Relevance of pottery ethnoarchaeology for the study of Late Neolithic households in Central Balkans

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Pottery ethnoarchaeology and archaeology of the Late Neolithic in Central Balkans

• Is it possible to apply ethnoarchaeological results from different parts of the world in the context of Balkan Neolithic?

• Problem oriented approach

• Ethnographic data as a frame of reference (sensu Binford)

• Relevance and applicability of ethnoarchaeological knowledge for the household archaeology of Late Neolithic Balkans

• Illustration on two concrete research problems
Late Neolithic in the Central Balkans – an archaeological background

• Chronology: 5300-4600 B.C.

• Culture-history: Vinča culture
Archaeological record of the Vinča culture

- Permanent settlements
- Remains of burned wattle and daub houses
- Sealed pottery inventories from houses
Problem 1: The nature of household inventories

• John Chapman’s hypothesis: Late Neolithic house assemblages from SE Europe are not everyday assemblages – they are deliberately deposited prior to house destruction as symbolic and ideological statement.

• In terms of behavioral archaeology (Schiffer 1976, 1987): are pottery assemblages from houses de facto refuse or a consequence of structured deposition?

• Chapman’s argument: pottery assemblages from houses are unusual (e.g. unusual size).
Unusual in comparison with what?

• The need for a frame of reference

• Ethnoarchaeological data as a frame of reference

• The ‘unusualness’ of Late Neolithic assemblage sizes can be assessed in the frame of reference provided by ethnography
Average household assemblage size

Individual household assemblage size

Cross-cultural sample

Vinča household assemblages

data from Mills 1989
Accumulated assemblages as a frame of reference

- Correspondence between house assemblages and accumulated assemblages
- Discard equation (Schiffer 1976, 1987)
- Average use-lives for vessel classes can be estimated on the basis of ethnoarchaeological research

\[ T = \frac{St}{L} \quad L = ? \]
Projected accumulated assemblages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Cooking</th>
<th>Serving</th>
<th>Storage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Banjica</td>
<td>45.74</td>
<td>37.06</td>
<td>17.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gomolava</td>
<td>59.38</td>
<td>36.65</td>
<td>3.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divostin</td>
<td>30.83</td>
<td>49.77</td>
<td>19.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jakovo</td>
<td>77.64</td>
<td>11.98</td>
<td>10.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predionica</td>
<td>18.91</td>
<td>58.35</td>
<td>22.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observed accumulated assemblages

Based on published accumulated assemblages:

- **20-30%** cooking vessels (pots and casseroles)
- **50-60%** serving vessels (bowls)
- **10-20%** storage vessels (amphorae and pithoi)
Problem 2: Interpreting the patterns of assemblage size variation – the case of Divostin
Ethnoarchaeological frame of reference

- Pottery assemblage size may be an indicator of household size (Arnold 1988; Arthur 2009; Hildebrand & Hagstrum 1999a; Nelson 1981)

- Pottery assemblage size may be an indicator of social status (Deal 1998, Smith 1987)

- Therefore, the observed patterns may reflect differences in household size and social status between different Divostin households.
Summary

- Results of pottery ethnoarchaeology are highly relevant for testing specific hypotheses regarding the formation processes of Vinča culture house assemblages

- Ethnoarchaeological knowledge is a useful frame of reference for the social interpretation of the observed archaeological patterns
Thank you for your attention!