

LONG-BLADE DISTRIBUTION AND APPEARANCE OF EARLY NEOLITHIC TULIP-LIKE POTTERY IN EASTERN BALKANS

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'Exotic' artefacts deliberately deposited in habitual and non-habitual archaeological contexts raise a number of questions about the constitution of the tell-settlement social model in the Balkans.

Anthony Giddens points out the importance of the 'positioning' of the body and the context relative to one another (1984: xxiv-xxv) and focuses attention on the 'regionalization' of encounters. Locales are not just places but settings of interaction. Time-space 'fixity' means social fixity; the substantially 'given' character of the physical milieus of day-to-day life interlaces with routine and is deeply influential in the contours of institutional reproduction (*ibidem*). The major question is how large social systems span large sectors of time-space.

On such a theoretical background we may ask the question how the new social system of tell settlement (the Karanovo I culture; Nikolov 2002) appeared and spread over a large area in the Middle Thracian plain and maintained its uniqueness for a long period of time. I shall focus on the presence of 'exotic' artefacts, materials, and on 'unique' features like pottery decoration. These characteristics delineate the field of social interactions: gender tensions and gender relations which are underlined by the remarkable absence of artefacts vested into symbolic violence: arrowheads, projectiles, microlithic points, etc.

In the archaeological record the vision of the existing tensions between the sexes appears in house and pottery decorations, in the way the settlements are organized, in the presence/absence of exotic materials, 'special' artefacts, grave goods, etc. It functions as a system of categories of perception, as ways of thinking, and in the habitual actions (Bourdieu 1988). The milestone of this complex social system is the gradual development of the idea of home (Tsonev in press).

The different social roles, and especially the control imposed on domestic violence, lead towards constitution of legitimate social institution, such as 'home' that unifies and smoothes the sexual and social differences and neutralizes them as sources of social disturbance. The newly emerged public domain in the PPN in Anatolia gradually gives way to the much more flexible institution - the home. On the one hand, such an institution can effectively control the violence based on sexuality (J. C. Chapman, lecture delivered in New Bulgarian University, April 2003), and, on the other, can control the violence based on public disputes. The late tell-settlement model of early pottery Neolithic in Anatolia and the Balkans reveals exactly this: the domination of separate home (households) on tells. All the houses on them seem to be uniform, built on exactly the same foundations, and with remarkable absence of public buildings, arrowheads, projectile points, microlithic points, etc. Instead, we have rich house decoration (Catalhoyuk, central Turkey), richer pottery decoration (the Karanovo, tell, Thracian plain), and mass long-distance imports of obsidian artefacts (in Anatolia, in central Balkans, Serbia), and high-quality flints from northeastern Bulgaria in the Balkans. In the early Neolithic contexts in the Balkans, the 'exotic' high-quality flints take the form of long blades (8-12 cm long) that travel long distances to Turkish Thrace, south Bulgaria, northern Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, and probably to the Trieste Karst (Grotta dell Orso, the exhibition in the Trieste Archaeological Museum).

I would like to consider briefly the complex role of the idea of home within the basic contradiction of the early development of tell-sites of PPN in eastern and central Anatolia. At this initial stage of development of tell-sites, it is the public domain that symbolizes the unity of the different kin or lineage groups. The accent is put outside the private domain. It was not the settlements themselves as a homogeneous whole, but the public, value-laden structures that turned out to be the focal point of the wider community network.

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They had to manipulate and put under control the newly emerged large inter-group conflicts, violent actions, and to maintain the community's integrity on a base of a common tradition. Thus the public domain incorporates 'power', 'prestige', and 'wealth' that better convey the strong messages needed to regulate the intensive negotiations among different social actors and group identities. The complex reality of tell settlements caused the appearance of a variety of prestige objects: projectile points, flint daggers, long pressure made blades, microliths and geometrics, the wide spread of obsidian and high-quality flints, stone balls and artistic images and sculptures. The paradox of the social model of tell-settlement is that at this early stage of its development the male symbols become visible in the public domain, but they do not go beyond a temporary, single act of 'collective', homomorphic expression – collective feasts. The potential of the arena of social power to both unify and divide pushes the public domain up on the surface, while at the same time makes it superficial and its acts cannot effectively control the inter-community violence. A much more flexible social institution is needed that can redefine gender relations and can incorporate and put under control the violence of the public disputes. And this institution turns out to be the home (household). The new role of the private domain both constitutes and contests the public one. A 'home' viewed through the social practices and their perception by the emerging complex societies encapsulates in it the experience of the living and the realm of ancestors. A 'home', on the other hand, is viewed as a major social arena, which goes beyond conventionalities of existing differentials of wealth and access to resources that rank people in the outside public domain. The outside of home space remains mainly the area where conceptual inequalities often taken as 'natural' – age and gender – almost always have political dimensions (Strathern 1988). This mutual influence between the public and the private domains causes substantial and radical changes in settlement patterns, architecture, material culture and aesthetics of these early communities. Unlike the neo-Marxist approach that views the gradual, socially preconditioned change with little room left for individual actor the present approach seeks to justify the individual's symbolic constitution which generates emotional commitment to social order.

The fact that the cultural selection of semantically significant features almost always takes natural forms helps transfer social relations into homologue relations and inter-connections. This transforms the social into natural necessities through the otherwise arbitrary, symbolic inversion of the cause and effect processes objectively visible in the natural and human worlds. For example, the early Neolithic tulip-like bowls represent a skilful artistic deviation from the

more natural forms of deep round bowls made of stone/marble that are well-known from the earlier pre-pottery Neolithic in eastern and central Anatolia. Unlike stone clay is plastic and better conveys human messages and symbolic meanings (Wengrow 1998). Such a logic of symbolic dedication to human and natural cycles of repeated human experience constitutes natural division between sexes in terms of common mythology and abstract presentations of common metaphors. Among the early Neolithic in the eastern Balkans, it is only the pottery decoration (especially the white painted pottery) which stands in remarkable contrast to the other archaeological features and artefacts that show significant uniformity replicated over large regions. The artificial monumentality of the Thracian tells is opposed by the diversity of the white painted pottery decoration. This semi-objectivity of the systems of representations implied by the pottery forms and decoration reinforces the female ideology of claims over control of private domain (the house/household).

Unlike pottery styles, however, the appearance and spread of long blades and imported high-quality flint varieties remains a highly contested social arena by male and female ideologies in the early Neolithic. The 'effectiveness' of communication between various social actors would depend on the experience induced by mystification of materials, techniques, places, people, and the vividness of imagery of selected natural symbols. This creates a characteristic way of knowing which gives visual representations of ancestrally granted, mystified practices of extraction of special materials (high-quality flints), production of particular artefacts and long distance exchange.

As guidelines for the analysis of the social role of long blades, we can use the following traits: fragility of long blades, the interesting texture and colour of the flint varieties they are made of, the direct distribution from workshops, their uneven spatial distribution. The direct distribution from workshops and the interesting texture and colour implies a lifestyle of their owners that is different from that of the rest of the community. Those who possessed such objects justified their social status by their connection to the remote workshops and the control they probably exerted on the exchange mechanisms. The redistribution of high-status objects (the uneven spatial distribution) created a dependence on certain social authorities and contributed to the formation of social identities. The fragility of the long blades suggests that they were used also for ritual purposes. The context in which long blades and other lithic artefacts occur is the domestic one. This means that they can be used equally well both by men and by women. In the early Neolithic lithic artefacts tend to occur outside, not inside houses. This also means that domestic activities

were taken as publicly displayed and valued work. The lack of chipped-stone workshops inside settlements (the only exception is the lithic workshop in a house in the Slatina IV early Neolithic site, Sofia) also means that communal actions of acquisitions of exotic materials and artefacts made out of them were undertaken by the community as a whole. Lithic artefacts and materials do not separate clearly the public and private domains. If we take as a criterion for distinguishing male from female activities the labour division suggested by the differential protein intake of the Iron Gate Mesolithic people (Bonsall *et al.* 1997), we can see that the early Neolithic horizons I and II of the Karanovo tell blades were used approximately in relation 40% to 60% in favour of women (Gurova 1998). While the blurred boundary between the domestic and public arenas does not permit to define clearly the every-day, laborious activities done mostly by women and the long distance communication and exchange probably dominated by men, it is notable the absence of investment in symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1990) expressed by arrowheads, small ritual axes, etc. People fail to identify themselves with particular knowledge, skills, attitudes, etc. that would permit them to conceptualize gender inequality.

The temporary suspension of the spread of long blades and the gradual change of pottery styles in the final Neolithic puts an end to the domination of ancestrally based common metaphors of communication. While the spread of long blades served as an act of ancestralization of a communal perception of long-distance exchange routes, the maintenance of a wide variety of pottery decoration emphasizes the importance of the private domain that dominates the overall communal life on tell-settlements. The human replication of natural forms such as the deep bowls/ tulip-like vessels and their rich ornamentation reinforces female ideologies set against the involving of long blades in the annual cycles of communal ritualization of long-distance exchange networks. The domination of home rooted ritual practices effectively counterbalances the investment in symbolic violence, accumulation of personal power and knowledge on tell-sites. The archaeological record in the Balkans shows male domination symbols spread in other contexts such as early

Neolithic cave-sites with presence of male symbols such as Middle Palaeolithic leaf-point, small polished axe, a long blade brought in from long distances. All these 'exotic' artefacts are found together in an early Neolithic context in Grotta dell Orso, Trieste karst region. Rich rock art paintings deep down in a cave are found in the Magura cave, northwestern Bulgaria. But these facts raise important questions about liminality of Karst areas, cave-sites as sacred places, etc. that go beyond the topic of my presentation.

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