

# Archaeology of Ukraine during the years of Independence. A brief overview of the long-awaited publication

Author: Serhiy Gorbanenko

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Serhii Gorbanenko<sup>1</sup>

## ARCHAEOLOGY OF UKRAINE DURING THE YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE. A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE LONG-AWAITED PUBLICATION\*

**The story of one book.** At the end of 2022, a new popular science publication “Arkheolohiya Ukrayiny za roky nezalezhnosti [Archaeology of Ukraine during the years of Independence]” was published. This book was edited by Yakiv Hershkovich and Denys Grechko (Kyiv: Institute of Archaeology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, 2022, 448 p.). The project has its own history, which dates back for several years, from the initial idea to the final publication, accompanied by presentations in a number of cities in Ukraine and abroad. In this book, the authors – professional archaeologists – tried to explain in simple words the complex processes of archaeological research in the field and in the office.

The idea of the need to report in a popular form to employers (that is, the citizens of Ukraine, from whose taxes many institutions exist), first came from Denys Grechko (this researcher is now engaged in the defence of the Independence of Ukraine in the Armed Forces). Such projects traditionally appear before certain anniversaries, and it was the same in this case. In 2015, on the eve of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the restoration of independence of Ukraine, the scientist proposed to the members of the Ukrainian public organiza-

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1 Senior Researcher, Institute of Archaeology, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Volodymyra Ivasyuka Ave. 12, 04210 Kyiv, Ukraine; gorbanenko@gmail.com; ORCID: 0000-0003-4786-0369



tion “Union of Archaeologists of Ukraine” (UAU) to prepare a popular science publication with 25 essays describing the most interesting materials. This would have served to acquaint the readers with the achievements of archaeologists of independent Ukraine. This idea did not come into fruition at that time.

The second occasion that “naturally” led to the issue being brought up for a second time was on the eve of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the restoration of Ukraine’s Independence. That time, at the end of 2020, Denys Grechko’s proposal received support, and work on creating the popular science essays began. Of course, the idea was transformed not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively. The initial idea was to have a series of essays, their number corresponding to that of the years since the restoration of the Independence of Ukraine. The second approach was a slightly different, more systematic one. This was to use the publication to highlight interesting facts of all periods of the Ukrainian archaeology. This is how a new concept of structure arose. The material was to begin with an introductory “Words to the Reader” and consist of several thematic chronological blocks, which were later entitled “Ukraine’s earliest past: the Stone Age”, “Eneolithic – Bronze Age”, “Early Iron Age (from the Cimmerians to the Sarmatians)”, “Cities and States of Antiquity”, “From the Venedi up to the Antes”, “From the Middle Ages to the Early Modern”. Each of the blocks mentioned was to have a similar structure, which was eventually implemented. Such a unit begins with an introduction from the “curators” with a map for the relevant period, which visualizes the study of sites in general and those discussed in the book, and

each unit contains several essays about these sites, and ends with a list of recommended reading.

Such modifications to the format render it impossible to create essays about all the studies performed during 30 years after the restoration of Ukraine's Independence. Personally, I consider it impossible to perform such a task at all. The subjective criterion of "the most interesting materials" of the original concept also had to be rejected. Therefore, the working group faced the difficult task of creating more or less balanced blocks about each of the periods. The geography of the sites discussed covers the entire territory of Ukraine. The description of these sites and results of their study over 30 years through the efforts of hundreds of scientists, led to a diversity of the styles of the essays. In the end, almost 50 scientists took part in the project as authors of texts in this volume.

The preparation of materials for the publication began at the end of 2021, and the work went quickly, lasting about five months and ended at the beginning of February 2022. But the layout did not make it to the printing house. On February 24, 2022, the Russian federation launched a full-scale brutal war against Ukraine. War criminals began to destroy cities and kill people. Not to mention their plans... Naturally, the boundless grief this act of aggression generated, increased the need to bring the project to its logical conclusion, and colleagues from abroad rallied to help. In the end, thanks to the support of the German Archaeological Institute, the project was implemented, and the book was published at the end of 2022. Thanks to the comprehensive support of the UAU and the Institute of Archaeology NAS of Ukraine, as well as due to the active work of the archaeological community, several presentations took place in Kyiv and other cities of Ukraine. The only presentation outside of Ukraine took place in the capital of Poland – Warsaw, on March 15, 2023. The platform for this was kindly provided by the Department of Archaeology of the University of Warsaw.

Copies of the books were distributed free of charge in museums, local libraries, universities, *etc.* in Ukraine in order to provide as full access as possible to interested readers. Thanks to volunteer activities, a large number of books reached Ukraine's closest western neighbours. Poland, as the nearest neighbouring country, with which Ukraine has good neighborly ties, as well as close professional archaeological relations, naturally received the largest number of copies. The reader can get acquainted with the book in such scientific institutions as University of Warsaw; National Museum in Warsaw; Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań; Poznań Archaeological Museum; Jagiellonian University in Kraków; Archaeological Museum in Kraków; Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences; Foundation of the Rzeszów Archaeological Center, University of Rzeszów; Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin.

Nowadays, anyone who wants can get acquainted with the electronic version of the project on the pages of the website of All-Ukrainian public organization "Union of Archaeologists of Ukraine" SAU by following the link below:  
[http://www.vgosau.kiev.ua/load\\_books/30-arh.pdf](http://www.vgosau.kiev.ua/load_books/30-arh.pdf).

**Content.** The key to most books is usually the introductory article to the publication; this book is no exception. On the first pages there is a “*Word to the Reader*”, which was prepared by the editorial board of this publication. It briefly reflects the modern history of the development of archaeological science during the years of the restoration of Independence, mentions the main institutions working in this field, lists foreign scientific centres with which Ukrainian archaeologists cooperate, and tells about other scientific directions, mostly collaboration with the naturalistic disciplines, which significantly supplement our knowledge of the past. This small, four-page article appears to be the most complete publicly available report that highlights the multidisciplinary activities and collaborations of Ukrainian archaeologists.

The first block, about the Stone Age in the territory of Ukraine, “*Ukraine’s earliest past: the Stone Age*”, opens with an introduction by Leonid Zaliznyak with the telling title “Turning the first pages of history: ancient gatherers and hunters”. The author summed up the results of archaeological research on the sites of the Stone Age, the development of scientific opinion on this matter, and also presented a brief history of the ancient gatherers and hunters themselves. Separate pages of the most ancient past in the territory of Ukraine are represented in six essays mainly about Palaeolithic sites: in the vicinity of Medzhibyzh settlement in Khmelnytskyi Oblast, in the Crimea (the essay contains mentions of nine localities), in the central part of Ukraine (Andriivka 4, Vys and Troyanove 4), Amvrosiivka in Donetsk Oblast, and Gintsi in Poltava Oblast. The essay on the most ancient past in the central part of Ukraine also contains interesting information about the Neolithic site of Dobryanka, where both burials and a settlement were investigated. This block of essays concludes with paper with the characteristic title “The primordial crossroad of cultural paths”, about an exceptional monument in the south of mainland Ukraine, Kamyana Mohyla, with a review of data from the period of 10 thousand years ago.

The next chronological stage, presented under the title “*Eneolithic – Bronze Age*”, began with an address to the reader of “Sights of ancient cattlemen, farmers and metallurgists” by Yakiv Hershkovich and Oleksandr Dyachenko. The authors mostly focused on the history of this difficult period, helping the reader to get a general idea of the cultural processes that took place in the territory of Ukraine at that time. The block contains seven essays, in which such a bright phenomenon as the Trypillia culture occupies a prominent place – five essays are dedicated to it. For the most part, they represent quite familiar settlements and materials from them. However, one of the essays describes a rather exceptional “atypical” site for the Trypillia culture, namely the Verteba Cave, located among gypsum rocks on the left bank of the Dnister. The archaeological studies conducted there not only significantly enriched our knowledge of the material culture of the ancient inhabitants, but also provided valuable material for anthropological research, which is quite rare for representatives of the Trypillia culture. Another essay describes the sensational discovery of 2015: as researchers report, the first workshop of ancient metallurgists of the Trypillia period was discovered in investigations in the Old City in Kamianets-Podilskyi.

The essay “Kartamiskyi mining and metallurgical complex of the Bronze Age” is also devoted to the issues of metallurgy. In it, the authors describe the Kartamiskyi microdistrict of mining and foundry sites near the village of Novozvanivka (Severodonetsk district, Luhansk Oblast). It includes four mines, a large man-made site for processing copper ore, and two settlements of miners-metallurgists of the late Bronze Age from the 17<sup>th</sup> up to the 13<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. The Sura-Oba mound, which during its research was named “the Ukrainian Stonehenge” in the media due to its dense ring of stone slabs (almost 70 blocks), is described in an essay bearing the same name. It refers to burials from the Eneolithic to Sarmatian times.

The block “**Early Iron Age (from the Cimmerians to the Sarmatians)**” is opened by the essay by Denys Grechko “In the footsteps of the first nomads and their settled neighbours”. It is based on the history of the study of sites of the early Iron Age, during the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC to the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD, where the history of research on Scythian monuments takes a prominent place. The first in the block about individual sites is an essay about a unique monument of the Scythian era the Bilske gorodische which was called the city of Gelon by Borys Shramko. Centuries-long attention to this complex, which since 1958 has been transformed into continuous systematic archaeological research, has led to the accumulation of a huge amount of materials and data. As in the previous sections of this publication, this one also has a certain “leitmotif” – the study of mounds. Four essays out of the seven are devoted to this topic. Two essays about the Sarmatians are the final ones in the block and according to chronology. One of them is dedicated to the archaeological studies of the Late Scythian archaeological expedition of the Institute of Archaeology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine at the complex (a hillfort and burial ground) near the village of Chervonyi Mayak in the Kherson Oblast. The other represents a unique male burial of the Sarmatian elite in the Mykolayiv Oblast.

A separate block, “**Cities and States of Antiquity**” begins with the introductory article “Ancient Greeks in the South of Ukraine” by Tetyana Shevchenko; the author made a brief review of the history of ancient Greeks on the territory of Ukraine. This part of the publication can probably be considered “the most systematic”, since it consists of four essays, corresponding to four ancient cities within the Northern Black Sea region: Borys-thenes, Pontian Olbia, Tauric Chersonesos and Tyras. They highlight the history of these polises, some achievements of archaeology at the monuments, examples of architecture and material culture are given.

The block under the general title “**From the Venedi up to the Antes**” turned out to be more diverse. It begins with the introduction by Oleg Petrauskas “On the Eastern borders of the European Barbaricum”. The author briefly outlined the main milestones in the history of research on the sites of the last quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC to the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD, and mentioned outstanding researchers of this period. The block consists of seven essays about individual sites. Three of them are devoted to archaeological complexes of settlement(s) and burials nearby: Dacian culture – Mala Kopanya in Trans-

carpathia; Chernyakhiv culture – Komariv in Transnistria, and Viytenky in Kharkiv Oblast. Two more essays are devoted to exceptional burials: the burial ground left by western warriors on the Seym River, and the burial of the Swabian “prince” in western Pobuzhha. Long-term excavations of the settlement of the Germans (Wielbark culture) in Styr and the diligent work of researchers led to the appearance of a number of reconstructions based on materials from that site. The latter is described in a separate essay. One of the essays, “200 Miles from the Limes: Romans on the Dniester”, refers to the recent discovery of a rather unique complex of buildings, direct analogies of which, according to the authors, are known only in the Roman provinces and Italy, and are designated as buildings with warm floors.

The block “***From the Middle Ages to Early Modern***” turned out to be the largest and the most variegated. It consists of 17 essays, and begins with an address to the reader from Yuriy Pugolovok and Yevhen Synytsia, with the telling title “From the Union of Tribes to the National State”. The authors outlined the periodization of the specified period, focused in more detail on the archaeological cultures of the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD, and also gave a brief reference from the time of the restoration of the Independence of Ukraine about archaeological research on sites dated in the range from the 5<sup>th</sup> century up to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and personalities thanks to whom these studies take place.

The larger number of essays caused the largest variety of “genres” in this section. In this block, readers will find information on various “treasures”, large-scale reviews of studies of historical cities of Ukraine, essays on excavations of individual sites, material on the study of Christian sacred places, *etc.*

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The inclusion of QR codes leading to educational YouTube channels, documentaries, and 3D-models of archaeology objects are nice additions to the book. I am sure that such a popular publication will be of great interest to a wide range of readers.

*Translation by Oleksander KOVALCHUK*