POTTERY IN BANAT. TRADITION AND INNOVATION

Diana Andreescu

Assoc. Prof., PhD, West University of Timișoara

Abstract: Pottery in Banat is a rich and long tradition that dates back hundreds of years and is part of the cultural heritage of this region in western Romania. This craft has been passed down from generation to generation and has evolved over time, adapting to social and technological changes. The tradition of pottery in Banat is closely related to the needs of the local community, but it has also experienced innovations to meet current demands. Pottery in Banat represents an interesting synthesis between tradition and innovation, and potters continue to make significant contributions to the cultural and artistic heritage of this region. This craft not only provides practical objects, but also preserves and transmits the cultural identity of the local community.
Features of pottery in Banat: Traditional materials: Potters in Banat mainly use clay and clay to create pottery. Traditional techniques: Banat potters use traditional techniques for shaping, decorating and baking clay vessels. Functionality and aesthetics: Banat pottery generally has a dual functionality - utilitarian and aesthetic.
Innovations in Banat Pottery: Modernization of Techniques: In recent decades, Banat potters have incorporated modern technologies into the production process. Diversification of products: In addition to traditional cooking and serving vessels, Banat potters began to produce decorative objects, souvenirs and contemporary art pieces from clay. Promoting tradition: Despite the introduction of modern elements, Banat potters are very dedicated to preserving and promoting local traditions. This is reflected in cultural events, exhibitions and workshops that celebrate the craft of pottery.

Keywords: pottery, tradition, innovation

In the mountainous parts of the Banat are located a series of centers that make up another family in Romanian ceramics. Located in places with difficult access roads, largely protected from the influences of urban centers or those of other nationalities, the Romanians of Banat have been able to preserve elements of ancient Dacian and Roman tradition until today. Especially in terms of its shapes, the pottery here closely resembles the one from the north-west of Oltenia, the one from the Apuseni Mountains and the one from Hațeg. The Italian Grizelini, who traveled here between 1774 and 1777, says: "Apart from what the home industry of the Wallachians produces, the country does not possess any industrial art or manufacture. The men deal with the making of kitchen utensils and other pottery, which they still supply today." From the text it appears not only that the Romanians made pottery, but that they were the only ones making pottery at that time. And given that the pottery here preserved old elements of Dacian and Roman tradition, it is likely that it had continuity. The excavations carried out at the beginning of this century in the citadel of Timișoara revealed vessels dated from the 17th-18th centuries, identical to those made today in the Banat peasant pottery centers. During the last century and at the beginning of this century, Hungarian potters appeared, especially in cities (Lugoj, Caransebeș, etc.), but today their number has decreased a lot and, for example, in Lugoj, only two potters work, an unglazed pottery, similar to the Romanian one. The center of Jupanesti is the most important: the chromatic decoration is exactly reminiscent of the Dacian one. The decoration is usually red on a yellowish, slightly rosy background; the red of the decor may become blackish after burning. The whole village was a

village of potters: about 280 craftsmen worked, who had 200 kilns. The clay is taken from deep pits up to 15 meters. Contrary to what happens in other parts, it is first allowed to dry and then it is watered and left to ferment; after that it is cut with a scythe, crushed, and mixed with sand, so that it may withstand the fire, say the potters. (The sand in the paste makes the surfaces rough, although after formation the vessels are given a thin layer of clay soaked in water, which covers some of the asperities.) After mixing with sand, the clay is kneaded until "e like wax". It is then passed through a machine that has two spinning scrolls to crush it. The pots are formed on a wheel and fired in a circular-section furnace, which has two fire mouths. The vessels, with simple decoration, are all objects of art. The background color, delicate, has yellowish-rose shades; the roughness of the surface increases the decorative effect of the background. The vessels are decorated with "strings of albeale" (white huma) or "boiala" (red huma). Green is also used, prepared by the potter from copper fired in the oven according to the usual process. The instruments with which the ornamentation is done are the "peneța" (the brush made from the hair on the ox's forehead), with which the flowers are drawn — newly emerging motifs; the "horn", with which anything can be written; the "comb", used as in other pottery centers; the "spindle", the sharp tool with which holes are made; the "plotoglu", made of leather or rubber, with which the surface of the vessel is smoothed after formation, when it is still wet. The most common motifs are the spiral, wavy line and parallel lines; the flowers have just appeared. In addition to the color decoration, a relief decoration is used on the large shapes. The reliefs are usually in honeycombed cheeses, made by pressing with the finger on the still soft cheese. Fragments of wavy cheeses sometimes resemble the shape of snakes; these snakes are better recognized in the color decoration, usually drawn in red. Braces are placed both horizontally and vertically. [1]

In Jupânești, all kinds of shapes are made, from small ones to very large ones, to store grains, whose size resembles the size of the bones. The shapes are very different. The "bowl", of different sizes, used for eating or preserving food, is made both glazed and unglazed, and the new ones are flowered; "boiling pot", used for cooking, with a single turn; "pot", also used for cooking, with a very wide bottom, equal to the diameter of the mouth, is a new shape adapted to the stoves recently introduced in peasant households; "olcuța", a small pot with a handle, serves for drinking, and the pot with a handle above the mouth, for carrying food to the field. Large pots, with a capacity of 20-30 liters, are also used; they have two ladles, which sometimes, instead of being placed face to face, are side by side, occupying only a third of the circumference of the vessel, as in some of the old Roman forms. People also work with other less common forms such as: "toys" (anthropomorphic figurines), "cuci" (whistles), spoons, "tolcere" (funnels). We see that among the old, traditional forms, a number of new forms appear, due to the imitation of industrial metal forms and the new demands of buyers. The center's products are taken far away with carts: the potters reach Hunedoara all the way to Brad; however, they mainly go to the plain areas, either of Arad or Banat. The potters from Banat work according to Greco-Roman methods, and enamel was used only recently. Some enamels, however, are used in a very special way; they are given so thinly that they seem more like a vitrification of the surface, recalling the glaze of ancient vessels. The angoba is of three colors: black, red or white, and the ornamentation is done with it. Black and red are obtained by a preparation of roasted iron filings mixed with humus. When mixed with oxides of lead and thinly rendered, they sometimes vitrify in the kiln and give a luster reminiscent of ancient Greek black-figure pottery on a red background. [2]

The village of Jupânești is located at the other end of the county, after Făget. The hills here hide a miraculous yellow earth with a density just right to be cleaned, strained and then

[1] BLAJ, Violeta, Forme şi ornamente în două centre de ceramică bănăţene-Biniş şi Lăpuşnicul Mare în Studii şi Comunicări de Etnografie – Istorie, Caransebeş, 1979
[2] GODEA, Ioan, Ceramica.Tehnologii tradiţionale, Timişoara, Ed. de Vest, 2007

kneaded and made into pots. Although in the old days, almost every household had an oven for burning clay pots, now there are only some ruins left. Those who knew and had the patience to prepare the clay grew old or passed into the world of the righteous. There are only two potters left in Jupânesti who sit down, from time to time, at the wheel and burn the yellow earth in the ovens. They have no one to leave their craft to. A craft inherited from the elders, pottery techniques, now used in Jupanesti, are more than two millennia old.

The last potters, the Jupânești Potters, disappeared little by little, because of the porcelain and plastic that invaded the kitchens of Romanians, easily replacing the burnt earthenware. The job that Ștefan Mestecăneanu carries on is not easy at all. First, the material must be brought from a place on the hills near the village. Then the soil is washed, ground, spread and only then is it ready to be turned into pots. It is laborious work for which you must first of all have dedication and passion. The potter was not some resident of the community. Through the art of mastering (shaping) the earth, he was an initiate in communicating with the underground world, and the craft was kept in the family for generations. Through this initiation, "there is a belief that clay vessels are enlivened. Through clay they communicate directly with the telluric, with the underground world, the object modeled from this substance being able to be a window through which it can invade the mystery of the deep." Then, "death transforms man into "pots and jugs", which puts him in a state of communication with the world of fantastic beings, with the other world".

Today, we stare at jugs, capacity pots, candlesticks and other types of shapes, not only for utilitarian reasons, but mainly for aesthetic reasons. The current success of some contemporary popular ceramic objects is also explained by the chance to discover, in their specific structures, a particle of our aspirations and nostalgia, offering us the joy of a spiritual rediscovery. The fact that pottery was closely related to people's lives gives it a documentary significance that should not be disregarded; through it we can find out some customs, beliefs, as well as the daily needs of the people who used it.

In the places where there was human life, we find potsherds from the most ancient times, because they accompanied people even in their graves. Against the ages they have reached us, often being the only documents that come from the past. Even the thinking of some peoples was preserved by writing on burnt clay.[3]

[3] NICOLESCU, Corina, Ceramica românească tradiţională, Bucureşti, 1974

Photo. Diana Andreescu - Jupâneşti village, master potter works, Ştefan Mestecăneanu

Our prehistory possesses one of the richest and most beautiful potteries that flourished and disappeared one by one until the historical era, when the Greco-Roman world imposed its aesthetics. The Byzantine pottery imported for the needs of the nobility, of which many incomplete specimens were found, served our potters as a source of inspiration. The models evolved little by little in their hands by introducing inherited autochthonous elements. The formation of a Romanian art under the influence of important Byzantine models is proven by the presence of colored shards from the pottery category painted on the engobe and with sgraffitto, as well as by remains of primitive pottery reminiscent of prehistoric pottery. The memory of some prehistoric decorative elements, together with the tradition of Greco-Roman forms and the contribution of new oriental and Byzantine elements gave birth to what we can call Romanian pottery.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1.BLAJ, Violeta, Ceramica populară bănăţeană, Ed.Waldpress, Timişoara, 2004

2.BLAJ, Violeta, Forme şi ornamente în două centre de ceramică bănăţene-Biniş şi Lăpuşnicul Mare în Studii şi Comunicări de Etnografie – Istorie, Caransebeş, 1979

3.BUCUR, Corneliu Ioan, Suprafeţe ceramice şi design, Sibiu, 2007

4.GODEA, Ioan, Ceramica.Tehnologii tradiţionale, Timişoara, Ed. de Vest, 2007

5.GODEA, Ioan, La ceramique, Ed.de Vest, Timişoara, 1995

6.MUNTEAN L., Îndrumătorul modelorului de ceramică fină, Ed.Tehnică Bucureşti

7.NICOLESCU, Corina, Ceramica românească tradiţională, Bucureşti, 1974