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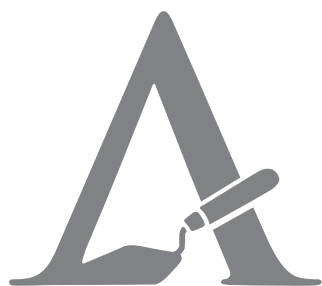
ARCHAEOLOGICA RESSOVIENSIA

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Wydział Humanistyczny
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Contents

ARTICLES

Mateusz Drewicz, Michał Pawleta Opinions of Polish Roman Catholic Clergy on Archaeological Research Conducted on Church Premises: A Pilot Study	7
Marie-Claire Ries Assessment of the Archaeological Potential of Prehistoric Settlement Areas along the Lake Shores and Wetlands of Carinthia, Southern Austria	19
Mariia Lobanova, Dmytro Kiosak Multidisciplinary Research on the Sabatinivka 1 Site: History and State of Art	43
Svitlana Ivanova Wooden Wagons in the Kurgans of the Northwestern Pontic Region (Catalogue)	57
Dariusz Król, Adam Olszewski, Teresa Dobrakowska, Mariusz Dobrakowski, Krystian Orczyk, Marcin Szpila Święte, Site 11: Monumental (?) FBC Cemetery in the Subcarpathian Loess Region	79
Vasile Diaconu, Alexandra Gereă, Dragoș Tătaru, Eduard Năstase, Bogdan Cerbu, Gabriela Sava, Oana Găză, Maria Ilie A Complex of Prehistoric Fortifications in the Moldavian Subcarpathians (Eastern Romania). Contributions to the Understanding of the Middle Bronze Age	99
Wojciech Rajpold On Two Newly Discovered “Scythian” Arrowheads from the Sandomierz Upland	115

DISCUSSIONS AND REVIEWS

Dmytro Kiosak (review) Simon Radchenko. <i>Portable and Parietal Art of Kamyana Mohyla, Ukraine</i> (= <i>BAR International Series</i> 3143). Oxford 2023: BAR Publishing, 228 pages, illustrated throughout in black & white, and colour, links to collection of 15 3D models.	127
Svitlana Ivanova, Mykhailo Videiko (review) Dmytro Kiosak. <i>Modelling the Rhythm of Neolithisation Between the Carpathians and the Dnieper River</i> (= <i>Antichistica</i> 41). Venezia 2024: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 270 pages, 68 figures.	131
Dalia Pokutta (review) A. Ghalichi, S. Reinhold, A. B. Rohrlach, A. A. Kalmykov, A. Childebayeva, H. Yu, F. Aron, L. Semerau, K. Bastert-Lamprichs, A. B. Belinskiy, N. Y. Berezina, Y. B. Berezin, N. Broomandkhoshbacht, A. P. Buzhilova, V. R. Erlikh, L. Fehren-Schmitz, I. Gambashidze, A. R. Kantorovich, K. B. Kolesnichenko, D. Lordkipanidze, R. G. Magomedov, K. Malek-Custodis, D. Mariaschk, V. E. Maslov, L. Mkrtchyan, A. Nagler, H. F. Nashli, M. Ochir, Y. Y. Piotrovskiy, M. Saribekyan, A. G. Sheremetev, T. Stöllner, J. Thomalsky, B. Vardanyan, C. Posth, J. Krause, C. Warinner, S. Hansen, W. Haak. 2024. The rise and transformation of Bronze Age pastoralists in the Caucasus. <i>Nature</i> 635, 917–925.	135

CHRONICLE

Carl Drexler

A Trip to the 2025 International Conference on the Anthropology of Salt	139
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OBITUARY NOTE

Adela Kovacs

Archaeology, a Never-Ending Story... In Memoriam Gheorghe Lazarovici (13 September 1941 – 3 February 2025)	147
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Svitlana Ivanova¹, Mykhailo Videiko²

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(review) Dmytro Kiosak. *Modelling the Rhythm of Neolithisation Between the Carpathians and the Dnieper River (= Antichistica 41)*.
Venezia 2024: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 270 pages, 68 figures.

The publication of new studies in Neolithic archaeology, especially on such an exotic subject for English-language literature, is always noteworthy, as such contributions not only expand our understanding of ancient cultures but also invigorate academic discourse. This is especially true when these studies employ advanced modern analytical methods, ensuring the rigorous examination of materials, and when the author's interpretations offer fresh perspectives that are both innovative and well-grounded in evidence. Such works significantly enhance the field by challenging existing paradigms and fostering new lines of inquiry. This is also a positive in the case when the author of the book has conducted his own research in this area for many years, making many interesting discoveries.

The book provides the author's comprehensive exploration of Neolithization in the easternmost region of early farming expansion, referred to by the author as *the region between the Carpathians and the Dnieper*. It integrates the latest archaeological discoveries and scholarly debates, using chronological modeling of radiocarbon dates to guide readers through the complex and often contentious archaeology of this area.

Notably, the book challenges the long-held assumption that southern Eastern European hunter-gatherers adopted agriculture immediately upon its arrival in the region. Its clear and logical structure, aligned with archaeological periodization, ensures that each chapter builds seamlessly on the last, allowing readers to follow the progression of the author's arguments with ease.

It is worth emphasizing what we find particularly interesting: the author's assertion that modeling the rhythm of Neolithization between the Carpathians and

the Dnieper suggests that stylistic groups in ceramic decoration do not necessarily align with the chronological positions of the respective sites. Instead, these stylistic variations may reflect complex social processes and might have coexisted over extended periods. In fact, this coexistence and interaction has already attracted the attention of researchers (Burdo 2001).

The author further concludes that early farmers and their hunter-gatherer neighbors utilized space differently. Consequently, early farmers and hunter-gatherers could coexist within the same region without engaging in significant interactions, as their economic strategies were fundamentally distinct. Even different groups of farmers may have had different strategies, depending on the natural features of the region, as, for example, in the Linear Pottery Culture (Bickle and Whittle (eds.) 2013)

Particular attention in our opinion is given to the well-founded concept of deconstructing the Buh-Dniester culture. The author critically reviews the historiography of this culture, reexamining its economic and cultural framework while addressing the longstanding debate over the existence or absence of agriculture in this context. The study meticulously describes sites traditionally attributed to the Buh-Dniester culture, analyzes stratigraphic layers, and incorporates radiocarbon dating to support its findings. This rigorous approach lends the author's conclusions both logic and credibility, even though they may face resistance from proponents of traditional perspectives on the status of the Buh-Dniester culture.

Another significant thesis presented by the author is the need to reconceptualize the Chalcolithic period. Copper artefacts, which first appear in the

Late Neolithic, do not necessarily mark a transformative milestone for the Eneolithic era. Instead, the focus shifts to the hypothesis of new social dynamics during the Chalcolithic, characterized by a greater emphasis on social hierarchies than in earlier periods. This shift represents a profound change, with the spread of copper artefacts serving as just one expression of how material culture was manipulated to assert and maintain elevated social status. At the same time, there is no attempt to truly assess the consequences of the development of metallurgy and metalworking in the Eneolithic, even at the level already covered in historiography (Černýh 1978; Todorova 1982; Mares 2012).

The author engages deeply with contemporary debates, presenting a balanced discussion of competing theories on the Neolithization of southern Eastern Europe. Furthermore, its reflections on sustainable practices in ancient societies hold relevance for addressing modern environmental challenges.

On the one hand, it is worth understanding that this book is not a collection of all of the available information regarding this era between the Carpathians and the Dnieper. On the other hand, the inclusion of high-quality artefact photographs significantly enriches the reader's experience, while numerous detailed site maps effectively illustrate the geographic scope of the research.

However, certain aspects may not always be accepted without reservation. While the book is rich in detail, its use of dense academic jargon may present challenges for non-specialist readers. Some sections resemble lists of radiocarbon date calibrations and stratigraphic descriptions written as prose, which might have been clearer if presented in tables. At times, the language becomes metaphorical (e.g., “cradle of Neolithization” or “steel of prehistory”), which arguably enhances readability but may strike some readers as inconsistent in tone. In the last decade, solving all problems based mainly on isotopic dates has become widespread and popular. It would be good if these dates were obtained as a result of systematic selection of large series of samples. It is no longer realistic to attribute the identified discrepancies to the quality of laboratory work, as is done with the Kyiv one. It is possible to continue playing with the selection of convenient dates and mathematical methods, but this is a path to nowhere. And this is perfectly visible from the content of the reviewed publication.

Perhaps the result would have looked better and would have been more convincing if the author had studied both Neolithic and Precucuteni-Cucuteni

Trypillia pottery at the same level as he did with the dates.

After providing an overall assessment of the book, we would like to delve deeper into several topics it addresses, which, in my opinion, merit further open discussion.

1. “Discontinuous model of Neolithization”.

The author highlights gaps in radiocarbon dates for early farming sites. He proposes to explain the existing “stepped” picture of total calibrations by temporary retreats of early farmers from the region to refugia on its borders – in the Carpathians or eastern Central Europe. The picture he paints of the abandonment of fields and cultural landscapes is perhaps too dramatic. Although periods of demographic growth and decline did indeed alternate in prehistory, it isn't easy to imagine a complete depopulation of a fertile and habitable region. However, a look at the maps in the monograph shows the unevenness in the archaeological study of the territories and all the “gaps” and “discontinuities” are simply unfilled gaps in our knowledge. Which is actually proven by the discovery by the author of the book of monuments of the LBC Culture on the Southern Bug. On the other hand, many “gaps” can be filled even now, if we take into account the already available information about the sites, for example, Precucuteni-Trypillia A (Bodean 2001).

While the temporary loss of identity may be vivid, it does not equate to the physical extinction of a population. The population could endure in “simpler forms of existence” lacking many superstructural frameworks, markers of previous collective identity, and still serve as the foundation for future, vibrant cultural developments. For instance, the Tatareuca Noua 15 settlement, mentioned by the author, has yielded local ceramics as well as ceramics from the Linear Pottery Culture. The latter exhibits signs of degeneration, indicating a loss of cultural tradition. Radiocarbon dating places the site in the early 5th millennium BCE. The site has been interpreted by the excavator, Olga Larina, as a settlement of former Linear Pottery Culture people who were in the process of losing their cultural identity (Larina 2006). Regarding Precucuteni-Trypillia A, existing studies on the formation of a diverse ceramic complex of this cultural phenomenon have not been taken into account. And they precisely testify to the presence of features of both “disappeared” and neighboring archaeological cultures (Burdo 2001; 2003; 2005; Papusoi 2008).

Therefore, it is no coincidence that paleogenetic studies on the transition from the Eneolithic to the Bronze Age in the North Pontic Steppe highlight

a mix of genetic continuity and transformative cultural shifts. Research reveals that populations in this region experienced significant migrations and interactions with other groups, influencing their genetic makeup while retaining some ancestral characteristics, thus making the picture much more complex than a suggested complete replacement (repeated replacements?) of the initial settlers (Ivanova 2023; Nikitin *et al.* 2025).

2. The division between the world of hunter-gatherers and that of farmers makes many feel uneasy – just as does the distinction between cattle breeders and farmers during the Eneolithic and Bronze Age. After all, hunting and gathering remained significant not only for Neolithic societies but well beyond. For example, this is evidenced by osteological materials from the settlements of Precucuteni-Trypillia A, which remained unknown to the author (Žuravlev 2008). Even in the Middle Ages, these activities were more than mere pastimes. Groups of diverse origins could adopt new activities based on their choices, shaped by unique environmental conditions or external pressures. It is reasonable to envision early farmers engaging in hunting within newly colonized territories – much like the region under discussion.

Rather than separating early farmers from their contemporaneous hunter-gatherers, it would be more productive to view them as part of a complex system, a network of interrelated groups. Populations of different origins cooperated in the shared exploitation of a single region for centuries (Reingruber 2016). The focus should be on the nature and archaeological visibility of their interactions, rather than emphasizing exaggerated differences between these groups.

Moreover, the choice to label the ceramic hunter-gatherers of 6th–5th millennium BCE as “para-Neolithic” is far from being obvious. The term “para-Neolithic” is sometimes used in archaeology to describe societies that exhibit certain characteristics of Neolithic cultures – such as pottery, basic agriculture, or settled lifestyles – without fully embracing the complete Neolithic package, which typically includes domesticated plants and animals, permanent villages, and advanced tools. However, the necessity and utility of the term can be debated. Existing terms like “incipient Neolithic,” or “final Mesolithic” can convey the same meaning without adding another layer of terminology. “Para-Neolithic” is not universally defined, leading to confusion or inconsistent application. Some may use it to describe transitional groups, while others might apply it to societies that resist Neolithic characteristics alto-

gether. In some areas, the Neolithic “package” was adopted piecemeal or modified, making it unnecessary to apply a new term rather than studying these variations within the broader Neolithic framework.

3. By labeling the onset of the Steppe Eneolithic as “the end of Neolithization” the author seemingly attributes changes within early farming societies to external factors, which had minimal relevance to the Neolithization of Northern Ukraine. This process occurred during the later phases of the Cucuteni-Trypillian cultural complex. The author appears to implicitly support the hypothesis of a militaristic dynamic in the interactions between the steppe’s mobile pastoralists and the Trypillians. While this hypothesis has faced sustained and often severe criticism over the years, it continues to appear in contemporary literature, though it is far from dominant (Videiko 1994). Consequently, when considering the influence of pastoralists on the spread of early farming settlements, it is essential to engage with this long-standing and ongoing debate, which includes a well-developed system of arguments from both perspectives. Given the fact that the “end of Neolithization” in the steppe belt actually coincided with the crisis of farmers in Southeastern Europe caused by climate change, it is possible to consider the displacement of the steppe population as a wave of relatively few refugees, rather than cruel conquerors (Videjko and Burdo 2020).

It is generally accepted that the spread of Cucuteni-Trypillian groups in Northern Ukraine occurred with significant delays, often lasting several centuries, without any apparent reasons. This phenomenon can be observed and explained without invoking Steppe invasions.

Moreover, the Eneolithic and Bronze Age are traditionally grouped together as the Paleometal Epoch. However, the author appears to combine Linear Pottery Culture groups, Trypillians, Neolithic and Eneolithic cultures under the broad label of early farmers. While this approach aligns with modern geneticist views on population history, it clearly contradicts the established archaeological periodization of the region. This radical reorganization is presented without sufficient discussion or justification.

Clarifying and discussing these aspects would enhance the integration of the book’s ideas into the broader context of archaeological science. It would help elucidate the relationship between the proposed terminological innovations and previously established theories, while also providing a rationale for the selective emphasis on certain sites or cultural elements.

This work is an essential resource for students and professionals in archaeology, especially those interested in the eastern frontier of Neolithization. The book's adept use of a number of tools for chronological modeling provides valuable insights, making it particularly beneficial for archaeology students.

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