

Ritual Pits (Bóthroi) of the Cucuteni Settlements from Romania

Dan Monah¹, Vasile Cotiugă^{1,2} Ștefan Caliniuc^{1,2}

¹Institute of Archaeology in Iași, Romania; ²“Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași, Romania

In the settlements of the Cucuteni cultural complex, which includes the Precucuteni and Cucuteni cultures, several ritual pits with various offerings have been discovered. The authors intent to present and analyse some of the most interesting pits of this kind. The ritual pits that will be presented can be described with the Ancient Greek term *bóthroi*. All the ritual pits were dug deliberately, have different shapes and sizes, some have special features such as clay or burnt cob plates, display markings, or are protected by stone paving. The offerings are plant materials, cereal cultivars or fruits from spontaneous plants, whole or fragments of human skulls, pieces of human skeletons, whole vessels or fragments of pottery, some of which have large dimensions, painted vessels, stone axes, bone and antler agricultural tools, shells, and, seldom, copper fragments. Also mentioned are a pit in which 21 quern-stones and fragments of quern-stones were deposited along two lines, and several instances in which whole or fragmentary statuettes were deposited.

Some of the ritual pits have been found under the burnt-clay platforms of houses, and interpreted as signalling the operation of founding rituals. In other cases, the ritual pits were found between dwellings, and interpreted, according to the offerings in them, as elements of a settlement's founding ritual. Ritual pits with offerings of snail shells, bovid skulls, or other animal bones also occur. In some instances, the offerings are constituted by the fragmentary remains of some sacred objects employed in magical-religious ceremonies.

Within the area occupied by the Cucuteni culture, two sites — Drăgușeni-În Deal la Lutărie and Faraoani-Livada de meri — have just pits with ceramic fragments and other remains, lacking the buildings usually encountered in settlements. The authors believe that the ritual pits from the Cucutenian area could be put into connection with the cult of a chthonic deity (deities), specifically with the offerings bequeathed to it.