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New data on the archaeological settlement and paleogeography of the Lower Danube area (Romania)

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Introduction

Since 2008, the beginning of archaeological and paleo-environmental research has yielded a better understanding of protohistoric settlement in the present-day Danube delta area. Particularly in the zone of Mila 23 (collective of Crișan), archaeological excavations have delivered chronological and stratigraphic data relative to human occupation that began at the start of the 5th millennium BC.

State of archaeological knowledge

Archaeological information is rare in the lower Danube delta, and very little is known about Early Neolithic to Chalcolithic settlement within the delta. Field surveys on the Caraorman and Letea spits have revealed artifacts and construction from antiquity to the Middle Ages. Hașotti (1997) mentions flint finds but without archaeological context and chronological attribution. Vasiliu (1995) excavated tumuli from the Late Bronze Age and Medieval period in the same area.

The only discoveries ascribable to the Neolithic were recorded near the delta, on the right bank of the Sfântu Gheorghe branch. Ceramic attributed to the Hamangia Culture (Middle Neolithic) was discovered at Mahmudia (Oberländer-Târnoveanu, 1980:55). Some sherds were found in Nufăru and are attributed to the Gumelnița Culture (Eneolithic). In addition, Comșa (1971) also mentioned some sherds recovered on Popina Island in Lake Razim.

Field and analytical data

Archaeological excavation, surface surveying, coring, topographic study, and geophysical (magnetic) prospecting were carried out on the site of Taraschina during 2009 and the beginning of 2010. The aim of this work was to characterize the settlement, i.e., extent, nature, etc. and to refine the previous chronological attribution (based on ceramic typology) of the site by radiocarbon dating.

Results

The microtopographic analysis and coring establish that the site of Taraschina is a tell built up from a succession of paleosols, domestic structures, and sterile levels corresponding to the degradation of architecture. This type of stratigraphy is characteristic of this type of building structure. The singular dome shape emerging slightly from the reed bed lends credence to this assumption.

The coring results exhibited a stratigraphic succession of at least 3.5 m. Radiocarbon dating of a domestic level at 3.20 m below the present-day top soil was done. Material used for dating was a single seed extracted from an anthropogenic level associated with ceramic fragments and fish bones. Radiocarbon dating (4880–4580 BC) is clearly related to the first half of the 5th millennium and allows us to propose an attribution to the Boian Culture for the beginning of occupation. The abandonment of this site occurred during the Chalcolithic (4500–4300 BC). We observed a reoccupation during antiquity and the Medieval period.

Paleo-ecological and stratigraphic data indicate that the archaeological site of Taraschina occupied, during Eneolithic time, an exposed, subaerial zone, probably located near one of the arms of the Danube and/or close to a lagoon.

A look forward

Other archaeological sources make it possible to specify the nature of the settlement network on a regional scale, in particular for the protohistoric period. Detailed cartography of these data has permitted reconstruction of an accurate chronological framework for the fluvial and coastal transformation and refining of our understanding of Danube delta growth. By widening the study surface, the aim of our contribution is to bring archaeological information face to face with paleogeographical sources.

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