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**Neolithic and Eneolithic**  
**in the**  
**Lower Mureş Basin**

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# INTRODUCTION

The present work is based on a unitary approach of Neolithic and Eneolithic discoveries in the Lower Mureş Basin. From a chronological perspective, it envisages the approximate period of 6000–3000/2800 cal BC, from the onset of the Starčevo-Criş-Körös pottery until the disappearance of the Baden and Coţofeni pottery. The area taken into consideration includes several units, distinct from a geographical perspective. The main landmarks are the Mureş Valley (from the settlement of Deva until Szeged) and the Crişul Alb Valley. In order to ease the archaeological discourse, throughout the research I have used the term Lower Mureş Basin for the entire area under consideration.

This research has two main objectives: publishing the artifacts preserved in the collection of the Museum of Arad and systematizing the information existing in specialized literature regarding the Neolithic and the Eneolithic in the Lower Mureş Basin. Through the systematic approach and the methodology employed the volume presents a classical approach of archaeological discoveries. At the same time, the end goal is to create a starting point for future archaeological approaches in this area.

The book reunites a series of personal projects implemented over the last decade<sup>1</sup>. The first project is my BA thesis defended at the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca; that research focused on the Late Eneolithic sites in the Western Plain of Romania. On that occasion I have processed several Late Eneolithic artifacts preserved in the collection of the Museum of Arad, under the coordination of Dr. Habil. Florin Gogâltan. Subsequently, under the impulse of Prof. Dr. Sabin Adrian Luca, I have tackled the entire Eneolithic period from the Lower Mureş Basin in my doctoral dissertation. I have also approached the Neolithic Era in the same region part of a post-doctoral scholarship provided by the Lucian Blaga University in Sibiu.

In a brief chapter I shall mention the main relief units from the area under discussion (Chapter 1). This section of the book includes, as well, information on the natural environment before the eighteenth century when ample anthropization works were initiated in the area. In order to present existing data as coherently as possible, I have included a chapter regarding the history of research (Chapter 2). In this second section I briefly present the performed archaeological excavations and, at the same time, I include quality evaluations of the archaeological publications on the topic. Two chapters have been allocated to revising the main opinions on the terminology employed (Chapter 3) and to discussing the systems of relative chronology of the Neolithic and the Eneolithic in the eastern part of the Intra-Carpathian area (Chapter 4). The work's main part is dedicated to the discoveries made in the research area (Chapter 5). I have elaborated a repertory of discoveries containing all essential data according to the “archaeological cultures” mentioned in the existing bibliography. At the same time this chapter presents data on the discovered archaeological features (dwellings, graves etc.) and artifacts, structured according to the following sections: settlements, settlement features, funerary discoveries and artifacts. The end of each subchapter will contain data on the relative and absolute chronology of each pottery style. The discussion on the metal artifacts is to be found in a separate section (Chapter 6). Starting from all the data collected throughout the research, at the end of the book I will present several characteristics of the Neolithic and of the Eneolithic in this region.

I should note that throughout the present book I have chosen to substitute, as much as possible, the terms “culture”, “cultural group”, “cultural aspect” etc. with the term “pottery style”<sup>2</sup>. At the same time I have

<sup>1</sup> These projects have been published in a series of works: Sava 2008; Sava 2009; Sava, Pădurean 2009; Sava 2010a; Sava 2010b; Sava, Ardeleanu 2010; Sava 2011; Sava, Matei 2013; Sava 2014a; Sava 2014b; Sava *et al.* 2014; Sava 2015a; Sava 2015b; Sava 2015c (This book was published part of the post-doctoral scholarship. I wish to note that the printing house and the editor have published the book without the 117 corresponding plates. At the same time, I was not given the due occasion to perform the necessary corrections of such an initiative and to approve the final printing form. I have subsequently burned 200 CDs with the plates in PDF format, but unfortunately they have not been, to this day, attached to the printed volumes.); Sava 2015d; Sava 2015e; Sava 2015f; Sava *et al.* 2015.

<sup>2</sup> The term is also employed in Gogâltan *et al.* 2014 and Sava 2015c.

employed syntagms such as: discoveries associate to the Tisa pottery, Coţofeni pottery etc. I have also given up, as much as possible, the use of the concept of archaeological culture, since the majority of prehistoric “cultures” from Romania, and not only there, have been defined on the basis of pottery shapes and ornaments. When the text does contain the syntagm “archaeological culture” it only envisages the distribution area of a certain pottery style, or a *terminus technicus*. By using these terms I intend to reduce the impression, widely encountered in Eastern-European historiography, heavily indebted to cultural-historicism, that each “archaeological culture” is to be identified with an ethnic group<sup>3</sup>. At the same time, as no other methods of analysis are available, I have kept the established names of these “cultures” but I have ceased to confer them their consecrated analytical value.

Consulting the bibliography upon which the present study relies, I was able to identify several drawbacks of existing researches that considerably reduce one’s capacity to analyse and interpret Neolithic and Eneolithic society in the envisaged area. Among the more significant issues of research one should mention: the low number of excavations performed according to current standards, the publication of a restricted number of researches and the few multi-disciplinary studies performed (anthropological, archaeo-zoological, soil analyses etc.).

I must admit that going through the bibliography has been a sinuous process, from several perspectives. Probably the most important factor is the absence of recent studies that systematize the information on the periods under research in the Intra-Carpathian region. Though numerous excavations have been performed, few have led to published monographs. The lack of a unitary terminology and of a system of relative chronology employed by the majority of researchers causes numerous confusions among those who wish to become familiar with the archaeological realities. I also wish to note the excessive interest of researchers into aspects of relative chronology that have led to the creation of complex, very difficult to understand systems. At the same time I was able to observe the fact that the study of relative chronology prevails over the publication of discoveries made over time and thus one is deprived of the actual basis of pertinent analysis.

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<sup>3</sup> I shall mention but some of the studies that approach the topic: Shennan 1989; Andersson *et al.* 1996; Barford 1996; Czerniak 1996; Friman 1996; Minta-Tworzowska 1996; Werbart 1996; Vulpe 2001; Palincaş 2010; Anghelinu 2014, 203–208; 295–304.