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LINEAR POTTERY CULTURE ON THE LOWER DANUBE

ABSTRACT

Garvăn D. and Frînculeasa A. 2021. Linear Pottery culture on the Lower Danube. *Sprawozdania Archeologiczne* 73/1, 421-437.

Archaeological excavations carried out at Sudiți (Buzău County, Romania) some decades ago unearthed several Linear Pottery culture features which were subsequently interpreted and used by various researchers in an attempt to explain the origin of Chalcolithic cultures (such as Boian). The poorly published findings generated conflicting or arguable theories. Even if it is not the only discovery of its kind, the Neolithic feature from Sudiți is the most complex one from Wallachia. Until now, accurate field research is undertaken, this old discovery is still appropriate for further discussion, offering some valid points regarding the relation between the local culture and Linear Pottery at the turn of the fifth millennium.

Keywords: Lower Danube, Wallachia, Linear Pottery culture, pottery, chronology

Received: 21.01.2021; Revised: 15.03.2021; Accepted: 29.06.2021

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INTRODUCTION

Although more than half a century has passed since the Sudiți investigations, there is still little information about the evolution of the Linear Pottery culture on the Lower Danube. Apart from the Sudiți site, where several complexes (deep dwellings or pits) attributed to the Linear Pottery culture were researched, the other data are exclusively related to the presence of ceramic fragments in various local cultural contexts such as Dudești, Vădastra I and Boian – Bolintineanu.

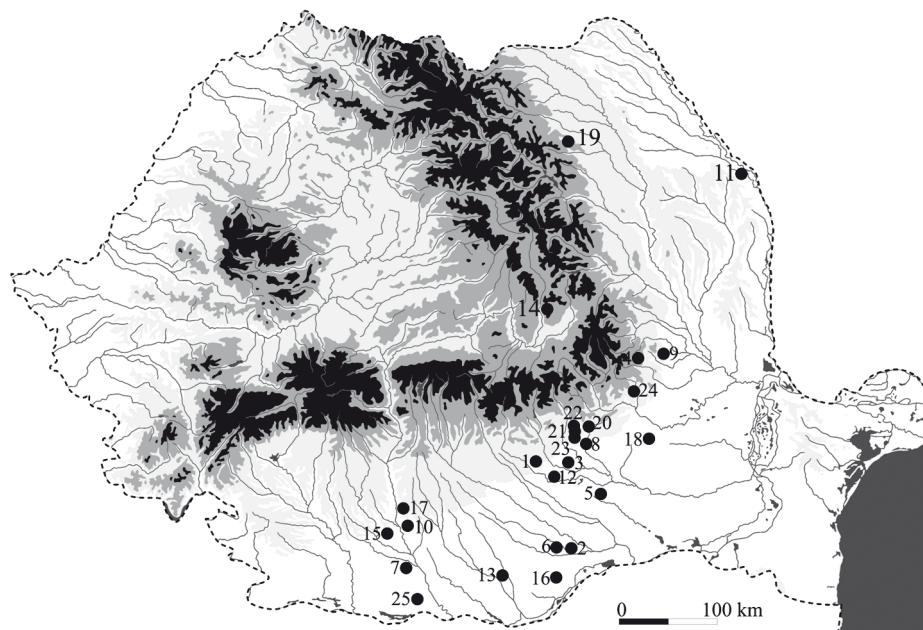
LINEAR POTTERY CULTURE ON THE LOWER DANUBE. A BRIEF PRESENTATION OF THE MAIN FINDS/DISCUSSIONS (FIG. 1)

The first ceramic fragments belonging to the Linear Pottery culture south of the Carpathians were found in 1958 in the lower level of the Vădastra – Movila Fetelor site, located not far from the Danube valley. They were associated with Boian – Bolintineanu archaeological materials (Mateescu 1961, 61, fig. 1: 2). Most finds come from the northern half of Wallachia, particularly as a result of the research conducted by V. Teodorescu, starting in the 1970s. We should mention the discoveries from Sudiți in 1961, 1964, 1970-1973 (Teodorescu 1966; 2009), Coșereni (1963), Lacul Turcului (1964) (Teodorescu 1966, 224), Boldești-Grădiștea (1980) (Frînculeasa 2007, 29), all located in the plain area, and from Ghinoaică (1961, 1964) (Teodorescu 1966, 226), Vadu Săpat – La Siliște, Puțul Tătarului, La Grec (Teodorescu and Peneș 1984), and Tohani – Dumbrava (Frînculeasa 2010, 49), in the foothills. Linear Pottery culture fragments were found at four sites on the north-eastern border of Wallachia, in the piedmont area, namely Vadu Sorești (Drâmbocianu 1980), Coroteni (Bobi 1987), Gugești (Bobi 1979, 26) and Voetin (Bobi and Paragină 1992).

A number of discoveries were made in the southern half of Wallachia, near Bucharest – some of them in archaeological contexts belonging to the Dudești culture, such as the finds at the eponymous site (Comșa 1969) and Cernica (Comșa 1978, 14). A few Linear Pottery culture sherds originate from Măgura, in the Teleorman valley, from a level with mixed Dudești and Vădastra materials (Frînculeasa 2010, 50, 51). Recently, Linear Pottery culture along with Dudești and Boian – Bolintineanu have been found at Pietrele (Hansen *et al.* 2017, 22, fig. 25).

As regards the area around the Olt River, in addition to the Vădastra find, there are those from Slatina – Crișana II, Piatra Sat – Nucet and Farcașu de Sus – Pe Costă, in the Dudești/Vădastra I levels (Nica 1997, 107).

To this list of finds of ceramic materials, specific to this culture, we should add a number of decorative elements considered to be of Linear tradition. One should mention the deco-



1. Boldești-Grădiștea; 2. Cernica; 3. Ciorani; 4. Coroteni; 5. Coșereni; 6. Dudești; 7. Farcașu de Sus; 8. Ghinoaică; 9. Gugești; 10. Ipotești; 11. Isaiia; 12. Lacul Turcului; 13. Măgura; 14. Olteni; 15. Piatra-Sat; 16. Pietrele; 17. Slatina; 18. Sudiți; 19. Târpești; 20. Tohani; 21. Vadu Săpat - *La Grec*; 22. Vadu Săpat - *Puțul Tătarului*; 23. Vadu Săpat - *La Siliște*; 24. Vadu Sorești; 25. Vădastra.

Fig. 1. Main Linear Pottery culture sites cited in text

ration consisting of parallel lines, which sometimes end in a short, oblique line, encountered in some Boian – Giulești settlements in north-eastern Wallachia, at Siliște – Conac, Lișcoteanca – Movila din Baltă (Pandrea 1999, 26, fig. 1, 2) and Pietrosu – La Arman (unpublished), or maybe the one consisting of triangles or parallel lines, made by incision, with the inside spaces filled with stitches.

THE SITE FROM SUDIȚI (BUZĂU) AND THE LINEAR POTTERY CULTURE (A STILL SOLITARY DISCOVERY)

The Sudiți site (Gherăseni commune, Buzău County) lies in the north-east of Wallachia, in the Bărăgan Plain, about 25 km from the foothills, on the bank of the Călmățui River. The Neolithic and Chalcolithic occupation is spread over a large area (approx. 10 ha), overlap-

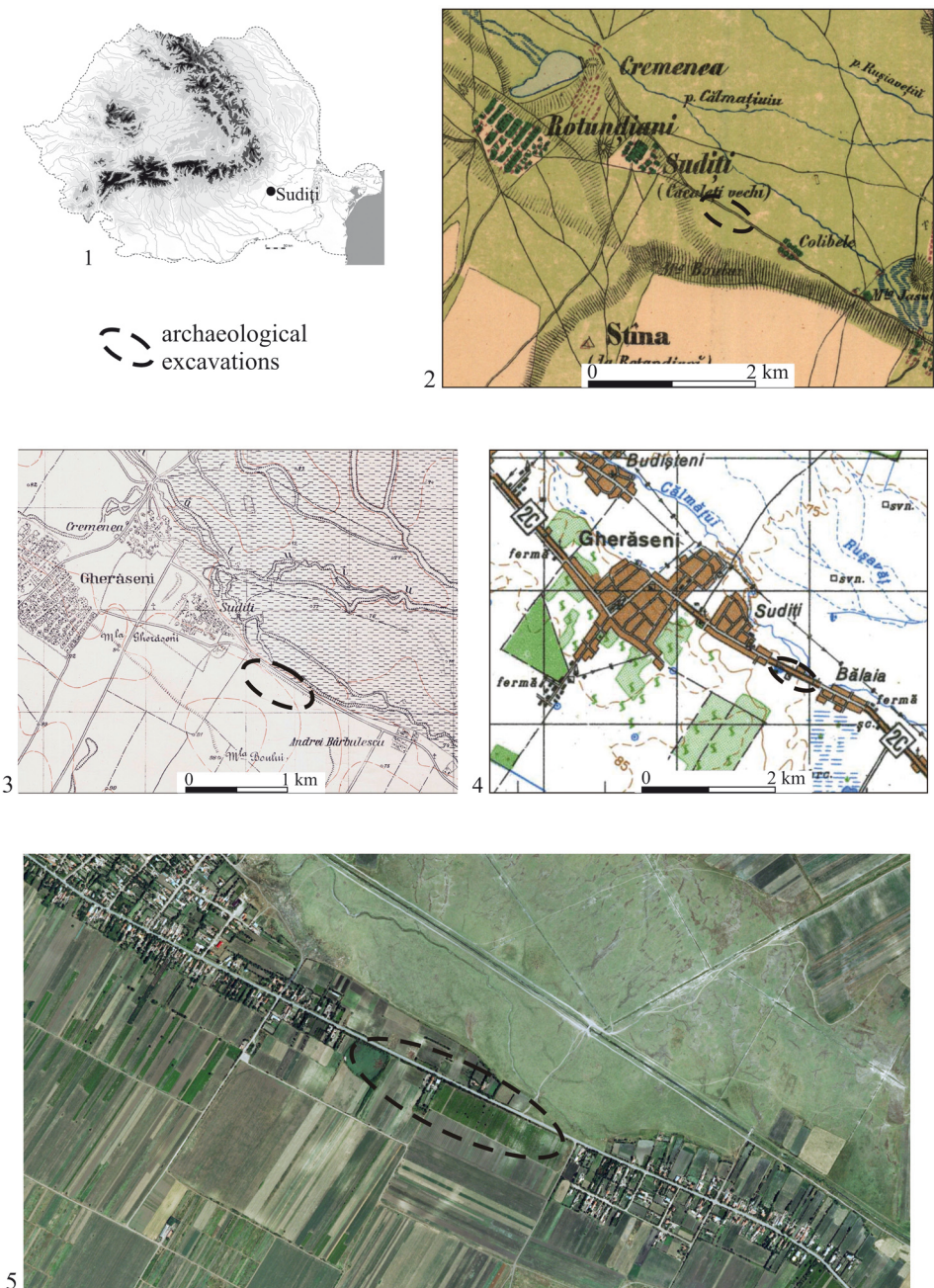


Fig. 2. Location of the Sudiți site (1) and the evolution of the area according to the Szathmari map, 19th century (2), the *Planurile Directoare de Tragere*, first half of the 20th century (3), military maps, 1997 (4) and the current orthophotograph (5)

ping almost the entire space between the villages of Sudiți (Gherășeni commune) and Bălaia (Smeeni commune), on the right bank of the river (45.015274°N; 26.822364°E) (Fig. 2).

The site was identified by V. Teodorescu in 1961, following some surface research. The excavations were carried out in 1964, 1970, 1971, 1972 and 1973. Following the results obtained after the first excavation campaign, the “Sudiți aspect”, resulting from contacts between Linear and Dudești and Boian – Bolintineanu communities, was defined (Teodorescu 1966).

The materials attributed to the Linear Pottery culture lay in a 0.25 m thick layer, alongside other Dudești and Boian – Bolintineanu and Boian – Giulești materials. Some overlapped complexes were decisive in establishing the stratigraphy. On this basis, it was established that Linear communities had preceded the Boian – Bolintineanu and Giulești ones (Teodorescu 2009, 619), and that there could have been an archaeological level more ancient than the Linear one (Teodorescu 1966, 223-225).

Six pits were attributed to this community, amongst them CL 1/1964 and CL 2/1970, which were interpreted as dwellings on basis of their shape, size and layout. Pit CL 1/1964 had an oval shape, 0.30-0.35 m deep, with sides measuring 3.55 × 2.95 m. Pit CL 2/1970 was 0.30 m deep, with sides measuring 4 × 2.75 m. The remains of a hearth were preserved inside, and the outline was bordered / delimited by 11 postholes (Frînculeasa 2010, 45).

Identical situations were also identified in settlements attributed to the Linear Pottery culture east or west of the Eastern Carpathians. Ten pits were found at Târpești (Neamț County), and based on their sizes (sides of 5 × 3 m and depths of 0.9-1 m from the excavation level), only one was labelled as a dwelling (Marinescu-Bîlcu 1981, 8). Remains of Linear dwellings, largely destroyed by later occupations, were also researched at the Isaiia settlement (Iași County) (Ursulescu *et al.* 2001, 111; 2002, 161, 162; 2005, 189). Fourteen deep dwellings and about 30 pits were investigated at Olteni (Covasna County) (Buzea *et al.* 2010, 286), considered to be one of the largest settlements in Romania. Boian – Giulești and Precucuteni I materials, which seem to be contemporaneous at this site, were also found here (Buzea *et al.* 2010, 286).

The situation in Sudiți may be an exceptional one due to the presence of successive occupations over a very short period of time, but the contextualisation of the archaeological material discovered by V. Teodorescu remains problematic. In most cases, Boian – Bolintineanu or even Boian – Giulești materials were found at the upper part of Linear Pottery culture pits, which can be explained by their being filled in different stages (Frînculeasa 2010, 47, 48).

The ceramic inventory from Sudiți is not very large, as the number of ceramic fragments is a little over 100. Two vessels, which today are part of the Buzău County Museum exhibition, were restored (Fig. 3: 1, 2). Almost the entire amount of pottery belongs to the category of fine ware. The only criterion of assignation was the decoration. The similar features of Neolithic coarse pottery (particularly the Linear and Dudești, but also Boian), the absence of distinctive ornamental elements and the context of discovery were impediments to separating this ceramic category based on cultural and chronological criteria.



Fig. 3. Sudiți (1-2, 4-14) and Vadu Sorești (3) pottery

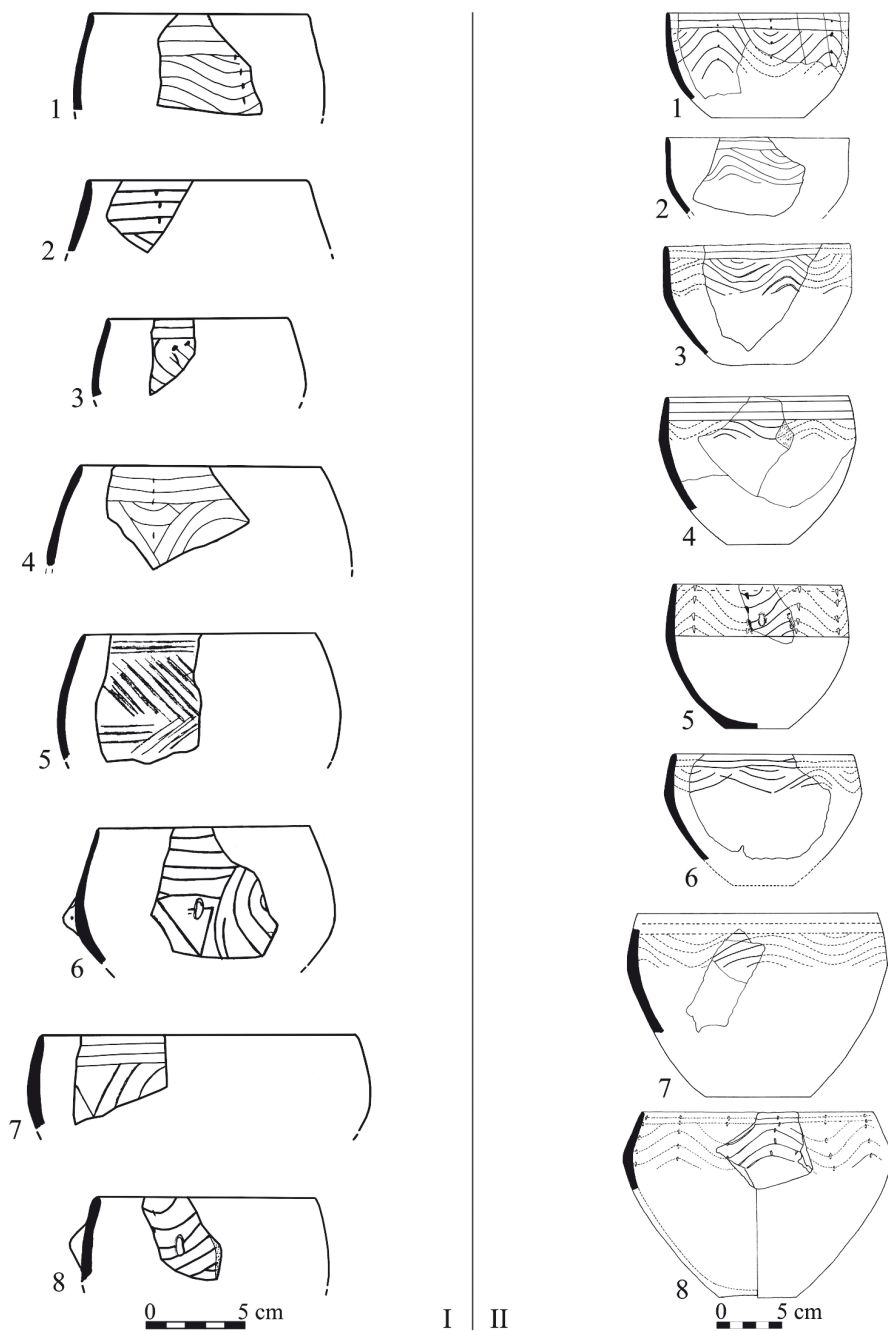


Fig. 4. I. Spherical bowls (1-8 – Sudiți); II. Truncated cone-shaped bowls (1-8 – Sudiți)

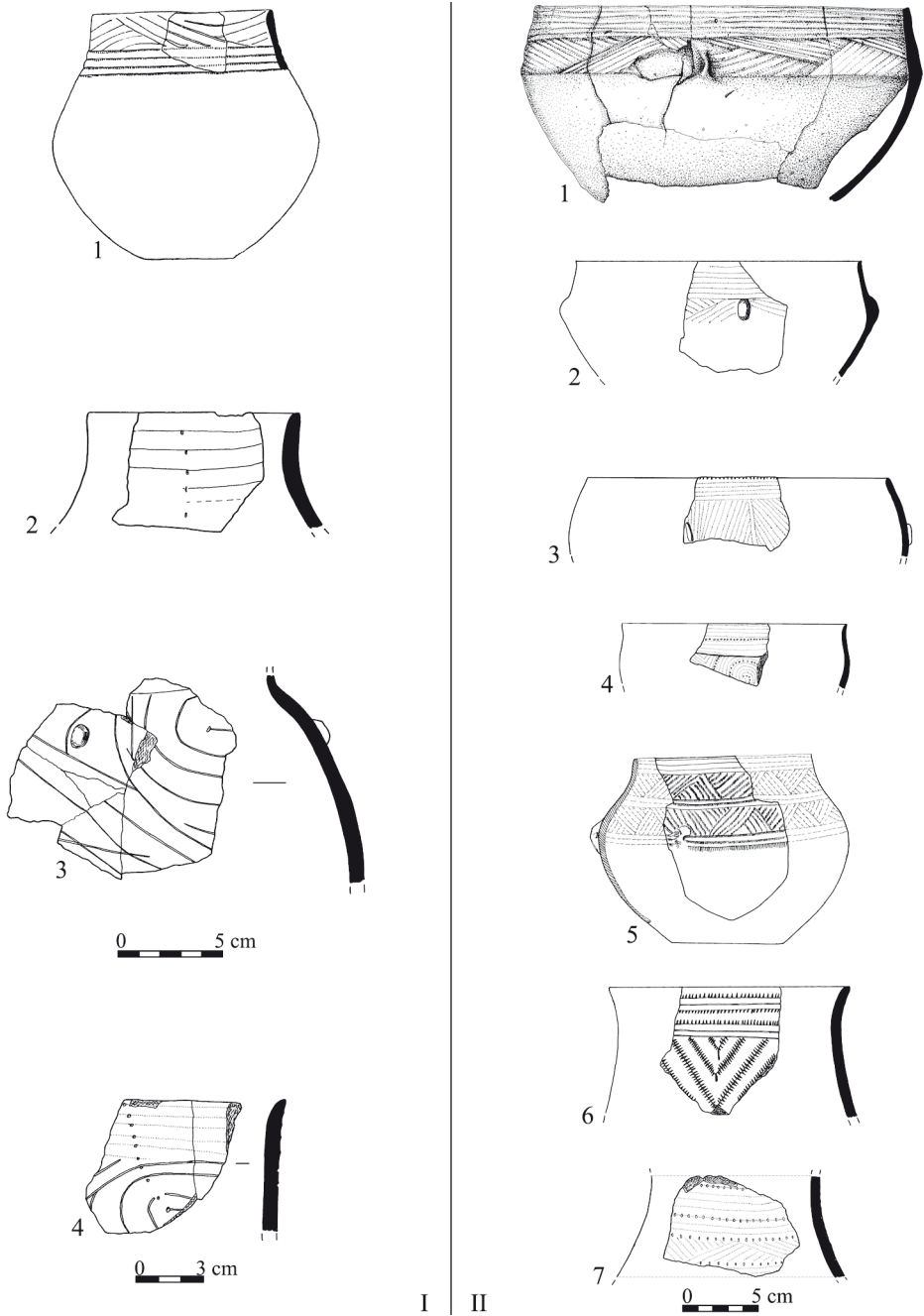


Fig. 5. I. 1-3 High-necked vessels; 4. Ceramic fragment with combined decoration (Linear Pottery culture and Bolintineanu) (1, 4 – Sudiți; 2-3 – Vadu Sorești); II. Boian – Bolintineanu pottery (1-6 – Sudiți; 7 – Vadu Sorești)

The typological repertoire is rather poor, partly due to the difficulty in identifying/separating the material. The “truncated cone-shaped bowl” (Fig. 4: II) is a frequently encountered form at Sudiți. This form is considered to be of southern influence (Dudești or Boian) and attributed to the final stage of the Linear Pottery culture (Teodorescu 1966; Ursulescu 1990, 17). The spherical bowl (Fig. 4: I) and the high-necked vessels (Fig. 5: I) are specific to this culture and, in the area east of the Carpathians, are considered to be typical of the middle and late stages according to the chronology proposed by N. Ursulescu for this territory (Ursulescu 1991, 17, 18). Three types of decorations can be encountered at the settlement in the Călmățui valley: the incised type (which prevails) (Fig. 3; 4: I), the type that combines notches with incisions (less common) (Fig. 5: I4) and the plastic type (perforated or unperforated protuberances) (Fig. 3: 6, 14; 4: I6, I8).

NEW DATA REGARDING THE RELATION BETWEEN THE LINEAR POTTERY CULTURE AND THE EVOLUTION OF CONTEMPORANEOUS LOCAL CULTURES

Linear materials occur alongside those of other cultures, often in unclear stratigraphic positions. There is information about the archaeological contexts of Dudești (Comșa 1969) and Cernica (Comșa 1978, 14), where Linear pottery was found alongside Dudești pottery. Linear pottery was discovered at Vădastra in a level corresponding to the end of the Dudești culture (Teodorescu 1966, 224), and in Slatina, Piatra and Farcașu de Sus in Dudești/Vădastra I levels (Nica 1997, 107). Linear materials were found alongside Dudești and Bolintineanu ones in Cernica (Fig. 6: 1-7; Cantacuzino and Morintz 1968, 12, fig. 4), Pietrele (Fig. 6: 8; Hansen *et al.* 2017, 22, fig. 25), and Coroteni (Bobi 1987, 329, fig. 4: 1), whereas inside the Carpathian arch, at Hărman, they occur in association only with Bolintineanu pottery (Alexandrescu 1971). Linear, Bolintineanu and Vădastra I ceramic fragments were found at Ghinoaică (Frînculeasa 2010, 51) and Vadu Sorești (Drâmbocianu 1980). Several Vădastra fragments were also discovered at Sudiți (Frînculeasa 2010, pl. 37: 6-10), but in unclear contexts. Linear ceramic fragments associated with Vădastra were found in Boldești as well (Frînculeasa 2010, 51). As previously mentioned, Dudești, Vădastra I and Boian – Bolintineanu fragments were discovered alongside Linear pottery in the Sudiți settlement. At Voetin (Vrancea County), the Linear settlement overlapped a Starčevo-Criș settlement, which, in its turn, was covered by a settlement attributed to the Spantov phase of the Boian culture (Bobi and Paragină 1992, 25). A Linear settlement overlapped by a Boian-Giulești settlement was also discovered in Vrancea County, at Gugești (Bobi 1979, 26, fig. 4: 6-8).

In south-western Ukraine, ceramic fragments with a decoration typical of the Dudești culture were found in a Linear complex at Kamyane-Zavallia (Kiosak 2017, 253-268, fig. 9: 12-14).

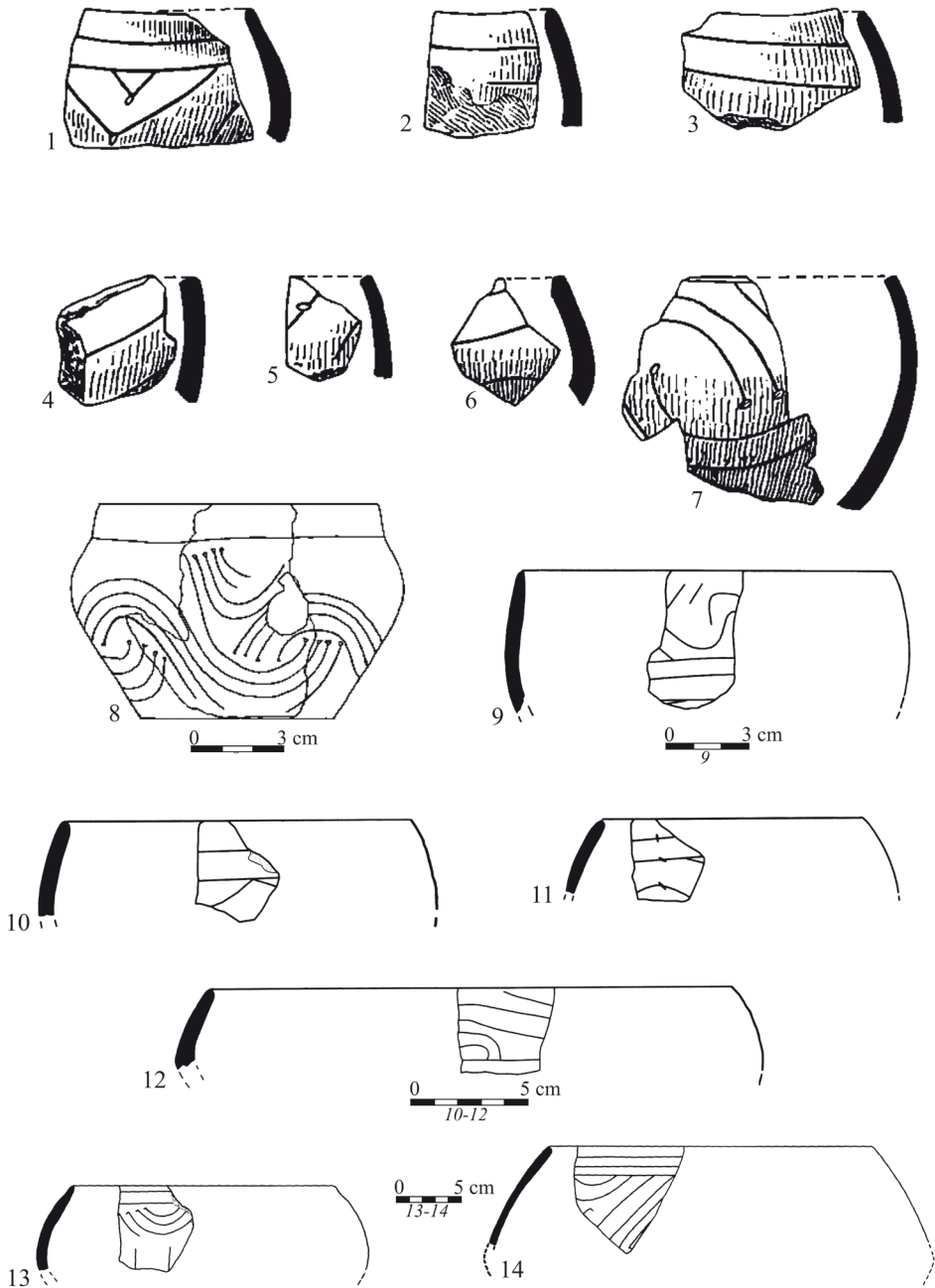


Fig. 6. Linear pottery found at Cernica (1-7), Pietrele (8), Boldești-Grădiștea (9), Ghinoaica (10-12) and Măgura (13-14) (1-7 acc. to Comșa 1969, without scale; 8 acc. to Hansen *et al.* 2017; 9-14 acc. to Frînculeasa 2010)

The lack of contexts and the period in which materials attributed to the Linear Pottery culture were investigated explain the absence of radiocarbon dating. The only option is to relate to the neighbouring areas and cultures. Radiocarbon dating carried out in Linear Pottery culture settlements (Nowak *et al.* 2017, fig. 6; Kiosak 2017, 258; Lazarovici and Lazarovici 2006, 463) points to a chronological interval closer to the Vădastra, approximately between 5200 and 5000 cal BC (Mirea 2015, 45). As for the Dudești culture, the most relevant radiocarbon dates are those from Măgura (Thissen 2013, 25, tab. 1). Attributed to an early stage of the culture, they are placed within an interval between 5500 and 5300 cal BC (Mirea 2015, 45). For the Boian – Bolintineanu phase, there is no radiocarbon dating from the settlements, and the dates from the Cernica graveyard (Stratton *et al.* 2018) are not relevant; however, some finds or associations of materials indicate the contemporaneousness of this phase with the Vădastra I (Neagu 2003, 145). Some authors consider the Boian – Bolintineanu phase to be an integral part of the Vădastra culture (Boroneanț 2005, 64). The Linear Pottery culture and the Giulești phase of the Boian culture played an important role in the emergence of the Precucuteni culture, which shows that the two were contemporaneous. In north-east Wallachia, the Giulești phase has a longer evolution than in the Danube valley. Radiocarbon dates are also scarce for this period. The earliest ones carried out at the Isaccea site indicate an interval of 4900-4800 cal BC (Carozza *et al.* 2020, 151, fig. 9).

The Linear finds south of the Carpathians prove the existence of a period of cultural contacts, with the Dudești, Vinča B2 culture as the lower limit and the Boian – Giulești as the upper one.

DISCUSSIONS (ON THE NATURE OF THE PRESENCE OF THE LINEAR POTTERY CULTURE ON THE LOWER DANUBE)

The Sudiți finds attributed to the Neolithic drew the attention of the researchers of the age, who formulated points of view regarding the internal evolution, the connections/contacts with the neighbouring area and the role played by the Călmățui group in the emergence of the Boian and Precucuteni cultures.

As early as the first publication, inferences on the cultural identity of the archaeological features discovered here were presented: “...these more or less still Linear tribes (later of Sudiți aspect)...” (Teodorescu 1966, 231). The wording of the 1966 text suggests the existence of two moments in the evolution of the complex here: the first one – the coming of Linear communities, the second one – the synthesis between the newcomers and the local communities (Dudești).

According to E. Zaharia, the Sudiți finds are a late stage of the Linear, of the transition from the Dudești to the Bolintineanu (Zaharia 1967).

Based on the results obtained at Târpești, S. Marinescu-Bîlcu considers that the late Linear communities descending from Moldavia and the Bolintineanu ones had mixed at Sudiți, thus excluding the participation of the *Sudiți aspect* in the formation of the Precucuteni culture (Marinescu-Bîlcu 1968, 400).

E. Comșa would view the Sudiți stratigraphy as uncertain and would attribute CL 1/1964 to the Dudești culture, arguing that the Linear pottery in the fill must have been an import, as it occurs also in a pit at Dudești eponymous site. Furthermore, he would acknowledge the antecedence of the Linear pottery from Dudești and Ghinoaița to that from Sudiți (Comșa 1969, 572).

Studying the Hărman Linear material, A. Alexandrescu noticed its resemblance to that of Sudiți, but considered the emergence of mixed elements to have resulted from the contact between Linear and Bolintineanu communities (Alexandrescu 1971, 13, 14).

Employing stylistic criteria, N. Ursulescu proposes three stages of evolution of the Linear Pottery culture in Moldavia and north-east Wallachia. As early as the first phase, these communities, who “dislocated and assimilated the Starčevo-Criș ones”, would spread as far as the north-east of Wallachia (the Călmățui valley – A/N) and even further south, coming into contact with the Dudești communities, in the second phase (Fundeni) (Ursulescu 2000, 252). During the second phase, that synthesis between the east-Carpathian and southern (Dudești) communities may have occurred, which the Iași-born scientist would regard as “a local aspect – the Sudiți aspect” (Ursulescu 2000, 253, 257). It is then that some of the Linear communities from Moldavia would enter Transylvania, and the influence of southern cultures on the Linear one would become increasingly stronger, this being the beginning of the formation process of the Precucuteni culture (Ursulescu 2000, 258). It results, from the aforementioned, that N. Ursulescu also acknowledges the existence of two moments in the evolution of the Linear Pottery culture at Sudiți.

While the northern, western and southern connections of the Linear Pottery community from Sudiți are emphasised repeatedly, there are no clear data to ascertain the cultural relationship with the eastern territory (Hașotti 1990, 21).

S. Pandrea rules out the participation of the *Sudiți aspect* to the formation of the Giulești phase, but admits there may have been a coexistence of the two ceramic styles (linear and Giulești), which is an idea based on the discovery of vessels with a decoration consisting of incised lines, sometimes interrupted by small alveoli, found at Silișteța – Conac and Lișcoteanca – Movila din Baltă (Pandrea 1999, 26, fig. 1, 2).

Reassessing the excavation data and V. Teodorescu’s manuscripts, one of the authors of the present paper concluded elsewhere that the Linear Pottery culture from Sudiți represent a particular phenomenon within the cultural evolution of north-eastern Wallachia that should be inserted between Dudești culture (Fundeni phase) and Boian culture (the Giulești phase), prior to or at least contemporary with the formation of the Precucuteni culture (Frînculeasa 2010, 56).

Traditions and influences of the Linear Pottery culture preceding the emergence of the Precucuteni culture were specified and observed following the discovery of vessels with anthropomorphic features at Dodești – the Stoicani-Aldeni cultural aspect (Nițu 1974), Isaiia – the Precucuteni II-III culture (Ursulescu and Tencariu 2004), or in the Bucovăț cultural environment (Lazarovici 1979; Maxim 1999).

These are some of the theories regarding the finds of Sudiți and their role in the new cultural constructions. Although many years have passed since the excavations carried out here, the echo of these finds has not disappeared. The lack of excavations in the area, which could confirm or refute what V. Teodorescu reported, makes it more and more difficult to discuss such an issue. The data on the Linear Pottery culture in eastern Romania still lacks substance. More recent discoveries, such as those from Isaiia (Iași County) and Olteni (Covasna County) are yet to be expounded in a conclusive manner. The data from Olteni are little known, but we believe they may have a significant impact on the interpretation of the occurrence of Linear, Boian and Precucuteni I materials in the same archaeological context (Buzea 2002, 183-225). As regards the ceramic inventory of Isaiia, it allowed J. Braungart to define three phases of evolution of this culture. He places the Sudiți, Vadu Sorești, Dudești, Vădastra and Hărman finds in the second phase (Braungart 2014, 25).

CONCLUSIONS

Analysing the evolution of the Linear Pottery culture on the Lower Danube, or its influence on the origin of contemporary or posterior cultures, is still far from being easy/accessible. Using only one element (pottery) within a model, namely the establishment of contact chronology based on “imports”, we believe that such an analysis is inappropriate in the absence of additional elements. In establishing a relative chronology, the association of “imports” with indirect finds, which points to the contemporaneity of cultural influences, complicates or at least raises questions regarding the absolute nature of this methodology. Acknowledging chronological gaps, cultural isolationism and conservatism seem easy answers, which are nevertheless difficult to prove only by studying the pottery. Certain materials are not “imports”, but bear mere similarities or influences marked by the “fashion” of the age (Frînculeasa 2007, 35); however, they may also indicate access to technologies and innovations in the production of pottery and/or of other artefacts.

The finds attributed to the Linear Pottery culture in Romania led to the reassessment of the local cultural framework following the evolution of the Starčevo-Criș culture, which represented the engine for the cultural homogeneity of a large area north of the Danube in the 6th millennium. Unlike the previous stage, the end of the 6th millennium and the beginning of the following one represented a chronological segment which was culturally heterogeneous and fragmented. Within this local picture, the discovery of Linear ceramic

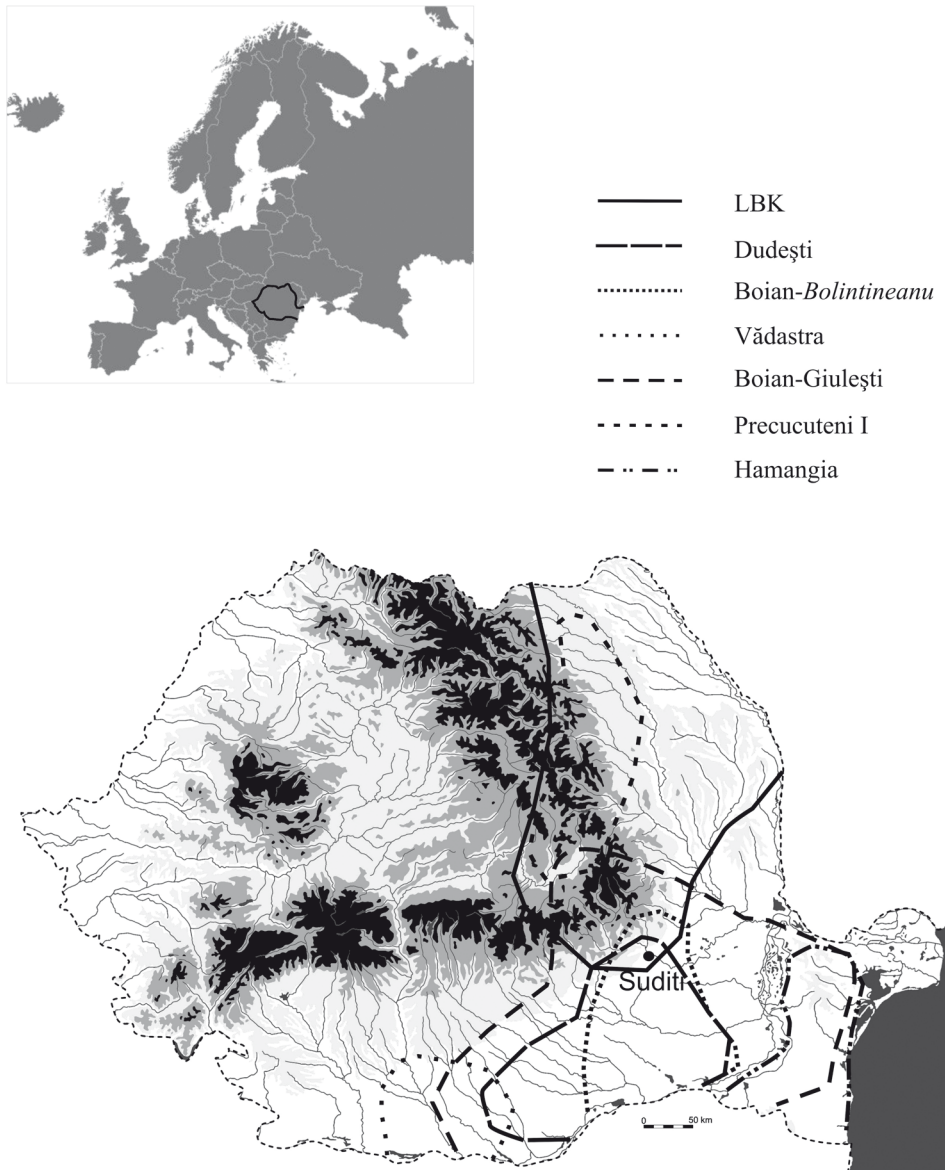


Fig. 7. Distribution of cultures discussed in the text

fragments south of the Carpathians marks a very culturally dynamic period, characterised rather by local evolutions, which however do not exclude contacts and interaction. The Sudiți finds seem to represent a certain kind of cultural manifestation with a strong local imprint, generated both by the geographical context and by the interaction between the

Linear Pottery culture and the contemporary cultural environment (Fig. 7). The lack of consistent discoveries might mark a reality in which the Linear Pottery culture interacted with the local cultural environment and influenced it on a more or less archaeologically noticeable level.

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