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IAMNAIA CULTURE IN THE CARPATHIAN-DNIESTER REGION. HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ISSUES AND INTERPRETATIONS

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Abstract. This article presents the summary of the experts results who were concerned about Iamnaia culture in the Carpathian-Dniester region. There were examined various lines of research, theories and visions to make a comparative analysis of the discussed matter. The investigation structure results out of several criteria which were followed. Conceptual conclusion – there were considered most representative concepts found in the literature, which explain the name of this culture. Another criterion is the addressed chronology. Timing and space is a crucial and complex task, and experts offer several versions to date Iamnaia culture. Therefore the area of spread was amplified and updated due to the increasing number of tombs discovered. Finally, there are detected and succinctly described the characteristic features of the funeral ritual, addressed by experts who have researched Iamnaia culture in the Carpathian-Dniester region.

Keywords: Iamnaia culture, Carpathian-Dniester region, Bugeac culture group, funerary rite and ritual, specific features.

Historiographical issues. The article presents an introduction about the Iamnaia culture in the Carpatho-Nistriian space, based on the theories, approaches and analyzes of the specialists in this field. The research and interest in this culture dates back to the second half of the XIX century. For Prut-Dniester space, the first excavations that laid the foundations for the establishment and identification of the Iamnaia culture were made by the I.Ia. and L.P. Stempovski in the surroundings

of Tiraspol (400 mounds)¹ and large excavations at Costesti from 1974-1976². Research in the field continued in several stages³, and as a result the number of archaeological excavation continues to increase⁴. The data has been capitalized in an impressive list of publications. The scientific works of synthesis dedicated to the Iamnaia culture, where its' characteristics are widely approached, are: *Drevneishie skotovodcheskie plemena Iugo-Zapada SSSR* (Iarovoi 1985), *Moldavia i sosednie teritorii v epohu bronzы* (Dergachev 1986), *Epoca timpurie a bronzului între Carpați și Prut* (Burtănescu 2002)⁵ *Evoluția comunităților patriarhale. Epoca bronzului* (Dergaciov 2010), *Iamnaia (Budzhakskaiia) kul'tura* (Ivanova 2013).

Conceptual conclusion. In the specialized literature we find many concepts that define this culture. Each of them has been established based on specific features of the funerary ritual or territory where mounds were discovered. *Iamnaia culture* is name like that, because of the funeral pit form, which is predominantly rectangular or oval in plan. It comes from Russian word "iama", which means pit. The name of *ocher grave culture* comes from another commonly observed ritual – sprinkling with ocher pigment (reddish color) of the deceased and the bottom of the pit⁶. *Kurgan culture*- raising mounds over the graves. The term was proposed by M. Gimbutas together with North Pontic population migration theory in several waves⁷. There are also a number of culture names which come from the region where the graves were discovered⁸, more common concepts as Bugeac (I. Cherniakov, S. Ivanova etc) and Nerushai culture (L. Klein).

¹ Dergachev 1973, p. 32; Iarovoi 1985, p. 10; Agul'nikov, Sava 2004, p. 4.

² Ivanova 2015, p. 15

³ Iarovoi 1985, p. 5-27, Iarovoi 2000, p. 5-6.

⁴ Dergachev 1973, p. 12-56; Gogăltan 2013, p.37-38; Frînculeasa et al. 2015, p. 181-182; Ivanova 2015, p. 15-16.

⁵ Surdu 2015, p. 22-23, Surdu 2016a, p. 513-514.

⁶ Surdu 2015, p. 24, Surdu 2016a, p. 512.

⁷ Gimbutas 1973, p. 163-214.

⁸ Iarovoi 2000, p. 7.

General characteristics of Iamnaia culture are rectangular burial pit (with or without rounded corners); crouched position of the deceased; ceramics as inventory deposited in the grave; skeleton or funeral pit painted with ocher; raising mounds over the graves.

Chronology. Chronological attribution of Iamnaia culture is a complex issue and was widely discussed in the specialized literature. Being in a transition period, however, Iamnaia culture belongs to the early Bronze Age period. It is foregone by Neolithic cultures and followed by the catacombs culture⁹. This historical-cultural complex existed for an extended period of time on an extremely broad space. In order to chronologically time frame the culture, researchers used radiocarbon dating method or dendrochronological dates. In the specialized literature, we meet varying timeframe depending on several factors, however, they estimate the existence of this culture in the third millennium BC.

Recent determinations, using radiocarbon dates propose time spans between 3000/2900 BC and 2500/2400 BC¹⁰. Other Ukrainian specialists state chronological data and internal periods up to several stages. The three stages of Iamnaia (Bugeac) culture offered by S. Ivanova are: *early stage* (3200 / 3100- 3000/2900 BC), *developed* and *final stage* (2200-2000 BC)¹¹.

For the Prut-Dniester region, V. Dergaciov indicates two variants of culture Iamnaia: *Dniester* and *cultural group Bugeac*¹². *Dniester variant*, calibrates according to radiocarbon dating to XXIX/XXVII – XXVI/XXV centuries BC, while the second variant called Bugeac is dated to XXVI/XXV – XXI/XX centuries BC. Traces of Iamnaia culture were grouped into four levels proposed by E. Iarovoi: *Early monuments* (end of the first mid-mid of third millennium BC); *Iamnaia graves*

⁹ Iarovoi 1985, p. 100-109; Dergacev 1994, p. 123; Ivanova 2013, p. 223.

¹⁰ Rassamakin, Nikolova 2008, p. 60-67.

¹¹ Ivanova 2013, p. 220-223.

¹² Dergachev 1986, p. 65-87, Dergacev 1994, p. 124-127.

(middle of third millennium BC- end of 3rd - beginning of the fourth quarter of third millennium BC); *Late stage* (the end of 3rd quarter- first quarter of the second millennium BC) and *post Iamnaia* (end of IIIrd millennium - first quarter of the second millennium BC)¹³.

In the Lower Danube region were established two distinct burial groups. First group – *early version* (between 3300-3050/3000 cal BC) and second group – *later version* (from c. 3050/3000 to 2600/2550 cal BC)¹⁴. Other known dating of the Carpathian-Dniester space indicates approximately the same period of existence for Iamnaia culture.

Area of spread. Area of spread for the discussed culture is extremely vast. Zone boundaries are considered from south of the Ural Mountains to the Carpathians¹⁵. Using radiocarbon dating method was confirmed simultaneous existence of this aspect on the whole territory¹⁶. There were seen more territorial demarcations, indicating the same space but with certain embodiments and specifications. The Iamnaia culture distribution area covers most of the West Eurasian steppes from the Lower Danube and the Carpathians in the west to the southern Urals in the east with single graves occurring even southeast of the Ural Mountains¹⁷. The territorial extension of the culture is at the Ural interfluves - lower Volga to the east and to the Carpathians and the Middle Danube to the west and southwest¹⁸.

Researchers in Bulgaria specified that the area of spreading are mainly distributed in the eastern European steppe zone between the eastern Carpathians and the area bordering the southern Urals¹⁹.

¹³ Iarovoi 2000, p. 21-22.

¹⁴ Frînculeasa et al. 2015, p. 82.

¹⁵ Surdu 2015, p. 24.

¹⁶ Chernykh, Orlovskaia 2004, p. 93.

¹⁷ Rassamakin, Nikolova 2008, p. 51.

¹⁸ Dergachev 1986, p. 26, Dergachev 1994, p. 123.

¹⁹ Kaiser, Winger 2015, p. 115.

Testimonies of Iamnaia culture are known only from burials, or housing settlements were not disclosed. It was discovered and excavated a considerable number of mounds in the Carpathian-Nistran area (Fig. 1). That is why, during a longer time period we have several theories and visions explaining Iamnaia culture.

The Iamnaia cultural community can be regarded in two general directions for interpretation. Some experts advocate for an inseparable cultural-historical region, while the other emphasizes the individual character of the Early Bronze Age culture²⁰ or “mobile-settled or mobile with a limited settled pattern”²¹.

In his works²², N.Ya. Merpert speaks about a distinct cultural and historical space, where there is an intensive interaction between local groups. The author analyzes the configuration of heterogeneous culture and proposes nine regional variants²³: Volga-Ural variant, Precaucasus variant, Don variant, Severskii Donets variant, Azov variant, Crimea variant, Lower Dnieper variant, Northwest variant, Southwest variant²⁴.

In 1985 O.G. Shaposhnikova proposed a new classification. Barrow graves were divided into five local variants: Severskii Donets, Middle Dnieper, Lower Dnieper, Azov-Crimea and Southern Bug²⁵. Subsequently, in each region or territorial variant researchers have found other local cultural groups²⁶.

Characteristic features of the funeral ritual. Following the above-mentioned, Iamnaia culture between Prut and Nistru

²⁰ Iarovoï 2000, p. 7.

²¹ Bunyatyan 2003, p. 276.

²² N.Ya. Merpert, *Drevneishaia istoria naselenia stepnoi polosy Vostochnoi Evropy*, Avtoref. dis. doct. ist. nauk. Moskva, 1968. 84 s.

²³ Merpert 1968, p. 17-39.

²⁴ Mounds from Prut-Dniester region belong to this variant.

²⁵ Shaposhnikova 1985, p. 347.

²⁶ Rassamakin 1994, propose for the northern pontic region several local variants.

rivers, were grouped into two local versions. To *Dniester* variant is attributed classical culture, but the later phase-*Bugeac* phase is distinguished by several features. These are²⁷:

- Burial pit with steps;
- Moderate or accentuated crouched position on one side;
- Specific tools and jewelries;
- Outstanding pottery (rich ornaments);
- Pit covered with planks.

Some experts use the concept *Bugeac* culture, where all the monuments of culture can be classified *Iamnaia*. In this case we are talking about a cultural group of *Iamnaia* culture that has developed in the Prut-Dniester region. L. Klein in 1975, said in a review²⁸ about the possibility of interpreting the tombs in the late phase of culture given a special aspect²⁹. Initially, assignation to the culture was done based on the deceased crouched position. Later, V. Dergachiov³⁰, research funerary complexes in the Prut and Nistru has found other particularities or criteria under which can be accomplished the classification of monuments.

The area of distribution comprises the space from *Velikii Kuial'nik* River to the beginning of the Danube and north to *Orhei* and *Dubasari*³¹. Following the new discoveries on the territory of the Republic of Moldova, the area can be expanded, for example the mound near the village *Brînzenii Noi*, *Telenesti*³² were seen a few graves type *Bugeac* or late *Iamnaia* – as the authors specify.

²⁷ Surdu 2016b, p.194-195.

²⁸ Reviu to the article „Kurgany stepnoi chasti mezhdurech'ia Dunaia i Dnestra” by N. M. Shmaglii H.M. and I. T. Cherniakov in 1970.

²⁹ Klein 2016, p. 6.

³⁰ „*Moldaviia i sosednie teritorii v epokhu bronzy*” (1986) și „*Epoca Bronzului. Perioada timpurie*” (1994).

³¹ Dergachev 1986, p. 83.

³² Agulnicov, Mistreanu 2014, p. 43-54.

V. Dergaciov, in his work, makes an analysis of funeral rite, which distinguishes the main differences between variants of local Iamnaia culture in the Prut-Dniester region. 65% of funerary complexes belongs to Dniester variant and 35% to cultural group Bugeac³³. The primary number of graves dominates in the first group and secondary graves are more common in the late phase of culture. Burial pit is rectangular, only in later phase the pit has steps. The position of the deceased in the first group is supine with arms outstretched over the body, knees and legs raised, but for Bugeac variant is crouched position. Another difference between variants of Iamnaia culture can be defined in the ritual of painting with ocher. This ritual was respected more by bearers of Dniester phase culture (deceased painted entirely or parts of the body such as skull, hands). In the latter variant are very few graves painted with ocher.

Early variant of tools are arrowheads for bow, worked in flint; axes from hard rock with hole for holding, and in Bugeac barrow graves are found bone arrowheads; flint axes. Jewelries differ. Dniester variant is known for pendants with one or more metal coils, while Bugeac variant for bracelets composed of several small tubes twisted from metal foil.

For the early stage there are spherical or ovoid amphora with relatively flat handles, horizontally perforated; bell-shaped cups; jar with bandy rim; vessels with round or rounded bottom. For the latter phase are specific spherical and ovoid amphorae with tubular handles or flat handle with vertical holes; conical vessels with or without circular support, with vertical perforated ears (often with rich ornament); simple domed or conical cups and bowls, jar with bandy rim. The room is covered with slabs stone, and the graves of Bugeac variant were observed to have roof built of logs³⁴.

³³ Dergacev 1994, p. 126.

³⁴ Dergachev 1986, p. 64-87, Dergacev 1994, p. 126-127.

If we consider the position of the deceased as one of the main criteria to assign graves to late Iamnaia culture, then the classification determined by E. Iarovoi corresponds to last 2 groups (*late stage and post Iamnaia complexes*). There are more secondary graves compared with the primary (17% / 83%) and (5% / 95%). For the late stage Iamnaia is specific the right side crouched position, but for the post Iamnaia the left side. Inventory met the primary and secondary graves is bronze knife, flint tools; pendants with one or more turns of metal, bronze bracelets; pots, jars, amphorae, cups, bowls, etc³⁵.

Studies conducted in the area to the east of the Carpathians revealed another culture typology and other distinguishing features of Iamnaia culture. For the Lower Danube region barrow graves were classified into two stages³⁶. In the early stage graves are primary; more oval than rectangular grave pits; predominate the side-crouched position; ochre rarely used if at all; intentional deposition of excavated soil around the burial & occasional stone circles; occasionally local vessels incorporated; rarely simple precious-metal hair-rings.

Late stage is characterized by burials both primary and secondary. Predominates rectangular grave pits and supine-flexed position. There were certified ochre straying and deposition of ochre patches/lumps. Jewelries become most frequent burial gift, and funeral inventory is occasionally cord-decorated (beaker) vessels given. Characteristic is the ritual of pits covered with wooden beams.

Conclusion. Dissemination of the culture on such a vast territory make it difficult to achieve a common classification of funeral ritual, but allows highlighting a number of specific features and territorial variations apparently independent. Also, we are witnessing a conceptual confrontation. In the specialized literature, there are known more synonyms

³⁵ Iarovoi 2000, p. 20-21.

³⁶ Frinculeasa et al. 2015, p.83.

defining Iamnaia culture. For example within Prut-Dniester space we have two variants, which can be considered early and late stages of the discussed culture. Summarizing the above mentioned one can see that despite the progress in solving the multiple problems of the various aspects of Iamnaia culture there is place for new approaches, especially in terms of mentioning some chronological, classifications, variants of local culture.

Abbreviations

| | |
|---------------|---|
| BPS | Baltic-Pontic Studies, Poznań, Poland. |
| PEUCE | Studii și Cercetari de Istorie și Arheologie, Tulcea, România. |
| PZ | Praehistorische Zeitschrift, Berlin, Germania. |
| RA | Revista Arheologică, Chișinău, Republica Moldova. |
| SCIVA | Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche și Arheologie, București, România. |
| Thraco-Dacica | Thraco-Dacica. Institutul de Thracologie, București, România. |

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Figures

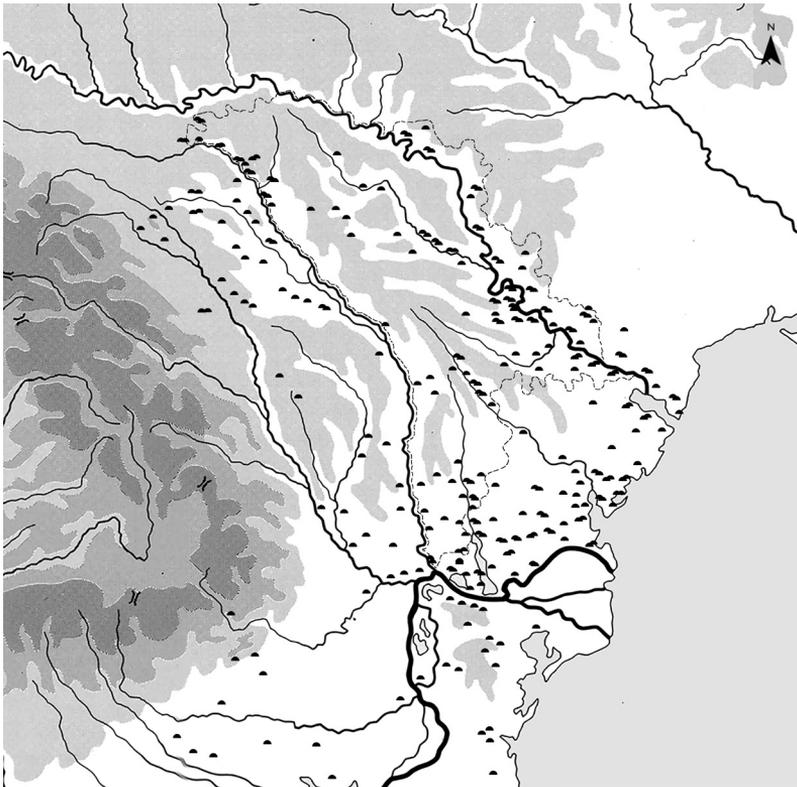


Figure 1. Pit-Grave burials from Carpatho-Dniester region
(after Dergaciov, Popovici 2010, p. 282; after Ivanova 2013, p. 217;
after Frînculeasa et al, 2015, p. 50)