles; 2, 4. Truncated cups with a high lip and a handle; 3. Drăgănești Olt-*Corboaică*: askos-type vessel.

Source: collection of the Olt County Museum, in Slatina



Pl. 5. Salcuta culture: Truncated conical vessels with a high lip and two side handles: 1–2. Drăgănești tell, *Corboanca* point, 3–5. Brebeni – *Ogașul lui Ioniță Țiganul*.

Source: collection of the Olt County Museum, in Slatina

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