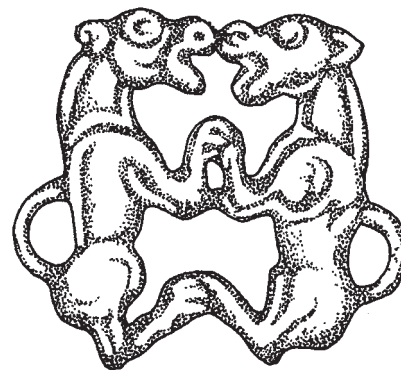


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## REASSESSMENT OF MAIKOP CULTURE INFLUENCES ON THE COMMUNITIES OF THE NORTHERN PONTIC REGION: CASE STUDY OF THE BURIAL CHECHELIIVKA 3/1



*In memoriam of my friend Yevhenii Osiievskiy — a talented young anthropologist who died while defending Ukraine from Russian occupants in May 2023.*

*The reinterpretation of a vessel from the previous excavations which was believed to be of the Maikop culture inspired the author to revise artefacts of the Maikop culture and their imitations in the Ukrainian steppe. As a result, it was concluded that the scale of the Maikop culture's influence on the Steppe communities is overestimated.*

**Key words:** *Caucasus, Late Eneolithic, Trypillia, Maikop, pottery, dagger, shaft-hole axe.*

### Introduction

In 1981, archaeologist N. M. Bokii excavated a kurgan burial containing a fine biconical vessel. The finding drew the attention of A. L. Nechytailo, who mentioned it in her paper in 1984 (Нечитайло 1984) investigating the examples of Maikop pottery located in the North Pontic steppe. Since then, the vessel has been attributed to Maikop culture and appeared in works by Yu. Ya. Rassamakin (Рассамакин 2000, с. 158) and V. O. Dergachev (Dergachiov 2021, p. 251) as evidence of the Maikop influence on the steppe communities. In May 2023, the author of the current paper visited the Kirovohrad Regional Museum of Local History and had the opportunity to examine the vessel *de visu* and take photos. In the author's opinion, the vessel belongs to the late phase of the Trypillia culture rather than to the Maikop culture.

The question of cultural interactions between the prehistoric people of modern Ukraine and the Northern Caucasus was raised in 1881 during the 5<sup>th</sup> Archaeological Congress. Among the events of the Congress, there can be found a discussion on the topic of “the comparison between the artefacts found within the tombs of Caucasus and some artefacts found in the kurgans of the Dnipro valley” (Уварова 1887, с. IV). The more distinct thesis about contacts between the people of the Caucasus and the people of the Catacomb culture was expressed almost 35 years later in 1914 by V. O. Gorodtsov (Городцов 1915, с. 160). In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, V. O. Gorodtsov's studies were continued by T. B. Popova (Попова 1955) and O. M. Melikhov (Мелихов 1960), who provided new arguments in favour of contacts between Catacomb and Northern Caucasian cultures. Also, in the 1930s, a famous scholar of prehistoric metallurgy, O. O. Iessen (Иессен 1935) joined the discussion. While analysing the “imported” items of Caucasian origin, the scholar supposed that the main motivation for establishing contacts between two distant regions was the development of prehistoric metallurgy. Desiring to exchange metal goods, raw materials, and technology, prehistoric metallurgists travelled for long distances and, in such a way, spread their culture. A similar idea can be found in the paper written by an archaeologist from Odesa O. M. Melikhov, who stressed the prominent role of Caucasian metallurgy and Northern Pontic steppe animal husbandry in the initiation of cross-regional communication (Мелихов 1960, с. 39). I. I. Artemenko insisted on the Caucasian

\* PhD student at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, the Department of Archaeology, ORCID 0000-0002-8473-9165, [mykyta.ivanov@ukma.edu.ua](mailto:mykyta.ivanov@ukma.edu.ua)

origin of temple rings and other metal items of the Middle Dnipro culture (Артеменко 1967, с. 37). Short notions about migration to the steppe of the Maikop culture people can be found in the paper written by O. H. Shaposhnikova *et al.*, in which the scholars drew readers' attention to the similarity between some fragments from Mykhailivka settlement and a vessel from their own excavation of the mound Sokolivka 1 with the Maikop culture pottery (Шапошникова, Бочкарев, Шарафутдинова 1977, с. 7).

In such a way, at the beginning of the 1980s studies of the cultural contacts between the societies of the Northern Pontic region and those of Caucasus lasted for almost a century. The focus of those studies was on the contacts of the Middle Bronze Age traced mainly by the metal artefacts while the contacts of the Early Bronze Age were investigated less. Most completely they were described by A. L. Nechytailo who dedicated to the subject more than fifteen years of her academic career. For the first time, A. L. Nechytailo's ideas were expressed at the conference in 1980 (Пустовалов 2008, с. 113). Four years later, in 1984, A. L. Nechytailo published an academic paper in which she identified a series of pottery that resembled vessels of the Maikop culture (Нечитайло 1984). In 1991, an archaeologist published a monograph in which the data about pottery were complemented by the description of shaft-hole axes, flat axe-adzes, leaf-like knives and daggers (Нечитайло 1991). In 1994, A. L. Nechytailo defended the monograph as a habilitation thesis (Нечитайло 1994). During the next years the Maikop attribution of the biconical vessels, in particular those from the burial Checheliivka 1/3 was supported by Yu. Ya. Rassamakin (Рассамакин 2000, с. 158; 2004, с. 56). For the last time, the problem of Maikop presence has just recently been discussed. In 2021, a Moldavian archaeologist V. A. Dergachev published a monograph named "*Late Tripolye and Maikop*" (Dergaciov 2021) and in 2022 its Russian translation (Дергачев 2022) was supplemented by the burial site catalogue. In 2023, a Russian archaeologist S. N. Korenevskii replied to the monograph with an article "*The Maikop-Novosvobodnaia Archaeological Culture and Late Tripolye: Contacts, Military and Production Aspects*" (Кореневский 2023). Although both works are published by well-known archaeologists, neither was written by a scholar local to Ukrainian archaeology which influenced the final interpretation. In author's opinion, while being attracted by the former historiographical tradition both authors overestimated Maikop culture's role in cultural

processes happening in the Northern Pontic steppe during circa 3600—3300 BC and underestimated the influence of the Trypillia culture. To prove that, in the following text, the author scrutinise the provided arguments and reviews the so-called Maikop-related artefacts located between the Southern Buh and Kalmius Rivers. The main focus is on the pottery that the author has examined. In the end, the author provides a model of the cultural processes happening in the Northern Pontic region during that time.

### **Materials and Methods**

As the primary materials for the research, the artefacts of four groups were chosen: pottery, metal shaft-hole axes, metal knives and daggers, and flat metal axes. The pottery group includes 32 vessels (fig. 1), which V. O. Dergachev (Dergaciov 2021, fig. 154) considers to be imitations of Maikop ceramics. Two of the mentioned vessels the author studied *de visu*, in particular:

From the burial **Checheliivka 1/3**. It was found in 1981 during the excavation of a mound near Checheliivka village in Kirovohrad Oblast headed by N. M. Bokii. The first short verbal description was published by A. L. Nechytailo (Нечитайло 1984, с. 184). The first drawing of the vessel was made after the photograph and was published in 2000 by Yu. Ya. Rassamakin (Рассамакин 2000, с. 158) and republished in 2004 (Рассамакин 2004, табл. 171:4). The excavation report (Бокий 1981) quoted by Yu. Ya. Rassamakin is currently absent from the Scientific Archive of the Institute of Archaeology while the vessel is exhibited at the Kirovohrad Regional Museum of Local History.

From the burial **Ordzhonikidze 3/32, mound group "Chkalovske"**. It was obtained in 1979 by the Ordzhonikidze expedition led by B. M. Mozolevskiy. The head of the excavation was O. V. Bitkovskiy (Пустовалов 1999, с. 141). The first publication of the Eneolithic materials of Ordzhonikidze mounds was made in 1985 by A. V. Nikolova and Yu. Ya. Rassamakin (Николова, Рассамакин 1985) while the complete publication of excavation results was made in 1999 by S. Zh. Pustovalov (Пустовалов 1999). The vessel is stored at the Scientific Funds of the Institute of Archaeology of the NAS of Ukraine (collection no. 1008)

In addition, the author reviewed the Trypillia vessel from the burial **Volodymyrivka 4/1**, which morphologically resembles biconical



Fig. 1. Late Encolithic sites mentioned in the text

vessels considered to be Maikopian. It was found in 1961 during the excavation of mounds near Volodymyrivka village in Kirovohrad Oblast led by A. P. Savchuk (Савчук 1960) and was published for the first time by V. H. Zbenovych in 1974 (Збенович 1974, с. 155). The vessel is stored at the Scientific Funds of the Institute of Archaeology of the NAS of Ukraine (collection no. 462).

The rest of the pottery was analysed after academic publications.

The group of shaft-hole axes is represented by 25 items, 14 of which were published in several works by V. I. Klochko (Клочко 2019; Klochko *et al.* 2020) 11 others will be published in a forthcoming paper by M. S. Ivanov (Ivanov 2023).

The group of metal knives and daggers is represented by 24 specimens, while the group of flat axes is represented by 50 items found within 31 Ukrainian and Moldovan sites. The author will quote the information on the artefacts of both groups after V. O. Dergachev's recent monograph (Dergachiov 2021, p. 236-241; p. 242-247).

## Pottery

According to V. O. Dergachev, there are at least 32 sites between the Southern Buh and Kalmius Rivers known that included imitations of the Maikop culture pottery most of which, except for Mykhailivka settlement, are represented by prehistoric burials of Serezlievka and Zhyvotyivka-Vovchanske types (Dergachiov 2021, fig. 154). The main argument in favour of such attribution is the vessels' morphology: biconical, round, beaker-like, and cup-like. Yet, in author's opinion, such an attribution is misleading. In reality, most of the mentioned vessels belong either to the late phase of Trypillia or Nyzhnii Rohachyk pottery tradition.

To start the argument, the author suggests comparing two vessels: the first is the pot from the burial Volodymyrivka 4/1 and the other is the pot of the same shape from the burial Checheliivka 1/3. The vessel from Volodymyrivka 4/1 (fig. 2) has a flat bottom, biconical body, short cylindrical neck and slightly deflected outside rims. At the level of the body's rib four small protrusions imitating handles can be noticed. The pot is made





Fig. 2. A late phase of Trypillia culture biconical vessel from the burial Volodymyrivka 4/1 (Scientific Repository of the Institute of Archaeology, NAS of Ukraine. Photo by the author. For high-resolution image visit: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8070157>)

of fine clay with a tiny admixture of fireclay. The outer surface of the vessel is covered with a thick layer of polished slip. Because of the bichrome black and red painted decoration in the form of geometrical linear ornament (fig. 3), the vessel's attribution as late phase of Trypillia causes no doubts. The closest analogies of the mentioned vessel originate from such late Trypillian sites as cemetery Cuncea, burial Obileni 4/8, settlement Gordinești, settlement Horodiște, and others (Топал, Церна 2010, рис. 7).

The other vessel originates from the grave Checheliivka 1/3 (fig. 4) which is believed by many scholars (Нечитайло 1984, с. 134; Рассамкин 2000, с. 158; Dergaciov 2021, p. 251) to be of Maikop origin. It has the same biconical shape with a slightly more pronounced rib. The structure and colour of the clay are also similar. The outer surface is covered with a layer of polished slip as well. The only difference is the absence of painted decoration.

The other case of a misinterpreted late Trypillian vessel is the pot from the mound 1 at Sokolivka. The vessel had a globular body

with short deflected outwards rims which were narrowing towards the edge. The item was made of fine clay with thick structure. The firing is even. The outer surface is polished (Шарафутдинова 1980, с. 76-77). As follows from the presented text the provided description of the vessel's texture exactly matches the features of Trypillian vessels from Volodymyrivka 4/1 and Checheliivka 1/3. Similar is the occasion of the globular vessel from the burial Shyroke 1/3 which had a yellow polished surface decorated with incised triangles (Мельник, Стебліна 2012, с. 431) and the globular vessel from the burial Dubova Mohyla 15, which was accompanied by a late Trypillian amphora of the Kasperivtsi type (Ковалева 2003, с. 58-60). A possible Trypillian origin has a beaker from the burial Osokorivka 2/12 which had a dark grey polished surface and was made of clay with an inclusion of the fractured shell (Рибалова 1960, с. 7). Such a description resembles the features of the so-called "grey polished" pottery of the Kaniv local variant of the Tripillia CI (3900—3600 BC) which according to E. V. Ovchynnikov was made of hydromica clay with natural insertion

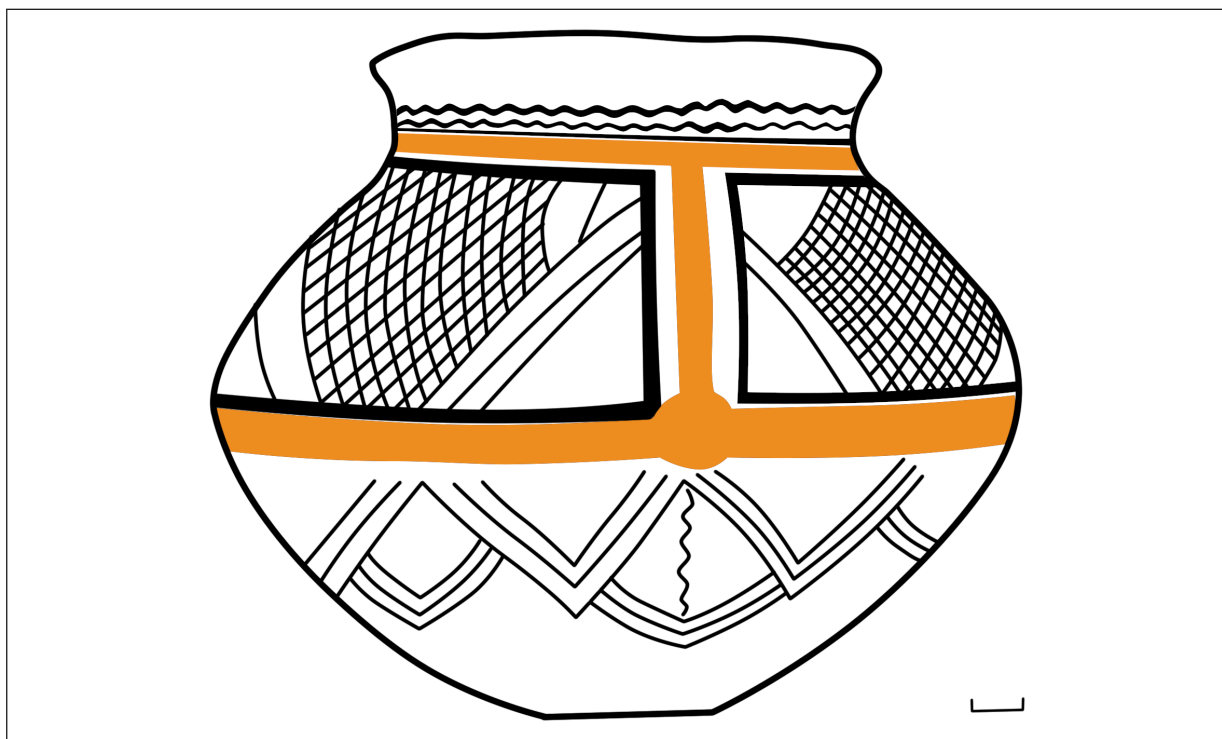


Fig. 3. A late phase of Trypillia culture biconical vessel from the burial Volodymyrivka 4/1 (drawing by the author)

of organics, sand and limestone (fractured shell?) (Овчинников 2014, с. 96).

Of special significance are the findings from the burial no. 5 of the mound Zhyvotylivka — an eponymous site for the identification of the Zhyvotylivka-Vovchanske type burials. The grave included two fine vessels (fig. 5): 1) a biconical vessel with a short cylindrical neck and increased linear decoration; 2) a flask-like vessel with painted linear decoration (Лягодовська 1953, с. 104). While the Trypillian attribution of the second vessel has never been questioned (Лягодовська 1953, с. 104; Збенович 1974, рис. 46), the first one is often considered as of Maikop culture (Трифонов 2014, рис. 281; Dergaciov 2021, fig. 154:82). Yet, its biconical contour in combination with its discovery within the same context as the painted flask suggests that it is a late Trypillian artefact as well.

Another globular vessel which is believed to be a local “imitation” of Maikop pottery (Dergaciov 2021, fig. 154:55) originates from the burial Ordzhonikidze 3/32, Chkalove group. The vessel (fig. 6) is made of clay with an admixture of fractured shell — a feature that has never been recorded within Maikop culture, but is typical for the Nyzhnii Rohachyk pottery tradition as it is defined by L. A. Spitsyna (Спіцина 2002,

2016, 2017). The colour of the inner body is dark while the outer surface seems to be covered with a layer of polished slip of brown colour. The firing is uneven. In such a way, the described vessel is an imitation of the Trypillian template with Rohachyk pottery technology. The other similar globular vessels that V. O. Dergachev considered imitations of Maikop culture, but which in fact are the products of the local Nyzhnii Rohachyk culture, are the vessels from burial Oleksandrivka 1/17 and 1/45, Dolynske 1/38 and Pershokostiantynivka 2/1. The vessel from the burial Oleksandrivka 1/17 had a round body with a neck that had been broken in the past and was made of thick clay with an inclusion of fractured shells. The outer surface of the grey colour was carefully polished. Under the base of a neck, seven drilled holes can be noticed. The vessel from the grave no. 45 had the same morphology except for the thinner walls. The vessel’s ceramic dough included a rich admixture of fractured shells. The outer surface of the grey colour with dark spots was carefully polished (Дергачев 2022, с. 392). The vessel from the burial Dolynske 1/38 had a round body with a deflected rim and was made of clay with an admixture of fractured shell. The vessel’s outer surface of grey colour is polished (Дергачев 2022, с. 388). The item from the burial



Fig. 4. A late phase of Trypillia culture biconical vessel from the burial Checheliivka 1/3 (Kirovohrad Regional Museum of Local History. Photo by the author. For high-resolution image visit: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8070157>)

Pershokostiantynivka 2/1 had a round body with a cylindrical neck and was made of clay with an admixture of fractured shells. The vessel's outer surface of brown colour is polished (Дергачев 2022, с. 388). The provided description matches the characteristics of the pottery of Nyzhnii Rohachyk culture.

The next case the author would like to draw attention to is the attribution of the vessel from the grave of Shyroky 1/18. The vessel had an egg-like contour with a pointed bottom, wide shoulders and high deflected outside rims. The place of transition from the body to the neck is emphasised with a groove. The pot is made of clay with an admixture of fractured shell. The colour of the surface is pink with dark brown spots. Also, the outer surface is slightly polished (Мельник, Стебліна 2012, с. 432). According to A. L. Nechytailo the pot is a local imitation of the Maikop vessels from such sites as Ust-Dzheguta and Maikop mounds, sites Hodzhoh and Yasenova Poliana (Нечитайло 1984, с. 132-133; Нечитайло 1991, с. 25). Yet, as was noticed by L. A. Spitsyna, the drawing provided

by A. L. Nechytailo is inaccurate. For this cause, there is no reason to associate the vessel with the Maikop culture. The more reliable attribution will be to assign it to the Nyzhnii Rohachyk culture (Спицина 2016, с. 16). Several other vessels assigned by V. O. Dergachev to imitations of pottery of the Maikop culture (Dergachiov 2021, figs. 154: 61, 62, 63, 76, 67, 69) also have a clear origin in the Nyzhnii Rohachyk tradition: from burials Zaozerne, Liubymivka 7/5, Obloi 2/6 and 2/16, Kamianka-Dniprovska 8/12, Skadovsk 1/6, Novopylypivka 11/3, Oleksandrivka 9/61, Vasylivka 2/10 and others which is indicated by vessels' morphology — an egg-shaped body with short slightly deflected rim.

### ***Shaft-hole axes***

Unlike the so-called "Maikop" pottery, the shaft-hole axes have more ground to be named "of Caucasian origin". Indeed, the technology of casting in an open two-part mould is first recorded in the East, but not within the Maikop culture as



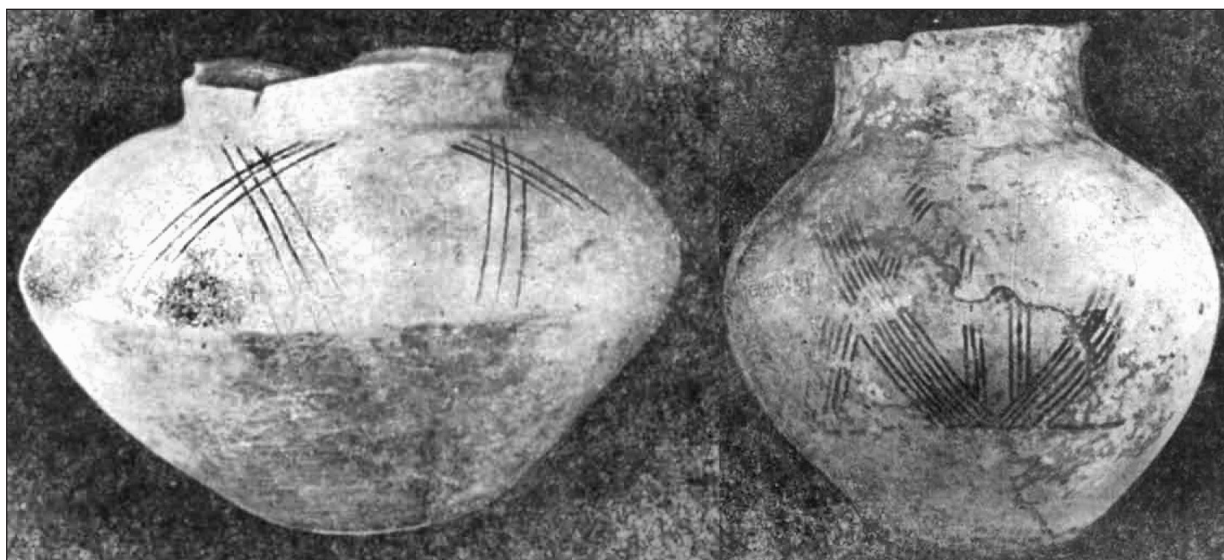


Fig. 5. Late phase of Trypillia culture vessels from the burial Zhyvotylivka (after: Лагодовська 1953)

stated by V. O. Dergachev (Dergaciov 2021, p. 230; Дергачев 2018), but within the Kura-Araxes culture as suggested by Ukrainian archaeologist V. I. Klochko (Клочко 2019, с. 67). From there the technology spread to Ukraine where local production was established, as attested by two burials of metalworkers: — burials Maivka XII, 2/10 and Sokolove 1/6, which were accompanied by the casting moulds and other metallurgical and metalworking equipment. A new local type emerged which V. I. Klochko suggests naming the Samara type. A large scale of axe's production is proven by more than 25 findings of Samara axes, 88 % of which concentrate on the Right-bank Ukraine. The dating of the Samara axes is problematic since most of them are single finds. The only AMS-dated specimens come from the burials of Dolynka and Oleksandrivka 35. The first burial is dated within 3500—3300 BC cal (Ivanova, Rassmann 2014, p. 214), while the second one — 3640—3370 BC cal (Петренко, Кайзер 2011, рис. 2). As a raw material for the casting of the Samara axes prehistoric metallurgists used local pure copper or sulfide copper of Kryvyi Rih origin which is proven by analysis nos. 1808 and 996 (Klochko et al. 2020). In such a way, it can be said that most of the Samara axes got spread in Ukraine during the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> millennia BC and are products of local craftsmen rather than imports from the Northern Caucasus.

### ***Daggers and Knives***

The next category of prehistoric artefacts which V. O. Dergachev associates with the Maikop

culture are daggers and knives which scholar divides into three types: haftless, half-hafted, and hafted blades (Dergaciov 2021, p. 236). The first and second groups are the most numerous and include in total 17 leaf-shaped knives and daggers. Because of the simplicity of their form, the circle of analogies is rather wide and includes items from the Caucasus as is noted by V. O. Dergachev, but also from Central Europe — from the Bodrogkeresztur culture as was noted by I. Vajsov (Vajsov 1993, s. 139). The group of hafted daggers is much smaller and includes only seven knives and daggers, one of which, — from burial Starogorozhenko 1/17 belongs to the Yamna culture (Шапошникова, Фоменко, Довженко 1986, с. 45). The dating of the other — from Nova Kakhovka is problematic since it is a single find. It may appear that it belongs to the Early Bronze Age as well. In such a way, from 24 knives and daggers attributed by V. O. Dergachev as of Caucasian origin, only a few can be somehow linked with the Maikop culture.

### ***Flat axes***

The last and the most problematic category of artefacts I would like to discuss are the flat axes or adzes. According to V. O. Dergachev, there are a total of 50 adzes found within 31 Ukrainian and Moldovan sites which can be associated with the Maikop culture. The distinguishing feature of those axes is a relatively thin cross-section (around 5—4 mm) and asymmetrical cutting edge. An additional argument in favour of the Caucasian



Fig. 6. A globular vessel of Nyzhnii Rohachyk type from the burial Ordzhonikidze 3/32, Chkalove group (Scientific Repository of the Institute of Archaeology, NAS of Ukraine. Photo by the author. For high-resolution image visit: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8070157>)

origin of mentioned axes is an admixture of arsenic in the axe's alloy (Dergachiov 2021, p. 242-247).

The view of the Ukrainian school of paleometallurgical studies on the origin of late Trypillian flat axes is rather different and suggests that mentioned artefacts were cast locally. According to V. I. Klochko, for the first time, the flat axes within Trypillia culture are recorded during the stages A—BI and are represented by the trapezoidal thick types Gumelnița and Coteana most of which are made of pure copper while others are made of alloy with 1.3 % and 2.1 % of arsenic (Klochko et al. 2020, p. 11). During the stage BII—CI Trypillian metallurgists switched towards items with a more distinct and wider cutting edge which famous Romanian archaeologist A. Vulpe named Cucuteni type. The other flat axes produced during this time are the axes of Ostrovul-Corbului and Nova Ushytsia types (Klochko et al. 2020, p. 27-29). During the stage CII, the flat axes had become thinner and a little shorter, creating a new type. The local production of those axes is attested by several two-part closed casting moulds

found within the habitation area of the Sofivka culture. The first one was obtained in 1893 by V. V. Khvoiko at the Kyrylivska Hora within modern Kyiv (Риндіна 2004, с. 247). The second one was obtained more recently — in 2022, near Fastiv (Ivanov 2023, fig. 6). In such a way, the flat axes which V. O. Dergachev considers to be of Maikop origin in fact stem from the local Cucuteni-Trypillia metallurgical tradition. As for the alloy of copper with arsenic, V. I. Klochko evaluates it as a natural bronze originating from the smelting of polymetallic ore of Eastern Carpathian Mountains (Klochko et al. 2020, p. 28) rather than the product of Caucasian mining centers.

### Conclusion

In such a way, as shown by the above analysis, the role of the Caucasian cultures in the historical processes in Ukraine is overestimated. As an alternative to the existing model, the author proposes investigating more on the historical role of the Trypillia culture and its heritage. Instead of the



three-component framework of the earliest kurgan cultures genesis, a two-component framework is suggested where both late phase of Trypillia and Nyznii Rohachyk features share the equal part. While V. O. Dergachev (2021) divides the Late Eneolithic burials into two groups: Serezlievka with a significant Trypillian component and Zhyvotyivka-Vovchanske with a significant Maikop component. It is proposed here to unite both groups within one Serezlievka culture with a predominant share of Trypillian traits.

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М. С. Іванов

Аспірант докторської школи Національного університету «Києво-Могилянська академія», кафедра археології, ORCID 0000-0002-8473-9165, [mykyta.ivanov@ukma.edu.ua](mailto:mykyta.ivanov@ukma.edu.ua)

## ПЕРЕОЦІНКА ВПЛИВУ МАЙКОПСЬКОЇ КУЛЬТУРИ НА СТЕПОВЕ НАСЕЛЕННЯ ПІВНІЧНОГО ПРИЧОРНОМОР'Я НА ПРИКЛАДІ ПОХОВАННЯ ЧЕЧЕЛІЇВКА 1/3

У 1981 р. археологиня Н. М. Бокій розкопала на Кіровоградщині курганне поховання Чечеліївка 1/3, яке містило столовий біконічний горщик. Нова знахідка привернула увагу А. Л. Нечитайло, яка згадала про неї у своїй статті 1984 р., присвяченій кераміці майкопської культури, виявленій в похованнях українського степу. З того часу горщик асоціюється з майкопською культурою та фігурує в роботах Ю. Я. Рассамакіна та В. А. Дергачова як доказ майкопського впливу на степове населення України. У травні 2023 р. автор статті відвідав Кіровоградський обласний краєзнавчий музей, оглянув горщик самостійно та зробити фотографії. Висловлено думку, що біконічний горщик із поховання Чечеліївка 1/3 насправді належить не майкопській культурі, а пізньотрипільській. Знахідка надихнула переглянути також й інші майкопські артефакти та їхні «імітації» знайдені в Україні. У результаті, зроблено висновок, що вплив майкопської культури на степове населення дещо переоцінений.

Зокрема, із 27 посудин які В. А. Дергачов вважає «імітаціями» майкопської кераміки, більшість насправді належить пізньотрипільській або місцевій рогацькій традиції. Крім того, із трипільською культурою пов'язані пласкі металеві сокири, найдавніші знахідки яких датуються етапом А-ВІ. Листоподібні ножі натомість, хоча і нагадують деякі зразки, знайдені на Кавказі, також мають широкі аналогії в середовищі центральноєвропейських культур, зокрема культури Бодрогкерештур. Щодо обушкових сокир, то вони дійсно мають кавказьке походження, втім пов'язані не із майкопською культурою, а куро-аракською, як стверджує В. І. Ключко. Від куро-аракської культури технологія виробництва обушкових сокир поширилась до Наддніпрянщини, де сформувався новий місцевий тип сокир, який В. І. Ключко пропонує називати самарським.

**К л ю ч о в і с л о в а:** Кавказ, пізній енеоліт, Трипілля, майкопська культура, кераміка, кинджал, обушкова сокира.

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