

**Article review:** Stanimira Taneva, Nikolay Sirakov.  
Hotnitsa-Orlovka Microperforators - Endsrapers:  
A Diagnostic Element of Pre-Neolithic Regional Lithic  
Traditions and Its Participation in the Balkan Neolithization.  
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The title of the paper sounds promising and intriguing and, naturally, readers' expectations will be to learn of a new type of flint tool with a significant role in the spread of the Neolithic into Balkans; anticipating the involvement of Bulgaria in this process; and to see this particular tool category well illustrated and discussed in the context of the **Early** Neolithic of the Balkans, where the features of the Neolithization can be recognized and distinguished from pre-Neolithic elements – or just to understand the authors' ambition to involve Neolithization in their research efforts. Unfortunately, none of these expectations is met, even in the most basic sense!

Apropos, the entire assemblage from the site is presented in Taneva & Sirakov's table 1, which contains a list of techno-typological artefact groups, some of which are described with inappropriate terms – for. ex. 'preliminary flaking products' and 'waste' (two groups of *chaîne opératoire* initiation, presented separately from the debitage), 'insoluble waste' etc. There are 91 tools, described as predominant and identified as 'functional' tools (p. 2). This is a significant number of pieces with functional predeterminations, which, for proper identification, require a detailed techno-functional approach<sup>1</sup> to anticipate a function and (or only) use-wear observation and expertise for identifying (and confirming) the function. Neither of the authors is a specialist in any of the aforementioned analytical methods and it will be really challenging to see the functional procedure in their forthcoming publication of the entire assemblage of the site. If their functional determinations are based on 'measuring by eye' diagnosis ... then additional arguments are required.

The authors restrict themselves to presenting their own reinterpretation<sup>2</sup> of a tool category that they refer to as combined microperforators-endscrapers. Twenty-five such artefacts are described, in a Late Neolithic assemblage recovered from Hotnitsa-Orlovka, the <sup>14</sup>C dates for which fall in the second half of the VI mill. cal BC (p.1). This means that the

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1 In Boëda's view (Boëda 2013).

2 These tools were initially defined by these authors as 1. **several** micro-endscrapers with prolonged bifacially and abruptly retouched opposite parts and 2. perforators (Чохаджиев, Чохаджиев 2014, 109). The subsequent grouping together of these two types has probably generated 25 microperforators-endscrapers, to which the reviewed paper is devoted.

artefacts in question appeared 6 to 10 centuries after the spread of the Neolithic into the Balkans (which, according to the title, is the focus of the authors' interpretation). Overcoming the perplexity of this striking chrono-cultural discrepancy, the reader at least will expect to learn more about these intriguing combination tools and their impressive Late Neolithic revival from the pre-Neolithic tradition in the Balkans. Obvious questions that arise here are: why is this small typological group interpreted as diagnostic – and based on what repetitive and characteristic features? If it is a diagnostic element, to which culture, region, period and technocomplex does it belong? Which kind of cognitive approach is used to identify pre-Neolithic characteristics in this small group of heterogeneous Late Neolithic artefacts? Let us follow the authors' analytical approach in more detail.

- The tools referred to as microperforators-endscrapers are divided into 4 groups, and only 9 of them are described as complete and typical pieces (ergo – recognisable and identifiable as combination tools, as implied in the title). Eleven of them consist of fragments, the features of which are clearly ambiguous and cannot be securely attributed to this category of combination tools. This uncertainty in the typological determination becomes even more obvious in the illustrations – two figures of roughly and carelessly made drawings. These drawings deserve particular emphasis because of the numerous confusions and mistakes (in spite of the good intention to present them at x2 magnification). Some of the more obvious mistakes should be briefly listed: the outline of the original pieces in many cases does not correspond to the magnified one; among the pieces mentioned as 'entire' (complete) (pl. 1. 1-6, 11) there are two drawn as incomplete (No 5 and 11); on the other hand No 7 is complete in the drawing, but listed among the "fragmented microperforator points" (p. 4). Pieces 5 and 11 are listed in two different groups (entire and fragmented). Also confusing is the authors' insistence on interpreting some fragments as microperforator-endscrapers, relying on their 'confidence... in indirect evidence ...for such an interpretation' (p. 4). To imagine for ex. fragments in pl. 1. 9 and 10 as having been theoretically endscrapers in their missing part...is nonsensical and unscientific. Incidentally, there are only three pieces (pl. 1. 4 and 7; pl. 2. 7) and possibly No 2 on pl. 1 that could reliably be described as having an endscraper front; the rest of the drawn tools appear to be truncations or simple piercers. There is even more inconsistency and inadequacy in the drawings (even technically), as well as discrepancies in the tool descriptions, but I think the details already given are sufficiently instructive.

As for the general impression of the tools' 'analysis' – apart from various retouch descriptions, there are neither morphometrical nor techno-typological (or proper functional) analyses allowing the distinction of these tools as a diagnostic typological category/group. This is in fact simply a heterogeneous mixture of various tools (dimensionally and typologically) and indeterminate fragments – both groups lacking any diagnostic features.

- After presenting and arguing (unconvincingly!) for this group of tools, the authors provide a comparative analysis and discussion – at this point the lack of a clear goal/concept for the article, and the authors' limited knowledge becomes obvious. In this part of the paper a curious mixture of comparative criteria is used: typological resemblance (in most cases partial), chronological compatibility (from Early to Late Neolithic!), and some direct observations by the authors on unpublished material. As a result, no more than a dozen pieces (there is no precise number!) from various chrono-cultural contexts and territories (from Sitagroi – to the Hungarian LBK!) are recognized as having parallels with the combination tools from Hotnitsa-Orlovka. At the same time many publications containing relevant evidence (for Neolithic microlithization, incl. microperforators) by Perlès (for

Greece); Kozłowski & Kaczanowska and Šarić (for the Iron Gates and the former Yugoslavia); and Gatsov, Skakun, Gurova and Anastassova (for Bulgaria) are omitted<sup>3</sup>. And here it is unavoidable to state:

- One of the most striking and disappointing aspects of the paper is the dearth of an adequate and properly used literature, reflecting directly on the poor contextual scope of the paper. From the past decade or even longer, there are dozens of publications on Balkan (and Bulgarian in particular) Neolithic flint assemblages (including diagnostic tools, pre-Neolithic trajectories, flints and the Neolithic package, geometric microliths as a feature of pre-Neolithic retardation *vs.* palaeoenvironmental impact on the lithic industry, lithic assemblages in a diachronic perspective, microlithisation as a peculiar feature of Late Neolithic assemblages, etc.), written by Bulgarian and foreign scholars<sup>4</sup>. The omission of these publications may reflect either the authors' ignorance, or a deliberate choice to present a very simplistic narrative in their paper as an innovative approach to a largely explored and debated topic. The references used in the paper create an impression of an ad hoc rather than carefully chosen set of publications.

There are two errors in the literature cited, one is serious and indicates improper use of unread publications (copying references from somewhere?!) or wittingly or unwittingly use of incorrect data, relying on superficial reading by the readership. None of the explanations is excusable. Two publications by Păunescu are cited in the text (1963, 1970) but neither is listed in the references. On the other hand, Renfrew is cited incorrectly in the text and the references (on pp. 6 and 9). The quoted "Sitagroi in European Prehistory", with a reference to pp. 477-485, **does not exist** as a chapter in the book (see Ester, Renfrew 2003). The mentioned pages are part of Appendix 13.1, written by Renfrew and entitled "Site Register and Selected Materials from the Drama Survey", pp. 475-488! Where the authors obtained the information about the correlation of the microlithic series from Sitagroi II and III with "...Karanovo IV and the beginning of Karanovo V" (p. 6) remains an enigma. If the authors were interested to establish a correlation with the Sitagroi lithic evidence, then they should have been satisfied with the formal "parallels" with 3 Fiera points (phases II and III, published by Tringham (2003, fig. 3.8). They should also have coordinated this correlation with the radiocarbon dating of the site, given by Renfrew in the preface (xxvii, table 1) and unavoidably they should have realized that even phase II of Sitagroi is later than the <sup>14</sup>C dates of the site of Hotnitsa-Orlovka. As for correlation with Karanovo – there is a direct and easier way to do it, by considering some of V. Nikolov's publications on the cultural periodization of the Tell (for. ex. Nikolov 1998; 2004), or at least the publications related to the <sup>14</sup>C database of the site (Görsdorf 1997; Görsdorf, Bojadžiev 1996), or by checking the regularly updated database at [www.14SEA.org](http://www.14SEA.org).

There is a long reference list of relevant literature on the Neolithization and the Neolithic flint assemblages of the Balkans, which, supposedly, the authors ought to have known, read and carefully considered before writing a paper with such an ambitious and pretentious title. In fact, it is their scientific duty to compensate for the gaps in their knowledge, if they intend to continue their research on lithics in the context of Balkan Neolithization.

- As for the so-called discussion, there are a couple of statements aimed at providing formal parallels with (mainly) points, perforators and borers from neighbouring regions

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3 These are just a few authors, among many others, listed for a simple illustration...

4 I do not mention the enormous corpus of works concerning the perpetual debate on Balkan Neolithization.

and interpreting them as comparable to the microperforators-endscrapers from Hotnitsa-Orlovka. In this respect, the authors' claim to have, "discussed the presence of larger series as well as single specimens of identical microperforator-endscraper forms in several separate ensembles assigned to the Late Neolithic, geographically distributed both in the northern and southern regions of Bulgaria" (p. 8) is grossly exaggerated – and 'Neolithization' remains a redundant term in all the authors' efforts. In any case, a map of the location of the site of Hotnitsa-Orlovka and the locations of the related sites from the Neolithic *oikumene*, introduced by the authors, would be very welcome for general consideration of the initial aims and subsequent results of this study.

In conclusion, the paper by Taneva & Sirakov is an example of an article that is insufficiently thought out and conceptualized, carelessly and superficially written, badly illustrated and very poorly argued. If it had been properly peer-reviewed, the article should never have been published in a serious scientific journal.

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