



# INTERACTIONS, **CHANGES** AND **MEANINGS.**

Essays in honour of Igor Manzura  
on the occasion of his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday

*Edited by*  
*Stanislav Terna and Blagoje Govedarica*

KISHINEV  
2016



# КУЛЬТУРНЫЕ ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЯ. **ДИНАМИКА** **И СМЫСЛЫ.**

Сборник статей в честь 60-летия И. В. Манзуры

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60-летию  
**Игоря Васильевича Манзуры**  
посвящается

*Dedicated to 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Igor V. Manzura*



*Manz*

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B. Govedarica

## Conflict or Coexistence: Steppe and Agricultural Societies in the Early Copper Age of the Northwest Black Sea Area

**Keywords:** Steppe culture, agricultural society, copper age, Sceptre bearer, Bolgrad-Aldeni, Varna, Giurgiulești, Suvorovo, Northwest Black Sea Area

**Ключевые слова:** степные культуры, раннеземледельческое общество, медный век, владеющие скипетрами, Болград-Алден, Варна, Джурджулешть, Суворово, Северо-Западное Причерноморье

*B. Govedarica*

**Conflict or Coexistence: Steppe and Agricultural Societies in the Early Copper Age of the Northwest Black Sea Area**

The course of culture during the 5<sup>th</sup> millennium presents a distinct depiction of the specific character of the northwest Black Sea region and particularly its role as mediator between the various cultural worlds. This can be demonstrated and verified on the basis of the emergence and dissemination of the Group of “sceptre burials”. The example shows impressively how a culturally and socially affective unit could develop out of a culture historical indolent substrate. Thereby, of crucial relevance was the economic interaction with an advanced and foreign cultural sphere, which occurred in this geoculturally exposed borderland.

*Б. Говедарица*

**Конфликт или сосуществование: степь и земледельцы в раннем медном веке Северо-Западного Причерноморья**

В пятом тысячелетии до Р.Х., Северо-Западное Причерноморье представляет собой специфический регион с особым развитием, в частности, играя роль медиатора между различными культурными мирами. Этот постулат очень хорошо прослеживается по возникновению и распространению группы «погребений со скипетрами», пример которых очень наглядно иллюстрирует, как ярко выраженная культурная и социальная единица способна развиваться из менее выразительного, с культурно-исторической точки зрения, субстрата. Здесь, решающее значение имели экономические взаимодействия с более развитой, гетерогенной культурной средой, которые произошли именно в этой геокультурной пограничной зоне.

### I. Introduction

The northwest Black Sea region encompasses the southern part of historical Bessarabia, that is, the steppe lowlands of the coast between the lower reaches of the Prut, Danube and Dniester rivers, including the hilly Budžak steppe in the north and the eastern littoral to the mouth of the Southern Bug River (Fig. 1). The region covers an area of about 275 km in length, northeast–southwest (the distance between Orlovka-Berezanskij Liman), and an average of 100–120 km in width, northwest–southeast. The landscape embodies the grass steppe, intersected by the great rivers Prut, Danube, Dniester and Southern Bug as well as lakes of the Danube and several coastal bays, so-called “limans” (Fig. 2). The river valleys and

lake areas provide mostly fertile soils and conditions that are favourable for settlement.

The northwest Black Sea region is bordered in the west by the Carpathian-Balkan area. In the north it ends with the Moldavian-Ukrainian forest steppe, in the east with the lower Dnieper and Bug rivers, and in the south with the Black Sea. The coastal area has always been directly dependent upon the dynamic changes in the sea level and, thus, the coastline is very irregular. The interchange between the sea and the coast as well as the dynamics of the rivers has exerted a strong impact, not only upon the geography of this area but also upon human habitation and settlement there. Yet, unfortunately, this dynamic situation has received very little attention in archaeological research until now.





**Fig. 1.** The northwest Black Sea region, the steppe area between the Danube and the lower Dniester and Southern Bug rivers.

**Рис. 1.** Северо-Западное Причерноморье, степная зона между Дунаем и нижним течением Днестра и Южного Буга.

From a culture-historical aspect this area has proven to be a primary contact zone between Central Europe and the steppe, whereby it gradually developed into a mediator between sedentary agriculturalists of Southeast Europe and the nomads of Eurasian steppe. It represents an important, frequently traversed corridor with a turbulent history. This status is already recognisable in the first contacts which according to the present-day state of knowledge occurred as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> millennium BC; it is these encounters that are the focus of the following contribution.

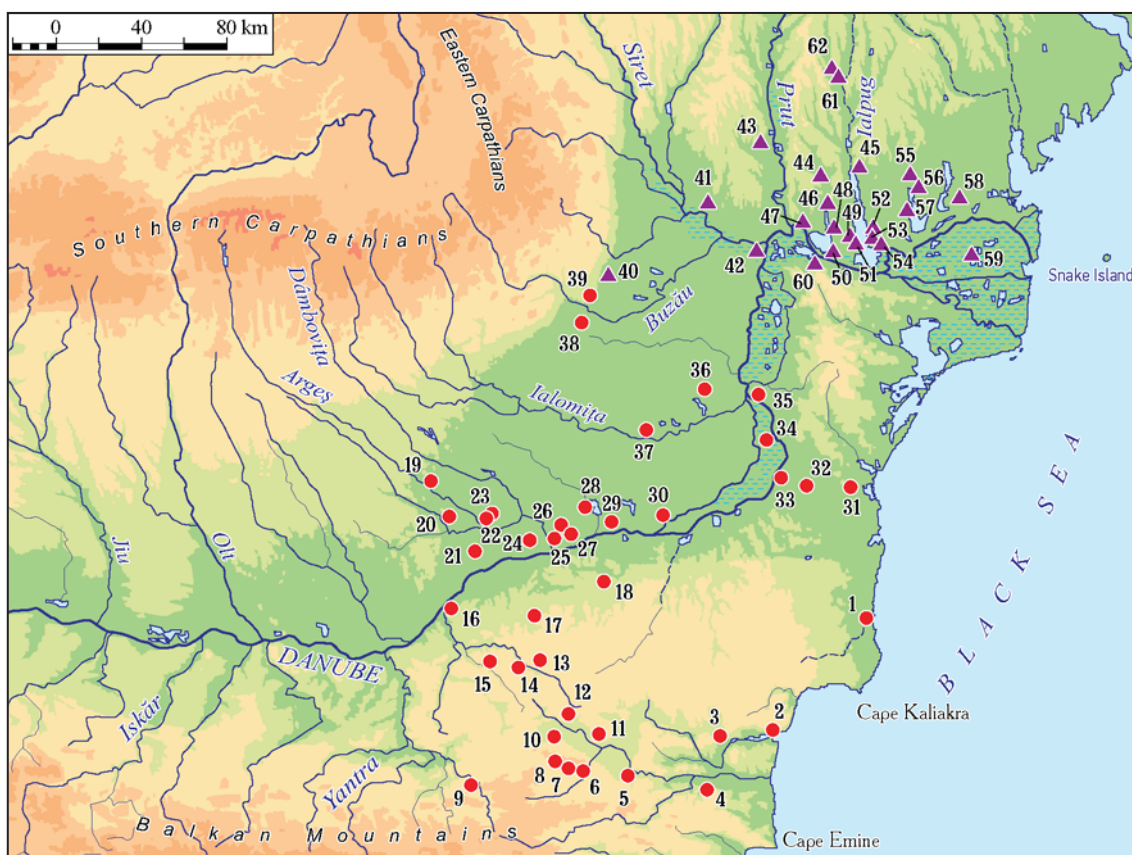
Nonetheless, the nature and character of these contacts are quite a controversial issue. Mostly, they are interpreted as the result of early migrations and conquests from East to West, whose impact was presumed to be crucial not only for the area discussed here, but also for great parts of the European continent. Among other effects, these migrations supposedly brought an end to the highly developed Copper-Age cultures of Southeast Europe and ultimately led to widespread, ethnocultural uniformity, or the 'Indoeuropeanising' of large parts of Eurasia (Gimbutas 2004: 29 ff). However, these theories of migration have been increasingly challenged in recent times (Videiko 1994: 20 ff). Here I shall attempt to explain these relations as a constructive coexistence between agriculturalists and nomads in this contact zone. It was a coexistence that did not have such disastrous effects in a continental framework, but instead led to the emergence of the "sceptre bear-

ers", that is, a new group of people, the so-called 'Ochre Grave culture', who left their mark the steppe upon the northern Black Sea area.

## II. The cultural situation in the northern Black Sea region at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> millennium BC

According to the present state of findings, at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> millennium BC the steppe bordering on the north-western Black Sea was still of Mesolithic character, or it was an open landscape that was not settled. Until now there are no finds that can be assigned to this time. Furthermore, nothing is known about the cultural development there prior to the 5<sup>th</sup> millennium, that is, in the 6<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. Well known sites such as Mirnoe, Vasilevka, Grebeniki and Girževo exhibit clear Mesolithic features with a cultural and economic system that was based upon hunting, fishing and gathering (Сранко 1982: 117 ff.; Wechler 2001: 12; Кюсак 2010: 57 ff.). They were stations of the late Mesolithic Grebenikovska and Kukrekska cultures, which date to the time from ca. 7500 to 6025 B.C. (Mirnoe: Дергачев 2005: 9; Баджа и др. 2008: 35) and 6440—5650 B.C. (Girževo: Кюсак 2010: 58, 60). Thus, the local Mesolithic displays a somewhat extenuated evolution that overlaps with the monochrome phase of the older Neolithic period in Southeast Europe.

Contrary to the forest steppe farther north and to the Carpathian-Balkan area in the west, in the



**Fig. 2.** Important sites of Gumelnița-Varna cultural sphere (triangle: Bolgrad-Aldeni). 1 — Durankulak; 2 — Varna; 3 — Devnja; 4 — Goljamo Delčevo; 5 — Smjadovo; 6 — Vinica; 7, Ovčarovo; 8 — Poljanica; 9 — Hotnica; 10 — Nevski Sultan; 11 — Kodžadermen; 12 — Loveč; 13 — Radingrad; 14 — Hisarlik; 15 — Goljam Izvor; 16 — Ruse; 17 — Kubrat; 18 — Sokol; 19 — Bucșani; 20 — Tangâr; 21 — Pietrele; 22 — Gradiștea; 23 — Vidra; 24 — Căscioarele; 25 — Chirnogi; 26 — Ulmeni; 27 — Gumelnița; 28 — Sultana; 29 — Vărăști; 30 — Curcani; 31 — Palazu Mare; 32 — Megida; 33 — Cernavoda; 34 — Bordușeni; 35 — Hârșova; 36 — Lișcoteanca; 37 — Dridu; 38 — Sarata Monteoru; 39 — Balanești; 40 — Aldeni; 41 — Draganești; 42 — Brăilița; 43 — Stoicani; 44 — Vulcănești; 45 — Bolgrad; 46 — Etulija; 47 — Reni; 48 — Nagomoe; 49 — Plavni; 50 — Orlovka; 51 — Vladiceni; 52 — Ozernoe; 53 — Novonekrasovka; 54 — Matroska; 55 — Novokamenka; 56 — Suvorovo; 57 — Utconosovka; 58 — Omarbija; 59 — Mila; 60 — Luncavița; 61 — Cealîc; 62 — Chioselia Mare.

**Рис. 2.** Основные памятники культурной общности Гумельница-Варна (треугольник Болград-Алденъ). 1 — Дуранкулак; 2 — Варна; 3 — Девня; 4 — Голямо Делчево; 5 — Смядово; 6 — Виница; 7, Овчарово; 8 — Поляница; 9 — Хотница; 10 — Невски Султан; 11 — Коджадермен; 12 — Ловеч; 13 — Радинаград; 14 — Хисарлик; 15 — Голям Извор; 16 — Русе; 17 — Кубрат; 18 — Сокол; 19 — Букшань; 20 — Тангырь; 21 — Петреле; 22 — Градиштя; 23 — Видра; 24 — Касчиоареле; 25 — Chirnogi; 26 — Ulmeni; 27 — Gumelnița; 28 — Sultana; 29 — Vărăști; 30 — Curcani; 31 — Palazu Mare; 32 — Меджида; 33 — Чернавода; 34 — Бордушень; 35 — Хыршова; 36 — Лишко-тянка; 37 — Дриду; 38 — Сарата Монтеору; 39 — Баланешть; 40 — Алденъ; 41 — Драганешть; 42 — Брэилица; 43 — Стойкань; 44 — Вулкэнешть; 45 — Болград; 46 — Этулия; 47 — Рени; 48 — Нагорное; 49 — Плавни; 50 — Орловка; 51 — Владичень; 52 — Озерное; 53 — Новонекрасовка; 54 — Матроска; 55 — Новокаменка; 56 — Суворово; 57 — Утконосовка; 58 — Омарбия; 59 — Мила; 60 — Лункавица; 61 — Чалык; 62 — Кёселия Маре.

northwest Black Sea region there was no full development into the Neolithic Age proper<sup>1</sup>. Hence, a further continuation of Mesolithic cultural traditions cannot be ruled out. Indeed, a continu-

ance is, in fact, supported by several archaic elements, which continued to mark the local development during the 5<sup>th</sup> millennium BC.

### II.1. The first upturn: emergence of the Bolgrad-Aldeni culture

One of the first post-Mesolithic changes came around the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> millennium, when the Copper Age Bolgrad-Aldeni culture left its

<sup>1</sup> The single exception to this is the site of Girževo, located on the northeastern periphery of this area; in view of the location it is already part of the distribution area of the full Neolithic Bug-Dniester culture. See Wechler 2001: 12; Дергачев 2005: 10 ff.

origins in the northern Dobrudža and Romanian Moldavia and spread into the steppe area east of the Danube River (Manzura 1993: 23).

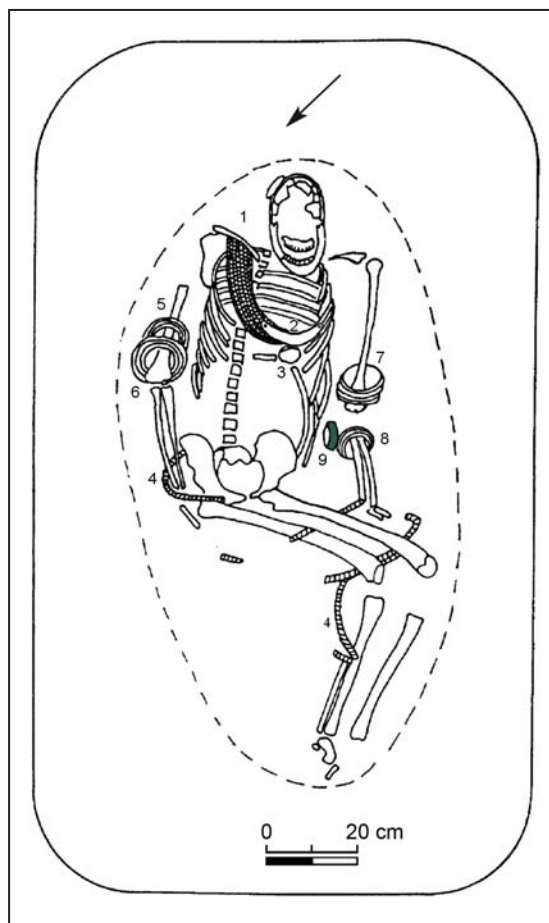
Although the Bolgrad-Aldeni culture has already been discerned as a peripheral group within the network of the larger Kodžadermen-Gumelnița-Karanovo VI (or 'KGK VI') complex (Comșa 1963: 7 ff.), it still has been scarcely researched. Mostly it is regarded as a variant of the early Gumelnița (Șimon 1983: 305–306; Subbotin 1983: 3 ff.; Subbotin 1992: 19 ff.) or Varna culture (Todorova 1985: 87 ff.), but seldom as an independent cultural unit (Sorokin 1994: 67 ff.). Thus far, ca. 65 settlement sites of the Bolgrad-Aldeni culture have identified, 36 of which are in Romania and 29 in the Bessarabian-Danube lake area (Subbotin 1983: 3–10; Comșa 1993: 162; Sorokin 1994: 67 ff.) (Subbotin 1983: 3–10; Comșa 1993: 162; Sorokin 1994: 67 ff.) (Fig. 2). The Bolgrad-Aldeni culture is the first and only cultural group of the highly developed Balkan-Carpathian Copper Age that spread into the steppe zone. In addition to agriculture, handicrafts and animal husbandry played an important role in the economy of this culture (Govedarica 2004: 352).

## II.2. The local reaction: emergence of rich graves in the steppe

Almost at the same time as the Bolgrad-Aldeni culture or directly thereafter, the oldest hitherto known burials appear in the steppe of the north-western Black Sea region. They constitute richly furnished, single graves or small groups of burials, in most of which one deceased lay in supine position with legs drawn up. The arms lay parallel to the body or slightly bent towards the pelvic area. The back of the skull rested evenly upon the ground or at a slight incline towards the chest. Usually red ochre was found strewn over the deceased and the floor of the grave (Fig. 3; 4; 6). A further typical feature of these burials is the relatively rich assemblage of grave gifts, mostly prestigious objects comprising jewellery, weapons, tools as well as cultic objects and status symbols (Fig. 3; 4). Interestingly, pottery was seldom present among the grave goods.

## III. The group of sceptre bearers and the problem of the steppe Copper Age

Originally these rich steppe graves were interpreted as a western branch of the so-called Ochre-Grave cultural complex that stemmed from the area of the Volga River, the Caspian

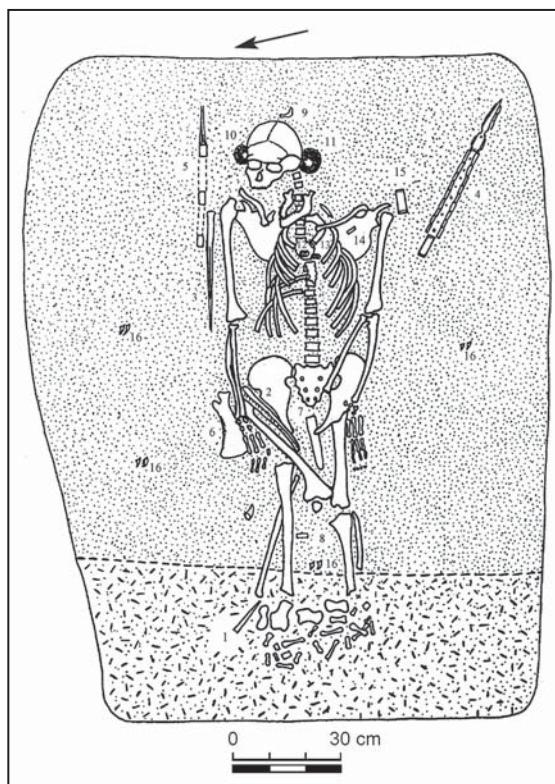


**Fig. 3.** Giurgiulești (Republic Moldavia), grave 5 (after Govedarica 2004: Abb. 21): 1 — necklace consisting of six strands of copper beads; 2 — pectoral made of boar tusk; 3 — cockle pendant; 4 — necklace of copper beads; 5–9 — copper bracelets.

**Рис. 3.** Джурджулешть (Республика Молдова), погр. 5 (по Govedarica 2004: Abb. 21): 1 — ожерелье из шести нитей медных бус; 2 — пектораль из кабаньего клыка; 3 — подвеска из раковины-сердцевидки; 4 — ожерелье из медных бус; 5–9 — медные браслеты.

Sea and the North Caucasus, and later part of the Novodanilovka or Skelyanska culture at home in the Dnieper River area (Даниленко 1974: 92 ff.; Gimbutas 1994: 29 ff.; Rassamakin 1994: 29 ff.). Through this interpretation an allochthonous or immigrant aspect of the burials came to the foreground. These 'migration hypotheses', however, were contested in view of the still unclear chronological, cultural and environmental conditions (Videiko 1994: 20 ff.; Govedarica 2004: 339 ff.; Manzura 1993: 23 ff.; Манзура 2000: 237 ff.). Recently the graves were identified as belonging to an emerging local steppe elite and defined as 'the group of sceptre bearers' (Govedarica 2004).





**Fig. 4.** Inventory of grave 4 in Giurgiulești, Republic Moldavia ('Big Man' of Giurgiulești): 1 — antler spear tip; 2 — flint dagger; 3 — copper dagger; 4 — composite sword (wood, bone and flint); 5 — wooden sceptre with golden plate; 6 — sheep scapula with 40 nicks on the edge; 7 — polished antler — symbolical phallus; 8 — bone plates; 9 — fish fin as ornament of the parade hat; 10—11 — temple rings of string beads; 12—13 — two golden spiral rings; 14 — polished shell bead; 15 — half of the bone handle; 16 — four sheep hooves — remains of the sheep fleece cover (after Govedarica 2004: Abb. 20).

**Рис. 4.** Инвентарь погр. 4 в Джурджулешть, Республика Молдова ('Big Man' из Джурджулешть): 1 — наконечник копья из оленьего рога; 2 — кремневый кинжал; 3 — медный кинжал; 4 — составной меч (дерево, кость и кремль); 5 — деревянный скипетр с золотой накладкой; 6 — лопатка овцы с 40 насечками по краю; 7 — полированный олений рог — символический фаллос; 8 — костяные пластины; 9 — плавник рыбы — украшение парадного головного убора; 10, 11 — височные кольца из string бус; 12—13 — два золотых спиральных кольца; 14 — бусина из полированной раковины; 15 — половина костяной рукояти; 16 — четыре копыта овцы — остатки овечьей шкуры, которой был накрыт погребенный (after Govedarica 2004: Abb. 20).

### III.1. Phase Giurgiulești

Two phases can be distinguished by the sceptre bearers from this area: the older phase — the Giurgiulești or pre-sceptre horizon — can be assigned roughly to the Cucuteni culture, phases

A1–A3 and Varna culture, phases 1–2. (cp. Govedarica 2004: 251 ff.). This is based on analogies with the necropolis Varna II, the Carbunga hoard, a Gumelnita A2 vessel found in Giurgiulești, and Cucuteni pottery in Căinari<sup>2</sup> and radiocarbon datings (Giurgiulești 4490–4330; Căinari 4455–4360 BC) (Govedarica 2004: 82; Rassamakin 2011: 84). Only flat graves are attested in this first and older phase, which are usually richly furnished. They are characterised by, among other items, rudimentary status symbols like commando staffs, weapons and jewellery made of copper from the Balkans (Govedarica 2004: 255) (Fig. 4; 5: 62, 63).

### III.2. Phase Suvorovo

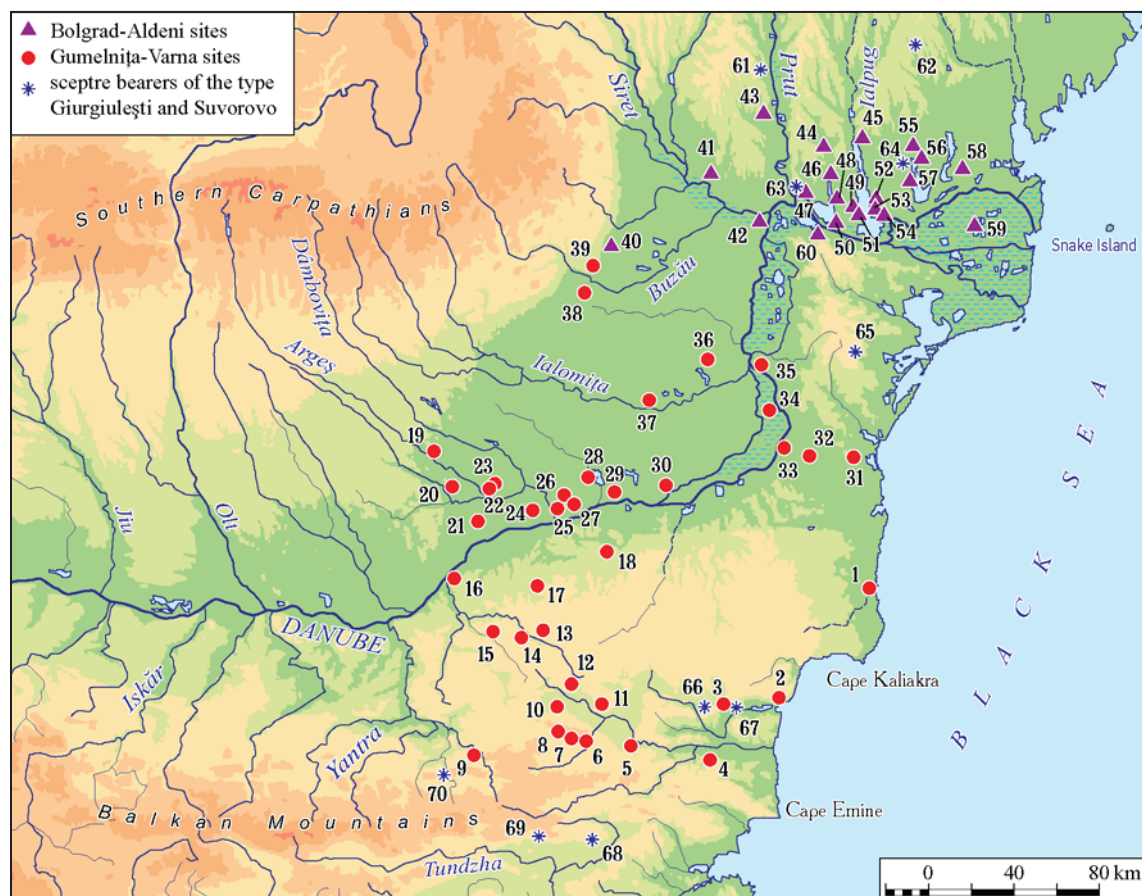
Stone sceptres and presumably the first burial mounds as signs of power and high rank appear after that in the second, Suvorovo phase of the sceptre bearers (Cucuteni A4; Varna 3, 4300–4200 B.C., Fig. 5: 61, 64–70; 6; 7)<sup>3</sup>. These new "wealthy" persons, that is, this burial custom, spread rapidly into the vast steppes, first as far as the area of the Dnieper River (Krivoj Rog, Čapli) and during the Suvorovo phase on to the Caspian Sea and the North Caucasus. And with that the large complex of early ochre graves with several local variations emerged (Suvorovo, Decea, Novodanilovka, Volga-Caucasus) (Govedarica 2004: 251 ff. and further recommended literature). Thereby, the practice of carrying a sceptre in the northwest Black Sea area has proven to be an autochthonous appearance (Govedarica 2004: 251).

### III.3. The Origin of the Group of sceptre bearers

In culture historical periodisation, the sceptre bearers of northwestern Black Sea as well as the other variants of this complex have been assigned to the Copper Age (Govedarica 2004: 361). Nevertheless, this periodisation is not tangible, but rather a formal chronological division, which was construed basing upon temporal par-

<sup>2</sup> The emergence of the sceptre-bearer was generally assigned to the time of pre-Cucuteni III/Cucuteni A1 (Govedarica 2004: 246 ff.); however, this dating probably should be corrected to a somewhat later date (Cucuteni A/Tripolye B1).

<sup>3</sup> There are several indications that the sceptre graves in Suvorovo, Căinari and Casimcea, like related graves in the south Russian steppes (Chutor Šljachovskij, Verchnij Akbaš, Komarovo, among others) were covered with a small tumulus. Due to uncertain find contexts of these burials, however, views about this in research are not in agreement. For a discussion about the situation see Govedarica 1998: 179 ff.; and 2004: 168–169.



**Fig. 5.** 1—39 — sceptre bearers of the type Giurgiulești and Suvorovo; 40—60 — Gumelnița-Varna-Bolgrad-Aldeni cultural sphere; 61 — Fălciu; 62 — Cainari; 63 — Giurgiulești; 64 — Suvorovo; 65 — Casimcea; 66 — Kjulevča; 67 — Reka Devnja; 68 — Drama; 69 — Gonova Mogila; 70 — Reževo.

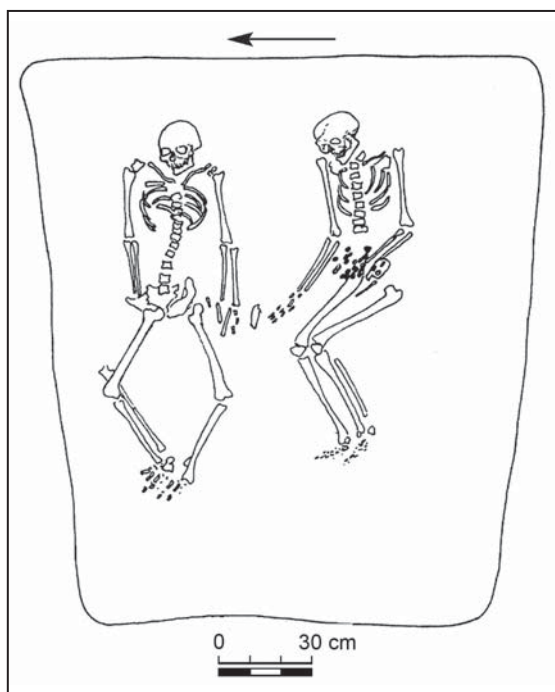
**Рис. 5.** 1—39 — памятники «держатели скипетр» типа Джурджулешть и Суворово; 40—60 — Культурная общность Гумельница-Варна-Болград-Алденъ; 61 — Фэлчиу; 62 — Кайнаръ; 63 — Джурджулешть; 64 — Суворово; 65 — Касимча; 66 — Кюлевча; 67 — Река Девня; 68 — Драма; 69 — Гонова Могила; 70 — Режево.

allels with the Copper Age in the Balkans. A substantial assignment is not concrete, because the term “steppe Copper Age” is still contextually unclear. Namely, in the steppe this period has not been well established nor defined transparently (See Збенович 1985: 1 ff.).

Graves of the sceptre bearers group contain metal and ceramic imports from neighbouring, copper-producing cultures (Gumelnița A, Varna, Cucuteni A), and, consequently, they are — at least with regard to the horizon in time — of the Copper Age. Nonetheless, the primary and definitive properties of this grave group are not metal and ceramic imports, but instead other elements of their burial customs and funerary goods, which display distinct archaic features. Among these elements are the supine position of the deceased in the grave, ochre strewn on the body and the pit, grave goods of tools and weapons made of flint, beads and pendants of deer teeth, and composite artefacts of flint and bone. These archaic grave goods find parallels in Mesolithic settlements and burials

in the Ukraine and the Iron Gate as well as in sub-Mesolithic northern Europe (Cp. Aleksin 1994: 153 ff.; Grünberg 2000, Band 1: 110 ff.; Band 2: 209—258, 294—331; 338—363). Furthermore, such finds also appear in graves of the culture of the Bandkeramik during the 6<sup>th</sup> millennium, in which the deceased were likewise placed in supine position (Jeunesse 1997: 94. 61 Fig. 16; Boës 2007: 133 ff.). Chronologically seen, the next analogies for sceptre bearers are found among the similarly archaic material in graves of the central European Rössen culture (Niquet 1938: Plate 4: 5, 6; 8: 13; 11: 81).

Accordingly, it can be deduced that the group of the sceptre bearers is a complex phenomenon, in which some elements borrowed from the Copper Age are interwoven with ancient traditions. The question as to whether the archaic burial rite of this group is a custom whose origin is from elsewhere, or whether it represents a local Mesolithic/Neolithic retardation that has not been documented yet, cannot be satisfactori-

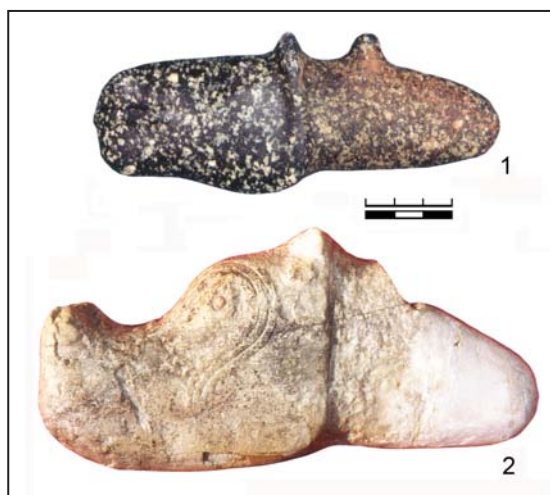


**Fig. 6.** Suvorovo (Ukraine), necropolis II, barrow 1, grave 7 (primary grave) (after Govedarica 2004: Abb. 23).

**Рис. 6.** Суворово (Украина), могильник II, курган 1, погр. 7 (основное погребение) (по Govedarica 2004: Abb. 23).

ly answered at this point. Investigations on this issue need comparable local grave material of use, which however is not available. Until now the burial customs of the local Mesolithic population as well as the Copper Age Bolgrad-Aldeni culture are unknown. This may sound quite extraordinary, considering that numerous burials of the late Mesolithic as well as the Copper Age communities in Southeast Europe, with the exception of the earlier Cucuteni-Tripolye culture, are at hand (Govedarica 2004: 301, with recommended literature).

This lack of documented sources is not due to the state of research, but rather could be contingent upon the specific way of life of the communities concerned, who did not leave behind any identifiable archaeological substances; or — more likely — it was caused by changes in the sea level and dynamics of the rivers. In the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> millennium the level of the Black Sea was demonstrably more than 20 metres lower than the level today (Konikov 2007: 405 ff.). This means that large land ridges that were more or less settled are now under water. The flat terrain of Bessarabia with its abundance of waterways is subject to such fluctuations. Followingly, it can be reckoned that the rise in sea level from the time of the 7<sup>th</sup>—6<sup>th</sup> millennium to the present day had disastrous effects upon this area, among others an immense loss



**Fig. 7.** Zomorphic sceptres in primary graves, placed as status symbols of the deceased: 1 — Suvorovo (Ukraine); 2 — Casimcea (Romania) (after Govedarica, Manzura 2011: Abb. 4).

**Рис. 7.** Зооморфные скипетры в основных погребениях, помещенные как символы статуса погребенного: 1 — Суворово (Украина); 2 — Касимча (Румыния) (по Govedarica, Manzura 2011: Abb. 4).

of archaeological material. Furthermore, an unknown number of sites has become inaccessible, possibly also the missing Mesolithic burials and Neolithic stations.

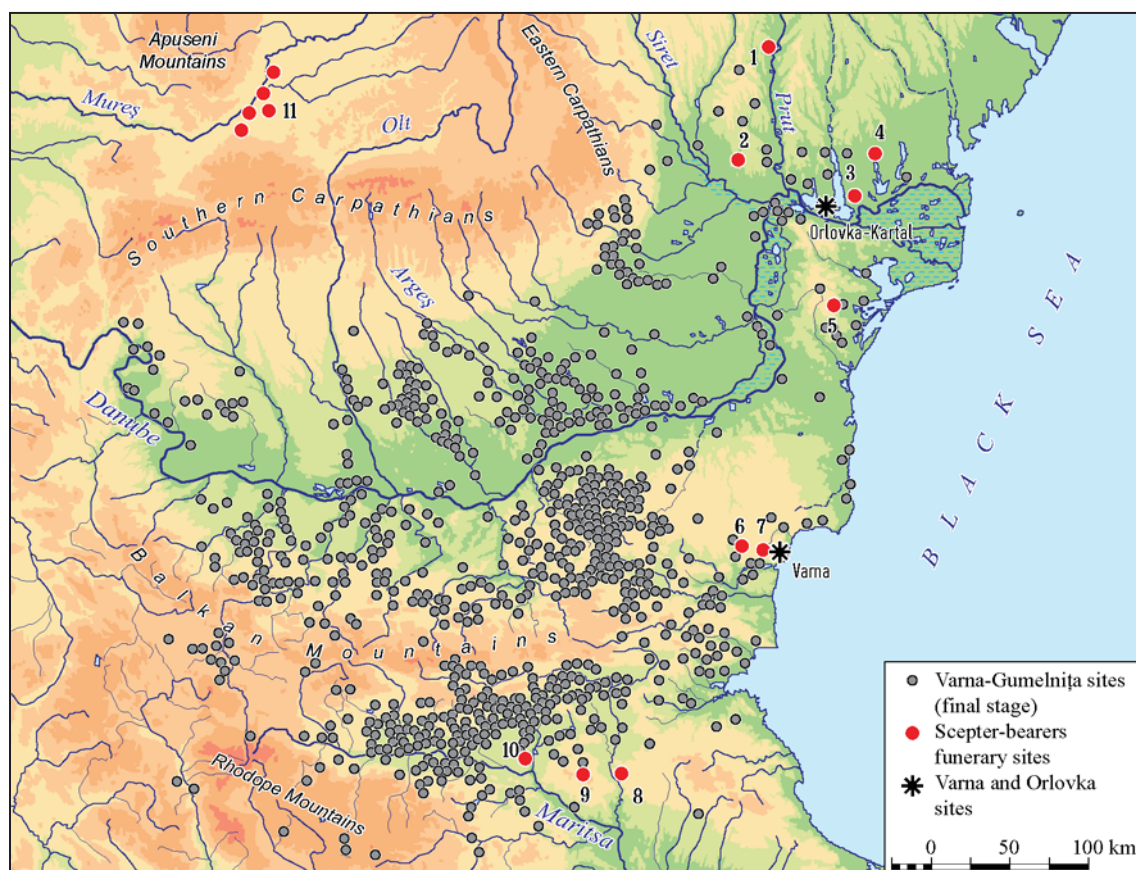
The uncertain state of source material hinders the investigation of biological and cultural substrate of the group of sceptre bearers; therefore, no clear explanatory statements can be made. A solution to the problem, however, might be sought in the following three possibilities. The sceptre bearers could have been:

- descendants of the local Mesolithic population;
- Mesolithic or sub-Mesolithic bands who emigrated from Southeast Europe (including the steppe areas);
- immigrant bearers of the Bandkeramik traditions.

#### IV. The interaction between the steppe and agricultural communities

Aside from the uncertainty about the substrate or the question whether the sceptre bearers descended from a local or a foreign population, it is evident that the cultural physiognomy of this group first appeared in the steppe of the northern Black Sea region during the time that the Carpathian-Balkan Copper Age came into being. Their emergence evolved within the interchanges between the developed east Balkans, low-





**Fig. 8.** Coexistence of the Varna-Gumelnița culture and the Suvorovo phase of the sceptre-bearer communities. 1 — Fălciu; 2 — Fundeni-Lungoți; 3 — Novoselskaja; 4 — Suvorovo; 5 — Casimcea; 6 — Kjuljevča; 7 — Reka Devnja; 8 — Drama; 9 — Gonova mogila; 10 — Reževo; 11 — geographically separate Decea variant of the sceptre bearer group (after Govedarica, Manzura 2011: Abb. 5, adapted).

**Рис. 8.** Сосуществование культуры Варна-Гумельница и фазы Суворово общности «держатели скипетр». 1 — Фэлчиу; 2 — Фундены-Лунгоць; 3 — Новосельская; 4 — Суворово; 5 — Касимча; 6 — Кюлевча; 7 — Река Девня; 8 — Драма; 9 — Гонова Могила; 10 — Режево; 11 — географически отдельный вариант Деча группы «держатели скипетр» (по Govedarica, Manzura 2011: Abb. 5, adapted).

er Danube and east Carpathian cultural spheres (Gumelnița, Varna, early Cucuteni-Tripolje) and the local steppe population. Thereby, the sedentary Bolgrad-Aldeni culture settled there might have acted as a mediator. Among the material culture the sceptre bearers are Balkan imports (copper, gold, vessels of the Gumelnița-Varna cultures) and some Cucuteni-Tripolye elements (like pottery of Cucuteni A in Căinari)<sup>4</sup>. Relations with the Cucuteni-Tripolye culture are attested by zoomorphic sceptres of the Suvorovo phase, which appear in sceptre-bearer graves as well as in Cucuteni A3–4/Tripolye B1 settlements. From there they spread farther to the east to the Volga River and the North Caucasus and to the east

as far as in Transylvania in West Carpathians or in Pelagonia in the south of the Balkans (Cp. Govedarica, Kaiser 1996: 59 ff; Govedarica 2004: 364. For the opposing opinion see Деграчев 2007: 21 ff.).

Within the framework of these cultural and economic relationships, a material prosperity arose among the local steppe communities and a social hierarchy gradually evolved. Imitating the structure of the east Balkan and east Carpathian social system, a leading group in society emerged in the northern Black Sea steppe area — the steppe elite — as expressed archaeologically in the group of sceptre graves. It is no coincidence that the oldest graves of this type appear in the territory of the Bolgrad-Aldeni culture (Giurgiulești, Căinari). And located in the same area are the graves in Suvorovo and Casimcea, among others, where leading personalities of the later Suvorovo phase were buried. It was during this phase that the territorial compatibility also spread to the east-

<sup>4</sup> For the ceramic finds from Căinari, originally assigned to pre-Cucuteni III/Cucuteni A1, see Govedarica 2004: 177 ff. Nonetheless, it seems that most distinct analogies are to be found in the Cucuteni A3 settlement of Rusești Noi. Cp. Palaguta 2007: Fig. 81: 4–6.

ern Balkans as far as the area of Karanovo (Fig. 8: 1–10). The use of the same territory can be viewed as the result of an attitude of tolerance, based upon common strategic interests, and less the expression of a mutual accord. Be that as it may, this initial symbiosis of Carpatho-Balkan and steppe cultures met its end with the decline of the east Balkan Copper Age around 4200 B.C.

With reference to the origin of sceptre-bearing communities, several factors speak in favour of the first possible solution proposed above: they were descendants of indigenous hunters, fishers and gatherers, who adapted their economic strategies to the needs of the newly developed trade with the rich, copper-producing Balkan-Carpathian cultures. As mobile gatherers they were predestined to offer raw materials such as flint, shells and gold as exchange goods. They do not, however, include products from stock-raising, as there is scarcely any evidence that the sceptre bearers practiced animal husbandry<sup>5</sup>. The extent to which the rich Copper Age clientele (Fig. 9) could lead to the avid search for raw materials is shown by the Decea branch of the sceptre bearers: this group settled near the auriferous Ampoi River at the foot of the Munții Metaliferi (metaliferous mountains) in distant Transylvania (Govedarica 2004: 61 ff.) (Fig. 8: 11).

Surely the trade with copper producing centres brought a continuous upsurge in the north-west Black Sea region, which was mediated by sceptre-bearing populations to farther regions in the Ukrainian and southern Russian steppes. However, this cultural upswing in society of the sceptre-bearers did not signify a break with nomadism and the long-standing traditions in nomad ideology. The upholding of archaic burial customs and the largely traditional repertory of grave goods imply the continuance of the original world view and system of values in the spiritual as well as social sphere. In this sense, the development of a new steppe elite must have been an essentially internal process, which was simply enhanced by foreign influences. The rich goods present in the graves, including the imports from Copper Age centres, served mainly to personify power and prestige within a local framework. For the neighbouring copper-age cultural sphere the sceptre bearers remained a remote and closed society within itself, despite existing outer contacts and mutual territory.

For these reasons, the assumption that relations with copper-producing cultures would suffice to integrate conservative steppe communi-



**Fig. 9.** Power, wealth and luxury even after death: grave 43 in the necropolis Varna I, Bulgaria (after Fol, Lichardus 1988: Abb. 24).

**Fig. 9.** Власть, богатство и роскошь даже после смерти: погребение 43 могильника Варна I, Болгария (по Fol, Lichardus 1988: Abb. 24).

ties that were engrained in their traditions into a new cultural period that was marked by copper metallurgy, not only chronologically but also culture historically, should be seriously questioned. The assignment of a specific stage of development of an area to a culture historical period may not be viewed as a superficial terminological or simply chronological matter. This matter concerns the actual quintessence of archaeology and, especially in this case, demands more investigations.

## V. Conclusions

The course of culture during the 5<sup>th</sup> millennium described here presents a distinct depiction of the specific character of the northwest Black Sea region and particularly its role as mediator between the various cultural worlds. This can be demonstrated and verified on the basis of the emergence and dissemination of “sceptre burials”. The example shows impressively how a culturally and socially affective unit could develop out of a culture historical indolent substrate.

<sup>5</sup> For the development of animal husbandry in the steppes, see (Stanko 2003: 299 ff.).



Thereby, of crucial relevance was the economic interaction with an advanced and foreign cultural sphere, which occurred in this geoculturally exposed borderland. The fact that the sceptre bearers did not cause an interruption in the long-standing nomad ideology, but rather re-enforced them, is just as significant. Thus, the formation and rapid expansion of new social conditions, that is, hierarchical division, as reflected in the distribution of sceptre bearers in the steppes from the Danube to the Volga rivers and

to the North Caucasus, cannot be seen as the result of some purported conquests, but rather as the social cultural chain reaction of like-minded groups that was initiated in this borderland. The formation of a leading level in society — the steppe elite — brought forth a socio-cultural dynamic in the northwest Black Sea region as well as farther regions of the steppe, a dynamic from which some new forms of economy such as trade and the beginnings of animal husbandry were probably derived.

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