

9. An Investigation of the North-western Pontic Regions

The widespread absence of Early Neolithic sites in Muntenia is particularly arresting in light of the close connections of the north-eastern Bulgarian Early Neolithic with the variants of the Criş culture in Romanian Moldavia lying further to the north. These contacts could only have been directly transmitted via the Wallachian lowlands. While a natural connection to the north is presented by the course of the rivers Siret and Prut, the route along the final section of the Danube must nevertheless have ultimately passed through Muntenia or the Dobrudja.

9.1. The Romanian Province of Moldova

Early Neolithic finds have long been known from the site of Perieni, with these reflecting two stratigraphically successive phases (PETRESCU-DÎMBOVIȚA 1957). With high, cross-footed vessels, incised and impressed decorations on pots, plastically applied cordons, and adornments of knobs and warts, the ceramics of the lowest, Criş IV-period level of Perieni I permit good comparisons with the material from Ovcharovo-Gorata (PETRESCU-DÎMBOVIȚA 1957, figs. 3–5). Above this level comes the younger level of Perieni II possessing LBK with *Notenkopf* adornments, which can be taken as evidence for a temporal separation of the two cultural groups in this individual case.

The question as to the chronological relationship of the Criş culture with the south-eastern groups of the *Notenkopf* pottery was already explored early on (COMŞA 1959). In contrast to the Pannonian Basin, which might be considered the area in which LBK emerged from of the Starčevo-Criş-Körös milieu (BÁNFFY 2000), a later encounter (or rather an overlapping of both cultural groups) must be presumed for Moldavia. While a chronological

succession of *Notenkopf* pottery and pre-Cucuteni would seem to be evidenced from stratigraphic observations, the relationship between later Criş and LBK long remained obscure. The discovery of Criş pottery and LBK together at, for example, Moreşti and Rupea in Transylvania (albeit also at Valea Lupului on the Prut) indicates a temporary adjacency of both cultural groups (COMŞA 1959, 41–43). In turn, a grave with predominantly Criş pottery and individual LBK sherds has been identified at Cipău within the bend of the Carpathians (COMŞA 1959, 41). At Glăvăneşti Vechi, the Criş III/IV-period site and a LBK settlement lie very closely to each other (COMŞA 1959, 44). Glăvăneşti Vechi's Criş site is crucial for various reasons; not only are individual vessel forms known from Ovcharovo-Gorata attested there, but also a few specific forms which are currently isolates on the Lower Danube. Accordingly, wide mouthed vessels with multiply pierced lips find their closest correlates here (COMŞA 1978, fig. 12/5). The frequent studs and plastic applications within the material from Glăvăneşti Vechi may be compared without difficulty to those decorative forms attested from Ovcharovo-Gorata (COMŞA 1978, figs. 15–20).

Should the LBK complexes of Moldova be inspected, then individual parallels to the material from Ovcharovo-Gorata can also be discerned (Fig. 193). Pertinent here are ring-shaped studs otherwise attested from the aforementioned LBK settlement of Glăvăneşti Vechi and, moreover, from Larga Jijia and Traian (COMŞA 1959, pl. II/17, 32, 49, 51). Also worthy of mention are plastically formed blossoms, one exemplar of which appears on a potsherd from Glăvăneşti Vechi (COMŞA 1959, pl. II/15). A fragment with four warts from Larga Jijia (COMŞA 1959, pl. II/45) may also

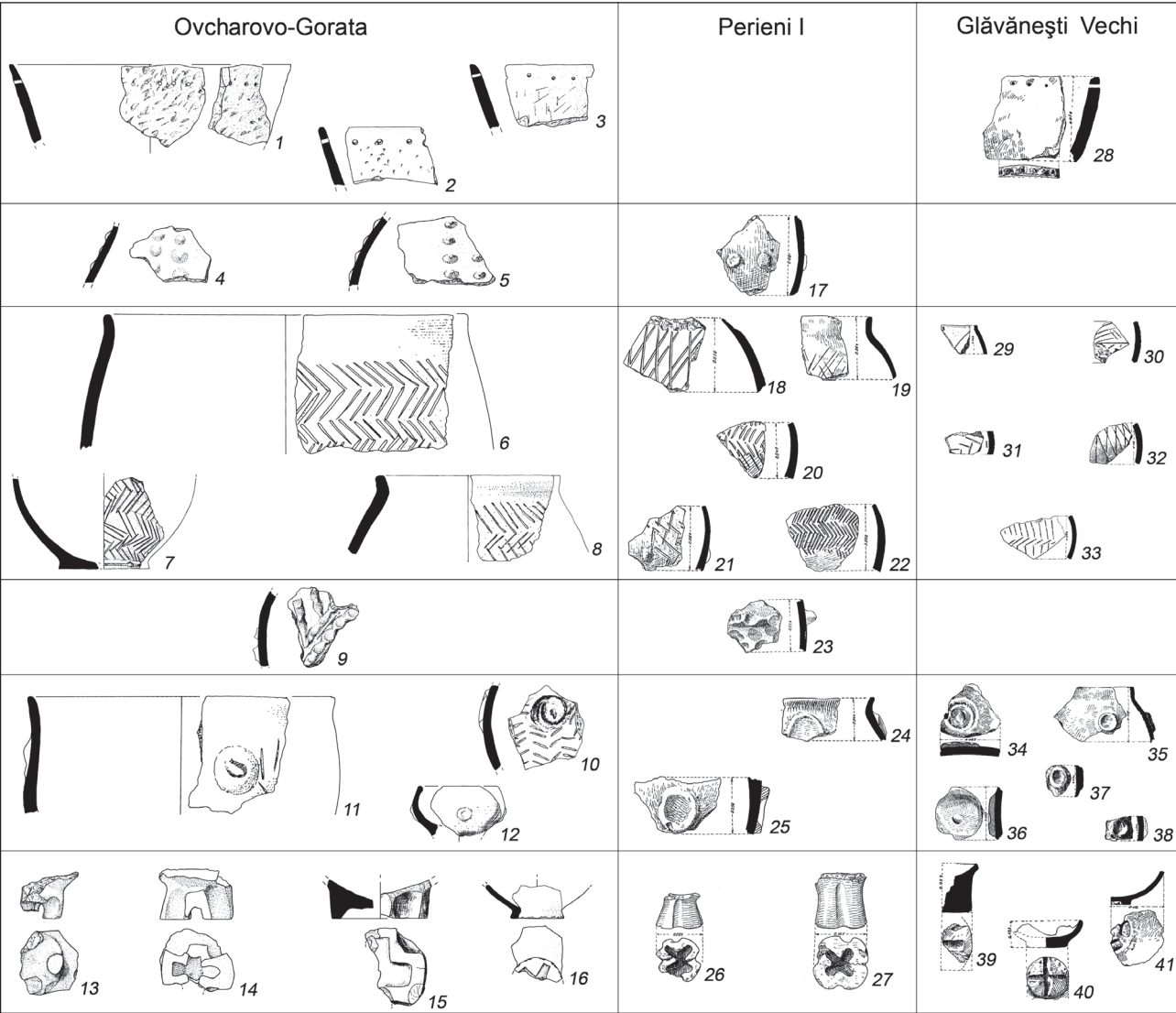


Fig. 193: Comparison of the pottery from the lower course of the Danube with that of sites in the northern Pontic (R. Krauß).

best be compared with material from Ovcharovo-Gorata. Remarkably, a small pot with horizontally projecting nozzle spouts considered a form particular to Ovcharovo-Gorata also finds its best parallels in a fragment from Valea Lupului (cf. URSULESCU 1983, pl. 44/15). This unidirectional intrusion of Criș elements into the form spectrum of *Notenkopf* pottery can be explained by means of a timely replacement of the Criș groups by LBK populations, whereby individual stylistic elements from Criș ceramics persisted within a LBK milieu. The simultaneous adoption of many of these decorative elements could indicate a swift chronological succession of the LBK immediately after the Criș culture's Phase IV according to Lazarovici's periodisation (cf. LAZAROVICI 1979). Numerous similarities in the pottery from Ovcharovo-Gorata with the Moldavian variants of the late

Criș culture are, nevertheless, attested most noticeably in the older complexes before the appearance of the LBK in this region.

Notable here is a site near Balș presenting comparanda to the material from Ovcharovo-Gorata, primarily in terms of its coarse wares (POPUȘOI 1980). Similar to the latter site, excised rims are present here within the find material (POPUȘOI 1980, fig. 10/1). Moreover, a cross-footed bowl has been identified (POPUȘOI 1980, fig. 10/4). In turn, vessel painting with dark pigment upon a red-slipped background is also preserved from Balș (POPUȘOI 1980, fig. 11/2). Less significant are the few finds published from Dîrțu-Ceahlău, of which a few rim sherds with excised decoration and body sherds adorned with incisions might only very generally be assigned to the Early Neolithic (PĂUNESCU 1958, fig. 1).

If Nicolae Ursulescu's periodisation is followed, then Balş is a late Criş IV site (URSULESCU 1983, 283–292). Further to Glăvăneşti Vechi, which has already been mentioned, levels from the phase of Criş III are only known from Trestiana (POPUŞOI 1979) and the municipality of Suceava (URSULESCU 1983). The schematically published vessel forms from Trestiana display cross-footed bowls with very elongated feet and bulbous vessels with narrow mouths, which might be generally compared to the material from north-eastern Bulgaria (URSULESCU 1983, pl. 1/1–2, 10–11, 12–15, 25–26). The various carinated dish types (among these particularly the low-set forms) appear conversely to be a peculiarity of the eastern Criş variants native to here (URSULESCU 1983, pl. 1/3–7, 16).

By means of contrast, the finds from Suceava-Parcul Cetăţii are directly comparable to those from Ovcharovo-Gorata. Copiously attested are narrow-necked vessels (cf. URSULESCU 1983, pls. 7/1–10; 16/8–17; 21/1–2) and various types of pots (cf. URSULESCU 1983, pls. 16/1; 24/1–2; 27/1–2; 37/1–2). Predominant among the bowl forms are types with markedly pronounced feet (cf. URSULESCU 1983, pls. 21/26–28; 28/17–21; 29/9; 30/15–19; 31/7–13). Conversely, low-set carinated bowls should be understood as a specific phenomenon of eastern Criş sites (cf. URSULESCU 1983, pls. 17/1; 21/6; 34/1). Precise correlates may nevertheless be found in individual forms such as the vessels decorated with warts (cf. URSULESCU 1983, pls. 20/2; 25/16; 34/10; 36/15), and the negatively reserved cross motifs on the base (cf. URSULESCU 1983, pl. 29/16). The latter is also attested from a base fragment from Probota, and from two examples originating from Glăvăneşti Vechi (cf. COMŞA 1978, fig. 12/6–7. – URSULESCU 1983, pl. 40/8). Among the forms of adornment at Suceava-Parcul Cetăţii might be encountered the parallel zigzag patterns realised by means of incision, and rough perforations, as well as individual studs on the vessel body (cf. URSULESCU 1983, pls. 21/15, 21; 22/4; 23/4–6; 24/10–12) as similarly occur at Ovcharovo-Gorata. The lips and the zone on the base of the vessel are analogously spared decoration. Vessel rims are frequently excised (cf. URSULESCU 1983, pls. 15/13; 18/4; 22/2; 24/2; 26/1, 6; 28/13; 30/8; 37/16–17; 38/12), while (by means of contrast) excision seems only rarely to occur upon feet. This simple form of adornment may, nevertheless, be evidenced, for example on a fragment from Suceava-Parcul Cetăţii and likewise on examples from Câmpul Şanţurilor and Suceava (cf. URSULESCU 1983, pls. 18/7; 40/15). Finally, channelled decoration is evidenced upon a few pieces from Suceava-Parcul Cetăţii (cf. URSULESCU 1983, pls. 9/13; 27/16–19).

From the aforementioned, a parallelisation of Ovcharovo-Gorata with Perieni I, the earlier material

from Glăvăneşti Vechi, and with Suceava-Parcul Cetăţii during the phase of Criş III in Moldova can be made. In the subsequent phase of Criş IV, LBK groups with *Notenkopf* decorations penetrate these areas, with these, in turn, adopting elements of Criş pottery within their form repertoire. Considering the parallels of these foreign elements with the material from Ovcharovo-Gorata which have been demonstrated, it is also entirely possible that the penetration of LBK populations into Moldova may already have occurred during Criş III.

9.2. Bessarabia and South-western Ukraine

During Phase IV, an extension of the Criş culture may also be identified within the region east of the Dniester. For example, the vessel forms from the site of Sacarovca still demonstrate weak echoes of types from Ovcharovo-Gorata. Some narrow-necked vessels are distantly reminiscent of Types K2a and K2b (cf. Chapter 7.4, Figs. 119–123), and are decorated on their surfaces with rough impressions (cf. LARINA 1994, fig. 3/36–37). Stand-footed bowls on very high feet and S-profiled pots are characteristic (cf. LARINA 1994, fig. 3/25–27, 39–42). A novel form is represented by sharply profiled bowls with two or three limbs and frequently a central knob on the vessel body (cf. LARINA 1994, fig. 3/28–33). An indirect influence of the South-eastern European Early Neolithic upon the northern Pontic steppes is nevertheless tangible, inasmuch as the emergent Bug-Dniester culture proves to be heavily inspired by Criş pottery. Some types appearing within Sokol'cy I are interpreted as direct Criş imports (WECHLER 2001, 277). Independent of the question as to whether Early Neolithic pottery is able to be traded over so great a geographical distance, a S-profiled bowl on a stand-ring may be compared to similar forms from Ovcharovo-Gorata (DANILENKO 1969, figs. 63/4; 64/5). Certain pot forms from Soroki I, Level 1b are also indicative of the material from Ovcharovo-Gorata (cf. MARKEVICH 1974, fig. 17/4–5, 8, 10–11). Furthermore, two globular pots with pierced lugs on their bodies from Soroki II, Level 1 and from Soroki III also find their best parallels in material from there (cf. MARKEVICH 1974, figs. 48/5; 55/3). The decoration of the pots with simple impressions realised with fingernails or a simple stick is still present here (cf. MARKEVICH 1974, fig. 27/1–5). Yet, most noticeably suggestive of a connection are the vertically running, parallel zigzag incised lines which are very much characteristic of Bug-Dniester pottery (cf. MARKEVICH 1974, figs. 17/1; 18; 48/4. – WECHLER 2001, pl. 7). This motif may be encountered within Sokol'cy VI on a pot with a flat base and among forms with pointed bases alike (cf. DANILENKO 1969, fig. 56).

9.3. The Reduction of the Neolithic Package during its Transmission into the Northern Pontic Steppes

The appearance of forms with pointed and rounded bases within the Bug-Dniester culture is a decisive difference to the Early Neolithic forms of the entire Balkan-Carpathian region. Conversely, the stand-bases so characteristic of the Balkan Neolithic most noticeably occur among vessels from the early Bug-Dniester culture (cf. WECHLER 2001, pls. 1, 6, 7/1–6). This observation is confirmed by the fact that the percentage of flat-based pottery within the entire ceramic spectrum of the Early Neolithic sites of the northern Pontus decreases as distance from the Balkan Peninsula increases (cf. DANILENKO 1969, figs. 1, 3, 59). This fundamental disparity in vessel tectonics may be plausibly explained by means of the differing economy of the Neolithic groups from the steppe which were heavily focused upon hunting, fishing and gathering (WECHLER 2001, 81–91). Interestingly, the multiple perforation of lips is already evidenced among the early vessels of the Bug-Dniester culture (cf. MARKEVICH 1974, fig. 27/5, 7), this prompting the question as to whether this specific treatment of vessels (found also among the material from Ovcharovo-Gorata) might be interpreted as an adoption from the northern Pontus (Fig. 193, upper row). Nevertheless, this would also be the only aspect of the material culture not transmitted from the Balkan Neolithic into the north-east, but from thence in the opposite direction.

The butchering waste and botanical remains from the Neolithic settlements of the northern Pontus already display a marked narrowing of the spectrum of exploited domesticated animals and plants (cf. WECHLER 2001, 36–47. – KOTOVA 2003, pl. 3). Game clearly predominates among the animal bones. Even the cattle bones evidenced from the site of Baz'kov Ostrov most likely originate from aurochs (*Bos primigenius*), and are thus to be understood as prey (WECHLER 2001, 37–38 and pl. 1, fn. 44). Intimations as to the use of cultivars are offered by the impressions of various grains and pulses upon pottery (KOTOVA 2003, pl. 3). However, the small quantities of even these secondary indicators actually hint at a rather sporadic use of these resources within the northern Pontic steppes, much in the manner of Kristina Jennbert's "Fertile Gift" (JENNBERT 1984. – JENNBERT 1988). It is quite possible that grain entered the northern Pontus from the eastern Balkans by means of exchange prior to any local cultivation. While a complete "Neolithic package" comprising structured settlements, ceramic and

grindstone technologies, agriculture, and husbandry was transmitted into every region of the Balkan-Carpathian sphere as yet discussed, the northern Pontic steppes are characterised by a reduced Neolithic package composed of ceramic production and occasionally additional elements occurring at certain sites (Fig. 194). Indeed, the appearance of the settlements is so different to that of examples from the Balkan-Carpathian sphere that permanent sedentary residence and pottery production on site could even be reasonably doubted. The marked reduction in domesticated animals in the midst of efficient exploitation of the sufficiently plentiful wild animal species and aquatic resources must be understood as an adaptation to the ecological preconditions of the steppes. The wide spectrum of available cultivars dwindles to only a few species initially occurring within the northern Pontus in small quantities and possibly not as products for cultivation, but rather as goods for exchange. Ceramic vessels and various relics of Neolithic 'ideology' remain as the only archaeologically tangible elements of the "Neolithic package". As pottery production is largely unaffected by climatic or economic factors, this may have been transmitted independently of an economic mode based upon agriculture and husbandry. The altered use of pottery is visible upon the vessels themselves as stands on vessels disappear with increased distance from those regions ecologically suited to farming and livestock breeding. A reason for this is to be elicited from the differing economy of the steppes, wherein pottery with stands for bases offers no advantage over the more stable examples with pointed or round bases. On the other hand, ceramics with bases with stands very frequently occur in the context of permanent housing, which becomes logical inasmuch as good horizontal surfaces exist for the placement of objects. In this respect, the pottery can also be considered as an indirect indication of a transformation of the Neolithic package on its way from western Anatolia and the Aegean into the northern Pontus by way of the Balkans. It should also be mentioned that such an argumentation can also be employed to support a diffusion of some elements of the "Neolithic package" into the northern Pontus via the eastern corridor between the Caspian and Black Sea (cf. DANILENKO 1969, 177–186). Despite this, the archaeological record is currently much sparser there, with this, in turn, perhaps being connected to the lack of any structural basis for the dispersal of elements of the Neolithic package from this direction.

	Northern Aegean	Marmara	Thrace	Vardar-Struma-Mesta	Central and Western Balkans	Lower Danube	Eastern Carpathian Basin	North-western Pontic
Beginning of Neolithisation Processes	From 6800 BCE		From 6000 BCE	From 6400 BCE	From 6200 BCE	From 6100 BCE		Dates are secure from 5800 BCE; older dates are uncertain
Domestic Architecture	Mudbrick on stone foundations	Mudbrick and wattle and daub	Wattle and daub			Settlement pits for largely unknown buildings		Flat settlements along rivers, rarely longer local duration
Ceramic Traditions	Connections to the ceramic tradition in south-west Anatolia's 'Lake District' and via maritime networks as far as the Levant; red-slipped ware and impresso	Connections to the ceramic tradition in south-west Anatolia's 'Lake District'	Own tradition; red-slipped ware and impresso, painted ware; later plastic applications and channelled ware	Connections to the ceramic tradition in western Anatolia and in Thessaly; red-slipped ware and impresso as well as painted ware	Initially clear references to the Aegean but later own tradition; red-slipped ware and impresso as well as painted ware and later plastic applications	Initially clear references to the Aegean but later own tradition; red-slipped ware and impresso, later plastic applications and channelled ware	Connections to Balkan Neolithic; red-slipped ware and impresso, plastic applications; very little painted ware, predominantly coarse fabric	Close links to the Lower Danube area but with increasing distance from the Balkans, pointed and round-bottomed ceramics appear; only plastic decorations
Use of Animals	Mainly sheep/goat, pig and cattle breeding, hardly any hunting						Preference for cattle among domestic animals; increased use of aquatic resources and hunting	Hunting, gathering and fishing
Use of Plants	Cereals and pulses, very small percentage of collected plants						Cereals and pulses, larger proportions of collected plants	Collective economy with occasional appearance of cultivated plants

Fig. 194: Comparison of the economic fundamentals in the different Neolithic regions (R. Krauß).