

Trypillia Mega-Sites—The First Cities in Europe?

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Little known until recently, the largest sites so far discovered from fourth millennium BC Europe—the Trypillian mega-sites of Ukraine—have received significantly more attention in the past eight years. Despite their impressive size of up to 320 hectares, traditionally they have been viewed as overgrown villages, and only a handful of Ukrainian archaeologists have posited a proto-urban development. Such views were based on aerial photographs, first-generation Russian geophysics, and limited excavations. The recent involvement of two international teams—an Anglo-Ukrainian and a German-Ukrainian—in the field investigations of the Trypillia phenomenon has invigorated the debate about the characteristics of these sites, their emergence and sustainability, and their place in global settlement trajectories.

This presentation will build on the results of these two international projects, focusing on high-precision geophysics, AMS dating, sediment coring, intensive systematic field walking, and selective excavations. It will revolve around four key issues: the population number of the mega-sites, on-site (production) and off-site (agricultural) practices, the possible impact of the latter on the environment, and the contemporaneity of mega-sites in the Bug-Dnieper region. The discussion will be framed by pros and cons about the possible urban development in Europe as early as the first half of the fourth millennium BC.