

II

THE LINEARBANDKERAMIK SETTLEMENTS

The choice of the subject for our investigations was, in advance, determined by two conditions. The first was that the investigation was conducted best with an entity, the contents of which are not subject to differences of opinion within the archaeological world. The second was that an investigation like the present one proceeds more smoothly when the material on which it is based is easily accessible to the investigator. These criteria together led to the choice of four settlements, belonging to the Linearbandkeramik culture.

The Linearbandkeramik culture, LBK in abbreviation, is a generally accepted taxonomic entity. It is also known by the names "Danubian I" and "Linear Pottery Culture". The entity belongs to the Neolithic and is dated by conventional C14 dates to the second half of the fifth millennium B.C., thus forming, in as far as known, the oldest Neolithic culture in Central Europe. Its best known characteristic is the pottery with its distinctive decoration; it is this decoration that has given the culture its name (first use by Klopffleisch 1884). Further attributes are ground stone adzes, a well-defined house-plan and a particular settlement form. Furthermore, the close relation to loess soils is also often mentioned. For details and examples, we refer to a handbook like that by Müller-Karpe (1968).

The Linearbandkeramik culture has had a wide distribution within Europe. "The number of settlements of the LBK culture which have become known through finds amounts to thousands. They are concentrated around the Rhein,* the Neckar, the Main and the Maas; further concentrations exist in the area between the Upper Leine and the Saxon Elbe, in the Donau Plain of East Bayern, in North Bohemia and in Silesia. They can also be found on the Lower Oder, along the Vistula, in Western Hungary and on the Upper Dnjestr" (Müller-Karpe 1968 p. 115, our translation). From the above quotation may be deduced that the LBK – occupied area can be divided into a number of regions, since the settlements are not distributed evenly over the area between the Maas and the Dnjestr, but show a distinct clustering. This aspect is clearly shown by the well-known distribution maps (e.g. Clark 1952 fig. 45).

During the five centuries of its existence, the culture does not remain completely identical in form. It is known that the pottery repertory, the shape of the stone adzes and the plan of the houses changed to some extent in the course of time. It is usual to divide the LBK into a number of phases on the basis of changes in the pottery. It is apparent that the shape and the decoration follow their own evolution in each region, resulting in the difference between the regions becoming greater and greater. In its early phases the LBK is conspicuously uniform; regional variants are found in the later phases. The number of phases distinguished differs per region and the transitions from one phase to the next are virtually nowhere synchronous. But in spite of the regional developments, the LBK remains a well-defined entity. There are many more similarities than differences.

* Geographical names are given according to "The Times Atlas of the World 1955".

The second requirement: accessibility of the material, could be met because the study of the LBK culture is among the projects of the Institute of Prehistory, University of Leiden, the institute to which we are attached. When we began our study, this institute was working on the publication of two LBK settlements in the Dutch province of Limburg, namely Stein and Elsloo.* At the same time excavations took place in the LBK settlement "Am Weinberg" in Hienheim, Landkreis Kelheim, Bayern, West Germany. So it was obvious to choose the settlements Stein, Elsloo and Hienheim as the subject of this study. We have added the settlement in Sittard, province of Limburg, Netherlands, because the material is also available in Leiden, namely in the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden. An additional advantage is that all four settlements were excavated by the same archeologist, prof. dr. P.J.R. Modderman, and in the same way.

So we have worked with four settlements from two regions. Sittard, Stein and Elsloo lie in that part of the Dutch province of Limburg, which is called Southern Limburg. They belong to a concentration of settlements, which is bounded by the river Maas and its tributary the Geleen. The occupational history of this region seems to start, as far as the LBK is concerned, in the years before 4400 B.C. and seems to end rather abruptly in the years between 4100 and 4050 B.C.* The total duration is circa 400 ± 50 years (Modderman 1970 p. 201). A younger and an older LBK are distinguished, each subdivided into four phases by Modderman. The first phase of the older LBK, called Ia, is, however, absent from Southern Limburg. Phase Ib is rare. It belongs to the above-mentioned early phases, in which the LBK shows a uniform character throughout Europe. The parallelisation of Ic and Id with phenomena in other regions is more difficult, because regionalization has set in. The younger LBK, with phases IIa-IIc, is clearly a regional variant. Absolute dates cannot be given for the different phases, because C14 dates are not accurate enough for this purpose (Modderman 1970 p. 200).

Hienheim, Ldkr. Kelheim, lies on the left bank of the Donau in a region which belongs to Niederbayern. It is the area that Müller-Karpe has called "the Donau Plain in East Bayern" (see above). The traces of occupation in Hienheim are dated by C14 between 4300 B.C. and 3900 B.C. The settlement is succeeded without hiatus by a settlement of the Stichbandkeramik (Middle-Neolithic). In contrast to Southern Limburg, the occupation does not end abruptly. The different phases in the occupational history of Hienheim are still being defined at the moment, so that a division into phases cannot yet be given.

In this publication we shall not give more information about the results of the excavations in the settlements, but we refer to the appropriate publications. For Sittard, Stein and Elsloo, these are the publications by Modderman from 1958/1959 and 1970 (Modderman 1958/1959 c, Modderman 1958/1959 d, Modderman 1970). Two provisional publications are available at the moment of the excavation in Hienheim (Modderman 1965/1966, Modderman 1969). The first part of the final report is being printed (Modderman in press). The material from the excavations in Sittard, Stein and Elsloo is now stored in the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden. The finds from Hienheim can be studied in the Prähistorische Staatssammlung in München. The original drawings of soil traces and material are not available in these museums, but can be found in the archives of the State Service for Archaeological Investigations in Amersfoort (Sittard, Stein and Elsloo) and in the Institute of Prehistory in Leiden (Hienheim).

* From Elsloo a cemetery is also known.

* All dates in this study are based on non-calibrated C14 dates.

It results from the above, that the choice of the four LBK settlements Sittard, Stein, Elsloo and Hienheim was determined on the one hand by the fact that they belong to a culture about which few misunderstandings are possible, and on the other hand by the fact that the material and documentation were in Leiden during the investigation. We realize that the four settlements chosen need not represent the LBK culture. It would not be correct to see them as a random sample. That was not our intention either. But we do think that the settlements may be compared to each other. If sufficient similarity would be found in the relations of these four settlements to their environment, this might lead to ideas about the relations between LBK settlements and their environment in general. The validity of these could be verified by a study of a real random sample.