

THE CERNAVODĂ III CULTURE AND THE FINAL COPPER AGE OF THE NORTHWEST PONTIC REGION

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The emergence of the Cernavodă III culture in the Lower Danube area coincides with noticeable cultural changes in other European regions occurred around 3500/3400 B.C. Whereas cultural development in the northern Balkan area was mainly connected with the spread of the Cernavodă III traditions, cultural alterations in most of the central Europe were determined by strong Boleráz impulses. The cultural block Cernavodă III-Boleráz and related cultural groups constituted a separate cultural system covering vast territories of the southeast and east middle Europe.

Slightly different trends were manifested to the east of the block in question, i.e. in the Carpathian-Dniester region. It is here that the historic-cultural situation was mainly conditioned by the process of desintegration of the previously fairly homogenous Cucuteni-Tripolye culture. It split into several quite independent local groups which occupied different parts of the region. Simultaneously with the formation of the Cernavodă III-Boleráz block, the Tripolye area came through a new kind of cultural integration caused by the spatial expansion of the Horodiştea-Gordineşti group. This new integration was extended far from initial area reaching the Lower Dniepr region and even the Lower Don. For East Europe it can be to some extent considered as a cultural opposition with regard to the Cernavodă III- Boleráz standards.

This statement can be obviously demonstrated by peculiarities of the historical-cultural situation in the northwest Pontic area at the turn from the Final Copper Age to the Early Bronze Age. It was by the end of the final Copper Age that the region was occupied by the Usatovo group. Two main stages can be discerned in its evolution. Earlier sites of the group shows very close connections with those of the Vykhvatintsy group localized on the middle Dniester. They are mostly concentrated in the Lower Dniester region and remains almost unknown in the Lower Prut area. On the second stage the whole region was penetrated by the Horodiştea-Gordineşti traditions whose presence on the Lower Prut is especially noticeable. In fact the Folteşti group located east of the Prut can be considered rather as a result of the second impulse from the forest-steppe regions than as an extension of the Usatovo area from the Lower Dniester.

These events removed the southeastern border of the Folteşti-Usatovo group on the Lower Danube towards the Cernavodă III area. Consequently, one could expect quite intensive mutual contacts between the two cultures. Nevertheless, interrelations between them seem to have been fairly weak. They can be traced, for instance, only on the basis of several pottery sherds discovered in some sites of the Usatovo-Folteşti group. At the same the contacts did not bring about essential transformation of the Usatovo-Folteşti group. It remained an independent cultural phenomenon with regard to the Cernavodă III culture. Similarly, influence of the Usatovo-Folteşti group in the Cernavodă III area is practically invisible.

The situation under consideration shows the opposition between central and east European cultural systems appeared as early as the end of the Final Copper Ages, long before the westward expansion of the Yamnaya culture. Both systems were developing quite independently, without apparent trends to a productive cultural exchange.