Early Farmers, Late Foragers, and Ceramic Traditions

Early Farmers, Late Foragers, and Ceramic Traditions: On the Beginning of Pottery in the Near East and Europe

Edited by

Dragos Gheorghiu

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To my mother, whose efforts and sacrifices made everything possible, but who is no longer here to see it

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PREFACE

The discovery of ceramic objects within Palaeolithic and Mesolithic societies, occurring as early as the second part of the 20th century, contributed to a re-evaluation of the complexity of prehistoric societies and focused the attention of scholars on the emergence of pottery before the advent of the Neolithic. In the last decades, new discoveries in Europe, and re-interpretations of material culture brought into light the contribution of the forager indigenous populations to the process of formation of ceramic traditions, preparing the ground for a shift in the interpreting paradigm.

For this reason I salute **Cambridge Scholars Publishing Ltd**.'s decision to edit a book on such a fascinating, up to date subject in archaeology, history of technology and anthropology, which will be of interest both to scholars, and to the public at large.

The present work has its origins in a session titled «Ceramic Traditions and Clay Cultures in the European Neolithic», co-organised by Dragos Gheorghiu and George Nash in 2005, at the 11th European Association of Archaeologists Meeting in Cork, which gathered most of the European experts in ancient ceramics, who authored the chapters of the volume. Its aim is to present some of the important ceramic traditions of the period between the 7th and the 4th millennia B.C., selected based on a geographical and chronological progression, so as to offer the reader a panoramic image of the phenomenon of the emergence of pottery in Europe; consequently, the first chapter begins with a re-evaluation of the process of emergence of pottery in Anatolia, considered by many scholars to have been the birthplace of the craft which then spread to Europe, other chapters deal with the Balkans and the Adriatic, the Mediterranean, represented by SE Italy and NW Spain, Central and western Europe and Southern Scandinavia.

Presented in ten case studies, the discovery of pottery is discussed in various societies: Neolithic farmers, Late-Mesolithic hunter-gatherers, and foragers transiting to farming, and is approached as an independent, as well as an interactive process between the abovementioned societies, making use of present concepts, but also challenging the limits of the current knowledge and preparing the ground for new interpretations of the subject.

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D. G.
Vadastra, August 2008

INTRODUCTION

EARLY POTTERY: A CONCISE OVERVIEW

DRAGOS GHEORGHIU

Ceramics, a first artificial material (resulting from an irreversible process of transformation of the clay; see David *et al*. 1988: 366), emerged in the dynamic prehistoric hunter-gatherer, or early Neolithic societies as pottery, a new material alternative to the design of massive non-transportable, or small transportable, containers (see de Roever 2004: 163), and a new kind of packaging with a high signalling potential (see Bliege Bird and Smith 2005: 234).

The improvements in the processing of food that occurred with the shift from indirect to direct cooking (Brown 1989: 207), the fermentation of cultivated plants, as well as the processing and consumption of the secondary products of the domestication process (Sherratt 1997) required a new material for an effective utilization and for support of the social competition (for a visualization of the various rituals employing pottery in a traditional society see Ionas 2000: 30 ff).

From the perspective of materiality, one may consider the emergence of pottery as being supported by a specific mystique, due to the symbolism of this new materiality (ceramics), whose skeuomorphic[1] character, manifested especially in the production of pottery, was considered most important. The skeuomorphic hypothesis of the advent of pottery from basketry, or other containers made of organic materials, has a long tradition which extends to Tylor (1871), and was resurrected by Childe (1951), Wormington and Neal (1951), and later employed by many others (for an extended bibliography see Brown 1989).

In the archaeological record of the 8th–7th millennia BC, the first unbaked clay and ceramic vases comprised miniature objects (Cauvin 1997: 69, fig. 18; Özdoğan, this volume). There is no possibility to infer

[1] "an object of feature copying the design of a similar artefact in another material", *The Oxford Encyclopaedic English Dictionary*

whether these symbolic containers were skeuomorphs of valuable containers made of stone, wood (see Mellaart 1965: fig. 69) or lime (the so-called *vaisselle blanche*, Özdoğan, this volume), or of the less valuable plastered baskets used for storage (Fig. 0-1). This double source of skeuomorphism seems to be more evident in the later ceramic production, which was split into a prestige technology (Hayden 1995: 258) of the "fine" (or prestige) pottery (Fig. 0-2) copied after wooden (Fig. 0-3) and stone models, and a less sophisticated one of the "coarse" ware for food storage, which copied the plastered baskets.

Fig. 0-1. Plastered baskets for grain storage, early 20th century Romania, Museum of Agriculture, Slobozia, Romania. (photographs by D. Gheorghiu).

Fig. 0-2. Ceramic painted vase, proto-Criş, Cârcea, 6th millennium BC, Museum of Art and History, Craiova, Romania. (photograph by F. Alexa).

Fig. 0-3. Carved wooden vase, proto-Criş, 6th millennium BC, Grădinile, Museum of Art and History, Craiova, Romania. (photograph by F. Alexa).

In support of my hypothesis I consider the semiotic value of pottery decoration. In farming societies, coarse pottery patterned with rows of incisions, or grooves made of slip, could, for example, symbolize plastered wickerwork. In addition horizontal and vertical rows with incisions could stand for cordage, ropes and plaiting for the vase protection and manipulation. It is possible that the pinches and nail incisions or shell and grain impressions could convey a semiotic message about the content of the vessel. For fine pottery wares, painted patterns could have possibly illustrated woven textile decoration or protection (see Barber 1991: 9; Zhushchikhovskaya 2005: 59ff). Such a plaited fibre wrapping would efficiently protect the ceramic vases, while allowing for their safe mobility.

There is no paradox in that pottery was produced equally in farmer and forager communities: the manufacturing of pottery was a rapid process which was developed by a society with a high degree of mobility (and in this respect both hunter-gatherers and farmers were very dynamic, bridging many landscapes). This is contrary to the ethnographic data which does not confirm the presence of pottery in contemporary forager societies (Arnold 1999; Binford 2001).

One can postulate a symbolic relationship between the pottery's technological rites of manufacturing (Gosselain 2002: 55ff), or pyrotechnology, and the diverse technologies of food and beverage preparation, or with particular rites of passage (David *et al*. 1988); in this scenario the paste (the mix of clay with water) could have been processed in an analogous way to the alimentary paste (bread or fermented dough for beverages).

Pottery is the result of a *chaîne opératoire* process applied to the clay paste, with some stages determined by the laws of firing, and with others which allow a subjective intervention of the community (see Gheorghiu 2008a: 167; Gheorghiu 2008b) to introduce its recognised symbols. Beside the weakening of the thermal shock (Walter *et al.* 2004) the choice of the temper was a symbolic action (Hultén 1985: 335), socially determined (see Arnold 2005: 16); for example, in the Pitted Ware culture (Larsson, this volume), bone temper could symbolize the « bone skeleton » of the vase, but could also be a symbol of a specific food.

The presence of this practice in the Linearbandkeramik (LBK) farmer communities in the northern part of continental Europe (Rauba-Bukowska *et al.* 2007) could be explained as an acculturation with forager populations.

Similar to the construction of the vases, their ritual destruction (see Chapman 2000; Chapman and Gaydarska 2007; Lukes 2004: 21; Larsson, this volume), represented a symbolic decision of the community.

The firing of the potteries by Neolithic farming communities could be regarded as an evolutionary process of protecting vases during the process of combustion, from the shallow pits (Fig. 0-4) to the up-draught kilns (Simson 1997: 39) generating temperatures of over 800ºC (Fig. 0-5) for the production of *figulina* fine pottery. This technological improvement did not however eliminate the parallel use of diverse technologies of combustion (see Vitelli 1997: 32 ff).

Fig. 0-4. Bonfire using dried dung as principal fuel. Note the fire clouds on several vases. Experiments carried in Vadastra village by the author in 2001 (photograph by D. Gheorghiu).
Fig. 0-5. An up-draught kiln after firing. The bright round area around the vent is the ceramic wall of the kiln. Experiments carried in Vadastra village by the author in 2002 (photograph by D. Gheorghiu).

Beside its main function of containing or storing, diverse substances of value (Vitelli 1993: 254; Vitelli 1989: 26; Delpino and Tiné 2003: 65), another function of the early fine ceramics was to support symbolic information associated with social competition (Sherratt 1991: 229; Chapman 1988: 4). These ceramics would have possessed a high signalling potential (see Bliege Bird and Smith 2005: 234). Wealth through display, for example, would have been communicated via the quality of the manufacturing of the body shape and of its decoration, but also by the conspicuous consumption of the potlatch-like breakage of the vases (for an extended bibliography see Gebauer 1995: 108).

One explanation for the high social visibility of the fine pottery may lie in its use in collective rituals of consumption (Chapman 1988: 19), and the quality of the decoration (sometimes on the inside of the vases). Their use may be similar to the drinking rituals evident in the later prehistory (Dietler 1996; Vander Linden 2001; for the consumption of beverages in

prehistory see Sherratt 1987; Vencl 1994; Jennings *et al*. 2005). One possible interpretation for the fine pottery, such as the pedestaled cups to be found in Greece (see Vitelli 1993: 438) to the Balkans and Central Europe (see Keroualin 2003: 124; Vizdal 1997: 119, 122), would be that it represented prestige through public and visible feasting rites (Dietler 1996; Hayden 1996; Le Count 2001), in contrast to the coarse pottery which represented the private zone of food preparation, consumption and storage.

A ritual utilization of pottery seems to have also taken place in the (semi-sedentary) hunter-gatherers' communities at Lepenski Vir I (Budja 2003) or Padina (Jovanović 2008), as inferred by its presence in contexts with high symbolic value like hearths or ovens (Jovanović 2008: 293). The hunter-gatherer pottery execution not at high standards, the simplicity of its decoration and the small number of types are all factors that lead us to infer its functional use (de Roever 2004: 161; Gebauer 1995: 103; Andersen and Malmros 1985: 81), or a ritual-utilitarian syncretism.

Although looking apparently dissimilar, some farmer and forager ceramic traditions share common elements. This may be due to the spread of different ceramic traditions across Europe; the result of multifaceted processes of diffusion and acculturation by means of adoption or acquisition (for the explanation of the terms see Zvelebil 2001), as the consequence of a more or less direct contact between farmer and the hunter-gatherers communities. From the Neolithic "package" (containing domesticates, crops and tools; Pluciennik 1998, as well as modes of living, cult, symbolism, subsistence, technologies, social organization and status objects, Özdoğan 2005: 23), Late Mesolithic communities employed a selective adoption, or "acquisition" of "[m]aterial symbols associated with agriculture" (Armit and Finlayson 1992: 674), pottery being acquired *before* other components due to its important symbolic and ritual role. For example, at Lepenski Vir I (Borić and Stefanović 2004: 536) on the Danube, as well as in the Swifterbant or Ertebølle traditions (Raemaekers 1999: 186, fig. 5.1) of North Western Europe, pottery appears to have been adopted before the other Neolithic traits. One element of the *Neolithic package*, whose distribution can be traced from Western Asia (Cauvin 1997) to Central Europe, but was not present in the farmer communities of Western Mediterranean (Guilaine and Manen 2007: 29), nor in all hunter-gatherer communities, was the ceramic anthropomorphic figurine tradition (see King and Underhill 2002).

The Earliest Ceramic Traditions in Europe

Europe was the last geographic region of the *Old World* where the production of pottery emerged. Situated at a relatively same distance from two early centres of ceramic genesis, the first being the Near East, in the area including the Tigris-Euphrates basin (Mellaart 1975; Moore 1995; Nishiaki and Le Mière 2005) and Anatolia (Özdoğan and Başgelen 1999; Özdoğan, this volume), and the second North Africa (Barich 1984; Close 1995, Guilaine 2005: 91), 7th millennium BC Europe was the theatre of complex socio-political processes that included the spread of this new technology, which, in the next millennia would reach the north-western limits of the continent.

Contrary to Eastern Asia, where pottery was present as early as the early 13th millennium b.p. in the Mesolithic forager communities of Japan (Aikens 1995: 11; Kobayashi 2004), or in China (Zhushchikhovskaya 2005: 10), Europe was characterized by an aceramic Mesolithic until around the 6th–5th millennia BC, when some local productions (with no archaeologically supported connection to Eastern Asia) began to emerge (but for a possible Asiatic influence on European foragers see van Berg and Cauwe 2000; Cauwe 2004; Gronenbon 2003; Timofeev 1998a, 1998b).

The current theories on the emergence of the Neolithic, and consequently pottery, in Europe are divided into two main hypothesises: **a**) *diffusionism*, following Childe's migrationist model of expansion (e.g. Bogucki 2003) and where the early, initial theories proposed a farmers' continuous "wave of advance" (Ammerman and Cavalli-Sforza 1984; Cavalli-Sforza 1996; Cavalli-Sforza and Cavalli-Sforza 1995; Cavalli-Sforza *et al*. 1993; Gkiasta *et al.* 2003; Pinhasi *et al*. 2000), and latter ones suggesting a diffusion characterized by small scale movements of a "leapfrog colonization" (Zilhao 2001; Zvelebil 2000: 58; Spataro 2002: 15) and b) *indigenism* (Barker 1985; Whittle 1996; Pluciennik 1998; Tringham 2000), which insists on *autochtonism* through frontier contact and cultural diffusion, or on the cultural independence from Western Asia, to exemplify with the local invention of the monochrome pottery in Thessaly and the Balkans (see Budja 2001, 2004; Thiessen 2000).

Between these two opposing trends, *integrationism*, a post-colonial paradigm (for an extended bibliography see Zvelebil 2004), emphasizes the importance of sequential transition and transformation (Whittle and Cummings 2007) in order to explain the Neolithisation process beyond the simplistic level provided by the confrontation between diffusionists and indigenists (see Kotsakis 2001; Robb and Miracle 2007).

When analysed and applying the current operating models of *diffusionism* and *indigenism*, the emergence of pottery in Europe as a *longue durée* process in the 7th–6th millennia BC reveals the following major ceramic traditions:

A) a continental eastern Mediterranean tradition, with monochrome pottery in Western Asia (see Özdoğan, this volume), whose presence in Europe is still regarded as a slow demic diffusion, whose route and dating still remain a subject of caution (Guilaine 2005: 47; Perlès 2003a; 2003b). After a short punctuated aceramic horizon (Perlès 2004) characterised by unbaked clay containers (at Argissa, in Thessaly), a monochrome pottery (for a forager origin of it see Budja 2004) was followed in South Eastern Europe by *Impresso* (see Özdoğan, this volume) and painted pottery. It has been noted that in the first centuries of the 7th millennium BC there is a tendency of ignoring the Anatolian tradition design and to develop an indigenous European painted pottery (see Vitelli 1993; Phelps 2004).

If in some parts of Western Asia, in the later stages of the Pre Pottery Neolithic phase B (PPNB), the real pottery emerged, after an initial period of symbolic, miniature containers (Cauvin 1997: 69; Moore 1995: 46; Guilaine 2005: 30), in Europe the first monochrome ceramic vases seem to have been the result of a syncretism between symbolism and functionalism. It is still difficult to identify their utilitarian function since they were *not* used for cooking on an open fire or for the storage of grain, due to their small dimensions (Björk 1995: 80; Perlès 2001: 216).

After the monochrome episode a splitting-up of the pottery production into two categories (fine-prestige and utilitarian) occurred, with the development of the fine ware and a solid skeuomorphic tradition preserved for the utilitarian containers.

B) a continental First Temperate Neolithic (FTN; Nandris 1970) tradition (in the Balkans and the Lower Danube area) which, after a monochrome period followed by one with white painting, continued the tradition of southern painted pottery within the Starčevo-Körös-Criş (SKC) tradition. The conventional diffusionist model of farmers coming from West Asia (Perlès 2005; Özdoğan 2005), which created in the Balkans a first monochrome tradition and an *Impresso* pottery incised with shells on the Adriatic coast (Özdoğan 1997; Perlès 2001; Perlès 2003b), even if supported by recent genetic data (see King and Underhill 2002), is now challenged by indigenists theory (Thissen 2000; Budja 2001; Budja 2005: 41).

Monochrome-*Impresso* pottery was discovered near Late Mesolithic stone sculptures in trapezoidal buildings (Srejović 1971), at the semi-