

# INTERCULTURAL CODES IN THE EUROPEAN CIVILIZATION PREHISTORY<sup>1</sup>

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**WIEDERMANN, Egon. Interkultúrne kódy v prehistórii európskej civilizácie.** Na sklonku doby kamennej sa populácie sídliače v západnom vnútrokarpatskom priestore (zhruba územie dnešného Slovenska) dostali do kultúrneho kontaktu s východným eurázijským svetom. Štúdia analyzuje rozsah eurázijského kultúrneho prúdenia a jeho prejav na sledovanom území. Nositelia nových civilizačných ohlasov z východu sa prezentovali ako výnimočná inokrajinná kultúrna zložka, symbolizovaná svojským výzdobným dekórom (šnúrový ornament), aplikovaným na keramike miestnych kultúr od mladšej doby kamennej až po mladšiu dobu bronzovú. Šnúrová identita tak pretrvala v prehistorickom kultúrnom vývoji severozápadného vnútrokarpatského teritória takmer celé jedno tisícročie.

**Kľúčové slová:** Interkultúrne kontakty, západné vnútorné Karpaty, mladý eneolit, staršia a stredná doba bronzová, kultúrna identita

**Keywords:** Intercultural contacts, western inner Carpathians, Late Aeneolithic, Early and Middle Bronze Age, cultural identity

## Introduction

In this treatise our attention has been focused on a remarkable intercultural phenomenon of European prehistory. It is a pottery surface complement that resembles cord imprints and appears on ceramic vessels made during the Late Neolithic up to the Bronze Age. In a simplified way, it was named the corded ornament and it got to the centre of research via archaeology that, inspired by the decoration pattern, has named its bearers the Corded Ware culture. Regarding its duration and dispersal, the corded phenomenon space-time model can take almost a thousand years from the end of Aeneolithic up to the Middle Bronze Age and in prehistory of European communities it can be classified as a cultural complex with many local groups.

## Goal and Methodology

Our research has been concentrated only on a part of the spacious territory that was occupied by the corded pottery bearers on the European continent – the north, inner west Carpathian space. The reason is that in this space in the vicinity of the south-west border of Corded Ware cultural complex which, regarding its geography, is almost identical with the present-day Slovakia, no settlement structure of these cultures has been clearly identified yet. It looks like – in spite of the vast occupied area from Ural through southern Scandinavia, the Carpathians and Alpine lakes up to the Atlantic Ocean – the corded ware cultural complex interfered in the cultural development in inner Carpathians only marginally as there is only one site known up to now (*Pavúk 1981*). Regarding numerous archaeological finds we can

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state, however, that the corded identity bearers had their extraordinary position in this space. In spite of the fact that they did not form a continuous population structure here in the end of the Stone Age they created an integral part of local communities and they were the identity that preserved its exclusivity in this territory in the long term. This is proved by unusual finds of pottery decorated with corded patterns that were revealed in pottery filling of the whole range of local west Carpathian prehistoric communities.

The corded identity entry and its long-lasting existence in cultural milieu of the local prehistoric west Carpathian communities was of complementary character. Considering its initial forms, genetic origin of which can be found in the Pit Grave culture, Corded Ware culture, Chłopice-Veselé culture and East Slovakian Tumulus culture (*Bátora/Marková/Vladár 2003; Budinský-Krička 1965; Pavúk/Šiška 1980; Vladár 2008*) through its progressing forms in the Baden culture, Jevišovice culture, Kostolac culture (*Němejcová-Pavúková 1970; Nevizánsky 1999; Soják 2001; 2007; Struhár 2001; 2003; Šuteková 2006*), Bošáca culture (*Šuteková 2010, Wiedermann 2003; 2004; 2013*), Kosihy-Čaka-Makó culture (*Nevizánsky 2001; Vladár 1966*) and Nyírség-Zatín culture (*Vladár 1970*) and at last in the Nitra culture, Košťany culture, Únětice culture, Litzenkeramik culture and Carpathian Tumulus culture (*Benkovský-Pivovarová/Chropovský 2015; Dušek 1969; Furmánek et al. 2015; Kuzma 1982; Oždáni 2010; Pavúk 1981*), the corded identity character in the milieu of autochthonous inner Carpathian communities is more or less exotic.

According to the recent archaeological research, beginnings of the corded phenomenon in the west Carpathian environment are closely linked with the late Baden culture phase, in layers of which *J. Vladár (2008)* has classified it as a cultural-ethnic Eurasian interference in eastern and southern Slovakia (Košice-Barca I, Drevení, Stránska). Classification of the corded ornament from northern Slovakia into the identical chronological and cultural layer has been determined by setting its unequivocal origin. Its presence in Spiš enclaves of the Baden culture is usually explained by its transmission from eastern (Košice-Barca I) or southern (Stránska) regions of the inner Carpathians and more recently also by contacts with outside Carpathian zone (*Horvátová 2010; Horváthová/Nevizánsky 2017; Soják 2001*). Translation of the corded ornament into the regions under the Tatras from the turbulent hetero-cultural milieu of the western Carpathians cannot be excluded however. Here in the same time period the corded ornament was used on pottery of the Early Aeneolithic cultural complex (*Đuriš 2005; Malček 2013; Němejcová-Pavúková 1985; 1988; Šuteková 2006; Wiedermann 2003; 2004*), whose contacts with northern Slovakia and southern Poland have been sufficiently proven already (*Bátora 1983; Točík 1970; Zastawny 2006*). Final shapes of the corded ornament on the territory under study have been recorded on pottery dated to the terminating Early Bronze Age and incipient Middle Bronze Age.

### **Corded Identity**

The new corded identity was transposed to the west Carpathian cultural milieu by various population movements as a foreign cultural interference that was formally manifested as an ornamental element on pottery surface (the corded ornament); spiritually it was an unknown and subconscious structure of thinking (the corded episteme). In duration of almost a thousand years here its bearers preserved their extraordinary position (uniqueness, small size and rarity) from its beginning in the turn of early metallic ages (Late Stone Age) up to its extinction (turn of the Early and Late Bronze Age).

Regarding prehistoric sources, the corded identity genesis and source code can be hypothetically searched for in Early Aeneolithic cultures of east Europe. After the corded ornament had penetrated the inner Carpathian space, it developed into numerous variations (fig. 1), which can be compared to their original Eurasian milieu (*Lagodovska/Šapošnikova/Makarevič 1962*). In spite of the fact that the corded identity had carried a strong inertial energy with it that helped the corded phenomenon survive in the west Carpathian communities

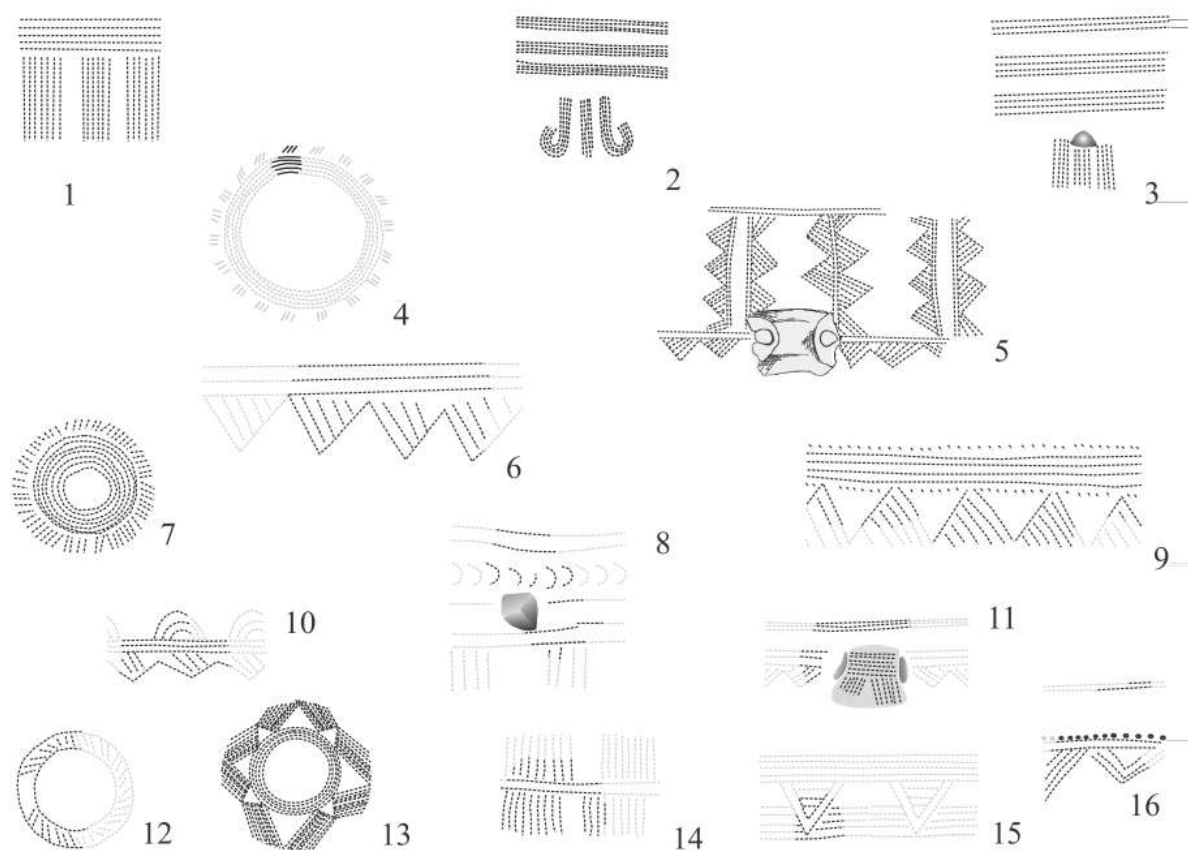


Fig. 1. Samples of corded decoration (ornament) on pottery in the Late Aeneolithic (4-16) up to the turn of the Early and Middle Bronze Age (1-3) as a formal manifestation of the corded identity in the milieu of local inner Carpathian communities. Author: E. Wiedermann

for almost one millennium it did not become dominant in the inner Carpathian milieu. The local west Carpathian heterogeneous cultural standard remained prevailing, within which the corded identity was a minority foreign culture component.

As the spiritual layer of the corded identity in the west Carpathian territory is almost invisible for archaeology and we can deduce its contours (traditions, customs, spiritual culture as the whole) only hypothetically mainly from various aspects of its funeral rite in the genetic Eurasian environment, let us ponder upon its visible manifestation – the corded ornament. Considering this, it can bring along numerous questions about its function and meaning for both its bearers and the contact local Carpathian communities, into which the corded subjects could integrate and last parallelly in the long run.

In addition to the option of explaining the corded ornament meaning in almost clearly practical and technical way, e.g. as a measure unit signature known in a cord form in the ancient milieu already (Novotný 1956, 1068), or as a socio-group etalon in the epoch of substantial technological changes, another meaning levels of the corded ornament can be in quest.

Besides the already mentioned alternatives there are more possibilities of its interpretation in other spheres of research. Very attractive one seems to be an explication of the corded identity meaning in wider semiotic field, within which the corded ornament could bear/mediate an information/references to its creator or community integrated in a local autochthonous community. Hence, its identity was individual and collective one. In some cases investigation of archetypal structures is a way to look for extent of contacts of outwardly isolated communities (Washburn 1983) or for social differences that are founded e.g. on ethnic affiliation (Krekovič 1996).

The scope of semiotic contemplations can be expanded further. In the environment of inner Carpathian communities of the Late Stone Age and Early Bronze Age, the identity of the corded ornament creator, i.e. his affiliation (foreign but established member) to another – originally “corded” community could be manifested repeatedly in the milieu of local socio-group identity. The same situation could be in the case of family bonds, i.e. affiliation to a certain family line. The key information – a sign, evolved just via information link – a symbol. While the symbol is more unambiguous and representing exclusivity within a local community (we/they), the sign is more universal. On a particular item (vessel) it can simultaneously bear information about the symbol itself and information e.g. about utility parameters of the vessel.

Outside of the above mentioned considerations on practical and formal or semiotic meaning levels, the corded identity is worth studying from the point of view of palaeosociology. In this process numerous researches from the sphere of micro-cultural relations, intercultural intersections, social relations and phenomena of prehistoric European communities can be used, first of all are proves of existence of particular traditions that are reflected also on pottery material and which are considered an evidence of matrilinearity as in some communities under study only women and daughters made pottery and they brought their techniques with them to a new location after they had been married (the Arkana tribe). Similarly remarkable in this sphere are also discoveries made during searching for reasons of pottery decoration changes. In the case of more long-lasting settled communities the decoration is more varying and richer than on short-lasting settlements (the Woodland cultural circle). The research projects in question (*Krekovič 1996*) that are typical by their new archaeological approach and focused mainly on the sphere of pottery sociology can be interesting sources of prehistoric parallels.

Not less remarkable results can be discovered by studying the corded identity in the context of palaeogenetic research, first of all of the mtDNA research in determination of parental bond or of the so-called double-parental DNA locus for determination of potential kinship. Analyses of local specific ratio of strontium isotopes can prove a region of birth, stay and migration as well. On a necropolis of the Corded Ware culture in Eulau origin of children directly from the community was identified in contrast with women whose dissimilar isotope values indicated their origin in entirely different region (*Haak 2008*). The results are not only evidence of existence of possible exogamous marriages and probable looking for bride in foreign kinship communities to preserve genetic health of the family but they are also proves of immigration and identity of women (and potentially also pottery techniques) and of strong family bonds emphasizing a nuclear family.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the above mentioned, the corded identity in the milieu of complex inner Carpathian cultural development in the terminating Stone Age can be seen as a result of trans-territorial response of Eurasian widely extended cultures, the Pit Grave culture and later the Corded Ware culture above all. In the end of Aeneolithic, locally sedentarised communities in the inner Carpathians formed small agricultural settlements with less developed communication system. These relatively enclosed communities, which accepted reflections of new life organization and mainly new ideology from the East (*Strahm 2002*), could evolve into several hetero-communities (*Wiedermann 2004*) with self-identification bodies under the incipient civilization changes (Metallicum). However, in the milieu of swelling Eurasian impulses and metallic activities the local Carpathian communities preserved their cultural identity and original agrarian ground.

In this context we have to observe again that the intercultural phenomenon of the corded identity did not appear to be a social domain in the cultural world of the west Carpathian



communities in the terminating Stone Age. On the contrary, it was a distant civilization episteme that the most probably preserved its leading position for almost a thousand years here. This unknown and subconscious structure of thinking that was characterised perhaps by its social exclusivity and in the long run symbolised by the corded ornament lasted in the turbulent hetero-cultural milieu of the frontier line between the north-east and south cultural complexes for the entire Top Metallicum period.

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## RESUMÉ

### Interkultúrne kódy v prehistórii európskej civilizácie

V záverečných štádiách starého praveku sa populácie sídliace v severozápadných vnútorných Karpatoch (zhruba územie dnešného Slovenska) dostávali do čoraz užšieho kultúrneho kontaktu s východným euroázijským svetom. Štúdia analyzuje dobu a rozsah euroázijského kultúrneho prúdenia a jeho prejav na uvedenom území. Nositelia nových civilizačných ohlasov z východu sa prezentovali ako výnimočná inokrajinná kultúrna zložka, symbolizovaná svojským výzdobným dekórom (šnúrový ornament), aplikovaným na keramike miestnych kultúr z prelomu najstarších metalických dôb. Šnúrová identita tak pretrvala v prehistorickom kultúrnom spektre západného vnútrokarpatského teritória od obdobia mladšej badenskej kultúry až po záver epišnúrového kultúrneho komplexu takmer celé jedno tisícročie.

Šnúrovú identitu možno v prostredí zložitého vnútrokarpatského kultúrneho vývoja na konci doby kamennej vnímať ako dôsledok transteritoriálnej odozvy eurázijských priestorovo široko rozvinutých kultúr, predovšetkým jamovej a neskôr kultúry so šnúrovou keramikou. Miestne sedentarizované spoločenstvá tvorili na sklonku eneolitu vo vnútorných Karpatoch malé, poľnohospodársky orientované osady, s menej rozvinutým komunikačným systémom. Z týchto relatívne uzatvorených komunit, zachytávajúcich ohlasy nového organizačného, hlavne však ideového podkladu z východu sa v dôsledku nastupujúcich civilizačných zmien mohli časom vyvinúť viaceré heterospoločenstvá so sebaidentifikačnými zložkami. V prostredí silnejúcich eurázijských impulzov a metalických aktivít si však miestne karpatské komunity zachovávali svoj kultúrny habitus a pôvodný agrárny základ.

Je zrejmé, že v kultúrnom svete spoločenstiev severozápadných vnútorných Karpát na konci doby kamennej sa tento interkultúrny prienik neprejavil ako celospoločenská doména, ale skôr naopak, ako vzdialená civilizačná epistéma, ktorá si tu s najväčšou pravdepodobnosťou takmer tisícročie uchovala svoju identitu. Táto neznáma a podvedomá štruktúra myslenia, charakteristická azda sociálnou výlučnosťou a dlhodobo symbolizovaná šnúrovým ornamentom, pretrvala v turbulentnom heterokultúrnom prostredí hraničnej zóny severovýchodných a južných kultúrnych komplexov, celé vrcholné obdobie metalika.

### Obrazová príloha

Obr. 1. Príklad šnúrovej výzdoby na keramike v neskorom eneolite (4-16) až prelomu staršej a strednej doby bronzovej (1-3) ako manifestácie šnúrovej identity v oblasti lokálnych vnútrokarpatských komunit.

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