Peter Stadler – Nadezhda Kotova: Early Neolithic Settlement Brunn am Gebirge, Wolfholz, in Lower Austria. Volume 2. Early Neolithic Settlement Brunn am Gebirge, Wolfholz, Site 3 in Lower Austria and the Milanovce Phase of the Linear Pottery Culture (LPC).

Over the past years, the results of the large-scale excavations of the well-known Neolithic settlement in Brunn am Gebirge have been presented to the international research by Peter Stadler and Nadezhda Kotova. Following the double volume on the Brunn 2 site (Stadler/Kotova 2019a; 2019b), the reviewed volume 2 addresses the settlement of the Brunn 3 site of the Earlier Linear Pottery culture’s Milanovce phase. Unfortunately, the publication of volume 3 containing the Brunn 4 site of the end of the Milanovce phase will still take some time, though it would make sense to read and discuss this cultural-chronological entity as a whole. It must be emphasised that the initial location of the settlement was situated around 700 m further north with the development of four settlements from the beginning of the Earlier Linear Pottery culture in Brunn 2, to Brunn 3, 4 and 1, which were relocated in an organised manner. This means that the settlement area was continuously built on and inhabited by the same people. The late Linear Pottery culture settlement of Sittard, Netherlands, could serve as a comparison, since the location of this settlement was gradually shifted by similar distances (Modernmann 1958–1959).

In the 20 chapters of the monography, chapter 4 and 5 deal with the comprehensive technological and typological description of the ceramics as well as the decorations of the pottery. Following the analysis of the ceramics, the search for the chronological position of the Brunn 3 settlement within the Linear Pottery culture, based on ceramic seriation and the sequencing of the radiocarbon data, is presented. This review mostly deals with these questions, so the other chapters will only be commented on briefly.

In the first chapter by Peter Stadler, Alexander Minnich and Ralf Totschnig, the first results of the geomagnetic prospection are presented and visualised as a map of the house floorplans. Additionally, Alexander Minnich has documented the hearths and ovens, located mostly in both longitudinal pits of the houses and presumably used for baking bread and firing ceramics (p. 213). Similar LPC ovens, also including a preserved dome, from Mohelnice, Moravia (Tichý 1962, 213, fig. 3–8), and from the Želiezovce-group Horné Lefantovce, western Slovakia (Bánesz 1959, 470–482), were built in groups into clay extraction pits or other depressions in the ground. Beneath the smooth oven floor was a layer of gravel and other stones. The ovens hardly contained finds and lacked charcoal. It is assumed that these ovens were used to dry wheat, making it easier to remove the husk. Before drying the wheat, the hot coal needed to be removed from the oven, letting the wheat dry simply in the closed hot oven. In Bylany, an oven filled with charred wheat from a failed attempt at drying was found (Soudský 1960, pl. 18–21).

In chapter 9 (Peter Stadler and Alexander Minnich), the houses in all settlements are sequenced based on the combination of radiometric chronology and the seriation. In chapter 11, Nadezhda Kotova reconstructs the sequence of the houses in Brunn 3 using radiocarbon chronology, ceramic seriation and climatic data as well as the orientation of the houses towards the sunrise. This original and complex method of a detailed dating of the houses down to the seasons will hardly find approval.

Chapters 12 to 16 concern the elaborate presentation and classification of the stone materials of all settlements in Brunn am Gebirge. Strangely, only few stone tools were found, especially polished working tools such as adzes and axes. The extensive catalogue of macrolithic artefacts is unique, containing many stones with traces of use, with the determination of lithotypes, object types and functions by Peter Stadler and Andreas Rohatsch.

The main focus of the volume is the especially detailed presentation of the ceramic artefacts, mainly the pottery shapes and the treatment of their surfaces, by Peter Stadler and Nadezhda Kotova. Besides the ceramics of Brunn 3, the finds of Brunn 5 were also included. The pottery shapes from both sites could be determined for 476 vessels. In tables 4.9 to 4.17, which were taken from volume 1 on Brunn 2 (Stadler/Kotova 2019a) with the detailed typology of the ceramics of all sites in Brunn am Gebirge, the pottery types that newly occur in Brunn 3 are presented numerically. At the Earlier Linear Pottery sites of Brunn am Gebirge, the characteristic fine ceramics with incised decorations were also found. So, it should be considered and clarified which ware the incised pottery should be classified into. This concerns vessels that are classified as amphorae with spiral and meander motifs (fig. 5.1: 5, 8, 9, 12, 14) as well as high bowls with typical Milanovce phase vertically perforated string eyelets and circumferential waved lines (fig. 5.3: 8, 10). The same applies to the other globular vessels with string eyelets and other arched patterns (fig. 5.3: 2, 4–6, 9), as well as other fragments, including hollow pedestals, which mostly belong to the fine ceramics (fig. 5.6: 1, 3, 7–10; 5.9). The mentioned examples should represent a separate category of ceramics and should be classified as fine ceramics. Part of the decorated vessels could belong to a type
of medium ware based on their production. The lack of polished fine ceramics is probably due to the erosion of the surfaces. The numerous thick-walled coarse ceramics with many types of knobs must generally be seen as a separate category of ceramics, though a chronological correlation to the decorated fine pottery relevant for dating should be sought after.

In chapter 5, various types of ornaments on ceramics are examined, bringing up the question of what should be understood as decoration. In the Linear Pottery culture, both coarse and thin-walled fine ware with incised decorations occur. The decorated thin-walled pottery is the main basis for the relative chronology of the culture, whereas the coarse pottery with the treatment of its surfaces is not suitable for this. The knobs and bands should be seen as technical components of the vessels – they carry chronological information as a technical procedure only in specific cases (slurries, barbotine, fluting), though in accordance with the incised decoration on the fine pottery. For this reason, the coarse ware and the thin-walled pottery should be seen as separate categories.

According to the detailed comparative analysis of the ceramic decorations and the seriation of the ceramics, Brunn 3 developed from Brunn 2 and should belong to the Milanovce phase together with Brunn 4, with Brunn 3 representing the older stage and Brunn 4 the younger. Only few ceramics with incised decorations are comparable or identical to the pottery of the Milanovce phase of western Slovakia. The thick-walled pottery with knobs is comparable only on a general level (fig. 5.10; 5.11; 5.13). The globular vessels with waved lines circulating around the vertically perforated string eyelets are clearly related (fig. 5.3; 8–10). This globular shape replaced the functional vessels of the Bíňa phase (Pavík 1980, fig. 5; 6) and occurs during the Milanovce phase from the Carpathian Basin to the Rhine (Pavík 2004, fig. 7). Amphorae decorated with spirals and meanders (fig. 5.1; 5–9, 12–14) as well as other vessels with arched linear patterns (fig. 5.3; 5.6) represent another group. Bands with finger indents (fig. 5.2: 5, 6; 5.8: 2, 3, 6) are common for the Milanovce phase in Slovakia. Though in Brunn, the thumbprints under the rim are missing on the thick-walled globular vessels, which are vastly common in the Milanovce phase (Pavík 1997, fig. 1; 2). On the other hand, many round knobs with indents (fig. 5.2: 7–9; 5.4: 3–6) are especially common in Brunn, as opposed to elsewhere in the LPC in this application and amount.

The presented classification and subdivision of the ceramics is compared with the radiocarbon data. Accordingly, Milanovce 1 should begin around 5340 BC and end around 5265 BC and Milanovce 2 should span between 5265 BC and 5210 BC. Without going into the discussion of the radiocarbon data, I would like to point out the discrepancies between the data of Brunn 3 and 4 and the Later Linear Pottery culture. In Vedorvice, the Late LPC is dated between 5300 BC and 5250 BC or perhaps 5300 BC and 5200 BC (Pettitt-Hedges 2008, 127–132). Based on 12 dated archaeological samples, the cemetery of the Late LPC in Kleinhadersdorf began around 5220 BC, so within the span of the Milanovce 2 phase (Stadler 2015, 149–152). The pre-Music Note phase is barely represented at this cemetery and should be begun similarly to Vedorvice. The cemetery of the Late LPC (Music Note Pottery) in Nitra should begin around 5370 to 5220 calBC and end around 5210 to 4980 calBC according to 12 radiocarbon dates (Griffiths 2013, 448–450; Whittle et al. 2013, 143, 448–450). Yet at the cemetery, the burials of the middle and late phases of the Želiezovce-group are missing, which should belong to the period of the latest dates. The dates of the Late LPC of the Flomborn phase of Brunn 1 (5260–5175 BC) rather correspond with the Music Note Pottery and the Želiezovce-group than the dates of the Vedorvice cemetery of the Flomborn phase. With these circumstances of the absolute dates contradicting the well-proven relative chronology of the LPC, another solution should be sought after for the radiometric dates, since these discrepancies affect and complicate the fundamental questions of the formation and chronology of the LPC.

In this volume, the cultural, genetic, and chronological questions are only covered briefly. The introductory thoughts on the formation, distribution and chronology of the Linear Pottery culture have already been summarised in the volume on Brunn 2.

Both authors accept my periodisation of the Early LPC – with one significant alteration, though. Firstly, when they place the Bíňa phase into the Milanovce phase, and secondly, when they identify the phases Nitra and Hurbanovo, supposedly represented by only few sherds, as the formative phase with Brunn 2 and Szentgyörgyvölgy-Pityerdomb (Stadler/Kotova 2019a, 231). The solution of the ‘formative phase’ problem is not this simple. The ‘irrtümliche chronologische Gliederung’ – erroneous chronological classification (Báňffy 2019, 233) of the Early Linear Pottery in the phases Nitra, Hurbanovo, Bíňa and Milanovce by Juraj Pavík is not erroneous – materials such as in Nitra and Hurbanovo have not yet been ‘excavated’ in Transdanubia north of the distribution area of the Starčevo culture. A collection of ceramics from Budapest and the Bíňa phase is considered to be the oldest there (Kalicz-Schreiber/Kalicz 1992). Yet it is possible to claim that it is false to consider the date and interpretation of the ceramics of Szentgyörgyvölgy-Pityerdomb as the formative phase of the LPC (Báňffy 2004). Southern Transdanubia from the area of the Balaton to the Drava was settled within two phases of the Starčevo culture and after the Spiraloid B phase, this area was contemporary with the Vinča A culture during the Milanovce-Bécshehy phase of the Early LPC. Therefore, this cannot be the beginning of the formative phase but rather the final stage of the Early LPC after the demise of the Starčevo culture.

Assuming the site Pityerdomb is situated outside of the Starčevo culture’s area of distribution, it is quite possible that feature-lacking ceramics are to be classified only after the Starčevo culture and are to be considered as a component of the Milanovce phase (Pavík/Farkas 2013). There are also reasons to synchronise the ceramics of Pityerdomb with those of Bicske (Makkay 1978) and level them with Vinča A. The settlement of Pityerdomb lies at the edge of the Carpathian Basin and was probably outside of the primary territory of the formation and the further development of the Linear Pottery culture along the Danube with the extension at the River Hron and Nitra in south-western Slovakia. The primary area of the Linear Pottery culture’s formation lies north of the distribution area of the Starčevo culture in the strip of 47° northern latitude. From there, on both sides of the Danube, the area spanned into south-western Slovakia between the River Ipel and the Little Carpathians. This is also why sites such as Nitra, Hurbanovo, Bíňa and Milanovce, with their ceramics as a part of the primary
centre, prove the formation and development of the Linear Pottery culture in the Carpathian Basin. In this context, it seems that the area around the Balaton remained outside of the primary centre around the Danube and did not contribute to the distribution of the Linear Pottery culture into Central Europe in the direction of the Music Note Pottery. In addition, in southern Transdanubia, in the former area of the Starčevo culture during the Milanovce phase, the regionally distinct Keszthely-group with specific ceramics outside the Central European Linear Pottery with the music note and specific band decoration formed instead of the classical Music Note Pottery. Transdanubia, which was previously settled by the population of the Starčevo culture, developed quite differently than the north-western Carpathian Basin. The border between the Starčevo culture and the LPC was retained until at least the end of the Lengyel culture.

The first agrarian society in Central Europe could not have begun with such technologically and typologically developed ceramics of the Biša phase. It must have had generations of predecessors, who learned the principals of Neolithic life and slowly adopted it. They also learned pottery and the LPC – similar to them – invented and developed the unique long post structures. The insufficiently documented phases Nitra and Hurbanovo with few finds could still indicate the supposed formative phase of the LPC. It is an open question whether the ceramics isolated first from Brunn 2 could represent such a formative period. This would be the only site of the LPC this early outside of the Carpathian Basin as well as far from the Starčevo culture, which introduced the Neolithic way of life into Central Europe. The prototypes of the ceramics of Brunn 2 in the Starčevo culture (Stadler/Kotova 2019a, 411), based on some basic vessel shapes, hardly support the cultural-genetic relation. Already known fragments of the chronologically fixed ceramics with slurrries from Brunn 2 only indicate the chronological position within the Biša phase and Starčevo-Spiraloid B. There are hardly solid arguments in the ceramics for the supposed migration from the Starčevo culture into the Vienna Basin (Stadler/Kotova 2019a, 410). The most significant results among the discoveries at the settlement complex of the Early LPC in Brunn am Gebirge raise more questions than answers about the formation and distribution of the first agrarian society in Central Europe. In the next volumes and after the overall evaluation of the gained information of the researched settlement complex, current questions regarding formation, development and distribution of the Linear Pottery culture will surely be investigated and interpreted further.

Peter Stadler commendably conducted the excavations of the extensive Linear Pottery culture settlement in Brunn am Gebirge at a high scientific level and generously organised a multivolume monography on the obtained knowledge with many researchers. Nadezhda Kotova achieved an especially qualitative documentation of many finds and an elaborate evaluation, comparative analysis and analysis of the ceramics. This is the first settlement of the Early LPC that was examined so intricately, was analysed in such detail by experts of other disciplines and was presented in large volumes. In both volumes, the greatest amount of Early Linear Pottery objects from one site with a lot of statistical information, seriation and expertise is compiled. Many features, such as houses and ovens, finds of stone artefacts, anthropomorphic figures and musical instruments, the evaluation of the anthropological, botanical and zoological finds as well as chemical and petrographic analyses are discussed, analysed and classified. When the many houses are evaluated in detail, the picture of this unique settlement complex will be much more complete. For multiple reasons, the reviewed work will be an important source for the research on the first agrarian society in Central Europe.

LITERATURA

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