

The foundations of European civilization are embedded in agriculture patterns which were brought onto the continent by groups of people migrating from the Near East in the end of the 7th millennium BC. The so-called "Neolithic package" consisted of technical solutions and basic means of production (as they moved together with their belongings and livestock) which allowed the immigrants to practice their traditional economy. For several centuries on, as its bearers were spreading northward (from Athens to Szczecin and from Kiev to Paris), the package was adapted to different changing conditions. Still, the economic system, social structure and even cosmology remained basically the same. Considering the apparent common origins and cultural continuity, Maria Gimbutas called this whole cultural area 'Old Europe'.

Concurrently to Old Europe, though somehow isolated, similar farming and stock-herding communities culturally rooted in the circum-Caucasian traditions, reached the forest-steppe zone of Eastern Europe. Just in the second quarter of the 5th millennium BC, when bearers of the latter tradition settled the valleys of the Black Sea steppe area and Central European communities spread eastwards, reaching the forest-steppe belt, close relationships became established. However, the real break-through took place around the mid of the millennium. As a result of intensifying interregional contacts, the influences from the east became stronger. At the beginning the highly developed stable farming communities of the northern Pontic forest-steppe belt and sub-Carpathian western Pontic area played the role of a buffer and a conveyor for different cultural impulses from the steppe zone. In the end of the 4th millennium, when Old Europe – not without agency of the steppe communities – became disintegrated, the frontier between both discussed cultural areas moved westwards. Eventually, as they reached adequate social and technological advancement, and historical circumstances allowed for it, the steppe communities started to penetrate deeper into Central Europe. Both the prehistory, as well as the later long and stormy history of interactions between Central Europe and groups coming from the Great Eurasian Steppe, has taken its toll on European civilization.

Our interest within the project will be focused on contacts between communities of the broadly defined steppe zone and people living in the northern part of Central Europe. Regarding the physiographic conditions and convenient location on natural routes connecting the Baltic with the Black Sea catchment area, the so-called Western Volhynian Upland must be considered as the most northerly front-end of the Pontic region. Located within the region, the so-called Dobu ek Scarp with a monumental settlement complex in its center, seems to have enormous potential for such studies. However, to reveal it, an integrated interdisciplinary research programme must be carried out.

Non-invasive prospections constitute the methodic backbone of the project. The whole area of the Dobu ek Scarp and its surroundings will be investigated with the use of satellite images and aerial photographs, LiDAR scanning, surface and magnetometric prospections. The obtained results will allow to mark out excavation trenches with 'surgical precision'. The excavations in turn, will provide us with necessary details of archaeological features detected during the prospections, as well as deliver finds suitable for further in-deep studies on palaeoenvironment, palaeoeconomics, structures of prehistoric populations etc. All in all, due to a comprehensive reconstruction of social and economic contexts of use and deposition of various foreign elements (with a special reference to Pontic elements), it will be possible to draw very precise conclusions in regard to the scale and mechanisms of their reception.