

Archaeological cultures and reality

Lech Czerniak^a

In this article the author discusses a number of questions concerning the relationship of archaeological cultures to cultural reality seen from the viewpoint of differing traditions of archaeological research. The paper addresses the bipolarity of the concept of archaeological cultures, as a means of ordering data as well as attempts to explain them, and explores the general lack of reflection on the meaning of the concept. Questions of interrelationships of culture and ethnicity are discussed. The paper utilises analogies from ethnology to discuss the concept of archaeological cultures and illustrates the conclusions with a Neolithic example from central Poland.

KEY-WORDS: archaeological cultures, ethnology,

“Our distinctions and divisions, our differences, ranks, continuities, sequences, consequences, systems, orders, and formations, hierarchies and arche are chosen by us, from a position of arbitrary power, – a miracle of exceptionally low probability, created by the historian acting as God” (Michel Serres 1988)

In adding my voice to the discussion in this volume on the subject of archaeological cultures as a subject of and concept in archaeological investigations, I first had to resolve the following dilemma. There is namely a clear difference between theoretical reflections and propositions on the subject of the understanding and systemization (classification) of archaeological cultures and investigative practice in the interpretation of history, within which the concept of archaeological culture is used. This process begins with the cultural qualification of artefacts and ending with the consideration of their cultural meaning. The bipolarity of theory and practice is not by any means exclusive to archaeology, but due to the present stage of the development of science in general, and such an observation is not an attempt to find a method to reduce the distance between them. The awareness of the existence of the two realities in archaeology – theoretical and practical – which differ in the questions posed, argumentation, cited literature and language, places us before an important choice.

In addition to this dilemma, the awareness of the existence of at least two very different, and usually self-contained (isolated), traditions of practicing archaeology – the continental and Anglo-American, places us before the next (and I think far

^a Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Poznań, Poland

more significant) choice. These two traditions, two alternative ways of practicing archaeology, are shaped by cultural tradition and history, either as a part of anthropology (the Anglo-American tradition) or history and ethnography (the continental tradition). There are other perhaps more visible differences, both methodological ones (the domination in continental archaeology of classical versions of empiricism, while in Anglo American archaeology the hypothetical-deductive approach dominates) and theoretical ones (the former concentrating on problems of cultural influences, continuity and periodisation in the spirit of evolutionism, while in Anglo-American archaeology one can see a constant search for new interpretive models from cultural ecology to the postprocessual trends). These differences affect the subject of our discussion, Binford and Stabloff (1982) oppose two visions of culture in these two traditions: (a) that of American anthropology, where culture is a fluid phenomenon and at the same time independent of other divisions of human groups (for example ethnic) and, (b) that of continental tradition, the tendency for the identification of archaeological cultures with ethnic groups.

It seems an excessive generalisation to engage in theoretical reflection in the tradition of only one of these two options. I doubt especially whether it would be proper to conduct a discussion on this subject solely within the framework of the theoretical propositions of Anglo-American archaeologists, despite it being evidently and undoubtably theoretically more mature and at the same time exhibiting a rich variety in approaches. At the present state of discussion however, a question which seems of more interest is why these theoretical propositions seem to me to have had less influence on archaeological practice that would be suggested by the frequency of their citation. The interpretation of this fact as an expression of differing levels of professionalism in individual cases and the state of advancement of knowledge in comparison to different traditions does not explain everything. I suspect that the explanation of this phenomenon may have certain significance in the search for a procedure of definition and systemization of culture which is more universal and persuasive. This is why, instead of a systematic analysis of all the possible aspects of the definition of and controversies surrounding what I am convinced is still the most important of archaeological concepts, the archaeological culture, I propose drawing attention to a few of the important theoretical questions functioning on the interfaces between different manners of practicing archaeology.

1. WHAT IS AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL CULTURE?

It is necessary to emphasise the bipolarity of the sense of the use of the concept of archaeological culture. Even though it is always defined as being an assemblage of so-called "material culture" which is specific for a particular area and period, it

can however be understood either as equal to the wider concept of culture or secondly, as a useful tool for naming certain groups of facts, as a proper name (as in the case of villages, clans etc. used by ethnologists wishing to illustrate their general theses with concrete examples), this is done without defining the relationship between cultural divisions and real societies. Archaeologists most often occupy the second of these positions, though usually with care (it should be added here that traditions of investigative practice do not force archaeologists to make such precise declarations).

Seen from the perspective of investigative traditions, it can be clearly seen that the concept of archaeological culture functions completely differently in continental archaeology (in which it plays a central role in all research programmes), and differently in Anglo-American archaeology, in which it appears more rarely and always in the reduced scope of a concept used for ordering and naming certain types of phenomena. It is no surprise also that in the framework of the traditions of Anglo-American archaeology (to be precise, on the basis of works deriving from the premises of cultural ecology or functionalism) there have been voiced opinions altogether negating the usefulness of such a concept.

In my opinion however those theoretical-methodological differences do not represent the reality of the presented division, they are secondary to the differences in the subject of interest. One cannot neglect these factors in any attempt to consider the cognitive function of the concept of archaeological cultures. The main feature distinguishing the way that cultures are conceptualised in continental archaeology is the priority given to the “ethnicising-descriptive” side of the problem. In continental archaeology one often observes the domination of interest in one’s own local and ethnic past (and not the past for its own sake which is the anthropological approach). From this – in my opinion – stems the description of and interest in cultural continuity, the investigation of which must be linked with analysis of cultural influences. Perhaps it is precisely this descriptive mode of continental archaeology which is responsible not only for the preference for but also conservation of the inductionist approach (together with a distaste for any form of theorising).

In characterising continental archaeology in more precise terms, one may say that it was formed from the extension of the model of the ethnography of European peoples. One can see the analogy in the comparison in the way these disciplines both deal with three elements: (a) description of the landscape in which a given people lives, (b) determination of the origin of the people as well as describing its genetic connections and especially (c) the comprehensive description of the people from the point of view of economics, social factors, belief systems and customs. In order to accomplish the archaeological reconstruction of this model, it was only necessary to replace the concept of “people” by that of “archaeological culture”. It was this

latter concept which – besides others such as “influences”, “contacts”, “genesis”, “continuity-discontinuity” which are most often met with in much of continental archaeology. As an example, we may note that works written in this tradition almost always bear titles in which the word “culture” is emphasised. These facts above all probably create the situation where continental archaeologists pay such special attention to the continuation of already-existing systemization of cultures, and prefer not to discuss the principles of their creation.

It seems that the opposite system prevails in Anglo-American archaeology, which has closer connections with ethnology, especially with functionalist and neoevolutionary concepts, which directs its attention to culture as culture, and thus its structure, functioning etc. Of course, as we have noted above, there is a great variety of approaches within Anglo-American archaeology. Placing some examples in a developmental sequence, we may mention first the proposals of Clarke (1968), *de facto* an attempt to modify classical (continental) procedures of the systemization of archaeological cultures by the use of quantification and formalisation. Somewhat different are (b) those concepts of the New Archaeology which stem from cultural ecology, for which the concept of culture played the marginal role of providing chronological-spatial coordinates for the localisation of the data concerning the basic subject of interest for this school: the conditions and mechanisms of the functioning of adaptive systems. Again totally different are (c) interpretations in which the ethnic dimension of the analysis of artefacts appear clearly (for example Sackett 1977: especially in the version practiced by Hodder and thus concerning symbolic culture *e.g.*, 1982, 1988).

2. ARE ARCHAEOLOGICAL CULTURES NECESSARY?

The question posed has at least two meanings. In the first we return to the points considered above concerning the differing needs for the concept in different traditions of doing archaeology. The second, which is the basic subject of my interest, addresses the doubts universal in archaeology about the relationship of an archaeological culture defined by the classification of groups of archaeological material, to the realities of prehistoric cultural, ethnic and social divisions. Do the units defined by archaeologists have anything in common whatsoever with real divisions of prehistoric societies?

There are many doubts about the possibilities of reconstruction of cultural divisions on the basis of so-called “material culture”, and many arguments fuelling those doubts. One of the main ones is of course the multiplicity of alternative and potential classifications, of which the most observable reflection in investigative practice is the variety of results, methods and propositions (see Tabaczyński 1993). This is among the justifications for suggestions of rejecting these cultural divisions.

The complete rejection of the concept of archaeological cultures is one the possibilities of resolving these problems. The second would be to apply similar approaches as in disciplines (such as ethnology), which accept the need for proper names, but exclude from that category cultural qualifications, regarding them as always having an interpretive character, especially when concerning the establishment of cultural frontiers, extents and lists of cultural components.

Complete resignation from the use of the concept of archaeological culture would be justifiable only – and even then with some reservations – in the case of archaeology conducted only in the framework of evolutionist interpretation (using data concerning the appearance of successive important technical discoveries) and neoevolutionist ones (using data showing the coincidence of socioeconomic changes with changes in the ecosystem). In both cases the subject of interest is man as a biological species equipped with culture, which is understood as an apparatus serving to free him from dependence on the environment (civilisational advance, classic evolutionism), or an adaptive apparatus differing with the passing of time and changable combinations of local environmental factors. Culture in this approach is – in the history of evolution – a new (because non-genetic) manner of generating and transmitting information which from the adaptional point of view is important, but nothing more. This is however a particularly extreme view. As it seems, most investigators concerned with the study of the adaptive aspects of cultural change regard culture as not entirely explicable solely in functional terms. It is just such an approach which does not require the utilisation of the concept of archaeological culture, which by the same token is reduced to determining the dating and localisation in a defined environment for the interpretation of the observed examples of different forms of adaptive behaviour.

I think, in polemising with such a view, the deletion of the concept of archaeological culture from the dictionary of archaeological terms would be too serious a crippling of archaeology (and would lead to it being excluded from among the ranks of modern humanistic sciences). From the humanistic point of view, the interpretation of culture cannot be separated from the concept of ethnicity. This concept, at least potentially, leads to an important element (and in my opinion a considerably more important one than questions of time and the ecological characteristics of place), this is the understanding of culture as a mental reality, as a system of values and traditions. Seen in this sense, the concept of archaeological culture becomes archaeologically indispensable.

The career of the concept of ethnicity in archaeology over the last decade or so in Anglo-American archaeology (*e.g.*, Sackett 1977; Renfrew 1987; Ehret 1988; Sterner 1989; Conkey and Hastorf 1990; Erikson 1991) and to some degree in continental archaeology is of course an indication that the concept of archaeological culture will still retain significance for a long time. I do not wish to suggest here that in the case of continental archaeology that such an approach to material

culture is a methodological advance of the last decade or so. Continental, and in particular central European archaeology, almost continually from its beginning has conducted ethnic interpretations of archaeological cultures. On the other hand it should not be forgotten that the 1960s and 1970s, for example, that in Polish archaeology we also see the treatment by some scholars of archaeological classification as merely a formal operation used to order the material and together with this attempts to discuss socio-economic problems instead of ethnicity (*e.g.*, Wiślański 1966; Tabaczyński 1970). One may speak in terms of a return to ethnic interpretation in central European archaeology from two points of view; firstly from the point of view of broken continuity – because there was a period when research into ethnicity was regarded as unscientific, but secondly because return to these problems is connected with a decidedly different conceptualisation (here clear influences from Anglo-American archaeology are visible; see Tomaszewski 1988; Olsen and Kobylński 1991). The concept of ethnicity no longer has its former 19th century form, the search for archaeological reflections of existing ethnic divisions, and material culture is no longer opposed to spiritual and social culture.

The return to a consideration of ethnic issues in archaeology and the increase in importance of the concept of archaeological culture prompts a more general reflection. This change occurred due to a number of causes, firstly archaeology “matured” as a discipline, able to undertake study of such a problem of universal cognitive significance. A significant factor was certainly the need to search for new interpretive possibilities, especially in reaction to the obvious crisis of investigations based on the “evolutionist-ecological” paradigm within Processual archaeology. It remains to recall the new cognitive possibilities of archaeology in the field of the empirical testing of population changes, such as for example through examining settlement continuities and discontinuities through DNA analysis (*e.g.*, Renfrew 1991).

The past negative (or at least very critical) approach to ethnic interpretation was justifiable firstly by the impossibility of empirically testing of the hypotheses of the proponents of ethnic interpretations. At the same time these interpretations were utilised for nationalist propaganda. Particularly in the case of central European archaeology, a very important factor has been the possibility of disconnecting ethnic interpretation from political issues. Full optimism on this issue is prevented by examples of ethnic overinterpretation based on simply reversing previous interpretations, motivated – it seems from the evidence – rather from a psychological need for countereaction than material justification. Such seems to be the justification for ascribing a Germanic origin for almost all local groups of the Przeworsk Culture in Poland (until recently seen almost compulsorily as “early Slav”). Another problem is the situation in countries which only now are in the process of forming a national identity, an example might be the Ukraine, where the neolithic Trypolje Culture has been presented in popular accounts as “Early Ukrainian” (!).

3. WHY DO ARCHAEOLOGISTS PAY SO LITTLE ATTENTION TO THE MANNER OF DIFFERENTIATION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL CULTURES?

It seems pointless asking this question of Anglo-American archaeologists, although it is precisely in this school that the most interesting theoretical and methodological proposals concerning the systemization of culture have appeared (such as for example Clarke 1968; Binford 1972; Sackett 1977; Dunnell 1978). In turn, in terms of continental archaeology the question may seem a paradox, because it is precisely here that the systemization of culture seems to have been the main topic of interest for most archaeologists. In this second case however the criticism is justified by the fact that without exception, we observe attempts to enlarge and subdivide schemes already in existence. What is more, continental archaeologists are well aware of the equivocal nature of criteria used for cultural classification, and the possibilities for the construction of alternative schemes, nor that they are ignorant of concrete proposals for new solutions. This is an illustration of the thesis that archaeological cultures are a specific concept, shaped under long term functioning of a specific tradition, and relatively resistant to change, even though these changes would make it more adequate for different interpretive directions in archaeology.

The problem has a far too long history of development to be explicable by a single cause. In my opinion one of the main causes of this situation is that archaeologists in fact doubt in the reality of archaeological cultures. This does not encourage a critical approach – nor in consequence, the formation of suitable investigative programmes. There are other reasons for suggesting this. For example, in archaeological interpretation undertaken by continental archaeologists, the possibilities of the co-existence of two or more archaeological cultures in one comparatively small geographical area is rarely (or rather never) considered. This is clearly visible in chronological schemes (periodisation), where cultures are generally shown as following neatly one after the other in monolinear chronological sequences. In my opinion, there are no theoretical grounds in support of such an unequivocal approach (such as for example from ethnographic analogies) nor any factographic ones (such as evidence from ¹⁴C dates, nor stratigraphy which instead show frequent synchronisms). This is why I think that in this case we are dealing with a stereotype which causes the automatic translation of cultural variation into chronological variation, and thus – looking more closely – the understanding of archaeological cultures as the effect of the ordering of archaeological material with one practical dimension: its use for establishing chronological schemes. At the same time there appears here a collision of two procedures in the development of archaeological chronology:

(a) typological dating – thus all cultures are differentiated according to the principle: **similar = contemporary : dissimilar = different culture = not contemporary**, and

(b) dating by physico-chemical methods. The second of these two methods in a manner increasingly evidently disturbs previous traditional chronological schemes, demonstrating more than anything the existence of a mosaic of contemporary cultures in some regions rather than monolinear development of successive cultures.

Another cause of this conservatism among continental archaeologists in their treatment of archaeological cultures seems to be the fact that the multiplicity of alternative and potential cultural classifications and in consequence the specificity and variability of schemes of cultural divisions is not consistent with the ideal which is strongly embedded in this archaeology that there is the possibility of developing an all-embracing system which will prove permanent. This ideal grew from the ethnographic roots of continental archaeology, and is based on the simple transferral of ethnic qualifications into cultural ones. It is thought, namely, that real (“living”) culture as formed on the basis of ethnic identity, exists in just one, closely defined form.

One can of course also see the permanence of cultural-chronological schemes in archaeology as an expression of other pragmatic needs, for example the stability of such schemes allowed unequivocal communication between archaeologists functioning in different countries and schools.

In the context sketched above, one sees a somewhat schizophrenic approach among investigators, the pragmatic and instrumental approach to the divisions of archaeological material, united in the belief that they represent however more than random and arbitrary units. This is best demonstrated by the way that it is always those same archaeological cultures which are interpreted in terms of economy, social and ideological categories, and thus in a manner more suitable for real socio-cultural communities. What else would be the reason for the undertaking of analyses of the type of “economy of the Funnel Beaker Culture”, even though the culture itself is defined on the basis of the form of the pottery vessels? Are we really permitted to accept, without any serious justification, that there is any coincidence between a ceramic “stylistic community” and an economic one? What is more, and here there is a basic lack of consequence, investigators of socio-economic questions seem to be completely uninterested in the connections between the conclusions they draw and the process of defining of archaeological cultures (leaving that problem to the “finds experts”), as if this question had had absolutely no influence on the selection of data to be analysed. Going further, if there are many potential solutions to the question of cultural distinction, there appears to be a new basic problem to be resolved: determination of the basis for the selection of the best method of systemizing archaeological material.

4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CULTURE AND REALITY

The doubts expressed in this heading are raised by any systemization which has the aim of the differentiation of archaeological cultures. The search for a solution to the problem of the objectivity of cultural divisions leads us to the conclusion that there is no one system of cultural division which has been developed in any of the disciplines studying culture which is universally applicable. There is no system which, once developed, remains valid – independently of the time it was developed and the problems which were the subject of interest of its authors. This is impossible, because in culture itself there is no such an objective reality, understood in this manner (see the motto).

In developing this thought further, one may state that “cultures” understood in the broad terms of, for example, ethnologists exists as a reality only in the same terms as the “forces” of physicists, or the “social bonds” of sociologists. They are theoretical constructions, “postulated existences”, concepts which are necessary in order to give sense (within an accepted interpretational model) to a specific class of facts. This is also why one cannot investigate any culture (including archaeological ones) directly. We experience however specific and real behaviour, events or material objects, about which we may say (on the basis of specified assumptions) that they are the “products of culture”. This is probably why culture is a type of phenomenon which gives rise to doubts about to which of its spheres a given article should be assigned. The real boundaries between material products, and human behaviours and customs are extremely diffuse and different in each case. For this reason, it is relatively easy to speak of “culture” in general terms (thus the multitude of its definitions), but so difficult to define significant cultural boundaries, and even more difficult to connect cultural divisions with other divisions within human populations. It follows from this fact that the cultures which we as archaeologists differentiate are no less real than culture defined on the basis of the principles of other disciplines. This is of course conditional on us not confusing cultural divisions with others such as ethnic, social or religious ones.

Among the misunderstandings which have arisen around the discussion of the reality of archaeological cultures, most of them seem to derive from difficulties in differentiating different levels of abstraction by which different definitions of culture are justified. Speaking – for example – of the “undefined relationship” of archaeological cultures to “living culture” suggests that the latter is closely defined. In an obvious manner reflection on reality has been dominated by the fragmentary nature of archaeological investigations (*i.e.*, through artefacts). Their real defect is primarily that we believe in the direct translatability of those same divisions created on the basis of differentiating features of ceramic finds into ethnic, tribal, social and economic divisions.

The cultural divisions of the ethnologist which are often used as a model are generally created by the assignation of a specific pool of behaviours and objects to existing divisions made on the basis of single, unequivocal criteria (such as linguistic or tribal). This creates the illusion of the reliability of the cultural divisions in all of their aspects, being at the same time an expression of the inferiority complex of (at least continental) archaeologists with reference to ethnology. At the same time, the ethnologist – using the systemization methods of archaeology – would have similar difficulties as the archaeologist if he was to try to create cultural divisions which were applicable to all spheres of the functioning of culture (*e.g.*, Leach 1961).

The above statement would be sufficient reason – as in other anthropological sciences – to push the question of the universality of cultural divisions (especially if we examine them through the spectrum of the form of material products) beyond the area of investigation of the phenomenon of culture.

Archaeology is of course in a considerably more difficult situation, for it has no fixed terms of reference which would be independent of cultural divisions and do not undergo change depending on the individual choice of criteria. Above all, however, there remains a doubt whether the archaeologist would find anything to interest him in a culture the reality of which was understood in such an abstract fashion. I think that archaeologists cannot resist searching for such an interpretive procedure, the aim of which would be the translating of the differential characteristics of material products into real units of division of prehistoric societies.

5. A FEW POSTULATES CONCERNING THE DIFFERENTIATION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL CULTURES

In my opinion it is necessary to resign from the use of the concept of archaeological culture in its traditional – continental – meaning, and thus as a relatively objective unit, which after collecting a suitably large sample of material it is necessary to establish “once and for ever”. No system can have universal meaning if we accept the view that on the one hand (a) there is an interdependence between criteria (effects) of description and a specific interpretive model, and (b) that only aspectual cultural divisions (considering only one or a few characteristics) can become the subject of successful attempts to translate the variability of features of material products into real units of divisions of prehistoric societies. This view leads in turn to the need to create a conception of the categorisation, hierarchisation and selection of features that would ultimately lead to a systemization of culture which is not based on a formalized procedure of “pure calculation”.

The basis for the above opinion is the belief that successive features of the investigated categories of products should not be added to the system cumulatively and by degrees, like bricks in a wall (each one the same and each equally necessary), or like the parts of an engine (each different from the other, but necessary for the functioning of the whole), but quite the opposite, a hierarchy and selection and reduction of the features taken into account relative to the model constructed in the framework of a given interpretation.

From the point of view of continental archaeology, it is necessary to question the future of the schemes of classification of cultures presently in operation and built up (by years of experience) as a consequence of the close relationship between the procedure of systematization and the interpretive models. I think that with regard to the long tradition of their use, they have – and will have – an important role to play, but only as a formal conception for ordering empirical material. Cultures understood in such a manner can therefore serve only as “material for further processing”; a basis for an aspectualisation, constructed as the result of a specific interpretive operation. Above all, however, a break with the tradition of approaching the systemization of culture as a procedure which is composed of two independent stages: “first distinguishing the cultures and then their increasingly fuller reconstruction”.

In the discussion of this question, it is often forgotten that the traditional approach to the systemization of archaeological cultures derives from the idea of objective (“atheoretical”) description without preconceptions. The aim of such a description must be an universal scheme. By the same token, the description must take account of all features accessible to observation, according to the principle that “everything may be useful”. This explains why, among other things, why the systemization of culture is a separate specialisation in continental archaeology, in which the investigator of – for example – social problems or economic matters does not interfere. In this type of relationship lies the source of one of the most important reasons for the stubborn attempts to translate archaeological cultures directly into units of ethnicity, tribal divisions, despite the awareness that in reality such divisions seldom correspond to one another.

It would be very difficult to formulate general postulates which would present the next stages of investigative procedure aiming to distinguish units of cultural division which would correspond to divisions in some or other sphere of life (such as tribal affinity) existing in the reality of the past. This is difficult not just because that it would require the precision of very many concepts and relationships in the field of the archaeological systemization of culture, such as: (a) general principles of hierarchy, and – in consequence – the selection of features usable in the process of systematization, (b) principles of measuring the equivalence of features, and (c) criteria for the identification of factors

“organizing” the occurrence of specified features of products (the circulation of a given type of information).

It is necessary to find a solution to the dilemma connected with every description, namely, dealing with the fact that the list of features (and states of those features) with the help of which one may describe a given type of material includes an almost infinite number of them. The chaos of features which we observe in connection with this is a reflection of the repetitive superimposition of the action of different factors: cultural models, or conditioning due to function, raw materials, level of technology, individual skills and habits of the manufacturer, state of preservation, repairs, post-depositional damage, and finally the individual predispositions and working methods of the investigator. The ideal would be the possibility of distinguishing those features which were intentional from those which are incidental, that is those the detection of which (both in the sense of as a category as well as the degree of difference within a category) could be – in principle – be understood also from the point of view of the manufacturer and consumer. Even if this is an unachievable ideal, it gives a good basis for the criticism of the purely formalistic approach in favour of one which is intentionally evaluative.

Taking into account all of the remarks so far, in the light of which archaeological taxonomy appears rather as a complex intellectual game rather than a method of objectively dividing archaeological cultures defined in a simple algorithm, I reject the possibility of presenting ready answers which can be used in all situations.

One can however draw attention to the main directions of research in this field. In my opinion it fits well in the general current of archaeological investigation which has as its aim the ethnic interpretation of variable characteristics of the material products of the past. I think that in connection with interest in culture as a system of values, it is one of the more interesting cognitive perspectives of modern archaeology.

6. AN EXAMPLE: KUJAVIA IN THE MIDDLE NEOLITHIC

In Kujavia (the area between the middle Vistula and upper Noteć in the region of Toruń and Bydgoszcz) in the Middle Neolithic period (4400–3650 cal. BC) two archaeological cultures have, from the evidence of many ¹⁴C dates, been registered as occurring in the same area over a period lasting several hundred years. These two cultures, Funnel Beaker (TRB) and the Late Bandkeramik (LBPC) – better known as the Brześć Kujawski Group, are clearly different from one another in terms of their taxonomy. TRB settlements are located on sandy soils, while those of the LBPC, though often neighbouring with them, occur in different conditions, on Black Soils on a clay subsoil (presented and discussed more broadly in Czerniak 1994).

Many neolithic cultures such as TRB have extensive distributions right across large parts of Europe of which their occurrence in Kujavia is just a small part. I think that in many cases, the appearance of phenomena across large geographical areas – such as the example quoted of the whole of TRB (as it is defined at present), extending right across central Europe – an integrational-isolational factor may be certain phenomena (such as, for example, geographical, the natural communications of a region, the barriers of watersheds *etc.*) which had, it is true, cultural consequences – but not at such a level of cultural integration to a degree that would be significant here.

In my opinion in this concrete example, even the classic division into separate cultures can be interpreted in terms of a close correspondence with deep real cultural divisions existing in the past. The basis for such an interpretation is not merely however the existence of formal differences between the groups differentiated as TRB and LBPC (for example in the forms of ceramic vessels), but the fact that the differences occur in communities living alongside each other and contemporary with each other. This formal opposition has and can have no universal character: it does not demonstrate the existence of a homogeneous community across the whole European extent of the TRB cultural area. This extent certainly has significance, but not in its traditional, ethnic, meaning. It is however important to note that the cultural mosaic existed and was maintained over a period of several hundred years despite close spatial relations. This leads us to the conclusion that its basis must have been a strong feeling of separation of the two social groups which gave rise to the material we classify as TRB and LBPC. I understand the interpretation of this fact in terms of ethnicity as the problem of demonstrating the context of and not some particular – but always the same – characteristics of the material products.

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