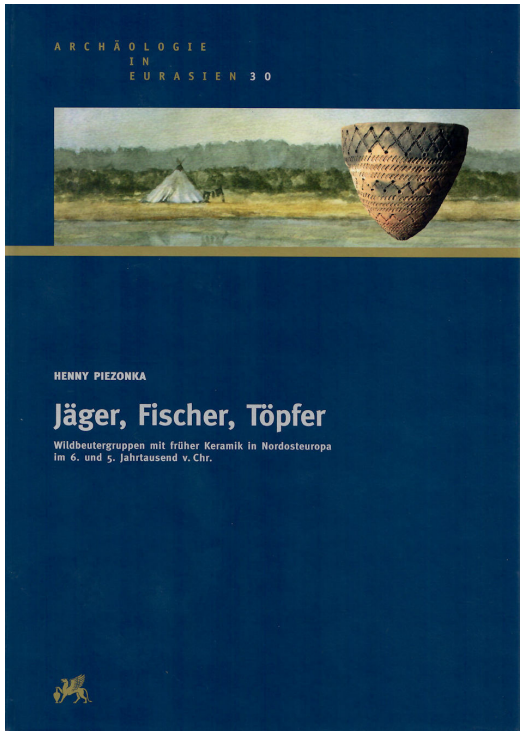
Henny Piezonka: *Jäger, Fischer, Töpfer. Wildbeutergruppen mit früher Keramik in Nordosteuropa im 6. und 5. Jahrtausend v.Ch.* Archäologie in Eurasien band 30. Habelt-Verlag, Bonn 2015. ISBN 978-3-7749-3932-5. 437 pp.



When I was invited to write a book review of Henny Piezonka's *Jäger, Fischer, Töpfer* I was delighted. Not just because I was eager to read it, but because this was a publication that I had actually been awaiting since I first heard about Piezonka's project at a workshop in 2006. However, I had missed the actual publication. The main reason for this is probably that it is (mostly) in German. In current research using an-other-than English language means much fewer first readers compared to publications in English, leading to fewer citations, and consequently less spread of knowledge of this volume and its content between colleagues interested in hunter-gatherer pottery, cultural dynamics in northern Europe in the 6th and 5th millennia BC and Eurasian prehistory in general. My first point to make here is therefore to inform potential readers that the book includes a detailed and well-written English summary of over 12 pages (and a corresponding résumé in Russian). So, although the choice to publish in German is in conflict with one of the main objectives of the project, which is to compile material across national and language borders and transgress the 20th century political barriers between eastern and western Europe, this is to a large extent compensated by the comprehensive summaries. The Russian text is further an important step in including eastern European colleagues into discourses on early pottery in the northern hemisphere.

The book presents a comprehensive study of the earliest pottery to the north and east of the Baltic Sea. It is the first study that crosses the national and language borders in this region which – for archaeologists in Fennoscandia and north-western Europe – lies nearby but remains poorly known. It gives access to a vast material and thus provides new opportunities to include eastern Europe into narratives of historical processes with more accuracy and detail than has hitherto been possible for the period 6th to 5th millennia BC.

The volume comprises 437 numbered pages plus 107 full-page illustrations (*Tafeln*). The main text takes up 258 pages and features a further 205 illustrations (including tables). Full-text pages are in a small minority, something that relaxes the first impression of the large volume considerably and, I would think, makes even the main part of the book well accessible for non-German readers.

The main text is divided into six chapters following a traditional material publication structure. After an introductory chapter, which frames the topic, questions and aims, follows a presentation of the large geographical area under study in relation to topography, climate, vegetation, wildlife, water systems and coastlines (Chapter 2). Chapter 3 provides general information on the 6th to 5th millennia pottery material in north-

eastern Europe, and presents the seventeen sites selected for closer analysis: five in Lithuania, one in Estonia, three in Finland and eight in Russia. It rounds up with a presentation of the methods used in the pottery analysis and its results.

Chapter 4 is a comprehensive and state-of-the-art presentation of Early Neolithic research in Belarus and White Sea region, including the results from Chapter 3. The presentation follows a sequence of archaeological 'cultures'/regions, starting from the oldest. The chapter includes a separate *Exkurse* on hunter-gatherer pottery in Japan and Canada with similar formal characteristics to the potteries of north-eastern Europe. In contrast to all other parts of the book, the headings of this section are not numbered. This suggests that the section has a different status. The presentation of the material from Japan and Canada, however, follows the overall template for Chapter 4, with a short text presenting the main characteristics of the chronology, pottery and lithics from each example area, supported by several illustrations.

Chapter 5 sums up the results in terms of a pottery distribution scenario in north-east Europe ordered in six 500-year-long chronological brackets from 'before 6500 BC' to 'after 4500 BC'. This part ends with a short conclusion regarding the origin and development of pottery in the study area (*Fazit*). The chapter rounds up with a separate sub-chapter, where Piezonka reflects on the environmental characteristics in which early pottery occurs among the hunter-gatherers of the northern hemisphere. Chapter 6 provides a summary and suggestions for further research.

Chapters 2–5 are divided into sub-chapters – up to three levels – each with short, descriptive names, which makes it easy to navigate in the large volume. This is further accomplished by using the same internal structure, approximate length of text and type of illustrations for all selected sites and pottery assemblages in Chapter 3; for all presentations of pottery 'cultures' and/or sub-regions in the study area in Chapter 4; and for each of the selected chronological entities in Chapter 5.

The book is richly illustrated. A large number of illustrations seem to have been made specifically for this publication. The pottery material itself is pictured both in the main body of the text as well as in the 107 *Tafeln* added. This is a book that takes seriously the need for multiple and focused maps in presenting archaeological materials. The results from bi- and multivariate analyses are illustrated in column and scatter diagrams in rich colours and excellent resolution. Many and good illustrations, including a number of maps, make the totality of information easily accessible, but also enriches the volume in general, and indirectly signals importance of the topic addressed.

The appendixes (*Anhang*) include a catalogue of pottery used in the study, arranged according to country and site as in Chapter 3. A second impressive catalogue lists more than 900 known sites with early pottery in the larger research area, arranged alphabetically according to country and with information on topography, type of pottery, dating, cultural association and references. Further, a separate catalogue of sites based on cultural association and radiocarbon dates from the study area is included, arranged in separate tables according to country in alphabetical order. The systematic way in which the comprehensive material and study area is addressed throughout the volume – both in the main text, selection of illustrations and appendices – provides us as readers easy access to datasets, methods and results.

Piezonka's comprehensive volume provides for the first time access to a substantial material from a large region. The dataset is selected from a vast material now available in the study area of Lithuania, Estonia, Finland and Russia. Many parts of this area have been mostly unavailable for over-regional studies due to language and political barriers and borders, and the systematic way in which Piezonka here presents it is extremely valuable. In addition to comprehensive pottery studies – 1570 pottery sherds belonging to 535 vessel units are documented – a number of new radiocarbon dates have been obtained to improve chronological resolution.

The study reaches some very interesting observations of typological interrelationships between different regions and over time. Based on her analysis, Piezonka separates the large pottery material into two large groups – a south-western and a north-eastern group – the latter of which broadly includes early Comb Ware (Sperrings, Ka I:1, Säräisniemi 1 cultures and

pottery in the Neolithic strata at Veksa 3 on the upper Sukhona, Russia). She proposes that there was a continuous typological development from the oldest Upper Volga pottery present at Veksa 3, which seems to be influenced by earlier pottery further east in the Kama and Pechora-Dvina area, and the younger pottery in this area. She suggests that at the younger stage, around 5000 BC, pottery rapidly spread farther north and west and included the northernmost Comb Wares in Fennoscandia. Piezonka suggests that the early Comb Wares in Karelia and southern Finland were not part of the same typological development as the 'northern type', but instead received direct influences from the Upper Volga culture.

However, studying the typological relations of pottery in Karelia and southern Finland is, Piezonka complains, hampered by insufficient typological definitions and unclear terminology. This is one of the areas she points out for further research. The observations of these and a number of other typological relations evoke new questions and inspiration to pursue them, which is a fruitful outcome of a scientific study. Why do similarities and differences between groups of vessels produce exactly these patters across vast distances? How are these patterns maintained over time, or why do they change? How are the different patterns intertwined?

Piezonka begins her Introduction (*Einleitung*) with a citation from Aarne Europaeus-Äyräpää's 1930 paper, in which he advocates broad studies of the relationship between Stone Age pottery in Finland and early pottery in central Europe (Europaeus-Äyräpää 1930). Piezonka points out that more than 80 years later, despite more archaeological material, better chronological resolution and a continued general interest in early pottery, such a study has never been undertaken. The book thus aims at contributing to a better understanding of the context of early pottery in north-east Europe and how it is related to contemporary developments in central Europe. Its purpose is to identify when and where pottery occurred among hunter-gatherer groups in the large region in the 6th and 5th millennia BC. The typological studies of pottery from selected sites aim at identifying relations between larger areas or 'cultures', and to trace changes over time.

My main objection to the present volume concerns the 'old-fashioned' choice of research objectives – identifying chronological, geographical and 'cultural' distribution patterns – without an attempt at explaining changes and continuations in observed relations in time and space. Although gathering more information on the material is undoubtedly necessary, to me, an archaeological study of Stone Age pottery should basically be about people. I miss the socio-historical reflections on why and how pottery production and use was spread apparently unevenly in north-east Europe during the 6th and 5th millennia BC. For what purpose did some groups choose to take up pottery – I am personally more interested in why people took up pottery production than use – and what were the historical circumstances that resulted in generally similar pottery (yet with regional and local differences) across a vast region? Why did pottery in general and various characteristics in particular have different durations in different areas?

Piezonka addresses these issues briefly in her concluding notion of three common features for the pottery, one of which is the general morphological characteristics, the second being the mobile hunter-gatherer way of life and the third the pottery's primary appearance in the forest zone. The short, unnumbered excursion into early pottery in Japan and Canada in Chapter 4 becomes important in this discussion. It is suggested in general terms that practical purposes and dwelling in forests can explain the phenomenon of early Stone Age forager pottery globally. Piezonka suggests that the early pottery vessels used by hunter-gatherer societies in north-east Europe served specific (and similar) purposes, different from those in contemporary farming communities, which developed other pottery container shapes. I miss a further development of this perspective. What were these specific forager purposes, given that their predecessors managed without pottery and that contemporary hunter-gatherers in north Europe continued to be aceramic societies? And on the other end of the social–functional explanation spectrum: could it be that pottery was restricted to forested areas because it required large quantities of wood for the burning? All these questions boil down to this: why did (some) groups choose to take

up and maintain pottery as part of their material repertoire?

I realise that this objection can be seen as unfair, given that the lack of previous presentations of large parts of the material and insufficient typological and chronological resolutions implies that solid material dissertation necessarily must take up the major part of this kind of study. I very much appreciate the contribution, in particular the extremely systematic way in which the selected material is presented, irrespective of where it was found. This should enable true comparison, something which has not been possible before. However, this leads me up to my second main objection: the question of representativity.

Seventeen sites were chosen to encompass the various established pottery-typologically based 'cultures' in the vast study region. A selection of vessels and particular sherds from each of these sites were documented and used in the analyses. Different selection criteria were applied, including context documentation quality but also random sampling of a proportion of larger materials in order to reduce the sample size for the analysis. Any selection risks reducing access to information concerning the full range of variation inherent in the material. Some characteristics occur rarely, and are at a risk of becoming invisible when only a selection is studied. The question why some elements are infrequently observed, or have limited geographical and temporal distribution, is probably just as important as the frequently observed, distributed or maintained elements or types in understanding the historical context of a given phenomenon (Sørensen 2015).

Multi-correspondence analysis, one of the selected statistical methods applied in the volume, is designed so that rarely occurring characteristics in a large material are removed in order to make general trends more visible. This further increases the risk for loss of information on less frequent elements. The methods chosen for analysis thus imply that the results presented probably have some limitations: general patterns in *how* things were distributed may overshadow any clues to *why* that was so. Detailed attribute analyses can for example reveal information about learning processes, and indicate whether procedures and finished items were copied in detail, or if there are signs of trial and failure or improvising. This would be particularly interesting in a situation when something, such as pottery production, is introduced for the first time.

I am also skeptical of the use of predefined 'cultures' as underlying the selection of study material. Piezonka is aware that the study only comprises a minor material part of what David Clarke (1968) defines as a culture – a dynamic interplay between material, economic, religious and social sub-systems – and she clarifies that her concept of culture in reality means pottery types. My problem is that the established Stone Age pottery styles/cultures in Europe are not updated according to the new, extensive materials found in excavations, and therefore do not necessarily reflect variation in a representative way. In my own experience with Säräisniemi 1/Early, Northern Comb Ware typology (Skandfer 2003; 2005), the long-accepted definition was based on a very limited material from a small selection of sites situated within small geographical areas. Going through a larger material statistically, it turned out that the highest numbers of typological similarities were found within single sites, and there were more typological similarities within local areas than between them. Only a portion of vessels matched the original typological definition, even though my study included the same material as were used for defining the type. The general conclusion is that sample size matters in making typologies, perhaps not least when it comes to pottery. Piezonka addresses the problem in relation to the Ka I:1/Sperrings ware, where she describes a '… lack of comprehensive statistical analyses of the *original material of various early ceramic types* …' (citation from the English translation p. 282; my emphasis). Her study is based on a selection of pottery predefined as belonging to specific 'cultures' (read 'types'), and I fear that the premise on which the selection has been based biases the analysis heavily.

Stone Age pottery studies are complicated, and for me more reflection on the issue of representativity and biased selection would have strengthened the study. Ideally, I would have wanted a more open-ended analysis, or alternatively a more narrow 'reference' analysis, in which all material from a few geographically separated sites was analysed. The results could

have been used to discuss the issue of representativity concerning the wider analysis, but also to discuss the fundamental question of established pottery 'cultures' in the light of new materials and new methods. I am not at all certain that borders between different 'cultures' (types) can be drawn (or withheld) as easily as this study presupposes. Having said all this, I recognise that once the selection of dataset has been done, I find the selected methods highly relevant for studying their relations.

The reason why I have been awaiting this book is that it provides information of material I myself cannot access. The book is novel and important in its systematic way of addressing and including material from the large region of north-eastern Europe, across national, political and language borders. The systematic presentation makes it very 'user-friendly – in my opinion also for those who don't read German – and the many and excellent illustrations add to this. I miss some theoretical, methodical and culture-historical discussion, but the presentation and results should evoke curiosity and encourage eager researchers to contribute to further knowledge and reflection on the natural and socio-historical contexts of the early pottery in northern Europe. The book can be read in full length by archaeologists interested in European Stone Age pottery in general, but its structure with short, to the point texts and illustrations, should invite a wider group of readers. It abounds with material footprints of local, regional and super-regional socio-historical dynamics among northern hunter-gatherers during the 6th and 5th millennia BC. The large effort put in this comprehensive volume should be warmly welcomed.

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