

On the problem of the Anatolian-Balkan relations during the Early Neolithic in Thrace

Tatiana Stefanova

Bulgarian Academy of Science, Prehistory Department,
Archaeological Institute with Museum, Sofia

ABSTRACT - *The paper concentrates mainly on the typological analysis and distribution of Early Neolithic painted pottery assemblages in Thrace and Eastern Rhodope Mountains. It is hypothesised that the Hoca Çesme cultural influence correlates with the processes of the setting up and development of Balkan early farming communities in Eastern Rhodope Mountains.*

POVZETEK - *V članku se osredotočamo predvsem na tipološko analizo in razprostranjenost zgodnje-neolitske slikane keramike v Trakiji in vzhodnih Rodopih. Domnevamo, da je nastanek in razvoj zgodnjih balkanskih kmetovalskih skupnosti v vzhodnih Rodopih povezan z vplivom kulture Hoca Çesme.*

This paper is not aimed at presenting a new concept of the Neolithization of the Balkans. It is rather an attempt to add new data to the complicated and still unclear processes of the setting up and development of Balkan early farming communities through the interpretation of a "special case". The archaeological excavations at the Neolithic site Hoca Çesme in Eastern Thrace, Turkey and the new evidence has provided the opportunity for a re-interpretation of some old finds from the Neolithic site at Krumovgrad in the Eastern Rhodope Mountains, Bulgaria.

KRUMOVGRAD

The Neolithic site was situated on a low terrace on the left bank of the Krumovitza river, a tributary of the Arda river which now lies under the central part of the modern town of Krumovgrad in the Eastern Rhodope Mountains, Bulgaria. The site was located in 1974 because of some urban construction activity. The materials available were unearthed in a central excavation made for block foundations, covering 560 m², and two additional small trenches. As almost all of the deposits were scraped out by machines in the central excavation, trench 1, covering 12 sq. m, yielded the basic information on stratigraphy and the site sequence. A mixed layer, containing

pottery from the Middle, Late Neolithic and Early Chalcolithic periods and the Early Bronze age, covered six Early Neolithic construction levels dated to the Karanovo I period; the average thickness of each level being 0.30-0.40 m. They yielded parts of houses with wattle and daub construction and plastered floors; hearths and domed ovens (one of them 1.40 m in diameter) made of stamped clay were found in the houses (Кънчев 1994). The pottery is typical of the Karanovo I period: coarse, semi-coarse and fine ware (Fig. 1). The surface of the coarse and semi-coarse ware is uncoated, smoothed or rusticated; sometimes decorated with plastic or incised ornaments. The pottery assemblage includes plates, bowls and necked jars with vertical string-hole lugs. The fine pottery is red slipped, brown or grey-black. All six construction levels yielded white painted pottery. The red or reddish-brown fine ware is white painted: open plates, bowls, tulip-shaped vessels, necked jars on pedestal bases and lids (Fig 1. 7-9). The channelled decoration and plastic knobs are registered on bowls and necked jars on pedestal bases. No ¹⁴C dates are available for the site. Certain shapes, considered typical of the Karanovo II period, are present in the Krumovgrad pottery assemblage; thus the Early Neolithic layer of Krumovgrad could be referred to the second half of the Early Neolithic period in Bulgaria.

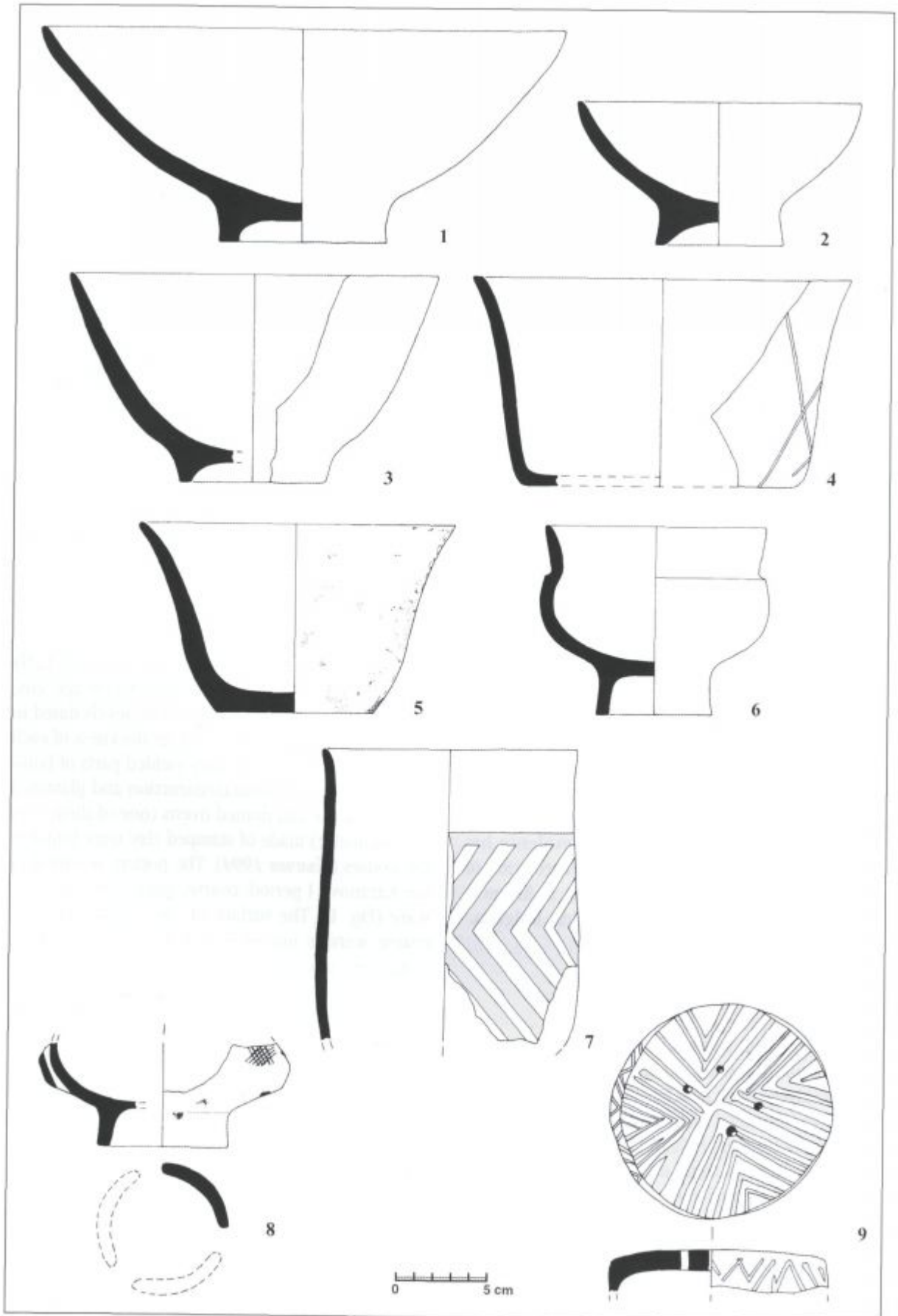


Fig. 1. Krumovgrad. Pottery types from the Early Neolithic levels.

Map of southeastern Balkan showing the location of Krumovgrad and Hoca Çesme.



HOCA ÇESME

The Neolithic site is located on a terrace by the estuary of the Maritza river, some 5 km inland from the Aegean. The site was excavated from 1990 to 1993 by an Istanbul University team, headed by M. Özdoğan. The cultural sequence was divided into four main phases, Phase IV being the earliest (Özdoğan 1993, 1997).

Phase IV.

The earliest settlement is small, and heavily fortified by a massive stone wall (Özdoğan 1997, 24, Fig. 7). The houses are circular and sit directly on the rocky surface, actually carved into it. The pottery assemblage is characterised by the total absence of coarse ware. The pottery is fine, thin-walled, with a lustrous red or black surface. Deep bowls, usually with "S" profiles, tubular or crescentic lugs, are common elements in this assemblage. The decoration consists mainly of vertical or curvilinear bands in relief; occasionally there are some fine grooved or incised pottery (Özdoğan 1997, 24-25).

Phase III

It consists of two architectural layers; the buildings are again circular in plan. The massive, enclosing stone wall from the previous phase was still in use. The pottery assemblage is similar to that of Phase IV, although the wares are slightly coarser and thicker. A new type of ware, with a thick smeared red

coating on a black surface, is represented by a very few sherds. This distinctive ware increases in quantity in Phase II. As for the vessel types, the difference from Phase IV is minimal. Stamped and incised decoration is now slightly more common than in the previous phase. There are some painted pottery (including white painted ones) from the end of the phase (Özdoğan 1993 Fig. 4; 1997, 25-26).

Phase II

The phase consists of three distinct horizons. There is a marked change in the plane and the construction techniques of the buildings; they are rectangular, with plastered walls, similar to the typical Karanovo I period houses. Domed ovens on raised platforms, bins, and working platforms represent the new elements of this phase. In spite of changes in the architecture, the massive enclosure wall was still maintained and used, indicating continuity in the settlement organisation. The red and black wares of the previous phase continue, though in lessening amounts, and the quality of the burnishing is lost and the walls are thicker. There is an increasing amount of reddish-brown and matt-black pottery, the latter occasionally having a smeared red coating. Though minimal, there are some coarse, dully burnished pottery. There are a number of new vessel types in the pottery assemblage. Besides the decoration, typical of the previous phase, there are fine fluting and intentional mottling. Though very few, there are painted sherds: white on red or black, red on cream or black, and black on red (Özdoğan 1993,

Fig. 4). The so-called "pintaderas", bone spatulas and clay figurines are among the common elements of the phase (Özdoğan 1997.26).

Phase I

The last layers of Phase I and Phase II are badly damaged by later intrusions and erosion. Phase I consists of three distinct horizons (Özdoğan 1993. 183–184). Most of the wares of the previous phase have disappeared. Most common for the phase are knobbed handles, footed vessels, plates and bowls with thickened rims, sometimes with channelled decoration, and triangular vessels with incised and/or encrusted decoration (Özdoğan 1993, Fig. 1, 2, 3). There are some painted sherds, white on red and red on cream, the latter being from the earliest horizon of Phase I (Özdoğan 1993, Fig. 4).

Calibrated ¹⁴C dates were published for the site (Özdoğan 1997.27). As the uncalibrated date were also available, Yavor Boyadziev from the Archaeological Institute in Sofia studied the information and proposed his own view (personal communication)¹.

M. Özdoğan	Y. Boyadziev
Phase IV 6400–6100 BC	Phase IV 6200–6000 BC
Phase III 6000–5900 BC	Phase III 6000–5800 BC
Phase II 5800–5700 BC	Phase II 5800–5600 BC

On the basis of the Hoca Çesme evidence, M. Özdoğan suggested the following interpretation of the site: a population from the Aegean part of Anatolia, being in close relations with the Central Anatolian plateau, moved northward and, reaching the estuary of the Maritza river, settled down. Hoca Çesme "... clearly demonstrates the gradual change and adaptation that an Anatolian type of colony settlement went through in a local environment. It is possible to follow not only the roots, but also the stages that led to the emergence of the Karanovo I culture from Phases IV and III of Hoca Çesme" (Özdoğan 1997.27).

The newly published Hoca Çesme evidence is of crucial importance for a better understanding of Neolithization processes in the Balkans. It provides a new basis for the reconsideration of several sherds from Krumovgrad. Four sherds which differ essentially from the rest of the pottery are available in the boxes containing the materials from the Krumovgrad site.

- A sherd from a jar with a bead rim; brown slipped and burnished surface; the wall is 3–4 mm thick; even brown scatter. The decoration consists of incisions and dots. There are traces of white matter in the dots (Fig. 2. 1). The sherd was found at 2.70 m (construction level IV). Sherds of vessels similar in shape or decoration were found at the end of Hoca Çesme Phase III and in Phase II.
- A sherd from a vessel with a vertical string-hole lug; there are traces of a red wash on the dark brown, very well smoothed surface; the wall is 5–6 mm thick. The decoration consists of two incised lines (Fig. 2. 2). The sherd was found in the scraped soil, therefore lacking a fixed stratigraphic position. The peculiar feature is the convex interior part of the lug, an element uncommon for the Krumovgrad pottery assemblage, but existing at the end of Hoca Çesme Phase III and the beginning of Phase II.
- A sherd from a necked jar; black burnished surface; the wall is 5–7 mm thick. The decoration consists of a "necklace" of dots and vertical bands of thin incised zigzag lines (Fig. 2. 3). The incisions were made on a semi-dry surface. The sherd was found at 2.70 m (construction level IV). Similar motifs were registered at the end of Hoca Çesme Phase III and in the beginning of Phase II, and similar motifs and incision technique in Yarımburgaz phase 4.
- A sherd from a plate with a slightly thickened rim; gray-black burnished surface. The wall is 6–7 mm thick. There are grooves on the rim and stamped decoration just beneath (Fig. 2. 4). The sherd was found at 1.90 m (construction level II). Sherds of vessels with similar decoration were registered at the end of Hoca Çesme Phase III and in Phase II. Thickened rims exist in Hoca Çesme Phase I².

¹ I would like to thank Dr. Bojadziev for the information he shared with me.

² I am deeply indebted to Prof. M. Özdoğan for the opportunity he provided to me to work with the pottery from Hoca Çesme, and for the help and the stimulating discussions as well.

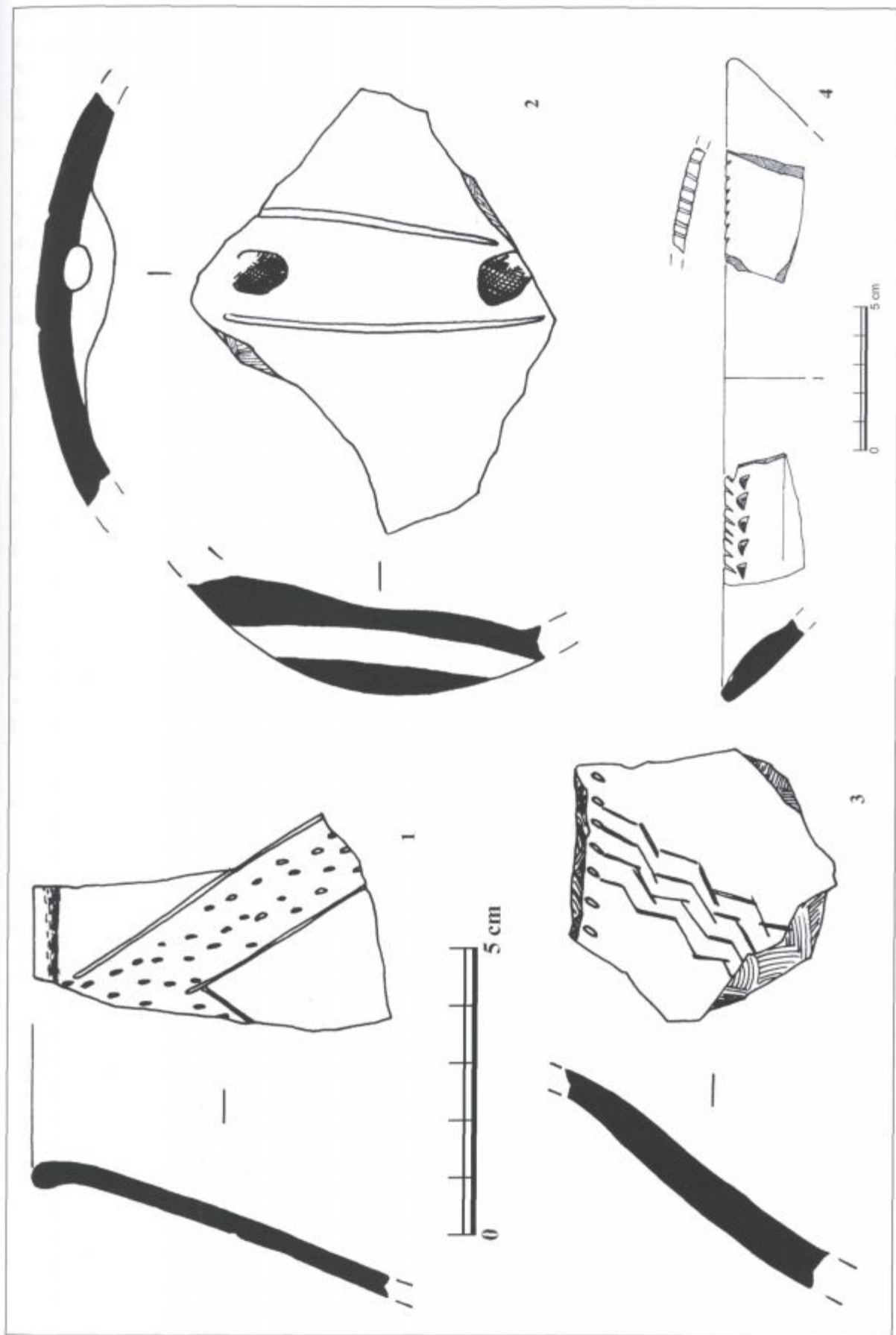


Fig. 2. Krumovgrad. Sherds from the Early Neolithic levels.

The few sherds presented are atypical of the Early Neolithic Krumovgrad pottery assemblage and of the Early Neolithic Karanovo I type of pottery as well. They differ in paste, surface colour, treatment, and decoration, which is why they could be regarded as imports. The only probable exception is the lug sherd; it could be a piece of local production under strong foreign influence.

The fact that sherds similar to the Hoca Çesme type of pottery were found in Krumovgrad provides grounds for a synchronisation of Krumovgrad construction levels IV-II with the end of Hoca Çesme Phase III and Phase II. The white, red or black painted pottery in the layers of the end of Hoca Çesme Phase III and Phase II support such an assumption. Some of the white on red sherds are identical to the white painted pottery of the Karanovo I type of pottery. In my opinion, they could be direct imports.

As was already mentioned, the lack of radiocarbon dates from Krumovgrad, makes the fixing of the absolute chronology of the site impossible. During the last decade, archaeological excavations of Early Neolithic deposits in Bulgaria have yielded a considerable number of radiocarbon samples. There are over 60 ¹⁴C dates calibrated by a computer programme in the Institute for Prehistory in Frankfurt am Mainz. According to the results obtained, the development of the Karanovo I period was most probably between 5950 and 5600 BC (*Nikolov 1989:30*).

The studies of Early Neolithic pottery show that the Karanovo I period in Thrace consisted of at least two consecutive stages. The earlier stage is attested in the Mesta valley and the western parts of Thrace – Eleshnitsa (construction levels I and II) and Slatina (the lowest levels of the sequence, the “Big House”) – and the painted decoration is made with white paint only. The later stage is attested in a larger number of sites in the eastern parts of Thrace and in the lower parts of the Rhodope Mountains – in Karanovo, Simeonovgrad, Krumovgrad, Kardzali, etc. This stage is marked by the appearance of a small number of imported or local vessels with darkly painted or polychrome decoration, indicating that the stage was contemporary with the Starčevo type cultures in the Central Balkan area. At the time this stage developed in the Eastern Rhodope Mountains in sites such as Krumovgrad and Kardzali, the consequence of Karanovo II, II-III and III settlements existed in the eastern parts of Thrace (in Karanovo for example) (*Nikolov 1997; 1998a*). The distribution of settlements belonging to different stages in certain areas

supports the idea that the routes of the initial distribution of early farming groups followed the Mesta and Struma valleys in a northerly direction. Thrace was later “colonized” and the process took place from west to east, reaching as far as the lower courses of the Maritza and Tundza rivers (*Nikolov 1998a*).

The presence of vessel types typical of the Karanovo II and II-III periods in the pottery assemblages of Krumovgrad supports the later chronological position of the site in the Thracian Early Neolithic sequence. If we accept the dates for Hoca Çesme proposed by Yavor Boyadziev, we see that Hoca Çesme Phase IV and the first half of Phase III should be contemporary with the stage with white painted decoration in the Central Balkans and the first stage of the Karanovo I period in Eleshnitsa and Slatina.

The painted pottery (white on dark brown, white on red, red on black, black on red) at the end of Hoca Çesme Phase III and those (white on red, white on brown, black on red) in Phase II, refer the relevant phases to the second stage of the Karanovo I period.

Burnished ware decorated with bands of incised zig-zag lines (similar to Fig. 2. 3) was registered in Yarrimbuzg phase 4, as well, and the pottery assemblage of the phase is correlated with the pottery assemblages at the end of Karanovo I and Karanovo II periods (*Nikolov 1998:218*).

To return to the “Hoca Çesme case”, I would like to propose another point of view: an Anatolian population reached the Maritza estuary, settled down, and established the Hoca Çesme site. The people protected the village from the potentially hostile or merely unknown environment by a massive stone wall. The enclosing wall suggests that the newcomers found the area populated already, otherwise they would not have put so much effort into its erection and maintenance. The settlement developed as a closed community during Phase IV and the greater part of Phase III, and “domesticated” the newly acquired area by maintaining traditions: – living in the same type of houses as in the old homeland, making the same pottery, etc. Contact with the Karanovo I people must have been established earlier, but evidence appears at the end of Phase III – several painted sherds in Hoca Çesme and a few sherds of “foreign” pottery in Krumovgrad. Obviously it was a time of intensifying contact between the two cultural communities. A new house type (much more suited to the local climate and environment) appears in Hoca Çesme Phase II, a significant change, indicating

closer relations with the local people. At the very end of Phase II and in Phase I the similarities to the cultures of the Balkan Middle and Late Neolithic grew in number and the initial cultural identification of the Anatolian colony changed considerably.

Most probably, the roots of Karanovo I culture lie in that type of colony; the migrations of population and the transformation of cultural experience gave birth to a new phenomenon in the Balkans, but there is still not enough evidence that it happened via the Maritza valley. It does not seem likely that Hoca Çesme was a kind of "generator". It was rather a

small colony, established on an area where the existence of the Karanovo I culture was an established fact (though it probably did not cover the lowest Maritza valley entirely). After some time, the two cultural phenomena established relations. These are detectable in the two directions from imports or local production under foreign influence. Hoca Çesme developed independently for some time, as is evident from the continuity of house and the pottery types, where Anatolian traditions dominated local trends. According to the available data, the cultural influence of Hoca Çesme was restricted to the relatively small region of Eastern Thrace and the Eastern Rhodope Mountains.

∴

REFERENCES

КЪНЧЕВ К., ЧОХАДЖИЕВ М. 1994. Неолитно селище в Крумовград. In Марица-Изток. Археологически проучвания, II: 13-38.

NIKOLOV V. 1989. Zu einigen Aspekten der Kultur Karanovo I. In *Tel Karanovo und das Balkan-Neolithikum*: 27-41.

1997. Die neolithische Keramik. In Hiller S. and Nikolov V. (eds.), *Karanovo. Die Ausgrabungen im Südsektor 1984-1992*: 105-146.

1998. Проучвания върху неолитната керамика. Керамичните комплекси Караново II-III, III и III-IV в контекста на Северозападна Анатолия и Югоизточна Европа.

1998a. The Circumpontic Cultural Zone during the Early Neolithic. *Archaeologia Bulgarica* 2 (in print).

ÖZDOĞAN M. 1991. An interim report on excavations at Yarımburgaz and Toptepe in Eastern Thrace. *Anatolica* 17: 59-121.

1993. Vinča And Anatolia: A new look at a very old problem (or redefining Vinča Culture from the perspective of Near Eastern tradition). *Anatolica. Special issue on Anatolia and the Balkans* 19: 173-193.

1997. The beginning of the Neolithic economies in Southern Europe: an Anatolian perspective. *Journal of European Archaeology* 5/2: 1-33.