



## AAA lectures – N-Pontic & SE-Balkans – 2024 Program

**Organizers:** *Agathe Reingruber and Elke Kaiser*

(April–June 2024, Thursdays at 4 p.m. CET)

Link to lectures:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82736329238?pwd=K3UrUG9WYkNkTDBZYWZ5WENjdjJmdz09>

ID: 827 3632 9238, Passcode: 041574

**18.04.2024**

**Bogdan Athanassov** – “Argonauts of the 2nd millennium BCE in the western Black Sea area: tracing links between cultures, economies and social groups”.

**25.04.2024**

**Udo Schlotzhauer** – “Early Greek contacts in the western and northern Pontic regions”.

**16.05.2024**

**Henny Piezonka** – “Hunter-gatherer worlds of postglacial Eastern Europe: relations and innovations between Black Sea, Baltic and Urals”.

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**Dmytro Kiosak** – “Why is ‘the Buh-Dniester culture’ a poor heuristic?”

**06.06.2024**

**Michael Meyer, Octavian Munteanu** – “Pre-Roman Iron Age in East Carpathian forest steppe: regional and supra-regional connections”.

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**Bisserska Gaydarska** – “Political organisation at the earliest low density, egalitarian cities in Eurasia: a Trypillia megasite narrative”.

**20.06.2024**

**Adina Boroneanț** – “Early Holocene fishing practices in the Iron Gates of the Danube”.

**27.06.2024**

**Denis Topal** – “Early nomads on the western fringe of the Eurasian steppe during the Iron Age: From ‘birth en route’ to the ‘symbolic death’ of Ares’ children”.



<https://arwa-international.org/>  
<https://www.youtube.com/@arwaassociation1802>

18.04. – Bogdan Athanassov, New Bulgarian University, Sofia

**Argonauts of the 2nd millennium BCE in the western Black Sea area:  
tracing links between cultures, economies and social groups.**

One hundred years ago, Bronislaw Malinowski used the Argonauts as a metaphor for maritime adventurers, travelers and entrepreneurs in his study of ceremonial exchange between Trobriand islanders in the Pacific (Malinowski 1922). He revolutionized cultural anthropology and particularly the study of exchange in traditional societies as he demonstrated that the economic and social aspects of exchange are tightly intertwined. Between the Aegean and the Black Sea, we do not see any archaeological evidence of regular or even sporadic navigation neither during the Middle nor the Late Bronze Age (MBA and LBA). That is why we speak of Argonauts in a metaphorical way only, as Malinowski did.

The strip of land west of the Black Sea is among the less known areas on the map of Europe in the 2<sup>nd</sup> mill BCE. This is astonishing given the proximity to the Eastern Mediterranean, to Hittite Anatolia and to the Carpathian area. It is still difficult to understand how it is possible that hundreds of archaeological sites have been recorded to the northwest of the Black Sea (e.g. Sabatinovka culture), and at the same time we are aware of only one or two settlements from the MBA and the LBA located in the huge area between the Danube Delta in the north and the Bosphorus in the south? The western Black Sea came into the focus of scholarly interest already in the early 1970s with the discovery of the spectacular Copper Age (5<sup>th</sup> mill BCE) necropolis near Varna. Therefore, the scarcity of archaeological finds from the 2<sup>nd</sup> mill BCE cannot be explained by insufficient research.

What makes the area to the west of the Black Sea interesting is the contrast between the quite limited evidence of settlements and the astonishing data on metal and symbolic objects such as Cypriot oxhide ingots, the hoard found near Pobit Kamak in northwest Bulgaria and the numerous stone scepters which resemble the one discovered in the Shipwreck from Uluburun. These objects point to an exchange over impressively long distance. However, their appearance in the regions west of the Black Sea can only be understood if we consider local values, economic and social conditions as Malinowski did on the Trobriand islands.



Cypriot oxhide ingot found near Chernozem, SW Bulgaria (Museum in Elhovo, photo by the author).

25.04. – Udo Schlotzhauer

German Archaeological Institute, Eurasia Department, Berlin

### **Early Greek contacts in the western and northern Pontic regions”.**

Unlike in the west, the "first Greeks in the Northeast" did not indirectly or directly tie in with existing contacts from the Bronze Age after the so-called Dark Centuries in Pontus. There also existed no older Phoenician trade network in which the Greeks could have been involved. Moreover, the oldest traces of the "first Greeks in the Northeast" are relatively late, dating no earlier than the middle of the 7th century BC. Furthermore, the finds first appear far inland, hundreds of kilometers into the hinterland, before the colonies on the coast were established. Therefore, in the time of the so-called Great Greek Colonisation, a contrast exists between the processes in the west and those in the northeast. The lecture will examine the special features of the early phase of Greek presence in the northeast on the basis of the following questions: Can the date of the oldest traces be determined more precisely and the course of the so-called colonisation reconstructed more accurately? Where did the artefacts come from and who transported them? Where and with whom did the first contact take place?

Key witnesses of the process to be reconstructed, from first contact to the foundation of settlements on the coasts, are primarily Greek pottery from the 7th century B.C. However, some individual finds from this period, for example from Etruria, and larger assemblages from inland Anatolia also need to be explained.



16.05. – Henny Piezonka  
Institute of Prehistoric Archaeology, Free University, Berlin

**“Hunter-gatherer worlds of postglacial Eastern Europe:  
relations and innovations between Black Sea, Baltic and Urals”.**

In the Early Holocene, a frontier line between two socio-economic macro-formations ran from the western Baltic through parts of Eastern Central Europe to the North-Western Pontic and on to the Caucasus and further south-east. This boundary, modelled on the basis of early pottery dispersals across Afro-Eurasia, separates a European world influenced by the spread of farming lifestyles and related material cultures and world views originating in the Near Eastern Neolithic, from a trans-Eurasian hunter-gatherer world characterized by – and traceable through – its own independent ceramic technologies. In the North-West Pontic region, this situation is exemplified by the easternmost Linear Band Pottery culture and the Bug-Dneestr culture adjacent to the east. Far from being a border, this boundary situation created a dynamic sphere of interaction that constituted both hybridization and conscious differentiation between social groups and communities.

In this lecture, I will discuss the current state of knowledge on hunter-gatherer lifeways, environment and socio-cultural dynamics between the Urals, the Baltic and the Black Sea and devaluate transregional relationships with formations further south-east, focussing on the 7<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> millennia cal BC.



30.05. – Dmytro Kiosak

Mechnikov National University, Odesa / Montaigne University, Bordeaux

### **Why is 'the Buh-Dniester culture' a poor heuristic?**

In Eastern Europe, particularly in Ukraine, the precise timing of the Neolithic era is a subject of ongoing debate despite extensive historical research. This topic continues to be a focal point of lively discussions, reflecting a broader disagreement regarding the character, origins, and progression of Ukraine's initial Neolithic period. In fact, at times, the Neolithic is defined solely by the presence of pottery. The emergence of pottery in Ukraine is documented as early as the latter part of the 7th millennium BCE or the early 6th millennium BCE. Similarly, the spread of cultivated crops and domesticated animals remains a complex puzzle in South-West Ukraine, with scholars still striving to comprehend it.

The topic of the time and nature of the first neolithisation of a region always has a certain nationalistic flavour. After all, the originality and uniqueness, the historical primacy of the achievements of one's own culture is something that never disappears from the public demand (Trigger, 1990). Therefore, certain concepts regarding the neolithisation of the Carpathian-Danube region require preliminary deconstruction. Such misleading concepts, in my opinion, include the idea of the "Buh-Dniester culture" as a social unity with one origin and continuous development over time for more than a millennium.

The demolition of the concept of a unified culture for early pottery-bearing groups of the region between Carpathians and the Southern Buh river opens a new fruitful direction of research – namely, search for diversity of the material culture expressions which would surpass artificial limits of "Buh-Dniester" culture.



Melnychna Krucha: the stratigraphy of the site, locus R4 (photo: Olha Demchenko).

06.06. – Michael Meyer<sup>1</sup> and Octavian Munteanu<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Institute of Prehistoric Archaeology, Free University, Berlin

<sup>2</sup>World History Department at the State Pedagogical University, Chişinău

### **Pre-Roman Iron Age in East Carpathian forest steppe: regional and supra-regional connections**

During the second half of the 3rd century BC a remarkable process of unification in material culture is to be seen in large parts of Northern and Eastern Central Europe. This process is so remarkable that it led archaeologist to the definition of new archaeological cultures. The reasons for the genesis of these archaeological cultures differ in the scientific debate and have up to now mainly been treated within the frame of the very cultures. The emergence of Poienişti-Lucaşeuca culture differs decisively from the other cultures by the fact that the previous ‘Getic’ culture has been structured in a widely varying structure covering settlements, fortifications as well as burials.

Now the interpretation of the P-L culture as being a result of migration from Northern central Europe is almost exclusively based on evidence from cemeteries. Contrary positions that emphasised local traditions that are mainly visible in settlement evidence remained far less influential, but pointed towards major differences existing between the material culture of graves and settlements. Much more reasonable is the hypothesis that it might point towards a diversity of burial rites for different groups of P-L population of which only the urn graves are visible for us today. Be this as it may – it underlines the great importance of settlement excavations as a second base for the interpretation of PL.

It makes clear that large scale excavations are necessary to enable us to use settlement evidence in an appropriate manner to learn about settlement structure, economy and ritual life as well as to discuss the entanglement of the east Carpathian forest steppe population of the late Iron Age within the large area between the Baltic and the Black Sea. To achieve this goal, from 2020 a largescale excavation project was initiated and is currently financed by Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. Our communication presents first results and discusses the connectivity that becomes visible.



### Political organisation at the earliest low density, egalitarian cities in Eurasia: a Trypillia megasite narrative”

The Trypillia megasites of Ukraine constituted the largest sites in 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC Europe and were, in my view, the earliest low-density cities in the world. They raise profound doubts about the standard model of social evolution and the development of the first cities in the Near East. The megasite investigations in the last decade have also questioned the long-assumed nature of these sites as overcrowded permanent settlements with a village-type economy. Using the megasite of Nebelivka in Central Ukraine as a starting point, this paper will offer a) an alternative to the standard view of the hierarchical nature of megasites, and b) an over-arching egalitarian model of Trypillia political economy, developed on the basis of Graeber and Wengrow’s (2021) groundbreaking insights.



Magnetogram of the geophysical survey in Nebelivka, Ukraine; © J. Chapman, Durham University

### Early Holocene fishing practices in the Iron Gates of the Danube

The riverine resources of the Danube were an extremely important part of both the Mesolithic and the Early Neolithic subsistence (ca 10 000- 5500 cal BC) in the Iron Gates of the Danube, and area located at the border between Romania and Serbia, in south-east Europe.

Faunal assemblages from certain sites on both banks contained important quantities of fish bones and bivalves (*Unio* sp.), although the frequency of species and amounts were highly variable, likely triggered by the methods employed when collecting the bones (hand collecting, dry and wet sieving). The extremely high dependence on fish consumption though, was first indicated by the results of the stable isotope studies when attempting to quantify the fresh-water reservoir effect observed at the Late Mesolithic radiocarbon dates from Schela Cladovei (Romania) in the 1990s. Another important piece of information came only a few years ago, from the study of organic residue in the pottery sherds from a number of Early Neolithic Iron Gates sites. Another recent direction of research – coprolite studies – pointed into the same direction.

But what is the direct evidence when looking at the archaeological assemblages yielded by the Mesolithic and Early Neolithic sites in the Iron Gates? The present lecture aims to take a close look at the resulted finds (stone and osseous industries), the archaeozoological and anthropological studies, and correlate them with similar

finds/results from both archaeological excavations at the same chronological horizon but also historical/modern traditional societies where fishing constituted an important subsistence activity. Finally, by looking also at the traditional fishing techniques in the Iron Gates area in recent times (1900s), possible fishing techniques used during the Mesolithic and the Early Neolithic will be suggested, in an attempt to identify both temporal and regional (Upper and Lower Gorges) patterns.



Sturgeon fishing in the Iron Gates (after Marsigli 1726).



27.06. Denis Topal

National Museum of History, Chişinău

## **Early nomads on the western fringe of the Eurasian steppe during the Iron**

**Age:**

### **From “birth en route” to the “symbolic death” of Ares’ children**

The Northwestern Black Sea region is rich in archaeological sites and can easily be called an archaeological *klondike*. The most common type of site, both in the Northwestern Black Sea region and Eurasia in general, is the burial mound known as *kurgan*. Kurgan constructions are closely related to the mobile communities of the steppe area and the larger Northwestern Black Sea region. They can be assigned to two distinct phases: The “heyday of the barrows” occurred in the Early Bronze Age with the arrival of the bearers of the Yamnaya culture in the early 3rd millennium BC, whereas the “Kurgan Renaissance” began with the Scythian period in the Iron Age. Altogether, the mound activity of the early nomads was much lower than that of the early herders. From the area between the rivers Dniester and Prut, at least 260 mounds and 400 burials of the Scythian period (7th-4th centuries BC) are known. In addition to burial mounds, flat burial grounds were also in use. Yet no more than five per cent of all assemblages belong to the Early and Middle Scythian periods since most of the burials were arranged in the late 5th and 4th centuries BC.

In the Danube-Carpathian region, in addition to the relation between burial customs and landscape preference, there is obviously also a connection given with the choice of weapons placed in the graves. Cultural enclaves thus show uniformity in the combination of grave goods and funeral rites. In the late Classical period, from the second half of the 4th century BC onwards, the main component of the Scythian military culture – the sword or *akinakes* – was also transforming and disappearing along with the disintegration of the Classical Scythian culture in the early 3rd century BC.



Scythian stone sculpture of the 4th century BC from barrow 5 near Butor (Republic of Moldova) depicting a warrior (National Museum of History of Moldova, © Denis Topal, 2021)