

Problems of the Connections of Neolithic Cultures in the Baltic Region

Connections of the Neolithic of the East Baltic Region and the Funnel-Beaker culture have been examined by a prominent Finnish researcher Europaeus-Äyräpää. He examined the interinfluence of the Funnel-Beaker culture and the culture of comb-pit ceramics or Comb Ware. He referred to the ornaments of Neolithic ceramics of Northern Poland and the South-Eastern parts of the Baltic region (1).

Since the time when these studies were published, two cultures, the Narva and the Niemen, have been investigated. These cultures are the main ones of the Baltic region. They existed throughout the Neolithic. In this paper we shall concentrate on the materials referring to the connections of these cultures and the Funnel-Beaker culture, which was spread throughout a wide territory of the Central and Western Baltic region.

The materials of the Niemen culture, the most western of the East-European cultures of the Neolithic of the forest region, take a special position in the research of the problems of connections of the East- and Central-European Neolithic cultures.

The Niemen materials were distinguished for the first time in 1960 in complexes in Belorussia by N.N. Gurina (2), and in Lithuania by R.K. Rimantiene (3). The Niemen culture sites were studied in south-western Lithuania, where the Dubichay group of settlements is situated, as well as such sites as Ejarinas 23, Margay and Barzdis (4). Some of Niemen sites are situated in the Belorussian part of the Niemen, where they have been studied by Chernavsky (5). These sites can be also found in the Up-Pripiat basin, where they have been studied by V.F. Isaenko (6). Some sites with extensive complexes of the Niemen culture were found and studied between 1970—80 in the north-east part of Poland (7).

M.M. Chernavsky (8) distinguished three periods in the development of the Niemen culture. This division into periods is based on the results of the typological division of the materials containing complexes of finds of different periods.

There are no sites with definite stratigraphy, i.e. vertical with the materials of all the periods of the culture in a stratigraphical succession. (At Kamen II in west Polesya, a succession of materials of the early and late Niemen culture was found (9). For early period (so-called Dubichay period) ceramics temper with plants and sometimes ground shells is characteristic.

The characteristic shape of the pots is sharp-bottomed with a simple, straight rim profile. Vessels have ornaments on their surface with different pits and signs of pricking, cuts, impressions of a comb-shaped stamp and crossed lines. Deep, round pits were incised on the upper part of the vessels, near the rim. In the middle period ground granite was added to the paste. The profile of the vessels became more complicated and new motifs appeared in the ornament. The method of alternate cutting of deep, irregular shaped pits under the rim inside and outside the vessel, was used. Profiled vessels with

inorganic temper are characteristic of ceramics of the third, Dobrobor, period. Along with the previously known motif appeared a cord shaped one.

Flint tools in Niemen complexes are numerous. Among them scrapers, often of large size, burins and axes were found. Arrowheads made of blades ("postvider"), trapezoids and "small tranches", lancet-shaped points, including "Janislavica types" were found. These types are characteristic of the early Niemen period. The early-Niemen period materials are found at such sites as Dubichay 1, 2; Ejarinas 23 in south-east Lithuania (10), Russakovichy 1, Nesilovichy 6, Babinka and others, in the Belorussian part of the Niemen (11), Senchitsy 1, Kamen II and others, in the Upper Pripiat basin (12). It is possible that part of the materials of Vozna-Vies settlement in north-east Poland (13) belongs to the Early Neolithic period. In recent years materials similar to the early Niemen ones were found in the west of the Ukraine, in the Rovensk region (14). Standard complexes of the middle period are Lysaya Gora, Yanovo 2 in the Niemen basin, Vaz 1, Kamen III & IV and Bokynychy II on the Upper Pripiat (15). The standard complexes of the late period are Dobry Bor 1, Russakovo 2 and the upper horizon of Kamen 2 settlement (16). Collections of the middle and possibly the late periods have been found at the sites of Sosnya, Wozna Wies and Stache (17) in north-eastern Poland. The complexes of the Niemen culture have not yet been studied by the radiocarbon method and we do not know the correct ages of the sites. It is certain that a flint industry of the early neolithic period was based on the Niemen Mesolithic culture, which was situated in the same territory (18). The Niemen culture existed for a long time, until the early Corded Ware culture appeared. In its west part, in the territory of Poland, the Niemen culture bordered on the Funnel-Beaker culture. In the materials of a group of sites of the middle period of the Niemen culture in Belorussia (19) M.M. Chernavsky found signs of the influence of this culture, apparent in the profiles of the vessels.

Interinfluence of these cultures in Neolithic materials in East and Central Poland is especially obvious.

In these areas finds of neolithic ceramics with ornaments, which are not characteristic of the cultures of the Central European sphere are known. They resemble the ornaments of vessels of the East European "Forest" Neolithic. These complexes were combined into the "Dnepr-Elbe" Neolithic culture (20) or "the culture Pit-and-Comb Ware" (21). The latter term was taken to denote the sites with an absolutely different form of culture, which is situated in another far region. This culture is not connected with the Neolithic complexes of Central and East Poland. In the overall composition of "Pit-and-Comb ware culture" in Poland were "pure" complexes of the Niemen culture, later singled out by E. Kempisty, among others. To this belong some other sites ("Linin type", according to E. Kempisty) which have ceramics, with a mixture of typological features which are characteristic of the Niemen culture and elements of the Funnel-Beaker culture as well as globular amphoras (23).

The complexes with such "hybrid" ceramics spread to the west as far as the right bank of the Oder. This shows the existence of strong, probably prolonged, influences of the Niemen culture.

Judging by the presence (according to E. Kempisty) of complexes with features of the Niemen culture and the Corded Ware culture and even the Tshinetz culture (24), the process of dispersal lasted until the Early Bronze Age.

The materials of Neolithic sites of the Zedmar type, which have been studied in the Kaliningrad region (25) point to a spread of the Funnel-Beaker culture's influence to the east. For these complexes, which according to territory and typology have an intermediate position between the Niemen and Narva cultures, flat-bottomed vessels are characteristic (beginning in the second half of the Early Neolithic, 5300—5000 B.P.,

according to C-14, earlier materials are not known) (p. 1, 1, 2). These are unusual among cultures with sharp-bottomed vessels. It is possible to find vessels with a "collar-like" thickening of the rim (p. 1, 3, 4), which is uncharacteristic for East Baltic Neolithic ceramics, but quite common for the ceramics of the east group of the Funnel-Beaker culture. In the ornaments of the sites of the Zedmar type (p. 2) we can see motifs which are close to the ornaments of the vessels of the Funnel-Beaker culture. Ceramics of a peat settlement, Zedmar D, which was excavated to an extent of 600 sq. metres, belong to this period (ca. 4300—4100, according to C-14). These materials show the influence of a group of cultures of the second half of the Neolithic: the number of vessels with Niemen ornament motifs had grown in comparison to the earlier complexes (in the material an inorganic, mineral temper is present), sherds with signs of influence of the late Funnel-Beaker culture were found (p. 1, 5) and fragments of two vessels of late Comb-and-Pit ware were also found (p. 1, 6, 7).

The connections with the Funnel-Beaker culture are reflected in the materials of the Narva Neolithic culture, which was defined in 1960 by N.N. Gurina and L.U. Jaanits (26). There are three local variants of this culture (south, north, west). They differ in chronological position and period of existence (27). The most western sites of the Narva culture are situated near the coasts of Lithuania and Latvia (28). Complexes of the Narva culture are not known from the Kaliningrad region or Poland. (We can hardly say that one find of a vessel from Charna Hancha (29), which has quite a different paste and ornament in comparison to the Narva culture, is a part of this culture). There are features of western influence from the Funnel-Beaker culture on the western variant of Narva culture, as shown by some elements. These elements are widely spread in the east group of the Funnel-Beaker culture. These elements began to spread since the middle, Viorecs period, viz. "a cord wound over a stick", "Furchenstich", plain stamp and a cord ornament (30).

Certain eastern influences from the Narva culture and the Zedmar type sites are obvious in the materials studied by S. Kukavka (31). These materials belong to a local group of the Funnel-Beaker culture of the middle and late periods (late Viorek-Lubon). This group occupied an interriverine territory between Visla and Drventza in the north-east of Poland. In the materials of these sites together with the typical Funnel-Beaker culture, a "hybrid" group of ceramics is often found. East Baltic influence is obvious because of pottery technique material (temper of organic and ground shells and smoothed surfaces). This influence is obvious in the elements and compositions of ornament of some vessels. The ornament is close to that of the Narva ceramics (especially the late Narva sites of East Lithuania (32) and the vessels of Zedmar type).

There were several vessels with decoration following the example of pit ornament.

Thus, connections between the Neolithic cultures of the East Baltic and the Funnel-Beaker culture of the west part of the Baltic region, present in the cluster of »hybrid« groups and types of ceramics with typological features of different cultures are dated to the end of the 4th—3rd millennia B.C.

The hybridization of material culture of the Neolithic in the east Baltic was not immediately noticed in the area of contacts of cultures (the sites of the Zedmar type and the Yara type in north-east Lithuania (33)). The hybridization is obvious when there is an assimilation and interinfluence of aboriginal and new-comer cultures ("hybrid" type of ceramics which formed as the result of the interaction of the Narva culture and the Comb-and-Pit Ware) the ceramics of the Piestina type in south-east Latvia, the Sarnate II complex in west Latvia and a part of the Narva I complex in the north of Estonia (34).

A. Europaeus-Äyräpää used these phenomena for synchronizations of Neolithic cultures in different parts of the Baltic region (35).

Were there connections between the earlier ceramic cultures of the east and west Baltic? The materials, which belong to the end of the Mesolithic and beginning of the Neolithic, which were studied by many researchers in the east and west Baltic, show that, according to numerous radiocarbon dates, the first ceramics appeared in these regions practically simultaneously. In the wide region of the first ceramics of the west Baltic — the Ertebølle — Ellerbek — we can see a succession of flint industries — from the different Late Mesolithic cultures in different parts of this region — i.e. the Kongemose culture, late Oldesloe, a local Mesolithic group of the island of Rügen and the Chojnicko-Penkow culture (36). New Elements in forming the culture were ceramics, artefacts of T-like form of deer horn and other materials and large numbers quantities of previously rarer "transverse arrowheads" (37). Thus, we can speak about the formation of the early ceramic culture on the basis of fragments of different origin — "local" and "strangers" upon a local substrata. The process of formation of the ancient Neolithic cultures of the east part of the Baltic region was much the same.

There is no doubt that the flint industry of the Niemen Early Neolithic culture was formed on the basis of the Niemen Mesolithic (38) culture and the bone-and-horn industry of the Narva culture (artefacts of stone are not very expressive) was formed on the basis of the Kunda Mesolithic culture (39). Ceramics was a new element. With respect to technological and morphological signs the early Niemen and early Narva ceramics are similar (organic remains and ground shells in the temper, combing of the surface, sharp and "thorned" bottoms of the vessels, simple straight rims) which may show their common roots.

In the ornaments of Early Neolithic ceramics of the east Baltic we can single out two components: 1. comb ornaments with a narrow stamp. This ornament is placed on the upper part of the vessel and is characteristic of properly dated ancient materials of the Narva culture (Osa type) and for Early Neolithic complexes of the Niemen culture of Belorussia. A close analogy in ornaments is present in the ceramic complexes of Neolithic cultures of the south of the forest region (Dnepr-Donetz, Strumel-Gastatin type). These materials confirm an assumption by D.Y. Telegin that comb ornaments of the Early Neolithic ceramics of the east Baltic came from the south i.e. the Dnepr region (40). These ornaments are not present in the complexes of Neolithic cultures in central Europe or in the west. 2. Surface pit ornament, which is made by tiny, often oval indentations, in horizontal rows only along the upper part of a vessel; this is characteristic for Narva ceramics in all three local variants of this culture. In the Narva ceramics this ornament was first described by N.N. Gurina (41).

Light surface pit ornament is not characteristic of synchronous cultures of adjacent areas of the forest region, but it is widespread in the ornaments of the vessels of the Early Neolithic period of the Funnel-Beaker culture- the materials of Sarnovo type, beakers A and B of Poland and the south-west Baltic (42), in the 4th millenium B.C. this was characteristic of Neolithic ceramics in the east and west parts of the Baltic region. It may show that there were some connections. Judging by radiocarbon datings of the complexes with Osa type ceramics (43) we can say that light surface "pits" appeared in the east somewhat earlier.

Evidence of connections of the East Baltic Early Neolithic cultures with the ancient ceramic culture of the South-West Baltic — the Ertebølle-Ellerbek, is absent. The presence of similar elements characteristic of the most ancient cultures of the both regions, similarity of shapes of vessels, may be explained by convergence. Such connections are suggested by the discovery of a complex with Ertebølle-Ellerbek ceramics in the north of Poland (44).

Also to be mentioned are finds at Ertebølle sites of pottery with ornaments similar to the Niemenian (45).

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