

TRYING TO DEFINE AND DEAL WITH “BUFFER TERRITORIES” IN THE WEST PONTIC LATE BRONZE AGE*

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Abstract: *The methodology to approach the cultural phenomena in prehistoric times may ne diversified by the inclusion of the micro-regional and macro-regional patterns of analyze. By its location and cultural diversity the west Pontic area during Late Bronze Age offers the elements for a study case. Although, it can be noticed an internal cultural sequecing, I think is not due to a „cultural competition”. The analysis of archaeological evidences shows that the differences represent the sum of the responses to the impact factors. According to this scenario mediator role was taken by „buffer/contact zone”, which were meant to include, to diversify, to transmit artifacts, technologies, contents and meanings. By a “buffer/contact territory”, I understand a fluctuant territory situated between areas in which rules emerged, acted and were respected by each of the involved side. According to this scenario, it can be easily understood that a part of the buffer territories in the Lower Danube, and I refer here to the Coslogeni area, survived by the services they provided – the means of crossing the Danube – to the nearby communities. In this case, those communities enjoyed a period of economic self-sufficiency that generated short-term survival, but then, on the long-term lead to a gradual disappearance or re-/absorption with respect to the other phenomena with a higher dynamic.*

* The present contribution represents a recovery of an older attempt as concern the topic, cf. BOLOHAN 2005. Since the article has not circulated in an adequate ratio, I thought that a comeback and an updated version would be welcome. These lines at hand represent the *nucleus* of the next attempt regarding the Late Bronze Age interconnections in the Lower Danube area.

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Thus, this model may explain the great diversity of cultural items and especially that of the metallic artifacts in an area without any important raw material source.

Rezumat: *Metodologia abordării fenomenelor culturale în perioadele preistorice poate fi diversificată prin includerea unor modele de analiză microregională și macroregională. Prin amplasarea sa, precum și prin diversitatea formelor de expresie culturală, ținutul vest-pontic în perioada târzie a Epocii bronzului oferă toate elementele unui asemenea studiu de caz. Deși se poate observa o secvențiere culturală internă, consider că aceasta nu se datorează „competiției culturale”. Analiza evidențelor arheologice ne arată că diferențele reprezintă suma tipurilor de răspuns la multitudinea factorilor de impact. În cadrul acestui scenariu rolul de mediator a fost preluat de „zonele de contact”, care au avut menirea de a include, diversifica, transmite artefacte, tehnologii, conținuturi și înțelesuri. Prin „zone de contact” am definit un teritoriu fluctuant, situat într-o macromediune care prezintă caracteristici generale comune. Între unitățile culturale componente există reguli care acționează și sunt respectate de către toate entitățile implicate. În aceste condiții, unele „zone de contact” de la Dunărea de Jos, mă refer aici la aria Coslogeni, au supraviețuit pe baza serviciilor – în acest caz, stăpânirea zonelor de trecere a Dunării. Astfel, comunitățile au beneficiat pe termen scurt de o perioadă de autosuficiență dar, pe termen lung, autosuficiența a dus la treptata dispariție în fața fenomenelor cu o dinamică accentuată.*

Acest model de analiză ar putea explica diversitatea artefactelor, în special a celor metalice, într-un ținut care se remarcă prin quasi-absența surselor de materie primă.

Introductory notes

For the moment I'm trying to focus upon some cultural interferences, mainly in the area of the eastern Balkan and west Black Sea coast, which may be considered as playing the role of a „buffer territory”.

For the next I considered important to introduce some methodological and theoretical explanations. For the time being, one can notice the existence of three different cultural areas: 1. The Mycenaean civilisation situated within the „moving frontiers”; 2. the so called Mycenaean periphery including huge areas from continental Greece (the north-western Thessaly, Epirus, Macedonia) the north-western and western Anatolia, the Levant, Cyprus, Crete, Southern Italy, Sardinia, Aeolian islands, the Dalmatian shores; 3. A contact area or an area of cultural similarities/buffer territory situated between the Stara Planina range and the inferior part of the Lower Danube. I suppose that at no time these three areas have not been in opposition. Furthermore, I admit a cultural complementarity by observing the preeminence/prevalence of the first area. This kind of cultural prevalence has been exerted in the quasi-absence of inner cultural frontiers. The archaeological context highlights a higher permeability among the cultural areas or the idea of a moving border, due to the permanently cultural shifting within such a huge area. Evidently, it is hard to identify and especially for the marginal areas, the manner or the direction of the cultural changes, the general causes and conditions, or the factors involved in this process.

Lately, there are many proposals as concern the changes, that took place in the LBA: 1. the people movements that affected the eastern part of the Mediterranean area; 2. the decay of the Mycenaean power; 3 the development of the metallurgy and the need for raw materials; 4. the production of prestige goods, and the need for *exotica* items that contributed to the people mobility. The historical evidences and the cultural context pointed out that there is a competition among these causes, finally contributing to the fall of the Mycenaean World¹.

Another problem to solve is the meaning of the cultural change directions and the character (the amount and quality) of the artifacts. Firstly, it comes out that there is a preference for the eastern, south-eastern and central parts of the Mediterranean. It remains to understand the possibility of a northern route, in fact an eastern variant with two pillars: the northern Aegean and the Lower Danube.

The diffusion of the Mycenaean artifacts or the imitations of these ones toward the far of areas of the Mediterranean and the positions of the shipwrecks (Cape Gelydonya, Uluburun, Kyme in Euboaia, and Point Iria in Argolid)² proves the maritime propensity of the Mycenaean and the maritime role of the Levant. Because of the fact that these findings contains artifacts of Cypriote, Cretan, Mycenaean, northern Balkan origin dated in the XVIth –XIIth century has been identified a long commercial route going on from Ugarit, Cyprus, southern Argolid, and from here toward the Aeolian island, southern Italy to Sardinia. By no means, we can presume a secondary maritime and terrestrial variant going through the Dardanelles to the Black Sea and/or along the west Black Sea coast³.

Noteworthy is the importance of the differences between the cultural units in which the Mycenaean items superposed or interrelated with them. In the areas

¹ The problem of the causes that contributed to the decline of the Mycenaean power is beyond the aim of this paper.

² PULAK 1999, 233-262. See also BASS 1997, 154-170 and footnotes 7-10.

³ As for the navigation through the Dardanelles straits there are two main controversial opinions. To see CARPENTER 1948, 1-10; B.W.LARABEE 1957, 29-35. Lately, has been argued the possibility to navigate from the Aegean to the Black Sea even in the Late Bronze Age. HILLER 1991, 207-216, footnotes 1-2, pl. LIV-LVIII. For the penetration of the Mycenaean items through central Anatolia to the Black Sea see also “the imported Mycenaean III B pottery that is found on the floors, beside Hittite pottery and Hittite seal impressions with hieroglyphic signs” unearthed at Maşat Höyük. ÖZGÜÇ 1980, 309, pl. 37/6. For the debate concerning a scarce possible southern penetration toward the Black Sea by using the central Anatolia see at CLINE 1991, 2-5. A short survey on the Aegean presence in north, at FRENCH 1982, 19-22. For a recent review regarding Troy and the Black, MEE 1998, 143-145, footnote 101 and footnote 102 *contra* ÖZGÜÇ 1980. More recently and the related references at GUZOWSKA 2002, 504-509. See also the objects (swords of Sandars H type and T shape type, spearheads, double axes of Buchholz C type with analogies at Vărbica, Kozorezovo and Troy VI, one *armchenbeile* with analogies at Asine, Lindos, Troia VII, one socketed axe of Černych K20 type, sickles of Carpathian-Danubian origins and the ox-hide ingot with analogies at Uluburun and Enkomi) in the deposit from Tekirdağ, south-eastern Thrace. All of them emphasize wide analogies in the Balkans, eastern Aegean and Anatolia and has been dated at the very beginning of the XIth century. HARMANKAYA 1995, 217-233, pl. 2a-2b, 3b, 4b, 5a-c, 6a-c, 7-11.

where the MBA cultures were strongly enough (the Middle Danube, the inner Carpathians, the northern Stara Planina territory) these ones resisted to the Mycenaean penetration as a northern counter-current from the outskirts due to the fascination exerted from the south.

The general framework

The placement of the area of study⁴ among the Central Europe, the Black Sea, the Central Balkans and the Northern Aegean and the physical variety contributed in different levels to the definition of the Bronze Age. The framework was marked by a series of events with an increased impact in the north-west Pontic area and in the eastern Mediterranean, as well. As concern the ancient geography and history, we can see this unit referring mainly to the Thracian territory marked by the variety of the ecological elements. Therefore, this situation as a bridge-point among south-eastern Europe, Anatolia and the northern Aegean world has stamped the cultural configuration of the entire Bronze Age in the area. It seems that for this cultural puzzle the main role has been played by the following access ways: the Lower Danube, the Vardar-Morava, Struma/Strymon and Marica valley⁵ and the western coast of the Black Sea, toward the area of Coslogeni pottery type group.

Study case - the western Black Sea area

Discovered in the early 70's of the last century, the Coslogeni pottery group has been ascribed to the Late Bronze Age in the region of Lower Danube, being often considered a southern extension of the Sabatinovka – Noua I "cultural complex"⁶. This new cultural set up, which resembles in several features - type of settlement, ceramics, bone, stone and metal artifacts – with the aforementioned "cultural complex", covered, during its maximum development, the South-

⁴ Here, for a general survey, I follow some recent introductory observations upon the Thracian area. ARCHIBALD, 1998, 11-24.

⁵ Furthermore, this one has been a straight connection between the northern Aegean and the Balkan-Danube interface. Thus, here we may include the findings of the Middle Mesta basin and those of Kamenska-Čuka near Blagoevgrad. TSVETKOVA 2002, 1, 43, pl. 30/1-7; STEFANOVICH, BANKOFF 1998, 255-338.

⁶ For this discussion on the origin of the Coslogeni pottery group and/or the alien cultural contribution were expressed different views regarding the dominant cultural elements. Adrian C.Florescu and other researchers from Romania considered that this new cultural group is a southern extension of the Noua culture. On the other hand, especially researchers from Republic of Moldova, believes that this group is a southern extension of the Sabatinovka culture; NEAGU 1993, 166 and footnotes 23, 24. For a highlighted view on the North Pontic cultural input at the individualization of the Coslogeni pottery group see, IRIMIA 2001, 184, pl. 1-2. Analyzing the large vessels from Grădina (Constanța County) he concludes that "they belong to a Sabatinovka community entered in Dobrogea during the historical *which preceded* the formation of the Coslogeni culture". An "external" view regarding the components of the Sabatinovka-Noua-Coslogeni cultural unit, see at KOPPENHÖFER 2002, 679, 687.

Eastern Romania (Muntenia and Dobrogea) and the North-Eastern Bulgaria, up to Varna. By its location, the Coslogeni pottery group may be regarded as a buffer territory/bridge point between cultural phenomena in the Black Sea northern surroundings and the Western and South-Western Black Sea surroundings. Within this frame, by the end of its existence, it managed to stand by its own characteristic features. The fluctuating economy type, mostly based on livestock and agriculture, might explain this preference for low hilly, flat or sometimes flooded areas. Throughout their development, the communities belonging to this cultural group did not extend, to the north, beyond the Ialomița river basin, which stands for a cultural contact area. In recent years, due to new research, there are new data available about the northern area of the Coslogeni pottery group. This includes North-Eastern Muntenia/Wallachia and much of northern Dobrogea. On the account of these findings, I presume another buffer territory/cultural corridor between Sabatinovka and Coslogeni groups, as well.

Moreover, there is archaeological evidence for proving the survival of some characteristics belonging to the Middle Bronze Age and for some borrowings from the neighboring Noua culture. It remains to establish which cultural manifestations of North and North-West Pontic coast have impressed the cultural aspect in South-Eastern Romania and North-Eastern Bulgaria⁷. To the west, it extended beyond the Mostiștea river basin, reaching, under disparate forms, up to Zimnicea on the Danube. In fact, between these two parts will be another area of contact between Coslogeni and Zimnicea-Plovdiv/Čerkovna groups, a phenomenon that also included some Tei cultural elements, which ultimately will lead to the formation of the so-called mixed-type Radovanu “aspect”, which I consider rather as a western outpost of the Coslogeni communities. To the east, although sporadically, features of this culture were found as far as the Black Sea shores. Finally, to the South, the Danube line was passed. Artifacts of Sabatinovka and Coslogeni type has been reported in a diffuse rank up to Varna, in Bulgaria⁸, Troy⁹ or, if estimates are correct, they also could be recognized in Central and Eastern Macedonia (Kastanas, Assiros)¹⁰ and even in Southern Balkan Peninsula, at Menelaion in Sparta¹¹.

⁷ See *supra*.

⁸ Although from 1970 to the present the Coslogeni map has grown up, the representative archaeological site remains Grădiștea-Coslogeni. Researches in the eponymous site were resumed in 1986 under the direction of Petre Diaconu and Marian Neagu and continued until mid 90's. By currently, no monographic study was drawn up to clarify "the situation" of this final Late Bronze Age pottery group. Information and details on stratigraphic and archaeological frame as well as the history of the investigations from Grădiștea-Coslogeni to see NEAGU, BARASAB NANU, 1986, 99-117 and footnote 2. For a broader view of this culture and its position in the cultural conglomerate of the Lower Danube in the period, see HÄNSEL 1976, I, 73-76 and MORINTZ 1978, 121-152.

⁹ A first attempt for finding this kind of relations between the Lower Danube and Troy, see at Ida Carleton Thallon Hill 1919, 193-202. For the some topic to see, LÁSZLÓ 1993, 24-43 and the references.

¹⁰ HOCHSTETTER 1984, *passim*.

¹¹ RUTTER 1975, 17-33. The presence of this group of sherds from Menelaion or elsewhere in the Aegean area has generated a long debate focused around the place of

Instead of conclusions

The Agamemnon's descendants preferred the blue quiet of the Ionic Sea and the Adriatic Sea or of the Aegean Seas. This statement is sustained by the identity of the landscape, the climate and maybe, by the cultural behavior, as well.

The world of Boreas come from, is even colder, inhospitable and it imposed the crossing of some barriers may them be imaginary or supernatural so, it may be considered in these conditions that the Epirus, the Macedonia, the Thrace formed the northern line of defense for the Mycenaean world. The Balkan-Danubian civilizations have the characteristics of a cultural unity with some differences due to the previous cultural background and by the way, in which it may contact with other civilizations.

The area, bordered by the western shores of the Black Sea, the Eastern Stara Planina, and Lower Danube, it's considered, due of its geographical position, as a *buffer territory/changing point* for the distribution and redistribution of some cultural components between Anatolia, Aegean world and the north-west Pontic area.

How many elements will have taken part in the setting up of this cultural unit? For example, there has been already state the contribution of the Aegean elements for the southern Italy or elsewhere seen as a peripheral area, but things are very different north of the Stara Planina. The presence of Mycenaean in north is difficult to sustain in spite of some out-posts in the "barbarian world"¹². At Kamenska-Čuka, in south-western Bulgaria has been discovered Mycenaean like pottery and handmade ware as imitations of LH IIIC southern prototypes, added to previous discoveries like those in Skopje *Hipodrome*. The northerly Aegean "imports" are considered those from *Debelo Brdo* near Sarajevo¹³. Lately, due to the researches in Bulgaria has been found pottery of Mycenaean type (an imitation of a Mycenaean amphora dated to Late Helladic IIIA-B) at Koprivlen II *Gotche-Delcev*, Middle Mesta. Unfortunately, up to now, north of the Stara Planina toward the northern Lower Danube there are only tiny discoveries belonging to Late Helladic tradition with the exception of the so-called Mycenaean-Aegean type swords, some topical motifs (triangles, spirals, meanders, floral) on pottery, metallic and bone objects and the anthropomorphic statuettes of Dubovač-Žuto Brdo-Gârla Mare type.¹⁴

origin and the mechanisms that would have caused displacement of communities of this group. Regarding this topic see a short review at PILIDES 1994, *passim*. See also an up to date discussion of the cultural frame in the Late Bronze Age in the Eastern Balkans at PINIAZEK-SIKORA 2002, 705-706.

¹² For the scarcity presence of the Mycenaean products beyond their homeland, see PAROVIČ-PEŠIKAN 1995, 24-26.

¹³ HARDING 1993, 157.

¹⁴ A recent opinion belongs to Alexandru Vulpe that compiles the archaeological and chronological evidences from the Carpathian-Danubian area and the related ones from the Balkan-Aegean-Anatolian frame. With this attempt, he intend to designate "a new periodization of the Carpatho-Danubian Bronze Age, emphasizing its similar rhythm with

What is the situation beyond the Balkans and the Lower Danube basin? The inner dynamic of the culture processes in this area is different from the Aegean one. Although it is well known the preeminent role of the local elements, because of its position at one of the most important "gates of Europe" there are enough proofs for eastern and Central European stamps. This new cultural circumstance arises following the setting towards west of the Sabatinovka culture from the north of the Black Sea. Two cultures are included in this phenomenon too: Noua and Coslogeni from east and south-east Romania. On the other side, the Middle Danube and a part of the Lower Danube will be the subject of the pressures exerted by the Urnfield culture from Central Europe.

During the XVIth-XIIth centuries north of the Stara Planina toward the eastern and southern Carpathians there were cultural units partial synchronized such as Noua-Coslogeni, Tei IV-V, Verbicioara III-V, Gârla Mare-Žuto Brdo, Yagnilo, Asenoveč, Zimnicea-Plovdiv (Čerkovna)¹⁵. All of them were involved in the reshape of the final stage of the Bronze Age due to their mobility and of the ecological, economical and cultural shifting.

If for the southern Stara Planina range, the archaeological evidences states for some Aegean influence, for the Carpathian-Danube area it is only accepted the presence of "signs" coming from the southern world through a buffer territory represented by some contact lines as the Struma/Stymon valley, the Marica-Mesta basin or the Vardar-Morava valley. Even more, these southern cultural signs did not succeed in affecting/ influencing the cultures with a higher mobility in the eastern and south-eastern Romania (Noua, Coslogeni). These two cultural units set up, by their evolution, in a northern counter-reaction together with other elements in the Central Balkans.

The introducing of the archaeological evidences indicates a differentiated cultural frame due to the radial disposition compared to the civilization centers. To that situation had contributed too, other ecological or cultural factors as the access or circulation ways, the natural barriers, the prospects activities, the presence of the ore deposits, the inner dynamic and the people movements. In spite of all diversities to the end of the Late Bronze Age within the eastern Balkans, the main tendency is the cultural stereotypy.

As far I see, because of the different cultural prints, the Carpathian-Aegean interface is shared into three major cultural units: southern Carpathian-Stara Planina, the southern Stara Planina-Rhodopes range and the seashores. For the first, one can state for two phenomena: the incrustrated pottery in the west descending to south through the Sofia basin and Struma/Strymon valley and the

the Helladic civilization, better say the Aegean Bronze Age", VULPE 2001, 13-16 and footnotes 15 and 27, especially. Furthermore, previously has been pointed out, on typological and comparative ground of the anthropomorphic idols, that "the morphological relation highlighted by the typology advanced by us shows that the art on the Danube is genetically related to the Mycenaean one" CHICIDEANU-ŞANDOR, CHICIDEANU 1990, 69-70, 73-74.

¹⁵ Useful informations as concern the Late Bronze Age in Carpathian-Danubian territory (a generous *Zusammenfassung* at the end of book) see at MORINTZ 1978. Still available, at least as concern the main cultural features, at HÄNSEL 1976.

Sabatinovka-Coslogeni pottery in the east, descending to south through Dobrogea to a buffer zone situated between the Marica/Hebros basin and the eastern Rhodopes. Here we can find some cultural coincidences as regard the archaeological evidences. For the Pontic seashore I can stress upon a kind of a cultural leveling of Coslogeni-Yagnilo-Asenovac type if we take into account that this part of the Balkans played the role of a cultural passage allowing the access or the circulation of communities/items, mainly the bronze artifacts or the *steinzepter*/ mace-heads of north Pontic origin¹⁶.

The introduction of some general lines of the LBA frame can not be concluded without the recording of those data to plead for a synchronized cultural evolution of the three areas. Obviously, the syntagma "synchronized cultural evolution" does not include the qualitative aspect of the archaeological evidences that characterize the cultural groups/pottery groups in the northern Balkan. According to the syntagma, when talking about the qualitative aspect of the material life we need to have into consideration an element of comparison with another model, of an inferior or superior scale.

In what we are concerned, we have chosen as reference the Aegean-Anatolian model that allows clearer differentiation. In what way are these differences visible? The separate presentation of the three areas starts from the differentiated aspect. The culture and economy is slightly equal between Mycenaean world and the neighboring area in the Aegean, but extremely different between these interfaces and the northern Balkan world.

About the Aegean-Anatolian model/pattern and its impact were talked over for last 20 years in the terms of the descending cultural equation of the centre-periphery-margin type¹⁷. In this way a lot of local subsystems were discovered with an inside hierarchic structure that gravitates around *nucleus* with coordinating and adjusting attributions. This situation needs a high degree of interdependence and a long series of cultural identities.¹⁸ If for the area of birth and development of the Mycenaean world this model is affordable, for the Danube and the Balkans we cannot guarantee for its validity and ability to function.

For the north of Danube it's hard to admit, with tiny exceptions the imitation of some southern patterns. When these do exist, I shall call them conventionally as being southern echoes in the "high barbarian Europe". Still, the reconsideration of some discoveries in the west of the Black Sea (anchors, copper

¹⁶ LICHARDUS, ILIEV, CHRISTOV 1999, 104-107, Pl.1-3; C.PULAK (*supra* n. 2) p. 253-254. I have no intention to introduce here the long story of the western Pontic stone anchors or of the "ox-hide" ingots supposed to be of Cretan or Aegean origins. Since there are no final remarks concerning the topic it remain a matter of debate.

¹⁷ A recent approach has been undertake by SHERRATT 1994, 337-343.

¹⁸ Even I do not reject the Wallerstein's "World Systems Theory" which implies different levels of dependency I still doubt as concern the validity of this one for understanding the pre-capitalist relations within the Aegean-Carpathian frame. Obviously, the proving of such relations are hazardous yet - to see the dilution toward north of the Aegean artifacts - but I do believe in such occasionally (seasonally !?) contacts due to a bulk of motivations. See also for more and refined discussions HARDING 2000, 417-423.

ingots, weaponry), asserts more and more the hypothesis of the interest shown by the Mycenaeans for the economically attractive areas or the need of *exotica* items¹⁹.

Thus, I consider that in this Late Bronze Age "world system" there have been formed buffer territories, redistributing some goods or patterns that influenced differently the cultural matrix. Differently received, the Aegean-Anatolian influences did not reshape the cultural scenario of the northern cultural interfaces. Still, their partial inclusion was successfully (to see the interest for luxury goods shown by the barbarian elites) or not (the action of some non-elites that refused the Mycenaean influences) they tried to impose in the barbarian world in a larger system of relations stated already in the Middle Helladic²⁰. In this system, the outskirts get the status of cultural crucible/melting pot.

I tried to highlight the ancient practice of searching cultural borders in favor of identifying processes, which have to do with the internal dynamic. This approach was impelled by the acceptance of the idea that distance and time in this case as being cultural created terms for explaining the connections. So, I believe in a long connectivity of some regions facilitated by a series of buffer territories, which were meant to mediate or intermedate the cultural processes. By a buffer territory, I understand a fluctuant territory situated between areas in which rules emerged, acted and were respected by each of the involved side. By their nature and positioning, the buffer territories have the role to facilitate the cooperation and the mutual relations. At the same time, they also had the statute of translation areas for goods and technologies. According to this scenario, it can be easily understood that a part of the buffer territories in the Lower Danube, and I refer here to the Coslogeni area, survived by the services they provided – the means of crossing the Danube – to the nearby communities. In this case, those communities enjoyed a period of economic self-sufficiency that generated short-term survival, but then, on the long-term lead to a gradual disappearance or re-/absorption with respect to the other phenomena with a higher dynamic. Thus, the great diversity of cultural items could be explained and especially that of the metallic artifacts in an area without any important raw material source. Paradoxically, in this system, the eccentric zones become better individualized getting the status of reaction centers towards the end of Late Bronze Age.

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¹⁹ PULAK (*supra* n.2) 251, 255.

²⁰ BADER 1990, 181-208.

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