

---

VLADIMIR SLAVCHEV\*

## ***ABOUT THE BEGINNING OF GUMELNIȚA CULTURE IN NORTH-EAST OF BALKAN PENINSULA***

---

**Abstract:** Articolul de față reprezintă o abordare nouă a unui subiect complex și discutat intens în literatura de specialitate: începutul culturii Gumelnița. Sunt prezentate ipotezele despre geneza, evoluția și sincronismele civilizației gumelnițene, insistându-se asupra variantelor regionale și aspectelor locale, în special asupra aspectul cultural Stoicani-Aldeni. Studiul se concentrează asupra descoperirilor din republica Moldova și din sudul Ucrainei. Este abordată problema importurilor gumelnițene descoperite în așezările Precucuteni III final de la Ruseștii Noi I și Holercani I (Fig.1). Vasele gumelnițene descoperite la Holercani I, sugerează contacte pe termen lung între cele două culturi. Sincronismul dintre Gumelnița A1 și prima jumătate a fazei Precucuteni III este demonstrată de figurinele antropomorfe de lut și vasele tipic gumelnițene, descoperite în așezarea de la Aleksandrovka. Plecând de la aceste importuri se discută posibilitatea unor contacte anterioare între cele două zone culturale. În opinia noastră, la acest moment ipoteza lui Eugen Comșa, conform căreia cultura Gumelnița evoluează exclusiv din cultura Boian este greu de acceptat. Este clar că apariția complexului cultural Kodjadermen–Gumelnița–Karanovo VI este consecința unui semnificativ proces de integrare culturală, care are loc în peninsula Balcanică și în zone adiacente acesteia. La actualul stadiu al cercetărilor, este foarte clar că geneza culturii Gumelnița reprezintă un proces lung și complex, originile acesteia trebuind căutate cu precauție în toate fenomenele culturale anterioare. Studiul de față sugerează doar o altă zonă în care pot fi căutate originile acestei culturi.

**Keywords:** eneolithic, Kodjadermen–Gumelnița–Karanovo VI, Stoicani-Aldeni aspect, Precucuteni culture, Tripolie culture, pottery.

The periodization of the initial stages of Gumelnița culture in the northeast part of Balkan Peninsula – along the right bank of the river Prut and the areas of Danube lakes on the territory of modern Southwest Ukraine and Southern Moldova – is widely discussed problem. On the right bank of the river Prut there is a group of settlements dated to the beginning of the late Eneolithic<sup>1</sup> which is known under different names: "cultural aspect Aldeni II" (Ștefan 1944: 78), "Gumelnița-Ariuşd" (Dumitrescu 1964: 53-66), "Stoicani-Aldeni" (Dragomir 1983). E. Comșa's opinion, that it is necessary to allocate them as an independent culture, has been heavily criticized and currently is not accepted (Субботин 1983: 6-7). All the researchers agree that is a local variant of an early stage of the Gumelnița culture Dumitrescu 1964: 63; Черныш 1962: 27; 1965: 6; Dragomir 1983: 9–15).

The discovery of the Gumelnița type monuments on the left bank of the river Prut and in the area of the lakes Kagul, Kugurlui, Ialpug and Katlabukh has caused a heated debate. According to E. Comșa, they belong to cultural aspect Aldeni II (Comșa 1963: 8). I. T. Dragomir (1977: 482–486; 1983) and V. Bejlekchi (1978: 15–16) have the same opinion. E. Chernysh unites them in "Bolgrad-Aldeni culture"

---

\* Archaeological Musuem of Varna, Bulgaria. e-mail: vladosl@yahoo.com.

(Черныш 1982: 253–356). In S. Bibikov's opinion it is possible to allocate these monuments into an independent variant of Gumelnița culture (Бібіков 1971: 213). The identification of such variant called Bolgrad, is proved by L. Subbotin (Субботин 1978: 36–41; 1983; 1992: 19–21). The opinion of the later scholar is maintained by the author of the present article as the only example of completely and scientifically argued hypothesis supported by concrete archaeological material, which is profoundly and effectively analyzed. H. Todorova holds a different position. She claims that the settlements of this area belong to the independent Bolgrad culture representing a northern variant of the Varna culture (Тодорова 1979: 32–33, 70; 1986: 122). However, it is clear that the carriers of this phenomenon appear in the steppe areas North from the Danube delta and East from the river Prut as a separate cultural entity with quite developed material culture, with domesticated animals and cultural plants (see Бейлекчи с. 135–138; Субботин 1983: с. 119–129). According to V. Bejlekchi (Бейлекчи 1978: 135) and H. Todorova (Тодорова 1979: 32–33, 70; 1986: 122 ) they come here from the South, and in L. Subbotin's opinion it is possible to trace two streams of migrants – from the right bank of the Prut river (Western) and from the northwest Dobrudja (Southern) (Субботин 1983: 120–122).

There were some attempts of periodization of the settlements belonging to Alden and Bolgrad variant of Gumelnița culture (Comşa 1963; Бейлекчи 1978; Субботин 1983; Dragomir 1983). If we examine them, I.T. Dragomir's division is unsuccessful, since in the monograph dedicated to "cultural aspect Stoicani-Aldeni", he illustrates its development by numerous finds from Vulcănești II and Lopățica settlements, belonging to Bolgrad variant but at the same time the characteristics of the Aldeni variant are unclearified. According to him, on Ozernoe, Vulcănești II and Bolgrad settlements it is possible to track three stages of their development (Dragomir 1983: 22–23), and their researchers clearly documented only two building horizons, precisely emphasizing the uniformity of the material (Бейлекчи 1978: 27–87; Субботин 1983: 120–124). E. Comşa has identified two phases of development in Aldeni variant on the basis of the stratigraphy of Stoicani settlement and the characteristics of the material from Aldeni, Brăilița and Drăgănești-Tecuci settlements (Comşa 1963: 7-26). L. Subbotin's periodization of Bolgrad variant is very well argued, it is based on the mutual occurrence of different types of vessels in the settlements (Субботин 1983: 119–125). All researchers agree that, Bolgrad variant, as well as Aldeni variant are short-term phenomena which has disappeared quickly. Therefore, it is very difficult to define clear sub-periods, having in mind that this is the time of the formation of Gumelnița culture, when the processes are very intensive, the tendencies are still beginning, and any suggestion for chronological sequence of the settlements in such short interval of time would have number of disputable moments and risks.

Many works are devoted to the synchronization of Aldeni and Bolgrad settlements with Precucuteni–Early Tripolie settlements. This problem is a key point in the identification of relations and chronological conformity of Gumelnița A1 and A2 stages with Precucuteni III and Cucuteni A. Although the problem seems very well-studied, there are, however, some issues that were not fully clarified (Berciu 1961: 67; Roman 1963: 45–46; Dumitrescu 1964: 53, 63)<sup>2</sup>. A large number of mutual imports, found on these settlements, repeatedly drew attention of the scholars and as a result of their research the synchronism of early stages of Aldeni and Bolgrad variants with the end of the phase Precucuteni III can be

accepted as firmly proved. Some fragments of Gumelnița pottery, found on settlements of the final Early Tripolie (the end of Precucuteni III) Ruseștii Noi I (from the hut and the storage pit of the bottom horizon) and Holercani I are shown on Fig.1. However, the occurrence of special Gumelnița forms (vessels that are connected by the crosspiece) in Holercani I suggests long-term contacts between the two cultures which would facilitate the production of such product and its occurrence in early Tripolie environment – the tradition of using of double vessels starts exactly towards the end of Tripolie A<sup>3</sup>. But many strong arguments suggesting earlier contacts between Gumelnița culture and Precucuteni culture can be achieved after the recent discoveries in Moldova and Romania.

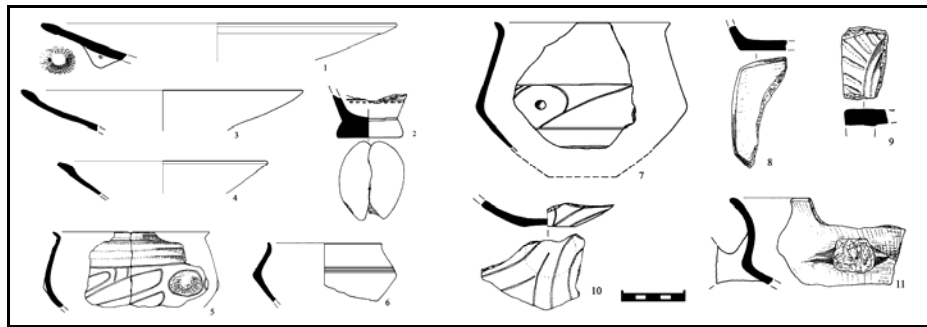


Fig.1

For a long time it had been considered, that settlements Traian-Dealul Fîntînilor and Tîrpești are the reference sites for the end of the Precucuteni culture in Romania, and their difference from the settlements of the final early Tripolie from the area East of Prut (Cărbuna, Ruseștii Noi I, Lenkovți, Luka-Vrublevetskaya, etc.) was explained by the earlier beginning of the Cucucuteni-Tripolie culture to the west of this border (see Marinescu-Bîlcu 1981: 137–138). This position has been criticized by V. Zbenovich who considers, that there are similar (and synchronous!) settlements are in Romania, but they are either poorly investigated, or unpublished (Збенювич 1989: 135–141). He points Bosanci as one of these monuments (Збенювич 1989: 137).

During the last two decades many settlements were found between the East Carpathian Mountains and the river Prut that contain pottery with the same characteristics as the pottery found on the above marked territory of modern Moldova and Ukraine. Unfortunately, most of them are unpublished<sup>4</sup>, but their presence unequivocally testifies that the cultural development within the last phase of the Precucuteni-Tripolie A culture is similar and with equal pace that passes through the same stages both to the East, and to the West of the river Prut. Even more, in addition to the already discussed sites, the top Precucuteni level of the tell Poduri-Dealul Ghindaru which V. Zbenovich's monograph synchronizes with Tîrpești (Monah 2001–2002: 3) should be dated to the last phase, too. At such synchronization it appears, that Precucuteni level of Tîrpești, as well as Traian-Dealul Fîntînilor belong to the first half of the Precucuteni III phase, and consequently also all repeatedly described and quoted in the literature Gumelnița imports, found on these settlements.

However, such "heretic" opinion is quite justified if it was to address the ceramics found on the settlement Coșernița I. In 1986, V. Markevich excavates there a ground dwelling (Маркевич 1990: 28–45). According to his opinion this settlement belongs to an unknown type, which in the periodization of E. Chernysh (Черныш 1982: 172–174, 177–190) stands at the beginning of the late stage of the Early Tripolie or to the fourth or the fifth step (Маркевич 1990: 44). Only V. Markevich's long-term experience would be sufficient to trust his dating of a monument – he took part and carried out independent excavations of early Tripolie monuments since the 1950s. In addition, the detailed publication of the materials, as well as my work with the material entirely<sup>5</sup> confirms such conclusion – it is possible to think that Coșernița I is a reference monument for the beginning of Precucuteni III between Prut and Dnestr. A special attention deserve some fragments of vessels found during the excavation of the settlement. They are made according to the characteristics of Precucuteni–Tripolie pottery tradition, but their forms have no analogies both in earlier, and in later Precucuteni monuments, and find further development in Gumelnița environment (Fig.2). Moreover, the find of a vessel, which body shape reminds a body of a duck strongly testifies for the relation of these products to the early Tripolie culture, rather than for the considered so far link to Gumelnița traditions – it is decorated with combination of channeling and stamp prints typical for the Early Tripolie<sup>6</sup>.

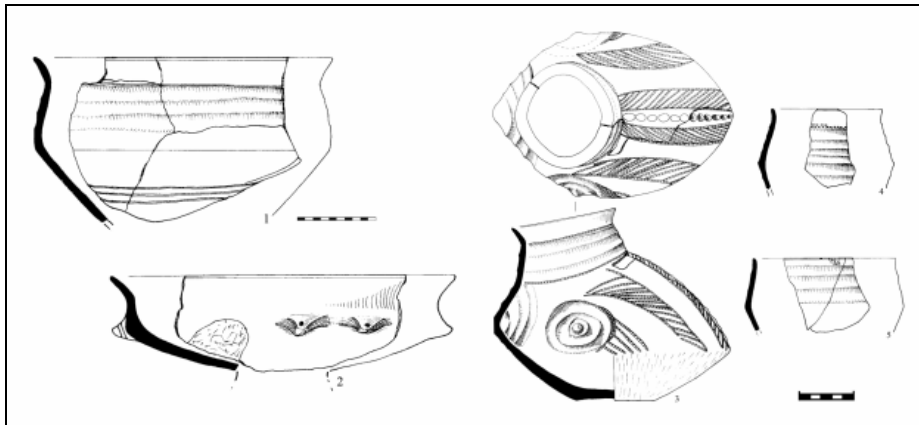


Fig.2.

The synchronization of the first half of Precucuteni III with the beginning Gumelnița A1 can explain, at last, the occurrence of the anthropomorphic clay figurine (Патокова et al. 1989: 22, рис.8/11) and a large amphora with handles (Зиньковская 1981: 17, рис.3/3), typical for Gumelnița monuments on such disputable settlement from chronological point of view, as Aleksandrovka which, despite these finds, majority of authors date to the beginning, instead of the end of the last phase of early Tripolie. Moreover, such opinion allows relevant consideration of the seemingly improbable finds of Precucuteni II sherds in early Gumelnița dwelling investigated at a settlement near Brăila<sup>7</sup>.

Having in mind the considerable set of vessel forms common for the ceramic assemblages of the last phase of Hamangia culture and the "pontic" (Berciu 1966: 41; Marinescu-Bîlcu 1972: 29–38), the "Dobruđjean" (Pippidi, Berciu 1965: 42–43)

or the "pontic-dobrojean" (Berciu 1961: 75; 1966: 17) variant of the Gumelnița culture or Varna culture (Todorova 1978: 136-145), as well as the full continuity between the Karanovo V and Karanovo VI cultures, it is possible to conclude that the hypothesis that relates the origin of Gumelnița culture only with Boian culture (Comșa 1961: 58-62; 1974: 245-251) is unacceptable. It is obvious, that the addition of cultural complex Kodjadermen–Gumelnița–Karanovo VI is a consequence of significant integration processes, which took place over the East half of Balkan Peninsula and some parts of this big area have their own specificities about which D. Berciu wrote earlier (Berciu 1961: 75-79). Also it is clear, that the genesis of this cultural phenomenon is long enough process and traces of it should be sought very carefully in the areas of all previous cultures. Here we only have marked one of the possible directions of this search which continuation would give even more important and interesting results.

## Notes

1. Here the culture Gumelnița is named the Late Eneolithic phenomenon as it used accepted in Bulgarian periodization of prehistory. In Romania it is named Neolithic, and in Moldova and in Ukraine – Early Eneolithic.
2. Also see the last review of a problem in В. Сорокин, *К проблеме культурных связей прекукутенско-раннетрипольских племен с обществами культур Балкано-Дунайского региона*, в: V. A. Dergaciov (red.), *Vestigii arheologice din Moldova*, Chișinău, 1997: 138–154.
3. See И. В. Мельничук, *Исследования на раннетрипольском поселении Багринешты VII*, в: *Археологические исследования в Молдове за 1986 г.*, Кишинев, 1990, с. 51, рис. 6 56.
4. The number of the unpublished finds from the different places is displayed in the exhibition of the Museum of History and Archaeology in Piatra-Neamț.
5. I would like to thank Dr. habil. V.A. Dergaciov and V. Bikbaev for the possibility to work with the finds found during the excavations of the settlement that are kept in the museum of the Institute of Archaeology, Ancient History and Ethnography of the Academy of Science of Republic of Moldova.
6. Later Gumelnița examples are ornamented by white and incised lines and by pricks with round form.
7. The monument was noticed by S. Pandrea in October, 2004 on a symposium in Piatra-Neamț, devoted to the 120-anniversary of opening of Cucuteni culture.

## References

- Бейлекчи, В. С. 1978. *Ранний энеолит низовьев Прута и Дуная*, Кишинев.
- Berciu, D. 1961. *Contribuții la problemele neoliticului în România în lumina noilor cercetări*, București.
- Berciu, D. 1966. *Cultura Hamangia. Noi contribuții, I*, București.
- Бібіков, С. М. 1971. Пам'ятки культури Гумельниця оп території УРСР. в: *Археологія Української РСР*, Київ.
- Черныш, Е. К. 1964. Многослойное поселение у г. Болград Одесской области. *Краткие сообщения Одесского Государственного Археологического музея за 1962 г.*
- Черныш, Е. К. 1982. Энеолит Правобережной Украины и Молдавии. в: В. Массон, Н. Я. Мерперт (ред.). *Энеолит СССР. Археология СССР 3*, Москва.
- Comșa, E. 1961. К вопросу о переходной фазе от культуры Боян к культуре Гумельниця. Предварительный очерк. *Dacia* N.S. V: 58–62.
- Comșa, E. 1963. Unele probleme ale aspectului cultural Aldeni II. *Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche* XIV (1): 7-32.

- Comşa, E. 1974. *Istoria comunităţilor culturii Boian*, Bucureşti.
- Dragomir, I. T. 1983. *Eneoliticul din sud-estul României. Aspectul cultural Stiocani-Aldeni*, Bucureşti.
- Dragomir, I. T. 1977. Contribuţii privind ritul funerar şi credinţele magico-religioase la comunităţile aspectului cultural Stiocani-Aldeni. *Studii şi Cercetări de Istorie Veche şi Arheologie XXVIII* (4): 477-508.
- Dumitrescu, Vl. 1964. Consideration et données nouvelles sur le problème du synchronisme des civilisations de Cucuteni et de Gumelniţa. *Dacia N.S. VIII*: 53–66.
- Маркевич, В. И. 1990. Раннетрипольское поселение Кошерница I. *Археологические исследования в Молдове за 1986 г.*, Кишинев: 28–45.
- Marinescu-Bîlcu, S. 1972. Asupra unor aspecte ale raporturilor dintre culturile Precucuteni şi Hamangia, *Pontica* 5: 29–38.
- Marinescu-Bîlcu, S. 1981. *Ţirpeşti – from prehistory to history in Eastern Romania*, BAR. International series, 107, Oxford.
- Мельничук, И. В. 1990. Исследования на раннетрипольском поселении Багринешты VII, в: *Археологические исследования в Молдове за 1986 г.*, Кишинев.
- Monah, D. 2001-2002. Tell-ul de la Poduri-Dealul Ghindaru. *O lume regăsită satul cucutenian de la Poduri*, Bucureşti.
- Пассек, Т. С, Черныш, Е. К. 1965. Открытие культуры Гумельница в СССР. *Краткие сообщения Института археологии АН СССР* 100.
- Патокова, Э. Ф., Петренко, В. Г., Бурдо, Н.Б., Полищук, Л.Ю. 1989. *памятники трипольской культуры в Северо-Западном Причерноморье*, Киев.
- Pippidi, D. M., Berciu, D. 1965. *Din istoria Dobrogei, vol. I. Geţi şi greci la Dunărea de Jos*, Bucureşti.
- Roman, P. 1963. Ceramica precucuteniană din aria culturilor Boian–Gumelniţa şi semnificaţia ei. *Studii şi Cercetări de Istorie Veche XIV* (1): 33-50.
- Сорокин, В. 1997. К проблеме культурных связей прекукутенско-раннетрипольских племен с обществами культур Балкано-Дунайского региона. в: Dergaciov, V.A. (red.), *Vestigii arheologice din Moldova*, Chişinău: 138–154.
- Субботин, Л. В. 1978. О синхронизации памятников культуры Гумельница в Нижнем Подунавье. в: *Археологические исследования Северо-Западного Причерноморья*, Киев.
- Субботин, Л. В. 1983. *Памятники культуры Гумельница юго-запада Украины*, Киев.
- Субботин, Л. В. 1992. Культурно-историческая интерпретация энеолитических памятников Болградской группы. в: В. П. Ванчугов (ред.). *Северное Причерноморье. Ритмы культурогенеза*, Одесса.
- Ştefan, Gh. 1944. Raport asupra săpăturilor arheologice de la Băieşti-Aldeni. *Raport al Muzeului Naţional de Antichităţi*, Bucureşti.
- Todorova, H. 1978. Das Spätäneolithikum an der westlichen Schwarzmeerküste. *Studia praehistorica* 1–2: 136–145.
- Тодорова, Х. 1979. *Энеолит Болгарии*, София.
- Тодорова, Х. 1986. *Каменно-медната епоха в България*, София.
- Зиньковская, Н. Б. 1981. Кухонная керамика раннетрипольского поселения Александровка. в: *Памятники древних культур Северо-Западного Причерноморья*, Киев.
- Збенович, В. Г. 1989. *Ранний этап трипольской культуры на территории Украины*, Киев.