

## **Linguistics 051:**

### **Proto-Indo-European Language and Society**

### **Late Neolithic in the Pontic-Caspian Region**

**Rolf Noyer**

## **Pontic-Caspian Neolithic**

### 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

## **Bug-Dniester Culture**

Criş 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 Criş people
- economy continued to be largely based on hunting and gathering

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## **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?

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## **Criș Culture**

A northern group of 'pioneers' formed the Criș/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

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## 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

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## 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.

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## 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

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## 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

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## 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

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## 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**

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## 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

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## 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.

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## 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.

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## 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)

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## **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.