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(review) Henny Piezonka, *Jäger, Fischer, Töpfer. Wildbeuterguppen mit früher Keramik in Nordosteuropa im 6. und 5. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (= *Archäologie in Eurasien* 30). Bonn 2015: Habelt-Verlag, 437 pages, 105 tables.

At the beginning, the author describes the book as a result of her fascination with communities of hunters and fishers from the woodland zone and her love for the East, especially for Russia, which arose during her Siberian excavations directed by Hermann Parzinger, the supervisor of the doctoral thesis reviewed here. Parzinger, the author writes, is also responsible for her inclination towards research carried out on a large, transregional scale.

Henny Piezonka has aimed at researching the spread of the oldest ceramics east and north of the Baltic Sea in the 6th and 5th millennia BC. The mobile communities producing and using the ceramics made their livelihood from hunting and gathering. The subject has hitherto been studied predominantly from regional perspectives. The author writes, therefore, that the time has come to synthesise these approaches in an analysis based on consistent premises, leading to classification of the ceramics within the same types relevant to the entire field of study.

In her introduction, Piezonka defines the terms of the Neolithic Age and of an archaeological culture, which are crucial for her book, but by no means obvious, due to diverse research traditions in the studied area. Researchers from Poland, Finland and the Baltic states tend to identify the Neolithic Age with the predominance of agriculture, whereas archaeologists from the post-Soviet states usually consider the presence of ceramics as the decisive criterion. It is the latter view of the Neolithic that is shared by the author of the reviewed book.

Piezonka is aware that archaeological cultures have often been categorised according to rather vague “impressionistic” criteria and they fail to fully meet the standards of David Clarke’s polythetical model. She proposes, therefore, that the requirements for an archaeological culture be minimised and that the term itself be treated as equal to the term

of a ceramic style. She suggests the same procedure for other terms used in the classification of ceramics, such as “type”, “style” or “group”, which should be viewed as synonyms. In her opinion, this approach makes it possible to compare results of various regional studies carried out within different research traditions.

Next, Piezonka describes the natural environment of the examined area. Its southern part, situated in the East European Plain, encompasses numerous lakes and the drainage basins of the rivers flowing into the Baltic Sea, while the northern part consists of the drainage basins of the rivers flowing into the Arctic Ocean. In the 6th and 5th millennia BC, i.e. in the older Atlantic period, the climatic conditions in that area were definitely more favourable than there are now. Moreover, the level of the ground in those regions gradually rose, as it has done to the present day, accompanied by the receding shorelines of the Baltic Sea and the great lakes.

The third chapter analyses early ceramics from chosen sites in the examined area. The selection has proved indispensable, because at the first stage of the research the author gathered data on nearly a thousand sites discussed in the literature, and the information differed so much in its archaeological value that it was impossible to process it within one descriptive system. At the second stage, therefore, Piezonka selected only those sites which had yielded good quality material for further detailed study carried out by herself at relevant museums. In sum, 17 sites were chosen: 5 in Lithuania, 1 in Estonia, 3 in Finland and 8 in Russia (Fig. 8), with nearly 1600 fragments of ceramics representing 535 vessels. Moreover, 16 samples of organic material were obtained for radiocarbon analysis of the AMS type.

The macroscopic view of the material has provided detailed standardised data needed for the description of the technology and formal features (shapes and ornamentation) of the ceramics. The structural order of the material has been determined by examining all possible combinations of the features and the identified vessel units with the method of correspondence analysis.

In consequence, the entire material has been grouped in two major classes: 1. the Dubičiai and Narva ceramics; 2. the early comb ceramics with the Sperrings, Ka I:1 and Säräisniemi cultures and the Neolithic Veksa 3 layer. Moreover, objective criteria for the identity of the cultural units making up the classes have been identified, which has helped to propose a change in the cultural description of some of the analysed sites and to determine new taxonomy of the early comb ceramics in the north.

Before presenting the new perspective on the cultural situation between Belarus and the White Sea in the early Neolithic Age, Piezonka describes its Mesolithic basis. Next, she synthesises earlier findings with results of her own research within the cultural units of Dubičiai (Fig. 145); Serteya, Rudnya and Babinavičy (Fig. 148); Narva (Fig. 153); Valdaj (Fig. 157); KI:1 and Sperrings (Fig. 167); Säräisniemi (Fig. 171); KI:2, Jäkärälä and the early asbestos pottery. Additionally, she discusses the adjacent cultural units of Bug-Dniester, Sura, Dnepr-Donets, Upper-Dnepr, Middle-Don, from the Volga-Kama area and many more, commenting also on sites such as Zedmar, Dąbki or Ertebølle).

Further, the author takes a new approach to the subsequent stages of the Neolithic cultures in the examined area. To show the early Neolithic cultural situation between Belarus and the White Sea more clearly, she presents, as points of reference, the oldest ceramic assemblages from Japan (the incipient phase of the Jōmon culture) and the Canadian ceramics of the Woodland phase in the Laurel tradition.

It is at this stage of her research that Henny Piezonka decides to reconstruct the chronology and geography of the distribution of ceramics in the vast areas of Eastern Europe in the early Neolithic, i.e. from 6500 to 4500 BC. She complements her analysis with excellent tables synchronising the cultural phenomena (Fig. 196) and with a set of maps presenting the range of the cultures in temporal horizons separated by 500 years (Fig. 197–202). This method helps the reader to locate the previously analysed assemblages from the area between Belarus and the White Sea in the network of the early Neolithic cultural phenomena on the whole continent, or rather in the whole northern hemisphere.

The oldest East European ceramics were produced in the steppe zone in the complexes of Sursk (on the lower Dnepr), Rakušečnyj Jar (the lower Don), Kairšak and Elšan (the lower Volga) already by 6500 BC, so they are as distant in time as the oldest ceramics on Cyprus and Crete, and earlier than the oldest finds in other parts of the European continent. The oldest pottery in the complexes of the Serteya type on the upper Dvina, the area discussed by Piezonka, was produced already in *ca* 6000 BC. Five hundred years later, *ca* 5500 BC, ceramics were also known in the Narva and the Valday complexes. At the same time, they appeared for the first time in the oldest complexes of the Linear Pottery culture in Central Europe.

The reviewed publication combines the qualities of detailed monographs on individual sites with the merits of comparative transregional studies. Its modern classification and taxonomy based on mathematical factor analyses, its disciplined strategy of drawing conclusions and good selection of the material have contributed to a new convincing view of the temporal distribution of the oldest ceramics in Eastern Europe.

One flaw in the publication is that it does not attempt deeper interpretation of the presented view. There are no comments on the function of the ceramics in late hunter-gatherer communities or on the mechanisms of its distribution, except for a possible communication network over those vast areas or the effect of environmental determinants unrelated to the communications.

The greatest merit of the book consists in giving the reader the opportunity to independently assess the presented results and to look for solutions to the questions which Henny Piezonka has left unanswered.

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