Linguistics 051:
Proto-Indo-European Language and Society
Late Neolithic in the Pontic-Caspian Region

Rolf Noyer
Copper Age Developments

a. the wheel and wheeled vehicles (wagons, chariots) c. 4000-3500
b. early copper mettalurgy (Chalcolithic/Copper Age/Eneolithic) c. 4000
c. domestication of the horse c. 4000-3500
Dnieper River frontier

West of the Dnieper ‘frontier’: European cultures
  Marija Gimbutas: ‘Old Europe’ culture 6500-3500
    Criş/Körös Culture: northern Balkans, Carpathians 5800-5300
    Linear Pottery Culture (Europe) 5500-4500
    Cucuteni-Tripolye Culture: eastern Carpathian mountains 5500-2750
At or east of the Dnieper ‘frontier’: Steppe Cultures
  Bug-Dniester Culture 6500-4900 | neighbors with
    Dnieper-Donets I: 6500-5000
    Dnieper-Donets II: ca. 5100-4300 | western neighbors with
      Khvalynsk Culture: 4700-3800
    Sredni-Stog Culture: centered on Dnieper in W. Ukraine c. 4300
  • Suvorovo-Novodanilovka Incursion c. 4200: Steppe culture ‘invades’ East
Pontic-Caspian Neolithic

- original forager economy lasted until 5200-5000
- steppe environment very harsh: temperature extremes, impenetrable grassland
- hunting, gathering plants, fishing
- settlements found near river valleys
- east of the Urals and north in the forest zone the forager economy continued much longer
Greek Neolithic

Immigration from western Anatolia to Greece beginning 6700-6500

- introduced cultivation of wheat and barley
- domesticated sheep and cattle (from wild aurochs)
- red-on-white pottery
- female-centered domestic rituals
- Aegean *Spondylus* shell bracelets and beads

‘Pioneer’ farmer-herders from Greek Neolithic moved north into the Balkans and Carpathians starting about 6200.
Criş Culture
A northern group of ‘pioneers’ formed the Criş/Körös Culture and occupied
northern Balkans and Carpathians 5800-5300.
• wattle-and-daub walls
• small villages of a few families
• no cemeteries
• continued using Spondylus shell ornaments
• cultivation of barley, millet, peas, emmer wheat, einkorn wheat,
  spelt wheat, common bread wheat
• large flint blades, polished stone axes
• ate mutton (sheep meat)
• some use of metal
Bug-Dniester Culture

Criș culture bordered the Bug-Dniester culture at the Dnieper River.

Bug-Dniester culture:

• foragers
• flint scrapers, chipped flint axes, no use of metal
• did not eat mutton
• although an outgrowth of a Mesolithic society, they had ceramics, which they adopted about 6200
• began to adopt animal domestication & agriculture from Criș people
• economy continued to be largely based on hunting and gathering
Transition to Agriculture

What reasons can be given for the transition from a forager economy to an economy based on domesticated animals and plant cultivation?

What kind of social changes could have accompanied this transition?
Eastern Pontic-Capsian

**Dnieper-Donets (DDI) Culture** located to the east of the Bug-Dniester Culture, particularly in the Dnieper rapids area.

- Contemporary with Bug-Dniester Culture
- No evidence of domestic animals: red deer and fish bones
- Burial of the dead in large cemeteries, but no elaborate grave goods

**Forager cultures on the Volga and Don** (further east)

- relied on hunting of onagers, horses and aurochs in the arid steppe
- hunted deer, horses, boars in the steppe-forest region
Eastward shift of the Dniester River Frontier

Starting around 5200 the culture of the Balkans and Carpathians changed and become considerably more sophisticated evolving into the Cucuteni-Tripolye Culture. This culture lasted a very long time, until around 3000.

Bug-Dniester culture disappeared around 4900 as villages with Cucuteni-Tripolye culture appeared east of the Dnieper River.

Forests were cleared to make large pasture areas.
Cucuteni-Tripolye Culture

- large houses and large villages
- fine pottery with distinctive ‘swirling’ designs
- advanced use of copper metal, imported from distant locations
- no evidence of burial of the dead
- pervasive presence of distinctive female figurines
- cult also shown by skulls of domesticated cattle: one buried under each house
Dnieper-Donets II Culture

Eastern neighbors of the CT Culture; inherited the DDI Culture

- Dated from 5200/5000 to 4400/4200.
- around 5200-500 began keeping domesticated cattle, sheep and goats
- domestic animals throughout the Pontic-Caspian steppes by 4600
- interaction with CT Culture intensified after around 4500
- had no ovens but used open fires
- lived in bark-covered huts and not in towns
- pottery did not resemble ‘swirling’ design of CT, although some CT pottery was imported
DDII Funeral Rituals

• Elaborate funeral and cemetery rituals
• Most of the dead were exposed to the elements, possibly in special buildings
• When ‘clean’ the bones were buried in layers in communal pits
• Some dead were not exposed but buried with flesh, perhaps wrapped in tight shrouds
• For some individuals only the skull was buried
• Differential treatment of the dead suggests complex social organization
• Cattle and horse bones testify to graveside feasts
DDII Grave Goods

• Certain individuals were buried with elaborate grave goods; others had few or none. This suggests a strongly hierarchical society.
• Burial of children with elaborate grave goods suggests inheritance of wealth and power.
• Grave goods signalling prestige included imported objects:
  - shell and stone beads
  - ornaments of Balkan copper
  - boar’s tusk plaques
  - belts made of mother-of-pearl beads and shell beads
  - polished stone mace heads
  - bird-bone tubes
Khvalynsk Culture
Located to the east of DDII on the Volga River starting around 4700/4600 and lasting till 3900/3800.
• slightly different funerary practices: only mature males were exposed prior to burial
• extensive animal sacrifices: these appear to have accompanied several stages of funeral and were distributed unequally in graves
• head-and-hoof sacrifice: for many slaughtered animals only skull and lower leg bones were buried
• horse bones found among domestic animal sacrifices, suggesting both domestication of the horse and larger symbolic significance.
• large quantities of copper objects and zoomorphic mace heads
Collapse of ‘Old Europe’

The complex agrarian society of ‘Old Europe’ disappeared in the southern Balkans and northern Greece between 4000-3800.

In northern Greece a ‘dark age’ from 3800-3300 followed, during which settlements became scarce and people returned to dispersed herding economies.

Old European society seems to have been based on an abundance of resources which led to a relatively egalitarian social structure.
Why did Old Europe End?

• Climatic change beginning 4200-4100, followed by extreme cold period 3960-3821
• Overpopulation (population growth to ten times its original size)
• Soil erosion, deforestation → conflict over dwindling resources
• Influx of ‘steppe’ peoples (cause or effect?)
• Warfare — some but not all sites were burned and the populations were killed (bones found at site) or fled suddenly (valuable objects found at sites)
• Some sites were heavily fortified in the 4300-4000 period.
Sredni-Stog Culture

Centered on the Dnieper in Ukraine and extending east to the Don.

- Probably correspond to the speakers of early Proto-Indo-European
- New cultural traits differentiate this culture from the earlier DDII
  - different pottery styles: round bottomed pots with decoration only on the upper third
  - new funeral rituals characterized by:
    → distinctive **posturing of the dead**: on the back with knees raised and oriented toward the northeast
    → some individual graves, beneath small **kurgans** (mounds)
- Mixture of skull shapes, suggesting a mixed population
- Strongly ‘agro-pastoralist’ economy (wheat, barley, millet)
Suvorovo-Novodanilovka Incursion

• The decline of Old Europe and the increasing presence of steppe culture artifacts in the Balkans is connected with an event called the Suvorovo-Novodanilovka Incursion or Migration, c. 4200.

• Possibly an elite sector of the Sredni-Stog culture, who consolidated status through cattle-wealth in times of crop failure, alliance building through feast- and gift-giving.

• Attracted to Danube Valley for cattle raiding and copper ornaments.

• Rode domesticated horses which facilitated long-distance raiding.

• Anthony proposes that these people were speakers of pre-Anatolian, who later migrated to western Anatolia via Thessaly.