

GYTIS PILIČIAUSKAS, 2018.
VIRVELINĖS KERAMIKOS KULTŪRA
LIETUVOJE 2800–2400 CAL BC.
(CORDED WARE CULTURE IN LITHUANIA
2800–2400 CAL BC) LIETUVOS ISTORIJOS
INSTITUTAS, VILNIUS.

This important book in Lithuanian includes a twenty-something page summary in English about the Corded Ware (CW) culture. Unfortunately, only 100 copies were printed. Aimed at archaeologists, it is well illustrated with ceramics from various CW sites in Lithuania, contains information that is accurate and up-to-date, and presents a survey of Lithuania's CW culture, which has been dated to 2800–2400 BC. The Corded Ware culture played a significant role in Lithuanian prehistory since many archaeologists believe that it was this culture that brought farming and an Indo-European language to the country.

CW is one of the best investigated Late Neolithic cultures in Europe. It spread out over a very large territory, which was equalled only by the Linear Pottery culture during the Early Neolithic. It should be noted that the eastern boundary of such Neolithic cultures as the Linear Pottery, Funnel Beaker, etc. which was a short distance from Lviv (Lwów), was pushed back by the CW culture.

Corded Ware culture burials, stone axes, beakers, and amphorae appeared in eastern and central Europe around 2900 BC. Numerous distinguished archaeologists have researched this culture. In the 1920's V. Gordon Childe and Ernst Wahle suggested that this culture moved into northern and central Europe from the Russian and Ukrainian steppes. Mound burials have especially attracted the attention of archaeologists due to their prominence in the physical landscape and in the symbolic landscapes of succeeding generations. Like Piličiauskas, most

East Baltic archaeologists suggest migration to explain the appearance of this culture, a scenario reinforced by recent DNA studies. The hypotheses of this culture's local development, as suggested by Valter Lang (1998) and Martin Furholt (2014), are currently out of favour.

Piličiauskas discusses a variety of topics: stone axes, flint tools, amber artefacts, settlement patterns, structures, the economy, burials, diet, ceramics, and CW sites. He also discusses the impact of genetic discoveries on the Corded Ware culture as well as the views of archaeologists on the origin of the CW culture and its spread through Europe, especially in Lithuania, and its relationship with the indigenous hunter and gatherer cultures.

The author briefly discusses the Corded Ware culture in Latvia, Estonia, and Finland, but does not include the Late Neolithic developments in the Kaliningrad District of Russia (Pre-World II East Prussia). The Bay Coast culture in that region shows many similarities with the CW culture.

Piličiauskas analyzes the typology, function, and chronology of Corded Ware ceramics using the culture-history approach, basing his study on vessels, not on sherds. 94% of the relatively small number of sherds, which made vessel reconstruction possible, were ornamented ceramics. Such studies are important for the spatial and temporal classification of archaeological data. These analyses are very time consuming and frequently archaeologists fail to receive much credit for them. For nearly half a century Anglo-American archaeologists have emphasized theory and de-emphasized other archaeological concerns. It is evident that Piličiauskas knows his data and has been following research on the Corded Ware culture in other countries.

The 74 CW sites currently known in Lithuania have yielded 360 vessels. 80% of these sites contained

5 or fewer vessels and represent short occupations. Piličiauskas suggests that they represent single households. The two largest sites, Daktariškė and Karaviškė, yielded 59 and 37 vessels respectively. The Karaviškė sample is based on about 6000 sherds with a total weight of 15 kg. One vessel was reconstructed on average from each 162 sherds. It should be noted that the Abora 1 site in Latvia yielded about 100 pots. The majority of the Lithuanian vessels are beakers and short-wave moulded pots. Only 5 amphorae were found. The ceramics represent three styles: Pan-European, impressed, and incised.

We can only guess what the population of CW sites was or how many sites were occupied at any one time. Most of 20 CW burials in Lithuania were disturbed before their investigation. Human skeletal remains are rarely recovered. Neustupný (1983), using the Vikletice Cemetery data from the Czech Republic, estimated a population of 25 at the CW settlement at any one time. By my calculation, using Neustupný's method, the total CW population in Lithuania, based on 74 sites, was probably no greater than 2000. Since most of the sites represented one to several households, this number may be too high. Corded Ware communities were likely no larger than those of the local hunters-gatherers. However, I realize that this method of calculating the CW population may not be applicable to Lithuania.

Daktariškė is a very interesting site since 132 amber artefacts were recovered there. Furthermore, this site is well dated with 40 radiocarbon dates.

The CW settlement system is illustrated by eight sites on Lakes Duba and Pelesa. Seven have only a few vessels but aforementioned Karaviškė had 37. Piličiauskas suggests that several pastoral families spent their winters at Karaviškė and in the spring they departed with their animals for seasonal pastures. To me it is unclear how CW people could have practiced pastoral economies in Lithuania, notwithstanding that cattle and pigs can forage in forests. The country was heavily forested without large open areas.

Not much can be said about the diet since evidence such as animal bones has rarely been recovered and it is difficult to determine their cultural association. According to Piličiauskas, CW communities lived mainly on domestic animal meat, dairy products, and fish.

Piličiauskas points out that no one scenario explains the spread of the CW culture in central Europe and the East Baltic area. He assumes that CW nomads migrated from the steppes of the Black Sea area into a Lithuania already occupied by the hunters, gatherers, and fishermen of the Narva culture. Recent genetic studies support this scenario which was championed for many years by Marija Gimbutas (Gimbutienė). This does not imply that the CW people directly moved into Lithuania. Piličiauskas suggests that they probably came through Poland and practiced nomadic pastoralism. The Narva communities did not practice agriculture or pastoralism although they could have learned it from their Funnel Beaker and especially their Globular Amphora neighbours. Corded Ware domestic plants and animals were no novelties to them. Narva groups living near the Baltic Sea and Lithuanian lakes relied heavily on fishing. In some places they had semi-permanent, possibly permanent settlements. The scanty CW settlement and burial data in Lithuania indicates that it was difficult for the CW groups to occupy Narva territory. No large CW cemeteries or mound burials of adult men with battle axes exist in Lithuania. This does not mean that there was no interaction between the different populations. As Piličiauskas (p. 230) notes 'the modern populations of the East Baltic region have preserved the largest amount of the hunter-fisherman genetic ancestry in Europe (Malstrom *et al.* 2009; Lazaridis *et al.* 2014); therefore, the merging of immigrants from the steppes and local hunters-gatherers definitely took place.'

By comparing Lithuanian data with the evidence from southeast Poland and western Ukraine, different scenarios can be proposed. Farming

appeared around 5500 bc in southeast Poland, some 2500 years earlier than in Lithuania. The earliest CW material appeared around 2900 bc in southeast Poland and western Ukraine, with which I am more familiar. The CW people were probably descendants of the Yamnaya culture. What caused the CW groups to migrate and eventually appear in Lithuania? We know that in historic times, pressure from one set of Eurasian pastoralists on another triggered a succession of migrations that eventually affected eastern and central Europe. But it is unclear whether this scenario can be applied to the third millennium bc. The farming communities were attractive opportunities for CW groups to plunder cattle, sheep, and pigs. Piličiauskas notes that CW groups encountered well-established hunters and gatherers in Lithuania, but they had to rely on their own resources. Sometimes I feel that the scenario presented for the occupation of Lithuania by large CW groups looks like Neolithic 'colonialism'.

The number of CW battle axes is not high in Lithuania. According to Piličiauskas, the number is between 150 and 500 depending on the classification criteria. He notes that about 2400 were found in Sweden and 1400 in southern Finland. The battle axes might indicate a warlike society. Some archaeologists

speculate that there were CW warrior cliques whose members practiced drinking rituals with their beakers.

Piličiauskas, like many other archaeologists, assumes that the CW people introduced an Indo-European language into Lithuania, but this does not mean that local indigenous languages were replaced immediately. Two or three languages were probably spoken for many years in Lithuania.

In conclusion, Piličiauskas' book is an important contribution to the Late Neolithic studies in the East Baltic region. I assume that he will continue to conduct his interesting research on the Neolithic.

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