

The Dacian Pottery Discovered in Closed Complexes at *Sarmizegetusa Regia*
(Grădiștea de Munte, Hunedoara)

- abstract -

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The pages of this doctoral thesis are dedicated to the pottery discovered in closed complexes at Grădiștea de Munte-*Sarmizegetusa Regia*, Hunedoara county, and it relies mainly on the ceramic material found in this Dacian settlement on Terrace VII. The innovative features of this thesis are a first classification attempt for the pottery discovered in the Dacian capital, and an extensive discussion regarding ceramic vessels' functionality and the way in which clay recipients should be studied. Another plus was brought by the suggested interdisciplinary approach, through which the archaeological data is supplemented by laboratory analysis (petrographic and chemical). The proposed conclusions and hypothesis are not definitive, thus the scientific approach must continue.

Chap. I – Theory, Methodology and Historiography

The present chapter aims to identify new ways to follow in the study of the Dacian pottery discovered in Romania by discussing concepts and working methods formulated and tested in the international literature on pottery. Starting from the local contributions, I have tried to create a methodological model which should include the foreign theoretical developments, and which could become a real starting point in a future pertinent and fresh analysis of Dacian ceramics.

A. Methodological Concerns in Dacian Archaeology

Firstly, I have chosen to present the papers dedicated exclusively to Dacian pottery (the synthesis), then the general works on pre-Roman Dacia (in which pottery represents a distinct chapter), followed by the special papers (articles and studies published in varied reviews or volumes), finishing with the way pottery was analyzed in the monographs on Dacian sites published so far. Thus, knowing the contributions of Ion Horațiu Crișan, Ioan Glodariu, George Trohani or Gelu Florea has provided a solid starting point in my personal analytic approach on Dacian ceramics.

B. Western Ceramic Studies

The reason I chose to point out the coordinates of ancient pottery analysis in the international literature is linked to portraying the mentality of the Western researcher, but also to identifying and importing a viable methodological model. These coordinates are: vessel analysis, vessel classification, quantification, identification of production centers and distribution areas, vessel functionality. This section shortly presents the way in which these coordinates have been defined and discussed in the West, the criteria used to shape the respective concepts, and the actual tendencies in the field.

C. What Is To Be Done?

In consistency with the ideas mentioned in the previous section, I consider that for a pertinent study on Dacian pottery a simple and efficient analysis system is needed, along with a comprehensive working sheet, properly arranged and methodologically verified, which would comprise the recent technological contributions and theoretical progress in the literature.

Chap. II – The Classification of Ancient Pottery

The notions and ideas in this chapter illustrate the varied theories and criteria used for the different classifications of ancient ceramics. I have followed the shaping of these diverse opinions in the bibliography in an effort to choose or elaborate an adequate classification system for the Dacian pottery from *Sarmizegetusa Regia*.

A. The Classification Theory

Starting with the distinction between “classification” and “typology”, I reviewed the main systems and classification criteria mentioned in the Western literature. One can notice the fact that typology, alongside technology, has become a secondary criterion, both being subsidiary to a more complex classification, on functional categories.

In order to underline the pros and cons of this contextual approach, I have discussed the ways through which one can establish the functionality of ceramic vessels, taking into account: morphological features, technological characteristics, and marks of current use. The problematic of function also implies determining its type (formal, current or secondary), therefore I chose the case study of perforated vessels to exemplify this matter.

B. Terminology: Necessity or Pedantry

A delicate and, so far, unsolved issue is related to the terms used to name ancient ceramic vessels. Due to the fact that there isn't a consensus regarding this aspect, that some denominations are difficult to translate, but also that such a nomenclature must not be rigid

and final, I have suggested the adoption of a conventional system for the pottery from *Sarmizegetusa Regia*, which could be completed whenever necessary with traditional terms (modern or ancient).

Chap. III – Proposal for the Classification of the Dacian Pottery from Grădiștea de Munte-*Sarmizegetusa Regia*

I think it is proper to successfully use for the Dacian pottery a classification based on functional categories, including ceramic types and variants, determined on morphological, technological and stylistic features.

A. Tableware

This group is made up of the pots used for serving, eating and drinking food and liquids, types SR 1 – SR 10. For SR 5 and SR 7 it is difficult to identify the possible models in Late Hellenistic and Early Imperial Roman pottery. However, these influences are probable for types SR 1, SR 3, SR 4, SR 8, SR 9, SR 10, and may be possible for the other forms. They could have arrived from Italy, Asia Minor or the Black Sea area. The pots in the category were mainly wheel-thrown, made from a fine paste and well fired. Some were painted in the specific style of the Dacian capital.

B. Kitchenware

The present group is made up of the vessels used for making, preparing, heating, and cooking food and liquids, types SR 11 – SR 13. Some of these recipients have burning marks caused by contact with fire. The percentage of handmade pots is higher than in the case of tableware, these vessels being shaped from a course paste, with a lot of temper, and uneven fired. If SR 11 is more likely a local form, SR 12 was probably taken from the Celtic world, whereas SR 13 seems to be a *mortarium* of Greek-Roman influence.

C. Storage Vessels

The pots grouped in this category are ceramic recipients used for medium or long term storage of liquids, food or other substances, type SR 14 (some SR 9 or SR 12 pots could have served the same purpose). I have identified 5 variants of *dolia*, but their number could be higher. These vessels were wheel-thrown, made from a fine, semi-fine or course paste, and some were incompletely fired. The form was introduced from the Hellenistic and Roman pottery, so I could identify some possible analogies, in the Western, as well in the Eastern parts of the Roman Empire. It must be stated that many finds belong to the variant SR 14.2 and that a considerable amount of them were painted.

D. Lighting Recipients

Few truncated cone lamps (“Dacian cups”) were discovered at *Sarmizegetusa Regia*, type SR 15. They were handmade from a coarse paste and uneven fired; some of them have two handles.

E. Cult Vessels

I grouped in this category the recipients with distinct morphological features, unique items produced for ceremonial, ritual or funerary purposes. To this day, a single vessel from *Sarmizegetusa Regia* can be included in this group, type SR 16. This recipient is well-known in the Romanian literature for its inscription, executed before firing, formed by 4 pairs of 2 stamps each, with Latin letters in a cartouche, spelling: *PER SCORILO* and *DECEBALVS*. This pot was considered to be a ceremonial artifact due to its unique inscription, its impressive size, and its finding place, in the center of a monumental edifice.

F. Accessories

This functional category comprises clay objects that are not proper recipients, types SR 17 – SR 18. The lids forming type SR 17 are probably ceramic artifacts of Roman influence, many analogies being found all over the Roman Empire. They were mainly wheel-thrown, made from a fine or coarse paste, some bearing *graffiti* on the handling knob. The function of SR 18 vessels is still debatable, but it is likely we are dealing with some heating and cooking installation, well-known in the Greek-Roman world.

Chap. IV – Case Study: The Pottery from T VII of *Sarmizegetusa Regia*

The goal of this chapter is accounting the principal theoretical and methodological concepts concerning the study of clay recipients on closed complexes and ceramic assemblages, as well as validating these for the case of the pottery from the Dacian capital.

A. The Ceramic Assemblage-Closed Complex Relationship

I considered necessary to have a section to present the definitions and theoretical elements which compose the concepts of closed complex and ceramic assemblage, these offering important data on the functionality, chronology, production, and distribution of ceramics. I haven't left aside the factors that may influence the quality of data, as well as the variables which have to be considered in the study of the ancient pots found in this type of archaeological contexts.

B. The Quantification of Ceramics

Discussing the method of quantification ceramics has become necessary for varying the way in which statistics affect the results of a study on ceramic vessels. Hence,

quantification is not a procedure following the archaeological excavation, but must be absorbed into it in order to obtain relevant and correct data. Some methods used by the French and Anglo-American ceramologists were presented briefly, noting that, no matter the adopted quantification system, one must take into account the contributions of ethnography and etnoarchaeology.

C. The Studied Ceramic Material

With the help from the staff of the Dacian Fortresses of the Orăștie Mountains site, I had the opportunity to study a part of the ceramics discovered on Terrace VII (T VII), deposited in the museums of Cluj-Napoca and Deva. The material (321 fragments) was compared to the pots uncovered on another two terraces, Terrace VIII and Terrace „Sub baie”.

In addition to the archaeological data, petrographic and X-ray diffraction analysis have been performed on a sample of 11 fragments.

D. The Interpretation of the Ceramic Material

The laboratory analysis confirmed the presence of mica in the clay composition of the pots found on T VII; the firing temperature reached a value under 900° C. The vessels were mainly wheel-thrown, fired in an oxidant atmosphere, but many times uneven. The slip is usually present, but its quality varies.

On T VII, samples of tableware (vessels for consuming and serving), kitchenware (cooking and preparing pots), storage pots, lighting vessels, and accessories have been uncovered. Tableware is the most represented category, with 153 fragments (almost half of the total of finds), followed by storage vessels with 93 fragments and the accessories group with 46 fragments. Among the ceramic types, SR 1.1 is the most present one (76 fragments), followed by SR 17.3 (44 fragments), SR 14.2 (26 fragments), and SR 11 (25 fragments). Some types or variants are represented by only one sample: SR 13, SR 14.4, SR 14.5, SR 17.1, and maybe SR 18. Only 5 fragments, belonging to 4 different types of tableware, bear *graffiti*. Probably, 4 samples come from imported vessels.

Chap. V – Conclusions, Reflections, Proposals

A. On the Classification of Pottery from *Sarmizegetusa Regia*

The undertaken approach on the classification of the Dacian pottery from Grădiștea de Munte-*Sarmizegetusa Regia* was aimed at obtaining relevant data on the chronology of the ceramic finds, the “court” aspect of this pottery, the existence of foreign influences and the distribution pattern of the respective vessels. Thus, the archaeological contexts always point to a dating in the second half of the 1st century AD, more often towards the end of the century

and the beginning of the following one. The cited analogies confirm the supposition that the pottery produced in the Dacian capital was strongly influenced by the Hellenistic and Roman models. In this respect, the study of the imports found at Grădiștea de Munte (already mentioned in the older excavations reports) must provide the groundwork for a future analytical approach.

We can identify some forms specific for this center of pre-Roman Dacia, namely: SR 1 and SR 3 (plus their SR 6 correspondences), SR 9, SR 10, SR 12, SR 14, and SR 17. It must be underlined that drinking vessels (SR 4 and SR 5) are exceptional presence at Grădiștea de Munte. According to the data gathered so far, types SR 11, SR 14 and SR 17 seem to uniformly cover the habitation on the Grădiște Hill. Other forms, like SR 1, SR 3 or SR 12, are concentrated around the sacred area, on T VII, T VIII, T XIV and T „Sub baie”.

In conclusion, the elegance of the shapes taken from the Greek-Roman repertoire, as well as the execution's high quality, confer an unique and special status for the pottery discovered on the Grădiște Hill among other ancient ceramic products.

B. T VII: Closed Complex and Ceramic Assemblage

Presenting the ceramic material unearthed at Grădiștea de Munte has revealed some important points. The first is the presence of imports in the inventory of the complex excavated on the respective terrace, although in small numbers; one of them could be a *terminus post quem* for the Dacian layer on T VII (middle of the 1st century AD). The second is presence of painted recipients, so far represented by storage vessels and lids. The significant number of the SR 1.1 samples, especially some recipients with a diameter around 40 cm, found also on T VIII, questions the function as a granary of the complex on T VII, hypothesis also suggested by the cooking pot fragments. Finally, I could notice (applicable for T VIII as well) the appearance of table services, meaning that some forms exist in diverse dimensions, with possibly different functions, or in the sense that vessels of different types share similar morphological features.

C. A Short Glance in the Future

The specialists' efforts must be continued, criticized, verified, and completed. Analysis techniques should be improved and updated to the Western flux of ideas. Ultimately, the ceramic material discovered through the years on the Grădiște Hill needs to be brought together and entirely studied.