
Recent Mesolithic in steppes of Ukraine at dawn of the Neolithization

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Résumé

In southern Ukraine the development of Neolithic society is generally placed within the framework of interaction between Mesolithic hunters and external Neolithic groups. Meanwhile, the Mesolithic sites immediately prior to the arrival of most ancient ceramics (presence of domesticates in the Early Neolithic of Ukraine is currently under dispute) are poorly known. The general cultural situation seems to be clear. There were two cultural blocks: Grebenyky and Kukrek sharing the steppes of north Black and Azov Seas littoral. However, there is an evident lack of well-dated excavated sites of both cultural aspects for the Early Atlantic period (7000-6200 calBC) for the regions of future Neolithic colonization.

Recently, two sites of Kukrek cultural aspects were re-excavated with enhanced stratigraphic controls and further radiocarbon dating of sediments namely the sites of Kamyana Mohyla 1 (north Azov Sea) and Melnychna Krucha (south-western Ukraine). The Mesolithic layers underlie the layers of later pottery-bearing cultures in both cases. The former can be attributed to the Kukrek technocomplex by a characteristic techno-typological composition of lithic assemblage. In Kamyana Mohyla 1 (middle layer) tools include retouched flakes (14% of tools), retouched blades (24%), notched or denticulate blades (5,6%), a backed bladelet, Kukrek inserts (19%), a simple end-scraper, perforator on a flake, burins and points. *Burins* are mostly composed by three distinctive groups: double / multiple burins on blades and dihedral and multiple (Kukrek) burins on flakes and simple burins on flakes. "Kukrek burins" resemble secondary cores (cores on flakes). *Points* were produced by an oblique truncation of microblades and bladelets.

The Kukrek-type inventory is also characteristic for the earliest pottery-bearing cultural aspects in the regions under study: Pechera (the south-western Ukraine) and Surska (the Azov Sea region). It can generally be distinguished from the Recent Mesolithic assemblages by more advanced microlithization, systematic presence of geometrics, extended variety of end-scrapers subtypes etc. Kukrek culture bearers are the best candidate so far known for the role of Mesolithic hunters which experience and/or were influenced by the earliest stages of "Ceramization" in southern Ukraine. Supported by SNF SCOPES SNF-IZ76Z0_147550

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Mots-Clés: Mesolithic, Steppe, Earliest pottery, Radiocarbon chronology