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Life on the Eastern Borders of Old Europe

The concept of old Europe defines its boundaries with the proliferation of ancient cultivating crops. Its eastern boundary is designated by the districts of Trypillya culture) the Eastern part of Cucuteni-Trypillya cultural unity, which reached the Dnipro valley at the second half of the 5th Millenium BC. At this time, we see several local types Trypillya, with different material culture, some different features in the economy. Subsequently, this added to the difference in the public organization. These groups were completely autonomous, while there is a tendency for their active interaction, perhaps the subordination of the less powerful groups by stronger ones.

The first Trypillya imports at the Dnipro region, which were found at Neolithic sites belongs to BI stage (near the middle of 5th Mill. BC). But there are any traces of Trypillya sites closer than 150-200 km. So we can speak about some trade or cultural relations at this moment, which preceded the direct migration of Trypillya farmers to the east.

There were two groups of Trypillya BI-II stage farmers which come to Dnipro at the second half of 5th Mill. BC, one to the Krasna river valley, the second – to the lower Ros basin. At this moment both groups practiced farming and livestock and used large settlements as the centers of social formations. For the Krasna river eponymous Trypillya site was the central place (near 100 ha square), for the lower Ros – Myropillia (near 200 ha). Most of archaeologists recognized both sites as the tribal centers. Some finds evidence of the long distance trade to the Carpathian region inclusive. This groups had trade relationship with the West, with other Trypillian groups, from where imported copper and, probably, painted pottery. On other hand there are some evidences about the local production of copper tools and painted pottery, but the latter corresponds to western models. It is interesting that new settlers adopted some pottery traditions from the Stog culture – forms and decoration of “kitchen” pottery, processing of the interior surface of the pots (with “true” Trypillya carved decor on other side!) by smoothing. Probably it means that local communities included some part of Stog population. Later, such a multicultural community will become a visiting card of the Trypillian world at the Eastern frontier.

Near 4000 BC new wave of Trypillya communities (with painted-black pottery) reached the Dnipro at the lower Ros region. They probably integrated former population and create a strong system with numerous large (from 20-50 to 100 ha) sites. At the same times tribal centers at the Krasna river disappeared and never been created at this area. Here Trypillya communities returned to archaic model of settling, with small sites (20-100 houses) and the surrounding system of temporary settlements. It was enough for coexistence with the Neolithic population, but not enough to confront the more powerful Trypillian communities in the south. At this time, groups of people come to the Dnipro from the West, which can be linked to a cultural complex of Lublin-Volhynian Painted Pottery. The result was a change in the ceramic complex, which included both traditional local pottery and alien products from the West (undecorated ware) and South (painted pottery from different units!). Such 'multiculturalism' developed around 600-800 years and led to more cultural differentiation inside the area to the North from the Ros river. At the same time a group with painted pottery ("the Kaniv Group") still remained homogeneous. Trade flourished and included metal, flint, painted pottery and Spondilus, some trade routes reached Volhynia. Ar this period we can observe not only contacts with the local Neolithic (marked by sherds from painted pottery), but integration of some Trypillya representatives to local communities (Pustynka V type).

Thus, for nearly a millennium, we see different strategies of life at the frontiers. From one side here were large groups, resistant to external influences, and small groups of population, aimed at the formation of multicultural communities. At the same time, trade was always an important unifying factor in all periods.