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TOWARD AN EVOLUTIONARY MODEL OF GRADUAL DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL COMPLEXITY AMONG THE NEOLITHIC POTTERY COMMUNITIES IN THE BALKANS
(CULTURAL-CHRONOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL-ANTHROPOLOGICAL PROBLEMS)

SUMMARY - Toward an evolutionary model of gradual development of social complexity among the Neolithic pottery communities in the Balkans (cultural-chronological and cultural-anthropological problems). Based on the recent data on the earlier Neolithic material culture, we distinguish five general stages of development in social complexity during the Neolithic in the Balkans, from the emergence of sedentary pottery-making communities to the culmination of the Neolithic cultures’ development in the latest Neolithic, including the introduction of metallurgy. In this approach we will discuss cultural-chronological and cultural-anthropological problems mainly of the first stage of Neolithic development in the Balkans, using in some cases a prospective analysis, from the later chronological periods. Of primary importance for the chronological conclusions are the radiocarbon dates, while the social models are based on the general theories in cultural and social anthropology, sociology and especially the anthropology of everydayness. This approach has also proposed that our understanding of the problems of the earliest pottery-making complex societies in the Balkans would benefit from further intensification of micro-regional interdisciplinary investigations from the point of view of the anthropology of everydayness, by constructing micro- and medium-social models of social reproduction.

INTRODUCTION: GENERAL RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Graduate models of Neolithisation of the Balkans have become the most popular in contemporary archaeology. Although the data included may have a variety of interpretations followed even by alternative conclusions (Parzinger, 1993; Whittle, 1996: 39; Budia, 1998; VajsoV, 1998; Bojadzhiev, 2000; NikoloVa, 2000; Thissen, 2000; Biagi et al., 2005), the models themselves are theoretically valuable contributions to this field of research.

We would point to two fundamental aspects: demographic growth (increasing population density in the Balkans), and social change (the gradual increase in social complexity). The latter is the subject of our approach.

Based on the recent data on the earlier Neolithic material culture, we are able to distinguish five general stages of development in social complexity during the Neolithic in the Balkans, from the emergence of sedentary pottery-making communities to the culmination of the Neolithic cultures’ development in the latest Neolithic, including the introduction of metallurgy (Topolnitsa, unpublished). We would briefly describe the evolutionary social scheme as follows:

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1. An initial development of the earliest pottery-making communities (in the later 7th millennium cal BC), and the emergence of archaic white-painted pottery communities (in the latest 7th millennium cal BC), which is still documented in only some parts of the Balkans (the so-called monochrome phase and the phase of Kovachevo Ia/b and related sites). With further research and additional data, we believe that in future it will become clear whether we can differentiate two sub-stages or even two independent stages in the later 7th millennium cal BC.

2. The classical white painted pottery-making communities covering a broader region of the Balkans (early Karanovo I, early Starčevo horizon), characterised by a demographic boom in the Balkans at the beginning of the 6th millennium cal BC.

3. Late white painted and polychrome pottery-making communities with a variety of regional models, and the development of a network of dense micro-regional settlement systems with multi-scale and multi-variation interaction systems (later Karanovo I, Karanovo II, later Starčevo horizon) during the second quarter of the 6th millennium cal BC.

4. Late polychrome and dark burnished pottery communities (late Starčevo, Karanovo III and related cultures), c. the third quarter of the 6th millennium cal BC. According to the recent evidence, it is also believed that Hamangia is the first Neolithic culture in the northeastern part of the Balkans, whose beginning was possibly contemporaneous with later Karanovo III Culture.

5. Encrusted, pricked and dark burnished pottery-making communities (early Vinča, Topolnitsa, Karanovo IV, early Boian, Hamangia and related cultures), c. the fourth quarter of the 6th millennium cal BC.

During the first two stages, the most parts of the Balkans between the Drina River and the Black Sea, and the Carpathians and the Aegean, were gradually occupied by pottery-making communities; during the next three stages the Neolithic complexity was reproduced, developed and expanded, representing, on the whole, a typical evolutionary model of development of complexity in prehistory, indicating possibly the existence of powerful systems of economic and political multi-scale social strategies and networks that kept the social systems stable.

In this approach we will discuss cultural-chronological and cultural-anthropological problems mainly of the first stage of Neolithic development in the Balkans, using in some cases a prospective analysis (from the later chronological periods). Of primary importance for the chronological conclusions are the radiocarbon dates, while the social models are based on general theories in cultural and social anthropology, sociology and especially the anthropology of everydayness (Featherstone, 1992; Chaney, 2002).

CULTURAL-CHRONOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

To study the problem archaeologically, of special importance are the new results of the Kovachevo excavations (Lichardus-Itten et al., 2000; 2006) and the radiocarbon dates from this site, the newly published data from the Struma Valley (Chokhadzhiev, 2001), the publication of Donja Branjevina (Karmanski, 2005) and Koprivets (Popov, 1996) and other sites in the lower Danube (Elenks, 2005; Elenks and Leshtakov, 2006), and the theoretical contribution of N.N. Tasić (2003) to the white-painted pottery settlements of Starčevo Culture.

It is worth considering the thematic studies of the Iron Gates data (Bonsall et al., 2000; 2002; 2004), the new data from Lepenski Vir (Borić, pers. comm. 2006), and a Macedonian survey project (Wilkie and Savina, 1997). The new archaeological compilation of sites from Bulgaria should be also added, despite the chronological problems of some sites and theoretical controversy of the model discussed (Elenks, 2005; Elenks and Leshtakov, 2006; Weninger et al., in press).

Our basic chronological framework of Balkan Neolithic sequences was argued in Nikolova (1998). It seems like the new evidence confirmed that for the time being, there are no archaeological arguments to divide the monochrome horizon as an independent stage of the development of the Early Neolithic in the Balkans while the publications after 1998 allow us to update the scheme, including especially Kovachevo.

THE EARLIEST POTTERY SETTLEMENTS IN THE BALKANS

We propose the following two typological and cultural-chronological horizons for the earliest Neolithic (c. 6300-c. 6000 cal BC) between the Danube and the Aegean:
1. Hoca Çeşme 4-3, Krajnitsi 1, Divostin 1, Koprivets 1, Dzhulyunitsa, Smurdesh 1. This horizon is known as the monochrome pottery horizon with an incipient painted pottery horizon (c. 6300-6200/6100 cal BC). The period between c. 6300 and 6000 cal BC coincides with the so-called 8.2 ka event.

2. Kovachevo 1a/b, Vaksevo-Studena Voda 1-2, Nevestino 1, Anzabegovo Ia, Donja Branjevina II and related sites (earliest white-painted pottery horizon (c. 6200/6100-6000 cal BC).

We cannot precisely date the beginning and the end of the two horizons because there are no radiocarbon dates available from most of the settlements investigated and the records come from different distant regions. In other words, horizon 1 could have overlapped with horizon 2, on the one hand. On the other hand, the radiocarbon dates from earlier Karanovo I Culture (c. 6000 cal BC and later) suggest that the first pottery-making settlements in Thrace (e.g., Kovachevo Ia/b, Rakitovo) could be before the beginning of 6th millennium cal BC.

Then, we have three basic problems:

1. What are the cultural and chronological interrelations between Horizon 1 and Horizon 2 formulated above?
2. What is the relationship of the beginning of Karanovo I Culture to these Horizons?
3. How were both horizons influenced by the 8.2 ka event (c. 6300-6000 cal BC), since the most probably probable chronological span of Horizon 1 and Horizon 2 completely overlaps with this interruption in the early Holocene climate?

THE FIRST NEOLITHIC TYPOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL-CHRONOLOGICAL HORIZON

The identification of the monochrome pottery stage as the earliest Neolithic chronological horizon in the Balkans was initially formulated by Srejović (1988: 85-86) on the basis of data from Eastern Serbia. Later the concept became popular since other archaeologists believed that they had documented monochrome pottery sites: in southwest Bulgaria (Krajnitsi I), northeast Bulgaria (for instance Polyanitsa-Platoto and Koprivets I), Romania (Gura Baciului Ia), the Vojvodina (Donja Branjevina III), European Turkey (Hoca Çeşme IV) and other sites. The stage is also called proto-Starčevo and was documented for instance, in Makresani-Ornice.

In light of the recent data, the site of Hoca Çeşme is of special value. Most researchers share the opinion that Hoca Çeşme preceded Karanovo I (Parzinger and Özdoğan, 1996; Nikołova, 1998). Ličardus and Iliev (2000:81) suggested a different interpretation. They did not accept the analogies with Hacilar and with Karanovo I proposed in the preliminary publication of Parzinger and Özdoğan (1996) and they believed that the earliest analogies with Thrace can be found in the Karanovo II culture. But the radiocarbon dates (c. 6300-6200 cal BC) strengthen the hypothesis that the earliest level of Hoca Çeşme IV belongs to the Balkan earliest pottery chronological horizon (Nikołova, 1998). According to the excavators of Hoca Çeşme, painted pottery was documented even in the earliest phase of this site. At the same time, some monochrome pottery sites from the Central Balkans and from the Lower Danube do not have radiocarbon dates. We also need to keep in mind the typology of the pottery of the first Balkan cultural-chronological ceramic horizon is not well elaborated, only small areas of the monochrome pottery sites have been excavated, and even during the classical Early Neolithic it is possible that painted pottery has simply been missed. The conclusion seems to be supported by the new excavations at Dzhulyunitsa-Smurdesh (central northern Bulgaria, Veliko Turnovo District), where according to the preliminary excavation reports (Elenški, 2005; Elenški and Leshtakov, 2006) pottery was discovered with analogies at Hoca Çeşme III-IV. A peculiarity is “a painting with a dark color/slip, like the vessel was washed with a slip” (Elenški, 2005: 22). The author dates the layer from pre-white painted stage of Early Neolithic in the Balkans. The site of Okhoden in northwest Bulgaria was proposed as a monochrome settlement (the final phase of Proto-Starčevo [ Ganetovski, 2005: 23]), but the preliminary information about a radiocarbon date from this site (5710±40 cal BC: Ganetovski, 2005: 30) points to later phase (Weninger et al., in press).

For the time being, let us assume that there are undiscovered monochrome pottery villages in the Upper Thracian valley that theoretically allow us to presume the stage overlapped with the white-painted stage. In this sense it is possible to question the real existence of the monochrome pottery stage (Thissen, 2000: 196-197).

In light of the recent evidence, it is a problem not only the synchronization of the earlier painted pottery sites from Upper Thrace with the monochrome sites, but also with the earliest painted pottery sites from the basin of the Struma. At Kovachevo, analogies with Upper Thrace can be found only during the third phase of Early Neolithic settlement, which may indicate a stage of independent development of the two painted styles.
Alternatively, we have to accept for the time being, that the pottery discovered in Upper Thrace is later than the earliest painted pottery in the basin of the Struma River.

As we stressed above, according to M. Özdoğan (1998), painted pottery fragments occurred in the earliest level of the village of Hoca Çeşme IV. If these sherds were found in their original stratigraphic context, they may indicate that the earliest stage of the Neolithic in the Balkans could not be absolutely monochromic, or that Hoca Çeşme IV is not contemporaneous with the earliest known monochrome pottery sites or that there were contacts with the painted pottery communities, so Hoca Çeşme IV represents a transition from the monochrome to the painted pottery in the Balkans.

Having in mind some typological similarities between the monochrome pottery and early white-painted pottery, in the chronological scheme the former can be defined as the earliest phase in the first stage of the gradual Neolithisation of the Balkans in the sense of foundation of pottery-using settlements. It dates from the later third quarter of the 7th millennium cal BC, since the calibrated dates from Hoca Çeşme IV and Polyanitsa-Platoto date from 6200-5800 cal BC, a span that overlaps with the dates of the earliest painted pottery in the Balkans (Nikolova, 1998: diagram 1).

The chronology of Hoca Çeşme III is important to define the chronology of Hoca Çeşme IV. According to Özdoğan (1998), Hoca Çeşme III preceded Karanovo I. Most of the radiocarbon dates date the third level to after the beginning of the 6th millennium cal BC, but computer modelling (Nikolova, 1998: diagram 3) means the beginning of Hoca Çeşme III can be dated to the very end of the 7th millennium cal BC, and Hoca Çeşme IV to before 6100 cal BC.

Since there are no radiocarbon dates from Krajnitsi, Divostin and Koprivets, they may have actually preceded even Hoca Çeşme IV, and we may have to date the beginning of the monochrome pottery horizon to before 6300 cal BC. New radiocarbon dates would help precisely to determine the horizon.

**The Second Neolithic Typological and Cultural-Chronological Horizon**

The earliest data about white-painted pottery from Kovachevo were a base for proposing a cultural group (Lichardus-Itten et al., 2000: 35) that includes the most southwest Bulgaria and the north regions of Nea Nikomedea and Giannitsa. It is believed this group was the ancestor of the Karanovo I Culture. Important elements are the documented southern elements in the ceramic style, an influence from Sesklo (Achilleion, Tsani), which according to the recent data occurred in the phase Ib/c at Kovachevo (Lichardus-Itten et al., 2000: 34, note 44).

The similarity includes chess motifs (dark brown on light brown), although the technology was different (Lichardus-Itten et al., 2000: 34; for Nea Nikomedea and Anzabegovo see Thissen, 2000: 194-195). The settlements analysed by N.N. Tasić (2003) with the earliest painted pottery in the western-central Balkans includes sites within a relatively wide chronological diapason (c. 6100 cal BC and the beginning of the 6th millennium cal BC) and would only partly cover our second horizon.

In southwest Bulgaria, impressive typological similarities with Kovachevo Ia/b in white-painted ornamentation are found at the sites of Nevestino 1 and Vaksevo-Studena Voda 1-2 (fig. 1). All these assemblages may relate to the earliest white-painted pottery at Donja Branjevina in the Vojvodina (Serbia) (fig. 2). The common elements may indicate interactions or common origins while the differences point to local peculiarities and/or some chronological differences.

Most of the published radiocarbon dates from Kovachevo (Reinruber and Thissen, 2005) come from the earliest phase. They verify our hypothesis that Kovachevo Ia-b could be dated to the last century of the 7th millennium cal BC.

A specific problem is the relationship of the earliest pottery Neolithic settlements to the Lepenski Vir Culture. Recently, new radiocarbon data were interpreted in terms of the 8.2 ka event and according to Bonsall (et al., 2000; 2002; 2004) with co-authors, there were changes in the settlement pattern in the Iron Gates area during the later 7th millennium cal BC, whereas at Lepenski Vir itself there was continuity.

The radiocarbon data favour possible co-existence of the hunter-gatherer communities and the earliest sedentary pottery communities in the Balkans in the earlier 6th millennium cal BC. However, we need more recently excavated evidence for deeper structural analysis. Possible DNA samples from Divostin, the Iron Gates and Dzhulyunitsa-Smurdyak would also help to construct models of interrelations between the Balkan non-pottery hunter-gatherers and the earliest pottery-using communities, whose economy was based on sedentary farming, semi-sedentary farming and/or stockbreeding, depending on the micro-regional environment.
Fig 1 - Similarity in the ornamentation in sites from the second typological and cultural-chronological horizon (after different authors).
CULTURAL-ANTHROPOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

THE NEOLITHISATION IN THE BALKANS AS A PROBLEM

Following the archaeological paradigm above, we have to point to the emergence of a new lifestyle, sedentary and semi-sedentary/semi-mobile pottery-using communities, in short or long-lived villages, founding in many cases the first prehistoric tells. Neolithisation in the Balkans means pottery, plant and animal domesticates and a new social network of stable early complex communities.
However, at a micro-regional level the questions are rather different: why one environment was chosen and not another, for instance, living on the riverside or next to a mineral spring, why one subsistence strategy was adopted and not another (completely sedentary or semi-sedentary and even semi-mobile to mobile way of life), what was the rate of population growth, of artistic and ideological presentations, etc. In other words, the ancient population had many more problems to resolve than those problems framed by the traditional Neolithisation paradigm (domestication and diffusion of the Neolithic package).

In our case, if we preserve the term Neolithisation it just means “formation of the early complex society based on productive economy by multi-faceted social processes in the different micro-regions” (Findlay et al., 1997; Özdoğan, 2002). In this context I believe we deal with one of the most amazing moments in human history, because our distant ancestors discovered and patterned the foundation of our modern life, the homes, in which we live, the food that we eat, and the bases of the multi-level and multi-scale social interrelations and interactions especially the fundamentals of what we name enculturation. In some regions Neolithic communities even developed social strategies of investment, up to discovering gold and jewellery as an opportunity to accumulate and reproduce wealth (the Hamangia Culture).

Neolithisation of the Balkans and the 8.2 ka event

The 8.2 ka event has been recognized as “the most prominent climatic event occurring in the early Holocene” documented by the climate researchers. It is the result of a salinity anomaly in the North Atlantic, which was caused by the outflow of two Laurentide glacial lakes, “transferring its effects globally through oceanic and atmospheric redistribution of energy” (Sugden, 2005).

In point of fact, the role of the 8.2 ka event in the earlier prehistory of Eurasia has become a popular topic for scholars interested either in the Neolithisation of Europe or in the economic and demographic crises in Near East and in Anatolia. The simplified thesis argues that the 8.2 ka event caused a crisis in Anatolia and stimulated a migration towards Europe. It is stated that in archaeological terms the climatic change known as 8.2 ka event coincides with the earliest pottery settlements in the Balkans (the so-called monochrome pottery horizon) from the second half of the 7th millennium cal BC. This at first view makes a strong argument that the Neolithisation of the Balkans was a result of the interruption in the Holocene climate known as the 8.2 ka event, or in other words the latter caused migrations and demographic changes in Eurasia including a wave of immigrants who occupied the Balkans.

Regarding Balkan prehistory, the problem was discussed by Bonsall (et al., 2000; 2002; 2004) at the micro-regional level: the Iron Gates case study, as well as more globally for the Balkans and Europe by Weninger and collaborators (Weninger et al., in press). For the time being, it is noticeable in the Balkans a transition to pottery settlements most probably began within the span of the 8.2 ka event or a little bit earlier. It is suggested the climate to the south of the Danube was dryer during the 8.2 ka event that before and after the event (Bonsall, 2006), but as L. Sugden (2005) stated “the event induced environmental responses globally, at least in the Northern Hemisphere, but the magnitude, spatial expression and mechanisms of this response are not well understood”.

Following this line of opinion, the best conditions for a graduate biological and social reproduction within the Neolithic pottery population in the Balkans occurred actually after the 8.2 ka event, since the beginning of the 6th millennium cal BC was the period of tremendous expansion of the pottery settlements. Of the newly-discovered sites we would mention the village of Ilindentsi, which was founded on high terrace of the Struma Valley, probably in the period of the classical white painted pottery (Karanovo Ic and Id analogies were documented by the excavator [Grebska-KuloVa, 2005: 42]). This case study supports an expansion of the white pottery settlements from south to north, but a period of population growth would also have led to the subdivision (segmentation) of existing communities and gradually increasing settlement density in the lower Struma Valley.

The conclusion would be that the 8.2 ka event did not favour, and possibly slowed the Neolithisation process in the Balkans. Further palaeoclimatic and archaeological data would allow further research in depth of this contentious problem.

Neolithisation, Enculturation and Anthropology of Everydayness

Although the Neolithisation of the Balkans is a deep-rooted theme in Balkan archaeology, the different schools of thought discuss familiar problems such as: Neolithisation and migrations; Neolithisation and the
autarchthons population; Neolithisation and emergence of the earliest Neolithic archaeological cultures (Karanovo I, Starčevo, etc.); Neolithisation and the monochrome ceramic horizon, etc.

In the 1990s R. Tringham (2000) and A. Whittle (1996: 37-46) offered different theoretical models of the Neolithisation of southeast Europe, while in general terms it has become clear that none of the current theories (migration, colonization, economic change, disaster-like events, climatic change, psychological factors, accumulation etc.) (Caumin, 2000) can itself completely explain the archaeological data on one hand, and the cultural process on the other, in any region of Neolithisation.

Anthropology of everydayness is also a traditional theme in archaeology. However, what makes the modern development of this theory actual and powerful are its methodological principles: from a description of artefacts of everydayness toward constructing structural models of prehistoric everydayness as a continuing development, in which we can find reproducing traditions, ideas and enduring changes.

Anthropology of everydayness has attempted to develop not only as a theory of explanation of ancient lives, but also it is strongly oriented toward the developing modern technique of excavating and documenting structures and artefacts for constructing micro-cultural as well as macro-cultural processes. Usually the researcher asks Why questions and answers as an outsider (e.g. “They migrated because there was A (B, C...) type of circumstances”). Conversely, we might say “They chose A or B as the most successful social reproduction strategy for the community”, which makes the ancient population not a subject and victim of nature and external circumstances, but active social actors with clear and well-defined social reproduction strategies. This is the place to point to at least two theoretical insights that could be useful for prehistoric cultural anthropology:

1. Evolution itself does not embody the trend of increasing complexity (Hodgson, 2006: 17).
2. Unlike the classical evolutionary schemes that posited “a uniform direction of change from simple to complex form, and from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous” (Smith, 1976: 35), one can argue for multi-evolutional and even devolution traits and search not only for the successful socially-reproduced strategies but also for the errors since “copying error is much more destructive to complexity than other forms of error, particularly in environmental interactions or individual development” (Hodgson, 2006: 17).

The contemporary development of the concept of cultural reproduction is associated with the work of P. Bourdieu and the growing interest in everyday social practices, while it is generally assumed that social reproduction is the process of reproduction of social relationships (Nikoloava, 2006). We have emphasised that reproduction does not mean the reiteration of certain traditions: in most cases social strategies are based on different kinds of variations.

It seems that the increasing interest in the cultural-anthropological aspects of the earlier Neolithic from the point of view of the anthropology of everydayness would in turn increase the value of cultural models as in the case of the Iron Gates. Regarding the earliest pottery sites in the Balkans, we still are able to work only with a few sites, which are situated at long distances from one another. On the other hand, there is only exceptional chronological continuity documented and respectively no opportunity for a detail analysis of the social reproduction on-site.

A general model of social replication (fig. 3) includes several steps in social reproduction: mating (competition, choice) and parenting (Betzig et al., 1988) followed by biological and social reproduction (kinship grouping and social grouping by age, gender and/or interest).

For the time being, among the best records for social reproduction are the burials in the settlements (Nikoloava, 2006) interpreted not only as evidence of the cult of the dead (Tilley, 1996: 215) but also an element in the social reproduction strategies for enhancing of the living community. A strong case study are the burials from northwest Anatolia (Early Neolithic Ilipinar), where on the periphery of the village were buried exclusively children. Such a concentration of earlier Neolithic burials, for the time being, has been recorded in the Balkans only at Malk Preslavets painted pottery village (northeast Bulgaria), where the ages of the deceased vary (Infans I, Infans II, Juvenilis, Adultus, Maturus [Yordanov and Dimitrova, 1996: 108]). However, isolated or grouped single, or more rarely double and triple burials were typical of the Early Neolithic Balkans (Lichter, 2001).

Whittle (1996: 37, 39), who contrasts the foraging way of life to that of Neolithic sedentary communities, includes in his comparison the increasing reverence of the dead as ancestors and for the principle of descent. However, the village burials in Upper Thrace are not comparable either with those of Lepenski Vir nor with those at Ilipinar. It is possible that flat cemeteries have not yet been discovered in Upper Thrace, but it also looks likely that despite the communal manner of life, the cult of the dead during the Early Neolithic in the Balkans was integrated into the household realm of traditions, and the graves were therefore dispersed. In other words, the communal life did not require a communal cemetery, and according to the available data it is in the later Neolithic when a central place of the ancestors was founded, for instance in the northeast Balkans.
Curiously, the large cemetery occurred in an area with a relatively mobile population. Accordingly, in the early stages of civilization the settlement and the cemeteries complement each other - big villages with no or smaller cemeteries, and a mobile or semi-sedentary (semi-mobile) - population with a large cemetery as a central place.

We can also presume that cult of the ancestors (respectively the social memory of the ancestors), was the framework of the everyday social life within the different sedentary and semi-sedentary communities. As Whittle (1996: 37) has pointed out, the clay figurines may have represented ancestors, although they could also represent mythic figures. The expressive finding from Thessaly, places the prehistoric figurines closer to the ancestor beliefs (Coles, 1998), while the common stylistic peculiarities replicated over vast territories, and the absence of individualized characteristics, may support their interpretation as mythic images. If one combines both alternatives, including also a presumed divine function, probably we could be closer to the past reality; mythic ancestors who connected the social-natural worlds of the communities and generations during feasts and rituals, combining the vertical and horizontal aspects of enculturation, the so-called “ein Medium der Kommunikation” (Cauvin, 2000: 29f. for the Near East; Hansen, 2006: 142). The role of the ancestors is very well documented among traditional cultures and can be thought even as the original owners of the land (Kuper, 1982: 15).

Towards the Neolithic Social Complexity

Despite the broader database on the Neolithisation of the Balkans, recently there are still irresolvable problems that make research in depth difficult and leave the Neolithic experts at the level of general hypotheses:

We still have a limited knowledge about the development and the demographic destiny and peculiarities of the hunter-gathering communities in the Central and Eastern Balkans in later 7th millennium cal BC, and especially about what happened to them during the latest 7th and the beginning of the 6th millennia cal BC. The data can be interpreted using different models and methodologies that permits two opposing models of Neolithisation to co-exist: autochthonous, which is more plausible in the light of the newest data from the Iron Gates, and pure migration, which connects the Neolithisation with immigrants from southeast and/or south only. The analysis of the social complexity in the Iron Gates (Borić, 2005; Budja, pets. comm. 2006; Bonsall, pets. comm. 2006) and the new radiocarbon data from the Iron Gates (Borić, 2005: 25) stimulate research into the
transformation of hunting-gathering strategies, keeping in mind that the earliest pottery sites occur in regions
closer to the Iron Gates (eastern Serbia and the Struma Valley). In archaeological terms, one possible next step
is to try to bridge socially the grave 7 (from House 21 at Lepenski Vir) discovered with an aurochs skull (Borić,
2005: 23-24) and the Neolithic data about social complexity.

1. The emergence of the earliest pottery settlements cannot answer the question of who founded those vil-
lages, camps or central places, since all hypotheses have been based on pottery data and burial evidence
is practically absent. However, the innovation of the fired pottery (ceramic) production can easily diffuse
and can be accepted in everyday life, as either as a replacement for wooden vessels or in the context of
revolutionary changes in diet and the development of the subsistence economy.

2. The role of the population from the latest 7th millennium cal BC in the settlement and the cultural explo-
sion during the first half of the 6th millennium cal BC cannot be evaluated realistically and cannot exclude
a possible new migration, since the evidence again makes possible only general hypotheses and allows the
co-existence of complementary and even of opposing explanation models.

In our opinion, Neolithisation represents a long-term process of gradual foundation and reproduction of
the earliest pottery-using complex societies and their spread over the whole territory of the Balkans. The flat
migration model of Neolithisation is based on distribution of societies in the space, while the social model of
Neolithisation stressed the gradual distribution of social complexity.

In theory the Balkan data support Model 1.2 (fig. 4) since any later Neolithic horizon is more complex
that the previous. The wider distribution of the white painted pottery is a stage of development of social com-
plexity, while the social strategies of economic and social stability required solidarity and possibly stimulated
macro-regional similarity in ceramic style over vast territories. But our understanding is that archaeological
similarity between households does not necessarily indicate social equality, since there are many archaeologi-
cally invisible distinctions. A special problem is how the land was exploited and its role in the development of
the Neolithic social complexity, but it is an unexplored theme that has been waiting for researchers specialised
in economic anthropology. It is usually believed that the land in prehistory provided the subsistence while the
accumulation of the wealth and the development of social hierarchy was a result of trade in exotic objects and
the emergence of metallurgy.

A special problem in earlier Balkan prehistory is the initial development of social stratification and the
biography of prestige objects.

Possible prestige items in the Early Neolithic in the Balkans include some exotic items like the obsidian knife
from Kliment-Banyata, in the Upper Stryama Valley, from the later Early Neolithic. Obsidian items have been
also reported from Kurdzhalii, which marks one of the possible trade routes, along the Maritsa Valley from the
Aegean or Anatolia. However, obsidian was also distributed in the Carpathians and their neighbourhood (Biagi et
al., 2007) and in the Adriatic (Spataro, 2002: 12 and references cited there, pp. 201-202), and its function in the
Balkan macro-region would be different because of the existence of different resources and perhaps because of a
different understanding of its value. The Early Neolithic was exactly the period in which these prestige items were
first used not only in everyday life but also as a possible investment and as a source of accumulation of wealth.

However, the most prominent and expressive were some jewellery items. From the Early Neolithic, they
become in many cases emblems of social prosperity and wealth (e.g. finds from Hoca Çeşme (Turkish Thrace)
and Gulubnic (Pernik District, western central Bulgaria) and later from Durankulak (northeast Bulgaria). This
fact allows us to propose that a specially important role in our model of the evolution of the social complexity

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Fig. 4 - Model 1.1. A flat migration model of Neolithisation. Society 1 occupies social space 1 and later the same community occupies
social space 2 (top). Model 1.2. A social model of distribution of the Neolithic complexity in the Balkans. Society 1 occupies social
space 1 and the reproduced (more complex) society 1/1 occupies social space 2.
would have been played by customs associated with marriages (respectively the bride wealth and marriage exchange) and generally the development of systems of hierarchical exchanges well-known from traditional cultures (Kuper, 1982: 14 ff.; Lipuma, 1988: 148 ff.)

Researching these problems in depth and using these examples, it is possible that some pottery shapes and especially painted pottery diffused into the Balkans as status symbols and not as everyday objects. Over time the exotic and high-status items became more common in most of the communities because of the opportunity for large-scale replication. But imports (see above about Kovachevo) and limited diffusion of some stylistic types indicate that pottery has a specific cultural function in the social strategies of the Balkan prehistoric communities. In other words, we have been posing generally the question of the development of the social meaning of prehistoric objects. Applied to the topic of our study, the wide distribution of white-painted pottery itself would be a sign of increasing complexity in the Balkans, and the differentiation of the functions of the pottery productions and its ability to connect and distinguish communities through communication of or avoiding a transmission of stylistic similarities. Further discussions, new data and critical considerations would probably in future help to advance the understanding of the social aspects of development of complexity among the Neolithic societies in the Balkans.

CONCLUSIONS

In light of the present evidence there are still many unresolved problems regarding the synchronization of the earliest Neolithic pottery settlements in the different micro-regions of the Balkans. This makes any cultural interpretations hypothetical and impedes in-depth research.

Within our 5-stage scheme of evolution of social complexity in Neolithic Balkans we have proposed two typological and cultural-chronological horizons of the earliest Balkan pottery settlements (stage 1 of Balkan Neolithic Social Evolution):
1. The initial pottery horizon: Hoca-Çeşme 4, Krajnitsi 1, earliest Divostin, Koprivets 1, Dzhulyunitsa-Smurdyak 1, Donja Branjevina III (c. ?6300/6200-6100 cal BC).
2. Earlier white-painted pottery horizon Kovachevo Ia/b, Donja Branjevina II, Vaksevo-Studena Voda 1-2, Nevestino 1, Hoca Çeşme 3 (c. 6200/6100-c. 6000 cal BC). Based on the comparative analysis of the pottery from earlier Kovachevo and Rakitovo, it is possible that the Karanovo I Culture started during this horizon, but we do not have direct evidence for a precise synchronisation.

The analysis of the data shows that the limited evidence of pottery-using settlements in the Balkans before 6000 cal BC may relate to the 8.2 ka event, while the real start of flourishing pottery long-term settlements in the Balkans occurred just after the end of the 7th millennium cal BC; in other words, after the 8.2 ka event. The 8.2 ka event would therefore have had a decisive role in the Neolithisation of the Balkans.

This approach has also proposed that our understanding of the problems of the earliest pottery complex societies in the Balkans would benefit from further intensification of micro-regional interdisciplinary investigations from the point of view of the anthropology of everydayness, by constructing micro- and medium-social models of social reproduction. We also proposed a diachronic model of evolution of Neolithic complexity in the Balkans, believing that in the earliest stage even painted pottery would have related to the prestige items. Burials were a very important component of the social reproduction strategies working towards development of the ancestry ideology of the kinship-based Neolithic society. Last but not least, we believe that in the Neolithic Balkans the figurines were multifunctional, but their leading social function, representing real and/or mythical ancestors, was to connect generations and communities over vast areas as one of the strongest symbolic means of communication. Future in-depth research would add new arguments and updates to the topics of this study.

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