

Social structures and economic strategies at household level in the Chalcolithic settlement of Hăbășești, Romania

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Abstract. *This study is intended to be an attempt to identify the social structures associated with the dwelling in the Chalcolithic settlement from Hăbășești, Romania. Starting from the analysis of dwellings, the intention is to identify the major components of the household: social, material and behavioural, and the determination of the nature of the activities carried out within the structures. Taken into account are the size of the dwelling, the number of rooms, the presence of combustion structures and the inventory of dwellings.*

Rezumat. *Studiul de față se dorește a fi o încercare de identificare a structurilor sociale asociate cu locuințele din așezarea eneolitică de la Hăbășești. Pornind de la analiza locuințelor se încearcă identificarea componentelor majore ale gospodăriei: socială, materială și comportamentală, și stabilirea caracterului activităților desfășurate în interiorul structurilor. Sunt luate în considerare dimensiunea locuințelor, numărul de încăperi, prezența structurilor de combustie și inventarul locuințelor.*

Keywords: household, economic strategies, social structures, Hăbășești.

Introduction

The present study analyses from a social point of view the structures that occupied the dwellings from Hăbășești (Strunga commune, Iași County, Romania). Researchers claim that based on spatial organisation, size and function of the settlement we can obtain information about the social nature. The spheres of social structures of a community, represented by the management of common space, the position of the individual or his family within the group, and the degree of the solidarity of the group, seems to be influenced by the quality and quantity of raw materials and the manpower available, the experience of the builders, the desire of the individual to assign a different amount of resources in the construction of houses, etc.²

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² URSULESCU 2008, 212.

Site description

The settlement, with a surface about 1.5 ha, is situated on a hill with the west-east orientation, with good natural defensive system provided by the abrupt slopes, situated in the north-northeast side of the village and two complementary ditches, arranged almost in parallel, situated on the western side of the plateau. The settlement was dated to the Cucuteni A3 stage. The archaeological researches carried out led to the discovery of 44 dwellings, of several annexes and of 85 pits. The dwellings were laid in two nearby circles, formed by 29 and 13 constructions, respectively, each of them with another construction in the middle, of large size, which could have had a more special role in comparison to the others. The exterior ditch was 121 m long, the maximal width, in its upper part being of 7.10 m and its depth of 2.60 m, narrower to both ends, and the interior ditch, was 123 m long widely open at its mouth, narrowed toward the flat base, the width of the opening at the mouth being of about 6 m and the depth of 2.30 m. Its northern end is split in two lobes, and then it is suddenly stopped³.

Methodology and analysis criteria

The present study focus only on the dwellings from the settlement of Hăbășești. The main source of information is the archaeological monograph of the settlement published in 1954. The emphasis will be placed on the three major components of household identified in the archaeological literature (Table 1): *the social component*, represented by the demographic unit, and the relationship between the members; *the material component*, marked by the inventory of dwellings; and *the behavioural component*, marked by the activities carried out⁴.

The association of structures and material found inside the dwellings can provide information about the management of resources and the economic organisation of the household⁵. The presence of storage area, either in the form of large vessels, clay bins or pits, suggests limited access to resources, with a distribution between the members of the household, and therefore at family level⁶.

The size of dwellings can be used to delineate the household space. Without being able to make an accurate estimation of this space, it is considered to represent the space where the family members were carrying out their activities⁷. In some cases the variations in the

³ LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI, ȚURCANU 2009, 119-121.

⁴ WILK, RATJE 1982, 619; TRIPKOVIĆ 2007, 10.

⁵ SHELACH 2006, 335.

⁶ FLANNEERY 2002, 421; 2006, 335.

⁷ URSULESCU 2008, 213-214.

Table 1. Household components from Hăbăşeşti – social aspects at the level of dwellings

Dwelling	Social component					Material component					Behavioural component						
	Area (m ²)	No of chambers	Combustion structures			Tools		Ceramic	Plastic		Platform		Domestic activities		Ritual activities		Annex
			H	O	EH	F	S		A	Z	yes	no	G	D	R	I	
1	135	1	?		1	x		x	x	x	x						1
2	60/80	1				x	x	x	x	x	x						
3	60	2	2				x	x			x		2?		?		2
4	84	1						x			x						1
5	72/54	1						x				x					
6	66	1	1	2		x	x	x		x	x		x	1		x	
7	40/48	1	2	1?				x	?			?		2			
8	49?	2		2?	1			x			x						
9	28.6	1	1	2				x			x						
10	60/84	1	2	1			x	x		x	x						
11	50	1		3?			x	x		x	x		1				1
12	49.5	1	1	1		x		x		x	x						
13	38.25	1	1					x			x			1			
14	70	2	1					x	x	x	x		1		?	1	
15	150	2	1	1			x	x	x		x				?		2
16	38,5	1	?	1		x	x	x	x	x	x		1			3	
17	32.5	1	1					x			x		2				
18	58.5	1	2	1				x			x						
19		1						x	x	x			?			1	
20	31/46.7	1	1					x				?					
21	60.2	1		1		x	x	x			x						3
22	42.8	1	1	1		x			x	x		x	2	3			
23	70	1	1			x	x	x	x	x	x						1
24	62	1	1					x			x		1				
25/25'	40/44	1	3	2				x			x		1	2			
26	26	2?	2					x			x		3				
27	60?	2	1		1		x	x					2?				
28	49	1	1			x	x		x	x	x		1				
29	24	1	1					x	x		x		3				
30	45/60	2	2	2				x		x	x						
31	60	1	1	1				x			x						
32	75	2	1					x			x		5				2
33	26.25	1	4					x			x		?				
34	55.25	1	1				x	x	x		x						2
35	54	1	1	1?					x		x		1				
36	32.5	1	2	1				x	x		x		1	1			
37		1	1					x			x		2	1			
38	35	1	1	1				x			x		2				1
40	41,25	2?	2	1	1			x			x		2				
41	18,5	1	2					x			x						
42	28	1						x			x						2
43	35/40	1	1	1				x			x		3	2			
44	50/55	2	2			x	x	x			x						3

H - hearth; O - oven; EH - external hearth; F - flint tools; S - Stone tools; A - Anthropomorphic plastic; Z - Zoomorphic plastic; G - Grinding tools; D - Deposits; R - Ritual; I - Idol

dwelling size is considered the result of the ability of some families to mobilize more workforce. The expansion of the dwelling it is also associated with the need to increase the internal space in order to achieve different household activities⁸.

Lately, households have become increasingly important in archaeological research. By a simple definition, the household is considered to be a group of people occupying a certain space (the dwelling), linked by kinship (parent, marriage, cousin, sister, brother etc.). The composition of the household may change over time as a result of matrimonial alliances, or by abandonment of the household by mature children⁹. Also, the household is seen as the place of interaction between social groups and the social and economic processes, therefore the main unit of organisation, associated with the dwelling, with the essential goals of producing and distributing the goods necessary for survival, reproduction and transmission of social structures¹⁰.

However, there is no clear distinction between different forms of social organization such as family and household. There are different cases where the smallest social unit occupy several buildings or a single building accommodates several families. The difference is that family members are exclusively linked by kinship, while households are more of an economic character, therefore a different form of social organisation. As so, the family can represent a household, but the household is not always a family¹¹. Most archaeological researches in Southeast Europe associates the household with the dwelling, the attention being placed on enhancing production and increasing reproduction. The architecture, the shapes and dimensions of the dwellings, the deposition and the character of the artefacts, the interior design, and the identification of activities, are important factors in the recognition of the household from the archaeological data, which allow us to make assumptions about internal differences within settlements¹².

The social component

The social component largely refers to the demographic aspect, including the number and relationships between individuals. Taken into account are the surface and the subdivision of the dwellings, as indices for certifying social division¹³. Recent studies do not exclude the possibility of a link between the average size of the household and the size of the residential structure, and the establishment of a conversion constant to allow household estimation

⁸ BYRD 2000, 86-87; SHELACH 2006, 340.

⁹ PORČIĆ 2016, 162-163.

¹⁰ STEFANOVIĆ 1997, 338; WILK, RATHJE 1982, 621; DÜRING 2006, 39.

¹¹ TRIPKOVIĆ 2007, 11.

¹² STEFANOVIĆ 1997, 338-339; MÜLLER 2017, 157.

¹³ NAUMOV 2013, 67.

based on the size of the dwelling. The proposed constant value is 6-7 m² per individual¹⁴. For the Cucuteni area, the researchers accepted a value of 6-10 m², with an average of 7-8 m², and an estimate of the number of inhabitants in the settlement was made by multiplying the number of buildings with an average value, usually 10¹⁵. Studying the size of the dwellings in the Vinča area, from eight multi-layered sites, J. Chapman in estimation of the household size proposes a 50 m² limit between the nuclear family and the extended family. Thus, the household, as the main socio-economic unit, is associated with the nuclear family (3-5 persons) or the extended family (6-8 individuals), based on archaeological data¹⁶.

The size of the dwellings in the Hăbășești settlement varied between 18.5 and 150 m² (Table 1), placed in the category of small ones (two), average (about 21 dwellings), large (about 17 dwellings) and very large (two dwellings). In the case of 11-13 dwellings there are traces of partition walls. As for the combustion structures, these were identified in about 36 dwellings, namely 49 hearths, about 26 ovens and four external hearths. The dwellings 2, 4, 5, 19 and 42, with an area over 50 m², did not have any kind of combustion structures¹⁷.

The material component

The material component of household is focused on the inventory. The distribution of artefacts may offer information for understanding the nature of interpersonal relationships between households, manifested as differences between rooms, differences between the locations of fixed installations or differences between storage structures¹⁸. Taken into account are the presence of combustion structures inside the dwellings (hearths, ovens or both), the presence of tools (flint or stone), and the presence of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic plastic.

In the settlement of Hăbășești, most of the dwellings had one hearth. In six cases the dwellings had two hearths (Table 1). Worth mentioning is the case of dwelling 23, small sized, with four hearths. There are also cases where we encounter a hearth and an oven in the same structure. This is the case of dwelling 18 with two hearths and an oven, dwelling 30 with two hearths and two ovens, and dwelling 41 with two hearths and one oven. In four cases the author of the excavations speaks of the existence of external hearths. Also, worth mentioning is the case of dwelling 1, with an area over 135 m², with only one hearth¹⁹.

¹⁴ PORČIĆ 2016, 164-166; BROWN 1987, 490; KOLB 1985, 590; PORČIĆ 2012, 72-86.

¹⁵ CHAMBERLAINE 2006, 126-128; MONAH D., CUCOȘ 1985, 48; PREOTEASA 2014, 75.

¹⁶ CHAPMAN 1981, 52- 61; TRINGHAM, KRSTIĆ 1990, 602-607; TRIPKOVIĆ 2007, 37.

¹⁷ DUMITRESCU 1954, 20-1786; POPOVICI 2003, 310 .

¹⁸ TRIPKOVIĆ 2009, 20; 2007, 10.

¹⁹ DUMITRESCU 1954, 20-176.

Correlation of structures and in-house inventory with a single household can provide information on economic management and organization both at the household level and at the level of the settlement²⁰. The pottery is present in most of the structures, with the exception of dwellings 22, 28 and 35 (Table 1). Flint tools were present in 10 dwellings, stone tools in 15 cases, bone tools in two structures, clay objects in eight dwellings, and in three cases copper objects. The presence of anthropomorphic plastic has been reported in 12 cases, and zoomorphic plastic also in 12 cases. Both categories of plastic were present in dwellings 1, 2, 16, 22, 23, 28, 34. Only in the case of the dwelling 2 the inventory consisted of all these categories of objects. Dwellings 3, 5, 7-9, 14, 17-18, 20, 24, 26, 29-33, 35-38, 41-43 except ceramics have no tools or other objects in the inventory²¹.

The behavioural component

Taken into account for the study of the third component of the household, the behavioral (Table 1), starting from the inventory discussed above, are the activities carried out inside the dwellings, possessions of ritual character (shrines, rituals, etc.), but also the existence of platforms and the presence of annexes.

The existence of platforms is supported for the most of the dwellings. Only in four cases they are not mentioned, probably does not exist. Some of them had traces of at least one layer of rebuilding. Dwelling 33 presents several layers of rebuilding²².

As far as the identification of the activities carried out within the dwellings is concerned, one possibility of approach is the division of the artefacts into their functions, and therefore the identification of the areas where they were carried out. This type of analysis can provide a possible classification of the activities carried out inside the dwellings as follows: (a) heavier activities, suggested by the presence of the stone tools; (b) easier activities suggested by the presence of flint tools; (c) food processing, suggested by the presence of grinding tools; (d) workshops; (e) cooking and consumption, suggested by the presence of ceramics; (f) storage (bins, vessels, etc.), and (g) ritual²³.

For the first two categories of activity discussed above, in the settlement of Hăbășești stone tools have been documented for 16 structures, and flint tools for ten structures. In seven cases both categories were present, in three cases only flint tools and in six cases only stone tools²⁴.

²⁰ SHELACH 2006, 335.

²¹ DUMITRESCU 1954, 20-176.

²² DUMITRESCU 1954, 20-176; POPOVICI, 2003, 312.

²³ SHELACH 2006, 336.

²⁴ DUMITRESCU 1954, 20-176.

Grinding activities were documented for 20 dwellings. In 16 cases only the presence of grinders is mentioned. Four dwellings had only one grinding tool, eight structures with two grinding tools, and three dwellings with three grinding tools. Worth mentioning is dwelling 36, with at least four grinders, disposed in two different sectors of the dwelling all placed in the sector without the platform of the dwelling. Near one of the grinders calcined seeds of wheat and vetch (*Triticum compactum* and *Vicia vilosa*) were found. Also, dwelling 32 had four such structures, two in SW sector, and the other two in the ENE and ESE corners²⁵.

Storage areas, in the form of supply vessels, were present in at least 10 dwellings. Dwelling 7 had remains from two such vessels, one carrying inside calcined wheat seeds. In the case of dwelling 22 fragments of large vessels were discovered in three points, two in the SW corner, with the bottom placed into the ground, and one in the centre. Also, a large vessel partially buried was discovered in dwelling 36 placed north of the grinding tool. A remarkable situation is found in dwelling 25, where, inside a vessel found near a hearth, four or five stones with an unknown role were discovered²⁶.

Studying the dwelling from Hăbășești we cannot talk certainly about the existence of workshops. However, the possibility of such activities being carried out at the level of the dwellings is not excluded. The discovery of a prismatic red pen in the external pit near dwelling 8 may suggest the possibility that the occupants of the structure were engaged in ceramic decoration. Also, in another pit (pit 36) associated with dwelling 14, the presence of some figurines, some rudimentary burned, may suggest a possible concern of the dwellers to this craft. A possible processing tool zone may be suggested by the presence of flint scraps originating from a fire affected core in the ENE corner of dwelling 22. Also, dwelling 27, a possible bone processing area is attested by the presence of a broken stone placed on a burnt clay frame with slightly raised edges²⁷.

A problem raised in the study of dwellings is related to the differentiation of domestic and ritual activities. It is known that the dwellings, in addition to household functions, can also represent the space of ritual activities²⁸. Although there is insufficient information, a possible ritual is considered to be the deposition of nine blades of black flint found in pit 1 before the construction of dwelling 1. Another discovery linked to a possible ritual, is present in dwelling 15, where in the mouth of broken vessel NNE of the oven plates, a small well processed chisel was placed, however in this case we do not have additional information.

²⁵ DUMITRESCU 1954, 20-176; POPOVICI 2003, 313.

²⁶ DUMITRESCU 1954, 20-176.

²⁷ DUMITRESCU 1954, 20-176.

²⁸ URSULESCU 2004, 7.

The presence of idols has been identified in two cases, dwelling 6 with a violin-shaped (*en violon*) idol with strings of dots and dimples, and another violin-shaped idol, found on the top of the pit associated with dwelling 19²⁹.

In this analysis we included the presence of annexes, considered a good source of information in the study of economic activities carried out at household level³⁰. Only 13 dwellings had annexes, six with one annex, five with two annexes and two with three annexes³¹.

Discussions

In archaeology, related to social structures, researchers assign small-sized dwellings to nuclear families, and large structures to extended families³². If the size of structures is taken into account as a parameter for identifying the social structure associated with dwellings, then variations in their size may suggest a structural complexity of the household. According to the researchers, the dwelling represents the place of building the identity of the new household³³. Taking into account the modest dimensions of the dwellings which formed the two circles, as well as the fact that the majority had one combustion structure, the author of the excavations said they were occupied by nuclear families³⁴. However, based on Chapman's estimation, for the settlement of Hăbășești we can talk about the presence of 22 dwellings with areas under 50 m² associated with nuclear families and 19 dwellings with areas over 50 m² associated with extended families.

Regarding the economic nature, the clearest activities materialized inside the dwellings were those related to the storage, preparation and consumption of food³⁵. In large part, except for two cases, the presence of annexes is associated with dwellings with areas over 50 m². Storage and grinding areas, in most cases, are present in dwellings associated with nuclear families, only in four cases are documented in dwellings associated with extended families. It is not excluded, at the settlement level, the collaboration between different households in carrying out different activities.

²⁹ DUMITRESCU 1954, 20-176.

³⁰ SCHELAH 2006, 336.

³¹ DUMITRESCU 1954, 20-176.

³² GIMBUTAS 1991, 330.

³³ TRIPKOVIĆ 2015, 390-393.

³⁴ DUMITRSCU 1954, 499-501.

³⁵ BURDO *et alii* 2013, 103.

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