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The study of pottery from the Eneolithic site
from Iernut (Mureș county). Contributions to
knowledge of the genesis of the Early Eneolithic
in Transylvania

Summary

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Table of contents

Acknowledgements	4
I. Introduction	5
II. Geographical framework	7
III. The cultural and chronological framework of the late Neolithic and early Eneolithic in Transylvania	9
Turdaş cultural group	9
Foeni cultural group	10
Zau culture.....	14
Precucuteni culture	17
Petreşti culture.....	19
Ariuşd cultural group	22
IV. Presentation of the settlement from Iernut – <i>Sit II</i>	24
Research history	24
Stratigraphy of the settlement	25
Ditches.....	26
Surface dwellings	30
Pit-houses	39
Funerary discoveries	45
Depositions of animal remains	50
Materials and features belonging to the Gáva culture.....	52
V. Eneolithic pottery from the site at Iernut (Technology, typology, analogies)	53
Typology of vessel forms.....	54
Typology of plastic attachments	110
Typology of decorations.....	120
VI. The cultural and chronological framing of the pottery from Iernut in the context of the genesis of the early Eneolithic in Transylvania. Conclusions	146
Bibliography	156

Repertoire of archaeological features from Iernut – <i>Sit II</i>	168
List of plates.....	301
Plates	313

Key words: Late Neolithic, Early Eneolithic, Iernut, settlement, pottery, typology, decoration, Foeni cultural group, Petrești culture.

The subject of the paper consisted in the analysis of the vast ceramic material which resulted from the preventive archaeological excavation in the Eneolithic settlement from Iernut - Sit II.

The first chapter introduces the context in which the Eneolithic settlement near Iernut was discovered. The settlement was identified during a preventive archaeological survey carried out in 2016 by a team from the Institute of Archaeology and Art History of the Romanian Academy, Cluj-Napoca. The archaeological site was located on the route of Lot 2 Iernut – Chețani from Section 2A Ogra – Câmpia Turzii of the Brașov – Târgu Mureș – Cluj – Oradea highway. During the excavation of the site the top layers were mechanically removed. During the autumn of 2018 the area surveyed was extended to the North and South and new archaeological features were discovered.

The second chapter describes the geographic framework in which the settlement was discovered. The site lies on a terrace on the left bank of the Mureș river, South-West of the town of Iernut. The terrace sits at a higher altitude than the terrain to its East, North and West, while on its South side it is bordered by a stream.

The third chapter “The cultural and chronological framework of the Late Neolithic and Early Eneolithic in Transylvania” briefly describes the cultural evolution of the transylvanian region during Late Neolithic and Early Eneolithic. In the western part of the Transylvanian Basin the Late Neolithic was influenced by the evolution of the Turdaș cultural group and of the Zau culture. The transition towards the Eneolithic was triggered by the migration of the Foeni cultural group from Banat, this phenomenon also leading up to the genesis of the Petrești culture. South-Eastern Transylvania during the Late Neolithic was occupied by the bearers of the Precucuteni culture, while pottery typical of the Precucuteni culture (phases I and II) was also identified in central and Western Transylvania. Subsequently, during the Early Eneolithic, South-Eastern Transylvania represented the area in which the Ariușd cultural group developed.

The fourth chapter includes the presentation of the Eneolithic settlement from Iernut – *Sit II*. The site’s excavated area was approximately 465 m long and about 50 m wide. The Eastern boundary of the settlement was not found in the excavated surface. Archaeological features

containing Foeni type pottery were discovered approximately 120 m Est of *Sit II*, at the edge of the terrace, inside *Situl III*. It is possible that the Eneolithic settlement extended to the East, occupying the eastern half of the terrace. The site's stratigraphy consists of an upper layer of dark soil, with few archaeological materials, with a thickness of 30-70 cm and a cultural layer, consisting of compact dark brown soil with a large quantity of burnt adobe, sherds and bones. Chromatically the cultural layer is very similar to the upper layer. Both layers were mechanically removed, except for the cases where agglomerations of burnt adobe and pottery were identified. Under the layers of dark soil there is a layer of yellow clay, in which most of the archaeological features were identified.

The Eneolithic settlement at Iernut was fortified with the help of large ditches, with a depth between 1.5 and 2 m and an opening in the upper part between 2 and 3 m. An accessway was discovered, with an opening of 7.5 m, but it was blocked by a third ditch, about 1.5 m deep, located to the West. Most likely the ditches formed a circular defensive system, even though in the eastern part of the excavated area no large ditches were identified. The excavated surface situated to the East of the large ditches is approximately 1.5 ha.

Within the settlement, narrow, shallow ditches were identified, forming predominantly straight lines. These ditches are most likely the traces of fences or palisades, with postholes for support posts. They do not appear to have had a defensive role. The fence/palisade in front of the accessway is subsequent to the filling in of the large ditches.

Surface dwellings were identified in the form of burnt adobe platforms, containing pottery and bones. The platforms lacked any traces of foundations or structure, except for large pieces of burnt adobe from the walls. Most likely the burnt adobe platforms represent the remains of surface dwellings placed directly on the ground.

Large rectangular surface dwellings were identified based on their postholes. The dwellings were rectangular and most of them were aligned on the northwest-southeast axis, while a few had a northeast-southwest orientation. The postholes had round or rectangular shapes, some rectangular postholes being dug in steps.

Most of the archaeological features found in the settlement are pit-houses or pits with an uncertain function. Inhumation graves were found in two archaeological features. Two of the burials were in a crouched position, lying on their left side. Human skulls and fragmentary human skullcaps were also discovered in the archaeological features from Iernut – *Sit II*.

The settlement at Iernut – Sit II contained a large amount of animal bones. Among these, bovine skulls deposited predominantly on the bottom of the archaeological features could be identified.

Ceramic materials belonging to the Gáva culture, from the end of the Bronze Age/Early Iron Age, were also discovered within the settlement. Pottery typical of the Gáva culture was discovered in small quantities and two archaeological features belong to this culture.

The fifth chapter contains the technological and typological analysis of the Eneolithic pottery from Iernut – *Sit II* and the analogies identified in other sites belonging to the Foeni cultural group.

A large amount of ceramic material was recovered, most of it coming from the pit-houses. The fabrics of the pottery were grouped into fine, semi-fine and coarse. The fine pottery was made using a homogeneous paste, with fine-grain sand used as temper. It was used to make small and medium-sized vessels. The firing was good, even, and the vessels were often polished. The fine vessels are usually *black-topped* or black, with an oxidizing firing being rarely used. The semi-fine paste can be characterized by a high degree of heterogeneity, the tempers being unevenly distributed. Along with fine sand, it can also contain large-grain sand and organic material. Coarse pottery was most commonly used for pots. The tempers consisted of large-grain sand, pebbles, organic material and crushed ceramics. Coarse fabric vessels are often uneven in color, frequently having dark spots.

The morphology of the ceramic vessels is generally simple, a fact that allowed their decomposition into geometric shapes, facilitating the creation of a typology.

Dishes are vessels with a simple, frustoconical shape, predominantly made from a fine paste. Most of the dishes are not decorated. The main criteria for classifying the dishes was the degree of their wall inclinations. The dishes in category A have an opening less than 20° from the vertical. Category B dishes have an opening between 20° and 45° from the vertical. Category C dishes have an opening larger than 45°.

Globular bowls represent a relatively rare category of ceramic vessels. They are predominantly made using a fine paste, a significant number are *black-topped* and generally lack decorations.

Biconical bowls represent a numerous and very varied type of ceramic vessels. Most of them belong to the category of fine ceramics. The majority of the bowls were fired in a reducing

atmosphere or are *black-topped*. The painted bowls had an oxidizing firing, The biconical bowls were classified according to the shape of their upper part: inverted, cylindrical or flared.

Carinated bowls are a vessel class typical for the Foeni group and the Petrești culture. They were classified according to shape and thickness of the carination, and the height, slenderness and shape of the neck. The carinated bowls belong to the category of fine ceramics, have a predominantly reducing or *black-topped* firing and are generally well polished. A small number have oxidizing firings.

Chalices were discovered only in a fragmentary state. Their classification was made based on the feet, comprising of short full feet, tall full feet, hollow conical feet of various sizes and cylindrical feet belonging to large chalices, some of them painted both on the inside and on the outside.

Amphorae are a common ceramic type, consisting of medium and large vessels, predominantly with an oxidizing firing. They were generally made from semi-fine paste. The fragmentary character of the majority of the amphorae determined the use of the opening and the shape of the neck of the amphorae as criteria for typology: A – amphora with small rim opening, B – amphora with wide rim opening. Most amphorae are not decorated. They often have vertically perforated handles on their shoulders.

Pyriiform vessels have a small and medium size, with a wide variety of shapes. Those belonging to types B and C are similar to amphorae, but smaller in size. They generally have a fine fabric, are polished, sometimes *black-topped* and lack decorations.

Pots are a category of medium and large vessels, made using semi-fine and coarse paste. Their firing is often uneven. The most common colours are brown, grey and reddish-brown and most of the pots have dark or black spots. They are often carelessly made, having a high degree of asymmetry, with a uneven or rough surface. Sometimes the surface of the pots is well smoothed.

Vessel stands were classified into two categories. The first category contains simple stands, in the shape of a cone frustum, with the upper edge bevelled on the outside, with rectangular or trapezoidal windows. The second category is that of painted stands.

Tumblers are small vessels, with the body in the shape of a cone frustum. Tumblers lack decoration, sometimes have knobs, and were made predominantly from fine and semi-fine paste.

Pans are short vessels with a large diameter, with a round or oval shape, made predominantly from fine and semi-fine paste. They sometimes have knobs or spouts and generally lack decoration.

Plates are short, round, flared ceramic vessels, with a diameter smaller than that of pans. They are a rare type of vessel, made from fine and semi-fine paste. The fine fabric plates are decorated.

Cylindrical and frustoconical vessel types have been identified. The cylindrical vessels are typical of the Iclod cultural group, some vessels being made from fine paste using mud as a temper. Frustoconical vessels were generally discovered in a fragmentary state, with most of the vessels being inverted. There are also fragments from flared frustoconical vessels.

Lids come in a significant variety of shapes. A small number of lids have cylindrical bases and frustoconical tops, while the majority is represented by dome-shaped lids and conical lids.

Vessels with tubular spouts have been discovered and have been divided into three types. The first two types have the shape and dimensions similar to those of tumblers, with a tubular spout on or close to the rim, while the third type, has a shape similar to that of spoons.

Strainers have been discovered only in fragmentary form. Based on some fragments, three types could be identified. They were made from fine or semi-fine paste and predominantly had a oxidizing firing.

Miniature vessels imitate other vessel types on a reduced scale. Their classification was made according to the type of imitated vessel. Most of the miniature vessels belong to the category of fine pottery and a significant number of them have a temper consisting of silt.

Rectangular bowls are a vessel type specific to the Turdaş cultural group. Only four fragments belonging to this type could be certainly identified and all of them are of fine fabric.

Along with these vessel types, fragments belonging to vessels with a most likely cultic role were also identified, most of them being in a highly fragmentary state. Ceramic weights and spindles made from perforated potsherds have also been identified.

A significant number of vessels had plastic attachments. These have a primarily practical role, mainly assisting the handling and transportation of vessels, but can also fulfil an aesthetic role. The most common form of plastic attachments used is the knob. Knobs have a simplistic shape, most often hemispherical or conical. Vertically elongated knobs, cylindrical knobs,

horizontally elongated knobs or trapezoidal shaped knobs were also used. Knobs were most commonly arranged in diametrically opposed pairs on the body of the vessel, but they can also be arranged in the form of groups or bands.

Grips are protrusions most often attached to the center or top of a vessel to allow it to be handled. Grip tabs are situated on the outside of the lip of biconical bowls. Most grips are derived from knobs: grips in the form of an elongated knobs placed horizontally; grips with the shape of half a dome; hook-shaped grips, arching down; oval grips, arching upwards; horizontally flattened grips. Some grips have features that are possibly zoomorphic.

A small number of protomes with zoomorphic or anthropomorphic features have been discovered.

The handles that were discovered were classified according to size, shape and orientation of the perforation. The main types of handles include: eyelets, vertically or horizontally perforated, their perforations being used together with cords or other items made of soft organic material; tubular handles; hemispherical handles perforated vertically or horizontally; handles shaped like birds' beaks or with other zoomorphic features; hemispherical handle perforated both vertically and horizontally; handles made by horizontally perforating flattened knobs; handles made by vertically perforating a downward arched grip; strap handles; handle applied longitudinally to the lip; handle made from a horizontally perforated prominence.

On the ceramic material from Iernut – Sit II, the following types of applied bands were identified: bands applied on large vessels, sometimes decorated with dents or notches; narrow bands applied on fine vessels, sometimes forming chevrons or rhomboidal motifs, in some cases decorated with notches; short bands applied obliquely to the body of the vessel.

A significant number of vessels belonging to several types (bowls, pots, tumblers, pans) were provided with lip spouts. A specific type is represented by bowls with a lip spout with an overhead semicircular or triangular arch, decorated with notches on the rim.

Decorations are present only on a relatively small number of vessels, especially vessels made from fine paste. Barbotine is used very rarely, having been identified only on two vessels of fine fabric.

Ornamentations made using pinches were used to decorate medium-sized vessels of semi-fine and coarse fabric, especially pots and less often dishes. The pinches were predominantly made in an organized manner, forming bands of horizontal rows, frequently under

the rim or on the shoulder of the vessel. In the case of some vessels the pinched decoration was made in an unorganized manner, while in the case of other vessels the pinches were organized in oblique bands or short horizontal bands.

Dents were used to decorate ceramic vessels of various shapes and sizes. Single or paired dents were used on fine vessels, while rows of dents were used on semi-fine or coarse vessels. Dents have also been used to decorate applied bands or knobs.

Most of the impressions were made with the help of the fingernail or the tip of the finger to decorate fine or semi-fine vessels. The most common form of impressions are the crescent shaped ones.

Stitches were used to decorate generally fine vessels. The shape and dimensions of the stitches can vary, with round, triangular and oval stitches being used. The stitches can be arranged randomly on the body of the vessel, they can form horizontal bands or chevrons, or they can form different motifs, predominantly triangular or rhomboidal. Sometimes stitches were used alongside other decorative techniques, such as incisions, notches, and in one case pinches.

Notches are a frequently used decorative technique, especially on fine vessels, being mainly placed on the rim or shoulder of bowls. Notches were also made as part of some decorative bands and were used to decorate the surface of applied bands.

Incisions were made especially on vessels with an oxidizing firing, of fine or semi-fine fabrics, of small or medium size. Most of the incised lines form geometric motifs, while curvilinear motifs are used to a lesser extent. Sometimes the incised decoration is associated with other forms of ornamentation, especially excisions and punctures, but also notches and painted decorations. Incisions were used to create signs on the bottoms of fine, sometimes polished, small and medium-sized vessels. These signs are predominantly angular, and in one case an anthropomorphic representation was created.

The stitched-incised decorations consist of the association of stitches with the incised decoration, predominant on vessels with oxidizing firing. Stitched-incised decorations form bands and angular motifs, especially triangles and rhombuses.

Excised decorations were predominantly used to ornate vessels of fine texture, frequently polished, predominantly black, sometimes fired in the *black-topped* technique. The excisions consist mainly of horizontal bands of isosceles triangles forming a *wolf's teeth* motif and squares

forming a *chessboard* pattern. The excisions are sometimes carelessly worked and the bands are often framed by incised lines.

Grooves are a rarely used decorative technique. They were predominantly used to decorate fine, well-polished vessels. Grooves were used to form oblique bands arranged *in rafters* or chevrons, or bands forming angular motifs or arches.

Burnished decorations, specific to the Foeni cultural group, were very rarely used in the Iernut settlement. An example of burnished decorations was used to create a cruciform motif both on the inside and on the outside of the bottom of a fine fabric vessel.

Imprints accidentally made by braided mats or other woven materials could be observed on the bottom and the exterior of some vessels. In most cases the impressions are partial and superficial. Also, the imprint of a rope was left on the bottom of a vessel.

Painting is applied to vessels of fine fabrics, generally with a oxidizing firing and covered with a yellowish-orange slip. The painting is predominantly brown or reddish-brown, while sometimes other colours are used: orange, red, grayish brown or dark brown. In the case of a grey vessel with a reducing firing, the painting is dark grey. The painted motifs are simple, consisting mainly of bands of narrow, oblique lines, sometimes found *in rafters*, with their borders occasionally thickened. The painting can also consist of straight lines of different widths. Lines forming chevrons, triangular motifs, triangles, solid painted rhombuses and concentric lines. The painting was applied on the outside and on the inside of the vessels and occasionally on their rim. In the case of many vessels, several decorative painted motifs were used at the same time, while the interior and exterior of the vessels were painted using different motifs.

In Chapter VI the Eneolithic pottery discovered at Iernut is included in the Foeni cultural group. The ceramic forms specific to the settlement are biconical bowls, conical dishes, carinated bowls and amphorae. Fine vessels, made with homogeneous paste, were fired evenly, predominantly in a reducing atmosphere or in the *black-topped* technique. Fine fabric vessels were generally polished. Most ceramic vessels are not decorated, while the most widely distributed decoration technique consists of notches on the rim and/or shoulder of vessels, especially biconical bowls. The most frequently used painted decoration consists of oblique bands of narrow, brown, reddish-brown or red lines arranged *in rafters*. The ceramic material from Iernut – Sit II has features that are considered to be defining for the second phase of the Foeni cultural group. This phase marks the penetration of the cultural group into the

Transylvanian Basin. The fine pottery is predominantly black or *black-topped* and well polished, the main form of painting consists of rows of lines arranged *in rafters* and the vessels are decorated with notches on the rim and on the shoulder. Carinated bowls and lids can be found in a wide variety of shapes. Carinated bowls are predominantly black or *black-topped* and are usually polished. Nevertheless, some features belonging to this phase have not been found: burnished decorations are almost non-existent, while grips tabs on the rims of vessels and beak-shaped handles were rarely used. It is possible that the absence of burnished decorations is a local feature.

The ceramic material has analogues in known sites of the Foeni group, such as those from Alba Iulia – *Lumea Nouă*, Foeni – *Cimitirul Ortodox*, Hunedoara – *Grădina Castelului* and *Judecătorie*, Mintia – *Gerhat*, Petrești – *Groapa Galbenă*, Pianu de Jos – *Podei* and Turdaș - *Luncă*. Also, the painted pottery has some features in common with the Petrești type AII painted pottery.

Within the Iernut - Sit II settlement, vessel types and decorations specific to other cultural entities, such as the Turdaș cultural group, the Iclod cultural group and the Precucuteni culture, were identified. Some of these elements most likely represent a local production, but there is also the possibility of imports.

Three bone samples from the archaeological features from Iernut – Sit II were dated with ¹⁴C. One of these samples was most likely contaminated, its result being much too early. The data obtained with the help of the other two samples indicates a penetration of the Foeni communities in Transylvania prior to the 4632-4499 calBC interval, previously considered to be the beginning of the Foeni group in Transylvania. This result suggests a rapid advance of the Foeni cultural group along the Mureș valley, marked by contact with other communities (the Turdaș cultural group, the Precucuteni culture and the Iclod cultural group), triggering the genesis of the Petrești culture and the beginning of the early Eneolithic in the Transylvanian Basin.

The work also includes a repertoire of the archaeological complexes researched at Iernut - Sit II, the complexes being briefly described, a list of plates and 257 plates.

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List of abbreviations

AB = Analele Banatului, Muzeul Banatului, Timișoara

AUA = Annales Universitatis Apulensis, Alba-Iulia.

AMB = Brukenthal Acta Musei, Sibiu.

AMN = Acta Musei Napocensis, Cluj-Napoca.

AMP = Acta Musei Porolissensis, Zalău.

Apulum = Apulum. Acta Musei Apulensis, Alba Iulia.

ATS = Acta Terrae Septemcastrensis, Sibiu.

CCAR = Cronica Cercetărilor arheologice din România.

Dacia N.S. = Dacia. Dacia (Nouvelle Série). Revue d'archéologie et d'histoire ancienne, Académie Roumaine, Institut d'archéologie « Vasile Pârvan », București.

EN = Ephemeris Napocensis, Cluj-Napoca.

Corviniana = Corviniana. Acta Musei Corvinensis, Hunedoara.

Materiale = Materiale și cercetări arheologice

PA = Patrimonium Apulense, Alba Iulia.

PZ = Praehistorische Zeitschrift.

SCIV = Studii și cercetări de istorie veche, București.

SCIVA = Studii și cercetări de istorie veche și arheologie, București.

StudComSb = Studii și Comunicări. Muzeul Brukenthal, Sibiu.

Terra Sebus = Terra Sebus. Acta Musei Sabesiensis, Sebeș.