
1. THE PREHISTORY OF THE BALKANS TO 1000 B.C.

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The earliest traces of human occupation in south-east Europe go back some half a million years to the stage of human evolution represented by *Homo erectus*. This discontinuous occupation during the warmer phases of the Ice Age was followed by permanent settlement of the region in the last glacial phase (75,000–10,000 years ago), represented by finds from upland caves. The critical transitional period around 40,000 years ago (which saw the appearance of modern man and more advanced stone industries) is not well represented in this region, but during the later part of this glacial period there are abundant traces of the reindeer- and mammoth-hunting groups related to those of the wider province covering the south Russian steppes.

With the advance of forests in the milder climate that began to prevail some 10,000 years ago, these animals retreated to the open steppe areas which persisted to the north of the Black Sea. They were replaced by wild cattle, pig or deer from further south, and the rivers were recolonized by fish. Sites from this early post-glacial period are best preserved in the Iron Gates region, where communities gained a living from fishing in the Danube and hunting in the forests nearby. This local development reached a climax around 6000 B.C., when it began to be replaced by an intrusive economy, based on cereal cultivation and livestock rearing, that had developed in the Near East.

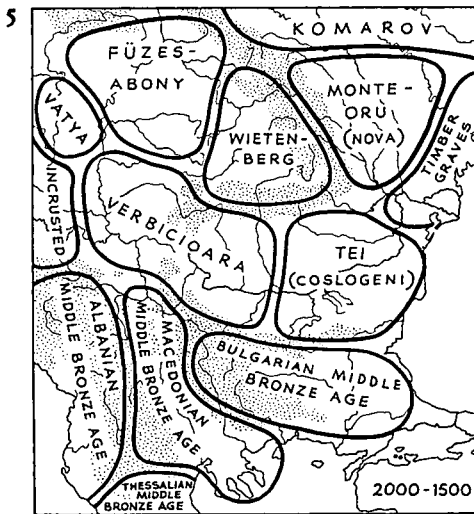
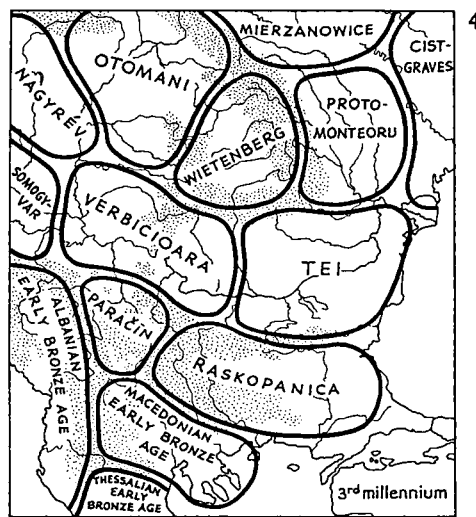
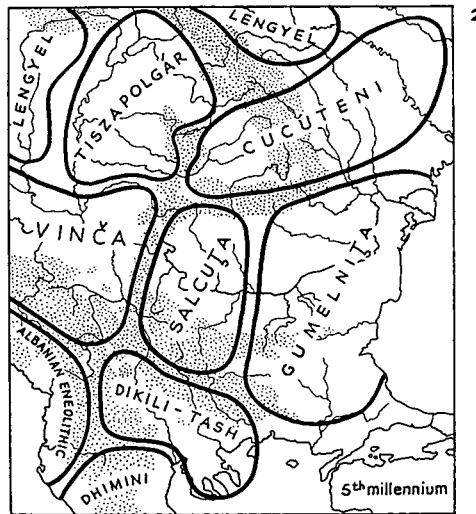
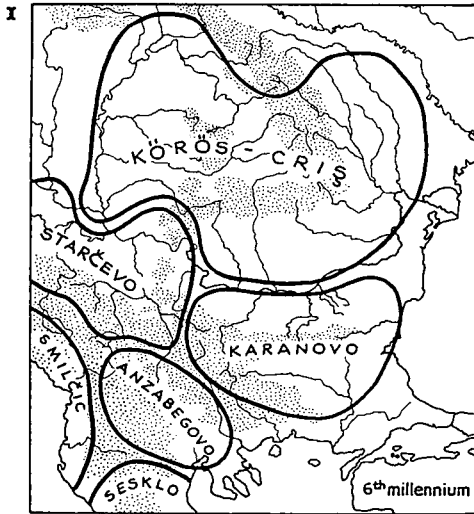
The earliest farming communities in the Balkans show a clear relationship to contemporary cultures in Anatolia/Asia Minor, and the groups which penetrated into the lowland plains of Thrace and the lower Danube used a handmade pottery decorated with designs in red and white paint. The permanent villages established at this time were sometimes occupied more or less continuously for the next 4,000 years, creating substantial settlement-mounds that provide a clear picture of the

subsequent development of farming cultures. During the sixth millennium B.C. farming spread into the Middle Danube area, Transylvania and Moldavia, where less substantial sites are especially plentiful along the rivers of the lowland loess areas.

The contacts maintained between these groups are evident from the changes in pottery style which can be traced over the whole of this area. The early painted wares gave way some time around 5000 B.C. to darker pottery, often decorated by incised ornament picked out in white paste. Experiments with new materials produced pigments in different colours, such as the silvery graphite which was used in Romania and Bulgaria to paint the elegant spiral decoration that is one of the striking achievements of Neolithic art. This style of decoration also appears on the pottery figurines that were characteristic products of these cultures.

Among the materials with which these peasant farmers became familiar were the ores of copper that are plentifully represented in the Balkan and Carpathian mountains. Simple objects of smelted copper occur from the mid-fifth millennium onwards, and by 4000 B.C. the scale of production is indicated by the occurrence of mining sites such as the shafts for the extraction of malachite at Rudna Glava in north-east Yugoslavia. Using simple casting techniques this material was made into flat axes and shafthole tools that were occasionally exported beyond the Carpathians to Central Europe and the west Pontic steppes. The wealth of these Copper Age cultures has recently been demonstrated by the discovery of a cemetery on the Black Sea coast at Varna, where graves contain not only copperwork but elaborate items in sheet gold.

During the fourth millennium B.C. a fundamental transformation occurred in the cultures of south-east Europe that reflects the increasing importance of the steppe areas to the east. One



aspect of this is the abandonment of many of the long-occupied settlement mounds and a phase of renewed colonization that extended the settled area from the edges of the plains which had been the foci of earlier settlement. The elaborate styles of painted decoration disappeared, and a new range of pottery forms, including jugs and cups, made their appearance. The metalworking tradition was radically altered by the adoption of the two-piece mould and the use of alloying – initially with arsenic rather than tin – that indicate connexions with the Caucasian metallurgical school. These developments were contemporary with the Early Bronze Age in the Aegean but there are no indications in the Balkans of the more sophisticated forms of social organization implied by the craftsman-made jewellery of the Troy treasures or the seal-impressions of the House of Tiles at Lerna.

Whereas the core area of Neolithic and Copper Age development had been the southern plains such as lowland Thrace, the focus of change in the third and second millennia B.C. shifted northwards to Transylvania and adjacent areas. The wealth of copper and gold in this region, and the successful livestock-raising economy of its inhabitants, provided the basis for a series of powerful chiefdoms centred on the lower valleys of the Carpathians. Access to the tin sources of Bohemia provided an essential element in the growth of an impressive local bronze industry that produced decorated weaponry known both from local hoards and along a trade route that reached northwards as far as Scandinavia. Gold was also worked, not only for ornaments but also for metal vessels, the first in temperate Europe. Large quantities of these materials, and even an iron dagger, have been recovered from fortified centres in the north east of the Carpathian Basin.

Another new element at this time was the chariot, whose use is demonstrated by models of spoked wheels. These are associated with

elements of horse-gear such as bone cheek-pieces whose compass-work decoration resembles that on similar objects from the Mycenaean Shaft Graves (c. 1600 B.C.). It is possible that these techniques of horsemanship, derived ultimately from the steppes, entered Greece from this area.

Further contacts with the Aegean world are evident during the closing phases of Mycenaean civilization in the thirteenth century B.C. The recession and political unrest in the east Mediterranean at this time coincided with further expansion and the achievement of new levels of industrial production by the communities of Transylvania and the lower Danube, and fresh contacts with the steppes. Weapons of Central European type appeared in the Mediterranean, and the technology of sheet-bronze working, previously confined to palatial workshops, came into use further north. The great expansion in population in the following two centuries had its effects both in the north Aegean (Troy VII B) and in Central Europe, where it is represented by the spread of the Urnfield cultures. The events of this period set the pattern for the succeeding millennium, when the peoples of the Balkans emerged into the historical record as the Thracians and Illyrians.

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SCHEMATIC CHRONOLOGICAL CHART OF THE PERIOD 6000–1000 B.C.

B.C.*	Albania	Greece	Macedonia	Šumadija	Thrace
6000	Early Neolithic	Sesklo	Nea Nikomedia	Starčevo	Karanovo I & II
5000	Middle Neolithic	Larisa Dhimini	Sitagroi II	Vinča	Karanovo III (Veselinovo)
4000	Eneolithic	Rachmani	Dikili-Tash	Salcuța	Karanovo IV & V Gulmenița (Karanovo VI)
3000	Late Eneolithic Albanian Early Bronze Age	Early Helladic I Early Helladic II & III	Macedonian Early Bronze Age	Bubanĵ Hum Paraćin	Ezero (Karanovo VII) Raskopanica
2000	Albanian Middle Bronze Age	Middle Helladic	Macedonian Middle Bronze Age		Bulgarian Middle Bronze Age
1000	Albanian Late Bronze Age	Late Helladic (Mycenaean)	Macedonian Late Bronze Age		Bulgarian Late Bronze Age

(*All dates are based on the tree-ring calibration of radiocarbon)

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IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE

Lower Danube	Moldavia	Transylvania	Eastern Hungary	Maps
Criș	Criș	Criș	Körös	1
Vinča/ Dudești	Linear Pottery Precucuteni	Alföld Linear Pottery Petrești	Tisza	2
Boian/ Vădastra Salcuța	Cucuteni	Tiszapolgár Bodrogkeresztúr		
Cernavodă	Usatovo- Foltești	Coțofeni	Baden	3
Verbicioara/ Tei	Monteoru	Wietenberg	Nagyrév Otomani	4
Verbicioara/ Coslogeni	Noua	Wietenberg	Füzesabony	5
Late Verbicioara	Noua	Gava	Suciu-Piliny	6

1a



1b



1c



1. The pottery of the first farming groups (c. 6000–5000 B.C.) in Bulgaria was already quite advanced, and shows similarities with the early painted wares of Greece and western Anatolia (e.g. Hacilar). Characteristic shapes were vessels with ring-bases, either tulip beakers or open bowls. The bowl (a), decorated with white paint on a red ground, is from Kremikovci near Sofia. The tulip beakers are from Karanovo in central Bulgaria, showing (b) the white paint typical of Karanovo I and (c) the channel decoration of Karanovo II.

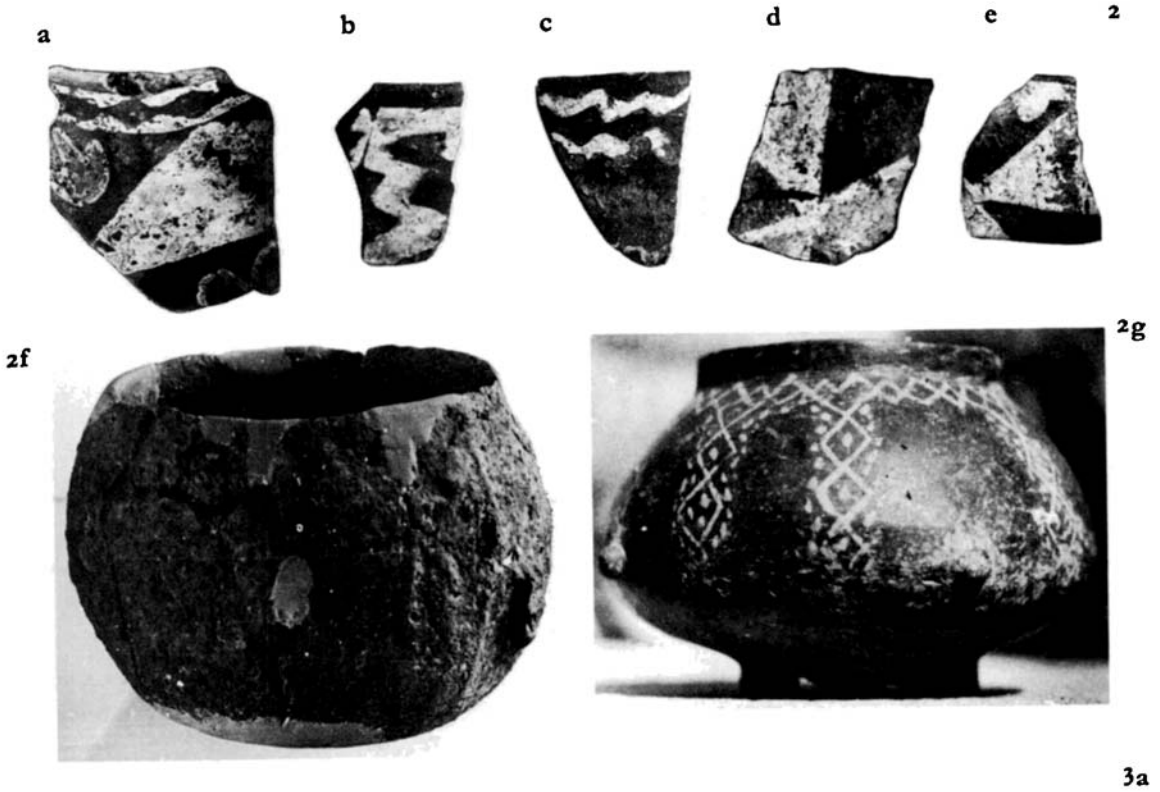
2. Pottery decorated in light paint is typical of the earliest farming groups throughout the Balkans. Sherds (a)–(c) are from Podgorie, (d)–(e) from Vashtëmi, and the vessel (f) is from Burini, Albania. The bowl (g) is from Gura Baciului in Transylvania (Romania).

3. Around 5000 B.C. new forms of dark-burnished pottery became common in many parts of the Balkans. In Bulgaria this is represented by the Veselinovo culture, whose attractive ring-base and polypod vessels with knob handles are characteristic of Karanovo III.

4. Some of the most attractive products of Balkan Neolithic potters are the theriomorphic vases such as this stag-vessel from Muldava in Bulgaria.

5. The great diversity of ceramic traditions that developed in the fifth millennium B.C. is shown by these four vessels from Romania, characteristic of (a) the Dudești culture, (b) the Vinča culture, (c) the Vădastra culture and (d) the Boian culture. Shallow channel decoration is typical of the earlier phases, though more deeply-incised lines that could be filled with white paste became more common. Each area emphasized its cultural distinctiveness through a typical repertoire of patterns.

6. Small figurines and cult objects are common finds from the fifth millennium. Among the most famous are the pair (a) from a cemetery at Cernavodă in the Romanian Dobruja. They belong to the Hamangia culture, whose pottery (b) is found along the Black Sea Coast. Some plastic ornament was applied to pottery, as in the case of the Vădastra handles (c) or the later example of a bowl in the shape of a quadruped (d) from the Gumelnița culture.



3a



7

3b



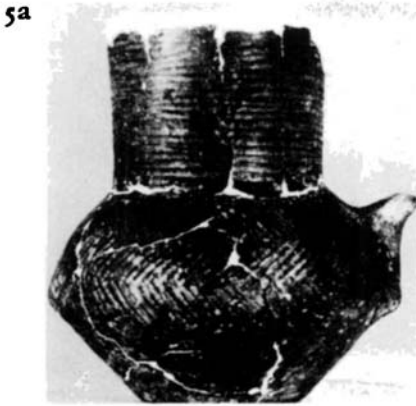
4a



4b



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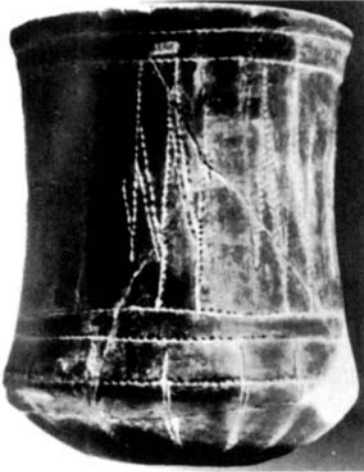
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6b



6d



6c



7a



7. Representations of the human body were usually schematic, and are hard to interpret in detail. The rod-head figurine fragments (a, b) are from the middle Neolithic settlement of Dunavec (Korçë) in Albania. Finely incised ornament (c) is characteristic of figurines of the Cucuteni culture, though it is uncertain whether they represent tattoos or details of clothing. The large hollow figurine (d) of the Gumelnița culture is almost 40 cm high, and decorated

with painted curvilinear ornament in silvery graphite paint.

8. As well as baked clay figurines, some examples are known in marble, such as the female with folded arms (a) from Bulgaria. Plastic ornament on pottery occasionally shows human figures (b) in an attitude of prayer, also from Bulgaria.